

THE NORTHWEST COAST SISIUTL

by

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B.A., University of British
Columbia, 1972

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

We accept this thesis as conforming to
the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

May, 1975

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ABSTRACT

This thesis comprises an investigation of the formal structure, iconography and iconology of a being mythically and visually represented on the Northwest Coast of North America, the sisiutl or double-headed serpent. The following arguments are made or are implicit in the body of the paper:

1. The prime reason for the importance of sisiutl is that it is seen by the peoples of the Northwest Coast as a supernatural being whose powers are directly accessible to them, and as one who will intercede with the other supernaturals on behalf of those humans who have obtained its help as a guardian.
2. Shamanism and sisiutl are strongly associated with each other because of the role of sisiutl as mediator; the position of the shaman in human society, that is, as one who has contact with both the natural and supernatural worlds, is paralleled by the similar attributes of sisiutl.
3. The central face seen so often on representations of sisiutl, here referring specifically to the Kwakiutl primary variant, generally represents BaxbakualanuXsiwae, the cannibal spirit; but, as shown by the fact that other supernaturals are sometimes depicted in this central position, BaxbakualanuXsiwae is actually representative of the supernaturals as a group. This is so because BaxbakualanuXsiwae is the most important character involved in the sacred winter dance

cycle of the Kwakiutl. The face seen in association with the northern variants of sisiutl apparently represents the "Princess who suckled the grubworm", a being described in a myth shared by the Tlingit, Tsimshian and Haida.

4. Sisiutl, the Kwakiutl primary variant of the double-headed serpent, is echoed in similar beings of the Tsimshian, Tlingit, Bella Coola, Nootka and Haida groups.

Sisiutl occurs in many Kwakiutl myths, but it is an established supernatural spirit with many attributes and no myth of origin. This fact supports the notion that the character sisiutl originated among the northern tribes and was adopted by the Kwakiutl.

5. In addition, the question of visual affinity among the Northwest Coast sisiutl and sisutl-like beings in Shang/Chou China and seventeenth-nineteenth century New Zealand is briefly addressed. This investigation indicates that structurally-oriented inquiry into phenomena far removed from each other in space and time is more productive than research based on diffusion theory.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor Audrey Hawthorn, my principal advisor for this paper, was invaluable in its preparation. My thanks to her and to the other people who assisted in my research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Magical thought is not to be regarded as a beginning, a rudiment, a sketch, a part of a whole which has not yet materialized. It forms a well-articulated system, and is in this respect independent of that other system which constitutes science....It is therefore better, instead of contrasting magic and science, to compare them as two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge.

(Levi-Strauss 1970: 13)

The central importance of entering into worlds other than our own - and hence of anthropology itself - lies in the fact that the experience leads us to understand that our own world is also a cultural construct.

(Castaneda 1968: viii)

Sisiutl is a Kwakiutl term, denoting the double-headed serpent; the quantitatively largest visual representation of the being occurs among the Kwakiutl, and this is the form most commonly accepted as representative of the sisiutl proper. This paper is concerned primarily, therefore, with the Kwakiutl variant of the sisiutl theme, referred to below as the primary variant. A formal description of the primary variant, illustrated in Figure 1-4 inclusive, is recorded in table form (Table 1) in order to more closely define its characteristics. It is noteworthy that in many cases the most coherent mythical explanations of sisiutl occur among the northern tribes, particularly the Tlingit and Tsimshian, where visual renderings of sisiutl are comparatively restricted in quantity.

The fact that sisiutl is a monster, or anomalous species (Douglas 1966), means that it is not confined to any particular locale or tribe in the Northwest Coast area. Because of this ambiguity, it is unnecessary in this paper to break down the references to sisiutl into formal sections corresponding to tribe. As Boas (1970: 662) states,

...all legends of this region are of complex origin, and they must have been carried over enormous distances from tribe to tribe. This is true of the more insignificant tales as well as of the most important myths, such as creation legends, and the legends of the origin of the secret societies.

He writes also (ibid.: 661):

A comparison of the ceremonials of the various tribes of the North Pacific Coast...does not leave any doubt that they are in the main derived from the same source. Among all the tribes, the badges of the ceremonials are made of cedar bark, which is dyed red in the juice of the alder. Head rings, neck rings and masks are worn by the dancers. The performances themselves are essentially the same from Alaska to Juan de Fuca Strait. But the most certain proof of their common origin lies in the identity of name among the various tribes. Therefore there can be no doubt that their present character was attained among the Kwakiutl, from whom the societies in their present form spread over a vast territory.

Discussing the Tlingit, Swanton (1908: 436) states that the secret society dances of that tribe originated in the south, towards Kwakiutl territory, thus corroborating Boas' opinion regarding the ceremonial complex. Boas refers above to the Kwakiutl as the main developers of the ceremonies found on the Northwest Coast. He does not, however, state that the characters in these ceremonials necessarily originate with the Kwakiutl. The sisiutl is believed by this writer to be a phenomenon common to all cultural regions of the Northwest Coast in various guises. That these

creatures are variants of a common theme is apparent through investigation of their attributes in the literature; they share, to a greater or lesser extent, certain features too similar and too numerous to be explained by coincidence. They all occur, in art and/or myth, as double-headed; they are serpent-like; there is a recurrent association of sisiutl with shamans; visual representations have horns in the majority of cases; inflated nostrils are shared throughout the area; crescents or segments are often seen on the bodies of double-headed serpents in both north and south, and attributes, visual or mythical, which are unexplained by the traditions of the area where they occur, can be more fully explained through reference to the traditions of a different area.

Sisiutl has other names in different locales within the Northwest Coast. Among them are the following:

- Tlingit - Woodworm (Barbeau 1964: 362)
- Scrubworm (ibid.: 363)
- Grubworm (ibid.: 366)
- Tsimshian - Caterpillar or Hrtsenawsuh (ibid.: 367)
- Larah'waese or Double-headed snake (Barbeau 1953: 240)
- Tlenamaw or Dragon (ibid.: 237)
- Haida - Woodworm or Weenamaw (Barbeau 1964: 369)
- Bella Coola- Sisiul or double-headed serpent (Boas 1898: 44)
- Nootka - Hai-et-lik or mountain-snake (Barbeau 1964: 375).

Illustrations of these additional forms can be found, accompanied by text, in Barbeau 1964 and 1953.

In order to justify detailed research into its origins and associations, the central nature of sisiutl will be briefly demonstrated. E.W. Locher (1932), in an important work on the serpent, supports the thesis that sisiutl is the central figure in the Northwest Coast cosmos, with many important supernaturals (Qomoqua, BaxbakualanuXsiwae, Winalagilis and Thunderbird among them) seen as manifestations of sisiutl. Badner (1974) sees sisiutl as representing "...a cosmic schema which depicts the dragon-like monster, at one and the same time as upper world, lower world and integrated symbol of both." Boas (1970: 371) states,

Besides a number of animals...we find principally a number of fabulous monsters whose help was obtained by the ancestors, and who therefore have become the crest of the clan. Perhaps the most important among these is the sisiutl, the fabulous double-headed snake....

Here Boas refers to the Kwakiutl; the next statement, by Barbeau (1953: 239), is more general: "...the Tlingit, the Kwakiutl and the Nootka made the double-headed snake or dragon...their most favorite emblem." The following indicates the central position of sisiutl by direct reference to mythology. In the Tsimshian myth regarding the origin of Txamsem (Raven), there is reference to sisiutl when (Boas 1916: 58) "...the whole world was covered in darkness." The myth describes a young man's death and return to life as a supernatural being. His father (ibid.: 59) "...had two great slaves - a miserable man and his wife. The great slaves were called Mouth At Each End." One day the youth was moved to ask the slaves what made them so hungry. (He had, up to that time, eaten very sparingly). The two great slaves replied (loc. cit.):

We are hungry because we have eaten scabs from our shin bonesTherefore the prince replied, I will also try the scabs you speak about. The shining prince took up the piece of whale meat with the scab in it, put it in his mouth, tasted it, and spit it out again. When the chief and the chieftaness came back from their visit, the prince said to his mother, I am very hungry. The slaves prepared rich food, and he ate it all...soon all the provisions in his father's house were at an end...the chief spoke to his son, and said, My dear son, I shall send you away inland to the other side of the ocean.

Thus began the flight of Raven, creator of the world. In another location, Boas (ibid.: 461) states that "...the slaves who make Txamsem greedy are called Was-at-Each-End...self-moving canoes have a Was head at each end." Self-moving canoes are a manifestation of sisiutl (Boas 1966: 146-148). It can be seen that the journey of Raven did not commence until he interacted with Mouth At Each End, identifiable with sisiutl. The taking of nourishment by Raven, from the slaves, can be interpreted as an indication that sisiutl is seen by the Tsimshian as the source of Raven's power. This view is given additional credence by the fact that a Kwakiutl bedroom painting, seen in Figure 5, can be seen as a depiction of various supernatural birds, among them Raven, eating of the flesh of sisiutl. The other birds are identified by Boas as Crane, Eagle and Thunderbird; at the very least, this painting visually depicts sisiutl among very select company, underlining its importance within the ceremonial system of the Kwakiutl and of the Northwest Coast in general.

As the ceremonial winter dance complex is so involved with the main characters of Northwest Coast mythology, it will be briefly summarized at this point. The Kwakiutl are used as the source of this summary, as recorded by Curtis (1915: 137-165).

The principle of inherited rank is very important...succession is strictly hereditary, and the eldest son succeeds to the father's rank. At a certain age, the heir receives a feast name. This is the name by which he will be personally invited to every assembly. All public business is transacted at feasts. At the base of the whole system lies the potlatch, or distribution of property among the assembled people. The ceremonial life of the Kwakiutl finds expression principally in the winter season, which is devoted exclusively to a series of quasi-religious performances constituting the winter dance. For ceremonial purposes the tribe is divided into two classes; the pahus (uninitiated) and the pepahala (shamans), who compose the secret society. Before a man becomes hamatsa, the most important of all, he must have first been initiated into eight prior orders or secret societies. A prospective initiate disappears a short time before the ceremony at which he is to be initiated. During this absence he is supposed to be with the spirit from whom a mythical ancestor obtained the supernatural power which the new initiate is now to receive. After acquiring this power, the ancestor returned and performed a dance portraying his experience and extolling in song the power he had gained; the new initiate recapitulates the ancestor's performance with the same dances and songs. Among the principal spirits supposed to be visited by initiates are these: Baxbakualan-uXsiwae, seen by those about to become hamatsa; and Winalagilis, seen by those about to become tokwit, si'lis or mamaga. The most important and striking feature of the entire winter ceremony is the performance of the

hamatsa. Curtis (ibid.: 165-170) also includes the origin myth of the hamatsa dance. According to Holm (1974), almost every tsetseqa (winter dance) revolves around the taming of the hamatsa.

CHAPTER II

DEFINITIONS AND METHODS

The representations of sisiutl dealt with in this paper are divided into two large categories; that of the primary variant and that of the secondary variants.

The complete primary variant is seen in Figure 1. It depicts the Kwakiutl sisiutl with all the distinctive elements recorded in Table 1: two heads, central face, horns, protruding tongue, a spiral or up-turned nose and crescents along its body. Figures 2 and 3 are different versions of the primary variant; Figure 2 lacks horns and Figure 3 lacks crescents. Figure 4 is a representation of the single-headed form of sisiutl, lacking the central head but with the distinctive finial serpent head diagnostic of sisiutl.

Secondary variants comprise either less literal Kwakiutl representations of the double-headed serpent or variants depicting sisiutl as seen by the other groups of the Northwest Coast area. Figures 12 and 13 are soul catchers, designated as representative of sisiutl, with differences from the primary variant, particularly notable in the finial "serpent" heads. Figures 6 to 9 inclusive illustrate duntsigs, said to be representative of sisiutl. Figures 16 and 17, a head and neck ring respectively, include in their composition very abstract depictions of sisiutl. Figures 23, 25 and 30 are peculiarly northern variants of sisiutl, presenting the Tlingit grubworm or woodworm. The most notably missing, or differently placed element in these northern forms, compared

to the primary variant, is the central face normally seen on the body. The other differences hinge upon variations in style.

As sisiutl is both an artistic motif and a mythical theme, it is logical to use iconographic analysis in its investigation. Panofsky (1957: 39-40) states the following regarding artistic analysis: "...I have summarized in a synoptical table...neatly differentiated categories (for analysis of artistic motifs) which...seem to indicate three separate spheres of meaning...in actual work (they) merge with each other into one organic and indivisible process." His three spheres are those of pre-iconographical description, dealing with formal analysis of primary artistic motifs; iconographical analysis, constituting the investigation of images, stories and allegories secondarily connected with artistic motifs; and iconological interpretation, dealing with intrinsic symbols of artistic motifs and the essential tendencies of the human mind. This breakdown is the basic analytic framework for this paper. Relevant data for the determination of cultural contexts have been considered to be myths, museum notes and ethnographies.

The term "mediator", one of central importance to the arguments presented here, should be defined. A dictionary definition is a logical starting point.

Mediate:

1. To occur or be in an intermediate relation or position.
2. To bring about or effect by one's intervention.
3. To serve as the medium for effecting (a result) or conveying (an object, information, etc.).

(From Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary, Canadian Edition, 1963)

Sisiutl is well described by these definitions. The first describes the position of the serpent in relation to its capacity to contact both natural and supernatural spheres; the second describes its performance as an interlocutor, a role which it fulfils when communicating with the other supernaturals on behalf of a human associate; the third is descriptive of the monster as it sometimes appears in myth, for example, as a vessel full of wealth. Implicit here is that sisiutl is a monster, which by definition means that it does not exist in the physical world. It operates on the psychic side of what has been termed, with respect to shamanism, as psycho-physical dualism. Its mediation takes place in what Mary Douglas (1966) has termed "the margins" between reality and unreality; between ordinary reality and non-ordinary reality. Sisiutl, then, is a psychological construct intricately involved in the structuring process of Northwest Coast thought. That it appears so prominently in the art of the area, especially among the Kwakiutl, is a reflection of its central position.

CHAPTER III

PRE-ICONOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION:

PRIMARY VARIANT

The sisiutl is described as follows (Dawson in Barbeau 1953: 244): "The double-headed serpent...is represented as with a cylindrical body, terminating at each end in a serpent's head, and with the appearance of a human head in the middle." This description serves to generally designate the primary variant of sisiutl, in its most common form, as seen in Figures 1, 2 and 3.. However, as Barbeau (loc. cit.) states, "Some of them are snakelike with a single head...." Among the Bella Coola (Boas 1898: 66), "...the sisiutl has only one head...." Figure 4 illustrates this single-headed form.

Distinctive Elements and Compositional Arrangements

Sisiutl has been characterized by Inverarity (1950: 41) as follows: "Usually one or more of these features will identify the animal...plume-like forms rising above the forehead, ending in round knob; spiral nose." Barbeau (1953: 241) notes "...a long bulging snout, inflated nostrils...and a long pointed tongue." These two quotes contain the majority of the elements recorded in Table 1: horns ("plume-like forms"), spiral nose ("inflated nostrils"), and protruding tongue. In addition, the table includes reference to the presence of crescent-shaped forms along the sides of many sisiutl representations. Compo-

sitional arrangements are included in the table, explaining the presence of the categories of central head in body, two heads and one head; the two heads/one head categories referring to the terminal serpent heads of sisiutl.

The material corpus used for analytical purposes in Table 1 comprises twenty-five pieces included in the collection of the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology. The articles referred to in the table are all illustrated in Hawthorn, 1967. They provide a good range of sisiutl primary variants, despite the limitations imposed by the use of one volume.

Key to Table 1

- A - one head
- B - two heads
- C - protruding tongue
- D - spiral/knobbed nose
- E - central head in body
- F - horns/plumes
- G - crescents on body

Table 1: Composition and Elements of Sisiutl

<u>Fig. #</u>	<u>Cat. #</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>
10	A4363	curtain		X		X	X	X	X
14	A6270	curtain		X	X	X	X	X	X
126	A4036	headdress		X	X	X	X	X	
126	A3639	headdress		X	X	X	X	X	
126	A3604	headdress		X	X	X	X	X	X
127	A3636	ceremonial board		X		X	X	X	X

Continued

Table 1 (Continued)

<u>Fig. #</u>	<u>Cat. #</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>G</u>
128	A7472	belt		X		X	X	X	X
128	A4263	belt		X		X	X	X	X
128	A3791	belt		X	X	X	X	X	X
128	A6147	baton		X		X	X	X	X
129	A3804	baton		X	X	X	X	X	X
129	A3800	baton		X	X	X	X		X
129	A3632	baton	X		X	X		X	X
129	A3799	baton	X		X	X		X	X
129	A3836	belt		X	X	X		X	
163	A6350	bow		X	X	X	X	X	
186	A4325	cloak		X	X		X	X	
190	A4172	apron		X	X	X	X	X	X
191	A4131	apron		X	X	X	X	X	
214	A3731	chief's headdress		X	X	X	X	X	X
251	A4147	dish		X		X	X	X	X
252	A3413	dish		X	X	X	X		
253	A3414	dish		X		X	X		
457	A4497	mask		X		X	X	X	

Note: All items illustrated in Hawthorn (1967).

In some examples, the serpent heads are rotated on a horizontal or a vertical axis around the central face area. Belts illustrate horizontal rotation, and the curtain in Figure 34 below illustrates the vertical variety of rotation. These operations are left to the discretion of the creator, who is, however, often limited in his choices by the shape of the field which is to be decorated. The serpent heads can be oriented

in various ways, with respect to the central face (in two-headed examples), from a slight curve to a full nose-to-nose rotation, as in Figure 34.

Horizontal rotation is generally tightly linked to mechanical considerations, as headdresses and belts both physically alter the orientation of the three parts of the sisiutl to make them functional; they are connected with flexible joints.

CHAPTER IV

BRIEF DESCRIPTION AND ICONOGRAPHY:

SECONDARY VARIANTS

While the above describes the primary variant, the typically Kwakiutl double-headed serpent, it does not by any means describe the range of representational variants which the sisiutl may take. These variants include duntsiqs, soul catchers, northern forms, and cedar bark neck and head rings.

Duntsiqs

Duntsiqs, or power boards, are used by the Kwakiutl during the winter dance season by the Tokwit dancer in her performance. According to Hawthorn (1967: 46),

The dancing societies of the Kwakiutl consisted of four main groups...the most important and the most complex was the Hamatsa society...the second group was under the inspiration of Winalagilis....The third group, the Atlakim dance series, could be used either for Klasila or Tsetseka displays by changing the symbolic decorations. The fourth group was made up of the Dluwalakha dancers...who were not, as a group, involved in the convincing and terrifying displays of supernatural seizure.

The Tokwit dancer is character number two in the war dance series of Winalagilis (A. Hawthorn - personal communication). According to Boas (1969: 90),

The toxwit, called by the Newetsee Olala, embraces many dances in which powers are conjured up from underground. To these belongs the dentsek which represents the double-headed serpent.

Boas states further (1970: 491):

In many of these dances (Tokwit) after the performer has been killed, the duntsiq arises from underground. It consists of a series of flat, carved boards, connected on their narrow sides by plugs which pass through rings of spruce root or through tubes cut out of cedar. The joints are somewhat loose, so that the whole can be given an undulating motion forward and backward. It has two or three points on top, and mica is glued on its painting. It is intended to represent the sisiutl, but I am not able to interpret the carving in detail. The characteristic detail of the sisiutl certainly does not appear on it.

Also (ibid.: 488), "At other times the (tokwit) will succeed in bringing the sisiutl up just enough for its horns to show." Figures 6 to 10 inclusive illustrate the duntsiq secondary variant.

The plume-like shapes at the top of some duntsiqs, generally occurring in pairs, often strongly resemble the horns or plumes noted in the more common renderings of sisiutl. Describing the Tokwit dance, Curtis (1915: 211) supports the identity of sisiutl and duntsiq: "She (the tokwit dancer) pretends to catch something in her hands...she throws them apart towards the back of the fire, and the horns of the sisiutl appear. The sisiutl is raised out of a pit by men below." (Curtis here refers to duntsiq as sisiutl, without differentiating the two.)

Some of these power boards have representations of figures or faces included in their designs. The identities of these figures are assumed to be the same as those discussed below in the Iconography section. Two possibilities not discussed in that section are presented here. Locher (1932: 73) supports the view that the bodies and faces seen on duntsiqs often represent Nomlemgila, a being which in turn (ibid.:

72) "...represents the serpent." Ritzenthaler and Parsons (1966: 98) describe the duntsiqs in Figures 6 and 8 as follows: "The faces in this design really represent the human face which is always in the middle of the sisiutl with its two serpent heads at its ends." While this statement can be successfully challenged on two of its points, that the face is human and that it is always present, the author's opinion that the central head seen on duntsiqs is identical with that portrayed on the sisiutl forms analyzed in Table 1 does add continuity to the range of sisiutl variants, primary and secondary.

Duntsiqs often exhibit flakes of mica attached to their surfaces. The following gives some information regarding this feature (Boas 1935: 126):

Yayagextsa arose and went to the place where the double-headed serpent had been lying on the ground, to search for a scale of the double-headed serpent. Then he found something shining, lying on the ground at the place where the serpent had been. Then he took a leaf of the salal bush and wrapped it around the scale.

The mica is apparently intended to represent the serpent's scales, and emphasizes sisiutl's supernatural origin, as (Boas 1916: 460) "...supernatural beings appear as shining youths, or they appear in shining light"; the glittering mica reproduces the shining light said to surround supernaturals. A Koskimo Kwakiutl myth recorded by Curtis (1915: 280) presents another possibility regarding the shining mica; that is, that it is representative of quartz. It deals with the acquisition of supernatural powers, here described as quartz, by a "magician" or shaman:

And now the sisiutl assumed the real form of sisiutl with two snake heads at the ends and a man's face in the middleIn the distance a voice cried: "Wa! Strike it once!" Four times the voice was heard...and then he really struck it, and the sisiutl fell into a mass of hwela (quartz crystal).... He...wrapped a piece of the crystal in it (cedar bark), and placed it in his bosom.

A Kwakiutl duntsiq owned by the Museum of Anthropology at U.B.C., A9083-9084 (Figure 10), strongly supports, in visual terms, the oft-mentioned identity of sisiutl with duntsiqs. It was found as part of a group of more representative duntsiqs in a cave site, located close to Loughborough Inlet on Vancouver Island. Its form is that of a sisiutl with its two serpent heads upturned from a lower central axis and minus a central face. A paddle, illustrated in Hawthorn (1967), is painted with a sisiutl very similar to that portrayed in Figure 10. It is of Coast Salish origin, made by the Comox, and is illustrated in Figure 11.

Duntsiqs are representative of sisiutl. The features shared by both duntsiqs and the primary variant of Table 1 appear to be limited to the horns and the appearance of the face, repeatedly seen on duntsiqs, which is a simplified version of the central face seen on the majority of the primary variants. Figure 10 is an exception, a duntsiq depicting a double-headed serpent in a more literal way.

Sould Catchers

The sisiutl is sometimes represented three-dimensionally as a soul catcher, an item found only in shaman's kits. Describing the Haida, Barbeau (1958: 57) notes that "...the double-headed Dragon or sisiutl (is)

one of the most potent charms in a medicine bag." Still referring to the Haida, Krause (1956: 209) reports that,

Among the ever-present paraphernalia of the Ska-ga (shaman), in addition to the noise-making apparatus, is a hollow tube, open at both ends...in this bone he captures the spirit... when it leaves the body, by stopping both ends of the tube with cedar bark.

In his footnote #15, page 209, Krause mentions that this item is "... usually called a soul catcher." Describing the Northwest Coast in general, Hawthorn (1967: 367) mentions the following:

These small carved objects were not connected with the pot-latch or the dancing societies but were part of the shaman's gear....A small box carved with magical symbols, the soul catcher was carried by the shaman when he pursued the soul of an ailing patient under his care. When he succeeded in approaching it, he popped it into the box, replaced the stopper, and returned it to the patient, who then recovered.

The function of the artifact emphasizes its importance to the shaman. The possession of a soul catcher might also have been an indication of rank. According to Benedict (1964: 75),

...among the Nootka, those having fasted and obtained guardians...knew when souls were absent, and could go after them and restore them to the body, and so prevent death...but the doctors proper...who cured all diseases...other...than the wandering of the soul required no supernatural experiences. The soul catchers were the higher in prestige.

Soul catchers were made in many forms other than sisiutl, and were sometimes simply undecorated pieces of bone. Figures 14 and 15 are made in the forms of wolf and killer whale respectively. The wolf was particularly prominent among the Nootka; Locher (1932: 32) supports the view that "...among the Nootka it (the wolf) probably occupies the place

which BaxbakualanuXsiwae has with the Kwakiutl." BaxbakualanuXsiwae has strong associations with sisiutl, as discussed below.

While the strong association of sisiutl with shamanism supports the interpretation of ambiguous soul catchers as sisiutl (Figure 13 is a verified sisiutl soul catcher of the Tsimshian), there are many cases in which a soul catcher, apparently because of its two heads, is mistakenly identified as sisiutl. Figure 12 is an example of this type of mistake, based on generalization. The central face seen on this Kwakiutl example is not the fierce one seen on the Primary Variants above; it probably represents the shaman, depicted in the act of soul-catching, with the two heads (of sisiutl, or some other being) representative of the two worlds between which the shaman must travel in search of lost souls. The terminal heads, in cases where they do not represent sisiutl, are probably depictions of the shaman's guardian spirit.

Head and Neck Rings

Although they represent sisiutl in some cases, these rings are totally unrecognizable as sisiutl to the uninitiated. Cedar bark plays an important role in the ceremonial life of the Northwest Coast, and these rings are indispensable to the winter dance cycle. Head and neck rings are discussed below in connection with shamanism, and are illustrated in Figures 16 and 17.

Northern Variants of Sisiutl

Figures 23, 25 and 30 depict the northern variant of sisiutl as seen among the Tsimshian and Tlingit, the woodworm or grubworm. The head seen in Figures 23 and 30 represents the "Princess who suckled the Grubworm". Her head is depicted below the centre of the two-headed being she is associated with, rather than in the centre of its body.

Stylization

Hawthorn (1967: 12) has described Northwest Coast art as follows:

Special characteristics of Northwest Coast painting are:

1. The use of salient recognition features, such as beaks, claws, or fins, as a representation of the bird or animal portrayed.
2. Frequent use of a highly stylized symbol for a whole animal.

This phenomenon applies to sisiutl. Figures 18, 19 and 20 include secondarily important depictions of the "shorthand" form of sisiutl, its head with a spiral nose and/or a protruding tongue. Figure 21 shows a hawinalal dancer standing between two assistants, each of which is represented as a humanoid figure with the "shorthand" sisiutl for a head.

Figure 22 is included because of the visual similarity between the "salmon trout head" motif it illustrates and the "shorthand" sisiutl form, perhaps an indication of some interrelationship.

CHAPTER V

ICONOGRAPHY AND ICONOLOGY:

ALL NORTHWEST COAST VARIANTS

Discussion of Distinctive Elements and Compositional Arrangements as
Presented in Table 1

1. Spiral/knobbed nose (96% occurrence, Table 1): The spiral nose, along with horns and double-headedness, is one of the most important traits shared among the southern (here, Bella Coola and Kwakiutl) and northern (Haida, Tsimshian and Tlingit) groups within the Northwest Coast. This detail points to a common origin for the beast, either in visual or mythical representations of sisiutl. Figures 23, 25 and 30 depict sisiutl as portrayed in the north. Referring to Figure 23, Barbeau (1964: Pl. 152) states,

...this post shows the familiar sisiutl of the Kwakiutl Indians of British Columbia (called) Larah'wais among the Tsimshian. It is explained in the myth of the grubworm or caterpillar, the distribution of which centers in the Tlingit and Tsimshian country to the north.

Barbeau here supports the view that the Kwakiutl variant of sisiutl is the same beast represented among other Northwest Coast tribes, here Tsimshian and Tlingit, and that it is more fully explained by utilizing the traditions of groups other than Kwakiutl. The spiral nose, mentioned as "inflated nostrils" by Barbeau above, could be an indication of dilated nostrils, opened wide for sniffing out food. (A. Hawthorn, per-

sonal communication 1975). This feature is seen in the Hamatsa masks of the Kwakiutl. Referring to this complex, Holm (1972: 11) has stated,

The most important of the Kwakiutl Tseyka dances is the Hamatsa, which is said to have been acquired in the early years of the historic period from related tribes to the north by marriage and war. Hamatsa can be roughly translated as cannibal, and the dancer impersonates and is considered to be motivated by BaxbakualanuXsiwae, a powerful man-eating spirit.

Insatiable appetite is also an attribute of the northern variant of sisiutl, the Grubworm or Woodworm, a point which lends credibility to this interpretation of the spiral nose in the north. This association suggests that sisiutl and BaxbakualanuXsiwae, discussed below might be related.

2. Horns or plumes (88% occurrence - Table 1): On the Northwest Coast, these are indicators of a supernatural being (A. Hawthorn - personal communication 1974). This device is normally associated with Thunderbird and sisiutl, but there are many examples of other creatures who exhibit this distinctive type of horn. Among them are the Kwakiutl beings Khenkho, BaxbakualanuXsiwae and supernatural codfish, illustrated in Figures 26, 27 and 28 respectively. What might be a variation of this horn form can be seen in Figure 29, a drawing of a mawihl excerpted from Curtis (1915). He describes it as "Raven and the man into whom Raven changes himself at will", introducing the probability that in this case the plume-like shapes represent feathers. A similar feature is shown in Figure 34 which depicts the peculiarly-shaped horns attached to the head of a being identified as BaxbakualanuXsiwae.

3. Protruding tongue (68% occurrence - Table 1): There are several possible explanations for this feature. Swanton (1908: 464) has stated that "The shaman's power, like that of a common person, was increased by obtaining many split animal tongues, especially the tongues of land otters." The presence of the protruding tongue could, therefore, be a reference to the unusual range of powers of the sisiutl. The tongue might be a representation of lightning; Krause (1956: 214) reports that,

In the collection of Haida myths the Thunderbird also plays an important role....When he needs nourishment he puts on his feather cloak and raises himself in the air so that his body darkens the heavens and the rush of his wings causes the thunder. Under his wings he hides a little fish which he has gotten out of the sea. He throws this with great force when he sees a whale and the snakelike tongue of the animal appears as lightning.

In this case, the "little fish" is probably a salmon; the Kwakiutl serpent (Locher 1932: 6) "...frequently appears in the shape of a salmon." Figure 18 is an illustration of Thunderbird in his role as lightning-maker. Under his wings he has "little fish", the form of which is identified above to be indicative of sisiutl. Protruding tongues are also involved in the transfer of power to a novice from the animal source of his power, as seen on raven rattles where (Gould 1972: ii): "...the reclining figure is the novice, the protruding tongue stands for the passage of power, and the animal at the other end of the tongue identifies the source of power." A Kwakiutl myth included in Curtis (1915: 275) mentions a canoe: "In the bow was a spear, the two points of which kept thrusting themselves in and out, like the tongue of a serpent. That spear

was a sisiutl." This, also, contributes to an understanding of the protruding tongue.

4. Crescents or multiple crescents (60% occurrence - Table 1): These occur along the sides of the bodies of many examples, as in Figures 1 and 2. They could represent either stylized scales, as sisiutl is described as both serpent and fish, or they could be an attempt to include in the visual rendering some reference to the segments of the northern woodworm or grubworm.

Composition of sisiutl motif - from Table 1: Based upon examination of the nineteenth and twentieth century material in the University of British Columbia Museum, the following arrangements characterize the sisiutl of this time and provenience:

1. ABA - Two serpent heads with a central face. 88% occurrence in this sample.
2. AA - Two serpent heads without a central face. 4% occurrence in this sample.
3. A - One serpent head, no central face. 8% occurrence in this sample.

Double-Head Representation and Central Face Identification

The double-headed serpent is represented throughout the Northwest Coast cultural area. In the north the commonest visual representation depicts a two-headed grubworm without a central face, as seen in Figure 25. Figures 23 and 30 both have central faces involved in their

composition, but their positioning is at variance with that of the primary variants. The northern examples have the serpents draped over the head of the being centrally positioned; the Kwakiutl primary variant normally includes a central face mounted between two serpent heads.

A Kwakiutl myth recorded by Boas (1970: 410) introduces the possibility that the central face is representative of the sun: "As soon as Kuexalalagilis had rounded the point, he opened the box. Then he took out the sun and removed his sisiutl mask. It grew light at once." Where the central figure does not have horns, it could be a human face, perhaps representing an ancestor, as in the transformation mask seen in Figure 31. Curtis (1915: 280) lends credence to this interpretation with the following: "And now the sisiutl assumed the real form of sisiutl with two snake heads...and a man's face in the middle. And this man's face was that of...the father of Wahanagylis." The appearance of the central face, however, often closely resembles the drawing of BaxbakualanuXsiwae seen in Figure 32, taken from a mawihl. Figure 33, a belt, has the same face.

Sisiutl and BaxbakualanuXsiwae

Mawihls, according to Boas (1970: 446) represent "...the house of BaxbakualanuXsiwae. Its front is painted with designs which represent either the face of BaxbakualanuXsiwae himself or that of his servant the raven." The Kwakiutl mawihl in Figure 34 is an important example. Here, instead of BaxbakualanuXsiwae and his servant Raven, there are possibly

three representations of BaxbakualanuXsiwae, two of which are incorporated into the sisiutl forming the circular boundary of the composition.

Sisiutl, rather than Raven, here represents BaxbakualanuXsiwae's servant.

The central being, described as human in the illustration's original caption, has horns; it is, therefore, not human, and probably represents

BaxbakualanuXsiwae. Figure 35 features BaxbakualanuXsiwae at the center of a Thunderbird's body. Figure 36 depicts, as would be expected from Boas' description above, Raven with BaxbakualanuXsiwae in its body.

Figure 38 is a particularly rich example. Included are a rainbow, which is mentioned by Boas (1970: 459) as follows: "The Milkyway is the cannibal pole of BaxbakualanuXsiwae; in other cases it (the pole) is the rainbow." When a potlatch takes place, this cannibal pole is represented by the potlatch pole; sisiutl, with BaxbakualanuXsiwae as central head, is seen; two raven helpers are present; central in the composition is a ceremonial copper, with the representation of a bifurcated whale's tail on the copper's lower half. The face represented on the upper half of the same copper could represent the grizzly bear helper of BaxbakualanuXsiwae, mentioned by Boas (1970: 394).

The tale of BaxbakualanuXsiwae is (Boas 1970: 662) "...the most important one of all the legends of secret societies." Boas' opinion of the importance of this being and of the ceremonial complex it inspires is supported by the fact that the highest-ranked of the sacred winter dance series, that of the Hamatsa, has as its three main characters Crooked beak, Hamatsa raven and Hokhokw, the helpers of BaxbakualanuXsiwae. These

three bird-monsters are by far the most often represented major characters in the Hamatsa dance, and are corollarily the most numerous of the Kwakiutl dance masks (Hawthorn 1967: 50-53; ibid.: 95-115). Hamatsa translates as cannibal, which is the term used, as a rule, to characterize BaxbakualanuXsiwae. A concise summary of the Kwakiutl winter dance time is given by Eliade (1958: 68-72). BaxbakualanuXsiwae is heavily involved in warlike, bloodthirsty acts; he is the central figure in the winter ceremonial, and sisiutl is closely associated with him. The hawinalal, or war dance (Boas 1970: 495-496), with its use of sisiutl-decorated implements in a bloody theatrical display, further emphasizes the involvement of sisiutl in this complex.

But sisiutl is not associated only with BaxbakualanuXsiwae. A myth recorded by Curtis (1915: 271-279; Appendix p. 8) presents sisiutl in close association with Qomoqua, making any absolute assumption that the central face always represents BaxbakualanuXsiwae untenable. The central face could, therefore, depict Qomoqua; indeed, according to Boas (1969: 129), "...Qomoqua is identified with the double-headed serpent." The first thing to note in this myth is that sisiutl is a mediator, represented here in its canoe form as the vehicle which takes a mortal woman from the supernatural realm of Qomoqua (here, Komuqi) to her home village. The second is that sisiutl is a wealth bringer, as its form in this instance is that of a wealth-filled canoe. The following provides additional information regarding sisiutl, extending the mythic base for identification of the beast as death bringer, wealth bringer and fire bringer.

In the Kwakiutl myth "Squirrel and Thunderbird", the double-headed serpent speaks to the mortal Yayagextsa in these words (Boas 1935: 126-132):

...you have succeeded when you took my scale. Now you have a great treasure...put the scale at the end of the arrow and nothing will live that is shot by you, even if it were a whale or an animal. When you wish it to become a rock, that which is shot by you, say to this arrow that it shall become a rock, and say to the arrow that what is shot by you will burn....Then he took his death-bringing arrow....

The death-bringing and fire-bringing qualities are self-evident; the rest of the text explains that Yayagextsa became wealthy through the use of his magic arrow. Boas (1935: 162) has recorded a Kwakiutl tale in which "...the cause of the house being a death-bringer was the double-headed serpent," further supporting the interchangeability of death-bringer and sisiutl. Sisiutl as property-bringer, as described by the sun to Kuexalalagilis, another Kwakiutl representation of Raven, appears as follows" (Boas 1970: 411) "My friend! Treat my sisiutl mask well. You may show it during the winter dance, and also the sunrise mask. Its name shall be ... "Abalone shell from one end of the world to the other," implying wealth. The presentation of sisiutl as both property-bringer and death-bringer, polar opposites, must be consistent with the image of sisiutl. This could be, in fact, the basis for its double-headedness; it must be ambiguous in character in order to have free access to all beings, supernatural and mortal.

It is well established from the above that the Kwakiutl sisiutl is strongly associated with a number of important supernatural beings, among them Thunderbird, Qomoqua, BaxbakualanuXsiwae, Winalagilis, Raven;

it also represents natural forces, such as lightning, sun (and fire), and earthquakes. Ordinary animals are also the results of transformation by sisiutl; one myth describes a double-headed serpent becoming a squirrel in order to escape the Thunderbird pursuing it. In its squirrel form, sisiutl speaks with the human protagonist.

The Central Face in the North

The most complete northern woodworm myth has been recorded from the Tsimshian; the theme presented in it is shared among the Tsimshian, Tlingit and Haida. It concerns a Tsimshian princess of the village of Khrain who suckled a grubworm until it was of an enormous size (Barbeau 1964: 367):

...before long (it) was able to scent the food boxes which were kept underground beneath the houses. On discovering these boxes, the woodworm bored through them and emptied them in turn. Only when it had reached the end of the houses and was on its last food box, did the people catch it in the act. They found that it had a head on its tail....

They then killed it. Some time after the death of the worm which had menaced Khrain, a strange being travelled along the coast in his canoe, following his floating urinal. He spoke to the villagers as follows (ibid.: 368):

The big man (big chief) shouted back, "Come, my dear folk, look at me! I have something to show you." The people on the shore gazed at him, and all fell dead. They were killed by the great supernatural power of the chief, who was the spirit of the great Grubworm that had brought death to the people of Khrain.

This was repeated at several villages, until finally (ibid.: 369),

...a Gitwilgyawts man took the contents (of the urinal) and threw them onto the big man in the canoe. He fell over dead, and the Gitwilgyawts then took possession of the narhnorh (spirit). This is the origin of the house and name of Me'awn among the Gitwilgyawts.

This myth, as will be discussed below, presents some clues as to the reason for the representation of sisiutl as having two finial heads among the southern as well as the northern groups. It also provides information regarding the possible identity of the central face seen on the primary variant. Referring to the Tlingit variant of the creature, Barbeau (ibid.: 366) notes: "The grubworm, now presented in its other form which is also familiar along the Pacific coast - that of the Double-headed monster, is shown on her head, its two heads with horn-like nostrils drooping on either side." (Figure 23)

The central being in the story is definitely the woodworm and its destructive narhnorh (spirit). It is presented here as a death bringer, which is a quality associated with sisiutl in its Kwakiutl variant. Another Tsimshian myth, recorded by Boas before 1916 (as opposed to 1947 for the above) deals with the theft of light by Raven (Boas 1916: 58-61). In this myth, summarized in the Introduction above, the central figure is ostensibly Raven. But his flight to create the world does not take place until he has direct intercourse with sisiutl, the double-headed being, represented here as slaves called Mouth At Each End. The role of the serpent in a myth with this subject indicates its importance in Tsimshian culture; Raven is the culture hero. These two myths indicate the amount of detailed mythic information available on

the Grubworm, northern variant of sisiutl, among the northern tribes, particularly the Tsimshian; this fact emphasizes the age depth of the woodworm tradition in the north, particularly the myth dealing with the origin of the grubworm. There is not, to my knowledge, a Kwakiutl myth dealing with the origin of sisiutl.

The central face seen on the primary variant has been interpreted above to be, in most cases, representative of BaxbakualanuXsiwae. But there are other important possibilities arising out of descriptions and visual evidence from the north. Figures 23 and 30 have a face associated with them; this face is believed to represent the "Princess who suckled the Grubworm", and is also described in myth above. The same myth mentions a "big man" sitting in the canoe; this "big man" and his two paddlers of the Tsimshian can be seen as representative of the central face and the two serpent heads respectively. If the sisiutl was imported by the Kwakiutl from the north, there may be some reference to these northern themes of "big man" and "Princess" in the primary variant.

Iconology: The Role of Sisiutl

The role and/or position of sisiutl in the ceremonial system of the Northwest Coast can be interpreted in a number of ways. The fact of association with the major supernatural beings, of both north and south, could mean that sisiutl is the center of the system, and that the other supernaturals are manifestations of itself; or that sisiutl

is the common link connecting the supernaturals, adding some coherence to the pantheon; another possibility, and this appears to be the most likely one, is that sisiutl is seen as the intermediary between the worlds of humans and supernaturals. Its role as human/supernatural mediator is given weight by the following (Boas 1898: 28):

The deity ruling there (upper heaven) is a woman who is called Qama'its or Tsi'sisnaaxil ("our woman") or Ek^u'yakim-tolsil ("afraid of nothing"). Behind (her) house is a salt-water pond in which the goddess bathes. In this pond lives the sisiul or xtsaltsalasen. This being sometimes descends to our world. Wherever it moves, the rocks burst, and slide down the sides of the mountains. It is described as a snake or a fish.

"This being sometimes descends to our world..." implies that the other supernaturals do not.

Another indication regarding sisiutl as mediator, recorded by Boas (1970: 494), is the following:

(The people sing:) The dreaded spirit is coming in his canoe!
How great is his name!

(Si'lis sings:) My protector the sisiul goes right up to
the greatest chiefs.

He said to me: "You will take counsel
with Winalagilis.

He said to me: "You will be friend to
Winalagilis.

Here, sisiutl "goes up to the greatest chiefs", among them Winalagilis; implied is that Si'lis, a mortal who has sisiutl as protector, cannot contact the great Winalagilis without his protector's help as mediator. The use of sisiutl-decorated mawihls, ceremonial curtains depicting the house of BaxbakualanuXsiwae, as boundaries between sacred and profane space

(a notable example being Figure 34) involves a physical rendering of sisiutl in a mediating position. This concrete form lends additional credence to the conclusions reached after investigation of the areas of mythology and its imputed symbolism.

As a psychological construct, sisiutl must be seen as representing some aspect of human nature. As an animal species, albeit one with supernatural qualities, sisiutl is subject to totemic association with humans (Levi-Strauss 1968: 8-13; Barbeau 1964: 369). In the words of Fernandez (1974: 122), "Totemism is one of a variety of tropic structures...arising out of the earliest experiences of inchoate subjects attempting through various concrete predications upon themselves to escape the anxiety of inchoateness." Metaphors arise because of the continual need to stretch the range of words as new concepts and abstract relationships are accumulated (Cherry 1966: 74). Sisiutl, in this frame of reference, is, as mediator between humans and supernaturals, a concretized metaphor of the human soul or spirit, which spirit travels its own abstract, ontogenetic journey in the life of an individual.

The supernaturals are seen as holding powers, attainable by humans for their own purposes; acquisition of these supernatural powers in societally approved ways is an important social step for an individual. As Levi-Strauss (1966: 221) states, "The notion of a supernature exists only for a humanity which attributes supernatural powers to itself and in return ascribes the powers of its superhumanity to nature." Supernaturals, therefore, are part of a controlled cognitive system which re-

affirms the legitimacy of mankind as an integral part of a functional whole including nature, culture and supernature. This schema is perhaps best summarized by Fernandez (1972: 58):

However men may analyze their experiences within any domain, they inevitably know and understand them best by referring them to other domains for elucidation. It is in that metaphoric cross-referencing of domains, perhaps, that culture is integrated, providing us with the sensation of wholeness.

It appears that the prime role of sisiutl is that of mediator, as mankind's contact with the supernatural world. It has been shown that the central face, represented on 88% of the sample in Table 1, usually depicts BaxbakualanuXsiwae, but also makes use of other beings. This ambiguity is explained by the fact that sisiutl mediates between mankind and the supernatural, not just mankind and BaxbakualanuXsiwae; but he is usually represented because he is the most important character in Kwakiutl ceremonial life (Boas 1970: 662). BaxbakualanuXsiwae represents, therefore, in this context, all those beings which inhabit the supernatural world. The dead are included in this classification, explaining the interpretation of Figure 31 above as having a human face in the centre of its body. More material concerning sisiutl as mediator is presented below in connection with shamanism.

CHAPTER VI

SISIUTL AND SHAMANISM

Many of the items used in the winter dance series are easily recognized as sisiutl, for example belts and knives; but there are other accoutrements, such as cedar bark neck and head rings, which also represent sisiutl, according to the ethnographies associated with them. Particularly notable in this respect is the dance of Haialikauae, the head and neck rings of which are described in Boas (1970: Figures 174-180) as follows:

- Fig. 174 - First head ring: "...heads of the sisiutl."
- Fig. 175 - First neck ring: "...powers of the shaman."
- Fig. 176 - Second head ring: "...powers of the shaman."
- Fig. 177 - Third head ring: "...powers of the shaman."
- Fig. 178 - First head ring: "...heads of the sisiutl, death bringer."
- Fig. 179 - Second head ring: "...powers of the shaman."
- Fig. 180 - Unspecified neck ring: "...heads of the sisiutl."

Judging from these figure descriptions, representations of shaman powers (in this medium) are virtually visually identical to those of sisiutl. This statement does not apply only to those rings used in the dance of Haialikauae; the dances of Nanaqauailil and Xaniatsangilak (Boas 1970: 488 and 454 respectively) utilize head and neck rings described in a similar way.

A possible reason for this association can be found by investigation of the powers of BaxbakualanuXsiwae, who is one of the close associates of sisiutl. Of this being it is sung (Boas 1970: 405):

1. You are looking for food, you great magician...
2. You are looking for men whom you want to eat, great magician;
3. You tear men's skin, great magician
4. Everybody trembles before you, you great magician.

According to Curtis (1915: 170), "The winter ceremony is called tsetsehka, translated by him as "secrets" or "tricks of legerdemain"; BaxbakualanuXsiwae is, as "great magician", accomplished in the performance of these tricks, which would be of use to the shaman. Also, according to Holm (1972: 26), "...the participants in the Tseyka (tsetsehka) are referred to as shamans...", which might explain the representations of the "powers of the shaman" on the neck and head rings.

If sisiutl is seen as a mediator between ordinary and non-ordinary reality, or natural and supernatural realms (see above pp. this would be important reason for the association of sisiutl with shamanism, as shamans also deal with the supernatural world. The shaman as mediator, as well as the position of a hamatsa initiate during the sacred winter dance season, can be seen as follows:

All Year

Society

Shaman

Supernaturals

Winter Dance

Society

Initiate

Supernaturals

Both are mediators between supernature and mankind. The shaman proper does not lose his properties during the winter dance time; his recognized powers are temporarily eclipsed in importance by the dramatic rendering of the initiate's trials. The initiate during this time is the foremost mediator between the two worlds. The many occurrences of representations of sisiutl with respect to the accoutrements of the hamatsa dance further emphasizes, by association, the conception of sisiutl as mediator.

The sisiutl in one of its forms is described as a self-paddling canoe (Boas 1969: 146-148). This is a very literal depiction of the monster as mediator between states of mind/being. As mentioned above, it is the bolt of lightning, mediator between earth and sky, as well as guardian of the houses of supernaturals (Boas 1966: 307), mediator between humans and the spirit world. The Tsimshian myth regarding the Khrain princess who suckled the grubworm has, in some variants, additional information about the origin of the beast. All the variants state that she was notable in her society, i.e., a chief's daughter; but some include the fact that she was (Barbeau 1964: 364) "...just reaching womanhood," or (*ibid.*: 365) "...in seclusion at the time she reached maturity." She was "in the margins" (Douglas 1966 - discussed below) at the time of her first encounter with the woodworm, at its point of origin, giving further information regarding its extraordinary powers.

The shaman, in order to get his power, originally has to endure privation of a major sort. This process includes starvation, exposure to extremes of weather, etc., because, according to an Eskimo shaman recorded by Rasmussen (1927: 54-55):

True wisdom is to be found far away from the people, out in the great solitude, and is not found in play but only through suffering. Solitude and suffering open the human mind, and therefore a shaman must seek his wisdom there.

His power quest is located in what could be termed the margins: both of society, as he is physically removed from his people; and of the mind, brought to search unknown areas by the abuses inflicted upon the shaman's body.

Discussing power quests, Douglas has stated the following (1966: 95-97):

First there is a venture into the disordered regions of the mind. Second there is the venture beyond the confines of society. The man who comes back from these inaccessible regions brings with him a power not available to those who have stayed in the control of themselves and of society. To have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power.

Entry to the margins is possible only after some sort of transformation: death, trance, etc. Human ontogeny also involves dealings with the margins, for example at the time of puberty rites, where passage from one social status to the next is in process. Transfer from one state to another requires a vehicle, or mediator, which sisiutl has been shown to be above.

More direct links between shamanism and sisiutl are presented here. Discussing the Tlingit, Swanton (1908: 465) states that,

The greatest of all the shaman's spirits of this family, however, was Unseeable, who was said to be chief of all shaman's spirits. He wore a tall hat and sat in the middle of a canoe in which were two other spirits. The spirit in the bow was called bow-man; that in the stern, stern-man.

This description strongly recalls the spirit of Khrain discussed above. Among the Bella Coola, according to Boas (1898: 44), "The sisiutl is another helper of the shaman, and the means of curing disease. It appears that it obtains its supernatural power from the fact that it lives in the water in which the supreme deity washes her face." A point which further explains the association of Tlingit shamans with sisiutl is the following: "...subsidiary spirits (represented on masks) ...were frequently supposed to strengthen...the shaman. Some of these small figures were animals, like land otters, but a favorite was the woodworm, because it can bore through wood and so typifies strong perception."

Sisiutl is a transformer, mentioned (Boas 1970: 371) as being able to turn others into stone. This faculty again emphasizes the marginal nature of sisiutl, as, in order to transform, a being is automatically involved with the boundaries crossed by the object of its actions. Sisiutl is, therefore, close to the power described by Douglas as present in the "margins"; its role as mediator is carried out in those same "margins", and it is a monster with supernatural characteristics. It is also associated with virtually all of the important supernaturals present in Northwest Coast myth. All these attributes combine to make sisiutl a perfect ally for an entranced shaman; as a guide through unknown psychological regions, as transport to those regions, and as a source of great energy. An important thing to note about the energy of the sisiutl is that it is accessible to men, given the proper circum-

stances, as described in the myth: the death of the woodworm's spirit, caused by a man, symbolizes this accessibility.

According to Jensen (1963: 228-230),

All shamanistic practices are based on psycho-physical dualism. The ability of the shaman's soul to separate from his body would bear this out...his effectiveness is based upon specific psychic capabilities which can, of course, take many forms according to his greater or lesser personal commitment.

Perhaps the two heads of sisiutl are somehow representative of this dualism.

Regarding shamanism, Swanton (1908: 465) has recorded the following in his work on the Tlingit Indians:

...it is said that some U.S. marines were going to cut the hair of a Sitka shaman, when his spirit came into him so powerfully that the arms of the big marine who was about to ply the shears were paralyzed and those of the other marines dropped to their sides.

There are physical factors which can be used to explain an occurrence of this type. Present in the brain makeup of psychics is the following (Ostrander/Schroeder 1971: 75): "Most people generate three or four times more electrical voltage from the back of the brain than from the front ...Mikhailova's (a tested psychic) brain generates fifty times more voltage from the back of the head than the front." Also (loc. cit.) "...the electromagnetic force field around Mikhailova is much stronger than average." Implicit in this electrophysical explanation is that some shamanistic experiences are explicable in terms of contemporary science, here para-psychology and/or physics. Acceptance of this argument, in this instance, necessarily presumes that the incident mentioned by Swanton

actually happened; that this was the case is not subject to verification. It cannot be denied, though, that shamans are effective in curing disease, be it physical or mental. As is the case with modern medicine, many of the shaman's patients would probably recover without his help; but the fact of physical recording of psychic phenomena, phenomena which have been viewed in the same light as magical events (that is, as being non-explicable in scientific terms), gives added credibility to the effectiveness of shamanistic medicine. Levi-Strauss (1967: 192-193) has discussed a shaman's treatment of a difficult childbirth as follows:

That the mythology of the shaman does not correspond to an objective reality does not matter. The sick woman believes in the myth and belongs to a society which believes in it. The shaman provides...a language, by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexpressable states can be immediately expressed ...it is the transition to this verbal expression...which induces the release of the physiological process, that is, the reorganization, in a favourable direction, of the process to which the sick woman is subjected. In this respect, the shamanistic cure lies on the borderline between our contemporary physical medicine and such psychological therapies as psychoanalysis.

The "language" that the shaman provides uses metaphor as its main communicative device; sisiutl is a familiar symbol sometimes used in curing rituals.

CHAPTER VII

PACIFIC RIM PARALLELS: THE NORTHWEST COAST

SISIUTL AND SISIUTL-LIKE BEINGS IN

CHINA AND NEW ZEALAND

A comparison will be made here between the Northwest Coast sisiutl and forms similar to the sisiutl which have been found in assemblages of Shang/Chou China (1523-220B.C.) and of New Zealand (17th to 19th Centuries A.D.). The examples compared are taken from the visual arts.

In his article on Northwest Coast Indian art, Inverarity (1972: 781-784) presents a list of elements which he sees as being shared by various Pacific Rim cultures. Within this listing, there are five headings which apply to sisiutl:

1. Symmetrically flanked displayed figures
2. Serpent
3. Double-headed serpent
4. Bird and snake motifs combined
5. Horns (on heads and elsewhere).

While these will be shown to be shared features among the arts of the Northwest Coast, China and New Zealand, it is hoped that an alternative explanation of this phenomenon can be determined without using the conclusion arrived at by Badner (1966: 29): "The correspondences between Northwest Coast and Maori art can be due only to their derivation from some common source in Eastern Asia."

The Chinese Context

In order to investigate the double-headed serpent in China, it is necessary to go back to the Shang period, 1523-1027 B.C. It is in the Shang that the Chou, 1027-220 B.C., has its roots, and the jade double-headed serpent of the Chou used as an example by Badner (Figure 41) is probably a traditional archaic form.

Distinctive Elements

The serpent in China, both Chou and Shang, exhibits a simpler set of identifying features than does that of the Northwest Coast. In the examples of art shown, there are two recurring elements: horns and a spiral or upturned nose. In cases of profile views, there is generally one fang indicated. In the Chou double-headed example (Figure 41) there is a central face in the body of the animal.

Composition of Chinese Serpent Motif

Compositional arrangements are as follows:

1. ABA: Two heads, central face in body. This basically resembles the ABA form of sisiutl in the Northwest Coast (Figure 41).
2. AA: Two heads, no central face. Again basically similar to the Northwest Coast (Figure 40).
3. A: One head. One-headed examples are very close in detail to those of the Northwest Coast. Figure 42 includes a single-headed form, seen above the eyes of the main figure in the illustration. To be especially noted are the shape of the nose and the presence of horns.

Investigation to this point has shown that the most common manifestation of the serpent in China is the single-headed form, A, distantly followed by the AA form with even fewer ABA examples. The reason for the number of A forms is the fact that they generally form the horns of k'uei dragons in Shang art, which dragons, when confronted with a mirror image on a horizontal base, form the t'ao t'ieh mask, the most important and by far the most numerous artistic motif in Shang China (Watson 1962: 42-44). Figure 42 depicts a t'ao t'ieh. The AA form is fairly common, both in handles of the Shang period and in much later 4th-5th Century A.D. carvings in living rock (J. Caswell - personal communication 1972).

Iconography

There is no mythical description for a double-headed serpent in China. There is, however, considerable information on the serpent and/or dragon. In China (Ackerman 1945: 89), "The serpent, an old vitalistic emblem, represents water, the coils representing the ancient spiral pool; and on the ritual bronzes it is used most conspicuously as the pheasant wing-covert." This point illustrates the association of bird and water with serpent in the Chinese context.

It has been noted above that the serpent is very closely allied to the t'ao t'ieh masks of the Shang. According to Watson (1962: 43),

The dragons found...closely associated with the t'ao t'ieh ...appear to correspond to the dragon ubiquitous in all later Chinese mythology. They were identified in Sung times (12th-14th Centuries A.D.) with the k'uei, a mythological creature mentioned in pre-Han texts and connected with rain-making.

In China, during the Shang-Chou periods, the double-headed serpent is a free form visual motif, occurring in association with a wide range of items, both personal and ceremonial. Iconographically, it has strong affinities with birds, water and rain, and also thunder and lightning (Baynes 1966: 6).

The New Zealand Context

The best examples of the "double-headed serpent" in New Zealand are to be found either as parts of carved door lintels or, more rarely, as complete lintels (S. Mead, personal communication - 1972). As in China, there is no mythical background for the double-headed serpent; also, in New Zealand, there are no snakes, Skinner (1966) has explained the presence of certain animal motifs in Maori art (of animals which do not occur in New Zealand) as the product of folk memory of those animals. As what is being dealt with here is represented only visually, probably a simpler prototype could be found in eels, which do inhabit the area.

The lintel part which most closely resembles a double-headed serpent is located centrally, at the extreme base of many lintels. This is generally an unworked area of wood (sometimes decorated) which terminates in a manaia head at either end. Manaia are discussed below. The areas under discussion are generally small and visually unimportant to the composition of the lintel as a whole, except in those cases where the lintel is condensed into a form specific to the relatively rare

Wanganui variant, seen in Figure 44. For purposes of distinction between the two major types of lintel, the Wanganui example is typical of Form B; the more common variety, as seen in Figure 48, will be designated as Form A. A-type lintels appear to have their bases primarily as strengthening areas; that part which is being dealt with as a double-headed serpent, therefore, is apparently so only through incidental decoration of an otherwise unworked area by an artist.

Distinctive Elements

In all cases, the head form on these pieces is that of the manaia. The Type A lintels sometimes have designs on the bodies of the "double-headed serpents" included in their compositional makeup; these are usually in the shape of a double spiral. Type B lintels sometimes have a central face between the terminal manaia.

Composition of Double-Headed Being

Compositional arrangements appear as follows:

1. ABA: Two heads, central face in body. This is basically similar to the sisiutl of the Northwest Coast in appearance, but it is a rare variant, whereas in the Northwest Coast it is the dominant form of the double-headed serpent. See Figure 44.
2. AA: Two heads, plain or simply decorated body. This is the most commonly occurring form of the double-headed being in New Zealand lintel art. Figures 43 and 46.

3. A: Single-headed legless beings or "serpents" do occur in the art of New Zealand, always represented as having manaia heads.

Iconography

As serpents are not represented there, there is no material on serpents or double-headed serpents in the mythology of New Zealand. The only possible way to accumulate a corpus of myth for the purpose of analysis of the New Zealand double-headed being is to investigate the manaia, as it is the only recognizable theme on the sisiutl-like motifs of this area and decorates all those things which have been classified as double-headed serpents (or legless beings).

According to Archey (1963: 278), "...apart from the reply to leading inquiry that the manaia was a fabulous water monster, we have almost nothing on record to tell us (what the form of manaia represents)." One variant of manaia does have scales on its neck (Duff 1961: 313). Buck (1950) endorses Archey's view that the manaia grew out of human profiles. Mead (personal communication 1972) sees the manaia as a being developed out of non-human forms. Barrow (1969: 64) emphasizes the bird associations of manaia, but states,

Its appearance as whole bird-men or as the head on a snake-like or fish body...make any single identification with one creature quite impossible. Manaia probably served as a symbol of supernatural force, especially mana, which the name... suggests.

Due to its generalized characteristics, both mythical and visual, it is very difficult to associate the manaia with specific referents. It is a generalized motif, quite unlike the sisiutl which is specific.

In New Zealand, the double-headed legless being is a secondary theme, generated through the decoration of structurally functional areas of lintels; it does not occur outside these lintels, and is therefore a bound form as opposed to a free form. Iconographically, the New Zealand form is associated with water, birds and fish, as well as ancestors (Barrow ibid.).

Possible Development of Double-Headed Forms by Area

Northwest Coast

The sisiutl is well represented in myth. Its AA form (of which ABA is the dominant variant) is a literal depiction of the monster described as two-headed in myth.

China

The late Chou pendant has definite parallels with Shang serpent figures. The spiral nose is evident in Shang times, as is the theme of the double-headed legless being or serpent. If it is accepted that the pendant grew out of the earlier forms, which themselves were only incidentally double-headed (as they decorated both ends of a handle) it can be seen that this Chou manifestation is not representative of a particular being.

New Zealand

The Type A compositional form has apparently arisen in a manner similar to that in China; that is, as a result of decoration of an area incidentally double-ended. Type B double-headed beings are apparently more condensed variants of the same decorative procedures.

Summary

From the above, the following points emerge:

1. Double-headed, usually legless beings, of basically AA composition, occur in China, the Northwest Coast and New Zealand at the times under discussion.
2. In all three areas, the motif exhibits horns.
3. China and the Northwest Coast share the spiral/upturned nose (compositionally) and association with birds, water and lightning (iconographically). The manaia is also associated with similar referents, but the data supporting this is highly speculative.

Shared Elements

The five shared elements, taken from Inverarity's listing as being applicable to sisiutl and sisiutl-like beings, will be discussed here.

1. Symmetrically flanked displayed figures. Symmetry is a highly probable logical possibility with respect to human compositional tendencies. The odds are at least even that a motif would be symmetrical,

given asymmetry as the alternative. This category describes a special case of symmetry, and due to the latitude of variants allowed by such a description, it does not appear to be a useful distinction.

2. Serpent. Serpents are not a feature of New Zealand fauna, but they do inhabit the Northwest Coast and China. The poor definition of serpent in New Zealand, both visual and mythological, makes the eel as likely a natural prototype as is necessary. There are, therefore, naturally-occurring serpents or serpent-like creatures in all three localities.

3. Double-headed Serpent. To produce this motif, all that is necessary is to make symmetrical an arrangement that would otherwise be asymmetrical, and therefore not balanced decoratively, by putting a head on the tail of an already existing snake.

4. Bird and snake motifs combined. This is a specific, well-defined trait in China, but is less so in the Northwest Coast, where the sisiutl is linked with many supernaturals, bird monsters included. In New Zealand, the poorly defined manaia, associated with the serpent-like being of its area, is identified with a great variety of phenomena, among them water monster, bird and human, to mention a few. It can be seen that the types of "birds" linked with the "snakes" of these regions are of completely different orders of classification.

5. Horns. On the Northwest Coast, horns indicate a supernatural being; also, there are horned animals present in the area. The Chinese horns are often traced to rams (Levi-Strauss 1967: 244). In New

Zealand, according to Barrow (1969: 63), "...the horn on the beak is a convention of bird renderings in Oceania and Southeast Asia," making unnecessary a search for distant and unlikely historical connections outside Oceania and immediate areas; particularly in view of the fact that the Kaitaia carving, seen in Figure 45, is a 15th Century A.D. foreshadowing of the later double-headed forms.

Visually similar forms in widely diverse locations are explained by some as being the result of diffusion of a particular trait from a central area, through historical contacts. The presence of natural prototypes, however, in the instance of double-headed serpents, appears to remove diffusion as a necessary factor for explanation of visual similarity in the areas under discussion. Levi-Strauss (1967: 242) has considered this problem and has arrived at the following statement:

If history, when it is called upon unremittingly (and it must be called upon first) cannot yield an answer, then let us appeal to psychology, or the structural analysis of forms. Let us ask ourselves if internal connections, whether of a psychological or logical nature, will allow us to understand parallel recurrences whose frequency and cohesion cannot possibly be the result of chance.

This statement makes it clear that the logical possibilities for Homo sapiens sapiens are similar for any area or time, and that artifacts produced by them will naturally display close parallels. Normal variation, based upon environment, available materials, the presence or absence of unusually creative individuals, and the presence of a highly developed art system, explains the differences to be seen among societies.

CHAPTER VIII

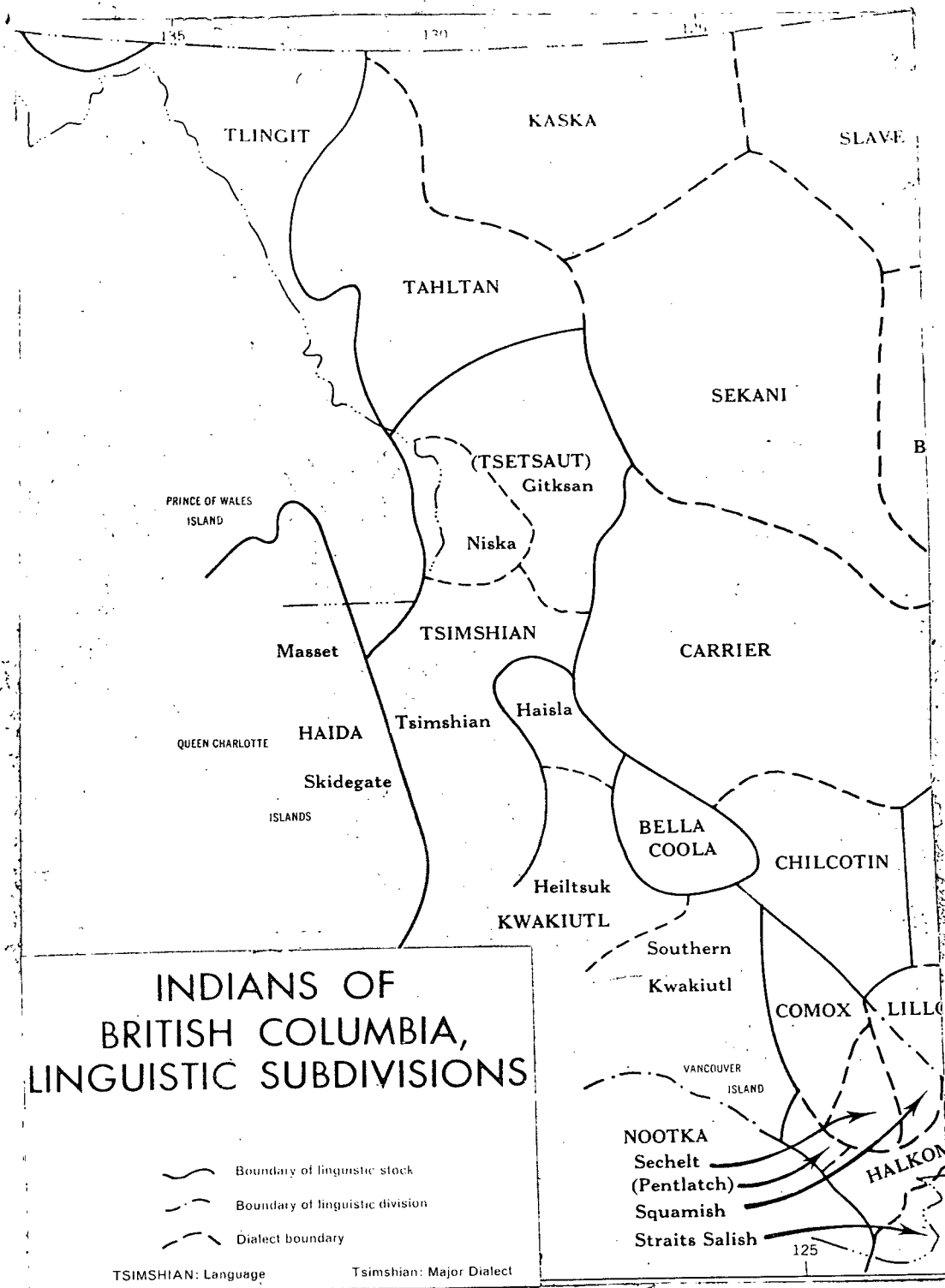
CONCLUSIONS

It has been shown that sisiutl, the Kwakiutl primary variant of a Northwest Coast theme of double-headed serpents, is depicted, with alterations in mythical and visual attributes, among the Tsimshian, Tlingit, Haida, Bella Coola, Nootka and Salish groups. This was shown by demonstrating that attributes if the being in one area are more fully explained by referring to data obtained from different areas within the Northwest Coast. Visual similarity of artistic representations was also taken into account, as the Northwest Coast is highly prone to trait diffusion. Sisiutl, in secondary variants, which are represented among all the groups, appears as duntsiqs, soul catchers, head and neck rings; it also has a stylized form, that is, its whole is represented by a part in some instances.

Sisiutl is, very importantly, a mediator; it is a supernatural being which intercedes with other supernaturals on behalf of humans. Evidence for this conclusion was found in the fact that the central face of the primary variant, while usually representing the Kwakiutl being BaxbakualanuXsiwae, also depicted other supernaturals, notably Qomoqua. This meant that the central face symbolized a class of beings rather than a particular one. This class was determined to be that of the supernaturals. Sisiutl as a mediating symbol is a metaphor for the human spirit.

Its role as a mediator makes sisiutl a natural ally for a shaman, who, like the sisiutl, has intercourse with both the natural and the supernatural worlds. Many references in myth identify the sisiutl as a healing and all-seeing spirit and it is also referred to as chief of shamans' spirits among the Tlingit.

Sisiutl and its Pacific Rim parallels discussed above do have many features and associations in common, but the attributing of this series of similarities to historical contact and/or diffusion processes is probably less productive of useful information than is an approach utilizing structural theory of the type advocated by Claude Levi-Strauss.



Map 1 - Linguistic Subdivisions: Northwest Coast
Hawthorn 1967:2

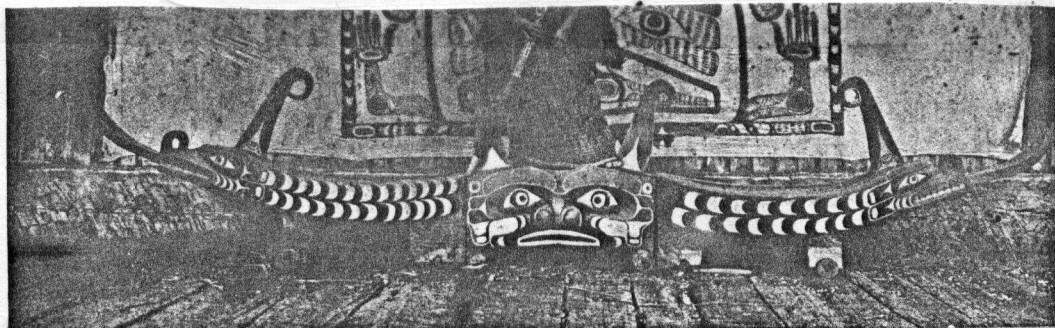


Figure 1. Feast dish - Curtis 1915:176



Figure 2. Belt - Boas 1970:370



Figure 3. Baton - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 129

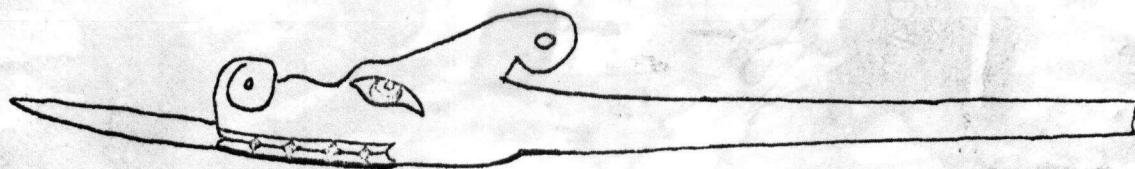


Figure 4. Baton - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 129

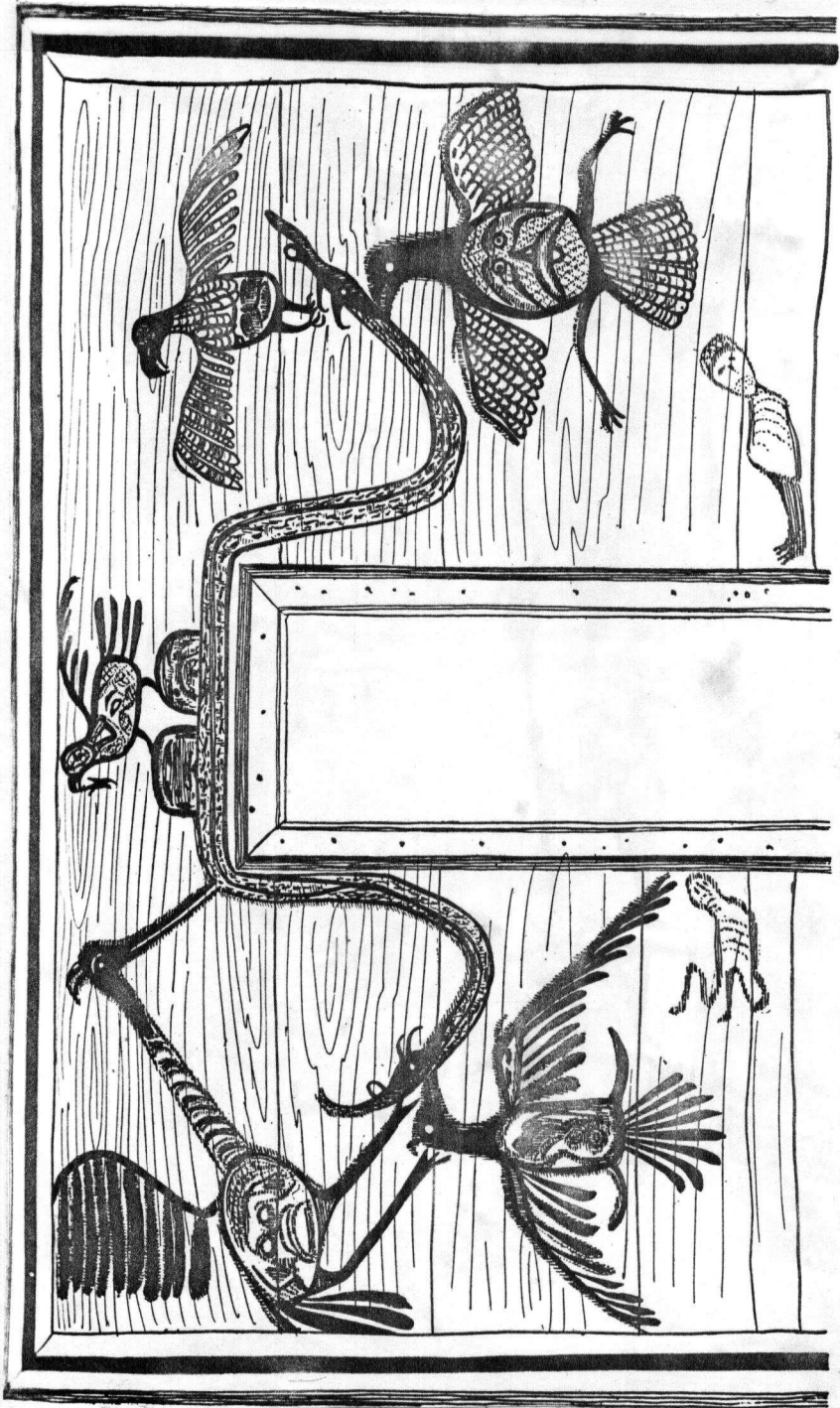


Figure 5. Painting - Boas 1970: Pl. 41

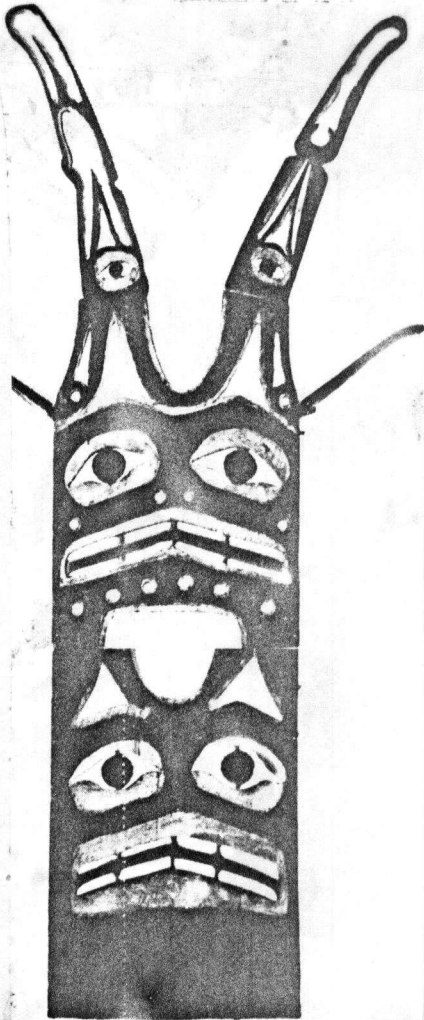


Figure 6. Duntsiq - Ritzenthaler et al
1966 Pl. 41

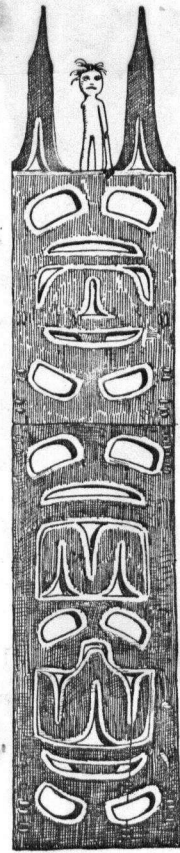


Figure 7. Duntsiq -
Boas 1970: Fig. 155

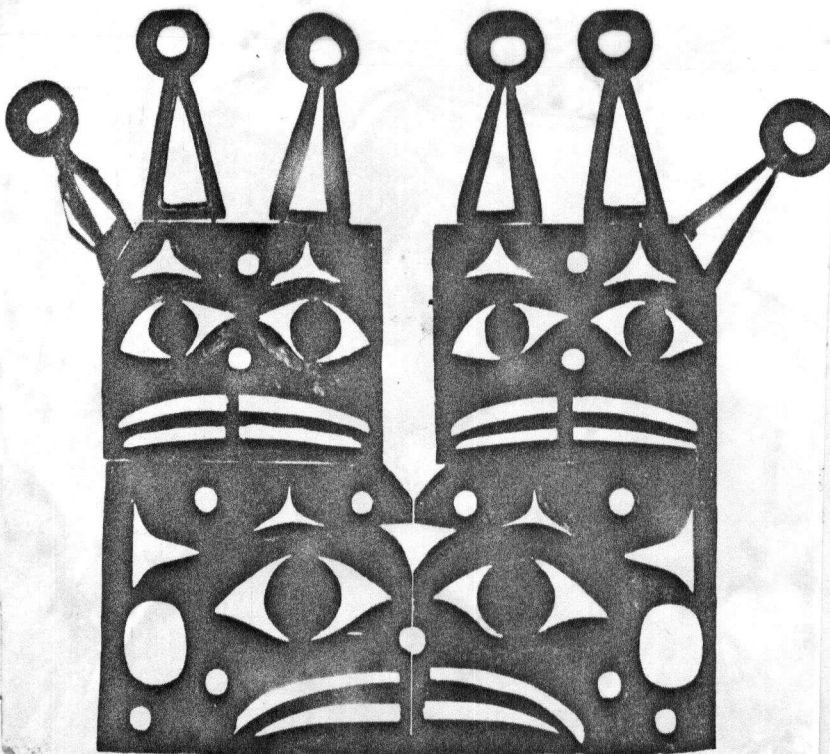


Figure 9. Duntsiq
Boas 1970: Pl. 39

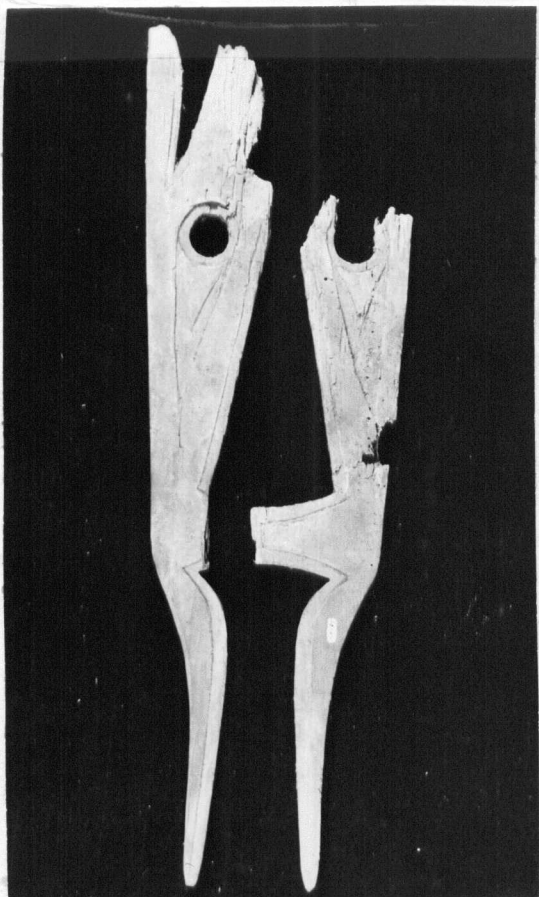


Figure 10. Duntsiq - University of
B.C. Catalogue #9083-9084

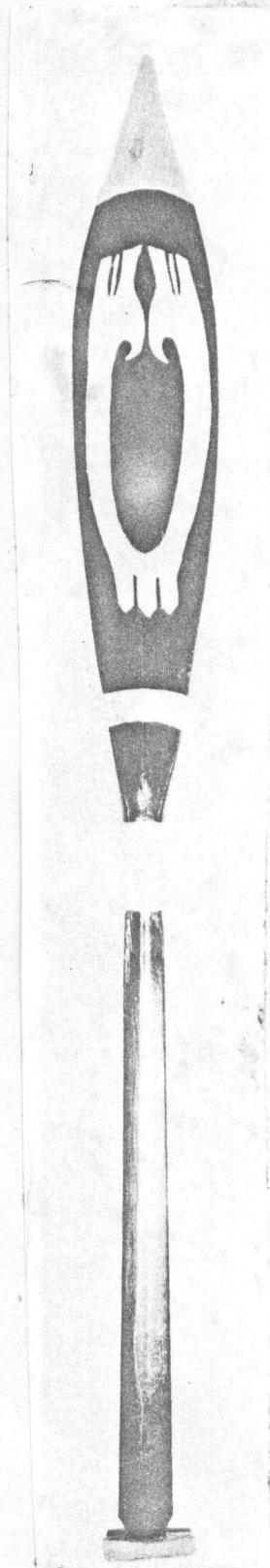


Figure 11. Paddle - Hawthorn
1967: Fig. 486

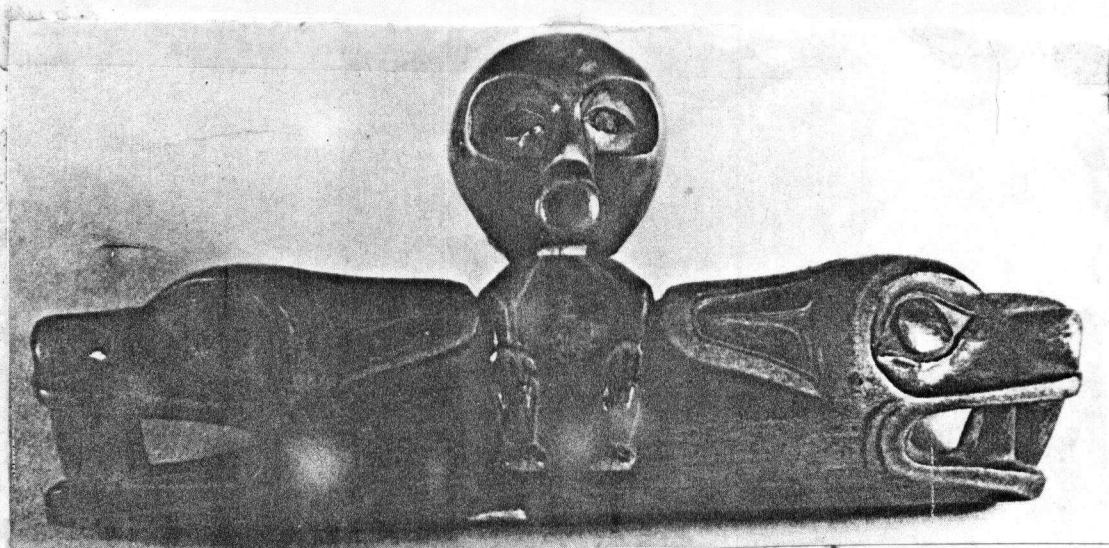


Figure 12. Soul catcher - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 521



Figure 13. Soul catcher - Dockstader 1966: Fig. 118

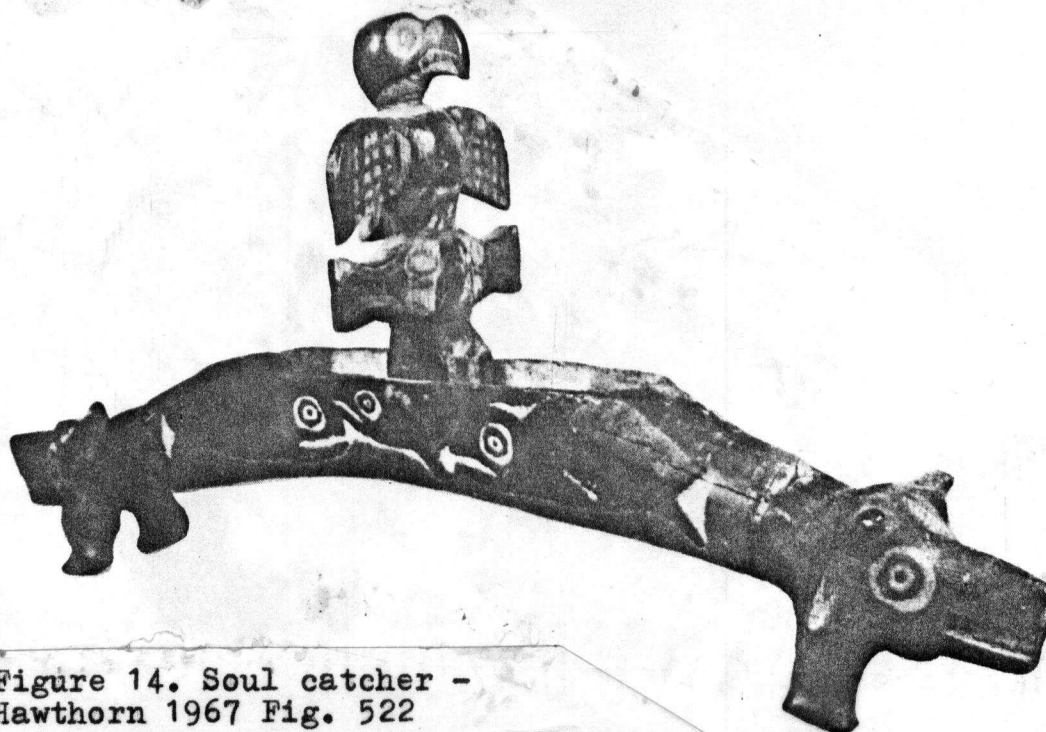


Figure 14. Soul catcher -
Hawthorn 1967 Fig. 522



Figure 15. Soul catcher - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 523

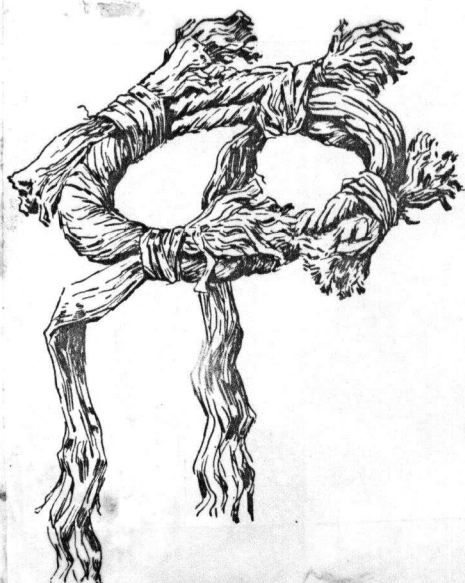


Figure 16. Head ring -
Boas 1970: Fig. 178



Figure 17. Neck ring -
Boas 1970: Fig. 180

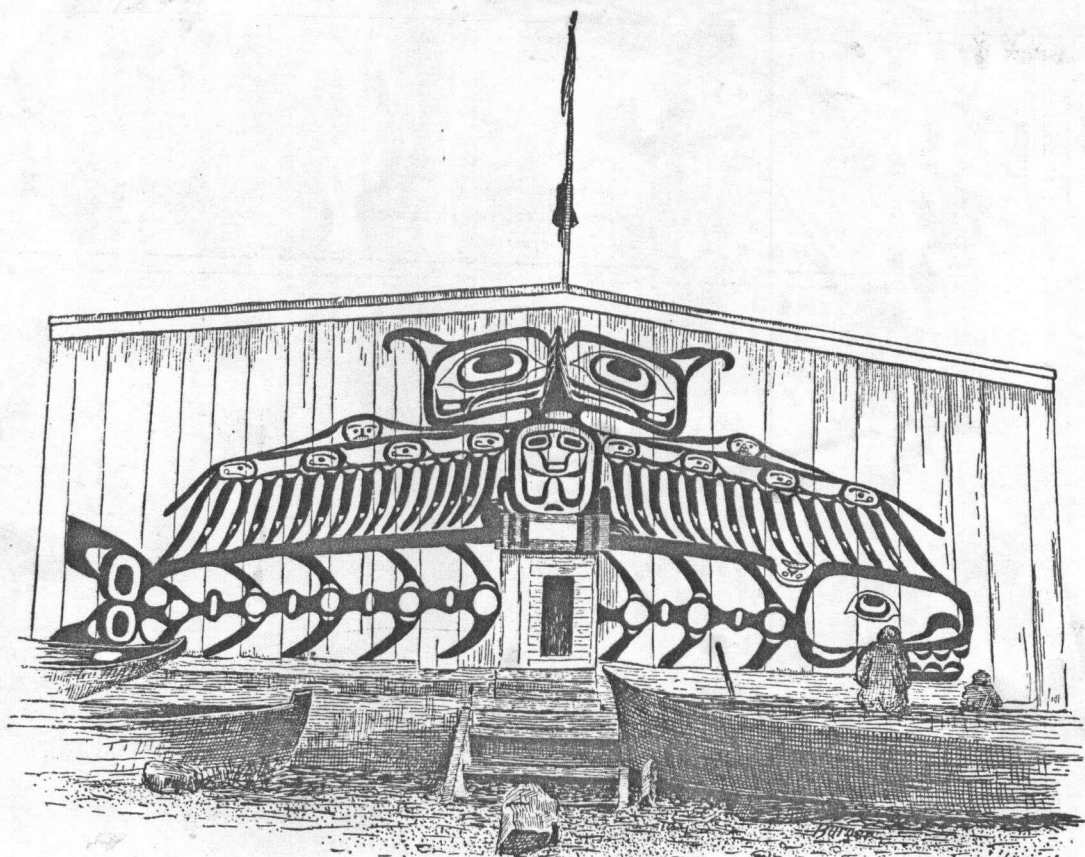


Figure 18. House front - Boas 1970: Fig. 18

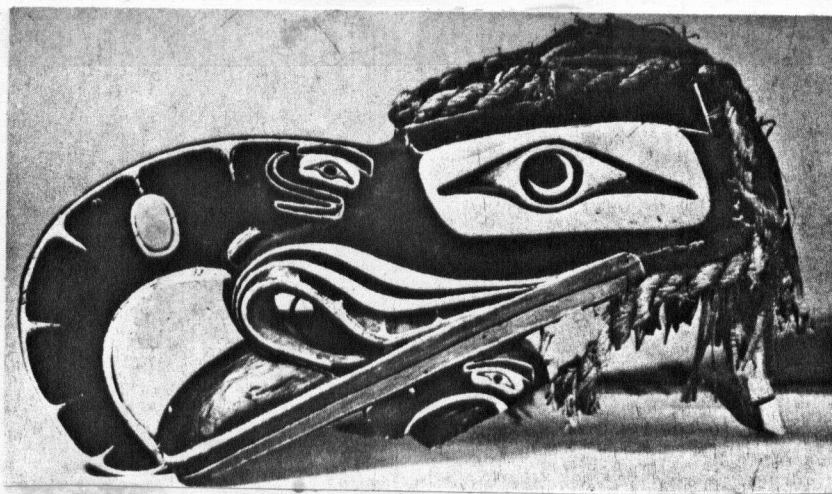


Figure 19. Crooked Beak mask - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 85

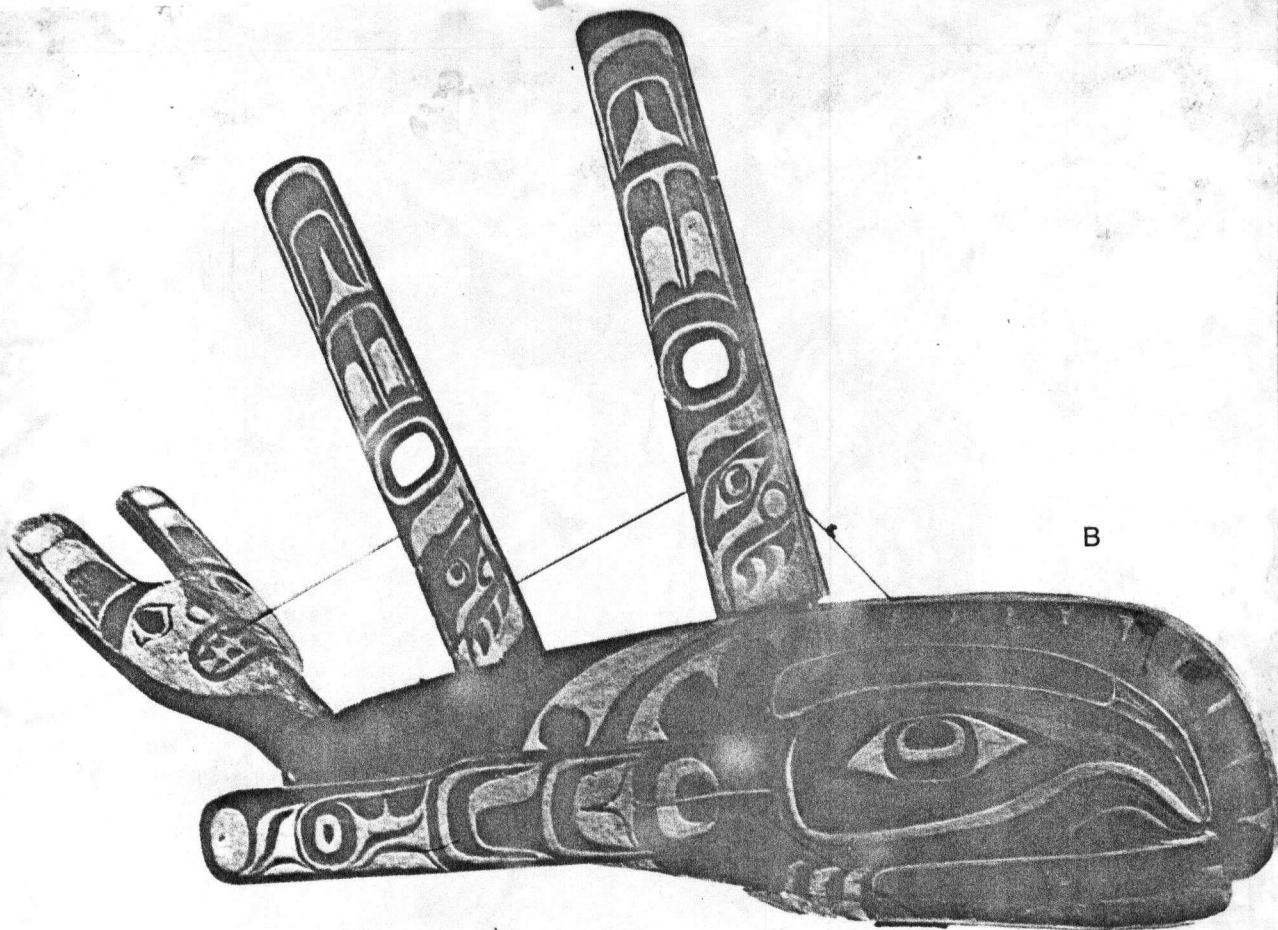


Figure 20. Killer whale mask - Hawthorn 1967: Pl. XVII

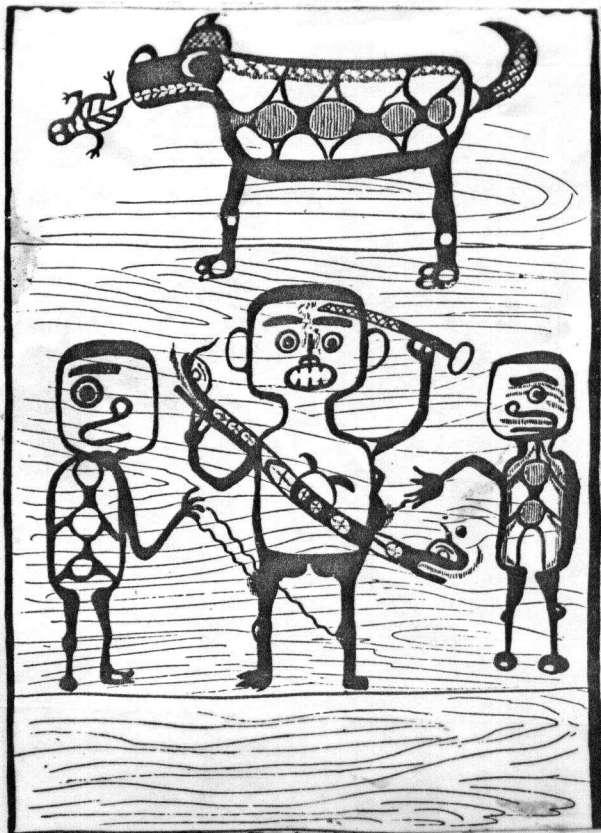


Figure 21. Painting - Boas
1970: Pl. 40

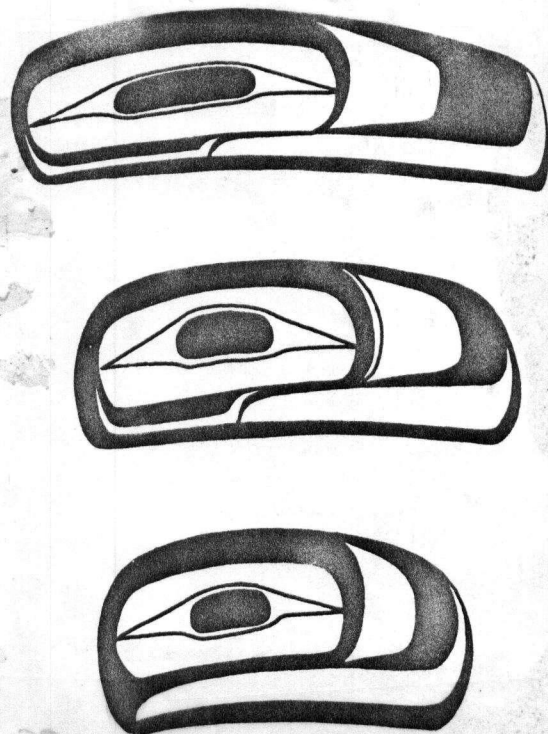


Figure 22. "Salmon trout head"
motif - Holm 1965

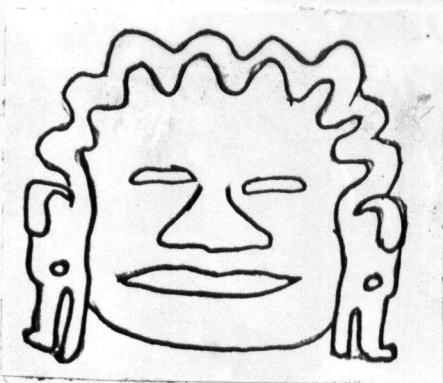


Figure 23. Housepost -
Barbeau 1964: Pl. 152

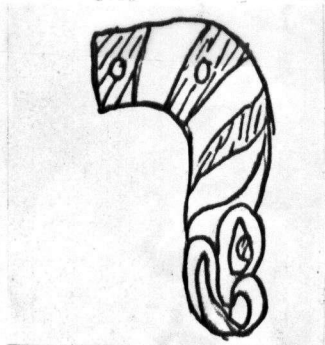


Figure 25. Housepost -
Barbeau 1964: Pl. 151

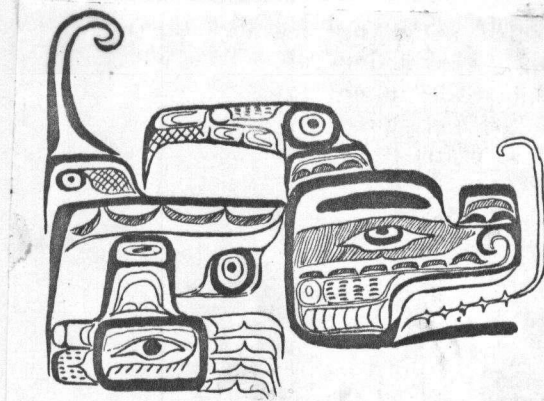


Figure 24. Drawing - Boas 1970:
Fig. 12

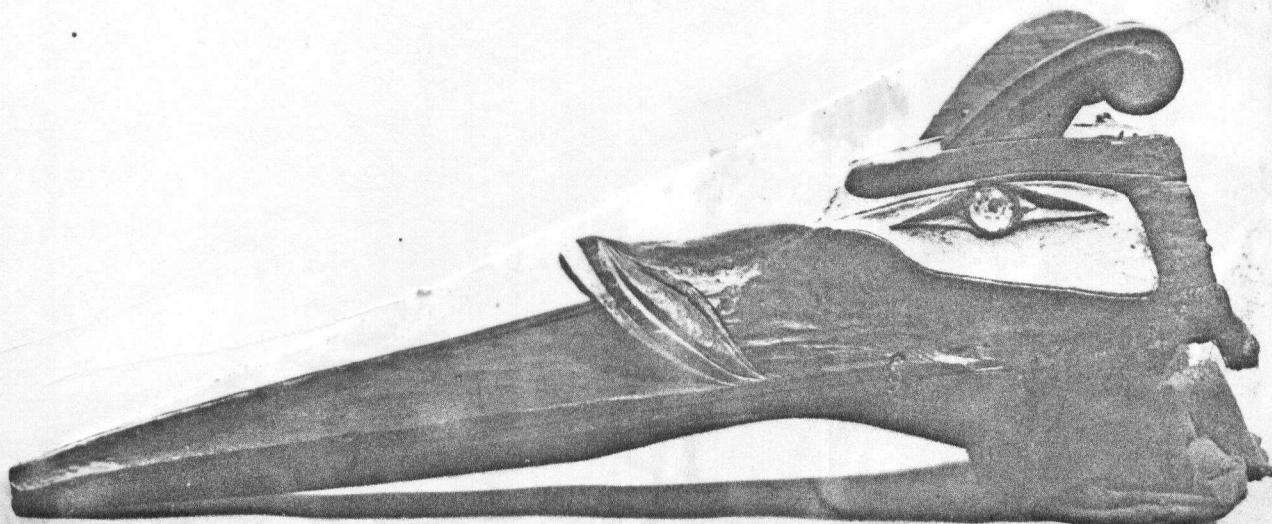


Figure 26. Khenkho mask - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 383



Figure 27. BaxbakualanuXsiwae mask - Boas 1970: Pl. 30



Figure 28. Supernatural codfish mask - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 322

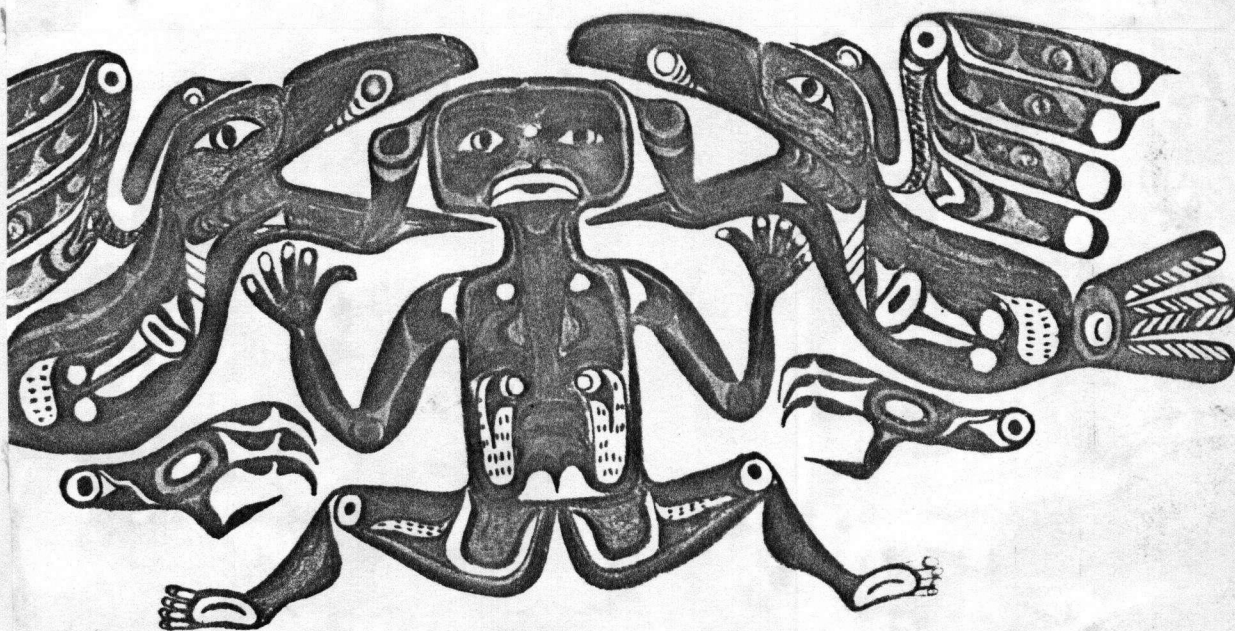


Figure 29. Mawihl - Curtis 1915:174

Figure 30. Housepost and detail -
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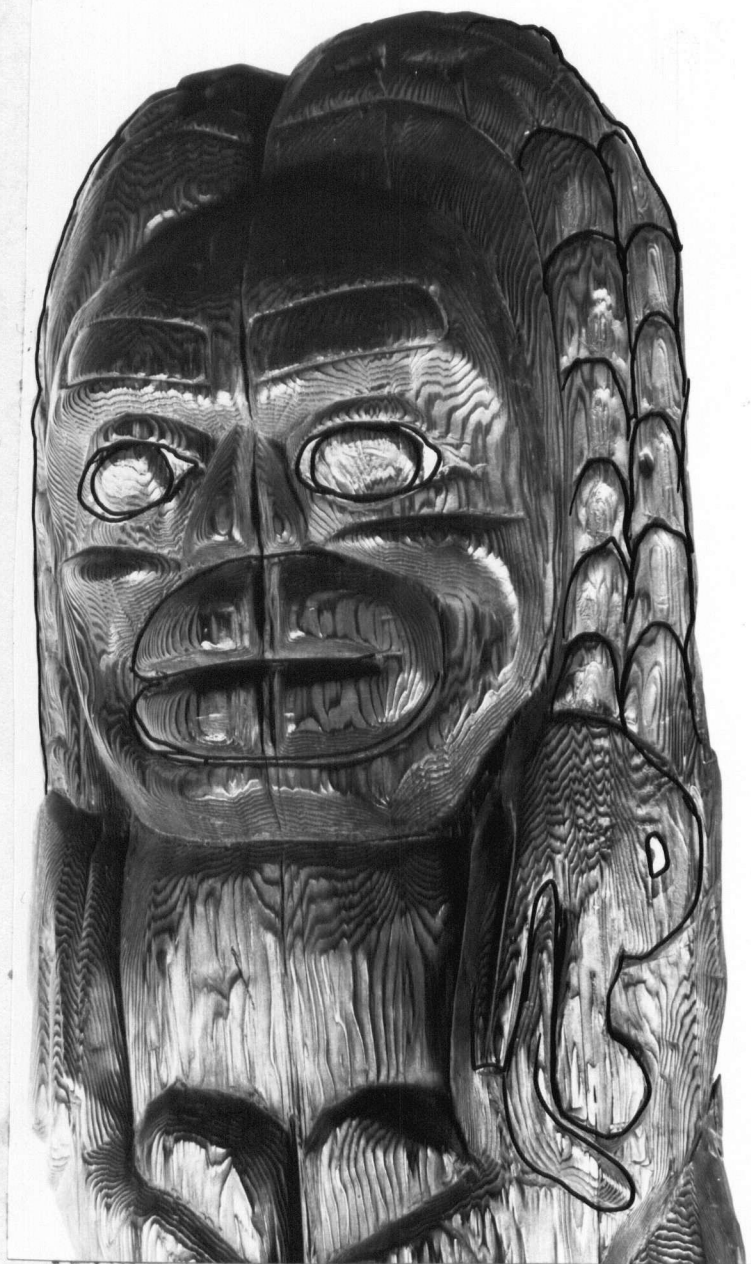




Figure 31. Transformation mask - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 457

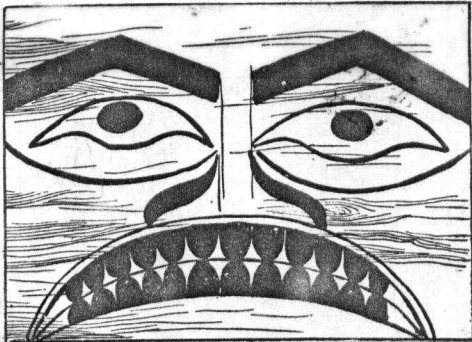


Figure 32. Mawihl - Boas 1970: Fig. 75

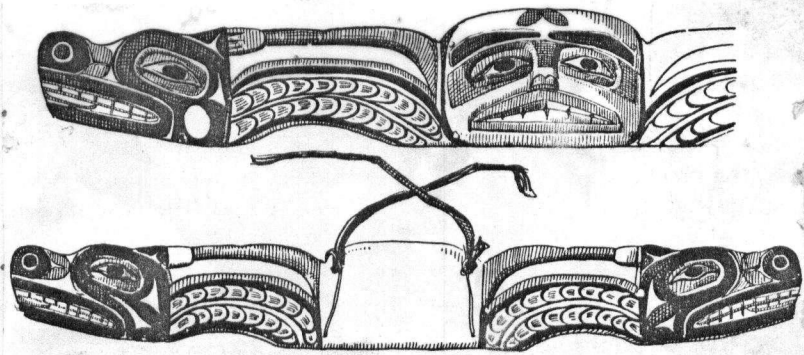


Figure 33. Belt - Boas 1970: Fig. 10

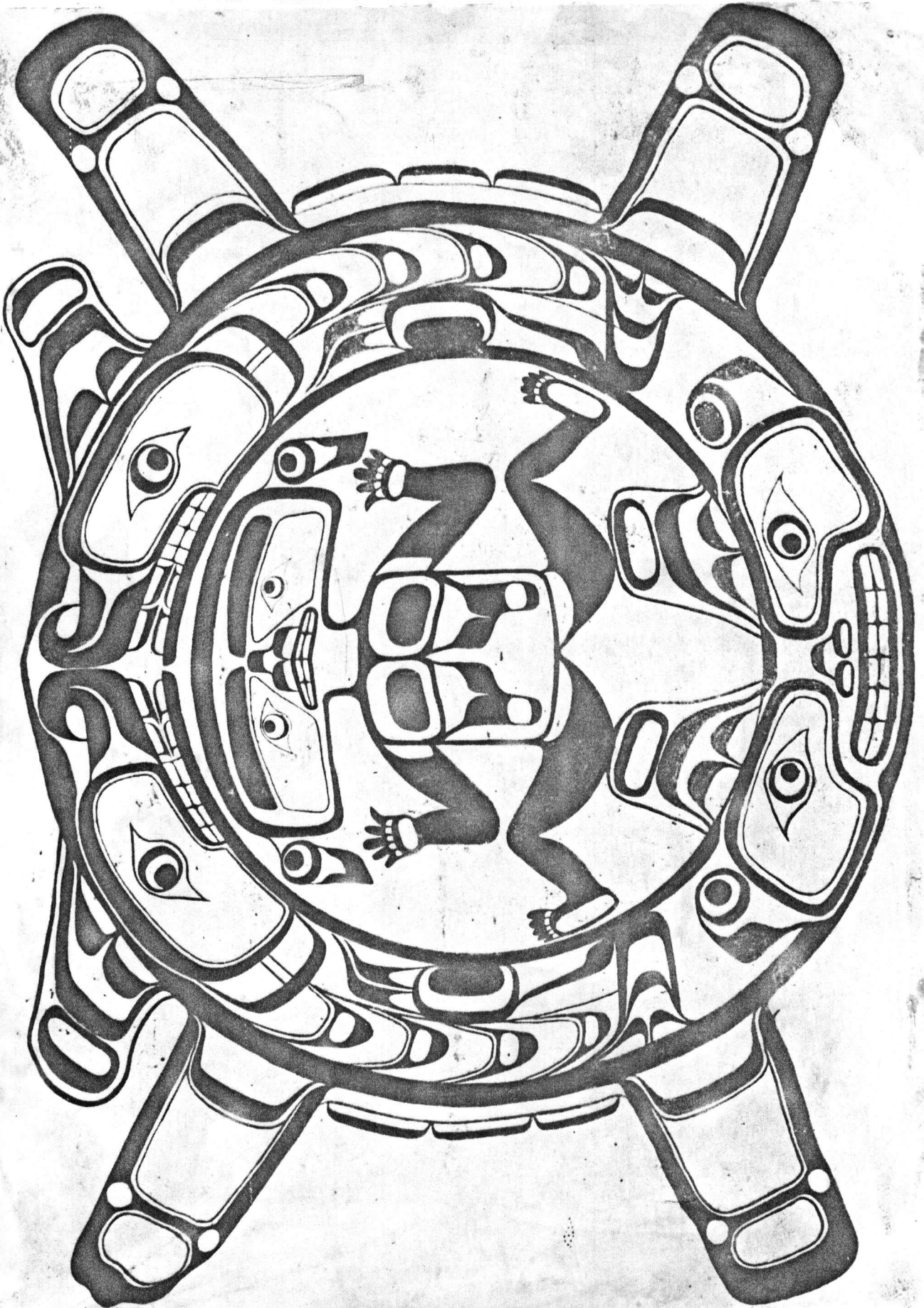


Figure 34. Mawihl - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 10

Figure 35. Mawihl - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 12



Figure 36. Mawihl -
Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 13



Figure 38. Mawihl - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 14

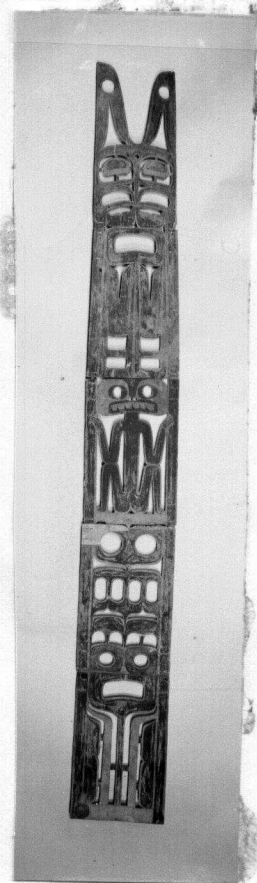


Figure 37. Duntsiq - Hawthorn 1967: Fig. 130

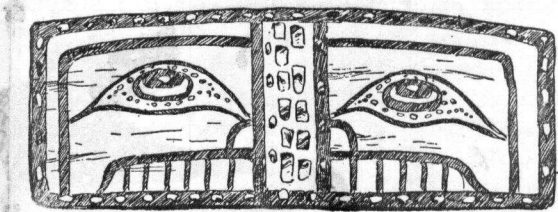


Figure 39. Ceremonial box lid - Boas 1970: Fig. 41

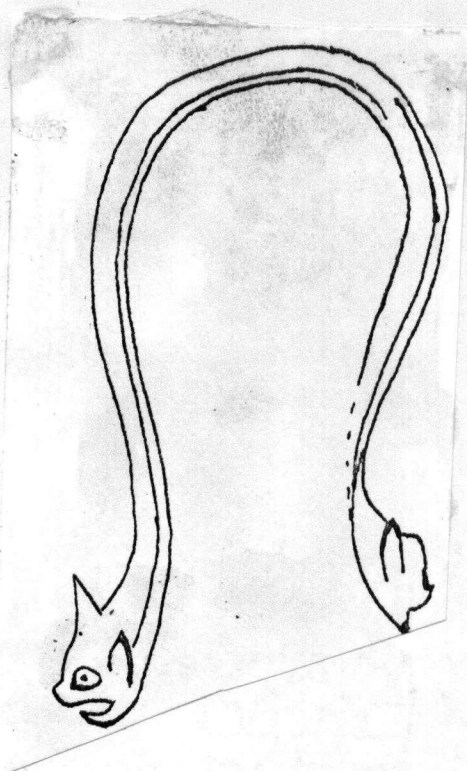


Figure 40. Handle - Speiser 1960:39

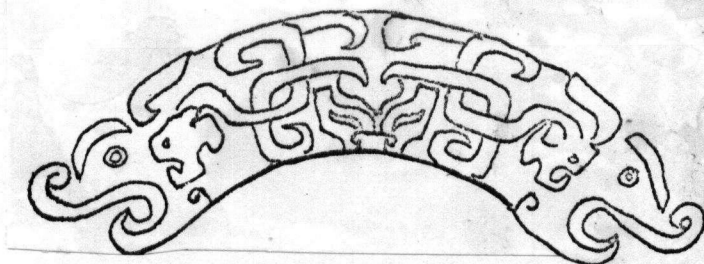


Figure 41. Pendant - Covarrubias 1954:52

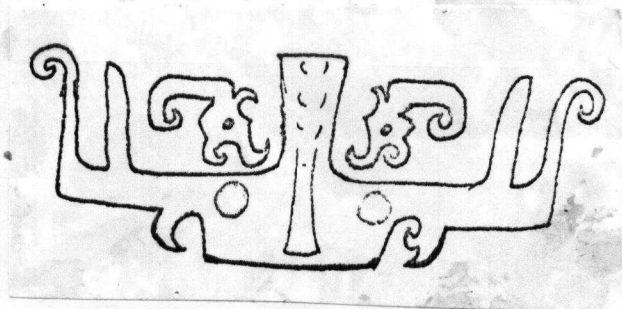


Figure 42. T'ao t'ieh - Watson 1962: Pl. 7b

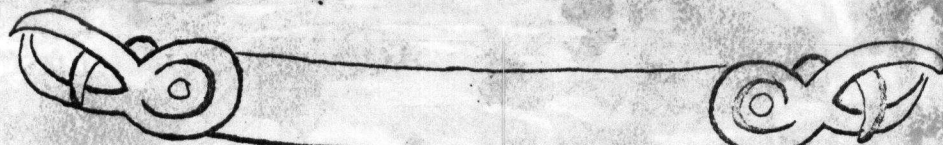


Figure 43. Lintel - Barrow 1969: Fig 122



Figure 44. Lintel - Duff 1961: Pl. 18

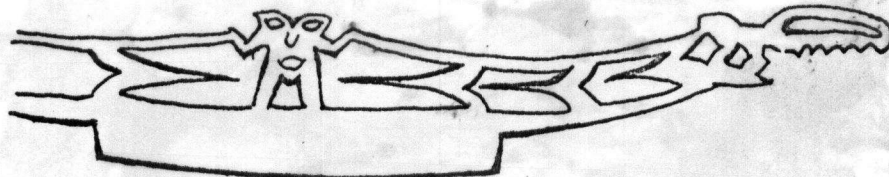


Figure 45. Ridgepole carving - Barrow 1969: Fig. 14



Figure 46. Lintel - Barrow 1969: Fig 120



Figure 47. Comb - Barrow 1969: Fig. 67

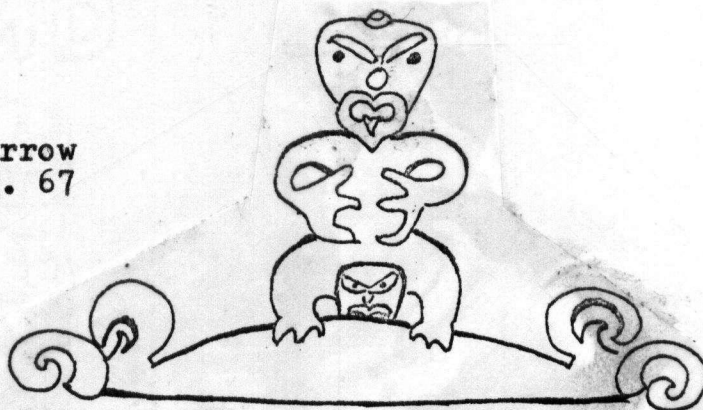


Figure 48. Lintel - Barrow 1969: Fig. 126

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