

5 Era of the Living Dead: Funerary Praxis and Symbol in Third Millennium BC Syria

Glenn M. Schwartz¹

As Colin Renfrew has remarked, most archaeological discussions of burial that venture beyond simple description tend to center on social relations – issues of prestige, social persona, and power, and how people negotiate, contest and compete for these entities.² Far less common has been the study of mortuary ritual and symbol in order to determine beliefs and practices about death, the afterlife, and the world of the supernatural. Clearly, the materialization of social factors in archaeological mortuary data provides an important source of information about past societies, but to disregard the religious meanings and beliefs inherent in such data is to neglect issues that played an immense part in the lives of the people in question. Since the existence of death elicits questions about the origins and meaning of life, mortuary practices are likely to reveal beliefs and attitudes about death and life, the nature of the cosmos, and the character of the divine.³

In this paper, I consider the possibilities and challenges of reconstructing funerary ritual by employing data from a third millennium BC community in western Syria. In the Early Bronze Age, Syria had developed an urban, literate, hierarchical society composed of numerous competing polities, and mortuary remains are among the most informative and impressive of the material residues available to us from this urban civilization.⁴ While they have been used to study issues like social relations, craft specialization, and technological development, here I consider how mortuary data can be employed to infer religious practice and belief.⁵ Of

potential assistance is agency or practice theory, since ritual and religion are performed and acted out in daily life and become part of the *habitus* as conceptualized by Bourdieu⁶, the learned but unconscious modes of thought shaped by *praxis* – daily human acts and experiences. As Fogelin notes, “people do religion as much as they think about religion”.⁷

Located in the Jabbul plain between Aleppo and the Euphrates valley, the site in question, Umm el-Marra, is a Bronze Age mound of some 25 hectares. Although far larger than any other Bronze Age site in its neighborhood, its size relative to other Bronze Age Syrian urban centers implies that Umm el-Marra can best be understood as a local regional center subservient to more powerful cities such as Ebla (Tell Mardikh) in the third millennium and Aleppo in the second. Work at the site thus permits the study of a second-tier center of Bronze Age west Syrian complex society, as a complement to the evidence from the primary centers such as Ebla. Although definitive proof has yet to emerge, the ancient name of Umm el-Marra may have been Dub or Tuba, well-known from the administrative archives from Ebla Palace G (24th century BC) and other Bronze Age texts.⁸ The mound is the subject of study by a joint Johns Hopkins and University of Amsterdam project inaugurated in 1994, directed by Hans Curvers and myself.

This paper is divided into four sections. First, I shall detail the features and chronology of the Umm el-Marra mortuary complex. Then, I discuss some issues of its interpretation. Following this, I attempt to reconstruct some of the ritual behaviors involved in the use of the complex, and finally I endeavor to infer beliefs and religious concepts of the people involved.

1 The Early Bronze Age mortuary complex at Umm el-Marra

In the Early Bronze Age, the center of the Umm el-Marra acropolis (figure 1) housed a mortuary complex of elite character (figures 2, 3). Judging from associated material culture and stratigraphy, the nine excavated tombs and related installations were used in a sequence over a period of some three centuries, from ca. 2500 to 2200 BC, Early Bronze III to IVB (Umm

1 I am grateful to the students and faculty of the ‘Symbole der Toten’ program for inviting me to the stimulating and masterfully-organized Tübingen symposium. For their support and encouragement of the work at Umm el-Marra, I would like to thank the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums, Syria, particularly Dr. Bassam Jamous, Director-General, and Dr. Michael al-Maqdissi, Director of Excavations. This material is based on work supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF grant number BCS-0545610) as well as other contributors. I would also like to thank Sally Dunham, Maria Giovanna Biga and Jill Weber for their comments, Christopher Ruff for providing references on rates of decomposition, and Ernest Batey for allowing me to cite results of his analysis of human skeletal materials from the Umm el-Marra mortuary complex.

2 Renfrew 1994: 53.

3 Grainger 1998: 54; Parker Pearson 1999: 147.

4 Akkermans – Schwartz 2003: 233-287; Cooper 2006.

5 For studies on Early Bronze Syrian mortuary data and associated artifacts, see, for example, Schwartz 1986; Carter – Parker 1995; Peltenburg 1999 and 2007/2008; Kulemann-Ossen – Novák 2000; Meyer 2000; Porter 2002; Aruz 2003;

Bolger 2008.

6 Bourdieu 1977.

7 Fogelin 2008: 132.

8 Schwartz *et al.* 2006: 603, n. 3; Schwartz 2010: 376, n. 3.

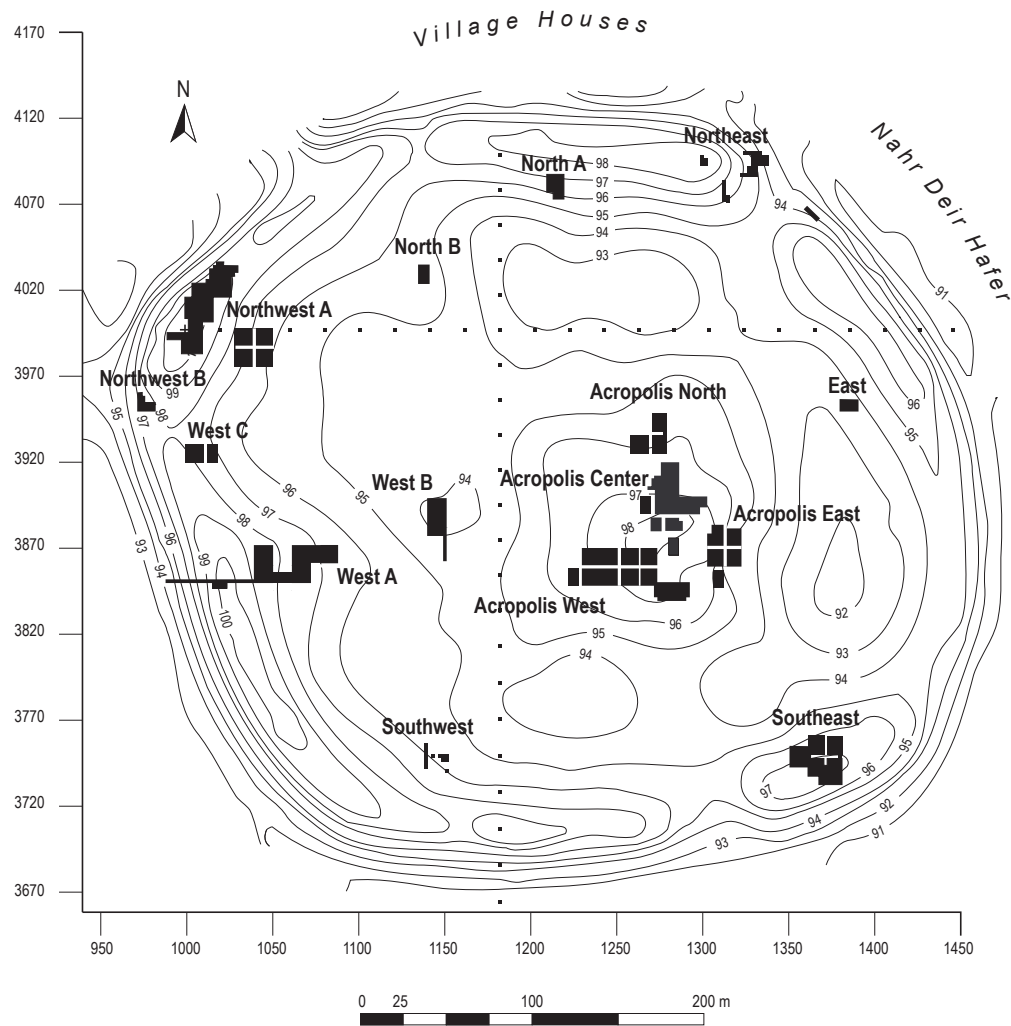


Figure 1: Tell Umm el-Marra.

el-Marra periods VI [late] to IV).⁹ The tombs were rectangular, usually with an entryway on the east, and built with a substructure of limestone boulders and a superstructure of mudbricks. Although the matter is still under discussion, it seems that the tombs were, except in one case, at least partly if not totally above-ground.¹⁰

In some cases, the tombs had well-preserved remains, allowing a careful consideration of the details of funerary practice. Particularly informative is Tomb 1 (figure 4), which contained three layers of skeletons interred in rectangular containers that are best interpreted as wooden coffins. In the third, lowest layer was an adult whose bones were disturbed, probably as

the result of the later interments. This individual was accompanied by fragments of a silver cup and pins. In the middle layer above were two adult males interred side by side, one with a silver diadem and bracelet and a mother-of-pearl disc, the other with a bronze dagger, spearhead and pin. Also in this level was an infant (ca. 3–5 months old) located near the tomb entry.¹¹ The top layer was particularly striking, with two young adult females positioned side by side, each with a baby of ca. 1–3 months at the knee, accompanied by personal ornaments of gold, silver, and lapis lazuli, either on the body or in a cluster next to it.¹² Given the symmetry of the interments in the top two layers and the good condition of the male skeletons, it is likely that both

9 Schwartz *et al.* 2003; 2006; 2012; Schwartz 2007. Note that the designation Tomb 2 is not used, since it was prematurely applied in the field notes to the structure now designated Installation B.

10 The exception is the latest tomb, Tomb 7, which also had no evidence for a mudbrick superstructure.

11 Ernest K. Batey, University of Arkansas, analyzed the human skeletal material from Tombs 1–8 in 2006. His analysis necessitates the revision of some preliminary conclusions on the age and sex of the interred individuals published in Schwartz *et al.* 2003 and 2006.

12 Estimated ages at death for the two women are 20–25 years (skeleton A) and 13–15 years (skeleton D).

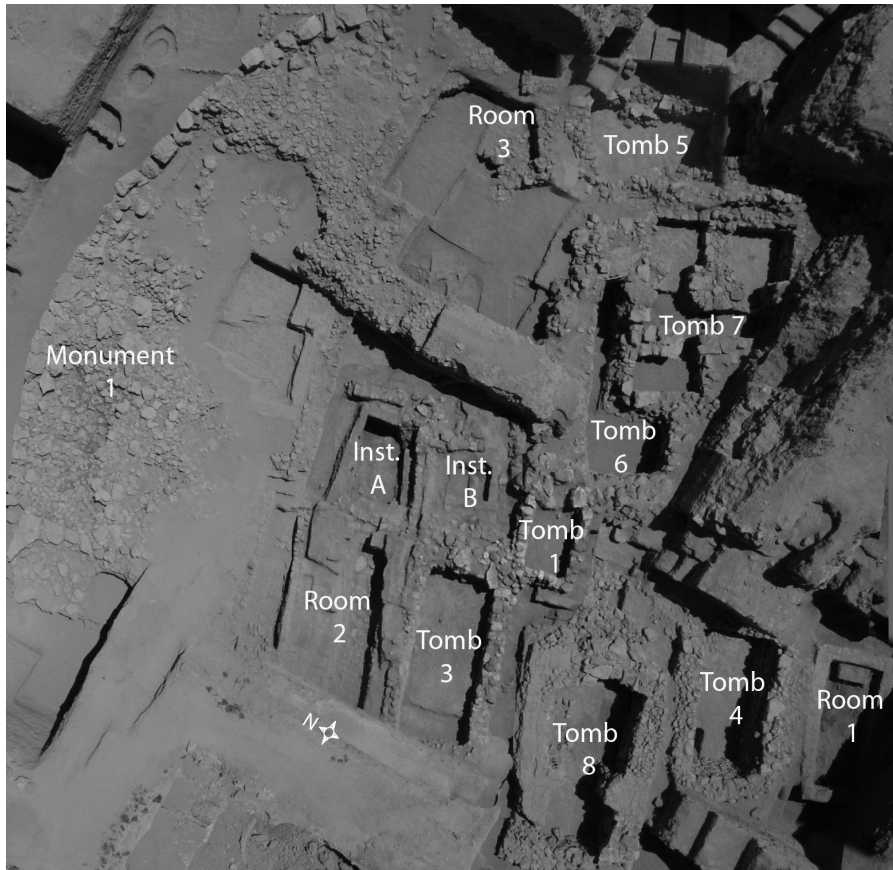


Figure 2: Acropolis Center excavations, composite photo 2004/2006. Monument 1 is Middle Bronze Age in date.

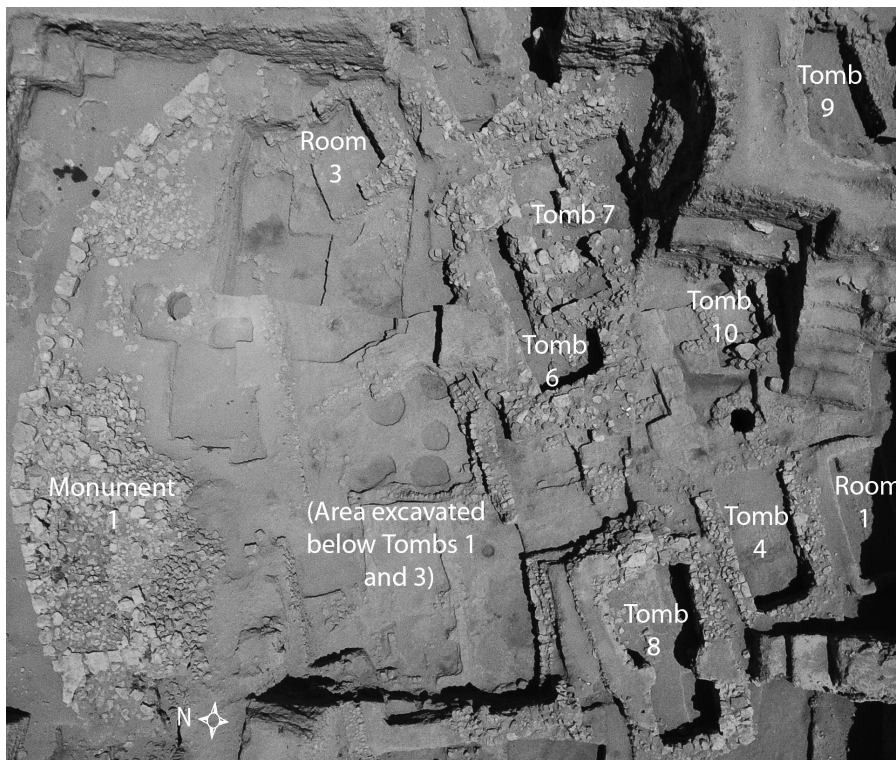


Figure 3: Acropolis Center excavations 2008.



Figure 4: Tomb 1, with top level *in situ*. Looking east.

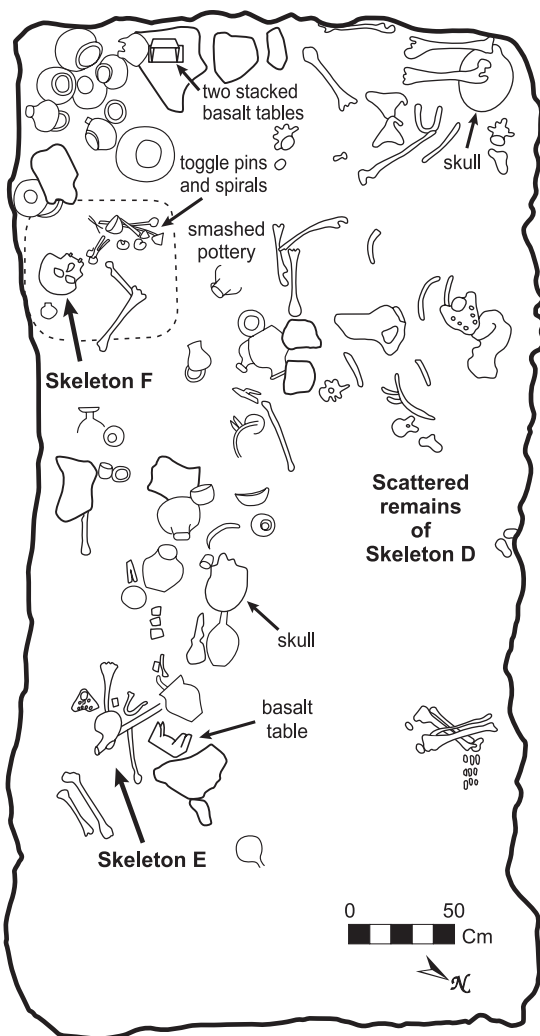


Figure 5: Tomb 4 interior, lower level. Dashed line around Skeleton F indicates zone of red/brown soil, perhaps the remnant of a container of organic material.



Figure 6: Skeleton F, Tomb 4 lower level. Looking south.

layers were deposited in a simultaneous episode. Judging from the pottery, the tomb should be dated to late Early Bronze IVA, ca. 2300 BC (late Umm el-Marra period V).

The other tomb with relatively well-preserved contents is Tomb 4, with a slightly earlier Early Bronze IVA date. The contents were deposited in two levels. In the lower layer (figure 5) were three bodies: two disturbed adult skeletons, one male (skeleton D) and one probably female (skeleton E), and the secondary interment of an adult female (skeleton F) (figure 6).¹³ The women had such accompaniments as silver and bronze toggle pins and gold ornaments. Also found were ivory hair ornaments and miniature basalt tables (figure 7). A curious discovery was that of a small square shaft in the tomb's northwest corner that contained two stone

¹³ Skeleton E, identified as male in Schwartz *et al.* 2006, has been designated as probable female after analysis by E. Batey. The bones of skeleton F were piled in a cluster with the skull on top, a practice also seen at Selenkahiye (van Loon – Meijer 2001: 4A.152, 4A.157, 4B.215).



Figure 7: Miniature basalt tables, Tomb 4 lower level.



Figure 9: Skeleton A (child), Tomb 4 upper level. Looking south.

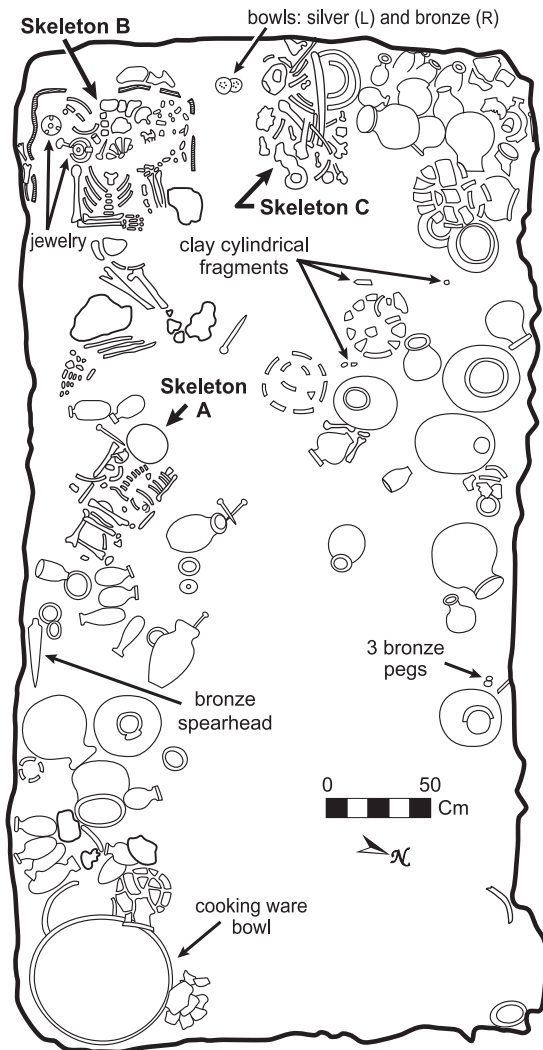


Figure 8: Tomb 4 interior, upper level.

and shell eye inlays of a type used for statues. Whether this indicates the original presence of a statue made of largely perishable materials is unknown.

The upper level of Tomb 4 also contained three bodies (figure 8): the secondary interment of an adult male (skeleton C) and the primary interments of a

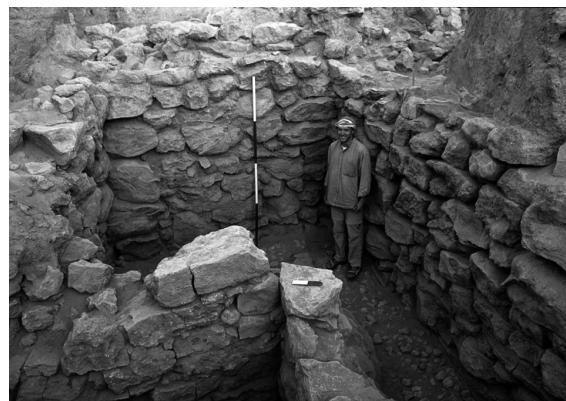


Figure 10: Tomb 6 interior, looking west. Tomb 7 north-west corner in left foreground.

child (skeleton A) and an adult female of 50 years or more (skeleton B), the latter inside a receptacle or coffin. Like the women in the lower level, the woman had a collection of personal ornaments next to her body, including silver jewelry and gold toggle pins. Pairs of toggle pins were also found at some distance from the body, perhaps reflective of garments placed in the tomb, either at the time of the body's interment or at a subsequent date. Not far from the man, together with ceramic vessels, were seven small silver vessels and one bronze vessel. The child had only a small jar and a small silver spiral in his or her vicinity (figure 9).

In contrast to Tombs 1 and 4, the other excavated tombs suffered extensive disturbance. Some, like Tombs 3 and 5, had only pottery and human and animal bones still extant. Others, like Tomb 6 (figure 10), had more materials *in situ*, such as the remains of an adult male (age probably 45–50 years), the vestiges of a wooden coffin, and gold and silver personal ornaments.

Not previously published are the results from four additional tombs excavated in 2006 and 2008, all with significant amounts of disruption. Dating to Early Bronze III (Umm el-Marra period VI [late]), the



Figure 11: Tomb 8, looking southeast.



Figure 12: Bitumen remnants and impressions from two superimposed coffins, Tomb 8 east room.



Figure 13: Tomb 9, looking west.

two-roomed Tomb 8 (figure 11) contained the scattered remains of an infant and two adult males in its western room. Most likely the bodies of the adults, if not the infant as well, originally had been placed in two superimposed wooden coffins in the eastern room, whose impressions and bitumen coating were

still extant (figure 12). The latter chamber also yielded some thirty vessels *in situ*, while the western room had pottery smashed or scattered in disarray, including two pedestal-based ‘champagne vessels’ or ‘fruitstands’ painted in the Euphrates Banded Ware tradition. From a slightly later period, Tomb 9 (figure 13) contained the disarticulated remains of at least two adult individuals. Inside this structure were many stone boulders thrown in as if to intentionally damage the tomb. Tomb 10 is the southern half of a structure otherwise destroyed, perhaps by the construction of Tomb 7, containing at least one adult disarticulated individual, pottery, a bronze dagger, an ivory handle with inlaid silver wire, and a silver torque similar to examples found in Tombs 1 and 4.

The latest tomb excavated thus far is Tomb 7 (figure 14), the only example that was clearly subterranean, dug into the ruins of Tomb 6. It contained the disturbed remains of three adults and an adolescent. A multi-chambered structure, Tomb 7 was nearly devoid of objects but contained Early Bronze IVB pottery (Umm el-Marra period IV) dating to the era after the fall of Ebla Palace G, perhaps in the 23rd century BC. This result is at odds with the evidence from other west Syrian elite tombs at sites like Tell Banat, Jerablus Tahtani and Tell Bi’a, which predate Early Bronze IVB. One might have concluded that the disappearance of monumental tombs after 2300 BC was associated with a decline in elite power or, at least, a shift in the nature of political authority or ideology, but the date of Tomb 7 necessitates a rethinking of that position.¹⁴

In addition to the tombs proper were subterranean installations that contained the remains of animals, particularly equids, and sometimes human infants. At present, we recognize four types.¹⁵ Type 1 installations are individual rooms constructed with mudbrick and/

¹⁴ Schwartz 2007: 47.

¹⁵ Weber in press.

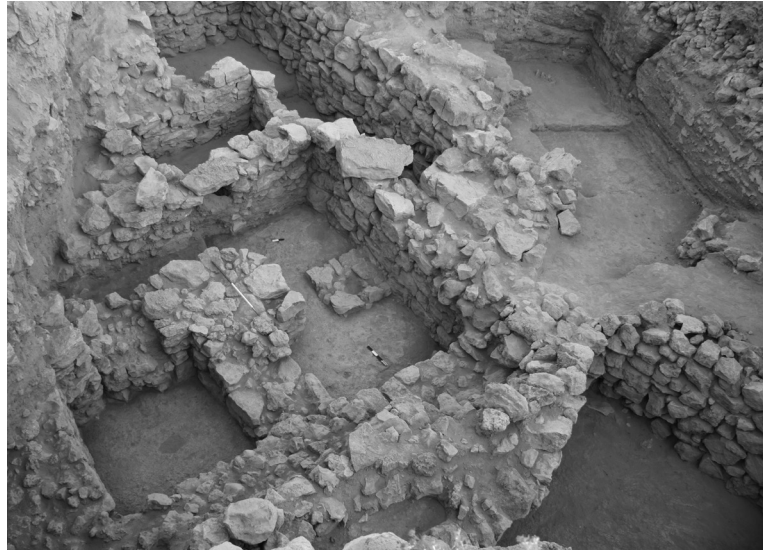


Figure 14: Tomb 7, looking north-west.



Figure 15: Installation E, looking northwest.

or stone walls, containing four young or prime aged male equids suggestive of a team of sacrificed animals. The most elaborate example, Installation E, was located between Tombs 6 and 8 (figure 15). This feature contained the skeletons of four standing equids whose fore and hind limbs were inserted into eight mudbrick compartments. The animals' skulls were located on a ledge near a large globular jar and a denticulated bronze object of uncertain function. Between Installation E and Tomb 8 was Installation F, containing four equids inside a stone enclosure. A third Type 1 installation was Installation A, notable for its inclusion of partial remains of a human infant.

Type 2 installations, exemplified by Installations B–D, are mudbrick structures with two compartments, each containing an aged male equid installed in a standing position facing west. Each Type 2 installation also contained a spouted ceramic vessel and at least one human infant skeleton (figure 16).



Figure 16: Installation B, southern compartment, with human infant skeletal remains to left and equid remains to right. Looking southwest.



Figure 17: Installation G, lower pit. Looking west (eastern segment of installation removed in prior excavation season).

Remains of extra animals could be added after the two equids were put in, as in Installation B, which had three puppies placed in each compartment.

Type 3 is thus far attested by Installation G, consisting of two pits with blue-gray fill stratified one atop the other. The lower pit contained four equids of relatively young age (figure 17), while the upper pit included four equids of varied ages.

Type 4 consists of individual skeletons found adjacent to, but outside of, other installations. An equid skeleton was found against the eastern exterior face of Tomb 8, another was found south of Installation E, and a third was located in a pit beneath Installation G.

The above data allow for the suggestion of a chronological sequence. In an early phase, three tombs were constructed in an east-west line, tombs 5, 6 and then 8.¹⁶ Then, tombs 3, 4, 9, and 10 were positioned – perhaps in the order of tombs 3, 9, 10 and 4 – to the north or south of the east-west line, while equid installations were installed in the center, between tombs 6 and 8. Finally, Tomb 1 was built inside the former equid zone, constructed atop an equid installation, and the latest tomb, Tomb 7, was constructed in space cleared by the demolition of much of Tomb 6.

2 An elite landscape of death

It will not be controversial to propose that the interred humans were of a high social status, given the associated objects, the high, central position of the complex, and the absence of any other adult burials in Bronze Age contexts, indicating that adults were usually buried extramurally. Whether the interred individuals were political hegemony and their families, heads of

important kin groups, or others remains to be determined. Considering nine tombs used sequentially over a period of 300 years, we might calculate roughly one tomb per generation, each housing an average of ca. five people.¹⁷ Such relatively small numbers of interred individuals might better be interpreted as members of local ruling families than elders and their kin, whom one would expect to be more numerous. Of course, the discovery of many additional tombs from the same time span would change these figures.

Because the tombs were centrally located, situated on a high point, and standing aboveground, they provided a persistent visual landmark. Dominating the landscape of the community, the tombs would have become part of the everyday world and the *habitus* of the residents. I have hypothesized that these monuments imply the practice of elite ancestor veneration, a practice also cited in the Ebla texts.¹⁸ With deceased elite individuals still residing amidst a community that constantly acknowledged their presence and periodically honored them, living members of high status groups could acquire and maintain prestige through their association with the revered dead. In this and, no doubt, many other ways, the ancestors exerted agency over the lives of the people in the community around them.¹⁹ A comparable phenomenon of elite aboveground intramural tombs in the middle Euphrates valley exists at sites like Jerablus Tahtani, Tell Ahmar, Tell Banat, Tell Bi'a, and Mari, interpreted similarly by Edgar Peltenburg and Anne Porter.²⁰

At Umm el-Marra, our hypothesis of ancestor veneration is supportable by two varieties of archaeological evidence. One consists of artifactual materials found at a considerable height in the soil above the tomb floors, such as vessels, bone comb fragments, a bronze chisel, and a silver bowl above the Tomb 4 upper floor; and five vessels in Tomb 3.²¹ These might

¹⁶ Judging from the pottery, Tomb 8 is probably later than Tombs 5 and 6, but it is not obvious which of the latter tombs is the earliest. One might posit that Tomb 6, the largest of all tombs, was built first, with Tombs 5 and 8 erected to either side.

¹⁷ The number of individuals attested in each tomb is estimated as follows: Tomb 1 - eight; Tomb 3 - four; Tomb 4 - six; Tomb 5 - two; Tomb 6 - one; Tomb 7 - four; Tomb 8 - three. The remains from Tombs 1 and 4 are complete, nearly complete (95%) or, in one case, 75% complete; the remains from Tombs 3 and 5–8 are incomplete, consisting of 50% of the body or less. The skeletal remains from Tombs 9 and 10 have not been studied yet.

¹⁸ Archi 2001. See Schwartz *et al.* 2003 and 2006 and Schwartz 2007 for earlier discussions.

¹⁹ Nielsen 2008.

²⁰ Peltenburg 1999 and 2007/2008; Porter 2002.

²¹ In Tomb 3, three vessels were found ca. 70–80 cm above the floor in the southwest part of the tomb, and two vessels were located in the eastern part of the tomb ca. 30 cm above the floor. Materials deposited well above the upper layer in Tomb 4 were found at ca. 40 cm above the floor. Note that the texts from Ebla Palace G record that the delivery of gifts for the funeral of an elite individual was often accompanied by gifts intended for previously deceased relatives of the dead person (Biga 2007/2008). Unfortunately, the place where the gifts were donated is not specified. On the archaeological evidence for ancestor veneration, see



Figure 18: Room 1 (left) and Tomb 4 (right), looking west.



Figure 19: Room 2 (left, foreground) and Tomb 3 (right), looking east.

be understood as offerings brought to the tomb to honor the occupants long after their deaths.

The other type of evidence is architectural. Structures in the mortuary complex that are not tombs might be interpreted as loci for rituals venerating the deceased buried nearby. Adjacent to Tomb 4, for example, is Room 1, whose apparent replication of Tomb 4's size, shape and orientation suggests that the two structures were functionally related (figure 18). It could be hypothesized that offerings to the deceased in Tomb 4 were placed on the white lime-plastered mudbrick podium in Room 1.²² Room 2, a slab-paved chamber north of Tomb 3, also presents the appearance of a 'twin' of the latter structure and could be interpreted as an ancillary space for rituals of ancestor veneration

²² Peltenburg 1999.

22 Room 1 had a sequence of two floor surfaces, the later of which had burned debris deposited on it that included complete ceramic vessels and several spindle whorls. The floors and interior wall surfaces of the room were lime-plastered. Apparently, the room is part of a larger structure yet to be excavated.

(figure 19).²³ The room had an entryway with steps leading east into the subterranean equid feature Installation A, implying the flow of ritual activities between those two spaces. Room 3, a U-shaped structure northwest of Tomb 5, included a bovid skeleton and several examples of painted wavy line jugs, a type sometimes suggested to be cultic in function.²⁴ This space might also have been used for the presentation of offerings to the dead buried nearby.

²³ Alternatively, it could be proposed that Room 2 was a tomb, since the bones of a disarticulated adult human skeleton were found inside near its western wall in association with sheep/goat bones and smashed pottery vessels comparable to those of Tomb 3. Arguing against this, however, are the absence of additional human skeletal remains, characteristic of the other tombs, no trace of a coffin, and the possibility that the human interment was associated with a later phase of use.

²⁴ Hempelmann 2001. The type is characterized by groups of parallel vertical wavy lines on the lower body and an oval base (cf. Mazzoni 1982: 159, fig. 26: 10, 163, fig. 27: 15).



Figure 20: View of Acropolis Center excavations, looking north, with Early Bronze IVB enclosure wall in background (with person standing next to it). Tombs 6 and 7 in foreground, segments of Middle Bronze Age Monument 1 in far background.

In the Early Bronze IVB period (Umm el-Marra IV), a stone enclosure wall was erected around the mortuary complex (figure 20).²⁵ Such restrictive activity would have limited the accessibility of elite ancestors to a select few. Peltenburg identifies such a trend toward mortuary exclusiveness to be part of the increasingly hierarchical character of Syrian society in the later third and early second millennium BC: “the material stage for ancestor ceremonies had been transferred from open, inclusive performances to more controlled spaces and finally to highly restricted venues and social participants.”²⁶

While Umm el-Marra shares a common practice of constructing intramural elite tombs, it is unique in the presence of the equid installations. On the basis of morphological and metrical attributes, Jill Weber has proposed that the animals are a hybrid of onager and donkey and may be the highly-valued equids referred to *kungas* (anše-BAR.AN) in contemporaneous texts.²⁷ Presumably a donkey-onager hybrid was valuable because it combined the strength, speed, and relative attractiveness of the onager with the tameability of the donkey.

It is likely that the ritual importance of the equids was interwoven with their role as animals of prestige. Their sacrifice or conspicuous burial would have provided an illustration of the wealth and status of the associated deceased persons. Presumably the animals were also expected to provide transportation in the life to come, and those that were slaughtered can be considered an example of ‘retainer sacrifice,’ in which individuals are killed to provide services to an overlord in the afterlife.²⁸

25 The wall was of moderate width, ca. 1.0 m on the west and south, ca. 0.7 m in the north.

26 Peltenburg 2007/2008: 232.

27 Weber 2008.

28 Schwartz in press. See Weber in press for an alternative in-

3 Reconstructing ritual

To reconstruct the funerary rituals that took place at Umm el-Marra, one can proceed from several vantage points, but the incomplete nature of our data must be kept in mind. We must also be cognizant of the fact that the material available for study is that which happens to have been left behind in the tombs and which survived post-depositional processes. We have no knowledge of material appurtenances that were taken away or were not preserved, not to mention remains of behaviors that left no material residue, what Daniel Miller terms “immaterial culture”.²⁹

3.1 Place, time, participants, actions

Due to these difficulties, it will not be possible to produce a reconstruction of the mortuary rituals conducted at Umm el-Marra in comprehensive detail and in the precise order of events. What we can do is consider a set of relevant variables and see what conclusions can be derived from them, acquiring a fragmentary but not uninformative picture. These variables include: where and when the mortuary rituals occurred, who was present, and what actions were performed.

Clearly, the intended spatial locale for the elite mortuary facilities and at least some associated rituals was the center of the site acropolis, which was already at a height that overlooked the rest of the community in the third millennium.³⁰ Tombs were built adjacent to one another in an area previously used for non-mortuary purposes.³¹

terpretation.

29 Miller 2005.

30 It is possible that related rituals took place in other locations as well, but there is no evidence for this as yet.

31 Excavations below Tombs 1, 3 and 5 in 2006 and 2008 revealed no mortuary evidence except for the skeleton of an infant interred inside the stone substructure of a wall.

It appears that the area available for the construction of tombs was limited, to judge from the evidence of the later tombs. By the late Early Bronze IVA period, the tomb builders constructed Tomb 1 in the zone previously reserved for equid installations, implying a lack of available space elsewhere. In the Early Bronze IVB period, the tomb builders' inability or unwillingness to construct tombs in areas that were empty or used for other purposes is indicated by Tomb 7, erected inside an intrusion dug into the remains of the much earlier Tomb 6.³² The same period saw the construction of the stone enclosure wall demarcating the mortuary complex, emphasizing the finite character of the space available and restricting access to the area.

When did funerary ceremonies take place? As noted above, each tomb was probably in use over a period of some two or three decades. Given the six to eight bodies found in the two best-preserved tombs 1 and 4, we could estimate that the interment of bodies probably occurred on an average of once every four or five years. If we are correct in concluding that ancestor veneration was an important aspect of the behaviors associated with the complex, rituals involving the veneration of the dead may have been performed at intervals over a number of years after the interment of the deceased individual. Unfortunately, the scheduling of such post-interment rituals cannot be determined from available evidence, although the placement of objects as high as 80 cm above the tomb floor in Tombs 3 and 4 probably indicates the passage of a considerable amount of time after the interment of the last bodies on those floors.

It seems that new tombs were built roughly once in a generation in the Umm el-Marra complex. Each elite death did not require a new tomb, in contrast to the practice in southern Mesopotamia.³³ Instead, the deceased was put in a mortuary structure used for up to eight people if not more. Eventually a new tomb would be built and used. A new mortuary edifice may have deemed necessary for a variety of reasons, such as the lack of available space in the previous tomb, the practice of burying members of a newly prominent kin or social group separately from the group's predecessors, or the availability of resources to construct a new tomb.

From our current evidence, we can say little about the season of interment or the amount of time that elapsed between death and burial.³⁴ According to



Figure 21: Stone slabs below coffin remains, Tomb 6. Note bitumen remnants and impressions from north part of coffin (with rectangular partitions) still *in situ*, under scale in background.

the Ebla texts,³⁵ deceased elite individuals in northern Syria were buried at least several days after their deaths, since the Eblaites sent gifts for deceased foreign rulers and needed time to learn of the individual's death, prepare the gifts, and deliver them. However, as Biga points out, it is also possible that the gifts were delivered after the funerary ceremonies had occurred and were placed in the reopened tomb.

The individuals who took part in the mortuary rituals at Umm el-Marra might have included relatives, friends, associates, members of the general public, and foreign dignitaries, as attested at Ebla,³⁶ but this cannot be adduced from the archaeological evidence alone. We might conclude, however, that the number of participants within the tomb area itself was probably small, given the limited space available, especially in later years when the area was significantly congested and the enclosure wall constructed. Outside the tomb complex, many people could have participated in funerary processions or ceremonies or observed the rites taking place inside.

The activities associated with the human tombs clearly involved the placement of bodies (human and animal) and non-animate objects in the tombs. Judging from the evidence in Tombs 1, 4, 6 and 8, the human bodies were placed in wooden coffins with bitumen coating on the edges.³⁷ These were sometimes installed atop a kind of stone bed or platform as attested in Tombs 6 and 8 (figure 21). One may imagine the dead person being carried inside the coffin to the tomb, or the coffin being placed inside the tomb prior to the body's arrival. The deceased was placed in fetal position, oriented east-west. In the later tombs 1 and 4, layers of bodies were interred, presumably because there was

32 Alternatively, it is possible that the builders of Tomb 7 were not troubled by the disturbance of Tomb 6 and simply sought a central location for their tomb within the tomb complex (Schwartz *et al.* 2006: 633).

33 Zettler – Horne 1998; Stein 2004.

34 One clue to the timing of mortuary activities might be provided by the inclusion of geese in some tombs, since the birds winter in the Euphrates valley (J. Weber personal communication). If they were domesticated, however, their presence would not be relevant to the seasonality of burial interments.

35 Biga 2007/2008.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Coffins are also attested in third millennium graves at Tell Bi'a (Strommenger – Kohlmeyer 1998) and at Tell Banat Tomb 7 (Porter 2002).

no space left in the existing layer, a new tomb was not yet desired or possible, and it was not deemed proper to remove the human remains and artifactual materials to make room for new bodies. It is also possible that a new layer was installed, not because of a lack of space, but because social or kinship differences between the individuals buried in the original layer and those to be added required a spatial separation.

Primary inhumations are attested for Tombs 1 and 4 and are likely to have existed in Tombs 6 and 8, given the evidence of coffins in the latter tombs. Two examples of secondary interments appear in Tomb 4, one in each level, an adult female (skeleton F, lower level) and an adult male (skeleton C, upper level). Although disarticulated, the skeletons were nearly complete. These secondary burials indicate that the individuals' bodies had decomposed in their original location, after which the bones were moved to the loci observed in excavation. The bones may have been transferred from place to place on the tomb floor in order to make room for an additional body. Although a relatively short time is estimated for the interment of bodies in each of the Umm el-Marra tombs (e.g. ca. 30 years), evidence indicates that there would have been enough time for a body in the tomb to be reduced to its skeletal state to allow for the transfer of the bones. The amount of time it takes for a body to skeletonize varies according to environment and context, but it is probable that skeletonization of bodies placed in the Umm el-Marra tombs took place by at least two years after death.³⁸

Arguing against an interpretation that the bones had been moved from a location within the tomb is their possible association, in both cases, with a wooden container, which suggests that they were transported from a more distant site.³⁹ The bones may have been moved from another location in Umm el-Marra or from another locality. Reasons for such activity could include the desired interment of an individual who died far from Umm el-Marra, the need to wait for the ritually ordained time to open the tomb, or the desire to amass enough resources to sponsor an elaborate funeral.⁴⁰

In her discussion of ancestor veneration in third millennium Syria, Anne Porter has proposed that the bodies of selected individuals could be subjected to a sequence of treatments after death and moved from

feature to feature in preparation for their role as ancestor.⁴¹ Such a sequence is especially characterized by a transition from primary, single inhumation to secondary, multiple interments. At Umm el-Marra, primary and secondary interments are found in a single architectural feature, Tomb 4, an arrangement that does not coincide with Porter's reconstruction. Were multi-stage preparations for the creation of ancestors being practiced in the Umm el-Marra complex, one might expect more evidence for secondary interments in the tombs and more diversity in mortuary architecture.⁴²

Apart from the human bodies and the receptacles they lay in, most inclusions in the tombs were personal ornaments, ceramic (and sometimes metal) vessels, and animal remains. The recurrence of items of personal adornment like torques and headbands demonstrates that sets of similar objects were commonly intended for elite burials. Some of the personal ornaments were worn by the interred individual, while others were placed in a group next to the body. Given the evidence from the Ebla texts, it is possible that some of the jewelry was not the personal property of the deceased but comprised gifts from central authorities, either local or foreign.⁴³ It is also likely that some of the funerary inclusions were intended for the persons already buried in the tomb, as hypothesized above; offerings found above the floors could have been intended for previously deceased individuals, and it is also possible that some of the vessels and other objects found on the tomb floors were likewise provided for such ancestors.⁴⁴

It appears that, at least in Tomb 8, vessels (and their contents) were inserted after the bodies were placed in the tomb, since a large collection of pottery was found directly in front of the entrance, impeding access to the rest of the tomb. Some vessels may have been intended for employment in the afterlife (see below), while others could have been used during the funerary rituals. Possible candidates for the latter category could include 'Syrian bottles,' which could have contained oil or perfumes for washing the corpse or for purifying the survivors after their polluting contact with the dead body, as in the *i-giš-sag* ceremony at Ebla.⁴⁵

38 In Arizona, with an arid environment comparable to that of the Jabbul plain, skeletonization in exposed bodies occurs most commonly two to nine months after death (Galloway 1997: 144-145). Studies on buried corpses in Tennessee and the northeastern U.S. indicate that skeletonization of a body buried 4 feet (1.22 meters) or deeper takes two to three years, while bodies buried at a shallower depth take six months to a year or more to skeletonize (Rodriguez 1997: 460-461).

39 Schwartz *et al.* 2006: 613, 618, n. 61. The association of skeleton C, in the upper layer, with a container is much more speculative than that of skeleton F in the lower layer.

40 *Ibid.*: 632.

41 Porter 2002. See also Bolger 2008 for similar evidence from other sites in the middle Euphrates.

42 **Admittedly, the disturbed nature of most of the tombs inhibits our ability to distinguish between the presence of primary and secondary interments.** The presence of a secondary interment in Room 2 must also be considered (see above).

43 Archi 2002; Biga 2007/2008.

44 Archi 2002; Button 2007: 92. On the donation of metal or textile gifts by the Ebla palace to elite individuals long after their death, see Archi 2002; Biga 2007/2008. Archi (this volume) has suggested that textiles given to elite ancestors may have been used to dress statues of those individuals. The inlay eyes from Tomb 4 are, thus far, the only hint of statuary found in the Umm el-Marra tombs.

45 Biga 2007/2008; Schwartz 2007: 50; Viganò 2000.

Spouted jars may have been used for libation, corpse washing, or hand washing.⁴⁶ In general, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether vessels were the remnants of funerary ceremonies, were intended for use in the afterlife, or both. Cooking ware vessels were never present in the tombs, with the exception of the large bowl in the upper layer of Tomb 4, indicating that the presentation of provisions and not their preparation took place at the grave.

Judging from the faunal remains, joints of meat as well as complete animals were put in the tombs. As with other tomb inclusions, it is usually unclear whether they were placed in the tomb concurrent with the interment of the deceased human(s) or at some later point. Animals represented include sheep/goat (the most common type), cattle, dog, equid, geese, duck, hare, pig, fox, weasel, frog and shrew.

To recapitulate, we can observe that tombs for elite humans, and related installations, were built in a relatively limited (if not restricted) area in the center of the Umm el-Marra acropolis, probably once in a generation or so, with people interred on an average of every four to five years. Rituals in this locale would have been attended by a relatively small number of people, but it is possible that a large audience watched from outside the complex. In the tomb, the body, wearing some personal ornaments, was placed in fetal position in a wooden coffin. On other occasions, the disarticulated bones of an individual were moved from another location to their final resting place in the tomb. Participants brought additional personal ornaments, joints of meat, complete animals (slaughtered elsewhere or on-site), and vessels containing foodstuffs and other contents. They also may have washed the body or themselves or conducted rituals of libation. From time to time, rituals venerated the dead persons buried within the tombs and included the presentation of pottery (and its contents), metal vessels, and perhaps personal ornaments.

Turning to the equid installations, we might expect that such features were constructed and filled in at the same time that a human owner was buried nearby, but this is not demonstrable. In the case of the Type 1 installations, in which the animals were young and presumably sacrificed, one can imagine the victims being led into the structure and killed there, but it is possible that they were killed prior to interment. It does appear that dead animals were inserted into the Type 2 installations, since the animals were of advanced age and presumably died natural deaths. They were installed in a standing position, which could have been performed when the animals were in a state of *rigor mortis*. Alternatively, the animals' limbs could have been placed in the compartments and the empty spaces filled in.

After the equids were inserted, the other animals would have been killed and placed in the structures. The human infants were also installed subsequent to

the equids' interment. It is not certain if the babies were sacrificed or had already died of natural causes, except for the stillborn infant in Installation B, clearly not a victim of sacrifice. The other infants from the equid installations are estimated at having died a month or two after birth.

The spouted jars of the Type 2 installations suggest libation rituals accompanying the interment of the equids or the other occupants of the feature.⁴⁷ In the Type 1 installations A and G, sherds of incised 'cult stands' found in the upper fill may have been used in the ceremonies and then broken and discarded in the installation when it was filled in. Alternatively, they could have been discarded after the features were no longer in use.

3.2 Desecration

While mortuary ritual usually involves the respectful interment and memorialization of the deceased, hostile ritual behaviors might also occur. Evidence of disturbance to the tomb contents at Umm el-Marra is apparent in the case of nearly all tombs.⁴⁸ I have previously suggested that these operations were conducted by people who wanted to sever the connection between the living community and the people interred in the tombs, due to personal or political hostilities. In this interpretation, the tombs were intentionally violated by intruders who blocked the entrances so as to prevent subsequent acts of veneration toward the discredited ancestors.⁴⁹ This scenario was proposed because Tomb 1, the best-preserved example, had no door blocking, while the most of the disturbed tombs had their entryways filled in with stone boulders, suggesting a correlation between the blocking of entryways and disturbance inside the tombs.⁵⁰ An interpretation of deliberate violation is also supported by data from Tomb 9, which contained a large number of sizeable boulders apparently tossed onto the tomb floor indiscriminately, as if in anger or to deliberately wreak damage.⁵¹

47 For the spouted jars, see Schwartz 2007: 42.

48 Tomb 1 is the main exception. While the upper layer of Tomb 4 was undisturbed, the lower level suffered significant disruption.

49 For ancient Mesoamerican examples of such behavior, see Chase – Chase 2011.

50 Tomb 4, a relatively well-preserved tomb, had no evidence of a doorway.

51 These boulders could not have been part of the stone substructure of the tomb walls, since that feature was completely extant and usually covered with one or more courses of the mudbrick superstructure. Nor is it likely that the stones were collapsed from the boulders blocking the doorway, since most of the random stones were found in the western part of the tomb, at considerable distance from the entryway. Given the mudbrick superstructure of the tomb, the stones could not have derived from the tomb roof.

46 Schwartz 2007: 50.

However, this reconstruction of events cannot apply to Tomb 8, which has a cluster of undisturbed ceramic vessels directly inside the entryway, making it unlikely that the robbers used the doorway or blocked it. Those who disturbed Tomb 8 probably came from above, through the roof, in the western and most damaged part of the tomb. In this case, the tomb entryway may have been blocked by respectful survivors rather than the tomb violators. Indeed, one might propose that tomb entryways were usually blocked by individuals interested in protecting the tomb contents, not by hostile persons, but one would have to explain the absence of any door blocking in the best-preserved tomb, Tomb 1.⁵²

The timing of the disturbances is important: if they occurred long after the mortuary complex had fallen into disuse, an interpretation of intentional desecration and animosity toward the tomb occupants would be less credible, and outright theft the most likely explanation. But at present, the evidence indicates that some, if not all, of the tombs were disturbed while the mortuary complex was still in use. Most obviously, the lower level of Tomb 4 was damaged before the upper level was installed sometime in the Early Bronze IVA period. It also appears that Tomb 9 was robbed not long after its period of use, in Early Bronze IVA: bone beads of the same style and size as a group from inside the tomb were found resting on the top of the stone substructure of the tomb's south wall, directly below the Early Bronze IVB stone enclosure wall. This evidence indicates the tomb was robbed when the mudbrick superstructure of Tomb 9 had already collapsed or had been dismantled, but before the Early Bronze IVB wall was built.

3.3 Social identity and variation

Mortuary ritual is likely to vary depending on an individual's age, gender, social status, ethnicity, and other means of identity – and on the agendas of the survivors with respect to such criteria. Judging from the ten sexed skeletons with associated materials from the Umm el-Marra tombs, we can suggest the following, bearing in mind the very small sample involved. If the interred was an elite woman at Umm el-Marra, she was likely to be buried wearing costly personal ornaments and to be accompanied by additional jewelry laid beside her body. If the interred was an elite man, he would be interred with fewer personal ornaments and was likely to have a weapon.⁵³ If the interred

52 It is also possible that the tomb entrances were blocked after a robbery in order to prevent future disturbances, but one would have to explain why the tomb contents were left in such disarray. At present the distribution of blocked tomb doorways is as follows: Tomb 1 - not blocked; Tomb 3 - blocked; Tomb 4 - no identified doorway; Tomb 5 - blocked; Tomb 6 - unknown; Tomb 7 - unknown; Tomb 8 - blocked; Tomb 9 - blocked; Tomb 10 - unknown.

53 On the disparity in the amount of wealth associated with

was a child, he or she would have far fewer associated artifacts, and infants none. It is important to note that infants in the complex were not separated from the adults, in contrast to the practice of burying infants in locations not otherwise reserved for adult interments.⁵⁴ Differential funerary treatment based on age and sex is also evident in the Ebla texts, manifested in the gifts of textiles and jewelry sent on the occasion of the death of a member of the local or foreign elite.⁵⁵

We find little gender-specificity with respect to object types: almost every type is associated with both males and females, including ivory or bone combs, metal toggle pins, stone and metal beads, metal headbands and frontlets, metal bracelets, and shell disks.⁵⁶ Torques are an exception, found only with females, but with only two examples from sexed skeletons.⁵⁷ Weapons, found only with adult males in contemporaneous tombs in Syria and upper Mesopotamia, were associated with males in two cases at Umm el-Marra (Tombs 1 and 6).⁵⁸ However, a copper/bronze spearhead was adjacent to the older female (skeleton B) in the upper level of Tomb 4, and one might consider the possibility that this individual played a military or political role otherwise associated with males, that the weapon was a sign of her identity as a religious specialist, or the person was gendered neither male nor female but belonged to a third or fourth gender.⁵⁹

Since the individuals in the Umm el-Marra tombs are understood to be members of the elite and there is a dearth of nonelite adult interments from elsewhere in the site, it is impossible to comment on possible differences in mortuary treatment with respect to social status. The Ebla texts imply that such differences occurred, as does the excavated evidence from the middle Euphrates.⁶⁰

3.4 Temporal and spatial change

Ritual behavior can change through time, and the mortuary activities that were conducted at Umm el-Marra were unlikely to have remained static. An example of changing practices is the predilection for layers of bod-

women as opposed to men, see Schwartz *et al.* 2003 and 2006.

54 On the spatial separation of infants and adults, see Kulemann-Ossen – Novák 2000; Bolger 2008: 236.

55 Biga 2007/2008.

56 Felli (this volume) notes a similar scarcity of gender-specific objects at Tell Afis.

57 Torques were found with women in Tombs 1 and 4; the torque found in Tomb 10 is not obviously associated with a particular skeleton. At Ebla, torques are said to be given to both male and female individuals as funerary gifts (Archi 2002).

58 Schwartz *et al.* 2006: 631, n. 114.

59 McCaffrey 2008; Dunham 2005; Schwartz *et al.* 2006: 631, n. 114; Brumfiel 2007; Asher-Greve 1997.

60 Biga 2007/2008; Cooper 2006: 202-256; Bolger 2008.

ies in the later Tombs 1 and 4.⁶¹ The equid installations may also have seen chronological changes: judging from preliminary appraisal of ceramic materials and stratigraphic data, Type 1 equid installations appear earlier than those of Type 2, while the Type 3 installations may belong to an intermediary phase.

Ritual also will differ from place to place, even within a society sharing numerous common ways of acting and thinking. On the one hand, data from intramural elite tombs elsewhere in third millennium Syria resemble the Umm el-Marra complex with respect to artifact and animal inclusions, the use of coffins, inferred practices of ancestor veneration, and entries on the east. As Biga remarks, the Ebla palace's delivery of similar funerary gifts to localities all over northern Syria suggests commonalities in funerary practices.⁶² At the same time, considerable variability can be observed, with the Umm el-Marra complex distinguished by its unusually large size, its long history of use, the layers of bodies attested in Tombs 1 and 4, and the practice of interring equids (and human infants) in separate features.⁶³

4 Meaning, symbol and belief

While the reconstruction of ritual has its problems and limitations, interpreting ancient symbol and belief is an even greater challenge. But it is nevertheless true that symbol and belief are materialized in ritual and other aspects of human life. As Miller observes, the more we feel the supernatural is beyond our comprehension, the more valuable its materialization.⁶⁴

Our primary source of information on meaning and belief from the Umm el-Marra mortuary complex derives from the materials left in the tombs. Pottery, the most abundant artifact category, could have contained foodstuffs and other materials intended to sustain the deceased in the afterlife, served as receptacles for gifts to underworld deities, or contained food consumed in feasts or other funerary ceremonies. Provisioning of the dead is implied in at least two cases in Tomb 4, where a cup was found on the chest of skeleton B and another next to the mouth of skeleton E. There is little reason as yet to suspect funerary feasting, except for the inclusion of a large cooking ware bowl in the

upper level of Tomb 4 that could be indicative of communal consumption.⁶⁵ But the faunal evidence shows no cut marks on the remains of the complete animals interred, making it unlikely that they were eaten, and the cut marks on bone segments appear to be from dismemberment, not from preparing cuts of meat for consumption. It seems most probable, then, that the foodstuffs in the tomb were intended to nourish the dead or serve as gifts to deities in the afterworld. In that case, there clearly was a belief in an afterlife and an idea that the dead or the underworld spirits needed to be provided with food and drink from the world of the living.

The interment of the dead with personal ornaments also indicates that such ornaments, and clothing as well, were needed or desirable in the afterlife. Those found on the body were presumably intended to be worn by the deceased in the afterlife, while those placed nearby may have been understood as part of the deceased's property, gifts provided by the living for the dead, or items intended to serve as gifts to underworld entities. Perhaps the costly ornaments were meant to serve partly as status markers in death, as they had in life. Given the differential treatment of the deceased at contemporaneous sites in the Middle Euphrates valley, it is likely that the social hierarchy of the living was understood to apply to the world of the dead.⁶⁶

It is also useful to consider what is *not* interred with the bodies. Clay anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, abundantly attested in domestic loci, are never found in the mortuary complex. Although we are still in the dark about the precise functions of these objects, they clearly were not understood to be of use for the dead.⁶⁷ Likewise rare are tools associated with craft production or food processing. No spindle whorls were found, for example, despite the importance of textile production in the west Syrian economy.

The only work-related objects consist of three miniature grinding tables (figure 7), a grinding stone, and two bronze chisels, all from Tomb 4. Although gender-related divisions of labor should not be assumed *a priori*, the discovery of the grinding tables and grinding stone near the female skeletons E and F may be significant, given the association of women with food-processing in contemporaneous sources. At Ebla, similar grinding tables recovered from Building P4 may have been used to process luxury cosmetics and were found together with bronze chisels. The latter point might suggest a functional association between the Umm el-Marra miniature tables and a small bronze chisel found in the small shaft in the Tomb 4 lower layer, although this is difficult to confirm. A miniature

61 Earlier tombs were disturbed and may have had evidence of layers of bodies destroyed, but it is unlikely that such evidence would be completely eradicated (Schwartz *et al.* 2006: 632, n. 121).

62 Biga 2007/2008.

63 On the variability of Early Bronze elite mortuary practices in the middle Euphrates, see Porter 2005 and Bolger 2008.

64 Miller 2005: 28. Mithen (1998) has argued that religion requires frequent embodiment in the physical and material world because of its inclusion of counterintuitive or irrational ideas. In order to think about concepts like a virgin birth or a deity composed of human and animal forms, humans require material representation and embodiment of those concepts.

65 Schwartz *et al.* 2006: 621, fig. 21: 17. On funerary feasting, see Hayden 2009.

66 Cooper 2006: 202-256; Bolger 2008.

67 Petty 2006.

bronze chisel was also recovered ca. 40 cm above the upper floor of Tomb 4.

In any case, the relative scarcity of work-related tools in the tombs implies that work was not anticipated to be a substantial part of a buried person's existence after death or that the deceased was expected to acquire tools for work in the afterlife.⁶⁸ Perhaps these elite people had lives of relative leisure and expected a similar death.

Apart from inclusions in the tomb, we may consider spatial patterns for reconstructing mortuary belief. Tomb doorways always face east, and adult bodies, when *in situ* as in Tombs 1 and 4, are laid out on an east-west axis, usually with the head facing west.⁶⁹ Even the entombed equids are usually oriented east-west, with their heads to the west.⁷⁰ The eastern doorway, facing the sunrise, may suggest the conceptualization of death as a form of rebirth, a belief also suggested by the fetal position of the bodies.⁷¹ Rebirth may also be implied by the placement of the babies in the top layer of Tomb 1 at the knees of the adult females, signifying departure from the womb.

Further insights about belief may be drawn from a diversity of sources. Although bioarchaeological analysis has yet to confirm it, the multiple interments in each tomb could suggest that the tomb occupants were related by kinship. If it proves to be the case, this pattern would attest to the belief that members of the same family or kin group belonged together in death, and perhaps in the afterlife as well.

I have argued above that the veneration of elite ancestors was an important part of the activities performed at the complex. If this is correct, the people involved would have entertained a belief in the continuing agency of the venerated individuals. Having been presented with offerings, the ancestors would be expected to perform a service for the living in return.

Finally, I have interpreted the presence of younger equids in the Type 1 installations as an indication of the practice of equid sacrifice. It is likely that these animals, used to draw the wheeled vehicles of the elite during their lifetimes, were expected to perform the same service in the afterlife, perhaps even supplying

transportation to the underworld. In such a case, a belief in the efficacy of retainer sacrifice is indicated, wherein the living could be killed in order to serve the dead in the afterlife.

5 Conclusions

Mortuary contexts can afford entrée into numerous aspects of the cognitive life of ancient people. As Grainger observes, funerary ritual is employed to reveal the meaning of life, making sense out of the 'nonsense' of death.⁷² Ancient perspectives on life, death and the supernatural are all approachable through mortuary evidence. But the challenges of extracting such information from archaeological data, usually incomplete and derived from a small sample, are not insignificant.

In the case of the Umm el-Marra tombs, we can study aspects of ritual performance involving place, timing, participants, treatment of the dead, and, sometimes, intentional desecration. Not discernible from the archaeological record is information on such issues as prayers or recitations enacted, whether there were particular times of the year when it was appropriate to inter the dead, how long the ceremonies lasted, and who attended the rituals. Similarly elusive are sensory effects like the wailing of mourners (perhaps including professional mourning women as attested at Ebla), the performance of music, screams of sacrificed animals, and the stench of dead bodies.⁷³ Certainly we are not able to reconstruct the stages of a funerary ceremony from beginning to end.

Religious concepts and beliefs observable in our data include the need to provision the dead with food and labor, the agency of ancestors, and death as regeneration. We can infer little or nothing about the conceptualization of supernatural entities. Such issues would be better understood if iconographic representation were available, one of the most effective means to study religious belief archaeologically.⁷⁴

Textual data from Ebla Palace G supply an important source of comparative material. The proximity of Ebla in both space and time to the contexts investigated at Umm el-Marra argues for the likelihood of cultural comparability between the two communities. At the same time, the ideas and practices referred to in the Ebla texts are not necessarily applicable to contexts outside of Ebla or even to all contexts within that community. Nor do text and material culture always have to agree. What contemporaneous texts provide is material for analogy and for constructing new and more nuanced hypotheses to test.

Despite the inherent problems, further study of symbols and practices involving the ancient dead is

68 It is possible that the weapons in the tombs were considered part of a warrior's toolkit.

69 Skeleton D in the top layer of Tomb 1 is an exception, with the head facing east. An east-west orientation of the body with the head facing west is also observable in other Early Bronze Syrian elite tombs with primary inhumations *in situ* at Bi'a Grabbau 6 Raum 2 (Strommenger – Kohlmeyer 1998) and in the Tell Ahmar hypogeum (Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: 110).

70 Installation D, a Type 2 feature, included equid skulls on the east (Schwartz 2007: 59, fig. 3: 8), but these belonged to animals added after the original two equids were placed in the grave with their heads to the west.

71 Bloch – Parry 1982. An alternative interpretation for the flexed position in mortuary interments is the consideration of death as a form of sleep (Brody 2008: 528).

72 Grainger 1998: 97.

73 Price 2008: 155.

74 Renfrew 1994.

well worth the attempt. It is not overly optimistic to expect that more sophisticated methodologies and theorizing, such as that which we can anticipate from the 'Symbole der Toten' program, will allow for greater insight as the task proceeds.

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