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EDITOR: NICK RUSSELL, Box 29, Whonnock, B. C.
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EARLY CHINESE EXPLORATION ON THE PACIFIC COAST?

by Grant Keddie
Archaeology Division
British Columbia Provincial Museum

Introduction

The topic of early Chinese exploration on the Pacific coast is one that commands a wide interest among the general public. In the United States amateur magazines that deal with such topics are rapidly gathering the zeal common in religious cults. Thousands of publications have been produced in recent years on the topic of early pre-Columbian voyages to the New World. Most of these are newspaper articles that are simply reworked versions of earlier articles. Only rarely do they provide a critical analysis of the topic under consideration. Articles written by the scientific community are considerably fewer in number and generally published in journals not as accessible to the general public as the morning newspaper.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief history on the question of early Chinese exploration on the Pacific coast, with a bibliography for those who wish to pursue the topic.

The Literary History

The topic of early Chinese exploration on the Pacific coast was first brought to the attention of the European academic community by Hugo Grotius in 1542 (see English translation by Goldsmid 1884). In his dissertation on the origins of the people of the New World, Grotius gave a number of subjective reasons why the Peruvians in particular were descended from the Chinese. To back up his statements he noted, "This is confirmed by the remains of the Chinese ships, which, according to the reports of the Spaniards, have been discovered on the shore of the Pacific Sea" (Goldsmid 1884:18).

Although the topic of Chinese influence on the Pacific coast was occasionally mentioned within the next 200 years, it appears to have been brought to a point of prominence in 1761 by Joseph De Guignes in a publication in the Memoirs of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres in Paris. De Guignes (1761:1) announced that he had found Chinese historical records which revealed that Buddhist priests had discovered a country called Fu Sang which was the Pacific coast of America. Stories of these adventures were recorded by the imperial historiographer in the year 499 A.D. as told by the priest or sham Hui Shin (or Hwui Shan or Hwei-chin) who began his supposed journey to the New World in 458 A.D.



The Land of Fou - Sang

Interest in the topic was intermittent over the next 70 years until 1831 when Klaproth attacked De Guignes' theory. Klaproth (1831) used the distances outlined by De Guignes from the Hui Shin stories to claim that Fu Sang was really Japan, not North America. From 1836-39 Alexander de Humboldt produced five volumes which examined the history of the New World and its similarities with Asian cultures. In the 1840s to 1870s numerous publications were being produced, especially in France and Germany. In this period of controversy, early Chinese documents referring to the voyages of Hui-Shin were translated in Europe. The most notable is a rewritten version (1321 A.D.) of Hui-Shin's adventures which was published in Geneva (Lin, 1876). One of the more thorough critiques of this and other translations was in 1892 by Gustave Schlegel, a professor of Chinese language and literature at the University of Leide.

The enthusiasm of the European scene began to show up in the United States publications in the 1870s. In 1872 Horace Davis wrote two publications on Japanese wrecks on the Pacific coast, followed by Brooks in 1875. Another popular publication in 1875 by Charles Leland called Fu Sang had a strong influence on the academic and especially the non-academic community. This publication encouraged the production of numerous articles, and in 1885 of the popular book by Edward Vining titled An Inglorius Columbus.

The first American academic to deal extensively with the question of trans-oceanic contact between the Old and New Worlds was Hubert Bancroft who in 1875 dedicated an entire volume to the subject (Vol. 5 of his series on "The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America"). Bancroft reflects the mood of the times in his statement as to why he is undertaking a review of theories and opinions concerning the origins of New World Indians:

...not that intrinsically they are of much value, except as showing the different fancies of different men and times. Fancies, I say, for modern scholars, with the aid of all new revelations of science, do not appear in their investigations to arrive, one whit nearer an indubitable conclusion. (Bancroft 1875:1:20.)

As archaeological work progressed in the New World around the turn of the century more articles started appearing in academic journals, such as Walter Hough's "Oriental influences in Mexico" in a 1900 edition of *American Anthropology* (Hough 1900). A moderate stream of articles appeared through the first half of the 20th century in the U.S. culminating with a revival beginning in the early 1950s.

In 1950 Gordon Ekholm published "Is American Indian Culture Asiatic?" In 1953 the Society for American Archaeology published a series of articles in "Asia and North America: Transpacific Contact" (Smith 1953). At the same time a popular amateur publication Pale Ink entered the market. Pale Ink still remains popular in its 1972 revised edition. This publication is one of the more comprehensive of those from the non-scientific community although it shows a definite lack of familiarization with the archaeological record and contains a lot of speculation.

In 1961 Charles Boland captured the mood of the public with his "They All Discovered America." In the 1960s and early 1970s the academic world began producing more volumes dedicated to the subject, such as "Archaeological Frontiers and External Connections" (Ekholm and Willey 1966) and "Man across the Sea: Problems of PreColumbian Contacts" (Riley 1971).

Controversy within the academic community was highlighted with the 1965 publication of Meggers, Evans and Estrada concerning contact between Jomon period Japanese fishermen and cultures of Peru, and again in 1975 with Meggers' "The Transpacific Origin of Meso-american Civilization." In the latter publication Meggers put forward her claims for a pre-historic connection between Olmec civilization in Middle America and the Shang Dynasty in China around 3200 B.P. Both of these publications have produced interesting responses such as those of Coe (1967), Pearson (1968), Schneider (1977) and McEwan and Dickson (1978).

Issues of Interest in British Columbia

Numerous newspaper and magazine articles have been written about early Chinese contact in British Columbia. Typical of these is a January 19, 1926 Victoria Daily Colonist article entitled "Orientals First to Find America" which brought about an instant reply from Alma Russel, then head of the Provincial Library, who had been misquoted on virtually everything she had said to an enquiring reporter.



Man milking a deer in the land of Fou - Sang is believed to be an Ainu (from Schlegel, 1892, p. 127)

On January 21, 1934 a feature article in the Daily Colonist was printed with the giant title "Mongols Found America." This and many other uncritical articles were often encouraged by respected historians. B. A. McKelvie, a well-known newspaperman and historian, whom many of us know from his publications, "Fort Langley" and "Maquinna and the Magnificent," not only wrote articles about the Chinese discovering the coast of B. C. (Province, January 15, 1955) but was also convinced of early Jewish settlements on the coast (Colonist, August 14, 1935).

A number of publications has been encouraged as a result of finding what are claimed to be very old Chinese coins or other items of Asiatic culture. I have demonstrated in a previous publication (Keddie 1978) that Chinese coins of considerable age can be expected to be found in British Columbia in connection with the fur trade and the later influx of Chinese populations to the gold fields. There are, however, specific references in the literature to coins and other items found in B. C. which are claimed to be of great antiquity.

The Comox District Free Press in 1951 (April 19, p. 1) had an article titled "1000 year old Chinese Coin found at Comox." In the Vancouver Daily Province in 1941 (Sept. 20, p.3) B.A. McKelvie wrote an article entitled "Ancient Chinese Charm Relic of Early Migration to Coast", and in the Victoria Times in 1968 (Feb. 2, p.17) Humphrey Davy produced an article titled "Tiny Piece of Pottery Raises Questions: Orientals First to Reach Coast."

These latter items have remained unresolved. Some of these unresolved cases have appeared time and again in unreferenced publications, causing endless frustration for those who want to examine the original references or the original objects. In future issues of The Midden I hope to deal specifically with some of these unresolved cases.

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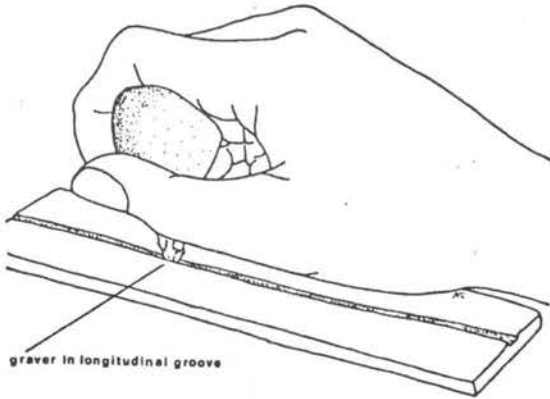
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Describing Artifacts, No. 22

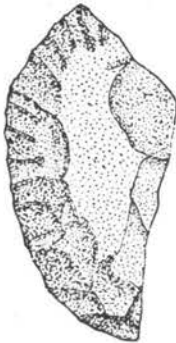
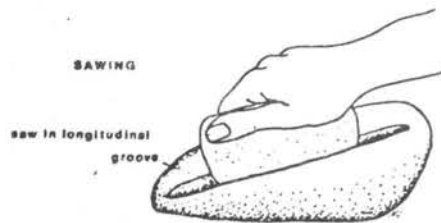
(Part of a continuing series on artifact description, reproduced from the handbook for archaeological staff working on the National Inventory Project in B.C. The Midden extends thanks to Tom Loy of the Provincial Museum for permission to reprint.)



A graver is a stone tool, held in the hand or hafted, used to incise or form organic materials (such as bone or antler) or soft stone. The tool has a chisel edge, but a thick distal end.

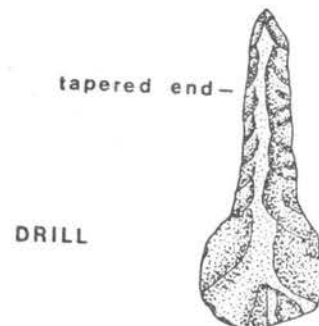
GRAVING

A saw can be a slab of stone, such as sandstone, schist or slate, used to abrade a groove in harder stones, such as jadeite. The saw stone shows extensive wear, usually rounded, on the edge, and may have striations parallel with the edge.



The scraper is a tool with a sharp edge usually with steep retouch on one edge and sometimes with minimal retouch on the other side.

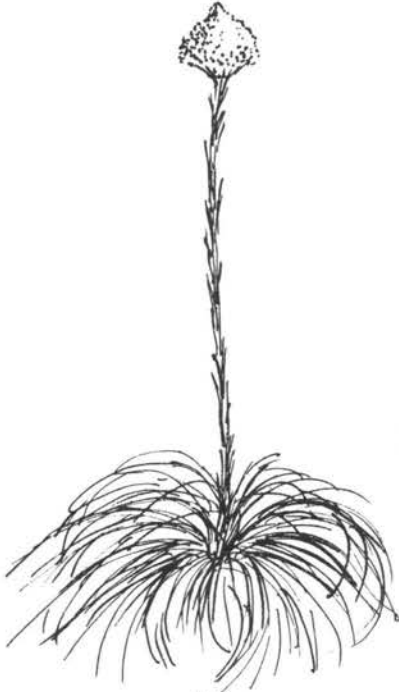
The drill typically has a wide proximal ("holding") end, sharply decreasing to a parallel-sided or tapered distal end which is thick in cross-section. Its function is to bore holes in hard material. (The alternative way of perforating stone is by pecking, but the results are visibly different.)



BASKETRY AND BEAR GRASS

By Hilary Stewart

Drawings by the author



BEAR GRASS [*XEROPHYLLUM
TENAX*] IN FLOWER .90 cm HIGH

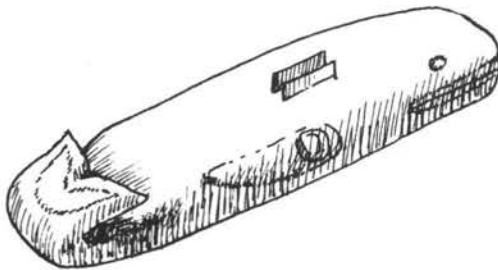
Familiar though we are with the recent proliferation of Northwest Coast Indian art, we tend to think of this as comprising wood and argillite carving, silver jewelry and print making. We have seen the revival of button blankets and dancing, together with the return of the old traditional songs that are now a part of the frequent potlatches held along the coast. But basketry on the Northwest Coast is generally thought of as a "dying art," and elderly women in a village may be referred to as "the last of the basket makers." There is often a feeling that when they die, so will the art of basketry because the young people are too busy or just not interested.

This may have been the case a few years ago, but the ebbing tide has turned; there is a surge of new interest in basket making as young women care enough to find the time to learn and practise the art. Perhaps the prices paid for new baskets have now made it worthwhile for the young people to take up the art, but whatever the reason, basket making in several areas is no longer a dying art.

Recently, at a potlatch in Masset, I bought a 3" diameter, spruce-root basket, with a lid, imbricated with maidenhair fern stem, for \$100. It was made by Primrose Adams, and the fineness of the weaving certainly showed the hand of an experienced basket maker. Her daughter, Isobel Rorick, a young girl in her twenties, was also making spruce-root baskets, and I watched as she worked at the tedious task of splitting the roots, and shaving the split sections to ensure exact evenness of the widths. But if the Haida are noted for the fine, close weaving of their baskets, so are the Nootka on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Instead of splitting spruce root for the weft, they use a long flat-bladed rush-like plant called swamp grass, or tall basket sedge (*Carex obnupta*), over a warp of inner cedar bark. Other sedge grasses are utilized also.

Another material ideally suited to this work is commonly called "bear grass" (*Xerophyllum tenax*), but since this does not grow in their area, they buy it from the Makah in Washington who have access to its habitat. At one time bear grass was broadly traded, and a woman might take a bunch of it as a gift to a friend or relative when going visiting.

Not long after being in Masset, I was invited to the Indian village of La Push, on the Olympic Peninsula, Washington. Situated at the mouth of the Quillayute River emptying into the Pacific Ocean, the village boasts a wonderfully sheltered harbour, a fine fleet of fishing vessels, two motels and its own tribal school. The inhabitants are Quileute people, linguistically unrelated to either the Nootka or the Coast Salish, but traditionally they make a basket very similar to that of the Nootka, also using bear grass. At La Push I was very impressed to find that a basketry class was being held two evenings a week. One evening when I was there, no less than 15 people were sitting around several tables, quietly concentrating on the three-strand twining technique - and one of them was a nine year old girl. Many had progressed beyond the base of the basket and were working on designs of canoes, whales and seagulls - the three basic symbols used in their basketry. Occasional light chatter and joking made the class a pleasant, social affair. The instructor was a delightful, outgoing lady in her sixties, Lillian Pullen, whose nimble fingers twined the grass so quickly it was difficult to follow her movements. But she had little time to do her own work for she constantly helped people who came to her with a problem in their weaving.



TOOL FOR SPLITTING BEAR GRASS -
ABOUT 10 cm LONG

Working over a warp of inner cedar bark, the beginners were weaving with coloured raffia as a substitute for the traditional bear grass, others were using the grass. After it was picked, the grass was pulled through a special double-bladed tool which ensured a uniform width. One such tool at the class was carved to represent a whale, the Quileute's favourite crest figure. The closer together the blades were set, the finer would be the strand of grass, and thus the finer the weaving.

When the grass dried and turned white, it was either used in its natural colour or dyed.

In early times it was dyed with berry juices and lichens, but the modern weavers used the expediency of commercial dye, claiming it is more permanent anyway.

Because bear grass is not native to the British Columbia coast, I was anxious to see it growing, and to see how it was picked, so the following day three of us set out on a grass picking expedition. I was surprised to find that we had to drive a considerable distance before coming across any plants, and supposed that in ancient times the two-hour drive would have been a day's journey along the coast by canoe. We turned off the highway onto a disused logging road and entered a partly cleared wooded area. We got out of the car, but something about the place worried Lillian, she felt uncomfortable there and said we must leave. A few miles further on the roadside was abundant with bear grass and we pulled onto the shoulder. Being mid May, the grass was in bloom. From the centre of a large clump of slender leaves gracefully arching outward, rose a strong stem crowned with an impressive head of tightly clustered creamy white flowers.

In a small clearing close to the road, Lillian began to pick the grass and I watched. "You must take only the leaves from the female plant," she said, "you never take it from the male plant." Curiously, the plants bearing the flowers were designated as "male," and those with no bloom were "female." When I questioned why this was, Lillian only repeated the instruction, making sure I understood which ones to pick. I know that had I pressed for an answer, it would have been one I have heard often before: "Because that is the way it is done." That means "It is traditional," and that in turn means that the reason may now be lost, but since it has been done that way for many generations, it must be the best way - don't question it.

In Nancy Turner's excellent book *Plants in British Columbia Indian Technology*, she writes of the Hesquiat women, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, gathering only the female swamp grass (*Carex obnupta*) and says "Anyone harvesting the fruiting or male plants is laughed at." With

gloved hands (the grass has very sharp edges), Lillian reached into the centre of a clump of bear grass, lifted up the thin blades so that they extended to their fullest height to check its length. If she was satisfied it was long enough, she reached down to the very base of the leaves, grasped several and pulled with a strong tug. The strands broke away cleanly, showing the white of the lower few inches contrasting with the green of the rest of the leaves. (If the white part shows any discolouration, it is discarded.)

Lillian ran one hand up the strands of grass, and holding it at the very tip, she shook the bundle so that the shorter lengths - not being held - fell away, leaving only the longest strands. When she had accumulated a bundle of grass about two inches thick, she tied it with a torn strip of rag and twisted the ends of the grass into a loose knot.



SHAKING OUT THE SHORT STRANDS OF GRASS

Some hours later we returned to the village with a good supply of bear grass, and with Lillian's permission I kept one bundle I had picked. "You hang it up in a warm place to dry" she said, "like over the stove, or a radiator. After a while it gets dry, and it gets white. In our language we call it 'ay-ba'."



BEAR GRASS BUNDLED AND TIED.
LENGTH OF GRASS UP TO 1m.

As more and more villages organize basketry classes (there is now one in Alert Bay), it is nice to know that the art of basketry is alive and well on the Northwest Coast.

FIELD PROJECTS - SUMMER 1980

Bjorn Simonsen, Chief, Resource Management Division of the Heritage Conservation Branch has kindly supplied us with the following information concerning archaeological field projects throughout the province. Members may be interested in either visiting or volunteering to assist on these projects. Please be sure to check with the director first.

Project Name	Location	Duration	Director
1. Pitt River Archaeological Salvage	Municipality of Coquitlam	May 1 - Aug. 31	Valerie Patenaude, Heritage Conserva- tion Branch
2. Beach Grove Archaeological Project	Tsawwassen, Municipality of Delta	May 15 - June 30	Dr. R. G. Matson, University of British Columbia
3. Kamloops Archaeological Project	Monte Creek	May 15 - June 30	Dr. Arnoud Stryd, Cariboo College, Kamloops
4. Mobile Salvage Project	a) Enderby b) Columbia Lake, Invermere c) Courtenay	May 15 - Aug. 31	Gordon Mohs, Heritage Conserva- tion Branch
5. Simon Fraser Archaeological Field School	Kwatna Inlet	June 1 - Jul. 31	Philip Hobler, Simon Fraser University
6. Anahim Lake Archaeological Project	Anahim Lake, Chilcotin	June 1 - Jul. 31	Dr. Roscoe Wilmeth, Archaeological Survey of Canada

LETTERS TO THE PRESIDENT

The following are excerpts from letters received by Ron Sutherland in response to his expressions of the Society's concern with regard to a number of sites in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

March 11, 1980 - from Russell J. Irvine, Director,
Heritage Conservation Branch, Victoria

...

As the Beach Grove archaeological site is somewhat complex in terms of property ownership, proposed development and possible action by the province, I would like to deal with this matter in three parts. These parts will correspond to the three portions of the site under consideration, mainly the northern-most part of the site which is a large vacant piece of property at the present time bordered on the north by the Pillar's Inn and on the south by an apartment complex facing Herd Road. The second part...constitutes that area lying south of Herd Road and including three privately owned lots as well as the Beach Grove Golf Course property. The third part of the site is that presently owned by Century Holdings Ltd. lying immediately south and west of the Golf Course property and bordering on Fairview Crescent to the west.

The portion of the Beach Grove site described as Part I above is presently vacant land owned by Century Holdings Ltd. Although Century Holdings had plans to develop the property approximately a year ago, these plans are no longer active and the owner has no immediate prospects for the site. As you are aware, this portion ...was excavated last summer by Vancouver Community College on contract to the Heritage Conservation Branch in order that we could determine the extent of archaeological deposits. As a result of these excavations it has been determined that extensive archaeological deposits do in fact exist in this location and the Branch feels that these deposits are quite significant in that they appear to be generally intact and represent a large accumulation of midden deposits.

Part 2 of the Beach Grove site is also dormant in terms of development for the immediate future. Through the British Columbia Heritage Trust, the government has acquired two of the three privately owned lots...and we have no immediate plans for future excavations in this area. The major portion of Part 2...lies within property owned by the Beach Grove Golf Course. Future development...is severely restricted by the present zoning applied by the Municipality of Delta to the Golf Club. The Branch intends to ensure that this zoning does not change in the future and we are quite prepared to purchase a covenant over this portion of the site if necessary. We will be carrying out negotiations with the Municipality of Delta and the Golf Club in the near future.

Part 3 of the Beach Grove site is that which underwent minor damage last July when Century Holdings carried out bulldozer work on their property. As you know, the owner of the property ceased operations as soon as it was discovered that archaeological deposits were being disturbed and the Branch was notified. As a result of test excavations at this portion of the site during the month of August by the Branch, it has been determined that extensive archaeological deposits exist on at least four of the lots proposed for development by Century Holdings. The Chief of the Resource Management Division is presently discussing development plans with the property owner with a view to either entirely avoiding future damage to the site or at least ensuring minimal disturbance.

In addition to the above specific actions...the Branch has also commissioned a study by Len Ham of U.B.C. which, if implemented, would see the development of the...site as an interpretive/educational centre focussed on the archaeological information and potential from the site. This report is presently being edited by Bjorn Simonsen and will be presented to the Minister by the end of this month....

May 2, 1980 - from Hon. Evan M. Wolfe, Provincial Secretary

...

I would like to assure you and the members of your Society that the Heritage Conservation Branch is working in co-operation with the Ministry of Transportation and Highways regarding any possible conflicts between archaeological sites and the proposed Annacis Crossing. The Branch has been assured that the Glenrose Cannery Site would not be affected by the above project. With reference to the St. Mungo Site, the right-of-way for the Annacis Crossing is located just to the south of the apparent boundary of this site. However, as there is a possibility that the St. Mungo Site extends southward into the path of the highway right-of-way, the Heritage Conservation Branch will be conducting test excavations in this area in the very near future.

The Heritage Conservation Branch has received assurance from the Ministry of Transportation and Highways that if a direct conflict exists between archaeological deposits and the proposed highway right-of-way, every effort will be made to avoid such a conflict, if at all possible.

Should the avoidance of archaeological deposits be an impossibility due to engineering constraints for the Annacis Crossing, I understand the Ministry of Transportation and

Highways will provide the necessary funds for the Branch to carry out archaeological salvage excavations and the subsequent analysis of materials and data recovered in such an operation....

And finally, May 22, 1980 - also from Hon. Evan Wolfe

Your letter of early April, along with other submissions, has drawn to my attention the archaeological significance of the property known as Spetifore Farms.

I have noted the concern of the Archaeological Society of British Columbia for the preservation of this site and it is my intention to speak on this matter when and if it is dealt with by Cabinet. My colleague, the Honourable James J. Hewitt, Minister of Agriculture, has also been sent information regarding the Whalen Farm site, as the Land Commission operates under his jurisdiction.

Let me assure you that I share your concern in this matter and shall make every effort to ensure that proper safeguards for the preservation of the Whalen Farm site are taken into consideration, should the Spetifore Farm lands be developed.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Archaeological Investigations at the Flood and Pipeline Sites, near Hope, B. C. by Henning Von Krogh. Occasional Paper No. 4, Heritage Conservation Branch.

The Great Sand Hills of Saskatchewan: A Report prepared for the Saskatchewan Department of the Environment on the Ecology and Archaeology and on Resource Management and Land Use in the Great Sand Hills of Saskatchewan. Edited by H. T. Epp and L. Townley-Smith, Policy Planning and Research Branch, Saskatchewan Department of the Environment, March 1980.

Archaeology in Alberta 1979, compiled by Paul F. Donahue. Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Occasional Paper No. 15, 1980. Published by Alberta Culture Historical Resources Division.

To borrow any of the above, please see Jim Garrison, Librarian, at regular meetings.

The Society would welcome the donation of any archaeological books which members might have to spare.

/o/o/o/o/

