Evaluation of eHRAF burial practice excerpts  Devon D. Brewer, February 19, 2016


Assumption: buried individuals representative of their communities (burial sites represented all adult segments of community)

- Exceptions
  - Ainu – buried in cemetery or around village, except for deaths on water (buried near beach) or deaths caused by bears (burial at site of death); neither exception would likely be associated with any social or demographic characteristic (except perhaps sex)
  - Aleut – there are discrepant accounts of how and where persons of varying social statuses were buried in pre-contact times, but most reports suggest that burial practices were consistent with my assumptions
  - Alutiik – most accounts suggest high status persons (and some of their slaves) were buried separately from others
  - Chinookans – accounts indicate only slaves were buried in the ground (sometimes; other times cast into the water); all others were buried above ground in group locations

Assumption: burial site corresponds to a single community over time (no multiple communities sharing a site concurrently, or successive communities using the same site)

- No accounts inconsistent with this assumption

Assumption: buried individuals lived as adults in burying community (non-residents not buried with residents)

- Tiwi – visitors/travelers buried where they died, but not necessarily at a cemetery site (depended on distance to such a site)
- Not a single report of an immigrant individual being buried in his/her natal community
- No reports of enemies buried with local residents.

22 societies unlikely to leave sites of multiple burials in the archaeological record:

- Mbuti (individuals buried in hut, camp abandoned; or tree burial; no sites of multiple burials)
- Dorobo/Okiek (individuals left on surface [in forest or dung heap] for hyenas to eat)
- San (left on surface or buried in ground/termite hill/cave, then camp abandoned immediately or after a few months)
- Andamans (by some accounts, they used tree platform burial or subsurface burial in forest at cemeteries, or burial at camp and then abandonment of camp; other accounts indicate cemetery burials consistent with my assumptions)
- Semang (full or partial subsurface burial or tree burial, according to most accounts not in group locations and often followed by abandonment of camp; one account suggests a cemetery site consistent with my assumptions)
- Aranda (burial near camp, which is then abandoned)
• Siriono (most accounts refer to corpse left or buried in hut and then camp abandoned, or corpse abandoned on forest surface)
• Ona (burial at site of death or close by but away from camp, never in a location of another burial, and individual burial sites soon forgotten or no longer recognizable)
• Chipewyans (left dead on surface where they died, scavengers then consumed and dispersed remains)
• Copper Inuit (dead left in an igloo, tent, or hut or on the surface, and abandoned)
• Innu (tree burial in apparently unique locations)
• Kaska (most accounts indicate tree burial, cremation, or abandonment, although some accounts do mention burial in unique locations as well as cemeteries)
• Ojibwa (most accounts of aboriginal patterns indicate platform or tree burial, often at locations where others had been disposed [a few accounts refer to burial of bones subsequent to decomposition], or burial in wigwams weighted down with stones and camp abandoned)
• Assiniboine (most accounts of aboriginal patterns refer to tree, surface, or lodge [and subsequent abandonment of camp] burial)
• Blackfoot (most accounts refer to tree, surface, or lodge/tipi [and subsequent abandonment of camp] burial)
• Comanche (most accounts refer to surface, cave, platform, or tree burial, and some accounts of very shallow graves dug with stones and other material put on top in seemingly unique locations)
• Crow (most accounts refer to tree or scaffold burial and subsequent abandonment of camp, with the bones after decomposition sometimes put in a rock crevice or cave [sometimes hundreds of miles away] or buried [unknown whether in unique locations or sites of multiple burial])
• Gros Ventre (tree, surface, lodge, or cave burial)
• Eastern Apache (cave, rock crevice, bottom of talus slope under rocks, or subsurface burial in unique locations far from camp)
• Mescalero Apache (rock crevice burial in unique locations far from camp)
• Northern Paiute (rock crevice, cave, or subsurface burial in unique locations far from camp)
• Ute (most accounts point to surface or shallow subsurface burial covered by many rocks)

Cremation practiced by:
• Klamath (cremation, but cemetery burial of burned bones)
• Pomo (cremation, but cemetery burial of burned bones)
• Yokuts (cremation, but cemetery burial of burned bones)
• Yahgan (most accounts refer to cremation; some accounts describe burial but unclear whether at sites of multiple burials)

Burial practices might or might not result in archaeologically detectable group burial sites for:
• Nuu-chah-nulth (most accounts refer to tree, above ground canoe, or cave/rock shelter burial, often in locations of multiple burials)
• Nuxalk (most accounts refer to tree, scaffold [near the deceased's house], surface, or cave burial)
• Quinault (surface, tree, and canoe/platform burial; except for tree burial, burials done in locations with multiple burials)
• Tlingit (cremated or uncremated remains buried on surface in gravehouses, totem poles, or caves, often in locations of multiple burials, but sometimes with social distinctions [e.g., shamans or high status persons buried in locations for them alone, such as shamans in caves]; slaves sometimes just thrown in the water or left on the surface in the forest)

Other relevant observations:
• There were no reports of corpses being transported distances of more than a few kilometers (usually corpses were moved very little, if at all). Most transports of more than a few hundred meters involved watercraft for much of the trip. There were some reports of cremated or defleshed bones being transported significant distances, often involving conveyance by horse.
• There were no consistent reports of a nomadic community using sites of multiple burials or cemeteries.