

Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World

Modern archaeology has amassed considerable evidence for the disposal of the dead through burials, cemeteries, and other monuments. Drawing on this body of evidence, this book offers fresh insight into how early human societies conceived of death and the afterlife. The twenty-seven essays in this volume consider the rituals and responses to death in prehistoric societies across the world, from eastern Asia through Europe to the Americas, and from the very earliest times before developed religious beliefs offered scriptural answers to these questions. Compiled and written by leading prehistorians and archaeologists, this volume traces the emergence of death as a concept in early times, as well as a contributing factor to the formation of communities and social hierarchies, and sometimes the creation of divinities.

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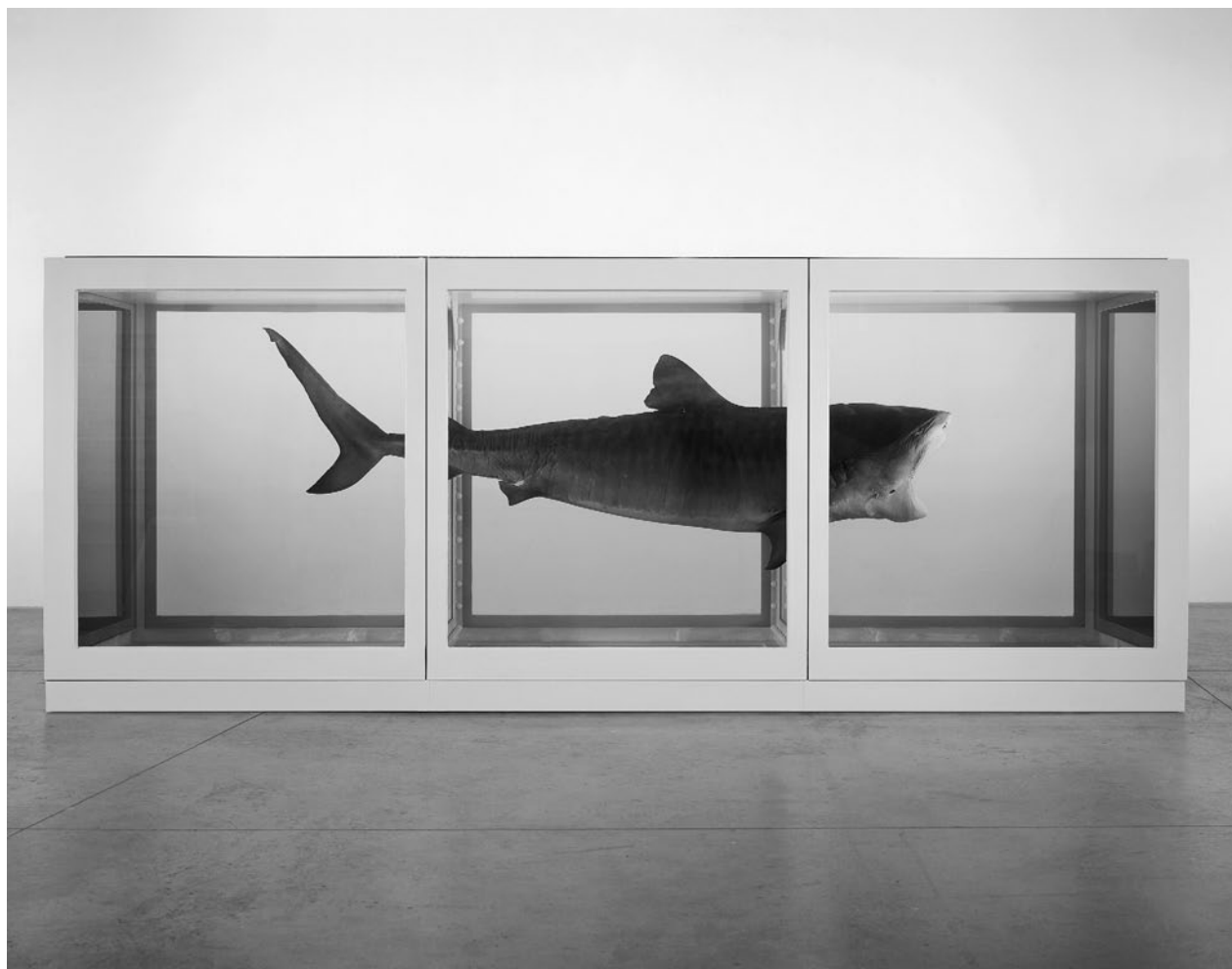
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978-1-107-08273-1 - Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World: "Death Shall Have No Dominion"

Edited by Colin Renfrew, Michael J. Boyd and Iain Morley

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'The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living', Damien Hirst, 1991. (Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd. © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2015).

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On Going to a Conference about Death and Immortality (For Colin Renfrew)

I pass the graves that are houses
On the way. Death has spread
Its dominion into the stories
That we live. Cemeteries have changed
Their form, have become cars,
Or the diminishing trees, but especially
Our offices and careers, where
We pass from living into something
Else, between being and not being.
Often we forget to breathe,
And the flowers remind us in vain.
All the metal we have dug up or made
Are the armature of our open graves.
Once we knew we were alive
Because an ache in the flesh
Sang to the unanswering sky
Or some love that possessed
Us like the ghosts we live amongst
Howls in our sleep when no-one
Hears. We were born with a shaping
Fire, but elude the flame
Meant to burn us into being.
Sometimes we catch a glimpse
Of a ghost in the window,
And wonder at its resemblance
To how we seem. Cities devour
The earth; the dead have changed
Places with the living, and wonder
How easy it is to be alive being dead.

(Ben Okri, 2012)

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[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page xi
<i>List of Tables</i>	xvi
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	xvii
<i>Preface</i>	xxiii
1. 'The Unanswered Question': Investigating Early Conceptualisations of Death	I
<i>Colin Renfrew</i>	
I INTIMATIONS OF MORTALITY	
2. Non-Human Animal Responses towards the Dead and Death: A Comparative Approach to Understanding the Evolution of Human Mortuary Practices	15
<i>Alexander K. Piel and Fiona A. Stewart</i>	
3. Lower and Middle Palaeolithic Mortuary Behaviours and the Origins of Ritual Burial	27
<i>João Zilhão</i>	
4. Upper Palaeolithic Mortuary Practices: Reflection of Ethnic Affiliation, Social Complexity, and Cultural Turnover	45
<i>Francesco d'Errico and Marian Vanhaeren</i>	
II MORTALITY AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN SOCIETY: SEDENTISM AND THE COLLECTIVE	
5. Gathering of the Dead? The Early Neolithic Sanctuaries of Göbekli Tepe, Southeastern Turkey	65
<i>Jens Notroff, Oliver Dietrich, and Klaus Schmidt</i>	

CONTENTS

6.	Death and Architecture: The Pre-Pottery Neolithic A Burials at WF16, Wadi Faynan, Southern Jordan	82
	<i>Steven Mithen, Bill Finlayson, Darko Maričević, Sam Smith, Emma Jenkins, and Mohammad Najjar</i>	
7.	Corporealities of Death in the Central Andes (ca. 9000–2000 BC)	111
	<i>Peter Kaulicke</i>	
8.	Mediating the Dominion of Death in Prehistoric Malta	130
	<i>Simon Stoddart</i>	
9.	House Societies and Founding Ancestors in Early Neolithic Britain	138
	<i>Julian Thomas</i>	
III	CONSTRUCTING THE ANCESTORS	
10.	Constructing Ancestors in Sub-Saharan Africa	153
	<i>Timothy Insoll</i>	
11.	Different Kinds of Dead: Presencing Andean Expired Beings	168
	<i>George F. Lau</i>	
12.	Putting Death in Its Place: The Idea of the Cemetery	187
	<i>Anthony Snodgrass</i>	
13.	Becoming Mycenaean? The Living, the Dead, and the Ancestors in the Transformation of Society in Second Millennium BC Southern Greece	200
	<i>Michael J. Boyd</i>	
IV	DEATH, HIERARCHY, AND THE SOCIAL ORDER	
14.	Life and Death in Late Prehistoric to Early Historic Mesopotamia	223
	<i>Karina Croucher</i>	
15.	The Big Sleep: Early Maya Mortuary Practice	237
	<i>Norman Hammond</i>	
16.	De-Paradoxisation of Paradoxes by Referring to Death as an Ultimate Paradox: The Case of the State-Formation Phase of Japan	255
	<i>Koji Mizoguchi</i>	

CONTENTS

17.	Death and Mortuary Rituals in Mainland Southeast Asia: From Hunter-Gatherers to the God Kings of Angkor	280
	<i>Charles F. W. Higham</i>	
V MATERIALITY AND MEMORY		
18.	How Did the Mycenaeans Remember? Death, Matter, and Memory in the Early Mycenaean World	303
	<i>Lambros Malafouris</i>	
19.	Eternal Glory: The Origins of Eastern Jade Burial and Its Far-Reaching Influence	315
	<i>Li Shuicheng</i>	
20.	Eventful Deaths – Eventful Lives? Bronze Age Mortuary Practices in the Late Prehistoric Eurasian Steppes of Central Russia (2100–1500 BC)	328
	<i>Bryan Hanks, Roger Doonan, Derek Pitman, Elena Kupriyanova, and Dmitri Zdanovich</i>	
VI INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY: GLIMPSING OTHER WORLDS		
21.	Northern Iroquoian Deathways and the Re-imagination of Community	351
	<i>John L. Creese</i>	
22.	Locating a Sense of Immortality in Early Egyptian Cemeteries	371
	<i>Alice Stevenson</i>	
23.	Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Mortuary Traditions in Ancient India: Stūpas, Relics, and the Archaeological Landscape	382
	<i>Julia Shaw</i>	
24.	Killing Mummies: On Inka Epistemology and Imperial Power	404
	<i>Terence N. D’Altroy</i>	
VII RESPONSES AND REACTIONS: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS		
25.	‘Death Shall Have No Dominion’: A Response	425
	<i>Timothy Jenkins</i>	

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[More information](#)

CONTENTS

26.	Comments: Death Shall Have No Dominion	430
	<i>Paul K. Wason</i>	
27.	The Muse of Archaeology	436
	<i>Ben Okri</i>	
	<i>Index</i>	439

Illustrations

<p>Frontispiece ‘The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living’, Damien Hirst, 1991</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><i>page</i> ii</p>	<p>5.1. Schematic plan of the excavation at Göbekli Tepe and its stratigraphic units</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">66</p>
<p>3.1. The Bouffia Boneval at La Chapelle-aux-Saints</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">28</p>	<p>5.2. Aerial image of the mound of Göbekli Tepe showing the excavation areas and position of enclosures excavated thus far</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">68</p>
<p>3.2. The Bouffia Boneval burial</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">29</p>	<p>5.3. View of Enclosure D, the largest and best preserved circular enclosure of Göbekli Tepe</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">69</p>
<p>3.3. Goya’s <i>Saturn [Greek Cronos] Devouring His Child</i></p>	<p style="text-align: right;">30</p>	<p>5.4. Pillar 31, one of the two central pillars of Enclosure D, illustrating their anthropomorphic appearance, which is due to the depiction of arms, hands, and elements of clothing</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">70</p>
<p>3.4. Altamura Man</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">32</p>	<p>5.5. Pillar 27 in Enclosure C, showing the sculpture of a predator in high relief above the flat relief depicting an apparently dead boar</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">71</p>
<p>3.5. The large carnivore competitors of the Sierra de Atapuerca Middle Pleistocene humans</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">33</p>	<p>5.6. Greater than life-size sculpture of a man, the so-called Urfa man</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">74</p>
<p>3.6. Two views of the Oase 2 cranium in situ</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">37</p>	<p>5.7. Life-sized human heads made of stone from Göbekli Tepe</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">75</p>
<p>3.7. The Oase passages, with indication of their names, of the position of the cranial remains from different species, and of former entrances</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">38</p>	<p>5.8. The rich decorated Pillar 43 from Enclosure D showing birds, a scorpion, and a headless, ithyphallic man</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">76</p>
<p>3.8. Humans in the Sima de los Huesos</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">40</p>	<p>5.9. A stone slab from Enclosure D showing an isolated human head (upper centre) accompanied by a hyena (centre), a vulture (right), and another animal (upper left)</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">77</p>
<p>4.1. Available indirect (top) and direct (bottom) calibrated ¹⁴C dates for Upper Palaeolithic primary burials (cf. Tables 4.1 and 4.2)</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">52</p>	<p>5.10. Composition of the avifauna of Göbekli Tepe based on bird bone material</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">78</p>
<p>4.2. Examples of Gravettian and contemporary primary burials</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">53</p>	<p>6.1. Wadi Faynan, southern Jordan, looking west towards the Wadi Araba and showing the location of Neolithic settlements</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">87</p>
<p>4.3. Geographical distribution of dated Gravettian sites (dots) and primary burials (crosses)</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">54</p>		
<p>4.4. Seriation of grave goods associated with Gravettian burial sites</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">55</p>		
<p>4.5. Principal coordinate analysis of grave goods associated with Gravettian burial sites (a) and with individual burials (b)</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">56</p>		
<p>4.6. Personal ornaments associated with the Saint-Germain-la-Rivière Madgalenian primary burial, as well as a photo and reconstruction of the structure protecting the deceased</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">57</p>		

ILLUSTRATIONS

6.2. Excavation of Wadi Faynan, April 2008, showing exposure of a dense cluster of pisé-walled structures and the large, partly excavated sub-circular structure (O75) in the foreground	88	7.10. Young woman with subadult, E. 13, OGSE-80, Las Vegas, Guayas, Ecuador	121
6.3. Semi-subterranean, pisé-walled structures at WF16, April 2010	88	7.11. Circular accumulation of human bones F25B, OGSE-80, Las Vegas, Guayas, Ecuador	122
6.4. Plan of WF16, showing dense cluster of semi-subterranean pisé-walled structures, the large sub-circular structure (O75), and the later circular structure O100	89	7.12. Large ceramic figurine, Valdivia culture, Río Chico	123
6.5. Distribution of burials at WF16	90	7.13. Figurine of unbaked clay, Caral, north-central coast, Peru	123
6.6. Burial O93 from the northeast	91	7.14. (Lost) Representation from Cerro Sechín, north coast, Peru	124
6.7. Burial O27 from the south	92	8.1. The Maltese islands	131
6.8. Burial O36 from the northwest	93	8.2. The cycle of conception and deconception	133
6.9. Burial O37 from the south	94	8.3. Scale and role of Maltese material liturgical culture	135
6.10. Burial O38 from the east showing white residue and linear black markings on the back of adult skull	95	9.1. The Hazleton North long cairn, near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire	140
6.11. Burial O39 from the north	96	9.2. The contents of the north and south passages and chambers at Hazleton North	141
6.12. Burial O28 from the southeast	97	9.3. Human remains in the northern entrance of the Hazleton North long cairn, showing the virtually complete condition of the final inhumation	142
6.13. Burial O82 from the southwest	98	9.4. Plans of the Early Neolithic timber halls of Claish and Balbridie	144
6.14. Burial O80 from the south	99	9.5. The chamber contents at the Fussell's Lodge long barrow, Wiltshire	147
6.15. Burial O35 from the south showing white residue on the ribcage	100	9.6. The chamber of the Cairnholy I long cairn, Galloway	148
6.16. Pierced and polished fragment of human cranium SF558	101	10.1. Midden (at rear) with in the foreground a cluster of ancestral shrines, Bonchiig Section, Tong Hills, northern Ghana	157
6.17. Burial O24 from the northeast	102	10.2. Complete anthropomorphic figurine from Yikpabongo, Koma Land, northern Ghana	161
7.1. Map showing sites mentioned in the text	112	10.3. Plan of a Yin shrine in abandoned compound, Bonchiig Section, Tong Hills, northern Ghana	164
7.2. House 100, La Paloma, central coast of Peru	114	11.1. Map of north central Andes and sites mentioned in text	172
7.3. Cane structure over burial, La Paloma	115	11.2. View of chullpa at Honcopampa	173
7.4. Young male under cane structure, La Paloma	116	11.3. Flexed interment, from Mashconga, Cabana region, Ancash	176
7.5. Detail of treated body with mask and sewn wig, Morro I, Arica, Chile, Archaeological Museum San Miguel de Azapa	118	11.4. One of the large interior interment chambers of Katiamá, a large chullpa near Caraz, Callejón de Huaylas, Peru	177
7.6. Cover of T-10B, Morro I, Arica	119	11.5. Photographs of ceramic vessels, representing ancestor bundles	178
7.7. Young child with mask showing open mouth, Morro I, Arica, Chile, Archaeological Museum San Miguel de Azapa	119	11.6. Photograph of stone sculpture effigy of mummy bundle, ca. 0.90 m tall	179
7.8. Foetus with wig, Maestranza, Arica, Chile, Archaeological Museum San Miguel de Azapa.	119		
7.9. Complete foetus inside a statuette of unbaked clay, Playa Miller 8, Arica, Chile, Archaeological Museum San Miguel de Azapa	120		

ILLUSTRATIONS

11.7. Four vertical slab sculptures documented at Chinchawas	179	15.4. Aerial view of part of the Cuello site from the northwest during the 1980 excavations, showing Platform 34, centre, and Platform 39 under vegetation at upper left	243
11.8. Small figurine, depicting a seated ancestor bundle, found at Chinchawas; measures 64 mm tall	180	15.5. The Cuello Main Trench from the south, with the early Middle Preclassic Str. 326, ca. 900–800 BC, exposed in the foreground and penetrated by a later grave	244
11.9. Camelid figures from Recuay tradition site of Chinchawas	180	15.6. Cuello Burial 186	246
11.10. Three huancas overlooking the city of Huaraz (middle ground)	181	15.7. Cuello Mass Burial I, ca. 400 BC, detail showing remains including a skull with unhealed frontal puncture (at right) and a partial humerus (in the pottery vessel at left) and a (probably) deer long bone carved with the woven-mat (<i>pop</i>) motif	248
12.1. A sector of the Boeotia survey, including two nucleated settlements and the intervening scatter of small rural sites (squares and circles), with occasional burials (triangles) in the interstices between these.	188	15.8. Cuello Burial 10, 400–350 BC	249
12.2. Sector Δ of the West Cemetery at Eleusis	190	15.9. Cuello Burial 79, part of Mass Burial II, in a semi-recumbent position with crossed legs	250
12.3. Plan and cross sections of a typical Mycenaean chamber tomb	192	15.10. A cut and perforated human frontal bone, perhaps part of a 'skull mask' for ancestor veneration	252
12.4. Distribution of the Mycenaean chamber tombs at Prosymna by period of construction	193	15.11. Pendant cut from a human parietal, with openwork eyes and mouth, found on the chest of Burial 160	252
12.5. Plan of the Late Helladic IIIC chamber tomb cemetery at Perati	194	16.1. The transformation of the globular jar shape-type for grain storage into the burial jar	258
12.6. The Submycenaean 'Pompeion' cemetery in the Kerameikos at Athens	196	16.2. Depiction of Sika deer, granaries, and human on burial jars	260
13.1. Tumulus at Ayos Ioannis Papoulia, Messenia	203	16.3. Dotaku bronze bells with human, animal, and insect depictions	261
13.2. Multiple-tholos mound at Kaminia, Messenia	204	16.4. Depiction of a human figure with a head decoration and a weapon (possibly halberd) and a shield on a Dotaku bronze bell-shaped clay implement from Kawayoriyoshihara, Saga prefecture	262
13.3. Scale in chamber and tholos tombs at Mycenae	206	16.5. Distribution of jar burials with Chinese grave goods or iron weapons	264
13.4. Clustering of tombs at Nichoria, Messenia	209	16.6. Human figures depicted without facial features, but apparently with a handle-attached halberd and a shield held in their hands, inscribed on pots, dating from Yayoi IV	265
14.1. Woolley's sketch of tomb 789, British Museum	229	16.7. Temporal change of the <i>Dohoko</i> bronze spearhead and the <i>Dotaku</i> bronze bell	267
14.2. Woolley's sketch of tomb 1050, British Museum	230	16.8. Stone artefact inferred to have been excavated from the Tatetsuki tumulus of Late Yayoi V	268
14.3. Woolley's sketch of tomb 1054, British Museum	231	16.9. Sendoyama site and its residential segments	269
15.1. The Maya Area, showing important sites	238		
15.2. The subpyramid burial vault of Janaab Pakal of Palenque, with the carved sarcophagus lid raised to show the inner lid of the fish-shaped cavity containing the corpse	239		
15.3. The carved lid of Janaab Pakal's sarcophagus, showing the deceased ruler as a youth rising from (or falling into) the jaws of the Underworld	240		

ILLUSTRATIONS

16.10. The location of the Japanese archipelago in East Asia (a) and ancient provinces as 'nodes' networked through exchange activities and interaction (b)	270	19.2. Jade cicada (<i>yuhan</i>) in the Baiyinchanghan burial of the Xinglongwa Culture, Inner Mongolia	316
16.11. Depictions of tattooed or painted faces in the Middle and Late Yayoi and Early Kofun periods	272	19.3. Jade dragon, Hongshan Culture, Sanxingtala site, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia	317
16.12. Hashihaka (Hashinakayama) tumulus	273	19.4. Jade hooked cloud-shaped ornaments, Hongshan Culture, Narisitai site, Balinyouqi, Inner Mongolia	318
16.13. Clay cylindrical vessels (<i>Haniwa</i>) decorated with characteristic complex curvilinear band motifs	273	19.5. Jade burial of Hongshan Culture, No. 1 tomb of the No. 1 stone mound at the No. 5 location at the Niuhefang site, Liaoning Province	319
16.14. The placement of different categories of artefacts with distinct symbolic meanings: the Yukinoyama tumulus	275	19.6. Jade burial of Songze Culture, No. 90 tomb, Dongshancun site, Jiangsu province	320
17.1. Map of Southeast Asia showing the location of the sites discussed in the text	281	19.7. Jade burial of <i>lingjiatan</i> cemetery, No. 23 tomb, 2007, Hanshan, Anhui province	320
17.2. The reconstructed genealogy of two descent groups at Khok Phanom Di, showing individuals with a precondylar tubercle	282	19.8. Turtle-shaped jade, No. 23 tomb, 2007, Hanshan, Anhui province	321
17.3. The second to the sixth mortuary phases at Khok Phanom Di	284	19.9. The No. 20 tomb, Fanshan, Zhejiang Province.	321
17.4. Khok Phanom Di, burial 15, a woman wearing more than 120,000 shell beads	285	19.10. The largest Jade <i>weng</i> with carved designs of supernatural figures with animal faces, from Fanshan cemetery of Zhejiang Province	322
17.5. The mortuary building from Khok Phanom Di, mortuary phase 6	286	19.11. Jade burial found in the Central Plains with human sacrifice, Qingliangsi Cemetery in Ruicheng, Shanxi Province	322
17.6. Ban Na Di, burial 28, a male jar burial from Neolithic phase 1	287	19.12. The No. 5 tomb at Xiaotun, Anyang, Henan Province	323
17.7. The layout of the Bronze Age cemetery of Ban Non Wat over the five phases, 1000–420 BC	288	19.13. Jade face covers (eye masks)	323
17.8. Ban Non Wat burial 106, BA2, showing reburied human bones and a pool of red ochre	289	19.14. Jade burial in the Zhou Dynasty, tomb No.2001, Sanmenxia, Henan Province	324
17.9. Ban Non Wat burial 532, BA2	289	19.15. 'Jade suits' (nine orifices seals), Han Dynasty, tomb of Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province	325
17.10. The layout of the Iron Age phase 1 cemetery of Ban Non Wat	291	20.1. Map of the southeastern Ural Mountains showing location of middle Bronze Age fortified settlements (black dots) and identified late prehistoric copper mines (black stars)	329
17.11. The layout of the four Iron Age mortuary phases at Noen U-Loke	292	20.2. Aerial photo of Solntse II cemetery showing fenced contemporary Muslim cemetery and prehistoric kurgan mounds surrounding it (photo taken from the north, looking south)	330
17.12. Two elite males from IA3 Noen U-Loke: burial 69 on the left has four bronze belts, burial 14 has three, together with 150 bronze bangles	293	20.3. Plan of Solntse II cemetery complex	331
17.13. Temple mausolea of Angkorian kings	296	20.4. Left, Eponymous Sintashta settlement and Sintashta Mogil'nik (SM) mortuary complex indicating graves with evidence of chariot vehicles. right, Grave 30 from SM cemetery showing wheel impressions of chariot vehicle, cheek pieces, and associated weaponry	332
18.1. Associative mnemonic enchainment	309		
19.1. Gold thread jade suite (<i>jīnlǚ yù yī</i> 金缕玉衣), Han Dynasty, from Mancheng, Hebei Province	316		

ILLUSTRATIONS

20.5. Burial of adult male from Krivoie Ozero cemetery, Kurgan 10, Burial Pit 3	336	21.6. Artist's rendering of a typical Ontario Iroquoian 'complex' intra-mural bundle burial, containing incomplete secondary remains of multiple individuals	365
20.6. Top, Soviet period air photo of Stepnoye settlement and associated kurgan cemetery; centre, bubble plot of copper readings (measured in parts per million through HHpXRF analyser) across Stepnoye settlement area based on a 10 m grid; bottom, grid sampling with HHpXRF analyser	338	21.7. Frequencies of aged individuals interred at Iroquoian sites in southern Ontario by burial context, stage, and type	366
20.7. Sintashta plate slag showing form and underside impression made by copper ingot	339	22.1. A Naqada IIC burial from Mahasna containing a body encircled by pottery	374
20.8. Relative abundance of alloy from the Stepnoye cemetery by alloy types and chronological periods	341	22.2. Map of Cemeteries B and U, Umm el-Qa'ab, Abydos	376
20.9. Relative consumption trends of each type of copper alloy in mass (g) at the Stepnoye cemeteries	341	22.3. Map of the tombs of the First Dynasty rulers at Abydos	378
20.10. Stepnoye 7, Burial 17 illustrating 'face to face' burial of male and female (S-2 and S-3) with additional female skeleton (S-1) and grave goods including copper battle axes, 'necklace', headdress and pottery	342	22.4. An above-ground funerary stela from around the tomb of Den	378
20.11. Left, composite headdress from Stepnoye 7, Burial Pit 17; right, composite ornament, perhaps to frame the face	342	23.1. Stūpa at Andher, near Sanchi (second century BC)	383
21.1. The Wendat 'feast of the dead'	356	23.2. Distribution of urban centres and Buddhist sites in ancient India	384
21.2. Moatfield Ossuary, late thirteenth century AD	357	23.3. Sanchi Survey Project study area: site distribution	393
21.3. Intact bundle within the Moatfield Ossuary	358	23.4. Sanchi Survey Project study area: Buddhist sites and rock-shelters	394
21.4. Flow chart for a <i>chaîne opératoire</i> of post-mortem bodily treatments	359	23.5. Andher stūpa from below	396
21.5. Artist's rendering of a typical Ontario Iroquoian flexed primary burial	365	23.6. Monastery platform at Morel Khurd	398
		24.1. A deceased Inka ruler being carried on a litter	405
		24.2. The Inka empire, Tawantinsuyu, at the time of the Spanish invasion of 1532, showing the road system, the main provincial centres, and (inset) the four parts (<i>suyu</i>)	406
		24.3. Drawing of living descendants making offerings to their deceased ancestors in the southeastern part of the Inka empire (<i>Kollasuyu</i>)	412

Tables

2.1. Species and observed responses to dead conspecifics	page 16	20.3. Metal artefact inventory recovered from the Stepnoye (MBA) and Stepnoye VII (LBA) cemeteries analysed with HHpXRF instrumentation	340
2.2. Behaviours seen in wild chimpanzees, dolphins, and elephants in response to dead conspecifics, under the realms of 'communication', 'social theatre', and 'morbidity'	24	20.4. Mass (g) of the metalwork from the Stepnoye cemetery excavations by dominant alloy and by relative cultural phase (metal objects noted as 'Bronze Age' come from burial contexts where relative dating was not established)	340
4.1. Indirect ¹⁴ C radiocarbon ages of Upper Palaeolithic burials	50	20.5. Data showing the consumption trends of different alloy types at the Stepnoye cemetery split among ornaments, tools, and weapons (g)	340
4.2. Direct ¹⁴ C radiocarbon ages of Upper Palaeolithic burials	51	20.6. Models used to characterize the nature of Sintashta metal production and use	345
6.1. Table of burials at WF16	83	21.1. Non-ossuary interments from Late Woodland southern Ontario from Early Iroquoian (AD 900–1280) sites, demonstrating variation of burial contexts, stages, and positions with individual age and sex	360
7.1. Chronological table for Ecuador, Peru, and Chile	111	21.2. Non-ossuary interments from Late Woodland southern Ontario from Middle Iroquoian (AD 1280–1400) sites, demonstrating variation of burial contexts, stages, and positions with individual age and sex	362
8.1. Ability of prehistoric inhabitants to register sea level change	132	22.1. Absolute and relative periods for early Egypt	373
10.1. Colour use on corpses in southern Nigeria	160		
11.1. Recuay subterranean funerary buildings	174		
11.2. Burial spaces and group affiliations, Otuco, Cajatambo	176		
13.1. Phases and dates in the second millennium BC Aegean	200		
14.1. South Mesopotamian chronology	223		
20.1. Table illustrating regional chronologies and archaeological culture phases	330		
20.2. Comparison of archaeological materials from the middle Bronze Age settlement of Arkaim and the late Bronze Age settlement of Gorny	335		

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978-1-107-08273-1 - Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World: “Death Shall Have No Dominion”

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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978-1-107-08273-1 - Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World: "Death Shall Have No Dominion"

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

And death shall have no dominion.
 Dead men naked they shall be one
 With the man in the wind and the west moon;
 When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone;
 They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
 Though they go mad they shall be sane,
 Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
 Though lovers be lost love shall not;
 And death shall have no dominion.

(Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems*, 1957. US & Canada: copyright ©1943 by New Directions Publishing Corp. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp. Rest of world: reprinted by permission of David Higham Associates Limited)

Death provides archaeology with much of its raw material, and publications dealing with the archaeology of burial certainly already exist. But there has been little emphasis in them upon the emergence of death as a concept in early times, and insufficient on the different ways that death is used in human societies in a manner that favours the formation of communities, and of social hierarchies, and sometimes the creation of divinities.

The present volume seeks to move such considerations to the fore, drawing upon the papers prepared for the symposium held at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in Cambridge from 11–14 April 2012. The papers, circulated before the meeting,

were discussed after brief oral presentations. The revised papers are published here together with the three discussion papers that followed.

The symposium was part of a project funded by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, to which the editors are deeply grateful.

João Zilhão was unable to attend the meeting in person and his paper was introduced by Francesco d'Errico, while that of Li Shuicheng was kindly presented by Xinyi Liu. The editors are grateful also to the McDonald Institute for its hospitality, and to Patricia Duff, Evi Margaritis, Magda Matczak, and Paula Pugsley for their assistance at the meeting.