

Ancestors

Ethnographies and archaeological studies suggest that ancestors were important members of the community in particular because the legitimised land rights. Ancestors legitimise lineages, status and authority. In many ways, the dead lose their individuality as they join the realms of the ancestors.

Ethnographies and archaeology also provide evidence for different ways in which people interacted with their ancestors:

- Commemoration / elaborate tombs
 - Revisiting the graves at set times to perform rituals, which ensure the ancestors' beneficence
 - Feasting (with the dead)
 - Manipulation of the body
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1. Think about how relevant these studies are to our (western) engagement with our own dead.
 2. Outline the similarities and differences there are between our own practices/rituals and the cult of the ancestors? Think about the following:
 - a. Do we consider our dead as ancestors (within the concept of the ancestors discussed by anthropologists – i.e. still a vital force within the community)?
 - b. How do we commemorate the dead? And why?
 - c. Why do we have bounded cemeteries – does this fit with the notion of legitimising the inheritance of wealth/resource (and in particular territorial resources)?
 3. How useful are these ethnographies for interpreting archaeological remains?