

DAUGHTERS OF COPPER WOMAN



Anne Cameron

SONG FOR THE DEAD

The numbers used to introduce the SONG FOR THE DEAD do not come from the matriarchy. The women who memorized family lineage and population died in the epidemics. The only surviving census came from the memorizers of the warrior society; from their perspective, a man had multiple wives, whereas the women memorizers' view was that several women shared one husband.

The warrior society drew its members from the nobility or royalty. Commoners and slaves represented the two other levels of society, and their numbers, like those of the women and children, were also lost.

There were obviously many more people on this island prior to the coming of the European diseases than the SONG FOR THE DEAD records. In view of the deaths of the memorizers, the figures are as accurate a representation as can be made. I believe thousands more people died and their deaths are unrecorded. I regret this.

IN THE 85 years between Captain Cook's visit in 1778 and the Royal Fellowship census in 1863, the Nootka nation was decimated.

The Nitinat once numbered more than 8000 people; less than 35 remained.

Yuquot, once home of 2000 men, their multiple wives, children and slaves, was less than 200.

In Clayoquot Sound more than a thousand warriors, their multiple wives, children and slaves, had been reduced to a total of 135.

Tahsis, with more than 2000 fighting men, their multiple wives, children, and slaves, was shrunk to a total of 60 people.

Civilization brought measles, whooping cough, chicken pox, diphtheria, small pox, tuberculosis, and syphilis.

SONG FOR THE DEAD

*We are beating the drums
and singing the songs
having a great feast for the dead
for our children are gone
and none remain.*

*Come back my nephew we miss you
Come back my daughter we miss you
Come back my son we miss you
Come back our lost ones we miss you*

*Come back we are lonely
Where have you gone
Come back we are lonely
Where have you gone*

*Come back we are weeping
Where have you gone
Come back we are asking
Where have you gone*

*Come back my brother
Come back my sister
Come back my father
Come back my mother*

*We will sing a song for you
We will follow the river to the sea
And add our tears to the waves*

*The tide will rise
The tide will fall
The night will come
The night will go*

*You will not come
You who are gone.*

Where did you go?

*We are singing our sorrow
We are singing our grief
We are singing our farewell
and our puzzlement*

Why did you go?