



Residential Burial and Social Memory in the Middle Bronze Age Levant

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Selected imported vessels from the assemblage of Tomb 100. Photograph by P. Shrago; courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.

Funerary practices in the Middle Bronze Age in the Levant (ca. 2000–1500 B.C.E.) exhibited a high degree of diversity in burial architecture, elaboration of body treatment, and complexity of funerary rituals. Here I discuss the variations in funerary activities that were carried out within residential contexts with a focus on inhumations in masonry-constructed chamber tombs (fig. 1). Such tombs have been found at urban centers across the Levant, where they were used actively for decades or longer in a process of multiple, successive inhumation (fig. 2). The fragmented nature of the skeletal and material remains found inside these tombs indicate that the assemblages had been disturbed periodically in antiquity through a process of compound inhumation, which involved multiple episodes of repositioning.

I have argued elsewhere (Cradic 2017a, 2017b) that the commingled remains of individual bodies and objects found in reused burial spaces represent the end result of a ritualized process of fragmentation after death. Although an important component of the extended funerary sequence of the Middle Bronze Age, these practices did not extend to the entire population of the deceased. Broadly speaking, the majority of Middle Bronze Age burials are primary inhumations (tables 1–4; Hallote 1994:

63). Drawing from a corpus of 225 intramural burials uncovered at Tel Megiddo, I argue that differences in body disposal methods found within a single settlement were closely linked to differential roles of the corpse after burial. Upon their deaths, certain persons were selected from the wider household community for collective inhumation in reused burial spaces on the basis of their membership of the household. Inhumation within the shared tomb space afforded the deceased the privilege of active, long-term commemoration due to the frequent revisitation to the tomb for additional depositions of corpses and material offerings. In contrast, those persons who were not selected for inclusion in the shared tomb space were typically buried in unmarked pits or ceramic jars, with little or no evidence of disturbance or commemoration at the grave site (figs. 3–4).

Diversity in Death: Inhumation Methods in Residential Burials

Middle Bronze Age burials demonstrated a range of body disposal methods as well as in the number of individuals who could be included in the same burial space (termed “individuality”), which could vary from one to several hundred. Inhumation involved the burial of the entire corpse, either underground or otherwise sealed by earth, stone, or architecture. Three forms of inhumation were practiced: primary, secondary, and compound inhumation. In primary inhumations, burial of one or more



Figure 1. Interior of masonry-constructed chamber, Tomb 100, from Building 12/K/15 at Megiddo. Photograph by Matthew Schaeffer; courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.

corpses occurred once without subsequent disturbance. Secondary inhumation involved one instance of relocating the body from its original locus of decomposition for burial elsewhere. Compound disposal was an extended form of inhumation that involved multiple episodes of disturbance, often resulting in co-mingling of body parts (Sprague 2005: 57–72). All three of these disposal methods have been traced contemporaneously across the wider region of the second millennium B.C.E. eastern Mediterranean, including Greece, Cyprus, the Levant, and Syria-Mesopotamia (Keswani 2012; Pfalzner 2012, 2014, 2016; Boyd 2015; Moutafi and Voutsaki 2016). This distribution pattern suggests that the introduction of secondary and compound disposals alongside primary inhumations was a widespread and culturally shared innovation of the Middle Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean and Near East.

In addition to considerable variation among inhumation methods, Middle Bronze Age burials also exhibited diversity in mortuary contexts. Burials occurred in extramural city cemeteries, within fortifications, and inside settlements in residential settings, typically cut below the floor of an occupied house. For example, the Middle Bronze Age settlements at Tel Dan and Tel Kabri contained intramural burials as well as those that were cut into the slopes of the fortifications (Ilan 1995, 1996; Kempinski 2002). Intramural burial specifically has been traced at twenty-eight sites of the Middle and Late Bronze Age Levant, accounting for approximately 17 percent of the burial population during this

Table 1. Distribution of burial contexts by architectural type and area of excavation at Megiddo Strata XIV–VIII.

Area	Jar	Simple pit	Stone-lined pit	Masonry-constructed	UID	Total
AA	7	10	4	3	1	25
BB	45	88	22	8	6	169
CC	6	6	3	0	1	16
K	3	9	2	1	0	15
Total	61	113	31	12	8	225

period (Gonen 1992a: 20; Hallote 1994, 1995: fig. 4; Bloch-Smith 2003; Brody 2008: 516; Cradic 2011: table 2.3).

Residential Burials at Middle Bronze Megiddo

Tel Megiddo is located in the Jezreel Valley in the Lower Galilee. At its largest, the urban settlement encompassed 12 ha (8–9 ha upper mound, and 4 ha lower mound) and was surrounded with monumental earthworks that consisted of free-standing ramparts and a city wall (figs. 2, 5–6; Arie 2008: 10; Homsher 2012, 2013: 39–46, 133–34). The settlement's burials



Figure 2. Map of Levantine sites with masonry-constructed chamber tombs dating to the second millennium B.C.E. Figure prepared by Robert S. Homsher and Melissa S. Cradic.

were located inside occupied houses and monumental architecture, within the city's fortifications, and on the eastern slope of the mound (Schumacher 1908; Guy and Engberg 1938; Loud 1948; Hallote 2001; Arie 2008; Cradic 2017b). Intramural burial at Megiddo was most frequent during the Middle Bronze Age (MB) II through Late Bronze Age (LB) I periods (Strata XII–IX) in terms of both quantity and diversity of burial type and disposal methods (table 2).

The 225 burials included in this study are drawn from two expeditions: (1) 210 burials from excavations conducted by The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago from 1926–1939 in Areas AA, BB, and CC (Loud 1948); and (2) 15 burials uncovered in Area K from the renewed excavations of The Megiddo Expedition, which have been conducted under the auspices of Tel Aviv University (Martin, Cradic, and Kalisher in press; Martin and Cradic in press). Although Gottlieb Schumacher uncovered three masonry-constructed chamber tombs, Chamber f, Grabkammer I, and Grabkammer II, these are excluded here due to insufficient data, as is T.51 from the eastern slope (table 2; Schumacher 1908; Guy and Engberg 1938).

Area AA

During the Middle and Late Bronze Age, the function and architecture of Area AA shifted from residential space with blocks of courtyard houses in Strata



Figure 3. Simple pit Burial 14/K/49 from Building 12/K/15 at Megiddo; courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.

Table 2. Masonry-constructed chamber tombs at Megiddo.

Stratum	Period	Area AA	Area BB	Area K	Mittelburg and Nordburg
XII	MB II		T.3092		
			T.3095		
			T.2129		
XI	MB II	T.3175	T.3075		
		T.4055	T.3080		
		T.4098	T.3085		
X	MB III/LB I		T.3110		
			T.3070		
IX	LB I			T.100	Grabkammer I, Grabkammer II
VIII	LB I/IIA				Chamber f



Figure 4. Ceramic jar Burial 14/K/175 from Building 12/K/15 at Megiddo; courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.

Table 3. Distribution of body disposal methods by identified individuals and area of excavation at Megiddo Strata XIV–VIII.

Area	Primary	Secondary/ co-mingled	Primary/secondary	UID	Total
AA	14	2	0	10	26
BB	87	6	2	94	189
CC	9	0	0	8	17
Total	110 (47%)	8 (3%)	2 (>1%)	112 (48%)	232

Table 4. Distribution of body disposal methods by burial context in Building 12/K/15.

Stratum	Primary	Secondary/ co-mingled	Primary/secondary	UID	Total
Level K-10	13 (ca. 86%)	1 (ca. 7%)	1 (ca. 7%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)

XIII–X to a monumental “palace” structure that appeared in Stratum IX (fig. 6; Loud 1948: figs. 378–84). Area AA contained twenty-five burials from Strata XIII–VIIA. Counting all pit and jar burials together, these basic forms of burial architecture accounted for 84 percent of the mortuary corpus of Area AA. Masonry-constructed chamber tombs (n=3) were represented in greater proportions, 12 percent, in Area AA than in the residential neighborhoods of Areas BB and K (see below), which also contained this tomb type. These constructed tombs are assigned to Strata XI, which predated the construction of Palace 2041, and were therefore not related to the transformation of space in Area AA from residential to palatial.

The body disposal methods of sixteen individuals were identifiable through examination of photographs and field notes (Cradic 2016). Body disposal methods fit three categories: primary inhumation; secondary/co-mingled inhumation; and burials in which methods of primary and secondary inhumation coexisted within a single

Figure 5. Aerial image of Tel Megiddo. Photo by Adam Prins; courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.

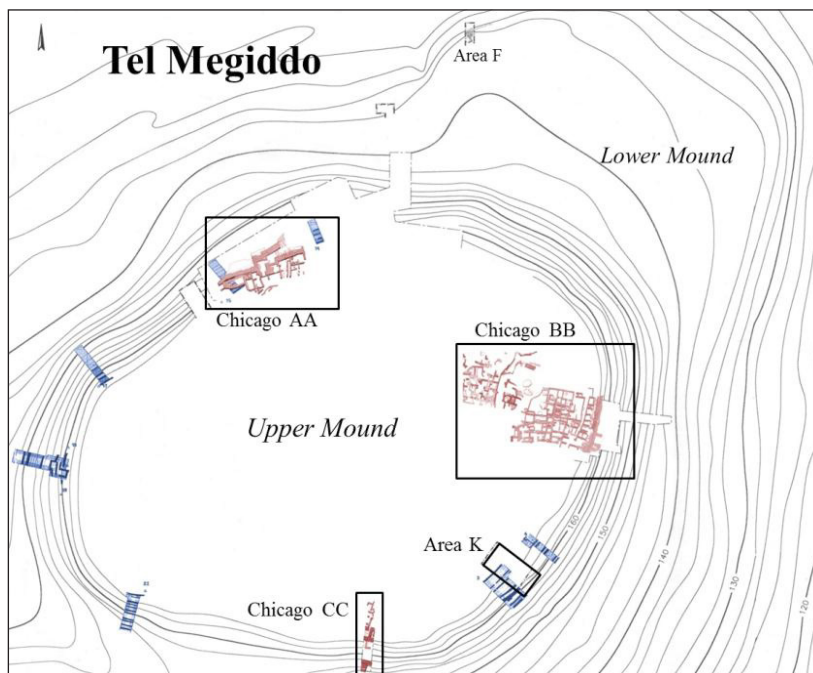


Figure 6. Plan of Middle Bronze Age Megiddo. Illustration after Homsher 2012: fig. 5; adapted from Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern 2000: fig. 1.2; Loud 1948: figs. 378, 397–398, 407; Schumacher 1908: Taf. II. doi: 10.5615/bullamerschoorie.368.0001

context that contained more than one individual. Primary inhumation was the means of disposal for at least 54 percent of the burials, outnumbering the secondary/co-mingled category that was attested to only two cases and made up just 8 percent of the total sample (table 3). No cases of co-existing primary/secondary burial were identified in Area AA.

Area BB

Area BB contained a densely built residential area of courtyard houses (figs. 6–7; Loud 1948: figs. 396–402; Adams 2013: 25, table 2.2). The 169 burial contexts from Area BB fell under the four major types: simple pit ($n=88$), jar burial ($n=45$), stone-lined pit ($n=22$), and masonry-constructed chamber tomb ($n=8$) (table 1). Six burial contexts were of unidentified type.

The distribution of burial type skewed heavily toward the simplest forms of burial architecture, which comprised the majority of the burials. Together, pit (simple and stone-lined) and jar burials make up 92 percent of the burials whereas masonry-constructed chambers represent a mere 5 percent of the assemblage. This pattern fits expected trends for Middle Bronze Age Megiddo specifically, and for the southern Levant more broadly (Hallote 1994, 2001; Cradic 2011).

For 189 individuals, body disposal methods were identifiable through descriptions or figures in the legacy data (Cradic 2016). Identification of secondary inhumations were made cautiously. In any case in which body disposal appeared to be secondary but could not be distinguished from unintentional disturbance, the burial was recorded as unidentified (UID). Due to the ambiguous nature of the data, ca. 50 percent of the corpus fell under this category. Where identifiable, the categories of secondary/co-mingled and mixed primary and

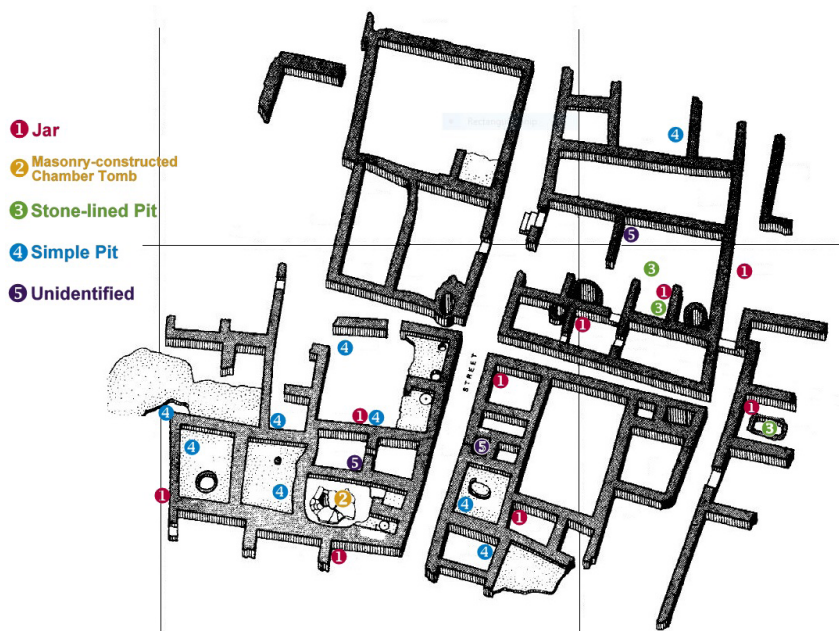


Figure 7. Plan of intramural burials within Buildings 3002 and 3003 in Area BB Stratum X. Illustration prepared by Robert S. Homsher and Melissa S. Cradic; adapted from Loud 1948: fig. 400; courtesy of The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

secondary inhumations comprised small proportions of the sample (table 3). In contrast, primary inhumation was most frequently attested disposal method, accounting for nearly half (46 percent) of all individuals. This proportion rose to 92 percent of the burial population when including only identifiable body disposal methods.

Area CC

Area CC was excavated as a narrow sounding that was cut into the southern edge of the tell (fig. 6). Therefore, not much is known about its fragmentary architectural remains. However, the fieldstone walls and paved floors that were uncovered in Strata XIII–VIII matched the typical construction for houses uncovered in other areas of the settlement, indicating that this sector was used primarily for residential purposes (Loud 1948: figs. 407–408).

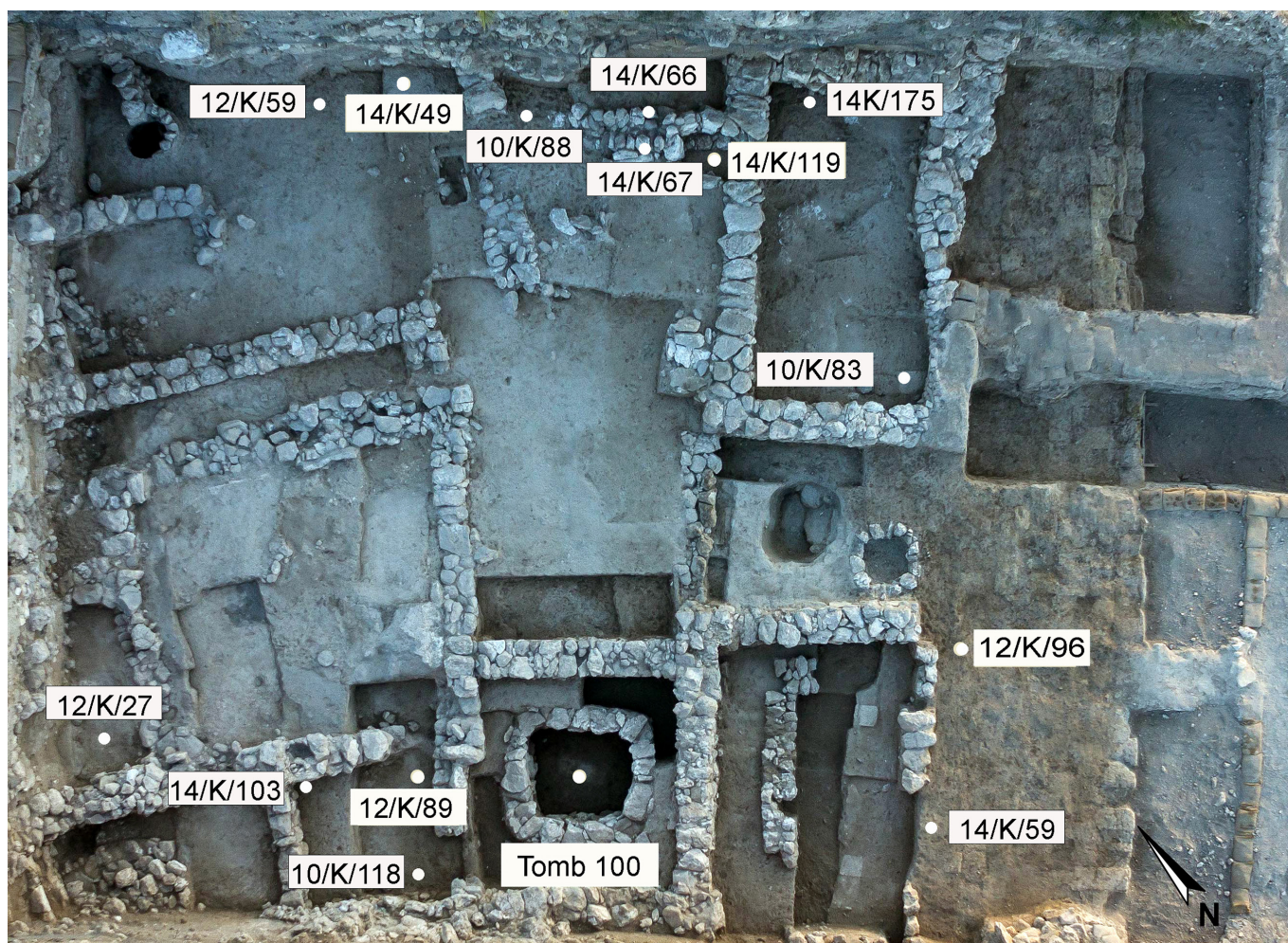


Figure 8. Aerial view of the courtyard house in Area K with locations of burials; courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.



Figure 9. Tomb 100 *in situ* before excavation; courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.



Figure 10. Bronze dagger recovered from the burial assemblage of Tomb 100; courtesy of the Megiddo Expedition.

Area CC contained sixteen burials from Strata XIII–VIII. Simple pit ($n=6$) and jar burials ($n=6$) were the most common burial types and were represented in equal proportions, with each category comprising 38 percent of the corpus (table 3). As with Areas AA and BB, these simple types of mortuary architecture represented the vast majority (76 percent) of the burials in the area. In comparison, constructed tombs of any type were few: Area CC contained three stone-lined pits, which made up 19 percent of the sample, but contained no masonry-constructed chamber tombs (table 1). All nine individuals whose body disposal type could be identified were primary inhumations; the

disposal methods of the other eight individuals were unidentified (table 3).

Area K

The excavation of the courtyard house Building 12/K/15, located on the southeast of the mound, has so far yielded fifteen burial contexts including one reused masonry-constructed chamber, Tomb 100 (figs. 1, 6, and 8). Building 12/K/15 dated to the MB III–LB I transitional period, ca. 1650–1500 B.C.E. (Martin et al. in press). The courtyard house measured ca. 240 m², was a relatively large residence compared to contemporaneous dwellings at Megiddo, and may have accommodated an extended family or co-residential group of up to a dozen inhabitants at a time (Martin et al. in press). The burials, several of which housed more than one individual, contained the remains of four to five generations of residents.

Approximately half of the burial population within Building 12/K/15, ca. two dozen individuals, were inhumed in pit and jar burials, which were sealed and unmarked following inhumation (figs. 3–4). The other half of the population was buried inside the small chamber tomb, which measured ca. 1.4 m in height,

1.5 m wide, and 1.7 m long (Martin and Cradic in press). The vertical entry slab of the reused chamber tomb may have functioned as a grave marker, facilitating the frequent reopening of the tomb for subsequent inhumations (fig. 9; Cradic 2017a: 235–36). There were no significant differences between these two burial populations on the basis of demographic factors or the overall wealth of the burial assemblages (Cradic 2017a: 220–23). Even accounting for the richness of the assemblage in Tomb 100, the relative wealth of the group of scaraboids, decorated bone inlays, bronze blades, and 65 vessels contained therein was only slightly higher than that of the pits and jars when broken down by number of objects per individual (figs. 10–11). Taking ceramic vessels as an example, the assemblage of Tomb 100 ranged between two to three vessels per individual, which was similar to the average ratio of one to two vessels per individual calculated for the pit and jar burials in Building 12/K/15 (Cradic 2017b: 175). Likewise, broadly speaking, the composition of the faunal assemblage was similar between the chamber tomb and those pit burials that contained faunal remains (Sapir-Hen, Martin, and Finkelstein 2017). In both corpora, caprines predominated the faunal assemblage, comprising ca. 94–97 percent of the specimens, with clear preference for sheep (Sapir-Hen, Martin, and Finkelstein 2017). High value wild game animals, which were absent from Tomb 100, were identified in three of the pit burials (Sapir-Hen, Martin, and Finkelstein 2017: table 4). However, it is worth noting that not all of the pit and jar burials contained faunal remains (Sapir-Hen, Martin, and Finkelstein 2017; Cradic 2017b: 49–50).

The variable that stands out between Tomb 100 and the pit and jar burials is body disposal method. Body disposal method was evaluated based on calculation of taphonomic index, which relied on field observations of skeletal completeness and articulation (Knüsel and Robb 2016; Cradic 2017b: 329–41). Body disposal employed in Building 12/K/15 encompassed the spectrum of inhumation methods. For the pit and jar burials, thirteen burials contained individuals that were complete and articulated to the extent that it was clear that the burials had not been disturbed in antiquity. These were identified as primary inhumations. One burial context, Tomb 100, contained secondary and co-mingled disposals (fig. 12), and a single context contained both primary and secondary inhumations (table 4).

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that diversity in death at second millennium B.C.E. Megiddo was the rule rather than the exception. Each area of excavation revealed a combination of burial types and disposal methods, with a clear emphasis on simple pits as the predominant form of burial type. These mortuary characteristics varied not only between neighborhoods but also within a single building, and even within a single room.

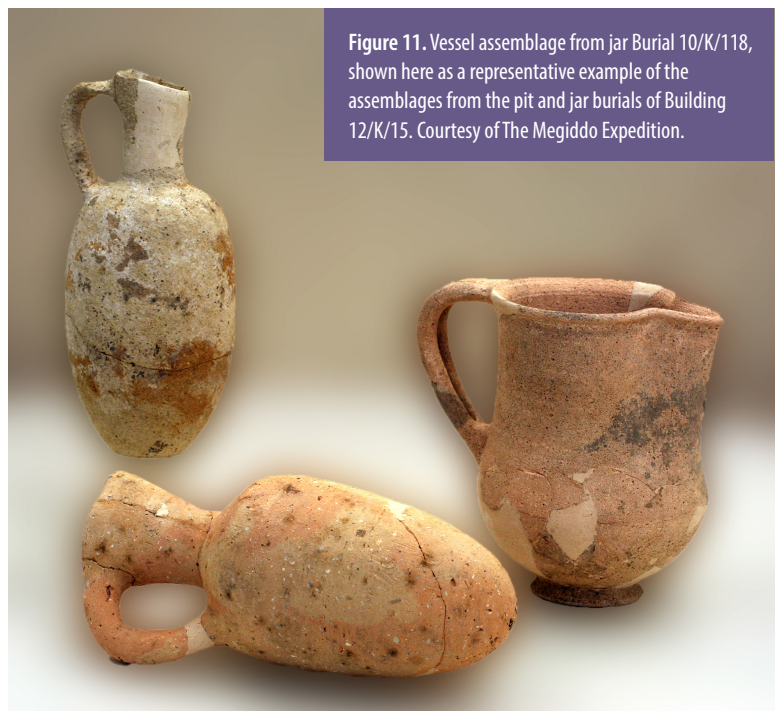


Figure 11. Vessel assemblage from jar Burial 10/K/118, shown here as a representative example of the assemblages from the pit and jar burials of Building 12/K/15. Courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.

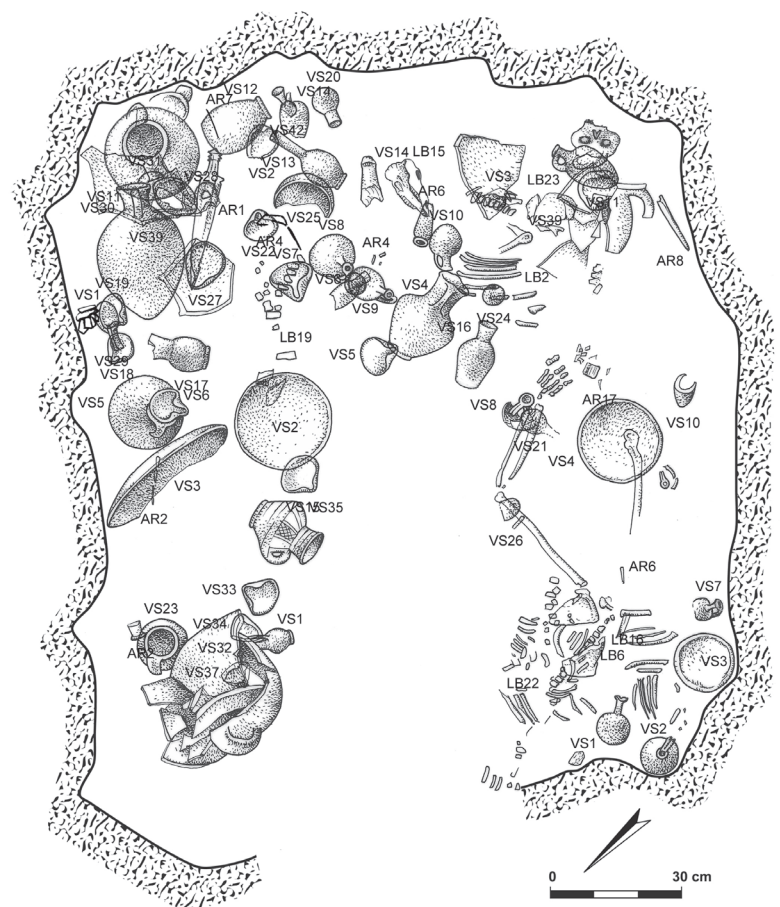


Figure 12. Plan of the depositional layers of Tomb 100. Note the partial articulation of an arm and shoulder in the northwest corner of the tomb. Drawing by Robert S. Homsher, Mario A. S. Martin, and Yelena Roban; courtesy of The Megiddo Expedition.

In every sample population from different neighborhoods of the settlement, primary inhumation comprised the plurality of disposal methods, whereas secondary and co-mingling disposals made up a small minority (ca. 7 percent) of the identifiable burials. The secondary and co-mingled disposals were generally proportional to the number of masonry-constructed chamber tombs that were represented in each area, strengthening the identification of the function of the chambers as reused burial spaces that involved disturbance after burial. At least 88 percent of the chamber tombs evidence co-mingling of the skeletal remains of multiple individuals of all ages.

Residential Burial and Social Memory

Subfloor residential burials in the Levant represented an innovative approach to mortuary context that reemerged in the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. Household burials would have been far more accessible on a daily basis than off-site extramural cemeteries, providing feasible opportunities for frequent interaction with the dead. The spatial proximity between household members, living and dead, continued their relationship over a number of generations. Residential inhumations may have been strategic components of place-making, commemoration, and group membership in death (Hallote 1995: 105–7; Brody 2008: 516, 529; 2010: 126).

Beyond the role that intramural burials served in place-making of the house generally, reused residential burials specifically reinforced household membership through active commemoration of the dead and their bodies (Hallote 1995: 105–7; Brody 2008: 516, 529; Brody 2010: 126). In the Middle Bronze Age Levant, the corpse was a focal point of funerary rituals, but its role differed from one context to another (Cradic 2017b). Two features of Middle Bronze Age burials pointed to the significance of body disposal methods specifically as a means of remembering and forgetting the dead. First was the overall diversity of inhumation practices, which included primary, secondary, and compound inhumation. The co-existence of three different methods of body disposal within House 12/K/15, for example, indicated that mourners made specific choices concerning the roles of individual corpses at the time of inhumation. The second factor was the clear emphasis on intentional disarticulation of skeletons and co-mingling of multiple bodies in chamber tombs and other contexts of burial reuse. Manipulation of the corpse after burial through various means, such as repositioning, decoration, furnishing with grave goods, and even destruction, involved interaction with the dead, even after the body became unrecognizable due to decomposition. As I have demonstrated, only certain individuals were selected for burial in reused spaces, where the living would periodically interact with their remains for years or even decades after biological death, while others were left untouched. Differences in body disposal methods cut across demographic categories and wealth, pointing to other, less visible social factors that determined who was selected for which burial treatment.

Differentiation in inhumation methods between the reused chamber tomb and the sealed pit and jar burials across residential contexts at Megiddo may have been related to membership of

the dead within the household community. Those whose bodies were continually revisited in chamber tombs such as Tomb 100 acquired a special status in death that maintained their role within the community of the living for a continuous span of 100–150 years. Such close and continuing interaction with the dead indicated that survivors placed meaningful emphasis on this particular group of deceased persons over a prolonged period. Each sequential burial commemorated the predecessors who were inhumed in the same space, creating an embodied “memory community” within the household (McAnany 2010: 136). These same treatments were not afforded to the primary inhumations inside the sealed pit and jar burials, which were unmarked and untouched. Considered both whole and broken down into its constituent parts, the body therefore served as a medium for remembering and forgetting after death. Survivors confronted the biological realities of death by handling the corpse in ways that disrupted or accelerated decomposition, and in ways that commemorated, erased, or transformed social identities after burial.

In contrast with the finality of biological death, dying was a social process of transition that transformed the status of the deceased from one state of being into another state of being (Bloch and Parry 1982; Janzen 2002; Fowler 2004; Robb 2013). Interaction with the dead after burial represented one way in which the existence of the deceased could be prolonged after biological death. Commemoration could take various forms, such as multistaged funerary rituals, deposition of offerings, and place-making of the grave site or burial monument for visitation and reuse (Robb 2013; Sjögren 2014). Through context and body disposal methods, residential burials cited the past and present members of the household community, creating intergenerational links between the bodies of the living and the dead. This interpretation of residential burials and social memory at Tel Megiddo adds to our understandings of complex society in the Jezreel Valley and the greater southern Levant in the Middle Bronze Age.

Notes

1. Most Levantine chamber tombs (93 percent) were intramural, with the exception of several examples that date to the mid- to late second millennium B.C.E. These extramural masonry-constructed chambers included eight Late Bronze tombs from the Lower Cemetery and Eighteenth Dynasty Cemeteries at Tell el-Ajjul (Petrie 1934; Gonen 1992a: 80–82, 1992b: 152); eleven from the Late Bronze Age cemetery at Palmahim, which does not have an associated settlement (Yannai, Gorzalczy, and Peilstöcker 2013: 12–14); T.51 from Megiddo's Eastern Slope, likely dating to the Middle Bronze Age (Guy and Engberg 1938: 54–55; Arie 2008); and one burial from Late Bronze Age Alalakh, Tomb 03-301730 (Boutin 2010; Yener and Yazicioğlu 2010: 27–28; Yener 2013: 266).
2. For full methodology, see Cradic 2016 and 2017b: 123–26. I wish to thank Kiersten Neumann, curator, and John Larson, archivist, of The Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago for allowing me to examine archival materials from the Oriental Institute's excavations at Megiddo, which enriched and enlarged my dataset. I carried out this research in May 2016 with the support of a Stahl Grant from the Archaeological Research Facility at University of California, Berkeley.

The results of the archival research are published here courtesy of The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

3. The full report of Level K-10 burials will appear in the forthcoming Megiddo VI volume (Martin, Cradic, and Kalisher in press). I am grateful to Israel Finkelstein, Mario Martin, and Matthew Adams, the directors of the Megiddo Expedition, for granting me permission to present my analysis of the Area K burials here. I owe special thanks to Mario Martin, supervisor of Area K, and Rachel Kalisher, field osteologist, for their support in the field and collaboration on the report, particularly regarding identification of disposal methods, individuality, and burial type for the burials that appear in Megiddo II. I thank Robert Homsher for assistance with preparing figures.

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