

THE HOUSES OF THE KWAKIUTL INDIANS,* BRITISH COLUMBIA.

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No. 130414 of the Catalogue of the Ethnological Collections of the U. S. National Museum is a model of a house from Fort Rupert, British Columbia (Fig. 1). Though the model is very rough it is of considerable interest, as it shows the carved posts which are characteristic of these houses and as the figures in it represent one of the winter dances in which masked men make their appearance.

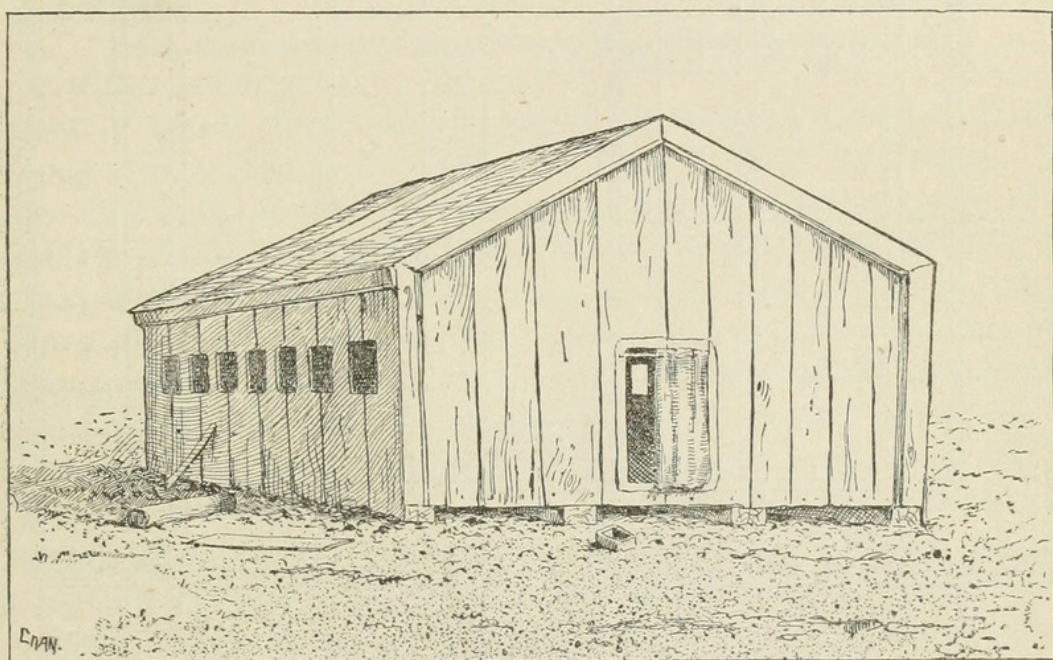


FIG. 1. Model of a Kwakiutl house, Fort Rupert, B. C. 130414.

In the following pages I shall describe the plan of the Indian house and the meaning of the posts according to observations made in British Columbia, 1886-'87. The model is a plain wooden house with a gable roof, one side of which is moveable on hinges, thus allowing the student to look into the interior. The door is covered with a curtain, and windows admit the light. The pieces of wood forming the walls of the house are nailed to a frame. This arrangement does not correspond to the real arrangement of the Indian house, as will be seen by the follow-

* In the present paper the alphabet of the Bureau of Ethnology has been adopted. The vowels are pronounced as in Italian, the consonants as in English, with the following exceptions and additions:

ə = e in power.

c = sh in shoe.

q = ch in German bach.

ɥ = ch in German ich.

ɣ = guttural k, almost kr.

ç = th in thin.

tl = an explosive sound produced by laying the back of the tongue against the palate and pressing forth the air on both sides of the tongue.

ing description, but the posts and the timbers carrying the central part of the roof are exactly like those of the houses. The houses of the

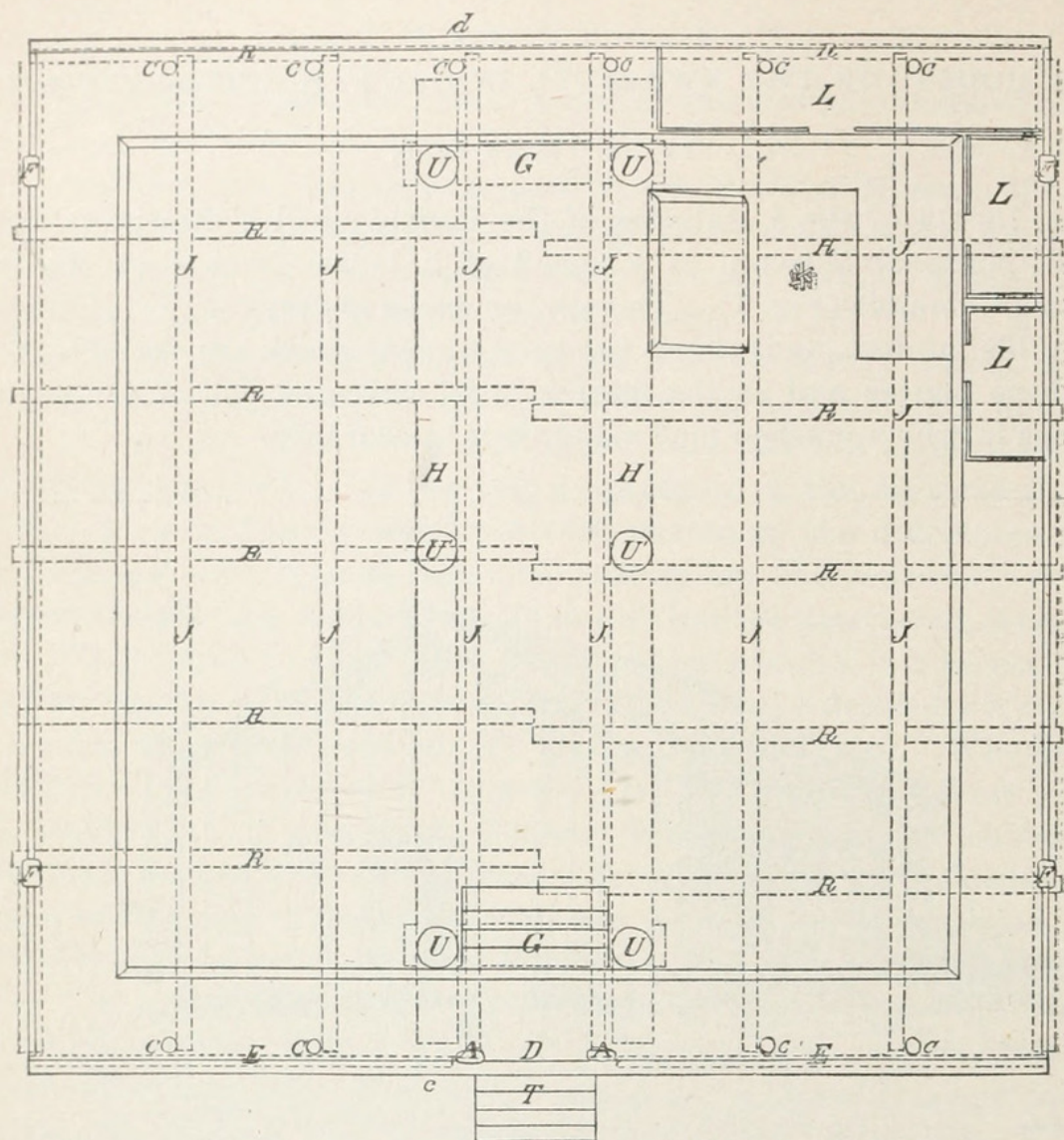


FIG. 2. Ground plan of Kwakiutl house.

Kwakiutl and their neighbors form a square, the sides of which are from 40 to 60 feet long (Figs. 2, 3, 4). The door (*D*) is generally in the center of the side nearest the sea, which forms the front of the house. The

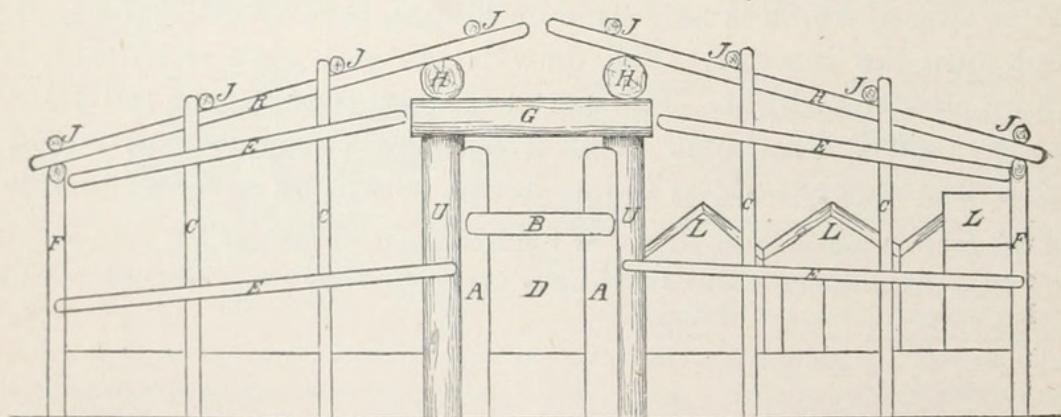


FIG. 3. Construction of Kwakiutl house. Front elevation.

latter has a gable roof, the ridge of which runs from the front to the rear. The walls consist of boards, which are fastened to a frame-work

of poles. The sides of the door are formed by two posts (*A*) from 6 to 8 inches in diameter and standing about 4 feet apart. Over the door they are connected by a cross-bar (*B*, Fig. 3). Sometimes this frame-work of the door consists of heavy planks. The frame-work of the house front

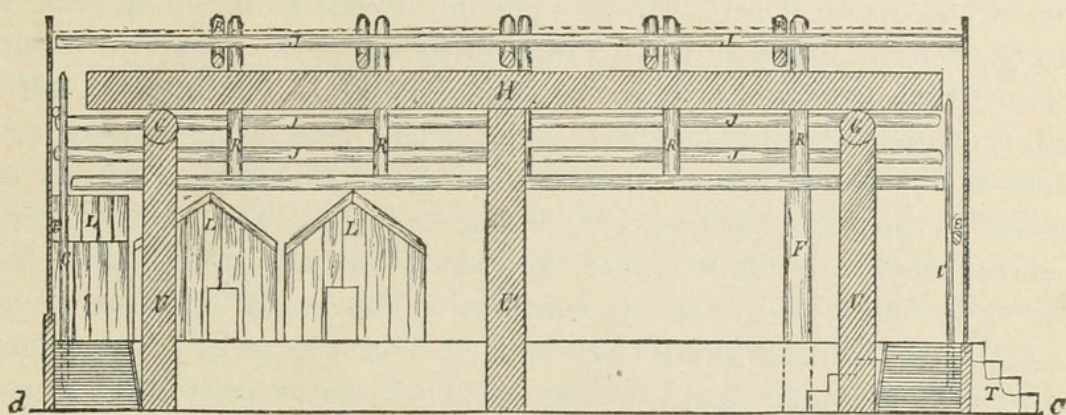


FIG. 4. Construction of Kwakiutl house. Longitudinal section, from *c* to *d*.

consists of two or three vertical poles (*C*), about 3 inches in diameter, on each side of the door. They are from 8 to 10 feet apart. Their length diminishes toward the sides of the house according to the inclination of the roof. These poles are connected by long cross-bars (*E*), which are tied to their outer side with ropes of cedar bark at half the distance between the roof and the ground. The frame-work of the rear part is similar to that of the front, but that of the sides is far stronger, as it has to support the roof. Two heavy posts (*F*) about 9 inches in diameter are erected. Their heads are cut out and a beam of the same diameter is laid over them. At the joints it is cut out so as to fit into the heads of the posts. On both sides of the door and in the corresponding part of the rear side, about 3 feet distant from the central line of the house, the supports of the roof (*U*) are erected. These form the principal part of the frame-work, and are the first to be made when the house is built. They stand about 3 feet from the walls inside the house. These uprights are about $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter and are generally connected by a cross-piece (*G*) of the same diameter. On each side of the cross-piece rests a heavy beam (*H*) which runs from the front to the rear of the house.

Sometimes these beams are supported by additional uprights (*U'*), which stand near the center of the house. The rafters (*R*) are laid over these heavy timbers and the beams forming the tops of the sides. They are about 8 inches in diameter. Light poles about 3 inches thick are laid across the rafters. They rest against the vertical poles (*C*) in the front and rear of the house, and are fastened to the rafters with ropes made of cedar bark. After the heavy frame-work which supports the central part of the roof is erected a bank about 3 feet in height is raised all around the outlines of the house, its outer side coinciding with the lines where the walls are to be erected. Long, heavy boards 4 or 5 inches thick are implanted lengthwise along the front of the house, their

upper edges standing $2\frac{1}{2}$ or 3 feet above the ground. Then the earth forming the bank is stamped against them, and thus a platform is made running along the front of the house. Later on this is continued all around the house. The frame-work of the front is the next to be erected, the poles (*C*) standing in the earth forming the platform. The upper edges of the front boards which were implanted into the ground are grooved, and in this groove the boards forming the front wall stand. They are tied or nailed to the cross-bar (*E*) and to the foremost rafter, which is connected with the frame-work of the front. The next thing to be done is to make the rear wall and the sides. The former exactly corresponds to the front, the door only being wanting. The boards forming the side walls are implanted into the ground, standing vertically, their upper ends being tied to the beam forming the top of the frame-work. The platform running along the inner sides of the walls is finished by stamping the earth against the side walls. The roof consists of a peculiar kind of boards, which run from the gable to the sides of the house and rest on the beams (*F*). They lap on their edges like Chinese tiles. This arrangement has the effect that the rain runs from the roof without penetrating into the house. The house front is generally finished by cutting the boards off along the roof and by finishing them off with a molding. Three blocks are placed in front of the door, forming steps (*T*) that lead to the platform. Three steps of the same kind lead from the platform to the floor of the house. The board forming the inner side of the platform slopes slightly inward. The house has no smoke escape, but several of the boards forming the roof can be pushed aside. During the night these openings are closed, but in the morning one board over every fire place is pushed aside by means of a long pole. As it is necessary to look after the roof from time to time, a stationary ladder is leaned against the side of the house. It consists of one-half of the trunk of a tree or of a heavy board, into the upper side of which steps are cut.

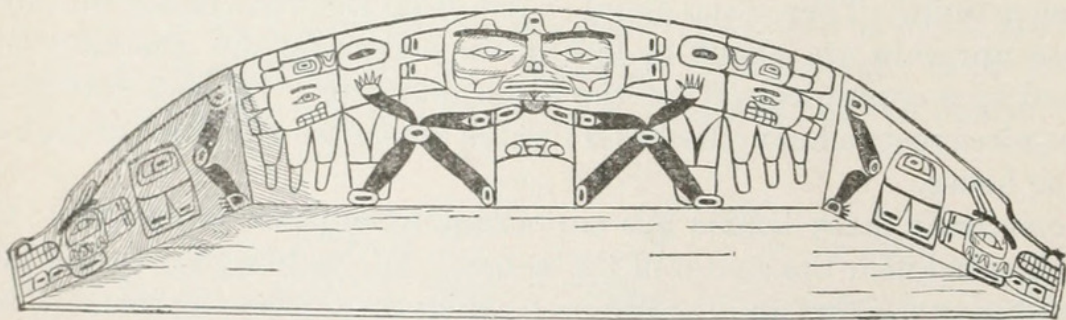


FIG. 5. Carved settee in a house at Qumta'spē (Hope Island).

The house is inhabited by four families, who occupy the four corners, and each of whom has a fire-place of its own. The corners belonging to each family are divided off from the main room by a rough frame-work of poles, the top of which is used for drying fish or other sorts of food. In the villages at the northern end of Vancouver Island a peculiar kind of frame is used for this purpose, while farther south poles are

laid across the frame-work. On each side of the fire stands the immense settee (Fig. 5)*, which is large enough for the whole family. It has no feet, is about 7 feet long and 4 feet deep, and its sides slope slightly backward, so as to form a convenient support for the back. Boards are laid along the foot of the rear and front platform and on the side of the fire opposite the settee. The arrangement is sometimes made a little different, the settee being wanting, or in some instances standing on the rear side. This depends on the arrangement of the bedrooms (*L*). These bedrooms have the form of small houses which are built on the platform running around the house. Most of these bedrooms have gable roofs, and their fronts are finished off with moldings. The section of *cd* (Fig. 4) explains the arrangement better than any description can do. Sometimes these rooms are enlarged by adding a low extension to the house, the floor of which is elevated as high as the platform. In the center of such rooms there is a small fire-place. The plans of the houses of the separate gentes show slight differences. In some instances the heavy beams (*H*) rest on the uprights (*U*), the cross-piece (*G*) being

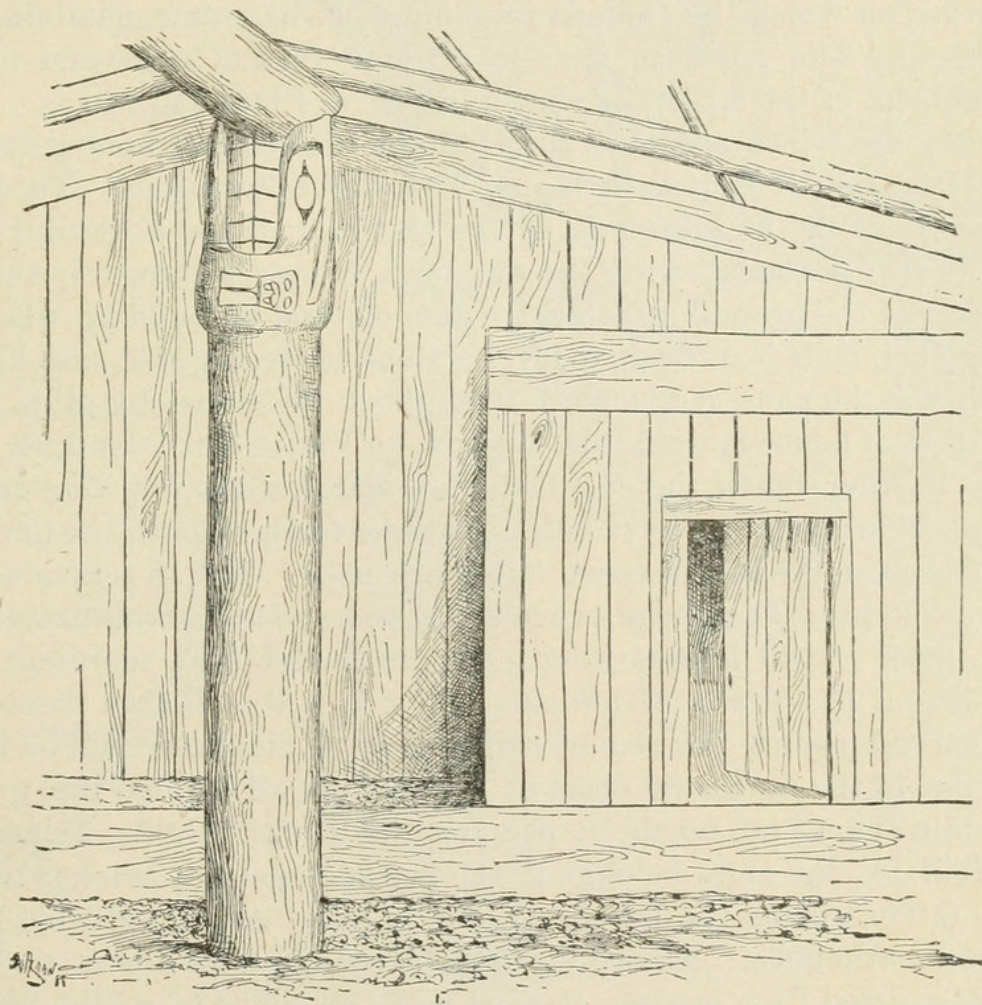


FIG. 6.—View of the rear part of a house in Qumta'spë.

wanting (Fig. 6); in other instances there is only a single timber (*H*) resting on the center of the cross-piece (*G*). Certain large houses that

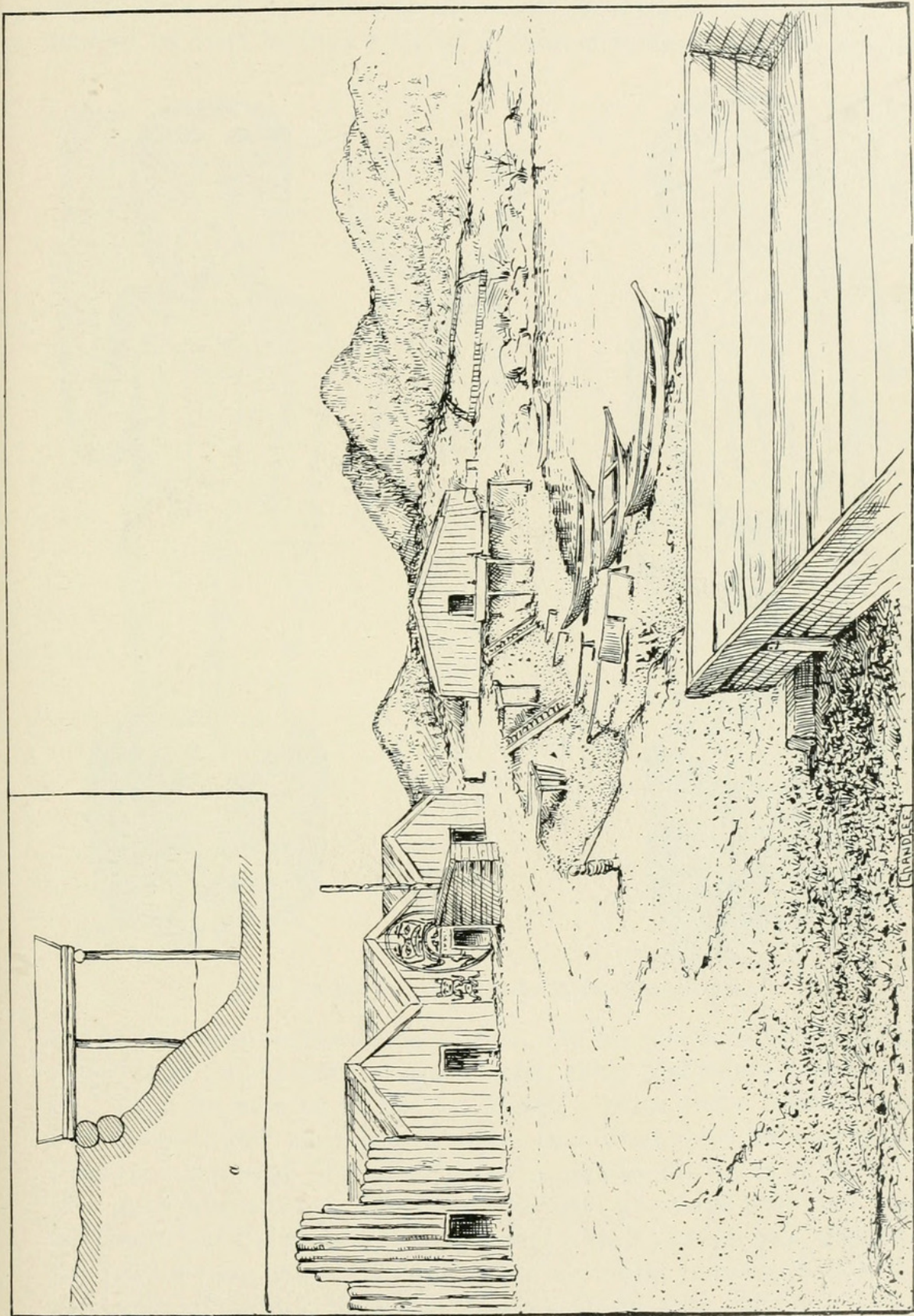
* The figures are from sketches by the author.

belong to the greatest chiefs have a number of steps or platforms, numbering from 2 to 4, instead of a single platform of the house described here. These steps either run all around the house, giving it somewhat the appearance of an amphitheater, or are confined to the rear side. In traditions houses are mentioned with ten steps. Each house has its name, as will be seen from the view of the village of Qumta'spē, on Plate XXXVIII, in which the names of four houses are given. In front of the village the Ōkuinā'tlē bight is seen, bounded by the narrow point Tlā'sōta, on which the natives grow some potatoes on a small inclosure. Behind this point the hills of Galiano Island, Kaqaqlā' and Wē'qōcoa are seen which are frequently mentioned in the legends of these tribes. The island is divided from Hope Island by the Strait of Ōqsā'.

The houses generally face the beach and are built in a row. (See Plate XXXVIII.) In front of the town there is a street, which is carefully leveled, the lower side being supported by an embankment of heavy logs. From here steps lead down to the beach, where the canoes are lying. Opposite to the houses, on the sea side of the street, there are platforms, on which the Indians pass most of their time, gambling and conversing. The platform rests on a frame-work of poles and on the embankment of the street, as shown in Fig. *a*, Plate XXXVIII.

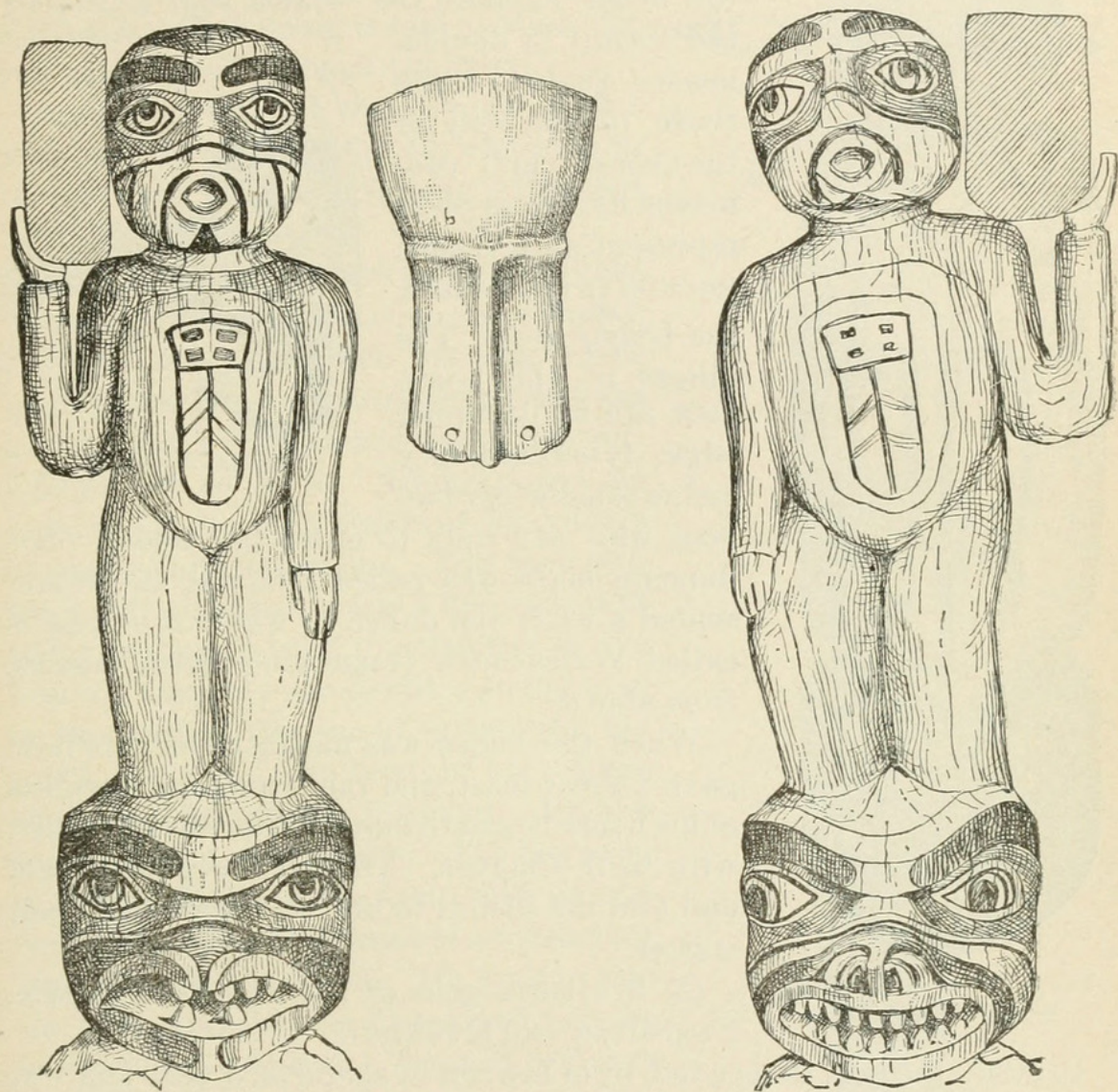
Among the tribes speaking the Heiltsuk dialect and among the Bilqula the same kind of house is in use, with slight deviations. The house rests on piles in the same way as the platform of the Kwakiutl does, only the rear part resting on the ground. It may be, however, that the character of the ground accounts for this method of building wherever it is applied, as it is difficult to level a slope of steep grade, and in such cases it will be more convenient to support the house by piles. The same style of house is used from Comox, on Vancouver Island, to Dean Inlet. Farther north the Haida house, which, although similar, has some peculiarities of its own, is found, while farther south the immense long houses of the Salish coast tribes are used. But to return to the Kwakiutl house: The uprights are always carved according to the crest of the gens of the house-owner. In the model they represent men standing on the heads of animals (Figs. 7, 8, 9). Before discussing these carved posts a few remarks of a general character will be made. The tribes of the northwest coast of America are all divided into gentes. But while among the northern peoples, the Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, and Heiltsuk, the child belongs to the mother's gens, it belongs to that of the father among the Kwakiutl and Salish. All these tribes claim to be autochthonous. According to their traditions the ancestor of each gens descended from heaven, in most cases in shape of a bird, and became a man. The crest he adopted hints at certain exploits that he has made.

I shall give a few characteristic traditions that show the connection between the carvings in the house, the masks, etc., with the legends referring to the ancestors of the gentes.



Omatsems. Wätsuqūioa. Kinā'n'amas. Wē'qōcoa. Xā'tlempaia. Kaqagllā'. Ō'KUIU'ŪTLE. Tū'sōta.
VIEW OF THE VILLAGE QUMTA'SPĒ, OF THE TLATLASIXOALA AND NAXÓMKILIS TRIBES, ON HOPE ISLAND, B. C., COMMONLY CALLED
NEWETTE. (Page 212.)

(1) Walasnomō'xois = the great Nomō'xois (a gens of the Kwakiutl). Walasnomō'xois descended from the sun to the earth and built a house in Tsa'qis (Fort Rupert). His son was Ōm'aqtā'latlē. The latter saw many seals and sea-otters on the island Mā'nsiqtle (Shell Island). As he had no boat he took a log of driftwood instead, went to the island



FIGS. 7, 8. Carved uprights in the Kwakiutl house, 130414.

and killed many seals and sea-otters. On his return to Tsa'qis he gave a feast and gave away numerous otter skins and many boxes of seal oil. Then he went to Gyōky (= house, a place about 3 miles east of Fort Rupert) and ascended the river that discharges its waters there. Near the sources of this river he met a man by the name of Mā'kakyu, who gave him a boat. Then Ōm'aqtā'latlē wandered eastward and in the country of the Ma'malēlēxala he met with Mawatsilexála, who was of the Tsawat'ēnoḡ tribe. He went with him to his house and took Mawatsilexála's daughter, Hāaqxolā'tlemēḡa, for his wife. His father-in-law gave him the emblems of his gens and after his return to the Kwakiutl country Ōm'aqtā'latlē built a new house in Ky'ā'ḡa, the posts and beams of which he carved according to the emblems he had received in the land of the Tsawat'ēnoḡ. The two uprights in the front part of the

house represent two men: *Yē'xent'əḡa* (something talking inside) and *Wawēqēmītl* (the orator). The uprights in the rear of the house also

represent men: *Lēqe'laqsta* (the braggart) and *Hasaxawā'sui* (attempting to talk louder than anybody else). The uprights in front of the house support the beams that represent the *Sisiutl* (a double-headed snake), while those in the rear of the house are connected by a cross-piece representing a *Sisiutl* (or wolf?), upon which the beams rest. The hinges of the house door are at its upper edge. It is very heavy and crushes every bad

man who attempts to enter the house. His dancing mask was called *Ōlikyen*, and represented a wolf; the dance in which it is used is called *Walas-aqā'k* (something great coming from above).

When the house was finished *Ōm'aqtá'latlē* gave a great feast, and the beams and uprights of his house began to move. The *Sisiutl* played with their tongues. The men began to talk and told the *Sisiutl* to kill all enemies of their master.

(2) *Sentlaē* (a gens of the *Tlauitsis*, *Nimkie*, *Náḡoartox*, and *Kwakiutl*).

Sentlaē, the sun, descended from heaven in shape of a bird and was transformed into a man. He built a house in *Yiḡā'men*. Thence he wandered to *ḡomoks* and married a woman of that tribe. He visited the *Tlauitsis*, *Nimkie*, and *Na'ḡoartox*, and married a woman of each of these tribes. At last he came to *Tliksī'waē*, in the country of the *Kwakiutl*, and built a house in *ḡ'aioq*. There he remained. He took a wife among the *Kwakiutl*, and they had a son who was called *Tsḡtsā'lis*.

On his house front a sun is painted on each side of the door. The uprights represent men carrying suns. Their name is *Lelā't'otpes* and they were slaves of *Sentlaē*. The cross-bars connecting the uprights are also men, the beams sea-lions. Three steps lead up to the door. They represent men whose names are *Tlē'nonis*. The heraldic column of the gens, called *Sentlē'qēm*, is shown in Fig. 10. It represents a series of coppers, one standing upon the other. On top of the coppers there is a man extending his arm as though he were talking. His name is



FIG. 9. Carved upright in the Kwakiutl house, 130414.

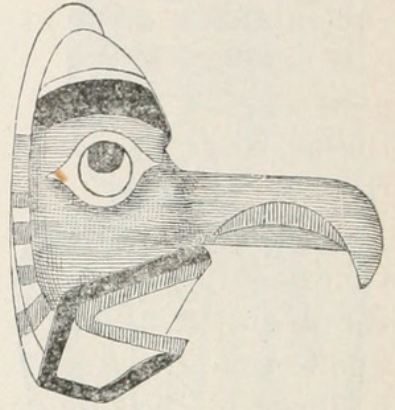


FIG. 11. Sun mask.

Lā'qt'ōtpes (sing. of Lela'qt'ōtpes = he who gives presents to strangers only). The top of the column is the Tlē'selaqemtl, a mask representing the sun surrounded by wooden rays. In the dance Tsā'eqa they use the sun mask (Fig. 11); in the dance Yā'uiqa the dog mask Ku'loqsa. This name is said to mean the sun shining red through the mist.

A simpler form of the column of this gens may be seen in Fig. 12, where, as in the last case, the face of the sun is fastened to the top of a pole.

(3) Kuē'qakila (a subdivision of the gens Omeatl of the tribe Tlatlasiqoala). Omeatl, the raven, had a daughter, Hā'taxa. Once upon a time Hā'taxa ate sea eggs that she had caught, although her father had forbidden her to do so. In his anger he ordered all the inhabitants of the village to remove and desert her. The poor girl, when left all alone, made a fish-basket of cedar twigs and tried to catch fish on the beach. One day she found a young man in the basket, the son of Xomō'qoa, the spirit of the sea, who brought her a huge whale and became her husband. By him she had a son, Kuē'qakila. The boy used to paddle about in his boat, and on one occasion he found the head of a whale that was eaten by the raven. He took it into the boat, and then he discovered that he had found the Sisiutl. The fish began to move his fins, and thus propelled the boat. Later on Kuē'qakila descended into the sea to his father, Xomō'qoa. Four days he remained there and left with many gifts. But when he returned he found that he had been four years in Xomō'qoa's house. Among the gifts he had received was the heraldic column, which is since that time used by that gens (Fig. 13). The lowest figure represents the Tsonō'qoa. On top of it is a Bekuc with a split skull (=man, a spirit of the sea with long hair), standing on his head; the next figure is an-

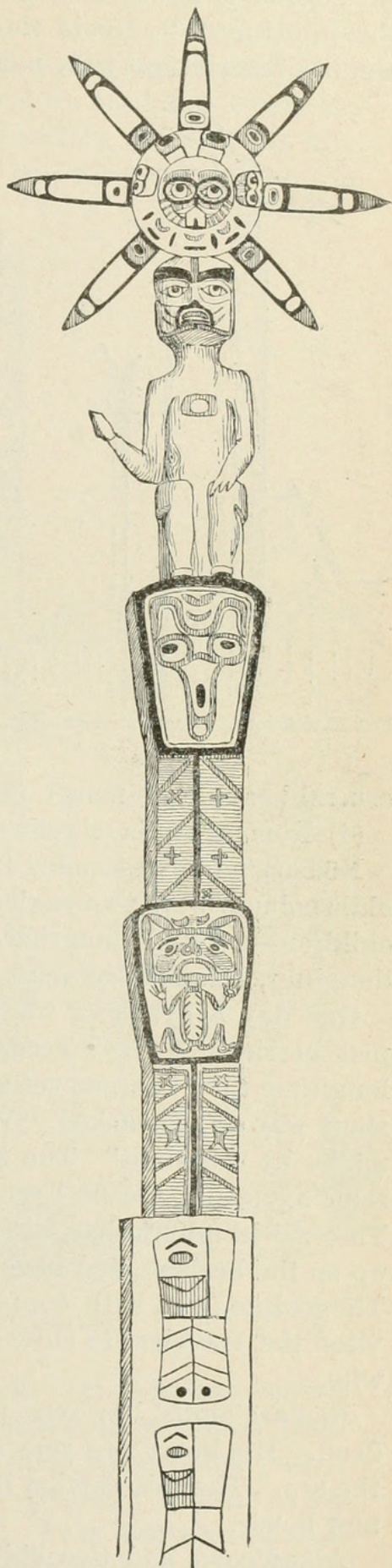


FIG. 10. Heraldic column Sēntlē'qēm of the Gens Sēntlāē; Alert Bay.

other Bekue. On top of it a wolf is standing, whose fore paws are in the mouths of two human heads. On top of the wolf sits a beaver, and the uppermost figure is the halibut. The two boards bearing the English inscriptions were nailed to the house by a white trader. But I

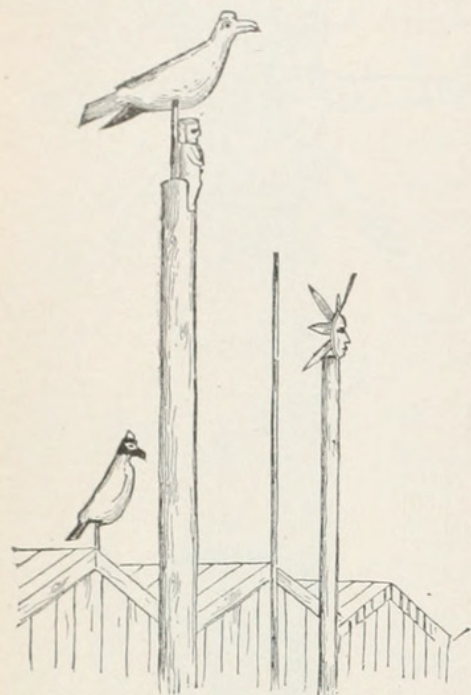


FIG. 12. Gables of houses at Alert Bay.

should advise future explorers not to trust the man 'Cheap' (a corruption of "chief"), as he is the 'greatest liar' on the whole coast. Formerly the Sisiutl was painted on the front of the house, but at the request of the Indian agent, Mr. Cheap, whose proper name is *Yomena'kulu*, whitewashed it, and unfortunately I could only see a few faint traces of the painting. In consideration of this action he was appointed constable and presented with an old uniform and a flag. It was made his special duty to prevent dances and feasts, and since that time he dances in this uniform and with the flag. I found the characteristic Sisiutl on a settee in his house (Fig. 5).

Part of the rear of this house is shown in Fig. 6. The upright that holds the

central beam in its mouth represents the sea lion.

(4) *Nōmase'ngilis* (a gens of the *Tlatlasiḡoala*).

Nōmase'ngilis descended from heaven and built a house. On his heraldic column were two eagles that watched his house. He had three children—a blind daughter, *Aikyā'oeḡa*; a son, *Tleḡyā'likila*; and a daughter, *Naqnaisilaō'ḡoa*.

One day *Aikyā'oeḡa* wanted to go to *Yaḡamā'lis* (Hope Island) to pick berries. A slave accompanied her in her boat, and when after a long time they had not yet arrived in *Yaḡamā'lis*, though it was only a short way off, she asked, "Where are we? We ought to be in *Yaḡamā'lis* by this time." The slave answered, "I do not know. I do not see *Yaḡamā'lis*, nor do I see the eagles on the post before your house." They sailed a long time without seeing land. At last an island loomed up on the horizon, and in coming nearer they saw a town. There lived *Tlā'ḡoakila* (*i. e.*, with copper plates). When he saw the boat he invited the travelers to enter his house, and he took *Aikyā'oeḡa* for his wife.

Nōmase'ngilis, however, mourned his daughter as though she were dead. His heart was very sad, and he threw the post of his house into the sea. The tide carried it to *Yaḡamā'lis*, where *Nomase'ngilis* built a new house.

Aikyā'oeḡa had two children, *Tlā'ḡoakila* and *Tlā'sutewalis*. One day she left them playing near the fire while she went to the beach to

get clams. The children in playing about fell upon the feet of their grandmother. At last she got angry and said, "Now, don't bother me. I do not even know where your mother comes from." The little ones felt unhappy, and when their mother returned they asked, "Mother, where is your home? Grandmother says she does not know where you came from." The mother replied, "I went with a slave in my boat. For many days we drifted to and fro and at last we reached this coun-

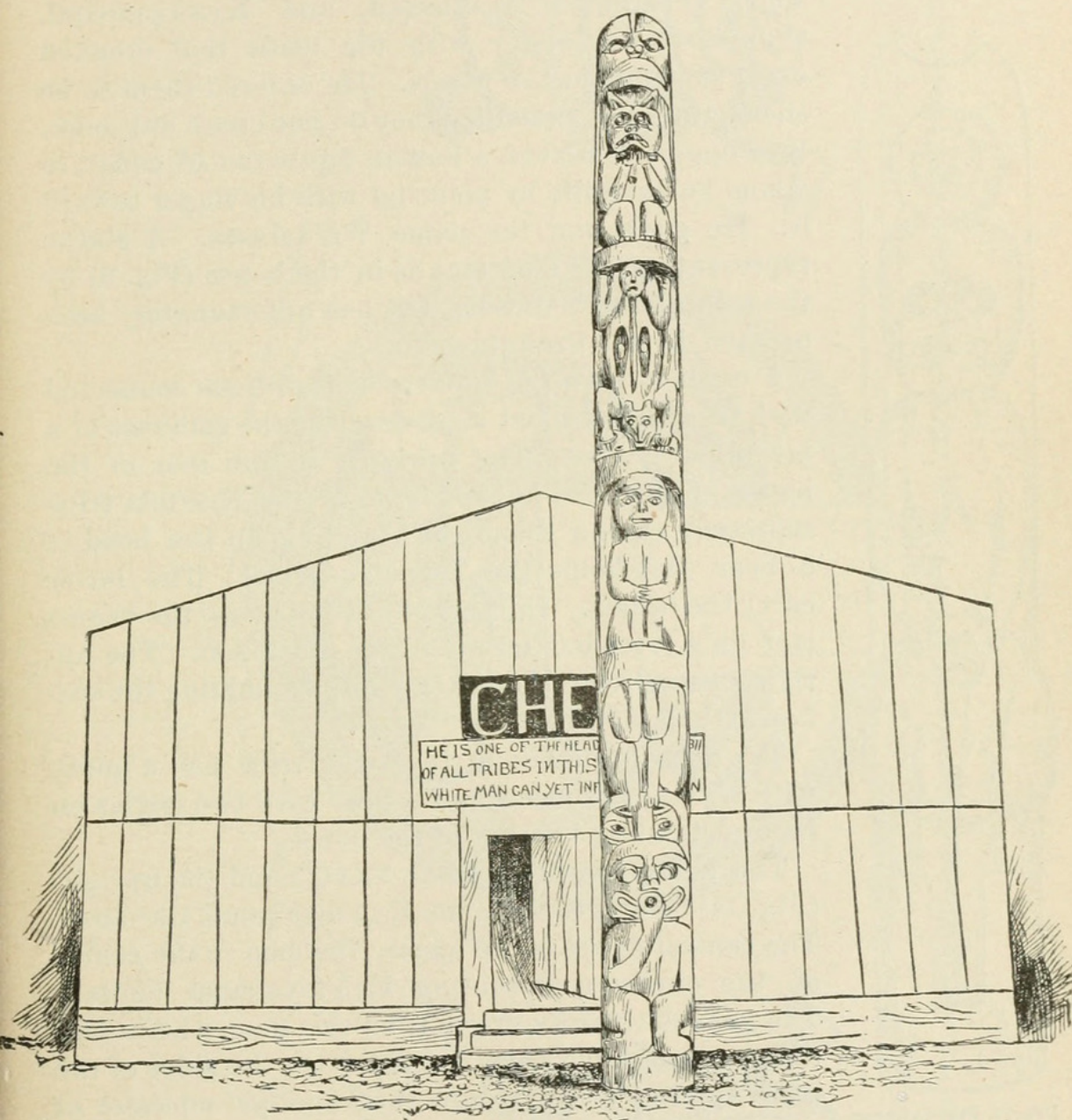


FIG. 13. Kuē'qakila's heraldic column at Qumta'sqē.

try." "Oh, make us happy," cried the children, "let us go and see our grandfather." Then she told them that he was a mighty chief. Their father gave them his copper boat, which he filled with copper plates, and Διxyā'oeqa said to them before parting, "Before you come to my home you will hear the eagles cry on our post." They started, and after a long journey they heard the eagles on the post, and now they knew that they were near Nōmase'nqilis's house. They gave him the copper

plates, and all the people admired their copper boat, the copper paddles, and the copper bailer. They staid for some time with the old man, but then they returned home. Their grandfather gave them costly skins and blankets before they left.

Later on *ḡanikila* (*v. infra*) transformed *Nōmase'ngilis* into a stone. *Tlēqyálikila*, *Nōmase'ngilis*'s son, emigrated at that time to *Quspalis*, where he built a new house. His son was *Tsē'selaso*, who had three sons, *Ō'maliqstē*, *Wa'lasḡoa*, and *Kya'lḡamistal*. *Ō'maliqstē* was angry with the toads that croaked every morning in the woods. He ordered them to be silent, and since that time they do not croak any more. *Kya'lḡamistal* carved a human figure out of cedar, to whom he gave life by pointing with his finger toward it. He gave him the name *Wā'tsiḡsta*. A statue representing the man stands in the house (Fig. 6) by the side of the bed-room, but has unfortunately been omitted by the draughtsman.

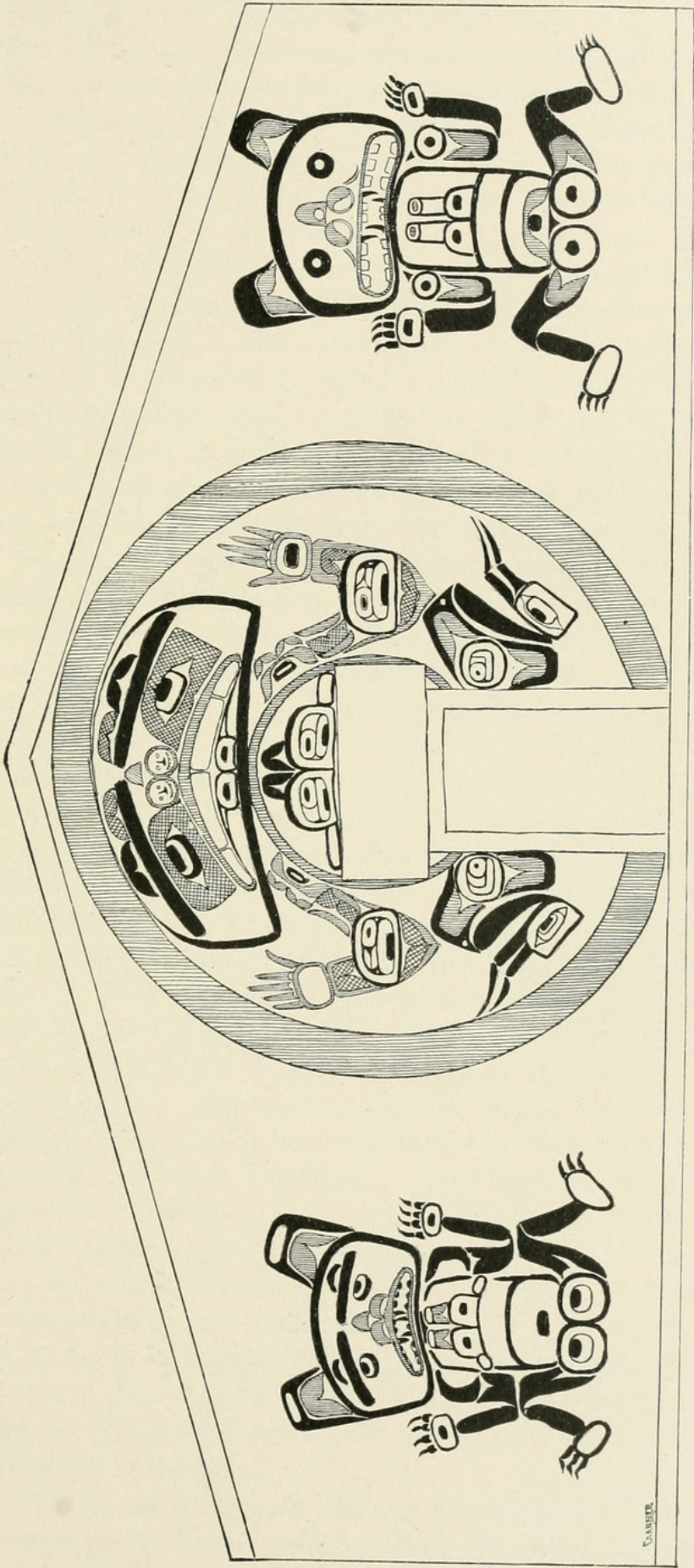
I can not give the numerous traditions connected with these houses, but shall describe the emblems of a few other gentes. The uprights in the rear of the house of the gens *Lalaqsint'aio* of the *Kuē'tela* tribe represent each a *Tsonō'ḡoa* standing on the head of a bear that holds the *Tsonō'ḡoa*'s feet. The latter carry the beams. In the front of the house the beams rest on a cross-bar representing a sea-lion. The uprights supporting the latter are seals holding the sea-lion in their mouths.

The gens *Tsinḡḡaio* of the same tribe has a house with several platforms and a post with two eagles on its top standing in front of the house.

The house front (see Plate XXXIX) and the upright (Fig. 14) belong to the gens *Kyā'loyaḡamē*, the moon. The central figure is the moon; the men in the center of the circles representing *Kyā'loyaḡamē* himself. The gens derives its origin from this man, who is said to have descended from heaven. On the sides of the door are two grizzly bears that another ancestor of the house-owner obtained from a *Na'ḡoartoḡ* chief.

FIG. 14. Post in house in *Qumta'spē*, showing moon and *Tsonō'ḡoa*.

The upright consists of two figures. The lower one is a female *Tsonō'ḡoa* holding a child between her legs; the upper one is the moon (Fig. 14). Fig. 15 shows another house front in *Qumta'spē* (Hope Island). The owner belongs to another gens in the traditions of which the thunder-bird *Kunkunḡulikya* plays a great part. He is squatting over the door. To the right and to the left of the door we see another representation of *Kyā'loyaḡamē*, to whose gens the mother of the owner belonged. Figs. 16 and 17 are from the house of *ḡalaite*, a



PAINING ON FRONT OF HOUSE OF THE GENS KYÁ'LOYAKAMĒ, OF THE TLATLASIXOALA TRIBE, AT QUMTÁSPĒ, HOPE ISLAND. (Page 208.)

chief of the Naqomkilis, who belongs to the χ anikila gens. χ anikila is "the great transformer" of all these tribes. He is the son of the deity, and descended from heaven in the shape of an eagle. (χ anikila means "he with spreadout wings.") Therefore the gens has an eagle for its emblem. The man on whom the eagle rests is Bebekumlisila, one of the figures that χ anikila put up in his house. I was unable to learn the meaning of the other upright (Fig. 17). The name of the kneeling man on it is Silai'oqa. The upper being was described as "the same as a bear," but it is evidently a sea animal.

In the model No. 130414 of the catalogue of the National Museum the men who carry the beams (Figs. 7, 8, 9) represent the slaves of one of the ancestors of the gens. The open mouth indicates that they speak for the chief, as it is considered beneath a chief's dignity to speak to the common people. The figure carrying the beam on its left shoulder is standing on a bear's head (Fig. 18). The animal, by which the other figure in the rear of the house is supported, is probably the wolf (Fig. 7). The meaning of the figure that is inclosed in the upright is unknown to me (Fig. 9). I have seen the same figure in the village of the Tlatlasiqoala, at Qumta'spē (on Hope Island), but could not learn anything about it. Neither can I say with any certainty to which gens the house belongs, as there is no painting on the front.

From these remarks it will be clear that every single carving in the houses of these tribes has some connection with the traditions of the gentes. The Indians of the present time make various combinations of the emblems of the gentes of both parents of the house-owner, and this is the reason for the great variety of forms. Besides this, legends referring to certain ancestors are illustrated in the emblems, and thus it happens that seemingly the ancient styles are not strictly adhered to.

It remains to explain several of the figures frequently occurring in these carvings. One of the most frequent carvings is the slave of the chief who is talking to the people. We saw him on the uprights of the model, on the post of Sentlaē (Figs. 7, 10), and in Fig. 18 he is standing on the gable of a house. The omitted statue in Fig. 6 and Fig. 19 belong to a similar class; the latter represents a man by the name of Kiē'xiā, who holds a wolf in his hands. The back of the wolf's tail shows a human face. The hind legs of the wolf are seen under the legs of a man who sits on an animal, the meaning of which I do not know, as the head is half buried in the ground, but probably it represents a bear. These two figures are hollowed out in the back, so that a man can stand behind them and speak through their open mouth, which acts as a speaking tube. The men represent slaves of an ancestor, and when the chief is speaking through the mouth at certain festivals it is supposed that the slave is speaking.

In many of the figures we see the famous copper plates (tlā'qoa), one of which is seen between Figs. 7 and 8. They are found painted on the breasts of the men in the model, they form the lower part of the post of



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