

RECYCLING THE SOUL: Death and the Continuity of life in Coast Salish Burial Practices.

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming  
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## ABSTRACT

The death rituals of a culture define the interaction between the world of the living and the land of the dead. This thesis examines how the Coast Salish depict this connection through an analysis of both archaeological and historical evidence and Coast Salish oral histories and interviews. I maintain that there are continuities which can be traced from the earliest midden burials of the "prehistoric" era, through the time of contact and the missionary period, into the present time. These practices illustrate that in the Coast Salish culture the perception of community extends beyond the grave. This connection is characterized by the practice of feeding the dead which has been an important component of Coast Salish practice for thousands of years. This thesis also discusses some of the changes that have occurred over time and the forces which motivated the Coast Salish to modify their customs.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

ii

Table of Contents

iii

Figure 1- Map

iv

Figure 2 - Chronology

v

Introduction

1- 17

Chapter 1 - Digging for Meaning - Archaeology and the Distant Past

18-46

Chapter 2 - Amazing Grace?

47-63

Chapter 3- Syncretic Religions - Jesus and the Trickster

65-74

Chapter 4 - Let me give you a story

75-88

Conclusion

83-93

Bibliography

## Introduction

If you ask me what is Sto:lo, I am not just thinking what we did now, I'd like to think as to what we did in the past and what was the importance of those things in the past.... In [my] past they weren't important, but as soon as I learned about them they became important... It must have been important in the past to our elders, so it has got to be of importance to our future... I have to look at it as a tie of the past to the way we live now.<sup>1</sup>

This is a story that begins with a skeleton in a basement. The body, buried near the banks of the Fraser River, was exposed when the bank eroded in the late 1990's. Its first sojourn was in the laboratories of the RCMP where the police ascertained that the death had not been recent nor connected with any "foul play" and that the remains were those of a First Nations person. Consequently, the skeleton was turned over to the Sto:lo First Nation in whose ancestral area it had been found. The return to the Sto:lo, however, was not the conclusion of the journey. As the Sto:lo Nation did not have policy or protocol in place to deal with the situation, they initiated a dialogue between knowledgeable elders and people with specific spiritual knowledge to determine the proper procedure for reburial. In 2000 I was invited by the Sto:lo Nation to examine the historical record and write a report outlining Sto:lo burial practices of the past. Meanwhile, as the discussion continued, the skeleton waited in the basement....

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the manner in which the Coast Salish attitude towards death and burial has been reflected in their cultural practices and oral traditions over time. The main objective is to incorporate archaeological and ethnographic information with oral histories to produce a description of these attitudes.

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<sup>1</sup> Sonny McHalsie quoted by Thomas McIlwraith, "The Problem of Imported Culture: The Construction of Contemporary Sto:lo Identity," American Indian Culture and Research Journal 20 (4 1996): 49.

The intention is to examine some of the beliefs that changed before the arrival of Europeans, some that changed as a result of “contact,” as well as others that remained constant for thousands of years. The discussion of change and tradition, while seemingly paradoxical, is at the centre of this thesis. Until the later part of the Twentieth Century, academic disciplines such as Anthropology and History, as well as “popular culture,” depicted indigenous societies as having only a “traditional life” founded in a “primordial order” which did not change until forced to do so by contact with European society.<sup>2</sup> The image of the “Noble Savage,” so naive as to be incapable of social or technological innovation beyond that which was needed for survival, is an apt illustration of this opinion. In the extreme, proponents of this theory assumed that indigenous cultures were subsumed and assimilated through contact with the “superior” western culture. This opinion has led to the conclusion that any resurgence of a native culture is, in essence, a historical recreation or fiction which has been designed by revisionists to thwart the progress or subvert the order of western society. For example, Clarence Meighan implies that native peoples “create” burial traditions in order to hinder the study of bones and grave goods by academics.<sup>3</sup> An example of the passion which can be elicited by the argument over “tradition” and “traditional activities” is in the discussion concerning the

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<sup>2</sup> Marie Mauze, “Introduction” in Present is Past, ed. Marie Mauze (Lanham, New York & Oxford: University Press of America, 1997), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Clarence Meighan “Some Scholars’ Views On Reburial,” American Antiquity. 57 (October 1992): 705. On the topic of compromise and mutual respect between archaeologists and “Indians,” Meighan states “...many Indian activists are not going to compromise away their beliefs (however unsupported by evidence) that every Indian bone of the past 12,000 years belongs to one of their ancestors. ... there are many... instances in which these valued qualities have been insufficient to prevent or postpone destruction of important archaeological finds.”

Makah whale hunt of 1999.<sup>4</sup> It is the goal of this thesis to show the fallacy in the perception that many First Nations lived either in a “crystalline,” traditional society or “re-created” burial traditions through an examination of rituals and stories of the Coast Salish of the Pacific Northwest in general and the Sto:lo Nation in particular. My argument primarily focuses on the idea that Coast Salish culture has, for centuries, recognized the existence of a “community” between the living and the dead and has emphasized this connection through both continuity and transformation in burial rituals.

The beliefs and rituals that surround death are an important area of study because they reveal much about the culture of the living. The dead, after all, do not bury themselves. These rituals illustrate exactly how the living perceive the dead and outline the expectations surrounding death held by the people who perform the rituals. One can examine social structure by asking why specific individuals were interred in a certain way. Certain types of religious attitudes can be ascertained by asking if individuals were buried as “whole bodies” or as skeletons that had been previously exposed to the elements. “Grave goods,” that were buried with these people, can reveal much about a particular culture’s view of the afterlife and the perception of the status of the deceased. Were “symbolic” goods meant as mementos or as emblems of power which would be useless or even detrimental to the living? Was the burial of utilitarian goods an indication

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<sup>4</sup> Ter Ellingston, The Myth of the Noble Savage (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2001), 360. Ellingston claims “Eco-colonialism” created an image of the “Ecologically Noble Savage” who were expected to live in “‘perfect harmony’ with their environment, acting as the infinitely kindhearted guardians of all living creatures.” The opposite view is expressed by Bob Hunter, a writer usually sympathetic to the “native cause,” in his article “Red Tide” in the Georgia Straight. He argues that “native spirituality itself has taken a hit, because the Makah falsely played up their spirituality from the start... Who can believe for a minute in any ‘traditional’ ritual

of the belief in an afterlife in which these goods would be used? As well, were the burial grounds delineated as “sacred space,” and, if so, what was the social use of this space. Who controlled this space? Did the use of space in First Nations cemeteries differ from its use in Western cemeteries? Did the change in the type of burial evidence a shift in the social construction of a culture? In post contact times, burial within a Christian cemetery was often dependent upon acceptance of Christianity. Those who were not considered “good enough” by the white Christian authorities were excluded from the “holy ground.” Were “cemeteries,” then, seen as places that held great power, or as places that needed to be protected? Were cemeteries located within the community or were they on the outskirts or even removed from the areas usually used by the living? Were the dead seen to have important and integral powers as spirits who inspired fear, or did they remain as members of the community? If the dead were believed to have power, were rituals used to acquire this power for the living? If they inspired fear, were these rituals meant to appease malicious spirits? Or were these rituals designed to include the dead in the world of the living and accentuate the connection between the generations?

The study of the death rituals of any culture is not simply a description of the methods of interring human remains. It necessarily incorporates an examination of the social structure, cosmology, perception of time and the “mythology” of the living culture. Every culture must devise a means to come to terms with the mortality of the individual while assuring the social, psychological, and economic survival of the society as a whole. Bernardo Arriaza, an archaeologist working with mummified remains in northern Chile, has offered the comments that: “Death rituals are abstract (spiritual

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that involves towing a ceremonial canoe... with powerful outboard engines.” June 3-10, 1999, 15.

concepts), functional (creating solidarity), and plastic (they change according to social needs).”<sup>5</sup> In essence, the death ritual is an attempt to both explain the passage of the human spirit to another plane and to establish a bridge between the living and the dead.

On the surface “death” seems to be an easily defined concept. However, even Western science, despite or because of its reliance on technology, is finding this concept more and more elusive. Whereas death was once recognized as the cessation of the physical act of the heart beating, now it is often defined as the time when brain waves are no longer evident. According to Western medicine “one” can be “brain dead” and, paradoxically, still attached to “life support” systems. A living human body is not perceived as an integrated whole, but as a dichotomy comprised of an almost mechanical body animated by the intellect. Despite notions of an immutable scientific “Truth,” Western society has not always viewed humans in this manner. In the past religious ideals informed Western perceptions of death. As historian Nigel Barley so humorously reports: “the awkwardness of the European soul comes largely from the fact that Christianity is a religion designed by a committee.” He that states that before a major revision in 869, which proclaimed that humanity contained only two components, body and soul, humans were believed to possess three components; body, soul and psyche.<sup>6</sup> Western views, then, are in constant flux and should not be considered a “constant” against which the beliefs of other cultures can be compared. The evidence suggests that many First Nations have not deconstructed the living human into the body, mind and soul, but have viewed it as an integrated whole. Unlike the “disjointed” Western view

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<sup>5</sup> Bernardo Arriaza, Beyond Death (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 29. Parenthesis in original

which, in general, defines illness and death as physical manifestations, the Sto:lo, like many First Nations, consider that illness has more than a physical cause.<sup>7</sup>

Any examination of death rituals must approach the topic with sensitivity. Many Native scholars have documented the propensity of nonnative academics to present this type of study as an analysis of the “exotic,” or as fetishistic behaviour performed by “the other” rather than an examination of an important aspect of human experience.<sup>8</sup> This thesis will attempt to present any findings with the respect due to any and all peoples. As this thesis is an extension of a previous project which examined policy and protocol for the reburial of human remains and was done at the request of the Sto:lo Nation, it is my goal to explore issues that are important and useful for the Sto:lo Nation as well as to fulfill academic requirements.

The Sto:lo belong to the Coast Salish, a First Nations cultural group that live in the Northern Puget Sound area of Northern Washington and the area surrounding the Georgia Strait in southern British Columbia. Linguistically, the Coast Salish are divided into five Salishan “languages.” They are Squamish, Nooksack, Clallam, Halkomelem and Northern Straits.<sup>9</sup> The Sto:lo people, whose home is in the lower mainland area between Vancouver and Yale, British Columbia, are considered to be speakers of the “Up River Halkomelem” dialect. According to Wayne Suttles, who has written extensively on the

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<sup>6</sup>Nigel Barley, Dancing on the Grave: Encounters with Dead (London: John Murray, 1995), 51.

<sup>7</sup>Wolfgang Jilek, Indian Healing (North Vancouver: Hancock House, 1981), 145-7.

<sup>8</sup> Vine Deloria Jr, For This Land: Writings on Religion in America ( New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 187-202. and Echo-Hawk, Walter C. and Echo-Hawk, Roger C. Battlefields and Burial Grounds: The Indian Struggle to Protect Ancestral Graves in the United States (Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1994).

<sup>9</sup>Suttles Wayne, “Central Coast Salish,” in Handbook of North American Indians Vol 7 ed. William Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1990), 453.

Coast Salish for the last 50 years, the Sto:lo people who now live in the area around Chilliwack, in the centre of the territory, were originally speakers of the Nooksack language until the middle of the nineteenth century when they were forced to relocate due to a logjam which diverted the Chilliwack River. These people moved into a Halkomelem speaking area in order to follow the river which was their primary source of sustenance and transportation, and were able to adopt the language of their Salishan “cousins.”<sup>10</sup> Historically, a great deal of intermarriage occurred among these groups. These close linguistic and cultural ties suggest that information which has been elicited from one of the above mentioned Coast Salish groups has relevance in a study of the Sto:lo. A great deal has been written on the study of the death rituals of indigenous American cultures and many of these works offer insights and can serve us as guides to determine which aspects of ritual illustrate a general human experience and which are the primarily those of the Coast Salish.

In order to examine these questions this thesis will be organized into a discussion of three time periods. This first section will investigate information from detailed archeological studies at Tsawwassen, Pender Island, Gabriola, False Narrows and Scowlitz and will incorporate a Coast Salish narrative which relates to one type of burial used during the “pre-historic” time. By incorporating these two types of sources, I will attempt to give the First Nations perspective a voice that is not usually found in the archaeological records.

The second section, composed of two chapters, will analyze the immediate “post contact” period and the changes in Coast Salish attitudes due to the influence of Western

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<sup>10</sup> Suttles, "Central Coast Salish," 456.

culture. Chapter two will discuss the writings of missionary-ethnographers in the from the contact period until the twentieth century. Although an examination of the period from 1800 until 1930 covers a great number of events and change, most of the writings from this period are imbued with the attitude of Western superiority held by the authors. The explorers generally considered the Native cultures to be a “curiosity,” the missionaries were dedicated to “civilizing the heathen,” and the ethnographers were attempting to “salvage” information from what they saw as a dying culture. Despite the obvious bias that is evident in many of these works, they do contain a great deal of useful information. These writings will be balanced by Sto:lo and Coast Salish narratives which show that these cultures were not dying, but rather that they were responding to the “culture shock” of invading Western diseases and thought, often through creative means. For this reason, the third chapter will address the concept of syncretism and the significance of the Prophet Movement and the Indian Shaker Church. Again, Coast Salish narratives will be used in order to provide some “native voice” in this chapters.

The third section will concentrate on the recent past and the present using information gathered from interviews with a number of Sto:lo and Coast Salish people. Although these interviews will focus on attitudes towards death in the “modern” world, they will also include current perceptions about the Sto:lo past. Like any group of people, the Sto:lo cannot be studied as a “monolith.” Rather, they hold a variety of opinions on subjects such as the excavation and study of human remains. For some, the past is a subject which can be studied if proper respect is paid to the ancestors. They conclude that the information that is presented can be used to further their claims of long term residency in the lower Mainland. Others maintain that any burial is sacred and should not

be disturbed. Both of these opinions deserve a voice and need to be considered in any academic study of burial practices.

As stated, I will use two methods to uncover attitudes towards death and burial. The first will incorporate archaeological, anthropological and ethnographic information. This evidence is of two types. The first type is “historical,” that is from the time of contact until the mid-twentieth century. Information from these times has the disadvantage of being rather speculative and often containing the strong prejudices of the writers. Both the philosophy of ethnography and the technology of archaeology were being developed at this time and were not available for most of these early studies. Despite these limitations, the observations made by these authors can often be separated from their racially prejudiced opinions. The second type, the more recent studies, have the benefit of both an advanced technology, such as means to accurately date materials, as well as a more culturally sensitive outlook. This type of information can be used to establish the hard facts of the death rituals.

The second method I will use is an examination of the oral histories and traditions of the Coast Salish themselves. This method is important as it gives the Salish a voice in this discussion of their own past. A major problem encountered during the research for this study is the lack of this voice in many of the documents and histories. Although the problem of interpretation is significant, it is possible to reread ethnographic accounts making allowances for the impressions created by the early writers who did not often convey much information with the stories. Many of the accounts of contact with the dead were recorded by writers who considered these accounts to be "mythology" rather than a record of real events. Further, many of the nuances of these stories were

"lost in the translation" or were never evident to those who compiled these histories. For example, many of the stories which recount the ability of the living to re-claim souls from the land of the dead are often presented as evidence of the "Orpheus myth." This viewpoint not only subsumes the concepts of native Americans into that of Western mythology, but also discounts their views in favour of Western ideas.<sup>11</sup> Numerous books have been written on the topic of translation and interpretation of oral histories. Authors such as Dennis Tedlock, Dell Hymes<sup>12</sup> and Keith Basso<sup>13</sup> outline the pitfalls of this endeavour, yet encourage the student to find the "native voice."

The five Salish language groups share numerous cultural and religious beliefs which allows for comparisons. Many of the narratives which describe creation and significant events are similar. Often the form and content of the stories are identical, with the only variation being the names of the characters and the places that they frequented. Most of the stories were recorded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, many of these stories relate to much earlier times. For example, historians generally agree that the Sto:lo did not face the full impact of Western culture until the founding of the Hudson's Bay Post at Fort Langley in 1827. The Sto:lo, however, were decimated by the smallpox epidemic of 1782 in which possibly two-thirds of the population died.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, this event had such a great impact that many of the Halkomelem narratives and place names recorded its occurrence. Almost 150 years after

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<sup>11</sup> Dennis Tedlock, Spoken Word and the work of Interpretation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 32.

<sup>12</sup> Dell Hymes, In Vain I Tried to Tell You. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981) 5-14.

<sup>13</sup> Keith Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 10-11.

the epidemic, “Old Pierre,” a Katzie Elder, recounted what is considered to be “the most detailed oral history account of the smallpox epidemic” to Diamond Jenness in 1936.<sup>15</sup> Names of places are translated as “people container” and “a lot of people died at once” and illustrate the social impact of the disease. Smallpox was not the only disease that affected the Sto:lo, measles and tuberculosis were but a few of the Western “imports” which increased the death rate among these people.<sup>16</sup> It is clear that Western culture had affected the Sto:lo perception of death and their narratives in the years before the Christian doctrines were introduced. Even before “contact,” Western pathogens had destabilized the Native population in a way which influenced social, cultural and religious aspects of their society. This impact is evident in some of their narratives. The effects of these diseases have been examined in depth in other studies and will not be directly addressed in this paper, however, it should be noted that an undercurrent of death preceded “contact” between the Sto:lo and Western culture. Thus the cultures that the early explorers and missionaries met were already deeply affected before “first contact” was made.

“Sto:lo” is a *Halq’emeylem* word which means “river.” Historically, the Coast Salish have relied upon bodies of water for sustenance and transportation. According to Thomas McIlwraith, who has studied the modern Sto:lo, there are two “common themes in the history of the Sto:lo: the Fraser River and salmon.”<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising that many of their stories and rituals are often comprised of actual and metaphorical incidents

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<sup>14</sup> Keith Carlson, *You Are Asked To Witness* (Chilliwack, B.C. :Sto:lo Heritage Trust; Chilliwack, 1997), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Carlson, *You Are Asked to Witness*, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Carlson, *You Are Asked to Witness*, 37.

which concern water. For example, a number of “creation type” stories identify the ancestors of certain peoples as salmon who have the ability to transform themselves. People descended from sockeye salmon behaved differently than those whose ancestors were humpbacks.<sup>18</sup> The importance of the river is also illustrated in recent studies. In Wolfgang Jilek’s description of a spirit healing in Indian Healing, the “Indian doctor” must travel across numerous rivers to retrieve the soul.<sup>19</sup> Jay Miller’s work, Lushootseed Culture and the Shamanic Odyssey, contends that the canoe burials prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were visual metaphors illustrating the perception of death as a journey rather than as a “final destination.”<sup>20</sup> Like the other Coast Salish peoples, the Sto:lo use these “tropes” in many of their stories. However, unlike their “cousins” who lived by the ocean, Sto:lo stories have centred on rivers and lakes and contain fewer references to the ocean.

The Coast Salish perceived death as the cessation of the physical life and the subsequent dispersal of the life essence that had been contained in the body. Unlike Christian thought which postulated that each body has only one soul, the Coast Salish maintained that the body contained four essences. Upon death, one’s essence journeyed to live in the land of the dead while another of the souls could become a “ghost.” However, one could also experience “spirit sickness,” which broadly defined, was the loss of a soul from a still vital body. The task of retrieving the soul fell to the shaman or

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<sup>17</sup> McIlwraith, "The Problem of Imported Culture: The Construction of Contemporary Sto:lo Identity," 46.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Hill-Tout, The Coast Salish People, Vol. 2 ed. Ralph Maud (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978), 558-64.

<sup>19</sup> Jilek, Indian Healing, 145.

<sup>20</sup> Jay Miller, Lushootseed Culture and the Shamanic Odyssey: An Anchored Radiance. (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 109.

Indian doctor. The "metaphorical death" accomplished by these "ritual specialists" is another topic which will be discussed. The study of these individuals' ability to travel between the world of the living and the world of the dead will help us to delineate this physically and spiritually liminal area between life and death.

One similarity that the Coast Salish share with many other indigenous cultures is that they find it necessary to "feed the dead." Unlike mainstream Western thought which considers the deceased as "dead and gone," the Coast Salish perceive that a tangible link of responsibility exists between the living and the dead. This belief implies they owe an amount of care for the welfare of the deceased and suggests a sense of connection and community. Further, this concept also transcends the Western dichotomy between the physical and spiritual by ascribing a spiritual aspect to food and the physical act of eating. Although the method of delivery of this "food" into the spirit world differs between the Coast Salish and other cultures, interesting similarities can be found.<sup>21</sup>

The study of death rituals forms a substantial body of recent scholarship. Although most writings do not concentrate on indigenous American cultures, many of the ideas in these works can be adapted and used in this discussion. For example, Mike Pearson's The Archaeology of Death and Burial (1999) addresses the problems of inter-cultural interpretation, and examines ideas of the physical body, spiritual body and the role of community in death rites. Douglas Davies Death Ritual and Belief (1997) studies

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<sup>21</sup> Modern day Coast Salish burn food for the dead. This practice will be discussed in the fourth chapter. On the "Day of the Dead" many Mexicans prepare meals which are left on the graves of their loved ones overnight. It is believed that although the physical aspect of the meal remains on the plate, the person for whom it was intended has eaten of the spiritual essence of the food. The Incas of pre-conquest Peru would remove mummy bundles from the grave, dress them and seat them at places of honour for a meal on special occasions.

a number of cultures and attempts to analyze the overall human experience of death.

Nigel Barley's Dancing on the Grave: Encounters with Death (1995) also takes a multicultural approach and includes a metaphorical or literary perspective on death.

In the last hundred years many ethnographers missionaries and “explorers” have compiled a great deal of information concerning the Coast Salish and the Sto:lo. However, information on burial customs has been scant, usually comprising an interesting footnote or presented as a curiosity. Perhaps this lack of information has been due to a combination of Western writers' bias in describing the rituals of “the other,” and the reticence of the Salish to divulge sacred information to outsiders. In his Faith of a Coast Salish Indian (1955) Diamond Jenness focuses on “Old Pierre's” acceptance of Christianity and his subject's ability to re-create Salish stories in accordance with Christian doctrine. Wilson Duff, writing The Indian History of British Columbia in 1964, remarks that most of the Salish have become devout Christians in the last generation.<sup>22</sup> In these two works the Salish burial customs, while interesting, are represented as the remnants of the dying past with little relevance to the contemporary Salish society. Other authors, such as Charles Hill-Tout writing in the early years of the twentieth century, have commented on the apparent changes in burial rites over the years, but few have attempted to explain them. In contrast, Myron Eells, writing in the 1880's wrote one of the most complete records of the burial customs of Twana, one of the groups of Coast Salish people. Eells, a missionary, compiled the manuscript for The Indians of Puget Sound in 1894. However, it was not published until 1985. Despite comments such as “a civilized burial” which describes a “white” style ceremony, Eells outlines tree burial,

canoe burial and burial in “enclosures.” As well as a description of each type of burial, he also speculates as to the meaning of each and offers possible explanations as to why changes occurred.

More recent studies have given much more attention to the native perspective. For example, Pamela Amoss’ 1972 dissertation, The Persistence of Aboriginal Beliefs and Practices Among the Nooksack Coast Salish, outlines many of the shamanic traditions of these people. Brian Thom’s 1995 thesis The Dead and the Living uses data collected from the Marpole era excavations to suggest that the change from burial mounds and cairns to above ground interment marks the change in the societies in the Gulf of Georgia region from those organized by rank to those organized through class distinctions. From the 1950’s until the present day Wayne Suttles has produced numerous volumes and articles concerning the Coast Salish. His work covers many aspects of Coast Salish life including linguistics, perception of time, social organization and shamanic traditions and provides an invaluable source of information. Although Susan Joseph’s 1994 thesis Coast Salish Perceptions of Death and Dying focuses on the grieving process, it also offers important insights into the Salish concept of death.

The study of language is a tool that can be used in a number of ways to determine attitudes towards death. This study will incorporate an analysis of both the English and translated Halkomelem syntax. One of the most obvious examples of the attitude a culture has towards death is found in an examination of the words used to describe death. For example, both “passing on” and “kicking the bucket” are euphemisms for death in English, yet each has a different implication. Further, the words

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson Duff, The Indian History of British Columbia. Volume 1 The Impact of the White Man, (Victoria: Anthropology in British Columbia Memoir #5, 1964), 88.

used to describe the deceased, such as “gone” or “resting” also suggest nuances of meaning. Although translation is often a difficult enterprise, Brent Galloway’s A Grammar of Upriver Halkomelem offers numerous insights into the Sto:lo language. Galloway did most of his work in the 1970s and was lucky to have had a number of informants who did not speak English. These native speakers offer a glimpse at a “more pure” process of Coast Salish thought. Further, this work is especially valuable as Galloway includes not only an exhaustive grammar and linguistic analysis of the language, but also includes sections which discuss the body, dysfunction of the body, the type of language used to talk with spirits, the language of religion and a variety of songs. He provides the Halkomelem words as well as a rough translation and an English version. Although these words were chosen by Galloway and represent his own opinions, his rough translation allows a reader who has not studied Halkomelem an insight into the structure, abilities and limitations of the language. Of particular interest in this study are the words used to describe illness and death. Galloway’s work suggests that many of the words for a type of illness are constructed from the same root as the word for death. To use an example from English, one can see that the words “the plague” are ominous, however the words “the black death” presents a stronger image and suggests, rather incorrectly, that all who contracted the disease died.<sup>23</sup> Galloway also scrutinizes known texts, in both the “original” and Salish translation, such as the Methodist hymn “Come Thou Fount,” which illustrate the problems encountered in any type of translation, and especially the type of problems encountered in translating religious texts which incorporate metaphysical ideas and dogma.

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<sup>23</sup> David Herlihy, The Black Death and the Transformation of the West, (Cambridge, MA

A number of stories which deal with death can be found in the many compilations of Coast Salish narratives. In her 1934 collection Folk Tales of the Coast Salish Thelma Adamson relates a number of “tales” that concern travel to the land of the dead. In these tales Blue jay, identified by Del Hymes as the “trickster-buffoon” of the Coast Salish, travels across a river to the land in order to visit his sister.<sup>24</sup> These stories, due to the “mythic” nature of the protagonist and his actions in the creation of various landmarks, fall into the category of “sxwoxwiyam.” These are stories of the world before it was transformed into its present order. Although she does not include any stories from Canadian Coast Salish people, Adamson does provide a detailed record on the collection of these “tales” which allows the reader to compare them to stories collected from nearby Canadian groups. Ralph Maud includes a number of stories that were collected by Hill-Tout in the four volumes of The Salish People. These stories focus on the travel to the land of the dead by a grieving husband in order to retrieve the soul of a beloved wife. Unlike the stories compiled by Adamson, those of Hill-Tout recount the actions of real people and seem to fit into the category of “sqwelqwel” or true stories.<sup>25</sup>

The study of death and its rituals reveals more than just how a people die, but also how they live. Social, religious and cultural ideas which motivate the living are reflected in the manner in which a people perceive death. Changes do not necessarily represent the evolution or “progress” of a culture, nor do they signal a loss of traditional values.

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& London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997), 18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Dell Hymes, “Mythology,” in Handbook of North American Indians Vol 7, ed. William Sturtevant, (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1990), 594.

<sup>25</sup> Keith Carlson, personal communication, February 23, 2002. He states that the differentiation between these two types of stories is artificial. However it is important to note that, although the “definitions” may be rather fluid, the Sto:lo have created these two categories for their oral histories.

Rather, they depict the ability of a culture to live and adapt in a changing world. Rituals and ideas that remain stable over time establish continuity and are not necessarily restraints, rather, they illustrate integral parts of a lasting cultural identity.

The agency of First Nations peoples in their dealings with the European culture has been stated many times by numerous authors in the last 50 years. This thesis is neither an attempt to “whitewash” the actions of the Europeans nor an attempt to present the First Nations as “noble savages.” Simply, it is my hope to be able to find the “loose strings” in the narratives that will lead the patient observer back to an more complete “ball of string” thus placing these findings in an arena for informed discussion. This discussion is important in the present day in which the treatment of human remains depends upon the ability to identify them within a certain culture group. Dialogue, based in an understanding of cultural nuances, is central to treaty negotiations which will decide what, if any, protection is given to the sacred places, objects and human remains of the community of First Nations peoples.

## Chapter 1 - Digging for Meaning; Archaeology and the Distant Past

This chapter will examine some of the archaeological findings which are central to an understanding of Coast Salish and Sto:lo mortuary rituals as they were practiced in the “distant past.” Until recently, the "standard logic" assumed that the First Nations peoples lived in a traditional, unchanging past which endured until the arrival of the Europeans propelled these "primitive cultures" headfirst into the modern ethos. A number of recent archaeological studies challenge this view and demonstrate that there have been changes in the mortuary rituals practiced by the Coast Salish during the millennia before contact. Archaeological evidence also provides evidence the practices of wrapping the body and feeding the dead have a long history in the Coast Salish culture.

Archaeology provides insight into the burial customs of the past. Through the systematic and intricate study of *what* items remain in burials, archaeology postulates *why* burials were *performed* in the manner that they were and seeks to reveal the importance of these rituals. Further, archaeology, as a discipline, defines cultures both by the period in which they existed, and by the specific items which remain. In the archaeological nomenclature these definitions are called "phases" or "cultures." Archaeology attempts to provide a sense of what was important to a people through analysis of their cultural markers.

Archaeology can itself be defined by the specific manner in which it chooses to examine certain topics. The goal of the earliest "archaeologists" who studied the Northwest Coast was not to study objects *in situ*, but to remove the greatest number of

collectable items for study or display in the museums that funded their expeditions. Further, most of these archaeologist/ethnographer/explorers came with a colonial mindset firmly in place. The undercurrent of their work was to prove, through a comparison of the artifacts they found to the material culture of the First Nations peoples they encountered, that evidence of the existence of any "high culture" was not related to the cultures of the "degraded Indians" who lived in the area.<sup>26</sup> By establishing this "fact," they asserted their "right" to the goods that they "found." They reasoned that if these goods did not belong to any specific person or culture, then the goods became the property of the "finder." As well, this attitude stressed the obligation that the colonizing Westerners had to "elevate" what they deemed as primitive societies into the modern world.

Modern archaeology explores issues that are dictated as much by the quest for knowledge as by the effects or interests of contemporary society. In some cases, archaeologists study sites which are in imminent danger of destruction, either through the acts of nature or the encroachment of urban society. These include the sites at Scowlitz on the Harrison River in the Lower Mainland and False Narrows. In recent years the effects of post modernism and revisionism have altered the direction of many fields of study. As a discipline, archaeology, has instigated a discussion of "self-assessment" concerning the exact goal of research. Joanne Curtin, who has worked in the Northwest

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<sup>26</sup>Some went as far as asserting that the Indians were members of the lost tribes of Israel who had both literally and figuratively lost their way and their culture. Father A.G. Morice, an Oblate missionary who worked among the carrier near Stuart lake from 1885-1905, expressed this idea in many of his writings. His opinion is discussed in his "Notes: Archaeological, Industrial and Sociological on the Western Dene With an Ethnographical Sketch of Same," Transactions of the Royal Canadian Institute, 1895, 1-222. It should be noted that not all early archaeologists held these opinions.

for a number of years, argues that the archaeological studies of the Northwest Coast have, until recently, been dominated by the goal of defining the “typical” mortuary practice for each of these "cultural-chronological units." She maintains that as more sites have been studied and more data accumulated, "[t]he search for "normative" burial patterns has yielded to the recognition that all cultures are characterized by a variety of burial treatments, which are correlated with variables such as the individual's age, gender, social status and the circumstances or manner of death."<sup>27</sup> She contends that the more recent perspective seeks an understanding of the cultural processes involved in mortuary ritual rather than a "cultural-historical reconstruction" of these practices.<sup>28</sup> Curtin argues that to be truly valuable, information must *inform* not merely describe.

Archeological evidence demonstrates that significant changes in the manner of burial have occurred from 2500 BC until the present. During this time, the Coast Salish buried their dead in middens, mounds and cairns and in above ground interments. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the exact reasons which caused modifications in mortuary rituals, an examination of relevant factors such those affected by environmental change, does suggest some reasonable conclusions. As well, this archaeological evidence demonstrates that many of the religious or spiritual ideas of the Coast Salish have their roots in earlier eras and that these concepts have persisted into the ethnographic record. The examination of this record verifies that many of the rituals of the modern Sto:lo and Salish have been fundamental for millennia. The studies that form the basis of this chapter examine the sites at Tsawwasswen, Pender Canal, False Narrows,

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<sup>27</sup> A Joanne Curtin, "Prehistoric Mortuary Variability on Gabriola Island, B.C" ( Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1998), 6.

<sup>28</sup>Curtin, "Prehistoric Variability on Gabriola Island, B.C, " 7.

the Gabriola Rockshelters and Scowlitz. Each of these sites is important as it offers insight into the both the changes and constants in the mortuary customs of the Coast Salish in these early times.

Mortuary practices cannot be studied in the proverbial “vacuum.” Changes in burial practices, which are important markers of culture, are considered to have necessarily signaled major shifts in a culture’s thought concerning both the social status of the deceased as well as the spatial and “spiritual” relation of the dead to the living. Mike Parker Pearson contends the appearance of cemeteries signaled the creation of somewhat sedentary village sites and the ability to modify and change the environment.<sup>29</sup> Unlike thoroughly nomadic peoples who would most probably bury their dead somewhere near the place of death, more sedentary people established cemeteries in order to keep the dead in proximity to the living. These dead could have been kept close by for means of reverence, remembrance, or to give access to the living to the power that the dead were perceived to hold.

Archaeologists divide the “prehistory” of the Northwest Coast into a number of periods. (Fig 2)<sup>30</sup> The period which is most pertinent to this discussion is the Pacific period, which is broadly defined as lasting from 4400 BC until contact in 1775. This period is, in turn, separated into three phases; the Early, Middle and Late Developmental Stages. Each of these phases is central to this discussion of the mortuary practices of the Northwest Coast peoples. The relevance of these phases will become apparent as most of the sites which will be discussed were inhabited for a length of time and contain burials

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<sup>29</sup> Mike Parker Pearson, The Archaeology of Death and Burial (College Station TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 157.

dating from more than one stage. At times, these sites were substantial villages, while during other times, these sites became less crucial. This observation suggests that the pattern of habitation did not remain static but changed as different factors became important in the lives of the people. With Curtin's earlier comments in mind, these stages, should be seen not as rigorous definitions but rather as general guidelines of cultural practices.<sup>31</sup> A brief description of the stages illustrates the type of cultural change which informs archaeological studies.

The earliest culture to be identified by archaeology is the "protowestern tradition." There is little or no dated evidence of this culture type on the coast. However, the "Old Cordilleran Culture," represented by the Glenrose Cannery Site near Vancouver, is considered to be a "clear derivation" of the protowestern.<sup>32</sup> Artifacts from this site have been radiocarbon dated from approximately 4300 BC.<sup>33</sup> The information from this site suggests that the people who lived here depended more on large land mammals, such as elk, than they did on shellfish resources. However, the remains of salmon and stickleback suggest that this site was heavily used during the late spring and

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<sup>30</sup> Knut R. Fladmark, British Columbia Prehistory (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1986), 17.

<sup>31</sup> Consider the changes in western mortuary ritual. As recently as the 1950's elaborate markers and headstones were common in cemeteries. However, with the advent of long bladed power mowers, these types of commemorative statuary are no longer allowed in many public cemeteries in Canada and the United States. Although it could be argued that this represents the triumph of the corporation over the individual, it does not seem that the attitude and beliefs of the "bereaved" have changed significantly in this period. What was once seen as almost a pauper's burial, has become the norm.

<sup>32</sup> Richard G Matson & Gary Coupland, Prehistory of the Northwest Coast (San Diego: Academic Press, 1995), 67-8.

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Ames & Herbert Maschner, The Peoples of the Northwest Coast (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 9. I have used the chart on page 9 of Ames and Maschner to "translate" radiocarbon dates into calendrical ones.

early summer months.<sup>34</sup> The Milliken site, which is located close to Sto:lo territory, is thought to have been contemporaneous with the culture at Glenrose. This site, however did not yield any organic remains.<sup>35</sup>

The Early Pacific Period, from 4400 to 1800 BC, was the time in which the climate was becoming close to what it is today. As the climate became cooler and moister, plants, such as the cedar, established themselves. The stabilization of the sea level allowed for the native exploitation of the inter tidal zone. Dependence on an established maritime system was one of the main factors which caused the inhabitants to become less mobile and to found large village sites in productive areas.<sup>36</sup> This use of marine resources, most prominently mollusks, also led to the construction of middens.<sup>37</sup> Due to their alkaline properties, which protects bone and other organic fragments from the naturally acid soils of the Pacific Northwest, these middens represent the first archaeological evidence of cemeteries.<sup>38</sup>

The “Charles Culture” occurred from about 3300 BC until 1850 BC. This culture included the Mayne and St Mungo phases in the coastal areas and the Eayem phase in the

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<sup>34</sup> Matson & Coupland, Prehistory of the Northwest Coast, 74.

<sup>35</sup> Ames & Maschner, The Peoples of the Northwest Coast, 72.

<sup>36</sup> Daryl Fedje, Rebecca J Wigen, Quentin Mackie, Cynthia R Lake & Ian Sumpter, "Preliminary Results from Investigations at Kilgii Gwaay: An Early Holocene Archaeological Site on Ellen Island, Haida Gwaii, British Columbia," Canadian Journal of Archaeology 25: 98-120.

<sup>37</sup> Ames & Maschner, The Peoples of the Northwest Coast, 88.

<sup>38</sup> A shell midden is an accumulation of used mollusk shells. Often other types of house hold “refuse” and tools are included. While middens are popularly described as “garbage dumps,” it seems that they could more reasonably be compared to compost heaps. While the material did not entirely decay, many elements found in the shells and other detritus would leach into the soil, or nearby water source or ocean returning elements to the environment.

Fraser canyon.<sup>39</sup> The most important development for this period was that of shell middens and shell midden burials.<sup>40</sup> The creation of these shell middens suggests that the coastal population in this period became highly dependent upon shellfish for sustenance. Jerome Cybulski, who has studied the North West Coast cultures extensively, maintains that middens are “not apparent” in the archaeological record before 3500 BC.<sup>41</sup> Ames and Maschner state that cemeteries became evident in the archeological record by 2500 BC with midden burials being “common” at this time.<sup>42</sup>

The Middle Pacific period includes the Locarno phase, lasting from 1500 to 600 BC and the Marpole phase, from 600 BC until 500 AD, on the coast, and the Baldwin and Skamel phases in the Fraser canyon region, which though poorly represented in the archaeological record, are considered to be contemporaneous with the Locarno and Marpole Phases.<sup>43</sup> Many of the practices from this time have persisted and represent facets of the immediate pre-contact cultures. Finally the Stselax phase is the name given to the transition/post contact stage.

Arcas Consulting Archaeologists LTD conducted one of the most in-depth archeological studies of the site at Tsawwassen, which is located in the lower mainland

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<sup>39</sup>Matson & Coupland, Prehistory of the Northwest Coast, 98. Fladmark, British Columbia Prehistory, 13. Fladmark calls this the “Early Developmental Stage.” Ames & Maschner, Peoples of the Northwest Coast, 103. These authors call it the “Early Pacific Period.”

<sup>40</sup>Ames & Machner speculate that in ground burials in designated areas may have been practiced earlier. However, the alkalinity of the midden, as opposed to the acidic nature of the soil: the middens, via their calcium carbonate derived alkalinity, buffer this acidity and allow for bone preservation. 90

<sup>41</sup>Jerome Cybulski, Greenville Burial Ground: human remains and mortuary elements in B.C. Prehistory (Hull, P.Q. :Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992), 33.

<sup>42</sup>Ames & Maschner, The Peoples of the Northwest Coast, 90.

<sup>43</sup>Ames & Maschner, The Peoples of the Northwest Coast, 103- 105.

municipality of Delta. Their work commenced in May of 1989 and lasted until April of 1991. This site has produced artifacts which range in date from the Old Cordilleran Culture through to the St. Mungo, Locarno, Marpole and the Stselax phases. This study has ascertained that the area has been a village site, a fishing camp and, most importantly for this paper, a St. Mungo and a Marpole burial Site.<sup>44</sup>

The Arcas authors describe the burials at Tsawwassen as primary types of inhumation. “Primary” refers to a burial that is conducted soon after death. In contrast, a secondary burial involves the reduction of the remains into “dissarticulated skeletal elements.” Dissarticulation occurred either through exposure, cremation or some other process. Once complete, the remains were then the subject of a mortuary ritual.<sup>45</sup> The area at Tsawwassen yielded human remains dated from 3000 BC (4360 BP) until 1200 AD (740 BP)<sup>46</sup> Some of the burials which seem to be “dissarticulated” were the result of the disturbance caused by later burials in the same area.<sup>47</sup> The Arcas study found that this site contains a number of burials from the St. Mungo phase. However, the authors state that many of these burials were too badly disturbed by the more recent Marpole burials to ascertain the original placement of the bodies. However they found enough evidence to conclude that the bodies from this period were wrapped for burial.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C. Volume III Prepared for Construction Branch, South Coast Region, Ministry of Transportation and Highways, Burnaby, B.C. and the B.C. Archaeology Branch, Permits 1984-41, 1990-2 (Coquitlam, 1999), 83.

<sup>45</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C., Vol. IV, (Coquitlam, May 1991), 33.

<sup>46</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C. Vol. IV, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B. C. Vol. IV, 40.

<sup>48</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C Vol. IV, 49.

The authors of the Arcas report extrapolate their summary of the mortuary rituals from the data that they have collected. They assert that during the Marpole/ transition phase, the body was dressed in the personal ornaments of the deceased. The body was then bent into a flexed position. The knees were drawn up to the chest and the hands covered the face. The remains were then wrapped in a plain cedar mat or blanket. The authors maintain that those who had realized an amount of wealth or prestige were dressed in a more elaborate costume and that some, but not most of these elite, were placed in a cedar box. They contend that the disposal of the cedar box would have been “affordable” only for the most wealthy. They assert that the burials at Tsawwassen are the earliest dated use of cedar boxes in a mortuary ritual.<sup>49</sup>

Their findings suggest that most bodies were wrapped prior to burial. The authors conclude that the wrapping accounted for the flexed position in which most of the remains were found. Most of those remains which were not found in a flexed position had been less tightly wrapped, or were wrapped in a less durable "blanket" and "relaxed" over time. The only remains that do not show evidence of wrapping were those of women in a common grave who the authors concluded were slaves on the basis of burial style and post mortem treatment.<sup>50</sup> While this burial would indicate that only members of the “immediate” society were afforded the full extent of mortuary ritual, it also suggests that the society at Tsawwassen, unlike some western religions which allow only

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<sup>49</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C., Vol IV, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C., Vol. IV., 44.

members to be buried in "sacred ground," did consider the midden as a burial place for all people.<sup>51</sup>

Once the body was dressed and wrapped, it was taken to an unused part of the midden. The remains were then placed in a shallow pit with the men facing west while women usually faced east. In some cases tools, belongings and food were placed inside the grave. Ochre was also sprinkled over some graves. As well, there is evidence that food and other goods were burned at the grave site. The authors of this study speculate that this practice is related to the practice of "feeding the dead."<sup>52</sup>

The Arcas study maintains that burial sites were usually situated away from the living area. They include the generally accepted theory, as postulated by Charles Borden who has studied the area extensively. He maintains that "cemeteries associated with village sites are generally behind or on the land ward side of the village midden"<sup>53</sup> and add that most of the burials found at Tswwassen justify a recent refinement of this theory that "burials in this region are *never* associated with actively-accumulating middens and *always* post date the midden when they are directly dated."<sup>54</sup> This information suggests that the burials at Tsawwassen represented the return of the physical and spiritual elements of the body to their natural cycles. Some aspects of this idea will be addressed later in the discussion of "myths."

The Arcas authors speculate that burials in mounds and cairns may have represented a transitional phase between midden burials and surface burials. The mound

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<sup>51</sup> For example, in the past only Catholics were allowed to be buried in consecrated cemeteries.

<sup>52</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C., Vol. IV., 58.

<sup>53</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C., Vol IV, 42.

and cairn type of burial is found in many sites throughout the southern Strait of Georgia, and occurs as both a surface type and as a subsurface midden component. However, as few of these mounds and cairns have been dated, it is not possible to determine the exact nature of this difference.<sup>55</sup>

The SFU-Heritage Conservation Branch Project studied the site at Pender Canal in the mid 1980's. The stated goal of the work was to provide "new insights into the development of Native American culture *provided such remains could be found in context.*"<sup>56</sup> The site, located on a canal dividing North Pender Island from South Pender in the Gulf Islands of British Columbia, had been inhabited for approximately 5000 years and has been used by the Saanich and Cowichan peoples well into the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> The authors believe that much of what was once part of the settlement is now under water due to the elevation in sea levels, thus evidence of any usage of the site that is older than 500 BC (2250 BP) would have been either eroded or inundated.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, construction of a ship canal in 1902-3 modified the immediate area.<sup>59</sup>

The Simon Fraser University study divided its findings into three stages: an Early Midden, dating from 3000- 2500 BC; a Main Midden, 2500-500 BC and Late Midden, 500 BC - 1200 AD. The authors state that the major cause of disturbance of the burials at

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<sup>54</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C., Vol. IV, 42. (Italics in original)

<sup>55</sup> Arcas Consulting Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C., Vol. IV, 60.

<sup>56</sup> Roy Carlson & Philip Hobler. "The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture" BC Studies 99 (Autumn 1993): 25.

<sup>57</sup> Carlson & Hobler, "The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture," 48.

<sup>58</sup> Carlson & Hobler, "The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture," 36.

the site was either the result of later burials or "the root systems of large conifers growing from the midden." <sup>60</sup>

The Pender Canal site contains two large mounds which were constructed over a number of years. Unlike other mounds, such as those at Scowlitz, these mounds housed numerous burials. The Early Midden, which does not seem to be part of the mound complex, contained four burials which dated from 4000 - 3000 BC (5170-4430 BP). The Main Midden contained 105 burials which have been dated to the Mayne Phase 3000 - 1250 BC (4500-3000 PB). Some of these burials form the basis of Mound 1. The Late Midden burials have been dated to 1250 BC - 1200 AD (3000 - 800 BP) These burials are situated in Mound 2 and in the upper layers of Mound 1. In contrast to the Main Midden, which seemed to have been used primarily for burials, this late midden was used for a variety of purposes. <sup>61</sup> The authors speculate that these burials were located at the rear of the village site, however, the rise in sea level since the time of the original inhabitation has obliterated evidence of this.

The authors contend that the long use of this site gives evidence for "stability and culture growth, and periods of change." <sup>62</sup> While samples from the Early Midden are too small to extrapolate definitive information, evidence from the Main Midden "shows the

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<sup>59</sup> Carlson & Hobler, "The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture," 29.

<sup>60</sup> Carlson & Hobler, "The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture," 37.

<sup>61</sup> Carlson & Hobler, "The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture," 38-9.

<sup>62</sup> Carlson & Hobler, "The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture," 44.

nearly full development of Northwest Coast culture- the memorial of funeral potlatch based on direct evidence for feeding the dead...”<sup>63</sup> They continue:

The basic belief system represented in the remains of the Main Midden period has considerable similarity with that of the ethnographic Coast Salish. First there are the representations in the archaeological record ...which conform to the spirit powers recorded ethnographically. Second, in the Main Midden period the ritual of feeding the dead is clearly shown by the discovery of spoons at the mouth area of burials and of clam shell bowls in the hand or nearby... There are small hearths associated with some of the burials... and it is probable that the custom of feeding the dead by burning food replaced the actual feeding of the dead in this period. Third, representations... on some of the Pender artifacts indicate shamanic beliefs fully in keeping with the ethnographic belief system.<sup>64</sup>

The results indicate that during the Late Midden phase the use of the site changed.

According to the data, the importance of the site decreased after 500 BC (2200 BP) as the artifacts found suggest that it became a “seasonal resource camp.” The authors speculate that the shift in prominence was due to changes in salmon runs, El Nino, or to internecine warfare.<sup>65</sup> Based on the artifacts found at the site, the authors conclude that after 500 BC (2200 BP) the site became a seasonal camp rather than an important village. For this reason, the mortuary use of the area changed.<sup>66</sup> Most importantly, like the site at Tsawwasswen, the Pender Canal site reveals a number of practices, such as the feeding of the dead, which have survived into the present.

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<sup>63</sup> Carlson & Hobler, “The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture,” 45. (Hyphen in original).

<sup>64</sup> Carlson & Hobler, “The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of the Coast Salish Culture,” 62.

<sup>65</sup> Carlson & Hobler, “The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture,” 45.

<sup>66</sup> Carlson & Hobler, “The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture,” 50.

Senewelets, an area around False Narrows near Nanaimo on central Vancouver Island, has been important to the Coast Salish for over 2000 years.<sup>67</sup> Its use as part of the "seasonal round" and for ritual purposes is emphasized by the presence of a seasonal settlement located near the shore, a number of inland middens, three petroglyph sites, and three isolated burials areas.<sup>68</sup> While the winter villages of the Halkomelem-speaking Nanaimo people were in nearby Nanaimo harbour and Departure Bay, this site was used during the spring and early summer to gather shellfish, hunt seals and sea lions, fish for cod and grilse, and harvest camas. The Nanaimo people also used a village site near Fort Langley on the Fraser River to fish for sockeye in late Summer.<sup>69</sup>

Excavation at the settlement of Senewelets began in 1966 when the midden was threatened by urban development. Although the site was accessible for only two seasons, 1966 and 1967, analysis of the data from this area has been ongoing.<sup>70</sup> Habitation and culture type provided the basis for analysis which divided the artifacts into four categories.<sup>71</sup> In all 50 graves holding 86 individuals were found.<sup>72</sup> Characteristics, such as the relatively large number of burials exhibiting "non functional" grave goods,

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<sup>67</sup> David Burley, Senewelets: the Cultural History of Nanaimo Coast Salish and False Narrows Midden (Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 1989), 43.

<sup>68</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 50. One of these isolated burials is located in the Gabriola Rockshelters and will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>69</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 9. The analysis in Burley's book is based on his Doctoral research into the Marpole culture type. He states that he was not involved in the excavations at the site which were carried out ten years before his research. While he admits that there are limitations in using "older work," as the original archaeologists did not have access to sophisticated methods of dating material, he feels that the data from this site is important.

<sup>71</sup> The four are False Narrows I, II, III and IV types. Burley offers detailed definitions of these in his study. 41.

<sup>72</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 51.

suggested that the inhabitants during the False Narrows I and II periods were closely related to the Beach Grove variant of the Marpole culture.<sup>73</sup> Most of these burials were dated to between 300 and 400 AD. False Narrows III and IV were judged to represent the Gulf of Georgia type and were specifically identified as belonging to the Halkomelem speaking culture of Nanaimo.<sup>74</sup> Immediate pre contact and historical elements were also found.<sup>75</sup>

Four types of burials exist at this site. The most common were shallow excavations made into a former midden surface into which articulated individuals were placed. They represent both the Marpole (FNI) and Gulf of Georgia (FNIII) culture types.<sup>76</sup> One of the most significant from the Marpole era is a burial of an adolescent male. This individual was buried in what appears to have been a dance costume with whale bone armlets, a decorated elk antler that could have been held, a zoomorphic pendant in the shape of a beetle and numerous other items of personal adornment.<sup>77</sup> Burley contends that these items identify the grave of a person who sought or controlled ritual power.<sup>78</sup>

The second type is a "rock slab" burial in which the body, placed in a flexed position, was covered by large pieces of rock. Burley speculates that these rocks were placed over burial boxes and were used to weight the lids or were used to cover burial

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<sup>73</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 38. The Beach Grove variant is characterized by a large number of grave goods.

<sup>74</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 41-2.

<sup>75</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 16-26.

<sup>76</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 52.

<sup>77</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 59.

<sup>78</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 60. See also Curtin, "Prehistoric Mortuary Variability on Gabriola Island, B.C.," 217, for a contradictory opinion of this burial.

boxes that did not have lids.<sup>79</sup> Both burials of the Marpole and Gulf of Georgia are found in this type.<sup>80</sup>

Two cairn burials are also present at Senewelets. Both of these burials contain the remains of women. Burley speculates that the first was that of a woman who had married into the group. Due to her Chinook-style cranial deformation, he contends that this woman was not a member of the Nanaimo people. The second was of a woman who died in childbirth. Because of their rarity at this site and due to the inclusion of grave goods, such as a dentalium necklace in the first burial, Burley speculates that at least the first woman held ranked status in the social hierarchy.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, one multiple burial containing three bodies was found at this site. Burley theorizes that these three were members of a kin group. He has his opinion on the observations of a late nineteenth century missionary who encountered a 19th Century Twana man who wished to bury his son in the grave of predeceased kin.<sup>82</sup>

Unlike the later studies, Burley's does not mention wrapping or feeding of the dead. Possibly the technology of the 1960's was not capable of producing the proper data to confidently assert that the bodies had been wrapped. However, in accordance with the Arcas authors who contend that flexed burials are the result of wrapping, due to the organic residue found in the burials, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the flexed bodies here were wrapped before burial.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 55.

<sup>80</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 54-55.

<sup>81</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 55-6.

<sup>82</sup> Burley, Senewelets, 56. The missionary was Myron Eells who will be discussed in a later chapter.

<sup>83</sup> Arcas Consulting, Archaeological Investigations at Tsawwassen, B.C., Vol. IV, 43.

The 1998 dissertation of A. Joanne Curtin examines the mortuary use of the Gabriola Rockshelters, located only 1 km from the False Narrows site. Her work both challenges and verifies many of the previous assumptions. The early archaeologist/ethnographers speculated that changes in mortuary ritual were due to an invasion which upset or replaced the indigenous culture. From the shape of a small number of skulls, they theorized that two conflicting peoples had lived in this area and surmised that one group prevailed, eventually replacing the long standing culture of the area. The debate seems to have been answered, in part, by Curtin's work. On the basis of what are called "non metric traits," she contends that the population buried at False Narrows was closely related to those buried in the rock shelters.<sup>84</sup> Curtin's findings at the Gabriola rockshelters indicate that the observed differences between the burials at these two sites represent the natural evolution of a culture rather than a radical shift effected by outside forces.

Burials at the Gabriola Rockshelters show evidence that social standing during life often affects the manner of burial. Most of the burials that Curtin examines were secondary inhumations. She reports that the bodies in one section of the rockshelters were not fully cremated. Only a localized portion of the body had been subjected to fire. Curtin suggests that this incomplete burning was the symbolic cremation used by those who were not wealthy or of high enough social status to afford a complete ritual. She bases this observation on the relative lack of grave goods as well as the sparse food offerings

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<sup>84</sup> A Joanne Curtin, "The Evidence from Gabriola," in The Midden 31 (2): 2-4. She defines a non metric trait as "minor inherited variations in the shape of bones and teeth." This is contrast to metric traits "such as cranial size and shape ...since they are less influenced by factors such as environment, age and sex."

associated with these partially cremated remains.<sup>85</sup> Another area in the site yielded burials that Curtin contends were of the elite. She bases her opinion on the high number of grave goods and the more complete cremation of the remains.

Her data suggests that possibly the manner of death was the factor which determined the mode of burial. To support this thesis Curtin cites Binford's survey of mortuary ritual which found that cause of death was an important determinant in the method of burial.<sup>86</sup> Few of the False Narrows burials were dated, despite the limited nature of the data, Curtin maintains that the site at False Narrows and the rock shelters were both used for a long period and by the same cultural group. As mentioned, she asserts that most of the bodies in the rock shelters show some signs of violence or disease, unlike a similar sample from False Narrows. Curtin maintains, on the basis of an examination of the skeletons, that most of the burials at this site were of those who had either died violently or from infectious diseases. A large number of the bodies had been either cremated or exposed to fire during the mortuary ritual. Some were dismembered before they were burned. The lack of charcoal in the burial caves suggests that these people were burned at another location and then brought to the rock shelters. She also contends that these dead were fed at the time of burial and possibly afterwards.<sup>87</sup>

Further, she maintains that the high number of cremated bodies in the Rock Shelters, as compared to the relative lack of burning at the False Narrows site, demonstrates that those buried in the shelters died in a different manner than those who

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<sup>85</sup> A Joanne Curtin, "Prehistoric Mortuary Variability on Gabriola Island, B.C., 100-1.

<sup>86</sup> Curtin, "Prehistoric Mortuary Variability on Gabriola Island, B.C.," 221.

<sup>87</sup> Curtin, "Prehistoric Mortuary Variability on Gabriola Island, B.C.," 162.

were interred in the midden area.<sup>88</sup> Curtin admits that her theory is open to argument. Like all archaeological studies, some of her argument is based on her interpretation of the data. Where she sees a fact, others may see nothing at all. Her work raises some questions that will be addressed in the following discussion of myth.

The Scowlitz village site, located at the confluence of the Fraser and Harrison Rivers in the lower Mainland, has been at the centre of a collaborative study involving UBC/ SFU and the Sto:lo Tribal Council, now called the Sto:lo Nation. This study was instigated in the early 1990's when erosion began to affect the integrity of the burial mounds.

Just as all of the other sites were used in a variety of ways for hundreds if not thousands of years, the inhabitation at Scowlitz extended through a period of roughly 1500 years. The site consists of 42 "burial features" situated on a terrace behind an area of house depressions. More mounds and cairns are found to the north and the south of the central area.<sup>89</sup> While the Scowlitz site seems to have been originally used as a village, it was later used as a cemetery.<sup>90</sup> At first archaeologists assumed that all the mounds and cairns had all been built on a bank behind the village, however the discoveries in 1997 of a burial cairn closer to the house sites and the remains of an earlier occupation of the area under Mound 1, suggests that the use of this site, like many others, changed over time. Evidence indicates that the village occupied the entire river terrace by 500 BC (2200 BP). By 600 AD (1500 BP) burial mounds were being built over the houses at the rear of the

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<sup>88</sup> Curtin, "Prehistoric Mortuary Variability on Gabriola Island, B.C.," 219.

<sup>89</sup> Brian Thom, "The Living and the Dead" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1995), 21.

terrace.<sup>91</sup> The archaeological report maintains that this change in usage "may serve to mark symbolically the claims of particular groups to specific, highly valued places on the landscape."<sup>92</sup> Further the concentration of these large structures suggests that the people of Scowlitz had a "high level of social and ritual activity, and likely involved individuals from outside the local community."<sup>93</sup>

Brian Thom asserts that the change in mortuary ritual at Scowlitz was due to a shift in the society from a rank to a class based hierarchy. He contends that such a change in mortuary rituals would be necessary as "the old symbols would hold less meaning, or might even undermine the new social networks..."<sup>94</sup> He argues that the construction of mounds and cairns would have required a great deal of effort, however this type of work was not as specialized as the artistic creations used by the Coast Salish at the time of contact.

Despite their lack of archaeological sophistication, the writings of some of the early authors, such as Harlan Smith and Charles Hill-Tout, offer some interesting insights into mortuary rituals. Unlike more recent studies which focus on the "hard data"

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<sup>90</sup> Nicole Oakes. "Preliminary Report on the 1997 Archaeological Reconnaissance near Harrison Mills, Southwestern British Columbia" (Chilliwack: Sto:lo Archives, May 1998), 15.

<sup>91</sup> Oakes, "Preliminary Report on the 1997 Archaeological Reconnaissance near Harrison Mills, Southwestern British Columbia," 11. The date for Mound 1, the largest mound at the site, indicates that it was constructed sometime between the years 460 and 640 AD. This would place the construction in what is thought of as a transition period between the Marpole to the Late phase. However, there is also evidence of a later, historic period occupation of the site. However, Mound 23 seems to be much older. The construction of this has been dated to approximately 250 BC.

<sup>92</sup> Oakes, "Preliminary Report on the 1997 Archaeological Reconnaissance near Harrison Mills, Southwestern British Columbia," 13.

<sup>93</sup> Oakes, "Preliminary Report on the 1997 Archaeological Reconnaissance near Harrison Mills, Southwestern British Columbia," 13.

discovered through the scientific processes of age-dating and chemical analysis of materials of the grave, these early works describe the human ingenuity needed to construct these mortuary edifices. Smith was working for the Jesup expedition, which began in the last years of the nineteenth century and was searching for connections between the Native Americans and the inhabitants of North- East Asia. Hill-Tout was a school teacher who immigrated from Britain in 1896 to live in the lower mainland.

Both of these men wrote a great deal on the mounds and cairns, most probably because of their prominence in the landscape. Many of their statements are problematical. Although they state, with great assurance, that the burials in these mounds and cairns were single, rather than multiple burials, they did not have the scientific means to truly ascertain this information.<sup>95</sup> They also state that some burials were deeper than others. While this was most probably exactly what they observed, they did not measure levels of erosion or other environmental factors that may have compromised this data. Despite the lack of “scientific” evidence to verify some of their claims, their work has historical significance.<sup>96</sup>

Smith, working with Gerald Fowke, published “Cairns of British Columbia and Washington” in 1901. This short article described the excavation of a number of burial cairns in coastal areas. They remarked that most of the cairns were well built, contained

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<sup>94</sup> Brian Thom, "The Marpole- Late Transition Stage in the Gulf of Georgia Region," in The Midden 30 (2): 4.

<sup>95</sup> Without modern techniques such as DNA testing and radiocarbon dating, it is difficult to ascertain the exact composition of a grave. A number of the burials discussed in this work contained bone fragments from individuals other than the "main occupant" of the grave. This was only identified through testing.

<sup>96</sup> Jonathan Meuli, Shadowhouse (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2001), 202. Art historian Jonathan Meuli reiterates the idea that the Jesup expedition “created”

the remains of only one person, and were always situated near shell-heaps. In contrast, they stated that pit burials, also found near shell heaps, usually contained the remains of many humans.<sup>97</sup> From these statements it is difficult to decipher if the midden burials were separate or if Smith and Fowke considered the midden, itself, to represent a single entity. They also stated that few grave goods were found in the cairns.<sup>98</sup> Despite the inability to date the materials that they found, Smith and Fowke remarked on the changes that they saw. They concluded that: “data tends to show that at one time the cairns were the burial places of the makers of the shell heaps nearby, but on other occasions and in the same region people who used the shell heaps did not bury in cairns.” They also mention that the great deal of effort needed and care evident in the construction of cairns which contrasted with the “rituals” that they saw practiced by the Coast Salish of their time. While the lack of grave goods must have been a disappointment, the fact that Smith and Fowke wrote the paper at all suggests that they saw these burial mounds and cairns as significant. Considering that their “mandate” as part of the Jesup Expedition was to stress the connection of Native Americans with the oriental cultures of antiquity, Smith and Fowke’s examination of these burial monuments was designed, possibly, to place their findings in the discussion of other American mound builders such as those in the Southeastern United States and Central America.

Although much of his work was published in the thirties, Charles Hill-Tout was working at the same time that the Jesup Expedition was collecting specimens. His paper

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the image of Northwest Coast arts and cultures through their selection of items to represent these societies in museums and studies.

<sup>97</sup> Harlan Smith and Gerald Fowke, Cairns of British Columbia and Washington (New York: Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol II, Part II, 1901), 55-59.

<sup>98</sup> Smith and Fowke, Cairns of British Columbia and Washington, 56.

for the "Museum and Art Notes" discussed the mounds of the Marpole culture. Many of his findings were similar to those of Smith and Fowke. He concluded that mounds were for the interment of an individual and that they yielded few grave goods.<sup>99</sup> Unlike his colleagues, Hill-Tout noted that this absence was "remarkable in the face of the fact that in all disposals of the dead among modern indians.... stone, bone and other objects were commonly buried ...with the corpse."<sup>100</sup> He remarked also on the changes that he saw in the construction of the mounds and stated that some "were undoubtedly formed when a mode of burial prevailed very different from that practiced by the natives of this region...it is well known that established customs rarely change radically among primitive people."<sup>101</sup>

Hill-Tout described four of types of mounds. The most simple was a shallow pit covered with soil which was then covered with sand and clay. A more complex type of mound featured the placement of stones over the corpse. These stones were then covered with soil and clay. He noted that this type of mound often had a layer of charcoal between the layer of stones and that of the soil and clay and speculated that these were the remains of some sort of ritual fire.<sup>102</sup> The third type of mound had a deep layer of sand over the internal layer of stones. Hill-Tout stated the sand "played an important role in the disposal of the dead,"<sup>103</sup> and in some cases was brought in from a distance. He remarked that it "...must have been brought from elsewhere, no sand of this kind being found in the

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<sup>99</sup> Charles Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," in Museum and Art Notes 4 (December 1930): 120

<sup>100</sup> Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," 120. "indians" is not capitalized in the original.

<sup>101</sup> Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," 121.

<sup>102</sup> Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," 124.

neighbourhood... the mound builders were not sparing of its use.”<sup>104</sup> Although he did not mention the dimensions of this type of mound, he remarked that one of these mounds provided over thirty sacksful of sand and still held a “considerable quantity.”<sup>105</sup> The most complex mounds were delineated by squares of boulders which surrounded a central burial pit. Hill-Tout believed that the corners of these mounds corresponded to the cardinal points of the compass. Like the other mounds, these contained evidence of ritual burnings. As well, this type of mound seemed to yield a greater number of grave goods than the less complex ones.<sup>106</sup> Since Hill-Tout was unable to date the materials that he found, he did not speculate on the meaning of the different types of construction. He did not suggest that these types represented either the evolution of building techniques over time or simply the greater amount of effort that would accompany the burial of a prestigious or powerful person. However he did remark that these practices were so different from those of the Salish that he encountered that he felt the mounds had been constructed by a “race different from the present Indians.”<sup>107</sup> What is significant is that he did note the presence of charcoal and evidence of ritual burnings which corroborates the idea that the current practice of burning provisions for the dead has been an important practice for generations. It is important to note that even at this “early date” of archaeological exploration the evidence of the longevity of these mortuary practices was evident, although it did not appear to be a topic of discussion. Rather, it seems that since these early writers were trying to prove that these structures were built by a

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<sup>103</sup> Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," 122.

<sup>104</sup> Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," 124.

<sup>105</sup> Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," 125.

<sup>106</sup> Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," 126.

<sup>107</sup> Hill-Tout, "Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia," 126.

civilization more “advanced” than the one they had personally encountered, and any evidence of cultural continuity was irrelevant.

One aspect that was briefly mentioned in both of these papers was the association of burial mounds and cairns with the remains of long dead cedar trees. The authors of both of these papers commented on the cedar’s longevity and used this quality to place the date of the construction of the burial structures in the distant past.<sup>108</sup> Hill-Tout wondered if the tree in conjunction with the sand had in some way shielded the human remains from the elements. He also remarked on the beauty and regenerative properties of the cedar. It is interesting that none of the authors suggested that these trees could have been deliberately planted within the mounds for both the physical protection of the burial and as a symbol or metaphor of the afterlife. As well as providing many of the necessities of life for the coastal peoples, the ability of the cedar to seemingly re-sprout from “dead” remains could have expressed the idea of an afterlife and the connection between the dead and the living. Further, if these trees were used in early burial practices, it is possible that the tree burials of the contact period were a “metaphorical reflection” of these earlier practices.

This short summary of some of the important archaeological studies indicates that there were changes in the mortuary ritual of the Coast Salish in the “prehistoric” era and also that many of the rituals which are still central to Coast Salish people have their roots in this “ancient past.” The evidence demonstrates that specific practices, such as wrapping the body, burnings and the feeding of the dead, have been important for millennia. Unfortunately, it is impossible to ascertain how much of the significance of

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<sup>108</sup> Hill-Tout, “Prehistoric Burial Mounds of British Columbia,” 122.

these ancient rituals parallels that of the modern ones. The archaeological data also indicates many village sites gradually became cemeteries, or “cities of the dead.” While environment and social factors were most probably the cause of the shift in usage, it would be fascinating to ascertain how these sites were described in the Coast Salish oral histories of the time.

Although there will always be gaps in our knowledge of the distant past, an examination of "myth" will offer some explanations for a few of these lacunae in the archaeological evidence. At least two oral histories of the Coast Salish suggest that knowledge of ancient mortuary rituals has not been “lost.” The evidence suggests that information on many topics has been passed on through the generations by storytellers. As mentioned, the Sto:lo divide their oral histories into *sxwoxwiyam* and *sqwelqwel*. *Sxwoxwiyam* are stories which take place in the distant past when the world was different than it is today. Often these are stories of *Xals*, the transformer, who “came through the world, transforming monsters and other myth-age beings into rocks and animals, and setting things in order for the people of the present age.”<sup>109</sup> *Sqwelqwel* are stories which occurred more recently and usually involve “real” people. Both of the stories that will be discussed exhibit elements of each type of tale.<sup>110</sup>

According to their oral traditions, the Sto:lo people have inhabited the eastern portion of the lower Mainland “since time immemorial.” As discussed, archaeological studies have verified that this area has been occupied for at least 9000 years. While it would be illogical to assume that any culture would have remained static for such a long time, an important factor to consider is that the climate in the Pacific Northwest was

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<sup>109</sup> Suttles, "The Central Coast Salish," 466.

radically different 9000 years ago. The opportunities open to the “Proto-Salish” were quite different from those offered to their descendants. At that time, the area was much drier and hotter than it is now. As late as 7000 years ago, an area of “oak-savanna” extended from the Willamette Valley to southern British Columbia. The forests that did exist in the southern area of British Columbia were mostly composed of Douglas fir and red alder. It was not until 5000 - 3000 years ago that the forests, with cedar as a dominant species, became established.<sup>110</sup> Further, the sea level, as we would recognize it in coastal British Columbia, stabilized approximately 5000 years ago.<sup>111</sup> The radical fluctuations in sea level affected the behaviour of sea mammals and species of fish such as salmon and eulachon which were important food sources for the coastal peoples. With these environmental factors “in flux” it is reasonable to assume that the cultures of these peoples would also be adapting to the evolving habitat. Further, these type of changes would have dictated that the cultures that existed in the past would have necessarily been very different from modern cultures which are based on the primary resources of cedar and salmon. This climatic and hydrographic evidence does not contradict the oral histories of the Sto:lo, but rather confirms their separation of oral histories into *sxwoxwiyam* and *sqwelqwel*. Many of the stories which concern *Xals*, the Transformer, show that the Salish were able to create metaphors to explain the complex geological changes which they clearly understood.<sup>112</sup>

Quite a number of the Coast Salish narratives are concerned with the transformation that occurs at death. In her collection Folk Tales of the Coast Salish

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<sup>110</sup> This suggests Keith Carlson’s statement that the difference between types is artificial.

<sup>111</sup> Ames & Maschner, The Peoples of the Northwest Coast, 52.

<sup>112</sup> Ames & Maschner, The Peoples of the Northwest Coast, 51.

Adamson recounts four Upper Chehalis narratives that describe Blue Jay's travels to the land of the dead.<sup>114</sup> In all of these stories, Blue Jay desires to visit a female relative, either his sister or his daughter who is married to a dead man. He travels to the river which separates the Land of the Dead from that of the living and shouts until he is tired and finally yawns. His yawn is heard as a shout by those in the Land of the Dead who send a canoe to transport Blue Jay to the other side of the river. At once his role of the buffoon becomes obvious. He is unable to see the reality of the “life” that surrounds him. For example, he almost upsets the canoe that ferries him across the river since he perceives it as an old vessel with many holes. He does not realize that the heaps of bones he sees are dead people and attempts to throw them out of houses and canoes. Food appears to him as rubbish and he tries to dispose of it. The inhabitants of the Land of the Dead soon tire of Blue Jay's misguided actions and send him home admonishing him never to return. In most of these stories, Blue Jay is unable to follow the instructions given by his relative and is burned to death on the return journey. Once dead, Blue Jay returns, crosses the river in what he perceives to be a fine canoe and is immediately able to see and understand “life” in the Land of the Dead.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Carlson, You Are Asked to Witness, 190-2.

<sup>114</sup> Thelma, Adamson, Folk Tales of the Coast Salish (New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1934), 21-9.

<sup>115</sup> Verne Ray, Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America. (Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, 1939), 113-31. Ray gives a detailed description of the “Blue Jay Complex” of the Interior Salish. His report from these Salishan cousins confirms the role of Blue Jay as a buffoon, and also establishes his role in the limnal world between the living and the dead. Blue Jay, one of the spirit guardians of the Flathead, often “talks in reverse.” If he says he is rich, he actually means that he is poor. He is comical in his seeming inability to comprehend the proper course of action in a given situation. These qualities lend a note of humour and irony to the story as Blue Jay is comparable to the person who maintains that he is always lying. Since the living do not travel to the Land of the Dead, it is impossible to know if Blue Jay was getting things

These short and deceptively “simple” stories impart significant information on the perception of death. The details suggest that the dead inhabit a place that is similar to that of the living yet is also a place of inversion.<sup>116</sup> The Land of the Dead is “seen” as a village across a river where a person is recognized not by a shout but by a yawn. The dead are visible only when Blue Jay has his eyes closed. Both the yawning and the closed eyes suggest a liminal state such as dreaming or a trance which is usually accomplished by an experienced shaman. In this land the people dance on their heads. While alive Blue Jay finds this most curious, yet once dead, he finds it enjoyable. The “timeless quality” of this place is suggested as the inhabitants dance, fish, gather berries and whale all in the same season.<sup>117</sup> These stories also seem to take place in an as yet untransformed world. In many of these narratives, Blue Jay is responsible for transporting the gift of berries from the Land of the Dead to the world of the living. This implies that before his journey, berries were not available to the people. While this gift may seem rather insignificant to modern readers, it was a major food source and would have had a symbolic meaning to the original audience.<sup>118</sup> Also, the stories explain that before Blue Jays’s journey, it was possible for the living to travel to the Land of the Dead. Blue Jay’s inappropriate behaviour and inability to comprehend the habits of the dead caused the closure. It is the

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backwards or giving an accurate description in any tale that concerns him. Further, a person with a Blue Jay spirit has powers to cure illness only at specific times during the performance of the Blue Jay Dance. This “limitation” also seems to be an example of humour and irony as those who “possess” a Blue Jay spirit must be able to perform specific tasks at the proper time, unlike their spiritual guide.

<sup>116</sup> Adamson, *Folk Tales of the Coast Salish*, 28. One of the most interesting inversions in these stories is the description of an orphan as one “whose parents had not died.”

<sup>117</sup> In Coast Salish culture these activities take place at distinct times as part of the “seasonal round.”

<sup>118</sup> It is also interesting to note that fire was used to encourage the growth of berry bushes.

dead who seal themselves away from the nuisances of the living, rather than a fear of the dead by the living which defines the border between these two worlds.

This story illustrates numerous aspects that have been raised by the archaeological studies discussed earlier. For example, although Cybulski states that at the time of contact nothing of midden burial was remembered, it seems that this practice was remembered in these Blue Jay stories. In all of the stories the food and goods of the dead appear to Blue Jay as “trash.” When the dead catch fish, Blue Jay sees only bones. When a whale is found, Blue Jay perceives it as a tree. Blue Jay observes that his brother in law’s canoe is full of holes. These images suggest the Land of the Dead is actually a midden. Further, the dead “live” in an area that is accessible to the living yet is situated a short journey away. While this can be seen as a literary device emphasizing the transitory nature of life, this situation mirrors the archaeological finding, as mentioned in the Arcas report, which states the dead were not placed in the active middens close to the villages, but rather were buried in a more remote area. Too often Western thought equates a midden with a garbage heap. While this is literally true, the western idea of “garbage,” as unusable refuse, is not the perception that the Coast Salish seemed to have. Rather, their idea is more akin to the concept of recycling. Midden burials, then, could be seen as a sort of spiritual recycling in which the decaying material feeds future generations.

The idea of burials as a recycling of resources is addressed in other stories as well. “Qais,”<sup>119</sup> a story of the Squamish people recorded by Hill-Tout, discusses the importance of returning specific resources to the environment. In this story the Qais brothers have reached the village of the salmon people and have been invited by the

chief, Kos, to spend some time there. Naturally the host provides a good meal for the guests:

When the fish were ready, Kos invited his guests to partake of them, begging them at the same time to set the bones carefully aside and not lose or destroy any... After they had finished their meal... the people came and carefully gathered the salmon bones together... and took them down and threw them into the sea; whereupon the bones were immediately transformed back into the four young people again.... On the second day [one of the guests] stealthily hid and kept back some of the head bones of the salmon he was eating. After the meal was over the bones were gathered up as before and cast into the water, but when the four young people came out of the water this time it was observed that one of the youths was covering his face with his hands. This youth... told Kos that all the bones had not been thrown into the water, and that in consequence he was lacking the bones of his cheek and his nose.<sup>120</sup>

This story illustrates the importance of returning the remains for the replenishment of the resource. The salmon bones are used immediately in this "re-creation" which suggests that placing the dead in an active midden would rob the decaying foodstuffs of aspects of their essence which were necessary for the preservation of the resource. If, however, the dead were buried in middens that had already served their "ecological purpose," the dead would still find themselves in a relative land of plenty and the prosperity of future generations would not be affected.

Another archaeological aspect that is raised by this tale is that of death by burning. In all of the stories Blue Jay is burned to death on his return home. Version One in the Adamson collection reports that those who die by fire go to "The Second Death, another part of the village. Those who go there can never return to life."<sup>121</sup> While, as far as the stories are concerned, it is literally true that he burns to death, this could also refer

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<sup>119</sup> This version of a Transformer story records the journey of four brothers, all named Qais. There are many other versions of this story recorded in Hill-Tout's works.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Hill-Tout, The Salish People, Volume 2, 60-1.

<sup>121</sup> Adamson, Folk Tales of the Coast Salish, 24

to the type of burials at the Gabriola Rockshelters discussed by Curtin. Burning of a substance, then, divides spiritual essence from the physical and is portrayed in these stories as irrevocable and as a culturally significant action.

There are also a number of other issues suggested in the Blue Jay tales. In all of the versions, the living neither fear nor loath the dead. For example, in most versions, Bluejay's sister either agrees or desires to marry a dead man. It is not the "fear of the dead," which is often ascribed to the living, that eventually divides these worlds. Rather, the dead, who feel that the living with their mundane concerns and chaotic desires are a nuisance, who instigate the division between the living and the dead. Stories such as these suggest that, upon death, one's outlook is expanded beyond that held during life.

While seemingly simple, these oral histories are deceptively complex and provide evidence that the knowledge of earlier burial customs was not "lost" to the memory of the Coast Salish. Early ethnographers and historians, such as salvage ethnographers who were tasked to collect as many exotic items as possible, did not examine these oral narratives closely enough to discern the nuances of meaning that they contained.<sup>122</sup> The details do not simply create "a good story," rather they present information that is relevant to the integrity of the narrative as an oral history. These stories when read in conjunction with the archaeological evidence, illustrate that the Coast Salish were not a static culture as the early writers considered. Their burial practices varied over time and location as would be expected of a sophisticated culture. As well, both of these types of evidence also demonstrate that certain practices, such as wrapping and feeding the dead,

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<sup>122</sup> Meuli, Shadowhouse, 203. Franz Boas, the "director" of the Jesup expedition, considered stories to be "collectable artifacts." Stories were particularly useful when they provided context for physical artifacts.

both of which stress the idea of community, began in the distant past and continued despite variations in other components of the mortuary ritual.

## Chapter 2 - Amazing Grace ?

In contrast to the first chapter which examines rather “mute” physical artifacts, this chapter analyzes excerpts from the diaries and works of missionaries and compares them with Coast Salish narratives to determine how significantly the encroachment of Western ideas affected native ideas about death and interment. Although changes in burial traditions occurred in the past, the period of European contact is usually considered to be the time in which the native cultures underwent the most radical changes. While it would be foolish to argue that “contact” did not have a profound effect on the First Nations peoples, the attitude that gives this era such centrality in First Nations history seems to be in part attributable to the west’s almost narcissistic desire to place itself at the centre of the gaze of any history. The evidence suggests that the Coast Salish, like most First Nations peoples, did not abandon their “primitive” or “heathen” ways and wholeheartedly embrace Christian mores until forced to change by the powers of colonialism. Even then, many of the changes seem more superficial than integral.

Although this time period is relatively long, beginning with “contact” in the late eighteenth century and extending through the mid twentieth century, it can be studied as a philosophical whole as an era dominated by the seemingly oxymoronic pursuit of both tradition and progress. Missionaries often represented the vanguard of western society. Many, such as Myron Eells, Thomas Crosby and Adrien-Gabriel Morice, sought to fill the role of salvage ethnographer<sup>123</sup> while at the same time bringing the “light of civilization to the heathen.” Despite some sympathy for their “subjects,” many early

writers often saw themselves as both “judge and executioner” of cultures that were deemed too primitive to survive the onslaught of western ideals. The “progress” from heathen to model citizen, which was expected by the salvage ethnographers, was to be accomplished through the social and religious conversion of these “primitive.” Once civilized, these “colonized Indians” could be easily assimilated into Western culture. With this goal in mind, the writers who are quoted in this chapter often depicted changes in burial custom as a “progression” from a primitive tradition to a modern practice. Despite the appearance of change, many traditional aspects, central to burial customs, remained and were often included by the Coast Salish in a Christian type burial. Further, some of the changes in burial customs that will be examined in this chapter were probably due more to the effects of less desirable aspects of Western culture, such as greed and intolerance, than to any “superiority” of Western ideals.

As mentioned, many of the works examined in this chapter reveal more about those who “studied” the Salish people than they do about the Salish themselves. Those who carried out “salvage ethnography” perceived a strict dichotomy between a culture characterized by “pure tradition” and one which seemed to accept a semblance of modernity. Many missionaries, as evidenced by the frenzy to baptize, considered that the slightest acceptance of Christian doctrine signified a successful conversion. Both views ignored the ability of the native cultures to innovate and to keep many aspects of their culture intact while weaving Western ideas into their social foundation. Despite or because of the limitations caused by the cultural biases of many of the authors, this period is an important one for study. First, historians may analyze the diaries and

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<sup>123</sup> Salvage ethnography” sought to record information concerning “pure” native cultures before these cultures became “extinct” or were corrupted by the influence of the

documents kept during this time as primary artifacts. The ethnographic observations of the writers constitute, in many cases, “secondary information.” The most important aspect is to ascertain how interactions between the writers, the missionaries and ethnographers, and the Salish contributed to the formation of the perceptions of the “observers” about “the observed.” These writings also illustrate what the First Nations peoples were “up against.” It is not difficult to realize that many of the “informants” would have been reluctant to reveal sacred knowledge to scrutiny, and possible ridicule. Lacunae in the record have led to the opinion that many sacred practices were forgotten.<sup>124</sup> Although some sacred information was possibly lost as disease caused the deaths of many of the religious practitioners, it is probable that a great deal was never imparted to "the collectors."

Unlike the nineteenth century archaeologists and ethnographers, such as Hill-Tout, who “merely” studied Native Americans, the missionary-ethnographers faced the awkward task of both promoting the "convertibility" of their "charges" in letters and articles written for mission societies and at other times stressing the "savage" ways of these same peoples. Many of their works are part religious tract and “adventure story.”

The earliest European explorers to the Northwest Coast observed, at the time of contact, that the Coast Salish put the dead in a canoe or on a platform which was then placed in a tree. Once the body had decomposed, the bones were often wrapped in blankets and buried in the ground. One of the earliest records of this type of inhumation comes from the journal of Manuel Quimper, who explored the coast for Spain in 1790.

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“superior” Western culture.

<sup>124</sup> The idea that many “traditions” had to be “reinvented” will be addressed in the final chapter.

While anchored off what is now Sooke harbour on Southern Vancouver Island, Quimper's pilot went ashore to explore. Quimper reported that: "At the mouth of the river he saw three canoes with a dead Indian in each one. This is the mode of burial these natives practice."<sup>125</sup> By 1899 the practice had changed very little. A Kwantlen woman interviewed in 1899 reported a similar type of ritual:

It was the custom of our villagers to bury their dead within an hour of death. They were in most cases placed in a tiny house raised on posts; but, if there was no house ready, or if they were a distance from the "dead houses" they were wrapped in skins and blankets and placed in pole platforms high above the reach of animals, or in trees. With the dead were placed pipes, bowls, hammers or such things as he made or might require to start life in the next world. Before the burial-house was placed a stone or wooden figure to guard the dead from evil spirits.<sup>126</sup>

Many missionaries arrived in the Pacific Northwest after this area was "opened" by the overland explorations of Simon Fraser in what is now Canada and by Lewis and Clark in the territories of the United States.<sup>127</sup> The earliest missionaries to successfully establish themselves in this territory were Roman Catholic Oblates from Quebec who arrived in the Oregon territory in 1838 and moved into British Columbia in the 1840's.<sup>128</sup> The Oblates established St. Mary's Mission in Sto:lo territory on the Fraser River near New Westminster in 1861.

Some of the success attained by these Catholics has been attributed to a teaching aid, called the "Catholic Ladder," which was devised by missionary Fr. Blanchet in

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<sup>125</sup> Henry R. Wagner, Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca (New York: AMS Press, 1971), 101

<sup>126</sup> Ellen Webber, "An Old Kwantum Village - Its People and Its Fall," in American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal, 21 (1899):313.

<sup>127</sup> The international border was established in 1846 by the Treaty of Washington. Wayne Suttles "History of Research: Early Sources," in Handbook of North American Indians, ed. William Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1990), 71.

<sup>128</sup> Duff, The Indian History of British Columbia, 89.

1839. This ladder illustrated the progression of Christianity from the Garden of Eden through to the present day. Important episodes from the Old Testament, such as the Flood, the creation of the Tower of Babel and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah were depicted and shown as were the more glorious incidents of the New Testament and important events in the life of the Church. These included the birth of Jesus, the growth of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, the establishment of the Papacy and the founding of missions in the “New World.”<sup>129</sup> Since “the ladder” was pictorial, and did not rely entirely on the use or understanding of a specific language, and was easily portable, this innovation was credited with helping to spread the Roman Catholic doctrines to a larger audience than was possible at the missions and schools. The missionaries recognized the advantage the ladders gave. The author of “Notice No. 5” of the Quebec Mission stated in January 1843;

The Yougltas chief... will become, I hope, a means of salvation for his nation. After having followed with a good deal of attention at Fort Langley, all the exercises of the mission,... he returned to the fort to ask for more historic ladders. After that deed, I would go without any fear to hunt up the poor people in his home to evangelize them.<sup>130</sup>

Burial customs, and their relation to “converts” were described by the author of Notice No 3, written in 1841;

Their way of burying their dead is somewhat revolting. If... the patient were to die, he has no sooner closed his eyes before they bandage them for him with chains of glass beads or other material. ...they dress him in his best clothes to which they add an additional covering.... The body is laid face down, the head following the course of the river, in a canoe placed on cross pieces... The canoe is covered with mats and the sepulchre is complete. After these ceremonies come the offerings to the defunct... If the canoe decays and falls to the ground, they collect the

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<sup>129</sup> Notices and Voyages of the Famed Quebec Mission to the Pacific Northwest ed. Carl Landerholm (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1956) 44.

<sup>130</sup> Famed Quebec Mission, 111.

remains of the cadaver, wrap them in new coverings and deposit them in another canoe. The missionaries experienced much difficulty in putting an end to these customs; and often were not able to give Christian burial to children they had baptised.<sup>131</sup>

The author's particular concern for the Christian burial of the baptized reflects his inability to envision any combination of the Native and Christian belief systems.

Anglicans, mostly from Britain, arrived on the Pacific North West Coast in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>132</sup> William Duncan, who worked with the Tsimshian, established his "model Christian village" at Metlakatla in 1862.<sup>133</sup> George Hills, the first Anglican Bishop of British Columbia, arrived in 1860. His duties as Bishop, an office he held for over thirty years, required him to travel extensively as his diocese stretched from the Pacific Coast to the Rocky Mountains.<sup>134</sup> Many other Protestant denominations, most notably the Methodists, arrived and established missions and schools during this early period of colonization on the northwest coast. Thomas Crosby, a Methodist, arrived from Ontario in 1862. In 1863 he was sent to Nanaimo to learn the language of the Coast Salish. Crosby worked among the Coast Salish from Vancouver Island to the Chilliwack valley and is credited with the establishment of the school at Coqualeetza in the centre of Sto:lo Territory.<sup>135</sup>

It was common for missionaries of this period to write accounts of their experiences or keep diaries. Hills' diary for 1860, his year of arrival, and Crosby's have been published. Both men focused on the problems encountered in missionary work,

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<sup>131</sup> Famed Quebec Mission, 52.

<sup>132</sup> Duff, The Indian History of British Columbia, 87.

<sup>133</sup> Duff, The Indian History of British Columbia, 93.

<sup>134</sup> George Hills. No Better Land ed. Roberta L Bagshaw (Victoria: SonoNis Press, 1996)11.

thus, they usually presented native beliefs and customs as hindrances to their work rather than as customs to be understood. George Hills dedicated more to the problems that the “Romish” church had caused by, what he considered, the hasty baptism of converts, than with the religious beliefs of the natives themselves.<sup>136</sup> For the most part, he portrayed the natives as willing to hear and accept the words of Jesus Christ and placed little importance on native customs.<sup>137</sup> He compared the Christian attitude towards burial to the native one:

I have passed many Indian burial places. These consist of upright poles, with cross bars upon which are suspended the favourite blankets... of the deceased. Beneath are wooden square box like tombs... nowhere have I seen the slightest trace of religious feeling, or idea of a future state excepting alone this supply to the deceased of something he was fond of, a canoe for instance.<sup>138</sup>

Crosby, who recorded his experiences with the Coast Salish in Among the An-ko-me-nums,<sup>139</sup> devoted only one chapter to a discussion of “Native Worship and Superstitions.”<sup>140</sup> In the space of thirteen pages he dismissed Salish cosmology and decried the influence of the shaman. He used the bulk of the chapter to describe his personal battle with a shaman over the treatment of a sick man. Crosby concluded that

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<sup>135</sup> Duff, The Indian History of British Columbia, 97.

<sup>136</sup> Hills, No Better Land, 170.

<sup>137</sup> Hills, No Better Land, 33. Despite his desire to convert the “Indians,” Hills recognized the dark side of colonization. He stated; “The Indian loved his home ten times stronger than we did.. .but the white man came and took possession of the land... He warned the Indians to keep off... And thus a barbed arrow was driven into their breast, and not removed while the white man was there.”

<sup>138</sup> Hills, No Better Land, 173-4.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Crosby, Among the An-ko-me-nums (Toronto: W Briggs, 1901), 9. Crosby described the group: “The An-ko-me-nums, as they call themselves, are a branch of the great Salish or Flathead family of Indians, whose territory is part of the Pacific Coast now known as Northern Oregon, Washington and Southern British Columbia.

<sup>140</sup> Crosby, Among the An-ko-me-nums, 112-125.

many native deaths were the result of “misplaced” faith. He stated; “the poor fellow died, the victim of his own superstitious fears, upon which the conjurers had worked all too successfully.”<sup>141</sup>

One of the most extensive observations of the Salish beliefs at this time was that written by Myron Eells a Congregational missionary and “salvage ethnographer” who worked among at the Skokomish reservation in the southern Puget Sound area. Unlike other missionaries who came to the Pacific Northwest from eastern North America, Britain and France, Eells was born near Spokane in eastern Washington while his father served as a missionary with Marcus Whitman. Although the Eells family left eastern Washington after the “Whitman massacre” in 1847, they remained in the northwest.<sup>142</sup> Myron’s elder brother Edwin was appointed the Indian Agent for the Skokomish in 1871 and both Myron and his father, Cushing Eells, worked at the reservation mission run by the American Missionary Association. Cushing was placed at Skokomish in 1872 and Myron followed in 1874.<sup>143</sup> Myron Eells worked at the Skokomish mission until his death in 1907.<sup>144</sup> During this period he wrote numerous essays, letters, two books and worked for both Franz Boas and the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>145</sup> Despite the original plans that the Skokomish reservation could accommodate all of the “Indians” who lived

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<sup>141</sup> Crosby, Among the An-ko-me-nums, 125.

<sup>142</sup> It is interesting that this massacre is linked to the spread of disease. It is thought that the Cayuse people believed that Whitman was directly responsible for the spread of disease through the community.

<sup>143</sup> Myron Eells. Ten Years of Missionary Work among the Indians (Boston: Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society, 1886), 23-25.

<sup>144</sup> Myron Eells. The Indians of Puget Sound, the Notebooks of Myron Eells ed. George Castille (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1985), vi.

<sup>145</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, xv.

in the southern area of Puget Sound, it was populated in the most part by the Twana during the tenure of Myron Eells.<sup>146</sup>

Eells' work contrasts with that of most of the other missionaries as it offers a comprehensive and interlocking explanation of the Coast Salish religion. Unlike missionaries such as Crosby who gave little space to a discussion of the intricacies of native religion, Eells offered detailed descriptions of rituals, objects and the social and religious interaction of the Twana. He focussed attention on the treatment of the dead and what death meant to the living. From the tone of his writings, it was obvious that he felt some grudging respect for the Twana despite his mandate to convert them. This dichotomy was evident in the two published books of Myron Eells. His Ten Years Of Missionary Work At Skokomish, published in 1886, considered the Salish language, religion and habits, such as gambling and potlatching, to be "difficulties in the way" of conversion. In contrast, his extensive notebook, The Indians of Puget Sound, written between 1875-1906, published in 1985 as the The Notebooks of Myron Eells, detailed many aspects of the culture of the Twana and Klallam peoples and presented these aspects in, if not a positive light, at least, at times, a neutral one.<sup>147</sup> As a missionary he was expressly interested in their religion and claimed to have witnessed numerous rituals and ceremonies. According to his notebooks he both attended and officiated at funerals and burial services. Despite his Christian emphasis, Eells did offer a number of interesting observations that can be reinterpreted in a less prejudiced manner.

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<sup>146</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, xii.

<sup>147</sup> On pages 37-9 of his Ten Years of Missionary Work, Eells decried the "Indian" propensity to gamble. In contrast, on pages 205-10 in his Indians of Puget Sound, Eells described various games, outlining the rules and providing intricate descriptions of the pieces used in the game.

Eells reported that he had seen five different types of interred remains. He considered the oldest to be a form of in-ground burial. He contended that due to the irregular placing of these burials, large numbers of them were often unintentionally plowed up. Eells expressed a number of opinions that were similar to those of Hill-Tout. First, he believed that these graves were so old that the “Indians of the present day profess to have no knowledge of the occupants, but believe them to have been their ancestors.”<sup>148</sup> Also, Eells felt that the people did not give much concern to the care of these graves. Eells continued "thirty five years ago the land containing bones ...was taken by a white man, and they were told to remove the dead before all traces of the graves were obliterated, but no one went there to do so, nor were they angry when... the ground [was] plowed and leveled."<sup>149</sup> He concluded that since these graves were not deep it was possible that they were actually bodies that had been placed in a canoe "and fell to the ground; and that in the course of a long, long time earth and leaves made soil over them."<sup>150</sup> In contrast to Eells' opinion that the natives were not concerned that the burials were to be disturbed and did nothing to save them, it is possible that the lack of action was not caused by indifference, but rather was due to the circumstance that there was no one, such as a shaman, who could safely perform the rites necessary to move these graves.

The second type of inhumation Eells described was the canoe burial. He claimed that this was the most common sort of burial in the early nineteenth century. In this type of burial the body was wrapped in cloth and laid in a large canoe that was placed either in

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<sup>148</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 331.

<sup>149</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 331.

<sup>150</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 331.

the fork of a tree or on a special burial platform. Eells reported that in many instances the bodies were either covered by a smaller canoe or placed in a box which was then put in the canoe. If the body was placed in a box, it was often positioned with the chin touching the knees.<sup>151</sup> While Eells maintained that this was due to the size of box used, it was more probably due to some significance given to this position that Eells either did not understand or was not informed of. It is possible that this practice was a form of wrapping. In some cases the remains were retrieved after a year or two and were then ceremoniously placed in the ground.<sup>152</sup> Although this style was being replaced by the scaffold burial by mid-century, Eells stated that he had been present and had played a role at a canoe burial in 1877. This burial combined what Eells thought was an amount of “old Indian style” with the Christian service that he provided.<sup>153</sup> The deceased, a widow, was first placed in a small Hudson’s Bay box and then in a large and valuable canoe which had been “provided” by the medicine man who was believed to have caused the woman’s death. Most of her possessions were burned before Eells “gave a benediction.” He also reported that a potlatch was given approximately thirteen months after the death but that the body was not taken down for a number of years.<sup>154</sup> While Eells considered this type of funeral represented “progress,” the combination of traditional and Christian beliefs and rituals was also an innovation produced by the Salish community.

The third type of burial Eells described was the scaffold burial. He considered that this was a variation of the canoe burial which as a response to the actions of "unprincipled" white gold seekers who stole both canoes and grave goods from burials

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<sup>151</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 332.

<sup>152</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 331.

<sup>153</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 333.

along the Fraser River. According to Eells these thefts “incensed the Indians and caused a change in their mode of burial. They collected their dead in cemeteries and because enough trees could not be obtained... they built scaffolds... instead of using canoes, they made boxes and elevated them on a frame.”<sup>155</sup> He reports that when canoes were used they were rendered useless by punching many holes in them.<sup>156</sup> These “boxes” that Eells described often took the form of western style houses which could accommodate a number of coffins. He described a “set of Twana coffins which were enclosed in a small house and entirely covered with red and white cloth. There was a window in the house through which could be seen the coffins... Six coffins were placed in this house... it having been a kind of family vault.”<sup>157</sup> He mentioned that the remains were placed in the ground in 1878.<sup>158</sup> Unfortunately Eells did not mention if native spiritual ideas concerning death and burial were changing. His evidence suggests only that the Salish were forced to change their practices and establish formal, western style cemeteries as a means to protect the remains of their loved ones from the encroachment of western culture by adopting a western form that would be respected by Westerners.

Eells described the fourth type of burial as "in ground with Indian accessories." He maintained that as the “Indians” had more contact with white culture, they “learned

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<sup>154</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 333.

<sup>155</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 334.

<sup>156</sup> Charlotte Frisbie, "Burial as a Disposition Mechanism for Navajo *Jish* or Medicine Bundles," in American Indian Quarterly IV (Autumn 1978): 350. The action of rendering the grave goods useless in the material world is not limited to the Coast Salish. Present-day Navajos, whose graves are often desecrated by grave robbers looking for jewelry and pottery, often break the pottery and jewelry in order to thwart the sale or use of these goods by grave robbers. This suggests that it is not the physical manifestation of the goods that will be useful in the spirit world, but the spiritual essence of the goods, which is not affected by physical destruction.

<sup>157</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 334.

to bury in the ground.”<sup>159</sup> This type was characterized by the use "of American style" coffin. The body was tied and wrapped in cloth before being placed in the coffin. Clothes and "keepsake articles" were then "jammed in until the coffin [was] full."<sup>160</sup> It was then buried in the ground. The grave could be marked by a burial enclosure, picket fence or by poles. The final type of burial Eells described was the "civilized burial." For him this was characterized by a lack of goods in the coffin or around the grave, gravestones or expensive monuments at each grave site, with a "good fence around the cemetery."<sup>161</sup> Eells' mention of the "good fence" suggests that he considered the proper delineation of the space between the sacred ground of the cemetery and the "profane" space outside the churchyard as a necessary component of a civilized society.

Eells also mentioned a number of aspects related to death and burial. He reported the Coast Salish considered it was "not good etiquette to pronounce the Indian name of the dead for a year or two, though they have no such feeling in regard to the English or "Boston" name."<sup>162</sup> Also he recounted evidence of burnings for the dead; "occasionally... at large gatherings afterward, as at potlatches, they burn valuable articles, as cloaks, in memory of the deceased."<sup>163</sup> Although Eells was present at a number of different types of ceremonies, his commentaries generally address actions rather than beliefs. Possibly he did not include a great deal of religious information as this would

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<sup>158</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 335.

<sup>159</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 337.

<sup>160</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 337.

<sup>161</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 339.

<sup>162</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 342.

<sup>163</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 343.

have the appearance of promoting the “heathen” beliefs, or because he was not privy to such information.

Not surprisingly, Eells considered the Salish religion to be simplistic and primitive, however, unlike those who dismissed the religion with little or no explanation, his works did describe a religion guided by shamanic principles. According to Eells, illness was often caused by a "wicked medicine man" who was able to send a "bad tamahnous into his enemy."<sup>164</sup> When ill, a person could be cured by a "good medicine man" who was able to counteract the “spell” if his tamahnous was strong enough. Eells described the ritual of curing; "the medicine man sings and places his hands on some part of the body and draws forth, or says he does, the evil spirit... he holds it between his hands, invisible, and blows it up or takes it to another man who throws a stone at it and kills it, or drowns it in a vessel nearby."<sup>165</sup> If the person is not cured, either the "wicked medicine man" was stronger than the good one or the spirit of the invalid had been taken away and was already in the "world of the departed spirits."<sup>166</sup> If this has occurred a longer ritual was necessary. Eells described the journey to retrieve the soul:

the spirit world is somewhere below, within the earth. When they are ready to descend, with much ceremony a little of the earth is broken, to open the way... for the descent. Having traveled some distance below, they come to a stream which must be crossed on a plank. Two planks are set up with one end on the ground and the other on a beam in the house about ten feet above the ground, in a slanting direction, one on one side of the beam and the other on the other side, so that they can go up on one side and down on the other. To do this is an outward form of crossing the spirit-

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<sup>164</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 411. Eells never offers a succinct description of “tamahnous” in this work. However, judging from the variety of usage, he usually uses this word to mean a prayer or a ritual action but the word can also be used to refer to a ritual object used in a ritual. The editor of the “notebook” explains that the word comes from Chinook Jargon. (xv)

<sup>165</sup> Eells, The Indians of Puget Sound, 413.

<sup>166</sup> Eells, Ten Years of Missionary Work among the Indians, 39.

river. If this is done successfully, all is well and they proceed on their journey. If, however, a person should actually fall from one of these planks, it is a sure sign that he will die in a year or so... Having come to the place of the departed spirits, they quietly hunt for the spirits of their living friends, and when they find what other spirits possess them, they begin battle and attempt to take them and are generally successful.... Having obtained that spirits which they wish, they wrap them up... and bring them back to the world and deliver them to their proper owners.<sup>167</sup>

It is noteworthy that a man of Eells' background was able to understand the importance of such an "alien" ritual. This spiritual action of mediation, transition and transformation was performed within the sacred space of the "smokehouse." The plank represented the "axis mundi mundi" which was the connection between the world of the living and the land of the dead. With shamans as the intercessors between the world of the living and that of the dead, the concept of death seemed to have been far more fluid to the Salish than it was in Christian thought.<sup>168</sup>

Just as Eells describes the physical manifestations of the change in the burial customs of the Coast Salish, some of the stories collected during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reflect this trend and suggest the incorporation of Western and Christian ideas into their belief system. A comparison of a number of versions of Hill-Tout's "Myth of the Man Who Gains Power to Restore the Dead to Life" illustrate these changes. Essentially, this tale tells the story of a man who is so affected by the death of his wife that he chooses to undertake a number of years of training in order to learn how to restore the dead to life. In the version attributed to the Chehalis people,<sup>169</sup> the man places his wife's body in a tree. "According to the custom he put her corpse away in a

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<sup>167</sup> Eells, Ten Years of Missionary Work among the Indians, 40 -3.

<sup>168</sup> Miller, Lutshootseed Culture and the Shamanic Odyssey: An Anchored Radiance. The discussion of soul loss and retrieval in the modern era is the central theme of this book.

tree and went off alone...” Once he was assured of his power he “climbed the tree and took the corpse down, untied the fastenings about it.”<sup>170</sup> In the version credited to the Lillooet, the woman is “wrapped in the best blanket and put away after the manner of his people.” Later in the story when the husband revives his wife he “arrives at night and opens the grave and levels the soil.”<sup>171</sup> Although neither version is dated in these volumes, the Chehalis version mentions the earlier practice of tree interment while the Lillooet version depicts the acceptance of the Western style burial.

The “original” version of the Chehalis story is included in an edition of Hill-Tout’s transcriptions, Linguistic Sections. This version contrasts in tone with the “polished” version published in The Salish People. While the “polished” version seems to question the ability of the man to restore life to the dead, the “original” conveys confidence in the capacity of a spiritually trained person to accomplish this task. In the polished version, once the man has sacrificed and prayed for four years, he is given the power to restore life. It states: “The man now set his face homeward. As he went he saw a bone in his path. ‘I will test my powers,’ said he, and therewith stepped over the bone four times. No sooner had he done so than a deer arose, and walked off alive in the woods. Then the man felt glad and rejoiced in his powers.”<sup>172</sup> The original version records: “Then he walks / he comes-home; / then saw-he-it / a bone, /then steps-he-over-it four times and straightway-it becomes alive,/ and-then it walked /the deer / he had-

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<sup>169</sup> The Chehalis are part of the Sto:lo Nation

<sup>170</sup> Hill-Tout, The Salish People, Vol 3, 120-1.

<sup>171</sup> Hill-Tout, The Salish People, Vol. 2, 146-7.

<sup>172</sup> Hill-Tout, The Salish People Vol. 3, 120.

restored-it-to-life,/ and-then glad heart-his.<sup>173</sup> (poetic divisions are mine but are suggested in the text) Although the “story” is essentially the same in this “rough” version, the tone and are implications are very different from those in the originally published version. In the “polished” version the man must “test my powers” suggesting both elements of magic and doubt. His elation at the successful “experiment” with the deer confirms this aspect of doubt. In the second version the man does not “test” his “power” but rather he uses the knowledge that he knows he possesses. His joy at the restoration of the deer’s life seems more the elation at the serendipitous use of his ability rather than a “test of power.” The more “polished” version suggests the idea of “mythic hero” while the other implies the power gained was a result of spiritual diligence.<sup>174</sup>

This story can be compared with the Blue Jay stories discussed in the previous chapter. In both versions of the story told by Hill-Tout the man who approaches spiritual training with respect acquires the ability to restore life. In the Blue Jay versions, the ability of the living to visit the Land of the Dead is blocked as a result of Blue Jay’s lack of respect for the dead and his inability to follow directions. However, as stated in the Blue Jay stories, the barrier between the worlds becomes impenetrable for all, not just for those without respect or ability. It is possible that this shift in attitude may reflect a change in the perception of death as a result of the huge numbers of deaths caused by epidemics, such as smallpox, and the effect of missionaries, who sought to undermine

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<sup>173</sup> Charles Hill-Tout, Linguistic Sections (Cultus Lake: Ralph Maud, 1983) Third page in section on "Stseelis and Skaulits" (this book does not have page numbers).

<sup>174</sup> Charles Hill-Tout, British North America (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1907), 214 -219. This story is included in this book as “ A Salish Orpheus.”.

indigenous religions. As death became less comprehensible, perhaps the perception of the connection between the living and the dead was lost.<sup>175</sup>

It is obvious that Western practices were imposed upon or influenced many of the outward aspects of Coast Salish burial traditions. In the early nineteenth century it seems that native practices were still followed, much to the disgust of the missionaries. However, as the influence of western society increased, modified western burials seemed to become “the norm.” The extent to which beliefs were effected is much less clear. The stories suggest that an amount of western ideas were being accepted by the Coast Salish. It is unclear if this acceptance signified a change of belief or was merely a form of “lip service” which the Coast Salish used to “camouflage” a continued belief in their “old ways.”

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<sup>175</sup> Madronna Holden, "Making all the Crooked Ways Straight: The Satirical Portrait of Whites in Coast Salish Folklore," in Journal of American Folklore 89: 353 (July-September, 1976): 272-3. offers a fascinating exegesis of the Blue Jay stories in her article. She maintains that the story of Blue Jay's visit to the Land of the Dead incorporated aspects of the “Bungling Host” who visits his neighbours imposing on their hospitality and then fails to return the favour. According to her theory, this “host” was a representation of the rapacious nature of Western society. She also compares the bungling actions of Blue Jay while in the Land of the Dead, to the priests desire to “straighten out all the backward people.”

### Chapter 3 - Syncretic Religions- Jesus and the Trickster

As the previous chapter outlines, Coast Salish burial practices did undergo “physical” changes after contact with missionaries. It is not obvious, however, from the missionaries’ accounts, if or how Coast Salish underlying beliefs concerning death were transformed due to the ministrations of these religious men. It is possible that forces, such as smallpox and other European diseases, in concert with the preaching of the missionaries, had a significant impact on Native belief systems and death rituals. For many of the Pacific Northwest Coastal peoples, diseases predated direct contact with the European colonists. Robert Boyd, who has studied the spread and effect of disease, speculated that the earliest epidemics of diseases, such as smallpox, migrated up the coast via established native trade routes.<sup>176</sup> These maladies struck “randomly” throughout the population causing social disorder.<sup>177</sup> The social and religious structure of the Coast Salish expected that there would always be individuals to fulfill specific cultural role. In their culture, like many others in the Northwest, social titles, names and even songs were owned by specific individuals. The rights to exercise these cultural practices were passed on only through prescribed rituals which required both a specific and proper performance of the song, dance or story which when witnessed was verified by the community. The large number of “sudden” deaths did not allow the people to plan these rituals and many

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<sup>176</sup> Robert Boyd. The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence. (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>177</sup> Death on a “large scale” has caused an amount of social and “psychic” disorder. The deaths of a large percentage of “upper class” British men in the First World War influenced the direction of postwar British society. The AIDS epidemic among North American homosexual men has caused a shift in the mind set of this “sub culture.”

of these cultural traditions “died,” metaphorically, with their owners.<sup>178</sup> Secondly, death no longer seemed to fit within an understandable pattern. As mentioned earlier, the Coast Salish, like many First Nations cultures, viewed the human being as an integrated whole made of body and spirit. Death, however random or accidental was seen to have had a spiritual cause and only the deaths of the very old or very young were considered to be natural.<sup>179</sup> Perhaps the most significant result of disease was a decimation of the population of shamans. The shaman filled the role of intermediary between the supernatural other world and the world of the living. The shaman was usually a man who trained for this special role for many years. He owned certain songs, dances and stories which he alone was competent to use.<sup>180</sup> His function combined that of a physician and a cleric. Just as the physicians and members of religious orders were in the “front lines” during events such as the Black Death or even the flu epidemic of 1918-1919, the population of shamans was probably decimated by smallpox. It was not the loss of “religious faith” per se, but the loss of a number of practitioners who were proficient in the use of specific religious knowledge that caused social upheaval. The Coast Salish addressed this situation with innovation rather than capitulation.

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<sup>178</sup> Miller, Lutshootseed Culture and the Shamanic Odyssey: An Anchored Radiance, 74.

<sup>179</sup> Diamond Jenness, Faith of a Coast Salish Indian (Victoria: Anthropology in British Columbia, Memoir # 3. BC Provincial Museum, 1955), 68. This idea is implied here. Ronald Niezen, Spirit Wars: Native North American Religions in the Age of Nation Building (Berkeley & Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2000), 97-101. Nizen discusses the differences between Spirituality and Biocentrism in the perception of illness and disease in many First Nations cultures.

<sup>180</sup> Richard Dauenhauer, “Syncretism, Revival and Reinvention: Tlingit Religion, Pre and Postcontact” in Native Religions and Cultures of North America: Anthropology of the Sacred, ed. Lawrence E Sullivan. (New York & London: Continuum, 2000), 162. Dauenhauer explains the importance of the shaman. He states:” ...in many shamanic traditions the right to hunt is typically established in ancient covenants (myth) continuing

Two of the most obvious examples of the ability of the people of the Northwest Coast to innovate in order to “make sense out of a rather senseless world” are illustrated by the Prophet Dance, which is considered to have begun in the Columbia Plateau, and the Indian Shaker Church founded in the southern Puget Sound area. Both of these religions are considered “syncretic.” Although this term is controversial as it is generally thought to delineate one religion as that of the dominant society and the “syncretic creation” to be that of a subaltern culture, syncretism can also be seen as an action of resistance, innovation or a result of the natural evolution of people and ideas.<sup>181</sup> While some would argue that this is usually one sided, one also need only consider the present “New Age religions” which have either borrowed from or co-opted Native American beliefs.<sup>182</sup> The ability or desire of the Salish to deliberately incorporate aspects of Christianity and other Native traditions into their belief system is made evident through

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luck or success is confirmed through ritual observances and correct personal thought and behaviour.”

<sup>181</sup>An example of resistance is the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico, who is thought to have “evolved” from the *Mexica* goddess, Tonantzin. The Virgin has dark skin and native features. Significantly, she appeared to a poor “Indian” rather than to the Spanish overlords. See Octavio Paz “Los hijos de la Malinche” El laberinto de la soledad (Mexico, DF: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1994), 93. The Afro-Brazilian religions of Umbanda and Candomble are considered to represent both Yoruban and Christian traditions and can be seen as the result of the evolution of the “mixed race society” of Brazil. Roger Bastide, The African Religions of Brazil (Baltimore and London; Johns Hopkins University, 1978), 31-57.

<sup>182</sup>This seems to be a case of “reverse” syncretism in which the “dominant” culture assumes aspects of the “subaltern” religion. However, it should be noted that many First Nations peoples consider this to be a degradation of their beliefs which does not represent either understanding or acceptance of First Nations spirituality. A portion of a resolution made by the Circle of Elders of the Indigenous Nations of North America on October 5, 1980 is quoted in Ward Churchill, Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of the American Indians (Monroe, MA: Common Courage Press, 1992 ), 223.

an examination of the Prophet Dance and the Indian Shaker Church. These two religions are discussed in this thesis as both have a direct connection to concept of death.

The Prophet Dance was one of the most visible and “historically important” movements which arose in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>183</sup> It is believed to have originated in the area of the Central Plateau just to the east of the Coast Salish homelands. The Prophet Dance promised a return to prosperity and a reunion with the deceased. Some prophets taught that this would be accomplished by a return to “pre-contact” ideals. Other adherents of this movement believed that the reunion with the dead would occur in a “heaven like” place and taught a “gospel” with many Christian overtones. There is some disagreement as to whether this movement was an entirely indigenous response to social destabilization or an attempt to synthesize Christian precepts into the Native cosmology.<sup>184</sup>

One of the main points of contention concerns the date that Christianity was introduced to the area and the form that this introduction took. Historians, like Leslie Spier who wrote a definitive study of the Dance, argues that the Prophet Dance was a direct and wholly indigenous response to the social changes that were occurring to the east. Native Americans who had been displaced by white settlers told of the threat that settlers posed. First Nations peoples responded to this “extraordinary happening” in a manner Spier argues was typical of their response to others happenings, such as volcanic

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<sup>183</sup> Although this “movement” is rather obscure, historians, such as Leslie Spier and Cora Du Bois, maintain that the Prophet Dance was the immediate progenitor of the infamous Ghost Dance. The practice of the Ghost Dance was one of the factors which led to the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890.

<sup>184</sup> Spiers and Aberle debated this topic in the Journal of Southwestern Anthropology 15 (Spring 1959): 74-88. Elizabeth Vibert offers a good summary of the debate and its

eruptions and earthquakes.<sup>185</sup> Others, like Aberle maintain the Prophet Dance was directly influenced by Christian thought as peoples from the east, who had been schooled by missionaries, were imparting specific information concerning a new and powerful religion. Some scholars, like Suttles, maintain that the movement gained impetus once the Christian missionaries had become established on the west coast and were beginning to preach to the inhabitants.<sup>186</sup>

One of the first in-depth studies of this “dance” is Leslie Spier’s The Prophet Dance of the Northwest published in 1935.<sup>187</sup> Although he refers to these beliefs as a “cult,<sup>188</sup> often denigrates the stories as “purely mythical adventures [that are] quite frequently couched as historical happenings”<sup>189</sup> and even states that “the stage was set for seeming resurrections on the coast, at least in its southern end, where premature burial

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recent history in “Prophetic Movements in the Columbia Plateau,” Ethnohistory 42:2 (Spring 1995): 197-227.

<sup>185</sup> Vibert, "Prophetic Movements on the Columbia Plateau," 200.

<sup>186</sup> Wayne Suttles. “The Plateau Prophet Dance Among the Coast Salish,” Southwestern Journal of Anthropology 13 (Spring, 1957), 357. Suttles mentions that the Catholic Ladder is good example of how easily the Christian message could be spread, even without the physical presence of the missionaries.

<sup>187</sup> Spier’s work is in some ways a response to James Mooney’s 1896 study of the Ghost Dance. According to Spier, Mooney maintained that the Ghost Dance was the result of the cultural and social upheavals associated with the displacement of Native Americans by the policies of the United States government. He contended that the Ghost Dance was a result of deep despair and as such could be considered to have been motivated by deprivation. In contrast, Spier maintained that the Ghost Dance was an offshoot of the Prophet Dance and that most of the important aspects of the Prophet Dance were fully of native origin and were not an illustration of despair, but rather were the result of the social chaos caused by invasion. This argument continued until at least the late 1950’s with some proponents of Mooney asserting that the Prophet Dance was a manifestation of deprivation and others, most notably Wayne Suttles who has spent his career studying the Coast Salish, siding with Spier

<sup>188</sup> Leslie Spier, Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives: The Source of the Ghost Dance (New York: AMS Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>189</sup> Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives, 13.

seems to have been not uncommon.”<sup>190</sup> His book laid the foundation for later, more sympathetic works<sup>191</sup> and as such a discussion of his opinions seems integral to any study.<sup>192</sup> Spier maintains that “the prophet dance was thoroughly at home in the cultures of the northwest”<sup>193</sup> due to the prevalence of tales which detail visits to the land of the dead among these groups. He describes this dance as originating with one man’s visit to the land of the dead in which:

He learned from them [the dead] that he was to teach his people to live in love and peace and that as a consequence of which there would be a general resurrection of the dead who were to return under the guidance of Big Man or Old Man, their chief. The earth was getting old and worn out: it was to be renewed (turn over; flooded), when the dead would return, the aged become young, men would live forever, the game would be once more abundant. He also learned from the dead a dance... the performance of which would hasten the approach of the dead... The present world would be overwhelmed in flood, when the Indians would find refuge on the mountain tops... disbelievers would suffer: grow small or be transformed into wood or rocks.<sup>194</sup>

Suttles maintains that it is impossible to discover a clear distinction between most Christian and Salish components of the Prophet Dance. He states that “the only element that is clearly native and *not* Christian is dancing as a religious activity and the only elements that are clearly Christian and *not* native are the Sabbath, the name Jesus Christ and the use of written or carved symbols representing the history of the world.”<sup>195</sup> Like Spier, he maintains that many of the aspects of resurrection may not be related to

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<sup>190</sup> Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives, 13.

<sup>191</sup> Robin Ridington, Swan People: A study of the Dunne-za Prophets (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1978).

<sup>192</sup> Spier is even responsible for the creation of the name “the Prophet Dance,” Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives, 5.

<sup>193</sup> Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives, 13.

<sup>194</sup> Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives, 7.

<sup>195</sup> Suttles, "The Plateau Prophet Dance Among the Coast Salish," 375.

Christian doctrine but are examples of the shamanic tradition.<sup>196</sup> Spier maintains that the Prophet Dance is “intimately linked to the curing practice wherein shamans go to the land of the dead in pursuit of souls or spirits.”<sup>197</sup> The distinction between what was thoroughly an Indigenous idea will probably never be found. It is perhaps a serendipitous that in both Christian and First Nations religion a powerful shaman is able to “conquer” death and return his people to life. The account of Jesus’ “travels,” such as the “Harrowing of Hell,” during the three days his body lay in the tomb illustrates just such a story. The Prophet Dance, despite its uncertain lineage, represents the innovative ability of the Salish.

The Shaker Church was founded in 1882 by John Slocum, a Southern Coast Salish man of the Squaxin group living at Hammersley Inlet in southern Puget Sound. According to church records Slocum died, yet before he was buried he returned to life. During the time he was dead, Slocum reported that he had received a vision that instructed him to bring salvation to all the Indians who would abstain from alcohol, gambling, smoking and the belief in the power of shamans.<sup>198</sup> According to tradition, Slocum himself could not adhere to his own dictum and within the first year after his “first death” was persuaded to gamble on the outcome of a canoe race. Once again he fell ill and was not expected to survive. His family called in a shaman. Slocum’s wife Mary was distraught that John’s family did not believe in his vision, she dismissed the shaman

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<sup>196</sup> Suttles, "The Plateau Prophet Dance Among the Coast Salish," 353.

<sup>197</sup> Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives, 14.

<sup>198</sup> Robert H Ruby & John Brown, John Slocum and the Indian Shaker Church (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 7. Ruby and Brown discuss the controversy over the “reality” of this death. They state that some people think Slocum was in a trance which was possibly induced by alcohol, tuberculosis or a broken neck, while others think he was “playing possum.” The authors counter these arguments and maintain that Slocum’s visions were the result of a classic “near death experience” described in many of the world’s religions.

and began to pray and “shake” over her husband. Her shaking was what gave the church its name. Ironically, shaking was an aspect of the same shamanic ritual healing shunned by this group.<sup>199</sup>

Like the Prophet Dance, the Indian Shaker Church directly addressed the position of death in Coast Salish cosmology. Rather than promoting the idea of the rebirth, or the recycling of souls, this religion adopted the Christian precepts of the death and resurrection of specific and singular individuals. Leslie Spier, one of the earliest historians to examine both the Prophet Dance and the Indian Shaker Church, maintains the Indian Shaker Church to be a “Christianized” version of the Prophet Dance. He believes that the Indian Shaker Church “may have had its origin in part at least in the Prophet Dance Complex.”<sup>200</sup> Pamela Amoss, who studies Salish religious practice, considers that “Shaker belief continues to offer a way for Indians to incorporate the principal religious symbols of a dominant alien culture into their traditional understanding of the relationship between human beings and the Supernatural.”<sup>201</sup> Amoss maintains the substitution of Christian for Salish symbols used in the Shaker Church represented a bridge between the two ideologies and legitimized this Salish “re-creation” of connection with the Supernatural.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ruby and Brown, John Slocum and the Indian Shaker Church, 39. Ruby and Brown compare the shaking with the “Spirit canoe.” They described this as a “primary religious ceremonial for healing the sick.” They cite anthropologist T. T. Waterman and his report that shaking was “associated with soul recovery and occurred in ceremonies in which shamans sought help from a certain spirit power.”

<sup>200</sup> Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives, 14.

<sup>201</sup> Pamela Amoss, “The Indian Shaker Church,” in Handbook of North American Indians, ed. William Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1990), 639.

<sup>202</sup> Pamela Amoss. “Symbolic Substitution in the Indian Shaker Church,” Ethnohistory 25 (Summer 1978): 235 For example, she considers the church to be a substitute for the “smoke house.”

One of the points raised in the discussion of both the Prophet Dance and the Indian Shaker Church is that both represent a shift from shamanic authority to the “spiritual reason” of the “average person.”<sup>203</sup> While both groups had established leaders, each was “founded” outside the shamanic tradition and allowed for the greater participation by “the common person” in ritual than had been previously allowed. It is possible that the social upheaval caused by the death of so many people allowed the prophets and Shakers to set themselves in direct opposition to the power of the shamans which was seen as ineffectual in the face of both disease and the new ideas presented by western society.<sup>204</sup> The syncretic religions, by combining familiar parts of native spirituality with aspects of the seemingly “unstoppable” Christianity, represented the ability of the Salish to fashion their own translations of the Christian doctrine into a message that they could understand.

Coast Salish oral histories also reflected the combination of Native and Christian ideas. “The Orphans who ascended to Heaven,” one of the longer stories in a collection published by James Teit in 1917, exhibits many elements of Western and Christian teachings.<sup>205</sup> In this story the orphans are from “somewhere in the White Man’s country.”<sup>206</sup> Upon the death of their parents, they travel to a town peopled by adult men.

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<sup>203</sup> Lewis, James R. “Shamans and Prophets: Continuities and Discontinuities in Native American New Religions,” American Indian Quarterly (Summer, 1988) 224.

<sup>204</sup> Lewis, “Shamans and Prophets,” 223.

<sup>205</sup> James Teit, Folk Tales of the Salishan Tribes (New York: Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society, 1917), 53. Teit does alert the reader to the missionary influence in a footnote, although he considers that “it has some analogy to Indian stories of visits to the ghost country.”

<sup>206</sup> It is probable that the orphans are not First Nations people, but are white boys. Even so, the story does represent a Salishan reworking of a Christian tale.

<sup>207</sup> The “chief” of this village, who adopts the boys, raises pigs, cattle and possibly owns a mowing-machine. On a foray for lost cattle, the eldest boy discovers the Land of the Dead where he is shown two houses. He is shown the first to enable him to report to “those who are bad as to the terrible fate awaiting them.”<sup>208</sup> This house is filled with “reptiles of different kinds” and the people who live there exist on “raw reptile flesh.” The second house is the opposite of the first. The inhabitants are clean and “were all singing and praying. Some were on their knees praising God.” The youth is told that only those who are “pure in body and mind” can enter this house. Further, in this tale the rewarded dead must renounce their earthly belongings. The youth finds a pile of “clothes and other things” placed near a golden staff. This image suggests that native ways must be discarded in favor of the teachings of Jesus Christ, who is often portrayed as a shepherd with a golden staff. Those who are unable to forget their connections to the earthly life are transformed into birds, reptiles and insects. Unlike the characterization of the Land of the Dead in the Adamson collection, discussed in the previous chapter, this telling describes a place of punishment that sounds remarkably like the Christian Hell and a place of reward similar to Heaven. However, the story concludes by claiming that the three protagonists are “the only people with mortal bodies who live in heaven.”<sup>209</sup> According to Roman Catholic dogma, the Virgin Mary is the only person whose body has been taken to heaven. While this story may be a reference to this teaching, it also seems to be a reworking of the idea of travel to the land of the dead as mentioned in the

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<sup>207</sup> This sounds similar to a community of Catholic priests.

<sup>208</sup> Teit, Folk Tales of the Salishan Tribes, 55.

<sup>209</sup> Teit, Folk Tales of the Salishan Tribes, 56

“Blue Jay” stories.<sup>210</sup> As an example, it illustrates the ability of the Coast Salish to adapt to social and cultural change, even if that change had been imposed.<sup>211</sup>

The massive “soul loss” caused by disease in tandem with the Christian concept which stresses the idea that the death of Jesus was a triumph, rather than a defeat, could have profoundly affected any group of people.<sup>212</sup> Redemption from sin was not a concept familiar to the First Nations peoples. A Nez Perce man, quoted in the diary of an early missionary asked about Jesus; “What he say Jesus Christ so many times? What for a good man die for me? I am not a bad man. I did not tell him to die.”<sup>213</sup> With these new concepts as the background, it does not seem implausible that the Coast Salish would attempt to translate the idea that an individual could die for no apparent reason into something that made sense to them. Rather than a denigration of the “ancient knowledge,” the Prophet Dance and the Indian Shaker Church represent the creative

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<sup>210</sup> Laura Piers, ““The Guardian of All”: Jesuit Missionary and Salish Perceptions of the Virgin Mary” in Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History eds. Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996) 298. Piers discusses the perception of the Virgin Mary in Interior Salish thought. She concludes that Mary’s ability to “intercede on behalf of the dead” led the Salish to have a particular veneration for her.

<sup>211</sup> The combination of Salish and Christian ideas is evident in a number of collections that also date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Martha Harris' History and Folklore of the Cowichan Indians published in Victoria by the Colonist Press and Publishers in 1901, includes "The story of the flood by the Cowichan Indians." This tale describes a time when the people had begun to quarrel over boundaries and had "increased their store of knowledge." At this time many "wise men" began to have dreams which foretold the "destruction of the people" by flood. Those who believed the wise men constructed a raft of "many canoes" which was anchored by means of a cedar bark rope to a rock on the top of Cowichan Mountain. Harris reports that "the stone is still there as a witness to the truth." All the people who did not believe drowned while those who had taken refuge on the raft were left to repopulate the area. Harris was the daughter of James Douglas.

<sup>212</sup> Without a theological understanding of the idea of “Original sin” the death of Jesus makes little sense.

ability of the Salish to incorporate religious concepts from the Western tradition with aspects of their own spirituality and are examples of their ability to innovate with such integral concepts as death and the afterlife.

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<sup>213</sup>Jarold Ramsey, "The Bible in Western Indian Mythology," in Journal of American Folklore, 90: 358 (October - December 1977): 446.

## Chapter 4 - "Let Me Give You A Story"

As mentioned in the introduction, some historians have assumed that many aspects of Native spiritual and religious thought were destroyed through the "civilizing" effects of missionaries or the deleterious results of disease. They often claim that many religious rituals, such as those that concern human remains and reburial, are inventions of the modern age and as such, do not deserve to be afforded the respect given to "real" traditions.<sup>214</sup> A discussion of the perceptions and practices of a number of modern Sto:lo confirms that many of the practices of the past have continued into the twenty-first century. This section will also examine Sto:lo ideas concerning the archaeological studies that have informed much of this essay.

Death and burial are personal and religious subjects and many people do not feel comfortable discussing this topic with "outsiders." This chapter will not directly examine the intricacies of modern practices, rather it will address the evidence that the age-old practices of wrapping the body and feeding and burning goods for the dead which are still important to the Sto:lo. In order to distance the discussion from the mention of the recently deceased, these topics will be examined in the context of the reburial issue. Although the Sto:lo maintain that all ancestors should be treated with the same respect, it seems more polite, and eminently more useful, to inquire about a topic, such as reburial, that is already being discussed than to ask "what will you do with Grandma?" In a larger sense, the issues that concern reburial also relate to a definition of "community" that

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<sup>214</sup> Meiken, "Some Scholars Views On Reburial," 705.

encompasses both the living and the dead.<sup>215</sup> This idea prescribes that a certain amount and type of interaction between these two “states of being” is necessary in order to “keep the world right.” While it is impossible to know if these beliefs have been held in the past, discussion of them gives voice to the possibility as well as provides a forum for the discussion of attitudes that differ from those of “mainstream” religious Western ideas.<sup>216</sup> In essence, this chapter will examine current practices that concern reburial and the treatment of human remains by looking into the past for guidance into the future.

Five members of the Sto:lo were interviewed for this chapter.<sup>217</sup> This group was composed of two female Sto:lo elders, one man who works as a cultural interpreter in the “Longhouse Extension Programme” run by the Sto:lo Nation at Coqualeetza, and two

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<sup>215</sup>Western thought does not deny this association, however, it assigns this connection to a wholly spiritual plane. For example Catholics are taught that on All Soul’s Day it is possible for the living to offer prayers for the dead that will ameliorate the pain and shorten the time spent in Purgatory. Mormons believe that the living can be baptized for deceased ancestors, thus offering the dead the ability to ascend in the Celestial Kingdom. In contrast many indigenous American cultures incorporate the physical and spiritual aspects of this idea. One of the most famous is “El dia de los muertos” or Day of the Dead that is celebrated in Central America. On this day food and goods are left on graves for the use of the dead. A number of South American cultures, such as the Incas, would dress mummy bundles as revered guests at feasts. While these may seem to some as simplistic ritual, this type of actions accentuates the idea that there is a tangible connection between “this world” and the next.

<sup>216</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, “mainstream” religious thought is comprised of beliefs and behaviours that are sanctioned by widely recognized religious bodies, such as the Catholics or the Baptists. These two differ radically in their creeds, yet each would agree, rather grudgingly perhaps, that the other conveys a valuable spiritual message.

“Mainstream” thought does not include either the liberal and freeform “New Age” ideas nor the “radically conservative” ideas of the “Born agains.”

<sup>217</sup> Italics emphasize the words of the Sto:lo. Most of the information presented in this thesis, including the thesis itself, is the work of “white academics.” While I feel that there should be no restrictions placed on who is allowed to study a certain topic, respect should be given to those who offer information and who can be personally effected by the study. The italics are my way of accentuating the words of the Sto:lo who were generous and gracious during my research.

women who work directly with academics involved in scientific excavations. The two elders, Rosaleen George and Elizabeth Herrling, are frequently interviewed and are respected as sources of the *Halq'emeylem* language, customs, place- names and other aspects of traditional Sto:lo knowledge. The two women, Betty Charlie and Helen Joe, and the man, Jeff Point, are all “middle aged.” They too are involved in the preservation of Sto:lo rituals such as the proper means for burial and reburial and the tradition of the longhouse. In addition, the experiences of another Sto:lo man, now deceased, were recounted in an informal conversation with Sto:lo cultural advisor Sonny McHalsie.<sup>218</sup> As well, the attitudes of many of the Sto:lo elders were evident in a discussion of the treatment of human remains that took place on May 25, 2000 at the meeting of the Sto:lo Elder’s council or “Lys” at the chambers on the Coqualeetza grounds. These interviews provide a variety of opinions on treatment of human remains. This discussion should in no way be considered a presentation of a “monolithic” set of Sto:lo beliefs. Like most groups the Sto:lo are a diverse people with a variety of attitudes and beliefs, unified by a sense of “community.”

In order to understand the Sto:lo attitude towards human remains, one must examine the Sto:lo perspective of the dead. Before the acceptance of Christian ideas, the Sto:lo believed that the “soul” had four components. These included the conscience, the emotions, the life essence, and a personal presence which continued to exist after death. In later times, these have been conflated to conform with the Christian idea of the soul. However, it is important to consider that the Sto:lo perception of death and the dead does

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<sup>218</sup>Sonny’s transcripts of his interview with Henry Murray have been misplaced.

not necessarily conform to either Christian or Western ideas<sup>219</sup> and traces of these ideas may still be evident in the cosmology of the modern Sto:lo. Further, unlike the Western belief in the progression of time in which the dead are considered “dead and gone,” the Sto:lo view life and death as cyclical. This is made evident in their language. In *Halq’emeylem* the word for “great grandfather” is the same as for “great grandson.”<sup>220</sup> While this may seem like a semantic limitation, the underlying sense is one of the connection between ancestors and descendants. This cyclical connection imbues the Sto:lo perspective with respect and responsibility for the living as well as the dead. Ancestors, no matter how long they have been dead, must be treated with respect.

This connection between the living and the dead is illustrated in a story told by elder Rosaleen George. She tells of a group of men who were instructed by an owl to find the remains of a long dead Sto:lo:

*They were all sitting around the camp fire and it was hunting season. They were hunting for deer. There was an owl and it was making noise. These men were kind of annoyed with that owl and one of them says [about another member of the party] well he’s a Doctor.<sup>221</sup> He should be able to understand what the owl is saying. So they told him why don’t you do something and find out what he wants. So he left the group and went further back, and it was dark by this time and the owl said I’ve been here a long, long time and I am tired. I am tired and I want to rest. So they didn’t hunt, they went around looking for this thing, this dead body where the owl said it was. And when they found it ..there was nothing but bones left. ...I don’t know if they found out who he was.<sup>222</sup>*

This story emphasizes the idea that it was more important for these men to find these remains than it was for them to hunt for food for the living.

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<sup>219</sup> Keith Carlson, informal discussion, May 2000.

<sup>220</sup> Keith Carlson, informal discussion, May, 2000.

<sup>221</sup> In this context a doctor means an Indian doctor who can loosely be referred to as a “shaman.”

Many “modern-day” Sto:lo have continued to practice their rituals despite the adoption of Western practices. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the dead are buried four days after death has occurred.<sup>223</sup> The body is usually washed, dressed and wrapped in a blanket. Following the ceremony, which can be “traditional,” Christian, or a combination of both belief systems, a feast is held. At this feast many of the goods of the deceased are distributed to friends and family as a means of paying debts that were not forgiven before death. As well, an important aspect of the feast, called a “burning” is performed. Food and goods, such as clothes, are burned in order to feed and clothe the deceased. The Sto:lo maintain that the act of burning allows the essence of the goods to move from the worldly, physical plane to the spiritual plane. Helen Joe, who often conducts these burnings explains:

*A burning itself is a way of providing for our people who have passed on. It is a belief ...[that] we take care of one another. It is kind of understood that once the people get to the spirit world there are different things they do - but they don't have means to feed and clothe themselves. They don't have the material means, but because they are used to these things, they still need them. So, it is our job here on the earth to set the table and call them. So we have the food that is there, the water, the tea, the juice that they used to drink... We prepare it, we cook it, we cut up the fruit,... take the candies out of the wrappers. When everything is ready we have the fire. Once it goes into the fire and you see the smoke going up from the fire, that means that a part of that food and anything else that goes into the fire, once you see the smoke going up that means the spiritual part goes to the spirit world so the spirits there can partake in the meal.... It is like any other meal with your family.<sup>224</sup>*

She continues to explain that if the deceased is “not hungry,” the spiritual food is shared with others in the spirit world who do not have anyone to take care of them or have been

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<sup>222</sup> Rosaleen George and Elizabeth Herrling, personal interview, May 30, 2000. Tape and Transcript Sto:lo Archives, Chilliwack, B.C.

<sup>223</sup> Helen Joe, personal interview, June 1, 2000. Tape and Transcript Sto:lo Archives, Chilliwack, B.C.

forgotten by their descendants. The dead, just as the living, share goods among members of their community.

The ritual of the burning is not limited to the post burial feast, but is considered the main method for the living to continue to take care of the dead. Further, the Sto:lo feel that the deceased are able to communicate directly with the living and request additional goods and food to be burned. Betty Charlie related the story of an ancestor who was cold and requested that another blanket be burned for her use in the spirit world.<sup>225</sup> She also considers that burnings should be done as a means of showing respect for the dead in places that are being studied, such as at Scowlitz. *“Burnings should be done, mostly for the people at the site because we are invading their territory. It is out of respect.”*<sup>226</sup> Burnings then provide spiritual sustenance for the dead and are seen as acts of common courtesy acknowledging the responsibility that the living have towards those in the spiritual realm.

Respect for the dead, both for their physical remains and spiritual essence, is of prime importance. Jeff Point maintains that:

*If human remains are mistreated, respect is lost for both parties. [the dead and the living] If they are treated with respect [then] generations down the line, our children, will see that, then they will have respect. All remains should be treated with respect. We should respect our past [ancestors], no matter how long ago they passed on.*<sup>227</sup>

Most importantly, if respect for human remains is not maintained, the interaction between the dead and the living can become dangerous for the living, especially for children.

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<sup>224</sup>Helen Joe.

<sup>225</sup>Betty Charlie, personal interview, May 29, 2000. Tape and Transcript Sto:lo Archives: Chilliwack, B.C.

<sup>226</sup>Betty Charlie.

Elder Rosaleen George tells a story concerning the mistreatment of a skeleton. In this situation, the spirits of the people came back and interacted with children, attempting to coax the children to follow them to the spirit world:

*There was a skeleton rolling around. They don't know that it would affect lots of people. These little people, they lived on the earth. [My niece] was playing with this little spirit, it was one of the little skeletons that have been rolling around. The little ones can be coaxed away. I phoned around and no one had heard anything. [about the bones] Finally Frank Malloway said that he heard that I was concerned. And I said "I am, they are our little people." So he went and asked the chief if we could bury them in the cemetery, so that's where they are now. And those little people didn't come around anymore. Ever since they put them in the ground, they have been at peace.*<sup>228</sup>

This preoccupation with the safety of children also suggests the connection that the Sto:lo feel exists between the generations. Children, as more recently reborn spirits, may have a greater affinity with the spirit world than adults who are more accustomed to the physical world.

Another aspect of danger was addressed by Betty Charlie in her first person experience concerning a white academic who did not believe that any danger was involved at the Scowlitz digs. The man was sent to cut weeds with a weed-eater near the open excavation site. Despite warnings, he did not apply temelth, a red ochre paint that is considered by some to have protective qualities, nor did he behave in a respectful manner. According to Betty:

*Andrew was a student and he was over there and he kept asking questions about spirit and stuff. And he told us that he didn't believe in stuff like that - that he was cool and didn't have to wear the temelth. And they were clearing one day and he went out to an area, like a wall of rocks - a platform. And his job was to clear out the nettles and he was over there*

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<sup>227</sup> Jeff Point, personal interview, May 31, 2000. Tape and Transcript Sto:lo Archives, Chilliwack, B.C.

<sup>228</sup> Rosaleen George and Elizabeth Herrling.

*by himself. And that should never have happened. Students shouldn't be over there by themselves. And he had the weed eater, he was over there cutting nettles and we were in area A and the next thing I saw was Andrew coming out of the stinging nettles without his weed eater and he was screaming that there was a man standing there on the platform. And I said that that was okay, it was probably just the man from mound one. He asked if it is okay to go back to work and I said yes. So he did. So the next thing, -he was coming out of the nettles and he was white and pouring sweat. He got over to area A and he dropped on the ground and he stayed there. And they took him over to the hospital by boat and the doctors couldn't find anything wrong with him. His body temperature was below normal and his blood pressure was high and they couldn't explain it. He was okay, but the elders came and they talked to him. They explained that he had to go back to the job because he started it. It was hard, but he did it. But he wasn't allowed to use the weed eater, he had to use a machete because the elder told him that the people there didn't like the sound of the weed eater. He got sick because he didn't believe. He didn't believe that there was anything over there. He was just over there for school, and then he got hit with whatever was over there and now he believes. When we are working over there in those mounds, we hope that they don't find anything. As soon as somebody said there was a skull, we were out of there. It was really hard.*<sup>229</sup>

One of the most eloquent points that Helen Joe makes is that spirit power is much stronger than physical power. It is for this reason that dealing with the dead can be dangerous. She offers:

*I'll give you a story. There was an incident from my mother's people down in the States. They had some remains that were returned back to the community and I'm not sure where they came from but they had evidence that one person that was there was a woman because they found this comb and it was carved and when they saw the comb I guess there were ones who were working there who wanted to duplicate it. So they asked a group, it was a group of elders, I guess they had an advisory group, if they could duplicate it. And they had the go ahead to duplicate it but they had to make sure that the comb, the original comb was put back with the remains before they were buried. But from what I have heard they put the duplicate in with the remains and there was a group that was involved with that. And one lady that was involved with it ended up having a stroke and she's not healthy, she lost the use of one side. Another man has had numerous surgeries and his health is just not right. The man who was supposed to have duplicated the comb, actually carved the comb and then*

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<sup>229</sup>Betty Charlie.

*put it back and apparently it was not the original that went back, he has died. There was another spiritual person who was in the community who wasn't really involved but he was kind of on his last stages of leukemia and they always say that the spiritual part of your being sometimes gets much greater at that period of your life because you are getting ready to go to the spiritual part of, the spiritual world. So they say that the spirits sometimes get extra strong or have that extra energy to take your spirit to the other side. This man, while he was laying in his bed in his home he said this old lady came and she said "I didn't mean to hurt anybody, I just wanted my comb." And this was the day that they had the young man's funeral who died... the comb needs to be returned, if the process isn't taken care of properly then people could get hurt. There have been no problems at the Scowlitz site because they have been taking care of those people by doing a burning [when necessary]. I have been involved in some of the burnings over there.*<sup>230</sup>

Helen continues this discussion with a reference to burnings and an admonition that even a hug given in love by a deceased person can be dangerous to the living recipient:

*I guess to go on, the spiritual part of our lives is much stronger than our own human one, much greater. Not just stronger but greater... When we used to have our burnings we would fix the plates cause we prepare the plates for our people and we would have them just heaping, and we would have all kinds of stuff and we would have just everything on them. And he [an elder] told us he said you know you don't need to have that much food. We putting a normal portion of fish and a normal portion of smoked fish and maybe a normal sized, one medium potato and a vegetable and cake and fruit and everything else and we had it all on the plate. and he said that's too much for them he said if you can look at a piece of fish that is maybe a half an inch that like giving the spirits a whole fish. That's how great their size and strength, whatever it is that they have, that's how great it is compared to us. So he said you only need to give them a little bit of each. One little inch square piece of each fried bread is like giving them a whole piece. So those kind of things, like portions, we had to learn how to fix. And then when you go up to a child or you go up to someone in your family and you give them a hug and you give them a good hug, a hug that feels good, we all enjoy being hugged, you like hugging your family. But if you were to experience that from a spiritual being, that hug would almost squeeze you to death. Because that energy is so strong. You know so he said we have to understand that the spiritual strength and the spiritual part of our people is so much greater than the human being and we have to be careful.*<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Helen Joe.

<sup>231</sup> Helen Joe.

This remark makes the point that the dead are not evil or malicious but are simply more powerful than the living.<sup>232</sup> Further, it explains some of the wariness with which the Sto:lo approach their dead. Rosaleen George explains;

*it all depends on how these people were when they were on earth. If they were very possessive, It's pretty hard to take something away from them... Our grandparents never let us take anything away from the cemetery. Sometimes they hung things on the cross and my grandmother always said "don't you fancy anything in the grave yard. Don't think of anything - just be happy that it's there." That's one thing my sister and I were told by my grandmother.*<sup>233</sup>

The respect shown to the dead, then, is both an aspect of concern for the ancestors as well as an acknowledgment of their enhanced "spirit power."

Although all the Sto:lo who were interviewed do not agree with the excavation of human remains for study, those interviewed did seem to agree that graves could be moved for a proper reason and if the movement was done with respect. Sonny McHalsie relates a story from the late 1930's that was included in an interview he conducted with Henry Murphy. As a youth of approximately twelve years, Henry was playing on a hill side and found what he knew to be human remains. Realizing the significance of his "find," Henry promptly told his father and uncle. Rather than rebury the remains in the same place, they moved the bones to a place where they would be more secure. Sonny notes that the important issue was the respectful reburial of the remains in a place where they would not be disturbed rather than interment in the same spot. According to Sonny, this was done without the intervention of any state authorities.<sup>234</sup> This story suggests

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<sup>232</sup> Helen Joe.

<sup>233</sup> Rosaleen George.

<sup>234</sup> Sonny McHalsie, informal interview, May 2000. Notes in possession of the author.

that work done at sites, such as at Scowlitz, is acceptable to those Sto:lo who define it as a “rescue operation” rather than solely a scientific expedition.

The ability to move graves was reiterated by three of the participants. Betty Charlie stated if the dead are apprised of the reason that they are to be disturbed, they have the same capacity for reason as do the living. One of the two elders who were interviewed also compared the dead to those that are sleeping. She felt that if the dead are gently made aware of the situation, rather than yanked out of their beds, they will respond in a positive manner. Rosaleen George states that: *“The spirits are bothered when they are moved around. What if you were sleeping and someone just came along and bothered you. They just wake them up, that’s what they do to those skeletons.”*<sup>235</sup>

Jeff Point mentions practices from the past:

*My grandfather told me there was a great big box of them [bones] and our people used to move them if they were moving, migrating from one place to another they would drag this big box with them. And on my grandmother’s side - they had a house similar to this one<sup>236</sup> and there were shelves and they stayed in there. Now to get to that point of view, you see our people didn’t bury people, it wasn’t until the Europeans came here. So they buried them all. So now I always tell them, to me if we wanted to keep these remains in a little box to me its okay. But it’s not up to me. There are people older than me and if they say it is wrong, we have to abide by it. This is all I can say about it.*<sup>237</sup>

Elder Vince Stogan comments on the role of the government in the movement of graves;

*We had huts, fence around it, they just put people in those huts, pile them up, one family in each hut. We have to destroy all those, bury the bones in the modern cemetery. Government said it should not be done like that. The huts were made of cedar. The spirits live on, they are always around. My grandfather was a healer, but we help people with problems.... We go to a*

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<sup>235</sup>Rosaleen George.

<sup>236</sup>The interview was conducted in a room off the kitchen used for the Longhouse. It was probably 12’ wide x 20’ long.

<sup>237</sup>Jeff Point.

*Chinese cafe down the street... They say they do that in China too, burning of food and spiritual counseling.*<sup>238</sup>

The subject of “found” remains, as opposed to excavated ones, elicited an interesting historical point. The Sto:lo maintain that there are a variety of explanations for the discovery of remains outside the bounds of established cemeteries. While some were simply buried before the establishment of cemeteries in the “modern” sense, many of the cemeteries are associated with Christian denominations. The Catholics, for example, would not bury those who were unbaptized or who were considered to have clung to their “heathen practices.” This restriction did not allow those Sto:lo who followed the traditional religion, whether wholly or in part to be interred in “holy ground.” Betty Charlie relates:

*The elders will tell you that a long time ago they put up fences around the cemetery. The priests used to come along and baptize people The priests would change their names. That is how some people lost their Indian names.. And some of the elders wouldn't, ...[so] they [the priests] would bury them outside the cemetery gates. So that's why they find so many outside the cemetery.*<sup>239</sup>

For reasons of dogma, Catholics did not allow the bodies of those who had committed suicide to be buried in church grounds.<sup>240</sup> This prohibition pertained to all Catholics and was not meant to discriminate against the Natives, however, recent revelations of the treatment of Native children and youths in the church run residential schools, which have resulted in suicide, make this discrimination doubly ironic.

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<sup>238</sup>Vince Stogan“ When I came home my Elders taught us that all our people who have passed on are still around us” in *In The Words of Elders* eds. Peter Kulchyski, Don McCaskill and David Newhouse (Toronto & Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 452.

<sup>239</sup> Betty Charlie.

<sup>240</sup> This has changed since Vatican 2 in the 1960's.

Elder Elizabeth Herrling recounts the drowning of a young child. While this situation does not relate directly to the treatment of “found” human remains, it does explain attitudes toward the dead and the responsibility that the living have for the proper treatment of the dead.

*I remember a couple of years ago my nephew lost a little girl, a baby granddaughter over on the island. She drowned but she lived and they brought her to the hospital, but before she got to the hospital she died. Anyway they had her at the hospital and then they got her back to the island*

*First thing when got back to the island where they lived, the first thing, my nephew looked and says oh he says what happened to her face? The baby was of, about 4 or 5 years old. He says The eyes was taken out. She hasn't got any eyes. He says I wonder what happened? And it bothered them, the mother, the baby kept coming in, during the night and crying. She said they cut me up and all this and that and she says it was so weird that they were going to put her in the psych ward. They told where she was going to go if she didn't straighten up - and she says I can't help it. Every time I close my eyes she says she's right there. So they came up to us and came and asked us one day what they should do about it - so they had to go to court to get that back and they got all that back. And I told them we don't do that And I asked them is did you give them consent, did they give you a consent form to sign? He says no we didn't -none of us. You can get that thing back regardless - they should not have done that in the first place. They thought that the rules were different Some reserves they have different rules, we don't do things like that.<sup>241</sup>*

The excavation of burials and the related topic of testing human remains seems a particularly apt topic for this thesis. Not surprisingly those who were involved with the Scowlitz site considered the study to be valid one. Betty Charlie explains the situation:

*I got involved in the Scowlitz site because of [various academics] and Sonny McHalsie when they “discovered” those mounds. A lot of the elders knew about it, but when they don't want anybody coming in and vandalizing the site, they don't tell anyone about it. They had to pick two people to work with the university, and Cliff and I were those. Cliff's dad wouldn't speak to us. He was in anger. “What's the use in keeping quiet,”*

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<sup>241</sup> Elizabeth Herrling.

*he said “we’d have every grave digger in the Fraser Valley over there.” It was mostly anger that we were going to be part of it.<sup>242</sup>*

Those who feel that studies, such as Scowlitz, should be allowed, do maintain that certain precautions must be taken. These precautions ensure both the respect for the dead as well as the safety of those who are working are maintained. Betty Charlie suggests that a “kit” composed of a blanket and cedar box should be required for all “digs.” The blanket would be available to cover any remains while the cedar box would alleviate situations such as happened in the past in which remains were placed in a plastic bucket. However, despite her work with the archaeologists, she admits:

*We tell them that we don't really like it when they are getting close to the centre of a mound. We'll watch and tell them stories, but we don't really like it... it does give you a funny feeling. Especially when they are getting near the centre, and you hope that there is nothing there.<sup>243</sup>*

In contrast, Jeff Point and the elders Rosaleen George and Elizabeth Herrling feel that there are no good reasons to excavate the dead. Jeff wonders:

*I mean it is kind of odd .I wonder if I went to England and started digging up the coffins. It would upset a lot of people. If it washed out.. by all means pay respect, but there are ways of finding out [ facts about Sto:lo history without excavations] I wonder what the English would think if my people wanted to do a scientific study on them. If the tables were turned, what kind of excuse would they find? I feel that scientific excavation is wrong.<sup>244</sup>*

Once remains are “found,” either through excavation or “serendipitous” means, the debate focuses on testing. Jeff Point feels that testing, while wrong could be done to determine identity or familial ties:

*I actually say ..it should be done. Basically because of what has happened to our people.. it would be good to know whereabouts these people came from. A lot of our people went missing. So actually it is wrong to do thing*

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<sup>242</sup> Charlie, Betty.

<sup>243</sup> Betty Charlie.

<sup>244</sup> Jeff Point.

*like that. But today for today's interest it should be done. To let the family know.*<sup>245</sup>

In contrast, the two elders maintain that any testing is inappropriate and disrespectful. All participants feel that reburial should occur as soon as possible, hopefully within the prescribed four days, as in the burial of the recently deceased. The two women feel that any material that has been removed for testing could be reburied at a later date. Betty

Charlie states:

*There should be a proper ritual, but no boxes and no washing. They should be put back exactly the way they are found except for a new blanket. If there are bones they should be numbered and graphed and put back exactly the way they are found. They should be able to take a piece of bone, like a baby finger. Once it has been dated it should be put back by someone who knows what to do.*<sup>246</sup>

All participants believe that some sort of ritual should accompany the reburial of the human remains. Further, there is agreement that the remains should be handled as little as possible except that they should be rewrapped in a blanket. Jeff Point states: *"I feel that it should be left the way it was found. Leave in that state and rewrap it, because our people wrap loved ones in blankets."*<sup>247</sup> In general the use of a cedar box was not considered essential. Jeff Point comments that the use of the box or coffin is of recent origin and is not a traditional practice.<sup>248</sup>

Although the sample group is small, it is clear that a number of customs which date from the earliest known times are still important. Burnings are still being practiced and are considered to be one of the main ways to interact with the dead. They are a means to both care and show respect for the deceased. Wrapping of bodies, while not

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<sup>245</sup> Jeff Point.

<sup>246</sup> Charlie, Betty.

<sup>247</sup> Jeff Point.

discussed as a separate topic, has been mentioned numerous times during the interviews. Finally, feeding the dead is one of most central practices that maintain the continuity of community between the living and the dead.

...and the skeleton is still waiting in the basement....

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<sup>248</sup> This comment contrasts the evidence found at Tsawwassen discussed in Chapter 1.

## Conclusion

You people keep talking about preserving the past. Can't you see that there is no past. Can't you see that the past is today and the past is tomorrow?<sup>249</sup>

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine the idea of transformation in the burial practices of the Coast Salish people generally and Sto:lo First Nation specifically. This has been accomplished by weaving together two types of narrative, "myth" and "history" that, until recently, have been considered as opposites. The historical philosophy of the late Nineteenth and through much of the 20th Centuries, the periods that have been examined at length in this paper, defined "myth" as a rather fabulous retelling of improbable or heroic events. In contrast, "history" was represented as a sober and factual recitation of events. It is my contention that Western "literate" culture took the myths of the Coast Salish "too literally" and did not see the subtle metaphorical nature that was, and is, central to the nature and relevance of "the story" told through their oral narratives. While these older historical opinions have been replaced by a variety of positions that range from social history to postmodernism, western thought, in general, still affords a more dignified position to "fact" than to "fiction."<sup>250</sup> However, this is a false dichotomy.<sup>251</sup> A philosophy or "style of thought" that is able to incorporate and

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<sup>249</sup> George P. Nicholas & Thomas D. Andrews "Indigenous Archaeology in a Postmodern World," in At a Crossroads: Archaeology and First Peoples in Canada. eds. George P. Nicholas & Thomas D. Andrews (Burnaby: Archaeology Press, 1997),4.

<sup>250</sup> While the Delgamuk decision seemed to overturn the "literal" type of thinking, one need only consider the outcome of the B.C. Treaty referendum of 2002 to see the reemergence of the "literal thinkers."

<sup>251</sup> Cassels Latin-English dictionary (1959 Edition) lists 2 definitions for the word "fabulae." The first is simply a story as told by story teller. The second is analogous to the English word "myth." The first definition, then, could include any oral history such as those told by First Nations peoples, Shakespeare, a poem by Tennyson and Beowulf.

understand the diverse nature of cultural histories can discern the connection and transform the "fables" of one culture into the history of another culture.

The concept of transformation is central to this discussion. As mentioned, the *Halqumeylem* word for great grandfather is the same as great grandson. This suggests both change and continuity and is an apt linguistic metaphor for the combination of tradition and variation that is evident in Coast Salish burial practices. The earliest archaeological evidence is that of midden burials. Middens, themselves, are places of transformation in which goods that have been physically "spent," as far as use by humans is concerned, still have value as a basis of the creation of new resources and for the spirit essence which can be consumed by the ancestors. Archaeological evidence from the more pre-contact period suggests that some villages, most notably those on Pender Island and at Scowlitz, were transformed from places of the living to a necropolis, literally "lands of the dead." The second chapter discusses the changes that occurred during the early years of the colonization. In this case, the transformation was one of style more than substance. In many cases it seems that the Coast Salish were able to translate portions of their rituals into those of the West in a manner that would be acceptable, and possibly even undetectable, to the missionaries sent to eradicate Native spirituality. The third chapter examines the ability of the Coast Salish to innovate yet still preserve some of the original essence of the belief. The Prophet Dance promised a return of the ancestors in a very literal and Western sense. Perhaps the Indian Shaker Church provides one of the most striking examples of innovation. While accepting the basic message of Christianity, the

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Further, the sober recitation presupposes that the audience is not distant from the event being described and has a sympathetic understanding which incorporates the necessary mythic qualities. Many popular histories, such as those incorporated into political

Coast Salish were able to provide their own intercessor in the person of John Slocum. Further, this religion while seeming to eschew shamanic practices, is named for its similarity to a shamanic ritual. In both cases the Coast Salish were able to transform Christian doctrine for their own needs. Finally, in the modern era, the Sto:lo are attempting to transform information from the past into policy for the future.

The concept of continuity is best illustrated by the practice of feeding the dead. There are numerous cultures which have ritually “fed the dead.”<sup>252</sup> It is not only that the Coast Salish and the Sto:lo *have* practiced this in the past, but that this ritual *has* persisted into the modern era despite the perception of a decline in the efficacy of native beliefs due to the direct and indirect influences of Western society. This ritual can be seen as more than a simple rite stressing concern for an individual. The act of eating is a transformative ritual in which the life essence of one being becomes that of another being. Further, food has a cultural significance. For example many First Nations peoples of the Northwest are people of the salmon, while peoples of the Southwest and Central America are people of the corn. These identities are more than superficial and figure directly in the cosmology of these peoples. Feeding the dead, then, serves to express cultural identity and personal connection. While individuals are the “personalities” that are being fed, it is actually the identity of the group that is being accentuated. This is a

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speeches which do not expect to be critically analyzed, rely upon the reader, or audience, accepting their message as “gospel.”

<sup>252</sup> Constance Classens, *Inca Cosmology and the Human Body* (Salt lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 81-95. See this work for a discussion of feeding the dead and the rituals that surrounded this practice in pre-contact Peru. The Incas held a number of beliefs that correlate with those of the Coast Salish. They believed that the connection between the realm of the living and the dead was of primary importance to the living. Further, their belief in the “constuction” of the soul was similar to that of the Salish. Ritual cleansing was also another important part of the mortuary rituals.

means of keeping the world in order at the time surrounding death when the concept of order can be called into question.

The evidence that has been presented in this paper indicates that the relationship between the living and the dead has been important to the Coast Salish for millennia. The depth of this connection is illustrated through an examination of both the archaeological record and the oral histories. The goal of this thesis has been to combine these two different types of knowledge in order to construct a vision of a possible past. The artifacts, unearthed by archaeological and ethnographic work, have been examined much in the fashion that one reads the last page of the novel and must construct the plot of the story from the final clues. The texts of the oral histories have been treated as artifacts with the power to inform these “bare bones” situations described by the physical evidence. To this end, this thesis has detailed the changes that are evident in the form of burial monument while at the same time acknowledging that some aspects of the ritual have persisted.

The significance of death rituals to the Coast Salish was made immediately visible through the fact that midden “cemeteries” were established soon after the Coast Salish settled into villages. These burial places were located close to but not inside the villages and can be seen to have “physically” mirrored the “Land of the Dead” as it was described in narratives. In approximately 1000 BC the Coast Salish practice changed from midden burials to more elaborate interment under mounds and cairns. However, without a “recorded” history, it seems impossible to determine from the archaeological account alone if these changes signaled a shift in religious ideas, were the result of an invasion by aggressive neighbours who imposed their beliefs on the Proto-Salish, or

were produced by cultural changes, such as those speculated by Thom. This type of burial seems to have been an important custom until approximately 500 AD. At this point the archaeological record becomes silent for roughly 1000 years until the time of contact with European culture. This led to the speculation that the Coast Salish began to place their dead in trees as was observed by the early explorers to this region.<sup>253</sup> The religiously motivated actions of missionaries in conjunction with the “greedy” actions of others, such as those who stole grave goods from burials, forced the Salish to modify their burial practices until their form seemed closely aligned to that of the West. Finally, while the Sto:lo of today must comply with details of RCMP investigations, coroners’ reports and municipal by- laws, they are still incorporating age old aspects of their tradition in modern burial practices. Despite the notion that contact with Western culture caused the greatest amount of change, it can be seen that change has been a “constant” yet that many of the central concepts that address the relation between the living and the dead did not change.

Finally, let us return to the skeleton waiting in the basement. In May of 2000, I attended a meeting of the elders council at which the details for the reburial ceremony were being discussed. One of the questions that concerned the elders was that the gender of the person was unknown. As discussed, an important component of the reburial would be the burning. Since this skeleton had not been found in an undisturbed grave and had been removed from the burial site, it was essentially naked and in need of clothing. It was a general feeling that further testing, which could ascertain the gender of the person, was not acceptable as most of the elders felt that the remains had “been through enough.”

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<sup>253</sup>This, however, is pure conjecture. Many other types of interment are possible.

Finally, one elder remarked that this type of testing was unimportant. She suggested that any person today would be happy to wear jeans and a T-shirt. In a very modern response to a traditional question, it was decided that these modern clothes would be burned at the reburial ceremony.<sup>254</sup> Seated amongst the others, wearing cedar clothes or Hudsons' Bay Blankets, is another Sto:lo person dressed in jeans, a T shirt and a baseball cap, enjoying the salmon feast, reunited with the rest of the family, the ancestors and the descendants.

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<sup>254</sup>Lys meeting, May 25, 2000. Notes in possession of the author.

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