

ARCH B336: Mortuary Archaeology in the 21st Century: Ethical Engagement

**ARCH B336: Mortuary Archaeology in the 21st Century:
Ethical Engagement**

Friday 9:10 AM-12:00 PM, Old Library 223

Instructor: Dr Jennie Bradbury (jbradbury@brynmawr.edu)

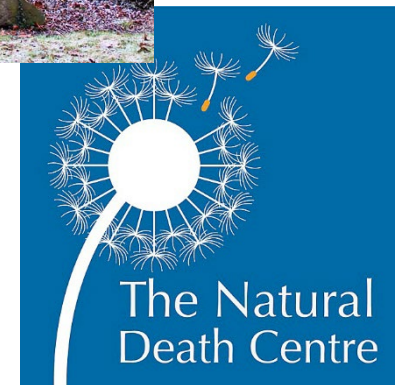
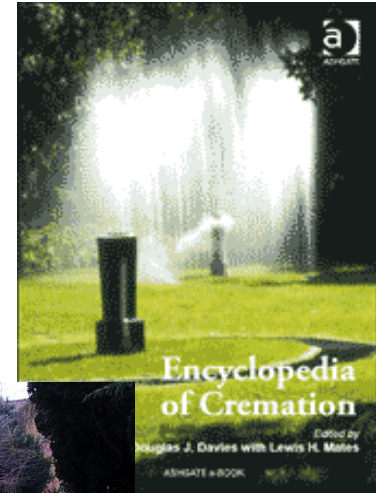
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- I will be showing images of human remains in almost every class, as and when necessary. These might include photographs, plans etc.,
- Topics people want to discuss and topics people want to avoid?



Different treatments and rituals within contemporary USA/Europe

- Cremation vs. Inhumation
- Resomation (Alkaline Hydrolysis-an automated, flameless cremation)
- Natural Burial (burying in a way that does not inhibit decomposition)
- Open vs. Closed Caskets/Coffins
- Development of Death Centres
- Religious vs. Secular or Humanist funerals
- “Wakes” vs. “Funerals”



Why is death and burial so interesting?

- Death as the universal “equalizer”; everyone will die.
- Individual perceptions and approaches towards death can change throughout our life span.
- Mortality can be perplexing, fear inducing, intriguing, enlightening.

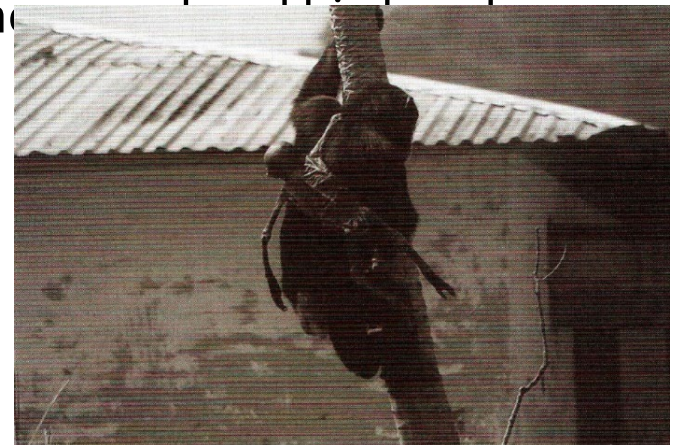
Where does it all start...

“ It was obvious that the baby was very ill indeed. All his four limbs hung limply down and he screamed almost every time his mother took a step. When Olly sat down, very carefully arranging his legs so as not to crush them, Gilka went and sat close to her mother and stared at the infant...”

“Gilka, who had followed her mother, stared again at her small sibling, and then mother and daughter began to groom each other...”

“...when Olly left the tree afterwards he made no sound and lolled back as limply as his arms and legs.”

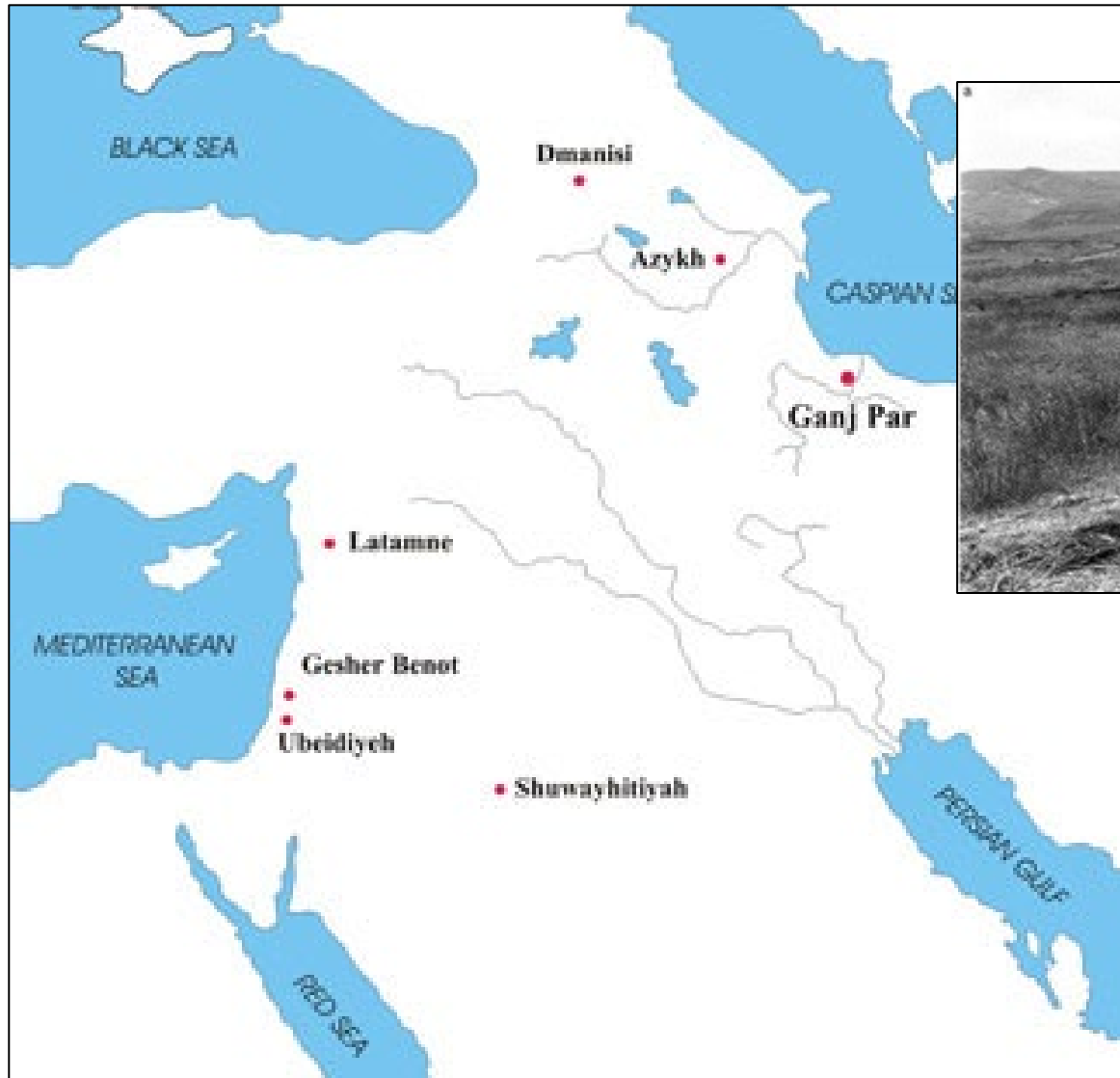
(Goodall 1971, quoted in Pettit 2012)



- Links between us and chimpanzees?
- Grief and Sorrow, Sympathy, Comfort and attempts to deal with death?
- At what point in our evolution did responses to death become “culturally meaningful” and what point during our history did a ‘sense’ of death and the presence of something beyond it develop?

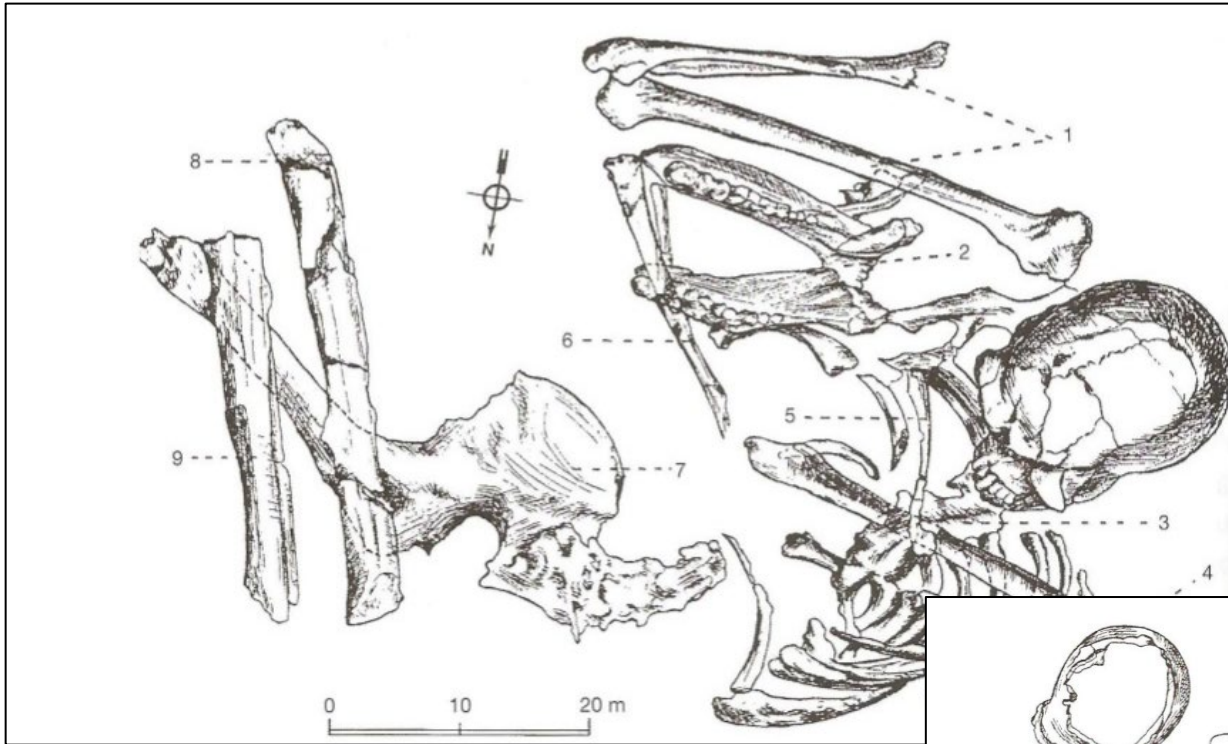
“...not a random reaction; always it is meaningful and expressive.” (Metcalf and Huntington 1991)

Palaeolithic Burial Practices in Western Asia



Ubeidiyeh (Israel)-
Lower Palaeolithic

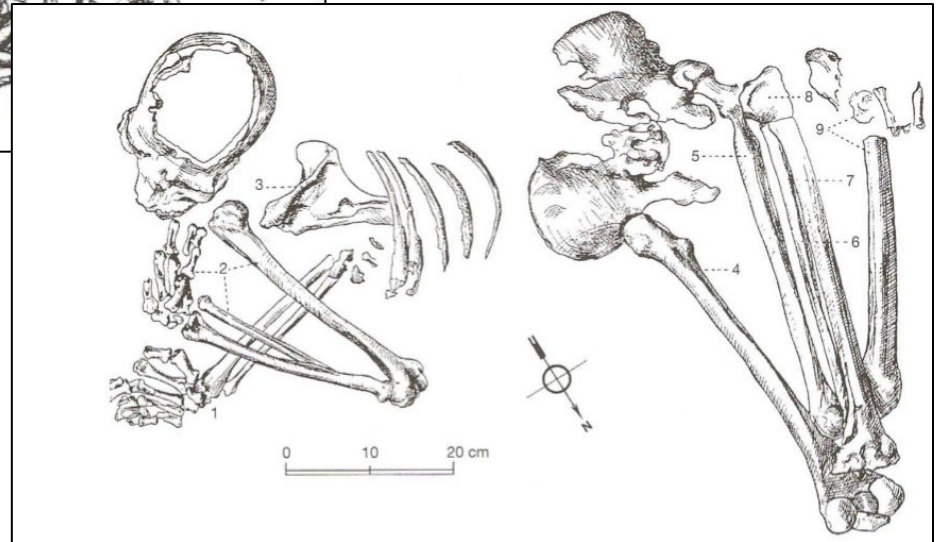
Middle Palaeolithic Burial Practices



- Burial Position
- Grave Goods?

Skhul IV and V (McCown and Keith 1939)

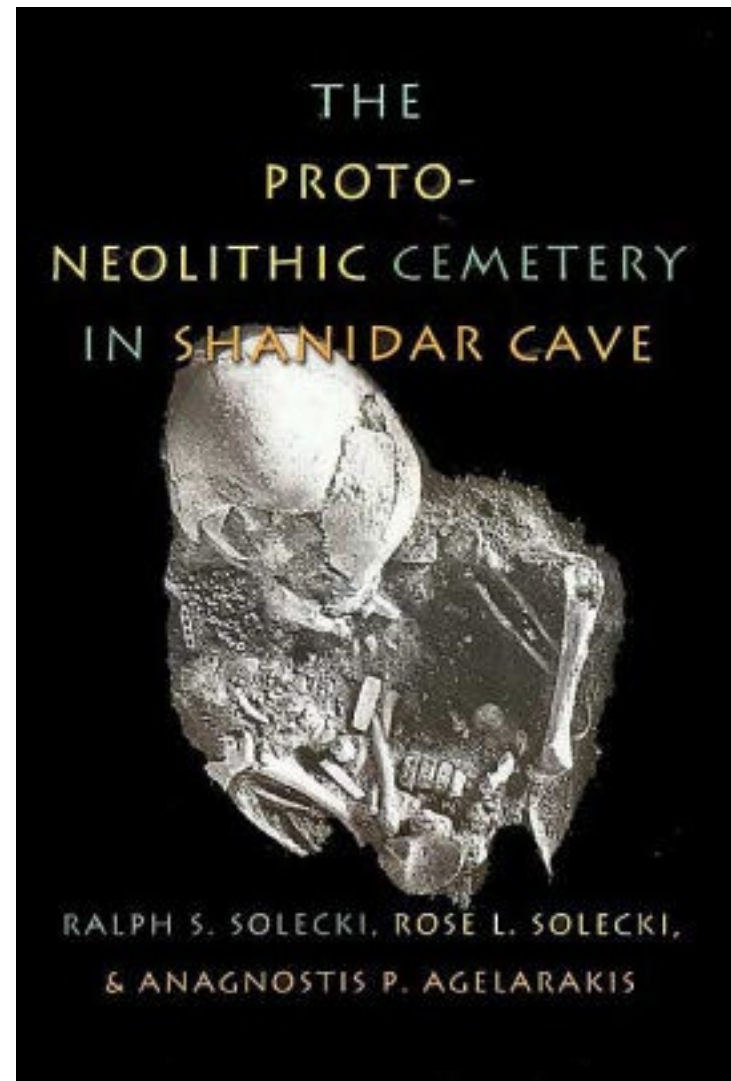
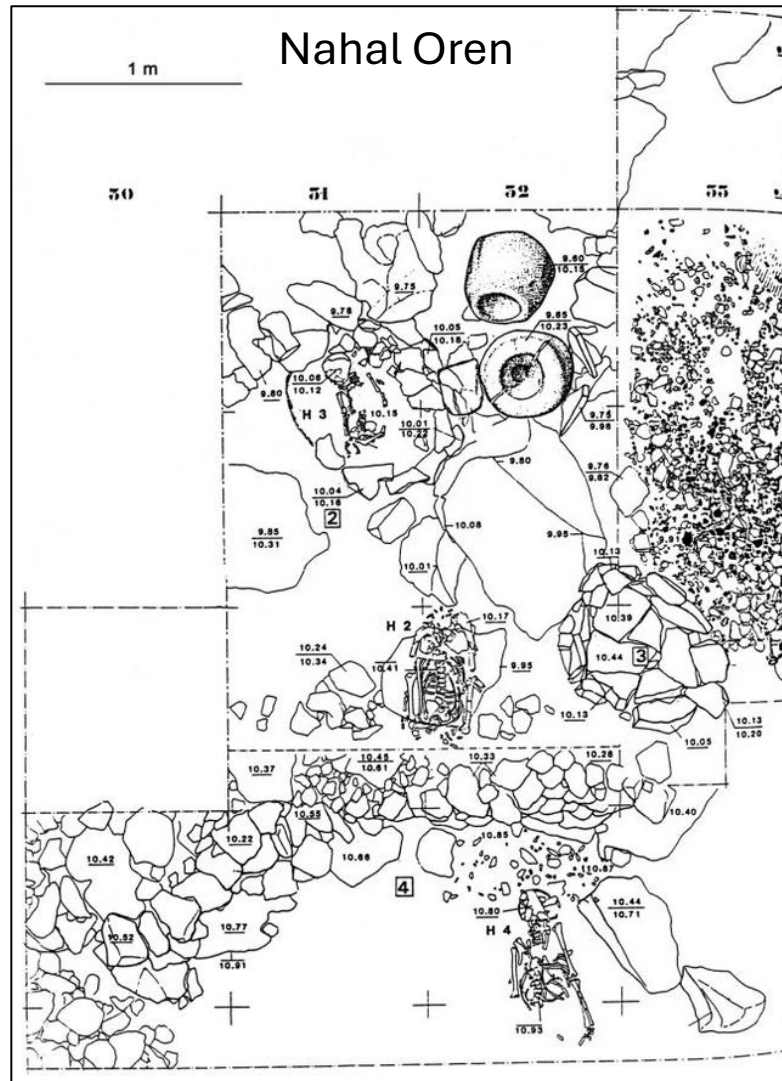
0.07 skeletons per 100 years (Nadel 1995)



Skhul and Qafzeh: Intentional Human burials

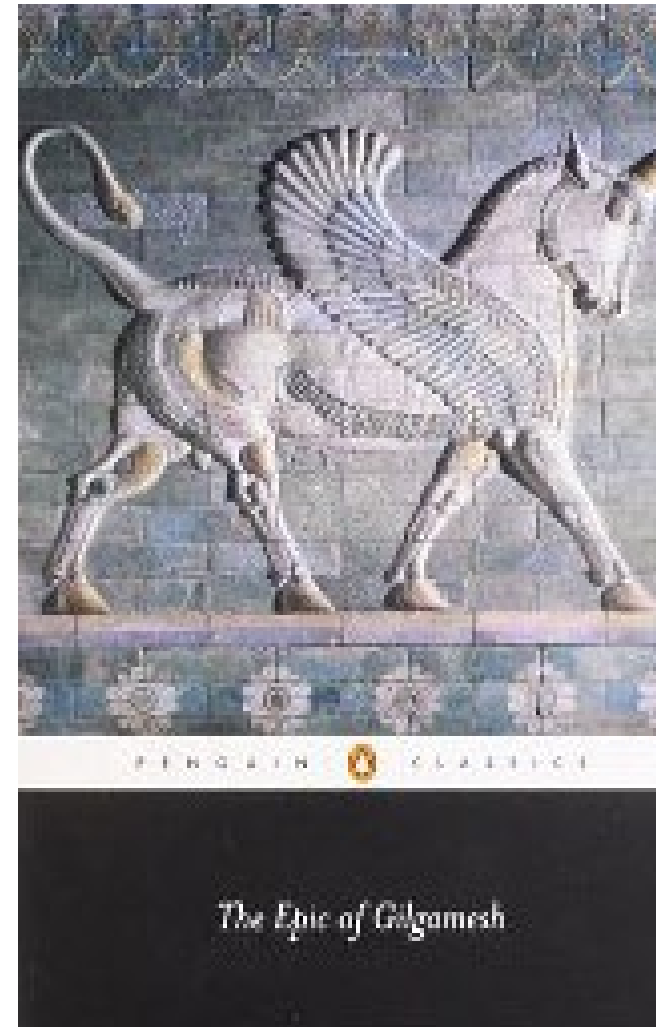


Epipalaeolithic/Natufian Period



The Archaeology of Death

- “Death Is Not the End’: Tracing the Manipulation of Bodies...” (Schoep and Tomkins 2016, title)
- Epic of Gilgamesh, “They appointed death for mankind...” (Old Babylonian version X iii (tr. Dalley 1989: 150)
- “Ancient Greece, with its great regional and social diversity, provides a unique context for exploring how the expression of social, cultural, and political complexities were expressed or reflected in death... but most work has focused on the documentation and publication of specific sites tombs or specific types of material, including tombs, tombstones, and certain categories of grave goods” (Dimakis and Dijkstra 2020: 1)
- “There is continuity in our funerary rituals and traditions extending back to the ancient Near East.”(Kennedy 1987: 227)



Go as you please...

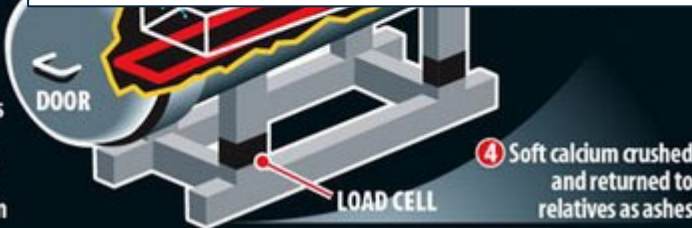


“Burial relations do not reflect actual social relations...” (Pollock 1992)

1 Body is placed in Resomator, which automatically crushes body by load cells

2 Correct amount of water and alkali is added and vessel is heated to 150°C

3 After three hours body is reduced to liquid and soft calcium



<http://www.goodfuneralguide.co.uk/category/resomation>

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MEGIDDO IV The 1998 - 2002 Seasons

ISRAEL
FINKELSTEIN

DAVID
USSISHKIN

BARUCH
HALPERN



Monograph Series 24

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The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices

David Ben-Shlomo

A new examination of the results of the excavations by Moshe Dothan at the cemetery of Azor (1958, 1960) is presented, indicating a variability in burial practices in a relatively small area. The different types of burials are discussed as well as the finds from the graves, which date to the late Iron I and Iron IIA. The variability of burial customs is evaluated in relation to the quantity and character of burial goods, and possible cultural, ethnic and socio-economic differences within the population. While other evidence on late Iron I-IIA burial customs is quite limited in the southern Levant, similar phenomena appear in somewhat earlier cemeteries as at Tell es-Sa'idiyah. Thus, at Azor a continuation of Late Bronze II burial customs may be combined with certain components of Philistine material culture.

Keywords: Southern-Levant, Azor, Iron Age, burial customs, cemetery

Questions:

- How might we explain some of the variations in the ways the human remains are being treated?
- Can you reflect on your own biases in interpreting these remains? Are there differing viewpoints within your group?
- Does the quote by **Metcalf and Huntington** apply in all cases here?

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ARCH 336

- Assignment 1: Contribution to discussion posts and class conversations - 5% - **DUE Ongoing, brief questions, comments and notes should be added to the shared document by 11.59pm on the Thursday before each class.**
- Assignment 2: Pitch for Popular Article submission (50-word headline and 100-word main points) - 15% - **DUE Friday September 25th, 11.59pm.**
- Assignment 3: Popular Article (1000-1500 words, not including figure captions) - 15% - **DUE Friday October 9th, 11.59pm.**
- Assignment 4: Research Proposal and bibliography (Short, 1-page research proposal presenting your chosen research topic for your final presentation and 3-page research bibliography outlining the articles/books/chapters and resources you intend to consult for your presentation and final paper with very brief annotations (1-2 sentences per entry) explaining why you have chosen these resources) - 15% - **DUE Friday October 30th, 11.59pm.**
- Assignment 5: Final presentations (short final presentations on your chosen research topic to be delivered in class) - 20% - **DUE in class Friday December 4th AND December 11th.**
- Assignment 6: Final Research Paper (15-18 pages) - 30% - **DUE December 18th, 12.30pm.**

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ARCH 536

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- Brief comments, questions or notes.
 - Reminders for you and for me.
 - Terms/ideas/definitions that are unclear.
 - Topics you would like to discuss more.

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What the archaeological record reveals about epidemics throughout history – and the human response to them

Published: June 15, 2020 8:23am EDT

Iraq's archaeological discoveries have shaped understanding of human civilisation – but its scientists have been sidelined

Published: September 2, 2026 11:54am EDT

Revolutionary War battlefields often romanticize combat, but this mass grave just outside Philadelphia shows the violence soldiers actually experienced

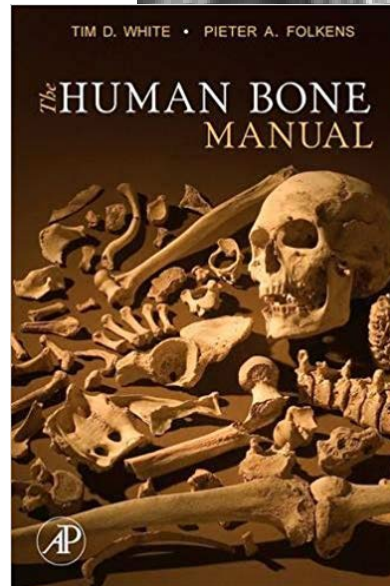
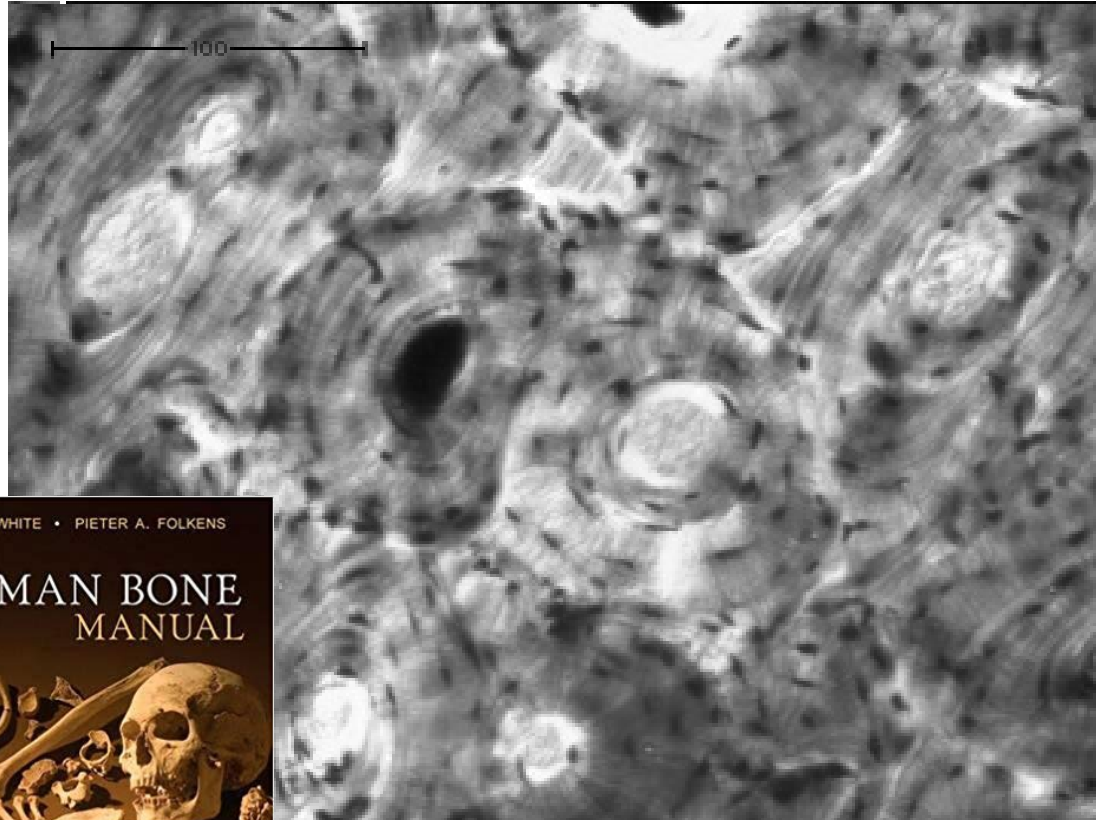
Published: August 28, 2026 8:17am EDT

Identifying and interpreting human remains in the archaeological record

“One of the first questions to be asked of any bone is whether it is, in fact, human at all” (Chamberlain 1994: 7)

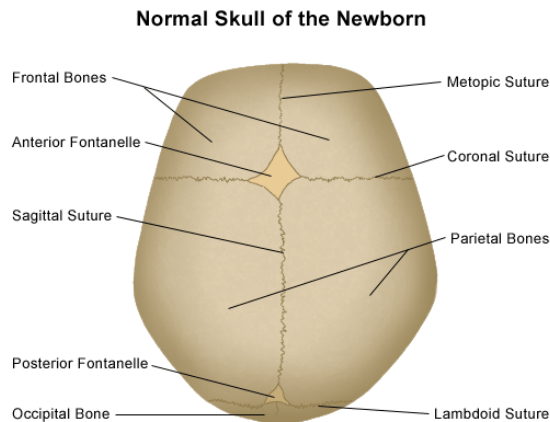
Identifying Skeletal Remains

- Shape
- Size
- Texture
- Density
- Microscopy



Sexing and Ageing Individuals

- Density, size and form of bones
- Fusing
- Teeth and Dental Development



Comparing Male and Female

TABLE 8.1

Comparison of Female and Male Pelvises

POINT OF COMPARISON	FEMALE	MALE
General structure	Light and thin.	Heavy and thick.
Pelvic brim (inlet)	Shallow.	Deep.
Pelvic brim (inlet)	Larger and more oval.	Smaller and heart-shaped.
Acetabulum	Small and faces anteriorly.	Large and faces laterally.
Obturator foramen	Oval.	Round.
Pubic arch	Greater than 90° angle.	Less than 90° angle.

TABLE 8.1 CONTINUES

Table 08.01a Tortora - PAP 12/e
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