

PORTER, B.J., and A.T. BOUTIN (eds.) — *Remembering the Dead in the Ancient Near East. Recent Contributions from Bioarchaeology and Mortuary Archaeology*. University of Colorado Press, Boulder, 2014. (23,5 cm, XV, 261). ISBN 978-1-60732-324-2. \$ 70.00.

Remembering the Dead in the Ancient Near East is an edited volume that has developed out of an SAA session that occurred in 2011. The contributors include predominantly younger scholars based in the USA, many of whom are bioarchaeologists, as well as a few, mostly senior, archaeologists. This is an interesting mix of scholars for an interpretive volume on burial practices in the ancient Near East, given that bioarchaeologists are only exceptionally part of such studies in the discipline.

The book consists of an introduction by the editors, Benjamin W. Porter and Alexis T. Boutin, as well as six chapters that deal with burials contexts from across the Near East, with examples from Turkey, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt, and dating from the Neolithic to the Iron Age. Thus, the question arises: what do these chapters have in common, apart from that they are all concerned with burials from ancient Near East? The editors provide two elements that, according to them, bring the case studies together.

The first is a call for a more integrated study of ancient burial practices, in which bioarchaeological, archaeological, iconographic, and textual evidence are all combined in order to achieve a more complete understanding of ancient burial practices. Such an approach is laudable, of course, and I will assess how successful this book has been in this aim of integrating various types of knowledge on ancient burial practices. However, one can also ask how accurate the editors' characterization of Near Eastern archaeology as being deficient in integrative studies of ancient burials really is. Collections such as those by Campbell and Green (1995); Laneri (2008) Weeks (2010) do integrate a lot of knowledge on ancient burial practices, even if not all studies contain a bioarchaeological component. It is therefore odd that Porter and Boutin do not discuss these earlier volumes at all in their introduction, and how this volume adds to and differs from existing scholarship.

The second means of integrating the various studies is conceptual rather than methodological. The chapters in the volume all approach burial practices as events in which memories were constructed and manipulated. This perspective relies heavily on Connerton (1989) who focused on the construction of social memories, meaning how societies rework and foreground particular aspects of their history through commemorations and the construction of monuments. While this work has been very influential in archaeological studies focusing on ancient monuments and memories, the applicability of this model to burials is not self-evident. After all, given a few exceptions such as the burials of kings, queens, and some politicians, most burials are not societal affairs, and those involved in them are primarily engaged in the conscious crafting of memories. It is for this reason that in one of the chapters, Smith and Buzon (p 191-2) highlight Connerton's distinction between *incorporated* and *inscribed* practices, in which only the second is deliberate and discursive, whereas the first, is more akin to what Bourdieu would call *habitus*: the culturally proscribed way of doing things, which is also constitutive of society. Many burial practices arguably better fit into the *incorporated* practices, and can therefore not be understood primarily as 'memory works'. One final note on this memory perspective is that, despite the central stage given to Connerton's work, the more recent study by the same author, entitled 'The Spirit of Mourning' and published in 2011, is not even mentioned in the volume, which again, is simply odd. Thus, I do not think the introduction does its job in situating the studies presented in the book in relation to either funerary studies in the ancient Near East or the central framework of burials and memories.

The second chapter of the volume takes us to the Neolithic case study of Domuztepe, in southeast Turkey. Here, a series of strange contexts were excavated in an open area of the settlement, in the so-called 'death pit'. This feature went through several stages of use, in which a mixture of animal

bones, sherds, stones, human bones, were placed in a complex sequence. The mostly disarticulated human bones show some signs of violence, and possible evidence for cannibalism. Also present were, likewise disarticulated, dog bones, which were treated similar in many ways to the human bones. This is clearly an important set of contexts that have been carefully dug and analyzed, but in the end the chapter by Campbell and colleagues doesn't really provide us with an explanation for why and how these humans and dogs, along with various assemblages, were thus deposited, apart from the obvious point that at this site humans are not buried in a distinct and discreet manner. How, for example, does the death pit relate to Halaf burials known from other sites? Are we dealing with a particular group of people buried in the death pit? If so, why?

The subsequent chapter by Pestle and colleagues presents an Early Bronze Age cemetery from Kish, in order to investigate whether there are any possible signs of ethnicity in the burial record. Focusing on the 'A cemetery' they discovered that although some of the men are clearly biologically distinct from the rest of population, suggesting that they migrated into the community, there are no clear indications in the treatment of the body or the burial goods that provided for any form of ethnic differentiation in death. The authors conclude that in their burial data no ethnic distinction between 'Akkadians' and 'Sumerians' can be discerned. This is, of course, not that surprising, given the long known 'invisibility' of the Akkadians (Nissen 1993).

Following this, in Chapter 4, Boutin and Porter discuss how disabilities affected the lives of a young archeologist, Peter B. Cornwall, and a young woman he excavated on Bahrain dating to the Middle Bronze Age. Peter Cornwall was a deaf archaeologist, who nonetheless managed to organize and direct an expedition to Dilmun, and complete his PhD dissertation on the results, but was unable to develop further in academia subsequently. In Bahrain one of the graves he excavated was of a young woman who had a misformed leg and arm. While she probably moved awkwardly, she would have been able to function in most situations. She was buried with a relatively rich assemblage of burial goods, suggesting that her disabilities did not negatively affect her social position. In both case studies, then, it appears, that the people concerned could achieve considerable things in society notwithstanding their disabilities.

In Chapter 5, Sheridan and colleagues discuss the rich funerary datasets from Bab edh-Dhra' in Jordan. At this site a transformation of collective subterranean burial tombs to above ground charnel houses can be documented. A discussion of the archaeological sequence is followed by a highly detailed discussion of the bioarchaeology, that for this reviewer is impossible to understand in many places (and the relevance of many of the tables is not clear). Crucially, the authors argue for the use of the MLNI (Minimum Likely Number of Individuals) instead of the MNI (Minimum Number of Individuals), but fail to explain why this is to be preferred (they do refer to another study), and by using this methods arrive at 2363 instead of 200 burials in a charnel house. Obviously, this is a huge difference and calls for some discussion, but this is not provided.

Finally, chapters 6 and 7 provide two very rich and well written case studies from Egypt and Nubia. In chapter 6, Smith and Buzon discuss the discursive and non-discursive mixing of Egyptian and local Nubian cultural traditions in

Nubia through time, as its status changes from Egyptian controlled with a mix of Egyptian settlers and local people to a local polity in which people from Egyptian descent participated. Interestingly, in the Napatan period Nubian elites re-appropriated Egyptian traditions that had been out of use for centuries in order to fabricate and substantiate links to a now long gone Egyptian past, but mixed with elements that were definitely not Egyptian. This is a very rich and stimulating paper full of food for thought.

Chapter 7, by Dabbs and Zabecki, present a discussion of a cemetery excavated at Tell el-Amarna, the short lived capital of the famous pharaoh Akhenaten. The cemetery was probably used by all residents of the city, except for the uppermost elites, who were buried in rock cut tombs. The authors describe the poor health and the many work related skeletal deformations among the burials. Further, on the basis of the demography of the cemetery, they argue for the occurrence of epidemics in the Egyptian capital. Finally, they describe that nearly 80% of the burials were disturbed. Instead of blaming robbers for this situation, they argue that these disturbance were probably the consequence of re-excavation by relatives when the capital was abandoned. While the idea is an attractive one, it needs to be substantiated further.

The final two chapters do successfully integrate different types of data pertaining to burials, such as bioarchaeological, archaeological, iconographic, and textual evidence. The same is not true for the Bab edh-Dhra chapter, where the archaeology and the bioarchaeology are almost completely disjointed. Better results are achieved in the chapter on Early Dynastic / Akkadian Kish, but here the treatment of archaeology and bioarchaeology is very uneven, exemplified in the uncritical presentation of the archaeological and historical data. Likewise, in the chapter on the deaf archaeologist on Bahrain, the imperial traditions that made such activities as archaeology in the Near East possible, are not even mentioned. In short, while I applaud the intention of bioarchaeologists to link up with a broad analysis of burials, beyond health, age, sex, diet etc., the critical potential of archaeology is insufficiently represented in most chapters. Nonetheless, there is much of interest in this volume, and I think the book should be part of all libraries that cover the ancient Near East.

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