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Deconstructing “Deviant”

An Introduction to the History of Atypical Burials and the
Importance of Context in the Bioarchaeological Record

AMY B. SCOTT, TRACY K. BETSINGER,
AND ANASTASIA TSALIKI

The treatment of the dead is one of the few universals of all human societies, past and present. In every culture, people do *something* with the dead. What death represents biologically, socially, and culturally, is very different, as there are a myriad of practices and traditions that facilitate these changes in the physical and spiritual states of being, whether immediately obvious or experienced over the long term (see Lizza 2006; Youngner et al. 1999). The complex nature of death, and more specifically how we treat the dead is significant as the intricacies of this process speak to various elements of the individual and the community. While we recognize that funerary rites and mortuary practices do not always involve burials or may not leave archaeological evidence, this volume focuses predominantly on tangible mortuary practices with the acknowledgment that there is more to death beyond physical evidence.

Mortuary practices, specifically burials, have been the subject of research and discussion in archaeology and bioarchaeology for more than ninety years, including early articles such as Kroeber's 1927 treatise, *Disposal of the Dead*, which explores variation in cremation and inhumation practices among indigenous groups of California as well as cross-cultural examples of mortuary customs. This meaning and understanding of the mortuary process was also examined by Hertz (1960) in *Death and the Right Hand* and the social require-

ments (i.e., mourning) needed when one moves from “the visible society of the living into the invisible society of the dead” (86). Binford (1972) and Saxe (1970) solidified mortuary archaeology as a specialty within anthropology, utilizing a “social systems” approach to burials and mortuary treatments (see also O’Shea 1984; Shay 1985). More recently, there has been a broadening of the field to include mortuary individualism and agency (e.g., Aspöck 2008; Tsaliki 2008a, 2008b). Mortuary practices are a focus of research because these treatments are thought to reflect the role of the deceased and their soul “in the lives of the living” (Rakita and Buikstra 2005b: 93). Burial treatments, however, are not just about the dead, they are also about the living (Parker Pearson 1999) and their thoughts, ideas, interpretations, and practices. As Rakita and Buikstra (2005a) point out, “mortuary rites involve manipulations of material culture, social relations, cultural ideals, and the human body” (1). Mortuary treatments, then, represent a nexus of the individual being buried and their social role in life as well as those doing the burying. Burial is a combination of what the deceased requested be done with their remains after death (if such a request was made), the interpretations and feelings about the deceased by the people doing the burying and their adherence to social norms, and the overarching cultural customs that guide and dictate how and why a certain burial type is employed. Teasing these factors apart can be quite difficult and, in some cases, impossible; however, the importance of assessing mortuary practices in a population cannot be denied. Arguably, we learn a significant amount about a culture when we examine their dead and the physical bodies left behind.

This volume focuses on archaeological mortuary practices, and more specifically, on practices considered atypical or non-normative in the expected mortuary traditions of specific geographic regions and temporal periods. By comparing and contrasting various influencing factors to identify the shifting ideologies that influence these practices, we are able to highlight the commonality of creating unique mortuary treatments for unique individuals. This consideration of identity established by the individual in life and subsequently maintained/reconstructed/abandoned/altered by their community after death, inevitably alters how the dead are not only treated but also remain engaged beyond their physical presence. In considering burial specifically, Chapman (2010) outlines that this is a process by which a fragmentation occurs, as a complete representation of the individual cannot possibly be attained within a mortuary context as carried out by the still living population. However, by recognizing this juxtaposition of information provided by the deceased (e.g., age,

sex, diet, disease) and that provided by the living (e.g., artifact inclusion, body positioning, burial location), it is possible to identify common threads of the mortuary process that can speak to larger notions of life and death. As Aspöck (2015) argues, we must embrace the complexity of mortuary behavior by moving beyond simplistic, typologically driven classifications of burial expectations. Humans are a species of extreme variation in life, so why are there expectations of simplicity after death?

Atypical or non-normative burials are those mortuary treatments that differ from what is considered typical for a population (Aspöck 2009; Tsaliki 2008a, 2008b); however, defining what is unusual within a population's complex, diverse mortuary treatments can be difficult. Chapman (2010) has argued that determining what the minimum difference needs to be to classify something as atypical is also challenging, thus making the basic step of identifying a burial as atypical problematic. Additionally, the use of westernized norms to define what is considered atypical is a typological constraint in which mortuary traditions are simplified into only two possible categories (i.e., typical and atypical). As Aspöck (2015) argues, "in any cultural context there are different 'norms' of funerary practices for different types of dead individuals" (88). Within these practices are subtle shifts or "improv[isations] within the larger traditions of funerary performance" that represent local geographic and temporal contexts that can eventually result in larger mortuary changes (Aspöck 2015; Gordon 2014: 42). It is through this continuous range of variation from "ideal to improper" (Aspöck 2015: 88) we are able to highlight the contextual elements of mortuary analysis beyond typological classifications of positive versus negative burial types. As Parker Pearson (1993) argues, understanding the burial process is dependent on the ability of archaeologists to decipher the ever-changing relationship that the living create with the dead.

Atypical mortuary practices first became a focus of processual archaeological inquiry in the early 1970s, as questions of the intentionality and the meaning behind these burials was at the forefront of mortuary research (Aspöck 2008). More broadly, this processual period focused on how variability in mortuary practices fit within a systems model of society (see Binford 1971). Binford (1972) argued that the social persona of an individual during life influenced the mortuary process, where a community had specific obligations to the deceased that were directly influenced by elements of sex, age, status, or other roles the individual may have played within the community. This "duty relationship" between the living and the deceased was therefore considered

a direct and true reflection of that individual's biological, social, and cultural identity (Binford 1972: 225–226).

Concurrent with Binford, Saxe (1970) explored the notion of “deviant” social persona and how certain circumstances during life may alter the way in which an individual was treated after death. From this perspective, Saxe (1970) argued that a deviant social persona would inevitably cause a change in mortuary rituals as these individuals would not be afforded a normal mortuary treatment, but rather one that reflected their degree of social deviancy. Further to this, Saxe (1970) suggested that a deviant individual would not be buried according to the normal traditions based on age, sex, and status, but would likely display a mortuary treatment showing less appreciation and care for the deceased, a notion also supported and further investigated by Goldstein (1981). Together, this work of Binford and Saxe became known as the Saxe-Binford hypothesis, but it was criticized for its rigidity by supporters of Van Gennep (1960), who saw death and burial as a more fluid rite of passage. The identity ascribed to the dead depended on the successful completion of this process, with Ucko (1969) demonstrating this variability of body treatment across cultures.

Following this initial work by Binford and Saxe, O'Shea (1984) and Shay (1985) examined atypical burials using both archaeological and ethnographic evidence. O'Shea (1984) recognized the difficulties in identifying atypical burials, as evidence found in the archaeological record has no ethnographic model to be compared against, and similarly, some ethnographic examples of mortuary traditions are nearly impossible to locate archaeologically (Aspöck 2008). O'Shea (1984) argued that because of this inevitable gap in the archaeological record, it would be impossible to locate and examine all examples of atypical burials. This difficulty associated with archaeological recovery was further explored by the work of Shay (1985), who examined the changing nature of atypical burials and how this categorization is not a static entity within a mortuary context, but rather has the ability to change over time and in different societies. Shay (1985) argued that this variability among atypical burials is an important tool to better analyze social norms and rules, as “deviance helps to mark the boundaries of society” (222). It was based on these early processual models that atypical burials were regarded as a means by which to conceptualize the boundaries of social acceptability.

Moving beyond these processual notions of atypical burials, current post-processual studies involve an exploration of individualism, agency, and the

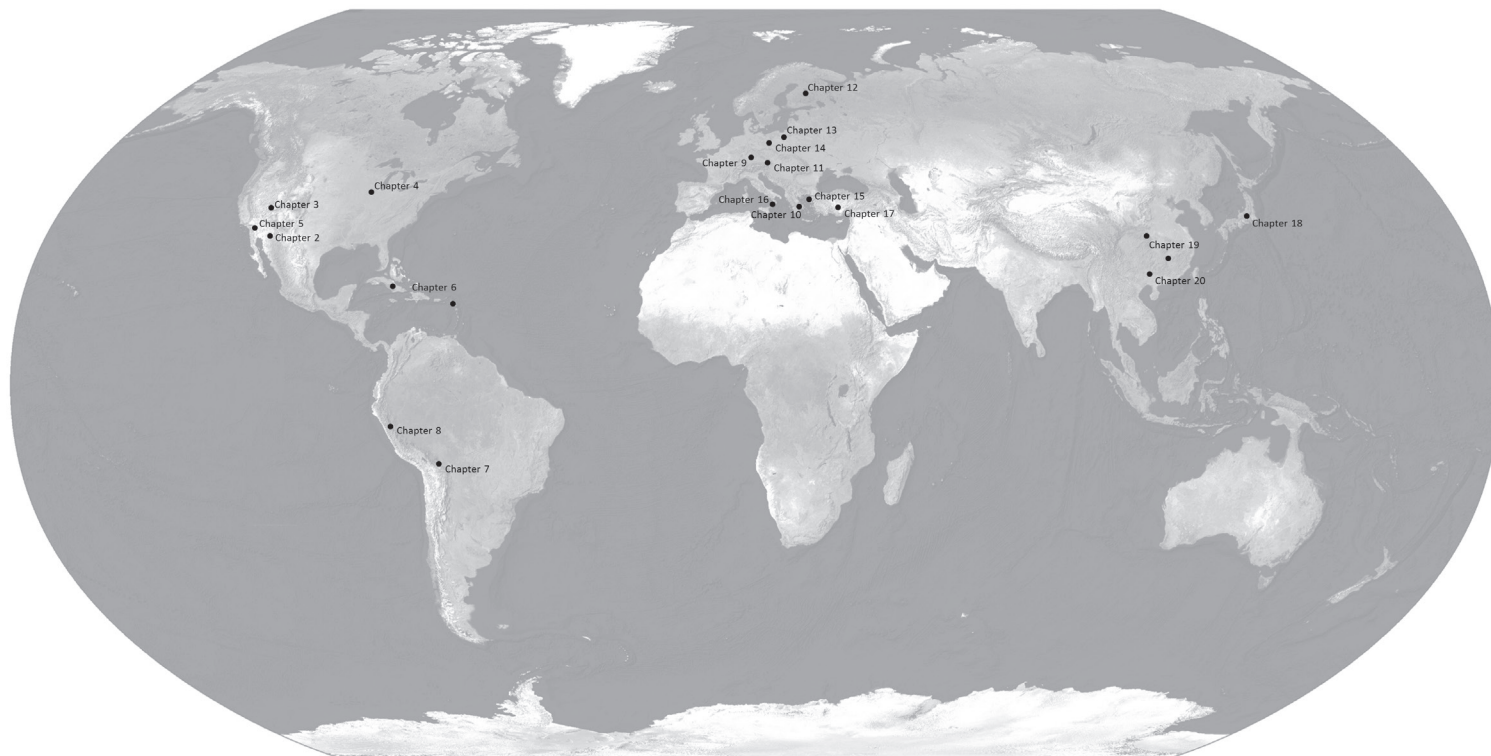
impact of these burials on the surrounding natural landscape (Aspöck 2008). Recent studies have also encouraged the inclusion of multiple lines of evidence when assessing atypical burials, such as biological factors, pathological factors (e.g., stress, disease), and social factors, all of which can contribute to the better understanding of these burials and why they are created. This post-processual framework stresses the need for a multidisciplinary approach in research design, analysis, and interpretation (see Knüsel 2010; McHugh 1999; Tsaliki 2008a, 2008b). Aspöck (2009) argues that atypical burials have undergone a transformation within archaeology, from being a secondary concern of the larger social system, to becoming more focused on the individual and elements of agency and identity (see Chapman 2010; Jonsson 2009; Riisøy 2015). Context, then, is of supreme importance. Without context, researchers may not be gaining a full understanding of the atypical burials themselves or of the larger social group under study.

As the exploration of atypical burials has evolved, so has its definition and the terminology used to explore variation in the mortuary process. Originally, the term “deviant” was introduced through the statistical modeling of processual archaeology to identify those that deviated from the norm; however, over time the term deviant and its use in mortuary archaeology has become stigmatized as these burials have, more often than not, been interpreted as representations of the bizarre (Aspöck 2009). While in some circumstances these burials do embody the negative connotations of social, cultural, or biological deviancy, this is not a universal pattern, and as such, terms like “atypical” better represent the flexibility needed when interpreting variation in mortuary practices. For example, the spatial distribution of graves while at times has been argued to represent those considered socially deviant to be separated from their community (e.g., Donnelly and Murphy 2008), such distribution may also represent examples of elite burial requiring separation based on revered status (e.g., Janowski and Kurasiński 2010). Moreover, these types of burials may have played an important role in strengthening early Christian beliefs (e.g., Riisøy 2015) or in contributing to social order (e.g., Betsinger and Scott 2014). Atypical burials exist beyond the confines of deviant behavior or deviant social persona.

A holistic focus provides a means by which to move beyond these binary categorizations in which skeletal analysis, ethnohistorical records, and archaeological interpretations can be combined in a way that highlights the individuality of these particular burials through an allied context. As Fitz-

patrick-Matthews (2007) points out in their study of Iron Age and Roman cemeteries, group identity in a mortuary context can be pulled from three levels of context: (1) the material elements of the burial, (2) the burial rite, and (3) the skeletal remains, representing both group expression of identity in burial treatment but also individual experiences captured within the skeletal remains. This contextual breakdown of burials into various elements that together create a comprehensive dataset is similar to the work of Stojanowski and Duncan (2017) and their discussion of biohistories. Whereas, Fitzpatrick-Matthews' (2007) model focuses on how burial data may distinguish individual and community social groups, the biohistorical approach by Stojanowski and Duncan (2017) highlights our ability both to serve the individual through historical construction of identity and also to use that individualized focus to reflect on the scale of these mortuary practices and how they intersect with the interests of the dead (i.e., funerary requests, agency as a once living individual). Both examples use this holistic approach to demonstrate the merit of contextual data to provide both emic and etic perspectives on the burial process and variations within it. While the term "deviant" is valid from a statistical perspective to describe the outliers of a particular dataset, the word "atypical" dominates this volume in an attempt to diminish preconceived, negative connotations associated with the use of "deviant" as a descriptor. We recognize that the dichotomous undertones surrounding this language are still present; however, through this volume we hope to move away from binary classifications with continuous datasets that showcase the continuum of variation outside of expectation. Similar to recent discussions in gender archaeology, there is a need to "de-contain" individuals from binary classifications to ensure that the entire spectrum of variability can be acknowledged and interpreted (see Ghisleni et al. 2016).

Because of the nature of atypical burials, the patterns and examples in this volume represent geographic and temporal variation that are highlighted by in-depth contextual analyses. The chapters have been arranged based on geography, beginning in the Western hemisphere and moving east, and then by time period, beginning with the oldest examples of atypical burials (fig. 1.1). Each chapter builds on the notion that while these burials display individualized elements speaking to specific cultural, social, or biological expectations, atypical burials are a cross-cultural phenomenon contributing to our universal understanding of death and burial. These chapters also place emphasis on context and build on earlier works by using a large temporal span and ex-



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Figure 1.1. World map showing the geographic range of research included in this edited volume.

panding the geographic scope of the evidence and examples considered. The authors approach atypical burials by first identifying and exploring what is considered typical mortuary treatment and how atypical elements are defined in each specific case study. This is then further investigated through potential causative factors explaining why these mortuary treatments exist. So, rather than simply presenting a case study of a unique atypical burial and what that might mean, the authors in this volume have considered broader practices and implications for the study of atypical burials overall. Moreover, this volume seeks to examine atypical burials on a broader scale and to highlight the theoretical aspects of such investigations. The chapters herein consider that atypical burials reflect both the deceased and those who buried them and provide sound contextual analysis and use multiple lines of evidence in order to gain a better understanding of atypical burials within a population.

This work expands on earlier volumes that also consider unusual mortuary practices but from case study and geographic and temporal perspectives, such as Eileen Murphy's (2008) volume, *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*, and Andrew Reynolds's (2009) *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*. Both Murphy and Reynolds present a broad overview of the deviant burial and how its definition is influenced by cultural notions of belonging and social acceptability but also by elements of folklore and superstition. Reynolds focuses on geographic boundaries that define atypical treatment, using the Anglo-Saxon period in England to demonstrate the true breadth of these unique treatments under the ideological, cultural, and political constraints of the early medieval period. Murphy takes a wider approach by using specific case study examples to survey deviant burials across Europe and over time with chapters exploring how deviant burials can represent both the deceased and the living through distinct care for the dead.

The significance of this volume lies in its ability to highlight not only the diversity of these atypical treatments but also the underlying similarities in how death is approached across time and space. Whether these mortuary treatments have evolved to benefit the deceased in the afterlife or the still-living community, their archaeological presence across the globe warrants further investigation. Collectively, this volume moves the study of atypical burials forward by providing a diverse array of comprehensive and critical analyses.

This introduction focuses on the broader notions of atypical burials, how their study has evolved, the terminology that defines this research, and the

benefits of a context-driven approach. Chapter 2 by Cerezo-Román explores the practices of inhumation and cremation in the Prehispanic American Southwest and outlines how atypical mortuary customs changed over an 800-year period, AD 700–1500. Cerezo-Román considers biological reconstructions of the deceased in combination with posthumous treatments in order to reconstruct the complexity of funeral customs and their social significance and how those shift over time. By comparing inhumations with cremations, the author addresses how these discrete mortuary practices are related and are part of the complex mortuary customs of the populations inhabiting this region.

In chapter 3, Stodder addresses how interpretation of atypical burials has shifted in the Mesa Verde region of Southwestern Colorado in North America. Initially in the 1980s, burials found in the floor of pit houses, dating to AD 725–900, were argued to be suspected witches who had been executed or individuals who died accidentally. With further research and contextual consideration, the more recent interpretation has identified these burials as less common but not necessarily atypical burial practices. Stodder's chapter emphasizes the need to rethink what constitutes normative and non-normative mortuary practices and illustrates the efficacy of using context and multiple lines of evidence to draw conclusions concerning them.

Cook and colleagues (chapter 4) focus on the Late Woodland (AD 830) and Mississippian (AD 1030) periods in west-central Illinois and a case of hand amputation. Situating this unique burial within a rich historical context that speaks to burial continuity over time, Cook and colleagues investigate how physical disability may dictate mortuary practices where factors that lead to physical disability in life (i.e., being burned) may also be incorporated into burial practices (i.e., burial being burned).

In chapter 5, Lambert discusses a mid-nineteenth-century example of an atypical burial from an early Mormon colony in San Bernardino, California. Lambert uses dental pathology and metrics to examine population affiliation, comparing and contrasting the results with historical records. Lambert argues that despite evidence suggesting acculturation of this “outsider” into this Anglo-American community, this burial acts as a symbol of social change during that time and demonstrates how these political relationships might have been navigated in life and after death.

Chapter 6, by Mickleburgh and colleagues, addresses the difficult task of identifying atypical burials in the Ceramic Age (500 BC–AD 1500) Caribbean

archipelago, where there was much variation in mortuary treatment. Utilizing a basic quantitative assessment and social network analysis, they identify specific cases of atypical burial, then subject them to multidisciplinary contextual analysis. Their study makes a strong argument for the necessity of using substantial contextual information in order to elucidate what is typical and what is atypical across related populations.

Gabelmann and Owens present a unique case study of burial positioning in chapter 7. Dating to the Bolivian Formative period (1300 BC–AD 200), this individual, while provided with burial goods similar to the remainder of the population and whose burial was located centrally within the cemetery, showed a tightly flexed, partially prone body position with distinct finger positioning. Gabelmann and Owens argue that body position represents “disposal format” and as such there are many possible interpretations for this unique positioning, ranging from social or sexual indiscretions to coming of age maturation rites; however, they stress that the care imbued in this burial negates the common negative interpretations that such a burial would normally evoke.

Continuing to explore this South American context in chapter 8, Więckowski and colleagues discuss four atypical burials dating to the Early Horizon period (800–100 BC) in Peru. Exploring both pre- and post-depositional alterations, the authors investigate the importance of iconographic comparisons and the transfer of personhood and identity through practices of postmortem body arrangements or trophy collecting. Connecting cosmology with the physical body allows the authors to investigate the social and cultural similarities of these burials which occupy different biological contexts (i.e., age and sex differences).

Müller-Scheessel and collaborators (chapter 9) investigate what are regular and irregular burials from the Early Iron Age (800–250 BC) Central Europe. The authors examine burials found in grain-storage settlement pits and consider proposed explanations to determine who and why individuals were buried in these unusual locations. Criticizing the lack of contextual information given in past assessments, Müller-Scheessel et al. use bioarchaeological, isotopic, and archaeological data to conclude that many of the earlier interpretations of these burials were incorrect.

In chapter 10, Tsaliki presents an unusual case of body disposal in a disused kiln from Roman Greece, dating to the fourth century AD. Discovery of burials outside established burial grounds has been rare in Greece until recently, mainly because of financial and methodological constraints surrounding excavations. In an effort to interpret this highly atypical burial, the author explores

notions of social structure, punishment, and dismemberment, which occupy a prominent position in ancient Greek myth and law.

Chapter 11 by Hosek discusses atypical burials in tenth century AD Bohemia at the site of Kanín and the significance of body position. Hosek argues that as Christianization spread across Bohemia, mortuary traditions reflected the ongoing negotiation between pagan tradition and the rise of Christianity. Using skeletal data in addition to body positioning, Hosek discusses emerging patterns in how social identity or status may have influenced the burial process during this politically and ideologically unstable period. While many of these atypical burial treatments seen at Libice may speak to the fear surrounding the dead, to local traditions, or to disease outbreaks, Hosek articulates that despite their atypical treatment, these burials represent “differentiation rather than exclusion” (page 219). Atypical burials, with single or multiple interments, display a recognition of and care for the deceased whether for the benefit of the deceased in the afterlife or of the still-living community.

Chapter 12 by Moilanen investigates what is good death and bad death in AD 900–1200 Finland. Drawing on Finnish folklore combined with archaeological data and large-scale regional analyses, Moilanen examines burials previously identified as deviant. The author concludes that the reasons behind this atypical practice are much more diverse than previously thought and argues that a “microarchaeological framework” is needed to identify variation in mortuary treatments as well as in atypical burials. In addition to finding substantially more variation in historic Finnish burials, Moilanen also contends that sociohistorical research should be combined with scientific methods to gain a more complete understanding of past mortuary practices.

Gardela (chapter 13) evaluates atypical burials from early medieval (tenth–thirteenth centuries AD) Poland and examines their interpretation as “vampire” burials. He considers other possible meanings behind unusual mortuary customs, drawing on historical records, folklore, and archaeological data. Gardela considers various atypical practices, such as prone burial, decapitation, unusual body orientation, and others, and offers alternative explanations. He concludes that the broad application of “vampire” burials or “anti-vampire” burials obscures the variety of reasons that people may have been subjected to atypical mortuary practices.

Similarly, in chapter 14, Betsinger and Scott investigate how health may dictate atypical burial treatment in post-medieval Poland (seventeenth–eighteenth centuries AD). Because atypical burials may represent those of individuals

considered deviant during life, whether because of social or biological differences, this chapter assesses the health status of individuals given distinct “anti-vampire” burial treatments to determine whether disease, trauma, or overall poor health may have contributed to certain artifacts being included in these distinct graves. The authors also explore the complexity of these burials through a review of “anti-vampire” practices in Poland during this period, with results suggesting that while no obvious health differences are associated with these burials, social or cultural factors not involving the physical skeleton were most likely the reason for their creation.

In chapter 15, Garvie-Lok and Tsaliki examine anti-revenant mortuary practices in Early Modern (eighteenth–nineteenth centuries AD) Greece. Utilizing ethnographic, ethnohistorical, biological, and archaeological data, the authors assess Greek “vampire”-related mortuary ritual. They also discuss why “vampire” burials may be underreported archaeologically and how they might be identified in the archaeological record.

Piombino-Mascali and Nystrom (chapter 16) investigate atypical burial practices involving mummification in sixteenth- to twentieth-century Sicily. Drawing on historical research and archaeological data, they consider how such a novel treatment of the dead began to develop, beginning as a non-normative practice and evolving into a more typical practice over time. Additionally, they assess the reasons this mortuary practice came into fashion and who was subjected to it. This chapter illustrates how atypical mortuary treatments are time sensitive and may not always be outside the norm.

Chapter 17 takes a temporal approach to atypical burials, focusing on four examples from the Neolithic period through to the twentieth century AD at the Çatalhöyük site in Turkey. Haddow and colleagues argue that, while these examples demonstrate non-normative traditions, there are at least some recognizable factors in these treatments that suggest a calculated exclusion of these individuals from the community. Their temporal approach highlights the impressive time depth at the Çatalhöyük site, but also how the definition and creation of atypical mortuary treatment changes over time. In addition, the comparative analysis demonstrates a community understanding of how individuals should be interred and how those choices reflect personal histories and the relationship between individual and community.

In chapter 18, Ishikawa discusses atypical burial treatments in the middle Jomon period (3500–2500 BC) at the Kusakari site in Japan. Focusing on body position and body direction, Ishikawa highlights a unique example of atypical

burial treatment with the removal of limbs and argues that removal or shifts in body position may be related to post-depositional changes but also to the fear surrounding the dead. By incapacitating the body through physical changes such as amputation, the belief was that an individual's remains would be fixed within the grave.

Chapter 19 by Lee examines a broad geographic and temporal range of mortuary practices in China and Mongolia from the Neolithic (3500–3000 BC) to the Period of Disunion (AD 744–840). This analysis, which utilizes archaeological, bioarchaeological, and historical data, demonstrates the breadth of mortuary diversity, reflecting the social, religious, and linguistic variability in the region. Lee's chapter underscores the importance of local contextual information when interpreting atypical burials, as large amounts of social diversity make a single explanation and understanding unlikely.

Finally, in chapter 20, Reusch investigates the burials of castrates, comparing such burials in China (200 BC–AD 1912) with those in Europe (AD 1500–1950) in order to determine whether there were cross-cultural prescribed burial rites for castrates and whether those burial treatments deviated from the norm. Their analysis, utilizing historical and archaeological data, reveals that castrates in both societies often received typical burials, suggesting that while they may have been “viewed as both socially and physically deviant, [they] were not considered deviant *enough* to require separate burial” (page 387, emphasis added). Moreover, in China, while the mortuary rites were typical, the historical record indicates that castrates received anomalous funerary rites. Reusch's study demonstrates that in any population, there may have been atypical funerary rites or rituals, with only those affecting burial observable archaeologically.

While all these examples focus on mortuary treatments within the confines of space and time, they share a similar exploration of what defines atypical treatment, specifically how these atypical elements are recognized, analyzed, and interpreted. These chapters utilize similar, but not identical, methods for making interpretations and drawing conclusions about these unusual practices. Moreover, these chapters develop a theoretical foundation for future research. Moving away from the narrowly focused assumption that these burials represent only those considered deviant within society, these contributions recognize that elements of biology, culture, social status, gender, and more all contribute to mortuary variability and representations of the individual. Most prominent throughout this volume is the understanding that while these burials may rep-

resent the bizarre or unknown, they do not necessarily mean exclusion, but simply a different manner in which to represent the diversity of personhood and identity experienced during life. There are many different types of atypical burial practices described in this volume, but the one thing that remains consistent among these chapters is the necessity of providing context. Context allows us to move away from the predominant dichotomous framework that surrounds these burials by showcasing the mortuary fluidity embodied by the dead and their continuous relationship with the living.

Acknowledgments

To my husband, James, who is atypical and unusual in all things.—T.K.B.

To Tracy, my mentor and dear friend. How lucky we are to have taken this journey together.—A.B.S.

To my Mother: I will always remember you.—A.T.

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