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Mortuary practices in Bam after the earthquake

An ethnoarchaeological study

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ABSTRACT

On 26 December 2003, an earthquake in Bam, south-eastern Iran, resulted in an estimated death toll of 40,000. This article suggests that post-disaster burial practices provide alternative avenues for research, notably the changes in burial styles, grave markers and other material culture associated with burials. This article is the result of ethnoarchaeological research conducted on eight cemeteries in Bam, at intervals of 2, 6 and 17 months after the earthquake. The cemeteries chosen span a time period of 200 years prior to the disaster to 17 months after it, in order to track a wide range of long-term patterns. The post-disaster burial patterns are compared with those patterns prior to the disaster. We hope to demonstrate that the patterns present can be used to interpret burial practices under conditions such as natural disasters in archaeological contexts.

KEYWORDS

ethnoarchaeology • Iran • mortuary practices • socioeconomic status

■ INTRODUCTION

The city of Bam was destroyed by an earthquake on 26 December 2003. Approximately 40,000 people died, a further 30,000 persons were injured (Tahmasebi et al., 2005) and 100,000 people were made homeless (Mann, 2005: 3). Mud brick villages and concrete buildings alike were all destroyed, resulting in a dramatic change in the landscape. Two months after the earthquake, Bam residents returned to what had previously been their homes, cleaned up the debris and were forced to adopt new lifeways in order to adapt to their altered environment. As survivors searched for bodies of dead relatives and neighbors buried beneath the tons of rubble, they attempted to reconstruct some semblance of their former lives with the assistance of the Iranian government and international relief agencies. People sought out what remained of usable household furniture, valuables, important documents and objects of sentimental value such as family photos.

Archaeologists recognize that settlements become archaeological sites either through rapid abandonment (Cameron and Tomka, 1993), as in the case of disaster, or as part of a gradual process. In order to investigate and interpret such processes, the material culture associated with burials in connection with disaster contexts might productively be explored. Ethnographic analogues and the patterns derived from these ethnoarchaeological investigations illustrate the ways in which processes of social change and abandonment might be reconstructed.

The Bam ethnoarchaeology project investigates and analyzes the data in five main categories: population change, material culture, graveyards, markets, and domestic architecture. Particular questions surrounding burial practices in post-disaster contexts arise, such as the following: What are the effects of disaster on the style of grave markers? What indicators are illustrated in the processes of mass production of such markers? How are the socioeconomic statuses of the deceased or surviving family members materially reflected?

The current project was conducted in two phases: short term and medium term. Obviously no processes of long-term changes can be adequately modeled on the basis of these short-term observations in the present. The short-term phase was conducted over one, two and six-month intervals after the earthquake. The medium phase was conducted 17 months after the earthquake. Participant observation was carried out and questionnaires administered both at cemeteries and at survivors' homes. A key factor in the analysis was socioeconomic status. This was calculated according to the occupations, wealth, and social status of the family, and with the location of the house in the city and the families' graves in the cemetery taken into consideration. In older or historical cemeteries the questionnaires focused on the chronology of the cemetery, the socioeconomic status of those buried and the styles of the grave markers.



While much research has been conducted on mortuary practices both archaeologically and ethnoarchaeologically (Chesson, 2001; David and Kramer, 2001), few studies have focused on mortuary practices in the context of disaster. We argue that the patterns retrieved from cemeteries after such incidents might be used to analyze the behaviors of individuals and groups in similar conditions in the archaeological record. Only by looking for and recognizing anomalies to general patterns of conformity to utilitarian exceptions in human behavior can we reliably infer when and under what conditions symbolic and ideational factors make a difference in the ways people actually behave (Gould, 1980).

■ BAM CEMETERIES AND MORTUARY TRADITIONS IN CONTEXT

Bam is located in the south-eastern Kerman province in Iran. The area of the city is about 5400 hectares, having a smooth topography although situated between mountains and deserts (Kardovani, 1987; Mostofi, 1968). The western and south-western areas are bounded by the Barez Mountains, while deserts and oases surround the southern and eastern areas of Bam. As a result, Bam's climate is variable (Bagherian, 1969; Mahalati, 1988). Based on 2003 data, the population of Bam was 242,438 with 45 percent classified as urban, 48 percent as rural and 7 percent nomadic (*Kerman Programs and Budgets*, 2003). Given the environmental diversity, a wide range of living and subsistence patterns developed in Bam. Many of the city dwellers are gardeners and farmers.¹

Cemeteries and graves are sites open to public view, yet are associated with very personal sentiments, religion, and ritual behavior. Unlike the household, the cemetery is a setting where both entrance and ultimately the people present remain outside of direct individual control (Buckham, 1998). In addition, cemeteries provide a context for material culture with multiple, complex structures and meaning for ceremonies of burying the deceased with ritual actions and communications (Parker Pearson, 2000) and thus a particular type of social practice (Barrett, 1996).

In many sedentary societies, graveyards form part of the settlement (Haviland et al., 2004). Hence the death of relatives and the attendant burial traditions are a part of social life that also includes ceremonies for the family that remain. So, cemeteries can be described as both dynamic and static in the ways that they are dynamic for those that survive and static for the deceased. Yet the ways in which socioeconomic status, practices and cultural representations are expressed before and after disasters are variable and thus worth tracking.

In this research eight cemeteries were studied. Five were located in Bam and three in Barawat, a small town 2 km from Bam. The sites studied

include an old cemetery (western Bam citadel); Hazrat Rasool mosque cemetery (eastern Bam citadel); Imamzadeh Zeyd cemetery (Zeyd holy shrine) in the central part of Bam city; Deh Shotor (south-western Bam); Bam Behesht Zahra, the largest and main cemetery of Bam; Barawat Behesht Zahra, the main graveyard of Barawat; the old graveyard in the north-western part of Barawat; and the old graveyard of Barawat.

Gravestones are used as a primary indicator of religious ideas and belief systems that illustrate concern with death and the survival of the soul, notions that are central to many religions (Deetz, 1995). According to the tenets of Islam, after death, Shi'ah Muslims are first washed and then wrapped in a white shroud. The family and friends pray for him or her and bury the body to a depth of between 120 and 180 cm. The dead are buried with the head pointed in the direction of Mecca, and a piece of stone or brick called 'Lahad' is placed under the head of the deceased. Gravestones are placed on the grave. Gravestones are signs of the socioeconomic status of the deceased as well as that of his or her family. The family then commemorate the deceased with a meal three, seven and 40 days (the holy numbers) after the death (Insoll, 1999). Graveyards are decorated with gardens covered with flowers, trees and small paths that serve to separate individual tombs. Persian inscriptions on the gravestones record the name of the deceased and the date of their death.

■ CEMETERY PATTERNS IN BAM

In this research, 'style' is intended to include various material aspects such as grave appearance, setting, ornamentation, manufacture and their attendant meanings for the residents of Bam. Gravestone styles studies generally relate to aspects of interrelationships between socioeconomic status, ethnicity (Spencer-Wood, 2003) and the changes in style through time (Feder, 2004). In Bam, these styles were examined historically dating back 200 years right through until after the disaster in order to understand the changes and their socioeconomic implications. In general, the most popular styles for each period of time are presented as representative.

Tomb types in Bam graveyards are divided into eight categories based on chronology.

- 1 The oldest graves are in the historical cemetery located in the western part of Bam citadel. This cemetery includes disturbed graves with scattered human remains. Scattered potsherds were also observed, and burial directions suggest that the graveyard dates to the twelfth–thirteenth centuries AD (Ahmadi, 2005). Grave destruction has affected the structure of the cemetery and as a result it cannot be studied further.



- 2 The Hazrat Rasool mosque cemetery and the two in the city of Barawat reveal another style of cemetery that is no more than 200 years old. These graves do not have gravestones and are ornamented with $20 \times 10 \times 6$ cm bricks. Mortuary structures at this time demonstrate a general similarity to each other. Interviews with local people suggest that the form of graves at this time was not indicative of social and economic status. In these three cemeteries, another style consisted of burials covered with clay and straw which were designated for infants.
- 3 Another tomb type employs either bricks or mosaics. The graves with bricks are older than those with mosaics (Figure 1).
- 4 A new style of grave structure appeared in the 1960s. Here the grave is typically ornamented with small stones set in a cement or mosaic frame and belonged to poorer individuals. At this time individual gravestones were not common.
- 5 In the 1970s gravestones once again became common, set within in cement frame. An element called a Hejleh (a pedestaled photo) is added to the mortuary structure. Gravestones might be ornamented with cement, cement frames, tiles or mosaics and are indicative of limited socioeconomic resources. Highly ornamented graves with large stones and Hejlehs belong mostly to the economically affluent families or deaths of young people (Figure 2). By the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, a group of specific tomb types was developed and these graves belong to martyrs of the Iran–Iraq war.
- 6 In the 1990s, gravestones became larger and more ornamental. Cement graves and those featuring tiles and mosaics are also present, albeit fewer than in past decades. Burials with markers and Hejlehs became popular.
- 7 From the end of the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century, fewer cement tombs are observed and the common forms of graves are those with large, highly engraved and ornamented gravestones. Most are made of white marble. Curtains were added to the Hejlehs. Two cases of black gravestones were also noted and in these cases vertical engraved stones replaced the Hejlehs.
- 8 The graves constructed after the earthquake are mostly black or in dark colors. Hejlehs were replaced by the vertical engraved stones, and the photos placed in the Hejleh were engraved on these stones (Figure 3). It is notable that before the earthquake, women's faces were not placed in the Hejlehs, but after the disaster women's images were painted on the stones. After the earthquake, the engravings were replaced by paintings. As a general pattern, the gravestones are less ornamented than before the earthquake.



Figure 1 Grave ornamented with bricks. (Photograph by authors)

Cement graves (correlating with lower socioeconomic status), burials with gravestones and without vertical stones, and those ornamented by tiles, mosaic, flowerpot pedestals (Figure 4) and small pieces of marble were recorded.

According to our study of cemeteries, a gradual change in styles is observable (Figure 5). The rapidity of these changes increased after the disaster and new styles emerged. These changes are not the result of long-term processes but are due to a sharp change and demand for tombs in a reconfigured sociocultural milieu. In sum, new gravestones made with dark green and black granite have appeared. Hejlehs were been replaced by vertical painted stones.

Simpler ornaments replaced the earlier, heavily ornamented gravestones, and the painting of women's faces on these stones became common.

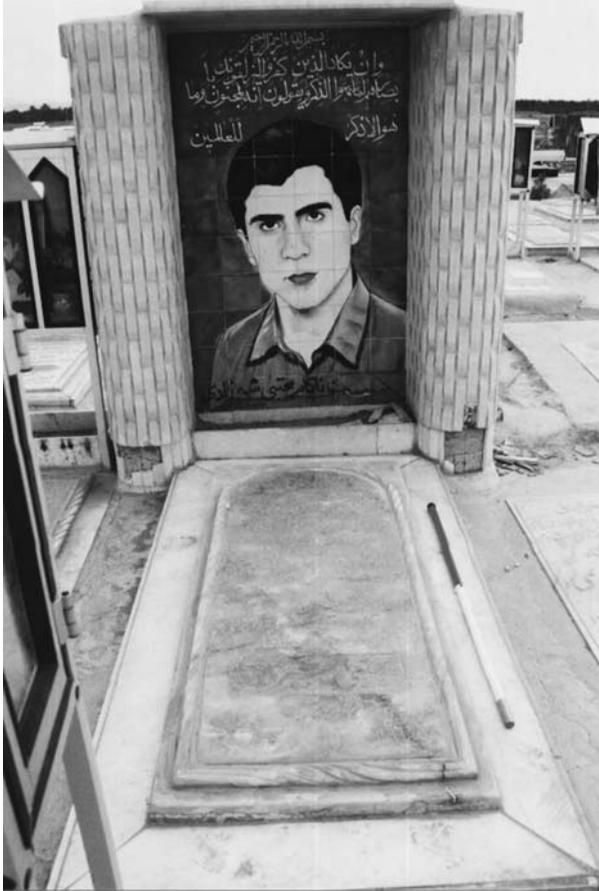


Figure 2 A very ornamented grave related to a young man. (Photograph by authors)

■ GRAVESTONES AND MASS PRODUCTION

Since approximately 40,000 people died, this natural disaster dramatically increased the demand for gravestones and thus increased their production. A sample comparison of production before and after the earthquake suggested that more time, money and effort was spent on gravestones before the earthquake. The pre-disaster gravestones are generally more ornamented and the mark of the individual workshop was inscribed under the gravestone.

After the earthquake, less time and effort was spent (except in those examples belonging to wealthy families), while painting has replaced



Figure 3 Graves ornamented with black stones related to earthquake victims. (Photograph by authors)



Figure 4 Flowerpots as the tomb decoration. (Photograph by authors)

engraving since it is less time consuming. Before the disaster, carvers typically spent one to three days preparing a gravestone using an engraving chisel and hammer. Due to the increased demand for gravestones after the earthquake, there was a change in technique to a new machine (called ‘Angoshti’), with which approximately 10 gravestones could be produced daily. This technology resulted in the manufacture of gravestones of a lesser quality of craftsmanship. Since the earthquake, distinct texts citing cause of death have become commonplace (‘in the earthquake’ or ‘bloody Bam Friday’). Prior to the earthquake the text was selected by the deceased’s family and included the name and the date of death, whereas after the

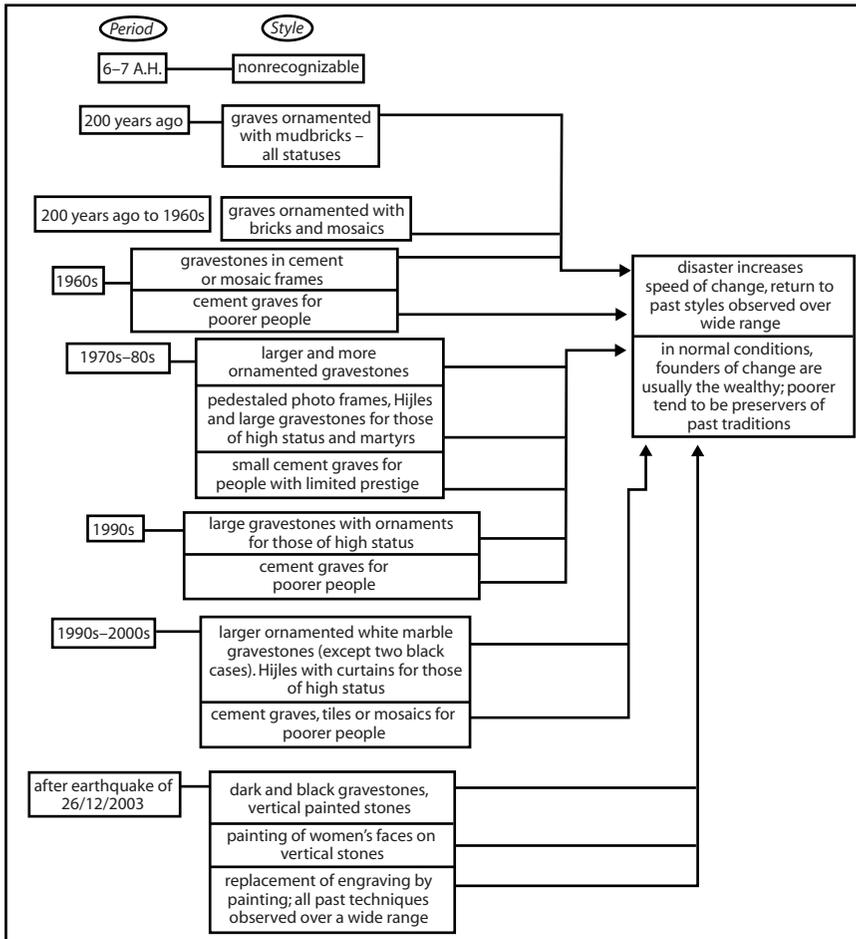


Figure 5 The process of gravestone style changes

earthquake they were chosen by the stone carver. Enhanced production, with the aid of mechanical carving machines (Veit, 2002), meant that mortuary goods were more accessible, financially and logistically, to more people (Tarlow, 1999).

Three out of eight of the cemeteries chosen (Hazrat Rasool mosque and the two at Barawat) could not be studied, since their graves employed brick styles.² In the other five cemeteries, the graves decorated with gravestones from the 1960s were studied. Through the 1960s and 1970s gravestones were imported from Kerman. In those decades there were no manufacturing workshops in Bam and Barawat. During the 1980s, stone workshops emerged in Bam. In the middle of the 1980s, 90 percent of the gravestones

were manufactured in Bam (these examples have workshop marks from Bam or Barawat). In the 1990s and 2000s, 98 percent of gravestones were manufactured in Bam and all of them bear workshop marks. Two months after the earthquake, unprocessed stones were again imported from Kerman. This was the result of the low extraction capacity and the suspension of the Bam workshops. The imported stones also bear the Kerman workshop's trademark. It should be noted that few graves were decorated during the first two months, while many of them were afterwards. Five months after the earthquake, workshop markings on the stones declined, thus making it difficult to determine the origin of the stones and the workshops involved. Our interviews suggest that those stones without marks were produced in Bam, since increasing demand and the escalation of mass production resulted in their omission.

■ SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Burial practices have long been employed as indicators of socioeconomic status (Hayden, 1995; Kristiansen, 1998; Wason, 1994). In archaeological contexts, grave goods – including quality and quantity – surely involve a measure of subjectivity in determining status or wealth (Sinclair and Troy, 1992). In contemporary gravestones, the degree of work involved and its quality can be used as an indicator of socioeconomic standing. Importantly, measuring socioeconomic status in this context is complicated by the fact that the relatives' wealth is not necessarily equivalent to their economic status before the earthquake. Aside from the expenditure upon the grave, another indicator of social and economic status is its location. Before the disaster personal tombs located in the graveyards of religious sites were considered desirable. In such cases, graves near the tombs of holy men or women belong to elite families.

Before the Bam disaster, cemetery styles varied and were based largely on socioeconomic status. For example, in Behesht Zahra cemetery, Hojreh's (family tombs which are built in rooms) were indicators of high status. Poorer people's tombs do not have Hojreh's, but the graves are ornamented with gravestones. In some parts of such cemeteries, simple graves without ornamentation were recorded, belonging to people of limited means. In each cemetery, special areas were reserved for martyrs of the Iraq–Iran war. These tombs were specially decorated with Iranian flags and the word 'Martyr (Shahid)' is inscribed with the name of the area where the person was killed.

It is obvious that socioeconomic status affects the appearance of the tomb, but is it the reflected status of the deceased or the relatives? Interviews suggest that it is the relatives' status that influences the form. In other



words, in disaster conditions, decorated gravestones were the result of the relatives' position rather than simply individual wealth. In general, after the quake, simple cement tombs belonged to poorer individuals. In the first days after the earthquake (when there were thousands of corpses and the gravestone carvers' workshops were closed) people used flowerpots, mosaics and ladders to distinguish their relatives' graves. Before the earthquake, Hojreh's and the graves near to the religious tombs were generally bought, but under such drastic circumstances this rule was abandoned. Thus, the pattern changed due to the lack of space and the massive death toll, and hence some of the deceased were buried without attention to status.

■ EXPLAINING EXCEPTIONS

The past is created by interacting forces or 'conjunctures' which operate in parallel but in different time frames in which the short term is affected by individual events, human agency and strategies (Chapman, 2003). In fact, in special cases the exceptions to general styles can be explained in terms of agents and their intentions. At Bam in those instances where the gravestones did not follow the general pattern, where their decoration was different to the other gravestones, our interviews revealed that familial behavior, individual agency and specific ideas about the deceased might account for these differences. Generally, four factors were observed in our discussions:

- 1 The age of the deceased. After the earthquake the tombs of the young were more decorated than those of babies and the elderly alike.
- 2 The gender of the deceased. Gender was observable in women's graves. Before the earthquake women's faces were not inscribed on tombs, but after the disaster they were painted. However, in some cases (due to the lack of time or money) a flower, Qur'anic texts or a verse of poetry was painted or engraved on the gravestones instead of women's faces.
- 3 Personhood and identity. Before the earthquake the deceased's distinctive identity appeared in only one case. In this case a wife and husband passed away in an accident. The wife's gravestone had more ornamentation than the husband's. In interviews, the family confirmed that she was held in high esteem. After the earthquake, the individual assumes a more important role. The occupations of people (lawyers, doctors, teachers etc.) were engraved on stones. Social elites like politicians were buried in more elaborate tombs.
- 4 Martyrs (soldiers killed in the Iran–Iraq war during the 1980s). Before the earthquake, only martyrs' graves were ornamented with special symbols such as flags, photos, and flowers that signify their special position.

These characteristics were studied in the cemeteries used from the 1960s to the time of the quake. The most important factor observed in the cemeteries of the 1960s and 1970s was the age of the deceased. Graves of youths were highly decorated as were those who died in car accidents. These patterns change dramatically in the face of disaster.

■ FAMILY GRAVES

Various archaeological studies demonstrate that in some societies it is preferable to bury relatives near other deceased family members (Hopkins, 2003; McGuire, 1994). This pattern is observed in Bam, too, especially after the disaster. Family graves were observable in both contexts before and after the earthquake (Figure 6). It should be noted that before the disaster placing relatives' deceased near each other occurred over the long term.



Figure 6 A family grave, Behesht Zahra graveyard

The entire family bought a place in the cemetery. After each death, family members buried the deceased near his/her relatives. After the earthquake, burying relatives near each other was done quickly because of the extreme circumstances: in the first days after the disaster, the survivors buried their relatives near each other in ordinary places. The following patterns were observable:

- 1 In the cemetery from 200 years ago (Hazrat Rasool mosque) tombs were individual. Only in one case were two relatives were buried near each other, and one of these tombs was decorated while the other was not.
- 2 In Behesht Zahra cemetery, in use from the 1960s to 1980s, 4320 graves were studied. Only 17 cases of family tombs were recorded. In these cases, relatives were typically killed in common accidents, or



died within a short time span. In a few cases, relatives specifically reserved space so as to be buried near each other.

- 3 In the graves from the late 1980s till the end of 1990s, only six cases of related grave placement were observed. All of these burials belonged to relatives who died together in accidents.
- 4 In Behesht Zahra cemetery 1247 graves from the 2000s (before the earthquake) were studied. In this context only four cases of relatives' graves were observed. These tombs similarly belong to relatives who died in the same accident.
- 5 After the earthquake, the distribution pattern of graves changes. In general, 1309 graves related to the earthquake were studied in Behesht Zahra graveyard, 98 graves were of individuals and 309 graves were in family groups. 35 percent of these family graves were buried near the father, 9 percent with mother, and 54 percent were buried as a family (parents, sisters and brothers). In the pre-disaster graveyards, relatives' tomb sets usually belonged to relatives who died from the same cause, typically car accidents.

Elite families usually purchased a space ahead of time to be buried near to their relatives. This space in Behesht Zahra cemetery takes the form of particular rooms (Hojreh). With the exception of these cases, most pre-disaster tombs are individual ones. The number of familial graves has increased since the disaster. The exception was when the deceased escaped from the debris later than other relatives. In some cases, the disaster victims were buried near their relatives who died before the earthquake.

■ MATERIAL CULTURE

In general, the material culture present in a cemetery might reflect upon the stability or instability of a society (Feinman, 2001). One could posit that in the case of an unstable condition, for example after a disaster, the death rate will rise alongside grave numbers. In fact the ratio of objects such as gravestones in cemeteries might be documented as an indicator of the disaster. In Bam, in the immediate days that followed the earthquake the deceased's family had to use any material at hand to bury their dead and mark their graves. In our project, the material culture of cemeteries was studied to categorize social changes in the material record such as assigning new meanings for old materials.

In the eight cemeteries examined in Bam and Barawat, material culture denotes changes in burial practices, ceremonies and elaboration. In cemeteries used after the earthquake, flower bouquets (or flowerpots), the

remains of candles, cookie boxes, dishes for sweets and fruit were present. Moreover, water dishes and 'Golab' (rose elixir) bottles were signs of a tradition of washing. Construction materials for tombs (stones, cement, tiles, etc.) were scattered across the cemeteries. Similarly, materials used for carrying corpses (blankets, coffins, curtains and even rugs) remained. In some cases, boxes of grass were observed on certain graves as a result of Persian New Year ceremonies.³

During this time, materials were employed in the mortuary context in a way that was far from their intended purpose. For example, bottles were used as candlestick holders, oil boxes were used to hold floral bouquets, while tiles, marble, bricks and ceramics were used as tomb decoration. Those people who survived attempted to recycle every usable thing. Six months later, the trend to recycle materials was replaced by materials specially designed for the purpose. Seventeen months after the disaster, the recycling of materials was only employed by the economically disadvantaged.

■ DISASTER CONTEXTS AND CEMETERIES

In dramatic contexts like these, socioeconomic relations will obviously change as local communities come to grips with increased vulnerabilities, and they enter into new relationships with both the environment and larger social contexts (Dyer and McGoodwin, 1999). In Bam, the crisis prompted individuals to adapt to new conditions. In this way the cemeteries took on new characteristics: they suddenly grew in number, tombs were located in particular places and rituals were changed or disregarded in the short term (Figure 7). These changing practices can be outlined as follows:

Unorthodox tomb locations: Burials were now located in unusual places, as already observed in Bam's cemeteries. In Behesht Zahra cemetery, lack of space and the number of corpses caused people to bury the deceased in boulevards and gardens. In one case a corpse was buried in the space between two older graves. In Zeyd cemetery a special section was designated for the elite, while after the quake, pressure led to burial of all the bodies in this section irrespective of status.

Rapid growth of cemeteries: Before the disaster, cemetery expansion was gradual. In fact, the ratio between cemetery expansion and settlement expansion was equivalent. After the disaster, the death toll led to the rapid development of graveyards. Before the earthquake Behesht Zahra covered an area of four hectares, whereas it reached 16 hectares afterward. Mytum (2003) has hypothesized that there is a constant relationship between population and memorialization. This is clearly not the case with Bam.

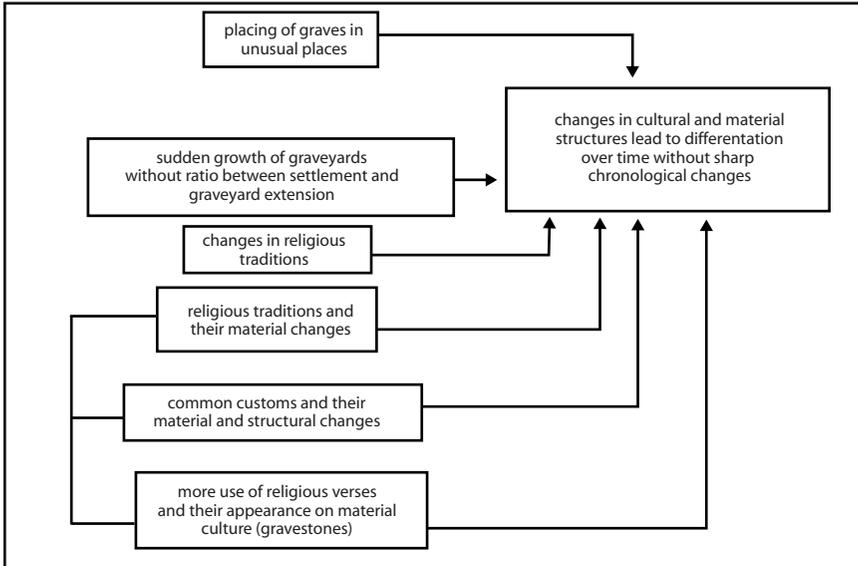


Figure 7 Special characteristics of graveyards in disaster contexts

Material culture trends: The purpose of studying the burial patterns is to determine if such disasters influence these traditions over a longer term or not. We have argued that they do and are expressed through the remains of material culture.

Religious traditions: Participant observations and interviews demonstrate that in the case of burial placement, bodies were buried on top of each other without concern for direction. Traditionally, Muslims pray for the deceased individually, after which they are buried, but in the case of Bam prayers were conducted over groups of bodies simultaneously. In most cases (especially after the third day following the earthquake), the accumulation of bodies and associated problems of decay meant that corpses were buried without grave cloths, washing or even praying. However, one week after the earthquake, when the number of bodies decreased, traditional practices gradually returned. This pattern contrasts with the fact that religious signs are more prevalent in post-earthquake cemeteries; using Qur'anic texts or *surahs* (verses) on gravestones also increased significantly after the disaster. The disaster also changed common customs of visitation. For example, before the earthquake the tradition of visiting relatives' graves was typically held on Thursdays, whereas afterwards visits were undertaken on all week days.

■ CONCLUSION

Natural disasters such as the Bam earthquake must be understood in relation to social change. Their special circumstances offer an opportunity for (or perhaps actually demand) the creation and adoption of short-term correctives or long-term adaptations (Perry, 1998). In Bam, the disaster and its individual changes gradually modified the traditional norms of the society and their material reflections. What we have proposed for Bam is a sharp change which is more obvious in cemeteries than in other parts of the city, although we should not isolate mortuary practices from other forms of social practice. The intentions of individuals are important because they are sources of variations, even if they are not the unique sources (Cowgill, 2000). Before the earthquake, the elite typically directed changes in burial style and poorer people tended to conform to more traditional tomb types; changes generally occurred as part of a long-term process (Figure 5). In pre-disaster conditions, the lack of stone carvers in Bam caused stone to be imported from neighboring regions. However, these imports decreased gradually to 2 percent (in the 1980s) after workshops started operating in Bam.

After the disaster, the death rate increased suddenly and dramatically. The first reaction we witness in Bam was a return to previous, simpler styles and techniques of marking the graves of the dead. Gradually, after burying the victims, the demand increased for grave markers and we have documented mass production, the omission of stone carvers' marks, and the decrease of elaboration. Additionally, a new technique called *Angoshti* increased the speed of production. Again, the importing of gravestones increased and carvers came from outside the city of Bam. Special changes in cemeteries had a profound impact on the locations of graves, their structures and their expenditure. As a result of the disaster, there were rapid changes and impacts in the short term (see Figure 7). From a diachronic perspective, the sudden change in structures and styles in the short term did not heavily impact long-term processes, and might be seen as one of the indicators of disaster in the archaeological record.

The location of tombs in unorthodox places, the sudden expansion of the cemeteries, internal changes in the ceremonies, changes in the materials employed, and the construction of family graves are some of the changes that occurred as a result of the disaster. Two years after the quake, the speed of change had understandably been reduced. Monitoring the processes of change will be continued in the future phases of our project. It is now obvious that the rate of change is not equal and is directly related to social context, individual reactions and events (Bintliff, 2004) that can be observed in the material culture of gravestones and their production. While cemetery data may not exactly mirror social life (Meskell, 1999), disaster context indicators and their material manifestations might be used as an important guide in interpreting archaeology.



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Notes

- 1 Based on information obtained after the disaster, the subsistence breakdown of Bam inhabitants is 25 percent gardeners and farmers (mostly date palm cultivation), 22 percent government employees, 39 percent non-governmental employees, 3 percent pastoralists and 11 percent unknown.
- 2 With the exception of three graves in Hazrat Rasool mosque.
- 3 In New Year (Norooz – 21 March) ceremonies, Iranians grow grass and put it in the houses as a symbol of spring and fertility.

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