


An African-study of the contribution of Neanderthals to funeral rituals

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Neanderthals are at the moment regarded as the originators of funeral rituals. The connection of the Neanderthals to Africa is understudied and in most cases not conclusive yet Africans practice funeral rituals as if it is the primary reason for their existence. Considering the importance of funerals to the African man and woman, there is a need to understand why there is lesser interest or lesser research on the connection between Neanderthals and the early humans who lived in Africa. Using references from researches carried out about funeral items found in Neanderthal graves and citing Yoruba burial rites as an example of a funeral ritual, I investigated the role of Africa in initiating the afterlife beliefs in addition to funeral rituals. The primary purpose of this research is to clearly show the gap created in the study about how funeral rituals started in Africa. The researcher observed that the contribution of early humans to the study of human development in Africa is understudied.

Contribution: There is a general view that the Neanderthals contributed so much to the civilization of modern humans. The theories pertaining to the origins of funeral rituals are at present attributed to them. The archaeological or paleontological remains of Neanderthals have not been found in Africa. Many questions are raised regarding the role of Africa in initiating and spreading beliefs that pertained to funerals. Scholars in the fields of anthropology, archaeology and comparative religion will benefit from this research because it raises questions on the need to debate the contribution of Africa to the study of funeral rituals.

Keywords: Africa; ancient Egypt; funeral; Neanderthals; rituals; Yorubas.

Introduction

Funerals are important practices or activities performed by people of various cultures around the world. Funeral activities might include mourning, dancing, burial services, incantations, recitations, memorisation, prayers and many more (Nielsen et al. 2020:1; cf. Jindra & Noret 2011:1–2). In simple terms, funerals refer to all forms of activities performed by the bereaved to bury the dead. In most cases, funerals are performed in honour of the dead. Funeral rituals might be completed within a short period of time and sometimes over some months or years. It is a global practice by various ethnic groups, and while there are similarities in funerals from one culture unto another, yet in many other cultures, the practices differ. Major factors that determined to the kind of funeral given to a deceased are sex, age, the cause of death and the social role of the deceased before he or she died. These factors determined whether the deceased could be qualified as an ancestor or not (Nwokoha 2020:68).

Burial rites are some of the significant examples of funeral rites. Africans do all that they could to make sure that they give their loved ones befitting burial rites (cf. Cavendish 1977:21). The ancient Egyptians, for example, mummified. They built larger graves, mourned and performed many other rituals as part of the funeral practices of sending the dead to the world of the dead (Agai 2013a:3–7). The bereaved performed funeral rites as a sign of respect for the dead and also in order to aid the journey of the dead to the otherworld. Befitting funerals rites helped the dead to have little or no difficulty in his or her journey to the otherworld (Agai 2015a:2–5).¹ The journey starts at birth and dead is not

1. For example, the ancient Egyptians buried their dead with the *Book of the Dead* inserted either in the coffin or in the grave. It was a major part of their burial ritual (Hubert 1996:39). According to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, death was regarded as a journey that required the deceased to pass through perilous times during his or her journey. They also believed that the *Ba* or *soul* of a deceased was expected to travel to paradise after bodily death through the routes in the netherworld. The Book described how the *Ba* was expected to travel up on a boat to the sea to meet with Osiris but on passing through the Milky Way, the soul would have to encounter turbulent and difficult events. For example, the *Ba* would meet monsters and deadly creatures that would torment him or her, but the *Book of the Dead* had secrets on how the deceased soul could escape from these monstrous beings. On calling the names of each of the monsters as written in the *Book of the Dead*, the deceased would be set free. Finally, the *Ba* would have to come across 42 celestial deities who would lead it through seven gates with a gate keeper, watcher and a herald at each gate. The *Ba* would have to call the names of these keepers, watchers and heralds from the *Book of the Dead*. When the *Ba* successfully called the names of these guardian deities, the *Ba* would then be directed into the presence of Osiris indicating that salvation had been gained by the deceased (Turner 1993:13). In this research, the ancient Egyptians are regarded as Africans because of the location of Egypt in Africa and for other reasons that connected the ancient Egyptians with Africans (Agai 2013b:90–101).

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regarded as the end of the journey but a transition or a continuation of the journey from one level of existence into another (Nwokoha 2020:73; cf. Bond 1992:3–4; Lawuyi 1998:372; Mbiti 1977:110–111).

African people such as the Yorubas and the ancient Egyptians had high regard for the dead. In fact, they lived their lives as though their main purpose of existence was to please the dead. The view according to which ancestors exist and that they are supreme over humans and nature and that they communed with the gods made it so easy for Africans to respect the dead (Adedeji 1983:117). Funerals are some of the practices that determine the level of respect the bereaved have for the dead, especially the dead who are regarded as ancestors.² Despite the high regard that Africans have for funerals and for the dead, the modern study of human origins and the origins of rituals seemed to exclude the early humans in Africa as a major contributor to the study of the funerals or major player in the study of the origins of funerals. The study of the origins of funeral as a ritual has been attributed to the Neanderthals, and this is so because a number of evidence has emerged according to which there is little or no evidence that other early humans such as *Homo ergaster* or *Homo erectus* and others practiced funeral rituals. These early humans mentioned with the exception of the Neanderthals used Acheulean items as a sign of development in their time, yet there seemed to be no evidence that they carefully buried their dead. As some of them lived around 1.2 to 1.8 million years ago, it would be difficult at this stage of study to ascertain whether they carefully buried their dead or not (Ladan 2016:4; Shaw 2004:26). This is unlike the Neanderthals only ceased to exist about 40000 to 100000 years ago (Condemi et al. 2021:1).

In addition, the Neanderthals whose roles in Africa are understudied are regarded as the originators of many rituals among modern humans including funeral rituals (Constable 1973:97). Nielsen et al. (2020:1–2) observed that '[t]here is a large, if disparate, body of archaeological literature discussion specific instantiations of symbolic material culture and the possibility of ritual practices in Neanderthal population'. The study about the contribution of Neanderthals and their roles in connection with the African people is ongoing yet; in most cases, it seemed understudied.

More so, as the study of the Neanderthals are mostly connected to Eurasia and the Middle East (Akst 2019:1–2), it becomes pertinent to inquire about why Africans value extravagant and complicated funeral rituals either equally or differently from the people of Eurasia or the Middle East? Could it be possible that other early humans in Africa initiated their own funeral rituals or that they learnt the rituals from Neanderthals? Should the Neanderthals be designated as the originators of all forms of rituals including funeral rituals or other early humans need to be considered in this study of the origins of funeral rituals? The purpose of this research is to:

²To be welcomed as an ancestor, one has to live a good life, have children, should not die a premature death or a 'bad death' and must be given a befitting burial rite. Continual food and water offerings to the dead also contributed to determining whether the deceased could continue to be an ancestor (Awolalu 1979:54–55).

- Elucidate on the practices and the importance of funeral rituals, especially among the African people such as the Yorubas of Nigeria.
- Highlight the contribution of the Neanderthals to the study of the origins of funeral rituals (cf. Bautista, Escobar & Miranda 2017:995–1007).
- Encourage the archaeological study of human origins in Africa likewise the contribution of early humans in Africa to the development of funeral rituals.

Funeral rituals among the Yorubas of Nigeria

Funeral rituals are carried out differently by different cultures in Africa. There is no doubt that modernity has an influence on the practices of some of the traditions. In modern society, reason, rationale and individuals' quest for the expression of both group and individual freedoms are paramount (Hopkins 2002). In other words, people in some cases questioned the reality of the afterlife similar to the Egyptian Period of Decline when mummification was abandoned because of skepticism in the reality of the afterlife (cf. Murnane 1992:35).

Notwithstanding the foregoing, in most African societies, the people uphold their beliefs in a life after death. For example, the Yorubas like many other Africans believe that death is a journey and that during the journey, food, water, the remembrance of the dead together with regular maintenance of the grave site are vital in aiding the dead towards his or her journey in the afterlife (Awolalu 1979:57; Strong 2011).³ Holes are left in graves so that the dead might continue to be fed, and this is also a practice that helped the dead to journey peacefully to the otherworld (Lucas 1948:253). Generally, after the death of a loved one, especially when the deceased died a 'good death' (dying at old age, not by accident or any form of a natural disaster), the Yorubas normally wrap the corpse of the deceased in a mat to be buried, while others design expensive caskets or coffins (Awolalu 1979:172).

In addition, the family members of the deceased would normally contribute money and other goods such as food and water to support all the burial arrangements of a deceased loved one. The community participates in all burial processions. The immediate family members of the deceased are expected to wash the corpse with soap and a sponge, after which the corpse would be clothed with beautiful apparel bought by the children of the deceased. If the corpse is not properly washed with a medicated soap, then the ancestors would not accept the corpse into their ancestral family and the deceased becomes a wandering ghost (Awolalu 1979:5). The Yorubas use medicated soap for different reasons, which include curative (to cure the deceased from any form of ailment) and magical (to enable the deceased to find his or

³The Yorubas are also found in Benin Republic, Nigeria, Togo and some other parts of West Africa. They value their culture in high esteem. In many Yoruba societies, the traditional religious beliefs are synchronised with either Islam or Christianity, thus they never despise their traditional funeral practice because for them funeral is a religious and godly practice (Agai 2015b:430–441).

her way through to other ancestors) (Idowu 1962:172). The emphasis is on the honour, respect and cleanliness for the dead.

The first-born son of the deceased is expected to participate in the washing of the corpse and is the first person to pour water on the corpse for washing. The idea is that the first son would be the deceased's successor so there is a need for him to be fully involved in every part of the burial ritual. For a female corpse, the hair is sometimes plaited and for a male corpse, the hair and moustache are shaved before burial. After the corpse has been washed, it lies-in-state in the sitting room and music, dancing and feasting commence. The music could be played for many days and for longer hours per day (Awolalu 1979:55). During the lying-in-state, the deceased's clothing is changed at different stages and with each change, the clothes become more beautiful as prepared by the bereaved in the honour of the deceased. In this way, the Yorubas preserved their corpse for up to 2 days before burial. One major reason for not burying the deceased immediately after death is to allow the deceased to stretch his back and have the last rest on earth (Awolalu 1979:55–56).

Another reason for preserving the corpse, according to the Yorubas, is to keep the ghost of the deceased safe otherwise the ghost could be seized by roaming evil spirits. The relatives of the deceased immediately offer a sacrifice to propitiate the evil spirits, and when the corpse is buried, a fowl, called *Adireiranna*, 'the fowl that buys the road', would be offered as a sacrifice that would open up the road of the afterlife for the deceased. The sacrificed fowl⁴ guides the deceased to arrive at the world of the dead successfully (Ellis 1966:128).

In the past, the Yorubas would dig their graves inside a deceased's room particularly if the deceased died at an old age but now graves are dug in family compounds (Johnson 1921:137). They still prefer to bury closer to home where they can easily have access to the dead. If a deceased is buried too far from his or her house, they think that the deceased will be denied food, water and the veneration that would please the deceased. Sacrifices, libations, the breaking of kola nuts and praying to the deceased cannot be properly performed if the corpse is buried far away from the family house, thus corpses are generally buried not far away from the family houses (Awolalu 1979:55–56). For the Yorubas who live outside of Yorubaland, it is preferred that they be buried in Yorubaland except where the bereaved cannot afford to pay for the transportation of the deceased body to Yorubaland.

Furthermore, on the day the corpse is to be buried, people from the deceased's community gather together at the graveside to show their last respects for the deceased. According to some aspects of the Yoruba tradition, the deceased would preferably be buried in the evening. The corpse is placed on a couch where dancing and music continue, and just before sunset, the celebrations are stopped and the corpse is wrapped in a beautiful heavy

4.The fowl seemed to serve the same function as the Egyptian Book of the Dead in terms of directing the deceased into an expected afterlife.

cloth, covered with a special mat and taken in a solemn procession to the grave where the corpse is carefully laid into the grave (Adamolekun 2001:612–613). Just before the grave is covered, the children of the deceased and close relatives each pour sand into the grave and pray loudly asking the deceased and other previous ancestors not to leave them (the bereaved) alone but to guide them (Awolalu 1979:55–56).

The deceased is then buried together with his or her beautiful clothing, money, pieces of silver and anything the deceased required during his or her journey of death. In the past, slaves, wives and loyalists of kings were buried together with the king (similar to the Egyptian burial rituals) so that the king's loyalists would continue to serve the deceased king in the world of the dead (Awolalu 1979:56–57).⁵ This has prompted the need to make larger graves and bigger coffins to accommodate other objects that the deceased required during his or her journeys. The Yorubas do not believe in leaving space for air penetration on coffins; they use clothes donated by family members and friends to cover any space in the coffin. In the absence of clothes, seeded cotton was used to fill up the coffin. The Yorubas have a superstition that in the course of filling the coffin, one might catch a glimpse of the world of the dead (Johnson 1921:137).

In the case of burial pertaining to a deceased woman, she would be buried with necklaces, earrings, clothing materials, food and utensils, and a hunter is buried with his hunting weapons. However, when the practice of burying kings together with their subjects stopped, animals were immolated and their blood sprinkled into the grave of the deceased (Awolalu 1979:56–57). The Yorubas believe that burial goods are needed to aid the journey of the deceased, and they think that an individual's social position on earth would continue to be maintained in the afterlife (Lucas 1948:256–257). Adamolekun presented the Yorubas as a people who have very elaborate burial ceremonies. The aim of the various ceremonies is to curry favour from the deceased who may become an ancestor if qualified. Adamolekun (2001) wrote:

Funeral ceremonies are very important to the Yoruba and are traditionally elaborate for good deaths. A good death is one that comes after a person has attained a ripe old age.... Apart from the age of the deceased and social and religious affiliations, the circumstances and perceived cause of death dictate the funeral. In addition, the ceremonies reflect the society's belief about rebirth and the life envisaged for the dead in the afterlife. The Yorubas believe that individuals live, depart and are reborn and that every individual comes from either the gods or one's ancestors on the mother's or the father's side. (p. 610)

With these type of laborious funeral rituals, the Yorubas attached to their deceased loved ones, it is pertinent to inquire how they came about these rituals. Most importantly, who initiated the ideas of funerals among Africans and especially

5.Evidence for the burial of a deceased with his or her loved ones in particular are today scanty in Yorubaland.

the Yorubas?⁶ Morality, an individual's social role, gender, weather pattern and age are factors that determined the level of ceremony linked to a deceased funeral after death. Good moral behaviour exhibited by an individual suggests that the individual adhered to the wishes of the gods by obeying societal norms and laws. These are vital to avoid 'bad death' or death by witchcraft or immorality or accident. In other words, the religious beliefs of a person are vital in determining the type of funeral he or she could be accorded (Nwokoha 2020:74–76).

The problem

It is important to note that Africa is a unique continent with contradictory histories depending on the author's perspective. The views about Africa often depend on the author and his or her perception about the continent. While some uphold the continent in high esteem because of its contribution to global history, others do not (Reynolds 2011:ix). In addition, it will be unfair to the wholeness of research to conclude or to ignore the fact that the previous stereotypic perceptions about the African people by some non-Africans did not have a serious effect on the mental thinking of some Africans and non-African alike (Connah 1987:6).

In the 19th century and after the 19th century, Africans were perceived as less-humans or as inferior people in comparison to their European or Asian or their Arab counterparts. The renowned biologist Carl Linnaeus, in his classification of species, identified Africans as inferior people while the Arabs with dark or black skin were regarded as less human (Skinner 2001:42). The separation of the Egyptians or some North Africans from other Africans by many Eurocentric scholars and archaeologists is because of the perception according to which other Africans are not civilised (Adamo 2010:475; Folorunso 2003:84; O'Connor & Reid 2003:1–5). These types of derogatory classification of Africans have affected the interpretation of some aspects of the history of the African people.

Even the contentious search for the origin of the name 'Africa' itself could be linked to the inferiority connotation of Africans. The Latin *aprica* in connection with the origin of the name Africa means sunny (Reynolds 2011:xi). The Arabs, the ancient Greeks and the people who lived in the Mediterranean shared a perception according to which the hotter or sunny the climatic condition of a place, the less civilised its inhabitants are. They regarded Africa as a region with a hot climatic condition (Hunwick n.d.:7–8; Sanders 1969:521). The Phoenician term for Africa is *afar*, which means dust is still linked to inferiority (cf. Reynolds 2011:xi).

This background is necessary for this research because the ideas pertaining to the origins of funerals or the afterlife beliefs and practices are surrounded by the controversy according to which Africa played no role or played only a

⁶It is not known precisely when the Yorubas began to believe in the afterlife. The similarities of their burial rituals with those of the ancient Egyptians made some scholars to think that the Yoruba afterlife beliefs might have originated from Egypt (Agai 2013a:1–7).

little role in the search for the origins of rituals among early humans. The idea is that Neanderthals lived in Eurasia, and the view according to which they interbred with other early humans in Africa is debated. While it is believed that Neanderthal DNA genomes are found in modern humans including or excluding the African people, there is so much uncertainty in scholarship about the connection of the Neanderthals with Africans (cf. Curnoe 2015:1).

In most cases, Neanderthals' ancestors are said to have left Africa to become Neanderthals in Eurasia or the Middle East, so Africa might be called a home for Neanderthals but likely not where they developed their instincts and other survival techniques. Their connection is associated with Eurasia than with Africa '... that 1.5% – 2% of the genome of living non-Africans was inherited from Neanderthals' (Curnoe 2015:2). Also, knowledge about the contemporaries of the Neanderthals that existed in Africa is understudied or not popular:

Most Neanderthal variants exist in only around 2 percent of modern people of Eurasian descent. But some archaic DNA is much more common, an indication that it was beneficial to ancient humans as they moved from Africa ... which Neanderthals had called home for more than 300 000 years. (Akst 2019:3)

Dr. Sarah Akka, a renowned neuroscientist who studied at the London School of Medicine, has great interest in the study of DNA, which is of the view that researches about the role of the Neanderthals are ongoing and any conclusion made now should rather be kept open for further study. She said that the most recent studies about African DNA sequences indicate that Africans do have Neanderthal DNA sequences (S. Akka pers. comm., 15 July 2022). Her view is shared by Curnoe (2015) who observed that:

[I]n Africa, interbreeding with archaic species has left genetic signatures in the genomes of some living sub-Saharan populations. Roughly two percent of the DNA of these people derives from archaic species as a result of mating that occurred around 35 000 years ago. (p. 2)

The main message conveyed in this research is that there is a need to do further study on the contemporaries of the Neanderthals that existed in Africa and also on the connection between the Neanderthals in Eurasia and their relationships with Africa. This will help immensely to add knowledge on how Africans initiated or learned their afterlife beliefs and funeral rituals.

The origins of funeral rituals

Neanderthals are early humans that are regarded as the originators of funerals or afterlife beliefs among both early and modern humans. This designation of the Neanderthals as the initiators of funerals or the afterlife beliefs is generally accepted because Neanderthals are currently the only form of the most ancient humans in whose graves burial items were found. MacGregor noticed that the Neanderthals are among the early humans found to have buried their loved

ones with food and flint implements, which suggest their beliefs according to which death is not the end of life (MacGregor 1992:55–56). In his article that pertained to the origins of the afterlife in ancient Egypt, Agai stated that researchers generally accept the view according to which the Neanderthals originated the afterlife beliefs among modern humans (Agai 2013c:40–66).

More so, Caldwell and Gyles said that different archaeologists around the world have found various evidences of burial rituals in various graves of many Neanderthals around the world (Caldwell & Gyles 1966:9). In a similar vein, Hultkrantz attributed the origins of funerals to Neanderthals because of the fact that burial items have been found in various Neanderthal graves (Hultkrantz 1982:24). Constable (1973) made it clear that the Neanderthals were the first humans to have conceived the ideas of the afterlife because of the funeral rituals they conducted in their graves:

By now, discovery after discovery has shown that these ancient people [Neanderthals] are due the honour accorded human pioneers, for they inaugurated some of the activities and beliefs that are considered most characteristic of mankind. The Neanderthal conceived life after death. (p. 97)

Neanderthals buried their loved ones in well-excavated graves. They buried with food items near fireplaces and with other burials items such as meat and stone items (Caldwell & Gyles 1966:9). For example, at the Shanidar grave in Iraq, a 60 000-year-old remains of a Neanderthal man has been found. The man was buried alongside carefully arranged white, blue and yellow medicinal flowers. In addition, at Moustier in France, the remains of a Neanderthal child have been found to be surrounded by flint items, stone axe and bones of wild cattle. His head was resting on his arms as if he was arranged for a sleep (Caldwell & Gyles 1966:9; Leakey 1982:57). It is important to observe that rituals meant a series of actions that are performed in the same way for religious ceremonies (Nwokoha 2020:71). The various activities performed and items found in the graves of Neanderthals suggest that they had certain ways of performing funerals for the sake of the dead. The Neanderthals are generally accepted as the earliest humans to have initiated funeral rituals. This is so because although fossils of other early humans have been found, there is no evidence that they venerated the dead with funeral items as the Neanderthals did. It is possible that future research might suggest a different view.

Who were the Neanderthals?

The name 'Neanderthal' actually came from the word Neander. Geographically, Neander is a small river in Germany that runs into the larger river known as River Dussel few kilometres away from the city of Dusseldorf, West Germany (Leakey 1982:54). Neanderthals have been living in Eurasia for over 40 000–100 000 years ago (Condemi et al. 2021:1). But how did the Neanderthals come about? It is generally believed that sometime around 350 000 years ago, a group of hominins left Africa for Eurasia, and in Eurasia, they became Neanderthals. More so, about 60 000–70 000

years ago, another group of humans known to be the ancestors of modern non-Africans left Africa for Eurasia and the Middle East where they interbreed with the initial hominins that left Africa for Eurasia. In simple words, the hominins that left Africa for Eurasia and for the Middle East became the Neanderthals (Akst 2019:3). Raven and Johnson said that the popularly known Cro-Magnon people also interbreed with Neanderthals until they replaced the Neanderthals (Raven & Johnson 1999:458–460). Cro-Magnon people were like modern humans who were tall and had long head or dolichocephalic skulls (Caldwell & Gyles 1966:14).

It is important to observe that the Neanderthals were unique form of humans that practiced many human activities including religious rituals and hunting (Hultkrantz 1982:22; Nielsen et al. 2020:1). There is evidence that Neanderthals cooked (Wadud 1971:206–207); they developed good communication systems among themselves (Clark 1970:145–146) and they lived a social and communal lifestyle (Clark 1970:90; Nielsen et al. 2020:2). Evidence has been found in France in the foothill of Pyrenees. where it shows that some migratory bisons were butchered in their numbers and gathered for consumption by Neanderthals (Nielsen et al. 2020:2).

About 30 000 and 40 000 years ago, Neanderthals were replaced by *Homo sapiens* (Nielsen et al. 2020:2). Leakey also said that Neanderthals disappeared from the European fossil record about 35 000 years ago (Leakey 1982:59). The only surviving *Homo* and hominid is *Homo sapiens*. The Neanderthals had modern skulls in appearance, with a vertical forehead and with a brain that is both high and short. Brain capacity is almost the same as that of modern humans; it is about 1550 cubic centimetres (Raven & Johnson 1999:458). Neanderthals were generally human-like creatures, and the major physical difference between Neanderthals and modern humans is in the shape of their faces. For example, Neanderthals' jaws and nose branched forward instead of being flat like those of modern man and their teeth are set much further forward with no obvious chin than they are in modern humans (Leakey 1982:55–56).

However, their average brain size was larger than that of modern humans and with skulls having characteristic bulges at the sides and back. They were generally of an average height of about 1.67 m (5 feet 8 inches) (Curnoe 2015; cf. Leakey 1982:55–56). Nielsen et al. (2020) added:

The principal morphological differences were that *H. sapiens* had relatively larger parietal lobes and particularly large cerebellum in comparison with Neanderthals.... This brain restructuring meant Neanderthals were very experienced in cognitively managing pragmatic situations through a strong focus on objects and actions while *H. sapiens* are less attentive to details but more able [sic] to develop creative solutions and plastically modify their behavior according to needs. (p. 4)

The important subject of debate is the view according to which Neanderthals played a little or no role in influencing Africa's view of the afterlife. Their connection with the

African people is not popular. Another point of relevance is that not much has been studied regarding the ways in which modern African humans learnt funerals ‘... no single synthesis exist that draws upon cognitive, psychological and cultural evolutionary theories of rituals’ (Nielsen et al. 2020:1). While it is generally accepted that one of the ways modern humans or Homo sapiens learnt about funeral rituals was through imitation⁷ (Bautista et al. 2017:997; Nielsen et al. 2020:4), there is at present no categorical conclusions about the role of Africans or early humans in Africa in initiating or originating the funeral practices, yet there are bountiful of evidence that indicates that funerals are the most important rituals in human existence and especially in Africa. This calls for the need to embark on further study on the subject.

Conclusion

It is not certain whether the stereotype created about the inferiorities of Africans can be connected to the view according to which only early humans in Eurasia or the Middle East initiated the afterlife and funeral rituals. What is certain is that the connection of the Neanderthals as seemingly superior humans is associated with Eurasia and the seeming exclusion of Africa in the debate indicates the need to study further whether the early humans or contemporaries of the Neanderthals in Africa had their own perspectives of death and the afterlife, which might have influenced their views about funerals. One of the objectives of this research is to highlight the role of Neanderthals in the study of funerals and its origins. Neanderthals are given the honour of originating funerals because of the evidence found in various Neanderthal graves. It can be speculated at the moment that the early humans in Africa might have also had their views about funerals or they might have initiated their *funeral type* or they might have learnt their funerals from the Neanderthals. Inadequate archaeological research about the contribution of early humans in Africa to human development, and the previous writers’ views that ascertained that Neanderthals originated funerals, affect the level of academic openness to new developments on the subject.

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Competing interests

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Author’s contributions

A.M.J. is the sole author of this research article.

⁷In ancient Egypt, the first forms of mummification were performed naturally by the warm weather of ancient Egypt. But over time, the ancient Egyptians began to develop wider ideas about the afterlife, and this influenced their views and made them to complicate and improve their mummification rituals (Murnane 1992:37). In a similar vein, modern humans in Africa might have continued to improve and complicate funeral rituals because of their progressive thoughts regarding death and the afterlife.

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This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Disclaimer

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