ABSTRACT

Many whirlpools formed during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Whirlpools were photographed by SPOT satellites and reported by observers in at least a half-dozen locales. Whirlpools have previously been reported in a number of other tsunami, and are a memorable feature of the human experience of a tsunami.

On the west coast of Canada, Haida mythology from the Queen Charlotte Islands mentions a whirling wave of foam in several stories that appear to describe a tsunami. A petroglyph from southeast Alaska shows a spiral suggestive of a tsunami whirlpool inside the body of a sea-monster who, stories say, inadutous causes, makes the salt-water ball, swallows fisherman, pushes fish into a cave, and creates a canoe passage by flapping across a split.

Hundreds of kilometers to the south, Balih carvings from the inland side of southern Vancouver Island show whirlpool-like symbols in conjunction with Thunderbird and Whale; supernatural characters used to explain the origins of earthquakes and tsunamis by tribes on the outer coast of Vancouver Island.

The Thunderbird and Whale, shown here, appear on the upper right. The Thunderbird appears on the upper right.

CONCLUSIONS

- Tsunami whirlpools are frequently reported by eyewitnesses.
- Cascadia-area Natives linked whirlpools and tsunami.
- Traditional knowledge contains information on ancient tsunamis.

Whirlpool Motifs from Southeastern Alaska

Water Monster Petroglyph

This petroglyph represents a sea-monster associated with earthquakes in Haida mythology. This petroglyph includes a vortex within the body of the sea-monster. The vortex enclosing the spiral indicates water. The oval shape “S” shape is similar to isometric-and is repeated strong currents, as in European masts. Pense from Dorris, Michael, 1975, Native Americans: 500 Years After, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell.

Whirlpool Motifs from Southern Vancouver Island

Spiral motifs appear with Thunderbird and Whale, and supernatural beings associated with tsunami and earthquakes in Native culture on the Cascadia Coast. These Salish spindle wheels are from the inner coast of Vancouver Island.