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Peter Pfälzner, Herbert Niehr, Ernst Pernicka,
Anne Wissing (Eds.)

(Re-)Constructing Funerary Rituals in the Ancient Near East

Proceedings of the First International Symposium of the Tübingen
Post-Graduate School "Symbols of the Dead" in May 2009

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Herausgegeben von Peter Pfälzner

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Edited by
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6 Funerary Practices from the End of the Early to the Middle Bronze Age in Northwestern Syria: the Middle Euphrates Valley

Candida Felli¹

“He has no house during his life, and when he dies he will not be carried to a burial place.”

The Marriage of Martu, lines 137-138²

Notwithstanding the urban clichè expressed by the literary composition quoted above, the Amorites did bury their dead:³ though not chasing Amorite graves *stricto sensu*, focus of the present paper are in fact funerary contexts dating to the period spanning the late Early Bronze and the Middle Bronze Ages in the Middle Euphrates valley,⁴ an area where pastoralism

has always played an important role within society and *mar tu* are attested as early as the third millennium, as we learn from the Ebla texts⁵ (figure 1).

This evidence has remained somehow on the side of the main scholarly attention, which instead has been focussing on the full Early Bronze funerary tradition in the area, admittedly a much more conspicuous phenomenon both in terms of scale and complexity.⁶ In a recent article comparing Early and Middle Bronze funerary practices in the Euphrates valley by means of statistics, T. Ökse has underlined that on the whole there is a certain degree of continuity in grave types and funerary equipments, with some differences as to preference of specific grave types and quantity of objects in each period.⁷ In particular, the number of cist graves and chamber tombs seems to decrease consid-

- 1 I wish to thank deeply the organizers of the workshop for the kind invitation, the warm welcome and assistance and the fruitful and thought-provoking discussions throughout my stay in Tübingen. This paper is an offshoot of a research started with my Ph.D. Dissertation “Le pratiche funerarie della valle dell’Eufrate siriano nell’epoca degli archivi di Mari” (Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli, 2000).
- 2 Zólyomi 1998. On this text see the recent discussion by Porter 2007: 108-109.
- 3 The question of Amorites is too complex to be dealt with here in any detail: recent views in relation to the archaeological, not only funerary, records have been expressed by Meyer 1997; Porter 2002a; 2007; Cooper 2007: 66-68; Lönnqvist 2008. See also now the various contributions in the proceedings of the symposium held in Tokyo in November 2009 “Formation of Tribal Communities: Integrated Research in the Middle Euphrates, Syria” published as a special issue of *Al-Rāfidān* in 2010 (especially Lönnqvist 2010): I wish to express my gratitude to Ann Porter for calling my attention to this very recent reference). It is a pity I could not incorporate here the results of the book by A. Wossink, *Challenging climate change. Competition and Cooperation among Pastoralists and Agriculturalists in Northern Mesopotamia (c. 3000-1600 BC)*, Sidestone, Leiden, 2009, of which I had knowledge only after the handing in of this manuscript through the kind suggestion of Edgar Peltenburg.
- 4 Unfortunately most of the evidence is published in a preliminary form, in some cases merely as a brief mention: **Horum Höyük**: Marro – Tibet – Bulgan 2000: 258-265; Marro 2007: 387; **Tilbeşar Höyük**: Kepinski-Lecomte – Ahlan 2001: 211, fig. 5; Kepinski 2007: 335, fig. 9; Kepinski *et al.* 2007: 283, figs. 4, 5; **Titriş Höyük**: Honça – Algaze 1998: 108-109, 113-114; **Tilbes Höyük**: Fuensanta – Seva Román – Misir 1997: 43, 45 n. 7, fig. 2; Fuensanta *et al.* 1998: 69; **Mezraa Höyük**: Ökse 2007a: 143; **Şaraga Höyük**: Sertok – Kulakoğlu – Squadrone 2007: 343, 345, figs. 4: a-c, 5; Sertok – Kulakoğlu – Squadrone 2008: 412-413, figs. 9, 11; Woolley 1921: 48, 133, 134; **Shiyukh Tahtani**: Falsone 1997: 290; 1999: 139; Sconzo 2007: 287, 298, figs. 20: 1-2, 24, 25; Falsone – Sconzo 2012: 171-172 (I wish to thank both authors for providing the manuscript of this paper when still unpublished); **Tell Ahmar**: Roobaert 1998; Bunnens 2003: 41-42; **Qara Qozak**: Valdés Pereiro 2008: 326, fig. 9; **Hadi**: Dornemann 1979: 132, 138, figs 26, 27;

- 1980: 227, 228, figs. 18, 19; **Halawa A**: Orthmann 1981: 24, 83, pl. 15; **Terqa**: Frank 2005; Rouault 2005; Masetti-Rouault – Poli 2007: 65; **Usiyeh**: Oguchi – Oguchi 2006; **Shueimiyeh**: Kepinski 2006. Exceptional are full publications, as in the case of **Lidar Höyük**: Kaschau 1999: 154-182, figs. 68-69, pls. I-XXIV; **Tell Bi’a**: Strommenger – Kohlmeyer 1998; **Mari**: Jean-Marie 1999; **Baghouz**: du Mesnil du Buisson 1948. It is also to mention that Middle Bronze graves at Amarna were reported orally by O. Tunca at the conference on the Tishrin Dam Area held in Barcelona in 1998, but not included in the written version published in the proceedings. Two cist-graves with tumulus possibly Middle Bronze in date on the Euphrates side of the Gebel Bishri have been discovered by the survey recently conducted in the area: Lönnqvist 2009: 6; a Middle Bronze pit-grave is reported at the site of Tell Ghanem al-Ali, east of Raqqa (Al-Maqdassi 2010; Hasegawa 2010: 33, figs. 9-10) as well as possibly at least three large cairns on the northwestern flank of the Gebel Bishri (Fujii – Adachi 2010: 66, 72); finally, at least four of the funerary sites recorded in the publication of the surveys of B. Geyer and J.-Y. Monchambert in the lower part of the Euphrates valley (i.e. from Deir-ez-Zor down to Abu Kemal) are associated to, more or less certain, Middle Bronze ceramic material: apart from Baghouz, El Kita’a 2 and 3, Es-Sousa 2 and Haddama 2: Geyer – Monchambert 2003: 161-163. In addition, evidence from contemporary sites of neighbouring regions (e.g. Chuera, Hammam et-Turkman, Oylum Höyük, Umm el-Marra, Ebla, Alalakh) have also been taken into consideration in the discussion of specific issues.
- 5 Peltenburg 2007: 11-13; Wilkinson 2007: esp. 28-29.
- 6 For a recent overview see Cooper 2006a: 202-256; 2007; Peltenburg 2007/2008.
- 7 Ökse 2007a.

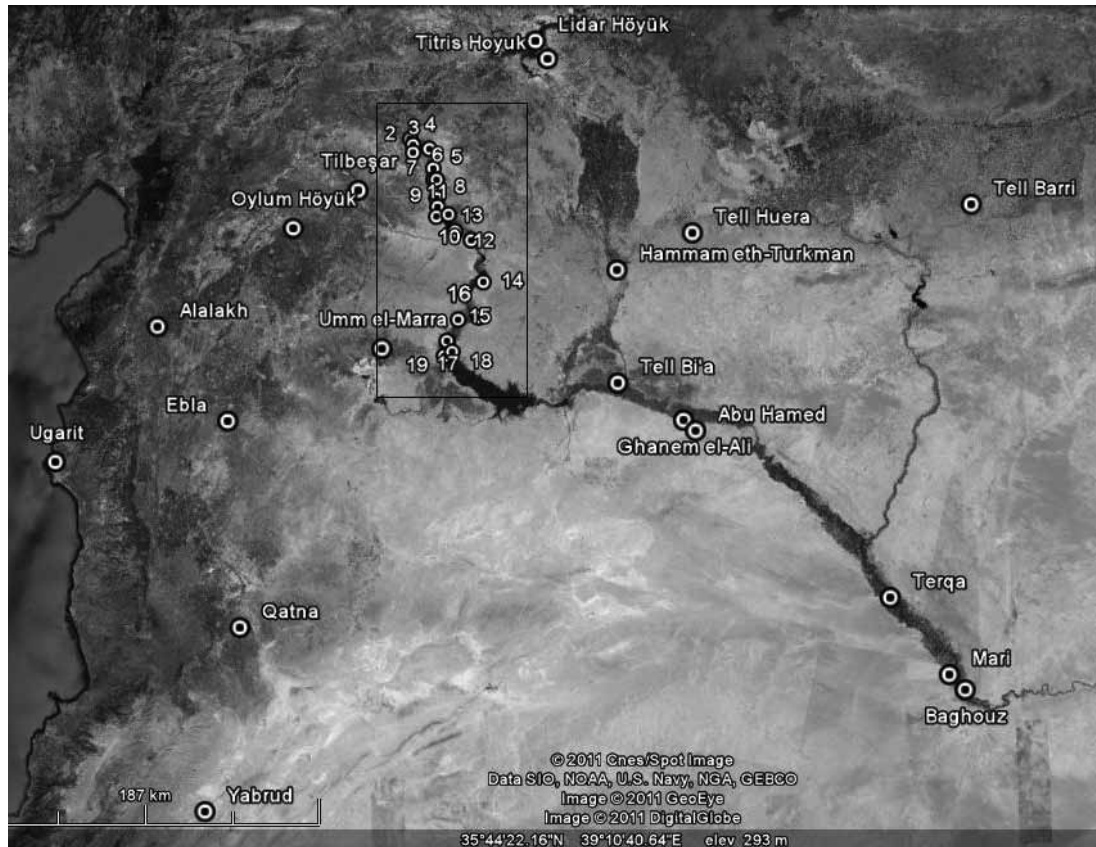


Figure 1: Map showing the sites mentioned in the text (numbered sites: 1. Horum Höyük; 2. Tilbes Höyük; 3. Birecik Cemetery; 4. Hacinebi; 5. Mezraa Höyük; 6. Gre Virike; 7. Şaraga Höyük; 8. Carchemish; 9. Jerablus Tahtani; 10. Shiyukh Tahtani; 11. Amarna; 12. Tell Ahmar; 13. Qara Qozak; 14. Banat; 15. Sweyhah; 16. Hadidi; 17. Habuba Kabira Tell; 18. Halawa A; 19. Selenkahiye) (Author's elaboration of Google Earth map 2011).

erably at the turn of the millennium; in addition, a general trend seems indeed to be the reduction in number of vessels in second millennium graves.⁸ Both elements are taken by the scholar as a sign of impoverishment of the elite which was at the head of the political system in the area during the third millennium.⁹ If the sheer data are basically correct¹⁰ and some conclusions drawn true in the end, questions may be raised as to how to interpret these data and if any alternative explanation could be offered: for example, by not assuming a one to one correlation between number of vessels in graves and social status of the buried individual's, I wonder whether the lack of significant changes in the forms attested in the Middle Bronze period may allow for a different reconstruction, such as that of a selection of

the containers which are now put within the tombs as a part for all (figure 2).¹¹

In addition, if it is true that on a whole we have a reduction in number of sites providing funerary evidence at a regional scale, this datum should be considered within the context of a reduced number of sites in the Middle Bronze period in general, especially as far as the northern sector of the Euphrates valley is concerned.¹² indeed the number of graves in total is larger in this period and, at an intra-site level, we have to acknowledge the absence of any dramatic change in funerary practices at most of the sites occupied in both periods, such as for example Shiyukh Tahtani¹³ or

⁸ Ibid.: 146-150, figs. 4-5, 7.

⁹ Ibid.: 151.

¹⁰ It is not clear for example why the analysis leaves out sites such as Qara Qozak and Tilbeşar or some evidence of sites (dating to the Middle Bronze period) which are instead considered as belonging to the Early Bronze period (e.g. at Tell Bi'a).

¹¹ They usually include at least a cup/bowl and a jar/pitcher: e.g. Shiyukh-Tahtani, Sconzo 2007: fig. 25; Tilbeşar, Kepinski 2007: fig. 9.

¹² Meyer 1996: 151-155, fig. 6: a-b; Cooper 2006a: 264-267; 2006b; Peltenburg 2007: 230; Schwartz 2007: 47. I would also recall the difficulties still existing in the recognition and/or definition of the ceramic assemblages of the so-called 'Early Bronze-Middle Bronze transition' (*inter alia* Porter 2007): the discussion of chronological issues and single grave attributions are left out here and will be dealt with in detail in Felli forthcoming.

¹³ Sconzo 2007: 298.

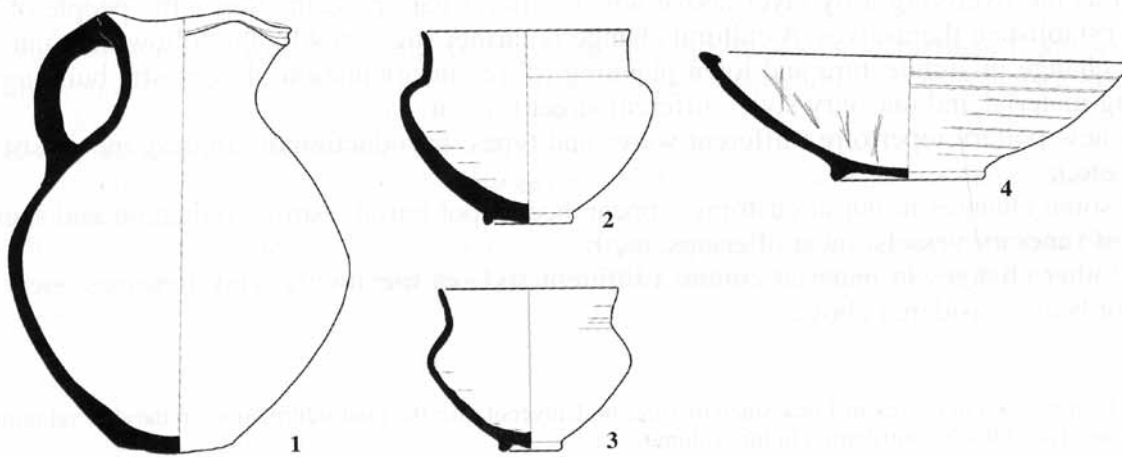


Figure 2: Pottery from Tomb 54, phase 7, MB II, Shiyukh Tahtani, scale 1:4 (after Sconzo 2007: fig. 25).

Lidar Höyük, where cist graves are attested both in the Early and Middle Bronze phases.¹⁴ Even the reduction of wealthy chamber tombs rightly noticed by Ökse should be evaluated along with the emergence of hypogea under royal palaces during the second millennium¹⁵ – not much of a novelty in Syria in fact, if we consider the Early Bronze Ebla hypogea¹⁶ and the tombs underneath the ‘*Palais oriental*’ at Mari:¹⁷ the fact that these structures have been found in most cases empty hampers any consideration on the degree of wealth of their equipments, but their mere existence attests that local elites do still maintain special privileges as far as death rituals are concerned.¹⁸ All this is said without discounting that a change is in act which is significant *per se*, but simply to underline

14 Kaschau 1999: 168-182. Hence the importance to observe the phenomenon in a diachronic perspective connecting the two periods, in order to appreciate changes and continuities without creating artificial boundaries.

15 Miglus 2003: 250-259. See also Hachmann 1996: 248-257 (on Alalakh and Ebla hypogea; as to the latter, it is to be added that further hypogea have been found recently to the north/north-west of the throne-room in palace Q: Matthiae 2002: 562).

16 Matthiae 1997.

17 Margueron 2008: 143-148, figs. 49-52, (with reference to earlier literature). It has also to be said that palaces are poorly attested in the area in the third millennium: it is however a fact that the only undisputed palace in the valley (apart from the ‘Presargonic’ Palace at Mari), palace B at Tell Bi’a, does not seem to have a hypogaeum but to be still associated with an earlier above ground structure: Strommenger – Kohlmeier 1998: 47-77, pls. 55-58; Bösze 2009: 11-13.

18 For a similar, though more articulated, view on this matter see Peltenburg 2007/2008: 235-236. An eventually decrease in funerary ostentation could also be explained with a decline of the need for it in the changed political order: Schwartz 2007: 47 (with reference to I. Morris’ “cycles of ostentation”).

the possible shortcomings of quantitative analyses and the risks of one-sided views on specific issues.

1 Archaeological and historical sources

A burial is essentially and primarily the result of a rite.¹⁹ If there is no longer much a question about the possibility to investigate ritual behaviour in ancient societies on the basis of archaeological evidence, it is however true that the correct methodologies for doing so are yet to be defined and properly refined.²⁰ One way which seems viable in the case of a historical period, as the one under study, is that of an integrated use of archaeological and circumstantial written evidence, when available;²¹ supported by careful refer-

19 I use here the word ‘rite’ as explained by L.-V. Thomas’ words, “in its anthropological sense, that is, in a larger sense, quite apart from liturgical or theological concerns. A rite, then, is a ceremony in which behaviours, gestures and postures, words or songs are uttered, and objects handled, manufactured, destroyed, or consumed are supposed to possess virtues or powers or to produce specific effects”: Thomas 2005: 3234. Obviously this is said without discounting the importance of implications of different nature (especially social and political) of the question: on this point see the recent analysis of the Early Bronze funerary evidence of Umm el Marra in Schwartz 2007: 48-51.

20 Cf. Pader 1982: 36, “a funeral being an activity which, by any definition, is a ritual activity. It must therefore be analyzed in a manner appropriate to a ritual situation”. Much progress in this direction has been made by some recent workshops (and their prompt publications) such as the one organized in Berlin in 1998 (Bonatz – Novák – Oettel 2000; see especially Meyer’s contribution: Meyer 2000) and that in Chicago in 2006 (Laneri 2007).

21 For a similar view see Meyer 2000: 17; a difference is however in the kind of texts used which in the latter study include also mythological ones whereas here, though acknowledging the importance, at a different level, of reference to Mesopotamian sources, I have taken into consid-

ence to ethnographic cases, this approach may succeed in unveiling, at least partially, “les gestes funéraires”²² behind the formation of that intentional deposit which is a burial, by adding meanings to finds and placing them into a wider context, i.e. their cultural context.²³ To avoid “to take it for granted that the grave goods are meant to accompany the dead person into an after-life, and to be at his or her disposal”,²⁴ I mean to discuss the possibility that at least part of the objects found in graves could in fact be, in the first place, residues of that rite.

For this time-period the textual evidence comes essentially from Mari: the topic has received attention especially as far as *post-mortem* rituals are concerned, i.e. the *kispum*-rite;²⁵ exceptions, apart from sparse reference in the texts publications of the Mari archive by J.-M. Durand,²⁶ are the studies by A. Finet and D. Charpin which have gathered the scanty evidence, both in the form of administrative texts and letters, scattered in the archive and, in the case of the latter scholar, in few other contemporary sources, such as those from Eshnunna and Alalakh, related to the question of death and funerals.²⁷ What is clear from these studies is that we know very little on funerary concepts about afterlife in Syria in this time frame and this is a great limitation once we want to elaborate on the question of funerary ritual behaviour which is obviously connected to them.²⁸ We also know very little about what were the actual rituals connected to mourning and burial. Nonetheless, there are things which are known and therefore I shall try here to elaborate on these data along with the archaeological ones available and to offer an overview which of course can only be considered as provisional.

eration only local, non-literary texts. A recent overview on literary texts from Mesopotamia related to the topic is to be found in Katz 2007.

22 Leclerc 1990.

23 It is perhaps superfluous to recall the official character of the textual evidence at hand which almost exclusively deals with questions which are of interest for the palace and therefore is not much enlightening when dealing with ‘normal’ graves: however, sparse references are also found to events, such as deaths and related matters, of individuals who are outside the palace circle, thus shedding some light on the uses of a larger sample of the population.

24 Postgate 1980: 77, who however explains his position by adding “This does, of course, beg a major question, but to broach that would involve us in complex religious theory, out of place here”. See also Cooper 1991: 24 “grave goods, as the texts makes clear, were intended both for the deceased’s personal use and for sacrifice to the deities that control the world he is about to enter”. Still on grave goods and texts see most recently Katz 2007: 171-172.

25 *Inter alia* Jacquet 2002; 2008: 393-405.

26 See especially Durand 1988: 559, 560.

27 Finet 1987; Charpin 2006; 2008. See now Jacquet in the present volume. On Old Assyrian sources see Veenhof 1998; Michel 2008, while for an overview on Mesopotamian, mainly first millennium, texts, see Abrahami 2005.

28 For a different view see Ucko 1969: 265-266.

2 Mourning

From the texts we have some knowledge about mourning practices, especially as far as royal courts are concerned:²⁹ people affected by a loss did not wash nor cut their hair,³⁰ professional mourners (*bakkītu/bakkātu*) were hired to execute lamentations, literally ‘to cry’, as indicated by the original root *bky* of the word.³¹ Mourning performances should possibly include also the beating of the breast and other body parts as suggested by the use, at least at Carchemish, of the term *sipittum* to indicate “mourning”³² and derived from the verb *sapādu* = to beat.³³ At Aleppo mourning is called instead *hidirtum* and it is not entirely clear in what the two words differ.³⁴ The duration of the mourning period itself is still a matter of debate: in the case of royal figures, at least fifteen days,³⁵ but a figure of thirty has also been suggested.³⁶

3 Funeral

We do not even know when exactly the burial ceremony took place:³⁷ there are hints that some time was allowed between death and burial in the case of highly placed individuals, among other reasons, in order to let people coming from abroad to take part into the

29 A recent synthesis on mourning practices at Ebla is to be found in Biga 2007/2008: 262 Archi’s contribution in this volume. As far as Mesopotamia is concerned see Alster 1983.

30 Charpin 2008: 87.

31 Ghouti 1991. On the lamentation *bikītum* in Old Assyrian records see Veenhof 1998: esp. 114-115.

32 Charpin 2008: 73. On the mourning terminology in the Mari texts see also Ghouti 1991.

33 We have nothing as the Ahiram’s sarcophagus to attest visually what mourning practices looked like in this period: however, I suggest that the nude female figurines included in some burials, especially in western Syria (for an example from Mari see Butterlin 2007a: 10, fig. 6), which do have their arms bent at the breast, represent in fact mourners much alike the first two female figures represented on one short side on that monument: Rehm 2004: pl. 9, fig. 24 (the other two have their arms over the head, in what we reconstruct as a sequence of repeated gestures: *ibid.*: pl. 9, fig. 25). On this matter see Felli forthcoming.

34 Charpin 2008: 83. However, Durand 2008: 608-609, contrasting earlier views of his, differentiates between *sipittum*, “la manifestation de deuil sur le moment même” and *hidirtum*, which would be on the contrary “sa commémoration rituelle”, while so far only the *hidirtum rabitum* was recognized as a commemorative rite: Charpin 2008: 87. I wonder whether *sipittum* could refer to a specific rite within the mourning period whereas *hidirtum* to the mourning period, including all related ceremonies.

35 *Ibid.*: 86 and 90, n. 87.

36 *Ibid.*: 90. The duration of the mourning period is not a trivial question if we think that in a number of societies it is conceived as equivalent to the time needed to the dead to move “de la société visible des vivants à la société invisible des ancêtres”: Hertz 1905/1906: 136.

37 For a similar remark on the basis of Mesopotamian texts see Gronberg 1990: 254.

funeral as the Old Babylonian texts from Tell Asmar clearly indicate.³⁸ Obviously, outside the palace circle, everything was simpler and faster: the few data available seem to indicate that burial took place quite close to death, although possibly not at night.³⁹

As far as the burial ceremony itself is concerned, archaeological evidence comes obviously to the fore: graves and tombs, being essentially the result of that ceremony, are almost the only sources of information we have on this matter – especially on the hows and wheres – although some textual evidence may be relevant too to clarify specific aspects of it. Before getting into details, a short excursus appears necessary: two are apparently the words encountered at Mari to indicate the grave, *qubūrum* and *kimabḫum*. No clear distinction between the two terms has been made so far.⁴⁰ My suggestion is that one could be made in relation to the type of documents in which they occur, that is to say administrative texts in the case of *kimabḫum*, and letters in the case of *qubūrum*, and this may be significant for the present discourse, as I shall show below.⁴¹ The latter term seems to have the meaning of ‘burial’, indicating both the burial as physical place and as ceremony, much alike similar words in many modern languages, and this appears confirmed also by the textual evidence of Tell Asmar⁴² and Alalakh; I put forward the hypothesis that the former term too, *kimabḫum*, the syllabic writing of the Sumerian KI-MAḪ generally translated as “tomb”,⁴³ had equally these two possible meanings and was used instead of *qubūrum* in administrative texts perhaps due to the usual scribal preference for sumerograms in this domain. This observation, if proved right, may have some consequence when we consider that there are administrative texts which record disbursements *ana kimabḫim*: while it is commonly understood that these are offerings given to the grave,⁴⁴ it can be suggested that these commodities or objects were primarily given to be used in the context of the burial ceremony

(even in the preparation of it, as we shall see below).⁴⁵ This of course does not exclude the grave as their ultimate destination and, on the contrary, may justify their occurrence within this context. To support this idea it is useful to recall a slightly later text from Alalakh VII where it is specified that a silver object, given *ana qubūri*⁴⁶ of a king, was placed with the latter in his tomb (again indicated as *qubūrum*).⁴⁷

3.1 Preparation of the body

Textual, but also archaeological, evidence seems to indicate the use of oil as a special treatment for the corpse before burial. Within the Mari archive are found some records of oil disbursements, specifically perfumed oil, *ana kimabḫim*, all but one dated to the reign of Yasmaḫ-Addu.⁴⁸ It is a matter of debate whether what is meant here are oil provisions for the afterlife, thus placed in the grave at the end of the ceremony, or used to anoint the corpse before burial or even else.⁴⁹ Indeed, within the funerary equipments retrieved in graves are often attested small sized vessels with narrow mouths, which have been since long recognized as oil containers, such as for example the

38 Whiting 1987: 48, n. 11, ll. 20-25. See also Biga 2007/2008: 255, on the Ebla evidence.

39 ARM XXVI/1 280, ll. 5-13; see also Charpin 2008: 71 and n. 11: interestingly the text says that the dead were buried after having passed the night on a bed, may be a hint to a practice of all-night watch (see below). See also *ibid.*: 72 for reference to another ‘death and burial’ record in a late Old Babylonian administrative text from Sippar.

40 *Ibid.*: 75, n. 29. See also Lundström 2000: 12.

41 In first millennium sources, again, the main difference between *kimabḫum* and the term *qabru* seems to reside in the domain in which they are attested, i.e. essentially magic rituals for the latter: *ibid.*: 9-13, esp. 13.

42 Whiting 1987: 160 “burial, funeral”.

43 CAD K, s.v. *kimabḫum*.

44 See contra Biga 2007/2008: 252 “In the case of Mari it is very clear that the funerary gifts are destined for the tomb, to be buried in the tomb and not used during funerary ceremonies”; Charpin 2008: 75 “[...] des offrandes faites pour le tombeau (*kimabḫum* ou *qubūrum*)”.

45 The use of *ana* + the term indicating the ritual occasion for a disbursement is attested frequently in the administrative texts of Mari: see e.g. Charpin 1984: 84. A similar interpretation is given by A. Archi to the occasion ÉXPAP of specific expenditures in the Ebla archive, “interment, burial; funerary ceremony”: Archi 2002: 164, n. 9 (with reference to related literature) and now his contribution in this volume). See however Biga 2007/2008: 250-254, which seems to opt for ÉXPAP = “tomb”.

46 At Alalakh this is the current formula (and not *ana kimabḫim*) found in administrative texts.

47 Wiseman 1953: no. 366, lines 13-15, esp. l. 15 (the term is here read *ku-pu-ri*; for its correct reading see CAD Q: 293, s.v. *qubūru* and Zeeb 2001: 54). For a recent interpretation of this much discussed text, and reference to earlier literature, see Charpin 2008: 80-81.

48 Charpin 1984: 106-107. Attestations outside Mari seem rare: see Nasrabadi 1999: 32, n. 154 on the Middle Assyrian text VAT 18901 recording oil disbursements for burials, which, according to the scholar “das auf dem Kopf des bzw. der Verstorbenen gegossen werden soll”.

49 According to Mc Ginnis 1987: 8, n. 16, the oils of one of the Mari texts, ARM VII 58, could be used for fumigations; in relation to the same text Jean-Marie 1999: 82 observes “ces huiles pouvaient être utilisées pour l’onction du cadavre à l’huile aromatique, soit pour la combustion (d’aromates) faite après la mise au tombeau”. See also, more in general, Finet 1987: 240. At third millennium Ebla, according to Archi 1996: 17 and n. 29, oil is usually given to the participants of the rite (but see contra Biga 2007/2008: 266-267). The possibility of a ‘prompt’ use of the oil for the corpse seems however likely in the case of the administrative text from Tell Asmar in which the offering is made on the very day of death: Whiting 1987: 115, text 1931-T263). An implicit attestation of the use of oil in preparation of a corpse is possibly to be found in the Sumerian ritual texts analyzed by Katz 2007: 170.

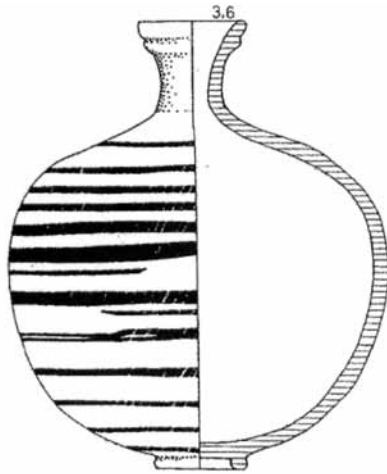


Figure 3: An oil (?) container from the MB tomb F 0217, Horum Höyük (after Marro 2007: fig. 7).

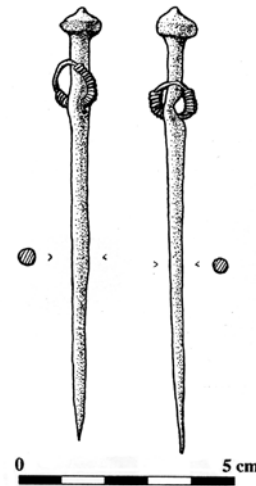


Figure 4: Toggle-pins from tomb 760, Mari (after Jean-Marie 1999: pl. 138).

so-called Syrian bottles,⁵⁰ a type well attested in the Early Bronze period⁵¹ which continues with some variations down to the Middle Bronze (figure 3).

On the basis of what is said above, I suggest that the actual presence of similar containers is to be put in relation to the process of preparation of the corpse.⁵² But what was this anointment for? A number of meanings could be possibly applied to this activity: however, by considering the different roles in which perfumed oils are attested within the Mari corpus, embellishment and perfume would seem to me the most obvious option.⁵³ Nonetheless, we should not overlook that anointment with oil could have purifying and protective effects too, as attested especially in first millennium ritual texts.⁵⁴

Presumably after the ointment, the corpses were dressed or at least covered or wrapped up in a cloth, as indicated by the scanty evidence for textile remains⁵⁵ and the more abundant presence of pins, especially toggle-pins, in the graves themselves (figure 4).⁵⁶ It is not out of place to mention here a disbursement of a cloth *ana kimabhim* of a certain Yatašha, female musician under Yasmaḥ-Addu and Zimri-Lim.⁵⁷ The *ūtublu* dress in question is an ordinary one, usually worn by travellers (e.g. by messengers).⁵⁸ At Eshnunna the son of the Amorite chief Abda-El, Awilanum, on occasion of his death, receives instead a *tūg nig-lám*,⁵⁹ corresponding to the akkadian *lamabūššū*, a ‘precious garment made of wool’,⁶⁰ which at Mari is one of those special dresses which “se portent, semble-t-il, en de rares occasions”:⁶¹ the difference in the quality of the

50 *Inter alia* Rova 1991: 136-141. Interestingly, the text ARM XXV 565 records specifically three *huburnatum*-vessels *ana kimabhim* of Batakra, i.e. a type of oil container attested also at Nuzi: see AHw s.v. *huburnu(m)*: 352, “ein kleines Ölgefäß”.

51 Sconzo 2007: 298-299, fig. 26 (piriform flask with stepped rim).

52 See also Schwartz 2007: 50. I. Winter has convincingly shown that some pouring vessels found in the Ur Royal cemetery were indeed used in the preparation (washing and anointment) of the body: Winter 1999: 249-250. For this time-period we have no records on the specialists involved in this kind of activities, as for example in the third millennium: Cohen 2005: 75. On a possible involvement of the gala-priests in funerals see Durand 2008: 391: “Peut-être, comme cela ce passe dans d’autres cultures, leur personnalité les rendait-elle aptes à s’approcher des morts et à manipuler les matières souillées”.

53 It is interesting to recall here that in the Neo-Assyrian text ABL 437, line 14, the first activity carried out on corpses to be prepared for burial, even if there is no mention of unguents, is described by the verb *dummuqu* = “to embellish” (Parpola 1983: 288, n. 352; see also Black – George – Postgate 2000: 55, s.v. *damāqu*, “improve something in quality, embellish, beautify, polish”).

54 Maul 1994: 44, 95-96; Nasrabadi 1999: 61.

55 It is not always easy to tell whether tiny fragments of fabric do relate to clothes or to some other kind of textiles (e.g. a shroud). For attestations in the area see for example the remains in the jar burials of the *sakkanakku* period (T. 1077, 1081) and Middle Bronze II (T. 1062, 1095-1097, 1102) at Mari: Jean-Marie 1999: 191, 193-194, 196-197.

56 On the use of toggle-pins see Klein 1992: 252.

57 M.10987, l. 6’: Ziegler 1999: 196, no. 25 and n. 6’. I see this disbursement, as most of the following ones from Mari, as a special case within what was the normal flow of commodities given routinely to people connected with the court, to be distinguished to gifts given to people outside the palace circle, mostly important foreign individuals (see below).

58 Durand 1983: 394-396, 403-406. For another case, which seems however to involve some sort of tapestry, see ARM XXI 347.

59 Whiting 1987: 115.

60 CAD L, 58, s.v. *lamabūššū*. This garment is also among the desiderata of Ušašum, the other son of king Abda-El who took the place of his father as tribal chief (see above: Whiting 1987: no 11, l. 16, translation at p. 49), and is found in the text from Girsu DP 75 l. 2, which Steinkeller 1990: 21, n. 29 reckons an inventory of grave goods.

61 Durand 1983: 403.



Figure 5: Gold band from tomb 1082, Mari (after Jean-Marie 1999: pl. 242: 1)

dress is obviously linked to the difference in rank. It is possible that these gifts were meant to dress the dead for the funeral, although no clear statement about this is given in the texts.⁶²

The dead were also provided with ornaments as attested by the jewels found both in male and female graves, although more often in the latter, with beads and pendants being particularly frequent in children burials. If adornment was probably one of the scopes of this activity, protection was certainly a main purpose too:⁶³ some ornaments do play the fundamental role of amulets during lifetime even nowadays and anthropological literature gives ample evidence of a similar role played by objects of this kind in death rituals in a large number of societies, both ancient and modern.⁶⁴ Of course, to investigate this matter more thoroughly a better knowledge of the symbolism both of the figurative repertoire and materials attested would certainly be needed.⁶⁵ One could speculate for example whether the frequent use of silver is to be related not only to the intrinsic but also symbolic values of this metal:⁶⁶ qualities like the shiny surface or the white colour could be linked to **positive** concepts, such as purity,⁶⁷ which would confer to the material, and ultimately to the object itself, **positive** properties.⁶⁸

62 Textiles are recorded also in the Ebla archive as offerings to individuals at the time of their death: Biga 2007/2008: 250, 258; according to Archi 2002: 178 “destined to adorn them on their burial”. The items are often more than one, being in fact different parts of a personal attire (Archi 1999: 48; see also the observations in Pomponio 2008: XVIII). At Ebla it is also attested the practice to offer, on the occasion of a funeral, clothes to long-dead people, maybe to dress anew ancestors’ statues: Archi 2002: 166, 174, 176, esp. 183-184.

63 As to Mesopotamia, it has been suggested that some of the jewels found in tombs, not directly associated to the body of the dead, could indeed be gifts to the netherworld deities, as occurring in some literary accounts such as the death of Ur-Nammu: see last Postgate 2009: 236.

64 See also Bottéro 1980: 37 for the amuletic purpose of the seals found in tombs. On the question of the possible functions of funerary objects in general see Mazzoni 2005: 3.

65 Just to quote some specific studies see Dunham 1993 (beads); Spycket 1996 (shell rings); Bonatz 2000 (funerary iconography); Cohen 2005: 126-142; Gansell 2007 (the latter two on Royal Cemetery ornaments).

66 For this matter, see the discussion on the use of gold in the Varna cemetery: Renfrew 1986: esp. 157-160.

67 On the current usage of silver at Mari see Limet 1982.

68 See Winter 1995: 2573.

Ornaments are also mentioned as offerings *ana kimabhim*.⁶⁹ Yaḥdun-Lim, one of Zimri-Lim’s sons, who died prematurely,⁷⁰ receives silver objects, i.e. *mêmmu* and 1 ḫar-šu. If the latter term does not create many problems in interpretation as “bracelet”, the *mêmmu* appear more problematic: the word, always occurring in the plural, should refer to some head’s ornament, possibly a diadem,⁷¹ but no certain identification has been proposed so far. These very objects, albeit heavier, are also given *ana kimabhim* of another royal figure, Addu-duri, the mother of Zimri-Lim.⁷² I suggest the *mêmmu* to be identified with the stripes of precious metals interpreted as ornaments for the head which are attested in a number of graves of the late third and second millennium in various parts of the Near East (figure 5).⁷³ They can be rectangular or oval and have pierced or tapering ends and have almost all been found on or next to the forehead of the dead. Sometimes similar bands are found in more than one specimen per person and that may explain the word in the plural in the texts. In Syria we have examples in Late Early Bronze graves from Selenkahiye,⁷⁴ Tell Bi’a,⁷⁵ and Mari:⁷⁶ in all these cases they show a leaf or floral pattern on relief which may reflect a vegetal origin of the ornament, whereas later examples are usually plain, as the stripe, made of gold, found in a tomb from Mari of the *šakkanakku* period.⁷⁷ They continue down to the second millennium and appear attested both in children and in adult burials,⁷⁸ and this would

69 Archi 2002 on Ebla offerings of these kind.

70 Dossin 1939: 106, but first edition by H. Limet in ARM XXV: 539; see also Ziegler 1999: 69.

71 See CAD M/1, 202, s.v. *mammu*. Finet 1987: 243: “un objet qui est peut-être un modèle réduit de couronne”.

72 ARM XXV 571, lines 1-3. According to Ziegler 1997: 53, these objects should have a funerary meaning; see also Ziegler 1999: 51 and n. 326.

73 This type of ornament becomes fashionable in Mesopotamia especially during the Akkadian period: Maxwell-Hyslop 1971: 21-23; fig. 13: a-c; pl. 23 (from Ur).

74 E.g. van Loon 1968: 27, 30, fig. 12; see also 2001: 426, pl. 8, 10: b.

75 Strommenger – Kohlmeyer 1998: 15, 31, 35, 40, pls. 22: 15, 40: 11, 36: 1, 46: 10, 165: 6, 7.

76 Tomb 300: Jean-Marie 1999: 22, 133, M 1427, pl. 45. See also the example from a recently found mid-third millennium grave: Butterlin 2007a: 11, fig. 9.

77 Jean-Marie 1999: 194, pl. 242: 1.

78 A fragmentary example in silver is found in the tomb Z 121 of the cemetery of Baghouz: du Mesnil du Buisson 1948:

be in line with the evidence of the texts mentioned above. In a child pit grave from Terqa such a stripe was found fastened to the back of the head by means of a spiral, again in silver;⁷⁹ interestingly, the child was also provided with a silver bracelet, which, as we have seen above, is the second object (*ḥar-šu*) occurring in the Mari provision.

Given their occurrence in what are generally perceived as rather wealthy (although no actual royal) graves, these jewels do certainly play a role as indicators of high status, as also suggested by the rank of people who receives them in the texts:⁸⁰ nonetheless, in relation to possible additional, symbolic, *raison-d'être*, it is not out of place to recall the use of similar ornaments on animals in ceremonial contexts, most likely involving their sacrifice, as depicted in one of the Mari paintings from the courtyard 106 of the Zimri-Lim's palace.⁸¹

3.2 Interment

3.2.1 Burial location

Apart from those cases in which the tomb structure was actually large enough to allow the preparation of the body to be held within – and there does not seem to be any in the sample under consideration⁸² – the corpse was most likely prepared indoors and then brought to the place of burial, of which the location may vary from very close, under the house floor⁸³ or in dismissed or abandoned areas within the site,⁸⁴ to a medium dis-

tance, for example in that sort of liminal area represented by the settlement fortifications or nearby, to farther away, in specific, off-site cemeteries.⁸⁵ In the cases in which the larger is the site exposure by excavations, and therefore the better the knowledge on the nature and aspect of the settlement, it seems that intramural burials are the usual (Mari, Terqa) but by no means exclusive pattern (Tell Bi'a, Halawa A, maybe Qara Qozak); it has also to be noticed the existence of cemeteries apparently not linked to any specific site, which seem concentrated in the lower stretch of the river valley (Baghouz, Es-Sousa) (figure 6).⁸⁶

presence of accompanying goods do indicate that they are most likely primary interments, as for example a Middle Bronze case in a kiln at Şaraga Höyük, a site in the upper course of the Euphrates (Sertok – Kulakoğlu – Squadronne 2007: 343, fig. 4: c). It comes then to mind E. Stone's observations on the analogies existing in Mesopotamia between burials and rubbish disposal (Stone 1991: 241-242), although the need for burying the dead is obviously dictated by factors which are not only practical as in the latter case.

85 The reason for one choice or the other, especially when more than one location is actually in use in one site at the same time, is still a matter for guesswork for scholars. I just recall here the famous Saxe-Goldstein's hypothesis 8 on the connection between separate burial grounds and the maintenance of privileges on behalf of corporate groups: Goldstein 1981: 61. Durand 2008: 609, commenting on the general lack of family vaults under house floors in Syria, in contrast to Mesopotamia, apart from few exceptions (see for example the hypogea underneath the floor of very large Middle Bronze houses at Ugarit: Mallet 1995: 173), as the result of the recent sedentarization of the population in the region. As far as the Euphrates valley, we can mention that, in the case of third millennium Halawa, Orthmann 1980: 103-104, has suggested that the graves found "immediately outside the fortification wall", which show the most elaborate architecture, were those of the town elite; see also Peltenburg 1999: 430, for a similar conclusion as far as Jerablus Tahtani is concerned. Finally see Meyer 2005: 363 for considerations on grave locations over a larger number of sites in the area.

86 Geyer – Monchambert 2003: 169-170 (see however du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: 12, which suggested for Baghouz a relation to the ancient town of Nagiaté, on the same river bank). A similar case is represented by the Early Bronze cemetery of Abu Hamed, south of Raqqa (Falb – Klasnik – Meyer – Vila 2005). The second millennium cemetery of Khabiyat al-Rashid, more to the west, north of Damascus, located only one kilometre and a half from the tell of Yabrud, can instead be put into relation with the latter: Abu Assaf 1967. The question on whom were the people buried in far-away cemeteries is still open: as to Baghouz, according to M. H. Gates "one might ask if the entire Baghouz cemetery is a nomadic burial ground. Du Mesnil du Buisson found no contemporary settlement" (Gates 1988: 85, n. 16); B. Hrouda suggested the possibility that it was the burial place of Haneans, referring explicitly to the inhabitants of Mari (Hrouda 1990: 109; see also now Geyer – Monchambert 2003: 170). The idea of a use by semi-nomadic groups has become in some way acquainted in the literature: see below. The issue requires a more in-depth development than possible here: it is however to recall the presence of the water source of 'Ain el-Ḥaḡal (du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: 5) which would make the place a crucial stop in the area for pastoralists. In the case of Abu Hamed,

75, pl. XLVIII: 7: in absence of anthropological data, the presence of weapons in the grave should indicate that the buried person was an adult male.

79 Buia 1993: 48.

80 According to Archi (at Ebla) "The gifts had the sole purpose of maintaining the social status which the deceased, consigned to the tomb, had enjoyed in life": Archi 2002: 179. See also the discussion, specifically in relation to first millennium female graves, in Mazzoni 2005: 8.

81 Parrot 1958: pls. V: 2, VI. Just as a reference, I would also mention the importance of binding the head of the animal substitute in later magic healing rituals: e.g. *LKA* 79, lines 1-33/*KAR* 245, lines 1-22, esp. lines 13-14: Tsukimoto 1985: 125-127.

82 A clear example of this is offered by the later royal Hypogaeum of Qatna: Pfälzner 2007.

83 Especially common for, but not exclusive of, still-born and small babies. A very special case is represented by the royal graves underneath palace floors: see below.

84 See for example the cemetery in the ruins of palace A at Mari, dated to the so-called Khana period (Margueron 2004: 528-529). One can also refer to the evidence of burials which are placed in 'unconventional' settings of different sort (out-of-use kilns, waste pits): in some instances these are secondary or possibly even tertiary burials (an example is the large vessel containing human bones in a silo of the earliest level of the Old Babylonian phase of occupation in area F, at Terqa: Rouault 1998: 318-319, fig. 8), the latter reflecting a quite casual attitude towards long time dead persons (on this issue Kümmel unpubl.); however, there are cases in which the arrangement of the body along with the

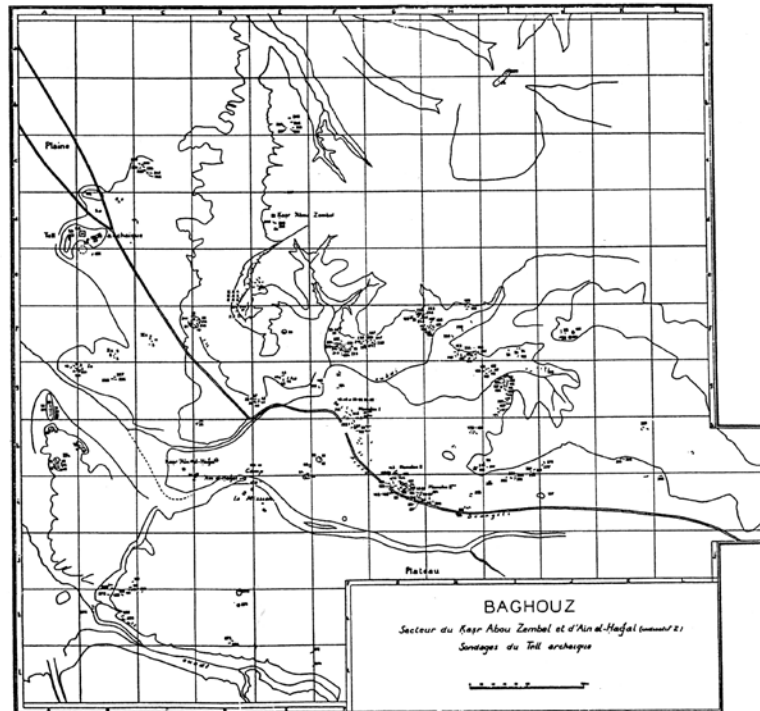


Figure 6: Plan of the cemetery of Baghouz (after du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: pl.VI).

The way how the transportation of the corpse, especially in the case of a relatively long distance, was accomplished is all subject to speculation, although it probably varied according to the importance and/or role of the dead and his/her family.⁸⁷ In this connection one may quote the evidence from Baghouz which is with Jericho the only Middle Bronze burial site where wooden furniture was found (figures 7, 8).⁸⁸ The pieces attested consist of a bed, on which the corpse was laid, and, in the remaining space, a round table and a stool.⁸⁹ One aspect which deserves attention is that these pieces of furniture are all portable, an element considered a possible further proof for the idea that Baghouz was a cemetery used by seminomadic people.⁹⁰ Their portability, however, could be in fact due to funerary purposes, i.e. the transferral of the body and all needed paraphernalia to the tomb during the funeral.⁹¹ Finally,

mentioned above, J.-W. Meyer ascribes it to a phase of sedentarization of mobile groups living in the area of the Jebel Bishri: Meyer 2005: 364.

87 The only example of a wheeled vehicle attested in the area is in fact that of which remains have been found in the Lord of the Goats tomb at Ebla: Matthiae 1979: 164.

88 Parr 1996.

89 Du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: 37-38, pls. 42, 44. In general they are found in the largest and imposing tombs of the cemetery, with some exceptions as for example tomb Z 305 (ibid.: 39): beds are found in fourteen, tables and stools only in seven.

90 Parr 1996: 47. It is worth recalling that the table-tops, for example, have raised edges much alike a tray: du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: 37-38, e.g. pl. XLIV (tomb Z 67) (here fig. 8).

91 This aspect deserves further elaboration, especially in relation to the possibility of lay-in-state ceremonies preceding the burial: see below. For a similar interpretation of much

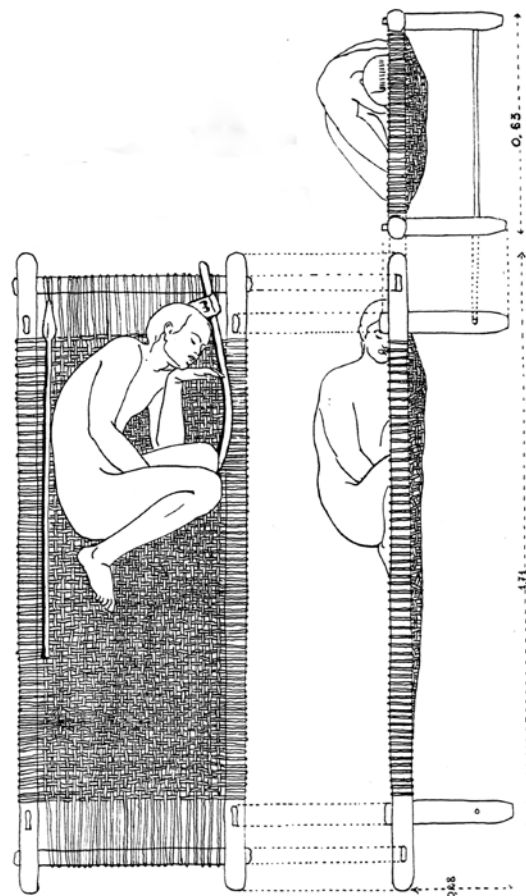


Figure 7: Reconstruction of the corpse position on bed, Baghouz (after du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: pl. LVI).

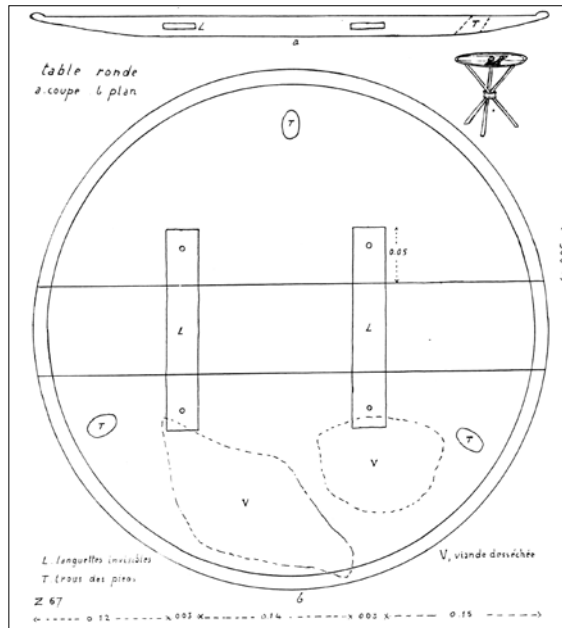


Figure 8: Drawings and reconstruction of a table, Baghouz (after du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: pl. XLIV).

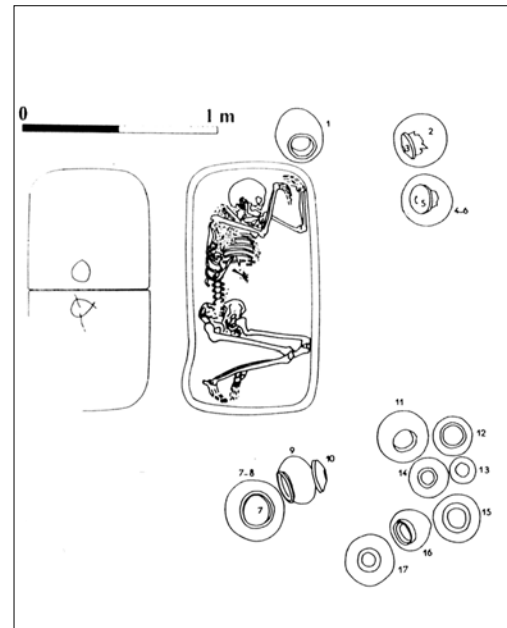


Figure 9: Plan of burial in clay coffin, tomb 480, Mari, MB I (after Jean-Marie 1999: pl. 69).

in absence of any information, it is open to debate if that was done out-of-sight or publicly, as for example recently suggested by A. Cohen in the reconstruction of the mortuary practices connected with the Royal Cemetery at Ur, assuming a special symbolism of the corpses in relation to the reinforcement of the royal institution.⁹²

later (and richer) material, the wooden furniture from Tumulus MM at Gordion, see Simpson 1985: 188-193, esp. 188; Simpson – Spirydowicz – Dorge 1992: 15. How exceptional a case such as Baghouz with its wooden furniture is difficult to say, since the rarity of finds elsewhere may be simply due to the lack of preservation of organic materials. To judge from the presence of inlays, decorated pieces of furniture were also included in the tomb beneath the throne room in the palace A at Mari, although in this case they could belong to containers such as chests or boxes: Margueron 1990: 419, fig. 2: 6; 2004: 360, fig. 345. As to earlier graves, the occurrence of inlays is usual in elite tombs: e.g. at Tell Bi'a in the so-called mausolea (see especially Grabbau 5: Stepniowski 1998: 68-71, pls. 91: 7-8, 93: 7-19, 94: 1-3, 169: 7-12, 170: 1). At Tell Banat stone inlays have been found in Tomb 7 (chamber D), where there was also a wooden coffin, while an alabaster table-top was retrieved in chamber C and bronze nails with wood still attached in chamber F: McClellan – Porter 1999: 109-110, fig. 10. Pieces of wooden furniture with bronze applications were also attested in the second millennium tomb of the 'Lord of the Goats' at Ebla, while the bronze figurative appliques which give the name to it were most likely part of the decoration of a throne or similar: Matthiae 1979: 163, 172. It seems possible to conclude with Parr 1996: 48 that the occurrence of furniture appears to be in connection with high status burials.

92 Cohen 2005: 149-151. On the contrary, the entire Hittite funerary ritual is accomplished with little emphasis on the corpse (except maybe on the second day) which, burned

3.2.2 Grave types

The types of graves themselves attested in this period display a considerable variety both at an intra-site and inter-sites level and range from the simple pit to burials in containers (either vessel or clay coffin)⁹³ (figure 9) within pits to cist graves, with or without a tumulus (figure 10), to chamber tombs (both rock-cut or built-in) (figure 17).⁹⁴

It is difficult to understand precisely the rationale behind the choice of a specific type, which is not simply a question of status and access to resources.⁹⁵ It seems however possible to trace significant associations such as between type and location, pit and pot burials being usually encountered within the settlements, while tumuli and rock-cut tombs being exclu-

on the second night, seems to play no role in the following ceremonies, replaced by what has been interpreted as an effigy: Kassian – Korol'ev – Sidel'tsev 2002, esp. 24 and 118-119; Archi 2008: 182.

93 Clay coffins are especially frequent at Mari, where they occur mostly in the *šakkanakku* period: Jean-Marie 1999: 13-14, 75. More difficult to assess is the degree of diffusion of wooden coffins/biers, usually very little preserved but of which sparse evidence is found at a number of sites: a complete example is attested, out of the area, at Alalakh (Woolley 1955: 96, pl. XXI: b).

94 Among specific, local variations of the above mentioned grave types we can recall the brick-lined pit burial with a peculiar cobble bedding found at Terqa: Rouault 2005: 58-59, fig. 7, "tombe à galets".

95 Environmental conditions are for example crucial to explain the occurrence of specific types of graves, e.g. rock-cut tombs. See also below for further discussion.

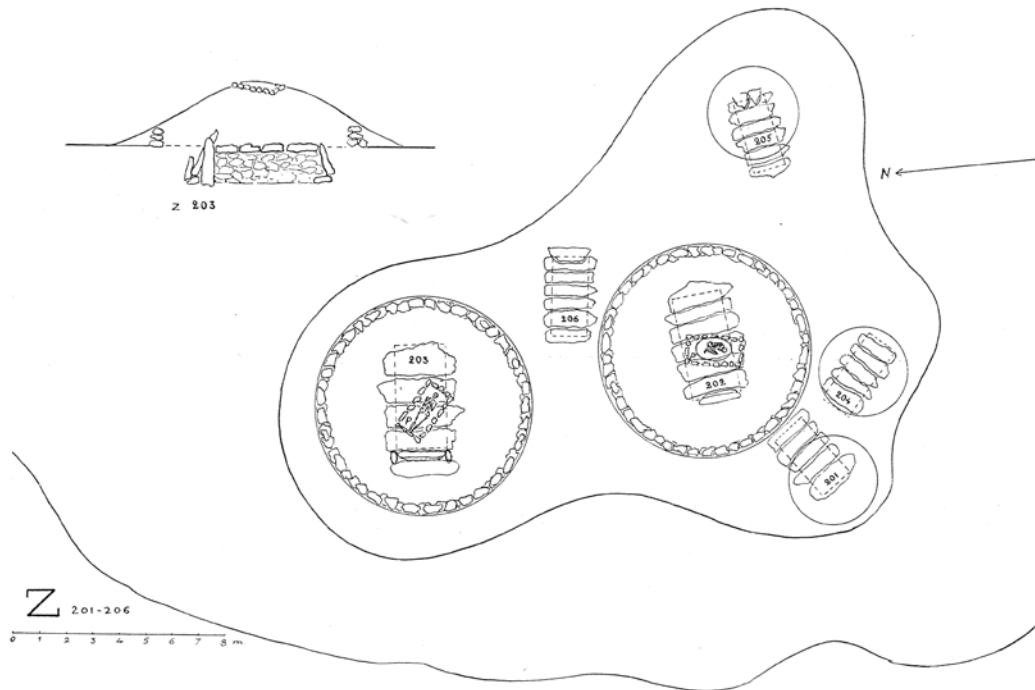


Figure 10: Plan of tumuli and cist-graves (Z 201–206) and section of tumulus Z 203 of the Baghouz cemetery (after du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: pl. XL).

sively set off the site; or between type and age of the dead, being pot burials the most frequent type of grave for babies and small children.⁹⁶ In this connection, it is however to notice the increase in this period of the use of ceramic vessels not only for babies and small children, but also for adult interments.⁹⁷ While in the

⁹⁶ This is a rather long-lasting, widely diffused phenomenon: for the Early Bronze Age see Carter – Parker 1995: 106; Dugay 2005: esp. 43-44.

⁹⁷ At Mari the number of adult burials in jars appears particularly high in the *šakkanakku* period (59), while decreases slightly in the second millennium (31 in the Middle Bronze I and eleven in the Middle Bronze II): Jean-Marie 1999: 11, 33, 35. As to Terqa, we do not have enough data to provide a numerical esteem of adult burials in jars; nonetheless, they do occur at the site and jar burials in general, which are here often of the double jar type, are attested both in the third and second millennium levels: Rouault 2005: 57. Jar burials containing adults dating to the EB IV are found at Oylum (Özgen – Helwing – Tekin 1997: 59-60, 62) while Late Early Bronze/Middle Bronze examples are attested at Tiriş, in the Lower and Outer Town (Honça – Algaze 1998: 108-109, 113-114). Some evidence for adult burials in jars is however known already from the beginning of the Early Bronze period, especially in the northern stretch of the Euphrates valley (Hacinebi: Early Bronze I, OP. 12 Burial 201; Stein 2001; Gre Virike, pithos grave in Trench L8, EB III: Ökse 2006: 12, figs. 2: a, 15-17; Carchemish: ‘Chalcolithic’ jars on the Acropolis: Woolley 1952: 214-218, now dated to Early Bronze I–II: Falsone – Sconzo 2007: 78, tab. 5: 1; Jerablus Tahtani: Peltenburg 1997: 3; Shiyukh Tahtani: Falsone – Sconzo 2012: 175, 176, n. 30). Differences at a sub-regional level are to be taken into account in a large or, better, long-stretching area as the one under examination.

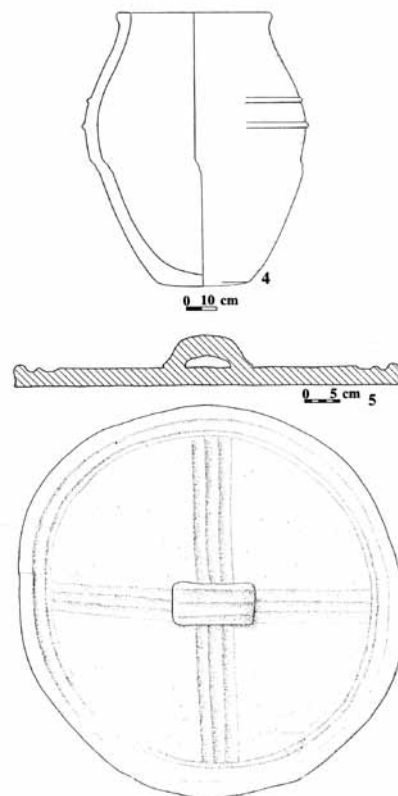


Figure 11: Burial jar and lid, tomb 1081, Mari, *šakkanakku* period (after Jean-Marie 1999: pl. 237).

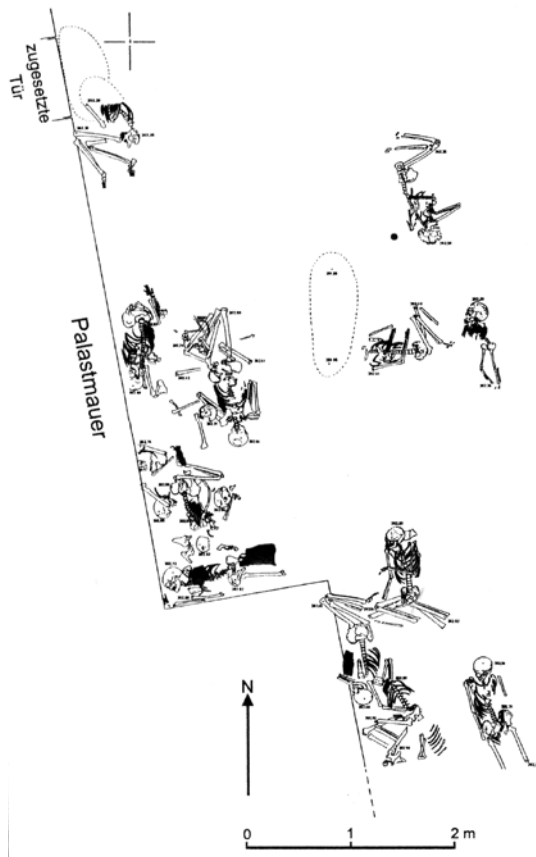


Figure 12: Plan of burials just outside the eastern wall of Palace A, Tell Bi'a (after Miglus – Strommenger 2007: pl. 46: 7).

former cases the container is generally a cooking-pot (either complete or a part of it), the one used for adults is usually bigger, often a pithos or similar vessel, placed either in a vertical or horizontal or oblique position;⁹⁸ lids or other forms of closing devices are frequently encountered (figure 11).

A general trend is the preference for individual burials, although exceptions are also found.⁹⁹ It is also

98 For Mari see Jean-Marie 1999: 76-77. The oblique position is particularly common at Terqa: Rouault 2005: 57; Carter – Parker 1995: 107 distinguishes between an earlier type of burials in which the container is placed horizontally and a later one (end of third and beginning of second millennium in date), in which the vessel is instead placed vertically; see however Cooper 2007: 58 calling attention on burials in jars in an upright position from the earliest Early Bronze levels both at Carchemish and Jerablus Tahtani (see below).

99 Especially in terms of double burials, i.e. one adult and one baby or child (see below) or two adults (e.g. Mari, tomb 954: Jean-Marie 1999: 183, pl. 202); collective burials are much less frequent than in the full Early Bronze Age and apparently concentrated in the upper part of the Euphrates: Tilbes Höyük (Fuensanta – Seva Román – Misir 1997; Fuensanta *et al.* 1998); Carchemish (Woolley 1921: 133-134). It is instead to notice that the extra-muros chamber tomb of Hadidi with at least four individuals published as a Middle Bronze grave by Franken 1978 does in fact belong

worth noticing the occurrence of what have been recognized as mass graves, i.e. the more or less simultaneous depositions of a large number of individuals in an apparent haste and careless manner, in the area of Palace A, at Tell Bi'a, and interpreted as a consequence of military conflicts (figure 12).¹⁰⁰

3.2.3 Burying customs

The burying custom appears to be always inhumation. From the sparse reference to semi-cremated corpses found in the literature in relation to some graves¹⁰¹ is not to infer the existence of a practice of cremation which, apart from the exception of the Early Bronze cemetery at Gedikli in Anatolia, is attested in this part of the Near East mainly in the Late Bronze and especially Iron Age.¹⁰² semi-cremation is usually accomplished at a much lower temperature and serves also to a different scope, the limited exposure to fire resulting in a temporary preservation of a dead body.¹⁰³ One could speculate if that was done in order to allow its exhibition before burial, as was presu-

to the third millennium (as clear from the pottery illustrated in the figures 3, 4 and confirmed by P. Sconzo, pers. comm.).

100 Strommenger 1991: 12-15, fig. 4; Kohlmeyer – Strommenger 1995: 46-47, figs. 2-3.; Strommenger – Kohlmeyer 1998: 10; Miglus – Strommenger 2007: 60-61, pl. 21. See also Mayer 1987: 149 for the historical correlates of the events.

101 E.g. respectively Early Bronze, Qara Qozak (Olavarri 1995: 16), Chuera (Moortgat 1962: 35-38; Krasnik – Meyer 2001: 386-390), and Middle Bronze, Terqa (F128: Tomczyk – Soltysiak 2007: tab. 1), possibly Tell Ahmar (F167: Roobaert 1998: 97; see below) and, extra area, Alalakh (Woolley 1955: 96, pl. XXI: b). The cases of 'incineration' at Mari described by Parrot 1935: 7 (corresponding to tombs 2, 4, 82 in the final publication: Jean-Marie 1999: 5, 83) remain difficult to judge in absence of clear anthropological data: *ibid.*: 18; see also the related observations in Frank 2005: 65, n. 21. A distinction between cremation and incineration is found in Grévin 2005: 16.

102 Bienkowski 1982; Duru 2010: esp. 172-173; Tenu 2005.

103 Evidence of an exposition to a low temperature has been found on some of the individuals buried in the royal Hypogeum at Qatna, where also activities related to corpses took place: it has been suggested that the purpose for it was short-term preservation over some weeks in order to avoid the side-effect of putrefaction: Witzel – Kreutz 2007: 178-179, 185; see also Pfälzner 2007: 60. It is worth recalling that exposure to heat is also attested on some of the bones from the Royal Cemetery at Ur: Woolley 1934, partially confirmed by a recent re-examination of some human remains still kept in the British Museum: Molleson – Hodgson 2003: 94, 100, 105 and 123. According to *ibid.*: 100, in the case of the attendants buried in tomb PG 1648, that was done "possibly to preserve them while the tomb was being constructed". It has to be said that traces of fire on bones can also be referred on the contrary to a method of accelerating flesh decay, especially in relation to secondary burials: Wilhelm 2000: 164-165. Finally, it should not also be forgotten the purifying role which fire plays in a number of rituals in the Near East and beyond (see Thomas 2005: 3239).

ably the case in the first millennium, at least as far as very high status individuals such as kings were concerned.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately this is hard to prove in absence of further evidence, although it is interesting to notice that the cases known for this time-frame appear to be all from ‘elite’ graves.

There seems to exist a general ‘rule’ in the arrangement of the body within the grave, usually found in a flexed position. Nonetheless, some degree of variation appears allowed too: some for example are placed on their back, a position at times encountered with young women, either buried alone or with a foetus or a baby,¹⁰⁵ and one wonders whether this may indicate a special treatment reserved to mothers who died while pregnant or delivering a baby.¹⁰⁶ From the texts is clear that there is a concept of natural death as the one coming at the end of one’s life¹⁰⁷ opposed to that of untimely and/or violent death. It is worth mentioning at this point a letter from Mari in which the provincial governor of Qatṭunan, to the north of Mari, Baḥdi-Lim, after having referred to the king about the unfruitful search for a corpse, most probably belonging to Qarni-Lim, the king of Andarig,¹⁰⁸ asks for directions as to the way of burying the only part of it found which is the head.¹⁰⁹ The queries refer both to the town where the head should be buried, especially whether *i-na ki-di-im i-na li-ib-bi a-lim*, “outside or within the town”,¹¹⁰ and whether to bury it *i-na te-er-si-im*,¹¹¹ a passage variously interpreted by the scholars, which seems to relate to the way of burying the poorly preserved corpse.¹¹² Leaving aside the

exact meaning of the expression, it seems evident that the abnormal situation creates obstacles to a normal procedure. The opposition between inside/outside the town may lead to think at the possibility that people who died in an unnatural way were not allowed to be buried within the settlement but this again has to be left uncertain in absence of further data.

4 Banqueting

It is quite *communis opinio* that a communal meal did take place in occasion of a death in various periods and areas of the Near East, although the subject appears very little investigated in detail in the end, at least as to Syria.¹¹³ Most of the references found in texts to banquets are indeed related to the post-mortem cult of the dead,¹¹⁴ while almost nothing explicit exists about similar feasts within the context of burial rites with a notable exception related to the court of Aleppo: from two Mari letters we know in fact that at the time of the *hidirtum* for the mother queen Sumu-nabi a banquet (*naptanum*) took place, on which unfortunately we do not have further information.¹¹⁵ Indeed, in the text of the *kispum* ritual there is mention of a *ni.gub/naptanum*, “banquet”, before the execution of the *kispum* proper itself:¹¹⁶ since many commemorative rites referred to a single and unrepeatably event, such as birth, marriage or death, often reproduce rites which took place on that occasion,¹¹⁷ this *post mortem* ceremony could be an echo of the banquet of the time of the funeral.

It is also unclear when exactly, in case, this banquet took place, if before or after the interment: in this connection, it is to recall the presence of vessels within tombs, often along with food remains, which could be related to this very occasion and thus interpreted as a part, more or less symbolic, of the banquet which was then placed in the grave.¹¹⁸ If so, the banquet should

104 A similar view is also expressed by Porter in a forthcoming publication, of which the manuscript was made very generously available to me by the author: Porter forthcoming: 285. One of the skeletons in the Queens’ tombs at Nimrud, maybe that of queen Atalia, does indeed show similar traces: Schultz – Kunter 1998: 95, 119. It is not clear indeed whether the so-called *taklimtu* rite of the Assyrian texts meant an exhibition of the corpse or simply of the grave goods: see Groneberg 1990: 255, for a description of the rite and relative bibliography; see also Scurlock 1991: 3. The possibility of a lay-in-state of the corpse is taken into consideration by Katz 2007: 172, n. 23 on the basis of Sumerian texts which indicate that burials of some high-ranking individuals, among which is king Shu-sin, took place on the third day after death.

105 E.g. Mari, tomb 342, Middle Bronze II: Jean-Marie 1999: 135-136. It is also worth noticing that the only intramural burial in the Middle Bronze settlement of Halawa A, tomb H-105, is a simple pit grave containing the skeleton of a woman accompanied simply by a toggle-pin: Orthmann 1981: 24, 83, pl. 15. For an Early Bronze example at Hadidi see Dornemann 1979: 118, fig. 11, tomb E I.

106 Hertz 1905/1906: 135; Parker-Pearson 1999: 15.

107 Guichard 1994: 239, n. a (on Mari evidence); see also Veenhof 1998: 97.

108 ARM VI 65; Charpin 1994: 52; see also Heimpele 2003: 65.

109 ARM VI 37.

110 ARM VI 37, v. l. 11’. See also CAD K: 345-347, s.v. *kidu* d.

111 ARM VI 37, v. l. 13’; see also commentary at p. 119.

112 For example Durand 1998: 326, n. 635; “de façon détournée”, maintained in Durand 2008: 611. On the case of Qar-

ni-Lim’s burial see also Richardson 2007: 202-203, notes 77-78.

113 For example Bachelot 2003: esp. 84; Schwartz 2007: 49. For Mesopotamia see also Pollock 2003; Barrett 2007.

114 Tsukimoto 1985.

115 Except that the Mari ambassadors were excluded from it: Durand 1988: 107, n. c; see also Durand 1989: 86 and now Charpin 2007: 85-86. I maintain here the ‘traditional’ interpretation of *hidirtum* as mourning period but see also above the observations of no. 34.

116 Durand – Guichard 1997: 66, no 4: 1, 4. Tsukimoto 1985: 60 rightly observes that *kispum* itself cannot be considered a banquet “weil die Lieferung für das ‘Mahl des Königs’ (*naptan sarrim*) auch an demselben Tag unabhängig von der für *kispu(m)* registriert ist”.

117 Van Genep 1981: 130.

118 Peltenburg 1999: 433; Pollock 2003: 26-27. The idea that the pottery equipment of a grave could be related to a funerary meal is found, as far as Mesopotamia is concerned, already in Wright 1969: 83 and is resumed by Forest 1983: 136 who points to a correlation between the large number

have taken place at least before the final closing of the grave. However, other explanations for the presence of this equipment, e.g. provisions for the afterlife¹¹⁹ or for the journey to the netherworld,¹²⁰ can also be offered and unfortunately there is no way to bring this matter to an agreement in any conclusive way: the mere presence of organic materials within the containers does not apparently contradict any hypotheses. And in fact, it is even possible that more than one of these scenarios are behind the formation of this material assemblage.¹²¹

It is however clear that food and drink are in some way connected to death: the, not too frequent, occurrence of a drinking vessel next to the hands of a skeleton or at the height of the mouth¹²² would seem to indicate that the dead was actually imagined as taking

part into a banquet,¹²³ either the very one at the time of the funeral and/or prospective ones in his/her afterlife. The emphasis on one single person as main subject in the few representations of banquets we have on objects from tombs would seem to support this view, although we lack the exact definition and meaning of this act.¹²⁴

Food offerings in the form of parts of edible animals are attested in graves at a number of sites. At Mari, the data resulting from M. Jean-Marie's survey gives a figure of 16 graves containing food for the third millennium (all but one from the *šakkanakku* period) and just two for the second.¹²⁵ In most cases we are dealing with shoulder or lower limbs pieces of caprovines and cattle, although horns and jaws are also represented.¹²⁶

At Baghouz, meat portions, including camel, have been found only in eleven out of over 300 graves, in some cases still placed on a table, which, as seen above, is found solely in the most imposing structures of the cemetery.¹²⁷ It is also to note the frequent association here with jars possibly containing beer, as suggested by the retrieval of metal strainers within some of them.¹²⁸ Just as a term of comparison, the study of E.

of vessels for the participants of the funeral and high status of the dead person. On this matter see also Bachelot 1992: 55; Cohen 2005: 88-92, on the evidence of the Ur Royal Cemetery. It is possible that vessels used in the context of a funerary feast could not return to everyday life and they were in this way 'buried', therefore dismissed, as much as objects used in cultic occasion (see Garfinkel 1994). For a recent discussion of the issue see Schwartz 2007: 49.

119 At least as far as Mesopotamian sources are concerned, the Netherworld is believed a place of dismay, with no water to drink nor proper food to eat: Bottéro 1987: 69, 73; according to Joannès 2005: 76-77 this view becomes prevailing only from the end of the second millennium onwards, while in earlier times the Netherworld is conceived in a less pessimistic way (see also Scurlock 1995: 1887). No description is however found in the Mari texts.

120 See for example Bottéro 1980: 37; Scurlock 1995: 1884, "travel provisions". Katz 2007: 171 reckons both options possible: "things that the deceased needed for his journey and survival in the world of the dead".

121 Some attempts have been made by scholars to clarify the question, especially on account of the disposition of the vessels within the grave. Postgate 1980: 77, for example, subdividing grave goods according to their function, distinguishes between "food and drink and their containers (for own consumption)" and "food and drink and their containers (for the consumption of others)". On the same line Meyer 2000: 29-30: "[...] die Gebrauchskeramik, die in der Grabkammer bzw. außerhalb der Sarkophage abgelegt wurden, mit Durchführung eines Festes [...] verbunden werden und damit als Beigaben angesehen werden. Auch Gefäße, die zur Durchführung der verschiedenen Opfer für die Toten gehört haben, sind eher weiter entfernt von der eigentlichen Grablege – eventuell sogar in der Verfüllung – zu erwarten und gehören ebenfalls zu den Beigaben. Davon zu trennen sind die Keramikgefäße, die sich – z. T. mit Inhalten – in unmittelbarer Nähe der eigentlichen Grablege oder im Sarkophag befunden haben. Sie sind entweder als persönlicher Besitz des Toten anzusehen, dann würde es sich, wie von der Fundlage zu erwarten, um Mitgaben handeln, oder sie haben als Behälter für Nahrung bzw. als Geschirrgedient, dann gehören sie nach der hier verwendeten Definition zu den Beigaben".

122 E.g. Mari, tomb 403, MB I: Jean-Marie 1999: 141. For an Early Bronze attestation see grave 83 at Shiyukh Tahtani (Sconzo 2006, 345: pls. 1, 3, 17, 19: conical beaker plus footed painted chalice).

123 A similar suggestion has been made by Cohen 2005: 90 for the Royal Cemetery of Ur and other ED funerary contexts, on the basis also of the glyptic evidence found in them.

124 Most of the existing funerary banqueting scenes are first millennium in date and clearly related to a posthumous cult, as suggested also by the perspicuous setting of the monuments: Bonatz 2001. Location is obviously a crucial factor to understand the meaning of similar representations and the few coming from tombs may refer primarily to the ceremony which took place at the time of funeral. For one example of this period, see the so-called talisman from the Lord of the Goats tomb of Ebla: Matthiae 1995: 505, no 470; see also Pinnock 1994: 21-22. Though a much less elaborate and precious object, it is also worth recalling a seal in frit from one of the Baghouz tombs with a banqueting scene, in which a single figure is depicted seated while drinking with a tube from a jar (tomb Z 286: du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: 62, pl. 57; metal tubes have indeed been found in some of the jars in the cemetery, see below).

125 Jean-Marie 1997: 694-695; see also Jean-Marie 1999: 33, Middle Bronze I. For graves excavated after 1993 (and therefore not included in the latter publication) see Margueron 2007a: 31, T-1; Margueron 2007b: 50, T-7 (bird's bones), both third millennium in date. Cordy – Léon – Tuncu 2009: 66, n. 17 suggest caution in considering the data from Mari since in ten cases the food remains were found out of the grave itself: however it has to be noticed that, apart from one instance, which is a pit burial, all others are burial either in jar or in a clay coffin and in these cases often not only the animal offerings but also the other grave goods are placed not within the containers but next to them in the corresponding pit (see for example the case of tomb 940: Jean-Marie 1999: pl. 182 or here fig. 9).

126 Jean-Marie 1999: 23 explains the latter as "des offrandes plus symboliques".

127 E.g. tomb Z 122: du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: 38, pls. 50-51.

128 Ibid.: 38-39, 51-52. All these would constitute "le repas funéraire": ibid.: 39; also Gates 1988: 71 and Hrouda 1990: 103, n. 3 ("daß zu dem Bestattungsritual auch ein Symposium gehörte, wie auf zahlreichen altorientalischen Darstellungen abgebildet"). See Horwitz 2001: esp. 88-89, on data

Vila on the animal remains in twelve of the graves of the Early Bronze cemetery of Abu-Ḥamed, mentioned above, has shown that generally goats are attested, with a sort of standardization in the selection and preparation of the parts; according to the scholar, the pieces were most probably cooked and represent selected parts of what was the entry of a communal meal either at the time of the interment or immediately after.¹²⁹

Food remains have also been recorded in Middle Bronze graves at Terqa¹³⁰ and Shiyukh Tahtani¹³¹: although no detailed studies are as yet available, it is clear that, at least at the latter site, the practice is widely attested in all children and sub-adults burials but not in those of babies and entails a clear separation between discrete animal bones and human remains within the grave.¹³²

On the whole, the phenomenon of meat portions appears not very widespread in the sample under consideration: it is for example worth noticing that at Tell Bi'a animal bones are not attested in any burial of the *Grabgruppen* 7–11, ascribable to the period of our interest.¹³³ The limited number of graves may be explained by considering this kind of offering more or less exclusive of high status burials which are in fact little represented in the sample,¹³⁴ although a possible connection with different factors such as age should not be discounted.

5 Gifts exchange

The funeral, especially that of a highly placed person, was also the occasion for receiving gifts: an Old Babylonian text from Tell Asmar a generic weapon (*kakkum*) is specifically asked for as a 'fine present' for a funeral.¹³⁵ Weapons when found in a grave are generally considered a good hint for an attribution of the occupant to the male gender even in absence

from Middle Bronze graves of the Southern Levant.

129 Vila 2005: 344-345, 349.

130 Rouault 2005: 58.

131 Sconzo 2007: 298 and fig. 7, tomb 54; Falsone – Sconzo 2012: 171-172.

132 Ibid.: 171, according to which these are not edible parts.

133 I follow here I. Bősze's reconstruction as synthesized in Bősze 2009: 61, pl. 2. It has to be said that only one grave in the whole corpus of Tell Bi'a, grave 25/48:5, of the *Grabgruppe* 6 (Late Early Bronze Age), has animal bones associated with it: Strommenger – Kohlmeyer 1998: 42.

134 For a similar conclusion as to Mari see Jean-Marie 1990: 700; Jean-Marie 1999: 23.

135 Whiting 1987: 60, no. 15, lines 6'-8'. The Akkadian term used is *šibulum* which is the gift "sent", the diplomatic gift, reserved to very high status foreign individuals, as it is clear not only from the Mari texts but also from the Amarna correspondence: Lafont 2001: 310; Zaccagnini 1973: 201-202. For a similar practice in third millennium Syria see the Ebla evidence in Biga 2007/2008: 251.

of clear anthropological data.¹³⁶ In addition, as usually showing up in rather wealthy graves, they are also taken as an indication of high social status in general.¹³⁷ The topic is too far-fetched to be discussed in much detail here: we can just recall the large debate over the phenomenon indicated in the literature as 'warrior burials', i.e. burials characterized by the presence of weapons, generally axes, spears and/or daggers and found over a wide area in the Near East (Levant, Inner Syria, Mesopotamia) during the late Early Bronze and Middle Bronze periods.¹³⁸ However, one aspect to stress is that the textual evidence just quoted above as well as some from Mari, as we shall see below, does indicate that weapons may also represent honorific gifts to male individuals playing leading roles within society, being thus a material acknowledgement of their status (and not a personal belonging) which appears particularly important in a context which was also the venue for confirming or reshaping leaderships.¹³⁹ This adds a symbolic value to their presence within the tomb which is not a secondary one.¹⁴⁰ We know for instance that a weapon in silver with golden parts is given *ana kimabhim* of the king of Aleppo Yarim-Lim, father-in-law of Zimri-Lim.¹⁴¹ The object, previously interpreted as a mace,¹⁴² has been now tentatively identified as a fenestrated axe.¹⁴³ This type of weapon is frequently encountered in funerary contexts in this period (e.g. Baghouz)¹⁴⁴ (figures 13, 14) and becomes common in

136 For example Pollock 1991: 373 on the Royal Cemetery of Ur, but see contra Montero Fenollós 1999/2000: 419 and n. 64.

137 See for example *ibid.*: esp. 418-419.

138 Philip 1995 (with reference to earlier literature). The important study by Rehm 2003 chooses the more neutral definition of "Waffengräber", thus avoiding the confusing label "warrior" of the most frequently encountered definition. On the question see also Gernez 2008: 657.

139 In this respect it is enlightening the case of the funeral of the king of the land of Apum, Turum-Natki, which is also the occasion for establishing his heir on the throne at the presence of all the kings gathered for the occasion: Charpin 1987: 136, n. 37, B. 103 [A.2821]; Charpin – Ziegler 2003: 200, n. 261.

140 It is difficult to identify within burial inventories gifts clearly coming from abroad which were probably the most coveted ones. An exception is represented by the mace with Egyptian hieroglyphs found in the Lord of the Goats tomb at Ebla: Scandone Matthiae 1979; 1995: 464-465, nos 383-384 (see however Ryholt 1998 for a new proposal of reading of the inscription).

141 ^{giš}ka-ta-pu. On this weapon see Durand 1983: 342-343.

142 Ibid.: 343.

143 Durand 1998: 392; 2002: 114, "hache ansée". More cautious Charpin 2008: 78: "Quelle que soit la nature exacte de l'arme-*katappum*, on ne peut s'empêcher de conclure que le présent des Mariotes avait une valeur symbolique précise, puisque cette arme était liée de près à l'exercice du pouvoir royal".

144 Du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: 36, pls. 48: 2, 60. See also, more to the west, the occurrence in the roughly contemporary Yabrud cemetery: Abu Assaf 1967: 57, pl. I: 1. Fenestrated axes are fully discussed in Gernez 2008: 189-202

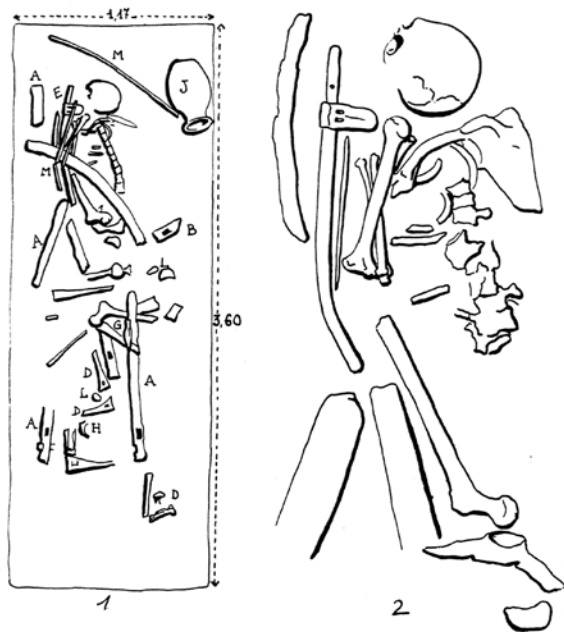


Figure 13: General plan and detail of tomb Z 121 of Baghouz cemetery (after du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: pl. XLVIII).

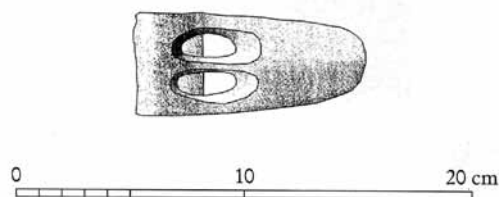


Figure 14: Drawing of fenestrated axe from tomb Z 95, Baghouz (after Gernez 2006: fig. 2: b).

Syria and Palestine at the beginning of Middle Bronze II, though remaining less frequent than spears and daggers in funerary contexts.¹⁴⁵

In a second text, another type of weapon, *gišilluru* (*tilpānu*), is given *ana kimabhim* of a certain Yabinum, most likely a notable of a small town next to Mari, Humsan.¹⁴⁶ This weapon has been identified as a composite bow,¹⁴⁷ which is attested as gift in non-funerary occasions too, especially in tribal contexts.¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately no actual specimen of the latter has so far been detected in the archaeological record, possibly due to

(type H4).

145 Philip 1995: 142-143, 146. Spears and daggers are not mentioned in the texts *ana kimabhim* published so far.

146 ARM XXI 329, l: 21; Lerouxel 2002: 439.

147 Durand 1983: 336-340, esp. 337; Durand 1998: 390-391; Groneberg 1987.

148 E.g. ARM XXI 375, l: 10⁷. See also Durand 1983: 399.

the organic nature of its components, but in this case textual evidence may obviate to this shortcoming.¹⁴⁹

6 Secondary burials, royal hypogea and tumuli

Recently the question of secondary burials has been raised in the literature by a number of scholars as to the area we are concerned with.¹⁵⁰ The archaeologists working at Tell Banat, in the Tishreen Dam area, Ann Porter in particular, has postulated the existence of protracted funerary rites at the Early Bronze site on the basis of the evidence recovered from a variety of both intra- and extra-mural grave structures, culminating in the White Monument, i.e. an artificial, imposing mound, close to the settlement, where selected human bones and other objects were finally redeposited.¹⁵¹ According to Porter's reconstruction, not all corpses underwent the same treatment, but only those of individuals chosen to become ancestors, as well known from a number of ethnographic parallels, and that would explain why not all burials at Banat were similarly displaced.¹⁵² No other site has so far offered the possibility to investigate the matter in a similar articulated way but evidence for secondary burials does apparently randomly pop up at sites also in the time-frame under examination and therefore it is worthy pursuing the issue more in details. A study by C. Frank, well acquainted with the domain of archaeo-anthropology as well as with R. Hertz's arguments on the ideological issues related to secondary burials, has tapped the topic by taking into consideration four specific situations in bones preservation and disposition at the site of Terqa (and few others) which can reasonably be referred to the practice of secondary interments:¹⁵³ burials with incomplete skeletons,¹⁵⁴ burials placed in

149 Arrow heads have been found at Mari in the chamber tombs 241-242 (Early Dynastic) and in the pit burial T. 1063 (*šakkanakku* period): Jean-Marie 1999: 129, 191, pls. 41, 229: 6-7. It can be also mentioned the presence of a bronze part of a quiver in the *Grabbau* 6 at Tell Bi'a: Strommenger - Kohlmeier 1998: 73-74, pl. 163: 5-6, burial 23/46:3 (for a possible reconstruction of the bow see Bösze 2009: 29, pl. 32: 2).

150 On the contrary, secondary burials have been long discussed in Levantine studies, especially in association to dolmen architecture: *inter alia* Zohar 1992: 54; Břeňová 2005; Polcaro 2006: 283-289. For the question of 'dual obsequies' in Cyprus see Keswani 2004: 32, 34, 44-49, 152.

151 Porter 2002a: 10-24. See also Wilhelm 2006. Secondary burials have also been found within the Early Bronze tombs at Umm el-Marra: Schwartz 2007: 41.

152 Children were eligible too: Porter 2002a: 8-10.

153 Frank 2005: 64-67.

154 *Ibid.*: 64-65, figs. 3-4 (Terqa, TQ23Fe361, phase II.1, second millennium). To the evidence listed by the author we can also add the secondary burial dated to the Akkadian period found in a pit grave dug within a large wall at Habuba Kabira (T13: Heinrich *et al.* 1970: 42-43, figs. 9, 12); the incomplete remains of multiple individuals within the large cairns dug by a Japanese expedition on the northwest-

containers of which the size of the opening appears too small for the insertion of a fully articulated body (and the state of preservation of the skeleton is accordingly incomplete),¹⁵⁵ erratic bones and skeleton parts still in connexion. By considering all these cases, the scholar has shown the relatively high frequency of the practice of secondary burials at the site and drawn interesting correlations between type of graves and mode of deposition as well as location, in the same line of thought as Porter's.¹⁵⁶

Indeed the possibility that the pattern just described above is much more widespread than thought is suggested by the popularity of jar burials in the Middle Bronze period, not only for children but also for adults, as seen above.¹⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the data on skeletal remains from these contexts which should shed light on this matter are often insufficient or even lacking in the publications: however, it is to be noticed that a description of poorly preserved bones is frequently encountered which would seem in accord with a secondary burial scenario, as seen above.¹⁵⁸ A clear exam-

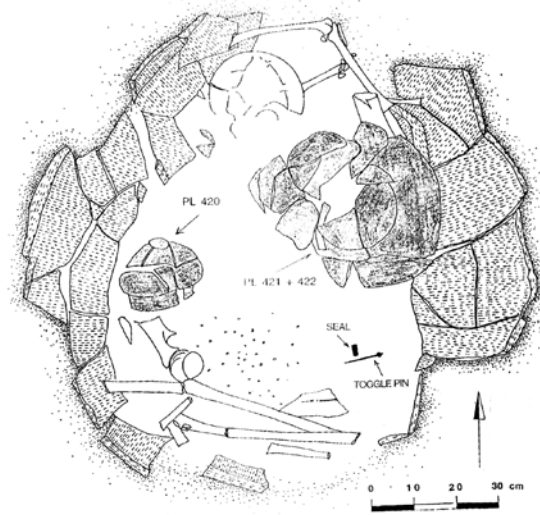


Figure 15: Plan of grave F 167, area S, Tell Ahmar (after Roobaert 1998: fig. 2).

ern flank of the Gebel Bishri (Fujii – Adachi 2010: 66, 73; Nakano – Ishida 2010: 105). Frank includes also the cases of the remains of previous inhumations piled along the sides of collective graves, where possibly practical, more than ideological, reasons could be at stake, as for example the need for additional space within the tomb: *ibid.*: 65 n. 26. See however Duday – Sellier 1990: 13 which consider the secondary burial, the collection of bones of an individual in the same place where initially buried and the intentional removal of certain bones as different practices; similarly Wilhelm 2006: 361 makes a distinction between secondary burials according to the mode of selection of the bones, either positive (i.e. “bones specifically chosen for deposition”) and negative (“bones left after positive selection was made”). On similar practices in relation to Early Bronze intramural tombs see Laneri 1999: 226.

155 Frank 2005: 64. Similar observations are also found in Barrelet 1980: 5; Carter – Parker 1995: 106; Meijer 2003: 60. When needed, the problem was solved by cutting the vessel or using a broken one or enlarging its mouth on purpose (see for example Valentini 2003: 279 on Tell Barri evidence); otherwise, the dead was not placed inside a vessel but simply covered by a large portion of one or by sherds: Kaschau 1999: 158, fig. 68, Grab 196.

156 Frank 2005: 67-71.

157 See also Meijer 2003: 60 which concentrates on the case of children secondary interments in pots underneath house floors at Middle Bronze Hammam et-Turkman.

158 If it is difficult to recognize secondary burials in the field, as clearly exposed by Leclerc 1990: 16, even more so in the bone descriptions provided in the literature. However, the frequency of the description ‘squelette affaissé’ for the Mari burials is worth noticing; Jean-Marie 1999: 77, observes that only when the vessel is placed in a horizontal position “la position des corps est déterminable”. Of course, more data would be needed to prove beyond doubt the occurrence of a similar practice in all these dubious cases (and further ones: a longer list is to be found in Felli forthcoming); since re-examination of the skeletal remains appears difficult, it is only to hope that new excavations may provide additional evidence. Things get more certain in those cases in which the vessel contains the bones of more than one individual: for an example from Terqa see Frank 2005: 65.

ple of a secondary deposition in a jar burial is found in area S on the acropolis at Tell Ahmar: grave goods included drinking vessels and a cylinder seal, uninscribed, but belonging to a specific type in use by royal officials in the area of Carchemish in Middle Bronze II (figure 15).¹⁵⁹

In relation to this, one can recall the case of tomb 760 in the *chantier B* at Mari, a burial in a large jar accompanied by a rather significant array of objects including a seal inscribed with the name of a son of the *šakkanakku* Iddin-ilum: the burial, primary at least as far as no different indication is found in the publication, is located just few metres away from an imposing structure built with baked bricks (tomb 755) found completely empty (figure 16).¹⁶⁰ It is tempting to see a relation between the two structures.

It is important at this point to consider the distribution pattern of jar/pithos burials within sites: they often gather around more imposing tombs and the phenomenon is usually explained in the terms of ‘satellite tombs’, i.e. graves (not exclusively in containers) attracted by the very presence of what we interpret as

159 Otto 1998; see also Roobaert 1998 for a description of the burial and Jamieson 1998 for an analysis of the pottery. It is important to say that the attribution of the human remains to an adult is probable but not certain: Roobaert 1998: 98-99 (see Dugay 2005: 43 which refers to it as a child burial). Other burials were also found in the same area, but no clear account has been so far given: Jamieson 2005: 81.

160 Margueron 1983: 16, fig. 4 and pl. V; Beyer 1985: 183, fig. B; Jean-Marie 1999: 168-169, pls. 93, 137-138: 4-7, 9. On the seal see also Otto 2007: 412-414, fig. 2, who suggests a dating to the 19th century for the *šakkanakku* (*ibid.*: fig. 13). No detail on the age of the buried person is given in the preliminary report (Margueron 1983: 16 “un corps en position repliée sur le côté”), whereas in Jean-Marie 1999: 168 it is said to be a child.

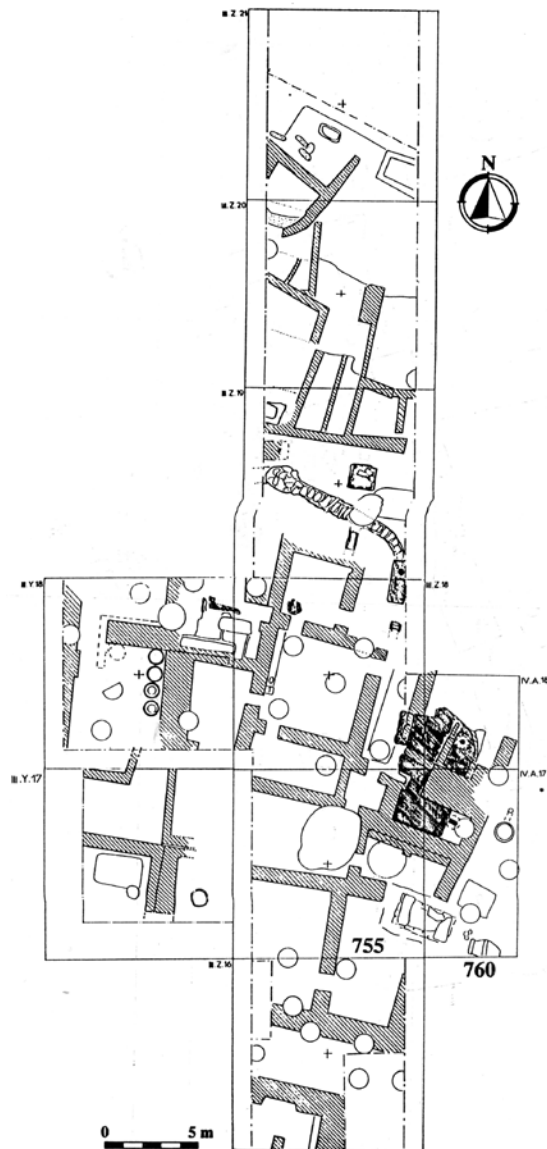


Figure 16: Plan of Chantier B, Mari, showing location of tombs 755 and 760 (after Jean-Marie 1999: pl. 93).

the burial of an important person or family group.¹⁶¹ A different interpretation was however given by L. Woolley of what he called ‘subsidiary burials’ – mainly under clay coffins and more rarely in vessels – found

161 Peltenburg 1999: 433, on the cluster of graves around tomb T.302 at Jerablus Tahtani, with reference to further, more or less contemporary, cases (Tell Ahmar; Gedikli; Oylum); Dugay 2005: 43-44, on the children burials next to the Hypogaeum of Tell Ahmar. ‘Satellite burials’ are also attested at the end of the third millennium at the site of Gre Virike: Ökse 2007b: 549-550. At the cemetery of Baghouz, small pit graves are found next to some dolmenic ones: it is this the case of tombs 1, 2, 3, 4, 10 next to tombs 200, 210: du Mesnil du Buisson 1948: 31 (noticing that the dimensions allow only the deposition of a flexed body of a child), 63-64.

close to the family vault in the second millennium houses at Ur: they would have been used to accommodate those family members who could not find place within the main tomb, either because already full or because the new interment was too close in time to the previous one.¹⁶² Working on this hypothesis and on Bloch’s study of Merina funerary customs, S. Valentini has suggested that these satellite burials, which are also found at the site of Tell Barri, in northeastern Syria, could have only temporarily received corpses which were then bound to be buried in the main tomb¹⁶³ or, less frequently, housed skeletal remains removed from it to make some room for a new burial.¹⁶⁴ If this hypothesis will prove to be correct, it would explain why, in this category, i.e. ‘satellite burials’, we find both pithos or pit burials with secondary interments, (i.e. the repositories where people originally placed in any of the hypogea were moved to) and pithos or pit burials with primary interments, (i.e. temporary locations for corpses waiting to be placed there)¹⁶⁵ and, in addition, why these graves display often quite rich funerary equipments, apparently contrasting the ‘poor’ type of structure.¹⁶⁶

It is difficult to ascertain whether tomb 760 at Mari is a ‘temporary burial’ of the kind just described or a true ‘satellite burial’.¹⁶⁷ It is however to observe that most of the very late third and second millennium, intra-muros, chamber-tombs, including the palatial hypogea mentioned above, preserve only very sparse evidence of skeletal remains and no clear pattern of successive burials, such as that found in the earlier

162 Woolley – Mallowan 1976: 33; see also Galli – Valentini 2006: 58.

163 Valentini 2001: 84; 2003: 287, n. 53.

164 Ibid.: 281, in the case of the pit grave 574 at Tell Barri, apparently containing a secondary burial (for descriptions see *ibid.*: 274, n. 12).

165 A similar pattern is not visible at Banat and this may differentiate third and second millennium practices, but the whole reconstruction is too uncertain that it is wiser not to draw any conclusion.

166 This contrast can be appreciated also in a pit burial found recently at Mari, belonging to the so-called Ville II, i.e. third millennium in date, which contained the remains of a girl within what is described as a sack (although no indication is given of a secondary burial) and a very rich array of grave goods: Butterlin 2007a: 11, fig. 9. The use of pithos and pit graves for both primary and secondary interments is also attested in Early and Middle Bronze Age Cyprus: Keswani 2004: 44-45.

167 Of course the possibility of no connection at all with the main tomb should also be taken into account. In relation to the issue under discussion is to recall the cluster of graves found in the debris on top of the floor of room I in the *Palais Oriental* at Mari, under which one of the Hypogea was located and which should be slightly later in date: Beyer 1983: 56-57; Margueron 1984: 208. A similar case is represented by the group of double jar graves at Terqa on top of the second millennium Hypogaeum in the chantier F, which was found partially destroyed and almost completely empty, with the exception of a skull and a gold bead: Rouault 2005: 59.

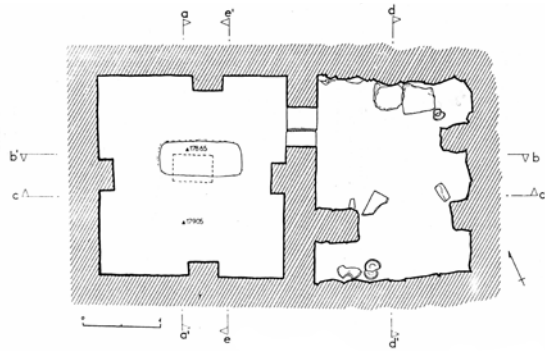


Figure 17: Plan of tomb IX Q 50 SE T6 found below room I floor in the *Palais Oriental*, Mari (after Margueron 1984: fig. 2).

family vaults in the region and in contemporary Mesopotamian sites.¹⁶⁸ Explaining this with the chance of discovery may be too simplistic: even thinking that they could not accommodate more than one person at the time and therefore needed to be emptied every time an interment had to take place, it is still to be explained why they were all found almost empty. The most frequently encountered reason for that in the literature is that they have been pillaged, maybe already in antiquity: and indeed we also have textual evidence from Mari related to depredations of this kind on behalf of Šamši-Adad at the time of the city conquest.¹⁶⁹ Though not discounting this phenomenon, at least in the case of the tomb under room I of the *Palais Oriental* at Mari (figure 17), a number of elements indicates that the structure has been opened up primarily by people who took then pain to accomplish a careful closure, even replastering the floor above;¹⁷⁰ on the other hand, the lack of human bones thereof and the scrappy remains of the funerary equipment would indicate that, if interments did ever find place there, they have been removed afterwards.¹⁷¹

168 E.g. Ur: Woolley – Mallowan 1976: 34, pl. 48: c. Few exceptions are found in the northern stretch of the valley: see n. 99 above.

169 The tomb in question is that of the king Yaḥdun-Lim: Charpin 2008: 78-79; Jacquet in the present volume.

170 Margueron 1984: 207-208; 2004: 356. For the tomb under the throne-room in the same palace, Margueron reconstructs four successive openings during its use-time, although acknowledging later pillaging: Margueron 1990: 414; see also 2004: 360 on the issue of depredation.

171 For a similar hypothesis as to some empty graves of Tell Banat see Porter 2002a: 21; 2002b: 165. The case of the *Gruft* underneath Palace A room Q at Bi'a, found equally empty, seems different because the two-rooms structure apparently was never finished nor used as a tomb: Einwag 1993: 47-48; Miglus – Strommenger 2007: 10, 59. It is to recall however that a large number of both primary and secondary burials, which have been ascribed to a mass grave as indicated above, was found in a large pit on top of this structure: Strommenger 1991: 13-15.

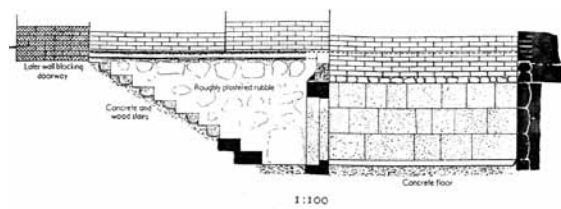


Figure 18: Section through staircase and subterranean room 17, palace of level VII, Alalakh (after Woolley 1955: fig. 36).

On this matter the evidence from the hypogaeum in the Alalakh VII palace appears intriguing and suggestive: here the remains of four individuals, including a child, had been found arranged in a wooden container, apparently moved in from, according to Woolley, or alternatively, bound to be transferred elsewhere (figure 18).¹⁷²

One way or the other, this again seems to support the idea of ‘provisional’ graves, where primary interments are placed, and ‘ultimate’ burials, where the whole or, more frequently, a selection of bones are finally accommodated. The modalities of as well as the reasons for that are certainly matters for further investigation: if ‘re-burial’ implied bone translation after the period of flesh decay (and not much later) and had behind a concept of transitional instead of punctual death, as found in anthropological studies in relation to a number of different study-cases,¹⁷³ is possible but difficult to prove in absence of further data and at the present state of knowledge on any concept of death at this time.¹⁷⁴

Be that as it may, what described above would indicate that the phenomenon of secondary burials does occur both in the Early and in the Middle Bronze period: of course more data and larger samples from individual sites would be required in order to have a better understanding of it. Had this proved to be correct, we could have here a possible response to our concern that burial data do not meet demographic expectations, graves being always too few in comparison with statistics on ancient population per settlement.

172 Woolley 1955: 96-97, tab. 21: b. According to the scholar the room was never roofed in and it could have been a sort of very elaborate foundation sacrifice and not a grave: *ibid.*: 97, n. 3. However I am more inclined to think with R. Moorey, that “identification [...] as a tomb, it remains the most likely function, both in view of its form and its contents”: Moorey 1984: 16; see also Adler 1994: 145, n. 58).

173 The phenomenon has been well elucidated for the first time by Hertz 1905/1906.

174 Valentini 2003: 279, n. 32 is in favour of the more prosaic explanation of the need of space. See also Frank 2005: 26: “le secteur d’inhumations choisies ont été en faveur durant un laps de temps suffisamment long pour entraîner, à un moment donné, un besoin de réaménagement de l’endroit”.



Figure 19: Tell Medkuk, view from the East (author's photo).

One wonders also how unique the case of the White Monument mentioned above is to be considered: a scatter of similarly artificial mounds are found in the Euphrates valley all along the river at least down to the Haditha region in Iraq, some of which at least dating to the second millennium,¹⁷⁵ apart from clear funerary tumuli covering graves (Baghouz, 'Usiyeh, Shuweimiyeh),¹⁷⁶ in many cases the relation to burials *stricto sensu* appears less obvious but possible (figure 19),¹⁷⁷ not only on the basis of the parallel of Tell Banat but also of the references in the Mari texts to a monument called *ḥumušum*, apparently made as a heap of stones and wood, which functions as a memorial mark in the landscape and, in one case at least, has a funerary significance.¹⁷⁸ Their *raison-d'être* in relation to the specific structure of the society in the region, especially to its mobile components, has already been discussed at length by others and will not be reproduced here:¹⁷⁹ in this context I would only like to stress that the importance of similar landmarks in the regional landscape is another evident trait of conti-

nunity between third and second millennium, although the phenomenon goes even beyond these chronological limits, reaching out, across the centuries, the Late Roman time, as shown by the large tumuli at Anab-As-Safinah, in the Tabqa region, and in the surrounding area.¹⁸⁰

7 Concluding remarks

In sum, the evidence gathered is evidently patchy and insufficient to reproduce a clear picture of what funerary practices in the period and area under examination were about and, from an archaeological point of view, the question remains somehow more obscure if compared with the Early Bronze period. Certainly it is too early for a synthesis and there is still need for further data and micro-scale analyses which may help in refining local, sub-regional and regional characterizations, especially in relation to macro-history, i.e. the emergence of Amorites. Nonetheless, the diachronic perspective does make possible to appreciate a few trends and patterns which clearly either make closer or differentiates the two periods; furthermore, the possibility of a fruitful interplay with second millennium written sources from the area does help in reconstructing at least some aspects of the whole picture and may also shed some light retrospectively on the previous period. Obviously many are the dark areas and the queries left without an answer: hopefully some clarity will come from the full publication of the results of excavations already completed and from the continuing investigation of both old and new sites.

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- 175 Geyer – Monchambert 2003: 163, 165 (on the question of the datings here suggested see however the criticisms expressed by Butterlin 2007b: 242 on the basis of the data from Mari). For a selected list including also tumuli outside the Euphrates valley see Porter 2002a: 23 n. 31.
- 176 Du Mesnil du Buisson 1948; Kepinski 2006: 88-90; Oguchi – Oguchi 2006.
- 177 Geyer – Monchambert 2003: 162 for a list of mounds which could be funerary in kind: among these, the site of Tell Medkuk (figure 19), very close to Mari, of which the investigation has recently started on behalf of the équipe of Mari: Butterlin 2007a: 12; 2007c (for a possible religious significance of the monument in relation to the high terraces of the town).
- 178 Durand 2005. For a possible correspondence to the Akkadian *bīrūtum/bērūtum* see Marti 2005: 191. Durand has recently raised the possibility of the existence of a *ḥumušum* of the king Yaḥdun-Lim at Terqa or nearby: Durand 2008: 610.
- 179 See most recently Kepinski 2006.
- 180 Bounni 1979: 57-61; 1980.

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