How She Was Laid to Rest. Theoretical Perspective on Bioarchaeology of Gender and Identity in Medieval and Modern Portugal

Abstract:

The proposed paper aims to present a preliminary framework for an ongoing research within the scope of a Doctoral Thesis regarding the mortuary practices in Mediaeval/Modern Portugal. The assumption that Christian burial practices are completely standardized has often been contradicted by bioarcheologists on-field, however, most observations and results are kept on site-specific level and confined to grey literature. Differences have been observed in other areas such as Art History and History. They can pertain to differences in the representation of deceased women in funerary art – with different positions and goods, while expressions of piety have been noted for both genders. Historical documentary sources show women as active members, financing the construction of religious buildings, and carefully stipulating their own funeral rites with astounding detail, from what will be worn, the offerings to be bestowed and the number of days of mourning. Some scholars studying testaments and pious donations have already pointed out differences related to gender: in the choice of the burial place – beside the husband or back with their own family line, and the increase likelihood to wish to be buried wearing religious attire, often from mendicant orders. The bodies themselves have been mostly kept out of the discussion where Christian Portuguese Medieval and Modern burials are concerned. As such, we aim to explore a bioarcheological perspective based on anthropological field reports, to outline differences in mortuary practice between female and male adults, and children in Portugal from burial sites instituted after 1297. In the present paper we aim to present the preliminary framework of our ongoing study, a theoretical state of the art and the methodology to be employed throughout our research. We believe that comprehensive statistical inter-site comparisons will underline possible trends not visible at intra-site level or highlight the geographical or chronological specificity of these trends.

Keywords: *Funerary Practice, Gender, Bioarchaeology, Medieval/Modern, Portugal.*