Talking to the Dead: 
Using Correspondence Analysis to Understand Gender, Age, and Time at the Greenville Burial Ground, BC

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ABSTRACT

Mortuary data from the Northwest Coast has primarily been used to support claims of status differentiation, age, and burial time. Burial goods and treatments have the potential to shed light throughout time. Mortuary data, however, has been used to understand important differences in gender associations about the social structures and behavior of the living, and using correspondence analysis, the meanings of certain burial treatments and goods can be seen to be associated with a specific gender or age groups. This study explores social dynamics and gender object associations of the living by using correspondence analysis on mortuary data.

INTRODUCTION

The Greenville burial ground is located inland from Prince Rupert Harbor on the Nass River (Figure 1). This site is thought to represent prehistoric N accusation (McIlraith 2002). After the burial dates to the Late Holocene, C (1992) identified three time phases for the burials unique to the site. Generally, all the burials dates to the Late Developmental stages associated with the Northwest Coast, which lasted from 450 CE to 900 CE. During 1991 excavations, 38 burials were identified. Using correspondence analysis, gender, age and wealth differences can be seen in burial goods and treatments, which correspond with what is expected in archaic social systems.

DATA

Although Cybulski (1992) recorded unique differences in grave goods and positioning, he did not analyze this data further. He explained that certain features, like “turban marks and face burials, are often marked on the Northwest Coast,” but did not examine data that could reveal interesting information about the burial meanings and differences. This data was compiled and recorded from the Greenville burial site report.

The data, recorded in presence-absence forms, includes sex, burial direction, elderberry seed associations, labret marks, grave goods associated with burials, grave goods associated with burials, and a multitude of other information. Interestingly, Cybulski (1992:62) notes that “the Greenville site appears unique on the coast not having had any burials associated with objects of personal adornment, even the most common form of artifact association with animal bone.” Although this data set contains a lot of interesting information, this lack of personal goods makes the Greenville site unique in the region and perhaps different in many ways.

Table 1: Correspondence Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burials</th>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>Dim.</th>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
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Chi-Squa. p: <0.001  Inertia Exp: 31%

CONCLUSIONS

As discussed above, Dimension 1 defines the relative wealth and age of the graves while Dimension 2 defines gender. Two interesting aspects of this data are that 45.1% of the burials appear to be associated with labrets and the association of males with violent injury and vice versa. Cybulski (1992) points out that labrets are associated only with females and are a symbol of status. This is supported by ethnographic data that describes “inserting a labret was part of the rite of passage in the life cycle of every non-slave woman” (Moss 1999:31). Not only this, but larger, more intricate labrets that were more likely to be worn by females were exclusively worn by slave women (Cybulski 1992). Although Cybulski (1992) was able to reliably the labrets as important to status and worn only by women using statistical analysis, using how heavily labrets rate as a grave good supports the validity of this analysis. Interestingly, too, Cybulski (1992) believed rocked associations were a male feature in the burials. When the correspondence analysis is examined, however, it seems clear that rock associations rank as feminine. Cybulski (1992) notes that a number of males show evidence of interpersonal violence likely from engaging in warfare. If warfare is an exclusive activity of males as Cybulski suggests, than violence should rank as a masculine activity, and this does appear. Again, like with labrets for females, the correspondence analysis results support Cybulski’s conclusion, and this helps validity to the analysis results. In addition to gender and wealth, age-related status can be seen in these results (Figure 2). As age increases, so does wealth of the grave, which indicates one must gain status throughout a lifetime rather than being born in it (Ansel 2001). This is interesting since the time of the Greenville burials, it is generally believed enslaved status had come into play. The results of this analysis suggest status on the Northwest Coast was more fluid than is generally believed.

Cybulski (1992) further notes that at Prince Rupert Harbor, many of the adult women wore stones and so were not treated to high-status burials, which seems to be supported by more identified male than female remains at Greenville in what Cybulski identifies as a high-status burial ground. If the burials at Greenville all tended to be wealthy in elderberries and box burials, for instance, which Cybulski (1992) identifies as high status items, then this would be a perfectly logical argument for why there is such a difference between the number of male and female burials at Greenville. This, however, is not the case. Regardless of gender, there is great variability in grave goods, and 21 labret female burials while 21 male burials, as can be seen in Figure 2. Although there is a discrepancy on sex based on physical identification, the correspondence analysis results, which rate burials with unknown sex, indicates that perhaps the sex ratio is the site is almost equal. Cybulski (1992) assumption that these burials represented high status individuals is perhaps incorrect, and it remains there is a discrepancy between the number of male and female burials, namely slavery. This being out, the seemingly even distribution by gender and differences in wealth suggest the same can be seen in the Greeneville burials other than sex.

REFERENCES


