



Social Memory, Identity, and Death: Anthropological Perspectives on Mortuary Rituals

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Embodied Memories of Place and People: Death and Society in an Early Urban Community

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Relationships to places may also find expression through the agencies of myth, prayer, music, dance, art, architecture, and in many communities, recurrent forms of religious and political rituals. Thus...places and their meanings are continually woven into the fabric of social life, anchoring it to features of the landscape and blanketing it with layers of significance that few can fail to appreciate. (Basso 1996:57)

Basso's quote so simply and so powerfully reminds us of the gathering power of place, and the wondrous tapestry woven with human desires, identities, emotions, and actions in certain places, that I find it useful in thinking about and crafting reconstructions of mortuary practices in the archaeological past. Throughout the history of anthropology, many ethnographers and archaeologists have nurtured a keen appreciation for the production and nurturing of memories of places, places we travel to and from, places where we grow up, places where we work in the field, and places we call home. For many of us, places evoke powerful memories of experiences, desires, expectations, and emotions. Places can gather these memories and embody specific chapters in our own personal biographies (Casey 1996:24).

Reconstructing a sense of place is an integral part of archaeological practice, regardless of whether we are studying mortuary behavior or other aspects of peoples' lives. For example, we often reconstruct landscapes from settlement pattern studies, or draft architectural plans from buildings or neighborhoods that we have excavated. But we do not always make the connection so eloquently stated by Basso: places are inextricably linked with people, and peoples' lives are intimately related to places. As archaeologists, our challenge then is to transfer the material remains of the past into anthropological stories of places. In crafting our vision of the past, we have the chance to people the past with individuals in places; places that gather their memories, languages, personal histories, emotions, expectations, and desires; places woven into the social fabric of a past community.

Approaching mortuary practices from the perspective of the link between place, memories, and people, we seek to gain an understanding of the interplay between the dead and the living in conducting commemorative rites and reaffirming or rending the bonds among members of the living community (for example, see Chesson 1999; Gillespie 2001; Hollimon 1997, this volume; Joyce 1999, this volume; Kuijt 1996, this volume; Kus and Raharijaona this volume; McCafferty and McCafferty 1994; O'Shea 1996; Raharijaona and Kus this volume). In these analyses, researchers seek to infuse their interpretation and reconstruction of life in the past with a sense of the conflicting emotions, sensuality, tensions, and excitement that can be a part of commemorative ceremonies, all of which occurred in a specific time and place. In this way, they recreate a more complete and realistic vision of the past, interweaving the complexities of peoples' lives with the richness of place.

Commemorative ceremonies set into motion richly textured interactions in which individuals and groups can assert identities, craft social memories, and repair the social fabric of the community. For many archaeologists, past mortuary rites, which enact the complex interplay of material culture and identity, can be at least partially gleaned from the excavated material remains of these ceremonies: namely, the grave goods, skeletal remains, funerary structures, and the built environment (for example, O'Shea 1996). From an ethnographic perspective, mortuary rituals offer a sensuous arena in which people actively create and (re)assert social memories; renew, forge, or break social bonds; and make claims for individual identities and group memberships (George 1996;

Hertz 1960; Jing 1996; Kan 1989; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Schiller 1997, this volume; Weiner 1976). Both ethnographers and archaeologists have clearly illustrated that our understanding of past communities through their mortuary practices benefits by close attention to the intensely complex interplay between people's identities, experiences, and desires; the multiple webs of social structures; and the use of material culture and the built environment to construct social memories and identities of people and places in primary and secondary mortuary practices.

In this analysis of the pre-urban mortuary practices at the Early Bronze Age site of Bab edh-Dhra', Jordan, I explore how we can witness the creation of social memories of people and places in rituals of commemoration in the deep past. When we consider mortuary practices as arenas in which social memories are created, in which people present their understanding of the past and their expectations for the future, the tombs at Bab edh-Dhra' take on a more profound significance than simply being how pre-urban people in this region disposed of their dead. From this perspective, we can immediately begin to consider the place in which people buried their friends, kinspeople, and adversaries, as well as the people who conducted these rites for the dead, the dead being memorialized, and the people for whom these social memories were (re)produced (George 1996:186–200). Drawing on the richness of the Bab edh-Dhra' data, gathered from extensive surveys and excavations, I will offer some ideas about how we might be able to answer some of these questions.

Burial Practices at Early Bronze Age IA Bab edh-Dhra'

Before launching into a discussion of mortuary practices in the Early Bronze Age (EBA), I believe it will be helpful to provide a brief introduction to the temporal context of the EBA and a short synopsis of the links between the settlement history of Bab edh-Dhra' and the mortuary practices.¹ The EBA in the southern Levant (ancient Israel, Jordan, and Palestine) represents the initial period of urbanization in the region, and several researchers have explored the complicated sequence of the establishment, growth, and eventual abandonment of walled towns (for instance, see Amiran and Gophna 1989; Ben-Tor 1992; de Miroshedji 1989; Esse 1989, 1991; Falconer and Savage 1995; Joffe 1991, 1993; Kempinski 1989; Rosen 1995). While a comprehensive discussion of these issues clearly lies beyond the scope of this study, the mortuary data from Bab edh-Dhra' shaft tombs and

chapel houses can offer an interesting perspective on the development and decline of an urban society in the third millennium B.C. As one of the only urban sites associated with a well-excavated and published cemetery, Bab edh-Dhra' offers the researcher an overabundance of data about life and death in an EBA urban town in the southern Levant (Figure 8.1).

For the EB IA period, the excavators have found no evidence of settlement at the site, located in the southern Ghor overlooking the Dead Sea. The nearest EB I sites occupy the adjacent Kerak Plateau, approximately fifteen to twenty kilometers up the Wadi Kerak (Steele 1990).² Steele (1990) has suggested that during this pre-urban, even pre-settlement, period, people from the Kerak Plateau traveled to Bab edh-Dhra' in the Ghor and buried their dead in chambers associated with shafts excavated into the ground (Schaub and Rast 1989; Rast, personal communication, 1998) (Figure 8.2, Table 8.1). In the period of urbanization (EB IB and early EB II) when people began settling at the site, the inhabitants utilized both shaft tombs as well as small, circular chapel houses, and placed the disarticulated and articulated skeletal remains of their dead within these transitional mortuary contexts. In the EB II-III period, the population of the site had grown and inhabitants constructed thick fortification walls around the town, which at its largest reached four hectares. Bab edh-Dhra' "urbanites" buried their dead in chapel houses: they stored the disarticulated remains of individuals in large, rectilinear, mudbrick chapel houses, located south of the settlement in the same cemetery in which the earlier shaft tombs were located (Chesson 1999). In the EB IV phase, people continued to live at the site, even constructing houses on top of the decaying fortification walls (Rast and Schaub 1981:31–34), but the settlement is no longer considered to be urban, and most of the population had dispersed throughout the countryside. Nevertheless, two shaft tombs from this period have been excavated; once again, we see that with the shift in settlement pattern, mortuary practices also changed. The EB IV inhabitants of Bab edh-Dhra' buried their dead in shaft tombs with stone-lined shafts (Schaub and Rast 1989:473–89, fig. 277).

This chapter will focus on the EB IA shaft tombs of the pre-urban period to gain insights into the foundations for the development of social differentiation and urbanization in the region. I believe that the EB IA people were creating, negotiating, and reproducing social memories at the site of Bab edh-Dhra', and that these memories and indeed the place of commemoration helped to create a social and physical framework for later urban lifeways. In particular, I argue that examination of the

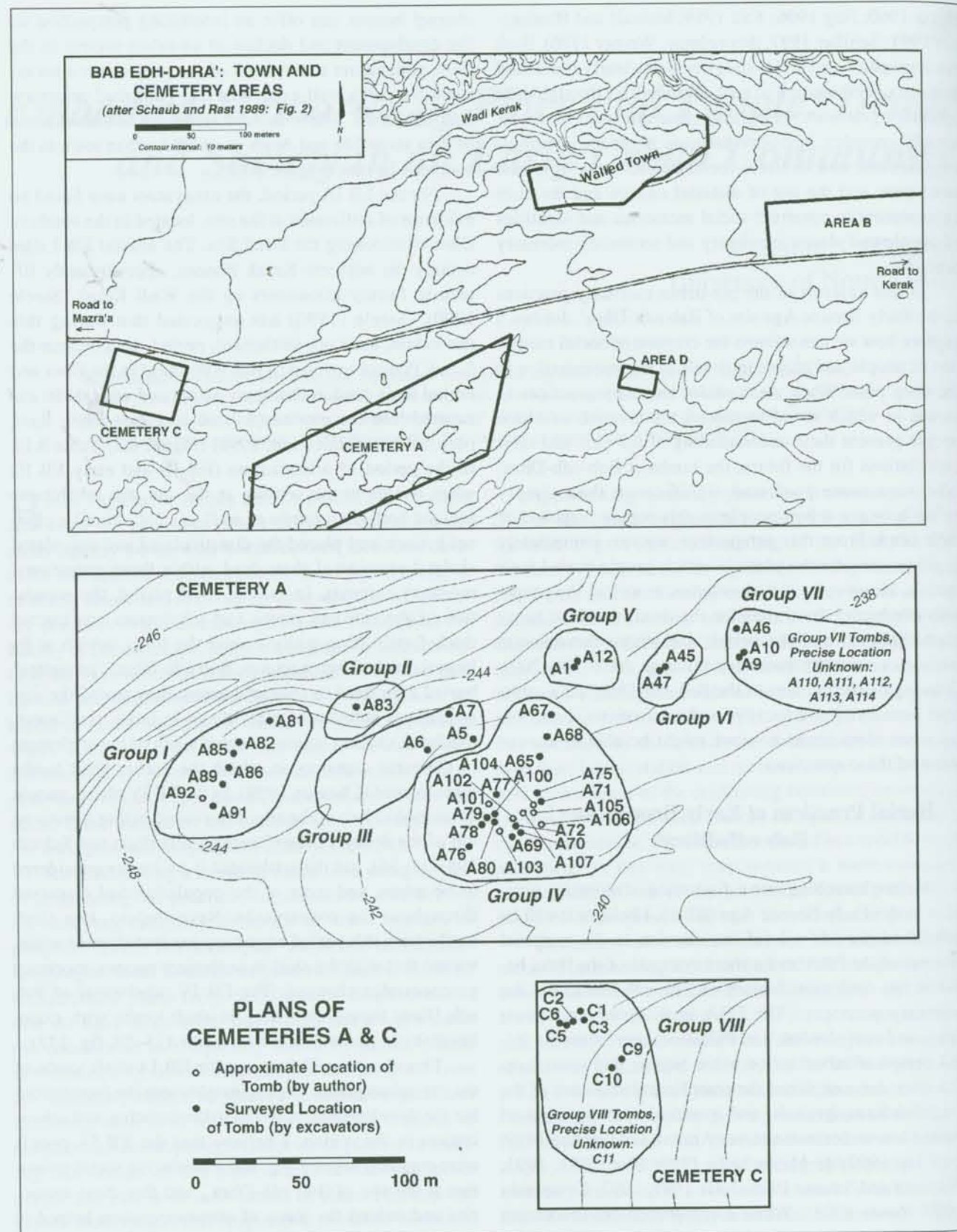


Figure 8.1. Map of Bab edh-Dhra' cemetery and settlement with location of EB IA tombs.

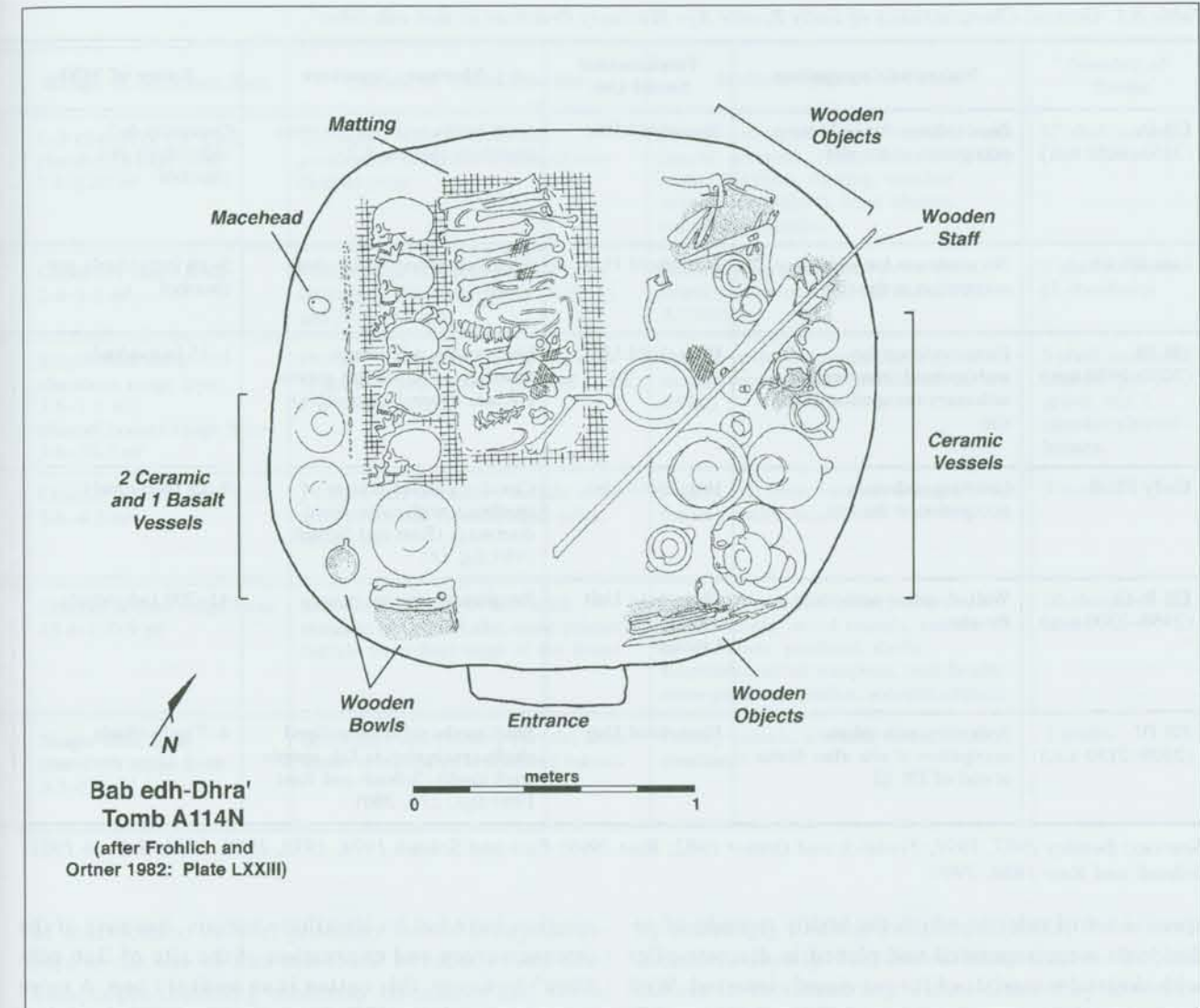


Figure 8.2. Plan of shaft tomb A114N, Bab edh-Dhra'.

mortuary practices, including the creation of a physical place for burial, the treatment of the dead in secondary mortuary rites, the inclusion of certain types of grave goods, and the communal burial of the dead, provides us with an insight into the social structures of the pre-urban period.

Stories of Mortuary Practices and Commemoration at Bab edh-Dhra'

In analyzing the mortuary practices of EB IA Bab edh-Dhra', it is helpful to bring to mind the different behavioral elements of the rites suggested by the material remains. Such a reconstruction will involve both the normative, scientific description of the material remains, as well as the more imaginative narrative implicating the actual people participating in these ceremonies (cf. Joyce

this volume; Kuijt this volume; Meskell this volume). Combining these two genres of writing produces a richer picture of the past and acknowledges the crucial role people play in creating the archaeological record.

Despite extensive survey and excavation in and around the site of Bab edh-Dhra', the excavators have uncovered no evidence of settlement at the site during the pre-urban EB IA period (Schaub and Rast 1989). The only archaeological remains from the EB IA period comprise mortuary remains: shaft tombs with anywhere from one to five chambers, each filled with the disarticulated remains of one to five individuals, associated with grave goods, including pottery vessels, stone vessels, clay figurines, wooden objects, beads of various materials, and stone (Figure 8.2). In these EB IA secondary burials at the cemetery at Bab edh-Dhra', the living followed a

Table 8.1. General Characteristics of Early Bronze Age Mortuary Practices at Bab edh-Dhra'

	Nature of Occupation	Fundamental Social Unit	Mortuary Structure	Range of MNI	Range of Structure Size	Nature of Burial Practice	Material Culture in Tombs	Number of Tombs
EB IA (3150–3050 B.C.)	No evidence for sedentary occupation at the site	Household Unit	Shaft tombs with one or more chambers (Figure 8.2)	Generally 4–5 individuals per chamber	1–5 chambers per shaft, chambers range from 1.4–3.85 m ²	Secondary burials: skull and postcranial elements separated into distinct piles	Pottery and stone vessels, costume items (beads, pendants, shells, bracelets), clay human figurines, matting, wooden vessels and objects, bone objects, maceheads, textiles	57 shaft tombs (104 chambers)
Late EB IA	No evidence for sedentary occupation at the site	Household Unit	Single chambers of IA shaft tombs	5–10 individuals per chamber	Chambers range from 2.4–3.0 m ²	Primary and secondary burials; articulated skeletons, piles of skulls and bones mixed	Pottery vessels, costume items (pins, beads), stone vessels, macehead (1 in A111N)	2 shaft tombs (3 chambers)
EB IB (3050–2950 B.C.)	First evidence for architectural structures, sedentary occupation at the site	Household Unit	Shaft tombs with single chambers, shallow pit graves, circular charnel house (G1)	1–15 individuals	Single shaft tomb chambers range from 3.6–7.0 m ² ; charnel houses range from 3.6–33.2 m ²	Primary and secondary burials with articulated individuals, piles of skulls and bones mixed	Pottery vessels, costume items (pins, beads), bone objects, maceheads (2 in A88L)	5 shaft tombs, 1 shallow pit grave, and 2 circular charnel houses
Early EB II	Growing sedentary occupation at the site	Household Unit	Circular charnel houses of mudbrick with stone-lined doorways (Rast and Schaub 1981:fig. 18)	9–15 individuals	Charnel houses range from 3.6–4.2 m ²	Primary and secondary burials with articulated individuals, skull piles, bone piles	Pottery and stone vessels, costume items (beads, shells, bracelets)	3 tombs
EB II–III (2950–2300 B.C.)	Walled, urban settlement at the site	Household Unit and House/Lineage	Rectilinear charnel houses	41–200 individuals	Charnel houses range from 13.4–120.9 m ²	Secondary burials of cremated remains of individuals; some primary burials from final stage of use found	Local and nonlocal pottery vessels, stone vessels, wood vessels, costume items (beads, pendants, shells, bracelets), metal weapons, maceheads, stone palettes, textiles, wooden objects	10 charnel houses
EB IV (2300–2150 B.C.)	Sedentary, non-urban occupation at site after hiatus at end of EB III	Household Unit	Shaft tombs with stone-lined shafts (exception is D1, simple shaft tomb) (Schaub and Rast 1989:figs. 277, 280)	4–7 individuals	Single shaft tomb chambers range from 3.5–5.6 m ²	Secondary and primary burials; some skulls removed in articulated burials	Pottery vessels, costume items (beads, pendants)	3 tombs

Sources: Bentley 1987, 1991; Frohlich and Ortner 1982; Rast 1999; Rast and Schaub 1974, 1978, 1980, 1981; Schaub 1981; Schaub and Rast 1984, 1989.

specific set of rules in which the bodily remains of individuals were separated and placed in discrete piles with skeletal materials of the previously interred. With few exceptions, the space in each chamber was discretely segmented to hold particular skeletal and grave goods. Skulls were placed to the left of the entrance, often in a line along the edge of a woven mat. On this mat, the living deposited the majority of post-cranial remains, particularly long bones, pelvic bones, ribs, and vertebrae. Finally, to the right of the mat and long bones, and to the right of the chamber entrance, people set the grave goods.

All of the EB IA shaft tombs contain the remains of individuals who were buried in secondary mortuary rituals, and the excavators have found no evidence for primary burials, namely articulated skeletons, in EB IA tombs. From this perspective, it seems that Bab edh-Dhra' represents a focus for secondary mortuary rituals in the EB IA. As of now, there is no clear evidence of where EB IA people conducted primary burial of their dead. It is possible that they buried the recently deceased at Bab edh-Dhra', and that archae-

ologists have not located these burials. Because of the intense survey and excavation of the site of Bab edh-Dhra', however, this option is an unlikely one. A more plausible explanation relies on the primary burial of individuals in another location, perhaps closer to the settlement of the EB IA people who traveled to Bab edh-Dhra' for secondary mortuary rites. Additional excavation and survey, particularly on the Kerak Plateau at the EB I sites, may address this gap in our understanding of the EB I sequence of mortuary rituals.

While we cannot say with certainty where the living communities were located, we do have some information on the social organization of the groups. In Bentley's (1987, 1991) analysis of dental characteristics of the EB IA skeletons from Bab edh-Dhra', she argues that individuals found within a single shaft tomb complex were more related to each other than to people buried in other shaft tombs. On the basis of this bioarchaeological research, she persuasively argues that the people buried in a single shaft tomb belonged to a particular kin group, because they show dental traits shared within a genetically related group

of individuals. People, probably family groups, traveled to the site of Bab edh-Dhra' to rebury their dead kinspeople, building mortuary structures and social memories in this site overlooking the Dead Sea.

With this framework as a starting point, we can now begin to consider more humanistic elements to the story, highlighting the intimate links between people, places, identity, and memory. Without evidence for settlement in the southeastern Dead Sea Plain during the EB IA, we can postulate that the people gathered the defleshed remains of the dead from their primary burial site, bundled up the remains carefully, and traveled to the site of Bab edh-Dhra' to bury the dead once again. Several individuals, likely belonging to the kin group of the deceased (Bentley 1987, 1991), traveled by foot or possibly donkey (Grigson 1995) to the site of Bab edh-Dhra', on the southeastern plain of the Dead Sea. Perhaps the remains of the dead were bundled onto the backs of donkeys, accompanied by the grave goods of pottery, stone vessels, figurines, maceheads, and jewelry. Traveling from the Kerak Plateau down steep slopes

by seemingly endless switchback trails, these family members slowly descended more than a thousand meters to the Dead Sea Plain. Once they arrived at Bab edh-Dhra', these people located their family's tomb, reopened the previously excavated shaft of approximately two meters in depth, and excavated out a new burial chamber or simply opened a previously constructed chamber. Into this chamber, they placed the discrete skeletal elements of their dead kinsperson, carefully laying the skull along with the other skulls and the long bones on top of the mat with their ancestors' post-cranial remains (Figure 8.2).

Drawing on several ethnographic studies of commemoration, mortuary rituals, and social memory (including George 1996; Kan 1989; Schiller this volume; Weiner 1976), we can imagine that this burial rite included a ceremony to commemorate the dead and to communally acknowledge the group's grief and anguish over losing one of their kin. On the journey to bury their dead, members of the group may have adorned their bodies with their most beautiful jewelry and textiles; they may have prepared eloquent

speeches or songs for people to speak, sing, and hear. They carried with them the correct number of special pottery vessels, the prized stone vessels, clay figurines, beaded jewelry, and wooden tools to place within the chamber with their ancestors. They slowly lowered the bundled remains down the shaft to the waiting arms of the deceased's brother, sister, father, cousin, mother, or friend, who was waiting down in the shaft to place the bones and goods in the chamber. While they placed the skeletal elements in the chamber, the gathered crowd may have spoken, sung, danced, and made offerings to the ancestors, and to the most recent occupant of the chambers. Perhaps these rituals, gifts, the proper segmentation of their dead kinsperson, and their burial with their foremothers and forefathers would help the newly deceased to join the community of the ancestors. After the group completed the rites, they withdrew, traveling back to their community on the Kerak Plateau, perhaps lightened from the burden of a vow, of mourning, or of anticipation of the ceremonies and various performances. As they journeyed from the burial site, the landscape around them, especially the high hills leading to the plateaus surrounding the valley and the vast salt lake, reflected the heaviness of the ceremony they just performed, the burden from which they were relieved, and a renewed sense of the memory of the ancestors.

Material Culture, Commemorative Place, and Social Memory

Commemoration obliges us to consider both its subjects and its objects, the commemorating and the commemorated. Commemoration cannot be disassociated from the sociality of remembering, nor can it be disassociated from the events that it recollects or reenacts. (George 1996:197)

From these two types of narrative reconstructions of the secondary mortuary practices at Bab edh-Dhra', there are several elements that I find particularly significant for this discussion:

- As we have found no evidence for settlement at the site, people traveled to Bab edh-Dhra' to bury their dead in secondary mortuary ceremonies;
- People placed their dead in collective tombs, and analysis of these tombs by Bentley (1987, 1991) suggests that those buried within a shaft tomb are genetically related;
- Grave goods within these tombs suggest the use of material culture to assert a particular identity through

adornment (George 1996:144–45, especially his citations of Simmel 1950; Hollimon this volume; Joyce 1999, this volume; Kuijt this volume; O'Shea 1996; Wiessner 1983); and

• In these burial rites, people followed a strict set of rules concerning the segmentation and placement of skeletal remains within these shaft tombs and concerning the construction of ritual space and commemorative place.

An examination of the grave goods, especially in relation to the spatial distribution of goods across the cemetery, and to the types (such as numbers of males, females, or subadults) of individuals accompanying certain types of goods, demonstrates complex, simultaneous patterns of ambiguity and marked differences.³ For instance, in the analysis of the spatial distribution of males, females, and subadults within single-shaft tombs, as well as between shaft tombs across the entire cemetery, there is an interesting pattern of ambiguity (Chesson and Kuijt n.d.). Analysis of the aged and sexed skeletons shows no spatial patterning of preferential location in the cemetery based on sex or age of adult men and women or age of subadults.⁴ Furthermore, the analysis of the aged and sexed individuals in association with different classes of objects, and their burial across space in the cemetery, also demonstrates no clear patterns of association. Men, women, and children of all ages were buried with multiple variations of the full range of artifact classes and materials, reinforcing the pattern of ambiguity that we see in terms of who is buried with whom and with what types of objects.

At the same time, the analysis of certain classes of artifacts, particularly ceramic vessels, stone vessels, maceheads, and figurines, demonstrates clear patterns of co-occurrences within tomb groups, and within tombs themselves (Chesson and Kuijt n.d.). For example, higher numbers of ceramic vessels do not necessarily co-occur with higher numbers of other types of artifacts (Table 8.2). For instance, the tombs A77, A78NE, and A80N all contained some of the highest concentrations of ceramic vessels per individual, but contained no maceheads, figurines, or stone vessels. On the other hand, there is a tendency for higher concentrations of maceheads to be accompanied by higher concentrations of stone vessels. Seven of the thirty-seven chambers in Group IV shaft tombs contained higher concentrations of both maceheads and stone vessels (Table 8.2). While there are numerous tombs with a stone vessel and lacking a macehead (and vice versa), these seven chambers contain higher numbers proportionally of maceheads and stone vessels within Group IV tombs.

Table 8.2. Groups of EB IA shaft tombs at Bab edh-Dhra'

Group	Tombs	MNI	CV/I	M/I	F/I	SV/I
I	A81E, A81N, A81S, A81W, A82E, A82SE, A82SW, A85, A86SW, A86SE, A86NE, A89SE, A89NE, A89NW, A91, A92	31	8.53	0.18	0.0	0.37
III	A5E, A5S, A6N, A6E, A7E, A7S	16	14.42	0.0	0.75	0.58
IV	A65S, A65E, A65W, A67N, A67E, A68N, A68E, A68SE, A68W, A69, A70, A71S, A71N, A71W, A72NE, A72NW, A72S, A75, A76E, A76W, A77, A78NW, A78NE, A78SW, A78SE, A79N, A79S, A79W, A79E, A80N, A80S, A80W, A80E, A100S, A100E, A100W	133	8.2	0.11	0.02	0.15
VII	A9, A10, A110NE, A110NW, A110SE, A111W, A112S, A112N/1, A112N/2, A112E, A112W, A113, A114N	38	7.97	0.05	0.01	0.17
VIII	C1, C2, C3, C5, C6, C11	15	10.2	0.16	0.0	0.16
TOTAL	All tombs and chambers	233	9.87	0.1	0.17	0.29

MNI: Minimum number of individuals

CV/I: Number of ceramic vessels per individual

M/I: Number of maceheads per individual

F/I: Number of figurines per individual

SV/I: Number of stone vessels per individual

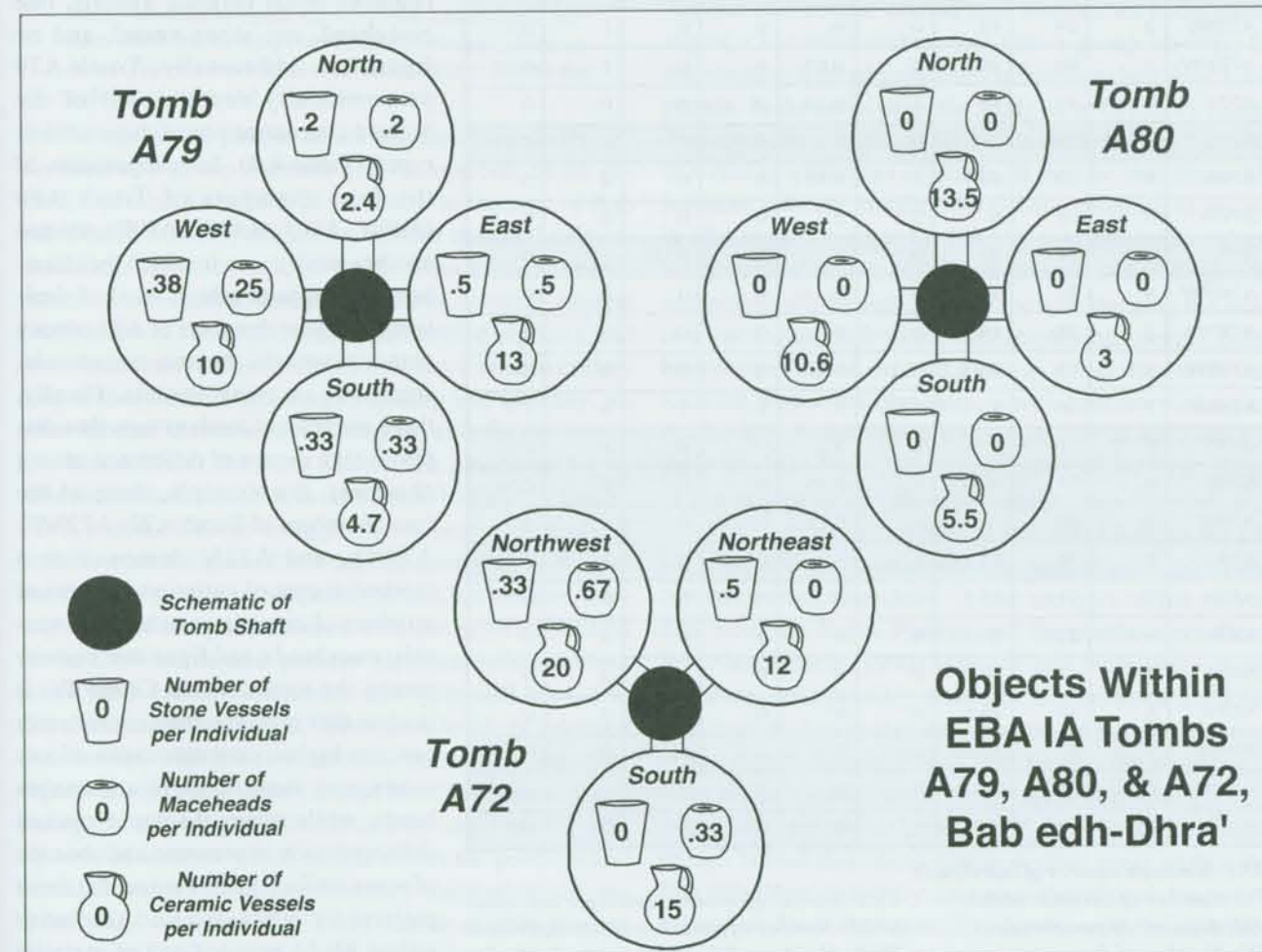


Figure 8.3. Comparison of objects within EB IA Tombs A79, A80, and A72 at Bab edh-Dhra'.

Table 8.3. Individuals and grave goods in EB IA shaft tombs in Group IV, Bab edh-Dhra'

Tomb	MNI	CV	CV/I	MH	MH/I	FG	FG/I	SV	SV/I
A65S	1	17	17	0	0	0	0	0	0
A65E	2	12	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
A65W	5	13	2.6	1	0.2	0	0	1	0.2
A67E	4	10	2.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
A67N	4	10	2.5	0	0	0	0	1	0.25
A68N	2	23	11.5	0	0	0	0	1	0.5
A68E	?	28	?	2	?	0	?	2	?
A68S	3	19	6.33	0	0	0	0	1	0.33
A68SE	2	23	11.5	1	0.5	0	0	1	0.5
A68W	5	24	4.8	0	0	0	0	2	0.4
A69	5	25	5	0	0	0	0	1	0.2
A70	4	6	1.5	0	0	0	0	1	0.25
A71S	6	46	7.67	1	0.17	0	0	0	0
A71N	3	24	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
A71W	10	57	5.7	0	0	0	0	0	0
A72NE	2	24	12	0	0	0	0	1	0.5
A72NW	3	60	20	2	0.67	0	0	1	0.33
A72S	3	45	15	1	0.33	0	0	0	0
A75	4	28	7	0	0	0	0	1	0.25
A76E	3	20	6.67	1	0.33	0	0	0	0
A76W	3	18	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
A77	1	31	31	0	0	0	0	0	0
A78NW	4	21	5.25	0	0	0	0	0	0
A78NE	2	28	14	0	0	0	0	0	0
A78SW	4	21	5.25	1	0.25	2	0.5	0	0
A78SE	?	29	?	1	?	2	?	0	?
A79N	5	12	2.4	1	0.2	0	0	1	0.2
A79S	3	14	4.67	1	0.33	0	0	1	0.33
A79W	4	40	10	1	0.25	0	0	1	0.25
A79E	2	26	13	1	0.5	0	0	1	0.5
A80N	2	27	13.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
A80S	4	22	5.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
A80E	2	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
A80W	5	53	10.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
A100S	7	8	1.14	0	0	0	0	0	0
A100E	10	34	3.4	0	0	3	0.3	1	0.1
A100W	4	23	5.75	0	0	0	0	0	0

MNI: Minimum number of individuals

CV: Number of ceramic vessels

MH: Number of maceheads

FG: Number of figurines

SV: Number of stone vessels

CV/I: Number of ceramic vessels per individual

MH/I: Number of maceheads per individual

FG/I: Number of figurines per individual

SV/I: Number of stone vessels per individual

When different classes of remains in chambers within single tombs are compared, several different patterns emerge in terms of quantities of goods. Several tombs demonstrate an overall similarity of the types and numbers of goods buried in all the chambers, while others demonstrate a marked differentiation within a single tomb system (Figure 8.3, Table 8.3). Additionally, certain tomb groups consistently contain greater numbers proportionally of the different artifact classes. Examination of the tombs in Group IV (Figure 8.1, Table 8.3), the largest grouping of shaft tombs in Cemetery A, shows that Tomb A79 contains four chambers (A79N, A79S, A79W, and A79E). All four chambers in A79 display a similarity in terms of types of objects: each chamber holds ceramic vessels, one macehead, one stone vessel, and no figurines. Additionally, Tomb A79 proportionally contains one of the highest concentrations of these artifact types (Table 8.3). In comparisons of the four chambers of Tomb A80 (A80N, A80S, A80W, A80E), we see another tomb group in which the chambers demonstrate a high level of similarity. All four chambers of A80 contain ceramic vessels, but no maceheads, figurines, or stone vessels. Finally, there are several tomb groups that display a high degree of difference among chambers. For example, three of the four chambers of Tomb A72 (A72NW, A72NE, and A72S) demonstrate a marked degree of variation in terms of numbers of ceramic vessels, stone vessels, maceheads, and figurines. In comparing the tombs within Group IV, it is clear that certain tombs consistently contain higher concentrations of ceramic and stone vessels and maceheads, while others display a marked differentiation in presence and absence of some artifact types. I argue that these patterns of difference and similarity reflect EB IA peoples' use of material culture to construct, assert, and nego-

tiate group and individual identities in a commemorative space. In turn, these different identities may have indicated differential access to craft or prestige goods (ceramic and basalt vessels, stone maceheads, and figurines), or to varying levels of authority within the living community.

Regardless of the significance of these different patterns, what is clear from the data is that within this place of commemoration, people employed material culture to adorn the bodies and tombs of the dead, and potentially the bodies of the living as well. Numerous anthropologists have discussed bodily adornment in the context of mortuary ritual, and in these cases ethnographers have tied the dressing of the bodies of the living and the dead to the performative aspects of asserting an identity (Feeley-Harnik 1989; George 1996; Joyce 1998, this volume; Kan 1989; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Weiner 1976). George (1996:144) deftly sums up the use of adornment:

Worn on and around the contours and features of the body, adornment opens up a radiant and stylized surface where the strivings of self and community become fused. No mere aesthetic frill, adornment is key to the politics of envy and emulation.

As George notes, people adorn themselves to assert individual and group identities, to be noticed, to be envied, and even to inspire. If we return to the case of Bab edh-Dhra', virtually all tombs contain material culture, including ceramic vessels, beads from costume ornaments, stone vessels, ceramic figurines, wooden objects (staves, bowls, tools, and other unidentified objects), and stone maceheads. Every shaft tomb has a unique collection of these items, differing in quality and quantity. So what kind of identities could they be asserting?

It is difficult for us to witness the assertion of specific individual identities in communal burials. However, when we take George's suggestion to heart and consider both the commemorated and the commemorating, we can see that the people participating in the burial rites were cognizant of the goods placed with the newest addition to the shaft tomb, and perhaps also remembered those goods from earlier ceremonies that were still housed in the shaft tomb. Likewise, these people likely adorned their bodies with jewelry, textiles, hairstyles, and other objects during their travels to and from the cemetery and during the rites themselves. Mortuary ceremonies offer a powerful arena in which people assess the political and financial status of others while they themselves are assessed, and adornment is a key factor in this process (Weiner 1976:61). In the mortuary ceremonies at Bab edh-Dhra', people adorned the bodies of the living and

the dead to assert and negotiate individual identities. With the memories provided by the rich tapestry of colors, textiles, objects, actions, and rituals included in present and past rites, EB IA people crafted and (re)presented social memories of the past, the present, and the future (George 1996:192-93).

Furthermore, I suggest that the communal nature of burials in shaft tombs reflects, even myopically, the assertion of group identities. I believe that we can approach this question from two basic scales: kin groups—potentially family units—and subregions. If families returned to the same place, to the same shaft tomb, year after year, to bury their dead, this repeated action itself creates an identity and reinforces social memories similar to those seen in the maintenance of family crypts and mausoleums in many cities today, with New Orleans being a famous example with its raised cemeteries and ornate family crypts. Additionally, the similarities of types and quantities of goods buried with the dead in several of the tombs in Group IV (for example, tombs A79 and A80) suggest that people crafted and asserted an understanding of a kin relationship, and thus a group identity, by maintaining a set of guidelines in burying their dead kinspeople. In the same vein, the analysis of Group IV tombs demonstrates a marked difference between tomb groups in terms of quantities of goods. It may be that these differences indicate marked social differentiation of people in life, suggesting that the EB IA communities contained kin groups with varying access to craft and trade goods, and potentially to authority and power. Burying the dead in a particular shaft tomb, and employing specific combinations of items, created a strong association with that location within the cemetery, a social memory of a particular kin group who always used the same tomb for their dead, and a reflection of the social differentiation of kin groups within the community.

With no settlement data at Bab edh-Dhra' in the EB IA, we have to assume that the people traveled to the cemetery from elsewhere. In her analysis of the survey data from the Kerak Plateau and the southeastern Dead Sea Plain, Steele (1990) suggests that there were strong economic, and possibly political, ties between the adjacent regions during the urban period. In her examination of the distribution of Plateau EB I sites, she argues that there are two distinct sets of sites on the Plateau, a northern group and a southern group. It may be that these groups buried their dead within distinct areas within the Bab edh-Dhra' cemetery, as a way of distinguishing each subregion from the other. Examination of the distribution of tombs in the cemetery, however, does not provide conclusive evidence of this practice (Table 8.3).

While the largest cluster of shaft tombs (Group IV) contains the greatest number of tombs (14, with 37 chambers and 133 individuals), another distinct cluster of a similar size and magnitude does not exist. Cemetery C (Group VIII), with six tombs and fifteen individuals, does not provide a complementary set of tombs on the same scale as the Group IV tombs in terms of numbers of tombs, chambers, and individuals. Alternatively, it may be that only one group, northern or southern, buried their dead at Bab edh-Dhra'; if this were the case, then one element of their identity may have been tied to and expressed by the place they buried their dead. Researchers in the southern Ghor identified a complementary EB I cemetery at the site of Safi', within easy walking distance of Bab edh-Dhra' (Schaub and Rast 1989; Steele 1990). While that cemetery was identified through extensive looting and has not been systematically excavated and published (McQuitty, personal communication, 1996), it may be that inhabitants of each of the subregions on the Kerak Plateau distinguished themselves partly in where they buried their dead, at Bab edh-Dhra' or Safi'.

Thus far, this discussion of material culture and burial practices has emphasized artifactual differences that may indicate the expression of social differentiation, in terms of individual, kin, or regional identities and the creation of social memories of those differences. However, as shown when the assemblages are examined for patterns of similarities, several elements of EB IA mortuary practices at Bab edh-Dhra' also indicate definitive guidelines for the treatment of skeletal remains of the dead (Rast 1999). While individuals and kin groups may have asserted identities and memories with the types and numbers of objects they placed within the tomb chamber, the vast majority of EB IA tombs follow a general set of guidelines: the body of the deceased was segmented in the secondary rites, with specific elements separated or grouped in the chamber (Figure 8.2). Skulls were always placed together to the left of the chamber. Postcranial elements, especially long bones, were deposited on a woven mat in the center of the chamber. Often people lined up the skulls along the margin of the mat. To the right of the mat, and to the right of the entrance, the people set the grave goods.

Several ethnographers have documented how mortuary practices often embody the most conservative or traditional aspects of ritual action in many societies (Jing 1996; Kan 1989). For example, in his examination of the Tlingit potlatch, Kan (1989:294) argues that mortuary rites, tied as they are to ancestors and the past, are more likely to be maintained through the generations.

At the same time, George (1996:192-93) notes that all rituals can be reworked over time, but even those involving invented or reinvented elements are tied expressly to the past. Rites of commemoration evoke the past, often with the goal of comfortably situating the community and its members in the known present and the unknowable future.

If we take this perspective in viewing the strong patterning in the treatment of the skeletal remains and the placement of material culture and individuals in the chambers, then we begin to glimpse another element of the EB IA identity in the region. On a regional scale, the people who buried their dead at Bab edh-Dhra' in the pre-urban period all followed a particular set of standards in their mortuary rites, forging a sense of similarity between people in this region, as well as nurturing a sense of tradition in the treatment of their dead. These communities shared a set of principles and local knowledge that instructed them how to treat their dead, where to commemorate them, and the importance of maintaining these practices. This knowledge, and the resulting practices, may reflect a regional identity, tied to the southeastern Dead Sea Plain and to a set of rituals performed within a rich tapestry of memories of individuals, kin groups, and regional communities, which created the foundation of the later EBA urban society.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have endeavored to demonstrate the efficacy of approaching archaeological data from mortuary behaviors through the lens of ethnography. In particular, I argue that we enrich our understanding of past mortuary practices by paying close attention to how people create and maintain social memories of the past, present, and future in these commemorative places. Mortuary rites provide an arena for reaffirming and strengthening social, economic, and political bonds between individuals and groups, asserting group and individual identities, and creating social memories of how life was in the past, and in turn positing ideas about how life should be in the future (George 1996:144; Weiner 1976). The participation of the living and the dead in funerary rites in a specific place shaped a more or less inclusive set of identities and memories of life in the EB IA and later periods at Bab edh-Dhra'. When we focus on social memories and identities in the context of a commemorative place, the material remains of mortuary ceremonies at Bab edh-Dhra', although distant from us in time and space, provide us with a tantalizing view of enduring structures of social organization and

identities during the earliest development of urban culture in the southern Levant.

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Notes

1. The Early Bronze Age chronology at Bab edh-Dhra' (Bentley 1987; Schaub and Rast 1984:36) is as follows:

EB IA: c. 3150-3050 B.C. (period may begin earlier than 3150 B.C. [Schaub and Rast 1984:36])
EB IB: 3050-2950 B.C.
EB II-III: 2950-2300 B.C.
EB IV: 2300-2150 B.C.

For the purpose of this paper, the EB IA is the pre-urban period at the site, for which the excavators have found no evidence of habitation in or around the site. The period of urbanism extends from the transition of the EB IB to EB II through the end of the EB III at Bab edh-Dhra'.

2. Steele's (1990) analysis, based on survey data, does not distinguish between EB IA and EB IB sites and assemblages.

3. The excavators at Bab edh-Dhra' divided all EBA tombs into groups, depending upon location in the cemetery, as well as assigned a time period (Schaub 1981:fig. 1). Most of these groupings reflect a physical cluster of tombs from any particular period, and for this reason I have maintained the groupings as a way of sampling within the overall population. Figure 8.1 illustrates the groups noted in this study. Many tombs were dropped from the analysis because of a lack of published information, or because of their compromised state of preservation, most often resulting from pothunting.

4. This study combines data from excavations at the site during two separate periods, the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s through 1980s. Because of the premature death of Paul Lapp, the director of the earlier excava-

tions, not all of the skeletal remains have been analyzed, sexed, and aged by a physical anthropologist. Thus only a small percentage of the EB IA skeletons can be discussed in terms of age and sex of individuals. Physical anthropologists assigned sex to approximately twenty-two percent (51 of 233) of the EB IA population (Frohlich and Ortner 1982; Rast and Schaub 1981; Schaub and Rast 1989); of these individuals a small percentage of the group has also been assigned an age at death. Additionally, twenty-six percent (61 of 233) of the skeletal population has been aged as subadults (approximately 16 years of age or younger, including neonates).

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