



Gitrhahla (Tsimssyan) on Porcher Island in 1870

ISLAND (GITRHAHLA) TSIMSYANS

GISPEWUDWADE PHRATRY

Carved Crests of Hale, a Gispewudwade chief of the Gitrhahla tribe of the Coast Tsimssyans on Porcher Island.

1. The Grizzly-Bear crest was shown as the Standing-Bear (*haitrhem-medeeek*), a large carved grizzly standing on the roof of the house and looking inside through the smoke-hole. The name of the house was Standing-House (*haitrhem-walb*). The name of the carver is forgotten.

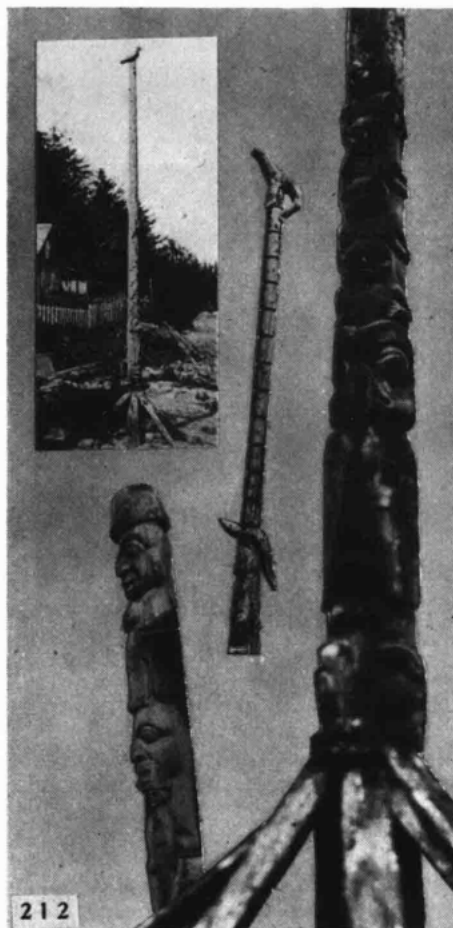
2. The Hanging-Grizzly (*yæ'kaisem-medeeek*) was the name of the carved figures of the Grizzly-Bear in a reclining position on the four interior house posts.

3. The Killer-Whale or Blackfish (*'nærlh*), also carved on house posts.

4. The Braided-Intestines crest (*rhawndekrhæt*), carved to represent braided intestines on the house beams. They were the work, long ago, of Wuteenærhs of the same tribe.

(Informant, Oswald Tolmie, an old chief of Gitrhahla; interpreter, William Beynon, 1939.)

Totem of Light (Hale) (*larh'awm*) of Hale, a Gispewudwade chief of Gitrhahla, a tribe of the Coast Tsimshyans of Porcher Island. It was cut down at the time when the school was built. The name of Light for this pole was that of the house in front of which it stood.



Totems of Gitrhahla

Description. The figures, from the top down, were: (1) Ligidihl, a mythical person whose origin went back to the Tlingits (called Gidarants) to the north; this human-like being, a crest of Hale, held a copper shield in its arms; (2) Killer-Whale (*'nærhl*), which formed the shaft of the pole, head down; (3) Grizzly Bear, at the base.

This tall pole, the largest in the village, stood 60 or 65 feet high in front of the door entrance, away from the house. Its carving was said by the informant to have been very good and life-like.

Carvers, age. It was carved by Pæsem-kanao of the Kanhade phratry in the same tribe, assisted by Gyælemksegwæn, when the informant was still young. The informant added that other poles had been carved and erected previously, this particular one replacing another one fallen.

(Informant, Oswald Tolmie, an old chief of Gitrhahla; interpreter, William Beynon, 1939.)

Pole of Kiyout, a Gispewudwade chief at Gitrhahla, a coast tribe of the Tsimshyans. Kiyoot was related to Wawsieberh of the Ginarhangeek tribe of the Tsimshyans; also to Ntawiwælp of Kitkata.

Description, age. The crests figuring on this pole were the Killer-Whale or Blackfish (*'nærhl*) and the Grizzly Bear (*medeek*). The pole disappeared before being seen by the informant; it never was replaced.

(Informant, Oswald Tolmie, an old chief of Gitrhahla; interpreter, William Beynon, 1939.)

Whole-Killer-Whale of Tsakawle (*pte'nærhl*) of the Gispewudwade, at Gitrhahla, a Coast Tsimshyan tribe. Tsakawle was of the same stock as Nees'ois of the Kitkata tribe, being of southern Tsimshyan origin.

Description. (1) Whole-Blackfish (*pte'nærhl*) occupying nearly the entire length of the pole; (2) Offspring-of-Grizzly (*neqhlkemedeeek*), two cubs on the top of the pole.

Carver, age. It was carved about 1880 and stood for about twenty-five years. When it became rotten at the base, it was cut down. Its carver, Wudinærhs, was a Kanhade of the same tribe; he belonged to the paternal side of the owner.

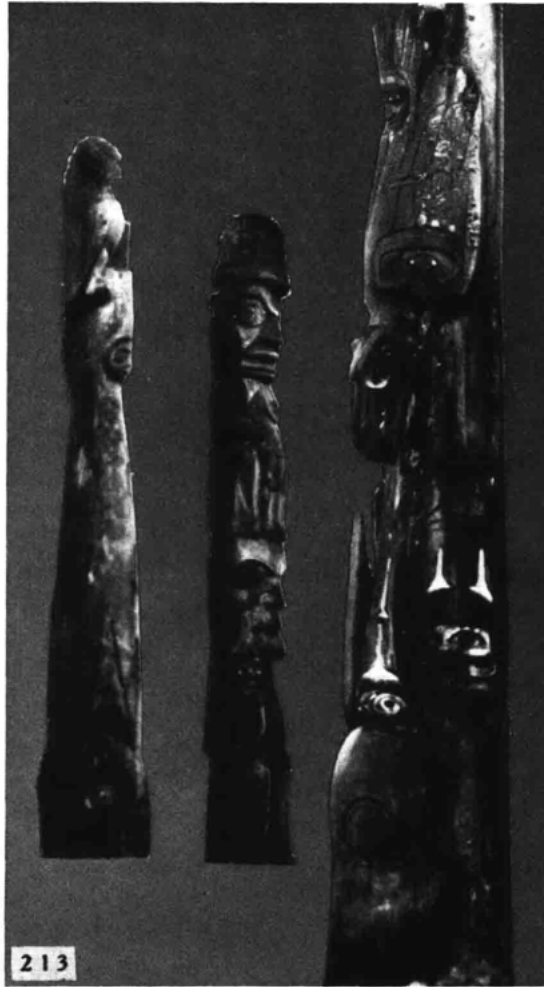
(Informant, Oswald Tolmie, an old chief of the Gitrhahlas; interpreter, William Beynon, 1939.)

Garment-of-Blackfish or Killer-Whale (*kwurh'nærhl*), belonging to Qawæi, a Gispewudwade of Gitrhahla, a member of the Kayemtkwaw group of southern Tsimshyan origin, whose close relatives live at Kitkata on the main coast.

Description. This pole, a short one, contained two crests: (1) Garment-of-Killer-Whale (*kwurk'nærhl*); (2) Grizzly (*medeeek*).

Age. It was cut down when the informant was a small child.

(Informant, Oswald Tolmie, an old chief of Gitrhahla; interpreter, William Beynon, 1939.)



Totems of Gitrhahla

RAVEN PHRATRY

Ten-faces-across-the-top. The totem pole called the sea-monster Parhlekepeel or Ten-faces-across-the-top of Hlkuse'men, a Kanhade chief of Gitrhahla. It still stands, about thirty feet high, according to the informant, but was not seen by the author. This family claimed the same Tlingit or northern origin as chief Neeshawt of the Gitzarhlæhl tribe of the Coast Tsimshyans.



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Pole of Gitrhahla



Description. The figures from the top down are: (1) Raven; (2) three small figures representing the beings emerging from the sea; (3) sea-monster Parhlekepeel with ten figures carved on it; (4) Person holding the bow (*gyel*) and the Pearl-Bow (*pælhémhakutak*).

Origin. Arhyasranks, of this group, is said to have been a great sea-otter fisherman who knew how to reach his catch by stealth. When he was hunting out at sea one day, a sea-monster like a huge person emerged close to him. Its body was covered with ten human faces. Upon his return home, he immediately assumed this as his own original crest—Ten-faces-across-the-top.

Carver, age. Carved by Withrwaw, a skilful craftsman of a Wolf clan, the paternal grandfather of the owner, about 1870.

(Informant, Oswald Tolmie, an old Gitrhahla chief; interpreter, William Beynon, 1939.)

Poles of Wakhæs, a Kanhade chief of Gitrhahla, a coast Tsimshyan tribe. Wakhæs was of Wudstæ or Gidestsu ancestry, that is, of northern Kwakiutl origin. This pole has disappeared long ago, and the informant could not describe it.

(Informant, Oswald Tolmie, an old chief of Gitrhahla; interpreter, William Beynon, 1939.)

WOLF PHRATRY

The White-Owl (*marhs-kutkuniyuks*) of Pænemwæltih, a Wolf chief at Gitrhahla, or coast tribe of the Tsimshyans, originally from the Kitkata tribe of the southern Tsimshyans, of the same stock as Neeskahlhowt.

Description. Figures from the top down: (1) White-Owl (*marhskutkuniyuks*); (2) Split-Person (*q'aoderhgyel*), with head down—the body was split open showing the pole coming out of it (*q'ao* means V-shaped crutch).

It is said that this house also owned a house-front painting.

Carver, age. Carved by Hagwellorom-larhæ, a Kanhade of paternal origin, it stood for twenty years and then was cut down when about fifty years old.

(Informant, Oswald Tolmie, an old chief of Gitrhahla; William Beynon, 1939.)



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Thunderbird and sea monster of Gitrhahla

METLAKATLA

Neeslaranos Poles in the Chapel, according to the Rev. Mr. Collison, Indian agent, Prince Rupert, in 1939.

Neeslaranos [Wolf chief of the Gitlæn tribe] was a fine carver. In fact, all the Gitlæns were fine carvers. Neeslaranos, in Rev. Mr. Duncan's time [i.e. before 1886], made four beautiful totems for the chapel of Old Metlakatla. They represented the four different crests of the phratries, about four figures on each pole. They were destroyed by the fire.

SOUTHERN TSIMSYANS

(*Gitamat, Killawp*)

Trick-Ladder of Tseebasæ (*kanærsem-dæi*) of Tseebasæ, chief of the Gispewudwades of the Gitrhahla tribe of the Tsimisyans, described by Chief Herbert Wallace of Port Simpson in 1915. Interpreter, William Beynon.

A ladder made of revolving slabs, carved out of logs, rested with cross-bars on two poles, intended for walking from one pole to the other. It was an exclusive crest of Tseebasæ, invented out of a spirit of showmanship. It was meant as a trick to fool the Eagles of the Gisparhlawts and Gitandaw tribes. The guests were invited to enter the feast house via this ladder through a special door over the ordinary doorway. Another ladder inside joined this front door ladder. This device (without a story to explain its significance) was used only once, at a great celebration given by the head-chief of the Gitrhahla to all the Tsimisyan leaders. Most of the guests tumbled down but did their best to overcome the difficulty. After the feast, the steps were fixed to no longer revolve. They were actually used only on the one occasion and became known as the Trick-Ladder of Tseebasæ.

Where-the-Blackfish-collide, house-front painting used by the (*nequkoot'nærhl*) Tsimisyans of the Killer-Whale clans of the sea-coast, according to Herbert Wallace, head-chief of the Gitsees tribe at Port Simpson, in 1915; William Beynon, interpreter.

Two Blackfish or Killer-Whales were represented in black and white paint as heading towards each other for a collision. (The white paint formerly was made of crushed clam shells baked into a white lime mixed with water and a mordant.) This crest, said to have originated at Gitrhahla, later spread to the other Gispewudwades along the coast and inland. It was also used on ceremonial robes and on totem poles; the two Blackfish were carved one on top of the other on the same pole.

The Snag Crest used on totem poles of the Coast Tsimisyans and their neighbours, according to Herbert Wallace, head-chief of the Gitsees tribe, in 1915; William Beynon, interpreter.

The name of this crest, Snag-of-Ktsem'aus (*kanem ktsem'aus*), is derived from a place close to the mouth of Skeena River, opposite Port Essington, formerly called Spukcu. At this spot used to dwell, according to the belief of the Coast Tsimisyans, a monster in the form of a fierce Grizzly Bear at the bottom of the sea, on whose back stood two tall and sharp snags emerging through the sandbars and the water of the ingoing and outgoing tides. The canoes that happened to hit the snags would at once be broken up.

Much dreaded by everyone, they became the general crest of the sea-coast (*larhmawn*) Gispewudwade clans, who have a myth to explain its origin. More particularly it is the emblem of Weesaiks (of the Ginarhangik tribe), of Neeslaws (Gitwilgyawts), whose high rank enabled them once to choose whatever emblem suited them. The Snag is represented as a tall mast usually bare of any carving.

The Pole at Gitamat, a frontier tribe between the Tsimsyans and the Kwakiutls, near the mouth of Kitamat River on Kitamat Arm, off Douglas Channel.

The following notes are from I. A. Lopatin's MSS.: *The Social Life and Religion of the Indians of Kitimat, B.C.* (National Museum, Anthropological Division.)

Extracts from pp. 19-23, which contain only generalities:

Totem poles were erected in memory of deceased chiefs or noblemen, and sometimes by a man on his own behalf. . . The makers of these poles were professional craftsmen. A chief or nobleman ordered such a craftsman to carve a totem pole for him, at the same time telling him what figures must be wrought on it. . .

At the end of the feast (when the pole was erected), the host stood by the piles of different kinds of goods (to be distributed as gifts), and delivered an address to his numerous guests. He pointed out the causes which had induced him to erect the totem pole. Usually it was the desire to impress the memory of his deceased predecessor firmly in the minds of the neighbouring tribes. Having done with the speech, he ordered his servant (*alookh*) to call out the names of the guests. The servant shouted these names in a loud, solemn voice, and, while handing the gifts to each individual, repeated all the compliments and remarks which had been made by the host. . . The celebration of the erection of the new totem pole usually lasted five or six days. During this period the guests were fed and entertained at the expense of the host. . . These totem poles have been real columns of glory of the Indian past. Some have already (in 1930) stood about sixty years. . .

Totem poles are no longer erected. In Kitimat, this custom was abandoned about fifty years ago. . . At present there is only one totem pole standing. It is on the beach, not far from Chief Morrison's house, and was erected some 40 years ago. According to Mr. Christopher Walkér, there were two others — one on the beach where the wharf now stands, the other on the beach near the site of the present church. Both fell down about forty years ago.

The Pole Commemorating Kapskoltsh (now at Stockholm, Sweden). Kapskoltsh was chief of the Kitlawp (People-of-Stone) tribe at the mouth of Kitlope River and Gardner Channel, at the frontier between the Tsimsyans and the Northern Kwakiutls. This memorial was acquired in 1929 by Mr. Olof Hanson, Swedish Consul at Prince Rupert, for the Ethnographical Museum at Stockholm, Sweden, and removed to its courtyard in 1930. (See "A Kwakiutl totem pole in Stockholm," by Gerhard Lindblom: *Ethnos*, November 1936, pp. 137-141.)

Description. According to the interpretation given by Mr. Iver Fougner, then Indian Agent at Bella Coola, and obtained from Gwil-ga-lock, wife of the chief (in 1928) of the Kitlawp band, the figures on the pole, from the top down, represent: (1) The "spirit of Zoda, who always wears a tall hat which revolves on his head"; (2) "Asoalget, who is also a personified spirit"; (3) "A grizzly bear in the water."

Tsaude and Halus are mythological beings in a myth bearing their name, published by Dr. Franz Boas in *Tsimsyan Mythology* (31st Ann. Rept. of the Bur. of American Ethnology, 1909-10, pp. 297-306), and recorded among the Tsimsyans by the author. A version of Tsaude (or



The pole of the Kitlawp tribe of the southern Tsimisyans
at the Ethnological Museum of Stockholm, Sweden

Dzawde) was collected from Herbert Wallace, head-chief of the Gitsees tribe at Port Simpson, in connection with Asaralyæn, Wolf chief of the same tribe, in which the mythical adventures of Tsaude and his slave Halus are recounted. Tsaude is connected with native copper and considered the legendary coppersmith of old.

Asewælgyet (Asaolget, as above) is a different name and special form of the Thunderbird, well known among the Coast Tsimshians. It is a crest of Hlerem's house (of a Raven clan) in the Gitsees tribe. There it is described, as follows:

Asewælgyet's body resembles that of the grizzly bear; its paws and head are the same, but he has large wings. Inside the wings small human beings are shown. When flying, this bird causes a great noise like thunder. Once, in the past, he was seen by an uncle of Hlerem when out hunting; this uncle's name was Larhtuyai'tk, who was the first to use it, several generations ago, on his house front as a painting and as a totem pole. (Informant, Herbert Wallace, chief of the Gitsees, Port Simpson; William Beynon, interpreter, 1915.)

At Port Simpson, it stood at the top of a round pole called Red-Garment, in commemoration of Hlerem, until about 1910.

In the myth of Asewælgyet (as related in 1915 by the same informant, Wallace) the following passage refers to this mythical bird:

"After the end of the oolaken (candle-fish) season in the spring, the people went out hunting for mountain goat to the very headwaters at the head of Warks Canal (*galaq'uatun*). Before hunting, they fasted and drank the juices of various roots, and for a length of time they bathed, so as to bring good luck upon themselves while in the mountains. A member of the house of Hlerem, after his fasting and bathing, proceeded to the headwaters of Large-River (*weedzem-ha'dzarh*), and camped with his family on the banks of a stream. One day, during the moon of *larhdzawas* (when the goats are fat), while they were standing close to their camp, they heard a clap of thunder coming from the river. Then they beheld a bird-like being flying, with large outspread wings and a body like a huge grizzly's. Hlerem took his bow and arrow and shot at the monster. Because of this, the bird flew down very close to them, and they saw human beings under its wings and on its breast. Hlerem looked at them carefully and said, 'We will use this as an emblem in our house.' For a period he kept on hunting the goat, drying the meat and gathering the fat, both of which were valuable foods. After the hunting was done, they went back home at the mouth of Warks Canal. From there they journeyed to their fishing stations near Skeena River. . . ."

At Gitlawp, situated as it is, close to the Tsimshians of the mid-Skeena River to the north, the grizzly bears are more likely to have been spirit grizzlies of the mountains than grizzlies "in the water," for the Water-Grizzlies were a Haida heraldic fictional, rather than a Tsimshian, feature, although some tribes of the lower Skeena actually claimed it as a crest.

Mythical origins. The narrative obtained by Mr. Fougner, as reproduced in *Ethnos*, runs as follows:

"Many long years ago Kapskoltsh, who was the chief of the Kitlope band of Indians, suffered the great misfortune to lose all his children

and every member of his band with the exception of his wife. This severe loss made him very unhappy and filled him with much sorrow. One day, while in a very fretful mood, he retired into the forest, where the spirit Zoda appeared before him, and inquired the reason for his grief. Upon being informed by Kapskoltsh, the spirit Zoda further inquired as to the cause of the death of his people and where he had placed their bodies. Kapskoltsh told Zoda that he had placed the bodies in boxes and put the boxes on branches up in trees.

"Zoda sympathized deeply with Kapskoltsh and gave him a transparent stone (crystal) and told him to go home and take a bite off the stone, and at the same time warned him that he must not stay with his wife. The chief then returned home and went to the place where he had put the bodies, and took a bite off the transparent stone. Then he called to his people up in the trees, and he saw that the spirit Zoda was among them, and his people came down alive from the trees. Kapskoltsh then realized that it was the good spirit Zoda that had restored his people to life again.

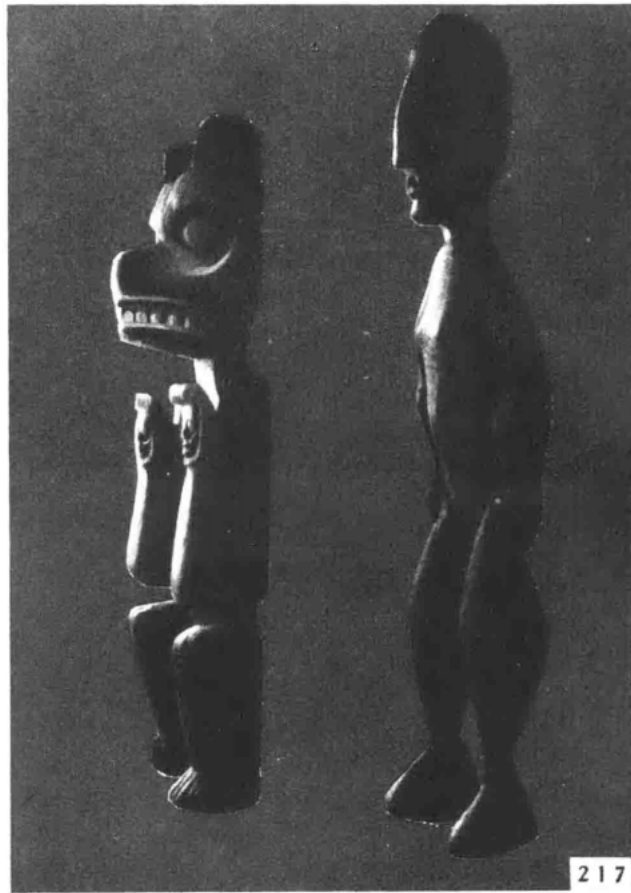
"After that day Chief Kapskoltsh became a great Medicine Man and cured many sick people; but before doing so he always took a bite out of the transparent stone which had been given to him by the spirit Zoda."

Function, carver, age. This pole, which was 9 metres long, was erected about 1872. According to the information quoted, "The foregoing Legend was related by Gwil-ga-lock, wife of the present (1928) Chief of the Kitlope band of Indians, and whose father about the year 1872 employed Humchit and Weikas, two Indians of the Raven Clan, to carve the Totem Pole, and when finished had it erected at Kitlope in order to perpetuate the memory of the ancient Chief Kapskoltsh and the good spirit Zoda."

It was "probably made from the trunk of a red cedar (*Thuja gigantea*), which has in parts begun to decay, and the wood shows a tendency to develop lengthwise splits. It has never been painted. From an artistic point of view it is fairly simple, but it is of very great interest on account of the preservation of the history, or legend of its origin. It is not a totem pole in the strict sense of the word, because so far as can be ascertained, it contains no totemistic representation. It belongs, it seems to me, to the group of 'totem poles' of the Northwest Coast that are known as 'memorial columns.' Such poles were also occasionally erected at some distance from the winter village, and constituted memorials designed to perpetuate the memory of some event, real or legendary, in the history of the tribe. . . ."

Interesting details, quite characteristic of the people and the circumstances in the purchase of totem poles, are quoted from a letter from Mr. Hanson, the donator of the pole to the museum at Stockholm:

"It has been my ambition during the last ten years to send a totem pole, and on several occasions I considered that I had all arrangements completed, and that in a few days' time a pole would be on the way to Sweden. Then, at the last moment, an old Indian woman or an old Indian man would appear, after many complications had already been successfully straightened out, and claim some equity in the pole. They would absolutely refuse to be reconciled in the matter, or consent to its removal, thereby cancelling all arrangements that had been previously made. However at last I was successful in securing a pole. . . ."



Totem carvings near Bella Bella. Raley's Collection
at the museum of the University of British Columbia