

Prokeš, Lubomír

Post-mortem changes and their meaning in the interpretation of the burial rite (relation between archaeology and forensic science)

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LUBOMÍR PROKEŠ:

POST-MORTEM CHANGES AND THEIR MEANING IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BURIAL RITE (RELATION BETWEEN ARCHAEOLOGY AND FORENSIC SCIENCE)

The work presents an overview of taphonomy and forensic archaeology, disciplines that have hitherto been marginalised in Czech and Moravian archaeology.

The first part deals with progressive post-mortem changes of the human body and factors influencing them (cause of death, grave depth, funeral equipment and soil texture). Attention is dedicated to the decomposition of soft tissues, the course of which can significantly affect the position and preservation state of skeletal remains. Special emphasis is laid on chemical aspects of the processes and the possibility of detection of totally decomposed or transferred skeletal remains on the basis of the analysis of chemical markers.

The second part centres upon the state of preservation of skeletal remains in the archaeological context, causes of bone decomposition and factors influencing it, both geological and biogenous (bacteria, mould, higher organisms).

The third part focuses on the observation of the position and disarticulation of skeletons. These observations help disclose burial types (e.g. empty spaces involved) and characterise secondary interference in graves (transfer of remains, grave robbing).

The fourth part discusses the issue of high temperatures affecting the human body. Apart from the separation of bones through boiling (*Mos Teutonicus*), spotlight is on a direct impact of fire on the human body (incompletely burnt remains, cremation). Possible closer characterisation of a burial rite on the basis of the nature of cremation remnants is also assessed.

The final part summarises information on the methodology of forensic archaeology, especially geophysical prospection, excavation, documentation, sample taking and the lifting of human remains.