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Pacific Northwest

The Pacific Northwest culture area, or Northwest Coast as it is more commonly known, includes a 1,000-mile long strip of sea-coast which extends from southeastern Alaska, through western Canada and northwestern U.S.A. as far as northern California. The region is characterized by a temperate climate (due to the warming Japanese current), lush vegetation with dense evergreen forests, and a wealth of sea (fish, shellfish, and sea mammals) and land animal life. The native cultures of this area exhibited many tribal variations, but certain traits were common throughout. Regarding the material culture, there was a general orientation towards the sea, particularly for food, and a corresponding sophistication of canoe manufacture and navigation, and sea-fishing and -hunting technologies. There was a highly-developed woodworking technology and extensive use of wood and bark for houses, canoes, mats, containers, clothing, and ceremonial paraphernalia. In its other aspects the culture was characterized by complex social units with elaborate status hierarchies and inheritance patterns and a rich ceremonial life.

For study purposes, the Northwest Coast groups are usually further subdivided into the northern group of Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian, the central group of Kwakiutl and Bella Coola, and the southern group of Coast Salish, Nootka, and Chinook. One of the most important sub-collections in the museum's North American material comes from the Nootka, collected by Johann Wäber, draftsman on board the «Discovery» during Cook's third world voyage, from 1776–1780.

Wäber was the London-born son of a Bernese Swiss. The Northwest Coast Indian material was collected from the natives of Nootka Sound, on the south-west coast of Vancouver Island, where the expedition dropped anchor between March 30 and April 26, 1778. The collection is a very early one: the first contact between the natives and Europeans had taken place only four years earlier, in 1774, when the Spaniard Juan Perez anchored offshore. Cook's journey was a crucial one for the Northwest Coast, for it was as a result of his expedition that the great potential of the sea otter and other pelts was realized, with repercussions in every aspect of native society.

Wäber presented his material to Bern in 1791, two years before his death. Apparently almost all items originally had hand-written labels (presumably by Wäber, in English) attached, from which the 1791 Accession List of the Stadtbibliothek Bern was drawn up, with the information being translated to German in the process. As the majority of Wäber's labels are now missing, the documentation relies on the 1791 list as its source. Unfortunately, three items of Nootka clothing, including a sea otter cloak, no longer exist.

The other principle collector of Northwest Coast material in the collection was Oscar de Watteville. Watteville (1824–1901) was a Parisian of Bernese origin who assembled a large, world-wide, pipe collection which, after the death of his brother Louis Oliver in 1912, was bequeathed to the History Museum. Included in the 500-item collection are some fine examples of North American Plains, Eastern Woodlands, and Northwest Coast pipes; it is unfortunate, however, that documentation is almost non-existent.

1 Harpoon Head and Line

Al. 3

Figure 2

Point is now missing; head is formed from two pieces of elk or deer horn, tips outward-curving to form barbs at base. Horn pieces are fitted together and bound with sinew and sealed with pitch. From this binding emerges rope or line of twisted sinew, wrapped for most of length with bark (cherry bark?). End of line is looped into an eye.

Except for loss of head, condition is good.

Head: 13.5 cm × 3.5 cm; L. (line) 300 cm

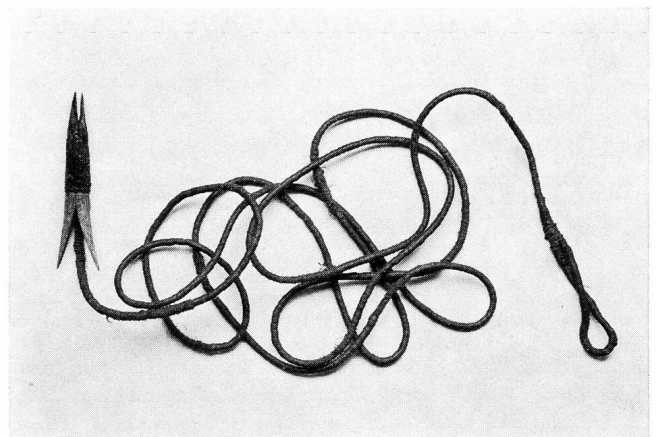
NOOTKA

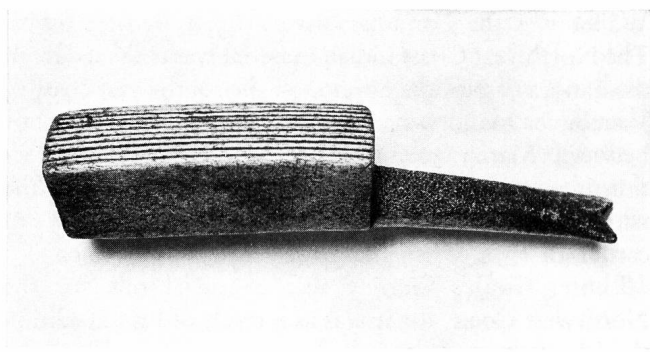
(Wäber, J.; 1778; Nootka Sound, British Columbia) (1791 Accession list says: «Harpoon aus King Georges Sound.»)

Acc.: 1791

Lit.: Henking (1957; S. 369, Nr. 62)

Fig. 2. Harpoon Head and Line, Nootka (Cat. No. 1)





2 Bark Beater

Al. 8

Figure 3

Heavy mallet from a single piece of whalebone. Working surface is carved in series of closely-spaced lengthwise parallel grooves. Most of surface is smooth and polished. Mallet is used to beat cedar bark until it is pliable enough to be stripped into shreds, which could then be woven into matting, basketry, clothing, etc.

Good condition

L. 28.5 cm; W. 5 cm; D. 5 cm

NOOTKA

(Wäber, J.; 1778; Nootka Sound, British Columbia) (1791 Accession list says: «Tuchschläger aus Nootka Sound.»)

Acc.: 1791

Lit.: Henking (1957; S. 369, Nr. 61)



3 «Slave Killer»

Al. 9

Figure 4

Wooden handle, at end carved into stylized human face, with large stone celt inserted into vertical mouth opening. Around rim and top of club, holes are pierced and tufts of brown human hair are inserted. The wood is overall smoothly finished and polished.

Slavery was common throughout the N.W. Coast until forbidden by the British (c. 1850). During rival potlatching, material property was destroyed and occasionally even slaves were killed in the attempt to shame a rival.

There is a crack in the wood around the handle, extending from the base of the stone insertion. Some loss of hair.

H. 31 cm; W. 7.5 cm; D. 15.5 cm

NOOTKA

(Wäber, J.; 1778; Nootka Sound, British Columbia) (1791 Accession list says: «Ein kriegerisches Instrument aus Nootka Sound.»)

Acc.: 1791

Lit.: Henking (1957; S. 368, Nr. 59)



4 Chisel

Al. 10

Figure 5

Wooden handle is made from slightly curved piece of stem from which most of the bark has been roughly carved off. Small blade of iron with curved cutting edge has been inserted in tapered end of the shaft, and the end wrapped with skin thong.

Good condition.

L. 20.5 cm; W. 3.5 cm

NOOTKA

(Wäber, L.: 1778; Nootka Sound, British Columbia) (1791 Accession list says: «eisernes Werkzeug aus Nootka Sound.»)

Acc.: 1791

Lit.: Henking (1957; S. 368, Nt. 60)

Fig. 3. Bark Beater, Nootka (Cat. No. 2)

Fig. 4. «Slave Killer», Nootka (Cat. No. 3)

Fig. 5. Chisel, Nootka (Cat. No. 4)

5 Female Figure

Al. 11

Figures 6 and 7

Carved from wood, in the round. Figure is sitting on buttocks, with legs drawn up against body; no arms are carved. Face is painted black, facial features are shallowly carved, with small holes for eyes. Around top of head, black hair is attached in upright fringe.

Body is clothed, but apparel is now in very fragmentary condition. A skin garment, now parchment-like, is secured around a long, freehanging rectangle of vertically laced quills in rows separated by horizontal strips of tanned skin. This in turn is overlaid by a similar, smaller, version of the same. At back, the original existence of the larger of these quilled rectangles is indicated only by long strands of sinew and a length of tanned skin. There are traces of red ochre on skin and hair.

Clothing is in poor condition, and there is some loss of hair; wood carving is in good condition.

H. 7 cm; W. 4.5 cm

NOOTKA

(Wäber, J.; 1778; Nootka Sound) (1791 Accession list says: «eine kleine Figur aus Nootka Sound.»)

Acc.: 1778

Lit.: Henking (1957; S. 367, Nr. 57)

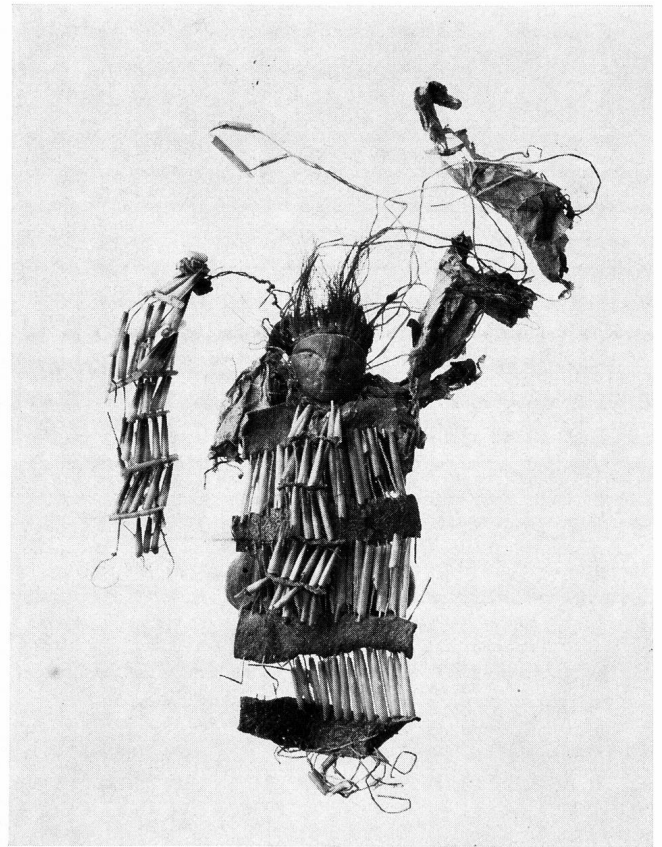
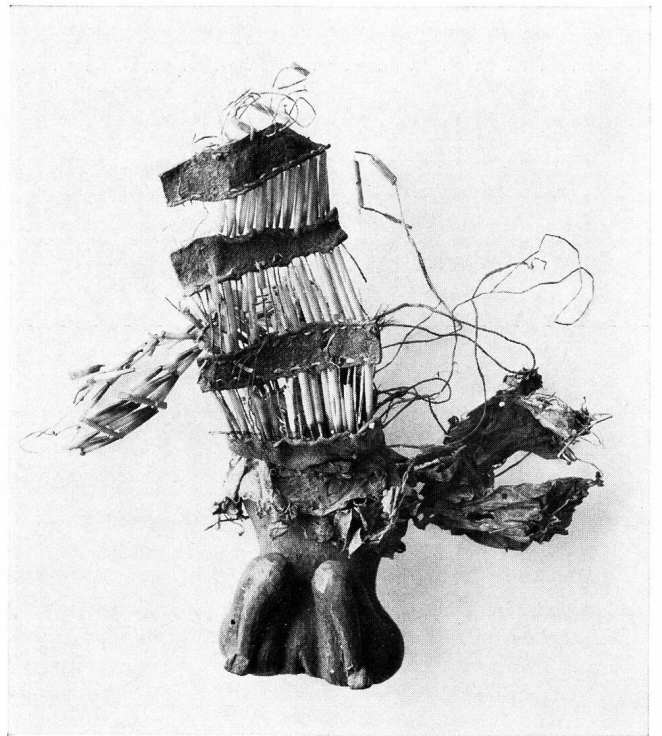


Fig. 6. Female Figure, Nootka (Cat. No. 5) (front view)

Fig. 7. Female Figure, Nootka (Cat. No. 5) (clothing lifted to reveal carving)



6 Male Figure

Al. 12

Figure 8

From ivory, carved crouching on buttocks, with legs drawn up against body, hands holding knees. Eyes are inlaid with abalone shell, mouth and navel also originally had similar inlay. One side of face and part of arm is missing; other side indicates ear-plugs worn in ear. Some kind of headdress is also carved, but only a fragment remains. Except where pieces have broken off, surface is smooth and highly polished.

A large piece is missing from back and side, and the abalone shell inlay is missing from one eye, mouth, and navel.

H. 10 cm; W. 4 cm

NOOTKA?

(Wäber, J.; 1778; Nootka Sound?)

Acc.: 1791?

Lit.: Henking (1957; S. 387, Nr. 88)

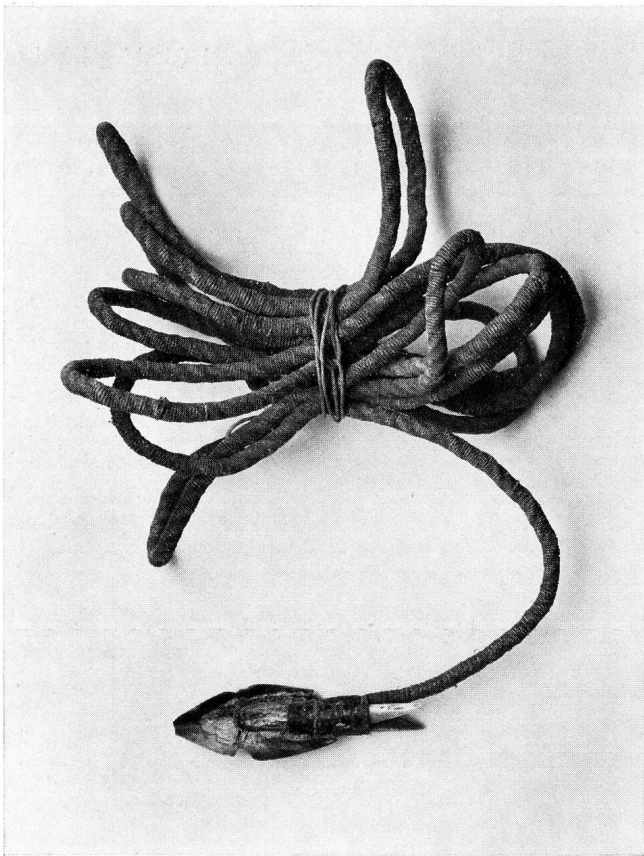


Fig. 8. Male Figure, Nootka? (Cat. No. 6)



Fig. 9. Face Mask, Nootka (Cat. No. 7)

Fig. 10. Harpoon Head and Line, Nootka (Cat. No. 8)



7 Face Mask

Al. 13

Figure 9
Carved from cedar wood, with exaggerated human features. Hair was originally attached around upper sides and top of mask, and was also glued in place to form eyebrows, moustache and beard (Hair is missing, and only traces of glueing material now remain). Wood has been painted dull red, and there are traces of a white clay-like material overall. On the inside of the mask, a grommet of cedar bark is reeved through the wood on either side of the mouth, forming a bit which the wearer held between his teeth to help support the weight of the mask.

Condition is good except for loss of hair.

H. 25.5 cm; W. c. 22 cm

Nootka

(Wäber, J.; 1778; Nootka Sound, British Columbia)
(1791 Accession list says: «Eine Maske aus Nootka Sound.»)

Acc.: 1791

Lit.: Cook (1785; p. 306)

Henking (1957; S. 367-368, Nr. 58)

8 Harpoon Head and Line

Al. 14

Figure 10
Head is a thin, sharpened piece of abalone shell to which two barbs made from elk or deer horn are secured with lashing of braided sinew line, and the whole covered with a coating of spruce gum. Line is made from sinew (probably whale sinew) twisted into a rope and then bound with nettle fibre cord. End of line is formed into an eye. Type used in whaling, although this example seems smaller than usual.

Head has shattered and been glued, but small parts are now missing.

Head: 16 cm × 5.5 cm; Line: L. c. 600 cm; Circumference: 3.5 cm

Nootka

(Wäber, J.; 1778; Nootka Sound, British Columbia)
(1791 Accession list says: «Harpoon aus Nootka Sound.»)

Acc.: 1791

Lit.: Mason (1900; pp. 227-228, Fig. 20)

Henking (1957; S. 369-370, Nr. 63)

9 Man's Shirt

Al. 20

Figure 11
Presently on exhibit in the U.S.A.; therefore, not examined. Existing description states: «doubled layers of buckskin, the outer with black, red, and green pigment, the two joined by rawhide lashings and straps.»

Good condition.

H. 90 cm; W. 67 cm

Tlingit

(Bischoff, T. T.; Sitka, Alaska)

Acc.: 1859



Fig. 11. Man's Shirt, Tlingit (Cat. No. 9)

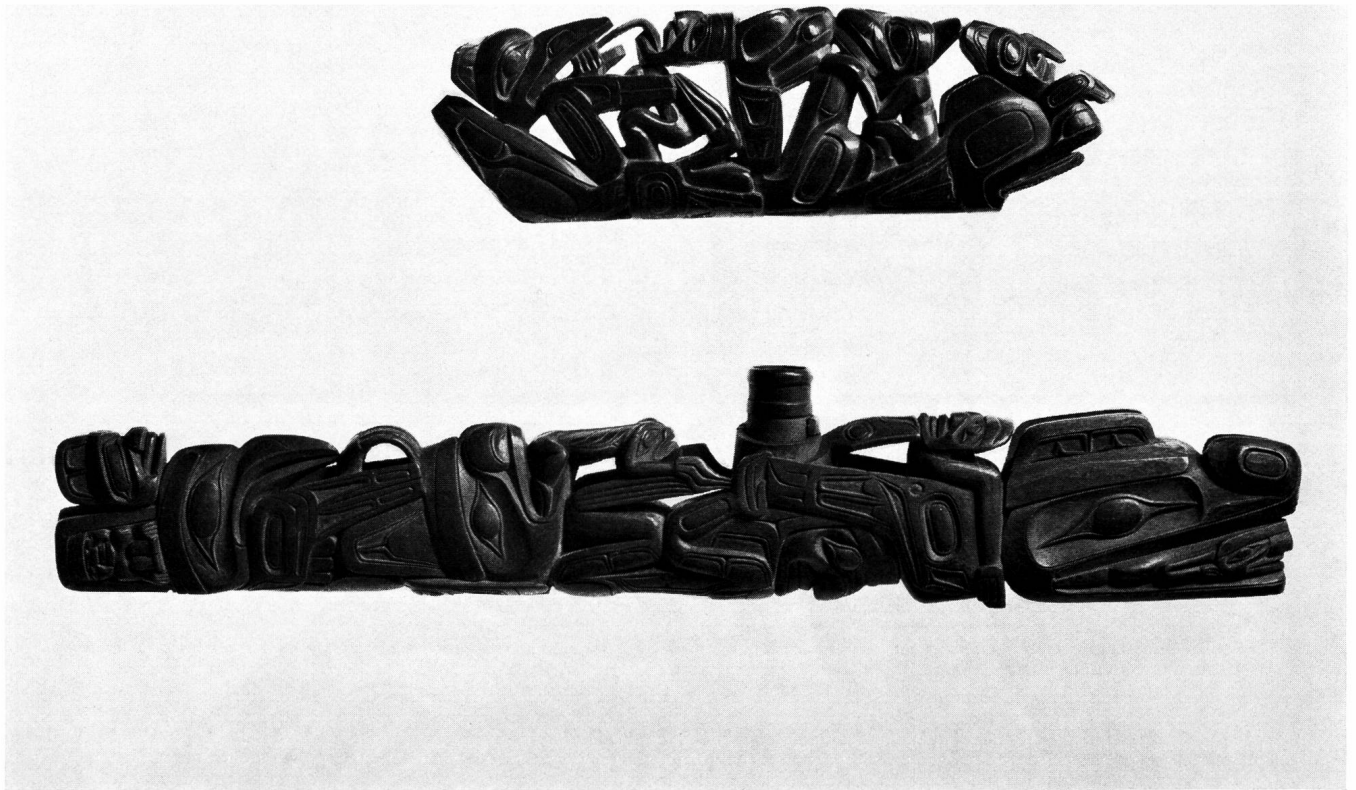


Fig. 12. Pipes, [Haida]: upper (Cat. No. 14); lower (Cat. No. 11)

10 Bow

Can. 38

Wood (red cedar?) with bowstring of twisted rawhide. Back of bows is crudely painted with black paint – eyeforms, curved and straight lines. «Anacortes» is written in pencil on back.

Good condition.

L. 110 cm; W. 5.5 cm

COAST SALISH

(Rothen, Ida; Anacortes, British Columbia)

Acc.: 1907

12 Pipe

de W 74.403.2

Carved from black argillite in openwork and low relief. Non-functional, having two very small holes, one at base of tapered end, other at top, midway along geometric designs.

Slight chips broken from argillite.

L. 43 cm; W. 1.5 cm; H. 11.1 cm

[HAIDA]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

Figure 13 (lower)

11 Pipe

de W 74.403.1

Figure 12 (lower)

Very finely carved from single piece of wood, in traditional motifs, with cylindrical iron bowl inserted upright about $\frac{1}{3}$ distance from end.

Good condition.

L. 38.5 cm; W. 2.6 cm; H. (at bowl) 7 cm

[HAIDA]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

13 Pipe

de W 74.403.3

Figure 13 (upper)

Carved from black argillite in openwork and low relief. Small hole at tapered end, and bowl at top (behind fin), without connection.

Pieces are broken from top and near end.

L. 30 cm; W. 2.3 cm; H. 8.4 cm

[HAIDA]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

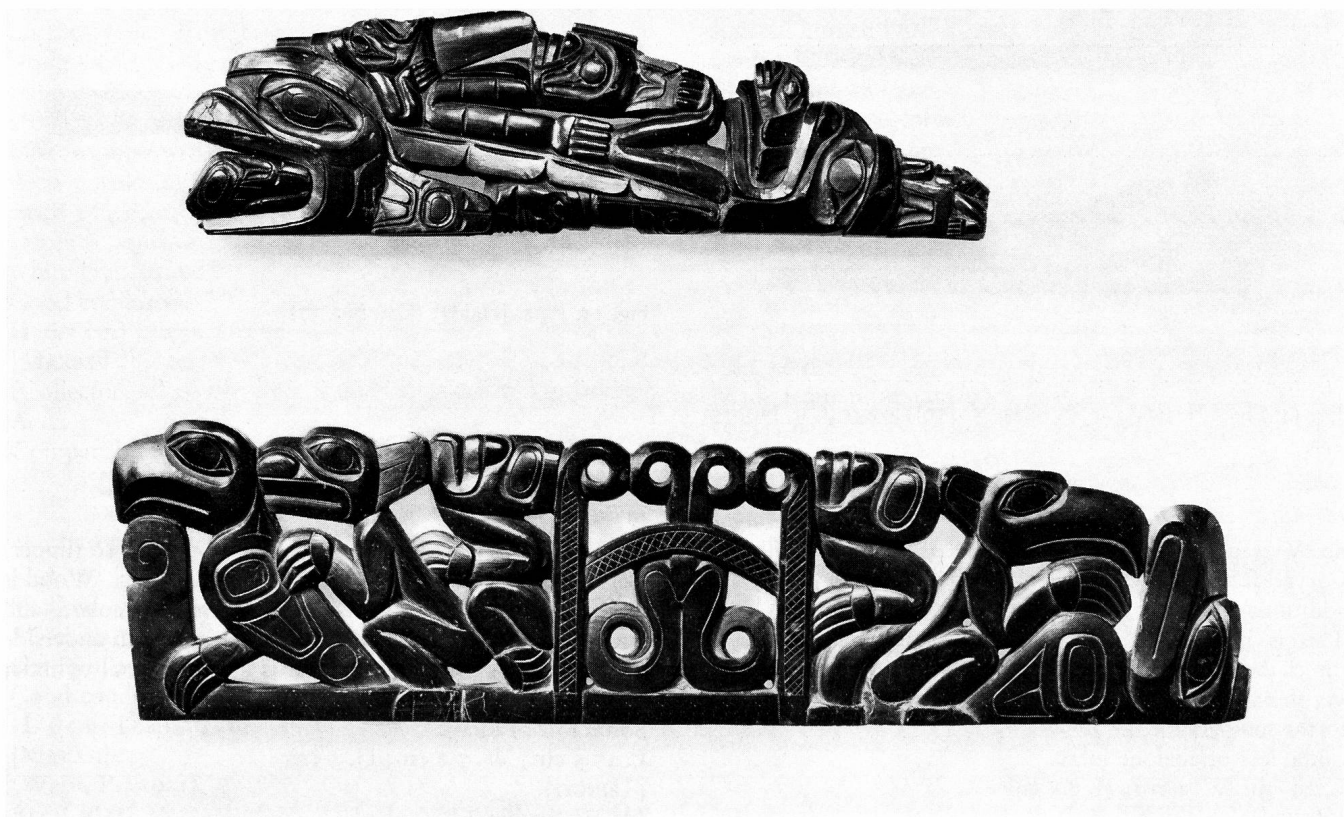


Fig. 13. Pipes, [Haida]: upper (Cat. No. 13); lower (Cat. No. 12)

14 Pipe

de W 74.403.4

Figure 12 (upper)

Carved from black argillite in openwork and relief. There is a conical bowl carved in stone about midway along top edge. Very small opening for mouthpiece is near base of slanted end.

Piece broken from lower front end.

L. 21.7 cm; W. 1.9 cm; H. 6.3 cm

[HAIDA]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

15 Pipe

de W 74.403.6

Figure 14 (lower)

Carved from black argillite in openwork and relief. Stem is long, cylindrical and slightly tapered; bowl is carved in shape of white man's head (note details of hair and cap). Behind bowl, small figure, again representing a white man, is carved astride the stem, followed by a stylized 2-headed bird figure.

Good condition.

L. 23.7 cm; W. 2.3 cm; H. 4.2 cm

[HAIDA]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

16 Pipe

de W 74.403.7

Figure 14 (upper)

Carved from black argillite in openwork and relief. Stem is long, cylindrical and slightly tapered; bowl is carved from same stone in almost upright position, flanked in front and behind with a carving in the round of an eagle.

Good condition.

L. 21.5 cm; W. 2 cm; H. 6 cm

[HAIDA]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

17 Pipe

de W 74.403.8

Figure 15

Carved from black argillite with simple tubular stem curving into upright oval bowl at end. There is low relief carving of a human face low on front of bowl, and of a bird on either side above face.

Piece broken from stem end.

L. 14.5 cm; W. 2 cm; H. 4 cm

[HAIDA]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

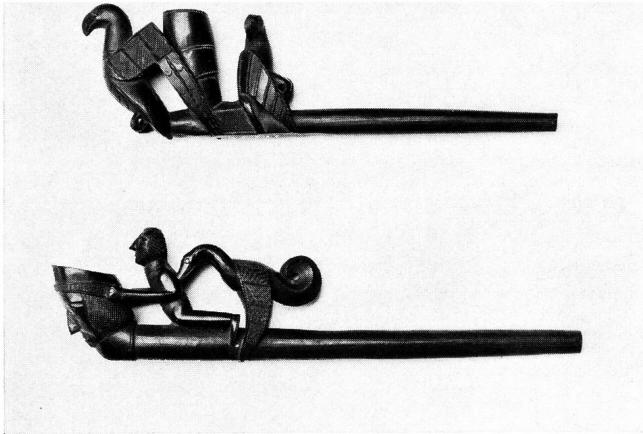


Fig. 14. Pipes, [Haida]: upper (Cat. No. 16); lower (Cat. No. 15)

18 Pipe

de W 74.403.10

Carved from wood, with abalone shell and ivory inlay and additions. Pipe bowl and mouth end are rimmed with brass. This is probably an early native-made pipe, carved in direct imitation of white sailors' scrimshaw work, and not yet showing the later adaption of native designs and motifs to the new art form.

Some loss of abalone inlay.

L. 29 cm; W. 4 cm; H. 8.5 cm

[HAIDA]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

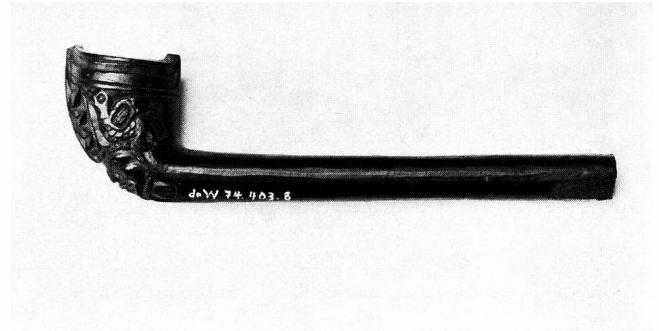


Fig. 15. Pipe, [Haida] (Cat. No. 17)

19 Pipe

de W 74.403.11

Carved from wood, probably representing insect. Wood is highly polished, with rectangular, semi-circular, and circular pieces of abalone inlay. There is a hole in underside to permit fitting of stem; bowl is a small metal cylinder inserted in top edge.

Some loss of inlay.

L. 17.5 cm; W. 3.2 cm; H. 5 cm

[TLINGIT]

(de Watteville, O.)

Acc.: 1912

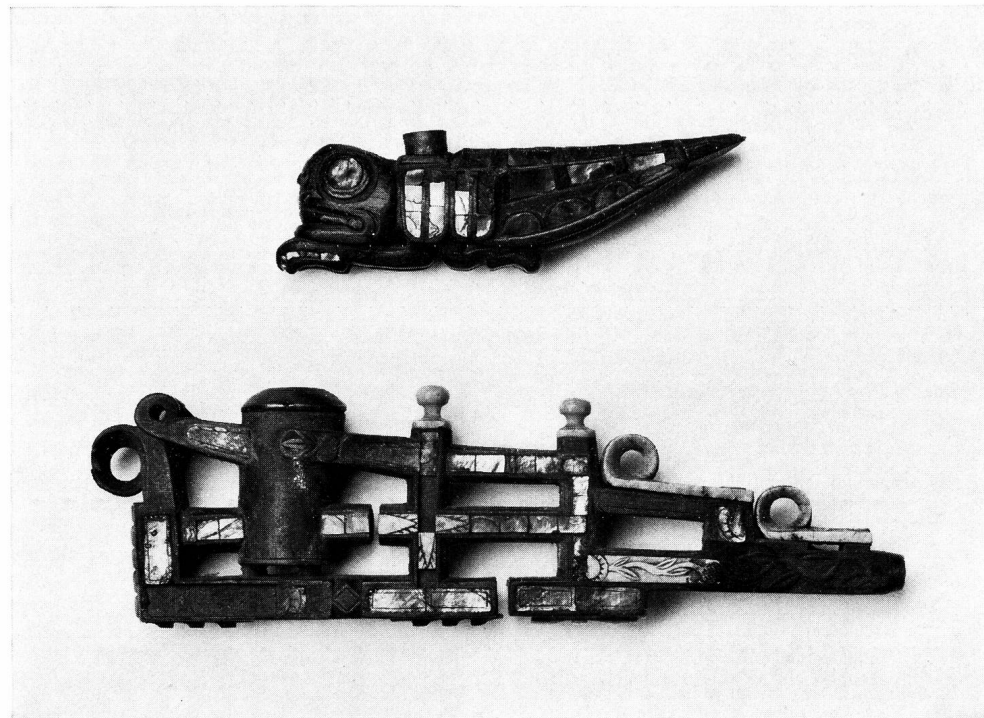


Fig. 16. Pipes:
upper [Tlingit] (Cat. No. 19);
lower [Haida] (Cat. No. 18)

20 *Basket with Lid*

X 74.404.31 (a, b)

Figure 17 (right)

Circular shape, with lid fitting over rim of basket. On sides and lid, technique is wrapped twined weaving: on the inside of the basket, one strand of the twine passes along horizontally across the cedar bark warps, and the binding element of shiny, straw-coloured grass is wrapped around the junction. Design consists of straight lines and bird motifs worked in warp strands dyed red-brown, deep purple and dark green. Base is formed from even strips of cedar bark interwoven in checkerboard fashion at centre, and around edges twined together with natural white grass strands.

Good condition.

H. 6.5 cm; Diam. 11 cm

[MAKAH]

(Collector unknown; item found un-numbered in storage)

Acc.: ?

Comparison items: Mason (1902: p. 235; Fig. 21, 22)

21 *Basket with Lid*

N.A. 67 (a, b)

Figure 17 (left)

Shallow, circular shape, with lid fitting over rim of basket. Materials and technique of manufacture are the same as Cat. No. 20. Design is in purple, red and orange.

Good condition.

H. 5 cm; Diam. 9 cm

[MAKAH]

(Weiss, P.; 1921)

Acc.: 1921

22 *Spoon*

Can. 56 a

Figure 18 (lower)

Made from mountain goat horn. Handle is rivetted with copper wire. Handle is carved in high relief; main figure is stylized human with bent arms and legs.

Such spoons were used during potlatch ceremonies to pass food among the guests.

Join on handle is loose.

L. 22 cm; W. 6.4 cm

Tribe unknown – [northern NORTHWEST COAST]

(purchased from Kalebdjian, a dealer in Paris)

Acc.: 1949

23 *Spoon*

Can. 56 b

Figure 18 (upper)

Made from mountain goat horn, in 2 pieces, joined with copper nails at base of handle. Low-relief carving on handle; main figure is that of a bird with human features, surmounted by a small human head and arms.

Good condition.

L. 20 cm; W. 5.5 cm

Tribe unknown – [northern NORTHWEST COAST]

(purchased from Kalebdjian, a dealer in Paris)

Fig. 17. Baskets, [Makah]; left (Cat. No. 21); right (Cat. No. 20)

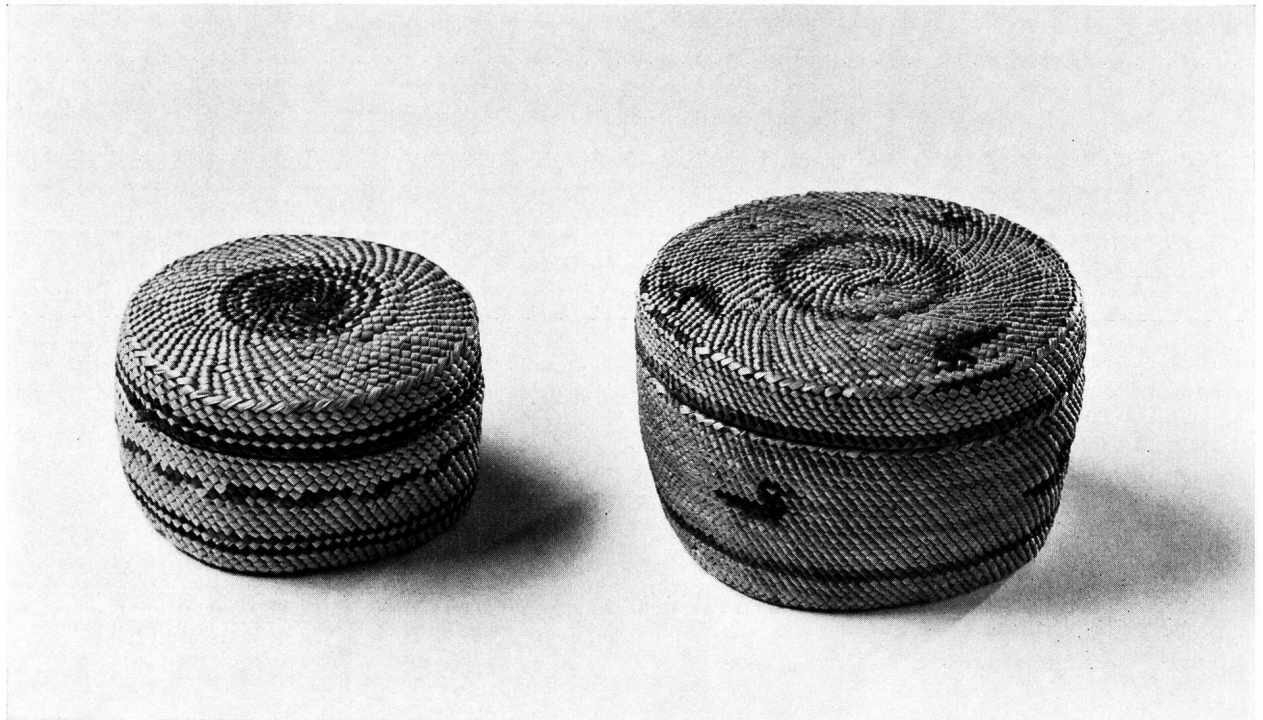




Fig. 18. Spoons, tribe unknown: upper (Cat. No. 23); lower (Cat. No. 22)

24 *Model Totem Pole*

Can. 57

Figure 19

Carved from cedar wood, back hollowed out, front carved in low relief with five main figures, topped by in-the-round carving of an eagle. Projecting beak of middle figure is a separate addition. Large areas are unpainted, details are painted red, black, and white.

There is a long split in the wood up the left side; this has been glued.

H. c. 400 cm; W. 19 cm; D. (at beak of middle figure) 25 cm

TSIMSHIAN

(Zingg, E.) (Museum Yearbook for 1950 says pole comes from Hazelton on upper Skeena River, British Columbia.)

Acc.: 1950

Lit.: Jahrbuch des Bernischen Historischen Museums: (1950; pp. 131-132)

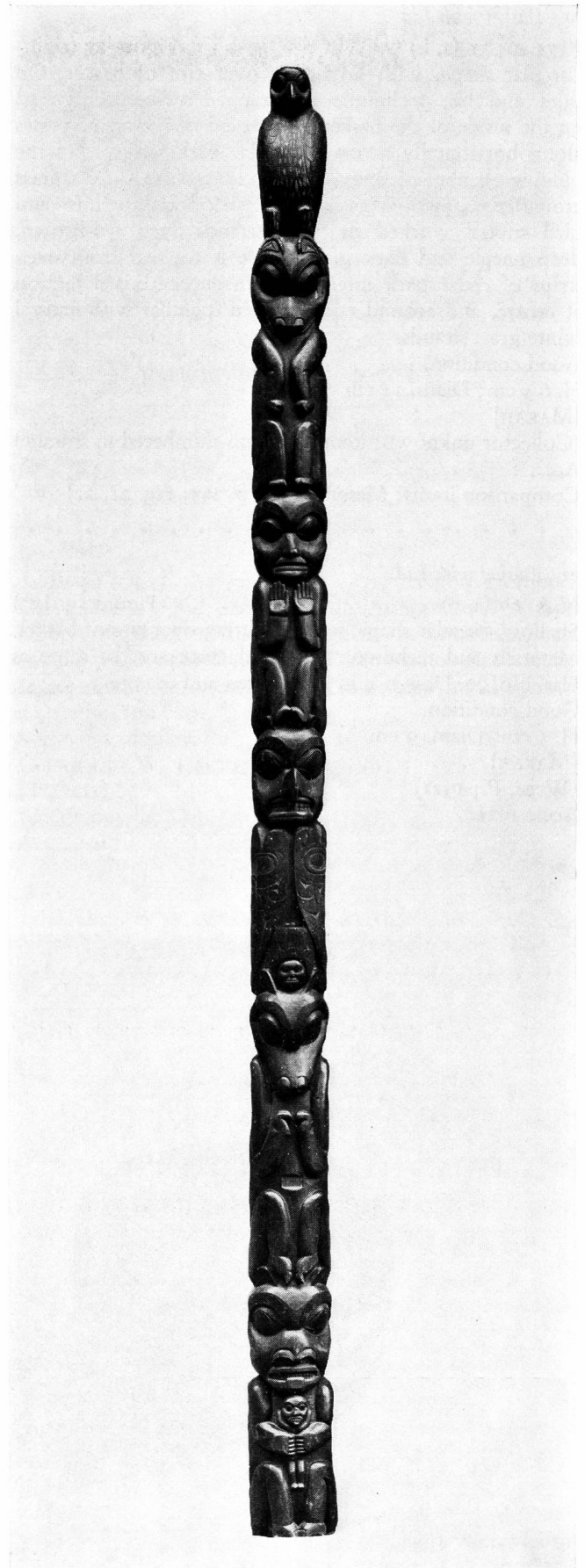


Fig. 19. Model Totem Pole, Tsimshian (Cat. No. 24)