CHAPTER 6

Prehistoric Art of the Northern Northwest Coast

GEORGE MacDONALD

In the past decade a major critical reassessment of the artistic heritage of the world by anthropologists and art historians has resulted in a major new status for arts of the Northwest Coast. Events affecting this reassessment have been occurring across a broad range of activities, ranging from stylistic analysis of ethnographic Northwest Coast art (Holm 1965) to archaeological activity which has yielded a surprising time depth for the styles of the coast. Major museum exhibitions, international travelling shows, the entrée to fine art galleries, the major renovations of museum exhibits and the dramatic surge of evaluations of historic art pieces have all provided inspiration to native artists in the revival of traditional art forms resulting in new directions for the styles of the area. This reevaluation is most clearly stated in the now famous words of Claude Lévi-Strauss at the opening of the Masterworks of Canadian Indian and Eskimo Art Show in Paris in 1967:

> I consider that the culture of the Northwest Coast Indians produced an art on a par with that of Greece or Egypt. *(Time Magazine)*

Lévi-Strauss elaborated this view to an international audience in his 1975 work on Northwest Coast art and mythology, *La Voie Des Masques.*

Although the enhanced status of Northwest Coast art affects all of the tribes on the coast, it is particularly the tribes of the northern coast, the Haida, Tsimshian and Tlingit, who produced the classic expressions of the Northwest Coast art tradition. This assessment is confirmed in exhibitions, museum and gallery displays, and is very evident in the world art market. Interest in archaeology and prehistoric sites on the coast has also been enhanced by this development, but it is painfully evident in reviewing the archaeological evidence from the northern Northwest Coast that much more work needs to be done before we can comment realistically on the problems of origin and development of the art of that area. Nevertheless, some major trends may be outlined and dated.

The following summary is based primarily on the archaeological information available from Prince Rupert Harbour and a few sites excavated on the Skeena River. Brief comparisons are also made to the limited material from the Queen Charlotte Islands. Despite the fact that roughly twenty thousand artifacts have been recovered from the Prince Rupert Harbour, scarcely more than 100 throw any light on stylistic development. Most of these artifacts are no more than fragments. Efforts to synthesize the situation on the Queen Charlotte Islands present even greater difficulties. The important work of Fladmark (1970a, 1970b) on the early lithic sites provides no examples of artistry since organic remains, including bone, are missing from the sites. Similarly the reported work of Fladmark (1973) and Gessler and Gessler (1974) on later Haida archaeology are too close to contact to provide insights into development of artistic traditions over a long span of time. The report on excavations at Blue Jackets Creek by Severs (1974) covering the period from 5000 to 2000 B.P., is indeed relevant, but is only preliminary.

The principal information presented here comes from nine excavated sites in the Prince Rupert Harbour, namely:

GbTo 23	Garden Island site
GbTo 18	Dodge Island site
GbTo 31	Boardwalk site
GbTo 30	Parizeau Point site

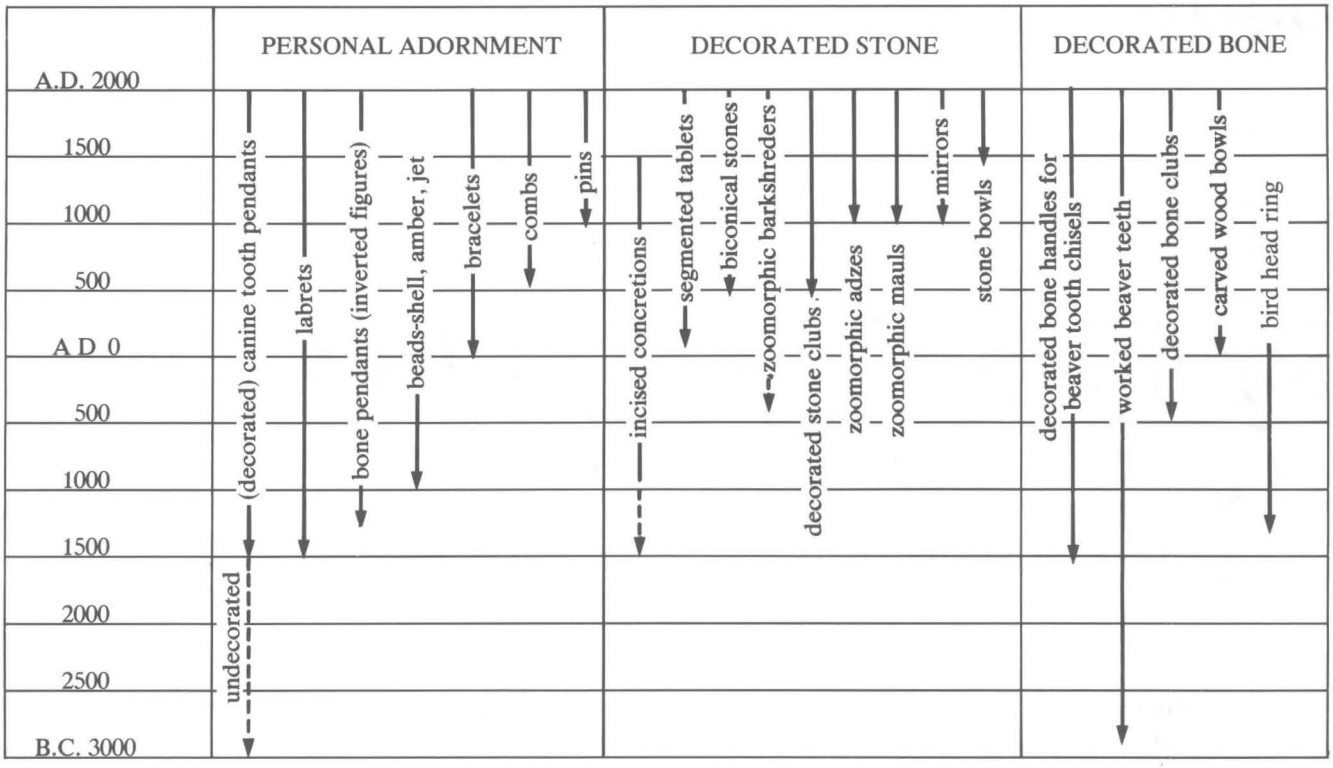


Fig. 6:1. Temporal occurrence of selected art objects from the Tsimshian area.

GcTo 1	'Knu site
GbTn 1	Grassy Bay Site
GbTo 33	Lachane site
GbTo 36	Baldwin site
GbTo 34	Kitandach site

Another major problem is the lack of radiocarbon dates from all sites which would allow precise dating of the artifacts in question. Many sites, for example GbTo 18 and GbTo 34, have only basal dates, and others such as GcTo 1 and GbTo 30 have no dates at all. The best dated site is GbTo 31, with twenty-four dates, ranging throughout the 4500 years the site was occupied. Unfortunately, only a few dozen fragments of art works came from this site. A review of the decorated artifacts in terms of earliest occurrences will provide a general picture of the data base available *(Fig. 6:1)*. The earliest remains from the Prince Rupert Harbour are almost 5000 years old. The following basal dates for four sites have been determined for the fifth millenium before present:

GbTo 34 4965 ± 95 years B.P.
GbTo 18 4790 ± 100 years B.P.
GbTo 33 4630 ± 105 years B.P.
GbTo 31 4230 ± 220 years B.P.

Between 3000 B.C. and 1500 B.C. there is evidence of personal decoration in the form of perforated canine teeth of various species, mostly of sea otter, but also bear, seal and sea lions. While the presence or absence of these items in graves may indicate status differentiation between individuals, they contribute little of significance for the delineation of artistic traditions. It is worth noting, however, that the key features of North Coast culture in other terms are clearly evident during this period. The economic pattern is established for the exploitation of fish runs in the rivers, and the extensive use of intertidal resources, along with land and sea mammal hunting. Although population density is not as large as in later periods, the settlement pattern is well established and most of the same sites continue to be occupied until the contact period in the Prince Rupert Harbour.

What is significant in terms of art is that the cultural pattern appears to be coalescing during this initial period. Symbolic modes of graphic expression have not emerged. Certainly to judge from available archaeological evidence, a distinctive coastal style did not begin to crystalize until about 1500 B.C. We can only infer that the accumulation of historical and mythological traditions by the corporate lineages of northern coast villages was approaching the threshold where graphic symbols of corporate identity became meaningful. Implicit here is the assumption that graphic symbolism expressed in art works, requires a base of shared cognitive modes, belief systems, etc., which must develop to a certain point, perhaps over several millenia, before it can be meaningfully expressed in art works. After 1500 B.C. it is possible to describe artistic development in terms of 500 year periods.

1500 B.C.—1000 B.C.

About 1500 B.C. the first decorated tools appear, represented in the archaeological record by a decorated antler for a beaver tooth carving chisel. This would imply that finely finished carvings were probably being made, although none have survived. In terms of decorative personal effects a few canine tooth pendants have incised motifs and the first labrets appear. By 1000 B.C. siltstone concretions modified with incised ribs, joint marks, vertebral columns and other features indicate the first evidence for an animal style of art emphasizing skeletal parts. This style subsequently produces the emphasis on certain parts of animals in repetitive patterns that become very important later on. A number of beach finds of incised concretions probably relate to this period though they have not been reported from the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Between 1500 and 1000 B.C., curiously shaped bone pendants are first noted which occur with increasing frequency, and in a greater variety of forms (in later levels). The basic form is a flat bone pendant with two parts: a blade-like lower zone and an upper zone perforated at the top for suspension with knob-like appendages on either side. Although simple in appearance, the subsequent elaboration and frequency within datable contexts makes this one of the most interesting of decorative forms from the entire sequence. The single occurrence of a peculiar carved bone object is worth noting for this period 1500-1000 B.C. It is a fragment of an openwork carving which I believe bears a strong similarity to the openwork bone birds' heads from the Fraser Delta (as illustrated in Stewart, 1973:143).

1000 B.C.-500 B.C.

By 500 B.C. numerous other types of personal decoration occur in graves at the Boardwalk site. These include shell disc beads (which also occur in the burials at Blue Jackets Creek on the Queen Charlotte Islands), and beads of amber, dentalium and jet. Copper ornaments from this series of graves (Area A) include bracelets, earrings and tubes of sheet copper wrapped around a wooden core. There is some evidence that these copper tubes were found in direct association with a large basalt dagger and three different types of clubs. Decorated clubs of bone make a dramatic appearance at this time. They include one made from a jaw of a killer whale and one of whale rib which is strangely reminiscent of the ethnographic Nootka whalebone clubs.

The earliest direct evidence for the elaborate stone clubs in the Prince Rupert Harbour, which Duff (1963) called "the Skeena River club style," does not occur until about A.D. 1. Since only a single dated example has been

found, I anticipate future finds should date back to about 500 B.C. Severs (pers. comm. 1976) reports a stone club in this style from Blue Jackets Creek between A.D. 1 and 500 B.C. At present A.D. 1 marks the beginning of a tradition of much more elaborate pecked and ground stone artifacts in the Prince Rupert area to which is added over the succeeding millenium and a half, all of the other elaborate pecked and ground forms.

The suggestions that stone clubs should eventually be found at 500 B.C. is reinforced by the occurrence around that time of skulls with depression fractures which match closely the knob-like butts of the stone clubs (Cybulski n.d.). Presumably the clubs were used in two ways: by delivering a blow with the blade, and by using the knob of the butt in a dagger-like fashion. A high incidence of forearm fractures (Cybulski n.d.), beginning at this time appear to relate to attempts to protect the head with the forearm which took the blow. There is further evidence at 500 B.C. of trophy-head collecting and the use of sections of human skulls as amulets. The emphasis on weaponry noted at this time coincides with the brief appearance of status grave goods that may relate to increased differentiation of rank. The development of ranked social status may also explain the concentration of materials imported over considerable distances, such as copper, obsidian, jet, amber and dentalium that may also indicate expanding trade relationships. A moderate degree of hostility is suggested by burial remains at this time, but this requires much further investigation. In any event, there is some evidence of marked intra-village, and possibly intra-tribe, hostility which carries with it an elaboration of decorative elements and weaponry.

500 B.C.-A.D. 1

In the interval between 500 B.C. and the time of Christ, ribbed and segmented stone forms occur in Prince Rupert and at Blue Jackets Creek that have no apparent function. They are usually of sandstone or slate and are generally small (under 10 cm.). I have called them amulets for want of a better term. Their main characteristic is the segments into which they are divided by sawing or incising. They are usually tabular in shape, divided by a longitudinal line (or lines) into zones that are further segmented at right angles into multiple bars or rings.

By A.D. 1 new types of decorated objects are clearly present in the deposits. A most interesting new form of personal decoration is the bent bone bracelet with elaborate engraved designs. Although minor examples of engraving on bone occur earlier, bracelets provide a relatively frequent class that are amenable to more systematic analysis of motifs. The motifs are entirely geometric and bear close resemblance to Tlingit bracelets noted in ethnographic collections. Engraved bands occur elsewhere on the coast and in the Fraser River area and are frequently called brow bands, presumably based on ethnographic parallels from that region. Severs (1974) reports two caribou metapodials with elaborate geometric decoration from Blue Jackets Creek at a much earlier estimated date of between 1000 and 500 B.C.

Several new categories of pecked and ground stone forms which are characteristic of the North Coast are clearly present in the Prince Rupert area by the time of Christ. Bark shredders with occasional zoomorphic designs and the enigmatic biconical stones appear. Drucker (1943:57) suggested that the later forms may have been used as plank smoothers with rope handles looped around the knob-like ends. The purpose of smoothing planks is thought to be in order to prepare them for painted decoration.

A.D. 1-A.D. 500

Between A.D. 1 and A.D. 500 there is evidence in the Prince Rupert area of a wide variety of wooden objects which were preserved due to the chance occurrence of an extensive waterlogged deposit at the Lachane site. This site was salvaged by a National Museum of Man team in 1973 (Inglis 1974). Occurring in the deposit were wooden boxes, bowls, weapon shafts, wedges, adze and chisel handles, basketry, canoe paddles, etc., that were mostly undecorated but which clearly established a technology in perishable organic material such as wood and bark, that is little different from ethnographic times. Considerable basketry was recovered from the deposit, some with simple decorative weaving but will not be discussed in this paper (Croes n.d.). Of particular interest, however, is a carved wooden handle, with two square peg attachments, which was possibly the handle of a bowl lid.

A.D. 500-A.D. 1000

There are no new art forms or decorated objects appearing at the A.D. 500 level in any sites, although all the previous forms continue through this period. About A.D. 800 the first combs appear which bear the earliest combination of stylistic features that can be considered as classic Northwest Coast style.

At A.D. 1000 another major occurrence of new forms is noted. In the category of personal decoration are bone pins with animal or human head finials. Zoomorphic labrets, though rare, make their appearance about A.D. 1100. Only three such labrets are known from the Prince Rupert Harbour and only one is from a datable context. All three have bird head decorations.

About A.D. 1000 a style of zoomorphic decoration applied to mauls and adzes is clearly present, although plain mauls and adzes occur a few centuries earlier. The zoomorphic forms are large-eyed, large-mouth creatures which cannot be identified as to species but seem to suggest frogs, wolves, birds and possibly fish. Although the earliest dated stone bowl fragment does not occur

until circa A.D. 1500, the style of zoomorphic decoration on a number of undated finds relates to the same zoomorphic style that appears on mauls and adzes about A.D. 1000.

A final type that occurs at this period is the slate mirror. Only two are from archaeological context, and one of these is a surface find. There are, however, numerous examples in ethnographic collections. They are all humanoid in form, with a head and body zone and highly abstract legs and arms.

A.D. 1000-Contact

The period from A.D. 1000 to contact is relatively devoid of new forms in the archaeological deposits. It appears that by A.D. 1000 all of the major elements of northwest coast art were in place, at least to judge from the preserved remains. No doubt changes were taking place in art styles applied to carved and painted wood, but of these there is no archaeological evidence.

The above statement on prehistoric art from the North Coast is concerned simply with first occurrences of objects relevant to questions of style, motifs and iconography, as well as to some of the questions of their broader chronological and cultural context. Once again I would stress that the small sample sizes for many forms, often only one or two examples, means that the date for first occurrences must be considered as minimal. For example, much eroded antler combs with traces of decoration have been found in a context on the Queen Charlotte Islands which date more than a thousand years earlier than do combs from the Prince Rupert area (Severs: pers. comm. 1977). The elaborateness of style integration even in the earliest finds, slate mirrors, for example, would suggest further that the use of decoration will eventually be found to be much earlier. The interpretation of dates from levels associated with the objects under consideration has also been handled in a conservative fashion. It should also be remembered that many interesting developments in various forms take place after their initial occurrence. Each category will be considered as a sub-tradition, and the variations through time associated with each will be examined. Since most pieces have not been published previously, it is necessary to include some description.

The description and analysis of decorated artifacts which follows is presented on the basis of the relative frequency and importance of the various items to the question of style definition and dating. They are mostly from the sites in the Prince Rupert Harbour, and are drawn from approximately 20,000 artifacts recovered by National Museum of Man projects between 1966 and 1973. As such the remains are then representative of Tsimshian culture in particular. Decorated bone will be examined first, since it represents the earliest decorated remains and is relatively abundant. It is also relevant to the problem of social status in the early cultures of the northern coast. Various classes of decorated stone artifacts occur generally later in time, with new forms introduced within the last few millennia, and these will be described next. Finally, wood objects and rock art will be briefly described as special categories.

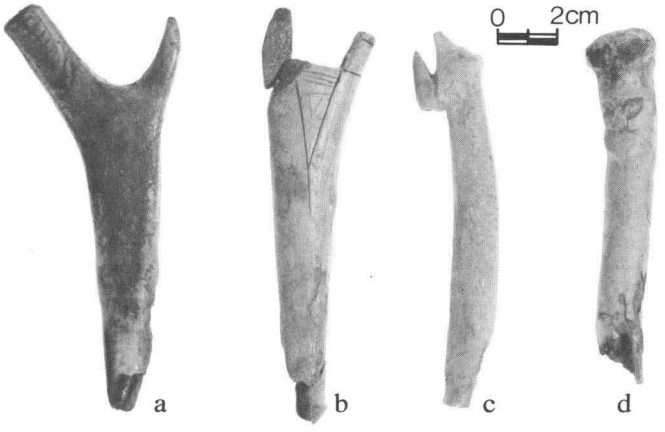


Fig. 6:2. Antler handles.

Decorated Bone and Antler

Antler Chisels

Five antler handles recovered from the excavations in the Prince Rupert area are decorated. Four are described below. The earliest example *(Fig. 6:2d)* dates circa 1500 B.C. It is a slightly modified deer antler with a roughly carved human face. The next example *(Fig. 6:2c)* circa A.D. 1, is also of deer antler but much more extensively modified. The decoration consists of an animal head, which to judge by the short muzzle, small ears and powerful jaw, is a bear. Indications of ribs are carved along the grip of the chisel. The third example *(Fig 6:2b)* is from a yet undated matrix and is decorated in an abstract design with linear incisions. Two projecting tangs at the end provide a socket for the index finger. The fourth specimen retains the antler tangs to form the finger grip *(Fig. 6:2a)* On the widest tang an eye and large toothed mouth is incised.

All examples have a deeply incised bed to provide a firm haft for the beaver tooth bit. The lateral grinding on some beaver teeth, supplemented by ethnographic information (Barbeau n.d.) suggest that beaver teeth were often hafted in tandem or even multiples to form a wider chisel edge. The importance of these chisels is that they provide proof of extensive wood carving (mostly now perished) as well as for the fact that their hafts are always decorated with animal or abstract designs. Over 1000 modified beaver teeth have been excavated from the Prince Rupert sites, which suggest that they usually had wooden hafts such as the Ozette examples.

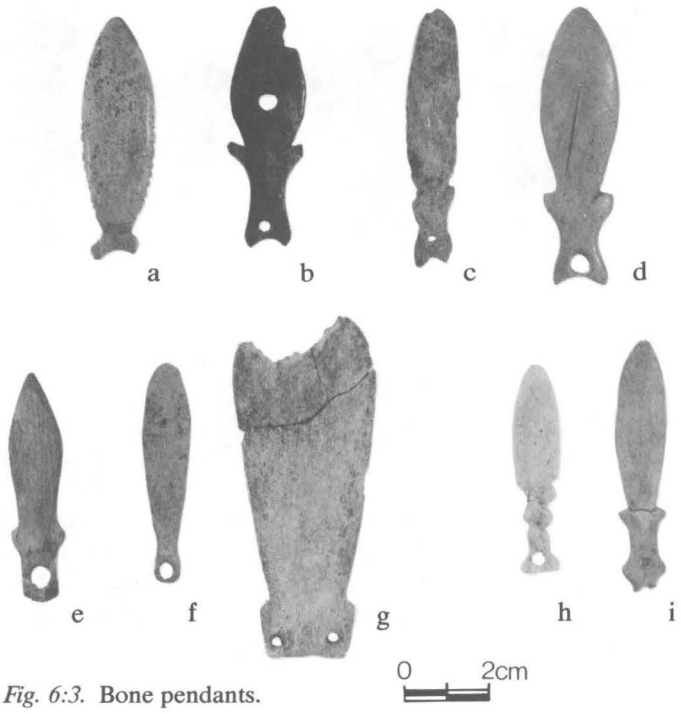


Fig. 6:3. Bone pendants.

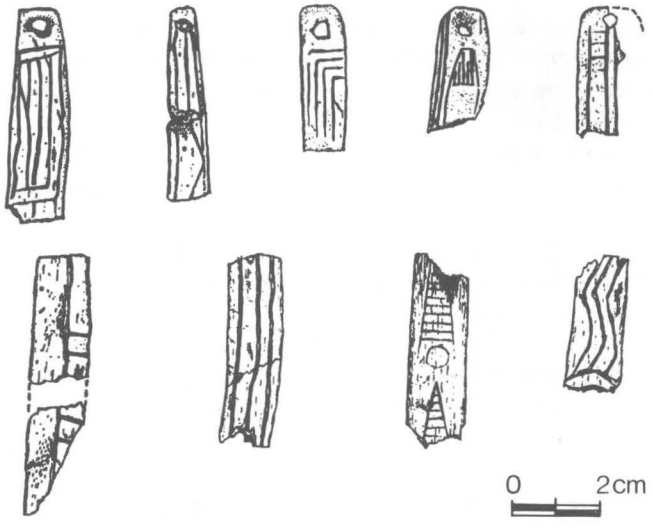


Fig. 6:4. Fragments of bone bracelets, illustrating some of the fine engraved decoration patterns.

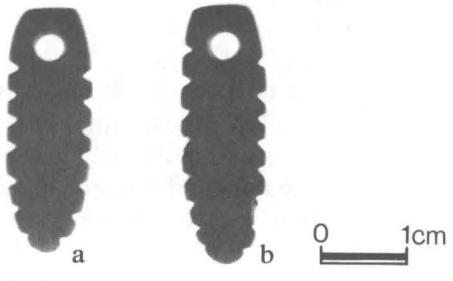


Fig. 6:5. Bone pendants.

Bone Pendants

The bone pendants are of particular interest in the Prince Rupert area since they are numerous, span a significant period, occur at most sites and are relatively simple in form. They appear to be highly stylized human figures which are hung upside down. Inverted as in Figure 6:3, the "head" of the figure is a large oval or pointed form with a proportionally smaller body and variable number of appendages. Usually the space between the "legs" is gouged or drilled to form the suspension hole. There are no indications of interior details on the figures. One example *(Fig. 6:3b)*, which dates A.D. 800-900 has a hole through the middle of the "head." One of the earliest examples *(Fig. 6:3d)*, which dates between 1000 and 1500 B.C. has a pointed "head" and simple protruberances for limbs. A number of aberrant forms occur. The pendant figure which appears in Figure 6:3h has multiple limbs and the specimen illustrated in Figure 6:3f has no limbs at all. In Figure 6:3i, the "body"portion has been transformed into a jawed monster with the head rendered as a protruding tongue. The specimen illustrated in Figure 6:3g is much larger than the others and may not in fact be part of this class. There are two suspension holes and the "head" has become the dominant element. Further aberrant forms include Figure 6:3a which has no suspension hole and appears to be more fish-like, with multiple notches on both margins. Figure 6:5 shows two examples found together which also have notched margins.

The identification of these pendants as humanoid in form is of course speculative, but warrants further comment. The basic model of several highly stylized, almost abstract artifact types from the Northwest Coast is one that is basically humanoid. One example is the slate mirror with a head and body zone with highly abstract arms and legs *(Fig. 6:6)*. Another example is the copper that has carried the abstraction of the human form even farther with only a head and a body. The limbs have been eliminated altogether (Holm: pers. comm. 1973). Of course the copper, unlike the pendants or mirrors, has basic interior details such as the central backbone and ridge dividing the head from the body. The painted decorations on copper provide further interior details, for those who are skeptical of the humanoid interpretation for these forms, such as face and ribs in the appropriate panels of the copper.

A question which remains to be answered is why the pendant figures were hung upside down. Although it is too complicated an argument to go into here, I will simply offer the statement that it is because they represent ancestors. These pendants can be compared to the many examples of Thule human figure pendants, which are

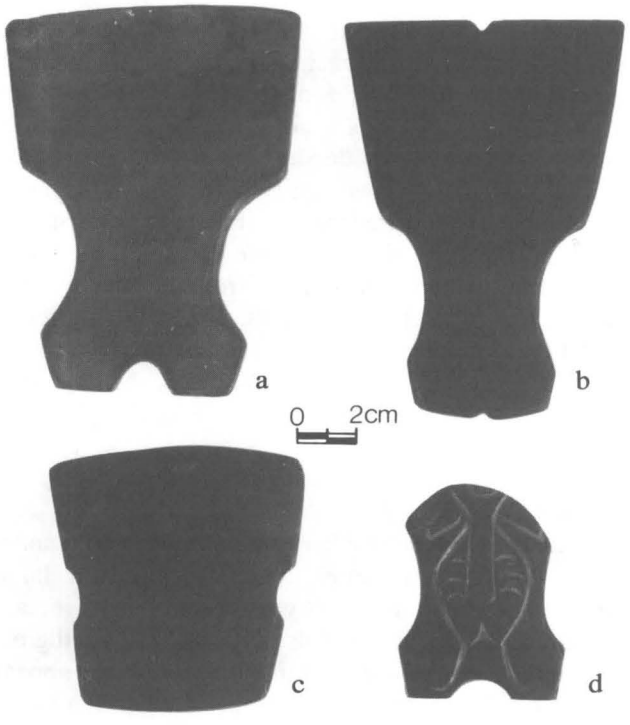


Fig. 6:6. Slate mirrors.

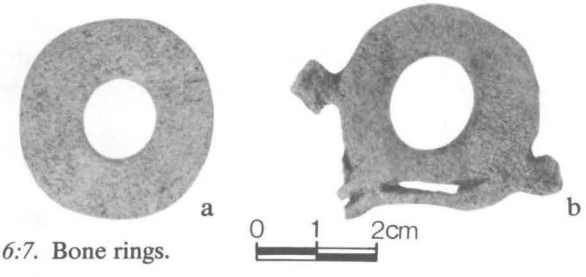


Fig. 6:7. Bone rings.

much more realistically carved, that were hung upside down by a hole between the legs. The only possible analagous form I can see on the South Coast are the highly stylized pendants which are found in cross section rather than flat, but which often have the same template as these North Coast pendants (Stewart 1973:147).

Any attempt to answer the question of how these pendants were used must also be speculative. However, the closest analogy from ethnographic material appears to be the bone pendants fund on chiefs' and shamans' aprons through Siberia and northwestern North America. These aprons often have hundreds of pendants of a single type for each costume, such as deer or reindeer hooves, puffin beaks, incisor or canine teeth or pieces of bone or antler. There is further evidence in the vast literature on shamanism that multiple small human figures on shamanic paraphernalia represent the people of the community he served. These multiple pendants also provided him at the same time with their support when required, such as in conflicts between shamans.

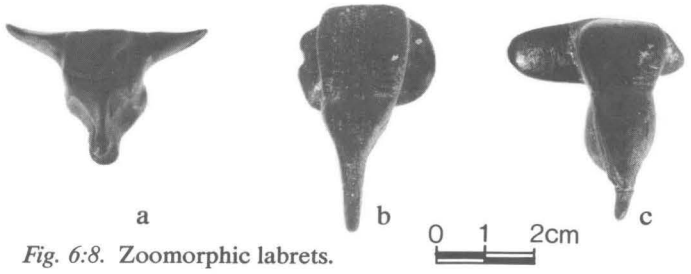


Fig. 6:8. Zoomorphic labrets.

Bone Rings

Although there are only a few bone rings from the North Coast sites they provide at least a glimpse with a possible cross-tie to the south. The first example is an incomplete carved ring *(Fig. 6:7a)* which dates between 1500 and 1000 B.C. that is similar to examples illustrated in Stewart (1973:143, V9). An example of a plain bone ring from the North Coast appears in Figure 6:7b.

Labrets

Although most stone labrets are plain, they are part of the category of items of personal decoration on the North Coast which spans a long period. The first example from the Prince Rupert area occurs about 1500 B.C. Dark grey slate is the favoured material although examples of coal, marble and a type of dull red slate also occur. Unfortunately, there are not enough sufficiently well-dated examples to suggest a sequence, although a few trends are obvious such as an increase in size toward the time of Christ when a few extremely large examples occur. The three late examples with bird heads protruding from the front have been mentioned previously *(Fig. 6:8)*. Only one was found in a site and it dates late in the sequence, after the first millenium A.D. All have beak-like protruberances and bulbous eyes, but otherwise are different stylistically from anything else from the North Coast. In the graves before A.D. 1 labrets occur with both males and females, although ethnographically they are restricted to females (Cybulski 1974).

On the Queen Charlotte Islands, Severs (pers. comm. 1976) has evidence from the occurrence of tooth abrasion for the possible use of dual lateral labrets from about 1000 B.C. as well as medial labrets similar to those from the Prince Rupert sites. Although labrets do not reveal much about art forms on the North Coast, their use as personal ornamentation, and their association with status differentiation makes them of some considerable interest.

Copper Ornaments

Prehistoric copper has been found in significant quantities only with the burials at the Boardwalk site which date to circa 500 B.C. Twenty pieces of cold annealed copper (including two flat copper bracelets *(Fig. 6:9)*, one pair of copper earrings, tubular rolled beads of copper and sheets of copper rolled around and preserved pieces of cedar rods *(Fig. 6:10)*) were found among the grave goods. The

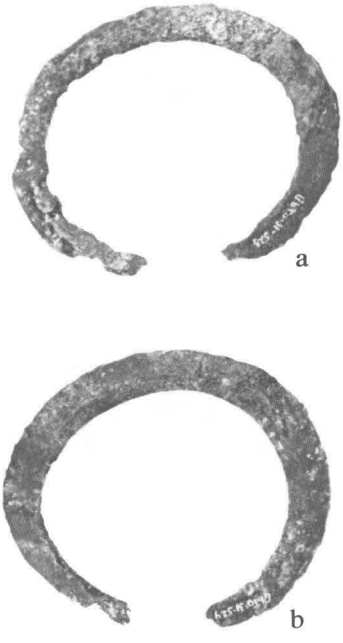


Fig. 6:9. Copper bracelets.

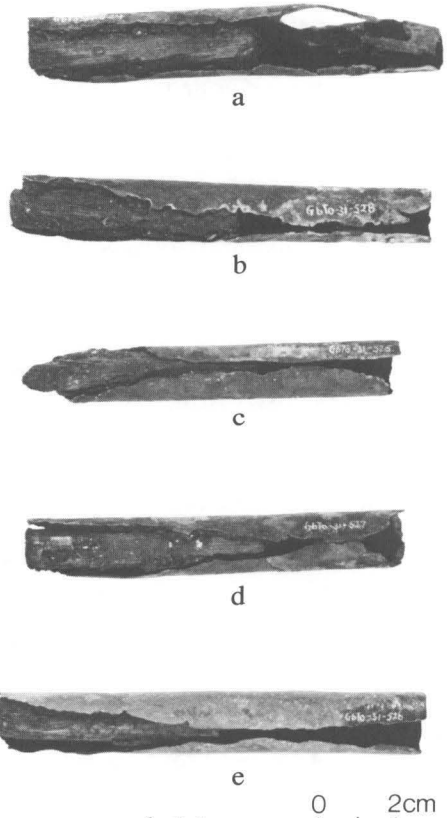


Fig. 6:10. Copper wrapped sticks.

alignment of the tubes in double, parallel rows, and their association with a cache of weapons including a slate dagger and three types of clubs, suggests that they may be all that remains of a suit of rod armour. None of the copper bears surface decoration. It is quite conceivable that this cache of weaponry represents an isolated example of booty captured from another tribe and disposed of in the cemetery area. A single female skull found nearby, and stained with copper from the cache, may have been a trophy head. Decapitation at this period is verified by a number of skeletons in the Boardwalk site and other contemporary burials that lack the skull and show cutmarks on the cervical vertebrae (Cybulski: pers. comm. 1976).

Sea Otter Teeth Mosaics

At one grave from 500 B.C. at the Boardwalk site, and a possibly contemporary grave from Dodge Island, large quantities of sea otter molars were found over a rectangular area covering the burials. Although no intelligible pattern could be distinguished in either case, they appear to have been used as decorative studs hammered into the lid of the burial box. The use of sea otter teeth inlay on box lids was common in ethnographic times along the length of the coast. The only prehistoric example, however, seems to be the whale saddle from the Ozette site that was inlaid with sea otter molars to form a thunderbird and Sisiutl design.

Beads

Shell disc beads were found in considerable quantities only in the Boardwalk site burials at 500 B.C., along with irregular drilled fragments of amber and jet. Dentalium shells also occurred as part of necklaces and ear pendants at this cemetery. The vast majority of burials excavated from other sites in the area are totally devoid of grave goods.

Bone Bracelets

Bone bracelets have not been found in the Prince Rupert deposits before the time of Christ, and appear to be entirely absent from known sites on the Queen Charlotte Islands. They are of particular interest, however, because of the fine engraved decorations which occur on them. The association of these bracelets in terms of age and sex affiliation is not known and I do not know of any in ethnographic collections of the Tsimshian or Haida. They do occur in Tlingit ethnographic collections however, with similar, predominantly geometric incised decoration, and are referred to as shamans' armlets (Harris: pers. comm. 1977). Most examples recovered from the Prince Rupert area *(Fig. 6:4)* are fragmentary but they still retain something of their original curvature. At either end of the bracelet one or two holes have been made for lashing

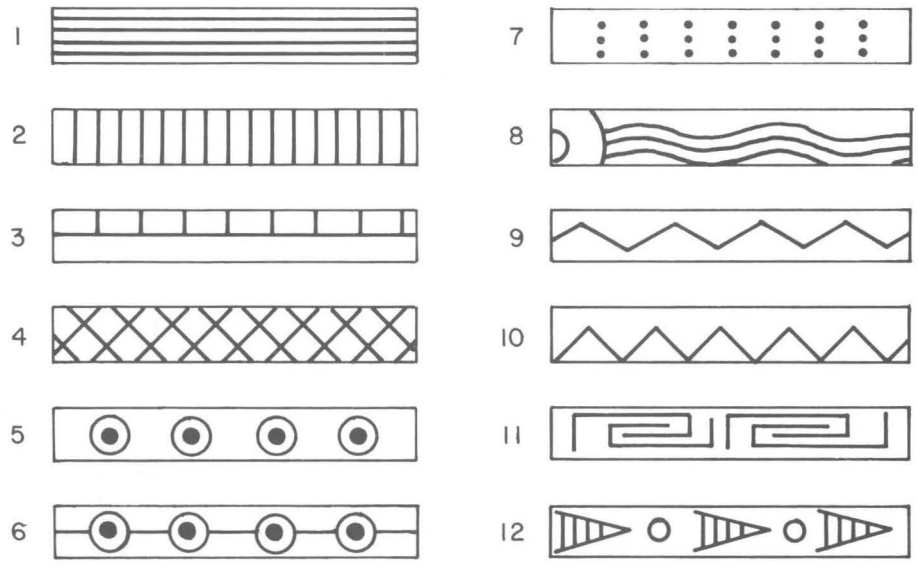


Fig. 6:11. Geometric motifs from bone bracelets.

together with sinew. The geometric decorations on bracelets can be grouped into the following forms *(Fig. 6:11)*:

1 parallel longitudinal lines
2 ribbed lines
3 longitudinal lines, segmented along one edge like the backbone designs etched on siltstone concretions of fish and serpents
4 cross hatching, a design that also occurs on incised stone
5 concentric circles arranged in rows
6 concentric circles joined by a line
7 parallel rows of dots covering the surface
8 undulating parallel lines (with or without intermittent circular designs)
9 zigzag design (with single or multiple lines)
10 zigzag lines filled with parallel lines
11 continuous fret motifs
12 continuous devouring monster heads comprised of circular eyes and expanding mouths filled with lines

The common thematic element in the motifs appears to be stylized vertebral columns, eyes, teeth and scales that have their parallels in incised stone concretions. The concern in all cases seems to be with the stylized features of water monsters or fish, particularly their eyes, vertebrae and ribs. They are much simplified concerns that are also emphasized in the elaborate stone club complex of the region. Occasionally these same motifs are applied to awls and perforators, either singly or in combinations *(Fig. 6:12)*.

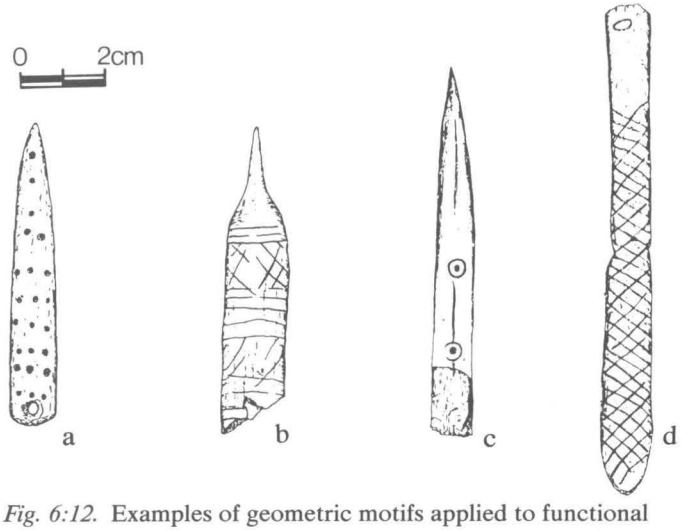


Fig. 6:12. Examples of geometric motifs applied to functional objects.

Bone Combs

Combs are the most highly decorated of all artifact classes on the North Coast. It is unfortunate that only four combs have been found in the 20,000 artifacts. Only three of these are sufficiently complete to comment on. The most interesting and complete example (GbTo 23-850; *Fig. 6:13a)* dates around A.D. 800. An earlier date of A.D. 290 (MacDonald 1971) had been assigned to this piece but subsequent dates indicate the strata in which it occurred accumulated more rapidly than expected. The bridge of the comb depicts a wolf (or possibly a bear) in a profile hocker position, carved identically on both sides. The ribs are clearly indicated but the emphasis is mostly on the tongue, the ear and the eye, the primary organs of communication. The consistent emphasis on these features in the iconography of the coast may symbolize the superior powers of communication of animals over man

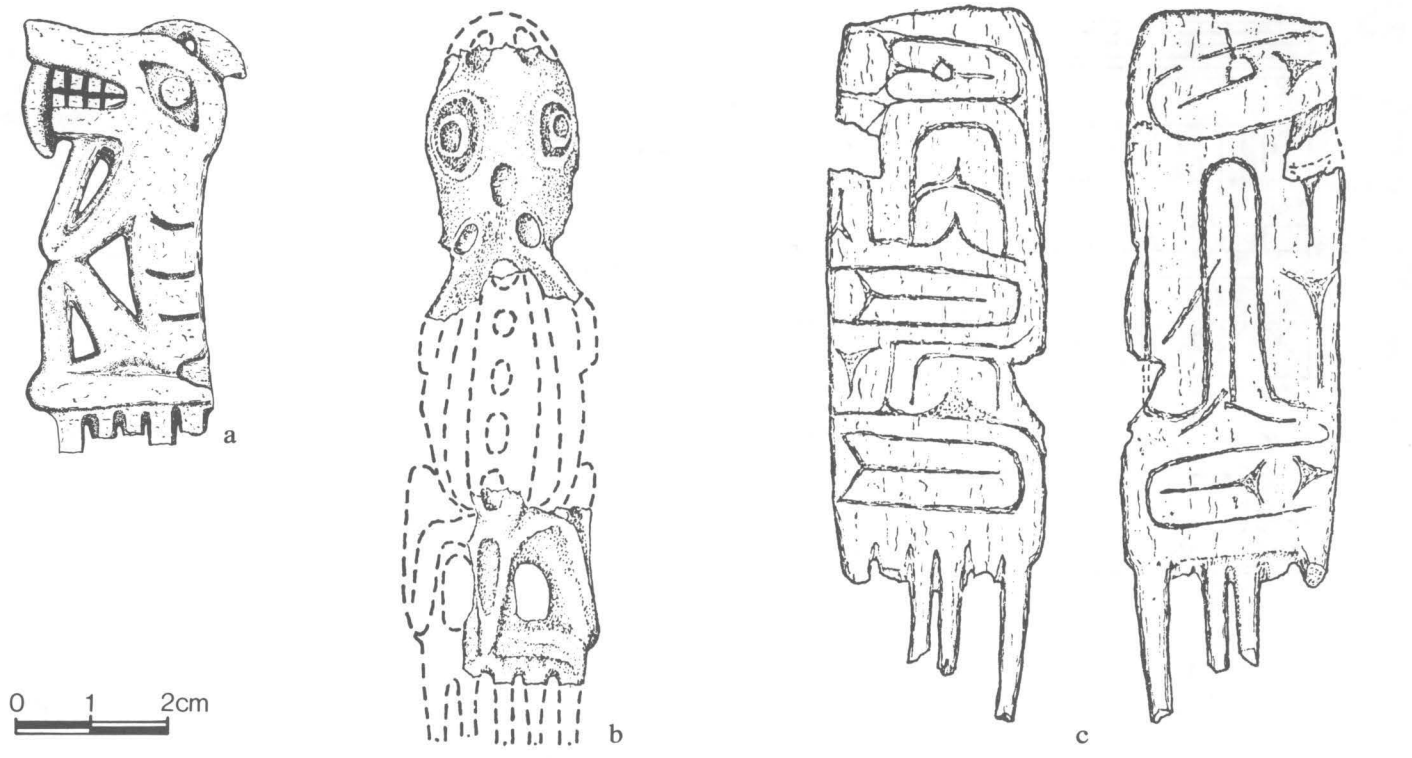


Fig. 6:13. Bone combs.

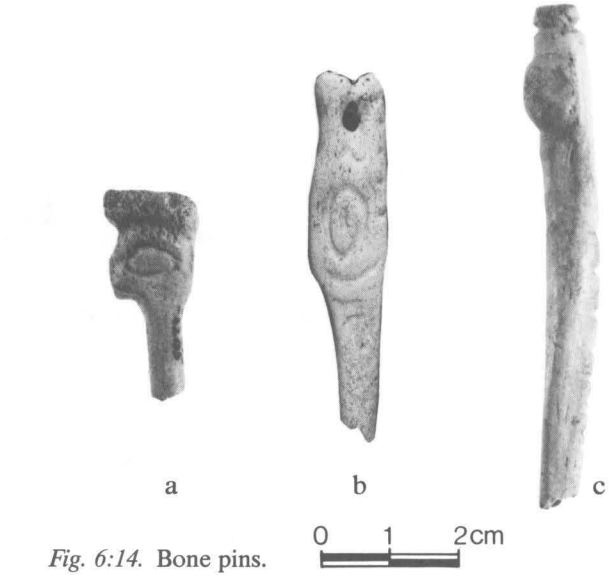


Fig. 6:14. Bone pins.

as emphasized in the circum-polar bear cult. Of stylistic importance is the extended tongue motif as well as the backward pointing ear, and the eye which slopes down at the back. All three features are prominent in the bear figures (and associated shaman) carved in the rocks of the Kitselas Canyon.

The second comb (GbTo 33-3985; *Fig. 6:13b*) dates somewhat later and portrays an animal with a long tail, possibly an otter or lizard. The stylistic importance of this piece is to be found in the use of many joint marks at the shoulders and along the spinal column and in the concentric ringed eyes and openwork between the limbs and the tail.

The third comb (GbTo 34-1805; *Fig. 6:13c*) is an example of flat design. The design relies heavily on ovoids, eye and U-forms and split U's. However, Bill Holm, who was sent a cast on it, was unable to see a meaningful figure in the design. The use of what Holm (1965) calls cuneiform (open Y-like) elements is much more characteristic of Straits Salish design in the historic period than it is of the North Coast. Nevertheless the importance of the piece is in its combination of several classic North Coast elements to completely fill the design field.

Bone Pins

Three examples of bone pins with carved heads appear in the Prince Rupert material between A.D. 1000 and 1500. They were possibly used as fasteners for cedar bark capes. It seems strange that no earlier examples

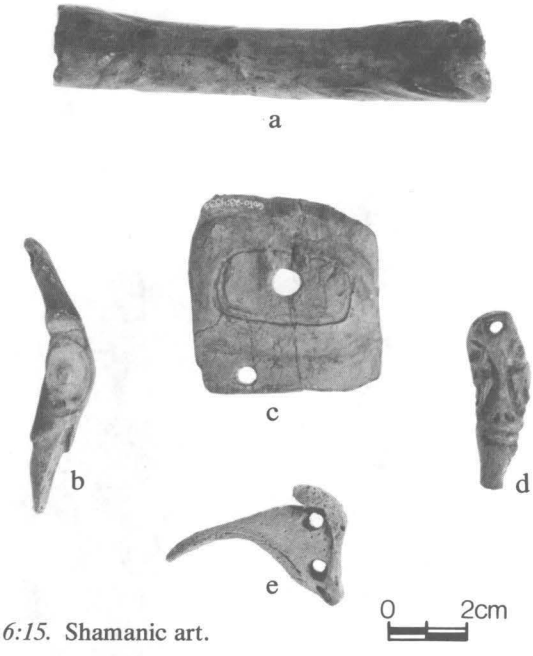


Fig. 6:15. Shamanic art.

have appeared but it may be due to the very small sample.

The first example (GbTo 23-1205; *Fig. 6:14a*) dates circa A.D. 1000 and is decorated with a bird's head. The only distinguishing features are the beak, the eye and a serrated comb on the bird's head. Rooster-like combs are also encountered on a miniature bone club, mentioned later.

The second example (GbTo 33-2086; *Fig. 6:14b*) is an innovative one with a long snout, a slotted eye and a vague arc behind the eye zone that may indicate an ear form. The proportion of the head to the tapered pin suggest that it may portray a serpent or water creature of some sort.

The third example (GbTo 23-25; *Fig. 6:14c*) is a somewhat thicker pin which dates circa A.D. 1000-1200. It is decorated with a crude human face, in which the eyes and mouth are simple pits, and a bun-like knob at the top that may represent a hairdo.

Shamanic Art

A number of isolated finds from the North Coast relate directly to shamanism. The first is a bear claw bony element with double perforations *(Fig. 6:15e)* which has been ground flat at the proximal end presumably as a part of a shaman's crown of grizzly bear claws. A crown of this sort is a standard item of a shaman's paraphernalia for the Tsimshian speaking people, although it is rare among the Haida and Tlingit.

The second item is a bone "soul catcher" with double eye forms on each side and four holes along the back for suspension *(Fig. 6:15a)*. This piece was found during the period the project was active in Prince Rupert by a private individual who turned it over to the Museum of Northern British Columbia in Prince Rupert. It was found during blasting operations for a fuel storage tank on Tuck Arm, a few miles from town. It was in a rock crevice with a human skeleton that was subsequently lost. The extent of blasting at the site destroyed all trace of the grave but I judged its isolated situation to be typical of a shaman's grave, well removed from village locations. Although there is no way of dating the piece, it appears to be characteristic of the carvings executed with beaver tooth chisels in the prehistoric period. If so it is the only prehistoric soul catcher from the North Coast. Although it is not as elaborate as the historic double killer whale type of soul catcher, it is stylistically closely comparable.

A number of carved bone charms from the Prince Rupert area are less definitely attributable to shamanism. The example in Figure 6:15c dates circa A.D. 1100 and is of interest as a classic North Coast eye form with a clearly incised double ovoid assymetrical pupil and ovoid eye zone. The next specimen (GbTo 31-4; *Fig. 15d*) is one of the only examples of a carved human face in a somewhat grotesque form. The last specimen (GbTo 34-910; *Fig. 6:15b*) is a bone pendant with a monster head in which the ears, eyes and tongue are enlarged to maximum dimensions. It is from a matrix that is yet undated and can only be attributed to the late prehistoric period.

The final example of shamanic art is the slate mirror *(Fig. 6:6)*. At one time I was inclined to view these items as paint palettes since there was some evidence to suggest they were used as abraders for faceted chunks of red ochre pigment, along with the fact they had very poor reflective properties, even when oiled. I am now inclined to see them as shaman mirrors, that were not true mirrors but objects for meditation. Widespread shamanic beliefs from Siberia and northern Canada lay heavy stress on shamans' mirrors as an essential tool for the location of lost souls which could only be seen as a reflection. A second well marked function for shaman mirrors was for looking into the future to predict the outcome of raiding or hunting expeditions. A decorated mirror handle from the Boardwalk site *(Fig. 6:6d)* depicts a human in frontal view. Unfortunately it was a surface find, and cannot be dated.

Bone Clubs

Four decorated bone clubs were found in the Prince Rupert sites in addition to several plain bone clubs. Two were miniature while the other two were working models. By far the most spectacular of all decorated bone objects is the club in Figure 6:16a from the Boardwalk site burials. Stylistically the elements used in this piece are surprisingly close to those of the ethnographic period from the

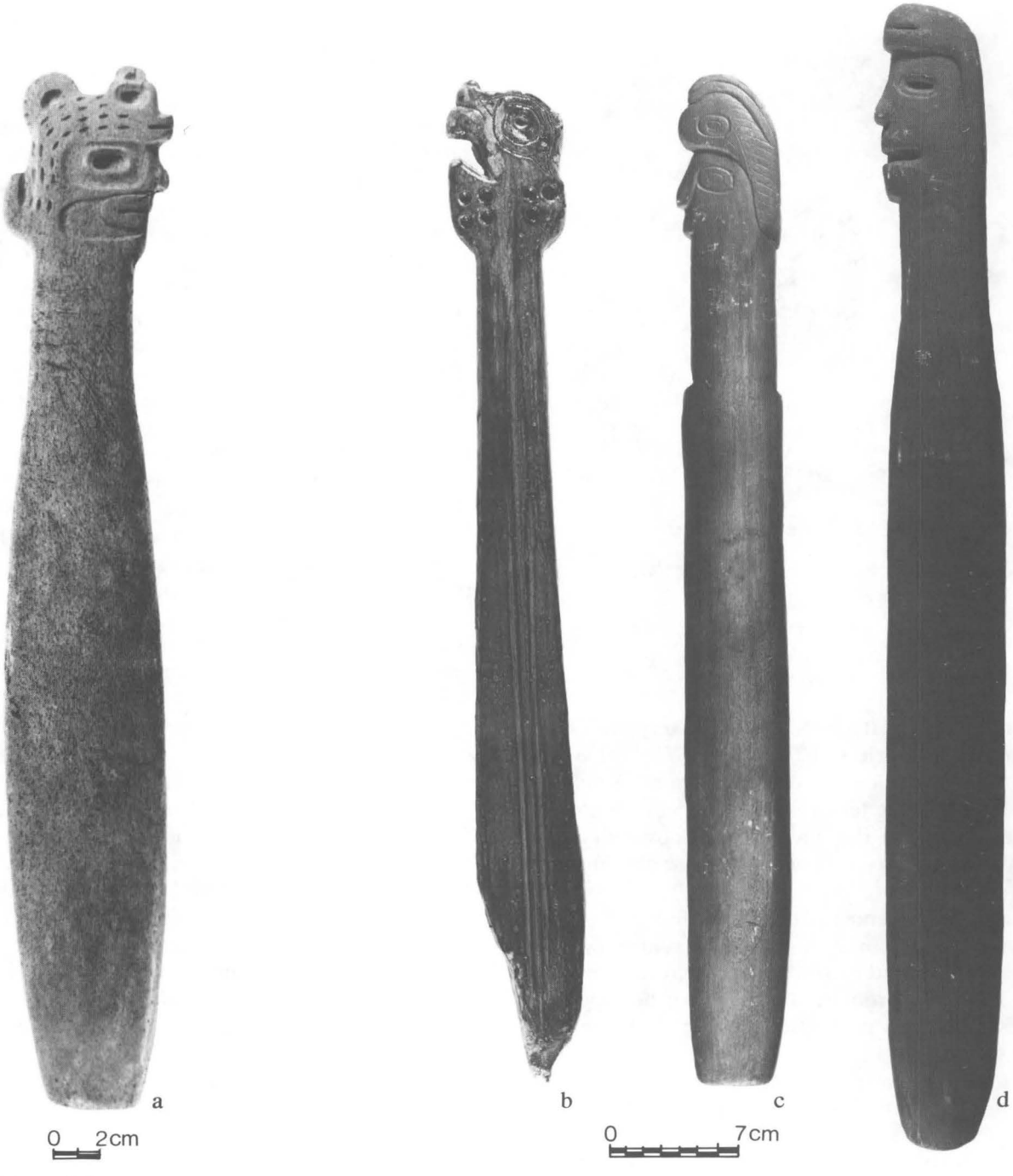


Fig. 6:16. Bone clubs.

South Coast as can be seen in the examples in Figure 6:16b-d which date at least 2000 years later.

The human face in the Boardwalk site example *(Fig. 6:16a)* is formed of ovoids and U-forms (Holm 1965). The eye zone and eye itself are ovoids while the mouth and mouth zone are U-forms. The upper lip is covered in front by a nose ring that is also a U-form. Surmounting the human head is an animal with fur (indicated with dashed lines) and a curved tail. The eye of the animal, possibly an otter, is similar, but somewhat rounder than the human eye. The ear of the animal is small and notched, while on its back is a larger notched U-form that appears to be part of the animal but which I believe is the human's ear. If so, it is an excellent example of merging forms and visual punning typical of ethnographic art of the North Coast. The animal and the human have drilled nostrils and the cut away iris of both figures suggest inlays of shell or other material now gone. The attention devoted to the sense organs of both figures, that is the emphasis on the ears, the drilled nostrils and the inlaid

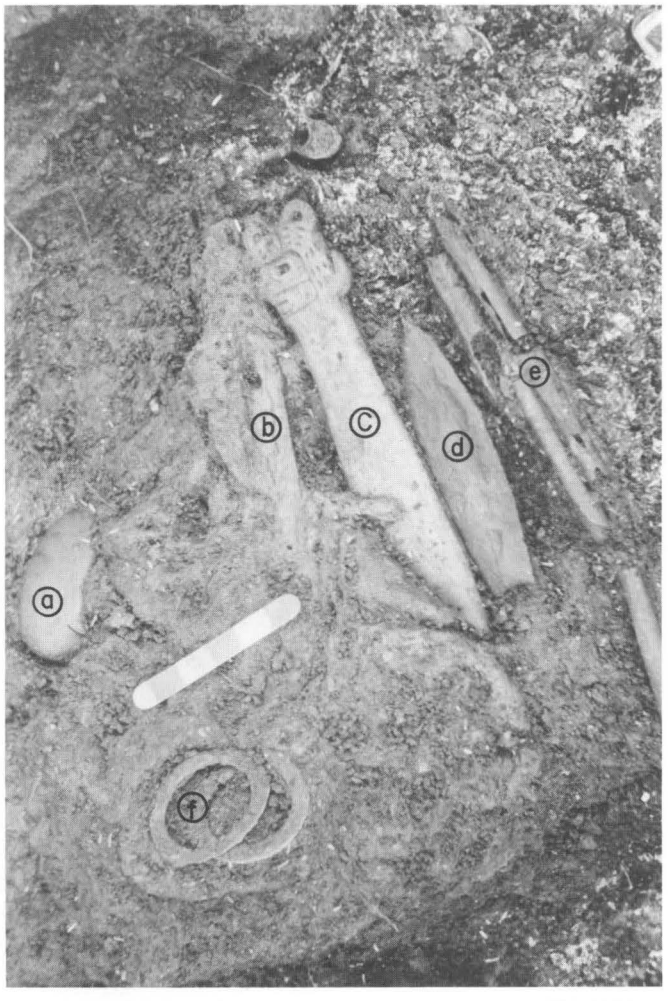


Fig. 6:17. Cache of warrior weapons, which date to 500 B.C., from the Boardwalk site. *a* stone club; *b* killer whale jaw club; *c* whalebone club; *d* basalt dagger; *e* copper wrapped sticks; *f* copper bracelets.

eyes, is a notable feature of all Northwest Coast ethnographic art. Only the tongues have been neglected. The rest of the club is undecorated.

The next example was found together with the above club in the cache of warrior weapons that date from 500 B.C. *(Fig. 6:17).* It was so fragile that it could not be preserved even in the laboratory (it was removed intact from the site in a wax jacket but proved to be only a paper thin shell of bone tissue when preservation was attempted). It was made from the jaw of a killer whale with the teeth forming the striking edge. In form it is very like a number of wood and stone clubs from the North Coast, having a row of large conical projections along one edge, which mimic the natural form of the killer whale jaw and teeth, although considerably modified in outline. The only decorations on this club were double rows of concentric circles joined by lines on either face of the club.

Several miniature clubs also occurred at the Boardwalk site. These obviously have no practical use as weapons and are therefore considered to be ceremonial in function. Shamans' kits often contained ceremonial weapons for fighting other shamans or witches in visionary encounters, which would be a possible explanation of these miniature clubs.

The first example (GbTo 31-211; *Fig. 6:18*) dates to circa A.D. 100. It is a miniature of the larger antler clubs that were common to the region in historic times. This example possesses the projecting branch of the larger antler original, even to the slot on the end that usually held a sharp stone inset. The top of the club is decorated with a bird's head with the suggestion of a crest. The segmented backbone is decorated with a bird's head with the suggestion of a crest. The segmented backbone of the bird extends down the handle. The base of the handle is stepped down and has an incised zigzag border and perforation. It appears significant that the slot in the branch, or 'beak' of the club ends in a carefully drilled circle that reflects the drilled eye of the bird. This can be interpreted as a second head in relation to the bird head at the top.

The second example (GbTo 31-1358; *Fig. 6:19*) which dates to circa A.D. 250, is another miniature replica of the antler club type. It also has a bird head finial and lightly incised wings on either side; the handle portion is missing.

Decorated Stone

By historic times the stone work of the North Coast had achieved a high degree of refinement on a par with that of classic civilization in Central and South America. Although the state of the art was highly developed, elaborate stone pieces were not produced in very large numbers, nor were large sculptural pieces made, in keeping with the fact there were no permanent cult centres. Localities of symbolic or ceremonial importance were often embellished with incised carvings of often major proportions. At least several thousand individual glyphs are found in the Prince Rupert Harbour and the life sized figure of "The Man Who Fell From Heaven" is possibly the most elaborate single figure from the coast.

The tradition of stone carvings appears in modest scale in the archaeological deposits by 1500 B.C. in the form of incised concretions of mudstone. These pieces are generally small, irregular forms whose natural shape suggests the figure for which details such as eyes, mouths, vertebral columns, ribs, limbs, wings or fins, are added by simple inversion. While a range of bird, animal and fish forms are found, salmon, killer whales and water monsters predominate in the iconography. Incised concretions continue through to the second millennium A.D.,

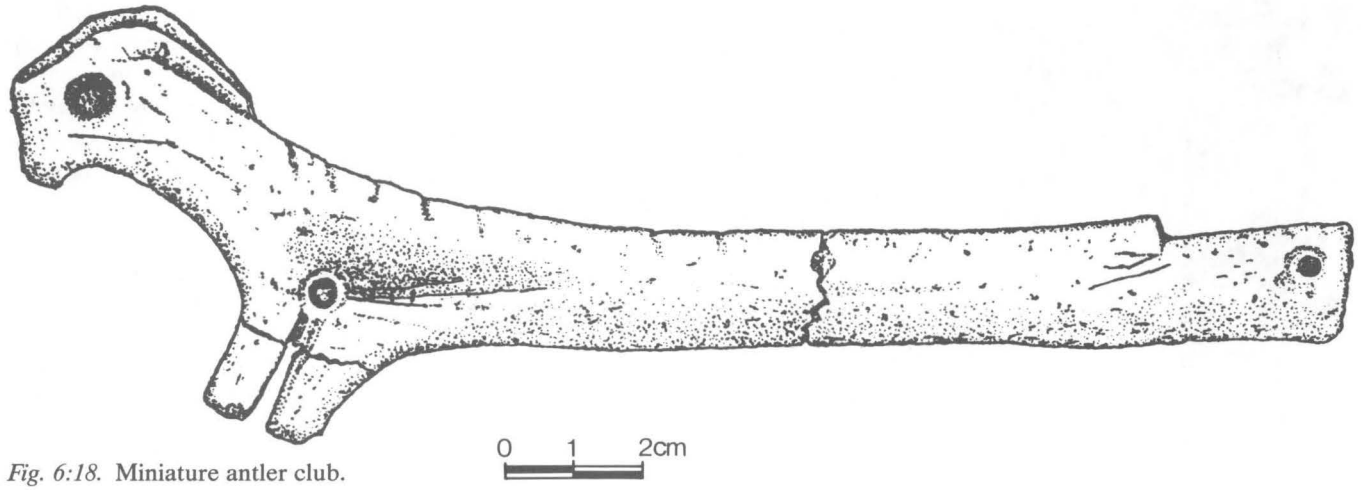


Fig. 6:18. Miniature antler club.

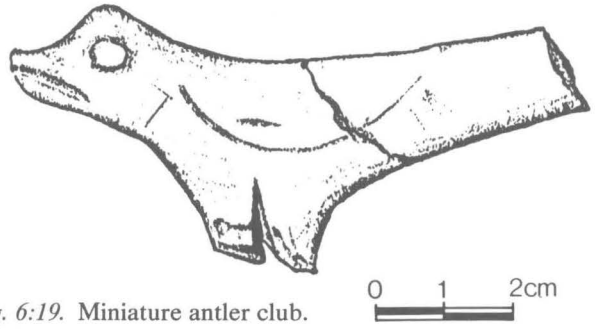


Fig. 6:19. Miniature antler club.

Fig. 6:20. Incised concretion.

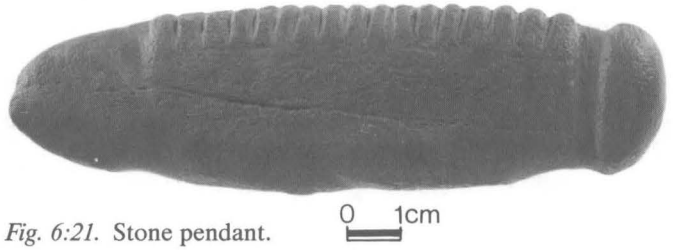


Fig. 6:21. Stone pendant.

which indicates they may have had a particular function in ceremonialism where their inherent natural shape was significant. By 1000 B.C. however, it is clear that completely sculpted effigies were being carved, such as the small raven pendant *(Fig. 6:26)* from an early Boardwalk site grave.

From the core features of the concretion carvings of segmented backbone, ribs, eyes and mouth lines, a highly stylized tradition emerges between 1000 and 500 B.C. in which these features become the essential statement of the piece and the likeness to a particular species is completely lost. The single most important stylistic element is the segmented backbone. Small sandstone tablets appear which generally retain the longitudinal mid-line which divides the backbone from the ribs, divided on either side of the mid-line into deeply carved segments. Frequently the number of segments on one side of the mid-line is greater than on the other, referring I would suggest, to the lesser number of ribs to vertebrae in all species, and an artistic convention well established in the incised concretions of the earlier period. In fact, I believe these tablets have become the quintessential statement of the regeneration principle of animals and especially of fish. This segmentary principle in Northwest Coast art was applied to many other media such as carvings in wood and bone and is the implication behind the stacks of cylinders or "potlatch cones" used on human or crest animal figures in historic times. The backbone of these figures has literally been extended out through their heads and appears to have symbolic implications of favourable reincarnation, as for example, the tall segmented extensions on North Coast memorial poles.

Before discussing the next major development in stone art, the pecked and ground stone tool complex, a more detailed description of the earlier incised stone complex is in order.

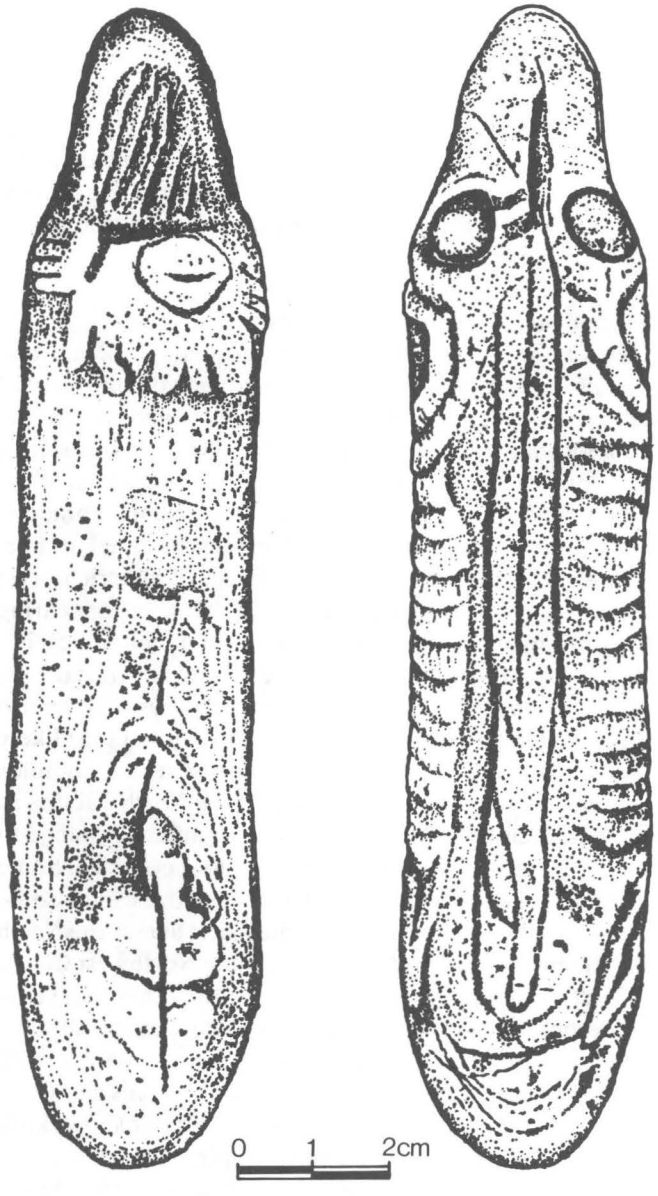


Fig. 6:22. Two views of zoomorphic concretion.

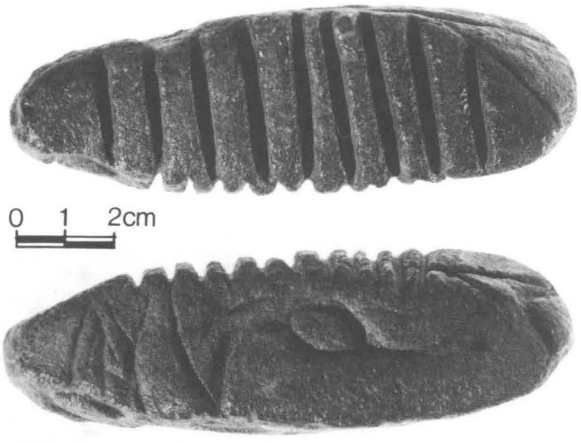


Fig. 6:23. Segmented stone (2 views).

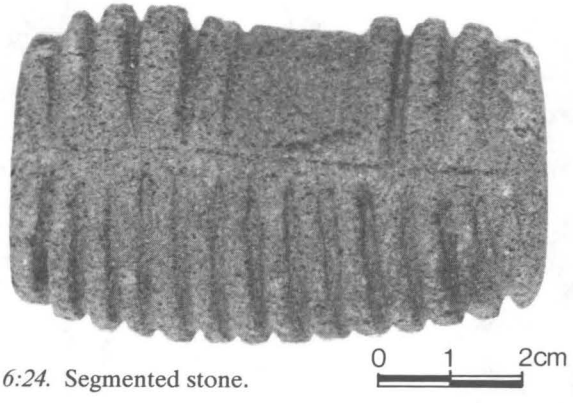


Fig. 6:24. Segmented stone.

Incised Concretions

The earliest example (GbTo 31-2424; *Fig. 6:20*) is a long concretion in which the head is divided from the body by a natural construction emphasized by three parallel bands incised around the neck. The backbone is indicated by a pair of lines which merge at the head. Both the ribs and the vertebrae are expressed by open cross hatching over the body of the creature, a device which may also have the implication of fish scales.

Another example from roughly 500 B.C. is a pendant of a harder stone, that is more clearly distinguishable as a salmon (GbTo 33-3261; *Fig. 6:21*). The head has eyes and gills and the tail section has a deep groove that is worn smooth, probably by a suspension cord. Only the backbone of the fish is indicated on the body. It is defined by a longitudinal line incised on both sides and divided into segments by deeply incised grooves. I believe this simple fish effigy relates the concept of segments to stylized animal or fish backbones which occur on earlier siltstone concretions, to the completely stylized segmentary forms.

A very elaborate incised concretion (GbTo 36-128; *Fig. 6:22*) dating from around the time of Christ, has the core elements such as the backbone of parallel lines continuing through the head, clearly defined ribs, eyes and mouth. In addition it has clearly defined force and hind limbs and paws, and on the underside an ovoid joint mark and tail or fin element composed of crude U-shaped elements. It is truly a monster figure combining limb features of several different creatures. An undated find from the Kitselas Canyon *(Fig. 6:23)* probably fits into the sequence about the time of Christ. It illustrates well the meaningless combination of core design elements such as backbone, mouth gash and eyes. Nevertheless, it still retains the appearance of a creature of some kind, or a monster, which is lost in the next series of segmented tabular forms.

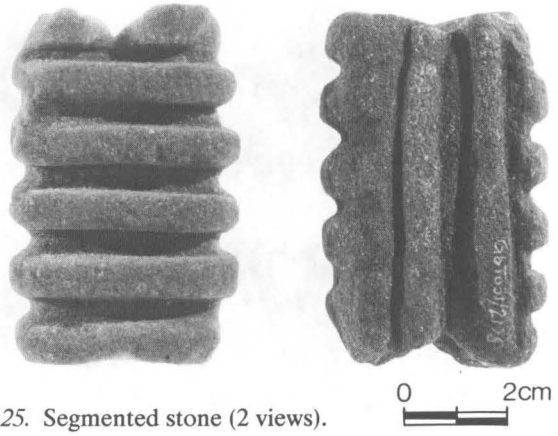


Fig. 6:25. Segmented stone (2 views).

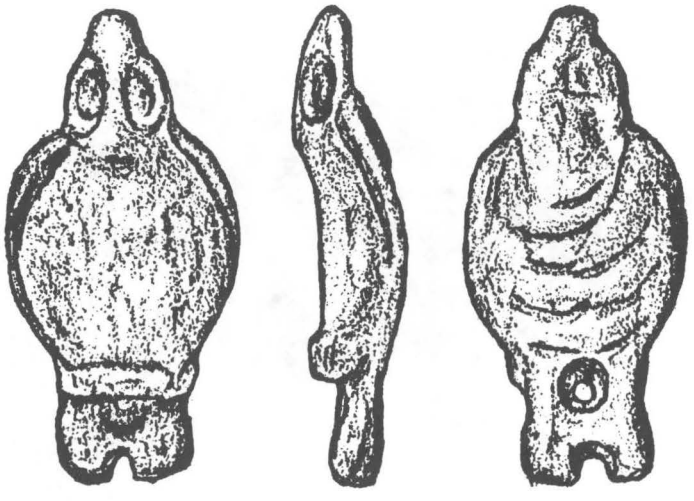


Fig. 6:26. Three views of a schist raven pendant.

Segmented Stones

Although the development of segmented stones begins in incised concretions and develops over a millenia, by about 500 B.C. it has achieved the level of a purely formal statement. In one example (GbTo 31-X717; *Fig. 6:24*), head and tail features are totally eliminated. The tabular body section is divided on both sides by a mid-line, and the rib and vertebral elements are matched except that they are interrupted on one side.

A second example (GbTo 31-2176; *Fig. 6:25*), lacks the mid-line, and the deeply carved segments completely encircle the form. Other examples of ribbed forms from the North Coast are illustrated in Stewart (1973:95), and many others were recovered from the site of Gitaus (GdTc 1) in the Kitselas Canyon. Since this major fishing station on the Skeena River produces an inordinate number of ribbed stones their association with fish ceremonies is strongly implied.

Carved Stone Charms

A beautiful carved raven pendant (GbTo 31-2178; *Fig. 6:26*) of micacious schist is a particularly subtle and refined statement of the art of stone carving at circa 1000 B.C. Rib-like crescentic designs on the underside of the bird, which is otherwise naturalistic in style, provides some link to the skeletal style which prevailed in the incised concretions of the period. The eye areas have been channelled out and once may have held inlays of shell or other animal.

Pecked and Ground Stone Tools

One of the major problems in the history of art and technology on the North Coast surrounds the problem of dating the appearance of the elaborate pecked and ground zoomorphic style. There is a high degree of consistency and integration in this style whether it occurs on stone bowls, hafted and hand mauls, adzes, plank abraders, etc. Unfortunately the extreme scarcity of dated archaeological finds compounds the problems of historical style analysis. A case can be made that the style, appearing together with new tool forms and hafting techniques, is a technological artistic complex derived from outside the area, presumably from the Maritime cultures of the north Asian coast. If, in fact, this is the case, it is more likely that it occurred by stimulus diffusion of a tool complex rather than by direct contact across the North Pacific, as the basic cultural pattern shows no significant change to coincide with the appearance of the tool complex. Some elements like stone bowls, 3/4 grooved adzes, and saddle type hand mauls have their counterparts across the North Pacific rather than further south on the Northwest Coast.

Pecked and ground stone clubs on the other hand may represent a specialized tradition with deeper roots on the North Coast than the massive stone tool complex with zoomorphic decoration. The Boardwalk burials and those from other sites in the Prince Rupert Harbour show skulls bashed with stone clubs of this complex has been found in datable context at circa A.D. 250. Elaborately decorated bone clubs, as noted previously, have been found in much earlier context (circa 500 B.C.).

The North Coast club style, particularly what Duff (1963) called the Skeena River style, will, in all probability, eventually be dated to at least 500 B.C. Leaving aside the strong sexual imagery described by Duff (1975), the club style is concerned very strongly with rib, backbone and scale designs carried to total abstraction that was noted in the earlier incised concretion and segmented tablet forms, and appears to at least have a strong indigenous element to it. I will return to this essential point of the origin of the massive stone zoomorphic style of the North Coast in the conclusion, but wish to pause here to review some of the pieces under discussion.

Stone Clubs

The only excavated stone club is from GbTo 34 *(Fig. 6:27)* with a date of circa A.D. 1-500. It is a very simple

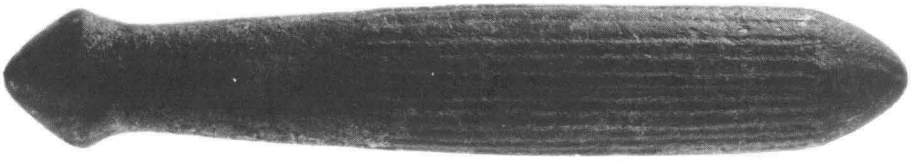


Fig. 6:27. Stone club. 0 2cm

example compared to those in Duff (1969, 1975) but has the essential features of a phalliform head and ribbed blade.

Biconical Stones

Close examination of excavated examples of biconical stones from Prince Rupert appear to confirm Drucker's reasoning (1943: *op. cit.*) that they were abraders for smoothing adzed or split planks in preparation for painting. The knob-like extremities are highly variable, but in extreme examples approach in shape the phallic-like head of some stone clubs *(Fig. 6:28).*

Barkshredders

Stone barkshredders are limited to the North Coast tribes, although they bear some formal relationship to the wooden barkshredders and mat creasers of the central and south coast tribes. While mat creasers were used for preparing reeds, an activity that was not important on the North Coast, barkshredders were used for shredding cedar bark for clothing, etc., a very important North Coast activity as elsewhere.

At least four stone bark shredders have been found in archaeological sites near Prince Rupert, but only one has zoomorphic decoration. Nevertheless, other decorated examples do occur in surface collections from the area. The decorated example (GbTo 18:297; *Fig. 6:29*) dates to circa A.D. 1 and is made of schist. It is not possible to identify the animal depicted but the head and tail appear to fit into a bird category.

Zoomorphic Hand Mauls

Plain hand mauls appear in the Prince Rupert sites about A.D. 500. The vast majority have the conical top; flat top examples common in the late period of the southern coast are quite rare. A number of examples with zoomorphic finials occur in surface collections from the area, but only one example has been found in stratified context. The bulbous eyes and curved snout of the very generalized animal figure are common features of the prehistoric examples, although ethnographic specimens occasionally are elaborately and completely carved (e.g., Duff, 1975: Figures 76, 77).

Zoomorphic Hafted Mauls

Stone mauls with 3/4 hafting grooves follow the same pattern as the hand mauls. Many surface collected examples with animal head finials exist in collections but only

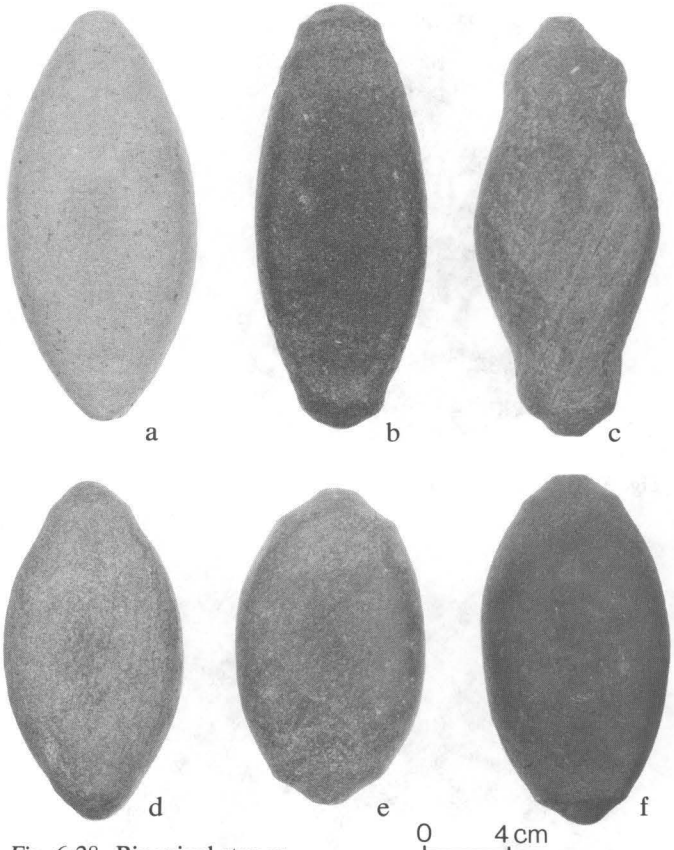


Fig. 6:28. Biconical stones.

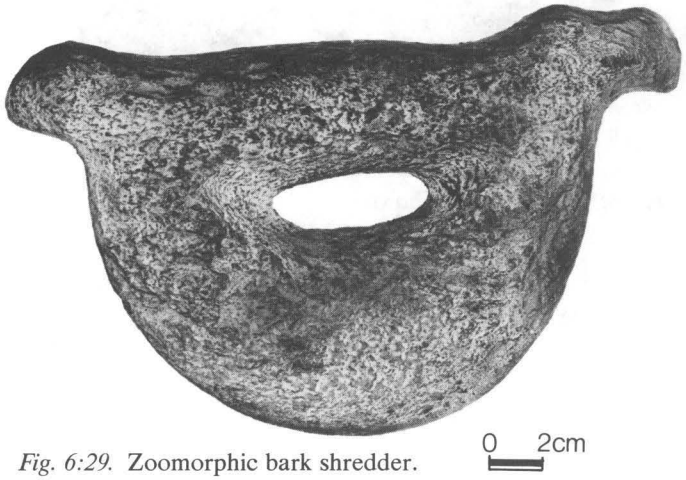


Fig. 6:29. Zoomorphic bark shredder.

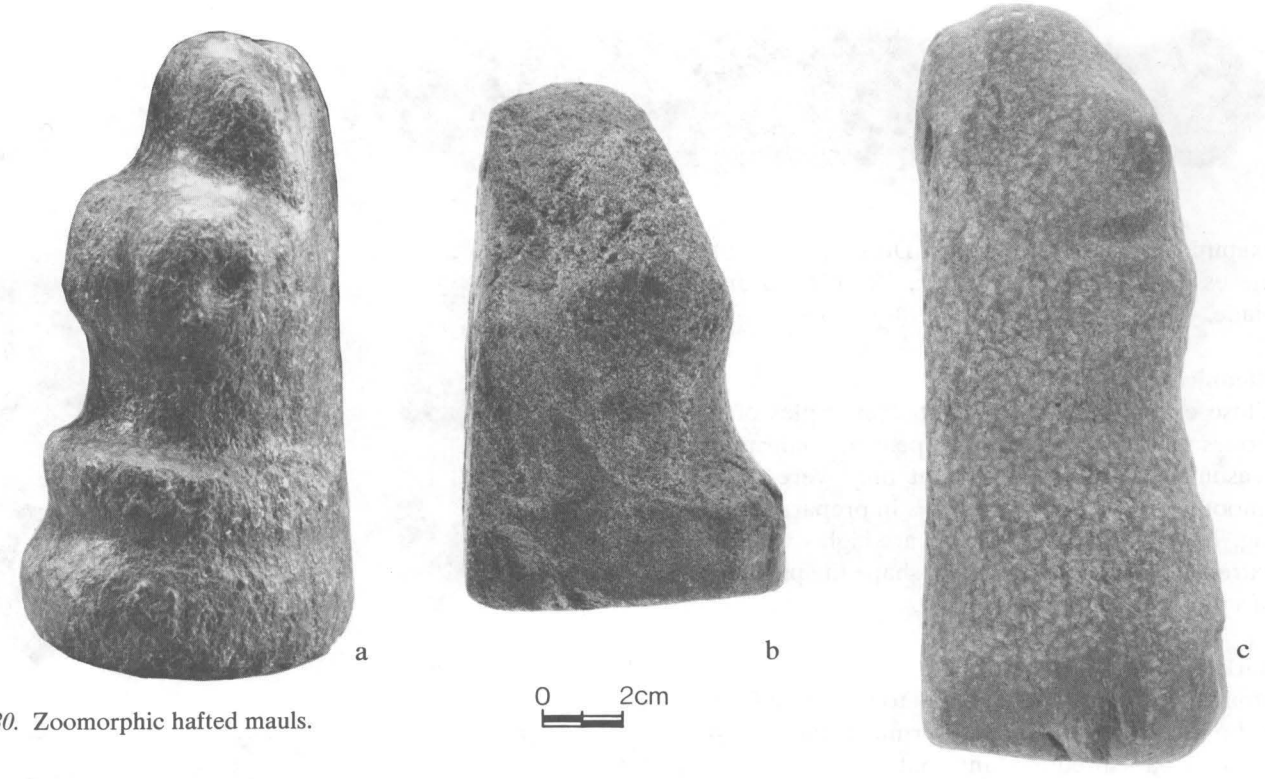


Fig. 6:30. Zoomorphic hafted mauls.

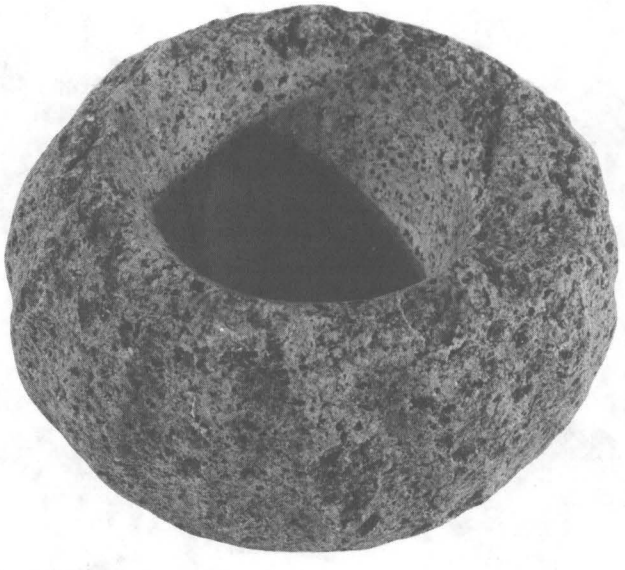


Fig. 6:31. Fluted stone bowl.

three examples GbTo 34-1374 *(Fig. 6:30a)* and GbTo 23-118 and 1784 *(Fig. 6:30b and c)* were found in sites. All date to the second half of the first millennium A.D. The first example has very prominent eye bases with central pits, a round snout and a groove around the face of the maul. The second example also has the prominent eyes, round snout and mouth. The third, although in the process of being manufactured, appears to have the same basic features. Several examples of birds and animal headed forms are illustrated in Duff (1975: Figures 92, 93).

Decorated Stone Mortars

Stone mortars achieve a high state of development in the later period on the North Coast, and have often been described as tobacco mortars, which may indeed have been their main, if not exclusive, function. Fine examples are illustrated in Duff (1975) and MacDonald (1976). Two prehistoric decorative styles occur. The simplest is embellished with grooves which run around the bowl as rings or up the sides of the bowl as flutes. A single fluted example (GbTo 30-2000; *Fig. 6:31*) has been estimated to date to A.D. 1500. No zoomorphic stone bowls have been found in datable context although the style of decoration on examples such as that in Figure 6:32 from the Museum of Northern British Columbia collection has the same emphasis on massive simplified sculptural features as does the hafted mauls. I would therefore expect that they will eventually be dated to at least the first millennium A.D.

The view of northern Northwest Coast art derived from

Fig. 6:32. Zoomorphic stone bowl in the collection of the Museum of Northern British Columbia (from Duff 1975:152).

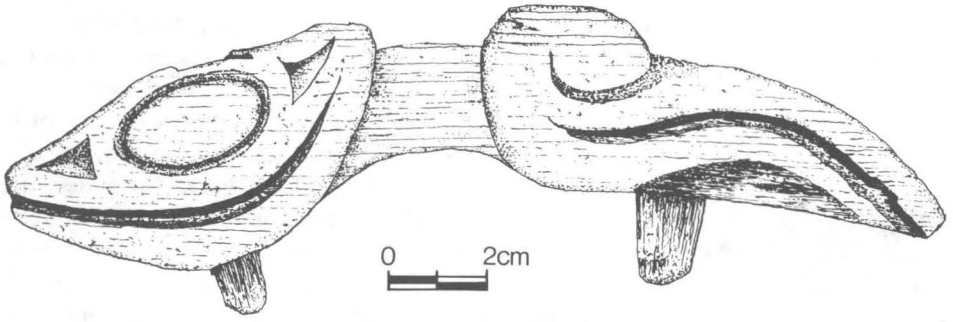


Fig. 6:33. Carved red cedar handle.

the bone and stone artifacts suggests that the art of a thousand years or more ago was stylistically simple and a relatively rare occurrence. In fact, we know that even in historic times the tribes of the northern coast used stone and bone sparingly and for relatively simple expressions such as amulets or shamans' charm figures, with the exception of Haida argillite carvings for the early tourist trade. The discovery of wet sites with preserved fibres and wood on the coast provides at least a glimpse of art in highly perishable (and easily worked) materials.

The Lachane site (GbTo 33) has produced a range of wooden and basketry artifacts including bentwood boxes, bowls, paddles, labrets, adze and chisel handles, bark containers, painted shafts and a range of basketry forms dating from 520 B.C. to A.D. 320 (Inglis 1976). The general impression obtained is that the wood and basket technology is remarkably similar to that at the time of contact. The bowls, for example, are unfinished discards, but demonstrate clearly the ability to carve wood with the stone and shell blade tools available. Only one object is elaborately carved (GbTo 33-C423; *Fig. 6:33*). It is made of red cedar and appears to be a handle of a bowl lid since it was evidently fixed to a curved surface with square pegs. It portrays an unidentified animal of fluid form, perhaps a sea creature. Stylistically it is interesting as it has no distinguishable limbs but does have a clear head portion with a well developed eye form and a whirl-like tail section. Another wet deposit, on the Boardwalk site, produced a small carving of a seal-like creature that was too eroded to retain any detailed features. There appears to be no lack of wet sites in the Prince Rupert region or elsewhere on the North Coast which hold the best potential for solving the problems of prehistoric development of the art of the northern Northwest Coast. I would venture to guess that when such work has been done the basic elements of North Coast style wll be traced back at least as far as the second millenium before Christ.

Rock Art

Our knowledge of the extent of rock art on the northern coast is expanding rapidly. Until recently few examples had been reported from the Queen Charlotte Islands. Gessler and Gessler's work (1974) however, has yielded examples from Skidegate Inlet and other areas that have been examined. Other localities are reported from Higgins Pass, sites on Kitimat Channel, along the Skeena and Nass Rivers and other regions that have been adequately examined (Hill and Hill 1974). The Prince Rupert Harbour is particularly rich in petroglyphs, although less so in pictographs. In total there are at least several thousand individual glyphs at a dozen or more sites in the Prince Rupert Harbour, limited only by the availability of large boulders or suitable bedrock shelves on which to carve them. To judge from the degree of erosion of many figures, some of which are only barely discernible, the rock art tradition in the area must be several thousand years old at the minimum *(Fig. 6:34)*.

I will limit my comments to pertinent comparisons between stylistic features of the rock art in comparison with those of mobilary art in stone.

Fig. 6:34. Bedrock outcrop in front of GbTo 6, covered with glyphs, typical of the rock art in the Prince Rupert area.

Fig. 6:35. "The Man Who Fell From Heaven" petroglyph, Robertson Point (GbTo 4), Prince Rupert Harbour.

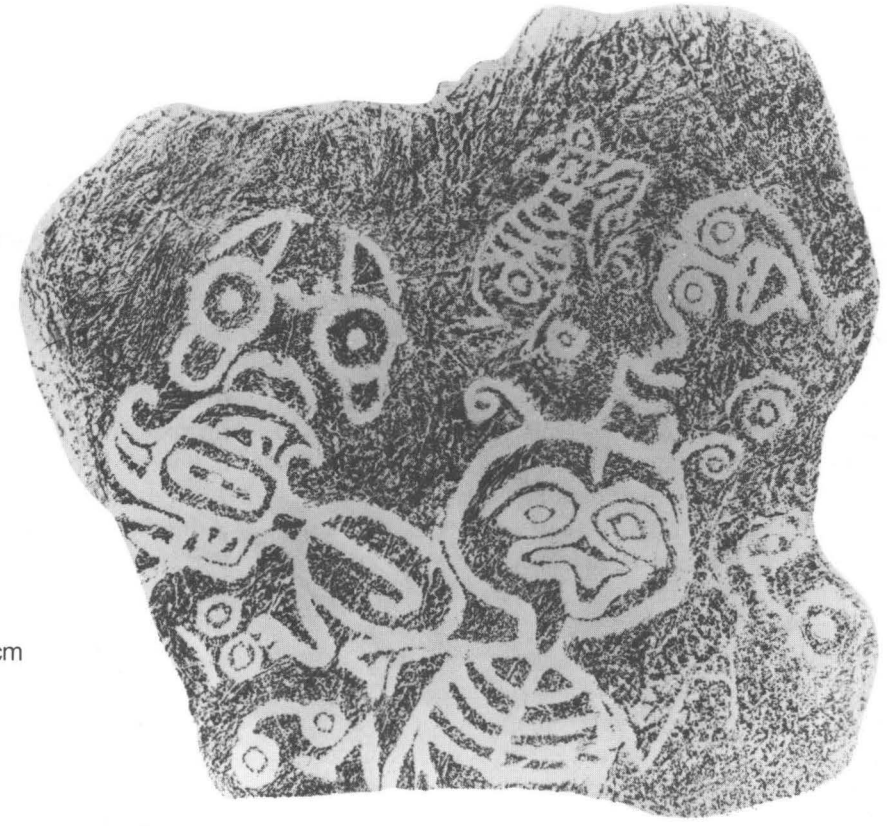
There are two extraordinary examples of rock art from the North Coast. The first is "The Man Who Fell From Heaven" petroglyph which is carved on a bedrock outcrop on the beach in front of the Roberson Point Site (Gb To 4; *Fig. 6:35*). In brief, the legend associated with the figure states that when Wegets (Raven) and his brother, who had human mothers and Sky people fathers, were expelled from the upper world for being half human, Wegets' brother chose to land on the kelp bed in the Prince Rupert Harbour and sank out of sight. Wegets observed this and chose the bedrock shelf that crosses Metlakatla Pass as his landing spot. Even he sunk into the rock from the force of his fall and had to enlist the aid of a marten to free him from the rock. Subsequent stories in the raven cycle of the region take Wegets up the Skeena and Nass Rivers, leaving his imprint on the rocks of the entire Tsimshian speaking territory.

In fact this is one of the best examples I know of in which rock art features are interrelated over a vast region by means of a mythological framework. No systematic study of the myths and rock art features has been done for the area but the potential for a structural study involving the Wegets myths, the rock art, economic territories and possibly social organization are outstanding. Without dwelling at length on this aspect, I would predict that at least some of the rock art of the region forms a cognitive map, via the Wegets legends for the territories of the Tsimshian, Gitksan and Niska. There is some evidence in fact that there are three cognitive maps, one for each dialect of the Tsimshian language. A cross linking of these cognitive maps is provided by the reference in the three systems of "The Man Who Fell From Heaven" as a point of common origin. The possibility of an overall cognitive map which transcends those of the three dialect groups, must also be explored.

Before leaving "The Man Who Fell From Heaven" example, I should note that H.I. Smith published a note on this feature in 1936, in which he cites ethnographic information which states that initiates for secret ceremonies reappeared on the morning on which their period of seclusion ended, lying in the depression of this petroglyph. In fact, some initiates claimed to have caused the feature. I view this as confirmation of the central importance of the feature, since initiates are themselves literally reborn from another cosmic zone, and typically such localities associated with cosmogenic acts are chosen for their reappearance.

A unique human figure of carved stone found in the midden at Metlakatla and presented to Israel Powell, the first Indian Commissioner in B.C. in 1879 is the only other known human figure of stone in the area *(Fig. 6:36)*, although in this instance the image is expressed in positive rather than negative terms. It is tempting to speculate that this figure also represents Wegets and its transfer to

Fig. 6:36. Human figure in stone collected from Metlakatla in 1879.



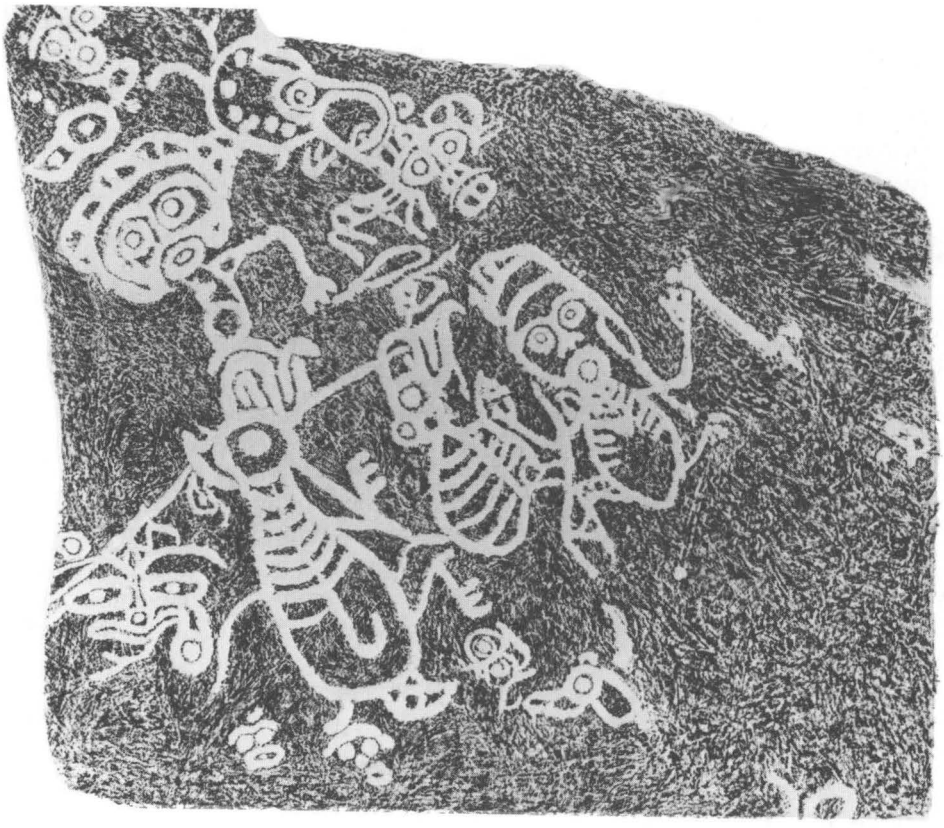


Fig. 6:37. and *6:38.* Rubbings of the two major glyph panels from Ringbolt Island, Kitselas Canyon, Skeena River.

the first Indian Commissoner of the area was not entirely devoid of symbolic value.

The second important rock art feature is on Ringbolt Island in the Kitselas Canyon *(Figs. 6:37 and 6:38)*, access to which can only be gained during favourable levels of the Skeena River. When Dave Walker and his associates from Terrace found this feature it was covered by heavy layers of moss, implying at least a certain degree of antiquity. The number of individual glyphs in this panel are considerable, but two sets warrant special attention. Both depict human figures directly associated with bear figures. The humans have long curling ears, extended tongues and prominent eyes. The bears also have extended tongues, curved back ears and prominent eyes. Knowledge of Tsimshian beliefs suggests that both sets represent shamans communicating with bear spirits.

Several aspects of Tsimshian cosmology are worth mention here. The first principle is that all animals and fish are under the control of "chiefs" or "masters" of their species in exactly the same way that humans are organized. Further, different species and their corresponding chiefs are hierarchically organized in a system in which "bear" is the ultimate chief of all of the animals. The second principle is stated in terms of cosmic zones. The sea, the land and the sky are joined by an axis (in fact multiple axes, depending on the circumstances and the area) which interconnect the cosmic levels through "holes" in the respective zones. Rivers are transitional features since they carry water which falls from the sky, from the mountainous interior to the sea. Salmon, the sustenance of Indian life, are caught in this transitional river zone, as shellfish and other species from the coast are taken from the intertidal zone, a parallel transitional region. A third principle which is common throughout northern North America and Siberia, states that animals (particularly the bear as chief of the animals) are superior to mankind in terms of their ability to communicate. Specifically, they can understand mankind's every utterance, but mankind's understanding of animal languages is very limited. Consequently the tongues, ears and eyes of animal representations are emphasized to express the superior ability of animals to communicate, and therefore to control other creatures. These principles are exemplified in a common Tsimshian belief which equates the image of mankind looking down at the schools of salmon in the river, with that of bears looking down at human villages.

The fourth principle, also widespread in Siberia and northern North America, states that the ultimate reduction of a living creature is to its skeleton as a concrete form, and is to its spirit as a power form. The spirit itself can be alienated, or even destroyed by improper treatment of its remains (ultimately its bones). Skeletal parts are individually important, as an expression of *pars pro toto* or in anatomical order as an expression of the ordered relationships of the universe in ultimate terms. Throughout the coast much emphasis is placed on the spinal column as the prime structure of the animal, or human being, since it is the axis of the being. Its segmented structure is the ultimate cognitive form of all axes. It is particularly significant that the axial line on incised concretions, bone clubs, segmented stones, etc., project through the head and tail of the figure. This principle of segmented forms projecting through the heads of animals and humans as potlatch rings is conceptually a lengthening of their prime axis and hence their spirit power.

The fifth principle is that the most effective communication link between mankind and animal powers is through the shaman, who opens the channel for communication by ritual purification, dreams and visions. The importance and meaning of the Kitselas petroglyph is therefore its expression of the communication between the human and animal world represented in the exaggerated ears and tongues of the shaman and the bears. The location of this panel on an island with limited access in the first canyon of the Skeena is particularly appropriate.

Focusing on stylistic cross ties between the rock art and mobilary art of the Kitselas Canyon and the Prince Rupert Harbour respectively, the emphasis on extended tongues, prominent ear forms and other sense organs such as eyes and occasionally nostrils, has been noted in the Kitselas glyph as well as in the Prince Rupert artifacts, particularly the bear comb and the bone club.

Conclusion

Despite the pessimistic note in the introduction concerning the relative paucity of artifacts and other prehistoric features from the North Coast with which to attack the problems of origin and meaning of North Coast art, I feel there is sufficient material to throw light on at least some of these problems. Stylistic features of the art are discernable, such as the emphasis on skeletal structure as related to regeneration and access to food species, on sense organs as expressing communication between man and his food supply, via the shamans' spirit power in terms of axis of spirit power. Broader cosmological and cosmogenic concepts can be seen in the rock art of the tribal and linguistic areas.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Richard Inglis for information, critical comments and figures and figure captions he provided, and to Jerome Cybulski and Patricia Severs for their information and critical comments for this text.