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The Coppers of the Northwest Coast Indians: Their Origin, Development, and Possible Antecedents. By Carol F. Jopling.

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Would that I could visit the Ant's kingdom  
Way down, not high as our skyscrapers.  
I'd find no mechanism, no computers,  
No electrical musts, or giant cabinets,  
Filled with drawers of business information.  
But feel the intuition that guides them—  
A spirit of nature since the beginning of time.  
Could not the Indian live as the Ant?

On the next page he states,

I'm tired of technical innovators  
The forked tongue of Anglo Saxon linguists  
Articulating like rocks down a chute.  
Is that fluent and poetic rhythm?  
I don't write for the intelligentsia.

This is a book by an elder Indian, penned—and emphatically so—for younger Indians. It is emblematic of the cross-generational transfer of native worldview, the cement that has bound our peoples together through the millennia. In writing it, Oliver has more than met his obligations to the rest of us; he has pointed the way to our cultural survival. In turn, it is our task to glean the true meaning of his words and to see to it that others have similar opportunities to share the wealth of their vision with us. *Chasers of the Sun* is the kind of book we need to see many more of in the years ahead.

*Ward Churchill*  
University of Colorado, Boulder

**The Coppers of the Northwest Coast Indians: Their Origin, Development, and Possible Antecedents.** By Carol F. Jopling. Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Volume 79, Part 1, 1989. 164 pages. \$25.00 paper.

This book represents an admirable attempt to bring together disparate accounts of that Northwest Coast enigma—the Copper. (Throughout the book, as in this review, Copper with a capital C refers to the artifact, copper with a lower case *c* refers to the metal.) Coppers are shield-shaped objects consisting of two parts,

a "flaring trapezoidal upper section," often decorated, and a lower rectangular section. The horizontal bar of a raised T-form separates the two sections and the lower section is bisected by the vertical bar. Coppers vary considerably in size, from as small as two inches to more than three feet in length.

Generally considered an item of wealth, Coppers played an important role in the ceremonial life of certain Northwest Coast tribes, especially in potlatching. The author has ferreted out historical and ethnographic references to piece together the probable development and history of this unique art form. Nevertheless, despite the breadth and depth of Jopling's analysis, I am somewhat troubled by two things: first, the somewhat vague connection between the Copper shape and Asiatic motifs; and second, the fact that some of the most important conclusions were arrived at nine years earlier in another publication, which Jopling does not appear to be aware of. Both of these points will be explored further below.

*The Coppers of the Northwest Coast Indians* is a four-part analysis in terms of both content and structure. First, the use of the Copper among five Northwest Coast groups—the Tlingit, the Haida, the Tsimshian, the Kwakiutl and the Bella Coola—is explored in some detail for the years 1860 to 1920. Not only does Jopling discuss the role of Coppers in these societies, but she delves into the ideological aspects of the mineral and its deeper meaning to Northwest Coast people. This section is, by far, the most fascinating part of the book. The research is thorough, the arguments well formed.

The second part of the book looks at the early history of Coppers, from 1741 to 1840. At first glance it seemed rather unusual to discuss the use and meaning of Coppers from 1860 to 1920 before discussing the early development of the object; however, it makes sense when considering what Jopling is trying to do. An excellent case is made for the development of the Copper as a result of contact with Europeans and the introduction of trade sheet copper. Faced with a known material but in a new form, the Northwest Coast people responded by creating a new item of wealth. Jopling discusses the availability of native copper as opposed to the types of copper used as sheathing on European ships in the late 1700s and early 1800s, and argues convincingly that the former was the source of metal for Northwest Coast Coppers. To further substantiate the argument, the third part of the



book deals with metallographic analyses of Coppers to determine if they were made of manufactured copper or naturally occurring copper. It has long been a bit of ethnographic "truth" on the Northwest Coast that Coppers were traditionally made of native metal traded from the groups residing in the Copper River area of Alaska, and that as the more workable trade copper became available, it came to be used to produce the Coppers. Jopling's evidence puts that fallacy to rest. While undoubtedly Northwest Coast people obtained copper from the Copper River area, it was for other purposes. Not one of the Coppers analyzed by Jopling was made of native copper. While this evidence does not preclude the possibility that Coppers of native metal will be discovered, the likelihood is slim.

While the first three parts of this book are fascinating, in my estimation the final section falls short. I had the good fortune to read the first half of this book while visiting the homeland of the Haida on the Queen Charlotte Islands off the British Columbia coast and the second half while on a research trip to the Yupik (Eskimo) village of Togiak, which faces the Bering Sea. As I looked over the gray expanse of ocean and read Jopling's speculation about the possible Old World antecedents of the distinctive Copper shape, I could not help but be awed by the incredible distance between the proposed Asiatic origin of the Copper motif and the homeland of the five groups that eventually incorporated it into their material and ideological culture. I could not help wondering, "What of the dozens of groups in between?" Are there no kindred motifs with these groups? If not, I fear Jopling has repeated many of the same methodological problems that plagued the diffusionists of several generations ago. I also asked, "Why must the origin of Native American singularities always be sought elsewhere?" Jopling offers one possible link with the example of a distinctively shaped archaeological artifact from Point Hope, Alaska, but it is generally conceded that an isolated artifact of a dissimilar use without connecting similarities is not likely more than coincidence. It is intriguing to think that the distinctive shape of the Copper has some ancient root in Pacific Rim cultures, but the evidence to support such speculation is lacking.

I must point out, with some trepidation, that some of the arguments put forth by Jopling previously appeared in an article nine years ago. Whether Jopling was aware of this publication I do not

know, but the fact remains that Martine de Widerspach-Thor's article, "The Equation of Copper," which appeared in a 1981 festschrift for Wilson Duff, published by the Provincial Museum of British Columbia, argues convincingly that known Coppers appear to have been made of European metal. Additionally, Widerspach-Thor makes a convincing case for the symbolic meaning of the distinctive "T-form" which appears on virtually all Coppers, a motif that Jopling states must remain "unexplained" (p. 128). For me the omission of this reference also remains unexplained, but it does not significantly detract from the first three-quarters of Jopling's book.

This work is an important contribution to Northwest Coast studies. The collection of historic and ethnographic sources is exhaustive. Virtually all the descriptive material on the Copper is here. While others may agree with Jopling's interpretation of the data, I believe there is much more to explain concerning the symbolic meaning of this Northwest Coast enigma.

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**Documents of United States Indian Policy.** Edited by Francis Paul Prucha. Second edition, expanded. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. 338 pages. \$35.00 cloth. \$12.95 paper.

Fifteen years ago the editor of this volume published his first edition of essential documents illustrating United States Indian policy. Documents in both editions begin in the year 1783, but the documents in the 1975 edition conclude with a 1973 statute, while this edition ends with a 1988 law. An appendix to the second edition adds two documents, the 1908 Winters Supreme Court decision and the 1921 Snyder Act, so that the organization of the previous edition remains unaltered. The bibliography of the second edition has been revised substantially, with newer studies replacing older ones. Both bibliographies are restricted to policy studies, so for the reader who is interested in the impact of policies, Father Prucha's bibliographies published in 1977 and 1982 and the annual bibliographies published by the McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian are indispensable.