

Chapter 1

Caddy in Native Lore

Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest coastal areas, from California to Alaska, drew their livelihood from the sea and were intimately familiar with the local marine fauna. They collected shellfish, fished, and hunted sea mammals, including whales. Their oral tradition also abounds with stories of serpentine marine creatures which are clearly neither fish nor seals. While these animals are often mythified in a way which obscures their zoological nature, they are a precious source of cryptozoological information. In the words of Bernard Heuvelmans:



Mythology by Giorgio De Chirico (1934). (Photo: Public domain)

When one of these animals is eventually discovered by zoology and scientifically described, it is sometimes found that it was previously taken for an imaginary creature. Nevertheless, the beast in question, fated to be stripped some day of all its fancy attributes, has become, almost overnight, a well-authenticated new species, rising from a sometimes ludicrous folkloric reputation, and even a disputed cryptozoological fame, to a respectable zoological status.¹

Mythification is of course not only to be found in pre-scientific societies. A striking modern example is offered by the subject

1. Heuvelmans, 1990

selected by the metaphysical artist Giorgio De Chirico to represent “Mythology.” We shall encounter numerous variants of such a long-necked creature in the descriptions of Caddy by eye-witnesses.

The earliest clues about the existence of Caddy-like creatures are thus to be sought in the sea-serpent stories of coastal First Nations. For example, the Manhousat, from the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, spoke of an animal which they called *hiyitl' iik*: “he who moves by wriggling from side to side.” In the words of Manhousat elder Luke Swan, “Sea-serpents were said to be seven or eight feet long. They moved very quickly, both on land and on water. They had legs, but when traveling on land, used their bodies more than their legs for propulsion,—moving like snakes.”² More surprisingly, sea serpents could grow wings at will! “Their head and back was covered with long hair, as is represented with strips of dyed red cedar bark on the sea-serpent mask.” Sea serpents were rarely seen, especially in recent times. Mr. Swan’s father had encountered one and shot an arrow at it but missed.

The cleverest cryptozoologist would have trouble imagining the animal hiding behind this story. Not an unusual situation. Take for example the iconic scene of the Lady and the Unicorn, pictured in the famous medieval draperies in Paris’ Musée de Cluny. The animal depicted is clearly a goat with a horn on its head. The only resemblance between it and a rhinoceros or a narwhal, usually thought to be the source of the unicorn myth, is the horn, clearly an attachment providing little information about its original owner.



The sea-serpent HIYITL' IIK (Ellis and Swan, 1981). (Photo: Theytus Books/P. Seesequasis, used with permission.)

2. Ellis and Swan, 1981

A clearly more mythological creature was Sisiutl, the two-headed sea serpent of the Kwakiutl people of northern Vancouver Island. It could change shapes, and transform from animal to man and back at any time. Its effigy was used to ward off evil spirits.

Other coastal tribes also have stories about sea serpents. The Comox band, on the east side of Vancouver Island, spoke of the sea serpent Numkse lee Kwala; Comox elder Mary Clifton relates that on the way to Cape Mudge, at the north end of the Strait of Georgia, her relatives had seen a very long sea-serpent. “It

rose out of the water and then fell back with a loud crash. It was playful and did not hurt any of the number of people who saw it.”³ Henry Assu, of Cape Mudge wrote that a gigantic skate-like creature was commonly sighted near Maud Island in ancient times.⁴ On the mainland side of the Strait of Georgia, the Sechelt mythology spoke of a friendly creature called T’ chain-ko.⁵ In contrast, the natives of Burrard Inlet (Vancouver harbour) spoke of Sayn Uskih (“Awful Snake”), a fearsome sea-serpent which, according to Captain Cates, former mayor of North Vancouver, “before the white man came, [it] lived a good deal of the time with its head resting on a rock just off Brockton Point, and its tail rippling out in the tidal stream.” Even the fierce Haida from the north would not dare come through the narrows into Burrard Inlet because of its presence.⁶ Further north, near Prince Rupert, an animal such as that described



The Lady and the Unicorn. Musée de Cluny, Paris. (Photo: Public domain)

3. Reimer, W. 1993

4. Taylor, J. 1999

5. White, H. 1994

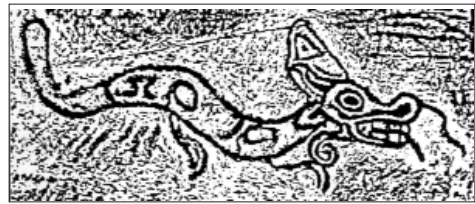
6. Commercial Drive Monthly, Vancouver, Vol. 4, Issue 30, April 2000

by the Sampsons in 1934 was known to “the old people” as Zaweaksh, the monster of the sea, which they said they had known in the days of their youth.”⁷

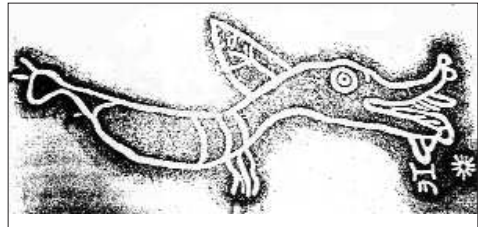
Artifacts preserve shape and forms which mere words often cannot convey faithfully. At numerous sites along the coast of British Columbia, local artists or shamans incised shallow engravings (known as petroglyphs) into prominent rock outcrops. The meaning of many of these icons has been lost. Human faces, salmon, sun symbols, sailing ships and other symbols can be recognized. There are also creatures that closely resemble the *hiyitl’ iik* of Manhousat lore.

A striking example is the animal sketched at the Monsell site (shores of the Nanaimo River) which has an elongated body, four small legs (or flippers?) prominent teeth, a large eye and a mane (or horns?) on its head. A very similar creature, although missing back legs, is depicted in the Gabriola Island petroglyph site. Another such carving is found on a vertical face of a cliff at the water’s edge on Sproat Lake, Vancouver Island. While these petroglyphs are difficult to date, they are widely believed to predate the arrival of European explorers.

Another well-documented pre-contact artifact is the Skagit



Petroglyph from the Monsell site, Nanaimo River, BC. (Hill and Hill, 1974). (Photo: Public domain)



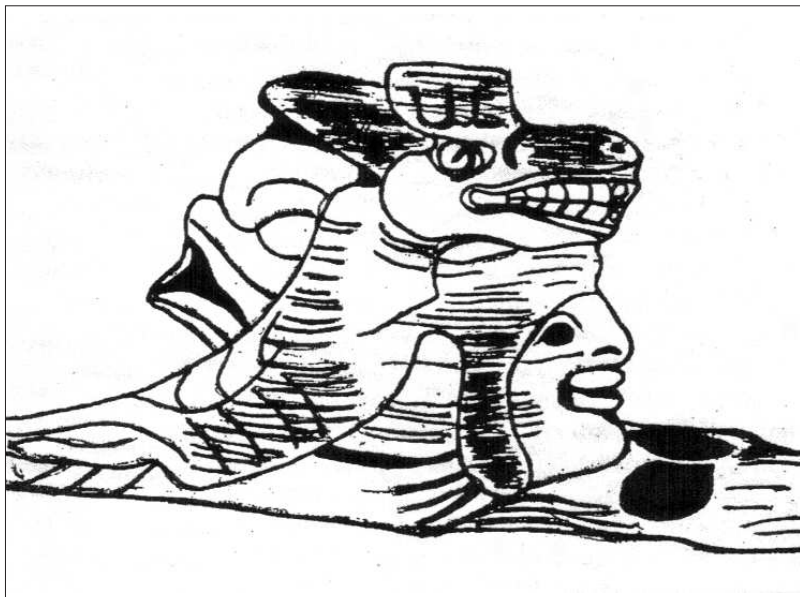
Petroglyph from Gabriola Island, BC, (Bentley and Bentley, 1981). (Photo: Public domain)



Sproat Lake, Vancouver Island, Petroglyph. (Photo: Public domain)

7. Prince Rupert *This Week*, 15 Sept. 1996

River atlatl (spear-thrower), part of the collections of the world-famous Anthropology Museum of the University of British Columbia. This object has been carbon-dated to 1,700 (+/- 100) years before the present.⁸ The atlatl is carved out of a piece of western yew (*Taxus brevifolia*). The handle is carved in the shape of a human head surmounted by that of a sea-monster reminiscent of those seen in petroglyphs, including some structure (mane? horns?) on top of its head, a large eye and large square teeth.



Drawing of the handle of the Skagit River atlatl (spear-thrower).
(Photo: Authors' file)

Is hiyitl'iik, as depicted in Manhousat legends and in ancient artifacts, a representation of a real, live, still hidden animal, as cryptozoologists might believe, or a mythical creature like the thunderbird and the sisiutl?⁹ Whether real or mythical, there clearly existed in local folklore, well before the arrival of European explorers and settlers, a solid tradition of a large serpentine marine animal: the earliest evidence for Cadborosaurus.

8. Fladmark et al., 1987

9. A two-headed sea serpent or snake with a human-like head in the middle of the body.