ABSTRACT:
We do not often think of the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast as monumental stone builders, yet for millennia stone was moved by many groups to enhance and demarcate critical resource sites. Beginning ca. AD 1400, for example, Coast Salish peoples began building remarkable numbers of burial cairns and mounds using stones cleared from economically important and managed blue camas (Camassia leichtlinii and C. quamash; Liliaceae) fields. Funerary ritual and the ancestral dead became increasingly implicated in the economic affairs of the living, conflating the moving of stones in the context of gardening and funerals with the inheritance and management of camas fields. Moving up the coast, Heiltsuk peoples reshaped shorelines with stone constructions to promote the growth, accessibility, and predictability of their most economically important resources. Features include stone-lined root gardens, fish traps, and clam terraces. These ubiquitous Coast Salish and Heiltsuk stone constructions are the intentional products of not only ecological management—the process of building these features is also implicated in the making of histories and places. These are indelible features and powerful places that have never stopped working—they continue to entangle us in present and future issues concerning ownership and resource use.