

**Abdulla Al-Shorman and Ali Khwaileh**

## **BURIAL PRACTICES IN JORDAN FROM THE NATUFIANS TO THE PERSIANS**

Jordan, rich in archaeological sites and the related funerary attributes, has the potential to reconstruct the life of past societies and deduce burial practices that, in turn, may assist in understanding these societies and tracking the changes of social adjustments chronologically. This study utilizes archaeological reports and manuscripts to synthesize the social archaeology in Jordan from the Natufian period to the Persian. The study shows a prominent variability in burial practices over the various archaeological periods that were triggered by culture change, where the latter was imposed by the intertwined socio-political and environmental factors. The simplicity or complexity in burial practices followed those of the society itself, where burial types and practices started as simple during the Natufian period and gradually intensified and complicated in the latter periods.

Abdulla Al-Shorman, Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan; [alshorman@yu.edu.jo](mailto:alshorman@yu.edu.jo)

Ali Khwaileh, Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan; [khwaileh@yu.edu.jo](mailto:khwaileh@yu.edu.jo)

### **Introduction**

Studies on burial practices appeared in the early 19th century by Worsaae (1843) on the burial mounds of Denmark, and followed by Hertz (1907) in an attempt to understand social organizations of past communities but with speculations (Kroeber 1927). ‘Social persona’ in burial practices was then introduced, which is “a composite of social identities maintained in life and recognized as appropriate for consideration after death” (Binford 1971, 17), therefore, the form of burial practices may mirror the complexity of the society as later proposed by Tainter (1978). He proposed that a greater amount of energy were expended at the burials of the higher social ranking individuals and supported by Frankenstein and Rowlands (1978) that grave goods may symbolize authority and thus ranking. The spatial dimension in burial practices was researched as well; Coles and Harding (1979) inferred the clustering of the Early Bronze Age cemeteries in central Europe to kinship, while Pader (1980) focused on the spatial distribution of artefacts and skeletons within graves.

The school of thought of *evolutionism* viewed death and its attributes as evolving cultural elements, which include the people themselves in their successive generations and disposing of the dead is the responsibility of the new generation (Tylor 1871; Frazer 1924; Bartel 1982; Metcalf & Huntington 1991). The *sociological school* viewed death as a social process not as an event (Hertz 1960), and as a transitory life scheme of *rite de passage* (Van Gennep 1960). For example, an extended mourning period is an adjustment for the living (Bartel 1982, 38). According to *functionalism*, death and its composites have a function within the society. For example weeping sustained the social ties with the dead (Radcliff-Brown 1964, 117; Metcalf & Huntington 1991, 44), which is like many other funerary rituals that are invisible archaeologically (Morris 1987). *Symbolism* considers death as a symbol for the living (Charles 1995). Constructing a fancy tomb for one's relative is a symbol for the high status of the builder. On the other hand, *structuralism* possesses that burial practices are reflected in the same structure that is found in the material remains (Levi-Straus 1976). The 'New Archaeology' or *processualism* relies on the scientific approach in studying burial practices and, at the same time, studies burial practices cross-culturally to extract mortuary variability and their functions among groups (Trigger 1989, 302; Saxe 1970, 49). Contrary to processualism, *post-processualists* claim that doing archaeology scientifically is complicated. For example, Hodder (1987) used a contextual approach; when people act socially they necessarily do so within a framework of meaning which is historically constructed and relative.

It is substantial that each extinct society had its own circumstances surrounding burial practices even in the presence of similar practices spatially and chronologically. A single school of thought is unable to set the burial practices in a context that centred on the human behaviour divorced from the surrounding environment and/or the nature of the culture itself. The latter is very dynamic and subject to change. On the other hand, the material culture from mortuary sites does not necessarily represent the entire elements of the culture. The burial practices as approached lately by *processualists* (Carr 1995; Pearson 2000) presented a direct relationship of cause and effect between the social structure of the living and the spatial organization of the dead, which might not be the case in many societies (Larsson 2003). These thoughts may shore up explanations to a particular mortuary element, such as weeping over the dead by the functionalism, but could not be justified archaeologically. Burial practices are composites of intertwined natural and social elements but not to the degree that, for example, proponents of the middle-range theory may claim (cf. Binford 1973).

Although the area of modern day Jordan is very rich in funerary remains and artefacts, which provides an opportunity to study the past people's funerary rites and customs, no comprehensive study has been published to the day of writing this manuscript. Understanding the past involves reconstructing past societies and social practices in their totality; material culture should be placed in a social context. Studying burial practices approached by studying material culture helps in understanding the past societies. These kinds of studies are applicable in areas like

Jordan that witnessed continuous occupation from the Palaeolithic till modern times, coupled with the presence of thousands of archaeological sites and monuments. This synthesis tracks burial practices and their change during thousands of years of Jordan's history, and identifies the imposed factors on the above mentioned change as well.

### Methods

Burial practice studies have the potential to reconstruct past cultures, especially the social organization and the ritual elements. Counting on this assumption, the current study relied on published archaeological reports and manuscripts on the Jordanian archaeological sites that span the period from about 12,500 BC (the beginning of the Natufian period) to 332 BC (the end of the Iron Age) (Fig. 1).

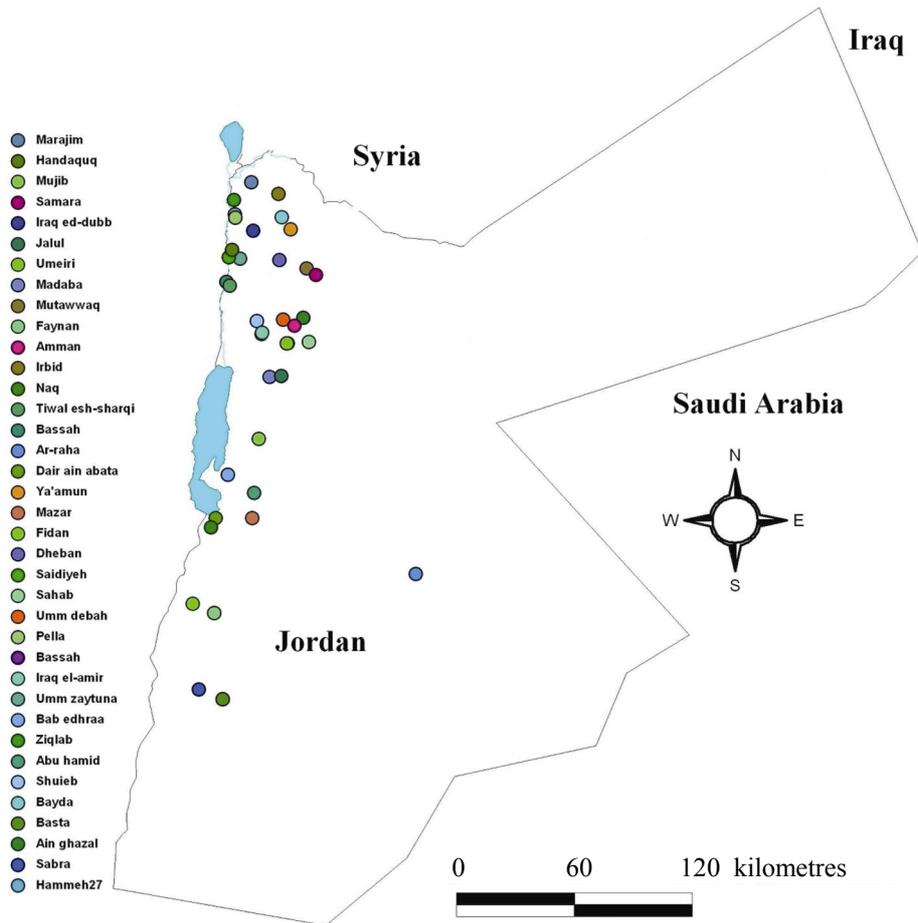


Fig. 1. The distribution area of the archaeological sites of the study.

The synthesis also utilized unpublished archaeological reports at the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology of the Yarmouk University, where a considerable number of excavations took place. Only the archaeological sites that revealed burials were included in the study. A database was created for all of the funerary sites in Jordan and structured according to the time period, tomb typology, tomb reuse, number of buried individuals, rock type, grave goods, spatial organization of burials, as well as demographic variables such as age and sex. Sites with speculative or undetermined dating were excluded from the study, on the other hand the selected sites were ensured to spatially cover most of the area of modern day Jordan for the purpose of including the environmental factors.

To understand the burial practices in ancient societies, a schematic approach (Fig. 2), as is the case in this synthesis, which divides and classifies certain natural and cultural elements of a given society into levels, blueprints the intentions hidden behind burial practices only if the practices are archaeologically detectable. The first level is the environment and the culture, where either of them may shape the burial practices; more weight is given to the environment especially in societies with limited resources bolstered by rugged topography. As for culture, four main sub-levels are identified: the first level includes myths and beliefs, subsistence economy, religion, and technology. Moving to the second level necessitates a transition in subsistence economy to a complex one (e.g. agriculture). The second level is social organization, culture change and the social persona. The third level is the politics of the dead like those of the Roman period. And the fourth level is symbolization where a society had to be a complex one to infer their burial practices according to symbolism.

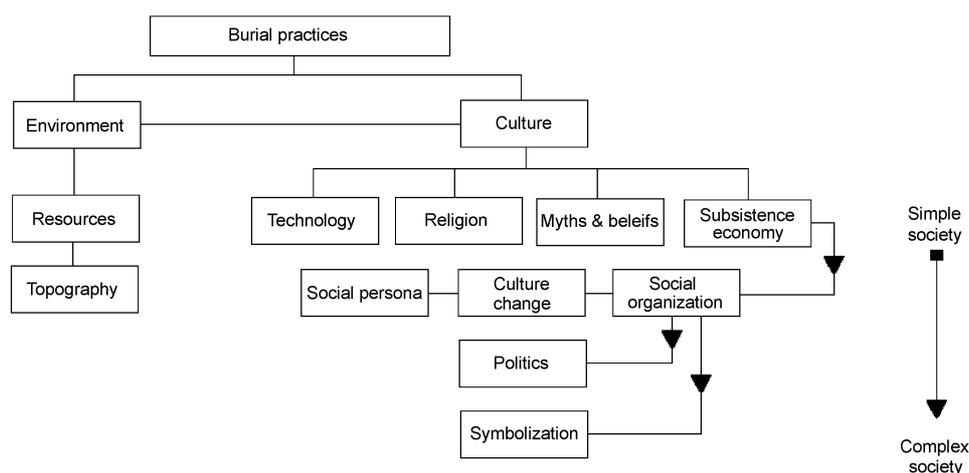


Fig. 2. The level approach to burial practices.

### *The Natufian burial practices (12,500–10,200 BC)*

The most preserved archaeological site for this period is Wadi Hammeh 27 (Webb & Edwards 2002). The cumulative mortuary data from both Jordan and Palestine indicates that the Natufian burials were pits found outside the living areas covered with limestone slabs (Belfer-Cohen & Hovers 1992). It was noticed that stones were found placed beneath the body or the head. The pits were either single or multiple (3 to 7 individuals), where the multiples have skeletons found either side by side or on top of each other's representing tomb reuse.

The Natufian society was egalitarian; at the transition period from hunting and gathering to farming, where wealth acquisition and ownership were at the very minimum levels. The earlier burials were ignored when establishing new ones and thus suggesting the absence of a formal area for disposing the dead, which would have been done in the presence of a legitimate group that arranged disposing or in the presence of ample natural resources. The latter suggestion is plausible because the population number during the Natufian period is expected to be low compared to the subsequent periods. The Natufians practiced decapitation indicating that this society practiced certain rituals but with a meaningful purpose that would have served their new transition to agriculturalists. The recovered tools from Wadi Hammeh 27 were very simple; mostly sickles made of stone flakes inserted in shafts of long bones. Consequently, their modest tools did not enable them to carve tombs in rocks. To overcome this restriction they utilized the naturally occurring stones in constructing burials besides pits. The uniformed similarity in graves as triggered by the modest tools did not permit elaborations in grave construction, where this kind of practices appeared only in stratified societies.

### *The Neolithic burial practices (8500–4300 BC)*

The Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) burials were similar to the Natufians being pits dug in soil as in Sabra (Finlayson et al. 2000), where the dead was placed in a flexed position (Kujit et al. 1991). The Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (MPPNB) revealed new types of burials as the case in Ain Ghazal: sub-floor, courtyard with intact skulls, courtyard decapitated and infant burials (Rollefson 1986; Simmons et al. 1990; Nessen et al. 1991) (Fig. 3). These places were interpreted as a representation of ancestor worship (Kenyon 1957).

The Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (LPPNB) had primary and later burials (Mahasneh 2001). Decapitation was very common and reported from many sites in Jordan and Palestine: Basta, Bayda, Jericho, Ain Ghazal, Wadi Shuieb, Abu Ghosh, Baysamun, Nahal Oren and Catal Huyuk (Kirkbride 1960, 40; Mellaart 1964, 64; 1970, 6; Perrot 1967, 267; Ferembach & Lechevallier 1973, 224; Noy et al. 1973, 79; Nessen et al. 1987, 95; Rollefson et al. 1989, 23; Simmons et al. 1989, 38; Bar-Yosef 1992, 25). Decapitation was practiced using two methods. The first is the decapitation before decomposition took place; the skull and the mandible are intact as well as a cervical vertebra, all in anatomical position. This



**Fig. 3.** A decapitated skeleton from Ain Ghazal in a flexed position. Photo courtesy by Professor Ziedan Kafafi.

method was reported from many LPPNB sites, such as, Jericho (Kenyon & Holland 1981) and Muraybat in the Euphrates Valley (Van Loon 1966; Ozbek 1976; Cauven 1978). The second method implies that the skull was removed from the burial after decomposition is completed; the mandible was missing as in Ain Ghazal, Basta, Jericho, Nahal Hemar, Tall Ramad, Cayonu and Hacilar (Bienert 1991, 19). It seems that the average age at death during the LPPNB (the site of As-Sifiya) was below 35 years probably triggered by certain ecological or physiological stresses. The recovered grave goods at the site include bone beads, sea shell beads and pendants, mineral beads and pendants both in male and female burials eliminating the Binford's dimension of sex.

The Pre-Pottery Neolithic C (PPNC) burials were simply burial pits that had witnessed multiple interments suggesting reuse. The tradition of decapitation was no longer in use during this time period suggesting a new phase of the Neolithic rituals. Sub-floor burials were continued till the Late Neolithic period but jar burials started to appear (stopped during the end of the Middle Bronze Age). Jar burials appeared during the Late Neolithic (Abu Hamid site), the other burials were found in flexed position (Simmons et al. 1989; Banning et al. 1996) beneath the floor of the rooms the (sites of Wadi Sh'eib and Wadi Ziqlab).

#### *The Chalcolithic burial practices (4300–3500 BC)*

During the Chalcolithic period, complex tombs and graves were not found. The common burials were tumuli and graves cut in soil but surrounded by field stones (Palumbo et al. 1996; Worschech 2000), cairns (Clark 1979), natural caves

(Rollefson & Kafafi 2001) and a dolmen in Al-Udhheimh (Neuville 1930). The Chalcolithic people had also used jars as burials as in Teleilat Ghassul (Mallon et al. 1934; Hennessy 1969; 1982) (Fig. 4). The associated pottery sherds recovered from these burials might have accompanied the dead for use in the afterlife. Adult burials were separated from sub-adults as evidenced by the absence of adult burials at Abu Hamid (Dollfus & Kafafi 1993) and the few burials at Teleilat Ghassul (Hennessy 1969). Sub-adults were mostly found buried in Jars (Fig. 5). It was suggested that the adult burials might be found outside the residential areas. Secondary burials were a distinctive feature for the Chalcolithic; the people were subsisting on animal husbandry and pastoralism and thus mobility was a necessity; they probably brought the dead back to their central places. Animal bones accompanied the dead in some cases probably to signify their importance among themselves as pastoralists; the Chalcolithic people were transhumance where animals were valued during life and probably at death. Grave goods were not abundant during this time period and at the same time of limited variety indicating a community that is not hierarchical.

There was no specific orientation for the dead during this time period. The secondary burial practice restricts generalizing statements about the position of the dead because bones were found disarticulated. The few recovered articulated skeletons from the Chalcolithic sites do not refer to a specific position. The scarcity in the presence of Chalcolithic burials is actually attributed to the absence of a formal area for disposing the dead during this time period; this actually reflects the abundance of resources and at the same time very large territories. It is also possible that the population number per territory during the Chalcolithic period was low and did not exceed the carrying capacity of land.



**Fig. 4.** A Chalcolithic jar burial from Teleilat Ghassul in Jordan. Photo by Yousef Alzou'bi.



**Fig. 5.** A Chalcolithic jar burial from Abu Hamid in Jordan. Photo by Yousef Alzou'bi.

Social groups that were frequently and continuously mobile tended to make best of their time in subsisting. Even in the presence of chiefdoms, they would have not expended a great deal of energy in constructing tombs. Consequently their burial practices tended to be simple at the minimum amount of energy expenditure, which was the case during the Chalcolithic period. Such small social units in pastoral societies, especially when they were away from the central camp, practiced those kinds of rituals and beliefs that did not consume a lot of time, and thus utilized the most available and rapid way of inhumation (like natural caves) but when they returned to their central camps, they would have had enough time to elaborate their burial practices; a matter that led them to adopt secondary burials. As the case in the Natufian and the Neolithic people, the Chalcolithic people were subordinate to the physical factors of nature. Their burial types were very simple and none of them were reported to be carved in rocks as their modest tools would have not endured.

#### *The Early Bronze Age burial practices (3500–2000 BC)*

Besides tumuli (Nicolle et al. 1999), dolmens (Ji 1998; Herr et al. 2001), natural caves (Marby 1988; El-Najjar et al. 2001), artificial caves (Hanbury-Tenison 1989), and cist graves surrounded by circular stones (Politis 1995)

sometimes plastered (Waheeb 1995), the Early Bronze Age I people had carved a few vertical shaft tombs for the first time in the history of Jordan as in Bab ed-Dhra (Schaub & Rast 1989; McCreery 1996) (Fig. 6). Vertical shaft tombs are carved vertical shafts that end in one or more burial chambers. Reed mats and textiles were placed under the deceased and also accompanied by objects that indicates certain professions or sex, such as the spindle whorls for females and daggers for males (Herr et al. 1996). Spindle whorls and daggers indicate that there was some kind of division of labour between males and females.

Unrobed tombs with disarticulated skeletons strongly indicate tomb reuse at this time period. Tomb reuse could be explained in two ways; a tomb might have been reused to bury a person who was related to those buried before, or it might have been used to save time and energy expended in carving new tombs. Some tombs have grave goods and neatly arranged skeletal materials (Bab ed-Dhra'), indicating a secondary burial (Loh & Ji 2000), where a working group might bring the dead back to the camp with them. The vertical shaft tombs were carved in soft limestone as in Iraq Al-Amir (Ji 1998), a rock type that their modest bronze tools could handle. This, in fact, could explain the absence of carved tombs during the Chalcolithic and the Neolithic period as mentioned previously.

The preceding period of the Early Bronze Age II–III (3050–2300 BC) has yielded very few tombs. The burials in Bab edh-Dhra' were found in rooms built of mud-bricks (Schaub & Rast 1989) (Fig. 7). The Early Bronze Age IV (2300–2000 BC) people had continued to carve vertical shaft tombs in marl and chalk



**Fig. 6.** A dolmen from North Jordan. Photo courtesy by Lamia Khouri.

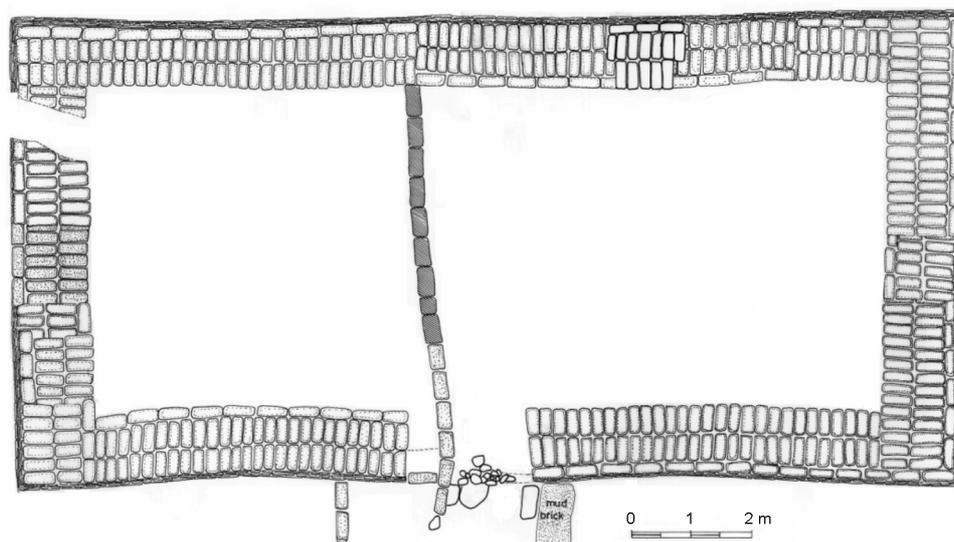
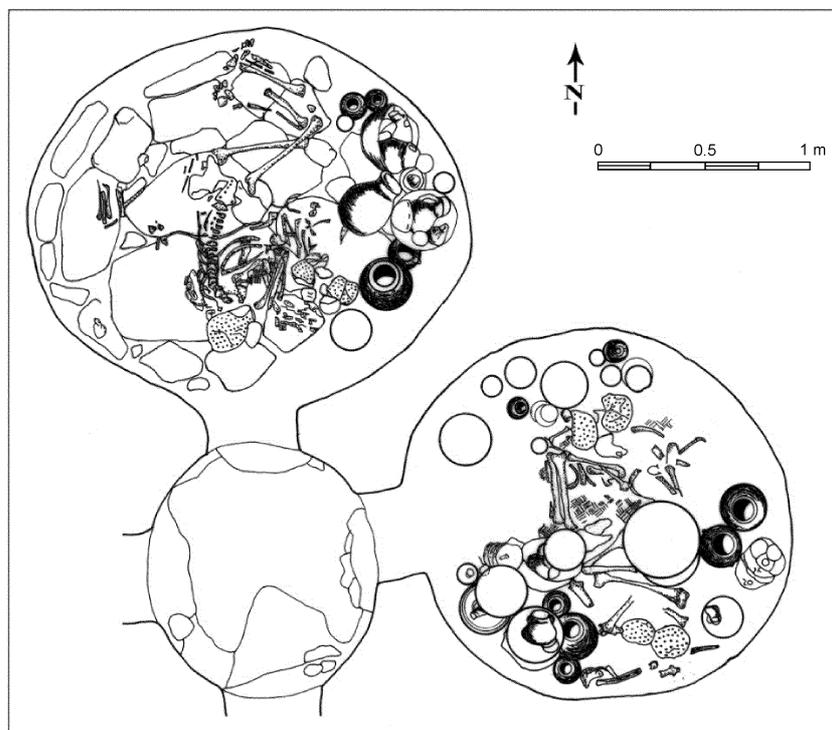


Fig. 7. Mud-brick charnel house from Bab edh-Dhra'. Drawing by Ali Omari.

layers (two soft and weak layers) besides other types as in Middle Bronze Age I including big jars (Waheeb & Palumbo 1994), such as Umm Zaytuna (Waheeb et al. 1994), Tiwal esh-Sharqi (Helms 1983), Al-Bassah (Waheeb & Palumbo 1994), Pella (Potts et al. 1985; Baker 1998) and Umm ed-Deba (Suleiman 1985) supporting the previous assumption regarding the rock type. The Early Bronze Age IV period is the first period to yield oil lamps from tombs (Waheeb & Palumbo 1993) as well as a variety of grave goods including stone beads, loop handled, amphoriskos, copper rivets, stone pendants, pottery sherds and funnels (Tubb 1985). According to Chesson (2001, 110) the ordering of skulls and long bones at Bab edh-Dhra' was a structured tradition to assert continuity with past generations. The Early Bronze Age tombs show men and women of various ages, children, and even some infants, gender did not seem to be a selected factor. Studies of Early Bronze Age burial patterns have concluded that tombs and cemeteries were organized by kinship ties (e.g. Bentley 1995; Chesson 1999, 155 ff.; Rast 1999, 171 ff.).

The grave goods during the Early Bronze Age were very simple and thus indicated a simple society with minimal if any hierarchies (Fig. 8). Cemeteries were more pronounced compared to the previous time periods in the form of many tombs or graves clustered together; this in turn (according to the 8th hypothesis of Saxe) emphasizes the role of landscape as crucial, probably arranged by a corporate group. The scarcity of Early Bronze Age burials might be attributed to burials that may have been simple affairs that left no remains for archaeologists to find (Ilan 1997). Lamps, in past and present, were used to light dark areas. The time



**Fig. 8.** Top plan of a vertical shaft tomb from Bab edh-Dhra'. Drawing by Ali Omari.

periods that preceded the Early Bronze Age IV witnessed few shaft tombs and most of the preceding tombs of other time periods were found in open areas (tumuli, dolmens, courtyards, soil pits) that required no lighting. So the use of lamps during the Early Bronze Age IV was exclusively for lighting the tomb's chamber while carrying out the inhumation not surmised by rituals. Also no correlation existed between the number of lamps and the number of skeletons recovered from these tombs.

Juvenile tomb typologies differ from adults probably because juveniles received little social recognition in the latter phases of the Early Bronze Age. Grave goods that were recovered mostly resemble those of the Early Bronze Age I. In Jericho and Tell Ajjul in Palestine disarticulation was noticed in many of the female tombs; this was interpreted as post-mortem treatment of the female bodies, it was also noticed that articulated skeletons were often accompanied by metal artefacts and belong to males (Baxevasi 1995). The burial practices during the Early Bronze Age indicate that people relied more on agriculture than pastoralism. This means that sedenterization was very prominent, allowing enough time to carve tombs in rocks. Also the better climate conditions may have increased their crop yields and thus more hierarchy in the community. This was probably what created the conspicuous variations in burial types.

*The Middle Bronze Age (2000–1500 BC)*

Cave chamber tombs (Ibrahim 1972; Potts et al. 1985; Mare 1991; Waheeb & Palumbo 1993; Herr et al. 1996; 1997; Waheeb 1997; El-Najjar et al. 2001), horizontal shaft tombs (Smith 1981), vertical shaft tombs (Dajani 1968), and cist burials (Walmsley et al. 1993) were the most common during the Middle Bronze Age. Artefacts (pottery and scarabs) referring to trade with Egypt were recovered from many tombs (Smith 1981) and probably refer to the higher social status of the people who would have afforded buying these objects. Tomb reuse was very common, as were multiple tombs (Ma'ayeh 1960; Zayadine 1973; Najjar 1992). These multiple or collective tombs were mostly family tombs, reflecting the type of families and residence during this time period. Families were probably extended with patrilocal residence.

Body ornaments were added to corpses extensively although it was first started during the Neolithic period. Also animal bones that may refer to certain rituals were found in some tombs; the presence of animal bones in the Middle Bronze Age tombs was not the dominant pattern and thus animal sacrifice is not suggested. People during this period had continued carving their tombs in softer rock types and for the first time in history they added two new tomb typologies, the rock cut graves and mud-brick constructed cists. Jar burials continued to be used for infants but to a lesser extent (Smith 1981). The variation in grave goods and tomb typologies indicates a society that was probably hierarchical.

The presence of toggle pins as grave goods indicates that the deceased was dressed in the same manner as in life. The objects that accompanied the deceased varied according to sex. There was no definite body orientation or position during this time period. No secondary burials were reported from Jordan belonging to this time period. The Middle Bronze Age people believed in the afterlife and probably believed that the dead may still feel during the time around inhumation and thus provided the burial with reed and fabric mats for comfort matters. There were no specific burials according to sex or age; the only dimension of the five posed by Binford (1971) is kinship. Thus the social status is not achieved through age or sex, but probably could have been achieved through the person's role during life.

*The Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BC)*

The relatively short period of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 350 years) with the absence of technological innovations have limited the diversity in burial practices compared to the preceding periods. Burial practices during the Late Bronze Age were very much like those of the Middle Bronze Age, but jar burials were not found except for one case (Tubb et al. 1996). Trade with Egypt was also represented in graves (Leonard 1985; Potts et al. 1985). The grave goods were very simple and not diverse, indicating a society that probably was not hierarchical as the Middle

Bronze Age. The Middle Bronze Age witnessed demographic instability represented by an extensive migration to nearby regions like Egypt leaving behind fragmented social groups and/or communities. The extended family was probably the main social unit as in the Middle Bronze Age. One of the intriguing mortuary behaviours during this time period is the transformation of dwelling areas into collective burials as in Cave C in Sahab (Dajani 1970; Gonen 1992); this is a very clear indication of a lower population number which was caused by migration. The only Late Bronze Age tomb that revealed diversity in the quantity and quality of artefacts is the one in Abilla (Mare 1991), which would place it among the wealthiest tombs of the Late Bronze Age.

There was a widespread use of Egyptian linen to bind and wrap the deceased as reported from Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Tubb 1995, 142 f.). Some of the foreign tomb typologies differ in their pattern from the general ones; they are explained as artefacts of the Egyptian administration (Gilmour 2002). Scarabs and other Egyptian pottery support this assumption. The site of Amman airport provided an evidence of human sacrifice, but the pattern is not there in other sites in Jordan or Palestine, the presence of burned human bones may indicate a fire and thus eliminating the possibility of sacrifice and cremation. The Late Bronze Age burials show no discrimination in sex or age. There was no specific position for the deceased or orientation of the burials. Softer rock types were preferred for tombs during this time period. Recent studies on the mortuary practices of the Middle and Late Bronze Age introduces evidence of personal tools that accompany the deceased, which differ according to sex. Some of these tools were the grinding stones, which were probably meant to be used in the afterlife.

One infant burial was found in jars during this time period, but this practice became widespread only toward the end of the Middle Bronze Age (Hallote 1994, 58). Ceramic vessels were the most common grave goods found in jar burials. Objects that were found inside jar burials (scarabs and jewellery) were talismanic in nature, intended to protect the infant (Bloch-Smith 1992, 65; Ilan 1997, 433), the fragmented and smaller objects might have been served as tokens (Nakhai et al. 1993, 1500). "These small grave goods do not seem to be indicative of an infant's status, wealth, or gender, and may have been interred as a small token of protection for the infant's journey to the afterlife" (Ebling 2002).

#### *The Iron Age (1200–332 BC)*

Plastered chamber tombs (Levy et al. 1999), cistern-like tombs with anthropoid clay coffins (Yassine 1975) (Fig. 9), jar burials (Ibrahim 1972), chamber tombs (Harding 1951) with anthropoid clay coffins (Stern 2001) and benches, and natural caves with built graves (Hadidi 1987) or sarcophagi (Yassine 1975) were the most common tomb typologies during the Iron Age. The Iron Age in Jordan represented the use of anthropoid clay coffins for the first and sole time in Jordan's history. Yassine (1975) categorized these coffins into four main types.



**Fig. 9.** Anthropoid clay coffins from Amman (<http://www.travelpod.com/s/photos/palace+hotel+in+amman>).

First, cylindrical coffins with lids modelled in high relief with crossed arms on the lid. This type was found in Lachish, Tell el-Far'ah and Bethshan in Palestine but not in Jordan and dated to the 13th–12th centuries BC. Second, cylindrical coffins with lids modelled in high relief and arms modelled at the sides of the body. This type was found in Sahab and the Royal palace in Jordan and dated to the 10th–9th centuries BC. Third: plain cylindrical coffins that were found in the Royal palace and dated to the 10th–7th centuries BC. Four: elongated boxes with rounded ends where the lid covering the whole box. This type was only found in Dhiban (a site that belonged the Kingdom of Moab) and dated to the 8th century BC. Similar anthropoid clay coffins were found in Egypt, which indicates the Egyptian influence over Jordan during the Iron Age.

Multiple burials were very common (Dajani 1964). The position of the dead was determined according to sex; males were in extended position and females were in flexed position. Grave goods also pointed to sex differentiation. Infants and young adults were not separated from adults and in many cases they were found in the same tomb; probably indicating no horizontal differentiation in the community but vertical differentiation as indicated by differences in grave good provision. Energy expenditure is very applicable to the Iron Age tombs especially when considering the anthropoid coffins. The presence of some figurines from the Iron Age tombs clearly connects the funerary customs with deities.

Rock type was not a determinant factor in selecting tomb location during this time period. Tombs carved in harder rock types, large boulders and quarries were very common. The Iron Age archaeological sites that are located far from the three main kingdoms Ammon, Moab and Edom show simplicity in burial types and more uniformity indicating simpler societies. These habitations were probably of lesser control by these kingdoms and of subsistence strategies that differ from

the central economy of the main government in these kingdoms as the case in Wadi Fidan. This leads us to conclude that the Iron Age in Jordan witnessed regional diversity in burial practices due to geographic isolation as imposed by different political systems. As there was political tension between the Iron Age kingdoms east of Jordan River and the kingdoms west of Jordan River, cultural exchange would have been at its minimal and thus there are differences in burial practices in these two regions; one of these examples is the differences in the types of the anthropoid clay coffins. Three skeletons from the Iron Age cemetery of Tell El Mazar exhibited trepanation, two of them in their skulls and one in the Tibia. These trepanations were probably performed around the time of death as there were no signs of healing around the circular surface of the holes (Yassine 1984). Trepanation might have been performed for the purpose of curing certain diseases or expelling spirits from the body.

In most of the archaeological sites that witnessed continuous occupation in Jordan, Iron Age burials were not found despite the presence of Iron Age artefacts. Ya'amun, for example, had been continuously occupied since the Early Bronze Age, where burials were found for various periods but not the Iron Age. The question posed by archaeologists is why there are no Iron Age burials at the site. The accumulation of the Iron Age artefacts is not too much compared to the other time periods indicating a short period of occupation and probably a lower population number. Besides the habit of tomb reuse during the Iron Age and the periods the followed, Iron Age tombs were melted in other period tombs and thus difficult to find. This assumption would be valid considering that the people during the Iron Age did not consider burying their dead outside the habitation boundary.

#### *The Persian period (539–332 BC)*

Few sites in Jordan have revealed burials of the Persian period; the site that has yielded many Persian burials is Tell al-Mazar. The Persians buried the deceased in isolated tombs and in cemeteries (Wolff 2002). Tomb typologies were pits, cist tombs, rock-cut tombs, chamber tombs, infant jar burials (only documented in Palestine), tumuli, ceramic coffins and shaft tombs. Tomb reuse was very common and interpreted as interring a new family member in the same tomb. No signs of cremation have been found in Jordan and Palestine. The burials during the Persian period were primary. There is no indication that the Zoroastrian custom of exposing the body and later collecting the bones was practiced, nor is there any evidence of ossuaries having been employed. The body orientation was east–west on a supine position with the arms on both sides, and the head at the eastern end. This may reflect a Phoenician belief; that is, facing the sea, which represents the main focus of Phoenician economic activity (Wolff 2002). Grave goods were very rare and did not reflect the social persona of the deceased and thus the social status.

### Summary and conclusions

Burial customs and consequently the social practices were very simple during the Natufian period as the society was simple as well. They moved towards higher levels of complexity as being part of the whole changing culture over the consecutive archaeological periods. Other than the internal factors that created culture change, such as subsistence economy, the political factors also played a major role; the trade with Egypt for example and their occupation of the region during the Bronze Age added new cultural dimensions that found a way into burial practices. Topography, rock type and the environment were determinant factors in burial practices especially in simpler societies. The accumulated data on burial practices in Jordan has established a link between wealth accumulation and consequently subsistence economy, and the amount of energy expenditure in burial practices. Burial practices are a by-product of many intertwined variables that cumulatively would have served a set of social systems with payoffs that sustained the subsistence economy.

From the Neolithic to the Persian period, people probably felt that death in one world was the beginning of life in another world. Consequently they either prepared the dead or buried him in a way that suited the afterlife circumstances. On the other hand, burial practices followed an evolutionary pattern, to some extent, throughout the history of mankind but were subordinate to nature, where the latter imposed some constraints on elaborations of these practices; especially when a society was not technologically advanced. Besides, cultural diffusion played its role in the addition of new practices that were previously not known, such as the case during the Iron Age in Jordan. Many of the cultural aspects of death cannot be archaeologically reconstructed including grief and mourning. However, many of the reconstructed burial practices here point to a society that maintained some sort of social ties with the dead, ancestor worship, or homage.

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### **Abdulla Al-Shorman ja Ali Khwaileh**

#### **MATMISVIISID JORDAANIAS NATUFILASTEST PÄRSLASTENI**

##### *Resüme*

Uurimuses on sünteesitud aegade jooksul kogunenud kirjandust Jordaania muististe kohta ja püütud rekonstrueerida matmisviiside arengut perioodil 12 500 – 332 eKr. Käsitlusviis on seejuures mitmekihiline, kuna matmisviis on tavaliselt inimkäitumise üks kõrvalprodukte, mida võivad mõjutada nii kultuurilised kui ka looduskeskkonna tingimused. Mõlemad on aga dünaamilised ja alid muutustele. Tundub tõenäoline, et kõrgemalt arenenud ja komplekssemate ühiskondade matmisviisid on olnud samuti mitmeotstarbelisemad.

Lisaks kultuurimuutusi põhjustanud sisemistele faktoritele, nagu elatusvahendite hankimine, on ka poliitilised arengud etendanud olulist rolli; kaubavahetus Egiptusega ja selle ekspansioon piirkonnas on näiteks pronksiajal lisanud matmisviisile mitmeid uusi jooni. Lihtsamates ühiskondades on aga matmistraditsioonides olulisel kohal olnud kalmete asukoht, kivimite (pinnase) liik ja keskkond. Matmisviis on paljude omavahel põimunud muutujate kõrvalsaaduseks: muutujate, mis kumulatiivselt on toetanud sotsiaalseid süsteeme ja pidanud ühtlasi ülal ka elatusvahendite hankimise viise.

Matmisviisid on teatud määral jälginud evolutsioonilist arengumustrit läbi kogu inimkonna ajaloo, kuid olid sõltuvuses loodusest, sest viimane seadis mõningaid piiranguid surmaga seotud praktikate väljaarendamisele, eriti tagasihoidlikuma tehnoloogiaga ühiskondades. Pealegi oli oma osa ka kultuuridifusioonil, lisades uusi, senitundmatuid tavasid, näiteks Jordaania rauaajal levinud inimkujulisi savikirste, mis sarnanesid Egiptuse omadega. Paljud matmisviisi elemendid osutavad ühiskonnale, mis pidas ülal teatud sotsiaalseid sidemeid surnutega ja esivanemakultust.