

The Archaeology of Death and Burial. *Mike Parker Pearson.* College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2000, 250 pp., black-and-white illustrations. \$34.95, paper.

In many ways, this is a curious and intriguing volume. One of the most curious features is the absence of a prefatory chapter that outlines the author's goals. There appear to be several objectives, both theoretical and methodological, that are masterfully woven together about the unifying focus: the archaeology of death and burial. Richly illustrated with case studies and images of archaeological sites and death rituals, this volume is informed by Parker Pearson's extensive knowledge of funeral rites past and present. While most examples are drawn from Britain, case studies range widely from the Lower Paleolithic cave sites in the Sierra de Atapuerca, Spain, to archaeologies of twentieth-century atrocities in Eastern Europe.

The first chapter forcefully makes the point that to properly interpret funerary contexts, the archaeologist must focus upon the mourners, because it is they who create the grave and direct attendant rituals. Thus, Parker Pearson's archaeological approach is contextualized in the multiple realities that are conflated at the time of death, idealized by those conducting the ritual whose representation of the individual may recreate, distort, or deny the roles played by the deceased.

To explicitly ground our appreciation of worldwide diversity, the second chapter examines the interpretative role of ethnographic analogy. Skillfully threaded through this discussion is a history of anthropological thought about death ritual, beginning with the early twentieth-century cross-cultural studies by Hertz and Van Gennep. New archaeological perspectives are introduced and critiqued, with Parker Pearson concluding that the largely American search for middle-range theories was wrongly focused "on *what* people did rather than *why* they did it" (p. 32, emphasis in original). The politics of funerals, including issues of power, ideology, and agency, are then illustrated through analyses of Tandroy monumentalism and twentieth-century British-American traditions.

Theories of the body inform Chapter 3, with emphasis upon the corpse as a multivalent source of information about cosmology and social order. Issues of social order are also treated in the subsequent chapter, "Status, Rank, and Power," which offers insightful critiques of inferential methods employed by the New Archaeologists. Topics currently of high visibility, such as gender, are considered next (Chapter 4), as Parker Pearson focuses upon empowerment and the politics of mortuary ritual. Curiously, the subject of kinship is introduced within this chapter, with the results of nonmetric skeletal trait and aDNA studies highlighted. The wedding of kinship to gender studies appears somewhat disjunctive, but united subtly in that both are subjects that require the archaeologist of death to appreciate that the biological and social personae may not be isomorphic.

That the dead may have power over the living is emphasized in Chapter 6 ("Placing the Dead"), as is the manner in which interment location can inform concerning cosmology and social order. Saxe's Hypothesis 8 and its revisions, which link disposal formality to territoriality, are again examined. Using the

ethnographic example of the Merina (Madagascar), Parker Pearson argues that the formulaic application of H:8 would focus too narrowly upon territory and cemetery formation, thus missing other key social and symbolic linkages between the ancestors and the living.

Considering first the temporality of death, Chapter 7 addresses the ways in which archaeological data can inform concerning existential awareness throughout human history. In so doing, Parker Pearson argues that this information has the power to develop a phenomenological perspective on the human condition as an alternative to “abstracted notions” (p. 145) such as the rise of civilizations, the evolution of social complexity, and ecological adaptation. As he develops his existential human history, Parker Pearson treats a remarkable variety of topics, ranging from cannibalism to mother goddesses to the rise of World Religions. Such perspectives are refreshingly provocative and will doubtless brighten seminars in a variety of subjects, including the History of Religion(s), Ritual Studies, and the Archaeology of Death.

Contemporary politics and the ancient dead, archaeological ethics, looting, and the archaeology of atrocities are united in Chapter 8. Predictably, discussion begins with the Kennewick find and then moves to a more global treatment of ownership of the past and the archaeologist’s responsibilities to living descendants of archaeologically recovered materials. Parker Pearson clearly articulates the postmodern message that studies of the dead, both ancient and modern, must serve the living.

A closing chapter weds very brief and relatively superficial considerations of ritual and of architecture, followed by an appendix that describes methods appropriate for excavating human remains. The appendix has a decidedly Old World flavor, citing examples familiar to European archaeologists. Americans will be reminded that sharing a common language does not always ensure communication when they puzzle over Parker Pearson’s advice to excavate the burial pit near the skeleton in “spits” (p. 201).

In sum, the volume reads like a series of essays, loosely organized around the subject of funerals and mortuary behavior—contemporary and ancient. The epilogue and the appendix are not well integrated, appearing to perhaps have been developed at the insistence of prepublication reviewers. One cannot help but wonder why the subject of architecture was not melded with earlier discussions of monumentality, while ritual could have been treated in concert with the early chapters on funerary treatment. And there are many handbooks on burial excavation that provide suitable guidance for the field archaeologist. More welcome would have been an introductory road map to the volume, as well as a substantive concluding chapter. Even so, this is a very good book, of interest to any student of archaeology and especially significant to those who investigate the history of humankind through funerary archaeology.

Jane Buikstra
University of New Mexico