

## Review Article

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*Handbook of North American Indians: Northwest Coast* (volume 7),  
edited by Wayne Suttles. Washington: Smithsonian Institute. 1990.  
Pp. xv, 777. \$47.50 U.S.

Here it is at long last — the book that everyone with an interest in Northwest Coast native cultures has been waiting for. At least nineteen years in the making,<sup>1</sup> this volume in the *Handbook of North American Indians* series will undoubtedly serve as *the* source of information on cultures in this area for many years to come. Most of the articles are well written and informative, but alas, there is also much that is poorly presented, incomplete, and sometimes questionable or misleading. The quality of the articles is inconsistent. Typographical errors are numerous. Reviewing each of the fifty-eight articles is out of the question, so I will keep to the more salient points.

The volume is very well laid out, with five introductory articles, including the general Introduction by Suttles, which has some wonderful drawings of indigenous tools, house styles, and canoe types. The other chapters in this section cover "Environment," "Languages," "Human Biology," and "Cultural Antecedents" for the entire Northwest Coast culture area as described in the volume. These articles are generally clear and easily grasped by the layman, except for some of the tables and technical terms in Cybulski's "Human Biology"; similarly, the non-linguist may have some trouble with the technical descriptions in "Languages" by Thompson and Kinkade.

The remainder of the volume is divided into four sections: History of Research, History of Contact, The Peoples (which comprises two-thirds of the book), and Special Topics. This is the layout of a good reference book: topics are readily identifiable and easy to find (there is also a detailed index). One also finds tables of a Technical Alphabet, and English pro-

<sup>1</sup> The first meeting of the Planning Committee was in February 1971, and the first manuscript received was of Mary Lee Stearns' "Haida Since 1960" in May 1972.

nunciations, which are very useful since many native names and terms are written using the technical alphabet. A most useful feature is the Sources section included at the end of many of the articles, which directs the reader to research available on the subject. Of course, the articles in the History of Research section provide extensive references to earlier work as well.

As Suttles points out in the Introduction, some cultures described in the volume are not in what is generally considered to be the Northwest Coast Culture Area: the Eyak in the north; and, in the Plateau area of Washington and Oregon, the Cowlitz, Chinookans of the Portland Basin, Kalapuya, Upper Umpqua, and Takelma. It is hard to judge whether or not they should be included. Suttles explains: "The boundaries between the areas covered by volumes 7 [Northwest Coast], 8 [California], and 12 [Plateau] were determined by the volume editors on the basis of a combination of cultural criteria and practical considerations" (p. 1). Unfortunately these "criteria" and "considerations" are not given. And since the *Plateau* volume hasn't come out yet, one wonders why these Plateau peoples cannot be included in it.

I also don't agree with the editor's choice of using "long-established English names" (p. 15) for peoples such as the Nuxalk (Bella Coola), Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl), and Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka). These newer names, along with Heiltsuk for the Bella Bella, have been chosen by the peoples themselves out of a desire to discard the old labels; they were not devised simply for their "symbolic value" (p. 15). As mentioned above, this book will serve as a major reference for many years to come, so let's get these names into the literature! This is the only way they will achieve currency. Besides, most people have had problems spelling Kwakiutl anyway (or is it Kwagiulth, Kwagewlth, Kwawkewlth . . .?) (*cf.* Macnair 1986:501); and uninformed people tend to confuse Bella Coola and Bella Bella or, worse, assume the cultures to be similar (or the same?) just because their names are similar.

A look at the articles themselves shows a vast range in levels of quality. Most of "Languages" by Thompson and Kinkade is certainly written for the specialist in linguistics, but much can be gleaned from it by the non-expert as well, especially in the sections "Prehistory" and "Survival of Languages." Other chapters that give the most extensive reporting on the subjects they deal with are Suttles' article on "Environment," Blackman's "Haida: Traditional Culture," Carlson's "Cultural Antecedents," Halpin and Seguin's "Tsimshian Peoples," Hobler's "Prehistory of the Central Coast of B.C.," Kennedy and Bouchard's "Bella Coola," Mitchell's "Prehistory of the Coasts of Southern B.C. and Northern Washington," Arima

and Dewhirst's "Nootkans of Vancouver Island," and Suttles and Lane's "Southern Coast Salish." Then you have Codere's "Kwakiutl: Traditional Culture" and Holm's "Kwakiutl: Winter Ceremonies," which are in a class by themselves, being at the same time scholarly and fascinating. One is tempted to answer the charge that too much emphasis is generally placed on the Kwakwaka'wakw among the Northwest Coast cultures by the fact there have been so many great writers on the subject, and this volume is no exception. And in the Special Topics section, Hymes' "Mythology," along with Holm's "Art," must be included in this category, although they are more general because dealing with the entire Northwest Coast culture area. The other article in Special Topics, Amoss' "The Indian Shaker Church," is informative and of historical interest, but seems out of place in a section that deals mostly with widespread indigenous phenomena. Would an article on non-Christian Northwest Coast indigenous beliefs (maybe on shamanism) be more appropriate? The Shaker Church, as evidenced by the map on page 635, did not influence much of the Northwest Coast as covered in the volume.

Some of the other articles don't meet one's expectations of giving a complete, up-to-date account of the subject. The "Haisla" article by Hamori-Torok, for example, lacks detail and presents undeveloped ideas: the section on "Environment" only talks about climate! Stearn's "Haida Since 1960," Inglis et al's "Tsimshian of British Columbia Since 1900," and Webster's "Kwakiutl Since 1980" do not really give a well-rounded picture of what the cultures are like today. What about the social settings? What is life like now in the communities? How does the white population fit into the picture? All three articles also mention different tribes but fail to provide maps of their present-day locations. Codere, in "Kwakiutl: Traditional Culture," does provide a map of nineteenth-century locations of tribes (p. 360), but the contemporary band names on her chart (p. 361) do not jibe with those of Webster (p. 387). Upon closer inspection, one can guess that Codere's Gilford Island and Turnour Island bands are probably Webster's Kwicksutaineuk and Tlowitsis-Mumtagila respectively, but nowhere on Codere's chart can one find Webster's Tsulquate and Kwiakah bands. This inconsistency is confusing.

Other articles just don't provide enough data. Zenk's "Kalapuyans" is cursory, doing away with technology, for example, in two sentences. Similarly, his "Alseans" is really lacking in material: he gives no population figures and no subsistence base or patterns, information which can be found elsewhere (*cf.* Ruby and Brown 1986:4). If this lack of detail is due to coverage of these aspects in other articles of similar, adjacent cultures, clear

and specific indication of this should be given. Hilton clearly states that little or no information is available on Haihais kinship terminology or social organization (p. 317), which doesn't leave one questioning whether something has been left out, missed, or should be inferred from neighbouring cultures — it just isn't there.

In some articles, authors don't explain the reasons for some practices. For example, in "Eyak," de Laguna says: "Most [salmon] were split and smoked; some were buried to rot" (p. 190). But for what reason were they "buried to rot"? Was it to make oil? Were they later unearthed and eaten? Or was it a ceremonial act, similar to that of other Northwest Coast native peoples who returned bones of the first-caught salmon back to the river or sea (*cf.* p. 468)? Hadja, in "Southwestern Coast Salish," misinterprets Olson, whom she cites, when she states: "The Quinault were the northernmost people on the coast to build houses with gable roofs" (p. 508). Olson says that the Quinault are at the northern boundary of the gable-roofed house type on "the *southern* part of the Northwest coast" (Olson 1936:61, *my italics*), i.e. from Washington state south. To boot, elsewhere in the volume we find gabled-roof houses among the Northern Coast Salish in Comox, B.C. (fig. 3, p. 446) and among the Southern Coast Salish (p. 491), many of whose groups are north of the Quinault. Nabokov and Easton (1989: 228-229) describe gabled-roof houses among the Nuuchah-nulth, Nuxalk, Kwakwaka'wakw, Tlingit, and Tsimshian.

Now to some of the photographs. The identification of individuals in older photos may be difficult, since this information was often not recorded; however, later photos should do so. De Laguna, for one photo in "Tlingit," only describes the traditional costumes the man and boy who appear are wearing, without identifying the two individuals by name (fig. 11, p. 216). Considering that the photo is cited as having been taken between 1972 and 1974, an effort could have been made to identify the people. The unidentified man carving the shaft of an arrow in Renker and Gunther's "Makah" (p. 427) is probably Young Doctor of Neah Bay (*cf.* Marr 1987: 59).

A photograph in Suttles and Jonaitis' "History of Research in Ethnology" identifies a Fort Rupert man at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair as the well-known carver Bob Harris (fig. 3, p. 79). Cole (1985:200) also identifies this man as Bob Harris. However, a photo from the same fair of a much younger man identified as Bob Harris appears in Macnair, Hoover and Neary (1984:126), which is undoubtedly the same Bob Harris depicted in photos in Inverarity (1950: plate 262) and Rabineau (1981: 32). A contemporary native carver from Alert Bay identifies the man in

the *Handbook* photo not as Bob Harris but as Abraham Brown, also from Fort Rupert.

Captions of other photographs pose some problems as well. Arima and Dewhirst, in "Nootkans of Vancouver Island," show a picture of an old Nuu-chah-nulth whaler's hat and make the claim: "Whaler's hats were not made after the early 1800s, but other conical hats done in wrapped twining with grass overlay were made until the late 1800s" (fig. 5, p. 400). Both parts of this statement are erroneous: first, the use of close-wrapped twining in Nuu-chah-nulth basketry, including hats, did not *start* until the late 1800s (Gogol 1980:6); second, the making of whalers' hats, which had been discontinued at the beginning of the nineteenth century, resumed early in the twentieth century, as evidenced by the hat collected by Newcombe between 1904 and 1906 (Marr 1988: 62) and the one he commissioned Ellen Curley of Opitsat to make in 1910 (Macnair, Hoover, and Neary 1984: 78, 80, 154). The difference is that the modern whalers' hats are woven in wrapped twining (the same technique used for the trinket baskets) as described by Holm (1984: 49) and not in the overlaid plain twining of old. Whalers' and other hats continue to be made by the Nuu-chah-nulth. Today, probably the best-known maker of these "Maquinna hats" (so called after the famous Chief) is Jessie Webster of Ahousat, who learned the craft from her grandmother (Efrat and Langlois 1978: 55-56). Information differs widely on the time span during which these hats were in fact made and worn: Gunther (1972: 30) would have us believe that they were a short-lived eighteenth-century fashion, while Kirk (1986: 43) informs us that these hats have been in Nuu-chah-nulth territory for almost 3,000 years! We do know for certain that this style of hat predated Maquinna by at least some 300 years, since fine examples of them from around 1500 A.D. were found at the Ozette site in Makah territory and are now displayed in the Makah Cultural and Research Center in Neah Bay, Washington.

Although Holm's article "Kwakiutl: Winter Ceremonies" is well written, interesting, and informative, the caption to one of the photographs (fig. 5, p. 385) is misleading. One would assume that the picture depicts two Kwakwaka'wakw dancers, since the dancers in other photos in the article are Kwakwaka'wakw (*cf.* fig. 1, p. 382; fig. 3, p. 383; fig. 4, p. 384; fig. 6, p. 385). However, neither Steve Brown nor Jack Hudson is Kwakwaka'wakw, although the latter is native (Tlingit). In Holm's other article, "Art," Steve Brown is identified (not in a photo) as a contemporary non-native artist (p. 632). In any case, one questions the ethics of Holm placing this photo of his controversial "Kwakiutl" dance group that he assembled

in Seattle in a volume which is supposed to depict native culture.

In other places, the material is presented in a confusing fashion, at times the result of poor proofreading. For example, Fladmark, Ames, and Sutherland's table 1 (p. 231) in "Prehistory of the Northern Coast of British Columbia" has the labels "B.C." and "A.D." reversed when referring to cultural sequences. Halpin and Seguin, in "Tsimshian Peoples," direct the reader to figure 14 (p. 279) after describing *wihalàit*, "great dancer." The figure, however, depicts the *?amhalàit* headdress of a *smhalàit*, "real dancer," which is mentioned in the previous sentence. In the same article, the reader is referred to "The four villages shown on figure 1 for the Gitkateen (16a-16d)" (p. 269), but figure 1 shows a map with no numbering of Gitkateen villages or of any other villages, for that matter. In Hilton's "Haihais, Bella Bella, and Oowekeeno," the maps of these peoples' nineteenth-century territories (p. 313) are rather confusing. One of the maps has an orientation different from the other two, and it is difficult to know the geographical relationship among the three areas. Having all the areas depicted on one map may have been better (or one can simply flip to the general map on p. ix!). And could Kendall please tell us what is meant by the reference to Takelma dialects "B" and "H" (p. 589)?

The typographical errors in the volume are far too numerous to list here; even one of the contributors had her name misspelled in the bibliography!<sup>2</sup> In this era of computers with spell-check capabilities, these types of mistakes can be easily avoided, and one has the impression that the final copy of the book was put together rather hurriedly.

There is also a problem with the inconsistent spelling of "Native/native." Generally speaking, some people prefer to capitalize it all the time, while others don't. Some capitalize it when used as a noun, but not as an adjective. There seems to be no hard and fast rule for this, but in any case, writers should pick one method and be consistent. In the *Handbook*, to cite only one example among many, Hamori-Torok on the same page talks about "the native economy," "a Kitimaat native," "a White missionary teacher," and "Native structures" (p. 310). Seaburg and Miller, in "Tillamook," and Kendall in "Takelma," capitalize the noun "Whites" but not "natives" (pp. 560-561, 592).

On a lighter note, the reader is at times allowed some comic relief, even if it is not always intended. The imagination conjures up wonderful images of creatures snuggled up in bed with kelp pulled to their chins with statements like Arima and Dewhirst's: "Sea otters were hunted with harpoon

<sup>2</sup> Gloria Cranmer Webster, p. 717, in reference to J. V. Powell et al., *Learning Kwak'wala Series*.

or bow in kelp beds where they might be found asleep" (p. 395). Zenk is not taking any chances when he tells us unabashedly that "Kalapuyan tribes were apparently politically basically autonomous" (p. 549). And we are enticed to read on when Seaburg and Miller tell us that, among the Tillamook, "A special foreplay technique, *ṣàpṣap*, was used when the bride was a virgin" (p. 563). Well, what was it? Translation, please?

This volume of the *Handbook* will certainly be a very useful and informative reference tool in the years to come for students, professors, and other enthusiasts of Northwest Coast cultures. Most of its shortcomings seem to be due to lack of editorial rigour. If it is ever revised, it must be gone over with a fine-toothed comb to pick out all the bugs. It also presents some interesting discrepancies in material that beg to be followed up with further research, which could lead to the production of some illuminating works in the field.

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