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A bed of ochre

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Summary in English

Cemeteries are our most important source of information on the life ways of prehistoric people. Differences in mortuary practices can, to some extent, reflect social differences in a prehistoric society, and the study of human skeletal remains can provide information on the sex, age, trauma, genetic relationships, and diet.

This research is focussed on the \pm 4500-year-old Native American cemetery of Port au Choix-3 locus II. This site, which was excavated in 1967/68, was attributed to the Maritime Archaic culture (Tuck 1976). At Port au Choix-3 locus II, 93 well preserved human skeletons were discovered, which were buried in three spatially separate clusters. The burials contained many tools, ornaments and other grave goods made of, stone, bone and antler. Almost all individuals were lavishly covered with red ochre.

The objective of the research was to formulate a diagnostic reconstruction of the social structure of the Maritime Archaic society of Port au Choix-3 locus II. This investigation was conducted by means of an analysis of the archaeological and physical anthropological data retrieved by Tuck (1970, 1971, 1976), Tuck *et al.* (*n.d.*) and Anderson (1976, *n.d.*), in combination with the results of recent studies on non-metric as well as metric skeletal and dental traits, stable isotopes, radiocarbon, and DNA.

One of the research questions was whether the three spatial burial clusters reflect different genetic and/or chronological groups, or whether they represent different social status groups.

The excellent preservation of the skeletons offered the opportunity to conduct DNA analysis on this material. Permission was granted for sampling 64 individuals. In 26 of those DNA was found and analysed. This part of the research was conducted in cooperation with researchers of the University of Oxford. By means of DNA analysis we were able to establish the sex of a number of individuals (which in some cases led to sex-determinations that were different from those established by means of the traditional morphological method). DNA analysis, in combination with physical anthropological techniques, showed that the three burial clusters were not genetically separate populations. The skeletons of 29 adults were analysed for their $^{12}\text{C}/^{13}\text{C}$ and $^{14}\text{N}/^{15}\text{N}$ stable isotope ratios. With these analysis the average diets in the three burial clusters could be reconstructed.

In combination with the studies mentioned above, an analysis of the archaeological mortuary attributes was conducted. These attributes can be classified into four mortuary domains; placement in the cemetery (1), grave construction (2), body treatment and position (3) and grave goods (4). We investigated whether or not the mortuary attributes are associated with sex, age and burial cluster. Subsequently all the relations between all the archaeological, physical anthropological, DNA and stable isotope variables were investigated statistically.

One of the results of the analyses was the detection of significant differences in diet between two of the three burial clusters. Also significant

differences in the amounts of energy invested in the burials were found. In addition to that, in one of the three burial clusters more male skeletons were discovered than one would expect on the basis of a biological 50/50 distribution. This suggests that females and males did not have the same access to these burial clusters.

The observed patterning in mortuary practices was compared to ethnographic data. The ethnographic analogies used originate from Algonquian societies which are thought to be comparable to Port au Choix-3. It was concluded that the three clusters are the burial grounds of three different social status groups in the Port au Choix-3 locus II society. It is likely that in one of the clusters young and relatively inexperienced hunters were buried. Their diet was heavily based on marine mammals, probably seals, which were easy to catch. In the second burial cluster we find the most skilled hunters. The greatest variability in diet was found in this group. These hunters were able to hunt all species successfully, and had the highest status. The greatest energy investment was found in the burials of this cluster. The third cluster consisted, probably, older and/or less capable hunters. Also the sex ratio in this cluster is more equal than that of the other two burial clusters. The subsistence of these people was mainly based on fish. These fish were probably caught in the vicinity of the settlement.

In addition to information on subsistence and social structure, some religious aspects of this prehistoric Native American society could be reconstructed.