



ANNE-MARIE TILLIER

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF ANTHROPOLOGIE "METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN FUNERARY ARCHAEOLOGY AND CORPSE TAPHONOMY"

Studies of human funerary practices serve to tell us much about the social behaviour of past populations. During the past three decades, in the field of the archaeology of death, archaeologists and later biological anthropologists have been trying to perfect methods to interpret human behaviours (e.g. Duday, Masset (Eds.) 1987, Crubézy *et al.* (Eds.) 1990, Castex *et al.* (Eds.) 1996, Duday 2005, Boulestin, Duday 2005, Duday, Guillon 2006, Gowland, Knüsel (Eds.) 2006, Moinat, Chambon (Eds.) 2007, Duday 2009, Castex *et al.* (Eds.) 2010, Bocquentin *et al.* 2010, Pereira (Ed.) 2013, Courtaud *et al.* (Eds.) 2013), through the positive identification of deliberate burials and the reconstitution of mortuary gestures.

The complete recording and studying of the spatial organisation of the human skeletal remains are major steps to the understanding of original characteristics of the deposit and to the interpretation of the process of body decay. Field observations are used to reconstitute the circumstances of body decomposition; they lead scholars to be aware of different modifications that are impacted by multiple factors, endogenous (related to the taphonomy of the cadaver itself) and exogenous (depending on environment, animal activities, grave

type, presence of perishable container, human intervention, etc.). Post-depositional movement of human remains and occurrence of disturbance and/or damage are important to identify. All these observations prevail in the reconstitution of the depositional environment, the definition of burial types and the distinction between primary and secondary funerary deposits.

The aim of this special issue is to benefit from the experience the contributors gained in different settings and to develop means of communication adapted to the study of funerary human deposits, by putting at the front place the deceased. The papers evince some aspects of the progress in studies of graves and testify to the necessity for recording field observations to elucidate patterns in the funerary archaeological context. The contributions represent a selection of approaches to research questions of correspondence between the archaeological relics and the nature of the original burial.

Henri Duday and his colleagues present an overview for the study of human skeletal deposits and identification of natural taphonomic processes which allows valid interpretation of the process of body decay by close

attention to its skeletal remains. By using the knowledge derived from field anthropology (so-called also archaeoethnology; the term suggested by Boulestin and Duday 2005), it is therefore possible to carry out an archaeology of actions. Here special attention is given to primary single burials covering a large time period from the Palaeolithic to the Roman times, originated from France, Cyprus and Southern Levant, thus putting aside the arbitrary partitions of the chronology.

The second paper by Philippe Chambon and Corinne Thevenet develops the implications of the characteristics of the grave, and especially the presence of a container, for the understanding of body decomposition and interpretation of human burial practise. The use of mobile containers during the Middle Neolithic is examined from the comparison of the available data from two distinct areas in Europe: the Paris Basin and the Upper Rhine plain. The effect of the container on the organisation of the human remains is discussed.

Frédérique Blaizot addresses the question of an analytical approach taking into account taphonomic anomalies, the architecture of the graves and the impact of perishable material, which lead to the interpretation of original funerary deposits. Her data base comes from a wide early middle age cemetery of Les Ruelles, at Serris (Seine-et-Marne, France) which was exhaustively excavated and her present contribution refers to the analysis of specific funerary architecture represented by the containers, which represent 35% of the area excavated.

Today archaeologists are taking benefit of the advances provided by digital 3D methods, in order to virtually reconstruct buildings and sites. Géraldine Sarchau-Carcel provides a very good evidence of the significance of 3D modelling applied to a collective burial in order to reconstitute the spatial distribution of skeletal remains deriving from successive deposits. The 3D virtual reconstruction of the central sector of the catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus from Italy, dated to the 1st to 3rd c. AD, serves as an example.

The next paper by Dominique Castex and her colleagues continues to deal with plural funerary deposits. The authors clearly demonstrate how analyses of skeletal collections can yield crucial informative data available from no other source, which are relevant to the evaluation and test reconstructions of historical populations. The authors focus on criteria that are useful for the distinction between successive funerary deposits and deposits resulting from a mortality crisis, through the discussion of several study cases belonging to distinct historical periods from France and Italy.

Studies of modification traces on human bones from funerary context provide information pertaining to cultural behaviour. In their paper, Louzia Aoudia and her colleagues discuss a study case devoted to a Capsian (9000 to 7800 cal BP) funerary complex from Eastern Algeria, based upon the re-examination of field archives. The authors focus their attention on anthropogenic modifications: identification of specific bone disarticulation and recognition of traces on bone surface allow them to deduce peculiar characteristics of complex *post mortem* funerary treatment.

In the analysis of human funerary deposits, great attention has been commonly paid to the consideration of the funerary ritual and there has been a long tradition in overlooking the evidence for symbolic activities and grave offerings. Most research in the funerary domain have centred on the objects within a grave rather than on the composition of the grave in-filling. However it appears that for instance the role of small biological agents can be informative in archaeo-forensic restitution. Jean-Bernard Huchet, with several examples covering a large time period, shows how the identification of insect remains within a burial or tomb can be helpful in the reconstruction of funerary practices.

I sincerely thank my colleagues who contributed to this volume for their willingness to take part in it and I am grateful to Jaroslav Brůžek for his valuable suggestions. I wish to extend particular acknowledgement to Martina Galetová, Editor-in-Chief of the Journal Anthropologie, for her support at different stages of the project and her help in making this project a reality. I hope that this issue will testify the clearly need for conjoint efforts, both anthropological and archaeological, to be devoted in a coordinated manner toward the interpretation of the complex funerary archaeology.

REFERENCES

- BOCQUENTIN F., CHAMBON P., LE GOFF I., LECLERC J., PARIAT J. G., PEREIRA P., THEVENET C., VALENTIN F., 2010: De la récurrence à la norme : interpréter les pratiques funéraires en préhistoire. *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* 22: 1–33.
- BOULESTIN B., DUDAY H., 2005: Ethnologie et archéologie de la mort : de l'illusion des références à l'emploi d'un vocabulaire. In: C. Mordant, G. Depierre (Eds.): *Les pratiques funéraires à l'âge du bronze en France. Actes de la table ronde de Sens-en-Bourgogne, (10–12 juin 1998)*. Pp. 17–35. Le comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques and Société archéologique de Sens, Sens.

- CASTEX D., COURTAUD P., DUDAY H., LE MORT F., TILLIER A-M. (Eds.), 2012: *Regroupement des morts. Genèse et diversité en archéologie*. Collection Thanat'Os 1. Ausonius and Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux.
- CASTEX D., COURTAUD P., SELLIER P., DUDAY H., BRUZEK J. (Eds.), 1996: Les ensembles funéraires, du terrain à l'interprétation. Actes du Colloque du GDR "Méthodes d'étude des sépultures". *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris N.S.* 8, 3–4.
- COURTAUD P., ROTTIER S., DUDAY H. (Eds.), 2013: Les comportements funéraires dans la Préhistoire : transition, rupture ou continuité ? In: J. Jaubert, N. Fourment, P. Depape (Eds.): *Transitions, ruptures et continuité en Préhistoire. Vol. 1 : Évolution des techniques – Comportements funéraires – Néolithique ancien. Actes du XXVII^e Congrès préhistorique de France (Bordeaux - Les Eyzies, 31 mai–5 juin 2010). Session B*. Société préhistorique française, Paris.
- CRUBÉZY E., DUDAY H., SELLIER P., TILLIER A-M. (Eds.), 1990: Anthropologie et Archéologie : dialogue sur les ensembles funéraires. Actes de la Réunion organisée par la Société d'anthropologie de Paris au Musée d'Aquitaine les 15 et 16 juin 1990. *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris N.S.* 2, 3–4.
- DUDAY H., 2005: L'Archéothanatologie ou l'Archéologie de la Mort. In O. Dutour, J.-J. Hublin, B. Vandermeersch (Eds.): *Objets et Méthodes en Paléanthropologie*. Pp. 153–215. Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, Paris.
- DUDAY H., 2009: *The archaeology of the dead. Lectures in archaeothanatology*. Studies in Funerary Archaeology Vol. 3. Oxbow, Oxford and Oakville.
- DUDAY H., GUILLON M., 2006: Understanding the circumstances of decomposition when the body is skeletonized. In: A. Schmitt, E. Cunha, J. Pinheiro (Eds.): *Forensic anthropology and medicine. Complementary sciences from recovery to cause of death*. Pp. 117–157. Humana Press, Totowa.
- DUDAY H., MASSET C. (Eds.), 1987: *Anthropologie physique et archéologie : méthodes d'étude des sépultures*. Actes du colloque de Toulouse, 4, 5 et 6 novembre 1982. CNRS, Paris.
- GOWLAND R., KNÜSEL C. (Eds.), 2006: *Social archaeology of funerary remains*. Oxbow, Oxford.
- MOINAT P., CHAMBON P. (Eds.), 2007: *Les cistes de Chamblandes et la place des coffres dans les pratiques funéraires du Néolithique moyen occidental*. Actes du colloque de Lausanne, 12 et 13 mai 2006. Cahiers d'Archéologie romande 110. Société préhistorique française, Mémoire 43. Société préhistorique française, Lausanne and Paris.
- PEREIRA G. (Ed.), 2013: *Une archéologie des temps funéraires? Hommage à Jean Leclerc*. Nouvelles de l'archéologie 132. La Fondation Maison des sciences de l'Homme, Paris.

Anne-marie Tillier
UMR 5199, PACEA
Anthropologie des populations passées
et présentes
Université de Bordeaux
Allée Geoffroy St. Hilaire
CS 50023
33615 Pessac Cedex
France
E-mail: am.tillier@pacea.u-bordeaux1.fr

