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Author(s): Anne Porter

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The Dynamics of Death: Ancestors, Pastoralism, and the Origins of a Third-Millennium City in Syria

Anne Porter

Euphrates Archaeology Inc.

P.O. Box 1688

Bucksport, ME 04416

aporter@mint.net

The rituals and practices associated with death are significant sources of social relationships beyond only issues of status. In the ancient Near East, mortuary practices created ancestors, evident both archaeologically and textually, and ancestors were intimately tied to social structures that shaped both the nature of the social group and its history. This paper focuses on the third-millennium settlement complex of Tell Banat, on the left bank of the Euphrates River, Syria. Mortuary practices there included multistage burials in which acts such as the disarticulation and burning of skeletal remains destroyed the individual identities of the deceased and rendered them cultural artifacts to be used in forming collective identities, identities that had their origins in an inclusive, mobile, pastoralist society. Paradoxically, the physical manifestation of those inclusive relations in mortuary practice led to the urbanization of this region and the eventual predominance of an exclusionary social system.

Mortuary practices have relevance for a wide variety of problems in the history and archaeology of the ancient Near East, for through them we may approach issues of social organization and structure that are not as readily accessible by way of other archaeological avenues. In preindustrial societies, the dead are central to the production of social order, and the way the dead are treated is indicative of the concerns of, or even threats to, that order. In the example presented in this paper, the dead are transformed into ancestors through mortuary practice. Ancestors provide a key to unlocking the processes of urbanization and state formation along the Euphrates River valley, Syria, in the third millennium B.C., pointing to the socio-economic system from which this derived. It is suggested that in this instance ancestor traditions were part of a complex dynamic of ideological representations of the social group in relation to place, expressed in the physical containment of ancestors

in a particular type of mortuary structure—monumental and visible burial mounds. The demarcation of space that these mounds represent was a response to shifting social relationships that resulted from fluctuations in the nature of use of space. Contrary to current consensus, it is argued that spatial relationships along the Euphrates were predominantly mobile and transitory ones arising from pastoral subsistence practices throughout the third, and into the second millennium B.C. Specifically, ancestor burials were used to demarcate the territorial and social boundaries of the group. Control of ancestor-related ritual and knowledge led to consolidation of power in the hands of a few, at the same time as ancestor traditions themselves defined the limits of that power and constrained the ability of an emerging elite to diverge far from traditional practice in establishing rule. Ancestor traditions created an ideal image of a socially unified group in the descent-based linkages, real or fictive, through which members of society

conceived themselves as connected, and are manifest in the symbolism of burial practices.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE DEAD

In Near Eastern scholarship, the dead tend to be considered in distinct (and mutually exclusive) classes. To archaeologists their disposition is indicative of social status and political complexity, while to epigraphers they belong to the realm of religious, rather than social, system. In either case, they have little significance in terms of the production of social structure. Yet ethnographies (e.g., Meggitt 1965; Salisbury 1965; Turner 1967; Rappaport 1968; Glazier 1984; Bloch 1971) indicate that the dead very often become ancestors, and ancestors and ancestor-related practices and rituals have a multiplicity of roles, depending on the social context in which they are encountered and according to both indigenous and academic conceptions. They can be the venue through which an ideal vision of society is perpetuated in contrast to actual social organization (Bloch 1971; 1986; Morris 1991; 1992; Kuijt 1996; 1997), and they configure group and individual identity (Metcalf and Huntington 1991; White 1991; Chesson 1999). They are also a source of social sanctions (E. N. Goody 1973) and legitimate authority of a political as well as moral kind (Fortes 1969; Bloch 1973). They maintain social cohesion, structure integration, and are a vehicle for the resolution of social conflict (Morris 1991), quite apart from the relationship of ancestors to lineal descent systems, wherein connection to an apical ancestor defines indigenous conceptions of the social group and influences the nature of relationships within it (Evans-Pritchard 1969 [1940]; 1956; Fortes 1949). Ancestors are instrumental in the transmission of rights, obligations, and especially resources—communal and individual property—over time (J. Goody 1962; Goldstein 1981; Brown 1981; 1995; Morris 1991; McAnany 1995; van der Toorn 1996). And the very same ancestors that constitute these roles in a public and ritual context are certainly also known to act beneficently or malignantly in the individual lives of their relations and direct descendants in a domestic context (van der Toorn 1996: 69), often because of a lack of attention or care after death (Bayliss 1973: 116; Abusch 1995: 589). To deprive the dead of appropriate ritual and commemoration, or to desecrate their final resting place, is to sever the social relationship between

them and the living, thus turning ancestors into rootless, and rancorous, ghosts.

Descriptions of troublesome ancestors and ritual methods to incur their goodwill are found in wide-ranging contexts, from ancient Babylon (Scurlock 1995a; 1995b; see also Abusch 1974; 1995; Bayliss 1973) to modern Madagascar (Bloch 1971). But whereas the ancient texts only provide a glimpse into the complex linkages between the living and dead, ethnography reveals the social depth and intricacy of these relationships, opening dimensions of the ancient world previously unconsidered. While the details vary considerably, most ethnographic examples share some common elements: a deeper social meaning is embedded in ancestral antics, and treatments of the corporeal are related to that meaning. Among the African Mbeere, for instance, “shades” or ghosts are the spiritual incarnation of a human being and are responsible for chaos, catastrophe, and misfortune among the living, for their world, while seemingly ordered in the same way as the human world, has no mechanisms to preclude outrageous and arbitrary behavior. Because of this, people seek to keep their distance from shades, on the one hand, but are forced into an ongoing propitiatory relationship with them, on the other (see too Fortes 1965). Hence death rituals are minimal and hasty—corpses are simply exposed in bushlands—to reduce contact and to create a clear separation between living and dead, but continued gifts of animal sacrifice or beer are made to the shades as bribes for good behavior. Individuals are vulnerable to the machinations of the dead on the basis of specific agnatic relationships (Glazier 1984: 138–39; see also Evans-Pritchard 1956 on the Nuer). On another level, however, the dead are the foundation of right conduct among the living Mbeere, for abuse of social mores, domestic turmoil, dissension, and failure to follow traditional pathways will bring the wrath of ancestral shades upon the transgressor. In recent times, the ancestral role of the Mbeere dead has become a key mechanism by which land claims are established.

The apparent dichotomy in the nature of the dead for the Mbeere is explained by the degree of generational distance. The recently dead and individually remembered act as a source of sanctions in moral issues, whereas the long dead and forgotten are arbitrary and capricious (Glazier 1984: 145). A similar duality is evident in the distinctions between individual and collective spirits of the dead among the

African Lugbara (Middleton 1960), where ancestors as a collective visit sickness and trouble on the living, but as individuals are a source of authority and act to ensure responsible behavior; and among the Siane of New Guinea (Salisbury 1965), for whom individual spirits are vindictive, but when incorporated into the undifferentiated body of ancestral spirits they are not. Communal rituals celebrating the dead bring benefits to the group such as fertile land, in contrast to the individual spirit's responsibility for disease, possession, and misfortune, mitigated by rituals practiced by the individual sufferer or close relatives. Among the LoDagaa in Africa, by contrast, the deceased are ghosts until certain ceremonies are performed that serve to transform them into ancestors. The liminal state of ghostliness is a dangerous one for living relatives and descendants, but incorporation into the ancestral body neutralizes this aspect (J. Goody 1962).

For the Nuer, even though all ceremonies connected with death are to exhort the ghost to turn away from the living, commemoration of the deceased's place in lineage structures is of central importance. Therefore, the deceased individual as ghost is anathema, but the deceased's social personality, as a perpetuating member of the lineage through which society is structured and organized, is essential, and in this context the dead are known by name. The ongoing social relevance of the dead as lineage ancestors is seen in the fact that the Nuer dead still have bridewealth rights (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 162–64), the fundamental vehicle for transmission and mediation of social relations in Nuer society (Kelly 1985). In contrast, among the Merina of Madagascar ancestors as an amorphous, unnamed group create and preserve an ideal image of society in face of historical flux and the dissolution of traditional social relationships (Bloch 1986: 12–47). But here, too, individual ancestors are also uncontrollable spirits who frighten people, and offerings are made to ancestral tombs and standing stones to secure benefits and blessings (Bloch 1971: 125–26; Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998: 313).

Ancestor practices in China are quite different from the foregoing examples. There three different levels and loci of ancestor attention are practiced: (1) public and male-dominated rituals centered around the ancestral tomb, usually of the founder of the lineage; (2) domestic rituals centered around the symbolic representation of ancestors by tablets which, placed in household shrines, commemorate

three to four prior generations; and (3) ancestral halls, also primarily the province of men, in which ancestor tablets of great genealogical depth are preserved (Ahern 1973). The body of the ancestor as contained in and symbolized by the tomb, and ancestors commemorated by tablets, are two separate but overlapping facets of the deceased (Freedman 1966: 140). Ancestor tablets, in contrast to ancestral tombs, seem to have a specific relationship with the lineal transmission of property and family authority, and in Taiwan only those ancestors who passed on property to their descendants were commemorated by a tablet (Ahern 1973).¹ While Chinese practices are generally interpreted as evidence of an ancestor cult or ancestor worship, and Freedman (1966: 153) makes the specific point that they are worshipped, not merely venerated or respected, Chinese ancestors are nevertheless not divine.

This all too brief ethnographic survey indicates the range of behaviors and beliefs associated with ancestor traditions but, more importantly, their potential significance for social structure and their implications for mortuary practice. Furthermore, aspects of these traditions can be recognized in a variety of sources in the ancient world, archaeological and textual. Van der Toorn describes evidence from the Emar texts from the mid-second millennium B.C. that parallels in some ways Chinese practices, suggesting that domestic “gods” are in fact not gods in the ordinary sense of the word at all, but ancestors who are “named,” “invoked,” and “honored” (cf. Winter 1999: 243)—verbs used, according to van der Toorn (1994: 47; 1996: 74; cf. Scurlock 1995b: 1889), in the context of a funerary cult rather than regular religious worship. This implies, among other things, the giving of gifts to the dead and their provisioning with food and libations. Actually the term “funerary cult” is misleading here (see, e.g., Morris 1991: 153). “Mortuary rituals” is preferred as a more neutral designation which at the same time indicates that these practices, well attested archaeologically and textually (Postgate 1992: 99), occur not only at the time of death but are ongoing after it. Van der Toorn (1996: 75) argues that many references to “gods” in the Emar texts are in fact to ancestors, especially when “god” and “dead” are found together. This is because ancestors are supernatural beings and have a privileged state vis-à-vis the liv-

¹Cf. Bayliss 1973; and see Morris 1991 for a review of the relationship between ancestors and the transmission of property.

ing and the gods, but are not actually divine (contra Archi 1988: 104). Similar examples of this practice are found in Nuzi texts, Ugaritic documents, and the Hebrew Bible. Ritual attention to the ancestors, which is the responsibility of the main heir, is very closely tied to inheritance of family property (van der Toorn 1994: 49) and is symbolized by the transmission over the generations of statuettes, especially the *ilanu* at Nuzi (van der Toorn 1994: 38, 54; see also 1996: 73; cf. Katz 1999). In Mesopotamian texts of the Old Babylonian period, there is evident an essential difference between the terms “god of the family” and “god of the house” (van der Toorn 1996: 73). The family god is a personal god worshipped in shrines outside the house and is often associated with the family’s place of origin. The household god is the ancestor who transmits inheritable property, and it is in this light that cultic installations in houses and tombs at Nippur, for example, and Old Babylonian Ur, are to be interpreted. These installations often include a small pedestal or table (van der Toorn 1996: 70; cf. Schmandt-Besserat 1998: 11) on which it might be suggested the ancestor-related statuettes were displayed. The household “shrines” are in turn to be connected (conceptually rather than necessarily physically) to inhumations in and below houses (Postgate 1992: 99; McAnany 1995), a common practice in Mesopotamia from the Early Dynastic to the Old Babylonian period, and, more rarely, attested in third-millennium northern Mesopotamia (Weiss 1990a) and Anatolia (Honça and Algaze 1998). There is a close and complex relationship between mortuary rituals and practices, the inheritance both of position of family head and property, the presence of household shrines, and the concept of ancestors to be observed in the documentation of greater Mesopotamia (Scurlock 1995b: 1887–89).

Ritual attention to ancestors in the domestic context is also to be contrasted with the manipulation of ancestors in royal lineages and dynasties, which may be understood as the transformation and mediation of ancestor traditions appropriated in the legitimation and differentiation of power-holding groups (Bloch 1986; McAnany 1995). But a focus on the divinity or otherwise of royal ancestors, as at Ebla (Archi 1988: 106–9; Schmidt 1995: 15–19), obscures other, more fundamental issues. The basic question is, does ritual attention to, or invocation of, ancestors amount to ancestor worship or a cult of the dead? There is a distinction to be made be-

tween the two. Ancestor systems are based on real or putative kinship ties between the living and the dead, whereas a cult of the dead is far more generalized (Schmidt 1995: 7).² Propitiation of, and the tending to, ancestors certainly constitutes neither a cult nor worship and may have little to do with any well-developed concept of the afterlife (Bloch 1971: 125) or sense of continuity of the person. There is a strong tendency to conflate the ideological and social roles of ancestors predominant in descent-based systems, for example, with a “cult of the dead” or “ancestor worship,” neither of which are appropriate terms to describe ancestor systems. Both suggest a purely religious framework divorced from everyday reality in which ancestors are considered divine and/or a generalized attention to the spirits of the dead for their own sake (Freedman 1966: 145, 153; McAnany 1995: 1, 11). Such terms should be restricted to very specific situations as described above, for neither denotes the immediate and active role that ancestors may play as a range of social referents. Additionally, distinctions should be made between rituals that separate the deceased from the living, rituals that provide continuing access to the deceased in the afterworld (Morris 1991: 150), and rituals that bring ancestors back into society as a vital and ongoing component of it (Schmidt 1995: 5–13; J. Goody 1962: 46).³ McAnany (1995: 11) argues for the use of the term “ancestor veneration,” but overtones of religious-philosophical practices linger in this phrase, and while a cultic complex may be attendant on such use of ancestors,⁴ whether or not they are considered divine (although I suggest that in antiquity, at least, this is a result of over-interpretation rather than empirical reality), it is a secondary issue to the place of ancestors at the heart of the ideological framework in the larger sense. Therefore “ancestor tradition,” tradition as recursive, reflexive praxis (Giddens 1981; 1984), incorporates the structural, the ritual, and the cultic, without privileging any one of these aspects.

²See J. Goody (1962: 13–46) for a review of the academic traditions of these concepts.

³Scurlock (1995b: 1886–87) suggests that the dead make annual visits to the living.

⁴There are of course many societies that do have a cult of the dead, or practice ancestor worship, without manifesting any trace of a lineage or descent system, as well as societies that are organized into lineages but place no significance on ancestors structurally or ideologically (Freedman 1967: 90), but these are not of concern here.

The question of how we as western scholars understand the nature of the dead in ancient society is particularly critical when dealing with the textual data from Ebla in the second half of the third millennium B.C. and from Mari in the early second millennium B.C. There is much debate as to the nature of ancestor practices at both Ebla and Mari (Schmidt 1995; Archi 1996a; Porter 2000), but that ancestors figured in the sociopolitical life of these two societies is not in doubt. Genealogies listing ancestors,⁵ ritualized offerings to the dead,⁶ and pilgrimages, one at least to the burial places of ancestors,⁷ are described in texts from each place. There are significant differences, however, between the two systems as attested in the sources. At Ebla, ancestors, at least as thus far recognized, relate specifically to royal lineages. They are dead kings, individuals known by name, designated with the *dingir* sign⁸ and comprise kingship itself. At Mari, on the other hand, dead kings are mentioned as a collective group in the *kispum*, and are not represented in any way as divine.⁹ The *kispum*, a regularly performed communal meal at which the living and the dead are present (Bottéro 1983; Tsukimoto 1985), is performed for a class of beings rather than named individuals (Schmidt 1995: 30, 42–43) and is argued to be a domestic rather than public rite even though the known examples are undertaken by the royal family (Durand and Guichard 1997). Whereas the Ebla ancestors seem to perpetuate and legitimate kingship through complex ritual interactions between very specific individuals—the newly married royal couple, the gods and preceding rulers as seen in the ritual text ARET XI (Fronzaroli 1992)—the Mari rituals perpetuate and affirm the role of a generalized class of the dead in the realm of the liv-

ing. The *kispum* of Mari text M.12803¹⁰ lists, along with Sargon and Naram-Sin, the “Hana-Yaradum” (Amorite pastoralists along the Euphrates),¹¹ “those of Numha” (perhaps also Amorites), and “divers others” (Biot 1980; Durand and Guichard 1997: 64) as recipients of the rite.¹² Yet although at least part of the purpose of the ritual seems to be to ensure the dead their rightful place in the scheme of things lest they become troublesome ghosts, the very inclusion of Sargon and Naram-Sin in this version of the *kispum*, as well as the presence of a *kispum* in the Genealogy of the Hammurabi Dynasty (GHD), implies that this ritual too was on occasion central to the legitimation of the king, but in an entirely different way from the Ebla pilgrimage. The GHD *kispum* in particular implies an ideology of incorporation, not just of the dead within society, but of society as a whole. “All the people” (GHD: lines 29–40 in Finkelstein 1966; Charpin and Durand 1986: 166–67), from prince to pauper, from city dweller to pastoralist, share in the *kispum* of the king and all may lay claim to the ancestors, the king’s ancestors, listed in the text. The king is thus firmly embedded within the larger society and does not, in this instance at least, seek to be excluded from it.

Two quite different worldviews would seem therefore to be perpetuated in mortuary-related ritual at Ebla and Mari. At Ebla a restrictive perspective is apparent; at Mari a communal imagery of society is purveyed through an affirmation of an ideal tribal unity (Charpin and Durand 1986: 169–70). The contrast between the nature of ancestors in these two sources, however, is not simply a matter of changing social organization and traditions over time, nor an evolutionary development. At Ebla kingship and

⁵From Ebla, ARET VII 150 and ARES 1 (Archi 1996a; 1996b; cf. Astour 1992); the preservation of Amorite genealogical traditions is seen in the Genealogy of the Hammurabi Dynasty (Finkelstein 1966; Charpin and Durand 1986) and the Assyrian King list (Gelb 1954).

⁶ARET VII and ARES 1.

⁷ARET XI; see also ARMT 10:51 (Schmidt 1995: 40, n. 138) from Mari.

⁸The implications of this are contentious. For a review, see Porter 2000.

⁹There are, however, at least five deities from the Mari pantheon that are known to possess royal human names (Sasson 1999), but again this contrasts with the situation at Ebla, where the deification of deceased kings, even if accepted, seemed to be but nominal, for there is as yet no evidence that they played an active role in the pantheon.

¹⁰Attributed to the reign of Šamši Addu by both Biot (1980) and Durand and Guichard (1997).

¹¹For the identification of this group, see Durand 1992: 118–19, although questions of interpretation here are superseded by Durand and Guichard 1997.

¹²Although Durand and Guichard (1997) have argued that M.12803 is one of four connected texts from Mari that constitute protocols for the performance of rituals (as has been proposed for the Ebla pilgrimage [ARET XI, Fronzaroli 1992]), Fleming (1999: 161) suggests that the rites, especially the *kispum*, took place outside Mari itself. Thus any linkages established by the rituals were not necessarily to the city of Mari (although the relationship of the rituals to the *kingdom* of Mari is a somewhat different issue). In fact Fleming questions whether M.12803 is a *kispum* at all as no food offerings, integral to the performance of a commemorative feast, are listed.

government were legitimated in terms of exclusionary ancestor traditions configured through restricted, perhaps fictive, genealogical and descent structures. Although the actual blood relationship of the sequence of kings at Ebla is in question (Archi 1986: 215; Astour 1992: 23), kingship is nevertheless presented in terms of dynastic succession (and cf. Finkelstein 1966: 105; Sasson 1998: 462), the rightness of which is emphasized by the use of *dingir* in reference to preceding kings. For the Amorites, the place of king as integral to a corporate system was perpetuated through reference to notions such as tribal unity constructed through genealogies intimately tied to place (Finkelstein 1966; Charpin and Durand 1986; see below). Associated with ancestor traditions, these were affirmations of the ways in which society was viewed by its very disparate members. Despite the apparent contradictions between them, social relations at both Ebla and Mari, especially social relations of authority, were rendered on the basis of an imagery and ideology of ascription through ancestor traditions. At both Ebla and Mari, ancestor traditions were each the venue through which an ideal vision of society was construed, even though that vision, different in each place, diverged from the actual nature of social organization. Ancestor traditions also legitimated political authority, maintained social cohesion, structured integration, and were a vehicle for the resolution of social conflict.

ANCESTORS, SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, AND PASTORALISM

Although the Mari texts belong to a period in which the state is a well-established entity, they are nevertheless redolent with aspects and attributes of tribal social organization derived from the pastoralist sector which apply not only to groups that might be understood as peripheral to the state, but to the state itself, for the Mari archives contain primarily the letters and administrative documents of the ruling elite, and especially of Zimri-Lim (Fleming 1998: 50). That Zimri-Lim was the scion of a pastoral tribe, the Sim'alites, is now well known (Charpin and Durand 1986; Durand 1998; Sasson 1998); that this relationship was an integral aspect of the particular nature of Mari kingship and Mari society has until recently been lost in the complexities of the historical documentation (but see Fleming 1998), where warfare between tribes

and city has been highlighted as symptomatic of innately hostile mobile-pastoralist/state interaction. This hostility is understood to rest in the fact that, despite *economic* interdependence, pastoralism, and urbanism based on sedentary agriculture represent two diametrically opposed, indeed irreconcilable, ways of life and social, cultural, and political value systems (e.g., Rowton 1973a; 1973b; cf. Fleming 1998: 47).

Yet not only are pastoralism and state *not* mutually exclusive constructs, ancient, indigenous concepts of history clearly enabled the synthesis of the supposedly conflicting elements of pastoralist and farmer, tribe and state, chief and king, often rendered through genealogies or king lists. Here the ultimate pastoral tribal origins of kings were not always obscured as detrimental to their image and power, but actively appropriated. Both the Assyrian King List (AKL, Gelb 1954) and the GHD claim their earliest antecedents in similar lists of rulers whose names are those of pastoral tribal groups (Finkelstein 1966; Charpin and Durand 1986: 159–63). This is explicit in the AKL, where the first 17 kings are stated to have dwelled in tents (Gelb 1954: 222–23), and is also evident in both genealogies, where the names of some of the early kings are identifiable as place names. This need not be understood as either mistake or coincidence, for tribal and topographical names are often synonymous, and tribal leaders may be identified by reference to either (Astour 1992: 22). In both lists, real historical pedigrees are linked with traditional, perhaps fictional, claims of origins. In both cases this might be understood only as a means of legitimizing kingship (Finkelstein 1966: 113; Schmidt 1995: 30). But these genealogies embody more than a vague Amorite historical consciousness of a pastoral background, for the formula of tribe = place = ruler establishes dynastic identity, that is, continuity over time construed through descent; it also defines, preserves, and extends relationships across space, and operates in the construction and maintenance of larger social and historical identities.¹³

That there is a particular relationship between time, space, and identity among mobile pastoralists is most clearly explicated by reference to modern ethnographies of pastoral groups, where the two fundamental factors considered to define identity are territorial distribution (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1969

¹³For a recent example of this process, see Shryock 1997.

[1940]; 1949; Marx 1977) and descent through a common ancestor, fictive or real (Godelier 1977: 77; Khazanov 1994: 139, 150–51; Barth 1961: 32), ideological or actual (La Fontaine 1973: 43; Salzman 1978a; 1978b; Tapper 1990: 58). Kinship and territory, while often viewed as conflicting or noncommensurate forms of group definition, in fact operate side by side to provide an elastic system of social integration that transcends dispersal, distance, and cleavage (Bloch 1971: 217; Marfoe 1979: 7; Lancaster and Lancaster 1991: 132–33; Casimir 1992a: 16–17). Such systems enable flexibility in the dissolution and reconstitution of groups across time and space, and as well maintain corporate or communal access to territories and resources.

Genealogical descent orders society in a number of ways:

Descent regulates relations between different groups and at the same time establishes the individual's membership in a given society as a whole and in specific subdivisions of it; this membership involves both corresponding rights and commitments and sometimes even social positions. Kinship establishes the position of the individual in society, descent legitimizes it. . . . Furthermore the notion of common descent could be of significance in yet one more sense . . . the external-political. It was able to sanctify relations between different nomadic unities by establishing the existence or absence of quasi-kinship between them. (Khazanov 1994: 140–41)

Territory as social identity, on the other hand, operates on two levels: the practical, in terms of determining who has rights to the land and its resources, and the abstract, in terms of providing coherence and integration in group membership.

As ways of determining group membership, territory and descent both counteract the potential for disunity and disintegration and the attenuating impact of time and space high in mobile societies. There are several different levels on which this operates. On one level, descent-based social organization and/or ideologies are related to the strategy in areas of insecure resources of ensuring access to many different types of pasture, or different areas of pasture, effectively achieved by some form of inclusionary or communal land and resource rights (Humphrey 1979; Casimir 1992a; 1992b). On another level, mobile societies are characterized by changing constraints inherent in factors of both resource procurement (Casimir 1992a: 22) and social interaction, where not all members participate in the

same subsistence strategies and movements (Salzman 1972; Kamp and Yoffee 1980). Movement, whether over long or short distances and time spans, is an essentially divisive factor in pastoralist society (contra Rowton 1975: 28), for it diminishes the possibilities of face to face interaction through which group decision-making, internal coherence, and political control are engendered in societies that do not possess, or rely on, technical means of transcending time and space such as writing (Giddens 1981: 4–5, 92–93). Pastoral tribes or tribal confederacies do not always operate as a complete unit; they may meet as such at only certain points in the seasonal cycle. Subsections of the larger social grouping may not have direct contact with one another from one year to the next, and near kin may be separated on a regular basis as an optimizing response to resource allocation (Gulliver 1975: 373; Marx 1978: 46; Lancaster and Lancaster 1986: 44). Nevertheless, most pastoralist societies retain not only an internal unity in the face of constantly shifting associations within residential or herding units (Cribb 1991: 54), they may also retain close relationships among groups that break away from the core, or fission, as the size of the population grows (Kelly 1985). Integration is a result not of modes of production, or direction, length, and duration of seasonal herding cycles or the ecology of animals herded (cf. Sadr 1991: 2), but of social structure. Conversely, as movement denotes the constant possibility of both association and disassociation with individuals and groups, it may be consciously manipulated in dissolving and reconstituting social relations (Gulliver 1975: 379; Glatzer 1983: 219; Lancaster and Lancaster 1991: 135). Therefore, direction and duration of movement may be dictated by social considerations and structured through social organization.

Flexible systems of membership also allow for the maintenance of group identity in other situations of fracture. Again, modern ethnographies indicate that social, rather than simply physical, dispersal among mobile pastoralists is a frequent result of a number of different circumstances: warfare, population intrusions, conflict between variant forms of political organization, competition over resources, or when ego-centered relations constructed through marriage practices crosscut or attenuate lineage structures and descent groups. A similar result may originate in conflict between the interests of the domestic group and the larger community, between

horizontal ties of kinship, private property in the form of animals, and communal ownership and identity (Khazanov 1994). From a sociological perspective, Giddens has argued that successful social integration in societies lacking the institutionalism of the state is based on high presence availability—that is, face to face interaction in which knowledge of the kin and genealogy of each other and of each other's environment (Giddens 1981: 160–61) is central. A mobile population reduces presence availability, self-knowledge, and knowledge of others (Bonte 1979: 212). In the face of such factors of disequilibrium, mechanisms that strengthen, redefine, and emphasize identity emerge.

In any social system where descent plays a prominent role, be it sedentary or mobile, the forebears who constitute the line, or web, of descent are attributed a singular condition. They are ancestors. They exist in a particular relationship to time and space, and in a particular relationship to this world and the other. Of course, sedentary societies based in cultivation and mobile societies based in animal husbandry may both be grounded in kinship, descent, and territory construed through ancestors, but the notion of territory is quite different in each, and the roles kinship and descent play in each are also quite different. For in societies tied to fixed-plot cultivation, where possibilities of tenure are finite, genealogies and genealogical depth are important, and ancestors will be individually recognized and named. Time is the predominant element in the time-space relationship (Manning 1998: 40), for one role descent plays in such systems is in transmitting land rights through inheritance (McAnany 1995: 11, 78). In contrast, crosscultural and ethnographic surveys indicate that corporate social ideologies are highly correlated with pastoral societies. For where territorial associations are fluid, transitory, or disrupted on a regular basis, space is a primary factor of destabilization, and ancestors often consist of a generalized group in which deceased individuals are subsumed into the group to perpetuate a communal identity and territorial association (Bloch 1986: 86).

Ancestors themselves are created by death and through the specific processes associated with social treatments of death, which endow the deceased with a new social persona. Making an ancestor involves more than separating the deceased from the living and readjusting social relationships in the absence of a member (van Gennep 1960 [1909]; Morris 1992: 10), however. It also involves the establishment of

differences among the dead, those who qualify for ancestor status and those who do not, and the establishment of the type of ancestor they are. And if ancestor traditions are actively implicated in the social relations of the living, then the way they are represented tells us something about the nature of those social relations on a structural/ideological, or on an actual, level. Two very broad classes of ancestor tradition may be discerned: those that are inclusionary—where many or most members of preceding generations become ancestors such as would seem evident in the practice of *kispum* at Mari—and those that are exclusionary—where ancestor status is accorded to a few, as at Ebla. Burials—styles, forms, practices, and locations—are a primary means of expressing this differentiation, for they are the permanent transmission of the deceased's condition in this regard across time. But while mortuary practices may be representative of ancestor, and hence social, systems, the relationship is far from straightforward.

CREATING ANCESTORS

As ritual and tradition, the mortuary practices of ancestor traditions are particularly appropriate to archaeological investigation for they are conducted, and indeed are constructed to operate, in the types of time scale with which archaeologists work (McAnany 1995: 16; Bradley 1998: 91). Variability in the mortuary practices of ancestor traditions is considerable—far more so than in situations where the representation of an individual's social status when living is the prime element. Nevertheless, two general characteristics seem to typify all types of ancestor systems. Not all the deceased become ancestors, and the process of becoming an ancestor involves protracted rites and stages in burial treatment that incur more than one inhumation (J. Goody 1962; Bloch 1971). Both these characteristics are evident archaeologically in the ritual treatment of the body (McAnany 1995: 11–12). For example, while not all secondary burials may be interpreted as ancestors, ancestors will often come to be placed in secondary burials. While membership in the realm of the ancestors may be evident at the time of death and immediate inhumation, and thus may be represented simply in two types of primary inhumation, the transference from the position of ordinary dead to ancestor is very often represented by, and achieved in, the act of transference from one

inhumation to another. A sequence of burials and associated rituals in and of themselves serve first to disincorporate the deceased individual from the material world and living persona, and second to transform that persona into an object of special attention and status—that is, otherworldliness—by both action and material representation.

Those individuals who, for whatever reason, are not thus honored will frequently remain in the place of the early stages of body treatment: the first interment, the defleshing grounds, or an intermediate stage between defleshing and the final placement in the ancestral tomb. Therefore, ancestor systems may be characterized in material terms by the contemporaneous practice of primary and secondary burials, the latter sometimes consisting of two separate stages of secondary interment. In southern China, for instance, temporary primary burials are used to deflesh the bones of the deceased, which are then removed and placed in burial urns. The urn is stored in the open air in fields or on hillsides for a period of time before it is reinterred in another, and final tomb. Even though urn burial and exposure is thought of as an intermediate stage, for many people it is the final resting place, as only certain individuals, those significant to the construction of social position through genealogical descent, are removed from the hillside to be put in the last tomb (Freedman 1966: 120–21). All, however, may be ancestors: some are more esteemed than others; some have a public role but others remain significant only in the domestic context; while still others figure prominently in lineage structures (Ahern 1973: 142–47).

The practice of burial in stages is also one of the many factors affecting deposition of grave goods. For example, as the first and primary burial is temporary, or undertaken hastily and unexpectedly, display in the form of grave goods or grave construction may be limited or poor, as prominent exhibition can be reserved for the final entombment. If, for whatever reason, that final transition to the ancestral burial place is not made, it might be proposed that even a comparatively wealthy individual or person of high economic and social status may be permanently accompanied by a noncommensurate assemblage of grave goods. If the status of the lineage of which the deceased is a perpetuating member is at stake, burial display may be lavish. If, however, ancestors are instrumental in creating an ideology of egalitarianism, or a unified commu-

nity identity in which socioeconomic disparities between individuals as factors of cleavage or conflict are to be obscured or transcended, then burial display is likely to be inconsequential, intended to show respect for the dead rather than individual glorification.

The transformation from deceased person to ancestor will also often involve the transition from a single inhumation to interment in a multiple burial. At the point of death, the deceased is an individual and not a social construct. Each death is a unique and singular event. Because the position of ancestor *is* a social construct, however, and is so closely associated with descent systems, the final burial is the venue through which that descent system is expressed (as in Bloch 1971). This frequently (but not invariably) consists of some form of group interment. The group, however, may be constituted by family, lineage, or community, among other possibilities, and may consist of a limited number of known antecedent generations or an indefinite number and timeless line of ancestors. And each of these may in turn be expressed in a number of ways. The ancestors of one descent group or lineage may be kept separate from those of others, leaders of different lineages may be placed in the same tomb, or generalized forebears of the group as a whole may be buried together. As well, the process of multiple interments will often involve regular and frequently ritualized rearranging of the skeletal remains in the tomb (Bloch 1971: 158, and cf. Peltenburg 1999b: 432). Sometimes this may involve the deliberate ordering of older corpses in a symbolic pattern as new corpses are brought in; sometimes removal will be haphazard and unceremonial. Older remains may be pushed out of the way as the memory of distant ancestors is lost or superseded by the immediacy of the new. Multiple burials may also be placed in the ancestral tomb over a long period of time, or as a single event marking the establishment of a new tomb.

Another factor that has a direct impact on archaeological patterning is the symbolic or ritual significance of bone loss in this process (McAnany 1995: 12). First, there is a degree of attrition attendant on the simple removal and transport of a burial from one place to another which may be represented archaeologically as random. In such cases we may expect small or very fragile bones to be absent from the final inhumation. Second, certain skeletal pieces—such as skulls, for example (Kuijt

1997), and long bones (McAnany 1995: 46, 61)—may have highly charged meaning in the social or cultic practices associated with ancestor traditions. These bones may be deliberately selected for reburial, or, as bones themselves are often considered to have power, they may be removed from the body to be kept within the household of descendants (Hingley 1996: 233; Bradley 1998) or used in other ritual contexts. Third, Bloch (1971: 156–59) has shown how some ritual practices lead to unspecified but deliberate bone loss in the demystifying of the corpse.

Different forms of descent may also affect the gender composition of burials, although this is highly problematic in terms of archaeological interpretation. Theoretically there should be observable correlations between the predominant sex of burials and agnatic, cognatic, and uterine descent systems. We might expect a greater number of male ancestors in agnatic systems, female in uterine, and an equitable mixing of males and females in cognatic ones. But not only does the ideological component enter into the archaeological record here—the difference between actual descent practices and the way descent is conceived and portrayed—even in markedly patrilineal societies women still have access to ancestor status. A further question is the place of children in ancestor burials. As young children are often not considered to have a social identity until a certain age, and may not have the type of personal power that can qualify a person within a lineage for ancestor status, it may be expected that in ancestor systems where status or the transmission of property is of importance, children will rarely be brought into the ancestral tomb. However, the ancestral condition may be achieved by virtue of birth into one's place in the lineage; also the incorporative rituals that children pass through in the creation of social identity may occur at a very young age. Thus children above that age may be considered fully chartered members of the society and entitled to ancestor standing. Among the Merina of Madagascar, children are usually buried in the ancestral tomb but cannot enter it on their own. They are only interred in the company of another (not necessarily related) adult (Bloch 1971: 139).

Additional forms and degrees of variation will be incurred according to the type of ancestor system at stake, and according to indigenous conceptions of what ancestors are and do. Nevertheless, when multiple secondary burials showing a good degree

of either deliberate or random bone loss are found contemporaneous with primary single burials, ancestor practices should be considered as potentially explanatory. Indeed, many burials at third-millennium sites on the Euphrates River may be explained most straightforwardly in this light. This region is marked then by an assemblage of mortuary remains that is notable for both its quantity and its spatiotemporal variety,¹⁴ including depositions on open ground, in pits and in pots (Peltenburg 1999a: 102), simple stone cist graves (Sconzo 1995–1996), elaborate shaft tombs (van Loon 1979; Meyer 1991; Orthmann 1981; 1989; Kampschulte and Orthmann 1984; Orthmann and Rova 1991), constructed tombs (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936), above-ground mausolea (Strommenger 1997), and mortuary monuments (Masuda 1986; Peltenburg 1999b); and located within settlements, within houses, in delineated cemeteries, and in unbounded dispersal (Laneri 1999). Previous proposals (e.g., Carter and Parker 1995) that have concentrated on chronological, ethnic, or status differentiation as explanation of mortuary variability in the Euphrates River valley leave as many unexplained anomalies as they elucidate. An alternative approach, which considers the multiplicity of social relationships that may be represented in death, does not.

MORTUARY PRACTICES AT TELL BANAT

An example of one Euphrates site where the relationship between the dead and the living is a significant factor in social representation, and where that relationship points to a dynamic in social construction, is the third-millennium settlement complex at Tell Banat, on the left bank of the Euphrates River, Syria (fig. 1). Excavations at the Banat settlement complex (Porter 1995a; 1995b; McClellan and Porter 1994; 1997; 1999; Porter and McClellan 1998; McClellan 1991; 1998; 1999) have revealed a group of contemporaneous sites of varying size and function (fig. 2). At Tell Banat itself, the central urban mound of about 25 ha, two main periods of occupation have been recovered (table 1). From the earlier phase, called Period IV¹⁵ and dated to

¹⁴A detailed examination of this material will be presented elsewhere.

¹⁵See Porter 1999; in press b; Porter and McClellan 1998, for a discussion of dating and stratigraphy at Banat.

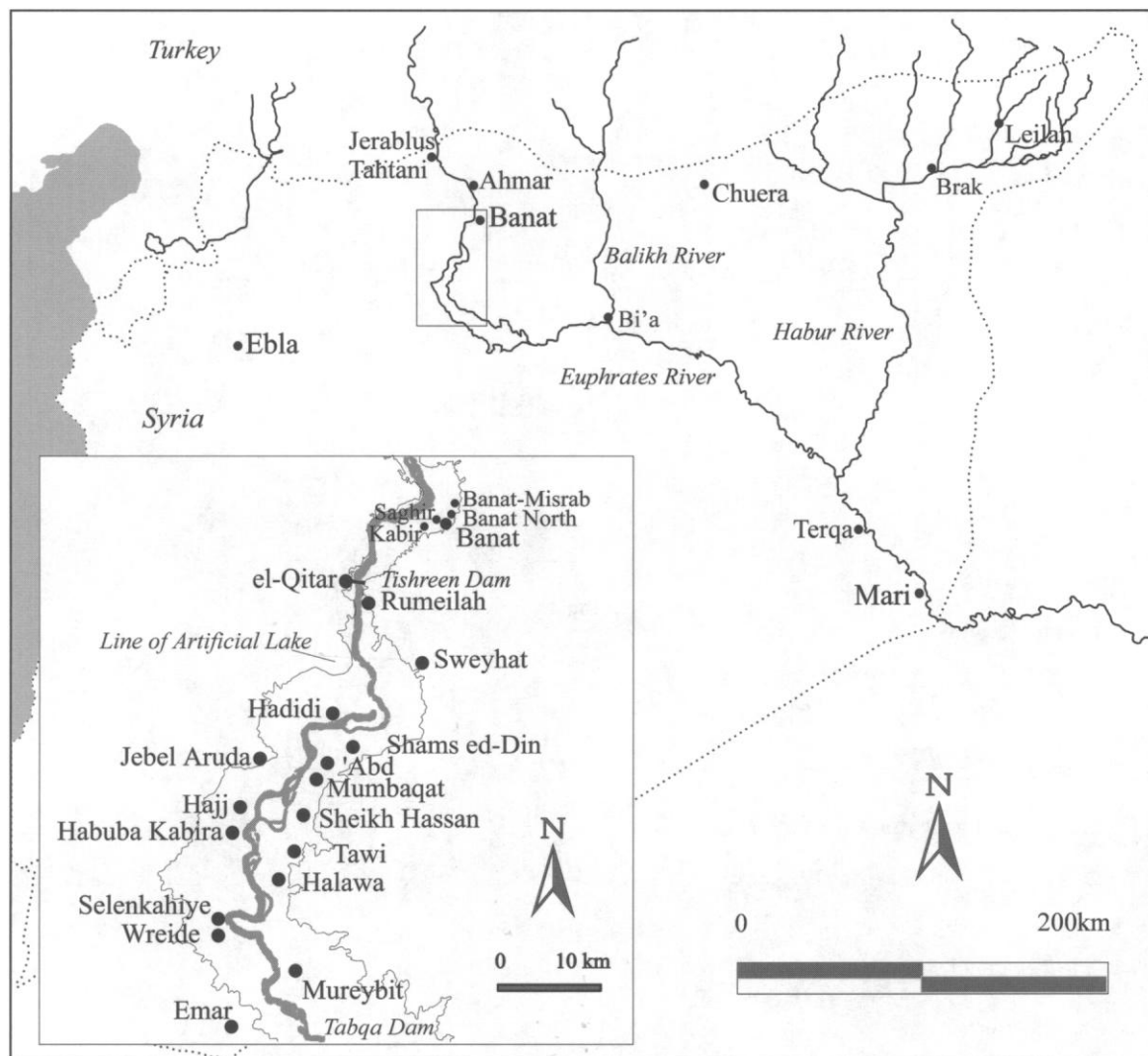


Fig. 1. Map of selected sites in Syria.

2700/2600–2450 B.C., elaborate public buildings and an extensive pottery production quarter have been retrieved. No segregated residential quarters were found at the site for this period, and there is some evidence to suggest that living and work activities were mixed. The subsequent phase, called Period III and dated to 2450–2300 B.C., saw extensive changes in architecture and organization: the public sector was rebuilt, the pottery production quarter was rearranged and relocated, and a domestic quarter consisting of small insubstantial buildings was newly established. A large temple *in antis* was constructed

at Tell Kabir, a low mound of 2.3 ha lying to the southwest of Banat.

In addition to the public, private, and productive facilities found at Banat and Kabir, contemporaneous examples of most of the burial types outlined above were recovered (table 2).¹⁶ Of particular note is an above-ground mortuary structure known as the White Monument (McClellan 1998; McClellan and Porter 1994; 1999). The White Monument, so

¹⁶See Porter 2000 for a discussion of Euphrates tomb types and their dates.

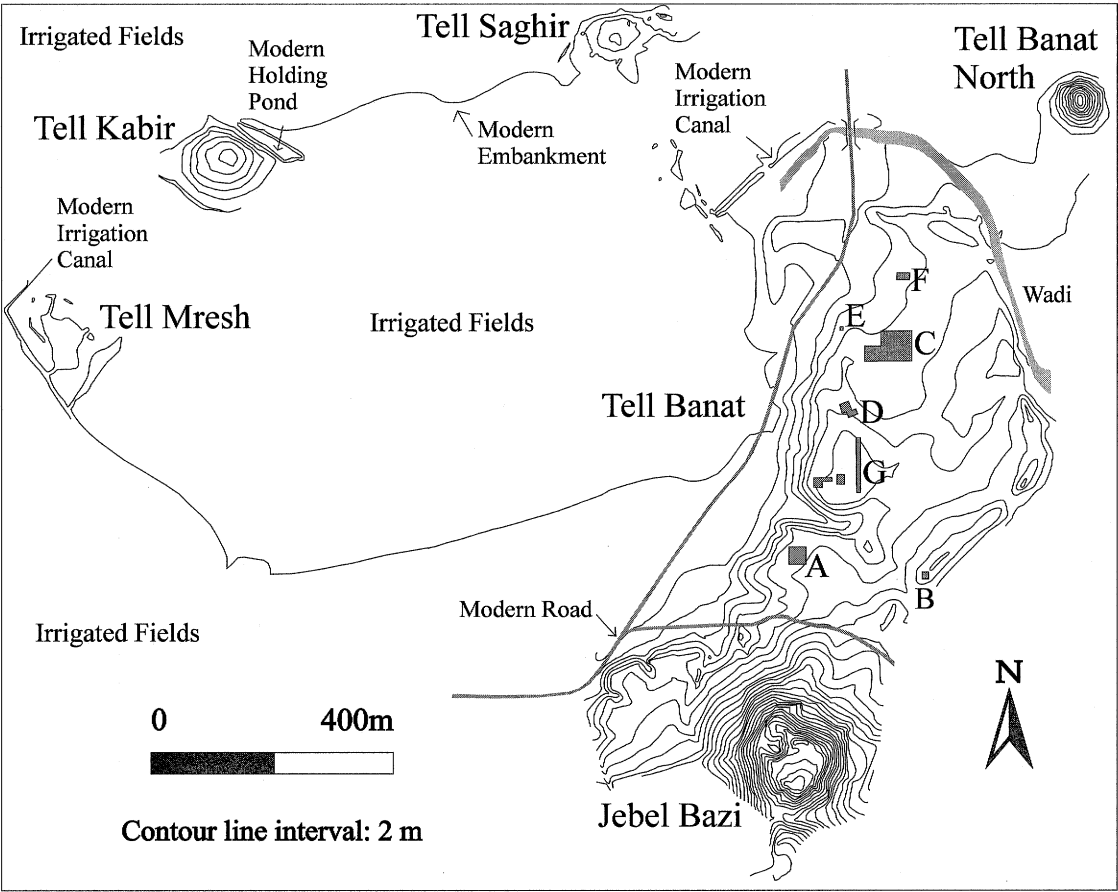


Fig. 2. The Tell Banat settlement complex.

TABLE 1. Chronology of the Banat Settlement Complex

Date	Period	Banat Area D	Banat Area G	Banat Area C	Banat Area F	Banat Area A	Banat North	Tombs
?	V	Unexcavated	Unexcavated	Mortuary Mound II	Unexcavated	Unexcavated	White Mon. C	
ca. 2600	IV	Pottery production	Pottery production	Gravel platform		Unexcavated	White Mon. B2	
		Pottery production	Pottery production	Public Bldg. B7	Public Bldg.		White Mon. B	Tombs 1/7
ca. 2450	III	Pottery production	Pottery production	Public Bldg. B6	Domestic housing	Pottery Production	White Mon. A	Tombs 2/4/6
ca. 2300		No evidence	Pottery production					Tomb 7 Tomb 9

TABLE 2. Distribution of Tomb Types in the Euphrates River Valley

<i>Above-Ground Tombs</i>		<i>Shaft and Chamber</i>					
<i>Mounds and Dolmen</i>		<i>(Earth-Cut and Stone-Built)</i>		<i>Stone-Lined Cist</i>	<i>Stone-Capped Pit</i>	<i>Plain Pit</i>	
Mortuary Mound II							
2600–2450	White Mon C						
(Banat IV)		Selenkahiye (I)					
		Selenkahiye (I)					
	Mari T241-242, T300	Halawa H70 (M)					
	White Mon B (M)	Banat Tomb 1 (M)		Banat Tomb 6?? (M)			
		Banat Tomb 6?? (M)					
	Jerablus T302 (M)	Sweyhat Tomb 1 (?)					
	Banat Tomb 7	Sweyhat Tomb 2 (D)		Tawi T65 (I)			
	Bi'a Mausoleums (M)	Tawi T6 (M)			Tawi T19-20 (M?)		
		Tawi T70 (M)			Tawi T24		
		Shams ed-Din 19			Tawi T25 (I)		
	Rumeilah ?	Rumeilah?		Rumeilah?	Tawi T71		
2450–2300		Shams ed-Din 7					
(Banat III)		Shams ed-Din 9					
		Shams ed-Din 60					
		Tawi T6 (M)		Jerablus T 787?	Shiouxh T2 (D)	Shiouxh T6 (D)	
		Tawi T16 (M)		Banat Tomb 5	Tawi T19-20 (M?)		
	Hadidi Area D (?)	Sweyhat Tomb 5 (M)		Banat Tomb 4 (I)	Shiouxh T4 (I)	Shiouxh T1 (M)	
	White Mon A (M)	Banat Tomb 2 (M)		Jerablus T 1518 (M)		Shiouxh T8 (M)	
	Jerablus T 302	Banat Tomb 7 (D)		Jerablus T 1526 (I)		Jerablus T 956 (I)	
		Halawa 119		Banat Tomb 3			
		Wreide W011 (M)					
		Wreide W054 (M)					
		Wreide W066 (I)					
		Hadidi 1972?		Tawi T5 (?)			
		Ahmar Hypogeum (D)	Hadidi L1		Banat Tomb 9		
	M = Multiple inhumations				White Mon = White Monument		
D = Dual inhumations				Jerablus = Jerablus Tahtani			
I = Individual inhumations				Shiouxh = Shiouxh Tahtani			

named before its exact nature was known and located about 200 m northeast of the main urban center of Tell Banat, is an artificial structure that is 100 m in diameter and stands some 20 m high (fig. 3). It was assembled in at least four phases that comprise three separate entities, White Monuments A, B, and C (fig. 4), constituting the entirety of the tall conical mound, Tell Banat North.¹⁷ The center

of this mound was not reached through excavation, but neither conductivity nor magnetometry surveys revealed evidence of any structure, such as a tomb, within the depths of the mound.

Although it is not known what comprises the core of the monument, nor what is its earliest date, extensive exposures of the southern portion of the mound and a long narrow trench through the western slope revealed considerable detail on the construction and history of the White Monument (McClellan 1998). The first version of the mortuary mound for which there is evidence, White Monument C, is a freestanding structure that appears to be somewhat pyramidal in shape, with the main face oriented

¹⁷In previous publications, the later two phases of the White Monument were designated I (now A) and II (now B), with a tumulus underlying occupation at the main urban center of Banat called White Monument III. This last is now Mortuary Mound II (see Porter and McClellan 1998).



Fig. 3. Excavations at Tell Banat North, viewed from Tell Banat.

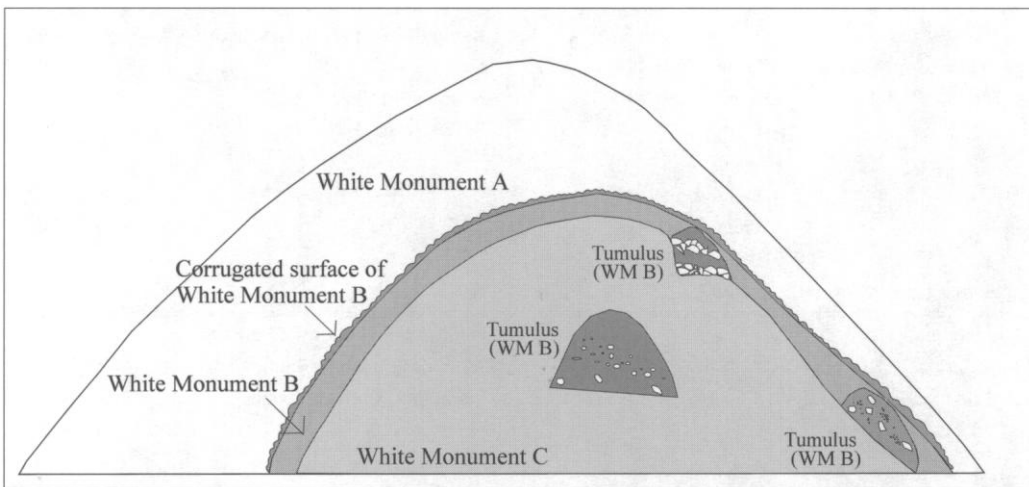


Fig. 4. Schematic section of Tell Banat North, showing the construction phases of the White Monuments.

toward the settlement of Banat. White Monument C was constantly plastered and replastered as its surface melted from weathering, indicating that it was exposed for a considerable period of time. There is no evidence for the dating of initial construction, for the few diagnostic pottery sherds found indicate only an early date within Period IV at Banat (Porter and McClellan 1998; Porter 1999; in press b) for the replasterings. Most pottery recovered comes from within or between the plaster faces and could have

been incorporated with the surfacing material, but there is at least one instance where a vessel had been deliberately broken and stones placed over the individual sherds. This is suggestive of a ritual act that was perhaps performed each time the monument was repaired.

Subsequently, but also within Period IV, a series of small earthen and stone tumuli or cairns containing human skeletal parts were cut into the sides of White Monument C. This phase of construction is

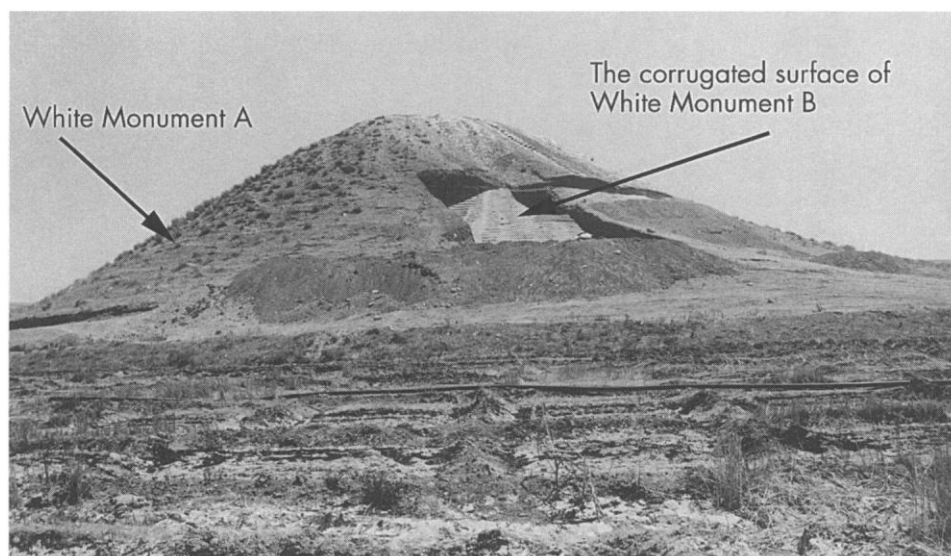


Fig. 5. White Monument B is located off-center inside White Monument A.

called White Monument B2. There are two quite separate processes evident in these additional tumuli. One, located on the upper southeast side of White Monument C, consisted of two stone lines placed in a cut, filled and covered over with earth. This construction was periodically repeated, each episode separated by thick layers of soil. Nevertheless, the alignment of stone tiers one on top of the other was so close that it was certainly done within living memory, if not within a very short period of time. Each episode would appear to represent a separate interment of a group of secondary burials. Once-complete pots were placed in and around each series of stone lines. Fragmentary human bones were found between the stone lines, and in one episode a skull lacking only the mandible had been placed upright outside but immediately adjacent to the stones. About 3 m to the north and farther up the side of White Monument C, another small cluster of stones was associated with a mandible but no cranium. A second tumulus, considerably lower than the first, consisted of loosely agglomerated stones and earth piled into a heap and appears to have been a single construction event. Bones and pots were scattered inside and around the outside of the tumulus here also. A deep cut into the southern slopes of Tell Banat North revealed a series of small, mainly earthen, mounds interleaved with fill in the interior of White Monument B.

The additional tumuli and deposits on the exterior of White Monument C may have been added in preparation for the enlargement of the structure, for although it is possible that they accrued over a long period of time, their surface definition was minimal, indicating that they were probably never freestanding but were intended to be incorporated into a larger structure. White Monument C and the small tumuli were certainly unified by encasement under a thick coating of white terra pisé to form a single tall and elliptical mound, White Monument B. This action was undertaken during the earlier period of expansive occupation at Tell Banat, also within Period IV. Manifesting distinctive construction practices, the coating had been formed in successive horizontal bands so that the surface was corrugated, giving it a steplike appearance (fig. 5), and evidence of erosion and replastering in places (although to a much lesser degree than the earlier structure) indicates it too was probably exposed sometime before being encased in turn in an enlargement of the edifice, White Monument A.

White Monument A represents both continuity and change in the burial practices and function of the mound. It was constructed not as a group of tumuli, but as one single entity. The inner fill was, however, built up in clear horizontal stages so that the outer structure once may have had the appearance of a layer cake, or perhaps a stepped pyramid, before erosion dissolved its exterior definition

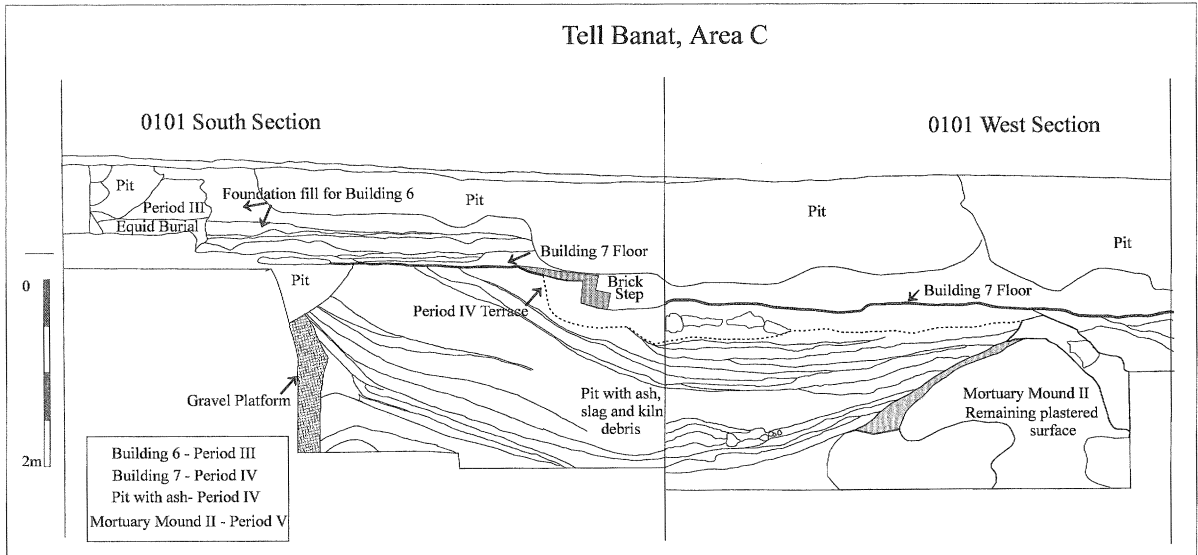


Fig. 6. Section showing the relationship of the three main levels of occupation in the public sector at Tell Banat.

(McClellan 1998: 244). White Monument A contained a series of discrete burial deposits that had clearly been interred as the mound was compiled, and not cut in after completion, nor incorporated randomly with imported fill (McClellan 1998: 245). Human bones were mixed with animal remains and ceramics. In addition, there were deposits of objects, primarily beads and biconical clay balls that may have had a ritual or votive purpose (cf. Becker 1992). A burial deposit with grave goods dated to 2450–2300 B.C. (Banat Period III [Porter and McClellan 1998; Porter in press b] to which all other artifacts contained in White Monument A are also to be attributed) and found directly on the surface of White Monument B, provides a terminus ante quem for that structure.

A similar monument, called Mortuary Mound II, has been partially excavated at Banat itself and constitutes the first extant trace of occupation there during the third millennium.¹⁸ Underlying the large walls of Period IV and Period III public buildings (fig. 6), as well as the mosque of the modern village of Igraya now situated on the ancient mound of Banat, excavation of this structure has been limited.

It is made of layers of gravel and dirt covered by a whitish, hard-packed, although fragile, terra pisé coating. Inside the structure was a jumbled mound of large stones, found against the north, mosque-bound balk. Badly damaged by subsequent building activities in antiquity, with only small patches of the surface remaining, nevertheless this edifice also comprises a burial mound or tumulus, with the pile of large stones constituting an inner cairn. The diameter of the structure as currently excavated is 7.5 m, but its base was not reached. It is evident that it once stood at a considerably greater height, but was truncated in antiquity. The small portions of the western and eastern faces and surfaces exposed were corrugated, giving the appearance of narrow steps descending down the face in an identical manner to White Monument B. Overlaying the tumulus is an extensive gravel deposit, an artificial construction deliberately erected in this area to form a platform over the top of Mortuary Mound II (and possibly other tumuli) and filling in the area around it. The platform on the western side of Mortuary Mound II was excavated to a depth of 3.5 m, and it is some 60 m in diameter.

A circular feature 25 m in diameter was recorded in 1997 by magnetic survey to the north of the White Monument, and in 1999, just prior to flooding of the Tishreen Dam, a circular pattern in the fields was sighted on the ground immediately

¹⁸An Uruk-period site has been located several hundred meters to the north of Tell Banat North at the modern village of Misrab, and Uruk tokens have been found in a secondary context at Tell Kabir.

adjacent to the Monument. A conductivity survey of the main urban site of Banat, combined with the undulating topography of the area in which Mortuary Mound II is located, suggests that other such structures are to be found in that vicinity too. Thus the mortuary mounds at Banat may constitute a field of such structures similar to the dolmen fields of Palestine. With the exception of Tell Banat North, the additional mounds would be commensurate in size with other dolmen.¹⁹ Dating of the establishment of this practice at Banat is unknown, but the stratigraphy of the area in which Mortuary Mound II is to be found clearly indicates that it preceded widespread occupation at the site in the mid-third millennium.

As structures and burial *containers*, the mortuary mounds stand out from all the other burials at the site. But the evidence of burial *practices* within them—multiple, disarticulated, and fragmentary skeletal remains often interred with considerable quantities of animal bones and a limited number of grave goods—are entirely commensurate with the customs evident in other forms of burial container at the Banat complex, and contemporaneous with them. For example, Tomb 1 (Porter 1995a), an earth-cut and two-chambered tomb belonging to Period IV, contains the multiple and disarticulated remains of at least five individuals: four adults, two of whom were of advanced age (that is, over about 45) and one subadult around six years of age. The group contained at least one adult female.²⁰ Some of the bones showed traces of burning. Perhaps not coincidentally, an earthen, hearthlike structure with traces of blackening was located toward the entrance to the tomb.

Large black pebbles, bronze objects, and a collection of smaller ceramic vessels had been placed on top of the bones, and several animal bones were also found in association with the human remains and distributed throughout the tomb. Accompanying grave goods included 163 pots: a majority of Plain Simple Ware vessels well known from other contexts at the site, a much smaller quantity of Euphrates Banded Ware vessels²¹ found primarily

in mortuary contexts or other specialized locations (Porter 1999), and two true Metallic Ware pots; and bronzes, beads, and incised bone tubes, at least one of which was associated with a block of kohl. Tomb 1 was located on the western slope of the mound of Tell Banat and may have been extramural.

Tomb 2 (Porter and McClellan 1998; Porter in press a), an extramural tomb²² located in the fields between Tell Banat and Tell Banat North and dated to Period III, consisted of a single chamber 6 m below the modern surface. The rear wall of the chamber contained two niches. Skeletal remains of both human and animal derivation were located in clusters distributed over the floor of the tomb. These comprised the remains of at least two individuals, possibly three, and included one male, 18–25 years of age and one female of indeterminable age. Several of the human bones showed strong indications of burning.²³ Over 90 ceramic vessels were found in similar proportions of ware type as found in Tomb 1; and grave goods included a braid of hair, possibly caprovid or equid, bronzes, and beads.

Tomb 4 (fig. 7), a small stone cist grave found in Area C, within or nearby the public sector, included the very partial disarticulated remains of one adult, or more accurately, at least one adult, of undetermined gender. Remains of this individual were very few, fragile, and piled against the eastern wall of the tomb. Tomb 4 had been opened, most probably in antiquity. Remaining in it was a small group of 14 pots—again Plain Simple Ware and some Euphrates Banded Ware—that probably constituted the original deposition, as in general the small cists only contain a few vessels. The date of this tomb is problematic. The pots are consistent with a Period IV attribution and contain no clear indications of Period III, but the sample is really too limited for certainty, and stratigraphically a Period III date is possible. In contrast to the previously described burials, Tomb 4 would appear to contain the remains of a burial since removed, rather than the placement of a secondary burial brought there from another context.

Banded Ware, and Euphrates Painted Ware, and further, is often conflated with Metallic Ware.

²²A series of stone-cut chambers in the limestone escarpment to the east of Tell Banat belong to the third-millennium settlement, but precise dating is more problematic as the tombs are now empty.

²³Information on the human skeletal remains from Tomb 2 and all other burials at Banat was provided by project osteologist Suzanne Wilhelm of Tübingen University.

¹⁹Tell Banat North is in fact similar in size to Rogem Hiri, which is 155 m in diameter at its outermost circle (Zohar 1989).

²⁰Information on the human remains from Tomb 1 was kindly provided by Barbara Stuart of the University of Amsterdam.

²¹Euphrates Banded Ware is also known in the literature on third-millennium Syria as Orange-Spiral Burnished Ware, Red

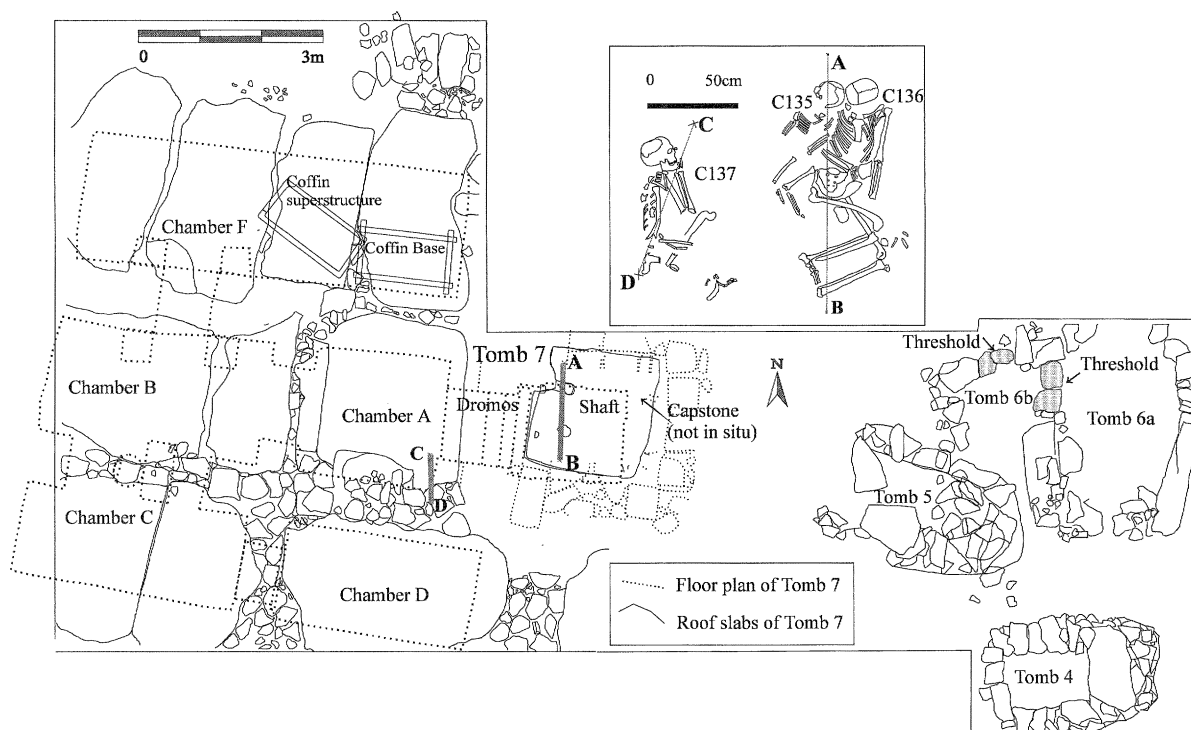


Fig. 7. The public sector was the location of Tombs 4, 5, 6, and 7 as well as articulated skeletons C135, C136, and C137.

Located 70 cm to the north of Tomb 4 was the small square chamber delineated by stone walls that constituted Tomb 6 (fig. 7). Tomb 6 was built in two phases. The earliest phase (6a) consisted of a small rectangular structure that protruded above the ground level of the period. No remains were found in this chamber. Sometime later a wall was added around the outside, providing a forecourt (6b), and this additional area contained mixed human and animal bones. The human remains consisted of three individuals: an adult, a child 2–4 years old, and one adolescent. Only three ceramic vessels were found, one of which was painted. A number of beads and several bronze pieces were also recovered.

Many of the depositional practices described above are also evident in Tomb 7, but in other terms significant variation is represented by this structure. Tomb 7 (fig. 8) is a five-chambered tomb with connecting passages, entered by a shaft and dromos.²⁴ The walls are of carefully dressed stone (finished

only on the outer face after the walls were constructed), mortared by bitumen. The floors are of baked bricks coated entirely with bitumen, and the roof consists of monolithic stone slabs, the interstices of which were also filled with bitumen. The use of Tomb 7 is connected to two succeeding levels of public buildings. The tomb was built in Period IV, when it is surmised that the stone slabs were open to view and formed part of an uncovered area, perhaps a courtyard, integral to the public building of this period. Level with the tomb roof was a surface made of a white lime coating in a material similar to the coating of White Monument II. In terms of design, Tomb 7 is related to the stone cist graves, also covered with large stone slabs, and its rooms may be considered as a series of linked cists. However, its monumentality, labor investment, and design render it unique not only at Banat, but for this period in Syria as well. The tomb was reused and modified, probably in Period III, and it is possible that the fragmentary remains of at least one individual (only 20% of bone remains could be identified), gender indeterminate but probably 20–35

²⁴Tomb 7 is now reconstructed in the National Museum of Aleppo.

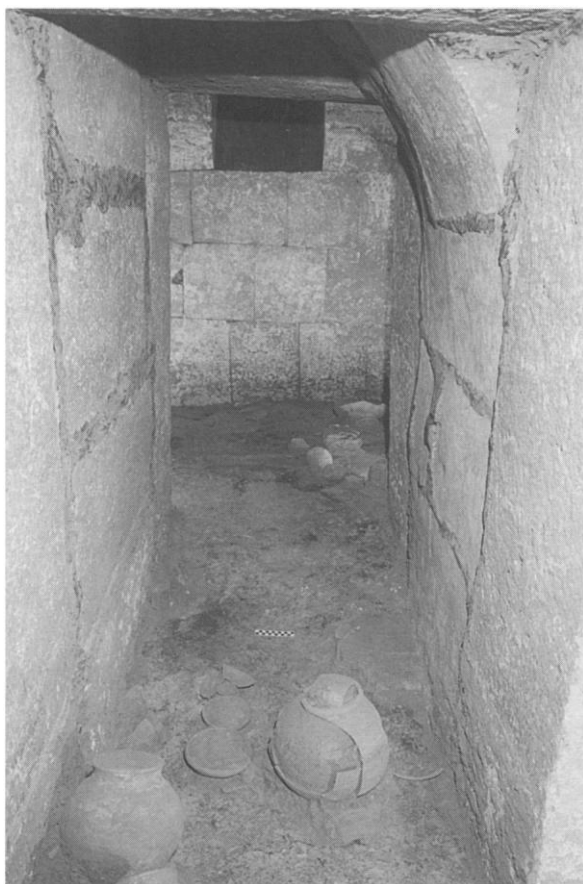


Fig. 8. Tomb 7, looking from Chamber F through Passage E to Chamber B. Each room was decorated with niches containing objects.

years of age, were placed in the southeast chamber, Chamber D, at that time. The bones of this individual showed pathological evidence of hard work and poor diet. Accompanied by a gold pendant and other objects, including a round alabaster tabletop, it is possible that the bulk of grave goods in situ in Chambers D and C at the time of excavation accompanied this inhumation. Only some 200 pots were found throughout the tomb (compared with 240 in the much less grandiose Tomb 1), comprising as always a majority of Plain Simple Ware vessels and a smaller quantity of Black and Red Euphrates Banded Ware vessels, which can be confidently dated to Period III. However, in Chamber F on the north side of the tomb, the powdered remains of a primary articulated burial in flexed position, with head turned to the north, was found in a wooden coffin (fig. 9), a practice not well attested in greater

Mesopotamia outside of the “Royal Cemetery” of Ur. Intermingled with it were approximately a thousand gold beads of a variety of types as well as many stone beads. Remnants of grave goods that had decayed or had been removed in antiquity were found in Chamber F, as well as some objects of types not found anywhere else on the site. These seem to have accompanied the coffin burial. Objects found include eye and eyebrow inlays for statues; a small stone wig or hairpiece; several small objects of lapis lazuli, including jar stoppers inlaid with gold; decorated ostrich eggs and a large and intricately incised shell;²⁵ and alabaster vessels. Traces of several pieces of inlaid wooden furniture were found (wooden furniture fragments adhering to bronze nails were distributed throughout the tomb, and impressions of some items were recorded in the bitumen floor [fig. 10], including a lyre-shaped indentation in the floor of Chamber C). Highly decorated, either by inlay or gold studs, wooden and organic pieces, perhaps leather, were found in association with animal bones immediately adjacent to the coffin. Some aspects of the treatment of these animal remains parallel that of the human burials at Banat, especially the placement of large black pebbles and small ceramic bowls on top of the bones (cf. Scurlock 1995b: 1883).

Of note is the discovery of two complete and articulated female skeletons, one an adult, 20–30 years old, one a child 2–4 years, with the skull fragments of a second child also identified, which had been placed over Tomb 7 and in the vicinity of its entrance shaft. No burial pit or container was recognized. A third articulated skeleton was placed directly on top of the roof of the tomb and under a line of stones. Other piles of stones on top of Tomb 7 contained no complete skeletons but did contain fragments of human bone, raising the possibility that other burials had already been removed. This suggests that the area over and around Tomb 7, which clearly had some particular symbolic or ritual mortuary significance (quite possibly because of Tomb 7 itself or perhaps even because of Mortuary Mound II) may have been used as a defleshing ground. That burial in multiple and protracted stages may have been practiced at Banat is further indicated by Tomb 9, a very small stone cist grave located to the northwest of Tomb 7 which had two unusual features: while it contained a few

²⁵ See Winter 1999 for a discussion of a similar object.

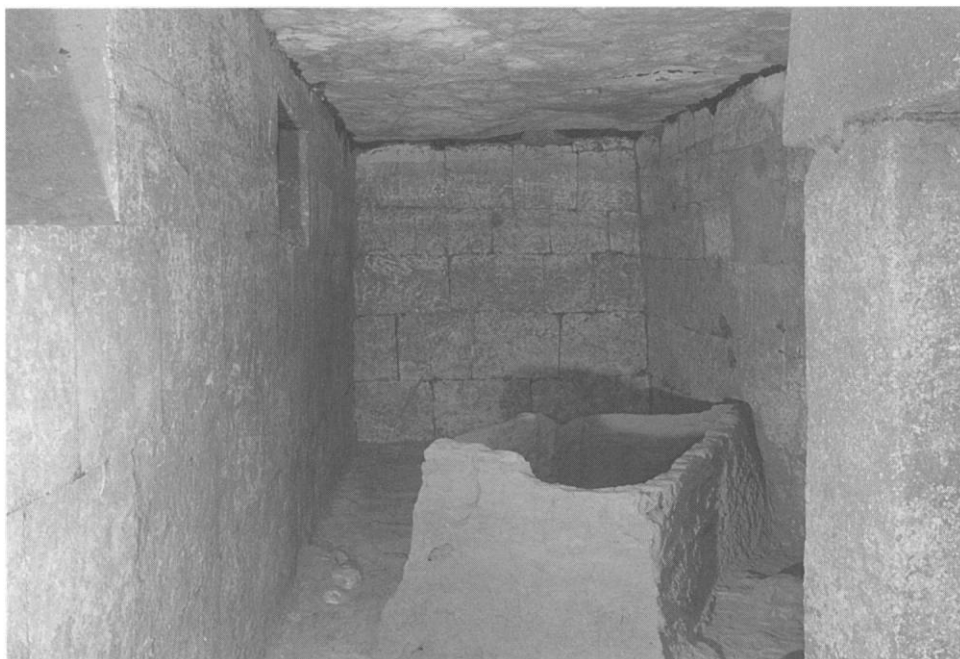


Fig. 9. Only a cast formed by silt and insect casings remained of the original wooden coffin in Chamber F, Tomb 7. Crossed bronze straps defined the coffin's corners.

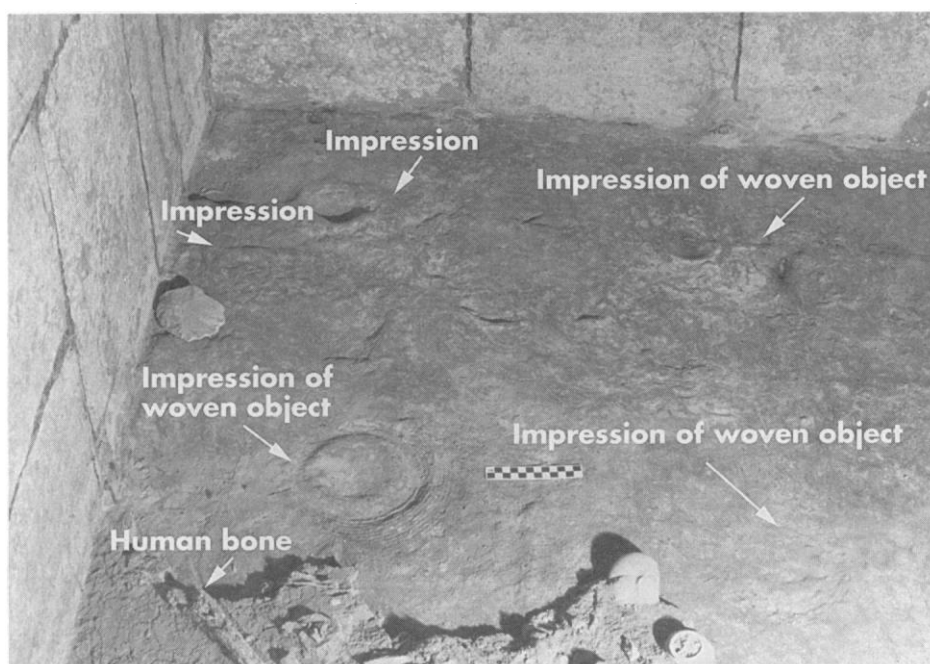


Fig. 10. Impressions of objects were found throughout Tomb 7, but organic, woven items were concentrated in Chamber D where one of the two inhumations contained in Tomb 7 was located.

distinctive jars and miniature vessels that compare most closely with vessels from the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936), and a cache of silver neck and arm rings, it contained no trace of either human or even animal bone whatsoever. Further, an additional deposit of ceramics had been made outside the tomb on top of its roof slabs, which were in place but not intact. Tomb 9 may have been opened, the body removed for burial elsewhere, the roof replaced, and a ritual offering made at that time. Small cist graves are rarely found intact. Disturbance is generally attributed to modern grave robbers, or even thieves in antiquity, but such was not always the case. The absence of bones, as well as grave goods, may indicate removal for burial elsewhere.

Three general types of burial are therefore attested at Banat: the first is the placement on open ground, in no container, of articulated bodies; the second comprises the stone cist graves which, although the evidence from Banat is highly fragmentary, may consist of both individual and multiple burials; the third is composed of secondary burials in multiple groupings ranging in number from at least two to at least seven individuals, found in earth-cut chamber and shaft tombs (Tombs 1 and 2), stone-cut chamber tombs (6 and 7) and the monumental mortuary mounds. Many examples of the third burial type—fragmentary, disarticulated placement in groups of two or more individuals, in all forms of containers—demonstrate at least partial burning of bone material. Human skulls, even fragments, are extremely rare in the disarticulated burials and usually consist of only pieces of lower jaw and teeth. There is a bias toward long bones in the overall collection of human remains, and this is particularly marked in White Monument B, where they comprise more than half of all bones recovered.²⁶ The placement of black river pebbles and small bowls over piles of bone is a frequent practice, and in all three burial types a very regular pattern of ceramic deposition is evident. It is also to be noted that some objects and vessel types occur commonly in burial contexts, but not at all, or rarely, in others (Porter 1999). In addition,

the majority of disarticulated human skeletal remains (with the notable exception of those of White Monument B) are mixed or closely associated with animal bones. A preliminary analysis of the faunal collection from the Banat settlement complex²⁷ shows that 40 percent of the animal bones from White Monument A are of equid, with a secondary concentration of bovid remains. Animal bones are comparatively rare in White Monument B and, when found, consist of primarily sheep/goat. In contrast, the below-ground tombs thus far contain no equid, little cattle, and a very high proportion of sheep/goat. The faunal assemblage from the settlement, as opposed to the faunal assemblage from mortuary contexts, is comprised of 80 percent sheep/goat and 20 percent cattle. Animal bones from burial contexts show a definite bias toward elements from the right side of the body.

THE MEANING OF MORTUARY PRACTICES AT BANAT

The first among the many factors contributing to similarities and differences in mortuary practice at Banat is that such variation may reflect two or more ritual stages in the burial process (Brown 1995). Thus primary interments may constitute a short-term burial for the purposes of defleshing, although some individuals may remain at this stage permanently and may even have additional bodies placed with them. Jamieson (Coqueugniot et al. 1998: 95) has noted the frequent occurrence of vessels connected with the pouring, containing, and consumption of liquids in small tomb groups and suggests that they may have been used in a ceremonial way during the burial process itself (also Peltenburg 1999b: 432; Mazzoni 1994; cf. Schmidt 1995: 22–23), as much as for drinking in the afterlife,²⁸ and certainly such vessels comprise one of the interior ceramic groups

²⁷ Undertaken by Jill Weber of the University of Pennsylvania.

²⁸ This topic has received a good deal of attention recently. Suggestions as to the purpose of certain sets of pots in burials range from the traditional notion that the dead were provisioned with all necessary goods for the afterlife, pots being both containers for other goods and implements, to more complex analyses focusing on ritual action. These actions have been thought to include, in differing contexts, libations oriented to chthonic gods (Nebelsick 2000: 216); lustration rituals related to the handling of the corpse (Winter 1999); ritual feasts, similar to the *kisum* but conducted at the time of the funeral to both comfort the living and to ensure that the dead did not become troublesome ghosts (Bachelot 1992).

²⁶ In part this trend may be explained by the exigencies of moving the remains from place to place, and also by excavation and preservation factors, but as other very small and fragile pieces were recovered, it seems unlikely that this is the only explanation. The absence of large and durable bones such as the pelvis also indicates selection.

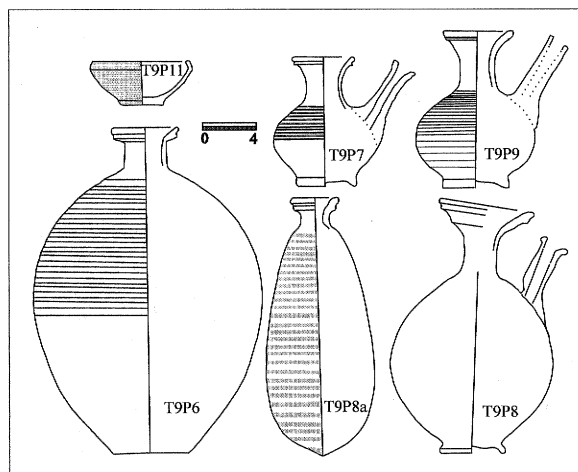


Fig. 11. A group of vessels found in one corner of Tomb 9, including two Black Euphrates Ware pots, T9P8a and T9P9. Turning techniques have created a lightly ridged surface on the other vessels.

in Tomb 9 (fig. 11).²⁹ Jamieson's observation, while by no means a rule, raises the possibility that if the small cists are a preliminary step in a multistaged and protracted burial process, then a special drinking ritual may perhaps be associated with that phase of interment. Those who are to be moved onto the next stage are exhumed, collected in pots and baskets or rolled up in mats, and another ritual, this time involving burning, is enacted (Porter 1995a: 5). The bones, and the objects used to carry them, are then placed in the final repository. Further rituals are enacted, additional grave goods deposited, and in some instances grave goods, mortuary deposits, and offerings continue to be added and subtracted over a long period of time.

Such fragmentary glimpses of mortuary ritual offer insight into the potential meanings of multistage burials. I would propose that at Banat, and elsewhere on the Euphrates where comparable sets of burial forms, containers, and practices may be similarly interpreted, the social transformation and incorporation of a deceased individual into the ancestral group was achieved through the multistage burial process, for acts such as the disarticulation, selection, and burning of skeletal remains destroy the individual identities of the interred and render them cultural artifacts to be used and manipulated in

forming collective identities (Tilley 1996a: 241–43). Collective ancestor traditions were in turn instrumental in the production of corporate sociopolitical identities in the world of the living (Porter in press a). This is not to imply that multistage burials are to be correlated with a particular or single type of ancestor system—far from it. As noted above, ancestor traditions may operate in many different ways, and burial practices will only potentially vary accordingly.

As well, in a “complex society” such as Banat, there are complex and manifold relationships among the different constituents of society, some or all of which may be represented at death. Simple bi- or tripartite social hierarchies, the classic class structures of social theory, rarely reflect the intricate networks of cleavages and alliances that can operate in reality. That multiple social relationships coexisted at Banat throughout the third millennium is evident in the sheer diversity of burial practices found there, for neither chronological differentiation nor a multistaged inhumation procedure in and of itself explains or accounts for all the variables unearthed. Not all the dead went through the same processes, nor did they end up in the same place. The shaft and chamber tombs, for example, are intrinsically different from the monumental mortuary mounds in a number of ways, even though many of the burial practices are the same. The shaft and chamber tombs contain a limited number of individuals, whereas White Monuments A and B enclose large numbers of groups of individuals. The number of inhumations and the age and gender range contained in groups in both types of burial structure may be indicative of some form of familial relationship, but in the absence of supporting evidence there are any number of ways these relationships may have been constituted. Burial groups could be representative of the household, a related but not synonymous grouping to the family, or selected kin relations that cut across household, nuclear family, or marriage practices. They may represent significant members of different lineage groups within the larger system, for example. In any case, these relationships may be symbolic rather than actual. At Banat the deposition of burial groups appears on the whole to take place as single acts. This is clear in Tomb 1 and White Monument A, but also within the individual tumuli of White Monument B. Although the tumuli accrue over time, the placement of each burial group within them does not. The degree to which the actual appro-

²⁹Winter (1999: 238–39) shows very similar shapes in metal from Ur, sometimes associated with ritual libations.

priate members of the burial group may be identified for relocation is questionable.

However, whatever the criteria for selection for each interment group, the grouping itself would appear to be a paramount factor in the below-ground shaft and chamber tombs such as Tombs 1 and 2, whereas in White Monuments A and B the significance of each grouping is subsumed within the totality of the mounds. In both cases, individual identity is of minimal significance, but this is especially pronounced in the White Monuments. The lack of differentiation among burials, or groups of burials, contained in these mounds, the number of bodies interred, and the paucity of grave goods perhaps are to be understood as depicting an ideological notion of the ultimate parity of the dead, for the mound burials at Banat highlight the collective nature of the deceased, who at death are transfigured from individuals to a community of amorphous, and probably unnamed, ancestors (cf. Scurlock 1995b: 1892).

It is in this light that the relationship of the Banat mortuary monuments to the delineation and signification of space is integral to understanding their meaning. As the creation and perpetuation of corporate social identities reproduced through inclusionary mortuary practices, they are intrinsically connected to the practical and conceptual exigencies of space. They reflect more closely the social concerns and structures of groups rooted in mobile pastoralism than those of groups engaged in fixed-plot or sedentary cultivation.³⁰ Space as much as time is a critical disjunctive factor in nonsedentary systems, and space as much as time is the central aspect of the distribution of mortuary mounds. For while the mortuary mounds certainly mark the continuity of the group over time (Bradley 1998: 63; Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998: 311), it is more particularly space that is denoted by their eminent visibility, in marked contrast to below-ground burials (Tilley 1996a: 157). The tombs of the ancestors as physical landmarks incorporate and objectify the social identity of the group (Tilley 1996a: 167) in relation to place. They also embody the genealogical history of the group within a territory, as is well attested in many ethnographic studies (Keesing 1970:

757; Marcus 1985: 460–61; White 1991: 37–40); and as the objectification of territorial and descent relations, they are perpetual mnemonics of social knowledge—who belongs where, and why.

Consideration of the monuments in relation to place also indicates a more basic level on which the correlation between corporate burial practices and subsistence practices operates. The widespread distribution, in less than optimal agricultural areas, of above-ground burial forms enclosed within earthen mounds—whether the barrows and dolmen of Europe (Bradley 1998; Nebelsick 2000), the Levant (Yassine 1985; Epstein 1985; Prag 1995), or the Persian Gulf (Potts 2000), the kurgans of the Caucasus (Edens 1995; Tsatskheladze 1998), or the megalithic cattle burials of southern Egypt (McKim Malville et al. 1998)—has given rise to a number of explanations based on environmental proximities. Renfrew proposed that megalith building is evidence of territorial behavior in small-scale segmentary societies that lack the political centralization of a chiefdom or state (Renfrew 1973: 141) and that their distribution reflects population/resource stress among sedentary farmers (Renfrew 1973: 144; Chapman 1981), who are pushed out into the fringes of arable land. In contrast, Jarman, Bailey, and Jarman (1982: 236, 240) suggested that the location of megaliths is related to the exploitation of pastoral grazing land. The same spatial juxtaposition is noted in the Levant by Zohar (1992) and Prag (1995); and mortuary mounds in the Euphrates region,³¹ while integrally connected to settlements, are at the same time located along the interface between croplands and grazing areas. Indeed, the Euphrates, although generally considered primarily in terms of the arable potential of the river valley, is a thin ribbon of fertility that cuts through a vast arid and semiarid landscape. It forms the western perimeter of the Jazirah

³⁰ The relationship between territory, ancestors, and pastoralism need not only be expressed by monumental mortuary mounds such as those at Banat. The site of Jebelet al-Beda on the southwest slope of Jebel Abdel Aziz, where a small artificial mound was associated with several large stelae (Meyer 1997), might be similarly interpreted.

³¹ The White Monuments are unlikely to prove unique to Banat. A small earthen mound, about 2.5 m high and enclosing a corbelled two-roomed stone tomb, Tomb 302, has been recovered at Jerablus Tahtani, in the vicinity of Carchemish (Peltenburg 1999a; 1999b). Burial mounds were recorded by the Japanese excavations at Rumeilah (Masuda 1986), a little downstream from Banat and of the same time period, and there is also a tall conical mound on the outskirts of the city of Mari that may comprise a third- or second-millennium burial monument. Farther south on the Euphrates, the site of Us²iyeh may contain similar material, while another mound comparable to Banat, about 30 m high and conical in shape, is located in the vicinity of Tell Hadhail in the Sinjar plain (T. Wilkinson, personal communication). It has been suggested by several excavators working in the Balikh that a conically shaped mound there may also parallel Tell Banat North.

steppe and is a vital resource within the subsistence practices of steppe pastoralists there today.

Clearly, there are two ways to view the disposition of mortuary mounds among resource zones in the Euphrates River valley. They may represent the burials of sedentary cultivators who exploited the steppe for domestic herds (e.g., Buccellati 1997), or of pastoralists who utilized the river valley in their seasonal resource procurement. Analyses of floral and faunal remains from sites along the Euphrates River, as at Tell Sweyhat (cf. Miller and Weber in Zettler et al. 1997 and Wilkinson 1994: 492), do not yet provide conclusive evidence for one form of subsistence practice over the other, at least in part because the parameters that distinguish one from the other are not as clear-cut as commonly assumed. Both practices, and several in between, are observed in operation side by side today.³² On the face of it, however, an association of the mortuary mounds at Banat with a sedentary farming community seems inescapable. This, after all, is in keeping with understandings of urbanism throughout northern Mesopotamia, indeed the ancient Near East as a whole, as based on the production of agricultural surpluses (Matthiae 1988; Weiss 1990b: 395–96; Dolce 1998). But while the mortuary mounds are spatially related to the urban occupation of Tell Banat, their original construction precedes it. The chronology of these monuments, and the nature of the archaeological material from the settlement itself, indicate the alternative scenario: that the mortuary mounds, indeed the entire urban complex, derived from pastoralist subsistence practices, ways of life, and sociopolitical structures.

³²The summer of 1999 saw a widespread drought that brought herds of sheep and goat to Tell Banat from different areas and for different reasons. Each herd was managed in different ways. A Bedouin family brought a sizable group of animals from their base in the region of Palmyra, where there was sufficient water but inadequate feed. A large flock combined from the small holdings of individual families in several different villages, and under the care of a single shepherd, came daily from the steppe. They traveled around 5 km each way simply to drink from the irrigation canals, returning home immediately. Others, such as the herd pictured in figure 3, belonged to a farming family from farther south in the river valley where there was also a shortage of grazing. Relationships with the Banat villagers facilitated shared exploitation of harvest stubble for the latter two groups, whereas the Bedouin were reliant on traditional rules of resource-sharing and hospitality. All profited from the abandonment of cotton fields when the Tishreen Dam started to fill.

ANCESTOR TRADITIONS AND URBANIZATION ON THE EUPHRATES

This argument, admittedly speculative, may be played out against contingent historic circumstances pertaining in the Euphrates River valley in the first half of the third millennium, when changes in occupation and use of the riverine area may have generated interaction with a greater number of unknown and/or similar groups, giving rise to a crisis in identity. The big bend of the Euphrates was a notable focal point of Uruk activity in the second half of the fourth millennium B.C. Apart from Habuba Kabira and Jebel Aruda on the middle Euphrates, excavations farther north in the flood zone of the Tishreen Dam have revealed a number of additional Uruk-related sites in this area (Yamazake 1999; Peltenburg 1999a). It has been proposed that the Uruk expansion may be connected to the exploitation of wool-bearing sheep (McCorriston 1997: 533–34). I would suggest that Uruk colonists were not directly involved in herding or textile production in the Syrian steppe, but rather, and under the auspices of a highly organized trading system, the river valley was a key venue for the exchange of products between indigenous pastoralist groups and Uruk settlements.³³ This interaction may have led not to the cultural or political incorporation of pastoralist societies within the Uruk orbit, but, as Zagarell (1989: 299) has suggested for the Iranian highlands, to an increasing divergence between the two social, economic, and cultural spheres. Following Snoek (1995) and Platvoet and van der Toorn (1995), the immediately apparent differentiation between the sociocultural attributes of Uruk and Uruk-related settlements, and those of local pastoralists, rendered superfluous any overt forms of territorial or social delineation at this time. Concomitantly, the relationship between interlopers and pastoralists is likely to have also contributed to the centralization of power and dispersed patterns of production among pastoral groups themselves (Barth 1961: 130; Zagarell 1989: 299). During the Uruk period, then, pastoralist society may have been characterized by increasing

³³The period in which pastoralism originated is debated, and depends in large part on what pastoralism is understood to be. Although there is little direct evidence until textual attestations of pastoralist groups appear in the third millennium, most authorities accept that pastoralism came into being during the Neolithic. See Schwartz 1995 for a review.

physical separation between the various groups who exploited the steppe and the elaboration within them of asymmetrical power structures based on lineage and genealogy.

Supplementary dietary requirements and other goods are essential to specialized pastoralists (Bates and Lees 1977: 825–27; Khazanov 1994: 39–69). After the collapse or withdrawal of the Uruk system from northern Mesopotamia at approximately 3100 B.C., the landscape along the Euphrates in the first centuries of the third millennium was sparsely inhabited, with few sites on the Syrian side of the Syro-Turkish border demonstrating unequivocal evidence for occupation in the period 3100–2800 B.C. This pattern of infrequent, generally small, and scattered settlements³⁴ has several ramifications: there were few markets to absorb regional animal production if no longer directed toward southern economies, and faunal evidence suggests that those settlements may have been self-sufficient in animal products in any case (Miller in Zettler et al. 1997). Not only were there few venues offering opportunities for exchange, much of the river valley was also available for cultivation. In contrast to the preceding period, there is little evidence for any degree of regional integration among settlements on either an economic or political level. In the absence, therefore, of an overarching economic system and regularized opportunities for exchange pursuant to the collapse of the Uruk settlements, pastoralists may have turned to the rich alluvial soils of the river valley to provide those cultivated products for themselves, if not to assume some of the trading opportunities left by this collapse (e.g., Finkelstein and Perevolotsky 1990).

This is not to say that pastoralists then created settlements for the pursuit of cereal cultivation: on the contrary. Large-scale permanent settlement was certainly not a necessary requirement for such additional and supplementary subsistence pursuits. But increased interaction, if not confrontation, with a greater number of unknown and/or similar groups shaped a crisis in social self-consciousness and territorial delineation, not to mention conflicts over resources. For in the absence of effective superior

authority, relations among autonomous groups may become competitive (Tapper 1990: 65), and competition brings about coalescence and boundaries (see also Gellner 1990: 111–12; Newbury 1991: 231). The political functions of the tribe become most visible when the tribe confronts the outside world (Khazanov 1994: 151).

Yet the establishment of territorial demarcation, if only about use-rights or the commodification of land, can be achieved equally effectively through other means such as simple boundary markers—stone cairns (Schofield 1996: 36) or kudurrus (Gelb, Steinkeller, and Whiting 1991). The reification of otherwise flexible mechanisms of group membership through mortuary mound construction attests to a society in conflict, or at the least in flux. The *nature* of that reification, the reproduction of territorial and descent-based relationships through ancestor burials contained in massive built structures, as opposed to the employment of oral histories, for example (Shryock 1997: 20–25), bears witness to the promulgation of social ideologies intimately connected to issues of group identity and self-conception. For fluid criteria for group membership, while maintaining social bonds across time and space, may ultimately have promoted the very instability that should have been ameliorated, by distending the social group with an impracticable number of unknown and unconnected members, by attenuating the linkages that were conceived of as creating the group in the first place. Salzman (1978a: 627; 1978b) has demonstrated that lineage/descent ideology is during times of stability a social structure in reserve rather than a functioning principle in reality. The converse argument is equally valid: that in times of instability, descent ideology comes into play, serving to define group membership and intergroup relations in actuality by limiting or expanding them or legitimizing an existing set of circumstances. In the scenario presented here, the way that descent is brought from the realm of the theoretical to the world of the actual is to reproduce it in physical symbolic form, to objectify it in material objects and places (Fortes 1969: 60).

The archaeological sequence of Banat demonstrates how the process may have operated. The three main periods of occupation recovered at the main mound of Banat and the satellite site of Tell Banat North (table 1) show the transition from a place of purely mortuary function to a more centralized and formalized polity, elaborated in a series

³⁴There are two possible exceptions to this pattern. First, there appears to be a distinct cluster of settlements in the northern Tishreen area, that is, slightly south of Carchemish, and second, it is argued that Mari was a very large planned city at the beginning of the third millennium (Margueron 1991).

of stages. In the first stage, ritual centers emerged around the monumental burial places of tribal ancestors, established to define and sustain group identity (Shennan 1983). The regularized enactment of rituals centered around these tombs, exemplified by the royal pilgrimage of Ebla, may have eventuated in that area becoming a locus not only of ancestor-related ritual, but also of other tribal activities such as regular meetings for exchange, disputes, alliances, and marriages (Wainwright 1970; Renfrew 1984: 242; Prag 1995: 78). Thus the tombs of the ancestors in and of themselves, and as a visible linkage to a particular territory (Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998: 312), became centralizing forces in the social organization of the group, resulting in the sedentarization of those parts of the tribe that maintain the institutions of the clan localized in a particular area—that is, those who controlled the aforesaid structures and those who serviced them.

Considerable labor investment, an organized work force, construction on a monumental scale, and extensive productive activities are demonstrated in this period, Period IV, and prior to the establishment of public buildings at Banat a little later in the same phase. Clearly the presence of a palace or a temple, physical structures to house the coordination of public activities, is not necessary for the institution of such programs (Whittle 1997: 148–49). Nor should it be assumed that control of the activities themselves led to a centralized government and administration and the emergence of an elite. Instead, coordinated complex activities may be undertaken as a communal activity in a tribally organized system where control is not overt but is perhaps indirect and invisible. The purpose of these activities, rather than the fact of the activities themselves, provides insight into the generation of political centralization and power structures at the site, as well as the nature of the society of those who built it. The mortuary function of the first structures there, their continued importance, the association of ceramic production with those structures, all suggest that mortuary practices were a venue of communal dynamics of considerable consequence in group integration and delineation, as well as a source of power for the organizers of ritual activities (Tilley 1996b: 162).

The second stage of occupation at Banat, manifest in the elaboration of ritual and administrative structures and their physical containers, was perhaps constituted by the convergence of power in the

hands of a single descent line. Control of ritual, ideology, and territory (Tilley 1996b: 168–69), that is, control of the mounds themselves, resulted in the role of tribal chief becoming “sovereignized,” divorced from the personal attributes of the individual leader and tied expressly to a particular descent line, impersonal and authoritarian in nature. It is at this time that the additional mortuary mounds, such as Mortuary Mound II in Area C, were abandoned, if not actively denied, in favor of the continued expansion of the White Monument. It may be proposed that this structure housed the apical ancestor(s) of the group and that the descent line that assumed prominence was that which could lay claim to the closest relationship to the founders.

Yet if the initial impetus behind the foundation of the monuments was identity demarcation, their later perpetuation was without doubt symptomatic of a contest over the very nature of society, for demarcation in turn gave rise to processes that both contradicted and undermined the same social ideologies it was instituted to sustain. Despite the tendency to see pastoral/tribal groups as egalitarian in all organizational arenas³⁵—social, economic, political—descent as a structuring social principle is inherently asymmetrical, and genealogies legitimate political and economic inequalities that can and do exist in pastoral/tribal groups (Humphrey 1979; Khazanov 1994: 142). Leadership as a nonproductive aspect of the economy can only be sustained if adequate surpluses are developed, but the ability to produce surplus leads to attempts to control it (Tapper 1990: 65), and genealogies can operate as a structuring principle in the determination and division of ownership of key resources (Khazanov 1994: 143). Further, Marx (1977: 354) notes that control of genealogies is linked to control over a given territory and the ability to defend it, thereby placing coercive power into the same hands, emphasized when the relationship between territory and genealogy is structured through tangible symbols (cf. Marcus 1985). At least one effect, therefore, of formalizing and institutionalizing descent structures through the use of above-ground mortuary monuments is to reinforce and enhance socioeconomic disparities among the group, to give rise to a delineated elite, and to consolidate the power of those who manipulate criteria of group identification. Additionally, divisions within the group in terms of

³⁵ See Salzman 1999 for an intense debate on the subject.

degree of mobility and types of subsistence practice also become intensified as those members who maintain the growing *institutions* of ritualization become ever more tied to the *locus* of ritualization.

As the range of activities controlled by the emerging elite increased, diversified, and became institutionalized, more elaborate buildings were erected. In Period IV, therefore, we have the large public building of Area C, Building 7, which served administrative and/or ritual functions (McClellan 1999). Yet the plan of Building 7, its relationship to the rest of the site, and the spatial organization of the manufacturing quarter of Area D may be understood as inclusive rather than as either creating or expressing a partitioned society at this time, and no private or domestic housing has been recovered at the site prior to Period III. Rather than seeing a highly stratified society in the material remains of this phase, despite the evident emergence of differentiation on at least a political level, it may be more appropriate to characterize sociopolitical organization as "a network of personal and political ties centered on the palace-temple" (Marfoe 1979: 16), where the elite stood at the center, rather than at the apex, of a largely undifferentiated subordinate population. Further, this undifferentiated population was no doubt organized in kinship groups, not only in the same manner as the royal family, but also through real or fictive genealogical ties to it. Archi (1992: 25) notes that at Ebla the city is the palace, and it may be that this describes a political construct as well as a physical one. The lack of separated quarters of residence or even differing architectural styles in houses (Stone 1997) may reflect a lack of any meaningful divisions among the city's component social groupings.

On the other hand, such spatial organization may in fact consciously mask, or even actively counteract, a fundamental tension between two different elements within a changing sociopolitical organization—the new elite and a traditional, communally-based society—and it is *this* tension that the continued construction of the monumental mortuary mounds representative of the time-honored ideal of corporation sought to resolve. Alternatively, and perhaps most likely, the monuments may represent an assertion of an identity that was undergoing rapid erosion by the increasing power of the new faction. In either case, the perpetuation of a corporate society of ancestors in Period IV would seem to be the act of those who would maintain the traditional

order, the larger social entity rather than an elite component within the group. The fact that multiple groups of multiple inhumations were housed in highly visible burial containers involving considerable labor investment indicates the continuing influence and centrality of that community.

Yet subsequent changes in both the spatial organization of the settlement and in burial practices indicate that corporation was ultimately unsustainable, that tradition gave way to the new order, for the third stage of city life at Banat is characterized by autonomization and involution of institutions, with a commensurate depersonalization and intensified stratification of group relations. In Period III a new public building, Building 6, was placed directly over the earlier structure, Building 7, incorporating key elements such as the entranceway, but it was of much more massive construction and dimensions than the earlier edifice. Whereas Building 7 was an integral part of the community it served, with access to it open and unrestricted, Building 6 was sequestered from that community by thick perimeter walls and an imposing style. A temple *in antis*, of identical construction techniques and equivalent in design to a room of Building 6, was also erected at the satellite site of Tell Kabir in Period III, and significant alteration made to the layout and organization of the manufacturing areas. Ceramic production was expanded to include such features as bead-making and weaving, and in contrast to Period IV,³⁶ buildings here were dedicated only to industrial functions, the area was densely built up, and living activities were relegated elsewhere. This, in conjunction with the appearance of insubstantial private domestic houses in Period III, indicates that social organization has undergone a maturation resulting in a more segmented society, with a commensurate physical separation of class, residence, and workplace. The reuse of Tomb 7, the reconstruction of White Monument B by the addition of White Monument A as a single act of aggrandizement are also signs of a significant move away from the system of Period IV and represent greater institutional autonomy.

However, White Monument A simultaneously maintained at least the appearance of the traditions of the earlier structures, which might suggest that the ideological representation of society as a corporate

³⁶Indira Sweeny of Yale University is undertaking a detailed study of this issue in her doctoral dissertation.

unity was upheld. If so, there can be little doubt that the communal imagery of the idealized past was appropriated in Period III by the ruling elite in the perpetuation of their own interests. There is no trace of a corporate society in the settlement of this period, and White Monument A, dominating the view of the floodplain from every part of the city, may have been constructed in a manner that suggests a conscious identification with the iconography of the south. Although now totally eroded, the interior sections of White Monument A indicate that the corrugated bands that faced White Monument B were replaced by blocklike stages, similar in external appearance to those of a ziggurat. And, judging from the resulting wash over what is left of the mound, those stages were coated with white plaster, rendering the structure dramatically numinous. This concurrent manipulation of highly divergent symbols is likely to have been the act of a group who on the one hand sought to establish their differentiated position in an interregional context, while on the other, needed to offset the troublesome ramifications of that distinction by claiming commonality with their local constituents.

Those constituents comprised not just the settled inhabitants of the town and its satellites, but also mobile pastoralists who exploited both the fields and steppe of the adjacent hinterlands. I suggest that Banat remained throughout its history a critical hub in the sociopolitical, and especially ideological-ritual, systems of the pastoralists who founded it, just as pastoralists continued to constitute the economic and demographic base of the town, despite the fact that once established, it might be expected that the town developed as a completely separate entity. But in fact there is no evidence that the population required to sustain a settlement of this size and type, with its heavy investment in monumental architecture and its extensive industrial sector, was ever permanently settled in the area. Rather, like other cities in northern Mesopotamia at this time, Banat was an administrative/ceremonial/manufacturing center, catering to a largely untraceable public.

Again, the documents of Mari and Ebla provide parallels to the history of Banat. If Mari society at the time of Zimri-Lim is one in which "most people maintain an identity by both tribe and town" (Fleming 1998: 56) and where an inclusionary social ethos prevailed, then the same might be said of Banat in the mid-third millennium. By the late third millennium, however, the duality between pastoralist ori-

gins and an idealized view of social organization based on kin and community at odds with a stratified society, government, and bureaucracy is largely resolved in favor of the latter, and the social situation may be understood to resemble more closely that manifest at Ebla. Here a more exclusionary and stratified system is still formatted within the framework of ancestor traditions, but ancestor traditions that are manipulated in a conscious act of exclusion.

At the very same time, exclusion at Ebla, and at Banat, is couched in a framework indicative of a continuing dialectic between differing components of the group. Rituals such as the royal pilgrimage described in ARET XI are examples of legitimation by reference to traditional ideologies and practice (and cf. Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998: 312), for in my view this text may be understood as a narrative of continuity, a statement of these historical antecedents of regional and royal identity and power (e.g., White 1991: 47). I would argue that evidence from Banat indicates that these royal ancestor traditions at Ebla may also have their origins in the common traditions of the non- or pre-elite population. Elite and nonelite attention to ancestors created common images and blueprints of social structure (Salzman 1978a; 1978b; Bloch 1971; 1986), models of behavior for sociopolitical action as well as an ideal situation toward which the group might strive. The place of the elite within society was constructed and constrained by that blueprint, thereby creating a social integration and source of moral order that linked both levels of the population. For ideology, understood as essential to the maintenance of social integration along with the monopoly of force (Godelier 1978: 767), is not only constructed by the elite and imposed on the subordinate population (Shanks and Tilley 1982) in the perpetuation of domination, but may also be appropriated *from* the subordinate population in order to transmute antithetical concepts into a familiar and acceptable guise (Bloch 1987).

Nevertheless, attempts to reconcile a social reality that conflicted with a social ideology by symbolic and ritual representation of that ideology failed to achieve effective, long-term resolution. The rapid contraction of settlement and eventual abandonment of the Banat system in the third quarter of the third millennium is to be understood as the result of an escalating divergence of interests between the constituent elements of the Banat population—pastoralists who remained the economic and demographic

underpinnings of the settlement, and the resident elite and attached manufacturers—eventuating in a separation of the two groups. In the absence of both the wider labor force and the economic base provided by pastoralism, the settlement eventually withered.

The recognition of the critical connection between mortuary practice and social relations as configured through ancestor traditions is not therefore a trivial matter, but rather one that paves the way for the elaboration of social history in antiquity. For now this model is primarily derived from the evidence at Banat, but the possible distribution of mortuary mounds throughout the left bank of the Euphrates

and the northeastern steppe indicates that Banat was simply part of a much broader process and hints at a series of third-millennium territorial designations. It also provides a provocative precursor to the situation evident in the Mari texts, where similar pastoralist territories, movements, and sociopolitical structures are recorded, and which until now have been thought a unique product of the emergence of the Amorites at the end of the third millennium. Although the situation at Mari is later in real time, it actually reflects a situation closer to the beginnings of key processes of social change so clearly reflected in the occupational history of Banat.

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