ARCTIC

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DAVID DAMAS (1926 – 2010)

David Damas, eminent Arctic ethnologist and scholar of comparative social organization. During his graduate student days he was engaged in studies on how Arctic peoples organized themselves and how they lived their lives. Between August 1960 and August 1961, he undertook fieldwork in the Iglulik region of the Northwest Territories. At that time, Inuit still dressed in furs, travelled by dog team, lived off the land, and periodically touched in at points of service. He travelled with them, researching Inuit kinship, social organization, and personality structure. David soon understood the harsh realities that Inuit coped with daily, and he did not romanticize the lives of the people he worked with.

After his appointment as Arctic Ethnologist at the National Museum of Canada in 1962, David spent long periods of time in the Arctic. He spent a year investigating communities in the Bathurst Inlet, Perry River, and Cambridge Bay areas, collecting information relevant to the reconstruction of aboriginal Copper Eskimo society. In 1965, he spent February to August in the Gjoa Haven and Spence Bay regions, focusing on Netsilik society, and he also collected ethnographic data from extant Inuit as well as mixed communities.