

Chapter 6

Materializing the ancestors: sacred body parts and fragments in the ancient Near East

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Death transforms the human body and person in ways both obvious and subtle. In the ancient Near East, decomposition of corpses beyond recognition as individual bodies and persons – into bones and dust – changed the relationship of the dead with communities of the living as well as with supernatural entities such as deities and ancestors. During the 2nd millennium BCE manipulation of corpses, skeletons and bones played a central role in household funerary rituals that were carried out in shared burial spaces located underneath floors of occupied residences. These sacred interactions with human remains extended beyond primary burial, culminating in a complex and protracted process of ritualized corporeal destruction. The extended funerary sequence broke down whole corpses into parts, which were often mixed together with other human remains. This paper explains how the stages of skeletal fragmentation materialized the shifting social and personhood statuses of the dead in the years and decades after death. Human intervention intentionally accelerated corpse decomposition in a series of ritual phases, while divine intervention recomposed the dead into a new supernatural entity: household ancestors.

Introduction

Interaction with bodies and bones of the dead after burial has a long and deep history in ancient Levantine funerary culture. Manipulation of skeletal remains can be traced diachronically, from skull exhumation and display in the Neolithic period, intermingling of bodies in cave and chamber tombs of the 2nd millennium BCE (the context of the present study), Iron Age bench tomb repositories, Roman period ossuaries, and Byzantine crypts of the 5th–7th centuries CE (Fine 2010; Croucher 2012; Bloch-Smith 2013; Haddow and Knüsel 2017; Suriano 2018; Ratzlaff 2019; Sheridan 2019). Study of the widespread and deeply rooted Levantine phenomenon of post-interment corpse manipulation has the potential to deepen understanding of funerary practices, ritual performance and ontologies of death throughout these different contexts.

Despite the frequent occurrence of reopened burials and commingling skeletal remains in the ancient Levant, little attention has been paid to practices of grave

reuse, corporeal fragmentation and secondary inhumations. Archaeological study of fragmented skeletal remains has often objectified them as isolated biological assemblages – if they are studied at all – with little recognition of their value as social artifacts or as past experiential entities (persons) (Tarlow 2011, 8; Sheridan 2017; 2019). The intimacy and immediacy of interacting with deceased bodies in various forms, in their corporeal forms as corpses and skeletal remains, as well as rendered materially through objects, deserves renewed attention.

Why and how did the living disturb the dead in their burial spaces? How did the living conceptualize and experience the materiality of the dead? How were deceased bodies and body parts imagined, reconfigured, personified and rendered sacred or mundane in the ancient Levant? Through the lens of funerary taphonomy, this study investigates the role of bodies, body representations and fragmented human remains in constructing memory, ancestorhood and post-mortem communities *after* burial. Discussion focuses on two case-studies of reused residential graves of the Middle Bronze Age Levant (ca. 2000–1500 BCE) at the settlements of Megiddo (Israel) and Qatna (Syria). Reused residential burials are well-suited to address these questions because they recorded relational, dynamic, and transformative funerary practices of a household group over time. These accumulative assemblages had rich and complex taphonomic records of disturbance, including adding to and subtracting from the burial contents to serve certain ritual and social goals. As I argue below, one of these goals was to transform the deceased into sacred ancestors through their bodies.

In the ancient Near East, mortality was contextual and conditional. Death was neither a great equalizer, nor a static and stable state of being. Textual sources from ancient Mesopotamia and the Levant documented not only different ways of dying but also a range of social outcomes of death, such as transformation of the dead person into an ancestor, ghost or, in rare cases, deified dead. I propose alternative models of materializing and embodying the ancestors through visual, verbal, and mnemonic representations that drew on the body in both direct and indirect ways. Framing the deceased body as a medium for social interaction, transformation, and negotiation among the living and the dead opens new avenues to explore post-mortem bodies as relational materials rather than as discrete and static categories such as ‘person’ and ‘thing’ (Fahlander 2016).

Theoretical and methodological approach

Death initiates an unavoidable biological transition that ends the functionality of a body as a living organism. It may expose existential contradictions between person and body, eliciting new social and biological tensions that must be reconciled through funerary practices and body disposal (Robb 2013, 453). In contrast with the finality of biological death, dying is a social process of transition that transforms the body and personhood of the deceased from one state of being into another state of being (Bloch and Parry 1982; Janzen 2002; Fowler 2004; Robb 2013). This transformation

can take multiple forms. Dying can alter an active social person into a passive object (objectification). Death and dying can also fundamentally alter the person/body relationship in other ways, such as allowing for embodied, disembodied and ‘alternatively bodied’ (Robb 2013, 455) persons to exist *within* decaying corpses as active, passive or potential persons. The corpse itself is not necessarily an inert object; its materiality can be used to create new relationships (Tarlow 2011, 10). Death may also allow persons to exist *beyond* their physical bodies. In other words, death of a body does not necessarily terminate the life-course or social presence of a person; in certain contexts, persons may continue to exist beyond death and beyond bodies (Janzen 2002; Fowler 2004; Fowler and Scarre 2014).

The role of the body in death and burial in the Middle Bronze Age Levant

Such ontologies go beyond dichotomous categories of living/dead as a way to account for the myriad ways in which embodiment and personhood were understood, experienced and performed in the ancient Near East. In the Middle Bronze Age Levant, experimentation with body disposal methods produced a wide variety of results (Bradbury and Philip 2017, 98). The richness, diversity and complexity of body disposal in Levantine funerary culture stands out as one of its most important features. Diversity in funerary practices was particularly strong during the Middle Bronze Age, when burials throughout the region varied widely within and between sites in terms of architecture, (jars, pits and chambers);¹ location and context (intramural and extramural); individuality (single, double and multiple); and, most importantly for this study, body disposal methods (primary, secondary and compound; commingling; multiple-successive). In primary inhumations, burial of one or more corpses occurred once without subsequent human intervention. Secondary inhumation involved one instance of relocating human remains from the original locus of decomposition for burial elsewhere within the same burial space, or in an entirely different location. Compound disposal encompassed multiple episodes of interment and disinterment or disturbance to human remains (Sprague 2005, 57–72).

The high degree of variation and complexity in Middle Bronze Age mortuary practice – within the region, within a settlement, within a single house or within a discrete burial space – indicated that the living had many choices about how to dispose of the dead. Particularly when lacking major disparities in status and wealth of burial contexts and assemblages, these variables in the mortuary record may have expressed a different phenomenon: social variation in death (Girella 2015, 117). As has long been recognized, funerary practices may mask, subvert or reimagine the dead after burial (Ucko 1969; Parker Pearson 1999). Body disposal was one of many social arenas through which to negotiate personhood status and the social role of the dead after burial (Gillespie 2001; Fowler 2004; Jones 2005; Robb 2007; Graham 2009; Geller 2012; Cerezo-Román 2015).

As I argue in this paper, in the Middle Bronze Age Levant the corpse was the focal point of a multi-staged funerary sequence, but its role in the sequence could differ

from one stage to another and from one context to another. Certain body parts, such as the cranium, were sometimes treated differently than other skeletal elements, such as long bones. Bodies of specific individuals may have been subjected to more complex rituals than others buried in the same space. Conflicting practices pertaining to the dead body could co-exist within a given context, such as in burials that contained multiple individual bodies that were disposed of in different ways.

The complexities of death, burial and their impacts on the human body and person mean that there are no simple answers to why such contradictions emerged. Investigating body disposal practices in the mid-2nd millennium BCE Levant provides access to relationships between the post-mortem body (corpse, skeletal remains and material culture) and posthumous person (personhood; embodiment; corporeality). These relationships open new avenues of inquiry regarding what happened to persons and bodies after death and burial, as well as how and when transformations of the body and personhood took place (Fowler 2004).

Personhood

Personhood in archaeology considers the socially constructed person and interactions that have left material traces between persons and materials, places, bodies and supernatural entities (Fowler 2004, 7). Persons may be composed of different constituent elements, physical or non-physical, that may be connected to or separate from the human body and may be derived from other bodies or persons (Robb 2013, 446). For example, persons may be constituted through social relationships involving living or dead humans and animals, as well as objects and supernatural entities such as spirits, deities, ancestors or ghosts (Hofmann and Orschiedt 2015, 987).

Modes of personhood include individuality, dividuality, partibility, permeability and fractality (Mauss 1985; Strathern 1988; Busby 1997; Brück 2001; Fowler 2004). In non-Western societies past and present, including the ancient Near East, experiences of personhood fundamentally differed from individualism, a notion that is predicated on the distinction between body, mind and soul that emerged from humanist and Cartesian thought of the Enlightenment (Thomas 2002, 29–31). In this ontology, these three features are bound together in a single, fixed unit: the individual, who is a unique, rational, autonomous actor able to exercise free will (Thomas 2002, 29–31). Another important aspect of individualism is the idea of concrete boundaries between persons, objects and animals (Thomas 2002, 30). In contrast to individual personhood, dividual (relational) personhood is a practice of shared, divisible or distributed personhood in which status is derived from and can be shared with multiple other persons (Strathern 1988; Busby 1997; Fowler 2004, 8–9). Dividualities include fractal, partible and permeable personhoods. Partibility allows for personhood to be broken down into discrete objects or body parts that can be exchanged, obscuring boundaries between etic categories of persons, objects and bodies. Blurring these lines enables understanding of embodiment from an emic perspective, as the body progressed in stages from a fleshed corpse to dry bone.

This framework is particularly germane to residential burials, in which bodies were embedded in the architectural construct and material assemblage of the house and the social construct of the household.

Funerary taphonomy

This study employs funerary taphonomy as an analytic method to understand step-by-step practices of body disposal methods and long-term modification to human remains. Drawing from archeothanatology (Nilsson 1998; Duday 2006; 2009), this forensics-driven methodology focuses on empirical evidence of treatment of human bodies at multiple time scales after death in order to decode the complex processes of deposition, decay and disturbance carried out in antiquity (Nilsson 1998, 6; Andrews and Bello 2006; Duday 2006; 2009; Beckett and Robb 2008; Bocquentin and Garrard 2016; Knüsel and Robb 2016). These criteria allow for a close examination of the materiality of the dead body (corporeality), following Tarlow (2011, 5).

Funerary taphonomy provides tools to trace the transformations that occur inside a burial space after inhumation. For example, skeletal element representation, dispositions and articulation differentiate disposal types² and indicate the degree of funerary complexity.³ Following Andrews and Bello (2006, 18), the ‘taphonomic index’ measures body disposal methods using four osteological indicators: (1) skeletal completeness, (2) breakage of bones, (3) disarticulation, and (4) surface modification. Each category is scored on a scale of 1–10 from poor (score =1) to excellent (score =10). The index’s maximum score is 40 and its minimum output is 4. Generally, compound disposals score 10 or lower; secondary disposals score 11–30, and primary disposals score 30–40.⁴ These expected ranges may vary based on qualitative evidence.⁵ The proportional representation of skeletal region is a useful indicator of disposal method for commingled and fragmented remains, particularly for differentiating between unintentionally disturbed primary disposals and secondary or compound disposals (Knüsel and Outram 2004; Crozier 2016; Knüsel and Robb 2016, 6; Triantaphyllou 2016). Zones of the body include eight categories: cranial, teeth, upper skeleton, lower skeleton, flat bones, foot bones, hand bones and vertebrae and ribs (Triantaphyllou 2016). Hand and foot bones are weighted more heavily due to their role in determining the extent of bone movement, which is an indicator of disturbance.

The funerary sequence

Taphonomic data provide the basis for explaining the sequence of funerary activities carried out in a given mortuary context. The funerary sequence in turn serves as the foundation for contextualizing and interpreting the meaning of these activities. The funerary sequence reconstructs the relative order of activity that impacted a deceased body at multiple temporal phases after death: (1) pre-interment (preparation of the body and grave), (2) interment (deposition of the body and materials), and (3) post-interment practices (intentional disturbance to the grave, materials and body).

This approach conceptualizes death, burial and decay as social processes, materialized through funerary practices, rather than as ‘self-evident biological fact[s]’ (Robb 2013, 441). The funerary sequence model has gained traction in Mediterranean and Near Eastern archaeology, providing a robust empirical lens through which to interpret mortuary practices (Keswani 2004; Green 2006; Voutsaki 2010; Schwartz 2012; Pfälzner 2012; 2014; Boyd 2014; 2015; Moutafi and Voutsaki 2016; Porter 2016; Cradic 2017a; 2017b). This study adapts Green’s (2006; 2014) ‘ritual sequence’ to denote activities that directly involved corporeal remains and/or grave site.

In the Middle Bronze Age Levant, the readily observable biological transformation of the body after death was a key component of social death and personhood transformation after burial. The sequential performance of funerary practices mapped meaning onto these physiological changes. I argue that human remains – whether fragmented, whole, curated as isolated parts or represented as material culture – redefined social relationships as corpses transformed after death and burial. Both natural decomposition and human intervention facilitated the emergence of post-mortem social entities of gods, ghosts and ancestors. The living mobilized human remains as a platform for performance of grief and mourning, social death, memory and transformation. The body and its constituent parts served social goals of remembering and forgetting that reimagined relationships between persons and bodies after death. Manipulation of the corpse through (re)positioning, movement, curation, decoration, furnishing with grave goods and destruction were ‘ways by which material cultures mediate[d] commemoration’ (Williams 2013, 195). In other words, remembering and forgetting could be materialized through the grave and its contents and performed through funerary ritual. Through spatial context, architecture, bodies and grave goods, burials selectively cited the dead through notions of time and space in ways that created tangible links between the long-dead, the recently dead and the living (Williams 2013, 195–196; Fahlander 2016).

Fragmentation and corporeality: Tomb 100 at Tel Megiddo

The case study of Tomb 100, a multiple-successive residential chamber tomb at Tel Megiddo (Israel), employs taphonomic methods to interpret social meanings of body disposal methods. The densely accumulated skeletal remains within the multi-layered tomb were highly fragmented, disarticulated and commingled when encountered during excavation, prompting questions about disturbance to the context and the intentionality of this taphonomic situation. The taphonomic results presented below indicate that body disposal involved repetitive repositioning of skeletal remains, resulting in breakage and commingling of skeletal remains, which were heaped in a mass in the back of the chamber. I argue that systematic disarticulation, fragmentation and intermingling of individual bodies and body parts broke the corporeal paradigm of living bodies and reformulated the body after burial. Out of disintegration emerged new posthumous persons whose corporeality was purposefully undefined: a corporate group

of household ancestors. As I explain in further detail below, these ancestors retained no discrete or individual elements of embodiment and could exist beyond their bodies.

Tomb 100 represented the richest and largest mortuary context within its setting of House 12/K/15, a mudbrick courtyard house located near the southwest edge of the tell. The dwelling contained a high density of subfloor intramural burials, most of which consisted of primary inhumations in pits and jars (Fig. 6.1). This pattern was reproduced throughout the settlement's residential neighborhoods in Areas AA, BB, CC, and the *Mittleburg* complex (Cradic 2018). Megiddo's diversity of intramural burials also fit broader contemporaneous trends attested at 28 Levantine settlements in which a high density of various burial types and body disposal methods occurred side-by-side within the same occupied houses (Cradic 2017b, 111–114).⁶

Tomb 100 remained in continuous use for over a century, likely corresponding with the entire habitational phase of the house (stratum K-10), during which time the chamber accumulated the skeletal remains of at least two dozen individuals (Cradic 2017a). Six layers of accumulation have been identified, spanning the 17th–16th centuries BCE (Table 6.1; Cradic 2017a, figs 7–12).

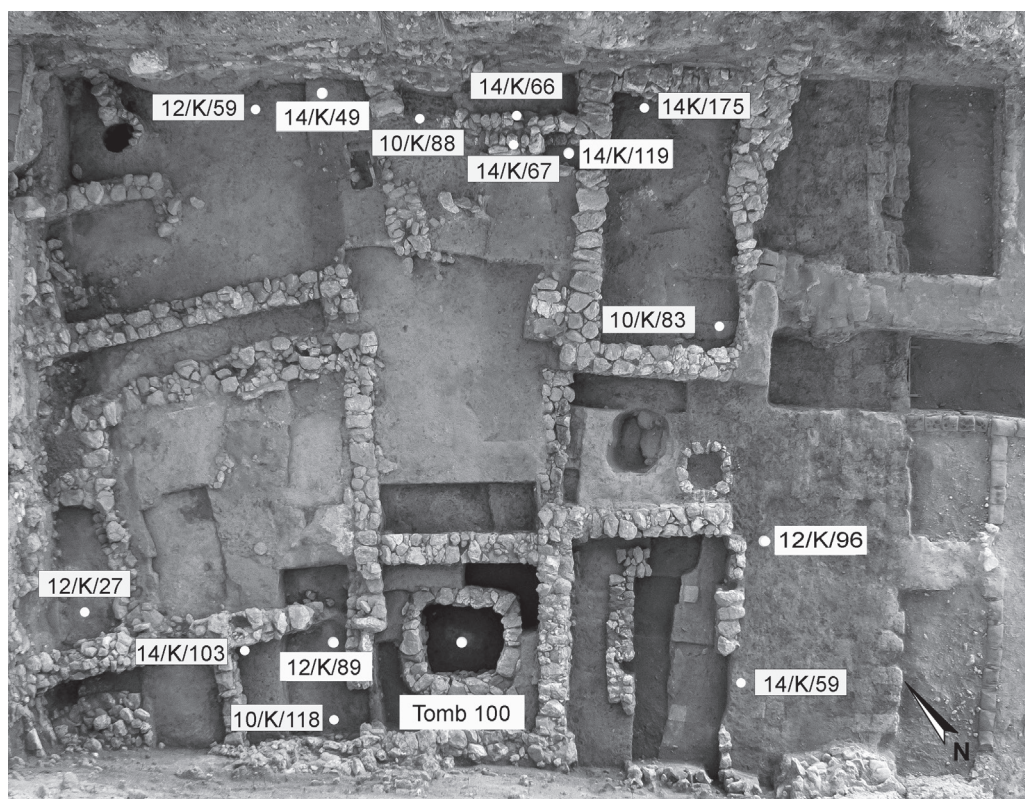


Figure 6.1. Aerial image of House 12/K/15 at Tel Megiddo with the locations of intramural burial loci marked. Tomb 100 is located in the southwest of the house (courtesy of the Megiddo Expedition).

Table 6.1. Calibrated radiocarbon dates from Tomb 100

Locus	Lab no.	Sample type	Determination BP	Calibrated range $\pm 1\sigma$	Calibrated range $\pm 2\sigma$
10/K/102 (Layers 1–4)	RTK-6401	Olive seed	3290 $\pm$ 55	1626–1501 (68.2%)	1727–1723 (0.3%) 1691–1443 (95.1%)
10/K/120 (Layer 5)	RTK-6402	Olive seed	3335 $\pm$ 50	1683–1605 (43.6%) 1585–1536 (24.6%)	1740–1505 (95.4%)

The tomb contained six depositional phases, Layers 1 (top) through 6 (bottom) (adapted from Toffolo *et al.* 2014, table 3)

Taphonomic index of Tomb 100

The taphonomic index of Tomb 100 provides an empirical method of identifying body disposal of the tomb’s individuals in order to address social meanings of burial reuse, fragmentation and intermingling. The remains are divided into two groups: the tomb’s general population and four individuals who could be identified in the field based on partially articulated remains. Because of the high degree of breakage and intermixing of the skeletal remains, the criteria of the index for the tomb’s general population were measured based on representation of zones of the body, as explained above as a method to evaluate taphonomy and funerary complexity in datasets containing commingling and fragmented skeletal remains. The taphonomic index scores are based on field observations and documentation including notes, photographs, plans, sketches and registration documents, as well as the final archaeological report (Martin and Cradic *in press*). This approach was chosen because of the fragility of the skeletal remains, which were dry, brittle and prone to breakage during excavation. Large volumes of already-fragmented skeletal remains disintegrated even further upon removal, which destroyed valuable data and distorted the osteological assemblage outside of its original context.

The commingled human osteological assemblage of the general tomb population scored low on the taphonomic index (score: 11), indicating that body disposal predominantly consisted of compound inhumations (Table 6.2). This score is on the cusp of compound and secondary disposal. As indicated by the taphonomic index scores of the four individuals presented below, several cases of secondary inhumation were also present among this osteological assemblage. The multiple-successive nature of the tomb’s inhumation practices, whereby individuals were inhumed separately over time, contributed to creating certain taphonomic conditions that resulted in this mixed outcome. Each new inhumation disturbed previous corpses and their grave goods, which were pushed toward the sides or back of the tomb. In combination, these activities completely disrupted the anatomical order of individual skeletons,

Table 6.2. Taphonomic indices, Tomb 100

<i>Individual</i>	<i>Skeletal completeness</i>	<i>Breakage of bones</i>	<i>Disarticulation</i>	<i>Surface modification</i>	<i>Taphonomic index (min: 4; max: 40)</i>	<i>Body disposal method</i>
1	4	4	4	6	18	Secondary
2	3	3	2	7	15	Secondary
3	3	2	2	7	14	Secondary
4	4	4	5	7	20	Secondary
Tomb 100 general population	3	2	2	4	11	Compound

which in large part were no longer identifiable as discrete bodies, with the exception of Individuals 1, 2 and 3, and 4. Individuals 1, 2 and 3 were located in the top (latest) four layers of deposition, and Individual 4 was located in the 5th layer from the top (Tables 6.1–6.2):

Individual 1. Individual 1 was located in Layer 3, the third layer of deposition from the top (Figs 6.2–6.3). This individual was represented by the partially articulated remains of a vertebral column along with cranial remains including a maxilla and mandible with teeth. Score: 18; body disposal method: secondary inhumation.

Individual 2. Individual 2 was represented by a limited number of articulated postcranial remains, including the vertebral column and ribs, which were located within the matrix of Layer 3 (Fig. 6.4). Score: 15; body disposal method: secondary inhumation.

Individual 3. Individual 3 was represented by a limited number of skeletal elements, including the vertebral column, fragmented humerus, and cranial fragments including the cranial vault (Fig. 6.3). This individual was located in Layer 4. Score: 14; body disposal method: secondary inhumation.

Individual 4. Individual 4, located in Layer 5, presented the clearest case of articulation and skeletal completeness (Fig. 6.5). The individual was represented by articulated postcranial remains including the vertebral column, scapula, humerus, ulna, radius, and bones of the hand. Score: 20; body disposal method: secondary inhumation.

With taphonomic index scores of 14–20, all these individuals fit the category of secondary disposals (Table 6.2). Their low scores in skeletal completeness, breakage of bones and disarticulation testified to the habitual practice of post-burial handling of their remains. Yet, their partial skeletal remains were intact to the extent that they could be isolated and identified as discrete individuals in the field, unlike the



Figure 6.2. Tomb 100: Cranial remains of Individual 1 (courtesy of the Megiddo Expedition).



Figure 6.3. Tomb 100: Vertebral columns of Individuals 1 (north) and 3 (south) and cranial fragments of Individual 3 next to the vertebra, facing east (courtesy of the Megiddo Expedition).



Figure 6.4. Tomb 100: Postcranial remains of Individual 2 in partial articulation, facing southwest (courtesy of the Megiddo Expedition).



Figure 6.5. Tomb 100: Postcranial remains of Individual 4 in articulation, facing southwest (courtesy of the Megiddo Expedition).

skeletal remains of the tomb's general population. This situation was likely due to a combination of preservation conditions and the passage of time after death and burial. If too little time had elapsed after death before the next stage of interaction with the corpses, or before final closure of the tomb, the process of decomposition may not have been completed. Soft tissues may have remained in place in some areas of the body, preventing full dismemberment and breakage of bones left *in situ* (Cradic 2017a). Alternatively, mourners may have chosen not to complete these individuals' ritual sequence for a social or ritual reason that cannot be traced archaeologically.

The taphonomic picture reveals that mourners would have encountered various states of bodily decomposition and skeletal articulation in the palimpsest of bodies during revisitation activities that occurred following original interment. In other words, some if not all the bodies were moved around during all stages of decomposition, both before and after reaching dry bone stage. Although incomplete decomposition may have been encountered commonly by mourners during the use-life of the tomb, with the exception of these four individuals, its traces have been lost with subsequent movement and disturbance that was apparently not applied to these four individuals. Repeated mechanical processes such as moving, fragmenting or adding and removing bones and objects would have affected decomposition rates and conditions (Weber 2014, 91). Stages of putrefaction, followed by active and advanced decomposition, and finally skeletonization were functions of time, space and mass. These states of decay were also dependent on the conditions of the tomb such as its exposure to air, humidity, water, and animals, as well as the ever-increasing corpse mass that was a consequence of multiple-successive inhumation practices (Duday 2009, 32–40; Weber 2014, 97).

In summary, the taphonomic indices show that most of the tomb's individuals were moved around within the chamber many times over, while a small minority, likely those disposed late in the use-life of the tomb, were disturbed just once or twice. The high degree of disarticulation, skeletal fragmentation and commingling of skeletal remains overall can be explained by the prolonged process of compound disposal, in which human and material remains were dispersed repeatedly inside the tomb chamber in patterned ways, mainly deposited in heaps along the sides and back (east) of the chamber. The fragmented and distributed nature of the skeletal and material remains obscured indicators of vertical status differentiation among the individuals; bodies and grave goods were shared, scattered and continually recirculated inside the chamber (Cradic 2017a, figs 7–12). They belonged to no one and to everyone, creating a collective, partible post-mortem body that differed conceptually from other bodies in terms of composition, coherence, organization and anatomical integrity. These practices of corporeal breakage and intermixing symbolized ideologies of embodiment after death, in which corporeal individuality, and perhaps personal identity and personhood, could be reconfigured as time after death elapsed. The mourners who manipulated the dead in Tomb 100 also differentiated between the recently dead, whose bodies were actively decaying and remained in (partial) articulation, and the

long-dead, whose bodies had reached dry bone stage and were therefore candidates for complete fragmentation, disarticulation and commingling. This new composite body may have represented the collective personhood of long-dead household ancestors.

Multimodal bodies at the Royal Hypogeum of Qatna

As the case study of Tomb 100 illustrates, boundaries between bodies could blur as time passed after inhumation in contexts of burial reuse and fragmentation. In the following example, I show how multiple forms of embodiment formed a coherent mortuary ideology within the burial assemblage at the Royal Palace of Qatna (Syria). Physical remains of the dead, both the newly deceased and the long-dead ancestors, played visible and central roles in burial and commemoration that ‘ensured their presence and protected the dynasty’ (Archi 2012, 28). Interaction with bodies took several forms, including repositioning and commingling of bones within their original locus of decomposition; packing and moving bones into a new, permanent locus of burial; feasting alongside the dead in their tomb; and creation of ancestor imagery that represented the dead outside of their tomb space. These modes of interacting with the dead through the body show that memory, transformation and representation worked in complex ways, sometimes requiring close interaction with decaying flesh and sometimes requiring physical and social distance in the form of euphemistic effigies.

The expansive palace at Qatna contained two underground rock-cut burial complexes: the Royal Hypogeum, which contained the remains of 19–24 individuals in a combination of primary, secondary and compound disposals, and Tomb VII, which contained an assemblage of over 1000 grave goods as well as the remains of 79 individuals or more, most of whom were inhumed in secondary and compound disposals (Fig. 6.6; Pfälzner 2014, 144). These two burial contexts were in use contemporaneously, spanning the mid-18th through mid-14th centuries BCE (Pfälzner 2017, 151). The Qatna excavation team has published an impressive range of detailed data that enable reconstruction of the sequence of funerary activities (Pfälzner 2011; Pfälzner *et al.* 2012; 2014). Pfälzner (2012; 2014; 2016) interprets the funerary sequence as a series of disturbances to the original inhumations that took place within the Royal Hypogeum and culminated in a final (re)burial in Tomb VII.

The Hypogeum contained an antechamber, a large central chamber, and three smaller units to the west, east and south. Discrete areas within the chambers have been identified as spaces for specialized activities such as feasting (Chamber 1), areas for offering deposits and ancestor commemoration (antechamber and Chamber 1), and a repository for discarded human and animal remains (Chamber 2; Lange 2014; Pfälzner 2016). Primary, secondary, and compound inhumation also took place in spatially distinct areas (Fig. 6.6). For example, Chamber 4 hosted an eight-step process of primary inhumation that included corpse preparation, display and initial burial (Pfälzner 2012, table 1). Secondary inhumations may have been deposited in Chambers 1 and 3, and Chamber 2 served as a long-term storage area for ‘tertiary [compound]

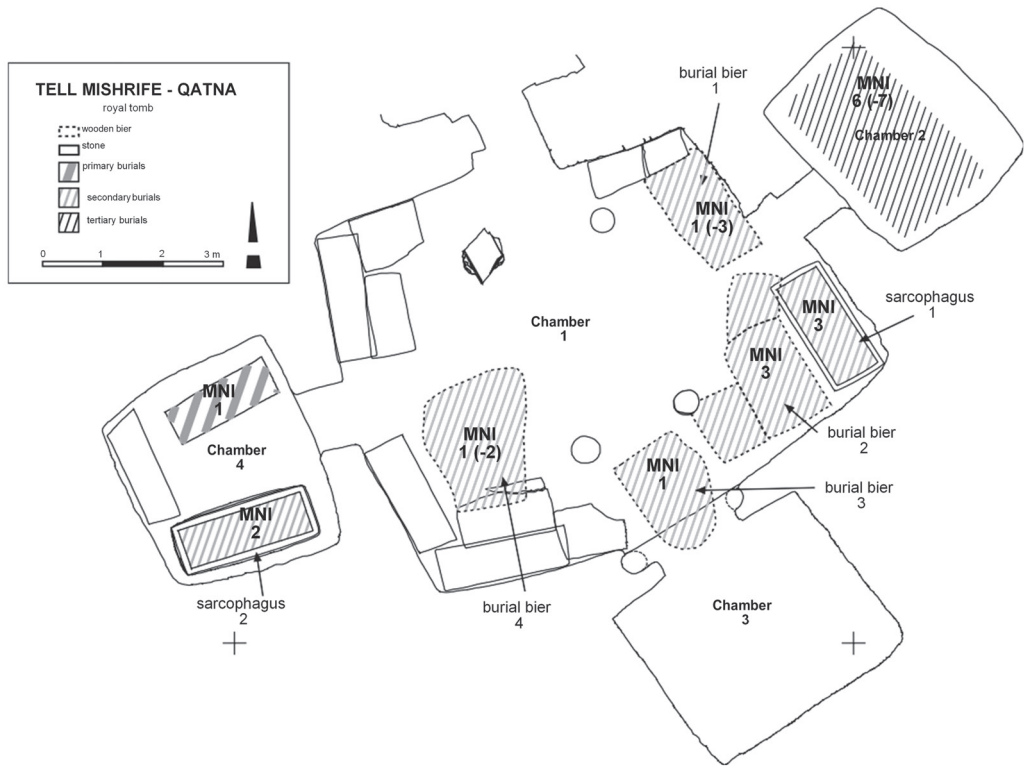


Figure 6.6. Plan of the Royal Hypogeum at Qatna showing the distribution of primary, secondary, and compound burials (after Pfälzner 2012, fig. 7; courtesy Peter Pfälzner, Qatna-project, University of Tübingen).

deposition of the long-dead' (Lange 2014, 252). According to Pfälzner (2012, 214), this stage of the sequence was carried out 'without respect to the unity of the individual person. The dead became part of a collective group of the deceased'. In other words, protracted disturbance to human remains disrupted corporeal coherence, breaking up whole bodies into constituent parts and eliding skeletal remains of multiple individuals together. These practices erased indicators of personal identity that were performed through the body. Corporeal destruction may have accomplished specific goals similar to those interpreted for Tomb 100: the construction of a new, amalgamated body of the long-dead that was more than the sum of its parts. Bodily destruction engineered social and personhood transformations of the dead, allowing for the emergence of long-dead ancestors in a collective embodied form that differed fundamentally in composition and configuration from other bodies, both living and recently dead.

Finally, 'quaternary' burial – the closing stage of the funerary sequence – took place in Tomb VII (Pfälzner 2012, 215–216). This stage involved the transfer of certain bones to a new locus as well as a significant reconfiguration of the dead body and person. Tomb VII contained well-preserved cranial remains of at least 50 individuals

(out of a total of at least 79 individuals). Most crania had been carefully piled on top of postcranial remains in 16 stacks 0.3–0.4 m high, and a few were placed inside ceramic platters or ‘surrounded by long bones in a rectangular arrangement’ (Pfälzner 2014, 144).⁷ These remains had likely been stored in wooden boxes, which have since decayed, leaving behind neatly organized piles of bones (Pfälzner 2012, 144).

Taphonomic analysis illuminates Tomb VII in further detail.⁸ The first observation concerns skeletal completeness and representation of body parts and zones, *i.e.*, presence of crania and long bones without connecting joints, absence of small bones of the hands and feet and under-representation of teeth, ribs and vertebrae. These light, small bones were likely left behind in the Hypogeum. Teeth, for example, were represented by higher than expected proportions in the Hypogeum relative to the cranial remains, particularly the bones of the skull vault and face, which were under-represented (Witzel and Kreutz 2007, 177). Absence or low representation of labile joints and teeth in Tomb VII indicated that heavier long bones and crania were removed selectively for reburial from dry bone skeletons.

The second taphonomic characteristic is breakage. The generally good state of preservation of crania in Tomb VII differed from the fragmented and commingling state of other bones, numbering in the thousands and representative of individuals of all age groups and sexes, which were scattered across the floor (Degenhardt *et al.* 2015, 118). Long bone shafts present in the Hypogeum were also ‘mostly heavily fragmented’, indicating high frequency or intensity of disturbances within the Hypogeum (Witzel and Kreutz 2007, 177). Cranial elements selected for removal to Tomb VII may have been spared breakage during the funerary sequence in the Hypogeum, and/or were selected for reburial on the basis of their good preservation. Such careful handling did not extend to other body parts.

The third criterion is disarticulation. The bones lacked original anatomic order and many were scattered, with the exception of a few isolated cases in which individuals were packed into boxes while still recently dead and before full decomposition (Pfälzner 2014, 145). However, for some of the remains, bone repositioning indicated intentionality in terms of stacking and packing into boxes as well as a system of internal logic dictating the organization of the bones. In some instances, long bones were organized together at the bottom of a stack, with crania placed at the top, and in other cases long bones surrounded crania in rectangular patterns (Pfälzner 2014, 144, fig. 6).

The separation of body elements and their arrangement inside specialized containers indicated purposeful collection, curation and storage of partible body parts in Tomb VII. Skeletal elements were broken down into constituent parts, showing a consistent attitude toward separability and partibility of the body, a process that began in the Hypogeum and continued in Tomb VII. In some cases, scattered bones distributed the partible body with no organizational scheme, likely leaving behind many skeletal elements in the Hypogeum. This practice may have reimagined the body and rendered the original body inert, which was possibly an important interim

step for becoming a candidate for ancestorhood. In other cases, *i.e.*, crania stacked on top of long bones, body parts were handled with care and were packed into boxes with an intent to maintain an internally consistent organizational scheme that had some schematic basis in anatomical reality. The over-representation of crania and long bones in proportion to teeth and bones of the hands, feet, ribs and vertebrae, also emphasized these specific skeletal elements.

The final stage of corporeal transformation that took place in Tomb VII may have mapped onto the final stage of social transformation of the dead. Bodies were hidden away in a permanent burial which did not serve as a locus of continuing commemoration in the same way as the Hypogeum. These deceased persons could have been conceptualized as having achieved ancestorhood (Pfälzner 2016, 258). Their actual mortal remains ceased to be the medium of interaction, shifting the focus to mnemonic proxies represented in the life-like physical form of anthropomorphic figurines.

Anthropomorphic imagery also played a role at Qatna. Two nearly identical stone figurines flanked the entrance to the Royal Hypogeum in the antechamber, which also contained deposits of ceramic bowls and faunal remains (Fig. 6.7; Lange 2014,



Figure 6.7. Antechamber of the Royal Hypogeum at Qatna showing *in situ* anthropomorphic statues and offering deposits (after Pfälzner 2016, fig. 10; courtesy Peter Pfälzner, Qatna-project, University of Tübingen).

fig. 4; Rimmer Herrmann 2014, 118–119, fig. C9). These figures, interpreted by the excavators as ancestor statues, may have been in place for the 400 year duration of the use-life of the tomb based on their stylistic and typological dating to the 18th–17th centuries BCE, as well as evidence of wear and repairs to the statues (Lange 2014, 244; Pfälzner 2017, 153–154). These generically rendered statues may have served multiple functions. They may have represented the collective bodies of the dead, personifying the dead in a familiar corporeal form and perhaps embodying the concept of the long-dead royal ancestors (*rp'm*) after their body parts had been removed from the main site of ritual action, the Royal Hypogeum. The removal of the remains of the dead to Tomb VII and their corporeal reconfiguration within that space completed their funerary sequence, rendering their bodies inert as sites of ritual performance. This transfer may have shifted the focus of commemoration or other ritual activities to the statue proxies who stood in for the dead. In this role, the figurines may have served as bodies for accepting and consuming offerings, perhaps akin to temple cult statues and mortuary stele. Moreover, the statues' placement in the antechamber created a boundary that allowed visitors to deposit offerings without breaching tomb's threshold, creating a space for ritual action outside of the tomb proper.

Post-mortem embodiment was a complicated and, perhaps experimental, matter at Qatna. Negotiation of social death through the body involved both skeletal remains and anthropomorphic representations, with multiple posthumous corporeal and social outcomes possible even within the same mortuary complex. A complex combination of concepts regarding the dead body were in play: mnemonic bodily representations; collection and curation of specific body parts; and destruction of skeletal remains through fragmentation and scattering. These modes of postmortem embodiment may have operated in tandem as a means to delineate between the recently dead, represented by skeletal remains in various stages of decay and disarticulation in the Royal Hypogeum, and the long-dead, represented by a combination of inert, partible bodies in Tomb VII and whole anthropomorphic figurines in the Royal Hypogeum's antechamber.

Ontologies of death in the ancient Near East

How did body partibility and fragmentation relate to postmortem personhood? Death represented one stage of the life-course and the dead could continue to exist in embodied, disembodied and alternatively bodied forms. Whether represented in name, imagery or through actual skeletal remains, the body mediated interaction and negotiation of posthumous social outcomes such as becoming an ancestor, deity or ghost.

Gods, ghosts and ancestors

In the ancient Near East, ancestorhood was an achieved social status selectively bestowed upon certain deceased persons, typically male descendants with heirs⁹ after certain conditions had been fulfilled.¹⁰ Sources such as Old Babylonian prayers involving

ancestors and Ugaritic liturgical and literary documents shed light on how one could have become an ancestor (Tsukimoto 1985, 51–56; van der Toorn 1996, 48–53). For example, Old Babylonian prayer *BE 6/2* referenced rituals related to care and feeding of the dead, termed *kispu* rituals, which provided a framework for commemoration. The document demonstrated that the ritual involved two main parts: (1) recitation of the personal names of the dead, up to five generations back, and (2) providing the dead with sustenance. Led by the *zakir šumi* (he ‘who invokes the name’), usually the eldest son who was the designated family caretaker (*paqidu*), surviving family members performed *kispu* rituals for ghost or soul of the dead at the grave site or in a ritual space such as a mortuary, household or neighborhood shrine (MacDougal 2014, 5; van der Toorn 2014, 84; Pace 2015, 86; Laneri 2020, 163). These named persons were cared for regularly in a ritual during which food and drink (water, oil, wine, bread) were offered (van der Toorn 1996, 60). In the Levant, as in Mesopotamia, residential burials and care and feeding of the dead were widespread and stable phenomena of 2nd millennium BCE funerary culture. Post-burial activities at grave sites involving consumable offerings can be inferred from the presence of grave goods such as faunal remains and ceramic assemblages with emphasis on serving and storage vessels. These materials were present in cave and chamber tomb deposits in relatively consistent repertoires from the Early Bronze Age through Late Antiquity (Bloch-Smith 1992; 2003; 2013; Gonen 1992; Hallote 1995; 2001; 2002; Bautch *et al.* 2000; Hachili 2005; Osborne 2011; Baker 2012; Suriano 2018; Sheridan 2019).

Textual sources also recorded the high status of named ancestors and in some cases illuminated the criteria for meeting this lofty social and ontological threshold. For example, inheritance texts from Old Babylonian Emar referenced the ‘gods and the dead’ together (*ilī u mētē*), possibly indicating deification of the dead at Emar for selected persons. This phrasing may have referred to those ancestors who were called gods due to their ‘privileged position’ as honored members of the household (van der Toorn 1996, 55–56). Lewis (2014, 73) argues that the dead could have attained divine status, which facilitated their veneration. Deified dead were referenced as ‘*Im* and ‘*ēlōhīm*, the vocabulary of divinity in Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew, respectively. A well-known biblical example was the use of ‘*ēlōhīm* (1 Sam. 28:13)¹¹ to describe the recently dead Samuel, whom Saul conjured from the Netherworld. At Ugarit, Pardee (1996, 283–284) interprets the phrase ‘*Ināšu ’līma* as a term denoting a vague form of collective divinity attained by humans. At Ebla, the evidence of deification of dead kings was more secure due to the linguistic marker of divinity, the Sumerian DINGIR sign, that preceded royal names in administrative texts and lexical lists (Archi 2012, 5–7). In this context, certain dead kings were named as palace recipients of monthly sheep offerings or for bread offerings typically intended for minor gods (Archi 2012, 6–7). As these examples demonstrate, it was not always clear where ancestorhood stopped and divinity began.

Ugaritic royal funerary texts differentiated between long-dead (*rp’m*) and the recently dead royalty (*mlkm*), lending further insight into the status of the dead as persons, ancestors and deities (Lewis 1989, 171). The *mlkm* appeared at the end of

deity lists while the *rp'm*, understood the generic group of ancestors, did not appear on these lists (Lewis 2014, 73). According to Lewis (2014, 73), 'presumably, the status of the dead as "gods" was much lower hierarchically than the status of the primary gods who made up the canonical pantheon'. Yet the inclusion of the deified kings as recipients of offerings alongside minor gods at Ebla solidified their place in the divine hierarchy. By the 1st millennium BCE in Mesopotamia, ancestors could be considered members of the *Annunaki*, a group of minor deities who inhabited the 'world below' or the Netherworld, the realm of the dead (van der Toorn 1996, 55). Together, this evidence indicated that being an ancestor was a dynamic and accumulative process, rather than a static condition.

In summary, textual sources reveal many permutations of the dead in existential, ontological and corporeal terms.¹² There was no single way of being dead, buried, remembered or forgotten. The status of the dead was dynamic, contextually variable and continually negotiated through an array of media, bodies and materials. These sources cross-cut temporal and geographic contexts of 2nd and 1st millennia BCE Mesopotamia and the Levant, so such results are not surprising. Below, I draw on residential burials and funerary iconography to discuss imagery as an alternative mode of embodiment beyond the grave.

Body-objects

Conceptualized as caves, underground chambers and as houses (Suriano 2018, 94–96, 157), tombs¹³ provided a subterranean physical location for the dead to cross boundaries between the Netherworld and realm of the living.¹⁴ The bodies therein materialized the dead, giving form to otherwise disembodied entities who resided in the realm of the dead. In ancient Mesopotamia and the Levant, archaeological evidence of caring for the dead, including feeding, provisioning and commemorating, indicated a variety of ways in which the dead could be 'embodied through ritual action' (Suriano 2018, 133). Material and immaterial aspects of post-mortem embodiment took shape in different ways in the funerary and textual records, revealing sometimes competing or contradictory concepts of where and how the dead existed. Corporeality could be imagined through realia such as human skeletal remains, burial assemblages, grave sites, inscriptions and iconographic representations of the dead, or through more ephemeral sensorial means such as vocally invoking the dead by name or achieving altered states of mind as a means of breaking down barriers between the realms of the living and the dead in the Netherworld (Cradic in press). For inhumation burials, human remains residing in the grave provided a place for the living to commemorate the dead by speaking their names and depositing offerings. Burial spaces and their skeletal contents also created a place for the dead to visit and a body to occupy when invoked to be present to receive offerings.

Physical remains of the dead were not necessarily involved in commemorative activities. The corpse itself may not have always been available or necessary for mourning and commemoration, prompting the use of symbols, text and body imagery

to receive offerings on behalf of the dead. In cases in which the corpse could not be recovered, or if the fate of a person who was presumed dead could not be ascertained, their names could still be included in *kispu* recitations as a form of (after) life insurance (van der Toorn 1996, 61). The representation of the dead could have included anthropomorphic figurines or standing stones depicting the names and/or iconography of the dead.¹⁵ For example, Ugaritic literary texts described setting up a stele of the father's deity, a 'votive' of the clan, and dedication of incense and grain offerings in the temple of Ba'lu as essential components of a son's filial duties (KTU I, 26–33, 44–47, II, 1–8;¹⁶ Kim 2011, 122–127).

In the absence of bones or a burial site, symbolic, epigraphic, or iconographic representations of the dead as persons provided alternative modes of embodiment. For example, 8th century BCE inscriptions KAI 258, Hadad Stele (KAI 214), and Katamuwa Stele at Zincirli, combined textual references and iconographic representations of care and feeding the 'defunct soul' of the dead (Suriano 2018, 152–165). The point of inscribing the name of the dead on the stele was to 'preserve [the] name for posterity' in a tangible and permanent form (Suriano 2018, 153–154). The image of the dead gave physical form to their presence as well as provided a tangible place to satiate the appetites of the supernatural dead and other divine beings sharing in the feast (Sanders 2013). Hebrew inscriptions carved on the exterior of three monumental rock-cut tombs at Silwan (late 8th century BCE) and on the interior of two rock-cut tombs at Khirbet el-Qom (late 8th or 7th century BCE) similarly recorded the names of the dead at their place of burial, alongside curses and blessings intended to protect them from illicit disturbance such as grave robbing (Suriano 2018, 99–115).¹⁷ Sanctioned reopening of the chambers for additional inhumations or depositions of offerings evidently was not problematic (Suriano 2018). In these and other cases, funerary inscriptions named and occasionally depicted the dead as individuals, perhaps drawing from the long Mesopotamian tradition of *kispum*.

Figural depictions and naming of the dead with inscriptions could replace skeletal realia, providing a physical form for the disembodied dead to inhabit and receive offerings. For figural imagery in particular, this mode of object personification (Suriano 2018, 154) may have functioned in a similar way to Mesopotamian temple cult statues or royal images, which could be enlivened ritually with divine presence to receive offerings (Winter 1992; Porter 2014).¹⁸ Likewise, at the non-elite social level, ritually purified clay and wood figures could be buried in corners, gates or room of houses to offer protection from invading forces of disease and evil (Wiggermann 1992), activating object agency that blurred categorical lines between persons and things. I adopt the view from Porter (2014), who argues that ritually activated images of persons and deities may have represented divisible, or partible, personhood.¹⁹ In other words, personhood could be divided, separated and distributed among different bodies, places or objects.²⁰ The presence of a single, whole body was therefore not required for post-mortem personhood when notions of individualism and indivisibility of the mind-body-soul are not assumed. Rather, consideration of alternative

modes of personhood and embodiment opens a wider field of view in which intact or fragmented objects, living or dead human and animal bodies, and real or imagined places could have attained personhood status. This status may have been independent or dependent on another person, body, place, animal or thing.

The partible personhood framework deconstructs categories of objects, bodies and persons. As this study has demonstrated, these variables were not necessarily stable in mortuary contexts. Rather, fluidity between these categories contributed to creating new bodies that broke the corporeal paradigm of the living and remade it into something new – in form, composition and meaning – for the dead. It may be helpful to consider body parts, representations and body-objects, such as the inert skeletal fragments of long-dead ancestors, as part of the wider burial assemblage. Such assemblages can be viewed as heterogeneous articulations of things, senses, memories and time which were ‘contingent and temporary, and have the endless generative potential to lead to new configurations, new assemblages,’ and new meanings (Hamilakis 2017, 175). Particularly for multiple-successive burial contexts, assemblages were not only performative and relational, they were also accumulative. They changed in form, composition and meaning depending on context and the passage of time, as well as through aspects of performance such as disposal, circulation and curation of materials; removal from the world of the living; ritual performance; fragmentation; and entanglement with other materials.

Conclusions: homing in on the dead

Reused and shared burial spaces of the Middle Bronze Age Levant functioned as places for commemorating, reimagining and reshaping the dead as persons and as bodies. These spaces materialized complex and dynamic beliefs about corporeality, embodiment and personhood after death and burial. Their accumulative assemblages blurred lines between bodies and objects and between corporeal and non-corporeal persons. Practices of disarticulation, breakage and intermingling also broke barriers that separated individual bodies. These experiments in embodiment reformulated the bodies of the dead in order to create a new kind of post-mortem body and person, that of the corporate group of household ancestors.

A unique aspect of compound and commingling burials was the partible nature of the bones as mnemonic representations of the dead. Bones represented separable parts of the greater whole that could be circulated, curated, stored and reconstituted after death. The separability of the body was only achievable after decomposition and was therefore an aspect of embodiment that was unique to the dead and unattainable by the living. Bones indexed the skeleton, which symbolized the person; in other words, decomposition enabled recomposition. Yet, bones shifted in meaning as bodies broke down and intermingled. The commingling of broken body parts of different individuals bound the many together irrevocably to create an aggregate whole that was more than the sum of its parts. Just as skeletal remains represented

a dead person, commingling remains represented a new physical and social entity. The case-studies of body disposal methods in Tomb 100 and of body disposal and body imagery at the Royal Hypogeum at Qaṭna illustrated how dynamic and complex beliefs about the dead were inscribed onto their bodies and body parts as well as externalized through material culture.

The spatial and temporal contexts of these spaces played an important role in their use and longevity as specialized ritual spaces. Shared cave and chamber tombs occurred within and outside of settlements. The living made choices about where and how to dispose of the dead, whether in the extramural city cemetery or inside the house, either in primary inhumations in pits and jars or in multiple-successive chamber tombs. Although not all the cultural, social or political rules and restrictions governing such choices are known, the outcome of these decisions carried implications for situating the role of the dead after burial within the household. Among all of these options, subfloor residential chamber tombs may have served a special purpose. By embedding the dead within the architecture of the house and the social construct of the household, these burials created close social, spatial and temporal connections between the living and the dead who occupied the same habitational space (Gillespie 2010, 99). The dead, initially as recently dead corpses and later as long-dead ancestors without coherent bodies, were foundational to the house and household in literal and figurative senses. Tomb 100 at Tel Megiddo and the Royal Hypogeum and Tomb VII at the Royal Palace of Qaṭna, as reused intramural mortuary spaces, fulfilled distinct social roles that differentiated these groups of household dead from those buried in undisturbed primary inhumations elsewhere in the same buildings. Reused tombs created space for commemorating a special group of household ancestors (Cradic 2018). This model of selective commemoration through residential burial and body disposal practices has also been traced across the ancient Near East, such as at Titriş Höyük where a similar interpretation has been proposed (Laneri 2010; 2020, 164).²¹

Shared residential tombs created not only a locus for commemoration but a dedicated ‘genealogy of place’ within the house, founded on the bodies of the household predecessors and founders – in other words, the ancestors (McAnany 1995, *passim*). As part of the residential assemblage, the bones of the dead generated intergenerational links or ‘referential chains, as citations of prior actions’ through the tangible and intangible body (Gillespie 2010, 104). Reused chamber tombs served as dynamic and carefully curated ancestral caches in which bodies and materials of inalienable and heritable value were collected, curated and stored in ways that referenced past, present and future generations (McAnany 1995; 2010, 139; Thomas 2016; Blomster and Ponce de León 2017). In commingling mortuary contexts, anatomical individuality was intentionally blurred in favor of creating a new set of wholes that, in an experimental and perhaps contradictory way, was composed of broken parts. Structured and repetitious funerary rituals reshaped the body as a medium through which to sustain commemoration of predecessors, negotiate the social role of the dead, reimagine relationships between persons and bodies, and to create new links in the chain.

Notes

- 1 This study follows Andreou's (2016) 'tomb concepts' which define and compare burial architecture based on performative criteria of functionality and methods of access. For example, under this model rock-cut chambers, built chambers and cave tombs fall under the same conceptual category because of their accessibility and ability to host specific ritual activities. This study applies this scheme to the variable of body disposal by drawing attention to conceptual and performative overlaps in contexts of multiple-successive and commingling inhumations.
- 2 Broadly speaking, primary inhumation is identifiable in archaeological deposits through the presence of *in situ* articulated skeletal remains in anatomical position and skeletal completeness, both of which demonstrate that at the time of burial bodily tissues were 'sufficiently intact to prevent the disarticulation of two contiguous bones' (Duday 2006, 33; Andrews and Bello 2006, 17). Joints of the hands, toes and neck disarticulate the most quickly and therefore are useful for identifying primary inhumations (Andrews and Bello 2006, 17). Other criteria include the presence of 'floating' bones, such as the patella, hyoid and terminal phalanges (Andrews and Bello 2006: 17). Secondary and compound inhumations are indicated by the degree of bone movement and disarticulation, as well as the representation of skeletal elements, particularly presence of persistent joints but absence of labile (unstable) joints and small distal elements such as phalanges (Bello and Andrews 2006, 9; Knüsel and Robb 2016, 3–4). Secondary and compound disposals involve components of time (delay) and space (movement of bones) (Andrews and Bello 2006, 17). Commingling and fragmented human skeletal remains are the most obvious material hallmarks of compound disposal. However, evaluation of taphonomy and context is required to establish intentionality of such practices and to rule out non-anthropogenic disturbances such as erosion, water action, scavenging, or bioturbation as explanations for this end-result encountered during excavation.
- 3 For example, Moutafi and Voutsaki (2016) applied the method to 21 burials from Mycenaean Greece and found that primary and secondary disposals occurred in nearly equal frequencies but that much more variation in the minimum number of individuals (MNI) and the number of funerary episodes occurred in secondary burials.
- 4 A complete skeleton scores 10 while a single bone gets a grade of 1; partially complete skeletons are ranked as bone counts in units of 20 bones or partial bones. Breakage is measured by proportion of breaks; if all bones are broken, the score is 1 and if all are complete, the score is 10. Likewise, a disarticulated skeleton gets a score of 1 and an articulated skeleton is scored as a 10. Finally, surface modification is the extent of staining, weathering, gnaw marks, punctures, root marks, cut marks, and burning (Andrews and Bello 2006; Crozier 2016; Knüsel and Robb 2016; Pilloud *et al.* 2016). Heavy modification scores 1 and no modification is graded 10.
- 5 For example, a primary disturbed inhumation may score on the cusp or close to the lower end of the primary disposal score range. Primary disturbed is a category defined here as a primary inhumation that demonstrates evidence of accidental and/or non-anthropogenic disturbance. Burials that contain multiple inhumations, particularly multiple-successive disposal practices, may show a combination of different disposal methods within a single mortuary context. Therefore, evaluating disposal method requires close reading of the archaeological context together (qualitative analysis) with the taphonomic index (quantitative analysis).
- 6 The clearest parallels in diversity of intramural burial practices within a settlement occurred at Tel Dan, Tel Kabri, and Ashkelon, with comparable examples of intramural masonry-constructed chamber tombs attested at Tel Dan, Tel Kabri, Tell Tweini, Tall Sūkās, Alalakh, and Ras Shamra (Cradic 2017b, tables 32–35). The Royal Palace at Qatna also contained a combination of intramural chamber tombs (multiple-successive, secondary, and compound disposals) and simple pit burials (primary inhumations) that 'existed parallel to each other' (Pfälzner 2016, 246–247).

- 7 In contrast to the high density of disarticulated skeletal remains, three articulated skeletons were also recovered inside Tomb VII (Pfälzner 2014, 145–146, figs 9–11). The exceptional state of articulation indicates that three corpses were likely primary inhumations. It is not clear why these corpses were selected for primary inhumation in Tomb VII, a context otherwise reserved for secondary disposals. For unknown reasons, these primary inhumations may have bypassed the Hypogeum entirely, missing out on the funerary feasts and commemoration events held in that chamber.
- 8 These taphonomic criteria are presented in descriptive form based on data provided in published excavation reports and analyses (Witzel and Kreutz 2007; Witzel 2011; Lange 2014; Pfälzner 2011; 2012; 2014; 2016; Pfälzner *et al.* 2012; 2014). Calculating the taphonomic index scores would require finer-grained data than appear in typical osteological reports, and/or access to first-hand field observations.
- 9 According to Old Babylonian prayer text *BE* 6/2, women could be included in *kispum* offerings as unnamed spouses and mothers, or could be named in the special case of *nadītu* (van der Toorn 1996, 54). *Nadītu* served *šamaš* in the temple at Sippar, a role that elevated their status in life and after death (van der Toorn 2014, 84).
- 10 Ancestor commemoration and cult of the dead are understood here as separate but related phenomena. The former involves the ritual commemoration of specific persons or groups of persons while the latter encompasses the care and feeding of the dead at large (Schmidt 1994, 5, 13; Pardee 1996; Teinz 2012, 236–239).
- 11 In contrast, Pardee (1996, 283 n. 17) maintains that the divine name written *ilib* does not reference a divine ancestor but rather ‘god of the father’.
- 12 The dead could also appear in other forms, such as ghosts (Akkadian *eṭemmu*) (Bottéro 1992, 271; Scurlock 2006; 2016).
- 13 Ugaritic root *hrt* ‘cave, grave’, cf. Akk. *hirtu* (del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2003, 408); also Ugaritic and Hebrew root *qbr* ‘grave, tomb, burial’ (del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2003, 692). In the Hebrew Bible, funerary imagery equated tombs with tent, house or an intergenerational dwelling (Suriano 2018, 150, 233–237).
- 14 Certain deities played a role in controlling access to the Netherworld, particularly *Šin* and *šamaš* in Babylonian tradition and *Špš* in Ugaritic tradition (Wiggins 1996). *Šin* and *šamaš* could ‘mediate between the dead and the living. [*Šin*] can “release” (*wuššuru*) the dead from the netherworld, as *šamaš* can “make the spirit approach its family”’ (van der Toorn 1996, 53). In the Hebrew Bible, the term ‘*Sheol*’ carried two meanings: it referred to the ‘mythologized realm of the dead’ as a liminal space and could also mean a subterranean tomb such as a pit (Suriano 2018, 218, 231–232).
- 15 The dedication of an honorary stele was not restricted to the dead. The ‘offering/festival of the stele’ (*nidba/hul na-ru*) at Ebla could occur during a person’s lifetime for reasons other than funerary commemoration (Archi 2012, 28).
- 16 *KTU* is an abbreviation for *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Habi und anderen Orten: KTU 3* (Dietrich *et al.* 2013).
- 17 See Suriano (2018, 117–122) for discussion of inscriptions at the tomb site of Khirbet beit Lei (7th–6th centuries BCE).
- 18 Divine agency attributed to Mesopotamian cult statues had ritual, economic and legal implications and involved physical engagement with specific body parts on the statue. For example, the mouth-opening (Akk. *mīš pī*) ritual of the cult statue, known mostly from Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources, transformed the statue into the deity. Once installed in the temple, it could receive sacrifices and donations of food and drink (Winter 1992; Lambert 1993; Matsushima 1993; Walker and Dick 1999; Dick 2005). The New Years’ festival (Akk. *akītu*), involved royalty taking binding legal and political oaths by holding the hand of the cult statue, which was paraded outside the temple (Bidmead 2002). Kings took responsibility for maintaining

the statues, which required feeding, housing, clothing, and decoration as well as rituals of purification and renewal (Matsushima 1993).

- 19 This reasoning applies notions of divisible personhood (dividuality), object agency, and material entanglement from the works of Mauss (1954), Strathern (1988), Gell (1998) and Hodder (2011).
- 20 Two fictional examples from popular literature illustrate divisible, partible personhood. First, the concept of horcruxes in J.K. Rowling's (2005) *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* demonstrates one way in which partible personhood may operate. Horcruxes are objects, animals, or persons that contain part of a soul outside the body. The soul fragment is divided from its original body and then transferred to a separate entity through the performance of a complex set of magical rituals. Partibility of personhood protects against the destruction of the whole person by dividing, separating, and distributing personhood to different bodies and materials. Second, a similar notion was deployed earlier by J.R.R. Tolkien (1954; 1955; 1956) in *The Lord of the Rings*. The One Ring not only serves as an object with agency that drives the narrative (Whitley 2013, 9–10), but its existential fate was intertwined with the personhood and body of its supernatural creator, Sauron, who imbued it with magical power that was directly derived and divided from himself.
- 21 Laneri (2020, 164) explains that 'individuals buried in crypts did not represent the whole range of inhabitants of the house, but must have been important representatives of the familial ancestors because of the selection of the individual buried within the crypts'.

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