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Introduction

Bringing Out the Dead in the Ancient Near East

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Intentional burial—a characteristically human behavior that first occurred nearly 100,000 years ago in the Middle East—is one of the most fundamental acts of commemoration. Although some people who lived in ancient Near Eastern societies[1] clearly planned for their funerary treatment prior to their death (e.g., the Egyptian Old Kingdom pyramids at Giza), burial practices were largely decided by the living: how to prepare the body for interment; how to position the body in the burial chamber; what objects to include with the deceased; what ritual acts to perform days, weeks, or even years later. Given the diversity of ancient Near Eastern societies over so many millennia, the Middle East boasts a rich archive in which to investigate how people made deliberate choices to remember and commemorate the dead. And yet for all of the bodies that have been exhumed since Near Eastern archaeology began in the mid-nineteenth century, comprehensive treatments of mortuary contexts are rarely published. Mortuary rituals, the identities of the deceased, or beliefs about the afterlife consequently are interpreted using a single data set—the assemblage with which a person was buried, for instance, or the person's osteological profile, or written commentaries about the deceased. In doing so, scholars paint only part of a much more complex picture of death in the ancient Near East. The dearth of holistic studies integrating these data sets is odd given the sustained scholarly interest in ancient Near Eastern societies' perceptions of death and beliefs about the afterlife (e.g., Baker 2012; Campbell and Green 1995; Kramer 1967; Laneri 2007; Schmidt 1994). This book is a response to the irregular nature in which ancient Near Eastern mortuary

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contexts have been studied in the past. The chapters that follow use evidence from across the region's societies—from Neolithic Turkey to Bronze Age Jordan, from ancient Egypt and Sudan to the Arabian Gulf and Mesopotamia. In each, authors bring at least two different, yet complementary, analytical techniques together to investigate how ancient Near Eastern societies remembered and commemorated the dead. While no chapter offers a perfect vision of collaboration, many demonstrate how teams of researchers with different skillsets—osteological analysis, faunal analysis, culture history and the analysis of written texts, and artifact analysis—offer ways to interpret ancient Near Eastern mortuary contexts in a richer and more robust light.

This chapter prepares readers for the studies to follow, introducing key issues surrounding the investigation of death, memory, and commemoration in ancient Near Eastern mortuary contexts. The chapter begins with a brief survey of the segmented roles that mortuary archaeologists, osteologists, bioarchaeologists, and cultural historians have played in analyses. When these disciplinary genealogies are placed side by side, a clearer vision for intersecting interests and moments of collaboration becomes apparent. The discussion then examines how recent scholarship on social memory in the humanities and social sciences provides a framework for investigating practices of remembering and commemorating the dead in ancient Near Eastern societies. Mortuary contexts, structured depositions shaped by both conscious and unconscious intentions, are sites of memory and are the result of memory work. Different modes of mortuary analysis can shed light on aspects of memory work, whether it is osteological data that can reconstruct the osteobiography of the interred person, the material cultural analysis of objects, or historians and epigraphers building a cultural context around the interment event. This chapter concludes with an overview of the different chapters in this book, illustrating how each speaks to issues raised in broader discussions.

INVESTIGATING MORTUARY CONTEXTS IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SOCIETIES

Mortuary Archaeology

The skewed emphases in the analysis of ancient Near Eastern mortuary contexts are explained by the fact that investigations have developed along distinct disciplinary trajectories that worked in relative isolation from each other. The most dominant trajectory has been mortuary archaeology, whose principal focus has concerned materials associated with the deceased, such as the objects interred with the body or the architectural design of tombs. A

glance at the contents of many excavation reports reflects mortuary archaeology's dominance. Each volume will invariably include an individual chapter, often entitled "The Burials," placed alongside other sections on architecture, ceramics, and chronology. Although human skeletal remains may be described in terms of their preservation and deposition in such chapters, the results of osteological analyses often appear in separate chapters, if at all (see below), with no attempt to integrate data and context. The mortuary assemblage receives the bulk of writers' attention for several good reasons. The objects' locations in a sealed context can help to establish chronological sequences (Duday 2006: 37), and, because whole or nearly whole objects are commonly recovered in mortuary contexts, they are valuable assets in designing artifact corpora; these same objects are also ideal specimens for museum displays (Woolley 1937: 81). For more than a century of research, these descriptive reports of human burials have comprised the majority of research on mortuary practices in the ancient Near East (e.g., Delougaz, Hill, and Lloyd 1967; Goffinet 1982; Jean-Marie 1999; Maeir 2004; Thrane 1978; Woolley 1934).

While basic documentation of mortuary contexts remains prevalent, thematic studies—often diachronic and broad in their geographic coverage—have grown more abundant in recent decades. The most common topics use mortuary assemblages to demarcate geographic zones of shared cultural and religious identities (e.g., Bienkowski 1982; Carter and Parker 1995; Gonen 1992) or observe changes in long-term mortuary practices that, in turn, reflect changes in social and political complexity (e.g., Joffe 2003; Keswani 2004; Richards 2005). Mortuary practices also have been regarded as key to understanding ancient Near Eastern symbolic systems and religious beliefs, with ancestor veneration a popular topic of inquiry (Mabry 2003; Pfälzner et al. 2012; Pitard 1996; Salles 1995; Schmidt 1994, 1996; van der Toorn 1994, 1996). Recently, scholars have interpreted elite funerary rituals in the ancient Near East, especially their conspicuous consumption of material wealth (e.g., construction of substantial architecture, disposal of rich and rare grave goods), as acts of memorialization that create and reinforce political authority, in particular by drawing on ancestor ideologies (Matthiae 1979; Morris 2007; Peltenburg 1999; Pollock 2007; Porter 2002; Schwartz 2007). Burials of children (Kulemann-Ossen and Novák 2000), and certain types of grave goods, such as figurines (Marchetti 2000; Pruss and Novák 2000) and weapons (Rehm 2003), have been considered as social or religious symbols. Mortuary archaeology also has been inspired by third-wave feminism and its emphasis on human difference. These approaches explore how one or more facets in the reflecting and refracting prism of social identity—encompassing age, kinship,

sex, gender, sexuality, agency, and so on—are reproduced through mortuary practices; however, they remain rare in scholarship on the ancient Near East (e.g., Baker 2012; Croucher 2005).

In the chapters that follow, authors include mortuary assemblages and architecture in their analyses, albeit in different ways and at different intensities. Almost all authorial teams use objects and architecture to supply relative dates, or confirm absolute dates, for interment events. And almost all authors explicitly or implicitly consider objects as "gifts" that the living gave to deceased persons to bring with them into the afterlife. Although this is a common assumption about the role objects play in ancient Near Eastern mortuary rituals, objects likely possessed multiple functions and meanings. While the editors did not plan this arrangement, most mortuary contexts analyzed in this volume may be classified as "vernacular," or nonelite. This is a refreshing change from projects in the region that favor elite contexts, such as the Royal Tombs of Ur, that have received steady attention since their discovery (e.g., Baadsgaard 2011; Cohen 2005; Keith 1934; Molleson and Hodgson 2003; Pollock 2007; Woolley 1934). Yet, consequently, such nonelite contexts often lack the abundant grave goods and elaborate architectural designs that offer themselves up for interpretations. The chapters in this volume nevertheless find much to interpret in even the smallest object and most ordinary structures, finding them to be humble yet evocative acts that the living could muster to commemorate the dead.

Skeletal and Dental Evidence

The second mode of mortuary analysis is osteology, a field that uses methods from the biological sciences to study human remains. The study of the human body in the ancient Near East traditionally has focused on it as an "objectified entity in physical or biological studies" or viewed its treatment in death as representative of social structures or symbolic systems (Boyd 2002:137). Detailed studies of the osteology of ancient Near Eastern populations have been conducted for much of the time that modern scholars have explored the region (e.g., Buxton and Rice 1931; Charles 1962; Charlier 2000; Keith 1934; Krogman 1949; Kunter 1984). Skeletal data prioritized by these studies include age, sex, metrics (cranial, postcranial, and dental), nonmetric traits, cranial morphology and associated "racial" types, and ad hoc observations (rather than systematic analysis) of paleopathology. As mentioned earlier, osteological data from burials often appear incidentally in excavation reports, or are conspicuously absent. When reports do appear, they are usually appended to, or published separately

from, excavation reports discussing the mortuary contexts from which the data were collected. This disconnect between data and context is even apparent in projects whose research designs ostensibly seek such integration (e.g., Hodder 2005; cf. Buikstra, Baadsgaard, and Boutin 2011:11).

Scholars of the ancient Near East are not alone in their inability to integrate mortuary analyses, theoretical developments in archaeology, and interpretations of human skeletal remains (Goldstein 2006). Fortunately, the introduction of bioarchaeological praxis has begun to ameliorate this blind spot through a holistic integration of archaeological and osteological data from ancient Near Eastern mortuary contexts (notably, Perry 2012). Several disciplinary histories of bioarchaeology's origins and research orientations have been published recently (Agarwal and Glencross 2011a; Armelagos 2003; Buikstra and Beck 2006; Buikstra, Baadsgaard, and Boutin 2011) and need not be repeated here. Although the populations and time periods studied are wide ranging and diverse, three primary perspectives have shaped bioarchaeologists' research agendas. The "biocultural" approach to bioarchaeology explores "the effects of localized, proximate conditions on human biologies and the linkage between these contexts and larger historical political-economic processes" (Zuckerman and Armelagos 2011:20). Its investigative scale varies from exploring longer-term adaptive trends (Goodman and Leatherman 1998) to the lived experiences of communities and individuals (Agarwal and Glencross 2011b; Blakey 2001; Sheridan 1999). Clark Spencer Larsen (1997, 2002) defines bioarchaeology as use of the human biological component of the archaeological record to make behavioral inferences that shed light on the history of the human condition. Research by him and other like-minded scholars has produced wide-ranging studies that explore patterns of disease, diet, activity, and demography, among other topics, from a population perspective (e.g., Larsen 2001; Steckel and Rose 2002; Tung 2012; Walker 2001).

The approach taken in this volume, however, follows the method and theory championed by Jane Buikstra (2006), which emphasizes the contextual analysis of human remains from archaeological settings via multiple lines of evidence (iconographic, textual, and ethnographic data in addition to archaeology and osteology). Contemporary social theory is employed to reconstruct human life histories and population structures (e.g., Baadsgaard, Boutin, and Buikstra 2011; Knudson and Stojanowski 2009; Stodder and Palkovich 2012). Accordingly, in the current volume, perspectives from disability studies (Boutin and Porter), postcolonial theory (Smith and Buzon), and the politics of ethnic identity (Pestle, Torres-Rouff, and Daverman) are deployed in support of holistic interpretations of data from mortuary contexts.

Several trends are evident when tracking bioarchaeological research on the ancient Near East. In addition to exploring how memory and commemoration are expressed in funerary practices, each chapter in this volume also engages with these broader areas of inquiry. Human skeletal remains have been a rich data source for correlating health and diet with changes in sociopolitical organization. The introduction of new technologies and methods of food preparation at key moments of growth in social complexity has been inferred from skeletal markers of occupational stress (Molleson 1994) and dental microwear (Alrousan and Pérez-Pérez 2012; Molleson, Jones, and Jones 1993). Long-term, regional changes in subsistence strategy also have been explored via dental pathology alone (Littleton and Frohlich 1989, 1993) and in combination with a variety of skeletal indicators of stress, trauma, and infection (Blau 2007; Littleton 2007; Smith and Horwitz 2007). In the current volume, Campbell and coauthors provide evidence for large-scale feasting and its ties to place- and memory-making, while Smith and Buzon analyze dietarily derived stable isotopes in their investigation of migration during colonial encounters.

The human skeleton also has been used to reveal social differentiation along many axes of identity in ancient Near Eastern societies. The ways that gender intersects with status, behavior, and ancestordom has been studied by means of artificial cranial modification (Lorentz 2008), skeletal markers of occupational stress (Peterson 2002, 2010), bone quantity and quality (Glencross and Agarwal 2011), and postmortem skull decoration (Bonogofsky 2003). Social interpretations of chronological aging and biological maturation across the life course are another growing area of interest, with a particular focus on childhood as embodied by health (Littleton 2011), social roles (Perry 2005), and mortuary treatment (Torres-Rouff and Pestle 2012). Biochemical evidence from bones and teeth has been a productive source for investigating transitional moments such as weaning (Dupras, Schwarcz, and Fairgrieve 2001; Gregoricka and Sheridan 2012; Richards et al. 2003). In the current volume, mortuary and osteological evidence are brought together by Dabbs and Zabecki to explore differences in socioeconomic status in New Kingdom Egypt, while Pestle and coauthors focus on ethnic affiliation at Kish during a period of transition from Sumerian to Akkadian rule.

The issue of analytical scale in bioarchaeology has undergone interrogation lately in an ancient Near Eastern context (Pollock 2011). Many of the studies just reviewed approach assemblages of human skeletal remains in a systematic, yet broad, fashion to produce population-level profiles of characteristics such as age, sex, health, and occupational stress. Such research also can shed new light on how kinship units, whether biological or fictive, were

organized (Bentley 1991; Pilloud and Larsen 2011). Finer-grained analyses of individual persons, sometimes termed "osteobiographies" (after Saul and Saul 1989), represent a more recent development (Boutin 2011, 2012; Martin and Potts 2012; Molleson and Hodgson 1993, 2003; Özbek 2005). In the current volume, Boutin and Porter juxtapose the biographies of ancient and modern individuals, and Sheridan and coauthors present skeletal evidence for family and lineage affiliation.

Written Sources and Visual Culture

A third analytical mode that works apart from mortuary archaeology and bioarchaeology consists of cultural historians, art historians, and philologists who study the large, diverse corpus of written sources and visual culture concerning death that was produced by ancient Near Eastern societies. Different genres of written sources, including ritual texts describing how mortuary customs were to be performed, literary texts that ponder death's meaning in myths and lamentations, and even economic texts discussing inheritance and funeral payments, reveal different, although sometimes oblique, insights into ideologies about death, the afterlife, and mortuary practices (Haas 1995; Scurlock 1995; Xella 1995). Visual culture such as public monuments, funerary paintings, and seals and sealings depicts a wide array of information about mortuary customs, including ritual and violent death, funerary banquets, and mythical scenes depicting the underworld, although this evidence is rarely vernacular in design. Elites often sponsored the crafting of such objects that were designed to commemorate authority and reflect the power and wealth that the deceased possessed while alive. Combined, this evidence reveals the diversity of ideologies about death and mortuary practices across the ancient Near Eastern societies, making it impossible to generalize about the region.

Interpreting such written and visual sources with any accuracy poses another challenge. One cannot merely translate and "read" a text, or easily tease out the image's visual program, unfortunately. Their interpretability will always be limited, not only because archaeologists lack living informants to confirm their conclusions, but also because these sources are the products of substantially different societies, both from each other and from the modern ones that scholars inhabit. Discussions of death and its commemoration within written sources should not necessarily be understood as a direct reflection of a society's attitudes, but must rather be interpreted within the context of a specific text. Furthermore, belief and sentiments may exist beyond language, beyond the expressions that writers and artists are capable of representing in text or

image. When such challenges are unheeded, scholars are led to think about death in anachronistic fashions that transfer meanings from one cultural and historical milieu with more information to another context with fewer or no sources. One cannot easily extend a stereotypical understanding about, for example, mortuary practices at late second millennium BCE Ugarit, to later societies, such as first millennium BCE ancient Israel, without several caveats. These risks of anachronistic thinking may partly explain why historians and philologists rarely integrate evidence from excavated mortuary contexts into their analyses, as one must first argue that there is an interpretive connection between a text and a particular context.[2] This reluctance, however, does not seem to be shared by mortuary archaeologists and bioarchaeologists, as many use written and visual sources to support their interpretations of contexts. In fact, many authorial teams make these interpretive leaps in the chapters that follow, using written sources and visual culture to paint a historical narrative around the context they investigate, or draw from commentaries about death located in contemporaneous sources.

That the investigation of ancient Near Eastern mortuary beliefs and practices is dispersed across these different fields of inquiry is not entirely surprising. Ultimately, each scholarly trajectory described above requires rigorous training in specialized analytical techniques, whether competency in an ancient language like Akkadian or in the osteological analysis of human remains. There are too many skills and too large a corpus for a single scholar to master in his or her lifetime. Yet the interpretation of mortuary contexts cries out for greater collaboration among these factions. All of the authorial teams in the following chapters are collaborative in nature, and half (Campbell et al., Boutin and Porter, Smith and Buzon) are composed of scholars with expertise in at least two different fields. While this is a strength in the book's contributions, more collaboration—particularly with experts in ancient Near Eastern written sources—is needed in future projects focused on mortuary contexts.

MEMORY WORK IN MORTUARY CONTEXTS

This book emphasizes how mortuary contexts are rich zones for thinking about the ways ancient Near Eastern societies commemorated the deceased, whether they were immediate family members or important leaders. Although popular Western notions of memory consign it to a psychological phenomenon occurring strictly within the minds of persons, social scientific and humanistic research in the latter half of the twentieth century have illustrated that memories need not be strictly personal. Memories, like other aspects of

culture, may begin as a sentiment within the body but can often become externalized through memory work, that is, externalized acts expressed through language, bodily practices, and objects that ascribe meaning to an event, a person or group, or place (Connerton 1989; Nora 1989). Memory work is cultural, learned through a person's membership in a society that teaches individuals appropriate rules and traditions. This partly explains why memory work is so diverse through time and between, even within, societies. But despite its predictable differences, memory is a human phenomenon that comes to be shared between people, as several scholars have argued (e.g., Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1992). An entire realm of scholarship dedicated to social memory, or now less commonly referred to as collective memory, has grown to become an interdisciplinary topic whose literature is too broad to discuss in this volume's introduction (but see, Erll and Nünning 2008; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011; Radstone and Schwarz 2010).

Cross-cultural investigations reveal wide variation in how the living experience the event of death (Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Parker Pearson 1999; Robben 2005). But despite so many differences in ideologies about the afterlife and the rituals (or lack thereof) designed to prepare the deceased's body for burial or cremation, the one universal aspect is that a person's death is a collective experience for those people left behind. Many pre- and postmortem rituals are public; that is, they are practices that can be observed by a third party and often leave behind physical traces, a monument, a tomb, or a published obituary, for example. But the near universal presence of ritual surrounding death does not explain what compels humans to commemorate their dead. Bronislaw Malinowski, seeking an explanation for death rituals among the Melanesian societies he studied, observed long ago the contradiction in many societies that simultaneously desire to preserve the body and a person's memory, while facing the need to distance themselves physically from the decaying body (Malinowski 1948: 52). Rituals surrounding death, he argued, played a role in mitigating this incongruity, creating a means to mollify both issues. While it is no longer fashionable to think in such universal and functionalist criteria, of course, one must at least recognize that the crisis that death presents to the living motivates different kinds of responses to commemorate and remember the deceased.

Broader social scientific and humanistic research on collective and social memory has inspired archaeologists to consider the role of memory work in different archaeological contexts, from households to monuments and landscapes (Jones 2007; Mills and Walker 2008; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Williams 2003). The examination of memory work in mortuary contexts,

however, has not always been archaeologists' principal question. While archaeologists have long agreed that the beliefs and behaviors of the living are expressed in a mortuary context's material signature (e.g., Childe 1945, [1944] 1971), they have used such contexts to discuss anything but issues pertaining to social memory. Processual archaeologists (e.g., Binford 1971; Brown 1995; Saxe 1970), for instance, believe that the degree of wealth and effort that a society differentially invests in mortuary ritual reflects the complexity of its social structure. Such mirroring of society in both life and death, however, may be naive, since ritual can invert or skew quotidian practices. Other avenues of inquiry must be pursued to confirm links between social organization and mortuary ritual. Accordingly, scholars have also argued that mortuary practices are a form of ritual communication in which the deceased are powerful symbols idealized and manipulated by the living. Based on his ethnoarchaeological work in Sudan, for example, Ian Hodder (1982: 200) writes that through "distortions, partial expressions and even inversion" mourners can manipulate material symbols to induce a form and meaning in mortuary practices that finds no direct expression in the living society. The symbolic power surrounding the corpse and associated mortuary practices has multiple levels of meaning that do not simply reflect social relations but represent and misrepresent them simultaneously. Thus, body symbolism and mortuary rituals can legitimize sectional interests and (re)constitute the social order (Shanks and Tilley 1982). Ideological beliefs may be operationalized through practices surrounding treatment and disposal of the corpse, thus producing specific material results. While certain social contradictions are ignored or intentionally misrepresented in mortuary activity, many social roles can be preserved in death so that their presence in living society is made to seem natural (David 1992; Rissman 1988).

The ideological realm of representation is not merely a feature of the ritualized world or a mask of everyday reality, however. Human experience encompasses economic and political circumstances, gender and status relationships, and social roles, all of which may be reconstituted within the ritualized world of funerary activity (Parker Pearson 1999). Postprocessual archaeologists have applied this appreciation for the socially recursive quality of mortuary ritual at two scales. On the one hand, research on a diachronic scale (e.g., Cannon 1989; Keswani 2004, 2005; Morris 1992) has focused on how major long-term changes in mortuary ritual articulate with independent social, political, and economic developments, in an attempt to understand the "structure and ideological significance of mortuary ritual within a particular society" (Keswani 2004: 20). On the other hand, funerary rituals have been understood as

embodied performances in which the disposal of the corpse and memorialization of the dead provide an opportunity for identities and social memories to be created, maintained, and contested in both personalized and formalized ways (e.g., Gillespie 2001; Joyce 2001; Kuijt 2008; Tarlow 1999).

The applications of such theoretical lenses to mortuary practices in the ancient Near East has grown increasingly common over the past decade, although not nearly as intensive as studies in other areas of the world. Meredith Chesson's research on Early Bronze Age Jordan (Chesson 1999, 2001, 2007), and Lynn Meskell's work on ancient Egypt (Meskell 1999, 2001, 2004; Meskell and Joyce 2003) have led the way in the ancient Near East and Egypt, respectively. Their scholarship investigates how the processes of dying, death, funerary treatment, and ancestor veneration provide new, unique opportunities for the (re)construction of the social identities of the decedent, the persons who survive him or her, and the living community. They have also employed phenomenological approaches to describe collective experiences of emotion and the immediate perceptions of the five senses in mortuary settings. In addition, a small handful of studies have focused on how particular aspects of personhood (e.g., gender, age, social status) were entangled with mortuary rituals and objects (e.g., Bolger 2003; Croucher 2012; Pollock 1991; Savage 2000).

The authors in this volume implicitly build on these earlier works, illustrating how mortuary contexts, as structured depositions, are sites of memory work. Such depositional practices are conceived in terms of strategies of commemoration that involve building mortuary spaces, modifying the body and interring it in a mortuary context—feasting and other events around the interment. The authors combine the different analytical strategies described earlier to identify and interpret memory work in mortuary contexts. Bioarchaeological techniques, for instance, can reconstruct an interred person's osteobiography, his or her life history as recorded in bone. Such information does not just provide the person's sex and age at death. Active or healed pathological lesions may reflect the disease processes or trauma that a person experienced during his or her lifetime and around the time of death, while markers of occupational stress can reveal habitually embodied behaviors, whether quotidian or occupational. Altogether, this information helps reconstruct the kinds of experiences a person had during life, social status, the diseases and disabilities struggled with, and the manner of death. While this osteobiographical information reveals who was being commemorated, mortuary archaeology reveals the strategies used to commemorate a person upon interment and how the memory work was materialized in a structured deposition. Mortuary archaeology pays attention to how commemorative rituals were materialized through

architectural construction and objects placed with the individual. Written sources and visual culture, the final analytical strategy, help build a historical and cultural context around the person's life and the commemorative event. Such evidence is not necessarily found in a direct relationship with the burial context and therefore must be used cautiously not to construct false analogies.

BRINGING OUT THE DEAD IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: AN OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In the six chapters to follow, each set of authors examines acts of memory work using a host of interdisciplinary techniques drawn from mortuary archaeology, bioarchaeology, and culture history. In chapter 2, Campbell, Kansa, Bichener, and Lau draw on evidence from mortuary contexts at late Neolithic Domuztepe in southeast Turkey, a fascinating mortuary context containing a minimum of thirty-five disarticulated individuals whose remains were highly processed, suggesting killing, sacrifice, or perhaps even cannibalism. The authors trace patterns of structured deposition of dog remains, feasting materials, and other objects in and around human interments at Domuztepe. They complicate the notion of burial, extending it from a funerary behavior reserved only for humans to one that also includes nonhumans. In chapter 3, Pestle, Torres-Rouff, and Daverman consider evidence from Kish in southern Iraq during the transition from the Early Dynastic III period to the Akkadian period. Written sources describe the late third millennium BCE period as one fraught with conflict, when Akkadian ethnic identities were ascendant over the Sumerian societies that had previously dominated Mesopotamia. The authors' chosen context, Kish's A "Cemetery," is surprisingly homogenous in burial treatment. The authors interpret the similarities either as a suggestion that Akkadian ethnic identity was not as pronounced as previous scholarship had assumed, or as an attempt through memory work to mask biological and ethnic differences between societies.

In chapter 4, Boutin and Porter draw on evidence from the Peter B. Cornwall collection in the Hearst Museum of Anthropology to discuss the commemoration of disability. Working anachronistically, the authors contrast Cornwall, a deaf graduate student who faced institutional discrimination, with a young woman he excavated during his expedition to Bahrain in 1940. Archaeologists know little of Cornwall's life and its challenges compared to other more celebrated archaeologists of his time. His biography does not fit seamlessly with disciplinary archetypes of able-bodied hero-scientists. This lack of commemoration is contrasted with that of the young woman who lived in Dilmun at the

turn of the second millennium BCE. Her osteobiography reveals unusually short stature, modified use of one arm, and an awkward gait. A large number of objects were interred with this young woman, many more than in normative mortuary contexts. These case studies, separated in time by four millennia, reveal how disability is a culturally constructed notion, displacing the untested assumption that past societies lacked tolerance for persons with disabilities.

In chapter 5, Sheridan, Ullinger, Gregoricka, and Chesson examine osteological evidence from the Early Bronze Age site of Bab edh-Dhra' located in the Jordan Valley. The settlement likely functioned as a regional burial center, where thousands of bodies were interred, from the mid-fourth millennium to the late third millennium BCE. Despite this continuity, osteological evidence and mortuary contexts indicate that funerary rituals shifted over time to reflect altered settlement patterns and changing social dynamics. Shaft tombs, created by the residents of seasonal campsites during the Early Bronze IA, contained secondary burials of related individuals and represented families from across the community. By contrast, the Early Bronze II-III charnel house—which was associated with a planned, fortified settlement—housed a smaller number of multigenerational families. As population size and investment in land at Bab edh-Dhra' grew, understandings of kinship changed. New ways of commemorating the dead were associated with expanding group identity and membership.

In chapter 6, Smith and Buzon consider how the deceased are remembered during and following periods of colonization. Based on evidence from Tombos in Sudanese Nubia, the authors explore both shorter-term practices commemorating individuals and longer-term cultural memories. They also investigate the ways in which the archaeological record reveals both inscribed (e.g., monuments) and incorporated (e.g., embodied practices) traditions of memorialization. Osteological and archaeological analyses of burials dating to this Egyptian colonial community's founding in 1400 BCE reflect the cultural entanglements between local Nubians and recently arrived colonizers from Egypt. Following Tombos's secession from the Egyptian empire and the establishment of a Nubian dynasty, a new, hybrid identity comprised of intermarriage and syncretic funerary practices can be discerned during the Napatan period. Finally, Dabbs and Zabecki consider remembering and forgetting at the late second millennium BCE site of Tell el-Amarna in Middle Egypt in chapter 7. Their investigation takes places in the enormous South Tombs Cemetery, where all social classes save the most wealthy were interred, but grave goods are rare. For a capital of the New Kingdom, skeletal indicators of physiological stress appear at unexpectedly high frequencies in all demographic and occupational groups. This may reflect the city's rapid construction

and occupation by a newly arrived and highly diverse population. The authors suggest that extensive grave robbing shortly after the cemetery's abandonment may not reflect irreverence of the dead, as is frequently assumed, but the respectful remembering and repatriation of deceased loved ones after the city's collapse.

Despite differences in time period and location, these chapters do possess some commonalities that are apparent when placed side by side. As already mentioned, most chapters investigate the mortuary practices of nonelite populations, a refreshing change from previous studies that have focused on the wealthy and powerful in the ancient Near East. More than half of the chapters are concerned with Bronze Age populations, with Campbell, Kansa, Bichener, and Lau's research on the Neolithic; and Smith and Buzon's on first millennium Sudan, being the exception. This bias toward the third and second millennia, unplanned by the editors, suggests that more work on either side of the ancient Near Eastern Bronze Age is needed in future research. Finally, most of the studies presented here fall within the core geographic areas of the ancient Near East, namely, Egypt, the Levant, and Mesopotamia. While the Arabian Gulf and Sudan are represented, the absence of Bronze and Iron Age Turkey, the Caucusus, Iran, and Yemen are conspicuous and call out for more research and publication in traditionally under-represented regions of ancient Near Eastern studies. Despite this overlap, the case studies presented here will hopefully serve as a model for integrating multiple lines of archaeological, osteological, written, and visual evidence in the investigation of ancient Near Eastern mortuary practices.

NOTES

1. Throughout this volume, the ancient Near East is defined broadly to include the area known today as the Middle East, including Egypt and Sudan, from the Paleolithic Era to the late first millennium BCE.

2. Egyptology is exceptional in this regard, as scholars must bring a diverse array of disciplinary knowledge from texts, images, material culture, funerary architecture, and the interred body together to interpret (often elite) mortuary contexts.

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