The Marpole-late transition in the Gulf of Georgia region

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Introduction

A few years ago, one of my fellow graduate students asked me why I was interested in the Late period of the Gulf of Georgia region. He claimed that anything we might want to know about this period could be better obtained from the ethnographies, and that archaeology is best suited to describing earlier material and explaining the origins of the ethnographic Northwest Coast pattern. This comment bothered me for some time. About a year later, when working on a study of Halq'eméylem place names, my Native colleague asked me why archaeologists were always interested in "the oldest sites", "the most elaborate artifacts" and "the origins of things". He told me that what he often wondered about was the differences between the culture his grandparents told him about and that of his ancestors found in archaeological sites. He gave the example of the burial mounds at the Scowlitz site, which is at the confluence of the Harrison and Fraser Rivers. His grandparents always talked about their burials being in trees, often with an entire family buried in a single elaborate tomb or burial house. At Scowlitz, only 1,200 years earlier, the remains were buried singly, in large burial mounds and in smaller rock cairns (Thom 1995). Although there is enough continuity in both oral tradition and the archaeological record to say that the site contains the ancestors of my colleague, their lifestyles differed in significant ways from that of my colleague's grandparents. Like some Northwest Coast scholars have said before, it is clear that we needed to ask new questions about the nature of culture and cultural change in the periods immediately preceding contact (Ames 1991; Moss and Erlandson 1995).

While working on my MA thesis, I became further vexed with the problem of explaining cultural changes in the past 2,000 years. In reviewing the literature for this time period, I found that most scholars agree that the Developed Northwest Coast pattern had emerged by at least 2,000 years ago (Matson and Coupland 1994; Ames 1994). However, explanations for culture change since then seemed to me to be very unsatisfying. These explanations have included ideas such as a possible migration of people from the southern Interior (Borden 1970:109; Carlson 1970:122); technological adaption to changes in environment (Carlson 1970:122); and the idea of a gradually increasing adaptation of technology for exploiting resources (Carlson 1970:122; Matson and Coupland 1994:218). There seemed to be very little effort in the literature to explain the social, political, economic and cultural changes which occurred in the most recent 2,000 years of history in this region.

Early intensification of the social networks that are documented ethnographically in Central Coast Salish society (Suttles 1960; Amoss 1978) provide an interesting angle from which to understand these Late period cultural changes. Intensification of social networking in a society may have resulted in a shift in how the social elite in Central Coast Salish society maintain this high standing. Such intensification would likely make changes in the archaeological record, particularly in the technology and organization of resource procurement and in the symbols used to define and maintain high social status. In order to make a preliminary evaluation of this model for social change, I review existing archaeological evidence for settlement patterns, artifact assemblages as well as subsistence and burial practices. I will conclude with some suggestions for future directions in research.

Social Networks - Ethnographic Perspectives

Social networks are the spheres of interaction that people have with each other. Individuals participate actively in social networks by having social, economic, and ritual relations with others. In contemporary western society these social networks commonly include the relatives a person chooses to see; friends from school, church, sports or other social activities; business or work colleagues. In smaller scale societies, such as the Central Coast Salish, social networks are often more tightly defined. Relatives through birth and marriage are often the people with whom a person interacts in social, ceremonial, and economic contexts. Having detailed knowledge of who your near and distant relatives are is important for defining and maintaining this social network. Elites in any society can use their social network as a strategy to become more successful over-all. Knowing who to interact with and how to behave is important for gaining the ties that can increase one's status and prestige. In a society where status competition between individuals is great, negotiating one's social network can make a difference between being successful and not succesful.

In a small-scale society increased so-

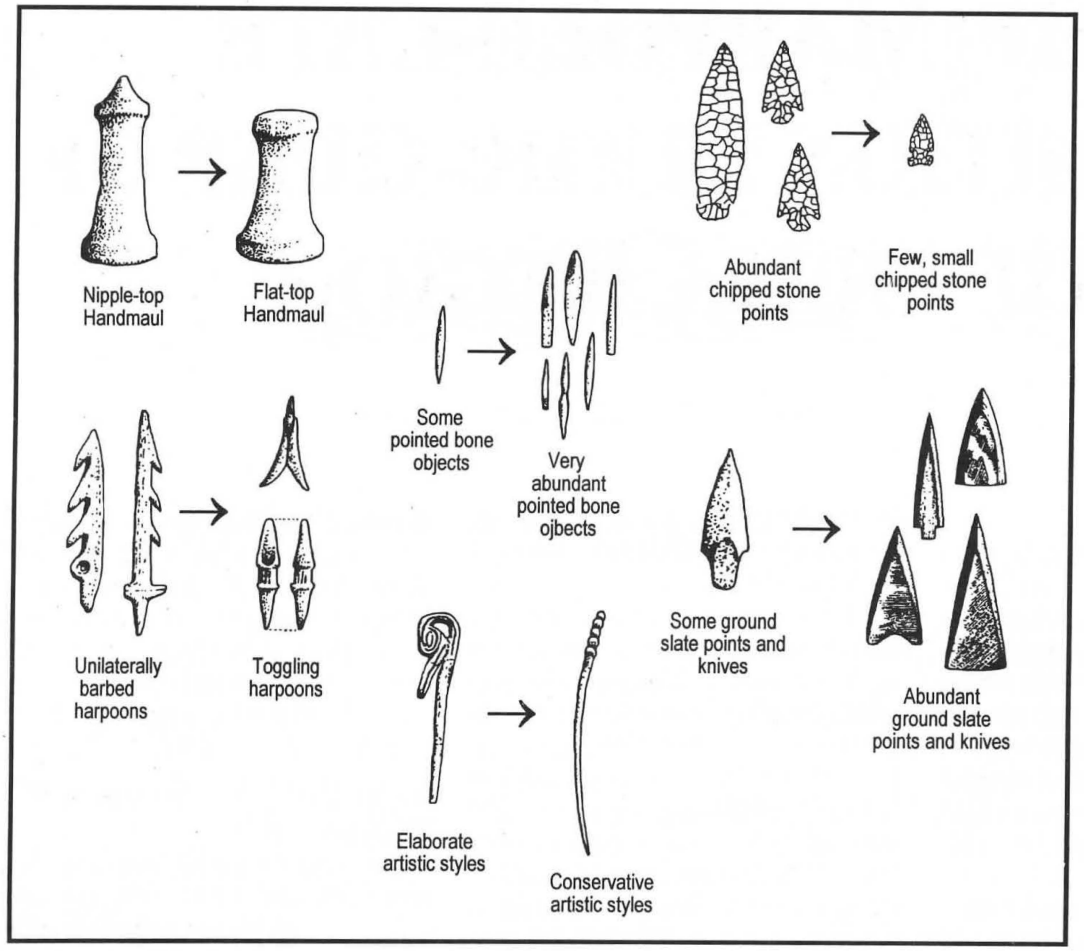


Figure 1. *General changes in artifact assemblages from Marpole to Late Periods (drawings borrowed from Mitchell, Don (1990) Prehistory of the Coasts of southern British Columbia and Northern Washington, in* Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 7, Northwest Coast, *edited by Wayne Suttles. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC. Pp. 345, 347.)*

cial networking between elites changes the means of production from individual, or nuclear family-based resource extraction, to one where the extended-family is relied on for much of the resource extraction and exchange. Successful people become more specialized in the social or economic resources that they extract or produce, so they may be able to exchange these for the specialized resources produced by others. As people become able to extend their social networks over a broader area, they gain access to a wide range of resources that would not normally be locally available. Bringing these back to the communities from which they came, and sharing with other community members would increase their status and prestige. In addition, as social networking becomes a more important means of elite competition, tight high-status family networks are created. The symbols used to define these new bonds of high-status families would likely change, as the old symbols would hold less meaning, or might even undermine the new social networks that are created.

In the ethnographically documented Central Coast Salish society, social networks were formed between elite families who would inter-married with each other. It was important for a successful person to marry into the right family because kin-groups held the rights to productive resources, names and ritual activities. Not all kin-groups had equal access to these important resources. Lower-class families could claim no inherited rights and privileges, and because they did not often receive important knowledge of kin relations, they had little opportunity to become upwardly mobile (Suttles 1960). High-class families had inherited rights to productive resources, which would be publicly validated through public feasts where wealth was distributed to other elites, extended family members and followers. Less public exchanges between members of the extended family would occur when co-parents-in-law visited each other to share surplus food. Diverse resources could be obtained by knowing who your family was and what resources they had access to exchange with you. These bonds were frequently symbolized in the mortuary ritual and artistic expression that high-class people had access to.

The Gulf of Georgia Region in the Marpole/Late Transition

The Gulf of Georgia region is possibly the best documented archaeological region in the Northwest Coast (Ames 1994; Matson and Coupland 1994; Mitchell 1990; Moss and Erlandson 1995). This area is geographically defined by the lower Fraser River, Straight of Georgia and Northern Puget Sound, and southeastern Vancouver Island. The Native people who live in this area are commonly referred to by ethnographers as the Central Coast Salish, and are made of up of speakers of the Halkomelem, Northern Straits Salish, Clallam, Squamish, and Sechelt languages (Suttles 1990).

Local culture historical sequences have

been defined extending back approximately 10,000 years. The period beginning about 2,500 years ago and ending sometime around 1,500 years ago is commonly known as the Marpole period. From about 1,500 years ago to the time of contact is the period called the Late period. This cultural sequence has been defined primarily by the types of artifacts that are found at sites from these time periods.

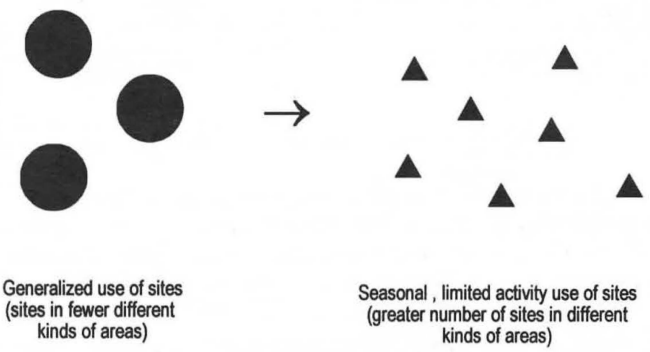
Typical Marpole assemblages include technologies of ground-slate knives and points, chipped stone points, celts and hand mauls, perforated stones, distinctive unilaterally barbed antler points, large bone needles, elaborate stone and antler sculptures, native copper ornaments, very elaborate burials, and cranial deformation for some individuals (Matson and Coupland 1994:201-203; 208-210).

The end of the Marpole period has been difficult to define precisely on the basis of artifact assemblages alone. Terminal dates for Marpole deposits range from 1,500 to 1,000 BP (Matson and Coupland 1994:203). Matson and Coupland have suggested that this difficulty is, in part, because late Marpole period deposits tend to be very similar to Late period deposits in their relative abundance of bone and antler tools and the absence of chipped stone.

However, the archaeological deposits *do* change after about 1,500 BP (see Figure 1). Assemblages from the Late period include a predominance of bone and antler points and bi-points, composite toggling harpoon valves, flat-topped mauls, continued use of pecked and ground stone objects, very few below-ground burials, and trench embankments (Matson and Coupland 1994:268, 270). Chipped stone tools are almost completely absent, with the exception of small bifacially flaked "arrow points".

Roy Carlson has recently summarized the characteristics of the Marpole and Late periods as being very similar, with "little evidence for changes other than in style" between them (Carlson 1995:224). The changes in style which occur include differences in burial practices (Carlson 1995:224; Ames 1994:224; Burley and Knüsel 1989; Cybulski 1994; Thom 1995); some stylistic changes in the ornamentation of objects (Ames 1991:940; Mitchell 1990:348); and in flaked stone, ground stone points, barbed bone points, and hand mauls (Burley 1989:41; Mitchell 1990:347). Other changes which occur between Marpole and Late include a marked increase in bone, antler and ground stone objects, and a major decrease in abundance of chipped stone objects (Ames 1991:942; Burley 1989:41; Matson and Coupland 1994:218). There is also some evidence to suggest that there was an increase in the number of limited activity sites around 1,500 BP (Matson and Coupland 1994:271; Ames 1994:219; Thompson 1978:68). Most authors agree that by at least 2,000 BP, a complex hunter-gatherer-fisher society existed in this region of the Northwest Coast, pointing to the presence of slavery, warfare, wealth, the potlatch, production of craft and food supplies (Carlson 1995:224).

Figure 2. Changes in settlement pattern from Marpole to Late periods.



So if all the attributes of Northwest Coast cultures existed by 2,000 BP, then what could the changes occuring in the archaeological record indicate? Changes in settlement pattern and resource use; symbolism in burial practice and art; and an increase in violence are all significant indicators of cultural change.

Changes in the settlement pattern and resource use from the Marpole to the Late period may be seen from a number of different lines of evidence. In an early study of changes in settlement patterns in the Gulf of Georgia and Puget Sound areas, Gail Thompson noted that sites occurred in a greater number of different kinds of areas in the Late period than they did in the Marpole period (Thompson 1978:121-123). She interpreted this as reflecting a shift from more generalized use of sites to sites being used on a more seasonally specific, limited activity basis (see Figure 2). This has tended to be supported by the evidence over the past 20 years where Late period sites excavated are nearly always of a seasonal nature, where the kinds of resources exploited were expanded by utilizing a number of different kinds of sites in a wide range of areas (Ames 1994:219; Kornbacher 1989; Hanson 1991; Monks 1987; Thom 1992; Matson and Coupland 1994:271).

This shift in the intensified use of a wide range of resources from very particular locations corresponds with the shift in tool types. Stylistic changes in ground stone points, barbed bone points and vastly increased numbers of bone and antler composite tools likely corresponds with this intensification of resource use from different environments. Although further functional studies should be done, Ames (1991:942) has suggested that these were used in compound tools which were needed to efficiently obtain a wider range of resources. Finally an extensive examination of faunal remains from the Late period has been conducted by Hanson (1991; 1995). Her faunal evidence supports the previous observations that there was a wide range of resources obtained from limited activity sites during the Late period. Although no comparisons to the Marpole period faunal assemblage were made, she was clear that this was a different pattern from that known from the 19th century ethnographic record, where salmon tends to be emphasized as the most important resource (Hanson 1991).

These changes in settlement pattern, tool types and intensification of use of resources may be seen as an increase in the importance of social networks. People with access to abundant, specialized foods

from specific family owned sites would be able to take their surpluses to other people in their social network in exchange for food, wealth or future obligations in ritual or economy. These exchanges, which are well documented by Suttles for the Central Coast Salish (Suttles 1960), emphasize the importance of food for the creation of wealth and prestige. As members of extended families became increasingly involved in these exchanges, their social networks would become more and more important. High ranking individuals would now rely more and more on their extended families to provide food or wealth in exchange for the surpluses they could themselves organize. As their desire to increase their status grew, their social networks would become wider.

The symbolism used in burial practices and in artistic expressions also changed between the Marpole and Late periods. During the Marpole and preceding periods, simple midden burial was in general the primary form of interment, with the deceased usually being flexed and placed in shallow pits dug into midden (Burley and Knüsel 1989). Evidence from the Pender Canal site (Carlson and Hobler 1993) and the False Narrows site (Burley 1989), among others, show that occasionally some of the graves of men, women and children had very elaborate grave goods associated with them. Between about 1,500 and 1,000 years ago, some individuals were buried in elaborate mounds and cairns at certain sites in the Gulf of Georgia region (Thom 1995). Like the midden burials, these graves usually contained single individuals but were buried beneath very elaborate piles of stone and earth. Men, women and children were buried in mounds and cairns, and in many cases the burials contained grave goods. Around 1,000 years ago, the practice of below-ground burials virtually disappears. Mortuary ritual shifts to one where family members placed in a box, canoe or house and left above-ground, behind the village (Suttles 1990:465). While some families had very simple boxes, others had very elaborate carvings on or beside the container for the dead. (See Figure 3)

Such a radical change in mortuary ritual likely indicates that authority elites had to perpetuate their social status. In the Gulf of Georgia region around 1,000 BP, as more and more people competed for high social rank, the display of prestigious symbols in funerary ritual became more widespread. Elaborate, permanent and visible burial markers such as cairns and mounds were initially important to promote visible kind connections to resource rights. As these rights became more exclusive, particularly through inter-marriage of elites, the symbols used to express kin connections and social status would be changed. When elaborate mortuary rituals were changed from mounds and cairns to above-ground graves, only those people with the ability (for instance) to hire artisans to produce new symbols to connect people to the spirit world, were able to make high status claims. Those families who did not have access to wealth were not able to create these kinds of symbols and had to use a lower-class grave marker. This is in contrast to the large groups of followers and supporters which would have been required to construct elaborate burial mounds and cairns. Restricted private knowledge of carving may not have been necessary to create these mounds and cairns, while demonstrated leadership ability needed to get people to create such large monuments, would have been.

It is interesting to note that hand mauls also change style at this same time, from ones which have nipple tops and other more complex designs to a simple flat-topped maul (Mitchell 1990:347). Artistic designs on objects tend to be more geometric than representational during the Late period (Ames 1991:940; Borden 1983:160-163; Mitchell 1990:348). These other changes in style of objects - which are less related to function and more related to the symbolism presented - may again indicate a conscious effort of elites to control which symbols reinforce the status of their users (see Figure 1).

The final significant change which occurred between the Marpole and Late periods was the dramatic increase in number of trench embankments which are used for village defense (Moss and Erlandson 1992:86; Ames 1994:223; Mitchell 1990:348), and deaths due to violence (Cybulski 1994:83) in the Gulf of Georgia region around 1,200 BP. In the Gulf of Georgia region, Charlton (1980:56) has suggested that the bow and arrow were introduced to the area from the southern Interior between 1,900 and 1,600 BP. The increase in trench embankments and violent deaths indicate a level of inter-community raiding unsurpassed in previous periods. Slave raiding may have been key in the formation of social classes, providing the extra labor needed to maintain high status. Leaders in raiding would also increase their social networks through the following of people needed to do successful raids. Leading a successful retaliatory raid against an offending village will also create social obligations of the offended party to the war leader, again increasing the importance of the social network a person has.

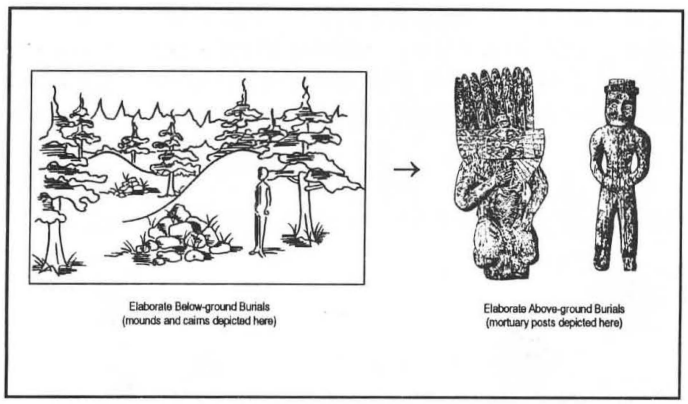


***Figure 3**. Changes in mortuary ritual from Marpole to Late Periods (sketch of burial mounds by K. Allen; drawings of mortuary posts borrowed from Teit, James (1906)* The Lillooet Indians. *American Museum of Natural History, NY.)*

Conclusions

Changes in settlement patterns, tool assemblages, subsistence techniques, burial practices and increased violence all occurred between the Marpole and Late periods, with little previous effort to explain why such changes occurred. Thinking of these changes as the consequence of intensified social networking during the Marpole period provides a way to think about the reasons for such change. The inter-marrying of elites from different fami-

lies created a network of high-status people. People began to intensify their procurement and production of resources from seasonally occupied limited activity sites. These resources could be used as gifts and exchanges with other members of a person's social network. Given that access to key productive resource areas were limited to certain families, people outside the extended family network of the elites had little opportunity to produce surplus food. This circumscription of the ability of non-elites to work hard and produce surplus goods played a key role in the creation of the ethnographically documented Central Coast Salish social classes. Symbols used in mortuary ritual, and the production of visible art changed to reinforce these new class ties.

A great deal more development is needed in both the development of theory and the application of data to the model presented. Further research should investigate more closely the timing of the cultural changes between the Marpole and Late periods. More subsistence studies need to be conducted, particularly on fall, summer and winter village sites. Material recovered from wet sites may reveal more of the changes in symbols used between the Marpole and Late periods. The Marpole-Late transition in the Gulf of Georgia area presents an interesting problem in interpretation for archaeologists. It also provides an opportunity for Native people to look at the historical changes between their culture and that of their ancient ancestors.

Brian Thom has done archaeology and ethnographic research in Coast Salish communities. He is currently a PhD student in cultural anthropology at McGill University, where he is examining the interplay between indigenous knowledge of the land and aboriginal rights.

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