

4D Tsavo Shrines

Chapurukha M. Kusimba

University of South Florida

Throughout our history, humankind has developed myriad ways to remember the dead, from leaving them in their homes to burying them at sea. Many of these ways leave no trace, so we may never fully appreciate how some communities memorialized the dead. We can, however, understand the pain they endured and continue to endure when we lose loved ones. Still, there remains a considerable bias in how the dead were remembered. Today's archaeological record mostly recounts the narratives of the elite, whose relatives could afford to inter the remains of their loved ones. For the most part, the remains of commoners were often discarded in the wilderness. However, archaeologists utilize the few memorials available to determine how each society viewed and dealt with death.

A Field Museum anthropological archaeology expedition in the Tsavo National Park in southeast Kenya recovered several hundred graves, cemeteries, cairns, and skull interment sites (Kusimba and Kusimba 2000). These memorial sites belonged to ancestors of Kenyan people who inhabited the Tsavo plains until they were designated a national park in 1948. These memorial sites provided the most substantial evidence of identities, mortuary behavior, and the people's belief systems during the precolonial period before many converted to Christianity and Islam. The cairns housed the remains of the pastoral Oromo; the graves were variously attributed to the agropastoral Wambisha and Wataita, who inhabited the Tsavo plains before warfare instigated by drought, disease, and the slave trade forced them to migrate to the Taita, Saghala, and Kasigau Hills. These migrants were to eke out a living on the congested hill for the next four centuries, after which peaceful coexistence was reestablished following the abolition of the slave trade and the advent of European colonial rule in the late nineteenth century. How did the people of southeast Kenya maintain relationships with the ancestral shrines which they abruptly abandoned in the Tsavo plains? How and in what ways did their new refuge residences influence their mortuary behavior and practices?

The Field Museum expedition recovered evidence indicating that as they moved to new, more congested hills, these refugees radically changed how they memorialized their ancestors. Slavery, famine, disease, and other crises had forced them to adopt a nomadic lifestyle which involved them regularly moving with little warning. Many adopted a mortuary behavior pattern of migrating with their ancestors. Beginning from the sixteenth century, instead of burying the dead in graves, they began to disinter their ancestors' skulls and built shrines for

them wherever they settled. To maintain strong bonds between ancestors and their descendants, the ancestors were regularly propitiated with gifts of food and drink. They reciprocated by protecting their descendants from calamities and crises like drought, diseases, sterility, and witchcraft. Large partially broken pots and gourds found at interment sites were used in the ceremonial feasting that occurred at these sites.

Our team recovered four such shrine sites in the Tsavo region. One was located in a deep ravine in Sungululu village near Wundanyi town. This one contained 26 skulls, including one of a sheep. The second was found in Kajire, a rocky promontory above the central zone of habitation on Saghala Hills, which included more than 300 cranial remains arranged in different areas of a composite of rocky outcrops. The third was found in Bungule in the Kasigau Hills (Figure 4.15). The Bungule shrine bore 45 individuals. The fourth was the shrine in Makwasinyi, Kasigau Hills, which contained 25 individual skulls.

Elders from the Sungululu community related that the skull of sheep stood in for an ancestor who was lost to the community in a slaving raid. His body was never interred with the ancestors and his mortal remains never returned to his community after his disappearance. Yet he is remembered by those he left behind, and the skull of an animal fulfills his place in the relocated shrine in the Tsavo Hills. Sometimes, an individual's removal from his community marks his social death, as his physical death and mortal remains are never seen by those family members who were ripped from his existence.

Informants confirmed that the groups of cranial remains represented their patrilineage of ancestors. Individuals would be buried in graves for two years, following which the deceased's skull would be disinterred and placed in a cranial display niche. Only married individuals with children were disinterred. Although the practice of disinterring ancestral skulls declined in the 1920s following conversion to Christianity and the colonial decree which discouraged the practice, informants argued that the skulls' rituals continued into the 1950s. The shrines of Tsavo remind us that physical death does not mean an end to familial relationship. Shrines ensure continuity and permanence between the dead, the living, and the unborn.

Reference

Kusimba, C. M., and Kusimba, S. B. 2000. "Hinterlands and Cities: Archaeological Investigations of Economy and Trade in Tsavo, South-Eastern Kenya." *Nyame Akuma* 54: 13–24.

Death and performances around it are continuously used to model experiences in the world. Don Handelman (1990) introduces the term “technology of events” to indicate how the logic of design of public spectacles dictates the way in which one perceives social and political reality. His proposed typology of events—“events that present,” “events that model,” and “events that re-present”—makes explicit reference to the constant manipulation of the design, as well as the internal setting, of the events in order to project and impose on participants desired notions of society, performances of death being an advantageous opportunity for such a process.

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, death should not worry us to the extent that we will not really face the aftermath of our own death. But perhaps this is an unfair characterization and death should worry us, after all, as this will be a continuous arena of dispute for justice and dignity for those that we leave behind. And although death always finds its own ways to make us face the imbalance of power present in our society, death also presents us with the opportunity to reinterpret, subvert, and openly criticize the preexisting social orders, fighting through the power of our actions and performances.

References

- Alberti, B., and Bray, T. 2009. “Special Section: Animating Archaeology. Of Subjects, Objects and Alternative Ontologies.” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 19, no. 3: 337–43.
- Arriaza, B. 1995. *Beyond Death: The Chinchorro Mummies of Ancient Chile*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Borić, D. 2010. “Introduction: Memory, Archaeology and the Historical Condition.” In *Archaeology and Memory*, edited by D. Borić, 1–34. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Bourget, S. 2006. *Sex, Death, and Sacrifice in Moche Religion and Visual Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Cerezo-Román, J. 2015. “Unpacking Personhood and Funerary Customs in the Hohokam Area of Southern Arizona.” *American Antiquity* 80, no. 2: 353–75.
- Connerton, P. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- D’Altroy, T. 2016. “Killing Mummies: On Inka Epistemology and Imperial Power.” In *Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World*, edited by C. Renfrew, M. Boyd, and I. Morley, 404–22. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.
- Fowler, C. 2004. *The Archaeology of Personhood: An Anthropological Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Geertz, C. 1980. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Giannachi, G., Kaye, N., and Shanks, M. 2012. *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*. New York: Routledge.
- Gillespie, S. 2001. “Personhood, Agency, and Mortuary Ritual: A Case Study from the Ancient Maya.” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 20, no. 1: 73–112.
- Hamilakis, Y. 2013. *Archaeology of the Senses: Human Experience, Memory, and Affect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Handelman, D. 1990. *Models and Mirrors: Toward an Anthropology of Public Events*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hill, E. 2016. “Images of Ancestor: Identifying the Revered Dead in Moche Iconography.” In *The Archaeology of Ancestors: Death, Memory, and Veneration*, edited by E. Hill and J. Hageman, 189–212. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Hill, E., and Hageman, J. B. 2016. *The Archaeology of Ancestors: Death, Memory, and Veneration*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Hodder, I. 2010. *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization: Catalhoyuk as a Case Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hodder, I. 2014. “The Entanglements of Humans and Things: A Long-Term View.” *New Literary History* 45, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2014.0005>.
- Huárag Álvarez, E. 2018. *Mitos de La Creación Del Mundo: Mitopoéticas Amazónicas*. Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma, Editorial Universitaria.
- Inomata, T., and Coben, L. 2006. *Archaeology of Performance: Theaters of Power, Community, and Politics*. Oxford: Altamira Press.
- Insoll, T. 2004. *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion*. Oxford and New York: Routledge.
- Kus, S. 1992. “Toward an Archaeology of Body and Soul.” In *Representations in Archaeology*, edited by J. C. Gardin and C. Peebles, 168–77. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- LaChioma, D. 2018. “La Antara en el Arte Moche: Performance y Simbolismo.” In *Música y Sonidos en el Mundo Andino: Flautas de Pan, Zampoñas, Sikus y Ayarachis*, edited by C. Huaranga, 37–74. Lima: Fondo Editorial de Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos.
- Lau, G. 2013. *Ancient Alterity in the Andes: A Recognition of Others*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Meskell, L. 2004. *Object Worlds from Ancient Egypt: Material Biographies Past and Present*. London: Berg.
- Moore, J. 2006. “The Indians Were Much Given to Their Taquis: Drumming and Generative Categories in Ancient Andes.” In *Archaeology of Performance: Theaters of Power, Community, and Politics*, edited by T. Inomata and L. Coben, 47–80. Lanham: Altamira Press.
- Muro Ynoñán, L. A. 2010. “La Tumba del Sacerdote de San José de Moro.” In *Programa Arqueológico San José de Moro: Informe Ejecutivo de la Temporada 2009*, edited by Luis Jaime Castillo, 280–397. Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

- Muro Ynoñán, L. A. 2019. "Tracing the Moche Spectacles of Death: Performance, Ancestrality, and Political Power in Ancient Peru. A View from Huaca La Capilla-San José de Moro (AD 650–740)." Doctoral dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Stanford University.
- Pettitt, P. 2018. "Hominin Evolutionary Thanatology from the Mortuary to Funerary Realm: The Palaeoanthropological Bridge between Chemistry and Culture." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 373, no. 1754. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2018.0212>.
- Renfrew, C. 2016. "'The Unanswered Question': Investigating Early Conceptualisations of Death." In *Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World: "Death Shall Have No Dominion,"* edited by C. Renfrew, M. Boyd, and I. Morley, 1–14. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, J. 2011. "Ritual and Religion in the Neolithic." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*, edited by T. Insoll, 371–86. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Gennep, A. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Death

William Schweiker

University of Chicago

Abstract: Jewish and Christian perspectives on death are examined in this thematic essay, and emphasis is given to Christianity, the area of the author's expertise, with comparisons to Judaism within each of the topics to be explored. The essay examines the origin of death, living while dying, dying and the dead, and, finally, what is thought to be beyond death. Importantly, Judaism and Christianity look forward to the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one (Judaism) or his return. This messianic outlook means that what is beyond death is not only personal or communal eternal life, but, more centrally, the reign of God throughout the whole of reality. The case studies explore examples of Christian and Jewish traditions, including syncretism with Indigenous religions and perspectives from other world religions.

Resumen: En este capítulo se examinan las perspectivas judías y cristianas sobre la muerte. Se da énfasis al cristianismo, el área de especialización del autor, con comparaciones con el judaísmo dentro de cada uno de los temas a explorar. El ensayo examina el origen de la muerte, el “vivir muriendo,” el morir y los muertos y, finalmente, lo que se piensa que hay más allá de la muerte. Es importante destacar que el judaísmo y el cristianismo esperan la llegada del Mesías, el ungido (judaísmo) o su regreso. Esta perspectiva mesiánica significa que lo que está más allá de la muerte no es sólo la vida eterna personal o comunitaria, sino, más centralmente, el reino de Dios en toda su extensión. Los artículos aquí contenidos exploran ejemplos de tradiciones cristianas y judías, incluyendo el sincretismo con las religiones indígenas y las perspectivas de otras religiones del mundo.

Religion and Death

It is often argued that the origin of religion is fear, especially fear of forces beyond human control and particularly death. From ancient thinkers, like the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE), to Enlightenment thinkers such as Scottish philosophers David Hume (1711–1776) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), the origin of religion and ideas about the gods and an afterlife originate in the fear and wish-fulfillment of death. God is to be worshipped and obeyed in order to diminish fear and relieve guilt, or rituals and practices are meant to provide relief from fear and its causes. Whether or not that is a sufficient explanation of the origin of religion, there are good reasons to doubt it. The fact remains that the world's religions do provide realistic responses to the fact of human death. However, it is also true that the religions insist that death is not the final word or the meaning of finite reality. Whether in Hindu ideas of rebirth (Figures 5.1–5.3), Buddhist ideas about Nirvana as extinguishing the fire of desire and releasing the person from the cycle of suffering, Christian conceptions of Heaven as union with or vision of the Divine, or belief among Indigenous religions in the power of ancestors to aid one in the present life, religions hold that death is not the ultimate horizon of human existence. This double perspective must be kept in mind as this essay explores death in Judaism and Christianity. That is, religions realistically face the fact of death and yet also insist that it is not

the ultimate truth of human existence. It is this double perspective on death that allows one to compare and contrast religious traditions.

I emphasize Christian perspectives on death, the area of my expertise, and compare to Judaism within each of the topics to be explored. Of course, every religious tradition is exceedingly complex, with many different beliefs and practices internal to and shared between religions. Given that reality, a comprehensive treatment of Judaism or Christianity, much less their comparison, is impossible. Accordingly, I will examine the origin of death, living while dying, dying and the dead, and, finally, what is thought to be beyond death. Importantly, Judaism and Christianity look forward to the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one (Judaism) or Christ's return (Christianity). This messianic outlook means that what is beyond death is not only eternal life, but, more centrally, the reign of God throughout the whole of reality.

The Origin of Death

Judaism is more a religion of practice, unlike Christianity with its many creeds and doctrines. Life is valued by Jews almost above all else. The Talmud, the basic compendium of Jewish *Torah* (law or teaching), even states that, since all people are descendants of one man (Adam), to take a life is like destroying the world. To save a life is to save the world. Death as a