

***Being and Place Among the Tlingit.* By Thomas F. Thornton. Seattle: University of Washington Press, in association with Sealaska Heritage Institute, 2007. xv + 247 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index.**

In a fresh interpretation of Tlingit social experience, Thomas F. Thornton argues that identity and environment are indivisible terms. In the words of elder Gabriel George, “these lands are vital not only to our subsistence, but also to our sense of being” (189). Indeed, for the Tlingit, so inextricable are these concepts that a constellation of place names, titles, songs, kinship lines, and material culture connect their varied and often overlapping senses of identity to a complex web of physical landscapes in different parts of the rugged Alaskan panhandle. The culmination of almost twenty years of ethnographic research, and informed by the author’s early work at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, *Being and Place Among the Tlingit* makes a stimulating and erudite contribution to the growing literature on the poetics and politics of indigenous landscapes.

Thornton’s central thesis is that for the Tlingit, and perhaps all indigenous peoples, concepts of place are not simply reflections of a broader cultural system, but rather constitute “the cultural system upon which all key cultural structures are built” (4). While this is not a new idea from a global perspective, when applied to the Northwest Coast it represents a radical departure from a long tradition of research which—if well aware of cultural geography—has tended to reduce the environment to obstacle, place names to identifying tags, and landscape to terrain. A handful of recent works have begun to rethink such assumptions, but Thornton’s text represents the first book-length treatment of such matters and is therefore a welcome contribution to Northwest Coast anthropology and cognate disciplines.

The book is composed of a theoretical introduction, four substantial thematic chapters, and a conclusion. It is further accompanied by black and white photographs, maps, and very helpful tables. In the introduction, Thornton provides a useful synthesis of major works on theories of space, time, and experience that underpins his own stance on the centrality of place in social reproduction. Many important works in time geography and phenomenology are wheeled out here to good effect. There are also several well-placed quotes by some of the founding figures of anthropology, reminding us that despite the apparent novelty of concepts of place and space in the humanities and social sciences, much of the theoretical scaffolding for these concepts was constructed long before current fashion would suggest.

Chapter 2 examines the way that social structure is implicated in nested and overlapping forms of geographic knowledge. Thornton argues that knowledge of particular named locales helps to delimit different scales of Tlingit community identity by revealing connections and boundaries often invisible to outsiders. For example, the clan and house group are symbolized by a clutch of “owned things,” or *at.óow*, ranging from salmon streams and mountain tops to ceremonial regalia and songs, all of which are associated with different toponyms that serve to delimit territories of belonging. While the varied boundaries that constitute institutions such as moiety, *kwánn*, clan, and house have shifted as a result of different historical tensions, these shifts were gradual compared to the cataclysmic changes brought about by Euro-American contacts in the last two centuries. Even so, Thornton argues, Tlingit culture has exhibited a significant amount of resilience, something seen, for example, in individual naming practices. Traditionally, a person’s clan, moiety, and individual status could be understood through his or her name, but European naming customs have confused things by imposing patrilineally inherited last names on Tlingit individuals. In response to this situation, the Tlingit developed an improvised naming strategy that ties first names (which are not inherited) to features of the local environment, resulting in names such as Berners Bay Jim, Hot Springs Charlie, Sheep Creek Mary, and the like.

The third chapter enters into a fascinating discussion about how the Tlingit name things, what the processes of naming are, the semantic components of names, and how these components are interpreted cross-culturally. Thornton is at his strongest in this chapter when parsing toponyms and other grammatical expressions, thereby throwing light on the nuanced ecological knowledge of this hunting, fishing and gathering people. The dependence of Northwest Coast cultures on salmon is well known, but not all salmon species have been equally important to local indigenous peoples. In Alaska, the most desirable types of salmon, sockeye and king, are referenced in a disproportionate number of place names, while others, such as pinks, are less well represented. The chapter also contains a wonderful analysis of the way that fluid process can be embedded within place names. For example, Thornton describes how the English place name “Glacier Bay” denotes little more than a static relationship between “glacier” and “bay,” while the Tlingit equivalent, *Sít’ Eeti Geeyi* or “Bay Taking the Place of the Glacier” (81), suggests a kind of experienced temporality that invites us to imagine the bay growing as the glacier shrunk, a characteristic probably unknown in Western toponymy. Distressingly, however, Thornton warns that with the Tlingit language

in a steep decline the long-term survival of local geographic knowledge remains in question.

In chapter 4, Thornton draws from the work of Karl Polanyi to suggest that all forms of place-making are bound up in the process of production, essentially defined as “the interaction of man and nature” (118). The important point to take away from this rather lengthy discussion is that the timing and spacing of the traditional seasonal round—often examined primarily as a matter of subsistence—was crucial in both constructing ties with place and maintaining and nurturing those ties. This discussion will be particularly valuable for those with interests in material culture because it shows how technology played an important role in mediating relationships between people and named locales. The canoe, for instance, informed the way that the geography of rivers was understood, which is why Porcupine Creek off the Klehini River was considered not simply as a subsistence site but as the “highest campsite to which the Natives could get by canoe” (147). The chapter also contains an examination of the ways that the development of commercial fisheries has encouraged a new, flexible, non-corporate, and geographically dispersed workforce, a process that has tended to weaken the sort of Tlingit ties to the land that are normally reinforced through house group and clan activities. Disappointingly, however, the author does not push his analysis of this subject far enough and fails to consider how new time-space locales and new technologies might shape Tlingit geographic knowledge.

In the final substantive chapter, the role of ritual in “emplacement” is considered. Here, Thornton suggests that the all-important memorial potlatch can be understood as a “total emplacement phenomenon” insofar as the social organization, symbols, and foodways associated with it all join people to place. The performance of the ritual within the clan house, the deployment of symbols in the form of songs and regalia, and the consumption of locally sourced food from the lands of the deceased all act to reinforce geographic ties. If the conclusions at this point are unsurprising, they are nevertheless well illustrated.

*Being and Place* takes many of its cues from an emerging body of research on indigenous landscapes, and its author shares concerns with a growing number of scholars interested in landscape as a medium of social reproduction. However, the details of Thornton’s study of Tlingit social experience make his contribution in this area stand out. The author’s deft linguistic analysis produces some fine examples of contingent cultural geography and allows his argument to go beyond trite assertions about the importance of place in social identity. Indeed, Thornton’s discussions

of how social identity becomes embedded in landscape, its semantic forms, and how it is engaged with in the present make his book a formidable piece of scholarship. As the author himself maintains, because most, if not all, indigenous peoples conceive of place in similar ways, this study will certainly facilitate useful comparative research across indigenous cultural boundaries.

If I have reservations about *Being and Place*, they relate to its subtext. Thornton suggests that language and physical attachments to place are fundamental to Tlingit identity, which makes some of his conclusions seem outdated. Tellingly, his informants were largely elders who spoke the Tlingit tongue and knew the land's traditional secrets, and he makes the point that if the Tlingit were to lose their language they would become a "lost people." Likewise, Thornton asserts early in his book that if one's appreciation of cultural geography is solely based on the study of maps, photos, or written narratives, then it is difficult to truly understand a place (7). In his mind, despite the weakening of ties caused by the development of a capitalist economy, the Tlingit people remain "strong," a view which curiously associates identity with a form of well-being. This line of argument draws on an outmoded form of anthropological thinking that relies on ideas of cultural authenticity. Are such views realistic in a globally connected world that is constantly reinventing itself—even though it may recycle its foundation myths?

From my standpoint as a Canadian archaeologist at a Scottish university, cultural identity neither hinges on language nor physical knowledge of places. Indeed, thousands of proud "Scots" return to Scotland every year to rekindle ties with the land, real or fictive. Most have no understanding of Scots or Gaelic, yet many reify connections to place through the consumption of tourist ephemera and genealogical data. Some have never even been to Scotland before, yet draw lines of identity as viscerally as any eighteenth-century clansman might have done. As Thornton points out, a considerable Tlingit population, including many young people, now reside in cities such as Juneau. They speak English as their first language and have little direct contact with traditional geographies. The fact that Thornton eschews consideration of how paper artefacts (including ethnographic texts) and other media shape ideas about homelands underlines the point that on some level he believes that indigenous peoples and other ethnic groups are defined at root by a bundle of core values. This perhaps explains why he falls short of addressing those forms of place-making created through Tlingit involvement in commercial logging or through their adoption of certain forms of technology, such

power boats. Admittedly, such an undertaking may have required a good deal more research and a much longer study; perhaps this will be the focus of the author's next book.

These issues aside, *Being and Place Among the Tlingit* provides an excellent grounding in indigenous environmental values and how they operate in society. The book will almost certainly become a standard text for Northwest Coast anthropologists, human geographers, even archaeologists, for whom Thornton's discussion of material symbols, such as Chilkat blankets, will serve as a useful reminder of the ways artefacts can actively reference people and places. Finally, because it is a well written book, brimming with helpful examples of the politics of place-making, it will interest scholars studying human-landscape interactions in diverse regions of the globe.

**Jeff Oliver**, Department of Archaeology, University of Aberdeen

*West Over Sea: Studies in Scandinavian Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300*. Edited by Beverley Ballin Smith, Simon Taylor, and Gareth Williams. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007. xxix + 581 pp. Illustrations, index.

No student of Scandinavian settlement in the British Isles can fail to be familiar with the works of Barbara Crawford, whose research and publications on many aspects of the subject have made such a huge impact since the 1980s. Crawford's interdisciplinary book, *Scandinavian Scotland* (1987), remains the essential overview of the subject and has been described as a "pioneering and visionary handbook" (x). Further contributions include several edited volumes (arising from symposia organized by Crawford), the excavation report on the late Norse site at Biggings in Papa Stour, Shetland (1999), and what has been described as a "steady flow" of articles (x). Recently, Crawford has been the moving force behind the "Papar Project," an investigation into all the places in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland and Caithness which have the name Papay, meaning "the island of the priests" and Papil meaning "the settlement of the priests".

*West Over Sea*, one of many excellent edited volumes on aspects of the Viking age to be published in the first decade of the twenty-first century, is a "celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Scandinavian Scotland* and of Barbara Crawford's wider contribution to the subject" (xiv). This thick, 581-page volume contains thirty papers