

Summary and Conclusions

The study of mortuary remains in Palestine was guided by a set of assumptions of a basic theoretical and methodological nature. The basic assumption underlying this research is that the persons who are treated differentially in life will be treated differentially in death. Thus the differential disposal of the dead would reflect the social differentiation within the community. This assumption, which is based on ethnographic data, offers for the archaeologists a powerful tool to interpret the archaeological remains.

It was argued that differential treatment of the dead in terms of location of the burial, tomb structure, age and sex of the deceased, the number of individuals buried in one tomb and the range and frequency of grave goods reflects the social differentiation within the community. Each category of mortuary observations is measured by a set of values, e.g. frequency, energy assumed to be invested in the construction of a tomb, the occurrence of prestigious items which symbolize the status held by an individual and a group. These remains could help the archaeologist to reconstruct the past social system. The legitimacy of these assumptions is based on ethnographic grounds and ethnohistoric data.

In my view, mortuary remains could serve as a significant source of information for the reconstruction of past social systems in Palestine.

This research is based on three sources of information, namely, archaeological data and ethnographic data as well as historical data. The main source is the archaeological remains. These remains were treated not only as an archaeological but also as a sociological phenomenon.

Ethnographic data of pre-capitalist societies represent the second source of information. Additionally, an ethnographic account of death and burial in the traditional Palestinian society was presented here. These local data were never used in any systematic way for the interpretation of the mortuary remains in Palestine. The aim of this account is to examine to what extent the social differentiation is reflected in the mortuary practice of a ranked peasant society.

The mortuary differentiation in the ethnographic literature in Palestine was discussed in terms of location of the burial, treatment of the dead, grave, posture and orientation of the dead, ceremonies after the burial, sex and age distinctions, funerary offerings and the rural-urban distinctions. Some of the interesting ethnographic observations are the occurrence of jars-burials until very recent times in southern Palestine, the differential treatment of the dead according to age and sex, the occurrence of funerary gifts in Beduin burials, the differential treatment of unnatural death and many other aspects of the mortuary practice in the peasant society.

The literary sources form the third source of information on mortuary practice in the past. These consist of Mesopotamian texts, Ugaritic literature and the Bible. The literary historical data provide us with unique information on the ideological aspect of mortuary behaviour not reflected normally in the archaeological remains.

This research is divided into three main parts, namely the prehistoric period, the early Urban Period and Tell Taannek which served as a case study of the urban period.

The first two parts represent a diachronic survey of the mortuary remains in Palestine from the Mousterian period to the second millennium B.C.. A general aim of this survey was to gain an overview about the temporal variability of the mortuary practice in Palestine. The study of the mortuary practice as a changeable phenomenon through time could serve as a basis for the study of social and cultural change by using mortuary remains beside other categories of archaeological data (e.g. technology, architecture, settlement pattern, ecology etc.).

A synchronic analysis of the mortuary remains in Palestine is provided by the intramural cemetery at Tell Taannek which represent the chronological end point of the development of the mortuary remains considered in this research.