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Social Memory, Identity, and Death: Anthropological Perspectives on Mortuary Rituals

Meredith S. Chesson, Editor

Contributions by

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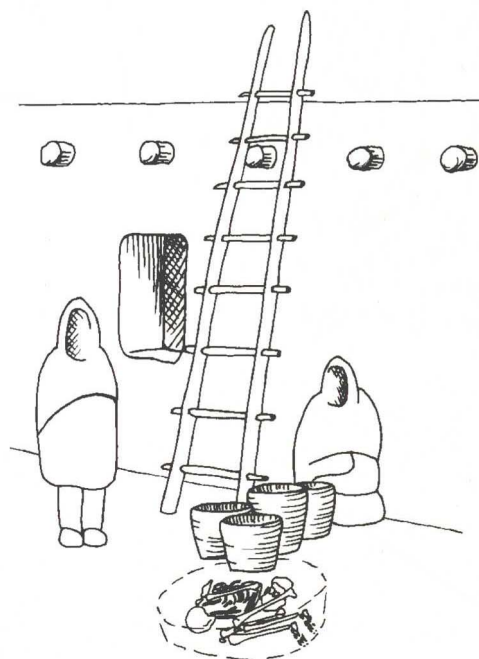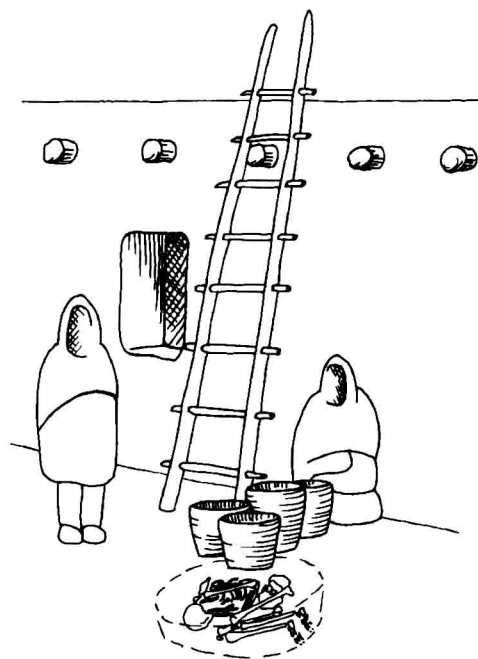Sandra E. Hollimon
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About the editor ...

Meredith S. Chesson is an assistant professor of anthropology at Notre Dame. She received her bachelor's degree from Brown University in classics and her master's and doctorate from Harvard in anthropology. Chesson's research focuses on ancient urban societies, the development of social complexity, and the articulation of feminist theory in archaeology. She is currently doing fieldwork that examines small-scale urban society in Jordan 5,000 years ago.

The cover artwork was drawn by Ian Kuijt.

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Social Memory, Identity, and Death: An Introduction

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The analysis of mortuary rituals provides a richly textured medium in which ethnographers and archaeologists examine the crafting of social memories and the assertion of individual and group identities in past and present communities throughout the world. From an archaeological perspective, mortuary practices represent the complex interplay of emotions, material culture, and social memories of the mourners and the deceased in the past, testimonied by the material remains of these ceremonies, namely grave goods, skeletal remains, and funerary structures (for examples, see Cannon 1989; Carr 1995; Chesson 1999, this volume; Dillehay 1993; Gillespie 2001; Kuijt 1996, this volume; McCafferty and McCafferty 1994; O'Shea 1996; Pearson 1999). From ethnographic accounts, we know that mortuary rituals provide a sensuous arena in which the dead are mourned, social memories are created and (re)asserted, social bonds are renewed, forged, or broken, and individuals make claims for individual identities and group memberships (for examples, see George 1996; Jing 1996; Kan 1989; Schiller 1997; Weiner 1976). Both ethnographic and archaeological studies clearly illustrate the intensely complex interplay between people's identities, emotions, experiences, and desires, the multiple webs of social structures, and the use of material culture in primary and secondary mortuary practices.[1]

In this age of increasing specialization within the discipline of anthropology, it is unfortunate that relatively few ethnographers and archaeologists explicitly draw on each other's work to help in the analysis of mortuary practices in diverse temporal and geographic settings. Even more troubling, many ethnographers and archaeologists perceive archaeological and ethnographic analyses of mortuary practices to be mutually exclusive endeavors. For example, in a recent conversation with an ethnographer, I was assured that "mortuary" analysis was clearly the realm for archaeologists; ethnographers dealt with "death." While this ethnographer may have been speaking facetiously to some extent, this comment reflects the increasingly prevalent tendency to define the practice of anthropology in terms of the divisive nature of the four fields, rather than in terms of the links between ethnography, linguistics, archaeology, and physical anthropology. This current volume is a response to those who envision the four fields of anthropology as mutually exclusive entities, and all the papers demonstrate the efficacy of a cross-field approach to analyzing rituals associated with death. The authors in this volume strive to engage both ethnographic and archaeological perspectives on mortuary practices, and to contribute to active interactions between researchers in the different fields of anthropology.

This volume focuses on the interdependence of crafting social memories and identities in mortuary practices, a subject that has received considerable attention from both archaeologists and ethnographers. The essays presented in this volume draw upon papers presented in a session at the Ninety-sixth Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. Ian Kuijt and I organized this session, entitled "Social Memory, Identity, and Death: Intradisciplinary Perspectives on Mortuary Analysis," with the hope of exploring the links between archaeological and ethnographic approaches to mortuary rituals. This volume includes the expanded and refined papers from the 1997 session, as well as papers written by invited contributors. The powerful combination of ethnographic and archaeological research into mortuary practices in the same volume demonstrates the immense utility of cross-field studies within anthropology by highlighting the interconnections between the fields and illustrating the exciting benefits inherent in an active dialogue between archaeologists and ethnographers. As discussions of the utility of the four-field approach continue to be aired in journals, newsletters, and academic fac-

ulty meetings, the flowing of ideas and discussions contained in these papers emphasize the common interests across anthropological fields and represent how anthropologists can gain a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior and the maintenance and negotiation of life and relationships in communities through time and space.

Anthropological Approaches to Death and Mortuary Rituals

Over the past century, ethnographers and archaeologists have energetically examined the connections between mortuary rituals and societal structures. Beginning with Petrie's (1901, 1904) pioneering typological studies of pottery from grave contexts in Egypt and Hertz's (1960) astute ethnographic treatment of primary and secondary mortuary practices, archaeologists and ethnographers have focused on mortuary practices as viewing points from which to examine contemporary, historic, and prehistoric societies (for example, Binford 1972; Goldstein 1980; Jonaitis 1991; Lévi-Strauss 1983; Saxe 1970). Many of these earlier anthropological approaches to mortuary practices emphasized the description of the practices themselves; many ethnographers catalogued and interpreted the significances of the ritual actions, while archaeologists concentrated on the description of grave furniture, tomb construction, and skeletal remains.

More recently, ethnographers concerned with studies of death and mortuary rituals have been incorporating into their studies a heightened awareness of the issues of social memory and the creation and negotiation of identities (Bloch 1982; Bloch and Parry 1982; George 1996; Kan 1989; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Schiller 1997; Weiner 1976). These recent studies demonstrate how researchers have refined their theoretical and methodological frameworks for exploring the connection between societal structures and mortuary practices. Frequently, anthropologists use the descriptive approach as a foundation to explore issues of intensifying social inequalities, political development, the nature of ritual action and structures, cosmologies, kinship structures, networks of exchange and reciprocity, and gender. For example, Weiner's (1976:61) study of the Trobriand Islanders describes the mortuary ceremonies as "moments of spectacular visual communication. They serve as a vehicle for the financial and political assessment of each participant, and for an instant, through the use of such visual qualities as style, color, and space, they frame the oppositional nature of relationships." Weiner's analysis highlights the key elements of performance, social drama, and material culture in mortuary practices, and the intensity of interpersonal interaction in mortuary contexts, in which relationships and social memories are strengthened, reassessed, and even shattered (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:6).

Archaeological approaches to mortuary practices have also demonstrated a refinement in the types of questions asked and methodological tools employed (see Gillespie 2001 for an excellent review of the theoretical developments). By necessity, archaeologists have always been interested in material culture and the built environment, in questions of style and space, as potential expressions of identity or societal structures. More recently, archaeologists have utilized ethnographers' awareness of how identities and social memories of both the living and the dead participants can be asserted, challenged, and renegotiated all within the context of mortuary ceremonies (Brown 1995; Cannon 1989; Chesson 1999, this volume; Dillehay 1993; Gillespie 2001; Hodder 1984; Joyce this volume; Kuijt this volume; McCafferty and McCafferty 1994; Meskell this volume; O'Shea 1996; Pearson 1999). For example, O'Shea's (1996) exhaustive analysis of the Bronze Age Maros mortuary complex displays a detailed consideration of the expression of identity with material culture by the dead and the living, and of how these different identities signify complex structures of relations of power and authority within these prehistoric communities.

Foundations for Dialogue: Data and Theory

Even from this cursory inspection of anthropological literature on mortuary studies, it is clear that ethnographers and archaeologists grapple with many of the same fundamental questions about what it means to be mortal and human, transients in a constantly changing world. Given the shared interest in mortuary behavior by archaeologists and ethnographers, it should come as no surprise that both sets of researchers often utilize the same data sets and ask the same questions in analyzing mortuary practices. In particular, they share four fundamental sets of data: treatment of the remains of the deceased; material culture worn, used, and carried by the living and the dead during the rites; the built environment (the context of the mortuary ceremonies, the funerary structure or monument); and the specific ceremonies and practices in both primary and secondary mortuary rituals. By necessity, archaeological inquiry places a heavy emphasis on the physical remains of hu-

man behavior, and in the case of mortuary practices in the past, these four categories of information are crucial to the reconstruction of life and death:

• The processing and elaboration of the remains of the deceased by the living, including cremation, defleshing, embalming, removal of skeletal elements, and adornment of the body using ochre, paint, textiles, and costume ornaments, which survive in the archaeological record;

• The deposition by the living of material culture with the deceased, such as vessels, textiles, costume ornaments, food, and other objects;

• The nature and scale of funerary monuments, which provide archaeologists with an important set of information in exploring death and social structures of past societies; and

• The differing patterns of skeletal remains, funerary structures, and material culture associated with primary and secondary mortuary practices.

For example, in Kuijt's (this volume) analysis of Pre-Pottery Neolithic mortuary practices in the southern Levant, his research focused on all four of these categories. The physical remains of mortuary practices at Pre-Pottery Neolithic B sites, such as 'Ain Ghazal, Basta, and Jericho, demonstrate that Pre-Pottery Neolithic B people practiced skull removal: reopening graves, removing the skulls, and reburying them in subfloor or courtyard contexts in secondary ceremonies. While most skulls were undecorated, before reburial many skulls were painted, plastered to recreate human features such as eyes, eyebrows, ears, and noses, and decorated with shell inlays. Most skulls were reburied in groups of three (or multiples of three) in pits in courtyard contexts, where multiple people from the community could have participated in the ceremony. From these physical remains, Kuijt suggests how the creation of social memories and assertion of group identities may have played important roles in the formation of these early agricultural communities.

Ethnographers have documented these same categories of data in mortuary ceremonies throughout the historic and contemporary world, identifying patterns of human behavior that transcend the archaeological past and the ethnographic present. For example, in Madagascar Feeley-Harnik (1989) has documented the wrapping and rewrapping of bodies and skeletal remains in particular textiles, the construction of ironwood tombs, and the inclusion of insignia or ornaments of authority as fundamental elements in secondary mortuary rites. The focus on material culture and the built environment in archaeological and ethnographic studies emphasizes the

fundamental links between these two anthropological approaches to studying the creation, maintenance, and contesting of identities and social memory during the memorialization of the dead.

Counterpoint of Theoretical Issues in Ethnography and Archaeology

On the basis of these shared data sets, ethnographers and archaeologists examine similar types of anthropological issues, including the nature of group and individual identities, the fundamental cosmological structures of society, the structuring forces of the community, including kinship, hierarchies, and gender ideologies, and the nature of ritual action by individual nonspecialists, ritual practitioners, and groups. For example, in recent literature archaeologists have striven to refine the concepts of agency, personhood, structure, and practice in relation to mortuary analysis, drawing particularly from Bourdieu's (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Gillespie 2001; McCall 1999). Practice theory continues to be a current framework for ethnographic research (e.g., George 1996). While it is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a synthesis of all theoretical approaches employed by archaeologists and ethnographers, I want to focus on certain themes from mortuary research that resonate powerfully in both ethnographic and archaeological contexts. Specifically, these themes include:

• Mortuary ceremonies, both primary and secondary, as public arenas for communication and assessment of individuals, social groups, and social relationships;

• Adornment of bodies and speech acts, and the assertion of identities and social memories through performance and material culture;

• The nature of "personhood," identity, social memory, and social structures, including the nature of "social death" and "biological death";

• Rituals as risky ventures, with the chance to fail or succeed, and the susceptibility of performance and the recreation of ritual to possibilities of creation and change;

• The nature of emotional response, involvement, and expression in any mortuary practice;

• The awakening and (re)construction of social memories in ritual context; and

• The nature of lived experience in mortuary ceremonies and in studying mortuary ceremonies.

I argue that these seven issues are crucial to both archaeological and ethnographic explorations and analyses of mortuary practices. I will briefly review how ethnographers and archaeologists have examined these themes

in their research into mortuary practices in the past and the present, drawing on works from within and outside of this volume.

Archaeologists and ethnographers have long recognized the public nature of mortuary ceremonies, particularly secondary rites, and how these ceremonies offer arenas for communicating and assessing group and individual identities and social memories (cf. George 1996; Gillespie 2001; Kuijt 1996, this volume; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Schiller 1997, this volume; Weiner 1976). Weiner's (1976) description and analysis of secondary mortuary rituals in the Trobriand Islands explores the nature of these ceremonies in asserting individual and community identities in public contexts. In these ceremonies, mourners' identities and affiliations are expressed publicly through the level and nature of their participation in the ceremonies, including choice of personal adornment, degree of involvement throughout the cycle of rites, and contribution of goods in reciprocal relationships. Similarly, Kuijt (1996, this volume) investigates the nature and scale of secondary mortuary rituals, particularly skull and statue caching in courtyard areas in the early Neolithic villages of the southern Levant. He convincingly argues for a strong link between these community-wide skull caching ceremonies and the architectural and skeletal evidence in the assertion of an egalitarian, house-oriented ritual system within the early Neolithic communities.

The issue of adornment offers a particularly potent link between archaeological and ethnographic research, with its focus on how people use material culture in dressing themselves and in their actions (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1989; George 1996; Hollimon 1997; Jonaitis 1991; Joyce 1999, this volume). During mortuary ceremonies people adorn themselves and the dead with material culture that reflects the complex webs of relationships between the dead, the living, and the community as a whole. In George's (1996) extraordinary analysis of headhunting rituals in *mappurondo* communities in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, he reminds us that material culture used to dress and adorn the body in ritual contexts enacts the powerful and empowering process of assessment: "Worn on and around the contours and features of the body, adornment opens up a radiant and stylized surface where the strivings of self and community become fused. No mere aesthetic fill, adornment is key to the politics of envy and emulation" (George 1996:144). In the context of the headhunting rituals, which signal the end of the yearly period of mourning in *mappurondo* communities, George demonstrates how adornment of the body, in

costume ornaments, ritual objects, and pigments, facilitates the assertion of personal and collective identities and social memories of what it means to be a member of the community. Joyce's (1999, this volume) study of Formative period burials at the site of Tlatilco, Mexico, deftly analyzes the patterning of objects associated with the individuals buried at the site. In her analysis she explores why different types of items may have been placed with the dead during mortuary ceremonies, and what these items reflect about the dead, the living, and relationships between the living and the dead. She proposes that archaeologists must acknowledge that the burials we excavate resulted from a complex set of practices that began long before the deceased individual was buried and the mortuary rituals were enacted. She urges archaeologists to consider burials as the intersection of individual experiences and multiple processes of the formation of social identities throughout a person's life. Ultimately, by exploring how the living adorned the dead and themselves, her research demonstrates how people crafted and celebrated the memory of their deceased loved ones in this early Formative village.

Drawing on the concept of adornment, archaeologists and ethnographers have approached mortuary practices as potential insights into the creation and assertion of identity, the nature of "personhood," and the expression of societal structures of status, authority, rank, gender, and collective groups (Binford 1972; Bloch 1982; Bloch and Parry 1982; Brown 1995; Cannon 1989; Chesson this volume; Gillespie 2001; Hodder 1984; Hollimon this volume; Joyce 1999, this volume; Kan 1989; Kuijt 1996, this volume; McCafferty and McCafferty 1994; Meskell 1999, this volume; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Pearson 1999; O'Shea 1996; Raharijaona and Kus this volume). Both ethnographic and archaeological researchers have extensively addressed the idea of "personhood" in mortuary contexts, recognizing the distinction between "biological death" and "social death" and how these concepts hold important implications for the death of a member of a community (cf. Bloch 1982; Gillespie 2001). Many researchers document how primary and secondary mortuary rituals enact a series of stages in which a person's biological death is followed by his or her social death, in which the individual leaves the living and successfully joins the community of ancestors (Feeley-Harnik 1989; Kan 1989; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). In addition to fulfilling the necessary steps in an individual's life history (including their death), mortuary ceremonies, with their public nature and as an arena for assessing relationships, identities, and social memories, can enact a powerful

integrative process for the community (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:149).

Kan's (1989) analysis of the Tlingit potlatch demonstrates the powerful unifying force inherent in secondary mortuary rites. In his portrayal and examination of the nineteenth-century potlatch, he notes that the community (re)created the social order in the context of mortuary rituals, drawing on the power of a strong ancestral ideology. Kan (1989:288) describes that "in their mortuary rites the Tlingit transformed death from a threat to the social order into the major opportunity for strengthening it and enhancing it." Tlingit funerals reconstituted the dead individual into a resource for the living, separating the perishable, polluted elements of the individual from the immortal, powerful elements that joined the ancestors and strengthened the living community. Kan's analysis emphasizes the relationship of the dead individual to the living, how the person's death potentially affects the relationships within the living community, and how mortuary practices directly address the tensions caused by a death within the community.

As part and parcel of the issue of identity and mortuary practices, several researchers have acknowledged the importance of recognizing the diversity of social positions of people participating in mortuary ceremonies. Each person, with ties to different social groups that often pursue competing interests, approaches his or her role in any given mortuary ceremony from a different perspective or position, and must negotiate these often complex ties to various factions (e.g., Kan 1989; Meskell 1999). This recognition underlies many critiques of the traditional archaeological approach to mortuary practices, exemplified by the oft-cited Binford-Saxe approach (Binford 1972; Saxe 1970). This approach has been justifiably critiqued recently (Brown 1995; Cannon 1989; Gillespie 2001; Hodder 1984; Joyce this volume; Meskell 1999, this volume; Pearson 1999), and archaeological mortuary analyses have profited from these critiques and discussions on the link between identity and mortuary remains. Meskell's analysis (1999, this volume) of the mortuary remains from the New Kingdom site of Deir el Medina, Egypt, represents the fruits of such intense critical evaluation and discussion. Drawing on cultural, archaeological, and textual data, Meskell argues that it is possible to explore the issues of identity and emotion associated with death in an archaeological context. Combining information from texts, such as attitudes toward the body and selfhood, with archaeological data from the mortuary complex at the site, she describes how, in Egyptian belief systems, individual selves persisted after death. With the five essential components of a multi-ply constituted identity (name, shadow, personal magic, vital force, and character of the individual), individuals transcended death and acted as intentional and powerful agents for the living, creating links between the living and dead members of the community. This transcendence of death was reflected in family tombs in which the living and the dead maintained contact during family visits, regular offerings, and festivals. Such practices inextricably bound together people through life and death and held important implications for the creation of a collective social memory, memorialization, and the creation of identities.

The creation and recreation of mortuary rituals are not immune to the risks of any other set of ritual practices. As mentioned above, mortuary ceremonies enact powerful forces affecting community unity, individual and group identities, and ultimately the continued survival of the living community based on the creation of social memories of the past and the future. With so much potency and potentially destructive implications, mortuary ceremonies run tremendous risks if they fail to accomplish their goals (George 1996; Jing 1996; Schiller 1997, this volume). Metcalf and Huntington (1991:6) argue that "although we do not doubt that rituals are invariably caught up in relations of power, what is overlooked...is the uncertainty of the outcomes. Rituals may make a show of power, but they run the same risk as other shows: They may fail." For example, Anne Schiller describes the fascinating process of crafting a national identity and of creating a social universe by constructing mortuary rituals among the Ngaju in Central Kalimantan. She documents the events of 1996, in which a group of Ngaju villagers, led by a group of indigenous religionists, conducted a secondary mortuary ceremony, the largest held in the region in peoples' memories. Schiller describes the process of intense negotiation and compromise involved in the creation of a set of rituals for the ceremony, the construction of the ironwood complex, and the presentation of a cohesive "authentic Ngaju identity" to the national and global audiences. She deftly explores how the ceremony's sponsors combined traditional and nontraditional aspects of material culture to represent their particular vision of Ngaju identity, to foster social memories of the past and present, and to address key facets of the richly textured past and the increasingly global future. Underlying her analysis is the sometimes overwhelming fear of the ritual practitioners in view of the risks they were taking: that in creating new ritual traditions, they may fail, anger the ancestors, and thus endanger their survival in a sometimes hostile world.

Change through time is one of the hallmarks of archaeological research, and many researchers have investigated diachronic change in mortuary practices as offering potential insights into changing societal structures (Chesson this volume; Kuijt 1996; Kus and Raharijaona this volume). Drawing on archaeological data from an early urban community in the Early Bronze Age of the southern Levant, I have explored how living members of a community mapped individual and group identities onto themselves and the deceased in the creation of social memories (Chesson 1999, this volume). My analysis links the complex interplay between grave goods, the nature and timing of the memorial ceremonies, and the biological sex of individual(s) in an archaeological skeletal population with the powerful changes in household structures, systems of kinship, and interaction between women, men, and children during the first period of urbanization at the Early Bronze Age settlement of Bab edh-Dhra´, Jordan. Dynamic changes in mortuary practices through time at Bab edh-Dhra´, specifically the shift from shaft tomb burials to charnel houses, were associated with the transition from a nonsedentary life-style to settled life in a fortified town, and a subsequent return to nonurban living. This research demonstrates that each of these profound shifts in life-style involved fundamental changes in the societal bonds of the community, particularly structures of kinship, and that the process of urbanization and ruralization transformed the relationships of gendered individuals within the shifting structures of kinship, Houses, and broader community memories.

The nature of an individual's participation and expression of emotions at mortuary ceremonies often reflects the complex relationship between societal strictures and a person's obligations to the deceased and his or her kin, as well as obligations to the living participant's web of social, economic, and political ties (George 1996; Kan 1989:294–95; Metcalf and Huntington 1991:61; Rosaldo 1984). A particular society's conceptions of propriety, duty, and beliefs about death shape and guide the expression of emotions at mortuary ceremonies. Metcalf and Huntington (1991:61) rightly caution anthropologists that experience and sensitivity are necessary to successfully deal with emotions in any mortuary analysis. With emotional expression clearly presenting ethnographers with a thorny issue in their treatment of mortuary rites in any contemporary community, archaeologists analyzing mortuary practices in deep prehistory face even greater challenges. Nevertheless several archaeologists skillfully confront this situation, imparting emotions to their reconstructed people burying their dead (Joyce 1999, this volume; Meskell 1999, this volume). As Kan (1989:294) notes, "No matter how important their various sociopolitical functions are, mortuary rites must deal with fundamental cognitive and emotional predicaments confronting humankind." As an underlying commonality, all people in the past, present, and future must deal with these cognitive and emotional challenges of mortality, and recently many archaeologists have acknowledged this importance of emotions as an integral element in mortuary rituals.

Mortuary rituals commemorate the life of the deceased, as well as the past life of the community. At the same time, commemoration clearly presents a picture of how life should be in the future, tying social memories of the past to the immediate future of the community in mourning (George 1996). George (1996:200) describes commemoration as a ritual action that touches the past, future, and present simultaneously: "And although we may associate commemoration with recollection and looking backward, it is also prospective—it offers a structure of anticipation. Memory—as a form of sociality and as a form of something remembered—is kept in motion." The subject of social memory and commemoration has received substantial attention in ethnographic and archaeological contexts (e.g., Dillehay 1993 and references therein; Jing 1996). Jing's (1996) *Temple of Memories* provides a good example of how a community's past, present, and future are intimately tied to social memories. In his focus on the village of Dachuan, a close-knit community of approximately 3500 people, Jing explores the devastating community memories of the destruction of family tombs, the deaths during a tremendous famine, and the reworking of mourning rituals during the Maoist era. As a foundation to his discussion, he examines structures influencing why and how certain deceased individuals are remembered or forgotten, and how the present and future survival of the community is intimately tied to these memories.

Archaeologists rely on the material remains of mortuary practices to understand how people commemorated the dead and crafted social memories of individuals and groups. Many archaeologists have addressed the issues of social memory in mortuary rituals (Chesson this volume; Dillehay 1993; Gillespie 2001; Joyce 1998, 1999, this volume; Kuijt this volume; Meskell 1999, this volume). Dillehay's (1993) volume *Tombs for the Living* provides an extensive exploration of commemoration in prehistoric and historic Andean communities. This collection of essays powerfully demonstrates how commemoration of the dead and the (re)creation of traditional practices link the past and the future in the physical monuments and the memories associated with individuals and communities.

Ethnographers bring to their mortuary analysis a keen appreciation for the nature of experience in shaping peoples' and communities' lives (George 1996; Jackson 1989; Rosaldo 1984). They acknowledge the primacy of peoples' actions in the present and the past, which ultimately shape peoples' lives (Jackson 1989). Rosaldo's (1984) reanalysis of Ilongot headhunting in light of his own devastating loss provides one of the most eloquent and powerful essays on acknowledging lived experience as an important element to anthropological analysis. Recently, archaeologists have confronted the challenge of understanding people's lives in the past through the lens of lived experience. Kus (1997:209–10) eloquently encourages archaeologists to recognize this connection between the ethnographic present, the archaeological record, and people as "sensuous human practice," in which

> meaning is embedded in cultural materials, is crafted by experience, both ordinary and extraordinary, and is grafted onto body and soul. This material nature of symbols whose meaning for the individual is produced, at least in part, by a slow and persistent sedimentation of experience, means that such symbols are not easily coopted. Such symbols are based on a powerful mix, if not imbroglio, of abundant and redundant metonyms of daily routine and dramatic metaphors of ritual and personal experiences that carry further entailments for thought and action. Consequently issues of local knowledge are not trivial and the ideological manipulation of symbols and experience…is neither easy nor straightforward but, once manipulated, can become incredibly persuasive.

Kus argues that in approaching the archaeological record from this perspective, archaeologists enhance their visions of the past, imbuing their reconstructions with the complexity inherent in human lives.

Future Directions for Dialogue

Clearly, from this discussion, ethnographers and archaeologists utilize similar types of data and theoretical frameworks in their analyses to explore very complex structures and behaviors in modern and past human communities. Within this scholarly overlap of approaches, ethnographers and archaeologists can offer important insights to each other. Archaeologists contribute a strong appreciation for the expression of societal structures (of change, compliance, resistance, coping mechanisms, and authority) in material culture and the built environment. Furthermore, in documenting the material residues of past behaviors, they are keenly aware of how different peoples treat death and mortality on the scales of the individual and group. Patterns of material culture and architecture

offer an archaeological foundation for reconstructing societal strictures for the dead and the living in the community.

The nature of the archaeological approach involves the crucial element of time depth, often associated with successful and failed attempts by people to maintain social structures and lifeways in their communities. In examining how patterns of material culture and the built environment change over time as people endeavor to maintain or create new societies, archaeologists can gain a sense of how particular communities altered and how world views and social structures shifted through time, and can posit potential explanations for these developments. The archaeological awareness of time depth and change plays a fundamental role in understanding human communities in the past and can be an integral element in understanding contemporary societies.

Ethnographers approach mortuary analysis with unique insights into the importance of lived experience in shaping peoples' and communities' identities, memories, and practices. Ethnographers have access to living participants, who can offer their own views on emotions, adornment, rituals of commemoration, and the creation of social memories. Ultimately ethnographers offer archaeologists a richly textured world of analogy, from which archaeologists can interpret and reconstruct the past.

In both archaeological and ethnographic contexts, primary and secondary mortuary rituals embody the complicated interplay between peoples' experience, desires, and social structures, and the use of material culture and the built environment. The vessels and objects placed in mortuary contexts hold multiple significances, evoking richly textured memories and powerful meanings of their creation and use in the contexts of origin, household, settlement, and tomb. Ultimately, the patterning that we observe in mortuary contexts may reflect several meanings at any one time; as anthropologists, we must appreciate, and even enjoy, this complexity as we attempt to interpret and understand the ethnographic present and archaeological past of human communities.

Conclusions

As illustrated by this volume, the study of mortuary practices and rituals provides anthropologists with rich and varied insights into a community's conceptualization of mortality, social memory, and relationships between individuals. While clearly not a comprehensive exploration of mortuary rituals or the creation of social memories and identities, these papers explore the complex methodological and theoretical challenges involved in

the analysis of death, ritual, and memorialization. This volume illustrates the similarities of approaches and challenges encountered by ethnographers and archaeologists in exploring these issues. Both groups of researchers concentrate on material culture, the built environment, and ritual action as fundamental elements in the formation and assertion of individual and group identities and social memories.

These authors offer the foundation for rewarding dialogues between archaeologists and ethnographers. In this time of increasing specialization in anthropology, and the shift away from a four-field approach, this volume demonstrates the efficacy of intradisciplinary research and dialogue. This rich collection of archaeological and ethnographic case studies of death, identity, and social memory illustrates how much archaeologists can learn from ethnographers, and ethnographers from archaeologists. Dialogues such as these make us better anthropologists and bring us closer to acknowledging, understanding, and representing the wondrous contradictions and complexities of life in human societies of the past and present.

Acknowledgments

Note

1. Several researchers have identified many of the key characteristics of and distinctions between primary and secondary mortuary ceremonies (Bloch 1982; Chesson 1999; Hertz 1960; Kuijt 1996; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Pearson 1999). Primary rites involve the immediate set of activities and behaviors following the death of a member of a community. These rituals

may include the processing of the body in preparation for interment, feasting, gatherings, formal and informal mourning rites, and the initial placement of the body or remains in the primary depositional context. All of these rites occur during the days or sometimes weeks immediately following the death. Secondary rituals, on the other hand, involve activities and ceremonies months or even years after the death, in which the living memorialize the dead as an integral process in repairing the rent in the social fabric of the community. These rites often involve the transport or modification of the remains of the deceased, and can also include the elaboration of the funerary monument or receptacle in which the remains are housed. These ceremonies are planned in advance to ensure cooperation and participation of a great number of people from within and outside of the community.

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Section One
Death and Collective Social Memories
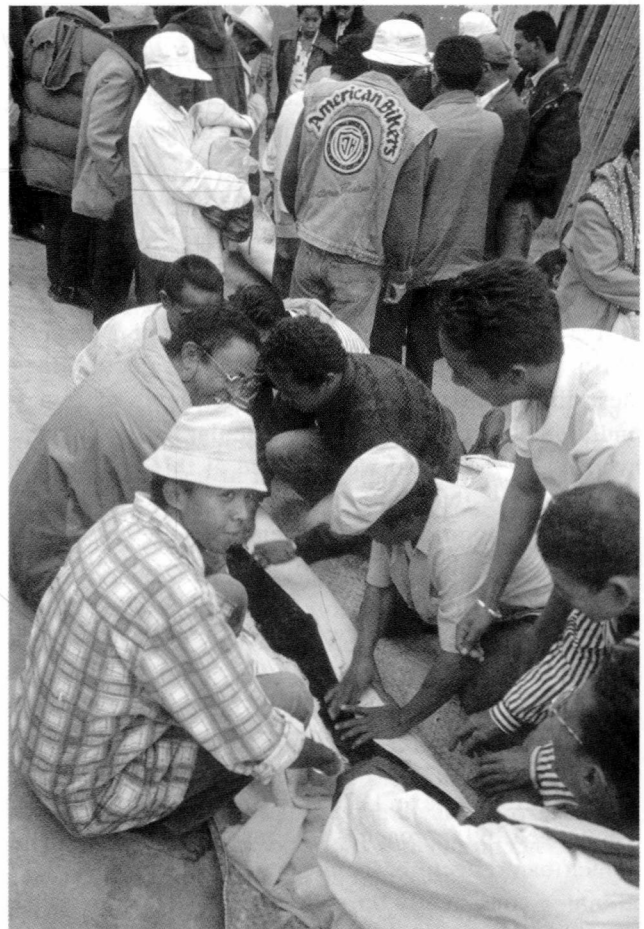
Burying the Dead at Tlatilco: Social Memory and Social Identities

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Every burial that archaeologists excavate resulted from a complex sequence of practices that were initiated, not with the death of the person or persons who were interred, but long before, as their social identities were shaped and their individual experiences linked them to others through webs of kin and non-kin relationships. Burials are thus complex intersections of processes of formation of social identities. Burials and the mortuary rituals that accompanied their creation were also intersections of the formation of social memory, media through which social identities gained greater or lesser degrees of shared currency and temporal persistence. Taking these perspectives on ancient burials and mortuary rituals as an entry point into their understanding leads to very different approaches toward archaeological data. Using the rich documents provided by burials excavated at the central Mexican Formative period site of Tlatilco, in this chapter I explore how examining the place of burials in the creation of social identity and social memory shifts archaeological practice. I trace a trajectory from describing statistical trends in interments of female individuals to discussing the particular lives of women who lived, died, and were buried at this ancient village. I argue that neither perspective alone is sufficient. Each approach complements the other, but without the particularistic examination, burials as social occasions—with all their experiential aspects—will simply be lost under the weight of their decontextualization.

Archaeology has a long history of privileging mortuary analyses. The systematic exploration of burials as reflections of the social status and role of the deceased (Binford 1971; Saxe 1970; cf. Brown 1995) has been challenged by approaches treating burials as masking, rather than reflecting, social status (e.g., Pearson 1982). Running consistently through all of these approaches is a more-or-less intuitive sense that burials should be heavily weighted with meaning because they were formed under the pressure of one of the most significant transformations in the human life course. At the same time, mortuary analyses are one of the classic sites for the expression of archaeological anxiety about the impossibility of ever knowing anything about the past with any certainty. Often these doubts are expressed within the bounds of the same texts. Burials with the most complex treatment and largest number of accompanying artifacts may be described with statistical certainty as those of societal elites, while when the burials in question are those of infants or young children, the same inference may be questioned (Brown 1981, 1995:8; Larsen 1995:249–50).

As Susan Kus (1992) has perhaps most eloquently argued, something fundamental to the living process of interring and memorializing the dead is missing when archaeologists come to interpret the final remains found within archaeological sites; the emotions, sights, smells, sounds, and experiential aspects of mortuary rites are rarely systematically considered as part of the forces structuring the final disposition of the dead. That absence in archaeological analyses is particularly unfortunate because it deprives us of a concern with burials as social practices by the living through which enduring social memory is created, through which everyday and individualistic occurrences are transformed into powerful common experiences that bind survivors together in new social forms (cf. George 1996:186–200; Kan 1989:181–96). "Representational" (following Barrett 1994) accounts of burials treat them as simple residues of events that had preceded their creation, mere traces of a past in the past. John Barrett (1994:87–90) rightly notes that representational approaches fail to acknowledge the creation of the past in the present through the active

intervention of archaeologists/authors. He suggests that, as archaeologists accept their role in interpretation, they come to occupy a place in a process of meaning-making not unlike that of the past actors whose actions produced the material residues we recover, who were also engaged not simply in reflecting what was, but in creating and recreating social relations through the use of material media. This perspective transforms the role of the archaeologist and, I would suggest, provides an impetus for us to seek to produce more and different kinds of knowledge from the material traces we document.

I suggest that ancient burials can be viewed as particularly charged sites where living survivors inscribed the dead into social memory in particular ways, as part of an ongoing process of spinning webs of social relations between themselves and others (Barrett 1994:94; Kuijt this volume; Meskell this volume; cf. Bloch and Parry 1982; Kan 1989:125–77; Raharijaona and Kus this volume; Schiller this volume; Weiner 1976:85–90; Woodburn 1982). As Nancy Munn (1986:164) writes, "Death itself initiates only a *physical* dissolution of the body...death dissolves neither the intersubjective amalgam that constitutes the *bodily person* and forms the ground of each self, nor the intersubjective connections between others built on and condensed within the deceased's person" (original emphasis). The existing biographies of the deceased were raw material available for the creation of social memory and social meaning, and the way that mortuary rituals were conducted and burial settings constructed extended those already established social histories.

We can view burials, then, as episodes in unfolding stories. Traditional archaeological practice treats the particularity of burials as noise to be filtered out in pursuit of regularities. As literally hundreds of studies have shown, regularities are there, and can be discovered through statistical examination or simply by observing patterns of presence and absence of specific features. We may argue that the regularities of mortuary rituals were one of the ways ancient societies were structured (in Giddens's [1979:62–66, 69–73, 1984:1–14] sense) through practice.

But the grain of structure is broad and ultimately fails to encompass the full power that mortuary rites would have had as embodied performances within which social actors reworked their emotional, social, and personal ties to those around them with whom they were connected through the deceased. Archaeological burial populations provide an unparalleled opportunity to explore not only the broad regularities of structuration but also the finer variation of individual practices, in ways that enhance and, I argue, improve the realism of our present accounts of the past.

Life and Death at Tlatilco

In order to illustrate my argument, I undertake here an exercise in reanalysis of my own work on more than two hundred published burials from the Highland Central Mexican site of Tlatilco (Joyce 1999). Tlatilco was exposed to modern archaeology accidentally through the excavations of brickworkers in the area of modern Mexico City. Archaeologists from Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) undertook documentation of the chance-exposed burials and more extensive deliberate excavation of other parts of the site (Piña Chan 1958; Porter 1953; Garcia Moll et al. 1991). Perhaps because the original discoveries at Tlatilco were informal, the site was originally presented as a cemetery, and even the more scientific excavations were geared primarily to documenting burials. However, as the INAH excavators and later analysts of the original burials have noted, features at the site that were visible in the walls of excavated units indicate that the burials were placed within the confines of a poorly preserved village of perishable houses, with house yards containing bell-shaped storage pits, sometimes used secondarily for burials.

A preliminary cluster analysis found that adult female burials from Tlatilco contained the most pottery and that nonpottery items were found more often in adult male or juvenile burials (Serra and Sugiura 1987). A statistical cluster of burials composed of individuals of mixed age and sex shared the use of iron-ore mirrors, jade belts, jade ear ornaments, and "rock-crystal" beads, along with certain elaborate ceramic vessels. In a more extended statistical analysis, Paul Tolstoy (1989) defined consistent rankings reflected in the quality and quantity of objects included in a burial, the depth and preparation of the grave, and the position of the body. He identified iron-ore mirrors, necklaces, and greenstone and shell objects as indicators of the top rank of a social hierarchy. He concluded that not all of the variability in the burial population could be explained simply as due to the reflection of individual rank: "The nature of these objects and their diverse patterns of occurrence suggest that the denotation of rank was not their exclusive function...Though consistent in the ranking they suggest for individual graves, these indicators do not exhibit uniformly strong associations with one another. This suggests that other important and, in part, hidden factors contribute to their distributions" (Tolstoy 1989:109–12).