

9 Throwing Away the Concept of Normative?

There has been a wealth of literature on the concept of ‘deviant’ or ‘atypical’ burials in recent years, particularly in relation to Medieval and post-Medieval Europe and the Americas (e.g. E. M. Murphy 2008a; Betsinger, Scott, and Tsaliki 2020). Relatively little, however, has been written about this subject in association with Western Asia and even, to some extent, the wider Mediterranean. As I shall shortly explore, a variety of ‘atypical’ burials are documented from the archaeological record of the Levant. From individuals showing potential signs of medical (mis)treatment to those placed in unusual positions. Bodies which seem to have been discarded to richly equipped individuals who were likely objects of sacrifice.

Trying to seek a pattern across or within such ‘atypicality’ might seem futile. Yet, all of the burials discussed in previous chapters, by token of their survival and archaeological visibility, could, in some ways, be seen as ‘atypical’. As scholars, however, we are happy to explore patterns within this fragmentary, and possibly for some periods, highly unrepresentative dataset. In this chapter, therefore, I want to shine a light on some of the different types of evidence that have traditionally been treated as lying outside of the norm. Through this I want to critically challenge current concepts of what ‘formal’, ‘typical’, and ‘atypical’ might actually have meant before posing a final question; do we need to throw away the concept of a ‘normative’ burial practice for Western Asia?

Atypical Burials: Do They Really Exist?

Recent discussions of ‘atypical’, ‘non-normative’, ‘deviant’, ‘non-formal’ or ‘non-burials’ in America, Europe, and the Mediterranean have highlighted a multitude of potential explanations and interpretations for such practices. From untimely deaths, including the death of unbaptised children (e.g. Donnelly and Murphy 2008; Weiss-Krejci 2013), the mistreatment of criminals or wrong doers (e.g. Lindenlauf 2001, 87; Weiss-Krejci 2013) to a fear of the dead, ghosts, revenants, and witches (e.g. Garvie-Lok et al. 2020; A. Taylor 2008; Tsaliki 2008). Many of these explanations and interpretations also play a role in Western Asia. Ghosts, for example, are mentioned in ancient textual sources as interfering with the living, with such events often being associated

with improper burial rites or the lack of continued provisioning of the dead (e.g. Scurlock 2016). Meanwhile texts, artefacts, and archaeological materials from ancient Iraq have been interpreted through the lens of violence and conflict (e.g. Bradbury 2024; McMahon, Sołtysiak, and Weber 2011; Porter et al. 2021; Richardson 2007; Winter 1985). Whether such practices can really be seen as ‘non-normative’ is a topic I shall return to below.

Issues of terminology also come into play here (e.g. Aspöck 2008; Lindenlauf 2001, 87–88; E.M. Murphy 2008b, 2020a). For example, in turning away from the use of terms with clearly negative connotations (i.e. ‘deviant’ (e.g. Aspöck 2008)), researchers have emphasised that ‘atypical’ or ‘non-normative’ behaviour may simply represent a less common practice or minority rite. More unusual or different, but still a sanctioned and regular form of burial or disposal for the deceased (e.g. Cherryson 2008; Holloway 2008; Mickelburgh et al. 2020). Thus, while in our reconstructions of mortuary practices in Western Asia significant attention has been paid to both textual and archaeological interpretations of ‘proper’, or perhaps ideal burials, such a picture is incomplete without a consideration of the ‘atypical’. With these overall discussions and concepts in mind, I wish to turn to several different categories of what could or have been classed as ‘atypical’ burials, including those associated with trauma and violence, human remains missing body parts, burials which appear to have been restrained or controlled in some way, and, finally, the less visible dead.

Violence and Trauma

Given the momentous changes wrought by historical and contemporary conflicts, it is an enduring oddity that, in contemporary archaeological discourse, the place of warfare in social relations and societal change remains a minor, muted concern or, quite simply, omitted.

(Knüsel and Smith 2013, 3)

The discussion and identification of violence in the archaeological record is a debated subject. Scholarship, especially that focusing on the grand narrative, has the tendency to occupy different ends of the spectrum, either suggesting that early society was inherently violent, filled with conflict and death, or that it was a peaceful idyll (e.g. Graeber and Wengrow 2021; Knüsel and Smith 2013, 5–6; Walker 2001). Since the above quote by Knüsel and Smith over a decade ago, there has been significant discussion within the archaeological literature of Western Asia on the role and appearance of conflict related, as well as interpersonal or sacrificial, violence (e.g. Gasperetti and Sheridan 2013; McMahon 2014; Porter et al. 2021; Sołtysiak 2017). As one of the reviewers for this volume noted, violence is, unfortunately, not rare. The archaeological evidence, however, is less visible than one might expect. This, I suspect, relates to numerous different factors, from a potential reticence to engage with this subject, the relatively recent turn to focus on the human body within mortuary

contexts, to the fact that the people and bodies involved in violence and conflict are not always afforded a burial that would be easily identifiable in the archaeological record. As such, these persons fall into yet another category of invisible dead.

Even when surviving, unequivocally identifying traces of such activities can be difficult. Evidence such as fortifications and weaponry from burials, while potentially indicative of conflict activities or the fear of potential violence and conflict, also conveys various messages of power, status, as well as community cohesion and cooperation (see Chapters 3 and 6). Turning to the human body, trauma and stress-markers are often associated with soft tissue injuries and therefore do not necessarily show on the skeleton. Such markers can also be hard to identify in fragmented assemblages and in different population groups (e.g. Knüsel and Smith 2013, 9–11; M. E. Lewis 2013, 39–40; Walker 2001, 584). Signs of violence and trauma on different parts of the body are also potentially more indicative of conflict than others. Healed (ante-mortem) cranial trauma, for example, is one of the most indicative signs of violence (both inter-personal and wider conflict-related) and has been used effectively across Western Asia to understand and explore temporal shifts at both regional (e.g. Sołtysiak 2017) and site scales (e.g. Gasperetti and Sheridan 2013). On the other hand, sub-cranial trauma can be suggestive of a range of different activities and trauma-related injuries, including accidents or heavy labour (e.g. Gasperetti and Sheridan 2013, 404–6).

Evidence for deliberate and ritualised killing and sacrifice can be equally challenging to identify and interpret, and, again, we are often reliant on indicators such as cranial trauma or less direct evidence such as mortuary demography. Such evidence has been extensively covered elsewhere (e.g. Porter and Schwartz 2012; Schwartz 2017), although only a few sites from wider Western Asia provide unequivocal evidence for (human) sacrificial activities (e.g. the Royal Tombs at Ur (e.g. Baadsgaard et al. 2011; Woolley 1934)).¹ In terms of the ancient Levant, beyond sites such as Umm el-Marra (Schwartz 2012, 2017, 230) and Arslantepe (e.g. Frangipane 2007; Porter 2012)), there is relatively little evidence for human sacrifice, and, as I will further discuss below, the evidence that does exist is debated.

In order to explore this theme in slightly more detail, I want to return to a topic touched upon earlier, the significance and interpretation of simultaneous and mass burials. In Chapter 4, I pointed towards one potential explanation for the fluorescence of simultaneous burials during the MBA, increasing warfare and conflict, a hypothesis which tallies with the growing evidence for substantial fortifications during this period (see Chapter 3). Indeed, while a much larger and robust dataset would be needed to make any conclusive interpretations, it is worth noting that the number of sites showing evidence for skeletal trauma is slightly higher during the MBA and particularly MB II (see Figure 9.1).² Given supposed shifts in conflict technology and warfare during this period ((Bourke 2013, 468–79; Burke 2008, 159–60) and see Chapter 3 for further discussion), this pattern is an area for future investigation, especially as it would seem to be

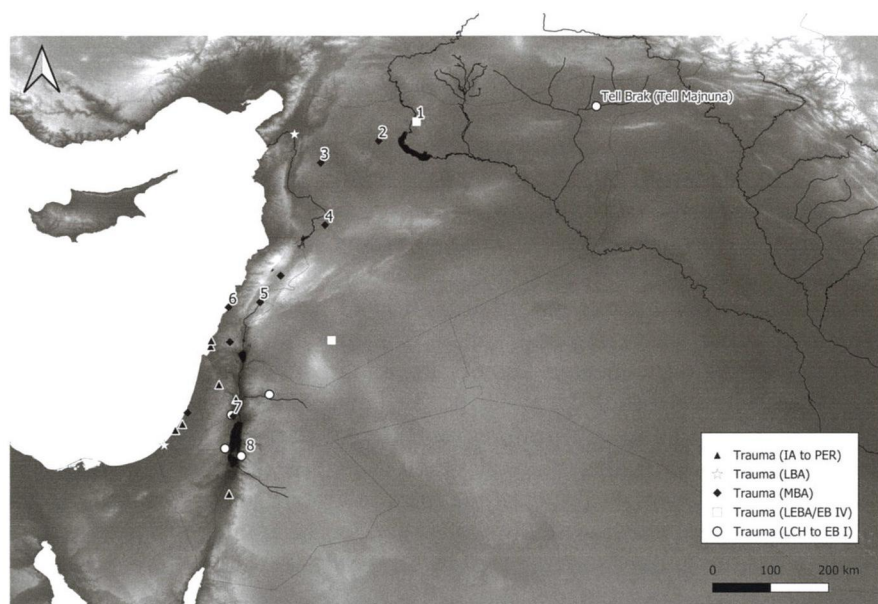


Figure 9.1 Sites from the database which include data on skeletal trauma. Sites mentioned in the text are labelled as follows: 1. Tell Banat; 2. Umm el-Marra; 3. Ebla; 4. Qatna; 5. Kamid el-Loz; 6. Sidon; 7. Jericho; 8. Bab edh-Dhra. Tell Brak is labelled on the map separately, as this site lies beyond the study region.

at odds with contemporary trends from northern Mesopotamia (Sołtysiak 2017, 124–25), perhaps suggesting different scales, modes, or conflict-related burial behaviours between the two regions.³

One of the earliest examples of a mass burial likely associated with conflict activities derives from Tell Majnuna (c. 3800–3700 BCE), a satellite mound of Tell Brak, and a site that lies just beyond my study area. Here, over 100 disarticulated individuals, including both adults and non-adults (excluding infants), were found in several discrete deposits (e.g. MTW, EME, EMS) in association with animal remains (e.g. McMahon, Sołtysiak, and Weber 2011; McMahon 2014; Weber 2014). The mass deposit of both human and animal remains, the latter potentially associated with feasting events, seems to suggest that the death of these individuals was associated with a catastrophic event. Healed cranial injuries provide indications for interpersonal conflict, with the intriguing evidence for the production of human bone tools (Area EM) being linked to the creation or processing of enemy trophy skulls (McMahon, Sołtysiak, and Weber 2011, 209–10, 213–14).

As will now be clear from earlier chapters, the continued interaction with, manipulation, handling, and processing of deceased remains is not a phenomenon unknown in the wider region (see below for further discussion). Moreover, given the paucity of burial deposits from this period across northern Syria and

Iraq, we cannot assume that this represents the disrespectful treatment of an enemy population (Bradbury 2024; cf. McMahon, Sołtysiak, and Weber 2011, 216–17). Within the area of the northern Levant, albeit further to the southwest and dating to around a millennium later, we can also recall the discussions from Chapter 3 regarding the White Monument at Tell Banat (Porter et al. 2021). Although involving far fewer individuals, this structure incorporated both fragmented human and animal remains and has been interpreted as a commemorative monument, a memorial to individuals involved in either an internal or external conflict. One of the most significant differences between these two examples, however, is the perceived level of formality. While McMahon et al. (2011, 215) discuss the haphazard collection of remains, Porter et al. (2021) refer to the intentional and patterned deposition of human and animal remains. Different processes and practices are clearly at play within these two examples. As I will discuss throughout this chapter, however, a lack of formality should not necessarily be the only rubric through which intentionality or respectful treatment is assessed and identified.

By way of example, moving forward in time, the shaft deposits, or burials (Shaft 1) from Umm el-Marra mentioned in Chapter 3 (dated to c. 1600 BCE, the end of the MBA) provide potential evidence for the sacrificial deposit of both human and animal individuals. Thirteen humans, including adult males, females, and non-adults, all apparently killed by a blow to the head, were found deposited below numerous strata of animal remains, including equids, puppies, donkeys, dogs, as well as griffin vultures. The shaft housing these individuals was cut into a monumental platform (Monument 1) built over the top of the earlier elite EB IV tombs (Schwartz 2013, 510–13, 2017, 230). The violent nature of these deaths and unusual burial methods have been interpreted in several different ways, either as indicative of sacrificial practices, perhaps to gain divine intervention during a time of military crisis,⁴ or alternatively as the slaughter of local rulers and their relatives by an enemy force such as the Hittites (Schwartz 2013, 513).

Much further south, at the site of Kamid el-Loz, a mass grave (G1-3), dated to the MB II, also provides unequivocal evidence for conflict and violence. G1-3 contained between ten and 12 individuals, some of whom were articulated, albeit in unusual burial positions (e.g. with their femurs bent behind their back or upright legs), suggesting the use of bindings. Three individuals showed evidence for cranial trauma (holes in their skulls), while a fourth was found with a bronze spearhead embedded in their ribs (Heinz et al. 2011, 61–63). Disarticulated body parts were also present, although in this case it is not clear whether this disarticulation/body part removal occurred in life or death (Heinz et al. 2011, 61–63).

Thinking back to the quote offered at the beginning of this section, both of these examples (Umm el Marra and Kamid el-Loz) appear to be tied to evidence for destruction events, highlighting the role violent deaths could play within moments of social change and transition. Whether deliberately enacted through sacrifice or conflict, their placement and mode of burial were

inherently tied to sociopolitical acts of memorialisation and/or forgetting (Schwartz 2013). The shaft at Umm el-Marra, for example, was cut into the underlying monumental platform, which itself overlaid an area of monumental tombs. By the LBA, after a period of abandonment, this area was covered with houses (Schwartz 2013, 515). A remarkably similar sequence of events can be seen at Kamid el-Loz, where the MB II mass burial was cut into the area of the MB temple, with houses then being constructed over this zone in LB I (Heinz et al. 2011, 61–63). The dating and similarity of these two examples bring us back to the idea of increased conflict and violence in the later MBA. Two further aspects are worth consideration, however. Firstly, there may be an investigation bias. We only have data on skeletal trauma from some of the larger well-investigated cemeteries. As several large MBA cemeteries have been excavated in recent decades, including those discussed here, this could be distorting the overall picture. Secondly, not every example of peri-mortem trauma dating to this period necessitated the distinctive treatment of the dead.

Tomb P19 at Jericho, for example, provides evidence for the simultaneous burial of six individuals, alongside an earlier deposition (Individual E) and has been variously interpreted as providing evidence for the execution of grave robbers, the sacrifice of retainers, or the violent death of the family members of Individual E during conflict/an enemy raid (R. Chapman 1987; Kenyon 1965, 388–90). All six simultaneous burials are thought to have been killed by blunt force trauma to the head, while three individuals lacked their right hands (Kenyon 1965, 388). Leaving aside the mode and nature of death (sacrifice versus conflict), for one moment, what is of interest is the fact that these individuals were treated in a similar way to those buried in other MBA tombs (see Chapter 7). If their death did, therefore, occur during a period of conflict, which, given all the evidence, seems the most likely interpretation, there was not the necessity to mark out or treat these individuals differently. Perhaps we are dealing with a different scale and nature of conflict in this case; we should not expect all forms of conflict to present in exactly the same way in the archaeological record.

Given the discussion above on memorialisation and forgetting, it is worth noting that this tomb did not continue to be used following the deposition of these six simultaneous burials. Moreover, despite the differences between the individual case studies discussed here, the demography of the dead, yet again, emphasises the potential importance of familial and/or generational relationships during this period, even, or perhaps even more so, within conflict situations. The 13 individuals from Umm el Marra, given their demographic range, may represent a familial group, while the presence of both adults and non-adults in the burial at Kamid el-Loz could be interpreted in a similar way. People in death played an important generational and sociopolitical role, although there was clearly no single ‘normative’ way to deal with the deceased during a period of conflict.

Beyond conflict and interpersonal violence, evidence for trauma is relatively limited. Here we are dealing with a very small number of individuals from a

handful sites dating to different periods. Perhaps one of the most striking examples, however, is the individual from Grave 21 at Qatna (Morandi Bonacossi 2011, 17–20). Dated to the MBA and identified as a biological adult male, this individual was found lying on their back. Their legs appear to have been removed and their feet, still fully articulated, were placed next to their pelvis. Cut marks suggest that their scalp had been removed and also provide evidence for trepanning. The lack of healing around the bone fractures suggests that these activities took place shortly after (or around) death and prior to burial. No associated materials were found within the tomb, and it is suggested that this individual suffered from anaemia, with their skeleton also showing signs of mechanical stress. The overall health, lack of grave goods, and post-/peri-mortem activities may indicate a lower status, while it is proposed that this individual's corpse was used for surgical practice shortly following their death (Morandi Bonacossi 2011, 17–20). Whether or not this would have been considered a violation of the human body is more difficult to determine. Importantly, however, he still received an archaeologically visible burial and was not spatially separated from the rest of the inhumations in the MBA cemetery, perhaps suggesting some level of integration and respect.

Moving us forward by over a thousand years, Burial G55 from Kamid el-Loz dates to the Persian/Hellenistic period and contained two burials, a male and female, both of whom appear to have had sections of their skulls removed. This interaction has been interpreted as a 'severe violation of the bodies' (Heinz et al. 2010, 22); however, bar the evidence for these activities, this grave does not particularly stand out. Both individuals were associated with metal jewellery and placed extended on their backs, similar to others within the cemetery. These two examples, from Qatna and Kamid el-Loz respectively, as well as those discussed above (e.g. the individuals from P19 who were missing their hands and the human bone tools from Tell Brak) can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. In every case, however, it is not clear whether the treatment of bodies was, without doubt, disrespectful and/or unsanctioned. Indeed, excluding Grave 21 from Qatna (and even in this case similarities exist), all these individuals appear to have been treated in a similar manner to others within the same cemetery or burial context. Perhaps such interactions were simply not seen as bodily violations or alternatively, given the role, status, or nature of death, such bodily violations did not necessitate the distinctive treatment or spatial segregation of the dead.

Restraining the Dead

In the summer of 2023, numerous popular news articles appeared around the discovery of the prone and likely bound burial of an adolescent girl from an Early Medieval site in the UK. Possibly associated with the abandonment of this settlement, headlines about this individual included ideas of warding off spirits, vampires, or, less sensationally, that experts had a theory (e.g. Alberge 2023; Ritter 2023; Web Desk 2023). Even the official Museum of London

Archaeology Headland news blog referred to the tragic story of this young woman (MOLA Headland 2023). The international reporting of this find emphasises wider interest in such discoveries. Moreover, the elision of unusual and tragic here, although perhaps warranted in this example, highlights one of the real challenges in attempting to interpret unusual or ‘atypical’ burials, a tendency to impose our own values and associations. It is with these caveats in mind that I want to consider the handful of prone burials we have evidence for from the Levant, considering whether they really are ‘atypical’ or not.

If we were simply to go by numbers, prone or face down burials are clearly unusual for this region. Just over 20 prone burials have been recorded by the project, and this figure further narrows to 16 if we only consider those burials where the dating and burial positioning are of the highest certainty (see Table 9.1 and Figure 9.2). We can also exclude those that do not appear to have been deliberate (i.e. examples where the burial positioning does not seem to be associated with a specific burial practice or rite) and are, instead, associated with destruction deposits. These include an individual found in association with crushed pottery from Locus 1745 at Megiddo (Harrison et al. 2004, 20, 230, Figure 83), as well as an infant (aged 6–8 months) and child (aged 2–3 years) from Lachish (Locus 3612-Square C/11 and C/9) whose remains were found prone, their legs splayed out in association with destruction layers (Smith 2004, 2504–6). Given the context of these finds, tragic, albeit bringing in modern sentiments and emotions, would appear to be an apt adjective for these discoveries. Leaving aside such destruction deposits, with such a small dataset any temporal or spatial patterns are problematic, although as I shall shortly explore, multiple examples have been documented from a single site. Moreover, even based on this small dataset, it is clear that no prone burial can be interpreted in exactly the same way.

By way of example and, in direct contrast to Grave 21 from Qatna discussed above, the single prone burial from this site (Tomb 24-MB I) is not particularly distinctive or unusual, bar the fact that the skeleton appears to have been placed in a prone position. Found within a dense area of burials, the individual, aged 25–35 years and of indeterminate biological sex, was placed within a pit, bordered with mudbricks, their left arm parallel to their torso and their right arm and hand placed under their jaw, with their head to the west. A carinated bowl was found near their head, while a copper or bronze toggle pin was also deposited within the grave. All these features appear to be indicative of ‘normative’ behaviour within this cemetery, with the excavators pointing towards the ‘usual’ use of mudbricks and head positioning (Morandi Bonacossi 2011, 20–22).

Staying in the MBA, the prone adult individual from Locus 793 at Tell Fa’rah North was found underneath the southern wall of a structure, with their head to the east and their legs flexed. No associated materials were found within this grave. At first glance, this burial may appear ‘atypical’, due to the positioning, placement (underneath a wall) and lack of associated materials. There are, however, several other examples of MBA burials from the site found

Table 9.1 Summary information from prone burials recorded by the project.

Map number	Site name	Reference	Body position	Comments	Certainty	MNI
1	Tell Hadidi	Dornemann (1979)	Flexed/semi-flexed on face	From Figure 11 in report would appear that female adult skeleton articulated on front, in flexed position. Orientations not possible to determine.	Definite	1
2	Tell Alalakh	Boutin (2008)	Flexed/semi-flexed on face	Articulated burial, legs flexed, individual on front, with head to left side. Female aged 35–45 years.	Definite	1
2	Tell Alalakh	Woolley (1955)	Extended on face	'Simple' grave containing single individual, 'youthful'-listed here as child/adolescent with possible certainty-extended on front, orientated S-N.	Definite	1
2	Tell Alalakh	Woolley (1955)	Extended on face	'Simple' grave containing single individual, child, extended, prone (on front), orientated S-N.	Definite	1
3	Qatna	Morandi Bonacossi (2011)	Flexed/semi-flexed on face	Articulated skeleton, aged 25–35, sex unclassified, flexed position on front, orientated W-E and head facing S.	Definite	1
4	Khalde	Saidah (1966)	Extended on face	Individual lying on face/front, legs extended and covered with large stone slab.	Definite	1
4	Khalde	Saidah (1966)	Extended on face	Lying on front, orientated W-E and covered with large stone slabs.	Definite	1
5	Kamid el-Loz	Heinz et al. (2010)	Extended on face	MNI of 1, NW-SE orientation, upper body not fully excavated, prone extended-assumed adult.	Definite	1

(Continued)

Table 9.1 (Continued)

<i>Map number</i>	<i>Site name</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Body position</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Certainty</i>	<i>MNI</i>
6	Tell Kabri	Kempinski et al. (2002)	Flexed/semi-flexed on face	Tomb 1105, primary burial under a living floor, flat stone lying above head of interment. Individual on front, flexed/semi-flexed position, head to E.	Definite	1
7	Megiddo	Guy and Engberg (1938)	Extended on face	Individual, face down, head to S/SW and arms bent under chest. Referred to as a girl/young female in publication.	Definite	1
7	Megiddo	Harrison et al. (2004)	Unclassified on face	Human skeleton found in association with crushed pottery in Locus 1745-not a deliberate burial, instead associated with destruction.	Definite	1
8	Tell Far'ah North	Mallet (1973)	Flexed/semi-flexed on face	Locus 793, adult skeleton found in unusual position underneath southern wall of structure, face down with head to the east and legs flexed, no associated grave goods.	Definite	1
9	Tell es-Sadiyeh	Green (2006)	Extended on face	Clay lined pit containing remains of single articulated female, extended on front, orientated W-E and possibly bound.	Definite	1
9	Tell es-Sadiyeh	Tubb (1990)	Extended on face	Single articulated individual, extended on front and orientated W-E, facing N.	Definite	1
9	Tell es-Sadiyeh	Green (2006)	Unclassified on face	Adult individual, extended on front, orientated W-E. Only skull/cranium and upper vertebrae recovered.	Definite	1
9	Tell es-Sadiyeh	Green (2006)	Unclassified on face	Non-adult recorded as flexed/semi-flexed on front by Green and extended on Front by Tubb, orientated N-S.	Possible	1

10	Gezer	Dever et al. (1971)	Flexed/semi-flexed on face	Single adult female, aged c. 34 years interpreted as latest burial in the cave. Lying on front, legs flexed.	Definite	1
11	Ashkelon	Master and Aja (2017)	Extended on face	At least three individuals (possibly more) found lying face down-includes 'children' and 1 adult female.	Definite	At least three individuals
12	Lachish	Smith (2004)	Unclassified on face	Locus 3612-Square C/11 contained child aged 2–3 years partially articulated, lying on front-legs splayed out, head to the side. Associated with destruction.	Definite	1
12	Lachish	Smith (2004)	Unclassified on face	Locus 3612-Square C/9 contained infant aged 6–8 months articulated, lying on front-legs splayed out, head to the side. Associated with destruction.	Definite	1
13	Wadi Fidan 40	Beherec (2011)	Flexed/semi-flexed on face	Single infant burial, semi-flexed lying on stomach with head to the SE.	Definite	1

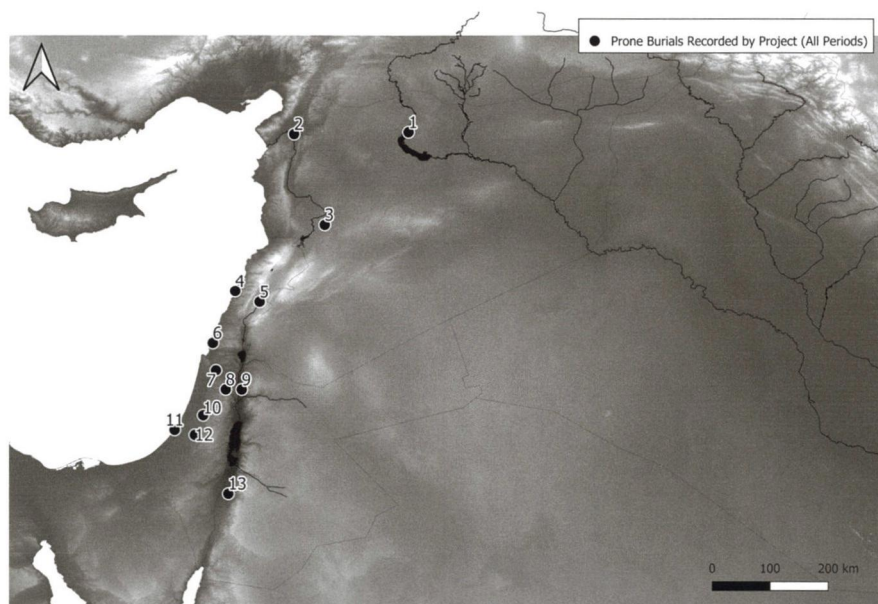


Figure 9.2 Sites with prone burials recorded by the project from across the Levant. This plot includes data from all periods studied by the project. Sites are labelled as follows: 1. Tell Hadidi; 2. Tell Alalakh; 3. Qatna; 4. Khalde; 5. Kamid el-Loz; 6. Tell Kabri; 7. Megiddo; 8. Tell Far'ah North; 9. Tell es-Sadiyeh; 10. Gezer; 11. Ashkelon; 12. Lachish; 13. Wadi Fidan 40.

alongside the walls of structures (e.g. Locus 763, 781 (Mallet 1973)). Much further north, at Tell Alalakh, three LBA prone burials (ATG/46/1, ATG/39/49, S04-5 (Boutin 2008, 564–75; Woolley 1955, 215, 217)), beyond their associated burial positioning, also appear to be within the ‘typical’ range of mortuary behaviours at the site.

A burial from Cave I.10A (LBA) at Gezer may, in contrast, represent a different series of behaviours and activities. This tomb contained the remains of over 80 individuals, the majority of whom appear to have been disarticulated (Dever et al. 1971, 104–8). Only a handful of articulated burials were documented, including a biological female aged c. 34 years, interpreted to be the last burial in the tomb. Found deposited within the entranceway, this individual was lying prone, their arms bent at the elbow, hands near their head. Unfortunately, no further osteological data was published on this individual, but their association with an Egyptian glass vase, articulation, and positioning at the entranceway of the tomb all highlight the potential ‘atypicality’ of this burial. Greenberg (2019, 339–40) places this tomb within his ‘lower’ echelon category, yet even within these so-called ‘communal repositories’ distinctive and individualised behaviour, as in this example, can be noted. Did something about this individual necessitate an ‘atypical’ burial, or, as with my interpretations of the splayed

burials positions in Chapter 7, did the fact that this was the last burial to be placed in the tomb encourage differential treatment, as a way of marking the closure and end life of this burial space?

Further to the north-east, several examples of prone burials have been documented from the site of Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (LBA-EIA), although they are rare and appear to be associated with mid- to high-rank burials (Green 2006, 242, 244–45). One example, in particular, is worth drawing attention to, Tomb 232, a partially mudbrick lined pit which contained an adult of indeterminate sex positioned face down. In addition to being prone, this individual was likely tightly bound and found with a wide range of associated goods, including a bronze bowl, beads, an Egyptian-style ivory fish box and the skeletal remains of three fish (Green 2006, 242; Tubb 1995, 141). Even more remarkable is the positioning of the bronze bowl and box, both of which were found inverted in the pelvic area, the box wrapped within the bowl (Green 2006, 242). Similar material inversions are also seen in Tomb 369, where the prone remains of an adult were found in association with an inverted bowl, jar, lamp, and stone pyxide. According to Green (2006, 299, Endnote 66), although biological sex could not be determined for the two prone/inverted burials discussed above, based on the association of stone and ivory objects, these individuals may be gendered female. Although later in date, similar gendered/sexed/age specific practices may be visible elsewhere. The few prone burials from Ashkelon cemetery (IA II), for example, were of children and at least one female (Master and Aja 2017, 138).

Bringing to mind some of the discussions from the previous chapter, Green's (2006, 242) interpretation of the prone burials from Tell es-Sa'idiyeh draws attention to the symbolic nature of these deposits. The ivory cosmetic box from Tomb 232, for example, references links between fish, fertility, and death within New Kingdom Egypt. The positioning of these finds, underneath the body around the pelvic area, would also seem to suggest a cosmological connection and belief, rather than simply elite emulation of Egyptian practices. The symbolic nature of the prone or inverted' burials at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Green 2006, 242–43) is compelling, and here I wonder whether ideas of protection and preservation in death can also come into play. Similar suggestions have been made in relation to the burials from Tell Shaddud (LB III/EIA), where several pit graves and an anthropoid clay coffin have been discovered (Be'eri, Van den Brink, and Kirzner 2021; Van den Brink et al. 2016). The latter contained the corpse of a biological male aged c. 50 years who was associated with a range of objects including jewellery, a bronze dagger, fish bones (a Nile species) as well as an inverted bronze bowl, which was placed on the chest of this individual (Be'eri, Van den Brink, and Kirzner 2021, 10–15). Perhaps most intriguingly, this individual appears to have been coated in heated beeswax⁵ and then wrapped in linen (Be'eri, Van den Brink, and Kirzner 2021, 33). This practice is akin to the use of bitumen and linen at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Green 2014, 159) and perhaps aimed at preserving the integrity of the human body (Be'eri, Van den Brink, and Kirzner 2021, 33).

Continuing with the topic of containment and protection, we can also consider examples of burials (both prone and non-prone) that seem to have been covered, topped, or restrained in some way via the placement of blocks, stones, or other forms of material culture. Tomb 369, one of the prone burials from Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, for example, was also covered by stones (Green 2006, 299, Endnote 66). Here, however, they were interpreted as possible grave markers, with the mouth of an upright storage jar possibly being visible above the original cemetery surface. Similarly, at Tell Shaddud, some of the pit graves appear to have been covered by unworked field stones (likely grave markers), while one of the burials (L126) contained a biological adult male over 30 years of age, whose head (or chest area according to Van den Brink et al. (2016)) was covered by a large mud-brick (Be'eri, Van den Brink, and Kirzner 2021, 16). Here, we could also be dealing with the marking of the grave. Given the anthropoid coffin at this site, however, the mudbrick placed on the chest/head, rather than preventing the dead from rising, was perhaps an alternative way of protecting and containing the corpse.

The line between protection, marking, and containing the dead is interesting to consider. Burial 120 (MBA), a child aged 5–6 years, from Sidon, although not a prone burial (see Chapter 8), is unusual due to the three stones that seem to have been deliberately placed over their forearms. It is possible that these features were placed with the intention of preventing this individual from moving from the grave. It has also been suggested, however, that these stones may have been visible in the floor surface (Doumet-Serhal 2011, 187–88, Figure 21, 22a). Again, therefore, this may have been less about protecting the living from the deceased and more about marking and protecting the dead from the living. Indeed, at many of the sites discussed throughout this section there does seem to have been effort made to avoid the disturbance of earlier graves by later burials.

Where superimposition does occur, therefore, relationships seem to be being created, either replicating those from life or establishing new ones. Here, I want to offer two examples showing such practices. Burial 63 (MB II) at Sidon contained a female adult aged c. 30–45 years. Although not a prone burial, this individual was found in a contorted position within a large jar, with their left arm encircling their head and their legs flexed (Figure 9.3). Although an 'atypical' position and burial mode for an adult—the majority of jar burials from Sidon, as already discussed, are of non-adults—it would appear that this had been enacted in order to facilitate their placement within the jar. This individual was also associated with a second burial, a partially articulated non-adult, who was likely removed from their original burial location and placed inside the large jar at the same time as the burial of the adult female (Doumet-Serhal 2006, 147). Thus, rather than representing 'deviant' behaviour, such positioning and 'atypical' practices seem to be linked with attempts to maintain or create a relationship between the two individuals in Burial 63.

Finally, staying in Lebanon but moving forwards in time, the adult male (c. 30 years old) from Tomb 22 at Khalde (IA II) was deposited in a prone

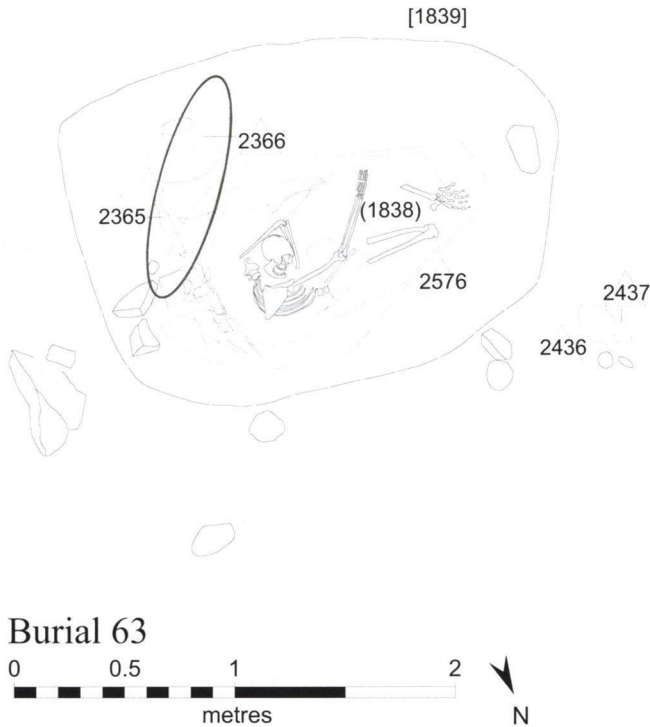


Figure 9.3 Burial 63 from Sidon. Image courtesy of Claude Doumet-Serhal.

position before being covered with large stone slabs. Here the associated material is less clear, as three graves (21, 22, and 23) were found in close proximity, overlapping one another. Despite this, again, there is nothing, bar burial positioning and slabs that would make this grave stand out. Based on the published descriptions and plan, Burials 21 and 23 (an older adult male and female, respectively) were positioned alongside one another, on their sides, heads to the north and facing west (Dixon 2013, 505, Table VI.8; Saidah 1966, 72–73; Shanklin and Ghantus 1966). Both of these burials were also covered in stones, and, as Dixon (2013, 507) has suggested, it is tempting to see a close relationship between these two individuals being imitated (or created) in death. Burial 22, in contrast, appears to have overlapped (at least) Burial 23 (Saidah 1966, 72–73), although presumably due to the lack of disturbance was interred at a similar time. As such it appears to have been the last burial placed in the area, recalling my discussions regarding Gezer.

All the examples of prone burials I have discussed above date to the second or first millennium BCE, and before I bring this section to a close, it is worth touching upon the very few earlier examples we have for this burial positioning. Dating to the later EBA, one of the chambers from the Area E1 tomb at Tell Hadidi contained an adult (apparently) female and foetus. Osteological

data is unfortunately limited; however, it would appear that the female adult skeleton was positioned on their front in a flexed position (Dornemann 1979, Figure 11). The majority of Late EBA tombs from the site were heavily disturbed, either via later reuse or via looting, and thus, it is difficult to assess how ‘atypical’ this burial positioning may have been.

Taking us further back in time, Tomb 1105 (EB I) from Tell Kabri contained a primary burial located underneath a living floor. Identified as a biological adult male, aged c. 35–40 years, this individual appears to have been placed in a flexed/semi-flexed position on their front and was associated with sherds, a worked bead, and a flint awl. A flat stone also lay above the head of this individual (Kempinski et al. 2002, 28). This burial is unusual for several reasons. Only a handful of EB I inhumations are documented from Tell Kabri, and all the others are jar burials of infants or children (six individuals in total). The adult male thus stands out in terms of age, as well as burial positioning. How, thus, might we explain this distinctive treatment?

In Chapter 4, I highlighted the large proportion of multiple successive or collective burials from this period, linking them to ideas of fragmentation, relational personhood, and multi-sited communities. As discussed, however, such practices may have been one of many burial traditions available to groups and individuals during the EB I. If the ways in which personhood were expressed and configured could change throughout both the life and death of a person, perhaps the lived biography or circumstances of death of the individual from Tomb 1105 necessitated or encouraged a distinctive mode of burial. Tomb 1105, therefore, may simply represent an alternative, albeit less common, way of interring the dead. Most burials discussed in this chapter so far can be termed as ‘formal’; a distinction has even been made between individuals associated with destruction deposits versus clearly distinguishable mortuary contexts. What happens, however, when we remove or blur the boundaries between such categories, what is the line between formal and informal?

Informal Burials?

As archaeologists we are obsessed with identifying what is deemed to be a deliberate burial. Much attention and ink have been dedicated to identifying the earliest ‘formal burials’ in the archaeological record, and although attempting to move away from such binary interpretations (i.e. formal, and informal), this book even started its discussions by using these terms. The very way in which we approach and tend to interpret whether something is deliberate and/or meaningful is by assessing its formality. Even by using the term ‘burial’ we are making a deliberate assessment and value statement (T. Taylor 2004, 37). While scholars of other regions, particularly Europe, acknowledge the ways in which fragmentary remains can be purposefully integrated into domestic settings (e.g. Armit 2017; Brück 2017; Morris 1987, 105; Ucko 1969, 269), this fact is often ignored in the Levant. Largely, I would argue, because of our internal biases. This becomes particularly acute when dealing with historical

periods, whereby the idea of the dead being left unattended has been associated with neglect, the treatment of enemies, and as a practice that is ultimately foreign to the Bronze and Iron Ages of Western Asia (e.g. Bloch-Smith 1992; Faust 2004, 175; King and Stager 2001, 363–81; Kletter 2002, 38–39).

Thinking back to the variable visibility of the dead, especially in contrast to the living, it is worth rethinking these interpretations and expectations. Are we missing part of the already very fragmentary picture due to assumptions regarding the informal treatment of the dead within ancient Western Asia? If we consider burials across a spectrum, evidence for less formal treatment of the dead begins to emerge. In Chapter 3, I introduced one potential explanation for the burnt and unburnt human remains from the LBA Amman Airport site: their accidental incorporation (Mumford 2015, 108). The Amman Airport Temple is not unique, however, and other sites provide potential evidence for such unintentional inclusions and disturbances. At Iron Age Ashkelon, for example, in addition to burials containing single articulated inhumations, several excavation areas revealed pits containing disarticulated remains. The investigators proposed two interpretations. First, that some of these remains may have been removed from tombs, and second, that they represent tombs that were robbed (Master and Aja 2017, 144). Several of these may very well represent looted burial structures. It is possible, however, that these deposits are the accidentally disturbed remains of individuals who were never afforded a marked or visible single inhumation burial. Both the Amman Airport Temple and disarticulated deposits from the Ashkelon cemetery are associated (or at least potentially associated) with mortuary sites. To further consider this pattern, therefore, I want to turn to contexts which appear to be unrelated to funerary or mortuary activities.

Initial data collection for this volume, largely due to time, specifically targeted ‘formal’ burial contexts (i.e. those with an identifiable burial structure, construction, or container). When coming across references to fragmentary human remains these data were included, however, this information was not collected or collated in a consistent manner. One of the most significant challenges, therefore, for reconstructing such evidence is the informal nature of deposition. Fragmentary deposits are rarely or only briefly mentioned in chapters or articles on formal burials and are often relegated to loci lists (if published) at the end of publications. In the case of the Ashkelon cemetery, for example, details about the human remains whose context are unclear are covered in a single sentence.⁶ Instead, our interpretations continue to be centred on the idea that a meaningful burial has to be formal and perhaps even archaeologically recognisable. Despite a lack of comprehensive discussion, however, fragmentary human remains from settlement, occupation, and non-funerary contexts exist within Western Asia. The question here, therefore, is whether all of these remains can be interpreted in the same way across time and space.

By way of example, human burials found in association with habitation areas are documented from the Chalcolithic onwards (and from both earlier and later periods not covered by this volume). At Chalcolithic Gilat, the

isolated bones of adults and, in one case an infant,⁷ found in pits, as well as areas of mudbrick collapse, removal, and fills (Smith et al. 2006, 336), appear to be scattered accidental inclusions, rather than deliberately created mortuary spaces or deposits. Again, we could be dealing with disturbed primary burials here, especially if, as the investigators suggest, there was no clear delimitation of the cemetery area or grave markers. In such a case, however, and although poorly preserved, you might expect to find more than a single phalange or tooth. Moreover, even if these deposits do represent disturbed burials, their subsequent incorporation into fills, pits, surfaces, and areas of mudbrick removal seems to suggest that there was little necessity for a formal reburial following disturbance. Were they, at this point, no longer recognisably human?

Further forward in time, in addition to the already discussed evidence for jar and sub-floor burials, fragmentary human remains have been found intermixed with animal remains from occupational deposits at Tell Kabri (Kempinski et al. 2002), ranging in date from EB I to the Iron Age. The numbers of individuals represented by such deposits are minimal, between two and six in total per phase. Similarly, while human remains from the site of Megiddo retrieved during the 1998, 2004, and 2006 excavation seasons provide evidence for primary burials within domestic contexts "... many of the findings constituted singular bone fragments..." (Sameora 2013, 1128), although no potential explanation is given for the presence of these fragmentary remains. The same pattern can also be seen from the Megiddo skeletal remains published by Nagar (2006). Here, bone fragments, teeth, phalanges, and vertebrae are documented in several strata. The lower permanent second molar of an older adult individual, for example, was found in association with debris and an installation dated to the Chalcolithic/EB I (Locus 00/J/37 (Nagar 2006, Table 21.1, Number 1; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern 2006, 446)). Dated to EB III, occupational debris included the lower permanent incisor of an adult (Locus 98/J/60 (Nagar 2006, Table 21.1, Number 10; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern 2006, 445)).

Such finds are not only associated with Early Bronze Age strata. Levels F11 and 10, at Megiddo, revealed evidence for five or six burials, while additional human skeletal remains from this area "... did not originate from burials" (Franklin 2006, 63). Based on the stratigraphic overview, human remains chapter, and loci list, the latter appear to have included the fragmentary remains of non-adult individuals, as well as the skull fragments, teeth, and postcranial bones of an individual aged between 20 and 30 years, found in association with a floor surface dated to the LB I (Nagar 2006, Table 21.1, Number 27; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern 2006, 439)). Moving later still, the proximal phalanx of a child/adolescent was found in association with brick material from Level F5 dated to the IA I (Nagar 2006, Table 21.1, Number 34; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern 2006, 438)). Finally, vertebrae of a similarly aged individual were found in association with a fill deposit in level H5 (Nagar 2006, Table 21.1, Number 48; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern 2006, 443)).

In terms of the overall numbers of individuals, we are clearly not dealing with a simple or easy solution for the problem of invisible or missing dead. This being said, the presence of fragmentary skeletal deposits, especially when found in association with animal remains, prompts a reconsideration of whether this was an unknown practice. Given that this review is far from comprehensive and has merely showcased a few brief examples, we could be dealing with the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Moreover, this emphasises the very real need to reconsider the incorporation of fragmentary human remains into domestic (and mortuary) settings and the significant role non-mortuary spaces may have held for the more informal disposal of the dead.

Returning to the Question of Personhood

As will hopefully now be clear and, although more research is required, the presence and incorporation of fragmentary and scattered human remains into settlement contexts is a practice seen at numerous Levantine sites across time. This is not to suggest, however, that either the motivations for and/or the meaning of deliberate or accidental inclusions of fragmentary human remains within domestic contexts remained static over time. To bring these discussions to a close, I want to briefly return to the role that the fragmentary body and body parts could play within the lives of the living, particularly during the fourth to third millennia BCE.

In Chapter 4, I explored the changing patterns of fragmentation and body part presence in secondary or collective tombs within the Bronze Age. I argued that fundamental differences could be detected between the behaviours, significance, meaning, and practices involving the disarticulation and incorporation of the dead into such tombs during the EBA and MBA, particularly within the south. Evidence from the EB I provides potential indications for lengthy interactions with the deceased, in both complete and fragmentary forms. These include manipulation of disarticulated remains, as well as the deliberate curation of particular body parts and removal or targeted burning of others (e.g. Jericho (e.g. Evans, Faulkner, and Asmussen 2022, 6; Kenyon 1960, 19–21, 1965, 11, 27); Jebel al-Mutawwaq (Polcaro et al. 2014, 13–16); Azor (Ben-Tor 1975)). While my deliberations focused on providing an overview of what happened within such burial contexts, little attention was paid to what occurred beyond them. What happened to body parts that were either removed or never deposited in the first place? It is possible that following initial burial or excarnation, not all body parts were collected or selected for re-burial or integration into a collective tomb. Both Megiddo and Tell Kabri, as discussed above, provide evidence for fragmentary human remains in association with domestic/non-mortuary contexts dating to EB I. Can we regard these remains as left behinds, discarded material with no significance? A complete, albeit fragmented, body may simply not have been required. It is worth, however, delving a little deeper into the examples of Megiddo and Tell Kabri here.

The latter site provides relatively little evidence for burial activity dating to the EB I. Beyond the adult inhumation and jar burials discussed above, all we have are fragmentary human remains from the occupation deposits dating to this period. Published information about the loci containing these human remains is unfortunately very limited. Fragmentary human remains, including the cranial fragments of at least two adults and a child, as well as fragments of an infant's clavicle, dating to EB I (EB IA-B), are associated with fill layers (and a test pit). Little more can be said about these remains, although adult cranial fragments appear to have been excavated from the fill adjacent to Tomb 1105 (Faerman et al. 2002, 385, Table 11.2; Scheftelowitz 2002, 20), suggesting a possible spatial relationship between these deposits.

MBA fragmentary human remains from Tell Kabri are, in contrast, more numerous and varied, including both cranial fragments (adult) and fragments of long bones (both adult and non-adult), including foot bones (Faerman et al. 2002, 385, Table 11.2). We are obviously dealing with a tiny assemblage, and thus, any interpretations must be tentative at best. Based on the evidence we do have, however, temporally specific processes and practices could be at play. If this very fragmentary and minimal dataset can, in any way, be seen as representative of broader patterns, we potentially seem to have indications of a deliberate selection process (i.e. of cranial material) for the EB I, in direct contrast to the more varied assemblages of the MBA.

Considering the five plus individuals found in association with Level J-4 at Megiddo, all of which are dated to the EB I(B), different patterns emerge. The medial phalanx (98/J/11) of an individual under 15 years and non-indicative bone fragments of an individual under 5 years (98/J/48), for example, were found in association with brick material, mother of pearl shells, and, in the case of Loci 98/J/11, wood remnants of Terebinth (*Pistacia palaestina*) (Bar-Yosef Mayer and Baruch 2006, 503; Lipschitz 2006, 507; Nagar 2006). While these examples could also fall into the category of accidental inclusions, it is worth noting that both of these contexts are linked to the Level J-4 temple, albeit seemingly associated with renewed activities within the ruins in the later EB IB (e.g. the construction of a supporting cross wall within a ruined corridor in the case of 98/J/11 (Finkelstein and Ussishkin 2000, 66; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Peersmann 2006, 51)). To the northeast of 98/J/11, a beaten earth floor (00/J/166) was laid over accumulated debris following the abandonment of the temple. In addition to a thin accumulation of animal bones, a non-indicative human bone fragment was also found in association with this floor context (Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Peersmann 2006, 38–41; Nagar 2006, Table 22.1, Number 6).

More intriguing, however, are the fragmentary human remains associated with the Level J-4 floors encountered adjacent to the later (EB III) Round Altar 4017 (Finkelstein and Ussishkin 2000, 64; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern 2006, 33–36). The floors were overlain by accumulations of bricky material, pottery and "... an enormous quantity of [animal] bones..." (Finkelstein and Ussishkin 2000, 64), including a human finger bone (proximal

phalanx) of an individual under the age of 15 (Loci 98/J/21) (Nagar 2006, Table 22.1, Number 3). Based on the discoveries it was suggested that this area, in both EB I and EB III, was a focus of sacrificial activity, with large numbers of bones also being found in this area by the University of Chicago Expedition (Finkelstein and Ussishkin 2000, 64; Loud 1948, Figure 166). How, then, did a human finger bone become incorporated into this area along with animal remains? Were the remains recognised at the time of deposition as having originally derived from a human? Clearly, we could be dealing with fragmentary human remains from disturbed burials being accidentally incorporated into these contexts. Given the importance and sacred nature of this area at Megiddo, however, I would suggest that other interpretations are more likely.

The demi-dolmen from the EB I Al-Hammam Megalithic field, for example, despite being undisturbed, only contained two fragments of human bone, which were interpreted as symbolic deposits (Schath, Collins, and al-Jarrah 2011, 341). Five out of the 12 dolmens examined during the 2011 season contained fragmentary human remains; however, none revealed evidence for complete skulls or large bones (Schath, Collins, and al-Jarrah 2011, 341). Could we be dealing with a similar practice at Megiddo? While the exact nature of the renewed phase of activity (Level J-4a) has been debated (e.g. Adams, Finkelstein, and Ussishkin 2014; Ussishkin 2015), the continued presence of both animal and fragmentary human remains may suggest continuation of sacrificial and depositional practices at this site into the later EB IB. It is generally agreed that activities on the mound of Megiddo were primarily cultic or ritual in nature, with the temple precinct on the summit and tombs on the south-eastern slope (e.g. Greenberg 2019, 56–57; Ilan 2013). Thus, if we envisage Megiddo as a major cultic centre, not only for the dispersed village at Megiddo East, but also for other communities in the wider area (e.g. Greenberg 2003, 17, 19; Ussishkin 2015, 89), we can wonder whether the very occasional deposition of human remains represents fragments which had been curated, collected, and moved from another locale.

Much has been written on the topic of fragmentation and practices of enchainment, particularly in relation to the European Neolithic (e.g. J. Chapman 2000; J. Chapman and Gaydarska 2007) and, to some extent, in Western Asia (e.g. Croucher 2010; Cradic 2021). In the context of the loosely tethered or multi-sited communities of the EB I, the wider circulation of fragmented human skeletal material between and amongst different locations, sites, and living persons may have helped to maintain and continue relations between different sections of the community, as well as the living and the deceased. Such material could be integrated into dedicated mortuary areas, such as the Al-Hammam Megalithic field and/or alternatively integrated with animal deposits at sites of particular social and cultic importance, such as Megiddo. This idea has several further implications. If we argue that the dead, just like the living, could move around and between different sites and burial contexts we could potentially be overestimating the total MNI for the EB I, with parts of the same person being deposited in different tombs or even at

different sites. Definitively proving this idea is very difficult, if not impossible; however, the combination of missing body parts from some collective tombs and presence of fragmentary material in undisturbed tombs is an intriguing pattern. Such hypotheses also have implications for the burial of non-local individuals (e.g. EB II–III Bab edh-Dhra (Gregoricka, Ullinger, and Sheridan 2020, 325))⁸ suggesting that it might be possible that it was fragmentary human remains, rather than a recently deceased body, that were being moved.

By way of contrast and conclusion, it is worth briefly considering the evidence from the summit of Megiddo dating to the EB III. The majority of human remains dating to this period (excavated during the 1998–2002 seasons) derive from Level J-6 and, in comparison to EB I levels, represent a wider range of body parts (e.g. skull fragments, vertebrae, teeth, post-cranial fragments, rib fragments, and fragmentary hand bones) as well as age ranges (c. 5–50 years of age) (Nagar 2006, Table 22.1, Numbers 7–17). Rather than representing a continuation of cultic activity, the remains from Level J-6 are largely domestic in nature, composed of traces of walls, floors, and occupational debris, associated with a series of relatively small domestic structures (Finkelstein and Ussishkin 2000, 68; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Peersmann 2006, 43). Indeed, there appears to have been a significant shift in the ways in which the summit of Megiddo was used during the EB III, with the only definitive cultic activity in this area (prior to the construction of the Megaron Temple (Level J-7)) being associated with the Round Altar 4017 (Ussishkin 2015, 90–93). Given the changing role of this area (from religious to largely domestic), the larger sample of human remains (at least ten individuals), as well as the wider range of body elements, we would seem to be dealing with very different practices and activities, especially when compared to the EB I. Combined with the general paucity of EB II–III burials discussed in Chapter 3, could we therefore be dealing with the incorporation of fragmentary human remains into occupation areas via the disturbance of poorly marked, shallow burials or even discarded human corpses?

To bring these discussions to a close, fragmented bodies, at least for some societies in the EB I southern Levant, could have played a role as active agents in the facilitation and (re)negotiation of relationships between persons and places. Such fragments could be deposited, re-deposited, and circulated between both mortuary and non-mortuary sites and, in certain cases, incorporated into cultic places, mixed with animal deposits. Moving into the third millennium BCE (EB II–III), and beyond sites such as Bab edh-Dhra and Jericho, we see the decreasing importance of archaeologically visible burial practices. For societies now occupying defended and hilltop settlements and towns, the importance of the fragmented human body as a tool for connection and enchainment was of little relevance. Instead, relationships between place and people were very much in the hands of the living, rather than the dead. The cooperative construction of features (e.g. fortifications) and habitation within nucleated settlements served as a means through which relations could be constructed and maintained. With such shifts, the power and agency of the human

corpse was subverted and replaced, perhaps even to the extent to which fragmentary human remains, when encountered, were simply treated in the same way as domestic refuse.

Variability and Difference

As highlighted through this chapter (and volume), variability in the mortuary record may be as important as similarity (e.g. Mickelburgh et al. 2020; Murphy 2020b; Robb 2007). Rather than following a single linear trajectory, burial practices can reflect highly localised trends and traditions, as well as wider social ideals and beliefs, the role and importance of which shifted over time. Normativity, continuity, and levels of similarity, thus, must be approached along a sliding scale or rather across different registers of practice and tradition. To bring this chapter to a close, therefore, I want to rephrase, elaborate on, and expand out the three general themes that were introduced in Chapter 1: fragmenting versus preserving the body, relationships between humans (living and deceased), and finally, interconnections between human bodies and non-human agents (and in this case the landscape).⁹

The Fragmentable versus Integral Body

A significant theme throughout this volume has been the importance of the human body, in both its fragmented and unfragmented forms. The role of corporeal remains, their nature and perceived value, and status in death do not seem to have been static over time, and in the preceding chapters I pointed to several broad temporal (and spatial) shifts. Here, I want to conclude these discussions by considering these changes within their wider sociocultural and geographical settings. Throughout this and previous chapters I have sought to demonstrate the role fragmentary human remains could play within ongoing interactions between the living and the dead, particularly during the fifth to fourth millennia BCE, at both a local level and possibly even regional scale. The nature of these interactions, and likely their meaning and cosmological significance, differed across time and space but also along the lines of biological age, sex, gender, and perhaps even the circumstances of death.

At a very basic level, the evidence presented in this volume points towards the declining popularity and/or the growing exclusionary nature of burial practices involving fragmentation of the human corpse (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.5). From at least the mid-second millennium BCE onwards, one of the emerging themes and trends is growing attention to the integrity, preservation, and protection of the human body, even if only for a limited time. This is not to suggest that such ideas and concepts were not present prior to this period. Instead, if we view interactions across a spectrum of behaviours, we can instead suggest that from the second millennium onwards increasing investment, attention, and energy appear to have been focused on the preservation, display, and beautification of the articulated human corpse, although not necessarily in

perpetuity. In Chapter 7, I hinted at some of the potential explanations for the increasing popularity of extended burials in both the southern and northern Levant, from the role of Egyptian influence to the role of the human body in the netherworld or afterlife. It is these cosmological ideals that I want to briefly conclude with here. Do shifts in the ways in which the human corpse was dealt with indicate broader changes around beliefs in what comes next or is necessary after death?

Untangling this question is fraught with difficulty. We are faced with the necessity of using textual sources from a range of temporally and spatially divergent literary, sociocultural, and religious traditions. Even within these sources, there is little to indicate what material (or immaterial) form the deceased took in the afterlife/netherworld. Scholars, based on Mesopotamian evidence, have argued for the perceived compositional duality of humankind (i.e. body and soul/spirit), with the soul being actualised as breath/wind (e.g. Katz 2003, 235). Others refute the idea of an immortal soul, preferring models centred on abstract forms of immortality, linked to remembrance and memorialisation (e.g. Bauks 2016, 187–88). Textual sources, including incantation texts from Mesopotamia, as well as the Hittite world, refer to the spirit/ghost of the deceased returning to the world of living, inhabiting or residing near statues, figurines, and effigies, possessing the living or even, in more unusual cases, being summoned by the living to speak through skeletal remains (e.g. Abusch 2015; Archi 2008; Finkel 1983; Scurlock 2006, 46–56, 2016). While some of the most commonly cited sources such as the *Gilgamesh* epic (e.g. George 1999) or *Death of Ur-Nammu* (e.g. Kramer 1967) have been used to evocatively describe different aspects of the Netherworld (e.g. Katz 2003), there is little indication as to what material or immaterial existence the deceased experienced. Beyond texts, which clearly reference the creation of humankind and thus a (re)turn to clay (e.g. Line X 68–69 (George 1999)), we have no indication as to whether the dead took on any material form in the netherworld, an imagined or reconstituted human body. We encounter similar issues when dealing with the biblical sources, although scholars have argued that individual preservation was at odds with beliefs circulating in the southern Levant during the late second and early first millennia BCE (Hallote 2001, 117). The Egyptian sources, on the other hand, present an entirely different view, whereby an intact preserved and individually named body seems to have been an essential element for the afterlife, at least for elite populations (e.g. Kucharek 2012, 246).

As discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, sites such as Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, Tell Shaddud and Horvat Tevet show potential emulation of Egyptian traditions, including the use of bitumen or heated beeswax for mummification/preservation (Amir et al. 2021; Be'eri, Van den Brink, and Kirzner 2021, 33; Green 2014, 159). As these processes only involved a handful of individuals and/or materials not commonly used until later in Egypt,¹⁰ they seem to reflect a partial adoption or culturally modified or amended practice (Be'eri, Van den Brink, and Kirzner 2021; Gonen 1992, 30–31, 38; Green 2006, 249). The extent to which such manipulations reflect the adoption of Egyptian *beliefs* is also

harder to determine. In her analysis of the MBA royal tombs from Byblos, Kopetzky (2015) considers the likely burial positioning of the deceased individuals, their association with Egyptian style objects or materials, as well as where objects were likely placed on the human body. Due to the highly fragmentary and disturbed nature of the Byblos tombs, reconstructions are difficult. Tomb II, however, is thought to provide evidence for the use of an anthropomorphic coffin and possibly even a death mask, leading Kopetzky (2015, 395–96, 406) to conclude that we see, not only elite emulation, but also the adoption of Egyptian afterlife beliefs by the rulers of this site. Given these examples, we could be dealing with the localised and temporally diffuse adoption of Egyptian belief systems by elite families or individuals. As demonstrated in previous chapters, however, increasing attention on the control of decay, and the preservation and presentation of the human body, appears at a wide range of sites, including those without any clear evidence for Egyptian influence.

The question that remains, therefore, is whether broad changes in practice are also representative of a shift in eschatological or cosmological beliefs. Although this is speculative at best, from the later second millennium BCE onwards I would suggest that we begin to see a broader reconfiguration and reconceptualisation around what type of ‘body’ was required in/for entrance into the netherworld or afterlife, necessitating an increased focus on the (temporary) control of decay. Such beliefs, especially by the first millennium BCE and with the emergence of discrete socio-religious groups (see Chapter 3), were likely not only spatially variable, but may have also differed based on the biography and identity of the lived individual. This brings me to another point of consideration: could a different type of bodily configuration or form of memorialisation have been required for entry as opposed to the long-term residence and continued existence in such spaces?

The Power of the ‘Ancestors’

In his now over 20-year-old article, Whitley (2002) offered a strong critique of what he saw as the spectre of the ‘omnipresent ancestor’ within British prehistory. To some extent the same could be said for the archaeology of Western Asia. Ancestors would appear to be everywhere and everything, and even a simple search based on article titles reveals how commonly this term is invoked and used within the literature (e.g. Brown 2009; Cradic 2021; T. J. Lewis 2014; Meskell 2008; Pfälzner 2016; Peltenburg 2007; Polcaro 2008; Porter 2002; Schmidt 1994; Schwartz 2013). As discussed in Chapter 2, the textual record of this wide region provides insights into different types of ancestral groups (*malākuma* and *rāpīūma* (e.g. Cradic 2021; Lange 2012, 2014)). The applicability of such terms to earlier periods, however, is more problematic, and in the absence of recognised emic terms, ‘ancestor’ may remain our best option.

Here, however, we can return to Whitley’s (2002) critique. I understand ancestors to be remembered forebears. Deceased persons linked through

genealogical (whether biological or imagined) descent and continuity, and initially remembered and commemorated as individuals, before being subsumed into the collective (e.g. Bloch 1996, 43; Whitley 2002, 121–23). As such the *malākuma* and *rāpīūma* would certainly fit this ideal. The same cannot necessarily be said, however, for the dead interred in the collective tombs of the fourth (and early third) millennium BCE. Here, as seen in Chapter 4, it may be that the segmentation of the dead was as much of a reflection of lived experiences and ideals of personhood, society, and the body, as a creation of a new community in death. This is not to suggest that the term ‘ancestor’ cannot be of relevance here. If we take the definition for ancestors offered above, research at EB I Bab edh-Dhra has suggested that we may be encountering individual kinship or household units within each shaft tomb complex (e.g. Bentley 1991; Chesson 2001). We may, however, be dealing with different types of ancestors over time and space.

How might we go about distinguishing or differentiating between these different forms? Did every deceased member of society become an ancestor? Likely not. Perhaps, as I argued in relation to secondary burial practices in Chapter 4, the deceased could be denied access to or the status of being a member of the ancestral dead. One of the remarkable elements of the earlier fourth- and third-millennia-BCE burial practices in the southern Levant is not only the number of individuals within each tomb complex but also the wide spectrum of biological age and sex groups incorporated into tombs. As discussed in Chapter 6, beyond very young infants, these factors do not appear to have been elements structuring or shaping the decision of who and who not to include within multiple successive burial contexts. In contrast, by the third millennium (northern Levant) and second millennium (in the southern Levant), we would appear to see growing exclusionary forces associated with burial practices, who could be buried where, access or denial of access to collective or secondary burial traditions, as well as perhaps a certain type of ancestorhood (e.g. Bradbury and Philip 2020; Cradic 2021; Peltenburg 2007). This is not to ignore the emotional and social values and relationships that individual families and persons could have with their deceased family members. It does, however, suggest that the deceased played differential roles in the worlds of the living over time.

One final element to consider here is the importance of named ancestral groups and individuals. Many of the anthropological definitions of ‘ancestor’ highlight the role and significance of individual commemoration before being subsumed into the collective (e.g. Bloch 1996, 43; Whitley 2002, 121–23). The longevity of individual commemoration is, thus, worth touching upon. In Chapter 5, the use of inscribed funerary stelae at the Iron Age cremation cemetery of Tyre el-Bass was linked to the disappearance of the human body, seen as necessitating the (permanent) memorialisation of the deceased’s name (Aubert 2013, 80–81). As argued in that chapter, however, this may have been less about the integrity of the bodily form and more about the growing

importance of being able to reference a named and/or idealised identity (e.g. Sanders 2012). This practice can be seen at several other Phoenician and Aramaic sites, including Akhziv (Cross 2002) and Neirab (see Chapter 7 (Abel and Barrois 1928; Carrière and Barrois 1927a, b)).

Funerary epitaphs and inscriptions are also documented from Iron Age II Judah, with inscriptions found on objects within the tomb, as well as on tombs themselves (e.g. the Silwan Necropolis (Suriano 2018, 100–112)). Again, we are likely dealing with regional variations within this practice. Beyond the handful of sites mentioned here, inscriptions and epitaphs naming deceased individuals are not often found in association with funerary contexts. The stele of Katumuwa, for example, was found within a domestic structure at Zincirli (Herrmann 2014; Sanders 2012, 20–27), while many Phoenician stelae do not directly mention burial in their commemorative epigraphs (Suriano 2018, 128, Note 4). Whether found in a funerary context or not, however, the *material* marking and memorialisation of a named individual clearly represent an elaboration on earlier practices.

Deceased, named, individuals clearly exist before this period, from the second millennium BCE and earlier, both via textual sources referencing dead kings and through the incorporation of personal objects, such as seals and vessels bearing or invoking individual or familial identities, regional interconnections and roles (e.g. Lange 2012; Nigro 1996, 166, 2009, 372–73). Such devices and practices, however, were more tightly controlled, both spatially and temporally and may also have had a different intended audience. While the existing textual sources would appear to point towards rituals and festivals during which both the recent and ancestral dead would be called upon (e.g. Lange 2012; Sanders 2012, 27–30), the audience and participants in these rituals may have been limited to the elite. Thus, while similar oral traditions may have existed beyond these groups, the material preservation of names does not appear to have been part of these practices. Similarly, objects bearing the name of individuals would only have been visible to those preparing a body for burial, especially if such objects were placed amongst and hidden within textiles and/or shrouds. Thus, while perhaps briefly visible to the living, we could envisage the primary audience for such artefacts being the dead themselves.

We can, of course, not totally discount the possibility of organic materials being used to materially memorialise a named individual. Based on the surviving evidence, however, inscribed stelae, and tombs, although very limited in number, only start to visibly appear during the first millennium BCE (e.g. Aubet 2013, 80–81; Suriano 2018, 98–99), becoming much more prolific in later centuries. With this broad temporal pattern in mind, and while recognising regional variations which take us beyond the level of discussions possible here, I tentatively suggest that from the first millennium BCE we also see different practices and perhaps even the creation of a different type of ancestor, one linked to the *material* preservation of individual and family names. Names that were of significance, not only for the deceased, but also within the world of the living.

Normativity versus Exceptionality

With all these variations in mind, I want to conclude by exploring a case study, where not only the living but also the landscape may have shaped and influenced treatment of the dead. At certain points throughout this volume I have referred to the role and importance of the spatial placement of the dead within the wider landscape. From the visual spectacle of some of the remarkable EBA tombs along the Euphrates (e.g. Chapter 3, Jerablus Tahtani and Tell Banat) to the varied spatial distribution of the dead during the MBA (e.g. Chapter 3, adjacent to settlements or within isolated tombs within fields), the dead hold an important role in the configuration and negotiation of space and place. For some periods, however, the dead seem to be largely invisible within the wider landscape, and it is here that I want to return to the EB II–III southern Levant.

As seen from discussions throughout this volume, surviving early-third-millennium-BCE tombs, including those from Bab edh-Dhra' and Jericho, have been variously interpreted as anachronistic, 'atypical' or deviations from the 'norm' (e.g. Bradbury and Philip 2017, 93; Ilan 2002, 101). Beyond these two sites, a handful of collective, single, or double inhumations have been recorded, although few in number and scattered across this broader region (Figure 3.5). Leaving aside issues of a shortened chronology for EB II (see Chapter 3) we are clearly dealing with a period where the dead, at least at a regional scale, appear to be largely absent from the archaeological record.

Given their overall archaeological invisibility, trying to identify a 'normative' burial practice would thus not seem to be a very useful endeavour. Here, however, we also have to return to issues of scale. While clearly exceptional on a regional level, visible burial and ongoing interactions with the dead do not appear to have been exceptional at the sites of Bab edh-Dhra and Jericho. Rather, as discussed in previous chapters, for the inhabitants of these settlements, and perhaps even for neighbouring regions (Gregoricka, Ullinger, and Sheridan 2020), highly visible ways of dealing with death and the dead were not 'atypical' or 'un-normative'. Instead, they were part of daily experiences and reflected the beliefs, ideals, and norms present within that community. As Ilan (2002, 99) has suggested, therefore, within this relatively small region we have the co-existence of divergent and disparate ideals. Can we go further than this, however, in our interpretations?

In Chapter 3, I suggested that rather than (solely) focusing on the paucity of EB II–III burials from the southern Levant, a potentially more interesting question was why groups at particular sites, such as Bab edh-Dhra and Jericho, continued to bury their dead in a visible manner. For the communities of these locales, one of the mechanisms by which to encode and (re)-negotiate social relations and beliefs was clearly through the mortuary arena. Elsewhere such approaches seem to have held less relevance. Questions of acceptance, comparability, and translatability are therefore raised here. Would the inhabitants of Bab edh-Dhra have been perceived as making "... a statement against the predominant pattern of accepted burial patterns..." (Ilan 2002, 99), or a stand

against the suppression of communal commemoration practices by urbanising ideologies (Greenberg 2019, 166)? Alternatively, would these practices have been an accepted, albeit materially different, way of reflecting identity and collectivism?

Here we can point to some of the discussions on the nature of the landscape around Bab edh-Dhra, its wider links and broad cross-temporal associations with concepts of refuge, ritual movement, and death. This is not to suggest that EB II–III Bab edh-Dhra necessarily represents a site where groups, including those from the Jordan Valley, came to bury and dispose of their dead, although the isotopic evidence may point towards some degree of movement between communities. Instead, I wonder to what extent acceptable mortuary behaviours were shaped and influenced by the long-term histories and biographies of the landscapes in which the living (and the dead) were operating. In this sense, the landscape itself, its history and longevity, may have been an active agent in shaping and dictating socially acceptable behaviour. Such considerations move us beyond simple reconstructions of divergent traditions and beliefs and allow us to explore how behaviour and shared ideals may have been differentially understood or translated within and beyond a particular region or landscape. For those living at Bab edh-Dhra, the dead may have been the most appropriate community to represent or communicate ideas of collectivity and identity. We could perhaps even suggest that for those dwelling beyond the southern Ghors, visible burial of the dead would have been recognised, or at least understood, as an appropriate way of expressing such ideals within this distinctive landscape setting.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has started to draw together some of the remaining threads touched upon throughout this volume. From potential ways of interpreting (less) formal burials, through the shifting role of the fragmentary body, to the importance of individual and material memorialisation. In my analyses, I have argued for the importance of approaching normativity along a spectrum, highlighting variation and stressing the need to bring so-called ‘typical’ and ‘atypical’ burials into conversation. So far, I have spent hundreds of pages considering the role of dead in the lives of the (ancient) living. In the final chapter, therefore, following a brief summary of the main findings of this research, I want to turn to an exploration of the duties and responsibilities we, the contemporary living, have in the ongoing lives of the ancient dead.

Notes

- 1 While the Royal Tombs of Ur are generally regarded to show clear evidence for the practice of human sacrifice, the meaning, method of ritual killing, and ubiquity of this practice are still debated. There is thus still much to learn from this site.
- 2 This pattern is not evident in one of the most recent broad temporal studies on violence in the ancient Levant (Cohen et al. 2014), which suggested that levels of

- inter- and intra-group violence were both relatively high and did not significantly fluctuate over time. The authors, however, collated their study collections into three very broad periods (Chalcolithic to Iron Age; Hellenistic to Byzantine, and Early and Late Arab), and thus, fluctuations during the periods covered by this volume were not necessarily apparent from their work.
- 3 Softysiak's (2017, 125) study of ante-mortem cranial trauma in Mesopotamia showed no evidence for MBA cranial trauma, which, he suggests, might be related to the centralisation of violence, rather than a lack of conflict.
 - 4 There is evidence for burning of the NW city gate and rapid abandonment of structures inside the town during the late MB II period (Schwartz 2013, 513).
 - 5 The use of beeswax as a preservative is also potentially documented from Iron Age Horvat Tevet, although here it is preserved within vessels found within the graves (Amir et al. 2021; Weitzel et al. 2024).
 - 6 "... the collections of bone are less easily understood, and it is not clear whether they represent Philistine practice or later disturbances" (Master and Aja 2017, 144).
 - 7 Documented skeletal remains included single phalanges, metatarsals, teeth, and ribs.
 - 8 Due to the disarticulated nature of the assemblage, sampling took place using isolated teeth.
 - 9 The three themes discussed in Chapter 1 were the manipulation and treatment of the human body, the relationships between human bodies within burial contexts, and, finally, the relationships between human bodies and non-human agents within the mortuary context.
 - 10 While the use of beeswax is well known in Egyptian mummification, bitumen was not common in Egypt until later periods (Abdel-Maksoud and El-Amin 2011; Gonen 1992, 30–31, 38; Green 2006, 249).

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