



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Artefacts for the Dead: Interdisciplinary Explorations

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Abstract: Archaeology and anthropology are closely related disciplines that study human cultures and societies from different perspectives and methods. A crucial connection that binds them is the use of material culture as a source of evidence and interpretation for understanding human behaviours, beliefs, and values. The term material culture refers to the objects that people make, use, modify, and discard in their daily lives. Material culture shows aspects of human life, like technology, economy, politics, religion, art, and identity. The form, function, distribution, and context of material objects are studied by both disciplines to reveal social and cultural meanings. However, material culture is not static, but a dynamic medium that is shaped by communication, negotiation, and transformation, along with external factors like environmental and historical events, and power relations.

Death as a transformation phenomenon is one of the areas in which this complexity between these two fields is most evident. The study of artefacts associated with death and the afterlife, including burials, grave goods, monuments, memorials, and rituals, offer insights into human beliefs and practices. They reveal how the living interact with the deceased and how the dead contributed to the vitality of their communities, as Heraclitus (6th-5th BCE) put it: Living each other's death and dying each other's life. These artefacts are not passive representations; they express, negotiate, and question status, identity, memory, and ideology. Their meanings evolve in social, historical, and cultural contexts.

This session is intended as a forum for researchers working on all types of funerary contexts, without geographical or chronological boundaries. We seek contributions that illustrate the advantages of combining archaeological and anthropological methods, case studies that use an interdisciplinary approach to investigate mortuary practices, burial sites, objects, and rituals. This workshop encourages discussions on the best practices to study this phenomenon through its relevant objects.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 1 | Room 4

Rachel Phillips: Art(efacts) for the Dead: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Early Mycenaean Burials

Giacomo Vizzino: Funerary deposits as a reflection of past societies: analysis of the burials of Alezio and Vaste in the IV-III centuries BC

Lyubov Liski, Tamaz Phutkaradze: Semiotic aspect of funeral artifacts in Georgia grave complexes during the middle ages and their functioning in funeral rites

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 2 | Room 4

Mordechai Zalkin: "Deus de monumento lapis": Epitaphs as a Source for Social Analysis

Ismo Björn, Olga Davydova-Minguet: Finnish Cemetery in a Transnational Era

Artem Ananiev: Home and life in the "other world". The object code of the Mari funeral tradition

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 3 | Room 4

Yuan Zhang: Death Artefacts in Shanxi: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Graves, Kinship, and Memory

Rebecca Sabatini: Exposing mummies: the Capuchin Catacombs of Palermo

Michal Uhrin: Transformation of funeral rituals: Houses of mourning and their influence on the funeral process in rural Slovakia.

SESSION PAPERS

Art(efacts) for the Dead: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Early Mycenaean Burials

Rachel Phillips

The early Mycenaean period, between 1600 and 1400 BCE on mainland Greece, was characterised by ostentatious burial practices. People were buried with hundreds or even thousands of objects, deposited in specific positions on and around the corpse. In this paper, I set out a new 'artistic' approach to these burials, based on the combination of art historical, archaeological, and anthropological methods. This approach, developed in my doctoral thesis, treats the tomb as an intentional and curated composition. Bodies and objects were combined in specific ways to achieve specific effects for the viewer, or in this case, the mourner.

I start from the notion of burial as representation, to ask how death was transformed into perceptual experience within the context of the tomb. I combine this idea with the concept of aesthetics. In recent decades, anthropologists have re-conceptualised

aesthetics in terms of human perception and experience, to shift the focus from the traditional connotations of the term (such as beauty) towards an interest in the use and evaluation of objects. My approach therefore examines the visual and sensory motivations behind the deposition of specific objects with the dead. It emphasises the role of the burial as a creative medium, centred around the deliberate combination of bodies and objects. The body, within this framework, represents another artefact (or artwork) intrinsically associated with death and the afterlife, albeit one that is often overlooked in traditional mortuary studies.

In advocating for an interdisciplinary and artistic approach to burial contexts, this paper offers new perspectives on the role of visual culture in the mortuary sphere more broadly. Although it focuses on the early Mycenaean period as one important case study for this approach, it also demonstrates that similar methods can be productively applied to other time periods and places.

Funerary deposits as a reflection of past societies: analysis of the burials of Alezio and Vaste in the IV-III centuries BC

Giacomo Vizzino

The study of funerary landscapes represents an extremely interesting field of investigation to understand many aspects of past societies.

The resting places for the deceased who inhabited the city represent a space of interaction between the dead and the living, a place of rituals dedicated to the missing members of the community, but also a space of representation and celebration for the living and their families.

The study of necropolises can be considered as the analysis of a planned space: the organization of the spaces reserved for funerary practices, the architectural aspects of the tombs, the methods used for the treatment of the body of the deceased, the actions that took place around the tomb and the body as well as the composition and organization of the grave goods.

The analysis of the grave goods found within the individual tombs represents the tool through which it is possible to evaluate the economy and commercial level of a society, their craftsmanship, their richness of themes and decorations, as well as their contacts with other people.

This work will focus on the study of the funerary areas of the Messapic settlements of Alezio and Vaste, in a chronological period between the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C. with the aim of examining grave goods in detail and intertwining these data with the results coming from the anthropological analysis of some of the deceased. This will allow us to better define the ritual system based on the gender and age differences of the deceased. Furthermore, some structures where public commemorations took place will also be analyzed in order to shed light on the community funeral rituals adopted, together with the environmental and socio-economic aspects of the Messapian population in this historical period.

Semiotic aspect of funeral artifacts in Georgia grave complexes during the middle ages and their functioning in funeral rites

Lyubov Liski, Tamaz Phutkaradze

Any culture is a set of interconnected semiotic systems in which, with the help of heterogeneous codes, information about the picture of the world, ways of relating to the world and life support of a particular ethnocultural community are "encrypted". In archaic and traditional societies, one such way of transmitting information is the "thing code". Any item has several functions: practical, symbolic, and sign function. In a semiotic sense, objects included in the ritual act as signs, and the ritual itself acts as a text. The sign function is the property of a thing to indicate something that is not identical to its material existence (Antonova, Raevsky). In funeral rituals, this property is primarily realized in archaeological artifacts that represent the deceased. From this point of view, in our presentation we consider funeral masks, various coverings for eyes and mouth and burial clothes as doubles of the dead. In the structural-semiotic context, the location of burial goods, in particular jewelry and dishes, in relation to the body in the dichotomy of west-east, top-bottom, sky-earth, left-right has a sign function. The semantics of the spatial code is based on cosmology. Therefore, for a more complete understanding of the functioning of these objects/artifacts in the semantic system of Georgians, we use mythological, ethnographic and folklore material, which gives us examples of mental constructions. Archaeological sources were burial complexes of Adjara (Georgia) during the Middle Ages. Our task is to identify the sign function of funeral artifacts and establish their semantic content, as well as to consider the relationship between the pragmatic and symbolic existence of artifacts and to determine the role of semiotic object in the funeral rite.

"Deus de monumento lapis": Epitaphs as a Source for Social Analysis

Mordechai Zalkin

Cemeteries are perceived in popular culture and consciousness as an intermediate space between two worlds - the earthly and the "heavenly." This perception allows for a sort of continuation, albeit imagined, of the lives of the deceased, with all that implies. This perception also applies in cases where the "cemetery community," not only those who are buried there but also the human community for whom the cemetery served as a final resting place, ceases to exist. It also allows for the consolidation of this community in the collective memory of the ethnic group or the relevant nation. One of the interesting test cases of this perception are the cemeteries of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, which ceased to exist during World War II because of racial laws and the annihilation policy of Nazi Germany.

One of the prominent and meaningful expressions of this phenomenon is the cemeteries gravestone, with its visual, artistic, and most importantly - textual component. The texts of the tombstones in the above-mentioned cemeteries are written in a unique language [in terms of linguistic and structural content] that combines a sort of "dialogue" between the author of the text, the deceased [the

subject of the text], and the visitor to the cemetery. Understanding this "language" requires the use of research tools from the fields of history, linguistics, religious studies, visual arts, sociology, and more. In my lecture I'll present an in-depth analysis of some of these texts which allows for the exposure of a variety of aspects in the world of the society that these cemeteries served.

Finnish Cemetery in a Transnational Era

Ismo Björn, Olga Davydova-Minquet

Finland's transition from a country of emigration to a country of immigration happened relatively late, in the early 1990s. Today, Russian-speaking immigrants form the largest foreign-language group. The majority of Russian speakers originate from Russian areas adjacent to Finland, and their lives in Finland have been characterized by dense transnational and transborder connections with their places and communities of origin. Their death-related practices (e.g., pre-death care, funerary rituals, gravestones) have also been marked by everyday transnationalism. Nevertheless, the Finnish welfare society and state play a leading role in immigrants' death practices.

In our study, we examine Finnish cemeteries through the lens of a changing Finnish society: what ideas and ideologies have shaped Finnish cemeteries and funerary practices, and how they accommodate the present (super)diverse condition. Particular attention is paid to the relationships with Russia and Russianness: how, for example, memories of WWII continue to influence Finnish cemeteries and funerary rites, and how Russian-speaking immigrants express their identities and affiliations through death artifacts and rites. Our theoretical framework draws from death and migration studies, as well as from history and anthropology. We study cemeteries as places of lived (trans)nationalism. The focus of our case study is the border area between Finland and Russia, where cemeteries reflect the complex relationships between Finland and Russia; Finnishness, Karelianness, and Russianness. Through cemetery inventory, observations, and "wandering and wondering," we investigate how these histories and current superdiversity are reflected in the cemeteries of Eastern Finland. In a transnational, multicultural, and changing society, the different commemorative cultures of the cemetery involve adaptation, application, and acceptance, but possibly also unconscious or conscious confrontations. We ask whether the cemeteries are ready to meet the needs of diversifying communities and if it is possible to "immigrate to history" (Rothberg 2014) through a cemetery.

Home and life in the "other world". The object code of the Mari funeral tradition

Artem Ananay

In this report, the author explores the material aspect of the Mari funeral rite through the lens of ethnographic and anthropological data. The study is based on fieldwork conducted in areas where the Meadow and Eastern Mari people of the Republics of Mari El and Bashkortostan reside. In these communities there are residents who

adhere to the traditional Mari religion or are dual believers, who combine Orthodox and pre-Christian practices in their rituals. The expedition work took place in the period between 2022 and 2023. It should be mentioned that the data used in this study is ethnographic sources about funerals belong to the present or recent past. Material objects play important role in the funeral ritual, designed to help the deceased's soul cope with the challenges of the afterlife and make its journey to the "other world" safer. In the Mari culture, death is believed to be a transition to a new state of existence, and the continuation of life in the realm of death. According to local beliefs, certain objects are necessary for the post-mortem existence of the soul. These items include thread, money, food, and other things that serve a symbolic purpose. The author's report examines various material aspects of the funeral ceremony, such as the funeral implements used by family members during the ceremony, as well as the characteristics and significance of the coffin in the cultural context. The author also notes the differences in the way the ceremony conducted by different religious groups of the Mari people: Orthodox Christians and adherents of traditional beliefs. The theoretical aspect of the report draws on the intersection of ethnography and death studies (Borgström E., Ellis J., Harper S., etc.)

Death Artefacts in Shanxi: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Graves, Kinship, and Memory

Yuan Zhang

This paper investigates the complex role of grave goods in the deathscapes of Shanxi, North China. By focusing on the intricate paper effigies and clothes crafted for the deceased, the paper reveals how these funerary artifacts serve as dynamic mediums for expressing, negotiating, and questioning status, identity, memory, and ideology, while forging enduring bonds between the living and the dead.

The paper is structured into three thematic sections, each illuminating different aspects of the grave goods' life cycle. "Crafting Memories" delves into the artisanal processes and symbolic meanings behind the production of paper effigies and clothes, showcasing the skill and creativity embedded in their creation. "Dressing the Dead" explores the emotional labor and material investments involved in personalizing grave goods for departed loved ones, capturing the intimate relationship between the living and the deceased. "Offerings of Remembrance" illustrates the role of these artifacts in mediating grief, gratitude, and connection through the rituals of burning and interment.

Theoretically, the paper engages with debates on materiality, kinship, and memory, tracing the biographies of these objects from workshop to grave. It reveals how these ephemeral artifacts acquire a potent aura of permanence through their ability to concretize intangible bonds between generations, highlighting the entanglements of commodity and kinship, ritual and economy, that animate Shanxi's deathscapes.

By contributing to discussions on the phenomenon of death through its relevant objects, this paper illustrates the advantages of an interdisciplinary approach in investigating mortuary practices, burial sites, and rituals across geographical and chronological boundaries. It reveals how the grave goods in Shanxi's deathscapes emerge as dynamic mediums that evolve in complex social, historical, and cultural

contexts, providing insights into how the living interact with the deceased and how the dead continue to shape the vitality of their communities.

Exposing mummies: the Capuchin Catacombs of Palermo

Rebecca Sabatini

In 1599 the mass grave in which the Capuchin friars of Palermo, Sicily (Italy), used to let the bodies of their deceased brethren rest, according to the rules of the order, was found to be full, and it became necessary to translate the friars to a larger grave. During this relocating operation, the bodies of forty-five friars were found intact and fragrant. This discovery was interpreted as a sign of divine benevolence and miraculous manifestation, triggering the mechanism of relic worship. The forty-five friars were placed in a room dedicated to them and displayed, hanging, in niches along the walls. After this episode the friars developed a thanatopraxis that recreated a similar conservation of the body: a natural mummification technique, based on the desiccation of the bodies in draining rooms, with the aim of keeping intact their aspect and expose them, all dressed up, in the, by this time, very large underground chambers.

Over time, requests for 'burial' at the so-called "Capuchin Catacombs" increased exponentially: the walls initially reserved only for the exponents of the clergy and capuchin order, became also occupied by people with high socio-economic status not belonging to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, who had been granted the privilege of being exposed in these hypogeum corridors. The Catacombs became an institution of great importance and reputation, a microcosm that recreated the structure of Palermo society, a highly desirable post-mortem location, a place where loved ones could visit and pray to free the deceased from the sufferings of Purgatory.

The exhibiting aim of the Catacombs has taken on an additional meaning to the primary religious and cemeterial one. From the time of Grand Tours to nowadays, they have, progressively and consciously, also played the role of a tourist attraction, so much so that today they are mistaken for a museum.

Transformation of funeral rituals: Houses of mourning and their influence on the funeral process in rural Slovakia.

Michal Uhrin

Monuments, burial sites and sacred buildings related to death and funeral rituals are significant places in the life of any religious community. In sociocultural anthropology, the importance of such buildings and the rituals performed in them has been pointed out not only by classics such as Emilé Durkheim, Victor Turner, and Roy Rappaport but also by many contemporary scholars. Sacred buildings, burial sites and monuments are often places where collective rituals are performed and can also function as clusters of dominant and instrumental symbols that evoke strong emotional responses. Another aspect of these objects is that they can function as cognitive anchors, "holding" religious ideas and axiomatic norms, which can affect collective and individual behaviour, ideas and emotional states. This paper presents

a case study based on longitudinal ethnographic research. I will try to show how the construction of buildings such as the House of Mourning modifies the course of funeral rituals, including practices, ideas and the material objects used. The data presented in this paper were collected via long-term ethnographic research in the region of Horehronie in the Slovak Republic, in a village with a majority Roman Catholic population. Based on the analysis of the ethnographic data, it could be argued that the construction of the House of the Mourning fundamentally modifies the course of funeral rituals. The house of mourning not only holds a significant role in the entire funeral cycle of rituals but also can gradually become a cognitive anchor and dominant symbol in the complex symbolism of funeral rituals.