

Interpreting Style in Early Nuxalk Masks

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Introduction

When interpreting style there is often an underlying implication of an evolution from crude beginnings to relatively more technologically advanced styles, and this implication is then reflected in chronological typologies. Some Northwest Coast researchers have assumed that carving only really began to flourish during the contact period with the introduction of metal tools and commercial pigments. Evidence from the archaeological record, however, indicates that at least on some parts of the coast the tradition of carving Northwest Coast masks is over 3500 [3825 cal BP] years old (Carlson 1983d, 1983c; 1993). Carlson (1983d:127) suggests that Nuxalk style (see Holm 1983:40-41) may have been present by at least 1200 AD, although the data for this inference are very limited. Examination of ethnographic documents and museum collections as well as interviews with the Nuxalkmc indicate that among the Bella Coola the mask styles or sub-styles are dependent on the contexts and functions of masks, and that a simple to complex typology of masks has no evolutionary significance. The results of research for a thesis entitled *Early Nuxalk Masks* (Seip 2000) are presented in this paper.

A collection of 384 ceremonial items, which include both masks and some associated theatrical props were examined. These objects were collected from the Bella Coola Valley between 1880 and 1926, and constitute nearly all of the Nuxalk masks in North American museum collections. This research focused on the presentation of a culturally meaningful typology. Analysis of the style used in the masks suggests that the style used by an artist reflected the function and purpose of the item. This paper first presents a brief background on the collections and then reviews the typology.

Background

On the Northwest Coast between 1880 and 1926 collectors came to the Northwest Coast from around the world to collect items of material culture as an attempt at "salvage anthropology" (Cole 1985; Gruber 1970). At this time smallpox epidemics decimated Native populations (Boyd 1999), missionaries arrived, and the Canadian government introduced the Potlatch law (Cole 1985). Anthropologists believed that these factors would cause the disappearance of Native cultures and they set out to record what they could. Among those anthropologists and other researchers who arrived in the Bella Coola Valley during this time were Philip Jacobsen, Franz Boas, Harlan I. Smith and Thomas McIlwraith. Although Philip Jacobsen (1891a; 1891b; 1894; 1997) was the first to arrive in the Valley, most of our knowledge about the ceremonial life of the Nuxalkmc at the turn of the last century comes from the work of Franz Boas (1891a, 1894, 1895, 1898); Thomas McIlwraith (1927, 1948), and Harlan I. Smith (1920-24, 1925a, 1925b, 1925c, 1991).

The Bella Coola Valley is located on the central coast of British Columbia (Figure 15:1). The language spoken in the Bella Coola region is called Nuxalk and the speakers of this language are referred to as the Nuxalkmc. While only the inhabitants of the Bella Coola Valley formerly referred to themselves as the Nuxalkmc, it is now the preferred name for the entire Native population (Kennedy and Bouchard 1990: 338). The Nuxalkmc have more commonly been called the Bella Coola. In the 1920s 45 village sites were recorded in the Bella Coola Valley (McIlwraith 1948). These villages were located along South Bentinck Arm, at Kwatna Bay, at the head of the Dean Channel on the Dean and Kimsquit rivers and at the head of North Bentinck Arm on

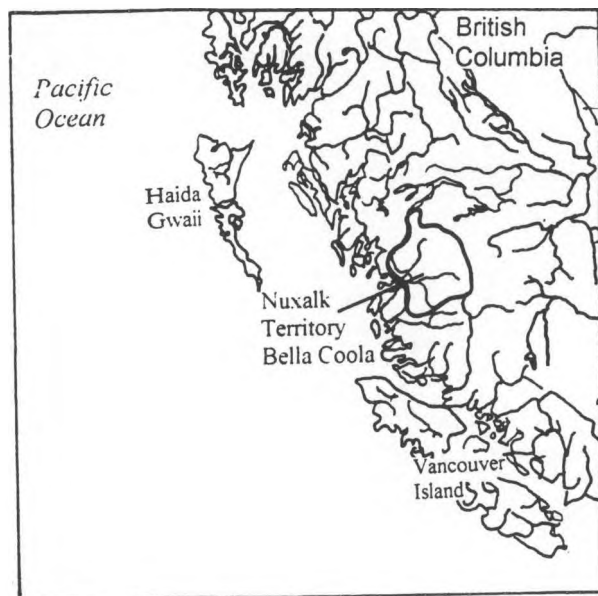


Figure 15:1. Map of Northwest Coast of British Columbia.

the Bella Coola River (Figure 15:2). Archaeological research conducted in the Bella Coola Valley suggests the valley may have been occupied for some 10,000 [11,400 cal BP] years, although the archaeological record is not continuous over much of this time span due to site loss through flood plain instability (Hobler 1990).

While anthropologists have always been interested in the way that collected materials fit into the cultures that produced them, it has only been recently that more systematic efforts at understanding the cultural contexts of items collected at the turn of the last century have been undertaken. There has been a considerable amount of research on the archaeology of the Central Coast (Carlson 1979; 1983d; 1984; 1987; 1993; 1996b; Hall 1998; Hobler 1970; 1982; 1990a; 1990b; Hobler and Bedard 1989; 1990; Prince 1992) and much done on the ethnography and linguistics (Olsen 1935; 1940; 1954; 1955; Baker 1973; Davis and Saunders 1980; 1997; Kennedy and Bouchard 1990; Kirk 1986a; Kolstee 1977; Lopatin 1945; Storie and Gould 1973; Stott 1975 a and b). The question of the feasibility of examining the cultural contexts of materials collected at the turn of the 19th century remains of interest today (Black 1997; Jonaitis 1978; 1981; 1986; 1988; 1991; Seip 1999). These collections provide us with a link between the present and the prehistoric past. Ethnographically the Native technologies of the Central Coast that stand out the most are the working

of wood and plant fibers; large houses, massive carvings, canoes, bark clothing, basketry, and matting. Because of factors of preservation such items are all represented poorly if at all in most archaeological inventories (Hobler 1990:298).

Another complex in the ethnographic pattern that is seldom seen in the archaeological record is "ceremonialism with its related emphasis upon wealth and social rank" (1990:298). Analysis of the masks and associated items may give us a better idea of the

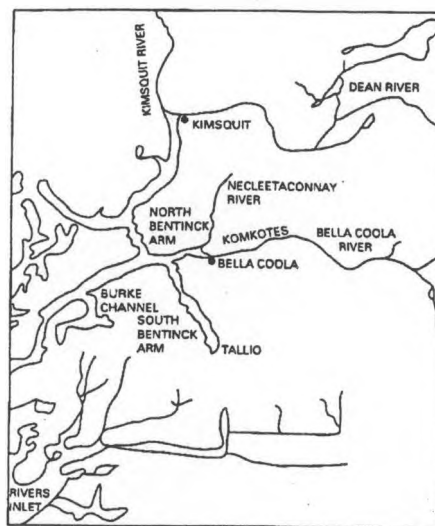


Figure 15:2. Map of Bella Coola Territory (Based on McIlwraith 1948).

material and ceremonial culture of the Nuxalk at the time of contact and assist in the interpretation of the archaeological record. The placement of the masks into a culturally meaningful typology assists us in exploring the relationship between style and context.

Typology

Archaeologists who use style theory suggest that stylistic behaviour is a form of information exchange (Durkheim 1947; Hodder 1982; Wiessner 1983; Wobst 1977; Sackett 1977, 1989; Singer 1982). In order to create a culturally meaningful typology the masks were first examined in their original social context. Understanding how each mask was used allows an evaluation of the style expressed in the masks. "Style is always grounded in some cultural context or frame of reference" (Conkey and Hastorf 1990:2). Style is defined as a distinctive, characteristic mode of expression or execution. People use style to communicate information, such as group affiliation, social status, and social boundaries. First the application of a time pe-

riod narrative typology to this collection is evaluated, then the method used to create the typology and, the original social context of the masks is reviewed and the typology is then presented.

Analysis of the collection revealed that there are too many variables affecting style to create a typology that traces changes in style throughout time. Typologies created by archaeologists for evaluating material culture are dominated by time period narratives that may not actually be measuring changes throughout time. Conkey and Hastorf (1990:2) suggest:

stylistic types (as defined by Krieger 1944) created the time-space divisions of the past and the archaeological "cultures". By our style types and definitions, we create the past. Some of the effects of this have been the detachment of the types from their past; and in addition, the past has become our own creation. As in art history, archaeologists have used style in a way that detaches from these cultural materials what may have been their original message and function . . . reducing them to patterns, samples. (Sauerlander 1983: 254).

One of the variables that has significantly inhibited the creation of a time based typology is the existence of individual village style. According to McIlwraith (1948), at one time there were at least forty-five villages in Bella Coola territory. Examination of the historic photos and drawings of the various village sites indicates that each village had a somewhat different artistic style expressed in the house fronts. These styles ranged from very structured Northern style designs, which included the use of ovoids and split-U's (Figure 15:3), to more naturalistic styles that had neither ovoids nor split-U designs (Figures 15:4,5). These various styles coexisted in Nuxalk territory. If we can assume that the style of house fronts is similar to the style expressed in the masks then the differences we see in the style of masks may be more of a factor of the village the mask came from than a reflection of a true change in style caused by time. As many of the masks only have the region from which they were collected mentioned in the museum records, controlling for the variable of the village the mask came from is impossible.

While some Nuxalk artists interviewed believed a few of the masks may be older in age than others, it was difficult to find evidence that the differences in style they noticed were a result of age alone. One set of masks that was

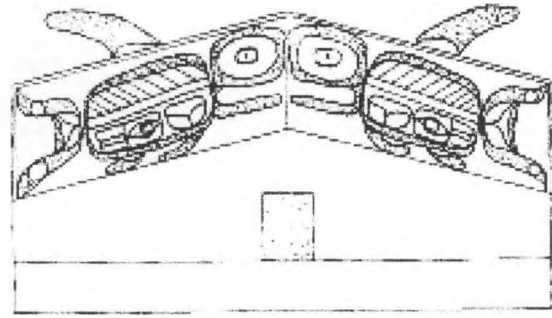


Figure 15:3. House Front of the Gens Tokwa's depicting a Killer Whale (Based on Boas' drawing 1891:410).

identified as possibly being older was collected in 1920 from Captain Schooner (Figure 15:6 and 15:7). These masks were collected at the end of the collection period and no information about the age of the masks was obtained from the seller. They exhibit unusual design elements such as straight edged triangles and cut out semicircles. However, these are not unusual when compared to the house front designs published by Boas in 1891a (Figure 15:3, 4, 5). What complicates matters more is that the materials used to manufacture these masks do not differ from other masks that were collected throughout the collection period. The variation in style we see is better explained by individual artist style and village of origin rather than period of manufacture. Until methods of dating the masks can be found it does not appear that a typology tracing change throughout time can be done.

Conkey and Hastorf (1990:3) suggest that there are two postures archaeologists use in defining style. These are

from seeking clues as to the meanings of and contexts in which the styles of cultural materials were "at work" in that culture, to the manipulation of attributes or patterns in these materials as measures of certain cultural phenomena that we want the styles to 'reveal' to us

As mentioned earlier, the social context and function of a mask will have a significant impact on the style used to create it. The process of creating the typology for the masks included reviewing all of the published and unpublished ethnographic material on the ceremonies of the Nuxalk. Margaret Stott's (1975) previous study of Bella Coola ceremony and art was quite limited with respect to creating a culturally relevant typology, in that there is

only a brief presentation of the various functions of the masks, and the Sisaok and Kusiut societies. Understanding the various functions the masks had is the key to creating a culturally meaningful typology. This section will clarify the various functions of masks in each society. Stott (1975:90-91) says:

In the materials prepared for ceremonials, there was a major difference between Sisaok and Kusiut practices. For Sisaok performances, masks of the characters that the host was entitled to use or that he had borrowed for the occasion were carved by a number of individuals who he commissioned. They were made before the time of the celebration, and were retained to be used again after the dancing had ended.

In contrast, masks for Kusiut performances were not made prior to the time of celebration. Kusiut ceremonies took place over four day periods; the preparation of masks being part of the ritual. On the second day, the Kusiut host requested individuals to carve masks and other paraphernalia for him. Wood was cut for the masks, and the carving began. On the third day, the carving was completed, and the masks were painted. The knowledge of their production was a secret shared only within the ranks of the Kusiut society. The masks were used during the public dances performed on the fourth day and were burned at the secret closing rites that night. Their destruction helped insure that the secrets of the society would remain the property of the initiated.

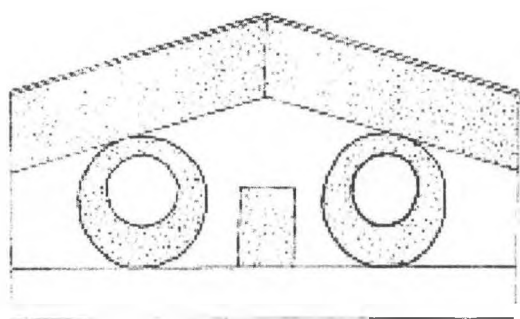


Figure 15.4. House Front of the Gens Tl'akwamot, representing the Moon (Based on Boas' drawing 1891:410).

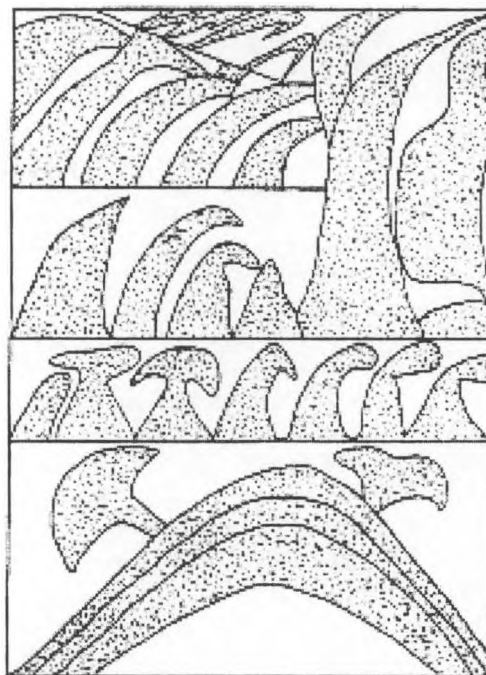


Figure 15.5. Crest Design of the Gens Smo'en "showing the mountain Suwak'c with two clouds near its summit; above a mackerel sky" (Based on Boas' drawing 1891:411).

There are a few problems with this statement that need to be addressed before the revised typologies are presented. McIlwraith's (1948) work confirms that the masks of the Sisaok were carved and retained for later use, but what Stott hasn't addressed is that some Kusiut ceremonies can go on for as long as 27 days. For example Noakxnum's ceremony (McIlwraith 1948:57) and other Kusiut rituals were performed whenever the associated natural phenomena occurred. McIlwraith (1948 vol. 2:208) states that the "dancers whose patrons are Thunder, Earthquake, Sun or Moon do not confine their dances to the ceremonial season, but perform whenever a manifestation of their patron occurs". Many of the more difficult dances of the Kusiut, such as the Scratch, Cannibal, Breaker, Fungus and Kusiotem, "require weeks of preparation" (1948:24). Stott suggests the difference in style we see in Bella Coola masks is a result of the two different societies; however there are many masks of the Kusiut society, (for example Thunder, Fire and the Hao hao), that are elaborately carved and curated just like those of the Sisaok. Therefore, her suggestion that it is the ceremonial society alone affecting the



Figure 15:6. (upper) Hao Hao Mask (Canadian Museum of Civilization VII-D-284).
Figure 15:7. (lower) Hao Hao Mask (Canadian Museum of Civilization VII-D-285).

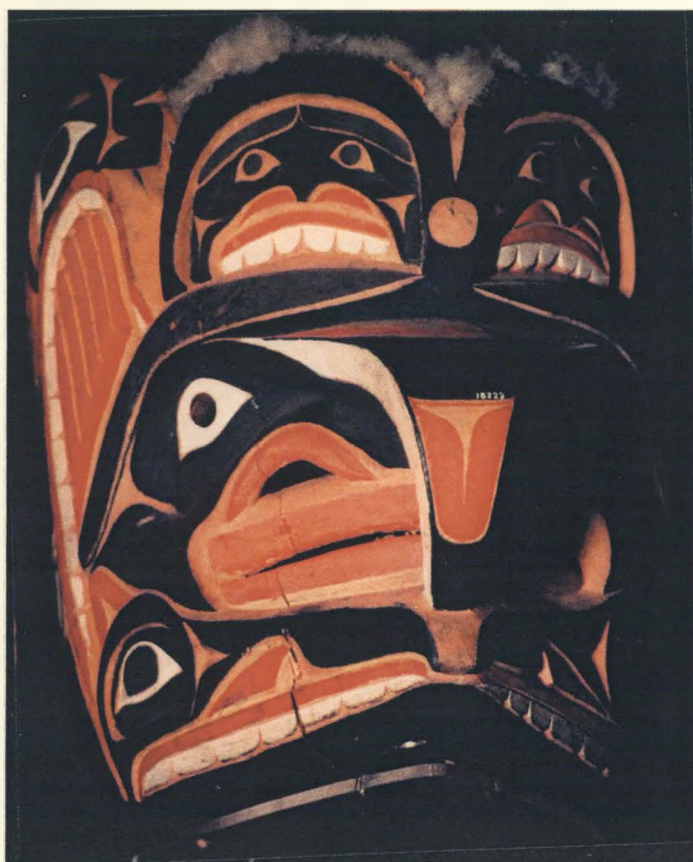


Figure 15:8. Sisaok name Mask, Sinoken (Field Museum 18223).

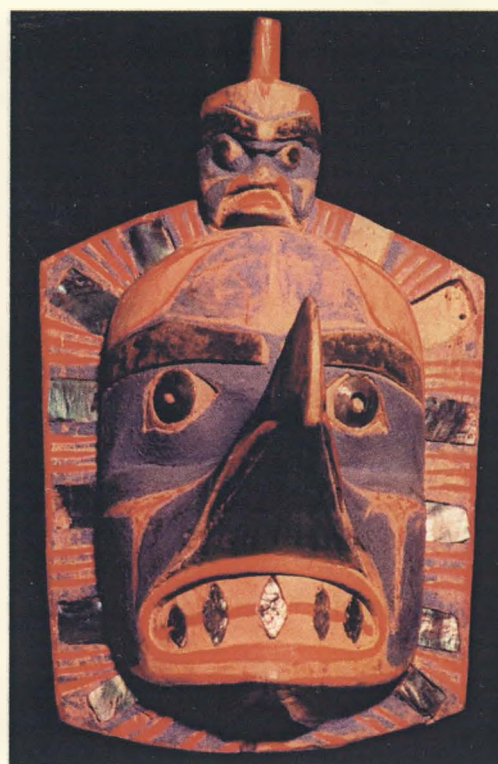


Figure 15:9. Sisaok Clan Identification Head Ornament (Eagle transforming, Chicago Field Museum, 18221).

style used in the masks is not entirely correct. Analysis of the collection indicates that the type of ritual and the importance of the supernatural being portrayed are the variables which have the greatest impact on style.

Ceremonial Societies

Within the Kusuit and the Sisaok are sub-societies based on rank. They are both considered to be secret societies. The Sisaok perform all of their ceremonies publicly and the Kusuit perform both private and public ceremonies. The purpose of this section is to review the functions of each society.

According to McIlwraith, there was also an A'alk society. There is very little information about it. From the 1870s onwards there were many changes in the rituals performed by the various societies, so much so that by the time McIlwraith arrived both the A'alk and Sisaok societies had almost ceased to exist (McIlwraith 1948 vol. 1:273). He (1948:274) states that "it is even possible that some of the facts recorded in connection with Sisaok ceremonial really belong to A'alk rites". Analysis of the collections reveal that no masks were recorded as belonging to the A'alk society. According to Phillip Jacobsen (1893:9), who was collecting in the Bella Coola Valley thirty years before McIlwraith arrived, "all masks in green, blue or red color belong to the Sissach, the black masks belong to the Kosifute dance". In the collections, however, there are many masks identified as belonging to the Kusiut which have green, blue and red painting on them. The presence of these contradictory statements suggests that either the ethnographers were confused or the Nuxalk ceremonial complex was in such a state of change that informants themselves did not know the difference.

The A'alk and Sisaok societies are closely related and both perform rites during potlatches. McIlwraith describes the A'alk society as being very similar to the Sisaok with the only major difference in the age of the members, the A'alk members being younger than those of the Sisaok. Both the Sisaok and the A'alk societies are involved in validating inherited names. According to McIlwraith (1948 vol. 1:274-275):

the right to perform an A'alk dance depends upon a duly validated ancestral prerogative of which the obvious mark is an A'alk name. Some of the first people brought down such designations and dances

with them from above in the beginning of time, a few were acquired on this earth as gifts from supernatural beings . . . the mask usually represents the guise adopted by the first user of the name; if the prerogative were obtained on earth, it portrays the being from whom the right was received.

As the A'alk society performs during Sisaok rituals, it may be a division of the Sisaok. The headdresses worn by members of the A'alk are identical to those worn by the Sisaok (McIlwraith 1948:275). Both performed a variety of rituals which focused on assisting its members through major life changes. These life changes included aging, the giving of new names, validating ancestral names, marriage, divorce, and death. As no masks were recorded as belonging to the A'alk, for the purpose of this typology only Kusiut and Sisaok masks will be discussed.

The function of the Kusiut society is very different from that of the Sisaok and A'alk societies. As the Kusiut society deals with the acquiring of siut, supernatural powers, the masks created by them often represent supernatural entities. The Kusiut (McIlwraith 1948:284)

comprises a large number of individuals bound together by the possession of supernatural patrons and claiming to possess supernatural power . . . the Kusiut are well organized and regulated; its members are proud of their powers, and scornful of those who lack the same.

According to McIlwraith (1925: 710),

all Kusiut ceremonials had one of three origins. Some, with the necessary regalia, were brought from above by the first people, others were originated by visitations of siut to a mortal, while others still were initiated by powerful stalm of his own initiative.

The rituals performed by the Kusiut are intended to create a sense of awe in the uninitiated. The identity of the supernatural patron depicted is not always clear to the uninitiated due to the use of symbolic codes in the designs that only members can interpret.

The style used in the masks of the Kusiut has a greater range than those of the Sisaok. The style can range from appearing to be hastily carved simple masks with only black pigment being used to very elaborately carved masks entirely covered with many colors. These differences in style reflect the ceremonial function of the mask. The symbolism

used in rites held by members of the Sisaok society is intended to convey clear messages to the audience, while the symbolism of the Kusiut is intended to convey clear messages only to its members.

Mask Types

There are many different styles that coexist in the Nuxalk repertoire that were used depending on the ceremonial function of the mask. There are seven distinctive groups of masks based on ceremonial function. These are:

Sisaok masks

- clan identification masks and head ornaments;
- mortuary masks
- name masks;
- children's masks
- public ridicule masks;

Kusiut masks

- masks which are burnt
- supernatural patron masks.

The function of each of the societies is discussed first and then the types are presented.

Sisaok Clan Identification Masks and Head Ornaments

The ceremonial context and function of a mask play significant roles in the style expressed in it. When people talk about what they consider Bella Coola style they are often referring to the style expressed in the masks and head ornaments used for public display of clan identification at potlatches. These ceremonial items are used in ceremonies where people from many different villages attend. It is in this setting, where members of the audience may speak a different language than the host, that visual symbols are used to communicate messages. The masks are a visual way of communicating that the host of the potlatch is part of, for example, the Bear clan of Bella Coola. Clans consist of people descended from a common ancestor. The masks of this category are finely carved and painted. Animals and animals transforming into humans dominate designs used in these items. This feature relates to the Nuxalk belief that their ancestors came from Nusmata as animals, and when they arrived in the Bella Coola Valley they removed their cloaks and took human form. For the identification of masks and head ornaments belonging to the Sisaok society we require an understanding the nature of the Nuxalk belief

system about how the world is organized, the functions of the society and the types of rituals they perform. In describing how the Nuxalkmc believe they came to this world McIlwraith (1948:36) states:

the manner in which the Bella Coola arrived is cleared stated. Around the walls of Nusmata were hanging a number of bird and animal cloaks, representing ravens, eagles, whales, grizzly bears, black bears, and a few others. Atquntam asked each individual which of these cloaks he preferred to wear. One selected a raven, another an eagle, and so on. Each donned his choice from the wall and immediately became the bird or animal chosen. Atquntam gave each man or woman one or more names, and some food in compressed form; then sent him down in avian or mammal form. Even the animals could travel through the air like birds, and each landed on the peak of a mountain in the Bella Coola country, took off his cloak, and reassumed human form. The discarded covering floated back up to Nusmata. . . . This myth is fervently believed in Bella Coola. Even Christian Indians, though they readily admit the biblical creation as applied to the white race, remain convinced of the manner in which their ancestors came into being... Nusmata is not only connected with the history of an individuals ancestors; it enters into his own future as well. When a Bella Coola dies, his spirit travels back on the path of his ancestors from generation to generation until it reaches the spot where the first one came to earth; there it assumes the bird or animal cloak used on that occasion and floats aloft to Nusmata to live forever.

McIlwraith describes this society as a chiefly society and the rituals it conducts are mainly concerned with assisting people through transitions in life. As this is the main function of the society it is important that the people present be able to understand the messages communicated by the masks.

The head ornaments used by the Sisaok fall into three categories: crowns, frontlets and forehead masks. Crowns are those head ornaments which have a cedar bark headband onto which the head, wings or fins and tail of the animal being portrayed are attached, with the head of the creature resting on the wearer's forehead, the appendages on either side of the head and the tail at the back of the wearer's head (Figure 15:15). A crown at the American Museum of Natural History in the form of an eagle is carved of wood with just the head of



Figure 15:10. Sisaok forehead Mask, Raven (Chicago Field Museum 18178).

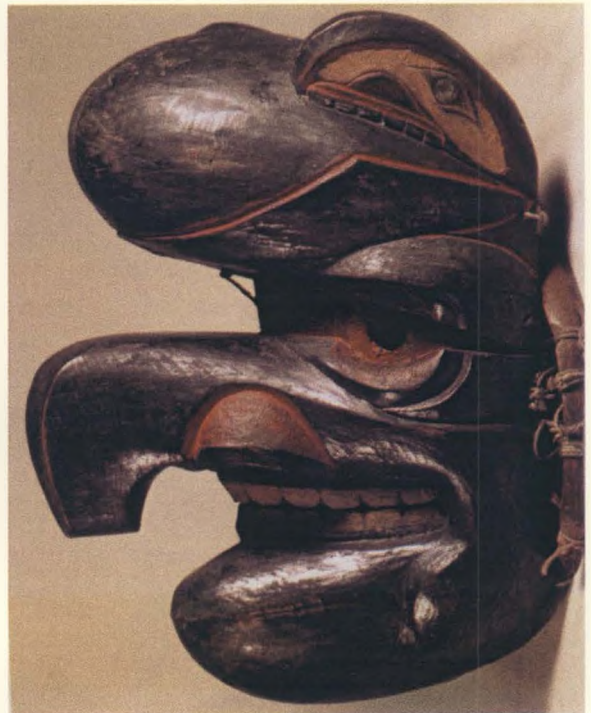


Figure 15:11. Kusuit Supernatural Patron Mask, Thunder (National Museum of the American Indian 19/0838).



Figure 15:12. Sisaok Mortuary Mask (Ghost, Canadian Museum of Civilization, VII-D-202).



Figure 15:13. Sisaok Child's Mask (Chicago Field Museum, 18930).



Figure 15:14.
Sisaok Name
Mask (Sinoken,
American Mu-
seum of Natural
History, 16/1518).



Figure 15:15.
Eagle Crown.
(Chicago Field
Museum, 18190).



Figure 15:16.
Sisaok Face Mask,
Raven. (Vancouver
Museum AA 107.

the animal repeatedly portrayed around the edge. Frontlets sit on the forehead and are usually accompanied by ermine skins that are worn around the head. Figure 15:9 illustrates the imagery of transformation that is characteristic of many items in this category; notice that the human-like face has an eagle beak but below the beak is a human mouth. Forehead masks are similar in style to the masks but sit on the forehead of the wearer (Figure 15:10). Ritually these types of head ornaments serve a different function than the masks as the wearer does not take on the spirit of the entity being portrayed but rather is communicating to the guests at the potlatch his/her family's original animal cloak. It is like wearing your ancestral story or name on your forehead.

The masks are used during potlatches in performances that illustrate the clan story of how the first ancestors came to this world. All of these masks take the form of animals or animals transforming into humans. Animals associated with the clan stories include bear, killer whale, fin back whale, wolf, deer, raven, eagle, and owl. Unlike the head ornaments the face of the wearer is completely hidden. The mask of a Raven from the Chicago Field Museum (Figure 15:16) illustrates the portrayal of pure animal form while the Vancouver Museum's AA107 depicts an Eagle transforming into a human (Figure 15:17).

Sisaok Name masks

Sisaok name masks are used in the passing on of hereditary ancestral names. They are different from the clan identification masks in that they are not illustrating the clan animal but an ancestor whose name and story is being passed on. Therefore the imagery used on these masks is different and more difficult to interpret without the context of a story and name. Unusual and multiple imagery beyond the transformation of animal to human characterize these masks. Each mask represents a story in which an ancestor plays a role. For example there are two masks that are associated with the name Sinoken. This is an ancestor's name associated with the Raven clan and the story associated with it involves a "fin back whale boy with two faces". The imagery on the

mask gives the viewer cues about the story that goes with the name, rather than being intended to represent one entity. First lets look at the story Jacobsen collected with this mask (Figure 15:8) then we will examine the symbolism used. Jacobsen (1893) recorded the following story:

It is said that very long ago a ghost by the name of Yakis lived on a small island Jellakla or Goose Island outside of Bella Coola. He had a brother, of course our old friend the raven, qwaxw. Every night Yakis heard that his brother qwaxw was engaged with some mysterious work and finally he found out that he had invented and was making wooden whistles (tayak). When he had four boxes full he went with them to the Skeena river or Nesskabts. His daughter accompanied him and when they came there he asked if anybody would marry her. There was no lack of suitors even trees and stones wanted to be her husband. The raven, however, declined to accept any of them. Finally he discovered in the East a great light which came nearer and nearer. This was the Sun whom he accepted as the husband of his daughter. She then left for Heaven with her husband and after some time returned with four children. The oldest was a big boy who looked like a finback whale with two faces. His name was Sinoken and it has been inherited from father to son. The persons at present wearing the mask also received the same name.

The main character in the story associated with the name Sinoken, is a fin back whale boy with two faces. An examination of the mask (Figure 15:8) reveals two faces above the eyebrows with a circle in the middle, representing the boy who looked like a two-faced finback whale, the circle representing the whale's blow hole. The bottom of the mask is qwaxw, the raven, on either side. The face in the middle is qwaxw's daughter who married the Sun, who has human like lips that are covered by the beak, suggesting that she has the ability to transform into a human. From bottom to top then, is qwaxw, his daughter and her son Sinoken. Who then is on the side of the mask? At the upper edge is an eye with an open mouth. This represents the ghost, Yakis, who went with qwaxw and his

daughter to find a husband; his image frames the central three characters in the story. His presence in the story is further emphasized by the use of green on the faces of the mask which is symbolic of the land of the ghosts (Seip 2000:91). How then is sun represented in this mask as part of the story? Take a look inside of Yakis' mouth where there are five red lines that extend from the eyebrows of qwaxw's daughter.

Red is used not only to mark liminal places but also to represent light (Seip 2000:84). The red lines surrounding qwaxw's daughter are symbolic of her marriage to the Sun. This example illustrates the importance of placing the mask into the context of the ceremony it was used for, otherwise the imagery on the mask has no meaning to us. It cannot be interpreted out of its ceremonial context.

The name Sinoken can be portrayed in a mask in very different ways. The mask of Sinoken from the Field Museum Chicago (Figure 15:8) illustrates the entire story associated with the name while the one from the American Museum of Natural History (Figure 15:14) depicts the ancestor alone. These masks illustrate that while an artist may take certain liberties in the design of a mask, in order for it to be a successful and useful ceremonial item it must contain recognizable cues that indicate the entity being portrayed. While these two masks are very different in style and imagery what makes them recognizable as Sinoken is the presence of the two faces and cues that a whale is being portrayed. The mask of Sinoken at the American Museum of Natural History depicts a whale-like creature in form which refers to Sinoken through the design on the ears. Each ear has a face in the center with a moveable mouth; on either side of the faces is the distributive design of a whale fin and a circle (which again is symbolic of the whale's blow hole). Nuxalk artists can use very different ways of depicting the same thing; it is the mark of a good carver to be able to reinterpret the story in new designs while maintaining the cues required for identification.

Masks that are associated with names always have a story that goes with them, so when a person is given a name during a ceremony they are also being given a story. To illustrate these stories masks are used. Although at first glance the imagery used in these masks may appear difficult to read, when one knows the story attached the imagery and symbolism become clear.

Sisaok Mortuary Ceremony Masks

The next category of masks are those used in mortuary ceremonies a year after a person has died. These masks are called ghost masks and are used to represent the soul of the departed person who is returning in the ceremony. Their imagery ranges from realistically carved human face masks to representations of the animal cloak of the departed person. The main difference in the animal masks used in mortuary ceremonies to those used in other potlatch settings is the way in which the mask is painted. Masks used in mortuary ceremonies always have the entire surface of the mask painted, first with a base of white onto which a design in blue or green with red is applied.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa has a collection of masks from chief Samuel King that were used in a mortuary ceremony which exhibit this type of painting. These masks include human faces (Figure 15:12) and animal faces. All of them exhibit the white base with the colored design on top.

The masks used by the Sisaok during funeral ceremonies contain certain cues about their function. During McIlwraith's (1925:594) 1922 field season he observed the funeral ceremonies of Mrs. Samuel King. For the funeral ceremony it was decided that she would "reappear as Eagle, Raven and Blackfish, three of her ancestral stories for which the necessary masks were available". McIlwraith (1925:605) describes the following:

. . . a man entirely covered with a white sheet so that the only part of his body visible was his bare feet. On his head he wore a mask of the eagle, from his back projected one of the blackfish, and to his chest was one of the raven . . . In the old days the carpenters would have worked for weeks fashioning an elaborate masked representation of the three, as it was they could use only what masks happened to be in existence and were forced to sew these onto the white sheet.

Harlan I. Smith purchased several ghost masks from Chief Samuel King, illustrating the symbolism used in masks associated with funeral rites. The use of animal masks in this ceremony refers back to the origin stories of the Nuxalk and their belief that the departed person returns to the land above in the animal cloak of his or her ancestors.



Figure 15:17. Sisaok
Clan Mask., Eagle.
(Vancouver Mu-
seum AA 107).



Figure 15:18. Kusuit
Mask, Rainwater-
Dripping-From-The-
Roof (Royal British
Columbian Museum,
6395).

Masks used by Children

Another type of rite carried out by the Sisaok is *nusaxkamx*. This rite is carried out by the children of chiefs and is intended to teach them "the principles of present-giving and indebtedness" (McIlwraith 1948:289). The rite is intended to mimic a real potlatch, but the young person (about ten to twelve years of age) gives miniature gifts (canoes, boxes, blankets, etc.) to his/her guests who are about the same age. Like the holder of real potlatch he/she validates a name, which has been chosen for him/her by the elders, and performs the dance associated with it. This practice may account for the miniature canoe models and houses in museum collections and also for smaller than usual masks (Figure 15:13).

Masks used for Public Ridicule

The Sisaok also performed ceremonies which involved publicly ridiculing others, for example for being stingy, performing an error in ritual or for any socially unacceptable act. Unlike the rituals used for major life events these rites do not involve the calling down of supernatural powers. A good example of the difference in the imagery used in masks created for these types of ceremonies can be seen in those ridiculing a person who has deserted a husband or wife. McIlwraith's informant told him that when the wife of a chief deserts him, he would hold a ceremony in which he wears "a lynx skin belt, a headdress of weasel skins, and sometimes above that a huge representation of the female organs". If a staltmc wife is deserted by her husband, the women would carry out the same rite; "the deserted wife dances wearing on her head a representation of the testicles and penis, the latter connected with strings so that the dancer can make it assume the erect attitude: (1925:615). In these ceremonies anyone in the audience may call out unsavory details about the deserter's public organs and these are "incorporated in the songs till they have become as foul as possible" (1925:614). The imagery and symbolism used in these rites are intended to be clear to the audience; the message conveyed is repeated over and over again in the ceremony via song, dance and the visual imagery used in the masks and head ornaments.

Kusiut Supernatural Patron Identification Masks

These masks communicate to the viewer the supernatural patron of the dancer. These are the most elaborately carved of the Kusiut masks and are curated by the owner. Masks that fall into this category are the central supernatural entities used in the rituals associated with Thunder (Figure 15:11), Earthquake, Sun or Moon, and Elaquo'tla (the Hamatsa of the Kwakwaka'wakw). The stories are different from the clan stories because they occurred after humans had been transformed from animals. The rituals they are used in explain an event that happened in the past to a related family member where supernatural assistance was acquired. Most of these masks are carved long before the ceremonies occur and are curated in the same way as the Sisoak masks.

These masks are finely carved and elaborately painted. One of the most common attributes of these masks is the presence of black pigment on the face. Only masks of the Kusiut have black faces. Only masks in this group will have the addition of animal parts such as jaws, teeth and the claws. The masks which are used in association with these masks are often made in the days preceding the ceremony and are less finely carved. They fall into the next category. It appears that the quality of carving and painting used on the masks is dependent on the importance in the ceremony of the entity being portrayed.

Masks of the Kusiut that are Burned

These masks are carved in the four days preceding the Kusiut rite and are intended to be burned after the ceremony. They are characterized by little painting and crude carving. They are made of a great variety of materials, ranging from fungus, cedar bark, shells, sea urchins and other natural materials to wood. Masks in this category are those that are used in association with the Kusiut supernatural patrons, for example the assistants of the Elaquo'tla dancers, the supernatural visitors who follow Thunder, such as the winter wren, rabbit, mosquito, snail, the clowns and Rain-water-Dripping-From-The-Roof (Figure 15:18), and the assistants of the moon (McIlwraith 1948). Other masks that are included in this

category are used in the telling of oral traditions relating to the explanation of how the universe is ordered and how it was created. Examples of these masks include Alk'un'tam, the North and South winds, the Mother of the flowers, and the plants and flowers.

Discussion/ Conclusion

Analysis of the collection indicates that a culturally meaningful typology can be created by first determining the ceremonial contexts in which the masks were used, and then placing the masks into meaningful types based on context. The typology based on ceremonial context revealed that the style expressed in the masks is dependent on how quickly the masks are carved and whether or not they are intended to be curated. Many of the characteristics we might normally attribute to the age of a mask are in fact more a function of the context in which a mask is used. For example, it is generally assumed in a time line that the style of a mask would evolve from the more crudely carved (which would be the oldest) to the more finely carved and that this is a function of the introduction of metal tools. However, what we have seen in the typology of masks organized by context is that right up to the end of the collection period "crudely" carved masks were still being made for use in the Kusiut society, often by the same artist who was creating very finely carved masks.

The Nuxalk masks examined can be seen as coming from a bridge that links the archaeological past of the Nuxalkmc with the present. They are not preserved in the archaeological record and yet their presence suggests that they were once part of that past. The collections examined here, have revealed much about the use of style in the Bella Coola Valley during the ethnographic period. This understanding of the ethnographic use of style may assist archaeologists with better interpretations of the artifacts found in the archaeological record.

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