Death And Empire: The Genesis And Expression Of Imperial Identity Via Assyrian Mortuary Contexts

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Death And Empire: The Genesis And Expression Of Imperial Identity Via Assyrian Mortuary Contexts

Abstract
The ancient Assyrian Empire at its greatest extent in the 7th century BCE, spanned almost one million square kilometers. As the world’s first regional-scale empire, it established control over many pre-existing settlements, drawing them into the fold of not only Assyrian political dominance, but Assyrian cultural influence. In the Middle Assyrian period – from the very beginning of Assyrian expansion in the 14th c. BCE to the collapse of the Bronze Age in the 11th c. BCE – the Assyrian empire underwent its first phases of expansion. After a brief period of contraction, the Neo-Assyrian period saw the culmination of this expansion, exploding outward to Western Iran in the east and Egypt in the west in the 8th and 7th centuries, before its fall in 609 BCE. Undoubtedly, this new Assyrian presence, known to us mainly through extensive provincial administration records, affected the local populations of new provincial centers from the inception of control onwards. The question I then ask is, to what extent were these populations affected by Assyrian culture, and was it enough to change the way they perceived themselves? I address these questions through an analysis of mortuary material, arguing that grave contents provide a unique avenue to explore cultural identity. Mortuary material is one of the most conservative forms of culture; it is deeply rooted in tradition, personal belief systems, and group identity. This dissertation argues that this long period saw the rise of a distinct Assyrian imperial identity through examination of mortuary data from both central and provincial sites within the Assyrian Empire. Middle and Neo-Assyrian burials from three geographically-broad areas serve as case studies: Aššur, as the cultural capital of the empire and our main source for the development of Assyrian mortuary practices; Tell Billa, as a major provincial site on the edge of the Assyrian core; and sites of the Balikh and Khabur rivers, located at the furthest edges of early Assyrian control. I argue that that distance from the empire's center explains differences in how “Assyrian” provincial burial practices became, with Assyrian culture permeating in varying degrees through the local, non-elite populations. Ultimately, I conclude that the inhabitants of the provincial sites began to view themselves as authentically “Assyrian” in the late Neo-Assyrian period.

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DEATH AND EMPIRE: THE GENESIS AND EXPRESSION OF IMPERIAL
IDENTITY VIA ASSYRIAN MORTUARY CONTEXTS

Petra M. Creamer

A DISSERTATION

in

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Dominik Bonatz, Full Professor at the Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Archeology, Freie Universität Berlin
Dedicated to my mother, Aleta Bonini, and her endless encouragement of my intellectual pursuits, both productive and not.
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can’t wait for all the rest.
ABSTRACT

DEATH AND EMPIRE: THE GENESIS AND EXPRESSION OF IMPERIAL IDENTITY VIA ASSYRIAN MORTUARY CONTEXTS

Petra M. Creamer

The ancient Assyrian Empire at its greatest extent in the 7th century BCE, spanned almost one million square kilometers. As the world’s first regional-scale empire, it established control over many pre-existing settlements, drawing them into the fold of not only Assyrian political dominance, but Assyrian cultural influence. In the Middle Assyrian period – from the very beginning of Assyrian expansion in the 14th c. BCE to the collapse of the Bronze Age in the 11th c. BCE – the Assyrian empire underwent its first phases of expansion. After a brief period of contraction, the Neo-Assyrian period saw the culmination of this expansion, exploding outward to Western Iran in the east and Egypt in the west in the 8th and 7th centuries, before its fall in 609 BCE. Undoubtedly, this new Assyrian presence, known to us mainly through extensive provincial administration records, affected the local populations of new provincial centers from the inception of control onwards. The question I then ask is, to what extent were these populations affected by Assyrian culture, and was it enough to change the way they perceived themselves? I address these questions through an analysis of mortuary material, arguing that grave contents provide a unique avenue to explore cultural identity. Mortuary material is one of the most conservative forms of culture; it is deeply rooted in tradition, personal belief systems, and group identity.
This dissertation argues that this long period saw the rise of a distinct Assyrian imperial identity through examination of mortuary data from both central and provincial sites within the Assyrian Empire. Middle and Neo-Assyrian burials from three geographically-broad areas serve as case studies: Aššur, as the cultural capital of the empire and our main source for the development of Assyrian mortuary practices; Tell Billa, as a major provincial site on the edge of the Assyrian core; and sites of the Balikh and Khabur rivers, located at the furthest edges of early Assyrian control. I argue that that distance from the empire’s center explains differences in how “Assyrian” provincial burial practices became, with Assyrian culture permeating in varying degrees through the local, non-elite populations. Ultimately, I conclude that the inhabitants of the provincial sites began to view themselves as authentically “Assyrian” in the late Neo-Assyrian period.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ IV

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................ IX

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..................................................................................................... XI

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................... XV

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ............................................................................................... XVI

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1

The Assyrian Empire ......................................................................................................... 6

The Study of Mortuary Culture ........................................................................................ 16

Interpreting Identity Expression in Assyrian Burials ......................................................... 22

Constructing a Methodology ............................................................................................. 29

The Wealth Value Index .................................................................................................. 34

Chapter Organization ....................................................................................................... 37

CHAPTER 2: A THEORY OF IDENTITY IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH .................... 41

Intersectionality and Modern Identities .......................................................................... 42
  Ethnic Identity ............................................................................................................... 45
  Gender Identity ............................................................................................................ 49
  Socio-economic Identity ............................................................................................... 54
  Other Identities (Age, Settlement/Community, Family Position) ................................ 59

Existing Identities within Northern Mesopotamia ......................................................... 62

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 65

CHAPTER 3: THE MORTUARY CULTURE OF AN EMPIRE ............................................. 67

The Assyrian Afterlife ....................................................................................................... 68

Ritual and Practice .......................................................................................................... 71
Chapter 5: The Graves of Tell Billā – Šībanība

The Excavations ......................................................................................... 163
The Graves................................................................................................. 166
Type 1: Pit graves ....................................................................................... 166
Type 2: Sherd graves ................................................................................. 166
Type 3: Jar graves ....................................................................................... 167
Type 4: Sarcophagi graves ........................................................................ 168
Type 5: Brick graves .................................................................................. 169
Type 6: Cist graves ..................................................................................... 170
Type 7: Composite graves ......................................................................... 170

The Tombs: ................................................................................................. 172
Type 1: Corbelled-ceiling tombs ............................................................... 172
Type 2: Barrel vaulted-ceiling tombs ....................................................... 173
Type 3: Rock-cut tombs ............................................................................ 174

The Placement of Burials .......................................................................... 177
The Missing Dead ...................................................................................... 178

Conclusion ................................................................................................ 180

Chapter 4: The Graves of Qalat Shergat – Aššūr

The Excavations ......................................................................................... 101
Aššūr’s Environment ................................................................................ 105
Aššūr in the Assyrian Empire ................................................................. 106
The Burial Data and its Challenges .......................................................... 109
Analysis and Discussion of the Burials ..................................................... 112
The Occupants ......................................................................................... 113
The Burial Contents ................................................................................ 114

Spatial Patterns ........................................................................................ 118
HOUSE e7:36 ........................................................................................... 118
Houses h8:1 and h8:2 .............................................................................. 119
HOUSE 9 .................................................................................................. 119

Conclusions ................................................................................................ 123

Chapter 5: The Graves of Tell Billā – Šībanība

The Excavations ......................................................................................... 163
Šībanība in the Assyrian Empire ............................................................. 167
Dating the Burials .................................................................................... 170
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Example assemblages related to Wealth Value index.

Table 4.1: Burial phases at Aššur

Table 4.2: Number of Occupants per type of burial at Aššur (* indicates a burial within a Tomb).

Table 4.3: Arm positions of the deceased at Aššur

Table 4.4: Leg Positions of the deceased at Aššur

Table 4.5: Burial positions of the deceased in relation to the Types of Burials (* indicate burial in Tomb)

Table 4.6: Number of burials which contained certain types of objects, by phase

Table 4.7: Wealth Values of burials at Aššur by phase

Table 5.1: A Summary of the Investigations at Tell Billa

Table 5.2: The number of burials containing different types of objects at Tell Billa, by level.

Table 5.3: Positions of the legs of the deceased at Tell Billa, by level.

Table 5.4: Positions of the arms of the deceased at Tell Billa, by level.

Table 5.5: Types of burials at Tell Billa compared to the positions of the deceased.

Table 6.1: Sites included in this chapter
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1.1: Map of the Near East, with the Assyrian heartland marked in orange.

Figure 1.2: The greatest extent of Middle Assyrian hegemony (reached under Tiglath-Pileser I)

Figure 1.3: Shalmaneser III’s Black Obelisk, with registers showing tribute and booty brought into the heartland (courtesy of the British Museum Online Collections)

Figure 1.4: The fullest extent of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, reached under Aṣšurbanipal.

Figure 1.5: The scale employed in the Wealth Value index.

Figure 2.1: Suteans bearing byssus-garments (a regional style of cloth native to the Middle Euphrates region) (Shalmaneser III’s Black Obelisk, detail: photo by author).

Figure 2.2: Tribute-bearers from Gilzanu (northwest Iran) carrying cauldrons, metals, and spears/ staves native to the region (Shalmaneser III’s Black Obelisk, detail: photo by author).

Figure 3.1: Plan of the concept of the Mesopotamian cosmos (after Bottéro 2001:77)

Figure 3.2: Example of a typical sherd grave. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.45)

Figure 3.3: An example of a single-jar burial. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.39)

Figure 3.4: Examples of typical double-jar burials (after Pedde 2015: Taf.28)

Figure 3.5: Example of a single-piece sarcophagus (after Pedde 2015: Taf.67)
Figure 3.6: An example of a rounded double-piece sarcophagus. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.49)

Figure 3.7: An example of a squared double-piece sarcophagus. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.48)

Figure 3.8: Example of a mudbrick grave. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.33)

Figure 3.9: Examples of composite graves from Aššur. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.98)

Figure 3.10: The different types of Middle Assyrian tomb vaults: A. Kraggewolbe mit Tragmauer, B. Kraggewolbe ohne Tragmauer, C. Paraboltonne ohne Tragmauer, D. Paraboltonne mit Tragmauer, E. Rundtonne mit Tragmauer (after Pedde 2015: Taf.4)

Figure 3.11: Example of a rock-cut tomb. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.104)

Figure 3.12: Locations of graves underneath houses at Aššur. Note the niche along the back wall of the “grave room” in House 2. Child graves in red, adult graves in green, tombs in blue, tablet archives in yellow. Topology plan: entrances in red, courtyards in green, grave rooms in yellow (after Hauser 2012: Taf. V)

Figure 3.13: Plan of Tomb 53 at Aššur. Note the niches on either side of the main chamber (after Hauser 2012:118)

Figure 4.1: Map of Aššur (Miglus 1996: Plan 1)

Figure 4.2: Percentage of Burials per Phase at Aššur

Figure 4.3: Types of Burials at Aššur by Phase
Figure 4.4: Number of Occupants per burial at Aššur, excluding unknowns.

Figure 4.5: Ages of the deceased at Aššur by phase

Figure 4.6: Body positions of the deceased at Aššur (excluding unknowns) by Phase

Figure 4.7: An example of a burial at Aššur with the deceased holding a ceramic vessel (after Pedde 2015, Tafel 124)

Figure 4.8: Orientation of the Deceased at Aššur by Phase (excluding unknowns)

Figure 4.9: Directions facing of the deceased at Aššur, excluding unknowns

Figure 4.10: Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian pottery types recovered from burials at Aššur (after Haller 1954: Taf.2-5)

Figure 4.11: Silver and Gold objects in burials at Aššur by phase

Figure 4.12: Wealth Values of the burials in Aššur by Phase

Figure 4.13: Line graph showing Wealth Values of the three phases at Aššur. Note the sharp decline of richer burials in the Neo-Assyrian period, as opposed to the more equal distributions of the Middle Assyrian and Transition periods.

Figure 4.14: Ages of the deceased at Aššur compared to general wealth values

Figure 4.15: Burial Contexts at Aššur by Phase

Figure 4.16: Map showing the boundaries of Aššur’s Inner and Outer Cities (Neo-Assyrian phase) with Houses discussed in text

Figure 4.17: House e7:36 with burials marked (after Miglus 1996 Plan 117)
Figure 4.18: House h8:1 in Aššur with burials marked (after Miglus 1996, Plan 131)

Figure 4.19: House h8:2 in Aššur with burials marked (after Miglus 1996, Plan 132)

Figure 4.20: House 9 at Aššur with burials marked (after Preusser 1955, Taf. 28)

Figure 4.21: Map of Cremation burials (Type 3.4; Red Circles) and Mudbrick burials (Type 5; Orange Squares)

Figure 5.1: The mound of Tell Billa (exact boundaries of Area VI unknown) (basemap: Google Earth 2018)

Figure 5.2: Map of Area VII at Tell Billa, displaying the houses of Level II (Houses marked; original plan courtesy of the Penn Museum Archives)

Figure 5.3: Map of Area VII at Tell Billa, displaying the structures of Level I (courtesy of the Penn Museum Archives)

Figure 5.4: The Gates of Nineveh, with the Šibaniba Gate marked (from Reade 1978)

Figure 5.5: Number of burials per period at Tell Billa.

Figure 5.6: The single example of a vaulted tomb in Area VII of Tell Billa – Tomb W84 (Level II) (courtesy of the Penn Museum Archives)

Figure 5.7: The types of burials found at Tell Billa by period

Figure 5.8: The numbers of occupants per burial at Tell Billa

Figure 5.9: The ages of the deceased at Tell Billa
Figure 5.10: Comparison of Level II ceramics from Tell Billa with Middle Assyrian examples from elsewhere (after Creamer forthcoming b)

Figure 5.11: Comparison of Level I ceramics from Tell Billa with Neo-Assyrian ceramics from Aššur (after Creamer forthcoming b)

Figure 5.12: The types of objects found within the burials at Tell Billa (all levels)

Figure 5.13: The wealth value of the burials at Tell Billa.

Figure 5.14: Wealth values of Tell Billa’s burials compared to burial type.

Figure 5.15: The orientations of the burials at Tell Billa, based on direction of the container

Figure 5.16: The directions in which the heads of the deceased were facing at Tell Billa

Figure 5.17: The body positions of the deceased at Tell Billa

Figure 5.18: Map of House Complex B in Level II/ Level IA

Figure 5.19: Map of House Complex E in Level II/ Level IA

Figure 5.20: Map of House A in Level II/ Level IA

Figure 5.21: Map of House C in Level II/ Level IA

Figure 5.22: Map of House D in Level II/ Level IA

Figure 5.23: Map of House G in Level II/ Level IA

Figure 5.24: Map of Houses F and H in Level II/ Level IA
Fig. 5.25: The burials of Level I shown in relation to Level I remains (after plans from the Penn Museum archives)

Figure 6.1: A map of the Upper Khabur/ Balikh region, with the sites in this chapter.

Figure 6.2: Burials discussed in this chapter.

Figure 6.3: Statue of local ruler Hadad-Yi’si from Tell Fekheriye (after Novák 2016, Fig.

Figure 6.4: A statue at Tell Halaf, a cremation burial was found at its feet (after Novák 2016, Fig. 2)

Figure 6.5: Types of Burials at Tell Halaf

Figure 6.6: Wealth Value of burials at Tell Halaf.

Figure 6.7: Burial types at Tell Mohammed Diyab.

Figure 6.8: Wealth values of burials at Tell Mohammed Diyab.

Figure 6.9: Types of burials at Tell Ta’ban.

Figure 6.10: Wealth values of burials at Tell Ta’ban.

Figure 6.11: A view of Tell Fekheriye from the south (after the Tell Fekheriye Project website)

Figure 6.12: Map of Tell Fekheriye’s most recent excavations (after Bartl & Bonatz 2013).

Figure 6.13: Types of burials at Tell Fekheriye
Figure 6.14: Ages of the deceased at Tell Fekheriye

Figure 6.15: Example of a mudbrick grave next to a single-jar burial in Trench CII at Tell Fekheriye (courtesy of Bonatz 2015 Fig.14)

Figure 6.16: Wealth values of the burials at Tell Fekheriye

Figure 6.17: Types of burials at Tell al-Hamidiya.

Figure 6.18: Wealth values of the burials at Tell al-Hamidiya.

Figure 6.19: Distributions of grave types for Levels 3-6 at Tell Sabi Abyad (from Düring et al. 2015)

Figure 6.20: Types of Burials at Tell Sabi Abyad.

Figure 6.21: Wealth values of the burials at Tell Sabi Abyad.

Figure 6.22: Plan of Tell Barri and the excavation Areas (courtesy of Benoit 2016)

Figure 6.23: Types of burials at Tell Barri

Figure 6.24: Positions of the deceased at Tell Barri

Figure 6.25: Wealth values of the burials at Tell Barri.

Figure 6.26: The overall types of burials found in the Upper Khabur/ Balikh Assyrian contexts.

Figure 6.27: The positions of the deceased within the burials of the Upper Khabur/ Balikh Region.
Figure 6.28: The Wealth Values of the burials in the Khabur/ Balikh Region.
CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

Imperial Assyrian culture has a long history of academic attention, but little research has been conducted on the expression of Assyrian identity outside of the royal and elite classes. Non-elite inhabitants of Assyria are studied largely via the analysis of material culture. In this dissertation, I use the remains of Assyrian mortuary culture to investigate the development and expression of personal and communal identity in an ancient imperial context from the Middle to the Neo-Assyrian period. Non-elite graves, especially when hailing from consecutive periods, can provide insight into individual and community developments. The grave goods, grave types, and placement of the corpse all reflect a series of choices made by the living to represent the deceased – drawing on aspects of identity such as gender, familial ties, ethnicity, class, and so on. I argue that the construction of the grave and the arrangement of its contents display a purposeful expression of identity. I use this analysis to investigate questions such as: what did it mean for inhabitants of the Assyrian Empire to be “Assyrian”?

Using previously-unpublished burials from the Assyrian provincial site of Tell Billa in modern-day northern Iraq and both legacy and recently-excavated burials from seven sites in the Upper Khabur/Balikh region, ranging in date from the Middle Assyrian (c. 1365-935 BCE) to the Neo-Assyrian (935-609 BCE) periods, I investigate material markers of identity via provincial mortuary contexts. I then compare this to the mortuary culture of Aššur – a capital city and cultural center of the Assyrian Empire. I employ Aššur’s graves in my research to understand how typical Assyrian identity is expressed via mortuary contexts. The Tell Billa and Upper Khabur/Balikh assemblages will be
compared to this Assyrian expression of identity. The wealth of data at hand (over 1,200 burials are included in this project) allows me to subdivide my comparisons between the Middle Assyrian period and the Neo-Assyrian period to understand trends of continuity and change in identity expression. The exceptional length of the Assyrian Empires creates a unique opportunity to observe long-term effects and developments within Assyrian identity in both the provinces and capital. Ultimately, my investigation shows that the development of Assyrian imperialism greatly affected both individual and community identities over space and time. I argue that, while provincial centers adopted aspects of Assyrian identity, the degree of Assyrian acculturation (based on similarities in the mortuary culture to that of Aššur’s) in the provinces was stronger in provincial sites closer to the core of the empire (Tell Billa) than it was in more peripheral centers (sites of the Upper Khabur/Balikh). However, Assyrian influence in all areas increased over time, with later graves exhibiting a more typically “Assyrian” composition than what is seen in earlier graves, including the adoption of Assyrian tomb architecture and grave goods. I suggest that the subjects of the Assyrian Empire grew, over generations, to perceive themselves as “Assyrian” – not just as Assyrian subjects.

Studying non-elite identity in this manner and at this scale gives us insight into imperial developments, its lasting effects on provincial populations, and the perspectives of the non-ruling classes in imperial Assyria. Historical sources from the Assyrian Empire are overwhelmingly oriented towards the imperial elite, and the same has been true of the majority of archaeological work, which has often focused on palaces and other
elite buildings.¹ This research focuses instead on marginalized groups; investigates the relationship between provincial inhabitants and the imperial core; and acts as the first holistic longue durée examination of burial practices in Assyria.

Material culture is crucial to study, as it reflects the performance of identities via the presence, form, and function of objects resulting from these practices, including use-patterns and context of these objects (Jones 1997). S. Jones defines culture as made up of a set of shared ideas or beliefs, which are maintained through regular interaction within a group, and includes the transmission of shared cultural norms to subsequent generations through socialization (1997:24). Cultures are not holistic and monolithic entities, but rather dynamic and arbitrary. The negotiation between identities maintained by groups drawn into an empire and the introduction of ideas and practices of the ruling group creates a complex setting of tensions between different actors (Mattingly 2004; Liebmann 2012; Wernke 2013; Khatchadourian 2016). This is especially relevant in the provincial centers of the Assyrian Empire which were occupied by the Assyrians both in the late second and first millennia, covering the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods. While these areas are typically considered “Assyrian” after the 13th century BCE (Akkermans & Schwartz 2003), there is great variation within this geographical expanse over seven hundred years of inconsistent Assyrian imperial hegemony, providing an opportunity to

¹ Historically, this prioritization of monumental buildings is evident in the famous early excavations of Nimrud (Layard 1849-1853), Nineveh (Layard 1848), Susa (Dieulafoy 1888), Babylon (Koldeway 1914), Zincirli (Spemann 1898), and many others. This trend has, however, endured throughout the last century: at Halaf (Oppenheimer 1933), Qatna (Al-Maqdissi 2008; Pfälzner 2015; Morandi-Bonacossi 2008), Ebla (Matthiae 2009), Emar (Margueron 1975), and others.
observe how the development and practice of identities changed over time within the empire.

Death, funeral, and post-mortem studies provide new perspectives in the how such identities manifest themselves. The archaeology of death can provide unique insight into these negotiations over imperial identity, given their importance to living communities (Porter & Boutin 2014). Burial practices, including funerary rituals and continued care for the dead, provide an opportunity to create and reinforce the identity and memories of the living community. One of the goals of this analysis is to recreate the practices surrounding not just death and the mortuary cult, but those aspects of funerary and postmortem ritual pertaining to living communities. The rich evidence from mortuary practices in the Assyrian core, compared to those found in provincial settings, allow for this type of assessment.

A thorough analysis of material culture such as this is necessary, as it is difficult to discern the exact status, situation, reception of marginalized groups within the Assyrian Empire using historical documentation. No doubt these categories were in flux as the empire underwent a series of expansions, contractions, and administrative restructuring. Most written evidence just details the presence of these marginalized identities, and even then, usually through the distortion of an outsider (the scribe). It is perhaps telling that one of our most popular methods of identifying ethnic groups is by the linguistic background of names, which necessarily obstructs and underrepresents these groups (probably drastically, as we also have evidence for Assyrian subjects changing their names to more typically-Assyrian ones) (Parpola 2004). As is appropriate,
the contemporary textual record will be addressed to add nuance and setting to the interpretation of these burials.

In an imperial setting, shifting the way one acted and how one was perceived could provide both indirect and direct benefits. Sometimes, these benefits manifested in the form of higher social standing and wealth – in other cases, these changes were a matter of survival (performing within Assyrian restrictions and settling on Assyrian land were choices of deportees, even if made under duress; rebellion or discord were also choices, but likely would have resulted in death or more restricted conditions of living).

Such a massive empire appropriately brought significant changes to the lives of its inhabitants. What had once been independent kingdoms with varying ethnic groups and cultural practices were now absorbed under Assyria’s control. Brutal strategies of mass deportation and resettlement of conquered populations created ethnically mixed communities at the empire’s center, further complicating the picture. Times of conquest and instability are often when identities are contested, re-negotiated, and re-created (Liebmann 2012; Wernke 2013; Khatchadourian 2016). The empire underwent many such times, expanding in the Middle Assyrian period, contracting after the Late Bronze Age collapse (c. 1070 BCE), and then rapidly expanding beyond its previous extent in the late Neo-Assyrian period.

My research draws upon the theoretical frameworks and methodologies addressing the negotiation of identity within an empire over the longue durée (Pestle et al. 2014; Mattingly 2004; Morris & Scheidel 2008). Most useful to this project, which focuses particularly on imperial influence within provinces, is how changes in material culture can indicate meaningful shifts in identity (Gardner 2007; Jones 1997). Applying
this to mortuary culture provides the tools needed to understand how Assyrian influence impacted the way which imperial subjects saw themselves, and how subjects met, altered, rejected, and/or reframed such influence in keeping with their own pre-existing identities, beginning to answer the question: How did Assyrian expansion affect the inhabitants of these provincial centers?

The Assyrian Empire

The LBA was a time of transformation in Northern Mesopotamia’s socio-political organization and culture. Though Assyrians had existed as a self-identified cultural entity under Mitanni rule, they established themselves as a separate state during and following the collapse of the Mitanni in the early 14th century (Kuhrt 1995; Brown 2014). Under the ruler Aššur-uballit I (1363-1328 BCE), Assyria began to extend its control to the north and the east of Aššur, eventually encompassing an area bounded by Nineveh in the north, Arbil in the east, and Aššur in the south (see Fig. 1.1). This triangle of land is known as the “Assyrian heartland” and, despite extensions and retractions of the empire in its future, this area would not be lost to the Assyrians until the middle of the 1st millennium BCE (Roaf 2001).
This first expansion allowed the Assyrians to gain control of valuable farming land and resources. By defeating Mitanni, Assyria claimed an equal place beside Egypt, Hatti, and Babylonia – the other great powers of the age. With Aššur-uballit’s campaigns, he established the Assyrian heartland and declared Assyria to be not just a grouping of settlements under one rule, but “māt Aššur” – an entity in its own right. After Aššur-uballit’s death, Assyrian power temporarily declined until a sequence of three powerful kings once again began a process of territorial expansion; Adad-Nirari I (1305-1274), Shalmaneser I (1273-1244), and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207) pushed the
limits of Assyrian control westwards, eventually encompassing what had previously been controlled by the Hurrians (Llop 2011; Lyon 2000).

Upon Tukulti-Ninurta’s death, Assyria continued to weaken and lose further territory. Aššur-nadin-apli only ruled for three years, and the several kings which followed suffered similarly short reigns. It was only towards the end of the twelfth century that Assyrian power began to revive as Aššur-resh-ishi (1132-1115) fended off attacks from Nebuchadnezzar I of the Second Dynasty of Isin. His successor, Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076) likewise held off Nebuchadnezzar I, soundly defeating the Babylonian army and forcing him out of Assyria (Kuhrt 1995; Brown 2014). Tiglath-Pileser I campaigned aggressively and not only restored Assyrian control in areas they had lost (expanding Middle Assyrian territory to its greatest extent yet) (see Fig.1.2), but marched as far as the Mediterranean Sea in the west and Lake Van in the north;

*I conquered, in all, from the beginning of my rule to the fifth year of my reign, forty-two countries and their princes, from the other side of the Lower Zab, the boundary of the far-off mountain forests, unto the other side of the Euphrates to the land of the Hittites and the Upper Sea towards the west* (Inscription of Tiglath-Pileser I in Grayson 1991).

His military exploits were recorded in detail, and he claimed to have crossed the Euphrates no less than 28 times while engaging in war with the Ahlamu-Aramaean and also to have defeated an army of 20,000 Mushki warriors in the Upper Tigris valley. This success was short-lived, however, and the extent of Assyrian control quickly shrunk to the heartland after his death (Rouault 2009).
Figure 1.2: The greatest extent of Middle Assyrian hegemony (reached under Tiglath-Pileser I)

The end of the Late Bronze Age was a transitional period in the Near East and Aegean – once believed to be violently disruptive, but now largely thought of as a break in settlement pattern and political systems, with continuity in material culture and technological development (Cline 2014). This period witnessed the collapse of the Mycenaean kingdoms, the Kassite dynasty of Babylonia, the Hittite Empire in Anatolia and the Levant, and New Kingdom Egypt. The Dark Age in northern Mesopotamia is termed as such because there is a lack of inscriptions/ written documentation and also no evidence for any building activity by Assyrian kings from 1030-935. (However, Middle Assyrian palaces and temples remained in use – for example, the palace in Aššur

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remained the primary royal residence from the 11th-9th c.) (Roaf 2001). Assyria was not removed from the effects of this collapse, but the “break” in continuity that modern scholars perceive during the Dark Age was not shared by the Assyrians themselves. The Assyrians emphasized the continuity of both rulers and their institutions; perhaps this is best illustrated in the Assyrian King List, which records in unbroken sequence the kings of the Dark Age.

The degree of Assyria’s loss of control is debated by some scholars; Kühne argues that several settlements in the Middle Euphrates region remained under Assyrian control, even throughout the Dark Age (1995a). He bases this on the inscriptions of rulers from sites such as Tell Ajaja, which mention, and defer to, the Assyrian kings. However, Brown disagrees, claiming a full retreat of Assyrian territory to within the heartland (2013). In Roaf’s survey of continuity between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, he believes that Assyrian hegemony outside of the heartland is unlikely, considering that there is no evidence for Assyrians receiving any kind of taxes from outside this region until Adad-Nirari II’s re-expansion (2001). As evidence for local dynasties appeared in the power vacuum left by Assyrian retreat at places like Satu Qala (van Soldt et al. 2013), it is clear that even close to the heartland, Assyrian hegemony had was tenuous. Despite this, cultural continuity in Assyria was maintained during the Dark Age and into the first millennium, and centers surrounding the heartland would soon be reclaimed (Roaf 2001).

With the end of the Dark Age, Assyria was the first entity in the Near East to recover. Emerging on the other side of this period of instability, the Assyrian heartland remained securely under Assyrian control. After the economic disruption of the Dark
Age, the earliest sources we have are from inscriptions of Assyrian kings detailing military campaigns and victories over other entities. It was with the king Adad-Nirari II (911-891 BCE) that the Assyrians began the long process of re-expanding their control into surrounding territories, beginning with a series of campaigns first into Babylonia and then into the regions of Kadmuh, Nisibin, and Hanigalbat (Roaf 2001). Effectively, Adad-Nirari II had reclaimed the land in the Khabur that the empire had controlled in the Middle Assyrian period. The sustenance of the heartland would grow to depend on this agricultural power for the duration of the empire as capital cities were founded and grew to astonishing sizes. Tukulti-Ninurta III (890-884), Adad-Nirari II’s son, continued to push the borders of Assyria out ever further – this time to the east and north. Further expansion continued under Tukulti-Ninurta III’s son, Aššurnasirpal II (883-859); almost immediately upon ascending the throne, he initiated military campaigns in all directions. His most successful campaign was to the west, through Syria and the Levant. This area of the Near East during the 9th century was mostly occupied by small polities or loosely-bound kingdoms held together by local rulers; the Assyrian army made short work of these entities, and by 877 Aššurnasirpal II claims to have “washed his weapons in the Great Sea (the Mediterranean)” – signaling a return to former glory by reaching as far as Tukulti-Ninurta I (Van de Mieroop 2007).

Shalmaneser III’s (858-824) campaigns extended into southeast Anatolia and the highland valleys of Iran (Roaf 1992). Ultimately, these mountain campaigns resulted in the acquisition of booty and the nominal (but not practical) extension of Assyrian power into these areas. Other excursions by Shalmaneser III were directed to the west, where he fought against the Aramaean state of Bit Adini, centered on the capital of Til Barsip.
Shalmaneser III’s success is recorded on the Black Obelisk (Fig. 1.3), which depicts numerous kings prostrating themselves before Shalmaneser and shows lines of exotic tribute items being brought into Assyria, such as Bactrian camels and elephants. The resources also included the tribute paid by the conquered regions – including human resources. According to Shalmaneser III’s Annals, 193,000 people were deported to Assyria between 881 and 815 – 139,000 of whom were Aramaeans (Grayson 1991). It was this influx of labor and material resources which contributed to the elaborate building projects of Shalmaneser III, including Fort Shalmaneser in the outer town of Kalhu – reinforcing the Assyrian royal persona of “builder.”

Figure 1.3: Shalmaneser III’s Black Obelisk, with registers showing tribute and booty brought into the heartland (courtesy of the British Museum Online Collections)
Despite his relative success in the field, unrest grew at home. Aššur-danin-apla, Shalmaneser III’s son, initiated a revolt in 828 which lasted for four years and included the support of all major Assyrian heartland cities except for Kalhu. Another son of Shalmaneser III’s, Shamshi-Adad V, then challenged his brother for the throne, taking advantage of the empire’s instability to make a treaty with Marduk-zakir-shumi, who held the throne of Babylon. Shamshi-Adad V triumphed and ruled from 823-811. During his rule, he broke the treaty to campaign in Babylonia, establishing a fragile Assyrian control over southern Mesopotamia. With this series of revolts, the empire’s grasp itself was weakened, and this period is generally thought of as a decline. Though Assyria still boasted military might over its neighbors, it was centrally weakened; provincial governors were installed and largely left to their own devices.

It was only with the reforms of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727) that Assyrian provincial administration significantly changed – introducing new titles and offices and less independent power in direct contrast to the flexibility which characterized previous forms of Assyrian administration. The rapidly-expanding empire needed efficient ways of managing their new land and population; “legibility” of the conquered regions was key to integrating them into the Assyrian sphere (Scott 1998). Tiglath-Pileser III standardized weights and measures, along with creating new positions within the provincial administration systems. Deportation and resettlement of conquered populations became the rule, and seemed to both destabilize the conquered city, strip power from the resettled groups, and increase agricultural productivity in the Tigris River Valley. Additionally, Tiglath-Pileser III reorganized the Assyrian army, introducing units comprised of soldiers with different ethnicities. In particular, Aramaeans were
employed as foot soldiers. To further facilitate Assyrian military dominance, regular staging posts were set up along the main deployment routes, providing dependable resources for the army. The potent reorganization of state apparatuses fundamentally shifted the Assyrian Empire into a real world power, and it is from this point that the Assyrians truly extended a secure control over the Near East.

It was with the ascension of Sargon II (722-705) that the final period of the Assyrian empire was established. A wealth of royal correspondence from Sargon II’s reign provides a further look into administration and events of this period. Still largely adhering to the reforms set by Tiglath-Pileser III, the administration of provincial towns was under the control of Assyrian governors. Under the Sargonid kings, a renewed emphasis was placed on fueling the “war machine” – Assyria’s ability to subjugate the people and lands around them. For Sargon II, this included establishing the ḫarran šarri – the Royal Road. This Royal Road was a highway of sorts, bypassing smaller towns and running directly between the larger centers within the empire. Soldiers used this road as a quick way of transport, utilizing waystations which were placed one day’s march apart (roughly 30km) (Roaf 1992).

Militarily, Sargon II’s son, Sennacherib (704-680) continued the strong campaigning policy of his father and predecessors, except this time his focus as the ruler of such a large empire necessitated an attention to rebellions and uprisings instead of territory-expanding ventures; this included his siege of Lachish in the Levant and battles against Marduk-apla-iddina II and his allies in Babylonia (Roaf 1992). After several expeditions into Babylonia, during which he deported and resettled numerous captives, Sennacherib engaged the Chaldeans and Elamites in various battles. The tide of the
conflicts seemed to shift back and forth, but ultimately Sennacherib’s final siege and
capture of Babylon (689) settled the area and peace was achieved for the remainder of his
rule (Van de Mieroop 2007).

Military dominance and expansion continued under Esarhaddon and
Aššurbanipal, securing Egypt and continuing a program of deportation and resettlement
to supply the Heartland. Although Shamash-shum-ukin, Aššurbanipal’s brother, was
appointed the monarch of Babylonia, a civil war broke out in 652 between the two. This
lasted four years, with Shamash-shum-ukin supported by Elamites, Arabs, and small
southern tribes. Upon seizing Babylon in 648, Aššurbanipal regained control of
Babylonia and established peace in the region for twenty-one years until his death in 627.
Upon the death of Aššurbanipal and Kandalanu (the king of Babylon established by
Aššurbanipal after the civil war), Nabopolassar ascended the Babylonian throne the next
year, initiating a series of wars between Babylonia and Assyrian which lasted a decade.
The Babylonians were successful in protecting their home and, in 615, marched up the
Tigris to attack Aššur. This campaign by the Babylonians failed, but left Assyria in
enough of a weakened state that the Medes, led by Cyaxerxes, attacked Nineveh and then
captured and sacked Aššur. Under treaty, both the Babylonians and the Medes marched
on Nineveh in 612 – wreaking havoc on the city and its structures, desecrating
monuments and palaces of Assyrian kings, and effectively ushering in what is commonly
thought of as the demise of the Assyrian Empire. While the Assyrian royal family and
several others fled to Harran to continue building a resistance there, after 609 the
resistance seems to have ended – leaving the Babylonians as the successors to the ancient
Near East’s first great empire.
The Study of Mortuary Culture

Because graves have been uncovered at almost every archaeological site, archaeologists have made use of them to study several aspects of past societies, including rituals, health and diet, labor activities, social status, and cultural interconnections. Mortuary archaeology has arisen as its own subfield, beginning in earnest in the last half century. This is in part due to the new interest in the late 1960s of applying ethnographic accounts to inform interpretation of mortuary practices. At the forefront of this shift was P. Ucko, who drew on the studies of non-western groups to challenge widely-held assumptions among archaeologists (1969). He pointed out that
broad, cross-cultural generalizations about death almost always are shown in some societies to be false, or even hold the exact opposite meaning (1969). Ucko’s assessment of interpretations of death came at a time when studies on funerary practices were on the rise in cultural anthropology, affected by the structuring principles of A. van Gennep and R. Hertz, both writing in the early 1900s. Van Gennep and Hertz both proposed universalist theories of death meant to apply to all cultures, but specifically drawn from several case studies. Van Gennep understood death as a *rite du passage*, a transformative event (such as childbirth, marriage, and death) (1909). For death, specifically, this transformation from the realm of the living to that of the dead was accompanied by “liminal rites”: funerary rituals of dying, interment, and “celebration” (Van Gennep 1909).

Hertz proposed that the passage of the corpse (the rites given to it upon death and burial) mirrored (and possibly even enacted) the passage of the soul. As in most universalist theories, Hertz had to keep his overarching description vague enough that it could serve as a common denominator; therefore, this passage of the soul could be from the deceased to the afterlife, to the next life via reincarnation, or other destinations. Ultimately, “the notion of death is linked with that of resurrection,” (Hertz 1907:78). Hertz focused on the fear surrounding death, and how the promise of resurrection mitigates that fear.

Another body of theory surrounding death and its related rituals arose from functionalist interpretations of these practices, which saw them “as affirmation of the existence of social bonds among the mourners and as a strengthener of political authority in the face of fear, fascination, and repulsion caused by the presence of a corpse,”
Functionalist explanations emphasized the survival of the community over individuals, arguing that humans adapted to their environment via culture. The culture surrounding death was no exception; influential anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard included death rituals in their analyses, and Malinowski argued that ceremonies surrounding death counteract fear and distress and solidify the cohesion of the social group of mourners (1948:34; 1948; 1948). A. Saxe’s dissertation and later work really applied New Archaeology to the social dimensions of mortuary practices (1970). He proposed eight different hypotheses regarding funerary rituals, mortuary material culture, and attitudes towards death, revolving mostly around indicators of social stratification, societal complexity, and the like. Saxe developed these ideas by examining ethnographic data on populations from West Africa, New Guinea, and the Philippines. Many of his hypotheses regarding the culture of death work to define differences between egalitarian and stratified societies, “simple” vs. “complex”. Saxe’s ideas, while difficult (if not impossible) to prove objectively, provided building blocks for later theorists.

However, as Geertz noted several decades later, the rites of death also provided groups with an arena for power struggles (1973:142). The deceased may become an object of status, the funeral rituals a venue for reaffirming or forming identity. For example, Metcalf discussed the occasional disparity among the Berawan of Borneo between mortuary treatment and social rank (1982). M. Bloch studied the Merina of Madagascar, and also noted contradictions between the existing social structure and the way it is represented in mortuary contexts; communal tombs contained the bodies of individuals who never lived together in one household (1971:166-170). In this instance,
the idealized notion of family is presented in death, as opposed to the socio-economic realities. Studies such as these are crucial to recreating the mortuary practices and ideas of ancient societies, because they provide contextual assessments of symbolism in funerary practices. By knowing the discrepancies between lived realities and deceased ideals, we can see how these contradictions are then expressed in the material record and compare it to what we find in ancient contexts.

Studying funerary practices was one component of Middle Range Theory, which aimed to identify the true relationships between the material culture record and the human behaviors which created that record (Binford 1978). If patterns of the material record could be unconditionally linked to practices of the society depositing them, then these relationships could be applied to the archaeological record. L. Binford is perhaps the most widely-known proponent of this “New Archaeology”. He particularly worked with mortuary contexts, proposing that, universally, one could expect “a direct correlation between the social rank of the deceased and the number of people with relationships to the deceased” and the “social persona” of the deceased portrayed in mortuary contexts is directly correlated with the relative social rank the deceased occupied in life (Binford 1971). The social persona in Binford’s explanation consisted of age, sex, social position, conditions of death, location of death, and social affiliation (Binford 1971). There were key differences between sedentary agricultural societies and others. As Parker-Pearson succinctly writes: “Who you are affects how you get buried and the separate bits that make up your identity get represented in different ways” (1999:29).

J. Tainter explored the relationship between the treatment of the dead and their status in life, especially in regard to energy expenditure (1975). Tainter’s main argument
is that certain funerary practices are associated with social rank (namely, the complexity of body treatment, construction, and location of the grave, the duration of the ritual, and grave goods contributed to the funeral and burial). He argued that the social rank of individuals correlated with the degree of energy expenditure in funerary rites in 90% of cases (but, in contrast, only correlated with grave goods in less than 5% of cases) (1978:121). As he writes, “we may suggest that both the amount of corporate involvement, and the degree of activity disruption, will positively correspond to the amount of energy expended in the mortuary act. Energy expenditure in turn should be reflected in the size and elaborateness of the burial facility,” (1973:6). However, C. Carr followed this study with a similar methodology and concluded that in 42% of cases, differences in grave goods (in type or number) were indeed linked with social rank (1995:178-180). As Parker-Pearson points out, “the only factors which vary with social complexity are the expression of personal identity – which decreases with increasing complexity – and the indication of horizontal social position which increases with complexity,” (1999:31).

The above processual generalizations have largely failed to retain credibility as cultural “universals” (notable exceptions being Saxe’s Hypothesis 8 and Tainter’s energy expenditure model). The focus of New Archaeology on what people did rather than why they did it shifted under the post-processual movement to emphasize human motivation. New studies in the 1980s and early 90s revealed that the living could purposefully manipulate the dead - and their associated mortuary practices – to gain prestige (Metcalf & Huntington 1991:133-88). Funerary rituals, like other ritualistic contexts, are a venue for communication and representation (Tarlow 1992). “Funerals
are lively, contested events where social roles are manipulated, acquired, and discarded.” (Parker-Pearson 1999:32). Key to this post-processual interpretation is recognizing human agency (how people act with knowledgeable intention), emphasizing an emic cultural view of the studied groups. This comes with the acknowledgement that there are contexts which are not simple reflections of identity and society, such as what Bloch evidenced in his study of the Merina, where mortuary contexts were manipulated to reflect an idealized life (1971).

In the last 30 years, the approaches of both processualists and post-processualists have been revisited, with added emphasis on areas such as ancestor cults (Metcalf & Huntington 1991:96; Palmer & Tilley 1996:63-4; Descola 1996:363-83) and the role of mortuary rituals in social memory and identity construction (Pestle et al. 2014; Smith & Buzon 2014). Ancestor cults and the rites associated with them exhibit a continuity of interaction with the deceased and, therefore, a continuous re-invocation of kinship and memory constructs (Creamer 2020). Rituals involved with death both pre- and post-deposition provide an opportunity to engage on a metaphysical level with the supernatural vestiges left of the deceased, sometimes to affect happenings in the real world. In addition to a shift in theoretical approaches within the study of mortuary archaeology, there has been a further distinct methodological shift towards bioarchaeological analyses. By analyzing human remains, archaeologists have been able to deduce disease (Porter & Boutin 2014), nutrition (Larsen 1995), life events (Sheridan

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2 See also N. Laneri’s edited 2007 volume.
et al. 2014), and migration patterns (Nugent 2017) of humans in the past. Though bioarchaeology analyses have been impossible in this study, it is among these renewed interests into the lived experiences of humans in the past that I investigate personal identity expression and manifestation within the Assyrian Empire. I approach the mortuary data with an emphasis on deposition, including possible funerary rituals (Pestle et al. 2014), while also drawing upon the quantifiable analyses of the processualists (Tainter 1975 & 1978) to tackle a large dataset. Yet, it is important to maintain an understanding of individual agency; those included in this study were once living humans who acted upon their surroundings. Therefore, I marry processual and post-processual thought to adequately understanding both the broad trends and the nuanced traditions comprising identity.

Interpreting Identity Expression in Assyrian Burials

The study of “identity” has a long-established history in Mesopotamian archaeology. Examples of current research have focused on material such as texts (Parpola 2004; Melville 2004) and architecture (Laneri 2015; Harmanšah 2013) to construct an understanding of how ancient peoples and their larger communities chose to communicate their perceptions of self. The picture is further complicated by multiple, overlapping socio-cultural entities present within the same geographical area (Beckman 2013; Feldman 2014). Assyrian control, even in the early stages of the empire, extended

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3Notable exceptions are Sołtysiak in recent excavations at Aššur (2016) and Düring et al. at Tell Sabi Abyad (2015), but mortuary material from other excavations has been discarded.
into areas which were not culturally Assyrian (see Chapter 6). It is the goal of this dissertation to show how Assyrian incursion affected the practices and material culture of these communities.

As illustrated above, mortuary archaeology can contribute greatly to this avenue of research. Burials are ubiquitous in the archaeological record and, therefore, have the potential to reveal a wealth of information related to the cultural shifts taking place over the *longue durée* (Gardner 2011). Usually, the deceased’s family or community carried out the mortuary rites, depositing the body and objects and allowing burials to be understood as the physical remnant of performance – intentionally reinforcing the deceased’s identity (and the identity of their kin group/community) (Quinn & Beck 2016; Cohen 1985). Burials are an excellent resource for understanding identity because they tend to be historically conservative: “burials...are inherently conservative insofar as they tend to be a vehicle for the expression of longheld traditions,” (Gilmour 2002:112).

However, O’Shea cautions:

“...it seems clear, not only that the archaeological record will manifest less organization than the cultural behavior that generated it, but also that less of this organization that is present will actually come to be detected and recognized. This is not a matter of technique or the use of one methodology over another, rather it is a statement of the limitations inherent in archaeological pattern recognition,” (1984:31).

Nonetheless, burial material provides an excellent set of data for producing an emic understanding of the inhabitants of these sites during the growth of the Assyrian Empire.

Grave assemblages must be interpreted as artifacts of imperial policy as well as products of interpersonal relationships (Voss 2008:194). The self-expression of the individual is limited to what the community chooses to express during the funerary
process. So, then, how do we interpret mortuary variability in relation to identity expression? First and foremost, as has already been mentioned, the living bury the dead. This provides us already with our first complication: the identity of the deceased is distorted through the interpretation/ manipulation of this identity by the living relatives or community. This is not inherently a disadvantage: in fact, this allows for insight of identity at a community of family level. It is assumed in this study that the individuals who were responsible for the body after death shared same aspects of their identity with the deceased, or were willing to represent the deceased’s different identity, which is expressed through the qualities of the grave and its objects. Essentially, the funeral ritual, and its end results are a performance (Bordieu 1991; Goffman 1971; Laneri 2015:6-8). This performance can have motives unrelated to the deposition of the dead, such a display of wealth, a show of power in the community, or even establishing a claim to property (Goldstein 1976; Hallote 2002:109). Identity is politicized, contested, and negotiated. As Gilmour notes:

“The progressive loss of identity is temporarily halted, even reversed, if only symbolically, as funerary ritual and symbolism is used as a form of social advertisement, reflecting perhaps more strongly than any other ritual could the changing relationships and social realities undergone by the immigrant group,” (2002:118).

The social vocabulary of mortuary practices must be read in the context of the socio-political environment of an expanding imperial power and the pressures of imperial policies on that community. With this in mind, identity expression in graves can take a multitude of forms through grave goods deposited, through burial forms and containers, through the arrangement of the deceased, and through the location of the burial itself.
The most common attribute of graves discussed in regard to identity are the grave goods. This broad category includes ceramics, jewelry, food, liquids, toys, trinkets, clothing, and whatever else has been deposited within the grave, excepting the body itself. The placement and positioning of these items further indicates intent. Another attribute is the corpse – how was it deposited, and in what position? How were the limbs arranged? In what direction is the body oriented, or the head facing? Where in the grave was it placed? The structure of the grave itself is also important, particularly the type of grave (tomb or burial) and the subcategory (for example, pit burial or sherd burial? Vaulted tomb or rock-cut?). The materials, craftsmanship, and location of the burial can all provide information on the deceased’s identity. Furthermore, the physical relation of a grave to built structures and even other graves can also reveal information about the identity of the deceased, and their possible relationship to kin groups, earlier ancestors, or various communities.

The perhaps obvious follow-up question, then, is how can we identify ethnic groups – and to a further extent, ethnic identities – in the material record? Cultural history paradigms of the early 1900s were concerned with identification and description of cultural change, with an emphasis on “organizing” past societies in a linear, evolutionary fashion. The emphasis was on producing systems for classifying spatial and temporal variation. Processual archaeology became interested in asking the question “why” – how and why did cultural changes occur? In processual archaeology, the traditional cultural unit survived as the basic unit of description and classification, with an implicit connection to ethnic groups as the main category (Jones 1997:27). Post-processualism pushed back against this identification of ethnic groups via mortuary
contexts, providing examples of modern ethnographies where the graves and their contents did not equate to the identities and belief systems of their groups (Rakita & Buikstra 2005:7).

In distinguishing original local material culture from invasive Assyrian material culture, I lean heavily on the research methodologies utilized by Parker (2001a) and Tenu (2009a), who both identify indigenous cultures separate from invasive Assyrian culture at provincial sites using ceramic analysis and grave types respectively. Data on ceramics (Hausleiter 2010; Pfälzner 1995; Anastasio 2010; Postgate et al. 1997) and studies which employ similar methodologies were useful during this project. However, as discussed by Roobaert (1998) and Smith & Buzon (2014), foreign objects alone are not necessarily an indicator of ethnicity, and could instead show the adoption of other cultural traits. For this reason, I consider grave assemblages holistically – combining an analysis of all objects with the physical characteristics of the grave itself – before coming to conclusions on the ethnic identities of those contained within. Objects specifically linked to personal identity include seals, adornment items, and tools (including weapons).

I treat gender identities in the same fashion. While several studies have identified notable differences between female and male assemblages in the ancient Near East (Melville 2004; Cifarelli 2016; Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005), these differences should not be considered universals, and my conclusions on “typical” gendered expressions of identity in Assyrian contexts will rely on the identification of the biological sex of individuals when available. It is crucial to look at the contents of burials, especially with skeletons that have been sexed (allowing for the inescapable caveat that we cannot be 100% sure of gender, regardless of biological sex, and that determining sex from skeletal remains is not
unproblematic) (White et al. 2012). By analyzing the contents and characteristics of burials which contain sexed individuals, it is possible to associate these with the performance of specific genders based on positive statistical relationships. The relations drawn between certain objects and gender can then be applied to other graves where the individuals have not been sexed. A study done by P. Allison on Roman gendered material culture used an analysis of Roman graves to support an investigation of lived Roman spaces in relation to gendered use patterns (2015). That same potential lies herein, and associations found between gender and material culture in mortuary contexts will be compared to similar items in other Assyrian contexts to add nuance to interpretation.

In an age where socio-economic status not only meant one’s comfort, but one’s safety and health as well, wealth and position formed a critical part of one’s identity and was displayed as such. Economic status has been treated as the most visible of all aspects of identity in funerary remains and I do not disagree (cf. Ucko 1969). In an imperial context especially, where loyalty to the empire’s ruler was demanded and rewarded, a display of wealth by elites and awarded by the king provided a not-so-subtle way of proclaiming both loyalty and status. For those in the lesser strata of society, displaying wealth in mortuary rites could strengthen influence within the local community. However, as is the case for both elites and non-elites, a display of riches in the funeral process does not necessarily translate to the goods deposited within the grave itself. Nonetheless, the quantity and quality of items remain our best source for determining the wealth of the deceased, whether or not a true representation is showed by funeral or other processes.
Another possible indicator of socio-economic identity in burials relies on Tainter’s suggestion of energy expenditure and investment. The type of burial can sometimes denote wealth: for example, a built mudbrick tomb showcases the use of more resources (in labor) than a sherd grave or a pot burial. The final aspect of burial which could be related to socio-economic identity is where the burial is in relation to buildings and other graves. If a burial that is otherwise plainly furnished is located in an area which contains several richly-furnished built tombs, this might indicate privileged access to this plot of land based on class or status. Variations in the socio-economic status of the graves’ inhabitants will be identified by a relative comparison of material wealth between graves at each site.

Ultimately, I am interested in how identities may have changed over both the long duration of the empire and across its vast domains. Therefore, by considering the above material indicators of identity, I can identify changes in how these identities are displayed both spatially and temporally. Of course, statistical analysis does not always reveal the whole story. In some cases, it might be that a personalized object or a unique attribute of a burial might reveal more personal information than just general categories of data. For that reason, idiosyncrasies in the burials are presented in my research not simply as curiosities, but as relevant information which can potentially lead to further conclusions regarding identity and its expression.
Constructing a Methodology

This study will attempt to identify possible emic perceptions of individual and community identity from burial contexts, by considering as many different aspects of these assemblages and their wider contexts as possible. In the course of my study, I constructed burial typology which includes all types of burials found within the Assyrian sphere of influence and stretching from the 14th to the 7th centuries BCE. This is in contrast to previous attempts to characterize/categorize Near Eastern burials, which rely on local burial typologies, or in some cases, borrow general typologies established for different geographic locations or time periods. The typology is presented at the end of Chapter 3.

As already discussed, purposeful deposits such as graves display intent – creating a connection between the characteristics of the burials (including the deceased’s position, grave goods, the type and layout of the grave, etc.) and the identity of the deceased’s community or kin group (Brandt et al. 2015). J. O’Shea provides a thorough overview of interpreting mortuary variability his monograph, which is based on three main principles of interpretation:

“1. Mortuary differentiation is patterned, and its elements are integrated with other aspects of the sociocultural system
2. The mortuary differentiation accorded an individual, although not necessarily isomorphic, is consistent with [their] social position in the living society.
3. The complexity of the system of mortuary differentiation will increase with the complexity of the society at large,” (1984:21).

Additionally, I will also identify potential temporal shifts in mortuary practices, indicating identity’s fluidity over time.
The burials included in this research came from the following sites: Qalat Sher’qat (Aššur), Tell Billa (Šibaniba), Tell Halaf (Guzana), Tell Mohammed Diyab, Tell Ta’ban (Tabetu), Tell Fekheriye (Šikani?), Tell al-Hamidiya (Taite), Tell Sabi Abyad, and Tell Barri (Kaḥat). These sites contained burials from the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods: 1034 burials from Aššur, 80 burials from Šibaniba, and 136 from the Khabur and Balikh regions.

I began my analysis by collecting data on all burials, following the analytic categories proposed by O’Shea: data on the burial itself (location, type, measurements), the individual(s) contained within (position, number, preservation, arrangement, direction facing, orientation, age, sex), and the objects contained within (type, number, measurements, material, position, orientation) (1984). All data, including relevant fieldnotes, archival documentation, photographs, and museum information, was recorded in a database. For burials with securely recorded locations, maps were created to display spatial data. Burial locations were compared to the contemporary architectural constructions in order to identify relationships between built structures and burials.

As discussed above, I explored several specific questions relating to the development and expression of Assyrian identity. In particular I considered the following:

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4 Differentiation in number and quality of burial records was expected between the three sites. To mitigate the discrepancies, burials were not considered in this study if they failed to record any of the following categories: 1) type of burial, 2) location and positioning of burial, 3) number of individuals interred, 4) number and type of grave goods, and 5) orientation and positioning of the individual(s) and grave goods. Human and faunal remains were rarely preserved in early 20th century excavations and therefore data on them is scarce. Due to this limitation, I took into consideration the sex of the remains and the age (restricted to adult, sub-adult, child, and infant) only if recorded. Consideration of faunal remains and other organic material similarly relied upon the quality of excavation data; if provided, species and age of the specimens were included in the study in addition to their positioning within the grave.
- If the identities of distinct groups (females, children, non-elites) displayed in Assyrian provincial centers were differently displayed in Aššur.

- If particular aspects of identity (gender, ethnic, class, familial, community, etc.) were dominant within grave contexts; the extent of local identity expression in mortuary contexts and burial practices in provincial centers, and how this was affected by Assyrian hegemony. I identified correlations between particular groups and burial aspects which tended to accompany them, then compared the temporality of such displays to Assyrian incursion in the area.

- The degree of “Assyrianization” between the mortuary contexts of centers located closer to the core of the Assyrian Empire (Tell Billa) and those from centers further away from the core (the Upper Khabur/ Balikh area), understood by quantifying percentile differences among burial groups.

- The continuity of grave types and their goods in provincial centers during the transitional period known as the “Dark Age”, when Tell Billa and Khabur/ Balikh gained brief independence from the Assyrian Empire, accomplished through temporal comparison and the identifiable “Transitional” period at several sites.

Grave location was useful in identifying both trends within settlements (such as the mortuary cultural divide between the Inner and Outer Towns of Aššur, see Chap. 4) and within households. When different members of the family were buried under different rooms (for example, in the Middle Assyrian houses at Tell Billa). Such trends tended to indicate variation in age group (where children were buried in different rooms from the rest of the dead) or familial role (mothers buried with their infants, for example).
Grave typology proved to be extremely useful in understanding identity groups.\(^5\) While several grave types seemed to be universally used (pit burials and single jar burials are good examples), other types proved to be utilized more often within geographic groups. While directly tying such burial characteristics to ethnic groups has already been problematized, such patterns could point to possible ties with the people who lived within the related areas. For example, as it will be seen, double-jar burials and sarcophagi are tied to Assyrian tradition at Aššur, while cremations and mudbrick burials seem to have most popular in the Khabur/Balikh region. These types appeared to not only be tied to regional identity, but also age (with infants buried almost exclusively in single jars, while adults and children had far more variety.)

The positioning of the deceased with the grave was also a consideration. This category included understanding the relationship between multiple individuals buried in the same grave. Ultimately, differences in the deceased’s positioning were heavily related to the type of container they were placed in. We will see that most of the variation in this category occurred through time, with individuals placed on their back in extended positions rising in popularity throughout all the regions included in this study. Multiple-person graves tended to indicate familial relations, but did not seem to affect the actual positioning of either occupant (with the exception of tombs, which were re-accessed to add new members and, therefore, constituted a rearrangement of the previous deceased.)

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\(^5\) For a breakdown of the typology, see Chapter 3
Historically, understanding identity in mortuary contexts has primarily relied upon the grave goods. I am not aiming to reject that, here, instead, I observed the objects, focusing on their relations to one another within the context. For example, objects found in sets, such as ceramic bowls and beakers (which we will see is a common set to include in Assyrian burials [Chapter 4]), are notable for the traditions they indicate. The presence of animal bones, as another example, could show funerary traditions (feasting) as well as depositional practices – in this case, a commonality in the graves of the Khabur and Balikh (Chapter 6). Jewelry, including metal bangles, earrings, and beads, is another common examples of grave goods. In addition to their contexts and frequencies within the graves, the types of these objects can be just as illuminating when considering identity. Ceramics are the typical poster-child of this in archaeology – different forms of vessels and decoration could betray certain groups. This is the same of personal adornment objects; as we will see, earrings of the type seen in App. A, Burial 74 are common in Assyrian graves, while black and white beads of paste (see App. A, Burial 46) seem to belong to a different identity group. Types of these artifacts (including their materials) allow us to clue into ethnicity, gender, and status (in the form of Wealth Value) identities specifically.

Of the goods typically included within the graves, I considered several in particular as indicative of personal identity. Generally, tools, weapons, and seals were included in this category. In terms of adornment objects, pins (and later, fibulae) have often been connected with geographic patterns (Pedde 2018), and therefore could reveal information regarding from which region an individual or family hailed.
In theory, all grave goods can provide such insights – it is well known, for example, how pottery practices different between regions in these periods, and similarly how jewelry and adornment varied. Yet, in the course of this study, it became evident that ceramic practices different little between the sites included, and only nominally within the sites themselves. Jewelry had a bit more of a variety (for example, gold was more common within Aššur, while beads of black and white paste were a common grave good in the Khabur region) yet still was mostly useful in determining relative grave wealth.

In cases where close examinations of objects will benefit identity and interpretation, then additional attention will be paid in the text. Seals are one such specific category: inscriptions on the seals can communicate information about ownership, position, family, etc. The iconography of the glyptic can further be connected to ethnicity, religion, etc. For this important reason, seals and similar objects (such as unique pendants) were given extra attention when such information was available.

**The Wealth Value Index**

When working with large datasets such as the one in this project, comparing burials in any meaningful way becomes a Byzantine task. To condense this to a manageable level, I have constructed a scale on which the various richness of each grave
can be placed. This relatively unorthodox solution to a problem of comparing vastly differing graves nonetheless served to allow any such comparison at all.

The Wealth Value index

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
(no objects)  (Aššur’s Tomb 45)

Figure 1.5: The scale employed in the Wealth Value index.

First, the number of goods in any one grave were taken into account. Then, depending on the type of goods/ their materials, they were tentatively assigned a Wealth Value (see Table 1.1). This was further refined by looking at craftsmanship of each object if that information was available. In order to check for consistency, I regularly compared Wealth Values of grave good assemblages during the assignment process. Additionally, upon assigning all burials a Wealth Value, I conducted a blind test in which 100 assemblages were extracted from the database without their identifying information and without their original Wealth Value and once again assigned a Wealth Value. Comparing these new Wealth Values to the original ones, 94 out of 100 examples were the same, demonstrating that there was internal consistency in the calculations of these values. What I hope to demonstrate with this explanation, and with the case studies in the following chapters, is that this Wealth Value system can be a productive way of comparing burial assemblages.
Taking the numbers, types, quality, and materials of the grave goods within each burial into account, I assigned each burial a number between 0-10 to designate a general “wealth” value. While largely subjective by definition, simplifying the vastly varying grave assemblages in this manner allows for a general comparison of the wealth of each burial. Inherent value attached to objects is a problematic concept of grave good interpretation. Simplistic assignments of gold items as high-status ignore very real aspects of the human equation, such as access to the material, production effort, and craftsmanship.

To ameliorate this, I addressed both quantitative and qualitative aspects of grave goods. Yet, this still does not adequately assess the intentionality behind mortuary assemblages. J. Thomas considered variation between assemblages to be an important indicator of meaningful choices in mortuary practice (1991). While similarities between assemblages show formal, structured behaviors, a variation in such assemblages can indicate individual agency (Richards & Thomas 1984). Therefore, understanding the variations between the grave good collections of burials is just as important as linking similarities, if not more. D. Graeber writes, “…value is the way actions become meaningful to actors by being placed in some larger social whole, real or imaginary” (2001:254). Value is based on the potential of the object, rather than any inherent value. Burial goods were gifts to the deceased, serving in an economy of exchange – properly providing for the dead in order to maintain their favor and protection (Creamer 2020). In some cases, in re-accessible burials (vaulted tombs and the like) the economy for grave goods may have continued after deposition to serve future occupants – therefore
maintaining their value (Linn 2018:111). Understanding value in this dynamic, multi-layered way is key to constructing frameworks of burial assemblage wealth and its link to identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wealth Value</th>
<th>Example Assemblages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>(no objects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 ceramic bowl and 1 ceramic jar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 ceramic jars and 1 ceramic bowl; string of frit and shell beads; bronze ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 ceramic jar and 1 ceramic bowl; string of frit, agate, and shell beads; 2 copper bracelets; 1 bronze pin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 ceramic jars, 3 ceramic bowls, 1 ceramic plate; various stone and shell beads; 3 copper bracelets; 1 set copper earrings; 1 gold ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 ceramic jars and 1 ceramic bowl; various stone beads; 2 sets of gold earrings, 1 set of copper earrings; 1 cylinder seal; 1 bronze pin; 1 bronze bowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 ceramic lamps, 3 ceramic jars, 5 ceramic bowls, 2 ceramic plates; shell and stone beads; 1 gold bracelet; 2 sets of silver earrings, 1 set of gold earrings; 3 bronze rings and 2 gold rings; 2 bronze pins; 1 stone bowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>16 various ceramics; gold, stone, and shell beads; 4 copper bracelets; 2 sets of gold earrings; 9 bronze rings; 2 copper bowls; 3 stone pendants of various shapes; 2 cylinder seals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>34 various ceramics; gold, stone, and shell beads; 5 bronze bracelets; two sets of gold earrings; 5 bronze rings and 6 gold earrings; 3 bronze pins; 5 stone pendants of various shapes; 1 copper bowl; 1 alabaster jar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>27 various ceramics; gold, silver, stone, and shell beads; 3 gold bracelets and 5 bronze bracelets; 6 sets of gold earrings; 11 bronze pins; 1 copper bowl; 8 pendants of various shapes; 1 ivory statuette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Tomb 45:</strong> 39 various ceramics; 78 pieces of jewelry, including lapis, carnelian, agate, and various metal rings; 1 cylinder seal; 5 tools; and 16 miscellaneous finds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Example assemblages related to Wealth Value index.

**Chapter Organization**

I begin with a discussion of the multiple aspects of identity in Chapter 2. This serves to set the parameters of what is considered an expression of “identity” in the mortuary contexts presented in this study. I then discuss intersectionality – the idea that everyone has multiple, overlapping identities throughout their life (Crenshaw 1989). All
of these identities intersect to shape one’s self perception and lived experience in unique ways.

In Chapter 3, I switch gears to explore the structure of the Mesopotamian afterlife and general beliefs that contributed to mortuary practices. This also includes a general survey of burial practices, and a typology of the burial types.

Chapter 4 forms the first case study of our analysis – that of the Assyrian imperial capital, Aššur. Even though it lost its status as a capital in the 9th century, its cultural and religious importance continued unmatched in the Assyrian psyche, and it remained an important city until the fall of the empire in 609 BCE. This chapter takes the over-one thousand burials from the Middle Assyrian (here, roughly 15th-13th centuries) and Neo-Assyrian (9th-7th centuries) periods at Aššur and further divides them into a “transitional” period, situated in the 12th-10th centuries. By looking at the placement of the burials, the types of the burials, and the occupants and grave goods, I am able to present a general picture of Assyrian mortuary practices in the heart of the empire.

Chapter 5 continues this analysis with a case study from the site of Tell Billa. Inhabited in both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, the burials from this site illustrate the mortuary practices of a provincial town near the core of the empire. Tell Billa, ancient Šibaniba, was located close to the heart of the empire. As one of the nearest lands, it was appropriately one of the earliest towns to be conquered and brought into the fold of the Assyrian Empire. The mortuary characteristics of the inhabitants in the southwestern portion of the tell reveal a close connection with Assyrian mortuary customs – a connection which strengthened in the first millennium.
The final case study, presented in Chapter 6, moves further afield into the Assyrian-rulled area of the Balikh and Khabur rivers. The burials in this study are taken from several sites, occupied either in the Middle Assyrian or Neo-Assyrian periods. Various burial characteristics in this area initially show a local tradition of mortuary practice, changing slowly over time to adopt more Assyrian characteristics. The sites covered in this chapter include Tell Halaf, Tell Mohammed Diyab, Tell Ta’ban, Tell Fekheriye, Tell al-Hamidiya, Tell Sabi Abyad, and Tell Barri. The burials from these sites combined showcase the effects of imperial Assyrian culture on the area, providing a window into understanding how the residents of these towns saw themselves in relation to their imperial controllers.

Finally, Chapter 7 offers a synthesis of the data collected within this broader study. It looks at the various identities displayed throughout the mortuary practices of the Assyrian Empire to understand how the lived experiences of these different areas changed over time. Here, I consider identity from both the top-down and bottom up, exploring how elite forms of identity and non-elite forms of identity contributed to identity formation in this imperial milieu. I conclude with an overview of the mortuary cultures from each area, and then explore how Assyrian identity permeated the lower-class imperial subjects in several ways. First, geography (i.e. distance from the core of the empire) played a key role – sites further from the Heartland, while adopting some Assyrian practices into their mortuary traditions, ultimately retained a local vernacular. Secondly, as there is no drastic, marked change in the burial cultures of the provincial settlements or in the Neo-Assyrian northwestern town of Aššur (inhabited, most likely, with deportees), that shows there was no official efforts on the part of the Assyrians to
enforce their own burial practices. What was adopted, then, was voluntary. Thirdly, this voluntary adoption of Assyrian traits in the most conservative form of culture indicates a willingness on behalf of Assyrian subjects to at least moderately conform to the norms of their rulers. The exception may be seen in several settlements in the Khabur/Balikh, where instead there is an uptick in local mortuary traditions (mudbrick burials, cemeteries), although burials still employ aspects of Assyrian mortuary culture.

Ultimately, I have undertaken this research with the express purpose of understanding how an imperial identity – in whatever form – is taken up by the non-elites of the empire: those who have little reason to maintain and promote the Assyrian ideology touted by the upper class. What forms did this transfer/adoption/amalgamation of identity take? Who adopted it? Did the residents of conquered provinces view themselves as “Assyrian”, or just as a group under Assyrian control? Though these questions alone would require the work of several lifetimes, I have offered my own answers relying on that crucial, ubiquitous aspect of life: death.
CHAPTER 2: A THEORY OF IDENTITY IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

“Archaeology is fundamentally a discipline concerned with identity,” as Gardner succinctly put it (2011:11). Working with any empire provides a challenge for the archaeologist when considering how to approach ideas of identity. This is due only in part to the complex, ever-changing and developing nature of imperial structures, and mostly to the multi-faceted, overlapping nature of “personal” identity. Ethnicity, ancestry, community, gender, age, and socio-economic status are all aspects comprising any one person’s identity. One must then consider the markedly different interpretations between internal perception (how the individual understands themselves) and external sources (how other entities, such as family members, acquaintances, administrative structures, etc. perceive the individual). Both viewpoints play a role in the mortuary process.

In this chapter, I present a survey of past and current theoretical approaches to interpreting identities of ancient actors. I employ the concept of “intersectionality”, a term coined by K. Crenshaw to describe the multiplicity of identities that co-exist within a person’s interpretation of self, drawing from categories such as those enumerated above (1989). With this concept in mind, I then explore these aspects individually, drawing on recent literature on ethnic identities, gender identities, and others. Moving on, I present a general review of interpreting mortuary contexts, beginning with the mid-twentieth century movement of New Archaeology, and outlining how approaches to understanding burials have developed over these last decades. Finally, I combine my discussion of
identities with that of mortuary archaeology to lay out the methodology for my project, which seeks to understand how subjects of the Assyrian Empire perceived themselves and their place in the empire through an analysis of burials from multiple times and places within the Assyrian sphere of influence.

**Intersectionality and Modern Identities**

The concept of “identity” is a convoluted one in our modern society. It is sometimes touted – and rightfully so – as a “western” ideal, where the individual is held in higher esteem than the community (Durkheim 1912). “Identity” is a perception of self, often based on external factors such as communal and familial ties, gender performance, and ethnic practices. Identity is both performed and internalized via performance. In this project, I specifically define identity as an idea that affects how a person acts and how a person views themselves and their own characteristics in relation to others. It shapes the way in which individuals act in their surroundings; choices made by the individual are influenced by their identity. A multiplicity of experiences, environmental factors, and cultural factors are combined in the performance of identity (Cote & Levine 2002; Casella & Fowler 2005). In an environment of Assyrian socio-political influence the identities of various groups – performed at both individual and community levels – are intersectional. This means that an individual’s identity, and therefore their choices, is comprised of multiple, overlapping facets produced from conditions such as their sex and gender, economic status, familial position, ethnicity, and other factors (Bauman 2004).
Often, we see archaeological studies formulated to represent marginalized groups, such as women or ethnic “minorities”.6 Rarely are these studies set up to consider multiply-marginalized persons: women of a minority ethnic group, for example. Instead, compound experiences are often affected by more than one type of identity and absorbed into the collective experiences of either group (Crenshaw 1989:150). Though intersectionality was born from criticism of a modern judicial system’s biases favoring only one aspect of a person’s identity, as opposed to understanding how being a member of multiple marginalized groups affects discrimination (Crenshaw’s first article on intersectionality focuses on several examples of legal cases where black women’s cases were considered only as examples of racism or sexism, but not both at once (1989)), the analytical frameworks surrounding intersectionality have found homes in multiple social science fields. Most recently, intersectionality theory has begun to move into the realm of ancient history (eg. Standhartinger 2017) and here I hope I can begin to usher it into archaeological practices, as well. In studies of empires, specifically, intersectionality throws light on “the interactions and interconnections between manifold forms of discrimination, oppression, and domination, including on the basis of sex/gender, race/ethnicity, class/status, body, religion, etc.” (Standhartinger 2017: 71). When studying a society comprised of people of all classes, ethnicities, and genders, such as that of the Assyrian Empire, intersectionality is an invaluable tool. As Carbado et al. state, however, intersectional analysis is always a work-in-progress, functioning “as a condition of possibility” (2013:304). While intellectual projects have long sought to map

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6 “Minorities” in this case used to describe non-Assyrians living within a predominantly Assyrian population.
the interface between systems of power and their attendant subjects, intersectionality in particular is a useful tool for articulating their interactions. Hierarchies to which intersectionality attend are more robust than the formal regimes of ethnicity, gender, and class power typically imposed upon past persons in academic studies. For this reason, in the context of the Assyrian Empire, teasing out these identities and their display and performance by individuals can reveal new information about tensions and prejudice during the growth of an empire. Furthermore, choosing to understand overlapping identities as separate from the expression of any one singular identity reveals how complicated the system of identity expression was within a political entity that was ever-evolving in its own right.

At its base, intersectionality promotes the idea that the experience of a person’s combined identities is greater than, and inherently different from, the sum of their identities. Therefore, for example, an Aramaean woman’s experience living in the Assyrian Empire is not equivalent to an Assyrian woman’s experience and an Aramaean man’s experience combined – instead, the identities of “Aramaean” and “woman” interact and affect each other to create a unique lived experience not encompassed by either category. Intersectionality provides for considering a host of issues confronting specifically those who are members of multiple identity-groups. Many effects of multiple, interwoven identities result from the performative roles expected from each identity. Essentially, an Aramaean woman is not Aramaean or a woman – she is both.
Ethnic Identity

There has always been a tendency to associate different types of material culture with ethnic groups in archaeology. This has been so prevalent, in fact, that it has spawned numerous critical articles, and, perhaps most famously, the oft-repeated assertion that “pots are not people” in response to the overwhelming cultural-historical tendency to classify “ethnic groups” by material culture groups and vice versa. Ethnicity and culture are not exchangeable concepts, but nor are they mutually exclusive. As Jones has noted, definitions of ethnicity, are characterized by a tension between the specific and the general (1997:57). Cultural objectivists regard ethnic groups as “social and cultural entities with distinct boundaries, characterized by relative isolation and lack of interaction” (an etic view) (Jones 1997:57). In contrast, an emic view propagated by subjectivists defines ethnic groups as “culturally-constructed categorizations that inform social interaction and behavior,” (Jones 1997:57). Overall, ethnic identity involves the active maintenance of cultural boundaries in the process of social interaction, rather than a passive reflection of cultural norms (Jones 1997:28). Hodder argues that concepts of ethnicity are an aspect of social organization (1982). Today, it is a relatively well-accepted concept that ethnic groups are largely self-defining – often relying on the construction of an “other” to give themselves a coherent, contrasting ethnic identity. However, this is also not without its problems as self-defined ethnic groups draw lines based on religious groups, geographic areas, language groups, political organization, etc. In fact, “ethnicity” is the most problematic group identity, because ethnicity seems to be constructed from an amalgamation of factors which, to an outside observer, often seem arbitrary and, in some cases, even contradictory.
Despite this, ethnic identity in an imperial setting is often the most promulgated and evident identity. An empire, by definition, spreads its hegemony over different groups of people – crossing what may be ethnically-identified geographical boundaries and re-drawing them to suit political needs. For a modern example, one simply has to look to the modern Middle East and the lasting effects of the Sykes-Picot agreement, post-World War II (Kitching 2015). It is because these differing ethnic groups are absorbed and politically-manipulated that questions of ethnic identity come to the fore in postcolonial narratives of past empires. Often, ethnic groups maintain cohesion even while under imperial rule (Jones 1997; Voss 2008). Furthermore, imperial systems of administration have imposed cultural or ethnic designations upon those they rule in order to comprehensively create a legible system of governing from the top down (Scott 1998). The expression of either real or ideal ethnic identity through social and material culture can be an unconscious self-replication of ethnic culture and group cohesion or a conscious reaffirmation of “them” versus “us” constructs, where “them” is the imperial ruling power and “us” is a variable concept which can include the local community defined as one ethnic group, or the wider population across the empire belonging to that group.

However, concepts of ethnicity in Assyria (and, more broadly, the ancient world) are difficult to identify and define and, in most cases, such definitions are anachronistic. Nonetheless, discussions of ethnic groups in the Assyrian Empire abound.7 In Assyria, as in the general case of Mesopotamia as a whole, other entities were rarely classified as

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7 See the volume edited by van Soldt et al. (2005) for just one example.
different ethnic groups but instead part of the constructed binary: “us” – settled, civilized people versus “them” – nomadic, barbaric people. Prime examples of this is an Old Babylonian scribe depicting the Amorites (in Sumerian) as,

“an abomination to the gods’ dwellings. Their ideas are confused; they cause only disturbance. (The Amorite) is clothed in sack leather… lives in a tent, exposed to wind and rain, and cannot properly recite prayers. He lives in the mountains and ignores the places of the gods, digs up truffles in the foothills, does not know how to bend the knee (in prayer), and eats raw flesh. He has no house during his life, and when he dies he will not be carried to a burial-place,”

(The Marriage of Martu ECTSL 1.7.1, II. 127-39)

and an Assyrian scribe describing the Aramaeans, “who do not recognize authority…[and] roam about the mountains like deer and wild goats,” (Tiglath-Pileser III, Tadmor & Yamada 2011:91, n. 37:16-22.) While this study focuses on the settled peoples of the Assyrian Empire, these examples serve to show how groups were “othered” using their heritage and traditions particular to ethnic identity.

M. Rosenzweig has recently suggested that this disdain for the ethnic “other” in Assyrian sources is based on the anxiety of a threat to sedentary life by non-sedentary people – not necessarily the people themselves (Rosenzweig 2016:314-15). This is exemplified by the large integration of Aramaeans (and their language) into Assyrian society (Rivaroli & Vederame 2005:254). Negative terms are reserved for discussing insubordination or enemies in battle, not when generally mentioning people belonging to certain ethnic groups (Liverani 2017:203-208). Z. Bahrani argues Assyrians categorized ethnic groups not by their physical features, but instead by how they were dressed and the objects they used (2006:56-57). This phenomenon can be seen clearly in the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III; tribute-bearers from different lands are illustrated as such by
carrying distinguishing types of objects or by different dress. Otherwise, their physical attributes do not distinguish them from Assyrians. A definition of “other”, in the Assyrians’ minds, was more dependent upon actions than familial/ethnic lineage. While ethnicity was noted in Assyria, it was not likely a critical factor in how one was treated once they became Assyrian citizens if they adhered to Assyrian norms at a basic level (sedentary living, obedience to Assyrian law, and respect for the Assyrian king).

Figure 2.1: Suteans bearing byssus-garments (a regional style of cloth native to the Middle Euphrates region) (Shalmaneser III’s Black Obelisk, detail: photo by author).
Figure 2.2: Tribute-bearers from Gilzanu (northwest Iran) carrying cauldrons, metals, and spears/staves native to the region (Shalmaneser III’s Black Obelisk, detail: photo by author).

**Gender Identity**

Gender identity is, like ethnic identity, based on historical setting and social environment. It should go without saying that the expression of gender and the various identities associated with it in the modern western world are different from the conceptualization of gender in ancient times. (This is true even of gender in the Roman and Greek worlds – two cultures which have notably informed the development of modern western culture, and yet both held remarkably different views on gender, sexuality and their related identities) (e.g. Allison 2015). It becomes a monumental task in this regard to separate out gender from the political and cultural institutions it is embedded in. Furthermore, gender identity intersects with other identities deriving from ethnicity, regionality, class and status, and others.
But what, exactly, is gender? Gender is a category related to – but separate from – biological sex. In most cases, biological sex informs the assignment of gender: typically, either female or male. Historical documentation can inform us of “third genders” or variations on the male-female binary (e.g. Assyrian eunuchs), but to identify the presence of such variance in terms of material culture alone is difficult, if not impossible. Additional complications to this are present in how we identify gender using human remains. Archaeological questions involving gender usually identify it only based on biological sex. Even this identification is an imprecise science, as skeletons are sexed by general ranges of measurements, all of which can have exceptions (biological males with wider os coxae, for example, or biological females with wider mandibles) (White et al. 2012:408-415). Biological sex, however, must be understood separately from gender. It must always be remembered that these data simply communicates the physical aspects of the individual’s sex – not how they viewed their own gender and what roles they performed in accordance with their gender. To understand the performance of gender and gender expression, previous researchers have often relied on historical and iconographical sources (Teppo 2015; Suter 2012; Melville 2004). Genders are easier to understand when we have context: legal documents describing a woman’s abilities, for example or, how men and women are differentiated in depictions based on garments and features.

In this discussion of gender identity, it is important to point out that, historically, “male” has been considered a default, while “female” is a deviation from the norm. This

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8 In contrast to this, see M. Cifarelli’s work on genders within burials at Hasanlu (2018b).
is due to what A. Teppo calls “double distortion” in the study of the past: not only are women present at a much lower rate in historical and iconographical sources than men, but academia has been male-dominated for the last several centuries, and is only just beginning to see an equal number of women academics engaged in the study of the past (2005:18). The study of women in the past has resulted in no small part from the feminist movements from the 1960s to today. Initially, feminism in academia focused on re-inserting women into narratives of the past from which they had been previously excluded or ignored (Lerner 1979). As this effort progressed, further questions began to be asked about the particular lives of these past women, especially in regard to the different experiences between genders. This led to approaching gender as a “performance”, wherein both women and men adhered to a general expectation of how to act and repeatedly affirmed their gender through daily practices (Butler 1990).

This performance of gender is affected by social and political circumstances. Existing structures can serve to either reinforce or change existing displays of gender. Specifically, women in imperial settings have been discussed often in recent years: Barbara Voss is perhaps one of the core examples of this in her studies of native women acting in, and being acted upon, by Spanish colonizers in California. Voss argues that native women played the role of “cultural brokers” (2008:192); acting as intermediaries between the colonizers they were often married to and the native men of their own community.

J. Butler claims that the categories of gender are upheld by the binary of male and female (1990:17). Whether this is true or not, most of our sources on ancient Assyria and its subjects generally follow this setup, with a possible digression in the form of eunuchs
(discussed below). As in many other societies, in Assyria men took the spotlight in contemporary documentation, with only 712 women present in the entire prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian period, out of over 8,000 names attested (Teppo 2005:30; Baker 2011). These women mostly existed in the orbit of the palace and temple institutions (Teppo 2005:7), while other, anonymous women were of course present in other parts of society. Lerner posits, “[t]he true history of women is women functioning in the male world on their own terms,” (1979:147). One way of producing agency is by choosing how to perform gender roles, and how gender identity affects one’s perception of self. This is especially important in an imperial setting, where power dynamics are often further entrenched in narratives of dominance and submission – where, more often than not, the role of “female” is considered submissive to the role of “male”. Understanding how female identity interacted with other personal aspects of identity is crucial to understanding the lived experiences of women in the Assyrian Empire. Personal identity was no doubt impacted by the continued performance of gender (both male and female) and the resulting expectations/restrictions imposed upon Assyrian subjects based on that role.

It is difficult to construct a general overview of gender in Assyria. This is not in the least because there are so few sources which discuss women in any length, but also because most of the sources only discuss elite women (Melville 2004). Even then, our historical knowledge of the female gender tends to be confined to what these elite women were allowed (and not allowed) to do. A set of 14 tablets termed the Middle Assyrian Law Code was excavated at Aššur and dated to the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076 BCE) (Roth 1995:153). The majority of the laws pertain to sexual relations between men
and women, including terms and punishments for rape and adultery. Other laws concern transgressions such as domestic abuse, wherein the punishments are laid out for the men. Issues of divorce, abortion, and property ownership also feature. In general, these tablets give an insight into the official status of women in the Assyrian culture; women are expected to defer to men – often depending on them for shelter, and sustenance. While it is apparent that women could own property and were entitled to part of their familial resources the “ranking” of women played a major role in how she was treated by the law. For example, women belonging to either the house of her husband or father were commanded to “veil” (pašāmu; lit. “to cover, conceal”) upon leaving the home, while prostitutes were expressly forbidden this (CAD: “P”). From this evidence alone, we see an emphasis placed on a women’s status via her family. Personal identity would seem to follow – at least according to state expectations – familial identity.

This leaves us with a sparse picture of non-elite women in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods. In many cases, women are mentioned almost as if they are objects being recorded: in marriage exchanges between kings of different lands, for example (detailed in the Amarna Correspondence, among others) (Mynářová 2015). Therefore, it is difficult to predict how they modelled themselves after their “female” identity. Art sources help a little in this regard (providing a visual record of materials that women wore or possessed) but once again are based entirely on elite and royal personages. Therefore, while the performance of masculinity has been explored largely in relation to elite figures (Winter 1989,1996; Suter 2012; Zsolnay 2019) it is less of an issue, as historical information on men and their actions is widely available, in both documentation and art.
I would now like to return to a topic mentioned briefly above: eunuchs. Eunuchs as a group played a remarkably large role in the Assyrian Empire – serving as high officials in multiple capacities. Although biologically male, scholars have often considered eunuchs as an almost “in-between” gender, given their castration. They have been the central focus of several studies (Wright & Chan 2012; N’Shea 2016; Grayson 1995) and have sometimes been understood as “third gender” – serving as a bridge into non-cissexual discussions in archaeology. Queer theory has the potential to disrupt the dominant model of heteronormativity normally found in archaeology; it pushes back on our modern value system being imposed on the past (Croucher 2005:611). Eunuchs are an interesting group to study when discussing gender performance in imperial Assyria, as they also provide an opportunity to examine how gender identity is affected by socio-economic identity; as eunuchs – to our current knowledge – mostly occupied respected political positions and received benefits appropriate for their rank (Wright & Chan 2012:115). However, without written documentation, it is almost impossible to identify eunuchs in a mortuary context based on skeleton or grave contents alone. Therefore, eunuchs are not included in this research project except as a thought experiment.

**Socio-economic Identity**

Socio-economic identity is related to the general categories of class and status, where “class” implies ranks within a society determined by wealth and access to resources, whereas “status” is an amorphous term, but here is derived from one’s social role in a community, which includes titles such as political offices, jobs, etc. Class and
status tend to be related in that a person in a higher-status position will often have access to more resources, and therefore will also be in a higher class. Often, it can work the other way as well: people in possession of more material wealth or resources are often placed in, or successfully pursue, positions of power (high status) commensurate with their wealth. Because of their close relationship, class and status are often conflated in archaeological studies and are rarely differentiated when discussing burials and the individuals contained within. In part, this is because they are difficult to distinguish from one another based on material culture alone: without historical documentation, exact status can only be loosely interpreted. For this reason, I consider the two categories under the term “socio-economic identity”.

As defined above, “identity” is an idea of self that affects how a person acts. It follows then that one’s socio-economic condition forms a part of their identity because it affects a person’s choices and how they view themselves in relation to others. Though often referred to in the studies of past persons, there is, to my knowledge, a gap in the literature in regard to how socio-economic conditions impact – and form – personal identity. In an imperial setting, wealth and social standing were two types of currency and social capital (Richardson 2016). One’s socio-economic situation impacted one’s life and choices. Access to a high status and high class could be both restrictive and freeing. While resources such as food, medicine, and other essentials and non-essentials might be readily accessible, positions which afforded the highest wealth and access were most likely highly-monitored. People of high status tend to be in the “public eye,” so to speak, and therefore must act in accordance with their position (Bavin 1989:16). Many of their decisions and the way they presented themselves were in accordance with their class and
status. For persons further removed from the public sphere, however, identities based on socio-economic conditions were likely less rigid and more varied in expression. Display of class and status within the lower strata often relied on expressions of certain positions these individuals held (Oxoby 2004). Like the elite, this could be a display of job or trade (overseer, craftsman, merchant, etc.), or in the form of one’s status or place among the local community, or even one’s place within the settlement (neighborhood, area, etc.). Identifying as one outside of the elite ranks was still a performance, just more varied in its presentation and affected by a wider array of factors. I argue that socio-economic identity impacted one’s choices and self-perception more than any other aspect of identity, and therefore this is a crucial aspect of identity formation to investigate.

Regarding the Assyrian Empire, there has been no dearth of scholarship discussing class and status based on the large number of historical documents recording the offices of high officials, provincial governors, scribes, craftsmen, temple workers, and even slaves. Analyzing this written evidence has led to a better understanding of government structure, the administration of the empire, and the duties expected of certain positions. Material culture, also, has been commonly paired with different levels of society. “Palace ware” ceramics have been considered a typical marker of elite consumption. Items made from precious materials (semi-precious stones, metals, ivory) are often cited as an automatic indicator of elite/royal involvement on some scale, an example being the exchange of items during the LBA, detailed by the Amarna Letters. Discussions of the “elite” in the Assyrian Empire (and almost every other stratified

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9 See, for example: Brown 2008; Richardson 2016; Tyson 2018.
ancient society) go hand-in-hand with objects of high craftsmanship or precious materials, monumental architecture, and governmental positions. Tainter’s association of high-energy expenditure with elite individuals is just one such example (1978).

In the Assyrian Empire, where the highest-status individuals were commonly in government positions (governors, treasurers, provincial administrators, etc.) or providing the king with resources (merchants), (the two were not mutually exclusive, either, which further complicates the identities of these individuals) those of the highest status and class often owed their positions, in part, to the king. “Career” in this case might be a misnomer, but different job positions were held with certain levels of regard; high-level positions, such as provincial governors, came along with a certain measure of prestige, power, and resources – therefore, affecting both one’s social and economic situation. In Assyria, this included advertising one’s capability in ruling/administration and their loyalty to the king in visible, public ways (Pongratz-Leisten 2013:293). Sumptuary laws further existed to privilege the higher classes and further separate them from lower classes (Richardson 2016:41). By showcasing their status and class, it secured their positions. Social mobility in Assyria has been little explored, but some cases show that it was possible (Radner 2017:211-12).

Economic terms such as “middle class” are anachronistic given their modern connotations, but here can serve to identify a class of Assyrians known as “awīlū” – Assyrian citizens. Awīlū, as the de facto middle class of Assyria, probably had the widest variety in how they presented themselves (Adams 1982:12). A large aspect of this, as mentioned, could have been influenced by vocation or career. This is evident not only in texts, but in personal identifying items such as seals, which could often present the name
of the seal owner and their position. “Muškēnū” can described as Assyria’s lower class, above only slaves in social rank (Adams 1982:12). The muškēnū are the least-known group in ancient Mesopotamian society, and it is possible that they were tenant laborers or indebted laborers who had not yet sunken to slavery.

Several studies have been done specifically on the status of slaves in Mesopotamia (Baker 2017; Tenney 2011; Galil 2007). In Assyria, slaves (urdū) were the lowest social class – considered the legal property of their owners. It is unknown what percent of the Assyrian population was comprised of slaves, but it is clear that the empire relied more heavily on the labor extracted from resettled deported populations than enslaved persons. Despite written sources mentioning the obtaining and transport and resettlement of deported populations, it is actually unclear what position they maintained in Assyrian society. Some slaves were obtained as war captives, so it complicates the distinction between deportee laborers and servile workers. As with other designated classes, they were treated differently under Assyrian law. In the case of slaves specifically, this came with more rigid restrictions and harsher punishments, and the institution of slavery itself was highly regulated. Therefore, one’s identity as a slave likely manifested as an extreme form of socio-economic “other”. Their choices and actions on how to perform and present themselves relied to an extent on what they were allowed to express. This undoubtedly affected other, non-socio-economic aspects of their identities as well.
Other Identities (Age, Settlement/Community, Family Position)

The identities discussed above structured many aspects of how people acted and were portrayed. Here, I discuss other aspects of identity which could also affect a person’s identity and, by extension, mortuary rites. Age is likely the most important of these, almost entirely due to the difference in burial practices between infants, children, and adults. We are able to securely pair the practice with the different age groups because the skeletons themselves (if they are preserved) can be identified between those three general development categories. Age, in particular, is a transient identity. A person’s identity based on their age – and all the social status and cues which come with it – is ever-evolving. Even if broken down to its broadest categories (infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, etc.) these stages change most rapidly in the beginning of one’s life. Because of this rapid sequence of growth, age forms a central aspect of a child’s identity, more than any other component. The importance of age likely decreases in importance only as one grows into adulthood and begins to be defined by things such as career, gender, and class/status. It has been argued before that gender identity effectively replaces childhood identity once the child reaches the stage of physical maturity needed to produce children of their own (Allison 2015). This divide often provides a convenient boundary utilized by premodern societies between the two general stages of age: child and adult.

Peleg problematizes the relationship between age and gender, pointing out (rightfully so) that women and children are almost always considered together in any study (2002). This tendency has the problem of a) ignoring any variation in specific
stages of childhood (infancy, adolescence, etc.) among children, and b) supports the tired notion that women are inextricably tied to the household and childrearing, without calling for any further critical analysis to tease apart and verify such relationships on a case-by-case basis. There has never been a more effective way at erasing women and their agency from history than by conflating them with children in juxtaposition to the “default” category of adult male. This study will attempt to avoid these pitfalls by considering age identity and gender identity separately. This approach has its limits, as children show no signs of sexual dimorphism until puberty, when biological sex can be determined with osteological measurements. Therefore, without historical sources, gender cannot be considered in children without falling prey to our speculation.

Another aspect of identity is that of kin and/or community. Community identity is a tricky knot to untangle because it involves both spatiality (local) and varying degrees of shared identity – either via ethnicity, family, or even shared life experiences (Roßberger 2014:211; Mac Sweeney 2011:37). Therefore, community identity relies in part on the above broad categories (excepting gender and age identity, although it can be argued that those identities form their own sub-group within a broader community). Kinship groups provide a structuring mechanism for both social and economic systems in the ancient Near East. To an extent, the metaphor of kinship relations and households is extended to the political sphere (Schloen 2001; Ur 2014). (This is particularly evident vis-à-vis official titles – not only within Mesopotamia, but in contacts with other foreign entities as well. “My father”, “my brother”, and “my son” are common terms employed in the Amarna Correspondence, where local rulers/governors are the “sons” of the Egyptian king, while other kingdom rulers such as the kings of Mitanni and Babylon
style themselves as “brothers”. This use of familial terms is meant to establish the metaphor of the government as the household and the kings as the heads of that household – the fathers.)

The typical family structure in Assyria consisted of a nuclear household (Galil 2007). Households were organized patriarchally (the head of the household was called the “ewru”). Older generations could also live within the same physical household (Veenhof 1996), but this was rarer in the Neo-Assyrian period, where only 5% of households included extended family members. Women married out of the family, going to live in their husband’s home. When no children were born, or they had died, the husband taking a second wife or the family adopting a child were both viable options, but polygamy was rare (Stol 2016:160; Galil 2007:350).10 In his extensive study of Neo-Assyrian lower-strata households, G. Galil averages over four persons per family before 680 BCE (2007:346).11 Middle and upper classes, he shows, averaged between five to six members (2007:347). Both the adherence to, and deviation from, the family “norm” could affect the expression of one’s familial identity.

The general sentiment of loyalty to one’s kinship groups continued even after death. It was expected that one’s children would care for one in the afterlife, carrying out the postmortem tasks of feeding, watering, and calling out the name of the deceased (see Chapter 3 for more information on the kispu ritual.) Continued actions in caring for both

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10 See Radner (2017:219-226) for several vignettes of Assyrian life as deduced from archives of several individuals.

11 After 680, the average decreases to 2.5 members per lower stratum family. He posits that a reduction in the number of family members of the lower class might reveal a strengthening of the upper and middle class dynamics in the reigns of Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal (Galil 2007:346).
direct kin and more distant ancestors strengthened the kinship bonds of the Mesopotamian family. Furthermore, concern for one’s status and comfort in the afterlife provided an impetus for adhering to a typical household structure and reinforced inheritance laws and the claims of children to family tombs, and, by extension, the family home. This aspect of Assyrian practice will be discussed at length in Chapter 3. For now, it is important to acknowledge the tremendous impact kin groups and ancestry had on one’s sense of community and familial identity and how ingrained it could be in the actions and choices one carried out.

These aspects of identity that I have presented above comprise several core examples of what constructs an individual’s basic worldview and perception of self. Ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic class and status have been discussed at length in studies of the ancient world, and therefore methods for identifying their expression in the archaeological record are and varied. Numerous other influencing factors no doubt existed (age, community, kinship, etc.), but hopefully these that I have chosen to focus on can provide a general starting point to my investigation.

**Existing Identities within Northern Mesopotamia**

Within northern Mesopotamia in the late second and early first millennia, the landscape was inhabited with multiple legacies of kingdoms, empires, and, contained within these were multiple ethnic groups. This, of course, comes with its own host of interpretations, especially when such ethnic groups are tied to particular geographic regions or specific kingdoms. Briefly, in order to address ethnicity within this study, we
must first problematize it as a catch-all term of community identity and address the specific groups we know to be relevant in these areas between the second and the first millennia BCE. This will be explored with a brief explanation of the groups within northern Mesopotamia at this time.

Three main groups come to the fore when discussing ethnic groups in northern Mesopotamia in the late second and early first millennia. We have already discussed the rise of the Assyrians on the Tigris, growing from the small merchant city state at Aššur into the expansive empire. However, the situation is complicated when looking further west in the modern-day regions of northern Syria and southern Turkey. This area specifically was a zone inhabited by multiple groups known to us through textual records: the Aramaeans and the Luwians.

The term “Aramaean” was first used under the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1077), originally associated with the Ahlamu (Bunnens 1997:606). Initially, Aramaean presence seems to have been limited to the west of the Euphrates according to campaign records. However, clashes began to occur east of the river under Aššur-bel-kala (1073-1056), including in the Khabur area. The nature of Aramaeans as a group it is unclear. They are often viewed as a pastoralist, semi-nomadic population, with no formal political structure known to us (Lipiński 1989:25; Kühne 2009). The exact nature of Aramaean settlements conquered by these Assyrian kings is, therefore, unclear; possibly being encampments rather than permanent cities.

As time goes on, specific tribes of the Aramaeans (designated by “bit” before personal names, meaning “the house of”) begin to appear in Assyrian campaign records. Bit-Adini, specifically, appears to have been a group with control stretching from just
south of Carchemish to the Syrian Jezirah (Bunnens 1997:608). Yet, the emphasis here must remain on the group, not the territory; J.D. Hawkins defines Bit-Adini as a tribal state, based on patrilineal ancestry (1982:375). Bunnens argues that Aramaean control of this area took the form of gradual infiltration of sedentary establishments and political takeover, rather than any military action (1997:610). Aramaean cultural influence remains difficult to pinpoint. Linguistic influence may be seen in the names of several settlements, such as Til Barsip (Bunnens 1997:611). Beyond the language itself, there is little other evidence for strong cultural influence.

Linguistically, the other main group in the area was the Luwians. Designated after the language used, this group referred to themselves as direct successors of the Hittites, with the “Great King” based out of Carchemish, which was once an important Hittite city. In the modern literature, this state has been referred to as “Neo-Hittite”, based not only on the language and political designation, but also on the iconography purposefully related to that of the Hittites culture in the second millennium. Based on its geographic nexus in Carchemish, the culture has also been called “Syro-Hittite” (Bunnens 1997:612). Essentially, this group emphasized the continuity of Hittite practice into the first millennium, prior to Assyrian reconquest.

Ultimately, then, we see in the Khabur/Balikh regions specifically an interaction between the Aramaean and Syro-Hittite spheres, which resulted in patterns of Hittite urban traditions (seen at Carchemish and Til Barsip) and local governing dynasties of various origins, self-identifying as Hittites or Aramaean tribes (Bunnens 1997:614). This creates a complex picture when we try to then distinguish such identities without the assistance of written records. Bunnens argues that the material cultural tradition of the
area was inherited from the second millennium Hittite states, while the Aramaean ethnic
groups entered with their own organization and linguistic traditions and then assimilated
to the Hittite sedentary states (1997:614). Essentially, it is difficult, if not impossible
with our current knowledge, to adequately distinguish Syro-Hittite and Aramaean identity
from one another via material culture. As Assyria once again entered the scene after its
brief decline, the picture is, of course, even further complicated. Furthermore, we cannot
ignore any possible remaining cultural influence from the Hurrian occupation of the area
in the second millennium, which may very well have been adopted and preserved in some
capacity by the new groups in the area (Düring et al. 2015).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out several aspects of identity. Ethnic identity, gender
identity, and socio-economic identity are three of the most prominently discussed ideas in
contemporary archaeological studies. Other identities, such as those revolving around
age, community, ethnicity, kinship, and ancestry, also play key roles in how one
perceives oneself in relation to others. All aspects of identity affect how a person acts
and what choices they make in presenting themselves. A nuanced reading of identity
includes the idea of intersectionality, which is based on multiple identities interacting to
form unique treatment and perceptions of the individual.

Identities such as these just described can be displayed and reinforced during
mortuary rites, which include the funeral process, the burial, and any continued
interaction with the deceased. The archaeology of burials has seen many approaches;
from processual efforts to extrapolate information on social organization from burials, to post-processual efforts at understanding how the mortuary process is a performance and expression of self, to more recent studies focusing on ancestor cults and osteological/bioarchaeological approaches. My research draws on all of these approaches. Through a detailed systematic analysis of Middle and Neo-Assyrian graves from three sites in the Assyrian Empire, my research draws on the material culture of these graves to understand how identity was understood and expressed within the Assyrian Empire. The next chapter provides a background of Assyrian history and archaeology. A discussion of religion and beliefs in the afterlife will round out the background needed to dive into the data analysis discussion.
CHAPTER 3: THE MORTUARY CULTURE OF AN EMPIRE

Assyria was a multi-faceted, multi-ethnic empire that spanned the Near East. As such, its mortuary culture is not a monolithic entity; instead, it is nuanced, combining the identity of the deceased with the beliefs held by the community to fulfill obligations to the dead as they pertain to their beliefs in an afterlife. To understand an Assyrian perspective on death, I turn in this chapter to the literary sources on the matter. Understanding the relevant historical and archaeological sources of data allows us to form a comprehensive view on not only the remains, but the concerns of the living community underscoring responses to death. To this end, I compile a general survey of the current academic literature on the burial practices and related mortuary culture within the Assyrian Empire. Included in this last effort, I present a working typology of Assyrian burials to be employed in the three case studies making up this dissertation.

The scope of my research, as previously mentioned in Chapter 1, is constrained to sites which were directly affected by both Middle and Neo-Assyrian expansion. This includes an area starting with Northern Mesopotamia extending to the Zagros mountains in the east and northeast (the “heartland” of the Assyrian Empire), the Taurus Mountains in the north in modern-day Turkey, the upper limits of the Tigris and Euphrates, and bounded in the west by the Balikh river in modern-day Syria. During the last part of the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and the Iron Age (IA), Assyrians controlled the settlements contained within this area, (though to varying degrees.) Focusing on this area affords a picture of the Assyrian Empire in the longue durée, from its very beginning in the 14th century to its collapse in 609 BCE.
The Assyrian Afterlife

With this necessarily general and brief description of the Assyrian Empire’s history, we are now positioned to discuss the religious and cultural practices contained within the Empire. Assyrian beliefs in the afterlife and the practices surrounding these beliefs typically are integrated into the religion and culture that widely characterized Mesopotamia as a whole. What we know about Assyrian beliefs from textual sources pales in comparison to widely known beliefs in the afterlife from other ancient societies (such as Egypt). Nonetheless, Assyriologists have reconstructed an Assyrian belief system surrounding death based on several preserved myths, documents detailing ritual care for the deceased, spells and protections against ghosts and spirits, and a few surviving funerary inscriptions. This skeletal understanding of Assyrian afterlife beliefs can be fleshed out by the archaeological evidence surrounding mortuary practices in Mesopotamia.

There are several literary texts on which Assyriologists have based their understanding of the Mesopotamian afterlife: *The Descent of Ishtar* (Foster 2005), *Nergal and Ereshkigal* (Foster 2005), and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Dalley 1989). The afterlife, as illustrated by these texts, took place in a physical location; Sumerian thought in the third millennium envisioned this locale as KUR – the eastern mountains, where one’s spirit had to travel to enter the netherworld (Katz 2003:105). Later, in the second millennium, this seems to have changed to an “underworld” – literally, a realm below the Earth’s crust (Katz 2003). This realm (KI in Sumerian, *erṣetum* in Akkadian) was located deep beneath the realm of the living. Written sources are vague, but it lay somewhere above the watery abyss of the Apsu and “below the mountains” (MacDougal
This vertical aspect of Mesopotamian cosmography seems to have assimilated with Mesopotamian practices of inhuming their dead. The journey to the afterlife was also conceived as an actual, physical journey undertaken by the deceased’s spirit. The grave became the deceased’s pathway into the netherworld, as shown in the Udughul incantations against evil spirits (dating to the Old Babylonian period, but with Neo-Assyrian bilingual versions): “In the grave the gate is open for them/ they leave toward the gate of sunset,” (Udughul 250-252 [CT 16], MacDougal 2014:96).

In the third millennium, this was described as a journey to the mountains. In the second millennium, this transformed to echo The Descent of Ishtar; now the newly-deceased first had to brave the demon-infested steppeland and cross the Ḥubur River with the assistance of the Mesopotamian equivalent of Charon (AOAT 216 8-9, ZA 73 191-196): (“Our fathers gave in, traveled the road of death/ ‘They crossed the river Ḥubur,’ it has been said since the days of yore,” (The Babylonian Theodicy, Lambert 1960:70)).
After this, they encountered the gatekeeper, Bidu, who let them pass through the seven gates. The spirit was then subjected to a preliminary screening by the Anunnaki-gods. Once in the netherworld, it seems that spirits were organized into different levels by the Anunnaki, with “wicked” souls banished to the lowest depths and ordinary spirits on the highest level. This separation of the good from the bad likely served as a comfort to the living – knowing that their loved ones existed more comfortably than the evil souls, who were sent to dwell with the demons who lurked in the lowest level. For both, however, their residence in the afterlife was eternal: even the road to the underworld itself was called “urrḫ la tārī”: the road of no return (Horowitz 1998:354-55). Despite this seemingly final title, however, there were ways for spirits to travel between realms – mostly to interact with the world of the living once summoned by necromancy or similar invocation: “On this day stand before Shamash and Gilgamesh (Gods of the Underworld), judge a judgment, decree a decree ... I will pour cool water down your water-pipes; cure me that I may sing your praises,” (KAR, 227 iii 14 f., 24 f. in Bayliss 1973:118). As this example illustrates, while death was a permanent state, the spirit of the deceased was believed to have had a surprising amount of control over events in the realm of the living.

Overall, it seems that the realm of the dead promised a dreary existence whether one’s spirit was deemed wicked or not. The underworld was a bleak place, with few resources and almost no escape. Even the gods could not venture freely into this realm, as they were restricted to heaven (AN) and earth. This is perhaps best illustrated in the well-known tale of The Epic of Gilgamesh. Though the story itself contains many separate arcs, one of the most prominent themes is Gilgamesh’s fear of death and his
resulting search for immortality, especially upon the death of his companion, Enkidu.

When speaking of the underworld, Enkidu says to Gilgamesh:

“He seized me, drove me down to the dark house, dwelling of Erkalla’s god/ To the house which those who enter cannot leave/ On the road where travelling is one way only/ To the house where those who stay are deprived of light/ Where dust is their food and clay their bread/ They are clothed, like birds, with feathers/ And they see no light, and they dwell in darkness” (Gilgamesh VII from Dalley 1989: 89).

Similar to this is a passage from Ishtar’s Descent, which describes the underworld in almost the same words:

“the Netherworld, dark house, the abode of Irkal[la], to the house which none leave who have entered it, to the road from which there is no way back, to the house wherein the entrants are bereft of light, where dust is their fare and cl[ay] their food, (where) they see no light, (rest)ing in darkness, (where) they are clothed like birds, with wings for garments, (and where) over door and bolt is spread dust. . .” (Ishtar’s Descent 4-11 from Scurlock 1997)

It is perhaps telling that even Ishtar must strip of all divine ornaments and indicators of status to enter the netherworld, on a mission to seek out her sister, Ereshkigal, who ruled the afterlife with her consort and royal court. Under her rule, the spirits of the dead spent the rest of their existence in a darker and gloomier world than the one they knew before; however, their circumstances could be improved. The comfort of the dead was directly dependent upon the charity of relatives who remained in the living world. The living kept the dead supplied with food, water, and other offerings, as will be described below.

**Ritual and Practice**

One of the best-represented rituals relating to death in Assyria is the *kispu*. The *kispu* was carried out periodically to appease spirits of the deceased with offerings of
food and fresh water. Documents detailing the kispu include incantations and documents from royal archives. These record the types and numbers of offerings intended for the dead. Texts like these are useful in reconstructing the ritual, revealing information about who, what, when, and why. To identify the ritual’s participants, we can turn to incantation texts. One text lists the relatives of the deceased (in this example, the god Marduk addresses restless ghosts): "…Whether (you be) one who has no brother or sister, or one who has no family or relatives, or one who has no son or daughter, or one who has no heir to make libations of water..." (AfO 19, 117, i1. 7-10 in Bayliss 1973:118-19). It was the family of the deceased’s job to carry out the kispu ritual – one of the family members detailed above acting as the “pāqidu". Lines from the Epic of Gilgamesh illustrate the consequences of dying without a caregiver: “‘Have you seen him whose ghost has no pāqidu?’ ‘I have seen (him). He has to eat the dregs of the pot and scraps of food that are thrown down in the street’," (Thompson 1928) It was the job of the pāqidu to supply the deceased with food, fresh water, and a verbal invocation of their name:

"Whether you be the ghost of one unburied, or whether you be the ghost who has none to take care of him, or whether you be a ghost who has none to make him a funerary offering, or whether you be a ghost who has none to pour out water for him, or whether you be a ghost who has none to call his name," (CT i6, 10 v 5-14 in Bayliss 1973:116).

Documentation from the Neo-Babylonian period indicates that the royal kispu ritual was carried out at least monthly – possibly at the end of every month (with a longer celebration in the month of Abu – when it is said that ghosts left their homes in the Netherworld to come back for a short visit with the living) (Scurlock 1997). The following inscription from Harran records Nabonidus’ mother describing her attention to
the dead: "But I, every month without interruption, in my finest garments, made them a funerary offering of oxen, fat sheep, bread, best beer, wine, sesame oil, honey and all kinds of garden produce..." (AfO I, Pls. I 1-13 in Bayliss 1973:120). Inventory texts spanning the second through the first millennia record monthly rations of meat and other foods set aside for the kispu (Tsukimoto 1980:132). “On the day of the new moon, day of kispu-offerings... kispu-bread will be set out for him (the cooperative family ghost) ... May his name be invoked, while he is continually respected,” (Alster, Acta Sumerologica, 13.58f:137-138, 141).

Where the kispu ritual was carried out is still a matter of some debate; Tsukimoto argues that offerings were made at the graveside – one’s physical presence near the location of the body was imperative to the success of the ritual (1985:132). However, others contradict this, arguing that certain structures away from graves were also utilized for kispu (as will be further discussed below) (al-Khalesi 1977; Brown 2010). It is possible to suggest that kispu was highly locational in nature because it required reoccurring maintenance of the deads’ needs. Success of the ritual depended on its proximity to the grave: a literal feeding of the dead – food and water were physically provided to the bodies of the deceased.

Incantations requesting the assistance of spirits (“etemmū”), seeking to appease angry spirits, or invoking the dead for other reasons (Bayliss 1973:118). These can be seen in tablets AfO 19 and CT 10, both quoted above, but also in further examples of incantations and ritual instructions; “On this day stand before Shamash and Gilgamesh (Gods of the Underworld), judge a judgment, decree a decree ... I will pour cool water down your water-pipes; cure me that I may sing your praises,” (KAR, 227 iii 14 f., 24 f.
in Bayliss 1973:118). Here it is important to note that in several ritual texts associated with the dead, a libation pipe through which to pour water is mentioned. The *arūtu*, or clay pipe, is employed as a direct conduit from the living to the dead by which sustenance is provided (Hauser 2012:358-59). Archaeological evidence of such pipes have been identified at Babylon and Kalhu in relation to both domestic and royal burials. (Reuther 1926:156; Oates & Oates 2001:82). There, the pipes existed above said burials, running vertically from their position at the surface downwards to the dead. Providing a direct link between living and dead precluded the chore of bringing said offerings down into the tombs. While *arūtu* such as these are not attested at Aššur, it is still possible to infer a direct link from the presence of drains. Such drains are recorded in two rooms of the Red House at Aššur: Rooms 21 and 14, each associated with niches (Hauser 2012:362). Likely, these pipes led to the burials underneath these rooms, although this is disappointingly impossible to prove from excavation records alone; Hauser notes that when these drains were uncovered, they were not followed down by the excavators (Hauser 2012:362). Ideally, future work at the site will uncover more evidence relating to these “drains”; until then, however, it must be sufficient to propose that these pipes were utilized as a variant of the terracotta *arūtu* pipes seen at Kalhu and Babylon.

Now it is important to address other evidence which might relate to the practice of domestic *kispu* within these “family rooms”. This other evidence is primarily in the form of food remains within graves. While the pipes provided an obvious repository for liquids, the process of offering solid food to the dead is not so transparent. Food remains recovered from burials are rarely attested (identified in thirteen graves and Tomb 38 at Aššur – mostly in the form of burnt and broken animal bones, fruit seeds and pits, and
grain) (Hauser 2012: App. 2). Several options can be presented: a) food was physically deposited in crypts and most likely left within niches for inaccessible graves, b) the offering of food was presented in the form of a meal that the pāqidu family would partake in (Bayliss 1973:119), or c) the food offerings were small enough to also deposit down the pipes with the water. Tombs even more than graves might have been directly accessed in order to place food and water offerings within. The design of the tombs’ floor plans show various architectural solutions for accessing the tomb chambers via staircase or shaft (Lundström 2009:150). A common offering to the dead was roasted grain or beer flavored with it – this was an archaized form of preparing grain, so the Mesopotamians served it to the dead, believing that it was the food of their ancestors and assuming that the dead would like it because they were “outside of time” so to speak (KAR 21 rev.13-14; KAR 32:15-16 from Scurlock 1997).

In addition to funerary offerings and the kispu rituals, other ceremonies seem to have been performed on the death-day anniversary of certain ancestors (Scurlock 1997). Attitudes towards the dead projected the tensions attached to lifetime relationships, and the repeated rituals of the cult seemed to have relieved tensions. Even though Mesopotamians likely tended to the dead to gain their favor and acquiescence, this is not to make light of the fact that they probably also carried out their duties due to sentiment for deceased relatives. It was also likely hoped that by performing these chores, they would then have the chores performed on them once they had died. In essence, they were maintaining a cycle of symbiotic relationships between the dead and the living. The mortuary cult, and the continuous reinforcement of caring for ancestors, seems to have been a means of preserving familial identity after death.
The Burials

Archaeological evidence surrounding death is our current best source for understanding Assyrian mortuary culture. Although burials have been excavated at almost every site in Mesopotamia, there are few comprehensive sources for burial practices throughout Mesopotamian history; burials are instead published in single excavation volumes, sometimes together (as in Haller’s *Die Graber und Gräfte von Aššur*) or grouped by related strata. This practice has the side effect of providing no general academic work on Mesopotamian mortuary culture. Perhaps the only attempt at this has been E. Strommenger’s article on the burial forms in Babylonia, in which she establishes a general typology of grave types found (1964). This article has been referenced repeatedly in the following years of publications on Mesopotamian burials, but is not sufficiently broad in scope to be employed here without several key adjustments.

I draw from several published typologies of Mesopotamian graves to construct a typology for this study which encompasses all Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian burials present from Aššur, Tell Fekheriye, and Tell Billa. I draw largely from the typology used by F. Pedde in his volume on the Middle Assyrian burials at Aššur, (adapted from Haller’s type divisions put forward in *Die Graber und Gräfte von Aššur* (1954)) with additional types drawn from Strommenger’s article and H. Baker’s chapter on Babylonian burials (Pedde 2015; Strommenger 1964; Baker 1995). I will now provide a brief summary on these types, generally divided between tombs (built structures for
holding one or many corpses, built with access points in the forms of staircases or shafts) and graves (burials without substantial built components, including burials in pots, sarcophagi buried in loose soil, or burials with unclosed libn structures, and not made to be accessed after burial).

The Graves

Type 1: Pit graves

Pit graves, sometimes called earth graves, are the simplest grave types. The deceased was placed directly in the ground in a dug-out pit and then presumably covered by soil. Though this grave type is by far the most common throughout Mesopotamian history, it decreases substantially during the Assyrian periods. Pit graves almost always only contain one individual, often accompanied by modest grave goods. In southern Mesopotamia, several pit graves have contained preserved reed mats – possibly indicating that pit graves in northern Mesopotamia similarly contained mats, but due to a wetter climate they have not been preserved (Strommenger 1964).

Type 2: Sherd graves

Type 2.1: Broken sherd graves

Sherd graves are similar to pit graves, wherein a hole is dug into the earth and the body of the deceased is laid into it, positioned with grave goods (if any). However, before reburial, a layer of broken potsherds is distributed to cover the body, with care often taken to cover the body from the head to the feet. The sherds often come from
more than one type of ceramic, and therefore were probably from already-broken pottery which would have otherwise been discarded.

*Type 2.2: Large half-vessel cover graves*

These graves, as obvious from the name, are covered by a large half-vessel (often covering the head of the deceased) while the rest of the body is covered by sherds of various sizes.

![Figure 3.2: Example of a typical sherd grave. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.45)](image)

*Type 3: Jar graves*

Jar inhumations are by far the most common type of burial recovered from all over the ancient Near East (Strommenger 1964). In these graves, the deceased was arranged to fit within a large ceramic pot and then buried in a pit, often accompanied by grave goods either inside or close by the pot.

*Type 3.1: Single-jar graves*
This variation of jar graves includes all burials where the deceased’s body is contained inside a single jar. The jars in these burials often measure between 45-65 cm in height, but can be larger or smaller depending on the size of the individual contained within. This type of burial was the most common for infants and children, but adults buried in single-jar graves have also been recovered. Some degree of contortion was required for the corpses to fit within the jars, and as such the fetal position is commonly associated with jar burials. Overall, there was a narrow range of variation within this type of grave.

Type 3.2: Double-jar graves

Double-jar graves consist of two vessels placed rim-to-rim to form a capsule (hence their alternative name, “capsule graves”). These burials are common in Middle Assyrian times, but decrease in popularity into the Neo-Assyrian period. Double-jar burials could contain one or two individuals, and the positions of the corpse(s) were varied. While infants and young children were almost always buried in single-jar inhumations, double-jar graves and their larger sizes seem to have been used for older
children, sub-adults (adolescents), and adults. Grave goods found in double-jar burials were widely variable between burials of the same type; all goods were included within the capsule. Like single-jar burials, each of the two jars used in double-jar graves were often between 45-65 cm in height, creating a capsule between 90-130 cm in length.

Figure 3.4: Examples of typical double-jar burials (after Pedde 2015: Taf.28)

Type 3.3: Multiple Ceramics

This type includes all jar burials of more than one or two vessels, and also encompasses all vessel burials which are augmented by additional sherds as covering. This is differentiated from normal sherd burials by the presence of vessels which contain the body.

Type 3.4: Cremation urns

Cremation urns are not included in the types of Assyrian graves put forward by Haller (they are lumped under single-jar graves) but I think that it is important to make a distinction here, especially with the recent scholarship on cremation practices in the
Assyrian provinces (Tenu 2009a; Soldi 2009; Kreppner 2014). Cremation urns are ceramic vessels, usually in the shape of a medium or large jar. They are deposited either with the mouth of the vessel facing up or laid on their sides. The burnt human remains are contained loosely within the jar, and any grave goods are similarly placed within. Rarely, burnt faunal remains will also be included in the jar, possibly indicating that food offerings were burnt on the funeral pyre as well.

*Type 4: Sarcophagi graves*

Sarcophagi were employed in both graves and tombs, but stand alone as a type in graves only. Sarcophagi could contain one or multiple individuals, with grave goods included in the sarcophagus itself. Sarcophagi were sealed with fitted lids.

*Type 4.1: Short single-piece sarcophagi*

Sarcophagi were extremely difficult to manufacture in one whole piece, and as a result, are rare in the archaeological record. These sarcophagi were ceramic and fired in one piece. They can be either rectangular or ovular in shape, with outside decorations usually in the form of braided raised applique on the sides below the rim. The heights and thickness of the walls vary, but all are straight-sided. Lids were found in most examples of this type of burial. Single-piece sarcophagi are rare in the Middle Assyrian period, but increase in number during the Neo-Assyrian period.
Type 4.2: Long single-piece sarcophagi

These sarcophagi are similar to Type 4.1 in nature, but are a larger version – up to or exceeding the entire length of the body of the deceased, in order to hold them in a fully-extended position.

Type 4.3: Double-piece trough sarcophagi
Like single-piece sarcophagi, double-piece sarcophagi are ceramic and come in various shapes, ranging from rectangular to ovular. They are constructed in two pieces and fired separately, each forming one half of the end result. They are then either just placed edge-to-edge in the dug pit or brought together with bitumen or clay securing the two pieces. The sarcophagi were sealed with custom-fitting lids after the deceased were placed within (often with grave goods arranged around the corpse). Like the single-piece sarcophagi, most have straight-sided walls.
Type 5: Brick graves

Brick graves are constructed with dried mudbrick, often arranged to form a sarcophagus shape in which the body is then laid. The bottom and sides of the dug grave are reinforced with mudbrick. No examples of brick roofs have been recovered, but some of the corpses have been covered in broken sherds. This type of grave could be included under the general category of “cist” grave, after Carter and Parker’s typology (1995).
Type 6: Cist graves

Cist graves, like the above-described brick graves, are stone lined tombs without a roof, forming a sarcophagus-like structure in which the body was laid. Stone sizes varied, and were often cemented together with plaster to hold its shape. No coverings have been found on this type of grave, although we cannot rule out perishable options such as cloth, matting, etc. This is a more typical example of the grave type of the same name described by Carter and Parker (1995). This type is extremely rare in Assyria, but occurs in the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods.

Type 7: Composite graves

Composite graves refer to the burials in which various containers have been used synchronously to contain the corpse. The most common example of this in Assyria is the combination of one half of a sarcophagus and a large pot, put together to hold the deceased. As such, these graves are also referred to in the literature as “capsule” graves. Another common example is a complete jar containing one half of the corpse, while the remaining half was covered with a layer of broken sherds. The four types of composite graves need no further explanation, as they are dependent upon the combination of materials used. More often than not, it is only possible to classify graves as Type 7, as notes are unclear on the exact materials used. Modifications to the vessels were made as needed; if the corpse was too long to be contained within two vessels placed mouth-to-mouth, sometimes a hole would be broken in the bottom of one pot to allow the feet to extend through. In other cases, the two vessels were spaced apart to contain the length of the body, while the gap in the middle was covered in sherds. Grave goods were included
in the vessels with the deceased. This grave type could contain one or more individuals, with one example from Aššur containing four.

Figure 3.9: Examples of composite graves from Aššur. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.98)

_Type 7.1: Sherd/ Vessel and Mudbrick_

These graves are comprised of ceramics and mudbrick. Often, this takes the form of a vessel containing one half or third of the deceased, while the rest is covered or surrounded by a mudbrick casing.

_Type 7.2: Sarcophagus and Sherd/ Vessel_

This is a rare type of grave which takes the form of a half or partial sarcophagus container covering part of the deceased, while the rest is covered with sherds or encased in an entire vessel.
Type 7.3: Sarcophagus and Mudbrick

This type is similar to sarcophagi and sherd composite burials, but the ceramic part is replaced instead by a mudbrick casing.

Type 7.4: Mudbrick and Stone

This composite burial includes both mudbrick and stone in the construction or covering of a burial.

The Tombs:

![Diagram of different types of Middle Assyrian tomb vaults]

Figure 3.10: The different types of Middle Assyrian tomb vaults: A. Kraggewolbe mit Tragmauer, B. Kraggewolbe ohne Tragmauer, C. Paraboltonne ohne Tragmauer, D. Paraboltonne mit Tragmauer, E. Rundtonne mit Tragmauer (after Pedde 2015: Taf.4)

Type 1: Corbelled-ceiling tombs

Tombs with corbelled vaults (or “false” vaults) were constructed by offsetting consecutive courses of stones on either side so that the project towards the center of the
space, meeting at the apex of the arch and often capped with flat stones. These vaults rest on the longest walls of the tomb. In some cases, these tombs almost completely consist of the vault itself, which sometimes begins as low as three courses up from the tomb’s floor – making the tomb itself almost a perfect triangle. Other tombs of this type have the vault begin much higher, making the bottom of the tomb useable. The brick dimensions of these tombs are usually between 24-25 cm in width. These types of tombs are also proportionally wider than the other types, although the length does not usually differ.

**Type 2: Barrel vaulted-ceiling tombs**

The barrel vault is the simplest form of vault, essentially formed by a series of arches creating a semi-cylindrical appearance. This generates an outward thrust, which is often offset by strengthening the lower supporting walls or lower courses of the arch.

**Type 2.1: “Parabolic vault” tombs (with and without supporting walls)**

The parabolic vaults are constructed to meet at the apex of the arch with a slight point – making the arches straighter than typical barrel vaults. There are two types of parabolic vaults used in Assyrian tombs: those with supporting walls on which the vault is constructed, and those with barrel vaulting from the ground up. In those of the latter category, the long walls of the tomb are comprised entirely of the vault itself while the two shorter walls are constructed vertically on either end to fill in the arch. This creates a very narrow tomb chamber, which immediately narrows from the first course of bricks. Most of these tombs have very small floor areas from about 2.5m² to 3m². This form is less common than other tomb constructions with retainer walls supporting the ceiling arch, and does not appear after the Middle Assyrian period. The parabolic vaults with
supporting walls, however, enjoy a much wider and more navigable space. These supporting walls were not strictly vertical, and occasionally slanted inwards at a shallow angle to support the arch built on top of them.

Both versions of parabolic vault tombs were often accessed by a narrow vertical shaft built into one of the narrow ends of the tomb. The bottom of the shaft was usually raised above the tomb floor, creating a small stair. Niches were also common architectural elements in this type of tomb, and were created by leaving out bricks from the walls to form a small, window-like inset ledge. The niches could be present on any side of the tomb, but usually are found on the narrow wall opposite the tomb entrance.

*Type 2.2: “Round barrel vault” tombs (with supporting wall)*

These types of tombs are common during both the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods. The vault itself is supported by two long vertical walls, usually consisting of four or five courses of brick which comprise about half of the tomb’s height. The two narrow walls are built to support the arch. Round barreled vault-tombs are generally no larger than parabolic vault-tombs, but the tallest of the round barreled vaults surpass the parabolic-vaults in terms of height. Round barrel vaults also allow for slightly more vertical space than parabolic vaults, and this factor is perhaps what encouraged their popularity during both periods. The entrances to these tombs were built in the narrow wall and could either be accessible through shafts or staircases. Some of these tombs also have small ante-chambers surrounding the entrance – using the same arch as the main chamber, but divided by a smaller wall with a doorway. Niches and ledges are found in round barrel vault tombs. They are most often built on the narrow
wall opposite that of the entrance, but in several cases have also been added to the longer supporting walls. Some of these tombs even contained two niches.

**Type 2.3: “Pitched brick vault” tombs (with supporting wall)**

In pitched brick constructions, the bricks are installed vertically (resting on their narrow edges) and are canted at an angle to form the arch. Dimensions of the bricks used varied from 25-51 cm wide and 5-10 cm thick. Like the round barrel vault tombs, this type of vault was supported by several courses of bricks below the arch which spanned the longer sides of the tomb, while the narrow ends were built vertically to meet the ceiling and contained the entrances and any niches or ledges present. Pitched brick vaulting was used to construct tombs during the Middle Assyrian period, but vastly grew in popularity during the Neo-Assyrian period. This type of construction was also popular in Assyrian gates, and in Sennacherib’s reign he used this architectural method to construct aqueduct systems to service Nineveh and the surrounding countryside.

**Type 2.4: Flat-ceiling tombs (with supporting wall)**

These tombs are built with courses of bricks stacked in either a pure vertical or angled orientation. The roof is comprised of bricks, as in other types, but these bricks are laid flat, supported by the long walls and additional short walls at either end acting as additional supports for the roof.

**Type 3: Rock-cut tombs**

Rock tombs are rare in Assyria but are distinguished from rock graves by built entrances to the chambers, allowing for access, and an unfilled space allowing for
movement and deposition of goods and other deceased. The ceilings of the rock-built tombs slope downwards to the floor, forming almost a domed roof. These tombs are accessed vertically by a manhole found in the center of the ceiling, which opened onto a central shaft.

Figure 3.11: Example of a rock-cut tomb. (after Pedde 2015: Taf.104)

The Placement of Burials

The locational aspect of Mesopotamian burials was likely affected both by beliefs in the afterlife and economic rationales. Families maintained continuous access to the deceased, as rituals such as the *kispū* demonstrate. As seen in several texts, the residents were buried in the home upon death; "*He who built a house and said: This is my house. I built it for myself; I will rest in it. The day fate carries me off I will sleep in it,*" (Erra Epic IV: 99-101 from Scurlock 1997). Overwhelming evidence shows that burials in
Aššur were placed under inhabited houses (cf. Mofidi Nasrabadi 1999; Reuther 1926).

This is best illustrated by using the data on burials from Aššur, which was the cultural capital of the empire and also bears the most excavated burials of any other Assyrian site. Of the 663 burials from the Neo-Assyrian time, 507 can be associated with houses (Miglus 1996:295). Though this is only half of the houses, A. Hauser suggests that it is because of the excavator’s disinterest in anything unrelated to exposing house foundations that graves or tombs were not found under every house (2012:324). This proposal correlates well with the fact that, to our knowledge, no cemeteries exist at Aššur. Knowing that all graves and tombs were contained under house floors, however, Reuther suggests that burials in Mesopotamia were only put in under abandoned houses, citing the smell of the bodies as a main discourager (1926). This suggestion can be refuted by simply looking at the contexts: burials (graves and tombs alike) tended to follow established house walls. 478 of the 663 Neo-Assyrian burials at Aššur were placed along the edges of rooms in line with the walls, while only eleven of the remaining 174 burials were found in the center of rooms (Hauser 2012:326). Following the walls of the house to preserve its integrity would not have been a factor in the placement of the graves if the houses in question were in a state of disrepair. Furthermore, the smell would likely not have been an issue – the bodies were usually individually encased in ceramic vessels or were covered in other ways so as to prevent excessive decay (Haller 1954).

In addition to this, graves were clearly grouped within particular areas of houses. As houses often varied in size and structure, establishing a general plan of Neo-Assyrian houses is challenging. Eventually, however, a pattern can be identified: a division
between the front of the house (used for the main entrance and likely the “public space” for guests) and the back of the house (where typical domestic activities likely took place, along with storage). Though there are many variants on this basic layout, the concept remains the same (Fig. 3.12). With this dichotomy established between the front public space and the back private space, it is essential to point out burials were only ever found under the rooms comprising the back of the house (Hauser 2012:347). These innermost rooms, forming the private living space of the residents, therefore also served the function as a receptacle for the inhabitants’ ancestors. Not only this, but as O. Pedersén has pointed out, these back rooms were also used for storing documents (1986:138). In fact, in houses with archives, the archives and graves/ tombs were almost always within the same room: of the 31 archives at Aššur, 28 were found in conjunction with burials (Pedersén 1986:140).
Figure 3.12: Locations of graves underneath houses at Aššur. Note the niche along the back wall of the "grave room" in House 2. Child graves in red, adult graves in green, tombs in blue, tablet archives in
yellow. Topology plan: entrances in red, courtyards in green, grave rooms in yellow (after Hauser 2012: Taf. V)

It is important to consider the implications of this; both the archives and the family dead were in secluded, private parts of the house. Archives themselves contained the written documents of the family, a physical form of past transactions, deals, and correspondence. While the reasons for keeping these archives were undoubtedly primarily legal and economic in nature, the physical presence of the actual documents can carry emotional connotations. The documents occupy a physical space within the household, essentially providing a visible and accessible reminder of the past. It is fitting, then, that the family’s deceased kin are also included within these rooms. In all likeliness, at least some of the burials preceded the archives; the presence of the dead – purposefully relegated to a specific area of the house – already created a physical space related to family memory. It seems natural, then, that other physical remainders of memory – here in the form of clay tablets – would also be included in this space. There are, of course, exceptions to this phenomenon: larger houses often separated the archives and room with graves (Hauser 2012:347). Obviously, in houses without archives this is a moot point. However, the relationship between the two in homes with both is undeniable; the private section of the house clearly served as a physical memory receptacle, which will be readdressed later.

The focus can now turn to the specific function of these rooms in relation to the interaction between the living and the dead. As has already been discussed, the kispu ritual served the function of both satisfying the needs of the dead and, in so doing,
guaranteeing their protection over the living. So then, is there evidence within these backrooms that points to the practice of ritual – *kispu* or otherwise? To address this question, one must again turn to the architecture of the houses. An element of these domiciles which has not yet been discussed is that of niches in the walls. As have been identified at other sites in Mesopotamia (for example, see Woolley & Mallowan 1976 for Ur and Oates & Oates 2001 for Kalhu), architectural niches within homes are associated with ritual activity, most likely in the worship of household gods. While cult images and altars – the like of which have been recovered from niches at these other sites – do not appear in the same numbers at Aššur, it is nevertheless likely that these niches were associated with domestic religion in Assyria, as well.

This in part has to do with their relation to graves and tombs; much like the archives discussed above, a definite spatial relation appears between burials and wall niches. As Hauser has found, niches are present in 39 out of 46 houses at Aššur (2012:357). Of these 39 houses, a total of 80 niches were distributed among 58 separate rooms (Hauser 2012: 357). As can be inferred from this figure, multiple niches in one room were common. However, there is a clear relationship between the presence of graves/ tombs and niches – out of those 58 rooms with niches, only two rooms lacked any burials beneath them (Hauser 2012:358). Niches appear to be a strong indicator of a room containing burials. However, the opposite does not hold true: at least half of the burials found at Aššur are under rooms without niches (Hauser 2012:358). Therefore, the relationship between the two seems to depend upon the presence of burials rather than of niches – out of those 58 rooms with niches, only two rooms lacked any graves (Hauser 2012:358). These statistics suggest that it is likely that niches were added after the
graves or tombs were dug in order to accommodate family religion and cult, rather than burials being placed in rooms with niches already established. Not only this, but niches were present within the tombs themselves, possibly as places for funerary equipment (Hauser 2012:358) (see Fig. 3.13). This could also indicate that niches were utilized exclusively in a context of death.

Figure 3.13: Plan of Tomb 53 at Aššur. Note the niches on either side of the main chamber (after Hauser 2012:118)

The Missing Dead

In this consideration of the dead, we must acknowledge that what remains to us is not the entirety of burials that must have existed. In Aššur, 967 burials have been recovered from the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods. This is, quite obviously, not the entire population of Aššur over a span of seven centuries. The fact stands that at Aššur (and the other sites included in this study), we are missing thousands of the deceased. Surely in some cases this is an issue of ill preservation of the body. Yet, we must acknowledge the possibility that the deceased were buried elsewhere. This is especially
relevant for Aššur and Tell Billa, where all burials have thus far been recovered within the city (mostly in domestic contexts). However, it is unknown whether or not dedicated cemeteries existed off the mounds. Such cemeteries are difficult to locate without intensive survey and test excavations; remote sensing with satellite imagery, often incredibly useful in predicting the locations of settlements in the Near East (Wilkinson et al. 2005; Hammer & Ur 2019), are less helpful when trying to identify possible burial locations. The choices between who was buried within houses and who may have been buried elsewhere is difficult to parse without textual evidence, and it may very well be the case that this will become a critical component in understanding identity groups in future studies. As more information becomes available in this regard, the results of this study will be able to be adjusted and reconsidered in light of such new evidence.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the caveats in working with mortuary culture mentioned in Chapter 2 remain true when working with Assyrian burials; the archaeological evidence is never complete, and so conclusions drawn from any subset are tentative. Preservation, excavator bias, and even funeral rituals impact the data available today. Selective excavation of Assyrian sites which privileges domestic and public architecture over surrounding areas could mean that we are missing evidence from cemeteries and smaller

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12 This is due mostly to the nature of settlements versus cemeteries; settlements are constructed of mudbrick, which retains less moisture than the surrounding soil and therefore appears as lighter areas within the imagery. While some components of burials or dedicated cemeteries may also retain less moisture, the contrast is not as extreme as it is with settlements and, therefore, may be easier to overlook.
settlements. Keeping this in mind, the large number of burials addressed in this
dissertation allow for generalizations which a smaller corpus usually would not.

Within this chapter, we have reviewed a rough outline of the Assyrian Empire’s
development and its most potent and lasting effects on its subjects, emphasizing changes
in the lives of non-elite residents. We discussed the lasting impacts of Assyrian practices
of deportation and resettlement, variable types of provincial administration, the
connection of the wider Near East via the construction of the *harran šarri*, and the
development of the landscape by irrigation works, agricultural intensification, and the
establishment of new settlements from small interfluvial villages to sprawling capital
cities.

From here, we were able to move into a discussion of Assyrian religious beliefs in
the afterlife based on literary and other textual accounts. I concluded in this part that the
process of burial was a way to initiate the transformation of the body into its non-
corporeal form inhabiting the afterlife, essentially acting as the first part of the liminal
stage. Assyrian burials typically were placed under domestic structures, and continuing
interaction with the deceased was expected. This discussion included a survey of the
*kispu* ritual, which illustrated the high level of interaction between the realms of the
living and the dead. This was explored further in a discussion of Assyrian burial
practices, where a working typology of graves and tombs was established for use in
Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

The above discussion has placed us at a starting point from which to begin the
analysis of Assyrian graves in the core and provinces. Moving forward is a chance to
marry the theory and methods discussed in Chapter 1 and the historical and
archaeological evidence presented here with the corpora of burials from the sites this dissertation discusses: Aššur, Tell Billa, and provincial sites of the Upper Khabur/Balikh.
CHAPTER 4: THE GRAVES OF QALAT SHERGAT – AŠŠUR

Aššur is the oldest and longest-lasting example of an Assyrian capital city, predating the grand constructions at Nineveh and Kalhu and continuously serving as the seat of the empire’s culture and religion. Aššur (modern Qalat Shergat) was excavated in the early 1900’s by a German team from the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (DOG) led by Walter Andrae, with shorter-duration excavations in the 1980’s (by the SOAH and Freie Universität Berlin) and again in the 1990’s (by the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, SOAH, and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). In this chapter, I present the Middle and Neo-Assyrian burials from these excavations at Aššur, divided further into three groups: those of the Middle Assyrian phase, a Transitional phase overlapping with the collapse of the Bronze Age, and the Neo-Assyrian phase. Before this analysis, I briefly lay out the excavation history of the site and Aššur’s historical significance within the growth of the Assyrian Empire. The burials discussed in this chapter provide a base from which I interpret the formation and evolution of a core Assyrian identity; the conclusions reached here will then serve to illuminate the similarities and differences within contemporary provincial assemblages at Šibaniba and Assyrian-occupied sites in the Khabur and Balikh valleys.

From this chapter onwards, I will present the datasets of burials, their characteristics, and their contents. Chapters 4-6 will focus on Aššur, Šibaniba, and provincial sites on the Khabur and Balikh, respectively, to understand how identity in the Assyrian Empire was constructed and displayed in each area. For Aššur and the Khabur-Balikh, many of these burials have been published elsewhere, and I will refer to the
appropriate sources. The burials at Šibaniba, however, have not yet been published and I
undertake this task in Chapter 5 and Appendix A. A general synthesis of the data and
cross-site conclusions is discussed in Chapter 7.

The Excavations

The very first investigation of Aššur took place in 1840 in order to explore what
was known to be an important site on the Tigris River. It was directed by William F.
Ainsworth, but without producing significant results. Seven years later, Henry A. Layard
and Hormuzd Rassam began their own excavations on the Assyrian capital – opening a
series of trenches and tunnels, and uncovering monumental statues, cuneiform tablets,
and prisms of Tiglath-Pileser I (Harper et al. 1995). Under the leadership of W. Andrae
(funded by the DOG) the German expedition continued this work over fifty years later,
beginning on Sep. 18, 1903 (Pedde 2012a). The project worked year-round at the site,
excavating for over ten years before it was finally closed on Apr. 1, 1914. Over 200
workmen were employed, and a considerable amount of the ancient capital was
investigated (Pedde 2012a). During the course of the DOG’s investigations, they dug test
trenches measuring 10m in width and extending in sections running E-W at 100m
intervals across the site (see Fig. 4.1). Monumental architecture in the form of religious
buildings and royal palaces, including the temples of Aššur, Anu and Adad, Ištar, Nabu,
and Šamaš and Sin, and the Old Palace were uncovered in the northern part of the site
(Andrae 1938). Additionally, the terrace in the west was excavated, revealing the House
of the New Year (the bīt akītu). Investigations of the city wall around Aššur revealed an
outer wall, an inner wall, and several gates (Andrae 1938). The main benefit of using the
E-W test trenches was that they provided not only an informed layout of the entire site, but also allowed for the exploration of Assyrian domestic architecture.

Figure 4.1: Map of Aššur (Miglus 1996: Plan 1)
After the close of the DOG’s excavations, it was not until 1978 that preservation efforts began at the site, undertaken by the State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage (SOAH) of Iraq. Multiple excavation and restoration projects by SOAH continued on-and-off until 1986, during which various areas of the site were investigated, but little was published. In 1988, the Freie Universität Berlin began a campaign at Aššur that lasted for two years (1988-1990), during which they focused on an area west of the Temple of Nabu. This project established a reliable stratigraphy of phases dating to the LBA-IA transition, contributing to a nuanced analysis of the rest of the material (Dittmann 1997/98; 1990). Overlapping with this project was a similar investigation begun by the University of Munich, led by B. Hrouda, which lasted from 1989-1990 (Hrouda 1991). These excavations focused on the area southwest of the Old City, containing houses from the late Neo-Assyrian phase. Later, this same area was reopened under a Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft-led project in 2000-2001, where P. Miglus opened two additional areas during these seasons yielding Neo-Assyrian levels (2000; 2002; 2003). Contemporary work by SOAH began once again in 1998, with the same result of few publications; one notable exception was the work done by H. al-Hayani on the hill to the south of the ziggurat which uncovered a large domestic neighborhood of Neo-Assyrian-phase homes – one with an archive of over 200 tablets (al-Hayani 2000). This work ended in 2002 and remains the most recent project at the site of Aššur.

Aššur’s data is well-represented in the academic literature of today. Publications utilizing the extensive collection of legacy data continue to use the vast amounts of

13 See Sumer volumes 35 (1979) and 42 (1981) for relevant publications.
information from the original excavations. Such new scholarship not only includes compiling and releasing “new” data gathered from the original records, but also reassessing and republishing the original datasets, such as the residential areas of Aššur (Miglus 1996), ceramics (Hausleiter 2010), the archival documents (Pedersén 1986), the Old Palace (Pedde 2011), and, perhaps most importantly to this research, the tombs and graves (Pedde & Lundström 2008, Hauser 2012, Hockmann 2010, Pedde 2015, Richter forthcoming, Pedde forthcoming). Spearheading this movement towards publication is the Aššur Projekt, created in 1997 with the purpose of publishing in full the old Aššur excavations and so far resulting in over 100 publications (Pedde 2012a).¹⁴

These modern reassessments of the original Aššur excavations are key to modern archaeological research as the sheer scale of such an excavation is no longer possible (or desirable). However, the benefits to wide investigations such as Andrae’s lay in the exploration of not just the royal or religious monumental architecture (so often prioritized in excavations) but the domestic sphere of the actual town. The Aššur excavations uncovered over 40,000m² of residential areas which continues to be our best source of daily Assyrian life (Andrae 1938). Hand-in-hand with this are the Assyrian burials; as mentioned in Chapter 3, it was common in Mesopotamia for residents to be buried within their own households. Aššur is no exception.

¹⁴ For a full list of publications related to Aššur and its excavations, see the project website: www.assur.de.
Aššur’s Environment

The site of Aššur was built on a cliff of the Jebel Hanuqa on the western side of the Tigris River, north of the confluence of the Lower Zab and the Tigris. The cliff itself slopes down on the SW edge, butting steeply against the river on its eastern side—forming both a defensible location and an outlook over the surrounding land (Miglus 1996). The city lies just inside the rainfall-fed agricultural zone of North Mesopotamia, meaning that the massive irrigation works of southern Mesopotamian cities did not need to be present at Aššur for the inhabitants of the city to survive (Andrae 1938). To the city’s west lies further dry mountains, while beyond the Tigris River to the east lies an extremely fertile floodplain, used by the Assyrians for subsistence. On the steep northern side of the outcrop on which Aššur was built ran a tributary of the Tigris, which afforded further natural defenses to the imperial city. Aššur formed the southernmost tip of the geographical triangle commonly known as the “Assyrian Heartland”—bounded by Arbela (modern Erbil), Nineveh (modern Mosul), and Aššur. Riverine traffic on the Upper and Lower Zab linked the region together through communication and economic interface (Pedde 2012b). Overland routes, also, were readily accessible from the heartland generally and Aššur more specifically—this is perhaps best exemplified by the extensive MBA textile-metal trade between the merchants of Old Assyrian Aššur and Anatolian cities, such as Kaneš (Veenhof 1996). Such a beneficial position afforded the opportunities needed for a single city to give rise to an ancient superpower.
Aššur in the Assyrian Empire

The site of Qalat Shergat was occupied continuously beginning in the second half of the third millennium and continuing into Islamic phases (Harper et al. 1995). Phases of its existence have been highly varied in nature: from the EBA town under the heavy influence of southern Mesopotamia to the merchant-city of the early second millennium, to the capital and religious center of the Assyrian Empire, to the administrative center of the Parthians. This continuity of settlement was believed by the imperial Assyrians to have played a crucial role in their empire’s genealogy; for example, in the Assyrian King List, Shamshi-Adad is listed as one of the first rulers of Assyria after his takeover of Aššur – believed by the Assyrians to have started the march towards Empire (Hagens 2005). Continuity was emphasized in Assyrian propaganda, and this tendency would also manifest in Aššur’s perpetual importance to the Assyrian Empire, even after retiring from its status as capital in the 9th century (Roaf 2001).

As Mitanni control shrank during the 14th century BCE, Hurrians relinquished control over the city Aššur, paving the way for Assyrians to regain power. The Middle Assyrian phase witnessed the restorations of old temples and palaces in the city by the new kings striving to consolidate power over a new and vast empire (Andrae 1921). Some structures, like the Temple to Ishtar, were restored.15 The city walls were reinforced and extended, and newer structures like the Anu-Adad Temple were built (Werner 2016). These building projects drew from the new wealth that was flowing into the empire’s capital from subjugated provinces, based on a system of tribute. To secure

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15 Tukulti-Ninurta I built a new temple over old foundations, completely altering its layout but maintaining its location (Andrae 1921).
Aššur’s status as the religious and cultural center of Assyria, kings made their mark by restoring and expanding the city’s public buildings – maintaining a sense of loyalty to the past. This loyalty continued through the LBA- IA transition and into the Neo-Assyrian phase. Throughout what has been referred to as a phase of collapse, the site was not abandoned – remaining the political, social, and economic core of the empire.\(^\text{16}\) As the Assyrian Empire began its second ascent to power in the 10\(^{th}\) and 9\(^{th}\) centuries, Aššur remained the seat of Assyrian power. It was only in the mid 9\(^{th}\) century that the Assyrian capital was moved to Kalhu (Nimrud) by Aššurnasirpal II, likely due to the new capital’s location well-within the rainfall agricultural zone (Pedde 2012b). Despite this geographic shift – which included moving the royal residences – Assyrian kings continued to build and renovate in Aššur – Tiglath-Pileser III renovated the city walls and Sennacherib showcased the continuing religious importance of the city by building the House of the New Year and returning annually to the city to celebrate the Akītu Festival in Aššur, to name just a few examples (Brown 2010). Furthermore, the Assyrian kings recognized Aššur and the Old Palace as the home of their ancestors, and many returned to be buried under the Old Palace upon their death.\(^\text{17}\) Aššur’s cultural importance to the Assyrian Empire lasted up until its destruction in 614 BCE by a coalition of invading Medes and Babylonians – temples and palaces in the city were sacked, and the city was unable to recover before the collapse of the Empire in 610 BCE.

\(^{16}\) See Roaf 2001 for a discussion of Assyrian continuity through the Dark Age.
\(^{17}\) Seven royal tombs were excavated under the Palace (Lundström 2009).
The Burial Data and its Challenges

I obtained the data for this analysis in three ways: by compiling the burial information from the Middle Assyrian burials presented by F. Pedde in *Gräber und Gräfte in Aššur II: Die mittelassyrische Zeit* (2015), compiling the data on the Neo-Assyrian burials from S. Hauser’s *Status, Tod, und Ritual* (2012), and by examining the material of both phases’ burials personally from the object collections at the Vorderasiatische Museum. As briefly mentioned above, current research is being undertaken by Pedde of the Aššur Projekt to publish in full the non-royal burials of the Neo-Assyrian phase. With over 1,300 burials recovered from the original excavations at Aššur, over 1,000 of those are estimated to belong to the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian phases. The dates of the burials can be further clarified; based on ceramic and stratigraphic data presented by A. Hausleiter (2010) and P. Miglus (1996), Hauser was able to further date many of the Neo-Assyrian burials to particular centuries. Likewise, Pedde also separated the Middle Assyrian burials into phases based on ceramics and other grave good information. Because of this, the burials could ultimately be grouped into seven phases: 15th-14th c, 13th c, 12th-11th c, 10th c, 9th c, 8th-7th c, and 7th c. (Unfortunately, 58% of the Neo-Assyrian burials and 19% of the Middle Assyrian burials were unable to be dated beyond their general phase.)

Since the research questions I address revolve around chronological changes in culture, and many of the phases above contained very few burials each, I combined these

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18 His monograph on Neo-Assyrian burials is forthcoming.
19 For a discussion of the earlier burials from Aššur, see Hockmann 2010. H. Richter has a forthcoming monograph on the Parthian burials of Aššur. For the King’s Tombs, see Lundström 2009.
into three general groups to facilitate comparison: a Middle Assyrian phase, a Transition phase, and a Neo-Assyrian phase (see Table 4.1 & Fig. 4.2). While these three basic categories were the standard for my analysis, I also present data from the particular century-groups when there are enough burials to be statistically relevant. This two-tier approach has the benefit of a) providing a general synthesis of chronological differences in burial practices using statistically-significant groups and b) using these three groups as benchmarks in the inter-site comparison in later chapters, while c) utilizing data from particular centuries to identify “micro-shifts” in practices which may have been affected by particular socio-political events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Centuries</th>
<th>Publications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle Assyrian Phase</td>
<td>15th-14th c, 13th c</td>
<td>Pedde 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Phase</td>
<td>12th-11th c, 10th c</td>
<td>Pedde 2015, Hauser 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Assyrian Phase</td>
<td>9th c, 8th c, and 7th c</td>
<td>Hauser 2012</td>
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Table 4.1: Burial phases at Aššur
In my reinvestigation into the mortuary data produced from Aššur, several other key problems with the data should be mentioned. As already pointed out by F. Pedde (2018), there is a serious discrepancy between the records produced and the work carried out by Andrae’s original expedition. This is best exemplified, perhaps, by an example: for the 1903-1914 excavations, an average of thirteen objects were recorded daily (Pedde 2012a:94). For projects today this might seem reasonable, but Andrae employed over 200 workers at the site daily; it is almost unimaginable that they would have only come across thirteen objects a day. It is instead likely that many artifacts were thrown away – most probably broken ceramics, but possibly others as well.

The information about the burials should be considered in the light of this practice. The 1,000+ burials found during Andrae’s tenure were recorded in what they called “grave books” in varying levels of quality and information – some including detailed illustrations and descriptions, others with rough sketches and few notes, while
some had just one or two sentences. Additionally, photographs were taken in the field and some can be associated with burials via the photo numbers recorded in the burial books. Object records for each burial were present in the same varying quality as the burial records themselves, and it is unknown how many objects were discarded without being recorded or photographed. In several cases, objects of the same type in each burial were grouped under a single field number. However, this system was not standardized, and therefore I have made an effort to consider these objects separately in the count of objects per burial and general wealth of the graves.

Aššur’s burial dataset harbors additional unique challenges to interpretation. One of these is weighting the tombs (84 in total) against the graves (Haller 1954; Pedde 2015; Hauser 2012). Graves are much simpler to analyze, as they are comprised of one container – by definition, one type of burial (except in several rare cases which are discussed individually). Tombs, however, are themselves a type of burial, yet also contain more types of burials within – often created during multiple stages of the tomb’s use. For example, a tomb can be constructed of vaulted brick (Tomb Type 2), yet contain two rooms, each with different types of burials (e.g. a two-piece sarcophagus (Type 4.3), a single vessel (Type 3.1)). The deceased could also simply be laid out on the floor – often disturbing previous occupants (effectively erasing any info about their original deposition characteristics). Further complications arise when some tombs are found empty or in broken disarray – the result of graverobbers in antiquity.

Considering the object counts and individual burial characteristics of a robbed tomb with the same weight as an untouched tomb gives a false conclusion of “typical”
tomb attributes. Taking this and the overlapping burial types into consideration, I have taken several steps to ameliorate these pitfalls in the face of such a large dataset:

- Robbed tombs are removed from object count totals (including general wealth values and the presence (or absence) of certain materials) but are included in the discussions of tomb architecture and types. For example, robbed Tomb 63 is known to have been part of House II (Hof II). While we know House II contained a tomb (which likely also contained deceased individuals), we do not know how rich it originally was. Therefore, as opposed to considering the inhabitants of House II “poor” because 0 objects were found in Tomb 63, I instead purposefully draw no conclusions about the wealth/lifestyle of House II inhabitants except what can be gleaned from the tomb style and any remaining tomb occupants/burial types.

- Tomb graves (burials within the tombs) are considered separately from graves, even if they share a type (such as Type 3.1 – a single vessel, which is present in both tomb contexts and in standalone graves.) Where it is possible to identify artifacts within tomb contexts associated with particular individuals/burials within the tomb itself, this is done. In cases where object find spots are unrecorded within the tomb, or are jumbled with no discernible related burial, the objects are considered only as part of the tomb as a whole. Where objects can be associated with burials, the total objects within the tomb are grouped and also considered as part of the general tomb assemblage. For this reason, tomb burials and tomb objects are considered separately. This is also true of individual tomb occupants. In all cases, tomb occupants are considered as belonging to their own “tomb burial”. (Occupants
simply laid out in the tomb without an enclosure are designated as Type 1). To summarize and better understand the tomb as a whole, these occupants are then also considered under the total tomb occupants – not just the total occupants of a specific tomb burial.

- While presence and number of burials is important to note, the differing number of burials in the Middle Assyrian (225), Transition (62), and Neo-Assyrian (681) phases make direct numerical comparison impossible. Therefore, most analysis is done in the light of ratios and percentages, instead of in numbers of occurrences.

**Analysis and Discussion of the Burials**

As mentioned above, Types are divided into three general categories: Tombs (called Tomb Types), graves, and burials within tombs (designated with a * after the Type number, for example, Type 2*). A multitude of grave types are seen at Aššur, with patterns arising in how often – and in what conditions – they are employed. At Aššur, the most common types of burials were sherd burials (Type 2), two-piece sarcophagi (Type 4.3), and tombs (see Fig. 4.3). Broken down into phases, in the Middle Assyrian period the majority of burials are sherd burials (Type 2 at 37%), followed by single-jar burials (Type 3.1, 17%). The Transition phase, unlike the other two phases, had single-piece sarcophagi (Types 4.1 & 4.2) as its most popular type (at 27%). This was followed closely by sherd burials (Type 2 at 25%) and then by single-jar burials (Type 3.1 at 15%). The Neo-Assyrian phase was dominated by sherd burials (Type 2 at 27%), followed by single piece and two-piece sarcophagus burials (Types 4.1 & 4.2 at 16%, and Type 4.3 at
14%). Most notable here is the increase over time in the use of sarcophagi, of both the double- and single-piece types. If we consider all types of sarcophagi together, it becomes the Neo-Assyrian phase’s most common burial-type at 30% – more popular than sherd burials by 3%. The Transition phase sees a rise in the popularity or sarcophagus burials which is borne out into the Neo-Assyrian phase, where ceramic vessels also decrease in popularity. As will be seen in many cases, the Transition phase tends to act as a halfway point during notable shifts between Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian practices. The differences seen between the types of burials employed in the Middle Assyrian compared to the Neo-Assyrian period is statistically significant ($X^2 (10, N=905) = 850.52, p = >.001$).
Throughout all phases at Aššur, graves with a single occupant were the most common. (Tombs, of course, often held more – ranging from one to over twenty-six [in the case of Tomb 53] occupants). In the Neo-Assyrian period, there is a higher ratio of single burials to multiple burials (402 out of 680) while in the Transition and Middle Assyrian phases this ratio is lower (105 out of 218 and 35 out of 62, respectively). The reason for the slightly higher ratio of multiple burials in the Middle Assyrian and Transition phases as compared to the Neo-Assyrian phase is unknown (see Fig. 4.4). Burials with two and three occupants were common as well (90 examples and 46 examples, respectively). The grave with the most individuals (outside of a tomb) contained seven occupants in a capsule-style burial (Type 3.2) (see Table 4.2). Sherd burials (Type 2) and sarcophagus burials (Type 4) burials have the widest variety of occupant numbers, containing between one and six deceased deposited next to or on top of one another. For every type, however, it was always most common to contain only a single individual. This shows that no grave types were exclusively used for multiple...
individuals; however, some types seem predisposed to multiple occupants – such as sarcophagus burials (Type 4) and composite burials (Type 7). All Tomb Types contained differing numbers of individuals with no pattern detected in the association between tomb type and the number of occupants. Likely, the choice of Tomb Type was predicated on another factor – such as the size of the household in question or temporal traditions. For example, Vaulted Tombs with parabolic-vaulted ceilings (Tomb Type 2.1) was over thrice as common in the Middle Assyrian phase (with a majority dating to the 15th-14th centuries).

![Number of Occupants per Burial](image)

Figure 4.4: Number of Occupants per burial at Aššur, excluding unknowns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Occupants</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>unknown</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burial Types</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

117
Table 4.2: Number of Occupants per type of burial at Aššur (* indicates a burial within a Tomb).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>44</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>69</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2*</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3.1</td>
<td>47</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3.1*</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3.2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3.3*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type 4.1</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type 4.1*</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4.3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4.3*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Type 5</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Type 7</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>79</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>534</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Occupants

Besides just the numbers of occupants, other aspects of the individuals contained within burials are key to understanding mortuary culture. In excavations today, it is expected for projects to employ specialists. This is especially true of bioarcheologists, who assess skeletal material to understand patterns of disease, migration, nutrition, and many others. Basic characteristics, such as sex and age, are determined by series of
measurements of the remaining material. The results are not perfect but are instead present along a spectrum of typically male and typically female measurements (White et al. 2012). However, the scientific analysis of skeletal material was rare in excavations of the early twentieth century, and the same is true of that from Aššur. Though the majority of skeletal material from the original excavations was discarded or lost, an analysis of human remains from recent excavations was undertaken by A. Sołtysiak (2016). He was able to analyze a set of skeletal material from 37 individuals at Aššur contained within 22 separate burials from the 2000/2001 excavations at the site. The results of this study are considered in the below analysis and act as a stand-in for the otherwise unanalyzed skeletal material from past projects at Aššur.

Adults dominate Aššur’s assemblage, with 446 adults out of the 611 skeletons able to be identified by age (see Fig. 4.5). Children are the next-most-popular, although comprising only a quarter of the adult total. The categories of older adult, young adult, and small child were recorded where mentioned in the records, but their veracity cannot be determined and therefore are only noted in specific instances – otherwise they are combined here with broader categories. “Small child” is subsumed under the broad category of “child”, while “young adult” and “older adult” are likewise combined under “adult.” In the Middle Assyrian phase, there is a significantly higher ratio of adults found than children (roughly a 5-to-1 ratio) while in the Transition phase and the Neo-Assyrian phase there is a nearly 3-to-1 ratio of adults to children. It is possible that, in the Middle Assyrian phase, children were disposed of differently in funerary processes – possibly being buried outside of the city, for example. Remarkably few infants were recorded (only 8 in total). This is not likely because of increased decomposition of infant remains
and more likely an indicator of a wider practice of differential burial that depended on age (Soltysiak 2016). It is possible that infants were buried outside city walls or left unburied and disposed of in different manners: this would seem to be the case during all phases under review.

Figure 4.5: Ages of the deceased at Aššur by phase

In general, children were most commonly buried in sherd, single-jar, and double-jar graves. The few infants were almost exclusively buried in single jars (Type 3.1). Children make up at least half of the single-jar burials in the Neo-Assyrian phase and in the Neo-Assyrian phase specifically, there is also a tendency for children to be buried in single sarcophagi (Type 4.1 & 4.2) and in mudbrick graves (Type 5). Burials of children will be explored further below, as children and infant burials can also be linked to location.
Of all the individuals preserved completely enough so that position could be observed (820 out of 1300), almost half were deposited in an extended position (365) (see Fig. 4.6). Corpses deposited in a semi-contracted position were the next most-popular (114), while fully-contracted individuals (fetal position) were relatively few (9). 224 individuals were jumbled – either by post-depositional disturbance (ex: looting) or by being moved after decay to make room for a separate deposition event (adding a new occupant to a tomb). Additionally, many individuals were purposefully deposited as disarticulated skulls. This was most common in pit graves constructed within tombs (Type 1*, in three cases) and sherd burials (Type 2*, in four cases). The contrast between individuals placed in an extended position and all other types is strongest in the Neo-Assyrian phase, where the number of individuals in an extended position is higher (29.4%) than all other types combined, excluding unknowns (23.6%). In the Middle Assyrian phase, the extended position is still the most common (16.7%), but the other types are present in relatively higher ratios than in the Neo-Assyrian period. The Transition phase seems to act as a halfway point in the progression from Middle Assyrian practices to Neo-Assyrian practices: it has a higher rate of deceased laid on their back than in the Middle Assyrian phase (and less than in the Neo-Assyrian phase), and has a lower number of skull burials than the Middle Assyrian phase (and more than the Neo-Assyrian phase).
Besides the general position of the corpse, choices were made regarding specific parts of the body, such as the arms and the legs. At Aššur, arms were most often crossed over the torso in both phases (152) (see Table 4.3). In a minority of cases, however, arms were crossed higher on the body, over the chest (55), and it is quite possible that these two positions were interchangeable in the minds of Aššur’s residents. However, because

Figure 4.6: Body positions of the deceased at Aššur (excluding unknowns) by Phase
arm bones were often found in varying states of disarray, arm positions could not be recovered for over 950 individuals. Though arm positions are present in much smaller numbers, including: arms alongside the body (19), the left arm alongside the body while the right arm rests on the torso (18), the left on the torso while the right is bent up (23), and both arms bent up at the elbow (17) (often accompanying fetal position, where the hands rest close to the face). In the Middle Assyrian phase, arms are almost exclusively crossed over the body (46 on torso, 7 on chest), with negligible examples of arms in other positions (and 235 unknown). The deceased contained within burials from the Transition phase were poorly-preserved (62% of the cases have unknown positions of the arms), but arms crossed over the body were once again the most popular, comprising 23% of cases (21 examples). The Neo-Assyrian phase is very similar, save for the higher variety in arm positions – including arms holding legs (4), arms over the head (4), and arms between the thighs (1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arm Positions</th>
<th>Middle Assyrian</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Neo-Assyrian</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alongside body</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arms hold legs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arms over head</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between thighs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crossed on chest</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crossed on torso</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>left alongside, right on torso</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>left on torso, right bent up</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right alongside, left bent up</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Included in the large numbers of arms crossed are those that are holding vessels on their bodies – a common attribute in many graves. There are at least 107 individuals who have some type of vessel on their chest or torso (usually a ceramic bowl, although metal and wooden examples have been observed) (see Fig. 4.7). In some recorded cases, the hands of the individuals even seemed to be arranged so that the hands were clasping the vessels or their fingers are within them – possibly so as to touch the contents (Hauser 2012:378). Another common position for vessels to be placed was near the mouth – implying that the dead could then consume the contents of the vessel, in nearly every case a carinated bowl. This tradition is seen in all three phases and is undoubtedly connected with beliefs in the afterlife and the destiny of the deceased.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arm Position</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>right alongside, left on torso</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right on torso, left bent up</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upper arms down, forearms bent at elbow</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>311</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Arm positions of the deceased at Aššur

20 As the data recorded from each burial varies, the exact amount of burials with this arrangement is uncertain.
Unlike arms, legs are preserved quite often and are recorded more frequently in the excavation records. In general, extended legs were the most common (273) (see Table 4.4). Bent and contracted legs were found in nearly the same numbers (97 and 102 respectively). In the entire assemblage, only 14 individuals had their legs crossed in some manner, whether at the ankles, the knees, or otherwise. The Middle Assyrian phase reflects almost this exact set of ratios (53 extended, 20 bent, 26 contracted, and 2 crossed). In the individuals from Transition-phase burials, extended legs are far more popular than other options (24 extended, while bent, contracted, and crossed form just 11 examples in total). The Neo-Assyrian phase has 196 individuals with extended legs, 73 with bent, 71 contracted, and 11 crossed. The steadfastness of the extended leg position at Aššur over time is interesting to consider, especially when we variations in other aspects of burial practices between the three phases under review.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leg Positions</th>
<th>Middle Assyrian</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Neo-Assyrian</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bent</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While extended positions with crossed arms and extended legs dominate the assemblage, it is important to note positioning trends in regard to burial types. Interesting exceptions are seen in single-jar burials (Type 3.1) (perhaps expected that contracted, jumbled, and semi-contracted are the most popular positions, as an extended individual simply would not fit in most cases) (see Table 4.5). Besides the domination of extended individuals, the overall purposeful inclusion of disarticulated skulls appears most frequently in Tomb pit burials (Type 1*) and sherd burials (Type 2). The burial of single skulls within graves could indicate a desire to keep family members together in death. It could also, however, arise from a need to move the contents of older graves to a new location – perhaps in moving to a new home. In this case, the largest bones would likely be prioritized, and the skull tends to have the strongest tie to representing a deceased individual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>extended</th>
<th>semi-contracted</th>
<th>contracted</th>
<th>jumbled</th>
<th>skull</th>
<th>unknown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 1*</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>230</td>
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<td>Type 2</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Type 3.1</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>Type 3.1*</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expectedly, jumbled individuals occur most often in pit graves (Type 1*) within tombs – where it was common practice to move decomposed bodies to the side to make way for new members. This cavalier treatment of the earlier deceased might point to a priority in honoring more recently deceased family members over older ancestors.

Hauser argues in favor of three different tomb burial “phases” – the first being the deposition of the recently-deceased, followed by shifting the skeletal remains of other occupants from the tomb floor to other containers, such as sarcophagi or jars, and then finally culminating in a removal and reburial of the skulls of the oldest ancestors underneath the tomb floor (all three of these phases are seen in Tomb 4 in House 33, for example) (2012). If this is the case, then it reveals a connection between the ancestral cult of the Assyrians and living memory of the household’s occupants.

Table 4.5: Burial positions of the deceased in relation to the Types of Burials (* indicate burial in Tomb)
Age groups also seem to have affected the burial positions of the deceased. In general, children of all ages were far more likely to be buried in a contracted or semi-contracted position than adults, who were often buried in an extended position (27.5% of children contracted/semi-contracted and 5.8% extended, compared to 10.3% of adults contracted/semi-contracted and 42% extended). Related to this, it was more common for adults to have either one or both arms placed across their bodies, while children had a higher rate of various other positions (however, most popular was still crossed over the chest or torso). This is generally true of all three phases. Legs, likewise, are more often bent or contracted in children than in adults, and vice versa. In fact, in the Neo-Assyrian phase, there are many more examples of children with their legs bent or contracted than there are with legs extended (22 bent, 37 contracted, 30 extended). This is also true of the Middle Assyrian and Transition phases, just to a lesser extent.

In many societies, the orientation of the burial and/or the occupants plays a function in funerary ritual. However, this does not seem to be the case at Aššur, where most burials are oriented along architectural structures. At Aššur, most bodies of the deceased were laid on NE-SW and NW-SE axes, like the houses at Aššur themselves (see Fig. 4.8). Totals were very nearly evenly split between heads lain to the N, E, S, and W (roughly 25 each). A similar split was found between deceased with their heads to the NW, NE, SW, and SE (roughly 85 each, excepting heads in the SW direction which only had 70 examples). These are almost all related to the axes of the houses they were contained within, and not purposeful, distinct choices. Most houses in the private living

\[21\] Likely the most notable example is in Muslim practice, where the deceased are oriented toward Mecca.
quarters of the city were built off the cardinal directions – preferring to orient NE-SW/SE-NW. As many burials followed house walls, the orientation of the houses obviously affected the orientation of the burials.

![Orientation of the Deceased at Aššur by Phase (excluding unknowns)](chart)

Figure 4.8: Orientation of the Deceased at Aššur by Phase (excluding unknowns)

The direction in which the heads of the deceased were facing was also affected by other factors, including the orientation of the burial and the position in which they were deposited. Since the majority of individuals were laid in extended positions on their backs, this also caused many of the individuals to face upwards (212 in total). In most cases, however, this information was not recorded by the excavators. Other popular directions the deceased faced were to the SW, SE, and NW (see Fig. 4.9). All other directions were present, but in much lower numbers. These same ratios are present in the Middle Assyrian period. The difference between the cardinal directions and other directions is further exaggerated in the Neo-Assyrian phase – wherein cardinal directions
have an average of about 5 each and non-cardinal directions have about 20 each (once again, with the exception of NE – which has 12).

![Diagram of Directions facing of the Deceased](image)

Figure 4.9: Directions facing of the deceased at Aššur, excluding unknowns

**The Burial Contents**

Overall, it is perhaps no great surprise that ceramics are consistently the most objects found in highest numbers in burials in all phases under review. In the Middle Assyrian phase, 146 burials (64.9%) contained ceramics. Following this closely, 121 burials (53.8%) contained jewelry – mostly in the form of beads, sometimes with pendants or other amulets. 63 burials (28%) contained rings of some sort – either finger rings, earrings, or hair rings, usually made of copper or bronze but also readily present in silver or gold (especially the earrings). Other common artifacts contained in the Middle Assyrian graves consist of bracelets/anklets, needles, pins, seals, and “other objects”,

130
usually spare shells or small fragments. This general spread is altered in the Neo-Assyrian phase: 458 burials (67.3%) contain ceramics (still easily the most common object in the burials), but the presence of other types of jewelry falls off – 218 burials (only 32%) contain beads or pendants. A comparable number of burials (208 – 30.5%) contain rings. Bracelets/anklets are the next most common (present in 121 burials – 17.8%), followed closely by fibulae (in 106 burials – 15.6%) and seals (92 – 13.5%). Between these two phases, the Transition phase once again seems to act as a middle stage.

The ceramics found in the graves at Aššur, with few exceptions, fall into two narrow categories: rounded jars with a neck and everted rim, and (often shallow) carinated bowls, with or without a rim (see Fig. 4.10). Other ceramics include varieties of smaller jars and bottles, and occasionally beakers (Hausleiter 2010: Taf. 41.h). The essential grave set of jar and bowl seemed to be maintained throughout all three periods, with little variation on actual type of either. Within the graves themselves, jars were most often placed at the head of the deceased, whether one or multiple. More rarely, they were arranged around the feet of the deceased. Bowls, however, are almost always placed on or around the torso of the deceased. This particular arrangement is undoubtedly related to the phenomenon we have already discussed, wherein the deceased sometimes holds a bowl on their chest. Whatever this may have symbolized to the deceased, it seems to be consistently replicated, especially in the Neo-Assyrian period,
where the deceased are most often lying extended on their back and physically able to hold such an object.
Figure 4.10: Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian pottery types recovered from burials at Ašşur (after Haller 1954: Taf.2-5)
There seems to be no meaningful difference in ceramic types or arrangement between the three phases, beyond small adjustment to the ceramics themselves to fit the selective shape standards of the era (for example, see Fig. 4.10 comparing Middle Assyrian types and their complementary Neo-Assyrian types).

We see further differences in objects typically associated with personal identity such as fibulae (Pedde 2001; 2018; see specifically Stol 2016: 41 for how pins and fibulae could represent women and/or status) and different types of seals (Gorelick & Gwinnett 1990). The seals are a type of artifact that have the potential to tell us the most about the owners’ identity. At Aššur, 91 graves contained some type of seal (including cylinder seals, stamp seals, and scarab seals). Multiple seals were common in single graves, even if there was only one occupant. At Aššur, it was very rare for seals to have an inscription. From those published, only one (from burial 19037 dated to the Middle Assyrian period) was inscribed, not counting the scaraboid seals. Yalcin, in their study on sealing practices of the LBA, notes that it is rare to be able to tie in seals with aspects of the seal owner’s identity (2014:118). For inscribed seals, the formula often includes the name of the owner, then their patrilineal descent, and then their profession, in descending order of commonality. Determining gendered seal ownership is also a difficult task. Though women certainly did own and employ seals, it is rare that any design or motifs on said seals specifically tie into women or other gender-identity groups. Yalcin tentatively suggests that, from the seals we can link back to female owners, female protagonists were preferred on seals belonging to women (2014:132).

The one trait of seals which consistently ties into social identity is that of seal quality. Seals of poorer craftsmanship can be convincingly tied to use by non-elites and
those within lower administrative positions. In the Middle Assyrian corpus of seals, for example, this can be seen in the use patterns of “cut style” seals (Kühne 1995b). These seals, which were roughly carved in a way that makes the scenes look like sketches, were often seals made of baked clay or glass. It was rare that elites or higher-level administrators used this type of seal – preferring instead the delicate carvings on stones. This indicator of socio-economic identity, then, can be told from the seal itself, while the presence of a seal within a mortuary context can be tied to personal ownership and, therefore, identity.

As shown in Table 4.6, both categories increase in frequency over time (for seals, from 9.3% in the Middle Assyrian period to 13.5% in the Neo-Assyrian period, and for pins and fibulae, from 6.7% in the Middle Assyrian period to 15.6% in the Neo-Assyrian period). This is also seen in the broad category of “other” less common types of objects, which include objects such as figurines, cosmetic vessels, and combs to name a few – also usually employed as markers of individualized identity. The only exception is found in the presence of jewelry/beads, which seems to decrease over time (from 53.8% to 32%, as mentioned above). This could indicate a shift away from utilizing necklaces as specific markers of identity, or it could also simply indicate a shift in grave good priority over time.

In all phases, very few burials contained remains of wood, leather, or fabric objects. However, some examples preserved in burials (for example, a wooden plate in Ass 6295, and the remains of leather and fabric Ass. 7905 and Tomb 4) show that it is likely wooden artifacts and materials were included in mortuary assemblages. The frequency of these objects in sarcophagi (the most well-protected type of grave) and not
other types of more-exposed graves leads us to believe this is dependent on the preservation of the materials in question rather than real numbers/ accurate representations of frequency. In support of this, organic materials are also more readily found in tomb contexts than in graves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burials with…</th>
<th>Middle Assyrian</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Neo-Assyrian</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceramics</td>
<td>146 64.9%</td>
<td>47 75.8%</td>
<td>458 67.3%</td>
<td>651 67.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewelry (Beads)</td>
<td>121 53.8%</td>
<td>28 45.2%</td>
<td>218 32.0%</td>
<td>367 37.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bracelets/anklets</td>
<td>40 17.8%</td>
<td>15 24.2%</td>
<td>121 17.8%</td>
<td>176 18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rings</td>
<td>63 28.0%</td>
<td>28 45.2%</td>
<td>208 30.5%</td>
<td>299 30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pins/ Fibulae</td>
<td>15 6.7%</td>
<td>7 11.3%</td>
<td>106 15.6%</td>
<td>128 13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metals</td>
<td>10 4.4%</td>
<td>6 9.7%</td>
<td>102 15.0%</td>
<td>118 12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seals</td>
<td>21 9.3%</td>
<td>5 8.1%</td>
<td>92 13.5%</td>
<td>118 12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>51 22.7%</td>
<td>9 14.5%</td>
<td>66 9.7%</td>
<td>126 13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>7 3.1%</td>
<td>7 11.3%</td>
<td>45 6.6%</td>
<td>59 6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather/material</td>
<td>11 4.9%</td>
<td>6 9.7%</td>
<td>27 4.0%</td>
<td>44 4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>10 4.4%</td>
<td>5 8.1%</td>
<td>31 4.6%</td>
<td>46 4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>60 26.7%</td>
<td>21 33.9%</td>
<td>148 21.7%</td>
<td>229 23.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6: Number of burials which contained certain types of objects, by phase

Despite preservation pitfalls, it is crucial to observe the materials from which grave goods are made. To give just one example of how material use changed over time, in the Middle Assyrian period, 12 out of 33 tombs contained gold objects, while 6 contained silver (see Figs. 4.11). Within these tombs, the gold and silver objects were mostly associated with tomb burials where the body was lain out within the tomb’s
structure without a container or covering. In graves, sherd burials (Type 2) and single-piece sarcophagi (Types 4.1 and 4.2) each had 6 with gold in them, and silver was the most common in sherd burials with 4 examples. In the Middle Assyrian phase, for example, 33 out of 225 burials (15%) contained gold objects, while 18 contained silver (8%). In the Transition phase, 16 (25%) contained gold while 5 (8%) contained silver, out of 62 burials in total. In the Neo-Assyrian phase, 60 (9%) burials had gold while 90 (13%) contained silver. In the Neo-Assyrian phase, 11 tombs had gold while 15 contained silver (out of 42). This increase in silver grave goods from the Middle Assyrian period to the Neo-Assyrian is notable. One possibility is that this new use of silver was due to a new availability of the material once the Assyrian Empire conquered silver-mining regions. Objects which would typically be copper, bronze, or gold (for example, rings) were now being made out of silver: likely reflecting a shift in day-to-day objects/jewelry as well as in burial practices. Silver mines in the ancient world were present in the Taurus mountains of Anatolia – accessible to the Assyrians by the mid-8th century BCE with the campaigns of Sargon II (Melville 2016). This likely points to the extraction of local materials from new centers of Assyrian power, such as Zinçirli (ancient Sam’al).
Overall, Aššur’s burials had an average general wealth of 2.3, with 209 burials containing no objects (and therefore, a wealth value of 0). The next most popular wealth value was 1 – usually consisting of one or two ceramic vessels and possibly a string of beads. Burials with a wealth of 1, 2, and 3 were present in almost equal numbers.

Ceramics were the most common grave goods, while beads and metal rings (bronze or copper) were also popular. Burials with a wealth of 4 were also fairly common (116 out of 970). 56 burials had a wealth of 5, while values of 6 and 7 were present in similar numbers (26 and 21 respectively). Very few burials had above a 7: 10 burials were of 8, 7 were of 9, and only one example (Tomb 45 from the Middle Assyrian phase) had a wealth value of 10 – the richest burial contained within the scope of this research (Feldman 2006). Overall, there are identifiable differences seen between the three
phases: the Middle Assyrian phase seems fairly egalitarian, and moving into the
Transition phase a sharper decrease is noted between values 3 and 4, and values 4 and 5,
which is further carried into the Neo-Assyrian phase – showing a higher preponderance
of poorer burials in the Neo-Assyrian period and a sharper disparity in wealth between
poorer burials and the richest burials (see Fig. 4.12). The Transition phase had the
highest numbers of burials with values of 1 and 3 (17.7% each), with those with a value
of 0 following (14.5%).

![Wealth Values](image)

**Figure 4.12: Wealth Values of the burials in Aššur by Phase**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wealth</th>
<th>Middle Assyrian</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Neo-Assyrian</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, there are identifiable differences seen between the mortuary assemblages of the three phases: the Middle Assyrian phase seems fairly egalitarian with a two-hump model emerging in terms of mortuary display, and moving into the Transition phase a sharper decrease is noted between values 3 and 4, and values 4 and 5, which is carried further into the Neo-Assyrian phase – showing a higher number of poorer burials in the Neo-Assyrian phase and a sharper disparity in wealth between these poor burials and the richest burials. The Transition phase shows a gradual upwards trend from the Middle Assyrian phase in wealth and the number of objects, but also points to a growing wealth disparity which is strengthened further in the Neo-Assyrian phase. Notably, 46% of Middle Assyrian burials have a wealth value between 0-2, while 60% of Neo-Assyrian burials do. This shows a statistically significant change between the two periods ($\chi^2 (10, N=905) = 88.83, p = .001$), and signals one of two possibilities: a growing wealth disparity between classes, or shifting mortuary practices placing less emphasis on grave goods.
Because certain burial types required more “investment” than others, “wealth” can also take into account the types of burials themselves. Generally, sarcophagus graves (Type 4) were fairly rich in comparison to other types, with a more even distribution between those with low wealth values and those with higher wealth values (up to 8). This was expected, as this is a more intensive grave type to construct, and therefore was likely utilized by richer groups. Single-jar graves (Type 3.1) are also generally poorer than other types of graves. This is almost certainly because of their association with infant burials – infants usually (not just at Aššur) have fewer grave goods deposited with them in comparison to children or adults. This supports the idea that infants were considered less important than members of older ages – possibly showing that familial/
communal bonds had not yet been established with the infant at the time of death. This also likely shows a difference in funerary ritual – possibly precluding the need for usual postmortem rituals (such as kispū), which may only have been intended for adults, as adults who had borne children were the only category which could technically be considered “ancestral”.

Related to this, adult burials were far richer than children’s burials. The child’s burial with the most objects contained 25, while the adult burial with the most contained 194 (see Fig. 4.14). The most prolific infant burial only contained 4 artifacts. When paired with Wealth values, this impression of richer adult burials and poorer child burials is upheld; only 2 children’s burials (from all phases) reach above a value of 5 (1%), while 6% of adult burials do. Furthermore, there is a far higher percentage of children burials with a wealth of 0-3 than there is for adults (79% versus 58%). Overall, if labor expenditure and value of material goods is taken to reflect the social value placed on the individuals buried, it seems that Assyrians valued children less than adults. It is also fair to say that infants were valued less than children based on the same factors. There is very little change in this pattern between the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian phases. On one hand, this could reflect a reaction to the psychological impact of early death, so common in the ancient world. Or it could be that because deceased children did not play a role in an ancestral cult, they could be buried with less and left out of afterlife rituals without the family fearing supernatural consequences. In either case, there is a strong parallel that can be seen here, whereas “adulthood” may be synonymous with “personhood”. This is also reflected in the relatively mundane grave goods deposited with children, while adults are more often buried with more “individualizing” goods,
such as pendants, figurines, and seals. While the few examples of teenagers were buried with adults and treated like adults in Aššur, children and infants were not. Therefore, there could have been a perception of increased importance and belonging associated with aging out of childhood. While these ideas cannot be conclusively proven, there remains a clear difference between the treatment of children and adults in the burial record of Aššur.

Figure 4.14: Ages of the deceased at Aššur compared to general wealth values

These grave types and contents did not arise *genesis ex nihilo* – rather, many of the traditions discussed here were already in use in previous periods. Old Assyrian-period graves are rarer in the assemblage, but a brief summary can be provided for reference. Largely, only pit and single-jar graves were present, along with brick (and in one case, stone,) tombs, which were reused over generations (Haller 1954). This is in stark contrast to the wealth of grave types introduced in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, notably the double-jar graves introduced in the early Middle Assyrian period,
and sarcophagi gaining in popularity in the Neo-Assyrian period. Surprisingly, sherd and composite graves are also absent from the Old Assyrian repertoire, despite their low cost investment. Grave assemblages in the Old Assyrian period overwhelmingly include ceramics (mostly large jars; see Haller 1954: Taf.3) and adornment items – mostly beads of varying stones and shell. As is to be expected, tombs were richer than graves.

The general trends of burials at Aššur shown above paint a picture of an overall stable Assyrian mortuary tradition, with some notable shifts gradually occurring during the Transition phase and into the Neo-Assyrian. Chief among these are the variances in burial type, burial position, and general wealth. Other examples of this are a change in the types and materials of objects buried with the deceased – illustrated in the varying quantities of gold and silver artifacts between the three phases. To add further nuance to our analysis of mortuary culture in Aššur, a discussion of spatial trends within the city is also necessary. In the next section, I examine trends between Aššur’s City Center and the Outer Town, which was especially occupied during the later parts of the Neo-Assyrian phase. The Inner City was inhabited through the Middle Assyrian phase onwards and the Outer City was an area comprising the Palastterrasse, small areas in between the temples in the north, and areas along (or just inside) the Binnenwall.

**Spatial Patterns**

153 houses at Aššur from the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian phases contain burials. Of all burials in Aššur, 587 (containing 968 individuals) are found within confirmed domestic contexts (89 Middle Assyrian, 29 Transition, and 469 Neo-Assyrian)
(see Fig. 4.14). Excluding burials from unknown contexts, this amounts to 66.4% of burials in the Middle Assyrian phase, 63% in the Transition, and 87.8% in the Neo-Assyrian period. Looking at burial trends within the homes and in general, several notable differences arise: there is a much higher percentage of sarcophagi burials found within the homes than is the case generally, overall the richer graves tend to be found inside homes rather than outside, and a majority of multiply-occupied burials hail from domestic contexts. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between the locations of children and adult burials, with children often being relegated to other rooms of the house to separate them from the adults.

Figure 4.15: Burial Contexts at Aššur by Phase

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22 Many burials recorded within domestic contexts are missing further information about the house/structure itself, either owing to poor preservation or gaps in record-keeping. Therefore, not all burials were able to be paired with their respective house number.
Of the 153 houses at Aššur containing burials, many of them contain multiple burials. While trends within certain households can certainly be identified, it was not unusual for single households to contain multiple different types of burial. This could reflect information about the deceased – for example, personal status – instead of simply representing a coherent familial or ethnic tradition. Location and treatment within the home seems to rely heavily on age of the deceased. Where sex of the deceased has been identified, no preferential treatment was shown beyond often burying males and females together in multiple burials, which Hauser argues may belong to married couples (Hauser 2012: 314).

However, this is not the case in all of Aššur – burials in the Neo-Assyrian Outer City actually show quite a different array of characteristics than that of the Neo-Assyrian Inner City (see Fig. 4.16). In general, multiple-use graves were rarer in the City Center – likely they were not needed due to the prevalence of re-accessible vaulted tombs. In the Outer Area, however, multiple-use graves seemed to have fulfilled the function of tombs. Indeed, the only tombs found in this area were much smaller than those of the city center. Nonetheless, here was significant overlap in the types of burials employed between the Inner and Outer towns, with some important differences. Cremation, for instance, is found exclusively in the Outer Town. Though excavators originally recorded eight cremations at Aššur, Hauser has argued that only five of these urns actually held human remains in what can truly be termed a “cremation” (2012). These urns were located in the Outer Areas of the City, four found in two pairs and one alone. As will be discussed below, mudbrick burials were also almost exclusive to the Outer Town. Whether these
are indicative of ethnic difference is unknown, but I put it forward as a distinct possibility.

Of the burials known to be from houses, I would like to investigate several specific sets to illustrate some patterns: House e7:36 (Middle Assyrian with 4), Houses h8:1 and h8:2 (Neo-Assyrian with 5 and 9 respectively), and House 9 (Neo-Assyrian with 4). This takes advantage of the opportunity to analyze a contained – but relatively large – sample of related domestic burial practices.
Figure 4.16: Map showing the boundaries of Aššur’s Inner and Outer Cities (Neo-Assyrian phase) with Houses discussed in text
HOUSE e7:36

Figure 4.17: House e7:36 with burials marked (after Miglus 1996 Plan 117)

House e7:36 represents an affluent Middle Assyrian house in the Inner City (the main area where Assyrians resided during the Middle Assyrian phase) which was later built over by the Nabu Temple. It contained five burials, all of which were sherd burials save for a single-sarcophagus (Ass. 13626). The sarcophagus contained the remains of one adult, while the ages of the occupants of the sherd burials are unknown. Here, it seems that all burials were restricted to the backrooms of the house, with burials separated by type. This division could be further affected by the fact that the sarcophagus burial is from a century later than the sherd burials, possibly indicating new ownership of the house. The decision to use a different room could have also resulted from overcrowding of the room with sherd burials, so that an elongated single-piece sarcophagus would not have fit.
The graves varied in wealth, with one of the sherd burials reaching a value of 5, including ceramics, jewelry (with some silver examples), and tools among others. All other burials in House e7:36 varied between Wealth Values of 0-3 – largely consisting of typical grave assemblages of ceramics and beads, without any individualizing pieces. Unfortunately, the ages and positions of the deceased were unrecorded, save for the single adult in the sarcophagus burial, found in a jumbled state.

**HOUSES h8:1 and h8:2**

Figure 4.18: House h8:1 in Aššur with burials marked (after Miglus 1996, Plan 131)
Figure 4.19: House h8:2 in Aššur with burials marked (after Miglus 1996, Plan 132)

House h8:1 was located in Aššur’s Inner City and was inhabited during the Neo-Assyrian period. It contained four graves and one tomb (Tomb h8:2). The tomb was poorly-recorded and little information about its structure or its contents survive, but the burial located behind it (Ass. 14199) was a sarcophagus burial which contained the jumbled remains of nine individuals. Three of the other graves were single-jar burials (Type 3.1), and the remaining burial was a two-piece sarcophagus (Ass. 14205, Type 4.3). An older child was found in burial Ass. 14215, while a very young child was found in Ass. 14451 – the latter located in a different room from all other burials, as seen in Fig. 4.18. Unsurprisingly, the richest burial was the sarcophagus grave with nine occupants (Wealth Value of 6) containing beads of various stones, bracelets, earrings, and other jewelry (with both gold and silver examples), and an iron rod. The burial of the young child was the poorest, containing only paste beads. The other burials were typical, with
Wealth values averaging 3 and containing normal sets of ceramic and beads. The contents of Tomb h8:2 was unknown.

House h8:2 is also located in the Inner City of Aššur and was found to contain nine separate burials, of which one was a tomb (Tomb 41, Tomb Type 2.2). Of the eight graves, there were two sherd burials (Type 2), two single-jar burials, a mudbrick burial (Type 5), a pit burial (Type 1), and two composite burials (Type 7). Four of these burials contained one occupant, two contained two occupants, Tomb 41 contained four, and the other two graves had unknown numbers of occupants – likely just one each. Of these individuals, only four were well enough preserved to identify age. Two adults and two children were present – the children both buried in sherd graves. Wealth values of the burials in House h8:2 ranged from 0-5, with the richest burial (Tomb 41) containing 18 objects and the next-richest 16 objects. Only two burials had no goods at all, while the rest had object numbers ranging between 1-10. Only three individuals were well-enough preserved to have their positions recorded: one extended and two semi-contracted.

Overall, the impression of these two houses is similar to that of House e7:36 in types of burials employed, locations of the burials within backrooms of the home, and the general assortment of grave goods. Though these form just three cases of houses within Aššur, so far they represent the larger trend of Middle Assyrian phase mortuary treatment being similar to that of Neo-Assyrian mortuary treatment in burials found in Aššur’s Inner Town. However, this stands in contrast to what is often seen in Neo-Assyrian burials of Aššur’s Outer Town, as shown in House 9.
HOUSE 9

Figure 4.20: House 9 at Aššur with burials marked (after Preusser 1955, Taf. 28)

House 9 is a good example of these different practices because it contained one of the archives in Aššur which identified its residents as Aramaean (Archive N17). The four graves found within House 9 are notable, as the mudbrick grave type (Type 5) is the most-used – employed for three out of the four burials within the home. As shown above, this type of grave was overall rare within Aššur (Fig. 4.3). Burials in House 9 were oriented along the house walls, and all occupants of the graves faced upwards. Two of the three mudbrick burials contained single adults, while one contained a child. The single non-mudbrick grave was that of a one-piece sarcophagus (Type 4.1), also holding a child. In general, the graves had aspects of what one would typically expect from an Assyrian burial assemblage: three graves held sets of ceramic vessels, and several strings
of paste beads were also recovered. Unusual, however, is the fact that both children’s graves (Ass 8626 and Ass 8753) contained a single bronze fibulae and examples of seals, including scarab seals and cylinder seals. This seemingly individualized, preferential treatment of the children of the household is in direct contrast from what we have come to expect from Aššur’s mortuary culture.

From this occurrence alone, it is impossible to identify a preferential treatment of children and the employment of mudbrick burials as indicators of Aramaean mortuary practices. The only other secure evidence we have of Aramaean mortuary practices at Aššur is from House 12 (Fig. 4.16), with the ethnicity of the residents revealed to us through Archive N18 (Hauser 2012). House 12 contained two burials: Ass 9200 and Ass 9201, a single-piece sarcophagus (Type 4.1) and a two-piece sarcophagus (Type 4.3) respectively. Both burials were oriented along house walls and contained adults laid facing up, with mortuary assemblages made up of typical ceramic vessels and alongside a single copper bowl. While the burials of House 12 are not unusual for Aššur’s residents, the connection between mudbrick burials and the Aramaeans of House 9 is notable. It is likely that Aššur’s Outer Town contained other residents with Aramaean and foreign roots – who perhaps also chose to build this type of grave, since the overwhelming majority of instances of this type of grave are restricted to the area of the Outer Town (see Fig. 4.20).
There are other houses in the Outer Town that belonged to people who were not Assyrian. House 41 (see Fig. 4.17) likely contained inhabitants of Luwian descent or with Luwian relations based on the find of lead rolls containing correspondence written in hieroglyphic Luwian (part of Archive N13) (Pedersén 1986). The house itself contained several different grave types, including one-piece sarcophagi, sherd graves, and composite graves, pit graves, and a single instance of a mudbrick grave. The composite grave (Ass. 06303) contained three adults in the house’s only instance of a multiple-
burial. Children’s graves were separated from the adult graves in a different room of the house, as was the case in other parts of Aššur. The single-piece sarcophagus was the richest burial of the household with a value of 8 – containing gold earrings, bronze fibulae, copper vessels, and many examples of fine stone beads. A certain degree of personal identity is preserved in the adult burials from House 41, where three contained multiple fibulae and two contained different types of seals.

Other mentions of foreigners at Aššur are found scattered throughout archives. Deportations and resettlements of conquered populations drastically altered the settlement pattern of the empire, affecting undoubtedly almost all aspects of society to some extent. A large number of deportees from conquered areas were brought into the heartland and nearby provinces to populate the new agricultural settlements which sprung up around the core of the empire (Altaweel 2008). Deportation strategies not only destabilized the new territories brought under Assyrian hegemony to prevent uprisings, but also provided a new source of labor for the Assyrians to exploit. While deportation began in the Middle Assyrian phase as a strategy of control, it reached its peak in the later Neo-Assyrian phase (Oded 1979). Not only did it uproot entire groups of people, but it also affected the indigenous inhabitants of the areas in which the deportees were then settled – effectively altering the social and economic organization of the empire.

While no burials can be conclusively connected with these deportees, these varying practices give us an idea of the wide variety of inhabitants in Neo-Assyrian Aššur – connected spatially to the Outer Areas of the city. When paired with the known population increase of Aššur in the 8th/7th centuries, this paints a picture of metropolitan
diversity, reflected to some extent in the variable burial practices that likely stem from economic differences and are influenced by ethnic identity.

We can see this in the cremation burials and mudbrick burials, especially. This spatial distribution is remarkable – possibly showcasing the tendency for Aramaeans or ethnic non-Assyrians to employ this burial practice and type of burial container. Furthermore, this is likely not in use due to normal economic restrictions, as this was more labor-intensive than sherd burials. However, the distinct possibility also arises that this type of grave was employed as a replacement of the normal vaulted tomb so popular in the center of the city. Despite this, many aspects of burial in the Outer Town were the same as, or similar to, contemporary Inner City practices. In general, it seems that the residents of Aššur most likely to be of foreign ethnicities attempted in varying degree to employ local Assyrian traditions of burial to the extent possible, while also including aspects of mortuary culture from their own traditions. In this way, performativity concerning identity in death is predicated on adopting and employing typical Assyrian practices.

In terms of personal identity expression, it seems that the greatest personal identity marker within burial practices of the same economic class is not gender or ethnicity, but age. The treatment of children and infants, while the treatment of the corpse and types of grave goods included remain similar to that of adults, differs greatly in terms of inclusion. Children in Aššur were often deposited separately from adults – in many cases, buried outside of family tombs, or in different rooms of the home altogether. In any case, the differential treatment of infants and children show an overarching theme of being considered “outside” the family. This is only different in the case of several
houses in the Outer City, including House 9, where children actually were afforded *more* mortuary care and typically personal identity markers than the adults in that same house.

The general trends of burials at Aššur presented here paint a picture of an overall stable Assyrian mortuary tradition, with some changes gradually occurring during the Transition phase and into the Neo-Assyrian phase. Chief among these are the changes in body position, changes in burial types (the shift from jar containers to sarcophagi burials, for example), and the wealth of the graves, and none of these changes are sudden. An internal division of Aššur in the Neo-Assyrian phase, gradually occurring over all three phases, resulted in one version of “Assyrian” mortuary practices employed in the city’s center within older, established households in contrast to a mixed set of mortuary cultures seen in the Outer Town, where the residents practiced both Assyrian traditions (at a generally poorer economic level compared to the Inner City) mixed with idiosyncratic practices, especially reflected in the types of burials, the treatment of children, and the inclusion of personal objects.

**Conclusions**

With the incredibly large dataset of burials from Aššur examined in this Chapter, several key observations about the development of an Assyrian identity over time can be made. The most structuring principle of how personal identity manifests within burial contexts, I argue, is socio-economic. It is the intersection of socio-economic status with other aspects of identity – chief amongst which are ethnicity and age – that largely dictate how and where the residents of Aššur were buried. This also includes the potential for
multiple-occupancy burial and for postmortem care, as described in the *kispu* ritual texts and several others. This is best exemplified in the division of mortuary practices between areas of Aššur in the Neo-Assyrian phase – with what Andrae describes as “flimsy” houses in the areas of the *Palastterrasse*, the *Binnenwall*, and the *Neusidel* representing poorer newcomers to Aššur. The City Center, in contrast, continued a tradition from the Middle Assyrian phase of larger houses with family tombs spanning generations – representing established households. It is of no great surprise, considering Assyrian deportation and resettlement strategies and modern phenomena of diaspora and refugee resettlements in larger cities, that the relatively new living quarters of the Neo-Assyrian phase are also where evidence for residents of different ethnicities hails from. It is also in this area that the typical Assyrian practice of tombs is absent – perhaps not surprising considering the generally lower economic status of the houses and contents of the graves within. I propose two possible explanations for this:

1) Residents of non-Assyrian ethnicities made a distinct attempt to adopt traditional “Assyrian” burial practices, such as tombs, but were limited by economic means. Therefore, they adopted practices such as sherd burials and Assyrian mortuary assemblages which were also widespread in Aššur as a more affordable compromise.

2) Residents of non-Assyrian ethnicities attempted to continue their local burial practices in Aššur (*i.e.*, cremation, mudbrick tombs), but were limited by economic or social means. Therefore, adapting their mortuary culture to Assyrian practices was the main solution available to them.
These conclusions are predicated on the reasonable assumption that these Outer neighborhoods of Aššur would have held more residents of non-Assyrian ethnicities than just what is evidenced through the few remaining archives. Cremations as discussed above, were undoubtedly part of the foreign burial practices that were difficult to enact within Aššur – this is likely as much for reasons of useable space (in a crowded city neighborhood, there would be little room outside of the home to perform such an act) as it was limited by possible disapproval of such a type of burial. In general, it seems that the residents of Aššur most likely to be non-Assyrian attempted in varying degree to employ local Assyrian traditions of burial *to the extent possible*, while also including aspects of mortuary culture from their own traditions. Performativity concerning identity in death is predicated on adopting and employing typical Assyrian practices. Cremations at Aššur are perhaps the furthest (conceptually) from Assyrian mortuary tradition. The use of mudbrick graves, as well, could possibly indicate the employment of non-Assyrian burial norms.

In terms of personal identity expression, it seems that the greatest personal identity marker within burial practices of *the same economic class* is not gender or ethnicity, but age. The treatment of children and infants, while the treatment of the corpse and *types* of grave goods (but not number or value) included remain similar to that of adults, differs greatly in terms of inclusion. Children in Aššur were often deposited separately from adults – in many cases, buried outside of family tombs, or in different rooms of the home altogether. The lack of infant burials at Aššur is also striking – very few infant burials (much lower than expected for a site of Aššur’s size) were recovered. This is not likely from increased decomposition of infant remains and more likely an
indicator of a wider practice of differential burial (Soltsyak 2016). It is possible that infants were buried outside city walls or left unburied and disposed of in different manners. In any case, the differential treatment of infants and children show an overarching theme of being considered “outside” the family. This is only different in the case of House 9, where children actually were afforded more mortuary care and typically personal identity markers than the adults in that same house. There are several reasons why this could be the case; one possibility is that children and infants were not able to join the ancestor cult. If this is the case, they were also likely treated differently in post-mortem care, and possibly did not have the same space or deposition requirements that adults did. Another possibility revolves around the concept of “personhood” to the Assyrians, which often dovetails with concepts of “adulthood” in many societies. While the few examples of teenagers were buried with adults and treated like adults in Aššur, children and infants were not. Therefore, there could have been a perception of increased importance and belonging associated with aging out of childhood. While neither of these can be conclusively proven, there remains a clear difference between the treatment of children and adults in the burial record of Aššur. An internal division of Aššur in the Neo-Assyrian phase, gradually occurring over all three phases discussed here, resulted in one version of “Assyrian” mortuary practices employed in the city’s center within older, established households in contrast to a mixed set of mortuary cultures seen in the Outer Town, where the residents practiced both Assyrian traditions (at a generally poorer economic level compared to the Inner City) mixed with idiosyncratic practices. This tendency to split into two general mortuary traditions will be addressed further in the next chapters.
Finally, this chapter has identified gradual shifts in mortuary trends between the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian phases by including an analysis of the Transition phase of the 12th-10th centuries. Often referred to as the “Dark Age” in Near Eastern history, the results of this case study show that, in the mortuary realm, there were no sharp changes in practice or perception. Instead, the burial forms and economic status of the residents at Aššur were shown to diversify gradually over time, probably with the expansion of the empire and the influx of outsiders into the Assyrian capital. These changes also are accompanied by a greater wealth disparity between groups at Aššur, but, once again, this shift is gradual. The Transition phase is really that – a transitional phase which often acts as a clear midpoint from Middle Assyrian practices to Neo-Assyrian practices. In most cases, traditions remained the same over the course of the three phases. These conclusions contribute to a body of similar scholarship which also shows that the Assyrian heartland was largely stable during the Dark Age in terms of social, economic, and political factors (Roaf 2001). The emphasis here must remain on a continuity of Assyrian culture and, as exemplified in this chapter, Assyrian identity.

The next chapters expand the scope of this research into Assyria’s provinces, starting with Tell Billa in Chapter 5, and continuing into the provincial capitals of the Middle and Upper Khabur/Balikh in Chapter 6. I draw from the general conclusions formed here about the manifestation and evolution of Assyrian personal identity beginning in the Middle Assyrian and continuing through the Neo-Assyrian phase. With the investigations of these next chapters, I add a geographical aspect to the concept of Assyrian identity – showing that different traditions were employed in these centers which were later affected by Assyrian hegemony.
CHAPTER 5: THE GRAVES OF TELL BILLA – ŠIBANIBA

Šibaniba (Tell Billa) was an important northern Mesopotamian site occupied from at least the Early Bronze Age onward into Parthian times, excavated by a joint expedition between the Penn Museum and the American Schools of Oriental Research in the 1920 and 1930s. In this chapter, I first present an overview of Šibaniba within the Assyrian Empire from the 14th century to the 7th century BCE. After situating Šibaniba within its historical context, I then discuss the surveys and excavations that E.A. Speiser directed at the site of Tell Billa from 1927-1935. This includes a discussion of data missing from several seasons, and my efforts to interpret the extant records from the third season (1932-33). I will then present the 80 Assyrian burials excavated during the third season at Šibaniba as an investigation into the mortuary culture of an Assyrian provincial settlement. Here, by pairing the modern archival records with current knowledge of Assyrian burial practices, I provide a new investigation of the Assyrian mortuary practices at Šibaniba.

The Excavations

The site of Šibaniba was first brought to the attention of the international archaeological community by Sir Austen Henry Layard in his famous 1848 survey of Northern Mesopotamia, published in “Nineveh and its Remains”. Over seventy years later, E.A. Speiser, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, led his own survey to the area in 1927 with plans to explore potential sites for excavations. Šibaniba was particularly attractive due to inscribed brick fragments which had been found on the
surface of the mound detailing Assyrian building projects on the site (Speiser 1934). Excavations began at Šibaniba in November 1930 with the hopes of both investigating the Assyrian levels of this site and procuring artifacts for the Penn Museum’s collections. Starting in the northeast corner of the mound, Speiser and his colleagues led a team of over 100 local workers to excavate five Areas (see Fig. 5.1) (Bache 1933). The goal of the first season was to identify the span of occupation for the site, and in Area III they excavated down to virgin soil after Speiser identified at least seven distinct phases of occupation, preliminarily assigned titles such as “Hurrian” and “Assyrian” phases (see Table 5.1). Though few excavation records remain, it is possible to briefly discuss the major importance of these Areas by revisiting the letters written as monthly briefings between Speiser and Bache and the American Schools of Oriental Research. Despite their vagueness, the monthly descriptions of new architecture and discoveries helps to elucidate the importance of these Areas.

Tell Billa’s long history of Parthian and Hellenistic occupation first came to light with the excavations of Area I in the northwestern corner of the mound, which was closed after it became clear that Assyrian levels would lie deep underneath the Hellenistic material. Areas II and III quickly proved to have Assyrian material much closer to the surface. One Assyrian stratum was identified by Speiser which contained predominantly mudbrick architecture. A number of inscribed bricks of Aššurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III were recovered from Strata 2 and 3 during the first month, leading Speiser to identify the 9th century remains of an Assyrian palace (Creamer forthcoming b). The Assyrian levels in the northern part of the mound extended roughly two meters below the surface. Another notable find recorded in Speiser’s report was a fragment of a
prism containing a typical inscription describing soldiers, tribute, booty, and punishment, “all in Aššurnasirpal’s best style” (letter 1935, Penn Museum Archives). Numerous graves were also found that dated to the Assyrian occupation – Speiser notes that most were single jar graves, “usually with a shallow bowl placed near the opening of the [jar]... which is always laid on its side instead of standing up.” One notable burial consisted of a “family”, with eight vessels forming four capsule burials laid side-by-side: four double-jar burials typical of the Assyrians. Not enough data about these graves is available to include them in this study, but the presence of these graves can provide some context for it. Under the remains that Speiser identified as 9th century, a corner of a baked brick “fortress” built upon a stone foundation was found, dating to the Mitanni occupation of the site. Additional tombs from this period were also uncovered in this area, though we encounter the same problems with missing documentation.
Returning in the fall of 1931 for their second season, they investigated the northeast corner and the southwest corner of the mound. They opened these new areas with the expectation of exposing further Assyrian occupation levels. While continuing investigations in Areas II, III, and IV, they also dug a trial trench at the base of the eastern slope. Here, they revealed a “Cyclopean” retaining wall; in some areas this construction reached a height of 4.5 meters and was as wide as 2.5 meters. The team
began to excavate at the bottom of a wadi that cut through the middle of the mound’s western slope (marked “Area VI” on Fig. 5.1). The excavators identified this area as “Persian” (see below for a discussion of re-dating) and postulated that it was used as a necropolis by those who occupied this part of the mound. Speiser describes “tombs, constructed… of long, thin slabs with covers of the same type” (letter, Penn Museum Archives). These “tombs” were almost always found disturbed. Single-jar burials were also found in this area. Like the burials found in the first season, little to no documentation beyond Speiser’s correspondence survives for these graves.

As they extended the excavation east of the wadi in the second season, the team traced walls of mudbrick faced with baked brick, which Speiser compared to the building style of the palaces of Nineveh and Khorsabad (letter, Penn Museum Archives). No further information unfortunately is provided about this structure. As mentioned above, the excavations at Tell Billa uncovered evidence for royal buildings (possibly palaces) of Aššurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III. A temple to Ishtar was also likely present at the site, located in the southwest corner of the tell and supported by a long list of houses with various professionals – among them, musicians, temple administrators, devotees of the goddess, and augurs (Finkelstein 1953: Bi85). The topmost level of this area yielded an inscribed brick describing the Shalmaneser III’s restoration of a shrine of Ishtar, found at the threshold of a large building which may have been this shrine.

In the third month of the second season, excavations in this area uncovered a cache of cuneiform tablets dating to the late Middle Assyrian and the early Neo-Assyrian periods (spanning the 13th through 9th centuries BCE). This discovery led Speiser to focus solely on the southwest corner of the mound in the next season (1932-33) in hopes
of uncovering more epigraphic material. In this regard they were disappointed, but they succeeded in excavating a large residential area spanning Levels II and IA (see Fig. 5.2).

The southwest corner of the mound, which I call Area VII for clarity, is the best-documented part of Tell Billa, as excavation notes and plans of this area survive in the Penn Museum archives. The excavators divided this area into three levels: Level I, Level IA, and Level II. The excavators originally assumed that Level I dated to the Achaemenid period, while Level IA and Level II dated to the Assyrian occupation. However, upon a reassessment of the material, it is clear that Level I instead dates to the latter half of the Neo-Assyrian period, while Level IA dates to the reign of Aššurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III, and Level II dates to Tukulti-Ninurta I or earlier. (See below for a discussion of the dating.)
The hallmark of Level I in Area VII is the use of stone in construction. Though the structures were heavily weathered, C. Bache, the field director during this season\textsuperscript{23}, was able to identify fourteen discrete “rooms” – including several storage pits, drain systems, and a large cobblestone courtyard centrally-located amongst the other structures (Fig. 5.3). Level IA and II differ greatly from Level I. These phases contain domestic

\textsuperscript{23} While E.A. Speiser was primarily an Assyriologist, C. Bache was trained as an archaeologist and had participated in multiple field projects prior to his arrival at Tell Billa. His expertise is reflected in the surviving documentation, which serves as a reliable assessment of the site’s archaeology where it is preserved.
houses situated along two main streets, with minor construction differences between the two occupation phases. In general, eight possible houses or house-complexes are identifiable in the plan, labelled Houses A-H (see Figs. 5.16-5.22). Some of the records of the southwest corner of the mound are published in a brief overview by Bache in *BASOR* (1933); but this was by no means comprehensive.

Figure 5.3: Map of Area VII at Tell Billa, displaying the structures of Level I (courtesy of the Penn Museum Archives)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Areas Investigated</th>
<th>Strata</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Significant Structures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct 1930 - Mar 1931</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Unnamed</td>
<td>Parthian/Hellenistic</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II/IV</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Neo-Assyrian</td>
<td>stone buildings, including part of the 9th c palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Middle Assyrian</td>
<td>mudbrick structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Hurrian</td>
<td>mudbrick structures, stone foundations; &quot;corner of a fortress&quot;?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Neo-Assyrian</td>
<td>stone buildings, including part of the 9th c palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Middle Assyrian</td>
<td>mudbrick structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Hurrian</td>
<td>mudbrick structures, stone foundations; &quot;corner of a fortress&quot;?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>MBA?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td>&quot;Sargonic&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>massive retaining wall (stone facing, mudbrick core)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Early Dynastic</td>
<td></td>
<td>burials and tombs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Chalcolithic?</td>
<td></td>
<td>burials and tombs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown Area name</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>&quot;Cyclopean&quot; wall at bottom of mound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 1931 - Mar 1932</td>
<td>II/IV</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Hurrian</td>
<td>burials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>MBA?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Hurrian</td>
<td>burials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>probably Hurrian-Neo-Assyrian</td>
<td><em>kisu</em>-type wall, burials and tombs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 1932 - Mar 1933</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Neo-Assyrian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Late Middle/Early Neo-Assyrian</td>
<td>Private Houses A-H, Vaulted Tomb W84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Middle Assyrian</td>
<td>Private Houses A-H, Vaulted Tomb W84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934 - 1935</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Hurrian</td>
<td>none mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-1937</td>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>none mentioned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: A Summary of the Investigations at Tell Billa

Unfortunately, excavation at Šibaniba all but ceased during the next two seasons (1934-35 and 1936-37), leading to few discoveries and even fewer surviving records.
Little material from Tell Billa was ever published, leading to little knowledge of the site. A few short, preliminary reports were published in the University of Pennsylvania Museum Bulletins (1930-1936), but no final excavation volume was compiled. Besides the detailed report on the third season published by Bache (1933) and two later analyses of the tablets – one on the Middle Assyrian glyptic (Matthews 1991) and one on the texts themselves (Finkelstein 1953) – the data from Šibaniba remains unpublished, owing no doubt to the fragmentary nature of the surviving records. In 1984, an attempt was made by graduate student E.R. Jewell to further analyze the third season of excavation at Tell Billa, along with the burials from that season. Her analysis (in an unpublished manuscript held in the Penn Museum Archives) resulted in the redating of several of the burials, which has contributed to their interpretations in this chapter (Jewell 1984). The excavation summary above relies on the few extant records held in the Penn Museum archives, including the excavation’s correspondence, financial records, and several sets of field “notecards” (artifact cards from all five seasons and loci and burial cards from the third season).

Šibaniba in the Assyrian Empire

The provincial site of Šibaniba played a distinct role in the Assyrian Empire during the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods. Šibaniba was located close to the core of the empire and was absorbed into it at the beginning of Assyrian expansion in the 14th century. Its location next to the foothills of the Jebel Bashiqa, but with access to the plains, ensured that Šibaniba was particularly well-suited for agricultural and pastoral
production and the transport of commodities and people (Finkelstein 1953). The site was in a position to oversee a major east-west trade route. This area was previously controlled by the Mitanni Kingdom in the 16th-14th centuries, but then fell under Assyrian jurisdiction after Aššur-uballit’s expansion of Assyrian claim and Mitanni’s contemporary decline.

Assyrian provincial administration in the Middle Assyrian period has been a topic of discussion in the last decades (Postgate 2013; Machinist 1982; Liverani 1988). The power structure of the newly established and expanding Assyrian government relied on officials ruling provinces to maintain peace and extract resources (Postgate 1992). Large settlements were targeted by the Assyrians as centers where they could place members of the royal family to rule, while largely keeping the local structure intact (Brown 2013). Smaller settlements outside of main centers would not have been a priority of Assyrian control, as much of the taxes, tribute, and labor were provided through the main centers. In addressing the Middle Assyrian provincial system, B. Brown offers a look at the structure of the system itself (2013). Ultimately, he argues that the Middle Assyrian state was loosely-centralized. The administration of the provinces outside of the heartland was often delegated to subordinates with a significant degree of their own ruling power (Van de Mieroop 2007: 244). Brown (2013) and Tenu (2009b) argue that the Middle Assyrian rulers relied heavily on local royal families to govern within the existing local structures, like past Mitanni control and contemporary Hittite control over their respective polities (cf. Machinist 1982). The degree of autonomy of these officials has been debated, but ultimately contributed to a stable standardized system of provincial administration and integration into the empire. Due to Šibaniba’s proximity to the Assyrian heartland, it is
likely that it was one of the first areas to see an official established provincial
government, especially since, in the time prior to the establishment of Nineveh as the
capital, it provided an otherwise-lacking center for control of the Upper Zab area.

Though Assyrian power contracted in the 12th century, a series of campaigns in the early
first millennium – the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian period – led to re-expansion by the
Assyrians, including once again establishing Assyrian hegemony at Šibaniba, which had
experienced a short phase of independence (Reade 1978). A century after this, a series of
vigorous campaigns established Assyrian rule from the Zagros Mountains in the east to
the Mediterranean in the west (Melville 2016). Šibaniba remained a seat of provincial
governance while the empire expanded to its largest extent.

Texts from Tell Billa fall into two categories: documents from what was likely the
residence of a local governing family dating to the Middle Assyrian period, and texts
from the Neo-Assyrian period from the 9th century. I. Finkelstein has dated the Middle
Assyrian texts to the reigns of Adad-Nirari I and his son and successor, Shalmaneser III
(1953). In general, the Middle Assyrian texts are comprised of private transactions of the
family of Sîn-apla-erîš, hasîlu (the ruling administrative official) of Šibaniba.24 J.N.
Postgate suggests that this is an earlier form of the later bēl pāhiti – a provincial governor
of the Assyrian Empire (2013:268). This family archive includes examples of loan
receipts, debt collection, public official orders regarding allocation and collection of
resources, and a number of letters (Speiser 1938). A closer look at these documents from

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24 For a discussion of ḫalzuḫlu, see Finkelstein 1953:FN30. This term was also employed at Nuzi, and the
equation of ḫasilḫu would make sense with the recent scholarship arguing that Middle Assyrian
administration strategies borrowed heavily from previous Mitanni examples.
the Middle Assyrian period forms a picture of administration and economy at Tell Billa; several public documents, in addition to detailing common resources such as barley and sheep, mention levies and troops. Texts Bi 48 and 49 list rations, including mounts, to be given to troops to be sent to Ḫanigalbat in the west (Finkelstein 1953). As Finkelstein points out, these texts coincide with Shalmaneser I’s campaigns to the land of Ḫanigalbat in the west – and the resources within were possibly intended for these campaigns. Given its position in northern Mesopotamia, Tell Billa could have served as a garrison point for troop deployment, particularly since Nineveh was not yet established as an Assyrian power base – showing Šibaniba’s importance as a main administration center as early as the Middle Assyrian period.

Later texts corroborate this military focus; several of the documents (Bi72-77) from the 9th century provide evidence for military recruiting from Šibaniba and the surrounding towns. The positioning of troops by Šibaniba is interesting in this regard, because it is listed as one of the settlements which rose against Shalmaneser III in revolt, detailed in the inscription on Shamshi-Adad V’s stela, Shalmaneser III’s successor (Luckenbill 1926). Despite this insurgency, Shamshi-Adad V put down the revolt and less than a generation later, Balāṭu, šaknu of Šibaniba, served as an eponym official (the official who gave his name to the year) in 786 BCE (RLA II, 445). The abrupt forgiveness and re-integration of Šibaniba into the Assyrian fold likely is indicative of its importance to the Empire, especially during the Empire’s major expansion in the 8th and 7th centuries. This importance was not only due to the military duties of Šibaniba, but also due to its agricultural and pastoral production. The town’s situation on an agriculturally productive plain, yet also next to the foothills of the Kurdish mountains
allowed it to provide both grain and flocks for the Empire (Ur 2005:324). Perhaps most indicative of this role is the full title of Nineveh’s Šibaniba Gate: “dumuq ašnānu ḠAR qirib-ša kayyān abul Šibaniba” – “the choicest of grain and flocks are ever within it, the Šibaniba Gate,” (see Fig. 5.4) (Reade 1978). This, combined with the numerous documents relating to sheep found at Tell Billa, led Finkelstein to propose that Šibaniba might have been a central marketing point for sheep in the region (1953:118). One list from the Middle Assyrian period even enumerates the agriculturally-based manors of the area (dunnū) from which sheep were to be collected (Bi47).

Figure 5.4: The Gates of Nineveh, with the Šibaniba Gate marked (from Reade 1978)
The town’s proximity to Nineveh and its situation at the entrance to the foothills of Jebel Bashiqa (likely Assyrian Mount Musri) also made it important to Sennacherib’s construction of his famous aqueduct which provided irrigation for this plain. Inscribed brick fragments of Sennacherib found on the surface of the tell show that this aqueduct passed through Tell Billa on its way to supply Nineveh (Speiser 1934). Šibaniba appears in external sources from the 9th century onward mostly in the form of royal inscriptions, most famous of which is undoubtedly Sennacherib’s Bavian inscription from 694:

“At the head of Dur-Ishtar, Šibaniba, and Sulu I saw streams and enlarged their narrow sources and turned them into rivers. To [give] these waters a course [through] the steep mountains I cut through the difficult places with axes and directed their outflow onto the plain of Nineveh,” (Jacobsen 1935:34).

Additionally, Sennacherib’s Khinnis inscription from the year 688 reads:

“I greatly enlarged the site of Nineveh... Its fields, which through lack of water had fallen into neglect (lit., ruin) and..., while its people, ignorant of artificial irrigation, turned their eyes heavenward for showers of rain—[these fields] I watered; and from the villages of Masiti, Banbarina, Shapparishu, Kār Shamash-nāsir, Kār Nūrī, Rimusa, Hatā, Dalain, Rēš Ėni, Sulu, Dūr-[Ishtar], Šibaniba, Isparirra, Gingilinish, Nampagāte, Tillu, Alumsusi, (and) the waters which were above the town of Hadabiti eighteen canals I dug [and] directed their course into the Khosr River. From the border of the town of Kisiri to the midst of Nineveh I dug a canal; those waters I caused to flow therein. Sennacherib’s Channel I called its name,” (Jacobsen 1935:34).

If Jebel Bashiqa’s identification as ancient Mount Musri is borne out, then this also reveals information about Šibaniba in the 8th c. BCE, during which the town was also part of a revolt against Shalmaneser III. The region of Mount Musri, including Šibaniba, gained brief independence from Assyrian hegemony during the series of revolts throughout Assyrian-controlled territory at this time, but it was short-lived (Olmstead 1915). Aššur-dan II reconquered Šibaniba in 787 and the Mount Musri area shortly after.

25 “Mount Musri” also might have encompassed the Jebel Maqlub and Jebel ‘Ain as-Safra (Reade 1978)
26 Dur-Ishtar has been identified as Ba’zani and Sulu as Mosultepe, although these have not been confirmed (Reade 1978).
which then appears as an integral part of the empire again as early as the Sargonid period (Reade 1978). As mentioned earlier, Šibaniba itself was quickly forgiven its transgression, as one of the officials resident in the provincial center served as an eponym in the year 785 – just a mere decade after the revolt (Finkelstein 1953).

To summarize, then, from the texts we can guess that Šibaniba’s importance as a provincial site likely lay in its advantageous location, where it was able to serve as a supply point for military, a central marketing point for flocks, and a step in Sennacherib’s grand water constructions. If this is indeed correct, then there is no wonder at the monumental constructions built on Šibaniba’s tell. The attention paid to Šibaniba by Assyrian rulers in the 9th century was predicated on its already-crucial contributions to the empire in the Middle Assyrian period. The importance of the site only increased over the next centuries, likely reaching its highest point when Nineveh became the Assyrian capital under Sennacherib and later rulers. Šibaniba’s situation within the empire and its increasing importance over time form a critical environment for imperial identity formation just outside of the heartland.

**Dating the Burials**

The loss of excavation records and the misidentification of certain strata by the original excavators necessitate a critical reevaluation of the graves’ dates. Throughout the five seasons of excavation at Šibaniba, the excavators altered their chronological interpretations of the different strata in several instances. While the chronology of the northeast corner of the mound remained fairly consistent due to the wealth of artifacts
and architectural structures (and also benefited from the initial trench in Area III extending all the way to virgin soil) the southwestern corner’s stratigraphy is much less clear in the records. Confusion as to the burials’ relations to the existing structures created various interpretations of their dates. It seems that instead of dating the burials based on their vertical stratigraphy, the excavators made judgements about their periodization based solely on the contents of the graves. This practice created a host of problems, not in the least the misdating of some key artifacts and then, by extension, the graves. Due to recent developments in our understanding of ceramic chronologies from the Assyrian and post-Assyrian periods, the original recorded dates of the burials need revision. This was first attempted by a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1980s, though the results were never finished or published (Jewell 1984). I will continue this work here.

The first complications arose in the dating of the levels themselves. It was possible to draw parallels between the ceramics from the Šibaniba burials and typical shapes of the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods by comparing the Šibaniba ceramics with corpora from secure contexts at other contemporary sites. While in many cases it is a difficult and delicate process to distinguish between ceramics from the Middle Assyrian period and those of the Neo-Assyrian period (Anastasio 2011), several examples of the Šibaniba ceramics correlate with well-known types from each period.27 Due to the presence of glazed pottery in Level I contexts, the excavators assumed that Level I must be Persian. However, almost a century’s worth of research since then has shown that

27 Hausleiter 2010; Pfälzner 1995; 2007; Anastasio 2011; 2010
glazed ceramics were common in the Neo-Assyrian period as well, and no shapes in the Šibaniba records from Level I seem out of place in a typical Neo-Assyrian assemblage (Coppini, personal comm). Furthermore, ceramics from the Level II occupation correlate well with typical Middle-Assyrian assemblages (see Creamer forthcoming b). Level IA, appropriately, contained ceramics which fit in late Middle-Assyrian and early Neo-Assyrian contexts (see Creamer forthcoming b). This re-dating corresponds to the historical sources from this area of Šibaniba, which largely fall between the reigns of Adad-Nirari I in the 13th century and Shalmaneser III in the 9th century of the late Middle Assyrian and early Neo-Assyrian periods. Inscribed brick fragments mentioned earlier, found on the mound’s southwestern surface from the reign of Sennacherib show that Šibaniba’s Assyrian occupation continued into the 7th century as well, included in Level I.

Among the problems mentioned above, there is also a discrepancy between the original excavation report and Bache’s final published field report of the third season (1933). In the latter, Bache conflates Levels II and IA – which were originally two separately-dated phases at Tell Billa. The designations of Level I, IA, and II were all employed concurrently to identify levels – IA was considered distinct from the other two. It is unclear why Bache combined IA and II, but upon further inspection of all the material belonging to these two levels, it is evident that the two should be kept separate. Level IA shares the basic house structure with Level II, but the excavators noted

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28 This same dating schema, however, should not be applied to the northeastern strata of the mound; Pfälzner (1995) has already discussed the issues of dating regarding the ceramics from Levels I and II in the northeastern part of the mound which were published briefly by Speiser (1933). The stratigraphy of Area VII and the Areas in the north of the mound must be considered separately, as they do not correlate.
differences in floor heights or multiple floor levels in certain rooms – what the excavator notes call different building phases (Penn Museum Archives). Doorways of these houses were also later blocked up. Most of these changes were designated as taking part after Level II (in Level IA). The exact time division between Level II and Level IA is unclear, however, ceramic shapes from IA recorded on object notecards/photograph cards (where IA and II are once again used and distinguished from one another) fit in both Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods consistently. Shapes from Level II, however, are always at home in the Middle Assyrian period, with very few of these shapes used in Neo-Assyrian times. Meanwhile, the shapes from Level I are consistently Neo-Assyrian in shape (see Creamer forthcoming b). This can be compared with the two groups of documents recovered from the site, both in the southwestern town. As mentioned above, one archive dated to the 13th century and was found in Level II, while the texts recovered from Level IA date to the 9th century (Finkelstein 1953). Because Level IA can be consistently identified by addressing the original source material, I have separated it from Level II in my analysis. This has the benefit of providing a more nuanced assessment of temporal changes within burials specifically, and the southwestern town more generally.

In lieu of secure vertical contexts, it was possible to use the horizontal stratigraphy of the burials to establish relations with contemporaneous architectural structures. Excavators considered all burials except five intrusive surface burials as Level I, dating to the post-Assyrian period. However, the Level II schematic revealed that some of the burials were aligned with the walls and constructions of Level II and Level IA occupation remains, but not those of Level I. Other burials were aligned with Level I remains and, in some cases, even cut into Level II walls, and therefore were
inhumed after the destruction of Level II. By establishing the burials’ positive relationships with the existing structures, it was possible to tentatively associate 19 burials with Level II, 23 burials with Level IA, and 37 burials with Level I.

![Burials per Period at Tell Billa](image)

**Figure 5.5:** Number of burials per period at Tell Billa.

The division between burials associated with Level II and IA are based on the notes of the excavators, who recorded differences in floor levels or burial depths in relation to one another. Furthermore, what the excavators termed “invasive surface burials” instead contained typical Neo-Assyrian goods within, and therefore likely belonged to the highly-eroded Level I (and I consider them here as such).

These chronological markers create a starting point from which to assess Šibaniba’s mortuary culture. However, like the problems encountered at Aššur (see Chapter 4), we run into difficulty when working with the human remains. Besides a general measurement taken on “the length of the body,” no other measurements were taken once the body had been exhumed. Additionally, none of the skeletal material was
preserved and the biological sex of Tell Billa’s grave occupants cannot be determined. For this reason, I included no analysis on gender portrayal in the Tell Billa burials. Age is broken down into three categories: adult, child, and infant.

Analysis and Discussion of the Burials

All burials included in this analysis were discovered during the third season. Eighty burials were found divided between three levels in the Southwest corner (Area VII) of the mound. All burials dated to the Assyrian periods, with most of the burials (37, in Level I) dating from c. 9th to the mid-7th century BCE (see Fig. 5.5).

At Tell Billa, there is a variety of grave types. Pit (Type 1), sherd (Type 2), single-jar (Type 3.1), double-jar (capsule; Type 3.2), multiple-jar (Type 3.3), cremation urn (Type 3.4), single-piece sarcophagus (Type 4.1), mudbrick (Type 5), and composite graves (Type 7) were present in the Tell Billa assemblage. Notably absent were two-piece sarcophagus graves (Type 4.2; seen in respectable numbers at Aššur) and rock-built graves (Type 6).29 A single vaulted tomb (W84), present as part of Level II, contained no remaining mortuary material when it was excavated (see Fig. 5.6). It serves as a general indicator that this type of tomb was known and utilized from the Middle Assyrian period onwards at Tell Billa. Using the types of graves as a point from which to embark on our analysis, the clearest patterns are seen from examining the popularity of each type by level.

29 This analysis is confined to Area VII. Other areas at Tell Billa may very well have contained other types of burials, but the surviving records are too vague to say for certain.
In Level II (containing 19 graves and 1 tomb), there were large numbers of simple pit, mudbrick, and composite graves combining sherd and mudbrick (see Fig. 5.7). The single example of a cremation urn at Tell Billa is known from this level. Level IA also had large numbers of pit graves, but multiple-jar graves replace mudbrick and composite
graves in popularity. Level IA is the only level which contained sherd burials – one of the most popular grave types elsewhere (as seen at Aššur, for example). Their absence in the other two levels of occupation at Tell Billa is notable, as it may indicate a conscious shift in burial practice resulting from economic means or belief systems. Level I had large numbers of pit graves, double-jar graves, and mudbrick graves. The only example of a single-sarcophagus grave at Tell Billa is known from this level. Overall, it appears that there are several statistically-significant temporal trends \(X^2 (10, N = 57) = 34.97, p = >.001\): single-jar burials become more popular over time, while the use of composite-type burials steadily decreases. Double-jar graves have been often called the hallmark of Assyrian burial types, and it seems at Tell Billa this begins in earnest in the Transitional period. The single-sarcophagus in Level I might indicate further Assyrian influence.

What is most interesting, perhaps, is the appearance of sherd burials in the Transitional period only. At the same time, mudbrick burials decrease during the Transitional period while pit burials are the most popular in this period. Since sherd and pit burials required the least investment of resources, this could indicate that during the Transitional period the residents of Tell Billa had few resources to spare on the burials of the deceased. Certainly, the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods bookending the Transitional period do not see the same restriction in burial types – employing varied types of burials which required more labor and material investment.
Burials with multiple individuals were rare at Tell Billa. Level II had three burials which contained two individuals each, while Level IA had one which contained two occupants and one with three occupants (see Fig. 5.8). Level I had two burials containing two occupants and four burials containing three occupants – therefore multiple burials were most-used in Level I. While the ratio of multiple burials remains similar between all three periods, the appearance of multiple burials containing three occupants
instead of two could indicate a further change in burial practice. In several instances, some of the occupants in these burials are only represented by skulls. It is possible that these skulls belonged to individuals who had been buried before in different contexts, but were then reburied in a different context with a recently-dead relative or house-member (as discussed by Hauser 2012). Reburial practices in the later periods might point to a greater mobility of Šibaniba’s residents (moving between houses, for example, and taking their ancestors with them), possibly indicating an adoption of the same practice seen at Aššur (see Chapter 4). In the multiple burials, in several instances the occupants appear to be that of parent and child (B39, B67, B75). While this is not exclusively the case (there are more instances of adults buried with other adults) it could show that treatment of infants was predicated on the status of the deceased adult, with little personal identity of its own expressed. However, the use of multiple-occupant graves with three or more occupants also could indicate a shift in the Neo-Assyrian period at Tell Billa to prioritizing familial relationships over personal identity (not just limited to mother and child). As discussed below, this is remarkably different from what was present at Aššur.
Adult deceased dominated the assemblage in all periods, with infants following at a greatly reduced rate. Children were very rare (see Fig. 5.9). There was only one adolescent in the whole assemblage. As we have seen at Aššur, this could indicate different burial practices for children and infants – possibly located in extramural cemeteries, if buried at all. Overall, it appears that adults and infants were generally buried with materials of the same value, with no meaningful difference in the wealth of the graves. The burials of children, however, seem to be poorer on average. But, if we look closer, this is only the case during the Transition and the Neo-Assyrian phases. In the Middle Assyrian period, the children at šibaniba are treated comparably with adults, with the same levels of wealth. Not only this, but the highest numbers of children and infants were recovered from the Middle Assyrian period, with the ratio of children and infants to adults steadily decreasing over time – as mentioned above, possibly indicating
different disposal practices of children and infant corpses during Tell Billa’s Neo-Assyrian phase – similar to what we have at Aššur. In general, it seems that while Middle Assyrian Tell Billa’s residents valued children the same way as they did adults, in the Neo-Assyrian period this definitively shifted.

![Ages of Deceased by Period](image)

**Figure 5.9: The ages of the deceased at Tell Billa**

Level II was generally the level with the richest burials. On average, burials in Level II contained 2.4 objects per burial. Only two burials out of 19 in Level II had no grave goods, while in Levels IA and I almost half of the graves do not contain any objects. Level II graves also had a wider distribution in the numbers of goods in burials. Level IA burials had an average of 1.6 objects per burial, and these burials are much poorer than either Level II or I. Level I had the burials with the highest number of goods in any one level (this level included graves with ten, nine, and eight grave goods, while
the other two levels have a maximum of seven objects in their richest grave). Level I burials, on average, contained 2.1 objects per burial.

The most common objects were ceramics and strings of beads. The ceramics included in the Middle Assyrian graves are typically tall jars with a flat base (for ex. see App. A, B43) or nipple base jars (ex. B16). Over time, this changes in the Transitional and Neo-Assyrian phases to more closely mirror what we have seen at Aššur: ceramic sets consisting of a bowl (most often carinated) and jar, sometimes with additions of another bowl or jar (often of low quality and overfired). The ceramics of Tell Billa closely parallel the types seen at Aššur (Chapter 4), with slightly more variation (Figs. 5.10 & 5.11) in both periods. Particularly noticeable is the frequent use of nipple and button-base jars in the Middle Assyrian and Transitional periods. The exact placement of objects was rarely recorded within the graves themselves, but when it is, we can see that ceramics often rested at the head or the feet of the deceased. Unlike we have seen at Aššur, there is no consistent pattern of placing specifically jars at the head – instead, all ceramics seem grouped together wherever they have been placed within the burials.
Figure 5.10: Comparison of Level II ceramics from Tell Billa with Middle Assyrian examples from elsewhere (after Creamer forthcoming b)
Figure 5.11: Comparison of Level I ceramics from Tell Billa with Neo-Assyrian ceramics from Aššur (after Creamer forthcoming b)
While beads are one of the most common grave goods at Tell Billa, black and white beads of paste seem especially common in the Middle Assyrian period, and might signal a form of local burial culture (these types of beads are present in 52% of the Level II burials (10 out of 19), while only present in 17% of Level IA and 16% of Level I burials (for a breakdown of grave contents see Table 5.2, below, and Appendix A). Other popular forms of beads are mixed stones (including carnelian, lapis, quartz, serpentine, and others) and pierced shells. Seals (both stamp and cylinder) are more common in the Middle Assyrian period.

Bracelets/anklets and jewelry items such as beads were proportionately more popular in Level II than in the other levels, indicating a shift in the personal adornment practices of Šibaniba’s occupants, similar to that of Aššur. Level IA graves in general seem poorer than that of the other two periods in both the quantities and types of objects, with the only exceptions being ceramics (an unassuming grave good which did not require many resources to produce) and rings. Seals are proportionately most common in Level II graves (3 out of 19), followed by those of Level I (3 out of 37; notably B15 from Level I includes two cylinder seals). None of these seals were inscribed, and therefore can give us no insight into specific facets of personal identity, such as familial lineage or occupation. The burials which did contain seals seem spatially unrelated to one another, so inclusion of specific seals within the burials seems more like a case-by-case basis rather than a tradition. Objects within the “Other” category at Tell Billa consist of unidentifiable pieces of metal or small clay objects – neither of which particularly denote any type of personal identity. Instead, it seems that the typical identity markers of adornment items, seals, and tools are most commonly included in burials of the Middle
Assyrian period (Level II), in contrast to what was seen at Aššur, where identity markers increased in mortuary contexts in the Neo-Assyrian period. The spatial patterning of grave goods at the site seemed to provide little clarity; it seems that the richest household occupied in Levels II and IA (House E, discussed further below) also seemed to prioritize burying their dead with adornment objects. Other houses reflected little internal consistency in the objects with which they buried their dead – instead, beyond general wealth of the graves, it seems that particular households mostly differed in terms of grave wealth, rather than any one consistent set of grave goods. This is also the case of the graves from Level I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burials containing...</th>
<th>Level I</th>
<th>Level IA</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceramics</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewelry</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bracelets/anklets</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rings</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibulae/pins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: The number of burials containing different types of objects at Tell Billa, by level.
As was done in the previous chapter regarding Aššur’s burials, I combine the number of objects, material of objects, and craftsmanship into one holistic category, termed “Wealth”. Tell Billa’s burials had an average wealth value of 1.2. Middle Assyrian burials, however, were the richest set of burials, with an average of 1.5 – possibly indicating a shift in the economic status of Tell Billa’s residents in later periods, as Level IA at Tell Billa has only an average wealth of “1” and Level I increases only slightly to “1.2”. The change in wealth between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods is significant ($X^2 (10, N = 57) = 28.09, p = .01$). It is quite possible that the Late Bronze Age Collapse – which correlates with Level IA, was a factor in the poorer burials during
this time period. While no burials at Tell Billa are ranked above a “4” in wealth, the disparity in burial wealth widens in the Transitional and Neo-Assyrian periods (where the majority of their burials were ranked “0”, meaning they contained no objects), whereas the Middle Assyrian period saw a more even distribution of grave goods across the burials; only three burials in Level II contained no goods at all (Wealth Value 0), while the majority of the burials were ranked between 1-3 in terms of wealth (see Fig. 5.13).

No drastic shifts were seen in the burial wealth of Šibaniba’s southwestern town occupants. However, there were still significant differences in how burials were supported across periods.

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30 Though this same loss of wealth during the Transitional Phase is not seen at Aššur. See Chapter 4 for further discussion.
Figure 5.13: The wealth value of the burials at Tell Billa.
Other trends can be seen by comparing the type of the grave with its general wealth (see Fig. 5.14). The only sarcophagus burial at Tell Billa (B68) was very rich, containing a gold earring, bronze anklets and bracelets, and a bronze needle in addition to ceramics and other metal pieces. Sherd graves were the poorest graves. Double-jar graves seem have the widest variety, while graves of mudbrick are generally poorer. Composite graves of sherd and mudbrick were usually poor, but two graves of this type (B74 and B75) contained high status material objects. This description generally holds true of all three periods (with the exception of the single sarcophagus grave (B68), which was only present in Level I). From this, we can conclude that a choice in type of burial may have been influenced by economic factors, with other possible influences being ethnic practices, religious beliefs, or even spatial limitations.

![Wealth Value per Type of Burial](image)

Figure 5.14: Wealth values of Tell Billa’s burials compared to burial type.

Variations in occupant age and the grave goods can be further understood relative to the positioning of the burials and their occupants. Most burials in Level II were
oriented East-West, closely followed by North-South (see Fig. 5.15). The same divide is seen in Levels IA and I, with Level I having East-West and North-South-oriented burials in similar numbers. In Level IA there is a marked preference towards burying the dead with their heads at the east, while Level I differs by having most of their dead oriented with their heads at the south and west ends of the graves. These orientations should, however, be considered in light of their contexts; in many cases, burials are constructed along existing house walls, meaning that this choice had more to do with architecture than tradition. For example, this is most obvious in Houses B, C, and E (see Figs. 5.18, 5.19, and 5.22). The directions their heads were facing, however, are not affected by such external circumstances: in Level II and Level IA, north was the preferred direction, with Level IA also showing a tendency towards orienting the head upwards (see Fig. 5.16). In Level I, there is also a clear tendency to orient the face of the dead upwards. Here it is interesting to note what generally might be seen as a gradual change in tradition, from facing north to facing upwards. This likely goes hand-in-hand with the positions in which the dead were oriented.

![Orientations of Burials at Tell Billa](chart.png)
In general, occupants from all levels show a preference towards placing the deceased in an extended position. This preference is much more pronounced, however, in Levels I and IA, where almost half are extended in Level I (21, or 50%) and slightly more than half in Level IA (15, or 62%) (Fig. 5.17). Level II’s preference towards extended positions (8, or 36%) is closely followed by semi-contracted bodies (7, or 32%). Between the periods, the rest of the positions are evenly utilized (including “jumbled” – which was likely unintentional). In most cases, the semi-contracted were probably adapted to fit the body into the funerary container.
The arms and legs of the deceased were also placed in various positions (see Table 5.3). Legs were generally extended or bent in Level II. In Level IA and Level I, extended is most common (12 and 17, respectively), with other positions occurring in equal number. This is related to the preference to lay the deceased in an extended position in Level I.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legs</th>
<th>Level I</th>
<th>Level IA</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contracted</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extended</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Positions of the legs of the deceased at Tell Billa, by level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arms</th>
<th>Level I</th>
<th>Level IA</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alongside body</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crossed on chest/ torso</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>left arm extended, right arm on torso</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>left arm on torso, right arm bent towards face</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right arm extended, left arm on torso</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upper arms down, forearms bent towards them</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4: Positions of the arms of the deceased at Tell Billa, by level.

The position of the arms is much more variable (see Table 5.4). In Level II, the arms of the deceased are most commonly laid alongside the body (11 examples), although there is also a tendency to lay the arms bent so that the elbows are by the corpse or bent sharply so that the hands are by the face (6 examples). The same division is seen in Level IA at almost the exact same frequency (9 and 5 examples). Level I likewise appears to have the same preference in positions, but a larger number of “unknown” positions of the arms (19) might have confused the results of this. At Aššur, we saw that arms were most often crossed over the body in all periods. Here, in Level I, we see a slight increase in the numbers of arms crossed over the body, possibly indicating a slow adoption of Assyrian traits.
Examining the occupants of the burials in relation to type, there is a marked tendency for corpses in pit burials to be deposited in an extended position (11; see Table 5.5). This is true of mudbrick (12) and composite burials (6) as well. Double-jar burials, however, seem to have the widest variety of body positions of the deceased, with an almost-even spread between all the recorded categories (except “skull”, which seems to be reserved for multiple-person burials or other unusual types). Mudbrick graves and double-jar graves continue to have the largest variety of body positions in Level I, with a slight preference for “extended” bodies (7 out of 12 deceased in mudbrick graves, and 5 out of 11 deceased in double-jar graves). In Level IA and Level II, only mudbrick graves show a marked preference toward the “extended” position (2 out of 3 in Level IA, 3 out of 4 in Level II). The high variability within capsule burials and mudbrick burials shows that these burials were utilized by groups with varying versions of mortuary culture. In this instance, such variability manifests in the positioning of the individual and not necessarily the container.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burial Type</th>
<th>contracted</th>
<th>extended</th>
<th>jumbled</th>
<th>semi-contrasted</th>
<th>skull</th>
<th>unknow n</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherd</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-jar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double-jar</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cremation urn</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-piece sarcophagus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mudbrick</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomb</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5: Types of burials at Tell Billa compared to the positions of the deceased.
The placement of vessels—particularly, bowls—within the graves also reveals interesting patterns that may be related to the position of the body. In 12 graves (4 from Level II, 1 from Level IA, and 7 from Level I), vessels were found next to the head or face of the deceased. In some cases (3 burials from Level IA) the vessels were found on the body instead, where they may have been clasped in the arms or hands. In all instances, it seems that the deceased was meant to symbolically interact with the vessel or its contents. This could, for example, reflect the beliefs espoused by the prevalent *kispu* rituals: that the dead need to be provided food and drink in the afterlife. These were likely the “first” provisions of the deceased—tiding them over for their journey to the afterlife before they would be regularly tended by their descendants in postmortem rituals.

In sum, the types of graves at Šibaniba largely adhered to Assyrian standards displayed at Aššur. At Šibaniba, six general types of graves were identified: pit, mudbrick, sherd, ceramic vessel(s), sarcophagus, and composite graves, while a single vaulted tomb was present, but empty. Three types of burials dominated the assemblage: pit burials, wherein the body was placed directly in the ground with no container or structure; capsule burials, where the body was enclosed by two or more jars or ceramic pieces; and mudbrick burials, where a small, tomb-like structure was built up to encase the body. Most skeletons in Šibaniba were extended on their backs, but orientation appeared to be inconsequential. Of the 80 burials, ten contained more than one individual, indicating either joint interments or re-accessing already-buried individuals.
Generally, Šibaniba graves contained few, modest objects, with some exceptions. Objects which stood out in the assemblage were beads of black and white paste, the ceramic bowl and jar combination (also present at Aššur), and various types of metal rings. General wealth of the graves varied between periods, but those of Level II were the richest, and Level IA were the poorest – possibly indicating a shift in resources during the LBA Collapse. Common grave goods included wheel-made ceramic jars and bowls of low quality, small bronze rings and weapons, and beads of stone, metal, and paste. While several gold pieces were included, the overall impression is of humble burials where the dead were deposited with meaningful objects and small offerings of food or liquids, indicated by animal bones in some of the vessels. In general it seems that divisions in the grave goods might have been instead affected by a household’s wealth and ability to supply the dead. This possibility leads us to our next question: if there was a difference between burial groups from different houses at Tell Billa.

The Spatial Context of the Burials

Because of the poor preservation of Level I, distinct structures were unable to be satisfactorily identified, and therefore this type of analysis is tentative.\(^{31}\) Therefore, I prioritize the burials from Levels II and IA to further understand their relation to the households of which they were a part.\(^{32}\) Because only a few burials were found in each

\(^{31}\) In a forthcoming publication, I argue that the excavated features of Level I in Area VII were part of a governor’s palace. However, the building phase of the palace has an uncertain relationship to that of the graves (see Creamer forthcoming b)

\(^{32}\) See Creamer (forthcoming a) for an in-depth architectural and use-analysis of Level II and IA’s neighborhood.
house, it is difficult to assume broader patterns of mortuary culture from these instances alone. However, I take this opportunity to identify notable trends or instances which may have been influenced by particular households.

All houses identified as part of Level II/Level IA had at least one burial. The Houses with the most burials were House Complexes B (Fig. 5.18) and E (Fig. 5.19), with eight and 20 burials, respectively. This total is not counting the deceased which may have occupied tomb W84, which likely belonged to the House E complex. On average, each of the other houses have around two burials. Because House Complexes B and E have the largest number of burials, these two houses form our main source of information on how households affected the display of mortuary identity at Tell Billa in the Middle Assyrian and Transitional phases. In Level II, House Complex E formed two separate households: E1 and E2. At some point in their occupation, these two domiciles were altered to form one large complex—likely a multiple generation or extended household. Because it is unknown at what point this merging of the two houses occurred, they are treated tentatively as one complex. The same strategy is used to assess House Complex B—made up of Houses B1 and B2, with exchanges of several different rooms between House Complex B and House C (Creamer forthcoming a).

**House Complex B**

House Complex B contained five different types of burials from Level II and Level IA: two mudbrick (B51 and B55), two composite (B52 and B48), two in ceramic  

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33 Three burials in the vicinity of the vaulted tomb (and which likely predated it) are included here as belonging to the E complex.
vessels (B47 and B46), one sherd (B54), and one pit grave (B53). Most of the burials in House B’s earliest phase were found in rooms for general domestic use. All the burials in House B’s original rooms were from Level II, while later burials are placed in the newly-added rooms (W25, W26, W27, W28, V36) after House B acquired them. This is likely because these were now the “backrooms” of House B. Burials 46, 47, and 48 were all located next to each other within Room V36, and contained two adults and a child. These were likely all members of the same family, possibly mother and children. Burying different people in different spaces within the houses, both before and after the new rooms were added to House B, could indicate different nuclear families residing within the same household. We can infer that such nuclear families might still have shared ancestry or legal relations; for example, in the Middle Assyrian Laws, we see a number of provisions regarding mothers, second wives, and the like moving in with their sons or their husband’s sons (Jastrow 1921). Assuming that similar practices were common at Tell Billa, like they also probably were at Aššur, is not a stretch.
House Complex E

Generally, House Complex E had the widest variance in burial traditions. On one hand, this could be due to having the most burials out of any house (19 burials; 5 from Level II, 14 from Level IA). Even so, we would expect a more coherent set of characteristics shared by the burials than what is displayed in this household. If we assume that House Complex E was occupied by one extended family and their unrelated members of the household, then they generally chose pit burials (6 out of 19) and ceramic vessels (6 out of 19). Considered separately, House E2 shows a slight preference towards ceramic vessels (5 out of 10) but harbored no less than six different types of burials. The burials of the entire house complex had an average wealth value of 1.5 (2 in Level II and 1.4 in Level IA). Notably, most grave good assemblages contained some kind of bronze artifact, mostly rings, bracelets, and earrings, but also a pin and ferrule. Other adornment
items, such as beads and pendants, were often made out of stone. Ceramics were found in nearly half the graves. Spatially, burials were located in many of the rooms. Burials which occupied the same rooms tended to be buried in the same grave container – indicating similar burial traditions. Without more evidence regarding the structure of the household’s occupants (such as might be present in an archive, for example), speculation must necessarily be limited. However, I suggest that this could indicate a complex household structure, including members with different origins, or even foreigners married into the main family (based on the wide variety of burial characteristics). As was seen in House B, different burial spaces could indicate differing family groups residing under the same roof. The occupants of House Complex E could have been an affluent Assyrian family – possibly even from Aššur itself – that settled in Šibaniba during Assyrian hegemony in the Middle Assyrian period. The vaulted tomb W84 would have served as the typically-Assyrian family burial place. The household may have been so large as to contain slaves or resident servants – which could also explain the other burials in the home outside of the tomb, in seemingly random locations within the house.
Figure 5.19: Map of House Complex E in Level II/Level IA
Figure 5.20: Map of House A in Level II/Level IA
Figure 5.21: Map of House C in Level II/Level IA
Figure 5.22: Map of House D in Level II/Level IA
Figure 5.23: Map of House G in Level II/Level IA

Figure 5.24: Map of Houses F and H in Level II/Level IA
In Levels II and IA, Houses B and E had the most burials. However, they were also the largest complexes. Houses F, G, and H only had burials from Level II. The rest of the houses bore relatively similar numbers of burials from Levels II and IA. Somewhat surprisingly, it seems that the types of graves within some of the households varied greatly; as already mentioned, House Complexes B and E had a wide variety of burial types. House A only contained burials within ceramic vessels, but the types of vessels themselves differed (see Appendix A, entries B44 & B57). House C mostly had composite burials (sherd/ mudbrick, Type 7.1), but also contained vessel burials – including the only example of a cremation at Tell Billa.

In general, House E1 had the richest graves (wealth average of 1.6), followed closely by E2 (1.5). House B’s graves fell within the same wealth level (averaging 1.1), while the same was also true of Houses C and D. House A, however, had graves which varied widely in wealth – one grave contained nothing (B44), while the other included objects of gold and precious stones (B57). The graves of houses F, G, and H seem to have high variation in numbers of objects between them. Notably, Burial 74 in House F was one of the richest graves at Tell Billa, with seven objects and a wealth value of 4, mostly comprised of beads, but also including a jar, a cylinder seal, a bronze ring, and gold earring. Within House Complex E, House E2 had the most variation in numbers of grave goods, while House E1 had the graves with the most objects. Overall, this paints a picture of households with a variance in “status” of individuals within households, but not necessarily between households.
Because the boundaries of these houses are not definite, some of these conclusions remain speculative. In cases like House C, where Rooms V42, V43, and V44 have been included in this analysis, but may have well had a different function unrelated to the domestic sphere, it is important to keep in mind that these generalizations are tentative. However, with the estimated occupation of the Level II/IA town lasting for at least four centuries, one would expect to find many more burials associated with the houses than were excavated. This begs the question: where were other members of the family buried? There are not enough burials in each house to account for the several generations that undoubtedly inhabited them.

The age division of these house burials may point to a solution to this question. In all the Houses except F, G, and H, there are generally comparable numbers of adults and children buried within the houses. This is significant and shows that children may have been prioritized for House burial, while adults may have been buried elsewhere in these periods, such as in a cemetery or in the Lower Town. As one possible explanation, I mention vaulted tomb W84, which would have been a prime example of a place to bury the “missing” deceased. Although only one tomb was recovered in Area VII, Speiser and Bache note regularly the large numbers of tombs that were found in the Assyrian levels in the northern part of the site (letters, Penn Museum Archives).\(^{34}\) It is possible that simply by expanding the excavation area that the excavators would have discovered more such tombs, partially answering our question. Another possibility is that a cemetery might have existed somewhere at Tell Billa.

\(^{34}\) It is unknown but likely that these tombs were associated with domestic structures.
Overall, we see a spatial difference between Tell Billa’s burial practices and those of Aššur in the Middle Assyrian period. Whereas most domestic burials at Aššur tended to be confined to one or two rooms, often in the back of the house, that does not necessarily seem to be the case here. Instead, Houses like E1 and E2 seemed to bury their dead in multiple rooms, with little regard for area use. Furthermore, the single instance of tomb W84 among nine houses might show that the residents of Billa did not utilize tomb burials to the same extent that Aššur’s inhabitants did. Despite these differences, however, we cannot ignore the similarities between the two cities in terms of prioritizing domestic burial.

**Level I**

As mentioned above, the Level I remains from Area VII were severely eroded upon excavation. Very few distinct structures were reliably identified. Because of this, I cannot definitively associate burials from Level I with domestic contexts.\(^{35}\) However, some burials were associated with certain structures. Most notable among these were a cluster of seven burials underneath what was likely once a courtyard leading into a monumental structure (Rooms P10, P5, & P4) (see Fig. 5.3). The burials in this cluster were grouped by their relation to the pathway into the building (B20, B13, B16) and their association with the main wall of the building (B14, B17, B6, B15). Four of these seven burials were constructed of mudbrick, and all contained adult occupants. Wealth values

\(^{35}\) Instead, the remaining structures of Level I seem to belong to a monumental structure of some kind – likely modelled on palace architecture and comparable to palaces such as those at Aššur and Kalhu. (See Creamer, *forthcoming b*).
varied between the burials; while B14, B17, and B6 were poor, B15 was unusual in that it contained two cylinder seals in addition to beads and at least one vessel. The fact that these were all Type 5 mudbrick burials could indicate that they belonged to members of a single group (whether familial or communal). Another group of burials in Level I was related to structure P11: B58, B59, B61, and B70. While the excavators did not speculate on the nature of the building, its relationship to the courtyard likely indicates that it, also, was related in some way to the monumental complex. The burials in P11 were all in ceramic containers (Type 3), with three adults and one infant. Three of the four burials were oriented on an E-W axis. While interacting with the walls of P11, they did not follow their same alignment – which could indicate a purposeful choice in burial orientation. These four burials were relatively poor, only containing ceramics and bead necklaces.
Unique Burials at Tell Billa

Within the corpus of burials at Tell Billa, several stand out as notable due to either their container or contents. Individual burials such as these provide unique opportunities to assess variances in identity expression, contributing to our broad view of mortuary practices at the site.

First is the case of mudbrick burial B36 from Level I, located outside of the official excavation boundaries of Season 3. This grave was located just southeast of a simple pit burial, B35. The relationship between the two can only be speculated upon at
the moment, but they may have been constructed at the same time, or in direct relation to one another – indicating familial or household attachment. Burial 36 is a typical mudbrick burial: the remains of one individual encased on three sides by mudbrick walls. The grave was oriented along a NW-SE axis, where the skull of the individual was placed at the NW end and faced SW. The burial is unique, however, due to the peculiar arrangement of the rest of the body; four long bones of the body (unidentified, but possibly from the excavator’s sketch and measurements, the radii and ulnae) were arranged in an exact square south of the skull (see App. A, B36). This is not only an unusual arrangement of the deceased, but is evidence for secondary burial, as the bones would have had to have been de-fleshed at the time of arrangement. The excavators attributed this oddity to graverobbers “with a sick sense of humor,” (Penn Museum Archives) but this may be instead purposeful. No objects were found with the burial.

The possibility for secondary burial also arises in Burials 38, 56a, 59, and 75 – also from Level I. These are all examples of multiple burials – B38 and B56a are double-jar burials; B59 is a composite burial made of multiple ceramic vessels, and B75 is a composite burial of mudbrick and ceramic vessels. These burials all contain three individuals, arranged in the same pattern: all occupants were adults; in B38 and B56a two adult skeletons lay extended with one adult skull, in B59, one adult was extended with two adult skulls, and in B75, there was one adult with two infants. It is significant that these four burials are all from the same level, indicating that a new tradition of burial possibly arose during the Neo-Assyrian period, as mentioned earlier. B56a has no associated grave goods, but was also buried with B56b – an infant buried in a single jar, lying atop the vessels encasing burial B56a – also with no grave goods. B38 and B59
both had goods of varying quality; B38 contained various beads probably on two strings and several bronze rings, B59 containing a miniature glazed blue jar and strings of stone beads, and B75 containing three ceramic vessels and several bronze rings. Burials B56a and B59 are located close to/within structure P11, possibly indicating a relationship between the two. As mentioned before, it is difficult to discern with any certainty the functions of the structures from Level I, leaving any association between P11 and these burials difficult to discern.

Also from Level I is Burial 76 – another example of a secondary burial. B76 is comprised of a small mudbrick “box” (33cm in length), found in the east part of Room P14. The grave contained a single skull, resting upright on its mandible and facing east. No other parts of the deceased were found in the grave. For the skull to be sitting the way it was found, it is likely that the head of the deceased was already defleshed at the time of burial. Directly in the line of sight of the skull was a double-decker ceramic lamp and a ceramic pot. Nearer to the skull was the only example of a fibula found in the Billa graves, along with two bronze earrings. Inside the ceramic vessel was an assortment of beads and two bronze “tacks” - possibly part of clothing or the bead strings. The implications of this burial are interesting to consider; P14 and P15 are the structures in Level I most likely to have been typically residential domestic buildings, so the association of Burial 76 with P14 could show relation to a household. One possible explanation is that this is an example of a reburial of a family member after the occupants had moved from another building into P14. The skull would be the easiest part of the

36 Fibula object B3-298; date 7th century BCE (Pedde 2000).
body to bring along, and the primacy of the skull in mortuary cults is well-documented in most cultures.\textsuperscript{37} Examples of skull-only burials can be seen in Aššur, as well – where they could have contributed to ancestor worship (See discussion in Chapter 4; Hauser 2012).

In Level IA, Burial 55 is unlike any other grave excavated at Tell Billa. It is a round grave constructed of mudbrick, measuring 57cm in diameter. It contained one adult individual, buried in a fetal position with knees drawn up to the chest so as to fit in the grave. Interestingly, the head of the deceased was arranged facing downwards, which is unique at Billa. Another unusual feature was the upside-down bowl positioned above the body. No other objects were found in or associated with this grave. Burial 55 was found in Room 26, after it had become part of House B. No other burials were found within this room, leaving open the possibility that this grave might have been purposefully isolated. The practice of burying upturned bowls is known in the ancient Near East in the form of “Incantation Bowls” – a popular form of warding magic in Late Antiquity (Saar 2018). Usually these bowls have spells written on the concave side in Aramaic, winding around the circumference of the bowl in a spiral and meant to ensnare dangerous or ill-intending demons/spirits. These bowls were usually buried in doorways, courtyards, corners of domestic space, and sometimes cemeteries (Saar 2018). This practice is, of course, almost a millennium removed from the period in discussion. However, the other unique attributes of Burial 55 (the round shape of the grave, the downturned skull) are also so unusual that such supernatural reasons cannot be

\textsuperscript{37} The retrieval and re-deposition of the skull is argued by Haddow & Knüsel to show a concern with ancestry (2017).
dismissed. Based on later practices of protection from – and ensnarement of – evil forces, it is quite possible this individual was buried this way in order to contain some malevolent threat after death, perhaps disease or witchcraft (Abusch 1974). Diseases were often identified as afflictions from supernatural powers (Scurlock 1997). Another possibility for this unusual burial is that this individual was somehow ostracized in society, and burial in this manner was a form of “punishment.” Another possibility is that the circular pit might have been originally for storage and was utilized as a ready-made grave.

**The Practice of Cremation**

The final example of a notable burial at Tell Billa comes from Level II in the southeastern corner of Room 44 – part of a structure of unknown use and without any obvious association to neighboring houses. Burial 39 is the only cremation burial at Tell Billa. The remains of one cremated adult and a non-cremated infant were placed within a single jar, sealed by the base sherd of another vessel. The jar was oriented with its mouth to the north and was placed at a 35-degree angle to the ground. The only objects associated with the burial were two paste beads within the jar itself, mixed in with the soil and burnt remains. It is likely that the rest of the bead string was burned with the adult deceased. The prevalence of cremation in the Middle Assyrian period is documented at an array of sites. While its use in the Iron Age is relatively widespread and well-known, cremation has its roots in the Late Bronze Age, as indicated by examples of the practice at sites such as Sabi Abyad, Shiukh Fawqani, Mohammed
Diyab, Nemrik, and Alalakh (Tenu 2009a; Sauvage 2005). Düring et al. have suggested that the overlap of cremation in the LBA and typically Hurrian-occupied areas indicates that this practice could have arisen from Hurrian traditions (2015:41). Tenu, however, takes a different stance: emphasizing that the areas in which cremations occurred in the Iron Age and LBA were also places that had extensive Aramaean populations. She points out that, though Aramaeans were not recognized as a group by the Assyrians until the end of the 12th century, they were undoubtedly present in the area before then and could have influenced burial practices (2009a:88). Tenu also links the increase in cremations in the IA to the practice of using discrete funerary areas outside of occupied areas. Necropoleis, she argues, preceded that use of cremation at many sites and signals a shift in the relationship between the living and the dead at these sites. She further suggests that this might be due to the decrease in urbanism during the collapse of the LBA, which could have shifted attention away from the physical home. In her particular assessment of the necropolis at Shiukh Fawqani, she also suggests that the rise in iron grave goods could be linked to Aramaeans, although the evidence for this is admittedly speculative.

Let us assess the cremation not, for the moment, as a marker or practice of ethnicity but instead as a set of ritual actions in and of itself. Cremation requires a significant time investment beyond burial. A single adult can take as long as nineteen hours to burn (Tenu 2009a:90). This does not include time needed to build the funeral pyre, prepare the body of the deceased, construct the grave that the burnt remains would be later deposited in, or any other funerary commitments such as feasting or extended
ritual. In many cases, after the funeral pyre had died down, the ashes of the deceased were collected and placed in an urn, capped with another vessel or sherd and then buried – sometimes with additional grave goods. In other cases, cremations took place in dug out pits, which were then covered with dirt – acting as both the funeral site and final resting place. Examples of this type have been found in late Neo-Assyrian contexts at Tell Sheikh Hamad, Ziyaret Tepe, and, most recently, Tell Gomel (Kreppner 2014; Matney et al. 2017; Morandi Bonacossi personal comm.). They date to the late Neo-Assyrian period (7th century). Rather than being conducted or deposited in discrete necropoleis, these cremations were placed in domestic spaces (Kreppner 2014).

So, what does Tell Billa’s single Middle Assyrian cremation tell us? Unlike other forms of burial, cremations were large events which needed space and resources. The presence of an adult cremation at the site shows that most likely there was more than just one person who practiced cremation as a means of funerary disposal. The urn type itself is at home with other ceramic types at Aššur and in contemporary sites in the Upper Khabur/ Balikh region, showing consistency among whomever was using cremation as part of mortuary ritual (Hausleiter 2010; Kreppner 2014; Düring et al. 2015; Sauvage 2005). Finally, the inclusion of the remains of an unburnt infant lead us to believe that the burned adult was likely the mother of the child, possibly relating to death from childbirth. However, the main restriction of the cremation practice seems to be by age group – children and infants are almost never cremated. The practice is reserved for

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38 Several cremations have been buried with the remains of caprids, suggesting a feasting or provisionary element to the cremation process (Düring et al. 2015; Sauvage 2005).
adolescents and adults. In this sense, then, cremation could be associated with adulthood and specific afterlife beliefs regarding differences between children and adults.

Regarding the afterlife, however, it is interesting to note the discrepancies between the practice of cremation and the afterlife beliefs of Mesopotamians as we know them. From the literature and rituals mentioned in Chapter 3, we see that the “etemmu” – the spirit of the deceased – is attached to the corpse. The etemmu uses the corpse as a tether point to exist between the underworld and the living world. Furthermore, continuing care of the deceased in the form of kispu relies upon feeding/watering the spirit by depositing the sustenance with the corpse (Tsukimoto 1980). Though fragments of bone and tissue may remain in the ashes following cremation, it is still an act of destroying the body – what the etemmu in Mesopotamian thought needs as an anchor. “Mesopotamian thought”, however, might be the key phrase in this instance – the practice of cremation is so far separated from the typical concerns and anxiety that is portrayed via ritual and literature that it likely indicates a discrete set of beliefs held by another group – whether ethnic or geographic (see Rutherford 2007; Tenu 2009a; Polcano 2014). In any case, it is clear that cremation differs enough in practice and belief from typical Assyrian burial practices that it should always be considered an indicator of diversity not only in mortuary practice, but in the site’s living demography. If the connection between cremation practices and groups in Anatolia and northern Syria proves durable, then members of such groups might have been present at Billa at least during the Middle Assyrian period. This might have been an entire family, or just several individuals aware of such burial practices. Düring et al. discuss this in their presentation of the burial material from Tell Sabi Abyad (2015). Without the knowledge of the earlier
burials found at Tell Billa on the northern part of the mound, it is also impossible to trace a temporal connection between earlier mortuary practices at Šibaniba during Mitanni occupation and the later practices of the residents. However, this is not to say that a connection does not exist, as presumably Hurrians remained at Tell Billa after Assyrian rule had already been established; Finkelstein identifies in the texts from Šibaniba a significant number of names with Hurrian roots (1953:119). Overall, from sites where Mitanni burials have been recovered, the burials themselves do not display anything drastically different from the Level II graves at Tell Billa show; Hurrian graves from Nuzi, for example, are a simple pit grave for an adult and a single-jar grave for an infant (Starr 1939:348-49) while Hurrian examples from Umm el-Marra (Maskevitch 2014:61) have the deceased in a flexed position, with one containing a jar, shell, and animal bones. At the current state of research, Hurrian burial practices have no specific identifying factors which could indicate a connection (or an absence of connection) with the burials at Tell Billa. However, a diverse population closely interacting with the Assyrian state undoubtedly affected the display and perception of inhabitants’ identities, especially over seven centuries.

**Conclusions**

During the course of Assyrian development, it is obvious that the spread of the empire – and Assyrian control – had a great impact on its subjects, both in provincial territories and within the heartland. While in the Middle Assyrian period rule over provincial settlements remained loose and depended on placing Assyrian elites to rule in
these areas, in the Neo-Assyrian period control over these centers tightened and Assyrian officials maintained direct control. The effects of Assyrian elites on their subjects (both in the provinces and the heartland) has been debated in scholarship. These changes in ruling strategy brought more Assyrians – and Assyrian material culture – into provincial centers to maintain the imperial bureaucracy. We see this change reflected at Tell Billa, whereas many practices were similar between Aššur and Billa in the Middle Assyrian period, there were still distinct local idiosyncrasies in burial patterns. A diverse population closely interacting with Assyrian state undoubtedly affected the display and perception of inhabitants’ identities, especially over the discussed period of seven centuries.

In what is undoubtedly just a small sampling of the burials from the site, we can identify relations with the main cultural center of Aššur. This was expected based on what we know of Šibaniba’s position within the empire in the late second and early first millennia. We can also tie the general characteristics of Assyrian-period burials at Šibaniba into contemporary practices seen at sites like Tell Mohammed Diyab and Tell Sabi Abyad – sites also affected by the steady growth and hold of invasive Assyrian imperial power (see Chapter 6). Most interesting, however, is comparing the many mudbrick graves at Šibaniba to the comparatively few at Aššur, which again were found only in the outer town. A similar disparity is seen when considering the high ratio of sherd graves at Aššur to almost none at Šibaniba. Mudbrick burials were more labor-intensive than sherd burials, yet a quarter of burials included mudbrick structures. The large number of mudbrick graves at Tell Billa actually shows a greater time investment spent on the burials than was seen in Aššur, where sherd and pit graves – requiring
relatively low levels of labor investment – dominated. Variance in the expression of mortuary culture such as this creates an opportunity to identify possible influences at Šibaniba. I point not only to the disparity in grave types between Šibaniba and Aššur, but also to the presence of cremation at Šibaniba, which is unusual in this region, and has been argued before to be characteristic of Aramaean mortuary culture, due to its presence at typically Aramaean settlements. Finally, the presence of multiple-person inhumations imply family burials and patterns of re-use which reflect similar patterns in the use of household tombs at Aššur. Particularly notable are the three-person multiple burials, which I proposed show a shift in mortuary practice towards emphasizing relationships over personal identity. The discovery of the burials underneath and related to the domestic structures is unsurprising, and even expected. In Assyria, it was common practice for people to be buried under house floors. Burials (both graves and tombs alike) tended to follow established house walls. Socially, this indicates a relation to familial practices and ancestral memory.

The mortuary remains in the southwest town at Assyrian Šibaniba collectively give an impression of a varied belief system, present in the Middle Assyrian period and continuing through the Neo-Assyrian period. This general picture also, however, shows both introductions of new mortuary practices and abandonment of older practices during the growth of the empire. This is seen in the decrease of mudbrick and composite burials in the Middle Assyrian period, where graves had higher numbers and general wealth of grave goods – becoming more uniform over time and eventually adopting the “typical” Assyrian culture that was maintained in the Center City of Aššur (see Chapter 4), including the rise in double-jar burials and the presence of a single-piece
sarcophagus. In the Middle Assyrian period, however, individual identity expression using personal items was more popular; mudbrick burials were employed along with cremation, and adults and children were afforded the same levels of funerary equipment/treatment. As time went on, Tell Billa’s practices became closer to that of Aššur’s – largely preserved from Middle Assyrian traditions. Essentially, the personal identity of Tell Billa’s inhabitants as expressed through mortuary culture became more traditionally “Assyrian” over time.

What these unique graves reveal is another example of diversity in burial practices that was present at Aššur and that will be seen elsewhere in the Assyrian Empire. Tolerance of cultural practices – especially that of mortuary culture – seems to have been a characteristic of Assyrian control and administration. The next chapter analyzes this diversity further by exploring provincial sites on the Upper Khabur/Balikh, located at a large geographical distance from the heart of the Assyrian Empire, in contrast with the relatively central position of Šibaniba. I present a comprehensive comparison of Assyrian burial practices in Chapter 7, in which Tell Billa’s graves represent the mortuary traditions of centrally-located provinces within the empire. On its own, however, the mortuary culture at Tell Billa represents a people who embraced new and old traditions in the mortuary sphere, where deliberate choices made by the living integrated the dead into the domestic and urban spheres.
CHAPTER 6: THE GRAVES OF THE UPPER KHABUR/ BALIKH

This chapter surveys mortuary practices in northeastern Syria during the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, when this area was within the Assyrian sphere of influence and, often, under Assyrian control. Unlike Tell Billa, which was located close to the Assyrian heartland, these sites were geographically distant from the Assyrian center, in which no doubt affected Assyrian interaction with the sites and their inhabitants. Additionally, this area was absorbed into the Assyrian Empire at a later date (c. 1300), and parts of it broke free of Assyrian control during the contraction of power during the LBA-IA transition – the “Dark Age” (D’Agostino 2009). These factors make the mortuary culture at these sites crucial in understanding the impact and development of Assyrian identity outside of the Assyrian homeland.

The chapter considers several archaeological sites in the Khabur River valley (Tell Halaf, Tell Mohammed Diyab, Tell Ta’ban, Tell Fekheriye, Tell al-Hamidiya, and Tell Barri) and Sabi Abyad in the Balikh River valley. Because there are so many sites in this area, it is necessary to limit the scope of this chapter; therefore, I examine in detail only places which contained five or more burials in identifiable Assyrian contexts. Mortuary culture examples from other sites in the area will be cited as comparanda but will not be discussed in detail. Other sites did contain burials from Assyrian contexts, but the data recording was either minimal (Tell Chuera) or not yet published (Sheikh Hamad), which meant that they could not be included.
### Sites included in this chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern Site</th>
<th>Ancient Name</th>
<th>Periods Occupied</th>
<th>Number of Burials</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Assyrian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell Halaf</td>
<td>Guzana</td>
<td>MA-NA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell Mohammed Diyab</td>
<td></td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell Ta‘ban</td>
<td>Tabetu</td>
<td>MA-NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell Fekheriye</td>
<td>Sikani(?)</td>
<td>MA-Transition</td>
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<td>Tell al-Hamidiya</td>
<td>Taite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell Sabi Abyad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell Barri</td>
<td>Kaḥat</td>
<td>MA-NA</td>
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**Table 6.1: Sites included in this chapter**

![Figure 6.1: A map of the Upper Khabur/ Balikh region, with the sites in this chapter.](image)

Figure 6.1: A map of the Upper Khabur/ Balikh region, with the sites in this chapter.
Data Inconsistency

As in any research involving excavation records from multiple sites, project data sets differ in terms of methodology, records, and publication quality. This is especially true of mortuary data – where often times only basic attributes were recorded about the burials and their contents, especially in excavations from the early 1900s. While I have endeavored to mitigate idiosyncrasies in the data, many remain. For this reason, the “Transitional” phase discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 cannot be distinguished to the same degree with this variable data. Only Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods are herein discussed.

This chapter also discusses burials that were excavated in many different contexts – at Sabi Abyad, for example, the burials hail from a Middle Assyrian dunnu (a rural agricultural estate). Neo-Assyrian burials from Fekheriye were inhumed among the ruins of houses in a makeshift cemetery. Three burials at Tell Barri were found in a palace,
and many of the Mohammed Diyab burials were found in domestic contexts. Because of the variation in burial context, the sites and their mortuary culture will first be considered individually, then general spatial and temporal patterns will be presented.

**The Khabur Region in the Assyrian Empire**

The history of any one individual place is closely tied with the history of northeastern Syria as a whole, especially that of neighboring sites in the Khabur Triangle. During the reign of the Mitanni Kingdom, this area formed the core of the Hurrian government and administration (Maskevitch 2014). The Khabur Valley was the heart of the Mitanni Kingdom, probably due to its fertile agricultural potential and its central location in a wider route network which facilitated fast travel and easy communication between points (Akkermans & Schwartz 2003). These same reasons were why settlements in the Khabur were established as provincial administration centers in the Middle Assyrian period. Shalmaneser I established the Middle Assyrian provincial system in the Khabur in the mid-13th century, with its headquarters at Dūr-Katlimmu (modern Sheikh Hamad) (Akkermans & Schwartz 2003:348; Kühne 1994; Fügert *et al.* 2014). Assyrian officials at Dūr-Katlimmu administered and maintained imperial control of the surrounding entities (Llop 2011). While Dūr-Katlimmu in the Lower Khabur Valley was an obvious choice as a seat of provincial power due to its connection to Aššur via a direct east-west route and its position as a prior seat of power to the Mitanni kingdom, Tell Fekheriye in the Upper Khabur was also an important administrative center in the Middle Assyrian period. It was probably the site of Waššukanni, the
Mitanni capital city, although this identification has not yet been confirmed (Bonatz 2014). The housing complexes uncovered in the western terrace of the mound indicate that families of some importance – likely elite officials, occupied the site during this time (Bonatz & Bartl 2012:162).

The LBA in this region was characterized by a settlement system consisting of short-lived farming hamlets and elite manor houses (dimtu or dunnu) outside of cities, while cities themselves consisted of large-scale elite buildings located on mounds and depopulated Lower Towns.39 This three-tiered settlement system of northeastern Syria did not last through the LBA-IA transition. Many of the elite-occupied tell sites were abandoned at the same time that other sites in western Syria show evidence for widespread destruction.

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39 For example, Hammam et-Turkman VIIIIB to the west of Fekheriye and Tell Brak to the east (van Loon 1998; Oates et al. 1997).
Figure 6.3: Statue of local ruler Hadad-Yi’si from Tell Fekheriye (after Novák 2016, Fig. 6)

Textual evidence from Tell Bderi and Tell Ta’ban reveals that Assyrians were still present in some capacity within this area, given the presence of the local “governor “Aššur-ketti-lešer c. 1100 (Ohnuma & Numoto 2001). Even as Aramaeans encroached upon this area at the very end of the 11th century, Assyrians retained control over strategic outposts (Liverani 1988). By the end of the 10th century, Neo-Assyrian rulers began to re-establish themselves in the Khabur, successfully campaigning against polities to the west (Masetti-Rouault 2015). Enemy territories in this area were first reduced to tributary status, supervised by Assyrian control points located at main settlements (Llop 2011; Postgate 1992). As Assyrian kings expanded their holdings and initiated mass deportations, many of the deportees were settled in the Khabur area to take advantage of
the fertile agricultural land (Morandi Bonacossi 1996). Centrally-planned demographic and agricultural projects such as this are indicated by a six-tier settlement system emerging in the area, with numerous small farming hamlets administered by large provincial centers (Morandi-Bonacossi 1996). By the end of the 9th century, all the Aramaean polities of the Syrian Jezireh were incorporated into the Assyrian Empire (Novák 2013). The ethnically-mixed population is best exemplified by the statue of Hadad-Yi’si found at Tell Fekheriye in 1979 – depicting the ruler of Gozan and with an inscription in both Aramaic and Akkadian (see Fig. 6.3). The Akkadian inscription (with Aramaic variants in parentheses) reads:

**Part A:** To Adad (The image of Hadad-yis’i which he has set up before Hadad of Sikan), regulator of the waters of heaven and earth, who rains down abundance, who gives pasture and watering places to the people of all cities (to all lands), who gives portions and offerings (rest and vessels of food) to (all) the gods, his brothers, regulator of (all) rivers, who enriches the regions (all lands), the merciful god to whom it is good to pray, who dwells in Guzan (Sikan), to the great lord, his lord, Adad-it’i (Hadad-yis’i), governor (king) of Guzan, son of Shamash-nuri (Sas-nfiri), also governor (king) of Guzan, for the life of his soul, (and) for the length of his days, (and) for increasing his years, (and) for the prosperity of his house, (and for the prosperity) of his descendants, (and for the prosperity) of his people, (and) to remove illness from his body (from him), for hearing my prayer (and for making his prayer heard), (and) for accepting my (his) words, he devoted and gave (he set up and gave to him). (And) whoever afterwards shall repair its ruined state (shall raise it to erect it anew), may he put my name (on it). (And) whoever erases my name from the furnishings of the house of Adad (Hadad), my lord, my lord Adad (Hadad) shall not accept his food and water from him (from his hand), my lady Shala (Sawl) ditto (shall not accept his food and water from his hand); (and) may he sow, but not harvest; (and) may he sow a thousand measures (of barley), (and) may he take a se'ah (a fraction from it); (and) may one hundred ewes not satisfy a lamb (suckle a lamb, but it not be satisfied); (and) may one hundred cows not satisfy a calf (suckle a calf, but it not be satisfied); (and) may one hundred women bakers not fill an oven (one hundred women bake bread in an oven, but not fill it); may the gleaner glean in a refuse pit (and, may his men glean barley
from a refuse pit, and eat), may disease, plague, and pestilence (may plague, the staff of Nergal) not be cut off from his land (trans. Millard & Bordreuil 1982).

The two versions of the inscriptions are varied in the exact titles used: “mlk” – “king” in the Aramaic, and bēl pahutu – “governor” in the Akkadian; this could indicate an Assyrian willingness to not only overlook, but allow such differences in local governing structures. The Upper Khabur/ Balikh existed as a unique entity within the Assyrian Empire, occupying a space both “originally Assyrian” (in the minds of the Neo-Assyrian kings, illustrated by their efforts to “reconquer,” not “conquer”) and separate in Assyrian thought and imperial structure.

The Burials

Tell Halaf – Guzana

Tell Halaf is located in northeast Syria on the headwaters of the Khabur River (see Fig. 6.1). The site was first occupied in the Pottery Neolithic period from 6000-5300 BCE (Novák 2013). After this, it was abandoned and only resettled in the early first millennium BCE under the name Guzana (Novák 2016). Initially the city was the center of an Aramaean polity, but was quickly subsumed into the Assyrian Empire and became the residence of an Assyrian governor. Following a revolt in 808 BCE, Guzana was conquered by Adad-Nirari III (810-783) and fully-incorporated into the Assyrian Empire (Novák 2016). Though basalt wall-reliefs and statues from the “West Palast” (also known as the Hilani) (Heitmann 2012) make up the most famous finds from Guzana, excavations have uncovered a number of burials from this period, as well. Excavations were carried out first under the leadership of M. von Oppenheim (in 1911-13 and then

In the first seasons of excavation, Oppenheim discovered a number of burials at Tell Halaf dating to the Iron Age. Elite examples included two massive mudbrick tombs north of the Hilani, and a number of “funeral chapels” near the southern gate (Heitmann 2012). These latter chapels contained female statues, likely involved in the tradition of ancestor worship known from this area – further supported by the cremated remains of a human adult found beneath the feet of one of the statues (Novák 2013:262) (see Fig. 6.4).40 Another possible tomb was labeled the “Cult Room” of the Lower Town, which also contained statues for an ancestor cult (Oppenheim 1950). These burials dated to the “Aramaean occupation” of the site in the early first millennium – this study’s Transitional period.

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40 Parallels have been drawn between these statues and Syro-Hittite funerary stele, such as the KTMW stele uncovered at Zinçirli (Struble & Herrmann 2009).
Figure 6.4: A statue at Tell Halaf, a cremation burial was found at its feet (after Novák 2016, Fig. 2)

Other burials dated to the first reoccupation of the site by a group of unknown settlers in the late second millennium. The northwestern section of the mound was a burial ground – excavated both by Oppenheim (Orthmann 2002:47-50) and the Syrian-German mission. According to Novák, they share strong similarities with the late Middle Assyrian burials from neighboring Fekheriye (2013:266). The earliest locals adopted luxury items and pottery shapes from Middle Assyrian culture.

The occupation of the town under the Aramaeans directly after this phase brought distinct changes to the town’s layout. The burial ground in the northwest was abandoned to make way for the Hilani palace. An area south of the citadel’s fortification and east of
the gate became a burial place for elite residents – this is where the aforementioned
funeral chapels were built, which were contemporary with the “Cult Room”. The
inhaumations of the previous occupation were now replaced by cremation practices
(Novák 2013:271). Furthermore, this seems to go hand-in-hand with the archaeological
evidence for ancestor worship, which also appeared at this time.

While Guzana had paid tribute to Assyria for much of the last century, Assyrians
conquered and officially integrated the city after a failed revolt in 808 BCE (although
possibly incorporated earlier under Shalmaneser III, according to Novák (2013:272)).
The general layout of the settlement remained the same, but the inner structure of the
citadel was modified extensively – and elite Assyrian residences were built over the
Aramaean elite cemetery. During Assyrian hegemony, the Lower Town was extensively
occupied (Novák 2013).

Overall, the residents of Guzana employed almost exclusively Assyrian-type
small objects and pottery, while Assyrian temple, palace, and domestic architecture is
present during Assyrian rule (Novák 2016). However, older traditions were still present,
evidenced by Aramaic language inscriptions used on local statuary (Novák 2016:129).
Furthermore, a blending of ethnic identities is expected from Guzana (as for the rest of
the sites from the Khabur area), as this area was used as a final settlement destination for
deportees from conquered western lands. A passage from 2 Kings reads, “In the ninth
year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria,
and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the
Medes,” (2 Kings 17:6).
Recent excavations found graves north and northeast of the West-Palast (Heitmann 2012). Two mudbrick graves were excavated in this area from our time periods. Graves 8 and 16 belonged to the “Groovy Ware” occupation (LBA/EIA (1200-1000)) (Heitmann 2012). Heitmann compares the mudbrick construction of Graves 8 and 16 to contemporary ones at Tell Fekheriye, (just several kilometers away, discussed below) (2012). The inhabitants at the site during Aramaean rule abandoned this burial ground and the Assyrians built the West-Palast over it. This led to the formation of an elite burial place in the area immediately south of the citadel’s fortifications. This area contained chapel-like buildings (two of them containing statues of women, one with a cremation burial at its feet) (see Fig. 6.4). Novák emphasizes the transition from the inhumation burials of the Groovy Ware settlers to the new cremation practices during the Aramaean period (2013:297). Despite the general reorganization of the citadel, Aramaean practices were still present, as shown by an ancestor statue from the 8th century of one Kammaki, with an Aramaic inscription (Novák 2013:301).

Figure 6.5: Types of Burials at Tell Halaf
The Tempel-Palast contained two tombs dated to the Transitional period (Oppenheim 1950:100). The southernmost one was the older of the two tombs, oriented E-W and containing gold, silver, bronze, and ivory finds. Though the excavation records do not allow for a detailed investigation into the mortuary culture, we can still construct a basic picture from the data available to us. Of the 9 burials from Halaf’s Assyrian levels, 2 are from the late Middle Assyrian period and 7 are from the Transitional period. In the Middle Assyrian period, burials are of the pit type and mudbrick type, with 2 adults and no children. The Transitional period is characterized by the appearance (and dominance) of Type 4.1 – single-piece sarcophagi (4 examples) with 3 adults and 4 children. In both periods, all burials contain only a single individual. Burials are overall poor (with wealth values between 0-3); the only exception is a mudbrick grave (Grave 16) from the Middle Assyrian period, which contained jewelry, textile remains, and other crafting tools (pigments, needles, etc.) and had a wealth value of 6.

Tell Halaf’s grave good assemblage is unusual as less than half of the graves containing ceramics. Those that do (Graves 16, 21, and 23) provide the dead with both the typical bowl and jar that we have seen at both Aššur and Tell Billa. Two of the Graves (8 and 16) contained animal remains, giving evidence for deposition with meat products. Adornment items do not appear in large numbers, nor are they particularly notable in comparison to what we have so far seen in the graves at Aššur; usually only paste beads and occasional bronze rings. However, both of these types of objects parallel some of the assemblages at Tell Billa. Two grindstones in Graves 16 and 23 are notable,
as grindstones are rarely found in grave contexts. Overall, while the sample size is small, Halaf’s grave goods reveal some typical characteristics shared by assemblages at Tell Billa and Aššur, while also showcasing several idiosyncrasies, such as the grindstones.

Besides objects, burial type, and occupant, almost no other burial characteristics were recorded. Even exact locations are questionable; in general, we can assign Graves 22, 23, and 24 to domestic contexts and the rest to “public” contexts—including along the city wall and in relation to the Assyrian temple. This indicates that the residents on the tell at Halaf might have been more closely-integrated with the Assyrian occupation—perhaps, even being native Assyrians themselves. Though impossible to discern from location alone, the combination of a decrease in mudbrick graves and an increase in single-piece sarcophagi might indicate a shift toward Assyrian mortuary practices by the city’s inhabitants.

![Wealth Values of Burials at Tell Halaf](image)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Wealth Values</th>
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<td>Middle Assyrian</td>
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244
Tell Mohammed Diyab

Tell Mohammed Diyab is a multi-mounded site located in the Upper Khabur area which largely dates to the EBA and MBA periods (Nicolle 2006; 2007). Between 1987 and 2001, twelve seasons were conducted at Tell Mohammed Diyab by the Ministère des Affaires Étrangéres in the north Jezireh, directed by J.M. Durand (1992). A series of trenches and sondages revealed that the site was occupied by Assyrians during the expansion of their control in the Middle Assyrian period. Ephemeral Middle Assyrian remains were found on top of earlier Mitanni levels (Level 5a-4b) but were poorly preserved (Nicolle 2006:100). After the Middle Assyrian period, the site was abandoned until the Parthian period. It is thought that the site was gradually abandoned into the first millennium, due to a lack of a clear destruction layer (Castel 1992:48).

Middle Assyrian remains were discovered in Sondage 3, Sondage 6, and Chantier 3, Chantier 1, and Chantier 5a. Notable structures included foundations of a mudbrick building with poorly-preserved walls, and parts of other buildings of unknown use. All eight burials at Mohammed Diyab dated to the Middle Assyrian period. Though they all date to the same occupation, and several are even found in relation to one another, the site’s Middle Assyrian burials are diverse in type (Sauvage 2005:49) – including pit burials, mudbrick burials, single and double-jar, and a cremation. Pit graves were the most common, followed by mudbrick graves and single-jar graves. Slightly unusual is the ratio of adult to child/infant burials recovered at the site: two contained adults, six
contained children, and one contained an infant. All burials harbored a single occupant except Burial 1497 – a mudbrick grave which contained a child and an adult. The sole cremation, burial 1498, was a jar burial, found under two mudbricks, with caprid remains on the outside of the jar (reminiscent of several cremations we will encounter at Tell Sabi Abyad, discussed further below). The cremated remains were of an adult, and the contents of the jar itself were fairly rich, containing gold objects and reaching a wealth value of 6.

![Burial Types at Tell Mohammed Diyab](image)

**Figure 6.7:** Burial types at Tell Mohammed Diyab.

We are fortunate to have data about the position and orientation of the deceased: all burials were oriented along the cardinal directions, with most oriented E-W or W-E. Occupants of the burials were largely laid in extended positions, with arms crossed on the
chest and legs stretched out to full extent. One unusual case (Burial 1610) was buried with the occupant facing down, paralleling an example found at Tell Billa.\textsuperscript{41}

![Wealth Values of Burials at Mohammed Divab](image)

**Figure 6.8:** Wealth values of burials at Tell Mohammed Diyab.

Overall, the burials at Tell Mohammed Diyab were fairly rich compared to other sites’ burials. At least four burials contained gold objects, and Wealth values were primarily between Value 4 – Value 6 (see Fig. 6.8). Such a high pattern of wealth distribution is unusual, and it is not clarified by the domestic contexts of the burials.\textsuperscript{42}

This pattern of rich burials fits within the general trend so far of richer mortuary contexts in the Middle Assyrian period (though here we have no Neo-Assyrian contexts to directly compare them to.)

Mohammed Diyab’s burials contained some notable preferences in grave goods: black and white paste beads were popular (found in 4 out of 8 graves) along with gold

\textsuperscript{41} See Chapter 5 for further discussion on this phenomenon.

\textsuperscript{42} Regarding the contexts of the burials, “[l]a plupart de ces tombes ont été trouvées dans un contexte domestique: les défunts étaient enterrés sous le sol et les murs des maisons ou à proximité... plutôt qu’en nécropole,” (Sauvage 2005:48).
earrings (also in 4 out of the 8 graves, overlapping with three of the graves with the black 
and white beads [Graves 1459, 1577, and 1498]) (Sauvage 2005:49). Both the black and 
white paste beads and the gold earrings were similarly seen at Aššur and Tell Billa. This 
is especially interesting when considering that both Mohammed Diyab and Tell Billa had 
instances of cremation in the Middle Assyrian period. However, at Mohammed Diyab 
there is also a difference in the ceramic assemblages from Aššur and Billa; instead of a 
typical jar and bowl, we instead see only cups deposited with the deceased, and only in 
three graves. This likely evidences different provisions for the dead (possibly prioritizing 
offerings that didn’t need containers) or different ways of provisioning the dead (such as 
postmortem care).

**Tell Ta’ban – Tābeṭu**

The site of Tell Ta’ban is situated in the Middle Khabur region on the eastern side 
of the river, just 19km south of modern Hassake. Excavations began at the site after it 
was determined that it was in danger of being submerged due to the construction of the 
Hassake Dam. Salvage missions worked here for a total of 10 field seasons, first from 
1997 until 1999 by a Japanese team under K. Ohnuma, then again in 2005-2010 by 
another Japanese team, this time directed by H. Numoto. Erosion and rising water level 
both affected decisions by the team on where to focus their efforts. The site itself bore 
occupation levels ranging from the Uruk to Hellenistic periods, with 71 inscribed artifacts 
belonging to the Middle Assyrian period, identifying the site as ancient Ţabetu (Numoto 
et al. 2013:167). A study by S.M. Maul shows that the local kingdom maintained a semi-
independent state while under Assyrian suzerainty (2005). Textual evidence for a local dynasty at Ţabetu comes from a 13th-12th century archive, which corresponds to local rulers Aššur-ketti-lešir I and Adad-bel-gabbe II. During their 10 excavation seasons, the team exposed parts of palatial structures, a defense system around the site, and a number of Assyrian burials (Numoto et al. 2013:169). They uncovered a subterranean Middle Assyrian vaulted tomb among other burials, which included pit and jar burials from both the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods. The team estimates the Middle Assyrian tomb dates to the mid-12th century, and possibly was built by local ruler Etel-pi-Adad (Numoto et al. 2013:178).

The Middle Assyrian period at Tell Ta’ban ended violently with a destruction layer between it and a later Assyrian level (Numoto et al. 2013:178). Possibly, the destruction took place in a later part of Tiglath-Pileser I’s reign to the early part of Aššur-bel-kala’s (1073-56) (Numoto 2008). The ceramics at the site underwent no drastic changes between time periods, which appears to agree with the continuity in local textual traditions. Numoto et al. (2013) argue that the inhabitants of Middle Assyrian Ţabetu upheld a strong local tradition, including refusing to adopt the standard Assyrian calendar and continuing to worship an older, local form of Adad (“Addu of Mahanum”). Furthermore, earlier generations of rulers at Ţabetu bore Hurrian names, while later ones had Assyrian names – showing that a process of Assyrian acculturation was already taking place in the second millennium and continued into the first (Numoto et al. 2013:179).

The burials reveal a similar transition: Tell Ta’ban’s burials span both the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods, providing a longue durée look at the mortuary
practices within a single site. There were 17 burials in total uncovered from the site – 5 from the Middle Assyrian period, 12 from the Neo-Assyrian period. Two of the Middle Assyrian burials were built tombs, and one belonged to the local ruling family, built to hold Etel-pi-Adad (Numoto et al. 2013). The three other burials in the Middle Assyrian period were pit, single-pot, and mudbrick grave types. They contained just one individual each (Numoto 2009; 2007). The positions of the deceased and their orientation remains unpublished.

![Types of Burials at Tell Ta'ban](image)

Figure 6.9: Types of burials at Tell Ta’ban.

In the Neo-Assyrian period, ceramic container burials dominate the assemblage; 6 burials were single-jar, while 4 were double-pot burials. The Neo-Assyrian burial contexts at Ta’ban were associated with the “Level 2 Building”, which may have had a “special function” due to the thickness of the walls (Ohnuma & Numoto 2001).
Tell Ta’ban’s burials, like those at Aššur and Tell Billa, prioritize ceramics in their grave assemblages (5 out of the 8 graves with their contents recorded). Specifically, the bowl and jar combination is present in all the graves which have ceramics, which is slightly less than half. In general, however, Ta’ban’s graves contain few objects, and none which specifically seem to suggest anything unusual or significant of their traditions. Burials in the Neo-Assyrian period were overall poorer than their Middle Assyrian counterparts; no gold was present in Neo-Assyrian graves, and on average burials had a wealth value of 1.8, compared to 3.5 of the Middle Assyrian assemblage. This lack of wealth in the Neo-Assyrian period is also reflected in the types of burials – unlike the Middle Assyrian period, there are no built tombs used to hold the dead. Instead, “cheaper” alternatives to burial containers were employed: ceramic containers, especially the “Assyrian” double-pot type. The adoption of mortuary traits from the Assyrian imperial core seems to be accompanied by a distinct decrease in wealth deposited in mortuary contexts – a trend which parallels that seen at Tell Billa (Chapter 5), and will become evident at other sites in the Khabur/ Balikh as well.
Tell Ta’ban occupied what was likely a “mid-range” place in the Assyrian Khabur; it had lost the importance it held earlier, and in the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods was located close to other provincial centers – some quite sizable (including: Tell Fekheriye and Dūr Katlimmu) (Shibata 2012). This could have diminished its importance on a regional scale. However, a “local elite” was still likely present in the Middle Assyrian period, as indicated by built tomb structures and richer grave goods. But, by the Neo-Assyrian period, Ta’ban’s status was likely diminished, despite (or perhaps, because of) its general proximity to the regional capital of Dur-Katlimmu.

Figure 6.10: Wealth values of burials at Tell Ta’ban.
Tell Fekheriye - Sikani

Tell Fekheriye is a tell site located in northeast Syria in the headwaters of the Khabur River (see Fig. 6.1). Lying just 1km south of Turkey’s southern border and just 2km away from the previously discussed site of Tell Halaf, the site is located next to one of the Euphrates’ most important tributaries. Anatolian mountains rich with natural resources lie to the north via the Harran Plain and the Balikh Plain opens on Fekheriye’s western side, making this area an important thoroughfare (Bonatz 2014).

The site itself is estimated to be c. 90ha in area, bordered by a former Roman-Byzantine wall (Bartl & Bonatz 2013). Much of the site is uneven, resulting from varied occupation patterns. The main tell rises 15m above the rest of the site (see Fig. 6.11). D. Bonatz and P. Bartl have identified a clear division between the Upper Town located on the mound (12 ha) and the Lower Town which forms an almost pentagon-like shape around it (c. 78 ha) (2012:164). Fekheriye has had a long history of archaeological attention; it was first mapped in 1929 by L.M. von Oppenheim, during his excavations at nearby Tell Halaf (Guzana) (McEwan et al. 1958). He harbored plans to excavate there after finishing with Tell Halaf, but a permit was instead obtained by C. McEwan of the Oriental Institute (University of Chicago). American excavations began at the site in 1940, where the team investigated the northeastern and western parts of the tell (McEwan et al. 1958). They discovered a monumental Neo-Assyrian building in the northeastern corner, and their work on the western terrace of the mound uncovered Middle Assyrian architecture in the form of a large residence – House I (McEwan et al. 1958). Two further campaigns were conducted in 1955-56 and in 2001, led by A. Moortgat and A. Pruß and A. Bagdo respectively (Moortgat 1956; Pruß & Bagdo 2002).
The most recent set of excavations was undertaken by a German team from the Freie Universität Berlin, led by D. Bonatz. Work began in 2006 and lasted four seasons (2006, 2007, 2009, and 2010) before excavations were halted due to the Syrian Civil War. This project targeted the Middle Assyrian and Mitanni levels; over four seasons of excavation, six areas were opened in total (see Fig. 6.12) (Bonatz & Bartl 2008; Bonatz & Bartl 2012; Bonatz 2014). Area A was located in the northeastern part of the mound, and was opened in order to provide a context for McEwan’s investigations of the Neo-Assyrian Palace. Area B was previously unexplored, located on the eastern slope of tell, and begun with the intent to understand the extent of occupation. Area C was designed to connect Pruß and Bagdo’s investigations with the current ones – investigating an important Middle Assyrian context located on the western terrace of the mound. Area D
extended this investigation of Middle Assyrian occupation southward into areas of the mound which lay unexplored, laid out as a step trench. Area E, like Area A, was focused on re-exploring the northeastern section of the mound containing the Neo-Assyrian monumental structure. This time excavations below Neo-Assyrian levels uncovered a building which contained no ceramics, only stone tools from the PPNB (Bonatz 2014).
Overall, Areas A, B, C, and D from the campaign of the Freie Universität and Areas I, IV, VI, and IX from previous excavations contained either Middle Assyrian or Neo-Assyrian material culture. The vast majority of these areas are located on the western side of the mound. Tell Fekheriye yielded a number of Assyrian burials, mostly resulting from the excavations of the Freie Universität in the 2000s. The original excavations by the Oriental Institute uncovered three burials (1 Middle Assyrian and 2 Neo-Assyrian). These were published in OIP 79, along with the stratigraphy and fieldnotes of the entire season (McEwan et al. 1958). The Freie Universität’s expedition to Fekheriye resulted in not only a wealth of architectural information from the Middle Assyrian and Transitional periods, but also 33 burials dating to these periods. Of the total 36 Assyrian burials, 10 dated to the Middle Assyrian period, 24 were from the Transitional period, and 2 were from the Neo-Assyrian period.43

Contexts between the two periods varied significantly – though graves were located in the same physical area, Middle Assyrian burials were buried within domestic contexts (in the houses occupying the western part of the mound), while Transitional burials were buried in the remains of those same houses (argued to have served as a cemetery at this time, see Bartl & Bonatz 2013), and the two Neo-Assyrian burials

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43 The burial data from the Freie Universität Berlin excavations is taken from preliminary publications (Bartl & Bonatz 2008; Bonatz & Bartl 2012; Bonatz 2014) and, as such, all exact dating of the burials is subject to change. All burials from the project are slated to be published in Bartl, P. The Burials of Tell Fekheriye (forthcoming).
excavated in the palace, uncovered by the American project in 1940 (McEwan et al. 1958).

Overall, Fekheriye does not contain a wide variety of burial types. Middle Assyrian burials at Tell Fekheriye are largely characterized by their similarity; nearly all contained only a single occupant, and most were double-jar burials (7 out of 10 examples). Single-jar (1 example), mudbrick graves (1 example), and pit graves (1 example) were also present in the Middle Assyrian period (Bartl & Bonatz 2013). These burials already began to showcase imperial Assyrian mortuary traditions (the double-jar), perhaps due to coming from a “later phase” of the Middle Assyrian period. There were more adults than children in the Middle Assyrian and Transitional periods (9 adults, 4 children in the Middle Assyrian period; 15 adults and 3 children, and 1 infant in the Transitional period – with 6 of unknown age) (Fig. 6.14). In the Transitional period, we see a sharp increase in the use of mudbrick burials, where the deceased was placed in an
extended position on their back, hands resting on their chest or torso. These burials usually have a roof made of mudbricks standing on edge to form a triangular pediment (Fig. 6.15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages of the Deceased at Tell Fekheriye</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adult?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adult</td>
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<td>adolescent</td>
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<tr>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.14: Ages of the deceased at Tell Fekheriye

In tandem with the Middle Assyrian domestic contexts, all burials are oriented on cardinal direction axes. This is, no doubt, owing to the same orientation of the house walls. Within these Middle Assyrian burials, occupants were placed in contracted and semi-contracted positions within their burial containers, laid on their sides. The Transitional burials were dug within this same area, but only once the houses were no longer occupied, forming part of a cemetery.
Fekheriye’s burials harbor a wide assemblage of goods. In general, while nearly every grave contained ceramics, the types varied – straying away from the typical bowl and jar we have seen at Aššur and Billa and several of the Khabur/ Balikh region sites. Some graves have only one ceramic container, while others have many. Faunal remains were extremely common within the graves (in 23 out of 33 graves with known contents), showcasing a heavy priority in supplying meat for the dead. A variety of the ceramic containers used also shows a concern for providing food and liquid provisions of many types. Of adornment objects, beads of glass and frit are most common. Metal goods are relatively uncommon, really only seen in bronze rings. It is interesting to compare this lack of metal goods to the high number of obsidian blades and other tools – possibly
illustrating a preference toward career and craft as an identity over aspects related to adornment goods (which tend to illustrate gender, status, and age)(Allison 2015). Parallels can possibly be drawn to Halaf, where tools were also notable in graves.

It is once again true at Fekheriye, as seen at Tell Ta’ban, and especially at Aššur and Tell Billa, that Middle Assyrian burials were richer than their later counterparts. Wealth values ranged from 1-5 with one burial having a value of 9. Additionally, two burials contained gold adornment items (earrings in both). All burials contained at least one object. However, this is not true of the Transitional burials; 2 have no objects at all, while the rest are largely valued between 1-2 (see Fig. 6.16). This dramatic decrease in mortuary-displayed wealth is accompanied by an increase in mudbrick and pit graves – counter to the trends we have noted so far at other sites. As the evidence from Aššur shows, mudbrick graves are not typically “Assyrian” in style. I tentatively propose that their increase here at Fekheriye during the Transitional period might reveal a resettled community in the area (as discussed in the region as a whole by Morandi Bonacossi 1996), while in the Middle Assyrian period, these houses and burials might have well belonged to Assyrian elites who moved here to govern the former Mitanni capital (as seen in Llop 2011).
Tell al-Hamidiya - Taite

Tell al-Hamidiya is located in the Upper Khabur area on the eastern bank of the Jaghjagh, just north of Tell Barri, and includes a central mound and lower town. It was occupied beginning in the Early Bronze Age, and its use continued (with various interruptions) up to Late Islamic times, when a cemetery was built on part of the mound. Hamidiya has been identified with the Assyrian provincial site Taite by M. Salvini (Eichler et al. 1985:67). If this identification holds true, then historical records show that it was first brought under Assyrian control during the reign of Adad-Nirari I in the early 13th century, when records describe him slaughtering the inhabitants of the city:

“I captured by conquest the city Taidu, his royal city, the cities Amasaku, Kaḥat, Šuru, Nabula, Hurra, Šuduhu and Washshukanu. I took and brought to my city, Aššur, the
Beginning in 1984, the site was investigated by a Swiss-German team from the universities of Bern and Konstanz until 2001 (Wäfler 2004). The site lay along a well-travelled route running East-West from Aššur and continuing to Harranu (Eichler et al. 1985:51) – the same road which ran through Tell Fekheriye. Similarly, Hamidiya also lay along a N-S route leading up the Khabur, along the Jaghjagh, and into the mountains of southeastern Turkey – crossing through Sheikh Hamad on its way north (Eichler et al. 1985:54).

Excavations took place mainly on the citadel, where Assyrian contexts were discovered in poorly preserved levels. On the SW portion of the mound, a structure named the “Jüngere Bau” consisted of several rooms seemingly surrounding a courtyard and could have functioned as a residence (Eichler et al. 1990:304-306). The Jüngere Bau was dated to the 9th c. (Eichler et al. 1990:309). The “Altere Bau” likely dated to the Mitanni or Middle Assyrian periods (Eichler et al. 1990:304). It was adjacent to the northern part of this building that a Neo-Assyrian grave was found. This was one of the seven Assyrian graves found at the site, all dating to the Neo-Assyrian period.

Seasons from 1988-2001 focused on other areas of the site – notably, a central palace built during the Mitanni occupation and re-used in the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods (Wäfler 2004:79-87). The excavation volume encompasses the results of all seasons at Hamidiya between 1988-2001, and descriptions of the structures and finds are brief. The other six Assyrian graves were found in relation to domestic

possessions of those cities, the accumulated wealth of his fathers and the treasures of his palace. I conquered, burnt and destroyed the city and sowed kudimmus over it."

(Grayson 1972 ARI I, 60).
occupation at the site, in Squares 39/29, 39/28, and 40/28 – the Neo-Assyrian structures surrounding this area included two houses (Wäfler 2004:81).

![Types of Burials at Tell al-Hamidiya](image)

**Figure 6.17**: Types of burials at Tell al-Hamidiya.

The situation at Tell al-Hamidiya is remarkably similar to that of Tell Halaf. Though only burials from the Neo-Assyrian period are present at Hamidiya (seven in total), they still show a high-level of Assyrian imperial influence. In this case, however, the influence is seen in the proliferation of double-jar burials (Type 3.2) – making up five of seven examples (see Fig. 6.17). Also like Halaf’s burials (and the other Neo-Assyrian examples we have seen thus far) most of these are poorly-provided with grave goods.

The objects deposited in the Tell al-Hamidiya graves seem to mostly be ceramics, with shapes similar to the jars and bowls seen in mortuary contexts at Aššur and Tell Billa. Other grave goods are rare. No gold is present in any burial – the only notable wealth item is a silver pendant (the only silver object in the burials discussed in this chapter) in Grave G4, which was also the richest grave at Hamidiya, with a wealth value of “6”.

Few other characteristics of the burials or their contents were recorded.
Tell Sabi Abyad

Tell Sabi Abyad is a site located in the upper Balikh valley of northern Syria. Between 1988 and 2008, this site was excavated by a project from Leiden directed by P. Akkermans. The site itself was first occupied in the Halaf period (Düring et al. 2015). After this, however, it was abandoned and remained uninhabited until the latter half of the second millennium. This site in historical sources was designated a *dunnu* – a fortified agricultural estate (*dimtu* in the Mitanni period) comprising a renovated tower flanked by a large residence on its western side (Düring et al. 2015:30) The *dunnu* was fortified by a large wall and moat, and inside the fortifications were barrack-like structures. Various workshops and other buildings were also present, and around 1197 BCE these buildings underwent a series of renovations. After 1180 BCE, the character of the site changed drastically, with different use-patterns of many buildings and the elite
residence and tower falling into disuse completely. However, tablets found at the site confirm that Sabi Abyad remained under Assyrian control (Düring et al. 2015:30).

In general, the residents of the *dunnu* would have been comprised entirely of deportees (Düring et al. 2015:32), serving as personnel and laborers, likely also soldiers in some military capacity. With this historical evidence of varying ethnic groups, it was already clear that we could expect variations in mortuary display among the residents.

A total of 40 burials were found dating to the LBA and EIA I (from 1170-1150 BCE). 33 of these burials were from Levels 5 and 6 – when the *dunnu* was in use. The excavators emphasize the variability present within the mortuary culture at Sabi Abyad; for example – inhumations consisted of several types, such as simple pits, mudbrick graves, and jar burials, but cremations were also present. Notably absent is the use of the double-vessel type. The excavators note that there was a higher diversity in burial types during the Middle Assyrian period than in the Mitanni (Düring et al 2015:42). Burials were found in nearly all parts of the *dunnu*, but cremations (save for the two richest examples) were generally located extramurally. Over time, burials generally move from outside the *dunnu* walls to within – with the first burials in residences occurring in Level 4, c. 1170 (see Fig. 6.19; Düring et al 2015:44). This makes Sabi Abyad one of only four sites in the Middle Assyrian period to have cremations (the others being Nemrik, Mohammed Diyab, and Tell Billa (Tenu 2009a)). Furthermore, two of these cremations were some of the richest burials at the site (BN88-01 and BN02-15 with wealth values of 5 and 7 respectively), presenting the possibility that the inhabitants of the elite residences at Sabi Abyad utilized cremation. They are not the only ones, however, as the six other
cremations were relatively poor in grave goods – containing only ceramics or beads. This same variety in wealth is apparent throughout the other types of burials, as well.

Figure 6.19: Distributions of grave types for Levels 3-6 at Tell Sabi Abyad (from Düring et al. 2015)
Thirty-nine Middle Assyrian burials were discovered when excavating the *dunnu* and the area around it. Most of these burials were found in the *dunnu* itself, within the structure’s walls. The majority of burials contained a single occupant, but four burials contained two individuals (one with a child and an adult, one with two adults, and one with a child and an infant), and burial BN88-04 contained five occupants. This exceptional case was postulated by the excavators to be a mass grave of people executed or killed in conflict (Düring *et al.* 2015). It was a simple pit grave, not a built tomb, and with no grave goods to speak of. Ages of the deceased at Sabi Abyad ranged from infants to middle-aged adults according to skeletal analysis: 31 were adults, 1 was a teenager, and 14 were small children or infants (one of unknown age). 14 individuals were known to be female, and 10 male. The body positions and orientation of these deceased remain largely unpublished. Notably, however, Burial BN03-11 had an individual buried facing downward, similar to examples we have seen at Mohammed Diyab (above) and Tell Billa (Chapter 5).

Figure 6.20: Types of Burials at Tell Sabi Abyad.
Where Sabi Abyad’s mortuary culture distinguishes itself is in the types of burial present at the site. Pit burials were overwhelmingly the most common, as has come to be expected in provincial sites. Yet, what stands out at Sabi Abyad is the presence of quite a few cremation burials. Most of these took the form of the typical cremation ashes buried in jars, as we have also seen from Tell Billa and Aššur in addition to other sites in the Upper Khabur-Balikh region, but there was a second type present as well. The excavators describe this as Type SA5 – an individual cremated in a dugout pit. Once the body was fully burned, the charred remains were covered over with soil and buried in situ.

Sabi Abyad is not the only site to have this type of burial in the Assyrian milieu; Tell Tayinat, Tell Sheikh Hamad, and Tell Gomel have also revealed these “in situ” cremation burials – though exclusively in palace contexts (Matney et al. 2017; Kreppner 2014; Morandi-Bonacossi personal comm.). The grave good assemblages within the cremations at Sabi Abyad, it was argued by the excavators, “suggest a western link,” (Düring et al. 2015: 46). The use of this type of burial could indicate a public funeral ceremony, meant to be attended by a wider crowd than that of a normal burial. Here, these burials only contained adults. Other types of burials utilized at the dunnu were single-jar burials (for infants and small children), and mudbrick burials. No tombs were found.
Figure 6.21: Wealth values of the burials at Tell Sabi Abyad.

The wealth distribution within the burials at Sabi Abyad is on a normal distribution curve; where 11 burials contained nothing whatsoever, and the two richest burials (Grave BN02-15 and Grave BN03-11) had values of 7 and 5 (see Fig. 6.21). These two burials also contained gold objects. The grave goods in Sabi Abyad’s burials are notable for how varied they are. In comparison to other sites, few ceramics were included in burials (only 7 of 39 burials contained ceramics). However, among the ceramics that are present, there are many examples of carinated bowls, similar to those seen elsewhere – within Tell Billa’s Level II and Level IA graves, especially. There are also fewer objects of adornment (found in 13 burials). However, the remains of animals (specifically caprids) feature more prominently than at Aššur and Billa. This seems to fit within general trends in the Khabur/ Balikh that we have seen so far that prioritize offerings of meat or whole animals among mortuary provisions.
Nonetheless, the wide variety of burial types and general wealth of these graves showcases a remarkable diversity in mortuary practices at Sabi Abyad for such a small sample. Furthermore, the shifts in burial location reveal important information about perceptions of mortuary space through time. The excavators suggest that these cremations could have been a Hurrian practice, using historical evidence of Hurrian šiliḫu (unfree workers) at the dunnu to support this claim (Düring et al. 2015:47).

Though typically associated with Aramaeans (Bienkowski 1982; Mazzoni 2000:34) and possibly Hittites (Rutherford 2007; Polcani 2014), it is clear that the practice of cremation may extend beyond just a single group (see Chapter 5 for full discussion).

Tell Barri - Kaḫat

Tell Barri is a site of 34ha located on the banks of the Jaghjagh – a tributary of the Khabur. The site was occupied from the Early Bronze Age to the Roman period continuously. Excavations of the site began in 1980 under an Italian expedition from the University of Florence, and then continued after 2006 by the University of Naples Federico II, directed by P.E. Pecorella and then R.P. Benoit (Pecorella 1999; 2000; Pecorella & Benoit 2004; 2005; 2008).

This site, ancient Kaḫat, entered the orbit of Assyrian control after being ruled by the Mitanni. Adad-Nirari I’s palace on the southern side of the tell best illustrates this Assyrian power (Benoit 2016:307). The entrance of the Assyrians apparently significantly altered the spatial organization of the site; the palace replaced a number of
earlier houses and workshops. This continues in the Neo-Assyrian period, where other buildings are constructed over the palace of Adad-Nirari I and a different palace is erected by Tukulti-Ninurta II, with possible evidence of a second Neo-Assyrian palace on the mound’s northern slope (Benoit 2016:308).

Figure 6.22: Plan of Tell Barri and the excavation Areas (courtesy of Benoit 2016)
In more than 30 seasons of excavation, over 15 areas were opened for investigation, with Area G reaching Early Bronze Age layers just above virgin soil on the SE slope of the tell. Middle Assyrian levels were excavated only in Area G, where a palace attributed to Adad-Nirari I was built over what was once a neighborhood of houses, warehouses, and workshops (Benoit 2016:307). Neo-Assyrian levels were uncovered in Areas G, F, and J (see Fig. 6.22); during this time, a domestic neighborhood was built over the palace of Adad-Nirari I, while a new palace was erected on the western slope by Tukulti-Ninurta II. On the northern slope of the tell was a second, smaller palace, as of yet unable to be attributed to any one king (Benoit 2016:308). The numbers of Tell Barri burials are nearly evenly-split between the Middle Assyrian and the Neo-Assyrian periods (nine Middle Assyrian and eleven Neo-Assyrian). Middle Assyrian burials were of a variety of types, all containing a single occupant. The assemblage is almost entirely composed of adults, with just one infant burial. This remains the case.
during the Neo-Assyrian period: all single-occupant burials, mostly adults, with only one infant. The burials of the Neo-Assyrian period, however, show a shift toward mudbrick types (3 examples versus 1 example in the Middle Assyrian period), and examples of double-jar burials are present in both periods (see Fig. 6.23). Pit graves, as expected, are also popular. Between the Middle Assyrian and the Neo-Assyrian periods we also see a shift in the arrangement of the deceased – not in relation to directional orientation (Barri’s burials, like those of other sites, are oriented along buildings and architectural features) but instead in body position. Though there are a variety of body positions in the Middle Assyrian period, this variety decreases in later periods. By the Neo-Assyrian period, almost all deceased are laid on the back in a fully-extended position, head facing upward, arms crossed on the torso.

![Diagram of Positions of the Deceased at Tell Barri](image)

Figure 6.24: Positions of the deceased at Tell Barri

273
Tell Barri’s grave good assemblages is very similar to those of Aššur, with similar ceramics (the bowl and cup set seems a nearly essential provision, with various other ceramic containers also able to be added). An interesting feature among the vessel sets is the replacement of ceramic bowls for bronze versions in several cases (Tombe 1410 and 193, Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian). Bronze pins and bronze bracelets are more popular in Tell Barri’s mortuary milieu than we have seen in others, and the types of these adornment objects are close in design to those at Aššur (Haller 1954: Taf. 38). While pins (three cases in Middle Assyrian burials) and fibulae (one Neo-Assyrian example) appear at Tell Barri, they are extremely rare at the other Khabur/ Balikh sites – appearing only in two graves at Tell Fekheriye (one Middle Assyrian and one Neo- Assyrian), and in a single Neo-Assyrian grave at Tell Ta’ban. Among the sites of the Khabur/ Balikh, gold is included more often in Tell Barri’s graves, often in the form of earrings and rings, also in similar styles to those at Aššur. Overall, Tell Barri’s objects
give an impression of a community which prioritizes wealth in burials, and seems to have ready access to such wealth. Furthermore, grave provision traditions are closer to that of Aššur than to other sites in this region.

In terms of general wealth, the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods are similar in terms of average wealth values, at 3.75 and 3.6 respectively. However, the Middle Assyrian period has the richest burial at a value of 8 (Tomba 1424), which contained over 50 objects. The richest Neo-Assyrian burial had a value of 6, by comparison. Furthermore, gold is only found in the Middle Assyrian period in 2 burials (1424 and 1368). In addition to the wealth of the period, the only built tomb in our dataset is found in the Middle Assyrian periods. It was part of a set of three burials found in a room of Adad-Nirari I’s palace at Kaḥat.

To summarize, Tell Barri shows the closest mortuary culture ties with Aššur. As Assyrian influence is clearly evident in various areas of the site (Benoit 2016), it is perhaps expected that Barri’s population seems so close in character to that of Aššur’s. Another possibility is that this resemblance to Assyrian practice could be due to a relation between the Assyrian palace in Area G and the numerous burials recovered nearby (all except one burial was found in Area G), showing a spatial relationship between them and indicating that the deceased may have held stronger ties to the Empire, perhaps being ethnic Assyrians.
Discussion

Taken holistically, the burial practices during Assyrian rule in the Balikh and Khabur river valleys show a trend toward more “Assyrian” mortuary culture over time – reflected in the increase of double-jar burials and single-piece sarcophagi and the presence of grave goods seen most often in Aššur’s graves, such as fibulae and pins. This shift is accompanied by an increase in individuals buried extended on their backs with arms crossed on their chest or torso, discussed explicitly in examples from Tell Barri, but also present at Tell Fekheriye. However, perhaps unexpected, is the increase in mudbrick burials seen after the Middle Assyrian period. These burials were mostly found at Fekheriye, in the cemetery composed of uninhabited houses, possibly indicating that non-Assyrian groups might have been responsible for this (especially since these burials were estimated to be from the Transitional period, when the empire was beginning its re-expansion) (Bartl & Bonatz 2013). In Chapters 4 and 5, I postulated that mudbrick burials, from their seeming association with non-Assyrian groups, possibly originated and were employed as a typical burial type of non-Assyrian groups, likely those linked geographically to Anatolia or northern Syria, possibly belonging to one of the ethnic groups there. Though the veracity of this cannot yet be proven (securely-identified Hurrian burials remain rare, while Aramaean practices continue to be debated (see Tenu 2009a, Bienkowski 1982), a lack of mudbrick burials at Aššur in the Middle Assyrian period (Pedde 2015) and before (Hockmann 2010) conclusively shows that they are not an “Assyrian” style, and that their origins lie elsewhere. Possibly, based on their prevalence in the Khabur and Balikh, to the west.
Additionally, there were very few multiple graves in the Neo-Assyrian as opposed to the Middle Assyrian – just one in the Neo-Assyrian, and even that single example remains uncertain. In those Middle Assyrian burials with multiple occupants, 8 have two, while only 1 contains more than two. Furthermore, there is a clear shift in wealth between the two periods. In this area, several trends in grave goods have become evident. The bowl and cup set seen at Aššur and Tell Billa is also present here, though popularity varies between sites. From the imperfect data recorded from the excavations of these burials, the ceramics within the graves of the Khabur/Balikh adhere largely to types seen at Aššur and Tell Billa (Chapters 4 & 5). In graves where specific ceramic types were recorded (20 of the 136 from this area) carinated bowls were particularly common in assemblages with ceramics. Jars were less common than bowls. Also common at these provincial sites is the presence of beakers and in some cases, goblets.
While these both have been seen at Tell Billa and Aššur, their stronger presence in the Khabur/Balikh might indicate different mortuary practices specifically utilizing them, such as funerary feasting rituals already discussed regarding the preponderance of faunal remains. Between these periods, ceramics typically adopt first millennium shapes, without significant changes evidence in the function of such vessels.

Adornment items such as gold earrings and bronze bracelets also show a connection with the Assyrian capital. However, also interesting is the prevalence of black and white paste beads, seen commonly in the Middle Assyrian period here and at Tell Billa. Middle Assyrian graves in northeastern Syria ranged from 0-9 in wealth, with some burials containing over 50 objects. The average wealth of the period was 2.6. In contrast, the Neo-Assyrian period is remarkably poor by comparison. The richest grave from this period ranks at 6, and the average wealth value among Transitional and Neo-Assyrian burials was 1.9. 9.5% of burials from these two periods had no objects at all, and no gold objects were found in Neo-Assyrian mortuary contexts. The single, highest-value piece from this period was the single silver pendant mentioned above, found at al-Hamidiya in Grave G4. In contrast, 12 Middle Assyrian burials contained gold objects. Furthermore, all built tombs from this dataset were from the Middle Assyrian period – showcasing the wealth of some families in particular. This same local wealth is absent in the Transitional and Neo-Assyrian phases.
Figure 6.27: The positions of the deceased within the burials of the Upper Khabur/Balikh Region.

Figure 6.28: The Wealth Values of the burials in the Khabur/Balikh Region.
What was the cause for this decrease in wealth in mortuary contexts? While it is possibly a result of excavation, biasing “monumental” contexts over domestic parts of the site, including Lower Towns, I think it is more likely a result of intensive wealth extraction from provinces, as illustrated in examples like that of SAA 1 52 wherein Tab-šar-aššur, the treasurer, writes meticulously of the gold collected and gold owed by an Assyrian subject: “of the king… one shekel of it… They have weighed it in my presence but have not yet received it. We have not [yet] received the rest of the gold [from PN]. He has returned one mina of the yield of wool (retrieved) from the son of [PN], but… [minas] of the gold is still [outstanding],” (ABL 1458, reverse, lines 1-6, SAA 1 52). Postgate put forward the “land of Aššur” and the “yoke of Aššur” as two varying forms of Assyrian governance, which resulted in the collection of “gifts” (de facto taxes) from the land of Aššur, which includes the regions discussed here in this study, and tribute from the yoke of Aššur (1992). Within the land of Aššur, provincial governors were in charge of collecting the taxes of their region, which came in the form of foodstuffs, such as grain and livestock. The empire used this extraction of wealth as a means of both subjugation and sustenance (Postgate 1992; Thareani 2016). Furthermore, with the absence of any built tombs from the Neo-Assyrian period, we might be seeing a dissolution of local elites – replaced instead by a top-down administration, such as discussed by K. Radner (2014), and exemplified in regular reports to the king, such as those from Adda-hatti, official in Hamath: “My[guard] is in excellent condition, the who[le dist]rict of [Hamath] is well. [The king], my [lord], can be glad,” (ABL 0224 & 0225; SAA 1 173 & 174).

280
Conclusions

Ultimately, while we cannot draw the same conclusions from a multi-site case study as that of single-site ones (see Chapters 4 and 5), this broad view of provincial mortuary culture paints a holistic picture of Assyrian influence. It seems that not only in name, but in practice, the inhabitants of these centers became “Assyrian” over time. They adopted and practiced Assyrian culture enough so that it penetrated down into their mortuary traditions by the Neo-Assyrian period (Tenu 2006).

There were some exceptions to this, however – notably the upswing in using mudbrick burials to encase their dead, seen at Fekheriye. While not a typical Assyrian practice, these burial types were seldom used in the Middle Assyrian period. Instead, their employment might have been a purposeful effort on the part of the indigenous ethnic populations in the provincial centers to practice a “non-Assyrian” way of living – or, in this case, dying. Such a purposeful “reclamation” of identity has been explored in other contexts.\(^4^4\) It is quite possible its popularity might be attributed to its use as a distinct “non-Assyrian” type of burial – making it even more appealing to groups who did not self-identify as “Assyrian” (despite how difficult that is to discern in the archaeological record). While some important sites such as Tell Sheikh Hamad were omitted, data from such sites (currently still in publication) will help to round out this analysis in the future. For now, this chapter serves as a general foray into the mortuary culture of the Khabur and Balikh areas, with evidence for Assyrian influence penetrating the traditions of the non-elite class.

\(^{44}\) (ex: Liebmann 2012).
With this our broadest and final case study, it is now time to embark on a holistic comparison of the Assyrian mortuary milieu in Chapter 7. Geography and temporality of burial practices together provide the opportunity to assess the genesis and adoption of an imperial ethos at its most basic, practiced form: that of the eternal identity displayed in death.
The dynamics of power, to some extent, have always relied upon the presence of an “us” versus “them.” This is true of the ancient world just as it permeates the modern. The main factor of this dynamic is the scale to which it is employed: “our tribe” versus “their tribe”; “our family” versus “their family”; “our city” versus “their city.” As gaps widen between groups, we see this employed more: “our civilized settlement” versus “their nomadic tribe”; “our deity-blessed empire” versus “their misguided groups.” Agriculture versus pastoralism. Low-land versus highland. These categories were actively applied in Assyrian propaganda to effectively “other” the lands and people outside their control – before, during, and after expansion (Liverani 2017). On some level, these definitions and classifications had existed since sedentary, agriculturally-based lifestyles began to flourish in the Near East, with such definitions of “us” and “them” stretching back into the Early Bronze Age. An inscription of Šu-Sîn reads, “Since that time the Amorites, a ravaging people, with the instincts of a beast… the sheepfolds like wolves; a people which does not know grain…” (after Civil 1967: 31). Jump forward two millennia, and it is much the same:

“The people of Ulluba… who did not pull the yoke of the kings who came before me, my ancestors, and who had not regularly done obeisance to them… those nomads who do not bring gifts and do not recognize authority… roamed about like deer and ibexes in the mountains…” (RINAP 1, no. 37:16-22, Tiglath-Pileser III).

Identity – personal and communal both – only exists in the face of difference: “I am different from you, therefore I can define myself based on your difference.” When both similarities and differences come into play, then the definition shifts: “I am different from you, but we are similar in other ways. We are more similar to one another than we
are to others.” It is shared similarities rising above idiosyncrasies that establish the identity group in the first place. Yet, to exist, there must be a difference between entities: individuals or groups, it does not matter. To construct an identity, a hierarchy of values must first occur. This structuring system of values influences what identities are elevated to defining roles – defining enough to unite families, cities, and yes, even empires.

However, the interplay of multiple identities at varying levels of value cannot be ignored. In Chapter 2, the concept of intersectionality was introduced, promoting a multi-faceted paradigm of identity. Factors contributing to one’s identity are not mutually exclusive: gender, age, status, family, all coincide. It is the interplay of these identities which construct the whole.

And now, we add a further possible aspect: being Assyrian. What did it truly mean to see oneself as “Assyrian”? Here, I endeavor to separate this question from the misleading and often-used term, “Assyrianization.” As M. Cifarelli discusses when investigating Hasanlu, Assyrianization implies the framework of core-periphery paradigms, wherein the Assyrian core is the dominant force exerting influence upon the weaker, less established periphery (2018a). She aptly problematizes this, identifying it as a relic of colonialist thought which ignores the agency of established cultures and systems. "Assyrianization" prioritizes the Assyrian system as a default. This dissertation has attempted to investigate such an assumption of Assyrian superiority by questioning the flow of Assyrian influence from the heartland to the provinces. Yet, central to this study is characterizing the resilience of non-Assyrian traditions in response to imperial pressures – placing the agency firmly on the deceased and their communities which make up the cases presented. Furthermore, discussions of "Assyrianization" specifically rely
almost entirely upon objects and constructions in the realm of the elite. By investigating non-elite, conservative contexts, a broader picture is painted than what the narrow term "Assyrianization" can provide. Instead, we have seen a conversation, so to speak, arise between typically Assyrian mortuary culture and that of other entities, be they geographic (at varying distances from the Assyrian capital) or cultural (Aramaean and others). This conversation has taken the form of a sort of back-and-forth: varying burial containers, differentiation in depositing and arranging the dead, and multitudes of grave good assemblages representing established ways of seeing oneself in relation to others.

Assyrian influence – while certainly not one-directional enough to warrant the use of the term "Assyrianization" – has shown itself to be strong enough to affect established mortuary traditions in provincial sites. Whether or not it was a conscious adoption of Assyrian identity, there was a distinct and identifiable shift in mortuary practices to a more Assyrian model. Here, in this final chapter, I tie together the results from our case studies to conclude that the subjects of the Assyrian Empire grew, over generations, to perceive themselves as “Assyrian” – not just Assyrian subjects.

Identity Near and Far

Both dimensions which this project investigates, spatial and temporal, are critical to understanding the impacts of imperial control on subjects. Three scales of the empire – imperial core, local provincial site, and distant provincial sites – are represented in this study. When assessed with a longue durée perspective, overarching trends in mortuary culture reveal patterns of identity development and adoption.

285
Aššur’s burials were grouped into three main periods: Middle Assyrian (c. 15th-13th centuries), Transitional (12th-10th centuries), and Neo-Assyrian (c. 9th-7th centuries). Traditions that were present in the Middle Assyrian period solidified in the other two periods to establish a “core” of Assyrian mortuary culture. This core took the form of burials under houses, found in vaulted tombs and double-jar burials, grave goods consisting of at least two ceramic vessels for food/liquid offerings, and beads or other jewelry, a general spatial separation of child burials from adult ones, and, in the Neo-Assyrian period, a majority of the deceased buried extended on their backs with arms resting on the torso. Taken together, these characteristics suggest an emphasis on familial bonds favoring adults, with a wish to provide for the deceased in the afterlife (also known through kispu rituals). This standardization supports the idea of a cohesive Assyrian set of burial traditions.

But, as discussed in Chapter 4, Aššur was not exclusively a bastion of native Assyrian practices. In the Neo-Assyrian period the city expanded, most notably to the northwest. It was here in this newer part of town that we begin to see increasing variation in burial type, spatial placement, and grave goods. This was an area of newcomers to the core of the empire – deportees, conquered populations, and internal migrants. We have evidence that Aramaeans, Luwians, and even Egyptians resided in this area and buried their dead. With them they brought their own mortuary culture in the form of mudbrick and cremation burials – burial types which are notably rare or absent in the center of the city. However, as already noted in Chapter 4, a primary difference between the two areas is the wealth value of the graves and the number of grave goods. Burials in the
northwestern part of the city were notably poorer than their counterparts in the central city, where old Assyrian families resided. This discrepancy in wealth, I argued, was both a factor of identity difference, and a factor of variation in economic status between the residents of Aššur’s northwestern town and those elsewhere in the city.

Overall, Aššur’s mortuary culture reflects a strong adherence to postmortem care. The tie between household burials and kinship ties remains strong even after death. The inhabitants of Aššur in the Middle Assyrian period share a mortuary culture prioritizing family/ancestral continuity, material wealth as a form of provision (ceramic containers for offerings) and personal identity (adornment objects, tools, weapons, seals), with a division between children and adults. Newcomers to the city in the Neo-Assyrian period adopted some of these mortuary traditions, while also maintaining their own – showing a hybridization of their identity took place in their move to the center of imperial control.

**Tell Billa – Šibaniba**

The burials of Tell Billa’s southwestern town could also be grouped into the same Middle Assyrian-Transitional-Neo-Assyrian periods as Aššur’s burials. Because of this, we had the benefits in Chapter 5 of seeing the development of the site’s mortuary culture throughout Assyrian hegemony. Tell Billa’s inhabitants, like Aššur’s, almost exclusively buried their dead within domestic contexts. In general, the southwestern town of Tell Billa has a wide variety of burial types, most notable of which were mudbrick burials. This burial type, I argued, indicates a greater time investment spent on the funerary preparations of the deceased than seen at Aššur, where the majority of burials were pit
graves and sherd-covered graves. The use of mudbrick burials decreases, however, in the first millennium at Tell Billa – instead shifting largely to other types – including double-jar burials and single-piece sarcophagi. This illustrates – along with a rise in the uniformity of grave good types in the Neo-Assyrian period – the strong influence of Assyrian practices which trickled down into local mortuary practices. The inhabitants at Tell Billa went from practicing widely-varied methods of funerary rites (cremation, mudbrick, composite burials, etc.) to a largely streamlined, united version of mortuary culture.

This newfound uniformity in the Neo-Assyrian phase was accompanied by two notable factors: a rise in multiple-inhumations of two or more persons, and a decrease in overall wealth contained within the burials. Multiple burials could indicate a shift in mortuary practice towards emphasizing relationships over personal identity of the deceased – particularly in relation to ancestry and familial status. The decrease in wealth and, therefore, a decrease in the individual identity expressed through mortuary assemblages, may be due to a decrease in the actual wealth of Tell Billa’s inhabitants, possibly due to extraction schemes by the imperial center.

Overall, at Tell Billa we see an adoption of typical Assyrian practices beginning to take hold in the “Transition” period between the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods. This is true of burial types, grave goods, positions of the deceased (an increase in grave occupants arranged on their back with legs extended is evident), and a general decrease in grave good wealth. The last trend, while not seen as keenly in the mortuary assemblages of Neo-Assyrian Aššur, is present in even greater degree in the wealth of the Upper Khabur/ Balikh mortuary culture, discussed below.
Finally, our last case study encompassed the sites of the Upper Khabur/Balikh area. While Chapter 6 included a wide variety of contexts yielding burials from various time periods over the course of the Assyrian Empire, several trends emerged as we explored the burial practices: an increase in double-jar burials and single-piece sarcophagi in the Transitional and Neo-Assyrian periods, the use of cemeteries in addition to domestic contexts, and a decrease in multiple-person inhumations.

Between the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods, there was a notable increase in the use of double-jar burials and single-piece sarcophagi. As already discussed in Chapter 4, these types of burial are most often associated with typical “Assyrian” practices. This is reflected in their highest ratio of use at Aššur itself. At the same time, there is an increased number of individuals being buried on their backs with their arms crossed upon their torso in burials from the Upper Khabur/Balikh area. Once again, this burial positioning is seen in the highest ratio at Aššur – also increasing between the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods. These examples of both shifting burial types and shifting burial positions to a more Assyrian tradition illustrates a potential influence of Assyrian practice on the mortuary culture of the areas which they absorbed into the Empire.

In contrast to these more “Assyrianizing” trends, however, is an increase in the use of mudbrick burial type. As I argued in Chapters 3 and 4, the mudbrick type tends to be associated with non-Assyrian groups: in Aššur, it is most widely employed in the
newly-built northwestern town of Neo-Assyrian Aššur, while at Tell Billa the mudbrick type was mostly employed in the Middle Assyrian period, before Assyrian mortuary cultural practices had a chance to penetrate into the activities of the provincial site in the Neo-Assyrian period. In the Upper Khabur/ Balikh area, a rise in the employment of mudbrick burials during the Transitional period (specifically at Tell Fekheriye) could signal several things, but most likely I argue is their use by new non-Assyrian groups moving into the Upper Khabur/ Balikh area during the first millennium. An accompanying sharp decrease in multiple-occupant burials in the Upper Khabur/ Balikh might further indicate less emphasis on traditional familial structures in the first millennium, in contrast to what was seen at Aššur. The implications of this could be many. It might indicate destabilized social networks in the area or decreases in extended-family households. These are too amorphous to declare with any certainty with just this study alone, however perhaps most notable is the sharp decrease in the wealth of the graves between the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods: a decrease which is seen in less-extreme forms in Aššur and Tell Billa. As I argued in Chapter 6, this is likely less an indicator of shifting mortuary practices and beliefs than a factor of an economy drained and destabilized by imperial extraction. Taxation and tribute fell especially heavily on the provinces beyond the scope of the Heartland (Postgate 1992).

In general, while conclusions drawn from a multi-site, multi-contextual case study must necessarily differ from single-use datasets, it is clear that the Assyrian Empire exerted great influence on the area in terms of cultural practice, while also affecting this region’s economic means.
Trends in the Empire

The broad trends we have identified in the burials from various areas of the Assyrian Empire allow us to further understand Assyrian identity expression of non-elites in the empire as a whole. The material record of mortuary culture reveals a general continuity of Assyrian mortuary practices at the imperial core, which is then adopted in varying degrees by Assyrian provincial residents over the course of the empire. At Tell Billa, we see an adoption of typically Assyrian burial types – the double-jar and single-piece sarcophagi burials. The Upper Khabur/ Balikh also adopted and employed these burial types with increasing frequency in the first millennium, also with the more local mudbrick type. So what, then, do these practices (and changes in such practices) tell us about the development and practice of an Assyrian imperial identity?

What these unique graves reveal is another example of the diversity in burial practices that was present at Aššur and that will be seen elsewhere in the Assyrian Empire. Assyrian control and administration seems to have been characteristically tolerant of cultural practices – especially that of mortuary culture. In essence, over the course of the 15th-7th centuries, there is a shift from the local vernacular of mortuary culture in provincial sites to that of the main Assyrian type shown in Aššur. This general trend, however, cannot ignore the idiosyncrasies that persist in many provincial burials, especially in the Upper Khabur/ Balikh region. Practices are also variable in the northwestern town of Aššur itself, showcasing a variety of foreign burial practices put in place by deportees, with hybrid Assyrian characteristics. Mortuary practices being one of
the most ‘conservative’ forms of identity expression, this adoption of Assyrian mortuary practices shows that Assyrian imperial influence was strong enough that inhabitants of provincial and capital cities alike acted in “Assyrian” ways even in their personal lives – not just as a public persona.

As we have seen at these sites, there exists a distinction between “local” mortuary practices and “Assyrian” practices. This was likely even further pronounced in reality, as the inhabitants of these areas affected by Assyrian imposition would have known the idiosyncrasies of such practices – the minute details and their implications that we cannot grasp with just the material left to us today. Our vantage point gives us the ability to perceive the influx of Assyrian mortuary culture into the provinces of their empire. It also illustrates to what extent this influx was an elite-driven phenomenon, as opposed to a natural shift over centuries to favor the dominant cultural milieu.

Top-down versus bottom-up tensions have become a sounding board in archaeological studies for understanding the dynamics of power and control. Nowhere is this truer than in studies of imperialism – a macrocosm of interlocking systems of control. Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter 2, this approach is made famously difficult by the complete dominance of archaeological and textual material belonging to the elite echelons. Monumental architecture, royal archives, palace reliefs, etc. all contribute to our knowledge not necessarily of the average Assyrian, but of the Assyrian upper class.

This problem of balance between elite and non-elite sources is what led this dissertation to center itself upon burial data in the first place. Among the sites discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, burial data has ranged between the poorest inhabitants of Aššur to
wealthy families at Tell Fekheriye, with a variety of levels in between. Combining this with the well-known material culture and historical records of the elites, then, we can tease out the relationship between elite presence within provincial settlements and the shifting burial practices of the inhabitants. Was it due to a purposeful imposition of elite Assyrian practices that the indigenous mortuary culture changed? Or was it instead a choice on the part of the residents to adopt and replicate Assyrian practices in their own ceremonies? And, above all, how did this tie in with the perception and adoption of an Assyrian identity?

Assyrian Identity from the Top-Down

To understand the adoption of an Assyrian identity, we must first identify how Assyrian identity was practiced. Our main sources in this matter, as mentioned, are elite in nature. In essence, then, how did the elite Assyrians – the king and royal family, the governors and those in governing positions, the top religious practitioners – perceive being “Assyrian”?

M. Liverani has conducted perhaps the most thorough review of this in his monograph *Assyria: The Imperial Mission* (2017). This has been followed by the recent work of B. Düring, explaining the success of the Neo-Assyrian Empire through the precedents and foundations set by the Middle Assyrian Empire (2020). Both touch upon identity of Assyrians in general terms, but only as it applies to imperial “success”. Their analyses address how Assyrian elites converted and convinced their provincial populations to have a personal stake in the outcome of imperial stability and success.
However, discussing identity as it relates to imperial power as a whole means that the intricacy of such identities is sacrificed to gaze broadly upon “the big picture”. To this end, we must look at identity in two lights: the purposeful imposition of identities by elites, and the natural evolution of identity in non-elites. As neither was a one-way road, the interplay between both is necessary to understand the actors responsible in identity formation and maintenance.

Overall, we can classify an *elite* understanding of being Assyrian within several categories:

- Living a sedentary, lowland agricultural lifestyle centered around a hierarchy of settlement sizes, with capitals at the apex. (Liverani 2017:165)
- Using the Assyrian language (Liverani 2017:230)
- Worshipping (and being favored by) the god Aššur, including carrying out his wishes (in the form of expansion and wars) and upholding the hierarchy with deities at the top, followed by the king (Liverani 1979).

As we will see, however, the only piece of Assyrian identity forced upon its subjects was the sedentary lifestyle, accepting rule by a king. This was less because of a desire to share with their subjects a common ground and more to establish the provinces as governable, agriculturally-productive assets.\(^45\)

During the course of Assyrian development, it is obvious that the spread of the empire – and Assyrian control – had a great impact on its subjects, both in provincial territories and within the heartland. In direct contrast to the emphasis placed in the

written records, the military expeditions of the Assyrians likely brought little cultural change to the empire – at least initially. Rather, it was the changes in the organizational structures of these acquired settlements, the new economic pressures the settlements were subjected to, and the displacement of people and ideas which seem to have caused lasting effects. However, rule over provinces beyond the Assyrian frontier was flexible and seems to have been a negotiation of sorts between the two entities.

The Assyrian Empire employed central rule from the heartland via adaptive provincial administrative systems. In the earlier Middle Assyrian period, conquered areas were first reduced to vassal states with tributes and corvée service imposed (Machinist 1982). These would then be converted to official provinces under Assyrian supervision, wherein Assyrian elites were placed in the capital cities of these provinces to manage day-to-day rule for the central Assyrian government. Despite the apparent ease with which the first adjacent provincial centers were absorbed and managed by the early empire, it cannot be assumed that this was due to a lack of local resistance. Documentation from the provinces points to “fairly self-contained Assyrian communities in the 13th-century provinces, governing but not integrated into the native or deportee populations,” (Machinist 1982:15-17). Postgate identifies a tendency towards heavily detail-oriented documentation in Middle Assyrian archives, with records showing extreme concern with provincial administration, including shipment of goods, maintaining lines of communication, and managing building projects (1974; 2013). Additionally, archaeological evidence for these administrative systems in both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods is evident in Assyrian material from sites such as Sheikh Hammad where Assyrian archives, cylinder seals, and sealings were recovered from late
second millennium levels (Kühne 1995a; 1994). Because such cities were the nexus of Assyrian control, it was important for the Assyrians to keep their provincial centers easily-accessible and well-supplied. This took the form of massive infrastructure projects – including the establishment of new capital cities within the Assyrian heartland.

This largely continued (with interruption) into the Neo-Assyrian period, with shifts in administration occurring as the empire continued to grow. While in the Middle Assyrian period rule over provincial settlements remained loose and depended on ruling Assyrian elites (Tenu 2009b), in the Neo-Assyrian period control over these centers tightened and Assyrian officials maintained direct control (Aster 2007; Grayson 1995; Oded 1970). As Y. Thareani lays out, Assyrians employed four main ways of ruling by the time their empire had reached its apex: annexation, military control, subjugation, and collaboration with imperial proxies (2016:79-80). In the Neo-Assyrian period, the latter two indirect systems were concentrated especially on sites in the Levant and Anatolia (Thareani 2016; Bloom 1988; Bagg 2013; Herrmann & Schloen 2016; Parker 2001; Lamprichs 1995). For some entities, this required providing tribute and obeying Assyrian orders; tribute strained the economic resources of the settlement and began an establishment of Assyrian relations with the local elites. Essentially, as Assyria expanded, it imposed formal rule over areas that had once been controlled loosely, while it imposed flexible tactics of extraction and intervention on its new, geographically-distant areas. These changes in ruling strategy brought more Assyrians – and Assyrian material culture – into provincial centers to maintain the imperial bureaucracy (Parker 2003; D’Agostino 2008). Specifically, reforms by Tiglath-Pileser III were the first concentrated attempt to establish rigid control over provinces, which likely also came
with a de facto increase in cultural pressure on provincial residents to adopt and adapt. Related to this influx of Assyrian officials, craftsmen, and other personnel in the Neo-Assyrian period, there was an increase in the amount of Assyrian architecture, ceramics, and other forms of material culture in provincial centers (Daviau 1997; Bennet 1982). With the placement of an Assyrian governor over the province, soon the local elites began to emulate Assyrian culture (Winter 1993; Miller 2009; Richardson 2016). Areas which fell under Assyrian hegemony during both the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods often displayed a greater influx of Assyrian culture than their Anatolian, Levantine, and Egyptian counterparts in the Neo-Assyrian period, including in seals, pottery, and architecture. For example, in the LBA and IA, mass-produced and standardized pottery types appear in provincial areas of northern Syria as a result of Assyrian administration (Jamieson 2011).

Though Assyrian elite art (almost uniformly palatial) tended to emphasize violent domination strategies over resisting provinces, the reality of this – especially in the Middle Assyrian and early Neo-Assyrian periods – was overstated. While military missions to conquer and subdue areas with force certainly existed, Assyrian rule depended on other versions of control as well. Notably, the renaming of cities, or even the rebuilding of cities which the Assyrian army had destroyed, served to “claim” the settlement for Assyria. The image of rebuilding was used to foster loyalty and give an image of the continuity of Assyrian resources. Furthermore, renaming these towns – which already had their own names – established an obligatory use of the Assyrian language (Liverani 2017:235). While the Assyrian language was used in official
contexts, it is unknown to what extent. Especially in the Neo-Assyrian period, it is known that Aramaic was widely used as the *lingua franca*.

While massive strategies like those detailed above had easily-identifiable impacts on Assyrian subjects and the landscape, the effects of Assyrian elites on their subjects (both in the provinces and the heartland) has been debated in scholarship. While writing and administration changed in provincial territories, perhaps the most visible and affecting to the non-elite provincial populations was the erection of public monuments, the establishment of new public structures, and the introduction of Assyrian culture in the form of religion, technology, and the visible practices of the Assyrians themselves. As discussed above, the resettlement of conquered populations likely had the most effect on local settlements, altering the demographics of the city and introducing new cultural concepts. S. Parpola addresses the long-term effects of the Assyrian empire on its provinces; mostly concerned with the mobilization of ideas and culture instead of the establishment of control, and subsequently focuses on Assyrian tactics of cultural integration (2003). These include the construction of Assyrian-influenced architecture in the provinces, the introduction of Mesopotamian deities and cults, and the systemization of weights and measures to the Assyrian standard.

Similarly, deportations and resettlements of conquered populations drastically altered the settlement pattern of the empire, affecting undoubtedly almost all aspects of society. A large number of deportees from conquered areas were brought into the heartland and nearby provincial land to populate the new agricultural settlements which sprung up around the core of the empire (Altaweel 2008; Ur & Osborne 2016). Deportation strategies, as mentioned above, not only destabilized the new territories
brought under Assyrian hegemony to prevent uprisings, but also provided a new source of labor for the Assyrians to exploit. Deportation began in the Middle Assyrian period as a strategy of control, but it reached its peak in the later Neo-Assyrian period. While strategic for administrative purposes and labor, deportation also served as propaganda for rulers: “To Assyria I added more land; to its people I added more people, enlarging the boundaries of my land and conquering all neighboring territories,” (Inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III, in Grayson 1972). Deportees were forced to settle into a sedentary, agricultural lifestyle which served not only to keep these populations under control, but also to settle the surrounding land and make it productive - two aspects which were of incredible importance to the upkeep of the empire, as established above (Parker 2003).

The question of how elites in Assyria acted to enforce Assyrian ideals, however, is less known. Was there an effort on the part of the empire to spread Assyrian identity? The settlements included in this study may not be the ones to answer this question. The areas discussed in this study were subject to all of the above practices of Assyrian elite powers, but the town of Tell Billa and the settlements on the Upper Khabur/ Balikh were sedentary, low-land, and ruled by kings and high-status individuals even before an Assyrian incursion; essentially, there was nothing inherently “non-Assyrian” about these settlements – at least in the ideology often espoused. Assyrian elites needed to vault no hurdles to consider these areas “Assyrian” from early-on. Thus, Assyrian elite expenditure of resources was better spent elsewhere than in imposing cultural practices on the peoples of these areas – especially since, in the elite Neo-Assyrian mindset, these areas were already a part of Assyria proper. The top-down perspective on establishing Assyrian identity revolved around the concern of obedience in their conquered territories.
Changes made to the provinces – such as deportations, construction of buildings/infrastructure, establishment of monuments, standardization of weights and measures – were based upon cementing Assyrian hegemony. The spread of Assyrian imperial identity – if purposeful at all – seems secondary.

Assyrian Identity from the Bottom-Up

The phenomenon of top-down influence on culture is well-represented and well-discussed in modern literature. What lags behind is the same attention paid to bottom-up adoption of culture. The agency of non-elites is often understated, yet we cannot ignore that these were real people choosing to act. As such, they both influenced and were influenced by the traditions and cultures around them.

As discussed in Chapter 2, identity involves both display and internalization. Bottom-up influence, by definition, has a tendency to remain “local” in most cases. The top-down analyses are tempered by bottom-up approaches in both Liverani’s and Düring’s works – Liverani using largely textual sources to outline the “ideal principles of Assyrian imperialism” while setting out to reevaluate Assyria’s role as an empire within the blanket of comparative imperial studies (2017:8) while Düring brings in material culture to offset primarily textual studies of the growth and impact of Assyria on dominated territories, even touching briefly upon burial practices (2020:54;124-31) to support his conclusions.

In general, our sources for understanding bottom-up influence once again come to us from elite sources. Identifying what is exclusively a bottom-up result of identity is a
difficult task – often, nothing is so explicit as in top-down orders and impositions. Yet, the culture and identity of the lower class pervades in the material culture left behind – a task for archaeology, as it were.

Material culture of the non-elites is more utilitarian than many of the celebrated elite examples of decoration and adornment. Because the material culture of the lower class was entwined with daily life, it tends to reveal differences in activities and practices of its owners. The typical, oft-cited example of this is cooking ware: different dishes, often tied to familial or local traditions, were prepared in different vessels. Just as today we have casserole pans, woks, and tagines, there was also a tie between food, preparation, and ethnicity in the second and first millennia. Material culture tied to practice also extends to other areas of life, such as hygiene (Düring 2020:119-21).

This employment of material culture is especially relevant to studies of deportees. Düring has argued that deportees brought into various areas of the Assyrian Empire could choose to “opt in” to Assyrian practices. This was, he argues, a key part in their survival in an unfamiliar land (Düring 2020:98). Though he primarily meant deportees becoming agriculturalists in their new area of residence, we see this in part in the northwest city of Aššur – people living in that area, several of which were known to be of non-Assyrian origin, employed Assyrian practices alongside their own. As seen in Chapter 4’s investigation into the northwest expansion of the capital city, Aššur was flooded by new inhabitants from all over the empire, likely brought in as deportees. To their new homes they brought their own material culture and traditions. Yet, while their practices seem in distinct contrast to those in the older central city, overall their mortuary culture aligns with Assyrian mortuary practices. As argued then, the largest dividing factors in praxis
were likely the extremely low amount of wealth and resources afforded these newcomers, in contrast to the established, healthy residents of Aššur’s oldest districts.

One of the most notable works done on deported populations is Parker’s 2003 monograph, where he studies the Upper Tigris region of southeast Anatolia and addresses Assyrian colonization practices and the identity of those affected. His main argument revolves around the Assyrian use of the area as a “middle ground” contact zone where indigenous inhabitants interacted with Assyrian administrators and military. Here, there was a triangle of interaction between the Assyrian colonizers, the indigenous Anatolian inhabitants, and the foreign deported colonists (argued by Parker to be mostly of Levantine origin) (Parker 2003). The material culture from several different sites in this region overall shows a mélange of influences, from Egyptianizing figurines and Levantine vessels to Assyrian pottery styles. From this case study, the wide range of documentation detailing deported populations, and the inferred changes (socially, culturally, economically) that came with deportation, it is obvious that this was one of the most disruptive impacts which the Assyrians had on their subjects. Not only did it uproot entire groups of people, but it also affected the indigenous inhabitants of the areas in which they were then settled – effectively altering the social and economic organization of the empire. From material culture alone, it seems that deportees practiced a hybrid form of identity – combining Assyrian and their own traditions.

This shows, in some capacity, a choice – not a compulsion – to adopt Assyrian practices. In Aššur proper, this choice could have resulted from a continuous exposure to other Assyrians in the city – not elites, necessarily, but the varied residents in the capital. In the provinces, however, interaction with Assyrians may have been more limited. In
these areas, it is possible that an adoption of Assyrian traits may have been more influenced by elite practices – elite Assyrian culture being the main form of Assyrian identity they were exposed to.

But here, among the non-elites, a tension manifests between “performing” identity versus “becoming”, which was not necessarily present for elites. Assyrian tenets of ideology were meant for the elite populations of Assyria – it gave reason and justification to the empire’s actions, and the key administrative roles in which the elites took part (Brown 2010; 2013; Richardson 2016; Zaia 2018). Such is not seen in the lower-classes – those “administered” by the aforementioned elites. The identity of the ruling actors can be taken up by the ruled for various reasons, resulting in varied forms of practicing such an identity. “Becoming” Assyrian shows an accordance with Assyrian beliefs – believing oneself to be a part of the empire, not just a resident of a province. In contrast, “practicing” denotes a purposeful outer adherence to the cultural norms of the ruling class, while internally “othering” them. In the latter, identity becomes a performance removed from the authentic self.

Yet, there is very little evidence for Assyrian imposition of culture by elites, as discussed in the previous section. Beyond new administrative standards, tribute, and deportation practices, it seems that Assyrian subjects could “take it or leave it” regarding actual Assyrian cultural practices. A top-down imposition of identity only goes so far – in reality, it is the identity of the masses which truly unites an entity. As mentioned when discussing elite identity, the areas included in this research dovetail quite nicely with ideas of being “Assyrian” – low-land agriculturally-based populations, generally ensconced within an Assyrian-speaking area (with the partial exception of the Upper
Khabur/ Balikh sites – undoubtedly mainly Aramaic-speaking, but with enough Assyrian exposure to assume that bilingualism may have been common), and with polytheistic, amorphous pantheons designed to allow for additions, such as the god Aššur (Liverani 2017).

When this unconcerned attitude of the elites is taken with the exploration of mortuary culture, and the result is still an increase in Assyrian practices, then I put forward the conclusion that these generations of residents of Assyria – those in areas ruled in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods alike, truly began to see themselves as “Assyrian” throughout the hegemony of the Assyrian Empire. No evidence exists for a purposeful imposition of mortuary traditions by Assyrian rulers. Rather, the mortuary practices of the Assyrians seemed very much like a “take it or leave it” aspect of their lives. When many of those living in the Empire decided to “take it,” it was an unimposed choice – reflecting not the demands of a dominant imperial power, but rather the purposeful adoption of new traditions into personal and community-driven narratives.

The processes of identity formation were different in the core of the empire versus the periphery – in essence, the identity of the elite at Aššur had once been the identity of the lower-classes – much of the local Assyrian culture stemming from practices and beliefs of early second millennium Aššur, the merchant city state. Assyrian identity formation in the provinces took a different tack – one which infiltrated an already-existing local identity to take hold. Both Tell Billa and the sites of the Upper Khabur/ Balikh developed an Assyrian identity along a different trajectory: adopting Assyrian traits instead of developing with them – combining them with local traditions to practice an identity neither fully Assyrian nor fully indigenous. Arguably, these hybrid practices
of the non-elites was the manifestation of an Assyrian imperial identity – one where they identified themselves as part of the Assyrian Empire enough to differentiate themselves from others, but still holding on to aspects of identity which differentiated themselves from their rulers. They had become Assyrian subjects, practicing a mixture of local and imperial tradition.

**Final Conclusions**

What, then, does this tell us about the world’s first regional-scale imperial power? Foucault defines “identity” as a form of social construction which people impose on themselves and others (1994). Yet, taken glibly, it seems that Assyrian imperial elites chose to impose very few social constructions upon their subjects. This perspective very well may change with future investigation, but the material left to us emphasizes administration over ideas and culture. And yet, the fact that there was a unified set of burial practices *at all shows* there was a form of Assyrian culture adopted by non-elites. The fact that this was *mortuary culture* – the most conservative collection of practices, illustrates that Assyrian influence penetrated deeply into the populations they ruled, with or without any effort on the part of the ruling class. These Assyrian mortuary practices were adopted in a more consistent manner in the examples from Tell Billa – the closest provincial area to the empire’s core that we examined – than in the Upper Khabur/ Balikh area located at a greater distance. Those residents of the Upper Khabur/ Balikh instead had a set of local mortuary traditions which accompanied a rise in Assyrian practices during the Neo-Assyrian period. Taken together, these case studies suggest that
Assyrians wielded more cultural influence over nearby provinces. With this said, however, we must remember that it was also an Empire composed of varying burial cultures, by no means homogenous.

The three case studies presented in this research illustrate a general change in mortuary practices to follow a more “Assyrian” model, meaning that *many inhabitants of Assyria – not just elites, not just those in the core of the empire – saw themselves as Assyrian.* To what degree or importance, we may never fully know. But, the simple concept that “Assyrian” factored in enough to their identity to affect burial practices – either completely or partially – is the best evidence we have for a culturally-powerful imperial entity. Assyria, arguably not only the first empire but a *successful* one at that, spread its influence not only widely, but deeply: enough to make its conquered subjects see themselves, too, as Assyrian.
APPENDIX A: BURIAL CATALOGUE OF TELL BILLA/ŠIBANIBA

A Guide to the Catalogue of Burials:

- Measurements are provided if available. All measurements are in meters unless otherwise stated.

- Drawings are recreated directly from the project’s notecards (courtesy of Penn Museum Archives). For clarity, some sketches have been adjusted.

- All photographs are courtesy of the Penn Museum and Penn Museum Archives. Color photographs of artifacts were taken by the author.

- If a burial was labelled as “no objects”, ceramics may still have been present, but not recorded. (Often, this was the case with undecorated sherds.) Unrecorded ceramics may have been discarded.

- Objects were divided in partage between the Penn Museum and the Baghdad Museum. Penn Museum object numbers are provided for objects in the collections, while field numbers (starting with “B3-” for Billa’s 3rd season) are provided for all numbered artifacts. Baghdad accession numbers are unknown.
Burial 1

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-433: Baghdad Museum – 2 bronze bracelets of twisted rope design with overlapping ends; 2 anklets of bronze – simple design with open ends; 1 bronze earring. (Image A)

B3-434: Penn Museum, 33-4-192 – 85 beads of various stones (mostly agate) and pierced shells with a large, polygonal bead of agate or carnelian. (Image B)

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA
**Description:** Burial 1 was located in Room 67 of Level IA. The individual was buried in the southwest corner of a room, in a composite burial consisting of two whole pots (containing the head and the feet of the individual) and a third half-pot-sized sherd resting over the midsection. The body itself was set on a floor of baked clay/libn. The corpse was extended, resting with face pointing up, with arms and hands lying straight at the sides. The body was oriented along a SSW-NNE axis, with head pointing SSE.

Copper anklets were found in situ around the skeleton’s ankles. One bronze bracelet was found around the left hand, while another was resting next to the right wrist. One bead was found resting on the left cheek of the skull, separate from the rest of the beads in place around the neck.
Burial 2

Area: W6

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 2 is from Level I, found underneath a pebble-paved courtyard. The burial is a capsule burial consisting of two large pots laid on their sides and placed rim-to-rim, fully containing the body. The capsule was placed in a pit with mudbrick on three sides, forming an almost oval-like enclosure. The burial is oriented E-W. The skeleton itself laid jumbled in the pots, but the skull was placed facing N. No objects were included in this burial, either in the capsule or in the surrounding mudbrick enclosure.
Burial 3

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-112: Baghdad Museum – 93 oblong and barrel circular disk beads of shell; 1 long cylinder circular of shell. (Image A)

B3-138: Penn Museum, 33-4-63 – Bowl of overfired ware with carination below rim and a small ring base. (60mm W x 80mm H) (see Pfälzner Taf. 67-h, 181-c, 70-I; Hausleiter 61 – SF23.3, 65-ST5.2) (Image B)

Date: Level I; NA
Description: Burial 3 is located in pebble-paved courtyard P5, as part of Level I. The grave consists of a mudbrick enclosure built in a rectangular shape, with one break in the center of each of the long walls. Nearly all of the skeleton was in a poor state of preservation, so it was impossible to determine its original position. What was left of the skeleton was oriented N-S. One unrecorded greenware bowl (16x7.5cm) was located at the SE corner of the mudbrick grave, while flat bone buttons (28x2mm) were also present – possibly from the clothing the deceased was wearing.
Burial 4

Area: W5

Objects:

B3-323: Baghdad Museum – 16 paste beads and 1 doubly pierced green glazed bird made of frit. (Also recorded on the notecards were 3 stone beads). (Image A)

B3-322: Baghdad Museum – 2 bronze bracelets with open ends (similar to 3-333). [3 rings originally inventoried here were discarded] (Image B)

Date: Level I; NA
**Description:** Burial 4 was located “close to the surface” in Level I. It consisted of several sherds – two larger pots rim-to-rim and containing most of the body, while more sherds were placed at the sides and laid overtop, likely covering the midsection. The burial was oriented SE-NW, but the bones were too disturbed to identify the position of the individual or which way they were facing. A number of objects were contained within the grave, among which is one glazed green bird bead. Other beads were mostly paste, with three of stone. There were included 2 bronze bracelets and three bronze finger rings. All objects were mixed in with the skeleton, implying that the individual had been wearing the objects when buried. It is possible that this burial contained more than one individual, according to Bache’s notes in the Burial Inventory.
Burial 5

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-317: Baghdad Museum – 16 beads, including one glazed lion figure (shown above, Image A). (7.5 mm L)

B3-318: Penn Museum, 33-4-143 – Bronze ferrule. (Image B)

B3-319: Baghdad Museum – Shell cylinder seal with parts of bronze pin and cap still in place (Frankfort 1955, 7). A kneeling archer and quarry (winged horse?) in early-
cut style. Parts of crescent star and rhombus are scattered throughout the field. The beast has no tail. Archer has either no headdress or a rounded cap without horns (note Porada 1948, Corpus 88). Corpus 725 E is better executed but close to exact parallel. (37mm L x 13mm D) (Image C)

**Date:** Level II; MA

**Description:** Burial 5 consisted of a simple pit burial contemporary with Level II, underneath the vaulted tomb structure from a later date. The individual buried was an adult and was placed extended on its back, oriented N-S. The skull faced SE. On and surrounding the individual were small objects, including 16 beads and amulets. One cylinder seal made of shell was present, with its ends capped by bronze bands. One bronze ferrule was also present, although its position is also unknown.
Burial 6

**Area:** W6

**Objects:**

B3-424: Baghdad Museum – 30 small white beads, 15 small black beads, 30 small cream-colored spherical paste beads, and 1 bronze amulet (no image available).

**Date:** Level IA; late MA/ early NA

**Description:** Burial 6 was a simple pit grave dug into Level IA from the upper occupation of Level I and aligned with an E-W running wall from that same level. The skeleton lay extended, with the left arm resting on the torso and the right arm extended at the side. The individual was oriented W-E, with its head to the West, and skull facing up. One necklace was present in the grave, consisting of 30 small white beads, 15 small black beads, 30 small cream-colored spherical paste beads, and one bronze amulet.
Burial 7

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-380: Baghdad Museum – Small glazed jar (interior and exterior) yellow buff ware with a thick green glaze. (95mm D x 145mm H) [For parallel, see 3-381; Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 92 FL1.12] (Image A)

Unnumbered: 3 small frit beads (1 white, 1 black, 1 green). [discarded]

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 7 consisted of a pit grave containing the broken and mixed bones of an infant. The burial was part of Level IA, and was located directly next to Burial 8 and Burial 23. It was impossible to tell the original position of the infant, and the orientation of the pot was not recorded by the excavators. Included in the grave was a small vase of yellow buff ware with a thick green glaze (B3-380, above). Inside of the vessel were several small frit beads (one white, one black, one green).
Area: W6

Objects:

B3-273: Baghdad Museum – Button-based jar with globular body and everted neck and rim. (160mm D x 98mm H) (For parallel see ill. nr. 47 in ERJ; Hausleiter 2010 Taf.82 BT2.5 & Taf.83 BT5.8) (Image A)

B3-276: Baghdad Museum – Glazed bowl with ring base and carination. (72mm H) [for parallel see 3-302; Pfälzner 1995 Taf.77m, Taf.105d, Taf.107e & Taf.179e]

B3-290: 8 stone beads. [discarded] (Image B)

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA
Description: Burial 8 consisted of a single individual encased in several different containers to form a composite burial from Level IA, associated with Burial 7 and Burial 23, both of which were present just W of this grave. The body was placed fully-extended, except for a slight bend of the legs at the knee – probably to fit the deceased within the available vessels. Parts of four ceramic containers make up this burial – the head is encased by half a rectangular ceramic sarcophagus, the torso and upper legs are covered by parts of two large vessels with incised and raised decorations typical of burial vessels, and the lower legs and feet are contained in one whole ceramic vessel. The individual was oriented E-W, with the head facing N. A small green-glazed dish was found near the left shoulder of the deceased (B3-276, above). A small vase of yellowish buff ware was found next to the bend of the knee (B3-273, above). At the feet were nine beads made of stone (B3-290, above).
Burial 9

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-288: Penn Museum, 33-4-132 – Lopsided wide-mouthed jar with shoulder, lower portion red-buff, upper portion is white. Medium quality. Heavily-tempered with chaff and some grit. Crack in the bottom of the basin from firing/drying process. Very shallow ring base (basically flat with raised bump in center). Tannish-red color
that fades towards the top of the jar into light buff. (110mm D x 84mm H) (Postgate et al. 1997 Taf. 66 #646) (Image A)

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 9 is a composite burial consisting of one half of a bathtub sarcophagus and one large ceramic vessel, found in Level II. The sarcophagus half had a typical rope design around the edge. The sarcophagus was a dark brown ware, fairly coarse. The vessel was of a finer and lighter ware. Two individuals were contained within, both laid in extended positions and oriented W-E, with their heads contained in the sarcophagus to the W and their feet in the ceramic vessel to the E. Both were facing each other – the northernmost individual facing S and the southernmost individual facing N.

Above the vessel was a ceramic jar (B3-288) with bottom about 15 cm higher than highest part of the burial vessel. No other objects were included in Burial 9.
Burial 10

Area: W6

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 10 consisted of two vessels containing the feet and head of the deceased (the torso remained uncovered, exposed between the two vessels). This grave was contemporary with Level I and was located directly above Burials 64 and 63 from Level II. The burial was oriented W-E, with the head towards the W. The individual was an adult and placed lying on its side, with knees in contracted position. The head was facing south. No objects were included in this burial.
Burial 11

Area: W6

Objects:
B3-361: Undecorated ceramic vessel. [discarded] (the container for the head?)

(Image A)

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 11 is a composite burial from Level II consisting of two ceramic vessels, mudbrick, and baked brick. The body was placed within the vessels rim-to-rim, while a mudbrick and a baked brick were placed over the jar containing the lower half of the body. The vessel containing the head and shoulders had a hole in the “bottom” of the vessel, “as for a flower pot,” noted the excavators. The grave was oriented S-N, with the head to the south. The deceased is a child, laid on its left side and facing W. Its body was arranged in semi-extended position, with knees bent (likely to fit within both vessels). The arms were slightly bent at the elbows and hands rested near the hips. One object, B3-361, was discarded – an undecorated ceramic vessel, likely part of the capsule burial container. There were no other objects in Burial 11.
Burial 12

Dug grave

Bowl of buff ware, glazed green (h 55 x d? .50 mm?) held in left hand.
Area: W6

Objects:

B3-406: Penn Museum, 33-4-226 – Simple, flat-based bowl of coarse ware, identical to 3-407/33-4-227; made of reddish orange clay, with maybe the remains of slip flaking off the surface. Temper itself is coarse, made with chaff. (150mm D x 57mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 1] (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 52 SF 5.2; Postgate et al. 1997 Taf. 37 #130) (Image A)

B3-407: Penn Museum, 33-4-227 – Simple glazed bowl, heavily worn, with a flat base. Glaze is bubbled in some places, completely separate from the underlying ceramic in some places. The glaze itself is whitish with a green tint. Very thin hairline cracks are visible across the glazed surface. In visible ceramic surface, one can tell that the temper was chaff. (155mm D x 55mm H) (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 52 SF 5.2; Postgate et al. 1997 Taf. 37 #130) (Image B)

Unnumbered: Small greenware cup. [discarded]

Unnumbered: 1 shell ring

Unnumbered: 1 iron ring

Unnumbered: 1 copper pendant
Unnumbered: 40 small spherical beads of cream colored paste, 1 barrel shaped rock crystal bead, 1 spherical carnelian bead, 1 spherical bead of variegated reddish stone, 1 black and white spherical paste bead

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 12 was a simple pit grave from Level IA. The deceased was buried in an extended position and laid on its right side. The skeleton was oriented N-S, with the head at the N and facing W. It was buried in Room V55. Both arms were bent at the elbow, with hands located near the face and neck. A bowl of buff ware, glazed green was held in left hand, tucked almost under the chin. Another bowl of buffware was also included in the grave, along with a small cup of greenware (discarded). Other objects included beads (one pierced shell, 1 shell ring, 1 iron ring, 1 copper pendant disc, 40 small spherical beads of cream colored paste, 1 barrel shaped rock crystal bead, 1 spherical carnelian bead, 1 spherical bead of variegated reddish stone, 1 black and white spherical paste bead – all uncatalogued and most discarded).
Burial 13

Area: W6

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 13 was a mudbrick burial from Level I. Mudbricks were laid in a rectangular shape around the body, which lay in a half-contracted position on its side. The grave and the individual were oriented S-N, with the head at the S end and facing E. Arms were bent at the elbow to have the hands resting near the face and neck. No objects were included in Burial 13.
Burial 14

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-386: Penn Museum, 33-4-179 – Overfired wide-mouthed jar with not too much of a globular body. Tempered with medium chaff and inclusions. Clay is greenish in middle, but the bottom seems to be blackish (almost burnt?) while the rim and neck are dark orangish-tan with grit emphasized. The tannish part of the rim is likely a glaze or paint with small inclusions - this is the only place that these inclusions are
found on the surface. This continues into the jar, ending at the inside around the bottom of the neck. Rounded button base. Cracks inside from drying/firing process. (128mm D x 190mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 58] (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 97) (Image A)

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 14 consisted of one adult laid in a shallow mudbrick enclosure, closed on at least three sides. It was found in Level I, underneath a wall and doorway used in Level II and rebuilt in Level IA with the doorway sealed. The grave was oriented E-W, with the body deposited in an extended position with the head to the E. The arms were bent at the elbows and a small pot was held in the right hand, near the head, which was facing N. The small vessel (B3-386) was placed upright in the grave.
Burial 15

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-409a: Penn Museum, 33-4-228 – Cylinder seal of black serpentine. A worn or lightly incised horned quadruped with crescent, star, and seven globes. Space for possible tree or upright figure has been sliced off. Pierced lengthwise. (12.1 D x 25.8 L) [See Porada 1948 Corpus I. 75. (c. 800)] (Image A)

B3-409b: Penn Museum, 33-4-305 – A thin tannish-buff cylinder seal pierced lengthwise. It has a cross-hatched pattern in two registers which connect, and one blank register in the middle of these two (with dividing borders). Well-preserved. (10mm D x 29.5mm L) (Image B)

Unnumbered: painted sherd
Unnumbered: six small frit beads

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 15 is a single adult burial found in Level I. It consists of a mudbrick enclosure which contained the deceased. The grave and individual were oriented N-S, with the skull facing straight up. The arms were crossed over the torso, while the rest of the body was extended. In the grave were included six small frit beads and a small sherd of painted pottery. Two seals were also present near the feet of the deceased – one steatite cylinder seal with the motif of a star and a bull, and a “decorated frit cylinder bead” which was also possibly a seal.
Burial 16

**Area:** W6

**Objects:**

B3-305: Penn Museum, 33-4-139 – Squat small nipple-footed jar with everted lip and globular bottom - very fine ware with some grit - whitish yellow color - small crack

335
on inside bottom from drying too quickly. (78mm D x 94mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 45]

(Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 81 BT 1.5) (Image A)

B3-306: Penn Museum, 33-4-140 – Overfired globular jar with nipple base and
everted slanted square rim; neck is ribbed below rim and just above shoulder. Clay is
yellow-green at top and turns gray-green towards the bottom. Highly-tempered with
chaff and some inclusions. Crack in bottom from drying/ firing process. Body is not
uniformly-round. (122mm D x 145mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 57] (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 90
FW 2.2) (Image B)

Unnumbered: small jar used to plug one of the others

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Besides the plan, very little was recorded about Burial 16. It was found in
Level I near Burial 13, which was just to the SW. A single jar contained the jumbled
remains of an individual of unknown age. The jar was oriented E-W, with the mouth
pointing W. Next to the single jar burial were deposited a set of ceramics, consisting of
two jars of buff ware and a smaller vessel plugging the mouth of one of them.
Burial 17

Area: W6

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 17 consisted of a simple pit grave located in Level I, partially running under the N wall of the pebble courtyard, meaning that it was likely an early feature within this phase. The individual was an adult and laid stretched out on their back, arms bent at the elbow, with their hands resting over their chest (left hand) and waist (right hand). The knees were bent so that they protruded upwards. The grave was oriented NE-SW, with the head at the NE end. The head of the deceased faced W. No objects were included in Burial 17.
Burial 18

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-260: Baghdad Museum – Button-based cup of reddish-buff fine ware. (78mm D x 92mm H) (Pfälzner 1995 Taf.97h; Hausleiter 2010 Taf.78 BR2.7; Postgate et al. 1997 67 #665) [For parallel see ill. nr. 50 in ERJ] (Image A)

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 18 is a mudbrick grave dug into a wall from Level I which contained the remains of one adult individual. It was later covered over by the construction of a drain. The grave itself was oriented SW-NE, with the skull at the SW end. The deceased was laid out in an extended position and placed on their back. The skeleton was noted by
the excavators to be in a very poor state of preservation. One cup of reddish, buffware pottery was found next to the deceased’s right shoulder.
Burial 19

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-128: Penn Museum, 33-4-57 –A string of 21 small beads in a tannish-white color, possibly either clay or bone. Beads are rounded and discoid shapes. (Image A)

Unnumbered: Two fragments of rose quartz.

Unnumbered: pierced bone fragment.

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 19 was a simple pit burial containing the remains of one adult near the surface of Level I. The grave itself was badly disturbed, due to being so close to the surface level. Twenty-one beads were found in the grave: five flat bone beads, thirteen white frit beads (rounded at the top, but with a flat base), two fragments of rose quartz, and one pierced bone fragment.
Burial 20

Area: W6

Objects:

*Unnumbered:* Small piece of corroded lead. *(discarded)*

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 20 is a mudbrick grave containing the body of one adult individual. This burial was found at Level I layers. The grave is oriented W-E, with the head at the W end. The deceased is facing S and was placed in a “half-contracted” position, with knees bent and spine curved – this was likely in order to fit into the small mudbrick structure. The mouth of the deceased was found widely open, leading the excavators to believe this was a purposeful positioning. Arms were bent at the elbows, and the hands rested next to the pelvis. No objects were found in Burial 20, besides one piece of badly corroded lead at the juncture of the shoulder and right arm, that was discarded.
Burial 21

**Area:** W6

**Objects:**

B3-394: Penn Museum, 33-4-182 – Small carinated bowl with flat base. Greenish-white clay (overfired), slightly lopsided. Strong carination. Highly-tempered with chaff and few grit inclusions. Rim is rounded. Medium craftsmanship. (100mm D x 38mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 7] (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 52 SF 3.2; Postgate *et al.* 1997 Taf. 31 #52) (Image A)

**Date:** Level IA; late MA/ early NA

**Description:** Burial 21 consisted of a double-jar burial containing two individuals and dating to Level IA (upper part of Level II). The jars themselves were of a greenish ware
and placed rim-to-rim to create the capsule burial, although they did not quite meet.

Inside the jars, the excavators say they found the skeletons in a “jumbled” state, although they were able to tell that one of the deceased was laid in an extended position, with arms bent at the elbows and hands resting on the torso. The head faced E. The other individual seemed to be pushed further to the E part of the capsule, with the skull resting at the far E of the capsule. The grave was oriented E-W. Within the capsule formed by the two jars was found a dish of light green ware next to both individuals, on their N side.
Burial 22

[No burial illustration available]

Area: X6

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 22 was located very close to the surface within Level I. It consisted of a single adult burial within a mudbrick structure, surrounding it in a rectangular enclosure. The deceased was placed within it in a mostly-extended position, with knees slightly bent to fit to body in the structure. The grave was oriented E-W, with the head of the deceased at the E and facing NW. No objects were found within Burial 22.
Burial 23

Area: W6

Objects:

B3-339: Small bronze pin. [discarded] (Image A)

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 23 is located above the NE room of the Vaulted Tomb (W84) in Level IA. It consists of a mudbrick “box” containing one adult individual lying in an extended position. Burial 23 was likely associated with Burials 7 and 8, located adjacent to it. The grave was oriented E-W, with the head of the deceased resting at the E end and facing N. One bronze pin was found near the skeleton, likely from the clothing they were buried in. No other objects were found as part of Burial 23.
Burial 24

**Locus 3W-96**

**Burial**

[Diagram of burial site]

**Area:** W6

**Objects:**

B3-435: Baghdad Museum – 39 assorted beads;

Penn Museum, 33-4-302 – One very thin and fragile crescent-shaped ring made of metal, corroded. Was probably complete - too small to be anything but an earring or child's finger ring. (2.5mm W x 12mm L) (Image A)

**Date:** Level II; MA

**Description:** Burial 24 was located within Room 65 in Level II and contained one child. The grave was of mudbrick with two slabs of mudbrick comprising a flat “roof” over the
three-sided mudbrick enclosure (which was built two courses up from the bottom of the
dug pit). The grave was oriented W-E, with the head of the child in the W. The child
faced N and was laid in an extended position. In Burial 24 were found 39 assorted beads
and one metal ring.
Burial 25

Area: W6

Objects

B3-481: Baghdad Museum – 1 cylinder bead of rose quartz.

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 25 was located near the east wall of Room 63 of Level IA. It consisted of two jars, which were oriented on their sides and facing with mouths towards one another, but with a length of space in between where the deceased was covered with a few mudbricks, making this a composite burial. The deceased was a single adult laid in an extended position, with their head towards the S and facing E. The entire burial was oriented S-N. Only one cylinder bead (uninscribed, therefore likely not a seal) was found within Burial 25 near the feet of the deceased.
Burial 26

No objects.

Area: W6
No objects.
Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA
Description: Burial 26 was a pit grave uncovered in Level IA (upper part of Level II) cutting into the N wall of Room 62. It contained the remains of one adult individual. The grave was oriented W-E, with the head of the deceased placed at the W end. The individual was laid extended on their back, with the legs bent at the knees vertically so as to fit within the confines of the pit. The head of the individual was facing S. The right arm was bent at the elbow with the hand resting over the upper chest, while the left arm was bent at a lesser angle, with the hand resting over the torso. No objects were found associated with Burial 26.
Burial 27

Area: W6

No objects

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 27 consists of a pit burial found in Level IA, containing one adult individual. The burial itself was placed directly against the E wall of Room 66. The grave was oriented S-N, with the head of the deceased resting at the S end and facing up. The deceased was placed in an extended position, with the right arm crossed across the breast and the hand resting on the collar bone. The left arm was extended at their side. No objects were found within Burial 27.
**Burial 28**

**Area:** W6

**Objects:**

- **B3-445:** Baghdad Museum – 2 crescent earrings of gold foil. (For parallel, see 3-54 and 3-397)
- **B3-456:** Baghdad Museum – 34 beads (varying shapes and material) and 1 bronze bracelet.

**Date:** Level IA; late MA/ early NA

**Description:** Burial 28 was a single jar grave that contained the remains of an infant found in Level IA. The grave was located at the base of the E wall of Room 64. It appeared that the infant was placed in a fetal position with its head at the bottom of the vessel. Within the vessel were found two gold earrings, 34 beads of varying types and shapes (including many shell beads), and one bronze bracelet.
Burial 29

![Burial 29 Diagram]

A
Area: V6

Objects:

B3-400: Baghdad Museum – 1 miniature blue paste bead in the shape of a frog; 21 other paste and frit beads. (Image B)
B3-401: Baghdad Museum – 15 standard circular beads of various stones; 17 long circular barrel beads of various stones; 17 miscellaneous shapes of stone (50 stone beads in total). (Image B)

B3-402: Penn Museum, 33-4-186 – String of small carnelian beads of varying types, shapes, and designs. One etched carnelian bead is present; another is carved into a delicate vegetal shape and pierced at one of the long ends. Some beads are roughly hewn, others are smoothed. Some of the longer beads have white parts purposefully carved to be the center of the bead. (Image A)

B3-403: Penn Museum, 33-4-187 – A string of small shell beads, pierced through the centers of the shells. All are fairly uniform in size and shape. (Image C)

B3-404: Penn Museum, 33-4-188 – 306 Beads.

**Date:** Level II; MA

**Description:** Burial 29 consisted of a broken mudbrick “sarcophagus” containing the skeleton of one adolescent individual. It was found on Level II in the doorway joining Room 53 and Room 55, oriented E-W with the head of the individual placed at the E end. The skeleton itself was mostly preserved, with the skull badly broken but facing S. The arms of the individual were bent at the elbows, with the right hand resting near the chin of the deceased and the left hand placed upon the torso. Around the neck and the upper right arm a large number of stone and frit beads of all sizes, colors, and materials were discovered. On the head and around it were found hundreds of small white stone discoid beads – probably part of a headdress.
Burial 30

Area: V6

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 30 consists of a mudbrick grave in which one adult individual was buried. The grave was uncovered as part of Level I and was oriented S-N, with the head of the deceased at the S end. The NE corner of the mudbrick structure was damaged by modifying the neighboring room at a later time. The deceased faced up and was laid in an extended position. Both arms were bent at the elbows. No objects were placed within Burial 30.
Burial 31

[No burial illustration available]

Area: V6

Objects:

Unnumbered: small, broken pot

Unnumbered: small, broken pot

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 31 was a single-jar grave containing the remains of one adult individual. It was uncovered as part of Level I and was found near a stone wall in Room P4. The jar was oriented on its side, with the mouth of the vessel facing NW and the bottom facing SE. The skeleton inside the pot was jumbled, making it impossible to identify its original positioning, though it was likely fetal position. Two small, “broken” pots were found within the single-jar burial.
Area: V6

No objects

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 32 consisted of a composite grave, formed by parts of several different ceramic jars variously arranged and containing the remains of a single adult. This grave was found in Room 50 below the floor as part of Level IA. Burial 32 was aligned with the S wall of Room 50 cut into the E wall of the same room. The grave itself was oriented E-W, with the head of the deceased placed towards the E. The deceased was laid out in an extended position, with its head and feet placed in two jars (mouths oriented towards each other), while the torso of the deceased was covered by “one half” of a jar, similar to sherd burials. No objects were found in Burial 32.
Burial 33

Area: V6
No objects
Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA
Description: Burial 33 was a composite burial, consisting of mudbrick and a single ceramic vessel. It was uncovered as part of Level IA in Room 48 “almost in the NW corner”. One adult individual was contained within the burial, and was laid in extended position and with their head placed at the S end of the burial. The head of the deceased was contained by the single jar, laid on its side. Several courses of mudbricks were constructed on the right side of the deceased, comprising the E side of the grave, while it seems the W side of the grave was formed by part of the existing W wall of Room V-48. No objects were found in Burial 33.
Burial 34

Area: V6

Objects:

B3-351: Penn Museum, 33-4-159 – Small jar of buff ware, thin-walled. Exterior smoothed with minimum straw temper, wide mouth neck and rim and button base. Nipple base. Tannish-yellow clay. Fine ware. Rim mostly broken, but remaining bits are thin and slightly everted. (90mm D x 100mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 49] (Postgate et al. 1997 Pl. 72) (Image A)

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 34 was a composite burial consisting of a single jar burial and mudbrick walls uncovered within Room 48 in Level II. The remains of one child were contained within Burial 34, and the grave itself was oriented NW-SE, with the head of
the child towards the NW and facing SW. The grave itself was oriented along the northernmost wall of Room V48, which formed the N boundary of the grave. The grave was enclosed on the S and the E by mudbricks several courses high. One large jar was laid on its side and contained the head and upper torso of the deceased, while the legs were bent at the knee and left bare. One fine ceramic buff jar was recovered from Burial 34.
Area: V6

Objects:

B3-153: Baghdad Museum – Large stone seal with crowded and elaborate scene. A kneeling worshipper (MA 13th c. Porada 1948 Corpus 598 E) before a seated deity holding a cup. A man in fringed kilt stands behind the seated deity. In place of missing offering table are the motifs of fish, flying birds, crescent, and wedges.

Worship scenes and ritual meals are common 12th-10th century NA scenes (Corpus I,
70) but kneeling man may be a carry-over from the Kassite period (Corpus I, 69).

(39mm L x 15mm D) (Image A)

B3-154a: Baghdad Museum – 80+ discs of lapis beads; 17 bone disk beads; 1
carnelian disk bead.

B3-154b: Baghdad Museum – 1 frit figure of kneeling male with Egyptian headdress.

(25mm H) (Image B)

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 35 was a pit burial found as part of Level I, found just NW of Burial
36. We know it was relatively close to the surface, as the excavators came across it
outside of the official opened area. One adult was buried in the pit, along with a large
cylinder seal, a frit figurine, and beads of blue faience and yellow frit. The seal is a
common MA type, likely an heirloom. The burial was oriented SE-NW with the head of
the deceased towards the SE and facing directly up. They were buried in an extended
position, with arms crossed over their chest.
Burial 36

Area: V6/V7

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 36 consisted of a mudbrick structure containing one adult individual. It was found as part of Square V7, as a burial from Level I and related to Burial 35. The grave was oriented NW-SE, with the skull in the NW end and facing SW. (One whole mudbrick was complete enough to measure: 37cmx11cm). The arrangement of the remains within Burial 36 is peculiar; four of the long bones were organized below the skull in the shape of a square, which the excavators attributed to graverobbers in antiquity. No objects were found within Burial 36, but the excavators noted that in the
debris above the burial there were “a number of small ornaments” which could have originally belonged to this grave (any further information about them is unknown).
Burial 37

Area: V7

Objects:

B3-139: Penn Museum, 33-4-64 – Glazed bowl with crumbly surface, underlying fabric of buff with calcium pits. In-turned carinated rim with flat base; glaze is white with barest of green tints; not much temper able to be seen - but tempered with large grit inclusions. (105mm D x 54mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 4] (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 65 ST 6.2) (Image A)

B3-140: Penn Museum, 33-4-65 – Heavily carinated bowl with flaring rim and heavily tempered with chaff; cracked in the firing/ drying process. Clay is greenish
Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 37 consists of a mudbrick built grave containing one adult individual from Level I. Burial 37 was located just to the W of Burial 38, showing that they were likely related. The mudbrick structure was one of the only ones at Tell Billa to be covered by a mudbrick “lid” of sorts. The walls of the mudbrick container measured 8cm thick, while the “roof” of the grave measured 20cm thick. Overall, the grave measured 186x70cm and was oriented NE-SW. The individual was deposited in an extended position, with the head placed at the NE end of the grave and facing S. Arms were laid next to the torso, where a bowl “of brown ware with green glazing” (B3-139) was placed on the SE side. Another bowl (B3-140) was found to the E of the deceased’s head, this time of “drabware”.
Burial 38

[No burial illustration available]

Area: V7

Objects:

B3-205: Baghdad Museum – 5 bronze earrings; 1 complete bronze finger ring; 3 incomplete bronze rings; 3 disk-shaped stone beads. (Image A)

B3-220: Various beads. [discarded]

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 38 was a capsule burial from Level I containing the full skeleton of one deceased adult and two additional skulls of adult individuals. Two large ceramic vessels made up the capsule burial, laid on their sides with mouths facing one another and
oriented along a W-E axis. Part of the occupants’ torsos remained uncovered by the limited extent of these two jars and were covered with sherds. The one full individual was laid in an extended position with knees and elbows slightly bent, with the head at the W end and feet at the E. This individual (individual A) was placed so as to be facing upwards. The two other skulls were laid around the skull of individual A, with one (B) found at A’s left shoulder and the other (C) placed above A’s head. B faced NE and C faced NNE, but neither could be associated with any bones. Within this burial, nine bronze rings were found on the fingers of A. An assortment of small stone beads were also present.
Burial 39

Area: V7

Objects:

B3-201: Baghdad Museum – 1 broken bead of blue paste and one bead of white glazed paste.

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 39 was a single-jar burial containing the remains of cremation found in Level II. The jar contained the burnt bones of an adult and the unburnt bones of an infant, although both were jumbled in disarray. The jar itself was found tilted 35 degrees, with the mouth of the vessel directed towards the N. The mouth of the jar was closed by inserting the broken base of a smaller jar. The main jar is of greenware. Within the cremated remains and soil inside the jar were recovered two beads – one of white glazed paste and the other of blue frit.
Burial 40

[No burial illustration available]

Area: V7

Objects:

- B3-353: Baghdad Museum – Fine fabricated buff jar with carinated shoulder, neck rib and button base. (100mm D x 130mm H) (Postgate et al. 1997 Pl. 74 #875) (Image A)

- Unnumbered: One green-glazed disk

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 40 consisted of a simple pit burial dug into the Level II wall between Rooms 44 and 40 from Level I. The burial itself was heavily disturbed in antiquity. It was oriented SE-NW, with the head of the deceased (a single adult) at the SE end and facing E. Many of the bones were broken and jumbled, making a conclusion on its position difficult. Near the head was found one green-glazed disk and one small pot.
Burial 41

Area: V7

Objects:

Unnumbered: one small vessel, undecorated.

Unnumbered: one small vessel, undecorated.

Unnumbered: one small vessel, undecorated.

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 41 consisted of two large jars (“D” and “C”) and two walls of mudbrick, making up a composite burial, oriented SW-NE. This burial was part of Level IA, and was uncovered in the SW corner of Room 42. The burial contained the remains of one adult individual, laid in an extended position, with the head at the SW end of the burial. The head of the deceased was laid in jar D and facing upwards. The torso and
legs of the deceased were largely contained within jar C (which consisted of two broken halves – one laid below the deceased and the other aligned over the body once it was deposited), but the base of the jar was broken to allow the feet to fully pass through. The N and S walls of the burial were comprised of mudbrick walls – the S wall re-used from a wall from Level II and the N wall consisting of one layer constructed for the sole purpose of the burial. No objects were found within this burial besides three small vessels.
Burial 42

Area: V7

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 42 was a capsule burial consisting of two large jars which intruded into Level II, and therefore was part of Level I. The burial was oriented S-N. The smaller burial vessel was patched with bitumen, retaining its original shape. The individual was placed inside both vessels in an extended position, knees bent up so as to fit within the smaller vessel. The right arm of the deceased was bent so as to rest the
lower arm and hand across the chest, while the left lay straight at its side. The head of the deceased was placed in the larger vessel to the S, which also covered their shoulders and chest. The pelvis and upper legs of the deceased was left exposed. The feet and lower legs were encased by the N vessel. Both jars were made of greenish grey ware and were wheel-made. No other objects were found in Burial 42.
Burial 43

Area: V7

Objects:

B3-135: Baghdad Museum – 1 flat, pierced bone bead; 1 glazed hemisphere bead with 2 concentric incisions. (Image A)
B3-137: Penn Museum, 33-4-62 – Medium-sized jar with flat base. Buff colored clay with some chaff and grit temper (surface is medium-smooth) Medium quality ware. Some imperfections and ridges on outside finish. (180mm D x 230mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 61] (Postgate et al. 1997 Pl. 86 #989) (Image B)

**Date:** Level II; MA

**Description:** Burial 43 was a simple pit burial from Level II, containing one adult individual. It was located in the SE corner of Room 37, oriented along the S wall. The grave was oriented S-N with the head of the deceased placed at the S end and facing E. The individual was deposited in a slightly contracted position on their side, with knees and elbows bent. At the deceased’s feet was found a small greenware jar. Near the upper torso of the deceased lay a white glazed button and a piece of pierced bone.
Burial 44

Area: V7

No objects

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 44 consists of a composite grave of multiple ceramic vessels and was found as part of Level IA. The skeleton of a child was found within. The excavators identified anywhere between three and five vessels making up the container of the grave, but because of the position of the child within the two main vessels (in a position very similar to a capsule burial) this should not be considered a sherd grave. The grave was oriented E-W, with the skull of the deceased at the E end. The child was placed in a semi-contracted position: the arms remained straight (lying on the right side of the body) but the knees were fully bent to allow the legs to fit into the jar containing the lower half. The skull faced N. No objects were found in this grave.
Burial 45

Area: V7

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 45 was a simple pit burial, containing the bones of one adult individual. This burial was part of Level I, located within Room P13. The individual was laid out in an extended position from S-N, with limbs straightened. The deceased was facing NE. No objects were found in this burial.
Burial 46

Copper Bracelet

[Top View]

A

35

B

28

60

33-4-103B
Area: V7

Objects:

B3-221: Penn Museum, 33-4-103 – 1 bronze bracelet, 132 black and white paste beads. (Images A & B)

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 46 was a double-jar burial found as part of Level II, containing the remains of an infant. The burial was oriented N-S, with the skull at the N end. The infant was placed in a contracted side position, with elbows and knees bent and head facing E. It seems that the majority of the body was placed in the N jar, but the legs were still exposed, and were therefore covered by a second jar – different from the normal capsule burial example, where the lower half is placed entirely inside the second jar. A bronze bracelet was found behind the skull. Four necklaces of black and white paste beads were also recovered (132 beads in total) – two of which were strung around the neck of the infant and two of which fell on the chest.
Burial 47

**Area:** V7

**Objects:**

*Unnumbered:* one glazed bead of frit

**Date:** Level II; MA

**Description:** Burial 47 was a composite burial consisting of three ceramic jars, where the middle jar (B) was only half a vessel, forming a large sherd cover. It was found within Room 36 in Level II, accompanied by Burial 46 and Burial 48 located just to the S. Burial 47 contained the remains of a single child, laid on its back with arms crossed on the chest and legs bent upwards to fit in vessel A. The burial was oriented NW-SE, with
the head of the deceased placed to the NW and facing NE. Only one glazed bead made of frit was recovered from Burial 47.
Area: V7

Objects:

B3-136: Penn Museum, 33-4-61 – Tall, narrow jar of good buff ware, exterior smoothed with flattened button-base, broken at shoulder. Fine ware - no inclusions or temper seen. Walls are extremely thin and uniform. Base is a tiny button base. No rim preserved. Clay is orangish-tan, deeper at the bottom and lighter towards the top. (96mm D x 210mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 48] (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 88 FT 2.1) (Image A)

Date: Level II; MA
Description: Burial 48 was a composite burial consisting of a simple pit, but lined with deteriorated mudbricks and stones placed around the corpse. This burial was found within Level II in Room 36, related to the deposition of Burial 46 and Burial 47 found next to this grave and buried with respect to one another. The grave measured 20 cm wide at the feet and 40 cm wide at the head. The burial contained one adult individual, deposited in an extended position with arms crossed over the chest and legs crossed near the ankles. The grave was oriented E-W with the head of the deceased at the E and facing N. Only one object was deposited in this grave: a smooth, button-base goblet of redware found near the head.
Burial 49 and Burial 50

**Area:** W7

**No objects**

**Date:** Level I; NA

**Description:** Burials 49 and 50 were recorded together, although they were not contemporary. It is theorized by the excavators that Burial 49 disturbed Burial 50 when it was dug, causing parts of Burial 50 to be re-buried. Burial 49 consisted of a simple pit grave from Level I. A single adult was contained in Burial 49, and was laid out in an extended position, oriented W-E like the pit, with the skull at the W.

Burial 50 was likewise from Level I, and was a double-jar burial which held the remains of one adult individual. The deceased was placed in a crouched position on its side, with arms bent at the elbows (hands resting close to face) and legs bent at the knees. The entire body was contained within the two vessels, laid on their sides and placed mouth-to-mouth. Burial 50 was oriented S-N, with the head of the deceased placed at the S end and faced NE. No objects were recovered from either burial.
Burial 51

Area: W7

Objects:

Unnumbered: 1 pierced shell. [discarded]

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 51 was a mudbrick grave containing the remains of one adult individual and recovered from Level II as part of Room 29, in the SW corner. It was oriented S-N, with the S edge of the grave butting up against the W and S walls of Room 29, with the N and E walls constructed purely for Burial 51. The deceased was placed in the grave with its head to the S and facing up. It lay in a semi-contracted position with arms bent at the elbows and hands crossed, resting over the torso, while the knees were drawn up in a half-contracted position. There were no objects except for a single pierced shell laying on the right foot of the deceased.
Burial 52

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-366: Baghdad Museum – 213 small disk beads of paste.

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 52 consisted of a single jar burial containing a child surrounded by what the excavators termed a “coating” of mudbrick, not unlike plaster. Burial 52 was part of Level II, buried in the SE corner of Room 29 and oriented along the S wall. The jar itself was oriented on its side with the mouth of the vessel facing E and the bottom to the W. The head of the child was placed at the “top” of the jar (to the E) and was facing N upon excavation. The mudbrick “plaster” surrounding the jar was measured to be roughly 10 cm thick. 213 small paste beads were included in Burial 52 (B3-366).
Burial 53

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-213: Penn Museum, 33-4-98 – Many types and styles of beads: shell, glass, lapis, agate, small paste beads, 1 round yellow bead, carnelian, larger elongated oval beads of some light stone. (Image A)

B3-214: Baghdad Museum – 2 bronze rings. (20mm D & 25mm D) (Image B)
B3-219: Penn Museum, 33-4-102 – Scarab inscribed with "R'-MN-HPR" dating to Thutmosis III. Drawing of its back suggests a naturalistic style with triangles at the corners of wings (an 18th dynasty indication). Seal base includes a seated sphinx with wings and a human head. Odd and unreadable signs are included on the seal. (15mm W x 12mm L x 7mm H) (Hall 1913 type H). (Image C)

B3-220: Baghdad Museum – 1 shell bead; 2 bone beads; 1 carnelian bead; 1 paste bead; 1 undescibed bead. (Image A)

**Date:** Level II; MA

**Description:** Burial 53 was a pit burial from Level II that was disturbed in antiquity. It was placed in the NE corner of Room 28. From what remained, it seemed to the excavators that the burial was originally oriented N-S. It contained the jumbled skeleton of one adult individual, with the skull missing. Burial 53 was fairly rich in grave goods, containing 2 bronze rings, 1 small iron pin, 1 scarab with a winged sphinx and inscribed with R’ – MN – HPR, 40 odd beads of paste and stone, 2 pierced bone ornaments, and 6 shell beads.
Burial 54

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W7

No objects

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 54 consisted of an infant burial from Level IA, buried under a single overturned potsherd. The corpse was compressed into a shape small enough to fit under the sherd. The orientation of the burial was unable to be determined, and there were no objects in the burial.
Burial 55

Area: W7

Objects:

Unnumbered: bowl, placed inverted over the burial

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 55 was an oddly-shaped mudbrick burial containing the body of one adult. This grave was uncovered in Room 26 from Level IA, about one meter below the Level I floor. Ten mudbricks were constructed in a circular enclosure, in which the extremely contracted body of an adult was placed, with knees drawn up the chest and arms crossed over the body. There was no orientation to the burial, but the skull of the deceased rested at the NE part of the circle and the excavators noted that the skull facing downwards to the floor. Above the body, the excavators found an inverted bowl. No other objects were placed within this burial.
Burial 56

Area: W7

No objects

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 56 technically contained two separate burials: 56a and 56b, both found in Level I. They were located to the N of the wall forming Room P11 and to the W of the wall forming Room P15.

Burial 56a consisted of a double-jar capsule burial, containing the bodies of two adults and one disarticulated adult skull. The grave was oriented S-N, with the skulls placed at the S end. Both complete adult skeletons were deposited in an extended position, and all three skulls seem to have been facing upwards. The two jars comprising the capsule burial were laid on their side and oriented so that their mouths faced each other, but they did not connect in the middle, leaving the torsos of the two complete skeletons exposed.
Burial 56b was a single-jar burial laid on top of 56a. It contained the remains of a single infant. The jar was oriented E-W, with the mouth of the jar (and the skull of the infant) towards the E. No objects were contained in either of these burials.
Burial 57

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-246: Baghdad Museum – Small pendant of lapis lazuli shaped as an owl, eyes inlaid with yellow frit, head pierced for stringing. (Image A)
B3-247: Penn Museum, 33-4-113 – Small metal loops; bracelets. Heavy for their size. Parts of the metal remain polished and smooth. (Image B)

B3-248: Penn Museum, 33-4-114 – 10 stone and paste beads. (Image C)

**Date:** Level II; MA

**Description:** Burial 57 consists of a double-capsule grave found in the NE corner of Room 24 in Level II. It contained the remains of two adults. Both vessels were remarkably similar in construction and shape, with rope applique decoration surrounding the rims of both. The grave was oriented NW-SE, with the mouths of both jars touching each other and covering the bodies completely. The individuals contained within were placed on their left sides, the southernmost occupant facing N and the northernmost occupant facing E. The legs and arms of both individuals were bent to allow them to fit within the capsule. On the neck of the northern skeleton was a necklace of ten stone and paste beads including a lapis owl pendant with inlaid yellow eyes. On both hands of the same individual was a bronze bracelet. Burnt animal bones (marked by Xs in the illustration above) were recovered behind the legs of the southernmost occupant, indicating food remains, although the types of bones were left unrecorded by the excavators.
Burial 58

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-271: Penn Museum, 33-4-125 – 68 tiny discoid beads made of gray paste. (Image A)
B3-273(?): Baghdad Museum – Button-based jar with globular body and everted neck and rim. (160mm D x 98mm H) (Hausleiter 2010 Taf.82 BT2.5 & Taf.83 BT5.8) (For parallel see ill. nr. 47 in ERJ) (Image B)

**Date:** Level I; NA

**Description:** Burial 58 was a double-jar capsule burial from Level I. It was located outside the entrance to Room P11, underneath a pavement of pebbles and just to the NE of Burial 59. The burial was oriented W-E, with the head of the deceased placed at the W end. The skeleton was badly disturbed, making it difficult to determine the original position of the deceased. Contained in the burial were 68 small blue paste beads.
Burial 59
Area: W7

Objects:

B3-295: Penn Museum, 33-4-135 – Miniature jar of coarse ware, glazed, with thick body, solid foot, and straight neck. Probably used for makeup or ointment or oil. Glazed blue on outside, although only patches remain. Mouth is off-center, only reaches halfway down into the jar. Ceramic is porous. (30mm D x 40mm H) [no ERJ ill.] (Postgate et al. 1997 Pl.81 #904) (Image A)
B3-296: Baghdad Museum – 21 circular barrel agate beads of standard and long lengths; 1 standard circular bead of carnelian; 4 long circular barrel paste beads; 1 paste disk bead (27 beads in total). (Image B)

**Date:** Level I; NA

**Description:** Burial 59 seems to have been originally intended to be a capsule burial, comprised of two main vessels placed on their side and mouth-to-mouth, as is usually seen, but with the bottom of one of the vessels broken open and then contained by a third, smaller vessel. This burial was uncovered in the paved doorway of Room P11 in Level I, underneath several large slabs of stone. It was just SW of Burial 58. Two adult skeletons were found within, along with a third adult skull. The grave was oriented SW-NE, with the heads of the occupants placed at the SW end. Both individuals were deposited in an extended position, the second largest vessel covering their torsos and their feet held in the smallest vessel. The legs of the westernmost occupant (A) were slightly bent, and the arms of both individuals were crossed. Occupant A faced W, Occupant B faced NE, and the disarticulated skull (C) faced E. Within Burial 59 was found a white frit perfume jar with green glaze, 27 beads of carnelian, agate, rock crystal, and paste – cylindrical, barrel, and spherical in shape.
Burial 60

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-96: Baghdad Museum – Black stone pendant, shape identical to B3-44. (27mm L) (Image A)

B3-308: Penn Museum, 33-4-141 – Flat-based bowl with uneven rim, ribbed carinated body. Heavily-tempered with chaff and grit inclusions. Poor craftsmanship. One main line of carination - the rest are incidental ridges made from wheelmaking process. Dull reddish-tan clay. (225mm D x 70mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 19] (Postgate et al. 1997 Pl. 29 #29) (Image B)
Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 60 was a single-jar grave found in Level IA, containing the remains of a single infant. The burial was oriented W-E, with the skull of the deceased at the W end. The infant was placed in a crouched position on its side, facing S. One bowl was found within the jar, containing a glazed frit bead (and other “ordinary” beads) and a flat rectangular diorite pendant.
Burial 61

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-364: Baghdad Museum – 31 small beads - mostly flat frit disks.

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 61 consisted of a double-jar grave containing the remains of one adult. This grave was uncovered as part of Level I in the S part of Room P11, oriented along one of the dividing walls running E-W. The burial was oriented W-E and the jars were placed on their side, but with a gap of space between them that left the torso of the deceased exposed. The deceased was laid on their side in an extended position with its head placed to the W and facing SW, with the left arm crossed over its torso and legs bent at the knees. 31 beads were found within the capsule burial.
Burial 62

[No burial illustration available]

Area: W7

Objects:

Unnumbered: 10 beads, 1 broken bead. [discarded]

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 62 was a single jar burial containing only the skull of an adult individual. This grave was found in Level II, in Room 74. The skull was placed upright within the jar and faced N. No evidence for burning or other remains was uncovered as part of Burial 62. One broken bead was found on the top of the skull, while 10 other beads were contained within the jar (probably as a necklace or disintegrated headdress).
Burial 63

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-334: Penn Museum, 33-4-149 – lopsided bowl, ring base, carinated body, lip folded and everted. Hairline cracks from drying or firing process. Greenish-white overfired clay color. Heavily-tempered with chaff and grit. Carination directly under rim. (240mm D x 79mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 22] (Postgate et al. 1997 Pls. 30 #38, 31 #67) (Image A)

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 63 consisted of a simple pit burial from Level IA, intersecting the W wall in Room 74 and between the floor levels of Level II and Level IA (the wall was rebuilt to be utilized once again in Level IA). The burial contained the remains of a single adult individual. The grave was oriented E-W, with the head of the deceased
placed at the E end. The deceased was laid in an extended position on their back, with arms bent at the elbows to rest the hands next to the dish laying on the corpse’s chest (probably originally holding this dish). The head of the deceased was turned to face N, and the lower jaw was drawn down at a right angle to the upper jaw. No objects besides the ceramic dish were found in Burial 63.
Burial 64

Area: W7

No objects

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 64 consisted of a double-jar capsule burial from Level IA placed in the S corner of Room 71, against both walls. The jars were placed mouth-to-mouth with no gap between them, and were oriented SE/NW. The remains of one infant was contained within the capsule, with the skull placed at the SE end. Burial 64 was located directly under Burial 65. No objects were found as part of Burial 64.
Burial 65

Area: W7

No objects

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 65 was a sherd grave located directly above Burial 64 and under Burial 10, and situated within the S corner of Room 71, from Level IA. The remains of one child were laid on two large halves of vessels which created the profile of a double-jar burial, but with an open top. Over the remains was laid a layer of smaller sherds, providing a cover over the child. The burial was oriented E-W, with the head of the deceased at the E and facing N. The corpse was laid in an extended position with knees slightly bent and arms crossed over the chest. No objects were found within Burial 65.
Burial 66

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-376: Penn Museum, 33-4-171 – Overfired greenware bowl with lopsided rim and sharp carination below rim. Basin is relatively shallow. Shallow ring base. Heavily-
tempered with chaff and few grit inclusions. Some cracks in bottom of basin from
drying/ firing process. (210mm D x 63mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 21] (Postgate et al. 1997
Pl. 31 #67) (Image A)

B3-370: Penn Museum, 33-4-168 – 2 bronze finger rings. (Image B)

**Date:** Level IA; late MA/ early NA

**Description:** Burial 66 contained the remains of a single adult individual within a simple
pit burial from Level IA. The burial was oriented E-W in the center of Room 70 (just S
of Burial 67), with the head of the corpse at the E end and facing NW. The deceased was
laid in an extended position, with the left arm placed so that the hand lay over the torso.
Two bronze rings were found near the hands, and one bowl of greenware was placed at
the left hip of the deceased.
Burial 67

Area: W7

Objects:

B3-349: 1 bronze ring, heavily corroded. [discarded] (Image A)

Unnumbered: Penn Museum, 33-4-157 – 10 paste beads, 1 green-glazed cylinder bead, 4 reddish stone beads, and 1 flat oblong white inlay bead.

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 67 consisted of a composite grave from Level II in Room 70 containing the remains of at least three individuals: one adult, one infant, and one skull. This grave was located just N of Burial 66. The burial itself was comprised of several
greenware jars and broken sherds to form a grave oriented E-W. The adult skeleton was oriented along this same axis, with the head to the E and facing upwards. The arms and knees of the adult skeleton were bent. The remains of the infant were laid in the W end of the burial, at the feet of the first individual. The bones of the infant were in disarray, and therefore it was impossible to tell the original placement and facing of the second individual. An additional adult skull was placed next to the bones of the infant, resting at the feet of the complete adult. The excavators did not record the direction that the skull faced. Within this complicated grave, only one bronze ring and 15 beads were found (10 paste beads, one green-glazed cylinder bead, four reddish stone beads, and one flat oblong white inlay bead).
Burial 68

Area: W7
Objects:

B3-332: Baghdad Museum – 2 anklets (?) of bronze with flattened overlapping ends. (332 in Image A)

B3-333: Baghdad Museum – Small jar with solid foot, globular body, short neck, everted rim, glazed. (100mm D x 100mm H) (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 115) (Image B)

B3-335: Penn Museum, 33-4-150 – Long, thick needle with ample threading hole (1.5mm wide). Eroded in some places - greenish surface with red patterns. (4.8mm D x 163mm L) (Image C)

B3-348: Baghdad Museum – 1 bronze bracelet; 1 earring of gold foil in crescent shape. (For parallel see 3-54) (Image D)

B3-354: Penn Museum, 33-4-160 – A small metal "tack" - one end is flat like a nail head, the metal attached to its back is ribbed and comes to a point. Possibly for securing pieces of leather or riveting metal? (8.3mm D x 14mm L) (Image E)

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 68 is a unique example at Tell Billa of a single bathtub coffin grave. This grave was part of Level I from Room P12 and contained the corpses of two adults. The coffin was oriented N-S, with the skulls of both occupants placed at the N end. Both individuals were placed in the same, crouched position on their right sides with knees bent and facing W. Many of the bones were broken or scattered. The objects included in this burial include one gold earring found close to the head of one of the occupants, one bronze bracelet, two bronze anklets, fragments of a bronze needle, and fragments of a ceramic “vial” and a nearly-complete small jar.
Burial 69

Area: W7

Objects:
B3-293: Baghdad Museum – 1 bronze finger ring;

Penn Museum, 33-4-183 – Wide variety of beads, mostly small and ovular (agate mostly, with some quartz and some dark stone – steatite(?) and a dark gray stone that looks like chert); 1 rosette bead made of paste or shell (originally Field No. B3-258), 1 large round bead with beveled edges made of limestone, 2 shell beads, 1 disc bead made of paste or shell. (Image A)

**Date:** Level I; NA

**Description:** Burial 69 was found as part of Level I from Room P12. It contained what the excavators termed a “mudbrick platform” which supported the skeleton of one adult individual from underneath. This falls into the mudbrick grave category, even though its unique structure should be noted. The “platform” measured 32cm by 60cm (with the lower portion worn away where the feet lay, meaning that its total length was more likely to be c. 80cm). The platform was raised by 13.86cm, and no other mudbrick walls or structures were recorded from this grave. The platform and corpse were oriented S-N, with the head of the deceased at the S end and facing N. The deceased was laid in an extended position on their back, with arms straight at their sides. Burial 69 contained 61 stone barrel-shaped beads, one cylindrical stone bead, three spherical stone beads, one green paste rosette, and three other beads. One bronze ring was also found in this grave.
Burial 70

**Area:** W7

**Objects:**

*Unnumbered:* “cigar-shaped” unbaked clay objects. *[discarded]*

**Date:** Level I; NA

**Description:** Burial 70 consists of a single-jar burial containing the remains of a single infant. The burial was found in Room P11 from Level I, set against the E wall. The pot was oriented on its side E-W, with the mouth opening towards the W and a lid laid over the rim, enclosing the contents. The bones of the infant were jumbled at the E part of the vessel. The excavators describe three “cigar-shaped” unbaked clay objects, which they theorize were likely toys of some sort. No other objects were found in Burial 70.
Area: W8

Objects:

B3-358: Penn Museum, 33-4-164 – Overfired jar with wide mouth and neck. Mouth and rim are everted, middle bulges slightly, ends in flat button base. Medium-tempered with chaff and some larger grit inclusions. Medium ware. Wheel marks
emphasized towards bottom in spiral pattern. Clay is whitish-yellow (not too overfired). (90mm D x 160mm H) [ERJ ill. no. 59] (Postgate et al. 1997 Pl. 72 #750) (Image A)

**Date:** Level II; MA

**Description:** Burial 71 was a simple pit burial from Level II in the Room 1A of House G, containing the remains of a single adult. The burial was oriented W-E, with the head of the deceased at the W end and facing upwards. The corpse was deposited in a slightly contracted position, with legs flexed and left arm bent so that the left hand rested over the heart. One small jar was found on the right side of the deceased’s skull with its mouth facing E.
Burial 72

Area: V6

No objects

Date: Level IA; late MA/ early NA

Description: Burial 72 was a pit burial covered with mudbrick, that falls into the mudbrick grave category. It was found as part of Level IA as part of either Room 50 or Room 48 (notes are unclear). The pit was dug oriented N-S, and five unbaked mudbricks were laid in a straight line over the body (each measuring 32cm x 32cm, and 11 cm wide). The single adult contained within was deposited in an extended position, with the head to the N. The arms and legs were extended (excavators noted that the long bones in the arms were broken), and the skull faced upwards. No objects were recovered from Burial 72.
Burial 73
Area: V8

Objects:

B3-194: Baghdad Museum – A scaraboid bead of white paste with minimal upper markings. Two crosses are incised on the base. (15mm W x 9mm L x 6mm H) (Image A)

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 73 was a double-jar burial which formed a complete capsule burial. This burial was found dug into Level II from Level I, and contained the remains of two adult individuals. The vessels themselves were placed mouth-to-mouth and oriented N-S,
with the southernmost vessel having an incised line decoration around the rim and the
northernmost vessel with an applique rope below the rim. The two individuals were
oriented with their heads to the N and were both laid on their sides in a semi-contrasted
position, facing W. Though the preservation was questionable, the arms of both
occupants seemed to have been crossed over their chests. A single scaraboid bead was
found within Burial 73.
Burial 74

break made when grave was dug

single layer of sherds

A

B

B3-043

B3-041
Area: V8

Objects:

B3-39: Baghdad Museum – 1 bronze finger ring.

B3-40: Penn Museum, 33-4-20 – Numerous discoid beads made of orangish material and covered in gray slip; very fragile, some have crumbled. (Image A)

B3-41: Baghdad Museum – 5 fluted paste beads. (Image B)

B3-42: Penn Museum, 33-4-21 – Shells pierced to make beads (they look somewhat like snail shells). (Image C)

B3-43: Penn Museum, 33-4-22 – 2 small squashed-spheroid beads made of white stone and pierced through middle. (6mm D x 10.5mm L) (Image D)

B3-48: beads [discarded?] (Image D)
B3-49: Penn Museum, 33-4-25 – Fragmentary cylinder seal (bottom and top edges have crumbled); pierced through, made of dark stone; depicting two animals, one mounting the other, with human figure to the side (head unpreserved); distinct linear patterns inside animals, small tree. (16.4mm D x 27.5mm L) (Image E)

B3-54: Baghdad Museum – earring of gold foil folded in crescent shape. Cross-section shows that foil edges do not quite meet. (20mm L) (Image F)

B3-57: buff jar. [discarded]

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 74 consists of a mudbrick grave from Level II containing the remains of one adult. It was dug in the SW corner of Room 17, oriented with the W wall. Several sherds were also found under the skeleton, possibly serving as a further bed on which the deceased was meant to rest. The burial was oriented E-W, with the head of the occupant at the E. The W portion of the burial was cut into and destroyed when Burial 75 was created in antiquity. The mudbrick walls measured 40 cm high, and the grave in total measured 30cm x 98cm. The deceased was deposited in an extended position on their back with arms laid straight at their sides. The skull of the deceased faced N. Within Burial 74 was found one bronze ring, 73 beads of varying types (including paste beads and others made of various stones), one gold earring, and 1 buffware jar.
Burial 75

Area: V8

Objects:
B3-37: Baghdad Museum – A cup of fine buff ware with a painted horizontal stripe just below the rim, button-based. (56mm D x 82mm H) (Postgate et al. 1997 Pl. 67, #656) (Image A)

B3-46: Penn Museum, 33-4-23 – A varied string of 61 beads with different types of stone and many different shapes. Most beads are tiny and spherical or discoid. Four spherical beads are of carnelian (roughly-hewn). One bead is in a modern “gear-shape” and is likely made of yellow frit. There is one rectangular stone bead (made of gray stone and domed on one side). One small bead looks like it was glazed blue, while a small tube-shaped bead is entirely blue and possibly stone. One bead is larger and rectangular, and seems to be etched bone (three raised lines cross it through its shortest width). A rounded rosette, possibly of steatite, was either a bead or a button. (Image B)

B3-47: 2 bronze rings, 2 bronze earrings. [discarded]

B3-55: Jar. [discarded]

B3-56: Jar. [discarded]

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 75 was a composite burial of mudbrick and multiple jars containing the remains of one adult and two infant skulls. It was found in Level I, cutting into Burial 74. It was a rectangular grave orientated SE-NW, and narrowed at the NW end. The grave was c. 50cm deep, with a shallower section 48cm long at the NW end, which is where the infant skulls were placed in a smaller vessel with the bottom broken out. The grave was covered by a layer of fragments of large jars, scattered irregularly but all with concave sides down. In the main part of the grave (measuring 170 cm in length by 77cm...
in width) the burial was capsule-like, with two large vessels facing each other and containing the remains of the adult occupant. At the long walls of the grave were bricks laid on edge, which held the vessels in position.

The adult skeleton was laid in an extended position with its head placed to the NW and facing upwards. The skeleton of an adult lay with the head in one vessel and with the feet in the other, with a gap of 80cm between the vessels which left the torso and upper legs of the deceased exposed. No objects were found with the adult occupant. In the NW end of the tomb, where the floor was 20cm higher than elsewhere, lay the upper part of a large jar placed with the mouth towards NW. In the jar were two skulls of infants, together with other bones. Near one of the skulls was a fine ware ceramic vessel with a painted dark band near the rim. Found in the jar were a pair of bronze earrings, two bronze rings, and 61 beads of various types. In the debris above the jar-fragments were beads of white paste & one of carnelian, fragments of a bronze ring and a rosette.
Burial 76

Area: V8

Objects:

B3-294: Tacks. *[discarded]* (Image A)
B3-298: Baghdad Museum – 2 bronze earrings; 1 bronze fibula with arched bow with collared bead on each arm; attached straight pin is of exploded metal. (Stronach 1959 II.4) (Image B)

B3-301: Baghdad Museum – Brown double-decker lamp with base of center post above rim of lower saucer. (105mm W x 110mm H) (For parallel see B3-16) [ill. nr. 72 in ERJ] (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 122 LD 2.2) (Image C)

B3-304: Baghdad Museum – Wide-mouthed jar of buff ware, ring based, everted neck with three ridges, rounded shoulder. (112mm D x 160mm H) (Hausleiter 2010 Taf. 84 BT 7.3) (Image D)

B-292: Penn Museum, 33-4-133 – Medium-long bone needle (broken in three pieces). (5mm W x 83.5mm L; threading hole 2.4mm W) (Image E)

**Date:** Level I; NA

**Description:** Burial 76 was found in Level I in the E part of Room P14. It consisted of a mudbrick “box” measuring 1/3rd of a meter in length, oriented E-W, which contained only a skull and a few grave goods. The skull was laid upright, resting on the mandible, facing E. Underneath the skull was a triangular piece of copper/ bronze (field notes unclear), and found within the jar were two bronze “tacks” with beads. To the E of the skull, there were a small jar of greenish-yellow ware and a double-decked lamp. A bronze fibula and two bronze earrings were also found within the grave, somewhere near the skull.
Burial 77

Area: V8

No objects

Date: Level II; MA

Description: Burial 77 was created with a mudbrick wall from Room 13a, an open courtyard, with a wall appropriated as one side of the grave, while the other three sides were newly-constructed with mudbrick. The burial hails from Level II, and is oriented N-S, with the deceased’s head to the N. The deceased faced W, and was placed in an extended position, with the left knee slightly bent to fit into the mudbrick enclosure. No objects were contained within Burial 77.
Burial 78

Area: V8

Objects:

B3-30: Baghdad Museum – 40 beads, “possibly glass”. (Image A)

Date: Level I; NA

Description: Burial 78 was located away from any architectural features within Level I. It is a capsule burial comprised of two jars containing the head and lower torso/legs of the deceased, which was a “half grown” child. The body was laid in extended position on its back, and was too long to be covered entirely by the two ceramic containers, leaving the chest exposed. The grave was oriented S-N, with the head pointing S. The direction that the head was facing was unable to be determined. Many white paste beads with a simple black decoration were found, of which about forty were unbroken.
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