

Culture



Cheryl SAMUEL, *The Chilkat Dancing Blanket*, Seattle, Pacific Search Press, 1982. 248 pages, \$29.95 (cloth)

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Cheryl SAMUEL, *The Chilkat Dancing Blanket*, Seattle, Pacific Search Press, 1982. 248 pages, \$29.95 (cloth).

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There are several discrete audiences for this book, and it will be truly satisfactory to only one of them. Weavers and afficianados of weaving in general, and Chilkat weaving in particular, will find a tremendous amount of carefully researched material on the process of weaving the famous chiefly dance regalia of the northern coast. I am confident that given time, access to materials, and a great deal of patience, I could produce an acceptable sample of Chilkat weaving with the guidance of this book and Emmons' earlier discussion of Chilkat weaving techniques. Samuels is a weaver, and she has written a superb book for weavers.

Scholars of the Northwest Coast will find that the book is less satisfactory as a secondary source. The difficulties are in the documentation of photographs reproduced, over-generalizations in description of social organization, and some dubious extensions of interpretations.

The book includes three types of illustrative material. The illustrations by Sara Porter and Duane Pasco are first-rate, and appropriately used and described. The modern photographs, especially those of Tony Hunt dancing in Chilkat regalia, are beautiful and contribute to an understanding of the forms in motion. The third type, archival photographs from a variety of museums, are apt and well-produced, but are sometimes inadequately documented. It would have taken very little extra effort to indicate that "A classic Dancing Blanket (courtesy of the British Columbia Provincial

Museum)" (p. 82) was obtained in a particular year in a particular location, or even that no further information was available for publication. Similarly, "Men, women, and children in attendance at a ceremony. Eagle down covers the cedar bark mat on the floor, indicating a dance has taken place. (Courtesy of the British Columbia Provincial Museum)" (p. 34) would have been more informative if the provenance of the photograph had been provided (or indicated as missing).

Reading Samuel's account of the cultures of the Northwest Coast, the reader takes the inference that it covers the entire area equally well, though it is largely based on the Northern groups who originated the weavings. Some of the interpretation, however, seems to relate more to Kwakiutl materials. The juxtaposition of a description of the Northern-based cultural patterns with modern Kwakiutl material, such as photographs of Hunt performing the Headdress Dance, invites over-generalizations. A careful reader can avoid the pitfalls, but a careful editing would have made this unnecessary. The problems are usually in minor points such as the assertion in a note (p. 219) about "Labrets: When a young girl finished her time of seclusion, her lower lip was pierced and a small bone plug inserted. This was the beginning of the labret, an ornament worn by all women of nobility." The labret was actually of limited geographic distribution. Finally, Samuel has chosen to paraphrase the "legends" included in the text; as a personal aesthetic quibble I will say that I find the paraphrases saccharine compared to closer translations.

This review has included a number of grumps, but overall I would like to remind readers that Samuel has produced a thorough treatment of a complex subject; her discussion of weaving will stand unchallenged for a very long time.