

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Native burial practices in the Plateau culture area have been the focus of a number of studies (for example, Sprague 1959, 1967; Sanger 1968a; Rodeffer 1973; Sarbescue 1955). These studies have dealt primarily with culture-historical problems of regional and temporal variation. Such research is essential as a first step in dealing with a complex phenomenon, but there are factors other than space and time which contribute to the observed variation in burial practices. It is clear that there is great variation in the amount and types of grave inclusions contained in Plateau burials. This variation is especially pronounced in the protohistoric and early historic periods, but can be traced back at least into the late prehistoric. Socioeconomic status differentiation has been invoked to help account for some of this variation (e.g. Sanger 1968a), but only in a rather cursory fashion. The emphasis in the culture-historical approach has been on those data which are most appropriate for this end, especially the presence of Euroamerican grave goods and the form, position, and orientation of burials. A second result of this approach is that intra-assemblage variability has tended to be downplayed in the interests of characterising a group of burials as a whole in order to fit it into a time period. A further limitation of previous research is that, while changes in burial assemblages have been noted between the late prehistoric, protohistoric, and historic periods, and have been useful in distinguishing these periods, little effort has gone into explaining the social changes underlying the observed differences.

The goal of the present work is to explore variability in Plateau mortuary assemblages, with an emphasis on that portion of the variability which can be related to socioeconomic status differentiation. By necessity the research focuses on the differential distribution of grave inclusions. Particular attention is given to discovering differences in mortuary structure between different regions of the Plateau, and between the middle prehistoric (approximately 4000-2000 B.P.), the late prehistoric (approximately 2000-200 B.P.), and the protohistoric period. Historic period documentation suggests that certain areas of the Plateau were characterised by more complex social organisation than others. These can seemingly be related to especially productive fishing locales, which presumably allowed the creation of greater surpluses to fuel economic competition. The formal testing of this hypothesis linking mortuary variability, social complexity, and resource richness is not a component of this work, although it is with such eventual goals in mind that the research is undertaken. Since there is essentially no framework upon which to build, much of the work will be exploratory. In terms of Gibbon's (1984) classification of research strategies, this work can best be described as an exploratory investigation in which archaeological data are examined and patterns sought. Hypotheses are more likely to be generated than tested in an approach of this kind.

The importance of this research involves a number of different issues. Ray (1939), based on his ethnographic work with the Sanpoil and Nespelem, has argued that the pristine Plateau social system was strongly egalitarian. Much of the emphasis on Plateau societies as egalitarian has probably resulted from the strong contrast these societies presented during the historic period to those of the neighbouring Northwest Coast, in which social complexity was of an high order. Whatever its origin, this outlook was accepted for many years. Recently there has been a shift in emphasis to examining social differentiation, whatever its degree, *within* Plateau societies. In 1973, Strydom suggested that the existing evidence was not compatible with the degree of egalitarianism normally attributed to Plateau societies ethnographically. At this point the question arose as to whether more complex societies existed on the Plateau in the past (i.e. in pre-ethnographic times). Some support for such an idea exists in the form of very large pithouse villages with bimodal house-size distributions in the Mid-Fraser Canyon area (Hayden 1990a; Hayden *et al.* 1985) and in the Middle Columbia area (Osborne 1951; Schalk 1983); these villages seem to have been abandoned long before European contact. The analysis of mortuary data can be used to explore the degree of status differentiation present at various times and in various regions on the Plateau, and can thus address

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the question of whether more differentiated social systems existed in the past than were known on the Plateau in the ethnographic period.

Changes in social organisation are widely held to have occurred on the Plateau during the protohistoric period, in response to the influx of new wealth, the horse and later the gun, and shifting trade relationships (cf. Stapp 1984). The more detailed question of how European trade goods were incorporated into the native value system and their relationship to the proposed social changes is a topic of interest on the Plateau that is only starting to receive attention. Burial data are arguably the single most useful form of evidence in dealing with such questions. The present study attempts to document changes in mortuary behaviour occurring at this important juncture and examine what changes occurred within different regions between the late prehistoric and protohistoric periods in terms of how material culture functioned in the social system and in its ability to differentiate status. Related to this goal is an examination of the distribution of age/sex classes against the distribution of grave inclusions in order to bring out any indications of a shift to greater emphasis on ascribed as opposed to achieved status, or vice versa.

The present work also investigates some more basic research questions. The primary referents of mortuary behaviour are age and sex. Little research on differences in the mortuary treatment of age/sex classes has been undertaken using archaeological data on the Plateau. The relative status positions of men and women has recently become an area of active interest in archaeology (e.g. Erhenberg 1989; Gero and Conkey 1991). Ackerman (1982, 1992) has suggested that, ethnographically, women enjoyed relatively high status on the Plateau, in some cases and in some spheres equal to that of men. Burial data, used with caution, offer one of the best means of testing this hypothesis (cf. Hayden 1992a). Age and sex associations of artifact classes found as grave inclusions are also of great interest. Grave inclusions, together with ethnographic data and "common sense", are sometimes used to infer the sex of burials on the Plateau, either in the absence of skeletal evidence (whether through poor preservation or an indeterminate result), or in spite of it. This situation, while not prevalent, is unacceptable, particularly in the absence of any quantitative studies using archaeological data.

The data needed for this study are scattered in various sources, many of which are unpublished, and are of varying quality. Thus, the same methods of analysis cannot be applied to all of the material. I therefore present relatively detailed analysis for some sites while for others I can give little more than a subjective impression of the data. While data from burial sites on both the Columbia and the Canadian Plateaus will be utilised, the database from the latter is unfortunately far smaller, and little in the way of quantitative analysis may be attempted at this point. Any apparent trends will simply be discussed and compared to the patterns seen in the larger samples of the Columbia Plateau. But the inclusion of data from both areas is not solely due to sample size problems. The boundary is, after all, to a large extent artificial, and the Plateau as a whole presents a coherent culture area, a fact often neglected in more recent syntheses. This work should, then, be regarded as a preliminary effort to bring some of this information together and begin to suggest patterns and questions which may be addressed in future work.

The Plateau

The Plateau culture area as originally defined by Wissler (1922) and Kroeber (1939) encompasses a well-defined natural geographical area, bounded to the east by the Rocky Mountains and to the west by the Coast Range in British Columbia, and by the Cascades in Washington. The southern boundary is marked by a gradual shift into the Great Basin with its desert adaptations. The precise northern boundary is equally arbitrary, with both Plateau physical and cultural characteristics grading slowly into the Subarctic culture area. With the exception of this northern boundary, there is fair agreement between the physical and cultural boundaries. Adaptations to the west of the Rockies are distinctly different from those to the east. For the most part this can be attributed to the presence and importance of salmon in the west as opposed to bison in the east. This distinction becomes progressively blurred on the eastern Columbia Plateau as well as in the Kutenai area of southeastern British Columbia in the protohistoric and historic periods, as the horse enabled parties to efficiently make the journey across the Rockies to hunt bison and return with dried meat and other commodities. As might be expected, the western boundary is also somewhat vague, since both Plateau and Northwest Coast cultures relied heavily on salmon and so share certain traits. Nevertheless, distinct linguistic as well as other cultural differences mark the coast/interior division.

Mortuary Studies on the Plateau

Sprague's *Aboriginal Burial Practices in the Plateau Region of North America* (1967) remains the most thorough analysis of Plateau burial patterns considered from a culture-historical perspective (though

see also Sprague 1959; Rodeffer 1973; Sanger 1968a). Emphasising data from the Lower Snake region in particular, Sprague proposed a Plateau-wide pattern based on three periods. Late prehistoric burials are found flexed on the side and interred in simple pits or in talus slopes. This is followed by a brief period, corresponding to the protohistoric, of extreme trait variability including the use of cairns, burning over graves, and wooden cists, all accompanying a flexed body. Finally, historic burials are characterised by bodies extended on the back in rough coffin-like boxes. The occurrence of grave inclusions is seen as increasing steadily through these three periods. These are only broad patterns, and there remains of course considerable variability, both temporally and regionally. Considerable overlap in burial practices has also been recognised, but since the main goal has been the construction of these general sequences, such overlaps have generally been dealt with only very superficially. There is certainly the potential for the occurrence of different burial regimes within an area at one time to provide information on social organisation. It has been suggested, for example, that those groups active in nativistic movements rejected the Christian-derived extended coffin burials of the historic period and continued to bury their dead in more traditional ways (Sprague 1967). It should also be recognised that different segments within society may have accepted Christianity quite early, either as a status symbol, or, more pragmatically, to help facilitate trading relations with whites (these two possibilities are not mutually exclusive). Again, such considerations are largely beyond the scope of this paper, but need to be mentioned if only to suggest the complexities involved.

The burial classification proposed by Sprague (1967), though originating mainly from data collected in the Lower Snake area, is intended to be applicable on a Plateau-wide scale. A number of important regional variants are, however, recognised. Cremation, for example, has long been a topic of interest and debate. Evidence for the practice is widespread in the Plateau, and it was certainly known prehistorically from the Lower and Middle Columbia, especially in The Dalles (W. Strong *et al.* 1930; Butler 1957, 1959, 1962, 1965; Garth 1952; E. Strong 1959a, 1960a), Yakima (Smith 1910), Lower Snake (Combes 1968), Okanagan (Atkinson 1952; Caldwell 1954a, b; Chatters 1986), and Kamloops areas (Smith 1900; Richards and Rousseau 1987). A host of other alternative burial practices can also be found both archaeologically and ethnographically, including canoe burial, basket burial among the Lillooet, volcanic ash dome burial among the Yakima, cave burial, and so on. These will be discussed in more detail, when warranted, on a region by region basis.

Unfortunately there is little information on the significance of these different burial forms. As we have seen, Sprague (1959, 1967) and Rodeffer (1973) suggest that much of the variation is temporal and spatial in nature, and indeed this is undoubtedly the case. Still, both researchers recognise that within any one region and at one point in time, there almost always seem to have been alternative disposal methods (see also Daugherty and Dammel 1952). An attempt to relate these to socioeconomic status on the basis of the ethnographic information offers some, though rather limited, insight. For example, Curtis (1911a:99) states that, among the Wishram of The Dalles, slaves were deposited along the edges of talus slopes. Poor people lacking wealthy relatives were not buried at all among the Thompson and Shuswap, but were left exposed or covered with brush (Teit 1900, 1909). Teit (in Sprague 1967) notes that it was the wealthy who were occasionally cremated among the Athapaskan-speaking Chilcoltin. Such references are very limited in the literature, and require corroboration when they do occur. Data from excavated burials can provide a better means of determining whether, within different regions, certain burial types are more often associated with richer graves in terms of artifact inclusions. Any such analysis clearly must also take into account the temporal trends noted by Sprague, Rodeffer, and others.

The ethnographies are of even less use when it comes to discovering whether any differential burial treatment existed based on age and/or sex. Ray (1932) states that, among the Sanpoil-Nespelem, children were accorded the same treatment at death as adults. In his culture element distribution, Ray (1939) notes the practice of basket burial among the Lillooet (see also, Teit 1906) and the Carrier; in both cases this practice was reserved for infants and small children. This was a prevalent practice among the Coast Salish as well (Barnett 1955; Yarrow 1881).

For the most part there has been little attempt to deal with mortuary variability on the Plateau from the perspective of socioeconomic status differentiation. Occasionally basic observations are made on the treatment of age/sex classes, particularly if there are any obvious differences, which is rarely the case. There are a few examples of more in-depth analysis of mortuary remains. Pullen (1970) has provided one of the few statistical analyses of an historic Plateau burial site, the Palus site (45-FR-36B), originally excavated and reported by Sprague (1967). The analysis focused on the distribution of glass trade beads, but again the emphasis was primarily on chronology, although wealth and age distinctions were also

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addressed. The results indicated that the Palus "... likely did not have an equal wealth distribution" (Pullen 1970:74), and that adults on average had more beads than infants and children. Dumond and Minor (1983) used chi-square to examine the relationship between grave inclusions and age/sex classes at Wildcat Canyon (35-GM-9). A discussion of their results is presented in Chapter 6. As part of an analysis of prehistoric fishing, Johnston (1987) presents a brief summary and discussion of sex differentiation in the occurrence of fishing gear in burials on the Columbia Plateau. None of the above examples approach the scope of the study attempted here.

Organisation of Chapters

Mortuary analysis has generated much ongoing debate in archaeology, and has cultivated a strong connection between theory and method. The degree of background information and explanation that is necessary depends to a large extent on the theoretical perspective with which one approaches the topic. To those who agree with the approach used here, little explanation of its rationale is needed, while others may question every step. Chapter 2 briefly discusses the history of recent mortuary analysis from a theoretical point of view, identifying the major points forwarded by those advocating different positions. Out of this discussion emerges the theoretical position taken in the present work. Chapter 3 deals with the design of data collection, the variables to be used, and the methods of analysis to be employed.

Chapter 4 begins by outlining the theoretical rationale behind the differential attribution of value to artifact types by the archaeologist. It then goes on to list some of the various items most commonly found as grave inclusions on the Plateau, and discusses them in terms of their potential association with wealth and prestige. The limited available ethnographic information relating to the value of artifact classes is also summarised, thus combining both etic and emic approaches in the study of value (cf. Hayden 1984).

Chapter 5 presents a detailed summary and discussion of ethnohistoric and ethnographic accounts of the various Plateau ethnolinguistic groups inhabiting the study area. Because the protohistoric is one of the periods of interest in this study, ethnohistoric and ethnographic accounts are invaluable, and are drawn upon extensively, both in a general Plateau-wide sense and when discussing specific groups. For each group a number of key components are addressed, including sociopolitical organisation, socioeconomic structure, ownership of resources, and burial practices. In all cases the emphasis is on those aspects of the society that inform on, or have the potential to inform on, socioeconomic inequality. The interplay between these sources of data and the archaeological record is expected to be far more informative than either could be alone. Thus the use of ethnography will basically be threefold: 1) to gain insight into the assigned relative value of various artifact classes, as well as any emic perceptions relating to spiritual significance, age and gender specificity, and so on, 2) to provide an independent measure of social complexity or socioeconomic differentiation, and "social distances" in various Plateau groups, and 3) to document the range of burial practices recorded for different Plateau groups.

Chapter 6 describes the mortuary site assemblages forming the basis of this work. Where the data are appropriate (in terms of a sufficient number of undisturbed burials with recorded grave associations), a series of detailed quantitative questions concerning each assemblage are posed. These include: 1) are subadults underrepresented beyond what could reasonably be expected given preservational biases? 2) are males and females equally represented? 3) are specific artifact classes associated with any particular age/sex group? 4) is the diversity of grave inclusions equally distributed among age/sex groups? 5) does the spatial organisation of burials over the site indicate any relationship with socioeconomic status? and 6) if alternative, roughly contemporaneous forms of burial are present at the same site, can they distinguished in terms of age/sex structure and/or number and kind of grave inclusions?

Chapter 7 is concerned with achieving a broader perspective on the structure of mortuary variability over the Plateau as a whole. To this end, all of the burials from sites used in the quantitative analysis, in addition to a few others, are pooled for analysis. This obviates the problems with small sample size that consistently hamper an investigation of differentiation along the dimensions of age and sex at the level of the individual burial site/assemblage. The chapter also presents the use of the Lorenz curve and Gini index to compare the degree of inequality observed in the distribution of artifact types in the various assemblages. Gini indices, together with more qualitative data, are used to investigate the development of socioeconomic inequality on the Plateau, and additional lines of evidence are brought to bear. Finally, discussion turns to an examination of the patterning observed and an attempt to interpret it.

Chapter 8 summarises the results and presents a series of proposals for future research into mortuary behaviour and socioeconomic status inequality on the Plateau.