



The Yuquot Whalers' Shrine

Aldona Jonaitis

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In 1905 George Hunt, at the insistence of anthropologist Franz Boas, acquired a remarkable collection of materials from the Mowachaht band of the Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka) for the American Museum of Natural History. An assemblage of 92 carved wooden figures and whales, 16 human skulls, and the small building that sheltered them, the shrine had for centuries stood in Yuquot, or Friendly Cove, on the remote west coast of Vancouver Island, visited only by chiefs and their wives. Since its removal to New York, it has been represented in anthropological and historical writings, film, television, and newspapers.

In this fascinating study, Aldona Jonaitis investigates and reconstructs the history of the shrine both before and after it was acquired for the museum. Clues to the shrine's complex history?traced to the mid-17th century?and meaning are provided by historical and anthropological writings, photographs, stories, the Hunt-Boas correspondence, and the artifacts themselves. Jonaitis addresses important contemporary issues, including the Mowachaht band's desire to have the shrine repatriated for display in Yuquot.

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