

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARPOLE PHASE

Although much has been made of the early research of Hill-Tout (1895, 1948) and H.I. Smith (1903, 1907) towards the development of a culture history in the Gulf of Georgia (see Mitchell 1971: 29–33; Robinson 1976), it was not until the 1950s that a temporal sequence, based upon assemblage content and stratigraphic position, was delimited. On the Fraser Delta and Point Roberts peninsula, Borden (1950, 1951) excavated a number of sites in the late 1940s including Locarno Beach (DhRt 6), Marpole (DhRs 1), Whalen Farm (DfRs 3), Point Grey (DhRt 5) and Musqueam (DhRt 2). Estimating a minimal age of the surface layers for each, he was able to place them into a gross chronological ordering of 500+ years (Marpole, Point Grey, Locarno Beach), 200+ years (Whalen Farm) and historic (Musqueam) (Borden 1950: 21). In no way was this meant to reflect succinct correlations of assemblage content. To the contrary, he found major similarities between Point Grey and Marpole as well as Locarno Beach II and Whalen I. Initial impressions pointed towards the interior for the cultures represented at the former sites while the latter components were seen as having far northern ties. As well, the Whalen II assemblage, while similar to Marpole and Point Grey by virtue of interior origins, remained distinctive.

On the heels of his initial report came a more explicit sequence (Borden 1951). Here, Borden outlined a three period breakdown for prehistoric inhabitants of the Fraser Delta. These were:

- 1) EARLY PERIOD – Eskimoid cultures
  - a) Locarno Beach I and II
  - b) Whalen I
- 2) INTERMEDIATE PERIOD –  
Interior Cultures in a State of Transition
  - a) Marpole – Point Grey – Locarno Beach III
  - b) Whalen II
- 3) LATE PERIOD –  
Developed Southern Aspect of Northwest Coast culture
  - a) Stselax Village at Musqueam

His intermediate period, the so-called “interior cultures in a state of transition”, is the precursor of the Marpole phase. Characteristic of this complex were the presence of

numerous heavy duty woodworking tools, barbed projectile points of antler, barbed harpoons with tangs, massive stone carving and an emphasis on chipped stone. Although the above listed traits were considered to be highly indicative of an interior origin, the presence of thin ground slate knives and projectile points suggested to Borden that the bearers of these assemblages were undergoing modification through adaptation to a Maritime environment. Thus, it was concluded that “the culture of these peoples may indeed be viewed as a modified aspect of a Plateau or Fraser River–Columbia River phase” (Borden 1951: 46).

Borden’s interpretations regarding what aspects of his materials were interior derived came under heavy criticism by Caldwell (1954). Specifically, having completed a survey of the Similkameen and Okanagan Valleys, Caldwell notes a paucity of evidence in support of the postulated associations. What parallels that existed were felt to have little archaeological depth and could be attributed to late importations. Caldwell, it would appear, favored independent development for both coastal and interior patterns while not ruling out the possibilities of trait specific diffusion.

In defense of the interior/coast migration hypothesis, Borden (1954) attacked Caldwell’s position by questioning the reliability of his survey data and its usefulness in making a contribution to “current theory”. Although Borden would seem to have modified his approach, especially with regard to the origins of a heavy duty woodworking industry, he continued to maintain his interior roots for intermediate components. As such, he again came under criticism by plateau archaeologists.

In a well-stated argument, Osborne, Caldwell and Crabtree (1956) provided a trait by trait refutation of interior characteristics found in the intermediate period on the Fraser Delta. Further, they took issue with Borden’s extension of the Fraser River hypothesis to all of the Northwest Coast. It was argued that historical reconstructions of this nature should be limited to the Fraser drainage (Osborne *et al.* 1956: 117). Finally, of the shift from early to intermediate cultures, they state:

If we must have migrations, this episode seems to us much more like one of coastal migration. It could as well represent diffusion and local population shifts as Borden suggests. . . (1956: 125).

Undoubtedly influenced by this critique, as well as the acquisition of a larger data base including several radiocarbon assays, Borden reformulated the Fraser Delta sequence into that which is currently in vogue. The early period became the Locarno Beach phase, the intermediate period was split into the Marpole and Whalen II phases and the late period was termed the Stselax phase (Borden 1968a). Eskimo origins for Locarno Beach were dropped (1962) and no further mention is made of interior traits for Marpole.

At approximately the same time that Borden was beginning his research on the Fraser Delta, archaeological work was being undertaken in the San Juan Islands of northwestern coastal Washington. King's (1950) excavations at the Cattle Point site provided a developmental sequence from an early land based hunting and gathering culture through to the developed aspect of the southern Northwest Coast pattern. The phase names of Island, Developmental, Maritime and Late were proposed.

Carlson (1954), analyzing subsequent material from Cattle Point, in addition to assemblages from several other sites in the San Juans, had misgivings with King's framework. Such a developmental sequence, he suggested, was somewhat controversial. Bringing the San Juan materials into line with those of the Fraser, his sequence included an "Early Maritime Culture", an "Archaic Culture" and a "Recent Culture". The term Archaic reflected the then

proposed interior origins for Borden's intermediate period. Carlson's unpublished chronology was not to have a long life, however. Bryan (1955), conducting research in northern Puget Sound, disagreed with the use of Archaic in describing cultures with a Maritime orientation (Marpole). Consequently, he proposed that it be reserved for the early pre-Maritime components turning up at a number of Washington sites. By extension, Borden's concept of "intermediate" was to be substituted.

Following the publication of Willey and Phillips (1958), the San Juan classification was again modified by Carlson (1960). Few differences between his intermediate or Archaic components and those excavated by Borden were seen and they were grouped as the Marpole phase. Such a case could not be made for the more recent materials resulting in the emergence of a San Juan phase. Carlson (1970) has continued with this scheme.

Since the mid 1960s, major alterations to the basic framework have been lacking. An attempt by Kidd (1964) to have regional prehistorians describe their materials in reference to a strict chronological series met with little success. In his framework, both Marpole and Locarno Beach phases were grouped together into a "Middle Period". Finally, as I have earlier reported, Mitchell (1971) has substituted the term culture type for phase. In addition, the Whalen II phase was incorporated with Marpole.