

***Sxwoxwiyám Xéyt te Xwélmexw* (Central Coast Salish Transformation Stories):  
Connecting Humans and Non-humans through Kinship and Place**

By: Brian Thom

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## Teachings from *Sxwoxwiyám* and *Xá:ls*<sup>1</sup>

In ancient times, when the first ancestors of the Central Coast Salish people - *xwélmexw* - lived in the world, things didn't work the way they do today. The people living in the world were powerful. They could take human or non-human form. People often carried the names of the animals, and had many of their characteristics. Characters like Mink, Grizzly Bear, Woodpecker and Eagle had adventures, travelling through the land and to worlds beyond - the home of the sockeye people, sky world, the land of the dead. At the end of this legendary time, *Xexá:ls* the Transformer siblings (*Xá:ls* the Transformer if only speaking of one of them) were born and received great powers. They travelled through the land changing the world to how we know it today. Many of the people the *Xexá:ls* met were changed into non-humans: animals, plants or stones, which are found in the world today (Galloway 1996:1; Suttles 1990:466).

In this paper I explore how these stories of the ancient past - *sxwoxwiyám* - are an important way that *xwélmexw* make sense of their connection to the non-human world. I will evaluate how a set of *sxwoxwiyám* told to Franz Boas by George StsEē'lis in 1889 and 1890 (Boas 1891, 1895, 1981a) provide insight into the relationships between humans and non-humans. I propose that the lenses of kinship and place can be used to view how these stories connect humans and non-humans. These lenses have been suggested by both *xwélmexw* story tellers and anthropologists as useful teachings of Central Coast Salish transformation stories.

While working as a researcher for the Stó:lō Nation in Sardis, I first began to hear *sxwoxwiyám* from Sonny McHalsie.<sup>2</sup> He has often told these stories to groups of people who are getting their first exposure to *xwélmexw* culture. Sonny will tell a story of how some man or woman lived in the past was transformed into an animal, plant or stone which could be found today. Sonny explains that *xwélmexw* have a special relationship to that plant or animal - that they are in a very distant way related to it. *Xwélmexw*, he would explain, have special responsibilities to respect and care for their relatives. This might mean that they would have to have special ceremonies for the first salmon or sturgeon that was killed, making sure that the soul of the fish is returned to the river. Or they would utter a prayer when having killed a deer or taken some roots, explaining

to their ancestor that they mean no disrespect and will make good use of what has been given to them. Some of these ancestors were turned to stone, and can still be seen today as proof of their having lived here in the past.

Elders who have been interviewed in the past have also related the importance of the kin connection of humans and non-humans. One story was told by Dan Milo about the older brother of *Wili:lég* (one of the first ancestors of the *Ts'elxwéyeqw* people) who turned into a bear with a spot on the breast. The children of that bear (who were bears themselves) feed the decedents of *Wili:lég* (Wells 1987:88). Mrs. Peters told a story about Mountain Goat woman marrying a man near *Lhilheqiy* (Mt. Cheam). Whenever his family wanted meat, they would always have to take every bone and put it back in the lake. Mr. Peters said that “many Cheam people are living, still living, that’s their ancestor is that goat, you know... [t]heir ancestor’s name was *Syewà:ls*” (Wells 1987:94-5).

Anthropologists have also looked at *sxwoxwiyám* and have discussed how humans and non-humans may be connected by kinship. In Franz Boas’s short ethnographic description of *xwélmexw* living in the Lower Fraser River region, he says that “the inhabitants of each village are believed to be the descendants of one mythical personage. (1894:454) and that “I do not understand that the tribe itself claims any relationship with these animals or plants, but nevertheless these ideas must be considered an interesting phase in the development of totemism” (1894:454-5).

Charles Hill-Tout asked Francois of *Sts'a'í:les* about the story he told of his ancestors being the otter (Hill-Tout 1978:110):

I sought to learn from him whether his people were known as the “otter” people, and whether they looked upon the otter as their relatives and paid regard to these animals by not killing or hunting them. He smiled at the question and shook his head and later explained that although they believed their remote ancestor to have been an otter they did not think it was the same kind of otter as lived now. The otters from which they were descended were otter-people, not animals, who had the power to change the form of men and women to those of the otter. All the

animals in the old-time were like that. They were not just common animals and nothing else; they were people as well, and could take the human or the animal form at will by putting on or taking off the skin or other natural clothing of the animal.

Hill-Tout was puzzled by the fact that although people told stories of being descended from animal ancestors, there was no system of crests or clans - only personal guardian spirits (Hill-Tout 1978:49-50, 73,109-113, 150-151).

Duff acknowledges that his anthropological predecessors interpreted these stories as having to do with the descent of “villages or lineage-local groups” from mythical ancestors (1952:85). He, however, draws a distinction between “Upper Stalo” and “Lower Stalo” villages (Duff 1952:85-6):

None of my informants knew of any such traditions, although I made every effort to probe their memories on the subject. It seems clear that the three Upper Stalo tribes were distinctly within the area to which ‘first man’ or mythical ancestor myths had not penetrated...

and that:

... in summary, the Upper Stalo lacked the type of traditions which gave to other North-west Coast lineage-local groups a strong consciousness of kinship and identification with certain definite places.

Suttles elaborates on the notion that *sxwoxwiyám* describe how some animals are descended from people (Suttles 1987a:104):

some animal species are the descendants of people, as the sturgeon in Pitt Lake came from the daughter of the first man there; some are affines of people, as the sockeye salmon are for the Katzie through marriage of another first man (see Jenness 1955:12, 18-21). But people are not the descendants of animals.

Elsewhere Suttles summarizes the relationship between transformed ancestors and place (Suttles 1990:466):

Traditions of local groups usually told how the group's founder dropped from the sky at or near its winter village or summer camp where the Transformer gave him technical and ritual knowledge and where he established special relationships with local resources. Marriage with non-human establishes an affinal relationship with its obligations of reciprocity... or a human being simply becomes a valuable non-human being...

All of these anthropologists state that although humans and non-humans were transformed into one another, and that sometimes humans and non-humans would marry, *people are not the descendants of animals*. I propose that by listening to the stories told about the transformation of ancestors, we gain a more subtle understanding of how *people are the descendants of animals* and are related to many of the non-humans in the world today. These *sxwoxwiyám* provide a framework for understanding how *xwélmexw* should relate to existing resources and places, and provides identity to the communities in which they live.

### **Mr. and Mrs. George StsEē'lis, Franz Boas and the Indianische Sagen**

An excellent, lengthy collection of *sxwoxwiyám* were told by Mr. and Mrs George StsEē'lis of *Sts'a'í:les* (on the Harrison River) and were recorded by Franz Boas (Boas 1891, 1895, 1981a). Boas does not give much context for the recording of these stories in his introduction to the Indianische Sagen other than:

Most of the following legends were collected in Agassiz, near the mouth of the Harrison River, around Harrison Lake, and in New Westminster... The majority of the following legends were told to me by George StsEē'lis and his wife.

Boas was in Harrison Hot Springs on September 6, 1889 and then in New Westminster from July 31 to August 10, 1890 (Rohner 1966:155). No mention is made of his 1889 stop in Harrison Hot Springs in any of his professional or personal correspondence, although we can presume that he met StsEē'lis there for the first time. In 1890 he missed a steamer to northern British Columbia, and so went to New Westminster to wait out his time to the next steamer. Here Boas spent “these days by taking some measurement of Indians and here got a considerable number” as so many people were working in the canneries.<sup>3</sup> Here again, he met StsEē'lis. He wrote very little

correspondence about his work with StsEē'lis:<sup>4</sup>

The Indian I have here is a prize. He is a chief and has a genealogy going back nine generations. He is of course very conceited and at least once a day I have to listen to a speech about how great he is. He does not work but lives on what the tribe gives him as payment for former potlatches. The main topic of his conversation is the fact that his wife once gave Princess Lenore, [?] the wife of the former Governor of Canada, five cows which she did not even acknowledge, thus proving herself to be most unworthy.

In addition to his conversations about genealogy, Boas made some detailed ethnographic notes (Boas 1894) and recorded a good collection of *sxwoxwiyám*. Although it is not entirely clear from the archival records, I suspect that these were recorded in English, as the ethnographic notes and stories are too detailed to have been made in Chinook or to have been given in *Halq'eméylem* and later translated to English. Boas only collected a short Fraser River vocabulary, which supports my suspicion that the stories were not recorded in *Halq'eméylem*.<sup>5</sup>

The work has had a complicated publication history, and is still not widely available to English speaking audiences. It was first published in German in the Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte (Boas 1891) and then compiled with an introduction and conclusion in the Indianische Sagen von der nordpacifischen Küste Amerikas (Boas 1895). Boas published a very few of the stories contained in the Indianische Sagen in English, but none of them from his work with StsEē'lis (Boas 1888, 1899). In about 1973 Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy arranged to have Dietrich Bertz translate the Indianische Sagen into English (Boas 1981a), which has circulated since as a typescript. Only very small selections (none of them from the Fraser River) of this translation has been published (Boas 1981b).

These stories are interesting for this exercise for many reasons. Firstly, they were recorded by Boas, whose careful work and persistence in trying to get the stories right makes them a valuable source for learning what the speaker was trying to get at (Maud 192:50). They are a long set of stories from mainly one teller (George StsEē'lis), who clearly took the time to give Boas

complex and intricate narratives. The stories cover a wide range of topics and characters, and in many cases discuss the transformation of humans and non-humans, particularly in the story of Qäls (*Xá:ls*). All proper names and place names were left in *Halq'eméylem*, using the writing system developed for the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Finally, I have often heard Sonny McHalsie tell some version of a few of these stories when explaining the kin connection humans have with their ancestors (eg: story Sonny told at 1997 First Salmon ceremony). This gave me a clue that these stories could teach something about the interconnectedness of kin and place.

There are 11 stories in this collection told by Mr and Mrs. StsEē'lis, three of which Boas says are from the Lillooet area and the rest from StsEē'lis on the Harrison River. I have considered only the StsEē'lis stories here.<sup>6</sup> The stories are too long to recount in full here. Below I summarize the major characters, places and events mentioned in the stories. These summaries are not intended to interpret the significance of the stories, only to familiarize the reader with the material.

The first narrative is the longest, telling of the journey of Qäls, the Transformers. In this narrative, the Transformers are three boys and a girl descended from Red-headed Woodpecker and Black Bear. When they were young, their father Woodpecker was killed by his other wife Grizzly Bear, and they wandered to the land of the sunrise, obtained great powers, and returned to the Fraser River, transforming whoever they met as they travelled through. The Qäls have adventures and transform what Boas calls “the first ancestors” at Mā'lē, K'oā'lEts (below Yale), Sk'tsās (top of Harrison Lake), along and above Harrison Lake, StsEē'lis and along the Harrison River, K'oā'antEl, K'ē'etsē, Mā'çQui, LEk'ā'mel, Ts'uwä'lē, Sk'au'ēlitsk', Tcā'tcōHil, Pā'pk'um, SQuhä'mEn, Siyi't'a, QETlā'tl and Spē'yim (see Figure 1). Qäls met many beings who he battled or transformed into non-humans: Iris, Octopus people, Stars, Swan, Crane, Swallow, little Mountain Whitefish, Red Salamander, Rattlesnake, Steelhead, Prairiewolf, Cedarbark, Mink, Badger, Beaver, Beaver's son, Sturgeon, Mountain Goat, Sandhill Crane, Bullrush, Bear, and River Monsters. He also met many humans whom he battled or transformed to stone, including: the boy who always wanted food, SHä'i (Indian Doctor), Pā'laHil (Oneleg,

Indian Doctor), LEqyiles (old, toothed-vagina woman), old man seal hunter, T'ēqulä'tca (son of woman and sturgeon), and K'ultē'mEltQ (chief of Sk'au'ēlitsk'). Many of the beings he met had significant adventures just before Qäls arrived and transformed them, which are described in this narrative. The remaining narratives are stories about the beings before Qäls came through the world transforming things (although in a few cases Qäls shows up at the end, rather incidently).

The story Moon & Sun is of two sisters, created by the lonely old woman Wolverine, that steal a boy being watched by a blind woman, raise him as their own and then marry him. The boy's real mother creates another boy out of dirty diaper water, who trains hard and finds his brother. The stolen boy is ashamed and kills himself and his family, becoming the moon and stars. The younger brother becomes the sun.

Woodpecker and Eagle is a long, complex epic narrative which runs over several generations, taking running, feasting, and acquiring power and skills, to the sky world, through dangerous villages on in this world, to the land of the dead, to the land of the salmon, through this world again, back to StsEē'lis and finally to Pā'pk'um where Mink is transformed to stone.



Brother and Sister is another long story, where a brother and sister break the incest taboo, and their son becomes powerful. He travels to sky world and brings the daughter of the sun back to Stcuwā'çEl.

The final four *sxwoxwiyám* are much shorter, are widely known, widely told stories with no local transformations of humans and non-humans. In Origin of Salmon and Fire Beaver and Woodpecker cleverly steal fire and Sockeye baby. They drop Sockeye baby's diapers in places where fish later become productive and lose fire to the ghosts. Mink gets fire back by tricking the dead. In Mink, the story revolves around Mink foolishly wanting to marry Horsetail, Rotted Pine and Eagle. In each case, he ends up unable to live with the women and finally, ends up dead. In Skunk, Prairiewolf uses "friend" East Wind (also called guardian spirit in the story) to battle Skunk. Skunk gets help from Porcupine, a powerful old man and is not defeated by Prairiewolf. In Mouse, the main character Mouse is a beautiful young girl who behaves properly at potlatch. She gets married, steals food and is thrown out by her husband and his jealous wife.

## **Learning About Kinship and Place**

### *Human descendants of non-humans*

These narratives recount many times how the members of present-day communities are descended from a human who married a non-human and had human children. In the Qäls story, the K'oā'antEl are descended from the first chief K'alE'tsEmEs, who had a daughter who slept with his dogs. Her six boys were caught dancing without their dog skins on, their mother took the skins and threw them in the fire, making her children keep their human form. The Tc'ileQuē'uk' at Ts'uwä'lē are descended from their first chief, who's daughter was tricked into sleeping with Mink and had a human boy T'ēqulä'tca. The people at Siyi't'a are descended from a boy who's mother slept with sturgeon and who's father, Autltē'n, was a bear who turned himself into a man. The sturgeon-boy was thrown into the river, caught, prepared and eaten, bones thrown back in the water and returned as a full boy who then moved from Squhä'mEn to Siyi't'a and was the first ancestor of the people there.

In all of these cases where present-day communities are directly descended from a human who married a non-human, the children are the result of a woman being tricked into sleeping with a non-human.

There are some narratives where non-humans were transformed to humans and had human children. In the story of the ancestors of the StsEē'lis, their first chief Ts'ā'tsEmiltQ dropped from the sky and had 4 boys. These boys married the four

Figure 2. K'oā'antEl ancestors  
ancestors  
in StsEē'lis 's stories.

Figure 3. Tc'ileQuē'uk' ancestors  
ancestors  
in StsEē'lis 's stories.

Figure 4. Siyi't'a  
ancestors  
in  
StsEē'lis 's stories.

daughters of K'ulk'E'mEHil, who was the descendent of mountain goat and martin and was the chief of people from the village K'oā'IEqt. The people from K'oā'IEqt moved down out of their village in the Chehalis River valley to share the fish trap that the StsEē'lis people had. The PELā'tlQ people at Tcā'tcōHil are descended from Bullrush and Sandhill Crane, who transformed themselves into humans. The people of SQuhä'mEn are descended from Autlētē'n, who was a bear that turned himself into a man.

Figure 5. StsEē'lis ancestors  
ancestors  
in StsEē'lis 's stories.

Figure 6. PELā'tlQ ancestors  
ancestors  
in StsEē'lis 's stories.

Figure 7. SQuhä'mEn  
ancestors  
in StsEē'lis 's  
stories.

None of these stories explains why the people take human form, but in all of them George StsEē'lis explains that these people are the ancestors of the contemporary community. All of the ancestors who were transformed, with the single exception of Clem (Sandhill Crane) at PEIā'tlQ, are men. These men are either partners of human women and have human descendants or, or are transformed into non-humans with human descendants.

### *Humans who have ancestors that were transformed to non-humans*

The narratives told to Boas by StsEē'lis often recalled a human who already had descendants being transformed into a non-human. The descendants of these ancestors, although they were human, could trace their lineage back to someone who had been transformed. At Mā'lē, the first chief Pā'pk'EltEl was transformed by Qäls into an “iris” that is abundant near there. At K'oā'antEl, the first chief K'alE'tsEmEs was changed by Qäls into a badger. At Mā'çQui, Sk'Elē'yitl and his son battled Qäls and were transformed into beavers. At LEk''ä'mel, their ancestor IälEpk'ē'lēm, who had received power from the sun, was changed into a sturgeon after losing a battle with Qäls. Aiuwä'luQ, the ancestor of the people at Pā'pk'um, was transformed by Qäls into a mountain goat, explaining why they are so plentiful on Mt. Cheam.

All of these transformations were done by Qäls when he defeated the village ancestor in battle, leaving their descendants with something good or important.

### *Ancestors live in the land*

We have seen how the *sxwoxwiyám* told by George StsEē'lis connect humans and non-humans through kinship. The stories also connect humans and non-humans to place. Places are important in the transformation stories told by StsEē'lis. In the examples discussed above, they are often mentioned by name and are in many cases locations which continue to be *xwélmexw* communities. In some of the stories, humans are linked to the landscape through transformation. Qäls turned many people to stone in these stories, stones which are still found all along the River as “evidence of the work done” by Qäls.

In the *sxwoxwiyám* told by StsEē'lis, eight different people are turned to stone by Qäls. The hunter and his dog are turned to stone at K'`oä'IEts. T'ēqulä'tca, ancestor of people from Ts'uwä'lē lost battle with Qäls and was changed to stone at Tc'ileQuē'uk'. At Sk'au'ēlitsk', their ancestor K'ultē'mEltQ (whose daughter found the Sqoā'eqōē mask) was transformed to stone. Qä'latca, who was a skilled canoe maker was turned to stone with his hammer and axe at Tcā'tcōHil. At StsEē'lis, an old man seal hunter, his canoe and the seal he was hunting were all transformed to stone when Qäls snuck up on them from behind. Pā'laHil "Oneleg" was transformed to stone at StsEē'lis in two different stories. In one, he was a salmon-harpooner from whom Qäls stole his harpoon head. Qäls wanted to make Pā'laHil happy after he returned the harpoon head so transformed him to stone where there would always be many salmon. In another story, Pā'laHil was catching salmon, Qäls stole his harpoon head, was challenged to see who could catch most salmon, and defeated Pā'laHil by changing him to stone. SHä'i was a powerful man who lived on Harrison Lake. Qäls had several battles with him, and finally killed him, tore him to pieces and flung his parts away, transforming them to stone where they landed. LEqyiles was the old toothed-vagina woman who lived on the Harrison River. She bit off Mink's hand when he tried to feel her genitals so Qäls changed her to stone.

Two additional people were turned to stone by Qäls, both of them non-human. Qäls changed the old woman Käiä'm (Wolverine) into stone at the mouth of Silver River on Harrison Lake. K'ā'iq (Mink - or more likely his penis) was transformed into stone just above Pā'pk'um after he tried to rudely capture some young girls and sleep with them.

The stones into which these ancestors were transformed link people to place through the stories that get told about them. In some cases these places have power. In the stories told by StsEē'lis, LEqyiles and Pā'laHil can make the weather change. I have seen four of these stones myself. At all of these places, there is the power to remind people about the teachings and the histories that these stories tell.

### *Understanding The Significance of Kin Relations*

So, what have StsEē'lis's *sxwoxwiyám* taught us about our first questions about the importance

of kin relations between humans, non-humans and place? Certainly they provide support for Sonny McHalsie's arguments, which suggest that *xwélmexw* have a unique connection to the non-human world, that they are related to all these living things. This makes further sense when we consider that *xwélmexw* recognize kin very widely, tracing back as many generations as possible, following ambilineal or bilateral descent.

Looking at StsEē'lis's own family tree, (Figure 8) which he and Boas carefully documented over ten generations, we can see that many of his extended family, carry the same names as the ancestors he told about in his *sxwoxwiyám*. The name Qē'lqElEmas, who in the *sxwoxwiyám* was the powerful Indian Doctor who did battle with Qäls near Yale, was carried by StsEē'lis's father's father's brother and his father's father's wife's father's brother. Ts'ā'tsEmiltQ, who was the first ancestor who dropped from the sky at StsEē'lis was the name also carried by StsEē'lis's father's brother, his father's father, and is StsEē'lis's name in his home community (StsEē'lis). Qä'latca, which was the name of the Bullrush who turned himself into a man at PELā'tlQ was also the name of StsEē'lis's father's father's father's father's father's wife's father (who was also from PELā'tlQ). Qä'wulEts, the name of an ancestor from Sk'tsās who had once been a bear, was also StsEē'lis's name in Sk'tsās, his father's name, his father's father's wife's father's name and his father's father's wife's father's father's name.

These ancestral names are hereditary - they are passed on through family lines. These names and stories can be understood together as connecting the ancient past to the present, humans to non-humans, people to places. As people who tell *sxwoxwiyám* are also trying to understand their genealogies, the stories and names become important for linking people to the past. Where an ancestor has been transformed from or into a non-human, the transformation connects people whose family has the name to those non-humans today. Where ancestors come from particular communities, or were transformed into non-humans or stones at a particular place, their names live on at those locations. I believe that George StsEē'lis was making this connection between names and family, humans and non-humans, people and places, when he explained his family tree in such detail and during the same conversation told the stories of the first ancestors of the contemporary communities being transformed by Qäls.

What are some of the implications of kin connections to non-humans being expressed in *sxwoxwiyám*? Ancestors command a sense of obligation, of responsibility to behave properly towards them. If ancestors are non-human, then humans are also responsible to them. The most clear example of obligations is the first sturgeon ceremony performed by the people at SQuhá'mEn. Ralph George and Les Fraser from this community have told me that they continued to perform this ceremony well into this century. First salmon ceremonies are also an expression of this obligation. People from these communities who are stewards for their locally available resource have in the *sxwoxwiyám*, a powerful reminder to take care of these fish - they are ancestors of the people.

These stories give people a sense of where they are from. When StsEē'lis tells these stories, he refers to these transformed people as the ancestors of an existing village. In many of the Qäls stories, the first ancestors of a community dropped from the sky or were just always there at the named village places. Then Qäls came and transformed people into animals and animals into people at these places. People living today are descendants of these “first ancestors”. However, not all people stay in one community their whole life. As *xwélmexw* have a preference for village exogamy there is a tension between the community you marry into and the one you are from. These stories may create or reinforce some kind of identity to a “local group”, who are descended from an ancestor. This local group does not function like a clan or sept in the sense that there are no marriage restrictions in this group (Suttles 1990:464).

This notion of a “local group” connected through a common ancestor is not a straightforward one. Recall that Hill-Tout was told a story by Francois of *Sts'a'i:les* of their ancestor being otter. In George StsEē'lis story, Ts'ā'tsEmiltQ, the first ancestor of that same community,

dropped from the sky and then married the human descendants of Mountain Goat and Martin. These two ancestors are both from the same community, yet they are both different. There may have been one first human ancestor who dropped from the sky in some communities, but many clearly have several non-human ancestors which can be traced through descent or marriage. This fits the notion that *xwélmexw* are not descended from one ancestor in the sense of people in the northern Northwest Coast moieties or clans.

Many of the anthropologists who have considered the connection between humans and non-humans in these stories have over-theorized it, or underplayed its importance. As I cited in the introduction, Boas (1894:454) and Hill-Tout (1978:110) both wrote that the first ancestors of *xwélmexw* communities could be recognized in stories. They both tried to understand this in terms of late 19th century models of totemism, but could not fit the information their *xwélmexw* informants were giving them into their models. Duff (1952:85-6) did not collect many *sxwoxwiyám* - and so was led to believe that the “Upper Stalo” did not have a “first ancestor myth complex”. Clearly he was mistaken about this. But like Hill-Tout, when he questioned *xwélmexw* directly if their villages could be considered as being descended from mythical animal ancestors, his informants said “no” - they were not. People are descended from real people who lived in the past, people who had the power to be transformed from humans to non-humans.

Suttles (1987a:104, 1990:466), acknowledges that animals are descended from people. StsEē’lis’s *sxwoxwiyám* provide ample evidence of this. Suttles states that people are not, however, the descendants of animals. Again, when we listen to StsEē’lis’s stories, we see clearly that humans are both descended from non-humans and are directly related to ancestors who were transformed into non-humans. However, Suttles may have been concerned not to let his analysis be mistaken for the older totemism ideas of Hill-Tout (eg: Hill-Tout 1978:111).

The third implication of these kin connections to non-humans is the significance of this for understanding spirit power. These stories provide people an individual, personal sense of their connectedness to their ancestors - such individual relationships being a well-understood pattern of *xwélmexw* cultural belief for their source of spirit power (Suttles 1990:467). Like many of the

powers obtained or used in the *sxwoxwiyám*, people gain their powers from non-humans. In StsEē'lis's Qäls story, IālEpk'ē'lēm received power from the sun - giving him fire and teaching his people "all the skills". IālEpk'ē'lēm used some of this power in battle against Qäls. George StsEē'lis told Boas that his own grandfather was instructed by the sun in using a bone with a mouth carved on it to protect him in war (Boas 1894:462). StsEē'lis's grandfather also received hunting power from a bear who revealed himself to be human when he took off his skins (Boas 1894:460).

Some contemporary *xwélmexw* story-tellers have related these *sxwoxwiyám* to the acquisition of power. Albert Louis talked about such a relationship between humans, non-humans and power when he told a story of a man with little ability in hunting who came upon two women-bears. These women made him sick, vomiting black fluid. He eventually killed them, fed his friends the bear meat and became a good hunter, using a part of the bear he killed as a magic item. He eventually transformed into a bear himself, but just before doing so gave his brother a bear song to sing when hunting (Wells 1987:165).

Anthropologist Diamond Jenness listed many different non-human guardian spirits which *xwélmexw* may encounter while questing in the woods. Many of these people gained their power from animals such as Wolf, Mink, Mole, Sandhill Crane, Beaver, Sea Otter, Dog Salmon and Raven who may have once been relatives (Jenness 1955:48-54). One example of this was Wolf:

When Khaals reached New Westminster, in the dawn of time, he transformed a family of Indians into wolves, and ordained that they should help the generations of people who should come after them. Hence all New Westminster youths secured the wolf for their guardian spirit and became excellent hunters of deer, elk, bear, and other game. Similarly their women, aided by the spirits of female wolves, became splendid mat-makers and weavers of woolen garments. Wolves, of course, roamed everywhere, and their spirits aided Indians of other groups, but it was only the New Westminster people who obtained really strong wolf spirits.

Boas (1894:456), Hill-Tout (1978:111), and Duff (1952:100) all tell of stories that their informants related about a recent fore-father encountering a non-human in the wilderness, being



taken into the home of the non-human where they took off their animal skin and taught him how to behave, giving him special powers. All of these stories are distinguished by the fact that “they really happened”.

As Suttles has said, vision, ritual word, ancestors and wealth are all sources of power for Central Coast Salish people (Suttles 1987a:104-105). Clearly these stories reinforce these as being sources of power for people today.

### **Lessons of *Sxwoxwiyám* and Future Learning**

*Sxwoxwiyám* teach many other lessons - the transformation stories told by StsEē'lis to Boas being no exception. Themes of gender, age, cultural values, and proper behaviour are all issues which should be considered when listening to *sxwoxwiyám*. These stories carried many meanings for StsEē'lis that may have enabled the stories to be told differently to different audiences at different times. I believe that considering these stories in the context of kinship is an interesting exercise, providing insights into *xwélmexw* notions of family history, the connectedness of humans and non-humans, connections to place, and their sources of spiritual power.

As a further analytical step in examining this idea of the kin connections between humans and non-humans, other tellings of transformation *sxwoxwiyám* should be examined, tracing genealogical ties and plotting the communities for whom these strong characters are deemed ancestors.

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### Endnotes:

1. Throughout this paper, I will use the Halq'eméylem orthography described by Galloway (1980) for my own writing, and will use the writing system used by Boas (1895), when quoting and discussing the characters, places and terms he wrote.
2. Because I have done most of my work with the Stó:lō people, this paper will be informed entirely by examples from the Lower Fraser River region.
3. Boas to Hale, 3 Aug 1890. Professional Correspondence of Franz Boas., American Philosophical Society.
4. Boas to Mrs. Boas, 10 August, 1890. Rohner 1969:127.
5. Boas Collection, BCARS, Microfilm A-249. Rp;; 19. S2:1 “Lower Fraser Vocabulary”.
6. Stsḗ'lis is both the name of the man and the name of the place - *Sts'a'íllis* - on the Harrison River. I have tried to provide context in the use of these names to distinguish them.