

# Prehistoric Mobile Art from the Mid-Fraser and Thompson River Areas

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The study of ethnographic and archaeological art from interior British Columbia has never received the attention which has been lavished on the art of the British Columbia coast. This was inevitable given the impressive nature of coastal art and the relative paucity of its counterpart. Nevertheless, some understanding of the scope and significance of this art has been attained, largely due to the turn of the century work by members of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (Teit 1900, 1906, 1909; Boas, 1900; Smith, 1899, 1900) and the more recent studies by Duff (1956, 1975). Further, archaeological excavations over the last fifteen years (e.g., Sanger 1968a, 1968b, 1970; Stryd 1972, 1973) have shown that prehistoric Plateau art was more extensive than previously thought, and that ethnographic carving represented a degeneration from a late prehistoric developmental climax.

This paper will attempt to review current knowledge of mobile art with known archaeological provenience from the mid-Fraser and Thompson River areas. Inclusion of this region of the Columbia-Fraser Plateau in a volume on prehistoric Northwest Coast art is fully justified, as there is great similarity between the art of this region and that of the Lower Fraser River and Strait of Georgia. Parietal art, that is, art which cannot be moved, has been excluded for consideration here for several reasons, notably the existing pictograph study by Corner (1968) and the poor age estimations usually available for petroglyphs and pictographs. To avoid spurious distributional conclusions only mobile art with secure archaeological provenience and context will be included. Lastly, this study is restricted to the mid-Fraser from just above Yale in the south to Williams Lake in the north and the Thompson River area including the Nicola River valley (*Fig. 9:1*) because these areas not only have witnessed

the majority of archaeological work in the Plateau but also appear to be the "heartland" of Plateau art development as predicted by Duff (1956). Special attention will be focused on the previously undescribed carvings recovered in recent excavations by the author along the Fraser River near the town of Lillooet.

Reports and collections from seventy-one archaeological sites were checked for mobile art. They represent all the prehistoric sites excavated and reported as of Spring 1976, although some unintentional omissions may have occurred. The historic components of continually occupied sites were deleted and sites with assemblages of less than ten artifacts were also omitted. The most notable exclusions from this study are most of Smith's (1899) Lytton excavation data which are not quantified or listed by site. Thirty-six of the seventy-one sites yielded mobile art. The locations of all sites are shown in Figure 9:1. Mobile art includes all art which is not fixed to any one place. Two categories of mobile art are recognizable: (1) decorated utilitarian and ornamental objects; and (2) carvings in the round. Each is discussed separately.

## Carvings in the Round

This category includes all portable objects sculptured in three dimensions as well as a few two-dimensional pieces (Table 9:1). Thirteen sites yielded thirty-eight specimens with two sites (EeRk4, EeQw1) accounting for twenty-two of the carvings. Many other carvings of unknown or questionable provenience are known but are not included in this study. Two basic kinds of carvings are evident. Most of the carvings incorporate the entire object so that the form of the subject and the carving are synonymous.

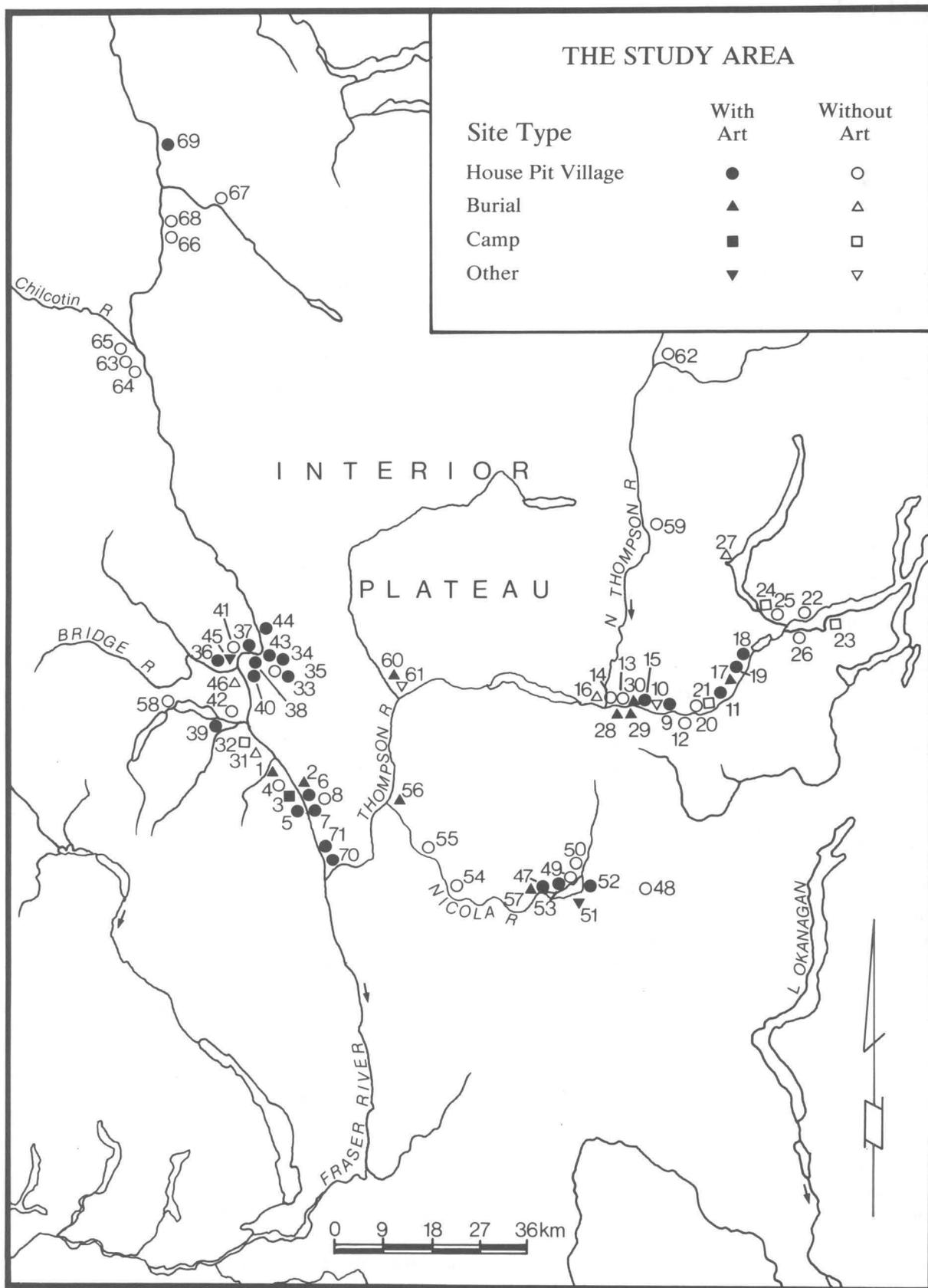


Fig. 9:1. The mid-Fraser and Thompson River areas of the interior Plateau of British Columbia locating the 71 prehistoric archaeological sites included in this study.

Table 9.1. Types of Carvings in the Round from the Mid-Fraser Thompson River Region.\*

TYPE	Number
<b>STONE</b>	
Complete Sculptures	
Clubs	2
Bear figurines	6
Human figurine bowls	4
Bird figurine bowls	1
Vulviform bowl with 2 faces	1
Snake figurine	1
Lizard figurine	1
Fragmentary human face	1
Partial sculptures	
Zoomorphic mauls	2
Anthropomorphic mauls	1
Tubular pipes with carved bowls	2
Pendant with face and headdress	1
<b>BONE &amp; ANTLER</b>	
Complete Sculptures	
Anthropomorphic figurines	4
Pendant or pre-form	1
Comb with bird figures	1
Hafts	2
Partial Sculptures	
Handles with human faces	2
Whalebone clubs	4
Fragmentary and undescribed	4
<b>WOOD</b>	
Masks	1

\*Those pieces not illustrated here are in Sanger (1968 a, b), Duff (1975), and Smith (1900)

In some cases it is obvious that the shape and size of the sculpture are due to the form of the raw material (e.g., an antler tine) or to the morphology of the tool which is being carved (e.g., stone club). In other instances, however, the size and shape of the sculpture seem to be free of such constraints. A few specimens constitute a second category of carvings in which only a small portion of an object, usually a formed tool or ornament, is sculptured.

Half of the carvings are made of stone. The mauls and clubs are made of a dense material, probably greywacke, and were shaped by pecking. The phallic (?) club (Fig. 9.2) is further decorated by several long parallel lines incised by a fine-pointed tool around the circumference of one of the enlarged ends. The other stone carvings were executed in steatite by grinding and polishing which has erased much of the evidence for any earlier shaping



Fig. 9.2. Incised bi-phallic club of dense stone. Site EeRl 167 near Lillooet, B.C.

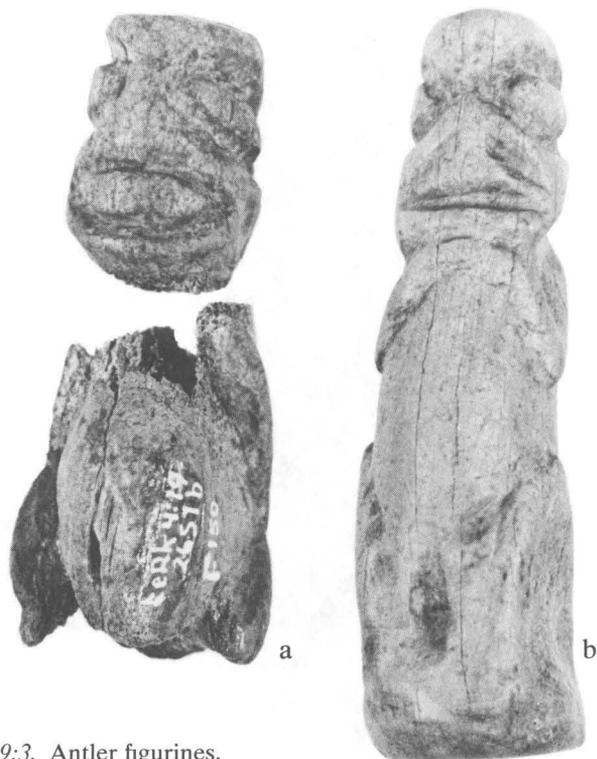


Fig. 9.3. Antler figurines.

by cutting or incising. Facial and other features were formed primarily by incising although bas-relief carving was also employed, especially for depicting eyes.

Nineteen of the carvings were expressed in organic media including eleven of antler, seven of bone and one of wood. Deer antler appears to have been the favoured material. The small figurines were made on antler tines and all show the taper of the tine, three with the taper towards the head (e.g., Fig. 9:3) and two with the taper towards the feet (e.g., Fig. 9:4, 9:5). Relatively wide, concave facets can still be seen on some of the bone and antler carvings attesting to the use of a whittling or cutting process in shaping the carvings to be followed in most cases by a light grinding. Like the steatite carvings, the features were usually incised, often in combination with some fine chiselling, with the occasional bas-relief carvings. Although I have been able to inspect only about one-third of the pieces the general impression is that most are well executed.

Recent archaeological excavations by the author at several house pit village and burial sites along the Fraser River near Lillooet, B.C. have yielded thirteen carvings of prehistoric age. Some of these have never been described whereas others have only been described in the author's unpublished doctoral dissertation (Strydom 1973). The vulviform steatite bowl with two faces was included in the *Images Stone B.C.* exhibition and was discussed in the accompanying guide by Duff (1975).



Fig. 9.4. Antler figurine.

Fig. 9.5. Anthropomorphic figurine.

**Bi-phallic (?) club** (Fig. 9:2). This club was found in association with a double adult female and newborn/fetus burial at a small prehistoric cemetery known as the Bridge River burial site (EeR1 167). The site appears to be of late prehistoric age but the small artifact assemblage remains undated. The club is made of diorite and was "roughed out" by pecking. Diagonally oriented grinding marks are clearly visible and attest to the finishing method employed. Several small areas, notably parts of the smaller, proximal end, were missed and still exhibit the rough pecked surface. The club measures 31.9 cm in length and the shaft has a maximum width of 4.80 cm. The larger distal end displays an oval cross-section and measures 6.20 x 6.87 x 7.76 cm. Slight battering is evident on the distal end. The other end is also oval in cross-section but is considerably smaller: 3.80 x 5.42 x 3.27 cm. No battering is present on the proximal end. Both ends are slightly wider than they are long. The distal end is decorated with several finely incised lines. Two sets of almost parallel lines encircle the distal end; one set of two lines near its junction with the shaft and another set of three lines near its distal extremity. Along both lateral margins there is a row of short parallel incisions between the two sets

of lines, eight on one side and six on the other. The meaning, if any, of these designs is not known although the long paired lines could represent a trench (Boas 1900:377). The club has a somewhat phallic form and may be a bi-phallic representation (Duff Ch. 3).

**Anthropomorphic figurine (Fig. 9:3a).** Number EeRk 4:19-2658. This small anthropomorphic figurine of antler was found in direct association with a second anthropomorphic figurine (number EeRk 4:19-2657) on the floor of house pit #19 at the Bell site house pit village (EeRk 4). Like the burial from this house pit, the floor assemblage is assigned to the early Kamloops phase (see below for the radiocarbon dates). Made on an antler tine which tapers towards the head, the 5.7 cm high figurine can "stand" erect on its flat circular base which has a diameter of 16 mm. The figure has a squarish, anthropomorphic head with a chin resting on two joined and fingerless hands (or two handless arms) held against the upper chest. The arms are flexed along the sides of the trunk but the elbows do not rest on the legs which are also flexed and without feet. The spinal column is marked by a row of five, short, horizontal lines incised into the figurine's back between the legs and the shoulders. Below the slightly distended abdomen is an 8 mm long notch which, considering its location and similarity to other figurines (numbers EeRk 4:19-554 and EeRk 4:5-213), probably represents a vulva. Facial features are marked by wide, carved lines. Two oval eyes with pronounced low relief irises almost meet above the nose which simply consists of two slanted nostrils, one more deeply incised than the other. A straight, horizontal line forms the mouth which has no teeth, lips or tongue.

**Fragmentary anthropomorphic figurine (Fig. 9:3b).** Number EeRk 4:19-2565. This anthropomorphic antler figurine was found next to the figurine just described (number EeRk 4:19-2658) on the floor of house pit #19 at the Bell site. Unfortunately, it was recovered in several pieces and is not complete, missing both the upper torso and the base. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the figurine resembles the one with which it was found and the two may have been a functioning pair. This figurine was also made on an antler tine which tapers towards the head. When intact, the figurine was probably slightly larger than its "mate" based on the dimensions of the two major fragments. Two eyes and a mouth are the only features cut into the squarish head. Both eyes are lenticular and have pronounced irises and the mouth is also lenticular, unlike any of the other figurines. No nose is shown and both the top and the back of the head are flat. The trunk fragments show a somewhat rounded belly and a straight back incised with at least fourteen short, unevenly spaced, horizontal lines which presumably represent the spinal column. Two bent elbows lie in low relief against the

sides of the body and the dangling arms deviate from the more common depiction of jointed hands in front of the chest by hanging downwards. Unfortunately, the lower abdominal area is missing and there is no way of knowing whether or not a vulva may have been present.

**Rattlesnake-woman figurine (Fig. 9:4).** Number EeRk 4:19-554. This antler figurine was found with the infant burial in house pit #19 at the Bell site. The infant, who was less than one year old but not newborn at the time of death, had been placed in a shallow oval pit dug into the house floor. Numerous grave inclusions were found in addition to the comb including several figurines described below. The burial is associated with a large artifact assemblage attributable to the early Kamloops phase (Sanger 1968:146-9; Stryd 1973:33-8) with dates of  $1430 \pm 60$ ,  $1515 \pm 90$ , and  $1250 \pm 200$  radiocarbon years ago (the last two dates came from the same sample).

The figurine is 7.3 cm long by 1.3 cm in diameter and shows a possibly masked face on a slender snake-like body. Legs have been replaced by a rattlesnake tail with the rattles marked by six encircling grooves. Explicit female genitalia is depicted immediately above the tail and below the abdomen. The latter is slightly rounded but there is no strong suggestion of pregnancy. The arms lie against the side of the body and join in fingerless hands (or handless arms) in front of the upper chest. Much of the upper torso was cut away by removing the antler between the forearms, between the forearms and the chest and between the upper arms and the body, leaving but a thin spinal column and narrow shoulders.

The face or mask shows two long and narrow curved eyes carved in low relief from the top of the nose to the back of the head. A thin incised slit extends along each eye and may represent the iris. An open, toothless mouth marked by a wide groove gives the impression of an unhappy or edentulous figure. The incised cheek furrows extend into the hooked triangular nose and accentuate the nasal alae. Ears are absent and the head may be crowned with a notched headdress with a small perforation at the back just above the eye. Short parallel incisions in longitudinal lines cover the entire figurine except for the face, the genitalia and the tail, with six lines of incisions on the body and a single row on each of the upper and lower arms.

The head has been hollowed from the top to a depth of 17 mm, leaving but a thin outer wall for carving. Unfortunately, part of this wall has broken away, thereby partially removing one side of the face. It appears, however, that there probably never was a back to the head, leaving a gap which leads directly into the hollowed interior cavity. Originally I called this sculpture a haft (Stryd 1973:397-8) but, upon reexamination, I now consider the thin outer wall of the head to be too fragile to have held a tool. Further, the binding would have obscured

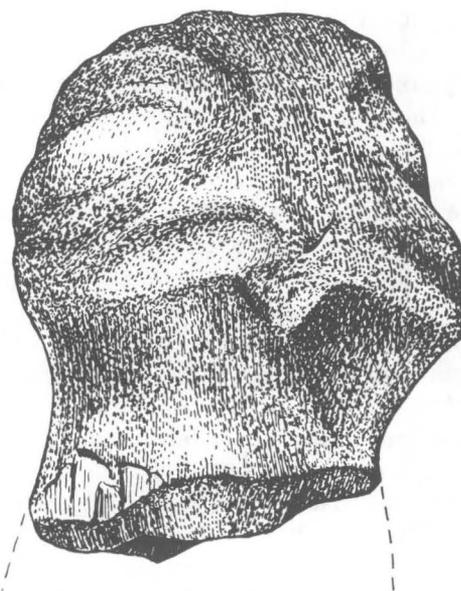
the carved face and would probably have left wear marks on the figurine, for which there is no evidence. Considering that much of the upper torso has been hollowed out for no apparent functional reason, it seems likely that the head could have been similarly carved simply for representational purposes.

Lastly, we should note the possibility that the figurine may be wearing a mask. The highly stylized and artificial facial features, the relationship of the possible headdress to the upper face and the absence of a forehead are all suggestive of a mask. The hole above the eye may have been used for attaching the mask to the head although we cannot confirm the existence of a matching hole on the other side because of its fragmentary condition. If the figure was wearing a mask there would possibly be no need to depict the head, thereby accounting for its absence wherever it was not covered by the mask, i.e., the top and the back of the cranium.

**Anthropomorphic figurine** (*Fig. 9:5*). Number EeRk 4:5-213. Another antler figurine came from the floor of housepit #5 at the Bell site. Dated at  $1380 \pm 65$  radiocarbon years ago, this house is assigned to the early Kamloops phase. The figurine was found close to four articulated fish vertebrae, a small Douglas fir twig with needles, and an angular rock measuring c. 18 x 8 cm, and may be functionally associated with them.

This figurine, although reminiscent of the other figurines which were recovered, is distinctive in several ways. It consists primarily of an anthropomorphic face with only a minimal representation of the torso. Arms and legs are not shown. The face occupies more than half the figure and so dominates it that it gives the impression that the body was of little or no importance. An exception to this may be the moderately deep, oval recess near the base of the figurine which probably represents a vulva. The face shows two oval, almost lenticular, eyes which are joined across the bridge of the nose by a shallow groove. The upper margins of both eyes extend down and back to form a spur 6 mm long. The eyes and oval nose are carved in bas-relief whereas the concave, smiling (?) mouth is depicted by a shallow, V-shaped whittled groove. Twelve short incised lines oriented longitudinally near the top of the head may represent a headdress. Broad, concave cut marks cover much of the figurine surface and may indicate that the piece was never finished. It is 5.94 cm long and 1.65 by 2.0 cm wide at the top, tapering to a rounded point at the bottom. The downward taper of the antler tine on which it is made is also unique to this piece.

**Anthropomorphic or zoomorphic maul (?)** (*Fig. 9:6*). Number EeRk 4:5-67. The carved proximal end of a pecked stone maul, pestle or club was also recovered



*Fig. 9:6.* Anthropomorphic maul.

from house pit #5 at the Bell site. Made of gabbro, the carving represents an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic head with an occiput and a slight facial projection (snout?). Two oval eyes have been pecked into the sides of the head, along with a faint groove below one of the eyes which may represent a mouth. At the base of the head the sculpture contracts to form a hand grip which can also be viewed as the neck or trunk of the figure. Extensive battering is evident on the top of the head. It measures 6.7 x 6.3 x 5.6 cm.

**Zoomorphic ornamental comb** (*Fig. 9:7*). Number EeRk 4:19-555. An intricately carved antler comb measuring 15.8 x 4.1 x 0.54 cm was associated with the infant interment in house pit #19 at the Bell site. Six long and slender pointed teeth with rectangular cross-sections and averaging 74 mm long form one end of the comb. Four of the teeth had been broken, probably due to the weight of the overlying fill, although one distal end may have been missing prior to the comb's placement in the burial pit. The other end of the comb depicts two crane or loon-like birds, 5.7 cm high, facing one another and touching at the beak. Both birds have a lenticular eye with a double spur, one spur slanting towards the beak and the other down the neck. A small drilled hole in each eye marks the iris. The mouths of both birds are represented by a single, continuous incised line which pierces the antler at both ends. Each bird also has two relatively long legs and a pronounced belly but wings and feet are not shown. One surface of the comb is partially decorated by pairs of incised narrow lines with short wide cross ticks which may represent trenches with earth or sacrifices piled to one side (Boas 1900:377, Fig. 298e), snakes, worms or

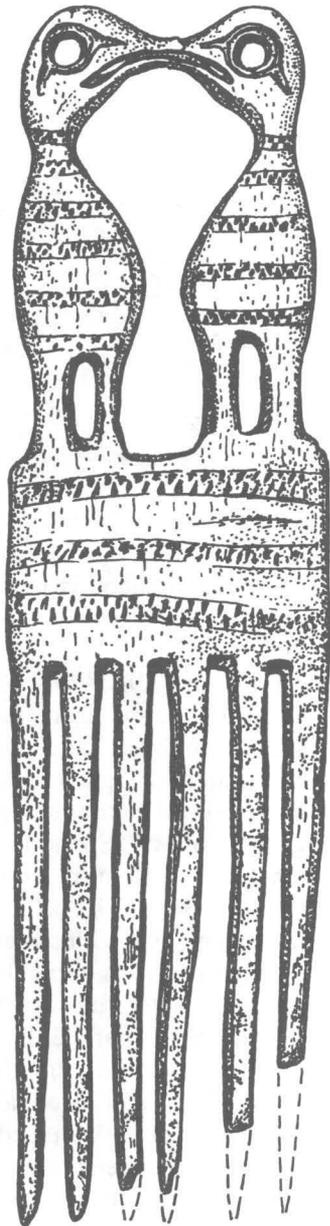


Fig. 9:7. Zoomorphic ornamental comb of antler.

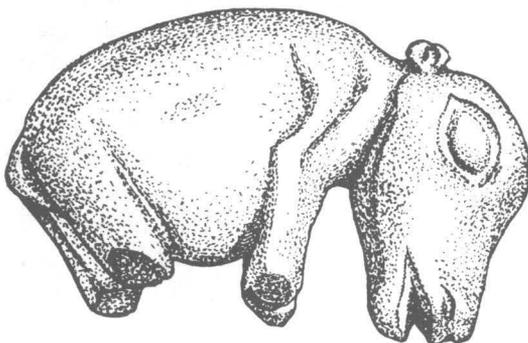


Fig. 9:8. Bear figurine of siltstone.

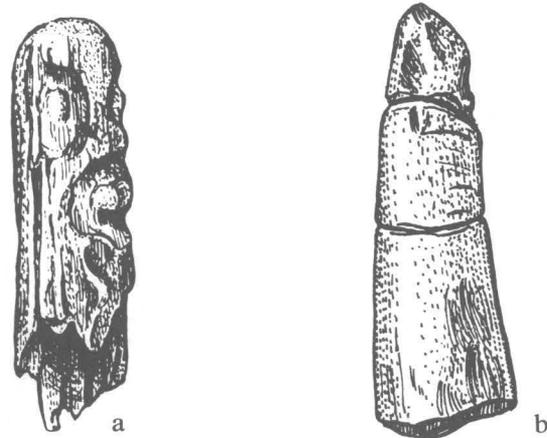


Fig. 9:9. a Anthropomorphic haft fragment. b Pendent.

woodworms or the skins of snakes or worms (Smith 1899:156). These decorations cover the medial section of the comb between the proximal end of the teeth and the feet of the birds and are also found on the bodies of the birds between the top of their legs and their necks. Short parallel lines oriented transversely to the long axis decorate the entire length of all six teeth but these lines are hard to see because of the deteriorated surface of the teeth. The reverse side of the comb is not decorated except for two incised eyes and the interconnected mouth of the birds.

**Bear (?) figurine (Fig. 9:8).** Number EeRk 4:19-553. A zoomorphic siltstone figurine depicting a seated bear (?) with outstretched arms and legs was also associated with the infant burial in house pit #19 at the Bell site. The proportionally large head is tilted downwards and sits atop a distended belly. Two small, circular ears, notched by a short line, are set off from the back of the head at the base of the skull. A narrow groove outlines two lenticular eyes with low relief irises. The open mouth shows neither teeth nor tongue but two short grooves directly above the mouth mark two nostrils separated by a septum. A small tail is tucked between the two hind legs (one of which is broken), forming a flat base on which the figure can "stand." The bear (?) measures 6.5 x 4.4 x 2.3 cm, is undecorated, and has been given a smooth finish by fine grinding.

**Anthropomorphic face fragment (Fig. 9:9a).** Number EeRk 4:23-268. A small and fragmentary anthropomorphic face of antler came from house pit #23 at the Bell site. It was found on the house floor in an early Kamloops

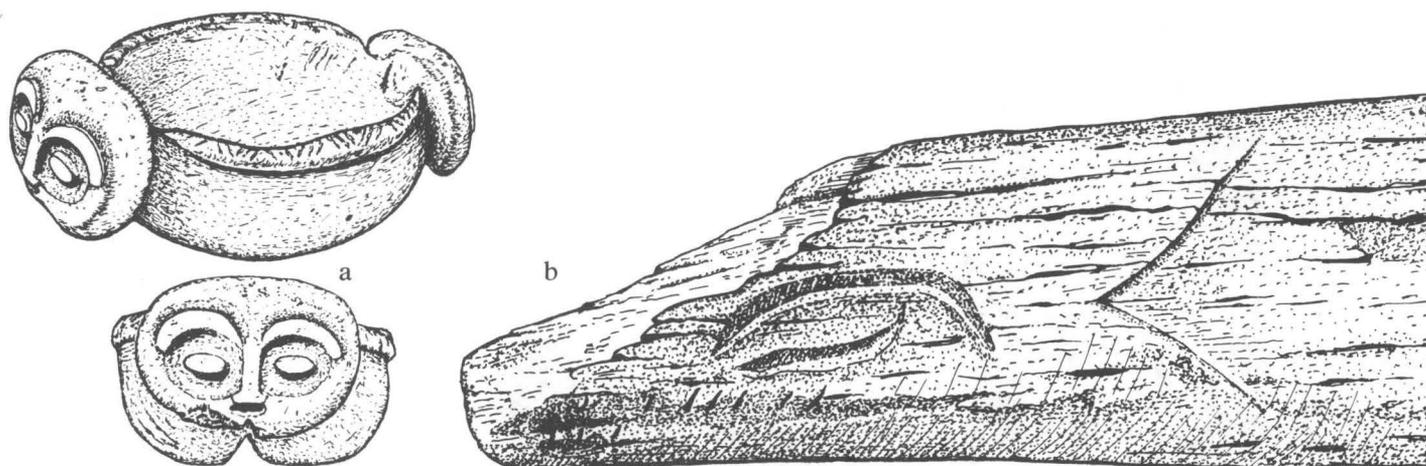


Fig. 9:10. a Vulvaform bowl. b End section of zoomorphic whalebone club.

phase context dated at  $1560 \pm 90$  radiocarbon years ago. Its overall size (5.1 x 2.2 x 1.4 cm), hollow interior cavity and worn exterior surface (due to handling?) suggest that it may be the proximal end of a small haft. The face consists of two circular, recessed eyes with round, raised irises and a nose marked by an oval groove with a raised centre, similar to the eyes. The object is too fragmentary to accurately describe the mouth although this feature may have been depicted by a short, concave groove directly below the nose. The grooves average 2.8 mm wide and are about 2 mm deep.

**Anthropomorphic face pendant (Fig. 9:9b).** Number EeRk 4:19-551. The infant burial from house pit #19 at the Bell site also yielded a carved steatite pendant. The low relief carving occupies about half of the piece and depicts a rectangular anthropomorphic face crowned by a notched headdress. The incised eyes have large irises and the mouth is represented by a straight incised line. The lower face is formed by a wide circular groove which encloses the mouth and divides the upper lip from a triangular nose without nostrils. The pendant measures 4.58 x 1.25 x 0.38 cm and has a convex-concave cross-section. A small hole, 3 mm in diameter and showing signs of wear, has been drilled through the uncarved end. Several long, thin lines had also been incised into this end but no pattern was apparent.

**Figurine preform (?) (not illustrated).** Number EeRk 4:19-815. The floor of house pit #19 at the Bell site also yielded an incised and shaped antler object which may be an unfinished figurine. It, too, was made on an antler tine which tapered towards the "head" and it measures 5.29 cm long, 1.77 cm wide at the base, and 0.76 cm wide at the "head." Incised lines have blocked out the major figure segments such as the head but detail and decoration are completely absent. Although it could have been a

pendant, its overall size and shape is reminiscent of a figurine.

**Vulvaform bowl with two faces (Fig. 9:10a).** Number EeR1 21:13-1. This steatite bowl came from the fill on the floor of house pit #13 at the Seton Lake house pit village site (EeR1 21). The small, nondiagnostic artifact assemblage associated with the bowl cannot be assigned to any cultural phase but a date of  $1220 \pm 85$  radiocarbon years ago was obtained on charcoal from the house floor. The small carving measures 10.51 x 5.67 x 3.10 cm. The bowl is 7.37 cm long and 4.38 cm wide with a maximum depth of 2.48 cm. A shallow groove runs parallel to the top of the bowl, creating a raised outer edge around the entire bowl except at the ends. Short parallel lines have been incised into the top of this raised edge. These poorly executed incisions occur in sets of three (and one set of five) and form a zigzag pattern. A V-shaped groove with a maximum width of 6.4 mm has been sawn longitudinally into the bottom of the bowl on the outer surface.

Both ends of the bowl display a carved, anthropomorphic or zoomorphic face. The two faces are similar in design but differ somewhat in size. The larger face measures 4.32 x 3.30 cm and projects 1.66 cm from the bowl whereas the smaller face projects 1.23 cm and is 3.60 cm wide by 2.75 cm high. Both faces show an open mouth marked by a small, almost oval notch; two oval recessed eyes with oval or lenticular irises carved in bas-relief; a thin, vertical nasal ridge with a flared tip directly above the mouth; and two curved eyebrows carved in bas-relief which merge with the nose at one end and which stop abruptly at the other end. Part of the small face has broken off and the V-shaped cleft, which had been sawn into the bottom of the bowl, extends into the chin of the larger face. Duff (1975:172) thinks that the bowl is a female sexual symbol representing an open vulva when viewed from the top and a closed vulva when seen from

below. He has also suggested that the faces may represent owls or generic humans (Duff 1975:49). The meaning, if any, of the short incised lines is not known.

**Zoomorphic club** (*Fig. 9:10b*). Number EeR1 19:1365. A zoomorphic club of whalebone was one of the grave inclusions associated with adult burial #1 at the Fountain site (EeR1 19), a large, plowed house pit village with a long occupation sequence and badly disturbed stratification. The burial probably belongs to the extensive but undated Kamloops phase component at this site. The club was exposed in three sections and must have been broken at least once prior to its placement with the burial because of the location of the pieces.

The club's morphology must have been largely determined by the shape of the rib on which it was made. It is narrow relative to its length and it is thin relative to its width and it has an elliptical cross-section. One end has been rounded whereas the other end has been modified into the head of a fish. A carved three-dimensional snout provides overall form whereas deeply incised grooves indicate various anatomical features. A long, wide groove filled with red ochre marks the mouth while numerous shorter incisions (some with red ochre) above and below this groove represent an upper and lower set of teeth. The eye consists of two wide grooves which do not meet, a lower concave groove filled with red ochre, and an upper convex one filled with black ochre which extends back and down below the bottom of the eye. Behind the eye an unlined V-shaped groove depicts a gill, its apex pointing towards the front. Because of the deterioration of the club's surfaces, the eye and gill are visible on one side only. The mouth and teeth are present on both surfaces but they are best seen on the surface without the eye and gill. The elongated snout resembles that of a sturgeon but the presence of teeth suggests that a salmon may be depicted.

**Context.** Carvings have been primarily recovered in a burial context. Only thirteen of the thirty-eight pieces were not associated with human interments and these all came from house pit deposits along the Fraser River. Carvings have been recovered from isolated, individual burials both within and outside house pits as well as from prehistoric cemeteries of all sizes. The placement of carvings with the dead does not appear to be age or sex specific as carvings have been recorded in association with males and females as well as with immature and adult interments. All the house pit carvings came from fill directly on top of living floors, and none were cached or placed in such a manner as to suggest any kind of special treatment or disposal.

**Spatial distribution.** Carvings have been found in the valley of the South Thompson River where seventeen

pieces are known from burial sites, primarily the Chase Burial site, EeQw 1 (n=12) and along the mid-Fraser River where twenty-one carvings have been recovered from between just above Lillooet in the north to a few miles below Lytton in the south. Duff's (1956) study of the steatite carving complex indicated that the Fraser River distribution may extend further southward, possibly to the Fraser delta, but secure archaeological evidence is currently missing between Lytton and Yale. The complete absence of carvings in the Nicola Valley as well as the Williams Lake area may mark the maximum geographic extent of prehistoric Plateau carvings. It would be prudent to exercise some caution here, however, in that the current spatial distribution of carvings may be a product of the archaeological research that has been carried out to date. The location and extent of field work, the kinds of sites investigated and the preservation conditions for objects of bone, antler and wood are all variables which could skew our distributional results. Nevertheless we have to work with what we have and it is interesting to note how the emerging archaeological picture seems to fit with the distributional pattern observed by Duff (1956), viz., with a major centre of art along the mid-Fraser and a secondary centre along the Thompson River. The mid-Fraser area has more sites with carvings (n=10 vs. n=17), plus a more continuous distribution of carvings within its confines.

**Temporal distribution** A rather limited temporal distribution characterizes the carvings with most pieces dating to the last 1500 years. The oldest known carving is the zoomorphic hand maul from zone I at the Lehman site (EeRk 8) radiocarbon dated at  $2185 \pm 150$  years ago (Sanger 1970:90, 103). The possible anthropomorphic hand maul (*Fig. 9:6*) is also relatively old, originating from house pit #5 at the Bell site (EeRk 4), radiocarbon dated at  $1380 \pm 65$  years ago. At  $1500 \pm 100$  years ago there is the sudden appearance of small carvings in various media. The steatite carving complex originates at this time. Small anthropomorphic and zoomorphic steatite figurines, carved steatite pipes and pendants, small anthropomorphic antler figurines and carved antler hafts appear in the archaeological record, and the single carved zoomorphic antler comb with the incised decoration (*Fig. 9:7*) belongs to this time period. These carvings continue to be made until late prehistoric or ethnographic times although the steatite carving complex was on the wane in or before the historic period. A major addition to the carving tradition occurs around  $1300 \pm 100$  years ago when small steatite figurine bowls make their initial appearance. The vulviform bowl with two faces from house pit #13 at the Seton Lake site (EeR1 21) is dated at  $1220 \pm 85$  radiocarbon years ago. The seated human figurine bowls seem to be a somewhat later development, estimated to date from  $800 \pm 200$  years ago although no radiocarbon

control is available. The seated human figuring bowls are probably the most recent form within the steatite carving complex and can be linked with Salish shamanism and ritualism (Duff 1956:114). Carved stone and whalebone clubs are added to the archaeological record between 1000 years and 600 years ago (*Figs. 9:8, 9:9, 9:10*).

Although the evidence is scanty, it appears that Plateau carving including the steatite carving complex probably had its origin in first the decoration and then the carving of large stone implements including mauls and mortars or large non-steatite bowls. This development took at least 2000 years and may go back further, with the evolution of the smaller carving tradition spanning the last 1500 years.

**Meaning.** It is impossible in a paper of this length to even begin to deal with the question of meaning. Undoubtedly the carvings have meaning and were produced for more than just aesthetic reasons. Duff recently investigated meaning in Northwest Coast stone art and observed that many levels of meaning may exist for any one piece. If we are to gain any real understanding of the cultural significance of this art we must, it seems to me, be prepared to include the psychological in our paradigms as the ultimate meaning and purpose of this work appears to rest in that arena.

### Decorated Objects

This category consists of all decorated objects, except those pieces which were partially carved and have already been described. A wide range of artifacts were decorated including utilitarian implements, toys and game items, and body and clothing ornaments. Thirty-two of the seventy-one sites in this study yielded decorated objects totalling 208 pieces. The private collections and museums of the southern interior contain many additional decorated artifacts but nearly all lack adequate provenience and contextual information. It appears that the 208 pieces of this study represent the range of decorated objects and decorative motifs in use in prehistoric times. Types of decorated objects are listed in Table 9:2.

The artifacts were embellished by several decorative techniques; the most common was inscribing a design onto the outer surface(s) and/or lateral margin(s) of the object. A gouging technique similar to incising was noted in association with incised decorations on a few specimens and one bark fragment exhibited a design of shallow "pin prick" holes (*Fig. 9:11*) which must have been made in a manner similar to tattooing, possibly with a porcupine quill. Some of the steatite pipes were decorated by one or more raised bands around the pipe bowl or stem. No other forms of decoration were observed. Presumably the ochre-stained pieces associated with burials were coloured

Table 9:2: Types of Decorated Objects from the Mid-Fraser Thompson River Region

<b>Ornaments</b>
Tubular beads of bone, steatite, and <i>Dentalium</i> shell
Pendants of bone, antler, red slate, steatite
Animal canine perforated pendants
Bone comb
Steatite ring
<b>Game items and toys</b>
Miniature bone bows
Rodent incisor dice
Gambling bones
<b>Utilitarian objects</b>
Antler digging stick handles
Antler splitting wedges
Bone creasers
Fixed bone and antler points
Antler harpoon valves
Antler awls and perforators
Bone and antler gadgets
Antler tine clubs
Antler hafts
Eyed bone needles
Bone pins
Antler tine flakers
Bone drinking tubes
Bone and antler sap scrapers
Antler "dagger"
Bone "head scratcher"
Wooden bow
Bark containers
Stone atlatl weight
Stone mortars
Tubular steatite pipes
Abrasive stone
Hand mauls of stone
Steatite spindle whorls
Miscellaneous bone and antler fragments

Illustrations of these artifacts will be found in Sanger (1968a, b; 1970); Wilson (1974); Smith (1900); Stryd (1973); Wyatt (1972).

as a result of the corpse being covered with ochre rather than representing a distinctive decorative technique. Of course some of the pieces may have been painted as they were in ethnographic times but no evidence of paint has been uncovered.

About eighty percent of all decorated objects are made of some organic media, notably antler or bone (*Figs. 9:12, 9:13*). Bone artifacts comprise half of the non-lithic sample and are almost twice as frequent as decorated antler specimens. *Dentalium* shells, animal canines and incisors and a few pieces of wood were also decorated. Sanger (1968a:135) reported that at the Chase Burial site more than three-quarters of the antler items and less than one-tenth of the bone pieces were decorated but these frequencies are not supported by this study where

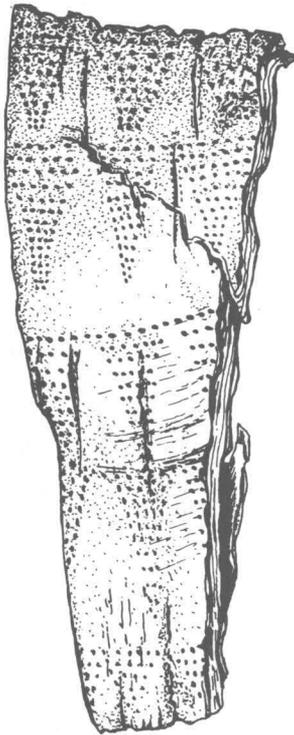


Fig. 9:11. Piece of birch bark decorated with a "tattooed" pattern from component 2 (?) at the plowed Fountain Site house pit village (EeR 119).

approximately thirty percent of both bone and antler artifacts were embellished. The decorated lithic objects are predominantly steatite, a not too surprising revelation considering how suitable this soft stone is for incising and for delicate, detailed work.

The steatite artifacts exhibit a better quality of incising than the non-lithic specimens, possibly because greater force and care was required to modify stone. The organic objects display a greater range of workmanship with quite a few examples of poor execution. Possibly some of these poorer specimens were not finished, but the majority appear to have been quickly incised with a rough design without concern for the quality of decoration. It should be noted that poor incising is most commonly found on ornaments and fragments of undeterminable function.

Burial and house pit sites yielded a similar number of decorated objects. Almost eighty percent of the burial sites contained embellished pieces whereas only twenty-five percent of the excavated house pit sites yielded decorated objects. It is apparent that decorated artifacts were selected as grave inclusions given the relatively small number of isolated burial and cemetery sites ( $n=13$ ) and the high incidence of decorated artifacts ( $n=104$ ).

The spatial distribution of decorated objects conforms to the pattern observed for the carvings. Two centres or nuclear areas can be identified: (1) the mid-Fraser region from Lytton to just north of Lillooet, and (2) the South Thompson River drainage with the Nicola valley as a minor sub-area. This distribution may, however, be

indicative of the location of field work and the quality of preservation conditions rather than of the geographic extent of prehistoric artifact decoration. Excavations in areas such as the Okanagan Valley and the Thompson and North Thompson Rivers drainages will be required before the spatial boundaries of this decorative tradition can be delineated.

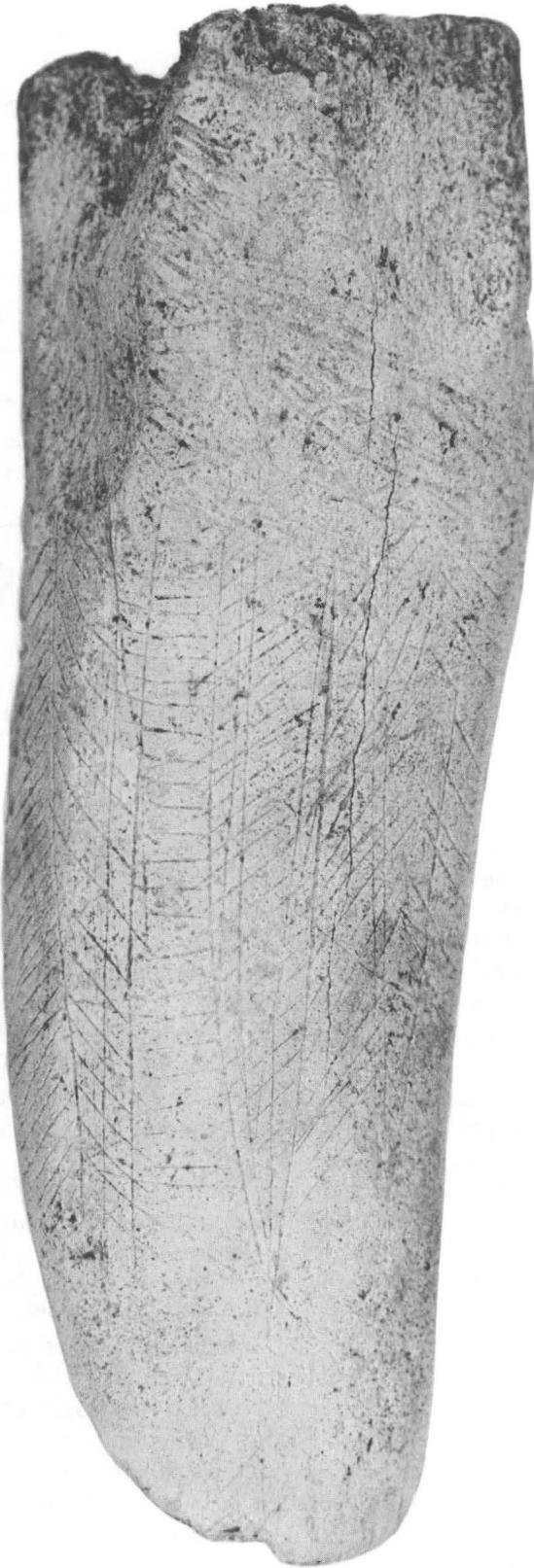
The temporal distribution of decorated objects is similar to that described for carvings except for a few considerably older specimens. Zone 7 at the Nesikep Creek site (EeRk 4) (Sanger 1970:Fig. 40a) yielded a bone bead with a series of deep cuts perpendicular to the long axis. This zone is dated at  $5635 \pm 190$  radiocarbon years ago (Sanger 1970:103-6) and this bead is the oldest known decorated artifact. Another piece of considerable antiquity is the fragment of a possible bone comb decorated by several short parallel lines from component 2 at the Moulton Creek site (EdQx 5) (Eldridge 1974:Fig. 33a). This specimen is older than 3800 years based on the age of the volcanic ash layer which caps component 2 (Eldridge 1974:51).

The practice of decorating utilitarian and ornamental objects can be seen as forming a 3000 year tradition which began sometime around 1000 B.C. and continued well into ethnographic times. The distinction between prehistoric and historic decorative art is, therefore, an heuristic device which has no meaning in terms of the art. The origin of this tradition may lie in the few pieces of older decorative art mentioned above but evidence is scanty and little can be said about its origin. It appears at present that the emergence of a true decorative art tradition did not take place until the first millennium B.C. The oldest assemblages—Bell site (EeRk 4), house pit #1; Mitchell site (EeR1 22), house pit #1, components 2 and 5; and Lochnore Creek site (EdRk 7), zone 1—primarily contain decorated bone and antler fragments which cannot be identified as to tool type although three decorated objects—one bone pendant, one stone pendant and a single bone needle—were recovered. Around 2000 B.P. there are several assemblages with decorated artifacts, notably the Guichon Slough site (EbRc 6) with a decorated abrasive stone (Wyatt 1972:78) and component 2 of house pit #22 at the Bell site (EeRk 4) (Stryd 1973:287-8) which contained an incised steatite pipe, bone bead, one perforated bone pendant and a unilaterally barbed antler point. Between 2000 B.P. and the historic period there are many sites with decorated objects, presenting a continuity that leads directly to the ethnographies of Teit (1900, 1906, 1909) and others.

It is impossible in a paper of this length to adequately describe the various decorative motifs employed, their groupings and their placement on the artifacts. A few descriptive generalizations will have to suffice. Decoration invariably consists of various combinations of lines, dots and circles. No naturalistic representations were en-



*Fig. 9:12.* Decorated digging stick handles of antler from the Bell Site house pit village (EeRk 4) near Lillooet, B.C. *a* from house pit #8; *b* from house pit #23; *c* from house pit #21.



*Fig. 9:13.* Incised splitting wedge of antler from house pit #19 at the Bell Site house pit village (EeRk 4) near Lillooet, B.C. The poorly executed decorations consists primarily of the fir branch motif oriented longitudinally along the implement.

countered. Certain combinations are continually repeated and can be said to constitute decorative motifs. Boas (1900) has identified more than twenty of these motifs with their representational meaning from ethnographic sources and nearly all the motifs on the prehistoric specimens are included. Long parallel lines, short parallel lines, circles and dots, ticked lines, crossed lines, Xs, zigzags are some of the more common motifs (Boas 1900:Fig. 298; Sanger 1968a:Fig. 11).

Even a cursory inspection of the decorated objects will reveal that the distribution of the various motifs across the tool types as well as the association of motifs with one another is not random. Although no one motif appears to be restricted to a single artifact type, some motifs are found on only a limited range of tools. Long parallel lines, for example, are restricted to digging stick handles and a few other implements utilized by women (sap scrapers, mat creasers) although broad bands, a motif similar to and easily confused with the long parallel lines, have a wider distribution and are especially common in painted form on ethnographic implements (e.g., Teit 1900:Figs. 159, 160, 222). Other motifs, however, can be seen on nearly all artifact types, the ubiquitous short parallel line pattern being a good example. The well-known circle and dot motif is not as common, however, as might be anticipated and is found on less than one-third of the tool types.

Certain motifs are frequently associated with one another although no exclusive pairings were observed. Long parallel lines and long ticked lines are often found together as are parallel lines of medium length with triangles and partial triangles. Short parallel lines are often the only decoration on an object. Designs often occur in fours or multiples of fours probably because the number four was of mystic significance as it was in historic times (Teit 1900:337).

The placement of the various motifs both in terms of orientation and position on the artifacts also appears to be non-random. Designs are placed either along the lateral margins or on one of the broad surfaces of the tool but seldom are both the edges and the surfaces decorated. The major exceptions are digging stick handles and similar implements with oval cross-sections where the surface motif curves around the lateral margins and just onto the fringes of the opposite surface (Sanger 1968a:Plate VIII). Rarely is more than one surface decorated. Lateral margin decoration may be bilateral if the object is symmetrical but asymmetric forms usually display incising along only one margin. Artifacts with a circular cross-section such as tubular beads are decorated along their long axes although one bead exhibits short parallel lines perpendicular to both ends (Stryd 1973:Fig. 37e).

Designs on lateral margins are usually oriented at right angles to the long axis, that is, the motif is placed "across" the margin and "down" the length of the tool. This

Geographic Area	Number of Sites	Sites with Mobile Art		Sites with Decorated Objects		Sites with Carvings		Number of Decorated Objects		Number of Carvings	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lillooet	16	11	69	10	63	5	45	84	40	15	39
Lytton-Lochnore-Nesikep	10	8	80	5	50	5	62	28	14	6	16
Nicola Valley	11	6	55	6	55	0	0	12	6	0	0
Kamloops-Chase Shuswap	22	9	41	9	41	3	33	82	39	17	45
Williams Lake	7	1	14	1	14	0	0	2	1	0	0
Other Areas	5	1	20	1	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	71	36	51	32	32	13	18	208	-	38	-

Table 9.3. Distribution of the mobile art included in this study by location within the mid-Fraser and Thompson River area.

placement is especially obvious with short parallel lines. When a surface is embellished, long motifs are normally oriented longitudinally whereas short designs have a transverse orientation. Diagonal placement is also quite common but is not restricted to either short or long motifs.

**Meaning.** The question of meaning of the decorative motifs and of motivation for such art is a complex one which can only be introduced at this time. Because of the continuity of decorative art into historic times, some information on the meaning of the various motifs is available from the ethnographic literature. Boas (1900) has summarized much of this data and Sanger (1968a) has applied it to a prehistoric context.

Boas (1900), Smith (1899, 1900), Teit (1900) and others have pointed out that most of the decorative motifs are really symbols utilizing realistic representations with conventionalized elements. That is, the motifs express ideas or convey messages through the use of simplified naturalistic representations, many of which have become conventionalized through time, presumably to avoid ambiguity of meaning although Boas (1900:377) attributes it to difficulties of execution. Conventional designs were usually understood (Boas 1900:377) whereas other motifs, including some conventional ones, depended on the function of the implement on which they were inscribed to provide meaning. Meaning could be modified by adding specific elements such as dots or short lines to the

standardized motif or by joining several distinct designs with connecting lines. Smith (1899:157) suggests that the grouping of designs also influenced meaning. Unlike much of Northwest Coast mobile art there appears to be little connection between the form of the implement and the decorative motifs and few designs are primarily decorative in purpose (Boas 1900:377). Smith (1899:154) reports that the incisions on small bird bone tubes may be notches or tally marks but, even if correct, this appears to be an exception to the primary symbolic function of the decorations.

If symbolic, what do the various motifs represent? Three major groups or kinds of representations are recognizable: (1) topographic features or weather phenomena such as mountains, creeks, the earth and lightning; (2) specific forms of man-modified ground, notable trails, crossing trails, trenches and trenches with earth piled to one side; and (3) animals, parts of animals and markings left by animals such as snake tracks, snake skins, rattle-snake tails, bats, wood worm tracks and eyes (which could also be human). Most of the symbolic designs found on artifacts can also be seen on pictograph panels, but the latter display a considerably greater range of representations including anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and "spirit" forms (Corner 1968:29) which, in my opinion, reflects the more varied purpose behind pictograph painting.

To simply leave the discussion of symbolic representa-

Site Type	Number of Sites	Sites with Mobile Art		Sites with Decorated Objects		Sites with Carvings	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Cemeteries	13	10	77	10	77	5	39
House pit villages	49	23	47	19	39	8	16
Seasonal Camps	6	2	33	2	33	0	0
Cache Pits	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Surface Chipping Locations	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Sites	1	1	100	1	100	0	0
Total	71	36	51	32	45	13	18

Table 9:4. Distribution of the mobile art included in this study by site type.

tion at this point, would, I think, miss much of what is really being depicted. It is not the snake track or the mountain or the trench that is important *per se*; it is the power of the snake track, the mountain and the trench that is of concern and is the key to understanding the design. Boas (1900:379) mentions that young men rubbed wood worms on their arms in order to gain strength and that men decorated their clothing and implements with designs representing guardian spirits and dreams in order to endow those objects with supernatural powers. We may also note that trenches, crosses and other symbols were associated with female puberty ceremonies, a time when girls attained spiritual guardians and gained the power to give life.

The motifs may be viewed as symbols of power derived from animistic belief in the mysterious powers which pervade all nature (Teit 1900:344). Decorated artifacts may then become statements of power, expressions of the powers available to or desired by the owner/user, at least in the context of the activities represented by the object. This, I think, may account for the greater range of pictograph designs mentioned above, in that statements of power were but one purpose motivating pictograph painting, primarily as part of the guardian spirit quest.

To view a decorated object as a statement or message about power leads to two interesting questions: "who is making these statements?" and "to whom are they addressed?" The answer to the first question is probably

the obvious one, namely, the user/owner of the decorated object. Presumably the statement is addressed to the animal, plant, person or object that is to be killed, collected, modified or in some other manner exploited by the owner/user with the aid of the decorated implement. The decorations transfer the supernatural powers of the owner to the tool and the tool uses that power to function better or to make a greater impact on its surroundings.

This is also true for non-utilitarian objects which function primarily in the social arena. Beads and pendants make statements about their owner's power and Smith (1899:157) has observed that pipes were decorated with designs representing the guardian spirit of their owners. These decorated objects are, in a sense, social announcements, statements of power addressed to the members of the community and, possibly, to all the animate and inanimate powers that permeate the Salish world view.

It is my opinion that the preceding discussion has only begun to explore the various levels of meaning which may underlie the decorative art tradition of the interior Plateau. Much of the significance of symbolic art appears to lie in its social and psychological genesis. If we are therefore, really interested in acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of the "Indian behind the artifact," the investigation of the more fundamental, subjective levels of meaning may be a worthwhile pursuit.

