Methodological Issues in the Use of Tsimshian Oral Traditions (Adawx) in Archaeology

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ABSTRACT. Tsimshian oral records, called adawx, provide an example of the storytelling capacity within a system that has structuring and, thus, historically translatable referents. Although many can be anticipated, here I focus on chronological order and the creation of a relative sequence of events in the adawx that provide an index to history and the most obvious conjunction to archaeological analyses. I argue that the use of significant moments in history as a means of creating chronological order in oral records may be a universal attribute of cultural historiography that is derived from our use of events as touchstones of memory, a phenomenon that seems to be an aspect of all contextualizations of history.

Résumé. La tradition orale des Tsimshian, appelée adawx, est un exemple de la capacité de production de contes au sein d’un système structurant qui a donc des référents traduisibles en termes historiques. Cet article se concentre sur l’ordre chronologique et la création de séquences relatives d’événements dans l’adawx qui fournissent un index historique et donc la conjoncture la plus évidente pour les analyses archéologiques. L’utilisation de moments historiquement significatifs comme moyen de créer un ordre chronologique dans le registre oral est peut-être un attribut universel de l’historiographie qui dérive de notre utilisation d’événements comme aide-mémoire, un phénomène qui semble présent dans toutes les contextualisations de l’histoire.

Naturally it is impossible to utilize historical traditions of the tribes for the construction of their history, because all of them are more or less of a mythical character. (Boas 1906: 4).

Record. Tradition. Literature. Narrative. History. Adawx. Of all these words, the latter is most meaningful here, and it is in a language (Coast Tsimshian) that few people speak anymore. The irony of Boas’ argument in the epigraph above lies in his own substantial use of oral texts as a means of reconstructing Tsimshian history (Boas 1916) in spite of his uncertainty that such an endeavour was even feasible. Humans have a passion for classification, and much of the debate in oral literature involves what oral records are and how or whether they can be compared to non-Indigenous views of history (Mason 2006; Whitley 2002). There is no simple answer to this question.

Oral systems of knowledge transmission can appear in similar forms and with similar purposes to those of some writing systems, permitting analogous forms of record keeping, case law, cumulative knowledge, history, biography, and self-reflexivity (Vansina 1985). Knowledge can be embedded, discussed, and interpreted throughout the social and cultural network of people sharing these stories (Rosaldo 1980a; 1980b), which can include metaphors and maps of landscapes (Marsden 2002; Nabokov 2002). Storytelling is itself a socially situ-
ated and contextually contingent, often ritual, act that invokes a rapport between the storyteller and the audience, as well as between the storyteller and an anticipated audience such that oral texts are as much about the non-verbal as the verbal (Cruikshank 1998; 2002). People sometimes modify their stories to integrate new ideas with old understandings, sometimes changing the remembrance of history itself (LeGrande 1997). Words like “tradition” and “history” become changed when paired with “oral” and invoke the uncertainties and ambiguities of anthropological knowledge and the existence of plural, perhaps mutually exclusive, epistemologies (Finnegan 2003). It seems clear, however, that these texts also speak of real and not just imagined history with demonstrable accuracy perhaps thousands of years into the past (Echo-Hawk 2000; Marsden 2001; 2002; Sharpe and Tunbridge 1997). Since archaeology deals with history, the potential for rapport and conjunction exists. The gulf is wide, however, in part because of the need for translation across the cultural epistemologies in which archaeology and oral records are constituted, and in part because some anthropologists fear that rendering these texts into historical documents imposes on them a form of pseudo-history.

I have considered oral records in archaeological interpretation in previous work (Martindale 1999; 2000; 2003; 2006; Martindale and Jurakic 2004; 2006; Martindale and Marsden 2003) without discussing methodological issues beyond the assumption that the two sources should correspond, followed by the teleological validation that they frequently do. This paper is an effort to understand the history oral traditions seem to invoke, the methods I have developed in creating archaeological-oral record conjunctions, and the epistemological assumptions at the root of this endeavour. I then apply these methods to a case study focussing on the Northern Tsimshian in the post-contact era, although I hypothesize that this work has implications for earlier periods and other people’s histories.

**TSIMSHIAN ADAWX**

Tsimshian oral records, called the *adawx*, are a complex literature made more complicated by the history and context of their preservation through the colonial era. Each corporate lineage, or House, owned (and still owns) its own *adawx* that explained the significant relationships legitimizing that lineage’s place in the social and geographical landscape (Marsden 1990; 2000; 2001; 2002). Boas (1912; 1916), Barbeau (1951; 1961), and Levi-Strauss (1958) were especially interested in the mythological aspects of the *adawx*. Oral histories have also been recorded and presented in ethnographies (Garfield 1939; Miller 1997). However, oral traditions represent a distinct class of texts within the Tsimshian oral record. These texts were inherited as heirlooms and purport to relate significant events in the history of specific families, lineages, clans, and village groups (Figure 1). Several hundred have been preserved in print from the work of William Beynon and Henry Tate (Barbeau and Beynon n.d.; Beynon 1941; n.d.; Boas 1912; MacDonald and Cove 1987; Winter 1984). Many Tsimshian ethnographers, such as Boas (1916), based their reconstructions of cultural patterns on published and unpublished collections of oral records (Beynon n.d.; Boas 1912). Others, including Garfield (1939; 1951) and Barbeau (1951; 1961) used Indigenous compilers of oral traditions, such as William Beynon, as an ethnographic source.
The adaxw are both narratives of the past and textual artifacts of the present. Beynon collected and transcribed adaxw as they were told in several contexts, including public ceremonies. As Winter (1984) notes, Beynon cross checked these texts against a variety of sources, including versions from individuals from different lineages and village groups. What he presents is thus a time-stopped version of these narratives, although one that we can assume has some authenticity and similarity to texts told before the colonial era. Reconstructing history from them requires comparative analyses often based on the assumption that recursivity within these texts correlates with greater historical accuracy. However, since specific versions of texts were owned by particular lineage groups, isolated texts may be as historically accurate as suites of narratives.

These texts exist in many forms today. I have heard fragments of them spoken in English by elders, experiences that give me the impression of a single long narrative rather than the smaller texts that have been written down. Used in this context, Elders reference the narrative and the history as a legitimation of knowledge of how the past was and why things are. As an outsider to the Tsimshian, my most frequent encounter is through Beynon’s work, and this analysis is based on 256 texts collected from 72 individuals and preserved in his original notebooks, copies of which I have on microfilm. These versions are ethnohistoric in that they list contextual data, including the name and social role of the storyteller, as well as the date and

**Figure 1. Northern Tsimshian Territory.**
location of the recording. They exist in interlinear form and Beynon seems to have written them down in Tsimshian during the narration and added the direct translation and full English lines later. Most of the texts are emended with notes, often addressed to Boas or Barbeau, which explain specific points of the story, refer to other related texts, or elaborate on aspects of the translation.

**History and Adawx**

Historians of the *Adawx* (Anderson and Halpin 2000; Cove 1987; Harris 1997; Marsden 2000; Winter 1984) recognize Beynon’s profound anthropological expertise. Beynon himself seemed to anticipate that while these texts were sometimes told out of traditional context and preserved in a non-traditional written form, they were legitimate versions of the historical narratives that were inherited and thus historically rooted. Marsden (2001; 2002) argues that structure and consistency were critical aspects of the geopolitical function of these narratives, aspects that were maintained through transmission by inheritance protocols (in which elders taught their heirs exact versions of the texts) and public performance (in which public performance provided a venue for collective scrutiny of the text by people whose interests did not necessarily coincide with the performer’s). The *Adawx* seem to be, at least in part, judicio-legal documents whose details preserved the territorial and ritual obligations of lineages; they were thus summaries of the history of families and communities in some cases extending back to times before which we have archaeological data. They explore the nature and antiquity of contemporary relationships through multiple versions of history.

Despite the historical elements within *Adawx*, an argument that they can be translated into an archaeological view of history must address two critical issues. First, while they may arguably be historical, they are often not primarily so. Does mining oral records for historical facts alter their nature by the imposition of a Western-scientific epistemology? Secondly, what confidence can we have that oral transmission of textual records can have any significant fidelity over tens, perhaps hundreds of generations? Both are really the same question—“how are oral records historical?”—though from two very different anthropological views.

Each of these concerns has merit, though neither precludes the identification of historical data in oral records. The former assumes that the sacred, performative, and interpretive capacities of oral texts are sufficiently specific to a cultural community that they either obviate historical data or render it into a form that is untranslatable to non-Indigenous archaeologists. Marsden (2002: 101–102) argues that such assumptions are themselves ethnocentric as they imply that oral records were unable to manage complex historical data. I argue that the two are not mutually exclusive. Oral traditions have a deeply sacred role in Tsimshian society. They are the narrative links that connect ancestors to descendants and people to the landscape. They underpin the iconography of crests found on architecture, ceremonial garb, and in artistic expression. In many ways, oral records seem to invoke both a human *secular* history and human *spiritual* history as a means of instructing and guiding people today and through the future. They fulfil these capacities in part by presenting a translatable view of the contemporary socio-political landscape.
and of its history to both people within the community and to outsiders.

The latter concern, most recently expressed by Mason (2000, 2006) argues that given the vagaries of transmission error inherent in verbal communication, there is no logical way for texts to be preserved beyond a few generations (see also von Gernet 2000; LaGrande 1997). It is argued that such texts should be seen as largely metaphorical commentaries on contemporary circumstance. Three lines of reasoning suggest otherwise. First, the apparently consistent conjunction between such records and archaeological data over thousands of years requires some explanation, the most parsimonious of which is that they both derive from a common history (see especially Hall 2003; Klimko and Taft 1990; Martindale 2003; Martindale and Marsden 2003; McMillan and Hutchinson 2002; Reimer 2003; Sharpe and Tunbridge 1997; Sobel 2000). Here, I explore more recent historic events, and I agree with Mason (2006) that texts referring to older events are more challenging to translate into archaeology; no doubt this will be a methodological direction from which to build on this work.

Second, some Indigenous communities, such as the Tsimshian, appear to have developed transmission protocols designed to preserve texts through generational transmission (Marsden 2001; 2002), suggesting that replication fidelity is a challenge that can be solved in the absence of writing. Among the Tsimshian, adawx are collective histories transmitted through a line of heirs. Once learned, texts are performed at intergenerational gatherings and ceremonies in which the substance of the narrative is vetted by an audience whose interests would be affected by even slight changes of historic detail. While the texts are owned by individual lineages, the collective tapestry of the broader narrative requires concurrence at a level not visible by focusing only on specific texts and individual-to-individual transmission. Third, as I argue in this paper, the nature of oral texts is not only textual, i.e., they are not simply lists of words that are recounted and transmitted by rote. Instead, they are narratives that are structured around events and people, the storylines of which form an internal architecture to the texts such that the precise wording of a story can vary while its historical accuracy is maintained.

Despite the complicated histories we weave, there is an underlying capacity for translation in the syntax of—and thus some measure of the content of—our historical reconstructions across different cultures. I think that the genesis of this commonality involves the negotiated memorization of the past that we engage in as individuals and communities. This negotiation occurs between us, as we create shared histories, but also within each of us as we construct our own personal histories of identity (Ricouer 2004). I will argue that despite the profound need to recognize the cultural construction and situated variability of such knowledge, there is a relational, though not necessarily substantive similarity to how we memorize history. We may not understand the content of each other’s patterns for memorializing and narrating the past, but we understand that grammars of memory and history exist.

This paper focuses on a methodology for exploring one such grammar, that of chronological order, within a history that conjoins archaeological and oral records. An examination of general principles of syntax in history and oral records can be both controversial and
naïve. At its worst, it implies a colonialism of epistemology that a Western academic view can subsume others (see for example, Mason 2000). At its best, it reduces a dynamic and complicated tapestry of understanding to a few meagre threads. However, such assumptions are a necessary, if unacknowledged part of any inter-cultural translation of history. Finding points of commonality necessarily reduces records and history to a superficial level. However, I argue that this is a required first step for archaeological comparisons to oral records, although one that does not preclude or obviate more richly contextual studies. Shoemaker (2002: 67) makes a similar point and recognizes that explorations of similarity are not a repackaging of universal theorizing, but a humanist commonality to our cognition, one that is similar to our ability to use language, or to our tinkering over identities such as gender (Meskell 1998: 211; 2001) or to our negotiations of non-discursive meanings (Stahl 2002). As Cruikshank (2002: 6) writes, “to relegate [these stories] to only the local and the particular is to oversimplify the very real work that stories do” (emphasis in original).

This view sees the potential for conjunction through interpretive frameworks that accommodate both plurality in epistemology (Hodder 2001; Shanks and Hodder 1995; Trigger 1991; 1998; Wylie 1995) and recognition that history is (re)constructed in the present as a contemporary social commentary (Anderson and Halpin 2000: 35; Bringhurst 1999: 66–67; Cruikshank 1994; 2002). The implication of latitude in empiricism should not constrict interpretation to observations that satisfy Western ideas of objectivity. However, neither should it undermine the utility of generalizable trends in history. Instead, epistemological flexibility promotes a negotiation of interpretation that recognizes that the past was more complex than our ability to reconstruct it (Martindale 2006), that a suite of distinct reconstructions of antiquity promote a closer approximation of this complex past (Wylie 1995: 270), and that non-Western views of history and archaeology complement rather than undermine each other.

In Canada, the academic study of Indigenous oral records has taken on a certain urgency since the 1997 Canadian Supreme Court ruling of the Gitk’san-Wet’suwet’en land claims case. Known as Delgamuukw after one of the appellants, the case was a rejection of a British Columbia Provincial Superior Court ruling in 1991 of a Gitk’san-Wet’suwet’en suit that claimed ancestral ownership of their traditional lands in Northwestern British Columbia (Culhane 1997). The Native community had based their claim largely upon their oral record, data that were initially rejected as hearsay by the trial judge. In upholding the grounds for appeal, Supreme Court Chief Justice Antonio Lamer argued in the majority ruling that Gitk’san-Wet’suwet’en oral records were to be considered legitimate data for historical reconstructions:

The trial judge gave no independent weight to these special oral histories because they did not accurately convey historical truth, because knowledge about these oral histories was confined to the communities whose histories they were and because these oral histories were insufficiently detailed. However…these are features to a greater or lesser extent of all oral histories…The implication of the trial judge’s reasoning is that oral histories should never be given any
independent weight and are only useful as confirmatory evidence in aboriginal rights litigation. I fear that if this reasoning were followed, oral histories of aboriginal peoples would be consistently and systematically undervalued by the Canadian legal system. (Loc. cit. Delgamuukw, para. 98, cited in Persky 1998: 80–81).

Significantly, the Supreme Court ruling argued that it was the responsibility of the courts, and hence the wider Canadian society, to translate the historiography of the oral record:

Notwithstanding the challenges created by the use of oral histories as proof of historical facts, the laws of evidence must be adapted in order that this type of evidence can be accommodated and placed on equal footing with the types of historical evidence that courts are familiar with, which largely consists of historical documents. (Loc. cit. Delgamuukw, para. 87, cited in Persky 1998: 76).

Thus, archaeologists need to think of the common history that is the foundation of archaeology and oral records if we are to make sense of the concept of an orally transmitted literature. Secondly, if we are to become empathetic to the complexities and nuances of Indigenous uses of narrative-as-history, we have an obligation to think of the complex ways that humans relate the experiences of events to an understanding of the past.

**METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES**

In hindsight, I recognize that my archaeological perspective envisions two scales to our understanding of history through which I have sorted data from oral records into fields of greater and lesser potential for conjunction. One axis varies by a scale of the shared nature of experiences; it ranges from isolated individual moments to broad collective experiences that are common to people across spans of space and time. The assumption here is that history varies by context and experience, but that as people build identities out of interpreting significant events in their lives, so too do communities build histories out of locating and historicizing shared experiences. The inference I make is that the greater the scale of shared experience in history, the more likely the event will be preserved in both the archaeological and oral records.

The second axis varies across the ranges of epistemological variability at the root of interpreting and understanding history. Every event, every moment, every reflection is recontextualized through remembering. Our understanding is thus borne not only of our conscious analysis of the past as history, but also of our cultural and individual assumptions. Mutual intelligibility of these doxic (Bourdieu 1977) or non-discursive (Giddens 1984), or aesthetic (Stahl 2002) principles seems to create cultural communities. The remembering and study of history is thus a process of translation within and between individuals creating communities of proximity in both shared experience and culturally constructed means of interpretation. In each case, we assemble a longer narrative or understanding by selecting and interpreting events into ordered meaning. There are two corollaries to this thesis. First, the capacity for translation increases within the objectivist doxic field. Thus, people internal to
a community who share a similar suite of assumptions are more likely to comprehend the subtle and complex history within a historical product, whether it is an archaeological data set or an oral narrative. Second, of the range of interpretive conclusions that can be drawn about history from various data, those that are more descriptive of things and events that have epistemological inertia are more likely to be translatable across doxic boundaries (Trigger 1991) and thus represent the most accessible points of comparison.

As a result, my efforts to engage oral records and apply their historical data to an archaeological understanding of the past are inevitably superficial. I confess this to illustrate both the challenge ahead for archaeology and what I see as a necessary starting point. Modern archaeologists gravitate toward oral traditions since they seem to serve both political and substantive needs, but caution is needed. Oral texts appear to be at times both beguilingly straightforward and potential solutions to three complex and fundamental archaeological needs. The combination can produce enthusiastic over-simplification. First, the oral record complements archaeological reconstructions of the past by providing cultural and historical content for Indigenous history, which is the goal of much archaeological work. Second, oral records also present historic data from an Indigenous perspective, a view that represents a useful counterpoint to the dominance of European perspectives. Much of professional archaeology’s ethical introspection over the past two decades has worked toward this goal. Archaeology is still navigating the uncertain ground over which to link scientific data and Indigenous views of sacredness (White Deer 1998), but oral records seem to be self-evident sources of this viewpoint. The danger lies in the imperfect understanding archaeologists have of both the complexities of the texts themselves and the significance of a contextual setting in which they were perpetuated (Schieffelin 2005). Finally, these texts may provide historical information on Indigenous societies for time periods up to thousands of years old, eras in which archaeological data are hard to locate and recover; the temptation is to view oral records as treasure maps to archaeological data. While these narratives describe historical events, many of the earliest texts are also the most metaphorical, focusing on origins and seemingly mythical landscapes in which human and other spirit-creatures negotiated belonging, being, and the start of history.

Many potential examples explore this subject and method. Sharpe and Tunbridge (1997) have demonstrated that Australian Aboriginal texts have accurately recorded events as old as 10,000 to 13,000 years. The Aboriginal oral record includes origin myths and oral traditions that make reference to significant events such as floods and migrations to the continent by journeys across water. In southeastern Australia, texts can be sorted into those which relate to events before rising water levels when Tasmania was connected to the continent by a land bridge, and those that occur later. Enough of the older texts survive that people remember landscape and territorial divisions of the now inundated land bridge. Similarly, in oral traditions from Queensland, texts of the explosion of volcanoes serves as both a significant chronological marker and as an illustration of the potential antiquity of historic data in an oral record. Texts recorded in the 19th century describe the eruption of three volcanoes, the subse-
quent development of crater lakes, and environmental change from scrub desert conditions to forest parkland. Geological research conducted in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century confirmed that these events and their environmental consequences occurred between 10,000 and 13,000 years ago (Sharpe and Tunbridge 1997). Geological events or environmental changes are often used as points of departure on the Northwest Coast (Budhwa 2002; Hall 2003; McMillan and Hutchinson 2002; McLaren 2003; Sobel 2000).

Although they are different historical products, the collective remembrances of an oral tradition and the material remains of an archaeological record derive from a shared, albeit complex, source. Neither provides unambiguous nor self-evident data on the lives of people in antiquity. Both exist today in fragmentary forms as incomplete subsets of larger suites of data that once informed and related groups of people in complex and multifaceted ways (Anyon \textit{et al.} 1996: 15). While our use of either requires interpretive extrapolations that are subject to error and bias, the effort to define how each conjoins is essential.

**MEMORY AND HISTORY: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE USE OF ORAL TRADITIONS IN ARCHAEOLOGY**

What is too often missing from American Indian studies as a whole, Greg Sarris (1993) suggests, is interruption and risk. Scholars frame the experiences of others with reference to disciplinary norms. Yet, unless we put ourselves in interactive situations, where we are exposed and vulnerable, where these norms are interrupted and challenged, we can never recognize the limitations of our own descriptions. (Cruikshank 2002: 4).

Later in this section I describe an example that seems to illustrate conjunction and thus implies the capacity for non-Indigenous archaeologists to understand, perhaps only superficially, the Indigenous oral record. However, let me begin with a story of my own, one that illustrates how a recent tragic event has become a chronological marker, a touchstone of history for many of us in the Canadian archaeological community.

**Arne Carlson**

My memories of Arne Carlson are necessarily situated and partial, built out of a few brief years together during our graduate work at the University of Toronto and a few encounters during fieldwork in what at the time were, for me, the distant western parts of the continent. I return to my memories of Arne as I am considering the nature of interpretation in archaeology. An odd association perhaps, but you must understand the history of Arne and me. I had returned to a graduate career with the mix of fear and ambition that most of us feel when we realize the implications of decisions we have made. Arne was a year ahead of me and in many ways my elder and my opposite. I knew little of western Canadian archaeology, coming into it from the unlikely direction of the Chilean Formative. Arne was himself an archaeological institution, practically an artifact himself—not that he was antiquated, but that he had a certain gravitas, the accumulated patina of
experience and lore acquired through a childhood of growing up in archaeology, the golden son of our first family. I was reserved while he was boisterous; I was uncertain where he exuded confidence; I had imagined myself as a student of post-processualism, a conceit that made Arne smile. Arne took me in, helped me find a home in the western archaeology landscape. He taught me about interpretation, never directly by instruction, but by being opinionated and curious, theoretical and pragmatic, and by reminding me that our purpose is to explore the past, not just the ways in which the past can be explored. I can think of my life in archaeology as having a period before and after Arne.

For me, Arne has become a fixture of my history—a chronological and thematic anchor around which I have built a historical narrative of experience that informs my identity as an archaeologist. Some of these anchors fade away; all change through use; and some, like Arne has for me, crystallized through deep, and in this case, tragic feelings. As the years pass and the memories of him both fade and solidify, he has become, for me, one of the thousands of touchstones I have constructed—in this case reminding me of the aspirations and values he had—a standard against which I try to find balance, a lens through which I consider myself. I do not think that I am alone in finding that Arne’s death has become a historical threshold; I think that all of us who knew him find that event, both privately and as a community, a chronological marker of our lives and our collective history. We seem to return regularly to his memory; at each Canadian Archaeological Association I have attended since 1998, those who knew him recall the events of his life and death. We recollect in part to remind ourselves of the past but also to connect with each other and to construct order to our disparate experiences of history. To an outsider, these events would speak of the past, but not of this self-reflexive narrative of history. Neither would they evoke the interaction of individual and event, the construction of a historical community, the signification of meaning out of the abundance of observations. To an outsider, the events of Arne and Leslie’s deaths might lack an understanding of their influence on us as individuals and as a community, but they would not be untranslatable.

**Grammars in Remembering**

Sharing and recollecting tragic events seem to me to be just one of the many grammars that humans have for navigating and locating ourselves in the experience of time. I can think of others that are more specific within subdivisions of modern Western society, such as the use of family photographs. Sharing one’s family photographs is usually restricted to moments of great intimacy between friends, a threshold over which we invite a select few with whom we have, or hope to have, a close personal relationship. I have seen the photographs of others, and I have shared my own, and each case is marked by an unspoken understanding that these disjointed images represent a constructed narrative of individual, family, community, and era. We understand them in part because we and our parents and grandparents have used photographs to record our own family histories. We recognize the subtle clues for chronological seriation: the contour of an automobile, the particular colours of an older instant Polaroid, the cut of hair and clothing. We categorize them into a narrative by reference to a familiar structure of informal conven-
tions and by knowledge of the formal rules of school, wedding, and holiday portraiture. We punctuate the static narrative with spoken and performed lists of events and individuals woven into a mesh that both creates and references the broader span of cultural history. Sharing them is a performance in which the photograph is both a source of history and a prop to the re-enactment and re-contextualization of the past (Cochran 2004). Just as in the story of Arne’s life and death, an outsider would see that these images speak of the past but not of the construction of a historical community, the signification of meaning out of the abundance of observations. To an outsider, these images would be static and simple.

My thesis here is that there is an underlying uniformity to the syntax of our historical reconstructions, one that lies below the level of recording events and involves the negotiated memorization of the past. This thesis is controversial in that it argues for a common foundation to our process of remembering history, one that should permit some form of translation between oral records and archaeological interpretations, such as through a concept of a linear sequence of events. I cannot actually demonstrate why this is, although Ricouer (2004: 52–55) offers a philosophical justification that, despite the volatility of imagination and the vagaries of recollection, there is a common reality, which he refers to as “faithfulness”, to recollected history. The assumption seems necessary if we are to embark on even an exploration of how archaeological and oral records share a common historic source.

If we consider that oral traditions are both products of history and indigenous forms of historiography, then the universality derives from the assumption that chronological order is a universal aspect of human historiography. This appears to be both tautological and limited. The apparent circularity of assuming that historiography is chronological because it examines history—which is by definition chronological—can be circumvented if we assume a universality to history. History is the past as seen from the present, a relationship that is inevitably sequential. While this solves the surficial tautology, it opens the door to essentializing culturally distinct modes of exploring the past into linear time. My only solution to this is to argue that the Tsimshian oral traditions I have worked with seem preoccupied with chronological order. While this does not preclude cyclical time scales and mythological time frames (see Cove 1987: 27), it implies a recognition of linearity in Indigenous history analogous to archaeology.

My approach follows Marsden (2001; 2002), Whiteley (2002), and Yellowhorn (2002) in assuming that while culturally specific knowledge informed an individual’s use and understanding of oral texts, even individuals who shared such narratives required a system of translation and organization to invoke them. In archaeology we cannot reconstruct the individual contexts of their use and meaning, but we can aspire to reconstructing some aspects of the conventions that structured them. Rosaldo (1980b) and Cruikshank (1990) have separately analyzed the use of space and landscapes as mnemonic structures that provide both an index and a narrative to oral texts. In both cases, the physical landscape encodes a historical landscape of significant events and their consequences. Landscapes are used as structuring devises in Tsimshian oral traditions (Marsden 2002), but I have focused on a suite of conventions that
identify a sequence of events that form the chronological index of an oral tradition (Marsden 2001; 2002; Martindale and Marsden 2003; Miller 1998). Examples of chronological syntax in oral traditions are also known from Central and South America (Berezkin 1996–97), Nisga’a and Gitksan peoples of western Canada (Sterritt et al. 1998), Caddoan native-language speakers of the central plains of North America (Echo-Hawk 2000), the Mahican and Schaghticoke people of eastern United States (Handsman and Richard 1995), and several communities in Africa (Somjee 2000).

Methodological Issues
Like my story of Arne and Leslie, oral texts are, at their most accessible and superficial level, descriptions of observable things: the natural world, material objects, human behaviours and events. These are data that are most likely to be recorded and transmitted with minimum distortion between people and thus across the cultural divides of space and time. Manipulation of these descriptions is certainly possible, but an analysis of descriptions of events and landscapes of the past is among our most neutral reading of either an oral or a written text (Wood 1990). This does not mean that such aspects of an oral record are objective, only that they have a higher probability of being transmitted without substantial modification.

In addition to recognizing that descriptions of events and things are only more resistant to manipulation and not objective, deeper levels of meaning within an oral record are essential to an understanding of the history that events and settings represent. I think of the relationship as four levels of increasingly abstract meanings (Table 1) along an axis from more superficial, widely accessible knowledge to particular, interpretive understandings. Yellowhorn (2002) identifies a similar axis that he terms a difference between an external and an internal view. If observations of things represent the most descriptive, externally accessible level of interpretation, then principles of organization and patterning are more arbitrary and more difficult to identify. Oral traditions seem intended in part to educate younger generations in the principles of social, economic, and political organization within a community. How a society was anticipated to operate can be explored in texts through descriptions of such things as scheduling, social or moral obligations, economic activities, jurisprudence and conflict resolution, ancestral claims to rights, or the origins of obligations and debt. In this case, the perception of reality by the long chain of storytellers influences how the inference of organization is made and transmitted. Thus, this level of interpretation is both increasingly arbitrary and susceptible to modification. The perceived order and organization of a community can

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<th>Table 1. Levels of meaning in oral texts.</th>
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<td><strong>Descriptive/External</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Observable:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- the natural world; material things.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- human behaviour, events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- relationships between people</td>
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<tr>
<td>- economic, social, political organization</td>
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<td><strong>Interpretable:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- symbolic meaning of things and actions</td>
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<td>- cause and effect of events</td>
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<td><strong>Abstract:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- ideology, religion, cosmology</td>
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<tr>
<td>- aesthetics</td>
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<td><strong>Arbitrary/Internal</strong></td>
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be distinguished from explanations of causality, which represent an even more abstract level of meaning. Interpretations include discussions of the cause and effect of events, the symbolic meaning of things and actions, and the role of spiritual knowledge and spirit-beings in influencing the course of human affairs. It is rare for an oral text not to contain interpretations of the past. Indeed, in many cases this is the apparent purpose of the text. Tsimshian oral traditions, for example, seem to focus on discussions of and lessons learned by human interaction with the spiritual realm. Finally, an understanding of the symbolic and causal associations made by a cultural community can lead to an anthropological understanding of their abstractions in terms of aesthetics, cosmology, ideology, and religion. Here I am following Marcus and Flannery’s (1993) somewhat essentialized definitions of these ideas in archaeology as underlying assumptions of how the society, the world, and the divine operate or should operate. The significant point is that oral texts can be read on a number of levels, the more superficial of which are appropriate for initial comparison to archaeological data, and the more abstract of which lend themselves to anthropological study (Marsden 2002: 135).

This is not to suggest that representational data revealed in oral traditions are historically more accurate than arbitrary data, only that it is more clearly identifiable from an outside point of view. Once identified, the historical accuracy of such data can be evaluated against other sources of information, such as the archaeological record. However, if conjunction exists at an observable, descriptive level, it presents an opportunity to move to the more abstract levels for comparison, levels at which archaeological data are notoriously difficult to interpret.

Yellowhorn (2002) argues that internalist/externalist perspectives represent negotiations of identity within individuals, as well as between distinct groups. As such, the sliding scale of arbitrariness in meaning of Table 1 also applies to the scale of shared understanding and thus the potential for translation across epistemological and cultural divides. Descriptive aspects of a historical data set are more easily comprehended regardless of cultural context. Thus, a description of an ancient landscape in either an oral text or a paleoenvironmental analysis has a greater chance of being understood as it was intended by the storyteller or archaeologist to a non-expert than an analysis of the epistemological principles on which either is based. More arbitrary or internal understandings are comprehensible to smaller and smaller groups and require increasing levels of contextual knowledge. Complex contextual knowledge increases the difficulty of translation, and decreases the potential for finding clear conjunction between disparate epistemologies, such as the archaeological and oral records.

To some extent, the argument that archaeology can engage oral records on multiple levels simultaneously is an effort to situate archaeology in Thom’s (2003) historical review of anthropological approaches to oral records. However, it is also a confrontation of the assumption that exploring and simplifying these texts into patterned modes of transmitting knowledge undermines their value or their indigeneity. As Thom argues, modern anthropological scholarship is itself the cumulation of limited functional, structural, and logocentric approaches. Vansina’s (1965; 1985) widely cited and simplified typology iden-
tifies four broad types of oral products, including the personal narratives of oral history and the collective histories of oral tradition. The latter are fundamental to the historical fabric of communities that rely on them for the accumulation of knowledge regarding spiritual and human history through which contemporary geopolitical relationships are constructed. The literate modern world has few examples of such systems of communication other than writing. The oral traditions at the root of biblical and Homeric texts are familiar but distant examples (Hearon 2004). My story serves to illustrate that communication systems are frequently shorthand for detailed culturally specific contextual knowledge. Such systems propagate through use and through the transmission of a suite of formal and informal rules, a nexus and coda of shared understandings and connotations, and a context in which the transmission of information is situated in a network of social relations (Goody 1987; McKean 2003).

**CHRONOLOGICAL MARKERS IN TSIMSHIAN ADAWX**
No single orthodox view of history is presented in Tsimshian oral records, except perhaps within lineages of their specific history. Instead, the body of texts present a series of situated viewpoints on history from which each member of the community-as-audience constructed a historical narrative. As Sterritt et al. (1998) have shown, the public performance of these texts is as much about vetting the history therein as it is about weaving a meaningful commentary. The multiplicity of versions of similar events implies that constructing historical orthodoxy was part of the active negotiation of maintaining an oral record (Marsden 2002). Plurality of form does not imply the absence of a common history; indeed the existence of multiple versions of the same event spoken from different points of view suggests a deep respect for historical accuracy, one that recognizes human fallibility and attempts to overcome parochialism through plurality. The arena of public performance required that texts be told to those audiences most affected by the claims of privilege and ownership. Social proximity seems to correlate with historical consensus since most texts are those of lineage groups and few texts represent versions by individuals. Even at the scale of multiple lineages there is often consensus: most texts from Northern Tsimshian groups agree on historical patterns though they may differ in the context and details. The greatest difference occurs between sources that have the largest social, geographical, economic, and political difference. For example, the Gitk’san and Nisga’a literature differ over territorial claims along their border, although Sterritt et al. (1998) have reconstructed 19th-century versions that derive from a time of shared feasting, around which there appears to have been more agreement.

Marsden, Archer, and I have constructed a unified Tsimshian history in the form of a self-referential index of chronological events referenced in the oral record (Archer 2000; 2001; 2006; Marsden 1990; 2000; 2001; Martindale 1999; 2003; 2006 Martindale and Marsden 2003). The assumption we make is that while the details and interpretations of the indexed events were subject to negotiation and interpretation, the use of a common series of chronologically ordered subjects for sorting collective history was shared (Marsden 2002). Thus, while the meaning of these events is shallow when framed as an index, it renders them in a form with greater
scale and less ambiguous interpretive meaning, increasing their capacity for translation into archaeology. Chronological control is necessary for any historical data, and this would be especially true in an oral tradition where competing claims to rights of territory are resolved at least partly by ancestral title (McLaren 2003; Page 1986: 280). If sufficient texts exist, we can reconstruct significant parts of the chronological index of an oral tradition much as dendrochronologies are assembled from individual cross-sections of trees. In such cases, the absolute date of events can be estimated by tracking the internal events and estimating their duration. This is useful when the historical context of chronological markers is well known, such as in the recent past, or when the detail of the oral records is rich, such as with the Tsimshian adax. In cases where only a few texts exist, we can still identify the time of the events if the chronological marker or associated event can be dated through independent means (see, for example, Budhwa 2002; Hall 2003; and McLaren 2003 for comparison to geological events).

Table 2 lists the chronological series. One of the more obvious chronological markers in Tsimshian texts is the arrival of Europeans, usually referred to as “Whites.” Of the 256 oral traditions from Beynon’s (n.d.) work, 39 record events that took place after the arrival of the Whites. Another 19 can be identified as post-contact texts collected by Beynon and Barbeau (MacDonald and Cove 1987). The chronological notation is not always related to the rest of the story, suggesting that the use of a marker was a conscious reference to an index. Many texts that note the coming of the Whites are not about Europeans at all, but refer instead to events within Indigenous society that occurred in the post-contact era. This suggests that the chronological syntax is an essential but autonomous component of the story’s structure. Some of the markers are clearly turns of phrase that convey culturally specific meaning. For example, the period before the arrival of Europeans is known as “Recent Times” (e.g., Beynon n.d.: 47), although it appears to refer to events of the last 1,000 years.

Most chronological markers appear in multiple forms that reflect the secondary events that subdivided the major historical episode. For example, “the war with the Tlingit,” a significant event in Tsimshian history that occurred about 1,800 years ago (Marsden 2001; Martindale and Marsden 2003), is sometimes marked as, “When the Tlingit lived on Dundas Island” (Beynon n.d.: 66). This was where the Tlingit launched attacks against the Tsimshian. The period after the war is sometimes noted as “When people had saltwater and river villages” (Beynon n.d.: 5; 37; 49). After the war, the Tsimshian settlement pattern changed and all village groups collectively followed a seasonal round from coast to interior for defence. The events that characterize a major chronological episode themselves have a chronological order.

Table 2 also lists absolute dates for some of the significant events in Tsimshian history as compiled by Marsden and Martindale (Marsden 2001; Martindale and Marsden 2003). These dates are estimated by linking events of the oral traditions with data from an external source, such as archaeology. For example, Marsden (2001) has shown that the Tsimshian war with the Tlingit was the culmination of generations of migrations of people from the interior to the coast that resulted in conflict over coastal territory and resources. The conflict was not actually between the Tsimshian and
### Table 2. Partial sequence of historical events used as a chronological index in Tsimshian oral traditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral Tradition Relative Chronology</th>
<th>Estimated Absolute Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>After the arrival of the Whites:</strong></td>
<td>AD 1787 (Halpin and Seguin 1990; Martindale 2006; Martindale and Jurakic 2004; 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relocation to Fort Simpson.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ascendancy of Ligeex.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Winter-style villages built on Skeena River for fur trading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recent Times:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decline of the Ginakangiik.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emergence of Ligeex as leader of the Gispaklo’ots.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saltwater and River Villages:</strong></td>
<td>1500 BP (Matson and Coupland 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Development of seasonal mobility between coast and interior.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All Tsimshian tribes winter at Metlakatla (for defence).</td>
<td>1800 BP (Archer 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>War with the Tlingit:</strong></td>
<td>2000–1800 BP (Archer 2000; 2001; 2006; Marsden 2001; Martindale and Marsden 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tsimshian alliance drives the Tlingit north.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tsimshian retreat inland to Skeena River.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tlingit attack, move into the coastal territories to the Skeena River.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conflicts over land and resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Northerners on Dundas Island.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Stage Migrations:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dispersal of the Eagle Clan among Tsimshian tribes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Migration of the Eagle Clan to Tsimshian territory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Arrival of Raven Clan people in Tsimshian territory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dispersal of the Raven Clan people throughout Tsimshian territory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Stage Migrations:</strong></td>
<td>3000 BP (Martindale and Marsden 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Migration of people from Kitsumkalum to the Nass River.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Arrival of newcomers at Kitselas Canyon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Departure from Texmlaxam.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before the Migrations:</strong></td>
<td>5000 BP (Coupland 1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When the Tsimshian lived only on the coast.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When people first moved to Kitselas Canyon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Origin Texts:**
- After the flood.

**Sources:** Archer 2001; Beynon n.d.; MacDonald and Cove 1987; Marsden 2000; 2001, Marsden and Galois 1995; Martindale and Marsden 2003.
the Tlingit, although that is how it is known in Tsimshian oral traditions, but between the Tsimshian and newcomers to the Tlingit area whom the Tlingit expelled. At first, these newcomers drove the coastal-dwelling Tsimshian south and east into river valleys by attacking individual villages. The Tsimshian eventually reclaimed their land by forming a multi-village alliance to counter-attack. Archer (2001) has identified a period of village abandonment and reoccupation matching these events that dates to between 1,900 and 1,800 years ago.

What appear to be the oldest texts make reference to the distant past, times of glaciations, floods, and a formative human world of talking animals and spiritual creatures. We have approached these oldest texts most tentatively since they are the least detailed, perhaps a consequence of the many generations of retelling. Our work has focused on the more recent events, in part because of the greater detail in these adawx and the existence of comparable European texts. The latter present their own challenges, such as the disagreement between the primary Tsimshian ethnographers over the nature of pre- and post-contact settlement patterns. Garfield used Beynon as her primary source of information on the Tsimshian, while Boas relied on the texts collected by Henry Tate. Their descriptions of settlement patterns appear to conflate traits from different times. Boas (1916: 394; 398–99; 482) argued that the settlement pattern and seasonal round discussed above existed prior to, and disappeared shortly after, contact with Europeans when all the Skeena River Tsimshians moved to Fort Simpson after its construction in 1834. Garfield (1939: 175; 1951: 33), on the other hand, argued that prior to contact there were permanent, year-round communities in the Skeena valley. She argues that sometime before AD 1800 Tsimshian people moved first to the coast, where they built villages, and later to Fort Simpson, although they did not abandon the Skeena valley villages (Garfield 1951: 33–34). Both the adawx and the archaeological record indicate that the patterns described by Boas and Garfield occurred at different times. Tsimshian people owned and used the Skeena valley and coastal areas throughout the last 3,000 years. Occupation of the valley intensified in two time periods: 1) during the war with the Tlingit about 1800 BP when the Tsimshian build defensive villages on the lower tributaries (Martindale and Marsden 2003); and 2) once the European fur trade market had shifted to land based furs after AD 1805 when village groups established village sites along the Skeena trade route (Marsden and Galois 1995; Martindale 2003). Coastal territories were also continually occupied, although the settlement pattern shifted around 1,800 years ago with the abandonment and then re-occupation of the Prince Rupert Harbour (Archer 2001). During the 19th century, villages were relocated from the harbour to Lax Kw’alaams (Port Simpson). Boas’s description of the pre-contact settlement pattern appears to be true of the late pre-contact era (up to AD 1787) and does not include year-round winter-style villages in the Skeena valley as Garfield stated. However, archaeological data indicate that Garfield is also correct that the Skeena valley sites were not abandoned after contact (Martindale 1999).

If the above chronological sequence is in some measure historically accurate, then Tsimshian history has its own historically
linear structure around chronological markers. If translation from oral records into Western history is possible on this superficial level, can conjunctions exist in other ways? Elsewhere (Martindale 1999; 2003) I have argued that the Tsimshian historical, archaeological, and oral records are independently interpretable as evidence of the development of an indigenous regional political organization in the post-contact era under the leadership of Ligeex of the Gispaklo’ots. Here I want to examine and discuss the oral record more closely for points of conjunction to archaeology in terms of increasingly abstract levels of meaning. The subset of texts recorded by Beynon (n.d.; MacDonald and Cove 1987) that refer to events after the arrival of the Whites covers a wide range of topics from the cause of diseases (e.g., Beynon n.d.: 205, “The Narrative of the Epidemic of the Excrement of Blood”) to the consequences of violating specific trade alliance prerogatives (e.g., Beynon n.d.: 8, “The Last Raid of Legex on the [Skeena] Gitksans”). However, descriptive data of observable phenomena are relatively easy to identify regardless of the subject. For example, several texts describe how pictographs were painted on a cliff-face at the mouth of the Nass River:

The chief had his tribeswomen make a large basket from strong roots and large enough to hold a man and all his articles of painting. As soon as they were ready to paint this picture, Legaix [Ligeex] sent his messengers to all the tribes, calling them to gather to this place called Kstiyanex... These all assembled here, on their way to fish eulachon, and Legaix called out to all the gathering, “I am now to have my picture painted on this cliff, which will be for our future children to behold. They shall know the power that is our own.” (Matthew Johnson, Laknits, Gipaklo’ots in MacDonald and Cove 1987: 122).

The Nass River pictographs were located on a cliff at a place now called Ten Mile Creek. They were located and described by Beynon before they were erased early in the 20th century. Other oral traditions describe Ligeex commissioning similar paintings on the Skeena and Kutzematheen rivers. Figure 2 shows the well-known Tyee pictographs on the Skeena River. In the adawx, the artist is named Nisaot or Dawxensk in different texts, which may reflect different painters or different names of the same painter. These names could also be adjectives since the word dawxensk (alternate form, dexansk) means “support” in Tsimshian; there is a story that records how a man who helped Ligeex took the name Dawxensk to commemorate his allegiance (Beynon n.d.: 120). This example illustrates the methodological point that we can identify basic observable data from oral records: a painting was made at a particular location, in a specific manner and a similar image has been identified archaeologically. Are these the same? We can only infer so from the description of the location and the content of the imagery. Such an inference requires that we assume that oral records contain descriptions of things that are not exclusively understandable to those in the historic community that produced them.

Going beyond the conjunction of things and events, we can compare the oral and archaeological records in the operational aspects of peoples’ economic, social, and political organization. For example, some texts describe the his-
The historical context of the events which lead to the pictographs being painted. Early in the contact era, the sea otter population collapsed and the Tsimshian began importing land-based furs from the east to meet the demand of European fur traders (Marsden and Galois 1995). This development shifted the economic power from coastal groups to those lineages that held rights and alliances with interior peoples, such as the Gitksan and the Carrier. This shift precipitated a series of events involving Ligeex, leader of the Gispaklo’ots village group. He is described as owning rights to inland fur trading, which prior to contact involved moose hides and groundhog skins for ceremonial clothes. He was able to parlay this privilege into an alliance that controlled the trade down three of the four major access routes to the coast: the Stikine, the Nass, and the Skeena rivers. The only route beyond his influence was Douglas Arm through Kitimat. As his economic influence rose, he sought to wield greater power. His ambitions confronted the traditional Tsimshian system of dispersed power so much so that the other village group leaders plotted to murder him:

He really seemed to have gotten up to be head of all the chiefs and this was why all of the different tribes were jealous of him and the Gispaklo’ots tribe. So this was why once all of the tribes made plans that they would kill Ləgex [Ligeex] and then the Gispaklo’ots would go down in prestige as now Ləgex had too much power and the same with all the Gispaklo’ots. So while the people were all at the Skeena River then was when they made

Figure 2. Pictography of Ligeex and Coppers on the Skeena River at Tyee. Photo by A. Martindale.
their plans that they would kill Ləgex during the winter when all of the people were at Metlakatla. (H.D. Pierce in Beynon n.d.: 120).

These texts record that when the pictographs were painted, the Tsimshian followed a seasonal round of economic activity between the Skeena valley in the summer and on the coast in the winter. We also know that they split up into their village territories in the summers, but coalesced into neighbouring villages at Metlakatla in the winters. It is implied in this passage and made clear in others that during the early part of the land-based fur trade, village groups were ranked into a hierarchy of status, but that there was no regional leader of all the Tsimshian villages (Martindale 2003). Archaeological data (Table 3) from the early post-contact era conform to this model of seasonality and socio-political organization (Martindale 1999). Large village sites with winter occupations are found throughout the Prince Rupert Harbour area that is still referred to as Metlakatla. In the interior, the late pre-contact pattern of small summer-occupied hamlets scattered throughout the lower Skeena River watershed continued into the early 19th century. My point is that we can read such texts for some understanding of the patterns and habits of people’s lives; the texts speak of specific individuals and events, but they also illustrate peoples’ tendencies or expectations.

In many cases, the purpose of the adaux is to educate others of a situated interpretation of historical events. Four texts refer to the plot on Ligeex’s life from the work of Beynon (Beynon n.d.: 64; 120; Macdonald and Cove 1987: 25; 30). All of them have been preserved by members of Ligeex’s own Gispaklo’ots descendents (namely, Henry Pearce. H.D. Pierce, John Tate, and James Pearcy). In each case, it is argued that by foiling the murder plot, Ligeex was able to translate the wealth that the Gispaklo’ots had accumulated through the fur trade into regional political authority. Ligeex learned of the murder plot through a niece married into a rival lineage, and he pre-emptively challenged the other leaders each to a potlatch, arguing that if they disputed his emerging power, they should confront him using traditional Tsimshian means—the competitive feast. When no individual rose to meet him, he then challenged all the leaders collectively, demanding that they either match his wealth or acknowledge his supremacy. In one version of the story, Ligeex is reported to have said:

“If anyone wants to challenge me let him walk out and we will combat in wealth and we will see who is the wealthiest.” After he was finished his reception dance and after he distributed coppershields to each one of the chiefs and caribou skins to each one of the headmen, who were the spokesmen of each chief. And in this way, without warning, Ləgex elevated himself above all of the Tsimshians and the Tsimshians knew that Ləgex was victorious as no one arose to challenge Ləgex. The people knew he had more coppershields among the chiefs and no one knew how many he possessed. Well, as soon as Ləgex had finished doing this he gathered together his tribe and said to them, “We shall make a picture, that we may show how many coppershields I would have used and we will select a place where we
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Phase 1 AD 1750–1810</th>
<th>Phase 2 1810–1850</th>
<th>Phase 3 1850–1875</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Material Trends</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Settlement:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coast</strong></td>
<td>2-tier hierarchy</td>
<td>3-tier hierarchy</td>
<td>3-tier hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interior</strong></td>
<td>Summer hamlets &amp; camps</td>
<td>Villages &amp; camps</td>
<td>Villages &amp; camps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coast</strong></td>
<td>Extended family plank house</td>
<td>Extended family plank house</td>
<td>Extended family plank house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interior</strong></td>
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<td>Extended family plank house</td>
<td>Extended family plank house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsistence:</strong></td>
<td>Stability in traditional foods</td>
<td>Increase in traditional foods</td>
<td>Decline in traditional foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coast</strong></td>
<td>Stored foods</td>
<td>Stored/purchased foods</td>
<td>Stored/purchased foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interior</strong></td>
<td>Food collection and storage</td>
<td>Food collection/purchased foods</td>
<td>Food collection/purchased foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imported Materials</strong></td>
<td>Few imported goods</td>
<td>Primarily ornaments</td>
<td>Ornaments/tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Technology</strong></td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Decline in groundstone</td>
<td>Decline in groundstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hybrid Technology</strong></td>
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<td>None evident</td>
<td>None evident</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social/Political Trends</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong></td>
<td>Marine-based fur trade</td>
<td>Land-based fur trade</td>
<td>Land-based fur trade</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
<td>Ranked local groups</td>
<td>Regional chiefdom</td>
<td>Regional chiefdom</td>
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<td><strong>Oral Traditions</strong></td>
<td>Defensive Alliance</td>
<td>Tsimshian autonomy</td>
<td>Tsimshian autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rise of Gispaklo’ots and Ligeex</td>
<td>Rise of Gispaklo’ots and Ligeex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 4 1875–1920</th>
<th>Phase 5 1920–1952</th>
<th>Phase 6 1952–present</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-tier hierarchy</td>
<td>2-tier hierarchy</td>
<td>Urbanization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towns</td>
<td>Towns</td>
<td>Towns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Villages &amp; camps</td>
<td>Villages</td>
<td>Cabins</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended-family plank house</td>
<td>Single-family house</td>
<td>Single-family house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victorian architecture</td>
<td>Victorian architecture</td>
<td>Suburban architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family plank house</td>
<td>Single family house</td>
<td>Single family house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional architecture</td>
<td>A-frame architecture</td>
<td>A-frame architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House pit (winter)</td>
<td>House on pilings</td>
<td>House of pilings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in traditional foods</td>
<td>Decline in traditional foods</td>
<td>Decline in traditional foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stored/purchased foods</td>
<td>Stored/purchased foods</td>
<td>Stored/purchased foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food collection/purchased foods</td>
<td>Food collection/purchased foods</td>
<td>Food collection/purchased foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily tools with medicinals, clothing and recreational objects</td>
<td>Wide range of goods</td>
<td>Wide range of goods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase in groundstone</td>
<td>Decline in groundstone</td>
<td>Decline in groundstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass tools</td>
<td>Increase in glass tools</td>
<td>Decrease in glass tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource industries</td>
<td>Resource industries</td>
<td>Resource industries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Market economy</td>
<td>Market economy</td>
<td>Market economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ranked hierarchy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tsimshian resistance</td>
<td>Tsimshian resistance</td>
<td>Tsimshian autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to traditional ranking</td>
<td>Traditional ranking</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Marsden and gallois 1995; Martindale 1999; 2003; 2006; Martindale and Jurakic 2004; 2006.
will make it....” Now the mouth of
the Nass River is where every canoe
goes to when gathering oolichans
and it will be a good place to make
the picture and Ten Mile Pt. will be
a good place to make it. And this
the Gispaklo’ots done. They made
a picture which was to be the face
of Lágéx and all around the human
face and there were three score
and fourteen copper shields. (H.D.
Pierce in Beynon n.d.: 120)

Being unable to, or perhaps by
choosing not to meet the challenge, the
Tsimshian leaders effectively allowed
Ligeex to become their de facto lead-
ing chief. It is possible to interpret this
as an imposition of power by Ligeex on
the other leaders, but I prefer to also
see their agency in allowing and elevat-
ing Ligeex as a unifying leader in their
stance towards Europeans. Ligeex’s
rising power is reflected in his alli-
ance with the Hudson’s Bay Company
through the marriage of his daughter
Sudaahl to the post’s clerk and med-
ical officer, Dr. Kennedy (Dean 1994;
Marsden and Galois 1995). Several texts
indicate that the Hudson’s Bay Company
(HBC) was under the influence of the
Gispaklo’ots (Marsden and Galois 1995;
Martindale 2003). While this is a situ-
ated perspective, access by indigenous
traders to the HBC was reportedly con-
trolled by Ligeex. Such a level of control
was possible because the HBC moved
its post from its original location in
Tsimshian territory on the Nass River to
Gispaklo’ots territory at Lax Kw’alaams.
After construction of Fort Nass, the HBC
discovered that the main interior-to-
coast trade route was not the Nass River,
but the Skeena River 100 km to the south
(Dean 1994). They scouted locations
on the Skeena, at what would eventu-
ally become Port Essington, but chose
Fort Simpson for reasons they never
articulated. The Tsimshian oral record
indicates that Ligeex’s daughter Sudaal
influenced the decision to move to Fort
Simpson through her husband Dr. Ken-
nedy (Marsden and Galois 1995):

When the Hudson’s Bay Com-
pany first established itself at
Crabapple Point at the mouth of
the Nass River, they stayed there
for three years. An officer of the
company had married the daugh-
ter of the great chief Ligeex, and
she lived with her husband at
Hlgusgan’moolks (Small Trees of
Wild Crabapple) … After they had
been there for three years they
found the site unsuitable, as there
was no fresh water supply nor shel-
ter from the north wind, during
the winter. All of this the Great
Ligeex knew. Being anxious for
the welfare of his daughter, he told
his son-in-law Dr. Kennedy, “I have
a place for you and your people.
Come to Laxhlgu’alaams (On
Small Wild Roses). Here we can
visit you frequently and help you
in many ways… At this time, Place
of Small Wild Roses had been only
a camping place used by people
en route to the Nass River for
oolichan fishing each tribe having
their own location to camp and
make fishing perparatives. (Sam
Bennett, Nisp’iins, Gitluts’aaw, in
Barbeau and Beynon n.d. [cited in
Marsden 1997]).

The effect of relocating the fort was
to bring the HBC within the jurisdic-
tion of the Gispaklo’ots. The HBC may
not have recognized the implications
of the move (Dean 1994), but Indigenous
traders now had to negotiate with the Gispaklo’ots for access to the trading post (Marsden and Galois 1995; Martindale 2003). I have argued that the relocation of the HBC fort to Lax Kw’alaams was part of an emerging three-tiered settlement hierarchy in archaeological settlement patterns dating from the early-to-mid 19th century (Martindale 1999; 2000; 2003; 2006). At the highest level was the Aboriginal community at Fort Simpson, which became a centre for feasts and ceremonies after the late 1830s (Dean 1994). By 1850 it had a permanent Aboriginal population of over a thousand (Garfield 1939; 333; Murray 1985:36). Below this regional centre was a tier of interior villages located within local group territories along the Skeena River, the main interior-to-coast fur trade route. Archaeological evidence suggests that during the late 19th century, these villages become occupied year-round (Martindale 2006). These villages were constructed after contact to allow the Tsimshian to participate in both the traditional subsistence economy and the fur trade economy (Martindale 2003). The lowest scale tier of settlements in the post-contact era consisted of small fishing and hunting camps located throughout village group territories. Traditional food production was necessary despite the increase in market exchange since food could not be obtained in quantity from Europeans until the late 19th century (Martindale 2003). Archaeological evidence of regionalization in settlement patterns reflects regionalization in economic and political relations that supports the interpretation of the oral traditions that Ligeex had become the paramount chief of the Tsimshian.

Adawx are also an exploration of the abstract and the aesthetic. For archaeologists, this is the most challenging aspect of both oral records and history in general. The interpretation of belief and non-discursive understandings, which structure and motivate actors in the past, remains an elusive goal. Tsimshian oral records reflect the history of the relationship between people and the spiritual realm, aspects of the past rarely discernable in archaeological data. However, cultural abstractions also include the aesthetics of material culture (Stahl 2002). In the Tsimshian context, the oral traditions and the archaeological data of the 19th century reflect an aesthetic shift in the conception of European-ness from a period of opulence, in which European objects embodied power and status, to a period of frugality in which traditional material culture re-emerged along with the use of traditional manufacturing methods on European material culture (see Martindale and Jurakic [2006] for a full discussion of the archaeological data).

With Europeans came market exchange, a system that benefited the Tsimshian who controlled the supply of furs. During the early years of the fur trade, successful leaders, such as Ligeex, were able to forge alliances between interior suppliers and coastal traders while defending their access to the European market. European luxury items became fashionable and leaders were recognized for their wealth and power. In 1825, the HBC sent its vessel, the William and Anne, on its first trading mission to the Nisga’a, northern neighbors of the Tsimshian. The master trader (Henry Halwell) and his clerk (Alexander Mackenzie) encountered an Indigenous population familiar with European products and trade. Most of the Nisga’a had guns and many wore European items of clothing. They also possessed more tobacco than the Europeans, a deficit the Nisga’a recognized and tried to exploit by offering
their own at an exorbitant price (Dean 1994: 46). The importance of European material goods is also recorded in the oral record. In the mid-19th century, the Gitksan circumvented Ligeex’s trading rights by shipping furs to the Nisga’a through the Kitselas. Texts from both the Tsimshian and Gitksan oral tradition describe how Ligeex razed five Gitksan villages in reprisal:

The chief (Ləgex) now planned to make war on all of the Upper Skeena villages because he had heard that the Gitsələsnə had been up among the Gitksan and Hagwelgits trading. This angered him greatly when he knew of it and now planned to massacre all the villages on the Upper Skeena. So now he started off to raid these villages and in order that he should not be seen going up he planned to pass all of the villages at night when it was dark, and would do this until he arrived at the upper most village which was called Kispaiyaks (Kispox) … When they were close to the village, Ləgex then sat in the middle of his canoe and when they were close by the Kispaiyaks village they started to sing their paddle song, mentioning in the song a new naxnox and Ləgex stood up and spread open the new naxnox (a gesture of spiritual power). When the gitksan of Kispaiyaks saw the approaching Tsimsyan canoes, some of them took to the hills but a good number stayed and watched where Ləgex stood up in his canoe opening and shifting a strange new naxnox. They were astounded, the people of Kispayaks and stood and marveled at this new naxnox. When the Tsimsyan arrived they were singing of the naxnox of Ləgex. When they arrived they entered the house of the Kispaiyaks chief and there a reception halait (feast) was given by the Gitksan and when Ləgex danced in the halait, the Gitksan noticed that he had no eagle down (a symbol of peace) on his his dancing hat. This caused the Gitksan to be more frightened. While Ləgex was dancing and when all was ready, they attacked and killed many Gitksan, and went into other houses killing and capturing many women and children. When he (Ləgex) finished, he razed the village by fire and then prepared to go to the next village below and raid this place. (Beynon n.d.: 8)

Beynon notes that the naxnox (i.e., spirit power) that Ligeex invoked as a prelude to this attack was his opening and closing of a large, multi-coloured umbrella. Ligeex’s use of a novel European or Asian object in a spiritual gesture at a crucial moment in history suggests an association between imported objects and indigenous authority. It was an act that would also have generated an aesthetic association between European things and spiritual power. In the archaeological excavations of the post-contact interior village of Ginakangeek (GbTh–2) (Martindale 2006), the earliest European objects are items of wealth and decoration, such as tea services, glass beads, silverware, and metal tools. An early fetishization of European ornaments by indigenous people throughout the Northwest Coast has been noted in ethnohistoric sources (Mullins and Paynter 2000). However, as the power of Aboriginal leaders such as Ligeex waned in the latter half of the 19th century, the
association between European objects and indigenous status eroded.

The man named Ligeex who commissioned his portrait in pictographs, died in 1840. He was replaced by a nephew, Paul Legaic, who struggled to hold the regional authority together. In 1863, Paul Legaic converted to Christianity and for a time the Gispaklo’ots stopped participating in the cycle of traditional feasts and ceremonials. Paul Legaic died in 1869 at the age of 45 (Murray 1985: 106). Oral traditions record that many Tsimshians considered the Gispaklo’ots to have accumulated considerable debt and dropped to the lowest rank because of this hiatus (Beynon n.d.: 169). Some Tsimshian argue that this placed the Gispaklo’ots in debt to all the other tribes. However, the Gispaklo’ots argue that the value of gifts they gave in the early part of the 19th century was so great that all the other Tsimshian tribes are still in debt to them.

While the paramount authority of the Gispaklo’ots may not have been appealing to many Tsimshians, neither was their complete debasement. In 1879, a feast and ceremony was held marking the ascension of a new Ligeex (also called Paul Legaic) as leader of the Gispaklo’ots. Called the Xməs or “red” potlatch, this ceremony reset the political structure to the one thought to have been in place before Europeans arrived. Thus, Ligeex was elevated as leader of the Gispaklo’ots and the tribe was reinstated as an equal member of the Tsimshian village group community. The effect of this feast was to eliminate both the paramount authority claimed by the Gispaklo’ots and the debt that other Tsimshian tribes claimed on the Gispaklo’ots for their absence from potlatching.

The reorganization of Tsimshian politics in 1879 and the rise of the wage-labour economy shifted the role of leaders from controlling powerful trade networks to maintaining social cohesion in the face of a changing economic and political landscape (MacDonald 1984). Part of a leader’s role in the late 19th century was to reconstruct traditional values and maintain a cultural identity independent of European influence. One of the traits of leadership that re-emerged at this time was efficiency with resources. Leaders today, like their traditional forebears, are recognized for their frugality and managerial qualities (Miller 1997: 18). A corresponding pattern to this aesthetic of frugality can be found in the archaeological record. Late 19th-century components from the Ginakangeek site show an increase in groundstone tools and the appearance of a ground glass and expedient glass industry (Martindale and Jurakic 2004; 2006). Plate and bottle glass was used to make scrapers, knives, and spokeshaves. While it is possible that the late 19th-century Tsimshian at this village turned to glass because of economic hardship, these objects appear in contexts alongside a full range of European objects, including functionally superior metal tools. The return of groundstone tools and the emergence of broken glass tools may be part of the aesthetic of frugality that is a quality of contemporary Tsimshian leadership. Material gestures of frugality and traditional manufacturing processes appear to be have been both an effort to reclaim aspects of the pre-contact culture as well as to construct an identity of leadership that contrasts with the wealth and turmoil of the early contact period leadership of Ligeex.

CONCLUSIONS

Within the range of interpretive stances towards oral records, there are two discernable, and at times contradic-
history, assumptions. Some historians and anthropologists argue that oral records include formal systems for the production, performance, and transmission of texts and knowledge. This approach assumes that historical groundedness is possible in oral records, even across long spans of time, and that such historical data are understandable to those outside the culture that produced the oral records. Others focus on the variability within oral records, especially on the performative and narrative skill of the storyteller. This approach sees oral records as the weaving of traditional metaphors and narratives into a dynamic and spontaneous version that speaks with relevance to the situated audience. These two differing approaches sort the academic world in a variety of ways. To some extent, the former reflects an older view, one that can be associated with Lord’s (1960) search for universal forms in narratives, and Vansina’s (1965) typology of oral systems of knowledge. It can also be associated with epistemological and disciplinary differences. Archaeologists (Budhwa 2002; Martindale and Marsden 2003; Yellowhorn 2002) and historians (Echo-Hawk 2000; Whiteley 2002) have expectations of historical factuality, at least at the root of an oral record. In contrast, assumptions of plurality in form, iteration, and purpose corresponding to individual storytellers’ intentions, motivations and contexts is both a more modern (Finnegan 2003) and anthropological (Cruikshank 1997) view.

The Tsimshian example of Ligeex and the rise and fall of regional political and economic authority in the contact era suggests that these two views are complementary. Such a comparison requires an understanding of the variability of oral records in general and of aspects of the syntactical structure of the *adaxw* in particular. While much data are embedded in oral traditions, outsiders can identify basic chronological sequences and objective observations that are directly comparable to the archaeological record. Comparisons can be made on more internal or arbitrary levels of interpretation. The Tsimshian example shows how events such as the construction and location of significant places on the landscape are discernable from both archaeological and oral sources. Identifying operational aspects of past cultures such as economic organization, requires modest interpretation of both data sets, and produces reasonable opportunities for recursive testing. The interpretation of historical events is clearly stated within oral traditions, but harder to identify archaeologically. Comparisons on this level are only reasonable if conjunction exists at the first two. Abstract aspects of cultural identity are the context that oral records existed in and served to create. This represents the most difficult level of meaning within oral records for archaeologists as it reflects dynamics of structure and structuration that are meaningful to the participants of a tradition of oral history and literature. However, archaeologists can still explore cultural identity as it is manifest in trends in material culture that coincide with concepts such as aesthetics.

It should not surprise us that chronological order is identifiable Tsimshian oral records in the recent past or that complex historical and anthropological analyzes are possible of them. Two questions remain. First, are such patterns analogous, as I have argued, to Western conceptions of linear history. And second, is this method applicable to earlier, pre-contact, time periods?
Nabokov (2002: 59) notes that reconstituting meanings in oral records can include tentative efforts at locating syntactical and typological patterns. He is arguing, I think, for a subtle balance in locating patterns in oral records and juxtaposing them against Western frameworks. The necessary assumption is the existence of a common font to historical and archaeological products in the human past that persists in some measure regardless of the culturally constructed historiographies through which the past is present today. This approach envisions both as parallel views on antiquity. I have tried creating multiple lines of historical reasoning in independent work as well (Martindale 2003), although this is more difficult as the tendency is to assume rather than test for conjunction.

The data of Table 2 suggest that this conjunction can be applied to the more distant past, and elsewhere Marsden (2001, 2002) and I (Martindale and Marsden 2003) have tried to demonstrate this. An implication of Mason’s (2006: 11) argument is that historical accuracy is lost in an oral record over time. This paper cannot refute this, and future work must focus on testing the hypothesis that some forms of historical data are not lost. I think that sufficient evidence exists to warrant further inquiry. However, such analyses need to be predicated on the recognition that oral texts can be surgical forms of complex grammars. Like archaeological data, these narratives and the shared tools used for translation and transmission may only be partially preserved. The Tsimshian adawx are extensive, but even here proof of their historical accuracy will be elusive. Instead, we should apply the scientific approach of testing conjunctions; only over time will we see how frequently and in what manner they fail. This will only be achieved if we combine theoretical arguments with an analysis of methods in detailed case studies that present sophisticated views of both archaeological and oral records.

Nabokov’s tentativeness and the autonomy of Indigenous and archaeological historiographies are important as they position the archaeological and oral records as equally legitimate explorations of history. In the absence of this balance, archaeologists will tend to put oral records in a peripheral or subservient position and mine these texts for comparable data without respecting their cultural context. I realize that in arguing for a capacity to compare these data on a superficial, descriptive level, I create opportunities for this. However, the mis-use of oral records by archaeologists is a theoretical rather than methodological issue. Most archaeologists recognize the complexities of oral records; creating explicit methods for comparison to archaeological data can only enhance our ability to engage these texts in a more sophisticated manner. Taking fragments of oral records out of context and using them to substantiate archaeological interpretations is predicated, not by a methodology like this, but by the theoretical assumption that oral records are historiographic by chance and not intent. The method I have outlined here requires both the assumption that oral records are complex systems of recording and analyzing history and that use by outsiders, such as non-Indigenous archaeologists, be built upon a long-term commitment to their study. My use of a sliding scale from descriptive to abstract forms of meaning is not meant to imply that sophisticated, contextually mediated understandings of oral records are unnecessary. Rather, it is an argument that from such internal views, some kinds
of historical data are more simply translated to external viewpoints.

Like the untimely deaths of Arne and Leslie Carlson, some moments for some people become shared iterations of a collective history that is recognizable beyond the internal community and become, for some period of time at least, historical reference points of collective remembering. This methodology recognizes that oral and archaeological records will not always agree. Both sources are incomplete and present divergent aspects of a complex past. Both indigenous histories and archaeological reconstructions begin with an effort at retelling these events. While they frequently diverge, the landscape of the past has common ground.

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NOTES
4. Beynon’s notebooks list individual oral traditions numerically; thus, the notation “n.d.: 66” refers to the text number, not a page number.
5. The spelling “Ligeex” follows Masden and Galois (1995) and identifies the leading name of the Gispaklo’ots in recent times. Other Anglicized spellings are known including “Legaic,” which is more commonly used to refer to Paul Legaic, the Gispaklo’ots leader who died in 1867. Beynon himself used a variety of spellings ranging from Anglicizations (e.g., Legaix) to more phonetically accurate forms (e.g., Łègex). Ligeex is used here for consistency across the literature.

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