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## Clarification of the Concepts of “Burial Rites” and “Funeral and Memorial Ritualism” in the Archaeological Context

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**Abstract.** This article is devoted to the theoretical understanding of the concepts of “burial rites” and “funeral and memorial ritualism” in archaeological interpretation. Based on an analysis of the works of domestic and foreign researchers, the main approaches to defining the content, structure, and interrelationship of these concepts are considered, and the terminology related to ritual practices recorded in archaeological materials is clarified. Particular attention is paid to the distinction between different levels and aspects of ritual activity, allowing for a more comprehensive reconstruction of the spiritual and material cultures of ancient societies. Burial complexes and the accompanying ritual practices are important sources of information about the social organisation, ideological attitudes, and symbolic models of the world of ancient communities. Analysis of archaeological data reveals insights into ideas about death and the afterlife, as well as demonstrating the complex interrelationships between ritual practice and the society's worldview. The study employed analytical-comparative and historiographical methods, which made it possible to systematise and compare the existing scientific approaches to the interpretation of funeral and memorial rites. This comprehensive approach enabled the tracing of the evolution of ideas about the structure and content of funeral and memorial rites, as well as the identification of their role in archaeological interpretation. The work aims to clarify the conceptual apparatus and the relationship between “burial rites” and “funeral and memorial ritualism”, as well as to identify their significance for the reconstruction of the ideological and worldview attitudes of ancient societies. The methodological basis of the study provided a systematic approach to analysing concepts and theoretical models, which allows archaeological, ethnographic, and semantic data to be combined into a single interpretative framework. Particular attention is paid to the practical significance of the work: the results of the research can be used to analyse archaeological materials and prepare educational programmes and methodological guides on archaeology and ethnology. In addition, the work emphasizes the importance of an interdisciplinary approach that combines data from various humanities disciplines to achieve a deeper understanding of cultural processes and the transformation of ritual practices in ancient societies. The results of this work open up opportunities for integrating archaeological data with ethnographic and historical-cultural sources, thereby increasing the accuracy of interpreting ritual practices in ancient societies. Thus, the work demonstrates a transition from descriptive approaches to complex models of research into ritual and ceremonial practices and emphasises the relevance of clarifying key concepts in modern archaeology.

**Keywords:** burial rite; funeral and memorial ritualism; memorial rite; custom; ritual; site; archaeology; term

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## Археологиялық контексте «жерлеу салты» және «жерлеу ғұрпы» ұғымдарын нақтылау

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**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада археологиялық интерпретациядағы «жерлеу салты» және «жерлеу ғұрпы» ұғымдары теориялық тұрғыдан пайымдалған. Отандық және шетелдік зерттеушілер еңбектерін талдау негізінде осы ұғымдардың мазмұны, құрылымы мен өзара байланысын анықтауға қатысты негізгі ғылыми тәсілдер қарастырылып, археологиялық материалдарда кездесетін салттық-ғұрыптық тәжірибеге қатысты терминология нақтыланған. Салттық іс-әрекеттердің әртүрлі деңгейлері мен аспектілерін ажыратуға ерекше назар аударылды, бұл көне қоғамдардың рухани және материалдық мәдениетін неғұрлым толық қалпына келтіруге мүмкіндік береді. Жерлеу кешендері мен олармен байланысты ғұрыптық тәжірибе ежелгі қауымдардың әлеуметтік ұйымдасуы, идеологиялық ұстанымдары және әлемнің символдық модельдері жөніндегі маңызды ақпарат көзі болып табылады. Археологиялық деректерді талдау өлім мен о дүниелік болмыс жөніндегі түсініктерді ашып көрсетеді, сондай-ақ салттық тәжірибе мен қоғам дүниетанымы арасындағы күрделі байланыстарды айқындайды. Зерттеуде қолданылған аналитикалық-салыстырмалы және тарихнамалық әдістер жерлеу және еске алу ғұрыптарын интерпретациялауға қатысты бар ғылыми тұжырымдарды жүйелеуге және салыстыруға мүмкіндік берді. Мұндай кешенді тәсіл жерлеу және еске алу ғұрпының құрылымы мен мазмұны туралы түсініктердің эволюциясын бақылауға және оның археологиялық интерпретациядағы рөлін айқындауға жол ашады. Жұмыстың мақсаты – «жерлеу салты» мен «жерлеу-еске алу ғұрпы» ұғымдарының арақатынасын және олардың көне қоғамдардың идеологиялық әрі дүниетанымдық белгілерін қалпына келтірудегі маңызын нақтылау. Зерттеудің әдістемелік негізі ұғымдар мен теориялық модельдерді жүйелі түрде талдауды қамтамасыз етіп, бұл археологиялық, этнографиялық және семантикалық деректерді біртұтас интерпретациялық шеңберде қарастыруға мүмкіндік береді. Жұмыстың практикалық маңызы да ерекше атап өтілген: зерттеу нәтижелері археологиялық материалдарды талдауда, археология мен этнология бойынша оқу бағдарламалары мен әдістемелік құралдар әзірлеуде пайдаланылуы мүмкін. Сонымен қатар, мақала көне қоғамдардағы салттық тәжірибенің өзгерісін тереңірек түсіну үшін түрлі гуманитарлық ғылымдарды біріктіретін пәнаралық тәсілдің маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Зерттеу нәтижелері археологиялық деректерді этнографиялық және тарихи-мәдени дереккөздермен ұштастыруға мүмкіндік беріп, ежелгі салттық тәжірибелерді интерпретациялаудың дәлдігін арттырады. Осылайша, жұмыс салттық-ғұрыптық тәжірибені зерттеудің сипаттамалық тәсілдерінен кешенді модельдерге көшу үрдісін көрсетеді және қазіргі археологиядағы негізгі ұғымдарды нақтылаудың өзектілігін айқын бейнелейді.

**Түйін сөздер:** жерлеу салты; жерлеу-еске алу ғұрпы; еске алу салты; әдет-ғұрып; рәсім; ескерткіш; археология; термин

**Сілтеме жасау үшін:** Қаражігітова а.археологиялық контексте "жерлеу рәсімі" және "жерлеу-жерлеу рәсімі" ұғымдарын нақтылау. *Gumilyov Journal of History*. 2026. Т.154, no.1, с.7-20. <https://doi.org/10.32523/3080-129X-2026-154-1-7-20>

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## **Уточнение понятий «погребальный обряд» и «погребально-поминальная обрядность» в археологическом контексте**

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается теоретическое осмысление понятий «погребальный обряд» и «погребально-поминальная обрядность» в археологической интерпретации. На основе анализа трудов отечественных и зарубежных исследователей рассмотрены основные подходы к определению содержания, структуры и взаимосвязи этих понятий, а также уточняется терминология, связанная с ритуально-обрядовой практикой, фиксируемой в археологических материалах. Особое внимание уделяется разграничению различных уровней и аспектов ритуальной деятельности, что позволяет более полно реконструировать духовную и материальную культуру древних обществ. Погребальные комплексы и сопровождающая их обрядовая практика выступают важнейшими источниками информации о социальной организации, идеологических установках и символических моделях мира древних сообществ. Анализ археологических данных раскрывает представления о смерти и загробном существовании, а также демонстрирует сложные взаимосвязи между ритуальной практикой и мировоззрением общества. В исследовании применены аналитико-сравнительный и историографический методы, позволившие систематизировать и сопоставить существующие научные подходы к интерпретации погребальных и поминальных обрядов. Такой комплексный подход обеспечивает возможность проследить эволюцию представлений о структуре и содержании погребально-поминальной обрядности и выявить её роль в археологической интерпретации. Цель работы состоит в уточнении понятийного аппарата и соотношения «погребального обряда» и «погребально-поминальной обрядности», а также в выявлении их значения для реконструкции идеологических и мировоззренческих установок древних обществ. Методическая база исследования обеспечивает системный подход к анализу понятий и теоретических моделей, что позволяет объединить археологические, этнографические и семантические данные в единую интерпретационную рамку. Особое внимание уделяется практическому значению исследования: результаты исследования могут быть использованы для анализа археологических материалов, подготовки учебных программ и методических пособий по археологии и этнологии. Кроме того, исследование подчёркивает важность междисциплинарного подхода, объединяющего данные различных гуманитарных наук для более глубокого понимания культурных процессов и трансформации ритуальной практики в древних обществах. Результаты работы открывают возможности для интеграции археологических данных с этнографическими и историко-культурными источниками, что повышает точность интерпретации ритуальных практик древних обществ. Таким образом, исследование демонстрирует переход от описательных

подходов к комплексным моделям исследования ритуально-обрядовой практики и подчёркивает актуальность уточнения ключевых понятий в современной археологии.

**Ключевые слова:** погребальный обряд; погребально-поминальная обрядность; поминальный обряд; обычай; ритуал; памятник; археология; терминология

### ***Introduction***

Burial sites and burial rites are one of the most important sources of archaeological information. Their study provides a wealth of data that enables us to reconstruct the spiritual and material culture of ancient communities, the peculiarities of their social structure, worldviews, and other elements of the ideological sphere. Analysis of materials uncovered during archaeological excavations contributes to a more complete understanding of the complex processes that reflect people's attitudes towards death and the afterlife.

The issue of burial sites and funeral rites has consistently attracted the attention of researchers throughout the entire period of archaeological science's development. The study of burial and memorial sites, as well as rituals in general, remains one of the pressing tasks of contemporary archaeology.

After completing archaeological excavations and initial processing of materials, the researcher proceeds to the stage of interpreting the data obtained, which requires the use of interdisciplinary approaches, as well as interaction with various fields of scientific knowledge. When studying funeral and memorial rituals, it is particularly important to apply comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches, which are a key condition for a comprehensive analysis of archaeological data and ensure a holistic understanding of the ritual practices of ancient populations.

The aim of this work is to examine and clarify the concepts of “funeral and memorial ritualism” and “burial rites” in archaeological interpretation, as well as to identify their relationship and role in the process of reconstructing the ideological beliefs of ancient societies.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks are addressed in this work: an analysis of existing approaches to defining the concepts of “funeral” and “memorial” rites, and a determination of the content and structure of funeral and memorial ritualism as a complex phenomenon.

The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that its results can be used in the analysis of archaeological materials related to funeral and memorial ritualism, as well as in the preparation and teaching of archaeological and ethnological disciplines.

### ***Materials and methods***

The work utilizes materials that reflect the primary scientific approaches to the study of funeral and memorial ritualism – works by domestic and foreign researchers dedicated to theoretical issues in the archaeological interpretation of burial complexes, ritual practices, and ritual symbolism.

When selecting sources, we considered works that encompass both the theoretical and methodological aspects of funeral rites studies and specific archaeological interpretations, enabling us to trace the evolution of scientific approaches over time.

The work employed analytical-comparative and historiographical methods, which made it possible to generalise and compare existing scientific approaches to the definition and

interpretation of the concepts of "burial rite", "memorial rite", funeral and memorial ritualism, as well as related terms such as "ritual", "custom", and funeral practice. This expansion of the conceptual range made it possible to trace the evolution of scientific ideas about the structure and content of ritual complexes in archaeological interpretation.

In modern archaeological science, the interpretation of burial complexes has been significantly expanded through the introduction of interdisciplinary research methods, including stable isotope analysis, natural science methods for analysing human remains, geoinformation modelling, and three-dimensional digital recording of burial structures, etc. The application of these approaches enables the reconstruction of migration processes, kinship ties, and the dietary and mobility characteristics of ancient communities, thereby refining and supplementing traditional archaeological interpretations of ritual practices.

Of particular importance in this context is the development of archaeoethnology, which considers the body's position, the sequence of ritual actions, and taphonomic processes as key sources for reconstructing the structure of burial rites (Duday 2009: 158).

The application of these methods was accompanied by the use of interdisciplinary data, primarily ethnographic and cultural, which made it possible to expand the interpretative possibilities of archaeological material.

### ***Literary review***

The study of burial rites and funeral and memorial ritualism has a long tradition and occupies one of the central places in archaeology. One of the first theoretical foundations for interpreting rituals was laid by Arnold van Gennep in his seminal work "The Rites of Passage" (Gennep 1999: 198), which identifies the universal stages of rituals of passage from birth to death. This approach became the methodological basis for analysing funeral practices as a transition between the worlds of the living and the dead.

The first fundamental works on the interpretation of funeral rites were written in the late 19th century by the ethnographers E. Taylor (Taylor 1939: 568) and J. Frazer (Fraser 1980: 832), who explained their diversity primarily in terms of primitive mythology and religious beliefs. At the beginning of the 20th century, Émile Durkheim's school introduced a sociological approach, viewing death as a social and biological transformation, and funeral rites as "a rite of passage for an individual from the world of the living to the world of the dead" (Gennep 1999: 198), (Hertz 2004: 174). According to this theory, the funeral ritual has a three-stage structure: the first stage is "rite of separation" (isolation of the body), the second is "carrying out the funeral" (final separation of the soul from the body), and the third is "the rite of reunion" (the return of the community to normal life and the inclusion of the soul in the circle of ancestors).

R. Hertz emphasised that the scale and form of funeral rituals depend on the deceased's social status and aim to restore social order (Hertz 2004: 174). At the same time, the influential archaeologist Alfred Kroeber, a representative of the cultural-historical school, argued that funeral rites are unreliable for reconstructing cultural history due to their variability (Averkieva 1979: 288).

This position was rejected by Lewis Binford in the mid-1960s, one of the founders of "new" or processual archaeology (Binford 1962: 217–225). Binford demonstrated the stability of burial rites and postulated that the form and structure of burial practices directly reflect the form and organisational characteristics of society itself. He argued that funeral rites symbolically reflect the "social identity of the deceased" (gender, age, social status) and the composition of the social group participating in the funeral.

Binford's follower, Joseph Tainter, introduced the abstract concept of “energy expenditure” (or labour) on funeral rituals and established that the social rank of the deceased correlates with the degree of this expenditure in more than 90% of the cases studied (Tainter 1978: 105–141).

Another follower, Arthur Saxe, suggested that the creation of formal burial sites (cemeteries) is used by corporate groups to legitimise their rights to limited resources through ancestral heritage. A. Saxe analysed ethnographic descriptions of three traditional societies – the Ashanti in West Africa, the Kapauku Papuans in New Guinea, and the Bontoc Igorots in the Philippines – and based on this data formulated eight hypotheses about the social significance of burial rites. Of greatest interest to archaeologists is the eighth hypothesis, which asserts that burial grounds and cemeteries were created to secure the land rights of living community members through their connection to the heritage of their ancestors (Saxe 1970: 240).

Since the early 1990s, “a post-processual” trend has emerged in Western archaeology, represented by Ian Hodder and Mike Parker Pearson. This trend has been critical of the ideas of “new archaeology” (Hodder 2007: 188). Post-processualists argued that funeral rites create a distorted and idealised portrait of the deceased, as they reflect the views and interests of the living, and not just the status of the deceased. They emphasised the ideological, religious, and symbolic aspects of funeral rituals, seeing them as “an active field of activity” where participants discuss issues of power and property. Moreover, the symbolism of funeral inventory could be misleading, as items could have been made specifically for the funeral and not used during the person's lifetime (Pearson 1999: 250).

In the early 21st century, a number of new theoretical approaches to the study of burial practices have been developed in foreign archaeology, within which the funeral rite is viewed as a complex social and symbolic system that participates in the formation of personality, status, and collective identity. Within the concept of personhood, ritual is interpreted as a mechanism for constructing social identity and posthumous status, materialised through the body of the deceased, burial goods, and the architecture of the burial site (Fowler 2004: 196).

Contemporary research focused on corporeality and practice emphasises that the archaeologically recorded elements of the burial rite result from ritualised actions performed with the body of the deceased and in the burial space, allowing us to consider burial as a process rather than a single act (Nilsson 2003: 395).

As a result, although some of the ideas of new archaeology (e.g., “the social approach”) continue to be used, modern foreign studies, as summarised by V.I. Gulyaev, emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach to the study of burial rites, including analysis of archaeological and ethnographic sources, as well as “a landscape approach” (analysis of burial grounds in the context of settlements and places of worship).

In archaeology, the development of methods for studying burial complexes is directly linked to the work of V.F. Gening and V.A. Borzunov (Gening, Borzunov 1975: 42–71), as well as S.V. Krasnov, who developed a systematic approach to the study of ritual actions (Krasnov 2012: 744–747). Theoretical issues of the structure and stages of the ritual are discussed in detail by E.P. Dvornikov (Dvornikov 2010: 30–33).

V.I. Melnik paid particular attention to the symbolism and semantics of funeral rituals, showing the interconnection between archaeological and ethnographic data in the reconstruction of the ideological representations of ancient societies (Melnik 2010: 52–59). Issues of methodology in the study of burial sites were systematised by E.V. Lagutkina, who emphasised the need to combine typological, statistical, and semantic analysis (Lagutkina 2010: 19–32).

A significant contribution to the development of theoretical and methodological foundations was also made by V.I. Gulyayev (Gulyaev 1993: 76–77), V.S. Alekshin (Alekshin 1981: 3–9), V.S.

Olkhovsky (Olkhovsky 1993: 78–93), M.F. Kosarev (Kosarev 2010: 33–51), and Z. Samashev (Samashev 2017: 511–548). Their works made it possible to consider burial rites as a complex system that includes ideological and practical aspects, as well as to clarify the conceptual range covering the terms "rite", "ritualism", "ritual", "custom", and "funeral practice".

Thus, the existing literature demonstrates a transition from a descriptive approach to complex models of analysis combining archaeological, ethnographic, and semantic methods. However, the problem of correlating and clarifying basic concepts remains relevant, which determines the direction of this study.

### ***Results and discussion***

Elements of the burial complex were identified by researchers practically from the earliest stages of archaeological study of burials. A wide range of ethnographic data provided opportunities for direct interpretation of the identified forms of burial structures and rites. The accumulation of a significant amount of material on burial sites has set science the task of developing new methods of analysis and approaches to interpreting the data obtained.

A burial rite can be viewed as a multi-layered symbolic system, where each action, object, or element of the ritual carries a certain semantic meaning associated with the worldview and social norms of ancient society.

Attempts to understand various phenomena in science usually begin and end with their systematisation. Comprehension of the general and the specific becomes possible only through comparison and contrast of the objects under study.

In modern archaeology, the concept of "burial rites" occupies one of the central places in the interpretation of ancient cultural practices. Unlike the ethnographic approach, where this term refers to the process of burying the deceased and the set of accompanying ritual actions, archaeology primarily deals with their material reflections – the remains of burial structures, material complexes, the position of animal bones, and human remains, among others. It is precisely on the basis of this data that it is possible to reconstruct the sequence of actions that made up the burial rite.

However, it should be borne in mind that not all elements of the ritual were materially embodied or could be preserved in archaeological material. In addition, the interpretation of the meaning and content of these actions often remains in the realm of probabilistic reconstructions and scientific hypotheses.

This approach has been summarised in several synthetic works devoted to the archaeology of death and burial, where ritual, social status, identity, and memory are considered as interrelated analytical categories (Tarlow, Nilsson Stutz 2013: 872).

The burial ritual is one of the most informative sources for studying the ethnic sphere. Although it is only a separate element reflecting ethnocultural features based on archaeological materials, the massive nature of burial data makes it possible to use them to analyse ethnic processes as a whole. This material is especially valuable for studying the mechanisms of formation and transformation of specific ethnic groups at different stages of historical development.

In archaeology, burial rites are recorded based on the remains of phenomena that recur with varying degrees of consistency across a multitude of individual objects. For a comprehensive and in-depth study of burial rites, it is essential not only to document specific varieties of their manifestations but also to reveal their internal content within the broader context of the overall ritual complex.

Contemporary researchers are largely focused on resolving issues of typological and chronological classification, formalisation, localisation, correlation, and systematisation of burial characteristics. As a result, the main focus is on source analysis, while the interpretative side of the problem, related to the disclosure of the worldview and symbolic aspects of the rite, remains in the shadows.

In the second half of the 20th century, the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences organised a series of meetings devoted to the issues of studying and interpreting burial rites. In particular, in February 1988, the meeting was held on “Issues of Interpreting Burial Rites in Archaeology”, and in April 1992, a meeting was held on “Methods of Computer Analysis of Burial Rites”. In 1991, meetings were also held that made a significant contribution to the development of research methods and theoretical understanding of this issue (Gulyaev 1993: 76).

V.S. Alekshin considers burial rites as a system comprising two interrelated components. The first reflects the ritual side and represents a set of traditionally approved actions performed before the funeral, at the time of burial, and after it. These actions are aimed at “transferring” the deceased to the other world and are performed in relation to members of the community who formed its core and were connected by kinship ties. The second component characterises the social status of the deceased and is expressed in a complex of material elements accompanying the rite: the type of burial structure, the composition of the inventory, the position of the body, and other features.

According to the researcher, these two components together form a standard (traditional) burial rite characteristic of any archaeological culture. At the same time, as Alekshin emphasised, it is wrong to consider them in isolation or to contrast them with each other, since reliable information can only be obtained through a comprehensive analysis of the funeral rite as a whole (Alekshin 1981: 3).

I.L. Kyzlasov noted that archaeologists researching and interpreting ancient burials must analyse not only the stratigraphy of the layers covering them, but also the unique layers of spiritual culture reflected in the material remains of the burial rite (Kyzlasov 1993: 98–112).

In his work “Studying the Structure of Burial Practices in Russian Archaeology”, V.I. Melnik examined and analysed the formulation of this question in studies conducted since the 1970s, emphasising the importance of the correct use and precise definition of terms (Melnik 2024: 332–356). In his work “Funeral Practices and Burial Rites”, V.I. Melnik attempted to define the relationship between the concepts of “burial rites”, “burial customs”, and “funeral practices”, which is important for clarifying the conceptual apparatus of archaeological science (Melnik 1993: 94–97).

In his article “The Study of Funeral Rites in Foreign Archaeology”, V.I. Gulyaev analyses the works of Anglo-American researchers who, over the years, have considered various approaches to the study of funeral rites (Gulyaev 2010: 5–19). In his opinion, the interpretation of burial rites in foreign archaeology is carried out within the framework of four main directions: religious-mythological, ethnocultural, chronological, and social (Gulyaev 2010: 6).

M.F. Kossarev proposed a distinction between concepts closely related to the ritual and ceremonial sphere. In his opinion, “a rite is an action repeated in certain situations, having a sufficiently pronounced sacred character”. At the same time, the researcher understands “ritual” as “a complex” of ritual actions aimed at achieving some particularly significant sacred goal. In addition, Kossarev noted that in archaeological and ethnographic research, another term from this conceptual group is often used – “custom”, which he defined as “an action that was

common under certain circumstances and for the most part, did not carry any significant sacred meaning" (Kossarev 2010: 34).

V.S. Olkhovsky made an important contribution to the development of the theoretical and methodological foundations for the study of ritual complexes. According to his definition, "a burial rite (ritual) is a set of ritual-practical actions performed in preparation for and during the burial in accordance with religious and ideological norms. The basis of the rite consists of funeral customs – generally accepted ways and norms of dealing with the deceased, a set of ideas and rules that prescribe how to behave in a specific situation. A rite is a phenomenon that is more complex in form, content, and structure, being a combination of ideological (a system of religious beliefs, norms, and prescriptions governing the burial process) and practical (a system of ritual and practical actions performed during the burial of the deceased) spheres. The ideological sphere is the content of the rite, and the practical sphere is its form, the actual actions (Olkhovsky 1991: 4).

In addition, the researcher emphasised the close relationship between funeral and memorial rites. In his opinion, "a memorial rite is an action performed during a certain period of time after burial for propitiatory and commemorative purposes. Like a funeral, it has its own practical and religious-ideological spheres. The interconnection between funeral and memorial rites requires their joint study and is designated by the concept of "funeral and memorial ritualism" (Olkhovsky 1991: 5).

In his article "Funeral and Memorial Rituals of the Ancient Nomads of the Kazakh Altai in the Context of the Ontological Concept of Life and Death (Based on Materials from the Berel Mounds)", Z. Samashev paid special attention to the interpretation of the concepts of "burial rite" and "funeral and memorial ritualism". The researcher offers a structural analysis of ritual practice, identifying several stages of the rite that reflect its internal logic and sequence. These include: "The beginning of the rite of passage: preparing the deceased for life in the afterlife", "Choosing a place for burial: the impact of the grave structure", "Carrying the deceased and the journey to the burial site", "The process of burying the deceased as the culmination of the cult and ritual practices of the ancient Berel tribes", and "Post-funeral activities: sacrifices, funeral feasts, and other ritual acts significant to society, aimed at restoring harmony" (Samashev 2017: 511–548).

In addition to the theoretical models and stage-by-stage reconstructions of the ritual discussed above, it seems important to turn to a structural analysis of funeral and memorial ritualism. This approach allows us to combine various archaeological features into a single analytical framework, revealing the relationships among the ritual's ideological, social, and material components. The transition from descriptive characteristics to a structural understanding of the ritual provides an opportunity for a more in-depth analysis of the ritual practices of ancient populations.

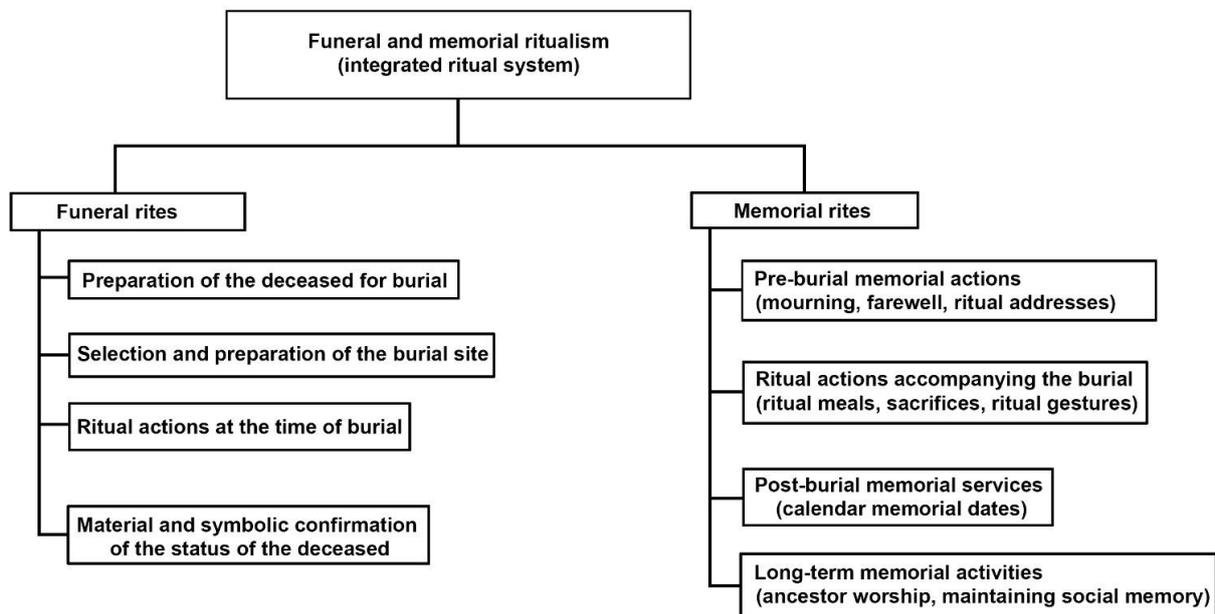
In modern archaeology, the study of burial and memorial ritualism is becoming multi-layered, requiring reference not only to recorded material data but also to the structural levels of the ritual system. This approach allows us to consider the burial complex as a holistic phenomenon, including ideological, social, behavioural, and material components. Dividing the ritual into structural levels contributes to a more accurate interpretation of the identified archaeological features and enables the reconstruction of ancient society's ritual practices in their internal logic.

The application of a structural approach is especially important when direct ethnographic parallels are absent or insufficient. The identification of ideological, normative-customary, ritual-

practical, material, social, memorial, and spatial-landscape levels allows for the systematisation of diverse data and the establishment of their interrelationships. Each of these levels is reflected in the archaeological material, but the degree of preservation, informativeness and interpretative load varies significantly.

Thus, considering funeral and memorial rites as a multi-layered, functionally differentiated system allows us to move from a descriptive analysis of individual ritual actions to their structural interpretation. To clarify the basic concepts used in the study and their relationship, it seems appropriate to refer to a schematic model of the relationship between funeral and memorial rites within a single ritual system (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Structure of funeral and memorial ritualism and the relationship between funeral and memorial rites.



The ideological level is recorded mainly indirectly through the orientation of burials, the choice of burial site, and the organisation of the sacred landscape. The normative-customary level is reflected in the repetition of burial structures and body positions, and in the stability of ritual patterns. The ritual-practical level is revealed by traces of specific actions.

The material level, as the most stable, serves as the primary basis for analysis. The social level allows us to reconstruct the status of the deceased, the characteristics of social organisation, and the structure of the group. The memorial level is manifested in traces of repeated visits, secondary sacrifices, and subsequent stratification. The spatial-landscape level reveals the characteristics of sacred geography, local traditions, and the community's territorial self-identification.

The inclusion of these levels in the analysis of burial and memorial ritualism allows us to move from a descriptive study of individual burials to the reconstruction of a complex ritual system. This approach enables a holistic understanding of the interaction among ideology, social structure, and the material forms of ritual practice. The use of structural levels as an analytical

model enhances the interpretative value of archaeological material and forms a methodological basis for further research on burial complexes (Table 1).

**Table 1.** *Structural levels of burial and memorial ritualism and their archaeological indicators*

<b>Level of the ritual system</b>	<b>Level content</b>	<b>Archaeological indicators</b>	<b>Possibilities for interpretation</b>
Ideological level	Worldview ideas about death, the afterlife, the soul, ancestors, sacred norms and prohibitions	Indirect fixation: orientation of burials, choice of location, sacred topography, repetition of rituals	Reconstruction of cosmological ideas, ritual logic, and belief structures
Normative-customary level	Traditional customs prescribing the form of burial, a set of actions and their sequence	Repeating types of burials, shapes of pits, presence of typical actions (orientation, body position, etc.)	Identification of cultural specificity and ethnocultural norms
Ritual-practical level	Specific actions performed by living persons in preparation for and during burial	Traces of the pit being dug, filling, traces of fire, remains of ritual manipulations, sacrifices, etc.	Analysis of the ceremony scenario, determination of stages and sequence of actions
Material and object level	Material inventory, food, and burial structures	Material inventory, organic matter, etc.	Assessment of social status, gender, age, professional activity or symbolic purpose
Social level	Reflection of the social structure of society: status of the deceased, role in the group, family ties	Differentiation of burials by complexity, quantity of inventory, and use of resources	Modelling social organisation, stratification, and power
Memorial and commemorative level	Actions after burial: funeral feast, commemorative rituals, installation of structures	Additional layers, traces of repeated visits, and secondary burials	Restoration of the commemoration system, duration of the ritual cycle
Spatial-landscape level	The relationship between burial and the surrounding topography: settlements, sanctuaries, sacred places	Landscape analysis, geographical distribution, connection with water and mountain objects	Reconstruction of sacred space and territorial organisation

## **Conclusion**

Thus, an analysis of approaches to the study of burial rites shows that research in this area has progressed from a descriptive and typological level to complex interpretative models that combine archaeological, ethnographic, and sociocultural data. The funeral practices of ancient societies reflect not only the ritual aspect of their attitude towards death, but also the structure of social organisation, worldview, attitudes, and ethnocultural characteristics.

This study clarifies the relationship between the concepts of “burial rites”, “memorial rites”, and “funeral and memorial ritualism”. It is shown that burial and memorial rites form a single ritual system, and the use of the concept of “funeral and memorial ritualism” enables adequate reflection on the integrity and duration of the ritual cycle in archaeological interpretation.

Understanding the burial rite as a multi-layered phenomenon, including ideological and practical aspects, opens up opportunities for a deeper understanding of the cultural processes of antiquity and their transformation over time.

The proposed structural approach, based on identifying key levels of burial and memorial rites, provides a systematisation for diverse archaeological data and a transition from describing individual elements of the rite to reconstructing its internal logic. Considering the burial complex as a multi-layered system expands the interpretative possibilities of the archaeology of death and forms a methodological basis for analysing burial sites from different cultural and chronological eras.

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