

# ADAWX, SPANAXNOX, AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE TSIMSHIAN

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THE ROLE OF ORAL HISTORY in proving aboriginal title was demonstrated by the Gitksan in *Delgamuukw v. BC*.<sup>1</sup> In *Tribal Boundaries in the Nass Watershed*<sup>2</sup> Gitanyaaw and Gitksan oral histories are offered as proof of title to territory on the Nass River. In *Defending the Mouth of the Skeena*<sup>3</sup> the Tsimshian record of their rout of Tlingit invaders is shown to be part of their historical record and proof of their territorial title. While oral histories from Northwest Coast societies can be difficult to understand, it is nevertheless possible to acquire the linguistic, geographical, historical and cultural knowledge necessary to appreciate them. Unfortunately, the postmodern position that questions the very possibility of cross-cultural communication tends to limit efforts at understanding and is itself a construct of non-indigenous societies. The cultural institutions that underlie Northwest Coast oral history, on the other hand, assume cross-generational and cross-cultural communication and include a sophisticated system of encoded knowledge to facilitate it.

The Tsimshian<sup>4</sup> oral narratives, or *adawx*, addressed in this paper are presented as cases in point. They reveal an unexpected view of

<sup>1</sup> While the trial judge rejected the position of the Gitksan, the Supreme Court of Canada, in its decision on the appellants' appeal, stated: "The trial judge, after refusing to admit, or giving no independent weight to these oral histories, reached the conclusion that the appellants had not demonstrated the requisite degree of occupation for 'ownership.' Had the trial judge assessed the oral histories correctly, his conclusions on these issues of fact might have been very different."

<sup>2</sup> N.J. Sterritt, S. Marsden, R. Galois, P. Grant, and R. Overstall, *Tribal Boundaries in the Nass Watershed* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> S. Marsden, "Defending the Mouth of the Skeena: Perspectives on Tsimshian Tlingit Relations," in J.S. Cybulski, ed., *Perspectives on Northern Northwest Coast Prehistory* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, Mercury Series, Archaeological Survey of Canada, Paper 160, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Northwest Coast sociopolitical institutions include the house, tribe, region, and nation; cross-cutting these are the "wilnaat'aał" (network of related houses, or lineage) and the

the geopolitics of the Tsimshian and of the nature of aboriginal title. While all *adawx* concern territory in one way or another, and rarely can be understood without relevant geographical knowledge, few deal as specifically as these with the geography and geopolitics of the Tsimshian or reveal as much about their intellectual and spiritual content. At the same time, these *adawx*, as all *adawx*, are also powerful records of important periods in history. Much of this can be brought to light and (one would hope) find its place in mainstream historical, geographical, and legal discourse.

A brief examination of two central concepts introduces the discussion. The concept of Northwest Coast *adawx*<sup>5</sup> should be set apart from the general concept of oral history. *Adawx* are oral records of historical events of *collective* political, social, and economic significance,

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clan. The house, or house group, is a matrilineal kin group and the fundamental political and land-owning unit in Tsimshian society. The house always bears the name of its chief, or headman. Within tribe, region, and nation, houses share economic and political concerns and a common geography. Their economic and political integration is expressed in their annual round of economic activities and in intermarriage and feasting. This integration is extensive at the tribal level and increasingly less so at the regional and national levels, where the ties between tribes, and between regions, are formed primarily by the leading chiefs.

The combined territories of the houses in a tribe (village) compose a watershed or similarly discrete geographic area. Among the Tsimshian, these tribes (villages) are the Gitando, Gitzaxłaał, Gitsiis, Gitwilgyoots, Gitlaan, Gilutsaaw, Gitnadoiks, Ginaxangiik, and Gispaxlo'ots (the northern Tsimshian); the Gitkxaał and Gitk'a'ata (the southern Tsimshian), and the Gits'ilaasu and Gitsmgeelm (the interior Tsimshian).

The combined territories of the tribes in a region tend to have more in common geographically than do those in the neighbouring regions. Among the Tsimshian there are three regions: (1) the northern Tsimshian, whose territories span the lower Skeena River and the mainland coast from the mouth of the Skeena to the mouth of the Nass River; (2) the southern Tsimshian, whose territories include several islands south of the mouth of the Skeena and in Douglas Channel as well as a number of watersheds along Douglas Channel; and (3) the interior Tsimshian (also called the Canyon Tsimshian), whose territories include the Kalum River watershed and a section of the Skeena River watershed stretching east and west of the canyon at Kitselas.

The identification of these three distinct but integrated regions is important to the understanding of all aspects of Tsimshian sociopolitics, geography, and history. Too often the understanding of one of these regions is applied erroneously to all.

While this overview describes the Tsimshian in the ethnographic period, much of it applies to earlier periods as well. Over millennia, the Tsimshian have become increasingly integrated, but from the beginning there was a sense of common identity. The term Tsimshian (Ts'mksiyeen) means "into the river of mists" and originally referred to those coastal tribes that occupied the mouth of the Skeena River and the adjacent coast and islands. These tribes became fully integrated with the lower Skeena River tribes after a major period of immigration, thus expanding the meaning of "Tsimshian" to include the river tribes that thereafter wintered at Metlakatla Pass. Although the southern and inland Tsimshian described above have always been part of the Tsimshian, as they are now called, they do not fully accept the use of this term to describe their tribes and peoples.

<sup>5</sup> *Adawx* is the term used by the Tsimshian, Gitksan, and Nisga'a. The Tlingit equivalent is *at. oow*.

such as migration, territorial acquisition, natural disaster, epidemic, war, and significant shifts in political and economic power. Adawx also contain *limx'ooy*, ancient songs expressing loss endured during times of hardship,<sup>6</sup> and give rise to visual images – *ayuks*, or crests – represented on poles<sup>7</sup> and on ceremonial regalia. While specific to a lineage and passed from generation to generation within the lineage, adawx are *formally acknowledged by the society as a whole and collectively represent the authorized history of the nation*. In every generation, adawx are reaffirmed in feasts, during which chiefs recount their lineages' adawx in the presence of chiefs from their own and other nations.

The geographical concept of *spanaxnox* refers to certain topographic features in which the *naxnox*,<sup>8</sup> the spirit, or power, in the land is manifested. At these locations, as in many indigenous geographies,<sup>9</sup> space becomes sacred – an opening, or gateway, between the human and spirit worlds. Spanaxnox are therefore literally *homes of spirit beings*, but they are also the spirits indwelling in the topography; that is, they are *spirits, or spirit beings, of place*. The Tsimshian, whose lives are intertwined with the landscape, form intimate and abiding relations with the spanaxnox of their territories. In fact, through human eyes, the spanaxnox inhabit a parallel world of socially organized beings who, like their human counterparts, acquire crests, engage in ceremony, and feast amongst themselves. For example, Lutguts'm'aws,<sup>10</sup> a spanaxnox along the lower Skeena River, is a chief who lives in the largest house at the centre of “a great village with many beautiful houses all with brilliant house-front paintings.”<sup>11</sup> Just

<sup>6</sup> Limx'ooy retain the ancient language in which they were composed, unlike adawx, which are told in the language of the time.

<sup>7</sup> *Pts'aan*, or totem poles.

<sup>8</sup> The term *naxnox* is used similarly in other concepts; for example, *wammaxnox* are *naxnox* names, chiefly names literally imbued with specific powers that become part of the chiefs who hold them. In the English translations of the adawx quoted here, the term *spanaxnox* and the term *naxnox* are used interchangeably, since the speaker or the translator has made it clear that the type of *naxnox* in question is a *spanaxnox*.

<sup>9</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1957); *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1963); *Images and Symbols* (London: Harvill Press, 1961).

<sup>10</sup> *Lutguts'm'aws* means “in where around into sand,” or “inside of sandbar.” To facilitate the reader, all words in the Tsimshian language in the text of this paper and in the quotes have been rendered in the modern orthography currently in use by the Tsimshian and following the work of John Asher Dunn, initiated in “A Practical Dictionary of the Coast Tsimshian,” Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 42, National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Heber Clifton, “The Narrative of Sarapgyaw,” in William Beynon and Marius Barbeau, *Wolf Clan Invaders from the Northern Plateaux among the Tsimshians* (Hull: Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Canadian Museum of Civilization, n.d.), no. 24, p. 3 (unpublished MS).

as a chief in the human world embodies the identity and power of his lineage, or house, so the spanaxnox expresses the identity and power of the landscape, or territory. Humans and spanaxnox therefore share the same cultural realm and, when they meet, interact as they would in either world.

The adawx addressed here reveal the complexity of the concept of spanaxnox and, in so doing, the intricacy of the interplay between the Tsimshian and the landscape they inhabit. Too often this interplay has been thought to preclude ownership. In fact, the interpenetration of humans and territory in Tsimshian society deepens the concept of ownership and reveals a territorial system that has important implications for the understanding of aboriginal rights and title.

#### ADAWX OF NISPILAX

The adawx of the house of Nispilax<sup>12</sup> tells of the founding relationship between a Raven clan lineage of the Gitxazłaał tribe<sup>13</sup> and the spanaxnox Lutguts'm'aws at the mouth of the Skeena River. As told by Mrs. Robinson<sup>14</sup> and Mrs. Heber Clifton (Eagle clan, Gitamaat), the adawx begins when Sagapgyoo, a niece<sup>15</sup> of the chief Nispilax, was taken into the world of this spanaxnox (see Figure 1).

One day, the young women wanted to go picking salmon berries at Lutguts'm'aws [In Around Sandbar] ... Here was the largest area of salmon berries in the locality. The young women all got into a large

<sup>12</sup> See note 11. Nispilax was the head of this house until Nisho'ot rose to power and replaced him as leader and changed the name of the house to Nisho'ot. Such a change is customary among many Northwest Coast nations when one leader replaces another. Today it is still the house of Nisho'ot, but Nispilax and his adawx remain distinct. Much of the identity of the house remains that of Yagagwin'usk and Nispilax.

<sup>13</sup> The nine tribes of the modern period are listed above (note 4). While the Tsimshian may not have used these terms to describe themselves in earlier times and may have changed their tribal composition by adding new houses over time, the original lineages of these tribes use their current tribal names in speaking of their past.

<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Robinson's house, clan, and tribe were not identified, but she probably belonged to an Eagle house of the Gitamaat tribe or a Raven house of the Kitkatla tribe. The adawx is prefaced by the remark: "Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Heber Clifton ... heard this narrative when attending a feast where Nisho'ot succeeded his uncle, at Port Simpson, about 1900." Like Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Clifton, the narrators of all the adawx in this paper are chiefs in their own right and would therefore have learned the adawx of their own lineages. The adawx they tell here are either those of their own lineages, of their spouses' or fathers' lineages, or of another chief's lineage whose feast they witnessed.

<sup>15</sup> The northern Northwest Coast peoples trace their descent through the matrilineal line. A chief, therefore, concerns himself with his sisters' sons and daughters, his *łguwaalksik*, inasmuch as they are his heirs and the mothers of future heirs. In English the terms used are "prince" and "princess."

canoe and set off for this locality. When they came to the top of the Sand Bar which was covered by high tides, they saw that there was an immense field of foam and a fog. Without any fear they headed into this fog and foam. All were paddling with their full strength and might, to get through the high foam and fog. They finally crossed them, and they were resting and laughing at their experience, when they looked into the stern where the princess sat and behold! She was gone ...

Sagapgyoo, the princess, while sitting in the canoe with her women companions, had felt someone grasp her and she seemed to be with someone else who said, "Yes, this is her! Take her away!" She was unable to shout or cry out, but she stepped into another canoe and down into the hole made by a huge whirlpool. Not long afterwards she arrived at a great village with many housefront paintings.<sup>16</sup>

Sagapgyoo had been taken to the village of the spanaxnox Lutguts'm'aws (Kts'm'aws).<sup>17</sup> Her companions returned to Spaksuut, their village across the Skeena at the mouth of the Kstool (Ecstall River). There they told their chief of the loss of his niece.

The great chief [Nispilax] called in his halaayts [seers] to inquire about his niece. "The princess is alive," they said. "She has been taken by the naxnox who lives in this vicinity. You will make sacrifices of food and other valuable things, so that this spirit will care for her and see that no harm comes to her." Every day, the chief and his tribesmen went to the place where the princess disappeared and gave offerings of food and valuables, so that now an immense quantity was thrown down into the abode of the [spanaxnox].<sup>18</sup>

Sagapgyoo "would sit during the day and she would see the slaves of the great chief bring in different foods and many robes. She saw all this being piled up in the back of the house." These were the gifts of wealth that her uncle Nispilax had sent through the whirlpool to the spanaxnox. Through these gifts the family of Sagapgyoo honoured the spanaxnox as they would a powerful human chief who had kidnapped a princess. If a human chief, or a member of his family, were to marry the princess, the gifts or offerings would become the first in a series of exchanges of wealth creating a marriage alliance

<sup>16</sup> Robinson and Clifton, "Narrative of Sarapgyaw," 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Kts'm'aws*, literally, "place into sand," or "place of sandbar" is another form of the same name used interchangeably with *Lutguts'm'aws*. Place names in the Tsimshian language, *Sm'algyax*, are frequently used in multiple forms.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson and Clifton, "Narrative of Sarapgyaw," 2.

between the two peoples. In this case, the kidnapped princess married the son of the spanaxnox, thus initiating an alliance that would raise their son, Yagagwin'usk, to a position of great importance among his own people. When Yagagwin'usk was born, Kts'm'aws prepared a feast and introduced his grandson to the other spanaxnox of the region. As in the human world, a child is introduced to the chiefs of the nation or region and acknowledged by them.

The princess soon became pregnant and when the great chief, her father-in-law [Kts'm'aws], heard of it, he went every day to Midii'aks, Grizzly Stream, which was his wishing stream. He called out, "Let Sagapgyoo's child be a boy!" This he did every day, until soon a child was born and it was a boy. The naxnox (spirit) would take the child and every day he would stretch it until the child became full grown. The chief then called, "My son, you will now have to give a feast inviting all the monsters, and we will present my grandson to them, that they may know and protect him in his travels." Messengers were sent out to the great spanaxnox (supernatural beings) who lived all along the many rivers and the coast, guarding the dangerous places, where they also destroyed people ...

[Sagapgyoo] saw the guests arrive each in a different manner. Some were preceded by a great storm, others by a fog, still others, by whirlpools. Some were very fierce looking, others very kindly. All were different, some like huge grizzlies, others like huge sea lions. But all were ferocious. As they came in, the earth trembled, the waters in the house arose until each was seated in their place, and now everything was ready, and the great chief spoke to his fellow naxnoxs. "Brothers, I have brought you together to meet my grandson Yagagwin'usk and his mother Sagapgyoo, who are visiting me. They brought with them plenty of rare foods. That is why I want you to share with me." Then the food was distributed to them, and a great murmur (xsmaw) of pleasure showed their approval.

Kts'm'aws thus formally acknowledged the place of his grandson's lineage in the living landscape of the spanaxnox. He then requested that the other spanaxnox assist them in their journeys between their Skeena River village at Spaksuut and their village at Kgadu in Metlakatla Pass.

When all had finished eating many had put to one side what they saved to take away (soo) with them, the great chief of the Sand Bar spoke again, "My brothers, I have brought you all together to meet

my grandson and his people ... All of the various naxnox who control the many dangerous places, I want you to stop destroying my grandson's people. Help them, as my grandson's people are very numerous. Now that he has brought you gifts, I want you all to promise that you will do them no more injury." He called each one of them off by name, and when he had finished, each of the monsters in turn spoke and promised that he would no longer destroy the people. But, in the future, people must make offerings of fat whenever they went past their different abodes. Then one by one the guests returned to their various abodes.<sup>19</sup>

Ritual gift exchange is an element in peaceful relations in the human world, and respect between humans and spanaxnox is shown in the same manner. Those passing through a territory are expected to acknowledge the privilege with gifts to the spanaxnox as well as to the people to whom the territory belongs.

After the formal creation of the alliance between the House of Nispilax, who had sent the food and gifts for the feast, and all the spanaxnox of the region, the young woman and her son were returned to their people. Gifts from Kts'm'aws finalized the alliance.

One day, the great chief called Sagapgyoo and Yagagwin'usk and said, "I am going to return you to your own people, and, you my grandson, will become one of the greatest chiefs among the Tsimshian. Your people are now living at Kgado (at Metlakatla Passage). They will be happy when you return, and you will take much wealth back with you, to give to your uncles and your people." Soon after this, the great chief had many canoes all made ready in which he had loaded many different kinds of sea foods, such as seals, sea lions, halibut, and all other foods. They suddenly found themselves, Sagapgyoo and her son, below the Gitzax'laał village of Kgado, and they went up to their uncles' house. It had been a long while since she had disappeared, and many of the people did not recognize her.<sup>20</sup>

When a young person, born in the foreign nation of his father, is returned to his mother's nation, a feast is given to establish his identity and status among his own people. So, when Yagagwin'usk came to the Gitzax'laał, his mother's uncle, Nispilax, gave a feast for all the Tsimshian tribes and distributed the food that the spanaxnox had given to them. He told them of Sagapgyoo's journey to Kts'm'aws's

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

village and of all that happened there so that this new alliance and the power and status it brought would be acknowledged formally by the other Tsimshian.

When all had finished eating, Nispilax spoke, "In gathering you together, chiefs and your tribesmen, I am showing you my niece who has been dead to me for many years and has now returned together with her son Yagagwin'usk, whom I make known to you. He will be my successor. While my niece was in the house of the naxnox of Kts'm'aws (On Sand Bar), her husband gathered all the spanaxnox, and these have promised to be more peaceful. But we must make offerings to pacify them, and there must be fat of mountain goat (banats'aw) kidney fat. This will be your protection. Now my grandson has adopted several of these beings as crests." Then gifts were distributed to all the guest chiefs and their tribesmen, and they all acknowledged the position and name of Yagagwin'usk.<sup>21</sup>

In the human world, the alliances formed by lineages and tribes create the sociopolitical and economic fabric of Northwest Coast society. Chiefly families form alliances outside the tribe to allow them access to new resources and trade prerogatives, and to increase their status; and they form alliances outside the nation to promote regional peace and prosperity. While alliances can be built on existing ties between related lineages of the same clan, marriage alliances create new ties with groups that have become important in the economic or political arena, or with previously foreign or hostile groups. Marriage alliances frequently consolidate negotiations for peace between warring nations, as they can when a woman of chiefly rank is kidnapped during war and married into the chiefly lineage of her captors. In all foreign marriages, the children belong to their mother's nation and are returned at puberty to their own people with the wealth and prerogatives that mark their new economic and political status. In all alliances, the relationships once created endure through generations, and the reciprocal responsibilities and rights of lineages partnered in this way are inalienable.

Marriages between humans and spanaxnox also create economic and sociopolitical alliances as they are the original and founding relationship of a lineage with the living landscape of its territory.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> The marriage of Sgawoo (Gao, Gawa) to the son of the Chief in the Sky is perhaps the most well known of these founding relationships, taking place in the very ancient past on the upper reaches of the Nass and Skeena Rivers, where Sgawoo's descendants still own



While they create the spiritual identity and social status of the lineage within its tribe and nation, they also benefit all Tsimshian by uniting the spanaxnox and human realms – a relationship to the land that underlies all human society. Nispilax’s lineage was one of the two original Raven clan groups that founded the Gitzaxłaał. To this day it owns most of the territory of the tribe. Nispilax’s original village, Kgado, was one of the first villages at Metlakatla Pass and was occupied by his descendants until the modern period. Nispilax’s lineage was also one of the first among the coastal peoples to expand to the mouth of the Skeena River and acquire territory there in the domain of the spanaxnox Kts’m’aws.<sup>23</sup>

The expansion of Nispilax to the mouth of the Skeena River initiated a new era of travel between the coast and this salt water estuary. From the upriver limit of salt water to the western coast of the islands at its mouth, the Skeena is a delta with many shifting sandbars and swirling currents and, especially at Kts’m’aws, snags and boulders that dot the sandbars and sit just below the surface at high tide. The alliance of Nispilax’s lineage with Kts’m’aws and the other spanaxnox of this region, and the promise of the spanaxnox at the feast to be “more peaceful” and to assist them in their travels, indicates their increasingly intimate knowledge of the river and a new-found mastery of travel in this environment.

There is considerable evidence that, from the earliest times, the founding peoples on the coast resisted incursions into their territory and, for millennia, remained a distinct coastal people.<sup>24</sup> The mouth of the Skeena River, like inlets and river mouths up and down the

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territory. The marriage is the founding identity of generations of people who, over time, spread throughout the Tsimshian, Nisga’a, Gitksan, and Tlingit. ‘Wiiseeks’s people (see below) belong to this lineage as it was the Children of Sgawoo who founded Temlaxam. See William Beynon and Marius Barbeau, *Temlarham: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast* (Hull: Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Canadian Museum of Civilization, n.d.) (unpublished MS).

<sup>23</sup> Wilson Duff, *Tsimshian File, Gitzaxłaał* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, n.d.); Marius Barbeau and William Beynon, *The Marius Barbeau and William Beynon Fieldnotes, 1915-1986* (Hull: Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1953), B.F. 13. This adawx most probably refers to a time when the mouth of the Skeena River was first inhabited after the end of the last ice age. This period is dated by Clague at 8000 BP. “The above evidence indicates that there was a progressive emergence of the McNeil River area [Ksin’iilt, just upstream from Lutguts’m’aws] between about 9200 and 7799 BP and that the sea reached its present level there about 8000 years ago.” See John J. Clague, *Quaternary Geology and Geomorphology, Smithers-Terrace-Prince Rupert Area, British Columbia* (Ottawa: Geological Survey of Canada, Memoir 413, 1984), 52.

<sup>24</sup> See Andrew Martindale and S. Marsden, “Comparing Archaeology and Oral Traditions in Tsimshian History,” MS submitted to *BC Studies*.

coast, was thus not only economically significant but also a strategic boundary between coastal and inland peoples.

James Lewis, Gaymtkwa (Killerwhale clan, Kitkatla tribe), and Heber Clifton, 'Waxmoon (Killerwhale clan, Gitk'a'ata tribe), described this situation among the southern Tsimshian.

The Wolf phratry was very powerful among the Kitkatlas ages ago, as they were very numerous among here and these people went away up as far as the Kitimat village. And it was these people who really governed this country as they were so many. And they were the first onto the coast. It was after the deluge that the other phratries came down the coast, coming from the headwaters of the Skeena, and they came upon the other places people lived. Well, this is the reason why the powers of the Wolf clan went down all over, and they had been the foremost years ago. The Wolf clan had no respect for any strangers, instead, whenever they saw any strangers, they would at once kill them. It was at a time when all the other phratries were weak, as they were all separated when they came on the coast, and it was this that made it impossible to protect themselves.<sup>25</sup>

The alliance with Kts'm'aws strengthened the position of the Gitzaxłaał and the Tsimshian at the mouth of the Skeena River and laid the foundation for an expanded role for the house of Nispilax in the region. Once introduced to the human world, Yagagwin'usk increased the status of his lineage, leading it and the other coastal Tsimshian to consolidate their regional power and strengthening their position at the mouth of the Nass River. Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Clifton described how Yagagwin'usk and the Tsimshian achieved this by holding a great feast for the spanaxnox of the coast.

[Yagagwin'usk] gathered together all the chiefs of the Tsimsyan tribes and told them, "We have got the protection of the naxnox for the Tsimsyan ... I intend to invite all of the spanaxnox to a great feast where I shall erect a stone totem (pts'aanmlo'op) on the Nass River at the next eulachon season. But I must ask the help of every tribe, in order to be ready."<sup>26</sup>

Now all the tribes<sup>27</sup> were very busy, and Yagagwin'usk went to his supernatural grandfather and his father, and they promised to help

<sup>25</sup> James Lewis and Heber Clifton, "The Wolf Clan of the Gitk'a'ata," in William Beynon, *The Beynon Manuscript* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, n.d.), no. 228, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson and Clifton, "Narrative of Sarapgyaw," 8.

<sup>27</sup> At this point, in most versions of this adawx, there is a listing of tribes and the goods they will provide for the feast. In one version, published by Boas, the Gispaxlo'ots are described

him. He now went to the Nass River and, at Ałkusooxs, he built a large house of stone, mostly underground, so that it would hold water, as all of his guests were of the sea, and rivers. They had to have sufficient water, so as not to perish. The house was all finished, and then each of the tribes began to arrive at the new camp that Yagagwin'usk had erected at Red Bluff (Ałkusooxs, place of Slide [Land-Slide], now grown up again with small timber). They all brought the various things that were to be used at the upcoming feasts, when all the sea monsters were to be invited.

Now that everything was ready, Yagagwin'usk and his mother called together the lead men, and they got ready to invite all of the monsters from many points. The mother said, "Go to the abode of these monsters at Kwook, Wark Mountain; at Spagayt'anaayt, Ganders Island, Hecate Sts.; at Łgu'ol (Small Bear) at the north of Knamas River; at K'na'adze, end of Pitt Island; at another Lagax'anbadza (lagax, each side; dzaxł, licked or lapped by tongue, a barren point which is smoothed on each side) at the north end of Dundas Island; at Wutaa'an'on (Large-hands) on the Nass River; at Kts'm'aws (In Sand or Sand Bar), the original house of Yagagwin'usk; at Gyedm'n'ax (gyet, man; 'nax, for ha'nax, woman or a dual being, part man and part woman), Point Lambert on the Skeena; at 'Wahmidii'aks ('wah, without; midii, Grizzly; 'aks stream), a wishing well or stream near Haysport on the Skeena River; Ktaxł (Bold Cliff), Cape Fox; Łguts'ak (Small Nose), Long Nose point below Claxton, on the Skeena River; Txa'max, Smiths Island, near the entrance of the slough going towards Inverness, and all of the other monsters." (Informants: There were a great many but they have forgotten them. These extended from Millbank Sound up north into Alaska.) ...

When all was ready, Yagagwin'usk told his headmen who had charge of the huge drum, "Beat the drum, and my guests will begin to arrive. But all my people, for your safety, you will all move into the woods on the high hills, as the coming of these monsters will cause floods. When they have all arrived, I call you down to help attend my guests." Long after the drum had been beaten, no guest arrived. Next day his father came and said to him, "The reason that your guests did not come is that one of the important chiefs was not

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as trading with the Hagwilget for their goods. Hagwilget did not exist until 1930. This anachronism signals a more extensive one since not all the tribes, as such, were in existence in these early days when Nispilax was leader. (see note 13).

invited. Because of that slight, the other monster chiefs would not show up unless they too were invited.” ... “It was Nłaks, a monster of north end of Kennedy Island entrance to the Skeena River.”

Yagagwin’usk at once sent a messenger to invite this monster chief who had been overlooked.

Again then the huge drum was struck and, next day, the people saw what appeared to be a big storm coming up the channel towards the mouth of the Nass. Soon it came to the point of Ałkusooxs, where the young chief had built his feast houses. As these monster chiefs arrived, the waters rose and great winds blew. As soon as they all had entered the feast house and [were] seated in their places, the waters subsided, the storms abated. Then the chief called upon his tribesman, “Bring all the wooden dishes and all the cedar bark mats and all the wooden and horn spoons, that all the Tsimshyan tribes have taken so long to make. Bring all the food in together with all the painted boxes, so that my guests, the great chiefs who have come a long ways may see.” The boxes and then all the other things that had been prepared were brought out and placed in front of the guest. Then the salmon was placed in food dishes of wood, as were berries and dried pulverized hemlock bark. These foods were placed in different wood dishes and boxes.

When all was ready, the chief Yagagwin’usk called out, “Put all these into the big fire, burn the boxes and spoons which are filled with food.” As each box was put in the fire the name of the monster chief for whom it was called out. This went on until all the guests had been served. Then the leather garments, the fur robes, and many other valuable things made of wool, the cedar bark mats, and last the mountain goat kidney fat, were all placed into the fire. As soon as these things started to burn, then the monsters began to eat, and all were very happy. Many that had come in looking angry and ferocious were now smiling and seemed very pleased. They went on eating for a whole day all these many things that had taken all of the Tsimshyan tribes so long to make. It was now all consumed by fire.<sup>28</sup>

Harry Brooks, Nisho’ot, (Raven clan, Gitzaxłaał tribe) related Yagagwin’usk’s speech to the spanaxnox.

Then after he had done this, he spoke to the many beings of the sea [that were his] guests. “Now I will ask, that you all stop destroying

<sup>28</sup> Robinson and Clifton, “Narrative of Sarapgyaw,” 8-10. The brackets in the third paragraph were modified to distinguish place name translations from locations.

people who travel over your abodes ... And this is why I have invited you that you will think this over. And you will erect a stone totem in front of my house and this will be the sign of peace between you and us.”

Well, just as soon as the great monsters heard the thing that the young chief had said, they all agreed to what he said. And they all promised they would stop bothering people ... And they were all very happy and then they erected a stone totem below Łgusganmoolks (Little Crabapple Tree Point), which would be the pole of the young chief.<sup>29</sup>

Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Clifton described the feast’s successful conclusion.

Again all the great naxnox chiefs gave their approval by murmuring together. Then the young chief Yagagwin’usk called out to his own people, “All of you, my people, go back into the hills, as now my guests the great naxnoxs are returning to their various abodes. You must keep out of danger, for great storms will arise when these chiefs leave.” When the people had climbed to the safety of the hills, the great naxnoxs began to come out of the feast house, and, as they did, the waters began to rise and huge whirlpools formed as well as very high waves and storms. The whole waters of the mouth of the Nass River was one great field of foam, as far as one could see.

Yagagwin’usk had now become a foremost and leading chief among all of the Tsimsyan, and his feast to the great monsters of sea of the world has never been equalled. This is a Ganhada narrative belonging to the Gitzaxłaał.<sup>30</sup>

The spanaxnox that attended Yagawin’usk’s feast are identified in four accounts: the two quoted above; one told by Sam Bennett, Nisp’iins (Killerwhale clan, Giluts’aaw tribe);<sup>31</sup> and one told to Henry Tate by an unidentified person.<sup>32</sup> Using all four accounts, and other geographic sources, it is possible to identify the location of most of the spanaxnox and to establish the region through which the Tsimshian now travelled freely (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

<sup>29</sup> Harry Brooks, “The Myth of What Happened to Yagagwinusk,” in William Beynon, *The Beynon Manuscript* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, ca. 1930), no. 131, pp. 79-81.

<sup>30</sup> Robinson and Clifton, “Narrative of Sarapgyaw,” 12.

<sup>31</sup> Sam Bennett, “When Yagagwin’usk Erected the Stone Totem at the Mouth of the Nass,” in Barbeau and Beynon, *Fieldnotes*, B.F. 123.6.

<sup>32</sup> “The Water Being Who Married the Princess,” in Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909-10), 275.



TABLE 1  
*Names and locations of the spanaxnox in the adawx of Nispilax*

BARBEAU & BEYNON NO. 24 BARBEAU & BEYNON B.F. 123.6	BEYNON NO. 131	BOAS NO. 42
Kwook (Wark Mountain) Kwook (Wark Mountain)	K'wok, Wark Mountain. This is supposedly the origin of many myths as there is supposed to be an undersea passage used by the beings that were inmates of the monster Kwoks. This mountain is on the coast between Port Simpson and the Nass River and is yet regarded with some fears by many.	Kuwa'k (good to look at)
Txa'max, Smiths Island, near the entrance of the slough going towards Inverness Txa'max (North End of De Horsey Island, Skeena)	Txam'ax - on Skeena River	Txam-ax
Łguts'ak (Small Nose, Long Nose Point below Claxton, on the Skeena River)		Short Nose (Łgu-dzak)
Ktaxł (Bold Cliff Cape Fox) Hałkstaxł (Tongas Point)	Hał-kstaxł, Along High Bluff - Cape Fox	
Midii'aks 'Wahmidii'aks ('wah, without; midii, Grizzly; 'aks stream, a wishing well or stream near Haysport on the Skeena River), ('Wahmidi'aks [Useless River])	'Wa-medi'aks, Good For Nothing River - Haysport Creek, on Skeena River, opposite Port Essington	Wa-medi-aks
Gyedm'na'ax (gyet, man; 'nax, for ha'nax, woman or a dual being, part man and part woman; Point Lambert on the Skeena) Gyedmna'ax (Lambert Point on Skeena)	Gadem - nag.ai, Person of Fins - Point Lambert, Skeena River	G.adem nagai

*Note:* Sm'algyax names in brackets in column one represent the modern orthography of names in the other columns. Places for which the locations are unknown are indicated with an asterisk (\*). Places incorrectly located in the original source are indicated with an (x).

BARBEAU & BEYNON NO. 24 BARBEAU & BEYNON B.F. 123.6	BEYNON NO. 131	BOAS NO. 42
Lutguts'm'aws Kts'm'aws (In Sand or Sand Bar, the original house of Yagagwin'usk) Kts'm'aws (Boneyard, Skeena River)	Ktsem'aws - the local name for this particular sandbar is "Boneyard"	K-tsl'em-aus
Wutaa'an'on (Large-hands, on the Nass River)	Wuta'an'on, Large Hands - on the Skeena River (x)	Long Hands (Wutle-an'on) on the Nass River
Lagax'anbadza (lagax, each side; dzaxł, licked or lapped by tongue, a barren point which is smoothed on each side, at the north end of Dundas Island)	Lagan-badzexł, Over on Top Lapping Waters, on the mouth of the Nass River about five miles down from Arrandale on the same shore (x)	Lax-an-batsaxł (wore hat made of twisted cedar branches)
K'na'adze (end of Pitt Island)		K-knaaze (one of two ugliest)
Łgu'ol (Small Bear at the north of Knemas River) Łgu'ol (Nasoga Gulf of the Nass)		K-łgu-al (his hat and his blanket were full of arrows)
Spagayt'anaayt (Ganders Island, Hecate Sts.), Spagayt'an'atk	Spagait N-atku (Between Two Cliffs) (North Arm of Warks Channel, a very narrow gorge. spagait = between, 'n'atku = cliffs ?, probably means darkened place, the high cliffs keep this place very dark WB [another place with same name])	Spagait-an-atk (one of two ugliest)
Nagwin'aks (Gander Island)	Nu-gwen'aks, Where Out Spouts Water - Little Gander Islands, Hecate Straits	
Wilhałmiilk (Queen Charlotte Sound)		
Wilksilootgił 'Neexł (Where Out Comes the Blackfish at Wark's Canal) (Wilksiloo'neexł)	Wil-ksi loo Ne'xł, Where Out Floats Blackfish - mouth of Warks Canal	
(Wil'nlabalga S'hoks driftwood - s'hoks; libiltwalk - enemy; Wil'nlibilgals'hoks)	Wil-n-labalga Sooks, Where Hate Each Other Driftwood, Where Drift Logs Hate One Another - near Ten-Mile Point on the Nass River	Drift Log Enemy (Wil-n-lebal-g'al-soks)



BARBEAU & BEYNON NO. 24 BARBEAU & BEYNON B.F. 123.6	BEYNON NO. 131	BOAS NO. 42
(Kspahawałk)*		K-spe-hawałk
(K'nidipwan)*		K-ne-dep-wan
(Kwilgigyamk)	Kwlgigamk, Always Warm, hot springs on the Nass River opposite Mill Bay	K-wil-g.ig.amk
(K'wilts'aan)* [possibly the same as Łguts'iyān below]		K-wil-dzan
(Nłaks, Nłaałks, Nłaaliks, Nłaałskt) (K'nłalksit)	K'en-łalksit - De-horsey Island at the entrance of Skeena and Slough	Nłaks
(K'wiits'uwaanł)*	Kwi-dziwanł, Long Point - Long Nose Point, Skeena River	K-wi-ts!u-wanł
(Ksin'iil)		K-sanail
(Ksp'aaxł)		K-sbaxł
(Kwlaxlax)	Kwlax-lax, Precipice Falls Down - Smiths Island, Skeena River [x]	K-gwilax-lak
(Wilgyamga'aks)	Wilgamga'aks, Where Waters are Warm - Hot Springs, Skeena River	Wil-g.amk-ga-aks
(K'nats'ahon)		K-n-ts!ahomt
(Kspała'is)		K-sbałił
(?)*		K-gutisgat
(Łguts'iyān)	K'wts'i-an, Islands of Skeena - Raspberry Island, junction of Oxtall and Skeena (?)	

Figure 1 shows the locations of the spanaxnox and their geographic range. These spanaxnox form a cohesive sociopolitical unit in their own realm. As chiefs they feast amongst themselves – a defining feature of any Northwest Coast political group. They also view themselves as a cohesive unit. When Yagagwin’usk failed to invite Nłaks to the feast, the other spanaxnox refused to attend until he was included, indicating their sense of common identity. Together they also define a specific and inclusive geographic region, as is indicated by Mrs. Clifton and Mrs. Robinson when they state that there were a great many spanaxnox (although they had forgotten them) extending “from Millbank Sound up north into Alaska.”<sup>33</sup>

The Tsimshian tribes also attended the feast as a cohesive group. In a society in which economic and political power resides primarily in the house and tribe, there are few political events, even today, in which all Tsimshian tribes join to achieve a common objective. Yagagwin’usk, as leader of the Gitzaxłaał, gathered the tribes together for the express purpose of inaugurating a joint Tsimshian/joint spanaxnox alliance.

Viewed together, the locations of the spanaxnox attending the feast at Ałgusooxs reveal the geopolitics of the alliance between spanaxnox and Tsimshian. The spanaxnox mark the coastal extent of Tsimshian territory: from the Alaska panhandle at Laxkstaxł in the north, to Spagayt’anaaytk and Nagwin’aks at Aristabal and Moore islands in the south, and to Lagax’anbadza on Dundas Island and Kna’adze on Pitt Island in the west.<sup>34</sup> These locations are the land boundaries between the Tsimshian and the Tlingit (to the north), the Heiltsuk (to the south),<sup>35</sup> and the Haida (to the west).

The spanaxnox also mark the controlling positions of the various Tsimshian tribes at the mouths of the three major waterways, the Skeena River, the Nass River, and Douglas Channel and, thus, the ability of the Tsimshian to control access to them. The cluster of spanaxnox at the mouths of the Nass and Skeena Rivers, especially,

<sup>33</sup> Robinson and Clifton, “Narrative of Sarapgyaw,” 9.

<sup>34</sup> Duff, *Tsimshian File*. It is common for Northwest Coast nations to describe the limits of their combined territories by naming key locations at its perimeter. As Abel Oakes, a Gitksan from Kisgaga’as, stated: “The Indians did not want all of BC but want only from Ksiganga’at creek (15 miles below Gitwanga) to Bear lake and Blackwater.” See Barbeau and Beynon, *Fieldnotes*, B.F. 94.1. In saying this, Abel Oakes was defining Gitksan territory – the Skeena River watershed from its western to its northeastern extent.

<sup>35</sup> Since the southern limit of Tsimshian coastal territory is at Aristabal Island, the single reference to Wilhalmiilk in Queen Charlotte Sound off Calvert Island indicates a greater geographic region for the early coastal Tsimshian. Calvert Island sits at the mouth of Rivers Inlet, which is frequently identified as the southern extent of the cultural realm of the Tsimshian and the place of origin of certain Tsimshian lineages.

indicates the key geopolitical position the Tsimshian as a nation had established in the region.<sup>36</sup>

At the mouth of the Nass River, the Tsimshian protected their coastal territories from upriver peoples and their access to an important eulachon fishery. Their eulachon grounds at the mouth of the Nass were part of the coastal Tsimshian economy from the beginning of settlement, when the Gispwudwada first established a travel route to and from the Nass River.<sup>37</sup> Nispilax and the other Tsimshian strengthened their position there. Tsimshian control of the mouths of the Nass and Skeena Rivers also affected trade. The choice of locale for the feast, at the mouth of the Nass, itself reveals an emerging focus on what was to become a major nexus of trade in the Tsimshian economy. The stone totem erected there by Yagagwin'usk marked his territory at the gateway to the eulachon grounds and affirmed Tsimshian control of travel in that area.<sup>38</sup>

Just as Kts'm'aws and the other spanaxnox at the mouth of the Skeena River assisted in a new era of travel between the coast and the river, so the alliance with the spanaxnox along the coast and inner islands enabled the Tsimshian and their neighbours to travel more freely through the region Yagagwinusk had consolidated. This adawx reflects a considerable level of integration among the coastal Tsimshian and also, perhaps, new developments in their maritime technology.

The feast at Ałgusooxs also marked a new political geography among the Tsimshian. As the final lines of Nispilax's adawx indicate, "Yagagwin'usk had now become a foremost and leading chief among all of the Tsimshian."<sup>39</sup> The Gitzaxłaał, long established at the mouth of the Skeena River, had unified the Tsimshian and, in forming a joint alliance with the spanaxnox along their major waterways, opened these for travel and trade to all the coastal Tsimshian tribes.

<sup>36</sup> While the history of the mouth of the Nass River is extremely complex, the territories there are still owned by lineages of the early coastal peoples who founded the Tsimshian nation. It was probably during the period of migration discussed below, when the tribes of the lower Skeena River and the coastal Tsimshian tribes became more integrated, that the Nass River tribes united with branches of the coastal tribes at the mouth of the Nass. At the same time, the Tlingit interest in this area also became a factor.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Marsden, "Review of Archival Materials for Information Pertaining to the Tsimshian Use and Occupation of the Nass River Area Greenville to Kincolith Highway Section," in James McDonald, editor, *Greenville to Kincolith Road, Tsimshian Traditional Use Study and Impact Assessment* (Victoria: Environmental Management Section, Engineering Branch, Ministry of Transportation and Highways, 1997), 4-7.

<sup>38</sup> This stone totem is a massive stone made by the spanaxnox. The only human-made stone totem was at Kitselas Canyon, the gateway to trade with the upriver peoples. Control of this route was the prerogative of Eagle clan houses in the Kitselas and Gispaxlo'ots tribes.

<sup>39</sup> Robinson and Clifton, "Narrative of Sarapgyaw," 12.

## ADAWX OF 'WIISEEKS

This era inaugurated during the time of Yagagwin'usk endured until the coastal Tsimshian and their upriver neighbours were faced with a wave of newcomers attempting to establish themselves in the region. The adawx of 'Wiiseeks describes these attempts as well as the assertion of dominion by the Tsimshian and the spanaxnox of their territories.

The adawx documents the departure of a Gitksan lineage<sup>40</sup> from its ancestral lands on the upper Skeena River. 'Wiiseeks's intention was to lead his people "down to the coast, where the weather was mild – so they had heard – and food was more easily obtained."<sup>41</sup> When they reached Tsimshian territory, they did not acknowledge the spanaxnox along the lower river with gifts until the powerful spanaxnox Gyedm'na'ax exacted retribution on behalf of all the spanaxnox (see Figure 2). Emma Wright, Łeex (Eagle clan, Gitlaxdamks tribe), recounted these events:

[ 'Wiiseeks] openly disregarded these supernatural beings and paid no respect to them or made any offerings of fat. This disrespect brought the anger of these spanaxnox. As the 'Wiiseeks group were travelling on down the Skeena, it kept hearing voices calling in the distance, "Be on your guard Gyedm'na'ax, for those who do not respect us shall soon be close to you." Those in the canoe heard these voices, but saw nobody. They disregarded the threat and also the warnings of the elderly wise men ...

When the canoe ... arrived at the abode of Gyedm'na'ax, they saw a huge whirlpool and it grasped the large canoe ... The huge whirlpool travelled round swifter and swifter until there was a hole in the middle of it, and this was gradually sucking the canoe in. Soon the whirlpool swallowed the canoe down and it disappeared from sight. As soon as the canoe disappeared, a being rose out of the water, a man resembling a woman, this being having the head and hair of a woman, but the lower part of the body was that of a man with male genital organs. This monster sang a dirge [limx'ooy].<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> 'Wiiseeks was a Gitksan chief who left the ancient settlement at Texplaxam (at the junction of the Skeena and Bulkley Rivers) to settle at Gitksigyuukla (further down the Skeena). From here, a later 'Wiiseeks migrated down the Skeena River into Tsimshian territory.

<sup>41</sup> Emma Wright, "Gyaedemna'arh, The Huge Whirlpool," in William Beynon and Marius Barbeau, *Temlarbam: The Land of Plenty on the North Pacific Coast* (Hull: Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1953), no. 59, p. 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

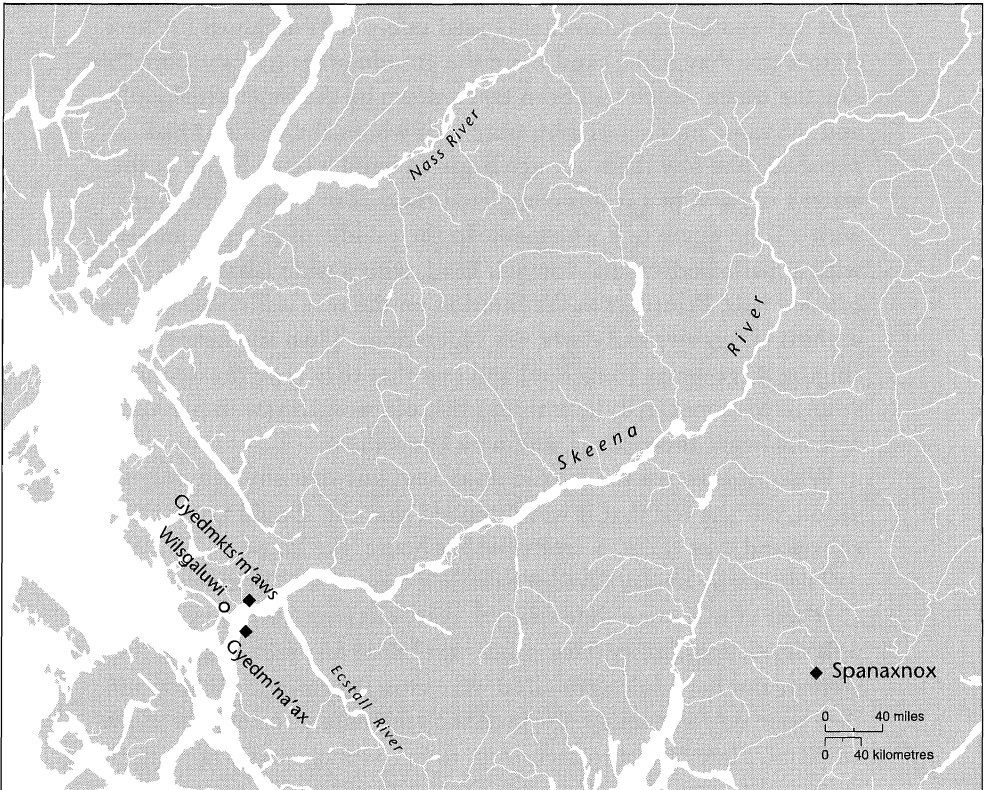


Figure 2: Geographic locations in the adawx of 'Wiiseeks.

Disrespect on the part of 'Wiiseeks and his people provoked an act of revenge on the part of Gyedm'na'ax, but it also led to a process of accommodation whereby 'Wiiseeks's descendants made reparations to the spanaxnox. The surviving members of 'Wiiseeks's house commemorated the events in an adawx honouring the spanaxnox, especially Gyedm'na'ax, whose image they took as their crest and whose limx'oo they sang in his honour. In so doing, they established peaceful relations with the spanaxnox and an alliance that secured them safe passage along the lower Skeena River.

The only surviving members of this lineage were a young girl and her grandmother who were being towed in a small canoe, "completely covered over to keep the adolescent girl from view or contact."<sup>43</sup> Their tow rope broke, but they were spared when the main canoe was pulled into the whirlpool. In Emma Wright's telling, the girl and her grandmother learned of their relatives' fate in a vision:

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The girl and her grandmother landed safely at Wilsgaluwi (Where Across the Way Alder) and there the grandmother had a vision: “She saw the canoe which had been taken down by the huge whirlpool, and the same number of men were in it whom she thought had perished. She saw them at once begin to build a large house at the water’s edge. When it was completed these men painted the front with a large figure of a whirlpool. In the middle of it was a monster with a man’s body and a woman’s head, with a wide labret and long braided hair. Paintings in the interior, on the rear walls, showed sea urchins (Daga’aw) and dayts, sea vegetations. Then she heard them singing dirge songs [limx’ooy] and saw that they were dressed in strange costumes. All these things this old woman saw in her vision, and she heard these songs, and now knew them.

When she awoke she looked down and saw that she had only a vision, but she felt that it was intended that she should know these things and take them as crests for her house, the house of ‘Wiiseeks ... That is why to-day Gyedm’na’ax is a crest of the ‘Wiiseeks group ... It was at this same time that the crest of Ganmks’tm’aws (Gan: pole or stick; kts’m: in; ‘aws: sand) was [also] first seen. As the woman and her adolescent child were crossing from the whirlpool, they were now at another abode of the supernatural being, Kts’m’aws, In-Sand. Here had been seen from time to time, emerging from the waters, the huge Grizzly-of-the-Seas, with a large fin on its back, and at the same time a large pole would also come out of the water. The singing of dirges was heard coming as from the waters. The abode of this monster was known as Gyedmkts’m’aws, Person-of-on-the-sand. The woman ... also took the crest of Gyedmkts’m’aws.<sup>44</sup>

This adawx and its associated crests and limx’ooy mark the establishment of privileges for the house of ‘Wiiseeks among the spanaxnox of a new land. The crests they painted in the interior of their houses, showing “sea urchins (Daga’aw) and dayts, sea vegetations,” commemorate this achievement and indicate their new identity as a coastal people. Gyedm’na’ax and Gyedmkts’m’aws, the spanaxnox they also commemorate as crests, are located across from each other at the mouth of the Skeena River. These spanaxnox guard the gateway to the Skeena, and the alliance between them and ‘Wiiseeks established the right of his people to pass freely to and from the coast.

Acceptance by the spanaxnox reflects a parallel process in the human world, where appropriate protocol allows new peoples a place

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 4.

in the territory of another nation. The Tsimshian would not accept a foreign lineage such as that of ‘Wiiseeks unless it brought wealth and status to the nation. As Herbert Wallace, Nisyaganaat (Raven clan, Gitsiis tribe), explained:

It was a custom, whenever a person wished to leave one band or tribe, to join in with another, providing there were relatives there to receive them, that is, relatives of the same crest, such as Gispwudwada, etc. To do so, that person had to spend a large amount among the new tribe he wished to join.<sup>45</sup>

The persistence of the house of ‘Wiiseeks in the face of adversity (commemorated in their adawx, crests, and limx’ooy), the alliance with Gyedm’na’ax and Gyedmkts’m’aws, and the wealth and status ‘Wiiseeks brought from his homeland accord this new lineage status among the Tsimshian. Implied in the description of their initial devastation by the spanaxnox are parallel difficulties faced in the human world as the Tsimshian’s acceptance of ‘Wiiseeks took place at a time when they were reluctant to allow foreigners to settle among them. While their acceptance did not imply any cession of Tsimshian territory,<sup>46</sup> the house of ‘Wiiseeks had achieved the goal of penetrating the Tsimshian’s coastal territories and of compromising their ability to exclude inland peoples from settling there.

#### ADAWX OF NISŁGUTS’OLK

The adawx of Nisłguts’olk documents the efforts, during this same period, of a Tlingit Eagle clan lineage to establish itself among the Tsimshian (see Figure 3). This group, among others, journeyed down the coast into Tsimshian territory, where it first battled and then settled among the Tsimshian. In the adawx of Nisłguts’olk, Lumaas, a member of this house, set out to overcome all the spanaxnox of the lower Skeena River. The adawx describes a shift in the balance of power between these spanaxnox and the human world as Lumaas seeks mastery rather than accommodation.

Lumaas initiated a challenge to the spanaxnox by deliberately carving a crest called Gawdigyet (Split Person) belonging to Kts’m’aws. He

<sup>45</sup> Herbert Wallace, “How the Larhkibu Houses among the Tsimshian Originated,” in Beynon and Barbeau, *Wolf Clan Invaders*, no. 18, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Among the northern Tsimshian, some of ‘Wiiseeks’s lineage joined the Ginaxangiik tribe (others joined the southern Tsimshian). It was not until considerably later, when ‘Wiiseeks rose to prominence among the Ginaxangiik tribe, that the tribe acquired territory on the lower Skeena River as compensation for a crime committed against them by the Gitsiis.

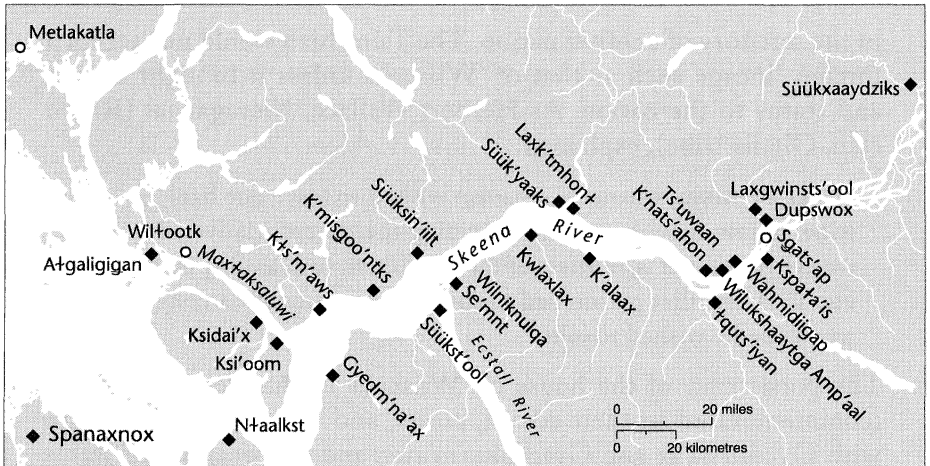


Figure 3: Geographic locations in the adawx of Nisłguts'olk.

then took the carving with him when he left Metlakatla with other Tsimshian for their salmon grounds up the Skeena River. His parents objected because they did not wish to offend the spanaxnox, but Lumaas persisted. As they proceeded upriver many spanaxnox responded to Lumaas's challenge. As Mrs. John Ross<sup>47</sup> related:

When they came to the abode of a monster called Ałgaligigan (Place Where No Trees Grow – Coast Island) it was blowing a west wind and the ancient people used cedar bark mats for sails. These moving people were happy when a voice suddenly spoke on the shore to them coming from the being of the sea “You have made a mistake Lumaas, in making the crest of the being of the sea.” ...

The canoe kept on its course until they came to Wilłootk (Place of Slides), and then another spanaxnox known as Ksidai'x (Waters of the Lagoon) spoke, saying “Keep on going Lumaas and do not return down.” The anger of all the beings of the sea was raging, because of what Lumaas had done in making the crest of the being of the sea ...

The canoe kept on sailing through Maxłaksaluwi (Passage of Green Alders) until they came to Kts'm'aws (Being in the Sand), and then the spanaxnox of Nłalkst spoke to Lumaas, saying “Thoughtless man you are Lumaas, why do you ridicule us.” And now he came to the middle of Kts'm'aws (Sandbar), which was also another spanaxnox.

And then another spanaxnox, known as Gyedm'na'ax (Point Lambert) spoke to the spanaxnox Kts'm'aws, saying “How do you

<sup>47</sup> Mrs. John Ross's Tsimshian name, clan, and tribe were not identified.



feel you Kts'm'aws, about what Lumaas has done to your crest." And Kts'm'aws replied to Gyedm'na'ax, "We will not let him return." ...

The moving people now came upon where was the abode of another spanaxnox known as K'misgoo'ntks and it was then that Süükst'ool (Mouth of Oxtal) [Ecstall], another spanaxnox spoke to Lumaas "Be very careful Lumaas, as you have really done something serious."

And now the moving people came to Süüksin'iilt (Mouth of Pebble River),<sup>48</sup> then another spanaxnox known as Wilniknulga Se'mnt (Where Long Spruce Trees) spoke to the spanaxnox at Süüksin'iilt, "Lumaas is coming near you" and then the spanaxnox at Süüksin'iilt replied, "I see him, but it is not my crest that he uses."

The moving people had now come to another abode of a naxnox known as Kwloxax (Falling Down About), and then the spanaxnox of Süük'yaaks (Mouth of K'yaaks) spoke across<sup>49</sup> to him, saying "Lumaas is here, you had better get ready for him." And Kwloxax replied, "Yes, I hear it and Ksin'iilt is no good, he will not help us."

The moving people now went past here and they came to Laxk'tmhontł (On Place Caught Salmon), and then another spanaxnox called K'alaax spoke to Laxk'tmhontł, saying, "It is well that you should let Lumaas go by, we will get him on his return." And then the spanaxnox Laxk'tmhontł replied, "Alright, the spanaxnox of Ts'uwaan K'nats'ahon (Point of Where Speared Salmon) is waiting for him to spear them." Lumaas had heard of the adawx that ... this being stood on a platform as he speared the salmon ... So then Lumaas said to his people, "This way you shall go." And they followed very close to the shore and this was the course they followed.

They now came to below Wilukshaaytga Amp'aal (Where Out Stands the Cottonwood) and then Lumaas looked about and saw where a big tall man was standing on a platform for spearing, holding a salmon spear. He was bending low over the water and seemed as if he would spear them, and he made movements to do so, but he did not do so. It was then that the moving people heard the spanaxnox of Łguts'iyen (Small Skeena) speak to K'nats'ahon (Where Speared Salmon), "Just wait, they will return again." And then Wilukshaaytga Amp'aal spoke to Lumaas, saying Kspał'a'is is the name of the spanaxnox ahead of you, Lumaas, he is a very fierce man."

<sup>48</sup> Original footnote: "Mouth of Bar of Pebbles – Ksin'iilt is derived from 'wa'iilt: bars formed by currents which [are] of stone, pebbles or gravel instead of sand."

<sup>49</sup> The word used in the original language is "dzaga," which means "across the water," indicating that the spanaxnox speaking is across the water from the one to whom it is speaking.

And now Lumaas came to another terrible territory which was called 'Wahmidiigap (Where Never Ate Of), and the spanaxnox of Kspała'is spoke to Lumaas, saying, "Stop here, you, Lumaas, eat of the berries here." But Lumaas knew that the berries on this territory were taboo and never eaten ...

It was now coming night and the people then camped at Sgats'ap (Village Across the Skeena).<sup>50</sup> Next morning they kept on going up the river. Then the spanaxnox of Laxgwinsts'ool (On Where the Beaver) spoke to Lumaas, "Take good care Lumaas." This being was friendly to Lumaas, so Lumaas replied to it saying, "I will do as you say."

They now came to where they were going to gather salmon at Süükxaaydziks and here they camped. But Lumaas never stayed in the house, but went up into the woods where he stayed. He did no work. He always carried about with him the carved figure of wood.<sup>51</sup>

At Süükxaaydziks, Lumaas remained in the forest until the end of the salmon harvest, but when his family prepared to return, they decided "to leave without him and to desert him here." Lumaas agreed to this, but Łguhaaymas, "a brave chief of the same tribe, the Gitsiis, but of the Raven clan made up his mind to take him in his canoe." Together Lumaas and Łguhaaymas led the Tsimshian downriver, and Lumaas, having challenged the spanaxnox, now faced the full force of their power. In Mrs. Ross's telling, the spanaxnox rose up against them, but Lumaas met and overcame their challenges.

Łguhaaymas ... said, "Take the flat board and sit Lumaas in the centre of the canoe." And this Lumaas did and he carried prominently the carved wooden figure. There were many companions of Lumaas in Łguhaaymas' canoe, and they led the moving people.

Then they shoved off their canoe and as they did so, the whirlpools started in around the canoes. It was now that the words of the sea beings were coming to pass. They came on down to the spanaxnox of Dupswox (Fort of Sleeping Mountain)<sup>52</sup> and this spanaxnox said to Lumaas, "Those who will harm you are now ready." Well they were now heading to Sgats'ap (Across Village) and then foam came and the waters rose around the canoe and then Lumaas said to

<sup>50</sup> Original footnote: "[A] village lying across the Skeena at the junction of several small streams."

<sup>51</sup> Mrs. John Ross, "Myth of Lu-mas and the Spawning Place of Children," in Beynon, *Beynon Manuscript*, no. 59, pp. 9-19.

<sup>52</sup> Original footnote: "A mountain which comes to the waters edge on the Skeena regarded as a spanaxnox."

Łguhaaymas, "Put me out from here." And they done this and Lumaas jumped out. And as soon as he done so, then the foam and rising waters quickly went down ...

And Lumaas kept on running down the river and he jumped on what he thought were boulders. But these were seals. He still carried the carved figure of wood and all before him were scattered many different beings of the water. After he had gone on down for some time, then Łguhaaymas came to shore to take Lumaas on board his canoe. And again, just as soon as Lumaas came on board the foam started to come up and the waters rise again.<sup>53</sup>

Lumaas continued the length of the river, in turn travelling in the canoe and running along the shore. Each time he rejoined the canoe, the foam and rising waters endangered the crew and he was forced to jump back on the shore. As he ran along the shore, Lumaas had to cross the mouths of the tributaries on logs and boulders that suddenly came alive or transformed into spirit beings. Mrs. Ross related how he arrived at the mouth of the Skeena River.

He now came to Lutgukts'm'aws (In Around Sand Bar), which he saw was filled with what seemed to be logs ahead of him. And then the spanaxnox of Gyedm'na'ax spoke to the spanaxnox of Kts'm'aws, saying, "Do your best to catch Lumaas, you shall really catch him." And Lumaas heard what all these spanaxnox were saying, saying this "Catch Lumaas, you, catch him."

It was now near night and Lumaas was now heading down through Maxłakswaluwi (Passage of Place of Alders) and the spanaxnox of Ksi'oom called out, "Catch Lumaas, you catch him." Lumaas was now tiring and his tongue was dry and parched as was his chest, but he dare not drink, because when he would drink the water would change quickly into things which would destroy him.

So he kept on running down, until he came to Sūüksidai'x (Mouth of Waters of Lagoon) and the spanaxnox living here spoke to all of the spanaxnox who were chasing Lumaas and said this, "You thought you would catch Lumaas, shame. Do not pass this spot here and it is well that you shall all pile right where you are." And they did so, they stood where they were and became stones. When the canoe of Łguhaaymas met Lumaas he was now victorious over all that were trying to destroy him and they arrived to Metłaklatla.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Ross, "Myth of Lu-mas," 24-8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-5.

While naming geographic locations in sequence up one bank of a river and down the other is common when territory is formally described or delimited, such naming is rarely found in *adawx*. This *adawx*, therefore, is an important reference for any study of the geography of the lower Skeena, especially since the location of most of the sites can be identified (see Figure 3).

In the *adawx* of Nisłguts'olk, Lumaas moved in and out of the *spanaxnox* world, overcoming foaming waters, boulders and logs that became living creatures, and spirit beings intent on spearing him or drowning him and his crew. He could not have made the heroic journey downriver, however, without Łguhaaymas, a Gitsiis Raven clan warrior. Together they conquered the very real dangers of travel between Metlakatla Pass and the salmon fishery at Süükxaaydziks at the upriver limit of Gitsiis territory. Łguhaaymas's lineage also originated among the Tlingit and was among the first of the newcomers to arrive from the north. Many of this lineage joined the original Raven clan peoples who had founded the Gitsiis and to whom most of the tribe's territory belonged. Lumaas's lineage, led by Nisłguts'olk, most probably joined the Gitsiis tribe as a result of an alliance with Łguhaaymas, and both their positions there were strengthened by their mastery of the *spanaxnox* of the lower Skeena River. As with 'Wiiseeks, however, the acceptance of Lumaas by a Tsimshian tribe did not imply the cession of territory to Nisłguts'olk.<sup>55</sup>

While Lumaas's and Łguhaaymas's lineages had migrated via the mouth of the Nass River, where they joined the inland Gitsiis tribe,<sup>56</sup> many of the other foreigners from the north attempted to invade the Tsimshian on the coast and drive them off their lands. They were successful at first, forcing those at Metlakatla Pass to move to defensive sites up the Skeena River, but they were eventually driven off by the famous warrior Aksk of the Gitwilgyoots tribe. The joint defence of the Skeena River initiated closer ties between the coastal and inland Tsimshian. When the Gitwilgyoots returned to the coast, they were joined at Metlakatla Pass by the lower Skeena River tribes and the foreigners from the north who had been accepted among them. In the end, each of the nine or more tribes of the time included coastal, river, and foreign peoples.

<sup>55</sup> Nisłguts'olk, however, does own an area within Gitsiis territory on Work Channel, which may have been accorded his lineage at the time.

<sup>56</sup> For a complete account of this period, see Marsden, "Defending the Mouth of the Skeena."

The adawx of Lumaas's journey thus marks an important shift in the nature of Tsimshian society. As newcomers joined the Tsimshian, the Tsimshian themselves became more integrated. As a result of this period of integration, the Gitsiis and other lower Skeena River tribes began to winter at Metlakatla Pass, and all the tribes began their annual trips up the Skeena for the salmon fishery. Thus, Lumaas's journey can be seen as an inaugural journey, initiating, at least for the Gitsiis, seasonal river travel as an aspect of Tsimshian culture.

In its original written form, this adawx is a single block of text handwritten in Sm'algyax with interlinear English translation. When the narrative is broken into stanzas more closely reflecting its original oral form,<sup>57</sup> a toponomic pattern emerges – a pairing of spanaxnox that are located across the river from each other.<sup>58</sup> In the adawx of Nispilax and 'Wiiseeks, Kts'm'aws and Gyedm'na'ax guard the gateway to the Skeena River. In this adawx of Nisłguts'olk, the paradigm is continued upriver, where, like sentinels, the spanaxnox monitor river travel past their territories. Several spanaxnox are named "mouth of..." indicating their control of the gateways to the tributaries of the Skeena River as well.

This paradigm is also found in the human world, where ancient single clan villages were established across the river from each other. Located on the perimeter of their own territory, often at the mouth of a tributary watershed, each exogamous village looked to the other for marital, ceremonial, and economic partnerships. Distinct and yet intimately allied with each other, these two villages formed a unit and thus effectively controlled travel along the waterways between them. In more recent times such pairing continued with multi-clan villages in which the leading chiefs, from different clans, formed a similar alliance, allowing them either to prevent travel past their villages or to exact tribute from those travelling to trade. Some villages, such as the two at Kitselas Canyon on the middle Skeena, stretched a rope across the river to indicate their control over river travel through their territories.

<sup>57</sup> The original of this adawx is almost entirely without paragraphing. John Asher Dunn has identified the structural elements in adawx that reveal their narrative form, reminding us that adawx, even in print, are oral records in the full bardic tradition. In this case, the stanzas begin with such phrases as "when they came to," "the moving people now came to," and so on.

<sup>58</sup> In six of the ten pairs of spanaxnox, one speaks across to the other. In nine of the ten pairs, the spanaxnox are located across the river from each other. In the last pair, the exact locations of the spanaxnox are assumed but not known. In two cases there is an alternate third to the pair on the return journey. See Duff, *Tsimshian File*.

The adawx of Nispilax, 'Wiiseeks, and Nisłguts'olk describe direct interaction between the Tsimshian and the spanaxnox of their territories, and reveal the spirit world as a parallel universe with the same structure as the human world. The adawx, and the crests that arise from them, mark alliances that are formed between these worlds. In this case, the Gawdigyet crest of the spanaxnox Lutgukts'm'aws became the crest of the house of Nisłguts'olk, and the name Lumaas continues to be passed on from generation to generation in this house. In addition, acceptance of Lumaas and his people by the spanaxnox reflects the parallel process in the human world. In overcoming the spanaxnox, Lumaas, like 'Wiiseeks, established a new people in a foreign landscape and participated in the changing sociopolitical and economic arena of the Tsimshian of that time.

#### THE ADAWX OF LAGAXNITSK

Lagaxnitsk and his lineage were among the last groups to migrate into the Skeena River area during this period (see Figure 4). Unlike 'Wiiseeks and Nisłguts'olk, who were foreigners, Lagaxnitsk was a Tsimshian from the southern region. He and his people left K'tsistsu, their original village near the southern limits of Tsimshian territory, and migrated to the Skeena River through Douglas Channel. As the adawx of Lagaxnitsk relates, his lineage became associated on the Skeena with Niswa'mak, "who knew them as strangers," and moved downriver with his tribe, the Gispaxlo'ots. Niswa'mak was a relative of Nisłguts'olk and had recently arrived from the north with the other Tlingit Eagle clan lineages.

Lagaxnitsk's crests commemorate a founding relationship with the spanaxnox of his lineage's original territories – crests that were acquired in an ancestral journey under the sea to the spanaxnox Nagwin'aks. When these Gitnagwin'aks (People of Nagwin'aks) arrived at Lax'nmaxłagwili, just below Kitselas Canyon, they did not acknowledge the Skeena River spanaxnox and their Tsimshian allies when they built a house on which they depicted their crests. As Matthew Johnson, Lagaxnitsk (Gispwudwada clan, Gispaxlo'ots tribe), explained:

And they asked for the privilege to live with the Gispaxlo'ots, but not assume any position of chief, before any of the older residents, as they considered themselves strangers. But they kept all their crests, which indicated their former rank ... and the time it was during the chieftainship of Niswa'mak.

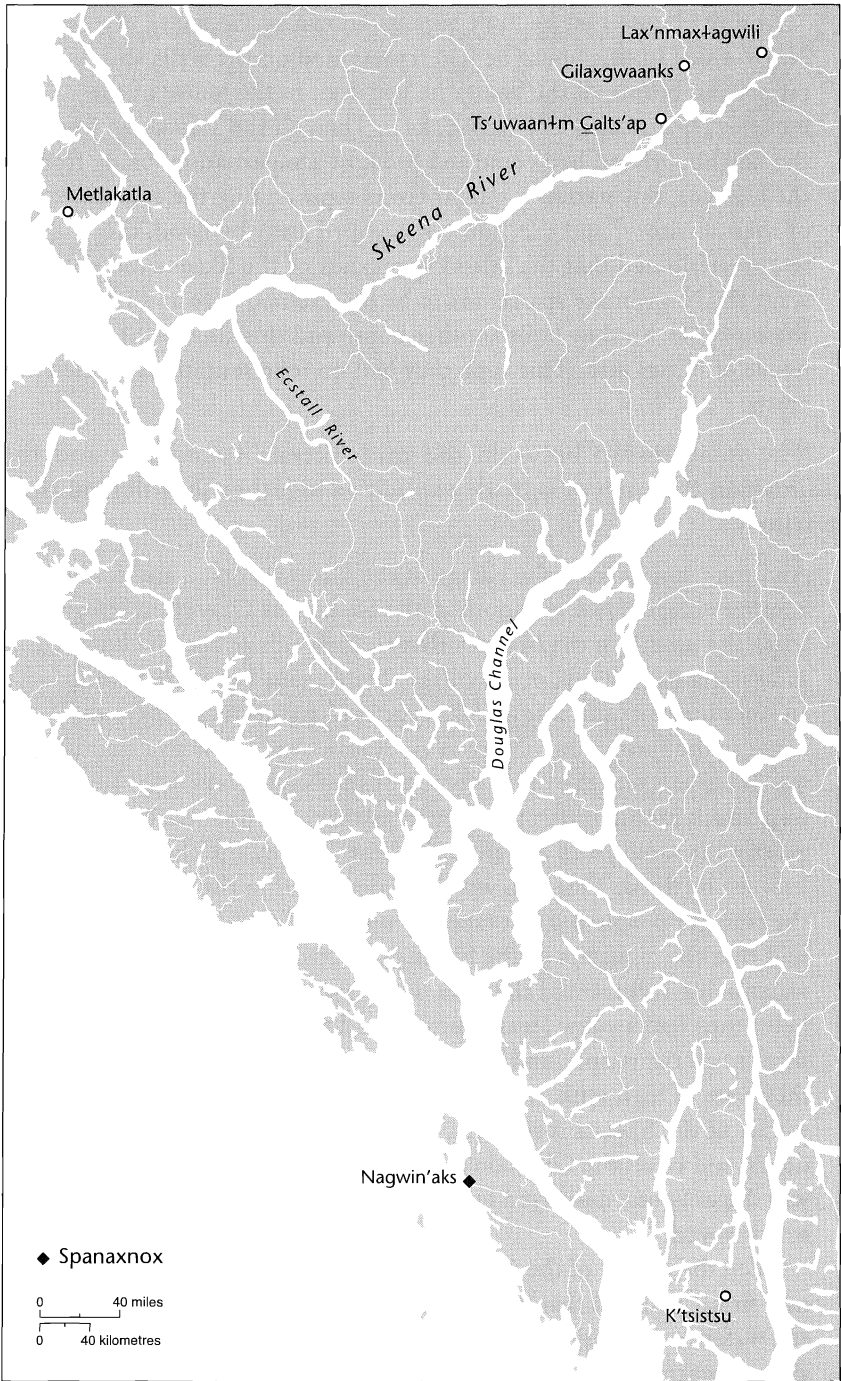


Figure 4: Geographic locations in the adawx of Lagaxnitsk.

And the house that he built became known as the house of Nagwin'aks. In this house he had represented on the walls and rafters and beams all the beings he had seen in the house of the monster [spanaxnox] of Nagwin'aks ... Then all the Tsimshian from the neighbourhood had come and brought a supernatural being from the heavens, this naxnox ... [their crests representing the spanaxnox of their territory] and this house was wiped away by flood, the reason attributed that the inland spanaxnox of the Skeena did not want the Nagwin'aks spanaxnox to be represented here at all by these people. So they built another house and this time went to the house of Niswa'mak. This time they had no representations of their crests.

The relationship between the mid-Skeena spanaxnox and the Tsimshian themselves is made explicit as together they defend their territory.

And they moved from the village of the Gispaxlo'ots ... and formed another village down to mouth of the Skeena, at Graveyard Point [near the mouth of the Shames River]. This village became known as Ts'uwaanłmgalts'ap, point village. Here again Lagaxnitsk built another house of the Nagwin'aks type, and termed it by the same name as the former one: Nagwin'aks house. And while this building was being erected, the older women of the Nagwin'aks wept and were much afraid of this new house, as they said one was built exactly the same years ago and been destroyed by the chief of the heavens by flood. This also was to be destroyed in the same way. But the younger people did not take any notice of it whatever: the older said that the monsters of the Skeena objected to those of the salt water being represented there on the Skeena. When the house was built, they had a yukw [feast], brought all their crests and showed them to all the people, and it was then that the Gispaxlo'ots saw that they were of high rank, not of the wa'ay'n class. Soon afterwards, the waters of the Skeena rose again, in a flood, and came to the house doors, and of all the Gispaxlo'ots houses, the house of Lagaxnitsk was the only one destroyed by flood there, being their second house so destroyed.

Then the people of the Gispaxlo'ots met together in council, they now firmly believed that the Skeena River spanaxnox objected to the salt water ones being represented there and the council decided not to allow Lagaxnitsk to build another house of the same type for their



own safety and then Lagaxnitsk built a home of the ordinary type.

The Gitnagwin'aks group had now spread out, and had married with other Gispaxlo'ots; and now they came to live to salt water as Lagaxnitsk had now determined to leave the Skeena to come to salt water, of which he originally was, he and the Gispaxlo'ots established themselves at Metlakatla.<sup>59</sup>

A branch of the Gitnagwin'aks joined the Gitlaan tribe. Their adawx, told by Enoch Maxwell, gives an account of their arrival and specifies the period of this migration:

After this quarrel, Wudimaas, Liplits'iiwst, and T'iibn went to the Skeena River and settled at a point near Gitsmgeelm, called Gilaxgwaanks, People-of-Springs, after Aksk had defeated the Gidagnits (Tlingit) and driven them from Metlakatla. Later on, Wudimaas and other Gitnagwin'aks moved together and joined the other Gitlaan people. They made Metlakatla their main village.<sup>60</sup>

Like the Gitsiis, the Gitlaan and the Gispaxlo'ots, now mixed with foreign peoples from the north and south, joined the inland tribes establishing winter villages at Metlakatla Pass.

While the Gitnagwin'aks were accepted by the Tsimshian, they were not able to retain their original territory; nor were they able to display the crests they derived from their alliance with the spanaxnox Nagwin'aks.<sup>61</sup> However, this alliance underlay their acceptance by the Gispaxlo'ots, as their adawx states: "Laans [of Lagaxnitsk's lineage] of the Nagwin'aks had married in the family of Niswa'mak and was recognized more or less as a man of high standing in the Gispaxlo'ots." Their relationship to the spanaxnox of their original territories, like all such alliances, remained at the heart of their identity, as its persistence into the modern period shows.

And when they came to Port Simpson here from Metlakatla, Laans and Lagaxnitsk built a house where (Rudge's shed is now); as the Gispaxlo'ots made the Nagwin'aks built their house on the water, in case it would be the cause of flood, which was their third attempt.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Johnson, Lagaxnitsk, Gispwudwada, Gispaxlo'ots, to William Beynon, 1915. In Barbeau and Beynon, *Fieldnotes*, B.F. 24.6.

<sup>60</sup> Enoch Maxwell, Gispwudwada clan, Gitlaan tribe, to William Beynon, 1915, in Beynon and Barbeau, *Temlarham*, no. 89.

<sup>61</sup> They share with Niswa'mak (later Ligeex), the other relative newcomers, small territories on the Skeena River and on the coast.

<sup>62</sup> Maxwell to Beynon, in Beynon and Barbeau, *Temlarham*, no. 89.

## CONCLUSION

The adawx of Nispilax commemorates a founding relationship between the Gitzaxłaał and Kts'm'aws, the leading spanaxnox of the region – a relationship that characterizes an era in which coastal Tsimshian consolidated their position in their territories and their identity as a coastal people. This relationship spans the millennia and was acknowledged in the modern period when the missionary presence at Kincolith, at the mouth of the Nass, was used to undermine the Tsimshian position there. In the 1930s William Beynon described Nispilax's stone totem, which stands upriver from Kincolith:

A sharp pinnacle of rock, which is almost dry during extreme low waters. At Crabapple Point, just about 2 miles up from Kincolith on the same bank. The writer [William Beynon] in 1927 while with Dr. Barbeau, tried to get some information from the Nisga'a, on this point, but owing to the fact that there is a dispute of territorial ownership between the Nass and Tsimshians, the Nass would not admit the narrative. But I recorded the myth from six or seven different older informants in 1915-16. And also from one Nass informant in 1917.<sup>63</sup>

The adawx of 'Wiiseeks, Nisłguts'olk and Lagaxnitsk date from a later period, when a number of Northwest Coast peoples abandoned their homelands and migrated into Tsimshian territory. The spanaxnox's response to the newcomers parallels that of the Tsimshian, who refused to relinquish their dominion.

The adawx of 'Wiiseeks and Nisłguts'olk commemorate the successful inclusion of these two lineages into Tsimshian society and record their eventual acceptance by the spanaxnox of the region. Their adawx, crests, and limx'ooy mark their acceptance of the dominion of the local spanaxnox and their Tsimshian allies. The adawx of Lagaxnitsk, in contrast, commemorates the enduring alliance of this lineage with the spanaxnox of its original territories and an uneasy relationship with the spanaxnox among the northern Tsimshian, which persisted into the modern period.

While the influx of so many foreigners over several centuries modified the Tsimshian sociopolitical and economic system, their cultural identity, and their ownership of their territories, remained remarkably intact.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Brooks, "Myth of What Happened to Yagagwinusk."

<sup>64</sup> Marsden, "Defending the Mouth of the Skeena."

These adawx, therefore, have many levels of meaning. They describe specific events in the history of a house while also revealing their importance within the broader context of the geographic and political history of the Tsimshian. As well, they exemplify the inherent laws of Tsimshian society by which charters are established that define relationships among peoples and between people and the living power of the land.

The knowledge contained in these adawx, like the events they portray, moves between the worlds of spirit and matter, reflecting the pervasive worldview of Northwest Coast peoples that all creation is imbued with spirit. From this perspective, the adawx reflect the world itself, where human and spirit realms interpenetrate. When this is appreciated, the adawx come into focus as an altogether understandable record of the history of Northwest Coast peoples.

It is evident that the adawx, and their record of Tsimshian/spanaxnox alliances, are essential aspects of an ancient and enduring system of land ownership. The adawx of Nispilax, 'Wiiseeks, Nisłguts'olk, and Lagaxnitsk encode legal proofs of specific rights and title acquired and defended over millennia, and indicate the profound nature of Tsimshian territorial ownership.