

The Regeneration of Life

Neolithic Structures of Symbolic Remembering and Forgetting

by Ian Kuijt

The social construction of identity and memory can be expressed through public ritual. The organization of mortuary practices, the repetitive use of imagery and figurines, and the long-term reuse of human skulls in the Near Eastern Neolithic illustrate how household ritual linked the living to the dead. Secondary mortuary practices and the plastering and painting of human skulls as ritual heirlooms served as a form of memorialization and erasure of identity within Communities. The deliberate focus on the face in both construction and decoration, was part of a shared system of ritual practices. Skull caching and modification transcended the past, present, and future, reiterating the expectation of future mortuary events while simultaneously recognizing continuity with the past through the crafting of memory. Collectively these patterns represent a complex web of interaction involving ritual knowledge, imagery, mortuary practices, and the creation of intergenerational memory and structures of authority.

To an imaginative person, an inherited possession . . . is not just an object, or an item, or an inventory; rather it becomes a point of entry into a common emotional ground of memory and belonging.

—Seamus Heaney, *The Sense of the Past*

Since their discovery in the early 1950s, the plastered and painted Neolithic skulls from Jericho and later examples recovered from other sites in the Near East such as Tell Aswad and Kfar HaHoresh have captivated the imagination and interest of the general public and archaeologists alike.¹ These exotic and highly visual items, as well as the striking anthropomorphic statues from 'Ain Ghazal, were crafted by highly skilled artisans. Their preservation in caches and the free-standing design of the statues suggest that they were part of complex ritual performances potentially reenacted multiple times. Researchers have explicitly or implicitly argued that these remarkable naturalistic representations from early agricultural villages of the Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (MPPNB) are related to complex mortuary rituals focused on the ancestors (e.g., Amiran 1962). Although not all researchers agree, these objects are often viewed as the material expression of Neolithic "ancestor cults" (e.g., Bienert 1991; Hayden 2004).

In many cultural contexts commemoration and memory, especially when associated with death, were linked to the lives of individuals. In both the European and the North Eastern

Neolithic there are examples of highly visible material monumentality associated with life and death that lead researchers to link landscape, location, and time and evoke models of ancestor worship and cult. Whitley (2002, 125), however, argues that researchers of prehistoric Britain are quick to link material phenomena to ancestor veneration and have largely failed to develop models of intergenerational memory that are contextualized, integrative, and consistent with archaeological data: "If we really want interpretations that respect the particularity of the evidence we are seeking to explain, we will have to treat ancestors with greater circumspection than archaeologists are wont to do at present." In using his critique as a grounding point for considering the MPPNB, I want to move the discussion beyond claiming that social memory and ancestor veneration existed to explore how archaeologists can develop sophisticated and internally consistent models.

This essay explores the possible interweaving of social memory, ritual practice, and time in Neolithic communities.

1. Although differing as to the exact timing and terminology, the Levantine Pre-Pottery Neolithic is generally subdivided into the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A period (ca. 11,700–10,500 BP) and Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (ca. 10,500–8,250 BP). The PPNB is traditionally subdivided into an Early, Middle, Late, and Final PPNB. Debate exists as to the existence and potential time span of an Early PPNB. I am assuming that the PPNA is followed by what can be termed the Middle (10,500–9,250 BP), Late (9,250–8,700 BP), and Final PPNB/PPNC (8,700–8,250 BP) periods. It is possible that there was a short transitional stage between the PPNA and MPPNB. It is not at all clear whether such a cultural-historical construct is supported by archaeological data or whether the available data are representative of regional variability. All dates presented in this paper are calibrated before present. Further details of chronology and timing of the Neolithic of the Near East are found in Kuijt and Goring-Morris (2002).

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Drawing upon the material and symbolic interconnections in Neolithic ritual, I argue that plastered skulls are only one element of interrelated social and materials practices focused on identity and the human body in early villages. This study draws upon other research (Dobres and Robb 2000; Hastorf 2003; Lock 1993; Robb 2007; Thomas 2000) to consider how the Neolithic plastered skulls and anthropomorphic statues provide insight into the ways in which individuals and communities structured social relations, identity, and memory.

My argument is that, rather than being a reflection of ancestor worship, Neolithic mortuary and ritual practices highlight integrated systems of memory and embodiment that initially focused on remembrance but through time facilitated the forgetting of the dead. Drawing upon several ethnographic works (e.g., Kan 1989; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Schiller 1997), I explore how social memory in Neolithic communities was linked to the construction and presentation of death. The definition and reiteration of the naturalized social order appear to have been linked to the manipulation and intergenerational use of bodily representation, accomplished through the physical and symbolic regeneration and recirculation of the dead with human skulls serving as ritual heirlooms. Exploring issues of remembrance and forgetting in early Neolithic villages, I focus on three tasks. First, I explore how the construction of identity and personhood in village life was structured through routinized practice in Neolithic communities. In brief, consideration of identity and different scales of memory help us understand how daily behaviors highlighted continuity and cohesion through the maintenance of certain cultural norms. Second, I draw upon a range of archaeological data sets to examine the symbolic and material means by which identity and memory were structured. Specifically, I argue that bodily regeneration, recirculation, and the integration of the living and the dead were important aspects of daily life in Neolithic communities. Third, I trace how these practices established a social tempo in these communities that connected past, present, and future.

Early Neolithic Villages: Background

The emergence of Near Eastern Pre-Pottery Neolithic villages involved profound changes in social organization, ritual, and economic systems. In the southern Levant, a largely self-contained area including what are now southern Syria and Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian Autonomous Authority, Jordan, and the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, the earliest villages appeared ca. 10,500 and persisted in this form until ca. 9,500 BP (Bar-Yosef and Meadows 1995; Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002; Rollefson 1998; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992). Often called the “Neolithic Revolution,” this period of transition was characterized by the aggregation of people into large villages, the domestication of plants and animals, and the reorganization of human interactions. Collectively, these fundamental changes transformed the economic, social, and technological landscape.

Field research at a number of sites, including Jericho, ‘Ain Ghazal, Yiftahel, Kfar HaHoresh, Ghwair I, Nahal Hemar, Munhata, Tell Aswad, Wadi Shu’eib, and Beidha, documents elaborate mortuary practices including skull removal and plastering, stable sedentary villages with well-made residential buildings, formal lithic technology, and domesticated plants and animals. While researchers are starting to develop an understanding of regional practices, they have only a preliminary grasp of the extent of variation in material practices within MPPNB settlements.

In the first agricultural communities in the Mediterranean zone of the southern Levant, villagers re-organized their physical and social landscapes, among other things building rectangular residential structures with white or red plaster floors and internal hearths and leaving little if any space between them. Trade networks expanded significantly, and obsidian was traded over long distances (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989*a, b*; Bar-Yosef and Meadows 1995; Bienert 1991; Byrd 1994; Cauvin 1994; Goring-Morris 2000; Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 1998; Hershkovitz and Gopher 1990; Rollefson 1997; Rollefson Simmons, and Kafafi et al 1992; Kuijt 1996, 2001; Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002). Over the past 20 years, archaeological research on these settlements has revealed a remarkable regional similarity in mortuary practices and, at the same time, a high degree of variation in those practices between settlements (Cornwall 1981; Goring-Morris 2000; Hershkovitz and Gopher 1990; Kuijt, 2000*b*, 2001; Kurth and Röhrer-Ertl 1981; Rollefson 1998; Rollefson Simmons, and Kafafi 1992; Rollefson Schmandt-Besserat, and Rose 1999; Verhoeven 2002*a*).

Data from Jericho, ‘Ain Ghazal, Beidha, Nahal Hemar, Yiftahel, and Kfar HaHoresh highlight a number of shared mortuary practices (see Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2000*b*, 2001; Rollefson 2000*a*; Verhoeven 2002*b*), including the use, caching, and discard of anthropomorphic statues and figurines, secondary mortuary practices, and skull removal and plastering. The use of clay to re-create human facial features (noses, eyes, chins, and mouths) is one of the more visible and intriguing aspects of these practices.

At the same time, there is subtle but observable variation in these practices in different settlements (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001; Goring-Morris 2005; Rollefson, Schmandt-Besserat, and Rose 1999) Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal (2001, 88) argue that there is significant intersite variation in the methods of skull modeling and that these methods reflect different technological concepts: “the specific details of the technologies employed reveal a marked degree of intra-site homogeneity and inter-site heterogeneity.” In brief, this pattern reflects the development of local, community-level traditions in the context of shared general practices and belief systems.

In this study I explore the possible links between general MPPNB mortuary practices, the burial of peoples’ bodies, and their materiality in the process of remembering and forgetting. A detailed study of the total range of material variation is

impossible at this time. Research at Tell Aswad (Stordeur 2003a, b), among other sites, will eventually make it possible to explore the interconnections between cycles of human life and death as expressed in the plastering of skulls and in the built environment. Other studies have explored the temporal and metaphorical connections between bodies and other material remains (notably Brück 2001, 2006; Robb 2007), illustrating the rich potential for such research. Preliminary considerations of related topics in the Near East (Boivin 2000) highlight the need for further consideration of these possible relationships. Little attention has been devoted to considering how objects and the rituals in which they may have been employed might inform us about Neolithic perceptions of ancestry, memory, and commemoration. For the most part researchers have focused on developing detailed descriptions of the materiality of ritual (e.g., Bienert 1991; Garfinkel 1994) or, more recently, the technology of the production of plastered skulls and anthropomorphic figurines (e.g., Bonogofsky 2002; Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001; Hershkovitz et al. 1995).

Material Topographies of Memory

Memory is linked to action, and some actions have physical manifestations that may or may not survive in the archaeological record. As physical actions, ritual and commemoration are linked to the production of shared memories and experiences in communities at different scales (see Casey 1987; Connerton 1989; Forty and Küchler 1999). Memory is dynamic and varies with the situation of people over time.

Memory is linked to meaning and experience. Experience, of course, can be spatially, temporally, and materially situated. Casey (1987, 224) notes, for example, that there are general patterns in the development of social memory and commemoration. He argues that the solemnization of commemoration involves four factors: repetitiveness in observance, reenactment of some former circumstance, social sanction of the ceremony, and formality. Repetitiveness in ritual is critical. Ceremonial observance is enacted on multiple occasions, often crosscuts generations, and is dynamic in that, while the internal structure often includes repetitive elements, their meanings may change.

The reenactment of some event or the representation of a mythical event in worldly time is almost always significantly removed from the event in time and space. The power of reenacted events is linked to individuals' legitimating them. What might otherwise be seen as disconnected words, actions, and traditions are given authority and meaning. Finally, formality provides the framework for the events. Casey (1987, 225) elegantly makes this point when he says, "If social sanction provides a reason for a given ceremony, formality furnishes its rhyme." The repetition of words, actions, and interactions makes the event coherent, understandable, and meaningful to participants. It is through this *mélange* that the past, present, and future dimensions of commemorative ritual are affirmed and made compatible with each other.

Only some ceremonial actions and meanings are materialized, and some of them are difficult to recognize (Verhoeven 2002b). Our understanding of the rationale for social sanctioning of ritual, for example, is largely circumstantial. Further, is very difficult to understand how past ritual actions and ceremony were organized. There is no question that both reiteration and the formal organization of ritual are manifested in the archaeological record, and in certain cases so were its process, tempo, and reiteration.

Commemoration and social memory center on direct remembrance and recollection, as well as on indirection, abstraction, and depersonalization (Bailey 2005). A number of researchers have explored the symbolic and communicative aspects of ritual (Bell 1993; Rappaport 1999; Tambiah 1979, 119) and some of its cognitive dimensions (Collidge and Wynn 2005) and addressed the material connections of these aspects in the archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean (e.g., Blake 1998; Chesson 1999, 2007; Renfrew 1985; Rollefson 2000a; Verhoeven 2002a, 2002b). In this study I follow Lukes's (1975, 291) definition of ritual as "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feelings which they hold to be of a special significance."

Memory and its materiality are generated through the actions of individuals and groups. Even highly formalized acts of commemoration are likely to change: it is, after all, through the act of remembering that memory is both crafted and maintained. Meaning and, by extension, memories are defined by the experiences of people (Ingold 2000; Hodder 1990). As Blake (1998, 68) puts it, "Memory and tradition alone do not preserve an object's identity; it is the ongoing incorporation of that object into routinized practice that generates meaning." While ritual is often conservative and resistant to change, change is to be expected in its meaning and practice, and, as a result, memory is transformed and modified through time. Events, pathways, and travels need not be exact replicas of past performances. Even when people are not directly linked to specific events, memory is transformed and expanded.

Ruth Van Dyke and Susan Alcock (2003, 3) ask an apparently simple but highly complex question: "All in all, it is clear that the creation and re-creation of social memory is an active and on-going process . . . yet how does the process work?" There are, of course, multiple answers to this critical question. Examining the development of short- and long-term memory, Baddeley (1990) and more recently Collidge and Wynn (2005) explore cognitive models of working memory. Moving beyond the scale of the individual to consider memory within societies, Connerton (1989) explores what he labels "embodied" and "inscribed" memory, the former including bodily rituals and behavior and the latter focusing on monuments and representation. Shifting this discussion toward the materiality of practice, Rowlands (1993) contrasts inscribed memory practices, which involve repetition and public access and are materialized through monumentally, with incorporated memory practices,

symbolic and at times exclusionary acts that are likely to leave limited material residues.

The critical question is how memory is created, maintained, and modified within and between households and across generations. To begin addressing this question, it is helpful to consider how meaning, experience, and memory are interconnected. Hodder (1990) notes that meaning and memory can be conceived of as either experiential or referential. Experiential meanings are those that are directly experienced by individuals, while referential meanings are those constructed in reference to people and events. Adapting this framework to issues of memory at different scales allows us to develop a framework for modeling patterns of Neolithic social memory and to situate this framework in a theoretical context that moves us beyond a simple and static reference to ancestors.

Memory is time-sensitive and dynamic, and the creation of memory has multiscalar aspects (fig. 1). Memory is created through the actions of people who intersect at different social scales, such as those of the individual, the household, and the community. These are, of course, ultimately interconnected and inseparable. Yet, from the standpoint of development and use, the genesis of memory is linked to the experiences and meanings that are created through the intersection of people at multiple levels. These short-term events and the interactions of people involved in them help shape the long-term intergenerational meanings and memories into a form of collective memory.

While on some levels memory is deeply personal and linked to the life histories of individuals, on other levels it is public and intergenerational. Over time memories change from experiential and personal to abstract and referential (Bradley 2003; Hastorf 2003; Meskell 2003; Vansina 1985; Williams 2003). Direct experiential memory, in which the individual has immediate contact with events and people, can become indirect and referential, highlighting social membership rather than direct biological lineage. After two or perhaps three generations, the memory of individuals becomes depersonalized and abstract. Rather than being conceptualized as known individuals, the dead are merged in an ancestral memory that is anonymous, homogenized, and collective. The social process for this transition, depending upon the cultural context, is complicated and probably not always observable in archaeological data.

Finally, remembering and forgetting are integrated and dialectic processes (Joyce 2003; Küchler 1999; Williams 2003). The process of forgetting the dead is linked to the decontextualization of the individual—the creation of a collective identity that is shared and experienced by others. There are clear practical reasons that the dead become depersonalized and forgotten in traditional societies. Among the living there is a deep personal and direct memory of the dead, creating a series of tangible links between personhood in life, death, and memorialization. At least initially, then, memory and commemoration are experiential—personal and direct. Over time, however,

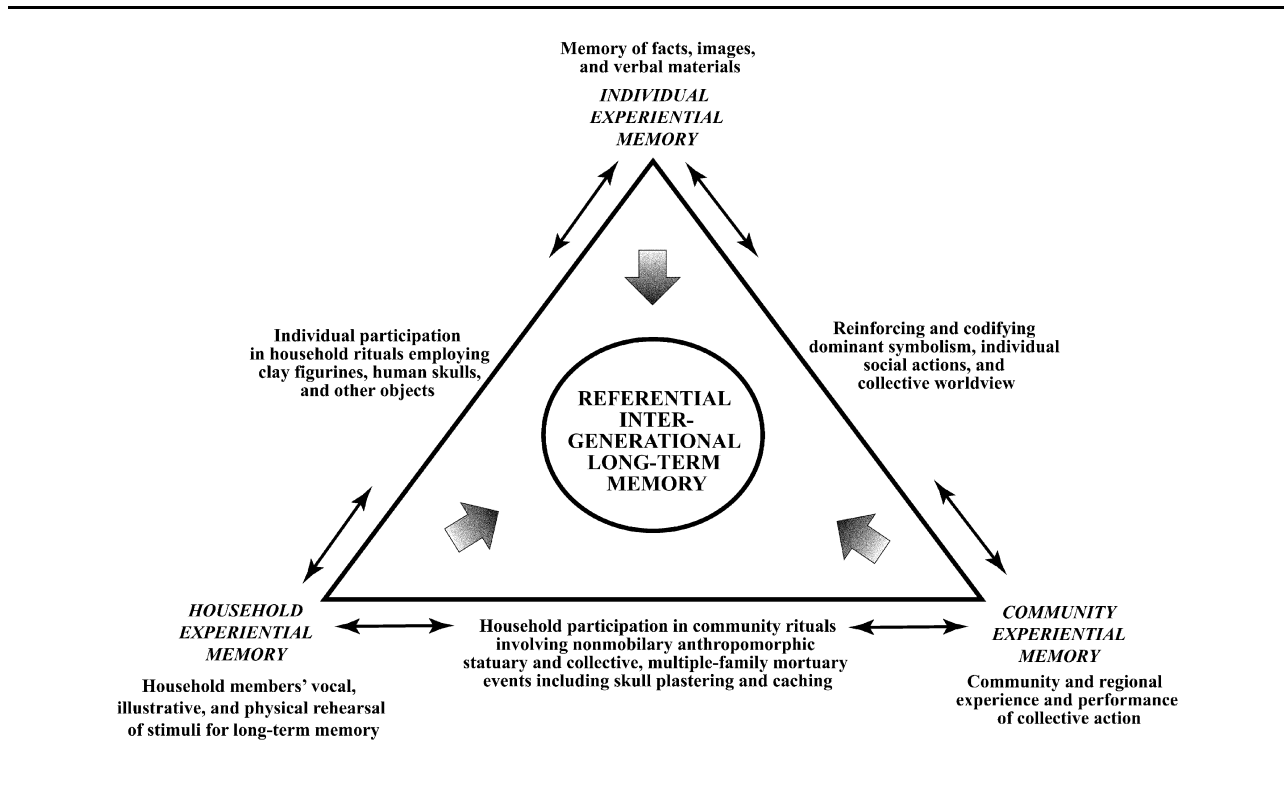


Figure 1. The creation of memory.

memory is based on reference to the deceased, and being deceased is characterized as being remote and anonymous.

Mediations of Remembrance: Secondary Burial, Commemoration and their Social Impact

A number of researchers have explored potential mechanisms for the ordering and transmission of social memory (see, e.g., Bradley 1998, 2003; Chapman, Kinnes, and Randsborg 1981; Chapman 2000; Chesson 2001; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Rowlands 1993; Vansina 1985). Social memory is, of course, intimately interconnected with oral tradition, images, and location and varies with scale. Ultimately, participation is the core of commemorative events (Casey 1987; Connerton 1989). The spatial context, organization, and imagery of mortuary practices are culturally defined: they cannot be understood without reference to a worldview that integrates place, time, space, and imagery in the production of meaning (Geertz 1973, 1980; Hertz 1960; Joyce 2003; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Snead and Preucel 1999; van Gennep 1960).

Primary mortuary practices center on the permanent burial of the dead after a relatively short period of time (often less

than a week). In contrast, secondary mortuary practice is the socially sanctioned movement of part or all of a deceased individual. From a material standpoint secondary mortuary practices involve the intentional removal of skeletal materials from one location to some other location, the addition of objects to a burial context, or the movement of the entire set of remains to another context. Primary and secondary mortuary practices are linked and often perceived by their performers as parts of a broader belief system. For example, secondary mortuary practices may involve the defleshing of the complete skeleton and the removal of the cranium. Secondary mortuary rituals are often part of high-profile public ceremonies and can therefore be viewed as spiritual and symbolic acts that have social, political, and personal meanings. Finally, multistage secondary mortuary practices are planned in advance, are intergenerational, involve multiple households, and require extraordinary community involvement (Downs 1956; Metcalf and Huntington 1991)(fig. 2).

Remembrance, regeneration, and forgetting are complementary in secondary mortuary practices as participants literally and symbolically dismember and memorialize people. Decapitation and the modification of skulls or their placement in a highly visible location also represent integrated acts of

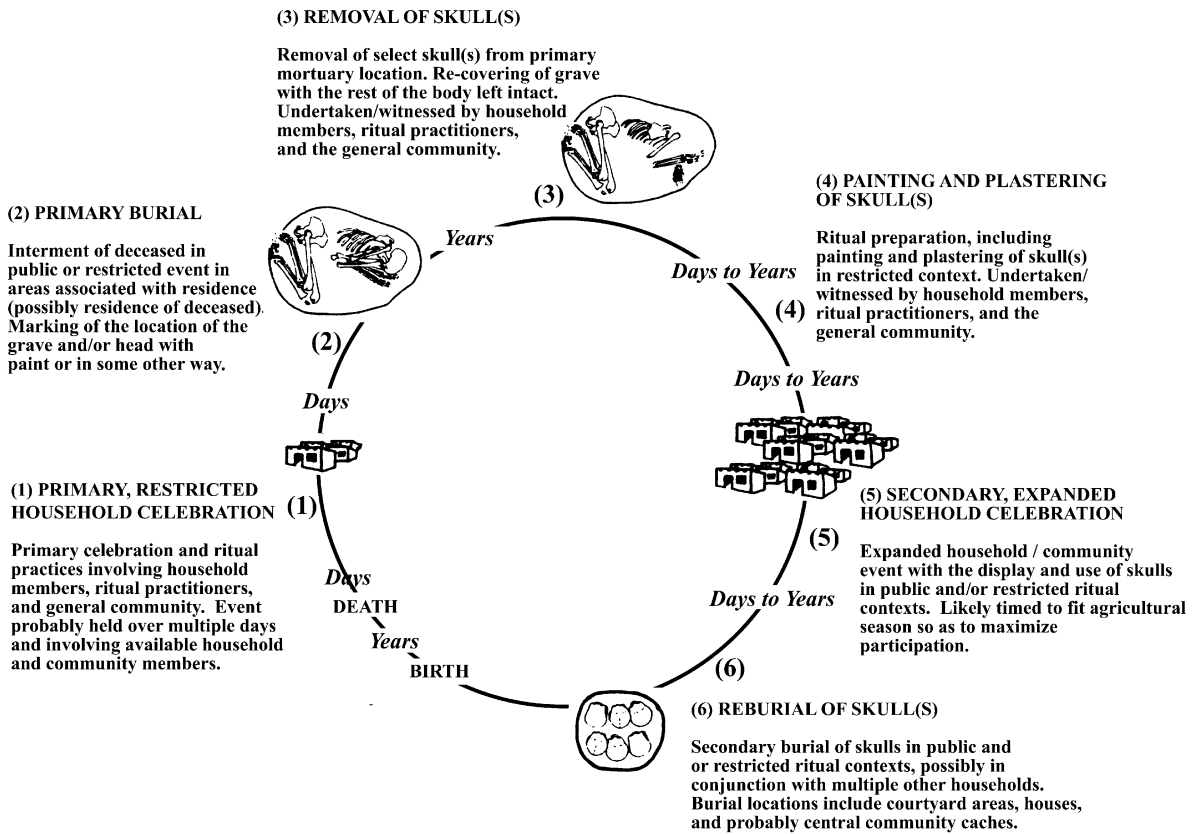


Figure 2. Ritual actions following a death in the MPPNB.

social memory: the reiteration of the naturalized order assists in both remembering and forgetting the dead (Battaglia 1990). Secondary mortuary practices facilitate a kind of perpetual rebirth and highlight that life is intergenerational and links past, present, and future. Although the dead are no longer present, they do not belong in the past: rather, they reside among the living but in another place. Fienup-Riordan (1994, 250) highlights both the cyclical nature of this view and the sense that the life of the person and the soul continues after biological death: among the Yupit "birth into the land of the dead was ultimately the source of continuing life."

Secondary mortuary practices are often viewed as enriching ties to ancestral lines, responsibility to the deceased, and beliefs about universal orders (see Crocker 1977; Hertz 1960; Lopatin 1960, 90–114; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). While they focus on specific individuals, they involve an element of communal ancestor worship. The articulation of a shared identity requires that the message be conventionalized and simplified to make it understandable to all (Fentress and Wickham 1992). This is achieved in part by reference to generalized ancestors and the development of highly standardized social rules. Importantly, secondary mortuary practices permit the scheduling of funeral events at a prearranged time that does not conflict with other tasks and is sometimes envisioned as a season of festivities (Hertz 1960; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). Finally, secondary mortuary practices may be organized in such a way as to facilitate participation in community events that crosscut kin, generation, and household lines (Downs 1956; Hertz 1960; Hudson 1966; Metcalf and Huntington 1991).

Neolithic Bodily Regeneration and Cycles of Remembrance

While some researchers (e.g., Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001) note that there were subtle, yet observable variations in MPPNB mortuary and ritual practices between settlements, other studies (e.g., Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989a; Cauvin 2000; Kuijt 2004; Verhoeven 2002a) show that similar regional practices, with many of the same material manifestations, are suggestive of shared cultural and ritual participation such as is seen in secondary mortuary practices and skull removal. Although skull removal existed in the Epipaleolithic (Belfer-Co-

hen 1991), it was only in the MPPNB that household and community ritual practices became visually and possibly metaphorically centered on acts of bodily regeneration. Skull removal, modification, and caching of skulls in groups became routine between ca. 10,500 and 9,500 cal. BP (Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002). MPPNB mortuary practices exhibit continuity with earlier practices as well as displaying diversification and increase in complexity (see Banning 1998; Bar-Yosef 1981; Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989a; Cauvin 1994; Goring-Morris 2000, 2005; Kuijt 1995, 1996, 2000a; Rollefson 2000a; Rollefson, Simmons, and Rafafi 1992). One important expression of continuity is the similar treatment of individuals at burial (table 1). As in the PPNA period, the predominant practices involved burying both male and female adults and children in single graves with no or few grave goods. Graves were located beneath the floors of residential structures and in a number of extramural locations. Bodies were usually placed on their sides in simple graves excavated from earlier deposits. Infants were usually buried as individuals, and while occasionally buried in intramural areas they and adult burials are also found in fill and courtyard contexts. Crania were also removed from the skeletons of infants and youths (Cornwall 1981; Kirkbride 1968; Moore 1985; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992; Strouhal 2003). Evidence from MPPNB 'Ain Ghazal, Kfar HaHoresh, and Jericho highlights variation in these practices, infant remains sometimes being associated with adults with intact skulls. It is not clear whether these associations were intentional or a by-product of the repeated burial of individuals over time or perhaps of death during childbirth. At 'Ain Ghazal and Jericho, infants were clearly interred in a ritual context, such as in subfloor pit features and as dedicatory offerings within the foundations or walls of a building (Cornwall 1981; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992). Although in need of further study, some of these caches appear to have been mnemonically organized (see Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2000b). At 'Ain Ghazal and the location of a cranium beneath the floor was often marked with red paint on the white plaster floor. After a time household members returned to the grave, opened the area around the cranium, removed the cranium, and then re-covered the grave (Kuijt 2001)(fig. 3).

In secondary mortuary practices identity and personhood become mutable and at the same time linked to life histories (Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Reina 1962). The timing of

Table 1. Mortuary Practices and Their Spatial Contexts in the Levantine Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B Period

Mortuary Practice	Spatial Location
Adults	
Primary Burial, intact	Courtyard and midden areas outside of structures, under plaster floors in residential structures
Primary burial, skull removed	Courtyard and midden areas outside of structures, under plaster floors in residential structures
Secondary burial: Skull caches	Pits in courtyard and midden areas, placed in wall niches inside of residential structures
Secondary burial	Pits in courtyard and midden areas
Children	
Primary burial, intact	Under house walls, in post-sockets for interior supports, and in exterior midden and courtyard areas
Secondary burial: Skull caches	Pits in courtyard and midden areas, wall niches inside of residential structures

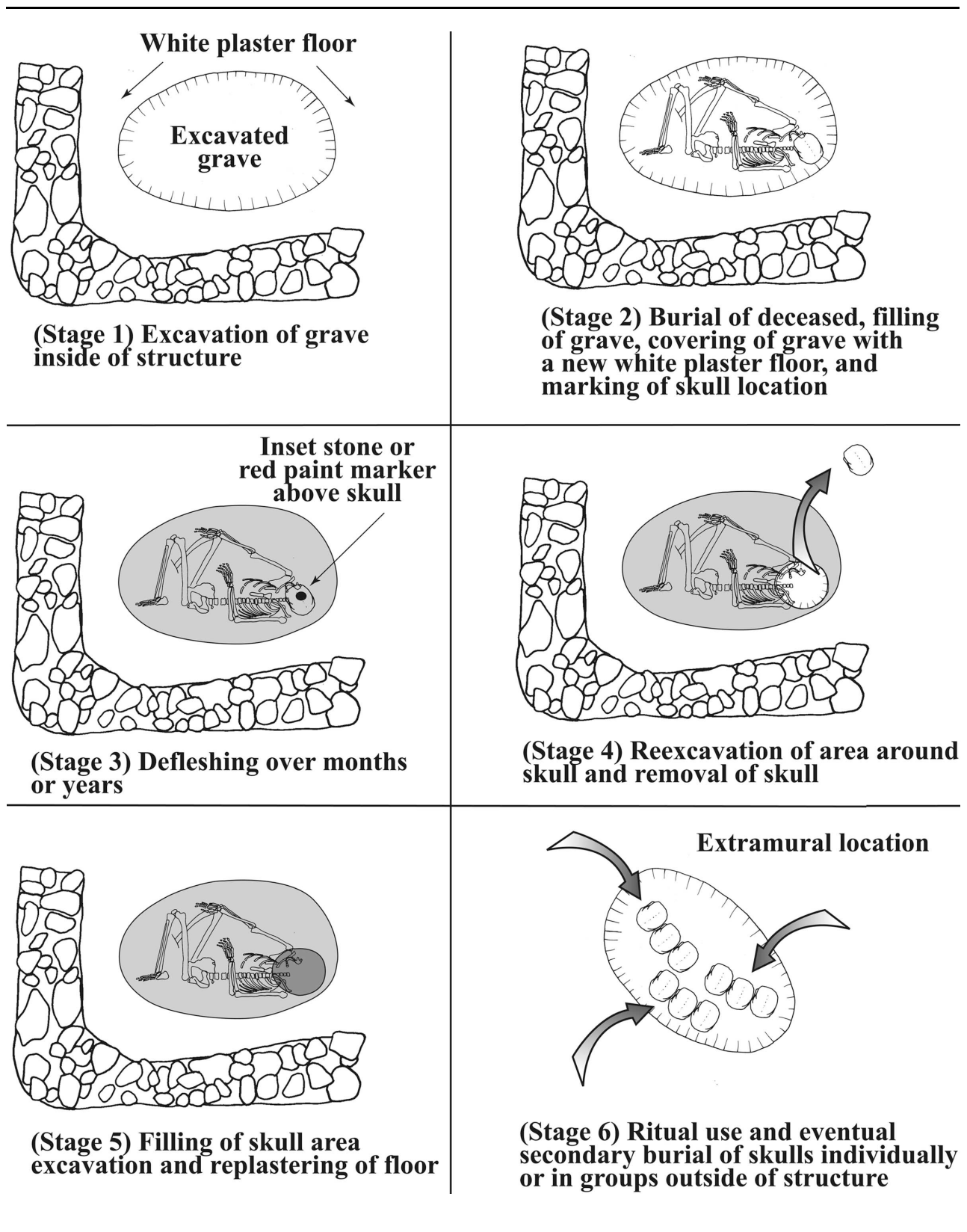


Figure 3. Sequence of mortuary practices at 'Ain Ghazal.

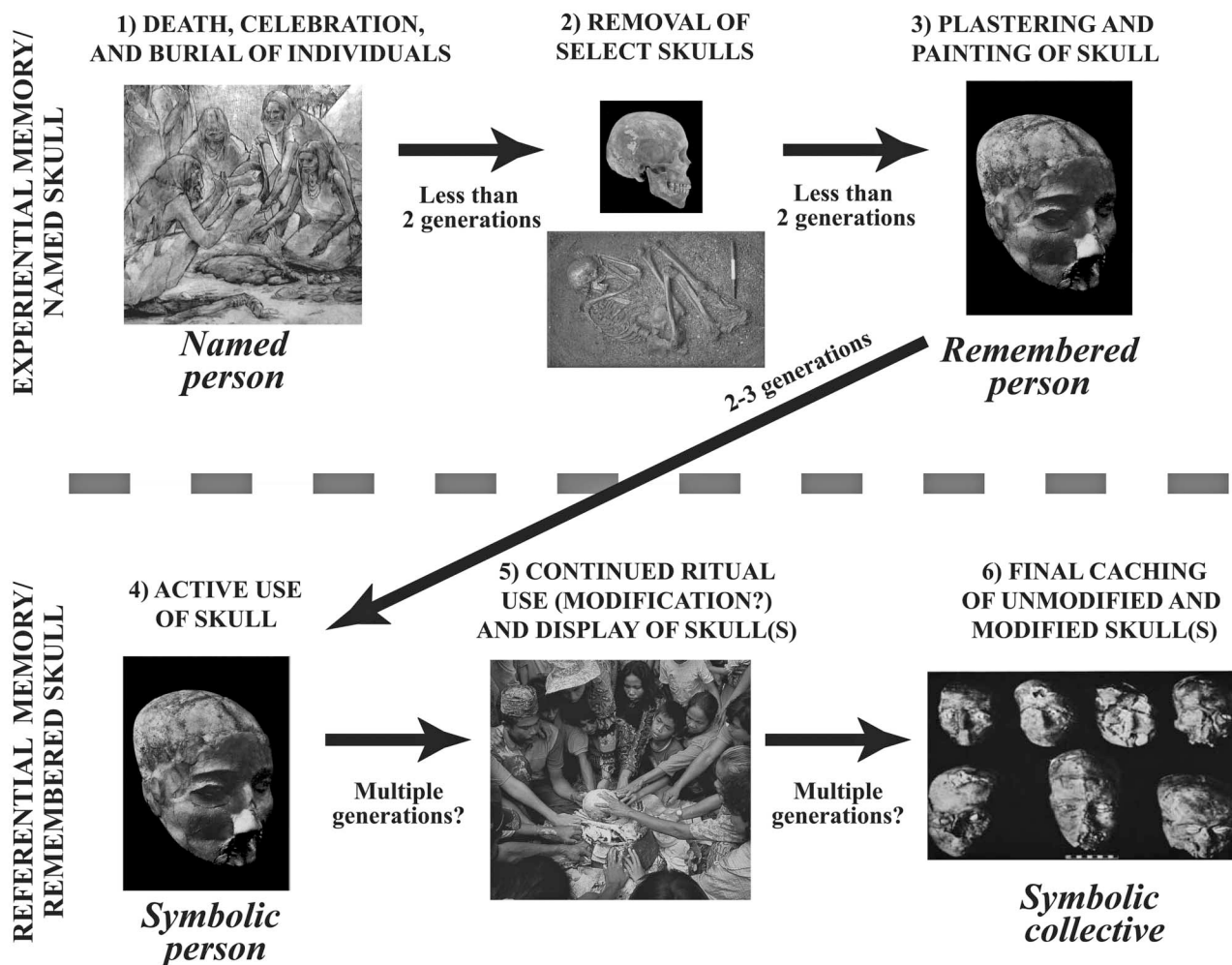


Figure 4. The timing of MPPNB mortuary practices.

MPPNB mortuary practices help structure the construction of memory and identity (fig. 4). When first removed from their bodies, the skulls of the deceased would have been associated with specific individuals and households. With the passing of generations, the nature of these memories and relations would have changed from experiential and personal to abstract and referential. It is through this process of the intergenerational manipulation of the body that identity and memory were transformed from named person to symbolic collective.

Similarly, the original conceptualization of Neolithic plastered skulls was likely linked to specific individuals, such as elder leaders or other people of importance. Given that fewer than 5% of the people had their skulls plastered, it can be assumed that only particular deceased individuals were selected, probably for their importance and skills. It is likely that these plastered skulls were identified with the deceased, perhaps even taking their names. The living organized or

witnessed the construction of these plastered skulls. A deep personal and direct memory of the deceased would have created tangible links between life and death.

Embodiment, Regeneration, and the Face

Perhaps the most striking example of how Neolithic people regenerated life through the portrayal of the body is seen in the rebuilding of facial features on plastered skulls. In the MPPNB representational practices were focused on the face. There is, however, local variation in the selection of which facial attributes to illustrate, how these were expressed, what technology was used for plastering different parts of the skull (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001).

In its most basic form, MPPNB skull plastering was an act of reconstructing the body—the use of materials to reconstruct facial features of the living of the physical structure of the dead (see Bonogofsky 2002; Goren, Goring-Morris, and

Segal 2001; Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998; Kuijt and Chesson 2004; Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002; Rollefson, Schmandt-Besserat, and Rose 1999; Verhoeven 2002a. At Jericho, 'Ain Ghazal, and Tell Aswad, for example, MPPNB people reconstructed natural facial features out of clay, with eyes, ears, mouth, and perhaps painting of other facial features (fig. 5). Whereas in most settlements eyes were portrayed as closed and made of clay, at Jericho shell was used to create the eyes.

Verhoeven (2002a) argues that symbolism such as the representation of the human face was one of the structuring principles of PPNB rituals and ideology. I would expand on this point, arguing that the shared MPPNB focus on the face and head was linked to community ideas of memory and embodiment. With the founding of relatively large agricultural villages, mortuary practices and household ritual changed dramatically. First, we see the expansion of secondary mortuary practices with the reuse of skulls, including the new use of elaborate specialized practices to reconstruct facial attributes on individual human skulls. Second, we witness the appearance of naturalistic plaster skulls, such as at Jericho, and rare stone masks that could have covered a face. Third, in contrast to the PPNA figurines, we see the creation and use of half-size human statues and busts made of wood, reeds, and plaster. Fourth, we see the appearance of small seated figurines of stone and clay (Rollefson 2000b; Kuijt and Chesson 2004). Finally, there are examples of the construction of small painted heads on the ends of animal bones. While it is difficult to address through archaeological data, that the deliberate focus on the face, the removal of the heads of small figurines, and the secondary removal of skulls from human skeletons were parts of a shared system of ritual practices.

Regeneration of Life from Plaster

Reconstructing the life histories of plastered skulls aids us in understanding how meaning, identity, and memory were generated with the embodiment of human facial features and the ritual use and eventual burial of these objects. People in relatively small MPPNB communities would have known each other, were likely to be biologically and economically interconnected, and were aware of the physical appearance of living and recently deceased individuals. Thus, at this point memory was direct and personal. With the passing of time, memory of and about the deceased, as connected with individual plastered skulls, would have become indirect and referential.

As is noted elsewhere (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998; Goren, Goring-Morris and Segal 2001), community artisans (for lack of a better word) developed or adopted different techniques and included different facial attributes (table 2). For example, Jericho is the only settlement whose plastered skulls have open eyes made with seashells. Other MPPNB settlements, such as Beisamoun, portrayed individuals with closed eyes shaped in clay, creating the appearance of someone sleeping, or with an open eye modeled in plaster (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998). It is also possible that only

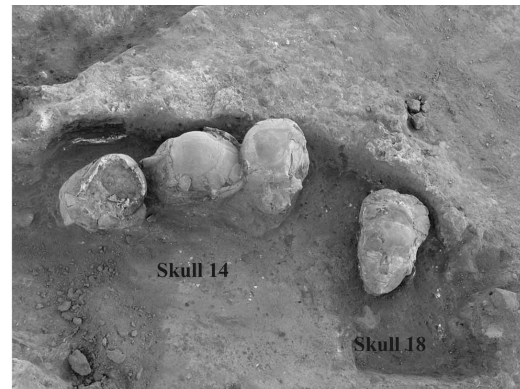


Figure 5. *Top*, four cached plastered skulls, Tell Aswad. Excavations have already removed the associated skeletons. Skull 18 has been postdepositionally crushed and appears abnormally elongated in this view. *Center*, frontal view of skull 18. Typical of the skulls from Tell Aswad, its orbits are filled with plaster and the eyes are represented as closed, nose, ears, and chin are present, and the mandible is plastered and attached. *Bottom*, oblique view of skull 14. The eyes are closed, there is a prominent nose, and the plaster extends to the eyebrows and around to shape an ear.

Table 2. Variation in Molded Plaster Skulls by MPPNB settlement

Settlement	Mandible	Eye Treatment	Ears	Painting	Deformation
Tell Aswad	Present	Plaster, closed	Present	Yes	Unclear
Beisamoun	Present	Plaster, closed	Present	Unknown	Unknown
Ramad	Present	Plaster, open and closed	Present/unclear?	Unknown	Unknown
Jericho	Both (11/12 absent)	Shell, open	Present and absent	Yes	Present
Kfar HaHoresh	Absent	Plaster, closed	Absent	Yes	Unknown
'Ain Ghazal	Absent	Plaster, open and closed	Absent	Yes	Unknown

Sources: Arensburg and Hershkovitz (1989), Griffin et al. (1998), Goren et al. (2001), Hershkovitz et al. (1995), Stordeur (2003a, b)

people at certain sites employed cinnabar and ochre for pigmentation (see Goren, Goring-Morris and Segal 2001). Thus, MPPNB skull plastering should be conceived of as a shared regional system of embodiment with variation in practice based on particular local histories (fig. 6).

The Idealized Face: Life from Clay

Whether the plastered skulls represented historical individuals or an anonymous ancestral group has been discussed by a number of researchers (see Amiran 1962; Arensburg and Hershkovitz 1989; Bienert et al 2004; Bonogofsky 2002; Ferembach and Lechevallier 1973; Goren, Goring-Morris and Segal 2001; Goring-Morris 2000; Hershkovitz et al. 1995). While design differences exist between the plastered skulls of the MPPNB, these differences appear to be related less to the physical characteristics of the deceased individuals than to the skills, technological knowledge, and preferences of the people of particular villages and communities (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001).

Several lines of evidence suggest that MPPNB plastered skulls were not accurate representations of known people but stereotyped abstractions. First, at some sites, such as Jericho, Kfar HaHoresh, and 'Ain Ghazal, the face was remodeled on the skull without the mandible. Second, in the case of Tell Aswad skull 14 (Stordeur 2003a), the plastered version had facial features (a nose covering the mouth) that could not have occurred in life. Third, there is variation from one community to another in the presence or absence of anatomical attributes (such as ears). Fourth, the skulls exhibit a smaller range of variation in facial phenotypes than existed in living populations. Although there were differences in the plastered skulls, there were also clear, shared elements in which features were portrayed and how they were represented. The skulls therefore seem to reflect a system of idealized representation rather than an attempt to represent historical people.

At some sites the representation of the face (eyes, nose, mouth, chin) in plaster was created or only part of the original skull. At Jericho, Kfar HaHoresh, and 'Ain Ghazal, with one exception, the molded plaster faces were made on the skull *without* the mandible. Detailed analysis of the two Kfar HaHoresh plastered skulls (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001) reveals that they were very similar in design—full facial reconstructions created on the skull only, with closed mouth

and eyes made of clay, resulting in a broad, squat face. While no completely preserved plastered skulls have been found at 'Ain Ghazal, excavations have recovered the remains of three of them (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998). Parts of other poorly preserved plastered skulls have also been identified, but these are fragmentary. Past occupants of this village removed the plaster adhering to the front of the skulls and then buried them together in a cache. The total absence of bones illustrates that this was intentional and provides insight into the process of production. As at Kfar HaHoresh, the frontal plaster sections from 'Ain Ghazal have closed eyes and full faces made on the skull only.

Excavations at Jericho recovered 12 plastered skulls. Of these, all but one (Jericho D112) had seashells for eyes and complete faces. Except for their shell eyes, they are similar to those found at Kfar HaHoresh and 'Ain Ghazal. Of the 7 plastered skulls found in the Jericho phase-DI.xlii level, only 1 had a mandible. The makers of these skulls were not, therefore, concerned about accuracy or replicating the facial features of the deceased so much as about the representation of certain facial features as opposed to others. In this way a new face was being created using only part of the skeleton. In some cases this required the removal of the dentition (Bonogofsky 2002; Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001). Maintaining the naturalistic features of the face with modeled plaster required the compression of facial features into a much smaller area (figs. 7 and 8). The new plaster mouth, nose, and eyes were not in their correct anatomical positions, and the plaster chin was at the bottom of the maxilla. Thus, the people who decorated these skulls stylized the face and shifted the visual center upward.

How are we to explain the presence of D112, with its complete plastered skull, in this group? First, there is some evidence that approaches to skull plastering varied between communities. With the exception of the one skull from Jericho, the northern communities plastered the entire skull and mandible while the southern ones plastered only the skull. While it is possible that this pattern is related to the limited amount of excavation, it is consistent with regional differences in practice and design. If it is supported by further research, it may reflect increased connections between neighboring community members, the separation of ritual elites, and shifting household membership. Depending upon how quickly de-

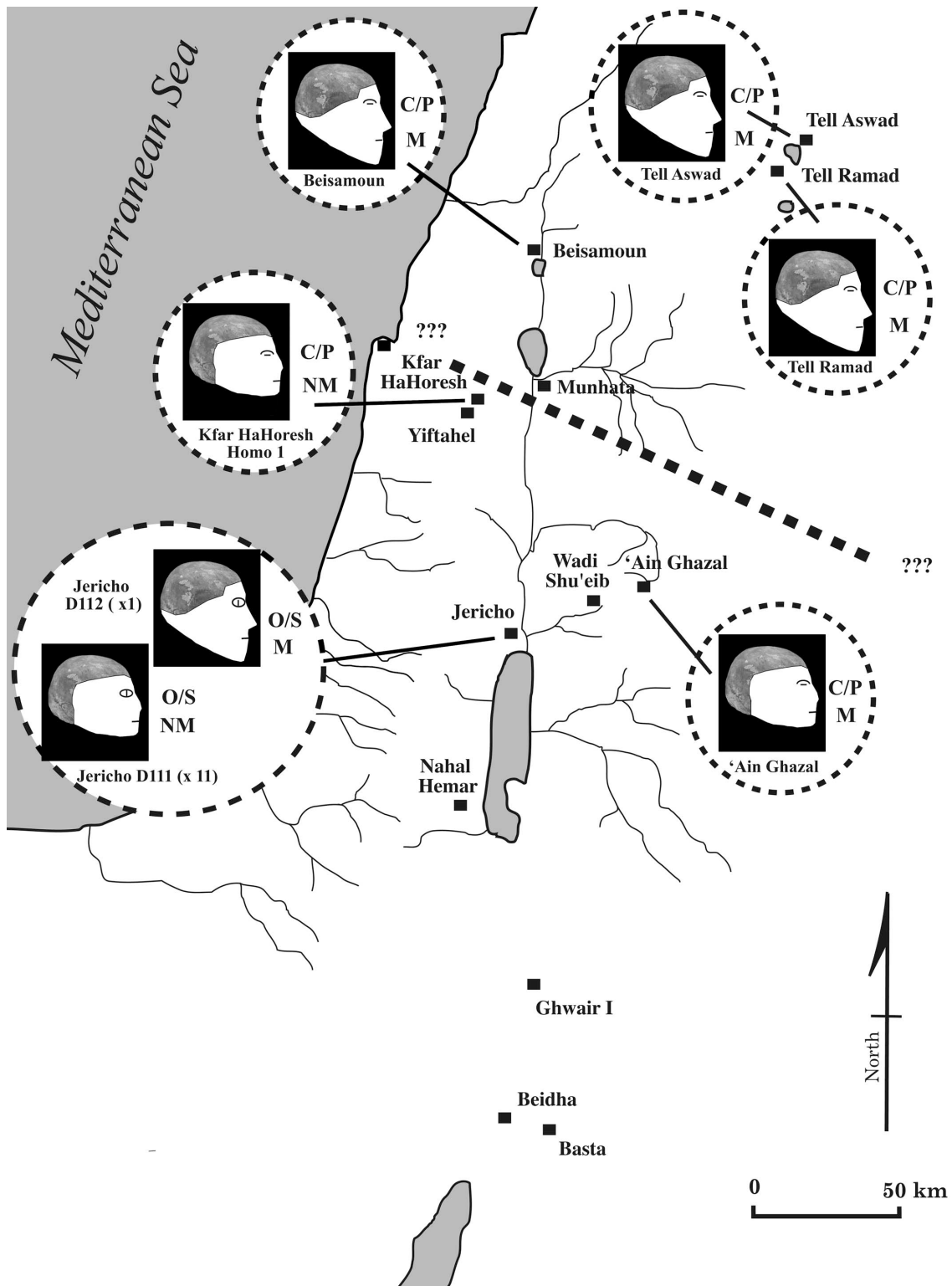


Figure 6. Variation among settlements in mortuary practices. C/P, closed/plaster eyes; O/S, open/seashell eyes; M, plastered mandible; NM, no mandible.

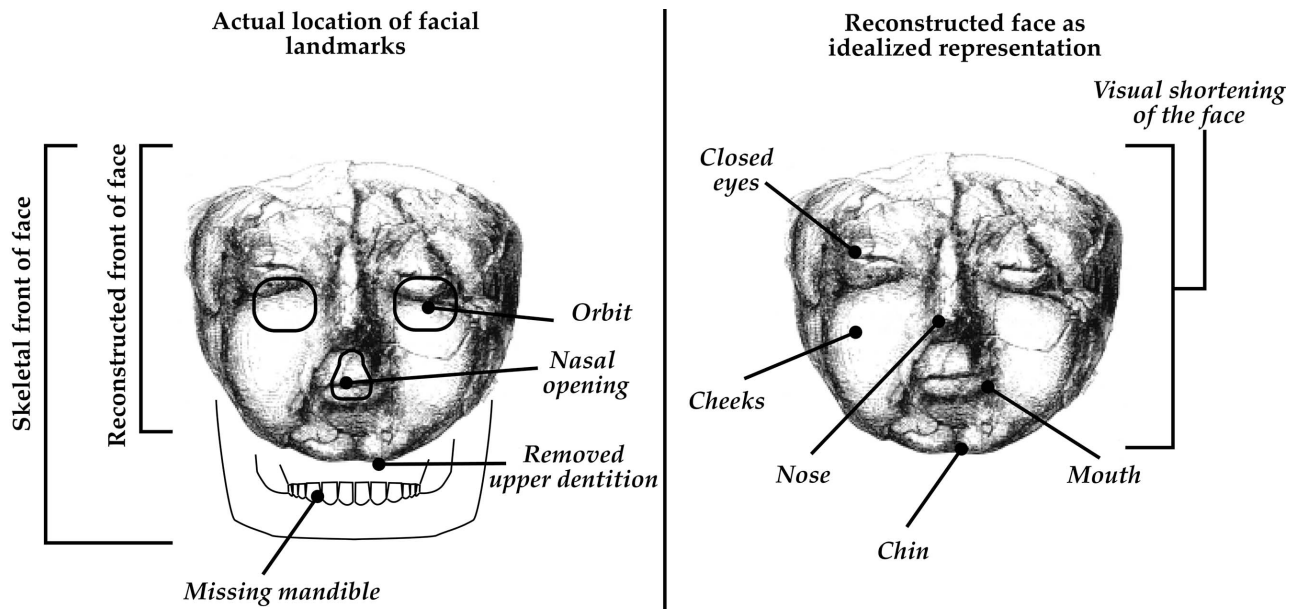


Figure 7. Frontal view of MPPNB skull remodeling, Homo 1 from Kfar HaHoreh (based on Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001, fig. 4).

fleshing would have occurred, these patterns may also reflect different tempos of recirculation of skulls and secondary mortuary practices.

Stone Masks and Anthropomorphic Stick Figures

While quite rare, stone face masks and small painted heads on the ends of bones provide a further example of the focus on the face (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988; Cauvin 2000; Kuijt and Chesson 2004). The Nahal Hemar stone mask was painted, and along with the one in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem (from an unknown site) and another uncovered at Basta (Nissen et al. 1992) it has clearly formed mouth, eyes, and nose and a series of drilled holes around the edge. These holes were likely used for attaching feathers, textiles, and other materials to the back of the mask, perhaps like a hood covering the head, or, alternatively, for attaching the mask to the head of the individual who was wearing it. It is entirely possible, therefore, that these masks were designed for repeated use in performance.

Excavations at Nahal Hemar (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988) have recovered a number of human skulls with braided decoration on the back, the remains of a single stone mask, and several small painted heads constructed in plaster on the ends of bones. These stick figures have small eyes, a mouth, ears, and hair. While unique to Nahal Hemar, they provide a naturalistic representation of the human face on an object that is portable, small, and highly visual. It appears that they did not represent specific known individuals.

Anthropomorphic Statues

One of the most visible examples of the shift in representational systems between the PPNA and the MPPNB is the appearance of large anthropomorphic statues (Rollefson 2000b; Kuijt and Chesson 2004; Schmandt-Besserat 1998a). As with the plastered skulls, these statues were produced with close attention to the face. One of the many exciting results of the excavation at 'Ain Ghazal has been the recovery from two pit features of multiple plastered human statues with highly detailed naturalistic painting of the faces and heads

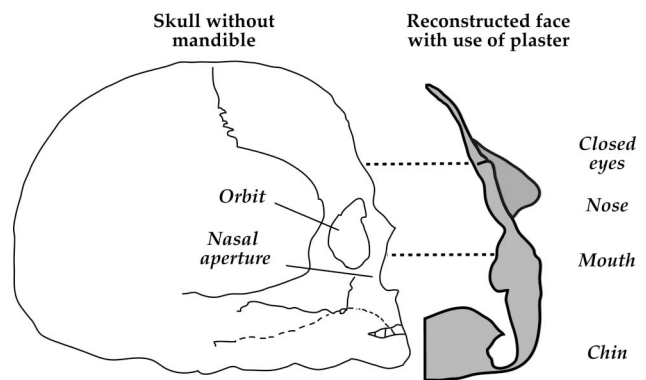


Figure 8. Cross section through the center of the face for MPPNB skull from 'Ain Ghazal, showing movement of the eyes, nose, and mouth upward (based on Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998, fig. 3h).

(Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998; Rollefson 1986; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992; Schmandt-Besserat 1998a). Most of these statues are half-size representations of the human body or busts. The large human replicas have clearly formed legs and arms, although in some cases they are bulky and lacking in details such as toes and fingers. Busts were usually painted to draw attention to the elements of the face, even employing bitumen for the eyes, a practice also seen with plastered skulls such as at Beisamoun (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998). In the statue cache from Sq 3282, 11 statues/busts were recovered, 4 in the lower layers and 7 in the upper, from a pit in the floor of an abandoned house. Although the excavations of the MPPNB deposits at 'Ain Ghazal have not involved extensive horizontal exposure, Rollefson (1986) argues that these caches were from extramural locations. While poorly preserved and from an unclear context, Garstang's (Garstang, Dropp, and Crowfoot 1935) excavations at Jericho also recovered anthropomorphic statues made of plaster in four statue caches, two with 3 statues each and two with single statues (Garfinkel 1994, 164). As at 'Ain Ghazal, all of the caches from Jericho seem to come from pit contexts. Study of the methods of construction by Tubb and Grissom (1995) indicates that building them would have required considerable time.

Regeneration, Memory, and the Face

One possible explanation for the focus on the face is that community members were employing material culture to create and reiterate concepts of identity and personhood. The construction of the statues and the plastered skulls and their incorporation into the social and ritual lives of people served to transmit and reinforce meanings through time. The number and relatively large size of these objects highlight the importance of bodily representation in the worlds in which they were made and may be linked to shifts in the way the body, the past, and social relations were identified in early agricultural communities (see Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992; Voigt 2000).

Memory, Reiteration, and the Bodily Circulation of Skeletal Elements

One of the interesting aspects of ritual in early Neolithic agricultural communities was the circulation of skeletal elements. As noted by Thomas (2000, 662), this circulation can be viewed as a flow or pathway. Neolithic ritual practices appear to have focused on the body as a signifier of social relations and involved the recirculation of these objects through multiple events (Garfinkel 1994; Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998). This included the removal and reuse of human skulls, the plastering, replastering, and painting of skulls, the manufacture and reuse of stone masks designed to fit over skulls, and the development, manufacture, and reuse of large anthropomorphic statuary (see Cauvin 1994; Garfinkel 1994;

Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2000b; Rollefson 1997, 2000b). Several settlements provide evidence of the circulation of objects and skulls of the deceased through multiple stages (Kuijt 2001). These practices, moreover, were materially expanded by the use, organization, and recirculation of objects with specific imagery (see Verhoeven 2002b).

Ethnographic studies indicate that heirlooms are material symbols with which individuals and groups actively construct and negotiate identities, histories, and memories (Kan 1989; Weiner 1992). Several writers (Joyce 2003; Lillios 1999; Thomas 2000) have argued that heirlooms are integrally associated with social reproduction, skulls for example, being a concentration of social power and a reservoir of personal skills (see also Craig 1990 and Urcid 1994). Joyce (2000) argues that heirlooms can exist as a form of wealth and a means by which identities are defined and shaped. Another important dimension of heirlooms is that they can be used to reinforce the existing social order through the construction of collective memory.

Recirculation, Heirlooms, and Memory

Memory is often rooted in the material world, reflected in the actions of people, and connected to the social practices of community members. Heirlooms serve as a means by which memory and history are developed, maintained and redefined by families, households, and communities (Joyce 2003; Lillios 1999; Schiffer 1976; Thomas 2000; Weiner 1985, 1992). They are, moreover, portable objects that can be inherited by individuals or groups with the intent of keeping them in circulation for a number of generations. Manufactured from durable or semidurable materials, they are, above all else, emblems of ancestry and are often worn, displayed, or used in public events and rituals.

Heirlooms can also be used to manipulate and transform genealogy and the construction of social history. Items become heirlooms after acquired individual property is inherited by others or the value of a commodity is redefined. Just as acquired property can become communal and focused on multiple generations, heirlooms can become commodities that are traded and exchanged. While heirlooms may start out as being linked to the identity of particular individuals or households, their meaning is likely to change, become depersonalized, and center on the collective.

Life History and the Circulation of Plastered Skulls and Figurines

Neolithic secondary mortuary practices are a form of bodily recirculation. There are at least two dimensions of the physical circulation of objects: reuse of and modification. In the recirculation of objects in ritual practice, the power of the performance comes from the reenacting of events or stories. Unmodified and plastered skulls were only one of several material means of telling stories. While plastered skulls may

have served as stationary ritual relies, it is also possible that they were passed around during performances, displayed, and actively reused. There is strong evidence for the reuse of human skulls and plastered skulls in ritual events (Garfinkel 1994; Goring-Morris 2005; Stordeur 2003*b*). Reflecting on the differential wear on the plastered skulls of Kfar HaHoresh cache L1304, Goring-Morris (2005, 96) says, "At least one was plastered, and it appeared to have symbolically 'died' when the outer plaster layer began to deteriorate, at which time it was ritually reburied a second time." Although the specific use-life remains elusive, it is reasonable to assume that ritual objects would have been displayed, used, and recirculated within various village social networks.

The deposition of skulls and statues hints at the coexistence of integrative and exclusionary rituals. Given that mortuary practices were generally shared across communities, it is clear that at least some component would have intersected with people beyond the individual household. Ethnographic studies (e.g., Metcalf and Huntington 1991) illustrate that secondary mortuary practices may be linked to larger groups and staged multiple times. The large anthropomorphic statuery recovered from 'Ain Ghazal fit with this argument. These almost meter-high statues were designed to be placed in an upright position on large stakes (Rollefson 2000*b*) and were probably displayed somewhere before they were disposed of. They may have been carried from community to community as part of seasonal festivities. The location of caches, such as the one at Nahal Hemar suggests, so however, that the use and storage of these skulls and statues was part of exclusionary rituals. Most likely village life included both public and exclusionary rituals.

Community members may have repeatedly modified certain objects, and if so these objects should be viewed as dynamic pathways of bodily circulation and material means by which meaning was shaped and reiterated. The unique anthropomorphic figurines from Nahal Hemar (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988) provide a clear example of the construction, modification, and eventual disposal of objects by MPPNB people. The anthropomorphic sticks recovered there were constructed by coating the end of a bone with white lime plaster, asphalt, ochre, and copper. Analysis by Bar-Yosef and Alon (1988, 21-23), reveals that while some parts of the figurines were constructed all at once, some colored layers were added later. Discussing figurine 2, they say (p. 22), "A major change was effected when most of the face was covered over with asphalt and again repainted in red. White plaster was reapplied to the bearded area of the face." Similar modifications occurred on all of the figurines (p. 23, emphasis added): "The repainting of figurines is viewed as evidence for sequential modification, either as part of isolated ritual events or as a representation of the biological cycle."

A further example of modification of objects is the construction of plastered skulls. The Jericho plastered skulls were manufactured, modified several times, and then deliberately taken out of circulation by burial. Consideration of Jericho

skull D 114 provides insight into this process. After the skull was defleshed, a series of evenly spaced lines was painted over the top of the skull from ear to ear then the skull was covered with clay, and later it was buried. The painting and plastering events were clearly distinct physical acts. Except at Tell Ramad, where vertebrae were plastered as part of the skull, possibly for standing it up, plastered skulls do not include other skeletal elements. After removing the skull from the grave, artisans probably cleaned it and then applied multiple layers of plaster and paint of different chemical and sedimentological characteristics (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001; Hershkovitz et al. 1995). Different types of materials were used to fill up the nasal aperture, build up the cheeks, and shape the features of the face. Many of these layers were chemically different and appear to have been specifically manufactured to facilitate some construction stage in the plastering (Gorens, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001). Some of the outer layers may have been applied for repair or rejuvenation of the skull.

Tempos of Memory and the Embodiment of Identity

The various data sets considered here suggest that Neolithic tempos of social action were defined by the recycling of mythically activated objects such as heirlooms, including human skulls, masks, and figurines. MPPNB mortuary practices reflect the connections between life and death and the physical action of moving human remains through the necessary stages of mortuary rituals. Thus, the creation of social memory was probably linked to specific spatial and temporal locations within communities, locations that were recorded, maintained, and, in all likelihood, identified as being linked to known individuals. Given that these processes would have taken several years, skull removal should be viewed as a delayed act that simultaneously linked people to their past and projected them into the future. Unlike the earthen animal figurines which could have been beheaded soon after their production, human bodies were decapitated after some delay, perhaps across generations.

The use of heirlooms is often perceived as facilitating the transcendence of time (Joyce 2000; Lillios 1999; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Thomas 2000). The concepts of time and space, are, as Ingold (2000, 143) notes, often interconnected: "The life of every being, as it unfolds, contributes at once to the progeneration of the future and to the regeneration of the past." Similarly, it is possible that skull caching and curation acted on Neolithic community and household memories by projecting their materiality forward and backward in time. The curation of skulls projected into the future: it reiterated the expectation of future mortuary events while simultaneously recognizing continuity with the past. We can look at this phenomenon from an integrative perspective as a symbolic means of crafting social codes, collective memory, and the experience of time.

Many of these objects may have directed attention toward a collective ancestry. The recirculation of heirlooms in ritual

contexts likely served to determine the tempo of social action, as their continued use was anticipated and often planned far in advance.

Collectively, these patterns reflect the deliberate organization of ritual along clear social lines. The removal, painting, and plastering of the skulls of important individuals served as a means by which the embodiment of the dead was recreated as “an anchor for meanings” (Humphreys 1981, 272). Following Hertz (1960), we can argue that Neolithic skull removal, circulation, and caching commemorated the dead and that the use and construction of such ritual skulls highlights the interlinking of physical and ritual embodiment.

Integration of the Living and the Dead

The European Neolithic is characterized by a physical segmentation of life and death through the separation of residential and burial locations (Bradley 2003; Thomas 2000). Thomas (2000) notes that the dead were conceived of as not only distant but physically removed. In the southern Levantine Neolithic we see the reverse: the physical and symbolic integration of the living and the dead. The critical distinguishing aspect of burial practices in the MPPNB was that they were physically centered on and interconnected with areas of the living. This is seen with the location of burials in the floors on which people lived, the physical recirculation of skeletal materials, and the symbolic regenerative actions of creating new plaster faces in was burial of (Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2001; Rollefson 2000a). Death, decomposition, and decapitation would have been familiar and anticipated events.

Secondary mortuary practices required that the living be aware of where and when individuals were interred. This awareness was not casual: it must have existed as a form of collective intergenerational memory. It seems likely that personal and community life histories were public and familiar to all members of the village and closely linked to conceptions of place.

Forgetting the Body: Decapitation and the Individual

One interesting expression of personhood and identity in Neolithic communities is seen in the multiple manifestations of decapitation of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines (Goring-Morris 2000; Rollefson 2000a; Schmandt-Besserat 1997, 1998b; Talalay 2004). The small MPPNB earthen anthropomorphic figurines frequently recovered from midden deposits were deliberately mutilated, damaged, or constructed as headless (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Choen 1989a; de Contenson 1966; Goring 1991; Rollefson 1986, 2001; Voigt 1983, 2000). Voigt (1983, 192) argues that damage to anthropomorphic figurines is often “due to ‘killing’ at the time of disposal.” Similarly, Goring (1991, 52) remarks that “the apparent association between damage and burial leads one to seriously

consider the possibility that this damage was deliberate and applied ritually.” This suggests that decapitation was symbolically significant to MPPNB peoples over many hundreds of years.

In many ways decapitation can be seen as a form of depersonalization, a shared action aimed at transforming the individual into a collective memory (Talalay 2004). Decapitation creates a single visual and metaphorical focus for memory. Above all, physically separating the head from the body removes the physical characteristics of the individual in life. When undertaken repeatedly, it serves to homogenize the past, potentially acting as a leveling mechanism at the moment of death, as well as a means of identifying and forgetting certain individuals.

The Social Body: Individual and Community Processes

Traditional anthropological classifications of emerging social complexity (for example, the classic model of the chiefdom) are inconsistent with the available archaeological data of the Neolithic (Verhoeven 2000a; Rollefson 2000a; Goring-Morris 2000). Examination of the complex, complementary, and in some ways conflicting physical and symbolic organization of material culture in Neolithic-villages sheds light on the emergence of authority in these communities. Elsewhere (Kuijt 2001) I have argued that early village social relations involved a balancing of individualizing and community processes that probably facilitated the emergence of limited social differentiation and simultaneously created the social conditions for community cohesion and shared membership. Representations of the human body such as plastered skulls or figurines served as tapestries on which to depict, modify, and contest social relations. Some of these practices were probably viewed as interconnected and mutually reinforcing: they supported the rationale for and the meanings of specific practices through time and created the context in which intergenerational memory was negotiated.

Cranial deformation at Jericho and Nahal Hemar (Arensburg and Hershkovitz 1989; Kurth and Röhrer-Ertl 1981; Meiklejohn et al. 1992) was one physical and symbolic means by which individuals were distinguished from others. Skull caching and plastering would have been others. The people identified for such treatment were probably powerful community members and individuals in positions of leadership, but they included males and females and ranged from old to relatively young. These individualizing processes appear to have coexisted with other, community-oriented processes, and together they celebrated both the historical individual and the community past and present. These practices effected the transformation from experiential memory, focused on named persons, to referential memory, focused on the symbolic collective.

Remembering and Forgetting

Forty and Küchler (1999, 1) pose the question "How does forgetting occur and what do material objects have to do with it?" Echoing the work of Bloch (1982, 1989), this question is critical for an understanding of the generation of Neolithic social memory, the multiple and complex layers of meanings of identity, and the balancing of forgetting and remembering. While focused on commemoration and remembrance, the abstraction of memory is also a form of forgetting. It is often assumed that material objects such as skulls act as the analogues of human memory and the focus of ancestor worship. From this perspective memories become material: they interject images, people, and events from the past into everyday lives and thus transcend temporal boundaries. The process can be conceived of as re-creating the physical structure that embodies both the living and the dead, transcends different realms and times, and obscures individual identity and history.

The processes of memorialization and depersonalization are interrelated and occur with the deliberate deconstruction of memory (e.g., Argenti 1999; Fowler 2003; Küchler 1999; Williams 2003). In some cultures memory is defined and crafted through the process of forgetting the past. This can involve the creation of ephemeral monuments or of elaborate material objects that are destroyed, left to decay, or made inaccessible. As outlined by Reina (1962), in Guatemala the physical remains of the dead are considered to have belonged to reputable people of importance in the past, but ordinary villagers and elders are almost always unaware of the identity of the individuals. Among the living there is no understanding of the acts, status, and identity of people in the past and specific skeletal remains. Other than being viewed as respected ancestors and in some cases relatives, they have been transformed into a collective ancestry.

There are, therefore, clear connections between remembering the collective and forgetting the individual. In Argenti's (1999) description of royal succession in Oku, Cameroon, the destruction of the objects produced in connection with the king's death serves to legitimate the subsequent transfer of power. For Melanesia, Küchler (1999, 64) outlines how architecture serves as the location for effigy display and performances that aid in the transfer of the life-force after death. With the destruction of commemorative vessels the soul becomes image and thus a floating memory. People are publicly forgotten, and the materiality of memory is reproduced through proprietary rights to the control of the mental representations, not just the material forms.

Discussion

The prominent place of secondary mortuary practices in certain Neolithic communities helps us to understand how individual and collective identities and memories were developed. These practices highlight cycles of remembrance and

indicate that community members approached life and death as integrated and cyclical. The broad regional similarities in these practices support the argument that they were part of a shared system of beliefs. There is, however, subtle variation in the local and material implementation. In this context mortuary practices were communal actions that served not only to commemorate the individual identity of the deceased but also as a conduit for collective memory and reaffirmation of identity and community membership.

The low mean age at death among Neolithic villages and the frequency of secondary mortuary practices created the context for rapid shifts in identity and memory. Within two generations memories, events, and objects associated with named individuals would have been transformed from experiential and personal to referential and abstract. This suggests that Neolithic villages would have been structured around the cyclical nature of practice, embodiment, and symbolism. This would have included the manufacture, use, and discard of painted and plastered skulls. Such events highlighted continuity with the past through the selection of certain skulls and objects associated with the deceased and at the same time established the foundation for the projection of these events into the future.

How people remember and forget and how memories are transmitted across generations are important issues in the study of Neolithic social systems. From an archaeological standpoint, it is important to address the materiality of imagery and ritual action in Neolithic communities. In many ways the Neolithic pictorial reoccurrence of the face and head served as a center for memory, for it was a theme that was visually and symbolically expressed in multiple media. This deliberate focus on the face was part of a shared system of ritual practices.

From this perspective, remembrance and forgetting formed an integrated and dialectic process in which Neolithic community members literally, visually, and symbolically dismembered and memorialized persons. Decapitation was a form of depersonalization, which allowed the individual to be forgotten and transformed aspects of the individual into collective memories. Governance in Neolithic communities was connected to ritual and particularly the creation and use of material culture such as skull masks, figurines, and statues.

Collectively these patterns represent a complex web involving ritual knowledge, imagery, mortuary practices, and the creation of intergenerational memory and structures of authority within Neolithic communities.

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