



Archaeology of Death

Syllabus by Jan Turek

The lecture provides a basic overview of the theory and methodology of the study of funerary areas, burial contexts and social and symbolic perception of death in prehistoric societies. Through the archaeological evidence of funerary rituals will be presented not only prehistoric people's attitudes toward death and the afterlife but also their culture, social organization, symbolic systems and cosmology. The focus on archaeology of personhood will be targeted mainly on the analysis of age and gender categories. Introductory topics summarize the methodology of field and laboratory research of funerary data in archaeology including application of scientific methods, spatial analysis of burial data and palaeodemography. In the interpretation section of the course an attention is also paid to the social and ritual significance of death and the transformation of human understanding of mortality. We are going to focus on case studies from different periods and locations throughout the world from Palaeolithic to the rise of historical societies. Case studies will further shed light on the social interpretation of burial data and their use in reconstructing social relationships, and will present significant discoveries. The end of the course is devoted to the ethics of the archaeological research of funerary and the political and ethical controversies surrounding human remains. This lecture is designed for audience among archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and others who have a professional interest in funerary evidence, or general curiosity about past death and burial.

1. Introduction to burial archeology.

Forms of burial in prehistory, hierarchy of burial sites and monuments.

2. Human understanding of death and the beginnings of funerary practices.

Death and perception of time, regeneration, reincarnation, immortality. The earliest evidence of funerary behaviour. The question of cannibalism.

3. Basics of field methodology of burial contexts and funerary areas.

Survey and excavation methods. Taphonomy, geochemical and geophysical methods.

4. Scientific methods of analysis - Burial contexts and human remains.

Paleoanthropology, Palaeopathology and Paleoparasitology.

5. Population mobility

Population processes. Palaeodemography and methods of molecular biology

6. Isotope studies and stress and diet reconstruction

Methods used for reconstruction of individual mobility, health and diet.

7. Spatial analysis of funerary areas

8. Shamanism and burials in the Palaeolithic period.

9. Burial rites as a source of reconstruction of prehistoric society.

Status and power, development of social differentiation. Feasting with ancestors.

10. Age and Gender reconstruction

Gender categories, children in pre-industrial societies.

11. Stages and variability of funerary rituals

Pre-burial treatment and ceremonies, methods of burial, postfuneral practices, exhumation, reburial. Primary and secondary burials. Alternative ways of burial.

12. Death and monumentality in the landscape - World of dead and living

Burial sites, burial monuments and settlement structure, What is a ritual landscape?

Death in the living space. Houses of dead – genesis of barrows. Human sacrifices and ancestral worship.

13. Mummies and conditions for their preservation

Eternity, mummification treatment and natural environment.

14. Ethics of funerary archeology

Political and ethical issues of surrounding human remains and their analysis. Scientific sampling, exhibiting human remains, repatriation and reburial.