

**TOMBS FOR THE LIVING:
ANDEAN MORTUARY PRACTICES**

A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks
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Contents

PREFACE	vii
TOM D. DILLEHAY	
Introduction	I
JOHN HOWLAND ROWE	
Behavior and Belief in Ancient Peruvian Mortuary Practice	27
MARIO A. RIVERA	
The Preceramic Chinchorro Mummy Complex of Northern Chile: Context, Style, and Purpose	43
ROBERT D. DRENNAN	
Mortuary Practices in the Alto Magdalena: The Social Context of the “San Agustín Culture”	79
CHRISTOPHER B. DONNAN	
Moche Funerary Practice	111
PATRICK H. CARMICHAEL	
Nasca Burial Patterns: Social Structure and Mortuary Ideology	161
JOHN W. VERANO	
Where Do They Rest? The Treatment of Human Offerings and Trophies in Ancient Peru	189
JANE E. BUIKSTRA	
Tombs for the Living . . . or . . . For the Dead: The Osmore Ancestors	229

Contents

TOM D. DILLEHAY	
Mounds of Social Death: Araucanian Funerary Rites and Political Succession	281
FRANK SALOMON	
“The Beautiful Grandparents”: Andean Ancestor Shrines and Mortuary Ritual as Seen Through Colonial Records	315
JOSEPH W. BASTIEN	
The Mountain/Body Metaphor Expressed in a Kaatan Funeral	355
PATRICIA J. LYON	
Death in the Andes	379
JAMES A. BROWN	
Andean Mortuary Practices in Perspective	391
INDEX	407
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Preface

THE IDEA FOR A SYMPOSIUM to focus on Andean mortuary practices began in conversations with Tom Dillehay in 1988. The Pre-Columbian program's Senior Fellows committee was looking to develop a symposium that drew upon recent research in the Andes and at the same time pushed researchers to expand their thinking about their own work. Dillehay and I had been discussing several ideas when he began to talk about a long-term interest of his: funerary practices. His work among the Mapuche, with their complex and costly burial practices, had made him realize how important and telling this aspect of a culture could be.

In spite of all the excavation—and all the looting—of cemeteries in the Andes, and in spite of the significance placed on burials by ancient Andean peoples, the theme of mortuary practices had never been thoroughly explored. The excavational material was potentially there, but analysis of that data in terms of the practices and beliefs lagged behind. The committee agreed fully with Dillehay's idea to organize a symposium for 1991 that would explore Andean mortuary practices and their social, economic, and religious implications, approached from a pan-Andean perspective.

As Dillehay has pointed out, in the Andes there is a long history of research on burial records and context for the purpose of reconstructing cultural affiliation, chronology, socioeconomic status, grave content, treatment of the human body, and specific burial context in various types of sites. Less attention has been paid to the larger question of how mortuary practices functioned in different cultures. The symposium, of which this volume is the result, focused on this broader issue by looking at linkages between the living and the dead (including ancestors) achieved through mortuary rites, the role of wealth and ancestors in cosmological schemes, the location and construction of tombs and cemeteries and their social and political implications, and the art and iconography of death. The speakers were chosen not for their geographic or culture coverage but because their work embraced different and complementary aspects of the topic. The speakers also brought their own perspectives and approaches, which makes for a richly textured volume.

Two features strike me about Andean mortuary evidence: the importance

Preface

of placement and the importance of preservation. Ancient Andeans must have considered them, too.

John Rowe, in his paper, perceptively highlights a fact we take for granted: objects and persons in burials were intentionally placed. Taking into account the natural settlement that occurs in burials and the potential for later disturbance, things in burials are found where they are, and the way they are, because someone thought to put them exactly there. Spatial placement and aspect are thus supremely important in funerary contexts and can reveal much about the motivations of those responsible for the burial. In this case, location carries meaning.

In the Andes, as practically nowhere else in the world, the preservation of organic materials is exceptional. The dry coastal desert and the frozen mountains at high altitude are ideal environments for preserving dead flora and fauna. Human remains, textiles, feathers, gourds, and animals buried in either location do not quickly deteriorate as they would in most other locations. The ancient inhabitants must have realized that things buried in these locations would not soon disappear. Rather the things (persons and materials) would still be with them on earth but would be physically separate from them. I do not know how this sense of enduring corporal existence affected individuals along the Andean coast. Esther Pasztory raised this question at the symposium, and it remains a consideration for thought. Certainly the Inka practice of curating the bodies of rulers tells us that very different ideas about death and decay were at work.

The title of the symposium, *Tombs for the Living*, reflects the understanding that elaborate burial rites, special accoutrements, and great funerary monuments all have social functions that go beyond their funerary purposes. Andrew Fleming of the University of Sheffield saw the megalithic chambered tombs of Western Europe as “tombs for the living” because their monumentality was clearly a conscious goal of the living members of the society and, therefore, must have served the interests of that society. Like Fleming, the participants in this volume are interested in understanding the social and economic roles of funerary practices. On the cultural level, tombs and burials actively serve the living just as they metaphorically serve the dead.

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Introduction

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MORTUARY PRACTICE IS A TERM used with facility in everyday anthropological discourse, despite the considerable ambiguity surrounding it. All of us know that the term signifies interment of the dead and the context and ritual of burial. Although clear in what it signifies, the precise meaning of the practice eludes us; the broad meaning points to certain essential and terminal features of the life cycle of individuals in a society and to lasting linkages between the living and the dead. Only when death and mortuary practice and their broad meanings are elaborated as an interest of social and ideological research does the term become more clear, and we can begin to understand the empirical referents of the practice. This volume considers various aspects of the context and meaning of death and burial practice among different Pre-Columbian Andean peoples (Fig. 1) from the perspectives of archaeology, ethnohistory, and ethnography.

There are several different directions that this introduction could take. Ideally, its first aim would be to identify traditional cultural practices of death and treatment of the corpse among different past societies, and would be organized in terms of major mortuary practices for each culture developmental period in each area of the Andes. Another approach would be to provide a historical review of research on mortuary patterns, topics, and problems. Both of these approaches would require a great deal of discussion beyond the scope of this introduction. An alternative would be to apply broad theoretical and conceptual studies to Andean mortuary data, but that would be inappropriate for an introduction of this nature. Instead, I have combined aspects of all the above-mentioned approaches to reflect on the regional patterns and problems discussed in this volume: the material and symbolic aspects of death, organization of contexts of death and burial ritual, the transformative work that such contexts are thought to do, and the relationship of such contexts of transformation to social order. We know from the ethnohistoric and ethnographic records that the mortuary practices reported for many late pre-Hispanic, historic, and contemporary Andean

societies are instrumentally related to the structure of the kinship system, political alignments and territorial divisions, the organization of authority, and economic investment in burial rites and tomb construction. We also know that premonumental and monumental burial contexts and the quality of the mortuary data are important. This information is a necessary starting point for suggesting ways to attempt to reconstruct and explain major Andean mortuary practices.

PATCHY DATA AND CHRONOLOGIES

When we turn to the archaeological evidence for mortuary data, a serious discrepancy immediately becomes apparent. The ethnohistorical sources show a greater number of burial forms, ritual practices, and uses of mummified bodies in the rites of the living than is suggested by the archaeological data currently available. Many students of archaeology must experience a feeling of unreality as they turn the pages of the books of Bernabé Cobo and Pablo Joseph de Arriaga on Inka religious and mortuary practices, for instance. These observers of late Andean culture provide numerous references to death and burial practices of which little or nothing is known archaeologically. The opposite is true of archaeological records, such as for the Paracas culture of coastal Peru or the San Agustín culture of highland Colombia, for which we have burial data but little knowledge of the society. Extensive looting and destruction in many areas and the archaeological "invisibility" of graves, such as deep-shaft and other below-ground burials, compound these problems. There are other, similar problems that could be cited, but these few suffice to suggest the patchy state of archaeological and ethnohistorical knowledge on this subject, and the uneven distribution of research in the Andes, in both time and space.

Perhaps more than anyone else in this volume, John Rowe considers in detail the quality, patterning, and interpretative meaning of burial records in various areas of Peru, focusing specifically on the classic studies of archaeologists in the early decades of the discipline. His study provides good examples of the strengths and weaknesses of specific burial records, describes formal and informal burial types, associates mortuary variables with differing ritual and social contexts, and critically reconsiders some controversial data. Perhaps, above all, Rowe's contribution is in providing a backdrop to understanding the contexts and directions of scholarly research in the rich and complex field of mortuary practices, while cautioning that the discussion of the archaeological evidence for these practices is in danger of giving a distorted, or at least an incomplete, picture.

The chronological framework used by most contributors is that of Rowe's cultural developmental periodization (1962b). Though other schemes exist (e.g., Lumbreras 1974), Rowe's original framework is still the most regularly

used by scholars working in the Central Andes. Rowe, Christopher Donnan, Jane Buikstra, Patrick Carmichael, and John Verano follow this scheme. Other contributors employ chronological frameworks developed for the countries or regions they discuss.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCERNS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIRECTIONS

Thinking in terms of interpretative approaches to Andean mortuary data, the traditional emphasis has been on context, variability, chronology, and description of tomb content and structure (e.g., Larco Hoyle 1945; Tello and Xesspe 1979; Kroeber 1925; Strong 1925; Rowe 1962a and this volume; Willey 1953; Bennett 1936, 1939; Donnan and Mackey 1978), and on the symbolic value of burial (e.g., Benson 1975; Donnan and Mackey 1978; Carrión Cachot 1948; Kauffman Doig 1979; Dwyer and Dwyer 1975; Greider 1978: 51–58; Greider et al. 1988; Paul 1990). Although the excavation and study of mortuary contexts were time-honored traditions in the early days of Andean archaeology, within the last four decades there has been less of an effort to understand the cultural and, especially, biological significance of human skeletal remains in light of their potential for the explanation of culture change and adaptation, and for the study of both pan-Andean and regional patterns. In the last decade, a greater effort has been made to focus more on the social aspect of death; the nature of the archaeological context of burial in terms of differential deposition, preservation, and recovery; the bioanthropological aspect of death and the evidence of group identity and associated material remains (see both Rivera and Buikstra, this volume); and the identification of interregional mortuary patterning. Little effort, however, has been made by archaeologists and other scholars, including several of the contributors to this volume, to bridge the gap between data and theory and between local and regional practices in order to reconstruct broader interpretative models of the meaning and context of death and burial in the Andes. Even less attention has been given to the types of burial forms characteristic of the different levels (types?) of chiefdom and state societies in the Andes.

As most of the papers in this book do not deal with model building but more with pattern recognition and interpretation, I will not provide a detailed discussion of general anthropological and archaeological thought on the meaning of mortuary practice. For such a discussion, the reader is referred to general publications on the subject (e.g., Bloch and Parry 1982; Bartel 1982; Brown 1981; Binford 1971; Chapman, Kinnes, and Randsborg 1981; O'Shea 1984; Tainter 1978). Several papers in the volume, however, deal with conceptual issues of general interest, including social differentiation, historical contingency, cosmology, social evolution, and hierarchies and inequalities (see Buikstra, Carmichael, Dillehay, Drennan, and Salo-