

HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LAKE STURGEON BY NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE ARTISTS

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Abstract / Résumé

Discussions of landscapes in the earliest accounts of traders in northern Ontario and Manitoba depict a land rich in resources. Native people, who lived in these spaces where the Europeans travelled and settled, saw the world through their own eyes. But what did these groups see? This paper discusses changing representations of lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*), noting differences in the stories and images presented by Native and non-Native people.

Les discussions sur les paysages du Nord de l'Ontario et du Manitoba retrouvées dans les anciens récits des marchands de l'époque décrivent un pays riche en ressources naturelles. Les peuples autochtones qui vivaient dans ces grands espaces, visités et colonisés par les Européens, percevaient ce pays bien différemment. Ce texte présente les perceptions changeantes de l'esturgeon des lacs tout en notant les différences entre les images et les contes créés par les autochtones et ceux créés par les blancs.

Introduction

Doctoral research into Cree, Ojibwe and scientific knowledge of lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) in the Lake Winnipeg basin has led to the present study of sturgeon representations.¹ Lake sturgeon is one of seven species of sturgeon, five of which can be found in North America, has always been important to the Native peoples who shared the fish's original range. The settler societies which began forming in North America after 1600 tended to view sturgeon as a nuisance fish, likely as sturgeon were notorious for destroying nets intended for other fish varieties. By the time settlement at Red River, present day Winnipeg, during the 1820s began, sturgeon was valued as a country food, important in the lives of both Native and non-Native inhabitants of the region. While by no means homogeneous both Native and non-Native peoples viewed sturgeon through their own eyes. What each group saw was reflected in stories and visual representations, only a fraction of which are available today.

The original range for Lake Sturgeon (see Figure 1) is thought by scientists to include: the Great Lakes basin, Mississippi drainage, and the Hudson Bay province. This paper will examine the Native perspectives from two generalized groups of Cree and Ojibwe in and around the Lake Winnipeg system. The dates for these representations can not be established with certainty, however, they most probably pre-date contact in the region. Non-Native perspectives come to us from newcomers to the interior mostly between 1750-1850s. Interestingly, in the 1850s, there was a marked change in how the fish was valued by both groups. Sturgeon became sought after for its high commercial value; that value which it previously held in the lives of both Native people and other local inhabitants was gradually displaced by an international demand for commercial sturgeon products.

The first sturgeon fishery in North America was established in Virginia in 1626. This fishery closed and Atlantic sturgeon did not emerge as a commercially viable commodity. According to Tower,

in those days of none too abundant food supply, the sturgeon apparently was not often eaten until many years after the colonies were established...the roe was regarded as worthless except as feed for hogs...few people of the better class would eat the flesh, it being the food of servants and negro slaves (1908:361-362).

This account is not consistent with what can be learned regarding the history and place of the sturgeon in the lives of both Native and non-Native people in Manitoba.² A pre-1850 focus on the Red River settlement and the

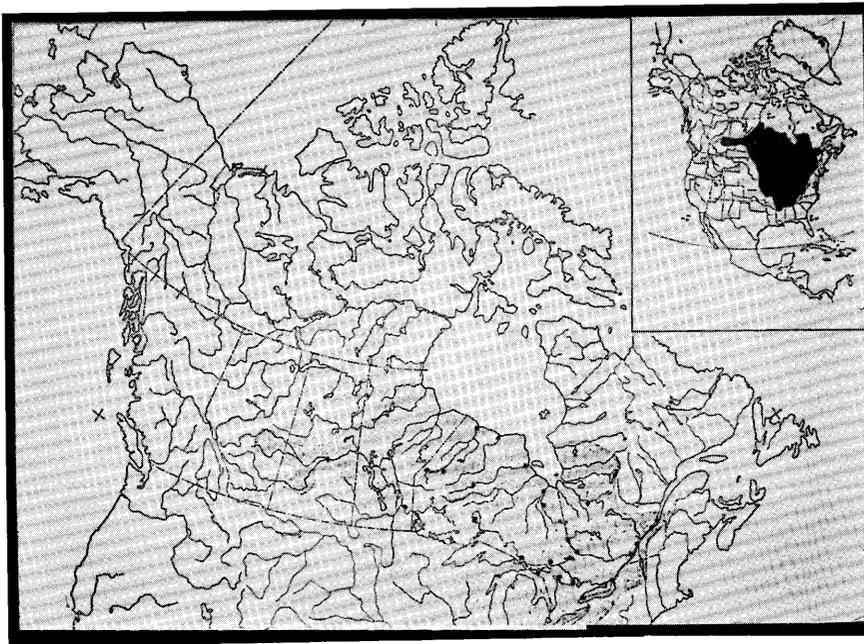


Figure 1: Organizational chart of health services for the Moose Factory Zone (Mushkegowuk Territory). Open boxes represent health services already under Weeneebayko Health Ahtuskaywin control (First Nation Regional Health Board). Open ovals represent health services still under University of Toronto, Faculty of Dentistry control. Shaded ovals represent health services still under Medical Services Branch, Health Canada control. The organizational structure of James Bay General Hospital (JBGH - shaded box) is not presented graphically. The Wing Director, Director of Patient Care, and Clinical Coordinator from JBGH Attawapiskat Wing and the Wing Director and Support Services Director from JBGH Fort Albany Wing report to the JBGH Chief Executive Officer located in Moosonee. Modified from various sources (Medical Services Branch Ontario Region, 1996; Weeneebayko Health 1996c).

surrounding region garners access to both written and visual descriptions in the journals of traders and explorers. While I am interested in gathering representations of past landscapes, it is important to consider the times in which image were rendered, as such keeping in mind the sensibilities of the day. Furthermore, distinctions between unique perspectives, while important features of this study, are less important than what can be, in general, discerned from them. For example, while Ojibwe and Cree artists may interpret sturgeon motifs, representations were made for select audiences following conventions unique to the audience, i.e. pictographs of sturgeon were rendered to attract other Cree and Ojibwe to fish in a location or to stay away.) These accounts force us to see the land through their eyes, a land rich in resources. Representations tell us something of the ways in which the land was seen and shaped. The people who guided and shared the voyages of these early explorers/traders, and the others who lived in the spaces through which explorers/traders passed—and sometimes settled in—saw the world through their own eyes. These peoples, the Ojibwe and Cree in particular, saw and depicted the world as they experienced it. While these later accounts come in a variety of forms, this paper refers primarily to selected sacred stories, pictographs and Midewewin songs. What can the combination of written texts and visual images tell us today about the people who created them? Following an analysis of naming, illustrations and stories, this approach may have some utility when applied to the history of relations between and among humans and other species.

Naming

Cultural critic Stephen Greenblatt says that colonists followed a trajectory “from legal ritual through the experience of the marvellous to the mystical understanding and appropriate power of naming” (1991:83). To name is to evoke. A whole set of cultural constructs and representations of what it means to be what is named can form a powerful relationship and always occurs within an act of/to control. For the newcomers to North America, the act of naming evolved within a learning process. Initially, naming of objects, people and places, was based on personal knowledge and comparisons with previous cultural experience or training. The power to name or rename provided the clean slate on which colonizers could etch their image. However, after a time, comparisons of Old and New world species would converge as scientific classification usurped naming for *god and country*. As explorers, traders, missionaries, and settlers became more accustomed to their new landscapes, the motivations for naming changed. Readers interest in toponyms (place-names) will be interested to learn that the Cree addressed sturgeon as *Namay Namaew*, while the Ojibwe used

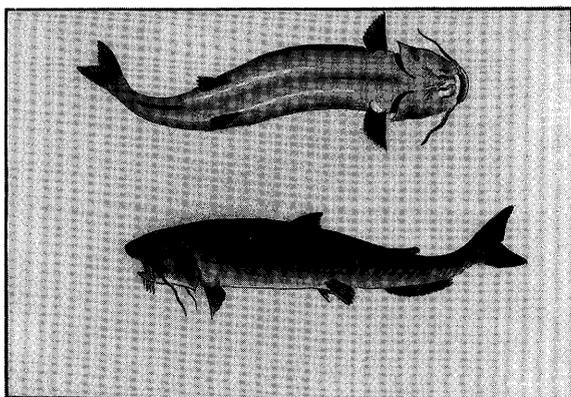


Figure 2: Peter Rindisbacher, *A Catfish from Red River, Manitoba, ca. 1821*. National Archives of Canada C-1988-250-27.

*Name.*³ Depending upon the training of the observer, sometimes the most recent Latin name was included in descriptions.⁴ The earliest accounts of sturgeon by explorers/traders interchange Native names with common English or French terms.

Europeans were familiar with sturgeon. A typical European representation advertising sturgeon is the 1811 print, *Sturgeon & Smelts*, not used extensively in this study of lake sturgeon. It none-the-less shows sturgeon captured for the table from Neptune's depths. In fact, the sturgeon harpoon suggested in the illustration would not have enjoyed widespread usage in neither Old nor New worlds (see Blakey, 1856; Rostlund, 1952; De Rohan-Csermak, 1963). In Europe and Asia several species of sturgeon have been fished for many generations, for example Beluga sturgeon (*Huso huso*). A well established European tradition/relationship with sturgeon, I argue, is the reason why the Native name for sturgeon was neither adapted nor adopted.

Elliot Coues' editing of Alexander Henry's journal included a footnote on fish names (Coues, 1897:444). As may be expected, due to its value during Coues time, sturgeon is at the top of the list. The fish was an important food to a population surviving in what Henry called the *Greater North West*. An example of the above argument on naming is provided by

Coues notation on a fish *Lachishe*, from French *la queshe*, taken from the Ojibwe *nacaysh* (*Ibid.*). A noteworthy comparison is to the freshwater drum, a lesser fish in the lives of those requiring fish as sustenance. The drum is listed a *male achegan* or *maleachegan* from the Cree *malashefaneh*.⁵ The fresh water drum was new to Europeans and of lesser value to them, so adoption and adaptation of the Cree meant little. Naming rested on economic motivations, sturgeon did not remain namay or some variant thereof for it was already a known commodity.

Illustration

Besides naming, there is illustration. A fine representation of the sturgeon from 1821 is *Sturgeon from Red River, Manitoba* by Peter Rindisbacher (National Archives of Canada/C-001927).⁶ The painting is stark while at the same time characteristically rich in detail. The figure is placed against a white background, similar to a scientific study. Realism and detail inform this impression, with sensory receptors, barbels and other physical features true to life. The form is simple, yet accurately accounts for the fish's unique characteristics: for example, scutes are readily apparent while the overall curve of the body tells us something of its movement. According to Major-Marothy, Rindisbacher

proceeded to make a visual record of many aspects of life...His method of working,...was to repeat, seemingly upon demand, various scenes from an established repertoire (1991:17).

Interestingly, similar studies of catfish (see Figure 3), buffalo and other scenes were made by Rindisbacher and reproduced throughout his works. However, sturgeon did not reappear in any of his collected and known paintings.

The significance of the sturgeon to the newly arrived Selkirk settlers at Red River can be factored into this discussion of the painting. The artist did not render the image along the Nelson River and Lake Winnipeg, although he would have been producing sketches on the way down to Red River from York factory. Rindisbacher and his family would have relied on sturgeon for their sustenance throughout the trip. The significance of the painting to the Red River may be linked to a gift given by Chief Peguis' people to the newly arrived immigrants. Chief Peguis met the Selkirk settlers who were under the guidance of Reverend John West. Josephy notes that West had joined the group at York Factory in August of 1821 and travelled with them to his mission, established a year earlier at Red River (1970:44). West's diary records that Chief Peguis gave the newcomers "a good supply of fresh and dried sturgeon" (*Ibid.*). The significance of this fish, at a time when the newly

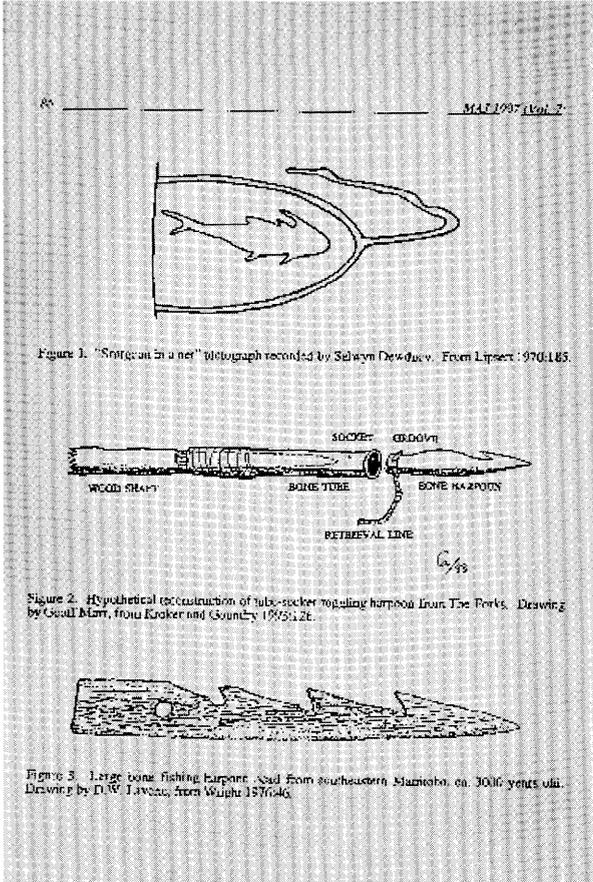


Figure 1. "Sturgeon in a net" photograph recorded by Selwyn Dewdney. From *Lippert*: 976:185.

Figure 2. Hypothetical reconstruction of tub-socket rotating harpoon from The Forks. Drawing by Gerald Barr, from *Kroker and Goulet*: 1875:12E.

Figure 3. Large bone fishing harpoon. Used from southeastern Manitoba, ca. 3000 years old. Drawing by D.W. Taylor, from *Wright*: 1576:46.

Figure 3: Historical Indigenous fishing technology. Hannibal Paci, 1997.

arrived settlers were most in want, must have had a profound, yet short-lived, influence on the young artists' imagination.

Some of the earliest document representations of sturgeon made by the Aboriginal people of northern Ontario and Manitoba are pictographs. Of particular interest are several images noted by Brenda Lipsett for the purpose of making comparisons with Ojibwe material culture (see Figure 3). The first image is an incised sturgeon taken from a Mide song, on birch bark, found at Leech Lake by William Hoffman (Lipsett, 1970:184-185). Reading Hoffman's description reveals little about the image, although he does note that sturgeon images rarely appear (1891:296-297). The first image in Figure 3 is a pictograph titled *sturgeon*, cited as being found by Selwyn Dewdney in 1965 (Lipsett, 1970:184-185).⁷ Ojibwe and Cree representations of sturgeon are mostly abstract and stylized, the fish is, in contrast to newcomers representations, not based on exacting details. This lack of realism signals that sturgeon was represented, not for comparisons, rather as it was experienced. Lipsett gathered 3 images of Ojibwe and Cree to suit her assertions of Ojibwe material culture. The Midewewin sturgeon was collected by Hoffman (1891) as part of a song, the image was imbedded in a larger story and was taken out of context by Lipsett. "Sturgeon in a net", originally a minor reference in Dewdney and Kidd (1962) is an Ojibwe pictograph. The third image, "sturgeon" at Hansen Lake was not referenced, however, Cree informants at Cumberland House identified a Hansen Lake, Saskatchewan, where there are pictographs. In searching Lipsett's reference to "sturgeon" all that could be found in Dewdney (1975) was a totemic representation which included sturgeon. The Ojibwe incised birch-bark shows a profile of sturgeon clan, quite unlike the other 3 images. Thus it would appear that the Cree and Ojibwe represented sturgeon as it suited their needs—to identify the object and convey the intended meaning; this is a sturgeon, I caught a big sturgeon here, I dreamt of sturgeon, or we are sturgeon clan. The pictograph titled *Sturgeon in a Net*, documented as coming from the Great Lakes by Selwyn Dewdney and Kenneth Kidd (1962:16),⁸ apparently reflects the fact that Ojibwe of the late 19th century fished for sturgeon by trailing a large open net, much like the pictographic image. The movements of the fish and the net combined to close the trap when a sturgeon entered the net. This technique will be discussed later in this paper.

A. Hultkrantz has argued that

where fishing is a conspicuous part of tribal economy the supernatural beings that protect the fish or provide good luck in fishing are propitiated. The supernatural master of the fishes

is an adequate religious response to the worries and wishes of the fishing population (1983:2).

While it may be true that these images represent game guardians and therefore symbolize the *other than human realm*. With the exception of the image from Hoffman, there are alternative explanations.⁹ The sturgeon images collected by Lipsett may also be markings to indicate where large fish were caught or re-tellings of either vision quests or dreams. Regardless, there is no support for Hulkranztz's thesis of a supernatural master of fishes in these images and I can find no evidence to support this romantic notion of a *master of the fish* (perhaps the roots are with Longfellow's Hiawatha). The Hoffman image may conform more closely with the spirit of Hulkranztz's assertion. Hoffman documented the sturgeon image from one of

several series of pictographs from birch bark songs found among the effects of a deceased Mide priest, at Leech Lake (1891:294).

Interestingly, Hoffman mentions showing the songs to "many Mide priests from various portions of the Ojibwa country" (*ibid.*) and notes that all he could learn from his informants was that they were "Grand Medicine":

no suggestions were offered beyond the merest repetition of the name of the object or what it probably was meant to represent. The direction of their order was mentioned (*ibid.*).

Rather than speculate further as to the meaning of sturgeon in this Mide song, I will simply note that representations of sturgeon—and fish in general—are indeed rare. Beyond speaking of the mystical and religious realm, sturgeon pictographs reveal something of sturgeon fishing technology. E. Rostlund (1952) noted the pre-contact use of nets and other technology for sturgeon fishing in North America. Two harpoon heads (bone-antler, see Figure 3) and Richard Preston (metal, see Figure 4) were used to spear sturgeon.¹⁰ The latter was used in commercial sturgeon fishing. Few Cree and Ojibwe fishers had the opportunity to participate in commercial sturgeon fisheries (see Tough, 1996). Cree informants at York Landing (previously York Factory) had never seen the use of spears, with sturgeon fishing accomplished mostly using nets and snag-lines. Generally, harpoons and weirs seem to have been replaced by the use of snag-lines and nets. Ojibwe at Sagkeeng, however, knew of the use and construction of harpoon heads. It is likely that bone harpoons were replaced, regionally, by metal ones, just as country made net materials were replaced by twine. The innovation of metal harpoon heads shows an adaptation of European items into Native technological form.

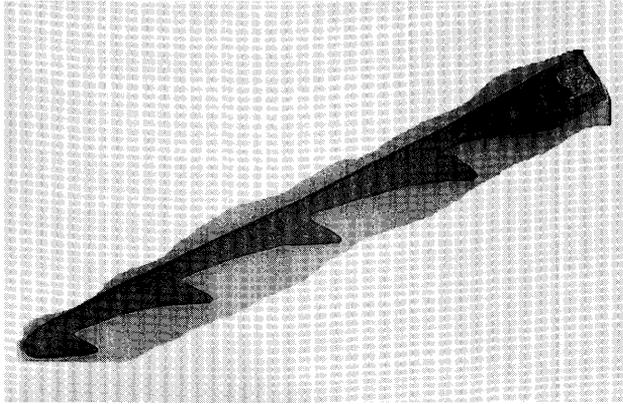


Figure 4: Reproduction of unilateral square-barbed metal harpoon courtesy of Richard Preston.

Sturgeon in a Net described by Lipsett occurred through a technique whereby “a large net made of willow bark is drawn along between two canoes. Once the sturgeon enters the bag, the opening is closed” (Lipsett, 1970:184). This fishing technique is in a way illustrated by George Finlay’s pen and ink drawing, *Sturgeon Fishing, Red River* (Glenbow Museum/1928 F.B. 58.24.29, [ca. 1848]) (Figure 5). Finlay, an ensign with the 6th Regiment posted to Fort Garry in 1846, captured sturgeon in context, vastly different from the previously mentioned paintings by Rindisbacher. It is an interesting drawing and reflects Mason’s generalization that

the savage man’s skill in fishing is undoubtedly, and has always been the admiration and envy of the civilized. The gill-net, the fish-trap, the weir, the pound, the tide trap are well known to the aborigines of all the continents (1966:292).¹¹

Finlay’s sketch raises two significant questions: was the scene staged or imaged and if so to what ends, and Native artists almost always remain anonymous. In the previous discussion of pictographs and Mide song, artists remain nameless. Europeans, on the other hand, constructed particularly portable images with signatures and usually dates. For the newcomers, images were made to tell a story of the New world which included the author as witness on the frontier.

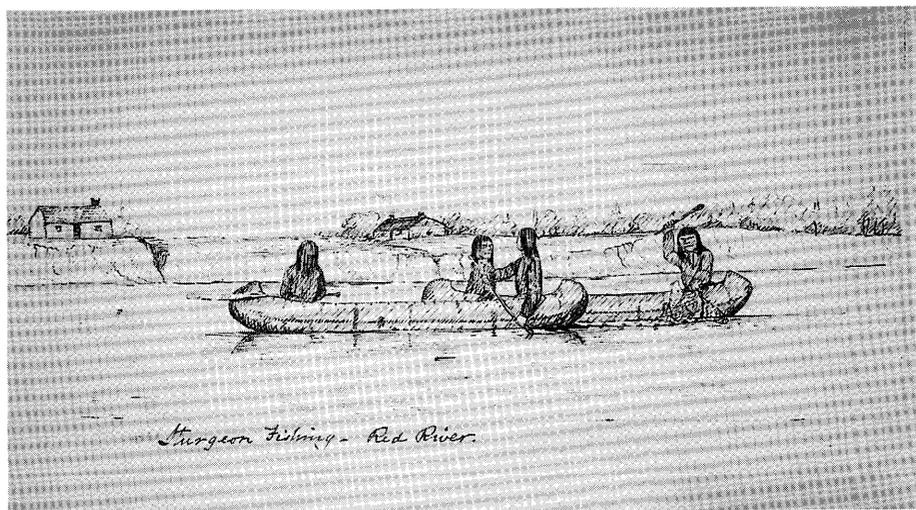


Figure 5: George E. Finlay, *Sturgeon Fishing-Red River*. n.d. [1848] courtesy of Glenbow Museum CN:58.24.29 PHN 1928.

Another painting by Rindisbacher, *Summer view in the Environs of the Company Fort Douglas on the Red River: drawn from nature, July 1822*, illustrates colonizing fishing technology and better reflects that artists' work (National Archives of Canada/copy negative 65-19).¹² Rindisbacher's stylized Ojibwe motifs are both romantic and sentimental. More than any other Canadian artist Rindisbacher's work best typifies 1820s Red River from the eyes of the colonizer. Métis are shown only slightly more advanced than the land locked Ojibwe, while influences of Europe, boat in full sail, epitomize the grand social evolution necessary for civilizing the wilderness. These sentiments reflect a myopic ethnocentric vision of Red River settlement. Rindisbacher's paintings neglect the rich and varied cultures whose landscapes he whitewashed over.

Unfortunately, nets made of organic materials, such as willow root, have not left significant traces and archaeologists mostly search for remnants such as net-sinkers. While it is difficult to argue conclusively that Cree and Ojibwe utilized similar fishing technology, there seems to be a general trend to suggest that as well as utilizing nets, Cree and Ojibwe used spears with detachable harpoon heads. MacNeish, writing of a site at Cemetary Point in the Whiteshell area of Manitoba, noted that a unilateral square-barbed antler point was used exclusively for sturgeon (1958:129-131). For a more in-depth discussion of the archaeology of sturgeon, see Hannibal-Paci, 1997.

Stories

In addition to the illustrations discussed above, several sacred stories can be juxtaposed with journal accounts of explorers and traders. Comparison with texts gives us further insights to the place sturgeon held in the lives of Native people. William Warren, writing well over a hundred years ago, cautioned

that much has been written concerning the red race by missionaries, travellers and some eminent authors; but the information respecting them which has thus far been collected, is mainly superficial. It has been obtained by transient sojourners among the various tribes, who not having a full knowledge of their character and language, have obtained information through mere temporary observation—through the medium of careless and imperfect interpreters, or have taken the accounts of unreliable persons (1984:24).

Mary Black-Rogers argues that the *story*, meaning the sacred stories, contain all the learning necessary to understand the Ojibwe (Overhold and Callicott, 1982:xv-xvii). One such story, documented by William Jones,

recorded a tale whereby a youth travelled for six years with the Chief of the sturgeons at Black Sturgeon River (Michelson, 1919:245-248). In a sacred legend of the Sandy Lake Cree, Ray and Stevens re-tell a transformation story of "a foolish young sturgeon" into *Me-zha*, the first *Ling* (1971:63).¹³ The Ojibwe at Lake Nipigon and the Long Lac area told Dewdney that "a really big sturgeon with a red belly and a box-shaped head" referred to as "evil snake sturgeon" would, if consumed, either transform a person into "a snake or be smothered by them" (1975:33). Within both Cree and Ojibwe cosmology the sturgeon occupied a complex and varied place. The Cree often referred to big sturgeon as grandfather. Sacred stories demonstrate both the social and religious value of Aboriginal-sturgeon relations. One example is an oral story which appears as *The Birth of Wisahketchahk and the Origin of Mankind, The Chase, and The Rolling Skull*. The first version was apparently recorded from a telling by Louise Moosomin at Battleford, Saskatchewan in 1925, and included both Cree and English texts, the latter credited to Bloomfield (1930:8-20). The second version is credited collectively as having been told by the Cree at Sandy Lake, but does not have a Cree text. It was recorded by Ray and Stevens (1971:48-63). The third and last version was told by Wasagunackank at Bois Fort, and includes both Cree and English texts. It was published by Michelson in a volume of stories collected by William Jones (1919:405-415). These variations on a theme illustrate something of the world views of Cree and Ojibwe.

The story tells of a woman whose husband discovered that she had taken a snake for a lover. The husband devised a plan to address her infidelity. He goes to the tree where he had seen her summon the snake. He does the same, but then slays the snake. The husband tricks his wife by sending her out to fetch some meat while he cuts up the snake into a pot of boiling water. After the wife returns, the husband feeds her the broth, thus tricking her a third time. The wife flies into a rage upon learning that she has eaten her lover, and the husband then beheads her. The narrative follows the rolling skull of the wife as it pursues her two sons. (The youngest is usually *Wisahketchahk*, to use Bloomfield's term.) They attempt to stop the rolling skull with magic gained from either their father or grandfather/mother whom they meet during their escape. Three barriers which they throw in the skull's path do not stop it. Finally, however, they are forced to cross a river with help from an animal that happens to be there at the time. Two of the three versions end with the rolling skull being dropped in the river, becoming/named by the courier as either sturgeon or sucker.

Journal accounts present an interesting and telling comparison with these sacred stories. For example, the manuscript journals of Alexander Henry the Younger from 1799 find Henry's party at Lake Namekan, referring

to a place at a fall where the Ojibwe speared sturgeon (Coues, 1897:17). Henry related the importance of sturgeon there, and later observed, on August 3,

we found several Indian fishing. They had a great many sturgeon and various kinds of small fish, a few of which were exchanged for liquor (*Ibid.*:20).

A few days later Henry's party found people who were most probably Ojibwe at Rat Portage, "making canoes for sale and trading sturgeon and dried berries for liquor" (*Ibid.*:23-4). Twenty years later, Henry R. Schoolcraft noted a sturgeon fishery in his 1820 journal in country to the south, stating that

the fishery is of great importance to the Indians of the region, and appears to have been known to them from the earliest times, and has been constantly resorted to without an apparent diminution to the quantity taken (Williams, 1953:120).

Schoolcraft also noted how those people whom he called *Chippeway Indians*, led by Chief Black Eagle, presented his party with

some fresh sturgeon (*accipenser* [sic]) which are caught in abundance in that river [River aux Sables] and received in return some tobacco and whiskey (*Ibid.*:74).

The similarities between Schoolcraft's account and Reverend John West's entry concerning Chief Peguis' gift are intriguing. The exchanges of country food, in this case sturgeon, as symbols of the land's sustenance are similar to other gift exchanges marking alliances. Neither journalist noted the political or economic significance of these exchanges, however, mentioning only the food value which sturgeon held for them.

Discussion

As the sturgeon was transformed from an item of gift exchange to trade commodity, it played a much different role than it had in the Native subsistence economy. Of interest here was a shift in social relations at posts and later at settlements. The demand for the creation of a fishing class is one example of this change. For example, at Fort Alexander, Roderick Mackenzie noted on July 1822, that *L'Esperance*, the post's fisherman, arrived

this morning, from the Fishery with a number of women and all his fishing implements; in the morning, he set two sturgeon nets (HBCA B.4/a/5, Fort Alexander, 1822-1823).

Later, in 1863 at the same post, Auguston Manville was sent "off to the mouth with 2 new sturgeon nets to hunt for the Fort" (HBCA B.4/a/8, Fort Alexander journal of occurrences, 1863). While the transformation of Cree and Ojibwe society to meet the growing needs of the sedentary populations is not the focus of the present paper, suffice it to say the distinction of fisherman was significant.¹⁴

Two maps help to illustrate my arguments regarding race relations and differences between Natives and non-Native worldviews. Philip Turnor (1778, PAM/HBCA G.1/22) sketched a map to illustrate the route from York Factory on the Hudson's Bay coast to Cumberland House Post on the Saskatchewan River. Both the Hayes and Nelson River routes are shown, though not identified as such, exclusive of other physical features. The grid lines dissect the landscape and erase the historical presence of the Cree and Dene. In contrast, Cha chay pay way ti (1806, PAM/HBCA E 3/4 fo. 13d) sketched a map for Peter Fidler, illustrating the route from Cumberland House to Split Lake on the Nelson River. This map is a much different view of the same route illustrated by Turnor in 1778. However, Cha chay pay way ti choose to show three routes (the Nelson, Burntwood and Hayes Rivers). The Cree informants knowledge of the river either ended at Split Lake, the page ran out, or Fidler was only interested in these inland routes. According to Tammy Hannibal-Paci, cartographic archivist with the HBCA, it's likely the later as we cannot conclude that Cha Chay actually physically drew the image in the journal. It is more likely that Fidler re-copies the information conveyed by Cha Chay into his journal as space permitted. Place-names are mostly Cree, the dashes representing portages, detail is more-or-less drawn from and for a need to navigate over time. Unlike Turnor's map there are no grid lines and the lakes are relatively the same shape.

Further to arguments of race relations two paintings by Rindisbacher and Finlay. First, Peter Rindisbacher (*Summer view in the Environs of the Company Fort Douglas on the Red River*, 1822, NAC CN 65-19) is an early snap-shot of Red River society. On the West bank stands a stylized motif, popular with Rindisbacher, of an Ojibwe family. However, this man with two children shows up in several of the artists other paintings. They appear in place, naturalized on the bank in the woods. None-the-less, the Natives' stare guides the viewers eyes to "their" fellow country men, possibly Métis fishers. These fishers are obviously more *civilized* in dress and use of European fishing implements. Perhaps the artist best reflected the ideas and hopes of his day for the acculturation of First Nations in Red River. Perhaps the painting reflects his fear of the *dying savage*. Speculation aside, the two men and boy in the boat troll and angle for fish while in the

distance another boat in sail approaches. The heroic feel of clouds and open spaces mirror the brave possibilities of the colony. The conflict is subtle and represented from a distinct perspective, reflecting the settlers' aspirations and feelings as Rindisbacher understood and reflected them to a non-Native audience.

In comparison with Rindisbacher's painting is another of Red River fishing by George E. Finlay (*Sturgeon Fishing-Red River*, n.d. Glenbow CN:58.24.29 PHN 1928). I have dated this simple sketch to 1848, around the time when Finlay was stationed at Red River. The painting is a study of Ojibwe sturgeon fishing (see Figure 5). It is probably much closer to reality than the previous painting. The painting shows 4 individuals in 2 canoes.¹⁵ In interviews with informants at Sagkeeng, Manitoba, the canoes were identified as Ojibwe in construction. The technological skill of co-ordinating a drag-net between 2 canoes is common practice to the Ojibwe and the innovation of clubbing sturgeon is not unique to Red River. During the Canadian Red River exploring expedition of 1857, Hind mentions a weir on the Pike River, "an Indian sits beside it all night with a wooden mallet in his hand, with which he strikes the larger fish on the head to prevent them jumping out" (1971:491).¹⁶ However, neither Ojibwe nor Cree informants could identify this technique of striking sturgeon on the head while in a net. There is no ethnographic material on this technique, nor is there a trail of artifacts to support the clubbing of sturgeon. In fact, Cree and Ojibwe reported reverence shown to sturgeon by not striking the fish while in the water and thus offending other fishes. A practical component was also that sturgeon could seriously threaten life and property if the fish were not killed with one blow. Finlay probably took artistic licence with or had the fishers stage the imaged scene.

The size of the sturgeon in Finlay's sketch is very interesting. It seems like a small sturgeon, one which would not have yielded a great return to four men and their families. Sturgeon fishing on Red River was accomplished mostly with weirs and wooden pens, thus ensuring a fair return on fishing effort. Perhaps Finlay unwittingly captured the decline of the fishery, we know that by the 1860s sturgeon populations on the Red River were seriously threatened by overfishing and incursions of development.

In the constructed images by non-Natives we see static and fixed hopes and dreams: houses erected on the stark banks of the Red River. The advance of civilization is suggested, yet the fishers pursue traditional practices. The audience adopts the watchful eyes of the ensign/artist. Perhaps, these fishers were catching and supplying fish to the soldiers, the pose may have been staged, or this picture represents an everyday occurrence recorded for posterity sake. What is most striking is the uneasy

tensions of colonization were mediated, Natives played many roles: labour, wives, friends, enemies, suppliers of services and country food, makers of goods, informants of land knowledge, boatmen, guides, and fishers.

Equally, the painting by William Armstrong (*Indian Settlement at Sault Ste. Marie Ontario with the Canal in the background*, 1869 NAC 1970-188-2230) illustrating an organized Ojibwe fishing village (see Figure 6). Along with wigwams there are dip nets, drying racks, and other material representations. A degree of affluence and permanence is suggested. Ojibwe and Cree located at secure and stable fisheries, seasonal gatherings were supported by the abundant supply of fish, other game and plants. The figures fishing in the canoe look toward the canal with an empty net.¹⁷ In contrast, the photo, *Lifting sturgeon out of net* (August 6, 1909 NAC RD 000059), shows 2 men pulling a sturgeon out of a tidal net. Informants at Norway House identify the boat as a "Pointer" (see Figure 7). The 2 men, as opposed to the women and child using a dip net in the painting by Armstrong, are commercial fishermen. The difference between Native and non-Native are clear in these two images: family and work together, family and work separated. For the Ojibwe subsistence fisheries did not mean the separation of domestic and commercial fishing. Race relations are expressed through such features of the sturgeon fishery as the imposition of scale fishing, displacement of Native fisheries, and the de/valuation of sturgeon for the accumulation of personal wealth.

A distinction can be made between Native and non-Native representations of sturgeon in that each was used specifically within cultural context. The images by Rindisbacher (Figures 2 and 8) and Finlay (Figure 5) show the old world Europe, portable New world illustration removed from their place of origin. The pictographs, whether set on stone or incised on birch-bark, were also created to document and describe, but they were not created strictly as objects of trade and commerce. The fish was intimately linked with the spiritual/religious Mide practices and daily/seasonal patterns of Cree and Ojibwe lifeways. Whether sturgeon was made a spectacle of scientific study or a statement of what and who were here, these images played a role both in capturing and making sense of the world for vastly different audiences. These images all played a role in the on-going cultures that also made sense of this world. These images reflect human-sturgeon relationships, serving a variety of purposes.

Conclusions

Susan Moodie titled her experiences in the natural landscape of Canada as *Roughing it in the Bush* (1991). The "bush" has long been a primary source for the collection of symbols and images to represent our national



Figure 6: William Armstrong, *Indian Settlement at Sault Ste. Marie Ontario with the Canal in the background*, 1869. National Archives of Canada 1970-188-2230.



Figure 7: Photographer unknown, *Lifting Sturgeon out of net*, August 6, 1909. National Archives of Canada, RD 000059.



Figure 8: Peter Rindisbacher, *Summer view in the Environs of the Company Fort Douglas on the Red River*. Drawn from Nature, 1822. Courtesy of National Archives of Canada. CN 65-19.

consciousness, i.e. bison, maple leaf, beaver, etc. While Canadians continue to be fascinated by the concept of *the Bush*, most have never *roughed it* outside of the cities and regions we inhabit. As such it is not surprising that little debate has gone into discussions of human-nature relations.¹⁸ Nature and geography seem merely as the back drop to human experiences, history. We can, however, learn much by studying human-nature relations. In fact, studying these landscapes may well prove to be a powerful tool for understanding the past. Studying landscapes to understand the past is not new. A case in point is Martin's (1978) speculative historical examination of Indian-animal relations. He argued that the Algonquians he studied waged war on animals as their cultural sanctions against wildlife overkill were eroded by contact, disease and the fur trade. There was very strong reaction to his thesis and book, with a response edited by Shepard Krech III (1981). Krech III noted that understanding human-animal relations was a function of what he termed the "traditional religious belief system" of the Algonquians, and he criticized what he felt was Martin's failure to interpret history correctly. Regardless of the legitimacy of these two claims, it is clear that Martin's arguments and the continued critique of them resulted from a lack of prior discussion about human-animal relations.¹⁹

Another useful tool for understanding landscapes is historical ecology. A relatively recent paradigm, historical ecology provides a methodology from which past landscapes, framed by complex and evolving ecosystems, can be understood. Such an approach can often prove unyielding, especially when researching human relations beyond the bounds of an ecosystem, over an extended period, or when the focus is on a specific species.

Both Rostlund (1952) and Cronon (1983) provide a methodological matrix towards an epistemology of human-species relations. Furthermore, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), concerned primarily with examining human-nature relations, also serves as an important paradigm. In study of Cree and Ojibwe knowledge of lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) in the Lake Winnipeg basin, scientific knowledge has yet to be made stronger by including TEK. It is as Cronon noted:

Indians had lived on the continent for thousands of year, and had to a significant extent modified its environment to their purposes. The destruction of Indian communities in fact brought some of the most important ecological changes which followed the Europeans' arrival in America. The choice is not between two landscapes, one with and one without human influence, it is between two human ways of living, two ways of belonging to an ecosystem (1983:12).

Sturgeon were never a nuisance at Red River and the surrounding region. Like those living here before them, the earliest explorers, traders and missionaries relied on the fish for their sustenance. This study of Native and non-Native representations of sturgeon reveals that these culturally different people saw the fish in different ways. Human-sturgeon relations changed from sturgeon being simply one feature of Native subsistence economies to being used commercially in the fur trade and commercial fishing. Not surprisingly, in the transition sturgeon lost something of its spiritual significance in Aboriginal cosmology, shifting from the *other than human realm* to an earthly one. With the commercialization of the sturgeon fishery, the fish took on an even greater economic value, although it took over a hundred years of commercialization and depletion for the fish to be seen as a precious commodity. The representations discussed reveal something of race relations within a context of diminishing resources. Sturgeon became more precious to both Native and non-Native as sturgeon disappeared from lakes and rivers. Causes for the disappearance are complex: pressures of over-fishing, habitat loss due to hydro-electrical development, and other human developments negatively impacted the species. Today the sturgeon no longer inhabit the lakes and rivers it had traditionally. It is now so rare in much of its former range that it is protected as a threatened species. Although the values associated with the great fish have changed over time, it remains for many a special creature within complex ecological and cultural systems.

Notes

1. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the Manitoba History Conference, May 10, 1997, at the Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg. The current course of interdisciplinary research which informs the paper crosses boundaries of history, zoology and fisheries theory. I would like to thank Dr. Laura Peers (University of Winnipeg) for the first sturgeon image, Jean Friesen (University of Manitoba) and Jennifer Brown (University of Winnipeg) for helping to shape parts of this paper. The author gratefully acknowledges access to the invaluable collections of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives and the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg. Tammy Hannibal-Paci, cartographic archivist HBCA, added significantly to discussions of maps and proof read the final document. The Winnipeg Art Gallery assisted in performing a C.H.I.N. search, which located sturgeon paintings at the Glenbow Museum (Calgary), Edmonton Art Gallery, University of British Columbia (Vancouver), and Musee de Civilisation (Quebec City). Dr. Terry Dick (University of Manitoba) provided valuable insights on lake sturgeon and made available his library of "grey

literature". Insights provided by community members of Norway House, Cross Lake, York Landing, Cumberland House and Sagkeeng are greatly appreciated.

2. The paper reflects only historical representations of lake sturgeon. The intaglio print owned by R. Ackermann's Repository of Arts and C. Publications, *Sturgeon & Smelts* 1811, housed at Musee du Deminarie du Quebec was discussed in a superficial way (see Figure 14). In addition, contemporary representations of sturgeon, such as Susan A. Point and Paddy Peters (see Figure 13), have not been included in great detail. Peters image of spawning sturgeon is a good example of boreal forest imagery and a rare example of fish motifs. Pacific coast artists have, in general, not been included for these are representations of White or Pacific sturgeon (*Acipenser transmountanus*). Moreover, sturgeon artifacts, harpoon heads and items with sturgeon motifs, were not discussed in great detail in this paper, but are discussed in Hannibal-Paci (1997).

Relatively little is known from the Cree and Ojibwe perspectives. Previous studies to have focused on commercial fisheries and Aboriginal fisheries include Rostlund (1952), Judson (1961), Lytwyn (1990), Van West (1990), Cleland (1982), Tough (1984; 1987a; 1987b; 1992; 1996), and Gulig (1995).

3. James Isham in *Isham's Observations and Notes* (Rich, 1949), noted the importance of *Nemau* while stationed on Hudson Bay from 1743-1749. One of Isham's successors, Andrew Graham, also recorded sturgeon as *Nemew* (Williams, 1969). The Ojibwe spelling listed here is from Baraga (1992:269).
4. Before 1850 most of the journals contain collected and translated Aboriginal words to which the editors of published journals often added Latin nomenclature as a service to their audience.
5. Coues (1897) list, at footnote 6, includes the fresh water drum as *Haplodintus grum*.
6. According to archivist Jim Burant (e mail communication), the inscription on the original, in pen and brown ink, is faded and now illegible, but read in German: *recto: Ein Stvrfisch von dem rothern Fluss. Nach de Natur gezeichnet; in pencil, glued on mat: A Sturgeon/Sturio:/from the Red River. Drawn from nature 27* (the number 27 is circled).
7. Hansen Lake is not mentioned in *Stone Age Paintings*, Hansen Lake was known to have some rock paintings and was considered to be a good sturgeon lake.
8. This pictograph comes from the Crooked Lake site, Basswood River, Minnesota.

9. The *other-than-human* realm builds on A. Irvine Hallowell's observation that Ojibwe relations with *other-than-human beings* was exclusive of the physical: "the locus of personal identity and experience is the soul"(1992:84-5).
10. Dick Preston (personal communication, 1997) noted that the artifact was given to him by Malcolm Diamond, Chief at Waskatanish (Rupert House, Quebec), used during the late 1950s for sturgeon fishing at the mouth of the Broadback River.
11. Many scholars argue that specific species were harvested through diverse fishing technology as an adaptive strategy for Cree and Ojibwe during seasonal rounds, ie. sturgeon spring fishing and whitefish fall fishing. Interestingly, Brian Smith has argued "the use of nets is probably an historic European innovation to the plains area and, as a consequence, most of the fishing would have to have been done during periods of open water when application of the weirs or traps or pen-traps would be possible" (Abel and Friesen, 1991:44).
12. Rindisbacher also painted *Winter fishing on the ice of the Assynoibain and Red River. Drawn from nature in December 1821, Manitoba*, found in Peers (1994:127).
13. *Me-Zha* is a meriah. The female sturgeon *Nah-may* in the story carries out a plan passed onto her by her favored suitor *Kama-chad-sick*, to get rid of the younger sturgeon by tricking him into eating her eggs. In the story this is forbidden by *O-ma-ma-ma*, who instead of killing the young sturgeon, transforms him into a meriah, thus serving as a lesson to others.
14. For discussions of changes in this region see Tough (1996) and Peers (1994).
15. Finlay may have undersized the sturgeon in this image, focussing instead on the act of fishing not the fish. It is important to remember that on average sturgeon of 6-8 feet were common and to land such a fish several men would be required.
16. In addition, other early visitors describe sturgeon fishing. Harmon is unique in his description on the Assinboine River, of Cree/Ojibwe beaching sturgeon, running them like buffalo onto sandbars.
17. Foreshadowing with what we know of depletions of fisheries in the wake of colonization and development.
18. What do we know of the past cycles of nature, a natural geography which includes people? When researching and writing history, human actions are often taken out of context. The land is more than a backdrop to the human history etched upon it. A most interesting and

under-developed part of Canadian history is the whole area of human-animal relations.

19. Albers and James argued, "attempts to explain... human relations by resorting to either the monolithic forces of ideology or to Western philosophies of utilitarianism and pragmatism continues to tell us more about the intellectual commitments of the observers than it does about the creative ways in which native peoples have attempted to survive the intrusion of conquest cultures" (1984:78).

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