

NEW BOOK

TRATAMIENTOS MORTUORIOS DEL CUERPO HUMANO: PERSPECTIVAS TAFONÓMICAS Y ARQUEOTANATOLÓGICAS.

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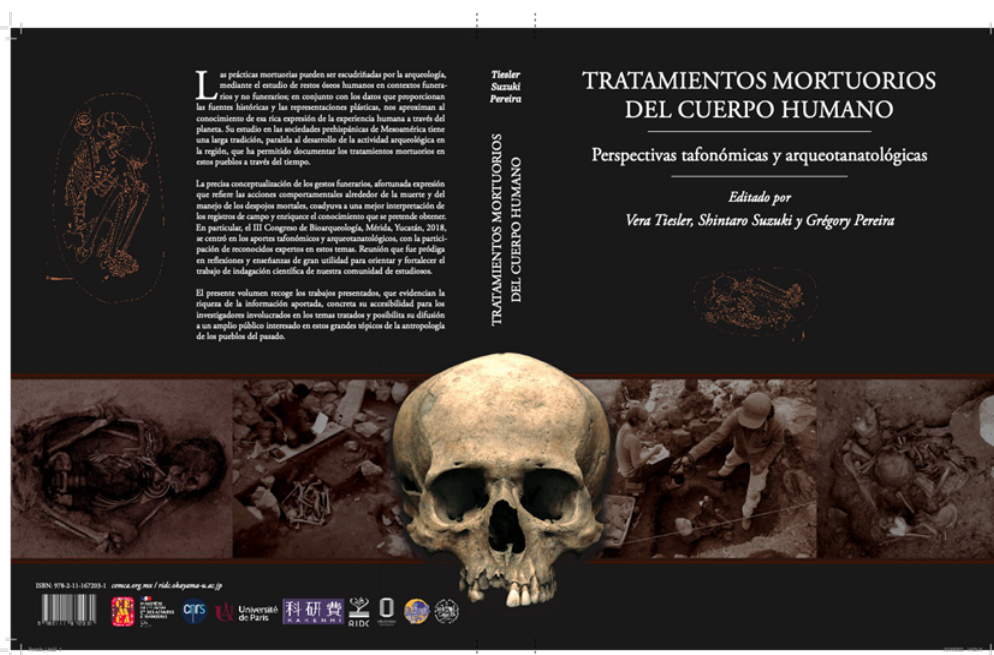
This book, entitled *Tratamientos mortuorios del cuerpo humano: Perspectivas tafonómicas y arqueotanatólicas* is an upcoming volume, based on the discussions during the *III Coloquio Internacional de Bioarqueología: Aplicaciones de La Arqueotanatología al Estudio Mortuorio en Mesoamérica*, which took place on November 2-3, 2018, in Mérida, Mexico. It is great that we can publish the volume three years after the event. As one of the book's editors, I would like to thank all those involved in the editing process, especially all the staff from the administration offices of the Publisher (CEMCA) and the relative universities (Kanazawa University and Okayama University). Without their tireless efforts, this timely and beautiful publication would not have been possible. I also thank the editorial board of the "Dynamics of Civilizations" for their invitation. We, editors of the volume, consider this space in a brand-new and promising journal as an excellent opportunity to present our work to the Japanese public.

Now, to take advantage of the opportunity, I would like first to devote myself to two "introductions": one is about bioarchaeology *per se* as our general framework of the book, and the other is about the study of mortuary treatments, as the central theme of the volume. Then, following these introductions, I offer a brief description of each chapter, borrowing several paragraphs from the "Introduction" of the Volume. I hope the reader could survey the contents of the book through the descriptions and finally this modest text be of interest.

Bioarchaeology as our general framework

Bioarchaeology is a specialized subdiscipline of archaeology. It is a relatively young field, and I think it remains admittedly unpopular, even unknown, in Japan. Indeed, there is even no consensus on how to translate the word of bioarchaeology in Japanese, conveying the concept properly. The essence of bioarchaeology is to examine skeletal remains ALWAYS within their own archaeological contexts and provides information to solve archaeological research problems (cf. Blakely 1977; Tiesler 2006; Larsen 2015).

Although the human body and the social person have always been closely linked to the sociocultural development of the human species, in the practice of science, both attributes have often been addressed separately by different approaches: physical anthropology and archaeology (cf. Gillespie 2001; Demarest 2009). Archaeological research problems have tended to be exclusively geological and



cultural, and physical anthropology has been usually oriented towards descriptive studies with a biological focus, particularly paleopathology (Tiesler 1999: 16, 19-20). Archaeologists have tended to specialize in classificatory and descriptive methods for each material, whether ceramic or lithic (Costin 2000: 399), so they often considered human remains as marginal, secondary, or peripheral data outside their specialty (Saul 1972: 3). Meanwhile, physical anthropologists sprang into action by receiving the remains in their laboratory, or even in hospital, sometimes labeled and adequately packaged, and other times not. There was little communication in the earlier phases of investigations (research design, excavation of skeletons, among others), so specialized and sophisticated osteological observations of human remains were few, considered in archaeological discussions, frequently presented in separate chapters of the report, or even worse, often ended up in appendix tables (Tiesler 2006: 24) describing how many males, females, young adults, adults, etc., were in the sample.

Under this general circumstance, the outline of bioarchaeology has gradually been shaped by the influences of “New Archaeology” and “New Physical Anthropology” throughout the last century. Although the same situation of academic separation always persists, in some cases, perhaps to this day, the bioarchaeological discipline has been generally supported by various researchers over the past decades. In fact, in Mesoamerica, on which I work, several investigations have been developed specifically as bioarchaeological research from the last decade of the 20th century. They were designed from their inception as bioarchaeology and now perhaps can be considered even “classic.” To mention a few examples: Lori Wright (1994) focused on the Petén region to explain the so-called “Maya Collapse,” a trans-regional work was done for the first time by Vera Tiesler (1999); a multi-factorial study by Ernesto González (2003) addressed the origin of the social inequality in Monte Albán, as well as in the interdisciplinary research series led by Linda R. Manzanilla in Teotihuacan (e.g., Manzanilla and Serrano 2003). Naturally, our bioarchaeological corpus has grown much more with new technologies and approaches throughout the 21st century (cf. Scherer 2017), as we discuss topics never considered before. For example, works on ancient migrations based on isotopic proveniencing have impacted the archaeological academy (e.g., Price et al. 2008, 2010, 2014).

Study of the mortuary treatment of the human body

Among the specialty fields bioarchaeology deals with, the most

recent highlights are the study of the mortuary treatments of the human body. It is undoubtedly one of the most significant subjects for both archaeologists and physical anthropologists, and precisely is the field in which interdisciplinary interpenetration is in most demand. Often confused with studies of funerary treatments, where “funerary” intentions, dedicated to specific deceased, are suspected, the concept of studying mortuary treatments encompasses “all” actions on the human body around his/her death, including extra-funerary treatments: for example, sacrifices that dedicate the human life and bodies as offering to other persons, deities, or buildings; diverse posthumous processes to prepare the bodies for different uses; ritual or accidental alterations of primary contexts to eventually generate secondary burials; among others.

If there are so many different kinds of treatments, with assorted intentions behind of them, how do we decipher such complex contexts of death, for example, by simply differentiating between funerary and extra-funerary treatments? The answer lies in that only through close collaboration, or even integration, between physical anthropology and archaeology, by starting studies of bones *in situ*, FROM archaeological excavation fields, we can correctly recognize the tangible traces left by the people of the past in their mortuary contexts and reconstruct their true cultures.

The volume

Thus, I present our volume *Tratamientos mortuorios del cuerpo humano: Perspectivas tafonómicas y arqueotanatólicas*, the newest book especially focused on mortuary treatments through the bioarchaeological viewpoint. In this work, a rich correlation is shown even beyond archaeology and physical anthropology, by integrating iconography, ethnohistory, ethnology, and linguistics to the study of mortuary treatments. On the methodological level, paramount spaces are given to introduce the new graphic recording techniques and the new perspectives from forensic taphonomy. The so-called “archaeothanatology” is naturally assessed and discussed in detail. In the theoretical sphere, we also deal with concepts, such as sequences, corporeality, and choreographies in ritual scenes and their materiality in mortuary contexts. Creative conjunctions of different approaches and perspectives, interpretation frameworks, and empirical data provide a new synthesis on mortuary practices and conceptions about death in ancient cultures. So conceived, the present volume comprises 18 chapters, plus the introduction and the preface.

Some of them concentrate on funerary practices and others on extra-funerary actions. Many of the cases presented come from Mexico and Guatemala. Indeed, examples from the Mayan area predominate (nine chapters), although there are also contributions from the cultures of Central Mexico (four), Western Mexico (one), Veracruz (one), and from the World (Costa Rica, Peru, and Italy).

The first chapter by H. Duday is indeed the case. He deals with the funerary ritual of cremation among the ancient Romans and introduces a new quantitative methodology that focuses on cremated skeletal remains' weight and the spatial distribution of these remains inside the funerary enclosures. Through some exemplary cases from his recent research in the necropolis of Porta Nocera in Pompeii and Porta Mediana in Cuma, Italy, the author identifies complex osteological relationships of the cremated remains found in secondary burials, as well as in the pyre where the cremation took place, and reconstructs the funerary custom of the ancient Romans that involved cremation and reuse of the tombs.

The second contribution takes us to Western Mexico, where G. Pereira suggests a series of archaeotological criteria that allow us to correctly distinguish direct and indirect burials, identifying the presence of the hidden space in apparently direct contexts. He exposes an interesting case study of the Portero de Guadalupe site, in Michoacán, and explains taphonomically the nature of its peculiar "boot-shaped" tombs, even glimpsing a connection of that Middle Classic context with the well-known tradition of Tumbas de Tiro.

The chapter by K. Perez and colleagues examines the tradition of applying red paint to bodies in Classic Maya funerary contexts. They explore the *postmortem* moment of pigmentation through experiments and even explain the properties of the materials used through nuclear magnetic resonance analysis. Their results, contrasted with pigmented archaeological skeletons from Xcambó, Mexico, reveal a model involving pigmentation of the deceased's relatively fresh body and that the paints contained fragrant resins as binders to smear the skin with an aromatic coat.

N. Marengo and colleagues in turn propose the use of short-range photogrammetry for studying *in situ* archaeotological records. Through the new digital technology, the authors reconstruct an exciting context of the Vista Alegre site, in Quintana Roo, Mexico,

and discuss the taphonomic process of the case, where a Postclassic period woman was buried along with two individuals, represented only by their presumably decapitated heads. It demonstrates the great usefulness of digital technology in studying mortuary contexts at excavation site.

From the heart of the Maya area, H. Goudiaby and colleagues offer an interesting archaeotological case study of four recently excavated burials at the Naachtun site, in Guatemala. The authors' meticulous excavations through the knowledge and criteria of archaeotology, reconstructing the funerary sequence of each burial, reveal a complex picture of both primary and secondary treatments at the Late/Terminal Classic Maya.

Another interesting contribution from the Petén region, Guatemala, is brought by C. Vidal and colleagues. The authors focus on the Terminal Classic and Postclassic remains from the La Blanca site and discuss the funerary reuse of the palace precincts already abandoned after the "collapse" phenomenon. Through taphonomic photo-interpretations and micro-excavations, they reveal the mortuary forms and sequences of how the remains of the later inhabitants were integrated into the Classic enclosures.

A. Scherer and colleagues provide another perspective on funerary treatments in Petén: the shrouding and burning of bodies. The authors evaluate taphonomic aspects of burials from the Late Classic site of El Kinel, a Late Classic Yaxchilán kingdom village, and El Zotz, that was dominated by Tikal during the Early Classic period. And they propose the probable evidence for shrouding and burning as part of the primary treatments of the Maya elite. It is also relevant that the interpretations of mortuary and osteological data are complemented with iconographic information.

The chapter by L. R. Manzanilla offers a general review of mortuary contexts at Teotihuacan. The apartment complexes hold formal burials of the same inhabitants, in pits under the plaster floors, at seated or flexed positions. The coexistence of local and foreign funerary practices is characteristic of the coordination centers of multiethnic neighborhoods. Finally, the architectural complexes along the Calzada de los Muertos does not present many formal burials, since they generally contain scattered remains.

J. Chatters and colleagues explore the topic of underwater taphonomy based on their new findings at Hoyo Negro, a huge underwater cave located in Quintana Roo, Mexico. Since their discovery in 2007, the authors have recorded at least 43 large mammals and a nearly complete skeleton of a 16-year-old female named Naia, all of which died over 10,000 years ago. An archaeothanatological study that reviews the distribution of the remains of Naia and other mammals, covering the entire three-dimensional space of Hoyo Negro, reveals how this interesting underwater context was formed. They even propose an interesting hypothesis about the cause of Naia's death.

M. Montiel and colleagues' contribution offers one of the few references on the Epi-Olmec population of the Cerro de las Mesas site, Veracruz, Mexico. The authors taphonomically and archaeothanatologically recognized diverse forms of posthumous processing of the human body before its deposit through a careful re-examination of the multiple burials discovered eighty years ago. And the authors culminate their discussions positing that the site was probably the cradle of some specific post-sacrificial rituals known for later periods.

S. Suzuki also provides a reference of the relatively unexplored region in terms of human sacrifice and archaeothanatology. The author combines his recent observations from the Reynosa site, in Escuintla, Guatemala, and the results of a re-examination of the remains from the nearby Sin Cabezas site, which were abandoned for almost 30 years, and contrasts them with the well-known and often discussed case study of mass sacrifice in Chalchuapa, El Salvador. The traditional perspective of early human sacrifice in the southern periphery of the Maya area is reconsidered.

C. Aguilar and J. Cetina present the taphonomic perspective from the extreme southern periphery of Mesoamerica, in Costa Rica. The authors explore all available field reports, photos, and archaeological drawings at the Jícaro and La Cascabel sites, and carefully analyze the taphonomy of its burials. They explain a diversity of mortuary practices sustained in the region during the Sapoá period (800-1350 A.D.).

V. Tiesler's chapter resembles an immense encyclopedia on Maya human sacrifice. She reviews in detail five forms of ritual sacrifice (by

decapitation and heart extraction) and discusses three sequences of *perimortem* and *postmortem* body processing (shrouding, cremation, and excarnation). Each context she discusses represents a particular taphonomic situation, allows inferences around violent deaths, and sheds light on the aftermath of ritual behaviors. In addition, the author addresses the increase of ritualized body processing around the second millennium AD, especially after the "Maya collapse," evaluating case studies at Chichén Itzá, and Champotón, in Yucatán peninsula.

J. Ruiz examines human remains from an interesting mixed context from the site of Toniná, Chiapas, Mexico. It is a vast collection of a "problematic" context that contains a minimum of 181 individuals. In addition to offering the basic osteological data of the individuals for the first time, the author explores in detail the anthropogenic cut marks on them. She concentrates, in particular, on recognizing different heart extraction techniques and reports a new methodology that had been seen only among the Mexicas and the Yucatec Mayas: the direct sectioning of the sternum.

V. Cortés investigates in turn skinning customs during the Late Postclassic period (1200-1521) in the ceremonial precinct of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The author proposes a new method of traceological observation with the support of scanning electron microscopy, which allows the identification of the tools used to detach the scalp and other soft tissue. Through his careful analysis, he distinguishes two techniques of head skinning the Mexica people used in pre-Hispanic times.

From the sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan, X. Chávez explores the issue of concentrations of fragmentary skeletal remains buried in the constructive fills, known as "problematic deposits." Through her detailed taphonomic and contextual analysis of such "problematic deposits" excavated between 2010 and 2012 by the Proyecto Templo Mayor, the author reveals a complex chain that began with the immolation of the victims, followed the treatment of their corpses, including their use, exhibition, reuse, and ended in their deposit at the foot of the main Mexica building. The area of deposits is known as the Coaxalpan, and harbors mythical and ritual importance, linked to the practice of sacrifice.

R. Barrera and his colleagues describe their recent finding of Huei Tzompantli by the Programa de Arqueología Urbana of Mexico's

National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). Their excavations found a section of a platform and identified traces of the vertical posts of the palisade, as well as one of two towers of human skulls. The authors bring together much ethnohistoric records, archaeological evidence, and bioanthropological information and show the most recent data on the analysis of the Huei Tzompantli of the Sacred Precinct of Tenochtitlan.

The last chapter by J. Verano takes us to South America, introducing his new research on the recently discovered remains from the North Coast sites of the Lambayeque and Río Moche valleys, dated to Late Intermediate Horizon and Late Horizon (1000-1530 AD). Through studying the massive sacrifice of subadult individuals, both human and camelids, the author identifies a technique to extract the heart by sectioning the sternum and violently opening the thorax, even breaking the ribs. He discusses the phenomenon of sacrifice, contrasting modern references from the Andean region with similar cases from Mesoamerica.

I hope that the present work will be of interest not only to the archaeological, but also to the physical anthropological public in Japan, and that it will open new horizons in the studies of the mortuary treatments of the human body in the past.

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Book information

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