a portion of walrus tusk cut in preparation for being made into a charm, and two bone bracelets. In the 1880s visitors described an old decaying grave house outside Klukwan that held the supernaturally powerful remains of a deceased Chilkat shaman. Standing near the house were several old wooden carvings that served as grave guardians, responsible for protecting the shaman's remains and his regalia from evil forces.

Although not a shamanic object, the halibut hook often was decorated with shamanic images such as land otters, octopus, or bound witches. These hooks were used by fishermen to catch large halibut. Their quality varied considerably, suggesting that they were carved by their owners, some talented artists, others not. Halibut hooks were designed so that the image, meant to magically attract the bottom-dwelling fish, faced down when the hook was suspended in the water.

THE TSIMSHIAN

THE TSIMSHIAN of northern British Columbia divide into four linguistic groups: the Nisga'a on the Nass River, the Gitksan on the upper Skeena River, the Coast Tsimshian on the lower Skeena and adjacent coast, and the Southern Tsimshian on coast and islands to the south of the Skeena. In precontact times the Tsimshian appear to have had a matrilineal moiety social structure similar to that of the Tlingit, but as a result of nineteenth-century community reconfigurations and movements a modified structure of four exogamous clans called phratries developed among some groups. Their highly complex system of crests includes hundreds of crests. As is the case with the Tlingit, each crest represents a being encountered in the past by an ancestor and inherited by the clan through matrilineal descent. The major crests, Orca, Raven, Eagle, Grizzly, Bear, Beaver, Frog, and Wolf, along with lesser crests, appear on portable and architectural art. In historic times the Tsimshian had four "classes": "real people" who outranked everyone else, "other people" with names of lesser rank, "unhealed people" without names in the potlatch system, and slaves. "Real people" had several responsibilities intimately associated with their position, including giving great feasts and distributing property, as well as hosting more spiritually oriented activities such as dances dramatizing ancestral powers and displays of supernatural abilities.

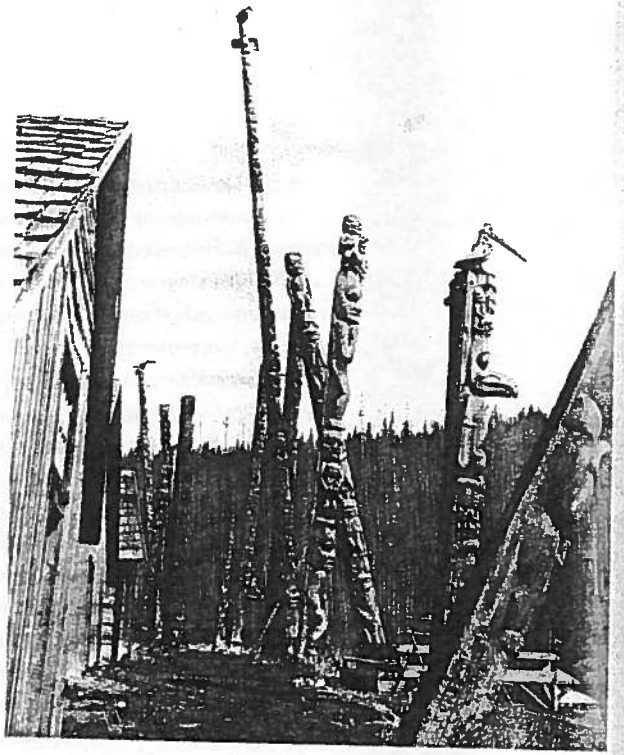
Potlatches celebrated the completion of a house, investitures of new leaders, memorials for deceased chiefs, and pole raisings (fig. 5.11). The most important of these was the final mourning feast, during which a successor to a deceased chief assumed his new position. At great potlatches, treasured regalia were proudly displayed, with boxes, headdresses, garments, masks, and cedar-bark rings symbolizing a clan's history, power, and importance.

Lax Kw'alaams (Fort Simpson)

In 1834, the Hudson's Bay Company founded Fort Simpson at the mouth of the Skeena River, at a site that had for years been a temporary eulachon-fishing camp called Lax Kw'alaams. As in other places, this trading fort became a magnet for Native people. Attracted to the fort's trading opportunities, nine groups of Tsimshian abandoned their winter villages on Metlakatla Pass and moved to Fort Simpson, which is now called Lax Kw'alaams. By the 1850s, this large permanent village had 140 houses and a population of approximately 2,300. In 1867, E. A. Porcher, commander of the British ship *Sparrowhawk*, visited Lax Kw'alaams, which he described as "the largest and best [village] I had as yet seen, the houses being better decorated and painted," with "doorways and pillars ... most elaborately carved with a great variety of the representations of animals ... of most artistic finish."[1]

The movement of several tribes into an amalgamated community such as Lax Kw'alaams created problems of social ranking. In their original communities, the relative status of individuals and families had been determined over the years, resulting in relatively stable hierarchies. However, in this new village no one knew for certain which chiefs outranked others. Because they were an essential means of working out these rankings, potlatches, which had previously been relatively low-key affairs, became intensely competitive and often outright hostile. As always, wealth formed the basis of hierarchy. At Lax Kw'alaams, certain families established monopolies over trade with interior people who trapped the furs, and as a result became fantastically wealthy. For

Aldona Jonaitis



5.11 Gitksan. Gitanyow (Kitwancool) totem poles, 1910.

University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, NA3475. Photo: G. Emmons.

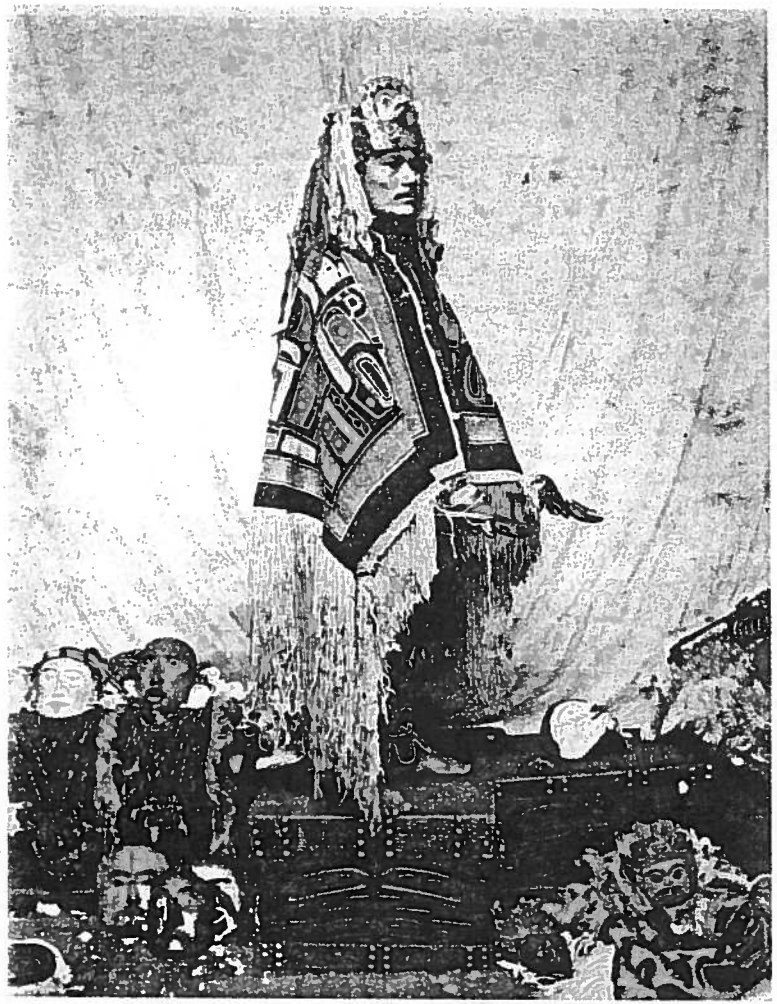
Gitanyow was one of the most conservative Gitksan groups and had an impressive array of totem poles. Because the village pictured here was in the interior, the poles were lined up not on a beach by the sea, but instead along the Skeena River. Tsimshian poles tend to be relatively deeply carved (in comparison with those of the Haida, see figure 5.20), with the individual beings separate from one another, and no elements of one body interacting with those of another body situated above and below. Sometimes the Tsimshian added projections such as bird beaks that extended beyond the cylindrical form of the log.

example, the family whose leaders were each named Legiac controlled access to the Gitksan, whom they prevented from traveling downriver to barter their furs. The man bearing the Legiac name in the 1830s engaged in a traditional practice to establish trading alliances by giving his daughter in marriage to Dr. John Kennedy, a high-ranking Fort Simpson official. For centuries, families had married their daughters to prospective trading partners, and now Legiac was doing the same with new partners. The individuals were different, but the rules of the game were the same. According to Porcher, the tallest totem pole in Fort Simpson belonged to Legiac.

Because everyone approached the village by water, all could see the totem poles and painted house facades that lined up along the shore and vividly declared a family's eminent history and rank. Both types of monumental art became increasingly impressive as families vied with each other for supremacy. Totem poles, which had originated as statements of clan history, became ostentatious declarations of a family's importance, as did the painted house fronts that some communities held in even greater esteem than totem poles. The house front shown in figure 1.4 shows elements characteristic of Tsimshian house-facade decoration—small figures along the roof line, and a wealth of additional imagery within the main figure's eyes, mouth, wings, and ears. See also figure C (in introduction), a contemporary replica of another Lax Kw'alaams house facade.

Spiritual Responsibilities of the "Real People"

"Real people" were ceremonial leaders, responsible for treating spirits and animals properly, ensuring stability during rituals, births, and deaths, and for initiating young people into ritual positions. When they assumed their roles as "real dancers," a term that connotes the extraordinary and phantasmal, chiefs wore carved frontlets and Chilkat robes and shook raven rattles; in this context, all of these items were signifiers of rank (fig. 5.12). The frontlet headdress, believed to have been invented around the Nass River, consists of a relief carving—often quite deep—of an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic face attached to an armature that fits on the head. Surrounding the face are sometimes rows of diminutive faces, a common



5.12 Chief James Skean of Gitlaxt'damiks, Nisga'a, c. 1903.

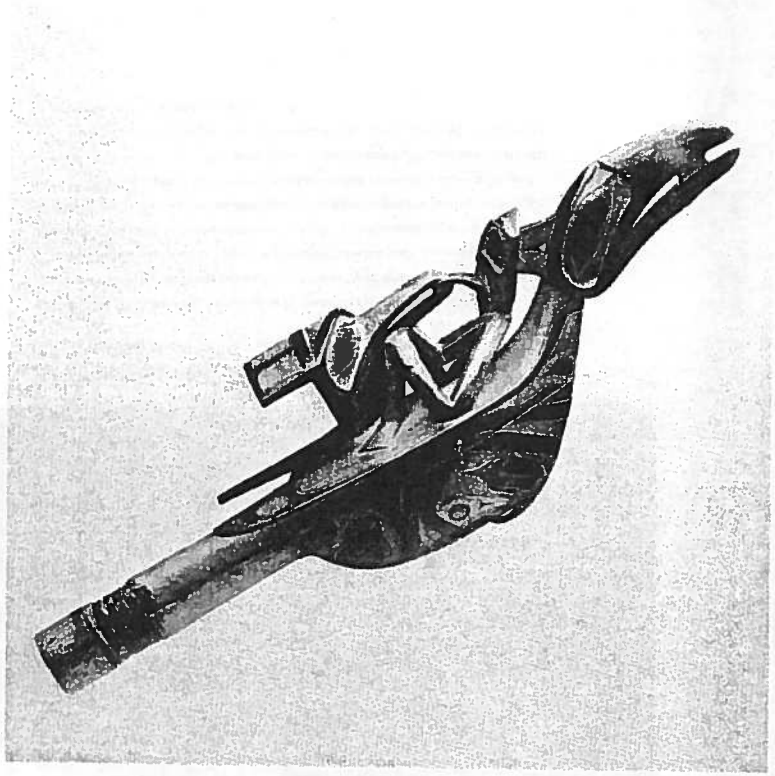
Royal British Columbia Museum, PN4329. Photo: C. H. Orme.

This chief poses on a box surrounded by his clan's ceremonial regalia and masks. He holds two raven rattles, as is conventional, upside down, so that the ravens would not fly away. His carved frontlet, which depicts his crest animal, is surmounted by a crown of sea-lion whiskers and has attached to it a train of ermine pelts. This type of headdress is said to have originated among the Nisga'a, from whom it spread north to the Tlingit and south to the Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw. The Chilkat robe that he wears presents his crest being's frontal face on his back, and its profiles over both his sides. Thus, the chief is wrapped in his crest—even merged into one with it.

feature of Tsimshian art. References to wealth include squares of abalone attached to the carving, sea-lion whiskers that project from the headdress's top, and ermine pelts that cascade down the back.

The Tsimshian are said to have invented the raven rattle (fig. 5.13), which by the nineteenth century had a wide distribution and was used among the Haida, the Tlingit, and the Tsimshian, with versions appearing as far south as the Nuu-chah-nulth. Although its precise symbolism has been lost, according to one theory the bird represents Raven, who stole the sun from his grandfather. The elder had hidden the sun in a box, denying humans the warmth and light necessary for survival. Through clever deception, Raven convinced his grandfather to let him look inside the box, upon which he seized the sun in his beak and flew away. Images that appear on the bird's back vary, but often a human being reclines on its back, connected by tongue to another bird, probably the kingfisher, whose head feathers form the raven's tail feathers. This connection might represent the transference of spiritual power and knowledge to humans. Dancers hold the rattle face-side down when they perform, as shown in the illustration.

In their winter villages, chiefs and their attendants manifested important power with various items besides crests. This power was principally held and transmitted by specific beings with whom chiefs enjoyed special bonds called *naxnox*, which translates as "power beyond the human." At events that only *naxnox*-name holders could attend, performers wearing masks and costumes dramatized the stories of these beings. Some *naxnox* masks represented animals, celestial beings, human shortcomings (such as stupidity, pride, or arrogance), classes of people including foreigners, rival groups, elders, youths, males, and females. Sometimes these performances mocked individuals, as with one mask that represented a specific local white man—a minister known for his alcohol consumption. The performer wearing this mask appeared in a suit and carried a bible, and during the performance took a bottle from his pocket and proceeded to become fall-down drunk. A pair of nested masks made of stone (fig. 5.14) perhaps represent another of the *naxnox* abilities, which is to transform from blind to sighted. The outer mask has no eye holes, and thus represents blindness, while the inner one has openings that allow for sight.

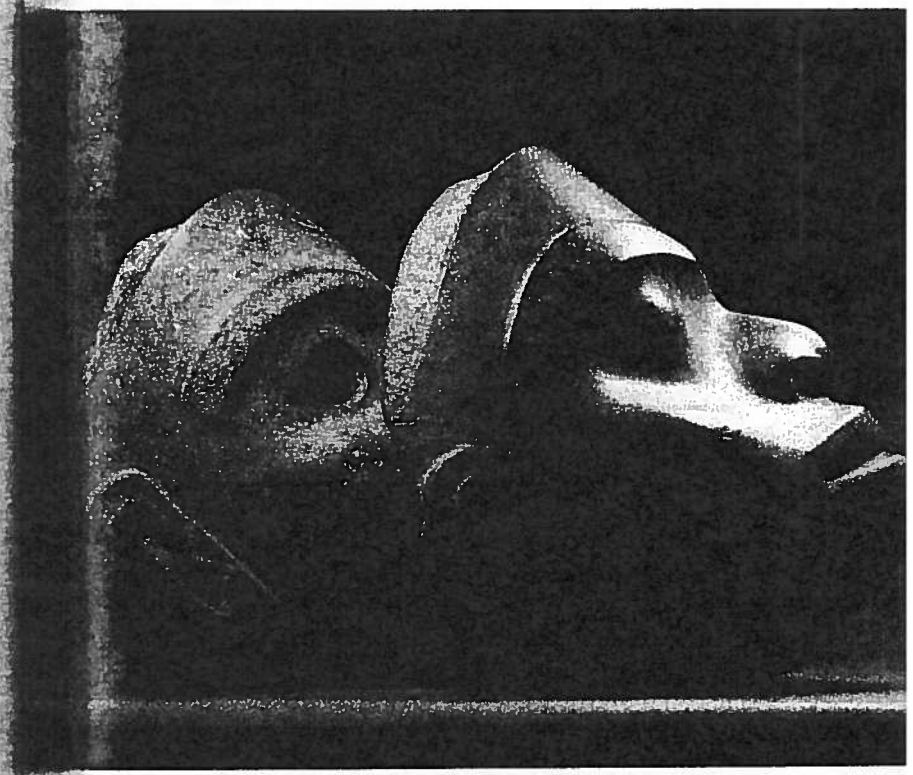


5.13 Coast Tsimshian. Raven rattle, c. 1840–60

Maple, leather, sinew, pigment. 4 x 4 x 13 in.

Thaw Collection, Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, NY, T174.

Museum collections abound with raven rattles made by groups from the Kwakwaka'wakw to the Tlingit, but the distinctive form originated among the northern Northwest Coast peoples, probably the Tsimshian. Numerous interpretations have been made for the interconnecting figures on these instruments, including a shamanic origin. For example, Tlingit shamans receive spirit power from the tongues of their animal helpers, and this rattle could depict spirit power transferring from one being to another through the tongue. Another interpretation is that the rattle depicts Raven, who obtained the sun, moon, and stars from the Raven-at-the-head-of-the-Nass, whose face with a beak curving into his mouth appears on the Raven's breast. Intriguing as such readings may be, there is no certain indication of the original meaning of the raven rattle.



5.14 Tsimshian. Stone masks, 19th century.

Stone and pigment. 8.9 x 9.5 x 7 in.

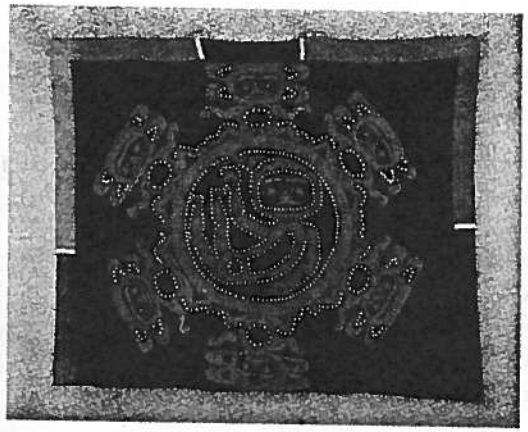
Courtesy UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, Canada, VII-C-329, and Musee de l'homme.

Until 1975, these two masks, located in different museums an ocean apart, had not been together since being collected, their actual connection was not entirely clear. But when they were brought to Victoria for the exhibit *Images Stone B.C.*, the exhibit's curator, Wilson Duff, was thrilled to discover that the two fit together snugly, indicating that they were meant to be used as a pair.

Anthropologist Franz Boas described Henry Tate's account of a particularly dramatic *naxnox* presentation, quoting directly some of the Tsimshian's words, which he felt were "not clear":

> When Legel-gulagum lax-ha [Crack of Heaven] is called, the curtain is withdrawn, the song-leader begins the song, and the chief appears wearing the mask. He goes around the fire four times, and then stops at the same place where he came out. Suddenly the face of the mask parts, and each side of the face hangs down; only the middle part of the face remains in position. Then the face closes up again. This is repeated four times. The fourth time the mask opens, "it makes the large house crack. One side of the large house moves backward from the other. It goes with the half of the large fire, and the whole congregation is still sitting on both sides. The roof is asunder, and the large beams go backward. This is the great wonderful enchantment among these chiefs in the Tsimshian nation. It is not often shown, only in the house of the great chief Legeox (Ligeex)." When the mask closes the last time, the house comes together again slowly.[2]

Although one would assume this description to be purely fantastical, it may not be far from the truth, for sleight-of-hand tricks were often features of *naxnox* masquerades. Thus, a Tsimshian version of smoke and mirrors may have created the illusion that the house did indeed split apart during this performance, or special rigging caused it to move. Creators of such dramatic theatrical legerdemain, a group of song composers, carvers, and impresarios called *gitsontk* ("people secluded"), spent much of their time in secret designing these manifestations of special powers. The most gifted *gitsontk* became celebrated, and chiefs from other villages sought them out to create especially illusionistic presentations. Tsimshian chiefs were often significantly indebted to these men, who could, through elaborate mechanical devices, make an audience believe someone really did have extraordinary magical powers. If the devices failed, however, the *gitsontk* might be executed.



5.15 Button robe belonging to Chief Minisqu' of Gitlaxt'damiks, Nisga'a.
Wool, mother-of-pearl buttons.
With Permission of the Royal Ontario Museum © ROM, 929.21.54.

Once women obtained trade buttons and woolen blankets, they started crafting button robes that became very popular throughout the coast. They would cut designs from colored wool and applique them onto wool of a contrasting color, then use buttons to outline various elements of the images. Such robes became colorful indicators of clan affiliation and history, and were worn at various occasions. Today, button blankets appear at numerous Northwest Coast Native events including potlatches, official events, and cultural celebrations.

Textiles

Prior to contact, people had worn garments of woven cedar bark, sometimes in combination with mountain goat or dog wool, furs, and skins. As was mentioned above (pp. 138–39), the Tsimshian were reputed to have invented the Chilkat robe, which by the late nineteenth century was being made almost exclusively by northern Tlingit women. Another type of textile that became increasingly popular throughout the coast during the nineteenth century was the button blanket, crafted from woolen trade blankets, often blue, and decorated with felt appliqués and mother-of-pearl buttons that depicted the wearer's crest. The button blanket represents another example of how Northwest Coast Native people creatively transformed materials obtained from trade into indigenous

expressions of social status and clan privileges. One such textile, owned by Chief Minisqu' (fig. 5.15), has red wool borders that frame the upper half of both sides and the area worn on the shoulders, except for directly behind the head. The central circle contains an anthropomorphic being with legs and one arm upraised, surrounded by six small squatting figures that are another version of the small faces that appear on the previously illustrated house facade and frontlet (see figs. 1.4 and 5.12). Buttons accent parts of all these beings as well as the circle itself.

Shamans

Tsimshian shamanic practices resembled those of the Tlingit. Shamans, with exceptional powers to transform into animals, tended to come from lineages with histories of shamanism. As was the case with the Tlingit, a person did not typically decide to become a shaman, but instead received a calling from spirits who had selected him specifically. Shamans wore special costumes that signified their spiritual status; the Tsimshian shaman, for example, donned special robes and placed on his head a crown of grizzly-bear claws. After he entered a house to heal a sick person, the shaman first needed to accrue power by entering an altered state of consciousness, often by using percussive instruments that facilitated passage into a trance. Once in that state, the shaman both interacted with his helping spirits, who appeared on his ceremonial objects, and confronted malevolent beings. He sang songs to the accompaniment of rattles (fig. 5.16), manipulated carved puppets that represented his spirit helpers, and brandished supernaturally potent charms. One of these charms was called the "soul-catcher" (fig. 5.17). It could be that the shaman used this bone to suck out illness or to blow healing breath onto the patient. The bone and abalone shown here depicts on one side a two-headed creature and on the other a central anthropomorphic being flanked by animals in profile, perhaps bears or wolves.

THE HAIDA

THE HAIDA LIVE in British Columbia on the Queen Charlotte Islands, which they call Haida Gwaii, and in Alaska on Dall, Sukkwan, and Long Islands, as well as on the southern portion of Prince of Wales Island. The

5.16 Nisga'a. Shaman rattle, Gitlaxt'damiks, c. 1830–50. *Wood. H. 12.25 in.*
© Canadian Museum of Civilization, VII-C-215. Photo: Ross Taylor, 593-9015.

Percussive instruments were commonly used during shamanic séances, as their repeated rhythmic shakings were thought to attract the shaman's spirit helpers, some of which are portrayed on this rattle. On one side, an anthropomorphic being squats, arms raised, next to what appears to be a crescent moon. On the other, an ovoid encloses a reclining being with upraised legs that appears to hold a crescent moon with its feet. The being is surrounded by four broad-faced squatting figures. The inclusion of small surrounding figures is a characteristic of some Tsimshian art, such as the house front in figure 1.4. The image of the being within a circle surrounded by small frontal figures is very similar to that on Chief Minisqu's button robe (fig. 5.15).

Alaskan Haida, called the Kaigani group, migrated north from Haida Gwaii in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Like the Tlingit, the matrilineal Haida are divided into two exogamous matrilineal moieties called Ravens and Eagles, composed of twenty-two and twenty-three lineages, respectively. Lineages trace their existence back to several supernatural women of each moiety, and claim their origin in a mythic "story town" on Haida Gwaii. The chief of the highest-ranking house of the wealthiest lineage in each town becomes the "town master." Crest