

THE SEA WOLF WASKO

The Myth of Wasco, in connection with the Sen-i-coot-quin-nie house near Skidegate, Queen Charlotte Islands, according to James Deans (36: 59-61).

There was a belief amongst these people, that whosoever could kill Wasco and wear his skin, would become as strong, and be able to catch whales as he was, more so while clad in Wasco's skin.

In order to try what could be done, one man had been scheming to catch him, and that man was Coon-ahts. He had left the others to make a trap and catch Wasco. This they did not know. A trap to hold such an animal must have been very large and strong. Coon-ahts found that Wasco, going and returning, always walked in the outlet. A strong beam placed across the stream, to which a number of ropes with a running noose were attached, could not fail to catch him in one or other of them. Looking along the stream for a suitable place he found a tree growing close to the river. Then he felled a stout tree across the river, close along side of the standing one, to which he bound it firmly with a strong rope. Then he crossed over the stream and felled two stout trees. These he bound together like an X. Then he raised the two upper ends, dropping the two lower ones into holes he had dug for them. After having them firmly placed, he raised the end of the cross-beam and dropped it into the shears. His next step was to get a number of strong ropes. These he formed into running loops, tying them to the cross-beam, each hanging low enough for Wasco to run his head into one or other of them while passing underneath. When everything was secure, he went home. Returning in a day or two, he found that Wasco had strangled himself while passing beneath. Coon-ahts then got Wasco out of the water to skin him. Having done so, he took the skin and fitted it on himself, so as to look like the real Wasco. When fully dressed a feeling came over him, which he was unable to resist, urging him to go out to sea and try to catch whales. Ever after, when any of the people wished whale meat, all that Coon-ahts had to do was to get into the skin and off to sea.

Tradition mentions two sorts of traps. One I have already given. I shall now describe the other. In this one, as in the other, Coon-ahts made a pair of strong shears, then he went back and felled a tree so as it would fall into the X, with its top projecting over the stream. He trimmed off the branches, and cut the top to a required length over the animal's trail. From the tree he hung a very strong noose, in such a position that Wasco could not help running his head into it. The ropes he used were made from cedar saplings. When all was ready Coon-ahts hid himself and awaited the outcome. After awhile Wasco came along and ran his head into the noose. Soon he strangled himself. Then Coon-ahts left his hiding place and skinned him. These are the two traditional stories.

In the village of Skidegat, on the east side of the road from the shore through the middle of the village, stood a house named Sen-i-coot-quin-nie, house of contentment or the contented peoples' house. In the miniature village (at the Chicago World's Fair, 1893), this model house is No. 19, and also stands in the middle of the village. On the totem pole are three figures — first, Wasco, whose head is shown, and a whale as if on its back; second figure is a scannah, and the third, is a female doctor or medicine woman in full dress. She forms a continuation of the above story, which is as follows:

Long ago a Skaggy woman lived at Kie, near Skidegat. At that time the people were very much in want of food. She came amongst them in her full regalia, with her clechadarran, or circle of puffins' beaks in each hand, as is shown by the carving. Knowing them to be in want, she promised to bring them within three days food enough to satisfy their wants. Day after day passed until the afternoon of the third, when a number of whales appeared. When they got in shore, where they could be seen, there were three of them. Seeing the whales, she harangued the people. "You see," she said, "what I can do; according to promise I have brought you not one or two whales; just look and see for yourselves; there are three of them and enough for every purpose." When she had finished her oration, Coon-ahts, who it was had brought in the whales, threw off his skin, jumped up and said: "It was I, not you, who brought in these whales." Hearing this, the old woman was so ashamed at being made a liar before all the people that she dropped dead where she stood.

The pipe along with this story shows Wasco with his load of whales. The three men on top of the totem pole attached to this house in the miniature village, and the man on each corner post are the taden skeel of the family, adopted through their connection with the Skidegat family. The family crests were first, the wife's which was a scannah of the raven phratry, and that of the husband which was a wasco of the eagle phratry.

Stone-ribs of the Haidas, given in brief by J. R. Swanton (97: 187, 188).

A Sea-Lion-Town man's younger brothers all disappeared, and the man bathed for strength. He caught various fishes, and at last a supernatural fish that tries the strength of people. After that, he had an encounter with Spirit-of-Strength and overcame him. Then he went to a small pond back of the upper oil-works at Skidegate, and killed a monster called the Wasko, that inhabited it. Before this, occurred the episode of the duck-grease, elsewhere related. He obtained his brothers' bones out of this monster's belly and restored them to life, but they soon disappeared again. Then he went to the end of Maude Island, where the supernatural beings were holding a contest to see who should support the Haida country, and by means of his wasgo skin obtained the position for himself. After that, the supernatural beings began to settle down.

Stone-Ribs, the Son of Djilaqons, was born from a woman in Tlkadan, in the Ninstints country. There he overcame the five-finned killer whale (Qagawai) that used to destroy people, and obtained its skin. Then he travelled all around the Queen Charlotte Islands under water, having adventures with and overcoming the Ocean-People as he went. From some of these he obtained their skins, which he could assume at any time. According to this account, Stone-Ribs passed through Skidegate Inlet; according to the second story, which I obtained from a Ninstints man, he went all the way around by Virago Sound and Rose Spit.

Upward was chief at Skedans in the time of supernatural beings. Once he learned that his wife was going with Stone-Ribs, and, when the latter came in one night and was asleep, he cut his head off. After this, Djilaqons came down to get her son's head back, but was not powerful enough; and on her way home she was stopped by Upward and compelled to marry him, although both were Eagles. Some time afterward Upward found that his wife was going with a kind of owl, and, disguising himself in his wife's clothing, he revenged himself upon them both. By and by Weegyret came after Upward, and the latter concealed himself in the clothing of the land-otter women, who passed him back and forth. At last he went through the smoke-hole in the form of ashes, in spite of which he was caught, pulled to pieces, and eaten by the shamans who had found him; but those who had eaten him died soon afterward.

The Sea Dog, as described in a narrative from the Queen Charlotte Islands recorded by Archie W. Shiels and communicated to Edward L. Keithahn (received from Mr. Keithahn in 1947).

A young man went hunting to Gulga Lake (Skidegate Lake) and disappeared. News came back from the lake that a monster named Wasko lived there and killed people. So his brother decided to look for him. Early one morning the brother took two children with him to the lake. When he arrived there he pulled two cedar trees by the roots, fastened them at the butt end with cedar limbs, did the same at the top, and held the trunks apart by means of a stick. He laid it in the lake, bound the legs of the two children and placed them as bait between the trunks. When they were afloat, Wasko came up to the surface in the space between. As he came up, he knocked the stick out and was caught by the head, but he pulled the trap under. It emerged at the surface as if thrown upwards, and broken to pieces. Failing the first time, the sea hunter went home and stood the two children up in front of the house (they were dead) with a pole, keeping them as a bait for Wasko for the next day.

Early the next morning he took the two children and went to the lake again. When he arrived there he looked round for a while. He pulled out a large two-headed cedar, stump and all. After he had split it, a wren jumped around him, chirping "Te! e! te! e!, my sinews!" Then he went to get it, pulled out its sinews, spliced them together, and fastened the butt end and the top with them, and put all into the water.

After the children had been suspended as bait in the trap, the Wasko came up for them. Then the monster knocked out the cross stick and carried the trap down. After a while he floated up with it, dead. The hunter pulled him up on the shore and was going to cut him on the top of his head, when there was thunder and lightning; the same thing happened when he started on the back. But when he started on the lower part of the back, and continued to cut on the monster open along the belly, his younger brother's bones burst out from it. Then he fitted together his younger brother's bones and spat upon them as the medicine Man-Woman had shown him. Immediately he stood up, revived, and said: "Sit down where you used to." They were glad to see each other again.

This Haida lake monster is represented with the head of the Wolf and the fins of the Killer-Whale. It went after whales at night, and could bring back as many as ten at once upon its back, behind its ears, and in the curl of its tail.

The Sea Wolf of Skidegate on the Queen Charlotte Islands, as given by Henry Young, of Skidegate, in 1947. (This brief narrative was communicated in writing, as presumably dictated by the informant to someone in his tribe.)

At Hunter's Point on the west coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands, lived a man and his wife. His wife came from Skidegate. When, every day, that man walked to the point, he would hear something whining. Once, he looked for the voice, and found two puppies in the hollow of a tree. He took them home and raised them, they grew rapidly, until they were real large dogs — Waskos or Dogs-of-the-Sea.

One morning he missed them and looked for them. Towards noon, he saw them off at sea, returning home with three whales each, a whale in the mouth, one between the ears, and the third held on the back with the tail. Every morning the dogs hunted for whales, and brought back more than was wanted by the tribe.

The man and his wife used to smoke the meat and put the fat in cedar boxes to store away. There was so much of it that the surplus soon began to rot. So they brought a lot of the whale meat to the wife's parents at Skidegate.

Once they were storm-bound at Skidegate for many weeks, and there was no more food left. The man's mother-in-law had dried raw salmon eggs put up in a seal stomach. As they were short of food, the man asked his wife to tell her mother to open this seal pouch and let them have some salmon eggs. But this she would not do. She was a miser.

The first fine day they hastened to go back home, and the mother-in-law also went with them. As soon as they passed out of the Skidegate Channel, they saw some whale fat floating around on the sea. The mother-in-law had her daughter ask her son-in-law to pick some up. But he refused, saying that this fat was the waste of his dogs. When they reached Hunter's Point, the mother-in-law was very surprised to see such large dogs, both of them lying in front of the house.

Piles of whales were lying on the beach. As she marvelled at this, the mother-in-law told her daughter now to cut open the pouch of dried salmon

eggs and use them. But the son-in-law would not accept them, because she had refused to cut it open when he was hungry. For this reason he put rotten whale grease on the Chinese slippers and mussels which his mother-in-law relished, so that she could not eat them, being too rancid.

One morning when the dogs went out to sea again, the mother-in-law out of spite got up very early and heated stones in a pot and let it boil. Then she poured out the liquid into the sea. This conjured a big storm keeping everybody home-bound. Nobody could travel.

The man became worried about his sea dogs. To watch for them, he went up the mountain. At last, he saw them coming back. He watched them until they reached the shore. There it was impossible for them during the storm to climb the rocky shore; the place was a steep cliff. So they changed their course towards Skidegate Channel, and went as far as Lawn Hill Point where, exhausted, they dragged themselves ashore, and turned into two big rocks, where they have remained to this day.

Animal Skins as a Means of Transformation, among the Koriaks of Siberia, according to Waldemar Jochelson (116:380).

By putting on the skins of animals, the wearer transforms himself into an animal (pp. 131, 135, 156).

Big-Raven and Eme'mqut put on their raven coats and fly up (p. 142).

Creator puts on his raven coat, turns into raven, and flies away (p. 149).

Coast of Southern British Columbia. — A man puts on a seal-skin, and turns into a seal (Boas, *Indianische Sagen*, p. 121).

Mountain-sheep say that they are men dressed in sheep-skins (Ibid., p. 169).

Two boys put on the skins taken from killed birds, and fly off (Ibid., p. 170).

O'meatl puts on a raven's coat and flies away (Ibid. p. 175).

Coast of Northern British Columbia. — A boy catches a bird, skins it, puts the skin on, and flies (Boas, *Tsimshian Texts*, p. 10).

Ts'ak puts on skins taken from killed birds, and flies off (Ibid. pp. 126, 127).

Chief's son puts on a gull-skin and flies off (Ibid. p. 179).

Athapascan. — A woman puts on a bear-skin and becomes a bear (Farrand, *Chilcotin Indians*, p. 21).

A man puts on a cloak of marmot-skins and is transformed into a marmot (Boas, *Traditions of the Tsetsaut*, p. 464).