

4 Counting the Numbers

Individual, Collective, and Simultaneous Burial

Perhaps one of the most basic (although not necessarily simple) questions we can ask of the burial record is how many dead we have from any given mortuary context, site, and region. Indeed, an assessment of the minimum number of individuals (MNI) is an integral part of any bioarchaeological assessment. Reconstructing numbers at a broader level, meanwhile, allows us to consider ideas of representativity, invisibility, and demography. As seen from the previous chapter, significant spatial and temporal variations are visible in the distribution of burial data. For some sites, periods, and regions, the settlement and burial record simply do not tally (e.g. Bradbury and Philip 2020). Alongside such numerical assessments and considerations, observations and assumptions regarding the nature of burial practices are often encountered. Individual burials are often elided with ‘primary’ depositions, while collective burials are often interpreted as ‘secondary’. Such simple binaries, however, hide a huge variety of diversity and ambiguities. In this chapter, therefore, I seek to tackle some of these variations, deconstructing current interpretations of ‘collective’ versus ‘individual’ tombs and ‘secondary’ versus ‘primary’ depositions. I explore why we might see shifting popularity of collective and individual practices over time and space and consider whether such variations reflect meaningful choices by the living, as well as underlying sociocultural beliefs and traditions.

Existing Terminologies and Interpretations

To consider these ideas further it is worth briefly reviewing the ways in which the interplay and temporal shifts between single and multiple burial traditions have been previously interpreted in Western Asia and the Mediterranean. Individual inhumation burial has, anecdotally, often been associated with alluvial, lowland areas, while collective burial has been linked to the stone rich uplands. The spatial patterning of individual versus collective, however, is far more complex, with temporal variations, as well as the presence of both individual and collective burials at the same site, cautioning against simplistic associations between geomorphology, tomb numbers, and type (Bradbury 2024, 375; Gonen 1992, 9). Local affordances can certainly influence the selection of different tomb types (e.g. natural caves or shaft burials versus cist

burials or pit tombs); however, the ways in which the human corpse (or corpses) is treated do not always correspond to our assumptions. By way of example, coffins and pithoi from Bronze Age Crete, so-called individualising containers, have been found to contain the remains of more than one individual (Hamilakis 2014, 148; Papadatos 2005, 57). Moreover, as I will discuss in this chapter, the same broad tomb type (and even sometimes the same tomb), a shaft tomb, can be used to host very different numbers of individuals, as well as very different mortuary behaviours, across time and space.

From a temporal perspective, as seen via the overview in Chapter 3, burial contexts holding more than one individual are known from across all time periods in the Levant. There are some phases (i.e. EB I (EB II–III), MB II, IA II), however, that stand out, during which multiple burials would appear to be far more prolific. Conversely, individual burials, albeit sometimes within cemeteries, are also documented from all periods, but again show particular temporal and spatial patterning (i.e. particularly visible during the EB IV and MB I in the southern Levant, later EBA in the northern Levant and during the LBA and IA). Zooming in at a site scale, the presence of contemporary multiple/collective and individual tombs is also relatively common (e.g. MBA Qatna (Pfälzner 2016); MBA Rishon le-Zion (Levy and Kletter 2018a, 2018b); IA Ashkelon (Master and Aja 2017)) and has been linked to differential investment, as well as ideas of status and power. These patterns, however, do not always neatly conform to expectations.

Previous scholarship on the shifting popularity of single versus multiple burials in Western Asia and the Mediterranean has also been critiqued for creating and maintaining a false and temporally unilinear trajectory between individual and collective forms of identity and society (e.g. Hamilakis 2014, 143–48). To provide just a few examples, the appearance of pithoi and coffins in communal contexts towards the end of the EBA in Crete has often been interpreted as indicative of a gradual shift towards individual burial practices and thus the growing importance of individual, as opposed to kin, identities (e.g. Branigan 1993, 65–66, 141; McEnroe 2010, 32). Similarly, while emphasising the non-linear nature of such trends and developments, research from the Invisible Dead Project pointed towards broader shifts in individual and communal burial traditions and thus identities, to some extent juxtaposing such concepts and forces (Bradbury and Philip 2017). Adopting a slightly more nuanced approach, Greenberg (2019, 166), in his analysis of southern Levantine EB IV burial traditions, suggested that practices during the later third millennium could be seen along a continuum between individualising visible traditions and collective subterranean traditions.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, single versus communal, individual versus individual are not static concepts and can be actively shaped and manipulated by the living (e.g. Bradbury 2024; Fowler 2016; Hamilakis 2014, 148). Moreover, it is still worthwhile considering the broader temporal and spatial patterns that are present within our data, and how these may or may not reflect wider socio-cultural shifts and changing beliefs. As such, rather than juxtaposing

individual versus communal practices and identities, we can perhaps try to reconstruct and better understand the multifaceted relations and interconnections that were being expressed and brought to the fore by different practices and burial modes.

One of the challenges faced in attempting to undertake such analyses is the fact that both individual and multiple contexts are often essentialised and subsumed under a single category or set of categories (i.e. primary versus secondary burial, individual versus multiple burial), necessitating some clarification in terms of terminology and potential interpretation. As I will illustrate below, the number of individuals within any given multiple burial can vary hugely, from several to hundreds of inhumations. Should these contexts all be treated and interpreted in the same way? The repeated presence and documentation of post-mortem manipulation or displacement of human remains in such collective spaces also means that these features and elements are often elided in the literature, in spite of the fact that we are dealing with multiple types of evidence.

Here it is worth spending a moment or two reflecting on these differences; a tomb containing multiple individuals, for example, does not always show evidence for post-mortem manipulation and vice versa, a burial context showing evidence for post-mortem manipulation does not always have to be collective. Evidence for extended interactions and displacement of the dead can also appear in many different guises, in some cases showing an attempt to maintain the integrity of the individual, while in other cases appearing to favour their almost total disintegration. As I shall further explore in the next chapter, there are also scholars who point towards cremation being a form of post-mortem manipulation, akin to a ‘secondary burial’.

To move these ideas and discussions forward, in this chapter I wish to focus on three main themes: the potential meanings behind differential (collective) burial numbers, the difficulties of interpreting what we could class as simultaneous burials, and, finally, the ways in which the processes, practices, and meanings behind continued interactions with the dead may have changed over time. To begin, however, it is worth offering a note of clarification. In this chapter so far, I have used the terms ‘individual’ and ‘collective’, but there is clearly more than one way to bury the dead together. What, therefore, are the differences (if any) between a cemetery and a multiple collective burial?

Collective Tombs versus Cemeteries: A Material Difference?

In Chapter 3, I highlighted the significance of cemeteries in the LCH southern Levant, identifying these features as a newly emerging mortuary practice. What, however, do we actually mean by this term? For Nativ (2014, 8), a cemetery constitutes a location “... where the remains of numerous individuals are grouped together...”, a deceased community coming together in a delimited space and acting as a social collective. Snodgrass (2015, 187) similarly identifies such spaces, at least as we are programmed to recognise them within modern Europe, the United States, and beyond, as locales set aside by some communal

decision, to be used exclusively for burial. Such definitions could just as aptly be applied to an isolated tomb containing multiple individuals. Both forms of burial are, in slightly different ways, creating a community of the dead. This is not to suggest that there is no meaning behind the choice to inter the dead within a single grave within a cemetery versus a multiple burial in an isolated location. Quite the reverse, the decision behind this perhaps lies with the potential for the manipulation and creation of different types of deceased communities. Through such configurations, different attributes of society could be emphasised or alternatively suppressed. These patterns may also allow us to think a little more about different mortuary temporalities, a concept touched upon in Chapter 2, as well as the creation and negotiation of memories. What, then, is the difference between a cemetery and a collective tomb. A decision is being made in each of these instances to group and bring together the dead. The contrast, however, lies in the potential for demarcation, delineation, and separation.

By way of example, whether subterranean, above ground or both, different opportunities are afforded by the burial of a single corpse within a delimited burial space, as opposed to the burial of multiple individuals within a single context. With the former, even when encompassed within a larger cemetery, society is provided with the flexibility to highlight the individual both at the point of deposition and in the weeks, months, and years following the burial by reference to the single tomb. The wider collective society, however, can also be referenced through the cemetery as a whole. Easy delimitation and demarcation of smaller groups, such as familial units, is also possible, with some scholars interpreting clusters of graves as family groupings (e.g. Jakoel and Elisha 2019),¹ although new evidence from Sidon challenges simple and direct links between spatial organisation and kinship structures (Kharobi et al. 2021, 1163).

In contrast, in multiple, collective tombs, there is perhaps less opportunity, beyond the point of burial/re-burial, to reference and pay attention to the individual person. Focus, instead, would appear to be on the wider community. Thus, if we view burials as venues for communication and expression, multiple collective tombs can be seen as depriving or hastening the end of potential one-to-one, individualised, communications between the dead, living, and even the gods, while perhaps also extending temporal opportunities for engagement with the material collective.

Deconstructing and Debating the Numbers

To consider this further I want to turn attention to the numbers of dead involved in each burial locale. A bewildering array of terms are used in order to describe and categorise tombs in which multiple individuals are present: charnel houses and ossuaries; multiple collective burials and mausolea, these terms all bring with them their own legacies and disciplinary baggage. Interpretations of such burials also vary, from the identification of family tombs to the burial and commemoration of victims of, or combatants in, warfare (e.g. Baker 2010; Chapman 1987; Cradic 2018; McMahon 2014; Porter et al. 2021).

The EBA (in both the southern and northern Levant) stands out as a period of significant variability in terms of burial numbers (Bradbury 2024). For the fourth millennium BCE, we see this on a regional scale with, as already discussed in Chapter 3, the concentration and florescence of burials dating to the EB I in the southern Levant providing a stark contrast to the overall paucity of fourth-millennium-BCE burials in the northern Levant and Mesopotamia.² We can also, however, observe this pattern at a much more localised site and tomb level, with burial numbers varying substantially, from tens to hundreds of individuals within a single context ((Bradbury 2024, 375–76) and see Figure 4.1). These variations, at least at the handful of mortuary sites in the southern Levant dated to EB II–III, would also appear to continue into the third millennium BCE. Burial numbers within the charnel houses at Bab edh-Dhra, for example, range from less than 40 individuals to 200+. Temporality could be a factor here. At sites with tombs in use from EB I to EB III, our MNI figures may be distorted by continued use and reuse of tombs. As a period spanning up to 500 years or more, we could also say the same for tombs whose contents would appear to solely date to the EB I. Here, however, and even in the case of tombs used throughout the fourth and into the third millennia, a (deliberate) decision is being made to continue deposition of the dead in any given burial locale.

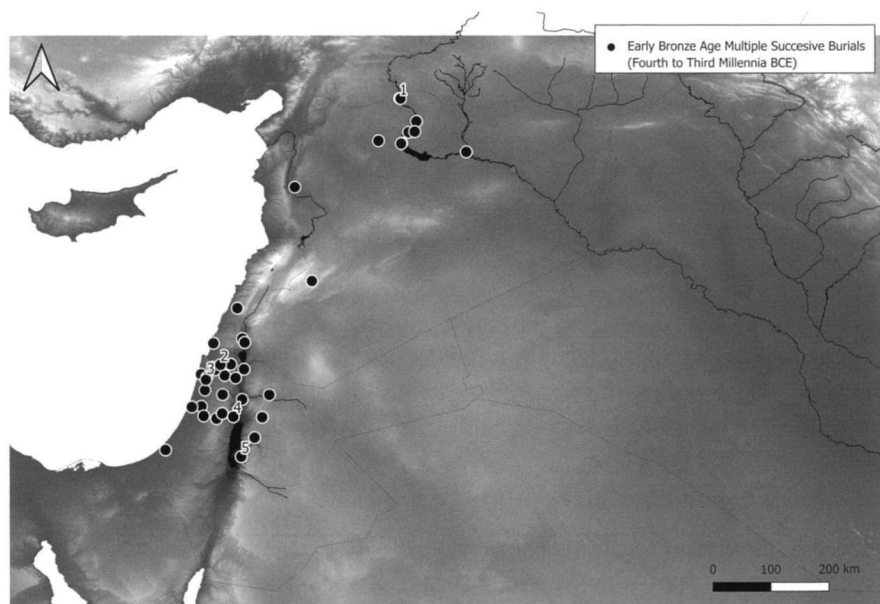


Figure 4.1 Sites with multiple collective tombs dating to the fourth–third millennia BCE in the southern and northern Levant. Included on the map are sites from which reliable MNI information is available. Site discussed in the text are labelled as follows: 1. Jerablus Tahtani; 2. 'En Hakhil/Migdal Ha-Emeq; 3. Tell el-'Assawir/Tell 'Esur; 4. Jericho; 5. Bab edh-Dhra.

To delve a little deeper into these questions, I want to explore two EB I tombs from Jericho, Tomb A13 (Kenyon 1960, 47–51) and Tomb K2 (Kenyon 1965, 8–27). Although located in different areas of the site, both of these demonstrate interesting parallels, having suffered significant denudation due to erosion, as well as showing signs of disturbance due to later trench/tomb cutting (see Figure 4.2). Tomb A13 contained six individuals in total,

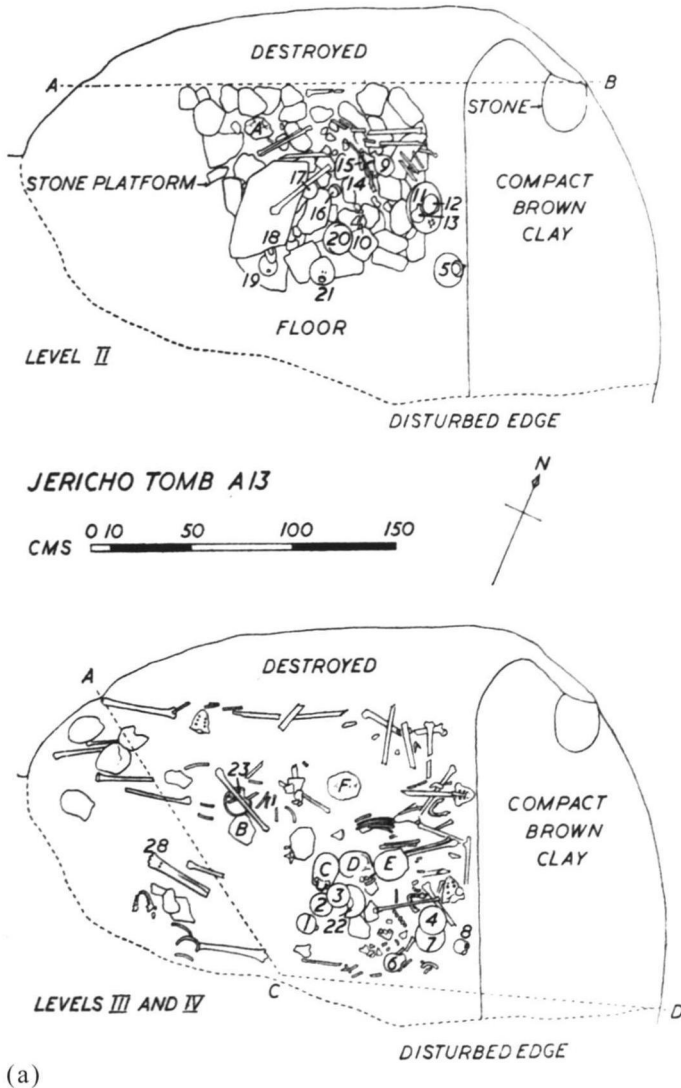
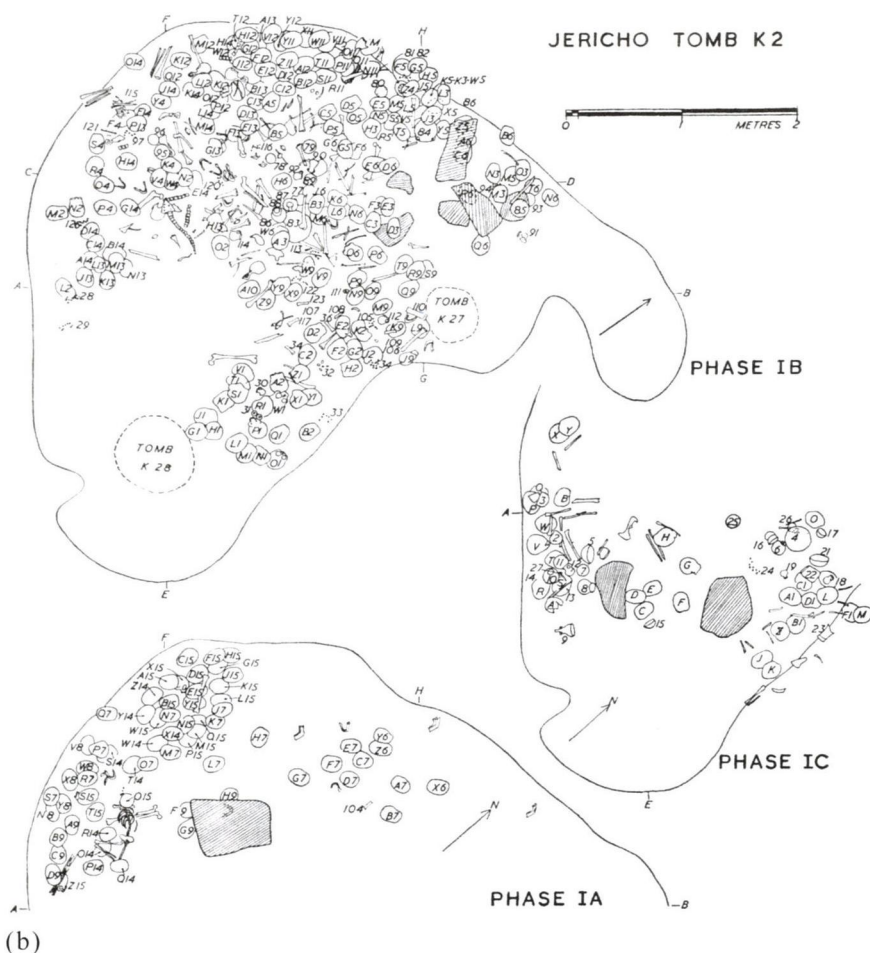


Figure 4.2 Early Bronze Age (a) Tomb A13 and (b) Tomb K2 from the site of Jericho (EB I). Image courtesy of the Council for British Research in the Levant.

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distributed between two discrete phases of deposition, both dating to EB I. The earliest, Phase 1 (Layer IV and III), included at least five individuals (based on skull count) with Kenyon (1960, 4), suggesting that the remains had been exposed or buried elsewhere, prior to being deposited within the tomb. This idea was abandoned in the later Jericho volume (Kenyon 1965, 3–4). Covering the main depositions in Level IV was a layer of sandy buff soil (Layer III), which contained a few bones and fragments of pottery. Materials associated with these layers included a jar, fragmentary and complete juglets and bowls, as well as a pierced bone object. Finally, a carefully constructed platform of rough stone slabs separated the earlier phases from a later burial phase (Phase 2 (Levels I–II), dated to Proto-Urban B (EB IB) according to Kenyon (1960, 47–51, 1965, 4–5)).

Tomb K2, similarly, provided evidence for two discrete phases of activity. The second included at least 14 individuals, with three found in articulation, while the rest were disarticulated. This phase was seen as contemporary with Levels I-II (Phase 2) from Tomb A13 (Kenyon 1965, 4–5, 8–27). The first, earlier phase, contemporary with Levels IV–III from Tomb A13, in contrast, contained over 300 individuals, with it being suggested that as new corpses were added, human remains, or at least some human remains, were carefully placed around the edges of the burial chamber (Kenyon 1965, 3–4). I will return to the question of re-burial, post-depositional manipulation, and interaction with the corpse later in this chapter but for now, I want to focus on the differential numbers of dead found within these two contexts. While Tomb K2 and Tomb A13 are located in different areas of the site, they show evidence for similar taphonomic and post-depositional practices, including the presence of two burial phases, subsequent denudation, and disturbance due to later activities. How then can we explain the profound differences in population?

Based on evidence from both tombs, these burials are not mass depositions, resulting from a catastrophic event. Instead, and especially in the case of Tomb K2, depositions appear to have been made over time, with the subsequent rearrangement and removal of human remains. Variations in burials numbers do not, therefore, appear to be easily related to mortality patterns. The tomb sizes are different, with the chamber of Tomb K2, for example, estimated to be around 4.50×4.00 m (Kenyon 1965, 11–12). The original size of Tomb A13 is, unfortunately, less clear, largely due a later trench, filled with a compact clay, which cuts the tomb on its eastern side. According to the plans and sections, however, the burial chamber would appear to have been around 2 m when excavated, but could originally have been larger (Kenyon 1960, 47–48; and see Figure 4.2). Although possibly a contributing factor, this evidence cannot account for such significant variation. Even if we assumed that Tomb A13 was originally a similar size to Tomb K2, based on the surviving MNI evidence, we would only be dealing with tens rather than hundreds of individuals. This is unless we assume that the trench cutting and erosion in Tomb A13 somehow removed all existing evidence for over 300 individuals. As these two examples demonstrate, variations in burial numbers within single cemeteries or burial zones go far beyond what we might expect from by-products of tomb size or even the biases of preservation. What other hypotheses, therefore, could apply?

In the previous chapter, I suggested that regions such as the southern Ghors, and to this I would also add the area around Jericho, were landscapes where different groups and sectors of society came together to bury their dead (e.g. Bradbury, Braemer, and Sala 2014, 225; Chesson 2023; Schaub 2009, 753). Within any given territorial area there may have been central gathering places, locales, including cemeteries, in which a whole multi-sited community could come together, as well as spaces used by a smaller group. If correct, the nature, timing, and location of death may all have been influential factors dictating, or at least influencing, whether the dead were interred within a settlement (see Chapter 9), within a large cemetery, a collective burial containing hundreds of

individuals, or in association with tens of individuals. This would, in part, therefore, explain the differential spatial patterning and burial numbers across the wider region. It does not, however, adequately explain variations such as those discussed at Jericho.

Chesson (1999, 2003), in her analysis of the charnel houses at EB II–III Bab edh-Dhra, has suggested that variations in burial numbers may be linked to the existence of lesser or great households, and bearing this interpretation in mind, we can consider how such a scenario would play out within the world of the EB I. If EB I society was one in which the fissioning and fusion of different sectors, groups, and communities was an integral part of life and death, we can perhaps better understand and explain the MNI variations, even at a site level. The differential numbers interred within tombs, as well as the variety of burial forms, including shaft tombs, cave burials, cist tombs, dolmens, and cairns, documented for this period, may have been a way of different sectors and groups from multi-sited communities to display both shared and divergent traditions and practices. The numbers of dead within any given context could, therefore, reflect a variety of different societal norms and behaviours. From group affiliation and association at the moment of death, to the seasonality or nature of the individuals' passing. This is not to attempt to streamline this variability; on the contrary, it was the option for flexibility that was perhaps a key element of southern Levantine mortuary practices.

Following a period during which such stark variations in burial numbers are less visible (e.g. the later third millennium BCE in the south (EB IV) and EBA in the northern Levant), by MB II (c. 1800 BCE), we again see the increasing popularity of multiple or collective burials in both the northern and southern Levant. At this point, however, we have far fewer individuals per tomb or rather, far less variation in terms of burial numbers (Bradbury 2024). Thus, rather than showing continuity in practices, these collective burials represent a comprehensive reimagining and reorientation of funerary practices after several centuries of predominantly single inhumations (Bradbury 2024, 377; Bradbury and Philip 2017, 98).

Tomb 100 at Megiddo, for example, housed several dozen individuals and is thought to represent the burial of generations of residents of a courtyard house (Cradic 2018, 197–98). Similar patterns are also visible at Rishon le-Zion (Levy and Kletter 2018a, 169–365), where numbers would appear to vary from around a dozen to several dozen individuals. Exceptions do exist and include several examples of very large MBA-LBA 'repository'-style tombs such as Tomb 62 at Pella (Bourke 1992; Bourke and Eriksson 2006, 346; Greenberg 2019, 339). In the northern Levant burial numbers vary between around 20 (e.g. Qatna's MBA-LBA royal hypogeum (c. 20–24 individuals (e.g. Pfälzner 2012, 207)) and just over 50 individuals per tomb (e.g. MBA, P. 8680 at Ebla (Mogliazza and Polcaro 2010, 437; Polcaro 2012, 323), although much larger numbers are recorded from Tomb VII at Qatna (Pfälzner 2012, 215–16), an example, along with Tomb 62 at Pella, that I will return to at the end of the chapter (Figure 4.3).

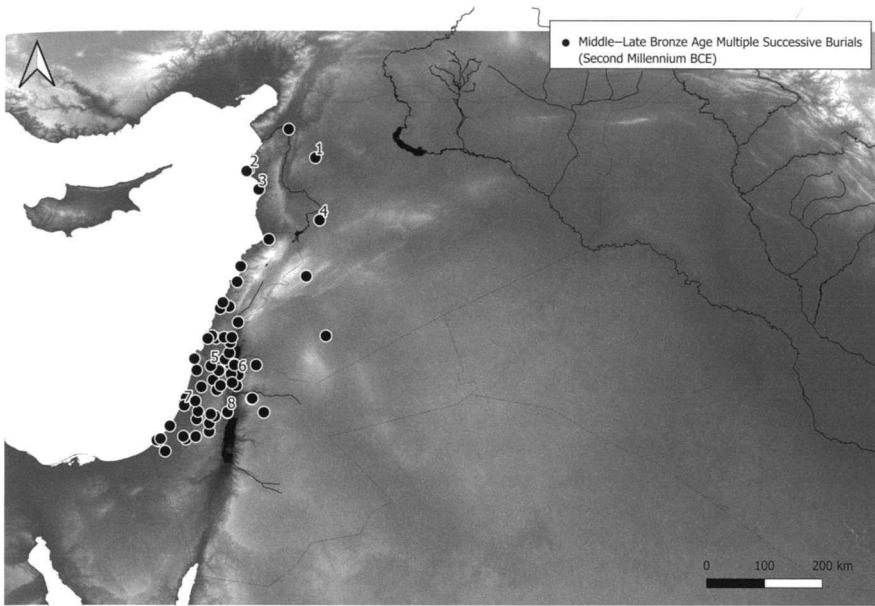


Figure 4.3 Sites with multiple collective tombs dating to the MBA-LBA in the southern and northern Levant. Included on the map are sites from which reliable MNI information is available. Site discussed in the text are labelled as follows: 1. Ebla; 2. Ugarit; 3. Tell Sukas; 4. Qatna; 5. Megiddo; 6. Pella; 7. Rishon le-Zion; 8. Jericho.

To zoom in once again, albeit briefly this time, I want to return to Jericho. Bartlett (1982), in his review of this site, estimated an average of c. 20 burials per MBA tomb, and while variations in numbers can still be seen, this is a fairly representative figure. What complicates reconstructions here, however, is the existence of multiple successive alongside simultaneous burials. I will return to the latter shortly, but here, by way of example, I want to briefly consider the numbers of dead in just two tombs: Tomb M11 and Tomb G1 (Figure 4.4).

Tomb M11 (MNI 15) was likely first cut in EB IV, although very little evidence survives from this period. In the MBA it was used over two broad phases; the first included the remains of around six individuals, all of whom were disarticulated, their remains and associated materials being pushed back against the tomb walls. The second phase, a simultaneous or very nearly simultaneous deposition, added nine individuals to the tomb. The tomb chamber spans 2.90×2.50 m (see Figure 4.4 and (Kenyon 1965, 162)), and, although clearly smaller than Tomb K2, size does not seem to have dictated how many individuals could be deposited here (Kenyon 1965, 226–42). Tomb G1 (MNI 22), although from another area of the site, shows very similar patterns. Here, 15 individuals appear to have been deposited successively, within the first MBA phase, with both articulated and disarticulated remains being noted. The second phase was again

broadly simultaneous, with an additional seven individuals, all in articulation being deposited within the tomb (Kenyon 1960, 443–53).

While not wishing to impose contemporary values on the past, it is very tempting to interpret these two tombs as the burials of nucleated or joint-household families. Momentarily leaving aside the simultaneous depositions (although see below for further discussion), the numbers in these contexts would appear broadly in line with the size of Bronze Age household units proposed on the basis of ethnographic and textual sources (e.g. Schloen 2001, 147–83). As such, differences in numbers can perhaps be partly explained by variances in the life cycle, or rather death cycle, of a household. For example, in the numbers of children, marriage residency norms, as well other factors, including status, age, and even location and nature of death. Whether such units reflect once living households, or not, the decision to group the dead in this way suggests some very significant shifts from earlier practices. A higher degree of numerical standardisation and perhaps greater consistency/less flexibility in the ways in which communities of the dead were being formed and articulated.

Having considered the numbers of dead in both fourth- (third-) and early-second-millennium-BCE collective tombs, I want to conclude this section by turning to the late second millennium BCE. Indeed, despite my insistence on the necessity of considering how many dead were buried in so-called collective or multiple tombs, by the end of the second millennium BCE, the numbers,

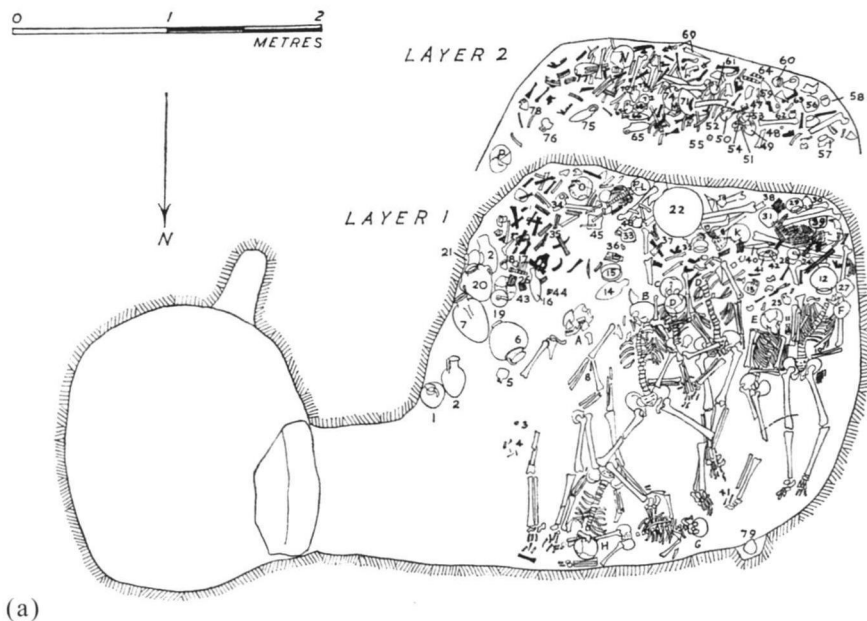
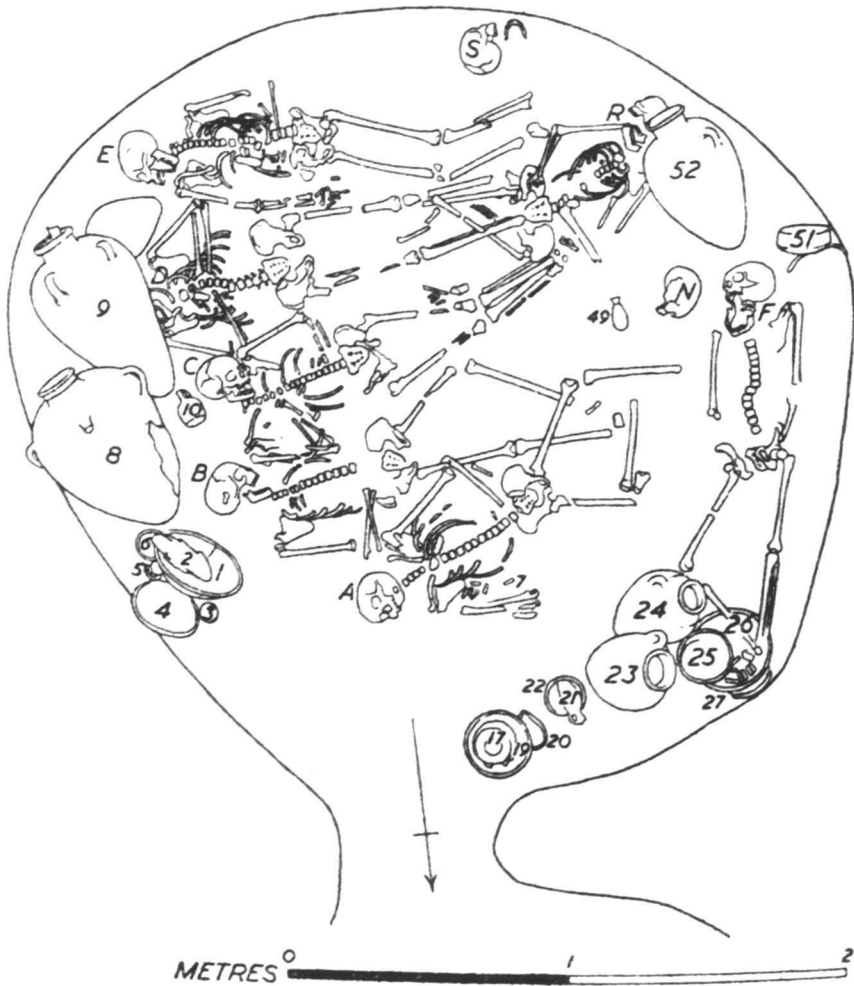


Figure 4.4 Middle Bronze Age (a) Tomb M11 and (b) Tomb G1 from Jericho (MB II). Image courtesy of the Council for British Research in the Levant.

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(b)

Figure 4.4 (Continued).

or at least differences in the numbers of dead involved, may be less important. As discussed in the previous chapter, the reuse and deposition of the dead within earlier tombs and burial contexts are potential explanations for the paucity and apparent invisibility of IA I burials, particularly within the southern Levant (e.g. Bloch-Smith 2004; Faust 2004; Kletter 2002). The question of whether such deposits represent a 'normative' IA I practice is, in some ways, missing the point. Indeed, fewer in this case may be more, especially if we consider the use and interment of individuals within multiple tombs as a

way of speeding up integration into some form of collective, ancestral, or familial society. As a result, whether prolific or rare (Kletter 2002, 39), at least some groups, including those in the highlands, may have continued to integrate their dead into LBA tombs. This point becomes even more interesting if we disregard Kletter's (2002, 39) assumption that populations dwelling in newly established IA I settlements simply did not use "... available Late Bronze Age tombs, since there were none in their vicinity". Indeed, earlier in the same article, while highlighting the perils of using biblical evidence, Kletter (2002, 38 citing 2 Sam. 21, 13–14, cf. Jos. 24:32) suggests that the movement of bones was not out of the ordinary if populations grew or, more importantly for my discussions, burial in a family tomb was necessary.

With these overall patterns in mind, from the fourth into the second millennia BCE we would appear to be seeing shifts not only in the popularity of collective tombs, but also in the numbers of dead that could be integrated into a given burial context. The sheer variety in the fourth-millennium-BCE southern Levant points towards the importance of flexibility and fissioning, while such practices may, at least at some sites, have continued into the third millennium. When multiple successive tombs re-emerge as a popular mode of burial in the second millennium BCE, we can detect the influence and importance of familial and generational ownership and authority. This is not to ignore the role of the individual within this period, and, as I will discuss shortly, at least within some communal MBA (and LBA) tombs there appears to have been an attempt to maintain the integrity of the human body, at least for a period of time. Such practices, perhaps on a more limited scale, continued into the later second millennium, and, at least some of the evidence from the IA I southern Levant may point towards groups or individuals deliberately choosing to integrate the dead, whether due to biological or culturally constructed familial relations, within older burial contexts. I will return to many of these discussions towards the end of this chapter. Such shifts and changes, however, emphasise that collective or communal behaviours are not static or unilinear phenomena, but rather are dictated or shaped by the existing building blocks within society and the wider social identities being created and enacted in both life and death. Variations in burial numbers are not the only disparities we find in the archaeological record, however, and here I want to return to the focus of this volume, the ways in which the human body itself was treated.

Simultaneous Burial: An Interpretative Challenge

So far in this chapter as I have drawn out some of the temporal patterns shown by single versus multiple tombs, as well as highlighted some of the variations in terms of what 'multiple' can mean. Beyond such classifications, we also have to consider the differences between multiple successive burials (i.e. burials in which the deceased are added following an indeterminate period in time), and burials which are more aptly described as simultaneous (i.e. in which the deceased were deposited at the same or following a very short span of time)

(e.g. Duday 2009; Kletter and Levy 2015, 276). Accurately identifying and differentiating between successive and simultaneous burials is a process largely based on the level of disturbance. If burials found alongside one another, especially those that are overlapping or in very close proximity to one another, all appear to be in anatomical articulation, the burial is more likely to be simultaneous, as opposed to successive (Duday 2009; Kletter and Levy 2015, 276). Tomb M11 at Jericho (Kenyon 1965, 226–42), discussed earlier, is an excellent example of this (Figure 4.4).

Numerous explanations have been put forward in order to theorise and understand the practices and processes behind simultaneous burials; from accidents, famines, and contagious diseases to war victims, executed criminals, and ritual killings (e.g. Chapman 1987; Cohen 2005; Porter 2012; Schwartz 2012; Kletter and Levy 2015, 289–90). What these explanatory frameworks tend to explore, however, is not why a group of individuals were simultaneously buried, but rather why a group of deceased individuals were *available* for simultaneous burial. Different explanations can account for the death of several individuals around the same time (e.g. Kletter and Levy 2015, 290) and clearly mode of death plays an important role in how the dead are treated. The choice to bury the dead simultaneously, however, is still worth further exploration.

In their thought-provoking article on this subject, Kletter and Levy (2015) point towards the uneven temporal distribution of simultaneous burials across the Levant. Data collected for this project point towards similar patterns (Figures 4.5 and 4.6), with early to mid-second millennium BCE

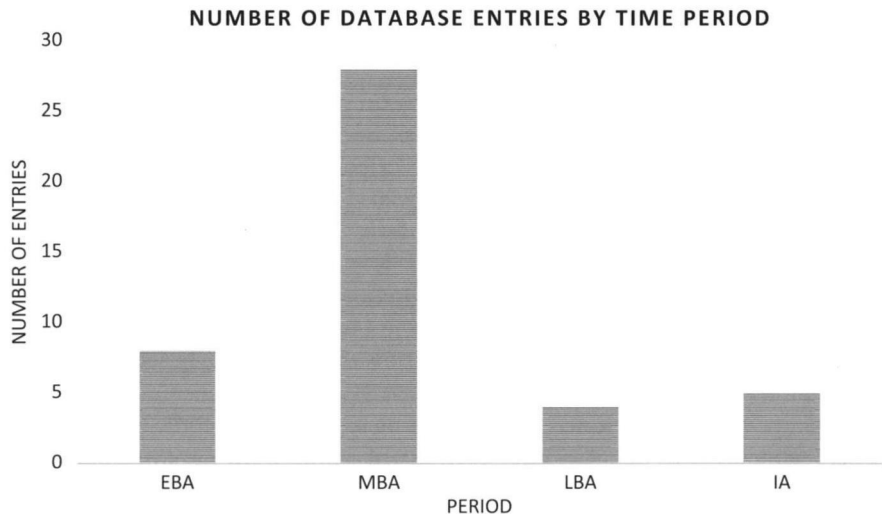


Figure 4.5 Numerical tally of records for simultaneous burials from the Invisible Dead Database plotted by chronological period. Records are reflective of the number of burial contexts containing simultaneous burials, rather than the MNI found within simultaneous burial contexts.

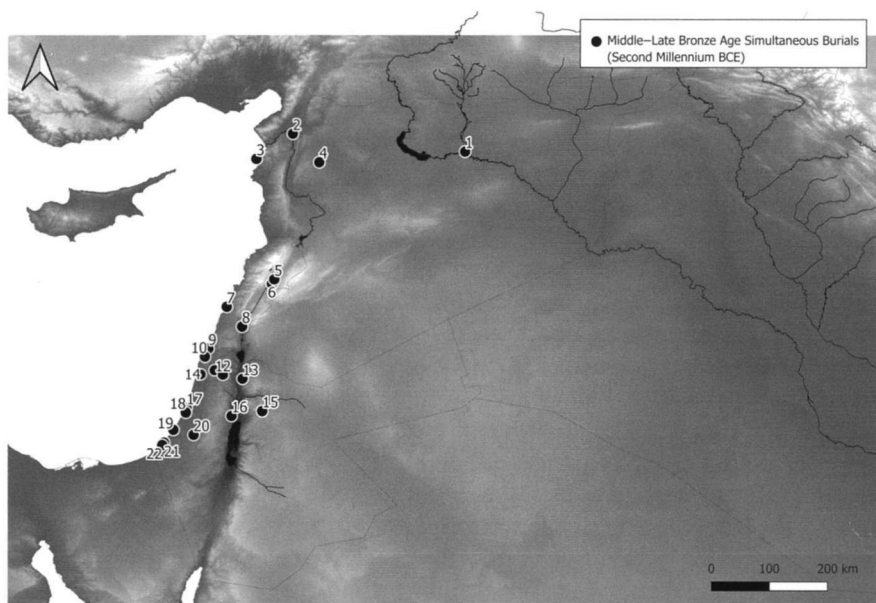


Figure 4.6 Second-millennium-BCE sites showing potential evidence for simultaneous burial practices from the northern and southern Levant. Sites are labelled as follows: 1. Tell Bi'a; 2. Alalakh; 3. Ras el-Bassit; 4. Ebla; 5. Tell Hizzin; 6. Tell el-Ghassil; 7. Sidon; 8. Tell Dan; 9. Tell Akko; 10. Tell Abu Hawam; 11. Megiddo; 12. Jalame; 13. Pella; 14. Tell Burga/Khirbet el-Bureij; 15. Amman; 16. Jericho; 17. Rishon le-Zion; 18. Dhahrat el-Hamriya; 19. Ashkelon; 20. Lachish/Tell ed-Duweir; 21. Tell el-'Ajjul; 22. Deir el-Balah.

(i.e. MBA) simultaneous burials appearing far more prolific, relatively speaking, than earlier or later periods. As always, one of the challenges in collating this material is the paucity of detailed descriptions and the varied use of the term 'simultaneous' (e.g. Kletter and Levy 2015, 288). Moreover, we are again dealing with a handful of sites, particularly Jericho (e.g. Chapman 1987; Kenyon 1960, 1965) and Rishon le-Zion (Kletter and Levy 2015; Levy and Kletter 2018a, 2018b), which provide the majority of evidence for these practices. Having put these caveats in place, here I want to consider why we might see a relative increase in simultaneous burials during the early second millennium BCE.

Some of the most obvious examples dating to this period come from Jericho, where simultaneous deposits have been noted within both the extramural and intramural tombs (e.g. Tombs P19, M11, HAR, and for further examples see Kletter and Levy (2015, 278, Table 1)). The data is less clear from Rishon le-Zion and, as the investigators themselves acknowledge, some of the identified simultaneous burials may well be successive deposits, albeit occurring within a relatively short time span (Kletter and Levy 2015, 279). Both of these sites have been discussed extensively by Kletter and Levy (2015). Thus, while I will return

to some of these data in Chapter 7, here I want to focus on sites beyond Jericho and Rishon le-Zion. These are stretched across a wide region, from Ebla in the north to Deir el-Balah in the south (see Figure 4.6).

Several trends emerge from a survey of these. First, the presence of simultaneously buried adult and non-adult individuals would appear to be a relatively common pattern across both the southern and northern Levant (see Table 4.1). At Ashkelon, for example, a simultaneous burial of a biologically sexed female adult (Burial 127) and infant (Burial 131) was found within the Chamber 5 Hidden Burial Niche and dated to MB II. The infant appears to have been deposited in the arms of the adult female (Baker 2010, 7, Table 1). Grave 9002, at Lachish (Cemetery 9000), a shallow rectangular pit lined by mudbricks and sealed by a layer of large pebbles, also contained three individuals. Two articulated skeletons, at least one of which was identified as an adolescent male, lay facing one another, while a third individual, a child around four years of age, was found behind the northern skeleton (Singer-Avitz 2004, 973–75). Further north, Tomb 13.11 at Tell Arqa contained two adults lying side by side alongside an infant/child (Thalmann et al. 2006, 58).

As Table 4.1 illustrates, simultaneous burials are not just restricted to the deposition of two or three individuals. Moreover, such examples are not just

Table 4.1 Example simultaneous burials discussed in this chapter (EB IV to LBA).

<i>Site name</i>	<i>MNI</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source</i>
Jericho	2 to 18	MBA	Fifteen burials with the MNI of each tomb ranging between 2 and 18 individuals.	(Kletter and Levy 2015, 278, Table 1)
Rishon le-Zion	2 to 6	MBA	Thirteen burials from Shaft Tombs in Areas A and F. The MNI of each simultaneous burial ranged between 2 and 6 individuals.	(Kletter and Levy 2015, 279, Table 2)
Jericho	2	EB IV	Two individuals deposited facing each other “... knees to knees...” (Tomb 91).	(Kenyon 1960, 194)
Jericho	2	EB IV	Two flexed burials (male adults), with the partial disturbance of the remains being attributed to roof-fall (Tomb A26).	(Kenyon 1960, 196)
Jericho	2	EB IV	Likely simultaneous burial of two articulated skeletons, arranged in flexed/semi-flexed positions, with one individual oriented E-W and the other oriented W-E (Tomb A95).	(Kenyon 1960, 191).

(Continued)

Table 4.1 (Continued)

<i>Site name</i>	<i>MNI</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source</i>
Tiwal esh-Sharqi	2	EB IV	Biologically sexed female aged 25–35 years and a child aged 5–10 years likely simultaneous as while highly fragmented and scattered due to flooding activities, no other evidence for disturbance is present (Tomb NE 15).	(Tubb 1990, 36)
Khirbet al-Umbashi	5	EB IV	Five individuals - human remains were incomplete when excavated, however, the overall lack of disarticulation and homogenous fill between and around the skeletons, suggest that the original burials took place at the same time (Tomb 13).	(Braemer, Echallier, and Taraqji 2004, 195–97)
Khirbet Iskander	2	EB IV	Two individuals (an adult and a child) may have been deposited simultaneously, although the tomb was disturbed by looting activities, with pottery found smashed and scattered inside the tomb and tomb shaft, while the roof had also partially collapsed (Tomb D9).	(Peterman and Richard 2010, 198–203)
Tell Shiukh Tahtani	5	mid-third millennium BCE	Burial pit containing five individuals likely represents a simultaneous burial although, in this case, is interpreted as providing evidence for potential sacrificial activities.	(Porter 2012, 199)
Lachish (Cemetery 9000)	3	MBA	Two articulated skeletons, at least one an adolescent male, lay facing one another. A third individual, a child around 4 years of age, found behind the northern skeleton (Grave 9002).	(Singer-Avitz 2004, 973–75)
Lachish (Cemetery 9000)	3	MBA	Two articulated individuals were deposited in the grave. A third individual was represented by disarticulated remains (Grave 9054).	(Singer-Avitz 2004, 985–86)

(Continued)

Table 4.1 (Continued)

<i>Site name</i>	<i>MNI</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source</i>
Ebla	2	MB I	Two individuals, lying side by side, both orientated to the E found directly underneath a pavement (Burial D4).	(Baffi Guardata 1988, 4)
Jalame	5	MB I	Tomb first hewn during EB IV and reused during MB I, appears to have contained the simultaneous burial of five individuals, including three adults, biologically sexed male, and two children (Tomb V).	(Karen Covello-Paran and Porat 2011)
Ashkelon	2	MB II	Biologically sexed female adult and infant found within the Chamber 5 (Hidden Burial Niche). The infant (Burial 131) appears to have been deposited in the arms of the adult female (Burial 127).	(Baker 2010, 7, Table 1)
Tell Arqa	3	MB II	Two adults found lying side by side, alongside an infant/child (Tomb 13.11).	(Thalmann et al. 2006, 58).
Sidon	3	MB II	Simultaneous deposit of three individuals within a successive burial containing five individuals, all articulated skeletons found lying alongside each other (Burials 103, 104 and 105).	(Doumet-Serhal 2009, 32)
Deir el-Balah	2	LBA	Two articulated skeletons, one adult male aged 35–40 years and one female aged 25–30 years, skulls touching one another (Tomb 118).	(Dothan 1979, 46, 51, Figure 119)
Deir el-Balah	3 to 4	LBA	Three to four individuals, possibly a simultaneous burial, although the remains are very fragmentary (Tomb 114).	(Dothan 1979, 5, 92),
Dhahrat el-Humraiya/ Khirbet Humra	3	LBA	Three (presumably simultaneously buried) individuals, identified as an adult male, adult female and child (Grave 57).	(Gonen 1992, 94; Ory 1948)
Megiddo	2	LBA	Articulated adult and disarticulated adult. The disarticulated remains were placed on top of the articulated skeleton (Tomb 3006).	(Gonen 1992, 114)

(Continued)

Table 4.1 (Continued)

<i>Site name</i>	<i>MNI</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source</i>
Tell el-'Ajjul	5	LBA	Five articulated skeletons, deposited in three different side chambers or loculi, surrounding a partial horse burial (Tomb 411).	(Gonen 1992, 131; Petrie 1931, Plate LVII)
Tell Ras el-Bassit	3	LBA	Two adults lying on their backs, in an extended position, their heads positioned in opposite directions to one another, with a child found lying between them at their head/feet (Tomb 46).	(Darcque 1996)
Alalakh	2	LB I	Two individuals, identified as an adult and child (Burial ATG/49/1).	(Woolley 1955, 218)
Alalakh	2	LB II	Simultaneous burial of an adult and child (Burial ATG/47/1).	(Woolley 1955, 221)

confined to the site of Jericho. Tomb V, at Jalame, for example, which was first hewn during EB IV and reused during MB I, appears to have contained the simultaneous burial of five individuals, including three adults, biologically sexed male, and two children (Covello-Paran and Porat 2011). Meanwhile, at Sidon, an MBA successive burial containing five individuals was used for the simultaneous deposit of three individuals, Burials 103, 104, and 105, all articulated skeletons found lying alongside one another (Doumet-Serhal 2009, 32).

A slightly different category of simultaneous burial is seen via the concurrent deposition of both articulated and disarticulated skeletal materials.³ MB II Tomb 1 at Tell el-Ghassil, for example, was interpreted as a single, simultaneous burial event (Badre 1982, 127). Both articulated and disarticulated/dismembered material is visible within this tomb, however, suggesting that even if placed simultaneously, the disarticulated remains may have been interred or exposed elsewhere prior to burial (Genz and Sader 2007, 264). Similarly, Grave 9054 at Lachish (Cemetery 9000) contained both disarticulated (one individual) and articulated (two individuals) remains. Based on the close arrangement of these burials, and due to the lack of disturbance, it has been suggested that all these individuals were deposited at the same time (Singer-Avitz 2004, 985–86). Finally, in the same vein, Burial 63 at Sidon (see Chapter 9 and Figure 9.3) was identified as a potential simultaneous burial, and, in this case, a partially articulated non-adult skeleton appears to have been removed from an earlier burial in order to be placed inside a large jar alongside an articulated, tightly flexed, adult female aged 30–45 years (Doumet-Serhal 2006, 147).

In order to better understand this phenomenon, it is worth briefly considering the simultaneous burials, albeit appearing in far fewer numbers, both pre- (contra. Kletter and Levy 2015, 289) and post-dating the MBA. Based on the close proximity of the individuals, several EB IV tombs at Jericho (Tomb A91, A26 and A95 and see Table 4.1) are considered simultaneous. The individuals in Tomb A91, for example, appear to have been deposited facing each other “...knees to knees...” (Kenyon 1960, 194). All of these examples are from so-called ‘dagger tombs’, perhaps suggesting, as other scholars have argued (e.g. Greener 2012; Shay 1983), that a particular set of practices or ideas are associated with this category of burials (see Chapters 6 and 8 for further discussion).

Beyond Jericho, the presence of simultaneous burials predating the second millennium BCE is much less clear (see Table 4.1). Tomb D9 at Khirbet Iskander (Peterman and Richard 2010, 198–203), for example, was disturbed by looting activities, with pottery found smashed and scattered inside the tomb and tomb shaft, while the roof had also partially collapsed. Two individuals (an adult and a child) appear to have been buried within the tomb, and the investigators suggest that it is difficult to determine whether the depositions represent a simultaneous or successive burial (collective vs. reused in their description). Much further north, at the site of Tell Shiukh Tahtani, a mid-third-millennium-BCE burial pit containing five individuals likely represents a simultaneous burial, although, in this case, is interpreted as providing evidence for potential sacrificial activities (Porter 2012, 199).

From the later second millennium BCE (Table 4.1), several anthropoid coffins at LBA Deir el-Balah are thought to have contained the remains of simultaneous burials. Tomb 118, for example, contained two articulated skeletons, one adult aged 35–40 years, who was biologically sexed male, and one biologically sexed female aged 25–30 years, skulls touching one another (Dothan 1979, 46, 51, Figure 119). Continuing patterns from the MBA, simultaneous burials of adults and non-adults are also relatively common. Grave 57 at the site of Dhahrat el-Humraiya, for example, contained three (presumably simultaneously buried) individuals, identified as an adult male, adult female, and child (Gonen 1992, 94; Ory 1948). In the northern Levant, at the site of Tell Ras el-Bassit, on the Syrian coast, three individuals, all articulated, were identified from Tomb 46. This stone lined pit contained two adults lying on their backs, in an extended position, their heads positioned in opposite directions to one another, with a child found lying between them at their head/feet (Darcque 1996).

Apart from this handful of examples, the evidence is more ambiguous. Several of the tombs from Tell el-'Ajjul Eastern Cemetery may be simultaneous burials. Tomb 411 (Gonen 1992, 131; Petrie 1931, Plate LVII), for example, would appear to have contained five articulated skeletons, deposited in three different side chambers or loculi, surrounding a partial horse burial within the central chamber. Gonen (1992, 131) argues that these likely represent simultaneous deposits, in part due to the lack of any evidence for a roof or roof supports and secondly due to the intact articulated nature of the

burials. Tomb 3006 at Megiddo was also interpreted by Gonen (1992, 114) as a simultaneous burial, although in this case contained an articulated adult and a second disarticulated individual, also identified as an adult, who had been placed on top of the articulated skeleton, with objects then being deposited above these remains. As with MBA Tell el-Ghassil, although likely occurring simultaneously, one of the individuals interred within this context had likely been previously buried or excarnated elsewhere.

Given these examples, why might we see more simultaneous burials during the MBA as opposed to earlier or later periods? One explanation worth briefly considering is simply that more people during the MBA were dying at the same time. Diseases or epidemics (Kletter and Levy 2015, 290) would be a possible explanatory factor for this and would also potentially explain the variations in numbers found within each context. There is, however, no definitive evidence to suggest that such events were any more prolific in the MBA than earlier or later periods. Alternatives could be associated with increasing warfare or conflict, although, as Kletter and Levy (2015, 289), suggest there are relatively few examples where clear evidence for trauma can be identified (see Chapter 9). Rather than looking for explanations that lie in mortuary demography therefore, we need to explore the factors influencing the choice to bury the dead together (or separately) when death occurred at the same time.

Not all the MBA dead are being disposed of in simultaneous burials. At Jericho we are dealing with somewhere in the region of c. 20% of MBA burials that likely contain simultaneous deposits (Kletter and Levy 2015, 278, Table 1). Moreover, for most examples discussed above (see Table 4.1), we have a relatively low number of simultaneous dead, generally between two and five individuals per burial context. The simultaneous deposits at Jericho stand somewhat in contrast, with higher numbers, between two and eighteen per burial, according to Kletter and Levy (2015, 278, Table 1). These depositions also often appear alongside successive burials. These variations may, in part, be explained by chronology, with many of the tombs at Jericho dating to the later MBA and/or in addition may be associated with regional or localised burial practices (see Chapters 3 and 7 for further discussion).

If, however, we accept the idea that more people were not simultaneously dying during the MBA than any other period, we come back to the tension and negotiation between familial, communal, and individualising practices. For the MBA (and earlier and later examples) we see a repeated association between adult and non-adult burials in these simultaneous contexts, potentially suggesting a familial relationship, whether biologically or culturally constructed, between the individuals included in these tombs. For the MBA and, particularly, as I will discuss further below the MB II, familial and generational relationships seem to have played a significant role in shaping burial practices and traditions. Thus, when individuals died at the same or similar time perhaps more attention and consideration were paid to their co-burial.

In contrast to the MBA, for the EB IV we see a stronger tendency towards individualisation, and the limited number of simultaneous burials dating to

this period strengthens these arguments. Such practices, while occurring, were perhaps associated more with individual choice and expression, rather than socially prescribed. Similarly, the limited numbers of LBA simultaneous burials, and especially their configuration as largely double or triple graves containing an adult and child, or several adults and a child, highlight the growing importance of individual status during this period. In this sense, we can perhaps infer that during the LBA (and EB IV) deliberate decisions were being made *to not* inter the dead simultaneously, even when death occurred at the same time. As Greenberg (2019, 341) has suggested, by the later second millennium we are perhaps seeing the devaluation of ancestral ties, a topic I shall return to below and again in Chapter 7. In some respects, however, these broad temporal patterns make these later and earlier simultaneous burials even more poignant and meaningful. Moreover, the dedication and energy expended in relation to the reburial of disarticulated remains, alongside a newly buried corpse, also serves as a powerful reminder of the personal and human connections between individuals in the past, a theme that should not be overlooked amongst the mass of data.

The Changing Meaning of ‘Collective’

I now wish to turn to post-mortem manipulation, movement, or reburial of the deceased, practices that generally fall under the heading of ‘secondary’ or even ‘tertiary’ burial practices. I have already touched upon examples of these practices from both simultaneous and collective tombs; however, terms such as ‘secondary burial’ can encapsulate and hide a variety of behaviours and types of evidence. For many, a true ‘secondary burial’ is one in which transformation, involving the removal and manipulation of the dead between a temporary and final resting place, has to be an integral, culturally intended, and sanctioned part of the mortuary process (Pfälzner 2016, 245 and see further references therein). ‘Primary’ burials (i.e. unmodified or unmanipulated depositions), thus, do not qualify for such an attribution. Taking this hypothesis to its logical conclusion and building upon arguments I have made elsewhere (e.g. Bradbury and Philip 2020, 75; Bradbury 2024), it is possible to see exclusion from this lengthened version of death as a form of control, similar to restrictions over access to burial spaces and modes of burial. Here, therefore, I want to pose two important questions. First, to turn some of the existing narratives concerning ‘normative’ burial on their head, if we see such secondary or manipulated burials as the ideal, at least for some periods and regions, should we see single primary inhumations as ‘abbreviated burials’ (e.g. Robb 2007), representative of a denial of the opportunity to attain an ideal burial? Second, if we follow Kuijt’s (1996, 316) definition of secondary mortuary practices as entailing the sanctioned removal of objects, or pieces/ the entirety of a deceased individual to a new resting place, does the simple displacement of human remains within the same burial context constitute a transformation and therefore secondary burial? In other words, do the

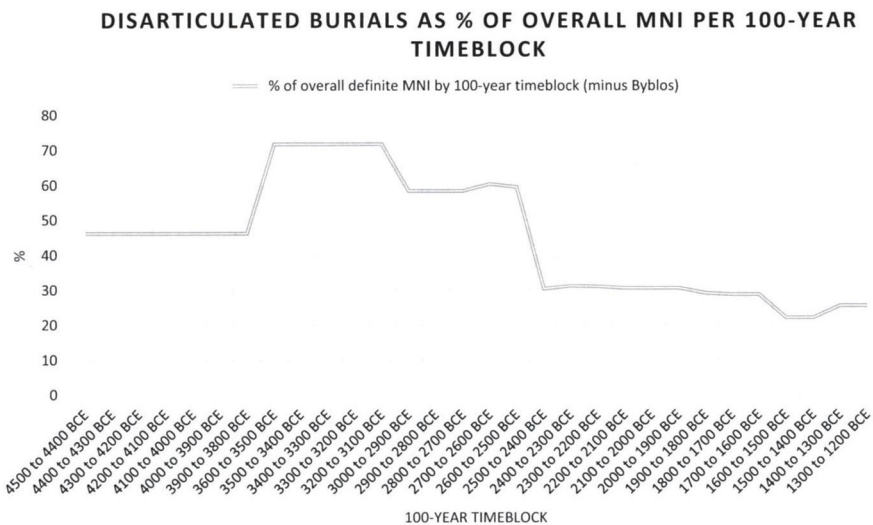


Figure 4.7 The MNI of disarticulated individuals by 100-year time-block as a percentage of the overall recorded MNI for which burial method is known (e.g. articulated vs. disarticulated vs. cremated). The false trough between 3800 and 3600 BCE (see Chapter 1) has been removed from the plot as it distorts patterns.

different variants of so-called collective or secondary burials all fit such models of transformation, and, if not, do they have different meanings and interpretations?

We can place practices along a continuum of interactions, from burials with no evidence for post-mortem manipulation to burials where there is a deliberate attempt to remove, replace, and interact with the fragmented corpse. The mention of disarticulated and fragmentary human remains within field reports and publications, therefore, can serve as a useful proxy for these practices. While unintended disturbances (via erosion, flooding, etc.) have to be considered, it is clear that the visibility of these practices shift over time and space (e.g. Bradbury and Philip (2017) and see Figure 4.7). Moreover, the degree and nature of fragmentation, disarticulation, and movement of remains can vary. Here, some of the definitions offered by researchers such as Sprague (2005) are worth highlighting. A useful distinction, for example, can be made between secondary burials involving the removal and relocation of human remains, and compound disposal methods, which encompass the repeated visitation, deposition, and disturbance of burial remains within a single context (Cradic 2018, 192). To these definitions I would also, however, add potential evidence for the deliberate and *structured* comingling of human remains, and it is to this topic I now wish to turn by way of a series of temporal and spatial case studies, focused on the southern Levant between the fourth and second millennium BCE.

Secondary Burial in the EB I Southern Levant

One of the key contrasts between the EBA and MBA collective tombs discussed throughout this chapter is the differing evidence for the organisation of the dead and their constituent body parts following decomposition and disarticulation (compare Figures 4.2 and 4.4 and see Bradbury (2024) for further examples and discussion). Such practices are particularly visible within the EB II-III charnel houses at Bab edh-Dhra, where fragmented skeletal material seems to have been carefully arranged on shelves, creating what Chesson (1999) has described as ‘libraries of the dead’. Processes of structured arrangement have also been observed in the earlier EB I shaft tombs, with skulls and long bones being grouped in clusters and placed upon mats (e.g. Chesson 1999, 145, Table 1, 2007, 116–17; Ortner and Frohlich 2007, 361, 2011, 105–6, Figure 3). Similarly, despite their longevity of use, the EBA tombs at Jericho also show evidence for the ordering of skeletal material. To return to one of the examples discussed earlier, the human remains in Tomb K2 (Figure 4.2) are described as having been gently handled, with some articulation being evident, the careful arrangement of crania, mainly around the edges of the chamber, as well as the deliberate removal of sub-cranial material from the tomb (Kenyon 1965, 11).

Such practices are not confined to Jericho, and occur elsewhere across the region, although no one site or tomb can be seen as a replication of another. While some provide evidence for burning (e.g. Tomb A61, Jericho (Evans, Faulkner, and Asmussen 2022, 6)), others do not (e.g. Tomb 4, Azor (Ben-Tor 1975)). In some, we see evidence for the removal of specific body parts, while others provide evidence for careful arrangement and subsequent marking/covering (e.g. Tomb 80 at ‘Ein Assawir (Gorzalczany and Sharvit 2010, 96; Nagar 2010, 121)). Equally, there are examples where the collective integration and fragmentation of particular individuals was likely never intended or realised. Here, in particular, we can think of the (partially) articulated inhumations 10, 12, 40, and 24 from Tomb A at Jericho (Garstang 1932, plate XVI; Polcaro 2005). These would appear to have been carefully set apart, the integrity of the individual preserved in some way and, particularly in the case of Inhumation 24, marked out via associated material culture and body positioning (Polcaro (2005, 59–63) and see Chapter 7 for further discussion).

The practices discussed above clearly fall in line with Kuijt’s (1996, 316) definition of secondary burial, with the removal of body parts and continued manipulation and interaction with the dead being seen in a variety of different guises. What is worth further consideration, however, is how treatment of the deceased’s body may reflect wider societal beliefs, different communities of practice, as well as conceptualisations of identity and the (un-)bounded self. Numerous interpretations centred on ideas of collectivity, ancestors, and heterarchy have been put forward in order to explain the disarticulation of the deceased and their subsequent interment within collective tombs. Scholars have also begun to point towards the ways in which these practices may be linked to different concepts of past personhood and what it meant to be human

(e.g. Bradbury 2024; Chesson 1999, 2007, 122; Cradic 2021). Building upon these ideas and my earlier discussions, the body, like society, during the EB I, may have been seen as potentially mutable, relational, and partible, able to fission, fragment, and subsequently coalesce and reform (Bradbury 2024, 382). As I will return to in Chapter 9, removal and continued interaction with particular body parts, both within and beyond burial contexts, therefore, may have been an integral part of EB I mortuary practices.

Alongside variability in burial numbers, the different processes and practices seen between and within sites also potentially hint at different groups and community members (practitioners, learners, and masters) being involved in the burial of the dead. Chesson (2023), for example, in her thought-provoking article on EB IA mortuary practices in the Dead Sea Plain, has emphasised the importance of learnt and mastered behaviours within mortuary and funerary contexts. Building on theoretical frameworks stemming from anthropology and ethnography (e.g. Lave 2011; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), she persuasively demonstrates how a ‘communities of practice’ approach can better enable archaeologists to consider aspects of regionalism, mobility, and connectivity, as well as variation and similarity within the mortuary sphere. Drawing inspiration from these ideas, if we think back to some of Kenyon’s descriptions of Tomb K2, persons involved in the arrangement and movement of human remains would have had to know how to correctly handle the human remains, what material to remove, and, in the case of Tomb A61, how to set, monitor, and control the burning process. If, as hypothesised earlier, some of these EB I cemeteries and tombs also served as central burial locales, we can also envisage how interactions and relations between different practitioners, communities, and social groups may have created variations, as well as similarities in practice (Chesson 2023, 74–75).

These discussions also open up alternate ways of interpreting some of the articulated individuals documented during the EB I. Inhumation 24 in Tomb A at Jericho, for example, has often been interpreted as the burial of a high-status individual (Polcaro 2005, 59–63). Equally, however, we could envisage this as an abbreviated burial, a person who, for some reason, whether due to identity, time, nature of death, relationality, or bodily form was not afforded a secondary burial. The models and ideas discussed above, therefore, not only shed light on the varying burial numbers and the variety of practices associated with EB I tombs but also suggest that different scales of relationality and concepts of personhood may have co-existed throughout this period (Bradbury 2024).

Secondary Burial in the EB IV Southern Levant

While accounting for a much smaller percentage of the overall burial population (see Figure 4.7), disarticulated human remains have been documented from a handful of EB IV sites in the southern Levant, including Khirbet Iskander (Peterman and Richard 2010), Dhahr Mirzbaneh (Lapp 1966), El Jib (Pritchard 1963), and Jericho (Kenyon 1960, 1965). At some sites, disarticulated

remains are only found in one or two tombs within cemeteries containing many more burials, while in others we are dealing with a much larger dataset. Questions of intentionality, significance, and 'normativity' come into play here. Tomb SE4 at Tiwal esh-Sharqi, for example, contained three individuals, one represented by a scatter of disarticulated remains. The tomb had suffered from flooding and roof collapse, with the original shaft for the chamber being unidentifiable, suggesting that the level of disarticulation and fragmentation may well have arisen from taphonomic processes, rather than anthropogenic interactions (Tubb 1990, 67). Similarly, although being treated as a 'shortened' secondary burial by Shay (1983, 27) the disarticulated remains from Tomb G88 at Jericho, which was reused during the MBA, may have been disturbed and damaged due to roof fall (Kenyon 1960, 61), complicating our analyses. Given ancient populations deep entanglement with the world and environment around them, we can wonder whether the deposition of burials in flood prone areas could have been deliberate, with water serving as an active agent in processes of decay and decomposition. The processes and practices in these examples, however, would seem to be very different from those discussed above in relation to the EB I southern Levant.

Whether natural or anthropogenically facilitated (intentionally or otherwise), in other cases, we may have very deliberate disarticulation of the human body, followed by the piling or arrangement of human remains. The EB IV burial in Tomb 110 at Beth She'an, for example, was described as a 'bone pile' (Oren 1973a, 23, 1973b). Likewise, two adult male burials in Tomb 50 at Pisgat Ze'ev were, despite their poor preservation, interpreted as secondary burials, with the skulls and long bones being separated along the edges of the tomb (Seligman 1995, 192). More compelling is the evidence from the EB IV layers within Tomb 33 at Hazorea, which also contained heaps of bones, around which ceramic vessels appear to have been arranged (Meyerhof 1989, 34–39). Where MNI data exist, and although there are exceptions, EB IV disarticulated burials would appear to follow the same trends as articulated burials; in most cases we would appear to be dealing with a handful of individuals per burial context, rather than the tens to hundreds of individuals record from the EB I–III and later MBA.

Perhaps largely to do with preservation, excavation strategies, as well as the overall cemetery size, Jericho (as well as El Jib (Pritchard 1963) and Dhahr Mirzbaneh (Lapp 1966) to a lesser extent) stand out due to the wealth of evidence for disarticulated burials dating to the EB IV. These data have already been extensively discussed and debated within the literature (e.g. Baxevani 1995; Greener 2012; Shay 1983), and thus, here, I only want to point towards a couple of important patterns. Shay's research on EB IV burial customs at Jericho worked with a sample of 40 tombs and suggested that c. 80% of the burials included in the study were secondary. Equally, Palumbo (1987, 1990, 121) and Greener (2012, 36–37) both highlighted the paucity of primary burials from the site, in comparison to the presence of disarticulated remains.⁴ Worth highlighting is Shay's (1983, 27–29) interpretation of this as a 'normative' or

‘regular’ treatment, with shortened versions being associated with individuals whose death or circumstances of death were unusual.⁵ Although a total of 356 skeletons is the most often used figure (e.g. Palumbo 1990, 46; Shay 1983, 26) for the overall mortuary population of EB IV Jericho, this is an *estimated* total. A total of 346 probable EB IV tombs were documented, but not all of these were published, and some were robbed, reused, collapsed, or never fully excavated (Kenyon 1965, 549–50).

Focusing on the over 200 EB IV individuals⁶ for whom we do have (published) data, the overall patterns are somewhat different. Burial mode and deposition have been evaluated for just over 60% of the EBIV individuals from Jericho recorded by this project, and here the patterns seem to be broadly similar between articulated and disarticulated burials, respectively accounting for c. 26% and c. 29% of the total number of individuals. A further c. 8% were represented by articulated body parts, representing a range of potential behaviours. These include the possible displacement of bodies to make way for later burials (e.g. Tomb L7 (Kenyon 1965, 148–49) and see Figure 4.8), burials originally deposited in articulated form, but that were subsequently disturbed due to water erosion (e.g. Tomb A82 and Tomb G18 (Kenyon 1960, 190, 257)) and partially articulated (and partially fleshed) body parts, which appear to have been mixed with animal remains, either due to later disturbance or during the transfer of remains from a prior depositional/burial area (e.g. Tomb P9 (Kenyon 1965, 98–100)).

While the disparities between the numbers of articulated and disarticulated (‘primary’ and ‘secondary’) burials are not as stark as they might seem, there does seem to be a difference in their distribution. A significance percentage of disarticulated burials derive from so-called ‘pottery tombs’ (Baxevari 1995, 88; Greener 2012, 36–38; Kenyon 1960, 1965). Conversely, only a couple of so-called ‘dagger tombs’ were associated with disarticulated remains. Moreover, as discussed earlier, in these cases we see the deposition of disarticulated remains alongside articulated bodies (e.g. Tomb A128 (Kenyon 1965, 51)), perhaps suggesting that it was the relationships between these individuals that necessitated this particular mode of treatment. Bearing in mind more recent projects that have restudied the Jericho skeletal material (e.g. Shafiq 2010), these patterns are worth further consideration in the future, although this goes beyond the remit of the current project.

What the examples discussed in this section do suggest, however, is that variable treatments and potentially different meanings and levels of significance were associated with the disarticulated dead. As already highlighted, for this period we are generally dealing with single or double burials, or in a handful of cases less than a dozen disarticulated/partially articulated individuals within a single burial context. Thus, although the patterns and relationships between the disarticulated and articulated dead, particularly at sites such as Jericho, need further consideration, there is nothing akin to the mass mobilisation of the fragmentary dead discussed for the earlier third- and fourth-millennium-BCE southern Levant. As multiple successive tombs again become more visible in

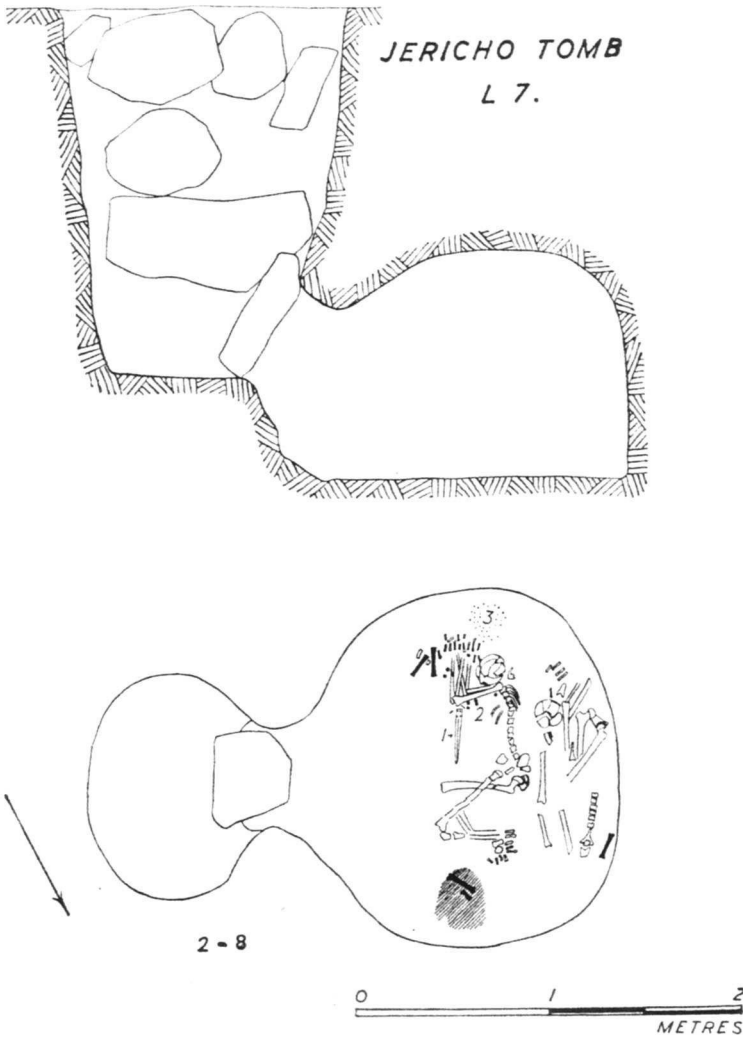


Figure 4.8 Early Bronze Age Tomb L7 from Jericho (EB IV). Image courtesy of Council for British Research in the Levant.

the archaeological record, a key question we have to consider is the extent to which these practices are similar to those of over a thousand years earlier.

Secondary Burial in the Second-Millennium-BCE Southern Levant

Earlier in this chapter, I pointed to the divergences in burial numbers seen between EBA (particularly EB I) collective burials containing disarticulated remains and those dating to the second millennium BCE. These disparities are

not only reflected in burial numbers but can also be seen via the ways in which the human body itself was being treated in death. If we take a closer look at descriptions and plans of MBA-LBA collective burials and compare them to those discussed above in relation to the EB I, this latter point becomes even more clear (Bradbury 2024). Evidence from the MBA shaft burials at sites such as Rishon le-Zion and Jericho (Kenyon 1960, 167–478, 1965, 263–518; Levy and Kletter 2018a, 10–11), for example, seems to suggest that decayed remains were pushed aside with relatively little care, resulting in the intermixing and commingling of partially articulated, disarticulated, and fragmentary material. Adjectives such as ‘disordered’ (e.g. Tomb M11 (Kenyon 1965, 227) and see Figure 4.4) or ‘mounded’ (e.g. Tomb B35 (Kenyon 1960, 370)) are used in relation to the Jericho tombs, while in the MBA-LBA tombs at Ashkelon, familial burial clusters appear to have been disturbed by the placement of additional burials (Baker 2012, 88–90).

Jericho, Rishon le-Zion, and Ashkelon are not unusual in this sense and evidence from other MBA contexts points towards similar patterns. Tomb AD, dated to the MB II, at Tell el-Far’ah North (Mallet 1973), was described as containing the skeletal remains of four adult individuals, arranged “pêle-mêle”, in layers. The recently excavated shaft tombs from Tell el-Hāshash (South) include evidence for both articulated and disarticulated remains, with some disarticulated material also being found in the shafts of these tombs (Marmelstein, Gorzalczy, and Segal 2016). Similarly, Tomb 1181, a MB II, rock-cut shaft tomb, cut into the southern slope of Hazor, appears to have contained at least 11 individuals, with skeletal remains being moved/pushed to the side to make way for later burials, resulting in a mix of disarticulated and articulated material (Maeir 1997). Although reusing EB IV burial contexts, the successive MB II burials at El-Jib also seem to have incorporated both disarticulated and articulated material (Pritchard 1963).

Variations, however, are also apparent and may tell us something about the different motivations, needs, and practices of MBA communities. At some sites and within some tombs, the rearrangement of the dead seems to have been unnecessary. New burials within some of the Ashkelon tombs, for example, apparently caused relatively little disturbance, while the ‘secondary sweeps’ of material into niches or piles, such as that seen in Chamber 5, were much more destructive (Baker 2012, 89–90). Likewise, the MB II tomb from Mazor (West) shows evidence for scattered and jumbled skeletal remains, although in this case no attempt seems to have been made to push earlier objects, such as pottery vessels, to one side in order to make way for later interments. Instead, clusters of skeletal material and associated objects have been identified from within the tomb (Gershuny and Milevski 2021, 65). On the other hand, some structured (re-)arrangement of human remains is also documented. The lower levels of Tomb 902 at Tell Kabri (late MB II), for example, provide potential evidence for the arrangement of skulls along the walls of the tomb (Kempinski et al. 2002, 33; Samet 2014, 388). These interactions, thus, seem to have been one possibility amongst many such contexts, rather than a necessity.

While we should be cognisant of these individual nuances and site or tomb specific variations, at a broader temporal scale, the interactions seen in MBA tombs seem to be acts of pushing aside, clearing out, or sweeping away. Fragmentation, while clearly a sanctioned way of treating and manipulating the dead, appears as more of a by-product and not necessarily a deliberate and intentional transformation (Bradbury 2024, 383–84). In this vein, it is also worth highlighting potential attempts to maintain the integrity of individual bodies within these tombs, at least for a period of time. The carved niches at Ashkelon, for example, have been identified as a potential way of preserving the integral human body (Baker 2012, 88; Gonen 1992). In addition, although taking us into the northern Levant, practices within Tomb P. 8680 at Ebla similarly show concern for the retention of individual identity, with partly decayed remains being gathered alongside funerary gifts into bags (Polcaro 2012, 323–24). While individuals or groups treated in such ways could be seen as exceptions or variations from the ‘norm’, the integration of these different features into the structure of the tomb itself at Ashkelon seems to suggest that this was a significant step or part of the process.

A number of possible conclusions can be drawn from these observations. First, while the eventual integration and collection of bodies into an ancestral community was important during the MBA (e.g. Cradic 2021), the deliberate fragmentation and continued manipulation of these fragmented bodies was not the primary aim of these practices (Bradbury 2024). Second, maintenance of individual identity during the initial burial was an important part of the process. Finally, in some cases, such individuality could also be maintained following decomposition of the corpse, with an attempt being made to confine, delimit, and enclose individual disarticulated remains. By using the fourth- to second-millennium-BCE southern Levant as a case study, I have (hopefully) demonstrated the necessity of taking a more nuanced look at the categories of ‘secondary’ and ‘primary’ burial. I will touch upon some of these ideas and examples again in Chapter 7. To conclude discussions here, however, I want to further problematise and break apart the terms ‘secondary’ and ‘collective’ burial by way of comparing three different examples (Tomb 62 from Pella, Tomb VII from Qatna, and Tombs 903 and 910 from Megiddo). Contexts that, despite showing broad similarities (e.g. the presence of hundreds of disarticulated individuals), can once again be interpreted in very different ways.

Passive Repositories or Meaningful Collections?

As discussed in Chapter 3, Tomb 62 at Pella (Bourke 1992; Bourke and Eriksson 2006, 346), despite its wealth of material (over 2000 objects and around 150 individuals), has been interpreted as a so-called ‘passive repository’, representative of limited social differentiation and the ‘lower’ echelons of society (Greenberg 2019, 339). Several factors complicate this interpretation and given the variety of collective forms of burial discussed in this chapter so far, it is worth considering this example in a little more detail. Tomb 62 was unfortunately badly damaged

due to rock fall and water infiltration, which is thought to have washed or seeped into the burial and moved objects. As a result, we have very little evidence regarding the original stratification and location of many of the objects and burials within this tomb (Bourke 1992). A second issue is whether Tomb 62 actually represents a successive multiple or collective burial at all. Could it instead have been used a locale for the relocation and deposition of material derived from the clearing out of other tombs (Smith and Potts 1992, 70–71). If this were to be the case, the material assemblages and human remains from Tomb 62 could potentially account for the contents of tens or even hundreds of MBA-LBA tombs.⁷ Why would groups clear out existing tombs? Could such practices simply be an extended and expanded version of the pushing back of materials seen in some of the other second-millennium-BCE contexts discussed above? Alternatively, could the gathering and relocation of collected burial materials be part of broader approaches towards death and burial?

Qatna's Tomb VII provides a useful case study by which to consider this idea in slightly more detail. This tomb is linked to the removal and relocation of human remains, as well as associated artefacts, from the Royal Hypogeum (Pfälzner 2012, 215). Whether enacted due to a lack of space or wider sociopolitical changes, Pfälzner (2016, 257–58), in his discussions of this so-called 'quaternary' burial or relocation phase, suggests that, although not ritually required, this phase was also associated with processes of veneration and transformation, providing a location for continued ritual and commemoration. The taphonomic disturbances observed in relation to Tomb 62 at Pella, unfortunately prevent us from identifying clear evidence for veneration or structured depositions following what may have been a similar relocation of human remains and objects from neighbouring tombs. Examples such as Qatna, however, challenge the notion of these locales being simple passive repositories. Instead, the relocation of human remains and objects, even if arising from necessity due to a lack of space, would have provided the living with a further, and perhaps final, opportunity to interact with the dead. Thus, rather than simply being passive entities, the events and activities surrounding these relocations may have been imbued with opportunities for further remembrance and commemoration. Worth considering is whether such processes allowed not only for remembrance but also forgetting. As I will discuss further in Chapter 7, we can potentially identify events or activities that may have marked the end of the use life of some MBA tombs, and it may be that such relocation activities also provided the opportunity for a final active process of closure, bringing commemoration and continued interaction with the dead to an end. Thus, to return to Greenberg's (2019, 339) concept of a 'passive repository', this perhaps ends up being an apt description, but only once the multitude of interactions and processes of remembering and forgetting preceding this final deposition are taken into consideration.

By way of contrast, a final example takes us back into the EB I and to the site of Megiddo, where we would appear to have a very different set of processes and practices guiding the removal and relocation of burial materials

from one context to another. Originally excavated in the late 1930s (Guy and Engberg 1938) and since reassessed by Ilan (2013), the removal and relocation of skeletal material has been identified as a potential explanation for the lack of order seen within some tombs at the site, as well as the imbalance between the numbers of skeletal remains and the numbers of associated vessels. Tomb 903 (Upper), in particular, has been identified as a possible locale used for the relocation of material from Tomb 910. Containing at least 60 individuals, skeletal material in this tomb, in contrast to many of the EB I examples discussed above, appears to have been haphazardly deposited, ‘spilling out’ of the tomb (Ilan 2013, 138). Only six complete vessels were recorded from this upper level, two of which may date to the EB III (Ilan 2013, 137, Table 15). The skeletal material from Tomb 910, in contrast, although recorded from all chambers, was far more limited and fragmentary and, as a result, we have no suggested MNI for this tomb.

The timing of these relocations offers a further dimension to these interpretations. Originally suggested to have been transferred during the EB IV, Ilan (2013, 138) proposes a *terminus post quem* of EB III for this transfer, with EB III deposits sealing some of the EB I material. While there is a possibility that some of the human remains documented from the eastern slope tombs at Megiddo date to the EB III, the relative paucity of EB III finds, as well as their domestic/productive nature makes this unlikely (Ilan 2013, 133–34). Whether such relocations highlight the simple insignificance of such practices at early-third-millennium-BCE Megiddo or something more akin to an active dismissal, rejection, or even destruction of EB I practices is harder to determine. Either way, the site (in contrast to Bab edh-Dhra and Jericho) during EB III seems to reflect wider regional patterns, and the increasing irrelevance of earlier methods of burial and their associated meanings, an idea I will return to towards the end of this volume. These tombs also highlight that no two collective burials can be interpreted in exactly the same way, requiring us to consider both broader patterns, as well as zoom in and explore individual burial contexts.

Concluding Remarks

As this chapter has demonstrated, local traditions, practices, and approaches have clearly shaped the evidence we have for ‘individual’ versus ‘multiple’ and ‘primary’ versus ‘secondary’ burials in the archaeological record. While problematising these terms and within a background of complexity and variety, broader temporal patterns can be identified. Significant shifts seem to be visible, for example, in the archaeological record of the fourth- to second-millennia-BCE southern Levant; thus, a collective and/or secondary burial dating to the MBA did not necessarily involve the same processes and practices, or the same types of meanings, as burials dating to the EB I.

As shown by my discussion of simultaneous burials, despite variations, the decision to bury more than one individual within the same context is meaningful. Moreover, while both cemeteries and multiple tombs represent ‘communities

of the dead', these spaces offer different potentialities. Single inhumation within a cemetery, for example, provide greater opportunity or flexibility in terms of an interplay between individual and communal expressions and identities. They also likely communicate different approaches to community and ownership, as well as ideas of ancestors and power (e.g. Bradbury and Philip 2017; Chesson 2003, 2007; Cradic 2018; Greenberg 2019). As I will continue to discuss in the next few chapters, such fluctuating ideals and beliefs not only influenced the ways in which the dead as a collective or an individual entity could be treated, but also how different categories of person could be represented and managed in death.

Notes

- 1 Also see Baker (2012, 88–90) for the potential identification of clustering and family units within the MBA-LBA collective tombs of the southern Levant, such as Ashkelon.
- 2 One of the very few burial contexts (containing both adults and non-adults) from the latter region, Tell Majnuna, is a collective burial or series of collective deposits, albeit one interpreted in association with violence and warfare, hence its lack of discussion here (e.g. McMahon 2014; McMahon and Stone 2013; McMahon, Soltysiak, and Weber 2011). I shall return to this example in Chapter 9.
- 3 These examples are not included in Table 4.1.
- 4 The figure of roughly one third of the EB IV burials being primary and thus two thirds being secondary is generally cited within the literature.
- 5 Only one example of this, however, was included in her study: Tomb G88, which was mentioned earlier.
- 6 Based on the original publication reports, the Invisible Dead Project collated data on 214 individuals dated to the EB IV, roughly 60% of the overall estimated population of 356 individuals. This figure does not, however, include tombs whereby skeletal material was recorded, but the MNI was unclear.
- 7 In a workshop at Durham University in 2019, Dr Stephen Bourke suggested and further explored this very intriguing idea.

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