Different Strokes for Different Folks: Near Eastern Neolithic Mortuary Practices in Perspective
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Introduction
How can one begin to address the questions pertinent to the ongoing discussion on religion, property, and power at early Neolithic Catalhoyuk? It seems that a productive avenue is to stand back and consider how Catalhoyuk integrates within the broader perspective of Southwest Asian (Near Eastern) Neolithization processes. Nevertheless, such an effort with regard to every aspect of human existence is a mighty endeavor, and certainly well beyond the scope of a single article, not to mention the humble competence of its authors. Given the special nature and prominence of burials at Catalhoyuk, we have chosen to focus specifically on that aspect of community behavior. We shall provide a background based on data from earlier periods within the broader region of Southwest Asia (the Near East), and most especially the southern Levant.

Burial practices are generally considered to reflect aspects of the symbolic/spiritual worldview of the populations involved. It has often been suggested that with the advent of sedentism and the beginnings of agricultural production (plant and animal domestication) there were significant changes in social organization and cohesion. Yet from the very beginning of our essay, we can state that the description of burial practices from the Late Epipaleolithic Natufian (as well as the scarce earlier evidence) through the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) (and even Pre-Pottery Neolithic B [PPNB] and later) in the southern Levant indicates “business as usual,” in the sense that we can observe the same marked variability (of the same components more or less) continuing unchanged all through the period considered as revolutionary, encompassing changing paradigmatic worldviews. We shall attempt to relate
Burial Practices in the Southern Levant (Terminal Pleistocene/Early Holocene)

Following virtually nonexistent evidence for burial practices during the Upper Paleolithic (Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris in 2013a), the number of documented burials increased during the Early and Middle Epipaleolithic (starting at ca. 22,000 up to ca. 15,000 years cal BP). These were mostly single, primary burials, in shallow pits; however, as data accrue it is becoming increasingly clear that there is some degree of variability, foreshadowing that observed in the following Late Epipaleolithic (ca. 15,000 up to 11,500 years cal BP), Natufian entity. At Ein Gev I the inhumation is located below the floor of a fond de cabane, while at Ohalo II the burial is located away from the huts (Arensburg and Bar-Yosef 1973; Hershlzowitz et al. 1995). Though most of the burials are single and extended (e.g., Ohalo II, Wadi Mataha - Hershlzowitz et al. 1995; Stockl et al. 2005), there are also other positions, for example, the sitting burial from Early Epipaleolithic Ain Qassiya (Richter et al. 2010) and the flexed burial, among the extended ones, at the Middle Epipaleolithic cemetery at 'Uyyun al-Hammam (Wadi Ziqlab 148) (Maher et al. 2011).

From the Middle Epipaleolithic there is some evidence for marlung of the grave by the placement of stone mortars/bowls on top of the burials, as at Neve David (Bocquentin et al. 2011) and Wadi Mataha (Stockl et al. 2005; and see later discussion). At the 'Uyyun al-Hammam (Wadi Ziqlab 148) cemetery most graves were of single individuals with no grave goods, but at least one grave contained the remains of two individuals, and a couple of burials included intentionally deposited animal remains, most spectacularly, those of a fox - until recently considered a uniquely Natufian characteristic, and see later discussion (Maher et al. 2011).

A polished pebble is reported from the single burial at Moghr al-Awal in the Lebanese mountains (Garrard and Yazbeclz 2003). Of interest are the Early Epipaleolithic burned human remains from Icebara Cave; deriving from Turville-Petre's (1932) excavation in the 1920's, these were long thought to be Natufian, yet both detailed osteological studies (Smith 1972) as well as 14C dates obtained much later on the bones...
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themselves indicate that these burned skeletons ($N = 23$) more likely relate to the earlier, Kebaran Epipaleolithic levels (Bar-Yosef and Sillen 1993). Unfortunately, no data are available as regards the interment details there, that is, position, single or multiple, and so on. Whatever the case, cremation has not been documented elsewhere in the Levant during the Epipaleolithic and Neolithic (but see Wadi Hammeh 27 during the early Natufian) (Webb and Edwards 2002).

The shift to the Late Epipaleolithic Natufian complex coincides with evidence for larger, more permanent settlements, especially in the Mediterranean zone (Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris 2013b). Recently, with advances in radiometric calibration, the duration of the Natufian has been extended significantly (at least thirty-five hundred years), and differentiation between the Early and Late phases relates also to the nature and patterning of the burials.

A significant increase in the numbers of burials as compared to the preceding period is indicated by the approximately four hundred fifty Natufian individuals identified to date. This actually reflects the fact that burials become an integral part of the Natufian social identity (and see discussion later). Burials become incorporated within settlements, both inside and outside structures (residential or other), for example, at Hayonim Cave (Belfer-Cohen 1988), as well as in areas specifically designated as burial grounds or cemeteries, such as at Nahal Oren (Stekelis and Yizraeli 1963), or even more obviously at Hilazon Cave (Grosman, Munro, and Belfer-Cohen 2008).

In certain cases the burials were marked, whether by breached basalt mortars incorporated in the grave as at Nahal Oren (Stekelis and Yizraeli 1963), or with cup-marked slabs, or with both, as at Hayonim Cave and Raqefet Cave (Belfer-Cohen 1988; Nadel et al. 2008, 2009).

Natufian graves comprise interments in every imaginable combination, including single and multiple burials (of various ages and genders), primary and secondary, sometimes together, and in a wide array of burial positions (Belfer-Cohen 1988, 1995; Bocquentin 2003; Webb and Edwards 2002; Garrod 1936-1937; Garrod and Bate 1937; Lengyel and Bocquentin 2005; Perrot and Ladiray 1988 and references therein). Graves with primary burials were sometimes reopened, and certain skeletal parts, mostly the skull and limbs, were removed to be interred elsewhere; such practices clearly reflect considerable manipulation of the human remains, as illustrated by some primary burials missing parts of the skeleton (and not simply as a consequence of taphonomic factors).
accompanied by secondary burials, comprising but limbs (sometimes still articulated), and sltulls. Through the course of the period both extended and flexed burials are documented, with a greater emphasis upon extended burials during the Early Natufian. It is of interest to note that tightly flexed, contracted burials are more common in the Late/Final Natufian. These are commonly considered to represent burials that were moved from some distance away to be interred in sacks or bundles, at "sanctioned" sites, such as An el-Saratan (Azraq 18) and Eynan (Garrard 1991; Perrot and Ladiray 1988). Some of the burials at various sites were "pinned down" (literally and figuratively) by large stones, sometimes crushing the skeleton. On other occasions stones were placed on both sides of the head to hold it in place, for example, H15 at Eynan and H2 at Raqefet (Lengyel and Bocquentin 2005; Nadel et al. 2008; Perrot and Ladiray 1988). Approximately 10 percent of the burials, but with rare, and often controversial exceptions, being assigned to the Early Natufian phase are decorated (Belfer-Cohen 1995). The decorated specimens are of different ages (from children to adults), and of all sexes. There are also significant contrasts in the intensity of decoration, ranging from single beads up to lavish adornments.

Although there is some evidence for local mortuary patterns in the nature and form of the decorative elements represented—that is, the beads and pendants, mostly shaped of bone, teeth, and shells—they differ from one site to the other; for instance, dentalia decorated caps and headbands are reported only from el-Wad (Garrod 1936-1937). Yet these local, sometimes site-specific patterns are never exclusive; for instance, beads of a variety dominant at one site are found in only single numbers in another, such as Eynan versus Hajronim (Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris 2013b). Other "grave-goods" sometimes comprise unique bone and stone tools, whether an elongated spatula/"bone dagger" or large flint bifaces, such as Graves XII, XIII, XVII at Hayonim Cave (Belfer-Cohen 1988, pers. obs.). Notable is the use of ochre daubed on skull bones at Ain el-Saratan and Wadi Hammeh 27, and flowers on burials at Raqefet (Webb and Edwards 2002; Garrard 1991; Nadel et al. 2013). In addition and, most interestingly, there are also parts of animals, such as the tortoise carapaces, as well as the human/dog burials at el-Wad, Eynan, and Hayonim terrace (Davis and Valla). Without going into a discourse of what is meant or considered as "grave-goods."
Different Strokes for Different Folks (1978; Garrod and Rate 1937; Perrot and Ladiray 1988; Tchernov and Valla 1997). Here, we should also recall the "shaman" burial of an old woman at Hilazon Cave, where we have an outstanding example of pars prototo—whether through parts of animals or a fragment of a basalt mortar (Grosman, Munro, and Belfer-Cohen 2008). Another instance of animal parts incorporated in a grave are two pairs of gazelle horns, one pair adorning the skull of H25, the upper burial, and the other, found admixed with the disturbed burial of H27 beneath the former in Locus 10, Eynan (Perrot and Ladiray 1988). It should also be stressed that there are instances of isolated human remains outside obvious grave contexts, such as a calvaria "chalice" on the floor of Locus 131 at Eynan, together with half a mandible of a fox (Perrot and Ladiray 1988), or scattered skull fragments, some with evidence of burning at Wadi Hammeh 27 (Webb and Edwards 2002). Such remains indicate most clearly rituals that were likely part of the mortuary practices taking place on-site. At Raqefet the possible presence of a "perishable" cushion to support the head of H17 (Nadel et al. 2009: 45) may presage more common "pillowing" during the PPNA (see later discussion).

Last, but by no means least, in terms of Natufian mortuary practices is the tradition of postmortem skull removal. This long-lasting tradition, which was never ubiquitous, was already sporadically documented during the Early Natufian. The skulls appear both as single items, such as H37, as opposed to the cache of eight skulls in Tomb 9 at Eynan (Perrot and Ladiray 1988). In addition there is considerable evidence for skulls being modified, for example, H102 on the floor of Locus 131 at Eynan (perhaps used as a chalice?) (Perrot and Ladiray 1988) and/or burned, as at Wadi Hammeh 27 (Webb and Edwards 2002). At some Late/Final Natufian sites, though, all burials retain their skulls, as at Raqefet Cave (Nadel et al. 2009). However, recent claims (Valla et al. 2010) for a complete absence of skull removal in the Final Natufian phase at Eynan are problematic, in light of both Perrot’s previous observations (Perrot and Ladray 1988), as well as Valla et al.’s descriptions of the human remains they recovered.

Within and associated with graves there is evidence for feasting. The most detailed account available to date derives from the Late/Final Natufian cemetery site of Tachtit, where species representation and.
contextual associations are interpreted as indications for feasting on both aurochs and tortoise (Grosman and Munro 2007; Munro and Grosman 2010). Of interest to note is the interpretation given to the “stone pipes” (breached mortars) incorporated within graves at the Late Natufian cemetery of Nahal Oren as ways to channel libations to the dead (Stekelis and Yizraeli 1963). Yet, in general, the direct evidence for feasting during the Natufian is rather meager (Hayden 2011); it is mostly based on concentrations of bones within confined localities, such as the bird bones from the two constructed hearths within Locus 131 at Eynan (Valla 1988), or in the shear amount of bones within the occupational level in general as well as the presence of large hearths, as at Nahal Oren (Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2011).

**THE PPNA**

Relatively few PPNA (ca. 11,500-10,500 years cal BP) sites provide reliable data about mortuary practices; this stems to a large degree from issues associated with the history of research. Thus, at Jericho, the site with by far the greatest number of burials, little attention appears to have been paid to differentiating between PPNA and PPNB burials (and see Cornwall 1981; Zenyon 1957; Zurth and Rohrer-Ertl 1981; Uziyel 1995, 1996, 1997). Generally during the PPNA, the vast majority of burials appear to have been single, primary, and articulated. However, there are indications that secondary burials may have been present at Jericho as well as at Netiv Hagdud (Belfer-Cohen et al. 1990; Kenyon 1981). Graves seem to have been concentrated in the area of the tower at Jericho (perhaps a sacred precinct), yet elsewhere there is little in the way of evidence for separate cemetery areas within habitation sites, or as dedicated mortuary sites. There is also little evidence for grave goods, apart from single finds reported from various sites (and see later discussion).

At Hatoula, where there are both Khiamian and Sultanian PPNA burials (Le Mort 1994; Le Mort, Hershkovitz, and Spiers 1994), most burials are complete—with but one instance (H04) just a single skull—tightly flexed or contracted on the stomach or back (but rarely on the side), and often with stones placed on the joints, for example, Sultanian H08, comparable to Natufian practices (Le Mort, Hershkovitz, and Spiers 1994). "Pillowed" heads have been observed in five (out of nine) burials at Hatoula (Le Mort 1994) (as well as at Wadi Faynan 16; see later discussion), again a feature observed first in the Natufian. Grave goods
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sometimes comprise single stone beads (in two cases at Hatoula-H07 md H04 - both adult males). There is also an aurochs skull associated with an old female, H09 (Le Mort 1994).

A very different pattern is reflected by the human remains at Netiv Hagdud, notwithstanding the great affinity of various material culture realms to those at Hatoula. Thus at Netiv Hagdud fifteen of twenty-seven individuals have the skull missing, but usually the mandible present; four of the individuals are represented only by the skull and mandible. There are a number of instances of cached skulls, sometimes in pairs. Skull removal was applied to male and female adults and young children (Belfer-Cohen et al. 1990). Furthermore, where the position of the burial could be ascertained, they were contracted on one side (for the others it was not possible to determine the orientation or they are disturbed/secondary burials).

Only preliminary reports are currently available for the PPNA occupation at el-Hemmeh in Transjordan (Makarewicz and Rose 2011). There is evidence for the use of carefully built grave cists/pits in one structure (Structure 6) for primary as well as secondary burials; interestingly, the arms, legs, and torso of a young adult placed in a sitting position in one cist (Feature 14) had been covered with lime or gypsum plaster; a similar position and treatment were afforded to a young child in an adjacent pit (Feature 15).

At Wadi Faynan 16 the total skeletal remains reported to date appear to represent three immature individuals and three adults (Roberts, in Finlayson and Mithen 2007). Detailed examination of the report reveals that only some of them can be treated as burials, while others are represented by single bones or teeth. One grave (Pit 247) is interpreted as a disturbed foundation deposit and included a “mixture of partially articulated, disarticulated and arranged bones” (Finlayson and Mithen, 2007, fig. 6.47), mostly of an adult, but also including the fragmented skull of a seven- to eight-year-old juvenile. The skull of the adult was resting on a stone “pillow.” Another burial, undisturbed, is of an articulated and flexed adult, with his skull resting, once again, on a stone “pillow” (Context 332, Finlayson and Mithen, 2007, figs. 6.61, 6.62).

In some sites burials seem to have been rare, and only sporadic remains have been described; such is the case at Abu Madi I, Bir el-Malzur, Nahal Oren, Gilgal, Iraq ed-Dubb, Dhra, and Zahrat ad-Dhra 2 (Edwards et al. 2004; ICuijt 2004; Malinsly-Buller, Aldjem, and Yeshurun 2009; pers. comm.)
obs.; Stelzelis and Yizraeli 1963). "As much as they do appear, they accord with the patterns observed in other PPNA sites throughout the southern Levant.

THE PPNB

The PPNB (ca. 10,500 to 8,400 years cal BP) represents the floruit of social developments, including burial practices. The period is of rather a long duration and is subdivided into at least four subperiods, each with its own distinct characteristics. As the numbers of burials and the variety of ways to treat the dead diversified, it is not possible to provide a detailed inventory and description here without vastly exceeding the framework of the current paper. Accordingly, we shall present only a general overview, while emphasizing those points we want to discuss as regards the role of the dead in the world of the living.

Though both PPNB settlements and burial grounds/cemeteries grew in size, it is widely accepted that there are insufficient burials relative to the assumed numbers of inhabitants within villages, the settlement sizes, and the relative areas excavated, such as 'An Ghazal and Beidha (Rollefson 2000; IGrlibride 1966). There is, however, some debate as to the nature and locations of supposedly normative PPNB burial practices. Burials do occur within walls and beneath the floors of residential structures (Kuijt 2001; Stordeur and Ichawam 2007, 2008), although significant numbers occurred as "trash burials" in pits within open areas (and see Rollefson 2000). There were also obviously special, designated areas at the edges of villages for cultic and/or funerary practices, as at Aswad, Atlit Yam, and Jericho (Galili et al. 2005; IZenyon 1981; Stordeur and Khawam 2008). Additionally, the specific location of some sites as well as contextual evidence indicate that they were designated primarily for ceremonial-cum-burial purposes, such as Nahal Hemar and Gar HaHoresh (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988; Goring-Morris 2000, 2005).

Many graves comprise single articulated burials, although multiple primary, as well as multiple secondary, burials are found, including combinations of primary and secondary interments within the same grave. Some of this variability appears to reflect geographical and/or chronological trends; for example, "cist" burials appear to be the form in At Gilgal a couple of burials (both adult, primary, articulated, with skulls) were recovered in an open area, although these were not reported in the final report (Bar-Yosef, Goring-Morris and Gopher 2010; pers. obs.).
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southern Transjordan, as at Shaqaret Msiad and Baja (continuing a tradition first noted at PPNA el-Hemmeh), and southern Sinai, at Ujrat el-Mehed (Gebel, Hermansen, and IGnzel 2006; Hermannsen et al. 2006; Hershltovitz, Bar-Yosef and Are~lsberg 1998; Znzel et al. 201)

Indeed, Building F at Shaqaret Msiad is a large (circa seven meters in diameter) circular structure, centrally placed within the settlement, and, although only partially excavated, yielded in excess of fifty-five individuals in stone-lined cists (IGnzel et al. 2011). The structure thus appears to have served as a dedicated charnel house in its later phase — perhaps akin to the memory houses of Catal (and see discussion later).

Postmortem skull removal continued to be practiced selectively, whether on males, females, adults, or immature individuals. In some instances these skulls were embellished by sophisticated modeling of the facial features or heads, as in 'Ain Ghazal, Aswad, Jericho, Beisamoun, IGar HaHoresh, Nahal Hemar, and Yiftahel (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal2001; Khalaily et al. 2008; ICuijt 2008; Stordeur and IUlawam 2007). After their secondary "death," skulls, modeled or not, were disposed of, sometimes as caches. Although long claimed to be absent, grave goods are present on occasion, whether in the form of beads, ena ants, flint artifacts, animal bones, marine molluscs, or other items (Goring-Morris 2000, 2005).

There is continuity from the Natufian in the presence of human/animal associations during the PPNB; sometimes this appears to be in the form of certain specific faunal elements being included within or placed adjacent to graves, as at Iaar HaHoresh, Shaqaret Msiad, and Basta (Beclzer 2002; Goring-Morris 2005; Goring-Morris et al. 1998; Hermansen et al. 2006; Hornlitz and Goring-Morris 2004). In other instances, there are indications that this reflects actual feasting activities (Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2011; Goring-Morris and Horwitz 2007; Twiss 2008).

Contemporaneous Burials in the Northern Levant

Without providing detailed descriptions of each site, one can state that the mortuary patterns observed in the areas to the south of the Taurus-Zagros (corresponding to the very end of the Natufian, the PPNA, and the PPNR in the south) are broadly similar to those observed and described for the Southern Levant, even though most reports are preliminary and
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fragmentary. There is considerable variability in the numbers of individuals in different sites, mirroring the situation farther south. Suffice it to note that at Cayonii more than four hundred fifty individuals were counted (Ozbeck 1982, 1988; Croucher 2006a, b, 2010, 2012). Indeed, Cayonu is quite unique in that many of the burials are primarily associated with the “slzull building,” a long-lasting (PPNA-PPNB) special function architectural complex, associated with animal remains including aurochs bucra

nias. At PPNB Dja’dè a charnel house was exposed (Coqueugniot 2008). Furthermore, the human remains in many northern sites comprise burials of both complete skeletons, as well as separate slzulls and postcrania, such as the six human crania placed in the northwest half of a “house” at PPNA Qermez Dere (Watluns, Baird and Betts 1989); while at Mureybet in Structure 21 of Level IIIB one may note a skull and long bones burial, together with, a little distance to the east, another burial comprising only the spine, pelvis, chest, and articulated hands and feet (Ibanez 2008).

The reports of all sites with human remains detail variations in the positions of interments: contracted to loosely flexed, on the back, stomach, and side, as at PPNA Nemrilz (IZozlowslu 2002) and Qaramel (Kanjou-2009). The situation at PPNB Tell Halula is locally unique in the systematic placement of the deceased seated in pits beneath the floors at the front of residential structures (Guerrero et al. 2009; Ortiz, Chambon and Molist 2013). However, the striking similarities in burial practices to those at PPNA el-Hemmeh in Edom, Transjordan, are intriguing (see earlier).

Generally there are few grave goods in most sites, but at PPNA Kortilz Tepe on the Tigris, the situation is quite different and the majority of burials were interred with numerous grave goods comprising jewelry, decorated and undecorated bone objects, stone figurines, as well as stone vessels, pestles, mace heads, and axes (Ozlzaya 2009; Ozlzaya and Co~lzun 2009). Additionally, quite a number of burials are covered by fragments of broken stone vessels, which may have been intentionally broken as part of the funerary practices (a variation of an old tradition, and see discussion later).

Furthermore, in the northern areas there are phenomena that have not, to date, been recognized (or only rarely) in the south. These include violence, sometimes on an individual level, as at PPNA Jerf el-Ahmar (Stordeur and Abbts 2002), but sometimes seemingly on a more systematic scale, as at Nemrik (though here it is difficult to distinguish between...
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PPNA and PPNB and see Kozlowski 2002) and, especially, at Shanidar Cave. In the latter, the “Proto-Neolithic” occupation represents a cemetery site with the remains of twenty-nine individuals (Soleclii, Soleclii, and Agelaralus 2004). Of interest here is the high number of individuals with evidence of traumatic injuries to the skull, perhaps from mace heads (quite common among the material culture remains).

Another pattern in the north appears to be the ceremonial closure of structures using human burials. This may be the case of the headless skeleton of a circa fifteen- to eighteen-year-old female, sprawled on the floor of the burned communal structure EA30 at PPNA Jerf el Ahmar (Stordeur and Abbts 2002): speculatively, the young woman had apparently been lulled immediately before the structure was intentionally burned, and her head subsequently removed after the roof had collapsed.

A similar situation may be indicated by a tightly contracted burial used for the “closure” of the lowermost “luva-type structure” in the PPNA levels of Dja’dja (Coqueugniot 2008, 2013).

Gypsum plaster was smeared on many of the skeletons at PPNA Kortilz Tepe (Ozkaya 2009; Ozlzaya and Co~lzun 2009) — this practice occurs later, during the PPNB at Tell abu Hureyra (Moore, Hillman, and Legge 2000), and perhaps presages the practices at Tell Sabi Abyad (Alkrmans 1996; and see discussion for comparisons with the southern Levant). Several skeletons at IZortilz Tepe display parallel bands of red and black pigments. Such color traces are also seen on grave goods; this is interpreted by the excavator as evidence for several stages of treatment of the dead, as first they were interred; later, after defleshing (natural or intentional), covered with plaster; and then painted (Ozlzaya 2009). Red coloring is implied also in Cay6nii in the form of red ochre pieces scattered over and besides the burials (Croucher 2006a, b).

Discussion

In appraising the nature of burial practices in the Levant during Neolithization processes as briefly described previously, it should be quite obvious that there are few, if any, definite and/or enduring patterns, spatially and/or chronologically. For example, “grave goods” do occur from the Natufian onward, but they are rarely numerous, and there is often difficulty in distinguishing between genuine grave goods and personal — jewelry and adornments on clothing of the dead, not to mention simple
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background "noise" of grave fill. Indeed grave goods are oftentimes difficult to identify as such; for example, how should we consider the incorporation of animal bones within graves—a sporadic occurrence from the Middle Epipaleolithic all through the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, whether as complete animal carcasses, or as single bones. These may be interpreted as purely emblematic, representing a symbolic system (pars pro toto) that we have yet to decipher or simply as evidence for ceremonial feasting as part of the burial rites (and see earlier examples). Should the burial of a fox together with human remains at the Middle Epipaleolithic site of the 'Uyun al-Hammam (Wadi Ziqlab 148) cemetery be considered as a precursor of the (rare) Natufian canid burials? And what should we make of the ground-stone utensils found in association with burials? Such associations are documented since at least the Middle Epipaleolithic, through to the Natufian, and even to the PPNB in the southern Levant. Do these "presage" the burials at Igdirq Tepe on the Upper Tigris, which were lavishly covered by the intentionally broken shards of stone utensils (and see earlier discussion)? Is this simply a matter of independent evolution and convergence? Or, do such practices reflect ties of some sort, which are otherwise undetected?

Some traditions were more spectacular than others, most especially that of postmortem skull removal. This custom, which was never ubiquitous, was first documented during the Natufian, continuing in the PPNA and PPNB, lasting through to at least the Pottery Neolithic in the southern Levant. Subsequent modification and embellishment, as in the form of plastering, are associated only with the Middle and Late PPNB, four thousand years after the Natufian. Skulls were curated or reburied after their "secondary" death. They appear both as single items as well as in caches. Indeed, it seems that skulls have been of special importance from the proverbial "beginning" (i.e., Epipaleolithic) since there is evidence of special treatment—decapitation, modification, and burning (?)—of skulls, with skulls being cached, stored, or reburied after their "secondary" deaths. The unique treatment of the skull overrules the caution one normally has to exercise when excavating a prehistoric occurrence taking into consideration problems of taphonomy; in other words, when does a missing skull actually reflect skull removal, and when does it represent poor preservation?

Last, but not least, we do find material evidence for long-distance And, tongue in cheek, we should not forget "Moshe," the headless Mousterian Neanderthal from Kebara cave (Bar-Yossef et al. 1988).
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connections between the southern Levant and central Anatolia in the form of one of the plastered slzulls from IGar HaHoresh in Lower Galilee, the pigment on which proved to be cinnabar deriving from sources in the Taurus region of central Anat~lia. Furthermore, various aspects of the mortuary practices at PPNB Shillo~~rolzambos in Cyprus (Guilaine, Briois, and Vigne 2011) also closely mirror similar practices at IGar HaHoresh.

bother convergence(?) is the practice of smearing gypsum/lime plaster on many of the slzeletons at PPNA IGrtilz Tepe (Ozkaya 2009; Ozkaya and Cogkun 2009) - this practice also occurs later, during the M/LPPNB at Tell abu Hureyra (Moore, Hillman, and Legge 2000), and perhaps presages the practices at Late Neolithic Tell Sabi Abyad (Alzlzermans 1996), all sites located in the northern Levant. Recently it has also been documented at PPNA el Hemmeh, in the southern Levant (Malzarewicz and Rose 2011)! So, one may ask, which area has precedence?

Another interesting and hardly commented upon practice concerns the use of "pillows" placed to raise the head of the deceased above the rest of the body. Sometimes this seemingly involved "perishable" cushions (e.g., Late Natufian Raqefet); or, and more commonly, stone "pillows," as at PPNA Hatoula and Wadi Faynan 16 (Le Mort, Hershkqvitz, and Spiers 1994; Nadel et al. 2008; Finlayson and Mithen 2007).

So, ultimately, how can we explain the observed variability in burial practices as regards the community behaviors that they reflect through this long period? And how do those burial practices relate to the broader picture of the socioeconomic transformations. occurring concurrently?

Burials as a constant phenomenon start to appear during the Early Natufian, crossing the "Rubicon" of domestication processes, that is, the shift from small foraging bands to large sedentary communities. All in all, it seems to us that the changes in burial practices were gradual rather than abrupt - apparently these aspects pertain to the core of soci- society's fabric, relevant to the very identity of the specific human group. Accordingly, each of the cultural entities during the terminal Pleistocene and Early Holocene displays evidence for continuity in some aspects of the burial practices, in tandem with considerable variability in others. The variation observed is indeed amazing, and it is already very obvi-
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... chronological sequence. We cannot resist yet another illustrative example: Tomb 23 at Eynan has one individual in articulation associated with grave goods (a small basalt bowl, a biface, and a few bones of a "large" animal [aurochs?]). The burial also has a "tombstone" and other large stones embedded in the grave to "pin down" the deceased and demarcate the grave's perimeter. And above this grave is yet another grave, this time represented only by a single mandible (Perrot and Ladiray 1988: 51, fig. 29). This seems to be another instance of extended memory and pars pro toto, at the same time reflecting the inherent variability of Natufian funerary practices.

Obviously we have to take into consideration those changes induced through time, as well as the particular, evolving histories of each settlement/area/region within Southwest Asia (i.e., the Near East). Such a statement is clearly valid for every period in human history. However, what is specific to the Neolithic in the region is that the changes involved in Neolithization processes were unprecedented occurrences in human history — aggregation, sedentism, cultivation, domestication, and so on, all for the first time (Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris 2009).

Aggregation, for example, meant that the traditional separation into small hunter-gatherer bands broke down as various such groups, because of the new circumstances involving economic and spiritual shifts, began to live together, as evidenced through the archaeological data. These were indeed first-time phenomena and individual groups were grappling with unfamiliar "territory," in the sense that there was still no real canonization of social mutuality, even if the basics of social behaviors and ritual practices derived from a general, shared sociocultural milieu. All of these were constantly changing, while individuals and communities tried to adhere to what was familiar and had been accepted practice/agency for many millennia.

Undoubtedly, the pronounced chronological and regional variability observed, occurring during these "troubling" times of profound changes in the fabric of human existence, can accommodate the uniqueness of the findings from Catalhöyük. Catalhöyük is geographically located at the very northwestern edge of Neolithization processes and was founded relatively late within PPN developments. Yet, we may assume that the initial founding and development of Catalhöyük likely reflect Neolithization processes somewhat akin to those encountered earlier within the Levant, namely, that Catalhöyük represents the amalgamation of disparate groups.
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from within the general region—and see Bonfuldu (Baird 2006, 2010)
The contexts of the human remains recently described and summarized for the Catal sequence (Boz and Hager 2013; Nalzamura and Mesltell 2013) incorporate almost all the mortuary elements described for the Levant from the Natufian onward. The detailed studies revealed some local patterns, such as the emphasis on primary burials, on grave goods being mostly associated with infants and children, and, to a lesser degree, with older women; differing proportions (through time) between burials outside and inside houses; but none of these is really unique or exceptional relative to the variability in the mortuary repertoire elsewhere in the Near East. Rather, we can observe differences on the basis of individual burials (e.g., Pattoil and Hager, this volume). Each internment and its context tell a story that incorporates both personal and societal aspects, reflecting the private history of the deceased in tandem with the customs and beliefs of the community at large. Indeed, the rather opaque diachronic and synchronic trends and tendencies displayed at Catalhiiyiilz broadly parallel those in the Levant. Accordingly, it is against the backdrop of the developments detailed earlier that the burials in Catalhoyiik and their chronospatial contexts represent yet another unique social experiment that developed, flourished, and gradually transformed into something else during the course of its circa-fifteea-hundred-year history. As such it parallels other distinctive and unique experiments during Neolithic transformations elsewhere in Southwest Asia.

Neolithization processes entailed profound changes in all spheres of human existence, prominent among which was the manner that the living accommodated—his-heir dead. In examining the inventory of mortuary practices detailed, it is quite clear that we are facing processes influenced by changes taking place in other realms; the most obvious is the aggregation of people into sedentary settlements, sharing space (in life as in death) with strangers (“nonlun”). The diachronic differences observed among subregions throughout the Near East reflect innovations that developed in situ or that were acquired through contacts with “outside” groups. The Neolithic as a whole was a period of flux and communities were constantly pushed into contacts with the outside (through trade, exchange, craft specialization, migration, etc.), at the same time trying to retain and define their own identities. Treatment of and attitudes toward the dead were undoubtedly influenced by this duality. Thus we can observe the adoption of traditions, originating in one particular place, diverging...
all over the Near East in no time at all, or at least at a pace that archaeology today can hardly measure (e.g., skull removal, plastered slzulls, the inclusion of animal remains). Mortuary practices played an important role in defining community identity. Even if one acknowledges the problematic of imposing present-day as well as recent and subrecent ethno-graphic values on prehistoric mortuary behavior, it is obvious that there was a continuous “discourse” between the living and the dead, with the former trying to continue and impose their Weltanschauztwj on the latter; the changes and variability reflecting the turbulent nature of Neolithic times and the “for the first time” circumstances of groups and individuals merging to create a “brave new world.” With all the intricacies and difficulties involved in identifying the complex patterning of mortuary practices observed at Catalhoyulz, this simply reflects the situation elsewhere within the Near East through most of the Neolithic sequence. Indeed the similarities in the treatment of the dead can be considered as one of the reasons that the concept of “the PPNB IZoine” came about; concurrently it is obvious that each community was feeling its own way in order to promote cohesion and solidify group identity, drawing from the realms of both the living and the dead.

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