



Physical Anthropology Section - 2012

H61 Burial Patterns during Times of Armed Conflict in Cyprus in the 1960s and 1970s

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the patterns of burial during times of armed conflict in Cyprus, as learned from the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP).

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by introducing the mission of the CMP, the CMP Bi-Communal Forensic Team's (BCFT) archaeology program, and the observations and patterns of burial practices during armed conflict that occurred in Cyprus in the 1960s and 1970s.

Between 1975 and 1979, the United Nations General Assembly implemented three resolutions, and as a consequence, an investigatory body was established to determine the fate of approximately 2,000 people that were registered as missing from the inter-communal violence of the 1960s and the events of July 1974 and onwards. The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) was established in 1981 under the auspices of the United Nations following an agreement between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities. The CMP project is unique, as it is the only institutionalized bi-communal program where individuals from both communities, which were once fighting, are now working together at every stage of the project. The goal of the BCFT is to maximize the recovery of skeletal elements and document the spatial relationship of all physical evidence as to provide as much information as possible that would help in the final identification process. As such, the BCFT uses standard archaeological methods and techniques that have been adapted to the specific conditions of the "Cypriot recovery scene."

To date, 555 sites have been investigated after obtaining information from witnesses from the two communities. Of those, 213 contained human remains that are being analyzed by the bi-communal Anthropology and DNA teams for identification. The BCFT has excavated multiple burial sites across Cyprus, where specific patterns of burial during armed conflict have emerged. Thus far, BCFT excavations can be consolidated to five main types based on similarities in archaeological context, which include: (1) *in situ*, primary burials; (2) burial in wells; (3) deposition in stream beds; (4) surface deposition on mountain tops; and, (5) burial inside or next to abandoned cemeteries.

From the outset of the project, many informants and witnesses came forward to provide information on burial location. The first sites to be excavated were those with persistent and reliable witness statements, which invariably involved primary *in situ* burials. Of the 555 sites, 51 involved *in situ* primary burials.

In the mid-twentieth century, much of Cyprus moved to municipality water supply and in the years that followed wells became redundant and fell out of use. During the events of the 1960s and 1970s wells became a convenient place to dispose of bodies. Consequently, the BCFT has excavated 82 wells, of which 24 contained human remains.

Seasonal streams were also popular locations to dispose of bodies. The formation processes that dominate streambeds ensure that human remains would be dispersed and difficult to find. The BCFT has excavated 38 streambeds, of which 15 contained human remains. The remains in most cases consisted of isolated skeletal elements.

According to historical information, intense fighting took place on the Kyrenia Mountains in July and August 1974 resulting in a large number of missing persons. Many were left unburied resulting in dispersion by various taphonomic processes. The recovered remains typically consist of isolated skeletal elements that are often sun-bleached. Since the start of the project 46 sites have been excavated in the Kyrenia Mountains, of which 20 contained human remains.

The BCFT has excavated 22 sites in abandoned cemeteries, of which five contained remains related to the inter-communal fighting of the 1960s or the events of July and August 1974 and onwards. The archaeologists assigned to these cases must determine the forensic significance by drawing on their understanding of the various burial practices of an island where Christian and Muslim religions have dominated for centuries.

In excavating the island's past the forensic archaeologist becomes aware of the various burial practices that prevailed during armed conflict, which become informative for locating future burial sites. The five main categories of CMP recovery sites are reflective of the environmental and cultural parameters that characterized Cyprus during the 1960s and 1970s. Today, in conducting excavations for the CMP, the forensic archaeologists from the two Cypriot communities contribute to the overall mission for the recovery and identification of missing persons, in order to find a reconciled future.

CMP, Burial, Post-Conflict