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### Title

HOW THE MATERIAL REMAINS AND IMMATERIAL CULTURE OF THE ABRAHAMIC MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS IN ENGLAND, FRANCE AND SPAIN DURING THE LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD EXPLAIN THE VARIATION IN MORTUARY BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

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PRACTICES

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## Abstract

The overall purpose of this study was to answer two questions. Question 1: Is there a correlation between the religious belief of a soul and the afterlife with the mortuary practices involving body adornment, grave orientation, and the internal and external grave structure? Question 2: Is there a pattern of similarities of the above mortuary beliefs and correlating practices across the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions during the Medieval Period? Throughout the period of gathering resources it became increasingly obvious that an additional purpose of this paper was to become a small collection of comparative analysis of the existing data. The design of the study was a comprehensive literary analysis of primary and secondary resources involving mortuary practices and physical remains dated to the Medieval Period spanning the 8th-14th centuries involving the practitioners of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The common factor in gathering data was that each religion had to have practitioners at the site in the relative same time period, where the Medieval Period was chosen due to the influx of a “multicultural” population. The guiding theories in the research are embodiment theory and materiality theory. Throughout the research it became clear that religions attempted to differentiate from one another in mortuary customs but had several common themes: grave orientation towards a holy site, modest funeral shrouds, etc. During the Medieval Period, practitioners followed a strict dogma, adamantly trying to differentiate between other religions, while holding similar styles of respect via the objectification of the deceased in order to showcase devotion. Overall, the rituals and practices performed by the practitioner were the embodiment and the physical mediums of the objectification of their nonphysical beliefs.

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## I. Introduction

Death is one of the few constants in life- the very last in fact. With this knowledge comes uncertainties of what will occur after death. This ambiguity has birthed ideologies, beliefs, rituals, and practices that comfort those left to live with the consequences of death. The presence of these postulations can be argued as the beginning of the human essence and the ending of “strict pragmatic and ecological dictates of animal behavior” (Kus 2013) which surrounded the disposal of the body after death for our evolutionary ancestors. As the complexities of thought and realization began to develop, so did belief systems and their practices. Religion can soften the emotional damage of death because for many people across the globe, religion explains the mystery of life, death, and most importantly the afterlife. The various mortuary practices throughout the world convey a deliberate message as compared to those seen in common mundane rituals. How the mortuary practices are implicated give insights to both the deceased and living populations. For populations of the past, the cemetery is highly important in discovering key aspects into how death was viewed and what precautions were placed to ensure social norms and beliefs were being fulfilled. A cemetery and all it entails is a significant feature of cultural heritage and historical values due to its ability to invoke memory. Within the context of religions, mortuary practices invoke personal memories of the deceased but allow reinforce ideologies of death and the afterlife. The Abrahamic monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are three distinct religions that share a common historical ancestry which allows for a intersectional relation of beliefs and practices amongst practitioners. With this set of religions I believe the material remains left behind by the mortuary practices of the body adornment, grave orientation and grave structure will embody the mortuary beliefs of the soul and afterlife found

in the theology therefore showcasing how the practitioners objectifs death in order to secure salvation.

## II. Materials and Methodologies

The methods for gathering data for this research was the accumulation of qualitative and quantitative primary and secondary sources in order to achieve the most accurate representations of beliefs and practices. The primary sources included archaeological articles regarding excavations in York, England, Toledo, Spain and Chateauroux, France dated between the Middle to High Middle Ages (roughly 1000-1500). During the Medieval Period there was a great influx of migration patterns into what is commonly known as Europe. With the rise and fall of many powerful Empires before and during this period, it was the most promising time to have all three groups of religious practitioners in the same location. In the excavations noted in the paper, the majority of the remains were dated in clusters to the later Middle Ages. The mortuary practices that were most important to note for this paper dealt with the body adornment and grave structure. Secondary sources were commentaries on religious beliefs of the soul and afterlife held by practitioners within the timeframe of the Medieval Period.

I will be using the data regarding the body adornment, grave orientation and grave structure from the sites in Spain, France and England to argue that the mortuary beliefs of a soul and afterlife in Judaism, Christianity and Islam are encoded in the mortuary practices of that period by using the theories of embodiment and materiality.

An unfortunate limitation to this project was the loss of archeological data of Jewish, Muslim, and some sects of Christianity gravesites. There is a lack of non-Christian cemeteries for many reasons, one being the presumption of multi-faith burial grounds seen in some

medieval settlements (Jacobs 2008). Another reason for a lack of data is due to the rabid xenophobia and persecution of these religions in Catholic dominated regions, many sites were ransacked and graves desecrated by robbers. For instance, in York there has been very little archeological evidence of Jewish cemeteries, despite there being written historical data stating the presence of such establishments (Kadish 2011). Explosions such as the Maimonides Pronouncement and Inquisitions took place throughout the European continent and due to the religious political power backing the edicts, Muslims and Jews were forced from the regions towards Northern Africa and Eastern Europe.

An additional limitation included language barriers. As a monolingual speaker, I was unable to use much data outside of English, with the exception of a single article found in French. Many articles found were in the native language of the country from which the research was conducted, such as French or Spanish.

### III. History of Anthropology of Religion and Death

#### A. Religion

The study of religion and consequently the practitioners, for there cannot be a religion without practitioners, explores the complexity that is religion and allows scholars to understand the relationship between belief and believers with depth and nuance. Religion has been the source of much comfort and much strife throughout human history. Religion has a force that has captivated and inspired many scholars across centuries. Anthropologists, such as Frazer, Malinowski, Hertz, Turner, Bell, and Van Gennep among many others have tackled the nuance of religion and/or death. Frazer took a view closely linked with cultural evolution believing that religion was the mid-phase of belief systems, with magic at the starting point and secularism the



final stage of evolution. Malinowski's main takeaway as a functionalist thinker was that religion was a method to reduce stress during highly stressful events in life like death. Turner proposed that the multifaceted nature of symbols (objects) must be interpreted in the context they are found in, "symbols change us in their ambiguity, polysemy and interrelatedness" (Kus 2013). Bell's theories of rituals were that due to their dynamic nature they could be used as memory triggers.

## B. Death

The anthropological study of death is deeply connected to religious studies. Many of the anthropologists that studied religion have also studied death within a religious context. Death can be classified as a transformative ritual, where the participant embodies a culturally metamorphosis. A common transformative ritual is coming of age ceremonies (Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Khatam Al Koran, Quinceanera) where children transform into adults via three stages as proposed by Arnold van Gennep: separation, liminality and incorporation. With that being said, in regards to death, at the beginning a person is one thing (alive) and by the end of the ritual they are another (dead). Separation is the actual death of the deceased, liminality would be the transitioning stages expressed by the funeral rites and mourning, and lastly incorporation would be the viewing of the deceased as no longer a member of the living, but that of the dead. The rituals that are associated with death are specialized to trigger a reaction from the living populace (Ekengren 2013). There is a need for specialized rituals in rites of passages due to the unique nature of these moments in order to remind the surrounding community members of the sacredness of such events. Hertz argued that death is not just a biological phenomenon, but spreads to the surrounding communities evoking moral and societal obligations expressed in funeral traditions. In funeral rites the bodily decay of the deceased can be seen as a parallel to the

bereavement of mourners and changes the social status of both participants. As such, every mortuary ritual performed during the death, burial and remembrance process is an insight of traditions that can be shared cross culturally especially involving groups with already shared aspects.

#### IV. Theories

##### A. Embodiment Theory

The two theories that will guide this paper are embodiment theory and the theory of materiality. Embodiment theory, in its most simple form, is using the physical (the body) to understand the nonphysical (emotions). In the case of death, embodiment theory seeks to explain how the deceased lives in their culture and consequently how cultures live with the deceased. Embodiment is the physical evidence of life which includes the contexts that may not be consciously recognized while living. It incorporates the concept of a person having three bodies: a physical body, a cultural body and a body politic. In other words, people biologically incorporate the physical experiences placed upon them by cultural and political forces. For the mortuary practices of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, embodiment theory will focus on how practitioners manage the dead by viewing their religious beliefs that guide their mortuary practices.

##### B. Materiality Theory

Materiality theory is quite extensive, with the original and most mundane expression of the theory being based on the interpretations of artifacts. “Select material culture can evoke many different pasts. . .[and] simultaneously articulate and configure future or prospective memories . . . through the choice of matter and things associated with the cadaver” (Williams 2013). Artifacts, ecofacts, and features found in the bioarchaeological context allow for current generations to

create a holistic interpretation of past generations that otherwise would be unknown. In relation to decedents and religion the grave goods present and not present tell a great deal of about the societal context the person lived. Material remains orchestrate the commemoration of the dead by creating memorable scenes (Williams 2013). Materiality is how the historical world is created by the generations before and after the present. It is the method of knowing the extent of cultural growth and without it that knowledge would be lost. The material remains can be divided into two categories: Objects directly associated with the body and objects accompanying the body (Ekengren 2013). The body itself can be the material mirror by which religion can be reflected. By gazing at the material context present with the deceased it reveals patterns that are connected by various beliefs.

## V. History of Abrahamic Religions

### A. Origins

There is no concise date for the beginning of Judaism, but secular scholars do give a tentative date of c. 1390 BCE and thus this will be the origin date for Judaism used here. Christianity began as a derivative branch of Judaism until it fractured into its own separate religion during the first century. Islam is the youngest of the three religions, its beginning established by the prophet Muhammad in the 7th century. Over the course of generations Jews, Christians and Muslims spread out from the contemporary Middle East throughout the world, dividing their respective selves into multiple denominations with difference in belief and practices. For instance, Judaism can be separated into Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, Christianity can be separated into Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, and Islam can be separated into Sunni and Shia.

Each of these sects can be further broken down into smaller more compact categories based on interpretational differences of holy works and other factors.

## B. Migration Patterns

Between the years 300 to 250 BCE the mention of a Jewish presence was recorded on the Island of Rhodes, and after the conquests of Alexander the Great there was a mass migration of Jews into Greek settlements around the Mediterranean Sea and it was in 90 CE that the Jewish diaspora was established in Rome (Gruen 2016 ). There were many reasons for this migration into Southern Europe including but not limited to trade and forced slavery. Unfortunately, under the Roman Catholic Church and with the rapid spread of the Black Death throughout Europe during the High and Late Middle Ages the Jewish populations were purged from Southern and Northern Europe, fleeing into Eastern European nations. In the years 1306, 1394, 1502 there were drastic expulsions of Jews from France by the Monarchy with over 100,000 Jews being expelled and cemeteries seized by the state, later to be auctioned off (Nahon 2011).

Christianity, beginning first and foremost a sect of Judaism, began under Roman rule during the 1st century. During the 4th century Christianity gained providence in Rome due to the influence of Emperor Constantine. The Roman Catholic Church was the ruling power of many provinces including England, France and Spain, with many of the population following Catholic doctrine, but a portion of the populace fell outside the Christian majority, which resulted in persecution, expulsion, and genocide.

The history of Al-Andalus also known as the Muslim Empire is well documented. The migration of Muslims into Europe began with the Iberian Peninsula during the 8th century (711CE). During the Medieval Period, the Mediterranean saw a great expansion of Islamic influence. Between the 8th and 15 centuries, Spain and Portugal had a majority of Muslim

population, and there is evidence of a Muslim presence in Southwestern France (Gleize 2016). The Muslim Empire settled and flourished in the region for 700 hundred years, until they were forced out by the Christian Kingdoms in 1492 (Guede 2017). As a result of the Al-Andalus breaking into taifa kingdoms, which were too weak to defend themselves against the rising Christian Empire, the once mighty Muslim Empire was pushed out of Europe in what is known as the Reconquista which gave rise to the prominent Christendom.

## V. Mortuary Beliefs and Corresponding Practices

### A. Judaism

#### a. Beliefs

For Judaism, the beliefs surrounding death have changed over the many centuries of its existence as the practitioners came in contact with multiple other civilizations and cultures. Some of the major changes deal with the concepts surrounding the soul, afterlife and resurrection.

In the Torah, there are two words which have meanings similar to the westernized concept of a soul. *Nefesh* is the most direct translation to “soul” with it meaning the personality of an individual while *Neshama/ruah* can translate to the “life force/life breath” (Sumegi 2013). *Nefesh* and *Neshama* should not be seen synonymously but as two entirely different expressions surrounding how a person exists. *Nefesh* is the personhood behind the person, while *Neshama* is the force allowing a person to exist. At death, the physical body is returned back to the earth and *Neshama* is returned to God and the *Nefesh* is “dead” in form but not in actuality (Sumegi 2013). There is not a duality seen here involving a mortal body versus an immortal soul, but instead a complex co-existence of personhood, body and lifeforce.

Originally, death was seen as a very final thing for the Israelites, with Sheol seen as the “tragic nature of death” according to multiple passages such as Job 10:21, Psa 88:3-5, Isa 38:18-19 (Sumegi 2013). After the destruction of the First Temple and the introduction of the book of Daniel in c. 165 BCE the finality of death began to change and the damning notion of Sheol is reversed. Gehenna and Gan Eden were established into the belief as metaphors for an eternal punishment or paradise and the *Nefesh* begins to have an existence after death. Those faithful in Yahweh would be granted to enter Gan Eden, while all who dismissed Him would be damned to Gehenna. The concept of resurrection is fairly recent in the history of Judaism, with there being no systematic dogma that all Jews follow (Sumegi 2013). During the 4th century, the notion of the immortal soul was popularized by Plato and infiltrated Rabbinical thought which caused a divide in beliefs of a physical resurrection of the body. Thus some fractions believe only the soul is resurrected while others believe in both a bodily and spiritual resurrection.

#### b. Practices

At Cerro de la Horca in Toledo, Spain 107 Jewish graves were discovered in 2008 which were dated between the 12th and 15th century. The cemetery itself was organized spatially in rows and no intercutting of previous or neighboring tombs were noted (Ruiz 2015). There was a zealous respect in the isolation of each tomb. The pits were designated for a single body in the majority of cases, but there were instances where multiple bodies were found together. “The most frequent associations are as follows: individual tombs, double tombs, triple tombs, adult (mother) and child, empty tombs, and pits containing bones in apparent secondary context (Ruiz 2015).

The graves themselves were deep pits of various depths. The body of the deceased was wrapped in a cloth shroud, speculated to be knotted at both the head and feet, placed within a

wooden coffin in supine decubitus position with the arms resting by the sides or across the pelvis rather than across the chest and feet parallel to each other (Ruiz 2015). The skull was commonly found facing towards the sky, but due to the decay of anatomical connective tissue it could be found facing Southwest or Northwest. Remnants of a small cushion were also found underneath the head denoted by a black/green discoloration. The orientation of the body typically was found to be west-south and east-north, but some graves were discovered with the orientation of south-north or west-east (Ruiz 2015). This orientation is striking, due to the comparison between Christian and Islamic grave retention, further detail to the latter revealed in the paper.

A brick lucillo or sepulcher was used as a subterranean enclosure of the coffin in the majority of the graves (Ruiz 2015). This structure was modest in build with designation to be a form of separation between soil and coffin. The data regarding tombstones and any inscription therefore is incredibly scarce, due to the Catholic Monarchs allowing for the sale and defacement of all non-Christian gravestones. Fortunately, some of the gravestones survived this purge and are preserved in the Sefardic Museum in the Madre de Dios Convent, with transcriptions provided by an anonymous copyist during the 16th century. One grave found had the name and family name of the deceased, which likely entails the person was of high social status (Ruiz 2015).

An excavation in Chateauroux, France found the remains of 46 individuals, the graves dating from the 12th -14th centuries. The graves were arranged in parallel rows with West to East orientation with the bodies interred in coffins and ample evidence of surface singages but none actually found (Jewish Heritage of Europe). The bodies were found buried in the supine position with a westward orientation of the grave.

In the excavation of the Jewberry cemetery in York, England 482 burials were discovered. The cemetery had two distinct burial patterns. The southern section of the cemetery had a clear pattern of organization with the graves tightly spaced in rows arranged laterally head to toe while the northern section of the cemetery was disorganized in comparison with rows still evident but spaced sporadically (McComish 2000). The pattern seen in the southern section is reminiscent of the organization found in Toledo and Chateauroux, but the northern section is unusual with its out of character pattern.

The southern graves also showed a uniform organization in body position with the remains being fully extended, while the northern section had much more variation (McComish 2000). The unusualness found in the northern section could be due to the area being the youngest portion of the cemetery and lacking the needed space for the amount of burials being performed. Of the 482 graves excavated 12% had evidence of being intercut into earlier burials (McComish 2000). Most of the evidence of intercutting, again, was found in the northern section. This practice was not found in the English or French cemeteries. The majority of the graves had a single interred, but there were more than a dozen of the graves that had two individuals in the grave. This phenomenon was seen typically in regards to children being buried with an adult.

The orientation of the graves in York were approximately south-west to north-east, which contradicted orientation direction in other Jewish burials as at Winchester and Cripplegate, London which were aligned east-west (McComish 2000). However, this practice is similar to the majority of the seen orientations in Toledo.

There was no evidence of tombstones or grave goods at this site. Iron coffin nails were found in a majority of the graves, with only 37 lacking any evidence of such nails being used



(McComish 2000). For all three excavation sites there was evidence of coffin use and little to no evidence of grave goods or headstones.

## B. Christianity

### a. Beliefs

Originally Christianity was a sect of Judaism, much like modern Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, and Protestantism are major sects within Christianity. The founder of Christianity, a man known as Jesus of Nazareth was a Jewish reformer who followed an apocalyptic approach to teaching, with a focus on “the spirit of the law over the letter” and “meaning of purity of rituals” (Sumegi 2013). The Bible is a combination of Judaism’s Torah (excluding the Talmud and Midrash), renamed the Old Testament and the new addition called New Testament. The concept of the soul follows closely to the Hellenistic approach seen in Greek Philosophy: a mortal body and an immortal soul. At the time of death the soul leaves the body an empty shell. During resurrection of the body on Judgement day by God there was no need for an actual material body or skeleton due to the belief that God can materialize the form (O’Sullivan 2013). This dualistic approach creates a divide dynamic of good or evil. In this approach the soul is considered good and the body is evil because of its physical and taintable aspects. In Christianity, the body and the soul are in opposition since it is the body that was corrupted by sin (Rustomji 2003). The dual nature can be synonymous with the spiritual and the material, which is in direct contrast with how Islam views the relationship of body and soul.

The notion of an afterlife ties directly into the notion of salvation. Salvation, during this period, was measured by good deeds and obedience to the will of God. The Catholic Church of the Late Middle Ages put emphasis on works and observation of practices over belief (Tarlow 2013). This emphasises how the practitioner solidified their going into heaven, which differs

from the modern Protestant beliefs. The beliefs surrounding the afterlife were more inclined to the intercession of the immortal soul than the treatment of the physical mortal body. Those who were unrepentant were damned to Hell, while those who were saintly or died in martyrdom would proceed straight to Heaven. Yet, the average Christian who had a great deal of wrongdoing tainting their soul was expected to do time in Purgatory for their penance (O'Sullivan 2013). Purgatory, the theological belief in an intermediate state of suffering between Heaven and Hell with the sole purpose for the purifying souls before entry to heaven. It was in the 12th century where it was explicitly formulated and became a staple for the Catholic Church during the Medieval Period. With the belief in Purgatory came the creation of indulgences which lessened or completely eradicated the time a deceased Christian would spend in Purgatory. Papal bulls and chantries would have acted as vouchers for entrance into heaven, which gave those with money and influence easier access into Heaven.

The *Ars Moriendi*, the art of dying well, was a manual used for preparation of death that became popularized towards the end of the Middle Age (O'Sullivan 2013). For the Christian, dying well meant dying in such a way that it aligned with the will of God. It would be a moral death that allowed the soul easier release from the body and access to God. *Ars Moriendi* was easily accessible to the poor and illiterate since it was pressed imagery, while another text entitled *Tractatus Artis Bene Moriendi* (A Treatise on the Art of the Good Death) was a more elaborate written manual. During this period, death was seen as an enemy to man due to the fall in the Garden of Eden more so than a natural occurrence (Thornton, 2009). These manuals were an important piece of theological doctrine that addressed death and a guideline on how to deal with the aftermath of death for both the living and dying individual.

## b. Practices

Christian graveyards in the outer city limits were found in Santa Leocadia de Afuera and San Eugenio in Toledo. Originally, all graves were situated outside the city limits, but beginning in the Reconquista Period and gaining momentum throughout the Medieval Period there was a shift with Christians burying the dead inside city churchyards. During this transformative process, there was an emphasis on the individual struggle in achieving eternal life (Ruiz 2015). This resulted in the change of final resting location being associated closer to sacred places and with it a closer spatial association of burials to sacred places. The closer to the altar of a church, the closer an individual would be to God, therefore symbolically creating a spiritual hierarchy of space. Outer city cemeteries still continued to be used, even as inner city cemeteries grew, which caused a diversification of burial types from the 11th century well into the 19th century (Ruiz 2015). Another occurrence which is documented is the use of inner church graves which was the most popular in the 15th and 16th centuries. With the use of internal versus external space to bury the dead came multiple setbacks that did not persuade the church against the trend, the most deadly being the spread of disease and the lesser negative being the overconsumption of space, which led to burials overlapping. An example of this was seen in the San Bartolomé parish where older tombs were destroyed to make room for newer graves due to the saturation of burials at the site. This destruction is a key characteristic for this style of necropolis and was systematically recorded (Ruiz 2015). The overconsumption of space and lack of future space started the practice of secondary burial and the use of ossuaries.

There was a strict prohibition on cremation during this time except for instances of dire situations like the Black Death. Secondary burials, an elite practice, saw various body parts (heart, head, etc.) buried in multiple locations. In England nobles would have body parts

exclusively buried in priories and abbeys, not parishes, this could be an outcome of the nobility partaking in the practice of embalming (O'Sullivan 2013). This may have to do with the practice beginning one solely for the elite of society, with them having the financial means and influential pull for such burials, while the common folk had to be content with more mundane and simple burials. Two factors greatly influenced burials: which church and where in that church or holy ground.

Unlike the typology of the Jewish graves in this location, the 36 Christian graves found in a southern masonry wall in Santa Leocadia de Afuera had three differing styles. The three main groups are as follows: "brick anthropomorphic cysts, brick demarcated anthropomorphic tombs, and pits without any kind of demarcation" (Ruiz 2015). Brick anthropomorphic cysts were bricks built into a coffin-like shape which gave an appearance of the human body therefore being anthropomorphic. Brick demarcated anthropomorphic graves are similar to the previous style with the differentiating trait being noticeable boundary markers. Plain pits are simply a burial pit with no decorative features. The tomb only interred a single individual, their body placed in supine decubitus position, arms flexed over the chest or across the pelvis and with the head looking towards the sky, a similar head position seen in the Jewish graves. The orientation of the tombs are east-west. The graves in San Eugenio had similar findings in regards to grave typography, orientation, and body layout. In the St Nicholas Shambles of London, 81 one of the remains found were wrapped in shrouds and placed in coffins, but other notable ways of settling a corpse were recorded "stone pillows to cradle the head (9%), paving the grave base with crushed material like mortar, tile or stone (6%), forming a cyst with stone slabs (3%), filling the surrounding area around the body with charcoal was the least common method" (O'Sullivan 2013).

The Christian corpse was striped, washed, bound in a shroud, and placed directly in the ground or coffin. The bodies were oriented towards the front of the cemetery's church or the apse, with the face turned towards the church entrance and body parallel to the nave. There is an active attempt to keep the face fitted in such a way that once disarticulation occurs, it does not fall towards the east, in an attempt to avoid similarity to Muslim burial customs (Ruiz 2015). In other cemeteries outside Spain, orientation followed a similar pattern. If a parish burial the orientation of the body would align with the chapels or altars of the church. In England, very consistently, the feet of a decedent would point east and the head west in accordance to ideologies of the second coming of Christ occurring in the east and the events of Calvary facing west (Daniell 1998). The most common positions of the bodies found were supine, with the hand either placed over the pelvis, hands crossed at the chest or arms extended laterally and the body was orientated east-west with the head facing west toward the rising sun (Daniell 1998, O'Sullivan 2013). Convicted criminals and pagans were seen with a north-south orientation in comparison while some individuals were banned completely such as Jews and those excommunicated by the Church.

Throughout the Christian Nations, there is an evident wealth divide seen in the cemeteries regarding gravestones and grave goods. Marble statues, brass wall memorials were for those of higher standing and wooden crosses for those of the gentry. Another way to display wealth and stature was the hierarchy of burials. In London Grey Friars there is a hierarchy from East to West with Margaret of France buried closest to the altar, nobles and church higher ups buried closest to her and lastly the common folk being found farthest away in the naves (O'Sullivan 2013). For commoners, there was a lack of grave goods found, with the small exception of pebbles, coins or other small items being found in some graves, but those in higher position in the communities

(church officials and nobles) were often buried with items signifying their position or wealth (Daniell 1998).

There are various tomb styles within the 10 century. Some of the most elaborate have been found in Britain and France during the 10th and 14th century. The “hogback” tomb has been found in Yorkshire and the northwestern portion of Britain. This grave style was believed to represent the houses of the deceased. Another style, recumbent grave slab, found in Eastern England within churches are believed to be solely intended for the elites, and during the 12th century the slabs became an effigy for the deceased. Western Europe sees many tombs of effigy, where the social body of the individual is presented above another form of the body- emancipated and decayed. These are known as “transi-tombs” (O’Sullivan 2013). During the Reformation, many of the church's internal burial sites were destroyed, therefore the information found in regards to these elaborate markers are not extensive by any means.

### C. Islam

#### a. Beliefs

The last religion being discussed is Islam, the youngest of the Abrahamic monotheistic beliefs. The Qur’an and the Hadith (oral transmissions from Muhammad) rarely mentions burial, but Muslim religious law (fiqh) is the guiding principle in the burial customs, providing a manual of sorts for mortuary practices in Islam. With this guide as a principle to follow, there is no noticeable difference in mortuary practices between the denominations of Shia and Shunni (Petersen 2013).

In Islam there is a belief of a continuity of some aspect of a person after they die. *Ruh* (spirit) and *Nafs* (soul) are descriptions of the nonphysical aspects of a person, with *Ruh* referring to the breath of life that animates the biological body and the *Nahs* referring to the ethical,

rational character of the person (Sumegi 2013). At times these words can be used interchangeably, but due to the semantic debate on the concept it is difficult to say whether the words are one in the same for meaning. A traditional approach to *Ruh* and *Nafs* is based on Sura 39:42 which focuses on the difference between death and sleep; during sleep *Nafs* is taken and *Ruh* stays, but for death the inverse is true. *Nafs* dies with the body and *Ruh* is the portion of self taken. Another interpretation of *Nafs* and *Ruh*, developed in the 14th century by Ibn Qayyim-al Jawziya states that the answer is indefinite and the soul which is taken is recognizable by others (Sumegi 2013). There is no need for the focus to be concentrated on which part of the self dies and which continues on in the afterlife. Jawziya follows the notion of a soul's quasi-materiality rejecting the theory of a completely immaterial soul, "when the soul is separated from the body, it maintains its distinctiveness and individuality because in life body and soul interact and mold each other characteristics" (Sumgie 2013). This interpretation differs from Judaism and Christianity's concepts of personhood to a degree. A simple approach to the topic of personhood, that will be followed in this paper, is that *ruh* is the life source and *nafs* is the human essence.

Death is not the end of existence for a Muslim, but the end of a period of testing, which will be assessed in the grave and ultimately on Judgement Day. At the moment of death the deceased is visited by Izra'il, an angel of death, to remove the soul from the body. He is sometimes assisted by other angels, depending on how sinful the individual was during life. The more sin a person has the more difficult the process of removal. After death there is a trial period called Barzakh. During Barzakh two angles, Munkar and Nakir question the soul about their Islamic faith and depending on how the soul answers the questions of the grave, it will become pleasant or unpleasant until the final Judgment Day (Sumegi 2013). Like in Christianity, there is no known date to when this day will occur.

In the afterlife there are two places a soul may go: a garden paradise called *al-janna*, (Surah 76:12-21) or a fiery place of punishment called *jahannam* or *al-nar* (Surah 76:4). References to both the garden and fire are common within the Muslim theological texts. These locations are described in the Quran with exquisite material detail. The garden is filled with rivers of honey, milk and wine with roads paved with gold and silver. Jahannam is located below heaven having seven specific gates designated for specific sins and sinners (Ali 2001). These locations are described with great attention to material details and were to be understood tangibly by the believers. This was so the believers would be able to link their faith to their daily life (Rustomji 2003)

#### b. Practices

The Roman Circus, located in Toledo, Spain, was where 60 graves were found dating to the 8th-10th century. Out of those graves 52 were excavated and noted to have characteristics following that of known Muslim burials. Islamic cemeteries were positioned outside the city limits, near the city gates (*maqābir*) or main roadways, but there were internal burials known as intramural family (*rawda/riyad*) which have been noted (Ruiz 2015). In Toledo, there are three tomb typologies: the first is a simple pit, second a simple pit with a small side cave, and thirdly a simple pit divided into two levels. In simple pit burials, the deceased is laid down, covered with slabs, tiles and other materials in order to separate them from the earth of the burial pit and the pit is filled completely and demarcated by a head and foot stone (Ruiz 2015). The pits were dug narrow to reduce disarticulation of the remains during decomposition. An additional step to keep articulation of the body was the use of stones and pottery as wedges. The pit was sealed twice, underground and above ground with underground sealing materials were various including adobe, wooden planks, tiles and stones. The majority of burials in Toledo follow the Mālikī



traditionalist ritual, with the body oriented to the East and placed in “right lateral decubitus position, with the arms slightly flexed and crossed at the pelvis (Ruiz 2015). The other less common body position was a frontal supine decubitus position but with the face still turned Eastward. The bodies appeared to be buried in shrouds. The most common burial shroud was a simple white cloth, never red due to the association of blood and fire, but there have been historical instances of embellished shrouds seen during later periods (Petersen 2013). The body is fully covered at the time of burial. Cremation and embalming was a prohibited practice seen as a violation of the physical body. Graves were seen with only one body occupying them, except in the instances of shahid (martyrs), children, suicides or plague victims. Typography of tomb cover are as follows: stone slabs, curved tiles or small rough stones and brick and wood.

In 2010, an excavation of a cemetery in Tauste (Zaragoza, Spain) revealed a cemetery holding several skeletons with Muslim characteristics, suggesting a stable Muslim population live in the area during the time frame of the 8th to the 10th centuries (Guede 2017). The remains were laid perpendicular to the direction of Mecca (aligned SW-NE), placed on their right side with the face set towards Mecca. The orientation of the deceased would be towards Mecca. Some variations have been noted that change the orientation of the graves such as family groupings, cemetery topography, the angle of the sun and the believed direction of Mecca (Petersen 2013).

A site in Nîmes, France has three skeletal remains which clearly had Muslim burial and have a date range between 7th and 8th century CE, suggesting that the remains found are indications this is the earliest known Muslim cemetery in France (Gleize 2016). This discovery reveals just how far northern Al-Andalus advanced. The remains were buried in typical *al-lahd* burials with the body having evidence of being wrapped and the upper and lower limbs extended in supine position (Gleize 2016). The body faced to the Southeast towards Mecca. In the site of

Plaza del Castillo, a Islamic cemetery dated to the 8th century, in Pamplona, there was indication of *al-shaqq* burials being used more readily than the *al-lahd* burials (Gleize 2016). The *Qabr* (grave) had two traditional layouts: *shiqq/shaqq* and *lahd*. The *shiqq* style had a prominent trench-like feature in construction while *lahd* style has side niche features in construction. *Shuqq* burials where the body is laid in the trench, it is covered with various objects like reeds or blanks, while in *lahd* burials the niche is sealed with a wall formed out of non fired bricks (Petersen 2013). No coffin is used in either burial style, the body stays in contact with the earth, however the face of the deceased should never touch the soil. Religious reasoning for interment style involves the judgment by *Munkar* and *Nakir* that occurs within the grave. Therefore, the deceased must have enough room to sit upright during the judgement (Petersen 2013).

Grave decorations were discouraged, seen as attempts to dissuade the prospect of worshipping the dead that may have occurred. The graves were simple with the guiding principle that there should be no elaborate construction and that the graves should not be lifted off the ground (Petersen 2013). This could also have been a way for Muslim believers to differentiate between Christian and Jewish burials that used sepulchers. There were various styles of grave markers, older styles are *sanam* (low humps of earth on a grave to counter the sinking of the ground during backfill), premodern are simple headstones typically with no inscription and a *kerb* stone outline of the gravesite. Slightly sophisticated gravestones are central grave covers built with plaster, stone or brick and the sophisticated ones are rectangular cenotaphs sometimes with elaborate headstones and footstones (Petersen 2013).

In Islam, there are four steps to the burial ritual. Wash the body at least three times in water and scented materials, dress the body with the appropriate number of clothing articles, pray the proper funeral prayers and bury the deceased with their head to Mecca (Hirsch, 2012). The

burial would happen rapidly after death, within a 24 hour period.

## VI. Results

How people dispose of their dead may be very similar cross culturally, but the symbolism behind the methods do vary. The existence of cemeteries can support the inference of shared cultural traditions (Chapman 2013). For Judaism, Christianity and Islam, cemeteries have the key material features in understanding how the religion embodied their beliefs surrounding death and the dead. Each religion had unique characteristics especially regarding how the grave was to be structured, but an overarching similarity can be seen in the reasoning behind many of the methods of mortuary ritual.

To answer the question: Is there a correlation between the religious belief of a soul and the afterlife with the mortuary practices of body adornment, grave orientation and the internal/external grave structure within the religion? Yes, there is to a degree. The Torah, Bible, and Quran do not have explicit verses detailing how to dispose of the dead, but there are additional manuals and guides to rectify that void. These religious guides, the taraha, ars moriendi, and the fiqh have one goal which is to give the deceased a secure way to enter their paradise which in turn allows the griever one final duty to fulfill to their lost loved ones. The beliefs held in the holy scripture for Jews, Christians and Muslims are embodied in their practices and as such can be seen in the material culture of the mortuary context.

The second question: Is there a pattern of similarities of the above mortuary beliefs and correlating practices across the three monotheistic religions during the Medieval Period has a more inadequate answer. It depends on the practice in question and which religion we are

comparing. Jewish and Muslim practices have more of a similarity thought the period with each other than with Christianity, especially when it involves the social hierarchy.

There was a common theme of a modest burial, with the exception of Christian nobility and church leaders. Common burials were recorded with no or very few grave goods, but church officials and aristocrats would be buried with items that signified their status. Modest dress with white shrouds for burial clothing as well was common across the religions. The burial pits had morphology variation with the Muslim graves being elaborate involving the horizontal or vertical niches and the Jewish burials having a brick lucillo. Christian burial pits were originally modest in built, but as the Medieval Period progressed the use of coffins and other enclosures soon came into practice creating a vast variation in types of enclosure styles.

Early medieval cemeteries were found on the outside of city limits for all religions, Christian cemeteries began to be moved inward inside churches and parishes during the middle of the Medieval Period. The orientation of the body during burial had a similar theme in all religions, having the head of the individual facing towards a holy landmark(s). Jews would be buried in an orientation towards Israel, Christians would be buried facing the altar of a church or towards Calvary and Muslims would face Mecca. This is a physical embodiment of the beliefs of resurrection. The believers would be facing the direction believed to be the origin of their religion and in a sense they would be looking forward to their deity once they were gathered from their graves during the final judgment. Each cemetery was created by the living and thus has significant influence and gives a particular insight into changing beliefs and thus practices for the time period in what we can call the process of selective remembering and forgetting (Williams 2013).

There was an adamant attempt within the religions to differentiate between each other with how the body was buried, especially within the scope of Christianity with the use of stones to keep the skull from falling to the side during disarticulation and to keep the face lifted heavenward. Some Muslim burials were the only ones where the body of the dead would be buried on their side in order to have the face continually in the direction of Mecca. And in Jewish burials there was a desperate attempt to order the practice of intercutting so very common in Christian cemeteries.

Though the concepts of a soul and an afterlife seem to be universal, there are several ways to express the ideas which are unique to each religion, even those such as the monotheistic religions. In Judaism and Islam, there is not simply a soul and a body, there is the person's essence, their life force and their body. For Christianity there is a harsh divide between material and spiritual which is seen in how the soul and the body are viewed. "Islamic eschatology provides an after world, while a Christian eschatology describes an afterlife" (Rustomji 2003).

Rituals and practices are the physical mediums of the objectification of nonphysical beliefs. The context in which these rituals are performed create both object and subject by the process of objectification (Miller 2021). In regards to mortuary practices how the normative is internalized and externalized may be indirectly influenced by the cultures held religions beliefs. The nonphysical elements of a person such as their soul is objectified during the details of the burial process. This can be seen in Muslim burials where the presence of niches to accommodate the spiritual judgement by a higher spiritual form are common, or the presence of a hierarchy in Christian burials in churches where the closer the body is to the altar the closer the soul is to God. For believers this external symbolism is a direct reflection of an internal narrative revolving around how the deity and believer interact beyond the physical plain.

Human remains are the preserved physical remains of human beings rather than continuing to be human beings themselves, defining our pattern of responsibilities towards them. There is a social responsibility that the living feel compelled to complete when involving the deceased. The deceased is more than a body decomposing in a grave, they exert an agency like the living. They are a catalyst for spiritual presence and cultural memory (Robb 2013). The body, when alive, has dual potential to be a physical body or a conceptual thing, a subject of social relations, but after death the body is only a thing, an object of those very social relations.

## VIII Conclusion

Due to the linear growth of the three religions and them branching from the previous versions of itself, there are many similarities with what and how they believe. This can be seen in the concept of a soul and the three locations of an afterlife.. Many other religions do have similar concepts, but what makes the Abrahamic monotheistic religions unique is there monotheistic belief in a single deity. Due to that based concept there is the necessary need to fulfill steps to obtain salvation, typically involving rebuking other religions and strictly adhering to the rules set about in the theological doctrines. But what happens when the doctrine has no set guidelines for the disposal of bodies? Believers satisfy those gaps with ways they deem are a proper fulfillment of scripture ideologies about death and the afterlife. How they are satisfied can be seen in the technologies of remembrance also known as the cemeteries and graves.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam may not be the oldest religions of the world, but they are old enough to have changed throughout their existence as practitioners move and spread throughout the globe. The versions of these religions will be quite different in the Medieval Period as compared to the more contemporary versions. By viewing Jews, Christians and

Muslims during the transformative period of death with the lens of embodiment and materiality theory it can be noted that the religions embody their respective beliefs to a certain degree of similarities in cultural material, but overall have significant differences.

In Judaism and Islam, the soul and the body do not have a shape separation, there is no hostility seen in the material. In Christianity there is a battle warring between the soul and the body always. The practice in Islam where the soul is given tangible room to move in the grave is a physical representation of that belief.

Hell was a place for souls to resign, a place that was not heaven, the place of the divine, or earth, the place for the living. There was a subconscious change in belief, an urge for a better environment to rest than the earthly plane or the blank existence of hell, which results in the notion that those who are morally sound will be granted reprieve in heaven with the divine, while those immoral will be punished in a place far removed from paradise. The supplementary guides to burial rites and dying well, there is a desire for the dying to be welcomed into paradise, with as little time in the intermediate location as possible. With the orientation of the body during burial we see the physical representation of the belief in a resurrection during the period of judgment. The body is positioned to be facing the place for which their deity will arrive once more. Jews face Israel, Christians face Calvary, and Muslims face Mecca. They are physically looking forward to the physical afterlife that they spiritually believe in.

Death is a troubling experience for many people. Even now there are people afraid of the finality of death. However, religions ease that anxiety and the mortuary rituals that are completed at the time of death transform both the living and the dead. Allowing the materiality of the ritual with all the decisions regarding dress, grave goods and grave structure to be physically embodiments of the spiritually held beliefs. This allows people tangible evidence of their beliefs,

aiding in the healing process of their grief and solidifying their beliefs in a repetitive process until finally it is their turn to leave this world and enter into the afterworld.

#### IV. Call for Further Action

The paper is only the beginning into understanding the patterns seen in religious preservation. The paper only focuses on a small sample size of the Abrahamic monotheistic religions within a broad time frame. For future papers there should be a continuation of specified religion to understand the similarities and differences to each other and speculate whether or not religions will continue to evolve while maintaining the core of their beliefs or if the future of humanities' religious beliefs will slowly cingulate into an unknown world view with multiple inspirations from all current and past religions. There is a dire need for more work analyzing non-Christian graves in Europe, especially since there is a relatively small sample sizes of Muslim and Jewish graves for the Medieval Period despite written histories documenting the presence of such groups.



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