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A BRIEF MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF BURIAL RITES AND OF RELATION TO DEATH ON THE BASIS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES IN BOHEMIA

ABSTRACT — One of the basic conditions of successful study of the development of the relation of man to death is an approach as complex as possible. It is necessary to follow in the archaeological sources all manifestations related to death i.e. not only graves and burial grounds, but also documents of human sacrifices, cannibalism and other manipulation with the dead body or with its parts. Correct inclusion of the testimony of archaeological sources into concrete historical context requires first abstraction from contemporary social standards connected with death. It requires also thorough orientation in the problem of the history of religion and philosophy, in the sphere of ethnography of extra-European pre-industrial societies, and last but not least also in local ethnography. The results of a study conceived in this way should be the evaluation of the relation of man to death in general as a specific irrational part of the relation of man to nature. Man assumed two basic attitudes to death from the very beginning: a passive and an active one. Passive attitude meant to drive the death off, to cheat it, or to suppress it. Active attitude tried to make use of those dying of natural death, or of sacrificed individuals to the benefit of the living. A basic change in the attitude to death was brought about by Christianity. Instead of trying to cheat the death it cheated man by glorifying death, as an admission to a better existence. An active approach to death was withheld from man by the doctrine about Christ’s sacrifice redeeming all believers. The natural fear of death and the efforts to limit its effects on the living, however, has never been wiped out completely. Christianity only enacted the coming into existence of new forms of some older tendencies.

KEY WORDS: Development of the relation of man to death — Methodology — Method — Model.

INTRODUCTION

The basic impulse for this paper arose from the study of funeral finds from Late Epipaleolithic (Buchvald 1967, Havel 1978, Matoušek 1982, 1987a) and from a study of post-Mesolithic use of caves in Central Europe (Matoušek 1987b), markedly expressing the development of man’s relation to death. The results of the above publications were completed by information from the latest synthesis of the Czech prehistory (Pleiner et al. 1978) and other synoptical publications.

STARTING POINTS

Prior to starting the study of any phenomenon from the sphere of relations of the historical societies to the reality of death, we shall explain certain methodological and methodical aspects, at least in four domains.

As analysis of the present idea of death. The natural, and often subconscious derivation of categories of a living culture, perceived and accepted by the scholar in his contemporary social environment (e.g. Hroch et al. 1985, 273, Neustupný 1986) were
frequent sources of mistakes and errors in the past. The problem of dying and death is dispelled and ousted by modern societies to the margin of social conscience. The fear of death is overcome by pretended ignorance of the human life cycle, but also by indifference to handicapped, to people suffering from grave illnesses, to dying people, and by maximally limited and restricted connection with dying and death (Anonym 1881, Freule 1882). All this is of course tragic self-deception, and in its consequence it causes bigger fear than at any time in the past. Social standards and conventions following from this situation influence also the scholars studying the past and are hindering for them. For these reasons the study of funeral sources is often reduced to mere statistical enumeration of the observed phenomena, and this arises only judgements of very general character, such as “ritual burial ... suggests that they believed in afterlife” (Plie ner et al. d.d., 44), or “the adding of grave goods (vessels, ornaments) seems to document the belief in the continuation of life after death” (ib. 220). Sometimes prehistoric societies are believed to have been setting according to the social code of the present society, e.g. secondary interferences with graves are regarded as looting according to the contemporary moral code (Stuchl ič 1988) and considered an amoral and antisocial phenomenon (Poicha 1988, 79). Ethnographic information from the milieus of extra-European pre-industrial societies. On using ana lytical methods for the exploration of ethnographic sources to the European prehistoric we have to abstract from the historically conditioned phenomena. Critical to the above analogy is one of the basic principles of studying the development of the society (Neátoπ y 1886, 545). In an effort to respect the peculiarities of a culture, we are also critical to the above analogy, which in its consequence means that ethnographic research presents only sections from the universe of phenomena: it is a number of variants of forms of the respective social phenomenon. The archaeologist thus acquires for the interpretation of the relics of a certain historically conditioned phenomenon of completely contradictory examples from incomparable social environments (to our topic see e.g. Holý 1986, Ukk 1988). Kunder 1978: 506] It seems that there are just publications exceeding the form of those enumerating various examples. Anyhow, the search for some rules of general validity in the time and spatial limitations in the mechanism of social processes, is in spite of its attractive character basically ahistorical (compare i.e. 26, 162, Blieck 1971).

Theory of the history of religion, history of philosophy. If we compare the frequency of the usage of the above-mentioned points by the theologians, with the frequency of the conclusions from the theory of religion and from the history of philosophy, we will notice, that the theologians differ completely with the low level of mutual information between archaeolo gists, philosophers, and historians of religion, result ing in isolating the conclusions to movements of the other branch, sometimes leading to errors and inaccuracies (one of the most palpable examples from the Czechoslovak production are the proceedings on the origins of religion in the light of archaeo logical sources). This situation should be seen namely in the different systems of the means of research used by the respective sciences: it is branched into different systems, e.g. principles, notions, methods and language. For these reasons an archaeologist will better get along with an ethologist than with a theologian, who often provokes the archaeologist to break this communication barrier, he will appear in a world where the phenomena in the history of religion are studied in the framework of broader systems of imagination and practices connected with death, which also leads to the more historically conditioned mythological, religious and philosophical systems. The ideas and practices connected with the phenomenon of death appear here as a reflection of the respective conception of life and death, while emphasis is always on life, not on death. The sense of these systems and practices has been to define the optimum way of existence of the society (at the mythical stage) and later also of the individual.

Ethnographic knowledge from local milieus. The mass of knowledge from the local ethnography and folklore are reflected by archaeology even less than the history of religion and the history of philosophy. Relation of the relational branch would without doubt deserve a more profound analysis, which cannot be done in this paper. Briefly, the lack of knowledge from ethnography — from Freule 1984 can be again derived from different research systems, and also from the fact that the ethnographer and the folklorist take their information mainly from the period of the recent centuries, i.e. from the period of industrialization. From this, archaeologists have to interpose and thereby give a slightly more positive tone. But archaeologists should hear in mind that one of the basic features of folk culture is strong adhesion to traditions, and that the folk culture of the rural society of the 18th—19th centuries grew from a material basis that had not changed substantially in the first centuries of prehistoric farmers. We can therefore rightly expect that the folk culture of the New Age has preserved very ancient elements and elements of local traditions. From the viewpoint of our topic it is very important that the ethnographer follows the rites and customs comprehended as autarchic formations, and that as such are in fact segments of the mythological world.

Basis problems. It follows from the above remarks that archaelogical funeral materials should be studied in their broadest possible connections, and for their interpretation we cannot use standards and categories of other disciplines. We should therefore seek answers at least to the following questions:

- what is a burial?
- under what historical conditions is this a burial?
- what are the basic trends of its development?
- what needs of man and of the society are being satisfied by rites and customs connected with death?

Brief model of the development of the relation of man and death. The problem of the problem of the relation of man and death is more complex than that in the case of many other phenomena (see for example Freule 1988, 91, 113). So that to have the feeling of the phenomenon in again formal, limited existences it would be necessary to have the feeling of animals, including the highest primates do not fear death, and if they meet with the fact of death, they do not pay attention to it, or they show something like amazement, wonder or sorrow (biologists, of course refute the application of human psychologigal interpretation to the behaviour of animals) over the change in the state of their companion (Schaller 1969, van Lawick-Goodall 1976, Fossey 1988).

The problem of determining the moment since when man or his animal predecessor became aware of its or its own existence, or the moment of transition from the branch of the movement of matter, the beginning of the process of anthropogenesis, is extremely complicated (Hulates 1966). For that moment, at least, there is an important presumption, that “the first emotion contributing to strengthening the social relations in the human society coming into being would probably be fear” ... “fear of predatory animals, and of various natural phenomena, completely unrelated to the social environment” (ibid. 235). We cannot say with certainty whether fear of death had some social echo already in the first hominids, but in the Paleolithic it became more frequent: with mass burials of several individuals, with practices of burying separately the individuals parts of human bodies, and with considerable preparing ability (compare i.e. Valslová 1982 mentioning also other literature).

The period of hunting-gathering economy was the period of the outbreak of the development of mythological concept of the world. In consequence of the low standard of production and consequently also of knowledge, man was perhaps able to recognize and describe the entire objective reality surrounding him, but was incapable of about the life (Nabholz, Roebke 1981, 162, Casier 1977, 106). His ideas and his conception of the world and life were formed by a conglomeration of individual experiences, as well as the consequence of these relations remained unrecognized. The world thus appeared to be a large association of various actions and phenomena, as death is a random phenomenon, natural death escaped the imagination of man (Casier 1977, 161). He does not realize the existence of the corpse, the artifacts that had been in touch with the deceased, and also with his relatives from the society, which were simply disposed of (sometimes quite rudely), disturbed by the set tlement, e.g. in the woods, thrown into water or burning them in the fireplace. His shelter was destroyed, so were also his artifacts, and in the same way also the corpse was removed from the settlement — in this act we can see the roots of a phenomenon that later found its expression in burial gifts (Nabholz, Roebke 1981, 161, 747). Some Upper Paleolithic finds are probably documents of this type of treating the deceased (Plie ner et al. 1978, 510, Klíma 1987). Ethnography, namely extra-European ethnographic documents on countless examples of certain limitations or banning the kindling during a certain period following the death; they were not allowed to speak, to touch food, they had to go to the stream, to swim, etc. It is understandable. The primary form of reaction to death has been its magic elimination from the society of the living, and dead. People would have been burned off, dismembered or reconstituted through the deceased.

In connection with finds of isolated remains, sometimes even entire bodies, cases with blood, we should briefly mention also problems of cannibalism, which are often estimated — and we should bear in mind that this is not just a natural social phenomenon, nor a contemporary social standards. Ethnography has worked out the following theories on the reasons for eating human flesh:

a) reasons of altruistic character (from fear of leaving parts of flesh on the bones lest evil forces should attach themselves to the bones of the deceased, causing him further suffering);

b) the need of maintaining biological contacts with the deceased (i.e. relatives were obliged to eat from his flesh);

c) the need to acquire in this way some of the properties of the deceased and to identify oneself with him;

d) cannibalism in the proper sense of the word, following from the shortage of proteins in the food (I am very indebted for this information to A. Navrátilová).

Cannibalism phenomenon from hunting-gathering economy to farming and animal breeding brought about important transformations and enriched the life of society with new elements. The rhythm of life of the people connected up to that time the rhythm of life of the surrounding world, whose run continued without substantial interference by man, was since then subordinated to the biological cycles.
Here we can see already the abyssal contrast between the graves of the members of the narrow immensely rich ruling section of the society on one hand, and the humble graves of the poorer sects on the other (in general the disintegration of the clan society Pleiner 1979, Bouzek 1985, 1988). Within the burial rites, we can see a further step to the custom to emphasize the individual characteristics of the deceased during the burial rites. But in this context it is important to mention that in that period already differed in various people in contrast to Late Eneolithic (when it was at least approximately the same) and they comprised burial rites and customs as providing protection and securing the identity of the society surviving (Navrátilová 1988), then the picture of burial sites of the disintegrating clan society may be interpreted, as symbolized by the members of the ruling section and by their protectors, while (and for that matter even death) a member of the subsection was of little importance for the society.

In this connection the logical question is from what social layer the people whose skeletal remains are found at numerous places of sacrifice of the Bronze Age and of the Late Tène period (Bouzek, Kouteký 1980, Goshenová 1988, Hrkal, Seiflärek, Vára 1988, Jellinek 1988). It is possible to determine the general references to the ranks of prisoners, criminals, but also to the ranks of innocent people of the lower strata, the third social layer, which is represented by the ruling class, responsible for the destiny of the society. The selection of the concrete person for the human sacrifice depends, on what was the sense of the sacrifice (general survey by Bouzek, Kouteký 1980, 418–420).

The most frequent burials from the following La Tène period in Bohemia is a rather complicated task. Perhaps it reflects the uneven development of social stratification, when not clearly evident patriarchal society was dying away, and in western and southern Bohemia began a decline of burials and burial sites, however, require the use of caution against any type of simplification. More crucial changes occurred in the development of burial rites only with the development of patriarchal society in the Eneolithic. The large and evidently not too differentiated patriarchal clans distinguished into small, clear-cut patriarchal communities (funerary groups). In the Late Eneolithic, at burial sites, graves with extraordinary outbuildings (Navrátilová 1980, 120, Pleiner 1989, Pleiner c.f. 243, 251, 253), in the Eneolithic and Neolithic Late periods, there were large burial sites with cobbled stone floors and bell beaker pottery we do not see such marked differences in the riches of the grave goods of the individual burials. More characteristic is the great variability in the ways of situating the bodies and grave goods (Buchwald 1967, Havel 1978). It seems that we have to do with reflections of efforts to characterize individually the social changes in each individual, and hence we may conclude that the Eneolithic period witnessed parallel or simultaneous changes on the other hand in the general disintegration of the clan society Pleiner 1979, Bouzek 1985, 1988). Within the burial rites, there was a further step to the custom to emphasize the individual characteristics of the deceased during the burial rites. But in this context it is important to mention that in that period already differed in various people in contrast to Late Eneolithic (when it was at least approximately the same) and they comprised burial rites and customs as providing protection and securing the identity of the society surviving (Navrátilová 1988), then the picture of burial sites of the disintegrating clan society may be interpreted, as symbolized by the members of the ruling section and by their protectors, while (and for that matter even death) a member of the subsection was of little importance for the society.

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Attempts to describe prehistoric social pheno-
mena with a relevant language will always fail, at
least to a certain extent.

The substantive "burial", "grave" and derived
forms, are in most cases simply names taken from
the verb that means to rake, pull, dig, grave (Anglo-
Saxon geofan, Greek grabein, German graben, Ten-
entei - tsagrib, a Roman manifestation of geofan,
Czech hrob), and their derivatives. But also "bury" from Anglo-Saxon hyrgan, hyrgan = hide in
the ground, bury (Kotek 1968, 382).

In their primordial meaning these notions designate only inhumation and activities connected with it. Other words used for human deaths (we cannot give a person's blessing with the sign of cross) are later derivations, often euphemisms (Zák, 1931, 83).

In view of the above mentioned explanation the
notion burial at present means only one of the two
basic manifestations of the relation of man/society
to death. Burial contains an element of passive rela-
tion to death - through meditation of the dead, death
is excluded from the community of the living, it
is "excommunicated". But it has also an active ele-
ment - the dead, if regular relations are main-
tained with him, protects the living and helps them. The grave, respectively burial site is a venue of regular and important meetings of the living and dead. With the development of abstract thinking we may presume that these come-togethers, respectively connections were limited to burial sites (Murko 1947, Václavík 1959).

Under what historical conditions does the above phenomenon (i.e. the connection of living with living and dead) arise? Here we do not speak of the burial only, but also of a very expressive and active com-
ponent of the relation to death, i.e. intentional, "premier plan" use of the dead to the benefit of the living. Indices of both basic trends can be recognized already in the period of hunting and gathering. But the prefix of a concrete event characterizing the Midolithic period - the appearance of the Neolithic - to our surprise - is not reflected by the funeral finds. In comparison with the Mesolithic we see rather greater similarity. Nevertheless, we can therefore say that the Neolithic first prepared the conditions for new quality in social development (B. and J. Nezbeda, 1969), but neverthe-
ver, it is possible to presume the existence of a cyclic relation to dead, and thus also the first cyclically repeated ritual practices made to the benefit of the society as a whole.

The dramatic development of productive forces in the Neolithic, facilitated the development of human culture in general, as illustrated
also by funeral finds. With the decreasing depen-
dence on nature, on a changing balance of different magic practices he tried to make use of the new knowledge to his own benefit. Manifestations of the relation to dead should be the primary parameters and further documents of active approach to objective reality, and are in direct contradiction to the thesis that prehistoric man lived in constant fear of the surround-
ing world.

Which are the basic development trends of this phenomenon? The initial form of manifestations of conscious relation to death is in the area of conjec-
tures. Hypothetically we may presume that the primary manifestation in this stage is the character - the dead body arose fear and people fled from its proximity, or removed it from the society of the living. Probably a first"burial" meant the physical occupation - the burial grounds in Bohemia reflected the process of disintegration of the patriarchal clan society. Probably a mixed identity of the indivi-
dual and of the clan in higher social limits, and on

the ruins of point-blank, firm, but simple clan rela-
tions between superior and subordinated social groups and layers a multilayered appears structure. This phenomenon may be the premise for growing more and more to symbolizing the pertinence to a social group, and less and less to characterizing the individual because as the minimum viable unit only within the framework of narrow (family, clan) commu-

nities. In this situation the death of any individual could not have a very significant influence on the ex-

ception of the death of the ruler, high priests or other important personalities. The more powerful were the ruling class, the more significant to the leaders, the more structures for the following existence of the society, following the death of the ruler.

The rather conspicuous increase in the number of human sacrifices at the beginning of the Bronze Age in some European countries, continuing also in our era, suggests the existence of links between the drop of the importance of a simple individual and of the importance of simple basic human relations on one side, and the trend to secure and safeguard the welfare of the society through human sacrifices, on the other.

The above interpretation of the relation of man
to death within the framework of the development of the patriarchal society may be compared by the relation of man to the nature of man/nature. The relationship of man to the nature bridges not only the dead, it is a bridge between two concrete aspects of the phenomenon, as they appear in the archaeologocal documents. However, these partial problems would deserve special complex analysis with special regards to the respective historical conditions. The problems of relations between cre-

mation and skeletal burials, grave goods, secondary interfering with graves, the problems of human sacri-

fices and places of sacrifices, relations between places of sacrifices and burial sites, but also the woman - death relation still wait for a profound analysis, freed from the prejudices of the present period. Only through the analysis of the phenomena, the concrete role of the individual person in their historical connection we can penetrate to the very substance of the funerary finds and make the act of human sacrifice a unique and characteristic element of the development of the society and culture as a whole.

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