ABSTRACT

Analysis and Interpretation of Neolithic Near Eastern Mortuary Rituals from a
Community-Based Perspective

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Early farming communities located in the ancient Near East participated in unique
mortuary practices throughout the Neolithic period (9300-4700 B.C.). These practices
include a "skull cult," which involved preserving and honoring human skulls apart from
the rest of the skeletons. Interpretations of the meaning behind this "skull cult" have been
a major focus of archaeology. In this thesis, I critique previous work interpreting the skull
cult, particularly Kathleen Kenyon's theory of a venerated male ancestor skull cult, and
explore Ian Kuijt's theory on the social role of these mortuary ritual practices, giving
insight into the emergence and evolution of social complexity within these developing
societies. Ethnographic accounts supporting Kuijt's theory of community-based mortuary
practices and their significance in understanding the societal structure during the
Neolithic period suggest that while people of the Neolithic Near East were preserving the
skeletal remains of their ancestors, it may not have been for veneration purposes, but
rather a mortuary rite allowing the deceased to transition to the afterlife, all while
preserving and renewing the social relationships involved in the community.

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ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF NEOLITHIC NEAR EASTERN

MORTUARY RITUALS FROM A COMMUNITY-BASED PERSPECTIVE

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Anthropologists have always been interested in ritualistic behaviors and cultural practices of our ancestors, and people of the Neolithic Near East are no exception. The Neolithic was a defining period of cultural evolution, as several innovations developed at this time led to the modern technologies and social behaviors still practiced today. As Neolithic civilizations became progressively more advanced, cultural behaviors were modified to accommodate these changing settings, leading to rituals involving the entire community. Ritual is a system of symbolic communication, producing and reproducing relations between humans. In other words, ritual regulates social behavior and sanctifies the social structure (Verhoeven 2002). When researching Neolithic farmers and the full capacity of their early agricultural societies, not only must anthropologists study every aspect of life, they must also understand facets of death and the ritualistic behaviors involved in mortuary practices. By evaluating the rituals behind death, anthropologists are better able to comprehend the social structure and possible inequalities within early sedentary civilizations, enabling them to construct a framework in which people and their communities define social relationships. Community based rituals can be seen in day to day life, but mortuary practices are vital in reflecting the importance of community in these early civilizations.

The Neolithic period is characterized by the introduction of farming, domestication, sedentary living, the use of pottery, and unique mortuary practices. In

archaeological sites dating to the Neolithic Near East, excavations have revealed an abundance of decapitated skeletal remains, as well as painted and decorated skulls (Bonogofsky 2001a, 2004, Kenyon 1954, Ozbek 2009, Simmons 1990, Talalay 2004). Due to the primarily elderly male skulls originally recovered at Jericho, a Pre-Pottery Neolithic site, older explanations for these burial practices focused on the worship of ancestor cults and honoring the deceased. As more archaeological evidence is discovered, new interpretations and theories are surfacing regarding the purpose of these particular mortuary practices, including the act of social remembering and celebration of life (Bar-Yosef 1998, Bienert 1991, Bonogofsky 2003, Kuijt 1996, 2002, 2008, Ozbek 1990, Verhoeven 2002). Some suggest that these practices created stronger community ties and complex ritual performances pertaining to the society as a whole. Ian Kuijt (2008) and colleagues have noted that while plastered skulls of the Neolithic give insight into the material aspect of the mortuary practice, the skulls also reveal something about social relations and identity within the society.

While it has been suggested that mortuary rituals reflect ancestor worship and life after death, I will discuss the theory that Neolithic Near East mortuary practices involving decapitated and plastered skulls serve a community-based purpose and are crucial to the social relationships of those living within the community. I will examine the society within which these practices took place, followed by an explanation and evaluation of the various interpretations regarding Neolithic Near East mortuary practices. Thirdly, I will discuss ethnographic accounts supporting Kuijt's and others theory of community-based mortuary practices and their significance in understanding the societal structure during the Neolithic period.

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CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Neolithic Period and its Mortuary Practices

In order to better understand the emergence of the Neolithic period and the

necessity for community-based practices, one must have a basic understanding of the

precursor to this significant period in history, including the cultural-historical framework

and mortuary characteristics of these periods.

The Natufian culture, approximately dated to 12,500-9,000 B.C., is often

considered to represent the culture of the first sedentary hunter-gatherers in the Levant

(Bar-Yosef 1989, Belfer-Cohen 2002). The Natufians were efficient hunter-gatherers and

perhaps the earliest farmers, playing a major role in our understanding of the emergence

of early Neolithic farming communities yet to come (Bar-Yosef 1998). Features such as

dwellings, faunal remains, flint artifacts, art objects, and numerous graves provide

evidence for a transition from seasonal or temporary camps into a more sedentary

lifestyle. This shift into sedentism and an eventual farming society caused the Natufians

to undergo a substantial socioeconomic reorganization, illustrated in their symbolic

activity (Grosman 2008).Underground storage pits and plastered dwellings, commonly

referred to as "pit houses," suggest long-term occupation of the sites and Ofer Bar-Yosef

(1989, 1998) has shown that faunal remains provide evidence for permanent residence.

House rats and mice remains are found in great abundance and appear to have

morphological changes due to a prolonged occupation within the household, providing

more support for a more long-term residency (Bar-Yosef 1998). Natufian material goods

such as bone tools were also discovered, exemplifying a unique degree of variability and decoration; hunting and fishing tools, hide-working tools, grinding stones and jewelry were found at various sites, indicating the existence of distinct group identities (Bar-Yosef 1998). Other stone tools, such as those made from limestone, sandstone and basalt, have also been excavated. Exotic goods, such as materials made from obsidian, provide evidence for trade with neighboring regions. Natufian art is also unique in its use of carved animal figurines and geometric forms.

Similar to other Natufian characteristics, burials are also highly diversified. For example, the body positions (flexed, semiflexed and extended), number of individuals per grave (typically ranging from one to five), structure, and decoration all vary within the sites (Bar-Yosef 1989). Based on excavations from Hayonim Cave and Ain Mallaha in modern day Israel, graves were dug in pits located in deserted dwellings and outside of houses, and were often filled in with sediment from the site itself. The Natufians were the first people to routinely bury their dead close to or within their households (Grosman 2008).The Early Natufian period saw an abundance of grave goods, including head decorations, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, shells, bone, teeth, and shells (Bar-Yosef 1998, Oggioni 2011). While this period had a significant amount of decorated burials, it should be noted that no actual indications of institutionalized social stratification or hereditary inequalities have been discovered and researchers suggest the Natufians practiced an egalitarian social system (Bar-Yosef 1998, Grosman 2008, Kuijt 1996). Regardless of the social hierarchy present in the Natufian period, Grosman (2008: 17665) notes that it was necessary to incorporate new social regulatory mechanisms into the Natufian's belief system as a result of sedentism and increased populations.

Hilazon Tachtit, a 12,000 year old site located in Israel, functioned as a Natufian burial ground for at least 28 individuals (Grosman 2008). The site includes three burial pits containing 25 individuals of varying age. The skeletons were no longer articulated, although research suggests the burials contain elements of whole individuals. The overall lack of skulls suggests the area was used as a primary burial site which was later re-opened to remove the cranial elements for a secondary burial, a practice seen in the Natufian as well as the later Neolithic period (Grosman 2008). One of the only three complete primary burials at the site belonged to a woman aged at approximately 45 years old. The woman was buried with several unusual grave goods, including a completely articulated human foot (not that of her own) and over 50 complete tortoise shells. Based on the fact that tortoises are solitary creatures, the accumulation of these animals suggests a prolonged investment in the preparation of this particular burial. Other interesting faunal remains found in the burial include a wing tip of a golden eagle and the nearly complete pelvis of a leopard, an extremely rare animal during the Natufian period. Finally, a complete male gazelle horn core was found near the woman's pelvis. Male gazelle horn cores have been found in other Natufian graves and have been found to serve spiritual purposes (Grosman 2008). The vast amount of grave goods and precision placed on the burial suggests that the woman held a unique position within the community, possibly that of a shaman. Shamans are characteristically known from hunter-gatherer and small-scale agricultural societies around the world and serve both the community and its members as a mediator between the human and world spirits. Even in an egalitarian society, a shaman would have ascribed high status within her community and received special treatment at death. Although this particular burial is unlike any other

found in the Natufian period, Grosman (2008:17668) notes it is not surprising that new burial traditions and ideologies arose with the social and economic changes associated with the transition to agriculture.

The Neolithic Period of the Near East saw extensive changes in food acquisition, social organization, settlements and rituals. Often termed the "Neolithic Revolution," this period was characterized by early domestication of plants and animals, the aggregation of people in larger villages, its degree of sedentism and reduction in mobility, residential architecture, the presence of sickle blades and microliths, and a reorganization in the way humans interacted. The Neolithic period is commonly subdivided into the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (9,300-8,300 B.C.), Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (8,300-6,800 B.C.), and Pottery Neolithic (6,800-4,700 B.C.) based on the presence and type of flaked stone tool assemblages and pottery found within each subdivision. Neolithic sites were most commonly located along fertile alluvial terraces within the Fertile Crescent, or what is now known as areas consisting of Turkey, Jordan, Israel, and southern Syria, near the Rift Valley and adjacent to the Jordan Valley (Bar-Yosef 1998, Belfer-Cohen 2002, Kuijt 2002, 2008).

Settlement patterns of the Neolithic period, first seen in the PPNA, are often rounded, semi-subterranean dwellings constructed of mudbrick. Various settlement sizes began arising in the Neolithic period, as larger sites had open areas between residential dwellings. Lithic tools during this period were often various forms of sickle blades, although a variety of flint materials suggest greater distances in trading (Bar-Yosef 1989, Kuijt 2008). Art forms also began changing, as human figurines, such as a kneeling female, were shaped from limestone or clay. Some suggest (Bar-Yosef 1998, Bonogofsky

2004) that this specification of gender not previously seen in the Natufian period

indicated the emerging role of women in the cultivating society. Evidence for social

hierarchy is minimal during the Neolithic period, but Verhoeven (2002: 9) suggests that

social and economic disputes may have been resolved in a "village meeting" scenario,

supporting the importance of community-based practices.

Mortuary practices of the Neolithic period are a source of great archaeological

data, giving researchers better insight as to the rituals and social organization involved in

this time period (Bar-Yosef 1989, Kuijt, 2002). Most burials of this period are simple and

single with few to no grave goods, possibly helping to equalize the socio-economic

differences between individuals and groups (Bar-Yosef 1998, Kuijt 1996, 2002, Oggioni

2011). Mortuary practices often involved secondary mortuary practices, meaning after the

body decomposed, the grave was reopened and the skull was removed from the burial

without disturbing the rest of the skeleton. Caches of skulls and crania covered in paint

and/or plaster are also known from several Near Eastern Neolithic sites (Bonogofsky

2005, Kuijt 2008, Ozbek 2009, Simmons 1990, Talalay 2004). The first evidence for

these mortuary practices involving the decapitation and collective caching of skulls

appeared in the PPNA, in which cases the separated crania were sometimes decorated in

red, black or white paint or plaster, located in domestic locales or special-purpose

buildings (Bonogofsky 2001a, Kuijt 1996). The term "plastered skull" is often referred to

both plastered skulls and to crania that were plastered to look like skulls in which the

lower jaw was re-created in plaster (Bonogofsky 2003, Kenyon 1954, Ozbek 2009).

Similarities in mortuary practices from the Late Natufian through the Pre-pottery

Neolithic A period, such as the use of primary burials and secondary skull removal,

reflect a sense of ritual continuity between the periods, suggesting that the mortuary rituals were based upon similar belief systems. Understanding the similarities in mortuary practices may also help identify social continuity during these periods (Kuijt 2002, Ozbek 2009). Kuijt (2008: 172) notes that the different methods used in skull remodeling and plastering, such as the use of ochre or various forms of plaster, reflect different technological differences, as well as the development of local, community-based traditions in the context of shared general practices and beliefs systems.

Jericho, an important Neolithic site of the Near East dating to 8,500-7,600 B.C., was occupied both in the PPNA and PPNB. The occupation of Jericho during the PPNA illustrates unique architecture, although the buildings are still constructed of unfired mudbricks and covered in plaster. Jericho is interesting in that its lowest levels are definitely dated before the presence of pottery, as seen in the character of the occupation, architecture, and planning that change in the following pottery periods (Kenyon 1954). Excavations of the site have recovered stone tools and bowls, as well as the typical sickle-blades of the Neolithic. The presence of obsidian blades also suggests trade with other areas. Jericho is perhaps best known for its stone wall and tower, although there are various interpretations as to its purpose, such as its use as a defensive tool (Kenyon 1954). Bonogofsky (2001a) argues that Jericho is the best representation of the PPNA population given its number of preserved skeletons. Although cached skulls from Jericho can be dated to the PPNA, no plastering occurred until the PPNB occupation (Bonogofsky 2001a, Strouhal 1973).

Abu Hureyra, another Near East PPNA site dated to 7,500-6,000 B.C., provides substantial evidence for plant domestication and year-round occupation, followed by the

eventual domestication of animals. Abu Hureyra was a large settlement during the PPNA and large amounts of exotic materials illustrate the significant degree to which goods were traded and exchanged. Excavated mortuary remains revealed groups of skulls buried by themselves, as well as primary burials of complete individuals. Some of the skulls also appeared to be covered in red ochre, a commonality of the Neolithic period (Bonogofsky 2001a).

The transition from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B saw increased settlement sizes and new developments in mortuary practices, particularly in regards to skull treatment. A substantial increase in settlement size during the PPNB led to the development of buildings designed for a wide range of activities, such as food storage, tool production and ritual purposes. As these agricultural communities began expanding and populations within the settlements continued to rise, the need for social cohesion arose, creating the need for public ceremonies and rituals, as well as an increased interest in foreign commodities (Bar-Yosef 1989, 1998, Hodder 2004, Ozbek 2009, Verhoeven 2002). Goring-Morris (2000:106) notes that in the PPNB, the emergence of incipient social hierarchies and ritual ideologies were necessary to regulate and codify increasingly complex interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup relationships.

During the PPNB period in the Levant, deceased individuals were usually buried beneath plaster floors within the home, often in the northern part of the household (Ozbek 2009, Simmons et al.1990). Bonogofsky (2001a) notes that archaeologists suggested this practice was thought to connect the living to the "world of the dead." Based on the findings of children and young adult skulls at varying sites, there is no reason to believe this mortuary practice was reserved for adults; there is evidence indicating that skulls

were removed regardless of age and sex (Bonogofsky 2001a, 2005, Oggioni 2011, Ozbek 2009).

Although the collective caching of skulls was present in the PPNA, it was not until the PPNB that the ancestor cult phenomenon reached its height with several occurrences of plastered skulls (Bonogofsky 2001a). There is speculation as to the purpose of the plastered skull, for example, Strouhal (1973) suggests that the red ochre coloring illustrates the color of life. Others (Kenyon 1954, Ozbek 2009) propose the skulls were used for the purpose of ancestor cults or even meant to represent real portraits of the deceased.

Plastered skulls have been recovered from PPNB sites such as Jericho, Catalhoyuk, Cayonu, 'Ain Ghazal and Kosk Hoyuk. It is interesting to note that while all of the Near Eastern plastered skulls appear to be part of the same regional funerary tradition, there is a high degree of variation between settlements in regards to location and condition of the skeletal remains (Kuijt 2008, Ozbek 2009).

Excavations of Jericho's PPNB occupational levels revealed multiple plastered skulls. The plastered skulls were found discarded beneath plastered floors, a characteristic often seen during the PPNB. While the tops of the skulls were left uncovered, the face and jaw are completely covered with plaster, as well as the features of the face being highlighted with shells and paint. Not only do the skulls illustrate highly developed technical and representational skills, they display a great deal of individuality in their plastered features (Kenyon 1954). Several intact skeletal burials were also found beneath the floors. While this is a normal practice for the Neolithic period, the number of

bodies present in such a restricted area gives rise to suspicion as to the circumstances behind the burials (Kuijt 1996). Kenyon (1954: 108) notes that it appears that at a stage when the flesh was partially, but not completely, decayed, some of the bodies had been collected up in a disjointed condition, and in other cases they had been removed.

Cayonu Tepesi, an Anatolian PPNB site dating to 7,250-6,750 B.C., provides evidence for an early village-farming community. Plant domestication appeared early in the site's formation, while faunal remains in the higher levels of the site provide evidence for animal domestication during Cayonu's later occupational period. The site's numerous and complex structural remains illustrate Cayonu's remarkable complexity of village life (Loy 1989). Although Cayonu bears resemblance to other PPNB sites, it reveals distinct burial practices unlike any previously seen. Rather than bury their dead in domestic dwellings, the people of Cayonu built a specific structure, often referred to as the "skull building," to house their deceased (Schirmer 1990, Talalay 2004). Earlier levels of the ossuary contained burial crypts and later stages consisted of compartments holding skulls and large quantities of human bones. Although each cell contained up to 90 skulls, they all appeared to be carefully arranged in a row. Conversely, bodies were arbitrarily deposited with no apparent order or orientation. Blood residue from both animals and humans was also discovered in one of the building's levels, suggesting possible dismemberment and/or secondary burial preparation within the building (Loy 1989, Talalay 2004). Horns of cattle were also found within the building, suggesting the significance of cattle in mortuary practices first seen at Cayonu as well as later Neolithic sites.

Several human remains and decapitated skulls have also been excavated at Catalhoyuk, a PPNB and PN site dating to 7,250-6,000 B.C., many of which were found in pits beneath the floors, storage pits and hearths. Like other PPNB sites, people of Catalhoyuk buried their deceased in mass or multiple burials and were rarely found in their correct anatomical position (Mellaart 1967, Talalay 2004). Burials at Catalhoyuk included both primary and secondary burials. Red ochre was prevalent among burials at Catalhoyuk, not just on decapitated skulls, but also the walls surrounding the burials. Bull niches have also been associated with mortuary practices, as they are often located in the same area of the building as the burials (Hodder 2004, Mellaart 1967). Not only have excavations of Catalhoyuk revealed decapitated and plastered skulls, they have provided symbolic wall paintings portraying excarnation scenes. Several paintings consist of vultures attacking headless bodies, as well as a damaged painting possibly illustrating a headless man holding his own head (Talalay 2004). While Mellaart (1967: 175) suggests that these headless bodies represent ancestors, this proposal is only speculative. Regardless of the exact meanings behind these paintings, it can be presumed that removal of the head from the deceased individual played a major role in the community's social behavior. Figurines found at Catalhoyuk also appear to follow this practice of head removal; an absence of heads on seven of nine figurines found *in situ* as well as the presence of a dowel hole at the base of one head suggest the use of transposable figurine heads (Talalay 2004). Catalhoyuk excavations have revealed dwellings used for various purposes, illustrating the PPNB trend of increasing settlement size and the sophistication of settlement patterns.

'Ain Ghazal, a PPNB site dating to approximately 7,250-5,800 B.C., is perhaps best known for its two caches of plaster human statuary, as well as several burials including two partially plastered skulls (Simmons, et al., 1990). Bonogofsky (2001a) has interpreted the un-plastered skulls located at 'Ain Ghazal as being in the preparatory stage before applying the plaster, evident by the sanding of the bone surfaces. One of the skulls with evidence of plaster was recovered under a plaster floor in the northern end of the house. The occipital bone contains four distinct cut marks, suggesting post-mortem defleshing of the individual's cranium (Simmons, et al., 1990). While there was no indication of paint on the cranium, plaster was found on facial features including the eyes, nose, the right cheek, and an ear (Oggioni 2011, Simmons, et al., 1990). Both the plastered skull and statue caches excavated from 'Ain Ghazal include wide-open, staring eyes, much like the plastered skulls recovered at other Neolithic sites. Although various interpretations exist as to the purpose of these plastered skulls, there is no doubt that they illustrate a rare symbol of early ceremonial treatment of the dead.

Kosk Hoyuk, a Late Neolithic site in Central Anatolia dating to approximately 6,200 B.C., contained nineteen human skulls, among them thirteen skulls which were depicted with clay and painted with red ochre (Bonogofsky 2005, Ozbek 2009). Both the plastered and unplastered skulls were deposited separately from their corresponding and unknown postcranial skeletons (Ozbek 2009). In the 2006 excavation season, five adult skulls were found in an interesting position, as they were laid in a row with the plastered skulls placed at the front and back of the row, while the untreated skulls were laid in the middle. Like other Neolithic site burials, the skulls were deposited on a plastered floor in the house, their fronts facing the east. Fibrous materials were also found on the skull

surfaces, suggesting they may have been laid on or wrapped in mats (Bonogofsky 2005, Ozbek 2009). The skulls were accompanied by three vessels and the headless figure of a goddess. The actual plaster remodeling of the skulls is life-like, illustrating the meticulous attention placed on the activity. The eyes, ears, nose and mouth are carefully marked, showing the importance placed on accentuating the features of the face (Kuijt 2008, Oggioni 2011). The eyes are modeled as large and prominent and appear to be closed, as if the individual is falling asleep or nearing death (Bonogofsky 2005, Ozbek 2009). The entire facial mask is also colored by red ochre, seen often in Neolithic Anatolia.

The excavation of Kosk Hoyuk also revealed two complete *in situ* skeletons in two different houses, both of which are missing skulls and are primary burials. The bodies had been placed in a flexed position and all skeletal parts remained in their anatomical location, except for the missing skulls and mandibles. The individuals were initially buried intact under the floor, and after decomposition had occurred, the skulls and mandibles were carefully removed from the two remaining skeletons (Talalay 2004). Only one of the skeletons had mortuary gifts, which were minimal. All the normal burials and headless bodies recovered from the Late Neolithic period were found beneath the floors of houses (Ozbek 2009). The excavations of Kosk Hoyuk reveal a late continuation of an earlier Neolithic mortuary tradition, as no other site in the Near East has recovered decorated and undecorated skulls dating to the Late Neolithic.

By the Pottery Neolithic, there is reason to suggest people were transitioning from a community-based burial practice to a more household or individual burial. Ritualistic characteristics seen in the PPNB, such as ritual buildings, decorated bones and

manipulated skulls, are rare or even absent in the PN (Bonogofsky 2001a). Verhoeven (2002) suggests domesticity as the cause of this change to a more intimate ritual environment, noting the high occurrence of PN figures in domestic spaces rather than in open areas, as well as the decrease in secondary burials. While the number of secondary burials dwindled in the PN, the introduction of cremation became standard. This interpretation is also based on Kuijt's idea that secondary burial practices are planned in advance and have a communal, cross-household nature, therefore reinforcing collective values, identity and cohesion (Oggioni 2011).

A basic understanding of the transition from the Natufian culture of hunter-gatherers to sedentary farmers of the Neolithic Period allows anthropologists to gain insight into the purpose of such unique mortuary practices. The initial domestication of plants led to a more sedentary lifestyle, creating the world's first settlements and civilizations. As the agricultural communities were growing in size, a need for social cohesion arose. In order to eliminate social hierarchy, community-based rituals were developed to enhance unity within the settlement. Community-based rituals, such as mortuary practices involving the removal and decoration of skulls, enabled early civilizations to define and maintain social relationships through repeated actions.

CHAPTER THREE

Interpretations of Neolithic Near Eastern Mortuary Practices

Excavations of Near Eastern Neolithic sites have revealed unique mortuary practices; although they are seen in several sites throughout the Levant and Anatolia, these practices are highly specific in their nature and persist for over an 8,000 year span. The presence of such interesting mortuary practices has raised questions regarding their purpose and why they emerged when they did. To help answer these questions, researchers have developed various theories intended to interpret these mortuary practices and the rituals behind them, leading to disagreements about why these practices were so important and what they represented. Although several interpretations have been suggested, interpretations of Neolithic mortuary rituals generally fall into five categories:

1. An ancestor cult consisting of elderly males,

2. The concept of a fertility cult,

3. The decapitation of heads as trophy skulls,

4. An association with headless clay figurines, and

5. A community-based interpretation focused on the living rather than the deceased.

I will begin by discussing the first and most widely accepted theory of Neolithic mortuary rituals, the ancestor cult, followed by a discussion of the other predominant mortuary ritual theories, and concluding with Ian Kuijt's interpretation of community-based mortuary practices in the Neolithic Near East.

Ancestor Cult

The first and most widely held theory of such unique Neolithic mortuary practices originated with Kathleen Kenyon's excavation of PPNB Jericho and its abundance of plastered skulls. According to Kenyon and her colleagues, this collection of plastered skulls was part of a mortuary ritual involving the veneration of elderly male ancestor skulls (Kenyon 1954). As more plastered skulls were excavated at surrounding Neolithic sites such as Ain Ghazal, Nahal Hemar and Kosk Hoyuk, Kenyon's interpretation of venerated male ancestors continued to grow recognition and support among other researchers.

After discovering the skull of what appeared to be an elderly man beneath the floor of a house at Jericho, Kenyon suggested he was "a venerated member of the community whose wisdom it was hoped to perpetuate in the house" (Kenyon 1954, Bonogofsky 2003:3). After uncovering a large number of discarded individuals placed under the floor of a house, Kenyon (1954:108) suggested the possibility of a massacre, after which time, survivors of the event may have returned and preserved the heads of the most honored individuals as venerated ancestors. Kenyon's excavations at Jericho also revealed plastered male skulls modeled into human faces, described by Kenyon as "the earliest known portraits in the direct line of ancestry of modern art" (Bienert 1991:11). When evaluating the number of plastered skulls recovered during the Neolithic Period, Ozbek (2009) also notes the remodeled facial features on the skull seem to recreate life through the portrayal of the body.

Household structures at Jericho provided further evidence of an ancestor cult. The north-east end of the site revealed a small room that Kenyon (1954:104) proposed to be a household shrine. The distinction between houses and shrines has been made at other Neolithic sites as well, although all buildings appear to have been used in a social and ritualistic context. At Jericho, one of the houses also contained a small room partitioned off from the main room of the house. A stone of volcanic origin was discovered in a niche located along one of the room's walls. According to Kenyon (1954:104), this representation of a cult object suggested "the community was already groping after a comprehension of a supernatural being." When discussing daily practices and social memory at Neolithic sites, Hodder and Cessford (2004:19) note that Neolithic people were linked to these daily patterns and behaviors through ancestors and repetitive practices at monuments to the dead.

The ancestor cult theory was quickly adopted by researchers excavating various Neolithic sites with plastered skulls. Kenyon's interpretation of venerated male ancestors at Jericho became so predominant that no other theories involving Neolithic mortuary rituals would overrule her assertion until newer evidence was available to dispute such claims (Bonogofsky 2003, 2005).

Ancestor Cult Rebuttal

Although Kenyon's theory of an ancestor cult has persisted among several archaeologists, researchers have disputed her interpretation based on newer archaeological evidence. When evaluating Kenyon's initial interpretation of the Neolithic plastered skulls, Bonogofsky has pointed out there is no mention of the significant

evidence of women and child plastered skulls (Bonogofsky 2003). Based on the excavations of Neolithic sites such as Tell Ramad, Kosk Hoyuk, Catalhoyuk, Jericho, and their occurrence of plastered skulls belonging to children and elderly people alike, as well as both women and men, there is no indication that mortuary practices involving plastered skulls was restricted to elderly men (Bienert 1991, Bonogofsky 2003, 2005, Kuijt 2008, Ozbek 2009). When looking at sex ratios, plastered skulls from Tell Ramad in particular contained more females than males and ranged in age from young adult to old adult, yet these findings were often overlooked by scholars (Bonogofsky 2003). This directly goes against Kenyon's theory of venerated male ancestors, given that both women and children are present.

The presence of male plastered skulls may have actually served an entirely different purpose than previously advocated by Kenyon. Some researchers have suggested that male skulls were selected for decoration based on particular facial characteristics, such as a broad vault and low and wide face (Arensburg and Hershkovitz 1989). Only a small number of Neolithic people fit this qualification, suggesting the skulls were either artificially deformed *in vivo* or the removal of the mandible occurred postmortem. The newly shortened and sometimes toothless faces advocated a concept of ruler ship and seniority among the elders, although the remodeled skulls were not necessarily from biologically old adults (Bonogofsky 2003, 2004, Simmons et al. 1990, Strouhal 1973). That being said, it would appear that decapitated skulls, in this case males, were manipulated in order to resemble elderly individuals, suggesting elderly appearance was more revered and sought after once an individual had died, regardless of the individual's actual age at death.

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When considering the theory that Neolithic mortuary rituals revolved around worshipping biological ancestors, Ozbek (2009:385) notes there is no actual archaeological evidence to suggest that remodeled and bare skulls were respected ancestors; researchers are unable to determine whether these remains were grouped according to special ties, such as kinship, or rather placed haphazardly within the household. Bonogofsky (2005:133) also notes that since ancestor worship involves the veneration of an adult from whom one is descended, it by definition does not include children. This distinction of an ancestor gives rise to further questions regarding the ancestor cult interpretation, given the substantial number of child-aged plastered skulls recovered from Neolithic sites in Anatolia and the Levant. Based on human skeletal remains consisting of male and female, young and old, Kenyon's theory of an ancestor cult focused on elderly males is becoming less valid among researchers.

Influenced by Status.

During the early Neolithic transition from a mobile hunter-gatherer society to a more sedentary, agricultural society, a shift in social cohesion may have occurred among the community members, causing social hierarchies to emerge. Some researchers have suggested that mortuary practices of the Neolithic period highlight this social inequality by limiting the number of individuals that received such rituals after death. Ozbek (2009) believes there is little doubt that the treatment of the dead represents an obvious example of social status differences among the people of the Neolithic period, given that not all skulls were found with the same plastered facial features. Goring-Morris (2000:106) supports this theory, noting that social hierarchies and ritual ideologies were necessary to regulate increasingly complex interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup relationships.

Simmons and his colleagues (1990:109) also discuss the significance of plastered skulls in association with ceremonial functions relating to ancestor worship or status. Plastering a skull and highlighting facial features of an individual may have been done to pay homage to the deceased; if these individuals were revered members of the village, their plastered skulls were displayed as a tribute. Talalay (2004) also notes that the close proximity of deceased individuals to the living community helps to reinforce the important links with death, burial, and the possible powers of the deceased. Bienert (1991) builds on this suggestion of power from the deceased, proposing that as people shifted from a mobile hunter-gatherer society to a more settled one, the living members of the society may have tried to preserve the spiritual powers of their deceased leaders and important members. The skulls could then be "asked" for advice in times of distress and danger (Bienert 1991). Kuijt (2008:177) agrees that Neolithic plastered skulls may have originally been linked to specific individuals, such as leaders or other people of importance. Given that fewer than 5% of people had their skulls plastered, Kuijt (2008:177) recognizes that only a select number of individuals were chosen, possibly for their importance and skillfulness within the society, but they included males and females and ranged from the old to the relatively young. Assuming there was a method of choosing particular individuals for mortuary rituals, it can be argued that community members were preserving special and important ancestors for their presumed magical powers in the afterlife.

Fertility Cult

The significance of mortuary practices focusing on heads has also been attributed to concepts such as virility and fertility within Neolithic societies (Bonogofsky 2005,

Talalay 2004, Verhoeven 2002). Verhoeven (2002:8) discusses the concept of a life force, or the vital power which principally resides in the head. He notes that Neolithic skulls were especially honored because they were the seat of said life force, ensuring fertility to animals, plants and humans. Funerary offerings recovered with Neolithic skulls also suggest their use as fertility devices (Bonogofsky 2004). Kenyon discusses the possibility of a fertility cult, symbolized by the presence of small animal figurines. One figurine, suggested as that of a mother-goddess, was recovered with a missing head, possibly coinciding with the removal of human heads (Kenyon 1954). Considering people of the Neolithic period were beginning to settle into sedentary lifestyles and establishing the foundations for an agricultural society, it is very possible they would have revered objects symbolizing fertility, not only for the benefit of their crops, but for their future offspring.

Skulls as Trophies

As populations in Neolithic settlements were growing, conflicts may have arisen within the community as well as with nearby settlements. In times of conflict or warfare, a trophy of some sort is often presented to indicate the victor. Kenyon (1954:108), in her discussion of Jericho's excavation, suggests the possibility that the site's conquerors collected the skulls of deceased individuals as trophies, noting that her discovery of a male skull under the floor of a house may have been "an enemy whom it was desired to keep under control." When considering skull trophies as a possible explanation for the caching of skulls, Talalay (2004:156) and Bienert (1991) note that skull trophies have ethnographically been obtained after battle to underscore the importance of valor, bravery, pride and manhood, providing societies lacking hereditary rank with a system of

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social prestige. The presence of fractures and depressions on skulls from Kosk Hoyuk has been suggested as representing social violence (Bonogofsky 2005). This notion of social violence may imply the practice of collecting skulls as trophies, perhaps from neighboring villages that were coming into conflict with each other, as well as inter-group conflict resulting in the death of community members.

Thorpe (2003:147) explains the three main competing theories for warfare in archaeological contexts- territorial, reproductive, and status competition. Despite the fact that people during the Neolithic Period were taking measures to preserve their egalitarian social system and adapting to their newfound sedentary lifestyle, it is plausible that conflict would arise in areas dealing with territorial and status competition. Given that the presence of fractures and depressions on skulls was not common among Neolithic burials, it may be possible that only a limited number of skulls were collected as trophies. This theory of trophy skulls has not yet been thoroughly investigated by researchers.

<p align="center">*Headless Clay Figurines*</p>

Interpretations of Neolithic mortuary practices have also been associated with the presence of decapitated anthropomorphic and zoomorphic clay figurines. The figurines appear to have been mutilated, damaged, or constructed as headless (Kuijt 2008). Half a dozen figurines from the Late Neolithic period site of Hacilar were discovered with detachable wooden heads pegged into clay bodies (Talalay 2004). The number of headless figurines is substantial, including one figurine containing a dowel hole at the base of the head. Talalay (2004:145) suggests these clay statuettes were utilized in some type of initiation ceremony or rite of passage. Supposing this theory is plausible, these transposable wooden heads may have represented shifting personae or identities used at

different times during a ritual in order to fit the specific occasion (Hamilton 1996, Talalay 2004). Talalay (2004:151) notes that these changing identities were susceptible to manipulation in various contexts. These heads revealed variations in facial details, suggesting they were used to portray a range of emotions, attitudes, or states of being (Hamilton 1996, Talalay 2004). Talalay (2004:152) proposes that the headless figurines may not have been significant until it was connected to the body of the figure. Similarly, skulls of the deceased may have required intentional placement on headless bodies in order to activate their accessibility to the living. The body is a powerful and complex social symbol that undergoes repeated action to establish an individual's different entities, including one's gender and social personas. These actions require the use of the body and serve to remind or possibly instruct individuals about their expected behaviors, beliefs and social roles (Kuijt 2008, Talalay 2004). Conversely, once a head was detached from the individual, it may have been seen as a collective symbol capable of new identities and powers; attached, the head cannot be easily objectified and manipulated, as it remains a stationary part of a single individual, but once removed from its body, the skull may take on various functions and roles, generating a "new life" for this part of the human form (Kuijt 2008, Talalay 2004).

Excavations at Nahal Hemar have also revealed several small painted heads constructed in plaster on the ends of bones (Kuijt 2008). Kuijt (2008:182) notes that these stick figures provide a naturalistic representation of the human face on an object that is portable, small and highly visual. Given that they did not represent specific individuals, there is reason to believe the presence of plastered heads focused on collective community rituals rather than the particular deceased individual. The fact that

disembodied skulls and headless anthropomorphic figurines appeared in both mortuary

and domestic settings illustrates the symbolic and social significance of heads during the

Neolithic Period, particularly as part of a shared system of ritual practices (Kuijt 2008,

Talalay 2004).

Ian Kuijt's Community-based Interpretation

In his explanation of community-based mortuary rituals, Kuijt discusses the

significance of rituals within a community, such as the purposes they serve. Rituals,

particularly those relating to mortuary events, give insight into the role that the deceased

played within the community, as well as what these practices meant to the living. While

Kuijt notes that plastered skulls may have originated as a tribute to deceased ancestors, he

argues that the rituals associated with the production and use of these skulls transitioned

from a focus on remembering the dead to one of forgetting the dead, in order to facilitate

communal behaviors within the society.

In order to evaluate mortuary rituals of the Neolithic and their interpretations, it is

important to have a better understanding of the role ritual plays within a society. Kuijt

(2008:173) notes that ritual is directly associated with memory and commemoration, as

rituals are linked to the production of shared memories and experiences in communities.

He argues that social memory and commemoration involve four factors: repetitiveness in

observance, reenactment of some former circumstance, social sanction of the ceremony,

and formality (Kuijt 2008). When tying these factors together, Kuijt (2008:173) notes that

> "The repetition of words, actions, and interactions makes the event
> coherent, understandable, and meaningful to participants. It is through
> this mélange that the past, present, and future dimensions of
> commemorative ritual are affirmed and made compatible with each
> other."

It is only through individuals coming together as a commemorative whole that social memory and repeated practices can be generated and sustained. Memory practices within a society may include bodily rituals and behavior, as well as monuments and representation. Drawing upon highly visible material monumentality and symbolic interconnections in Neolithic rituals associated with life and death, Kuijt (2008:172) argues that plastered skulls are only one element of interrelated social and material practices dealing with identity of both the individual and society as a whole.

Rather than reflecting ancestor worship, Kuijt believes mortuary rituals may have initially focused on remembrance but eventually facilitated the forgetting of the dead. While direct memory placed an individual in direct contact with the events and people involved in the mortuary practice, Kuijt (2008:174) notes that over time this memory becomes indirect, emphasizing social membership rather than direct biological lineage. After several generations, the memory of individuals becomes lost and depersonalized, until mortuary practices of the dead develop into what Kuijt (2008:174) calls "an ancestral memory that is anonymous, homogenized, and collective."

Kuijt (2008:174) notes that the process of forgetting the dead is linked to the decontextualization of the individual—the creation of a symbolic collective identity that is shared and experienced by others. Memorial actions can also be transferred via heirlooms, portable objects symbolizing ancestry and used in public rituals or events (Kuijt 2008). As time progresses, these heirlooms may lose their association with particular individuals or households, and instead become depersonalized and used as a source of collective social history within the community. Kuijt (2008:183) suggests the plastered skulls may have served as stationary ritual relics and were passed around during

ceremonies and performances, given the evidence for the reuse of human plastered skulls in ritual events. The idea of plastered skulls as heirlooms and ritual relics may account for their confusion as venerated ancestors as well as trophy skulls collected from neighboring communities.

When trying to preserve a symbolic collective identity within the society, it was crucial to maintain an egalitarian system during the transition to an agricultural community. In studying the emergence of social inequality, researchers have focused on the ritual behavior in which people and communities define and modify social relationships (Kuijt 1996). Kuijt (1996:313) notes that some researchers understand ritual as a device of powerful social regulation and a consolidator of political, economic, and social power among select individuals within communities, as well as a potential means of social advancement facilitating the breakdown of egalitarian belief systems. Although rituals have been associated with hierarchal power, as advances in food production and population aggregation occurred within Neolithic societies, several measures were taken to maintain a shared identity among its members. The development of hierarchy and food production would have been viewed as a threat to the social cohesion of the community, as well as raised a growing fear of loss of authority by one household to that of another; this fear would have reinforced existing codes within the society and led to the development of new, egalitarian social codes "for limiting the development and centralization of power and authority within early agricultural communities." (Kuijt 1996, Verhoeven 2002). Kuijt, as well as other anthropologists, recognizes how ritual practices, particularly those involving mortuary rituals, actually help to maintain egalitarian social systems.

In order to fully understand the social impact of specific Neolithic mortuary rituals upon both individuals and communities, it is crucial to examine the significance of living individuals and their role in group membership rather than the perceived status of deceased individuals and their influence on the community (Kuijt 1996). Kuijt (1996:315) notes that mortuary rituals are a form of public practice, often to elicit community participation, and is not always, therefore, a direct reflection of the status, authority, and importance of the deceased. Talalay (2004) supports this claim, proposing that regardless of whether secondary mortuary practices focus on specific individuals within the society, there is a component of collective social memory and identity for the community as a whole, as these decapitated remains help to mediate complex relationships between the living and the dead (Kuijt 1996, Talalay 2004).

Certain characteristics of Neolithic mortuary practices highlight the measures taken to preserve an egalitarian society. Similarities between Late Natufian and PPNA period mortuary practices, such as the lack of grave goods, the use of secondary burials and practice of skull removal, emphasize the importance of ritual practices involving the collective community's beliefs and identity. A decrease in the appearance of grave goods implies an attempt to downplay social differences and Kuijt (1996:322) suggests the curated and eventually cached skulls were used to preserve this collective shared past and identity, in light of changing economic and subsistence practices. Secondary burial practices often elicit high-profile public ceremonies, allowing them to be viewed as spiritual and symbolic acts with social, political, and personal meanings (Kuijt 2008, Verhoeven 2002). Multi-stage secondary burials are planned in advance and require abundant community participation. The scheduling of funerary events were arranged as to

not interfere with other tasks, and may have even been seen as a season of festivities (Kuijt 2008). Talalay (2004:153) also references this planned out mortuary practice by acknowledging a "calendar of events" used in Neolithic mortuary practices, noting that collective rituals or festivals were associated with secondary burials and skull caching, most likely serving as powerful social regulators intended to preserve community cohesion (Verhoeven 2002).

Given not only that very little distance was maintained between the skulls of the dead and the living community, but the extensive activities involved in preparing and transporting various body parts, particularly the head, Talalay (2004:155) argues that although the dead were no longer social agents, they were actively involved in the production of social relationships. Kuijt (2008:184) makes a similar argument when discussing differing characteristics of Neolithic burial practices; unlike their European Neolithic counterparts who separated residential and burial locations, Levantine Neolithic burials were located in and interconnected with areas of the living, suggesting the presence of the dead was crucial to the sustainability of the living community. Given these close quarters between the living and the deceased, Kuijt (2008:186) suggests these mortuary practices were communal actions that served not only to commemorate the individual identity of the deceased but also as a conduit for collective memory and reaffirmation of identity and community membership.

As more evidence is recovered from archaeological sites, further insight can be gained as to how these complex mortuary rituals fit into the larger context of Neolithic life. While Kenyon's theory of a male ancestor cult has been widely accepted by researchers, Kuijt's interpretation of community-based mortuary rituals contains a vast

amount of evidence that can be supported by all aspects of archaeological data, including

the presence of male and female plastered skulls, all ranging in age.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ethnographic Accounts of Community-Based Mortuary Practices

Much of a society's culture can be better understood by evaluating the mortuary

practices involved and the role these rituals play in everyday life. For example, mortuary

practices can be used as indicators of prehistoric social organization (Kuijt 1996, Levy

1989). Since there is no way to definitively determine the social implications associated

with Neolithic Near Eastern mortuary practices and beliefs, ethnoarchaeological evidence

allows researchers to create analogies between various societies and the available

archaeological data from the Near East. While the mortuary rituals of the Neolithic Near

East have most commonly been interpreted as demonstrating ancestor veneration, several

ethnoarchaeological accounts provide evidence for Ian Kuijt's (1996, 2002, 2008)

interpretation that these mortuary rituals may have served as social regulators for the

purpose of preserving communal cohesion.

Although the methods behind secondary mortuary rituals vary among

ethnographic groups, these community-centered rituals are all means of defining,

shaping, and maintaining identities and social relationships. Janet Levy (1989:160) notes

that

> "from the archaeological perspective, death rituals are significant
> not only because they may crystallize values and social structures of a
> community for an experiential moment, but because they leave behind
> physical remains that may influence or organize human behavior or be
> manipulated by human behavior for much longer than the ritual event
> itself."

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A deeper investigation of ethnographic accounts will aid in deciphering the function behind such unique mortuary rituals of the Neolithic Near East and their likely role in maintaining societal relationships.

There is a substantial amount of ethnographic evidence from cultures around the world suggesting mortuary practices serve an important integrative function within communities by encouraging participation in a powerful communal act (Kuijt 1996). Some examples of these mortuary rituals are seen in cultures from Indonesia, Peru and Alaska.

Andaman Islanders

One such place this behavior can be witnessed is among the Andaman Islanders residing in Burma. Many of Andamanese cultural practices involve ritual weeping, specifically in regards to a death in the community. While the Andamanese may weep spontaneously in times of joy and sorrow, the weeping is most commonly associated with ceremonial customs. Radcliffe-Brown (1964:240) explains that ritual weeping is "an expression of that feeling of attachment between persons which is of such importance in the almost domestic life of the Andaman society…the purpose of the rite is to affirm the existence of a social bond between two or more persons" (Huntington 1979:25, Kuijt 1996). According to the Andamanese custom, mourners are associated with the world of the dead, and as such, are separated from society. At the end of this mourning period involving ritual weeping, these members are reunited with the rest of the community and are able to renew their bonds with the living.

Ceremonial weeping over the relocation of human remains expresses continued sentiment between community members, despite the fact that social bonds are being

lessened. Huntington (1979:26) notes that this form of weeping is still a positive affirmation of the continuity of social ties, even though they may be altered by final reburial of the deceased. Once the final reburial ceremonies take place, the deceased individual is entirely cut off from the living world and the bones are treasured as relics. Community members weep over the bones as a representation of the individual's remains being received back into the community in order to fulfill a special place in society. That being said, the affection once felt for the deceased individual are transferred to his or her skeletal remains. Each aspect of the weeping process serves to renew or modify social relationships within the community after a partial break in the social ties occurs (Huntington 1979, Radcliffe-Brown 1964).

Secondary mortuary rituals are also important for emphasizing the transitory nature of death through a series of ritual acts and mortuary practices spaced over time. These rituals are used to facilitate participation in community events; rituals recognize group memberships, and co-participation in these events strengthens existing relationships while developing new ones. This mortuary practice involving a series of ritual acts is clearly evident in the burial process executed among the Bara in Indonesia.

Bara

The Bara burial process consists of three ceremonies: the initial burial which takes place within the first few days after death, a gathering that occurs after the harvest following the death, and the exhumation and final burial of the corpse after the flesh has completely rotted away (Huntington 1979). Huntington (1979:115) notes that during the time following death, extreme vitality is generated through the various excesses of the funeral celebration in an effort to counterbalance the extreme order of death; since this

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cannot persist, the funeral activities are directed toward creating a return to normalcy.

These ceremonies are seen as an annual season of festivities, as families attend several

burials and gatherings occurring in neighboring areas; while these funerary rites are

serious and important to the community, they are also very social events.

When an individual dies, the death is not immediately announced, but the

preparation of the houses and body quickly begin. The body is first placed in the female

house, or "the house of many tears," for three days (Huntington 1979). After being

moved to the male house, the body is prepared for burial. During this process, visitors

must abide by strict rules regarding ritual weeping. After three days, the corpse is placed

in a coffin and a funeral procession takes place throughout the countryside, consisting of

up to 100 people including youth, adult men, women and children, and finally the family

cattle. At the conclusion of the procession, the youth and two or three older men take the

coffin to the burial cave to perform the proper burial, while the remaining processional

people wait for the party's return (Huntington 1979).

The next ceremony, the gathering, is the largest, most important, and most

elaborate event in Bara social life (Huntington 1979). This event is unlike the other two

ceremonies as its main objective is the reordering of social relationships that have been

altered due to the loss of a community member. The gathering is an organized celebration

that occurs each year during the same season. While the burial process consisted of up to

100 people, the gathering may be attended by as many as 500 people. Whole families will

walk several miles in order to attend such events. The gathering is a time of much eating,

as a dozen cattle are often slaughtered and several hundred liters of rum are provided.

Although the Bara are generally modest about their material possessions and success, the

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gathering is a time for families to display their wealth by parading the amount of rum and total expenditures of the ceremony to the public (Huntington 1979).

Although it may be delayed for several years, reburial is obligatory of the descendants to the deceased, and is ritually more important than the gathering. After an extended period of time, the body is exhumed and prepared for its final resting place. This ceremony, like the gathering, also takes place during the dry season following the harvest. The reburial process lasts one day and is a significantly smaller event than the gathering. The old coffin is removed from the burial cave and the bones are removed and scraped clean, rubbed with cow grease, and placed in new cloth. Similar to the preparations immediately following death, all signs of grief are forbidden during this process. A similar burial procession takes place, but people gather at a location in the savannah. After a final weeping scene, the bones are collected once more and taken to a final tomb. The deceased are organized according to kin, specifically with respect to one's father; male caskets contain a lineal order of grandfather, son, and grandson, and female caskets are organized according to this agnatic system (Huntington 1979). The reburial process is seen as a rite of passage concerned with reestablishing the proper relationship between the ancestors and the living. Huntington (1979:118) summarizes the entire funeral sequence as separation, transition, and incorporation; the original burial seen as a rite of separation, the gathering as a period of liminality, and the reburial as the ceremony of reintegration. All three aspects of the Bara burial process are very social and involve the entire community. While the burials are arranged according to lineage, there is minimal influence placed on actual ancestor worship.

Berawan

A similar secondary mortuary ritual can be seen among the Berawan culture in Borneo, in which the mortuary ritual involves two mortuary ceremonies, each lasting several days and involving several hundred people. Berawan mortuary rites involve a sequence of both public festivals and private observations spread out over several months or possibly years (Huntington 1979, Metcalf 1982). Every phase of the burial process is open to the whole community. Community involvement begins immediately after death, with rituals lasting up to ten days. During this period, the body is placed in a wooden coffin until the ritual is over. If secondary treatment of the corpse is to occur, the coffin is placed in a temporary location, such as the graveyard. Occasionally, the body may be placed within the residence until secondary treatment takes place.

The secondary treatment, or second funeral, is performed at least one year after death and involves another extended public festival, again lasting up to ten days. The festival involves eating and drinking, and guests from neighboring areas may be invited for socializing purposes. During this festival, the remains of the deceased are removed from their temporary storage area and brought back into the home for the remainder of the celebration. Following the second funeral, a kind of secondary disposal of the body occurs, in which the bones are cleaned and then restored in a smaller container. Once the festival is over, the bones are removed from the house and placed in a single massive post or in a mausoleum (Huntington 1979, Metcalf 1982). Metcalf (1982:21) recognizes that these mortuary rites are of particular interest because they stand near the center of Berawan life, noting that they are "the most ritually complex and symbolically dense of all communal celebrations;" by failing to attend them, one is renouncing his or her

membership within the community. Regardless of social standing, everyone is expected to contribute something to a community member's funeral.

While ancestors are involved in community rituals, the veneration of these individuals is not the primary reasoning behind such acts. Ancestors, particularly those that held leadership positions within the community, are often included in funeral prayers, and depict the continuity of the generation of the living and the dead. The ancestors are asked to protect the recently deceased as he or she enters the afterworld (Metcalf 1982).

Dayak

The Dayak of Borneo also participate in a sequence of ceremonies involved with double burials. It is not customary for the body to immediately be placed in its final resting place; rather, the body is placed in a coffin and placed in a temporary burial location, usually a deserted part of the forest, until it is relocated to its final burial place. The coffin may either be placed under a wooden shelter or buried underground. Indonesians place a special importance on the changes that occur within the body during this temporary period, preventing them from performing the final funeral rites immediately after death. While the body is in the forest, it is exposed to evil spirits and must be exorcised and protected from demons. Survivors are placed with the responsibility of keeping the deceased company and beating gongs frequently to keep the negative spirits away. During this temporary period, the relatives of the deceased are separated from the rest of the community; they are not permitted to leave the village and may in fact spend months confined to a corner in their house. The length of the mourning period varies according to the degree of kinship, allowing distant relatives to rejoin the

community after a few days. For those closer in kinship, the mourning period persists until the time of the final burial (Hertz 1960).

Similar to other Indonesian mortuary rituals, a great feast is connected with the final burial of the Dayak. The feast, which can last for as long as a month, is of great importance to the community and involves extensive preparation and expenses. Practices performed at the funeral feast also liberate the deceased individual's kin from their mourning period and welcome them back into the community. In order to fully be rid of their impurity, the surviving kin must sacrifice a human victim and cut off the head. The decapitated head is then either deposited with the bones of the deceased or attached to the top of a post (Hertz 1960).

When the final burial is ready to take place, the remains are collected and brought back to the village in order to be carefully cleansed. These purification rites allow for the body to end its previous period and move on to the beginning of another, in which it will worthily enter the company of its ancestors. For the Dayak, the final resting place for the body is a small house which constitutes a family burial place, allowing for a large number of individuals to be placed inside. The transfer of the remains to the family burial place illustrates the transition of the deceased individual from an isolated location to a reunion with his or her ancestors (Hertz 1960).

Ma'anyan

Ma'anyan mortuary practices from Indonesia also involve temporary storage of the deceased individual, but rather than performing a secondary funeral for one person at a time, bodies are accumulated over a significant period of time and all receive secondary rites together. This festival for the dead involves the entire community, near and far, and

lasts for over a week. Rather than being buried, the assemblage of deceased bodies are stacked and burned collectively (Huntington 1979).

Recuay

Moving into the New World, further ethnoarchaeological evidence can be used for interpreting Neolithic mortuary rituals. Evidence for feasting and possible ancestor veneration has also appeared in the Northern Highlands of Peru. Lau (2002:279) suggests that funerary rituals and feasting play significant roles in the development of sociopolitical complexity, particularly throughout the Central Andes. When looking specifically at Recuay groups of Peru's North Highlands, such as the Chinchawa site, special public ceremonies combining ancestor veneration and feasting were already being used for sociocultural purposes by 500 A.D (Lau 2002). Feasting along with the consumption of alcoholic drinks increased the importance of social interactions in life-history events, such as births, marriages, and funerals. The sole purpose of these public feasts was to generate social interactions among community members. These communal events involved the participation of both men and women and included drinking, dancing, and embracing one another. These feasting events helped to establish reciprocal relationships between the host and guests; reciprocity was vital to the community and seen in various aspects of daily life.

Recuay groups such as those from Chinchawa have also been linked to ancestral veneration. The practice of venerating ancestors has been identified in several ancient societies with varying degrees of sociopolitical control, although it is most often seen in smaller scale, kin-based societies (Lau 2002). While ancestor veneration is often associated with the enabling of supernatural powers and special rights of those still alive,

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it also serves to reinforce group solidarity and traditional sociopolitical arrangements. By upholding the authority of those deceased, ancestor veneration can also reassert the local status quo of existing kin-based relationships. As discussed by Lau (2002:281), the veneration of ancestors in the Central Andes involved "ancestor mummies" that were used in festive ceremonies both as objects of reverence and as active participants; during special times of the agricultural calendar, these mummies were retrieved from their repositories, offered food and drink, danced with, and consulted.

Human remains found at the Chinchawa site were mostly disarticulated and in mummy bundles, as well as other tombs containing only one or two individuals. This cemetery area may have been organized by ancestral associations and allowed for easy access to the burials, useful during post-burial rituals. Ceramics located near the burials suggest offerings made during these rituals. Much of the pottery is also derived from mortuary contexts, supported by the fact that the pottery was recovered in tombs associated with public ceremonies. Some of the vessels depict ancestor celebratory festivals and even portray ancestors themselves. Funerary statues containing mummy bundles are portrayed as alert individuals, perhaps suggesting that these venerated ancestors are "omnipresent, protecting guardians" and that ancestral relations are ongoing (Lau 2002:297).

Kachemak

Mortuary practices involving the treatment of the dead have also been acknowledged in other cultures, for example the Kachemak tradition. The late Kachemak tradition seen in on Kodiak Island of southcentral Alaska is often characterized by elaborate methods of human disposal and treatment of the dead. Remains from this period

have been grouped into single burials, multiple burials, disarticulation and incomplete

burials, isolated or scattered human skeletal remains, culturally modified human bone,

human bones as burial goods, and cremations and burned human bone (Simon 1992).

Similar to several Neolithic burials, the single burials present in southcentral Alaska were

typically found in a flexed position with little to no grave goods. One of the multiple

burials contained two fully articulated skeletons and two isolated crania, interpreted by

researchers as trophy skulls. The disarticulated crania also contained a layer of white clay

covering.

The presence of trophy or curated skulls suggests that the disarticulated remains

were a result of warfare and local violence, along with being used for ritual purposes.

Cultural modifications on human remains included cutmarks, human bone artifacts, and

perimortem breakage. Human bones were also used as apparent burial goods, seen in a

multiple burial containing the remains of a man and child as well as two isolated crania

covered in white clay. Human bones occurring as burial goods are also manipulated by

drilling holes. The locations of the drilled holes suggest the bones were tied together in

articulated position or were suspended for some ceremonial activity (Simon 1992). Based

on the number of scattered bones, researchers believe these burials were disturbed,

possibly as a result of storing the remains for a prolonged burial. Unlike a secondary

burial, a prolonged burial may still contain a fleshed individual. The disturbed burials

suggest the remains may have been used for ceremonial purposes, such as through

ancestor worship. Simon (1992:132) notes that the dismembering of bodies was not

limited to "rendering the evil harmless, but rather emphasized renewal and regeneration."

Ethnoarchaeological research in Indonesia has also provided insight into another cause for secondary burials and decapitation among the Neolithic Near East. When discussing the presence of buried corpses without corresponding skulls at Catalhoyuk, Adams (2005:185) suggests that headhunting could account for some of these skulls. According to Adams, headhunting is a relatively common practice among societies throughout Southeast Asia, such as Tana Toraja and West Sumba. At West Sumba, skulls acquired through headhunting were occasionally buried underneath houses. Some of these societies also practiced ancestor skull removal, for example, the Chin of northeast India took part in both headhunting and the deliberate removal and special treatment of skulls (Adams 2005).

Discussion

In order to create analogies between the ethnographic accounts described above and secondary mortuary practices performed in the Neolithic Near East, all aspects of secondary mortuary practices must be established, which according to Kuijt (1996:316) is defined as "a social act focused on the regular and socially sanctioned removal of objects, pieces, or all or part of a deceased individual from some place of temporary storage to a permanent resting place." All of the ethnographic accounts described above comprising of secondary or final burials involve several aspects of social activities, many of which occur between the primary and secondary burials. As there are no records of what social acts occurred throughout the mortuary rituals practiced in the Near East, these ethnographic accounts involving secondary mortuary practices provide viable evidence for the broader social and symbolic beliefs that perpetuated secondary mortuary practices during the Neolithic period.

The dismembered skulls found among the Dayak and Kachemak traditions also provide an interesting perspective into the mortuary rituals of the Neolithic Near East, particularly in respect to what researchers have suggested to be an ancestor cult. Using ethnographic evidence that the Dayak skulls were a result of human sacrifice and the Kachemak skulls were trophy skulls, there is evidence to suggest that the cached skulls of the Neolithic Near East may not have been used for the sole purpose of venerating ancestors, but rather functioned as objects involved in ceremonies focused on social continuity. The placement of headhunted skulls buried beneath houses at West Sumba directly correlates with the location of recovered skulls from Neolithic sites in the Near East, again indicating that at least some of the Neolithic skulls may have been used for purposes other than ancestor veneration (Adams 2005).

When looking at mortuary practices from a broader perspective, the events involved are often collective activities requiring the participation of entire communities. Kuijt (1996:315) acknowledges that the use of rituals for cohesive purposes indicates that mortuary practices are a form of "public action designed and conducted by the living, often to elicit community participation, and is not always, therefore, a direct reflection of the status, authority, and importance of the deceased." Daily routines and social rules can have an important role in forming part of a social memory process that involves practices repeated and passed down through generations.

Hodder and Cessford (2004:16) note that once repeated, these practices constitute a memory of earlier practices and the social order that is being maintained through their continued performance. Although the participating individuals may not recognize the actions that reiterate group membership, their very act of coparticipating serves to

strengthen existing relationships while developing new bonds (Kuijt 1996). Social memory is preserved through burials and feasts involved with funerary rites, both of which are used for maintaining the cohesion of groups within the community (Adams 2005).

Several researchers have used ethnoarchaeological accounts, such as those described above, to suggest periodic ritual feasts occur in association with funerals, at which time bonds within and between clan, lineage, or kindred groups are restored and maintained (Adams 2005, Huntington 1979, Metcalf 1982). Kuijt (1996:316) notes that although membership within households would have been through kinship relations, not all members of the household were kin; often, such small-scale social groups were based on reciprocity and often included gift exchange and reciprocal participation in mortuary events. This sense of reciprocity is also seen among the Recuay groups of Peru's North Highlands, particularly in respect to mortuary events involving the community. During these feasts and festivals, it is common for the family of the deceased to publicly display the amount of wealth put into the events (Adams 2005, Huntington 1979). Feasts as part of mortuary rituals illustrate how these practices involved the community as a whole. Not only were community members involved in the celebratory feast, but neighboring villages were invited as well, and not attending the feast was not an option. Although the members may not have directly known the deceased, the communal priority of the society ensured that everyone was involved in the mortuary rituals, promoting intra- and inter-community integration.

That being said, different cultures may vary in their mourning process and community involvement, but all are concerned with the community as a whole and how

societal relationships are affected by the death. While the mortuary rites appear to be primarily concerned with the deceased, there are underlying motives supporting the need for social cohesion throughout the process; these mortuary practices emphasized the importance of a shared community identity over one's individual identity and by requiring participation in such ritual events, members were able to limit the rise of social hierarchy within the community.

Among the various ethnographic accounts, two themes appear to be consistent in the mortuary rituals practiced. The first is that death is not an instantaneous act, but rather an extended progression that is considered complete only after the termination of the decedent's body. The second theme, as pointed out by Hertz (1960:203) is that

> "death is not a mere destruction but a transition: as it progresses so does the rebirth; while the old body falls to ruins, a new body takes shape, with which the soul – provided the necessary rites have been performed – will enter another existence, often superior to the previous one."

Given this theory, it appears that while people of the Neolithic Near East were preserving the skeletal remains of their ancestors, it may not have been for veneration purposes, but rather a mortuary rite allowing the deceased to transition to the afterlife, all while preserving and renewing the social relationships involved in the community.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

An examination of the ritualistic behaviors associated with death provides insight into the various facets of daily life within early settlements, including those of the Neolithic Near East. Rituals help to regulate social behaviors and structures, and by evaluating and interpreting mortuary rituals of these early civilizations, anthropologists are better able to construct a framework in which people and their communities define social relationships. Archaeological excavations from the Neolithic Near East have uncovered an abundance of decapitated skeletal remains, as well as painted and decorated skulls. Although various theories have been proposed to interpret the rituals behind these mortuary practices of the Neolithic Near East, there is strong ethnographic evidence to suggest these mortuary rituals are focused on maintaining social cohesion among those still living rather than focusing on remembering the dead.

When first examining graves from the precursor to this period, Natufian burials were highly diversified, including the body positions, number of individuals per grave, structure, and decoration within the burial. Natufians were the first to bury their dead near or within their households, a practice that continued through the Neolithic period. Although Natufian burials contained significant amounts of grave goods, there is no evidence to indicate that social stratification was present, suggesting Natufians practiced an egalitarian social system. Burials lacking cranial elements and disarticulated skeletons indicate that these locations were used as primary burial sites, later reopened to remove

the skulls for a secondary burial. The practice of removing and relocating skeletal remains continued through the Natufian period and into the Neolithic.

The transition into the Neolithic Period saw extensive changes in food acquisition, social organization and rituals. A rise in sedentism and aggregation of people in larger villages led to the early domestication of plants and animals, all of which requiring the need for reorganization in the way humans interacted. When evaluating burials from Neolithic sites, an overall lack of grave goods may have been used as a preventative measure in limiting socio-economic differences between individuals and groups. Secondary mortuary practices became increasingly more prevalent during this period, as well as caches of skulls and crania covered in paint and/or plaster. Similarities in mortuary practices from the late Natufian through Neolithic periods, such as the use of primary burials and secondary skull removal, suggest a sense of ritual continuity during this transitional period, although the technological advances seen in Neolithic plastered skulls from sites such as Jericho, Catalhoyuk and 'Ain Ghazal, suggests the development of community-based traditions in the context of shared belief systems. As these communities began to expand and populations continued to rise, the need for social cohesion arose, calling for the creation of public ceremonies and rituals to regulate increasingly complex interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup relationships.

The presence of such unique mortuary practices in the Neolithic have raised questions among anthropologists as to the purpose behind these rituals; in order to answer these questions, researchers have developed theories to help interpret these practices and their significance within the community. While interpretations involving a fertility cult, an association with headless clay figurines, and the decapitation of heads as trophy skulls

have arisen, the primary arguments for these mortuary practices include Kathleen Kenyon's theory based on an ancestor cult consisting of elderly males, and Ian Kuijt's theory of community-based rituals focused on maintaining social cohesion.

After excavating Jericho and recovering a significant amount of what were presumably plastered male skulls, Kenyon hypothesized a ritual based on the veneration of ancestors, specifically elderly males. Household structures supported this ancestor cult, as the excavation of a household structure containing cult-like objects provided evidence to suggest it served as a shrine in the settlement. The structural differences between households and shrines have been acknowledged at other Neolithic sites, although all buildings appear to have served both social and ritualistic functions. Later archaeological research performed at both Jericho and other Neolithic sites has revealed cached and plastered skulls of men, women and children, indicating that mortuary practices involving plastered skulls were not restricted to elderly men. Researchers have also suggested male skulls were chosen for decoration simply due to desired facial characteristics and that skulls were altered to achieve this appearance. When discussing the theory that these rituals focused on biological ancestors, there is no archaeological evidence to suggest that these skulls were grouped according to kinship or lineage. Based on skeletal remains consisting of both male and female, young and old, Kenyon's theory of an ancestor cult focused on elderly males is becoming less valid among researchers.

During her excavation at Jericho, Kenyon also suggested the possibility of cached skulls being a result of social warfare. These trophy skulls may have been due to civil unrest among individuals within the society or conflicts with neighboring communities. Ethnographically, the collection of trophy skulls indicates prestige, bravery and pride

within societies. The presences of fractures and depressions on skulls from Neolithic sites have also been suggested as representing social violence.

Ian Kuijt's theory of Neolithic mortuary practices involves a different perspective on the purpose behind these rituals, suggesting that these rituals are focused on the community as a whole rather than just the deceased individual. Although these cached skulls may have originated as a tribute to deceased ancestors, the rituals and purposes behind these practices transitioned from a focus on remembering the dead to one of forgetting the dead, in order to facilitate social cohesion within the community. After several generations, the memory of specific deceased individual ceases, which leads to the creation of a collective symbolic identity that is shared and experienced by everyone. In order to preserve this collective symbolic identity, it was crucial for the community to maintain an egalitarian social system, which is supported by the earlier discussion of human remains with minimal grave goods and secondary burial practices eliciting the involvement of the entire community.

These rituals associated with shared memories involve four factors: repetitiveness in observance, reenactment of some former circumstance, social sanction of the ceremony, and formality, all of which are seen directly in the ethnographic accounts described in chapter four. Kuijt explains that mortuary rituals are a form of public practice, often used to elicit community participation, and do not always directly reflect the status or importance of the deceased. Other researchers have supported this theory, noting that given the minimal distance between the cached skulls and the living community, and the extensive activities involved in preparing and transporting the human remains, the dead were actively involved in the production of social relationships. The

practices involved with secondary mortuary rituals reflect the reaffirmation of identity and involvement in community membership.

In an effort to provide evidence for community-based mortuary rituals of the Neolithic Near East, I have drawn support from various ethnographic accounts, such as the Bara, Berawan, Dayak, Ma'anyan and others. Although the methods behind secondary mortuary rituals vary among these groups, all reflect community-centered rituals focused on defining, shaping, and maintaining identities and social relationships. Given that these ethnographies involve secondary mortuary practices and placement of human remains similar to that of the Neolithic Near East, they may also provide viable evidence for the broader social and symbolic beliefs associated with these mortuary practices during the Neolithic period. The events involved with secondary mortuary practices involve entire communities, and their coparticipation alone serves to strengthen existing relationships. Celebratory feasts involved with the mortuary process also functions as a means of maintaining social cohesion within the community.

As discussed previously, secondary mortuary practices do not function as strictly methods for preparing the deceased individual for burial or veneration, but serve as transitional periods allowing for the community to acknowledge the loss within society, while reconvening and building new social relationships among those still living. Using evidence from ethnographic accounts, there is ample support to suggest mortuary practices of the Neolithic Near East reflect the development of community-based rituals used as a method of limiting social hierarchy within the society, while emphasizing a shared community identity rather than a focus on remembering deceased individuals.

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