

BOOK REVIEWS

Emerging from the Mist

Studies in Northwest Coast Culture History

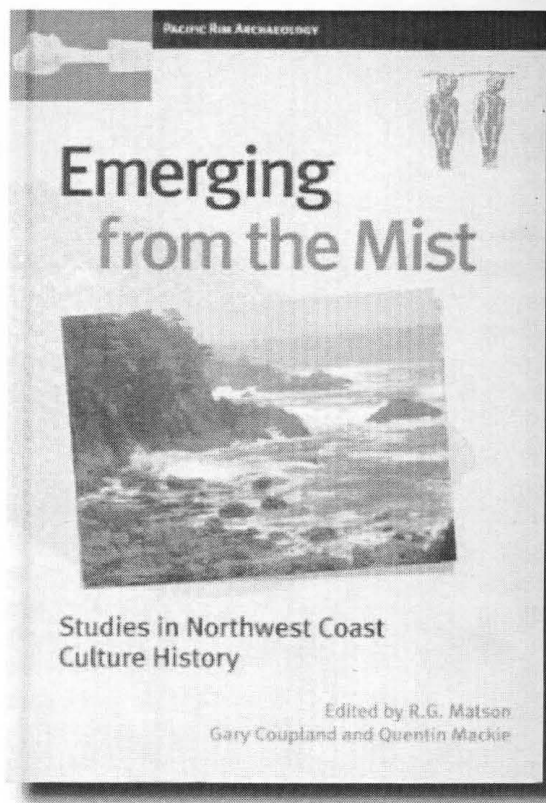
Matson, R.G., Gary Coupland, and
Quentin Mackie, editors.

University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2003.
xiii + 380 pp., illus., maps. Hardback \$95.00. 0-7748-09818-7.
Paperback \$49.95 0-7748-0982-5 (July 2004).

This edited volume began as a festschrift symposium for Donald Mitchell at the Victoria Canadian Archaeology Association meetings in 1998. Its title, *Emerging from the Mist*, reflects the editors' belief that Northwest Coast archaeology is emerging from its long obscurity relative to other regions in North America and particularly relative to Northwest Coast ethnography. The pace of publication and range of publication venues is increasing, although edited volumes, such as this one, are uncommon unlike other regions where they function almost as journals. The subtitle, *Studies in Northwest Coast Culture History*, reflects the volume's contents and Don Mitchell's interests. The editors' goals are to represent the range and quality of archaeological research on the coast and our current understanding of the ethnographic pattern.

There are thirteen chapters, a preface and an "epilogue." In the useful opening chapter Matson introduces the volume's themes: (1) the coast as environment and culture area; (2) the evolution, driven by archaeology and ethnohistory, of our thinking about Northwest Coast sociopolitical organization during the past 40 years; (3) households and household archaeology; (4) integration of archaeology, ethnography and ethnohistory and (5) unique aspects of Northwest Coast culture that make it an important exception to many anthropological generalizations. In all of these, archaeology plays crucial roles as the only means of testing generalizations based on the ethnographies and ethnohistory.

In the second chapter, Martindale analyses the rise of a Coast Tsimshian paramount chiefdom during the fur trade era using his own archaeological field work, ethnohistorical sources and the *adawx*, traditional Coast Tsimshian histories. Following Martindale, Croes continues exploring wet-site artifact distributions along the coast, examining here the temporal and spatial distributions of fishing tackle, including wooden harpoons, stor-



age baskets and knob-topped hats.

In his own chapter, Matson describes excavations of a shed roof house at Shingle Point, discussing the taphonomy of these structures, their variability, and resulting challenges in their excavation and interpretation. Alexander Mackie and Laura Williamson reconstruct house forms at *kix7in*, a small village on the southern edge of Barkley Sound. The reconstructions are based on maps of house depressions and fallen house timbers. The houses were far more variable in form than one would expect, given our stereotypes of Northwest Coast architecture.

Gary Coupland and his co-authors, Roger Colton and Rebecca Case, discuss recent results of Coupland's important on-going excavations at McNichol Creek in Prince Rupert Harbour. McNichol Creek was a two row village dating between c. 1500 and 2000 B.P where Coupland has tested theories about

the development of stratification as marked by the appearance of very large houses. Also addressing social complexity, Colin Grier, using data from the Dionisio Point site, argues increased complexity during the Gulf of Georgia's Marpole phase resulted from intensifying regional interaction. Gregory Monks examines the taphonomy of whale bone assemblages with data from Ozette and Toquaht. Although hampered by small sample sizes he establishes that while whale bones were used in myriad ways, the prestige economy was probably the most important factor affecting the butchering and use of whales.

Precontact metallurgy on the Coast is an old nagging issue. In his chapter, Acheson assesses current evidence, demonstrating metal working was widespread and ancient. In addition to copper use, which is quite ancient, there is good evidence in late precontact context for iron working. Bernick uses a single, apparently unique basket to explore material culture variability and the use of basketry as an ethnic marker. Explicitly drawing on Donald Mitchell's work, Alan McMillan reviews Mitchell's hypothesis that migrations by Wakashan speakers caused abrupt technological changes in Johnstone Strait around 2000 B.P. Integrating linguistic and archaeological evidence including his data from Barkley Sound, McMillan concludes there may indeed have been population shifts around 2000 B.P.

In a methodologically intriguing paper, Mackie uses a spatial interaction model to explore relationships among site size and site distribution on the southern two-thirds of Vancouver Island's west coast. He concludes site distributions cannot be explained using what he terms "straight-forward decision making terms." Rather, he argues, correctly I think, the social landscape shapes subsequent site distributions even as they evolve. I suspect his results also display multiple scalar effects; i.e. there are large regional scale as well as sub-regional and very local site distributions merged in his data.

In the final paper, Donald contributes to the long, ongoing discussion of what, exactly, is the Northwest Coast culturally and environmentally? What are its boundaries? What features define the culture area? How do we cope with variation? One method, of course, is defining subregions although recent work shows as much variation within subregions as between them. This paper is an important contribution to this issue. In the epilogue, Donald briefly discusses what he views as the volume's themes and their relationships to the broader issues in his chapter. He identifies five such themes: boundaries, whaling, stratification and big houses, social and economic interaction spheres, new kinds of data and new kinds of analyses.

Emerging from the Mist is a valuable contribution to Northwest Coast archaeology. Its value lies in the individual paper's overall quality and their subject matter, although some are stronger than others. However, it does not fully succeed as an assessment of Northwest Coast archaeology. Many topics are absent, most notably research on the Late Pleistocene/Early Holocene. This is a consequence of the book's origins as a set of papers reflecting Don Mitchell's research interests. Additionally, and despite the editors' and Leland Donald's best efforts, the book is not tied together by its themes; it has too many of them. Finally, the book has an inward looking quality; the authors talking to other Northwest Coast specialists more than to the broader disciplinary audience the editors hope to reach. However, the

book does succeed in the way an exceptional journal issue does; the papers are all useful and timely, some are quite important; it materially moves the field along, and there is the promise of many more such issues to come.

Kenneth M. Ames

Kenneth Ames is the President of the Society for American Archaeology and a Professor of Anthropology at Portland State University in Oregon.

The Bone Woman

A Forensic Anthropologist's Search for Truth in Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo.

Knopf, Toronto, 2004. x + 271 pp., illus. ISBN Hardback 1400060648; Paperback 0812968859 (February 2005).

Since the Nuremberg trials in the 40s, and particularly in the last two decades, the increasing willingness of governments to prosecute war criminals has led to the rise of a new discipline within the field of archaeology. This new discipline, dubbed forensic anthropology, is an application of archaeological and physical anthropological techniques to the remains of the recently dead. The primary goal is to provide prosecutors at war crimes tribunals with evidence about the age, sex, identity, and cause of death of suspected genocide victims.

Clea Koff's *The Bone Woman* is a dynamic narrative of post-genocide forensic anthropology in Rwanda and the Balkans. The bone woman herself—author and nominal subject of this work—is a forensic anthropologist trained at Stanford and the University of Arizona. At the age of 23, she left for Rwanda to help exhume five-hundred victims of the 1994 genocide, a journey that is the first of the five missions described in this book.

Koff's work is an attempt to transcend the oft-glamorized labour of forensics by focusing on the stories that emerge from the evidence. Going beyond the archaeological details of exhumation and taphonomy, she describes her emotionally-demanding journey through the thickets of the post-conflict landscape; she becomes intimately acquainted with the fates of genocide victims, the struggles of their survivors, and the bureaucracies responsible for reorganizing this painful geography. *The Bone Woman* is equally an account of Koff's private motivations and her professional experience. As such, it is the subjective experience of the author that drives this "search for truth," and is as much a personal journey of self knowledge as it is a query after the victims of 1990s genocides. *The Bone Woman* is the memoir of a passionate professional, not a textbook in post-conflict forensics.

For the non-specialist, Koff's story provides a direct and detailed account of the process and practice of large-scale, judicially-mandated forensic anthropology. Many pages are