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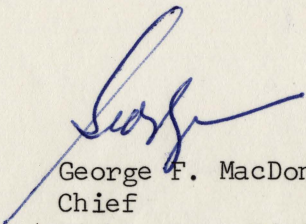
Professor Wilson Duff
Department of Anthropology
 and Sociology
University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, B.C.

1027 NW 190th
Seattle Wash 98177

Dear Wilson:

I'm glad the slides arrived in good condition.   There is no
charge - I know they will be put to good use.   I also have
a set for Bill Holme but I don't have his address.   Could
you supply it to me?

Congratulations on your promotion to full Professor.

Best regards,

George F. MacDonald
Chief
Archaeology Division

/fl

enclosed are some rough notes for a talk I gave at
the Archaeological Inst. of America, Toronto Chapter, which
I would appreciate your comments - keep the copy if you wish.

May 13, 1971

Dr. George F. MacDonald,
Chief, Archaeology Division,
National Museum of Man,
Ottawa, Canada.

Dear George:

Bill Holm's home address is 1027 N.W. 190th St.,
Seattle, Washington, 98177. His office is in the
Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum, University
of Washington, Seattle. Thanks again, very much, for
the slides.

I would like to keep the copy of your paper, as
it does express a lot of the ideas we have discussed
partly from time to time. I find the whole thing very
stimulating, and am especially pleased to see your
ideas on the archaic Haida art style and conservative
mortuary and shaman's architecture written down. I
think you have definitiely got something there.

As requested, I'll give you the comments that
come to mind. On argillite totem poles: my impression
is that very few were in any real sense "models" of
poles that had existed or could have existed. I agree
with you however that their production did have the
effect of keeping some of the traditions alive.

My main questions have to do with "houses" and
houses, the distinction between the social unit and
the physical structure, a distinction that I would
make more sharply that you seem to have in the paper.

In the middle of page 3 you are talking about Haida houses (dwellings). Each had its name and origin myth, I agree. But there was no strong tie between the dwelling and its site; that is, it didn't have to be built on the same site each time it was renewed, and I would suspect for the Haida seldom was.

It is where you go on to say that houses were corporate entities that I balk, because here the meaning shifts from the dwelling to the social unit. The Tsimshian called this social unit the "house", (eg, Gitksan wilps-Gwasslam "house of Gwasslam"). Rather like House of Windsor, or House of David. The "house" usually occupied one dwelling, but might have more. The dwelling was usually also called "house of Gwasslam", but it might have its own name, eg "where you have to shout". It was the "house" (social unit) that was the corporate unit and owned territories and other prerogatives. The question then becomes: to what extent was this social unit tied to a single dwelling and the dwelling to a single site, and I don't think it was to the extent that you have suggested.

Pn p. 4 I don't agree that the main political unit among the Haida was the house. I think it was the lineage or sub-lineage (Swanton's R12 or R12c). These units were comparable to the Tsimshian "house" but were not called "house of (chief's name)", but eg "those-born-at-(place)". I think these were the corporate units. They might own just one dwelling, but usually had more. Among their prerogatives were house names, but again I don't think the houses were very often renewed on the same sites.

In my mind the evidence is not very clear that in
Haida villages it was only the chief's house that was
excavated, usually. Nor have I seen any evidence that
the layout of the houses resembled the seating order of
chiefs at a potlatch. It may have been some kind of
ideal pattern, but have you evidence that it was ever
really done? Something of the kind was the ideal in
Gitksan villages (see my Kitwancool example), but it
seems to me that such a pattern would be established only
when an entire village was relocated so that it could start
afresh, and that the pattern quite soon gets loused up by
the addition of new houses in inappropriate places.

All these questions, of course, converge on your
archaeological situation at the Boardwalk Site and others,
and your interpretaion of it. It sure looks as though
some such pattern as you suggest must have been true. I
can agree that one might expect a process through time
of a continuing relationship between a "house" and a house
site, and between the "houses" and their territories.
The trouble in my mind is that in the actual historical
cases I know, it didn't seem to work that way. There was
too much shifting around. Also, if the process worked
for the coast Tsimshian, why didn't it work the same
for the Haida or Gitksan?

My impression is that winter village sites were
not continuously occupied through the generations and
centuries by the same groups. Maybe I am wrongly general-
izing from conditions unique to the post-contact period,
but it seems to me that groups tended to move around a lot.

Of course they could well have returned after some
interval, or another group having the same culture
(including social structure) may have taken up residence
on the site, which might leave the same archaeological
results.

Having worked that over, it doesn't look so
important now. Anyhow, you may be intebested in my
reactions.

Take good care of Suki. All best regards,

The Origins of Northwest Coast Art and Architecture
Paper presented to the Archaeological Institute of America, Royal
Ontario Museum, January 14, 1971 by G.F. MacDonald, National Museum
of Man Ottawa

The topic I chose to talk on, The Origins of Art and Architecture on the
Northwest Coast, is impossibly broad for a single lecture, so I will begin
by setting some limits on the topic.

Of the three main subdivisions of Northwest Coast Indian culture - into
southern, central and northern - I will limit discussion to the northern
pattern as exemplified by the Haida, Tsimshian and Tlingit. While the
archaeological assemblages of stone and bone artifacts of these three
tribes are virtually indistinguishable from each other through time due
to a constant interchange of ideas, their ethnographic styles, in carving
and painting, are distinctive. So, I will first discuss the ethnographic
pattern, then the archaeological evidence. Furthermore, I will concentrate
on architecture, where the archaeological evidence is better with less
emphasis on the graphic arts.

The surprising conclusions of recent field work of the National Museum of
Man on the northern coast of British Columbia is that the cultural patterns
have a much greater time depth than was expected, particularly by such
writers as Marius Barbeau who considered northwest coast art, and particularly
its monumental aspects such as totem poles, was a direct result of surplus
wealth pumped into the tribal economies by the fur trade.

It has now been demonstrated by C^{14} dating that sizeable village communities
with multifamily plank houses and economies oriented to riverine and coastal
exploitation have a time depth the length of the west coast of Canada of
slightly more than 5,000 years. Dates in this range have been obtained for
sites in the vicinity of Prince Rupert on the northern mainland, on the
Queen Charlotte Islands, in Bella Coola and Bella Bella territory on the
central coast, from Vancouver Island in present Nootka territory and finally
from sites in the Vancouver area.

My own research on the northern coast has been directed towards ethnohistoric

reconstruction of the Haida villages on the Queen Charlotte Islands, and archaeological work on the prehistoric sites in present Tsimshian territory of the adjacent mainland. This is due to the fact that the largest and stratigically most accessible archaeological sites are in the vicinity of Prince Rupert where, unfortunately, from the archaeologists' point of view, there was a total abandonment of the old village sites in historic times due to the fur trade. Conversely, the Haida villages that escaped radical change during the historic period until as late as 1870, are well documented, but have relatively shallow time depths and are less accessible to large archaeological crews.

I will begin by an examination of Haida villages and monumental sculpture. During the past five years, I have mapped 20 Haida villages and have assembled more than 1,000 photographs of them. John Swanton, the main ethnographer for the Haida in 1899 assembled lists of families and even house names for all of the winter villages of the Haida from informants who had lived in them. In many cases these lists can be correlated with the village plans I drew, providing an indication of their social organization in terms of the arrangement of clans in the villages, the social stratification evident in the arrangement of houses to each other, and changes of architectural and sculptural style through time.

The early photographic documents are as valuable in this kind of study as are written sources. Government survey parties starting in 1878 regularly included photographers whose plates are still preserved in archives and museums. Surveys in this period were frequent, and many villages and even individual houses were photographed a dozen times or more at brief intervals before they were totally abandoned by the turn of the century. As a result we have photos of approximately 90% of the houses that stood on the Charlottes in the last quarter of the 19th century — of which there were about 300 in total. Multiplying this figure by 25, the average number of people inhabiting a plank house according to Swanton, we have a figure of 6,000 people, which is the generally accepted figure for the population of the Haida before it was decimated by European diseases. Approximately 500 carved columns stood in the twenty villages at

not counting Kaigani

Why should Haida not live continuously on sites?

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- 3 -

this time, of which three-quarters are depicted in the photographs. Of
these, slightly ~~less~~ more than 50 have been saved in museums, while the remaining
90% were destroyed, or fell into decay.

A final documentary source in studying Haida architecture and monumental
sculpture in the 19th century is available due to the Haida's predeliction
for model making. Relatively accurate house models exist for about 100
Haida plank houses, with many of their individual histories collected with
them, and indeed, a complete model of the village of Skidegate is preserved
in an American museum - with over 30 house models in this single collection.
Totem poles were also miniaturized, first in wood and then in argillite
and of these there are probably thousands in existence which were produced
by traditional carvers immediately prior to the turn of the century.

Were argillite poles really models?

This penchant for model making has on one level an economic explanation -
the sale of crafts to visiting seamen, but I think it has a deeper level of
significance as well, the desire to see some vestige of their household
traditions survive. Extended family houses were endowed with rich
traditions and were regarded by northwest coast Indians as having an
existence in their own right independent of their embodiment in any
and independent of their location (
particular structure. Each house had its own origin myth and oral history.
They were named individually and the name was transferred ceremoniously
to a new structure through the potlatch when an earlier structure had to
be replaced. Many of the house names were claimed to go back ten
generations or more. (In anthropological terms houses were <u>corporate</u>
entities. Economic territories were the perogative of particular houses
and these perogatives had to be constantly renewed at the succession of
house chiefs through the institution of the potlatch. Although the group
inhabiting the house was matrilineally related to the same clan and
usually the same lineage, a house that for various reasons declined in
population or in prestige could be taken over by another related lineage
and redeveloped, again through agressive potlatching. In a sense it was
analogous to a modern economic corporation in difficulty being rescued by
trouble shooters. In other words, there was a limited number of houses in
each village which functioned to redistribute people to resources.

OK, but not nec. on same site

↓ applies to Tsim and to "house" as social unit

Extrapolating from Adam's material on Gitksa

No

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The corporate house, guaranteed each member access to the fishing grounds, berry picking areas and beach salvage rights to which that house laid claim and the house chief ran the corporation and determined distribution of wealth within the house and acted on its behalf in regard to other houses.

No - it was the lineage

The main political unit among the Haida, and other north coast groups, was the house and the main political personages were the house chiefs. Villages recognized the authority of the chief of the most powerful house in the community, but he could act only with the approval of other house chiefs. Beyond the village level there were no alliances between villages, other than temporary ones in warfare.

In addition to having a corporate function in economic terms, houses also had a spiritual function. The plank house could be converted quickly from profane to sacred function by re-arranging the furnishings, and the addition of screens and painted props and the performance of purification rites for religious ceremonies, with the house chief again playing the major ceremonial role. It is interesting to note here, the difference between the north coast tribes and those further south in regard to the winter ceremonies - and in particular the dancing societies which for the central and southern coast provided an authority structure during the ceremonial season, in the person of dance society leaders, that cross cut the house chief authority structure. When the dancing societies were adopted by the Haida from the Bella Bella, the Haida house chiefs immediately installed themselves as heads of the dancing societies, tolerating no competition to their own authority.

no - lineage

An understanding of the architectural style of the Haida, particularly houses of the highest ranking chiefs is incomprehensible without recognizing the religious nature of the house as well as its profane function in terms of economic and social units. Although houses were traditional institutions, surviving in many cases for hundreds of years without much change, some manipulation of their corporate image was possible. A house could be enlarged or diminished in size to suit current needs and every time a house

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was renewed, the crests of the frontal pole changed slightly by the addition
of the crest figures of the house-chief's spouse. The crests belonging
to the wife were placed on the top of the pole with those of her husband
on the bottom. Although the Haida had only two clans, Raven and Eagle, the
lineage crests included thirty to forty different animal and plant forms.

House names could also be changed by the chief who usually claimed to have
been so directed by a dream or vision. It is interesting to note here
that the model often varies from the house that was actually constructed in
that more of the dream elements could be added to the model whereas their
execution in full scale was often too expensive. House models frequently
have, in addition to carved frontal poles, carved roof beams and corner
posts.

The so-called totem poles of the Haida involve a considerable range of
carved columns of which the Haida themselves distinguished three main
types. These were, house frontal poles, mortuary poles (containing the
remains of the deceased nobility) and memorial poles. It is often claimed,
particularly by Barbeau, that totem poles did not exist before white
contact, but the first sketches of the explorers clearly demonstrate that
all three forms were in use when the villages were first visited, although
in less numbers than in the mid nineteenth century.

Examining briefly the house construction of the Haida, two types of
construction were employed. The first type, and probably the earliest
form, was the interior support type in which four main uprights supported
double ridge poles over which a shed of split planks was placed. This
type was most common on Graham Island, in the northern half of the
Charlottes where it reached a frequency of roughly 50%. Among the Kaigani
Haida, still further north in the Alexander Archipelago of Southern Alaska
it was the exclusive type, as it was on the entire mainland coast. On
the southern Queen Charlotte Islands it was vastly outnumbered by the
exterior support type, in which eight paired posts on the exterior walls
supported heavy sloping gables which in turn supported huge hexagonal roof
beams. Since this second type is unique to the Charlottes, its distribution

suggests it originated in the southern group. A linguistic separation
between the Masset (or northern) and Skidegaten (or southern) Haida may
indicate further evidence of distinctive traditions between the northern
and southern Haida in prehistoric times. Carving styles, mortuary
monuments and numerous other differences between the two are also
observable.

Turning to the community pattern, further observations can be made for the
Haida in general in the mid nineteenth century. Villages consisted of up
to three parallel rows of houses extending the length of a suitable beach
where canoes could be landed in all weather. Defence was a prime consider-
ation and fortifications were usually constructed on high ground near the
village to which the inhabitants retreated in times of seige. Fresh water
was of course another important factor in site selection; as was easy access
to economic resources.

On the more abstract level, it is obvious from the maps that villages are
not random ordering of house units but in fact diagrams of the class
structure, and to some extent, the social organization of the Haida. The
house of the village chief is near the centre of the village and usually
distinguished by having the only house pit (Massett and Skidegate are
exceptions). Immediately to his right is the house of the next highest
ranking chief, on his left, the third ranking house and so on to the end of
the line in both directions. What the community pattern resembles is the
seating order of chiefs at a village potlatch (fan out of seating pattern).
In multiple row villages (25%) the chiefs house is usually in the back row
which suggests to me two possibilities - either defensive (protection
behind another house) or reflecting the growth pattern of the village where
the houses of newcomers were added in front of established houses in
villages where the length of the beach was already occupied. Where the
beach was adequate, however, newcomers went to the flanks of the house
row. John Adams has recorded a term among the Tsimshian in this regard,
that refers to newcomers' houses as "houses on stilts" referring to the
fact that newcomers often had to build their houses on pilings over rocky
or swampy ground when choice beach lots were exhausted.

Turning now to some speculation on prehistoric Haida, I will first consider monumental sculpture. Starting with the premise that various elements of a cultural pattern, and by extension a stylistic pattern, change at different rates, I divided monumental sculpture into two categories. Those pieces which concerned the living as opposed to those concerned with the dead, and I found profound stylistic differences between the two. Heraldic columns and house posts (corporate art?) tended to undergo rapid stylistic change judging from the documents, and could be termed flamboyant, while mortuary elements changed very little and were generally ultra conservative. It is analagous to our own society where funeral accoutrements linger in the Victorian age stylistically while other more vital material cultures have continued to change. I think this is a generalization that holds up in most cultures, that material culture associated with death is conservative.

Another conservative element in society involves institutions that mediate between man and the supernatural. In our society it is the Church which has only lately begun to modernize its language in the service and the written word and change the style of its paraphenalia.

So why are our Churches our most varied modern architecture?

With northwest coast tribes the institution of Shamanism appears to follow this pattern. Shaman ritualistic paraphenalia is conservative in form and design elements. In fact, some of the clearest relationships between northern North American Indians and northeast Asian groups exists in the ceremonials and apparatus of the Shaman.

Combining these two generalizations we would expect the Shaman grave to be the most conservative of all. Indeed this appears to be true.

Shaman graves are unlike any other Haida form. They are enclosures on the ground flanked by two figures. It would be my guess that the earliest sculptural forms all along the coast were indeed such simple grave figures. In British Columbia carvings on the south coast and in the interior are still limited to simple grave figures. (e.g. Nootka whales shrine, Salish - both coastal and interior). The only form where this is retained among the north coast groups however, is the Shaman's grave.

The Haida feared greatly the power of the Shamans even after their death
and always placed their corpses on small islands well removed from the
village where there was little chance of coming upon them unexpectedly
for to do so meant death to the intruder.

In terms of disposal of the dead other than Shamans, however, the Haida
preferred to keep their relatives as close as possible to their lineage
house. Small mortuary houses formed a rear row in the village where
commoners were placed. These mortuary houses are of two types. The
first, limited to the southern Charlottes are similar to the exterior frame
type dwellings - even to the extent of the frontal pole. The poles, however,
are usually very flat and resemble those described by early explorers
among the Haida in the 18th century. The second mortuary house type is a
smaller shed structure and is commonest in the central and northern
villages. In form it resembles the drawing of a shed roof dwelling from
Kiusta village done in 1787. It is possible that shed style dwellings
were once numerous on the Charlottes but were entirely replaced in the
19th century by gable roofed forms. In both types of mortuaries the dead
were placed in coffins which were stacked around the walls. Chief's
remains were usually placed in niches hollowed out of the tops of special
mortuary poles on the southern islands, and in communal tombs elevated on
two or three posts on the northern islands.

Turning to dwellings, the earliest dwellings recorded photographically,
were probably built about 1830 (photographed in 70's). Perhaps twenty
such houses from the Charlottes are known and all show major stylistic
differences in the carving of the frontal poles. Figures of animals are
not nearly as well integrated as in later examples. The early poles were
relatively flat and the carving fairly shallow. Major crest animals were
very large and stacked in registers, while minor figures were extremely
small and protruded from the orifices of the major forms. In many
respects this archaic Haida style is similar to the later Tsimshian style
of the mainland. Frontal poles, often combined with facade painting, were
used by the Bella Coola which marked the southern limit of the house frontal

pole. Still further south among the Kwakiutl and Nootka, house front
paintings are the sole form of house decoration until relatively recent
times. Again on the basis of distribution I would conclude that Bella Coola
houses are closest to what I would assume Haida houses were like about
500 years ago. Previous to that, house frontal paintings were the common
form all along the coast although they were almost totally replaced on the
Charlottes by carved frontal poles. Consequently, postulating the forms
of dwellings and monumental sculpture on the north coast a thousand years
or more ago, I envisage the latter as limited to simple grave figures, and
the houses to be of interior frame type with walls separate from (not
supporting) the roof, gabled roof, multifamily occupancy, oval entry ways,
and crest decoration limited to frontal painted designs.

Turning to the archaeological data that has come to light in the past six
years, I will first consider community pattern. I would remind you that we
are now looking at patterns from the mainland adjacent to the Charlottes
in the present coast Tsimshian area. Statements made here are based on five
winter-village site excavations in the Prince Rupert Harbour, each containing
deposits spanning 3 to 5,000 years of occupation. I will limit specific
illustrations to the single most important excavated site, called the
Boardwalk site.

This site is on the end of a peninsula so that the beach describes a semi-
circle. In total it contained no more than 12 plank houses at any one time
with all but a few houses in the front row facing the beach. The major
difference between this and a typical Haida village is that it is sitting on
a prehistoric deposit up to 15 feet in depth. In plan it is very similar
to the kept level as the deposit accumulated. The remains of shellfish,
the main winter staple of the Tsimshian, were dumped at the back of the village
where in time they formed a steep ridge, demarcating clearly the inland edge
of the village as the high tide line defined the seaward edge.

The dead were placed in wooden boxes on this ridge, and the lids of the
boxes were weighted down with heavy rocks to discourage the dogs from
disturbing them. The burials in boxes go back 1500-2000 years according to
radiocarbon dates.

Over two hundred skeletons have been excavated from this ridge and tend
to occur in clusters immediately behind the platforms of individual
houses. The stratigraphic cuts into the platforms at the site shows that
houses were rebuilt many times over a period of up to several millenia
on exactly the same platform indicating strongly that house lots were the
perogatives of particular house-corporations for extremely long periods.
Pushing the data even further, the suggestion by Adams for the Tsimshian,
that villages were comprised of a relatively fixed number of house-
corporations, the number perhaps set by an interrelation of economic factors
and organizational units of Tsimshian society, might be verified archaeologically.
In such a system population figures could fluctuate considerably without
affecting the number of house units. Continuous population growth over a
long period would, however, result in the creation of new house units. One
of the problems of demonstrating this hypothesis archaeologically is that
a considerable amount of the village would have to be excavated and the
Boardwalk Site contains roughly one million cubic feet of deposits. To
date we have excavated about 50,000 cubic feet. Most of the back ridge
has been sampled, however, to the extent that the following observation can
be made. The only grave goods consisted of wealth items - including
decorative items such as labrets, beads, ear-rings, bracelets, and charms
of stone, shell, copper, and amber - or weapons such as clubs, daggers and
armour which probably belonged to high ranking men to judge from their
elaborateness. No functional items of daily use were included in graves.
Furthermore, such wealth only occurred in graves behind two or three houses
in the centre of the village. This pattern occurred not just at one level
but extended down through the deposits in this central area. My present
speculation is that the distribution of grave goods reflects the heirarchy
of village rank, and indicates once again that this pattern persisted
through a considerable period, perhaps several millenia.

The tentative conclusion that I draw at this time that the burials from
various levels of the ridge can be associated with a series of individual
houses at fixed locations in the village, means that we can trace the history
of a particular house and recover the remains of many of its inhabitants
for many generations.

Drawing a few general conclusions about this site, it appears from the faunal remains ($\frac{1}{4}$ mil.) and artifacts (15,000) that the population which settled there 4 to 5,000 years ago had an economy well adapted to maritime exploitation. The frequency of stone adze bits and wood carving tools indicates an extensive use of wood in their material culture, and probably the construction of multifamily plank dwellings. Art styles were limited to stone and bone items incised with simple geometric designs or siltstone concretions resembling fish and animal forms with incised features emphasizing skeletal parts. Populations remained relatively stable until about 0 A.D., when for a period it increased rapidly.

So roughly around the time of Christ the pattern adds many new features which indicate larger populations and a developing ranking structure. Wealth goods particularly, traded over considerable distances appear including copper, amber, jet, jade, dentalium, obsidian. The size and variety of large woodworking tools increases as do more elaborate carving tools. A host of items decorated with designs of crest animals including ravens, wolves and killer whales etc., also occur, marking in my view the growth of the crest system as corporate symbols of the lineage houses as competition for resources increased as the result of population growth.

No complete houses have been entirely excavated or dated from this period in the Rupert area but traces of walls, central hearths and support beams have been numerous in the 2-3,000 year old levels. The problems in recovering a complete house of this age are many. House sites were levelled before each new construction and most of the evidence of earlier structures were destroyed in the process. Furthermore, houses of this age appear to have been as large as in the historic period, that is, 30-40 feet square, so that uncovering a complete house at a depth of ten feet requires the removal of up to 20,000 cubic feet of overlying cultural deposits. Three possibilities for recovering complete houses from around the time of Christ exist -

1) Finding a house that was burned either by accident or by raiding parties.

2) Finding houses that have been covered by mud slides.

3) Houses that have fallen into waterlogged deposits.

An example of a burned house comes from a Tsimshian site further south
on the coast where a National Museum project uncovered parts of a communal
plank house with wooden trays still on the interior benches, carbon dated
at 500 A.D.

Houses covered by mud slides are now being excavated at a Makah site near
Puget Sound. This plank house is only about 500 years old and is over-
lain by two historic houses also covered by mud slides. There is
indication from testing that other house remains occur at even earlier
levels perhaps back to the time of Christ. At this site the wooden parts
of the houses are totally preserved, and in fact collapsed under the mud
with the occupants and all of their possessions still inside. This site
is being called the Pompeii of the Northwest Coast. All materials
including fibre, fur, cordage and wood are perfectly preserved. Numerous
wooden carvings have been recovered so far, and demonstrate that style on
the south coast even in wood has changed little in the past 500 years.

Until this past summer, I had great hopes that the Boardwalk site contained
waterlogged deposits with house remains, as preserved house planks and
posts of considerable age were found in a stream bed on the site. Further
excavation with fire hoses this past summer uncovered no further evidence
of structures but did yield wooden wedges, fragments of harpoon shafts and
cut cedar bark. The only carving was a charm in the form of a seal recovered
from an undated level.

Archaeological activity on the coast is beginning to concentrate attention
on sites with exceptionally good preservation, since 95% of the artistic
products and all of the architecture was of highly perishable materials and
can only be reconstructed by excavating such sites. I am confident that
within the next five years we will have numerous examples of houses, carved
boxes, masks and utensils from all periods extending back 5,000 years and
from all regions of the coast. At that time a definitive statement on the
origin of Northwest Coast Art and Architecture will be possible. I do not
anticipate, however, that the broad speculations I have just outlined on
this topic, will be altered too radically.