

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**Death and Life They Did Establish, The Day of Death They Did Not Reveal:  
A Reconstruction and Analysis of Denied Funerary Rites in Southern Mesopotamia**

By

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## Contents

|                                               |           |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Introduction .....</b>                     | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Terminology and Methodology.....</b>       | <b>2</b>  |
| Collective Burial versus Co-Burial .....      | 2         |
| Rites, Ritual, and Ritualization .....        | 3         |
| Funerary Rites versus Mortuary Behavior ..... | 4         |
| Burial Selection.....                         | 9         |
| <b>Archaeothanatalogical Approach.....</b>    | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Funerary Traditions .....</b>              | <b>12</b> |
| <b>Kish .....</b>                             | <b>18</b> |
| Burial Y426.....                              | 23        |
| <b>Ur.....</b>                                | <b>29</b> |
| Burial PG390 .....                            | 31        |
| <b>Analysis .....</b>                         | <b>37</b> |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>                       | <b>41</b> |
| <b>Glossary .....</b>                         | <b>42</b> |
| <b>Bibliography .....</b>                     | <b>44</b> |

## Introduction

Mortuary behavior encompasses all treatments and actions surrounding deceased individuals. Under the scope of mortuary behavior are funerary rites, which are the culturally dependent expected treatments of deceased individuals that honor the dead. However, under various circumstances, individuals may be denied their respective funerary rites. The historical sites of Kish and Ur both exhibit the societal, cultural, religious, and political hallmarks of the Early Dynastic Periods. Excavations have uncovered several thousand deposits of human remains between the two. From these deposits, ranging from the Jemdet Nasr to the Ur III periods (3100–2095 BCE)<sup>1</sup>, we can see the mortuary culture of their respective times. Ur's Royal Cemetery displays the wealth and grandeur of royalty and conceptions of the afterlife. Kish and Ur's private burials exhibit the typical mortuary processes of the average individual. Burial Y426 at Kish and burial PG390 at Ur both exhibit variation of the "typical" mortuary process in patterns of denied funerary rites. The individuals interred in burial Y426 and burial PG390 lack the necessary and expected preparation, positioning, grave goods, and treatment of the deceased. Using Archaeothanatological methodology allows for the reconstruction of the individuals and grave goods of Y426 and PG390 to their original composition at the time of deposition, thereby revealing the intentional denial of expected funerary rites and subsequent rejection of post-funerary rites, such as *kispum*.

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<sup>1</sup> Porada et al. 1992: 100–17.

## Terminology and Methodology

This study relies on the terminology put forward in the “Lexicon of Terms Used in Archaeoethanatology” in *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeoethanatology*. The terms “burial,” “grave,” “interment,” and “inhumation” are commonly used interchangeably. Still, for clarification, burial and grave broadly refer to the physical location of the deceased. In contrast, interment and inhumation refer to the physical act of placing the deceased individual in the ground and covering them and the grave goods with sediment.<sup>2</sup> Deposit broadly refers to any human remains found in an archaeological context, burial refers to remains intentionally placed/deposited within a grave and covered with earth, and the act of placing the deceased within a deposit or burial is referred to as interment or inhumation.<sup>3</sup>

### Collective Burial versus Co-Burial

When referring to deposits of multiple individuals, there are two different terms used to classify the time of deposition. Collective burial refers to deceased individuals who are interred either successively or consecutively over time. Co-burial refers to the remains of multiple individuals found in the same feature (burial, grave, or tomb) that do not display differences in depositional timing. While this difference may be slight, individuals in a co-burial are interred at the same time, and the feature is not reopened,

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<sup>2</sup> Schmitt 2022: 107.

<sup>3</sup> See glossary for full definitions, Knüsel, Gerdau-Radonić, and Schotsmans 2022: 659, 665; Schmitt 2022: 107.



while collective burials are specifically meant to be reopened for the placement of new deceased individuals.

### Rites, Ritual, and Ritualization

Scholars like Roy Rappaport and Mary Douglas view ritual as a form of communication made of culturally expected actions distinguished by their special function.<sup>4</sup> In this vein, Stanley Tambiah defines ritual as “a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication.”<sup>5</sup> This constructed system is then characterized by patterns of words or acts that have degrees of formality. These degrees of formality are distinguished by ritualization, which Catherine Bell characterizes as “ways of acting that are designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other activities.”<sup>6</sup> Ritualization draws a culture-dependent, arbitrary line through aspects of life that distinguishes the ritualized side as more important or powerful.<sup>7</sup> Ritualized aspects are then performed in rites, which are ceremonies that have an enacted code of actions where each actor has a more or less clearly defined role.<sup>8</sup> This arbitrary line can be drawn through treatments of the dead, separating funerary and mortuary from one another. Funerary rites are the ritualized side, and mortuary behavior is the non-ritualized. Funerary rites are socially based rites of passage that remove the

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas 1973: 41, 97, 178; Rappaport 1979: 178–78.

<sup>5</sup> Tambiah 1979: 119.

<sup>6</sup> Bell 1992: 74.

<sup>7</sup> Bell 1992: 90.

<sup>8</sup> Knüsel, Gerdau-Radonić, and Schotsmans 2022: 676.

deceased from the living to the dead, allowing for their social position to be reorganized without them.<sup>9</sup>

Definitions of ritual gained momentum in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Emile Durkheim, who viewed ritual as the means by which an individual's perception and behavior are conditioned.<sup>10</sup> However, such definitions are far too broad and yet restrictive to what ritual may encompass. Definitions of ritual often focus on a “universal” understanding that ultimately excludes varying aspects that are culture-dependent. A broad “universal” definition places ritual and what may be deemed ritual within a box without expectations or implications of culture. Formations of rituals cement our worldview, which sprout from mythological and religious interpretations of the world around us. Barbara Myerhoff emphasizes that the origin of ritual and its inventors are invisible because beneath the rituals that we have created, there is the fact that rituals and culture are of our own construction we use to make conceptions of our world and society—we want our rituals to be reflections of “the underlying, unchanging nature of the world,” not mere wishes and dreams of our imagination.<sup>11</sup> Without cultural constraints, ritual falls into “products of our imagination” that risks revealing itself as not a divinely mandated response to the true nature of things.<sup>12</sup>

### Funerary Rites versus Mortuary Behavior

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<sup>9</sup> Schmitt and Dederix 2018: 200.

<sup>10</sup> Durkheim 1965: 463ff.

<sup>11</sup> Myerhoff 1996: 152.

<sup>12</sup> Bell 1997: 224.

Differences between funerary rites and mortuary behavior must be made clear. Mortuary behavior refers to all treatments of the deceased.<sup>13</sup> Funerary rites are rites of passage that include a funeral held for the deceased, in which an individual may be honored with funerary rites or denied funerary rites.<sup>14</sup> Determining whether a deposit was part of funerary rites is a particularly difficult task of archaeoethanatology; however, through reconstruction of the deposit, analysis of textual evidence, and comparison with other deposits, the creation of supported and valid hypotheses regarding deposits and inhumations that are not included in funerary rites can be made.

Funerary rites are divided into two stages: the funerary cycle and the post-funerary process. The funerary cycle is the treatment of the deceased after biological death, which includes the funeral. The nature of the treatment is culture dependent, but regardless, the deceased are deposited and treated in what is considered an honorable, expected fashion.<sup>15</sup> The post-funerary process is not universal but is represented in ancestor cults, secondary burials, and charnel houses, to name a few.<sup>16</sup> Post-funerary processes are actions and treatments that occur to the deceased post-deposition.

Denied funerary rites exist outside the scope of the funerary cycle with evidence of an intentional act of disrespect or lack of care.<sup>17</sup> Indicators include the position of the remains, grave inclusions or lack thereof, and peri-mortem treatment such as burning or

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<sup>13</sup> Schmitt 2022:106.

<sup>14</sup> Schmitt 2022: 107.

<sup>15</sup> Schmitt 2022: 106.

<sup>16</sup> Schmitt 2022: 107.

<sup>17</sup> Schmitt 2022: 112.

dismemberment. Distinguishing between anthropogenic actions and natural processes—such as cannibalism versus gnawing from scavenging animals—is vital during analysis.<sup>18</sup> Once evidence of intentional disrespect is identified, interpretations may be hypothesized.

Individuals are denied funeral treatment in various ways for numerous reasons. Notable instances of denied funerary rites include mass graves of warfare, genocide, and murder victims.<sup>19</sup> Less recognizable instances are the accompanying dead, sacrifices, transgressors, outcasts, inaccessible bodies, and individuals who die at a young age or in childbirth. However, honored and denied funerary rites are entirely culturally dependent, and the examples mentioned above may not result in a denial of funerary rites, nor is it an exhaustive list of ways in which funerary rites are denied.

An example of denied funerary rites is the accompanying dead, which is a term for individuals who are killed for or due to another individual's death and subsequently placed within the same deposit.<sup>20</sup> Events include events such as children killed at the death of their parents, servants following their royalty (also known as funerary retainers), and companions or followers who vowed not to outlive their leader.<sup>21</sup> The most notable archaeological discovery of the accompanying dead from what is modernly defined as Mesopotamia<sup>22</sup> is the Royal Cemetery of Ur, excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in the

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<sup>18</sup> Schmitt 2022: 113.

<sup>19</sup> Schmitt 2022: 109.

<sup>20</sup> Boulestin 2022: 92.

<sup>21</sup> Boulestin 2022: 92.

<sup>22</sup> A Greek word meaning “between the rivers” was never used by the cultures within the area of “Mesopotamia,” but is rather a modern regional term used to refer to the ancient civilizations between the Tigris River and the Euphrates River (Finkelstein 1962: 73).

1920s. Within the royal burial was a large deposit of royal staff and soldiers (see figure 1).<sup>23</sup> These individuals are often classified by modern scholars as funerary retainers. Funerary retainers are individuals who are meant to accompany the deceased in the afterlife.<sup>24</sup> In the case of Ur, the funerary retainers were originally thought to have been poisoned due to the cups placed next to several bodies, in particular, Body 61, which had a smashed silver cup held to her mouth. Woolley's interpretation was that the attendants all committed suicide by drinking poison.<sup>25</sup> Through CT scans done at the Penn Museum of a female skull, which was wearing an elaborate headdress that during excavations was covered in wax to remove the entire piece, and a male skull, blunt force trauma was discovered. Refuting the theory of drinking poison by choice and indicating that the servants were bludgeoned and then delicately interred.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the two bodies that had CT scans also exhibited signs of mercury sulfide and heat exposure with no exposure to direct flames.<sup>27</sup> Heat exposure, but not to direct flames, has been used over large periods of time including the Assyrian queen, wife to Sargon II as a form of preservation and delay of putrefaction.<sup>28</sup> The use of mercury sulfide, also known as cinnabar, was used in a variety of ancient cultures to preserve dead bodies.<sup>29</sup> The earliest use before the discovery of mercury sulfide in the funerary retainers at Ur was in the Western Han

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<sup>23</sup> Woolley 1934: 113–24.

<sup>24</sup> Testart 2004: 6.

<sup>25</sup> Woolley 1934: 34–35.

<sup>26</sup> Baadsgaard, Monge, and Zeitler 2022: 140.

<sup>27</sup> Baadsgaard, Monge, and Zeitler 2022: 146.

<sup>28</sup> Baadsgaard, Monge, and Zeitler 2022: 145.

<sup>29</sup> Baadsgaard, Monge, and Zeitler 2022: 146.

Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) for the wife of the Marquis of Tai.<sup>30</sup> The use of both heat and cinnabar indicates that the sacrificed individuals were killed some time before being interred. In this context, these individuals were denied the funerary cycle that they would



Figure 1. Drawing of the Great Death Pit, PG1237 (Woolley 1934).

have been given upon their natural deaths, since their main purpose is to act as a form of grave goods for another individual. The funerary cycle can be reconstructed through the analysis of textual evidence, in-depth analysis of the placement and positioning of remains and grave goods, and comparison of contemporary deposits. Reconstruction is then done through archaeothanatological analysis.

<sup>30</sup> Aufderheide 2003: 263.

## Burial Selection

Among the several thousand burials of Kish and Ur, Y426 of Kish and PG390 of Ur are examples of strict deviation from the expected funerary traditions. Burial Y426 is the only example from the Early Dynastic Period documented to represent such a marginal difference in inhumation practice, and burial PG390, contemporary to burial Y426, is part of a collection of burials intentionally removed from funerary traditions with the use of fire and garbage to cover the deceased's remains. In order to grasp the full scope of denied funerary rites, the analysis of an individual burial (Y426) and co-burial (PG390) is needed. Additionally, these two burials contain sufficient excavation, skeletal positioning, and grave goods information for a successful argument.

## Archaeothanatological Approach

Archaeothanatology, coined by French archaeologists in the 1960s, focuses on physical and societal effects, practices, and concepts of death.<sup>31</sup> Often used interchangeably with “archaeology of death”, Henri Duday and Bruno Boulestin further formalized the definition of archaeothanatology in 2005 and 2006 as the reconstruction of the “organization of past societies from the analysis of the treatment, handling, and management of the deceased.”<sup>32</sup> The goal of this approach is to reconstruct the inhumations of deceased individuals. Therefore, observing and describing in as much detail as possible the positioning, orientation, grave goods, and any other notable features

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<sup>31</sup> Leroi-Gourhan, Bailloud, and Brézillon 1962.

<sup>32</sup> Knüsel and Schotsmans 2022: 3.

is crucial. Arguably, the most important aspect of archaeothanatology is the analysis of skeletal remains and the corresponding goods *in situ*. Cross-section and sediment analysis of the soil surrounding the burial, as well as osteological analysis of the skeletal remains, are key in creating an accurate reconstruction of the deposition at its time of creation and must be recorded in the field.<sup>33</sup> Any such analysis of skeletal remains requires extensive knowledge of skeletal and muscular anatomy in order to reconstruct how a human body moves during decomposition and how the shifting of pit walls and sediment may affect the positioning of the human remains.<sup>34</sup>

The in-depth analysis formulated through the archaeothanatological methodology was put forward by Henri Duday in lectures given at a specialist conference in 2004, then subsequently formed into the book *Lezioni di Archeotanolgia*. This extensive skeletal analysis highlights taphonomic anomalies, which refers to the determination that the remains of an individual do not correspond with the expected response during decomposition.<sup>35</sup> This may refer to the position, orientation, or placement of a bone or set of bones that do not correspond with the definable way a human body decomposes in a deposition.<sup>36</sup>

When a body decomposes in soil, a series of events occurs, that causes the deceased's skeleton to move. Bones shift in the absence of soft organic material.

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<sup>33</sup> Knüsel and Schotsmans 2022: 3.

<sup>34</sup> Boulestin 2022: 24–26.

<sup>35</sup> Duday 2009: 16–20, 32–52.

<sup>36</sup> Boulestin 2022: 24.



Regardless of how an individual is interred, the rib cage or thoracic vertebrae always falls and/or flattens due to the lack of organs and muscle within the chest cavity.<sup>37</sup> The side an individual is on is important to note because it affects the way bones fall in the absence of organs. The ribs of an individual on their right side cause only the left ribs to fall. The head of individuals in supine rotates to either side or falls back, with the mandible staying in place. The first is due to the lack of ligaments connecting the first cervical vertebrae to the occipital. The second results in an open mouth due to the decomposition of the muscles between the mandible and the temporomandibular joint.<sup>38</sup>

Further movement of the skeleton is dependent on the environment in which the individual was interred. An unstable position refers to remains of an individual within a void that shift freely due to the lack of external pressure on the bones, resulting in a fall and/or flattening to fill the spaces that are open from the decomposition of soft organic material. Remains of a deceased individual in a filled space do not fall or flatten into an opening from decomposition because the sediment prevents the bones from falling.<sup>39</sup> For example, a narrow coffin or hole prevents proximal heads of the humeri from falling to the sides, which causes the clavicles to turn upward in what is called the “verticalization of the clavicle.”<sup>40</sup> Such displays of bones close to one another are the result of compression effects where—due to restrictive material such as bindings, skeletal

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<sup>37</sup> Duday 2009: 16.

<sup>38</sup> Duday 2009: 17.

<sup>39</sup> Duday 2009: 39.

<sup>40</sup> Duday 2009: 45.

elements, or other objects—the bones remain in close anatomical position after decomposition. Variations outside of these expected positions are defined as taphonomic anomalies. Such as the burrowing of a rodent through the soil under the remains of a deceased individual can cause a shift in the bones that did not occur due to natural decomposition. Taphonomic anomalies are important in understanding how and why an individual was interred and how these inhumations reflect mortuary behavior. Once an inhumation is reconstructed, a disposition may be interpreted within its respective cultural setting.<sup>41</sup> Interpretation of these anomalies ultimately adds further information to societal, cultural, and religious conceptualizations of death and dying. However, to determine variations in the archaeological record, the expected normative traditions must be examined and analyzed.

### **Funerary Traditions**

During the Early Dynastic Period (2900–2334 BCE), textual evidence of the conception of the Netherworld and the afterlife has not been discovered. All textual information given in this study is later than the archaeological evidence of the deposits. The earliest preserved evidence of conceptions of the afterlife dates to the Ur III period.<sup>42</sup> Later Sumerian and Akkadian texts regarding concepts of the Netherworld required the body to be preserved in its natural state in a dedicated location. This location served as

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<sup>41</sup> Knüsel and Schotsmans 2022: 4.

<sup>42</sup> Vogel 2013: 428.

the placeholder in the living world to which the dead could be called back.<sup>43</sup> Such reverence was placed on the burial location that in Sumerian, the word for grave is *ki-mah* (exalted place) and *uru-gal* (great place).<sup>44</sup>

The *kispum* or *nasbītum* in Old Assyrian refers to ritual feeding of the dead.<sup>45</sup> Surviving family members of a deceased individual were required to carry out the ritual for the ghost of the dead.<sup>46</sup> During this rite, the living were required to give the ghost of the deceased food and drink, once a month, at the end of the month. Typically performed at the grave of the deceased, the deceased would be invoked by name and return to their physical body to partake in the food and drink given. Evidence of the *kispum* rite is limited archaeologically due to the organic nature of the offerings, but ceramics are the most common archaeological evidence of the *kispum* rite. Excavations regarding *kispum* rites have noted ceramic vessels covered by bowls to protect the contents.<sup>47</sup> The contents of the vessels are not always food and not always covered by a bowl, but there are typically ceramics in the burial. Despite most modern scholarship arguing that the *kispum* was performed to keep the ghosts of the deceased at bay, with evidence for the rite as a commemorative and living memory ritual, where the goal was to keep the deceased close

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<sup>43</sup> Potts 1997: 221.

<sup>44</sup> Potts 1997: 221.

<sup>45</sup> Nation 2024: 81.

<sup>46</sup> MacDougal 2014: 5.

<sup>47</sup> Lange 1999: 181.

to the living.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of intent, *kispum* formed the basis of funerary rites for much of southern Mesopotamia.

Evidence for the *kispum* rite in the Early Dynastic period is debated since there is minimal evidence regarding *kispum*-related rites. However, detailed records from the wives of the rulers of Lagaš, the capital city of Ancient Sumer in modern day Iraq, discuss the offerings given to the deceased. The texts indicate offerings of animals, flour, barley, breads, and oils.<sup>49</sup> Which Cohen argues is more closely related to agricultural festivals than *kispum*.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, textual evidence of places where the offerings were given was recorded. *Ki-a-nag* (the drinking place), which would vary in physical location, and there is not enough evidence to locate these places. Offerings were given to the deceased; however, they did not have the same reasoning as the later *kispum* in calming the anger of the deceased.

Postmortem rituals for preparing the body for burial and mourning played a large role in the funerary cycle of the Early Dynastic Period. Mourning in southern Mesopotamia during the Early Dynastic period was a public event. Weeping was expected as well as self-mutilation. In *Inanna's Descent*, a Sumerian literary text dating to the Old Babylonian Period (1900–1600 BCE), where Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of love and war (Ištar in Akkadian), sets out to journey to the Netherworld with her

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<sup>48</sup> MacDougal: 2014: 289.

<sup>49</sup> Vogel 2013: 429.

<sup>50</sup> Cohen 205: 108.

companion Ninšubur.<sup>51</sup> During her descent, she must remove a piece of her jewelry and clothing at each of the seven gates that guard the Netherworld until she reaches Ereškigal, her sister and ruler of the Netherworld. Once Inanna reached Ereškigal, she and Anuna, the seven judges, proclaimed her fate of death. Inanna turned into a corpse and hung by a hook.<sup>52</sup> Ninšubur, distraught by this, travels to various temples to enlist help for Inanna, eventually getting Enki, the Sumerian god of the Apzu (ground water), to agree to help bring Inanna back to life.<sup>53</sup> Enki succeeds, and upon return to the living world, where she must find someone to take her place, Inanna discovers that her husband, Dumuzi, has not mourned her death, which causes her to send him to the Netherworld in her place.<sup>54</sup>

Since Inanna died, Ninšubur mourned her by changing her clothes and clawing at her skin.<sup>55</sup> This was the expectation of mourning during this period. Mourners were required to change their hair and dress to signify that they were in mourning. Men were not known to take part in mourning until attested later in the Standard Babylonian (~2600–500 BCE) version of the Epic of Gilgameš, where we see Gilgameš mourn the death of his friend Enkidu.<sup>56</sup> Stories concerning Gilgameš (Bilgameš in Sumerian) date earliest to the Ur III period (2112–2004 BCE).<sup>57</sup> Five stories of what becomes part of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš are from the Ur III period. Old Babylonian

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<sup>51</sup> Dedović 2019: 2; De Shong Meador 2000: 15.

<sup>52</sup> Black et al. 2001: 164-172.

<sup>53</sup> Leick 1991: 40.

<sup>54</sup> Dedović 2019: 2.

<sup>55</sup> [*i-bi2-zu*] *hur-ma-ab kiri3-zu hur-ma-ab ki mu-lu-da nu-di hac4-gal-zu hur-ma-ab*; Black et al. 2001: 37–38; Cohen 2005: 49.

<sup>56</sup> ~2000 BCE Cohen, 49.

<sup>57</sup> George 2003: 7.

(1894–1595 BCE) school tablets and Middle Babylonian (1595–1155 BCE) tablets contain stories of Gilgameš in Akkadian. Sections of these tablets and the Ur III period tablets overlap, indicating a consistent telling of Gilgameš stories. The Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš is thought to have been compiled and written by Sîn-lēqi-unninni, a Neo-Assyrian who worked with various tablets from Nineveh, Aššur, and Babylon to create essentially one complete text.<sup>58</sup> The Epic is told across 12 tablets, which modern scholarship has reconstructed through collections of tablets acquired or excavated over the course of a century.

Mourning is part of the rite of passage that the living must go through at the death of an individual, yet there must still be a separation of the living from the dead. The Sumerian text of *Traveler and the Maiden* gives further information. Acquired by the British Museum in 1898, the provenance and date of this tablet are unknown. *GIR*<sub>5</sub> and the *ki-sikil* (BM 24975), translated by Samuel Kramer, is a funerary chant about the reunion of a woman with her fiancé, who has died:<sup>59</sup>

My traveler- he has come but he walks not, he has come but he walks not,  
 He has eyes but cannot see me,  
 He has a mouth but he cannot converse with me,  
 My traveler has come- approach! He has indeed come- approach!  
 I have cast down bread, wiped him clean with it.  
 From a drinking cup that has not been contaminated  
 From a bowl that has not been defiled,  
 I poured water—the place where the water was poured ‘drank it up’.  
 With my fine oil I anointed the wall for him,  
 In my new garment I clothed (his) chair.  
 The spirit has entered, the spirit has departed.

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<sup>58</sup> George 2003: 7–32.

<sup>59</sup> Kramer 1977: 140–42.

My traveler, was struck down in the mountain, in the heart of the mountain, (and now) he lies (dead).<sup>60</sup>

This excerpt describes what the maiden is bringing for her traveler as he comes back from the Netherworld to enjoy the offerings of the *kispum*. It also highlights how the body is treated; she has anointed him with fine oil and wiped his body with bread. This creates a degree of separation between the dead and the living which is further emphasized in Gilgameš and the Netherworld: “Do not put on your clean garment, for they would take it as the mark of a traveler, do not rub yourself with sweet oil from a jar, for they would surround you at its fragrance.”<sup>61</sup> Gilgameš is telling Enkidu that he must not be mistaken for the traveler (the dead) by oiling himself or wearing clean garments which are meant for the deceased.<sup>62</sup> This differentiation between the living and the deceased placed importance on preparing the body for burial.

In terms of archaeological evidence of the expected burial for the deceased, the deceased would be interred on their side typically in an individual burial, flexed with their arms near their chest or face, as seen at both Kish and Ur.<sup>63</sup> Grave goods of at least a cup, bowl, or vessel were typical. Rarely were individuals interred with no grave goods since the *kispum* required the deceased to have a cup to be able to drink from during the event. The deceased were interred either inside a house under the floor or in a dedicated cemetery. Regardless of the location, it was meant to be a visitable spot that loved ones

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<sup>60</sup> Kramer 1977: 142; Cohen 2005: 71.

<sup>61</sup> Cohen 2005: 74.

<sup>62</sup> Cohen 2005: 75.

<sup>63</sup> Delougaz, Hill and Seton 1967: 58–133.

could return to. With these expectations in mind, the case studies of the individuals and their grave goods of burial Y426 and burial PG390 paint a considerably different picture.

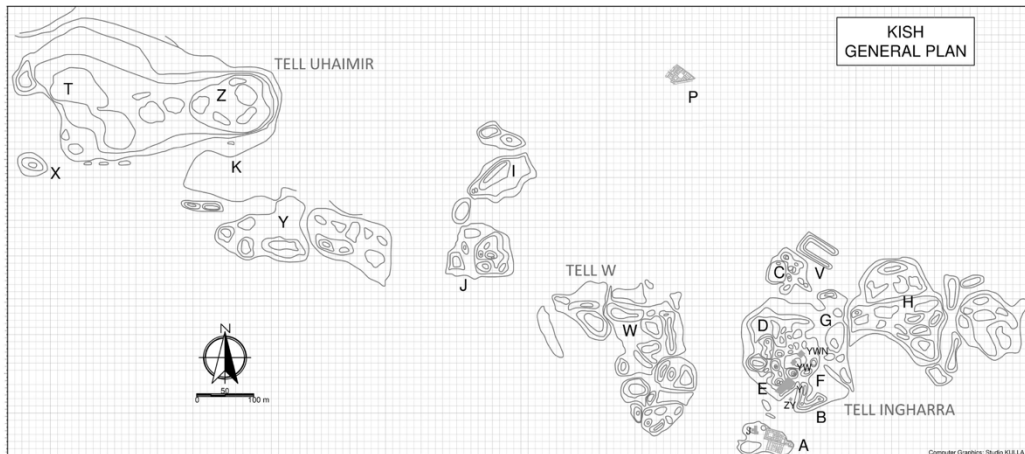


Figure 2. General topography of Kish (Zaina 2020)

## Kish

Interest in Kish began in the early 19th century as European scholars grew fascinated by Babylon and its biblical connections. Kish was considered the periphery of Babylon until the early 20th century. It wasn't until a piece of alabaster inscribed with cuneiform bearing the name Kish identified the site as its own city. Furthermore, François Thureau-Dangin noted in 1909 that Kish was situated along the Euphrates, based on river levees that correspond to modern-day Tel Uhaimir, where Kish is



located.<sup>64</sup> This solidification of Kish's location created an influx of excavations and expeditions to the site. Henri De Genouillac's expedition in 1911–1912 uncovered two large structures that paved the road for the joint Oxford University and the Field Museum of Natural History expedition in 1923–1933.<sup>65</sup> Over eleven seasons, Tell Uhaimir, Tell Ingharra, and 15 other mounds were excavated by Stephen Langdon and Louis Charles Watelin (see figure 2).<sup>66</sup> Archaeological evidence ranges from Jemdet Nasr to the Ur III

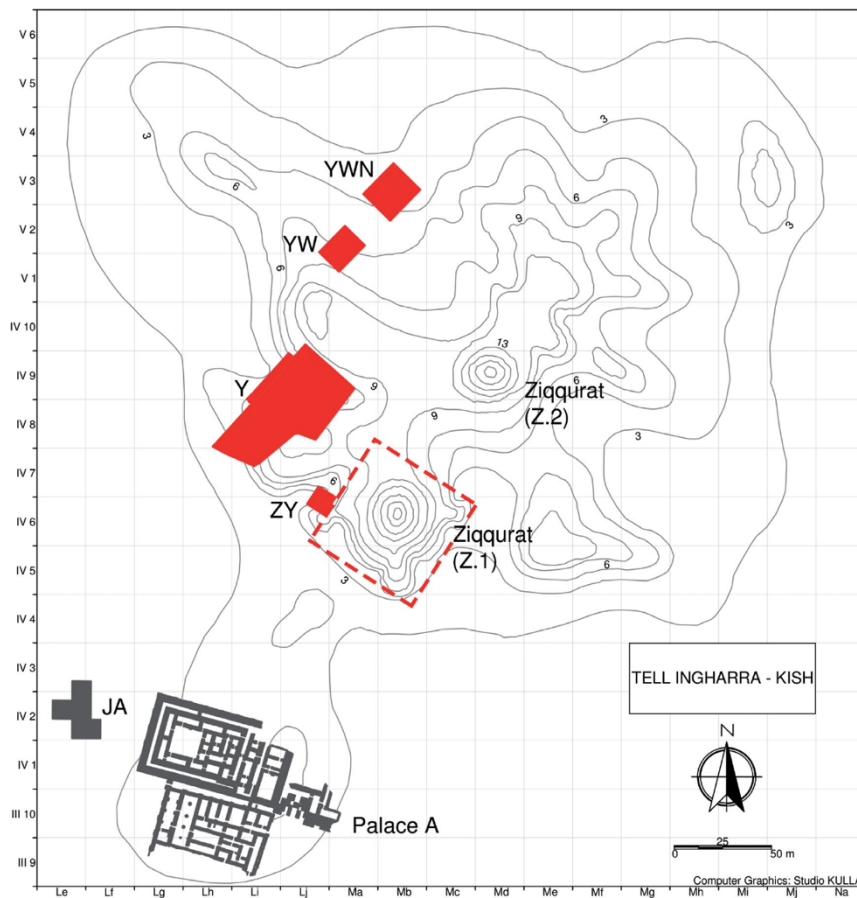


Figure 3. Tell Ingharra topography (Zaina 2020)

<sup>64</sup> Gibson 1972: 51; Zaina 2020: 2; Moorey 1978: 11.

<sup>65</sup> Zaina 2020: 3.

<sup>66</sup> Moorey 1978: 15.

period.<sup>67</sup> Despite extensive excavations, a lack of accuracy and consistency resulted in limited and poorly recorded field notes. Ultimately, leading scholars, 30 years later, to collect correspondence and field notes to reconstruct a timeline of excavations.<sup>68</sup> A part of these compilations is the Field Museum's extensive database containing all available information on the excavations and the respective artifacts. This database was compiled over the 2000s and 2010s by a number of scholars working with material excavated at Kish and is in the process of being released to the public.

Excavated between 1927–1932, the site of Tell Ingharra, Ancient Kish, includes a Neo-Babylonian temple complex, two ziggurats, and graves (see figure 3).<sup>69</sup> At 13 meters

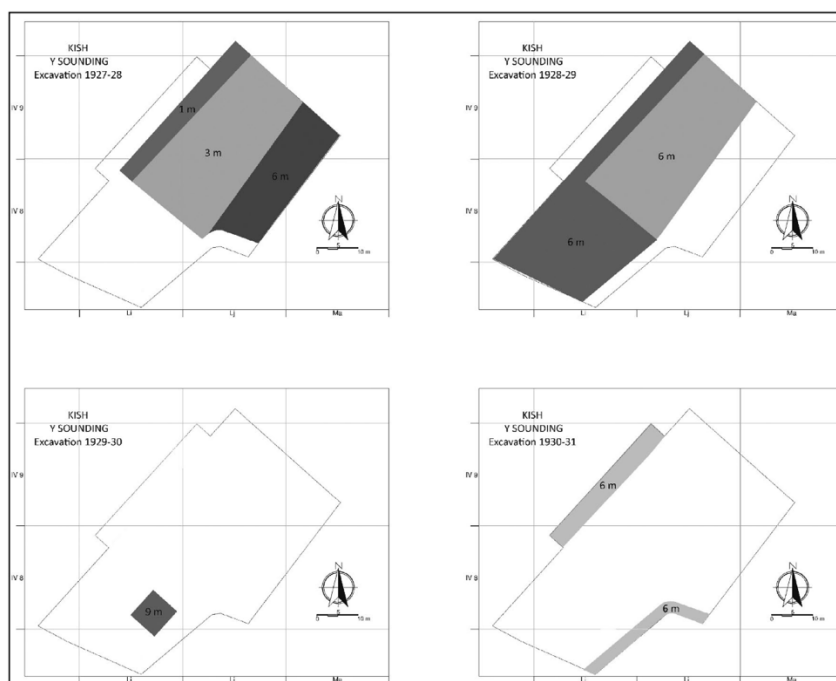


Figure 4. Y Sounding sections (Zaina, 2020)

<sup>67</sup> Jemdet Nasr: ca. 3100–2900 BCE, Early Dynastic I, II, III: 2900–2334 BCE, Akkadian Dynasty: 2334–2154 BCE, Ur III: 2112–2095 BCE (Porada et al 1992: 100–17); Zaina 2020: 14.

<sup>68</sup> Moorey 1978: 14.

<sup>69</sup> Moorey 1978: 81–99.

below ground level and 3 meters below plain level, a flood stratum was uncovered where freshwater fish and mussels were found alongside pottery sherds, likely due to a large-scale inundation of the Euphrates.<sup>70</sup> Just below this stratum is the “Y” sounding settlement was excavated (see figure 4). At 5 meters below the plain level and 15 meters below ground, excavations uncovered an urban settlement along with several hundred deposits.<sup>71</sup> Many of these deposits were in “plano-convex brick” tombs—rounded vaulted tombs made from unbaked convex bricks.<sup>72</sup>

The deposits at Kish follow a similar standardized form. The plano-convex brick tombs, which were characteristic of southern Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic Period, were around 2.40 x 1.80 meters—large enough to fit an adult individual. Deceased individuals were interred wrapped in a matting, flexed on either side, with their hands either grasping or near a cup or bowl.<sup>73</sup> The relative standardization of burial practices at Kish during its occupation from the Early Dynastic to Neo-Babylonian suggests that the foundational conceptions of the afterlife and the Netherworld had remained relatively

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<sup>70</sup> Moorey 1978: 99.

<sup>71</sup> Moorey 1978: 99–101; Langdon and Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia 1924: 4:7.

<sup>72</sup> Moorey 1978: 99.

<sup>73</sup> Moorey 1978: *Microfiche 2*.

similar. The consistency of construction, grave goods, and positioning of the burials reported by Moorey, Langdon, and Algaze all indicate a steady, unbroken trend.<sup>74</sup>

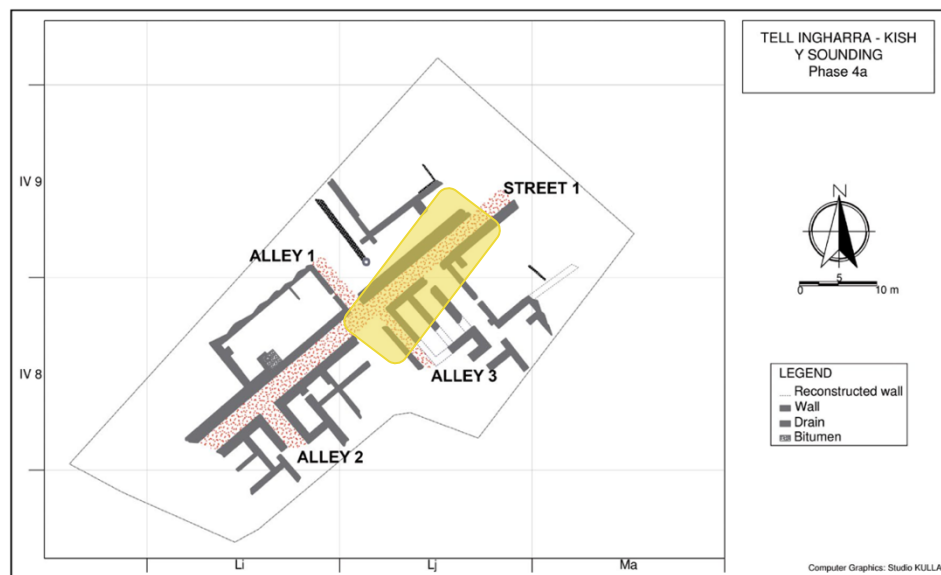


Figure 5. Yellow box indicates the hypothesized location of Y426 based on Figure 6 and the hypothesized reconstruction of houses from 4a phase (Zaina, 2020)

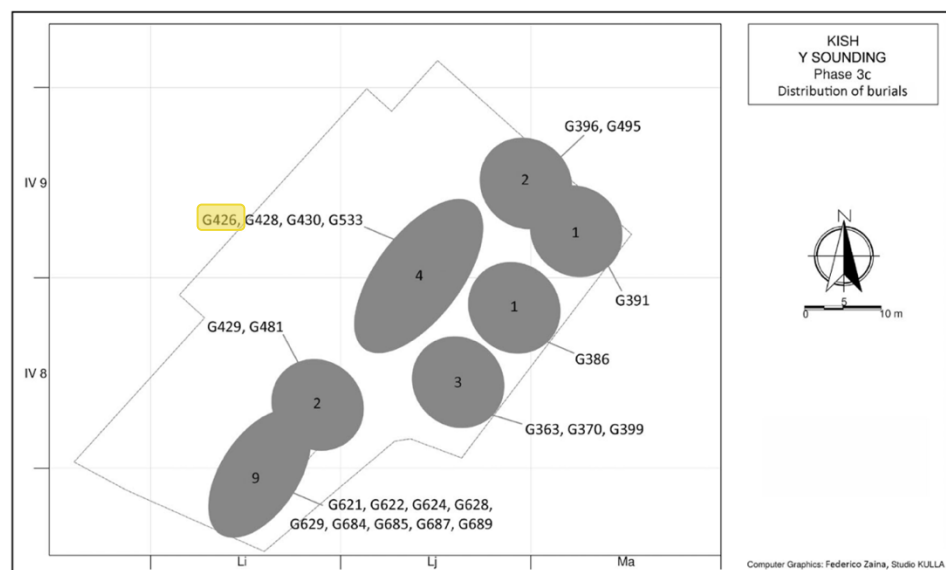


Figure 6. Estimated location of Y426 (Zaina 2020).

<sup>74</sup> Moorey 1978: 103–121, Mircofiche 2; Langdon and Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia 1924; Algaze 1983: 169–191.

## Burial Y426



Figure 7. Y426 excavation photo (Langdon 1934)

At 6 meters below the plain level, Y426 sits physically outside of any tombs on poorly baked plano-convex pavement (see figures 5 and 6).<sup>75</sup> The remains of a female skeleton excavated in an abnormal position, along with uncommon grave goods, date from the late Early Dynastic I to Early Dynastic II period (2900–2600 BCE).<sup>76</sup> The individual was found on her back with her knees drawn up (See figure 7).<sup>77</sup> Reports regarding what goods were included vary. In P.R.S. Moorey's *Kish Excavations*, grave goods include a flint borer under the knees and lapis lazuli and carnelian beads around the neck (see figure 9).<sup>78</sup> These grave goods have field numbers V132 and V247,

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<sup>75</sup> Algaze 1983: 172.

<sup>76</sup> Algaze 1983: 147.

<sup>77</sup> Langdon and Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia, 4: pl. XI.

<sup>78</sup> Moorey 1978: Microfiche F13.

respectively. The Kish Database indicates that a complete statuette (V549), a plaque (V551), and a demon mask (V550) were excavated with this deposit.<sup>79</sup> Neither the lapis lazuli and carnelian beads or the flint borer are mentioned in the database. The demon mask is the only artifact in the Field Museum collections.<sup>80</sup> Information regarding the statuette and plaque is not available in any excavation report or the Kish database.

Original excavation reports by Watelin and Langdon make no mention of any of the grave goods from the database. Where the lapis lazuli and carnelian beads were found is disputed as well. The original excavation reports state that the beads were around the deceased individual's wrist, while Moorey's updated compilation of excavation reports states that they were found at the neck.<sup>81</sup> This variation in excavation records and modern databases, which is not uncommon with older excavations, requires an analysis of each to get a full understanding of this woman's burial.

The position of the individual's remains is of considerable note; her skeleton was supine, and her knees are drawn up in a wall effect (skeletal remains held in a linear arrangement) due to what appears to be a wall from excavation photos (see figure 7).

There is no indication of mat wrapping. Her right leg fell to the side, which resulted from a lack of soil or goods to stop the leg from falling after decomposition. This is then

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<sup>79</sup> Kish Database.

<sup>80</sup> The Humbaba mask, not mentioned in the original excavation reports, appears only in the Kish Database. The mask dates to the Neo-Babylonian period (1000–539 BCE) indicating it cannot have been originally interred with the individual. This is likely an error in the database or a result of mixing in the archaeological record.

<sup>81</sup> Langdon and Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia 1924: 4:12; Moorey 1978: F13.

termed an inhumation within a void. Decomposition allowed for this leg to fall after the muscles and tendons holding the femur to the acetabulum deteriorated. The left femur and tibia were still in anatomical position, indicating the left side of the legs was held up by a wall or sediment. The proximal heads of the humeri were near the mandible from clavicle verticalization, with the arms bent and the hands placed anterior medially to the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae. This results from the individual's remains being placed within a narrow space, causing the arms to sit higher than the spine and rib cage, resulting in a dip effect. The cranium was still facing forward, upright, and higher than the rib cage and spine. A result of the head having been placed against a wall, which would have caused the head to lean anteriorly over the clavicles and cervical vertebrae. Ultimately, this space was not long enough or deep enough for the individual, resulting in a compressed placement of the skeleton.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, from the hypothesized

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<sup>82</sup> See figure 7; Langdon and Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia 1924: 4:pl.XI.

reconstruction of the location of her burial in figures 5 and 6, the deceased individual of Y426 would have been located most likely in an abandoned house or alley.

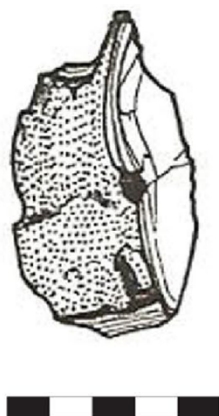


Figure 8. V.132 flint borer drawing (Zaina 2020)

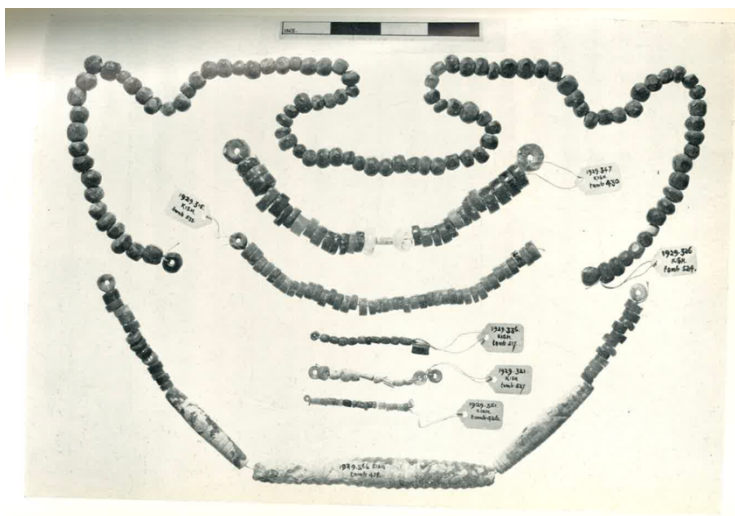


Figure 9. V.247 beads (second from the bottom) (Moorey 1966)

Lapis lazuli and carnelian are not uncommon grave goods; however, they are not naturally occurring in southern Mesopotamia, indicating a need for the importation of the raw material from the northeast.<sup>83</sup> The presence of lapis and carnelian objects in southern Mesopotamia dates as far back as the Neolithic (7000–5300 BCE) at Tell Halula and along the Zagros Piedmont at Bestansur.<sup>84</sup> Written sources from the third millennium BCE indicate the prestige associated with these stones. Literary texts such as a Hymn to Inanna, written by Enheduanna, the daughter of Sargon of Akkad (reigned 2334–2279 BCE), high priestess to Nanna, and the first known author, discuss lapis and carnelian in

<sup>83</sup> Langdon and Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia 1924: 4:12.

<sup>84</sup> Campeggi 2022: 29.



connection with “high mountain land.”<sup>85</sup> Archaeological evidence of lapis and carnelian beads, seals, and amulets ranges from temples to domestic houses. Lapis is known to have been used for cylinder seals, amulets, discs, figurines, and beads, while carnelian is most commonly used as beads.<sup>86</sup> With such a wide variety of uses and settings, it is not abnormal or irregular for the woman in Y426 to have had beads of lapis and carnelian.

The flint borer excavated in Y426, stated to be under the knees, is large enough to fill the palm of a hand. A long double-edged point protrudes from the body of the borer (see figure 8).<sup>87</sup> It was most likely a personal tool and is not an uncommon grave good to be placed with the deceased.<sup>88</sup>

The positioning of her body, along with an unusual grave good, indicates an atypical inhumation. Several questions arise after analyzing this deposit. Why is this skeleton outside of the typical burial locations? Was she intentionally interred in this area, and if so, why was she placed within an area too small for her body? What role does the flint borer play as part of her grave goods? The potential for her denial of funerary rights may be hypothesized after this analysis.

Evidence of the funerary cycle of this woman is ultimately missing. Her skeletal remains lack evidence of preparation of the body for burial. Her unusual positioning, which I would argue is due to sudden death and subsequent discarding or abandonment,

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<sup>85</sup> De Shong Meador 2000: 37; Campeggi 2022: 33.

<sup>86</sup> Campeggi 2022: 45.

<sup>87</sup> Langdon and Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia 1924: 4:12.

<sup>88</sup> Delougaz, Hill and Seton 1967: 58-133.

justifies that her remains were not prepared for burial. Such is an instance of discarded remains, where the deceased individual's remains are haphazardly disposed of in an insignificant location away from areas of the living.<sup>89</sup> If her body had been prepared, she would have been placed on her side in a fetal position with matting around her body. While mat wrapping is likely to decompose due to its organic makeup, there are no traces of the material.

Her grave goods do not include a cup or bowl that is expected to be placed near a hand. Burial Y426 does not contain any pottery or food debris, such as faunal bones, that might indicate a food offering not in a ceramic vessel. The scholarly discrepancies of correct grave inclusions create difficulty in determining the original grave inclusion makeup. However, the lack of staple grave goods that are represented in other deposits from this time period argues for a variation of the typical funerary cycle.

The individual interred in Y426 is found outside of a dedicated burial, which is the single largest indicator of the lack of a funerary cycle (see figures 5 and 6). Of the deposits excavated within the Y sounding, this deposit is one of the only ones outside of a dedicated burial, and of the deposits outside of a burial, this is the only deposit with a complete or near-complete skeleton. The other deposit that is noted as outside of a cemetery contained only a singular male skull. Through analysis of the positioning of the

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<sup>89</sup> Schmitt 2022: 111.

body and the grave goods associated, it is reasonable to argue that this individual was not given the funerary rites of southern Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic period.

In contrast to the individual of Y426, who exhibits signs of a lack of intention, the individuals of PG390 appear to have extensive signs of intention with the intentionally burning of the upper halves of the deceased individual's remains.

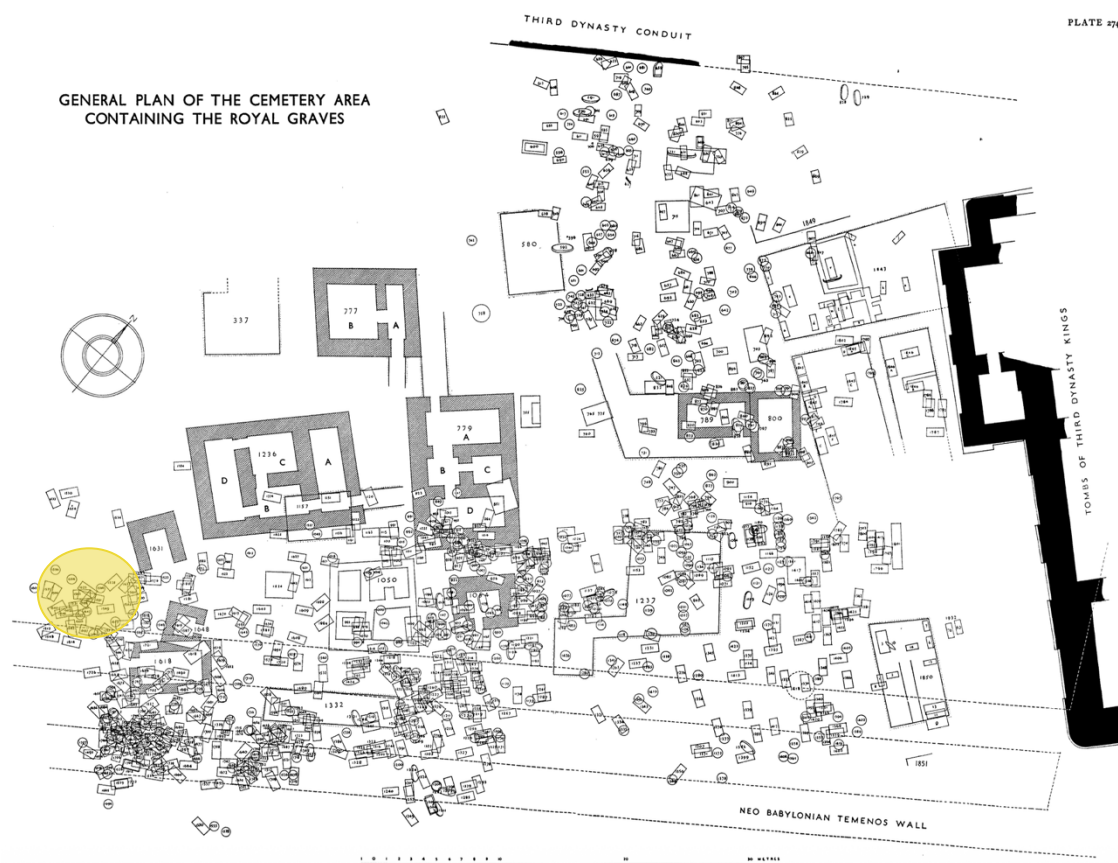


Figure 10. General plan of private and royal burials. The yellow circle indicates the location of burial PG390 (Woolley 1934).

The occupation of Ur began during the Ubaid period, marked by an agricultural and cereal economy. Western interest in Ur started in 1850 with the Turkish Boundary Commission, which recommended that the British Museum excavate the mound. Minor excavations conducted in 1853 and 1854 yielded few artifacts, leading to the end of further digs.<sup>90</sup> J. E. Taylor, the British Museum's consul in Basra and director of the excavations, uncovered a corner of a Ziggurat featuring inscriptions by King Nabonidus that confirmed the mound as the site of Ur. The site remained unexcavated for over half a century until British troops of World War I occupied modern-day Iraq, which enabled the British Museum to resume excavations. Twelve seasons of digging from 1922 to 1934 unearthed some of the most well-known artifacts and burials in southern Iraq.<sup>91</sup>

Ur includes the Royal Cemetery and an abundance of private burials spanning from late Jemdet Nasr to the Ur III period, totaling 1850 deposits, with 660 of these burials from the Predynastic or Early Dynastic Period.<sup>92</sup> These finds include the Great Death Pit, an elaborate royal burial (PG1237) hypothesized to be for King Mesannepada, containing extensive grave goods, and the accompanying dead of servants and soldiers, which is the only known occurrence of human sacrifice as part of a Mesopotamian funerary rite. The private burials are represented by five different interment types. Trench burial is the most common and simplest of the burial types. The deceased's body was

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<sup>90</sup> Woolley 1934: II: 3.

<sup>91</sup> Woolley 1934: II: 3.

<sup>92</sup> Woolley 1934: II:32, 222–27.

wrapped in matting and placed at the bottom of a rectangular shaft.<sup>93</sup> Wooden coffins were common and, in some instances, were lined with matting. Wicker coffins of reed stems assisted in strengthening the coffins. Larnax or clay coffins are oval-shaped and only about 1.4 meters long, preventing the deceased from fully extending in the coffin.<sup>94</sup> As seen at Kish, the deceased individual was laid on the side in a crouched position and typically ran North to South with the head placed North.<sup>95</sup>

### Burial PG390

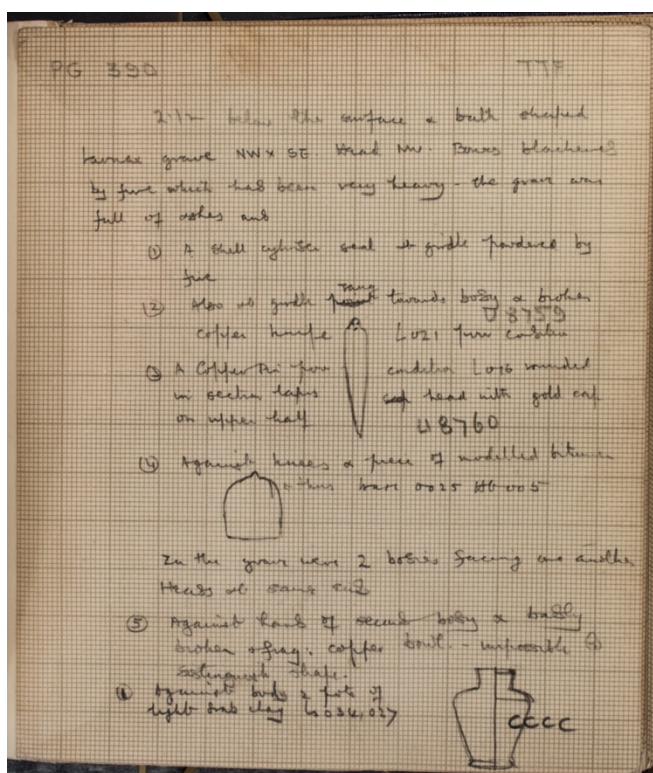


Figure 11. Woolley's Field Notes on PG390 (Woolley 1928-29).

<sup>93</sup> Woolley, 1934: II:135.

<sup>94</sup> Woolley 1934: II:134-37, 411.

<sup>95</sup> Woolley 1934: II:141.

The field number 390 was given to this burial when it was excavated at 2.10 meters down. Dating to the First Dynasty of Ur (EDII)<sup>96</sup>, this burial ran Northwest to Southeast with the head of the deceased facing Northwest. The deceased individuals' remains were excavated in a small "bath-shafted" larnax burial.<sup>97</sup> Woolley's personal field notes indicate that there were two skeletons, both facing towards each other with

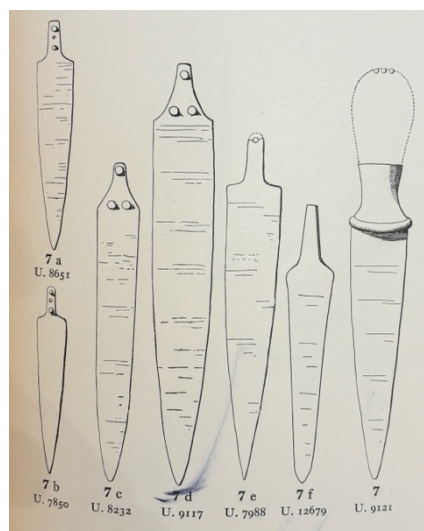


Figure 12. Dagger Type 7 found in PG390 (Woolley 1934)

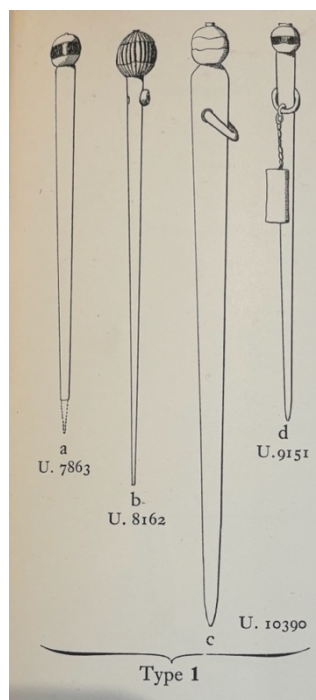


Figure 13. Pin Type 1 found in PG390 (Woolley 1934)

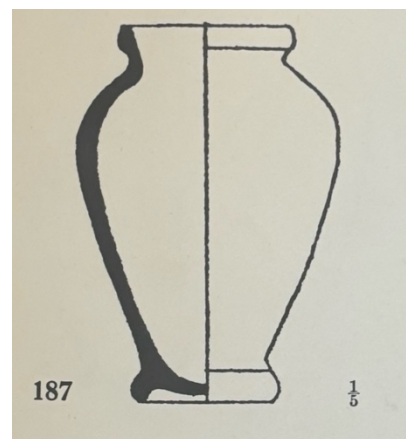


Figure 14. Pottery Type 187 found in PG390 (Woolley 1934)

their heads at the same end (see figure 11). Final excavation reports do not indicate that this was a co-burial. The grave goods excavated were a shell cylinder seal, a dagger, a pin, a copper bowl, seven mud-filled bitumen counters, and one clay vessel.<sup>98</sup> The

<sup>96</sup> 2600–2340 BCE

<sup>97</sup> Woolley 1928-29.

<sup>98</sup> Woolley 1928-29; Woolley 1934: II:428–29.

dagger, pin, and clay vessel are noted in Woolley's excavation reports by type. The dagger is type 7, the pin type 1, and two clay vessels type 187 (see figures 12, 13, and 14). The pin is made of copper with a lapis lazuli head and a gold upper half.<sup>99</sup> The dagger, bitumen counters, and clay pots are reported to have surrounded the first body with the bitumen counters around the knees, the pots up against the body, and the dagger facing the body. The copper bowl was positioned next to one of the hands of the second body.<sup>100</sup> The size or distance between the two bodies and their grave goods is not made explicitly clear in the excavation reports for each item, with most of the reports being quite vague.

Dubbed the "burnt burials" in Woolley's excavation reports, this deposit and several others exhibited signs of partial burning on the top half or head of the individual.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, all the burnt burials were excavated in a garbage heap which dates as far back as the Jemdet Nasr Period. The garbage heap extended over early houses and abandoned settlements. This continued to be used until the Ur III period, when shallow, small burials were made directly into the garbage. Some of the deposits were under the heap while others were on top, yet they all date to the Early Dynastic III period.<sup>102</sup> The larnax burial was full of ashes, and the "upper part" of the bones was blackened by fire. Woolley notes that the fire would have been very heavy for the amount

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<sup>99</sup> Woolley 1928–29.

<sup>100</sup> Woolley 1928–29.

<sup>101</sup> Woolley 1934: II:143–44.

<sup>102</sup> Referred to as First Dynasty of Ur in Woolley's reports; Woolley 1934: II:227.

of ashes. Woolley refers to the burnt section as the upper part; therefore making it unclear whether he is referring to the skull only or the top half of the body.<sup>103</sup> However, it is safe to assume that at least the cranium, mandible, cervical vertebrae, clavicles, scapulas, and superior heads of the humeri were blackened since the individual was most likely in a crouched position on their side due to the size of the larnax coffins. No mention of whether there was a variation in the degree of burning on the two separate bodies is made. Notably, the copper bowl that was found within the deposit had no signs of fire damage, and no information regarding the other grave goods, including whether any had fire damage, was recorded.<sup>104</sup>

According to the excavation reports, the bones were completely black on the upper half.<sup>105</sup> Whether the individuals were burned at the time of interment or after skeletonization occurred could lead to two different interpretations. The first: if these individuals were burned at their time of internment, then these individuals were intentionally disrespected, fitting into Woolley's original hypothesis that he mentions in excavation reports.<sup>106</sup> The second: If these individuals were burned after skeletonization, which indicates a revisit to the burial after some time to desecrate the remains, then the individuals would not have been denied funerary rites, since any treatment of the body

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<sup>103</sup> Woolley 1934: II:143.

<sup>104</sup> Woolley 1934: II:143.

<sup>105</sup> Woolley 1934: II:143.

<sup>106</sup> Woolley 1934: II:143.



after deposit is part of the post-funerary process. Both of these interpretations may be argued due to the limited data regarding the deposit and the physical remains.

To support this argument, there are no examples of cremation in southern Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic Period. The color of the bones exposed to fire indicates duration, temperature, and soft tissue presence during burning. As previously mentioned, the reservation of the physical body was part of the funerary process and preparation of the body. Individuals who are cremated are not able to return to their bodies to partake in offerings given to them. It disrupts the *kispum*, which in turn would be done as a form of punishment to prevent the deceased from receiving offerings in the Netherworld. Additionally, if cremation were practiced at the time, it would be unlikely for the deceased to be interred in a typical burial for a whole body and then burned. Cremation in the Neo-Assyrian period involved burning the body on a pyre, collecting the burned remains, and subsequently burying those remains.<sup>107</sup> The remains of PG390 would not have been collected and then placed in anatomical position in a burial if they were from a cremation. Moreover, the entire skeleton would have been blackened if the deposit of PG390 were the remains of cremation instead of just the upper half.

The color of a deceased individual's bones is also an indicator of how the body was burned. As bones burn, they change colors from "ochraceous" to white depending on the duration and temperature of the fire.<sup>108</sup> High-intensity short-duration fires are likely to

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<sup>107</sup> Ferreri 2015: 14.

<sup>108</sup> Galloway, Pope, and Juarez 2024: 3.

result in fully black, charred bones, while low-intensity long-duration fires will result in blueish white gradation charring.<sup>109</sup> In addition to the differences in temperature and duration, the presence of soft tissue affects the color of bone as it burns. When soft tissue is present, muscles retract from bones, resulting in banding as the fire burns.<sup>110</sup> Banding is a result of partial burning that allows for soft tissue to decompose naturally after the fire dissipates. If the burning continues until all soft tissue is burned off, bones will continue to darken.<sup>111</sup>

Due to the time period of the excavations of Ur and the general poor quality of archaeological field notes, no photos or other information regarding the coloration of the bones in PG390 exist to suggest either long-term low-intensity or short-term high-intensity fires. The upper half of the body was likely burned in a high-intensity short-duration fire that resulted in the upper half blackening, leaving the bottom half unburnt. The presence of ashes in the deposit is likely a result of soft tissue and clothing that burn quickly in comparison to harder materials such as bones, which do not produce ash naturally when burned without external breaking.<sup>112</sup> The fire in PG390 must have been focused on the head, and the resulting upper portions of the body were burned in part of the fire spreading to other flammable items. Grave goods are the result of intentional actions and represent ritual practice for the deceased making it unlikely to place grave

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<sup>109</sup> Galloway, Pope, and Juarez 2024: 10.

<sup>110</sup> Galloway, Pope, and Juarez 2024: 11–12.

<sup>111</sup> Galloway, Pope, and Juarez 2024: 12.

<sup>112</sup> Brickley and Ferllini 2007: 70.

goods alongside the remains if revisited, which is supported by the shell cylinder seal, which is the only grave good with evidence of burning..<sup>113</sup> The cylinder seal was most likely on the person at the time of burning, and the other grave goods were either not near the fire or placed in after the burning finished. A high-intensity, low-duration fire would account for why the shell cylinder seal did not completely burn and disintegrate due to its more durable nature.

The physical location of the remains also plays a considerable role in understanding the intentions of those who buried these individuals. PG390 and several other burnt burials were excavated in layers of garbage..<sup>114</sup> The garbage and burnt burials are roughly contemporaneous, which suggests that these deposits were covered by garbage immediately or soon after interment. For the deceased of PG390 to be deposited, burned, and then have garbage placed over their burial argues for intentional mistreatment of the individual. Accounting for the burning, the placement of the individuals in a garbage heap, and the lack of cremation use at this site indicates a lack of a funerary cycle.

### **Analysis**

Deposits Y426 and PG390 show variation in how individuals may be denied funerary rites in death as a final act of control over an individual. Culture and religion are

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<sup>113</sup> Ekengren 2013: 177.

<sup>114</sup> Woolley 1934: II:143.

in constant competition with nature for control over death.<sup>115</sup> Because of this, funerary rites or lack thereof should be studied as a means of understanding and defining the impact of funerary rites' construction in their social and cultural setting.<sup>116</sup> The construction of the "expected" funerary rites in southern Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic Period is based on the gods' creation of death as a response to the uncertainty and wandering waiting for the deceased in the Netherworld.

In the Epic of Gilgameš, when the gods created mankind, they kept life for themselves and gave death to mankind.<sup>117</sup> Marduk creates humans after defeating Tiamat in *Enuma Eliš*, the Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian creation myths, so that their work would be given to humans who would spoil the gods with offerings and temples.<sup>118</sup> However, when the gods created humans, they did not create population limits, so Mammītum, the mother goddess, created death.<sup>119</sup> Ūta-napišti's speech in the Epic of Gilgameš gives insight into how death was characterized and conceptualized by the people during the Early Dynastic Period:

All [too soon in] their very [prime] death abducts (them)  
 No one sees death  
 No one sees the face [of death]  
 No one [hears] the voice of death  
 Yet savage death is the one who hacks man down...

The abducted and the dead, how alike they are!  
 They cannot draw the picture of death

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<sup>115</sup> Pollock 1999: 216–17.

<sup>116</sup> Laneri 2007: 5.

<sup>117</sup> George 2003: 278, III 3-5.

<sup>118</sup> Lambert 2007: 52.

<sup>119</sup> George 2003: 697–98; Lambert, Takayoshi, and George 2016: 126.

The dead do not greet man in the land...

Mammītum, who creates destiny, made a decree with them:  
 Death and life they did establish  
 The day of death they did not reveal<sup>120</sup>

This fear and anger towards death adds depth and background to the practices surrounding death in southern Mesopotamia. The living's role in caring for the dead is to help appease their suffering after death by performing the *kispum*, and the preparation for the ritual begins during the funerary cycle during the internment of the deceased. Preserving the body, accompanying the body with bowls and cups to drink and eat from, and placing the body in a dedicated location that the deceased may return to are all needed for later offerings. The post-funerary process, as defined by Schmitt, indicates that the funerary cycle and post-funerary process are separate and do not directly correlate. In this instance, however, the *kispum* is not a post-funerary process that begins after interment. It begins with the grave goods placed with the deceased. The *kispum* event itself always begins after internment, but the items needed for the ritual are prepared during the funerary cycle. The funerary cycle and the post-funerary processes are not mutually exclusive and may be highly dependent on their preparation during the funerary cycle.

The lack of these essential aspects of funerary rites in burials Y426 and PG390 indicates a diversion from the funerary cycle. In burial Y426, the positioning of the

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<sup>120</sup> George 2003: 697–99; lines 303–307, 316–318, 320–322.

remains appears as if the individual died and was moved to an abandoned alley or house and placed in a shallow pit with her personal items. This suggests that she was abandoned or forgotten. The absence of pottery in her burial suggests a lack of preparation for the *kispum* rite, and she was not revisited monthly to be remembered by her family or loved ones. The individual/s who placed her body most likely also haphazardly placed her items in her burial with her, but did not care for where they placed her. The beads were likely jewelry she was wearing at the time of her death. Circumstances of how she died cannot be determined since analysis of her bones is not available. Further research into her remains may give insight into her cause of death, which would allow for further understanding as to why she was buried in this manner.

PG390's co-burial, deposition in a garbage heap, and burning all point toward a disruption in the funerary cycle. The two individuals facing each other with their heads and upper torsos burned suggests a more violent denial. The cause of death is unknown, and while it is unlikely they were burned alive, it cannot be ruled out with certainty. The lapis lazuli and gold pin indicate wealth; however, that wealth clearly did not have a bearing on the respect the deceased was given in death.

Both of these burials contain precious high-status stones and metal, which begs the question as to why high-status individuals are being denied funerary rites.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Winters 1999: 46.

Unfortunately, this is likely not to be answered without further analysis of skeletal remains.

### Conclusion

The diversions of burials of the deceased in Y426 from Kish and PG390 from Ur offer a striking contrast to the normalized funerary rites of the Early Dynastic Period. While the larger funerary record at both locations evidences a common cultural schema regarding death, burial practice, and the afterlife—explicitly illustrated through both elite and non-elite burials—these two burials are notable for their departure from the expected rites. The absence of staple grave goods like the cup or bowl, the variable orientation of the remains, and the lack of evidence of ceremonial treatment all raise important questions about how these individuals were perceived by their communities. Their lack of preparation for the post-funerary rite of the *kispum* suggests the funerary cycle is directly connected to particular post-funerary events that require preparations to be taken during the funerary cycle. By employing archaeothanatological analysis, interpretations beyond superficial data of the archaeological material culture allow for an exploration into the physical, social, and symbolic processes involved in producing these burials. Ultimately, the individuals interred in burials Y426 and PG390 challenge assumptions regarding homogeneity within Early Dynastic mortuary processes. Such analysis allows for a more nuanced comprehension of how funerary denial can operate as a signifier of marginalization, punishment, deviance, or other forms of social exclusion.

## Glossary<sup>122</sup>

**Burial:** “corpse(s)/cadaver(s)/remains intentionally placed/deposited within a grave and covered with earth”

**Individual Burial (*sépulture individuelle*):** “contains remains of only a single individual”

**Collective Burial/Deposition:** “human bodies are deposited successively or consecutively over time rather than in a single episode in the same grave”

**Co-Burial:** “remains of individuals found in the same feature with no notion of depositional timing”

**Compression Effect:** “bones that are found in close proximity due to the restriction of an anatomical segment by its close approximation to another object or skeletal element within the grave or the presence of some restrictive material such as bindings”

**Deposition/Deposit:** “any human remains or objects encountered in an archaeological context”

**Dip Effect (*effet de gouffre*):** “one part of the end of the bone or object lies at an angle higher or lower than the other end of the same bone or object”

**Disposition:** “mode of disposing of the dead once the original position of the body or its constituent elements within the grave and with respect to furnishings and associated objects have been identified through taphonomic analysis”

**Funerary Rituals:** “repeated actions/gestures/deeds that accompany the intentional deposition of the deceased”

**Grave:** “a cut feature in which a body or bodies has been intentionally deposited”

**Internment/Inhumation:** the action of placing a body within a deposition or burial

**Mortuary Behavior/Processes:** “human remains found in an archaeological layer or feature, the origin of which does not only include evidence for the performance of funerary gestures/actions/deeds. All treatment of the bodies of the dead is qualified as mortuary, but those that reflect the handling of the corpse in the funerary sphere define funerary behavior”

**Rites:** “ceremonies and principles of an ideological framework that guide performances. An enacted code of actions embedded in a collective ritual context where each actor has a more or less clearly defined role”

**Ritual:** “a series of repeated ceremonies performed in a prescribed order”

**Skeletonization:** one of the last stages of decomposition when a corpse is reduced to its bone constituents

**Supine:** “lying on the back”

**Tomb:** “a built superstructure into which complete or partial skeletons are placed”

**Unstable (position):** “skeletal remains in the grave, which entails that after

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<sup>122</sup> Direct definitions put forward by Knüsel, Gerdau-Radonić, and Schotsmans 2022: 659–679; Schmitt, 2022: 107.



decomposition of the soft tissue structures, they could fall or be displaced if nothing stabilizes them“

**Wall Effect (*effet de paroi*):** “skeletal elements or objects are lined in a linear arrangement”

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