

The Haidahs bring with them as articles of traffic, furs of various kinds, dogfish, and seal oil, and carvings in wood and stone, as well as ornaments in silver of excellent workmanship, such as bracelets, finger-rings, and ear ornaments.

A peculiar kind of slate-stone is found on Queen Charlotte's Islands, very soft when first quarried, and easily carved into fanciful figures of various kinds, but growing very hard upon exposure to the air, and after being rubbed with oil, which seems to harden and polish it.

These stone carvings are eagerly purchased by persons looking for Indian curiosities, and are generally regarded by casual observers as idols, or objects of worship, or indicative in some manner of their secret or mystic rites. This, however, is an error. None of the tribes of the northwest coast worship idols or any visible symbol of their secret religion, which is confined to the totem, or tomanawas, or guardian spirit of each individual Indian.

But the custom which prevails among them, and seems to be a distinctive feature of this tribe, is that of tattooing their bodies with various designs, all of which are fanciful representations of animals, birds or fishes, either an attempt to represent in a grotesque form those which are known and commonly seen, or their mythological and legendary creations. A recent visit of a party of these Indians to Port Townsend has enabled me to study carefully a variety of their carvings and tattoo marks, and to ascertain with accuracy their true meaning and signification.

I have forwarded to the Smithsonian Institution, to accompany this memoir, several carvings in wood and stone; and, in order the better to describe them, I have made sketches illustrative of these carvings and also of various tattoo designs, which were copied by me from the persons of the Indians, and also have caused photographs to be taken to still further illustrate this subject.

The first of these carvings which I shall describe is of wood (Plate 2, fig. 1). It is intended to represent one of the carved posts or pillars which are raised in front of the houses of the chiefs or principal men. These pillars are sometimes from fifty to sixty feet high, elaborately carved at a cost of hundreds of blankets; some of the best ones even costing several thousand dollars, consequently, only the most wealthy individuals of the tribe are able to purchase the best specimens.

These pillars are carved out of a single cedar tree, the back hollowed out so as to relieve the weight when raising it in a perpendicular position. They are deeply and firmly set in the earth directly in front of the lodge, and a circular opening near the ground constitutes the door of entrance to the house. The Chimsean Indians, at Fort Simpson, and the Sitka tribes have this style of carved posts, but they set them a short distance from the front of their houses.

The figures carved on these posts are the family totems or heraldic designs of the family occupying the house, and as these Indians build large wooden lodges capable of containing several families, the carvings may be said to indicate the family names of the different occupants.

The chief or head man owns the house, and the occupants are his family and relatives, each one of whom will have on some part of the body a representation in tattooing of the particular figure which constitutes his or her family name or connection.