PERFORMING DEATH

SOCIAL ANALYSES OF FUNERARY TRADITIONS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND MEDITERRANEAN

edited by

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E36177. Egyptian, Relief from Funeral Stele, New Kingdom, Dynasty 19/20 (1306–1085 B.C.),
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

10

DEATH AND DISMEMBERMENT IN MESOPOTAMIA: DISCORPORATION BETWEEN THE BODY AND BODY POLITIC

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> "As for the grave: the hoe buries people,
> but dead people are also brought up from the ground by the hoe."
> — *The Song of the Hoe*, lines 74–75[1]

This contribution investigates funerary ritual not by looking at ideal or optimal prac-tice, but rather by looking into examples of its deliberate inversion or non-perfor-mance. It is argued that corpse abandonment and abuse were deployed as literary-his-torical motifs which primarily acted on (and thus reflect) Mesopotamian social anxi-eties about death and the body. The essay surveys two particular thematic "episodes" of corpse violation in royal literature (third-millennium burial mounds and the reper-toire of Neo-Assyrian corpse abuses) and makes a further assessment of the theme's position in other textual genres. Idealizing behaviors and cultural norms — even those concerning funerals, burials, and the dead — must always be considered in juxtaposi-tion with the undesirable (if mostly propagandistic) alternatives which gave them operational force.

Two very modern stories can be used to illustrate the arbitrary and socially-constructed na-ture of even the most sacrosanct cultural symbols, the treatment of the human corpse: In June of 1982, the American essayist Joan Didion was asked, in polite conversation with an aide to then-President of El Salvador, Alvaro Magaña: "Of course you have seen El Playón?" The aide extolled the virtues of the famous touristic site, a national park with breathtaking views of geo-logical and botanical wonders, without mentioning what both he and Didion knew was the real point of the question. From 1979 to 1981, the daily views to be taken in at El Playón included many of the 30,000-total bodies of death squad victims, dumped nightly following their extra-judicial murders, and left on view in the morning as political warnings by right-wing elements allied with the government.[2] The point was to display the bodies (fig. 10.1).

Only a few years earlier and half a world away, quite a different tack was taken in the discorporation of "undesirable" social elements: from 1975 to 1978 Cambodia's Khmer Rouge regime undertook the murder of hundreds of thousands of citizens. In this case, however, the program was effected through a "legal" process including police detention, interrogation (though without trial), sometimes written and photographic documentation of the "criminals," and finally execution by the state. Though the sites of these murders are now famous as "Kill-ing Fields," they were notionally secret under law. The now-familiar images of exhumed buri-als and towers of skulls erected *in memoriam* only became public *after* the fall of the regime, as monuments, memorials, and tourist stops. Thus, despite a scaffolding of legitimizing process, bodies were anonymously and hurriedly buried in mass graves at secluded, clandestine sites,

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[2] Didion 1983: esp. 14–21.

Figure 10.1. Skull of a Death-squad Victim, Left
Exposed; El Playón, El Salvador, 1982.
Photo Courtesy of Marcelo Montecino

Figure 10.2. Sign Marking the Site of One of
Almost 100 Mass Graves Used by the Khmer
Rouge in the Mid–Late 1970s; Siem Reap,
Cambodia. Photo Courtesy of Caleb Crane,
May 2006, http://www.flickr.com/photos/
simulacre/sets/

often located in former population centers that had been depopulated via mass evacuations.[3] The point was to hide the bodies (fig. 10.2).

In the case of El Salvador, legitimacy was beside the point and the display of the corpse was a grisly tool for political rhetoric; in the case of Cambodia, the machinery of death existed precisely to bolster claims of state legitimacy (though virtually all accusations of criminality were patently false), but its operation on bodies took place in secret prisons, camps, and killing fields.[4] It is by now well argued that the state's claim on the living body as an object of punishment deeply underlies political relations;[5] the state's claim on the *dead* body as a medium of political discourse is perhaps less well explicated. Yet in these cases we see two points somewhat at odds with each other. First, the "proper" treatment of the dead body in burial must be uncovered as a form which (like other cultural practices) derives its meaning and force not only through ideal observance, but also through social knowledge and fear of non-performance, denial, or inversion. Second (and simultaneously), violation of normal funerary practice, like

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[3] My thanks to Dr. Stephen Heder of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, for some clarifying language here; the legal applicability of the term "murder" in the case of the Khmer Rouge program is, he cautions me, still "a very open question."

[4] It is worth noting that both El Salvador and Cambodia observe a range of "normal" burial practices, including inhumation and cremation; it cannot be in doubt therefore that both exposure and mass burial were inversions of normal practice.

[5] Notably, Foucault 1977.

proper burial, is an ambivalent and changeable symbol, with a range of emphasis and importance within the rhetorical systems which construct them.

These points together present something of a conundrum, but they underlie my main argument: the importance of burial can be distinguished partly by looking at examples of its deliberate inversion (and the manipulation of the fear of inversion), yet burial must nevertheless be viewed as a categorical imperative secondary to the ongoing economic and ideological needs of living households. This latter opinion I have argued elsewhere,[6] and thus here abbreviate: it was the act of speaking the name of the dead and offerings of food (not body, grave, or funerary rite[7]) which were the *sine qua non* materials in rituals for the dead in ancient Mesopotamia. (This being the case, we must remain aware that the principal ritual symbols for household identity and historical knowledge are archaeologically invisible.[8])

My investigation is a reaction to this seminar's topic as implicitly privileging idealizing behaviors as culturally representative (through ancestor worship, *die Totenreligion, enterrement pieux*, etc.) in the face of much evidence for a wide variety of other treatments of the dead human body.[9] My method here is to focus on the most extreme examples of inversion in order to establish a bracketing antipode, but as Robb (this volume) suggests, the most difficult phenomena for analysis will remain those many intermediate data sets, distributed across the spectrum, in which evidence for "abbreviated" burials will be either lacking or obscured. Analysis of cultural forms must take into account not only the full range of attested treatments of the dead body, but also the function of the physical body as a symbol within a wider semiosis of rituals-of-death.

IDEAL AND INVERSION

Ritual performance of burial indeed aided the construction of social boundaries, but funerals did not limit their transformative effects to changing the "negative" event of death into a "positive" one, always and consistently affirming community ideals. As Pollock (1991) and others have argued, death is a "contested realm" (and not only for subjects, but for scholars, as well[10]). Social identity, therefore, is created not purely by the projection of perfecting ideologies, but also by their admonitory inversion. Cautionary examples and fears of non-performance reveal cultural anxieties and social differentiation, principally deployed in royal literature as claims which extended the authority of the state into the afterlife. In short, the concern

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[6] Richardson 1999–2001: esp. 172f.

[7] The greater archaeological visibility of these forms for elite household contexts discussed by Katz and Pollock (this volume) may tend to give a skewed view of graves as inherently important, where rather what we have left to us as evidence are mostly the more important (and exceptional) burials. I do not here undertake the question of whether or not burial was differently emphasized within Sumerian and Akkadian cultures as expressions of irreducible social authority.

[8] For the purposes of this argument, I adopt Brian Schmidt's (1996: 29–30) terminological structure of ritual evidence and behaviors relating to the dead: situational, regular (commemorative), and magical (or problem-solving) rites (typically to do with ghost-exorcism or necromancy). In Mesopotamia, body and grave were indeed optimal (but not necessary) elements for com-

memoration and remembrance. This clarification of the middling importance of the body is important for two reasons. First, terminologically, it asks us to consider more carefully what ritual actions are precisely funerary (i.e., human death, and the ensuing acts of body preparation, tomb building, and interment), and which are commemorative or magical. Second, and resultingly, we should re-direct our focus away from the liminal, transformational (and archaeologically dominant) events of death and burial, and toward the ongoing social claims of families about their dead.

[9] Other recent Assyriological work on the body has focused on questions of gender, eroticism, and/or medicine as primary subjects of interest.

[10] On the unbounded field of inquiry as a theoretical problem for the scholar, see Connor 1995.

for proper burial should also be illuminated by an examination of cases in which burial was flagrantly *not* performed. Our texts about burial already do not so much document practice as they project idealizing and normative precepts, and the exceptions are those instances in which they deal with deviations from the norm. This being the case, we are obligated to do more than look at burial as an "ideal type" purely upholding social inclusion, but also investigate instances in which the treatment of the body was intended to discorporate social elements through violations of burial: the display or exposure of the dead body, head, or (more rarely) other *pars pro toto*, without burial; corpse abuse and dismemberment;[11] corpse abandonment; burial-as-trophy; disinterment — all as acts establishing burial as meaningful through deliberate inversions.[12]

The wide variety of meanings mobilized in ancient literatures and practices by the corpse-abuse topos is evident at a glance. In the Greek epic, outrages upon the dead acted as devices to foreground the heroic exploits of others whose *élan* earned them "*la belle mort*."[13] In Roman literature, the display of the dead body of Lucretia rallied the citizens against tyranny, while the head and hands of Cicero (among others) were displayed in the Rostra as an enemy of the state.[14] Egyptian funerary practice incorporated dismemberment as part of a ritual cycle ultimately geared toward reintegrating the body through magic spells.[15] The Hebrew Bible introduces both narrative and metaphoric references to the display of the dead body or *pars pro toto*; segregated, prohibited, or deliberately abnormal burial; disposal by cannibalism or scavenging animals.[16] One can also find here an apotropaic use of corpse abuse, however, when human bones were used as ritual instruments to close off human contact with idolatrous cult places (Ezekiel 6:5, 2 Kings 23:14–16).[17] Every one of these uses, as circumstantially or formally different as they were, referred to some ideal or its opposite, and the variety of Mesopotamian cases are in this respect no different.

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[11] Although the physical dispersal of body parts was not an unusual feature of Mesopotamian battlefield accounts, they were rarely specific to already-dead bodies (compare with the First Geneva Convention, Article 15, which encourages the prevention of bodies "being despoiled"; and Third Geneva Convention, Article 120, which omits it); yet the conduct of "uncivilized" enemies was occasionally marked by these acts, for example, the Gutians in the "Uruk Lament" (Green 1984: 272, line 4.23) are charged with having torn apart corpses.

[12] These examples are themselves problematic, since "violence toward the dead — in the form of destructive acts committed on the corpse of the deceased — is not simply a permitted outlet for undifferentiated aggression, as Freudian interpretations would suggest, but can [as well] be understood as deeply motivated actions with a precise [reparative] psychological significance" (Stephen 1998: 405). Some cases of "corpse abuse" in other cultures (e.g., taboo violation, necrophagia, preservation of decapitated heads/skull fetishes) had purposes which were in fact socially therapeutic or magically protective rather than political statements about enemies and social membership (DeLeonardis 2000; Connor 1979).

[13] Vernant 1982: 71: "Par le thème de la mutilation des corps, l'épopée souligne la place et le statut exceptionnels de l'honneur héroïque, de la belle mort, de la gloi-

re impérissable …" It is unclear, it must be noted here, whether the Greek ritual form of *sparagmos*, only occasionally practiced on human beings, should be counted among abuses to the corpse per se — except in those cases where it is followed by *omophagia*.

[14] The ambivalence of these symbolates is captured by Plutarch's whimsical but fitting account in his *Cicero* XLIX 2: "Then [Antony] ordered the head and hands to be placed over the ships' beaks on the Rostra, a sight that made the Romans shudder, for they thought they saw there, not the face of Cicero, but an image of the soul of Antony."

[15] The removal of body organs during the embalming process was thus not purely mechanical, but meant to encode them as ritual instruments since "the *disiecta membra* of the corpse were identified with a plethora of gods…" (Powell 2007).

[16] Display: 1 Samuel 31:8–12, 2 Samuel 4:7–12; differential burial: Isaiah 14:20, Jeremiah 16:4, 22:19, Ezekiel 39:14–15; metaphoric body desecrations: Deuteronomy 28:53, Jeremiah 34:20, Psalms 79:2.

[17] Since corpse contact was abhorrent in the first place (e.g., Leviticus 21:11, to idolators and non-idolators alike), this device used a common-culture taboo to assert a specific religious one.

Since it is not my intention to present a *catalogue raisonné d'horreurs*, I illustrate these points first by discussing two of the most important episodes of *discorpora* found in royal inscriptions (the most explicit source type for our subject), and then turn to non-royal sources to indicate the broad cultural folkways from and against which those ideological statements derived their force. Royal inscriptions are the texts that are perhaps least representative of actual cultural practice, especially regarding social discorporation, since they make explicitly political claims. Yet they were also less conservative in deploying or contravening those practices as metaphors for their particular claims, and in this sense they amplify, rather than invent wholesale, the concerns of their audiences about the political community and its claims on the body; the non-royal sources thus reveal the anxieties upon which these claims capitalized.

The negative treatment of enemy bodies in royal inscriptions, we may take note, was a subject restricted to certain times and places: in lower Mesopotamia ca. 2500–1700 B.C. (via the theme of burial mounds for enemies) and in Middle and Neo-Assyrian inscriptions from the thirteenth to seventh centuries B.C. (in a variety of forms). These episodes were not, as perhaps superficially appearing, identical rhetorical symbols; the third-millennium references to burial mounds of enemies were markedly conflicted in their symbolism — were they victory markers[18] or proper burials of enemy dead? — in comparison to the lurid Neo-Assyrian accounts of corpse abuse. Further, between these cases lies the vast swath of the second millennium during most of which we find no lack of warfare, but a much more subdued rhetoric about the treatment of the enemy body.

BURIAL MOUNDS

A number of royal inscriptions from around 2500–1700 B.C. mention the construction of heaped-up burial mounds (Sumerian saḫar.du₆.tag₄, ki.gal, and zar; Akkadian *birūtum*,[19] *gurunnu*, and *damtum*) of enemy dead marking the conclusion of successful military campaigns. Ur-Nanše of Lagaš (r. ca. 2475 B.C.) was the earliest to claim the construction of such a mound:

> He (Ur-Nanše) defeated the leader of Umma. He captured Mu[…] the admiral?, captured Amabara(ge)si and Kišibgal the officers, [captured] Papursag, son of U'u, captured […] the officer, and he made a burial mound (for them) (Cooper 1986: 25).

Such brief descriptions have come to seem a very unambiguous hallmark of Mesopotamian triumphal rhetoric; it is therefore remarkable that the practice was restricted to thirteen instances which present no clear typology (see table 10.1). It is tempting to connect the appearance of the practice with a uniform, general rise of mass political violence, but too many important variables appear in their descriptions in the texts, terminology aside. In some cases, mounds were erected for only a few, elite, and specifically identified individual enemy leaders and officers; in others, masses of unnamed enemy dead (civil and/or military) are the recipients of this dubious honor.[20] In some instances, the tone is clearly celebratory, while in the Enmetena inci-

[18] Van Dijk 1983: 89, line 303, where Ninurta celebrates a victory over the burial mound of the Asag.

[19] CAD Š/1 s.v. *šapāku* v. 1 a-4′; cf. CAD B s.v. *birūtu* s. 1, "(a rare and poetic synonym for destruction) … [e.g.,] 'he (Rimuš) heaped destruction upon them (the defeated Elamites)'…" and CAD D s.v. *damtu* 1, also "destruction," in similar context. Both terms are considered by Westenholz (1970) to mean "burial mound," but it must be pointed out that the meaning of the term is not fully clear. The translation "burial mound" as a unitary and

identifiable cultural phenomenon throughout this essay derives from (a) context, and (b) the depiction on the Stele of the Vultures (where the term appearing is saḫar.du₆.tag₄,); see figure 10.3.

[20] Cooper 1986: 34, La 3.1: The promise given by Ningirsu in a dream to Eanatum that "the myriad corpses will reach the base of heaven" matches a new emphasis on a mass enemy, rather than the elite peer competition implied by Ur-Nanše's previous humiliation of specific enemy rulers and officers.

Table 10.1. Early Victory Burial Mounds: A Typology[a]

King	Victory Over	Burial Mound Term / For	Enemy	Site
Ur-Nanše	Ur (La 1.6)	**SAHAR.DU$_6$.TAG$_4$**[b] for named officers	Babylonian[c]	Unclear
Ur-Nanše	Umma (La 1.6)	**SAHAR.DU$_6$.TAG$_4$** for ruler and officers	Babylonian	Unclear
Eanatum[d]	Umma[e] (La 3.1, 3.5, 3.6)	**SAHAR.DU$_6$.TAG$_4$** "for Umma" (not ruler)	Babylonian	Fields(?)[f] (Twenty mounds)
Eanatum	Elam (La 3.5, 3.6)	**SAHAR.DU$_6$.TAG$_4$** "for Elam" (not ruler)	Non-Babylonian	[Not in Elam][g]
Eanatum	Urua (La 3.5, 3.6)	**SAHAR.DU$_6$.TAG$_4$** "for Urua" (incl. ruler)	Non-Babylonian[h]	Unclear
Enmetena[i]	Umma (La 5.1)	**SAHAR.DU$_6$.TAG$_4$** for sixty chariot teams	Babylonian	Battlefield (Five mounds)
Rimuš	Elam (RIME 2 1.2.6–8)	*birūtu* for king and officers	Non-Babylonian	Near City of Parahšum
Narām-Sîn	Unclear[j] (RIME 2 1.4.24)	**KI.GAL** for [unclear]	Non-Babylonian	Unclear
Narām-Sîn	Lullubum (RIME 2 1.4.31)	**KI.GAL** for "highlanders" (SA.DÚ-*i*)	Non-Babylonian	Unclear
Šulgi	Kimaš (RIME 3/2 1.2.33)	*birūtu* for [unclear]	Non-Babylonian	At City Moat(?)
Šu-Sîn	Simaški (RIME 3/2 1.4.3)	**ZAR** for "corpses of the people [Zabšali]"[k]	Non-Babylonian	Unclear
Iaḫdun-Līm	Samānum (RIME 4 6.8.2)	*gurunnu* for troops of Samānum coalition	Non-Babylonian	City of Samānum
Samsuiluna	Larsa (RIME 4 3.7.7)	*damtum* for Rim-Sîn (II)[l]	Babylonian	"in the land of Kiš"

[a] Data derive from: Early Dynastic: Steible 1982 and Cooper 1986; Akkadian: RIME 2; Ur III: RIME 3/2; Old Babylonian: RIME 4.

[b] The Early Dynastic instances are remarkable in their consistency: all are SAHAR.DU$_6$.TAG$_4$-bi / mu-dub (Steible 1982), inscriptions Urn. 51 (rev. col. 3:8–9 and col. 5:4–5), Ean. 1 (col. 11:14–15). Ean. 2 (col. 3:15–16, 21–22, 25–26), and Ent. 28 (col. 3:25–27).

[c] "Babylonian" here means "lower Mesopotamian" (i.e., "native" Mesopotamian); "Babylonian" is, per se, a geographic anachronism in cuneiform-writing antiquity.

[d] Eanatum's campaigns against seven other enemies did not result in the construction of burial mounds: Uruaz, Akšak, Ur, Uruk, Kiutu, Mišime, and Arua.

[e] La 3.1 (the "Stele of the Vultures") is the only known depiction of a burial mound (see fig. 10.3, detail): the reverse shows Lagašite soldiers bearing baskets of earth (much as for normal Mesopotamian building work), and enemy bodies heaped in a pile. The image of massed bodies is evocative of the compact phalanx of living bodies advancing above it, suggesting a grim input/output sensibility of mass warfare, which may have been new along with the non-elite burial mounds in this reign.

[f] The text may have meant to indicate a burial mound marking each one of the fields in contention (cols. xii–xiv); see Cooper 1986: 38 n. 18.

[g] Subsequent to the victory claim, La 3.5 records: "He [Eanatum] drove the Elamite back to his own land" (Cooper 1986: 42).

[h] Edzard, Farber, and Sollberger 1977: 180–81: "Der Ort wird immer im Zusammenhang mit elamischen ON genannt."

[i] Enmetena was at that time only the son of the ruler of Lagaš, Enanatum; cf. La. 9.3. The episode is not preserved in Eanatum's account (La 4.2).

[j] The Pir Hüseyn stele records a victory somewhere in the Upper Tigris region (RIME 2 128).

[k] ad$_6$-nam-lú-ùlu(GIŠGAL)-bi / zar-re-éš mu-du$_8$-du$_8$. The verbal clause /zar/ ("stack of sheaves") … /du$_8$/ ("to heap up") is unique among these allusions to burial mounds. Note in this case the differing treatment of kings, lords, and governors, bound and taken as prisoners.

[l] Compare the same inscription, lines 101–110: twenty-six other "rebel kings" were simply "killed"; Iluni, king of Ešnunna, was "led off in a neck-stock and had his throat cut." Compare RIME 4 3.7.8, lines 42–49, wherein the regular prisoners of war from the Ešnunna campaign were set free.

dent, the mound is erected as much to rectify the enemy leader's dereliction of duty for his own dead:

> Enmetena, beloved son of Enanatum, defeated him (Urluma, ruler of Umma). Urluma escaped, but was killed in Umma itself. He had abandoned sixty teams of asses at the bank of the Lumagirnunta-canal, and left the bones of their personnel strewn over the plain. He (Enmetena) made burial mounds in five places there for them (Cooper 1986: 55).

Within single Early Dynastic inscriptions, some of which summarize multiple victories, it is unclear why some defeated enemy kings were singled out for burial in a mound while others were not (e.g., Cooper 1986, La 3.5, 3.6). Also odd is the choice of Rimuš

Figure 10.3. Detail of the Construction of a Burial Mound after Battle. Verso, Stele of the Vultures. Drawing by Elizabeth Simpson, Courtesy Irene Winter (as appearing in Winter 1985)

to claim the erection of a burial mound only once, where he was not in other inscriptions too shy to have described killing tens of thousands of men in lower Mesopotamia. The location of mounds was also variable: sometimes at the battlefield, sometimes within view of cities, but most of the time unspecified. One possible trend that emerges, however, is that burial mounds were in almost all cases only constructed for non-Babylonian enemies following the Early Dynastic period (Samsuiluna's claim being the anomaly); the practice was perhaps now suitable only for foreign enemies.[21]

At least some of the mounds were piled up in borderlands already peppered with inscribed monuments (if we may trust their descriptions), displays for both gods and humans. Their verticality on the flat plain must have made them stand out sharply, resembling the ruin mounds of abandoned tells (see fig. 10.3[22]). Among the built monuments of the floodplain, these found company among other historical symbols on view to audiences. Yet, with no clear correspondence of whether the occupants of these "anti-burials" were elite peers or mass dead, whether the mounds themselves constituted completed curse formulae, marked property, asserted political claims,[23] and/or conformed to pietistic behaviors, we are presented with a pastiche of messages which probably should only be harmonized insofar as recognizing that they accommodated multiple political needs. Burial mounds stigmatized the enemy as the "Other," but simultaneously permitted victors to assert claims about legitimate ownership and civilized practice by speaking through a medium of normative burial.[24]

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[21] Conversely, "piled-up corpses" then became a signature of barbarisms perpetrated by Gutians on Mesopotamians: "The Lament for Ur," lines 212ff. (Jacobsen 1987: 460) and "The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur," lines 93–94 (Michalowski 1989, with corpses "[floating] in the Euphrates").

[22] The basket carriers here are figures evoking, in inverted or parodic context, the construction of cities. Figure 10.3 is reproduced from E. Simpson's line-drawing as it appears in Winter 1985: 16, fig. 8.

[23] See, for example, the Laws of Hammurabi, lines l 92–li 23 (Roth 1995: 139) and discussion by Westenholz 1970: 30.

[24] Compare with the clear indication from a Mari letter that the burial *damtum* could be considered an honored place by local nomadic tribes, marking their ancestral territory (Westenholz 1970: 28).

Though dead enemy bodies were subject to abuses other than burial mounds, much more emphasis in text and image remained on the body of the still-living enemy. Even in Akkadian monuments, the most explicit in terms of early depictions of graphic violence, when the execution of depicted captives was virtually certain, the preferred depiction was of bound and captive bodies. Battlefield scenes in Akkadian monuments display almost ritualistic executions of enemy soldiers, but few actual dead bodies. Telling is Rimuš's metaphorical use of the term "annihilation" in describing enemies expelled from rebel cities: he gave body counts of the killed and the captured, but those whom he "expelled" (*ušuṣiamma*) were also said to be those whom he "annihilated" (*ana karašîm iškūn*) since they were no longer part of the city-state's body politic. In this sense, it mattered less whether enemies were rendered (and displayed as) physically dead, and more whether or not they were resident in the urban commune.[25] The later royal rhetoric of the Old Babylonian period then showed virtually no interest in chest-beating about the disposal of big piles of enemy bodies, an unsurprising absence of claims on the body given that political rhetoric at this time was more geared toward persuasion. In sum, the conspicuous display of dead bodies in this era was both atypical and restricted to a few heterogeneous situations. It was, altogether, a lesser symbol in a political vocabulary which ultimately preferred other symbols of domination than control of the body.

ASSYRIAN CORPSE ABUSE

Not until the rise of Middle and Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions do we again find a literature employing corpse abuse as a statement of power. Historians of the ancient Near East hardly need to be introduced to the parade of ghastliness here: enemy bodies displayed as stacks of severed heads, skulls, or heaped-up piles of unburied bodies; impaled on poles; as flayed skins hanged over city walls; corpses burned to deny burial; severed heads hung on trees surrounding defeated cities.[26] Here, enemies degrade their own bodies by inviting mercy killings;[27] ritualized executions fulfill curse formulae; the dead are trampled by their fleeing comrades; corpses of deposed rulers are cast into the streets and dragged around the city.[28] The methodical ritualism in these displays is evident in their most baroque variations-on-theme, as with Aššurnaṣirpal II's treatment of rebels from the city Sūru, a veritable confection of gore: "I erected a pile [of corpses] in front of his gate, I flayed as many nobles as had rebelled against me (and) draped their skins over the pile; some I spread out within the pile, some I erected on stakes upon the pile, (and) some I placed on stakes around the pile."[29] In the course of this inscription (one of the lengthiest), Aššurnaṣirpal II records six instances in which enemy dead were decapitated (the heads then arrayed in piles, hanged from trees, or decorating a palace

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[25] For example, RIME 2 1.2.2 and passim in Rimuš inscriptions. Similarly, see the transferred meanings of *mītu* "dead," CAD M/2 143 usage e, as metaphors for political powerlessness of individuals and political units. Compare Gelb 1973: 73–74, who understood the event described as "gathering enemy males … and putting them to the sword at some place within the territory of the conquered cities," with reference to burial mounds.

[26] The violation of burial norms is best compared against the honorific state burials for (representative) Assyrian soldiers described, e.g., in the "Letter to Aššur" inscriptions of Šalmaneser IV (RIMA 3 105.3), Sargon II, and Esarhaddon (Borger 1956: § 68 "Der 'Gottesbrief,'" 102–

07). These ritual burials seem to have served a similar cultural position as the American Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the paradigmatic "Honored Dead."

[27] Borger 1996: 59, Prism A VII 28–37, the suicide pact of Nabû-bēl-šumāti; Curtis and Reade 1995: 77 and pictured detail, "a wounded Elamite calls to an Assyrian to cut off his head"; cf. Bahrani 2004: 116 on epigraphs 1 and 3.

[28] Borger 1996: 35, Prism A III 6–9ff.

[29] RIMA 2 101.1 i.89–90; compare the very specific schedule of five separate "treatments" for 174 men captured alive in RIMA 2 101.21 13'–15'.

courtyard),[30] four episodes of impaling,[31] and one each of burning alive and flaying a city-ruler.[32] In these messages, there can be no doubt that the royal punishments went beyond the threat of what merely could be visited on the living body, but also on the dead one.

Reprisals against the dead first became a feature of Assyrian royal inscriptions in the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I (r. 1243–1207 B.C.), including piles of corpses[33] and enemies burned by fire;[34] piles of severed heads beginning with Tiglath-pileser I (r. 1114–1076 B.C.);[35] flayings and impalings beginning with Aššur-bēl-kala (r. 1073–1056 B.C.).[36] These motifs remained, with minor variation, the full repertoire of Assyrian violence against the dead until Sennacherib's description of the battle of Ḫalulê (691 B.C.) ushered in a new growth of literary creativity: the severing of penises, hands, and testicles ("like the seeds of cucumbers") from dead enemies, the trampling of corpses by fleeing leaders.[37] Esarhaddon after him not only beheaded the kings of Kundi and Sidon, but hung "the heads of Sanduarri and of Abdi-Milkutti … around the necks of their nobles and I marched (them) through the public square of Nineveh with singers and harps."[38]

Yet it is really in the inscriptions of Aššurbanipal that this assemblage of motifs widens most dramatically. His inscriptions dispense with metaphors of animal butchery and take up literalism: enemies were executed not only "like pigs," but upon actual slaughtering tables (giš.*makāṣu*).[39] The Assyrian war machine produces the consumption of bodies in perverse ways: two episodes relate the starvation of enemies to the point of devouring the bodies of their children or each other;[40] the dismembered bodies of Šamaš-šūm-ukīn's palace household are "fed to the dogs, swine, wolves, and eagles, to the birds of heaven, and the fish of the deep."[41] Aššurbanipal's wars are pursued to the brink of the Netherworld: enemy bones are spread to encircle Babylon, surrounding the city's outskirts (*kamâtu*); the sepulchres of the

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[30] RIMA 2 101.1 i.64, i.118, ii.18–19, ii.71–72 (in this instance, twenty more bodies were "spread out" to decorate the palace walls, *ina* ŠU DIB-*ta ina* BÀD É.GAL-*šú ú-ma-gi-gi*; see CAD Ṣ s.v. *ṣabātu* v. 8 sub. *qātu* e), ii.107–09 (where the bodies of the decapitated are burned), iii.106.

[31] All restricted to column iii: RIMA 2 101.1 iii.33, .84, .106, .111–12; the intent of impaling is made clear by Tiglath-pileser III: "I impaled him … and exposed him before his countrymen" (Tadmor 1994: 160–61).

[32] RIMA 2 101.1 i.111 and i.67–68, respectively.

[33] RIMA 1 78.1 ii.16; Šalmaneser I's slightly earlier (77.1 line 103) reference to strewn enemy corpses not only serves a different rhetorical function, but also does not show the concerted action of heaped-up corpses.

[34] RIMA 1 78.1 iii.44: burning by fire secured not only the physical death of enemies, but also pursued their destruction into the afterlife by making burial impossible (CAD Q s.v. *qalû* v., passim, noting the variety of ritual uses, but especially TuL 145:27 sub. 2c): "be it the ghost of someone who was burned to death").

[35] RIMA 2 87.1 line 81, "[I] stacked them (i.e., heads) like grain piles (*kima karē*)." The observation by Dolce (2004: 121) that Aššunaṣirpal II was "the first Neo-Assyrian sovereign to introduce themes of defeated enemies as beheaded corpses ignores the earlier Middle Assyrian pedigree of this practice.

[36] RIMA 2 89.1 line 7′; 89.2 iii.12′ and 89.5 16′. One might, however, usefully distinguish between this earlier practice of flaying enemy rulers and the later Sargonid flaying (and impaling) of entire enemy populations (e.g., Borger 1996: 23, Prism B II 1–2).

[37] OIP 2 46 vi:11–12; in his Nebi Yunus inscription, Sennacherib also claimed to have forced Merodach-baladan to flee with the bones of his fathers across the "Bitter Sea," where he died (OIP 2 85 b, lines 7–11).

[38] Borger 1956: 50 A iii 32, 37 (cf. CAD R s.v. *ribītu* A s. d); note also 57–58 A iv 6, that Esarhaddon in some cases expressly neglected the burial of enemy warriors: this pointed gesture suggests that burial of enemy dead was in other cases considered normal practice (see also RIMA 2 102.2 ii.100f.) and abuses thus were exceptional, purposive messages.

[39] Borger 1996: 108, Prism B VI 87–89, on Dunanu, the Gambulu prince. Animal similes otherwise pervade Sargonid punishments: the Arab king Uaite' has his jaw pierced so that he can be chained and kept in a kennel at Nineveh like a dog (Borger 1996: 68–69, Prism A IX 106–11; see also CAD Š/1 s.v. *šaḫû* s. 1 b, kings captured by Esarhaddon and tied up "with a bear, a dog, and a pig" (literal) and "like a pig" (metaphoric).

[40] Borger 1996, all Prism A: in Babylon: 43, IV 44–45, and 63, VIII 35–37; in Arabia: 67, IX 57–59.

[41] Borger 1996: 44–45, Prism A IV 73–76; to vultures/jackals see CAD Z s.v. *zību* s. a.

Elamite kings are exposed, their bones seized as prizes of war, and eternal restlessness laid on their ghosts.[42] The bones of Nabû-šūm-erēš, the governor of Nippur, were brought from Gambulu territory to be ground into powder inside the gate of Nineveh.[43] The corpse of Nabû-bēl-šumāti was originally packed in salt for transport to Nineveh,[44] and the head of Teumman, most famously depicted hanging in Aššurbanipal's garden, did not arrive there until it had first been paraded through all the Assyrian cities.[45] In forcing the brother of Nabû-bēl-šumāti to wear the dead king's head around his neck for display, he said of that corpse: "I made him more dead than he was before."[46]

　　While attention to these features suggests a tinge of credulity for propagandistic claims, by far the most typical question asked is nevertheless (simply and simplistically) whether or not they were actually carried out, namely, the historicity of these claims. Several features of Assyrian royal inscriptions could indeed be marshalled to argue that these abuses were very real: the restriction of the claims to specific instances within the context of longer narratives otherwise devoid of atrocities; their application to specific persons or small groups (marking them as exemplary, but real); the variations in staging for display (gates, interiors, different cities, on parade), suggesting response to specific audiences; to say nothing of more believable reportage in Neo-Assyrian letters.[47] There is also the possible example of the jumbled mass (re-)burials of 1,500+ bodies from Lachish, which some have argued to be the result of Sennacherib's siege and subsequent punishments in 701 B.C.[48] One is left, however, with the possibility that these specifications and variances were marked merely on the rhetorical level, a grammar of violence meant principally to persuade and assure Assyrian (rather than terrorize subject) audiences, not to document practice. These persuasions were not merely normalizing, but eroticized and titillating, inviting participation through a "pornography of violence." Lincoln (2007) has recently described a similar aestheticization of violence in the Achaemenid (as well as modern American) empire:[49]

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[42] CAD E s.v. *eṣemtu* s. usage b; Borger 1996: 55, Prism A VI 70–76.

[43] Borger 1996: 108, Prism B VI 97–VII 2.

[44] Borger 1996: 59–60, Prism A VII 39–45.

[45] Borger 1996: 106, Prism B VI 52–55ff., entering Nineveh; CT XXXV 31, 36, Teumman's head on the road to, and entering, Arbela; for other "parades," see also Borger 1996: 108, Prism B VI 90–92, the butchered "flesh" (UZU) of the Gambulu princes paraded throughout Assyria *ana tāmarti mātitan*, "for viewing in all lands"; cf. 37 Prism B IV 16–17, submission of an enemy head to Aššurbanipal by vassals.

[46] Borger 1996: 60, Prism A VII 46–50.

[47] Reynolds 2003: nos. 148 and 170 both report impalings of criminals in quite matter-of-fact tones; it must be admitted, however, that such references seem few and far between. Albenda (1970) previously argued that the technical and compositional developments in the depictions of nude captives being flayed demonstrated first-hand familiarity with the procedure. Yet indeed, with the amount of scholarship committed to re-imagining the brutal, coercive power of early (non-literate) pristine states, it sometimes seems remarkable that the textual evidence for mass political violence of first-millennium empires is so interrogated for veracity!

[48] Tufnell 1953: Tombs 107–08, 116, and 120: 187–08, 190, 193–04 and pl. 4. Most of the remains in these tombs were secondary reburials; Tomb 107 and 120 in particular revealed a top layer of animal (mostly pig) bones over the human ones; the visible violence to the bones included only burning, though purposeful decapitation may remain a possible construal of the many disassociated skulls. It is not a necessary deduction that the bones were the direct result of Assyrian violence; both the original and later excavators (Ussishkin 2004: 92–95) seem to incline to the idea that the reburials were a reconsequence of the rebuilding phase that followed, which entailed the clearing out of older cemeteries. Punishments depicted in Sennacherib's palatial reliefs included impalings, flayings, and only possibly beheadings (Russell 1991: 204–06, Slabs 7 and 9–10).

[49] Assyriological attention to the question of audience for palatial reliefs has generally been directed toward the subjects, at the expense of Assyrian audiences. Bersani and Dutoit already twenty years ago (1985: esp. 52–56) argued for a primary function of violence in the reliefs as normalizing and propagandizing the Assyrian elites through its eroticism. These elites, after all, were the ones who were expected to participate in and reproduce violent control from the center on a regular basis. An-

> What we see here is the way moral depravity and moral confidence (or the simulacrum thereof) are dialectically related: how they produce and reproduce each other through a variety of discourses …, all of which help relieve the leaders and foot soldiers of empire from those inconvenient reservations and qualms that might otherwise inhibit their effective, relatively guilt-free exercise of the brutish and brutalizing power necessary for the conquest and maintenance of empire.

What is further remarkable then, is that, as a grammar, the symbols (severed heads, flayed skins, impaled figures) do not display a coherent relationship to other Assyrian ritual systems. Insofar as they bespeak ritual action, they seem neither to be the performance of curse formulae (which in general prescribe fates on living kings and lands that require them to be alive to suffer them[50]), nor magical rituals of execration.[51] Only among Sargonid documents does one begin to find florid corpse abuses encoded among curse formulae, in Esarhaddon's succession treaty[52] and among some land grants.[53] By this late date, these acts seem either a reflection and amplification of a pre-existing political rhetoric, or the creation of an altogether different level of mantic communication. Otherwise, one thinks of a purely political communicative system, of analogies about control and ownership — flaying "like sheep," slaughtering "like lambs" — under which the bodies of docile vassals were reduced to objects for use, decoration, even amusement. This language of control was meant to indoctrinate Assyrian elites through a normalization of violence. From this point of view, the earlier burial mounds and Neo-Assyrian reliefs could not be more different, in that they are pointed toward entirely different audiences: in the first place, the conquered; in the second, the conquerors.

A. Westenholz (1970) long ago struggled to explain the change in mistreatment of corpses between third- and first-millennium contexts. His partial explanation was that fear of the dead motivated victorious kings; the proximity of warring states in city-state times meant that roving ghosts would remain physically proximate and thus needed to be buried for the protection of the victors (though this seems unlikely for the long-distance campaigns of Rimuš, Narām-Sîn, Šulgi, and Samsuiluna). Westenholz's idea for the first millennium was that corpses could be abandoned because the dead were left so far away from Assyria and Assyrians. A friendly amendment to this idea: not only corpse distance but corpse *dispersal* reveals the political sym-

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other point of view is offered by Bahrani's (2004) work on images of the head of Teumman; she sees depictions of violence as performative rather than mimetic; the realism of the images was primarily meant to evoke "the effect of the real," rather than create an accurate historical record as such.

[50] Such curses in royal inscriptions, however, are normally directed at desecrators of the relevant monument, inscription, or building — not at enemies (my thanks to Anna Steinhelper for this observation). The few allusions to enemies turned into ghosts are found in royal epithets, e.g., Erība-Adad II's epithet (RIMA 2 90.1 lines 9–10), "[who] has turned his dangerous enemies into ghosts like reeds in a tempest"; similarly, Tiglath-pileser III Summary Inscription 1 line 2 (Tadmor 1994: 122–23). Compare Cogan (1983: 756 and n. 14). Curse formulae anticipating violations of the corpse were in general of Babylonian origin.

[51] Bahrani (2004) has argued that the episode of Teumman's head (in both text and image) functions as an ani-

mistic and mantic, rather than mimetic, representation, as the fulfillment of an oracle. The episode, however, is rather different from the more general practice of severing heads (or depiction thereof). Reade 2005: 19–22 has offered that a mocking, parodic element may also reside in certain corpse-abuse images (e.g., a game of catch played with enemy heads in an Aššurnaṣirpal II relief), but it is difficult to see these "jokes" as ritualistic, per se.

[52] Parpola and Watanabe 1988: no. 6, line 440: "… instead of grain, may your sons and your daughters grind your bones"; line 481: "that dogs and swine will drag penises and teats through the streets, the dead finding their burial in those animals' bellies"; line 637: "may your bones never come together."

[53] Kataja and Whiting 1995: nos. 25–26, 31, 33–34: "may the dogs tear apart his corpse as it lies unburied." Some of these clauses were almost certainly the basis for later enactments by Aššurbanipal.

bolism at work. In Neo-Assyrian representation, the physical dispersement of corpses across the pictorial space was prefigured in texts as early as Šalmaneser I,[54] describing enemy corpses covering wide plains, ravines, wadis, ditches, city streets and squares, filling entire valleys[55] — like *ašagu*-shrub in the desert, like herds of cattle after a plague. Corpses are carried away by rivers (as early as Tiglath-pileser I[56]), they "cover the surface of the sea" (Šalmaneser III[57]), are even piled up to the edge of the sea (Sargon II[58]). In two cases (Šalmaneser III, Aššurbanipal), the king claims to have dammed major rivers (the Orontes, the Ulai) with corpses.[59] Human blood dyes rivers, fields, mountains, the sea, and even flows through mountain creek beds and city-streets "like a river." In several cases, the land itself — the mountains, deserts, and rivers — is said to have "consumed" (>*akālu* "to eat") the enemy dead. The corpses are strewn about by a "high wind," a "deluge," a "circle of standstorms" — all similes naturalizing Assyrian dominion by inscribing it in the terrain.

By these means — and in contrast to the verticality of the third-millennium burial mound, which mimicked the city as the emblem of the fortified city-state (see again fig. 10.3, noting the obvious parody of city-building via the presence of basket carriers) — the horizontal dispersement of enemy corpses across Neo-Assyrian battlefields was a rhetorical means of naturalizing dead enemies as the emblem of an extensive imperial landscape. These vertical versus horizontal displays of "anti-burial" were metonymic for conquered states: mounds for city-states, fields of dead for empires, representing the social discorporation of political communities as a whole. Naturalizing both enemy and imperium in this way removed both from the scope of mere human politics and history and re-inscribed them as eternal verities, re-enactments of an unquestionable Assyrian order.

CORPSE ABUSE IN OTHER LITERATURES

Violation of normative Mesopotamian funerary practice in political literature was just one among a repertoire of rhetorical instruments, with little to suggest that actual violations were at all common. That is, despite the number and variety of violations, many more victories were documented without claims of abuse. Yet if actual and practiced "anti-burials" are not reflected in abundance outside of royal inscriptions, a plentitude of sources — of many types, from all periods — show that those rhetorical statements about corpse abuse would have activated deep, widespread anxieties about abuse of the dead body. Fear of non-burial was a pre-eminent concern for Mesopotamians, and the incidence of statements expressing such fears (i.e., the inversion of normative depositional practice for corpses) in fact far outstrips those promoting or documenting normative behavior.[60]

For one thing, corpse abuse and display were among the sanctions of the legal apparatus, although specific prohibitions against burial per se are extremely rare (indeed, as rare as prescribed methods and agents of execution of a living person).[61] One of the most explicit attach-

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[54] RIMA 1 77.1 103–04, "I filled the extensive countryside with the corpses of their warriors"; examples of this motif are too numerous throughout Assyrian royal inscriptions to warrant citation.

[55] RIMA 2 101.1 ii.83–84, in Zamua: bodies were piled up "between Mount Aziru and the River Turnat."

[56] RIMA 1 87.1 ii.23–24.

[57] RIMA 3 102.28 44.

[58] Fuchs 1994: 65, 304, lines 33–34, a campaign against Dūr-Yakin: "der die Leichen seiner Kämpfer im flachen

Land (am Ufer) des meeres zu Haufen schichtete."

[59] RIMA 3 102.2 ii.100f.; Borger 1996: 104, Prism B V 97–99.

[60] Note generally the high incidence of attestations for the verb "to bury the dead" (CAD Q s.v. *qebēru* v. 1 b) which refer to non-performance.

[61] Whitman (1995: 46–49, 82–84) took up the difficult question of the relationship between legal protections against mutilation, death penalties, and posthumous mutilation. In the present context, it seems relevant to observe

es to the dead and impaled female body, prescribed once in the Laws of Hammurabi (LH ¶153, for the killing of a husband in favor of a lover), and once in the Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL A ¶53, for [self-]performance of abortion). In both cases, the body is impaled and displayed, but only in the latter case is an actual burial prohibition spelled out.[62] Two other Old Babylonian laws identify the open hanging or impaled body of a criminal as punishment: breaking and entering a house (LH ¶21), or aiding and abetting the theft of a slave by knowingly shaving off a hairlock (LH ¶227), would result in the thief or barber, respectively, being killed and then hanged in the breached wall or household doorway. Other displays were probably occasionally effected as well — a Mari letter calls for the execution of a criminal and the display of his head "from city to city" on parade[63] — but in virtually every law which carries the penalty of death, the ultimate fate of the body is unspecified, along with much of the rest of the procedural information. One assumes that the almost complete legal indifference of the judicial authority to the body meant that its disposal was a matter normally left to the family or household.[64]

Where fear of non-burial shows up, rather, is across a wide spectrum of literary and epistolary material. These arrive as early as the third-millennium proverb collections:

> SP 18 13: "A slave entrusted with a burial will be negligent."[65]
> UET 6/2 299: "A man who does not worship his god is thrown into the desert; his
> body is not buried, his son does not provide his ghost with drinking water
> through his libation pipe."[66]

Omen literature similarly reflects the concern: a dream omen indicates sex with a corpse as a violation of taboo,[67] and the ominous appearance of a corpse at the door or gate, deposited by an enemy or a lion, perhaps echoes the Old Babylonian law establishing doorways as places for corpse display.[68] More common were worries and fears expressed about corpse abandonment and exposure resulting in the devouring of the dead body by dogs, lions, pigs, jackals, or other animals. In some instances, these motifs appear as epithets expressing the fearsome power of gods, monsters, and heroes,[69] in others they are punishments (e.g., in curse formulae of oaths

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that Whitman's doubts about the state's putative origins as the regulator of "primitive vengeance orders" via monopoly are echoed in some historic states' perpetuation of mutilation against the dead as a proprietary right.

[62] Abbreviations here follow Roth 1995 unless otherwise stated; note also the Old Babylonian letter which parodies corpse display, in which a man complains: "Hang me on a peg, dismember me, but I will not stay married to that woman!" (CAD P s.v. *pagrum* s.). Compare LH Epilogue lines l 92–li 23: "… May the goddess Ištar … make a heap of the corpses of his soldiers upon the plain, and may she show his soldiers no mercy" (not, as Westenholz [1970: 30] gives: "his troops should not be granted any burial"). See also the Neo-Babylonian burial prohibitions in curse formulae, in CAD Š/1 s.v. *šalamtum* s. usage c.

[63] CAD D s.v. *dâku* v. 2 b-2′; note also AbB 13 60, an Old Babylonian letter describing a plot of rebels who had sworn to "fill the bank of the Euphrates with skulls …." Severed heads/skulls throughout the history of Mesopotamian literature are most typical of all body parts to act as an index for the (unburied) body.

[64] *Pace* Westenholz (1970), who operates under the assumption that burial prohibitions like MAL A ¶53 were

the norm rather than the exception.

[65] Translation ETCSL, t.6.1.18; Alster (1997: 242) is less certain of the meaning: [s]ag ki tùm á-ág-gá še ba-e-da-e-⌈še?⌉ "He who is entrusted with a burial, will … barley …."

[66] Alster 1997: 316.

[67] Geller 1997: 2, citing Oppenheim 1956: 290–91, who was not yet clear on the ideographic value of UM as "to have sex": "the indications concerning the usage of UM in these omina are … insufficient to determine to what aspect of behavior this verb belongs."

[68] Jeyes 1989: 128, no. 7 13′ (*pagrum*). To be clear, however, though there are many apodoses predicting death, mention of the corpse, burial, funeral, etc. are generally absent from at least Jeyes' corpus; see, however, no. 19 lines 8–10 and note p. 186.

[69] For example, Gilgameš and Huwawa A 98–106 (ETCSL 1.1.1.5): Huwawa is like "a lion eating a corpse, he never wipes away the blood"; in "Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave" (Black 1998: 177), Enmerkar's warlike demeanor earns him the simile that he is "like a dog eating a corpse" (line 58); of Inanna: "That you devour cadavers like a dog — be it known!" ("The Exaltation of Inanna," line 128; translation W. W. Hallo [COS I.160]).

and treaties, "your burial place [*naqbaru*] shall be in the bellies of dogs and pigs," etc.[70]). Few sources suggest that these were normal occurrences, but the fear was real and ambient: one letter of an indebted man from sixth-century Ur prays, *in extremis*, "let the dogs not eat what is left of my body and the bodies of my family,"[71] and a variety of similar general statements and personal names (e.g., *Ša-pī-kalbi*) reflect a fear of street animals as not only killers but corpse devourers. These expressions all reflect what would have been unusual circumstances, but the diffusion of the motif throughout many genres and periods reflects a very real social anxiety rooted not so much in afterlife punishments or fate as a roving ghost, but in the neglect or absence of a family to carry on a living household.[72] As with the many expressions of concern about unburied persons who produce harmful ghosts, these fears are centered on the poverty or dissolution of the living family.[73]

Disposal of the corpse in the river is another common fear motif; again the indications are found first in early proverb collections (e.g., "a huge river is a grave"[74]), court literary letters in Sumerian ("Let my bones not be carried off by water to a foreign city"[75]), and a variety of literary historical works. "The Lament for Sumer and Ur" lists "corpses floating in the Euphrates" among the signs of Nanna's abandonment of Ur; one Babylonian chronicle tells of Marduk consigning Utuḫegal's corpse to the Euphrates as punishment for his "criminal designs" (*lemuttu*) on Babylon; another juxtaposes swamp burial for usurper kings with (proper) burial in a palace.[76]

Some ambivalence about this method of disposal, however, must also be noted; a Mari letter describes an episode within which the body is, with little remark, buried in the Ḫabur River (with a wide range of options for burial of the head from which to choose):

> … and they searched, but they did not see his body. And I heard the following: 'They buried his body in clothes and left it for the Habur [River].' Now, I did not find his body. And his head is in Qaṭṭunān. Is his head to be buried? And in which city is it to be buried? And where is it to be buried: is it to be buried outside or inside the city? And when we bury it, are we to bury it in outstretched position? (ARM 6 37 r. 2′–14′).[77]

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[70] See footnote 52 above; CAD N/1 s.v. *naqbaru* s.; Grayson 1975: Chron. 20 A 30 (Marduk's vengeance on Šulgi [for "criminal tendencies," *lemuttu*] enacted by *something* consuming his body); and Lambert 1960: 197 14, on the boast of the Dog (in a fable) describing his corpse-devouring prowess (but compare against, ibid., p. 149 in "The Dialogue of Pessimism," line 77, wherein the motif of exposed skulls on ruined mounds serves as a *memento mori*).

[71] UET 4 190:14 (NB); a similar, but earlier, Old Babylonian letter (AbB 14 135) seems to express the fear that creditors will actually repossess any unburied family dead! See also CAD K s.v. *kalbu* s. 1a.

[72] It is unclear whether or how any ancient Mesopotamian municipality would have dealt with the problem of unclaimed dead or abandoned corpses in the event of a household's failure to perform its duty (beyond permitting animal devourment or riverine deposition). At least one astronomical omen predicts that an epidemic will result in the dead going unburied (among other literary tableaux depicting mass unburied dead, e.g., YOS 10 24:34), and most medical texts reflect no provisions for corpse disposal as an anti-epidemiological measure (Scurlock and Andersen 2005); for some evidence in fa-

vor of sanitary measures against contagion from dead bodies, see Farber 2004.

[73] Note the juxtaposition of honored versus abandoned dead in Gilgameš' inquiries of Enkidu about whom he saw in the Netherworld (Foster 2001: 138–42); see, for instance, Jeyes 1989: 135 No. 91.13′, the liver omen "[If …] they will carry the head of the leader (as a trophy)."

[74] Alster 1997, SP F 2: íd-maḫ ki-maḫ-àm.

[75] Letter from Inim-Enlil (ETCSL 3.3.27).

[76] Michalowski 1989: 42–43, line 94 ("There were corpses floating in the Euphrates …"); Grayson 1975, Chron. 19 l. 62 and Chron. 18 v 5–6; see also Šulgi E 220–39 (ETCSL 2.4.2.05), referring to corpses filling the reedbeds and "crannies" of rebel lands.

[77] Translation after Heimpel 2003: 487; cf. CAD Q s.v. *qebēru* v. 1b (negated use — note also other references there); his assumption was that riverine burial was an "unceremonious dumping." Heimpel had earlier argued (1996) that CAD's translation of *ina terṣim* "in the regular way" (after Kupper 1954, "dans la règle"), and Durand's later (1997: 326–37) "de façon détournée" mistook the distinction being made of a "round hole" for the head versus a hole for the full shape of the body (i.e., "outstretched position").

Clearly the burial options were far from perfect at this point — and some scholarly disagreement has obtained as to the precise meaning of the practices in question — but the fact that four questions of procedure were worth discussing by letter, while the head waited by patiently, indicates that each choice meant something, marked some particular social signal. These signals were not "natural" and known to all, but had in extreme cases to be negotiated and coordinated; simply because the situation was not perfect does not mean that some attempt was not being made to mitigate the imperfections.[78] Another case: Gilgameš, describing to Utu the distress of his city, says resignedly:

> I raised my head on the rampart, my gaze fell on a corpse drifting down the river,
> afloat on the water: I too shall become like that, just so shall I be!

Gilgameš' complaint here is about mortality in general, not proper funerary procedure: in no way does the narrative indicate that the presence of bodies in the river is unusual.[79] Riverine burial was perhaps less prestigious, but withal an acceptable and practiced method of burial. We might think not only about variability of practice on the level of social class, but also about individual choice making about burial, for which Mesopotamian letters are a further, rich source: an Assyrian letter directs a man to indicate his preference for a burial spot; in a Neo-Babylonian letter, a man wonders, resignedly and rhetorically, where his grave would eventually be; a Middle Babylonian letter glumly notes that the burial of a man in another city was purely circumstantial, he having died there.[80]

What is little anticipated in models of optimal burial — and in the variety of anti-burial — is the degree of (socially normative) variation and (individual and agentive) choice in method of burial. Clearly there were ideas about what forms of burial were insufficient, hostile, punitive — if also infrequent, exceptional, and notional. None of these concatenations requires us to conclude that sufficient and honorific burial was exercised as a unitary, ideal type. Between ideational extremes, there was both variety of practice — household, cemetery, tomb burials (even contemporaneously) — and also social choice making, elements of variability that have already been identified for the Ur cemetery by Pollock (1991). Any argument reifying an ideal type of burial from either literary or archaeological sources will be perpetually stymied by this aspect of variability, further aggravated by Robb's (this volume) observation that "abbreviated" burials (e.g., riverine burial) were likely the most common, and yet the most invisible in the archaeological record.

This brief survey suggests that the original conundrum — burial's secondary importance, and the sustained but low-level evidence for failure to bury, or for outright corpse abuse or display — implies that the body and its sanctity in death could be violated, but the intersect of concern for proper burial and fear of improper burial was secondary in the system of Mesopotamian of sociocultural concerns. Mesopotamians were most critically concerned not with the dead themselves, but with the ambivalent complex of problems and opportunities they presented for the living: for the economic well-being of the estate, the ritual protection of the household by the honored dead, and the claim of social identity in the perpetuation of the name of the dead.

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[78] It is worth remembering that the head belonged to Qarni-Lim who was, after all, for the most part an ally of Zimri-Lim, whose agent Baḫdi-Lim now writes with these questions. Literary references to corpse disposal in rivers are otherwise widely attested; see also Piotr Steinkeller's response to Pollock (1991: 187). It is my assumption that the function of the rolled reed mat in the case of ARM 6 37 was to help prevent a corpse in a river from bloating and rising to the surface.

[79] George 1999: 151, Bilgames and Huwawa, Version A, lines 25–27.

[80] References in CAD Q s.v. *qebēru* v. 1: ADD 647 r. 22; BE 14 8:15; CT 54 1 r. 10.

ABBREVIATIONS

AbB	Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung
ADD	C. H. W. Johns, *Assyrian Deeds and Documents* (ADD 1182–1281 pub. in AJSL 42 170ff. and 228ff.)
ARM	Archives Royales de Mari (1–10 = TCL 22–31; 14, 18, 19, 21 = Textes cunéiformes de Mari 1–3, 5)
BE	Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cuneiform Texts
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. A. Leo Oppenheim et al., eds. Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1956–
COS	Hallo and Younger 2003
CT	Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets
Ean.	Eanatum
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature: http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk
LH	Laws of Hammurabi
MAL	Middle Assyrian Laws
NB	Neo-Babylonian
OB	Old Babylonian
OIP 2	Luckenbill 1924
r.	reign
RIMA 1	Grayson 1987
RIMA 2	Grayson 1991
RIMA 3	Grayson 1996
RIME 2	Frayne 1993
RIME 3/2	Frayne 1997
RIME 4	Frayne 1990
SP	Sumerian Proverbs
TuL	E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1931
UET	Ur Excavations, Texts
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Researches

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