



***Gathered in Death. Archaeological and Ethnological perspectives on Collective Burial and Social Organization***

***Louvain-la-Neuve, 8-9 december 2016***

Collective tombs were widespread in the Near East and Europe during the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, up to the point that their proliferation and diffusion in the late 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC was singled out as a «phenomenon». For example, 6000 Neolithic collective burials have been identified in France<sup>1</sup> and it is by far the most common type of tomb on Crete during the Early Bronze Age, a situation which strongly contrasts with the mortuary customs of other areas and periods of the Aegean<sup>2</sup>.

All collective burials are characterized by the successive gathering, during a more or less extended period of time, of several deceased within the same confined space. The treatment of the body, however, as well as the mortuary practices and the rituals associated with collective tombs display much variability. The latter can be architectural, with natural and man-made tombs, subterranean and above-ground structures or apply to funerary treatment with a diversity which includes primary or secondary deposits, cremation and inhumation. It can also imply a variety in the deposition of objects, such as personal belongings, provisions for the journey of the deceased or ceremonial items. Finally, it may also entail various manipulations of bones for tomb cleaning or ritual purposes.

Currently, research on collective tombs tends to focus on one of the following issues:

<sup>1</sup> Chambon 2003 Les morts dans les sépultures collectives néolithiques en France, CNRS éditions.

<sup>2</sup> Legarra Herrero 2009 The Minoan fallacy: cultural diversity and mortuary behaviour on Crete at the beginning of the Bronze Age, Oxford Journal of Archaeology 28: 29–57

- the manipulation of the body – i.e. “how?” : the restitution of the internal organization of burial deposits through an archaeothanatological approach;
- the identity of the deceased buried together in the tomb – i.e. “who?” : identification of the deceased on the basis of their biological characteristics (sex, age, biological affiliation, health status), the objects deposited in the tombs, particular architectural choices, etc.
- the social motivations for placing the deceased in the same tomb – i.e. “why?” : could these practices be related to particular types of social organization?

Approaching the manipulation of the body would in itself deserve a full-scale investigation and, most certainly, an independent workshop. This round-table hence rather focuses on three interconnected issues pertaining to the identity of the deceased and the socio-cultural contextualization of collective burials.

First of all, we aim at discussing potential selection criteria that may have restricted the access to the tomb to only a part of the community. Collective tombs are not necessarily communal; they may be devoted to specific members of the community only.

The second issue focuses on the relationships between and among the deceased buried in the same tomb. It is often suggested that they are linked by a common descent, a combination of marital and descent ties and/or other parameters such as status and function.

The last issue to be addressed during the round-table is related to the role played by collective burials as an arena of social negotiation. Some hypotheses have been suggested in this respect: for instance collective tombs, creating a sense of identity and membership actively taking part in the constitution of social memory, would have been linked to the development of corporate groups asserting their lineage or descent from the dead or could indicate cohesive, relatively egalitarian or socially undifferentiated units such as an extended family.

Such interpretations touch upon complex issues of social, political and economic dynamics. But are they relevant? How can they be addressed by examining archaeological and bio-anthropological data? In other words, what kind of social information can we hope to obtain by studying collective burials?

To shed new light on these issues, this round-table first and foremost aims at combining archaeological and ethnological approaches. We therefore welcome two types of contributions:

1. papers examining mortuary data as evidence of social practices, focussing on collective context data. The scale of analysis should be regional rather than site-based;
2. papers devoted to ethnological issues, with the emphasis placed on collective burials and their role in the socio-political organization of the human groups under study.

In this way, it is hoped that the workshop will broaden our perspectives regarding the ideological and social practices that motivate the gathering of the dead in the same tomb over several generations. More generally, we also hope it will help reinitiating discussions on the interest of archaeological and anthropobiological datasets to approach the social organization of past populations.

## **CONFIRMED SPEAKERS**

### **Connecting death and life - group characterization in collective burials**

Kurt W. Alt (*Danube Private University, Krems, Austria*)

### **Collective burials of the European Mesolithic**

Nicolas Cauwe (*Royal Museums of Art and History, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium*)

### **Houses for Bones: Collective Reburial and Society in South Borneo**

Pascal Couderc (*Independent researcher, Quebec, Canada*)

**Present collective graves in the Austronesian world: a few remarks about Sumba and Sulawesi (Indonesia)**

Christian Jeunesse (*Institut Universitaire de France, UMR 7044 Archimède-Archéologie et Histoire ancienne : Méditerranée-Europe, Strasbourg, France*)

**House Societies, Ancestors, and Burials at Neolithic Çatalhöyük: Attempting to Disentangle Collective and Multiple Burials**

Christopher Knüsel (*PACEA UMR 5199, Bordeaux, France*), Eline Schotsmans (*PACEA UMR 5199, Bordeaux, France*), Scott Haddow (*PACEA UMR 5199, Bordeaux, France & Çatalhöyük Research Project*)

**House of the dead, Skull building, wells...: diversity and specificities of collective burials during the pre-pottery Neolithic period in the Near East**

Françoise Le Mort & Bérénice Chamel (*UMR 5133 Archéorient : environnements et sociétés de l'Orient ancien, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée – Jean Pouilloux, Lyon, France*), Yasemin Yilmaz (*Archaeology Department, University of Düzce, Turkey*)

**Collective burials and the creation of communities in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium Mediterranean: Crete and southeast Iberia**

Borja Legarra Herrero (*Institute of Archaeology, University College London, UK*)

**The social implications of death in prehistoric Malta**

Caroline Malone & Rowan McLaughlin (*Queen's University Belfast, UK*), Bernadette Mercieca Spiteri (*Superintendency of Cultural Heritage for Malta, Malta*), Eóin Parkinson, Ronika Power (*University of Cambridge, UK*), Jay Stock (*University of Cambridge, UK*), Simon Stoddart (*University of Cambridge, UK*), Jess Thompson (*University of Cambridge, UK*)

**Divided in life, divided in death. The historical trajectory of lineage rituals in southern Benin (19th-21st centuries)**

Joël Noret (*Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des mondes contemporains, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium*)

**Collective and single burial in Madagascar**

Mike Parker Pearson (*Institute of Archaeology, University College London, UK*)

**Performing the 'collective' in Early Minoan and Early Mycenaean funerals**

Nikolas Papadimitriou (*Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens, Greece*)  
Despina Catapoti, (*University of the Aegean, Mytilene, Greece*)

**Circulation and fixation of the dead in Madagascar**

Denis Regnier (*Centre Universitaire de Mayotte, France ; Université d'Antananarivo, Madagascar*)

**How are individual and collective burials really different?**

John Robb (*Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, UK*)

**Introduction. Towards a theoretical and methodological framework for the study of collective burials**

Aurore Schmitt (*ADES UMR 7268, Marseille, France*), Sylviane Déderix (*University of Arizona, USA*), Isabelle Crevecoeur (*PACEA UMR 5199, Bordeaux, France*), Jan Driessen (*Université catholique de Louvain, Belgique*)

**Beyond ethnothanatographic variability. Terminologies and practices of funerals in East Borneo in relation to features of social organization**

Bernard Sellato (*Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS & EHESS, Paris, France*)

**Who is who in the grave? A cross-cultural approach**

Estella Weiss-Krejci (*Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria*)

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More information later...