

How to Cope with Death: Mourning and Funerary Practices in the Ancient Near East

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edited by
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PREFACE

I am sincerely pleased to present the Proceedings of the workshop held at the University of Florence on December 5th-6th 2013, “How to Cope with Death. Mourning and Funerary Practices in the Ancient Near East” and host it as the 5th issue in the series *Ricerche di Archeologia del Vicino Oriente*.

The workshop was organized by Candida Felli in the framework of a research project financed by the Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca (PRIN 2009). It was devoted to discussing the mourning rites performed *post mortem* in particular periods and areas, and was carefully planned by Candida who assessed the main issues for the contributors aiming to pursue a coherent trajectory of analysis and let the debate flow among the participants with their different perspectives and disciplines.

This workshop was not, in fact, an occasional event bringing together specialists in funerary archaeology, but was instead conceived as a crucial step in a personal route of the research which Candida Felli has undertaken for many years with coherence and commitment, and on which she has produced a doctoral dissertation, published in the volume *Dopo la Morte* (Florence 2015). This volume, despite its accurate and in-depth examination of data and the proposed innovative approach, did not exhaust her curiosity and queries on the subject, but rather stimulated new questions opening the way for further investigations. A new focus on rituals as repeated performances and related practices, and the presence of recent data, encouraged her to promote a workshop as a joint effort among scholars for confronting different approaches and various perspectives. It is now clear that the physical burying of the corpse of the dead in a distinct space and in a definite moment was not a final act; it was more often followed by various spatial and temporal activities that had to provide the dead and the living, ancestors and successors with a perennial link and eventually mutual protection. There is a significant trajectory after the death which is composed of rites carried out in and outside the burials which were destined to create a familial and community linkage that extended beyond death.

It is certainly a demanding task to collect consistent textual and archaeological data from the Syrian Bronze Age sources concerning mourning rites and the *post mortem* performances, especially when we confront them with the richer and more vivid data offered by ethnological studies. However, the many contributions in this volume succeed in presenting new evaluations as well as criticisms of this complex and definitely fascinating subject. Despite a certain variety of situations reflecting heterogeneous chronological realities and specific cases, a quite homogeneous funerary, ideological and practical structure of post mortem rites seems to emerge from the discussion of the workshop: corpses were manipulated, treated after time, and eventually moved to spaces either adjacent to or distant

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from the first burial; secondary burials integrated separated corpses in common spaces, and these were also visible, exposed and the object of reiterated rites of remembrance. We ascribe these different cases to the cult of the ancestors and the ideology of identity in a broad term definition, but in fact they testify to a quite generalized need not to cut the threads that linked the members of the family and community after a death. Death was a terminal moment, but the mourning, manipulation and displacement of corpses contributed to maintaining a spiritual and even physical contact between the living and the dead, consequently providing consolation for the loss, shortening the distance from the dead, and relieving the angst of nothingness.

The contributions in this volume are the result of different approaches and present various interpretations which, however, combine in showing the complexity and variety of behaviours in the lengthy Near-Eastern trajectory of post mortem mourning rituals. To the participants of the workshop and the present volume goes my sincere gratitude for their enthusiastic involvement in the debate, and to Candida for her ability to encourage and stimulate discussions on often difficult points. In my memory of the often vivid debates which followed the presentations, the clarity of mind and concreteness of Edgar Peltenburg stand out: we all miss him, but his contribution in this volume will help us to revive his memory.

Stefania Mazzoni

REMARKS ON ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY AND DEATH IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

ALFONSO ARCHI - ROMA

1. *Concerning the role of ethnoarchaeology*

History in the ancient world used anthropology from its very birth, as we see with two outstanding historians, Herodotus and Thukydides. In our age, several scholars (starting from the 19th century) have applied ethnological comparisons in classical studies, although convinced that they were concerned with ‘*advanced* societies’, while maintaining that the object of anthropology was, presumably, the study of ‘*lower* cultures’. This obsolet terminology clashes today with political correctness, but may still continue at a subliminal level. Religious studies, instead, generally benefit from an anthropological approach, excepting cases of antiquarian research. M. Finley, who used anthropological methodology in analyzing the concept of gift in presenting his *The World of Odysseus*, has however expressed the caveat that “a dialogue is useful in so far, as it is useful. Because anthropology illuminates one period (or one aspect) of the Classical world, it does not automatically follows that it also illuminates all other periods (or aspects)”¹.

Relations between Archaeology and Anthropology are rather recent, but – starting with Processual Archaeology – much more intense. It was the merit of L. R. Binford to have used sytematically cross-cultural data in relating mortuary variability to social complexity. “The New Archaeology aimed to gather ethnographic data and frame questions within the hypothetical-deductive reasoning of a positivist philosophy of science”². Criticisms of the New Archaeology were, however, concerned with the fact that “the proponents [of this methodolgy] have been looking for the wrong rules, focusing on *what* people did rather than *why* they did it”. Moreover, even New Archaeology could not escape the all-pervading terroristic political correctness, since: “terms such as ‘simple’ and ‘complex’ carry connotations of previous racist schemes of ‘savage’ and ‘civilized’ and have been judged to be no longer morally acceptable for distinguishing between contemporary societies”³.

The post-processual *cognitive* school has “the aim to understand the contextual workings of material culture symbolism within particular societies, to understand how that material culture might fit into or be used to constitute ideological strategies of power and domination/resistance”⁴. Therefore, “the role of ethnoarchaeology is *not to fill* the ancient and prehistoric past with possibilities derived from other people’s present but to open up

¹ “Peculiar features in Spartan life that appear to be illuminated by anthropology, were, by classical period, fossilized rites which had lost their original function (and which Spartans themselves no longer understood”, FINLEY 1986, pp. 116-117. For the gift in the *Odyssey*, see FINLEY 1954, pp. 120-123.

² PARKER PERSON 1999, p. 34.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

COPING WITH DEATH ACCORDING TO THE “ELEGY ON THE DEATH OF NANNĀ”¹

ANNE LÖHNERT - MUNICH

Clear indications of actual funerary and burial rites are rare within the Sumerian literary text corpus, and certainly “The Death of Urnamma” and “Gilgameš’s Death” rank among the most prominent ones.² While these compositions concern the death of (legendary) kings, two other texts highlight the immediate reactions to the death of one individual. These are the two so-called “Pushkin Elegies”. The two texts focus on the man Ludiĝira and on his own and his family’s handling of the death of Ludiĝira’s father Nannā and of the death of Ludiĝira’s bride Nawirtum.

The designation “Pushkin Elegies” stems from the major manuscript with museum number G.1.2.b.1725, a tablet of unknown origin housed at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. This tablet contains the complete texts of the two “Elegies”, and it was published in a seminal treatment by Kramer in 1960.³ While the “Elegy on the Death of Nannā”, also dubbed “First Pushkin Elegy”, counts 112 lines, the “Elegy on the Death of Nawirtum” (“Second Pushkin Elegy”) is with its 66 lines almost half as long. The “Elegy on the Death of Nawirtum” is only known from the tablet in the Pushkin Museum, the “Elegy on the Death of Nannā” survives in seven manuscripts, of which five were published by Sjöberg (1983) and one by Peterson (2009). The transliteration and translation of both “Elegies” were also incorporated in the “Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature” (ETCSL) as nos. 5.5.2 (“Elegy on the Death of Nannaya”) and 5.5.3 (“Elegy on the Death of Nawirtum”).

The exact archaeological contexts of all manuscripts escape us for the most part, even though it is clear that at least four manuscripts stem from Nippur, and one can be connected to a scribal school-context.⁴

Grammatical features and the existence of numerous Akkadian glosses suggest that the texts must have been written down sometime during the later Old Babylonian period (c. 1800-1600 BCE).⁵

¹ I want to express my deep gratitude to the organizer of this workshop, Candida Felli, not only for inviting me to this excellent and stimulating workshop but also for suggesting the discussion of the “Pushkin Elegies” – these two interesting and underappreciated texts would otherwise have escaped my attention. I also wish to thank Charles Steitler for correcting my English of the written version of this paper.

² On the “Death of Urnamma” see FLÜCKIGER-HAWKER 1999, pp. 85-182; MEYER 2000; ETCSL 2.4.1.1, on the “Death of Gilgameš” see CAVIGNEAUX and AL-RAWI 2000; ETCSL 1.8.1.3.

³ KRAMER 1960a.

⁴ UM 55-21-68 is the most obvious evidence for a school-context as this tablet is in lentil format (ms. C in SJÖBERG 1983; see already KRAMER 1960a, pp. 50-51); note however that this tablet has only line 20 of the “Elegy on the Death of Nannā”.

⁵ See already KRAMER 1960a, p. 48; for Akkadian glosses as typical features in Old Babylonian texts see WILCKE 2000, pp. 38-39.

MOURNING AND LAMENT IN ANCIENT EGYPT¹

ANDREA KUCHARÉK - HEIDELBERG

Introduction

Thinking about ancient Egyptian funerary customs what comes to mind is the huge effort that went into making a deceased's afterlife worthwhile. The archaeological, pictorial and textual evidence for such rites and customs is simply overwhelming – apart from decorated and inscribed tombs and tomb equipment there are stelae and statues, not to mention the countless funerary papyri inscribed with the *Book of the Dead* or, later on, the *Books of Breathing* or the *Book of Traversing Eternity*. Thus it is almost understandable that the study of the bereaved and *their* customs has been rather neglected for a long time. The sources concerning these, while still abundant, are much scarcer than the ones concerning the afterlife of the deceased. Also, some of them are difficult to detect as they crop up in unexpected contexts. Perhaps, too, grief and lament haven't appealed to scholars as much as other subjects.²

While there is a large number of texts, such as laments or more or less descriptive texts, the bulk of the testimony on Egyptian mourning and lament is pictorial.³ The most important source are the funerary procession scenes on the walls of tomb chapels, mainly dating to the New Kingdom.⁴ Closely related, but usually less detailed are the vignettes to the first chapter of the *Book of the Dead* which date from the New Kingdom to the Ptolemaic period.⁵ Apart from these main sources there are scenes on stelae as well as on coffins, again mainly dating to the New Kingdom, roughly the 2nd half of the 2nd millennium BC.⁶

While we are dealing here with mourning and lament as a cultural phenomenon, they are based on an emotion, grief. Grief, the intense emotional reaction to the experience of loss, is by many held to be universal. Its forms of expression or repression, however, are various. The founder of the modern theory of loss, John Bowlby, wrote: "Social custom differs enormously. Human response stays much the same" which I think is correct.⁷

I want to begin with a few remarks on method and terminology concerning the inter-

¹ This paper is based on an ongoing study on ancient Egyptian mourning customs that from 2009-2011 was supported by a Gerda Henkel Foundation research fellowship.

² The only comprehensive study of ancient Egyptian laments yet was published more than 70 years ago (LÜDDECKENS 1943). A comparative study of ancient and modern Egyptian mourning customs is EL-SHOUMI 2004. See also the overview by VOLOKHINE 2008.

³ Cf. WERBROUCK 1938.

⁴ For the Ramesside period see BARTHELMESS 1992. See also the study by TAWFIK 2008.

⁵ For these see *ibidem*.

⁶ There are no comprehensive studies on mourning scenes on either stelae or coffins. A paper on the latter is being prepared by the present author for the proceedings of the 2014 colloquium «Ancient Egyptian Coffins: craft traditions and functionality» at the British Museum.

⁷ BOWLBY 1998, p. 126.

MOURNING AND FUNERARY PRACTICES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: AN ESSAY TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE TEXTUAL AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

CANDIDA FELLI - FIRENZE

Mourning was certainly a crucial part of the ritual cycle revolving around death in the Ancient Near East, as we learn from the available textual evidence.¹ However, as noted by Glenn Schwartz in a recent article commenting upon the Early Bronze Age Umm el-Marra burial complex, “not discernible from the archaeological record is information on such issues as prayers or recitations enacted, [...] how long the ceremonies lasted, and who attended the rituals. Similarly elusive are sensory effects like the wailing of mourners [...], the performance of music, screams of sacrificed animals, and the stench of dead bodies”.² All this is indisputably true: as already mentioned in the introduction to this volume, the imbalance among documentary sources with which scholars investigating death have to deal has caused mourning rites to be the subject almost exclusively of philological studies, separating them from burials although the two are in fact strictly connected. Nonetheless, instead of leaving all that out of our agenda and concentrating only on the material side of the question, it is the point of this paper to look at some of the archaeological evidence in a different way, by exploiting the advantage of the existence of texts, and gaining some insights on those practices as well. I shall experiment with the heuristic potential of burial finds in this way: I will analyze figurative artefacts found in graves which, in the light of textual information on mourning practices and with the support of comparisons with acknowledged visual attestations of the latter from other areas as well (*e.g.* Egypt), may be interpreted as unrecognized, fixed memories of ceremonies occurring in funerary rites. The focus of this paper will be Northwestern Syria during the centuries between the middle of the third and the middle of the second millennium BC. I will first summarize the textual evidence available on this topic and then move to graves and artefacts. The aim of this paper is not to provide answers but to ask questions which can help in retrieving the meaning and purpose of the presence of these objects within the grave.

Texts

I shall concentrate on the evidence from second millennium Mari, Syria, though exploiting both earlier and later materials as additional information. Although there is no clear reference in these texts to anything, such as a journey,³ which could correspond to the liminal state of the dead acknowledged by anthropologists as the underlying concep-

¹ FELLI 2015a, pp. 42-62 with reference to earlier literature.

² SCHWARTZ 2012, p. 84.

³ As for example found in the descriptions of the journey to the Netherworld in Mesopotamian literary accounts concerning deities (excluding that of King Ur-Nammu), or in later exorcist texts: BOTTÉRO 1983.

MORTUARY PRACTICES AND EMBODIED IDENTITY IN NORTHWEST SYRIA IN THE 3RD MILLENNIUM BC

EDGAR PELTENBURG † - Edinburgh

Introduction

General studies of Bronze and Iron Age mortuary practices in Greater Mesopotamia are frequently shaped by rich textual evidence which tends to emphasize the bleak nature wherein wander the ghosts of the Afterworld, and the finality of death.¹ Amorite *kispum* ceremonies, and earlier rites of remembrance, on the other hand, show that the deceased had roles amongst the living in regular ceremonies for several generations after death.² This scenario of extended engagement raises questions of Near Eastern perceptions of personhood and identity, ones that are unlikely to be identical with western notions of bounded and autonomous individuality generated by post-Enlightenment Cartesian conceptions.³ One way to examine this issue through the lens of archaeological evidence is by an analysis of mortuary remains, especially those that indicate prolonged association with the dead. The latter, it will be argued, were prevalent in NW Syria at least from Early Bronze Age times (fig. 1). But before looking at that evidence, we should briefly outline Eblaite texts of the 24th century BC that concern ancestors since they alert us to the unexpected longevity of mortuary rites related to specific individuals and to the strategic role of the dead in the world of the living.

The relevant texts deal primarily with festivities surrounding the confirmation of the king of Ebla and his marriage to the queen. Several scholars have considered details of the different versions of these ceremonies elsewhere, so here I only present a brutally condensed outline.⁴ In the course of multiple festivities, the king and queen travelled to NEnaš, possibly Binash some 20km north of Ebla, in a retinue with priests, scribes and other functionaries, stopping en route to make offerings to divinized predecessors. On the 7th day they entered the mausolea of the 8th, 10th and 11th kings of the Eblaite dynasty at NEnaš, together with statues of the deities Kura and Barama that had been transported there on a cart. During ensuing ceremonies, such as the king and queen sitting on the thrones of their fathers, the announcement is made that “there is a new god Kura, a new goddess Barama, a new king, a new queen”. The six-week long festival continues with further rites when the entourage returns to Ebla. Of note here is that the couple must not

¹ There is a vast literature on the subject. See, for example, ALSTER 1980, BAYLISS 1973; JONKER 1995, pp. 190-191; KATZ 2005, SCURLOCK (1995) and VAN DER TOORN (1996, pp. 64-65). They are amongst those who stress a more positive existence in the Afterworld, so long as there are regular funerary offerings.

² COHEN 2005, pp. 106-111; DURAND 2012; TSUKIMOTO 1985; VAN DER TOORN 1996, pp. 62-65; JACQUET 2012; see also references in FELLI 2012, p. 82.

³ See BRÜCK 2001; THOMAS 2000.

⁴ FRONZAROLI 1992, 1993, pp. 39-40; ARCHI 2012; BIGA 2007-2008; MATTHIAE 2012, pp. 953-958; PORTER 2012, pp. 214-6; RISTVET 2011, pp. 9-12.

THE MATERIALITY OF MOURNING

ANNE PORTER - Toronto

Mourning by Definition

Determining the processes and practices of mourning would seem to be an insurmountable challenge for the archaeologist. Mourning is often conflated with grief, for both may be experienced as an emotional state and both have been viewed as behavior.¹ But they are not the same. Grief is a feeling experienced *by* the individual *for* the individual, and is a product of innumerable, and perhaps immeasurable, factors specific to those individuals. These factors might include personality, personal histories and experiences, nature of the relationship and so on. Grief is personal. For although society can tell us what we *should* feel, it cannot control what we *do* feel. Feelings deemed inappropriate, such as hatred of the dead, can be hidden in order to avoid social opprobrium. Society can, however, establish norms constraining how we express grief, and how we should behave upon a death, because what we do or do not do is visible. This is mourning. To have meaning, it must be recognizable to others whether it conforms to those norms or deviates from them. Mourning, in contrast to grief, is socialized and public.

Mourning therefore is to be defined as a socially sanctioned or prescribed act, or series of acts, that appears to be an outward expression of grief, but which does not have to match in any way what the individual feels on a death. People may mourn who do not grieve at all. People may grieve and not mourn. So where does that leave the archaeologist, who has only at her disposal the traces of an act, or acts, that may have nothing to do with mourning – that is, the disposal of the dead? Not, as first seemed the case when presented with the challenge of this topic, high and dry.² If mourning is socialized and public it is also patterned behavior. So while the material manifestations of mourning cannot be predicted, they can be elicited. That is, patterned behavior is identifiable in the archaeological record, and the nature of that behavior is, because it is patterned, potentially interpretable. While many acts of mourning may leave behind no discernible physical trace, such as the beating of the breast, rending of clothes, or tearing of hair,³ there are other acts that do.⁴

¹ A case in point is that of Lindy Chamberlain, the Australian woman convicted of the 1980 murder of her child whom she had said was taken by a dingo. Popular discourse surrounding the trial centered on the fact that Chamberlain did not cry in public. Her lack of mourning was seen as a lack of grief, which was then taken as confirmation of her guilt by police, media and court. She was subsequently exonerated.

² *Contra* VOGEL 2013, p. 422.

³ MAUL 2007, p. 360.

⁴ See FELLI 2015 for a comprehensive treatment.

AFTER INTERMENT/OUTSIDE THE TOMBS: SOME MORTUARY PARTICULARS AT UMM EL-MARRA¹

GLENN M. SCHWARTZ - Baltimore

Investigating an elite mortuary complex from the third millennium BC on the acropolis of Tell Umm el-Marra in western Syria, I have been primarily concerned with evidence of interments and their accompaniments inside the tombs, since these are most apparent from the archaeological remains.² However, the wealth of funerary evidence from Umm el-Marra may allow a consideration of rituals taking place in spaces adjacent to the tombs where the dead were interred, or rituals conducted after the deceased were interred. One avenue for a consideration of such ritual is ancestor veneration, and I have suggested that elite ancestors were venerated at Umm el-Marra in practices that materialized an elite ideology strengthened by links to an illustrious past.³ At the same time, evidence suggests that this ideology was not universally accepted.⁴

In this paper, I review the evidence for ritual behavior inferred to have taken place in spaces ancillary to those where the dead were interred, or ritual behavior that was performed subsequent to the interment of the body. Through such investigation, we may attempt to learn more about the “full ritual cycle”⁵ that accompanied the treatment of the dead at Umm el-Marra. In addition, I provide details on the mortuary complex derived from work in the most recent season of excavation, May-July 2010.

Umm el-Marra is the largest Bronze Age site (ca. 20-25 hectares) in the Jabbul plain of western Syria (fig. 1), located approximately halfway between Aleppo to the west and Emar (Tell Meskene) in the Euphrates valley to the east. Given its smaller size when compared to the major urban centers of Bronze Age Syria such as Mari or Nagar (Tell Brak), Umm el-Marra has been understood as a local regional center probably under the domination of more powerful cities such as Ebla or Aleppo. Such an interpretation would agree with the proposed ancient identification of the site as Tuba, capital of a small kingdom in the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Ages. Work at Umm el-Marra, a joint expedition of

¹ I would like to thank Candida Felli and Stefania Mazzoni for inviting me to the “Coping with Death” conference in Florence, during which I learned much. I am grateful to Candida Felli for her editorial suggestions and other useful comments on this paper, Paul Delnero for his comments, and Marian Feldman for help in locating references to spindles in grave contexts. The Umm el-Marra project is directed by Glenn Schwartz (Johns Hopkins University) and Hans Curvers (University of Amsterdam). Research discussed in this paper was supported by funding from the National Science Foundation (BCS-0545610, BCS-0137513, 9818205), the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Geographic Society, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Arthur and Isadora Dellheim Foundation, the Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Amsterdam.

² SCHWARTZ 2007, 2012, 2013.

³ There has been an increasing awareness of the importance of ancestor veneration in the archaeology of Bronze Age Syria (PELTENBURG 1999; PORTER 2002; PFÄLZNER 2012).

⁴ SCHWARTZ 2013.

⁵ Felli, this volume.

VAULTED *HYPOGEA* DURING THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE: A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THE INTRA-MUROS MULTIPLE TOMB IN MESOPOTAMIA

STEFANO VALENTINI - Firenze

In this paper¹ the case of the Middle Bronze Age vaulted *hypogea* excavated Mesopotamia is presented (fig. 1). The starting point is some examples of these funerary structures excavated at Tell Barri (*Kaḥat*)² in the Jezirah (north-eastern Syria), that will be compared to those documented in contemporaneous Southern Mesopotamia. The intention is to explore the relationship between the *hypogea* and ancestor cults using anthropological data.³

Archaeological Data

At Barri between 1997 and 1999, 24 burials of the jar, pit, cist, and chamber types were excavated in Area G under the direction of Paolo Emilio Pecorella.⁴ All of them were dated to the Old Babylonian/Old Jezirah II or Middle Bronze Age,⁵ during which the city of *Kaḥat* was ruled by a local dynasty subjected to the king Zimri-Lim, as confirmed by the cuneiform texts of Mari.⁶

Here we will focus on the vaulted *hypogea* of strata 30 and 31, which have yielded the partial remains of the dwellings of traders and artisans. This consists of a series of buildings arranged in a very tight grid.

In stratum 31B, three functional units were discovered (fig. 2). A court paved with baked bricks was found to the northeast of room 495. The sides of the court were decorated with engraved baked bricks. This floor covered a *hypogeum* (609) and both were partially destroyed by a Middle-Assyrian well. Room 717, included in Building Two, had a simple clay-beaten floor, covering another *hypogeum* (840). At the SE of room 495 was Building Three. A court paved with baked-bricks, which also showed engravings on the top face, was near room 583, where a lot of pottery was found on the floor. *Hypogeum* 570 was found under this courtyard, heavily damaged by two Islamic silos.

¹ First of all I would like to thank, with affection and friendship, Candida for inviting me to this workshop and, moreover, for including me in a wonderful session, between Glenn Schwartz and Peter Pfälzner, who have always been among my researcher models. Certainly I found myself a little bit hesitant to read the case studies that I was to present in the session. On one side were two incredible funerary contexts (Qatna and Umm el-Marra), on the other, my case study. Therefore, in my contribution, not to end up crushed between these *colossi*, I tried to bring out the peculiarities of my case study in comparison to those of Glenn and Peter: a domestic/household/rural *versus* a royal/urban/complex context.

² VALENTINI 2001; 2002; 2003. Concerning the site of Tell Barri and the excavation of the Old Babylonian levels see Pecorella 1997; 1999a; 1999b; 2003.

³ GALLI and VALENTINI 2006.

⁴ PECORELLA 1997, 34-58; 1999a, 46-62; 1999b, pp. 26-55.

⁵ For a comparative periodization see PRÜß 2004, pp. 16-17.

⁶ SALVINI 1998.

ROYAL CORPSES, ROYAL ANCESTORS AND THE LIVING: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DEAD IN ANCIENT SYRIA

PETER PFÄLZNER - Tübingen

In this article, it will be attempted to elaborate on a differentiation between the dead and the ancestors from a theoretical point of view, and, upon this basis, with regard to royal contexts of the 2nd millennium BC in ancient Syria. The main questions to be discussed in this respect are the following: when does a dead person become an ancestor? And how is this reflected in funerary rituals and grave contexts? And finally, can we detect the difference archaeologically?

The relationship between the living and the dead

As a starting point for our discussion, we have to keep two things in mind: that the perception of the dead is an idea of the living, and also that the treatment of the dead is an activity of the living. Thus, the living and the dead are inextricably linked. Therefore, it needs to be asked in which way the living relatives of a dead person participate in the latter's post-mortal existence. In particular, it needs to be studied what the living's role in perceiving the status of a dead person and his transformation into an ancestor is.

In this line of thought, it must be kept in mind that what happens to a dead person is conceptualized, perceived and experienced by the living members of their social group. The connected behaviour and attitudes emerge out of the desire to cope with death. The primary social intention of these cultural concepts is to re-organize social life after the death of a person.¹ The extent of the necessary social re-organisation depends on the social status of a dead person and their family. The more important a person was, i.e. the higher their social status was, the more is it necessary to re-organize social life after their death.

In order to understand the general perception of the relationship between the living and the dead it needs, at first, to be investigated how the path from life to death is conceptualized in a specific culture. This passage will here be called the "transformation of the dead".² This cultural concept involves a complex and interwoven set of relations between the dead, the living, and society. These kinds of relations and associated transformations are performed as rituals which are distinctive and divergent in every society.

In most, if not all societies, these rituals include a sequence of different funeral activities, ceremonies, feasts, banquets, and acts of mourning. The effects of these complex relationships can be visualized in a scheme (fig. 1). It demonstrates that we have to look at two axes: a horizontal one which indicates the path of the dead person, and a vertical one

¹ See: VAN GENNEP 1909; BLOCH and PARRY 1982; HUNTINGTON and METCALF 1979, pp. 8-15.

² Compare the similar concept of "transformational sequence" by FITZSIMMONS (2009, p. 182).

INFRA-URBAN FUNERARY SPACES: HOW THE DEAD INTERACT WITH DAILY LIFE AT MARI (3rd MILLENNIUM - 2nd MILLENNIUM BC)

JOYCE NASSAR - Beyrouth

Introduction

Most of the archaeological data dealing with the dead in the Near East of the 3rd and 2nd millennium B.C. comes from burials discovered beneath inhabited areas, since a great number of archaeological programs focus on the exploration of these particular spaces and rarely detect cemeteries. The lack of exploration of these spaces is a handicap, since an entire part of societies' funerary beliefs cannot be apprehended. Beliefs concerning death are still mostly unknown in this region except for some rare epigraphical records.¹ Even then, these records are not comprehensive, either in time or space, and they only concern some high ranked individuals. Therefore, the burials under inhabited areas are the only framework allowing for the perception of at least part of the mortuary practices of these societies. Besides, occupied contexts are a great opportunity to understand the relationship between the living and the dead. The burials are set up under inhabited structures and sometimes they are integrated into them. The interaction between the living and their dead becomes easy to analyze, unlike the case with cemeteries, exclusively dedicated to death and where the presence of the living is barely perceptible apart for some traces of funeral ceremonies (deposits, libations etc.). The relationship between the living and the dead can very well be considered on the site of Mari where a systematic archaeo-anthropological analysis was conducted on the 3rd and the 2nd millennium B.C. burials uncovered from the 1930's onward. After establishing the existing data and the general features of funerary practices at Mari, this contribution will focus on the identification of patterns concerning the burials' distribution under the urban areas, the relationship between these burials and the inhabited structures above them, throughout the occupation of the city. The result of this study allows us to qualify the funerary spaces at Mari as "infra-urban" spaces in order to highlight the specificity of the environment in which the burials have been placed and their positioning regarding inhabited structures. The term "infra" (*infra* meaning "under") and the term "urban" (*urbs*, *urbis* meaning the city) seems to better define the reality of these burials and opens prospects for wider considerations concerning the complexity and the heterogeneity of these funerary spaces in comparison to typical patterns of extra-urban funerary spaces.

¹ E.g. BOTTÉRO 1980, BOTTÉRO 1982, CASSIN 1982, CAVIGNEAUX and AL-RAWI 2000, ABRAHAMI 2005, COHEN 2005, VAN DER STEDE 2007.

TAPHONOMY OF HUMAN REMAINS AND MORTUARY ARCHAEOLOGY THREE CASE STUDIES FROM THE KHABUR TRIANGLE

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Introduction

Human burials are an important source of information about past societies and the mortuary archaeology developed many research agendas which aim at the reconstruction of burial rites,¹ social stratification, human mobility,² etc. There are three general lines of evidence which are sometimes combined, but often used in separation from each other: one is the analysis of grave goods (including animal and plant remains),³ second is the analysis of grave construction and local stratigraphical context,⁴ third is the analysis of bones and teeth of buried individuals.⁵

Standard approach to human remains usually includes assessment of sex and age-at-death, sometimes also reconstruction of stature, research on pathologies and stress markers. Other bioarcheological tools are used much less frequently and also insight into postmortem agents affecting human bones and teeth is still quite rare, especially in Mesopotamia where at many sites human remains must be studied in the camp with limited access to more sophisticated analytical tools.⁶

Although taphonomy is still largely neglected by many human osteologists, it has great potential in answering questions concerning burial rites, body treatment and agents affecting the body after the deposition. In this paper, a small portion of this potential will be presented using three case studies originating in the Khabur triangle, a part of the dry farming area in North-Eastern Syria (fig. 1).

Taphonomy of human remains

Taphonomy is the term used in paleobiology to denote research on any changes of biological tissues that occurred after death of an organism.⁷ In general, it is possible to distinguish between biostratinomy and diagenesis: first includes all taphonomic agents affecting a dead organism prior to its deposition, second concerns all agents present after the deposition. Research on taphonomy is a standard part of zooarchaeological toolkit, as it covers such important economic activities as butchery, skinning, cooking and differential

¹ E.g. TARLOW and STUTZ 2013.

² E.g. TURNER 2009.

³ E.g. WYGNAŃSKA 2011.

⁴ E.g. COOPER 2007.

⁵ E.g. SOŁTYSIAK 2010a.

⁶ SOŁTYSIAK 2006.

⁷ LYMAN 1994.

THE INVISIBLE DEAD PROJECT: A METHODOLOGY FOR 'COPING' WITH THE DEAD

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Despite the multitude of burial, cremation and disposal options now available in modern society, current western attitudes to death often bring with them expectations of 'normality'. There is a general belief that, despite the distances of time and space that separate us, there will still be elements within ancient burial traditions that we can recognise, behaviour that we can easily interpret as being respectful towards the dead. Many of the beliefs that underpin these expectations of 'normality' or 'respect', draw substantially on Judaeo-Christian traditions, which took shape in the Levant¹ during the latter half of the 1st millennium BC and 1st millennium AD. These beliefs differ substantially from those of past societies in the region, as witnessed by references in the Old Testament (Isaiah 65.2-6), which highlight the difficult relationship between the requirements of monotheism and the traditional cult of the dead. The 'Invisible Dead' Project, carried out at Durham University between 2012-2014 and funded by the John Templeton Foundation, has sought to chart the long-term development of attitudes to the dead, from c. 4000 BC down to 400 AD (Chalcolithic to the end of the Roman period), through an examination of documentary and archaeological evidence for the form, scale, and significance of mortuary practices. This paper aims to present some initial results from the project. We will explore some of the emerging trends in treatment of the human body and wider developments in society, economy and religious belief. We also seek to consider the ways in which scholarly attitudes to the dead, as an object of study, have impacted upon the kind of questions asked of the material and the various lenses through which burial has been examined, in particular by researchers working on different periods. As this paper will demonstrate, burial practices and the beliefs behind them differ across space and time, and the treatment of human remains in the past cannot simply be understood as a direct equivalent of 'burial' as understood today.

Traditions of Research

The basic corpus of current published research on death and burial is comprised of numerous descriptive presentations of the burials from individual sites and cemeteries,² and less frequently, practices within a particular region.³ While artefacts are generally treated

¹ For the purposes of this project, the Levant encompasses the modern countries of Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, from the Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean coast in the West (see fig. 1).

² E.g. AUBET 2003; OREN 1973; SCHAUB and RAST 1989.

³ E.g. GONEN 1992; SARTE-FAURIAT 2001.

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