

TRANSFORMATIONS OF A MASK:  
CONFIDENTIAL INTELLIGENCE FROM THE LIFEWAY OF  
THINGS<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The story of a Nootka mask, traced from its first documented appearance in 1881 through an undistinguished museum career to stardom on the Native American art market in 1997, reveals some of the characteristics of the social environments, which have contributed to the mask's transformation: the worlds of museums, dealers, collectors, and auction houses. An attempt to reconstruct the mask's history prior to 1881, beyond its erroneous attribution to Kodiak Island and its later misrepresentation as a Cook Voyage specimen, points to a likely acquisition on the voyage of Camille de Roquefeuil in 1817 or 1818.

For anthropology as a general science of the culturally constituted lifeways of human societies, individual experiences are of secondary and, at best, illustrative importance. As a hermeneutic discipline, however, anthropology is also interested in the biographies of individuals, which reveal the relationship between the individual and society as well as the variation of cultural expressions. Thus, individual experiences may be typical for whole classes of similar cases. They highlight the cultural characteristics of periods, regions, or social groups.

Far too long things have been regarded as having no life history of their own. The study of material culture was generally focused on what is typical; individual variation was considered to be of subordinate relevance. Early exceptions were objects regarded as works of art and thus possessing a distinctive personality of their own, because the genius of their creator had endowed them with an

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unmistakable identity and individuality—comparable to the idea of the animation of things, which is known from cultures which do not recognize a realm of “art” that would be separable from other experiences of the world. And yet, each object may equally be looked upon as an individual which shares features with other examples of its “type,” but which is also distinguished from them in its specific constitution. Deviation from the norm may be seen as the measure of the specific, while congruence with it would be the measure of generalization. The interest of anthropology in the specific form is by and large limited to cases in which its valuation is typical for the respective culture.

The lifeway of things is distinguished from that of humans by its pronounced passivity. Things are only the bearers of changing attributions of meaning and value and cannot act on their own. Nevertheless, their biography—like those of humans—speaks to the conditions of their existence in the various culturally patterned habitats in which they happen to exist.

Their birth illustrates technological processes, their life is spent in the service of technological, economic, social, and/or religious purposes; they serve the needs of production, exchange, and consumption; and they are linked to their users through a network of material and symbolic relations. The history of an object also reflects the history of a culture. The all too frequent disregard of the material features of culture has contributed to our still inadequate understanding of the purpose in the life of objects within the cultural framework. And yet it is the role things play in a social context that makes it possible to interpret human action, which imparts a social life to things (cp. Appadurai 1986, Spittler 1993).

Museum objects have an ambiguous past: They are part of the history of their culture of origin as well as of that of its collectors. Their transfer from domestic or public use of one culture into the world of exhibitions and study collections of another entails a transformation which gives them a new identity. The roles which are now demanded from the object are no longer defined by the intentions of their makers and former users, but by the needs of collectors and museums (less often, the museum visitors), the dealers, and the auction houses.

The sources on the biography of things are the same from which the life stories of humans are drawn: official documents, letters, sometimes books, newspaper accounts; often confidential intelligence from the memory store of witnesses of their times; drawings, and old photographs. The autobiographical contributions of the mute artifacts are obviously meager, but they often provide powerful evidence of past experiences: Objects, after all, are also sources of their own history. They display traces of their coming into being, scars of mistreatment, and

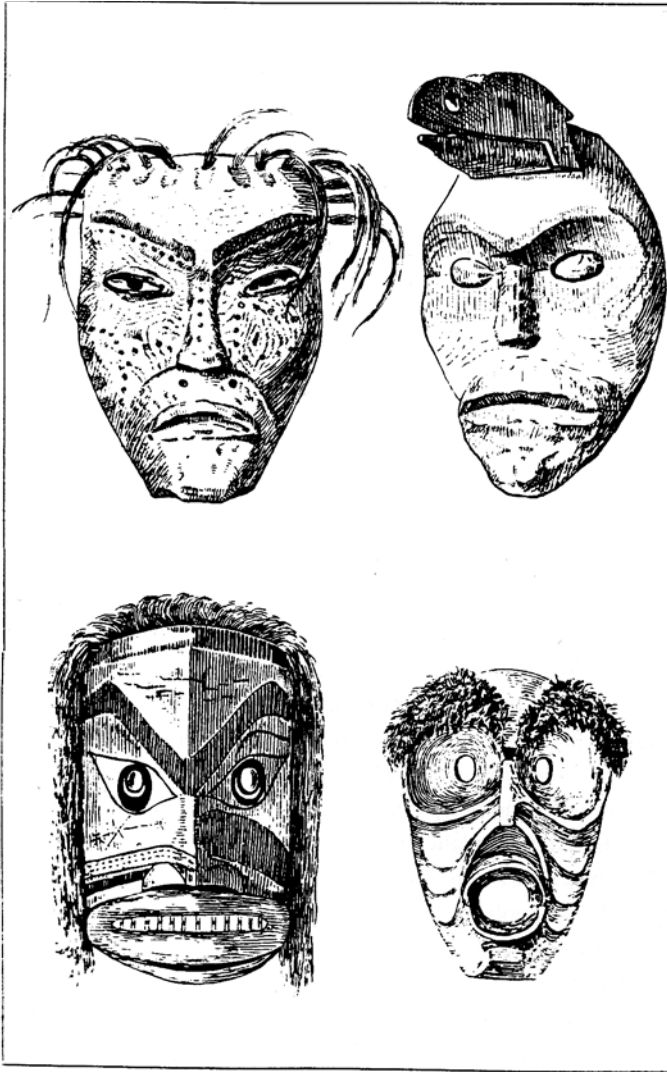
indications of past devotion; they are bearers of labels, numbers, recently also of bar codes, which give them an administrative identity and elevate them from the anonymity of the sum total of human procreations.

### **Museum: The Big Sleep**

In many cases the documentary history of an ethnographic object begins only with its acquisition by a museum. At this point, whatever may seem relevant about the known previous life of the artifact is generally committed to writing. Even if what is thus recorded is extremely poor, as it often is, this anamnesis will generally offer hints for its assignment within the collection and—given a little patience and interest—may in fact help to trace the specific conditions of its previous existence, which in turn will help us to better understand the object. Whenever the interest surpasses the patience, however, the tracks may be left untrodden. This is indeed true of the object, whose biography will here be reconstructed.

In 1881, the Royal Zoological and Anthropological-Ethnographic Museum in Dresden, whose ethnographic collection had been established six years before, used money of its benefactor Oskar Loebel to purchase from the Parisian collector and dealer Eugène Boban (35, rue Sommerard, près le Musée de Cluny) a mask. When it was entered into the museum's accession book under the catalog number 1030, its provenance was recorded as "Archipel de Kodiak." The price of the mask was 50 French francs. Another piece, a Haida spoon of mountain sheep horn (cat.no. 2391), was acquired by the Dresden museum from the same source in January 1883. Such purchases were rather made at random and do not reflect the priorities of the collection policy of the museum's first director, Adolf Bernhard Meyer (1840–1911), to whom his successor Arnold Jacobi (1925:50) later attested "an occasionally erupting business sense," and who until his removal from office for related reasons primarily used the money of the museum's main benefactor Arthur Baessler for the acquisition of spectacular large and "complete" collections.

Since northwestern North America was then (and continued to be later) only weakly represented in the collection, the museum was probably grateful for an opportunity to acquire at least some individual specimens; at the end of Meyer's tenure as director there were from North and Middle America "only incoherent examples" (Jacobi 1925:51). In other respects as well little has changed in the



**Fig. 1** Mask, Nootka (Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden, cat.no 1030) (upper left) as an illustration in Jewitt's captivity narrative (Jewitt 1929: pl. 9). Below are two masks presumably representing Nootka Wild Men.

past 117 years: This is illustrated by the fact that Boban offered the spoon and other ethnographic pieces to Meyer on 23 November 1882 to the museum, “if by chance you have some unappropriated funds at the end of the year.”

The lack of adequate storage facilities in the museum is reason enough for the assumption that mask no. 1030 was soon put on display in the insufficiently heated hall C of the Zwinger pavilion, which since 1879 had been the only display space for the small ethnographic collection of the museum, a room, however, which—as Meyer complained in 1884—“was terribly dirty.” By 1889, the rapid growth of the collection made it necessary to remove some of the objects displayed and to store them in the dark and humid basement of the Zwinger (Jacobi 1925:62). It is likely that mask no. 1030 disappeared at this point from the view of a public, which probably had not taken much note of it anyway. In 1907, the published guide to the Royal collections at Dresden reports: “Because of lack of space, almost all of the American as well as part of the Asian collections ... and of the African ones are not on display.” North America was indeed totally unrepresented in the exhibition (Königliche Sammlungen 1907:79, 93).

After Meyer’s departure from the museum in 1905, his successor Jacobi managed in 1909 to gain control over the arched gallery M for the ethnographic museum, where at last eight cases were devoted to the Americas. In 1919, Jacobi was able to acquire for the ethnographic collection three halls in the Orangery building, which allowed a more comprehensive presentation of the collections. Later, two more rooms were added in the Zwinger, where by 1932 America was shown together with the Circumpolar and the Pacific material in hall H (Israel and Neumann 1976:8–9).

It appears that mask no. 1030 was then also given some attention, because Jacobi used a drawing of it to illustrate a popular version of the autobiographical narrative of the 1803 captivity of John Jewitt among the Nootka on the west coast of Vancouver Island (Fig. 1; Jewitt 1929:pl. 9). Unfortunately, there is no caption for the mask and the little book also lacks any credits for the illustrations. That the mask from “Kodiak” was here used to illustrate a book on the Nootka may be taken as an indication that an undated note in the Dresden accession book was made before 1928: “According to Boas (1898) from the west coast of Vancouver.” Since none of Boas’s publications of that years appears to contain anything that could have led to the correct identification of the specimen, it must be assumed that the new attribution was based on personal information supplied by Franz Boas, probably in connection with the exchange of artifacts between the Royal Ethnographic Museum in Dresden and the American Museum of Natural



**Fig. 2** Mask, Nootka (Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden, cat.no. 1030) in half-profile. Photographed in 1966 by Christian F. Feest.

History in 1898 (some of which have since been deaccessioned by the Dresden museum).

In 1940, the exhibition in the Zwinger was closed by orders of the responsible Ministry because of the dangers posed by World War II. Mask no. 1030 and the other artifacts were packed into crates and were removed to safe havens outside the city, where they survived the war without significant damage. Since the halls in the Zwinger and in the Orangery were badly hit when Dresden was leveled by a bombing raid in February 1945, the objects remained in their crates (mostly in the Zwinger) after their return to Dresden in 1945/6. This state of affairs continued when the museum moved to the Japanisches Palais (Japanese Palace) between 1952 and 1955. By 1975, the hundredth anniversary of the museum, most of the

artifacts were at least accessible in the study collection, and “only a small number still had to be taken out of the crates” (Israel and Neumann 1976:12–13). Regular exhibitions were still unthinkable. Whether the mask was to be seen in a special exhibition of the Dresden Museums on “Indians of North America,” shown in Prague and Budapest in 1963 and 1964, is presently unknown. The accompanying publication contained, in the style prevailing at that time, only a few illustrations to enliven a summary account of the cultures and history of the indigenous peoples of North America and a fiery indictment of U.S. Indian policies (Anonymous 1963). In short, the history of mask no. 1030 during the first hundred years of its life in the museum world was not particularly exciting and rather marked by a certain lack of interest in its potential value. This, however, was to change very soon.

In 1966, I had the opportunity to visit the museum in Dresden and thanks to the kindness of its director, Siegfried Wolf, was given the privilege to see and photograph parts of the North American collection, which then was still resting in its war-time crates. I took two 35 mm color slides and two black-and-white photographs of mask no. 1030 (Fig. 2) and made a short note on the documentation appearing on the catalog card (which apparently lacked a reference to Boas’s oblique attribution of the mask to the Nootka). In hindsight, I doubt that at this early stage in my career I recognized the mask as Nootka, especially since my notes only identify it as “Northwest Coast.” The recognition of its Nootkan origin followed, if not in 1966, during the following years as I was increasingly better able to see stylistic differences.

From my experiences in the Vienna museum I was well aware of the fact that under unfavorable economic circumstances museums were often only able to make new acquisitions to supplement their collections by means of exchanges with dealers or private collectors. In Vienna this practice was fairly common until the early 1970s, when the government began to increase the budget of its museums in view of their importance for tourism and the international image of Vienna as a city of culture. In such exchanges, capable dealers were offering everything to please the curators’ appetite, including especially examples of cultures which had only recently become fashionable. In Dresden, this problem was compounded by the limited possibilities for travel and field research outside the Soviet sphere of influence (with Cuba and—briefly—Chile as the major destinations in the New World). At the same time, the number of dealers who ventured into the Eastern unknown was notably smaller than those who used the well-trodden paths in Western countries. Those, who braved the difficulties

involved in doing business behind the iron curtain (which entailed unwelcome scrutiny by the government's intelligence agencies) must be credited with a certain amount of desperate risk taking and self-effacing exertion for profit taking.

### **The Dealer: The Thing that Came in from the Cold**

The asymmetry in the relationship between museums and dealers is decisively defined by the substantially higher competence of the latter with respect to knowledge about the marketability of objects on a market dominated by private collectors. This competence, after all, is the very basis of their existence and economic survival. Since museums, especially those operated by the public sector, are generally not permitted to sell off their collections without considerable procedural difficulties, they are never able to accumulate the experience necessary for successful salesmanship, and there is the realistic danger that they will be outsmarted by the dealers. As long as museums have sufficient budgets for the purchases they deem necessary, they happily refrain from using the instrument of exchange, which has long been recognized as ultimately unfavorable for museums.

There is another argument against exchanges as a means to supplement museum collections, which is based on the differential interests of museums and traders. Every transaction of this kind leads to the loss of documentary information, either because objects are removed from the context of larger, coherent collections, and/or because dealers are generally not overly interested in the often meager documentation available in the museum records; with few exceptions (which will be encountered at a later stage of our mask's biography), the market value is primarily based on "inherent" properties of the artifact (such as style or "quality"), rather than upon their documentary character. The life history of our mask is particularly illuminating in this respect, because in the course of its removal from the museum context existing information was not only lost, but actually replaced by a new legend of origin.

In the early 1970s, a few daring American dealers began to make forays into the emerging markets behind the Iron Curtain. In 1973, Everett Rassiga, once the owner of galleries in Dallas and New York, who abandoned his enterprises in the United States after an ill-fortuned attempt to smuggle Mayan antiquities from Mexico into the U.S. (or, as others suggest, to avoid conflict with the Internal Revenue Service), then domiciled in Berne and later in Budapest, had already



encountered a declining interest in exchanges in the museum in Vienna; he ultimately sold the museum a small group of—partly dubious—American antiquities. In Dresden, however, Rassiga succeeded in arousing substantial enthusiasm for his exchange proposals.<sup>2</sup> In 1974, the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden received from Rassiga in an exchange a presumably prehistoric pottery figure from Vera Cruz representing the Aztec deity Xipe Totec, which a few years later was exhibited and published as one of the museum's jewels (Guhr and Neumann 1982:23, fig. 13), but which ultimately turned out to be the work of a prominent Mexican artfakler. (The ethnographic museum in Budapest, Rassiga's new home and hunting ground, was also favored with the receipt of a highly suspect "Mixtec turquoise mosaic mask.")

This deal, regarded as highly advantageous by the museum, helped to establish a relationship of trust, and Rassiga was given liberal access to the collections.<sup>3</sup> He happily informed an American customer that Dresden had opened all of its storage for him and offered to obtain specific objects that might be of interest to the collector, who immediately ordered *two* Nootka masks collected on James Cook's third voyage (E. Carpenter, personal communication, 1997). At this point, the facts are beginning to fade in the haze of oral tradition. How could the collector know about Cook voyage artifacts in Dresden, if even the museum disclaimed any knowledge of such a collection in the early 1980s? What was the basis for the assumption that there were *two masks* among the Dresden Cook pieces, when in fact there was (and still is) only one mask-like wooden head, which actually had belonged to the ethnographic museum in Herrnhut and which remained unpublished for several more years?

2 On Rassiga and his relationship with the museum in Dresden, also see the journalistic account by Reuter (1995).

3 "A special way to raise the profile of certain areas of the collection is the exchange of objects, which, however, must be based on extensive considerations as well as *sound scholarly preparatory work* and whose problem rests especially in finding a partner who is able to follow the museum's intentions," the curator in Dresden primarily responsible for these exchanges later observed (Tiesler 1989: 128; translation and emphasis by the present author). While the museum seems to have believed that it was in full control of the matter, the known facts would rather support the assumption that here a dealer had found a museum willing to follow his intentions. In a brief conversation with the author in the mid-1980s, Rassiga exclaimed—specifically in relation to the museums in Budapest, but with more general implications: "These museums have no idea about the value of their collections; they are such fools. They need someone like me to recognize all this wealth."

But even this piece was apparently beyond the reach of Rassiga, perhaps because the Dresden museum recognized that its property rights to the Herrnhut collection were far from clear. Thus, mask no. 1030 was elevated by Rassiga to the status of a Cook voyage artifact. In 1975, the object left the museum in an exchange with the dealer and found a new home in New York. At present, the exact conditions of the exchange are unknown, although it may be taken for granted that it was markedly above the equivalent of the 50 francs paid for it in 1881. According to the new owner, he paid Rassiga \$15,000 for the Nootka mask and considered the price to be “very cheap.”

### **The Collector(s): Between Devotion and Disappointment**

The collector who obtained the object recently ennobled by a distinguished pedigree was Edmund Carpenter. As an anthropologist, he had been a student of Frank Speck and had authored numerous notable essays and interesting books (including *Eskimo Realities* and *Oh, What A Blow That Phantom Gave Me!*). He was also a member of the Board of Trustees of the old Museum of the American Indian—Heye Foundation (and in this capacity involved in the dismissal of its director Frederick Dockstader, who was accused of having sold without the Board’s approval pieces from the collection in order to fill the depleted chests of the museum). Carpenter began to collect when the acquisition of Native American art was still possible for a student with a good eye for quality and style. He has himself told of how in 1940 he hesitated to lay down three dollars for a mask, because this was double the price he was accustomed to pay for such things. According to his recollection, museums in North America were then likewise liberally exchanging artifacts, without even recording such transactions in their books, since the market value of ethnographic objects hardly exceeded that of sea shells or beetles. By 1948, his spending limit had been adjusted to post-war prices, when he paid \$125 a Haida frontlet by Edenshaw and \$150 for an argillite totem pole (Carpenter 1975:17, and personal communication, 1998).

His interest in collecting was reinforced by his marriage to Adelaide de Menil, the daughter of a prominent family of collectors and philanthropists. His Parisian mother-in-law, Dominique de Menil (née Schlumberger) had for many years been chairperson of the art department at Rice University in Houston; she and her husband Jean had made available their collection of Northwest Coast art as a study collection at this university (Holm and Reid 1975); and their children had



**Fig. 3** Mask, Nootka (Collection of Adelaide de Menil and Edmund Carpenter), looking down.  
Photograph courtesy Edmund Carpenter.

also been infected by the collecting virus (Carpenter 1975:24). By 1975, there was already another Nootkan mask with a Cook voyage provenance in the de Menil collection (Holm and Reid 1975:216–217; supporting documentary evidence for the association with Cook became available only later, cp. Feest 1995a:120, 125, fig. 5).



**Fig. 4** Mask, Nootka (Collection of Adelaide de Menil and Edmund Carpenter), looking ahead.  
Photograph courtesy Edmund Carpenter.

Carpenter does not think of himself as a collector, because what he and his wife bought was generally destined to go to museums. There is no good typology of collectors, but if there were one, collectors of his kind would hardly make up a majority. And yet, in terms of market mechanisms, Carpenter is a collector (and neither a museum, not an old fashioned benefactor, who just pays the bills for things a museum has selected for acquisition). He buys independently of what

other people think and say, but he does not do this for profit, so he is not a dealer, but—for want of a better word—a “collector.”

According to Carpenter’s own account of the events he was considerably disappointed when Rassiga delivered to him mask no. 1030, because it was neither one of the two he had expected (Figs. 3, 4). But the dealer wholeheartedly reassured him that all *three* masks had been obtained together, and the collector accepted the story—but apparently not without second thoughts. In any case, Carpenter wrote to the museum in Dresden and requested a confirmation of the provenance as reported by Rassiga, but never received a reply. When he complained to Rassiga about the museum’s silence, the dealer told him that the curator of the Pacific department in Dresden, who was the major local contact in his transactions, had been irritated by the visit of Michael and Sharon Johnson from Seattle, who had gotten wind of Rassiga’s activities, had flown into Dresden, and had attempted to get themselves into what seemed to be a lucrative exchange business. Both the curator and Rassiga suspected that Carpenter had been behind the visit of the couple from Seattle, but the collector categorically denies his implication in this matter (E. Carpenter, personal communication, 1997).

Thus, in the end, Carpenter had to accept Rassiga’s tall tale as fact. The mask was once published in the early 1980s as a possible Cook voyage object (Furst and Furst 1982:112, pl. 96), and two years later in a Paris exhibition of the de Menil collection as a Nootka “Trophée en forme de tête” without date or collection history (Hopps and Mock 1984:340, #193). After I had heard about the deal with Rassiga during a visit to Dresden and Leipzig in 1983, I was told by Carpenter in 1985 about his acquisition of the mask, and shared with him my doubts about its presumed Cook voyage provenance. Perhaps I didn’t make myself clearly understood, perhaps Carpenter was not overly enthusiastic about this piece of information. In any case, the whole matter seems to have been forgotten before too long.

Apparently, however, the collecting couple’s fondness for this mask declined, until they finally decided to put it up, together with other artifacts, for auction at Sotheby’s in New York. It was their first sale of objects, instigated by the increasing reluctance of museums to accept donations of American Indian material since the passing of the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* of 1990 (cp. Feest 1995b).

### The Auction: Late Riches and Fame

Sotheby's catalog *Important American Indian Art* for the auction on 4 June 1997 described our mask as lot 216 and devoted a full-page color illustration to it. It was identified as "Property of Adelaide DeMenil" and offered with the following provenance: "Probably collected on Cook's Third Voyage, 1787. Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden, no. 1030." Both the spelling of the museum's name and the year of Cook's visit to Nootka (actually, 1778) are misprints. The following text is no misprint:

"Catalogue numbers associate this mask with two other 18th century Nootka masks remaining in the Dresden collection. One of the latter is identical with a mask in the British Museum collected by James Cook and accessioned into the collection by 1780. Numbers on these three masks suggest that they all may have come from the auction of the Leverian Museum" (Sotheby's 1997a:#216).

Almost every single assertion in this account of the object's "documentation" is false. First of all, as noted above there are no two "further" Nootka masks of the eighteenth century in the Dresden collection (or that of its Herrnhut branch). The one piece actually present, referred to as a "mask," is a wooden head (Augustin 1993:94–97, frontispiece, fig. 26a), which indeed is similar to another one in the British Museum (NWC 58; King 1981:79–80, pl. 60), although it is not "identical" with it; King's attribution of it to an acquisition of 1780, however, is purely inferential.

The numbers on the two existing Nootkan human face carvings (mask and head) clearly indicate the lack of any previous past history. The Herrnhut head now has the Dresden catalog number 69269, its accession number when it was transferred from the Museum in Niesky was 218 (Herrnhut catalog number 4015), its oldest number—that of the old Moravian collection in Barby—is 229 (Augustin 1993:94). None of these numbers is in sequence with 1030, the only number the Boban mask was ever assigned in Dresden. Prior to 1975, when the Herrnhut museum became a branch of the Dresden museum, whose curators had provided scholarly support of it since 1959, the two items had no common history. It also cannot be claimed that these numbers provide evidence for a provenance from the sale of the Leverian Museum in 1806. The old label on the Herrnhut head is written in German script and none of the various numbers quoted above corresponds even by chance to the numbers of comparable items in the Leverian sales catalog. Moreover, the fact that the Cook voyage collection in Herrnhut had reached Barby through the efforts of Benjamin Latrobe between October

1780 and February 1782 has been known to the reading public since Stephan Augustin's publication (1993:16) and obviously precludes any association with the Leverian sale.

After I had come across this apocryphal piece of information, I wrote a letter to Carpenter on 3 May 1997, in which I pointed out that any relationship between this mask and James Cook's third voyage was at best the result of Rassiga's fertile imagination or worse, that the mask had indeed been obtained in 1881 from Boban, that it bore no stylistic resemblance to the masks (and heads) known to have been collected by Cook and his companions, and that I was inclined to date it to the first half of the nineteenth century. Carpenter promptly replied on 12 May 1997, offered the explanation relating to his purchase of it as cited above, and reassured me that he had instantly passed my information (plus a copy of his letter to me) along to Sotheby's.

On 1 June 1997, three days before the sale, the *New York Times* published an extensive article adorned with a picture of what was then still Carpenter's mask. Entitled "Attracted by the Who As Well as the What" and based on an interview with Carpenter and with Ellen Taubman of Sotheby's, the article refers to the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden as "Dresden Museum of Folk Art" and discusses the importance of well-known collectors' names (such as Captain James Cook, James Hooper, George Gustav Heye, Edmund Carpenter, or Adelaide de Menil) for auction prices.<sup>4</sup> The mask is described in the caption as "200 years old," but in the middle of the text the Cook voyage attribution is retracted with reference to information obtained since the catalog had been published. This fact, the article says, would also be announced at the sale.

The catalog's estimate for the mask was \$75,000 to \$95,000. At the sale, it fetched \$525,000 (including the 10 percent buyer's premium), the highest price ever paid at auction for a work of Native American art (Sotheby's 1997b). Neither the presumed provenance of the mask from Cook's third voyage, nor its later denial had apparently negatively affected the price.<sup>5</sup>

- 4 In its year-end review of the auction scene, the *New York Times* (28 December 1997) noted that "in the realm of American Indian art, the collectors Adelaide de Menil and her husband, Edmund Carpenter, have celebrity status" to explain that (in Carpenter's words) "celebrity-owned icons (Warhol, Jackie, Windsors, etc), like holy relics, command astronomical prices at auction" (E. Carpenter, personal communication, 1998)
- 5 The buyer of the mask was Richard A. Manoogian, "Chairman of Masco Corporation (a large international home products and furniture manufacturing company)" (Taubman 1995: 7), who is also owner of Morning Star Gallery in Santa Fe, NM, reputed backer of Alexander Gallery, as well as

### Traces: In Search of a Forgotten Youth

In view of the value of the mask as determined by the free play of market forces, the question about the actual infancy and youth of this work—certainly no longer a mere artifact—becomes even more interesting. It is admittedly somewhat more difficult to remain on factual grounds than to invent a nice lie (and there is no other way to qualify Rassiga's assertions regarding the previous history of this piece). As I will attempt to demonstrate below, however, even the poor and potentially misleading data in the museum's accession books should not be regarded as a reason for despair. What may be deduced from this slim evidence is remarkable enough.

An obvious possibility for the elucidation of the time and place of an artifact's origin rests upon the comparative evidence of similar objects with better known collection histories. Any comparison with Nootkan masks of Cook voyage provenance is facilitated by the fact that the corpus of known and documented specimens has been repeatedly published and discussed during the last two decades (e.g., Kaepler 1978, King 1981, Feest 1995a, 1998). Such a comparison clearly demonstrates that the mask represents a type different from those collected by Cook (all of which, however, are documented in more than one example). With Cook-voyage Nootkan human face masks the Boban mask shares the decorative use of the grain of the wood and of human hair (rather more bushy on Cook voyage specimens) attached to the mask with wooden pegs inserted into pre-drilled holes. The fact that eyebrows (and beards,<sup>6</sup> if present) on Cook voyage masks and heads are generally made of fur strips, may be related to the different types they represent; similar arguments may be made for the differences in the treatment of eyes and mouths and for the lack of facial painting on any of the

Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Detroit Institute of Arts, where the mask has now been placed on loan. The possible ethical conflicts between the private collector and dealer's interest in raising the value of his investments and the activities of the chairman of a museum's board of trustees are obviously not perceived as such in the American art world and will not be further discussed here. The fact that Ellen Taubman (1995: 7) was "advising curator of what is now the nucleus of the Masco Collection of Native American art" after working as the American Indian art expert for Sotheby's (and before returning to the same job) illustrates how small the world of American Indian art sometimes appears to be. Ms. Taubman's father-in-law, a Detroit real estate mogul, is also chairman of Sotheby's Holdings Inc.

- 6 The two perforations above the lips do not appear to have served for the attachment of a mustache, but rather for a string or fiber bit to be held by the wearer's teeth "to help support the weight of the mask" (Drucker 1951: 102).



documented Cook pieces. A comparable chin and mouth, painted eyebrows, and facial painting appear on a mask now in the Museo de América in Madrid, which, on the other hand, significantly differs in size and other respects (Sánchez Garrido 1991:118–120, #95, 159). The Madrid mask first appears on an inventory written after 1850, where it is designated as a Peruvian theater mask from the collection of the naturalists Ruiz and Pavón; a few years later it was taken to be a shield collected on the circumnavigation of Alejandro de Malaspina – both, at least, collections dating from the late eighteenth century. Cabello (1992:16–17) correctly identified the carving as Nootkan and offered good reasons to suggest that it was collected in 1790 by José Moziño. This, unfortunately, exhausts the store of anthropomorphic masks or mask-like carvings collected among the Nootkans during the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Documented Nootkan masks reappear only in collections of the late nineteenth century. This group no longer includes the types collected on Cook's voyages and also illustrates the substantial stylistic changes that had taken place in the course of one century. My assumption that the mask obtained from Boban dates to the first half (or first quarter) of the nineteenth century is based on its obvious transitional status between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth century examples. Irrespective of the differences noted above, which make it unlikely that the Boban mask dates from the time of James Cook's third voyage, it shares several early features, which are no longer found on the later examples.

There may today be a total of about 250 to 300 historically collected anthropomorphic Nootkan masks in museums and private collections. 142 of these have recently been published on a laserdisk as a study collection, but without adequate documentation (Wright 1995). A look at this sample has led to the identification of two masks, which show relatively close iconographic relationships to the Boban mask. One of these, now in the Thomas Burke Memorial State Museum at the University of Washington in Seattle (cat.no. 4610), was acquired in 1913 from the widow of Dr. S. W. Hartt, who had collected it among the Makah of Neah Bay; the accession records describe it as a "Grotesque mask (human)", but do not add any further information (R. Wright, personal communication, 1997). The second mask is found in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary (cat.no. AA438), which has so far failed to reply to my inquiries regarding its collection history. Nothing is known about a rather similar Nootka mask, not found in Wright (1995), from the Fred Harvey collection, now in the National Museum of the American Indian (cat.no. 8/1644; Penney 1981:105, fig. 13).

A somewhat more distant relationship exists between the Boban mask and a Nootkan mask type of which four examples were collected in 1885 by the Norwegian collector Filip Jacobson (Haberland 1979:182, #H-22; Boden 1995:95, #314, 34, color plate; Universitetets Etnografiske Museum, Oslo, cat.no. 6365; Museum für Völkerkunde, Frankfurt). Except for the provenance “West Vancouver [island],” no reference to the meaning or function of this type of mask is found in the documentation preserved by the museums.

Beyond the information to be derived from the object itself, any attempt to reconstruct the biography of mask no. 1030 must begin with their first known owner: Eugène Boban. Little is presently known about Boban, but even the facts available are interesting enough.

During a sojourn in Mexico of more than two decades, Eugène Boban (1834–1908) became a collector of antiquities, some of which later ended up in the Musée de l’Homme (Dias 1991:175, 178). At the beginning of the Mexican empire of Maximilian, Eugène Boban had been sent to Mexico in connection with the *mission scientifique* established by Napoleon III in order to acquire Mexican antiquities for an exhibition in Paris. In the Mexican capital, the Frenchman set up a *museo científico* which doubled as a store for antiquarian books, antiques, and antiquities. After the execution of Maximilian, Boban quickly established a friendly relationship with the Mexican republic and its museum curators, with whom he engaged in various transactions of purchase, exchange, and sale (Walsh 1997). In Paris, Boban concurrently opened a *comptoir d’archéologie*, in which he sold books on this subject, but also prehistoric, anthropological, and ethnographic specimens (and plaster casts). Since 1878, sales catalogs were published under Boban’s Paris address, in which, however, ethnographic items were of only secondary importance (cp. Boban 1878, 1881; Museum für Völkerkunde Wien 1879).

In Mexico, Boban got into serious problems in 1885, when he attempted to sell to the National Museum an Aztec crystal skull, which he considered to be a masterpiece of Aztec carving, but which the museum considered to be a fake. (This and other similar pieces may have been made—not faked—in the lapidary workshops of Idar-Oberstein in Germany, and either been mistaken for or “transformed” into Aztec carvings by Boban.) As a consequence, Boban lost his strategic advantages on the Mexican market and decided to abandon his trans-Atlantic business operation. In 1886 and 1887, Boban had his extensive collection auctioned off by George A. Leavitt & Co. in New York (Boban 1886, 1887): The incriminating crystal skull was bought by Tiffany’s for \$950—the highest price

paid at the auction; twelve years later, Tiffany's sold it to the British Museum. The Aztec crystal skull at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris also can be traced back to Boban (Walsh 1997).

In his later years, Boban became especially known as the reputable author of the catalogs of the famous Aubin and Goupil collections of books and documents at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and as the editor of the Aztec *Codex Aubin* (Boban 1898).

Mask no. 1030 first appears in Boban's 1881 catalog as "Masque en bois, des naturel de Kadiac. 50 fr." together with "Deux masques en bois avec tatouages, Vancouver, 50 fr." as well as his several Eskimo harpoons and snowshoes priced from 20 to 60 francs (Boban 1881:43). This may indicate that all three masks (one presumably from Kodiak and two presumably from Vancouver Island) had come from the same source.

Unfortunately, very little is known about the sources which Boban tapped to fill the shelves of his store. It can be regarded as probable that the majority was obtained from French owners, since except for his long sojourn in Mexico, Boban is not known to have made collecting trips of his own. We know about Boban's association with Alphonse Pinart (1852–1911), a French ethnologist and linguist, recognized by Mexicanists as a temporary husband of Zelia Nuttall and also temporary owner of the collections of his mentor, the Abbé C. E. Brasseur de Bourbourg. More significant for our purposes is the fact that Pinart in 1871–1872 and 1874–1876 had traveled in Alaska and in western North America, and that Boban's "Aztec" crystal skull had been acquired by the Musée de l'Homme under Pinart's name.

An interesting reference to another source for Boban's ethnographic items is found in the New York auction catalog of 1886, in which 22 North American objects—nearly all of them of Eskimo origin and mostly from "Behring Straits" or "Behring Sea"—are listed.<sup>7</sup> One of these items, a three-seated kayak model from the Bering Sea (lot 1139) is said to have come "from the National Museum, Mexico," which shows that even 110 years ago clever dealers were able to draw upon the collections of museums to fill their most pressing needs.

7 Jane Walsh (personal communication, 1998) has identified Edward Nelson as the Boban's most likely source for his "Behring Sea" objects. Since Nelson had been to Mexico, it is possible that even the kayak model from the National Museum of Mexico had ultimately been collected by Nelson.

The two masks from the 1881 catalog likewise reappear in 1886. One of them is described as “1142 Wooden mask, tattooed and lip ornaments, worn in religious ceremonies by the natives of Vancouver Island. Very fine. 25 x 19 cm.” The second appears as “1143 Another; quite as fine” (Boban 1886:70). These references are interesting, because the representation of lip ornaments speaks against a provenance from Vancouver Island and suggests an origin on the northern Northwest Coast (particularly Tlingit or Haida). In connection with the erroneous attribution of mask no. 1030, these misattributions are further indications for an acquisition by Boban from an older collection or from a second-hand owner; direct acquisition from the field collector would have made such mistakes rather unlikely.

Lot 1142 was sold in 1886 for \$5.00 to a man appropriately named Savage (who was apparently a buyer for Tiffany’s), 1143 went for \$4.50 to a customer named Madison. A third, consecutive lot (1144), a painted model of a dugout canoe from Vancouver Island, was also bought by Madison. The latter two items, however, reappeared in the 1887 sale—virtually the only North American items in this group (Boban 1887:4). The present whereabouts of the three pieces are unknown.

At this point, Feest’s Second Law of Museum Documentation<sup>8</sup> comes into play: “The uncertainty of an attribution increases with the square of its distance from the data supplied by the collector.” Its corollary is that “provenances supplied by the collector, even if wrong, will lead closer to the truth (through questions such as why are they wrong and what are the reasons for the specificity of their error) than even the most ingenious secondary attributions” (Feest 1968:154).

In the present case, we have to ask how it could happen that a Nootka mask was designated as coming from the Kodiak archipelago. It may be taken for granted that Boban himself was unable to make such an attribution. Thus, even if patently erroneous, it must be based on a misunderstanding or a mistake by the previous owner—probably the field collector or his descendants. On the basis of our knowledge of the facts, there are three possible explanations, which may claim different levels of probability:

Hypothesis 1: Boban’s friend Alphonse Pinart collected the mask in the early 1870s. During a visit to Kodiak, Pinart had indeed assembled a large collection

8 The validity of the First Law (“If it looks good, we can always find a label for it”) is, of course, illustrated by the conversion of the Boban mask into a Cook voyage piece. It is once again illustrated by its identification as a “red-faced Wild Man” by the Detroit Institute of Art’s curator (David Penney, personal communication, 1997).

of masks, which he himself published in 1875 (Pinart 1875, Lot-Falck 1957). He had also visited Vancouver Island—where the mask had actually come from—in 1875, perhaps also on his first trip to the West Coast in 1871–1872. Since a proposed extensive report on his first trip was only published in fragmentary form, the second sojourn on Vancouver Island alone is documented; yet, all we know is that Pinart excavated some burial tumuli; a Nootka vocabulary from his possession may have been acquired on this or on another occasion and does not appear to represent Pinart's own work. The strongest argument against the Pinart hypothesis is that he should not have been able to confound a Nootka mask with one from Kodiak; Pinart's collection also seems to have gone more or less completely to the museum in Boulogne-sur-Mer. It should be noted, however, that the Musée du Trocadéro also acquired a few pieces from Pinart in 1881, the same year that the "Kodiak" and "Vancouver Island" masks appear in Boban's catalog (Lot-Falck 1957:5). Thus, it is not totally inconceivable that a few objects from Pinart's collection could have ended up with Boban. Pinart's willingness to part with his North American material at this point of time was in part caused by his marriage in 1880 to Zelia Nuttall and his subsequent shift of interest to more southerly regions of the Americas. It is also true, that in 1873 Pinart, at the age of twenty-one, had inherited a substantial fortune from his father, which he appears to have depleted in the course of his extensive travels and an uninhibited collecting spree over the next five years; Zelia Nuttall's money helped him until their divorce in 1883 to keep up a lifestyle not supported by gainful employment, but in 1884 he had to dispose of his valuable library, which was sold at auction in Paris (Parmenter 1966:1–2).

Hypothesis 2: Boban may have acquired the mask (and possibly the other northwestern American items in his catalog) from the National Museum of Mexico, about whose old North American collection only very little is known. We know that several Spanish expeditions left Mexican ports between 1774 and 1793 to explore the Northwest Coast (cp. Palau Baquero 1988). Of voyages after 1793, nothing is known, although it cannot be completely ruled out that some ships continued to go north to trade for sea otter furs. Collections assembled on the known expeditions to the Northwest Coast have apparently mostly (but probably not completely) ended up in Spain (cp. Sánchez Garrido 1991). The only presently known proof for the early presence of Northwest Coast collections in Mexico is a set of drawings made in the 1820s in the National Museum by Maximilian Franck, a German from Düsseldorf; the few non-Mexican items depicted include a typical Nootkan mask (however, of a different type than the

Boban mask), whose present whereabouts are unknown (Jane Walsh, personal communication, 1997). Boban's spelling "Kadiac" may support the Mexican hypothesis (Pinart's spelling was apparently "Kadiak"; Lot-Falck 1957:9). The lack of recorded contacts of the Spanish at Kodiak, at least during the early voyages, speaks against the Mexican hypothesis, as does the fact that Boban explicitly noted the provenance from the National Museum of Mexico in the case of a kayak model; if he thought that this information might help sales, it is likely that he would have also made the point in connection with the mask(s).

Hypothesis 3: The most probable explanation thus appears to be that a French collector had acquired objects both in Kodiak and among the Nootka, and had either misidentified them himself, or that the unmarked artifacts had later been randomly attributed by his heirs to the places they knew their forebear had visited. If the stylistic attribution to the period around 1800 is correct, the choice is limited to those Frenchmen known to have visited Nootka and Kodiak around or after 1800. Of the French voyagers calling at the Northwest Coast, neither Lapérouse in 1787, nor Marchand in 1791 had visited Nootka Sound, which since James Cook's visit in 1778 had become a favorite stopping place for seafaring fur traders of various European nations. There were, however, during the early years of the fur trade some visits by French ships about which we are only imperfectly informed. Since the massacre perpetrated on the crew of the American ship "Boston" by the Mowachaht of Nootka Sound in 1803, most ships cautiously avoided the formerly popular spot. It was only in 1817, that we have an official record of a ship visiting Nootka Sound, when the French trader Camille de Roquefeuil anchored his ship *Le Bordelais* in the sound; he returned for another visit in 1818. In addition, Roquefeuil called at several places along the northern Northwest Coast, including Kodiak in May 1818. Immediately before this visit, he had given a parcel of unknown contents to be forwarded to France to the Russian commander at New Archangelsk (Sitka) (Roquefeuil 1823a, 2:13).

Unfortunately, Roquefeuil's extensive French account of his voyage (of which abbreviated English and German versions were published almost simultaneously; Roquefeuil 1823b, c) makes no reference to any collecting of indigenous arts and crafts, although the peoples at Nootka and their culture are described in great detail. He does mention the use of masks ("Masques représentant des têtes monstrueuses d'hommes ou d'animaux"; Roquefeuil 1823a, 2:192), which is the more remarkable, since apparently no dances were held during his two relatively brief visits; it may also be noted that this passage (contrary to some of his other description of Nootkan culture) was not taken from published accounts. Thus, if

the information was not merely derived from interviews with his hosts, it was probably based upon masks seen and/or purchased from the local people. Of course, Roquefeuil himself was not the only possible collector on this occasion; among his crew, another prominent candidate was the ship's doctor Yves-Thomas Vimont, who together with his captain "discovered" the Nootka whaling shrine of later fame (Mauzé 1991). Vimont also left an (unpublished) account of the voyage (Niaussat 1983), which likewise contains no reference to collecting activities.

Nothing is presently known about other French voyages to the Northwest Coast during the first half of the nineteenth century. The collection presented in 1850 by the Moillet family to the city of Lille for the establishment of an ethnographic museum, however, includes a number of Northwest Coast artifacts. Two Nootkan whalebone clubs are too unspecific to be dated (other examples are known to have been collected from the late eighteenth throughout the nineteenth century), but there is a Haida argillite pipe which on the basis of its style must have been made between 1830 and 1850 (Mauzé 1997).

The major reason for suggesting that the mask was acquired on Roquefeuil's voyage is found in the fact that he is known to have visited both Kodiak and Nootka at about the right time; if the two masks which appear on Boban's list together with the Nootkan mask from "Kadiac," and which despite their attribution to Vancouver Island were probably of Tlingit or Haida origin, had come from the same source, the argument for Roquefeuil would be even stronger, since he had also visited both the Tlingit and Haida. Rather than "Kadiac," Roquefeuil uses the spellings "Kodiak" (the form preferred by Vimont), "Kodiack," and "Kodiaque," but since the erroneous attribution was most likely made by his heirs (and may actually only appear as written down by Boban), the different spelling bears little weight in this connection.

### **Historical Ethnography: Dancing in the Dark**

Independently of the question of who may have originally collected the mask, we have already determined the approximate age of the object on stylistic grounds. We now have to ask whether we can determine its meaning to its Nootkan makers. This question turns out to be even more difficult than the one about the mask's collection history. Although the historical ethnography of the Nootka remains to be written, its principal sources are known and generally available. This is

especially true for the last quarter of the eighteenth century, when following James Cook's visit numerous British, American, Spanish, and French ships entered the highly profitable maritime fur trade or attempted to enforce the territorial claims of their respective countries to the central Northwest Coast.

While most voyagers visited the Nootka for only brief periods of time and outside the ceremonially important winter season, the account left by John Jewitt, who was kept as a slave by the Nootka following their seizure of the "Boston," is based on two and a half years of continuous participant observation. Similarly, the Spanish botanist José Moziño wrote his *Noticias de Ntka* after having spent five months among them in 1790. Despite the generally abundant sources on the Nootka in the period from 1778 to 1805, there are very few descriptions of their use of masks. After Roquefeuil's brief mention of their existence, no substantial information is available until the last third of the nineteenth century, and even these later data are rather rudimentary.

Actual masks collected during the early period are only documented from James Cook's third voyage and from Spanish sources. Both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic types appear to have been made, but they bear little resemblance with forms collected at later dates. John Webber's drawings of Nootka masks, illustrating the report on Cook's voyage, are based on actual specimens and do not show their indigenous use. A few additional illustrations also depict objects in European or Mexican collections. The only early depiction of Nootka masking illustrates the 1792 account of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra (not included in the 1990 edition of the journal); it is largely based on Webber's engravings, and this is where the inspiration for the two zoomorphic masks shown in use may also have come from (cp. Moziño 1970:pl. 10; Henry 1984:169). The drawing by Atanásio Echeverría y Godoy ("one of our best artists of our botanical expedition in New Spain"; Moziño 1970:83) is correct, however, in showing the mask worn as a helmet-like headdress rather than a face mask.

During Cook's sojourn in April 1778, the British observers noted that the dignitaries circling the ships in their boats to greet the strangers frequently wore anthropomorphic or zoomorphic masks (Beaglehole 1967, 1:298–299). They speculated about their possible use in ceremonies, as helmets in warfare, or as a disguise in hunting, and in addition praised the remarkable quality of their carving (Beaglehole 1967, 1:314–315; 2:1102, 1411; Rickman 1781:243). Ellis (1783, 2:207–208) reports a dance performed during one of the visits on board of the ships, in which a masked dancer changed his mask several times during his performance. Other sources exclusively speak of zoomorphic masks for hunting



and warfare, in welcoming ritual, and in the winter ceremonial (Mears 1790:234; Strange 1982:128; Moziño 1970:60; Jewitt 1974:38, 83). On the event illustrated in Bodega y Quadra's account, Vancouver's companion Archibal Menzies remarked that it was a kind of ritual greeting, accompanied by gift exchange, and that there "assembled at the Chiefs door ... a group of the most grotesque figures that can possibly be imagined, dressed, armed, & masked in imitation of various characters of different Countries." The masked dancers included the famous Mowachaht chief Maquinna (Henry 1984:169). Bodega y Quadra (1990:179) describes a dance in which another Mowachaht chief (Quicomacia) wearing a mask "represented the movements of various animals." It can only be surmised that all these cases involved the demonstration of the privileges of the local nobility.

Unfortunately, the sources on Nootka ethnography after 1850 provide no significantly improved information on the use of masks. To Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, an early settler on the west coast of Vancouver Island, we are indebted for one of the earliest ethnographic summaries of Nootka culture (1987; first published in 1868), which, however, is silent about masks. Johan Adrian Jacobsen, one of the most important field collectors of Northwest Coast art and material culture of the 1880s and Filip Jacobsen's brother), visited the Nootkans in 1881 and described dances, in which zoomorphic masks were used, some of which were acquired by Jacobson, "unfortunately at considerable expense" (Woldt 1885:108–109; 1977:63–64). Augustin Brabant, who lived among the Nootka as a missionary during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, describes the Wolf ritual held during the winter ceremonial season without reference to the masks used and speaks on another occasion only of "masks of different descriptions" used by the Nootka (Lillard 1977:55, 87–88).

A relatively extensive description of nineteenth century mask use relates to the Makah, the southernmost Nootkan group, living in the northwestern corner of the state of Washington, and was written by James G. Swan, a resident of Port Townsend in Washington Territory, whose important Northwest Coast collection was for the most part acquired by the Smithsonian Institution (and a smaller part by the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna). In his 1870 monograph on the Makah, Swan illustrates also a few anthropomorphic masks associated with the Wolf ritual (*tlu:kwa:li*:<sup>9</sup>) (Swan 1870:69–70, figs. 35–41). The similarities with the

9 For ease of reference, the spelling of Native terms has been normalized and follows (in a modified and somewhat simplified manner) the conventions of the *Handbook of North American Indians* (Arima and Dewhirst 1990).

Boban mask are remote and relate to the presence of face painting and of hair attached to the upper edge. On Makah masking in general, Swan observes that masks were used in the evening in “masquerades and other amusements, when each lodge was visited and a performance enacted.” As shown by the illustrations, some of the masks were “frightful objects” of which even the Makah were afraid when they entered their dimly lit houses during the nocturnal dances. The most interesting information is that fact that the masks were carved of alder, maple, and cottonwood by the Clayoquot and Ditidaht, and later painted by the Makah buyers. More specific accounts are only supplied for zoomorphic masks.

According to Boas (1890:599–604; 1897:632–635), who also cites Jewitt, Sproat, and Swan, but describes the situation among the Central Nootkans of Vancouver Island, the Wolf’s dance (*tlu:kwa:na*) was the public part of the meetings of the shamanistic associations, who were the owners of these ceremonies; he also notes that among the Nootka two masks of the same type were always dancing together. While most of the masks were zoomorphic and resembled the birdlike being *hínemix*, Boas (1890:603) notes the use of anthropomorphic masks specifically for the *á:tmaqko*: dance. *á:tmaqko*: is a being living in the forest, which was first encountered by the a subgroup of the Sheshaht of Barkley Sound and along Alberni Inlet, who thus came to own this dance. Unfortunately, these masks are neither described nor illustrated. Boas (1890:588) also notes the Nootkan use of masks in potlatches, when the chief’s son or daughter performed a dance for the guests, wearing “the dress and mask of the crest animal of the sept,” and mentions a Kyuquot mask representing a being with different interchangeable mouths (Boas 1890:589). Zoomorphic masks were placed around the huts of twins, who were believed to be related to salmon (Boas 1890:592).

Edward S. Curtis, best known for his beautifully posed photographs, collected data among the Nootka and Makah shortly before World War I. In the Boasian tradition of ethnography, Curtis’s description of the *tlu:kwa:na* consists of a Mowachaht narrative (in English translation only). It includes an enumeration of the masks used by men and women, almost all of which were zoomorphic. Only the male “masked dancers” performing the dance of the *hóhasimmimuts* (a kind of wood spirits, compared in a note to the Kwakiutl *ts’óno:qa*) wore anthropomorphic “masks with long cylindrical mouths,” clearly not resembling the Boban mask (Curtis 1970:84; cp. 84 and note 3, 86); this is also true for the only mask illustrated in a photograph, which is identified as “Há’wa’nahat, ... one of the four slaves who were transformed into speaking house-posts” (Curtis 1970:88 note). For the

indigenous authors of texts, there was obviously no need to describe the ceremonial attire, which may have been generally known. But often, not even the associated meanings were explicitly noted, and the whole description is limited to an account of the ceremonial sequences. For this reason, the extensive collections of Nootka texts assembled by Edward Sapir are also of little help for the purposes of our discussion (Sapir 1939, Sapir and Swadesh 1955).

Frances Densmore conducted her ethnomusicological research among the Makah between 1923 and 1926, in the course of which she also collected material on the Clayoquot. Referring to illustrations showing the son of a Clayoquot chief living among the Makah and wearing various zoomorphic masks, she remarks: "The dance helmets were of many patterns, including representations of the wolf and various birds," of which raven and duck are specifically noted. Masks with movable parts are likewise mentioned, but no anthropomorphic masks. All of the masks described by Densmore were apparently the work of Jim Hunter, the Clayoquot noted above, which appears to support Swan's information about the lack of mask carving among the Makah<sup>10</sup> (Densmore 1939:25, 100, 136–137, pl. 4, 13a).

For the Clayoquot themselves we have the data gathered in 1923 and 1929 by the Benedictine father Vincent A. Koppert. His remarks about masks (*haqóma*) in the chapter about "Amusements" are short and painfully inadequate: "Many and various are the masks used by this people, but it is very doubtful whether they have any significance beyond that for use in entertaining. At practically all dances and feasts, masks were worn part of the time. All sorts of sizes and figures are made. The masks are carved of cedar-wood and painted." Other observations and illustrations in this section relate to sculptures with movable parts; a *hínemix* mask is illustrated without further comment (Koppert 1930:97–99, figs. 60–61).

Philip Drucker's monograph on the northern and central Nootkan tribes was based on fieldwork conducted in the 1930s and contains scattered references to masks. From these we learn that the Nootkans distinguished four types of masks, including the face mask (*hóqom*)—of which Boban's mask is a representative (the others are frontlets, kerfed and bent board headdresses, and hollowed out cedar blocks) (Drucker 1951:102). Masks were kept at (whaling) shrines by the Hesquiaht, displayed as privileges at potlatches after the *tlu:kwa:na* by the

10 This may indicate that the mask in the Thomas Burke Memorial State Museum in Seattle (cat.no. 4610), which shows some resemblance to the Boban mask and which was collected among the Makah, may in fact have a more northern (Clayoquot or Ditidaht) origin.

Kyuquot, and used as Kyuquot marriage privileges (two “huge masks,” one male and one female) (Drucker 1951:172, 259, 295, 414). Anthropomorphic masks mentioned as occurring more commonly among the Northern, than among the Central Nootkans were those representing “ancients (*ma'iytux*),” “dressed and acting like a very old man and woman” (Drucker 1951:370, 442). At the Nutchatlaht Shaman’s Dance, four “Fire Tenders (*i'iniqwol*)” owned by the Nutchatlaht chief “were represented by men wearing large masks, and old ragged blankets” (Drucker 1951:434). The only specific description of anthropomorphic masks relates to those representing “a ‘Woods Spirit’ or ‘Wild Man Spirit’ (*tci:ni:'ath*), impersonated by men wearing masks with ‘sharp’ features—long hooked noses and pointed chins—and long shaggy hair. They also wore neck rings of shredded bark dyed a bright red, with long streamers behind, had their arms and legs painted red, and carried long sharp staves.” According to Drucker (1951:394), these beings appeared in the Wolf packs of the *tlu:kwa:na* only among the Northern Nootkans. Three anthropomorphic masks from the collections of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History, two of which show at least some resemblance with the Boban mask, are illustrated without any reference to them in the text (Drucker 1951:pls. 4a,b, 5a).

Alice Ernst’s study of Northwest Coast Wolf rituals (1952) was likewise based on fieldwork conducted in the 1930s, which included direct observation among the Makah (where dances were still held) and “word-of-mouth transcription” for the west coast of Vancouver Island (mainly among the Central Nootkans at Alberni and Ucluelet). Her book is by far the most detailed account of Nootkan masking, but relates only to *tlu:kwa:na* (Makah: *tlu:kwa:li:*). According to Ernst, two anthropomorphic Wild Men make their appearance in the *tlu:kwa:na*: The *qwálabaqath* of the Makah (who correspond to the *á:tlmaqko:* of the Nootka) are represented by a giant, larger than face-size brown mask with split feathers or rushes tied into a top knot; their “jutting eyebrows and triangular shape” are considered features linking the Makah forms to their Nootkan models. The mask of *qwálabaqath* (identified at Alberni as the husband of the Basket Woman, *ts'óno:qa*) is characterized as “protean”—and “in times of haste or stress, any fierce-looking mask will do” (Ernst 1952:15–16, 33, 39–40, 71, 74). The examples illustrated show indeed a substantial variety of forms (Ernst 1952:pls. III, IV, XV) and may be indicative of a growing confusion of locally distinctive versions of ideas about Wild Men brought about by intertribal borrowing. The “Other Wild Man” is known to the Makah as *pukwu:bis*, the “spirit of the nearly drowned,” and is also often considered a “ghost.” Like their Nootkan counterpart *pokomis*

or *pukmis* (Boas 1890e597, 603), *pukwu:bis* generally wear no mask, but are characterized by white face and body paint of flour or pipe clay (Ernst 1952: 16, 34, 70 note 19, 71; Swan 1870: 72). A mask identified as the “Other Wild Man” or “The Destroyer” is painted white, has sharp features and a pouting mouth, and wears a top knot of cedar bark (Ernst 1952: 17, pl. V). Ernst also notes that the various Wild Men masks were reserved for male wearers, although like all Nootkan masks they came in pairs representing man and woman (Ernst 1952: 26, 94).

Long before he became the keeper of the Boban mask, David Penney (1981) made a valiant effort to make sense of the conflicting evidence offered by the sources on the Wild Man concept among the Nootkans and their neighbors. He describes the basic distinction between the *pukmis*, malevolent “former humans” or “ghosts” recruited from among those nearly drowned, and the *á:tlmaqko:* (or *qwálabaqath*), supernatural mountain spirits, who were regarded as sources of power for those who happened to encounter them. A broadly defined type of mask associated with the *á:tlmaqko:* is characterized by its high angled brow, hooked nose, protruding, cylindrical mouth, prominent chin, and white face or face markings (Penney 1981:figs. 1–2, 8, 10; cp. Fig. 1 lower right in this essay); only one of these examples, a rather deviant form, is identified in the collection records as “Qualu bo quth, giant wild man of the woods” (Field Museum cat.no. 61903), whereas others are described—inaccurately, Penney believes—as “corpses or death heads.” While the *pukmis* often wear no mask at all, those that can be tentatively identified as such are not much different from those of the *á:tlmaqko:* (especially Ernst 1952:pl. V; a “ghost” mask collected by Swan and shown by Penney [1981:fig. 9] is an unlikely candidate for a *pukmis*). It is rather surprising that two beings, whose character and function are described as complementary, should be so similarly represented. This similarity also leads Penney (1981:100) to identify Curtis’s *hóhasinnimuts* as *pukmis* although Curtis’s comparison with the Kwakiutl *ts’óno:qa* and the masks’ long cylindrical mouths would rather indicate a close relationship with the *á:tlmaqko:/qwálabaqath*-type.

Beyond the cylindrical-mouth masks, Penney (1981:103) thinks that other Nootkan “masks with entirely different sets of features represent the same or parallel ideas.” Thus he designates a varied group of anthropomorphic masks as “red-face masks” and identifies them as representations of the Wood Spirit called *tci:ni:’ath* according to Sapir and Swadesh (1939:143) and Drucker (1951). One of the mask types in this group is a sharp-nosed, broad-lipped face with almost caricature-like features (Penney 1981:fig. 14; cp. Fig. 1 lower left in this essay); another one is related to the Boban mask, which has prompted Penney (personal

communication, 1997) to pronounce it a “red-face spirit.” None of the masks in question is identified as a *tci:ni:’ath* in the records, and Drucker’s description of the *tci:ni:’ath*-masks as having “‘sharp’ features—long hooked noses and pointed chins—and long shaggy hair” (1951:394) may refer to the first type, but certainly not to the second.

Unfortunately, Penney’s reconstruction of Nootkan Wild Men masks not only suffers from a lack of close correspondence between known mask types and information about certain anthropomorphic forest-dwellers, it also silently reduces the number of such beings and generalizes what were apparently strongly localized concepts. The variations of the general idea are, of course, related to the nature of these representations as privileges inherited or obtained in ceremonial exchanges, which necessarily led to local reformulations of the basic patterns. As we have already seen, Drucker (1951:394) reported that the *tci:ni:’ath*-concept was limited to the Northern Nootkans, where the *á:tlmaqko:* appears to have been absent. But Drucker (1951:152) also stresses the importance of the *ya’i:*, anthropomorphic beings with white bodies and coarse hair, which appear singly or in groups, and—like the *á:tlmaqko:*—bestow powers and privileges upon humans, including ritual displays and songs. These *ya’i:* are apparently the “*ya’e:*” of the Sheshaht, identified by Boas (1890:597) as “a fabulous people living in the woods.” Drucker (1951:152–153) also mentions the *matlu:h*, “a race of [wood-dwelling] pacific giants whose women had long hair that dragged on the ground when loosened.” Like the *tci:ni:’ath*, the *matlu:h* did not give “any gift of moment to humans, except the right to represent them in dances.” In connection with dances performed during the *tlu:kwa:na*, Boas (1890:603–604) briefly refers to the *hútlmis*, “another fabulous being living in the woods and always dancing.” Far too little is known about these various anthropomorphic beings and about the Nootkan masks in collections today to allow with any degree of certainty the kind of classification proposed by Penney.

It seems highly unlikely that the Boban mask represents a *tci:ni:’ath* or “red-faced” Wild Man. When Boas identified the mask as Nootkan in 1898, he apparently did not attempt to identify the being it represented. If the mask had originally been collected by Roquefeuil in the spring of 1817 or 1818, the winter ceremonial season was over, and it is more likely that it was either connected with greeting ritual (and the accompanying ceremonial exchanges), or obtained surreptitiously from the whaling shrine discovered by Vimont.

## Conclusions

On first sight, the frustrating failure of our search for a meaningful ethnographic context of mask no. 1030 may appear to be disappointing and sobering. The biography of our mask and of the comparative pieces located in other collections impressively documents the carefree spirit in which generations of field collectors have removed artifacts from their functional and meaningful context, without supplying the necessary information about their cultural background. The reluctance of the Nootkans to freely discuss matters of their religious beliefs with outsiders has certainly contributed to the defective state of our knowledge. For many of the old mask types, the continuity of the traditions relating to their meaning has since been severed<sup>11</sup> and an interpretation must necessarily rely on comparisons and the recovery of forgotten documents.

On closer inspection, however, the pain caused by the knowledge lost is somewhat alleviated by the recognition that the mask (like all things) is an inestimable document of a remote period of Nootka culture, a period, on which we are insufficiently informed by other sources. It is to be hoped that its present owner looks at his expensive purchase in a similar way and that, spurred by the Nootkan spirit of the mask, feels compelled to validate by public display the privilege he has acquired as often as possible.

I have personally seen the mask in 1966 for perhaps ten minutes and without the benefit of an adequate knowledge of Nootka history and ethnography. Whatever I can say on the basis of my personal encounter with it must therefore necessarily remain poor. Perhaps the new owner, hopefully stimulated by the extraordinary biography of the mask, can be convinced of the importance to make up for what has been neglected far too long.

The price the buyer put down at the auction was a considerable sum of money for an object, whose character was then even more shrouded in the dark of an uncertain past than it may be after the results presented above. The record price was obviously neither paid for the quality of the mask's documentation, nor for the sheer value of an old piece of wood and some human hair. It was in part paid for the primary transformation of the raw material into a culturally constituted

11 In his 1977 print "Eats.qwin," Nootka artist Joe David depicts "a mouse who inhabits the island where the artist lives," whose face strikingly resembles the features of one of the Wild Man masks (Hall et al. 1981: 120).

form, and in a much larger part for the transformation of the Euro-American valuation of this form in the course of the past 117 or even 180 years.

The transformation of a piece of wood into a mask had probably been completed 190 years ago. We do not know whether it had a market value then, as it had later in the century, when the Makah purchased unfinished masks from their northern relatives. It must have had, however, a ceremonial value (still unknown to us) as a privilege of the Nootkan nobility or of one of the associations dominated by it. In all likelihood, the transfer of this privilege into non-Native ownership occurred through the exchange of goods within the framework of the sea otter fur trade of the early nineteenth century; we may even assume a pre-scholarly documentary motive for its collection on the part of a possible collector Roquefeuil or Vimont. A short-term commodification occurred when the mask passed into Boban's *comptoir*, but was lost again when the purchase of the museum in Dresden removed it from the market and transformed it into a nominal object of scholarship. At least, the benefaction of Oskar Loebel saved the mask from the total loss of identity experienced by the two "Vancouver" masks in Boban's catalog, the imagination of whose ultimate fate is left to our gloomy contemplation. On the other hand, in 1881 the Nootka were still not comparable to the Aztecs; otherwise Boban may not have hesitated then to act like Rassiga did in 1975.

The failed scholarly career of the mask as property of the state of Saxony and later of the German Democratic Republic had the same unenviable smell of tenured civil service shared by all objects in museums. It was not all too often exposed to the scrutiny of the general public, and even less to that of scholars. Boas, Jacobi, and Feest are on record of having so much as looked at it, and so are the Americanist curators of the museum in Leipzig, whose own North American collections had been almost completely destroyed during the war. The only appearance of the mask in print during nearly a century of service for scholarship was an uncaptioned illustration in a popular edition of an adventure story. It would be unfair to put the exclusive blame for this silent disregard upon the museum's directors and curators. To the different priorities they may have had as scholars must be added the prolonged problems with adequate exhibition and storage space, lack of financial resources, two world wars, the second of which ended in the near-total destruction of Dresden, and a cold war, which kept them largely isolated from the most of the rest of the world. Under such circumstances, the museum personnel must be commended for their exemplary sense of duty which helped the survival of the mask for almost one hundred years without notable scars.



Often unable to meet the demands of a research institution, the museum at least gracefully fulfilled its archival functions.

When in 1975 the interest of the museum in the mask was awakened, the impetus came from the outside, and the interest was not focused on the material document, but on its potential exchange value. The resignation of the museum from its archival function was sweetened by the fascination of the hitherto unattainable—no matter whether it was a Mexican falsification or an inaccessible culture of the Pacific islands. The illusion of a profitable exchange of “duplicates” with a humanistically minded businessman was shattered by the inequality of the partners in their ability to make reasoned and market-oriented judgments, even if the lack of scruples on both sides must have been about the same. The museum and its representatives made no known effort to independently assess the history and importance of the mask they were giving away—admittedly a nearly hopeless task in the German Democratic Republic in 1975. For the dealer, the documented history and possible meaning of the mask was irrelevant; his trained eye and his knowledge of the market promised him a quick profit. The sale by direct order from the museum’s storage minimized his capital investment, cut down on the expense of prolonged care, and made it possible to offer the piece at a very reasonable price. The buyer was in need of Cook voyage artifacts? He could instantly be satisfied: For a dealer in fakes, a harmless lie about the collection history of an old mask is no serious moral problem.

Two transformations changed the fate of the mask in 1975. The hitherto inalienable property of the government became a marketable commodity and at the same time mutated from representing the artifact type “Northwest Coast mask” to becoming a cherished individual, whose—however fictitious—history contributed as much to its character and valuation as did the previously disregarded unique aspects of its visual form. Declaring the transaction with the dealer to be an exchange allowed the public owner to maintain the fiction of its unsaleability; for the dealer the mode of exchange allowed him to hide his profits, because even an equitable exchange is only a fiction based on the willingness of the museum to accept the equality of the *ideal* values of the exchanged goods, whereas for the dealer any transaction not involving an improvement of his position in the market would not be attractive in economic terms. The largest profit accrued to the dealer by the simultaneousness of the two transformations: In the process of its commodification, the object was elevated from artifact to work of art.

For the object itself, its privatization was an unexpected blessing. The newly ascribed material and ideal value as well as the private interest of the collector in

the well-being of his collection resulted in the mask's being illustrated three times in full color within twenty years. Its published presence has at last created the basis for a broader appreciation and discussion of its formal merits; indubitably it has also helped to further increase its material value. Its spurious contextualization in the historically important collecting activities of James Cook's voyages is an apt illustration of the attribution of non-inherent values. But as the history of the auction has shown, the attribution of values does in the end not rest upon the documented facts or the material properties of an object. Not only can the price paid for it not be derived exclusively from any inherent qualities, it has now become part of those very qualities.

For museums the question remains to be asked, what they could possibly learn from the biography of this mask. Exchanges today are no longer a serious option in civilized countries. That one should not blindly trust anybody more clever than oneself, may be taken as a general rule of life. But, to end on a happy note, the story also goes to show that a little research can bring some excitement to the darkest corners of a museum's storage. If the biography of mask no. 1030 will help to convince museums that it actually pays to devote more attention to the social history of things, everything may have come to a happy end.

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