

Icarus June

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Households in the Ancient World

Essay 1 - Practice Theory

Bourdieu's theory of practice is one theory that archaeologists use to assess the usage and meaning of items and structures of the past and try to understand the way that ancient societies operated. The theory argues that instead of only observing the past from either a theoretical or a methodological standpoint, it is important to utilize both to better understand the past and make sense of how people lived and interacted. While culture shapes people, the people do the same to the culture, having an influence on the world around them with the things they create and do. Looking at the people who made objects that are recovered is just as important as examining the objects themselves. The theory makes use of one important concept along with other things; the habitus, which is the structure of the society and how people interact with each other and the things around them based on past experiences. This is important to understanding any kind of society and why they operate the way that they do, as reactions are an intricate part of human nature, and in turn it makes it easier to understand the reasoning behind the creation of relics recovered at archeological dig sites and interpret recreations of ancient homes and graves.

One of the many graves that has been excavated is Tomb 11 in Kalavassos. The tomb has been reconstructed to get a sense of the layout of the tomb without seeing it in person and allow others to see what the interior would have looked like in order to examine the tomb and its contents. Using an image of this reconstruction, it is possible to examine the tomb using

Bourdieu's theory of practice and make interpretations of how Bronze Age households may have operated. The tomb was built to be able to fit multiple bodies, inferred by the reconstruction of a woman on one end of the tomb and the image of two human-like skulls on the other, along with reading over records of the tomb's excavation. Having multiple bodies in a tomb can be indicative of the importance of family during this time, and the commonplace use of one tomb for multiple family members to have the family buried near each other. Excavations of the tomb found a total of seven bodies, comprising of both women and children. (Todd, 339) Burying women and children together was not an uncommon practice, seen quite frequently in excavated tombs of this time period and area. The bodies of Tomb 11 were located on benches made of cut stone on opposite ends of the tomb, the deceased placed together but elevated from the floor of the grave. Placing the bodies on an elevated surface is common, possibly to keep a level of respect for the dead and not placing them directly onto the floor.

There are a number of pots, jewelry, and bones in the tomb along with the bodies, most of these items intact to some level. It is one of the few tombs in this area to have been found unlooted, and contained objects from all across the Mediterranean. (Fisher, 480) The variety of items in the tomb is indicative of trade between cities on Cyprus and throughout the Mediterranean, and shows that the family was able to afford these imports as well as deposit them into a grave site instead of continuing to use them after the passing of their family members. This variety and the value of these different items indicates that the family buried in this tomb was on the wealthier end of people living in this area. The tomb being located near other looted tombs is another indicator of this, as the looted tombs likely had similarly valuable items stored inside. The area the tomb itself is in has been discovered to be a wealthier area of Cyprus, and any interpretations of the style of life and house would be practices conducted in the

wealthier parts of ancient civilization. The tombs have also been noted to be on the more sophisticated side of construction and contents, due to the import locations of the grave goods and the prestige and size of the building that the tomb was discovered near. (Todd, 339) There were many types of pottery recovered as part of these grave goods, among which were types that were indicative of the custom of drinking parties, so entertainment of guests was a factor in the lives of these people. Due to the fact that they were wealthy, this factor of entertainment makes sense as they would have likely wanted to keep good relations and business with the other people living in this area. Golden jewelry was also discovered on the bodies, another indicator of the wealth of the deceased and their family. (Todd, 338)

While examining the physical goods and the bodies recovered in the tomb gives us an idea of the class standing of the deceased and the types of trade and wealth they participated in, it is also important to analyze the goods and the people through the lens of theory to get an idea of how they would be interacting with each other and the world around them. The unspoken social rules that these people abided by and influenced are just as important as what they physically left behind. Due to their wealth, it is very possible that the family that was buried in the tomb had a decent level of influence on the society around them. The recovery of items related to drinking parties is another indicator of their placement within the social part of the society around them, as hosting parties like that and engaging with other families was important to upkeep the reputation of the family as well as branch out to get to know other people that lived around them. The clear engagement they have with trade and the outside world can also be used to get an idea of how they used imported goods and the value attributed to them. As one of the richest tombs in this area of Cyprus, the contents of Tomb 11 were very clearly viewed as valuable. Including imports from other areas of the Mediterranean is a clear indicator that these people valued the

creations and goods of other civilizations, to the point of finding them important and expensive enough to bury them in one of the tombs of this area.

Bourdieu's theory brings up concepts along with habitus, one of which is the capital. He argued that having similar preferences as others helps establish one's place in society, but also makes the class divide easier to see. The obvious wealth of this tomb makes it clear what the societal standing of the deceased is. Considering the part of the theory that speaks about the divide between classes, it is important to remember that the lifestyle and possessions of this tomb would be very different from other tombs from lower classes, and should not be used to draw wide assumptions about the people of the area and their home traditions.

Observing a tomb from the past can yield a good amount of information about the people who were laid to rest in the tomb and about the society that they lived in. The wealth of a tomb and its contents can point to the trade routes of the area and the society that these people lived in. Making use of Bourdeiu's theory along with surface observations of this tomb can better garner an understanding of the people who were buried within and draw better conclusions about the society that they lived in.

Bibliography:

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