Vestiges of Mortality & Remembrance

A BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF CEMETERIES

by

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Introduction

Archaeological Investigations of Historical Cemeteries: An Introduction to Scholarly Trends and Prospects

1. MORTUARY PRACTICES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Death touches each of us, fixes the liminal and transient elements of our journeys; it is the common direction “where all our steps are tending” (Stannard 1980:19). The universality of death and the social conventions brought to bear on loss focus attention on the significance of mortuary phenomena. Death ritual, with its material and behavioral aspects—the physical vestiges of creation and mortality, and the artifacts of remembrance and memorialization of the survivors—has long been recognized in anthropology as a source of rich information on the nature of life and death, and on the role of the individual, in society (e.g., Hertz 1960 [1907]; van Gennep 1960 [1909]).

Mortuary behavior includes the disposal of the dead, the events and rituals that revolve around the disposal of the corpse, and the processes that allow death to be understood or integrated within the social and psychic structures of the survivors. In sociocultural anthropology, specifically ethnology, the description and interpretation of mortuary and other ritual behavior probe the structures, beliefs, operation, and
transformation of living societies (e.g., Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Kelly and Kaplan 1990; Palgi and Abramovitch 1984). In the history of archaeology, material vestiges of mortuary ritual have been significant in methodological and theoretical developments (e.g., Bartel 1982; Trinkaus 1984). Chapman and Randsborg (1981:3) observed that “the early history of archaeology was very much the history of burial studies.”

Increasingly, archaeologists are investigating historical burial sites, nearly always in response to accidental discoveries or in the course of archaeological surveys undertaken in advance of new construction. The archaeological study of historical cemeteries has brought to light compelling information on death ritual, memorialization, and mortality. Cemetery investigations by archaeologists have uncovered the remains of people from the earliest colonial periods through the 20th century, often providing the only direct evidence of changes in funerary customs, patterns of health and disease, and the development of medical practices.

The archaeological literature furnishes a convincing and frequently poignant dimension to historical studies of mortuary practices. Historical archaeology, with its combined historical, anthropological, and archaeological approaches, has the advantage over purely documentary history in encountering often informatively divergent material assemblages left behind by many social groups, whose past has been misrepresented in written sources or completely lost in the passing of time and memory. Comparisons among cemeteries can detect trends among disparate segments of society, the panoply of cultural traditions and genetic affinity that characterize the Modern world.

Encountering remains of none too distant ancestors regularly generates publicity and sparks controversy because of the moral consensus that sepulcher should be inviolate. Over twenty-five years ago, Noël Hume (1969:158) surmised that archaeological excavations of historical, especially Christian, graves were “much more trouble than they are worth.” Prior to the Native American rights movement in the 1970s, only the excavation of non-Native American remains carried the “disadvantages” of bringing “all hell down on the archaeologist” (Noël Hume 1969:159, 160). Insensitive to or unaware of living Native peoples’ cultural traditions and religious concerns, archaeologists commonly excavated Native American burial sites. In the intervening years since Noël Hume’s authoritative guide to historical archaeology was published, the constituency for protecting and repatriating Native American remains became politically successful. The violation of an individual’s grave is spiritually disturbing among many Native people and the unequal treatment and variable legal protection of Native graves compared with all other peoples’ remains led to revisions of cemetery and archaeological laws.

While mandating against the unencumbered excavation of burial sites that proliferated in American archaeology up to the 1970s, recent laws and policies on cemeteries in fact provide more opportunities for the protection and investigation of cemeteries. Although laws and policies on cemeteries vary among jurisdictions, the trend has been to extend historic preservation laws to mandate consultation with descendants, culturally affiliated groups, and other interested parties; to require archaeological excavation of threatened graves, rather than removal by morticians; and to prescribe timely analyses of human remains prior to curation or repatriation. In Massachusetts, for example, the State Archaeologist investigates accidental discoveries of human remains in unmarked graves that are 100 years old or older, in consultation with the Massachusetts Commission on Indian Affairs for remains of Native Americans. The Massachusetts law sets a standard to pursue all prudent and feasible options for preserving the burial in situ, mandates archaeological investigation of graves that cannot be protected, and allows for analysis of remains before disposition (Simon 1988; Talmage 1982). Many states have adopted similar laws based on the Massachusetts example (Price 1991; Simon and Talmage 1989).

Passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (25 U.S.C. 3001-3013 [1990]) codified consultation with Native American tribes when remains and funerary objects are found on federal or Indian lands or held in federally assisted institutions. The
Act also established a funding program to inventory collections of cemetery material, and a process for the timely repatriation of Native American remains and funerary objects. Federal law does not currently offer non-Native cemeteries similar protections, nor does the current federal law extend to privately owned lands. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f [1992]) allows cemeteries on both private and public lands to be considered as historic and archaeological resources in projects with federal agency involvement.

On one hand, with the passage of protective legislation on state and federal levels, the disinterment of human remains of whatever social or temporal context is less likely to be treated sanguinely. On the other hand, project planners have and will continue to appropriate burial places for development and unmarked graves will continue to be inadvertently discovered during construction projects. Social prohibitions and legal mandates that aim to protect and preserve mortuary sites and repatriate human remains and funerary objects have paradoxically created both limitations and opportunities for archaeology. In many cases, once a burial is accidentally exposed to modern eyes and its integrity is jeopardized, the archaeologist’s trowel and brush are seen in kinder light than is a mortician’s backhoe (Sprague 1989). Exacting archaeological excavation, documentation, and recovery techniques are favorably viewed as the first step in restoring a burial place that has been, in John Peters’ words, “devastated spiritually and culturally” by the intrusion of activities incompatible with sepulcher (quoted in Kenny 1993). As Yentsch (1987) cogently observed, archaeologists perform an important function in society by mediating between the living and the remains of the dead.

Disparate parties are often brought together to mediate disputes regarding burial sites: landowners, government agencies, tribal representatives, ethnic groups, archaeologists, museum administrators, private citizens, business interests, and attorneys. Goldstein and Kintigh (1990) recognize the importance of case-by-case negotiation between interested parties to resolve disputes on excavation, analyses, and repatriation or curation. Restrictive conditions imposed on the period allowed for analyses (e.g., immediate reburial) do not offer propitious opportunity for detailed study of remains (Rathbun 1989; Wesolowsky 1990, 1991). With diplomatic negotiation emphasizing respectful treatment of remains and the potential contribution of the data, interested parties will often allow for appropriate study. Archaeologists need to come to the table well-informed on the research values of cemetery data in context of previous studies to better advocate for appropriate research, and we must be able to translate research values to the interested public.

As burial sites research is under greater scrutiny than ever, we have to better communicate our proposals and results to our constituencies. We need to learn another language, to be flexible in mentally and verbally “negotiating” between many partners. This is not to suggest that negotiators have to adopt another worldview, but we must be willing to listen to and respect alternative views if negotiation can proceed in good faith. Worldviews about the dead may be at variance with our perceptions of time, causality, and corporeality: Western tradition lacks an appropriate verb tense for an historically present eternity. “The spiritual journey of the dead is interrupted when ancestral graves are disturbed and bones removed from their resting places. Spirits of the ancestors thus disturbed can harm tribal communities” (Parker 1990:43). Ritual knowledge is necessary to encounter the spirits, extend protection to those in spiritual proximity or contact, and restore the balance where and when living people and spirits coexist. Acknowledgment and respect for the spiritually “heated” state of human remains and funerary objects are necessary to ensure the safety of ancestors, descendants, and outsiders (Pollard 1993). Demonstrating the value of archaeological cemetery data, for all of our constituencies, will enable scholars and preservation agencies to make a better case for thorough and well-conceived research that accommodates the views, values, and needs of many people. Valuable guidelines for communication, negotiation, and accommodation have recently been offered by Leone and Preucel (1992) and Kiesert and Powell (1993).

Archaeologists can contribute technical expertise to identify,
meticulously excavate, and preserve burial sites and funerary objects; provide "biohistories" of the individuals and populations whose remains we handle; draw upon our anthropological roots when encountering the beliefs, interests, and sociopolitical actions of interested groups; and encourage our constituencies to ask us questions we can address about their past. Within our research programs, archaeologists must consider whether the implications and effects of our research findings advance "partisan political goals at odds with the aspirations [and survival] of indigenous peoples" (Layton 1989:2).

The recent political trends placing greater restriction on the excavation and curation of at least Native American cemetery material, however, have caused a few archaeologists to consider and address the subtextual context and context of the research (e.g., Layton 1989). In critically examining research programs, scholars may address the nature of bias both in the data sample and in the historical treatment of groups based on socioeconomic or political power. Burial sites historically associated with socially, economically, or politically marginal groups—African-Americans, Native Americans, and institutional populations—are more frequently disturbed and subject to archaeological investigation than those cemeteries that are historically affiliated with more socioeconomically and politically established groups. This bias creates a scholarship characterized in another context as "a profound discourse of colonialism" (Handsman 1992). The selective preservation of historical cemetery landscapes associated with the powerful functions to commemorate ancestry while creating a mythical historical precedent for hegemony, subjugation, and segregation (e.g., Blakey 1990; Hall 1988; Leone 1981; Schuyler 1976; Yentsch 1988). Several encouraging research programs have involved living descendant populations. McBride (1990) is fulfilling a cooperative endeavor with the Pequot Nation in the excavation and analysis of a threatened 17th-century Pequot cemetery in Connecticut. The investigations, funded by the Mashantucket Pequot tribe, recovered a significant collection of Native-manufactured items. Tribal craftsmen are creating replicas of funerary objects and in the process have rediscovered long-forgotten decorative motifs and craft technologies.

Beyond that, it appears that information passed between the archaeologists and the Mashantucket Pequot has instilled a deeper sense of the history and continuity in their reservation land.

By and large, archaeological investigations have occurred at cemeteries abandoned and obscured from public memory—the result of the displacement of families and populations who no longer have the ability to protect, visit, or maintain the burial sites of their kin. Preservationists know that cemeteries that are routinely visited are less likely to deteriorate or be vandalized. The circumstances that lead to the accidental discovery of forgotten cemeteries, or threats to graves by new development or vandalism, could also be considered in light of the generally 20th-century trend called the "denial of death" (Farrell 1980). Beginning in the 19th century, death became a social taboo, and the dead were literally and figuratively distanced so that they became removed from consciousness, from home to the hospital to the funeral home. Perhaps this distancing of the living from the dead had a small role in the abandonment and forgetting of burial places. While the taking of cemeteries for other uses was not limited to the 20th century, perhaps also the denial of death allows cemeteries to be appropriated for development, vandalized, and, indeed, excavated.

Archaeological investigatory techniques have been used to address concerns that graves are located in areas slated for development. Typically, these concerns involve regulatory agencies, landowners, Native American or other groups whose ancestors' graves might be present, and individuals otherwise interested in or opposed to proposed development projects. Surface evidence such as piles of stones, mounds or hillocks, certain kinds of vegetation, or suspicious markers have been brought to archaeological attention, and have required systematic evaluation to determine whether or not graves are present (e.g., Elia 1991; Hoffman 1990; Leveillee, et al. 1987; Moeller 1987; Mowchan, et al. 1989).

While more criminal science than historical archaeology, archaeological and forensic techniques have been used during criminal investigations, including cases of tomb vandalism (e.g., Sigler-Eisenberg 1985; Nicholas F. Bellantoni, pers. comm. 1993; Michael F. Gibbons,
pers. comm. 1993). Infamous historical crimes have been investigated through archaeological and forensic methods (Dickerson 1993; Miller 1993). The techniques have also been applied to uncover politically motivated crimes against humanity in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, El Salvador, and Iraq (Browne 1992; Golden 1992; Clyde Collins Snow, pers. comm. 1993). Snow was instrumental in training anthropologists in forensic and archaeological methods to document the brutal execution of victims of political repression and identify “disappeared” persons. The important work of Snow and his colleagues, considered in its tense sociological and political context, is instructive for the parallels to the practice of the historical archaeology of cemeteries. Socioeconomically and politically marginal groups observe or participate in the excavation and reinterment of their relatives or ancestors. In both situations, a concealed, or at least forgotten past is uncovered and publicized. The survivors of that past, or at least their descendants, suffer a liminal state when the dead are sociologically reintroduced, and ritual activities are performed—press conferences, funeral ceremonies—to mark the occasion of their excavation and reinterment.

2. AVENUES OF INQUIRY
IN MORTUARY ARCHAEOLOGY

The complexity of mortuary data demands the contributions of various disciplines and practices. Research teams regularly include specialists in history, cultural and physical anthropology, archaeology, geography, material culture studies, and the adjunct biological and chemical sciences. Several scholars have applied admirably innovative research designs to historical cemetery data, demonstrating the effectiveness of comparative and synthetic mortuary studies. Such well-conducted research programs provide the impetus for this review. The interpretive value of historical mortuary sites depends upon casting our nets wider to integrate the results of previous cemetery studies, to refine methods, and to more explicitly apply conceptual models. More frequent demands for archaeological study of historical cemeteries encourage a compilation and review of the growing literature on the subject.

Introduction

The capacity of archaeology to make the most of the incomplete cultural information at its disposal should support optimism and confidence in conducting archaeological mortuary research, even in the face of changed circumstances. As it is no longer acceptable to undertake excavations at non-threatened cemetery sites, archaeologists need to make the best use of available cemetery data and take full advantage of the rare opportunities for new excavations. Historical mortuary sites have exceptional and unique research potential, but are a fount of information not often fully tapped. The quality and scope of cemetery studies vary widely because of differing legal and regulatory controls; degrees of commitment to fund appropriate research efforts; the often pressing circumstances of unmarked burial discoveries during construction; and occasional professional mediocrity.

Much of the recent archaeological cemetery research is conducted within the framework of cultural resource management (CRM). CRM is concerned with activities by private parties or government agencies that may affect historic and archaeological resources. CRM developed as a result of historic preservation laws and regulations to identify and evaluate historic and archaeological resources in a proposed project area, and to implement steps to avoid or mitigate adverse effects to significant cultural resources. For cemetery sites that cannot be avoided, mitigation requires archaeological excavation, analysis, and reporting of the results. CRM suffers from ineffective local, state, and federal planning mechanisms to protect cultural resources; from variable legal or regulatory jurisdiction over new construction projects; from uneven authority of regulatory agencies to review and enhance archaeological research designs; from underfunding that limits research and fieldwork; and from the tight scheduling of concurrent and sequential investigations. In contrast to planned mitigation, true salvage projects occur when burials are discovered, investigated, and recovered after being impacted by construction activities or vandalism. Archaeological surveys can locate and identify unmarked cemeteries early in the planning stages of a project, preventing costly delays while salvage efforts are undertaken when a project has advanced so far that avoiding graves is no longer feasible.
Most archaeological cemetery reports are unpublished and the archaeological community and our constituencies are largely unaware of the full benefit of previous research results, a situation that does not allow comparative and complementary research pursuits. Lacking a cost-effective way to access the literature, researchers reproduce patterns of investigation, hindering synthesis and advancement in the field. Some investigations are ahistorical, lacking a firm grounding in the site-specific or comparative sociocultural historical contexts. Many studies have been conducted within an unexamined, narrow, rank-obsessed, functionalist framework borrowed from prehistorians and uncritically applied to historical sites. All these problems result in the production of archaeological research that is unsophisticated, confiningly particularistic, and largely, but not irretrievably, incomparable.

Archaeological research on historical cemeteries may be approached through theoretical orientations, and placed within several broad subject areas: archaeological locational techniques and field methods; material culture studies (including cultural landscapes, grave markers, and artifacts from the grave); physical anthropology; and contributions to the history and ethnography of deathways. Selected citations in each of the following sections illustrate various approaches and directions. The next section of this introduction discusses theoretical orientations—epistemological issues relating to anthropological and archaeological interpretive models used to organize and understand material and behavioral aspects of mortuary ritual. Subsequent sections discuss archaeological approaches to cemetery sites by subject area.

3. THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

It is necessary to discuss theoretical orientations in historical mortuary archaeology because the practice of studying and organizing archaeological information arises from, is wholly dependent upon, epistemological positions. Theoretical positions are treated here in general terms, recognizing that characterizing approaches, e.g., as “functionalist,” or “postprocessualist,” simplifies the history of intellec-

tual development. More detailed, and far more accomplished historical overviews of theoretical issues in mortuary archaeology, and the relationship of these issues to archaeology in general, have been written by, e.g., Bartel (1982), Chapman and Randsborg (1981), Hodder (1982, 1985), Stahl (1993), and Watson and Fotiadi (1990). The purpose here, nevertheless, is to point toward scholarly precedent in applying archaeological theory to historical cemetery sites. This section of the essay touches upon the problematic reliance in American archaeology on paradigms, developed for preindustrial societies, to explain material vestiges of historical mortuary ritual. In practice, these models are often applied to historical cemeteries without consideration of cultural and taphonomic factors that affect the archaeological visibility of mortuary assemblages—the links between the context of the behavior that created the assemblages and the preserved remains available for study. Alternative paradigms are offered that draw upon social and cognitive anthropology, critical theory, and historical ethnography to interpret material remains of mortuary ritual.

a. Descriptive approaches to historical cemeteries

The archaeological study of historical burial sites, at least in the United States, was taking place well before the development of historical archaeology as a distinct discipline. Having its most certain roots in American anthropology and prehistoric archaeology, theoretical perspectives of American historical archaeology parallel those of its parent disciplines. Graves from the historical period have been excavated by archaeologists trained in anthropology and prehistory, chiefly concerned with the Native American past, although the graves of other groups were also investigated in the formative years of historical archaeology (e.g., Farver 1957). Noël Hume's (1969) pessimism on the value of historical cemetery excavation reflected the modest prospects of descriptive and reconstructive goals at that time. Archaeological cemetery investigations were initially limited to the description, documentation, classification, and chronology of material culture (e.g., Swauger 1959; Witthoft 1951). Archaeological and documentary information was collected and compared to reconstruct
historical events. Funerary objects, for example, were used as a window through which to view the timing of contact and acculturation by noting the adoption of European material culture by indigenous groups (e.g., Quimby 1939, 1966). Analyses of skeletal material were often limited to identifying race, sex, age, and pathology or trauma, and were frequently relegated to appendices of reports (Bumsted 1980).

b. Functionalist approaches to historical cemeteries

The late 1960s saw a transformation in the theoretical orientation of American archaeology. The field rediscovered the utility of evolutionary models of cultural processes, emphasizing environmental and social conditions that place adaptive pressures on populations. Material culture was seen to function in the adaptation of cultures to ecological and social environments. Artifacts primarily served technological, social, or ideological purposes. Mortuary assemblages at prehistoric burial sites were used to infer social organization, such as rank or status differentiation in hierarchically arranged societies. Grave goods helped to interpret descent or affinity groups, to study trade or migration, and to elucidate details of "emic" belief systems (Bartel 1982; Tainter 1978; Trinkaus 1984). Analyses of skeletal material were integrated with archaeological mortuary studies, as biological anthropology fit tightly within the evolutionary and adaptive paradigm. Approaches that grew out of this "New Archeology," have been labeled (e.g., by Hodder 1982) as "functionalist" or "processualist," because behavior and cultural material are viewed as interdependent with social and ecological systems.

Generally, functionalist approaches to mortuary sites search for material clues of rank or status differentiation or social role, to describe and explain the social structure of cultural systems. Historical archaeologists using functionalist models typically approach gravestones (for examples, see Horvath 1975), decorative coffin hardware (for examples, see Bell 1990a), or other associated funerary objects to infer the status of their subjects, to discern ethnic "markers" of mortuary behavior, or to evaluate prehistoric typological models of diffusion and change in the formal, stylistic characteristics of artifacts (e.g., Deetz and Derlese 1965).

Archaeologists who have applied functionalist models to historical mortuary sites have drawn on the pathbreaking volume, Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices, edited by Brown (1971), especially the article by Binford (1971), and Saxe's (1970) dissertation (cf. Bartel 1982; Buikstra 1990). Interpretive difficulties in functionalist approaches to mortuary sites in general arose from what Tainter (1980:121) characterized as an "extensive reliance archaeologists place on grave associations," echoing Brown's (1971) call for more rigorous studies that place the description and explanation of grave-associated artifact assemblages within the larger social context. Buikstra (1990) recognized in several studies the importance of taking into account the "filters" between the observers of the archaeological record and the cultural and natural processes that created archaeological deposits (what has become known as "middle-range theory") as well as our ability to comprehend significant variability in patterns of material culture. Braun (1981) evaluated the difficulty of operationalizing functionalist approaches using complex descriptive statistics, while Tainter's (e.g., 1981) work remains the most explicit and ambitious approach in this regard.

Archaeological approaches to historical cemetery data have largely drawn on functionalist or processual trends in American archaeology, skeletal morphology, dental health, and traumatic injuries, as affected by changing health care practices, improved nutrition, and ethnic admixture" (Owsley 1990:171). Undoubtedly, Angel's work encouraged a generation of physical anthropologists in studies of historical skeletal series.
even if the praxis was not explicated. The application of models
developed for prehistoric mortuary sites to sites dating from the historic
period is understandable in the historical context of American archae-
ology. But as Beaudry (1988) pointed out, the differences in scale of
cultural phenomena between Modern and earlier societies are enor-
mous; historical archaeologists would pursue more interesting research
by developing their own models of relevance (Beaudry, et al. 1991).

Archaeologists have not been successful in applying functionalist
models to historical cemeteries for two reasons (Bell 1987, 1990a). First,
many studies do not take into account the same interpretive
difficulties addressed by modern pioneers of mortuary archaeology to
explicitly address the social context of mortuary practices, to apply
middle-range theory, and to define culturally significant artifact pat-
tens. Second, historical mortuary assemblages do not seem to be
analogous to “grave goods” or “status symbols” encountered in
preindustrial societies. Status symbols are generally regarded as “exotic
material items” (Tainter 1978:120) requiring a great energy expendi-
ture to acquire or produce, and presumably restricted to an elite faction.
Historical mortuary assemblages, often consisting simply of decorative
coffin hardware, religious paraphernalia, personal offerings, or attire,
cannot be easily construed within this category of material goods. The
functionalists’ élan for searching out panchronal status markers may
stem from our own doggedly competitive milieu. The more explicit
models of rank derived by prehistorians are in fact drawn from
behavioralist management and organizational theories, originally de-
veloped to describe hierarchical capitalist structures in bureaucratic
and industrial settings (e.g., Braun 1981:399).

Functionalist gravestone studies at times have incorporated ill-
defined or unexamined intuitive assumptions about formal or stylistic
attributes that are presumed to indicate status (Horvath 1975). (How
does our notion of “status” compare to that of the people responsible
for a monument? Does documentary evidence support that a particular
decedent was in a “high status” group at his or her death?) This,

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together with not accounting for the natural and cultural transforma-
tions in the surviving sample of funerary monuments, skews the
reliability of functionalist gravestone studies. Compounding the issue
is whether “status” can be separated as a causal rather than a contrib-
uting factor in the form and style of a funerary monument. As Thomas
(1988:115) concluded in his overview of mortuary variability in 16th
and 17th-century Spanish Florida, “it is clear that simplistic categori-
zations such as ‘high status’ and ‘low status’ serve to obscure consider-
ably more than they clarify.” Deetz (1991) recently pondered that the
application of Occam’s razor (the principle that the simplest explana-
tion is probably correct) to cultural behavior will often lead to
misperception of the variety and complexity of personal and cultural
practices. Geertz (1973:34) turned to Alfred North Whitehead’s
admonition to “Seek simplicity and distrust it,” to further suggest that
cultural interpreters “seek complexity and order it.”

As applied to coffin hardware and other artifacts or features at
historical cemeteries, functionalist, status-seeking interpretive frame-
works need to take into account the social context of mortuary
practices. The archaeological representation of mortuary assemblages
is the result of a complex of circumstances: chronology in the appear-
ance, supply, demand, and technological development of coffin hard-
ware; availability of burial insurance or the pooling of resources to
purchase a finer casket or grave marker than might otherwise be had;
consumer preference; ethnic differences in incorporating the objects
with funeral rituals; circumstances surrounding the time and place of
death; and the constraints of the institution or individuals responsible
for burial. The factors that resulted in a particular assemblage are not
always amenable to study or even observable, and such information
tells little about the cultural significance or emic meaning of the
assemblage. We are reminded again that only vestigial portions of a
group’s deathways are encountered archaeologically, and consider-
ation of context is necessary to understand what remains, what does
not, and why.
Physical evidence of poor nutrition, health, and hygiene, and of trauma, violence, and heavy labor, appears in the skeletal series at many of the sites where high rank of individuals has been inferred from decorative coffin hardware (Bell 1990a). Understanding the development of mass marketing and mass consumption as a way to bridge real socioeconomic distance by relying on cheap but affordable symbols of wealth (decorative coffins or elaborate memorials) also suggests why poor or socially disenfranchised people used similar embellishments. The nature of mass consumption points to the larger issue of socioeconomic distance between classes. "Buying into" the illusion that coffin hardware indicated real elevated economic status actually masks the facts of economic disparity. While I certainly do not encourage historical archaeologists to cease characterizing the social and economic status of their study groups, I believe that assessing the socioeconomic position of our subjects should only be a point of departure, not an end in itself. I agree with Trinkaus (1984:674) insofar as recognizing that "patternning of mortuary remains reflects separation of an individual from the community and reinforces the intactness of the community despite loss of a member. In the process, the roles, or the social persona, of the individual are defined, as are the relations of living members to the deceased," at least that persona at death. The appeal of Trinkaus' view is its holistic approach to mortuary assemblages within the context of the social function of ritual behavior. It is a position that looks to social anthropology for understanding the function of social identity in ritual practice.

 Whereas the uneven or unsuccessful application of functionalist models is a problem of performance and methodology, a more fundamental problem is of course the epistemological limitations of processual archaeology. It has become increasingly clear (e.g., Wylie 1981) that processual archaeology was a reaction to what was originally (and mistakenly) called the "empiricist" or "inductivist" practice of archaeology. Criticisms of classificatory-descriptive archaeology included its lack of an explicit epistemology or social theory, and its reliance on conventionalism, authority, or precedent to evaluate the plausibility of assertions about the past. Processual archaeology was originally conceived within an untenable logical positivist approach, a method of testing statements deductively through falsification and by reference to empirical observations under which those statements are logically covered or subsumed. Because logical positivism relies on uniformitarian principles, when applied to human behavior it becomes deterministic, essentially antihumanistic, and given to deriving trivial and ahistorical "laws" of behavior. Unaware of the empirical/ideational dialectic between object and observer, processual archaeology failed to consider that interpretations are grounded in subjective constructions of meaning. Processual archaeology tended to be discordant with or uninterested in the active role of the individual in society or in the role and emic meaning (in contrast to mere "technomic" functions) that artifacts possess in society. Processual archaeology was teleological in viewing cultures and societies as operating in a simplistic reactive manner to internal and external forces, and its practitioners applied systems theory in a diachronically descriptive, operational manner without producing a synchronic explanation of social change (Hodder 1985). Finally, although processualist archaeology was epistemologically flawed in its approach to human behavior, it benefited the field by turning attention to explicit empirical methods of observation, description, and analysis, to context, and to the consideration of epistemology in archaeology.

c. Postprocessual approaches to historical cemeteries

 In the past decade, new models of relevance, appealing to cognitive, symbolic, and structuralist approaches, Marxist dialectical materialism, and critical theory have been sought to overcome the epistemological and theoretical limitations of processualist mortuary archaeology. Just as the rubric "New Archeology" was eventually undescrptive, "postprocessual archaeology" is unsatisfactory for the unity it suggests. What postprocessualist approaches have in common is the acknowledgment of the often contrary material responses in human behavior that may be irrational, maladaptive, or discordant. Cultural material
and behavior may serve to legitimate, perpetuate, or reinforce social structures and social identity, or serve to repudiate or resist those same structures (Hodder 1985). Critical theorists would add that the histories we build are actively used and reinvented. Characteristic of postprocessual approaches to cognition and social action, overt references to tradition, genealogy, and historical events are recognized in rituals and brought to the analytic fore (cf. Kelly and Kaplan 1990; Trinkaus 1984).

Parker Pearson (1982) studied 19th and 20th-century mortuary practices in Cambridge, England, using documentary and material information on funeral expenses that varied among economic and occupational groups. Utilizing a dialectical materialism outlined in the first part of his study, Parker Pearson was able to connect material changes in mortuary ritual to urbanization, class structure, and competition, to health and hygiene, and to nationalism. Parker Pearson's conclusions suggested several provocative propositions relating to mortuary ritual. Material expressions of ritual may not embody actual social roles or "status," but may idealize power relations. Power relations may be concealed or manifested through ritual behavior that refers to or borrows from a real or imagined past. By citing historical precedent, ritual processes thus call upon the observers to recognize legitimacy. Funeral ritual can thus consolidate, legitimate, or disavow social roles and power or powerlessness through the (re)creation of "history." In this light, a purely functionalist search for "status" among graves was demonstrated to be a problematic endeavor (Parker Pearson 1982; cf. Cannon 1989 and Okely 1979, among others, who have reached similar conclusions regarding the complexity of rank indicators in historical mortuary contexts).

Through the "demystification" of history, however, postprocessualist models can mystify chronology and subtly exclude the active participation of various social groups in the larger culture. Historical cultural contexts are considered almost as an afterthought. Cultural activities are treated as a reaction to external supracommunity events or as a narrowly framed resistance to domination; differences among ethnic groups and classes are viewed competitively. The dominant ideology thesis can reductively cast a unidimensional intention on a plural past, a "narrow and a priori" definition of power in society as overdetermined and intrinsically inimical to volition, creativity, or intentionality" (Beaudry 1990:115). Ironically, the dialogue is once again weighted toward the dominant group and not the social margins where diversity and variability are most pronounced. Blakey's (1990) exegesis of the skewed representations of Native American, African-American, Asian-American, and European-American histories reveals an underlying bias among scholars focused on dominant ideologies. Blakey indicates that groups that had not or have not yet entered the socioeconomic or political mainstream are often portrayed as "ethnic," having separate histories, underscoring and justifying their present segregated state, or implicitly suggesting they should be segregated once again. Such groups, Blakey notes, are often depicted as passive recipients of cultural information and material, yet their contributions to society as a whole, and the interplay and conflict in relation to more powerful groups, are concealed. There are many studies that measure "status" alongside the accumulation of material culture, precious few that show how that status was wielded in society, and fewer still that try to understand why certain material forms weren't embraced by groups (e.g., Stewart-Abernathy 1992). A more nearly emic-based, deeply contextualized approach to mortuary artifacts found in the writings of contemporary anthropologists (e.g., Crosby 1988; Whelan 1991) and social historians (e.g., Pike and Armstrong 1980) allow multiple and complementary models of relevance to guide interpretation. In the case of mortuary contexts, personal, group, and cultural expressions of grief, of identity, or of ritual may be viewed as active contributions of ethnic or working-class funerary ritual and display to the larger cultural milieu of death in America.

One would hope that recent social anthropologies of mortuary ritual would find substantive directions in the historical archaeology of cemeteries. Sadly, this is not the case. The revised edition of Metcalf and Huntington's (1991) otherwise distilled and provocative review of social anthropological mortuary study is altogether dismissive of archaeology. The authors have an odd take on processual archaeology
as predominantly concerned with the reconstruction of past societies. More accurately, processualists focused on the explanation of cultural processes, a reaction to mere descriptive-classificatory “reconstructive” pursuits and to interpretation absent an explicit theoretical or empirical base. The authors reductively cast postprocessualists as frozen by the realization that science is irredeemably subjective and inseparable from political action, and give only a brief nod toward cognitive approaches as “more stimulating,” if “opportunistic” in generalizing about cultural process (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:14-18). History does not fare well in their treatment, either:

analytic goals and premises go unstated. At the same time there is no common understanding of them, so that studies do not much relate to one another. Historians generally do not share basic theoretical tenets, beyond the professionalism involved in scholarly use of written sources. Instead they make a virtue out of devising interpretive frameworks ad hoc, by common sense criteria. In the last couple of decades, the retreat from positivism has moved anthropology away from sociology and closer to history. But anthropologists have a century of experience in the pitfalls of “common sense” explanations of cultural differences, and the suspicion with which we regard unconscious narrative still divides us from the historians (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:21).

It is not clear whether these narrow and curious views of archaeological and historical contributions to deathways are the result of a superficial survey of the literature, or merely strawmen designed to dismiss critical reviews of the earlier edition of the work (Huntington and Metcalf 1979), and get back to the matter at hand: the contextually meaningful, yet strikingly common ritualized and symbolic treatment of death and the corpse; and (if not pan-culturally explanatory in the forms of ritual behavior), the forces of emotion and cognition, sorrow and fear, in understanding the performance of funeral ritual in general. I would grant, initially, that “[c]ollective representations [of death sense Durkheim] are after all, as difficult to excavate as beliefs” (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:15), but material vestiges of mortality and remembrance in fact embody cognition, emotion, and practices of ritual behavior. Approached from an emic context, material remains are symbolically and meaningfully discernible, through, e.g., textual analyses of documentary sources that Beaudry (1988) describes—not merely the passé mechanistic practice of distant ethnographic analogy Metcalf and Huntington (1991:17-19) believe is so heavily relied upon in current archaeology. Stahl (1993) recently provided a significant critique of analogical reasoning in archaeological, historical, and anthropological practice. Metcalf and Huntington (1991:19) in fact appear to be aware of the value of textual analysis (though they do not use that term—“a close reading” is used instead), but cite merely one study (Hantman 1990) as a favorable example of “close analogy” used for “reconstructive studies.” While aware “that reconstruction is not the only, or even the principle, goal of archaeologists,” all else they apparently gathered from their readings is that “[m]any retain a primary interest in tracing long-term sequences of culture change,” finally concluding that “here again the contrast between archaeology and social anthropology is obvious” (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:19).

In my view, whether or not social scientists ever directly or objectively “observe” emotion or cognition is an open question; we see, in fact, the effects of that emotion or cognition, be they behavioral or material, per se. While I do not emphasize in this essay or the bibliography the literature on bereavement1, as it most pertains to mid- to late 20th-century societies and largely concerns psychology, archaeologists are interested in the interpretation and explanation of behavior, cognitive and otherwise. In the culturally heated area of death and mourning, emotion is not easily ignored, though both Palgi and Abramovitch (1984) and Kan (1992) have faulted recent ethnog-

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1Harrah and Harrah (1976) and Jackson (1977b) are good beginning guides to the literature on bereavement, which has since burgeoned into a new field of "grief counseling."
raphies of deathways for so doing. Ariès' (e.g., 1982) sweeping treatments of death in Western tradition incorporated grief; however, like Ottmer and Kelley's (1990:20) recollections of Angel's lectures, Ariès' monumental syntheses of historical sources are "a legend of complexity beyond the reach of most mortals." Rosenblatt's (1983) study of 19th-century North American diaries in light of 20th-century theories on grief is one way to integrate bereavement in historical terms without losing perspective on personality and context. Clearly, some cross-disciplinary reading is in order if we are to approach a study of culture that aims toward interpretation (reconstruction, if you will), comparison, and explanation to approach an understanding of ritual in the functioning of societies and the longue durée of cultural change.

A satisfying perspective on ritual, history, and the practice of ethnography has also been drawn out by Kelly and Kaplan (1990). Ritual may be a symbolizing method of communication; a description of what is done or required; a way of ordering or explaining events ("history"); and/or a force for social stability or change through the legitimization of, or resistance to, hegemony. "[R]ituals in ongoing practice are a principal site of new history being made. ...[A] history of rituals is a history of reproduction, contestation, transformation, and...deconstruction of authority" (Kelly and Kaplan 1990:141). It is in such a holistic perspective, where even convoluted or anti-structural behavior is meaningful if ironic, that the observation of ritual practice and the practice of observing cultural phenomena may meld.

Historical archaeologists have questioned the use of mortuary artifacts to unidimensionally infer status and instead interpret mortuary behavior within popular cultural traditions drawn out through documentary and other historical sources. Note especially that in the work of Bell (1987, 1990a), Cannon (1989), Little, et al. (1992), McGuire (1988, 1991), and Parker Pearson (1982), mortuary assemblages are first placed within the historical and cultural context of deathways in the industrializing world. Funerary artifacts are not viewed simply as status indicators, but are understood as playing an active role in communicating ideas about class and class relations. Bell (1987, 1990a) and Little, et al. (1992) both place the site-specific historical context at the fore of the analysis, incorporate parallel lines of evidence (such as artifacts and osteological findings) with comparative examples from other cemetery sites, and interpret the results at the site-specific, intersite, and larger cultural levels. Multiple scales of observation and meaning guide the interpretation. Bell (1987) drew on Redfield's (1956) concept of popular cultural traditions, citing the "beautification of death" as the overarching Great Tradition that divergent groups contributed to, emulated or avoided, and finally abandoned in their "Little" funerary traditions. While Redfield's model was formulated to understand peasant society, even in industrialized societies the paradigm helps to characterize interaction, contribution, rejection, and adoption of cultural material (e.g., Burke 1978). Such a perspective lacks the elitist, normative view and the quaint hard diffusionism of colonialisivist anthropology and the reductive domination/resistance dialectic of Marxist anthropology.

The inception of mass marketing and manufacturing in the early 19th century made formerly expensive goods, including those associated with funerary display, widely available in cheaply rendered forms. Cannon (1989) sees a cyclical process of display at work in the manipulation of material symbols of power by a dominant class, and a drive among other classes to follow the dominant tastes. Lymes' (1980) classic The Tastemakers, first published in 1949, focuses in on the market-driven change from Victorian ostentation to understated elegance (simplicity) apparent in comparisons of late 19th and early 20th-century material culture. Contributions to theories of conspicuous consumption and mass production by Veblen (1912 [1899]), 1

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1The beautification of death, fully developed by the 19th century, was characterized by ritualized behavior and material objects that idealized or sentimentalized death and heaven and prolonged the mourning and memorialization of the dead. The movement was manifest in elaborate mourning clothes, decorative mortuary art, ornamental burial containers, and ornate memorial statuary set in bucolic, landscaped cemeteries (Douglas 1975; Farrell 1980; Jackson 1977a; Linden-Ward 1989; Pike 1980; Pike and Armstrong 1980; Stannard 1975).
Packard (1957), Williams (1982), and Trachtenburg (1982) serve to illuminate how and why many classes used inexpensive objects symbolic of wealth in mortuary contexts (Bell 1990a). Cannon’s model of the cyclical effectiveness of specific symbolic forms of competitive display is equivalent to the seriation of popular forms in histograms familiar to archaeologists, but as applied to different classes in a society. The value of the work is certainly not in its normative views of the transmission of “taste” from upper to lower classes, nor in the limited applicability of the model to groups similarly preoccupied with economic competition through material display, nor in particular, the narrow perspective on 19th-century English mortuary practices as functioning merely as an opportunity for competitive display. The value of the work is in bringing attention to the need for historical depth and context in viewing series of cemetery assemblages: that social, economic, technological, and symbolic changes, interpreted from documentary sources, are embodied in material aspects of funerary ritual; and that high rank or status does not at all times and places require elaborate mortuary expressions.

Little, et al. (1992) applied this model at a Virginia cemetery with tightly dated documented graves spanning the popular beautification of death movement. Cannon’s model helped the researchers to explain the rise and fall of certain decorative embellishments in terms of changing symbolic codes for appropriate display. Further, elaboration of mortuary assemblages noted at the cemetery for the post-Civil War period suggested that conspicuous display of apparent wealth was necessary to maintain the family’s station in the face of a devastated economy and a destabilized class structure. More important, Little and her colleagues (1992:415) conclude that although the cycle of elaboration outlined by Cannon has important interpretive potential, the model does not substitute for “a specific historic context, with its attendant complexities.” It is necessary to add “cultural content to processual form” to integrate local expressions with more encompassing cultural patterns of mortuary behavior.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL LOCA TIONAL TECHNIQUES AND FIELD METHODS

Methodological innovation in the archaeology of historical cemetery sites has focused on locational survey techniques. Documentary evidence to locate and identify unmarked cemeteries can be found in deeds and land plats, maps, state and municipal death and tax records, genealogies and cemetery inventories, local histories, newspaper accounts of deaths and funerals, photographs, etc. (e.g., Cook 1985; King 1991). Interviews with local historians can also be fruitful. Geophysical or remote-sensing technology, such as electrical resistivity, electrical conductivity, and ground-penetrating radar (e.g., Bevan 1991) is highly successful in locating unmarked burials. In general, these methods detect the differences between graveshafts1 and surrounding, undisturbed soil. Geophysical surveys still require test excavations to evaluate and verify the results because site-specific conditions (especially vegetation, soils, and the presence of metal debris) affect the readings. Bachman and Catts (1990) have developed a predictive geographic model for locating small family cemeteries in Delaware based on distance to historical farmsteads and favorable topography. Reilly (1985) used stereoscopy to detect minor variations in ground topography over graveshafts, not often evident from surface reconnaissance. Systematic surface or “walkover” reconnaissance surveys can locate markers, relict ornamental plantings, and enclosures that may suggest a cemetery is present, and can otherwise assist in identifying areas likely to contain unmarked graves based on favorable topography, such as knolls. Strangstad (1988) best describes how to undertake systematic probing to locate buried gravestone fragments. All of these non-destructive methods can provide a general location for a cemetery, allowing field surveys to focus on particular areas to locate

1 A graveshaft is the soil feature formed by the grave-digger in excavating and backfilling the grave. The appearance of graveshafts, like other soil features of interest to archaeologists, often contrast sharply with the surrounding, undisturbed soil matrix in terms of color, texture, friability, moisture, and organic enrichment.
cemetery boundaries and individual graveshafts (e.g., Bell 1993).

Subsurface testing strategies are highly effective to locate unmarked graveshaft features. Machine-assisted removal of topsoil to expose graveshafts is undeniably effective (for an early example, see Bass 1963), yet should be preceded by hand excavation to evaluate stratigraphy and to determine whether evidence of the surface treatment of graves is present. Hand-excavated trenches are effective to locate graves and are potentially less destructive of important near-surface stratigraphy, grave offerings and landscape treatment, and evidence of impermanent grave markers (Bell 1990b, 1993). Leveillee and Glover (1992) combined hand-excavated trenches with machine excavations to achieve a high probability of encountering graveshafts in a project area, based on conservative estimates (derived from documentary sources) of the cemetery location and the number of graves present. To locate and excavate cemeteries in urban settings may demand a higher investment in time, equipment, and labor (e.g., Harrington 1987). Rodwell (1989) provides helpful methodological guidance for excavating cemeteries in general, not only crowded churchyards in urban settings. Textbooks by Barker (1983), Brothwell (1981), and Ubelaker (1984) are valuable introductions to the excavation and recording of skeletal material and artifacts. Analysis and interpretation of material culture from the grave, dealt with in a subsequent section of this essay, rely upon accurate stratigraphic documentation and recording. Conservation protocols for both skeletal remains and mortuary artifacts should of course be developed prior to excavations, and in consultation with interested parties. Consideration should be given to the appropriateness of applying consolidative chemicals to bone (Polyvinyl acetate or Akryloid B-72 is effective for consolidating poorly preserved bone in situ but may preclude isotopic or elemental studies) or otherwise conserving remains or artifacts that will be reburied. Commonly recovered materials requiring special treatment include metal, wood, textile, bone, and preserved soft tissues (e.g., Sease 1987; Watkinson 1987).

One concern for archaeologists is the possibility of encountering hazards when opening graves. The opening of well-sealed metal coffins is not for the constitutionally weak. Embalming fluid from 1856 to 1910 contained arsenic trioxide, a potential ground water contaminant, and a concern for archaeologists who may be exposed to the toxin (Koneses 1991). Reeve and Adams, who investigated Christ Church, Spitalfields (London), considered the possibility of disease transmission, specifically smallpox, when working with well-preserved remains (Razzell 1976; Zuckerman 1984; Jez Reeve, pers. comm. 1991). More recent medical literature (Baxby 1989; Marennikova, et al. 1990; Wenzel and Nettleman 1989) suggests that wearing protective gloves, masks, etc., is a prudent precaution.

5. MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES

a. Grave markers and cemetery landscapes

From the more particular genealogical research and documentation, to the broad cultural and regional surveys, to the understanding of symbolic conventions and intellectual trends, scholarship on monuments and cemetery landscapes offers a great deal toward the understanding of historical mortuary behavior. Linden-Ward’s (1989) intellectual history of Mount Auburn cemetery ably traced the development of the “rural” or landscaped cemetery movement. Jordan’s (1982) more anthropological treatment of Texas graveyards provides a view of cemetery landscapes more commonly found in archaeological contexts, while Sloane’s (1991) splendid book, The Last Great Necessity, provides a sweeping panorama of cemeteries in American culture. Archaeological techniques can be helpful for restoring historic cemetery landscapes by interpreting surface treatments and the former locations of ornamental plantings, and by locating buried grave markers and graveshafts so that repaired markers can be reset appropriately (e.g., Hannus, et al. 1988; Harrington 1965; Strangstad 1988; cf. Paine 1983, 1992).

The most visible elements of the cemetery landscape are, of course, grave markers. Many of the writings on gravestones are of an antiquarian or genealogical bent, focused on survey and documentation of
individual funerary markers, style and motif, and the identification of carvers (e.g., Chase and Gabel 1990; Forbes 1927). Gravestone studies (which has been referred to as a “microdiscipline” with the Association for Gravestone Studies at its center) are particularly useful for research on markers or cemeteries that may be encountered archaeologically, and for understanding local contexts or styles of funerary monuments.

Gravestone enthusiasts have also moved beyond antiquarian pursuits by incorporating historical, anthropological, and archaeological methods to address issues of craft production, social structure, and culture change (e.g., Meyer 1989). The careful documentary and genealogical research that characterizes the better gravestone studies is often not evident in larger formal and temporal surveys of mortuary art. Chiefly, surveys of existing monuments by archaeologists have been used to demonstrate seriation techniques (chronological ordering of artifacts by formal or stylistic attributes) (e.g., Deetz and Dethlefsen 1965), to characterize status (e.g., Crowell and Mackie 1990), or to investigate variations in ethnic displays of commemoration (e.g., Goodwin 1981). Documentation by gravestone scholars of commemorative markers erected several years prior to or years after death, and the observation of removed, reused, recarved, replaced, rearranged, and restored gravestones, are a striking reminder of the dynamic and transformed nature of the surviving sample of funerary monuments. The modification of cemetery landscapes and artifacts, as they are ignored and allowed to deteriorate or are reinvested with social value and maintained or restored, needs to be more explicitly considered in broader regional surveys of ritual spaces and objects (Bell 1991).

b. Material culture from the grave

Monuments and landscapes are readily accessible artifacts, but the cemetery data with which archaeologists are more often concerned are located below ground. The positions of artifacts and the skeleton within grave features have provided the bulk of cultural data on eschatological and religious practices.

Artifacts from the grave can be idiosyncratic and of a personal nature—interpreted here as vestiges of remembrance or commemoration—or common items, such as coffin nails found in many cemeteries; they can be deliberate or inadvertent deposits, and may be found in different contexts within the grave (e.g., in, on, or above burial containers, in the gravestaff, or in a buried landscape soil horizon). Variation in mortuary practices among and within societies may be approached through comparative archaeology and historical research. Anecdotal, documentary, and material information by folklorists and by historians and ethnographers, of death, burial, and mourning practices is often helpful for interpreting the material vestiges of funerary behavior. Descriptive statistics, attentive to appropriate scales of measurement and observation, are extremely valuable in organizing and presenting complex data sets (e.g., Braun 1981; Chapman and Randsborg 1981; O'Shea 1985; Tainter 1981). When viewed broadly, changes in mortuary assemblages, such as the appearance of European objects in Native American graves, provide important information on persistence and change in social structure, economy, and ideology (e.g., Axton 1981; Bradley 1983; Brenner 1988; Cleland 1971; Crosby 1988; Gibson 1980; Simmons 1970; Turnbaugh 1993a, 1993b).

Documentation of peculiar or particular finds within graves has been the purview of archaeologists, using stratigraphic excavation and recordation techniques (e.g., Noël Hume 1969:157-159). Detailed recording of artifact locations has been used to infer details of coffin construction, such as coffin lid styles from nail or hinge positions (e.g., Bell 1987:107-110, 1990a:63, Fig. 4; Noël Hume 1982:76-83 and passim). In favorable cases where burial containers have been largely preserved, archaeological documentation has given rare details of carpentry and style (e.g., Brauner and Jenkins 1980). Rauschenberg's (1990) important study of coffin-making and related material culture emphasized the role of the woodworking craftsman in the environs of Charleston, South Carolina; in his use of documentary and material sources, Rauschenberg's study was much like St. George's (1979) satisfying view of colonial woodworking traditions for Southeastern
New England. Burial containers were short-lived artifacts in the cultural context, and rarely survive in collections (Higbee 1992). Archaeological documentation of formal variations of burial containers provides a rare glimpse of vernacular woodworking traditions, and suggests a slow replacement of hand-crafted forms with mass-produced varieties beginning in the mid- to late 19th century.

Careful observation of skeletal position, stature, and coffin size can suggest when stock or custom-made burial containers were used (Wesolowsky 1991; Winchell, et al. 1992). Bellantoni and Poirier observed evidence of the curious molestation during historical times of an 18th-century Connecticut grave, and are reviewing the region’s deathlore to interpret the activity. The femurs and skull had been arranged over the chest area to form a skull-and-crossbones effect (David Poirier, pers. comm. 1993). Stratigraphic and artifactual evidence has revealed notable burial techniques such as carefully dug graveshfts (Woodall 1983) or the use of “grave arches” or planks placed laterally across the coffin lid to forestall collapse (Bell 1990a; Blakely and Beck 1982; Swauger 1959). Microscopic examination of coffin wood has provided more clues on coffin supply and construction (Aliaga 1984; Burnstom and Thomas 1981; Hansen 1991; Holloway 1986; Rogers and McReynolds 1981; Trinkley 1984). Clothing fasteners and textile remains are useful to determine date of burial, gender differentiation within cemeteries, and information on the history of textile technology and clothing (e.g., Welters, et al. 1991a, 1991b). The Lead Coffin Project in St. Mary’s City, Maryland, is an unprecedented multidisciplinary, technological foray into burial excavation and data collection, involving remote sensing, atmospheric testing of air inside the 17th-century coffins, palynology, DNA and immunological testing of preserved tissue, and other sophisticated analyses (Maryland Division of Historical and Cultural Programs 1993).

6. PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Physical anthropological studies of skeletal remains from historical cemeteries have provided otherwise unavailable information on the biology and behavior of a range of social and economic groups. Morphological and metric observations of skeletal tissue can characterize the nature of the cemetery population from data on age, gender, stature, and racial or familial affiliation (e.g., Bass 1987). Skeletal pathologies or anomalies can assist in evaluating nutritional history and fertility, and can identify trauma, disease, and mortality (e.g., Ortner 1992). In combination with specific historical information (e.g., oral accounts, vital records, photographs, grave marker inscriptions), it is sometimes possible to positively identify the remains of specific individuals (e.g., Brauner and Jenkins 1980; Scott, et al. 1989). Insect remains (Bass 1984) and pollen (Gerald K. Kelso, pers. comm. 1993) can estimate the timing of burial and the season of death. Skeletal and dental changes related to repetitive behaviors (tooth wear, arthritic, and musculature patterns) are often suggestive of occupational roles (e.g., Owsley 1990). Less successful than for prehistoric populations, chemical analyses of trace elements and isotopes in bone give some indication of historical diet (e.g., Crist 1990; Sandford 1992), but one yearns for this approach to be coupled with documentary information on historical foodways. Advances in biochemical techniques offer the prospect of identifying consanguinity and the history of certain diseases (Miller 1993; Ortner 1992; Owsley 1990).

Osteological studies, when combined with historical, archaeological, and demographic information, contribute significantly to an understanding of the quality of life of specific social groups (e.g., Rose 1985; Scurry and Rathbun 1991). Quality of life, a relative term when applied to historical populations, is indicated by overall health; incidence of chronic disease; the availability or absence of medical care; and interpersonal violence (such as trauma from gunshot and blunt or sharp injuries) (e.g., Owsley 1990).

Physical anthropologists have taken into account appropriate historical, archaeological, and taphonomic contexts that enter into their interpretations of analytic results, points frequently missed by their archaeological colleagues studying complementary material remains. Cemetery skeletal samples may be historical rather than
biological samples (e.g., institutional vs. family cemeteries) (e.g., Wesolowsky 1991). Differential preservation (age and sex biases) can affect demographic profiles, and taphonomic processes in general are necessary to consider in evaluating skeletal series (e.g., Gordon and Buikstra 1981; Pappalardo and Nawrocki 1991; Walker, et al. 1988). While much can be gleaned from skeletal pathologies, many diseases do not leave ossified clues. The etiology of skeletal pathologies and anomalies would benefit from more explicit reference to medical and forensic literature and “more explicit knowledge of genetic, nutritional, and random components” of skeletal morphology (Ortner and Kelley 1990:22). Diagenesis or chemical changes to bone and even the portion of the skeleton sampled affect the results of elemental and isotopic analyses (Crist 1990; Sandford 1992). A concerted effort to utilize available cemetery comparanda will also provide a more complete historical perspective on the nature of health and disease in the Modern world. Ortner and Kelley (1990) have stressed the importance of developing an explicit data collection protocol and methodology, such as that suggested by the Paleopathology Association (1991).

Toward this end, the compilation of computerized skeletal databases and bibliographic reference material such as this volume will be invaluable.

7. HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF DEATH

In the late 1960s through the early 1980s, social historians began to turn their attention to the significance of changing patterns of mortuary practices as a popular cultural phenomenon and as an expression of local or ethnic identity, persistence, and variation (e.g., Buckley 1980; Garrity and Wyss 1976; Kleinberg 1977; Pike and Armstrong 1980; Vlach 1978). The historiography of death has been reviewed by several scholars (e.g., Farrell 1980; Jackson 1977a, 1977b; Stannard 1975; Stone 1978; Wilson 1980). Historical archaeologists have amassed a wealth of data pertinent to historical inquiry, but only a small number of investigations have been described beyond the site report. It is not that historians are uninterested in archaeological information (e.g., Axtell 1981), but that they find that the archaeological literature (largely unpublished) is inaccessible, largely technical, and also incomprehensible. Historians (and not a few archaeologists) may be frustrated by the lack of site-specific or broader historical contexts, or disappointed by leaps of sociohistorical interpretation only vaguely supported by demonstrable and considered evidence. The relevance of historical archaeology to history is of discipline-wide concern. Yet, archaeological approaches to topics in the area of mortuary studies complement recent subjects of historical inquiry: for example, the role of epidemic disease in the depopulation and displacement of indigenous peoples; diet, nutrition, and endemic disease in historical populations; the interplay and integration of colonial and Native cultures; the effects of conflict and war; the rise of medicine and the uneven availability of medical care; craft production and artisan traditions; the rise, spread, and acceptance or rejection of mass-produced items (consumerism); and the nature of ritual behavior in historical perspective.

One area of historical interest that may be approached through historical archaeology is the beautification of death movement. Anthropological inquiry suggests that rituals intensify during times of social stress. Douglas (1975), Morley (1971), Pike and Armstrong (1980), and Stannard (1980) suggest that the rise of industrial production, with the attendant shifts in the structure of the family, economy, and divisions of classes, was responsible for the content and direction of the beautification of death movement. Such a parallel seems to me more satisfying than reference made by some historians to a high death rate which somehow only in the 19th century caused an upwelling of mourning and sentimentality. I have suggested a way to approach archaeologically the beautification of death as a social phenomenon by viewing it as an archaeological “horizon” (Bell 1990a). A horizon was understood by Willey and Phillips (1958:32-33) to consist of shared “cultural traits and assemblages” broadly and rapidly distributed. Tracing the appearance of material correlates of the popular movement found in dated archaeological contexts (differentially distributed
geographically, temporally, and socially) provides a sweeping view of the inception, spread, transformation, acceptance or rejection, and abandonment of popular cultural forms, symbols, and traditions among disparate and interactive groups. The archaeological documentation of the material signature of the beautification of death through coffin hardware provided a more democratic view of the extent of that popular movement among many more segments of society than was previously suspected.

On a local level, ethnographies of death—i.e., accounts of death ritual and the use of material objects—can guide archaeological interpretation to trace group-specific deathways. Yentsch’s (1979, 1980, 1981) textual analysis of 17th-century New England court records resulted in a rich and deep view of perceptions of death—natural and unnatural, private and public—and the administrative means through the inquest that the community used in an attempt to restore social order. Combes’ (1974) research was an early example of an archaeological survey that “discovered” the then-little-known surface treatment of graves by African-Americans. While the practice among African-Americans was described in literary and folklore studies (e.g., Bolton 1891; Ingersoll 1892; Waring 1894), Combes’ findings are often cited by historians interested in the archaeology of the African-American experience. Local histories of deathways can give us a set of expectations on the form and nature of the incomplete ritual vestiges found in archaeological contexts, and the correlate aspects of ritual which are not preserved. The persistence and transformation of mortuary practices, and antecedents from ancestral traditions, can be approached through historical ethnography (Stahl 1993).

Site-specific documentary research, using property and probate records, account books, maps, census schedules, genealogies, photographs, cemetery and gravestone inventories, newspaper accounts of deaths and funerals, etc., should be the basic foundation of our investigations and interpretations. Sadly, a number of archaeological cemetery investigations are conducted without the benefit of documentary information. In preceding sections of this essay, I described the use of documentary sources to assist in locating unmarked cemeteries and to provide a comparative context to interpret archaeological assemblages. The more links that can be made to the individuals responsible for the creation of the mortuary assemblages and of the decedents interred, the stronger will be the connections between the interpretive levels of our inquiries. It is the archaeology of individuals and groups in local places that supports the foundation of our work.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The development and refinement of theory, methodology, and scholarship can begin from a review of archaeological research at historical cemeteries. This overview and the accompanying bibliography will provide a source for interested parties to develop an informed position on the research value, and more fundamentally, the cultural significance of historical cemeteries. The appropriate treatment of archaeological cemetery sites, funerary objects, and human remains is defined in part by historical precedent in scholarship and praxis, and in part by the religious, sociopolitical, and legal interests of individuals and constituent groups. Building upon the foundations provided by the available documentary, archaeological, and anthropological database, archaeologists can contribute important and otherwise unavailable information on historical mortuary behavior linked to more pervasive cultural trends. Mortuary data can be used to relate and refine the understanding of ritual in society and of cultures and populations in transition. In explicitly applying models of relevance to mortuary data, archaeological, historical, and anthropological studies of ritual and demography may fulfill the axiomatic promise that mortuary data seem to possess. The research reviewed here reflects the interpretive potential of historical mortuary sites and provides scholars with the means to integrate a fascinating aspect of historical archaeology into a broader comparative context for the study of the historical past.
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