

Comments on Kaufmann ms. Argillite chronology and Illustrations

One of her main claims is that she "establishes a chronology for Haida art for a century (1820-1920)". This would be a very significant contribution. However she does not give the reader any opportunity to test the way in which she established the chronology, and she does not explain why she attributes individual pieces (non-slate as well as slate) to a given decade. Some readers will be able to check back to her PhD dissertation, but even there she does not give full supporting data.

1. She should give the basic museum catalog data on each piece used. All she gives in the present manuscript is the museum number and her assigned decade designation (which the reader has no way of checking).
2. She should also explain in each case why she places pieces in a given decade. In only a small proportion of the cases is there firm museum documentation for the earlier pieces. In many cases there is no documentation at all, yet Carole has assigned the pieces to given decades, with no explanation why.
3. She has stretched her sequence by a decade to make a round century. Her thesis, which uses mainly the same pieces, uses the 1900-1910 decade as its termination.
4. Specific questions:
 - a. Photographs 1, 2, 3, 14 and 15 are of pieces in other media than argillite, and she has assigned them to early decades without giving reasons. I am sure that in most cases at least the museum documentation does not support such datings. How does she know?
 - b. Photograph 17, a wooden mask, she attributes to 1850. I am quite sure it is one of a series which came out of Masset about 1888-1890, and is not as old as 1850.
 - c. Nos. 5, 10, 11, and 12 were all collected together in 1841 by the Wilkes expedition. She assigns one to 1810-20, two to 1830, and one to 1840. Why?
 - d. Why is No. 4 assigned to 1810-20, when the museum records show that it was collected about 1890? If she is assigning it to the early decade on stylistic grounds she should say so.
5. Since she doesn't give the basic data, and doesn't explain her methods of assigning ages, and since I find some questionable assignments and errors, I cannot be confident of her conclusions:
 - that she can apply the chronology to other art objects
 - that 1810-20 was a "Haida" decade.
6. The other part of her contribution, the componential analysis of the art through time, depends on the accuracy of this chronology. I think the chronology is broadly speaking correct, but there is enough doubt about the details of it that it casts doubt on the entire study.