The Regeneration of Life

Neolithic Structures of Symbolic Remembering and Forgetting

by Ian Kuijt

The social construction of identity and memory can be expressed through public ritual. The organization of mortuary practices, the repetitive use of imagery and figurines, and the long-term reuse of human skulls in the Near Eastern Neolithic illustrate how household ritual linked the living to the dead. Secondary mortuary practices and the plastering and painting of human skulls as ritual heirlooms served as a form of memorialization and erasure of identity within communities. The deliberate focus on the face in both construction and decoration was part of a shared system of ritual practices. Skull caching and modification transcended the past, present, and future, reiterating the expectation of future mortuary events while simultaneously recognizing continuity with the past through the crafting of memory. Collectively these patterns represent a complex web of interaction involving ritual knowledge, imagery, mortuary practices, and the creation of intergenerational memory and structures of authority.

To an imaginative person, an inherited possession . . . is not just an object, or an item, or an inventory; rather it becomes a point of entry into a common emotional ground of memory and belonging.

—Seamus Heaney, *The Sense of the Past*

Since their discovery in the early 1950s, the plastered and painted Neolithic skulls from Jericho and later examples recovered from other sites in the Near East such as Tell Aswad and Kfar HaHoresh have captivated the imagination and interest of the general public and archaeologists alike.[1] These exotic and highly visual items, as well as the striking anthropomorphic statues from ʻAin Ghazal, were crafted by highly skilled artisans. Their preservation in caches and the free-standing design of the statues suggest that they were part of complex ritual performances potentially reenacted multiple times. Researchers have explicitly or implicitly argued that these remarkable naturalistic representations from early agricultural villages of the Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (MPPNB) are related to complex mortuary rituals focused on the ancestors (e.g., Amiran 1962). Although not all researchers agree, these objects are often viewed as the material expression of Neolithic “ancestor cults” (e.g., Bienert 1991; Hayden 2004).

In many cultural contexts commemoration and memory, especially when associated with death, were linked to the lives of individuals. In both the European and the Near Eastern Neolithic there are examples of highly visible material monumentality associated with life and death that lead researchers to link landscape, location, and time and evoke models of ancestor worship and cult. Whitley (2002, 125), however, argues that researchers of prehistoric Britain are quick to link material phenomena to ancestor veneration and have largely failed to develop models of intergenerational memory that are contextualized, integrative, and consistent with archaeological data: “If we really want interpretations that respect the particularity of the evidence we are seeking to explain, we will have to treat ancestors with greater circumspection than archaeologists are wont to do at present.” In using his critique as a grounding point for considering the MPPNB, I want to move the discussion beyond claiming that social memory and ancestor veneration existed to explore how archaeologists can develop sophisticated and internally consistent models.

This essay explores the possible interweaving of social memory, ritual practice, and time in Neolithic communities.

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1. Although differing as to the exact timing and terminology, the Levantine Pre-Pottery Neolithic is generally subdivided into the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A period (ca. 11,700–10,500 BP) and the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (ca. 10,500–8,250 BP). The PPNB is traditionally subdivided into an Early, Middle, Late, and Final PPNB. Debate exists as to the existence and potential time span of an Early PPNB. I am assuming that the PPNA is followed by what can be termed the Middle (10,500–9,250 BP), Late (9,250–8,700 BP), and Final PPNB/PPNC (8,700–8,250 BP) periods. It is possible that there was a short transitional stage between the PPNA and the MPPNB. It is not at all clear whether such a cultural-historical construct is supported by archaeological data or whether the available data are representative of regional variability. All dates presented in this paper are calibrated before present. Further details of chronology and timing of the Neolithic of the Near East are found in Kuijt and Goring-Morris (2002).

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Drawing upon the material and symbolic interconnections in Neolithic ritual, I argue that plastered skulls are only one element of interrelated social and material practices focused on identity and the human body in early villages. This study draws upon other research (Dobres and Robb 2000; Hastorf 2003; Lock 1993; Robb 2007; Thomas 2000) to consider how the Neolithic plastered skulls and anthropomorphic statues provide insight into the ways in which individuals and communities structured social relations, identity, and memory.

My argument is that, rather than being a reflection of ancestor worship, Neolithic mortuary and ritual practices highlight integrated systems of memory and embodiment that initially focused on remembrance but through time facilitated the forgetting of the dead. Drawing upon several ethnographic works (e.g., Kan 1989; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Schiller 1997), I explore how social memory in Neolithic communities was linked to the construction and presentation of death. The definition and reiteration of the naturalized social order appear to have been linked to the manipulation and intergenerational use of bodily representation, accomplished through the physical and symbolic regeneration and recirculation of the dead with human skulls serving as ritual heirlooms. Exploring issues of remembrance and forgetting in early Neolithic villages, I focus on three tasks. First, I explore how the construction of identity and personhood in village life was structured through routinized practice in Neolithic communities. In brief, consideration of identity and different scales of memory help us understand how daily behaviors highlighted continuity and cohesion through the maintenance of certain cultural norms. Second, I draw upon a range of archaeological data sets to examine the symbolic and material means by which identity and memory were structured. Specifically, I argue that bodily regeneration, recirculation, and the integration of the living and the dead were important aspects of daily life in Neolithic communities. Third, I trace how these practices established a social tempo in these communities that connected past, present, and future.

Early Neolithic Villages: Background

The emergence of Near Eastern Pre-Pottery Neolithic villages involved profound changes in social organization, ritual, and economic systems. In the southern Levant, a largely self-contained area including what are now southern Syria and Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian Autonomous Authority, Jordan, and the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, the earliest villages appeared ca. 10,500 and persisted in this form until ca. 9,500 BP (Bar-Yosef and Meadows 1995; Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002; Rollefson 1998; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992). Often called the "Neolithic Revolution," this period of transition was characterized by the aggregation of people into large villages, the domestication of plants and animals, and the reorganization of human interactions. Collectively, these fundamental changes transformed the economic, social, and technological landscape.

Field research at a number of sites, including Jericho, 'Ain Ghazal, Yiftahel, Kfar HaHoresh, Ghwair I, Nahal Hemar, Munhata, Tell Aswad, Wadi Shu'eib, and Beidha, documents elaborate mortuary practices including skull removal and plastering, stable sedentary villages with well-made residential buildings, formal lithic technology, and domesticated plants and animals. While researchers are starting to develop an understanding of regional practices, they have only a preliminary grasp of the extent of variation in material practices within MPPNB settlements.

In the first agricultural communities in the Mediterranean zone of the southern Levant, villagers reorganized their physical and social landscapes, among other things building rectangular residential structures with white or red plaster floors and internal hearths and leaving little if any space between them. Trade networks expanded significantly, and obsidian was traded over long distances (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989*a*, *b*; Bar-Yosef and Meadows 1995; Bienert 1991; Byrd 1994; Cauvin 1994; Goring-Morris 2000; Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 1998; Hershkovitz and Gopher 1990; Rollefson 1997; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992; Kuijt 1996, 2001; Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002). Over the past 20 years, archaeological research on these settlements has revealed a remarkable regional similarity in mortuary practices and, at the same time, a high degree of variation in those practices between settlements (Cornwall 1981; Goring-Morris 2000; Hershkovitz and Gopher 1990; Kuijt 2000*b*, 2001; Kurth and Röhrer-Ertl 1981; Rollefson 1998; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992; Rollefson, Schmandt-Besserat, and Rose 1999; Verhoeven 2002*a*).

Data from Jericho, 'Ain Ghazal, Beidha, Nahal Hemar, Yiftahel, and Kfar HaHoresh highlight a number of shared mortuary practices (see Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2000*b*, 2001; Rollefson 2000*a*; Verhoeven 2002*b*), including the use, caching, and discard of anthropomorphic statues and figurines, secondary mortuary practices, and skull removal and plastering. The use of clay to re-create human facial features (noses, eyes, chins, and mouths) is one of the more visible and intriguing aspects of these practices.

At the same time, there is subtle but observable variation in these practices in different settlements (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001; Goring-Morris 2005; Rollefson, Schmandt-Bessarat, and Rose 1999). Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal (2001, 88) argue that there is significant intersite variation in the methods of skull modeling and that these methods reflect different technological concepts: "the specific details of the technologies employed reveal a marked degree of intra-site homogeneity and inter-site heterogeneity." In brief, this pattern reflects the development of local, community-level traditions in the context of shared general practices and belief systems.

In this study I explore the possible links between general MPPNB mortuary practices, the burial of people's bodies, and their materiality in the process of remembering and forgetting. A detailed study of the total range of material variation is

impossible at this time. Research at Tell Aswad (Stordeur 2003*a*, *b*), among other sites, will eventually make it possible to explore the interconnections between cycles of human life and death as expressed in the plastering of skulls and in the built environment. Other studies have explored the temporal and metaphorical connections between bodies and other material remains (notably Brück 2001, 2006; Robb 2007), illustrating the rich potential for such research. Preliminary considerations of related topics in the Near East (Boivin 2000) highlight the need for further consideration of these possible relationships. Little attention has been devoted to considering how objects and the rituals in which they may have been employed might inform us about Neolithic perceptions of ancestry, memory, and commemoration. For the most part researchers have focused on developing detailed descriptions of the materiality of ritual (e.g., Bienert 1991; Garfinkel 1994) or, more recently, the technology of the production of plastered skulls and anthropomorphic figurines (e.g., Bonogofsky 2002; Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001; Hershkovitz et al. 1995).

Material Topographies of Memory

Memory is linked to action, and some actions have physical manifestations that may or may not survive in the archaeological record. As physical actions, ritual and commemoration are linked to the production of shared memories and experiences in communities at different scales (see Casey 1987; Connerton 1989; Forty and Küchler 1999). Memory is dynamic and varies with the situation of people over time.

Memory is linked to meaning and experience. Experience, of course, can be spatially, temporally, and materially situated. Casey (1987, 224) notes, for example, that there are general patterns in the development of social memory and commemoration. He argues that the solemnization of commemoration involves four factors: repetitiveness in observance, reenactment of some former circumstance, social sanction of the ceremony, and formality. Repetitiveness in ritual is critical. Ceremonial observance is enacted on multiple occasions, often crosscuts generations, and is dynamic in that, while the internal structure often includes repetitive elements, their meanings may change.

The reenactment of some event or the representation of a mythical event in worldly time is almost always significantly removed from the event in time and space. The power of reenacted events is linked to individuals' legitimating them. What might otherwise be seen as disconnected words, actions, and traditions are given authority and meaning. Finally, formality provides the framework for the events. Casey (1987, 225) elegantly makes this point when he says, "If social sanction provides a reason for a given ceremony, formality furnishes its rhyme." The repetition of words, actions, and interactions makes the event coherent, understandable, and meaningful to participants. It is through this mélange that the past, present, and future dimensions of commemorative ritual are affirmed and made compatible with each other.

Only some ceremonial actions and meanings are materialized, and some of them are difficult to recognize (Verhoeven 2002*b*). Our understanding of the rationale for social sanctioning of ritual, for example, is largely circumstantial. Further, it is very difficult to understand how past ritual actions and ceremony were organized. There is no question that both reiteration and the formal organization of ritual are manifested in the archaeological record, and in certain cases so were its process, tempo, and reiteration.

Commemoration and social memory center on direct remembrance and recollection, as well as on indirection, abstraction, and depersonalization (Bailey 2005). A number of researchers have explored the symbolic and communicative aspects of ritual (Bell 1993; Rappaport 1999; Tambiah 1979, 119) and some of its cognitive dimensions (Collidge and Wynn 2005) and addressed the material connections of these aspects in the archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean (e.g., Blake 1998; Chesson 1999, 2007; Renfrew 1985; Rollefson 2000*a*; Verhoeven 2002*a*, *b*). In this study I follow Lukes's (1975, 291) definition of ritual as "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feelings which they hold to be of a special significance."

Memory and its materiality are generated through the actions of individuals and groups. Even highly formalized acts of commemoration are likely to change: it is, after all, through the act of remembering that memory is both crafted and maintained. Meaning and, by extension, memories are defined by the experiences of people (Ingold 2000; Hodder 1990). As Blake (1998, 68) puts it, "Memory and tradition alone do not preserve an object's identity; it is the ongoing incorporation of that object into routinized practice that generates meaning." While ritual is often conservative and resistant to change, change is to be expected in its meaning and practice, and, as a result, memory is transformed and modified through time. Events, pathways, and travels need not be exact replicas of past performances. Even when people are not directly linked to specific events, memory is transformed and expanded.

Ruth Van Dyke and Susan Alcock (2003, 3) ask an apparently simple but highly complex question: "All in all, it is clear that the creation and re-creation of social memory is an active and on-going process . . . yet how does the process work?" There are, of course, multiple answers to this critical question. Examining the development of short- and long-term memory, Baddeley (1990) and more recently Collidge and Wynn (2005) explore cognitive models of working memory. Moving beyond the scale of the individual to consider memory within societies, Connerton (1989) explores what he labels "embodied" and "inscribed" memory, the former including bodily rituals and behavior and the latter focusing on monuments and representation. Shifting this discussion toward the materiality of practice, Rowlands (1993) contrasts inscribed memory practices, which involve repetition and public access and are materialized through monumentality, with incorporated memory practices,

symbolic and at times exclusionary acts that are likely to leave limited material residues.

The critical question is how memory is created, maintained, and modified within and between households and across generations. To begin addressing this question, it is helpful to consider how meaning, experience, and memory are interconnected. Hodder (1990) notes that meaning and memory can be conceived of as either experiential or referential. Experiential meanings are those that are directly experienced by individuals, while referential meanings are those constructed in reference to people and events. Adapting this framework to issues of memory at different scales allows us to develop a framework for modeling patterns of Neolithic social memory and to situate this framework in a theoretical context that moves us beyond a simple and static reference to ancestors.

Memory is time-sensitive and dynamic, and the creation of memory has multiscalar aspects (fig. 1). Memory is created through the actions of people who intersect at different social scales, such as those of the individual, the household, and the community. These are, of course, ultimately interconnected and inseparable. Yet, from the standpoint of development and use, the genesis of memory is linked to the experiences and meanings that are created through the intersection of people at multiple levels. These short-term events and the interactions of people involved in them help shape the long-term intergenerational meanings and memories into a form of collective memory.

While on some levels memory is deeply personal and linked to the life histories of individuals, on other levels it is public and intergenerational. Over time memories change from experiential and personal to abstract and referential (Bradley 2003; Hastorf 2003; Meskell 2003; Vansina 1985; Williams 2003). Direct experiential memory, in which the individual has immediate contact with events and people, can become indirect and referential, highlighting social membership rather than direct biological lineage. After two or perhaps three generations, the memory of individuals becomes depersonalized and abstract. Rather than being conceptualized as known individuals, the dead are merged in an ancestral memory that is anonymous, homogenized, and collective. The social process for this transition, depending upon the cultural context, is complicated and probably not always observable in archaeological data.

Finally, remembering and forgetting are integrated and dialectic processes (Joyce 2003; Küchler 1999; Williams 2003). The process of forgetting the dead is linked to the decontextualization of the individual—the creation of a collective identity that is shared and experienced by others. There are clear practical reasons that the dead become depersonalized and forgotten in traditional societies. Among the living there is a deep personal and direct memory of the dead, creating a series of tangible links between personhood in life, death, and memorialization. At least initially, then, memory and commemoration are experiential—personal and direct. Over time, however,

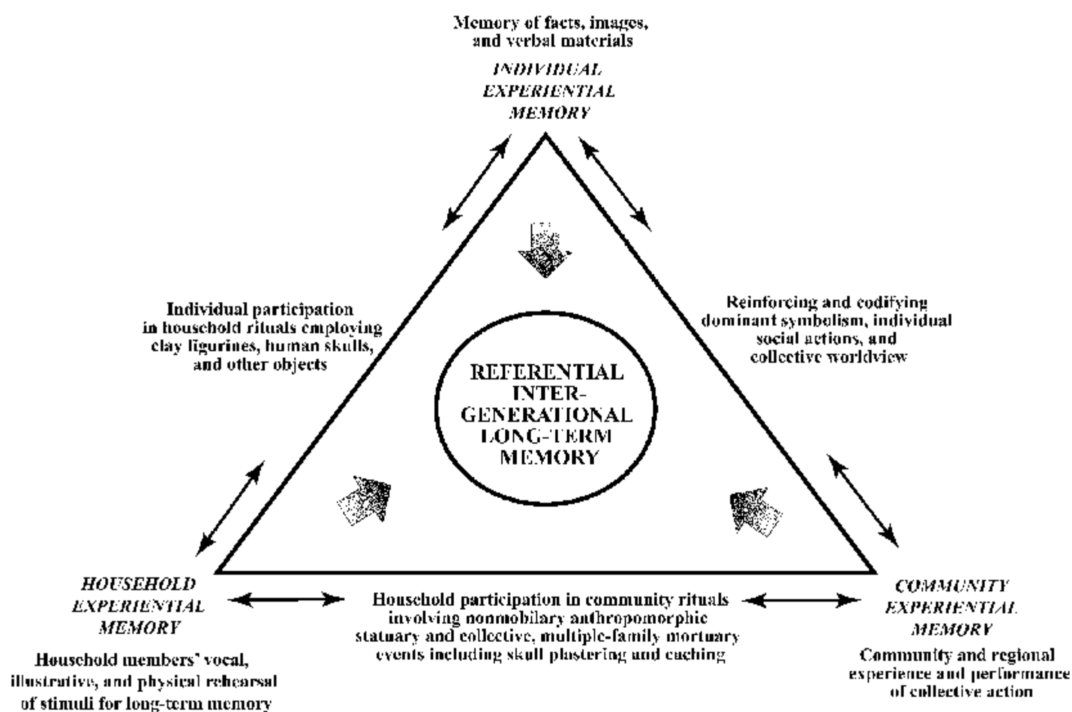

Figure 1. The creation of memory.

memory is based on reference to the deceased, and being deceased is characterized as being remote and anonymous.

Mediations of Remembrance: Secondary Burial, Commemoration, and Their Social Impact

A number of researchers have explored potential mechanisms for the ordering and transmission of social memory (see, e.g., Bradley 1998, 2003; Chapman, Kinnes, and Randsborg 1981; Chapman 2000; Chesson 2001; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Rowlands 1993; Vansina 1985). Social memory is, of course, intimately interconnected with oral tradition, images, and location and varies with scale. Ultimately, participation is the core of commemorative events (Casey 1987; Connerton 1989). The spatial context, organization, and imagery of mortuary practices are culturally defined: they cannot be understood without reference to a worldview that integrates place, time, space, and imagery in the production of meaning (Geertz 1973, 1980; Hertz 1960; Joyce 2003; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Snead and Preucel 1999; van Gennep 1960).

Primary mortuary practices center on the permanent burial of the dead after a relatively short period of time (often less than a week). In contrast, secondary mortuary practice is the socially sanctioned movement of part or all of a deceased individual. From a material standpoint secondary mortuary practices involve the intentional removal of skeletal materials from one location to some other location, the addition of objects to a burial context, or the movement of the entire set of remains to another context. Primary and secondary mortuary practices are linked and often perceived by their performers as parts of a broader belief system. For example, secondary mortuary practices may involve the defleshing of the complete skeleton and the removal of the cranium. Secondary mortuary rituals are often part of high-profile public ceremonies and can therefore be viewed as spiritual and symbolic acts that have social, political, and personal meanings. Finally, multistage secondary mortuary practices are planned in advance, are intergenerational, involve multiple households, and require extraordinary community involvement (Downs 1956; Metcalf and Huntington 1991) (fig. 2).

Remembrance, regeneration, and forgetting are complementary in secondary mortuary practices as participants literally and symbolically dismember and memorialize people. Decapitation and the modification of skulls or their placement in a highly visible location also represent integrated acts of

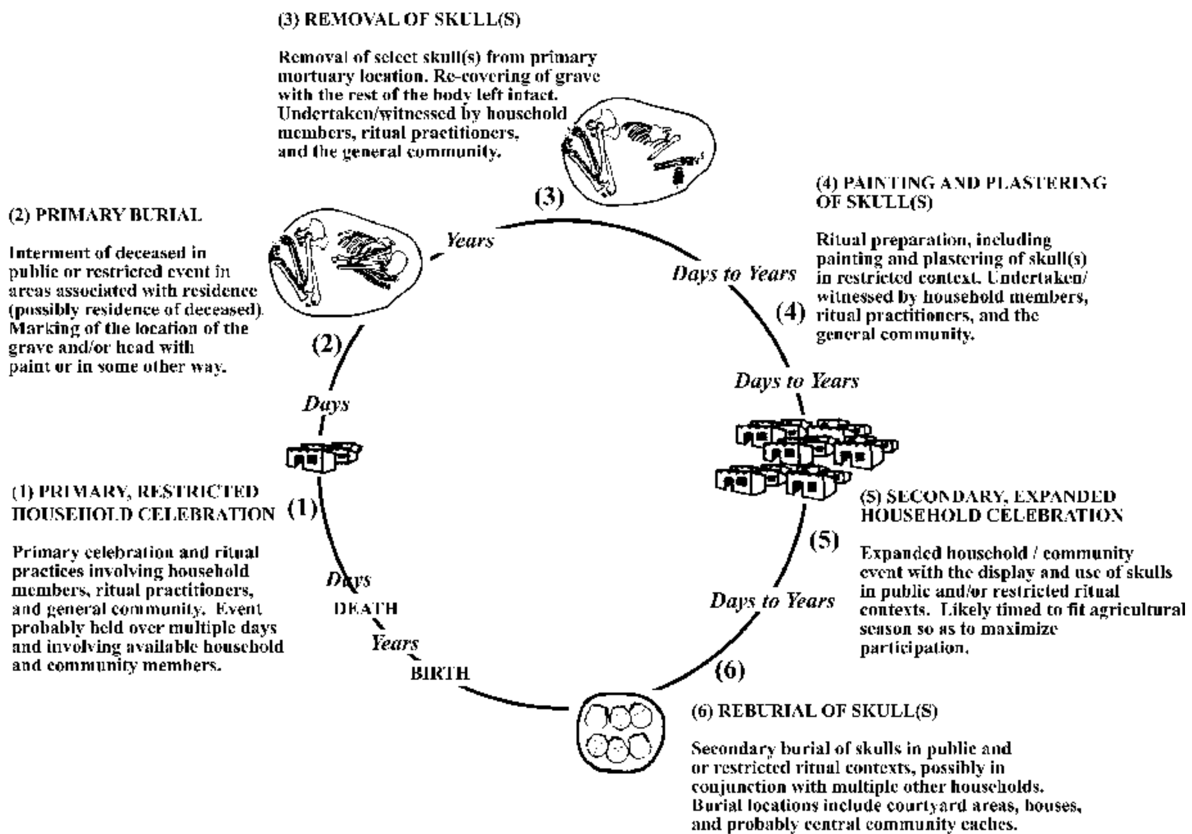

Figure 2. Ritual actions following a death in the MPPNB.

social memory: the reiteration of the naturalized order assists in both remembering and forgetting the dead (Battaglia 1990). Secondary mortuary practices facilitate a kind of perpetual rebirth and highlight that life is intergenerational and links past, present, and future. Although the dead are no longer present, they do not belong in the past: rather, they reside among the living but in another place. Fienup-Riordan (1994, 250) highlights both the cyclical nature of this view and the sense that the life of the person and the soul continues after biological death: among the Yup'ik "birth into the land of the dead was ultimately the source of continuing life."

Secondary mortuary practices are often viewed as enriching ties to ancestral lines, responsibility to the deceased, and beliefs about universal orders (see Crocker 1977; Hertz 1960; Lopatin 1960, 90–114; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). While they focus on specific individuals, they involve an element of communal ancestor worship. The articulation of a shared identity requires that the message be conventionalized and simplified to make it understandable to all (Fentress and Wickham 1992). This is achieved in part by reference to generalized ancestors and the development of highly standardized social rules. Importantly, secondary mortuary practices permit the scheduling of funeral events at a prearranged time that does not conflict with other tasks and is sometimes envisioned as a season of festivities (Hertz 1960; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). Finally, secondary mortuary practices may be organized in such a way as to facilitate participation in community events that crosscut kin, generation, and household lines (Downs 1956; Hertz 1960; Hudson 1966; Metcalf and Huntington 1991).

Neolithic Bodily Regeneration and Cycles of Remembrance

While some researchers (e.g., Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001) note that there were subtle, yet observable variations in MPPNB mortuary and ritual practices between settlements, other studies (e.g., Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989*a*; Cauvin 2000; Kuijt 2004; Verhoeven 2002*a*) show that similar regional practices, with many of the same material manifestations, are suggestive of shared cultural and ritual participation such as is seen in secondary mortuary practices and skull removal. Although skull removal existed in the Epipaleolithic (Belfer-Cohen 1991), it was only in the MPPNB that household and community ritual practices became visually and possibly metaphorically centered on acts of bodily regeneration. Skull removal, modification, and caching of skulls in groups became routine between ca.10,500 and 9,500 cal. BP (Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002). MPPNB mortuary practices exhibit continuity with earlier practices as well as displaying diversification and increase in complexity (see Banning 1998; Bar-Yosef 1981; Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989*a*; Cauvin 1994; Goring-Morris 2000, 2005; Kuijt 1995, 1996, 2000*a*; Rollefson 2000*a*; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992). One important expression of continuity is the similar treatment of individuals at burial (table 1). As in the PPNA period, the predominant practices involved burying both male and female adults and children in single graves with no or few grave goods. Graves were located beneath the floors of residential structures and in a number of extramural locations. Bodies were usually placed on their sides in simple graves excavated from earlier deposits. Infants were usually buried as individuals, and while occasionally buried in intramural areas they and adult burials are also found in fill and courtyard contexts. Crania were also removed from the skeletons of infants and youths (Cornwall 1981; Kirkbride 1968; Moore 1985, Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992: Strouhal 2003). Evidence from MPPNB 'Ain Ghazal, Kfar HaHoresh, and Jericho highlights variation in these practices, infant remains sometimes being associated with adults with intact skulls. It is not clear whether these associations were intentional or a by-product of the repeated burial of individuals over time or perhaps of death during childbirth. At 'Ain Ghazal and Jericho, infants were clearly interred in a ritual context, such as in subfloor pit features and as dedicatory offerings within the foundations or walls of a building (Cornwall 1981; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992). Although in need of further study, some of these caches appear to have been mnemonically organized (see Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2000*b*). At 'Ain Ghazal the location of a cranium beneath the floor was often marked with red paint on the white plaster floor. After a time household members returned to the grave, opened the area around the cranium, removed the cranium, and then re-covered the grave (Kuijt 2001) (fig. 3).

In secondary mortuary practices identity and personhood become mutable and at the same time linked to life histories (Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Reina 1962). The timing of

Table 1. Mortuary Practices and Their Spatial Contexts in the Levantine Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B Period

Mortuary Practice	Spatial Location
Adults	
Primary burial, intact	Courtyard and midden areas outside of structures, under plaster floors in residential structures
Primary burial, skull removed	Courtyard and midden areas outside of structures, under plaster floors in residential structures
Secondary burial: Skull caches	Pits in courtyard and midden areas, wall niches inside of residential structures
Secondary burial	Pits in courtyard and midden areas
Children	
Primary burial, intact	Under house walls, in post-sockets for interior supports, and in exterior midden and courtyard areas
Secondary burial: Skull caches	Pits in courtyard and midden areas, wall niches inside of residential structures

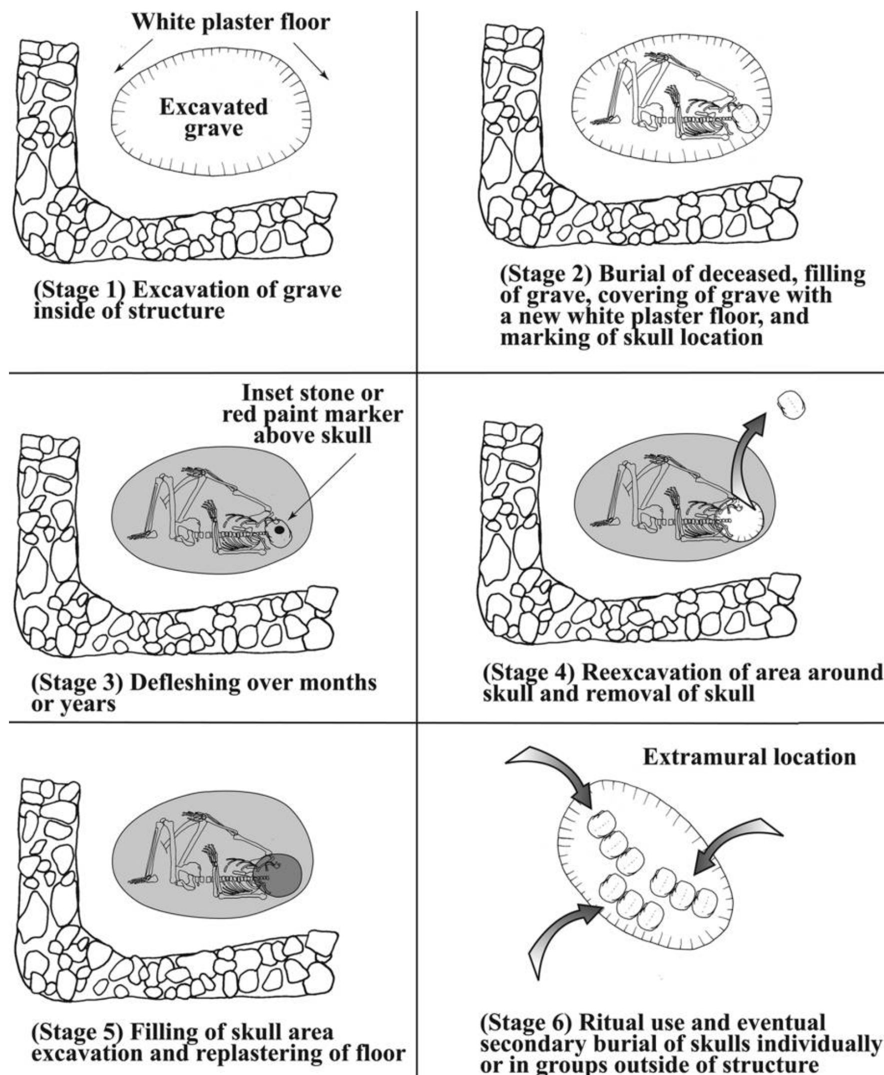

Figure 3. Sequence of mortuary practices at ʻAin Ghazal.

MPPNB mortuary practices helps structure the construction of memory and identity (fig. 4). When first removed from their bodies, the skulls of the deceased would have been associated with specific individuals and households. With the passing of generations, the nature of these memories and relations would have changed from experiential and personal to abstract and referential. It is through this process of the intergenerational manipulation of the body that identity and memory were transformed from named persons to a symbolic collective.

Similarly, the original conceptualization of Neolithic plastered skulls was likely linked to specific individuals, such as elder leaders or other people of importance. Given that fewer than 5% of the people had their skulls plastered, it can be assumed that only particular deceased individuals were selected, probably for their importance and skills. It is likely that these plastered skulls were identified with the deceased, perhaps even taking their names. The living organized or witnessed the construction of these plastered skulls. A deep personal and direct memory of the deceased would have created tangible links between life and death.

Embodiment, Regeneration, and the Face

Perhaps the most striking example of how Neolithic people regenerated life through the portrayal of the body is seen in the rebuilding of facial features on plastered skulls. In the MPPNB representational practices were focused on the face. There is, however, local variation in the selection of which facial attributes to illustrate, how these were expressed, and what technology was used for plastering different parts of the skull (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001).

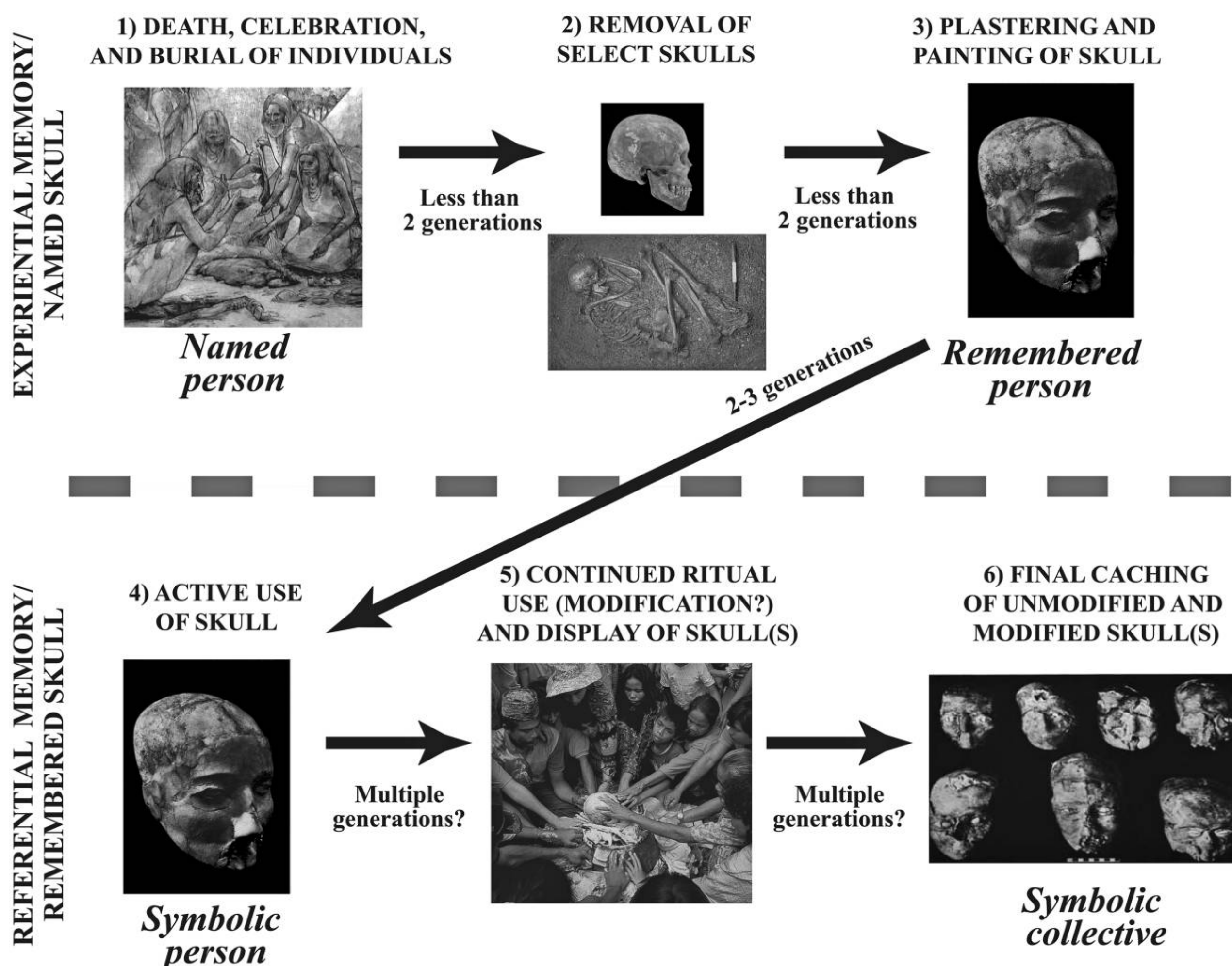

Figure 4. The timing of MPPNB mortuary practices.

In its most basic form, MPPNB skull plastering was an act of reconstructing the body—the use of materials to reconstruct facial features of the living on the physical structure of the dead (see Bonogofsky 2002; Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001; Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998; Kuijt and Chesson 2004; Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002; Rollefson, Schmandt-Besserat, and Rose 1999; Verhoeven 2002*a*. At Jericho, ʿAin Ghazal, and Tell Aswad, for example, MPPNB people reconstructed natural facial features out of clay, with eyes, ears, mouth, and perhaps painting of other facial features (fig. 5). Whereas in most settlements eyes were portrayed as closed and made of clay, at Jericho shell was used to create the eyes.

Verhoeven (2002*a*) argues that symbolism such as the representation of the human face was one of the structuring principles of PPNB rituals and ideology. I would expand on this point, arguing that the shared MPPNB focus on the face and head was linked to community ideas of memory and embodiment. With the founding of relatively large agricultural villages, mortuary practices and household ritual changed dramatically. First, we see the expansion of secondary mortuary practices with the reuse of skulls, including the new use of elaborate specialized practices to reconstruct facial attributes on individual human skulls. Second, we witness the appearance of naturalistic plaster skulls, such as at Jericho, and rare stone masks that could have covered a face. Third, in contrast to the PPNA figurines, we see the creation and use of half-size human statues and busts made of wood, reeds, and plaster. Fourth, we see the appearance of small seated figurines of stone and clay (Rollefson 2000*b*; Kuijt and Chesson 2004). Finally, there are examples of the construction of small painted heads on the ends of animal bones. While it is difficult to address through archaeological data, that the deliberate focus on the face, the removal of the heads of small figurines, and the secondary removal of skulls from human skeletons were parts of a shared system of ritual practices.

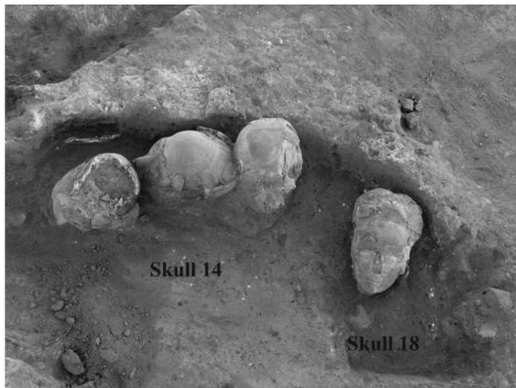

Figure 5. *Top*, four cached plastered skulls, Tell Aswad. Excavations have already removed the associated skeletons. Skull 18 has been postdepositionally crushed and appears abnormally elongated in this view. *Center*, frontal view of skull 18. Typical of the skulls from Tell Aswad, its orbits are filled with plaster and the eyes are represented as closed, nose, ears, and chin are present, and the mandible is plastered and attached. *Bottom*, oblique view of skull 14. The eyes are closed, there is a prominent nose, and the plaster extends to the eyebrows and around to shape an ear.

Regeneration of Life from Plaster

Reconstructing the life histories of plastered skulls aids us in understanding how meaning, identity, and memory were generated with the embodiment of human facial features and the ritual use and eventual burial of these objects. People in relatively small MPPNB communities would have known each other, were likely to be biologically and economically interconnected, and were aware of the physical appearance of living and recently deceased individuals. Thus, at this point memory was direct and personal. With the passing of time, memory of and about the deceased, as connected with individual plastered skulls, would have become indirect and referential.

As is noted elsewhere (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998; Goren, Goring-Morris and Segal 2001), community artisans (for lack of a better word) developed or adopted different techniques and included different facial attributes (table 2). For example, Jericho is the only settlement whose plastered skulls have open eyes made with seashells. Other MPPNB settlements, such as Beisamoun, portrayed individuals with closed eyes shaped in clay, creating the appearance of someone sleeping, or with an open eye modeled in plaster (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998). It is also possible that only people at certain sites employed cinnabar and ochre for pigmentation (see Goren, Goring-Morris and Segal 2001). Thus, MPPNB skull plastering should be conceived of as a shared regional system of embodiment with variation in practice based on particular local histories (fig. 6).

The Idealized Face: Life from Clay

Researchers have discussed whether the plastered skulls represented historical individuals or an anonymous ancestral group (see Amiran 1962; Arensburg and Hershkovitz 1989; Bienert et al 2004; Bonogofsky 2002; Ferembach and Lechevallier 1973; Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001; Goring-Morris 2000; Hershkovitz et al. 1995). While design differences exist between the plastered skulls of the MPPNB, these differences appear to be related less to the physical characteristics of the deceased individuals than to the skills, technological knowledge, and preferences of the people of particular villages and communities (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001).

Several lines of evidence suggest that MPPNB plastered skulls were not accurate representations of known people but stereotyped abstractions. First, at some sites, such as Jericho, Kfar HaHoresh, and ʿAin Ghazal, the face was remodeled on the skull without the mandible. Second, in the case of Tell Aswad skull 14 (Stordeur 2003*a*), the plastered version had facial features (a nose covering the mouth) that could not have occurred in life. Third, there is variation from one community to another in the presence or absence of anatomical attributes (such as ears). Fourth, the skulls exhibit a smaller range of variation in facial phenotypes than existed in living populations. Although there were differences in the plastered

Table 2. Variation in Molded Plaster Skulls by MPPNB Settlement

Settlement	Mandible	Eye Treatment	Ears	Painting	Deformation
Tell Aswad	Present	Plaster, closed	Present	Yes	Unclear
Beisamoun	Present	Plaster, closed	Present	Unknown	Unknown
Ramad	Present	Plaster, open and closed	Present/unclear?	Unknown	Unknown
Jericho	Both (11/12 absent)	Shell, open	Present and absent	Yes	Present
Kfar HaHoresh	Absent	Plaster, closed	Absent	Yes	Unknown
‘Ain Ghazal	Absent	Plaster, open and closed	Absent	Yes	Unknown

Sources: Arensbugh and Hershkovitz (1989), Griffin et al. (1998), Goren et al. (2001), Hershkovitz et al. (1995), Stordeur (2003*a*, *b*)

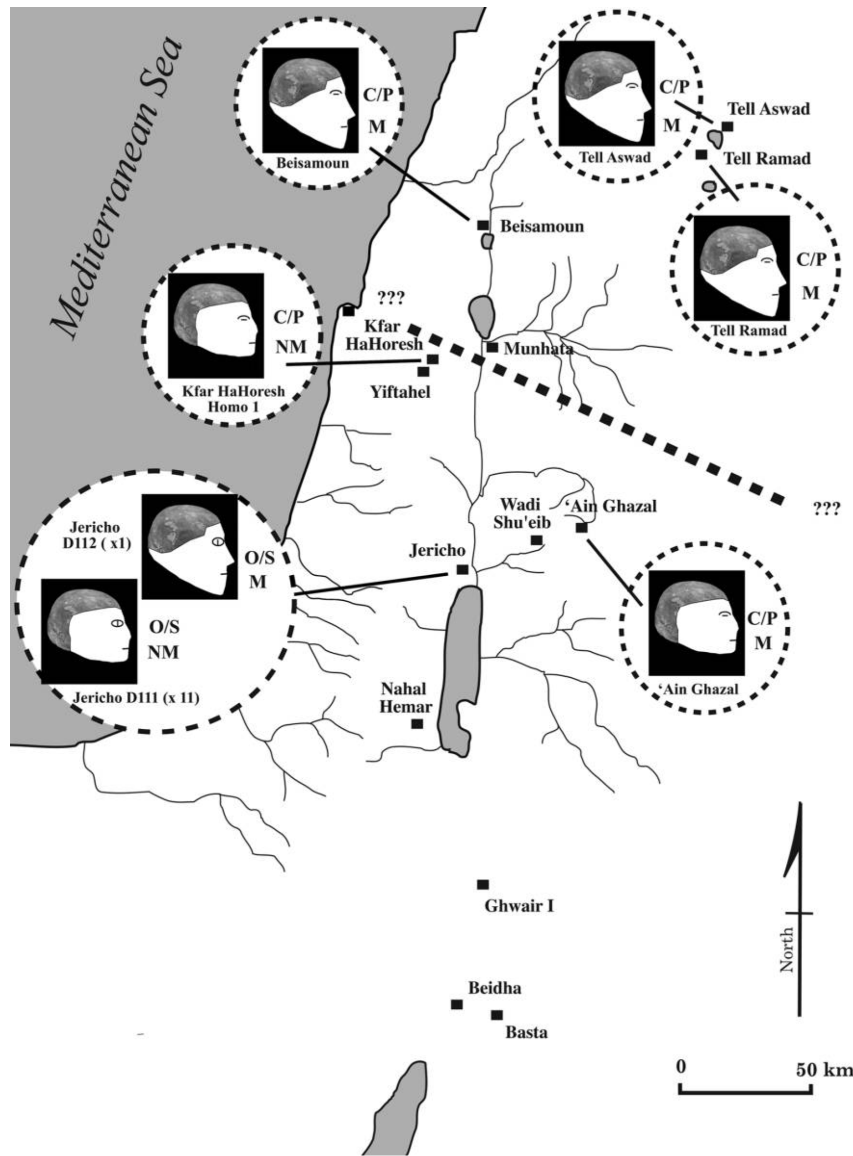

Figure 6. Variation among settlements in mortuary practices. C/P, closed/plaster eyes; O/S, open/seashell eyes; M, plastered mandible; NM, no mandible.

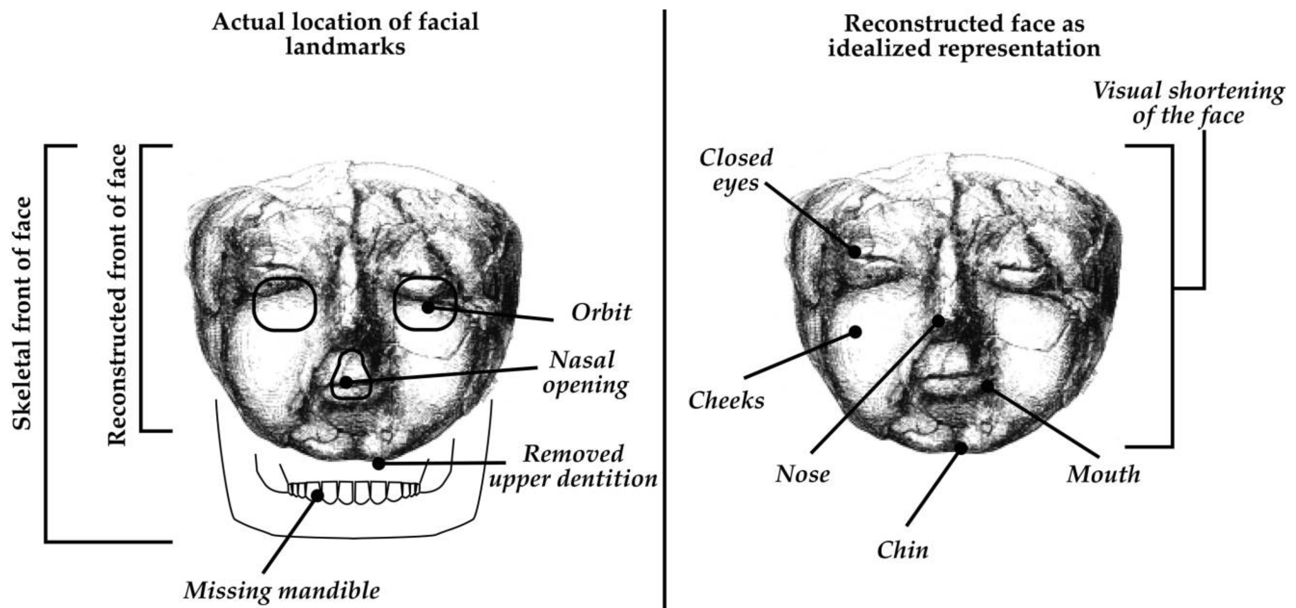

Figure 7. Frontal view of MPPNB skull remodeling, Homo 1 from Kfar HaHoreh (based on Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001, fig. 4).

skulls, there were also clear, shared elements in which features were portrayed and how they were represented. The skulls therefore seem to reflect a system of idealized representation rather than an attempt to represent historical people.

At some sites the representation of the face (eyes, nose, mouth, chin) in plaster was created on only part of the original skull. At Jericho, Kfar HaHoresh, and ʻAin Ghazal, with one exception, the molded plaster faces were made on the skull *without* the mandible. Detailed analysis of the two Kfar HaHoresh plastered skulls (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001) reveals that they were very similar in design—full facial reconstructions created on the skull only, with closed mouth and eyes made of clay, resulting in a broad, squat face. While no completely preserved plastered skulls have been found at ʻAin Ghazal, excavations have recovered the remains of three of them (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998). Parts of other poorly preserved plastered skulls have also been identified, but these are fragmentary. Past occupants of this village removed the plaster adhering to the front of the skulls and then buried them together in a cache. The total absence of bones illustrates that this was intentional and provides insight into the process of production. As at Kfar HaHoresh, the frontal plaster sections from ʻAin Ghazal have closed eyes and full faces made on the skull only.

Excavations at Jericho recovered 12 plastered skulls. Of these, all but one (Jericho D112) had seashells for eyes and complete faces. Except for their shell eyes, they are similar to those found at Kfar HaHoresh and ʻAin Ghazal. Of the 7 plastered skulls found in the Jericho phase-DI.xlii level, only 1 had a mandible. The makers of these skulls were not, therefore, concerned about accuracy or replicating the facial features of the deceased so much as about the representation of certain facial features as opposed to others. In this way a new face was being created using only part of the skeleton. In some cases this required the removal of the dentition (Bonogofsky 2002; Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001). Maintaining the naturalistic features of the face with modeled plaster required the compression of facial features into a much smaller area (figs. 7 and 8). The new plaster mouth, nose,

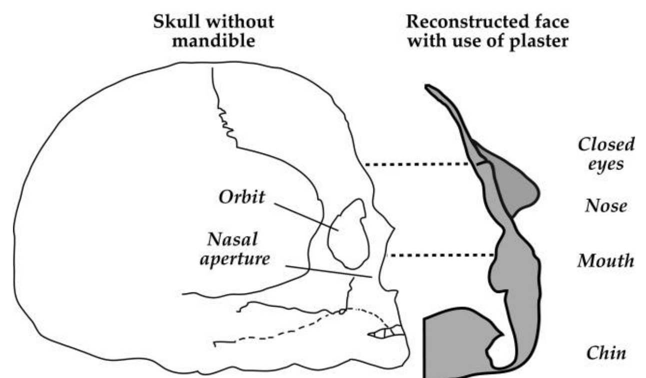

Figure 8. Cross section through the center of the face for MPPNB skull from ʻAin Ghazal, showing movement of the eyes, nose, and mouth upward (based on Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998, fig. 3h).

and eyes were not in their correct anatomical positions, and the plaster chin was at the bottom of the maxilla. Thus, the people who decorated these skulls stylized the face and shifted the visual center upward.

How are we to explain the presence of D112, with its complete plastered skull, in this group? First, there is some evidence that approaches to skull plastering varied between communities. With the exception of the one skull from Jericho, the northern communities plastered the entire skull and mandible while the southern ones plastered only the skull. While it is possible that this pattern is related to the limited amount of excavation, it is consistent with regional differences in practice and design. If it is supported by further research, it may reflect increased connections between neighboring community members, the separation of ritual elites, and shifting household membership. Depending upon how quickly defleshing would have occurred, these patterns may also reflect different tempos of recirculation of skulls and secondary mortuary practices.

Stone Masks and Anthropomorphic Stick Figures

While quite rare, stone face masks and small painted heads on the ends of bones provide a further example of the focus on the face (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988; Cauvin 2000; Kuijt and Chesson 2004). The Nahal Hemar stone mask was painted, and along with the one in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem (from an unknown site) and another uncovered at Basta (Nissen et al. 1992) it has clearly formed mouth, eyes, and nose and a series of drilled holes around the edge. These holes were likely used for attaching feathers, textiles, and other materials to the back of the mask, perhaps like a hood covering the head, or, alternatively, for attaching the mask to the head of the individual who was wearing it. It is entirely possible, therefore, that these masks were designed for repeated use in performance.

Excavations at Nahal Hemar (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988) have recovered a number of human skulls with braided decoration on the back, the remains of a single stone mask, and several small painted heads constructed in plaster on the ends of bones. These stick figures have small eyes, a mouth, ears, and hair. While unique to Nahal Hemar, they provide a naturalistic representation of the human face on an object that is portable, small, and highly visual. It appears that they did not represent specific known individuals.

Anthropomorphic Statues

One of the most visible examples of the shift in representational systems between the PPNA and the MPPNB is the appearance of large anthropomorphic statues (Rollefson 2000*b*; Kuijt and Chesson 2004; Schmandt-Besserat 1998*a*). As with the plastered skulls, these statues were produced with close attention to the face. One of the many exciting results of the excavation at ʻAin Ghazal has been the recovery from two pit features of multiple plastered human statues with highly detailed naturalistic painting of the faces and heads (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998; Rollefson 1986; Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992; Schmandt-Besserat 1998*a*). Most of these statues are half-size representations of the human body or busts. The large human replicas have clearly formed legs and arms, although in some cases they are bulky and lacking in details such as toes and fingers. Busts were usually painted to draw attention to the elements of the face, even employing bitumen for the eyes, a practice also seen with plastered skulls such as at Beisamoun (Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998). In the statue cache from Sq 3282, 11 statues/busts were recovered, 4 in the lower layers and 7 in the upper, from a pit in the floor of an abandoned house. Although the excavations of the MPPNB deposits at ʻAin Ghazal have not involved extensive horizontal exposure, Rollefson (1986) argues that these caches were from extramural locations. While poorly preserved and from an unclear context, Garstang's (Garstang, Dropp, and Crowfoot 1935) excavations at Jericho also recovered anthropomorphic statues made of plaster in four statue caches, two with 3 statues each and two with single statues (Garfinkel 1994, 164). As at ʻAin Ghazal, all of the caches from Jericho seem to come from pit contexts. Study of the methods of construction by Tubb and Grissom (1995) indicates that building them would have required considerable time.

Regeneration, Memory, and the Face

One possible explanation for the focus on the face is that community members were employing material culture to create and reiterate concepts of identity and personhood. The construction of the statues and the plastered skulls and their incorporation into the social and ritual lives of people served to transmit and reinforce meanings through time. The number and relatively large size of these objects highlight the importance of bodily representation in the worlds in which they were made and may be linked to shifts in the way the body, the past, and social relations were identified in early agricultural communities (see Rollefson, Simmons, and Kafafi 1992; Voigt 2000).

Memory, Reiteration, and the Bodily Circulation of Skeletal Elements

One of the interesting aspects of ritual in early Neolithic agricultural communities was the circulation of skeletal elements. As noted by Thomas (2000, 662), this circulation can be viewed as a flow or pathway. Neolithic ritual practices appear to have focused on the body as a signifier of social relations and involved the recirculation of these objects through multiple events (Garfinkel 1994; Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998). This included the removal and reuse of human skulls, the plastering, replastering, and painting of skulls, the manufacture and reuse of stone masks designed to fit over

skulls, and the development, manufacture, and reuse of large anthropomorphic statuary (see Cauvin 1994; Garfinkel 1994; Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2000*b*; Rollefson 1997, 2000*b*). Several settlements provide evidence of the circulation of objects and skulls of the deceased through multiple stages (Kuijt 2001). These practices, moreover, were materially expanded by the use, organization, and recirculation of objects with specific imagery (see Verhoeven 2002*b*).

Ethnographic studies indicate that heirlooms are material symbols with which individuals and groups actively construct and negotiate identities, histories, and memories (Kan 1989; Weiner 1992). Several writers (Joyce 2003; Lillios 1999; Thomas 2000) have argued that heirlooms are integrally associated with social reproduction, skulls, for example, being a concentration of social power and a reservoir of personal skills (see also Craig 1990 and Urcid 1994). Joyce (2000) argues that heirlooms can exist as a form of wealth and a means by which identities are defined and shaped. Another important dimension of heirlooms is that that they can be used to reinforce the existing social order through the construction of collective memory.

Recirculation, Heirlooms, and Memory

Memory is often rooted in the material world, reflected in the actions of people, and connected to the social practices of community members. Heirlooms serve as a means by which memory and history are developed, maintained, and redefined by families, households, and communities (Joyce 2003; Lillios 1999; Schiffer 1976; Thomas 2000; Weiner 1985, 1992). They are, moreover, portable objects that can be inherited by individuals or groups with the intent of keeping them in circulation for a number of generations. Manufactured from durable or semidurable materials, they are, above all else, emblems of ancestry and are often worn, displayed, or used in public events and rituals.

Heirlooms can also be used to manipulate and transform genealogy and the construction of social history. Items become heirlooms after acquired individual property is inherited by others or the value of a commodity is redefined. Just as acquired property can become communal and focused on multiple generations, heirlooms can become commodities that are traded and exchanged. While heirlooms may start out as being linked to the identity of particular individuals or households, their meaning is likely to change, become depersonalized, and center on the collective.

Life History and the Circulation of Plastered Skulls and Figurines

Neolithic secondary mortuary practices are a form of bodily recirculation. There are at least two dimensions of the physical circulation of objects: reuse and modification. In the recirculation of objects in ritual practice, the power of the performance comes from the reenacting of events or stories. Unmodified and plastered skulls were only one of several material means of telling stories. While plastered skulls may have served as stationary ritual relics, it is also possible that they were passed around during performances, displayed, and actively reused. There is strong evidence for the reuse of human skulls and plastered skulls in ritual events (Garfinkel 1994; Goring-Morris 2005; Stordeur 2003*b*). Reflecting on the differential wear on the plastered skulls of Kfar HaHoresh cache L1304, Goring-Morris (2005, 96) says, "At least one was plastered, and it appeared to have symbolically 'died' when the outer plaster layer began to deteriorate, at which time it was ritually reburied a second time." Although the specific use-life remains elusive, it is reasonable to assume that ritual objects would have been displayed, used, and recirculated within various village social networks.

The deposition of skulls and statues hints at the coexistence of integrative and exclusionary rituals. Given that mortuary practices were generally shared across communities, it is clear that at least some component would have intersected with people beyond the individual household. Ethnographic studies (e.g., Metcalf and Huntington 1991) illustrate that secondary mortuary practices may be linked to larger groups and staged multiple times. The large anthropomorphic statuary recovered from 'Ain Ghazal fits with this argument. These almost meter-high statues were designed to be placed in an upright position on large stakes (Rollefson 2000*b*) and were probably displayed somewhere before they were disposed of. They may have been carried from community to community as part of seasonal festivities. The location of caches such as the one at Nahal Hemar suggests, however, that the use and storage of these skulls and statues was part of exclusionary rituals. Most likely village life included both public and exclusionary rituals.

Community members may have repeatedly modified certain objects, and if so these objects should be viewed as dynamic pathways of bodily circulation and material means by which meaning was shaped and reiterated. The unique anthropomorphic figurines from Nahal Hemar (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988) provide a clear example of the construction, modification, and eventual disposal of objects by MPPNB people. The anthropomorphic sticks recovered there were constructed by coating the end of a bone with white lime plaster asphalt, ochre, and copper. Analysis by Bar-Yosef and Alon (1988, 21–23) reveals that while some parts of the figurines were constructed all at once, some colored layers were added later. Discussing figurine 2, they say (p. 22), "A major change was effected when most of the face was covered over with asphalt and again repainted in red. White plaster was reapplied to the bearded area of the face." Similar modifications occurred on all of the figurines (p. 23, emphasis added): "The repainting of figurines is viewed as evidence for *sequential modification*, either as part of isolated ritual events or as a representation of the biological cycle."

A further example of modification of objects is the construction of plastered skulls. The Jericho plastered skulls were

manufactured, modified several times, and then deliberately taken out of circulation by burial. Consideration of Jericho skull D114 provides insight into this process. After the skull was defleshed, a series of evenly spaced lines was painted over the top of the skull from ear to ear; then the skull was covered with clay, and later it was buried. The painting and plastering events were clearly distinct physical acts. Except at Tell Ramad, where vertebrae were plastered as part of the skull, possibly for standing it up, plastered skulls do not include other skeletal elements. After removing the skull from the grave, artisans probably cleaned it and then applied multiple layers of plaster and paint of different chemical and sedimentological characteristics (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001; Hershkovitz et al. 1995). Different types of materials were used to fill up the nasal aperture, build up the cheeks, and shape the features of the face. Many of these layers were chemically different and appear to have been specifically manufactured to facilitate some construction stage in the plastering (Goren, Goring-Morris, and Segal 2001). Some of the outer layers may have been applied for repair or rejuvenation of the skull.

Tempos of Memory and the Embodiment of Identity

The various data sets considered here suggest that Neolithic tempos of social action were defined by the recycling of mythically activated objects such as heirlooms, including human skulls, masks, and figurines. MPPNB mortuary practices reflect the connections between life and death and the physical action of moving human remains through the necessary stages of mortuary rituals. Thus, the creation of social memory was probably linked to specific spatial and temporal locations within communities, locations that were recorded, maintained, and, in all likelihood, identified as being linked to known individuals. Given that these processes would have taken several years, skull removal should be viewed as a delayed act that simultaneously linked people to their past and projected them into the future. Unlike the earthen animal figurines, which could have been beheaded soon after their production, human bodies were decapitated after some delay, perhaps across generations.

The use of heirlooms is often perceived as facilitating the transcendence of time (Joyce 2000; Lillios 1999; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Thomas 2000). The concepts of time and space, are, as Ingold (2000, 143) notes, often interconnected: "The life of every being, as it unfolds, contributes at once to the progeneration of the future and to the regeneration of the past." Similarly, it is possible that skull caching and curation acted on Neolithic community and household memories by projecting their materiality forward and backward in time. The curation of skulls projected into the future: it reiterated the expectation of future mortuary events while simultaneously recognizing continuity with the past. We can look at this phenomenon from an integrative perspective as a symbolic means of crafting social codes, collective memory, and the experience of time.

Many of these objects may have directed attention toward a collective ancestry. The recirculation of heirlooms in ritual contexts likely served to determine the tempo of social action, as their continued use was anticipated and often planned far in advance.

Collectively, these patterns reflect the deliberate organization of ritual along clear social lines. The removal, painting, and plastering of the skulls of important individuals served as a means by which the embodiment of the dead was recreated as "an anchor for meanings" (Humphreys 1981, 272). Following Hertz (1960), we can argue that Neolithic skull removal, circulation, and caching commemorated the dead and that the use and construction of such ritual skulls highlights the interlinking of physical and ritual embodiment.

Integration of the Living and the Dead

The European Neolithic is characterized by a physical segmentation of life and death through the separation of residential and burial locations (Bradley 2003; Thomas 2000). Thomas (2000) notes that the dead were conceived of as not only distant but physically removed. In the Southern Levantine Neolithic we see the reverse: the physical and symbolic integration of the living and the dead. The critical distinguishing aspect of burial practices in the MPPNB was that they were physically centered on and interconnected with areas of the living. This is seen with the location of burials under the floors on which people lived, the physical recirculation of skeletal materials, and the symbolic regenerative actions of creating new plaster faces (Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2001; Rollefson 2000*a*). Death, decomposition, and decapitation would have been familiar and anticipated events.

Secondary mortuary practices required that the living be aware of where and when individuals were interred. This awareness was not casual: it must have existed as a form of collective intergenerational memory. It seems likely that personal and community life histories were public and familiar to all members of the village and closely linked to conceptions of place.

Forgetting the Body: Decapitation and the Individual

One interesting expression of personhood and identity in Neolithic communities is seen in the multiple manifestations of decapitation of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines (Goring-Morris 2000; Rollefson 2000*a*; Schmandt-Besserat 1997, 1998*b*; Talalay 2004). The small MPPNB earthen anthropomorphic figurines frequently recovered from midden deposits were deliberately mutilated, damaged, or constructed as headless (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989*a*; de Contenson 1966; Goring 1991; Rollefson 1986, 2001; Voigt 1983, 2000). Voigt (1983, 192) argues that damage to anthropomorphic figurines is often "due to 'killing' at the time of disposal." Similarly, Goring (1991, 52) remarks that "the apparent as-

sociation between damage and burial leads one to seriously consider the possibility that this damage was deliberate and applied ritually." This suggests that decapitation was symbolically significant to MPPNB peoples over many hundreds of years.

In many ways decapitation can be seen as a form of depersonalization, a shared action aimed at transforming the individual into a collective memory (Talalay 2004). Decapitation creates a single visual and metaphorical focus for memory. Above all, physically separating the head from the body removes the physical characteristics of the individual in life. When undertaken repeatedly, it serves to homogenize the past, potentially acting as a leveling mechanism at the moment of death, as well as a means of identifying and forgetting certain individuals.

The Social Body: Individual and Community Processes

Traditional anthropological classifications of emerging social complexity (for example, the classic model of the chiefdom) are inconsistent with the available archaeological data of the Neolithic (Verhoeven 2000*a*; Rollefson 2000*a*; Goring-Morris 2000). Examination of the complex, complementary, and in some ways conflicting physical and symbolic organization of material culture in Neolithic villages sheds light on the emergence of authority in these communities. Elsewhere (Kuijt 2001) I have argued that early village social relations involved a balancing of individualizing and community processes that probably facilitated the emergence of limited social differentiation and simultaneously created the social conditions for community cohesion and shared membership. Representations of the human body such as plastered skulls or figurines served as tapestries on which to depict, modify, and contest social relations. Some of these practices were probably viewed as interconnected and mutually reinforcing: they supported the rationale for and the meanings of specific practices through time and created the context in which intergenerational memory was negotiated.

Cranial deformation at Jericho and Nahal Hemar (Arensburg and Hershkovitz 1989; Kurth and Röhrer-Ertl 1981; Meiklejohn et al. 1992) was one physical and symbolic means by which individuals were distinguished from others. Skull caching and plastering would have been others. The people identified for such treatment were probably powerful community members and individuals in positions of leadership, but they included males and females and ranged from old to relatively young. These individualizing processes appear to have coexisted with other, community-oriented processes, and together they celebrated both the historical individual and the community past and present. These practices effected the transformation from experiential memory, focused on named persons, to referential memory, focused on the symbolic collective.

Remembering and Forgetting

Forty and Küchler (1999, 1) pose the question "How does forgetting occur and what do material objects have to do with it?" Echoing the work of Bloch (1982, 1989), this question is critical for an understanding of the generation of Neolithic social memory, the multiple and complex layers of meanings of identity, and the balancing of forgetting and remembering. While focused on commemoration and remembrance, the abstraction of memory is also a form of forgetting. It is often assumed that material objects such as skulls act as the analogues of human memory and the focus of ancestor worship. From this perspective memories become material: they interject images, people, and events from the past into everyday lives and thus transcend temporal boundaries. The process can be conceived of as re-creating the physical structure that embodies both the living and the dead, transcends different realms and times, and obscures individual identity and history.

The processes of memorialization and depersonalization are interrelated and occur with the deliberate deconstruction of memory (e.g., Argenti 1999; Fowler 2003; Küchler 1999; Williams 2003). In some cultures memory is defined and crafted through the process of forgetting the past. This can involve the creation of ephemeral monuments or of elaborate material objects that are destroyed, left to decay, or made inaccessible. As outlined by Reina (1962), in Guatemala the physical remains of the dead are considered to have belonged to reputable people of importance in the past, but ordinary villagers and elders are almost always unaware of the identity of the individuals. Among the living there is no understanding of the acts, status, and identity of people in the past and specific skeletal remains. Other than being viewed as respected ancestors and in some cases relatives, they have been transformed into a collective ancestry.

There are, therefore, clear connections between remembering the collective and forgetting the individual. In Argenti's (1999) description of royal succession in Oku, Cameroon, the destruction of the objects produced in connection with the king's death serves to legitimate the subsequent transfer of power. For Melanesia, Küchler (1999, 64) outlines how architecture serves as the location for effigy display and performances that aid in the transfer of the life-force after death. With the destruction of commemorative vessels the soul becomes image and thus a floating memory. People are publicly forgotten, and the materiality of memory is reproduced through proprietary rights to the control of the mental representations, not just the material forms.

Discussion

The prominent place of secondary mortuary practices in certain Neolithic communities helps us to understand how individual and collective identities and memories were developed. These practices highlight cycles of remembrance and

indicate that community members approached life and death as integrated and cyclical. The broad regional similarities in these practices support the argument that they were part of a shared system of beliefs. There is, however, subtle variation in their local and material implementation. In this context mortuary practices were communal actions that served not only to commemorate the individual identity of the deceased but also as a conduit for collective memory and reaffirmation of identity and community membership.

The low mean age at death among Neolithic villages and the frequency of secondary mortuary practices created the context for rapid shifts in identity and memory. Within two generations memories, events, and objects associated with named individuals would have been transformed from experiential and personal to referential and abstract. This suggests that Neolithic villages would have been structured around the cyclical nature of practice, embodiment, and symbolism. This would have included the manufacture, use, and discard of painted and plastered skulls. Such events highlighted continuity with the past through the selection of certain skulls and objects associated with the deceased and at the same time established the foundation for the projection of these events into the future.

How people remember and forget and how memories are transmitted across generations are important issues in the study of Neolithic social systems. From an archaeological standpoint, it is important to address the materiality of imagery and ritual action in Neolithic communities. In many ways the Neolithic pictorial reoccurrence of the face and head served as a center for memory, for it was a theme that was visually and symbolically expressed in multiple media. This deliberate focus on the face was part of a shared system of ritual practices.

From this perspective, remembrance and forgetting formed an integrated and dialectic process in which Neolithic community members literally, visually, and symbolically dismembered and memorialized persons. Decapitation was a form of depersonalization that allowed the individual to be forgotten and transformed aspects of the individual into collective memories. Governance in Neolithic communities was connected to ritual and particularly the creation and use of material culture such as skull masks, figurines, and statues.

Collectively these patterns represent a complex web involving ritual knowledge, imagery, mortuary practices, and the creation of intergenerational memory and structures of authority within Neolithic communities.

Acknowledgments

This essay emerged out of a presentation made at Columbia University in April 2003 and from a plenary lecture for the annual meeting of the British Association for Near Eastern Archaeology in March 2004. Most of this paper was written in the fall of 2004 while I was on leave at the Department of Archaeology, Reading University, and I am deeply thankful for the professional support and kindness provided by the members of that department. The British Academy and the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, University of Notre Dame, provided the funding for this leave and this and a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities made it possible for me to write, read, and think. This time was made possible, profitable, and enjoyable by Bob Chapman, who served as our gracious host. I am very grateful for the detailed comments and discussions on versions of this paper from Y. Rowan, R. Matthews, M. Chesson, G. Rollefson, R. Chapman, W. Matthews, and R. Bradley. This paper has emerged from discussions over many years with B. Finlayson, G. Rollefson, A. Simmons, R. Joyce, N. Goring-Morris, D. Stordeur, O. Bar-Yosef, M. Verhoeven, and, most of all, Meredith S. Chesson. Danielle Stordeur graciously allowed me to use photographs of the Tell Aswad skulls in figure 2. Constructive comments from eight anonymous reviewers were instrumental in sharpening the focus and context of this work. I thank Roger Matthews for our highly enjoyable and free-range early morning discussions while traveling to London on the train. The constructive criticism and advice of all of these people has immeasurably improved the clarity and organization of this essay. This essay is dedicated to Kaatje Dianne Chesson, born in September 2003, who caused me to consider how intergenerational memory, family, and affection are interconnected in past and present cultures.

Comments

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Kuijt's article is a thought-provoking journey into realms every Near Eastern archaeologist dreams of—the spiritual-cum-social, non-mundane aspects of early Neolithic existence. Alas, as with every dream, there is a rude awakening to be faced. In order to pry this kind of information from the archaeological past, we have no choice but to speculate, yet we should beware of potential pitfalls. The difficulty lies in accommodating the available archaeological data, especially when using ethnographic analogies, which can both support and contradict the views espoused.

The longevity (almost 1,500 calendrical years) and geographic spread of the PPNB *koine* cannot be overemphasized. Certain values were clearly shared by all, as is apparent from their archaeological correlates, but the phenomenon was also characterized by variability on multiple levels, including subsistence, community size, and relative mobility (Bar-Yosef 2007). PPNB societies were heavily imbued with symbolic content, but, again, variability was considerable, laterally and

vertically. Unfortunately, a great deal of information remains missing. Beyond mortuary data, we have little understanding of whether and how hierarchies evolved during the Neolithicization process. What, if anything, do we know about ranking within and between PPNB communities? There is most definitely great variability in mortuary treatments, so in death, at least, there is some evidence for stratification. But did this translate into life? At ʻAin Ghazal a considerable proportion of primary burials were dumped in trash pits (Rollefson 2000*a*), contrasting with Kuijt's "normative" PPNB burial. We can identify shared traditions, but particularistic treatments are present. Understanding the worldview of the PPNB is a staggering task—this was a first-time experience that developed locally, in situ, and, while there was continuity (Belfer-Cohen and Goring Morris 2002, 2005; Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2002), motifs and symbols can and do change in meaning over time.

Some of the statements and suppositions voiced by Kuijt are arbitrary, and we are asked to perform leaps of faith about various aspects of PPNB life. Sometimes these violate "reasonable" assumptions and should be treated with caution.

Modeled skulls have been found in both Middle and Late PPNB contexts in the Levant, bringing us back to the longevity and the dynamic rather than static aspect of the rituals performed by different Neolithic communities drifting apart both spatially and through time as part of the Neolithicization process.

Decapitation is performed *in vivo,* whereas skull removal is a postmortem activity. The distinction is vital, since Kuijt speculates about the meaning and intentionality of sculpting facial features on "mandible-less" skulls. Since most skulls were removed postmortem, after the soft tissues had decayed, a technical problem of keeping skull and mandible together arose, for by then they lacked anatomical connections. Some communities were more adept than others at finding solutions; for example, at sites in the Damascus basin the mandibles were included. One can also compare ʻAin Ghazal, where the modeled faces subsequently fell away because of the inclusion of straw prior to applying the plastered facial features, with Beisamoun and Jericho, where the faces were more firmly anchored. There is a vast array of specific mortuary treatment throughout the PPNB (from Early through Late and even Final stages)—primary burials in various positions, secondary burials with a wide array of treatments (and including grave goods)—and selective skull removal and modeling are not the only phenomena observed.

Another leap is necessary for the premise that plastered skulls and large statues were paraded from community to community as part of seasonal festivities and practices. "Unification" of the Neolithic "nation" is problematic, considering the dynamics of Neolithicization, with developing disparities between and within communities. Heirlooms could age from use and exposure in situ. Handling, manipulation, and presentation do not automatically imply extensive geographic circulation. What do we know from the archaeological data to sustain the notion of high-profile public, familial, and clan ceremonies/rituals, as opposed to those that were exclusionary?

The assertion that plastered skulls were intended to depersonalize the individual can be contradicted. Some skulls do appear generalized, but others display apparently personal details, for example, the dimpled chin on the Kfar HaHoresh skull (Goring-Morris 2000, fig. 3). The degree to which differences between communities stemmed from differentiation in local skills and technological knowledge remains elusive. Ultimately they certainly relate to the decisions of individuals in specific villages and communities. Therefore individualization was likely a primary issue when people came to create a specific plastered skull.

The claim that heirlooms were used to reinforce the social order through the construction of collective memory is neat but definitely not anchored in archaeological data. The same holds true concerning the idea that "while heirlooms may start out as being linked to the identity of particular individuals . . . their meaning is likely to change, become depersonalized, and center on the collective." Why, necessarily, "collective" and "depersonalized"? Alternatively, one may hypothesize that modeling skulls was a means of resurrecting the "individual," providing him with a face after the flesh had decayed and the skull had lost its personal features.

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I am sympathetic to the topic and approach in this article but ignorant of data specifics. I read it as one interested in applying its principles to the Neolithic in Middle America. With this in mind, I raise some issues for further discussion of the intriguing ideas it presents.

1. The definitions of concepts seem to me too labile to operationalize. Many terms soothe the postmodern ear but lack the hard edges needed for organizing phenomena and conducting archaeological analysis. What are the distinctions among commemoration, memory, meaning, and practice? Any sensory experience can trigger multiple memories of previous experiences and emotions, so how does one deal with this polysemy theoretically and analytically? Most of the claims implicate meaning and practice, with memory being consensual meaning among agents in space and through time.

2. An exciting thesis of this article concerns the social construction of interpersonal and transgenerational meaning through action, practice, and ritual and changes in these meanings/memories as conditions changed. All of these involve codes, communication, and repetition in overt attempts to create and promote specific meanings. Analyses of these features require a semiotic approach (see Preucel 2006). I do not see what the specific memories of decorated and manipulated skulls were or why they would have had any evolutionary impact. Each time I checked arguments against facts

I was confronted with assertions or references to data and logic sheltered elsewhere. I am concerned about the assumptions behind some declarations (e.g., that manipulated human remains are of ancestors and related to veneration and lineage priniciples); in Mesoamerica, bones of enemies were frequently curated and manipulated.

3. The disparate scales of analysis in this article could stand clarification. The decorated skulls in question, frequently found in groups, come from six sites and span a millennium. This averages less than one cranium per century per site and even fewer final deposition events or rituals, so it is difficult to imagine in real time the social construction of memory argued for (the documented periodicity being one head every third generation). This temporal frame for the deposition and known use of old skulls is out of sync with the temporality of agency and practice.

4. I am equally concerned with the fine scale. What are the artifact histories? How many times was each skull replastered? What is the evidence for handling and repair? How long were the skulls in circulation? What inferences about their life histories are warranted by use-wear traces on the skulls themselves?

5. The interpretive punch of this article comes from evidence of the manipulation of old heads and their social contexts, but only generic contexts are mentioned. Distinguishing between public and domestic space is a good start, but the argument requires closer analysis. Why were some skulls cached outside houses and in middens? This final context does not appear reverential. Surely the deposition of a cache of skulls altered the structure and meaning of space. Do decorated skulls or traces of them occur only at special houses as indicated by independent evidence?

6. It is interesting that manipulation of human bodies and their representations in other media correspond to a critical transition in human lifeways and economy. I would like to have seen evidence for differences in mortuary practices and representations from the preceding and following periods. As part of this genealogy, it would be well to tighten the relative and absolute chronology of the practices. For example, did the manipulation of entire skulls precede the manipulation of jawless crania? For sites such as Jericho, is it possible to arrange decorated skulls in temporal series? The conflation of all practices in a millennium moment undercuts arguments for the construction of memory. Did the manipulation of skulls represent a new idea or belief? If so, what was it, and what impact did it have on changing social practices? If not, what old idea was promoted in this new way?

7. The article well represents the best of imaginative archaeology that pushes the boundary between fact and fiction, a desperately needed antidote to the lingering positivism and empiricism in which scholars are too easily constrained by interpretive barriers of their own making. Imagined alternatives are the first step in seeking new kinds of data. Archaeology benefits from the kinds of question Kuijt raises if they are subjected to subsequent testing. I anticipate that the speculation in this piece will elicit strong criticism and the old song that there is insufficient evidence for some claims. Fine, let's look for the evidence. I welcome even more speculation to flush the Neolithic out of its interpretive doldrums. What were the specific memories being created, reinforced, or modified? What about alternative choices not exercised by agents? Why did agents encase human skulls in mud and plaster to make the objects they manipulated? Human bone would have been conceptually present in the imagination and memory but not to view, and a same-looking object could have been made without a bone skeleton. What sorts of metaphors and meanings were being evoked? Adam was made of mud, and Eve of his bone. Did decorated skulls send this message? Did specific raw materials matter? Why not just use figurines to represent the ideas conveyed with decorated skulls? How can one be confident that the original occupant of the bony interior of a plastered skull was forgotten? The asserted strategic forgetting-while-remembering appears to counter the power of mnemonics and oral tradition to remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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Kuijt's study of how social memory operated in the MPPNB utilizes a combination of media (human remains, figurines, masks) and foregrounds the place of the dead in this system. I am not familiar with the archaeology of this region but find the avenue of enquiry profound and provocative. The piece illustrates a sophisticated approach to social time whereby the experiences and memories of one generation become transformed by the actions of subsequent generations within the field of ritualized practices. It thus opens up the broad phenomenon of "ancestor veneration" to closer scrutiny.

Such a piece inspires many questions that are doubtless easier to ask than to answer, and mine revolve mainly around the relationship between identities in life and identities after death. While appreciating that Kuijt has given important consideration to the way identities are transformed by sequences of mortuary practices, I think that the use of the term "depersonalizing" needs further exploration. Removing flesh from bones need not depersonalize the dead: Seremetakis (1991, chap. 9) suggests that the exhumation of bones among contemporary Inner Mani communities is intended to bring the dead back into the world of the living. These ancestors are recently deceased persons, and they belong to families who welcome them back through small-scale, intimate exhumations. Kuijt's argument that replastering did not attempt to portray the deceased individual's face and that these surfaces were idealizations is very persuasive. It seems plausible to me that the identities of the MPPNB dead were revised and idealized through skull removal and replastering, which

painted certain aspects of the person in a new (and auspicious?) light. The deceased could be remembered in a selective way as a family member or house ancestor with certain idealized traits. Perhaps it was only when skulls were buried together that the identities of the dead, already revised and selectively remembered, were forgotten and the dead became part of a broader community of anonymous ancestors.

While he mainly suggests that skull replastering created idealized images, Kuijt also argues that replastering and caching of skulls was part of an "individualizing process" for "powerful community members and individuals in positions of leadership." It could equally be postulated that some bodies were selected to stand archetypically for part or all of the community or even the cosmos in mortuary practices. Perhaps the special placements of children's bodies under buildings imply a special status for children (a connection between young children and the ancestors as part of a cycle of life and death has been noted in some communities [Gottlieb 2004; Richards 1996, 182–83]). The removal and "regeneration" of select skulls could imply cosmogony or regenerative renewal of the community and the world, as could the house "foundation" burials. Following up Kuijt's compelling suggestion that death, decay, and renewal were integrated, it would be fascinating to see how principles in the treatment of the dead compare with those in the repeated transformation of places and artefacts, as Kuijt briefly suggests in alluding to Boivin's study of replastered rooms at Çatal Höyük. Could these also relate to the way the past was remembered and forgotten?

I am intrigued by what these mortuary practices could suggest about the generation of living bodies and persons at the time—the formation of personal identities in a world of ancestors. A number of interpretations stress that bodies and persons are composed of social relations and are often understood as complex and composite entities (e.g., Fowler 2004; Meskell and Joyce 2003). The living might embody ancestral spirits or energies, for instance, through the blood, flesh, and bone that the ancestors contributed to their bodies. Persons may consist of multiple spiritual aspects, connected with materical media, which ultimately become separated in mortuary practices (see Fowler 2004, 87–92). In Kuijt's study life seems to be defined primarily by biographical individual identity and death by increasing anonymity and emergence of ancestral qualities. A blurred and more complex relationship between the aspects of the person might be expected where death and life are integrated. Perhaps different aspects of a person (living or dead) were brought to the fore when wearing masks (which may embody otherwise disembodied entities and transform the wearer [Bach Danielsson 2002, 179–82]), handling and replastering skulls (see Verhoeven 2002*a*), and making, redecorating, and breaking effigies. Given Kuijt's aim to consider "how the construction of identity and personhood in village life was structured through routinized practice," I wonder whether and how the masks, the figurines, the skulls found in caches, and the bodies buried under houses exerted a daily presence in people's lives and shaped their memories and their sense of personhood alongside broader daily routines.

As Kuijt acknowledges, these issues are hard to detect with archaeological data, and it would be impossible to discuss all this in one article. There is, though, good reason to believe that further archaeological, ethnographic, and historical comparisons could assist in developing the fascinating picture emerging through this work.

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Kuijt's analysis of Near Eastern Neolithic mortuary practices provides an interesting and welcome change from the traditional view of ancestor worship during this period. Perhaps its most important point is that the role of Neolithic mortuary practices likely changed over time, from a focus on remembrance to one that eventually facilitated the forgetting of specific dead. Too often anthropologists have looked at specific ritual practices as static, representing one moment in time, rather than as being used over a period of time and changing in the way they were perceived and used. While Kuijt is perhaps not the first to make this point, he is among the first to outline it for these data and this region.

At the outset, Kuijt makes it clear that he is limiting his analysis to the southern Levant, the existence, treatment, and placement of plastered, painted, and cached human skulls, and the ritual practices in which these skulls may have been use. His case is persuasive that these specially treated plastered skulls are representative of concepts of identity and personhood, as well as exclusionary rituals. The skulls and the practices reminded people of the past and projected them into the future. He links these practices to a process of remembering the collective and forgetting the individual. I agree with his analysis, but I would like to offer some comments and questions stimulated by it.

One of the key points I have made in a different context (Goldstein 2000) is that, in contrast to primary burial, secondary burial may have little to do with death per se. The rite may come a year or even several years later, and it is triggered not by the death of the individual being afforded the treatment but by some other event. Because of the relative independence between the secondary treatment and the death of the individual, associating treatment with status or other specific items can lead to misleading conclusions. Schroeder (2001) found secondary treatment surprisingly common in societies worldwide and concluded that it frequently represents group association over individual distinctions and is used as an expression of rights to define and continue the group.

Some of the questions I would ask Kuijt include the following: (1) How should we interpret the clay floors in these

structures, and how do these relate to the plastered skulls? Are they part of the ritual as well? Do they appear before or after this period? Do they appear in structures in which skulls do not appear? (2) Given his interpretation of the Neolithic in the southern Levant, how does this change his interpretations of what happened before and after this period? (3) What are some of the reasons the Levantine Neolithic might have operated in reverse from the European Neolithic (that is, with physical separation of residential and burial locations)? Kuijt stresses integration in the Levant, but I doubt that he is necessarily implying a lack of integration elsewhere. While I do not expect him to answer each of these questions, I raise them to point out that his article not only gives us fresh interpretations of this period but also forces us to reexamine earlier and later periods and the broader region. In other words, it does what we expect a good article to do—raise as many questions as it answers.

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Death is one of an infinite number of contingencies that human beings and societies have to respond to. These responses can take various forms—emotional adjustment to the loss of a loved one, a rearrangement of tasks, ties, and obligations to carry on, devising a means with which to remember/forget the dead, and so on—and involve a series of choices, a differentiation and articulation of the change(s) to which they are responding. This differentiation and articulation draw upon certain rules (both discursive and practical/embodied) and resources (both functional and symbolic). These rules and resources are shaped by the memory of past responses to death and their material and nonmaterial consequences. The consequences are monitored by referring to the operation of other fields of social life (e.g., dwelling, subsistence, production and reproduction, exchange). If they are perceived to interfere with the smooth operation of those fields, the rules and the resources will be modified or replaced. Thus human beings cope with death and through it various other difficulties that the world generates. From these general observations it follows that (1) responses to death constitute a distinct field of thought and practice—a discourse—and (2) the structure of this discourse, consisting of rules (ranging from how to treat the physical remains of the dead to how to remember/forget the dead) and resources (ranging from the physical remains of the dead to the particular meanings attached to them), is constituted by past experiences of dealing with contingencies generated not only in that discourse itself but also in the whole range of other discourses constituting the society. Kuijt's investigative endeavor focuses on the details of the operation of this particular discourse and the effects it generates.

One of the most fascinating points Kuijt's work has revealed is that the prolongation of the process of engaging with the dead led to a significant change in the way the living perceived time and the rhythm of lives, their bodies and selves, and their community and communality. The living became aware of the flow of time beyond the immediate cycle of human, plant, and animal reproduction and began projecting what was perceived/constructed to be their norm or desirable state of being into the future, and they began differentiating the individual and the communal in their self-identification and strategically prioritizing the one or the other in different socio-historical settings. The latter, Kuijt argues, was achieved by the invention of the technology of remembering and forgetting the individual dead by representing their remains either in a realistic, hence personalized, or in an idealized, hence depersonalized, manner. The changes that took place in the communities of the MPPNB Levant were the effects of the operation of a particular discourse, and the emergence of that discourse is partially explained by the invention of a particular technology of representing the dead.

A detailed mapping of the structure of this particular discourse is not enough, however, for a full understanding of its uniqueness. The structure of the discourse is constituted by preexisting resources, both perceptual and material, and these are the products of the operation not only of the discourse of engagement with the dead but also of other social discourses. I would argue that investigations of the way in which various social discourses were entangled with one another and how and why the particular structure of a discourse was generated by this entanglement would help us to make more sense of the uniqueness of a discourse such as the one Kuijt examines.

For instance, the remodeling of the faces of the dead (see fig. 7) appears to me a standardization of their faces in terms of the idealized face of the infant. The coexistence of infantness and adultness in individual skulls, I would argue, evoked the image of the cyclic regeneration of life, and this image would have been metaphorically linked to the regeneration of communities and crops. To point out yet another possible element of the structure of the discourse in this way, however, is not enough; why this particular linkage between those images and concepts—a new structure of the discourse—emerged at this particular time remains to be investigated. To answer this question we must examine the wider context constituted by the operation of the whole range of social discourses, influenced by factors such as climate, population, and social organization, in which this particular linkage emerged. Causal connections between the contents of the custom and the contents of other discourses need to be found and explained. Conducting these investigations will necessitate more refined relative-chronological control over the entire range of the data available and a shift of emphasis from the interpretative reconstruction of synchronic linkages between mental and material factors, which Kuijt has done very

well, to the explanatory reconstruction of the diachronic causal connections between them.

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In this thoughtful paper, Kuijt presents a nuanced, integrated approach to MPPNB mortuary practices to argue, convincingly, that they seem to have revolved at least in part around skull plastering as a way of transforming deceased individuals into generic ancestral figures as part of a ritual pathway that linked MPPNB communities to their social past and future. His interpretation that the focus on the face is embodied by skull plastering is, in my view, amply supported by the data that he discusses. While I have some general questions about some of the conclusions reached by Kuijt, these are mainly additional lines of inquiry that might be of use in providing independent confirmation of his arguments. Not being a specialist in the Neolithic, I limit my comments to more general issues about prehistoric mortuary practices and broader technological observations about the "function" of plastered skulls as objects of collective remembrance.

First, while I am largely convinced by his arguments concerning skull plastering, I found myself wishing that Kuijt had contextualized *the prevalence* of this practice within the broader corpus of MPPNB (and more generally Levantine Neolithic) mortuary practices. As he documents in table 1, skull plastering clearly existed alongside other forms of treatment of the dead, and it would be worthwhile to discuss just how common (or not) that specific practice was. Discussing all of these in greater detail would permit a better appreciation of the proportional preponderance of skull plastering relative to other practices and of its central importance in MPPNB mortuary behavior.

Second, Kuijt cogently argues that skull plastering represents an intentional focus on the face and that it reflects established practices of ritual decapitation in the context of generalized ancestor representation. That said, is it reasonable to assume that a focus on the face should have a single meaning? Might this focus have additional and/or alternative meanings in the MPPNB, especially in light of the focus on peri/postmortem manipulation and modification of various cranial remains manifest in the repertoire of mortuary practices of other periods? Restricting this argument to the Paleolithic (see also Riel-Salvatore and Clark 2001), I can point to several examples of the selective treatment of cranial remains, including the Kebara 2 Mousterian burial, in which the skull was removed by humans some time after interment (Bar-Yosef et al. 1992, the Aurignacian deposits at Brassempouy, Isturitz, Tarté, and La Combe, where human teeth were forcefully removed from their gums and pierced to be transformed into ornaments (White, Henry-Gambier, and Normand 2003), the Middle Stone Age deposits at Herto, where human skulls bear traces of defleshing and of repeated handling (Clark et al. 2003), and the Early Upper Paleolithic of Eastern Europe (e.g., Peştera cu Oase and perhaps Mladeč), where crania may have been deposited in select caves in the absence of postcranial remains (e.g., Svoboda 2006). While these examples admittedly do not evidence as clear or coherent a set of ritual practices as the MPPNB material summarized by Kuijt and while he does cite Belfer-Cohen's (1991) discussion of cranium removal in the Levantine Epipaleolithic, it is nonetheless striking that some of the earliest evidence of purposeful treatment of the dead also displays a focus on the human skull, thus perhaps pointing to a wider set of potential concerns than solely the perpetuation of social structure.

Lastly, I find Kuijt's discussion of the circulation of plastered skulls across time and space fascinating. Since the practice of cranial plastering lasted for about a millennium, I wonder whether it might be possible to estimate the overall use-life of those skulls on the basis of, say, comparative dating of a given skull, its first incidence of plastering, and the fill of the cache in which it was found. It would be very interesting to determine empirically whether these ceremonial items had a standard use-life and, if not, what factors might have influenced this differential longevity (e.g., individual prestige, social dominance of its polity of origin). Combined with isotope analyses to establish the most likely provenience of individual skulls and with DNA analysis to trace potential genetic relationships between the skulls found within a given cache, it might yet be possible to reach an even richer understanding of MPPNB mortuary practices and the active human decisions that structured them.

Reply

I thank all the reviewers for their constructive and insightful comments. They have drawn attention to a number of unresolved issues that require clarification, and they highlight the benefits of dialogue exploring alternative perspectives. Their concerns about Neolithic frameworks of time and space highlight the significant challenges in synthesizing archaeological field data. Temporal scales for Pre-Pottery Neolithic villages across space contain large gaps, especially since there are very few excavated Neolithic sites from the Near Eastern MPPNB and even fewer published detailed reports on these projects. As Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris point out, the paucity of data creates a challenge for discussions that go beyond individual settlements and descriptive treatments of material objects. With the ongoing excavations at Tell Aswad, Kfar HaHoresh, and Tell Halula and with final publications in process for 'Ain Ghazal and Basta, we are poised to witness

a revolution in our understanding of the Neolithic as a social process rather than just a domestication event. Recently researchers are moving beyond traditional materialist boundaries and categories. Verhoeven (2002*a*, 2007) and Goring-Morris and Horwitz (2007), for example, have produced careful comparative considerations of the material links between human action, mortuary practices, and identity.

Similarly, Clark and Riel-Salvatore lament the lack of a more detailed understanding of the context of mortuary practices before, after, and during the MPPNB. Publications on Pre-Pottery Neolithic burial practices typically focus on individual villages and describe individual burials without much consideration of their context and spatial placement. While there are some excellent detailed descriptions of individual burial treatments (e.g., Goring-Morris and Horwitz 2007; Rollefson 2000*a*), there are no publications outlining the spatial variation of all the mortuary practices in a single MPPNB site, let alone a comparative treatment of practices in different settlements through time. Our limited understanding is a byproduct of limited horizontal excavation of settlements and, in some cases, the fact that the excavations are still years away from publication. Researchers such as Verhoeven (2007) have elegantly demonstrated, however, that we can start to disentangle the intricate associations between ritual and symbolism and, as illustrated through this debate, reflect upon the materiality of memory and agency in Neolithic villages.

One of the greatest challenges that archaeologists face emerges from the need to reconcile normative patterns with diversity of evidence. What is "normal"? When do behavior and its material correlates cross the line from normative to variant? Wilk (2004, 89) argues that anthropologists have trouble with the fact that cultures can become at once more connected with one another in terms of shared material culture and more self-consciously different, and this is one of the greatest hurdles for students of the MPPNB. Neolithic mortuary studies come in two forms: broad treatments of regional similarities and individual descriptive treatments of specific sites. As Wilk notes, the next step is to identify shared regional cultural patterns. Intuitively it seems reasonable to assume that there would be less variation in mortuary practices within the household and more at the level of the village, the subregion, and the region. If this assumption is correct, then we need to consider the scale of comparison in our analysis and discussion and how this might be linked to a convergence or divergence in practices or both.

Documenting patterns of similarity and difference will be only the beginning; next we will need to interpret the variation we observe. For example, Clark, Fowler, and Riel-Salvatore argue for the importance of individual life histories of objects in general and of plastered skulls in particular. Unquestionably this is *the* critical next step in Neolithic mortuary research, and it will require researchers to build on other studies exploring agency and the person (e.g., Dobres and Robb 2000; Dornan 2002; Robb 2007). As I noted, ethnographic sources and archaeological evidence indicate that plastered skulls were used multiple times, perhaps circulated as ritual cargo over multiple generations. Individuals had unique life histories, and after biological death individual plastered and unplastered skulls probably served as objects that transcended time and space. Other than casual observations of multiple plaster layers and wear traces on the plaster, researchers have yet to develop methods for tracing the circulation and reuse of skulls, let alone for producing rich, holistic reconstructions of life histories of artifacts.

To understand objects' life histories it will be necessary for us to reflect upon what can be termed the foundational life-history pathways of primary burials along the dimensions of age, gender, status, and location of death. Building upon this, we will need to conceptualize the expanded or "alternative" life-history pathways of secondary burials for the human body (see Robb 2007). Such practices potentially involved the recirculation, modification, and ritual use of plastered and unplastered skulls. It is only with secondary mortuary practices that we see the material construction of the social person and the bodily-manipulation construction of memory and identity. Mizoguchi highlights one interesting avenue for exploration by drawing our attention to the coexistence of infant and adult features in individual plastered skulls and the fact that this might reflect the notion of a cyclical regeneration of life that is metaphorically linked to the regeneration of communities and crops. Certainly, MPPNB mortuary practices included differential treatment of adults and children, and how age, identity, and memory were represented is an important line of inquiry.

As Riel-Salvatore and Clark note, isotopic research and DNA analysis offer promising avenues of exploration. Other physical methods, such as micromorphology, could potentially be used to create plaster thin sections and help us understand the formation and modification of plastered skulls at different times. Collectively, these methods have great potential for identifying the basic material manifestations of life histories. As with stratigraphic analysis, however, the more challenging task is the construction of nuanced household and village-scale life-history models that disentangle household-scale variation from shared practices within the broader community.

It is rewarding to see that this paper has provoked reflections on alternative interpretations of the data patterning. For example, Riel-Salvatore asks whether it is "reasonable to assume that a focus on the face should have a single meaning." The answer is no. While we may see similar material patterning and organization of practices, I assume that practices, meanings, and performances varied in different periods of the Neolithic and across the Near East. To explore this variation we must develop data-based models that account for household and community variability before considering regional practices.

Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris argue that skull plastering was part of an individualizing process. I agree, but, as noted by Fowler, there are elements of skull removal and plastering

that are linked to a symbolic collective. The problem with this categorization is that memory, meaning, and identity change over time. Rather than restricting ourselves to labeling based on dual categories, it is reasonable to assume that the intent and impact of skull removal, plastering, and caching varied over time and between households within communities. We need to explore the shifting and coexisting dimensions of individualization and depersonalization in the context of different points in life histories, including the production and recirculation of plastered skulls.

Clark argues, and I strongly agree, that this essay forces us to think creatively about broader social questions and processes and to do so in a ways that are consistent with the archaeological data. To move beyond what Clark terms "lingering positivism and empiricism" we must adopt a broad comparative perspective and draw upon ethnographic case studies that are geographically and temporally separate from the Neolithic. After all, there are no direct ethnographic analogues for the agricultural villagers of 10,000 years ago. Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris are clearly uncomfortable with the use of some of the ethnographic analogues I employ. They correctly point out that different ethnographic accounts support different perspectives. This should not unnerve us, for unless we restrict ourselves to a strict materialist approach, we need to draw upon a range of different ethnographic accounts to understand the world(s) of the past. Such ethnographic comparisons help us develop new perspectives and, as is argued by Fowler, Mizoguchi, and Clark, alter our views about the past and frame new interpretations. I am delighted to see that this article facilitates the discussion of alternative reconstructions of Neolithic intergenerational memory, identity, and the materialization of death.

—Ian Kuijt

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