Comparative Archaeologies

The American Southwest (AD 900–1600) and the Iberian Peninsula (3000–1500 BC)

Edited by Katina T. Lillios
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Since the 1990s, the human body has enjoyed growing popularity as a research topic in archaeology (for example, Hamilakis 1999; Hamilakis et al. 2002a; Houston et al. 2006; Joyce 1998; Meskell and Joyce 2003; Thomas 2000). The three main strands through which the body has been studied by archaeologists are biological anthropology, representations of human bodies, and experiential dimensions to embodiment (Hamilakis et al. 2002b). Although our two contributions demonstrate different approaches to the body, they both primarily deal with bodies of the dead and biological anthropology. Examination and interpretation of skeletal remains and knowledge about bodily modifications, injury, violence, and corpse treatment all provide crucial insights to archaeologies of the body. In this introduction we provide a brief overview of the development of biological anthropology in the American Southwest and in the Iberian Peninsula, outline the main characteristics of mortuary behavior in both areas, discuss overlapping features of our chapters, and address some issues which we would like to be given more attention in the future.

Histories of Research

Southwest

The history of biological anthropology in the American Southwest is as old as the discipline itself and includes thousands of papers on both living and skeletal populations. The initial focus of much of the early research centered on the use of craniometrics to generate typological classifications and taxonomic descriptions (Boas 1903; Hrdlička 1908, 1935; McGee 1898; Ten Kate 1885, 1892). Hrdlička (1914: 512–13) credits Samuel G. Morton, a physician from Philadelphia, as the father of biological anthropology in the United States and indicates that the discipline began during the summer of 1830. That summer, Morton gave a lecture on the craniological variations in the “five races of man,” which led to his creation of a private collection of 968 racial crania. Morton’s craniometric
work became the foundation for most of the osteological work conducted throughout
the nineteenth century (Walker 2000: 8). This typological approach to analysis of hu-
man skeletal remains continued in the American Southwest through the middle of the
twentieth century (Gabel 1949; Hooton 1930; Howells 1936; Hrdlička 1931; Kroeber 1931;
Stewart 1937, 1940).

Over the last 30 years, the analysis of human skeletal remains from archaeological
sites has shifted from a solely descriptive endeavor to a scientific subfield that embraces
hypothesis testing in the context of anthropological archaeology. The term bioarchaeol-
ogy was first used to refer to the broad variety of biological data present at archaeologi-
cal sites that could be used to reconstruct ancient environments (Clark 1972). Buikstra
(1977: 69) adopted the term to refer to population studies of human remains. The goal
of bioarchaeology is to interpret the biological data in relationship to social and ecological
contexts such as changes in diet, increases in population size and density, shifts in
power and stratification, and differential access to resources. Bioarchaeology contextual-
izes the analysis of human remains within cultural and historical frameworks and
generates hypotheses for evaluation that draw together the mutual influence of culture
on human biology and vice versa. This is accomplished through the examination of the
symbiotic relationship between human biology and cultural practices such as the adop-
tion of agriculture (Cohen and Armelagos 1984), the emergence of social complexity
(Danforth 1999), prehistoric population movements, and contact between distant cul-
tures (Larsen and Milner 1994). By using multiple working hypotheses, scientific meth-
odology, and strong inferences, bioarchaeology provides a means for utilizing multiple
lines of evidence in interpretations. Most importantly, variability is not factored out;
rather, it is considered and weighed against all other available lines of evidence so that
it is accounted for.

Although biological anthropology began to move away from conceptual frameworks
of nineteenth-century racial typology by the mid-twentieth century (Johnson and Mann
1997: 1072; Walker 2000: 9), race continues to be a conceptual framework in human
osteological research, as Armelagos and Van Gerven (2003: 58) illustrate. Much of this
work has been generated by forensic anthropologists. Over the course of the past 50
years, forensic anthropologists in the United States have created a niche for themselves
in much the same way forensic pathologists did by invoking a sense of cultural author-
ity (Collins 1979; Freidson 1970; Gieryn 1983; Kuklick 1983; Rosenberg 1976). Using new
techniques and technology, forensic anthropologists “map the terrain of cranial mor-
phology much as their forebears did over a century ago” (Armelagos and Van Gerven
2003: 58).

Iberian Peninsula

In the Iberian Peninsula, skeletal remains of tens of thousands of Neolithic to Early
Bronze Age individuals have been unearthed from their original contexts over the course
of 150 years. This high number can be attributed to the fact that most Neolithic and
Copper Age mortuary structures, especially natural and artificial caves, contain large
numbers of bones. The bones are often badly preserved, fragmentary and disarticulated,
and probably less than 10% of all excavated skeletons have been studied in greater detail. Despite the large number of human remains, skeletal analysis has played only a marginal role in Iberian archaeology. This is not only due to the complexity of discovery contexts and bad preservation of bones but also a product of the separation of archaeology from the biological sciences, and thus a result of disciplinary history.

Biological anthropology and the study of prehistoric skeletons in Portugal and Spain began in the mid-nineteenth century, at first with strong influence from France (for example, Delgado 1867; see also Cunha 1982, 1996; Garralda 1997: 988; Lubell and Jackes 1997: 834). Until recently, biological anthropologists were predominantly interested in population variation and construction of racial taxonomy. Skeletal studies primarily focused on determination of sex, age, and mortality, as well as stature and cranial morphology, which was used as a device to understand historic relationships among populations (for example, Bubner 1986; Corrêa 1949; Cunha 1956; Fusté Ara 1952; Gallay and Spindler 1970; Garralda 1973; Isidoro 1964). Pathologies, bones with cut marks, burned bones, as well as skull trepanations also attracted the attention of scientists of the early days (for example, Delgado 1884). However, more extensive and detailed investigations of these phenomena are of more recent date (Botella López 1973; Campillo Valero 1979–1980; Etxeberria 1994; Guijo Mauri et al. 2000; Jiménez Brobeil et al. 1986).

The shift away from nineteenth-century racial typology only took place in the 1980s, when biological anthropologists working in the Iberian Peninsula — Portuguese, Spanish, and a variety of foreigners — started to better integrate studies of ancient skeletons and their contexts with archaeological agendas. Research topics of the recent past include diet and dietary change through time, paleodemography, community health, social differentiation through biological differences in skeletons, ritual treatment of the dead, questions regarding preservation, and formation processes of collective mortuary deposits (for example, Baraybar and de la Rua 1995; Buikstra et al. 1995; Cunha 2000; Duarte 1998a, 1998b; González López and Teijeiro López 1998; Jackes et al. 1997; Jiménez Brobeil and García Sánchez 1990; Kuntrer 1990; Lohrke et al. 2002; Miguel Ibañez 2004; Silva 2000; Straus et al. 1992; Umbelino et al. 2000). The focus on bioarchaeology, the use of new dating methods and types of skeletal analysis, and a growing precision in data gathering not only have contributed to a better understanding of Neolithic, Copper and Bronze Age societies but have also enhanced the image of human bones as highly valuable data sources for archaeological interpretation (Chapman 2005; Zapata 1995).

Dimensions of Comparison

American Southwest Burials

In the American Southwest, there is a wide array of mortuary behaviors that span from the archaic period (6000 BC–100 AD) up to and including the historic tribes. For brevity’s sake, we will only address the major post-Archaic regional traditions: Ancestral Pueblo (Anasazi), Hohokam, and Mogollon. In the pre columbian Southwest, most interments consist of a single individual. Some burials with multiple individuals in pits, rooms, and kivas have been found at Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Canyon (Akins 2001), and among
the Salado (Loendorf 2001: 129). These burials usually consist of a combination of a few articulated and disarticulated skeletons.

Ancestral Pueblo mortuary behavior and treatment of the dead had some common elements across space and time on the Colorado Plateau. Children, reproductive-age women, and the elderly died on a regular basis from common but deadly health problems related to infections, inadequate nutrition, and blood loss (Martin 1994; Martin and Akins 2001). Many Ancestral Pueblo burials are deposits of corpses in a prepared pit. Generally, a body was placed on its side in a flexed or semiflexed position. Grave goods were often present but rarely extensive or exorbitant (Neitzel 2001). Prepared graves during the tenth and eleventh centuries are found in many locations: middens, floors of habitation structures, storage cists, extramural pits, in the walls, shafts and floors of kivas, and in abandoned structures. The Ancestral Pueblo had a penchant for burying their dead in places built for and used by the living.

Hohokam mortuary behavior included cremation of the corpse and deposition of the remains inside ("primary cremations") and outside ("secondary cremations") the locus in which the cremation occurred. Primary cremations usually occur in pits, secondary cremations in pits, urns, and trenches. Cremation of the corpse was the most common burial practice during the Preclassic period (before AD 1150), and the remains were often placed in cemeteries located outside living areas (Beck 2005; Haury 1976; McGuire 1992). By the Classic period (ca. AD 1150–1400), deposits with corpses become as common as deposits with cremations and take the form of extended, semiflexed, or flexed burials. Often these burials were placed in adobe sarcophagi or plaster-lined or unlined pits located within courtyards or under room floors (Brunson 1989; Wilcox 1987).

The burials associated with the Mogollon took many forms, including deposits of corpses in a flexed or semiflexed position often placed on their back or right side and cremation deposits. Placement of the corpses included under the floor of houses, in storage pits, within the fill of abandoned houses, courtyards, and plaza-oriented cemeteries (Anyon and LeBlanc 1984; Haury 1985; Shafer 2003; Woosley and McIntyre 1996). The shift from flexed or semiflexed deposition in the flesh to cremation of the corpse seems to increase from the late Formative/Preclassic (AD 600/650–1100/1150) to the late Classic period (AD 1300–1450; Shafer 2003).

Iberian Burials

In the Late Neolithic and Copper Age, deposition of the dead predominantly took place in caves, hipogea (artificial caves), mortuary monuments (passage graves, gallery graves, tholoi, tumuli), and in simple pits and silos. In the Early Bronze Age, new grave types such as cists (some surrounded by stones and/or covered by mounds), different types of pits, and small artificial caves appear. However, Neolithic and Copper Age monuments and caves are also reused in this time period, a phenomenon that occurs throughout the Iberian Peninsula (for example, García Sanjuán 2006: 151–60; Leisner and Leisner 1943; Rojo and Kunst 1999).

The majority of Late Neolithic and Copper Age graves are located outside settlements, although exceptions also exist: silo burials below structures with multiple bodies have been
discovered in the Guadalquivir Valley (late fourth millennium, Lizcano et al. 1991–1992); deposits with human remains as well as isolated human bones without associated graves were found at a variety of Copper Age Portuguese sites (Cardoso 1994; Jorge et al. 1998–1999) and settlements of Andalusia (Alcázar Godoy et al. 1992; Lillo Carpio and Walker 1987). In the Early Bronze Age, grave sites continue outside settlements but intramural depositions become also common. In the Southeast, early Bronze Age (“Argaric”) graves (cists, pits, covachas, urns) are usually located within settlements and beneath house floors or embedded in the walls of domestic structures (Castro Martínez et al. 1993–1994).

Late Neolithic and Copper Age mortuary contexts contain multiple individuals, ranging from at least a few individuals to hundreds of people. In the early Bronze Age there is a shift from graves with many bodies to graves with only a few individuals (usually one individual, although several graves also hold two or three bodies). Several researchers have equated collective burials with collective identity and interpreted the change from “collective” to “individual” burial as a sign for growing attention to individual corpses and increasing social complexity (for example, Criado Boado 1989: 91; García Sanjuán 1999: 347).

Synthesis

The mortuary contexts in the American Southwest and Late Neolithic and Copper Age Iberia are very different from each other. With the exception of a few multiple burial contexts, most of the burials of the American Southwest are individual. In the Iberian Peninsula, individual deposition of corpses in pits and crypts under house floors is a characteristic of the southeastern region during the early Bronze Age. Apart from one Neolithic rock shelter, Abric de l’Escurrupenia in Alicante (Pascual 2002), cremation as mortuary treatment as known among the Hohokam of the American Southwest does not exist in the Iberian Peninsula within the time period under consideration (Weiss-Krejci 2005). Despite these seemingly disparate mortuary treatments in the two areas that we are going to deal with and the disproportionate time lengths (a few hundred years for the Southwest, almost two millennia for the Iberian Peninsula), our two chapters do touch upon some similar problems, especially those that concern the evidence for physical trauma and mortuary treatment of the corpse.

Comparative Aspects

All human societies have their own rituals, beliefs, and customs surrounding death. The way that people dispose of the dead and the meaning associated with death varies from culture to culture and even from neighborhood to neighborhood within the same town. The meaning of the ritual, its timing, and those expected to participate vary enormously. These death rituals serve a variety of functions, including helping the spirit or soul move on to its next life, separating the body from the soul, and constructing boundaries between the living and the dead (Hertz 1907; Hubert 2000: 209).

Death ceremonies are comprised of three dramatists: the corpse, the soul, and the mourners, all of which are sent on a ritual journey at death. The marking of this passage occurs through the corpse, because the corpse is a transitional object linking the living to
the afterlife. Human remains are not simply physical objects, just as death is not simply a biological phenomenon. Both are as culturally constructed as the death rituals inscribed to deal with them. Thus, the body can be used as a “natural symbol” through which societies and cultures may be interpreted (Heinz 1999: 155–56).

From our earliest human ancestry, disarticulated bone assemblages evidencing perimortem cultural processing have been part of the history of our species (Pickering et al. 2000). Although it is difficult to establish specific reasons for such behavior, plausible explanations include mortuary practices, ritual destruction, mutilation, cannibalism, and violence. In societies that practice corpse dismemberment, parts of bodies come to represent whole bodies. Displayed or otherwise memorialized parts of bodies are often considered comforting and have powerful symbolic messages about how to remember and obtain power from the dead.

The extent to which violence and perimortem modifications of human skeletons played an important part in shaping the lives of the prehistoric inhabitants of the American Southwest has become a controversial debate among some anthropologists. From AD 900 to 1250, skeletal remains from the Southwest show a variety of injuries (for example, Lambert 1999, 2000; Martin 1997; Martin and Goodman 1995; Wilcox et al. 2001); however, the most inexplicable form of trauma from this period are the dismembered corpses with cutmarks, extensive perimortem fracturing, percussion scars, and burning (Billman et al. 2000; Turner and Turner 1999; White 1992). On the southern piedmont of Sleeping Ute Mountain in southwestern Colorado, corpse mutilation, cannibalism, and community abandonment around AD 1150 strongly suggest that serious inter-group violence was important in the formation of at least some of these “cannibalism” assemblages (Billman et al. 2000; Lambert et al. 2000; Marlar et al. 2000). Unburied bodies with and without obvious trauma are prominent at some locations after AD 1250 (LeBlanc 1999; Rice and LeBlanc 2001), but evidence for cannibalism is at present less common (Billman et al. 2000; Turner and Turner 1999).

The relationship between this evidence and warfare is suspect at best. This is because there is no reason to believe that all of these assemblages were created under the same conditions. Warfare is a distinct possibility for some of the assemblages, but the proposed rationales for their creation have been culturally simplistic with regard to how and why the violence would be expressed in such a horrific way. Rather, explanations are framed in simple ideas of raiding or warfare based on resource scarcity or political exploitation (Billman et al. 2000; LeBlanc 1999; Turner and Turner 1999).

Like the Pueblo landscape, Iberian Neolithic and Copper Age settlements and mortuary contexts contain human remains that are disarticulated, broken, cut, chopped, and burned. As in the American Southwest, these bones have variously been interpreted to represent cannibalism, warfare, and mortuary rituals (for example, Antunes and Cunha 1998; Cardoso 1994: 143; Lillo Carpio and Walker 1987; see also Rojo and Künst 2002; Weiss-Krejci 2005). In her chapter, Weiss-Krejci discusses the possible reasons for the state of these bones. Although she feels that especially cuts, burns, and dismembered bones result from a variety of mortuary treatments such as the stripping of skin and flesh, artificial dehydration, body storage, and reburial, at present there is little data to allow the distinction between these different behaviors. With a few exceptions (for example,
Duarte 1998b; Etxeberria 2000; Silva and Ferreira 2008), biological anthropologists and archaeologists have not discussed these issues in great detail, nor have they developed or tested models that could explain these different situations. Although the issue of violence is increasingly playing a stronger role in Iberian archaeology (Armendariz et al. 1994; Kunst 2000: 131; Monks 1997, 1999; Silva and Ferreira 2008), Iberian archaeologists still consider the burning of entire mortuary structures on the Northern Meseta and in Navarre as a result of ritual behavior (Rojo and Kunst 2002). However, the nature of these fires remains ambiguous, and violence in the form of deliberate hostile destruction should not be ruled out (Weiss-Krejci 2005). Osteological evidence for trauma caused by weapons and evidence for violent death have been recovered from a variety of contexts (Silva and Marques 2010; Vegas et al. 1999). These injuries, which were responsible for the death of at least some of the buried individuals, could be the outcome of interpersonal violence and warfare.

However, research in the Iberian Peninsula does not distinguish different types of violence, nor does it discuss the term “warfare” in greater detail. Pérez’ chapter, which addresses these topics for the American Southwest, proves especially interesting concerning this problem. To Pérez it is important to consider violence as something far more complex than merely the absence of peace. The social consequence of violence goes well beyond the immediate physical trauma inflicted upon the victim. Because current research into violence and warfare also includes the threat of violence, it has been difficult to factor in data that cannot be culled directly from the empirical evidence of archaeological excavations. For example, recent research suggests “some of the worst and most degrading offenses work by sustaining a palpable threat of violence over a victim without ever having to produce much injury” (Moore et al. 1994: 178). Violence diminishes the daily life of those who are threatened, afraid, or hurt. Luhrmann (2000), Ewing (2000), and Suárez-Orozco (2000) have suggested that large-scale violence and massive trauma destroy the fabric of the sociocultural bonds and trust that make human life possible.

**Directions for Future Research**

Southwest

Studies of violence in contemporary society demonstrate that fear and victimization is not randomly distributed in a population (Warr 1994: 11). Thus, the study of violence in archaeological contexts must necessarily go beyond the proximate causes of individual cases of traumatic injury. To do so requires the use of a theoretical framework that is responsive to the historical and contextual factors that create and maintain violence. Archaeologists have most often used theoretical frameworks derived from cultural or sociological studies in order to model violence and warfare for past populations, and this literature is expanding the traditional frameworks to include prehistoric and protohistoric sites in the Americas. Episodes of violence and warfare have been linked to inequality, political economic stratification, and differential access to resources that can become heightened in periods of unpredictability and environmental degradation (Ember and Ember 1997; Ferguson 1997; Knauft 1991).
The great majority of the work on violence as gleaned from osteological evidence of trauma has tended to focus on male activities related to warfare (for example, Blakely and Mathews 1990; Brothwell and Sandison 1967; Milner et al. 1991; Wells 1964). Apart from these observations, there have been relatively few analyses of intentional injury and identification of groups at risk by gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status within a framework that contextualizes violence in a broader biocultural perspective. Notable exceptions to this include the work of Wilkinson and Van Wagenen (1993) for a pre-contact site in Michigan, Walker (1989) for pre-contact sites along the California coast, and Martin (1997) for pre-contact Ancestral Pueblo sites. These pioneering studies provide models for thinking about ritualized, institutionalized, or sanctioned violence against women (and men, in the California case).

In order to understand the role that conflict, violence, and warfare played in the behavior and cultural dynamics in the American Southwest it is important that empirical data and theoretical models begin to classify the specific types of violence as opposed to homogenizing all violence into a single category. This new paradigm for considering violent behavior should include, but not be limited to four categories of violence: individual (homicide, witchcraft, theft); household (domestic abuse, child abuse, low status women, witchcraft); intercommunity (elites exacting tribute, social stratification, raiding and abducting, internal strife, witchcraft, ancestor veneration); and inter-group (differential access to resources, warfare, massacres, resource depletion, trophy taking, symbolic anthropophagy, genocide, the Politicization of the Dead, ancestor veneration).

These alternative hypotheses of violence can be tested by using a multidisciplinary scientific approach that will include osteological and bioarchaeological data in conjunction with available archaeological data and theories derived from broad patterns of evidence from settlement patterns, site construction, and local and regional contexts. This approach has the potential to revise recently proposed patterns of violence in the pre-hispanic American Southwest — as well as the Iberian Peninsula — and can offer alternative hypotheses for the multiple types of cultural taphonomic processing seen on the various human skeletal assemblages throughout these regions.

Iberian Peninsula

Most parts of the Iberian Peninsula — with the exception of the northwestern region and some areas in the south — offer a particularly fertile field for the recovery of osteological remains. Natural and artificial caves as well as megalithic monuments probably still hold thousands of bodies that have not yet been touched by archaeologists. Additionally, unlike later Bronze Age and Iron Age societies, the people of the Neolithic, Copper Age, and Early Bronze Age did not cremate their dead. Therefore the bodies in the Iberian Peninsula constitute a highly valuable resource for present and future research.

For all these reasons it is very important to study ancient human remains with much greater care. In research projects aimed at the study of funerary contexts, as for example the excavation of a cave or megalithic monument, a biological anthropologist should be present during all phases of excavation. Since many bones in the Iberian Peninsula are found outside “mortuary contexts,” a person who is able to recognize human bones may
be required at all times in all types of excavations. At present, these bones often make it into bags with animal remains only to be discovered by zooarchaeologists at a later point.

Though techniques during recovery of human remains are continuously improving and the general awareness for the value of osteological material has grown, the methods of recording and analyzing deposits with human remains are still far from sufficient. Several groundbreaking studies have been published, but there are still too many excavation reports and publications that do not provide contextualized data for human bones. The discussion of human bones is often saved only for the appendix, usually compiled by a biological anthropologist who had no part in the original research. This situation is bolstered by the strong separation between archaeology, biological anthropology, and cultural anthropology, which provides some of the sociopolitical mechanisms for the ultimate creation of the archaeological assemblage. In the Iberian Peninsula these constitute separate academic fields. In contrast to the United States of America, where every student of archaeology has to take classes in biological anthropology and vice versa, Iberian archaeologists have no training in biological anthropology. This has a very negative effect on the research. Some of the current problems in understanding formation processes of burial deposits, topics that Weiss-Krejci will discuss in greater detail in her chapter, could probably be solved if archaeologists and biological anthropologists worked more closely together in the field.

While in the Southwest the dating has been extensive, very few mortuary contexts are thoroughly dated in the Iberian Peninsula. Usually three to five dates per mortuary context are provided, which, unfortunately, is too little. Clearly dating of human bone is expensive; however, in the context of complex collective burial deposits it is absolutely indispensable. If no immediate threat to a mortuary structure exists and resources for extensive analysis are lacking, the investigation is best postponed until sufficient funding can be raised.

Conclusion

In this bridging chapter, we have considered the body mainly from the point of view of biological anthropology, mortuary archaeology, and violence and warfare, which form a special aspect of human corporeal experience. Attempts to engage in understandings of the human body can be manifold; Hamilakis et al. (2002b: 13) consider the emphasis on the experiencing body as a special opportunity for integrating several approaches, because “critically-aware sensory and phenomenological archaeologies may be used to enrich existing traditions such as biological anthropology, gender studies and mortuary archaeology.” As for the future, we also hope to see more attempts to move beyond simply seeing bodies as bones, to seeing bodies as they are represented in other media (for example, Lillios 2004: 145). The human body in its corporeal state has long been used by anthropologists as a lens through which to examine cultural processes (Martin and Pérez 2001: 6). Understanding how dead bodies are discussed (incorporated by various media) and differentially utilized serves as a point of departure for a better understanding of past experiences and meanings in these two geographic areas.
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