

HAIDA

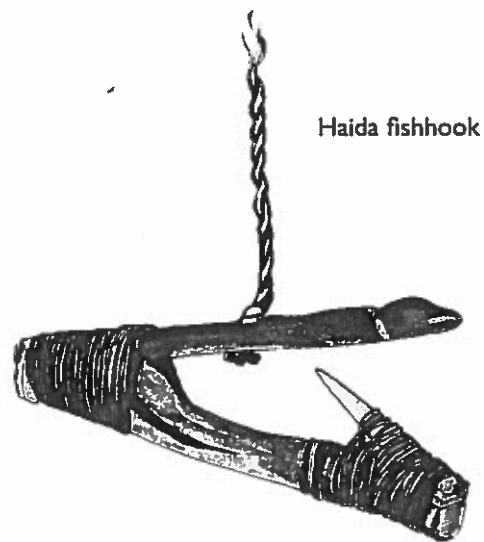
The Pacific Northwest Coast was a region of master woodcarvers. NORTHWEST COAST INDIANS crafted giant totem poles as well as elaborate ceremonial masks, chests, headdresses, and other objects. Of the many skilled woodworkers along this heavily populated strip of coastal land, stretching from northern California to southern Alaska, Haida craftspeople perhaps were the most highly skilled. Their seaworthy boats were especially prized by other tribes. Individuals of other tribes showed off their wealth by trading for a Haida dugout and displaying it at ceremonies, such as weddings.

The Haida occupied ancestral territory on the Queen Charlotte Islands off present-day British Columbia in Canada. In the early 1700s, a group of Haida migrated northward to the southern part of Prince of Wales Island, now part of Alaska, where they used the name *Kaigani*. The Haida, whose name is pronounced HI-duh and means "people," belong to the Na-Dene language phylum, distant relatives of the TLINGIT to their north and perhaps of the ATHAPASCANS to the east.

Lifeways

Since the Haida lived on an island whose streams were too small for salmon, they depended more on fish such as halibut and cod. The candlefish provided oil for cooking and lamps. The Haida also hunted sea mammals, such as seals, sea lions, and sea otters. Unlike the NOOTKA and MAKAH to the south, however, the Haida did not pursue whales. Although the forests in the interior of the Queen Charlotte Islands had little game, the Haida were known to hunt black bears.

Haida men constructed some of the largest gabled houses in the Pacific Northwest, some of them 60 feet by 100 feet. The structures were made from cedar planks, and their openings faced the sea, with one or more totem poles in the front.



Haida fishhook

Haida clothing was made from woven cedar bark or from the pelts of otters and other animals. The women tattooed their faces and bodies and the backs of their hands with family symbols.

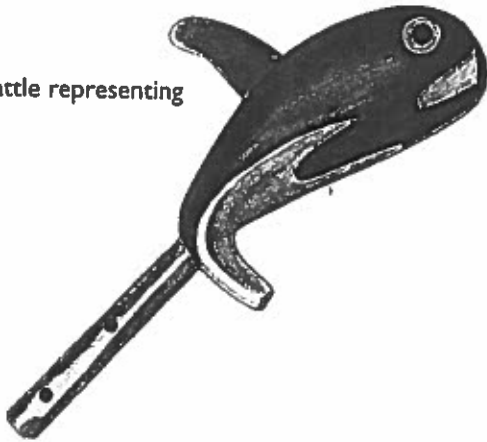
Haida society was divided into two clans, the Bear Clan and the Raven Clan. The Haida practiced the potlatch, the ritualistic giving of gifts to guests. Shamans were organized into secret societies and held great power through their supposed contact with the Ocean Beings. The shamans used "soul-catchers," carved bone tubes, to capture the wandering souls of sick people and return them to their bodies. The dead were placed in carved grave-houses overlooking the ocean, and only the shamans could visit these open coffins.

The favorite wood of the Haida for making their famous dugouts was the giant redwood, although cedar was also used. A tall, straight tree would be felled and floated to the worksite. The log would be split along its center with wooden wedges. Then the remaining round



Haida dugout

Haida rattle representing
a whale



side of one of the logs would be further split to flatten it. The wood would be charred with a torch to make it easier to scrape with a stone adz (later, the Haida used metal tools, acquired from non-Indians). Both the inside and outside of the hull would be scraped, chiseled, and rubbed smooth, until the sides of the boat would be two fingers thick at the bottom, one inch at the top. The cockpit would be widened by putting water inside and adding hot rocks, by burning fires near the outside to further heat the wood, and by forcing the sides outward with oversize wooden braces. The bow and stern pieces, the former longer than the latter, would be carved separately and attached with either cedar pegs or spruce lashings. Strips of cedar would also be added to the tops of the sides. The hull would be sanded with stone and polished with sharkskin to prevent friction in the water. The bow and stern would be decorated with carvings, inlays, and paintings of totemic designs. The resulting boat could be as much as 60 feet long and seven feet wide at the center and could hold about 60 warriors or the same weight in cargo. At first the Indians propelled their boats with paddles, but added sails after contact with Europeans.

Contacts with Non-Indians

Spanish, Russian, British, and French explorers reached the Haida homeland in the mid- to late 1700s. After the first trips of exploration, the fur traders came and estab-

lished trading posts. (Hudson's Bay blankets bought from whites became the main gift at Indian potlatches.) Soon came the missionaries, both Episcopal and Methodist. Disease, liquor, and alien religions all contributed to the gradual decline of the Haida people and their traditional culture.



Haida whistle

Contemporary Haida

Only two organized Haida communities remain in Canada—Masset and Skidegate. Work in fishing and canning provides income for some tribe members. Others generate income through their rediscovered traditional artwork. A community of Haida lives at Hydaburg on the southern end of Prince of Wales Island in Alaska. This group has joined in a corporation with the Tlingit, called the Sealaska Corporation. Both Haida and Tlingit have a reputation as being among the best Alaskan fishermen. Other Haida have moved to urban centers in the region.

The Haida repatriation committee is negotiating with museums across North America to have remains and artifacts returned to the tribe. This process has been made easier by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which was passed in the U.S. Congress in 1990.



Haida paddle