

Home to *S'ólh Téméxw*:  
Establishing Foundations for the Repatriation of Stó:lō Sacred items

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May 2022

“We’re just the hands and the feet.”<sup>1</sup> Dr. Dave Schaepe, Director of the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre (SRRMC), shared this perspective with me during one of our many meetings during the month of May, 2022. The SRRMC had asked me to conduct research regarding the repatriation of Stó:lō cultural objects, specifically those that could be considered “sacred.” My job was to be the hands and the feet, to begin looking into this topic and begin to piece it together, letting the community and SRRMC staff fill in the blanks where my outsider hands and feet cannot go.

Using the term “sacred” to describe these items is by no means a concrete or exclusive term. Rather, this word was used when the project was introduced to me, and appeared to be the English word used in primary and secondary sources. Both Steven Point and Naxaxalt’si (aka Albert (Sonny) McHalsie) used the Halq’emeylem word Xa:xa as a translation for sacred. For the purpose of keeping this paper comprehensive, I will use the word “sacred” to describe the type of objects I was asked to research.

There were several elements of this research topic, with some questions more easily answered than others. One task was to interview Stó:lō elders to piece together a Stó:lō definition of the word sacred. Government bodies and institutions have their colonial-based definitions, but SRRMC staff had determined that in most cases, their perceptions of sacred do not align with the Stó:lō world. For the Stó:lō, everything has *shxweli*, or life. Herb Joe shared with me that

everything in our world has *shxweli*... so given that, that’s the basis for our lives. Anything that becomes a part of that life takes on a life of its own. And therefore, is a living object as far as we were talking about historically. And the sacred objects are claimed because they are a part of us would be life, I think your object would become like, like your sister, and would become part of your family. And if

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Schaepe: May 20, 2022 interview (circa 8:29).

that was taken away by an archaeologist, then how would you and your family feel? That loss would be huge.<sup>2</sup>

While colonial organizations may have a secular and ethnocentric definition of “sacred,” I came to learn that the Stó:lō have a complex, deeply rooted understanding of that term.

Another goal for this project was to try and locate sacred items in museum collections. I spent several hours sifting through the Reciprocal Research Network (RRN) and various independent museum websites to try and locate Stó:lō sacred objects. Locating these items and attempting to answer how items got into museums and private collections is difficult. The anthropologist Michael Ames provides an answer for why this dilemma exists:

The traditional museum, as it developed in Europe and North America, began as an elitist institution designed to limit access to the privileged classes. Though museums today serve a much wider clientele, they still retain many exclusive features. Most large museums, for example, grant public access to only a small percentage of their total collection – usually one to five percent or less – and those objects that are made accessible are usually presented within the context of elaborate interpretations. Access is consequently, in the typical case, highly structured, predetermined, and controlled by museum professionals so as to be ‘correct,’ ‘safe,’ ‘understandable,’ and ‘educational.’<sup>3</sup>

Museum goers and researchers typically have had little or no power over what is being presented. Dr. Dave Schaepe provided me with photos he took at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) several years ago of distinctly Coast Salish sacred objects, including Sxwoyxwey masks, rattles, and dancing sticks, all items that should not be on display. When going through the AMNH online collection, I was unable to locate any of the items I had seen in the photos, demonstrating that museums get control over what is included and what is accessible in their collection.

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<sup>2</sup> Herb Joe: May 19, 2022 interview (circa 40:47).

<sup>3</sup> Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 90.

The final question I was asked to help answer is what Stó:lō protocols should be followed during future repatriation efforts, and what should be done with items once they are brought home. Speaking with Stó:lō elders, it seems there is no clear-cut way that repatriation should be carried out. What was emphasized to me was the importance of respect and doing it as a family. As I mentioned previously, *shxweli* is a life-force that connects all Stó:lō people together and to the world around them. Therefore, from a Stó:lō perspective everything should be treated with love and care because it is alive.

In the short span of a month and as an outsider this work is far from finished, and there is a great amount still to be done regarding the repatriation of sacred items. All I did was merely begin to lay the groundwork and get a basic understanding of the important questions raised by the SRRMC. During our interview, Chief Dalton Silver shared with me something his grandfather used to say: “the person who knows it all or thinks they do, they missed the first lesson.”<sup>4</sup> There is always more to learn, and I feel that I was only able to scratch the surface of such an important and sensitive topic.

### ***Defining “Sacred”***

I had been asked by the SRRMC to identify which cultural items were considered “sacred” according to Stó:lō people and find where this understanding compared and contrasted with institutional and federal definitions of such. The United States of America’s government’s North American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) defines sacred objects as

items that are specific ceremonial objects needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions by their present-day adherents. While many items, from ancient pottery sherds to arrowheads, might be imbued with sacredness in the eyes of an individual, these

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<sup>4</sup> Dalton Silver: May 24, 2022 interview (circa 26:25).

regulations are specifically limited to objects that were devoted to a traditional Native American religious ceremony or ritual and which have religious significance or function in the continued observance or renewal of such ceremony.<sup>5</sup>

NAGPRA is a federal law implemented in 1990. All cultural institutions, archaeological sites, and organizations in America proceed with repatriation processes under this federal legislation. Dr. Schaepe, who has dealt with NAGPRA on several occasions, including the repatriation of stone *T'xwelatse* in 2006<sup>6</sup>, shared with me how exclusive and challenging this government policy was: “It comes from a government and their legal foundation, protecting themselves. And it’s their process they oversee. So, there’s a complete power imbalance there.”<sup>7</sup> Working with NAGPRA is a one-sided, government process, with little to no room for Indigenous involvement, making repatriation efforts difficult, and potentially traumatic. In Canada, there is no overarching legislation that informs museums and peoples through the repatriation process. This consequently means that there is no single definition of “sacred” when it comes to repatriation in Canada. The Canadian government defines sacred objects as including “objects or places that are venerated, consecrated, dedicated, or protected.”<sup>8</sup> This description is vague and lacks cultural nuance. Additionally, this definition is not bound to a federal law, meaning that Canadian historical, archaeological, and ethnographical institutions do not have to abide by this definition. Dr. Schaepe says that although there is common ground, this comes with its own unique set of problems. Repatriation then varies on a case to case basis, as “each place has its tailored perspective and a tailored process, even their due diligence process before they – and how a

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<sup>5</sup> North American Graves Protection Agency 1990, (Title 43, Subpart A, § 10.2), Accessed July 13, 2022. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-43/subtitle-A/part-10/subpart-A/section-10.2>.

<sup>6</sup> See Herb Joe, *T'xwelátse Me t'ókw' Telo Qáys = Stone T'xwelatse Is Finally Home*, Bear Image Production, 2007, and T'xwelátse, *Man Turned to Stone: T'xwelátse*, Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Dave Schaepe: May 20, 2022 interview (circa 12:59).

<sup>8</sup> Government of Canada, “Caring for Sacred and Culturally Sensitive Objects, last modified 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/preventive-conservation/guidelines-collections/caring-sacred-culturally-sensitive-objects.html#a3>.

museum deals with its obligation to inform others that they're going to – this intention to repatriate, who has to do that work, whether it's us or them varies from institution to institution [...] That just requires a lot of capacity.”<sup>9</sup> Whether repatriation and sacred items are defined federally or institutionally, the indigenous communities making the repatriation request are never in the place of power. Identifying a Stó:lō way of understanding sacred objects would provide the community with a way to navigate government and institutional policies.

After speaking with four Stó:lō elders on The House of Respect and Caretaking Committee, it became apparent that coming up with a definition of “sacred” was not going to be easy. This is because Stó:lō see everything as having *shwexli*, or life. Herb Joe was helpful in explaining this concept.<sup>10</sup>

I asked the rest of the Elders I interviewed how they would define a sacred object. Steven Point explained that

the word in English is- means that has some sort of religious or spiritual connection. And so our word is Xá:Xa which loosely translates to being sacred too so when I, when I think about the word sacred it, I think it means, to me like something that can't be changed or altered, has to stay the same. So it's sacred, you can't sort of go and muck around with it, got to leave it alone. And it's, it means something that's come from someone else, like, [an] elder or come from the from a sacred spiritual event. So yeah, so sacred means that and so sacred artifacts that they're held by Smithsonian or anybody I think are, often are belong to personal people, people as personal property as part of their own spirituality and, or they belong to groups of people and families. And so [...] they're held by the family as sacred artifact and article, sometimes it's a mask, sometimes it's a rattle, sometimes it's a pipe. So it's, they're held like that they belong to the family or they belong to the person.<sup>11</sup>

Semá:th First Nation Chief, Dalton Silver, defined sacred as:

<sup>9</sup> Dave Schaepe: May 20, 2022 interview (circa 12:59).

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Point: May 12, 2022 interview (circa 0:23).

[...] sometimes, there are things that are sacred that we might not even discuss. There are some things that are so sacred that see, I might talk [...] with my brothers, but I might not talk to [...] my mother or my sister about. There are some things that are that sacred. There's a broader sense of, of things that are sacred, but when you're talking about items some of our people will say that a sacred item that say, maybe used in ceremony, or has been used in ceremony, while the belief is that that [...] may belong to a family, or even to an individual, that from our perspectives is actually a part of that family or a part of that individual that is more sacred to them than really can be described.<sup>12</sup>

Naxaxalt'si shared with me:

Sacred, Xa:xa's our word for it. Sacred...would be things from our past that help us understand our relationship to the past and how our ancestors viewed the world and how we can still see continuity. And then like, for instance, témélh, I mean, everybody has témélh so, well, it's not something that's protected and put away in a museum. But it's still really – it's really sacred right? And [...] sacredness comes from the fact that [it was used by...] all our ancestors at least as far as six and a half thousand years ago that archaeologists has been able to show is still [...] very sacred to us. And so, people you know, when they make their paint and use it that's considered a very sacred, sacred thing. But yeah, not something that you put away into the museum I guess, because it's still it's important to be used, use today.<sup>13</sup>

These four interviews show that there is a common understanding of “sacred” for Stó:lō. These items possess intimate and personal spiritual connections. There is far more that goes along with defining an object as “sacred” for Stó:lō than it does in NAGPRA or for the Canadian government and Canadian institutions. It is NAGPRA that defines what a sacred object is and is not in the repatriation process.<sup>14</sup> To NAGPRA, sacred items have a ceremonial purpose. But for Stó:lō, sacred items can be much more than that, because everything has *shxweli*.

Therefore, the term “sacred” and what constitutes as a sacred object varies from person to person. NAGPRA, defined and carried out through colonial government policy, does not make room for personal or cultural perceptions. In Stó:lō culture, knowing the private or guarded knowledge of one's family is a sign of good status. Wayne Suttles writes that this knowledge

<sup>12</sup> Dalton Silver: May 24, 2022 interview (circa 2:10).

<sup>13</sup> Naxaxalt'si (Albert (Sonny) McHalsie): May 25, 2022 interview (circa 22:35).

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 5.

“consisted of genealogies and family traditions revealing family greatness, gossip about other families demonstrating how inferior they are... and a good deal of solid moral training.”<sup>15</sup>

Essentially what this boils down to, is that families have particular ways of defining what make them distinct from other families. This implies to me that the definition of sacred likely varies between families, and possibly within families.

Several years ago, Dr. Norman Todd, a white physician, worked for the Stó:lō community. Dr. Todd asked Stó:lō artist Simon Charlie to carve him copies of some sxwoxwey masks that he had found in the British Museum’s collection. Charlie obliged, and carved several masks for Dr. Todd who displayed them in his home for all to come and see, including the Stó:lō community.<sup>16</sup> While Charlie had deemed it alright to sell undanced masks to the Todds, not everyone approved of this decision. Artist Stan Greene shared his opinion on Dr. Todd’s collection:

Those aren’t for sale, they’re not for show. They’re not to be hanging on people’s walls. They’re sacred to our people. I understand they have a whole collection of them, I’ve seen them [indecipherable] 17 all of them. Myself, the galleries have tried to get me to make sxwoyxwey masks for sale, [shemucks] is the rattles, but those belong to my family. We use those in our longhouses and they’re sacred. They’re not meant for sale, they’re not meant for trade or display, being in the stores. They come to us from the creator to use by our people to carry on our way of life. We use those when a child is born, when a child changes life, when a person becomes married, when a person dies. We honour the dead. We mourn. They’re not made for people on the walls.<sup>17</sup>

Depending on one’s private or family knowledge, perceptions, and understanding of sacredness can change. While there are objects that all Stó:lō people see as sacred, there are times when opinions vary, such as with reference to the masks in the Todd collection. Naxaxalt’si shared with

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<sup>15</sup> Wayne Suttles, “Private Knowledge, Morality, and Social Classes among the Coast Salish,” *American Anthropologist* 60, no. 3, (June 1959): 501.

<sup>16</sup> Cara Krmpotich, “The Todd Collection,” Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre Archives.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



me that when a mask is first danced, it becomes “alive with a connection.”<sup>18</sup> Because the Todd masks would not be danced, Charlie felt it appropriate to carve them and have the Todd’s showcase them on their walls. But to Greene, whether the mask was danced or not, did not make a difference. It was still sacred.

Naxaxalt’si told me about a young man he had seen about fifteen years ago on Vancouver Island, who was selling a Sxwayxwey mask for several thousand dollars. Reflecting on that encounter, Naxaxalt’si said, “he felt that he was part of the family that allowed him to carve this big mask and commercialize on it and sell it right. Which to me is like, I don’t think we should be doing.”<sup>19</sup> The man on Vancouver Island had made a decision to carve and sell this mask, without consulting the Sxwayxwey family and the private knowledge that family shares, which to Naxaxalt’si, should have been done. While on the surface, Stó:lō might share a unified understanding of the sacred, the root of it is much more nuanced.

### ***Identifying Objects as Stó:lō***

As I reviewed online museum collections for this project, it became clear that it was not going to be so easy to identify which items were necessarily Stó:lō. In some cases, enough information was provided that I was able to trace them back to being from Stó:lō territory. However, for the majority of the items, the location attributed to these items by institutions was extremely broad, using categories like “Coast Salish” and “Northwest Coast,” which encompass multiple Indigenous communities. This can create a variety of complications for Stó:lō, as laws such as NAGPRA require tribes to prove that the object is theirs. Subsection 10.6 of NAGPRA states:

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<sup>18</sup> Naxaxalt’si: May 25, 2022 interview (circa. 32:47).

<sup>19</sup> Naxaxalt’si: May 25, 2022 interview (circa. 57:29).

In circumstances in which the cultural affiliation of the human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony cannot be ascertained and the objects were excavated intentionally or discovered inadvertently on Federal land that is recognized by a final judgment of the Indian Claims Commission or the United States Court of Claims as the aboriginal land of an Indian tribe:

(A) In the Indian tribe aboriginally occupying the Federal land on which the human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony were excavated intentionally or discovered inadvertently, or

(B) If a preponderance of the evidence shows that a different Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization has a stronger cultural relationship with the human remains, associated funerary objects, unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony, in the Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization that has the strongest demonstrated relationship with the cultural items.<sup>20</sup>

NAGPRA makes it clear that definite proof of ownership is the best option when making a repatriation request in order to ensure the item returns to its place of origin. The Canadian Museum of History has a similar policy, writing that repatriation requests must show “the historical relationship of the requestor(s) to the human remains or objects concerned.”<sup>21</sup> With so much knowledge loss due to historic and ongoing colonial actions, shared artistic styles, and spiritual ceremonies, proving that these items came from Stó:lō territory specifically, is a challenge.

I sat down with Herb Joe and showed him all the items I had found in museum collections through my online searches to that date. I had located several sets of *kw'oxwemel*, deer hoof rattles, that were being held at the Canadian Museum of History, Smithsonian Museum, American Museum of Natural History, and Museum of Vancouver. All these items were described as coming from Coast Salish territory. Regarding the *kw'oxwemel*, Herb Joe said:

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<sup>20</sup> North American Graves Protection Agency 1990, (Title 43, Subpart B, § 10.6), Accessed July 13, 2022. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-43/subtitle-A/part-10/subpart-B/section-10.6>

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation (CMCC), “Repatriation Policy,” (Section 5.3 i), last modified 2011, <https://www.historymuseum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/REPATRIATION-POLICY.pdf>.

those are common, right from our territory here, up here in the upper valley, right through to Vancouver Island, and probably down the coast as well. As I know, my wife is from the Upper Skagit community and... their traditional ceremonial regalia have deer hoofs, as part of it.<sup>22</sup>

Without more details on how these objects ended up at museums, there is no way to prove for certain that any of the *kw'oxwemel* I located are specifically Stó:lō. This raises questions regarding who they should be repatriated to, and who should be in charge of the process. That is, suggesting that the institutions would agree to repatriate them without a singular person or tribe laying claim to them. When we moved on to looking at the *swoyxwey* masks Dave Schaepe had photographed at the American Museum of Natural History, Herb Joe shared with me that while the original mask came from Stó:lō territory, at Kawkawa lake, “the masks moved down the valley through marriage and migration down to the coast. And then onto Vancouver Island. But it still stayed within our Coast Salish tribe.”<sup>23</sup> As discussed previously with the *kw'oxwemel*, proving ownership of a *swoyxwey* mask could prove to be a challenge and raises the same questions about what should be done with it and where it should go upon repatriation. Although, families did and do often have a distinct *swoyxwey* mask. For instance, Herb Joe shared with me that when he received his *swoyxwey* mask, he was the only one to have a spring salmon mask.<sup>24</sup> In speaking with Steven Point, he was able to identify one of the *swoyxwey* sawbill masks from the American Museum of Natural History as belonging to his family: “This is our Coast Salish mask from our family. This is my family mask.”<sup>25</sup> This information could allow for the NAGPRA repatriation process to be more direct, as an owner could be identified.

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<sup>22</sup> Herb Joe: May 19, 2022 interview (circa 1:29:15).

<sup>23</sup> Herb Joe: May 19, 2022 interview (circa 1:04:57).

<sup>24</sup> Herb Joe: May 19, 2022 interview (circa 1:00:08).

<sup>25</sup> Steven Point: May 12, 2022 interview (circa 18:26).

Another avenue to finding where items were taken from and who the rightful owner is, is through the collector. Some museums, although not all, list who the item came from, providing a name. From these names, we can get a glimpse into the history of the items and where they might have come from. Collector George Emmons had sold a large collection of Northwest Coast items to the American museum between 1882 and 1886. From this sale, historian Douglas Cole wrote that “that purchase had put Lieutenant Emmons and the American Museum in a close and continuing relationship.”<sup>26</sup> With a buyer like the Smithsonian Museum, George Emmons diligently continued to collect items, including some from Stó:lō territory, which I was able to locate, including rattles and ritual objects. The Emmons collection from the 1880’s and his later contributions to the museum after 1894 gave the museum “prominence in the region.”<sup>27</sup> The Smithsonian was looking to set itself apart from and above other museums in the area, and possessing a large anthropological collection was one way to draw in more museum goers and make a name for itself.

Although not Emmons’ biggest fan, Franz Boas, a German anthropologist and well-known collector born in 1858, said of the American Museum that it “is ‘being done’ by Mr. Emmons.”<sup>28</sup> While Emmons continued to buy for the Smithsonian on a few occasions, museum politics prevented him from selling such large quantities of items. Boas, head of the ethnology department at the Smithsonian, felt that Emmons was too amateurish, and “not scientific enough” to meet the standards of the museum and its future.<sup>29</sup> Boas then looked to others to fill gaps in the Smithsonian collection, such as James Teit, a collector in British Columbia’s interior,

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<sup>26</sup> Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 142.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

John R. Swanton who located items amongst the Haida, and Charles Frederic Newcombe. These three men looked to Indigenous people, missionaries, traders, and other collectors to build their assortment of items.

On a research trip to the British Columbia Archives in Victoria, I came across correspondence from between 1901 and 1906 between C.F. Newcombe and Charles Hill-Tout, an ethnologist who was in Abbotsford at the time. The letters discussed a “grave totem” which Hill-Tout had somehow acquired from the Harrison River and according to his Indigenous informant, “it represented a member of a family whose ancestors were “real men” and not descendants of mythical creatures as most of the ancestry of the upper Delta tribes.”<sup>30</sup> Newcombe collected items for several museums, including the Smithsonian and Royal British Columbia Museum. I was unable to find an item with this description in any of the museum databases I examined, but this letter shows that Newcombe collected items from Stó:lō territory. Newcombe kept copious journals which are all housed at the Royal BC Museum, and could be further investigated for more information regarding items purchased or taken from Stó:lō lands by Newcombe and his network of collectors.

As seen with Boas discouraging purchases from George Emmons, museum politics could mean that sacred items ended up at a variety of museums, with museums selling parts of their collections or collectors looking elsewhere for buyers. Anthropologist Michael Ames states that “deciding what is ‘art’ is not only a matter of academic tradition, semantics, or personal preference, it is also a political act. The label determines what is to be admitted into that inner sanctum of the cultural establishment, the prestigious gallery.”<sup>31</sup> Who collected items, what was

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<sup>30</sup> C.F. Newcombe to Charles Hill-Tout, *Newcombe Family Papers*, Reel A01748, Vol 4 Folder 80, MS-1077, British Columbia Archives.

<sup>31</sup> Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours*, 154.

collected, where items were collected from, how long museums held on to the items, how items were and are still presented, and what information is provided to museum visitors, all lays in the hands of the establishment. When trying to locate items and how they arrived at the places they are now, it is dependent upon past and present museum politics.

### *Coming Home*

Bringing cultural items home is a crucial part of knowledge restoration and healing. Authors David M. Schaepe, Bill Angelbeck, David Snook, and John R. Welch argue that:

the healing of wounds caused by cultural stress through the loss of personal and cultural identity and erosion of meaning can result from regaining elements of culture and history. Recovering tangible material culture provides a direct means of filling the holes within “porous societies” that are created through colonial erasure and theft or destruction of cultural icons and belongings.<sup>32</sup>

The repatriation of objects allows Indigenous people to control their heritage in whatever way they see fit. One of my tasks for the project was to find out what protocols surround bringing home culturally sensitive items, and what should be done with them once they are returned.

Herb Joe shared a few examples of what the repatriation process looks like for the House of Respect and Caretaking Committee:

Well, we normally go down to like, for instance, the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, they agreed to repatriate [...] sacred objects that they had down there that belonged to up here. So, our committee got together, and we formed a family that would go down to the university to enter into discussions with the appropriate people down there to make the arrangements for the trip back home. So, I think we went down maybe two or three times and we met with them, made all the [...] appropriate arrangements. Dave, of course, got involved with our committee, and then went and arranged for a vehicle to transport our ancestor back up here. We brought him back here as the first step. And then from there, the next step would

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<sup>32</sup> David Schaepe, et al. “Archaeology as Therapy: Connecting Belongings, Knowledge, Time, Place, and Well-Being,” *Current Anthropology* 58, no. 4 (August 2017): 508.

be we met with the community that the stone object came from, and we arranged for it to be transferred there. And in the meantime, other objects that we have gotten, we got some from the Royal Museum in BC in Victoria, Museum of Vancouver, Vancouver Museum, I think. And of course, at UBC, we've met with them a number of times. And there have been a couple of other museums as well that we want to do. Of course, we went back down to Burke a couple of times to talk about things on there. And we made of course, one trip, when David was our, integral and, and finding out about sacred objects that were in the National Museum in Ottawa. So we got committee and my wife and I were part of that group that went back to we were there for, I think three days for initially met with the [...] people at the museum. And on that first day, accepted their sacred object back. And then we made arrangements in the second day to have it have it brought back and then the third day, we actually made the trip and came back home. But I think that process, we've repeated a number of times.<sup>33</sup>

Herb emphasized the importance of proceeding as a group, calling the House of Respect and Caretaking Committee a “family.” There were multiple voices that guided each repatriation effort he was a part of.

Naxaxalt’si spoke of the importance of respect:

“[C]hildren aren't allowed to handle artifacts and there's a lot of other protocols that take care of children, because children are really considered to be very vulnerable. And so, we have to take care of them. And that's one of the protocols is to not touch the artifacts, just the same way that they're not allowed outside after dark and the sun goes down, they have to be inside, not allowed to be in cemeteries, not allowed to be in the same room of a deceased person, things like that. There's all these protocols to take, take care of them. Yeah, so that's [...] part of the Heritage Policy as well. What else can I think of? Oh, other guidelines that came about was the importance of wrapping them in red cloth. Right. So that's one of the first things that we did with those ones at MOA there's a picture hanging on my wall when we're still looking at the cardboard boxes. Right, and that's one of the first things they said well, we need to get them into the cedar box. They shouldn't be in a cardboard box, and we need to wrap them in, in red cloth,” right, so that's what we ended up doing, [...] getting all these custom-made boxes, depending on what the ancestral remains or where or what size they were. And so, we got these boxes, and we went down there and then we had, I think, I don't know if it was Helen or for it was Gwen? One of them actually wrapped the remains in cloth and [...] put it inside the box, then that's also where Steven was there as well. And he was one that was marking the boxes with *témélh*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Herb Joe: May 19, 2022 interview (circa 53:40).

<sup>34</sup> Naxaxalt’si: May 25, 2022 interview (circa 13:35).

Respect is a multifaceted notion when it comes to repatriation. The objects and ancestors being returned home must be treated with respect, wrapped in red cloth, and placed in boxes marked with *témélh*. *Témélh* provides protection as *Naxaxalt'si* explained:

[W]e used it six and a half thousand years ago as well. And so that's why we use it in the like archaeologists, when they go out into the field, they have to put *témélh* on the temples and on their hands, and here, front of their feet. And one of the elders from Sq'éwlets actually said, they should actually put it on the back of their neck as well. So right behind their neck. And the reason for that is the ancestral spirits will recognize that and then recognize that it's sacred, right, and so then [...] won't do any harm. And we also explained to the archaeologists, especially the archaeology students that came out they had to wear *témélh* they're doing the archaeological work. We said it's not just for their own protection, it's also because we're all connected. Everybody's connected, right. And I've talked about that story where Rosaleen talks about that *mimestiyexw* bothering her,<sup>35</sup> and yet it was bothering her cousin from Sts'ailes, and her cousin from Katzie and her cousin from Musqueam bothering all four of them. Right, so you can see, and that's what she was saying, that it's not just to protect the person that's wearing the *témélh*. But it's also to protect other people as well because all other people that are connected to that village or to [...] those ancestral remains or to that village site, there's a potential for them to get harmed as well. So that's one of the things we tell the archaeologists [it's] not just for their protection, that protects us too.<sup>36</sup>

Steven Point also echoed the importance of respect:

Oh, well, it depends on what it is. I know that when we brought back the stone [...] man downstairs, *T'xwelatse*, I went down with a family, and we did the protocols necessary to move the stone. So, I went with them to do that. And so, there are protocols, there are things that you should do that boil down to just being respectful. That's all. That you're being respectful. So, you know that some objects should be wrapped up in a certain way. It depends on what it is, like, if it's a bundle, then the owner often has a certain way that they take care of the bundles so [...] it depends on what [...] it is, its not going to be the same for everything. But there are protocols and depends, I guess on what it is [...] So they do need to consult the family or the owner about that and make sure that that they're not being disrespectful to the artifact or the article. Native people believe that things are alive, right.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Naxaxalt'si: May 25, 2022 interview (circa 1:01).

<sup>36</sup> Naxaxalt'si: May 25, 2022 interview (circa 15:39).

<sup>37</sup> Steven Point: May 12, 2022 interview (circa 3:05).



Steven Point's mention of respect ties back to what Herb Joe said about *shxweli*.<sup>38</sup> Everything on Earth has life, and therefore should be treated with the utmost care.

Chief Dalton Silver talked about the procedure in figuring out what should be done with a repatriated object:

[...] well firstly, try and find the area that they're from and [...] then maybe find those things from Stó:lō, [...] or the Salish, find those people that are [...] still involved in the [...] cultural ways of the people there, and it's pretty hard now to pinpoint the locations of things or [...] the exact families. As I said, some of these may come from, ultimately, they will come from an individual, but also to find the families that are associated with [...] that person if [...] that can be found or located. It's [...] a pretty difficult thing now, but I think one of the things would actually be to contact the tribe who was closest to the area that these items are associated with.<sup>39</sup>

From these interviews, it seemed clear that protocol generally proceeds on a case-by-case basis, but there are elements that remain consistent, including respect, family, and connection. In my interview with Dr. Schaepe, he shared with me one of Herb Joe's quotes that sums up the information that the Elders told me: "there's no right way to do this, there's only a good way to do it."<sup>40</sup> This sentiment is one that guides repatriation for Stó:lō people.

### ***Conclusion***

After spending a month at the SRRMC researching this topic and speaking with four Stó:lō elders, it is clear that this research is far from complete. With more interviews, reading journals and correspondence of collectors, publications, and digging through more museum collections, more sacred items can be identified, along with the history of how they got to the places that they are. Schaepe et al. write that "in pursuing and learning about the past, we affect

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<sup>38</sup> Herb Joe: May 19, 2022 interview (circa 40:47).

<sup>39</sup> Dalton Silver: May 24, 2022 interview (circa 3:57).

<sup>40</sup> Dave Schaepe: May 20, 2022 interview (circa 8:29).

the present.”<sup>41</sup> By locating and working to bring home sacred items, wounds inflicted by colonialism can potentially begin to heal. Repatriation helps communities to become whole again, as ancestral items are reconnected with descendants. Ames reminds readers of an important concept:

There are many voices, many stories. They do not add up to one consistent view, nor should they, because they represent different people with different interests and experiences. We nevertheless need to listen. Native points of view may remind us that outsiders do not have the final word. It is the continuing interaction between these various perspectives that is important.<sup>42</sup>

Like with many things, there is nuance and complexity to repatriation. This paper included only a few informants, and more must be consulted to gain a better picture of what that process should look like. The important thing is that Stó:lō voices be many in number, and be at the forefront of repatriation efforts. It is their heritage and their journey, to be carried out in whatever way Stó:lō see fit.

However, in order for repatriation to move forwards, colonial museums must challenge their history and swallow the hard truths of their existence. Museums are resistant to change, as the way they run continues to allow the highly educated classes to be prized. Widespread education is the focus of these institutions, as museums see themselves as the best narrators of history, and while they may see themselves as conservators of the past, they are passive bodies, historically unwilling to put themselves in uncomfortable situations.<sup>43</sup> Museums are able to remain in this comfortable rut because colonial government policies allow them to remain running as they did hundreds of years ago. Pushes for change must occur and have begun to take shape in museums across the world. Colonial institutions must learn to listen – to take a step

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<sup>41</sup> David Schaepe, et al. “Archaeology as Therapy,” 516.

<sup>42</sup> Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours*, 7.

back and make themselves vulnerable and open to hear the voices of Indigenous people. Hopefully with this attitude objects can be returned home, and communities can continue to heal.

While individual beliefs and experience do come into play when defining the term ‘sacred,’ there are common threads that tie each perspective together. Everything possesses life, or *shxweli*, therefore everything is connected and must be treated with the utmost care and respect. When it comes to sacred items, this could include storing and using them properly, keeping children from touching them, letting them decompose naturally, bringing them out for specific events, or only talking about them with a select few. Sacred items include but are not limited to ceremonial items. Depending on who the owner is and their connection to an object, the term sacred could be applied to a variety of things. In the repatriation process this same care and respect must be observed. Identifying further commonalities in what is considered sacred will lead to a more fleshed out, representative definition that can be used when making repatriation requests.

## Appendix

### Potential Next Steps

The Royal BC Museum and Archives possesses the fonds of Charles F. Newcombe, a notorious ethnographer and collector in 19th and 20th century British Columbia. These fonds include diaries and personal papers, organized on 25 reels of microfilm. The finding aid for this collection can be found in Series MS 1077 or through this link: [Series MS-1077 - Newcombe family papers](#). As other collectors are identified, their diaries could be searched also.

More community members should be interviewed to better formulate an understanding of ‘the sacred.’ Community members could also inform the House of Respect and Caretaking Committee on missing sacred items with details like: who took items; where they may be housed now; family symbols, artistic styles, and stories that could help identify an object as Stó:lō, experiences with repatriation, caretaking methods of sacred items, sacred items they have seen or heard about in museum and personal collections, etc.

More museum collections should be canvassed to locate Stó:lō sacred items. As the definition of ‘sacred’ grows, these collections should be searched again in case items were missed. Collections I viewed include the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver BC, British Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Royal Ontario Museum, Canadian Museum of History, Detroit Institute of Arts, Deutsches Museum, and the Rijksmuseum, and the museums which are part of the Reciprocal Research Network. Provincial museums in Canada and American state museums could be searched, as well as large world institutions such as in Australia, France, England, Scotland, Greece, Italy, Vatican City, Mexico, etc.

A synthesized definition of ‘sacred’ could be established, and broken down into categories such as: human remains; items associated with burials; ceremonial items such as Sxwayxwey regalia, Winter Dance regalia, etc.; household items, etc. This would help with repatriation requests, for museum staff to gain an understanding of the Stó:lō understanding of items in their collections.

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