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## Book Reviews

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**R.G. Matson and Gary Coupland**

1995 *The Prehistory of the Northwest Coast.*

Academic Press

[xvii + 364 pp.]

This is the first book-length synthesis of the 10,000 year prehistory of the Northwest Coast Culture area. Previous syntheses of Northwest Coast prehistory have been brief, sweeping overviews. In contrast, Matson and Coupland's is more detailed and follows an explicit theoretical framework. It is organized in a straightforward manner, taking the reader chronologically through a sequence of culture-historical periods. Each chapter is sub-divided according to broadly defined geocultural regions of the Northwest Coast, and includes a summary of general evolutionary changes for the period under consideration. In total, the book represents an integrated body of the writers' ideas on the cultural development of the Northwest Coast. For professionals, especially those working in the Gulf of Georgia region, the wealth of data presented is a useful tool, while for students, it is a logical starting place for beginning research. For these reasons, the book is a valuable addition to Northwest Coast archaeological literature.

However, this book is not without its short-comings. In the preface the authors claim their book should have popular appeal. The end product, however, is rather dense in detail, and focussed on abruptly or intuitively introduced sites, phases and issues which are obscure to the general public and to archaeologists not specialized in Northwest Coast prehistory. Yet specialists are apt to find many aspects of the book frustrating. Primary among these is its constrained and dated adherence to an evolutionary paradigm. This is apparent throughout the book in the repetitive use of phrases like 'achievement' and 'adaptive stage', which make it seem as though history consciously progresses towards a goal in a series of steps and plateaus. As well, the authors' attempt to make all of the data fit within their developmental model is occasionally heavy-handed. However, these criticisms could not be offered if they had not constructed this general framework.

Matson and Coupland's goal is to explain the origins of the ethnographically reconstructed "Developed Northwest Coast Pattern" (DNWCP). The DNWCP is characterized by a high degree of sedentism (large, permanent villages), a relatively narrowly focussed subsistence specialization (primarily intensive salmon harvesting and storage), and most importantly, a system of ascribed social differentiation. Matson and Coupland see the DNWCP as the culmination of a series of step-like adaptations including a relatively rapid colonization, a long period of 'settling in' to the coastal environment, the emergence of distinctive coastal adapted cultures, and eventually increasing economic specialization in salmon fishing and storage of surpluses, which form the basis for sedentary settlement, resource ownership and ultimately ascribed social statuses. This general outline

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may seem reasonable, but the timing and importance of the individual steps is not always clear when the argument presented chapter by chapter is scrutinized.

Chapters one and two introduce the purpose and format of the book, and are intended to demonstrate the importance of understanding the origins of the DNWCP by stressing how 'unique' it is among hunter-gatherers. Other ethnographically and archaeologically known affluent foragers are not discussed, and variation from the "egalitarian norm" is dismissed as a recent development. In the second chapter, the authors go on to discuss the fit of the DNWCP with Freid's definition of rank society, and debate whether some groups may also fit the definition of stratified/class societies (a 'higher level' of complexity). I do not take issue with the presentation of Northwest Coast cultures as complex hunter-gatherers, but I do find Matson and Coupland's assertion of their uniqueness unconvincing, and the assignment of them to an evolutionary stage unnecessary.

Chapter three discusses the history of archaeological research. This discussion is largely descriptive, but it effectively places the book within the context of recent research, which has been focussed on modelling and testing the development of social inequality, primarily from a culture-ecology perspective.

In chapters four to eight, the authors review the evidence relevant to their developmental model. Chapter four, 'The Initial Colonization of the Northwest Coast', covers the period 11,000 to 4500 BP. It begins with a discussion of the peopling of the New World, and migration routes to the coast. The authors present a good argument for an initial migration south along the ice free corridor in the interior, and then movements back up the coast, although they also acknowledge arguments for an entirely coastal route of entry. The earliest cultural components on the Northwest Coast are also described, the most important of which are the North Coast Microblade Tradition of the north, and the Old Cordilleran Tradition of the south. The crux of their model here is that these early cultures were not fully coastally adapted. The Old Cordilleran Tradition is distributed along the coast and major coastal river valleys, such as the Fraser. Matson and Coupland think that its origins are in the interior and that it was adapted to large land animal hunting. The reasoning behind this interpretation is very hard to follow. Faunal analyses are of primary importance in their argument, and Matson's own investigation of the Glenrose Cannery site at the mouth of the Fraser River figures large. The remains of the early component indicate the use of a variety of marine resources. Matson's own charts show that the most abundant faunal remains are salmon, which are available during summer and fall spawning, and can be stored to support winter occupation. Yet based on the presence of the much less abundant remains of stickleback and eulachon, he interprets the component as a late spring and early summer occupation, and argues that subsistence was centred on elk, deer and seal. Other Old Cordilleran components from the coast and major salmon fishing grounds on the Fraser and Columbia Rivers are discussed, but are also argued to fit a general land mammal hunting orientation with a high degree of residential mobility. Discussion of the North Coast Microblade Tradition is much more brief and focussed on technical description of excavated assemblages, but interpretation is similar to that presented above. The use of maritime resources is acknowledged,

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but the possibility of full-time adaptation to the coast is not, even though the authors present evidence contrary to their interpretation.

Chapter five, 'The Emergence of Distinctive Coastal Cultures', covers the period 4500-3300 BP, and argues that coastal cultures diverged from their interior neighbours and developed an unequivocal adaptation to coastal resources, but do not represent the DNWCP because they lacked winter villages, multi-family houses, large-scale storage and ascribed social statuses. Matson's own investigations in the Gulf of Georgia, and faunal data, are important again. Charts are shown which indicate little difference in the fauna of this period (St. Mungo Phase) and the earlier Old Cordilleran component at Glenrose Cannery. Although the importance of salmon is now acknowledged, it is argued that they were still not stored because head parts are relatively frequent, and based on ethnographic analogy, Matson and Coupland believe salmon heads were removed prior to storage. The reader may wonder if heads must be discarded prior to storage, and even if they were, why the location of salmon procurement, processing (head disposal) and storage could not be the same, especially on major salmon rivers like the Fraser, where the Glenrose site is located. The authors conclude that intensive salmon use and storage had not yet developed. In doing so, they have overlooked published evidence for a fish weir at the Glenrose site dated 4000-4500 BP (Eldridge and Acheson 1992). This is a significant omission since Matson and Coupland argue in later contexts (Chapter Six) that weirs reflect intensive salmon fishing, and intensification is equated with storage of the surplus catch. Matson's work at the Crescent Beach site is also described and interpreted as a broad-scale, seasonal coastal adaptation. The detail present here, and in a series of tables that compares several Gulf of Georgia components is overwhelming to the casual reader, but could be of use to researchers doing comparative analyses. The summary of the North Coast during this period concludes that this area also saw small, mobile groups with a broad-scale coastal adaptation, although their discussion of the Namu site actually shows a narrowing of the subsistence focus with salmon representing 92-94% of the faunal remains.

Chapter six, 'The Development of Cultural Complexity', deals with the period 3500-2500 BP. It begins with a chronological review of theories on the origins of cultural complexity on the Northwest Coast. At the core of all of the ideas presented from the 1970s onwards seems to be salmon abundance and the complicated strategies needed to procure, process, store and distribute this resource, leading in various ways to large sedentary populations and coercive or managerial elites, or de facto inequalities between groups due to variability in the productivity of fishing areas. This discussion is useful in helping the reader to understand the authors' perspective and why they think each of the above elements appeared in a step-like sequence. The thrust of this chapter is that the period under consideration saw the appearance of the DNWCP subsistence pattern with intensive salmon use, storage and a high degree of sedentism, but social inequalities had not yet developed. Subsistence, artifactual and settlement pattern data to this effect from the Gulf of Georgia and North Coast are presented. For all parts of the coast, evidence of social differentiation is lacking.

Chapter seven, 'The Achievement of Cultural Complexity' covers the period 2500-1400 BP and presents evidence for the full suite of DNWCP traits. For the south

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coast, large sites with outlines of plank houses are discussed as evidence of permanent villages and extended family groups. Evidence of differential mortuary treatment, and hence ascribed statuses, is discussed for both the north and south coasts, as are special resource locations, exotic pieces of personal art, and warfare, which the authors relate to a pattern of cultural complexity.

Chapter eight, 'The Continuation of the Developed Northwest Coast Pattern', presents the most balanced synthesis of current knowledge for the entire culture area of all of the chapters. Useful and convincing detail is presented for all of the sub-regions of the coast to demonstrate a shared culture pattern that includes the general traits identified in the first two chapters. Interesting inter-regional cultural variation is discussed which is reasonably interpreted as reflecting ethnic diversity and adaptation to local environments. Less effort is put into identifying temporal variation, which makes it seem as though little happened in the 1500 years prior to European contact, but the departure from an overarching model (complexity having already been achieved) and the recognition of cultural diversity is refreshing.

At the outset the authors claimed that given the pace of research, the time had come for a grand synthesis of Northwest Coast prehistory. This has been an admirable attempt to pull together what is known archaeologically from a vast area. Although it could be better illustrated with maps and chronological charts for the non-specialist, this book is a valuable reference tool. However, a comprehensive and definitive synthesis of Northwest Coast prehistory is probably premature. There are still large geographic and temporal gaps in the culture history. Despite their attempt to impose order on the extant data, Matson and Coupland have actually demonstrated that a great deal of inter and intra-regional variability exists. Their evolutionary model works best in the Gulf of Georgia where Matson works, and which the book most thoroughly covers, but even within this region important geographic and temporal variability is being pointed out. Stimulating explanation of variation from the Matson-Coupland model may yet prove an unexpected and valuable contribution of this book.

#### References

Eldridge, M. and S. Acheson

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