

Chapter Four

Changing Burials

Having now outlined general ideas of the nature of Later Stone Age burials in the southern Cape and the history of their study by archaeologists, we can move on to consider the burials in more detail. How, for instance, were graves constructed? What material culture did they contain? And, importantly, can Inskeep's sequence be demonstrated? Equally importantly, can spatial variants be detected?

With these questions in mind, I examine San ethnography relating to burial practice. I then discuss in detail the available archaeological burials. I end the chapter with a comparison between the ethnographic and archaeological burials.

Ethnographic San burials

Surprisingly, considering the large amount of ethnographic material on various San groups, there are relatively few details available about burials and burial practices. It seems that burial was not a topic informants were comfortable discussing. Most of the published accounts reported on individual burials witnessed by an ethnographer or general comments from informants. There is only a single report of a burial from most San linguistic groups. Whilst such eye-witness accounts are extremely valuable, they bring with them the danger that a single burial comes to stand for the traditions of an entire group; idiosyncrasies may become entrenched as orthodoxy.

A second problem with the paucity of ethnographic detail on burial practices amongst San groups is that it is not always clear to what extent they may have been influenced by other cultural and economic groups. The Revisionists pointed out the sustained contact between Kalahari San groups and Tswana farmers. It is

likely that some San groups adopted some aspects of burial practice from Tswana, Khoekhoen or Christian neighbours. Whenever possible, I highlight burial practices that may have derived from other cultural groups.

These dangers aside, there have been several reviews of San burial practices (Schapera 1930; Inskeep 1986; Wadley 1996). All of them perpetuate a similar methodological problem: they attempt to give a general account of ‘San burial practice’. Details from multiple groups (sometimes supported with archaeological material) are conflated to produce an overall account. Differences between groups are lost in this process. This is another case where group differences are elided in the construction of a general account, as Mitchell (2005a:163–164, 2005b:67–68) has described.

In the review I present here, I take cognizance of Mitchell’s point and discuss the burial practices group by group. In this way, inter-group variation becomes visible. A full ethnographic analysis of this kind has not, as far as I am aware, ever been undertaken. In its place, we have only superficial and synoptic summaries. A comprehensive review not only brings out variations and their causes, it also provides substantive information that is crucial to an understanding of the southern Cape burials in all their variety. One of the difficulties with this approach is that several groups are represented by descriptions of only a single burial. In groups where multiple accounts exist, it seems that a certain amount of variation may exist in the details of how people are buried. Such variation is, obviously, lost in groups with only single accounts.

I do not draw on travellers’ accounts and other early records. Most of these sources (summarized in Schapera 1930:160–166) are extremely fragmentary, do not state which San group was described and are often based on biased colonial opinion that does not ring true with more recent, detailed accounts of San burials (e.g., Dornan 1917:51, 1925:145). The ethnographer Hans-Joachim Heinz (1986:25), for instance, in discussing a couple of quotations from early accounts of burials stated, “I do feel, that the information given in both of these quotations

stands in complete contrast to everything that I know or have heard about or from the Bushmen.” The warning contained in his statement should be heeded.

In what follows, I emphasize the physical structure and arrangement of graves and the disposition of objects around them. As will become apparent, these aspects are useful in comparisons with the archaeological material.

Ju/'hoansi

I begin with the Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) because there is more information available on their burial practices than on those of other groups. The only direct account available of a Ju/'hoan burial is that given by Polly Wiessner (1983a). She described in detail the one burial that she witnessed, and supplemented this description with information she was told about other burials. I therefore begin this section by summarizing Wiessner's (1983a) direct account of a burial. I then supplement her account with additional information on burial variation recorded by Elizabeth Marshall Thomas (1959, 2006) and Lorna Marshall (1999) through interviews with Ju/'hoan people.

The burial Wiessner (1983a) witnessed was that of a woman named Cwa at Dobe. She was an old woman who had died of tuberculosis. The other two burials on which she had information were also those of women. All three burials took place between 1973 and 1975. Information on men's burial, if it differed from that of women, was not available.

Once Cwa had died, four men went into the bush to dig a grave. Women sewed Cwa's blanket closed around her body. They left her wearing her traditional front and back aprons and wearing bracelets and anklets. That night, her hut entrance was closed with an animal skin and a barrel.

The funeral ceremony began early the next morning. Burials, Wiessner was told, took place either in the early morning or in the evening. Whether this was a veiled reference to the rising and setting sun is unclear. Cwa's brother made a speech to the great god. Three men then broke through the back wall of Cwa's hut and carried her body out and to the grave. Most people at the camp went to her grave. The grave was about half a kilometre from the camp and about two metres deep.

Men passed the body down into the grave and spent 10 to 15 minutes arranging it into place. They discussed the importance of correctly positioning the body. The grave was oriented in a north-south direction. The body was laid on its right side facing east. The legs were slightly flexed. Wiessner (1983a:2) reported that in two burials from /Xai /Xai, about which she had information but did not witness, an additional chamber of about 200 mm width was dug into the wall at the bottom of the grave. The backs of the corpses were tucked into these recesses. A similar recess was not dug in Cwa's grave: the people did not think the additional work was necessary in the hard ground. These recesses may have some relationship with the side chambers frequently dug in Bantu-speaker or Khoekhoen graves, though on a far smaller scale.

By this stage of the proceedings, Cwa's brother, Tsao, had worked himself into a trance without the aid of singing or dancing. He sprinkled scented powder from a tortoise shell box into the grave. He then made a second speech "asking that Cwa find the right path to join her ancestors in the eastern sky" (Wiessner 1983a:3).

Children, women and then men took it in turn to throw hands full of earth into the grave. This practice is reminiscent of Christian funerals. Men then filled in the grave with shovels. A mound of earth about 0.6 m high was made over the grave, and the top flattened. A large stone was placed at the head of the grave to mark it and prevent people from walking over it at a later date. The other two burials at /Xai /Xai followed a similar pattern, except that one was marked with two stones and the other with sticks and stones.

Once this was done, women brought out a bowl of water. The men who had worked on the grave washed in it. Others attending the funeral ceremony symbolically washed their hands in the water. The remaining water was poured over the grave.

After the washing, Cwa's husband and brother took powder from a tortoise shell box and rubbed it up the nose, between the eyes, of each participant. Excess powder was blown into the air above the person's head. In a similar way, powder was rubbed on each cheek, and blown towards the ears. This action was accompanied by the words "Here is your beloved —, your relative who has come to say goodbye and wish you well" (Wiessner 1983a:3).

The next day, camp members shaved their heads as a sign of mourning. The following week, they moved the camp. This was apparently always done after the death of an adult. It was said to be done to leave a place with sad memories and to make a new camp as a symbol of the continuation of life after death.

After a person's death their *hxaro* (delayed, exchange system; see Chapter 3) relationships may be inherited, although such relationships were often passed on before an old person's death (Wiessner 1983a:4). The deceased person's possessions would be passed on to their *hxaro* partners by the children or siblings of the deceased with the request that the relationship continue (Wiessner 1983a:4).

Marshall (1999), although not having witnessed any Ju/'hoan burials herself, provided some additional details and variations from interviews with San in the 1950s, 20 years before the burial that Wiessner witnessed. She began with the important observation that amongst the Ju/'hoansi, death and burial were not honoured with highly developed rituals (Marshall 1999:39). Also, food was not associated with burials and there was no ritual avoidance or consumption of food by mourners (Marshall 1999:91).

Marshall (1999:178–185) recorded considerable variability in burial practices. This variability was due to circumstance (where the death occurred, which people were present, and so on), choices of the people performing the burial and, more pragmatically, conditions of the soil. Variations were not based on the social status of the dead person or their manner of death. A distinction was made between ‘good’ (natural) and ‘bad’ (unnatural) death, but the manner of death made no difference to the burial procedure (Marshall 1999:178).

Members of the family of the deceased prepared the body for burial; anyone could assist in this process. The body should ideally be bound into a flexed position with the knees drawn up to the chest, the ankles crossed and the arms bent at the elbows, right hand to right shoulder, left hand to left shoulder (Marshall 1999:178–179). Thomas (1959:126) added that the head was bowed down to the knees. The body could be rubbed with fat “to make it nice”, but this was not a ritual procedure and could be omitted (Marshall 1999:179). The eyes, nose and ears of the body had to be protected. This could be done by placing an old leather bag over the head or by covering the eyes and plugging the nose and ears (Marshall 1999:179). This was said to be done to protect the eyes, nose and ears from flies, and that this protection would be transferred to the living. A woman’s body was completely wrapped in a kaross; a man’s body would be covered with a small old kaross or a mat.

The grave was dug by male relatives of the deceased. Women did not participate in digging the grave or lowering the body into it (Marshall 1999:180). The grave could be placed anywhere, either near or distant from the camp. Graves could be round or oblong, but “the ideal grave is a round hole ‘as deep as a Bushman is tall’, or at least deep enough to completely contain a flexed body” (Marshall 1999:179). Ideal graves were not always achieved: in some cases people had to make do with shallow trenches or in other cases the body may have been stretched out on the ground and covered with thorn branches (Marshall 1999:181). The body could be placed in the grave in a sitting position or on its side (Thomas 1959:126; Marshall 1999:181). Some people claimed that the body should face in

the direction of the deceased's birthplace (Marshall 1999:179; Thomas 2006:209); others claimed that the direction was of no significance (Marshall 1999:179).

Thomas (1959:127) described how people lit a fire near the dead person's shelter and placed a bent reed in the ground so that the grave, the fire and the reed made a line pointing to the dead person's birthplace.

Once the grave was filled in, thorn branches were placed over it to deter carnivores. If they were available, branches of *!ei* (*Ochna pulchra*) and *mai* (*Dichapetalum cymosum*) were added to the pile: their odour was said to keep carnivores away (Marshall 1999:180). On other occasions, stones were placed on graves to prevent animals from digging them up (Thomas 1959:127, 2006:129). The oldest relative present would sprinkle *sa*, an aromatic powder, over the grave and speak to the spirits. A fire was sometimes built at the graveside and bark of *zao* (*Terminalia sericea*) and *!ei* burned (Marshall 1999:180). This was also to keep carnivores away.

The dead person's shelter would be torn down and the branches and grass thrown on the grave (Thomas 1959:127; Marshall 1999:180). A man's bow and quiver were hung on a stick beside the grave; his arrows were broken and thrown on the grave (Marshall 1999:180). In contrast, Thomas (1959:127, 2006:130, 209) stated that all items of biodegradable material were broken and scattered on the grave together with *sa* powder. The grave was marked with a few stones so that people passing there would know it was a grave. People may have sprinkled medicine from a rain-horn on the grave to help it rain the following year (Marshall 1999:167).

After a burial, people abandoned their camp and started a new one at some distance from the previous one (Thomas 1959:127, 2006:209; Yellen 1976:65; Howell 1979:51; Marshall 1999:179, 180). According to Marshall (1999:184), people made no outward sign of mourning, such as cutting their hair. This contradicts Wiessner's (1983a) observation.

The Ju/'hoansi seem not to have had any concept of providing the dead with grave goods to use in an afterlife (Marshall 1965:260, 1999:185). This is an important point to keep in mind when we come to consider the varied items placed in many of the southern Cape archaeological graves. Bracelets, under-knee ornaments and small hair ornaments were left on the body when it was buried; more important ornaments were kept and distributed amongst relatives (Marshall 1999:179). The other possessions of a dead person could be disposed of in two ways. Common objects of daily use were usually thrown onto the grave or otherwise destroyed. They were said to remind people of their loss (Marshall 1965:260, 1999:185). Fine ornaments and objects obtained through trade were usually distributed to relatives, a man's possessions given to his relatives and a woman's possessions given to her relatives (Marshall 1999:185).

Although some differences exist between the burial described by Wiessner and the practices described by Thomas and Marshall, a generally coherent picture of Ju/'hoan burial emerges. Some differences may relate to changes in practice between the 1950s and 1980s. Others may be local variations between Dobe and Nyae Nyae.

!Xun

The next group I discuss is the !Xun. !Xun is a cluster of dialects occurring in northern Namibia and southern Angola; Ju/'hoan is one of the !Xun languages (Biesele 2002). Although I have already discussed the Ju/'hoansi separately, additional information exists for other, non-Ju/'hoansi, !Xun speakers from further north. The details are brief, yet nevertheless worth including.

The most detailed description of !Xun burial was given by Carlos Estermann (1976):

When anyone dies they wail and lament as long as the body is unburied. For an adult the mourning lasts for four days, for a child, two. Adults are buried outside the hut, with the head towards the east. For children a grave is dug inside the hut. Some time after the death of an adult the site of the encampment is changed. At the moment of departure the men throw green branches on the grave. They go through the same procedure if they happen to have to go near the site of burial at a later time. Women and children take a little charcoal, rub their heads with it, and throw the rest on the grave, saying the ritual words, "Accept this offering. We are going farther into the forest. We will meet you there!" (Estermann 1976:10).

Estermann (1976:10) received conflicting reports of what became of the possessions of a dead man: some people said that his wife inherited his property, others said that his bow and arrows went to his maternal relatives and his hatchets to his children.

Estermann's brief report is largely consistent with the Ju/'hoansi accounts, although with some differences. More details are available from the accounts of three young !Xun boys, !Nanni, Tamme and /Uma, who spent time with Bleek and Lloyd in Cape Town in the late 1800s (Biesele 2002 discussed the ethnographies collected from these boys and its relationship to wider !Xun ethnographies).

!Nanni and Tamme confirmed that !Xun moved campsites after burying a body (Bleek and Lloyd MSS: L.XI–XII.4.9235–9236, 9251). In contradiction to Estermann's report, !Nanni stated that a dead man's possessions were not given away (L.XI–XII.7.9559). He described how a man was dressed for burial: he wore his back apron made of the skin of a male jackal, on his right arm a bracelet made of two jackal ears; two jackal feet and a horn were hung around his neck; on his head was a jackal tail (L.XI–XII.7.9563–9564). The man was buried with his head on his bag (L.XI–XII.7.9563). The corpse was prepared in this fashion by the dead man's father (L.XI–XII.7.9563 rev.). The detail of this description suggests that !Nanni may have been describing a particular individual rather than a normal way of burying men. I am wary of generalizing this as a standard practice for burying !Xun men. In another account, !Nanni and Tamme stated that a man's bow and stick were put into the grave with him, but that another man took his arrows

(L.XI–XII.4.9236). Tamme gave a description of his younger brother's death and burial saying that the grave was filled with earth and covered with tree trunks cut down for the purpose (L.XI–XII.3.9215). /Uma gave a very similar account of burying people and cutting trees down to cover the grave. He said that the tree they use is a thorn tree called //i (unidentified) (L.XIII.10263–10264, 10267 rev., 10268).

Some of the most interesting information from these informants came from !Nanni. Remarkably, he drew two pictures of burials. The first of these, made on 22 January 1880, is a plan of the settlement at which his sister had died (Fig. 4.1). His drawing shows the positions of various people's fires and houses and two graves, one open and the other closed. The open grave mouth (8 on the drawing) is surrounded by a mound of earth and stones (9), the stones uppermost. Next to the grave lies the body of his sister Karuma (7). Five fires (10) burn on the mound of earth and stones. The second, closed, grave (15) is surrounded or covered by a number of large (12) and small (14) stones. 5a indicates the fire at which !Nanni and his brother cried. It is not certain whether the two graves in the drawing were supposed to represent the same grave at different stages (open and closed) or to be two separate graves.

!Nanni's second drawing (Fig. 4.2), made on 30 July 1880, is even more useful for our purposes. It illustrates the structure of a !Xun grave. An oval grave hole (1) is shown with a round side chamber (6). The notes on the drawing state that the body (5) was placed in the side chamber with its head on a bag (4). The drawing itself suggests that the body was placed in a flexed position, and that the whole body was placed in the side chamber. This side chamber is reminiscent of, though larger than, that described amongst the Ju/'hoasi. It is interesting to note that the grave is illustrated at the foot of a tree called *zau-u* (unidentified, but possibly *Terminalia sericea*), the seeds or berries and gum of which are edible. It is uncertain whether this drawing was intended to illustrate the grave of a particular individual (perhaps the man whose burial !Nanni described in such detail), or a typical !Xun grave.

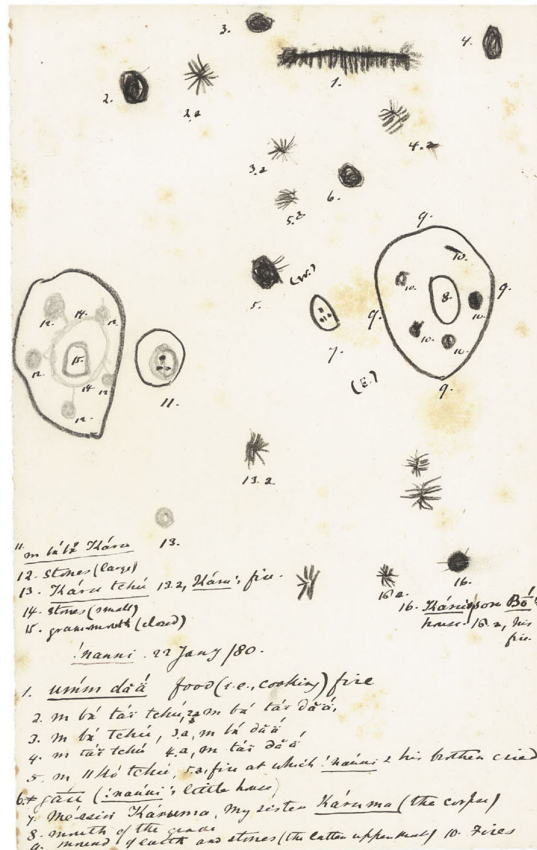


Figure 4.1: !Nanni drew this plan of a settlement with burials on 22 January 1880.

1. umm da a, food (i.e., cooking) fire; 2. m ba' tai tchu, 2.a. m ba' tai da a; 3. m ba' tchu, 3.a. m ba da a; 4. m tai tchu, 4.a. m tai da a; 5. m||ko' tchu, 5.a. fire at which !nanni and his brother cried; 6. #gau (!nanni's little house); 7. me ssin Karuma, my sister Karuma (the corpse); 8. mouth of the grave; 9. mound of earth and stones (the latter uppermost); 10. Fires; 11. m ba' ba' Karu; 12. stones (large); 13. Karu tchu, 13.2. Karu's fire; 14. stones (small); 15. grave-mouth (closed); 16. Karu's son Bo's house, 16.a. his fire (picture: National Library).

!Xõ

There is only one definite account of a !Xõ burial. It comes from 1974 (Heinz 1986). The deceased had died in a hospital and was transported back to the village. Men decided on the location of the grave. A site outside the settlement, but not far from it, was chosen (Heinz 1986:25–26). A number of points of positioning were considered important. The grave had to be oriented north-south

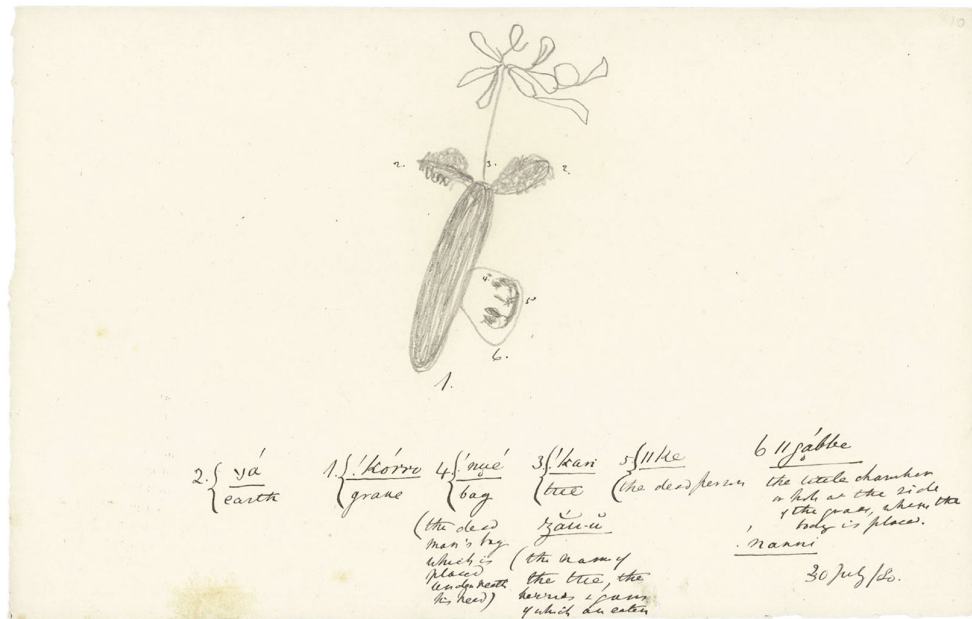


Figure 4.2: !Nanni drew this diagram of a !Xun grave on 30 July 1880. 1. !korro, grave; 2. ya, earth; 3. !kan, tree, *zau-u* (the name of the tree, the berries and gum of which are eaten); 4. !nue, bag (the dead man's bag which is placed underneath his head); 5. ||ke, the dead person; 6. ||gabbe, the little chamber or hole at the side of the grave, where the body is placed (picture: University of Cape Town Libraries Manuscripts Department).

so that the body could lie facing west (Heinz 1986:26, 29, 31). The reason given for this orientation was that “it will walk to the setting sun to reach the realm of God (Gu/e)” (Heinz 1986:31, parenthesis in original). This is the only explicit reference in the ethnographies to orienting the body in relation to the sun. It was also desirable for the grave to be in the shade (Heinz 1986:26, 32).

Men dug the grave to a depth of about 3.05 m (10 ft). It appears from Heinz's (1986:fig. 1) illustration that the grave pit was rectangular. A side chamber large enough for the entire body was dug at the bottom of the grave pit on the eastern side (Heinz 1986:26, fig. 1; Fig. 4.3). The body, still wrapped in its hospital blanket, was lowered into the grave and placed in the side chamber. The body was stretched out, lying on its side with its face towards the west (Heinz 1986:26). In earlier times the body had apparently been buried in a flexed position (Heinz 1986:32). Its head was laid on a pillow in order to “cover its ears and keep the sand out, otherwise, how can it hear a man making fire, how can it help him doing

this?" (Heinz 1986:32). This observation recalls similar practices amongst the Ju/'hoansi that Marshall (1999:179) recorded and in !Nanni's report of !Xun burial.

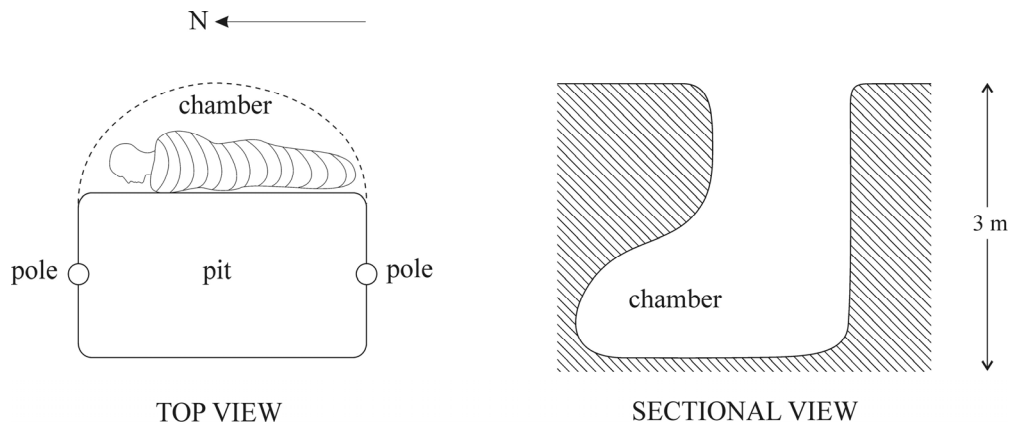


Figure 4.3: Plan and section of a !Xõ grave (after Heinz 1986:fig. 1).

The father of the deceased brought grass and sticks to the grave. Grass was placed over the body in the side chamber. Sticks were laid diagonally over the entrance to the side chamber, and covered with more grass (Heinz 1986:27, fig. 2; Fig. 4.4). This was done to prevent earth being thrown directly onto the body. The thought of throwing earth directly onto the corpse was repulsive to the !Xõ (Heinz 1986:32). Once this was done, some earth was thrown into the grave. Everyone, especially women and children, then filed past the grave and threw in a bit of earth (Heinz 1986:28). Two large poles of *n!u* (*Lonchocarpus nelsii*) were then set upright in the grave, one at either end, protruding above the ground surface (Heinz 1986:28). The grave pit was then completely filled in by men. A third pole of *n!u* was then placed horizontally across the tops of the other two poles. This was said to be as a walking stick to serve the corpse on its future path (Heinz 1986:28, 34). This statement is the only allusion to providing the dead with material items for the spirit world.

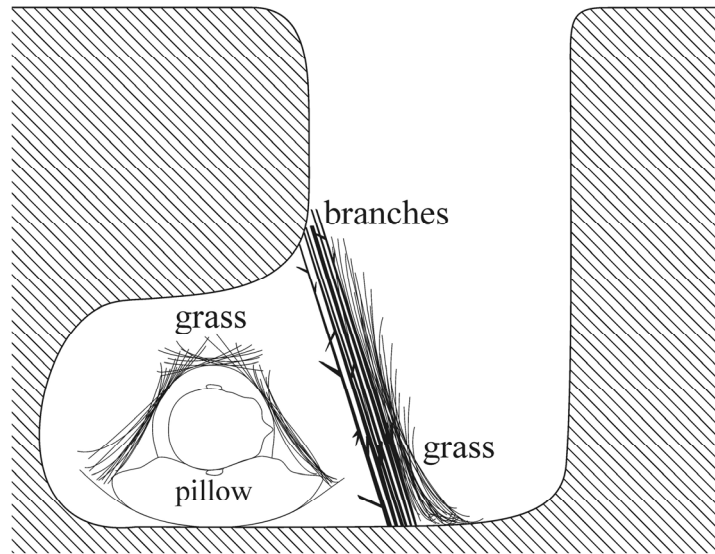


Figure 4.4: Detailed structure of a !Xõ grave (after Heinz 1986:fig. 2).

The father of the deceased prepared a cleansing medicine from /xei (*Sansevieria scabrifolia*), n/eujate (*Wormskioldia juttæ*) and #in (*Aster luteus*) which were pounded together and mixed with water (Heinz 1986:28). The father then gave the medicine mixture to the men who had worked on the grave. They placed it at the foot of the grave and added more water to it. Each man who had worked on the grave washed his hands in it (Heinz 1986:28, 34). Women and children washed in a similar mixture that excluded /xei (/xei was a component of hunting medicine and so inappropriate for women) (Heinz 1986:28, 34). Branches were then brought to cover the grave. This was done so that strangers would recognize it as a grave and to prevent people and animals walking over it (Heinz 1986:28, 33).

Finally, the men who had worked on the grave started a fire at the eastern end of it. It was a ritual fire and had to be made with fire drills. The men sat around the fire and said a prayer to the creator god Gu/e. The prayer related to provision of food, fertility and rain (Heinz 1986:31). The fire was seen as an intermediary between Gu/e and the praying men (Heinz 1986:33). The importance of covering the dead man's ears so that he can 'hear a man making fire' may be explicable in these terms of fire as an intermediary between material and spirit worlds.

After the burial, the hut of the deceased was left alone. Shortly after the death, the whole village moved to a new site (Heinz 1986:34).

Tielman Roos (1931) provided a detailed account of a Kalahari San burial. He variously named the group concerned as ‘!Kaũ’, ‘!Ai kou’ or ‘!Ai churi chi kou’. It is not entirely certain who the people he described were, but it seems likely that they may have been !Xõ. I therefore include his description of the burial of a boy who had died of illness in my section on !Xõ burial practices. Although there are some differences between Heinz’s and Roos’s accounts, there are also many similarities.

A round grave was dug to a depth of 1.5 m about 3 m from a large tree growing in the centre of the camp. Graves were apparently dug in front of the deceased’s shelter; in this case, the boy had been sleeping under the tree with other bachelors (Roos 1931:82). The knees of the body had been bent up to the chest and tied in position. The left arm was bent across the chest; the head rested on the palm of the right hand (Roos 1931:82). The grave and body were prepared by the oldest man in the camp.

The body was lifted down into the grave by men. It was placed on its right side facing north. The boy was buried in his clothes and his body covered with a softened skin of a large antelope. The grave was then filled in by the adult men. Thorn branches were placed over the grave to keep wild animals away (Roos 1931:82).

The boy’s sandals and shoulder bag containing personal possessions were placed at the foot of the grave. A wooden vessel part-filled with food and a tin containing water (the remains of food and water used during his illness) were also placed at the foot of the grave. A wild orange (*Strichnos* sp.) shell filled with //na powder was broken and strewn over the grave (Roos 1931:82).

Two long poles were cut and pushed into the grave to show the position of the boy's head and knees. On the head-pole were hung the boy's bow and quiver. A smouldering log from the bachelors' fire was placed between the two poles (Roos 1931:82).

After the funeral the camp was moved to some distance away. According to Roos (1931:83) this usually only happened at temporary winter camps, such as the one described. If a young child died, it would be buried in the back of its parent's shelter and the shelter then moved within the camp. If someone died at a permanent camp, the deceased would be buried some distance from the camp, but the camp not moved.

Roos (1931:82–83) suggested that the arrangement of the grave was similar to the way in which a man's shelter would be arranged during his lifetime with his bow and quiver to hand and a centrally placed fire. On this basis, Roos (1931:83) suggested that the dead man was considered to be asleep. This seems to be Roos's inference based on spatial similarities rather than a comment from an informant.

G/wi

Very few details are available on G/wi burial practices. Thomas (1959:125–126) provided the earliest information. She described the burial rites of a group she called the Gikwe. This is an earlier version of the name 'G/wi' (Thomas pers. comm. 2007). They dug the grave with digging sticks. The body of the deceased was bound with the arms crossed over the chest, the knees raised, the ankles tied together and the head resting on the fists which were drawn up to the chin (Thomas 1959:125). The powdered herb called *sasa* was placed in the nostrils of the deceased, and the body sprinkled with the powder (Thomas 1959:126). This was done to ensure heavy rains in the following rainy season and possibly to protect the living from the spirit of the dead person. The body was then wrapped in an old kaross and placed in a sitting position in the grave, held upright with a

forked stick. Each person attending the funeral then threw a handful of earth into the grave to “‘make the person remember them’ and also to make the spirit go peacefully away” (Thomas 1959:125). After this, the grave was filled in and covered with thorn branches to prevent animals from digging it up.

Whilst performing the burial and afterwards G/wi stayed upwind from a grave: the spirit of the dead person was said to blow down the wind and harm the living (Thomas 1959:125). According to Thomas (1959:125–126), G/wi remained in the vicinity of a grave for at least three months after a funeral.

More recently, George Silberbauer (1965:102) reported that the dead were buried in a squatting position in a grave about 1.5 m (5 ft) deep. The death was “mourned with loud lamentations for three days” (Silberbauer 1965:102). All the personal possessions of the deceased person, except beadwork, were broken and heaped on (not in) the grave (Silberbauer 1965:102, 1972:313, 1981:113). This was said to warn other people that it was a grave. Beadwork passes to the daughters of the deceased (Silberbauer 1972:313). The grave site was then abandoned and not visited again. G/wi believed that if they wandered too close to a grave they would be attacked by the spirit of the deceased (Silberbauer 1981:113).

Carlos Valiente-Noailles (1993) gave a slightly different account of G/wi burial practice. He worked with people living in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. He referred to the people as Kua. He used this word as a substitute for ‘San’ or ‘Bushman’, not as an identifier of a specific linguistic or ethnic group (Valiente-Noailles 1993:8, 10). The people with whom he worked were mixed or undifferentiated G/wi and G//ana groups living in the same area (Barnard 1992:9, 98, 100). I include his account of burial practice in my section on the G/wi although it may contain some material derived from the closely related G//ana.

Men dug graves with their digging sticks, each taking turns as others became tired (Valiente-Noailles 1993:85, 108). The grave was dug to a depth of 1 m. It was located under the dead person’s house or in its immediate vicinity (Valiente-

Noailles 1993:108). The body was carried to the grave by men. Other men lowered themselves into the grave to receive the body as it was passed down (Valiente-Noailles 1993:85, 108). The body was laid on its side with a pillow of rolled cloth under its head. It faced to the west or southwest if it was that of a man and to the east or northeast if it was that of a woman. A branch may have been placed over the grave once it had been covered. The dead person was buried in their clothes and sometimes wrapped in a blanket. A dead man's possessions were distributed to other people by his widow who may have kept some of them. Some possessions of a dead woman, such as her digging stick and gathering bags, were buried with her (Valiente-Noailles 1993:108).

Some differences exist between the accounts of Thomas, Silberbauer and Valiente-Noailles. The most significant of these relate to the orientation of the body in the grave and the distribution of the deceased's possessions. Thomas and Silberbauer stated that the body was buried in a sitting or squatting position, Valiente-Noailles said that bodies were laid on their sides. According to Silberbauer, all of the dead person's possessions, except their beadwork, were broken and dumped on the grave. Valiente-Noailles on the other hand stated that certain possessions were distributed. There is also some discrepancy between Thomas's statement that G/wi remained near a grave for at least three months after a funeral and Silberbauer's that the grave site was abandoned and not visited again. The reason for these differences is uncertain. It may relate to changes that occurred between the time that Thomas did her fieldwork (1950s), Silberbauer did his (1958–1964) and the time Valiente-Noailles did his (1977–1990). Otherwise it may simply represent variations in practice that exist within the group.

Nharo

Amongst the Nharo, the body of the deceased was tied with a rope into a contracted position with the knees up against the chest (Bleek 1928:35). The same day as the death, a deep grave was dug into soil that was not too hard (Bleek

1928:35). Men carried the body to the grave and lowered it into the grave on ropes (Bleek 1928:35). The body was supposed to be laid on its left side facing towards the east (Bleek 1928:35). The deceased were buried in their clothes and wrapped in their blankets or karosses (Bleek 1928:35; Steyn 1971:321). The grave was then filled in and bushes or stones piled on top to keep animals away (Bleek 1928:35). The following day, a close relative of the deceased burnt buchu on the grave and said good bye. The rest of the community then moved to another locality and did not visit the area for some years (Bleek 1928:35).

As I have described, the clothes, blankets and kaross that belonged to a person were buried with them. The fate of the deceased's other possessions, however, is unclear. Dorothea Bleek (1928:35) stated that "all their possessions are placed in the grave, or if too long, as a bow or spear, hung on a bush close by." H. P. Steyn (1971:321), on the other hand, reported that when a man died his possessions were taken by his father or brother and distributed amongst his sons, or, if he did not have sons, amongst his brothers and other male relatives. Similarly, a deceased woman's possessions were shared amongst her daughters or sisters and other female relatives if she has no daughters (Steyn 1971:321). Bleek (1928:10) stated elsewhere that ostrich eggshell beads were not buried with women, but that "her people" kept them.

Hei//om

The last of the northern San groups I describe are the Hei//om. They are rather enigmatic in that their relationship with other groups is uncertain: they speak the Damara language, but may be descendents of !Kung groups (Barnard 1992:214).

The earliest mentions of Hei//om burial are those of Louis Fourie (1926:52, 61, 1928:95) who noted the oft recorded practice of moving camp after a burial. The only other information he provided was that upon the death of a *gei-khoib* ('chief'

or ‘great man’; Fourie 1926:50; Barnard 1992:215) the man’s sister needed to come to the camp before he could be buried.

More recent ethnographic work has been conducted amongst the Hei//om by Thomas Widlok (1998). He described Hei//om burial practices based on his observation of eight funerals. The people with whom he worked were nominally Christian, but their burial practices seem to contain pre-Christian elements. The body was wrapped in blankets and carried to the grave side on a wooden stretcher. The stretcher was left to rot near the grave. After the deceased was carried to the grave side, the place the body had been lying was wetted with cold water. Later, those who participated in the funeral washed themselves with cold water and each person sprinkled some cold water onto the grave to complete the burial (Widlok 1998:117). Widlok (1998:117) pointed out that this use of cold water during the funeral is similar to Nama practices. Hei//om avoid visiting graves after a funeral.

//Xegwi

The first of the southern San groups from which we have burial details are the *//Xegwi*, a small group who lived in the Lake Chrissie area of Mpumalanga Province. Evert Potgieter (1955) reported what he saw of their burial practices at the time he was working with them, and also described what he was told about former burial practices.

The *//Xegwi* apparently formerly buried their dead in graves with a side chamber. The side chamber was closed with a stone (Potgieter 1955:17). The body was placed with its head towards the west (Potgieter 1955:4, 17). The grave was filled and closed at the top with grass sods kept for this purpose when the grave was dug (Potgieter 1955:17). All loose earth was removed from the spot (it was believed that Swazi medicine men were always on the look out for the bodies of dead San; Potgieter 1955:4, 17). People occasionally returned to the grave to speak to the

dead. In some cases it seems that the dead person was buried in their hut. The hut was then either moved or burnt down (Potgieter 1955:17).

In describing the more recent burial practices, Potgieter (1955:17) pointed out that European influences were evident, although some traditional aspects of burial persisted. When a person died, the corpse was washed and dressed and placed in a coffin. The coffin was carried head first from the house to the grave. After the coffin had been lowered into the grave the eldest child or close relative threw the first hand full of earth into the grave. Personal possessions do not seem to have been buried; they were distributed to relatives after the funeral. A period after the funeral, a feast was prepared. On the morning before the feast, all those who had attended the funeral washed themselves ceremonially in water with the medicine plant *bubuphu* (unidentified) in it (Potgieter 1955:18).

Although certain European elements are evident, other aspects of the burial seem to reflect traditional practice. Comparison with accounts of burial from other San groups suggests that the distribution of personal possessions and ritual cleansing are likely to be traditional practices.

/Xam

The only other southern San group about whose burial practices we have any information is the nineteenth-century /Xam. Surprisingly, given the amount of material recorded by the Bleek family, the details that are available are limited. There are substantial records of /Xam beliefs about death (summarized in Wadley 1996), but little information on the burial process itself.

According to Bleek (1936:201–202), the /Xam buried their dead far from home. They dug the graves with the shell of a water tortoise. The grave was dug deep and smoothed. A ‘bed’ for the dead person was made with grass or bush. Whether the word ‘bed’ was simply Bleek’s description of the grass lining or whether it

was an explicit link between death and sleep is uncertain. The body was laid lengthways in the grave, wrapped in skins. The grave was then filled in with earth and covered with bushes.

This report is supported by other fragmentary accounts. The informant /Han=kass'o, in a brief account of /Xam burial, mentioned that graves were covered with bushes as well as stones (L.VIII.28.8467). It seems also that the bow and arrows of a dead man could be passed on to his brothers (L.II.13.1295–1296).

Comparing ethnographies

Having now reviewed the available details of the burial practices of eight San groups from both northern and southern areas, I compare these practices. This comparison is not an attempt to construct an overarching description of San burial practices. Rather, I discuss which elements are consistent between groups, which elements are either variable or unique to a particular group and which may be products of outside influence. In this way, when I compare the archaeological burials to the ethnographic descriptions I have a good idea of the standard or general practices as well as the variability.

The first and most obvious point to make is that all groups preferentially bury their dead in holes in the ground. This point is neither as obvious nor as trivial as it may at first seem: inhumation is only one of a number of possible ways of disposing of the dead. The San do not, for instance, place dead bodies in trees or rock crevices or on built platforms, nor do they cremate them, as do hunter-gatherers (and, of course, other economic groups) in other parts of the world. That inhumation occurs across all groups suggests a distinct cultural choice, although the reasons for that choice may no longer be remembered by still-living San communities. There is some variation in the details of the graves. Grave pits were either rectangular (Ju/'hoansi, !Xõ) or round (Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, !Xõ). They varied in depth between 1.5 and 3 m (excluding non-ideal situations in which bodies may

have been buried in very shallow graves). The body was laid directly on the bottom of the grave by some groups (Ju/'hoansi, G/wi, Nharo, /Xam). Others had a side chamber of some sort into which the body was either completely or partially placed (Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, !Xõ, //Xegwi). Similar uses of side-chambers in graves is common amongst several Bantu-speaking groups (Hammond-Tooke 1993:152) and some Khoekhoen groups (Laidler 1929). Inskip (1986:224) suggested that the use of side chambers in graves by both San and Khoekhoen groups was adopted from Bantu-speakers.

The orientation of graves and bodies was variable. The Ju/'hoansi and !Xõ oriented their graves north-south. Other groups specified the direction in which the body should face: east (Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, Nharo) or west (!Xõ, //Xegwi). If bodies faced east or west, they must have been oriented north-south. Amongst !Xõ, the body was faced towards the setting sun. The G/wi differentiated the direction a body should face according to sex: males faced to the west, females to the east. Some Ju/'hoansi said that the body should face towards the place the deceased was born.

The arrangement of the body in the grave was also variable. Some groups buried the body in a flexed position (Ju/'hoansi, !Xõ in earlier times, G/wi, Nharo). The Ju/'hoansi, !Xõ and Nharo tied the body into this flexed position. Possibly the /Xam, and the !Xõ in more recent times, buried the body in an extended position. The G/wi and occasionally the Ju/'hoansi buried bodies in a sitting or squatting position. The Ju/'hoansi buried the body on the right side, the Nharo on the left. The !Xõ buried the body laid on its side, Heinz (1986:26) did not specify on which side, Roos (1931:82) stated that it was the right side.

A curious feature is that four groups (Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, !Xõ, G/wi) covered or protected the head of the corpse in some way. This seems to relate to protecting the eyes, ears and nostrils. The Ju/'hoansi said that it was to protect the eyes, ears and nostrils from flies (Marshall 1999:179); the !Xõ said it was to keep the ears clear to facilitate future communication (Heinz 1986:32). Significantly, the

Ju/'hoansi placed an old leather bag over the head of the deceased and the !Xun placed the deceased's head on the bag he owned during life. Leather bags were an important symbol of transformation in San thought (for a recent discussion of this symbol see Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004a:120). Leather bags occur in both San myth and rock art in contexts related to religious transformation and travel between levels of the cosmos. Other than the special attention that was sometimes paid to the head, the body was usually wrapped, partially or completely, in a blanket, kaross or animal skin before burial.

The San do not seem to have made much use of grave furniture (i.e., structural material placed in the grave). The G/wi, when burying someone in a sitting posture would sometimes prop the corpse upright with a stick. The /Xam laid the body on a lining of grass or bushes. The !Xõ seem to have had the most elaborate grave furniture. They covered the body with grass and then closed the entrance to the side chamber with sticks and grass. They also set two poles upright at either end of the grave. The //Xegwi also closed the side chambers, but with a stone.

In filling the grave, four groups, the Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, !Xõ and G/wi, had a ceremony in which everyone present at the funeral filed past the grave and threw in a hand full of earth before the grave was finally closed up. This practice immediately brings to mind Christian funerals, and indeed may be the result of missionary influence in the Kalahari. On the other hand, the fact that the practice exists across four groups recorded at different times from the 1950s may suggest that it was an original Kalahari practice. It is unlikely that a definitive answer will be found without in-depth ethnographic fieldwork.

Once the grave was filled in, it usually had some stones (Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, Nharo, /Xam) or branches (Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, !Xõ, G/wi, Nharo, /Xam) or both placed over it. The few stones placed on San graves were qualitatively and quantitatively different from the large cairns of stone constructed by some Khoekhoen groups (e.g., Morris 1992b). These were usually said to mark the spot as a grave and to

keep scavengers away. The //Xegwi covered their graves with sods of grass. The Ju/'hoansi, !Xun and !Xõ all seem to have lit fires at the grave side.

The Ju/'hoansi, !Xõ, Hei//om and //Xegwi all performed ritual cleansings after the burials. The Ju/'hoansi and Hei//om used water. The !Xõ and //Xegwi used herbs steeped in water. The Ju/'hoansi and !Xõ performed the cleansing at the grave side immediately after filling in the grave. The //Xegwi performed the cleansing at a separate ceremony sometime after the funeral and not at the grave side.

Most burials took place outside of settlements (Ju/'hoansi, !Xõ, /Xam, //Xegwi), although burials did sometimes happen within settlements (!Xun, !Xõ, G/wi, //Xegwi). Most groups relocated their settlements after a burial had taken place (Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, !Xõ, G/wi, Nharo, Hei//om).

The disposal of a person's possessions upon death was very variable. This is an important point in our consideration of the southern Cape burials. People seemed to be buried in their clothes and wearing small personal ornaments. Some possessions were disposed of by dumping them on (not in) the grave (Ju/'hoansi, !Xõ, G/wi, Nharo). Other items could be distributed amongst surviving kin, group members or exchange partners (Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, G/wi, Nharo, /Xam, //Xegwi). A combination of dumping and distributing was most common. Which items were dumped and which distributed varied between groups and, indeed, seemed to vary to some extent within groups. Elaborate items of decoration or jewellery tended to be distributed and mundane, everyday items tended to be dumped. Men's hunting equipment was often singled out for special mention, but its treatment was not consistent. Personal possessions or gifts do not seem to have been regularly buried in graves.

All groups also seem to have practised only primary burial: the body was buried and the grave abandoned. No secondary burial rites occurred in any of the groups reviewed, and, indeed, precautions were taken to avoid contact with graves after funerals (except amongst the //Xegwi).

It is instructive to note that the observed variations in burial practices arise for a number of reasons. Some are quite mundane, such as the hardness of the soil dictating how deep a grave may be dug. In other cases, it may be the result of the influence of outside groups, Christian missionaries or Bantu-speaking agriculturalists for instance. Much of the variation is less easy to explain, and probably simply shows that burial practices did not follow a fixed, universal set of rules in any given group. This position should not come as much of a surprise. After all, much of San religion is idiosyncratic and varied in expression and not codified in the same ways as many other religions.

With these points of comparison in mind, we can now consider the details of the southern Cape Later Stone Age burials. Many of the elements of burial I have discussed will leave distinct archaeological traces. Others, of course, will leave no traces at all, but they none-the-less broaden our understanding of the conceptual contexts of burials.

Southern Cape Later Stone Age burials

In this section I develop a general picture of the Later Stone Age burials from the southern Cape that form the core of this thesis. In initially describing them, I consider them to be all of a piece. I do not sub-divide them geographically or temporally. Once a general picture of the characteristics of the southern Cape burials has emerged I subject the data to finer analysis to determine whether geographical variations may be found (Chapter 10) and whether the sequence of types that Inskeep (1986) suggested can be confirmed and refined (Chapter 9). In this way, I note both continuities and differences.

In performing these analyses I draw on data from 95 burials from the southern Cape. I have compiled the data on each burial from all available published and unpublished sources and, wherever possible, physical collections in museums and

other institutions. Of course, the details available for each burial differ depending on the available records. Not all fields of data are available for each burial. All available details of each burial are presented in Appendix A. I compare each element of the archaeological burials I discuss with the ethnographic information on San burial as I proceed.

Mode of disposal of the body

Like the ethnographic examples cited, the majority of human remains analyzed in this study were inhumed (90%, n=63). The only exceptions are seven bodies which were placed under small, low-packed cairns of stone. This difference is statistically valid ($\chi^2 = 44.8$; 0.001; 1 d.f.): there was a real preference for the inhumation of bodies. It is important to note that these cairns were qualitatively different from the, often large, cairns associated with Khoekhoen herder burials (compare, e.g., the burial cairn at Welgeluk [Hall & Binneman 1987:fig. 8] with herder cairns on the Riet River [Morris 1992b:fig. 2.7]). Of course, bodies may have been disposed of in other ways that left no material trace. There are, however, sufficient numbers of bodies that were inhumed or covered by cairns to suggest that these practices were widespread and significant during the Later Stone Age in the southern Cape. In the absence of evidence of any other mode of disposal of bodies, this thesis proceeds on the assumption that inhumation was the predominant means of disposing dead human bodies, with occasional burial under cairns.

As in the ethnography, only primary burial seems to have been practised. There is no evidence to suggest that secondary rites involving the body or skeleton were performed. This, of course, is not to say that later rituals or memorials may not have taken place on or near the grave. They may have done, but did not involve exhumation and secondary burial of the body. This too corresponds well with what is known ethnographically about San groups. None is known to perform secondary burial.

Shape of graves

Ethnographically recorded San burials tend to be either round or rectangular and between 1.5 and 3 m deep. Unfortunately, there is little information on the shape and depth of archaeological burials. Researchers either did not record or did not report these details. Of those burials for which some detail is given, most seem to be round or oval shaped in plan. Depths are rarely indicated, probably because of difficulties in determining the original ground surface for burials.

None of the archaeological burials seem to have had a side chamber as those of Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, !Xõ and //Xegwi had. The manner of some of the early excavations, however, would very likely have prevented details of this sort being noticed. The fact that none of the recently excavated burials shows any sign of a side chamber does though suggest that this feature of graves may not have been present in the southern Cape Later Stone Age.

Arrangement of the body

When describing the orientation of a body in a grave there is some confusion between the heading of the body and the direction in which it is facing. By 'heading' I mean the direction that the head points if a line was drawn along the long axis of the body. 'Facing' is the direction to which the face points. This distinction is not always made when writers described archaeological burials. I have attempted to distinguish whether the directions given in descriptions of burials are headings or facings. In some cases it remains unclear.

The headings of bodies for which these data exist (n=35) are indicated in Table 4.1. These data suggest a preference for body heading to the north or south. This

preference is statistically valid ($\chi^2 = 14.6$; 0.05; 7 d.f.). There does not however, seem to be any statistical difference between the preference for north or south ($\chi^2 = 0.529$; 0.05; 1 d.f.).

Table 4.1: Directions in which bodies headed as frequencies and percentages.

Direction	Frequency	Percentage (%)
N	7	20
NE	2	5.7
E	4	11.4
SE	4	11.4
S	10	28.6
SW	4	11.4
W	4	11.4
NW	0	0
Total	35	

The facings of bodies for which these data exist (n=35) are indicated in Table 4.2. These data suggest a preference for facing bodies to either the east or the west. This preference is statistically valid ($\chi^2 = 14.6$; 0.05; 7 d.f.). There does not, however, seem to be any statistical difference between the preferences for east or west facing ($\chi^2 = 0.588$; 0.05; 1 d.f.). There is an obvious relationship here between bodies heading north or south and facing east or west. It is unclear whether it was heading or facing that was significant.

Table 4.2: Directions in which bodies faced as frequencies and percentages.

Direction	Frequency	Percentage
N	5	14.3
NE	2	5.7
E	8	22.9
SE	4	11.4
S	5	14.3
SW	1	2.9
W	9	25.7
NW	1	2.9
Total	35	

The distinct preference for particular headings and facings of bodies is interesting in that it suggests that the orientation of bodies in graves was often (if not always) an important consideration in the construction of graves. The reason behind these orientations and the symbolism they may have had is, unfortunately, much more difficult to ascertain. The San ethnographic examples I discussed show a variety

of different orientation preferences amongst groups. More instructively, though, they also show that a variety of different factors determine the direction of both heading and facing. In some cases, a preference was shown for either a particular heading or a particular facing, in other cases for both.

The Ju/'hoansi, on the other hand, said that they buried people facing towards the place they were born. This statement suggests another aspect to body orientation. Bodies may be oriented in a particular direction not because of any intrinsic significance of that direction, but because that way lies some place of practical or conceptual significance. Besides place of birth, one could imagine any number of possible places graves could be oriented towards (or away from). In a coastal context, for instance, the ocean may have fulfilled this role. The preferences for orienting bodies heading north or south and facing east or west do, though, suggest that those directions themselves were significant. The preference for facing bodies to the east or west is suggestive because of the common practice in many societies around the world of facing the dead towards either the rising or setting sun or moon. If celestial alignment was a factor, it may account for some bodies facing a few degrees north or south of the cardinal direction: the relative position of the sun or moon would have changed through the course of a year. Having said this, more than half the burials are scattered over the other directions. Factors other than directional significance may have been at play in the cases of these burials.

Social distinctions may also have affected orientation. Amongst the G/wi, for instance, males were buried facing to the west, females to the east. Similar rules based on sex, age classes, kin relations or status, amongst others, may have determined orientation of the body. The available data are, unfortunately, too sparse to detect any such correlations.

A second important aspect of the orientation of the body is whether it is buried in a flexed or an extended position. Of those burials with these data recorded (n=62), 98.4% were in flexed positions and 1.6% (a single burial) in an extended position.

These frequencies show a distinct, significant preference for burial in a flexed position ($\chi^2 = 58.065$; 0.001; 1 d.f.). In one exceptionally well preserved burial, that from Tierkloof (Steyn *et al.* 2007:3–4, fig. 2), remains of the cord used to bind the body into a flexed position are present. The practice of binding the body into the flexed position is recorded amongst the Ju/'hoansi, G/wi and the Nharo.

2.6% (n=1) of bodies were laid on their backs compared to 97.4% (n=38) laid on their side. None was laid face down. There was a clearly significant preference for bodies to be laid on their side ($\chi^2 = 72.154$; 0.001; 2 d.f.). There is, though, no significant difference in the side chosen on which to lie the body ($\chi^2 = 0.421$; 0.05; 1 d.f.). This result too is in keeping with what is known about San burial practices: bodies were almost always placed on their sides (except when the body was not laid down, but placed in a sitting or squatting posture; only one burial in a squatting posture is known from the southern Cape Later Stone Age, MHB4). Once again, it is unclear why bodies were placed on one side or the other. Many possibilities exist. Amongst others, these could include sex, age classes, status differentiation, or could simply be a by-product of orienting the body in the correct way.

Grave furniture may affect the placement and arrangement of bodies. In archaeological cases it is often difficult to distinguish between grave furniture and grave goods. To avoid drawing potentially misleading distinctions, I discuss all material items placed in graves in the section on grave goods.

Location of graves

Ethnographically known San burials tend to be made in or, more often, a short distance from the camp. Camps are typically abandoned after a burial. This practice would leave a pattern of individual graves scattered about in open areas with no relationship to each other and usually distant from each other. A different pattern seems to pertain in the southern Cape Later Stone Age.

4.2% (n=4) of the burials I studied came from open sites. The rest (95.8%, n=91) came from rock shelters. The extremely high number of burials in rock shelters may, however, be something of a skewed sample. It is likely that a large number of graves have been found in rock shelters because a lot of rock shelters have been excavated, often with the express purpose of finding graves. Graves in unmarked open locations are less likely to be found. The human remains found in rock shelters are unlikely to represent the whole Later Stone Age population of the area.

Despite this point, the positioning of graves in rock shelters is still a significant deviation from the ethnographic pattern. More significant still is the observation that multiple burials tend to be found in a single site. 65% (n=13) of the sites I analyzed contained more than one burial. This number is deceptive; it almost certainly under represents the true extent of multiple burials in a single site. The evidence we have from several sites comes from excavations of small extent. In some sites with only a single burial recorded, others may exist in unexcavated parts of the shelter.

Both of these points are serious deviations from the ethnographic pattern. That the dead were frequently (but not exclusively) buried in rock shelters deviates significantly from the ethnographic pattern of burying in open sites. Admittedly, there are few rock shelters in the Kalahari, the region in which most ethnographically recorded groups live. The second point of deviation, that multiple dead are buried in a single shelter, cannot, however, be explained away as an accident of topography. The southern Cape Later Stone Age people were repeatedly burying dead in a single site. The majority, certainly of the shelter sites, contained occupational deposits. That graves were dug into occupational deposits is in itself not especially noteworthy. What is extraordinary, however, is that occupational deposits continued to accumulate after the dead were interred (cf. Hall 2000). Such a situation is clearly different from the abandonment of camps after a burial had taken place that is described for most San groups.

One could argue here that Later Stone Age people did abandon shelters after a burial for a period. Unfortunately, the archaeological evidence is not of sufficiently high resolution to state definitively whether this was or was not the case. The point remains that even if people abandoned a site after burial, they returned to it at some later time: this much is evident from the continued accumulation of occupational deposit. Once again, resolution is not sufficient to say what time elapsed between abandonment and re-occupation, if any.

Moreover, I argue that if people did abandon a rock shelter, once they returned to it they would be returning to a site that they knew contained one or more burials. There are at least two reasons for this. First, unless abandonment was for a very long time—a generation or more—people returning to the shelter would have known that there were graves in the shelter. Someone in the band would have had personal experience of the death and burial. Second, burial in a rock shelter was clearly a common cultural practice during the Holocene Later Stone Age in the southern Cape: the sheer number of burials in rock shelters leaves no doubt on that point. If that was the case, a band moving into a rock shelter would have had a reasonable expectation of there being graves in the shelter: most habitable shelters were likely to have been used in the past for burial.

If we keep these points in mind, the choice to bury the dead in habitable (and inhabited?) rock shelters and then to continue to occupy or re-occupy those same shelters takes on additional significance. People in the Holocene Later Stone Age in the southern Cape were not trying to avoid the dead as most ethnographically recorded San did. This suggests that they had a different relationship with the dead from that which the San had. I explore some of the reasons for this difference in belief in following chapters.

Grave goods

In this section I examine all material items found in graves. The subject of grave goods is one in which the differences between the ethnographic and archaeological burials is obvious upon inspection. A large number of archaeological burials contained grave goods, and many of these contained substantial quantities of grave goods. This could not be further from the ethnographic situation, and is clearly a distinction that demands explanation.

Ethnographically recorded San vary quite considerably in how they disposed of a dead person's possessions. The dead were usually buried in their clothes and with small personal ornaments they may have been wearing. Large, elaborate beadwork was never buried in the grave: it was distributed in one way or another. Other possessions were either distributed or dumped. Only very rarely were other items placed in a grave.

In contrast, 80% (n=76) of the archaeological burials analyzed contained grave goods. Of these, 61.9% (n=39) contained more than one class of grave good. The items placed in graves were varied. Table 4.3 indicates the frequency of inclusion of the different classes of grave goods. A table of this sort may easily be deceptive. I have chosen to divide the items included into a large number of categories. Many of these categories are based on the biological species of the animal from which the item is made. Such divisions may not necessarily have been recognized by the people making the burials; they may be purely artefacts of the categorization process. Without knowing the meanings of the items involved to the people who made the graves, it is difficult to know which set of categories are most appropriate. An example of this problem is the seashell beads. I list eight categories of seashell bead by species and a further two categories of seashell beads that have not been identified to species. In this system of categorization we end up with ten categories each occurring in no more than 7.9% of graves. If we were to categorize items differently, we could collapse all ten of these categories into one: seashell beads. They would then occur in 30.2% of graves. We would

arrive at another (higher) frequency if we were to include unmodified seashells into this category. This example illustrates well the dangers of categorization. In one system items are split and appear insignificant, in another they are the second most frequently represented item.

Table 4.3: Frequencies of occurrence of classes of grave goods. Items are listed in descending order of frequency. N=63.

Item	No. graves in which it occurred	% graves in which it occurred
Stone slabs	35	55.6
Ostrich eggshell beads	22	34.9
Ochre	20	31.7
Tortoise carapace	11	17.5
Grinding stones	8	12.7
Unmodified seashells	8	12.7
Animal bone	7	11.1
Ostrich eggshells	7	11.1
Animal teeth	6	9.5
Lithics	5	7.9
<i>Nassarius</i> beads	5	7.9
Plant	5	7.9
Seashell pendants	5	7.9
<i>Conus</i> shell beads	3	4.8
<i>Donax</i> pendants	3	4.8
Pallets	3	4.8
<i>Tricholia</i> beads	3	4.8
<i>Turbo</i> beads	3	4.8
Bone 'bodkin'	2	3.2
Bored stones	2	3.2
Crystals	2	3.2
<i>Cafferia caffer</i> shells	2	3.2
Nacreous seashell beads	2	3.2
Oyster pendants	2	3.2
Painted stones	2	3.2
<i>Polinicies tumidus</i> beads	2	3.2
<i>Achatina</i> sp. shells	1	1.6
Bone points	1	1.6
Bored limpet shells	1	1.6
<i>Bullia digitalis</i> beads	1	1.6
Clay beads	1	1.6
Grooved stones	1	1.6
Hammer stones	1	1.6
Ironstone pieces	1	1.6
Ivory arrow heads	1	1.6
Ochre stained pebbles	1	1.6
'Rubbing stones'	1	1.6
Seed beads	1	1.6

As Table 4.3 indicates, some items are substantially more frequently represented than others. When considering the composition of these grave goods it is useful to

think about a core of items that are regularly placed in graves, and a periphery of other items that may occasionally be drawn upon for inclusion in certain burials. Stone slabs, seashell beads, ostrich eggshell beads and ochre can all be included amongst the core items. Any explanation of grave goods in the southern Cape Later Stone Age burials will need to take account of these items.

The grave goods represent more than small items of personal ornamentation. Indeed, some of the beads must represent the remains of large and elaborate pieces of jewellery. It is uncertain how each material item would have got into a grave. Some items almost certainly entered graves as part of the dead person's apparel. Many of the other items included in graves, though, were not the sorts of things that would have been worn or carried on the person. A distinct possibility is that grave goods were contributed by a number of other people attending the funeral. Of course, such a practice would be very much at odds with known ethnographic patterns. I discuss the significance and potential symbolism of certain classes of grave goods in following chapters.

Grave goods, then, are a second and highly significant area in which the archaeological burials differ substantially from ethnographic San burials. The inclusion of large quantities of diverse grave goods in many burials must have had religious or ideological significance.

Discontinuities

Although there are some similarities in the general form of burial between the Holocene Later Stone Age in the southern Cape and ethnographically recorded San burial, there are two major areas of discontinuity: burial location and the inclusion of large quantities of grave goods. Both of these points of difference are ones to which ideological significance is likely to have been attached. The fact that the dead were buried in locations (living sites) that would have been considered anathema by ethnographically known San strongly suggests that Later

Stone Age people had a different relationship with their dead from that of the San. A similar conclusion may be drawn from the grave goods. Whereas San distributed a dead person's possessions according to detailed rules that varied from group to group, the Later Stone Age people buried the dead with many items, some of which may have been their possessions, other of which must have been given by others. This too suggests a different relationship with the dead.

The most obvious implication of these discontinuities between San and archaeological burials is that San ethnography relating to death and burial is likely to be of only limited use in understanding southern Cape archaeological burials. A different ideology in relation to the dead was clearly in play.