Stratigraphy and storytelling

Imbricating Indigenous oral narratives and archaeology on the Northwest Coast of North America

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Abstract: Oral narratives and archaeological chronologies are diachronic systems of knowing the past. In this paper we explore how archaeologists working on the Northwest Coast of North America have imbricated these two 'forms of knowing' to achieve a more complete understanding of history. Indigenous communities on the Northwest Coast have transmitted their complex and dynamic oral narratives across generations for millennia. Indigenous knowledge keepers have upheld rigorous standards of transmission in order to maintain the legitimacy of their oral narratives. Archaeologists have therefore looked to Indigenous oral records as a legitimate and informative source for insight and interpretation. Through the application of archaeological survey and dating methods, archaeologists have been able to temporally and spatially anchor events recounted in oral narratives on the Northwest Coast. In concert, the results have added significant contributions to science, history, jurisprudence and other socio-political pursuits.

Keywords: Indigenous oral narratives; archaeology of North America; Northwest Coast culture area

1. Introduction

The term imbrication refers to patterns created by two or more objects that overlap one another, as in roof shingles or tiles. Similarly, in examples of Salishan basketry, design elements are imbricated into the structure by interweaving a pattern using a material of contrasting colour (Bernick 2003). Other indigenous groups on the Northwest Coast use similar, but differently named, techniques of adding decorative elements to basketry, including the use of overlay and dying. The end product of these manufacturing techniques is a finished object that incorporates the structural design of the basket and combines it with an interwoven decoration. Here we consider the imbrication of Indigenous oral narratives with archaeology on the Northwest Coast of North America. Both of

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these are diachronic forms that relate stories about past events. In combining the two, a more detailed and decorated understanding of the past can be constructed. This approach can provide a means of understanding the results of certain archaeological investigations from a more emic perspective. Archaeology can be imbricated with Indigenous oral narratives, adding chronology, spatial information and physical evidence of historical events.

Overall, the goal of this paper is to review the ways in which archaeology and oral narratives have been intertwined on the Northwest Coast of North America. We draw our examples from the growing body of academic and grey literature born from this trend. While it may not always be appropriate to combine oral narratives with archaeology, we find that many of the studies that have attempted to do this have enhanced the results of their research.

1.1 Indigenous oral narratives

For millennia, indigenous communities on the Northwest Coast of North America have transmitted their complex and dynamic oral narratives across generations; forming a foundation of culture, identity, rights and privileges (Hulan & Eigenbrod 2008; Martindale 2006; Wilson & Harris 2005). Involving a focused exchange between orator and listener, oral historical traditions are simultaneously educational, entertaining, socially situated, contextually contingent, ritualised, and in some cases, highly politicised (Cruikshank 1998, 2002; Martindale 2006; Thom 2003; Wilson & Harris 2005). Certain types of stories were regulated via strict transmission protocols (Marsden 2001, 2002; Wilson & Harris 2005), and indeed, their exchange occurred in the context of power, and differential power, meaning they were subjected to social 'vetting'. As a result, oral narratives have evolved over time, and they are imbued with multiple levels of contextually specific meaning (McMillan & Hutchinson 2002). Oral narratives therefore cannot be viewed as a 'product' in the same way that we consider artefacts or other 'things' (Cruikshank 1994:405). Indigenous communities continue to develop, transmit, and verify their respective oral narratives today through ceremonies (Cruikshank 1998; Marsden 2001, 2002; Wilson & Harris 2005), traditional use studies and language programs.

Researchers and the public have long used the terms 'oral traditions', 'oral narratives', and 'oral histories' interchangeably. In this paper we make an explicit distinction among the terms and we operationalise them as follows: oral traditions are a 'social process' referring to the inter- and intra-generational transmission of oral narratives and oral histories (Cruikshank 1994). Oral narratives or 'stories', are a form of indigenous 'property' – they comprise

knowledge of observations and experiences that have been transmitted across generations – they are encyclopaedic compendiums of ecological, social, political, medicinal and other information (Bahr 1998; Wilson & Harris 2005). Oral narratives therefore provide historical accounts of events on the landscape, many extending into deep time (Hall 2003; McLaren et al 2015; Wiley 2008).

We further subdivide 'oral narratives' into 1) clan stories, which are owned accounts of lineage-specific histories, and 2) creation stories, which are shared accounts of population-specific histories (eg Raven cycles) (Marsden 1998a; McLaren 2008). Following Cruikshank (1994), we use the specialised term 'oral history' to refer to recent 'first-hand experiences' or 'eye-witness' accounts documented during an interview with a witness, that has later been transcribed (see also Mason 2000).

1.2 Ethnography

Ethnographic research conducted within the Northwest Coast cultural area is unique in some respects. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ethnographers complied a massive and detailed collection of Indigenous oral narratives. Some of the ethnographers involved in this effort include Franz Boas (1888, 1898a, 1898b, 1910, 1912, 1916, 1917, 1935, 1981); Henry Tate (Maud 1982, 1989); George Hunt (Boas & Hunt 1905, 1906); Ella Clark (1953); Charles Hill-Tout (1978); Edward Sapir (1912, 1924); John Swanton (1905, 1908); Stith Thompson (1977) and Claude Lévi-strauss (1967). The aforementioned list is in no way exhaustive, but it is demonstrative of the abundance of documented narratives available for consultation. In addition, it is important to note that the amount of ethnographic work conducted with the diverse indigenous populations along the Northwest Coast significantly varied from nation to nation. The primary goal of this early ethnographic research was to gain a better understanding of the different cultural groups living in the region – their respective histories, and their inter-connections – 'in their own words' (Thom 2003:3).

1.3. Archaeology and oral narratives

Some scholars, mostly working outside of the Northwest Coast cultural area, have scrutinised the content of Indigenous oral narratives, and dismissed them as mere 'myth' or 'legend'; ultimately classifying the accounts as problematic sources of information lacking in scientific objectivity (see Henige 2009; Mason 2000, 2006; Vansina 1985; Whiteley 2002). In so doing, they perpetuated the

antiquated theoretical hang-ups surrounding the 'scientific illegitimacy' of this body of knowledge well into the twentieth century (Gaudreau 2015; Wilson & Harris 2005). In many cases, however, the ethnographers have been quite clear about the legitimacy of oral narratives as testimonies of the past:

> it must be pointed out that while the Indians had no written records, and had to rely on oral transmission of the clan and family histories, the traditions of all the groups from Vancouver Island northward are so specific and consistent and insofar as they can be checked, so correct – that there is little doubt that for the most part they are historically accurate. (Drucker 1955:115)

Recognising the validity of Drucker's perspective, some of the earlier approaches to Northwest Coast archaeology involved actively weaving information from oral narratives into archaeological investigations and assemblage interpretations (De Laguna 1960; Drucker 1939; MacDonald 1969; Strong 1934).

This trend gained increasing momentum following the ground-breaking R v Delgamuukw 1997 Supreme Court of Canada case, wherein oral narratives were legally recognised as valid historical records for consideration in lands title cases and other legal disputes (Budwha 2002). Over the last two decades, many Northwest Coast archaeologists have formed a concerted effort to continue exploring the ethics (Gaudreau 2015; Martindale 2006) and methodologies for combining Indigenous oral narratives with their archaeological investigations (Atalay 2008; Cruikshank 2005; Echo-Hawk 2000; Finnegan 2003; Martindale & Marsden 2003; McMillan & Hutchinson 1997, 2002). Through these developments, it has become apparent that no 'universal framework' or methodology exists for combining Indigenous oral narratives with archaeological data (Budhwa 2002:108). Indeed, no catch-all framework will ever exist for combing the two different lines of evidence because they are epistemologically and ontologically different ways of knowing – they originate from different cultural traditions, and the formation processes for both types of data significantly varies (Martindale 2006).

Recognising that there is no 'catch-all' framework for this, our goal is to identify the emerging themes and trends in this field of inquiry. To achieve this, we compile a comprehensive review of cross-disciplinary research conducted on the Northwest Coast of North America ranging from Alaska down to the northern regions of California (Figure 1), and we identify the contributions that indigenous narratives and archaeological research/chronologies can offer our collective understanding of the past. We apply the metaphor of imbrication to structure our review and discussion of these cross-disciplinary studies. We are not arguing that imbrication be considered as a universal strategy. Instead,

our approach follows the same vein as Jackley (2012) metaphor of 'weaving' and Bernick (2003) metaphor of 'stitching' as a means of conceptualising the ways in which these diachronic sources of information can be combined. Lastly, we address the ethical and theoretical issues that have been raised over time, and the ways in which community-based research may help overcome some of these issues.

Combining Indigenous oral narratives with archaeological methodology is surrounded by socio-political complexity, and the main arguments against this approach have centred on issues of validation, oversimplification and appropriation (Martindale 2006; Gaudreau 2015). As a result, several archaeologists have struggled to recognise oral narratives as valid in their own right (Wylie 1995), and have not acknowledged the myriad ways in which indigenous ontologies and ways of knowing can provide new insight and paradigms for the interpretation of archaeological assemblages and sites (Gaudreau 2015). In this paper we acknowledge these issues exist, and are very necessary for us to continue to explore as a discipline, however, it is also important to highlight those instances in which this approach has been applied in a fruitful manner.

We advocate here that archaeology should not serve as a means to 'validate' oral histories, but rather, be seen as a complementary suite of tools that communities and researchers can partner with oral narratives to enhance our collective understanding of the past. Indigenous ontologies and ways of knowing bring novel interpretations and understandings of the material remains recovered from archaeological investigations. Of course, archaeology and oral history do not always 'match-up' – memory is fallible, just as archaeological sites erode over time – but the purpose of this paper is to focus on those instances in which these types of data converge to reciprocally support, and flesh-out, regional and site-specific histories.

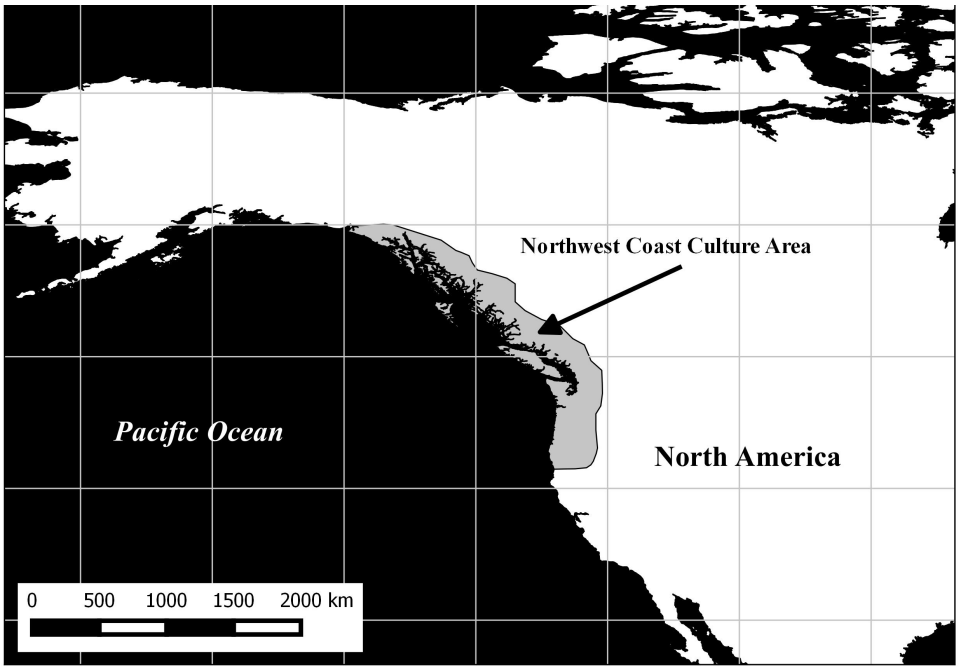

Figure 1 Map of the Northwest coast culture area in North America

2. Types of imbrication

Both Indigenous oral narratives and archaeological chronologies represent incomplete sources of information (Marsden 1998b; McKechnie 2015; Wilson & Harris 2005). By imbricating these diachronic systems of knowing the past, archaeologists have formulated more robust, emic, and accurate interpretations of the historical record (Martindale & Nicholas 2014; McKechnie 2015; Gaudreau 2015; Wiley 2008). Thus, much like the shingles on a roof, Indigenous oral histories and archaeological research have edges that overlap (Figure 2).

Oral narratives often relate large-scale events that occurred in the past, whereas archaeology is often more concerned with everyday life as interpreted through artefacts and features. For example, aspects of archaeology, such as lithic debitage analysis, may not figure prominently in oral narratives. Likewise, a story relating the accomplishments of a hero-animal figure may not have archaeological residues. While information contained within oral narratives will not always perfectly align with the archaeological and geological records, they are often complementary (Gaudreau 2015; Rosaldo 1980).

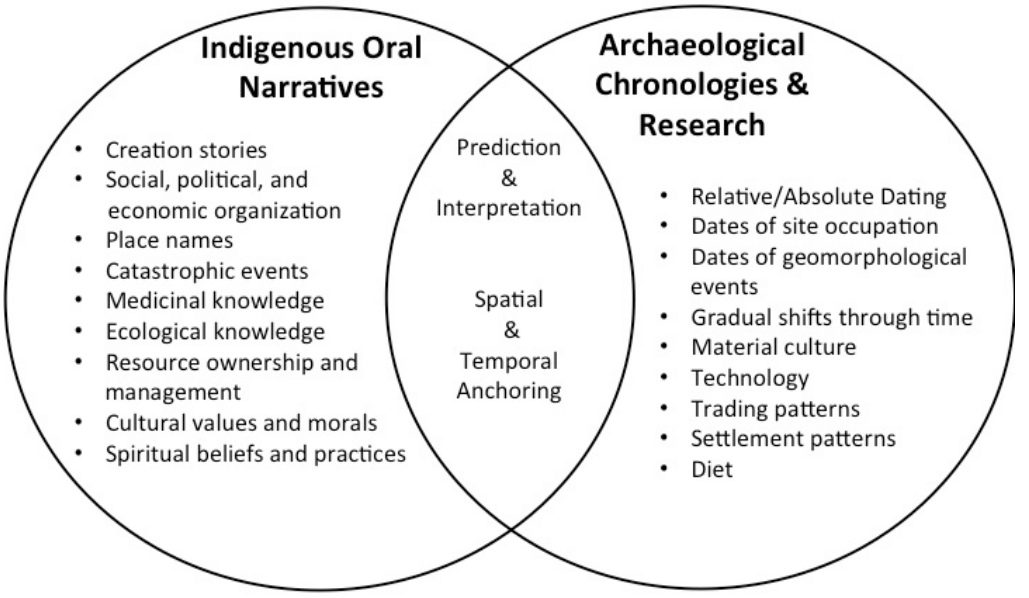

Figure 2 The imbrication of Indigenous oral narratives and archaeology

Some of the major contributions of Indigenous oral narratives and histories are listed in the left circle of Figure 2. Indigenous oral histories – some documenting events that are likely to be millennia old (McLaren et al 2015) – carry invaluable information for their respective cultural groups and can also serve to organise the proprietors 'perceptions about the world' (Cruikshank 1991:141). Some narratives contain information about social, political and economic organisation as well as lineage and clan histories (Angelbeck & McLay 2011; Martindale 2006; Martindale & Marsden 2003; Swadesh 1948; Vansina 1985). Others describe traditional medicinal and ecological knowledge (Cruikshank 1998; Houde 2007; Jones & Russell 2012) and spiritual practices (Wilson & Harris 2005). Oral narratives also document traditions of indigenous resource ownership and management strategies (Lepofsky & Caldwell 2013; Gauvreau 2015) and serve as records of catastrophic geomorphological events (Bornhold et al 2007; Budhwa 2002; McMillan & Hutchinson 2002).

Over the last century, archaeologists have developed specialised methods and techniques for studying and reconstructing the cultural and environmental past of peoples on the Northwest Coast through the analysis of their material

remains (Carlson 1970). Some of these techniques are borrowed from other disciplines such as geology, geography, botany, history and ecology. Archaeological methods of investigation, such as systematic surveying, subsurface testing, geophysical testing and the establishment of chronological dates – whether through relative or chronometric methods – enable site occupation histories, settlement patterns, trading patterns, diet, technological developments and other material culture remains to be anchored in space and time.

The area where the two circles overlap in Figure 2 reveals some of the complementary roles that Indigenous oral narratives and archaeological research can perform. Oral narratives can play a predictive and interpretive role in archaeological investigations, and, reciprocally, archaeology can spatially and temporally anchor events and other information contained in oral narratives. These roles are all interrelated, but we consider them below under separate headings for the sake of clarity.

2.1 Prediction and interpretation

Oral narratives can play a predictive role for archaeologists as they can draw on the information contained therein to develop hypotheses, and they can also rely on them as guides for locating sites related to important place names and events (DeLaguna 1960; Fedje et al 2005; Marsden 1998b; White 2006). White's (2006) thesis involved linking oral history to ethnographic narratives about the Heiltsuk selective fishery system and recording the physical remains of fish traps and their surrounding environment (White 2011). This was an 'internalist' archaeology approach (Yellowhorn 2002) as he is a member of the Heiltsuk First Nation. He used the information contained in the narratives provided by 12 elders to locate the fish-trap sites and develop hypotheses about their use and function (White 2011). White (2006) successfully applied archaeological methods to help his community better understand their recent and ancient history. The results of his (2006) research included novel information about the methods of fish-trap operation, and the construction of fish-traps of various shapes and sizes to target specific marine species.

Archaeologists have also drawn from origin narratives that discuss sociopolitical relationships between communities to hypothesise about the effects that inter-group conflict and political alliances have on settlement patterns (Angelbeck & McKlay 2011; Marsden 2001, 2002; Martindale 1999, 2003; Martindale & Marsden 2003). For example, MacDonald & Inglis's (1981) seminal research involving ethno-historic and ethnographic material (eg oral

narratives and photographs) from the Northwest Coast gave equal voice to the knowledge provided by the local First Nations and that of the archaeologists (Marsden 1998b). By linking the photographs with some of the local group origin narratives of the region, MacDonald & Inglis (1981) were able to predict the location of features (eg house platforms) and interpret the village plans at the Kitselas Fortress in Prince Rupert, British Columbia (1981:60). Combining these data enabled them to hypothesise about 'variability' within and among communities, and address ideas of village structure, and their associated cultural material assemblages.

Local group origin narratives were an integral part of the land and resource title systems that were practiced by the peoples of the Northwest Coast (Boas 1940; Drucker 1939, 1943; McIlwraith 1992). These stories often related how the original ancestor of the local group came to earth. Original ancestor figures were important in bestowing certain prerogatives to their descendants. Importantly, the rights to relate these stories were hereditary and for this reason they were protected, through bloodshed if necessary. The original ancestor narrative would be related at ceremonial potlatches in association with displays of crests and dances associated with the story. Through this means, the narratives were publicly vetted and the hereditary prerogatives were reified.

Hereditary prerogative associated with origin narratives include title to land and resources (Boas 1940; Drucker 1939; Trosper 2009). In this manner, land ownership was hereditary and in some respects inalienable. Overall, the effects of this system centred on the importance of oral narratives for control and access to resources. This would have tended to keep local groups in proximity to the areas where they had hereditary title to property and to invest in and manage that property appropriately (Trosper 2009). If this pattern played out over several generations, then it is possible that this system of title acted as a major cultural factor that would have implications for archaeological interpretation. Taking this into account, McLaren et al (2015) have considered the role of original ancestor narratives as cultural factors leading to the long-term occupation of sites on the central coast of British Columbia. The system of hereditary narratives may have also spurred the rise of social inequalities, as a dichotomy would have eventually appeared between people who held hereditary links to the original ancestor stories of a certain place and those who did not. Similarly, it would potentially account for the tendency for some narratives to be reshaped over time by those vying for access to territory and resources. In this manner, the evidence for social stratification found in the archaeology of the Northwest Coast may have roots in this narrative-based system of social organisation.

In a similar vein to McLaren et al (2015) analysis and interpretations, Letham et al (2015) analysis of Tsimshian oral narratives highlighted the importance of geographically peripheral regions within Tsimshian territory, and the social and political factors that affected human occupation and resource use on the Dundas Islands. Some of the Tsimshian narratives that Letham et al (2015) analysed discussed the influx of non-Tsimshian groups from the north to the Dundas Islands, and they used this information to interpret and explain the occurrence of different village 'layouts' observed during their surveys of outer coastal sites. Similar population movements documented in Tsimshian narratives have been investigated in Prince Rupert Harbour (Archer 1992; MacDonald 1969; Martindale & Marsden 2003). In several studies, place names that were repeatedly mentioned in different oral narratives appeared to be of greater cultural and historic significance and this was an important consideration when the researchers were establishing the relationship between different settlement sites (Letham et al 2015; Martindale & Marsden 2003).

2.2 Temporal anchoring

Archaeological methods can be used to help temporally anchor events that are recorded in oral narratives. Due to regular referencing in oral histories and narratives, it is clear that earthquakes, tsunamis and floods were observed phenomena, but the timing of these events was never specified beyond general sequential referencing (see below) (Bornhold et al 2007; Hutchinson & McMillan 1997; McLaren 2003). In pursuing large-scale geomorphic changes and social upheavals related in oral narratives, archaeologists have sought to provide historic ages using chronometric (eg AMS dating) and relative dating techniques (Marsden 1998b; Martindale 2006; McKechnie 2015; McLaren 2003).

The temporal duration of a particular historical event may become incorporated into oral histories and narratives in different ways (McLaren 2008). Short-term environmental change, for example, caused by a tsunami, would be highly perceptible to the local population and as a result of this impact, more likely to become an event in an oral narrative. In contrast, sea level change as the result of eustatic or isostatic factors may occur on a barely visible scale to the local population. However, evidence of this type of sea level change may be more evident to the local populations in local geological records. For example, shellfish found in exposed raised beach deposits are indicative of times when sea level was higher and are regularly revealed through creek bank erosion or large tree throws. Such lasting evidence may provide an alternative means through which events are remembered and make their way into lasting oral narratives.

2.2.1 Relative dating methods

Some oral narratives have a type of inherent temporal structuring using what are referred to as 'sequencing references' (McLaren 2003). In a narrative, the orator may use specific devices to relate when a particular event occurred in history (Ludwin et al 2005; Marsden 1998; Martindale 2006; McKechnie 2015). For example, a story may be located in the past in relative terms by the use of phrases such as 'this story occurred before the flood'. Another story, seemingly unrelated, may be set in the time after the flood. In this manner, major environmental events can provide sequencing references for the stories. Using relative dating methods, common in archaeology, it is possible to order a series of oral narratives into a coherent sequence using these temporal references. For example, McLaren (2003) reviewed a body of Coast Salish narratives from the Fraser Valley and was able to order them temporally using relative dating techniques. A total of 11 major epochs were used by the Coast Salish narrators of these stories: 1) The Beginning, 2) The First Humans, 3) Before the Transformation, 4) The Age of Transformation, 5) World Transformed, 6) The Great Flood, 7) After the Flood, 8) The Great Snow, 9) After the Snow, 10) The Great Sickness, 11) The Arrival of Europeans.

Significantly, the application of archaeological methods to a diverse set of oral narratives provided an opportunity to understand these events in relation to a chronological series of epochs. Furthermore, the same general sequence of narrative events was employed by different orators from different communities, suggesting a shared understanding of this temporal sequence of events to which different narratives could be attached. Following suit, McKechnie's (2015) research combined narrative sequential ordering with chronometric dating to better understand the ages of occupation of small and large settlement sites documented in Nuu-chah-nulth oral histories. By combining the two, McKechnie (2015) temporally anchored oral historical knowledge of growth, expansion and shifting residence patterns of multiple village sites within the Nuu-chah-nulth territory over the last 2,500 calendar years.

2.2.2 Chronometric dating methods

In some cases, archaeological and geological methods can be used to gain chronometric dates for episodes related in oral narratives. Extensive research has been conducted to spatially and temporally anchor orally documented geomorphic events on the Northwest Coast (Budwha 2002). It is apparent from these studies that large-scale events (eg war, disease, catastrophes) are more likely to show up in both oral narratives and the archaeological record (Angelbeck & McLay 2011; McLaren 2003, 2008; Martindale 2006). The major geological events

documented in oral narratives on the Northwest Coast involve glacial periods (Cruikshank 1991, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2002; McLaren et al 2015), earthquakes (Clague & Bobrowsky 1999; Ludwin et al 2005; McMillan & Hutchinson 1997, 2002), tsunamis and floods (Clague 1995; Marsden 1998b; McLaren 2008; Wilson & Harris 2005), and volcanic eruptions (Edinborough 2015).

Unsurprisingly, earthquakes feature prominently in the oral narratives of cultural groups located along the Cascadia Subduction zone. Ludwin et al (2005) explored over 40 oral narratives about earthquakes from communities along the primary-boundary fault of the Cascadia Subduction Zone and they used radiocarbon and tree-ring dating to temporally anchor the geomorphological events. As seismic activity can lead to powerful wave action, many narratives that recount earthquake events also discuss tsunamis and flooding.

Geological investigations undertaken by Clague (1995) and Clague and Bobrowsky (1999) explored oral historical evidence of earthquakes and tsunamis on Western Vancouver Island and identified areas of imbrication with the geological record in order to date the events. Similarly, Bornhold et al (2007) established a 'village-specific' timing for a landslide-generated tsunami at Kwalate Village. In the case of the Kwalate Village Tsunami, the Kwakwaka'wakw knew the approximate timing and location of the event, but they were uncertain of its precise calendar date. Through archaeological survey, subsurface testing and AMS dating, the researchers were able to find and sample the village site location as well as to establish the event occurred in the mid-sixteenth century (Bornhold et al 2007).

2.3 Spatial anchoring

Much work has been done to imbricate oral traditions with archaeological investigations in order to better understand site locations and settlement patterns on the Northwest Coast of North America. Archaeologists have explored this on the mainland coast of BC (Archer 2006; Reimer 2003), among the outer coastal islands of the central and North Pacific coast of BC (Fedje et al 2005; Letham et al 2015; McLaren et al 2015; White 2006), the west coast of Vancouver Island, BC (McKechnie 2015), the Sunshine Coast, BC (Jackley 2012; Johnson 2010), and Alaska (Crowell & Howell 2013; De Laguna 1960, 1972; Downs 2006). Studies focused specifically on identifying the impacts of orally recorded geological events on coastal settlement patterns include Budwha (2002); Hall (2003); Marsden (2001, 2002); McMillan & Hutchinson (1997, 2002) and Harris (1997).

Jackley's (2012) community-based archaeological research with Tla'amin First Nation is an excellent example of successful imbrication on the Sunshine Coast, BC. Jackley (2012) wove converging lines of evidence (eg interview data, Tla'amin oral narratives, archaeological survey data, and radiocarbon dates) together in order to develop a detailed timeline that captured the settlement history of the Northern Coast Salish *Klehkwahnonohm* village site. Each line of evidence provided unique insight into different periods of time, enabling Jackley (2012:iii) to trace Tla'amin First Nation 'continued use of and connection to the landscape' for over two millennia.

Similarly, in Reimer's (2003) study of alpine archaeology and the oral traditions of the Squamish First Nation, he combined his survey data with information contained in local stories in order to establish settlement patterns in the mountainous areas near Squamish, BC. This research was fundamental to the recognition that mountainous areas are part of the cultural landscape. He documented numerous sites and compiled other reports that identified sites in different mountainous regions that were previously thought to be 'peripheral' or 'too remote' to be inhabited by the Squamish and neighbouring Indigenous groups (Reimer 2003:59).

Fedje et al (2011) research on southern Haida Gwaii used the information contained within an oral narrative to name a regional archaeological complex. The Kinggi Complex is an archaeological period that spans from 12,700 to 9,700 Cal BP on the islands of Haida Gwaii (Fedje et al 2011). The name for this complex is borrowed directly from Haida oral literature that relates a series of episodes that involved the ancestor Kinggi. One of these episodes includes a period of rising of sea level. As this is a feature of the archaeological narrative from this time period as well, the researchers decided to name the archaeological complex after the character in the oral narrative (Fedje & Christensen 1999). Other cultural history periods in Haida Gwaii are named the Graham and Moresby Traditions (Fladmark et al 1990:231), named after the islands on which they were initially identified. These islands were named after figures that participated in British imperialist expansionism into the region (Akrigg & Akrigg 1986) and have nothing to do with Haida oral traditions.

3. Discussion

A prominent critique surrounding the imbrication of Indigenous oral narratives with archaeological research is that it involves a process of 'cherry-picking tid-bits' of data contained in the stories, and exploiting this data for scientific

pursuits (Gaudreau 2015). Gaudreau (2015), and others (Edinborough 2015; Martindale 2006) have therefore argued that if we are to incorporate elements of Indigenous oral narratives and histories into our archaeological interpretations and analyses that we must look at the intricate layers of these complex stories as closely as we look at the intricate layers of stratigraphy.

Community-based research (Castleden et al 2012) involving close collaboration between indigenous community members and external researchers has been proposed as an arrangement through which the overlapping edges of oral narratives and archaeological data can be ethically and appropriately explored (Brady et al 2003; Gaudreau 2015; Martindale & Nicholas 2014). Neither an easy, nor straightforward process: community-based archaeological research requires ongoing negotiations, clear lines of open communication, solid ethic agreements, and mutually-agreed upon outputs (Castleden et al 2012; Nicholas & Markey 2014). Community-based archaeological research represents a developing trend towards indigenising archaeology on the Northwest Coast of North America (Gaudreau 2015; McKechnie 2015; Nicholas 2008) and an attempt to achieve multi-vocality in coastal research (Atalay 2008; Damm 2006).

Pursuant to the results of the R v Delgamuukw 1997 Supreme Court of Canada case, it may also be detrimental to dismiss archaeological inquiry as a valid means of investigating the direct history of the past. First Nations on the Northwest Coast have a vested interest in the results of archaeological research and how they relate to their oral traditions. This is due, in part, to the complete lack of treaties or other formal agreement concerning land title in the region (in particular on the Canadian side). Recently, a landmark Supreme Court of Canada case found that Aboriginal title to land could be assessed based on a combination of archaeological, historical and oral evidence provided by Aboriginal elders (R v Tsilhqot'in Nation 2014, Supreme Court of Canada). In this particular case, the judges awarded the Tsilhqot'in Nation a declaration of Aboriginal title over the area at issue based on these three distinct, though complementary, types of information.

By working with knowledge holders and the owners of certain oral narratives, we can collectively bring more 'emic' perspectives and interpretations to the field of archaeology (White 2006; Yellowhorn 2002). By consulting transcribed accounts of Indigenous oral narratives we can improve our collective understanding of the past by overcoming some of the limitations imposed by only considering environmental pressures. Through these imbrications, researchers can gain a better understanding of how knowledge was created and in which contexts it has evolved (Budhwa 2002; Cruikshank 1998). These represent important steps for mobilising data for direct application relevant

to resource and cultural management and revitalisation issues being faced by Indigenous communities today (Brady et al 2003; Wilson & Harris 2005).

There are many more avenues for this research to occur. Moving forward, we propose that new archaeological methods of investigation be incorporated into imbricated research. For example, the application of cosmogenic Chlorine-36 dating may be appropriate for establishing when glacial ice last crossed the Stikine River and left erratics. This event is a prominent feature in some Tlingit, Tsimshian and Tahltan migration stories (Marsden 2001).

Most of the literature reviewed in this paper comes from published sources. However, much of the archaeology undertaken in the region is done so under the auspices of cultural resource management (CRM). Most of the information and data generated from CRM is unpublished; it is presented in reports for governmental and other agencies. In British Columbia, there is an online library (Provincial Archaeological Resource Library) of this 'grey literature' that can be searched using keywords. The following list details our keyword searches and the number of reports with these words in them:

- 'oral history' or 'oral histories' = 845 reports
- 'oral tradition(s)' = 468 reports
- 'oral narrative' = 25 reports
- 'myth', 'myths' or 'mythology' = 674 reports

Combined, these search terms are used in a total of 2012 reports out of a system total of 6762 or 33.5%. Not all of these sources are from the Northwest Coast, as British Columbia also includes portions of the Interior Plateau and Subarctic culture areas. While we did not undertake a comprehensive review of all of these documents, we draw upon a few here as examples of how oral narratives are entwined with CRM in the study area.

One of the most common ways in which oral narratives are referred to in the grey literature is through referencing them in the background research section (eg Allester 2014:14; McLay 2002:6–7; Stafford 2011:8). In essence, if there are oral histories and/or narratives concerning an area, the presence and purpose of archaeological sites can be cross-referenced with this information. If no archaeological sites are known in an area, oral narratives can raise the likelihood that archaeological sites may be present (eg Nord et al 2009:58) and specify possible archaeological site types (eg Eldridge & Seip 2002:4).

In some cases, this is more formalised and locations and land use activities specifically mentioned in oral narratives are incorporated into archaeological predictive models (eg Fisher et al 1998). Oral narratives concerning a 'specific place' have been used to rate the relative significance of a site (eg Eldridge & Seip 2002:16; Mathews 2003:17). In all of these cases, oral narratives provide

a local context for archaeology where development may impact sites. In other instances, places related in oral histories/narratives and map-based traditional land use studies provide a guide for archaeological inventory (eg Gray et al 2015).

The temporal context of oral narratives is sometimes considered in cultural resource management reports, although not to the same degree as the spatial context. For example, the regional 'culture history' synthesis given in Marshall's (2004:8) report, on an impact assessment of the proposed Hazelton landfill site, includes the following statement: 'A rich body of oral tradition has been preserved and passed down through "time immemorial", which claims that the Tsimshian have lived throughout different locations within their territories since the beginning of time'. She goes on to point out that the oral narratives of the local region are more fully documented than the archaeology and for this reason much of the archaeological work has been influence by the oral narratives (Marshall 2004:24).

The practice of imbricating oral narratives and archaeological research is by no means a new phenomenon, especially when it comes to the research being conducted on the Northwest Coast of North America. From academic publications, to CRM reports, to court cases involving issues of land title, communities and researchers are clearly drawing from both oral narratives/histories and archaeology to provide a more comprehensive picture of the past.

4. Conclusion

This paper has explored the benefits of undertaking a more polyphonic approach to archaeology on the Northwest Coast of North America – the imbrication of two diachronic forms of knowing the past: Indigenous oral history and archaeology. It is clear from the review presented here that this is an active and fruitful subfield in the archaeology of the region. Oral narratives and histories can be used to help guide archaeological predictions and hypotheses about the past. Archaeological and geological methods can help to situate oral historical events in time and in some cases provide calendar dates for when particular events occurred. Archaeological methods can also help to situate oral traditions in spatial terms, in particular through survey, mapping and sampling techniques. Overall, the imbrication of archaeology and Indigenous oral narratives has resulted in a much more robust understanding of the regional history.

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