Afterword

Visible Death: Mortuary Site and Mortuary Landscape in Diachronic Perspective

Lynne Goldstein
Michigan State University

As someone who long ago (Goldstein 1976, 1980, 1981) argued for the significance of a multidimensional spatial approach to mortuary analysis, it is gratifying to see the many different directions in which the authors in this volume (as well as others) have taken such studies, even when they criticize (sometimes appropriately) my own work. Certainly, some of this new research focuses on issues I had not even considered twenty years ago, but all of these studies use one or more dimensions of space or spatial representation as a critical principle or variable, and all of these studies also acknowledge the complexity of interpretation underlying the use and analysis of spatial data. Further, a number of authors effectively highlight the very important point that inclusion or analysis of space can help the archaeologist address some important but very different and difficult questions. Finally, most authors also note that multiple lines of evidence and careful use of analogy are critical in trying to understand or determine the meaning of space or the use of space in these contexts.

As Silverman points out in her introduction, the themes of these papers cover a wide range of topics—scale and frames of reference, from local to regional to national; connections between the living and the dead, and especially the space and place of ancestors; memory, in terms of its representations and in terms of its manipulations; and agency, practice, and representation in death. Several chapters also provide archaeological perspectives on the present. Cannon cogently reviews the work of the authors in this volume from the somewhat more targeted and specific perspective of how spatial representations of death are part of the creation of ritual and the maintenance of personal and social memories. Cannon argues: "All of these efforts can be described as going beyond any memory of once-living individuals. The result is a formalized expression that does not actually rely on knowledge of the dead as real beings. The mortuary landscape becomes the spatial representation of political power, which is more potently expressed in its construction than in social memories of death."

The focus of this volume on the meaning of space—the deeper iconological level of understanding as described by Silverman—represents a very different kind of spatial analysis from what people thought about in the 1970s and 1980s, and this different view is both welcome and appropriate as we have become more sophisticated in our thinking about space, the use of space, and the creation of landscapes. No one in this volume used any complex statistical approach or even a Geographic Information System to present his or her data. No one looked for patterns because the assumption that space and place had been deliberately manipulated and negotiated had already been demonstrated in these instances. We know that space was not randomly used or people randomly placed across the landscape. I would like to focus my discussion on several points that I think highlight some of the successes and questions of the current work. Taken together, one cannot escape the impression that these researchers appreciate the complexity and depth of meaning represented in mortuary contexts.

Targeted Field Research

A number of the papers in this volume represent new and very specifically targeted field research (Arnold, Charles and Buikstra, Manzanilla). People are not necessarily working in new places, but they are trying to integrate and synthesize extant, and often disparate, data from areas in which archaeologists have worked for many years. The difference today is that the researchers are carefully trying to improve the data base by adding more carefully collected data and data that will add signifi-

cantly to the context and understanding of the extant data. The information being collected is often regional in nature and can include both survey and excavation information, or in the case of Doyon, geological information. The work is being done to answer a very specific set of questions but, in so doing, it illuminates materials excavated in the past under more problematic conditions. In other words, old data are not being set aside or ignored, they are being enhanced. This is an extremely promising development.

Time Depth and Incomplete Ritual Sequences

These authors appreciate what can be termed the messiness of everyday life and death. In other words, like a habitation site, any particular mortuary site may represent considerable time depth, during which ideas about the space and place of death may have changed one or more times (Charles and Buikstra, Hutchinson and Aragon, Parker Pearson, Silverman, Small). With these changes come changes in meaning as well. Further, the material expression of any ritual behavior may not necessarily be the end result, but instead might be some middle point in a multistage ritual process (see especially Hutchinson and Aragon). The mortuary ritual might require later movement of bones or other behaviors that would have eventually resulted in a different set of outcomes. Everything we see in what we call a mortuary context may not represent the end of the ritual sequence, or the sequence itself may have undergone change over time, or both. To put it simply, we cannot assume that a mortuary site represents a single, unified "finished picture" of mortuary ritual. It is far more likely to represent a group of different ritual stages that have changed in meaning and form over a number of years. Although we have come to understand the inherent messiness of the real world in many other contexts, we still tend to think of a mortuary site as monolithic in meaning and variation, when change through time and across space, as well as the staged nature of ritual, applies equally here.

Alternate, More Complex, Explanations

The authors in this volume are more likely to understand the impact of making assumptions about a mortuary site and its meanings. Instead of developing single-line interpretations, authors try several alternative explanations to understand the complexities of the sites they study (Blake, Charles and Buikstra, Dulanto, Gillespie, Manzanilla, Parker Pearson). They are more likely to use multiple lines of evidence and seek alternative approaches to meaning. While these interpretations or approaches might not always have the traditional feel of "real science," the openness to alternatives, the use of multiple lines of data, and the willingness to look at things differently represent hallmarks of "real science." Linked to this is the discussion by Charles and Buikstra of the problems of intersubjectivity on the part of the analyst as they relate to understanding mortuary behavior. They warn against the tendency to project contemporary values into the past.

Multi-Ethnic Realities

It is refreshing that many authors recognize the multi-ethnic character of the sites they examine (see especially Manzanilla), particularly when the sites are not necessarily historic. Historic archaeologists have had to struggle more directly with what multi-ethnic settlements mean in terms of complexities of archaeological interpretation (see, for example, Lightfoot et al. 1998), but prehistoric archaeologists have largely ignored such issues, and mortuary analysts have perhaps ignored the problem even more. The occasional mortuary analyst might raise the possibility of a diverse population represented at a site, but it is unusual to see the researcher deal directly with the consequences of this diversity in terms of multiple layers of meaning and ritual variability. This is an area of interpretation (and analysis) that needs considerable work, and in which the space and place of death figure prominently. Certainly, different ethnic groups might be placed in different sections of a mortuary site or landscape, as is the custom in many modern cemeteries, but what about those instances in which different groups are integrated into the same mortuary site? Is the diversity apparent? If so, in what ways, and can one determine whether or not there is a difference in meaning?

Human Remains and Mortuary Sites

In part because of NAGPRA, other laws, and changes in sensibilities, in archaeology today there is generally less discussion of the physical anthropology of the human remains and little integration of this information into the analysis and interpretation of the meaning of the site. This seems a most unfortunate development because a whole set of relevant data is being omitted or sidelined. Among the chapters in this volume, those by Arnold (specifically, the study of human remains through DNA analysis), Charles and Buikstra, Dulanto, and Manzanilla (to an extent) integrate the physical anthropological data

into the interpretations. But the number of chapters that do not even mention the osteology or physical data is surprising. Discussions of everything from the nature of secondary burials to the distribution of bone across a site could benefit from a more sophisticated use of the osteological data.

Mortuary Landscapes

Several authors stress the idea that mortuary sites are part of the overall landscape and would be visible to people who lived at that time and moved across the landscape. We must view mortuary sites as part of the *whole* landscape, as well as aspects of the culture and society. Landscape, culture, and society all have a history, and we must try to be cognizant of that history. This is especially true because earlier landscapes were visible (as palimpsests) to later people and had meaning for them, even though that meaning may have changed in the new situation. We need to pay attention to *which* landscapes were visible to people at a particular time and in a specific region. Thus, we need to focus on the setting of the space and place of death; we need to understand what the landscape looked like at any moment for individuals, groups, larger groups, and societies.

The importance of the overall landscape to a group was made clear to me in a very different context. A number of years ago, I served on the Wisconsin Historic Preservation Review Board, which reviewed National Register nominations for the state. During my time on the Board, we received the first nomination for a rural historic district, prepared by William Tishler, University of Wisconsin-Madison. The proposed district was a large, rural historic Belgian community just outside Green Bay, Wisconsin. Tishler showed the spatial consistency in the rural area, with houses set in certain places on the landscape, and in relation to other cultural features. Each building seemed to be thoughtfully and deliberately placed. The historical integrity of the community was clearly as dependent on the use of space and place as it was on the physical buildings. I remember that everyone on the panel was impressed. Then Tishler brought out the rest of his evidence. He showed a sequence of slides that appeared to be the same community, or perhaps a different one down the road. The placement of buildings and farmsteads was the same, and the uses of space and place were remarkably similar. At that point, Tishler explained that the second set of slides was a rural community in Belgium from which these people in Wisconsin came—the immigrants had specifically sought out a landscape that was similar, and they made similar use of it. Of course, things changed the longer the Belgians lived in Wisconsin and the two communities grew in different directions with different neighbors, and in different sociopolitical contexts, but the importance of the whole landscape to these people was clear and remarkable. I do not think that one could have studied only the mortuary landscape and gotten the picture—a view of the entire landscape was essential. Archaeology requires more extensive and intensive regional work, as well as better integration of disparate data sources.

In attempting to understand the mortuary landscape, it seems to me that technology might be at a point where it can be of major assistance. Why not use GIS and other simulation systems to try to place ourselves into the landscape of the time and see sites as someone who was there might have seen them? Instead of using simulations as we did in the old days to figure out calories available when it did or did not rain for three months, why not use these geography-based systems to examine the landscape and its human-created features and monuments from different perspectives and at different times? The importance of being able to see a particular feature from a mortuary site might become clear. It might also be useful to see how a landscape changed as more monuments or mounds were created. This would not be a tool for interpretation per se, but rather a tool to be used to place oneself in different locations on the landscape, and in the same locations on the landscape with different settings (forests, no forests, mounds, no mounds, etc.). In a paper I wrote about Aztalan, a Mississippian village in Wisconsin (Goldstein 1991), I noted that although the location may seem odd to us today, if you examined the location in comparison to the area in Illinois from which we think these people came, the Aztalan location is the first place along the river to look like the landscape at "home." That similarity and familiarity is important. Our landscapes have histories and meanings for us.

Visible and Invisible Landscapes

It is probably important to distinguish between the invisible landscape of death and the visible space and place of death. By invisible, I mean those locations, like burials in house floors, that are not seen by people going about their ordinary jobs. The visible space and place of death would include constructed features such as mounds or monuments. These different burial strategies did not necessarily mean the same thing in their own time and place, and they certainly do not mean the same thing later.

Both can occur in the same society. Further, just because something is "invisible" to a passerby does not mean that its meaning was less important or profound. As Gillespie notes, the Mayan dwelling with its house burials should not be seen as a place of death, but rather as "a locus for the enactment of claims to group continuity through the curation, transformation, and renewal of that group's material and immaterial property." This practice was, according to Gillespie, tied to the importance of the disposition of the soul, and therefore represents regeneration of social personae. By contrast, Parker Pearson outlines an "envelope of visibility" around Stonehenge in which some features deliberately can and cannot be seen. For Arnold, Iron Age society used tumuli to advertise and promote ancestors. In some instances, it is important to reference the ancestors by being able to see where they are located (buried). These visible spaces help contribute to the production of locality, even though they do so in different ways. In some contexts (Arnold, Charles and Buikstra), the dead and the living are clearly separated, whereas in others (Manzanilla, Gillespie), this is not only unnecessary, it is undesirable.

History and Memory

One of the most significant observations to come out of these papers and other current mortuary studies is the tie between mortuary practices, histories, and memories. In this volume, Cannon focuses his comments on the development of social memories, with the mortuary landscape being the spatial representation of political power. I agree, but also think that the role of mortuary landscapes in history and memory is far more complex and multilayered than this. I am impressed by Charles and Buikstra, who use their many years of work in the Illinois Valley to demonstrate that Middle Woodland mortuary practices are not understandable without knowledge of Archaic practices, and that changes in practices often relate to a variety of changing conditions. The changes in practices are deliberately manipulated for the circumstances—they are not just something that happens as a by-product of change. Charles and Buikstra (as well as a number of other authors) also remind us that social and political concerns are not only negotiated through mortuary practices, but also can be represented in other contexts and places. Landscape, however, is often a locus of memory and history, and as Arnold notes, it is often co-opted by later cultures. Blake makes some similar arguments about the "giants' tombs" in Sardinia, noting that the builders of tombs would have had an ongoing impact on people in the region for hundreds of years because the built environment structures human actions, and repeated activities in these spaces make them meaningful. These spaces and landscapes can continue to have meaning for different people at different times.

Cannon makes the distinction between personal memory and social memory, noting that it is social memory that is defined and maintained through ritual. The mortuary landscape becomes the basis for collective memory that transcends the personal. When we see a cemetery or other mortuary facility, we may or may not know whose bones are represented, yet the bones themselves not only provide a powerful symbol, but also can serve to establish and strengthen group ties in the present. As Cantwell (1990:625) notes in a different and more recent context: "When life has gone from a body, the individuality has gone with it. It is then that the body, skeleton, or mummy can be used to represent the structure—the skeleton, as it were—of any or all peoples. That skeleton then can be 'fleshed out' to suit the current needs. What is hard and imperishable about a human body can be used to represent all bodies, or more specifically the larger body, the body politic. I refer here not to the fate of individual soul or lineage but of society itself."

In another context, Blu (1980) makes an analogous argument, relating back to the critical importance of histories, as well as the issue of multi-ethnicity. In her discussion of the Lumbee of North Carolina, Blu argues that ethnicity is replacing race in symbolic dominance, and this change requires an increased concern with history. Specifically, Blu (1980:215) suggests: "Not only are the members of one ethnic group concerned with their own past, as a group, but members of another ethnic group must also be concerned with it insofar as they must interact with and understand the first group. Historical traditions and experiences are considered important features linking members of an ethnic group because they are part of a common heritage....History, as perceived by both insiders and outsiders, is at the core of ethnic identification, which makes more understandable the urgent demands from ethnic groups to rewrite and expand history....History is not a frill, it is at the heart of a symbolic structure of ethnicity in the United States."

This particular example relates more to modern societies than archaeological ones, but stresses the importance of understanding histories and memories when trying to understand what happened in the near or distant past, as well as the link between these and different ethnic groups. The link from histories and *memory to* space is a simple and powerful one, and one that is just beginning to be explored by the authors in this volume

and by others. This work holds great promise for mortuary studies and should help us to uncover a more nuanced, multilayered, and messier, but ultimately more real and interesting, past.

References

Blu, K.
1980 *The Lumbee Problem: The Making of an American Indian People.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cantwell, A-M.
1990 The Choir Invisible: Reflections on the Living and the Dead. *Death Studies* 14:613–28.

Goldstein, L.
1976 *Spatial Structure and Social Organization: Regional Manifestations of Mississippian Society.* Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.
1980 *Mississippian Mortuary Practices: A Case Study of Two Cemeteries in the Lower Illinois Valley.* Scientific Papers No. 4, Northwestern University Archaeological Program, Evanston, Ill.
1981 One-Dimensional Archaeology and Multi-Dimensional People: Spatial Organization and Mortuary Analysis. In *The Archaeology of Death,* R. Chapman, I. Kinnes, and K. Randsborg, eds., pp. 53–69. New York: Cambridge University Press.
1991 The Implications of Aztalan's Location. In *New Perspectives on Cahokia: Views from the Periphery,* J. Stoltman, ed., pp. 209–27. Monographs in World Archaeology, No. 2, Prehistory Press, Madison, Wis.

Lightfoot, K., A. Martínez, and A. Schiff
1998 Daily Practice and Material Culture in Pluralistic Social Settings: An Archaeological Study of Culture Change and Persistence from Fort Ross, California. *American Antiquity* 63(2): 199–222.