



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Curating the Dead in the Ancient Levant

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Abstract

Despite the frequent occurrence of reopened burials, collective graves, and commingling skeletal remains in the Levant in antiquity, little attention has been paid to grave reuse from perspectives of memory construction, assemblage theory, and community building. To address these issues, this paper focuses on the transformative processes of adding, subtracting, breaking, and disturbing of burial assemblages within commingling and reused grave contexts. Moving away from the “funeral kit” as a fixed set of object types, this paper draws on assemblage theory, applied to examples from the 2nd-1st millennium, to consider burial assemblages as dynamic and accumulative collections. These repositories could shift in meaning as ordinary materials were placed within new funerary contexts. Although these finds are often studied in isolation, the rich and complex taphonomic records of reopened burials demonstrate that the composition and function of burial contents could continue to be manipulated over long spans of time. This paper argues that practices of (re)assembling the dead and their curated assemblages could serve social and ritual goals such as creating long-term memory communities. They also drew on experimental concepts of postmortem embodiment, corporeality, and materiality that blurred the boundaries of these categories in the realm of death and burial.

Keywords

Mortuary archaeology, Levant, Assemblage theory, Memory, Collective burials

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