

ment (4500–550 BCE)

for Researchers. Lanham: AltaMira

Eric Coqueufniot, and Guillaume
Bronze. Bibliothèque Archéologique
Proche-Orient.

Bronze Age Cemetery of Tiwal Esh-
British Museum by British Museum

Learning, Meaning, and Identity. New

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University Press.

5 From Inhumation to Cremation

One of the most significant shifts during the thousands of years under study in this volume is the widespread appearance of cremation at sites across Western Asia. While researchers have argued for the continuation of long-term relationships between the dead and fire or heat treatment (e.g. Felli 2017), evidence becomes much more prolific by the first millennium BCE (Bienkowski 1982; Nabulsi 2019). New discoveries have been documented since Bienkowski's (1982) broad overview; however, the majority of material discussed by scholars still comes from the LBA/IA (Felli 2017, 82–83). In this chapter, I revisit some of the current evidence for cremation in the ancient Levant (and Western Asia) in order to consider who and who was not being cremated. Interrogating in detail sites that show evidence for contemporaneous cremation and inhumation, I will explore the similarities and differences between these practices over time and space. As these discussions emphasise, huge variations are hidden within our existing categorisations. This in turn highlights the necessity of moving beyond the treatment of human remains as a single event or type of evidence (i.e. 'a cremation'), but rather as a series of processes and practices, possibly even ones that have been interrupted or abbreviated.

Defining a 'Cremation'

Just as there exists multiple definitions for what a burial is, scholars employ numerous definitions and terms to define and characterise 'cremation.' Indeed, it would appear that the number of definitions, interpretations, and approaches towards cremation almost exceeds the number of sites providing evidence for these practices, particularly for some periods and regions. While at its very essence, cremation involves processes of bodily transformation through interactions with fire (e.g. Davies and Mates 2005, xvii; Kuijt, Quinn, and Cooney 2014; Oestigaard 2013, 497), the material, sensorial, and likely psychological manifestations of this practice vary across time and space. For some, the challenges created by the lack of a standardised vocabulary are something to be embraced. Rather than viewing the heterogeneous and messy range of vocabularies and terms as an impediment, they reflect the sheer diversity of practices

involving fire and the body and are an opportunity for dialogue and discussion (e.g. Quinn et al. 2014).

Here, I review some of the different definitions and approaches that have been taken to categorise and interpret these practices and traditions within the Levant and wider Western Asia. These influence how scholars identify an occurrence of burnt human remains within the archaeological record as a deliberate cremation, as opposed to evidence for a range of other processes involving heat and fire (heat treatment of the body, accidental post-depositional burning, etc.). Given my focus on the human body, a useful starting point for discussions is the materiality of burnt human remains or *cremains*, their colour, texture, and consistency. Drawing upon research carried out on cremated remains from Norway (Holck 1987, 131–46), Oestigaard (2013, 501–3) presents five levels of modifications. These range from bones that, while having been exposed to fire, show no clear signs of burning, to human bones that have altered in both colour and consistency. Similarly, in their analysis of the burnt human remains from Tomb A61 at Jericho, Evans et al. (2022, 7) identified four intensity levels of burning, from bones appearing unaltered to those burnt at a very high intensity.

As shown in Table 5.1, while colour changes on burnt human bones show some general trends, from creamy browns, greys, eventually to white, the temperature at which these shifts, and changes in texture, fragmentation, and consistency occur, and the causes of these variations, are often multifaceted (e.g. Evans, Faulkner, and Asmussen 2022, 5–7; McKinley 2008, 2013, 163; Nicholson 1993; Ullinger and Sheridan 2015). A huge range of factors can influence the degree of thermally induced changes and their effects on different parts of the body, from where the body is placed in relation to the fire, whether bones were fleshed or de-fleshed, the presence of other materials wrapping, covering, containing the body to the locality (exposed to wind, rain, etc.) in which the burning took place (e.g. Evans, Faulkner, and Asmussen 2022; McKinley 2013, 159–60; Ullinger and Sheridan 2015). One of the biggest challenges for differentiating between practices in a project such as this is a lack of detailed legacy data. In some cases, even with earlier excavation reports, we have some indication or description of the texture, colour, and consistency of the burnt human remains. In the majority, however, details are entirely lacking, and reference instead is simply made to cremated or burnt human remains.

Alongside discussions and considerations of the ways in which fire can interact with and transform the human body, the locality, and spatial dimensions of burning or cremation are pivotal. These can help to distinguish between deliberate and accidental practices. Identifying where a human body was physically burnt can be methodologically challenging (Nilsson Stutz and Kuijt 2014, 143). A description often utilised, however, is the term ‘pyre’, communicating the idea of a specific or dedicated burning locality, whether or not that location/feature is archaeologically recoverable (e.g. Fairgrieve 2007, 1; Grzegorska 2020, 61; Nilsson Stutz and Kuijt 2014, 143). Evidence for such ‘pyres’ and locales varies hugely, from reconstructions of open air pyres on the

Table 5.1 Cremation temperature assessments.

Holck 1987, 131–46; Oestigaard 2013, 501–3

Apparently unburnt: Bones that have been exposed to fire, but likely at a temperature no more than 200 degrees Celsius. Such examples would be so minimally affected that they show no visible signs of being burnt.	Unburnt ret bu eit bu to alt
Sooting: Bones that have been exposed to fire and temperatures likely not exceeding 400 degrees Celsius and thus show evidence for very imperfect and slight cremation. There is no significant change to the bone substance.	Partially burnt Bo de sh ht
Slight burning: Bones that have been exposed to fire and temperatures likely around a maximum of 700–800 degrees Celsius. These are clearly burnt and are pale in colour.	Early cremation bi C fo ce sh
Moderate burning: Bones that have been exposed to fire and temperatures likely around a maximum of 1000–1100 degrees Celsius. These are paler in colour than those remains classified as within the ‘slight burning group’.	Calcined er gr C co sl w
Hard burning: Bones that have been exposed to fire and temperatures likely around 1200–1300 degrees Celsius. The remains have changed colour (i.e. are almost white) and consistency (i.e. have a porous texture).	

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Table 5.1 Cremation temperatures and example colour, consistency, and texture assessments.

<i>Holck 1987, 131–46; Oestigaard 2013, 501–3</i>	<i>Evans et al. 2022, 7</i>	<i>Nicholson 1993</i>
Apparently unburnt: Bones that have been exposed to fire, but likely at a temperature no more than 200 degrees Celsius. Such examples would be so minimally affected that they show no visible signs of being burnt.	Unburnt: Bones which retain their original (pre-burnt) colour and have either been unburnt or burnt at temperatures too low to substantially alter their colour.	c. 200 degrees Celsius: Greasy appearance.
Sooting: Bones that have been exposed to fire and temperatures likely not exceeding 400 degrees Celsius and thus show evidence for very imperfect and slight cremation. There is no significant change to the bone substance.	Partly to fully carbonised: Bones burnt c. 300–700 degrees Celsius which show a black or brown hue.	300–500 degrees Celsius: Black, tarry, glass-like bubble char with a flat and granular texture c. 400 degrees Celsius.
Slight burning: Bones that have been exposed to fire and temperatures likely around a maximum of 700–800 degrees Celsius. These are clearly burnt and are pale in colour.	Early calcination: Bones burnt c. 500–700 degrees Celsius showing evidence for partial or full carbonisation and show shades of taupe.	500–700 degrees Celsius: Powdery.
Moderate burning: Bones that have been exposed to fire and temperatures likely around a maximum of 1000–1100 degrees Celsius. These are paler in colour than those remains classified as within the ‘slight burning group’	Calcined: Bone showing exposure to temperatures greater than 700 degrees Celsius. White or grey in colour and possibly showing evidence for warping.	800–900 degrees Celsius: Chalky and smooth.
Hard burning: Bones that have been exposed to fire and temperatures likely around 1200–1300 degrees Celsius. The remains have changed colour (i.e. are almost white) and consistency (i.e. have a porous texture)		

periphery of a cemetery/tomb area (e.g. Aubet 2010, 153; Mazar 2001) to the identification of potentially dedicated (or dedicated for at least a time) crematoria, buildings, or platforms (e.g. Kreppner 2014; Mazar 2013). There is also a recognition of pyres being placed within already existing burial structures, such as subterranean tombs or caves (e.g. Evans, Faulkner, and Asmussen 2022). Here it is worth highlighting, however, that different terms can be used for the same site/tombs based on whether researchers view burning practices as being deliberate or accidental.¹ The notion of intentionality is perhaps the largest driving force in definitions or discussions around cremations, the idea that, like the decision to bury, deciding to ‘cremate’ the dead is equally value laden and imbued with sociocultural meanings (e.g. Davies and Mates 2005, xvii). It is perhaps for this very reason that an overwhelming number of publications written on this subject fail to give a working definition or even set of parameters for the identification and categorisation of cremation (e.g. Bienkowski 1982). By using the very term ‘cremation’ it is assumed that the reader identifies this as a meaningful event or practice. This also has the added complication of allowing scholars to bring their own biases and concepts of what a cremation should and should not look like to their reading of any given case study or discussion.

To avoid this pitfall, this chapter seeks to explore the widest possible range of practices from within the literature that could come under the term ‘cremation.’ Thus, as a guiding principle, the following discussions consider and encompass human remains that show any evidence for exposure to fire/heat. Drawing inspiration from research which emphasises the multifaceted and diverse nature of cremation (e.g. Felli 2017; Oestigaard 2013; Quinn et al. 2014), I propose moving beyond discussions of *when* this practice first appears in the archaeological record of Western Asia, although this is a subject I will explore in the next section of this chapter, to focus on *why* and *how*. What can the different practices involving the body and fire tell us about sociocultural beliefs, as well as ideas of personhood, bodily integrity, and identity in the past.

Cremation in the Levant and Western Asia

Until relatively recently, Bienkowski’s 1982 article, *Some Remarks on the Practice of Cremation in the Levant*, remained the most often cited and comprehensive treatment on the topic of cremation in Western Asia. In the past few years, however, several scholars have taken on the task of providing an up to date overview of the evidence (e.g. Felli 2017; Grzegorska 2020; Nabulsi 2019). While these contributions represent valuable additions to the literature, they each, based on their differing interpretations and approaches, offer divergent conclusions. Felli (2017) and Grzegorska (2020), for example, see cremation as a practice with a long history within the region, from the Epipalaeolithic onwards. Nabulsi (2019), in contrast, argues that cremation does not appear within the area until the LBA and, in Jordan, the main focus of the article, until the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Each author refers to the same sites



Figure 5.1 Sites showing evidence of cremation (Iron Age). Those discussed include: 1. Tell Shiukh Fawqani; 2. Rasm et-Tanjara; 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. Tyre el-Bass; 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. Megiddo; 17. Ra. 18. 19. 20. Damiyah/Damiya; 21. 22. 23. Airport Temple; 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. Khirbet el'Alya; 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. Wadi I.

and site assemblages (see Figure 5.1). This information is determined by the evidence for this in mind, and despite the limitations of these contributions, it is worth considering the practice across the Levant before the Iron Age burning practices and their regional variations.

Taking the broadest possible view of the thermal modification of human remains for the thermal modification of human remains between fire/heat and the body, the broad phases (see Figure 5.2). The LBA or fifth to second millennium BC stable number of sites with evidence for cremation in the second phase, from the beginning of the Iron Age, increase, more than a doubling of sites with evidence for thermal modification.

2010, 153; Mazar 2001) to the dated for at least a time) cremation (Mazar 2013). There is also already existing burial structures, plans, Faulkner, and Asmussen that different terms can be used. Scholars view burning practices as of intentionality is perhaps the plans around cremations, the idea 'mate' the dead is equally value (e.g. Davies and Mates 2005, overwhelming number of public working definition or even set of categorisation of cremation (e.g. cremation' it is assumed that the practice. This also has the added their own biases and concepts of like to their reading of any given

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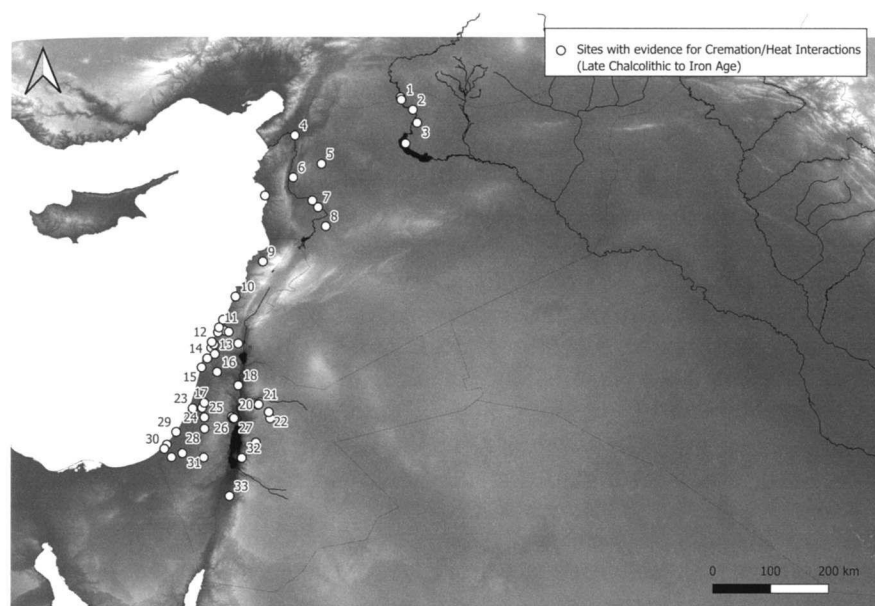


Figure 5.1 Sites showing evidence for Cremation/Heat interactions (Late Chalcolithic–Iron Age). Those discussed in the text are labelled on the map as follows: 1. Tell Shiukh Fawqani; 2. Qara Quzaq; 3. Tell Banat; 4. Alalakh; 5. Ebla; 6. Rasm et-Tanjara; 7. Hama; 8. Qatna; 9. Mgharet al-Hourriye; 10. Khalde; 11. Tyre el-Bass; 12. Akhziv; 13. Tell Kabri; 14. Tell Abu Hawam; 15. Atlit; 16. Megiddo; 17. Ras el-Ain/Tell Aphek; 18. Lower Wadi Makkuk; 19. Damiyah/Damiya; 20. Jebel al-Qesir; 21. Jebel al-Hawayah; 22. Amman Airport Temple; 23. Azor; 24. Qula; 25. Gezer; 26. Abior Cave; 27. Jericho; 28. Khirbet el'Alya; 29. Ashkelon; 30. Tell er-Ruqeish; 31. Gilat; 32. Bab edh-Dhra; 33. Wadi Fidan 40.

and site assemblages (see Figure 5.1), and thus, the chronological start of cremation is determined by the different definitions used by each scholar. With this in mind, and despite the fairly comprehensive treatment of the topic in these contributions, it is worth reconsidering the existing evidence for this practice across the Levant before turning to a broader discussion of cremation/burning practices and their meaning across wider Western Asia.

Taking the broadest possible definition of cremation to cover any evidence for the thermal modification of human skeletal material (i.e. any interaction between fire/heat and the body), the archaeological data point towards two very broad phases (see Figure 5.2). The first, spanning a period covering the LCH to LBA or fifth to second millennia BCE, is characterised by a relatively low and stable number of sites with evidence for thermally altered skeletal material. The second phase, from the beginning of the IA, is characterised by a significant increase, more than a doubling, in the number of sites recorded by this project with evidence for thermal modification. While additional excavations and data

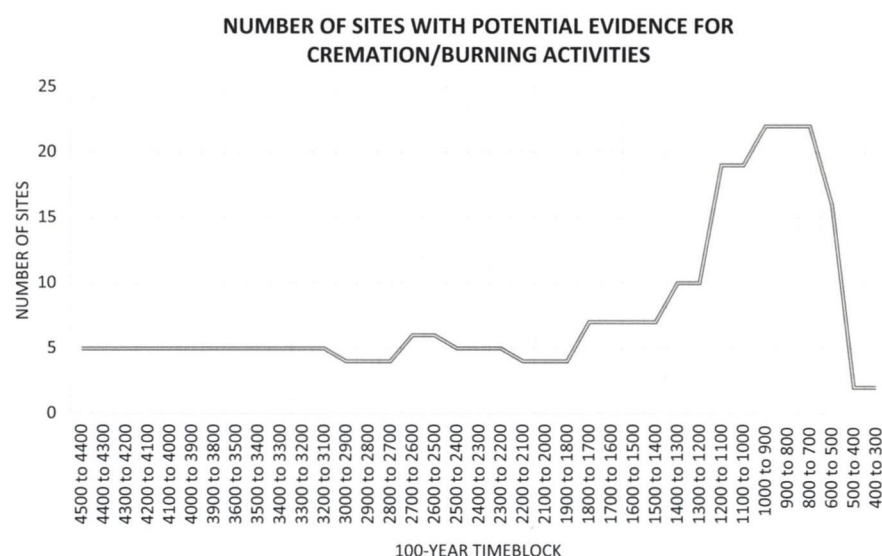


Figure 5.2 Cremation/Heat interactions or exposure over time in the Levant. Note that this chart shows the total number of sites by 100-year time-block that provides evidence for this practice, not the total number of individuals. False peaks and troughs created by overlapping date categories/gaps in date categories (see Chapter 1) have been removed from the plot for ease of interpretation.

may, in the future, slightly alter this pattern, this shift is worth further exploration, as are the different terminologies that have been used by projects and publications to describe these activities. Here, I want to zoom in and consider the specific evidence we have from these broad phases and to question whether they represent similar phenomena or not.

Burning in the Fifth and Fourth Millennia BCE

Leaving to one side the evidence for pre-Chalcolithic cremation or burning practices (i.e. Epipalaeolithic or Neolithic²), the earliest evidence considered by this project dates to the late fifth–fourth millennia BCE or LCH (see Figure 5.2). Here, all the examples appear to show evidence for partial or targeted thermal modification/burning, often following initial burial or decay. Cave 1, in the Lower Wadi Makkuk (Agur, Arobes, and Patrich 1986, 94), for example, contained the remains of c. 35 individuals, variously aged and sexed. Traces of burning were noted in association with some (23), but not all, individuals. Similarly, the LCH human remains, including both adults and infants, from Abior Cave appear to have been partially cremated or partially burnt (Eshel and Zissu 1995, 295). Cave K1 at Qula, a site I will return to at the end of this chapter, shows several phases of mortuary activity dating to the LCH

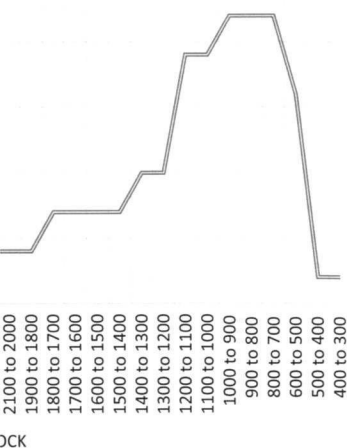
(Phases IV–II), while burnt human remains were found in the LCH phase (Milevski 2001, 62–63). The cremation of an adult individual (*Homo sapiens*) is thought to have been burnt to a dull black, and the process was carried out some distance from the site. Some shrinkage or fissuring was identified.

The relative popularity of cremation in the fourth millennium BCE (Figure 5.2) is also reflected in the archaeological record. A94 at Jericho provides an excellent example of a partially burnt, disarticulated human skeleton (Levels IV–III), Kenyon (1962, 105) in his analysis of the site. The latest phase of activity in the site is represented by rock chips, earth, and large stone remains. Based on this evidence and other assessments, these deposits were interpreted as a hygienic preparation method for the dead, and that those starting the fires in the site were aware of the burials.

Taking us away from subtle variations in cremation practices and, in this case, the cremation of a single individual (1961a, 1961b), Stekelis (1961b) identified cremation as a common practice at the site of Jericho, with various tombs. De Vreeze (1961) analysis of the material, brought together from several sites and concludes that while the sequences of behaviour can vary, the cremation of human remains and their associated activities, in some cases, the construction of further interments or the construction of further interments.

Several final points are worth noting. First, the burnt or thermally altered, as opposed to the cremated, context (e.g. Late Chalcolithic (Kenyon 1960, 16–25)). Such variations in the evidence, as well as different phases of deposition, within a cemetery shows evidence for different practices. Investigations at Azor, for example, show evidence for the burning of human bones in the Late Chalcolithic. The potential selection process for cremation include evidence for targeted cremation of the body. In the case of T. 1, the remains were preferentially burnt (Eshel and Zissu 1995, 295) that activities were far from the site, and the construction of the cremation ovens.

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(Phases IV-II), while burnt human remains are associated with the earliest phase (Milevski 2001, 62–63). Finally, at the site of Gilat, the cranial fragments of an adult individual (Homo 85/L.838) were deposited within a pit and appear to have been burnt to a dull black colour. The investigators suggest that this process was carried out some time after decay or burial, as no evidence of shrinkage or fissuring was identified (Smith et al. 2006, 334).

The relative popularity of burning activities/cremation continues into the fourth millennium BCE (Figure 5.2). Interpretations, however, vary and Tomb A94 at Jericho provides an excellent example of this. Based on the presence of partially burnt, disarticulated human remains, and (stratified) layers of burnt materials (Levels IV–III), Kenyon (1960, 16–25) suggested that repeated cremations³ occurred within the tomb, an interpretation agreed upon by Callaway (1962, 105) in his analysis of Tomb 2, or the so-called ‘Crematorium’ at Gezer. The latest phase of activity in Tomb A94 (Levels II–I), meanwhile, contained rock chips, earth, and large stones intermixed with pottery but no burnt human remains. Based on this evidence, and in contrast to Kenyon and Callaway’s assessments, these deposits were interpreted as accidental burning (Tomb A94) or a hygienic preparation method (Gezer) by Nabulsi (2019, 33), who suggests that those starting the fires in Tomb A94 at Jericho may even have been unaware of the burials.

Taking us away from subterranean burial contexts to above-ground monuments and, in this case, the dolmens at Damiyah (De Vreeze 2010; Stekelis 1961a, 1961b), Stekelis (1961b, 56) identifies cremation or incineration as being a common practice at the site, with calcined bones being found in association with various tombs. De Vreeze (2010, 85–106), in his careful and in-depth re-analysis of the material, brings this evidence in conversation with several other sites and concludes that while the exact details and processes may vary, repeated sequences of behaviour can be identified. These include the deposition of human remains and their associated materials, the burning of bones, followed by, in some cases, the construction of built features within tombs, and the deposition of further interments (De Vreeze 2010, 105–6).

Several final points are worth highlighting here. First is the appearance of burnt or thermally altered, as well as unburnt, human remains within a single context (e.g. Late Chalcolithic Qula (Milevski 2001, 62–63), EB I Jericho (Kenyon 1960, 16–25)). Such evidence pertains to both specific individuals as well as different phases of deposition. Secondly, not every contemporary tomb within a cemetery shows evidence for the same practices (see Chapter 4). Investigations at Azor, for example, revealed evidence for the cremation or burning of human bones in Tomb 1, but not Tomb 4 (Ben-Tor 1975, 10). Lastly, the potential selection process goes beyond specific phases or individuals to include evidence for targeted or preferential burning of particular components of the body. In the case of Tomb A61 at Jericho, long bones appear to have been preferentially burnt (Evans, Faulkner, and Asmussen 2022, 6), suggesting that activities were far from accidental. Similarly, despite the original reconstruction of the cremation of whole bodies at Gezer (Macalister 1902, 348,

1912), rather than body parts or bones, preferential burning activities are also possible here. Callaway (1962, 106), piecing together information from these publications, for example, suggested that while long bones were clearly involved in the cremation activities, several skulls survived this process. The burning or thermal modification of human remains was clearly a recognised and socioculturally accepted mode of behaviour during the LCH and EB I. It did not, however, as already seen in Chapter 4, necessarily involve transformation of the entire body or population, nor was it the only means through which transformation could occur.

Third-Millennium-BCE Burning Activities

Evidence for the thermal alteration of human remains from the northern Levant moves us into the third millennium BCE, where the skeletal remains (from two individuals) found in L12 at Qara Quzaq show evidence for burning. In contrast to earlier examples, no evidence of incineration was recorded from the tomb structure itself, indicating that this activity likely occurred in a separate location (Valdés Pereiro 1999, 120–21). The theme of movement is also attested at Tell Banat, with scattered human remains from Tombs 1 and 2, showing evidence for thermal modification, as do some of the artefacts from Tomb 1. In this latter example, fragmentary bones such as metatarsals, teeth, and cranium pieces were also found inside small ceramic vessels, with the investigators suggesting that these remains had been gathered together for transportation (Porter 1995, 2–5).

Despite some of the disparities between these two examples, one shared element is the wealth embedded and represented within these tombs. Tomb L12 at Qara Quzaq (Valdés Pereiro 1999; Montero Fenollós 2004), as discussed in Chapter 3, is a high-status complex, while Tombs 1 and 2 from Banat are also elite in nature (Porter 1995, 2016). Even more intriguing is the suggestion of heat treatment or preservation strategies, rather than incineration, at Tombs 1 and 2 (Porter 2016). Given the nature of the burials at Qara Quzaq, we could potentially be dealing with similar interventions against decay at this site as well. Such practices would have allowed for extended contact and interaction with the body, not only at an individual, familial, but also a public level (Porter 2016, 164). Furthermore, whether linked to incineration or partial preservation, clearly not everyone at these sites was accorded such treatment. We are thus, at least in these cases, dealing with restricted, yet possibly publicly visible mortuary behaviours.

Moving to the southern Levant, the evidence from the third millennium BCE is very different. Tomb 1101B Lower/Tomb 1102 Lower from Megiddo provides potential evidence for thermal modification, although here the identification is much more tentative. Fourteen individuals in total were documented, with the original reports indicating the presence of charcoal alongside burnt bones. Burning was apparently only noted on the upper surface of the remains, leading the excavators to suggest that the fire had taken place after burial, and

following the disturbance (or disturbance) (e.g. 1938, 26). While tempting to interpret the materials discussed above from Jericho as evidence for incineration, the evidence is unclear, and at least five of the burials discussed above are of the EB I type (Guy and Engberg 1938, 2000). The evidence from Khirbet el'Ayia is also problematic. Disarticulated and, according to the excavators, human remains were found in situ. The evidence potentially date to the EB III, LBA or LBA-EIA is also possible.

Evidence from EB II–III B at Tell Banat (e.g. Chesson 1999, 1999; Sheridan 2015) and points to examples discussed above. Burial in a portion, although not all, of the tombs, even structures without clear evidence (A20), seem to have some individual burials (Rast 1989, 339; Ullinger and Sheridan 2015). Such as from Charnel House, used as combustible devices, (Ullinger and Sheridan 2015) analysis of Charnel House throughout the structure, betwixt and between, treated at the centre. It is also possible that some flesh was still present.⁴

A final example, Mgharet el-Khazir, at the beginning of the second millennium BCE, is a burial context with evidence for incineration (Beayno, Mattar, and Abdu 2015). In the Valley, this natural cave was in use from the Byzantine and Medieval periods. The remains were deposited within the cave, with fragmentary burnt and unburnt remains throughout the cavity. Unfortunately, whether the two mortuary practices were contemporary or, alternatively, whether behaviours changed over time (2002, 167).

The fragmentary nature of the remains, the low temperature levels and temperatures recorded by the bioarchaeologists (2002, 167), raise a further possibility that the original burial could have been preferential cremation. It is possible that despite incineration, human remains alongside greyish earth

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ad taken place after burial, and

following the disturbance (or disarticulation) of the deposits (Guy and Engberg 1938, 26). While tempting to interpret this activity along the lines of the materials discussed above from Jericho and Gezer, the dating of this context is very unclear, and at least five of these individuals may be associated with IA deposits (Guy and Engberg 1938, 24–27; Hrdlicka 1938, 192; Ilan 2013, 136). The evidence from Khirbet el'Alya (Site 94/23), Burial Cave B, is similarly debatable. Disarticulated and, according to the investigators, deliberately burnt human remains were found in this tomb (Dagan and Mettens 1998). These potentially date to the EB III, although due to the mixed deposits a date of the LBA or LBA-EIA is also possible.

Evidence from EB II–III Bab edh-Dhra finds us on a firmer chronological footing (e.g. Chesson 1999, 151, Table 4; Schaub and Rast 1989; Ullinger and Sheridan 2015) and points towards fire being used in different ways from the examples discussed above. Burning is seen in association with a sizeable proportion, although not all, of the charnel houses at Bab edh-Dhra. In addition, even structures without clear evidence for a major fire (e.g. Charnel House A20), seem to have some indicators (e.g. charcoal) for burning (Schaub and Rast 1989, 339; Ullinger and Sheridan 2015, 405). Fragments of burnt cloth, such as from Charnel House A8 (Chesson 1999, 151, Table 4), may have been used as combustible devices, although whether intentionally or not is unclear (Ullinger and Sheridan 2015, 405). Ullinger and Sheridan's (2015, 409–12) analysis of Charnel House A22 suggests differential intensities of burning throughout the structure, between the core and periphery, with the fire concentrated at the centre. It is also possible that the human remains were burnt when some flesh was still present.⁴

A final example, Mgharet al-Hourriye, moves us into the end of the third/beginning of the second millennium BCE and provides an excellent case study of a burial context with evidence for both burnt and unburnt human remains (Beayno, Mattar, and Abdul-Nour 2002). Located in Lebanon's Qadisha Valley, this natural cave was in use during the EB IV to MB I, with later Roman/Byzantine and Medieval material also being recorded. At least 24 individuals were deposited within the cave during the later third/early second millennium,⁵ with fragmentary burnt and unburnt human remains⁶ found scattered throughout the cavity. Unfortunately, due to the lack of clear stratigraphy, it is unclear whether the two mortuary practices (e.g. cremation and non-cremation) were contemporary or, alternatively, given the lengthy use of the burial context, whether behaviours changed over time (Beayno, Mattar, and Abdul-Nour 2002, 167).

The fragmentary nature of the skeletal material, as well as different combustion levels and temperatures (from unburnt to c. 800 degrees centigrade) recorded by the bioarchaeologist, Berszin (Beayno, Mattar, and Abdul-Nour 2002, 167), raise a further possibility, that different parts of the same individual could have been preferentially burnt (or not burnt). The excavators conclude that despite incineration residues being present (e.g. partly burnt human remains alongside greyish earth mixed with ash and lime), burning activities

could not have taken place within the cramped conditions of the cave (Beayno, Mattar, and Abdul-Nour 2002, 142). Given the presence of ash and lime deposits within the soil matrix of the cave, and despite the lack of smoke traces on the walls of the cave, the *in situ* incineration of remains cannot be totally ruled out. Unfortunately, only around 15% of the archaeological deposits from Mgharet al-Hourriye have been excavated, consequently further conclusions are limited. In line with the other examples from this section, however, we appear to be dealing with a complex and spatially/chronologically diverse set of traditions. Thus, despite the limited data, the messiness and variability may point towards each of these third-millennium-BCE examples representing a very different set of behaviours, motivations, and practices.

Second-Millennium-BCE Burning Activities

Shifting focus into the second millennium BCE, several different instances and types of interaction between human remains and fire are documented from both the northern and southern Levant. A MB I jar burial (Tomb 378) from Ras el-Ain, for example, was found to contain skull fragments and burnt bone, although there are unfortunately no further details about these remains in the publication (Gal and Kochavi 2000, 85, 290). Two MBA pits (00/J/58 and 00/J/61) from Megiddo also contained burnt (postcranial) remains, with the individual from 00/J/61 identified as a non-adult, less than 15 years of age (Nagar 2006, 472, Table 22.1). Numerous cereal fragments were found within this locale including emmer, naked wheat, and barley, as well as an olive stone, although it is unclear whether these remains represent the secondary use of this context or offerings for the deceased (Borojevic 2006, 523).

In contrast to the fairly prolific burning activities within the EBA collective tombs discussed above, relatively little evidence has been documented for thermally altered skeletal material from MBA collective deposits. There are, however, a few exceptions. Burial G from Tomb H18 at Jericho, for example, showed potential evidence for burning although, in this case, it was suggested that the patch of burning visible on the skull may have been the result of a pre-mortem medical treatment or an accident leading to death (Kenyon 1960, 489). Similarly, some of the human remains from Tomb 902 at Tell Kabri appear to have been charred (Kempinski et al. 2002, 34), although further details are not included in the excavation report.

Further north, two examples from the site of Ebla are worth touching upon. The first, from the area of the Western Fort, dated to MB II, may provide evidence for the accidental burning of two individuals (Ferro, Mogliazza, and Peyronel 2010). Both identified as biologically adult males, these remains were burnt at a low temperature (c. 350–400 degrees Celsius), possibly as part of a conflagration, rather than as a ‘ritual cremation’ (Ferro, Mogliazza, and Peyronel 2010, 356, 361). This example stands in direct contrast to P. 8680, already mentioned in Chapter 4, where burning activities have been interpreted as anything but accidental. Instead, based on evidence for repeated *in situ*

burning, it has been argued that the tomb. New burials were then their exposure to fire, being c. Polcaro 2010, 439–40; Polcaro Area C at Azor (Ben-Shlomo of incineration (MB II-LB). I equid, a possible canine, and a ‘burnt debris’ (Phase IV) overl and III respectively) (Ben-Shlomo been burnt which, to the inven Shlomo 2012, 17), although w

Leaving some of the more Amman Airport Temple) to c second millennium BCE we se for thermal modification. The ied. By way of example, at T contained a double inhumatio burning on the apparently fe older adult male (Anati 1959, BCE tombs from the Beqah V show evidence for limited bur LBA (probably LB I) tomb (McGovern 1980, 55–60), prov tal material (e.g. Locus 6 (Fin clear whether this burning/cha to/during the burial process. I similarly unclear, with some e having been burnt. Again, it is erate and may even be the res the burnt human remains w (McGovern 1986, 49). Finally like that of earlier Tell Bana represent a very different set o this case, the ‘heating’ of the degrees Celsius, potentially fa with the dead by temporarily 78; Pfälzner 2012, 209–10, 20

Through the end of the se our evidence for thermal mod the northern Levant. The cem the thirteenth to tenth centur ited within jars (Athanassiou found in association with inci cremation burials have been 1979; Sader 2013, 618). Tell

conditions of the cave (Beayno, the presence of ash and lime despite the lack of smoke traces on of remains cannot be totally the archaeological deposits from consequently further conclusions from this section, however, we ally/chronologically diverse set e messiness and variability may -BCE examples representing a nd practices.

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burning, it has been argued that these practices were intended to ritually purify the tomb. New burials were then deposited, with the earlier remains, following their exposure to fire, being collected together within sacks (Mogliazza and Polcaro 2010, 439–40; Polcaro 2014). Excavations within a shaft tomb from Area C at Azor (Ben-Shlomo 2012, 15–26) provide another potential example of incineration (MB II-LB). In this case, several burials, including that of an equid, a possible canine, and a human alongside an equid, appear in a layer of 'burnt debris' (Phase IV) overlying and underlying additional burials (Phase V and III respectively) (Ben-Shlomo 2012, 16–18). All the bones appear to have been burnt which, to the investigators, suggested the presence of a fire (Ben-Shlomo 2012, 17), although whether deliberate or accidental is not mentioned.

Leaving some of the more debatable examples of LBA cremation (e.g. the Amman Airport Temple) to one side, as we move into the latter half of the second millennium BCE we see an uptick in the number of sites with evidence for thermal modification. The evidence for such interactions is, again, very varied. By way of example, at Tell Abu Hawam, a LBA pit burial (Burial 6–7) contained a double inhumation, with excavations revealing possible traces of burning on the apparently female individual who was found 'embracing' an older adult male (Anati 1959, 94; Gonen 1992, 86). Late-second-millennium-BCE tombs from the Beqah Valley, Jordan (McGovern 1980, 1986) similarly show evidence for limited burning activities. At Jebel al-Hawayah, the looted LBA (probably LB I) tomb (Burial Cave A2) (Brown and McGovern 1986; McGovern 1980, 55–60), provided evidence for charring on some of the skeletal material (e.g. Locus 6 (Finnegan and Husted 1986, 295)), although it is not clear whether this burning/charring occurred during looting activities or prior to/during the burial process. Evidence from LB II Jebel al-Qesir (Cave B3) is similarly unclear, with some evidence for individual fragments of human bone having been burnt. Again, it is possible that this burning activity was not deliberate and may even be the result of preparing a funerary meal in the tomb, as the burnt human remains were also associated with a burnt cooking pot (McGovern 1986, 49). Finally, the evidence from the Royal Tombs at Qatna, like that of earlier Tell Banat (and possibly Qara Quzaq), would appear to represent a very different set of practices around fire and the human body. In this case, the 'heating' of the human remains, at a temperature of c. 200–250 degrees Celsius, potentially facilitated a lengthy burial process and interactions with the dead by temporarily preserving or desiccating the corpse (Felli 2017, 78; Pfälzner 2012, 209–10, 2016, 250–51; Witzel and Kreutz 2007, 177–79).

Through the end of the second millennium BCE, the LBA-IA transition, our evidence for thermal modification continues to expand, particularly within the northern Levant. The cemetery at Rasm et-Tanjara, for example, dated to the thirteenth to tenth centuries BCE, includes burnt human remains deposited within jars (Athanassiou 1977, 239–40). Similarly, based on pottery sherds found in association with incinerated remains, twelfth- to tenth-century-BCE cremation burials have been documented at Tell Sukas (Riis 1961, 140–41, 1979; Sader 2013, 618). Tell Alalakh remains one of the most famous and

earliest examples dating to this period, with both inhumations and cremations being documented from at least the sixteenth century BCE onwards (Boutin 2008; Gilmour 1995, 168; Woolley 1955, 201–23). While much has been made of the potentially foreign and, in particular, Anatolian origins, of cremation at these sites (e.g. Gilmour 1995, 169; Polcaro 2014, 144–45), as Gilmour (1995, 145) himself acknowledges, we are likely seeing independent developments, un-associated with population movement or shifts, ideas I have already covered in Chapter 3. Finally, likely dated to near the beginning of the IA, c. 1200 BCE, the Hama cremation cemetery (Riis 1948) provides evidence for hundreds of cremated individuals, from neonates to adults (see Chapter 3 for further discussion of the dating of this site).

In contrast to the north, only a handful of IA cremation burials have been documented from the late second/very early first millennia BCE in the southern Levant. An upright jar (D63) at Azor, for example, contained cremains and was covered with a basalt slab (Ben-Shlomo 2008, 38–40). One of the most intriguing finds from this tomb was a golden mouthpiece. Found deposited within the cremation jar, this artefact shows analogies to a similar object discovered at the Amman Airport Temple (Ben-Shlomo 2008, 40). D63 is only one of several possible cremation burials at Azor, including D62, which was only partially excavated and D9, which due to the traces of blackened earth, potentially represents a cremation (Ben-Shlomo 2008, 40). This practice would appear to be far less common, however, than inhumation at the site. Moreover, much has been made of the uniqueness of D63 in terms of the rich associated finds (e.g. gold mouthpiece and bronze bowl), as well as the structure encircling the jar containing the cremains. The only analogies suggested for this tomb structure are to be found in northern Greece (Ben-Shlomo 2008, 40; Papadopoulos 2005, 181–82), although recent excavations at Ashkelon have also revealed cremated remains (Burial 345) interred within a very similar jar (Master and Aja 2017, 144). Furthermore, while cremations at the site of Azor show similarities with examples from the Aegean world, they are not necessarily indicative of a foreign population and, just as in the Aegean, appear to be sporadic during this early IA period (Ben-Shlomo 2008, 48).

Cremation in the First Millennium BCE

By IA II (c. 1000 BCE), cremation activity explodes (see Figure 5.2), and it is from this period that the majority of our evidence dates. Here I want to draw attention to just a few final examples, before turning to a more interpretative discussion. Cremation, as a practice, has often been linked with the Iron Age Phoenicians, and indeed, numerous sites from the coastal Levant have yielded evidence for burning practices, although often alongside evidence for inhumation. Tyre el-Bass (Aubert 2004, 2010), as discussed in Chapter 3, provides evidence for a potential shift in burial practices from the IA I into IA II, with cremations possibly replacing the inhumations found in broadly the same area

(Aubert 2013, 79). Similar evidence is also found at Tell el-Faraj (Aubert 2004, 2010). In contrast, at Atlit (Johns 2003), broadly contemporary inhumations are the norm. Chronological trends aside, an analysis of 56 cremation urns from Tell el-Faraj (Mendeles 2002; Mazar 2003, 2018), for example, suggests a much lower than non-adult inhumation ratio, with many non-adults that are present as cremated remains (Smith and Bar-Gal 2010).

What particularly marks off the contrast to those discussed from burial containers (i.e. jars/urns) is the presence of cremation pyres (e.g. from Tell Shiukh Fawqani in 5.1), although they are not at Tell el-Faraj (Smith 1992, 213; Culican 1973). Cremations (i.e. ash lenses) were also found at Tell el-Faraj, as well as inhumations. Stelae, in cremation burials/pyre deposits, are also indicated by ashy deposits within a handful of graves (Levy 2014). Here, there is no contrast to other sites, many of which have cremation pyres (e.g. Bloch-Smith 1969), cremation pyres above tombs, or cremation pyres in contrast to other sites, many of which have cremation pyres.

Much has been written on the contrast between cremation and inhumation, as discussed in Chapter 3, particularly in relation to different ethnic and religious groups (e.g. Bienkowski 1982; Gilmour 1995). It has been argued then, however, and with the debate and moving beyond the binary, that we should ask a more interesting set of questions.

The Human Body and Cremation

All of the above discussions are based on the category of burning or thermocremation. As Bloch-Smith has argued, therefore, burning is not practices 'foreign' to this region, but rather, they appear to have been very different practices. Even within a particular time period, the way in which cremation was carried out, and likely the meaning of cremation, was significantly altered. How then might we understand these variations and shifting patterns?

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(Aubert 2013, 79). Similar evidence is possibly attested at Khalde (Saidah 1966). In contrast, at Atlit (Johns 1938) and Akhziv (Smith and Bar-Gal 2018), broadly contemporary inhumation and cremation activities are documented. Chronological trends aside, age-dependent patterns are also evident. A recent analysis of 56 cremation urns from the Northern cemetery at Akhziv (Dayagi-Mendeles 2002; Mazar 2003, 2008, 2013; Shaked 1996; Smith and Bar-Gal 2018), for example, suggests that the percentage of cremated non-adults is much lower than non-adult inhumations. Similar to Tyre el-Bass, the cremated non-adults that are present appear to have been interred alongside adult cremains (Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 169).

What particularly marks out the IA examples discussed thus far and, in contrast to those discussed from earlier periods (i.e. pre-Iron Age), is the use of burial containers (i.e. jars/urns) to contain cremains. Such deposits are noted from Tell Shiukh Fawqani in the north to Ashkelon in the south (see Figure 5.1), although they are not attested at every site. At Tell er-Ruqish (Bloch-Smith 1992, 213; Culican 1973; Ory 1944, 205), for example, open or primary cremations (i.e. ash lenses) were found alongside cremains within containers, as well as inhumations. Stelae, in this case, appear to have marked the location of cremation burials/pyre deposits (Bloch-Smith 1992, 213). Possible cremations are also indicated by ashy deposits containing very small fragments of human bones within a handful of grave circles at Wadi Fidan 40 (Beherec, Najjar, and Levy 2014). Here, there is no evidence for associated cremation containers. Finally, at Atlit (Bloch-Smith 1992, 217; Johns 1938; Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 169), cremation pyres above burial pits/the ground were used, and, in direct contrast to others sites, many of the remains appear to have been of non-adults.

Much has been written on cremation in the first millennium BCE and, as discussed in Chapter 3, particularly the associations between this practice and different ethnic and religious groups within the Levant and wider Western Asia (e.g. Bienkowski 1982; Gilmour 1995; Kreppner 2014; Tenu 2007, 2009). As I argued then, however, and will (hopefully) now demonstrate, by opening up the debate and moving beyond simplistic ethnic associations, we can perhaps ask a more interesting set of questions.

The Human Body and Cremation

All of the above discussions and examples can be subsumed under a general category of burning or thermal alteration of human remains. As Felli (2017) has argued, therefore, burning, cremation, or thermal alteration were clearly not practices 'foreign' to this region. Based on existing data, however, there appear to have been very different processes and motivations at play over time. Even within a particular timeframe, the ways in which these activities were carried out, and likely the meanings and beliefs associated with them, significantly altered. How then might we begin to understand and characterise these variations and shifting patterns?

Long-Term Manipulation of Human Remains

One of the most obvious ways in which to disentangle the various examples of thermal modification discussed above is by considering whether the human remains being burnt are also subject to other forms of modification and treatment. What distinguishes some of the earliest evidence for burning activities discussed here is the fact that these practices are just part of a complex series of lengthy interactions with the dead, many of which I have already covered in Chapter 4. With the majority of the LCH and EBA examples, therefore, we are dealing with the burning of already disarticulated or possibly partially fleshed skeletal remains.

Considering the range of socially sanctioned, albeit varied and potentially infrequent, behaviours discussed by De Vreeze (2010, 106) we can also add to this list the idea that different parts of the body may have been specifically selected and targeted for burning activities. Rather than a method designed to create an anonymous ancestral community, burning activities in tombs of the fourth and fifth millennium BCE, such as those at Jericho, Gezer, and Damiyah, might have been an additional way of further fragmenting, transforming, and breaking the human body down into smaller constituent parts. Such activities would have served to express and actively create the multiplicity of societal building blocks and forms of personhood co-existing during this period. Similar ideas have been suggested in relation to Bronze Age Crete, whereby the destruction of remaining flesh and clothing by fire has been argued to act to remove or eliminate any remaining bodily individuality (Hamilakis 2014, 138). As I will further discuss in Chapter 9, it also opens up yet another way in which the living could have interacted with and handled the dead. Such practices could have been part of a lengthy sequence of processes involving the deposition (and re-deposition) of human remains and their associated burial goods, as well as the construction of built features within tombs and the deposition of further interments. In such examples, burning activities were clearly not required or mandated, but were yet another way of enacting and facilitating the transformation of both the dead and their relationships with the living.

Burning as a Closure or Sanitising Process

Given these lengthy processes, also worth considering is whether acts of burning were a way of bringing such relationships to a close. The burning activities identified at Bab edh-Dhra, for example, have been variously interpreted as unintentional, due to natural events, accidental activities associated with a funerary ceremony, or even the result of intentional destruction and vandalism by attacking groups (Ortner and Frohlich 2008, 127; Ullinger and Sheridan 2015, 405). Given discussions so far, however, I would like to add a further possible hypothesis into the mix, that these activities can perhaps be seen as indicative of the use of burning as an act of closure. This practice was clearly not always required; several of the EB II–III charnel houses show no evidence

for burning. Instead, fire, while a means of closure, was not the only usage and life history of a closed tomb. In this respect, the transformation of the body, but a transformation of individuals.

The same can be suggested elsewhere (e.g. 142–43) in his discussion of the use of fire. Here, however, we can perhaps see the thermally modified human remains within textile bags. Given the phases within the MB II–LBA, a similar closure or sanitisation of the body, and separating one burial from another, also potentially explain the burial practices, especially if we view the cerea

Such activities did not take into account the lack of thermal modification, another stark contrast between the selective tombs at this site and the other sites. In this case, burning or thermal modification within may not have been an act of closure, as was not required for the elimination of the body. Instead, as I will discuss in Chapter 9, the use of fire was used within these contexts. As I will discuss, it is worth highlighting the use of fire as an abbreviation or interruption of the process, to date only attested in very few examples of the practices at Qatna, Tell Banat, and other sites. The closure or end of interaction with the dead and ensure continued interaction with the dead (e.g. Felli 2017, 78; F

Visual Display and Process of Transformation

So far, many of the burning activities documented in association with the dead, which may or may not have been a closure, with exception are the charnel houses. These certainly have made a visible transformation, would have made a marked impression, and be suggested for many of the burial practices with open air pyres and the opportunities represented by the use of fire, sounds and smells that would be the opportunities.

entangle the various examples of considering whether the human forms of modification and treatment evidence for burning activities are just part of a complex series which I have already covered in EBA examples, therefore, we are not or possibly partially fleshed out, albeit varied and potentially (2010, 106) we can also add to the body may have been specifically rather than a method designed to burning activities in tombs of the at Jericho, Gezer, and Damiyah, fragmenting, transforming, and constituent parts. Such activities create the multiplicity of societal co-existing during this period. In Bronze Age Crete, whereby the use of fire has been argued to act to destroy individuality (Hamilakis 2014, 138). It opens up yet another way in which to handle the dead. Such practices of processes involving the deposition and their associated burial goods, within tombs and the deposition of burning activities were clearly not a way of enacting and facilitating relationships with the living.

Considering is whether acts of burning to a close. The burning activities have been variously interpreted as ritual activities associated with intentional destruction and vandalism (2008, 127; Ullinger and Sheridan 2008). I would like to add a further dimension: activities can perhaps be seen as closure. This practice was clearly in charnel houses show no evidence

for burning. Instead, fire, while not essential, was a useful means by which the usage and life history of a charnel house could be brought to some sort of conclusion. In this respect, then, burning was not so much about a transformation of the body, but a transformation of the structures used to house deceased individuals.

The same can be suggested for P. 8680 at Ebla and indeed, Polcaro (2014, 142–43) in his discussion of this example, draws attention to these similarities. Here, however, we can perhaps also point towards bodily transformations, with the thermally modified human remains then being re-deposited within the pit within textile bags. Given the presence of both overlying and underlying burial phases within the MB II-LBA shaft tomb at Azor (Ben-Shlomo 2012, 17), a similar closure or sanitisation event may also have occurred at this site, demarcating and separating one burial phase from another. Such a hypothesis could also potentially explain the burnt human remains from pit 00/J/61 at Megiddo, especially if we view the cereal fragments as a secondary usage.

Such activities did not take place within every burial context, however, and the lack of thermal modification from the MBA Tombs at Jericho represents another stark contrast between the earlier, fourth to third millennia BCE, collective tombs at this site and those dating to the second millennium BCE. In this case, burning or thermal modification of the burial space and the burials within may not have been an appropriate way of dealing with the dead and/or was not required for the elimination of any remaining signs of individuality. Instead, as I will discuss in Chapter 7, other markers of closure were perhaps used within these contexts. As a final note, and in contrast to ideas of closure, it is worth highlighting the potential opportunities afforded by fire for the abbreviation or interruption of processes of transformation and decay. While to date only attested in very unique and high-status examples,⁷ heat treatment practices at Qatna, Tell Banat, and possibly Qara Quzaq, rather than marking the closure or end of interactions, were perhaps one of the tools used to facilitate and ensure continued interactions with and the continued visual display of the dead (e.g. Felli 2017, 78; Pfälzner 2012, 209–10).

Visual Display and Process of Transformation

So far, many of the burning activities touched upon above, and particularly those documented in association with subterranean contexts, relate to practices which may or may not have been visible to a wider group or settlement. A clear exception are the charnel houses, whose fiery destruction or closure would certainly have made a visible visual and sensorial impression. Events that would have made a marked impact on the surviving community. The same can be suggested for many of the IA cremation activities documented in association with open air pyres and indeed, in addition to the visual displays and opportunities represented by these practices, we can also think about the sounds and smells that would have been produced by such events. Worth highlighting are the opportunities, in contrast to the affordances of a subterranean

tomb, that an open-air cremation might offer for wider societal interactions with the dead at the point of transformation. Whether or not whole communities were involved in these processes and events is not easy to determine. As Nilsson Stutz and Kuijt (2014) have highlighted, however, these considerations do raise the impacts that such events were likely to have had on any participants involved. There is also a temporal element here, as cremation, whether followed by deposition of human remains within an urn or not and depending on the desired level of oxidation, generally takes hours (McKinley 2008, 2013)⁸ and would clearly have been a swift way of transforming a once living body and dealing with decay, especially when compared to some of the long-term interactions discussed in the previous chapter.

What marks out the majority of evidence from the end of the second millennium BCE onwards is the fact that the act of cremation or thermal modification is the primary means by which transformation of the deceased occurs. This is not to suggest that fire had no transformative properties in these earlier instances. Rather, in the majority of examples predating the IA, burning was intertwined with a range of other processes and practices, many of which required long term investment and repeated visitations and interactions with the human body. The uptick in cremation or the evidence for thermal modification of human remains as the primary means for transformation during the late second to first millennia BCE is therefore an enduring pattern. I began this chapter by suggesting I wanted to focus less on the *when* and more on the *how* and *why*. Part of the reason why there has been so much attention paid to *when* and *where* cremation traditions arise, however, is due to the broadly contemporary appearance of these practices across the Mediterranean and Western Asia.

Cremation practices in Greece and the Aegean, for example, make a visible appearance during LH IIIC (c. 1100 BCE) before becoming more common during the IA (e.g. Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 93–94; Mee 2011, 239; Snodgrass 1971). In Anatolia, meanwhile, the earliest evidence dates from the earlier second millennium BCE at Osmanakayasi (Bittel 1958). I am certainly not suggesting that all of the varied and chronologically disparate attestations of cremation originate from a single region or tradition. The timing of these practices, however, with their sporadic appearance in the second and increasing popularity during the early first millennium is a temporal pattern worthy of note. Indeed, as Aubet (2013, 80) suggests in relation to mortuary rites in the area of Phoenicia, the end of the second into the first millennia BCE represents a period during which burial practices, and the beliefs and identities that go alongside these, were being re-negotiated, re-shaped and re-forged. What then might lie behind these shifts and changes?

During this period we start to see new ideas emerging as to the importance of the integrity and survival of the human body and control of decay within the mortuary process (see Chapter 7 for further discussion), as well as different mortuary temporalities. Burial practices during the latter half of the second millennium, as already discussed in Chapter 3, are characterised by a bewildering variety and amalgamation of traditions, shaped and influenced by

the intercultural and international backdrop of the final phases of the emergence of a new world order in which ties were being forged. The incipient shifts in the treatment of the dead and enacted during a period of transformation. Within such a setting, cremation, presenting the potential for decay, in a similar way to within an inhumation, swifter and more rapid transformation of the temporality of funerary memory.

Many of the Iron Age cremations from those from the wider Mediterranean markers or in a more limited context (Aubet 2013, 80; Sader 2005, 1). The Al-Bass funerary stelae, has a body necessitated the permanent via stelae. Yet, the vast majority of many cases, may have been encoined. Furthermore, commemorative cemeteries (e.g. Tyre el-B) monumental tombs (e.g. Silwa) ple one to one relationship between cremation does not exist. Tra offered opportunities for a different in which the integrity and body than the memorialisation of a

Beyond the Big Picture

To bring these discussions, and to explore three case studies in dates to the LCH, while the to the IA.

Cave K1 at Qula provides LCH mortuary activity, with with the earliest of these, Phase consisted of a layer of Detailed bioarchaeological although the published report human bones...”, as well as decorated and pedestal bowls, as were found immediately above ossuaries (at least 15), pottery aries) were deposited (Phas

for wider societal interactions whether or not whole communities is not easy to determine. As, however, these considerations likely to have had on any participant here, as cremation, whether in an urn or not and depending on hours (McKinley 2008, 2013)⁸ transforming a once living body shared to some of the long-term

from the end of the second millennium cremation or thermal modification of the deceased occurs. Native properties in these earlier predating the IA, burning was and practices, many of which situations and interactions with the evidence for thermal modifications for transformation during the enduring pattern. I began this the *when* and more on the *how* so much attention paid to *when* is due to the broadly contemporary Mediterranean and Western Asia. can, for example, make a visible before becoming more common 3–94; Mee 2011, 239; Snodgrass evidence dates from the earlier second millennium (1958). I am certainly not suggesting separate attestations of cremation the timing of these practices, how second and increasing popularity pattern worthy of note. Indeed, mortuary rites in the area of first millennia BCE represents a the beliefs and identities that go shaped and re-forged. What then

is emerging as to the importance body and control of decay within (see discussion), as well as differences during the latter half of the chapter 3, are characterised by a positions, shaped and influenced by

the intercultural and international milieu of the LBA Levant. Amongst the backdrop of the final phases of the Bronze Age palatial system and the emergence of a new world order in the IA, new social, ethnic, and religious identities were being forged. The increasing popularity of cremation and, in contrast, shifts in the treatment of the inhumed human body were thus being negotiated and enacted during a period of increasing innovation and experimentation. Within such a setting, cremation may have offered a way of controlling bodily decay, presenting the potential for remains to be contained or delimited in a similar way to within an inhumation grave, while also enabling a potentially swifter and more rapid transformation of the human body and thus a different temporality of funerary memorialisation.

Many of the Iron Age cremation cemeteries discussed above, as well as those from the wider Mediterranean, provide some evidence for the use of markers or in a more limited number of cases inscribed funerary stelae (e.g. Aubet 2013, 80; Sader 2005, 11:25). Aubet (2013, 81), in her discussion of the Al-Bass funerary stelae, has suggested that the disappearance of the human body necessitated the permanent memorialisation of the name of the deceased via stelae. Yet, the vast majority of stelae contain no such references and, in many cases, may have been entirely blank (Dixon 2013, 82; Sader 2005, 11:16). Furthermore, commemoration of named persons appears within both cremation cemeteries (e.g. Tyre el-Bass (e.g. Aubet 2010, 150, Figure 10)), as well as monumental tombs (e.g. Silwan (e.g. Ussishkin 1970, 40–42)). As such, a simple one to one relationship between permanent named memorialisation and cremation does not exist. Transformation, via cremation, however, may have offered opportunities for a different type of memorialisation and memory, one in which the integrity and bodily form of the corpse was of less importance than the memorialisation of a (likely) idealised identity.

Beyond the Big Picture

To bring these discussions, and this chapter, to a conclusion, I want to zoom in to explore three case studies in slightly more detail. The first, Tomb K1 at Qula dates to the LCH, while the second and third, Akhziv and Atlit, both date to the IA.

Cave K1 at Qula provides evidence for several different phases (IV–II) of LCH mortuary activity, with burnt human remains being found in association with the earliest of these, Phase IV. Located immediately above bedrock, this phase consisted of a layer of sandy sediment, spread across the cave floor. Detailed bioarchaeological information is, unfortunately, not available, although the published report indicates that the remains included “... burnt human bones...”, as well as diagnostic LCH material including V-shaped, carinated and pedestal bowls, as well as cornets (Milevski 2001, 62). Flat stones were found immediately above the Phase IV deposits, upon which ceramic ossuaries (at least 15), pottery vessels, and human remains (some within ossuaries) were deposited (Phase III). These activities were followed by the

movement, breakage, and scattering of some of these earlier ossuaries and human remains, with new ossuaries (at least eight) again being placed on top of stone coverings and above fragments of earlier deposits in Phase II, the last stage of LCH activity (Milevski 2001, 62–63).

Despite the lack of anthropological data from this burial context there are several striking observations. First, burning activities are not seen in association with every level at Qula. They are instead isolated to the earliest burial phase (IV), which was then deliberately covered (using stone slabs), prior to Phase III deposits being placed. Second, ceramic ossuaries are not found in these earliest levels and are, instead, confined to Phases III and II. This pattern also applies to the rest of the burning activities dating to the Late Chalcolithic discussed in this chapter. Burning activities, at least in the sample of tombs and burials contexts surveyed for this project, are not found in association with burial contexts/phases containing ossuaries. How then, given earlier discussions, might we go about reconstructing practices within Tomb K1 at Qula? Two broad interpretations immediately come to mind.

First is the use of fire within this context as a form of long-term manipulation and interaction with the dead. The disarticulated skeletal material from this tomb would seem to suggest that, in addition to burning, other anthropogenic practices were at play. Although lacking information on the number of individuals and other details, we can hypothesise that the practices leading up to the burning and final deposition of these bones could have included primary burial or excarnation elsewhere, with a selection of bones then being brought and deposited within the tomb, either prior to or after burning activities. Given the possible use of ossuaries as vessels of transformation (e.g. Ilan and Rowan 2019) and see Chapter 3), the lack of these from Phase IV at Qula is intriguing. Perhaps burnt human remains or possibly even the persons whose remains had been burnt were not seen as suitable for deposition within an ossuary. Indeed, the lack of ossuaries from the other Late Chalcolithic contexts discussed here does suggest a degree of hesitation to combine burnt remains with such vessels of transformation. Were burnt remains already regarded as having been altered or adequately manipulated, and therefore, further transformation (via an ossuary) was unnecessary or unwelcome.

A second, although not mutually exclusive, hypothesis involves the use of burning as a closure or sanitisation event. We unfortunately lack the information necessary to assess whether the burning at Qula occurred within the cave or not. If, however, burning did take place *in situ* and, especially given the use of stone slabs to cover earlier deposits, fire could have been a way of marking the end life of this first phase of LCH depositions. The degree of temporal separation between Phases IV and III is difficult to determine. The excavators note that the ossuaries and pottery vessels from Phases IV–II are all characteristic of assemblages from the Chalcolithic period (Milevski 2001, 63); however, we could still be dealing with a temporal gap of days, weeks, months, or longer. If acting as a sanitation or closure event, however, it is worth highlighting that, despite Phase III deposits being again (partially) covered by stone slabs in

preparation for the later Phase III, reason, not required at this stage, burning only being required at the text or even in association with

Located less than 50 kilometres from Akhziv (e.g. Mazar 2001, 201938) move us into the Iron Age. Burial and cremation practices often been drawn between the discussion of this). Despite the evidence for very different funerary

Iron Age inhumations and cremations and southern cemeteries at Akhziv of tomb types, from chamber burials which seem to have been in use (Mazar 2001; Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 165–66). Deposits dominated by cremations, including TC1, as well as incinerations appear to have the use of an open fire, with human and animal remains (Bar-Gal 2018, 166–67).

As already discussed, the burials at the site were of adults and adolescents (0 and 5 years) appear to be largely the cremation cemetery. Urn 8 also contained adult cremations (Urn 4, Urn 8, 168) also contained adult cremations (accidental additions). The no consisted of a deciduous second years of age. The three associated cranial and post-cranial fragments resorbed during replacement of this tooth within the child's life. However, it continues the pattern side those of adults. This, although across the roughly 300 cremations infants generally only found (Bar-Gal 2018, 169–70).

The final case study, Atlit, providing evidence for over and non-adults, only one of burial container. As described

at (4500–550 BCE)

of these earlier ossuaries and (light) again being placed on top of deposits in Phase II, the last

from this burial context there are activities are not seen in association isolated to the earliest burial (using stone slabs), prior to ossuaries are not found in Phases III and II. This pattern dating to the Late Chalcolithic east in the sample of tombs and not found in association with. Now then, given earlier discussions within Tomb K1 at Qula? to mind.

a form of long-term manipulation of skeletal material from on to burning, other anthropological information on the number of use that the practices leading up to these could have included primary deposition of bones then being brought on after burning activities. Given information ((e.g. Ilan and Rowan in Phase IV at Qula is intriguing. the persons whose remains had deposition within an ossuary. Indeed, Chalcolithic contexts discussed here burnt remains with such vessels regarded as having been altered their transformation (via an ossu-

), hypothesis involves the use of unfortunately lack the information at Qula occurred within the cave situ and, especially given the use could have been a way of marking positions. The degree of temporal shift is difficult to determine. The excavators in Phases IV–II are all characterized (Milevski 2001, 63); however, of days, weeks, months, or longer. However, it is worth highlighting that, especially covered by stone slabs in

preparation for the later Phase II deposits, burning activities were, for some reason, not required at this stage. This, in turn, brings us back to the idea of burning only being required at certain points in the life history of a burial context or even in association with particular types of persons or deposits.

Located less than 50 kilometres from one another, the coastal sites of Akhziv (e.g. Mazar 2001, 2013; Smith and Bar-Gal 2018) and Atlit (Johns 1938) move us into the IA. Both provide evidence for contemporary inhumation and cremation practices, emphasising the false dichotomies that have often been drawn between the two practices (see Dixon 2013 for an excellent discussion of this). Despite their relative proximity, however, they also provide evidence for very different funerary and mortuary behaviours.

IA inhumations and cremations are documented from both the northern and southern cemeteries at Akhziv. The Southern Cemetery includes a range of tomb types, from chamber and cist tombs, to rock-shaft tombs, many of which seem to have been in use over generations, if not hundreds of years (Mazar 2001; Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 164–65). Scattered and fragmentary burnt human and animal bones were found from within some of the inhumation tombs, including TC1, as well as four looted shaft tombs (Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 165–66). Depositions in the Northern Cemetery, in contrast, are dominated by cremations, the majority of which were interred in urns. Incinerations appear to have been carried out relatively soon after death, via the use of an open fire, with unguents potentially acting as accelerants (Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 166–67).

As already discussed, the vast majority of inhumations and cremations at the site were of adults and adolescents; younger children and infants (between 0 and 5 years) appear to be largely absent from both cemeteries, but particularly the cremation cemetery. Meanwhile, the handful of urns containing non-adult remains (Urn 4, Urn 8 and Urn 9) studied by Smith and Bar-Gal (2018, 168) also contained adult cremains, and some non-adults may have even been accidental additions. The non-adult remains from Urn 9, for example, consisted of a deciduous second molar (with complete roots) of a child c. 6–9 years of age. The three associated adults, in contrast, were represented by both cranial and post-cranial fragments. As the roots of deciduous teeth are partly resorbed during replacement by permanent teeth (Nikita 2017, 58), the appearance of this tooth within the cremated urn does not appear to have been due to loss during the child's life. Whether an accidental or deliberate inclusion, however, it continues the pattern of non-adult remains only being present alongside those of adults. This, although not visible at every site, is a common trend across the roughly 300 cremations from the Levantine IA, with children and infants generally only found in association with adult depositions (Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 169–70).

The final case study, Atlit (Johns 1938), goes completely against this trend, providing evidence for over 20 individual cremations, including both adults and non-adults, only one of which appears to have been deposited within a burial container. As described above, bodies appear to have been burnt in situ

(within the burial context), with body positioning and orientation still detectable (Johns 1938, 124–25). Out of the 18 contexts recorded from this site, just over 30% included non-adult remains (with non-adults accounting for just under 40% of the deceased), in contrast to the 6% frequency of non-adults at Akhziv (Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 169). Another notable difference is the presence of isolated or discrete child cremations. None of the non-adult cremations, at least based on examples where age could be established, appear to have been directly associated with cremated adults. Even when relatively close spatial relationships could be detected, these appear to have been between non-adults, rather than non-adults and adults. Burials XI a-c, for example, were of three children. The first, an "... incinerated, small child", was associated with a bronze earring, the second (XIb), also cremated but at a deeper level, was associated with two bottles, a goblet, amphoriskos and bowl, while the third (XIc) was found close to XIb, but in a discrete patch of burnt sand (Johns 1938, 146–47).

Differences in associated material culture are also worth noting. Much of the pottery at Atlit appears to have been deliberately fragmented, possibly scattered around or between several cremation areas (Dixon 2013, 528; Johns 1938, 125). In addition, alongside common vessels such as bowls, jugs, jars, and bottles, the presence of lamps is particularly noteworthy. Despite their association with burning activities, lamps are not commonly associated with IA cremation deposits, although they are a common feature of IA mortuary deposits more generally (see Figure 5.3). Lamps at Atlit were found in association with five out of the 18 cremation deposits (Burials I, IVb, VII, VIII, IX (Johns 1938, 139–45)), although never with remains identified as non-adults. When taken together, these patterns suggest that different types of mortuary and funerary activities were potentially taking place at Atlit. Libation and consumption activities in and around funeral pyres may have been followed by the deliberate fragmentation and deposition of the containers used for these events. The differential distribution of lamps, meanwhile, may suggest that despite non-adults being afforded similar mortuary treatments to adults, that funerary behaviours and practices were still partly age-dependent, or at least shaped by the different intersecting identities of the dead and the living.

How then might we interpret the differential evidence from these two sites? As emphasised by Dixon (2013, 540), no clearly distinctive or ethnically discrete mortuary practice seems to be visible within this region (Phoenicia) during the IA I–II. Instead, we appear to be dealing with local traditions which, rather than expressing shared group characteristics, communicated different aspects of identity and belief. At Akhziv, and the majority of sites providing evidence for cremation, non-adults appear to have been excluded from these practices and zones of burial/deposition. As I will return to in the next chapter, the visibility of non-adults and particularly very young children and infants varies significantly across time within this region. The IA, however, stands as a period during which representation, via all forms of mortuary practice, is

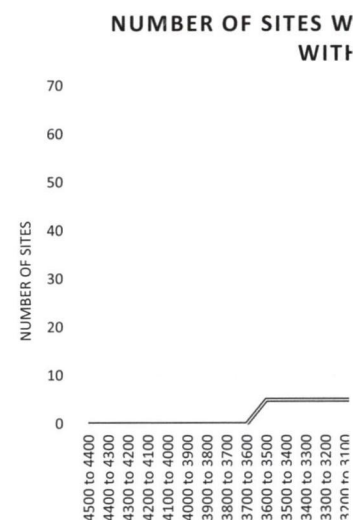


Figure 5.3 The number of sites with use of lamps in mortuary deposits, not the number of lamps by site. The number of sites with lamps by site is unclear have also been

relatively low. Explanations for these practices, barring infants and high levels of infant mortality within society. The high costs of lamps as a further way of explaining the differential distribution (Bar-Gal 2018, 170), although the differential practices showcase mortuary practices (from 'very little' to 'extremely

Returning to the theme of cremation, practices associated with cremations would be devalued in death. Non-adults may not have been appropriate for the process of rapid transformation and infants may not have received a rite or presumed proximity to a transformation at death, or particular modes of death or however, may have not appeared to adults and non-adults at Atlit and expression was of greater

ant (4500–550 BCE)

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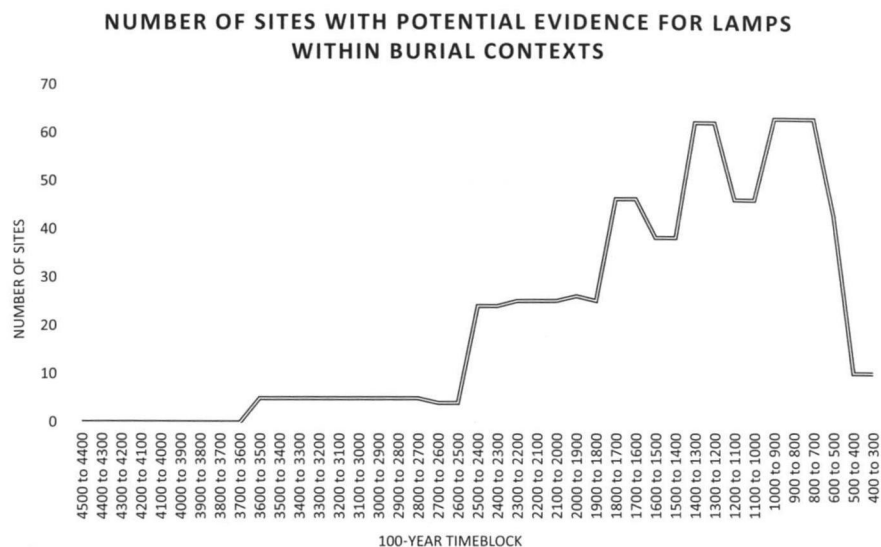


Figure 5.3 The number of sites by 100-year time-block that provides evidence for the use of lamps in mortuary contexts. Note that this graph indicates the numbers of sites, not the number of burial contexts containing lamps or the total number of lamps by period. As such, sites where the number of lamps is unclear have also been included.

relatively low. Explanations for this have commonly centred on exclusionary practices, barring infants and young children from full funerary rites due to the high levels of infant mortality, as well as their status, role and importance within society. The high costs and public nature of cremation have been used as a further way of explaining their exclusion (e.g. McGeorge 2013; Smith and Bar-Gal 2018, 170), although, as Dixon (2013, 553), has demonstrated, IA practices showcase mortuary behaviours that vary significantly in expenditure (from ‘very little’ to ‘extremely high’).

Returning to the theme of this chapter, the evocative visual displays associated with cremations would certainly fit this explanatory framework. If non-adults were devalued in death, the relative expense or visibility of such practices may not have been appropriate. On the other hand, if we see cremation as process of rapid transformation, non-adults, and particularly young children and infants may not have required such procedures. Their lack of life biography or presumed proximity to the dead/gods may have simply not necessitated a transformation at death, unless dictated by particular circumstances (e.g. particular modes of death or relationships). Such practices and associations, however, may have not applied everywhere. The similar treatment of both adults and non-adults at Atlit, perhaps, suggests that shared group identity and expression was of greater relevance than age at this site.

Concluding Remarks

As this chapter has highlighted, cremation is not one, but many practices (e.g. Oestigaard 2013, 507–8). From a process linked to the continued interaction and manipulation of and with the dead, an act of closure or sanitation to a visual, sensorial display, or way of speeding up decomposition, cremation is as varied and messy as the vocabulary used to describe it. Although evidence for cremation from the Levant and wider Western Asia becomes much more prolific with the turn of the first millennium BCE, burning activities were not ‘foreign’ to this region. Nor do they seem to be associated with discrete and easily defined identity groups. Instead, as with inhumation, the choice of how, where, and when to incinerate seems to have been shaped by a multitude of factors. With some of the discussions, broad temporal themes, and patterns from both this and preceding chapters in mind, I now want to delve further into a discussion of the different groups and identities we see (and do not see) represented in these cremation practices and, more broadly, the mortuary record as a whole.

Notes

- 1 For example compare the use of ‘fires/campfires’ in (Nabulsi 2019, 33) with ‘burning events’ used by (Evans, Faulkner, and Asmussen 2022) and the term ‘cremation area’ (Grzegorska 2020, 74), all used in reference to the evidence for burning activities within tombs at Jericho.
- 2 For more details on this topic see Croucher (2012, 274–81); Felli (2017, 81); Grzegorska (2020, 62–66).
- 3 or perhaps more accurately burning activities.
- 4 Similar patterns may be present in the earlier EB IB, Tomb G1 (Ortner and Frohlich 2008, 125, 135).
- 5 The stratigraphy of the cave (archaeological layers included both EB IV and MB I ceramics) unfortunately does not allow for a separation between the different phases.
- 6 The remains of both adults (biologically male and female) and non-adults appear to have been burnt (and un-burnt), allowing us to rule out age/biological sex-dependent practices.
- 7 Similar practices have also been suggested at the Royal Tombs of Ur (Baadsgaard et al. 2011), as well as the later Neo-Assyrian queenly burials at Nimrud (Schultz and Kunter 1998, 95, 119).
- 8 McKinley (2008, 2013, 157–58, 160), based on experimental cremations, suggests that the main structure of a pyre burns down after c. 2 hours, with oxidation of most/all of the bone and soft tissues occurring by 6–7 hours. This is in contrast to a modern temperature-controlled cremator, where cremation takes around 1.5 hours.

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- not one, but many practices (e.g. led to the continued interaction of closure or sanitation to a decomposition, cremation is ascribed to it. Although evidence for Asia becomes much more pronounced, burning activities were not 'forbidden' associated with discrete and easily identifiable, the choice of how, where, shaped by a multitude of factors. themes, and patterns from both to delve further into a discussion (and do not see) represented the mortuary record as a whole.
- in (Nabulsi 2019, 33) with 'burning' (2022) and the term 'cremation area' the evidence for burning activities (2012, 274–81); Felli (2017, 81);
- IB, Tomb G1 (Ortner and Frohlich
- ers included both EB IV and MB I variation between the different phases. and female) and non-adults appear to rule out age/biological sex-depend-
- the Royal Tombs of Ur (Baadsgaard recently burials at Nimrud (Schultz and
- n experimental cremations, suggests er c. 2 hours, with oxidation of most/ hours. This is in contrast to a modernation takes around 1.5 hours.
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6 Biology and S

With the exception of a few (2001; Croucher 2008; Helle 2008), archaeology in Western Asia and the East have, until relatively recently, focused on gender and sexuality, as well as on the histories, and intersectionality of these. Considered value judgements, based on the past are not unusual, even within the field. To ask and approaches we use are not unusual. research on age and identity, and the passage of time are crucial (e.g. Artin 2008; Faerman and Pearson 2015; W

Drawing upon some of the material in this chapter examines the existing archaeological record. Information on the element of mortuary and funerary practices is regarded. As scholars have started to move beyond binary or strictly categorised understandings of patterns of social differentiation, these assessments, exploring the biological sex, as well as a variety of other aspects of the mortuary sphere.

Age and Ageing: The Role of t

In a recent seminar taught at the University of Oxford, a basic search for articles from the 1980s to the 2010s on children and childhood within southern and 'Near Eastern' archaeology produced only a small handful of articles, many sensational, discussing topics