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# Funerary Practices in Archaeology: Pluralities & Heritage

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**Abstract:** This article presents an aspect of the configuration of the studies of funerary practices in archaeology, first in terms of their plural perspectives and intersecting spaces, such as mortuary studies, funerary archaeology, social bioarchaeology and archaeology-anthropology of death; and in a second moment, with emphasis on the issue of cemeteries as historical archaeological heritage. It was based on an article initially published in *Revista Clio Série Arqueológica*, a periodical of the Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil, which dealt with the issue of the relationship between funerary sites, funerary practices and archaeological heritage. From a review of the random archaeological bibliography, the intersections between a general archaeological theory of material culture and as bioarchaeologies were verified, on the one hand in the international perspective and hermetic legislation and burial terminologies, on the other hand, in the perspective of the case from Brazil. In the first case, hypotheses were formulated to characterize funerary contexts and non-funerary contexts in relation to funerary cycles. In the second case, exemplified sites and funerary terminologies linked with the proper funerary contexts - the heritage-cemeteries in the case of Brazil. Heritage-cemeteries contain objects of material culture, closely related to human skeletal remains, comprising artifacts or primordial, symbolic, sensitive structures, representing an innovative intersectional area, with the body amalgamated with artifacts and funerary structures, within the studies of funeral practices, perhaps necessarily, in the underground and aboveground approaches.

**Keywords:** Funerary Practices, Burial Terminology, Cemetery, Archaeological Heritage

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## 1. Introduction: Mortuary Polymorphy

Firstly, this article presents the plural perspectives of studies of funerary practices in archaeology under the perspective of mortuary studies, social archaeology of funerary remains, social bioarchaeology and the archaeology of death. It was based on an article published in *Revista Clio Série Arqueológica*, a periodical of the Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil [58], which dealt with the issue of the funerary archaeological heritage. These major themes or areas of archaeology were discussed [1-4], achieving little repercussion in the case of Brazil. Here, some authors sought to synthesize this plurality of the study of funerary practices within archaeology [5, 6]. In a second moment, the situation of the sites of interest for the studies of funerary practices in the case of Brazil will be explained.

Obtaining information about the sociocultural systems of the past necessarily involves the investigative study of

ancient human graves and is very closely related to the so-called biocultural studies [1]. In this first perspective, the author warns us that any analysis of human skeletal remains must always include, also, their orientation and disposition, their accompaniments or funeral offerings, buried with them, the funerary structures in which they were deposited and this is all which can provide different types of data on past cultures, health and disease, diet and nutrition, paleodemography, cultural practices (eg such as head deformation and tooth decoration with inlaid stones) as well as certain evidence, even if fragmentary and in the form of inferences, about social organization, relationships of work activities and religious beliefs.

The study of funerary customs (burial customs or mortuary customs) has been seen as an important area of archaeology and anthropology [1] for a long time [7-12]. The intentional deposition of the dead has characterized the behavior of modern humans (*Homo sapiens*), unlike other species of

Homo. This intentional deposition is part of funerary practices and these are indicators of religion and belief in life after death, constituting the first object of study by anthropologists and archaeologists in the late nineteenth century. This belief is considered as one of the components of the psychic unity of all human beings [1, 13].

One of the first archaeologists to devote himself to the systematic study of human burials was Sir John Lubbock [1, 14]. In developing a typology of religious beliefs, starting with atheism and continuing to monotheism, Lubbock described the graves he studied in terms of stages of religious beliefs, having certain types and funerary accompaniments indicative of specific beliefs. He was one of the first archaeologists to recognize the variation in the treatment of the dead according to sex, age, and social status or level.

In 1900, Lubbock published a statistical analysis with a series of mortuary data as per the study of 297 British tombs, including the frequency of the type of grave, orientation of the body, funeral accompaniments, method of burial and the labor investment represented there [1, 15]. Between the 1970s and 1980s, systematic investigations of burials were carried out using social and biological data that were statistically treated [1]. During this period, the texts of the main Anglo-Saxon representatives of mortuary studies were published [4, 16-23].

Based on concepts derived from anthropological theory, the principles of mortuary analysis in contemporary archeology were remodeled [23]. According to this approach, the roles that an adult plays in society are part of their social persona. This multifaceted persona of yours will be “reflected” in the treatment given to that individual after death. Also, in egalitarian societies, children will have fewer social identities compared to adults. However, if archaeologists find elaborate burials of children, indicating a typical social persona of an adult, it may be considered that the principle of social position guaranteed by birth is present, representing a high hierarchical status to a child of a differentiated or dominant social class [1, 18].

The prerogative that funeral practices can “reflect” the very organization of a society and can be ethnographically proven [23, 24], having been criticized in (pseudo) archaeological arguments [5]. This “reflection” is related to the mortuary treatment of the corpse, which may vary according to its age, sex and social status. Within hierarchical societies, the number of social classes or hierarchies can be identified by burials if different mortuary treatments leave their traces. In this case, the orientation of the grave, the body, the physical construction of the grave or tomb, the position of the body and the ways in which it is manipulated after death have social significance [1].

Other important social information can be obtained from biological data through the examination of skeletal remains. Skeletal studies can indicate episodes of hunger, social differences in access to better, more nutritious foods, growth disorders and their relationships with the social hierarchy, age at which children become adults, life expectancy, births and deaths, infectious diseases, traumas and forms of care in

face of these occurrences in society, among other factors, all related to biocultural and paleodemographic studies of the population under study [1, 6].

Forms of interregional relationships, with exchanges and commercialization, can be verified by the presence of unusual funeral accompaniments at burials. Migrations can also be verified by the presence of these indicator artifacts. The levels of social change and technological complexity can be studied. Certain special mortuary treatments may relate to certain classes or categories of individuals, such as women or children [1], who may receive different treatments in many archaeological cultures. Any changes in funeral practices are significant as indicators of economic, ideological and religious changes. In this aspect, the multivariate statistical techniques for the analysis of mortuary data continues to produce new insights into society and prehistoric (archaeological) behavior, contributing to an increased understanding of the lifestyles or *modus vivendi* of populations from the past [1].

But death, as a universal phenomenon, is a natural condition of living beings and, in this human context, it becomes a rite of passage, as well as birth and marriage, within many societies. From this anthropological perspective, the life or systemic context of the populations and individuals that comprise them is under observation. From an archaeological perspective, observation refers to the field context and this restricts or limits the understanding of social phenomena that occurred in the past, requiring new research guidelines. In this field, a social (bio) archaeology of the funerary remains – not just the bones – is present. However, the intrinsic pattern of preservation of human skeletons excavated in archaeological sites has an influence on the interpretation of funerary behavior [2].

## 2. Funerary and Non Funerary Contexts

The concern with the archaeological context of funerary deposition, that is, with the archaeothanatological spatial distribution of human remains, has been one of the guidelines of archeology that dismantled the focus on the demand for bone for bone itself [1, 25]. In the approach to social archaeology with an emphasis on funerary remains, it includes plural themes related to the preservation of human remains and their influence on the interpretation of funerary practices; patterns in the burial practice of *Homo sapiens*; archeothanatology and its relationship with the archaeology of death; taphonomy studies and its influence on the interpretation of funerary rituals; the presence of cremation and its meaning as a funerary practice; funeral accompaniments and the presence of animals; isotopic studies related to the study of dietary variation, social differentiation and migrations; the study of funerary evidence and its relationship to age; funerary – and osteological – evidence and its contribution to the study of gender; funerary remains and the monastic lifestyle; funerary remains and their relationship to disease events; the funerary remains and their importance in understanding the contexts of violence; the fragmentation of

bones and their relationship with cannibalization rites and related; bones and body modification signatures during life (the intentional deformations of an aesthetic character); the representations of the dead and death in an imaginary of the other world.

Is there a distinction between mortuary practices and funerary practices? Preliminarily, the same occurs between the Archaeology of Death and the Funerary Archaeology. Do they deal with the same meanings? Do they characterize a conceptual non-problem? The Archaeology of Death, similarly the Anthropology of Death and the History of Death, deal with human representations and responses to the phenomenon of death, in synchronic and diachronic perspectives, in short or long-term human history. This means that an Archaeology of Death can address from the cultural practices and symbolisms expressed in the objects of material culture of a funerary nature, to (together with) the biophysical characteristics of the bodies of the dead manipulated by the living (the living part of society). But this Archaeology of Death can deal with cases in which the manipulation of the dead body is not involved in a funerary cycle, such as in the cases of mass graves of epidemics, wars, homicides with concealment of corpses, sacrifices, suicides, among other contexts without the participation in funerary rituals and practices subordinate to them. A funerary archaeology, a specific portion of the Archaeology of Death, has objectives focused on the remnants of funerary practices associated with specific funerary cycles, where the symbolization of objects and the body demand rituals of passage linked to the phenomenon of death, in its various aspects (death natural, violent death, death by disease, death by suicide, good death, among others). Cemeteries and extermination camps and corpse concealment (commingled graves/burial), simultaneously, for example, are objects of study in the broad Archaeology of Death, while Funerary Archaeology deals exclusively with cemeteries and their non-Western counterparts.

### 3. Three Hypotheses for the Funerary Cycle

The distinction between cemetery term-concept and others, such as spaces – and the very idea or social ideology about these spaces of death – can be discriminated in archaeology according to the presence of a determining element: the funerary cycle [26], or funerary program, funerary practices, funerary rituals, or a set of practices that are related to the symbolization – within the production of culture [27] – of death and the dead. The proposition here, relating to the archaeological context of spaces with the presence of human remains of an organic nature - since an artifact and an ecofact or biofact can be evidence of human presence in a given geographical landscape - is related to scientific knowledge about the presence or the absence of this determining element (the funerary cycle or related designations, involving the presence of funerary practices). From this perspective, a sociocultural system in time-space manifests itself – or

establishes responses to the phenomenon of death – in the face of death, in front of the dead person or in front of the body (immaterial and material phenomena). Initially, the hypothesis of the presence (a), absence (b), and presence and absence (c) of the funerary cycle is considered as the predominant process of formation of the archaeological record. Below is a proposal of archaeological spaces with the presence of human remains, considering these two hypotheses:

- a) For hypothesis (a): there is a mortuary space (which is of nature or cultural origin) that demands the first existence of the funerary cycle, thus originating a space that can be called funerary space. This is built from immaterial and material human responses to the phenomenon of death. Examples of this type of space are cemeteries (intra or extra-walls, mortuary crypts in religious buildings, isolated chapels with graves, individual and collective ossuaries. Cemeteries within total institutions (hospitals, barracks, forts, churches) in this case, can include events with intense demand for burials resulting from epidemics and epidemics, wars and other events such as those of natural origin - catastrophes and/or natural disasters. The symbolization of death predominates over sanitizing practices, the result of a specific ideology of symbolic death, in the sense of the presence of a list of practices typical of the funerary cycles constructed by humanity, creates the dead and death, the worlds beyond the grave, according to the Paleolithic origins of human burials [28] and the studies of French historians on death [6];
- b) For hypothesis (b): there is a mortuary space, also of a cultural nature, but which does not demand the first existence of the funerary cycle. In this case, this space can be called non-funerary space - outside the funerary cycle [26]. Includes disposal ditches in meat markets (sale of newly arrived slaves from Africa in negotiations of licit or illicit trafficking in human beings in the 16th to 19th centuries, characterized by a type of diaspora movement within the colonial system and the system of plantation in America), representative of the coasts of Pernambuco (Porto de Galinhas, Porto de Recife), Bahia and Rio de Janeiro (Cais do Valongo), for example. Absolutely devoid of any relationship with any type of funerary cycles, these spaces are suitable for the disposal and disposal of remains, excreta or unwanted debris, including human bodies not traded within the slave system after the 16th century. These types of non-funerary spaces also include cesspools or mass graves - commingled burials - with human remains resulting from the intentional concealment of socially non-legalized or non-accepted homicide/genocide practices (eg, war crimes, “terrorism” of state, even though these criminal causalities are evidently current, not applying in the same way in very different chronologically contexts). The latter come from authoritarian and/or slavery systems or regimes in the Modern and Contemporary Age. Also, with the advent of hygienist and eugenic

practices in various historical moments, these spaces arise from the risks to social survival as a whole, where the disposal of the dead has a meaning of sanitizing and protecting the living, dissociated from ideologies contained in the funerary cycle and care with the dead. The body is the main object in this process, being absent the concern with death and the dead as a subject within specific funerary programs of each society. There is no symbolization of death in the proper senses of those established in funerary cycles (symbolic-religious). The presence of the discarded body is characterized by cleaning, concealment, disposal and chance in relation to the human body: it is the body of the dead slave, not sold or injured on the plantation; the body of the plagued, leper, tuberculous, alienated and syphilitic; of the body of the Jew from the ghettos, of prisoners, of sacrificial victims, victims of murder, among other declassified-undesirables. The mortuary depositions, in these cases, result in "hygienic" burials, in their varied sociocultural and ideological meanings;

- c) For hypothesis c): the deposition space of human bodies is funerary and not funerary simultaneously. In cemeteries, in times of endemics, epidemics, and pandemics they end up becoming spaces of intense demand for burials, often collective, with or without actions derived from funeral cycles. Funerary and hygienic burials and cremations, resulting from events of intense demand for hygienic burials. In this case, these mortuary depositions have a mixed character, with a funerary cycle, but subordinated to the survival of the living community. Funerary spaces in their variability can still contain both funerary depositions and hygienic or non-funerary depositions, simultaneously, served both as spaces for rituals and practices of the funerary cycle, as well as spaces for hiding undesirable, persecuted and dead personas of political regimes totalitarian and genocidal, among other socio-political-religious systems. The symbolization of death (funerary cycle) occurs simultaneously with the cleaning of the dead and the disposal of the body. Funerary ideology also encompasses the discarded body and non-funerary practices derived from events of human violence and aggression-dominance, pathogens and human fear and their responses to the phenomenon of death.

These three hypotheses proposed in this article, sought to initiate a discussion on the designation of areas with the presence of human remains in Archaeology. The presence of remains of human bodies in the archaeological record always demands special attention from archaeologists and the constant review and adaptation of funerary terminology and concepts more suitable for each case and explanation of related phenomena. Bioarchaeology, biocultural studies and mortuary analyzes [46] constitute places in the production of scientific knowledge in Archaeology that are correlated with each other. Bioarchaeology and the archaeology of death deal with cross-cutting and converging themes simultaneously, considering that Bioarchaeology constitutes a paradigmatic

umbrella of wide reach, which subordinates in a (bio)multidisciplinary way several areas of knowledge about death, the human body and modes of life in the past, beyond the Anthropology of Death, the Archaeology of Death and the History of Death; as well as beyond Archaeology of the Body, Anthropology of the Body and History of the Body and their correlates in relation to diseases, childhood, gender (cultural-symbolic sex) and sexuality, arising from post-processualist approaches integrated between biological and social sciences from the 1950s onwards, at least. These have a critical and reconstructive deconstruction character of monolithized or indestructible static and hegemonic, and heteronormative-phallocratic concepts, theories and paradigms. Evidently, one must consider that Bioarchaeology and its variances are of the same nature, predominantly hegemonic and flexibly static, equally heteronormative-phallocratic.

These themes are recurrent in the world archaeological production regarding the study of funerary practices already in the second decade of the 21st century, specifically linked to social Bioarchaeology [3], recovering the ethics and professionalization of the bioarchaeologist, for example. The predominance of theoretical and methodological insertion coming from the biological sciences within archaeology becomes evident. A sociobiology interposes itself as a theoretical mechanism for the production of archaeological knowledge when the problem is in interpretation of funerary remains, especially human skeletal remains.

A methodical explanation was provided about how mortuary deposits form and what their implications are for understanding the mortuary behavior of past populations [26]. Based on models of funerary operative chains [26], it becomes possible to show the probable processes of formation of the archaeological deposit from the individual's death until its discovery by an archaeologist. The funerary portion, called Funerary Cycle, constitutes only a fraction of the whole, which involves other processes such as post-funeral training processes. It is evident that, in this perspective, the natural and cultural processes that form the archaeological records are included [29]. This concern has been more noted in current archaeological research in cemetery sites or with human remains, as verified in the context of Brazilian prehistory [30, 31] and in classical archaeology [32], all in the case of Brazil.

The schematic model [26] presents death, given by its causes, which are natural, violent and accidental, followed by a traditional funerary cycle, two formation processes (post-funerary and non-funerary) and the discovery of mortal remains by the archaeologist. Along the way, biological death occurs, followed by social death.

#### **4. A Contextual and Individual Approach to Death**

The incorporation of archaeological contextual information was a central fact in the study of mortuary practices for a long time, as criticized [3]. However, with the development of

bio-archaeological or archaeobiology science, more recent studies emphasize an understanding of past lifestyles based on simultaneous consideration of archaeological, historical, ethnographic data sources along with skeletal analyses. Currently, the integration of elements of social, ecological, behavioral and biological research into the study of mortuary practices is of interest. The term mortuary practices, in this perspective, represents an opening of the term funerary practices, as it includes the non-funerary contexts [26], located outside the traditional funerary cycle and which are represented by sacrifices, cannibalization, improper or anomalous depositions, clandestine/criminal graves, suicides with loss and abandonment of bodies, among others.

The human remains and bone collections (sensitive collections) are put into perspective to verify the taphonomic aspects and the methodology of bioarchaeological study. The state of preservation of human bone remains from funerary depositions can result in biased or unreliable research when the methods are not suitable for that individual or population [33].

Recent developments in the bioarchaeology of social identities can be found in abstracts [34]. In this bias, the theoretical, methodological and interpretation problems in bioarchaeological research on sex and gender were resumed: gender is just one of the many identity axes that can be involved in the construction of the person [35]. Sexed and/or gendered bodies are simultaneously combined constructions of age, class and social status and ancestry [35]. Themes that relate health and disease have been more recurrent in mortuary analyses, constituting sex and gender, a small portion of this bioarchaeology with little involvement of the feminist orientation. Traditionally phallogocentric archaeology resists the pluralist perspectives of feminist-oriented theoretical bioarchaeology.

Central and South America (Andean region and the Pacific coast) have represented a region with a relatively long history of mortuary analyzes that consider the gender problem. The main research themes are related to the mortuary analysis itself; divisions of work and occupational specialization; intentional body modifications; health and illness; stable isotope analysis; violence, military life and war [35]. Future research topics include the use of queer theory [36, 37].

Archaeological identity studies, for the recognition and identification of populations and groups, would include analyzes of ethnicity, gender, age, as well as class and social status, sexuality and religion [38]. These and other identity studies are integrated within Bioarchaeology. (Bio)archaeological studies of enslaved populations, forced to provide work during colonial and European nation-building projects in America, allow for a scientifically based critique of the construction of inequality and the lively interpenetration of sociocultural, necrosocial, economic, political and biological realities. The European colonial expansion involved voluntary and involuntary movements of people, changes in political, economic and social relations, where commercial relations and settlements were established [39].

These populations changed due to forced or voluntary migrations, violent conflicts and expanding their exposure to

new environments, involving the introduction of a wide variety of diseases, compromising health standards considered normal at the time and increasing morbidity/mortality. This bioarchaeology is focused on the studies of African diasporas and the human person reduced to a piece or object to be sold, used to the absolute extreme of bodily and psychic resistance and discarded in garbage ditches, rivers and seas; and eventually in "slave cemeteries", specific funerary spaces, managed by religious brotherhoods, in plantation areas or in chapels inside churches and other religious buildings.

The relationship between identity and health represents another research theme within the studies of social bioarchaeology, centered on the analysis of human burials. Leprosy and tuberculosis are two diseases related to health and identity, through their perception, stigmatization, diagnosis and treatment in the affected societies. In this sense, comparative studies on the contagion, perception, stigma, diagnosis and treatment of leprosy and tuberculosis emerged from the perspective of bioarchaeology, that is, very preliminary studies [40] on the marks of these diseases on bones in collections from the English Middle Ages.

## 5. The (Bio)demographic Problem

The calculation and/or estimation of age in social bioarchaeology studies represent a critical axis in the study of human remains (the underground bias of funerary archaeology). The estimated biological age of human skeletons of archaeological origin is important for demographic studies, on human growth and pathologies [41]. To focus on age, bioarchaeology participates with other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology and sociology. As individuals grow, mature and age, changes leave their marks on the physical body over time. These are changes in height, in the development of secondary sexual characteristics, in the appearance of the first gray hairs, aging wrinkles on the face and in physical and mental capacities. Also, these transformations and differences created between bodies have been investigated as significant changes in individual social identity, as well as broader cultural responses to these transformations [41].

It seems that there is a tripartite model in bioarchaeological studies, in which the concept of age is analyzed in three distinct but related ways. The first meaning of age is physiological or biological age, relating to the physical age of the body and identified through the sequence of physical changes associated with human growth, maturation and aging. The second meaning of age is chronological age and refers to time in weeks, months or years. Building a relationship between chronological age and physiological age is critical. The third meaning of age is that of social age: this is culturally constructed, comprising what constitutes age-appropriate attitudes and behavior. The relationship between chronological age and social age is an important way to seek the interpretation of data in terms of social identity, allowing the identification of patterns of disposition of artifacts along bodies and age [41].

Furthermore, biological age can be distinguished from physiological age in the following sense: physiological age is established by the sequence of physical changes associated with human growth, maturation and aging; Biological age is used in medicine to describe the deficit between the average life expectancy of a population and the life expectancy of an individual of the same chronological age [41].

Thus, it is important to distinguish the different “types” of age, namely: biological or physiological age (includes the skeleton and teeth and is estimated by the biological changes that occur in the body); chronological age (the time counted from birth); and social age (it is culturally constructed according to norms of appropriate behavior and status of individuals for certain ages within society [42].

Paleopathological aspects of skeletons found in burials may represent skeletal injuries that involve deformation, displacement, cuts, crushing and fractures of bones, joints or teeth under unfavorable loads or environments. These injuries are unique biological data resources that, combined with other contextual information, have the ability to make significant contributions to the understanding of social identity, cultural age and social actions [43].

The methods of social bioarchaeology in the study of subadults (or non-adults, characterized by the presence of skeletal development traits, such as teeth in formation and impacted and secondary ossification nuclei not yet fully fused, except for anomalies such as craniosynostosis or related) include the analysis of mortality, growth, interruption of growth, pathologies and traumas. Non-specific stress indicators are used; paleodemographic and mortality patterns; longitudinal and oppositional growth; interruption of tooth growth; skeletal pathologies. The study of childhood diet and dietary practices includes the study of stable isotopes (C, N), dental disease and health, trauma, skeletal stress marks. The osteo-archaeological interpretation of children includes the definition and identification of social age (the social child) [42].

The last theme or area of archaeology to be revisited in this article is the Archaeology of Death [44]. The death is universal and generates significant and expressive reactions: Isn't death absolutely universal? Thus, the responses to it vary, as the bodies of the dead can be buried, burned - with or without human sacrifice -, they can be mummified, cannibalized, exposed, abandoned, and wrecked. In funeral cycles, parties, combats, sexual encounters, between crying and laughing are held. Death means intense variability of expressive and meaningful cultural responses [44, 45].

The Archaeology of Death, which is not a new area, denotes that there is a clear interest in the mortuary practices of past human cultures in archaeology from its beginnings to its present disciplinary status [44]. The Archaeology of Death itself has different approaches and in the 1980s, it was focused on the issue of the social dimension of the funeral practice. During this period, little attention was given to the processes of formation and transformation of the archaeological record, to the inadequate approach to symbolism; the relative neglect of spatial characteristics in the location of areas with burial depositions; and the absence of a regional perspective in the

analysis of mortuary practices. There is also a lack of formal testing of hypotheses derived from ethnographic contexts. The fields of paleodemography, paleopathology (environmental paleopathologies) and diet analysis should be revisited. Due to the stimulus given by the new archaeology to holistic, ecosystemic research, physical (biological) anthropology was more formally integrated into the analyzes of mortuary practices. The result of this integration and the development of skeletal analysis techniques comprise the most exciting and stimulating path of interdisciplinary work [44]. This Archaeology of Death comprises the study of mortuary behavior and its use as a basis for the (re)construction of a social organization of the past. The development of archaeological theory, with attempts to correlate the social configuration of a society with its practices of depositing the dead, has a broad anthropological basis: with terminology, use of linguistics, case testing by comparative ethnography and analogy [46].

But in general, for example, the diagnosis processes of biological profile and disease data from lesions (note that bone lesions are not always specific signs of the disease under study) in bones are objects in themselves the unique limitations of the fragile relationship between the methodologies of modern biomedical clinical practice, with an emphasis on the biological approach, and the methodologies of paleopathology, with an emphasis on comparative empirical approaches [60, 61]. Perhaps an interaction and/or collaboration between these methodologies would be a more effective solution for the proper determination of diseases and other biological profile data in remnants of archaeological skeletons.

## 6. The Heritage-Cemetery: The Brazilian Case

The Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988 considers, in art. 216, which are Brazilian cultural heritage assets of a material and immaterial nature, individually or together, which are bearers of reference to the identity, action and memory of the different groups that make up Brazilian society and which include, among others, the sites of historical, archaeological, paleontological and scientific value. In Federal Law n. 3924 of July 26, 1961, art. 2nd., a) considers archaeological or prehistoric monuments, among others, sepulchral wells, which represent cultural testimonies of the paleoamericans of Brazil. In the same article, c) the sites identified as cemeteries, graves, among others, in which human remains of archaeological or paleoethnographic interest are found. References to sites of interest for studies on funerary practices are generically and non-specifically present in art. 216 of the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988 (sites of historical and archaeological value, bearers of reference to the identity and memory of the groups that form Brazilian society) and specifically in art. 2nd., c) of Federal Law n. 3924 of 1961: sepulchral wells, cemeteries and tombs with human remains of archaeological and paleoethnographic interest [47].

In this respect, prehistoric (*precolonial*, according *IPHAN*) sites of direct interest to underground mortuary studies are classified as archaeological monuments, whose scientific production is in relative growth in Brazil.

Still, there are few historical cemeteries listed in Brazil. In the list made available by National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute - *IPHAN* (<http://www.iphan.gov.br/ans/>), are the *Reservatório de Mocó*, in Manaus, Amazonas; the architectural and landscape complex of *Mucugê*, Bahia; the architectural and landscape complex of *Porto Seguro*, Bahia; the tombs of Dr. Peter Wilhen Lund, Peter Andreas Brandt, Wilhelm Behrens, Johann Rudolph Müller and cemetery, in Lagoa Santa, Minas Gerais; the *Nossa Senhora da Soledade* Cemetery: landscape complex, in Belém, Pará; Batalhão Cemetery, in *Campo Maior*, Piauí; Convent and Church of *Nossa Senhora dos Anjos*, Chapel and Cemetery of the Third Order of *São Francisco*, Cabo Frio, Rio de Janeiro; the Chapel and Cemetery of *Maruí*, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro; *São Francisco da Penitência* Church, Cemetery and Museum of Sacred Art: collection, in Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro; the landscape and urban complex of *Vassouras*, Rio de Janeiro; Gate of the Cemetery of *Arês*, Rio Grande do Norte; and the Protestant Cemetery, Joinville, Santa Catarina. Other aspects that legally relate cemeteries within the scope of historical archaeology are still non-existent in the norms and management of the Brazilian archaeological heritage. The research takes place during renovation and salvage interventions, linked to an aboveground funerary archaeology, with a focus on architecture and tomb art (the aboveground bias of funerary archaeology). Terminological studies are needed for the common definition - with expected variances - for the construction of descriptors of the qualitative data of artifacts, ecofacts/biofacts related to mortuary contexts in Cemetery Archaeology, in particular to assist in the management of norms to deal with cases of cemetery excavation, non-funerary spaces and fortuitous finds - "undesirable" - in large and small enterprises, in political and Human Rights issues and in basic and applied research in archaeology, in the Brazilian case.

On the other hand, the Penal Code (Articles 210, 211, 212 of Decree Law 2,848 of December 7, 1940) stipulates penalties for the destruction, subtraction or concealment of a corpse (Art. 211) in crime contexts or cemeteries; or violate or desecrate a grave or a funerary urn (Art. 210); or to vilify a corpse or its ashes (Art. 212). All these articles of the penal code refer exclusively to On Crimes against Respect for the Dead (Chapter VII) of Title V, On Crimes against Religious Sentiment and against the Respect for the Dead [48].

The legislation, in the Brazilian case, refers to a) human skeletal remains from archaeological sites and b) human skeletal remains in current sites, modern cemeteries or current criminal events. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish the scope of legal instruments and their possible intersections in the practices of archaeology and forensic sciences [59].

## 7. Suggestion of a Funerary Terminology in Historical Archaeology

Fifteen terms in funerary - or burial or necro - terminology have been briefly described below to help think about and identify funerary spaces in Brazilian Historical Archaeology:

- 1) *Carnario*: (lat. *carnarium*) is an ossuary, tomb, sepulcher. It can be called an underground where embalmed bodies are deposited. Form of burial (burial deposition technique), usually temporary, in a funerary niche that resulted in the transport and accommodation of the skeletonized remains of the body in an ossuary (individual or collective). Eleven wall *carnarium* were located at the *Recolhimento da Luz* (a female monastery), in *Sao Paulo*, Brazil. Within these *carnarios* were usually an articulated skeleton, or natural mummy, and reassembled bones from a first individual who had been buried [49, 50]. They can also form wall tombs (mural tombs).
- 2) *Catacomb* (it. *catacomba*): underground where the dead were buried. The best known catacombs, which in their origin were just abandoned quarries, are those in Rome, Naples, Syracuse and Paris. The catacombs of 'Rome became famous for having served as a refuge for Christians in the age of persecution; but it is not to be believed that the persecuted there hid for a long time or in large numbers, much less lived there, because the lack of ventilation would be enough to make it impossible for them to do so. In fact, the catacombs provided Christians with a means, not precisely of concealing their graves, but of keeping public attention from them, and also of celebrating religious funeral rites in secret, because the Christian religion prescribed its adherents to bury the dead and not burn them, as the heathen did (...). As for the catacombs of Paris, they are old explored quarries, which fortuitously had a fate identical to those of Rome, as it was decided from 1781 to 1788 to transport there the bones from the city's abandoned cemeteries' [51]. On the other hand, a more detailed description [52] of the term considers catacombs, 'cemeteries excavated by Christians during their clandestine existence, from the 1st to the 3rd century, in the calcareous subsoil of Rome itself. On the walls of long corridors (*ambulacra*), which constitute true subterranean cities, the graves (*loculi*) are superimposed, closed by a slab on which the name of the dead person appears. Occasionally a more important tomb, vaulted (*arcosolium*), corresponds to a notable or martyr. Certain extensions, in a gallery with *arcosolia*, constitute as funeral chapels (*cubicula*)'. The habit of burial in catacombs existed in Rome even before Christianity. The catacombs provided space for both pagans and Christians.
- 3) *Cemetery*: (lat. *coemiterium*, gr. *koimêtêrion*, place where one sleeps) land where the dead are buried or deposited. The catacombs were the first Christian cemeteries in Rome. It is, "a disciplined, silent space,

where one speaks softly, so that the sleep of the dead is not disturbed” [53]. In Portugal at the end of the 19th century (1853-1863), cemeteries should have a land surface capable of holding a number of graves at least equal to five times the number of deaths of the population, so that the grave in which it is placed a corpse is not used again until 5 years later. The cemetery contains chapels, tombs, streets, trees, etc. The graves should be 2 m long and 65 cm wide and be 33 cm apart on all sides. A cemetery can be understood as “an archaeological site, the tombs being considered as artifacts and, in this condition, bringing together a series of attributes” [53]. It can be used to verify the changes that occurred in the forms of representation of death in the passage between the slavery imperial period and the progressively capitalist republic in Brazil [53].

- 4) Cenotaph: they are tombs, *cenotaphium*, funerary structures erected in honor of a dead person who is not found in or under the same structures. The dead body is found elsewhere. Mini-chapels with crosses (empty tombs) on Brazilian roads are common, indicating places of car disaster with death. They are places of memory, funeral patrimonies.
- 5) Cloister (lat. *claustrum*): interior *patio*, uncovered and generally surrounded by *arcades* (arches), in convents or in buildings that used to be. The courtyard surrounded by four porticoes in the old *basilicas* was the *atrium*, the origin of the cloister in medieval monasteries. In the center of this *atrium*, a *canthare*, or ablation fountain, the origin of the holy water font, was built [52].
- 6) Crypt (gr. *kruptos*, hidden): underground of a church where the dead were once buried. When the first Christian churches appeared, the crypt was kept underground and was intended solely for burying members of the clergy and for depositing some bodies of saints. It's actually an underground building, lined with bricks or stones, or dug directly into the ground. It is located in the lower parts of churches, containing bodies of clerics or important civilians or even relics (eg Crypt of Franciscan priests in the central *nave* of the Church/Convent of São Francisco in João Pessoa, Alagoas, Brazil).
- 7) Funerary chapel: an enlargement of the *arcosilium*, the largest compartment in the Roman catacombs, used as a place of devotion in the graves of martyrs and bishops; as a tomb chapel, a type of minor dependence on a parish church in the West, as well as the baptismal chapel, buildings with a rounded shape [53]. In Mosteiro da Luz [49, 50], an eclectic construction from the 18th to the 19th century in the center of the city of São Paulo, SP, Brazil, the oldest internal mortuary chapel faces the cloister and the internal courtyard (with *impluvium* and *atrium*). It has windows, a door, a central altar for masses, an arch, sheep (vertical tombs), ground holes (horizontal tombs) and a possible ossuary or mural ossuary. The most recent funerary chapel, with door and roof, contains 4 tombs (tombs), with 6 drawers or funerary niches each, two sets of individual ossuaries on the side walls, a central altar for masses, a vertical tomb and mural (sarcophagus) of Sister Oliva and a place for the disposal of the individual ossuary called the collective ossuary (*ossuaria*), under a slab, on the right side of the altar.
- 8) Horizontal tomb in shallow ground: it is a type of medieval and modern tomb, horizontal, fitted to the ground floor, closed by a simple flat rectangular stone tombstone, whose dimensions are variable, but in general correspond to those of the human body, rarely larger. They are called *tumulus*, *monumentum*, memory, *sarceu* and later called lame (blade), *cova*, tomb or tomb *rasa*. It is a funerary structure inserted in a *substratum* (floor), at the same level and horizontal, closing or delimiting a grave or tomb.
- 9) *Mausoleum* (from Mausolus, n.p.): sumptuous sepulcher. It is a category of tomb or grave. ‘*Mausoleum* is understood a third category (in addition to tomb and ossuary), hybrid, which includes both primary and secondary burials, in coffins and urns, of several individuals, belonging to the same family, group, organization or civil or religious entity. From the point of view of form, it is a large building, monumental, sumptuous. Two sub-categories were recognized among the *mausoleums*: the chapels, in which case these buildings present an eminently religious, Christian architecture, reproducing a small church, and the monuments, where this type of link does not exist’ [53].
- 10) Monastery (lat. *monasterium*): housing of monks or nuns. In the plural: monasteries or arches, vaults or small chapels, where the dead are buried. It is a religious place for the living that also holds the dead in appropriate funerary spaces.
- 11) Ossuary (lat. *ossuarius*): or ossary, *ossaria*, is a deposit of human bones, particularly close to battlefields; place where bones are kept. Once, all cemeteries had an ossuary. When the cemetery surrounded the church, the ossuary was usually installed between the buttresses of the naves. Sometimes it consisted of a small, independent building. In the cloisters, the ossuary was situated in the gallery adjoining the church; it consisted of a kind of cabinets where the bones were placed. Sometimes these redoubts were closed and, when repairing the walls of old churches, these niches were found. It is understood as one of the 3 types of grave or burial. The ossuary ‘is understood as the tomb where one or more secondary burials were carried out, that is, where the disarticulated bones of one or more individuals were placed, after the process of their decomposition, normally in urns. From the point of view of form, these graves are narrow and high, not supporting the human body in an extended position’ [53]. In the case of modern cemeteries in Brazil, from the graves (primary depositions), after a period of time

that varies from 2 to more years of burial, the human skeletal remains are stored in individual family *ossuaries* in the cemetery or in churches (secondary deposition). Posteriorly or following the primary burial, the bones may proceed to a collective *ossuary* (secondary or tertiary deposition, as appropriate). Afterwards, they can be "collectively cremated" and result in an "uncertain" fate, as the case may be, in absolute dissonance with the guidelines of the Funeral Law area/legal sciences [54] in Brazil.

- 12) Tomb, *Tumba*: (lat. *tumulus*, *tumuli*) is a monument raised in memory of someone, in the place where he is buried. Lot of earth; *cumulus*, construction of stone, in the shape of a cone, a trunk of a cone, a pyramid or a simple mound, which the ancients raised over the graves. In Portugal, for example, from the 12th to the 18th century, there are tombs of great architectural importance, in Romanesque, transitional, Gothic, Flemish, Renaissance and King João V styles. substrate or on the same level as the substrate. It is synonymous with sepulcher, grave, tomb, *mausoleum*, catafalque. The tomb where one or more primary burials were performed, that is, where the articulated skeletons of one or more individuals were placed, in an extended position, usually in coffins. From the point of view of form, these graves are elongated, so as to contain a lying body [53]. Furthermore, the term *tumba* was taken from the Greek in the sense of *tumulus*. It was used in the Latin form in the 5th century. The term has been found in several languages since the European Middle Ages: tombe, tumb, *tomba*. It is synonymous with tomb, grave, and coffin [55].
- 13) Tomb-epitaph: a small plaque measuring approximately 20 to 30cm x 40 to 50cm (for example), covered with inscriptions. It is an ancient type of tomb, open in the outer and inner walls of churches. It is a *loculus* where the bones of a corpse were deposited, after the transfer of the first provisional grave. They were built in 18th-century Europe. XII to the end of the XVIII, fixed on the walls, pillars of churches, chapels, galleries of sheep. Other morphological types of tombs are the vertical and mural and the other, horizontal, extended on the ground.
- 14) Tombstone or funerary blade: is the stone (*pierre sépulcrale*) or tombstone that covers the tomb and grave where the body was deposited. This type of tomb involves the burial (the technique of burial in the earth) of the body under the ground, unlike ensarcophagement. It is rare that the tombstone coincides with the exact place in the grave where the body was actually buried. But it does not matter. It is part of the slab, blending in with the floor, of which it is a structural part. It separates the "world above" from the "world below". The tombstone (lat. *lapis*, *lapidis*) can also be understood as a slab that covers the tomb [55].
- 15) Vertical and mural tomb: it is a sarcophagus, normally reusable, without inscriptions or portraits, placed

against the wall. Only three of the four faces were decorated. On the sarcophagus, an inscription. Both sarcophagus and inscription were placed under an arch (*arcosolium*). The tomb-oratory represents sarcophagi or tombs attached to the altar. Vertical tombs lent themselves to monumentality. The tombs are small constructions for the remains of the deceased, with walls, a roof and a door (fenced or open); it can be built partially or entirely underground inside a cemetery, a church or its crypt. Mausoleums are tombs of medium or large proportions, and may also be a structure formed by crypts containing tombs. It is a positive funerary structure, raised above the level of the substrate and joined to a floor and wall simultaneously, predominantly vertical and mural.

This set of terms was established during the archaeological research at Mosteiro da Luz, in São Paulo, Brazil, between 2008 and 2010, within the Funerary Archaeology Program Project at *Mosteiro da Luz*, IPHAN Process nº 01506000416-08-65, whose general objective was to produce knowledge on the funerary practices of the Order of Conceptionists of the *Mosteiro da Luz*, founded in 1774 by *Antonio de Sant'Anna Galvão*, as well as on the history and memory of the architectural sacred spaces of *São Paulo* [49, 50]. The Project was coordinated by Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo - *MAE-USP*, in partnership with the Museum of Sacred Art of São Paulo - *MAS-SP*.

Note that not all terms described here can be directly applied to identify artifacts or funerary structures. Some have a specific space and time (Ancient Mediterranean, Medieval Europe). Others were brought from Portugal, Holland, Spain and France and later from Italy and Japan to Brazil by immigrants, along with their funerary construction practices. The most recurrent and applicable terms in the Brazilian case of heritage cemeteries are ground and vertical tombs, *carnarium*, tomb-epigraph, tombstone, collective and individual *ossuaries*, epitaphs, *claustrum*, and funerary chapels. The link to Judeo-Christian religious architecture is predominant, even in public cemeteries made official in part in the first and second half of the 19th century.

## 8. Conclusion

The areas or themes dealt with predominantly in this article review the importance of the plurality of studies on funerary practices, which occur from the perspective of mortuary studies, Social Archaeology of funerary remains, Social Bioarchaeology and Archaeology of Death (including here the Archaeology of Cemeteries), all gathered around productions international scientific organizations that have influenced research in Brazil. We do not specifically exemplify with the bibliography produced in Brazil, but with some of the most representative Anglo-Saxon authors. This discussed example will be the subject of a forthcoming article. The configuration of sites

of interest in the archaeology of mortuary practices and their plurality in the production of archaeological knowledge about the behavior of *Homo sapiens* in the face of the natural death of individuals of this species is more specifically included in Federal Law n. 3924 of 1961, still in force in Brazil. There is still a demand for studies of this nature, especially those that can result in the production of scientific knowledge that establishes dialogues and exchanges with international researchers, whose advances in these same studies are very accelerated in relation to Brazil, revisiting new problems and research guidelines every year, with the inclusion of unexpected themes that have greater influence on the improvement of social demands of an archaeological and anthropological nature. Among the pressing social demands are those that seek relate archaeology with forensic sciences in solving missing persons cases and criminal cases [59].

The frantic disregard for the presence of human skeletal remains (called in common sense or pseudoarchaeological "bones"), most often discovered fortuitously, characterizes the ideology of eternal life and youth at any cost to the eternal consumer (non-citizens), utopian elements propagated in the media and in the medical field or through religion, associated with the interference of public bodies and the absence of basic and applied research policies in this area of archaeology, has resulted in the systematic destruction of archaeological sites in Brazil. Among them, the sites with funerary and non-funerary (criminal or forensic contexts) spaces in Pernambuco stand out (*Furna do Nego*, in Jataúba; *Pilar* site, in the Bairro do Recife).

It is verified that the mortuary studies are developed, in a synthetic way, in an underground perspective in prehistoric (precolonial) sites and aboveground in historical archaeological sites, observing the bioarchaeological approach in the first case and that of the history of death and art in the second. In the second case, bioarchaeological analyses, when they occur, are restricted to some items of the biological profile for purposes of demographic and epidemiological, and forensic analysis.

Mortuary spaces in landscapes transformed by men, from the perspective of the *Archaeology of Death and Mortuary Analyses*, can result in at least three types of variations: funerary spaces, non-funerary spaces and simultaneously funerary and non-funerary spaces, according to the prevalence of actions of the funerary cycle or of other sociocultural cycles or subsystems (disposal, sanitation, public health, wars and conflicts, violence and aggressiveness). These hypotheses for explaining the mortuary space and its variations in the archaeological record demand attention by specialists in Bioarchaeology and in Mortuary Analysis or Archaeology of Death.

The distinction between *sites with the presence of human archaeological remains* (SPHAR) and crime scenes with the concealment of corpses should initially be made by collating data on the location of archaeological sites preliminarily registered by archaeologists at *IPHAN*, for the Brazilian case. Both the Federal Law n. 3924 of 1961 and the penal code on

disturbing crime scenes or crimes against respect for the dead [48] can be violated by law enforcement officers or archaeologists, as the case may be.

However, the suggestion and critical discussion of a glossary of funerary terminology is welcome, requiring an addition of terms/descriptors applicable to prehistoric funerary and non-funerary spaces [56, 57].

Cultural heritage in Brazil includes a varied typology of objects of material culture, structures from different architectural parties and, in this context, human remains are always a problem to be solved. As a biofact/ecofact, the human body is always claimed by researchers from disciplines whose study of the body is more traditionally and socially accepted, such as the medical and biological sciences. However, in Archaeology, whether as a subdiscipline of Anthropology, History or an independent multi and interdisciplinary discipline, it has guaranteed space for the study of the body and its treatment practices, whether *antemortem* or *post mortem*, considering that burials (*artifacts-biofacts*) and ancient cemeteries (contexts of these *artifacts-biofacts*) are evidently an object of interest in modern archaeology, according to the legislation (punitive and/or educational) or social demands still repressed by taboos and the constant denial of a naturally human phenomenon.

For the future, the authors intend to prepare a systematic collection of extensive bibliography on the topics covered and to qualify and quantify the theoretical terms and concepts related to funerary archaeology and social bioarchaeology, identifying terminological and conceptual recurrences within the intersecting spectra of these areas of archaeology for the case of Brazil. The continuities, changes and variability of understanding of terms and concepts in the production of archaeological knowledge about death-representation and its relationship with heritage, in the areas of memory, territoriality, domination, violence, agency, identity and self-reflexivity and tribalization.

A general reflection on the nature, stages and limits of archaeological knowledge about human responses to the phenomenon of death; and the relationships between the questioning subject and the object (the subject) being questioned; are important needs in this perspective. The research and construction of a worldwide database on theoretical postulates, practical instances, conclusions and methods in the areas of scientific knowledge linked to the *archaeologies of death* (produced by archaeologists) have cognitive validity and can be described in their evolutionary trajectories, their structural paradigms or their explanatory and sufficiently interpretive relationships about the ways in which past societies symbolized and represented their ways of seeing death and the dead.

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