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Skidegate Inuit pole to Bremen

Yaku hardagi - middle of village

Amos
Lues

Eyateno - Eagle family

Daguid Kunal - name of family

"belonged to Skidegate, made by
C Edensaa 40 years ago. Only
Yaku harderi had that kind; was
Skidegates not a woman

Top 1. Eagle - nose flattened
haver at bottom

1901

40

1861

The Totem Pole at the Städtisches Museum, Bremen

This formerly stood at the back of the house belonging to the principal chief of the village called Skidegate by the Whites, after a previous chief who was living at the time when the first fur-traders visited the east coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands.

The first reference to the carved poles so characteristic of the Haida villages appears in "Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America" by John Meares, published in 1790. On page 384 begins an account of the visit of his colleague Captain Douglas to the village at the north end of the islands called Dadens, though wrongly spelled in the work referred to as Tartanee. Here these carvings are spoken of as "great wooden images". This was in the year 1787. (sic, 1789)

The next reference is contained in the "Voyage Autour du Monde pendant les Annees 1790-1792" par E. Marchand. In this book is a very good description of the poles then existing. In the unpublished "Journal of the Voyage of the Brigantine Hope" commanded by Captain Joseph Ingraham of Boston is another account of the same carvings and also of others not mentioned in the French work.

The above mentioned accounts show that the Haida had reached a high point of efficiency in the working of wood at the time when they were first visited by the white race. Indeed this is partly to be accounted for by the fact that they already had tools of iron when the earliest explorers reached them, as may be found in the various accounts of the Spaniards' voyages to these regions in the years 1774 and 1775.

In the following notes the spelling adopted by the Bureau of American Ethnology will be followed, as used in the recently published "Handbook of American Indians". A more exact system will be found in the Jesup Exploring Expedition, Vol. V, 1905, entitled "Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida", by Dr. J. R. Swanton.

The native name of Skidegate village is Hlgaiu. The name of the house in which the pole stood is Daagu-kunhlin, meaning "house better than (those that have) excavations". This is no. 13 on p. 266 in Swanton. The owner, chief Skidegate, belonged to the Gitins, or Eagles of Skidegate, and was of the division Na yuans haidagai, or Great House People. He was entitled to use the following crests: Raven, mythical Wolf called Wasku, Dog-fish, Eagle, Sculpin, and Halibut (Swanton, l.c. p. 273). All of these are mentioned by Dr. Swanton but my informants gave another crest, that of the mythical Hawk, Skiamsm. Of these only two are shown on the pole, namely the Eagle above and the Raven below.

The Eagle is in a sitting position with its wings seen on the sides, and with a much blunter beak than is usually made. It was brought down to show more clearly in the gloom of a smoky house. In this respect it may be compared with the upper figure No. 10 in Swanton, l.c. pl. 29. From

its mouth is hanging a frog, Hlkian-kostan, which is here only used as an ornamental appendage but considered appropriate on account of its association with the Eagle story of Djilaquons which is given in Swanton, l.c., pp. 91-98, also in Swanton, "Haida Texts and Myths", Bulletin No. 29, Bureau of American Ethnology, pp. 316-317, and by Professor Boas in "Indianische Sagen von der Nord-Pacifischen KustenAmerikas", pp. 310-314.

Between the Eagle and the Raven below it is introduced a crouching human figure. As can be explained by a series of other carvings of birds, this is only an ornamental extension of the "eye" joints so often seen. In this case the tail of the Eagle is turned upwards on the front of the body and part of it may be seen on each side of the human head. Photographs are enclosed to bring this point out more clearly. In No. 1 the design is that of a Raven and is carved on the front of a coffin. The head is central, the wings are shown on the sides with the claws turned outwards below them, and the up-turned tail has a human face upon it. In No. 2, the Eagle crest is shown on a large ceremonial "copper". Here the head has been split into two parts from the tip of the beak backwards and the two halves are turned outwards. The wings, as is usual, are shown on the sides of the copper, and the tail in this case is turned downwards. Above the feathers is a human head. The arms and claws do duty both for the bird and the man, being the hind limb of the former and the fore limb of the latter.

Photo No. 3 is an owl, painted on the flat surface of a box. The head occupies the upper half with the beak shown by the narrow central wedge below which is the apex of an angle formed by the top of the body. Between the out-turned wings is a space bounded by vertical lines. The lower part of the space has two "eyes" representing the articulation of the tail with the body, and below them is the tail itself, turned downwards. This is a simpler form of the idea shown on the pole. The specimens are all from my own collection and are now at the Museum of the Canadian Government at Ottawa.

Returning to the pole, the lowest figure, as before stated, is the Raven. Like the Eagle, it is in a sitting position with the wings on the sides. Here, however, the legs and feet are brought to the front of the body and the tail is not seen. The "eyes" on the wings of the two birds stand for the joint between the brachium and the antibrachium, and, so far as can be learned, have no other significance.

It is unfortunate that there is no picture extant showing the high outside pole in its entirety. Photograph No. 4 was taken in the year 1879 or thereabouts by the late Richard Maynard, the pioneer photographer of this border town. Most of the carving may be seen; the upper part, alone, being concealed by a burial post.

The top figure was Raven below which was a Whale, a crest sometimes used by the Gitins. This is the concealed figure. Next is seen the figure of a woman, holding in her hands a shaman's rattle, of a circular form and hung with puffin's beaks.[#] Her feet are on a small whale, the head of which

[#] See Joyce, Journ. Anthr. Inst., XXXIII, London, 1903, pp. 90-95. pl. XIX.

is hanging downwards. These two figures are used to fill up space and so make the pole look more important. This was frequently done in the case of such high poles where there were not enough actual crests available. Although entitled by descent to a greater number of crests than actually shown on a totem pole, the man who erected it could not assume them until such time as he had completed his title by the distribution of property and the erection of a memorial to his predecessor. In such an event then it became customary to illustrate some story and so to occupy with carvings more surface than could be filled with heraldic figures.

The story of these inserted figures is that long ago there lived a woman shaman at Kai, or Sea-lion Town, near Skidegate. One morning a whale stranded just opposite the town and all the people ran down to the beach and wanted to cut it up immediately. The woman however reached it first and began to sing and dance upon it shaking her rattle at the same time. A young man, who had wanted to be a shaman, then came up and slit her in two from the head downwards and tore her into small pieces with which he strewed the ground as one might with feathers. When the people saw him do this they were much afraid. Not long afterwards a large bird was seen circling round the place. It had red legs. They thought that it must have been the woman shaman.

Next below the shaman and the whale is a seated figure with long ears projecting upwards. This is an unusual form of the mythical Wolf, or Wasku, one of the principal crests of the Skidegates. The story associated with this is given at length by Dr. Swanton in "Haida Texts and Myths", p. 192, and only a slight variant was told to me.

All of the crests hitherto described belonged to the man who built the house, but the bottom figure was a Grizzly Bear and belonged to his wife. She was of the Naikun keowai, or "Those born at House Point" and belonged to the Raven clan.

The poles were made by the chief Edensaw so often mentioned by Drs. Boas and Swanton as an artist and as a narrator of the old stories. He is still living, although an old man now.

One of the most reliable Haida at Skidegate, Amos Russ by name, informed me that, originally, the central part of the village where the poles under discussion stood was occupied by the Yaku haedagai, and that the chiefs of this family of the Eagles or Gitins were alone entitled to use such an inside house pole as that now at the Museum at Bremen. The Yaku gitinai migrated to the west coast of the island after one of them had shot a Skidegate chief. They were not entitled to use the Dog-fish crest and this is probably the reason why it does not appear on the two poles, although it is such a conspicuous feature on nearly all of the columns erected by other chiefs Skidegate belonging to the direct line of descent in the Gitins or Eagles of Skidegate. (See Swanton, "Haida", p. 374. Idem, p. 23, pl. I, fig. 3.) The figure last referred to seems to be intended for a model of the large house pole above described. Very frequently in making such models the artist will rearrange the order of the crests and will even /leave/ some out, and will add or omit details according to his own fancy. It is extremely rare to see a model that has any pretensions to being an

accurate copy of the original.

An explanation of the two burial posts in photograph No. 4 may be of interest. The nearer one with the two-finned killer whale was erected for the remains of Kamodi, the wife of Chief Skidegate. She was the last of the Koa ganas or Sea Otter family of the Raven division, and the pole shows her two crests, the Tsumos or animated floating log, and the Killer Whale.

The second burial post was for the body of a Skidegate's wife also. She belonged to the Naikun kegawai, or "Those born at House Point", of the Raven division, and her crests shown are the following. On the cross board is the head of a Grizzly Bear; at the top of the pole is a Killer Whale holding a seal in its mouth. Below its head is a supernatural being and then, in the centre, comes the upturned tail of the Killer Whale. Its fins are seen on each side below the angle of the mouth. The lowest figure is the Grizzly Bear, devouring a boy, as often represented in carvings of this sort.

Just at the edge of the picture is a high memorial pole. This was erected by my informant himself about thirty years ago, to the memory of his first wife. She belonged to the Na yuans branch of the Gitins or Eagles of Skidegate, and her crests, as shown, are the Dog-fish above, with a projecting dorsal fin in front and its long body rising into the air, with the mythical Hawk, Skiamsm, next to the ground. The latter has a large beak, with the point brought back close to the mouth as is illustrated by Swanton on the house pole at the Provincial Museum at Victoria (Swanton, "Haida", p. 129, fig. 9).

(Written at Victoria 29 August 1907)

Note on back of master photograph:

Sent to Bremen 1907 by C.F.N. Formerly stood inside Chief Skidegate's House at Skidegate Q.C.I. which is shown in Maynard's photog. (circa 1883) to W or inside of Eldjuin's (this spelling in question) house.

Crests, Eagle above, with flattened beak to show better in gloom of house. Raven below.

Bought from Tom Stevens who inherited through his mother of the Naikun Keowai and therefore of the opposite clan.

Original Photograph sent from Bremen together with a smaller one. Retouched by C.F.N. and rephotographed forming $\frac{1}{2}$ pl. Neg. No. E C 355

Note in Photo Catalogue:

Haida. Skidegate's Inside Pole at Bremen. October 1907.

Bremen Pole

Note on back of master photograph:

Sent to Bremen 1907 by C.F.N. Formerly stood inside Chief Skidgate's House at Skidgate Q.C.I. which is shown in Maynard's photog. (circa 1883) to W or inside of Bidjain's (this spelling in question) house.

Crests, Eagle above, with flattened beak to show better in bloom of house. Raven below.

Bought from Tom Stevens who inherited through his mother of the Waiyau Keowai and therefore of the opposite clan.

Original photograph sent from Bremen together with a smaller one. Retouched by C.F.N. and rephotographed forming 1/2 pl. Neg. No. E C 355

October 1907. at Bremen.

Skidgate's Inside Pole

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