Grave Concerns: Agency Theory and Post-Burial Manipulation of the Corpse

by

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INTRODUCTION

Israel, Iron Age. The funeral procession winds its way from the city gates to the cemetery. A wealthy elder has died, and family members wail as his body is carried to the cemetery. Priests chant prayers as the corpse is lowered into the grave, the linen burial shroud concealing the jewels and ornaments which adorn his body. As the moaning and chanting reach a crescendo, attendants lower the body into the grave, and priests carefully place decorated ceramics containing foods and a long iron sword next to his body. The priests say their final prayers as the grave is filled in and sealed, and the funeral party moves slowly back toward the city.

Several months later, in the dark of night, a small but determined band straight from the city’s underbelly follows the same winding path the funeral procession took months before. They move cautiously to avoid alerting the guards of their presence. The gang moves quickly from grave to grave, digging into the burials as quietly as possible. One man, younger than the others, vomits noisily as he uncovers his first-ever rotting corpse and the sight and stench overwhelm him. He has unwittingly uncovered the relatively fresh burial of the elder, interred only a few months earlier. Initially, the body had bloated as the internal organs were consumed by bacteria, putrefying into viscous puddles of yellowish fluid. The dry heat and arid environment had shriveled the corpse, and flesh-eating beetles had made a home in the dead thing that once was a man.

The young man returns to his grim task, attempting to strip the corpse of its valuables. As he pulls at an arm to retrieve a gold bracelet, the limb separates from the body. The young man vomits again, and passes the arm up to the leader, who laughs and walks away with it. The leader, the most experienced of the grave robbers, will quickly parse through the loot his men retrieve, the waste, body
fragments and worthless sentimental items will be tossed into a shallow pit. The best items will be melted down or sold in distant markets.¹

In my second and third summers at Wesleyan I received funding to excavate a burial ground in Israel. At first, the human aspect of what I was doing seemed strangely remote: that I was uncovering real ancient people, people who had loved and been loved, people who had felt embarrassed and who had been angry and spiteful. I valued the experience for the archaeological data I was gathering and for how fascinating it was to apply my college anatomy class to real-life corpses. It was not until we came upon piles of long bones seemingly thrown haphazardly into pits, unusual for this burial ground, that the significance of excavating human remains hit me and I realized just how much there is to take into consideration when one is thinking through the motives and concerns of those dead and those dealing with the dead. The imagined account at the start of this piece is an attempt to conceptualize what may have occurred in this burial ground. We reasoned that a few months after the initial deposition, grave robbers had opened tombs in search of valuables and pulled apart corpses to retrieve these items. Because the bodies had decomposed the long bones were easily separated from the corpse but remained intact. The looters then re-deposited the limbs into pits with other disarticulated skeletal remains. Imagine the horror one would face opening a burial soon

¹ Details of the vignette were inspired by my undergraduate excavation experiences in Israel. I gathered specific details about human decomposition from Henri Duday’s Archaeothanatology (2004), Mary Roach’s Stiff (2003), and Galloway et al., (1989).
after deposition, discovering the gory and partially decomposed remains of a person one might have known.

I have deliberately divorced the opening vignette from any identifying information of the actual burial ground I excavated as well as formal descriptions of grave goods. The vignette does incorporate details inspired by my excavation, but in including these details I aim to provide an example of unusual post-depositional manipulation of the corpse. This thesis, therefore, is not about my excavation. It was inspired by my experiences in Israel but does not seek to interpret those specific burials. Rather, I hope to shed light on the unusual phenomenon of post-burial manipulation of the dead body, which occurs across time and space, in terms of agency. Therefore, in each chapter of this thesis I delve into a different case study of post-burial manipulation of the corpse in order to understand the motives of those involved and the interpretative work of the archaeologists. Essentially, I’m trying to understand how academics can appropriately approach instances, such as the one described, of post-burial intentional disturbance of the corpse by members of the communities.

In this introduction I will set forth various conceptual tools that are appropriate to approach these case studies. These include the Durkheimian notion of the inviolability of the corpse, the functional importance of mortuary rites, the concepts of agency and structure in philosophical and archaeological interpretation, the comparative method, and approaches in funerary archaeology. I begin with the widely held assumption that in confronting the dead we confront our own mortality (Ariés 1974; Bataille 1962, Girard 1977). Burial rites vary greatly in space and time as well as in degree of complexity. While sometimes the decomposed dead are incorporated into funerary traditions in the form of secondary burial rites (Baker 2010; Parker-Pearson 1999; 36, 114), more often the
deposited corpse is meant to stay undisturbed. There is a conscious choice, then, involved in the decision to open a tomb and manipulate the corpse. That choice or intention must factor in the effort required to dig up the tomb, to pry open the lid, to look upon, and to touch the decaying remains.

This thesis will examine three archaeological case studies of post-burial re-entries into tombs and manipulations of corpses to consider ideas regarding the inviolability of the corpse and the agency involved in its disturbance. The first case will focus on a 7th century AD Anglo-Saxon burial ground in which corpses were found crushed, decapitated, and in distorted positions. I will compare the evidence at this site with a 10th century AD Scandinavian burial ground that demonstrates the same sort of careless, if not malicious, treatment of the corpse. Next, I will concentrate on a re-interment of an aristocratic woman from 8th century AD Maya Tikal and will consider this instance in light of the political ramifications and reasons for reburying her. Finally, I will examine a case of grave robbing in the late New Kingdom period of ancient Egypt. After laying out each of these case studies and informed by the conceptual tools mentioned above, I consider the evidence pointing to the motives of those doing the tomb re-entry. For example, what forces they were reacting to in their decision to manipulate the dead body and whether they were responding in line with established cultural behaviors and norms, or whether their actions were subversive of conventional structures.

The Durkheimian ‘Sacred Corpse’

My theoretical framework in this thesis is ground in the notion that ritual mortuary structures are put in place to deal with the dead when the corpse is believed to be inherently powerful or charged with forces that need to be managed and contained
(Durkheim 1912, 225). Indeed, my thesis rests on the idea that in most cultures human corpse are often treated in some distinct way that can be discerned from the archaeological record and that, in the instances where the corpse’s treatment deviates from established norms, and it is moved or manipulated post-burial, something unusual is occurring. Before going into the archaeological approach to the study of burial, specifically the agentive method I plan to use in my case studies, it is important to lay out clearly why corpses are most often treated in a reverent manner. The Durkheimian approach is useful in illuminating the distinctive quality of the corpse that is mediated through mortuary rites. There are other theoretical schools that can be considered in conceptualizing the meaning of the corpse. Scholars influenced by Durkheim, such as Robert Hertz (1909), Georges Bataille (1962), and Michael Taussig (1998) take on the interpretive challenge of the ritual handling of human bodies as a way to theorize the sacred. First, I will explore the notions of the sacred, taboo, and transgression, as they relate to archaeological practice and then I will discuss the importance of mortuary rites.

The sacred, these scholars argue, is a quality that sets people and things apart form the realm of ordinary, everyday life. As a result, two realms emerge and exist in relation to each other; the ordinary only appears ordinary when it is compared to the sacred. The realm of the sacred tends to be surrounded by prohibitions and other strict rules (Durkheim 1912; Bataille 1962; Taussig 1998). The sacred can be holy and righteous, or it can be base, dangerous, and impure. Catholic reliquaries, for example, are revered because they contain the remains of saints. In contrast, as illustrated in Hertz’s classic treatise of burials among the Dayak people of Borneo2, Death and the Right Hand, the

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2 I include an older ethnography (1909) as valuable source material for this theory section. Robert Hertz is an immensely relevant Durkheimian scholar who engaged with structural ideas
corpse must be separated from the living and placed on the outskirts of a settlement until it has fully decomposed because, “the evil power which resides in the corpse and which is linked with the smells must not be allowed to escape and strike the living” (Hertz 1909, 32). Finally, once the Dayak corpse has decomposed, it is buried. The corpse is powerful and inspires ambivalent emotions. It is deemed to contain potent forces, both positive and negative, depending on the time and place.

The sacred, according to this Durkheimian approach, arises from and functions in relation to taboos and their transgression. A taboo is something that is off limits to common individuals, separated from the routine existence. According to anthropologist Michael Taussig, a taboo exists as a result of its “negation”, that is, a taboo is brought into being and empowered through the committing of a transgression. It exists through structural rules, like the ones put in place by mortuary rites, and when these rules are broken, when there is a transgression, the taboo, which is usually an unspoken rule, becomes real (Taussig 1998, 349). According to Hertz, there are taboos concerning the physical distance the living must keep from the corpse (Hertz 1909). When these taboos are transgressed, the transgressor is committing a dangerous act that puts them into contact with the sacred. As a Durkheimian scholar, Hertz argues that the cultural proscriptions and traditions around funerary procedures have come about in order to mediate and channel the sacred charge transmitted by the corpse and aid the living in managing their ambivalent emotions.

According to these Durkheimian scholars, the idea of the dead, and the corpse specifically, invites a feeling of sacred reverence. Paleoanthropologists believe that

on the use of mortuary rites. His ethnography, while upwards of a century old, is very useful for illustrating the theoretical concepts I discuss in this piece.
Qafzeh, Israel was the location of the first intentional burial (Shea and Yosef 2005). The burials at Qafzeh are approximately 100,000 years old and consist of fifteen individuals found buried in a cave with a Mousterian stone assemblage and red ochre (Shea and Yosef 2005, 458). The ochre and tools were incorporated into the treatment of the body and have been interpreted as elements of formalized mortuary ritual. It is unclear what was done to the corpses exactly, as they have decomposed, but the red ochre in the surrounding soil indicates that the corpses were painted with pigment (Shea and Yosef 2005, 461). The Mousterian assemblage has been interpreted as grave goods. Elsewhere between 100,000 and 60,000 years ago we begin to see proto-cemeteries in cave sites utilized by the Neanderthals in France (Bataille 2009, 148). Archaeologists – like these Durkheimian theorists – agree that the conscious effort to dispose of the dead in a respectful or a special manner marks a huge step in human development. In the Cradle of Humanity, Georges Bataille argues that, “our consciousness of death is one of the rare, fundamental traits that distinguish us” (Bataille 2009, 150). While today we know that other animals are not necessarily unmoved by the death of others, a ritual disposal of the dead implies a concern for the corpse’s fate and/or the fate of the living, and indicates an understanding that putting someone in the ground, burning their remains, or depositing them in some regulated way is an important, if not necessary, act. This special treatment of the dead corpse is what, for Durkheim, renders it “sacred.”

In interpreting the evidence of burial excavations, the notion of the corpse as sacred is helpful. In a particular cemetery this may be indicated by the care given to the treatment of the corpse, and the elaborate and presumably costly grave goods that would have taken not only time but also resources to create. Additionally these goods were deposited in the earth, seemingly with the intention that they would remain there and
would no longer be used by those living. Archaeologists don't always know for sure what a grave good would have meant or why one person got this ring over that sword or that bowl. However, the very act of depositing a good with a cadaver carries meaning and a particular investment in the corpse or their soul and in the funerary ritual. The fact that graves tend to be uniform regarding the treatment given to the corpse and the character of grave goods in a given area indicates that there are rules – proscriptions and prescriptions – governing mortuary rites, which can be interpreted through these obvious patterns.

**Why We Bury: The Structural Importance of Mortuary Rites**

Following the Durkheimian approach, the mortuary rites afforded to the corpse, as seen in the archaeological record, tell us we can presume that there were relatively strict or special rules surrounding its treatment and that it was therefore considered sacred in the sense that it was treated ritually, distinct from the routines of the ordinary life. The mortuary rites of the Dayak and the burials in Qafzeh, mentioned above, depict two very clear examples of the need felt to treat the corpse reverently and in a distinct way because of its sacredness. The rules concerning the sacredness of the corpse are thus mediated and governed by mortuary rites. I will spend the next few pages discussing and elaborating on possible explanations for the existence of mortuary rites. For this section I rely on the approaches of structuralists such as Arnold van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1967), and the Durkheimian scholars, René Girard (1977), and Émile Durkheim (1912).

Death disrupts the structure of societies. When members of the Dayak community die, the community enters into a state of flux and unrest (Hertz 1909, 37). Mortuary rites
serve to reorganize the living community without the deceased. Van Gennep furthers this notion in *Rites of Passage* (1909), in which he discusses the various transitional stages of an individual’s life during which an individual or group must transform personally and in the roles they play structurally. During a transitional period, a person changes status and becomes sacred in relation to others who are not in transition, who are profane (van Gennep 1909). Death is also a change of status that requires a transitional period because the society must reorganize itself without that person and the deceased must transition into that culture’s conception of the realm of the dead. According to Victor Turner, immediately upon dying, as in other liminal periods, the individual enters a state that is “betwixt and between” (Turner 1967, 95). The recently deceased are not quite the same as they were in life, and are not quite what they will become in the next phase, after incorporation into the afterworld. Van Gennep discusses the various rites that serve to “cushion the disturbance” (Kimbali 1960, ix). In a funerary context this cushioning includes rites of separation and rites of incorporation. In the Dayak culture, the family of the dead is placed under a taboo and is excluded from society, while the dead themselves are feared as impure and separated physically, placed at a distance away from the settlement. After a certain period of time, the family is reincorporated into the community, as are the dead into the society of the dead (Hertz 1909, 38). While eschatological beliefs vary tremendously, van Gennep argues that these rites of separation and incorporation remain fixed and are necessary for the community to reorient itself following the death of a member of its community (van Gennep 1909, 189).

René Girard’s book, *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), also offers a perspective that opens up interpretive possibilities. Girard similarly illustrates death as a violent incursion
into a community that throws off the community’s balance and requires a response in mortuary ritual.

Death is the ultimate violence that can be inflicted on a living being. It is therefore the extreme of maleficence. With death a contagion sort of violence is let loose on the community, and the living must take steps to protect themselves against it. So they quarantine death, creating a cordon sanitaire all around it. Above all, they have recourse to funeral rites, which (like all other rites) are dedicated to the purgation and expulsion of maleficient violence. (Girard 1977, 255)

According to this argument, the death of an individual in a community is disruptive to the whole because it reminds them of their own mortality. Further, there is an empty void in the place of the deceased. Indeed, the corpse is considered contagious and dangerous in that death may now affect the whole community. Therefore, the dead are often separated and dealt with through various mortuary rituals so that their negative, potentially dangerous or threatening forces may be reduced or managed through mortuary rites.

Additionally Girard says that death inspires not only fear but also hope in those who remain, “a mixture conducive to resolutions of good conduct in the future” (Girard 1977, 255). Girard says that the person who died of whatever cause is a sort of sacrifice for the whole community and convinces them to cherish life and act more meaningfully. Indeed, Girard goes on to discuss the connection between death and resurrection and writes that “the surrogate victim dies so that the entire community, threatened by the same fate, can be reborn in a new or renewed cultural order” (Girard 1977, 255). Death shocks the community and, in the performing of mortuary ritual, the community reemerges in the wake of the loss of an individual with an inspired attitude towards living.

Funerary rites are a way to achieve collective effervescence and a sense of social cohesion among people. Durkheim, in The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912), further
explores the construction of sacred rites as an avenue to experiencing collective effervescence.

When collective life reaches a certain degree of intensity it awakens religious thought, because it determines a state of effervescence that changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies become overstimulated, passions more powerful, sensations stronger; there are even some that are produced only at this moment. Man does not recognize himself; he feels he is transformed, and so he transforms his surroundings. (Durkheim 1912, 317)

As discussed by van Gennep, rites exist during transitional stages and are particularly important when dealing with the dead. It is through these rites that humans gain access to the sacred realm and experience a sense of one-ness with their community. They feel united. They feel transformed. Mortuary rites therefore allow societies to reorganize themselves in the wake of a loss, they facilitate the individual’s sense of acceptance of their own death, while creating a sense of collective effervescence and building solidarity within a community.

The Agentive Interpretation

When we bury a corpse we do not wish for it to be disturbed. The Durkheimian conception of the corpse as sacred and as charged with mysterious forces is helpful in understanding how and why its power must be mediated by religious proscriptions and mortuary rites. In order to understand whether or not instances of unprecedented post-burial manipulation of the corpse violated its sanctity, or the mortuary rites that served to protect it, one must understand the interplay between structure and agency in the decision to manipulate the body. I will discuss agency and structure in archaeological interpretation, define these ideas from a philosophical standpoint, and then lay out how I plan to use the notion of agency as a tool with which to examine whether the corpse has
been violated in a series of case studies dealing with post-depositional manipulation of the corpse.

Archaeological agency theory rests on a philosophical foundation that combines definitions of structure and agency. Before delving into the different ways in which archaeologists utilize this interpretative tool, I will define the terms from the philosophical basis from which they are derived. Structure is defined by scholars such as Rom Harre (1979), Anthony Giddens (1978, 1984), and Jonathan Turner (1997), as a complex group of social institutions that are reproduced in different societies (see also Miller 2014). Structures can function as isolated entities or in conjunction with other structures to form a unified system. Some illustrative examples of structural institutions include eschatology, government, economy, and language. Each is formed by a number of sub-structures. For example eschatology is comprised of notions regarding entities such as: the afterlife, morality, funerary traditions, gods, goddesses, and charity. People function within these structurally defined boundaries and typically abide by institutional proscriptions (Harre 1979; Giddens 1984; Miller 2014). The corpse is treated in a manner determined by the rules that govern mortuary procedures. These rules may be violated in order to reinforce or subvert the structure.

Agency is defined by scholars like Anscombe (1957), Davidson (1980), Mele (1997, 2012), and Wegner (2002), as a phenomenological sense that is, to put it broadly, experienced by an individual when they have a pre-action intention to act or not act in a certain way (Schlosser 2015). According to Wegner (Wegner and Wheatley 1999; Wegner 2002), agency exists when there has been mental causation. Broken down into its constitutive parts these would be: an intentional thought which deliberates between choices and precedes an action, and the ensuing action in line with that intention, the
agent being unaware of any factors that could have provided an explanation for the
decision beyond their own control. In the case studies that follow this introduction, I will
examine whether or not there was a conscious decision made to violate structural rules
regarding the deposition of the corpse, and whether the actors were exercising agency in
their actions.

Archaeologists tend to rely on either Pierre Bourdieu (1977) or Anthony Giddens
(1979) in their use of agency theory. Bourdieu took a restrictive approach in arguing that
individual action is determined by unconsciously internalized structures. Essentially, this
means that, for Bourdieu, there is no free will and that embodied responses are beyond
conscious control (Bourdieu 1977; Dornan 2000, 305). Giddens, in contrast, allowed for
human creativity and intention in his conception of agency, which he defined as “human
practice as a goal-directed, skillful enactment of tacit knowledge” (Giddens 1978, 150).
As a result, he argued that human beings are neither to be treated as passive objects, nor
as wholly free subjects” (Giddens 1978, 150; Dornan 2000). Humans are aware of social
institutions and are capable of using this knowledge to act reflectively and
conscientiously. This thesis will utilize a Giddensian version of structure and agency,
identifying the intention or preemptive deliberation behind the actions of individuals as
examples of agency, as long as they are not governed by the proscriptions and
prescriptions of an outside force (i.e. institutions and conventions).

Agency and structure theory have been used extensively and somewhat
controversially as an interpretative framework of archaeology in the post-processual
school (Parker-Pearson 1999, 24; Barrett 2001). There are numerous approaches to the
use of agency theory in archaeology. For the purposes of this study I will only delve into
two relevant theories utilized by Ian Hodder (2000) and James Bell (1992). These two
methodologies have their strengths and weaknesses but they serve as a useful jumping off point from which to consider the use of agency theory in archaeological interpretation.

“Individual intention” (Hodder 2000; Johnson 2000; Meskell 2002) involves the examination of individuals using historical dimensions of experience to evaluate past human agency (Dornan 2002, 310-311). This approach uses archaeology to uncover individual lives and agency to conceptualize an individual’s intentionality within a larger structure. Hodder (2000) used this approach to examine the life of a man buried at Çatalhöyük based on the grave goods and manner of his burial. Hodder utilized the archaeological evidence to come to a conclusion about the social networks, struggles, lifestyle choices, and habits of the dead man. While many scholars now follow this approach, it has also come under criticism for providing an, admittedly in depth, but ultimately too specific analysis of a single individual that doesn’t add to the more general understanding of a culture (Dornan 2002, 311).

The “rational agent” approach (Bell 1992, Clark and Blake 1994, Earle and Preucel 1987, Flannery 1999, Spencer 1993) is premised on the idea that agency can be utilized in the realms of activity where ideas and motives are shared and universal (Dornan 2002, 311-312). This approach examines collective action and shared institutions, like funerary rites, as outcomes of choices and actions, and posits that the beliefs and choices of individuals explain social change (Dornan 2002, 311). The argument is that changes in structures and social institutions are normally the results of unintentional human actions but that some agentive motives and intentions can be discerned based on archaeological evidence. Bell (1992) used this approach to analyze prehistoric activities. He wrote that this approach is effective because “all individuals
need to make decisions about obtaining food and shelter” (Bell 1992, 41). Bell analyzed lithic tools found at prehistoric sites to interpret the motives of individuals and therefore to consider agency as related to the universal needs of human beings to survive. The rational agent approach has been criticized as relying on cross-cultural generalizations without taking its universalistic approach into a critical perspective (Dornan 2002, 312).

Hodder uses agency to define the individual and Bell considers the approach in understanding how structures that reproduce themselves throughout time and space come into being. In the remainder of this thesis, I show that in considering the phenomenon of post-burial corpse disturbance Bell’s approach to agency and mortuary rites is illuminating, as is Hodder’s idea of examining the actions of individuals. This thesis will utilize these philosophical and archaeological frameworks of structure and agency in examining whether or not the corpse has been violated. In the three particular case studies I consider, the disturbance occurred at the hands of the community, of the political leaders, and of grave robbers. In doing so, I will consider questions such as: was there a conscious decision to manipulate the corpse? Was this done in spite of existing social structures or to reinforce said structures? Was the agent aware of other reasons for their decision?

All of the approaches viewed previously are useful in conceptualizing an agentive interpretative framework for examining possible violations of the corpse in situations of post-burial manipulation of the dead body. The approaches of Hodder and Bell, in looking at individual intentionality and rational action, are particularly useful in how they examine agency at the micro and macro levels. Hodder (2000) examines agency in the individual and Bell (1992) studies agency within universal structures. Each of the case studies I consider in the following chapters focuses on one burial manipulated by a
particular group of individuals. In looking at these individual instances, I am using Hodder’s agentive approach: examining the specifics of a moment of interplay between structure and agency to fully understand the choices made by particular people in disturbing burial and manipulating the corpse. In acknowledging the widespread structures of mortuary rituals, my process aligns with Bell’s approach to agency, seeing how individuals make agentive decisions in the face of universal needs and concerns. While working within the methodologies of Bell and Hodder I will follow the philosophical definitions for structure and agency to determine whether or not the corpse in each case study has been violated. To summarize, these definitions are: structure, the institutions which govern society; and agency, an intentional action consciously chosen in spite of structural rules.

**Funerary Archaeology and the Comparative Method**

In understanding the agency, or lack there of, involved in the manipulation of the corpse, we must consider how funerary behaviors are identified in the archaeological record and establish a basis for the use of agency within archaeological interpretation. For the most part, mortuary behaviors are discerned from a variety of sources, including oral history and mythology, historical textual evidence, archeological investigation of the composition of a burial ground, and analyses of individual graves. If an archaeologist is aware of the normal mortuary patterns of a group of people when uncovering and analyzing a burial ground, it is possible to identify any unusual treatment of the corpses.

There is a precedent for secondary burials wherein the corpse undergoes an initial burial and then, as part of the established funerary framework, is moved to its final resting place. This is the case with the aforementioned Dayak and is common in
Neolithic cultures. This practice is notably prevalent in the Bronze Age Levant. For example, in Middle and Late Bronze Age Ashkelon, Israel, people practiced secondary burial and deposited their dead in chamber tombs (Baker 2010). These chamber tombs were able to lodge multiple generations and consisted of a chamber with multiple clusters of corpses deposited in a number of sub-floor niches. The Middle and Late Bronze Age Ashkelonites would place the corpse with its grave goods in the center of the chamber on the ground. When the corpse was either decomposed or the space was needed for a new individual, they would sweep the remnants into a specific sub-floor niche with other skeletal remains (Baker 2010, 9). Jill Baker attributes this seemingly chaotic treatment to attempts to maintain and emphasize immediate familial relationships within a large or rapidly growing community (Baker 2010). The corpse would be placed in a niche with members of their immediate family but within a tomb designated for those related to this or that ancestor. Thus, there is a precedent for post-depositional manipulation of the corpse. However, cases in which the corpse is manipulated by cultures that do not practice secondary burial rites must be examined as unique instances that could represent a possible violation of the dead body.

It is possible to discern in the archaeological record whether or not the physical remains of a corpse have been treated with atypical hostility or reverence. Furthermore, the reasons why this was the case may often be deduced from textual data and cross-cultural comparisons. An unusual burial is termed “deviant.” This word signifies that the burial evidence is unusual in comparison to expectations of the customary treatment of the corpse based on the culture and the burial ground. In order to determine whether a burial is deviant, the whole burial ground must be considered. Once a framework for the "normal" burial for that period, geographic area, and cemetery has been established, any
strange burial practices can be documented and reviewed.

Of course, some abnormal mortuary practices do not show up in the archaeological record. For example, the hallucinogenic poisoning we see in bog bodies would be totally invisible on their skeletal remains and thus unknown to archaeologists if their soft tissue hadn’t almost totally preserved (Corner et al., 2011). Thus there is a limit to archaeological interpretation of burial sites. As the proverbial archaeological saying goes, "the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.” The quality of archaeological excavation and recording can determine whether or not one can establish deviancy in a cemetery, and the preservation of the bones, along with the actual means and rituals by which the body was interred, can have an effect on whether deviancy is visible. Naturally, if the archaeologists are unaware of either expected or deviant mortuary rituals, atypical post-depositional burials can be, and often are, mistaken for instances of grave robbery (Van Haperen 2010, 28; Tsaliki 2010). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the setting for the burial ground, its historical background, and its archaeological context, are understood. Anastasia Tsaliki identifies a set of basic criteria that is commonly used to distinguish unusual burials. I have adapted and shortened the chart for the purposes of this thesis (See Table A), removing some of the redundant examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A: Basic criteria applied to distinguish unusual burials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Primary and secondary burials in unusual places and/or positions when compared to the ordinary burial customs of the cultural group or of the time period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mass burials (inhumations and cremations), especially those without evidence or historical documentation for a crisis or those unique in the given burial ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inhumations or cremations, in cemeteries or isolated, associated with indicators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of unusual ritual activity
- Cremations found in an inhumation site and vice-versa
- Skeletons with evidence that may be indicative of crime, torture, or elite, specialized mortuary ritual

(Tsaliki 2010, 2)

To understand what constitutes an abnormal or ‘deviant’ burial and why these corpses may have been treated in a specific way, other graves in a burial ground and in other contemporary and regionally similar cemeteries must be analyzed in comparison. One must understand the specifics of a culture, their eschatological beliefs, and the ways they deal with the dead. However, if one wants to theorize a recurring circumstance, in this case, the inviolability of the corpse, one must examine the same phenomenon in different societies across time and space. I will be relying on the comparative method as outlined by Peter Ucko (1969) and Evans-Pritchard (1909, 1963), that “if any general statements are to be made about social institutions they can only be made by comparison between the same type of institution in a wide range of societies” (Evans-Pritchard 1963, 3). My intention is not to make universal or essentializing statements concerning post-burial manipulation of the corpse; rather I wish to work toward a framework that could help discern the circumstances in which post burial manipulation of the corpse arises and what this means for the inviolability of the dead body in that situation.

As Ucko writes, “it is impossible to assess whether a particular megalith burial, for example, is really significantly rich unless one also has available for comparison less rich forms of contemporary burial” (Ucko 1969, 267). To gain anything from the comparative method, the units of comparison must be similar enough that the contrast is possible but not so similar as to be the same. Evans-Pritchard writes, “the customs
rather than qualities or aspects of things…must be alike with regard to some features and unlike with regard to others, so that the classification which necessarily processed comparison depends on” can be made (Evans-Pritchard 1963, 10). My three case studies are not joined in time or space, but they are united in that they all feature a post-burial manipulation of the corpse that is abnormal in comparison to the normal mortuary treatment for that culture. The social processes in each instance all resulted in the same phenomenon; the dead body being moved around and manipulated in the tomb after its final burial. It is important to study these processes side by side to determine what led to the manipulation in each case and how we can understand the inviolability of the corpse given, precisely, this post-burial manipulation.

Human concerns for the treatment of the dead are evident beginning 100,000 years ago in Qafzeh, Israel. Prehistoric man’s deliberate burial of the corpse with beads, worked stones, and other goods indicates they were equipping the dead for some journey as per their eschatological beliefs. Mortuary rites are governed by structural rules that control the treatment of the dead. These proscriptions and prescriptions are a way to deal with the corpse, manage the forces unleashed by decomposition, and ensure that the taboos surrounding the dead body are not violated. This thesis will examine a series of case studies in which the deceased has been manipulated after burial. Through an agentive framework grounded in Giddensian structure and the work of Hodder (2000) and Bell (1992), I will consider whether or not the structures surrounding the treatment of the corpse have been violated in several case studies.

The question to be asked in each of the case studies is whether those disturbing the dead were responding to structures in a way that demonstrated their individual agency in spite of institutionalized rules. If they followed some sort of societal
compulsion to violate the corpse, then they were upholding the existing structures. They
were not exercising agency and therefore, while the corpse may have been disturbed after
burial, it was not truly violated. However, if the actors were behaving against structural
regulations regarding the manipulation of the dead body, then they were disregarding the
charge that is generated from the rules and taboos that surround its treatment, that is,
they were violating the corpse.

**Thesis Outline**

My aim in this thesis is to contribute to a framework for future archaeologists to
study burials in which the corpse appears to have been disturbed after initial deposition.
In particular, I am referring to instances in which, after examination of the larger burial
ground and burial patterns, these burials are deemed ‘deviant’, their manipulation
abnormal. Therefore, I am examining how archaeologists can consider post-burial
manipulation of the corpse in light of the inviolability of the dead body and the necessity
of mortuary rites. Agency theory is a useful means through which to consider this. I
posit that in examining what the dominant structures are that determine burial treatment
and the normative conception of the fate of the dead and/or of the corpse, and whether
the instance of manipulation of the dead body reinforces or subverts these structures,
one can determine whether the corpse was indeed “violated”.

In each of the three case studies that delve into various unprecedented instances
of post-depositional manipulation of the corpse, I ask whether or not that manipulation
constitutes a violation of the sacredness of the dead body. I will work through the
relationship between structure and agency involved in the decision to open the tomb and
manipulate the corpse. In cases in which the corpse was manipulated but its sanctity was
still respected, the actors were acting in a way that reinforced the structures that
governed their society. In cases in which the corpse was manipulated and its sacredness
violated, the actors were exercising their agency in the face of structural proscriptions,
vviolating those rules, violating the structure, and violating what scholars following
Durkheim have termed the sacredness of the corpse.

The corpse may be viewed as a sacred entity that is surrounded by charges and
taboos that determine its treatment. Eschatological structures and belief systems exist in
part to mitigate mankind’s fear and anxiety over the mystery of death and reinforce the
inviolability of the corpse. Unprecedented cases of post-depositional manipulation of the
dead body, then either violate the corpse and the structures that govern its treatment, or
uphold those structures. Each of the following chapters examines case studies of post-
depositional manipulation of a corpse. After discussing the historical context and
archaeology of each case, I will examine the relationship between structure and agency
involved, and consider whether the corpse has been violated.

Chapter one will deal with fear of the dead. Archaeological sites Winnall II from
Anglo-Saxon England and Bogøvej from Viking Denmark demonstrate apotropaic
burials, burials that involve post-depositional rites intended to thwart the apparently
malevolent power of the corpse. Chapter two is on Tikal, a Maya site from Guatemala
that involves an aristocratic corpse being exhumed and used in a reburial ritual designed
to enforce a political alliance. Chapter three shows instances of grave robbing in ancient
Egypt. Grounded in textual and archeological evidence, I will look at two elite New
Kingdom tombs that have been ransacked and looted. Following these chapters, I will
conclude by providing a discussion, now that these case studies have been examined, on
what archaeologists may be able to incorporate of this agentive approach in future interpretations of post-burial manipulation of the corpse.
CHAPTER ONE: The Evil Dead

Introduction: Harming the Corpse

Unusual burials are often accompanied by a treatment of the corpse that indicates anxiety or mal-intent on the part of the living community. These burials involve apotropaic rites, funeral rites designed to reduce or thwart the evil power of the dead body. These are cases in which an individual is interred in an abnormal manner and/or where the physical remains of the deceased exhibit a treatment involving unusual fear or malice. In many cases, non-normative and even violent treatments of the corpse that occur after the initial deposition of the body have been interpreted as instances of necrophobia, fear of the dead, and as apotropaic efforts to keep the restless or evil dead in the grave.

Apotropaic rites are rituals that are established in the eschatological structure as a sort of last resort to deal with the evil dead. There are strict rules that are laid out that the living must follow in order to keep the restless cadaver in their grave. These treatments usually involve ways of “restricting” the corpse, including bodily mutilation, decapitation, tying or staking down the body, putting it in a prone position, or crushing or weighting it down with heavy stones (Tsaliki 2010, 3). If a group of people generally treats its dead with a degree of respect, then finding a corpse crushed with stones, headless, or with a stake driven through its chest is a sure sign that something unusual has happened. Further, if that culture is known to fear some aspects of the dead and if we can find parallel bodily treatments or textual descriptions of the rising corpse and prescribed treatment, then there is an eschatological institution for fearing the dead and
controlling that fear. In destroying or harming the corpse it would seem as though the corpse is being violated, however if these actions are regulated by the eschatology of the culture then they are done to uphold social structures, the charge attached to the corpse is still respected even if the body itself is destroyed.

This chapter will focus on the deliberate manipulation of the corpse in order to prevent its potentially malevolent reanimation. In doing so, I will examine two sites, providing evidence for their living community’s fear of the reanimated and potentially dangerous dead. Winnall II and Bogøvej are two sites grounded in a historical and textual context in which, contrary to normal mortuary behavior, there was deliberate post-depositional treatment of a few graves that incorporated unusual elements seemingly indicative of anger, fear, or malevolence. These kinds of treatments were done to reduce the evil power of the corpse and are atypical of the Viking and Anglo-Saxon funerary traditions. Based on the normal mortuary behaviors, literary evidence, and material remains, these cases have been interpreted as post-depositional manipulations in the form of apotropaic rites, attempts to prevent the cadaver from remerging as a revenant or corporeal ghost, a reanimated and malicious corpse.

I would like to emphasize that this chapter deals exclusively with the post-depositional manipulation of the inhumed body occurring shortly after the initial burial. This is known because the degree of skeletal disarticulation and soft tissue disintegration indicates how long the body has been decomposing. The human body begins decaying approximately four minutes after death (Vass 2001, 190). Rate of decomposition varies tremendously based on the pH conditions and microorganism content of the soil. However, if those conditions are disregarded, soft tissue degrades faster than muscle attachments, and some areas of muscle attachment, because they are stronger and more
robust, are more resilient to decomposition than other areas (Vass 2001; Duday 2004, 52). The time after deposition at which the corpse was disturbed can sometimes be estimated based on environmental conditions and known skeletal decay rates. For example, if one finds a pile of long bones in a disturbed burial area, then, depending on the specifics of that site, it may be reasonable to deduce that a period of a few months after burial some tombs were reopened and the arms and legs pulled off the corpses and thrown into piles – the muscular attachments at the shoulder and hip being weaker than those that connect the humerus with the radius and ulna and femur with the tibia and fibula. Thus, those reopening graves in Winnall II and Bogovej shortly after burial would have come across partially fleshed and decomposing corpses. While they would have probably have been more used to foul sensations than we are today, the smell of rotting flesh would be overwhelming to those nearby and the sight would be startling at the least (Roach 2003, 70). This would probably not have been done lightly, especially not by a community that traditionally leaves its corpses untouched and in the ground.

It is important to note that there are many theories as to why a community fear the dead or why a burial is treated in a specifically fearful manner (Ariés 1974; Bataille 1962; Bell 1992). Is this fear in the circumstances of the individual’s death, in the manner in which they lived, or does it have more to do with historical situations or natural events beyond the deceased or the community’s control? This piece will not attempt to cover every possible explanation or examine a single burial through that individual’s life and death – such information is not available due to the fragile and often incomplete nature of the archaeological material, along with limited textual evidence. Given the available folklore and the nature of the corpse’s treatment it can be reasoned that these corpses
were manipulated from fear of or anger at the corpse; that they were restrained in some apotropaic way in the grave to prevent their rising, thwarting their potentially evil power.

**Winnall II: Anglo-Saxon Religious Transition and a Typical Burial**

Winnall II was excavated in 1957 by Audrey Meaney and Sonia Hawkes, and their excavation report was published in 1970. Winnall II has been interpreted as an Anglo-Saxon burial ground in the West-Saxon area of England, originally part of the Wessex Kingdom (Cherryson 2010, 115). As indicated by a comparative analysis of its grave goods, including brooches, rings, and pendants, the burial ground was in use from the mid-to-late 7th century AD (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 45). It has been established that Winnall II served a Christian community. Therefore, we would expect the burials to be interred in settlements in consecrated land near the church with no grave goods and, “in view of the Christian belief in the resurrection of the Body, the corpses would have been carefully laid out, and placed in the grave with some signs of reverence… [However] there is a surprising carelessness about the manner of many of these burials” (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 29). Before analyzing the graves and the unusual ways in which they were manipulated and deposited, it is worth noting that the inconsistent manner of burial at Winnall II (some careless, some reverent, some fearful) did not correspond to a greater or lesser quantity of grave goods (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 30). Some were buried with amulets, animal bones, brooches; others were left with just iron knives and many were buried with nothing at all.

Winnall II is considered to be a “Final Phase” burial ground indicating that it was part of a group of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries that were the last to stop utilizing pagan burial methods in the transition from paganism to Christianity (Meaney and Hawkes
Christianity would have been in existence for at least one hundred years at the time of Winnall II’s use. However, because of a lack of organization in the priesthood and reluctance by communities to abandon traditional pagan practices, the adoption of Christianity was slow throughout the Wessex Kingdom, especially at Winnall II (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 50).

**Winnall II: Archaeology**

*Figure 1.1 A map of the cemetery at Winnall II (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 8).*
In my analysis of Meaney and Hawkes’s excavation report I went back over their grave inventory (1970, 9-20) and reorganized the burials into the following categories: normal, destroyed in modern excavation, crushed skull, stoned body, crouched positioning, removed skeletal material, and headless corpse. The following chart (see Table B) serves to illustrate the spread of normal and abnormal, or potentially deviant, mortuary behavior at Winnall II. Some of the most notable burials include stoned burials 24 and 25, decapitated grave 23, crushed grave 11, and crouched burial 17. Drawing on the findings of Meaney and Hawkes (1970), I will discuss the positioning and the amount and type of grave goods in each of these specific burials and interpret their treatment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment of Corpse</th>
<th>Burial #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 14, 26, 29, 30, 40, 41, 44, 45, 47, 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyed in Modern Excavation</td>
<td>1, 10, 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skull Crushed</td>
<td>7, 9, 11, 15, 19, 31, 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Stoned</td>
<td>8, 24, 25, 28, 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crouched</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed Skeletal Material</td>
<td>19, 21, 27, 30, 33, 35, 37, 42, 43, 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headless Corpse</td>
<td>23, 32, 33, 36, 49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B. The chart above shows the results of my analysis of the excavation report of the burials at Winnall II as arranged in categories of notable corpse treatment (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 9-20).

Grave 24, Stoned Burial

3 As compared to contemporary and proximal burial sites in the Wessex Kingdom, such as Abingdon, Collingbourne Ducis, and Totternhoe (Reynolds 2009, 183) this means buried supine and fully articulated.

4 Meaning a loss of context and material.
This burial was rectangular, wide, and had rounded corners. It contained two individuals, one aged between fifteen and sixteen, and the other aged eight. Both of the skeletons were poorly preserved. The adolescent was laid out in a supine position, with the head slightly tilted to the left, the left arm bent with hand in lap, and the knees flexed slightly to the right. The younger child was on its right side with the arms bent with hands at the shoulders and the knees slightly flexed. There were six large pieces of flint arranged over the heads of the two skeletons. With the adolescent there was an iron

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5 These ages are based on teeth and bone evidence. Children are much easier to age based on dental eruption, after adult teeth are in place it gets much more difficult. Aging in adulthood is based on fused bones and skeletal wear.
6 Supine burials are laid out face up and prone burials are face down.
knife placed across the top of the right pelvis, pointing outwards. The blade was 4.7 inches long with a worn cutting edge. A few potsherds, rubble, and frog bones were found in the grave (Figures 1.2 and 1.3; Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 15).

Grave 25, Stoned Burial

Grave 25 was cut as a rectangle with vertical-sides and a flat bottom. An adolescent female between the ages of fifteen and sixteen was buried supine. The left arm was raised with the elbow beside the head, the hand at the shoulder, while the right arm was raised across the face, the hand toward the left shoulder and the right forearm crossing the left forearm. The arms and legs were kept straight. The skeleton had been covered by six heavy flints on its chest. These stones appeared to have crushed the ribs.
and middle vertebrae. The body was buried with an iron knife, 5.3 inch long with a split along the pane of the blade. The knife was located near the right lower ribs (Figure 1.4 and 1.5; Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 15).

**Grave 23, Decapitated Burial**

This burial was roughly rectangular and narrow with rounded edges. Inside, there was an adult male of an uncertain age inhumed in this grave. The skeleton was semi-crouched, the shoulders and pelvis flat but the lower spine was slightly rolled to the right. The arms were bent, hands at the shoulders. The right leg was bent and the right foot placed along the edge of the grave. The left leg was sharply bent with the knee over the right thigh, the foot turned up. The skeleton was well preserved but headless: the atlas was incomplete and the axis was missing. The burial had no grave goods but an iron nail and iron fragment were found in the grave (Figure 1.6; Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 14).

7 The atlas and axis are the two top cervical vertebrae and make up the neck.
**Grave 11, Crushed Skull Burial**

Grave 11 was rectangular and very roughly dug. The skeleton of an adult female was inhumed, aged between thirty and thirty-five. The skeleton was on its left side, both hands atop the head. The hips were flat, the left leg straight, and the right leg crossed under the left with a bent knee. The atlas sat in front of the teeth and the axis was shifted off to the side away from where we would expect it, in line with the atlas. The skeleton was buried with a piece of burnt flint near the left femur, a piece of glass near the skull, and an animal tooth. There was also a bone spindle-whorl behind the shoulders, an iron knife 2.6 inches in length, and a double-sided bone comb beneath the right humerus (Figure 1.7; Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 12).

**Grave 7, Crushed Skull Burial**

Burial 7 was placed in a roughly rectangular grave with rounded corners. The burial had an adult female skeleton interred at about age thirty. The left elbow was bent with the hand on the middle of the chest; the right arm was propped against the side of the grave, the forearm pointing towards the lower vertebra and the hand over the body. This skeleton was found askew in the grave; its skull crushed and with only one bone preserved in its left hand. Grave 7 was found with a small bronze pin near the front of the skull, two beads and a pair of bronze wire rings inside the skull, a small piece of a coiled bronze strip in the grave filling, a fragment of an iron pin under the chin and a fragment of pale green glass at the waist (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 11).

**Winnall II: Grave Discussion**
It is worth noting that decapitation burial Grave 23 was next to crushed-skull Burial 11 and stoned Burials 24 and 25 all of which were grouped near the middle of the burial ground (Figure 1.1; Reynolds 2009, 202). It’s hard to speculate why these burials would have been clustered together and placed in a central location. The grave goods indicate that Winnall II was in use in the latter half of the 7th century AD but the pattern by which it grew and whom (part or all of the community) it served is unclear. Perhaps the disturbed burials were deposited around the same time, their reopening and manipulation triggered by the same event. If the graves are somewhat contemporaneous, the cluster of disturbance may be explained as a response to the same incident which inspired a dread for these particular burials.

A high proportion of the forty-five burials at Winnall II included unusual burial rites. In fact, 16% of the burials in Winnall II were found to involve treatment which categorized them as deviant. These include decapitations, stonings, and amputations. This is a disproportionately large amount when compared to nearby contemporaneous sites where percentages were much lower, but still significant: 9.8% at Abingdon, 6% at Collingbourne Ducis, and 6.4% at Totternhoe (Reynolds 2009, 183). At these sites ‘deviant burials’ were often placed on the edges of burial grounds, isolated from other burials, or in execution cemeteries which solely contain corpses with unusual treatments. In contrast to these established types, Winnall II contained richly furnished burials and burials with no grave goods, skeletons treated well and skeletons treated poorly. All of the bodies seem to be clustered together in one area; the deviant corpses were not isolated from others buried more normally.

The people who buried their dead at Winnall II were at the tail end of the transition from their pagan religion to Christianity and still practiced pagan mortuary
rites. The people of Winnall II buried outside of their settlement instead of in consecrated church land, as was customary in settlements with Christianity (Aries 1974). Their dead were buried with grave goods, a remnant of a time when such a burial practice was common (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 27). In discussing the careless nature of the burials, Meaney and Hawkes refer to the crowded burials, stoned bodies, decapitations, crouched burials, and crushed skulls that are evident among the forty-five graves in Winnall II.

In understanding how the prevalent and seemingly punishing disturbance might have come to be, Meaney and Hawkes (1970) devote a significant portion of their work to discussing the aforementioned burials at Winnall II. These graves underscore the continuation of pagan burial practices during the Anglo-Saxon transition from pagan to Christian religion. Meaney and Hawkes assume that pagan practices continued surreptitiously among the people of Winnall II, that “perhaps, because of the need to be sure that some potentially dangerous dead, who could not be propitiated with a public ceremony, would not trouble the survivors, arose the stoning and beheadings, which could, with luck, be kept secret from the priests” (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 32). The fact that not all burials incorporated these apotropaic rites indicates that not all of the burials required them, that the ones that did were probably the ones most feared, most charged with evil power, and therefore most deserving of these extra precautions.

In Grave 25, the adolescent female was buried in an unusual position with her arms bent and in front of her face, her body beneath six large flints. Grave 24 contained two children lying next to each other, their heads covered and crushed with six more large flints. In fact, two of the flints clearly had been parts of a larger rock, indicating that they had been dropped with such a force that they had splintered upon impact. The
children would have been crushed (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 31). Grave 23 was well preserved but headless. There were no signs of an animal’s burrow that may have disturbed the corpse’s head so the body must have been either buried headless or the grave opened later and decapitated. Graves 11 and 7 may also have been reopened and decapitated, as the tombs too showed no signs of animal burrows.

Intrusive small objects in the grave backfill and animal bones in the tomb indicate that there was “considerable disturbance after burial” to all of the aforementioned graves (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 31). Indeed, Edeltraud Aspöck argues “finds may have been re-deposited into the graves when the graves were reopened and not fully filled” (Aspöck 2011, 314). Stratigraphy shows that pits were dug into the burials after they had been initially filled. Additional bone samples from other individuals in some of the graves, along with the unusual positions and treatments of the bodies, indicated the possibility of the graves having been reopened. The fact that the bodies had been physically manipulated and were found with other material that could have been incorporated from an artificial disturbance of the burials indicates that the graves were reopened after deposition, the corpses moved, and the burials backfilled with material. Something about these burials prompted the community to reopen them and harm their occupants. Because of the manner in which the corpses were treated, we can assume that the community was trying to restrain or pin them down as per some eschatological prescription.

Many deviant burials found in Winnall II were corpses, crushed with heavy flints and with tied feet, legs bent and twisted, and arms in front of heads, if they even had heads. While the original excavators assumed that the post-depositional manipulation was the result of looting, the fact that this practice was done unevenly in the cemetery
and that many grave goods were left in the disturbed burials indicates that the tombs were re-entered to punish occupants or prevent their rising. The high proportion of occurrences of decapitation and stoning of the graves seem to have been done in order to ‘execute’ the corpses for crimes posthumously or to weight them down. This measure was often depicted in textual sources and seen in cross-cultural analysis as a means to prevent the ghost, the revenant, from walking again (Reynolds 2009, 54). It is thought that these reanimated corporeal beings spread misfortune in a community and required apotropaic rites to reduce their evil power. Parallels for this phenomenon are found in other Anglo-Saxon sites and indicate that there was an eschatological framework for the revenant and that the suspected evil corpse had to be dealt with in a specific manner.

The Revenant in Folklore

A revenant is identified in medieval texts as a walking or animated corpse able to leave its burial to harm the living. The Christian priests believed that a corpse should be buried undisturbed in consecrated land and without grave goods; they neither believed nor supported the pagan fear of revenants. Anxiety over reanimated corpses persisted from pagan times through the early medieval period, and even exists today. In the mid-11th century AD, St. Kenelm of Winchcomb described his evil sister Cwoenthryth’s refusal to stay in her tomb, she “resisted repeated attempts to keep her in her grave” (Blair 2009, 540). Indeed, a folktale recounted by a knight in the Welsh Marches during the mid-12th century AD tells of a corpse that refused to remain in the grave and walks about haunting the village and leading people to their death:

Recently a welsh evil-doer died faithlessly enough (satis infideliter) in my village, and since four nights after that he has taken to walking back nightly to the village, and will not desist from summoning his fellow-villagers singley [sic] and
by name; once they had been called they fall ill and die within three days, so that few of them are left now. (Blair 2009, 541)

There is a dearth of written material from the 7th century AD “Final Phase” Anglo-Saxon pagan people, those contemporary and culturally similar to Winnall II. Therefore, in studying the period, we must rely on later textual evidence, folktales and oral legends grounded in pagan culture that involves ghosts and reanimated corpses. These necrophobic sentiments remained through the adoption of Christianity, despite the attempts of Christian priests to prevent their spread. Although the pagan religion was declining, the eschatological framework which established fear for the rising corpse and detailed how a community may prevent the revenant, was still very prevalent.

What happened in Winnall II was a mortuary practice aimed at destroying the “life function” of the corpse by decapitating or distorting its body after it had been buried (Aspöck 2011, 319). This practice was so widespread in Winnall II that the people probably believed they were at risk for, or already in the process of, being haunted by the animated corpses of the dead. Something in the initial burial rites had failed, the dead were dangerous, and the community had to take measures to protect themselves. These measures are found in pagan cemeteries and were done to restrict the potentially harmful revenant to their grave. They were a structurally sanctified response to the fear of the dead in pagan cultures. The Winnall II case study was grounded in straightforward archaeological findings and comparative Anglo-Saxon evidence of deviant burials. I will next discuss a Viking case study which, due to the abundance of folk tales and legends grounded in the sagas, may indicate a Norse fear of the walking dead, the *draugr*.

Viking Eschatology: the *Draugr*
The Norse notion of the soul and the afterlife is particularly relevant to the idea of the reanimated corpse, the *draugr*. The soul, or the *hugr*, is the essence of an individual and implies personhood, mind, thought, and desire (Raudvere 2002, 241). Norse eschatological beliefs imply that there are two fates for the dead: they would either enter Valhalla, where aristocrats and notable warriors (and possibly sorcerers) joined the realm of the Gods, or they would continue to dwell within the earth (Ellis 1943, 96). The soul in Norse eschatology was thought to be indestructible – the body could be destroyed in cremation (as it often was), but the soul continued to survive to complete the journey to the afterlife (Hedeager 2011, 82).

In Scandinavia, ghosts were not spirits; rather, they were corporeal beings that continued to reside in their mound or tomb after interment, though they were free to wander close to their grave (Chadwick 1946). There are even reports that hungry corpses would prey on animals (Chadwick 1946, 55). These corporeal beings had a strength and power that was not only spiritual but also physical. Textual sources indicate a belief that these *draugr*, animated corpses, were able to frequently leave their tombs and walk amongst the living. Indeed, the inhumed corpse that remained intact continued to interact with the living in a variety of ways. The dead could appear to the living in a dream, issuing instructions, and sorcerers could raise the dead through necromancy. Alternatively, the dead could return to haunt and terrorize the living (Ellis 1943, 151). The latter case is the most useful for the purposes of examining Grave T, a 10th century AD cemetery in Bogovej, Langeland, Denmark in which we see malevolent post-depositional treatment of the dead.

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8 Viking legal codes condemn the practice of raising the dead for their knowledge of the future or their prowess on the battlefield (Ellis 1943, 151).
The Bøgovej Cemetery and The Typical Viking Burial

Snorri Sturluson’s *Ynglingasaga*, written c. AD 1225, describes the institutionalized mortuary rites of pre-Christian Norse Scandinavia. Sturluson recounts how Odinn created a rule that “all dead must be burned on a pyre with their possessions” and their ashes thrown into the sea (Price 2002, 257). The items burned with the dead would arrive with them in Valhalla along with whatever they may have hidden underground. Further, according to divine law, men who were particularly notable should have mounds built or stones erected as memorial (Price 2002, 257). Sturluson’s tale was recorded about two hundred years after the deposition of burials at Bogovej but it claims to describe that time.

In practice, archaeologists find a lot of variation and disparity between the material record from cemeteries and textual evidence from Norse literature. While cremation does indeed seem to be the most common means of disposing of the dead, in Scandinavia inhumation burials are also present in large numbers and the wealthier or higher-status individuals tended to be buried in chamber or ship tombs (Price 2002, 260-264). Furthermore, large numbers of the Viking people tend to be invisible in the archaeological record, notably children and servants. This means that mortuary evidence does not reflect demographics that we know existed in Viking settlements. It is thought that slaves and children, depending on their age and whether they had made the transition into personhood, were given no special mortuary treatments (Price 2002, 259).

In order to account for the variability common in Viking burial grounds, archaeologists compare the site in question with other contemporary cemeteries in the region. Bogovej was excavated in 1994 by Ole Grøn, Anne Hedeager Krag and Pia
Bennike (Grøn et al. 1994). Grave goods indicate the burial ground was in use during the 10th and 11th centuries AD (Grøn et al. 1994, 173). In establishing a base line context for Bogøvej, archaeologists looked to Stengade II, Lejre, Kaupang, and Gerdrup, all sites in Denmark which exhibited similar types of normal burial and all had evidence for decapitation and mutilation of a few corpses in the cemetery (Taylor 2014, 153). It is problematic to claim a single model of mortuary behavior for Viking Scandinavia. Because the mortuary practices in the region tend to be hugely variable and biased, it is reasonable to look at the general survey of burials in Bogøvej, and in the Langeland region of Denmark as a whole, to deduce what to expect of a burial. Based on these comparisons the typical, “normal” corpse at Bogøvej would be buried supine with various goods including iron knives, combs, and possibly beads (Taylor 2014; Gardela 2013).

**Bogøvej: Archaeology**
Grave T, Decapitated Burial

A well-preserved woman aged between thirty and forty years was found in Grave T in the burial ground at Bogøvej. The woman was oriented west-east and was found lying in a supine position with her hands at her pelvis. A fragment of an iron fitting indicates she was buried in a wooden coffin. There was a horizontally placed knife on her right tibia. Archaeologists also found two glass beads by her collarbone and vertebrae suggesting clothing and their disturbance. For example, if she had been wearing glass beads on her dress, finding these beads near her collarbone is a sign that the entire garment was shifted during or after her initial deposition. Her skull was found on her left tibia close to the knee and her jawbone was detached from the skull, placed between her thighs and broken in half alongside with a cervical vertebra and a small
shell. Because of the arrangement of her skull and her grave goods, this particular grave appears to have been disturbed after burial (Figures 1.8, 1.9, and 1.12; Gardela 2013, 114; Taylor 2014, 35). The woman in Grave T would have been buried, the burial then re-opened later and her dress disturbed, her head decapitated, and her mandible displaced.

In terms of when this burial was disturbed, neither the excavation report nor subsequent mentions of Grave T mention lesions on the mandible. If the skull and jaw had been severed when the body was still fleshed we would expect cut marks and incisions on the bone marking that action. Other examples of flaying and defleshing the corpse indicate that it is highly probable that there would be cut marks on the bones if the body was still fleshed when the skull was removed. Therefore, Grave T was probably disturbed after the body had decomposed to such a degree that the skull and mandible could be shifted from the skeleton without requiring cutting, a period of possibly six months to a year depending on the acidity of the soil (Vass 2001, Duday 2004, 38).

**Grave P, Prone and Crushed Burial**

Grave P contained a man who was found lying prone, crushed with two stones on his left hip and left arm. He was buried with an iron knife that had been placed vertically by his foot. Prone burials are exceedingly rare and this grave has been interpreted as a live burial with the knife having been used to slit his throat (Figures 1.10 and 1.11; Gardela 2013, 116). In fact, instances of vertical knives have been found associated with rites of dedication to Odinn and are common among deviant Viking burials that involve rites seemingly intended to harm the corpse (Gardela 2013, 115).
The people who used the Bogovej cemetery were not strangers to deviant burials and the potentially dangerous dead. This man in Grave P was both crushed and buried prone. He was restrained by rocks and potentially killed immediately before or after being thrown into the pit in which he was later found. Grave P was not used as a central case study in this chapter because, while definitely of interest in its deviancy and the evidence of fear and malice in the manner of its burial, it exhibits no signs that it was manipulated post-deposition or involved apotropaic rites. Instead, it serves as an example of the deviant burials at the cemetery. Further examples of deviant burial at
Bogøvej, not discussed in detail here, include two double burials Grave D and S, and crushed burial Grave Y (Taylor 2014, 34).

**Bogøvej: The Idea of “Bad Death”, an Interpretation of Grave T**

Hilda Ellis, in her 1943 book *Road to Hel* suggests, “the continued animation of the restless *drangr* is caused because the soul cannot be freed until it is reborn into the world” (Ellis 1943, 149). She suggests that the malevolent, reanimated *drangr* was thought to rise and haunt the living because it had suffered a bad death. It would continue to do so until its soul “was freed”, for example, until the circumstances of the individual’s bad death had been rectified by destroying the corpse’s physical remains. In Viking Sagas, academics have identified the “bad death” as one in which someone died while angry, in their bed or chair, or left unfinished business.

Those who died a bad death would not be able to leave the world and may return as malevolent reanimated corpses to stalk the living until their souls were freed. According to Ellis, this would entail destroying the physical corpse. Indeed, there is support for this concept from a number of literary sources. For example, in the *Waking of Angantyr*, a young woman sails to the Isle of Samsay to find the mound in which her cursed father and brothers continue to haunt the living after their death. She defeats the three *drangr* and at the end of the battle avenges the death of her king and takes her father’s sword, *Tyrfing*, as reward (Klevnäs 2010, 5). Therefore, destructive re-entering of the tomb was often necessary to quell the evil power of the corpse. The corpse was destroyed through stoning, decapitation, mutilation, or the binding of limbs. If a bad

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* This book, while somewhat older, continues to be referenced widely and is considered very relevant in the Viking eschatological scholarly field.
death occurred, the family and household of the dead person may have reason to fear their return as an animated corpse. To prevent this return, specialize post-burial apotropaic mortuary rituals had to be employed.

In the Norse tale _Saxo_, the animated corpse of a sorcerer named Mithothyn was haunting the community. His body was exhumed, he was decapitated, and then his body was impaled (Taylor 2014, 114). This post-depositional apotropaic rite stopped Mithothyn’s _draugr_ from haunting and the community returned to normal. Sorcerers were ambivalent characters in Norse sagas. Some were good and helped their community; others inspired fear and stole or killed. Whether good or bad, Norse sagas provide clear details on how the corpse of a sorcerer was often stoned or decapitated following a burial to keep it in its place,

From an archaeological perspective it is striking that the sagas provide rather precise details about the ways in which the evil sorcerers were interred. As the sources suggest, after the stoning procedure, the bodies of the deceased were also covered up with stones. It is also significant to note that the burial often occurred in a secluded place were people were least likely to pass by. Already during their lifetimes, the sorcerers were seen as rather ambiguous and marginal figures and this aspect of marginality seems to have also been apparent after their death. (Gardela 2009, 287)
The head in Viking literary tradition was also very symbolically charged. It was potentially dangerous and could be detached in order to defeat the evil dead and restore peace to society. Decapitation occurred in burials as the result of ritual sacrifice, the punishment of a criminal, or as a way to keep the dead in their graves (Taylor 2014, 14). Because Grave T was already partially decomposed when the decapitation took place, it has been interpreted as the latter. The woman was buried with expensive grave goods indicating respect, but was also harmed after her burial. Leszek Gardela hypothesizes that this woman had been a sorcerer in the community and therefore required ambivalent treatment. She had been respected enough to be buried in the community.

Figure 1.12. An artistic representation of the posthumously decapitated woman found in Bogvej Grave T (Gardela 2013, 130).
cemetery with goods, but also had been capable of rising and haunting the people, thereby warranting her post-depositional decapitation (Gardella 2013, 114).

There was an institutionalized way to deal with the evil, rising dead in Viking eschatology. The *draugr*, the corporeal ghost, was identified based on folklore as someone who had died a bad death or lived with ambivalent power. If there were suspicion that the dead was harming the living, the living would respond in a structurally prescribed manner to reopen the grave of the restless dead, decapitate the body or crush the corpse. Viking religion had a framework for who could be suspected of haunting the community and a means through which to deal with the restless corpse.

**Winnall II and Bogøvej: Structural Fear and Structural Response**

The Anglo-Saxon evil dead, as seen in in Winnall II, are depicted in texts as sinister, often criminals in life, and indiscriminately harmful. The Scandinavian reanimated dead however are people who were involved in sorcery, those who died angry (previously referred to as a ‘bad death’), and sometimes even those raised by the living to harm the living. Indeed, reanimated Viking corpses tended to haunt those who harmed them, those against whom they had a justified and specific grudge.

To highlight this difference, an Anglo-Saxon folktale described by William of Newburgh tells of two recently executed peasants in Drakelow, wandering around their village and “summoning the inhabitants to sickness and death”, the Anglo-Saxon evil dead have the same personalities they had in life but with a satanic, evil motive (Blair 2009, 539). In contrast, in the Viking *Laxdøla Saga*, an ill-tempered dying man named Hrapp told his wife to bury him in their doorway so he “could keep a watchful eye” (Gardella 2013, 105). Although afraid, she did as he said. After his burial, Hrapp began
to haunt his farm, even killing his own servants. It was not until a heroic man named Hoskuld exhumed the body, cremated it, and threw the ashes into the sea that peace was restored. In the two instances examined in this chapter, who became a dangerous dead and what their motives were differed. However, both the Viking and Anglo-Saxon cultures had an eschatological structure for the anxiety surrounding reanimated corpses and dealt with them through similar apotropaic rites, decapitation or crushing the corpses after burial.

Anxiety over the rise of the malevolent dead is not an uncommon fear. Children tell each other ghost stories and zombie tales are abundant in movies and books. The normative idea of death in America today is one confined to hospitals and is seen as something so technical and unnatural that only doctors can officially declare its occurrence. In contrast, textual evidence from the 12th and 13th centuries AD of Western Europe indicates that there was a familiarity with death, an awareness that it was imminent. Literature tells us that when people would get a sense that their death was soon, they would perform rites and, without anxiety or fear, would pass away (Ariés 1974). There was a sense that death was familiar and natural, it was an institution, a structure. The past few centuries are unique in the fear and horror people express at the idea and the fact of death, that “death is so fearful that we dare not utter its name” (Ariés 1974, 13).

We know of many staked and decapitated ‘vampire’ burials from the 17th through the 20th century AD in Romania, Serbia, and Greece (Blair 2009, 540). However, beliefs in the evil power of the dead and the corpse’s potential re-animation are not universal fears. John Blair argues that the fear of animated corpses comes from pre-Christian pagan religions. He refers to the increasing evidence from 6th and 7th century AD
cemeteries in England, Eastern Europe, and across Scandinavia, to discuss how the spread of necrophobia was a result of cultural diffusion from the Rus to the Vikings westwards through the British Isles (Blair 2009, 544). Blair’s argument is a large claim, requiring more literary and scholarly analysis, as well as archaeological evidence and DNA analysis of migrations and interactions between peoples. However, based on archaeological similarities and textual evidence, the mutilated and maltreated burials at Winnall II and the posthumously decapitated woman of Bogovej seem similar in their treatment of the dangerous dead. Either the circumstances of their life, their death, or their existence in the afterlife necessitated their final burial being broken into and their remains manipulated through apotropaic rites to prevent their reemergence. In both Anglo Saxon and Viking cultures, who could be considered a restless and malevolent corpse, and how they were treated was controlled by institutionalized eschatological beliefs concerning the evil dead.

There was an institutional fear of the dead established in pre-Christian pagan societies, and the so-called ‘dangerous dead’ had to be dealt with in a manner suited to their evil power, as outlined by structured rules. For example, looking at Ström, Scandinavia; Meaney and Hawkes write, “the stoning of corpses in Anglo Saxon burial rites…served the same purpose as decapitation – that of preventing the ghost of the dead person from walking by mutilating the body” (Meaney and Hawkes 1970, 31). In their analysis of the findings at Winnall II, Meaney and Hawkes draw connections between stoned Graves 24 and 25 and Scandinavian parallels where the dead were weighted down with stones to prevent their reanimation.

It is established that the community of Winnall II and Bogovej feared a number of the dead they buried. They feared them to such a degree that they re-opened their
graves and performed apotropaic rites to ensure that the corpses would not reanimate to haunt and harm the community. These rites included stoning the corpses or decapitating their occupants. The people at Winnall II and Bogövej were reinforcing their pre-Christian pagan religious structures that condemned those who died a “bad death” and those who were posthumously harming the community by following structural rules that regulated apotropaic treatment of the dead. In both of these cases the charge of the dead was not violated. The structures and taboos which created the fear of the dead were honored and followed and, while the corpse was violated, the structures that determined the evil charge of a specific corpse and the way it was to be dealt with were upheld.

This case study is an example of the inviolable charge of the corpse. The cadavers found in Grave T at Bogövej and Winnall II may have been mutilated, but they were treated in this way not because of the independent free will of those involved. The community was not practicing its agency in destroying these corpses because they were not making an intentional decision regardless of social structures, rather they were closely adhering to structural guidelines and rules that determined who was to be feared – sorcerers and criminals to name a few – and what was to be done to them – decapitation and stoning. The people upheld the institutional taboos and evil charge of the corpse. The corpses at Bogövej and Winnall II may have been destroyed, but this was done in order to uphold the structures that determine the inviolability of the sacred corpse.
CHAPTER TWO: The Corpse Politic

Introduction: The Political Dead

The corpse as a political tool is a cross-cultural phenomenon; we see the body utilized in different cultures throughout space and time. The Durkheimian corpse is meaningful, symbolic, and charged, it represents man’s fear of death and demands institutionalized mortuary rites to mitigate that fear. The corpse is often employed for some specific means. For example, the ideological leaders of Communist Russia, Vietnam, and China, Lenin, Stalin, Ho Chi Minh, and Mao, were all embalmed after their deaths. They continue to be displayed to the public and curious visitors in great mausoleums. The preservation of these men’s corpses symbolizes the preservation of communist ideology and is important for people’s belief in their leaders. In antiquity, the same notion of the symbolic and political corpse is seen time and again in the explicitly directed uses of the dead body for political purposes and gain.

Lenin said that it was distasteful to “dote” on the corpse rather than emphasize the ideas of the dead (Quigley 1998, 37), Mao Tse-tung had signed a cremation pledge and had chosen a burial plot with his wife, and Ho Chi Minh asked his followers to avoid the time and expense of a large funeral (Quigley 1998, 42). The decision to use a corpse for a specific purpose may represent an intentional and deliberative choice by actors who seek to achieve an outcome in spite of social structures and institutions that proscribe against the usage of the dead body. In the case of the communist dead, the corpses were utilized for a purpose that violated established structural rules concerning what was acceptable for the treatment and disposal of the corpse. The first instance,
involving the corpse of Lenin, was an action stemming from the exercise of agency. The agent involved, the government, was deliberately making a decision to utilize the corpse of Lenin for political means, to support its newfound control and power, against what was the norm and because of its own beliefs and agendas. In this case, the regulated treatment and nature of the charge of the corpse was circumvented and redirected in a manner that fulfilled the agent’s wishes.

The embalming of Lenin was the first of its kind and therefore that act was agentive. The subsequent embalming of communist leaders occurred within accepted and institutionalized treatments. The political use of Lenin’s corpse, which had been done in spite of structural rules, set up as a precedent for the other communist corpses. Therefore, in determining whether or not a political usage of the dead constitutes an exercise of agency, we need to take into account whether or not there is precedent for such action. If so, the action is structural, and if not, it is an exercise of agency. The preceding example details what to expect when agency is involved in the decision to use the corpse for a political purpose. In doing so, the agent is acting in spite of and against taboos and manipulating the charge of the corpse for a specific purpose. They are depositing the dead body regardless of how structures regulate the treatment of the corpse. Agency occurs in the unprecedented political use of the corpse to achieve the agent’s purpose.

This chapter will consider a Maya archaeological case study in Tikal, Guatemala c. AD 703-711 which demonstrates the secondary deposition of the corpse for political means. The Maya civilization spanned thirty-seven centuries, and included southwestern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and parts of El Salvador and Honduras. The civilization was not a unified entity; rather, it consisted of a group of city-states ruled by dynastic families.
that interacted through trade, war, and marriage alliances (Tikell 1991). The Maya chronology is defined by the Pre-Classic Period, 2000 BC to AD 250, The Classic Period, AD 250 to 909, and the Post Classic Period, AD 909 to 1697 (Martin and Grube 2008, 8-9). I will mostly touch on the Early and Late Classic periods in this chapter, which in Tikal, spanned from AD 250 to 557 (Early Classic) and AD 682 to 909 (Late), with a “Hiatus” in between (Martin and Grube 2008, 44). After a discussion of typical Maya mortuary behavior including eschatological beliefs and the “typical” Maya burial I will establish a baseline for secondary burials among the Maya people and then delve into the case of Tuun Kayawak and Tikal Altar 5.

**Maya Eschatology**

The evidence we have for Maya eschatological belief comes from a series of representations on Early Classic vessels and wall reliefs as well as the 16th century recording of the journey to the afterlife, the *Popol Vuh* (Taube 2004, 70). It is noteworthy that the *Popol Vuh* was documented much later than the case study in question. The myth belongs to those who speak Quiché, or K’iche’, in modern-day Guatemala and who are descendants of the Maya. The *Popol Vuh*, although it is more modern, is used as a credible analogy for earlier eschatological beliefs because it is grounded in Maya tradition, and is a platform from which to examine or consider Maya religious beliefs.
The Maya were concerned with the afterlife, a passage of trials in which one might gain entrance into their version of paradise, Flower Mountain. From both the Popol Vuh and Classic-period painted pottery we know of the journey of the Hero Twins who overcame death in the underworld and ascended to Flower Mountain (Fitzsimmons 2009, 19). The deceased began their journey with a canoe trip through still water, then through a series of “places of fright”, levels in the underworld that were depicted as hot, decaying, and bad-smelling, and inhabited by spirits of death (Miller and Taube 1997, 39). If the deceased could defeat these spirits they overcame death and would rise, like the Hero Twins, to Flower Mountain.
Scholars believe that this eschatological notion was based on the life cycle of maize: death and regeneration. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 depict the Early Classic so-called ‘Death Vase’ or ‘Berlin Vase’ which emphasizes these themes of “rebirth and deification” in death (Taube 2004, 79). On one side of the vessel (Figure 2.2) three female mourners flank each side of the dead Maize God and the Wind God stands behind. Both the Maize God and the Wind God are identified based on their cheek markings, hair and floral motifs (Taube 2004, 79). Placed behind this scene there is a stepped pyramid and also some kind of long-snouted creature. This creature, the so-called “witz monster” has been shown to represent a mountain based on modern ethnographic and comparative evidence (Stuart 2002). The creature has flowers protruding from its body. On the other side of the vase (Figure 2.1) there are three personified trees growing out of a decaying corpse. The center and left tree have cocoa beans growing out of them and face each other, fingers touching. Karl Taube (2004) suggests that they are an “ancestral couple,” the Maize God and his wife, and that this physical interaction is a “gesture of affection” (Taube 2004, 79). This side also appears to have a flowery mountain-creature, a witz monster. The two registers on the Death Vase are linked by images of still water, not shown in either Figure 2.1 or 2.2, a symbol of the underworld.

Interpretations of the vase suggest that the latter scene shows young maidens dressing the Maize God for his underworld journey of death and resurrection. The former scene shows the Maize God resurrecting as a tree from a corpse, presumably his own, with his wife. The floral mountains in each scene appear to show the goal or outcome of that journey, Flower Mountain. Estella Weiss-Krejci describes the belief in Flower Mountain thus:
Beliefs in a direct connection between the fate of the soul and the corpse, and the idea that the tomb serves as a point of departure for the soul of the dead, also existed among the ancient Maya. [This] suggests that the ideal of Maya afterlife was not the dark and threatening underworld, but a lovely paradise called Flower Mountain, which appears widely in Ancient Maya art. Resurrection was the ideal end to a person’s life. (Weiss-Krejci 2011, 37)

Flower Mountain appears quite often in Maya art and seems to be the place in which the ancestors and gods dwell, a paradise that all Maya sought. Another example comes from the tomb of Pakal, a king from the 8th century AD Maya state, Palenque. In this tomb, not only was the king adorned in costume as the Maize God, but also the sarcophagus lid was decorated with imagery showing the king “resting in a fetal position,” this birth imagery is indicative of him being delivered as a new being and ascending to the afterlife (Figure 2.3; Scherer 2012, 247).
The Early Classic Death Vase, the Pakal Sarcophagus, and the 16th century *Popol Vuh* epic, while centuries apart, are consistent in their depictions of Maya eschatology. The motifs of death; of the Maize God, the anthropomorphic mountain figure sprouting flowers; and resurrection, are quite common images on vessels and reliefs found in Maya burials and religious centers.

**Maya Primary and Secondary Burials**

The fate of the deceased, whether or not they would be able to survive the afterlife and gain entry into Flower Mountain, was of much concern to the ancient Maya. The Maya dead were buried in tombs ranging from grandiose monuments with pyramids constructed atop to simple pits in the floors of common houses or cemeteries (Tiesler 2007, 17). In the case of a steep pyramid being raised above the tomb, the upper temple served as a shrine for the veneration of the deceased as an ancestor, these temples were maintained for generations (Martin and Grube 2000, 16). The dead were always given careful and reverential treatment; even the corpse of a commoner would be treated respectfully, and buried in a cemetery in a supine or flexed position (Tiesler 2007, 17). The aristocratic dead were sometimes honored further with an embalming and wrapping treatment, as was given to the Maize God on the ‘Death Vase’, and the postmortem coloration of their corpses through the application of natural pigment and dyes (Fitzsimmons 2009, 83).

The typical burial for a Maya ruler or aristocrat featured the inclusion of rich grave goods that would help the deceased in their journey. These goods included human and animal sacrifices, effigies of gods in clay or wood, mirrors of polished mineral,
instruments, furniture, jade, cloth, rope, and pots of chocolate to drink (Fitzsimmons 2009, 87). Even a commoner might be interred with a piece of jade, an item that they could use as currency in the afterlife (Martin and Grube 2000, 16; Miller and Taube 1997, 39). Of course, these standards refer only to primary burials. Secondary burials, for example, the corpses of human sacrifice and post-depositional manipulation of dead bodies, were also not uncommon among the Maya.

To the Maya, sacrifice was regarded as a way to maintain harmony and balance. In the Popol Vuh, it is said that the gods created the human race out of maize (Fitzsimmons 2009, 17). Just as maize must be replenished, the cycle of humanity must be nourished through prayer and sacrifice. The Maya believed the creation of the universe was a “blood debt”, that the gods had given blood to form people, and that the debt had to be repaid through human sacrifice and voluntary bloodletting (Tiesler 2007, 20; Miller and Taube 1997, 46). Blood was thus considered an especially potent entity, the sacrifice of which was necessary to maintain and support the Maya coexistence with nature and the supernatural (Miller and Taube 1997, 30). Whether individual voluntary bloodletting, or a collective decision to sacrifice another, this kind of offering was thought to be vitally important in sustaining political regimes, agriculture, and economies, and was the fundamental reason that human living and harmony with the world was possible (Miller and Taube 1997, 30). Sacrifice was done to honor a ruler or mark a passing of time, to restore the harmony of the Maya and revere a god, and even to create a “companion” for dead aristocrats (Tiesler 2007, 19).

In addition to sacrifice, where in some cases the corpse was deposited in one place then reused and moved for a certain purpose, secondary burial also occurred in situations in which ancestral remains were used as relics or skeletal material relocated as
part of an effort to commemorate a leader or to dedicate a temple or other large, costly structure. In fact, most secondary Maya burials are found in the courtyards or plazas of temple structures (Vail and Hernández 2007, 155). Additionally, based on the archaeological evidence and iconography, the overwhelming majority of those sacrificed or utilized in secondary burials were male, between infancy and young adulthood (Tiesler 2007, 22).

Bioarchaeological analysis shows the many different ways that skeletal remains were manipulated by the Maya. Anthropogenic marks on Maya human remains include skinning, disarticulation and dismemberment, defleshing, fire exposure, cannibalism, and the reuse and offering of human bones (Martín and Vargas 2007). Most of these post-mortem treatments were done for some ritual purpose and occurred either before or after burial, the former as a rite preparing the corpse for initial burial, the latter as a post-burial manipulation. In a typical Maya secondary burial however, it is sometimes difficult to deduce some of these treatments (Martín and Vargas 2007, 102). Many post depositional treatments are done after natural decomposition has occurred. Burning the tomb would result in charred bones; and cannibalism, skinning, and defleshing would result in cut marks. Other rites, like disarticulation of the bones, dismembering the corpse, or reusing skeletal remains, may not show any anthropogenic marks by virtue of the fact that they may be done after full decomposition has occurred.

Often times the bones that are utilized in the re-deposition are the skull and long bones and it is hard to infer bioarchaeological traces of defleshing, and other sorts of extreme violence and torture, where the evidence is limited. To remedy this, archaeologists look to placement of remains and textual evidence. In Maya archaeological interpretation, the “presence of sacrificial victims has been assumed on
the grounds of positioning (or, rather, lack of positioning) and contextual evidence” (Tiesler 2007, 21). As aforementioned, and is the situation for this case study, most secondary burials are found in temple structures. When a deposition of human remains, often discarded carelessly and disarticulated, is found in a temple complex, it is a sign that this may be a secondary deposit of a ritual or sacrificial nature. The decision to inter people in the temple area would have been very deliberate and conscientious because the grounds were ritualistic and sacred, and tied not only to the political success of the state but also to the state’s relationship with the heavens.

There is an institutionalized precedent for the political use of the dead in Maya culture. In some areas, human mandibles are found buried around Maya settlements (Fitzsimmons 2009, 167). Textual evidence suggests that many of these remains belonged to individuals from enemy states with whom the polity had to fight for territory. The ritual deposition of such remains were therefore linked with creating and sanctifying territorial boundaries (Fitzsimmons 2009, 106). Additionally, in many royal funerary contexts, archaeologists find a lack of heads. It is generally thought that new rulers would open the tombs of their ancestors, perhaps in the process of commemorating them through censing ritual\(^{10}\), and remove these items (Martín and Vargas 2007, 109). It is thought that the heads and faces of dynastic ancestors were removed “for the purpose of ancestor veneration” (Fitzsimmons 2009, 168) and as a result the current ruler created a link to his ancestors, thereby furthering and legitimizing their rule.

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\(^{10}\) Many elite Maya tombs are found with a layer of ash indicating that a certain time after deposition, the burial was reopened, the tomb set alight and then put out in a “censing” ritual (Fitzsimmons 2009, 101).
Additionally, in times of regional instability, the tombs of important leaders would be ritually opened, the contents removed as relics for luck and also as proof of the ancestor’s approval of the city-state (Martin and Grube 2000, 16). Further, human remains of enemies were often taken and kept as war trophies or as ritual objects used during human sacrifice (Harrison-Buck et al., 2007, 93; Fitzsimmons 2009, 166-169). Human remains were often employed in political situations to demarcate territory, to ensure dynastic legitimacy through ancestral links, and to represent war trophies and symbols of subjugation. The following case study will showcase a unique example of post-depositional manipulation of the corpse for political reasons set in the Maya city-state of Tikal. Tikal is considered by some scholars, “the pinnacle of Maya civilization and cultural achievement” (Tickell 1991, 7). Tikal is located in modern Guatemala. At its peak, Tikal had a population of approximately 60,000 people and boasted a succession of thirty-three rulers spanning eight centuries (Martin and Grube 2008, 25). Most relevant for this discussion is Complex N, a monument composed of two twin pyramids, Altar 5, and three deposits: 76, 75, and from below Stela 16. These features I will discuss in detail in the next few pages.

**Tikal Altar 5 and Stela 16: A Case Study**

Tikal’s Altar 5 and associated Stela 16 were discovered in 1904 by Teobert Maler and excavated in 1963 by Christopher Jones (Weiss-Krejci 2011). The stela and altar are part of Complex N. Complex N consists of two twin pyramids constructed 100 yards apart on an east-west axis. The associated stela and altar are located in a small enclosure to the north of the pyramids and there is also a shrine to the south (Figure 2.4; Tikell
1991, 85). Similar groupings of complexes are known to exist in nine other iterations in Tikal.

During the excavations of these monuments, Jones discovered three unusual depositions of skeletal remains in a trench centrally located within Complex N. Subsequent analyses of the contexts and inscriptions reveal that these monuments were constructed during the 8th century, approximately AD 711, during the Late Classic Maya period. The monument was constructed to commemorate the relationship between Jasaw Chan K’awiil I, ruler of Tikal, and the lord of the neighboring city-state of Maasal (Jones 1977, 37).

**Miscellaneous Monument 67/Deposit 76**
Deposit 76 was covered by miscellaneous monument (MS) 67. These features were located 1.75 meters north of Stela 16. The monument consists of a thin and unbroken “disk” of limestone (Weiss-Krejci 2011, 28). Underneath this feature is Deposit 76. At the bottom of this pit a large crocodile was positioned with its head facing north. Zooarchaeological study found the crocodile was buried fully articulated and on its back, apparently having been sacrificed. To the north of the crocodile was the skull of a human juvenile, a series of flint and obsidian flakes, jade, pyrite, an oyster shell, and two obsidian pieces incised with what appear to be Maya deities. Above the crocodile there was a ceramic bowl, two fragmented pottery boxes, a sandstone tripod metate, and just to the west, an incomplete disarticulated child skeleton. Osteological analysis revealed that the child was about six years old and that the skeleton was mixed with unidentifiable animal remains (Figure 2.5; Weiss-Krejci 2011, 28).
Deposit 75

“Problematical” Deposit (PD) 75 is a pit located south of MS 67 and north of Stela 16. The term “problematical deposit” was coined during the Tikal excavations in the 1960s and is used to differentiate deposits like burials or middens from pits that “can be well dated and contain a wide range of cultural material; yet their function is uncertain, and they appear to represent a wide range of ritual or social behaviors” (Shelton 2008, 1). Problematic deposits are often discovered in the center of ritual architecture. PD 75 contained the remains of two adult skulls, seven adult teeth, and was found with deer bones, pottery sherds, pieces of flint and obsidian stone, and fragments from a limestone monument (Figure 2.6; Weiss-Krejci 2011, 27-28).

Deposit Below Stela 16
Stela 16 is located in the same structure as the two deposits described above, but is positioned to the south. Underneath the stela is a cache of human remains and other objects. The stela was excavated by Christopher Jones in 1963. In total, the cache consisted of incised obsidian, pieces of flint, and an individual between twelve and twenty years of age. The skeletal report found that the skeleton was missing a series of teeth: two molars, one incisor, one canine, and four premolars; the corpse was also missing its ribs, vertebrae, and phalanges. Excavators did find the skull, various small bone fragments, and the long bones: the femur, tibia, fibula, humerus, ulna, and radius. (Figure 2.7; Weiss-Krejci 2011, 28). There were no cut marks reported on the bones.

Stela 16 and Altar 5: The Inscriptions
In translating the text on Stela 16 and Altar 5 scholars were aware that, because there are no markers connecting the two monuments, it was impossible to determine whether there was some order to translating the stela and altar pair (Figure 2.8; Jones and Satterthwaite 1982, 38). They inferred, however, based on other stela-altar pairings in the Tikal region, that the Altar should be read first. The content of the translated inscriptions confirmed this hypothesis.

The following translation of the inscription was done by Christopher Jones and Linton Satterthwaite (1982) and confirmed by Estella Weiss-Krejci (2011)\(^{11}\). Altar 5 describes the series of events in the life of Tuun Kayawak and her later exhumation,

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\(^{11}\) It is preferable to include actual text in an archaeological thesis. However, the inscriptions are surmised by glyphs and their translation is as such: “Panel y, yA1-yD1: Four non-calendrical glyphs (skull meaning death? at yA1; women’s name and title at yB1-yC1)” (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982, 37). It wouldn’t add anything by inputting them as they are quite nebulous without Mayan glyph knowledge.
reburial, and resurrection into the Maya paradise afterlife, Flower Mountain. The altar’s inscription describes that on a certain date in AD 691, something happened to Tuun Kayawak, a lower aristocratic woman in Tikal’s political structure, though it is unclear what this event was. A little over a decade later, in AD 703, she died. Her burial was overseen by both the Lord of Tikal, Jasaw Chan K’awiil I, and the Lord of Maasal, a neighboring kingdom with whom Tikal had tense relations (Martin and Grube 2008, 46). Tuun Kayawak was buried at the Nine Ajaw House (Fitzsimmons 2009, 164). In AD 711, the body of Tuun Kayawak was exhumed and three days after this, the altar depicts the two Lords re-depositing her skull and long bones and Tuun Kayawak’s entry into Flower Mountain. Stela 16 is inscribed with the details of Jasaw Chan K’awiil I, the leader of Tikal, conducting the fourteenth k’atun\(^{12}\), or commemoration, ritual in AD 711, 9.14.0.0.0, thirty-one days after the final depositional scene on Altar 5 showing Tuun Kayawak’s reburial (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982, 32; Weiss-Krejci 2011, 29).

**Tikal Altar 5: Discussion**

Based on the position and orientation of the human remains from below Stela 16 and the inscription on Altar 5, the altar is believed to have described the person who is buried beneath Stela 16, Tuun Kayawak (see Figures 2.7 and 2.8 for a comparison). Therefore, the monumental inscriptions indicate that Tuun Kayawak was initially deposited, left for seven years, then exhumed and reburied under Stele 16 as part of some sort of rite that involved the leaders of two neighboring city-states. Tuun Kayawak’s corpse was left for an extended period of time. This is confirmed by the fact that there were no cut marks on her bones (or the bones attributed to her) mentioned in

\(^{12}\) A *k’atun* in a unit of time equivalent to 7,200 days or 19.726 years (Fitzsimmons 2009, 7).
the excavation report. If her body had been removed from the burial as part of a ritual redeposition after only a few days of burial, her bones would have had to have been removed from the body using sharp instruments. We would see markings on the bone similar to those we see on butchered animals. Because these marking either do not exist, or were not mentioned in the excavation report, it is likely she was indeed reinterred after she had fully decomposed, seven years after initial burial\textsuperscript{13}. While this was attributed in the inscription as an effort to ensure the entry of Tuun Kayawak into the paradise afterlife, the fact that this was an unprecedented effort that required two heads of state, and additionally was done without clear reason indicates that there may have been an ulterior motive. To understand why I say there was another intention and what else may have been going on, I will detail the historical context of Tuun Kayawak’s reburial, the political structure of the time, as well as theories of different scholars as to why she was exhumed and re-interred.

This ritual act of reburying Tuun Kayawak occurred at the beginning of the Late Classic period. Preceding this time archaeologists and historians see evidence for the “Hiatus,” a kind of Dark Age in Tikal’s history where textual recording and building stops. In Tikal this period spanned AD 557 to AD 682 and is marked by the last recorded date on Tikal’s Stela 17 and the first date recorded for the activities of the 26\textsuperscript{th} ruler, Jasaw Chain K’awiil I (Harrison 1999, 119). It’s unclear exactly what occurred during this period in Tikal. However, while textual evidence is nonexistent, it is possible to hypothesize what happened based on material changes and known historical events and interactions with other city-states that continued to produce texts.

\textsuperscript{13} It is noteworthy that James Fitzsimmons (2009) argues that the presence of knife glyphs on the altar, and the observation that both Lords are depicted with knives in their hands, indicates there was a defleshing ritual. However, the archaeological evidence disagrees (164-165).
From the Early to the Late Classic periods, there was a seemingly drastic change in art and architecture. This change is evident in Complex N, which represents a "new era in twin-pyramid group construction, innovating many of the patterns that became standard afterwards" (Jones 1969, 111). The platform and pyramids are much larger than in previous structures, the enclosure more central to the pyramid complex, and the representations on the stela and altar show innovation in artistic style (Jones 1969, 112). The stela (Figure 2.9) has the figure facing the viewer instead of turned in profile, and the altar shows two figures conversing over a pile of human remains surrounded by a band of glyphs, an image that was not seen before this period (Figure 2.8). But even
though the construction techniques of the Late Classic period represent a break from the Early Classic, there is a great degree of irregularity and variation in Complex N. For example, the orientations of the structures and their proportions are not quite as uniform as we saw before the Hiatus or will see later (Jones 1969, 112). This is indicative of a sort of clumsiness, as if this was a newly learned skill, a construction endeavor that had not been attempted previously.

The change from the Early to the Late Classic period features the abandonment of old styles and methods of producing art and constructing buildings and monuments. Scholars have attributed the Hiatus in Tikal to a period of intense warfare and subjugation by Calakmul, a nation state located in what is now southern Mexico (Harrison 1999, 120; Braswell 2003). When Jasaw Chan K’awiil came to power he ushered in a new period of accomplishments for Tikal. He initiated a time of peace and prosperity in his alliance with the states of Copan and Palenque, who in turn defeated the city-state Calakmul (Martin and Grube 2008, 46). He was responsible for the construction of the Great Plaza’s Great Temples, and Complex N, which we have considered in this case study. Complex N was constructed to commemorate Tikal’s fourteenth k’atun which occurred under Jasaw Chan K’awiil’s rule (Martin and Grube 2008, 44-47).

Interpretations about this altar and its representations are variable. The altar and stela pair is very interesting because the scene depicted on the altar is unique (Schele, Freidel, and Parker 1993, 262). Nowhere else in Tikal or other known Maya settlements is there a similar depiction of two rulers in ceremonial dress standing over a pile of bones to dedicate to the afterlife. Peter Harrison posited that Tuun Kayawak was the Queen of Tikal, that her death had been untimely and thus she had received this elaborate
treatment (Harrison 1999, 139). However, other references to Jasaw Chan K’awiil’s wife are inconsistent with this proposal and just because the aristocrat’s remains were treated with such care does not make her a queen. Fitzsimmons suggests that the moving or reburial of the human remains within any monumental ceremonial architecture was important simply because they were “instrumental in the activation of that Stela within the Great Plaza” (Fitzsimmons 2009, 166). Therefore Tuun Kayawak may have been reinterred for this same purpose, to commemorate the stela of Jasaw Chan K’awiil I. This interpretation is consistent with the unusual deposition of other skeletal remains in Complex N. Martin and Grube propose that because historical records indicate Maasal had a strong relationship with Calakmul, the very fact that the Lord of Maasal participated with Jasaw Chan K’awiil in this exhumation and reburial effort indicates the increased political sway of Tikal. Following the defeat of Calakmul by Tikal, Tikal gained the alliance, probably by conquest, of those with ties to Calakmul. Maasal “may have been an important gain” (Martin and Grube 2008, 46).

Estella Weiss-Krejci suggests that instead of seeking a familial connection between Jasaw Chan K’awiil and Tuun Kayawak or a political explanation for the reburial effort, scholars should instead look simply to the eschatological beliefs of the Maya (Weiss-Krejci 2011, 41-42). Weiss-Krejci states that until Tuun Kayawak was exhumed and overseen with rites by the two lords, she was in the underworld. It was not until she was reburied that she was able to be reach a “different state of being,” reborn into Flower Mountain (Weiss-Krejci 2011, 37). Weiss-Krejci supports her theory by recalling the different names inscribed on the alter which refer to the remains before and after the exhumation. During her life and in the underworld, the woman was called Tuun Kayawak, after she was resurrected in Flower Mountain, she was given a new name to
represent her higher status. However, it was not clear from the altar what this name was or who the name was referring to so while Weiss-Krejci believes that this name must be referring to the changing status of Tuun Kayawak, this is not necessarily the case.

The most compelling theory comes from an integration of the theories of both Weiss-Krejci (2011) and Martin and Grube (2008). While I partially agree with Weiss-Krejci’s interpretation of the religious intention behind the act, that it was done in part to resurrect Tuun Kayawak into Flower Mountain and that she was given a new name following this attainment, Weiss-Krejci fails to provide parallel examples to prove her theory of the renaming of the dead. Furthermore, we have seen the dead are often helped to Flower Mountain through initial burial rites, not secondary ones, and with grave goods, for example the piece of jade that was used as currency in the afterlife. Additionally, her theory falls short in that it does not fully explain why this aristocrat, not otherwise mentioned in any historical narrative or texts, would be afforded highly individualized and reverential treatment by not only her lord but the Lord of a subjugated neighboring city-state over whom Tikal was showcasing its control. Martin and Grube (2008) pick up where Weiss-Krejci falters in explaining why Tuun Kayawak’s remains were chosen for this ritual. She may have needed some assistance in the afterlife, but this assistance also afforded Jasaw Chan K’awiil a chance to solidify his forced alliance with the lord of Maasal and assert his dominance (Martin and Grube 2008, 46).

Furthermore, in depositing Tuun Kayawak in Complex N, right between two monumental twin pyramids and underneath Stela 16, Jasaw Chan K’awiil was making this location a focal point. Complex N was built to commemorate Jasaw Chan K’awiil. In conducting this ritual and depositing Tuun Kayawak directly underneath a commemorative stele, the lord was linking her and the ritual act with the pyramid
complex. We know that the corpses of witches were thrown into caves (Lucero and Gibbs 2007, 46). Their dangerous charge meant that they had to be deposited outside of society. By placing Tuun Kayawak so centrally in the complex, the Lord was emphasizing Tuun Kayawak’s resurrection as so spiritual and politically important that it deserved to be placed in a monumental site designed to emphasize his accomplishments. Jasaw Chan K’awiil was not only honoring Tuun Kayawak by reburying her in Complex N, but he was also emphasizing his own power and enforcing the political alliance by placing it in this monumental site.

All of the aforementioned interpretations fail to account for the deposits found in association with Stela 16, Altar 5, and the deposit below Stela 16. It is known from archaeological analysis of Maya sites that the majority of those placed in secondary deposits were found in a careless and partial manner in temple courtyards, and, most of the time, were adolescent males (Fitzsimmons 2009, 93). Further, we know that most of the time secondary deposits like the ones found in the temple complex in Tikal were associated with sacrificial rites (Vail and Hernández 2007, 155). Whether or not Deposits 76 and 75 at Tikal were sacrifices, unfortunately, is not possible to deduce because the bioarchaeological evidence is incomplete. The bones present were either not the ones that had been harmed or it’s possible that they have since degraded to such an extent that if there was evidence of sacrificial violence it does not show up in the osteological analysis. It seems clear, based on the typical secondary burial, that Deposits 76 and 75 were associated with the secondary deposition of Tuun Kayawak in Complex N. Because of their fragmentary nature, the skeletons in both Deposits 76 and 75 were found disarticulated; they were meant to be a dedication sacrifice at the erection of the altar and
The altar was used to commemorate the conquest by Jasaw Chan K’awiil over the Lord of Maasal in a ritual act that involved reburying Tuun Kayawak. This commemorative altar was set up close to the stela that honored Jasaw Chan K’awiil and his accomplishments. This signifies that the new relationship forged between Jasaw Chan K’awiil and the Lord of Maasal in reburying Tuun Kayawak was important to the reign of Jasaw Chan K’awiil. Clearly these rituals to enter into Flower Mountain were special and sacred and were not performed often or lightly, but the political situation at hand seemingly demanded a commemoration and a ritual pact. Tuun Kayawak’s resurrection into Flower Mountain was the subsidiary benefit of a political alliance. While the use of the dead for political purposes is a known Maya ritual behavior, the post-depositional manipulation of Tuun Kayawak represents a unique case in Maya mortuary rite.

So where does the case of Tuun Kayawak fall in the agency-structure dichotomy? This particular treatment, retrieving a corpse from its grave and reinterring it to emphasize a political alliance, is otherwise unknown in text and illustration. However, there is a structural precedent in using the corpse to achieve certain political outcomes. As previously mentioned, skulls were dug up and reburied around a territory to demarcate boundaries, sacrificial victims were displayed to appease the gods and sustain the Maya polities, and the tombs of ancestors were often opened and manipulated for worship. The case of Tuun Kayawak is interesting for our discussion because even though her treatment differs from known political uses of the corpse, it is a political use nonetheless. Tuun Kayawak’s reburial effort was used to enforce a political alliance and activate a stela. Even though there may have been a conscious decision made to use the
corpse of Tuun Kayawak in this particular way, the fact remains that the use of the corpse upheld political structures.

This case is an example of the structural inviolability of the body being upheld. Tuun Kayawak was dug up so that her reburial and resurrection ritual could be a platform on which Jasaw Chan K’awiil could showcase his domination over the Lord of Maasal and impose a political alliance. Her corpse was honored according to existing structures that regulated the treatment and meaning of the dead. The charge of her corpse was not violated in the ritual; rather it was directed toward reinforcing the political union between Lord Jasaw Chan K’awiil and the lord of Maasal. While the specifics of her ritual resurrection may have involved creative thought and a unique treatment of the corpse, her corpse was still dealt with according to institutionalized structures and in order to emphasize an existing political infrastructure. The corpse of Tuun Kayawak was treated uniquely but the reasons upheld structures. Therefore her corpse, while manipulated, was not violated.
“Tomb robbery, if not quite Egypt’s oldest profession, clearly ranks a close second”
– Reeves and Wilkinson (1996, 190)

Introduction: Robbing the Dead

Generally, grave robbing in antiquity is indicated by traces of careless disturbance of the body and tomb, and the absence of valuable materials (Van Haperen 2010, 3). Perhaps, this is because grave robbing is usually done hastily, the traces of entry covered to prevent discovery. Archaeologists will find a tomb or burial having been haphazardly opened, grave goods and jewelry missing, the corpse often times moved carelessly aside. In ancient Egypt, there is clear evidence for grave robbing since pre-dynastic times. Indeed, tomb looting was so widespread that the only “realistic insurance against robbery was to have a grave too poor and insignificant to warrant plundering” (Baines and Lacovara 2002, 25). The New Kingdom, ca. 1550-1070 BC14 (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 9), presents archaeologists with a series of primary source papyri that deal with suspected and proven pillaging of the royal tombs (Peet 1963; Breasted 1962). These documents are known collectively as the ‘tomb robbery papyri’ and were found with other records of treason in the archive at Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Ramses

14 The Old Kingdom dates to 2575-2134 BC, the Middle Kingdom to 2040-1640 BC, with intermediate periods characterized by instability, powerful aristocrats, and overall a lesser degree of centralized power (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 9).
III (El Mahdy 1989, 136). The papyri are focused on two periods of grave robbing that coincided with unstable periods during the reigns of Ramses IX and Ramses XI (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 190). These documents provide evidence of who the robbers were, what was coveted, how the robberies were committed, and how robbers were punished.

Following a discussion of the importance of the preservation and completeness of corporeal remains for ancient Egyptian eschatology and after establishing a baseline for a typical tomb in the Valley of the Kings in Thebes, I will use the evidence from the ‘tomb robbery papyri’ to detail New Kingdom grave robbing. Further, I will demonstrate the inconsistently careless treatment of and disregard for the corpse in a society that urged mummification and valued lavish mortuary expenditure and provision for the afterlife. In doing so, I will attempt to determine whether or not there was agency involved in the grave robbing. Was the act of looting and ransacking the tombs upholding New Kingdom structures or do they represent a break from the structures, an agentive action that involves choice and the expression of free will despite institutional prohibitions.

**Ancient Egyptian Eschatology**

An understanding of ancient Egyptian eschatological beliefs is necessary in order to understand the magnitude of the violation involved in the illicit entry and robbing of the corpse and the tomb. The survival of the physical body was necessary for the survival of the *ka*, *ba* and *akh*. For the purposes of this chapter, wherein these concepts are important for understanding ancient Egyptian eschatology, the definitions I provide for the *ka*, *ba*, and *akh* are admittedly simplistic. These terms are very nuanced and intricate and while one could dedicate a thesis unto each, yet I will try to distill a working
definition of each term for use in this chapter. According to Egyptologist Christine El Mahdy, the god Khnum created an infant on a potter’s wheel and placed him inside his mother’s womb and, in forming the baby, he also created a spiritual copy, the ka (El Mahdy 1989, 12). The ka lived in the heart and after death was separated from the corpse. The ka had to be sustained like a person, so the grave goods placed in the tomb, such as food, drink, and clothing, were meant to satisfy its needs. The ba was unique to each person like the ka, El Mahdy describes the ba, as “all the non-physical aspects that constitute an individual, what we might call character or personality” (El Mahdy 1989, 12). The ba entered the body at birth (with the first breath), and left the body at death. Finally, the abk, the “transfigured ancestral spirit” or “heart, name, shadow” (Assmann 2005, 88) was the form in which the deceased was to exist in the afterlife.

From ancient Egyptian texts and archaeological evidence for the mortuary treatments of the corpse, we learn about the evolution of ideas concerning a passage or a journey in the ancient Egyptian conception of the afterlife. The texts consist of the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts, the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts, and the New Kingdom Book of the Dead, each of which was a “canonized corpus of spells” that advanced from one to the other (Assmann 1989, 136). The journey in the afterlife is thought of as a transformation from the earthly form of the deceased to the akh, the form the individual takes in the afterlife. It is in the abk form that the deceased completes the journey. The mortuary treatment of the corpse in ancient Egypt involved the dismemberment and mummification of the body. This process parallels the death of Osiris, as outlined in the Pyramid Texts. Osiris was killed by his brother Seth, chopped into pieces, and later restored and ‘reborn’ by his sister Isis through mummification. In the mummification treatment the corpse was thought to be transformed, having undergone a rebirth, and
now “filled with magic” (Assmann 1989, 139; Assmann 2005; 74; Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006). Further, the myth emphasizes that mummification, and therefore preserving the body, was essential for the successful transition to the afterlife. Understanding the importance of mummification is essential for understanding the importance of the complete body for ancient Egyptian eschatology. After a discussion of the Egyptian conception of the afterlife, I will delve into mummification.

In addition to a physical transformation, the deceased must undergo a journey through the afterlife. The following is a very brief summation of the complex eschatological beliefs of the ancient Egyptians; it is distilled for the purposes of this chapter. The destination of this journey is an eternal heavenly place in the northern sky and in order to reach this place, the deceased must “master the ascent” in an underworld ruled by Osiris (Assmann 1989, 143). In inscribing the tomb with texts defining the journey, the living equipped the deceased with the knowledge to complete it. Apparently then, the deceased must know the names of all the entities they will face on the journey, including details of their nature, and words they will need to say in confronting them. In addition, if the deceased do not properly dress, identify themself, or follow the right path, they might be attacked by demonic guards who threaten their journey (Szpakowska 2009, 800). The journey through the afterlife consists of first convincing a ferryman to take the dead from the earth to the heavens, then the deceased must participate in a series of interrogations and trials to convince the inhabitants of the netherworld that in having the knowledge of the heavens, the deceased belongs there (Assmann 1989, 144). The most important of these trials was the Judgment of the Dead in which Anubis weighed the heart of the deceased against a feather. If the deceased failed this test he
would be killed permanently, swallowed by the devouress Amyt (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 56).

The consequences of either being unsuccessfully prepared for death or for failing the trials in the afterlife were extreme. Within the journey through the afterlife the deceased met harmful enemies who tried to hinder their progress. These adversaries were those who had “threatened or transgressed against the gods, ones who had not passed the required tests for successful transformation or for whom the proper funerary rituals had not been carried out” (Szpakowska 2009: 800). Therefore, the deceased had a lot at stake when going through the afterlife. They had to be properly equipped with the right tools and knowledge to transverse the netherworld or they would possibly end up an evil spirit preventing the progress of others.

Mummification: The Importance of the Preserved and Complete Corpse

In order to aid the deceased on their journey, rituals were done to equip the dead with the correct items and the knowledge they would need to survive. Scholars have discovered a plethora of textual evidence referencing these rituals. From the Middle Kingdom, a letter, “The Story of Sinuhe” describes the mortuary rites promised to an Egyptian merchant, Sinuhe, living in Palestine, by the pharaoh if he returned to Egypt. This treatment, described below, matches depictions and archaeological remains from the New Kingdom Valley of the Kings and provides an expectation for ancient Egyptian funerary rites.

…at night you would be anointed with pine oil and bound in wrappings made by Tait, the goddess of weaving. A procession will take place on the day of your burial. The inner coffin will be made of gold, its head will be of lapis lazuli.
Heaven is above you as you lie on the bier. Oxen will draw you, a chorus of singers will precede you. At the entrance to your tomb the dance of the ‘Weary’ (that is, the Dead) will be performed. The list of offerings will be recited for you. There will be a slaughter at the entrance to your tomb. The pillars (of your burial chamber) are made of white limestone... (Germer 1997, 36)

Further, according to ancient Egyptian religious belief, as laid out in the previous section, the spirit of the deceased, the *ahk*, could only survive and make the journey to heaven through the underworld successfully if its corpse was complete and given the necessary burial items. In considering the ethics of funerary archaeology, Paul Bahn remarks upon the sanctity of the physical completeness of the corpse to the ancient Egyptians:

The preparation for the afterlife and the preservation of its security were the most sacred things in their culture...they had an intense and well-justified dread of tomb-robbers, whose profession persisted through generation after generation. Even in the later periods, when concern for the mortal remains was superseded by anxiety about the fate of the soul, there was a basic desire to give the body a life resembling in some ways that which it had led on earth. They dreaded having a body mutilated; this was like a second death... (Bahn 1984, 215)

The corpse was considered inviolable and sacred and it remaining intact and complete was of utmost importance in ancient Egyptian eschatology in order for the dead's successful journey through the afterlife.

From pre-dynastic times through the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms there is consistent belief among the ancient Egyptians that the ideal burial was one which prepared the corpse for the afterlife with treatments and grave goods that preserved the body and prepared it for its journey. The deposition of the corpse developed and improved from simple pit burials in the Neolithic pre-dynastic period through to the Valley of the Kings tombs in the New Kingdom, but was always centered around the preservation of the complete corpse (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006).
In the pre-dynastic period we find naturally preserved corpses, one famous example being the mummy “Ginger” buried c. 3200 BC. The incredibly dry and stable environment would have desiccated and preserved her remains. It is thought that, upon seeing these corpses mummified by natural means, the ancient Egyptians would have been inspired by the preservation of the corpse, suggesting the idea of the importance of the body’s postmortem survival (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 8). There was an underlying institutional need to preserve the corpse John Baines and Peter Lacovara argue,

"The preservation of the deceased’s body, of the coffin and, of the tomb and grave goods was fundamental. Conservation of the corpse developed slowly from the late pre-dynastic times to its fullest form in the Third Intermediate Period, when mummification was a very elaborate and costly procedure aimed at maintaining the deceased’s physical appearance. (Baines and Lacovara 2002, 11)"

Mummification in the New Kingdom was very nuanced and intricate. The corpses of Yuya and Thuyu (Figure 3.4) attest to this. They look very human and pristine, as if they had only recently departed. To mummify a body, first the internal organs: the brain, lungs, intestines, stomach, and liver, were removed from the body, dried and placed in canopic jars. Next, the body underwent desiccation in which it was dried with salt over forty days (Assmann 2005, 33). Following this, the corpse, having been reduced to skin and bones, was restored into a more heavenly form through mummification. Renowned Egyptologist Jan Assmann succinctly and beautifully describes the steps to this renewal through the mummifying process and how it relates to the Osiris myth:

"By anointing it with balsamic oils that made the skin supple again, by stuffing it with resins, gum arabic, cloths, wood-wool, chaff, and other substances, by adorning it with artificial eyes, make-up, and a wig, and lastly, by wrapping it in mummy bandages of fine linen that were partly inscribed with magical formulas and had amulets interspersed among them. The end result of this elaborate"
treatment was a mummy. The mummy was more than a corpse, it was an image of the god Osiris and a sort of hieroglyph of the entire person, one that, as the Egyptians put it, was “filled with magic”. (Assmann 2005, 33)

In following the mummification ritual, a ritual that mirrored the Osiris myth, the dead body was transformed into a mystical and heavenly corpse ready for its journey through the afterlife. Thus, the ancient Egyptian eschatology demands the completeness of the corpse in order for the *ka*, *ba*, and *ahk* to survive and journey through the afterlife. The skilled development of mummification and the extent to which the ancient Egyptians went to preserve the physical remains of the deceased shows just how important the complete body was to their eschatology and how violating the complete corpse would have been violating the structures.

**A Typical Tomb in the Valley of the Kings**

*Figure 3.1. A map of the Valley of the Kings in Thebes (Theban Mapping Project 2002).*
The Valley of the Kings tombs were constructed as a subterranean series of stairways, corridors, and chambers, with gates and walls to maintain the security of the deceased (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006). The walls of each tomb were decorated with reliefs taken from ritual texts that were meant to protect and help the deceased on their journey through the afterlife. In the New Kingdom, anthropomorphic coffins became the norm. They were elaborately painted and decorated, often in the idealized likeness of their occupant, and were inscribed with the corpse’s name, title, and a myriad of ritual texts (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 44). The process of mummification was much improved at this time, the corpses of Yuya and Thuyu (described in detail in a later section) attest to the almost perfect preservation of the corpse’s physical appearance. The elite dead in the Valley of the Kings were interred with a large quantity of lavish burial goods that would have been intended to feed, protect, clothe, and aid them in the afterlife, unfortunately, many of the tombs were completely robbed and ransacked. The untouched tomb of Tutankhamen serves as an example of what a tomb in the Valley of the Kings may have looked like before looting; it will be used to establish a baseline for what one might expect to find in other tombs of the area.

Tutankhamen is said to have been buried in a quartzite coffin contained in “four gilded wooden chapels” (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 44), the sarcophagus comprised of three nested coffins, the first two of gilded wood and the third of solid gold. Each of these coffins was shaped like an idealized Tutankhamen depicted in the “Osirian pose and provided with the god’s beqa-scepter and flabellum”15 (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 44). Inside the innermost coffin, Tutankhamen’s mummy was adorned with a solid

15 The beqa scepter was a crook that, with the flabellum, a fan, was associated with Osiris. These objects symbolized royal power (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 215).
gold funerary mask and inside the mummy’s wrappings were high quality jewels and amulets. In fact, it is said that the “unwrapping process was extremely frustrating, for the abundance…each finger and toe was encased in gold” (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 45). Tutankhamen was buried with a vast array of grave goods to equip him for the afterlife. These goods include items such as: statues representing deities, several beds decorated with animal heads, mummified food offerings, thrones, staffs, games, everyday and ceremonial clothing, sandals, wigs, chairs, and chests (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 48). Some goods were ritualistic, canopic jars to contain the viscera of the pharaoh, model boats to symbolize his pilgrimage after death, and food for sustenance; others related to his royal office or daily life.

**The Legal Trials of Paser and Pawero**

Though the physical remains of the corpse and the grave goods had to remain intact in order for the *abk* to make it through its journey in the underworld, pillaging and looting of elite and royal tombs was widespread throughout ancient Egypt. Indeed, tombs were inscribed with curses that depicted what the deceased would do to those who vandalized or looted their tomb. The texts describe the deceased “‘wringing [someone’s] neck like a bird’ – or indirectly litigating with them in an otherworldly court… and Old Kingdom text promises ‘the crocodile against him in the water, the snake against him on land, who will do anything against this [tomb]’” (Baines and Lacovara 2002, 23). However, these inscriptions did little to discourage would-be robbers, the prospect of abundant riches likely dismissing any fear looters may have had about curses befalling them. Before diving into the archaeological evidence for ancient Egyptian tomb robbing found in the graves of Yuya and Thuyu (KV46) and of Ramses
VI (KV9), it is noteworthy to look to the papyral evidence for legal action taken against those who pillaged the corpse.

There was a series of major investigations and trials into grave robbing which took place in the New Kingdom in the sixteenth and seventeenth year of Ramses IX (ca. 1124-1123 BC) (Vernus 2003, 5). During these two years, the state was unable to send provisions to those who were building the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. This was not an uncommon issue, as prices of grains often fluctuated greatly from year to year (Vernus 2003, 6). However, during the reign of Ramses IX, the situation worsened and the tomb-builders stopped constructing or even coming to the valley to report for work. The royal tombs were left practically unguarded and were ripe for pillaging.

While Thebes as a whole was under the control of the vizier, Khamwese, the main city was divided by the Nile into East and West sides with two mayors. At the time in question, Peser governed the east side of Thebes; the west side, including the necropolis, was ruled by Pewero (Strudwick and Strudwick 1999, 184; Vernus 2003, 7). Peser learned that robberies were occurring in the Valley of the Kings and passed the information to Khamwese, who initiated an inspection of the necropolis in the sixteenth year of Ramses IX. Khamwese’s investigation found that nearly half of ten royal tombs examined had been plundered including the tombs of Pharaoh Ramses VI and his mother, Queen Isis (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 191; Strudwick and Strudwick 1999). Pewero was able to identify the thieves and gave Khamwese a list of names. The trial documents are recorded in the ‘tomb robbery papyri’ collection: Papyrus Abbot, Papyrus Amherst, the Turin Fragment, Papyrus Leopold II and the Mayer Papyri (Capart, Gardiner, and van de Walle 1936; Breasted 1962; Peet 1963). An excerpt from Papyrus
Mayer B details the testimony of a robber of the tomb of Ramses VI, the archaeological particulars of which will be detailed more explicitly in the next section.

The foreigner Nesamun took us up and showed [us] the tomb of King Nebmaatre-meriamun [Ramses VI], life! Prosperity! Health! The great god… and I spent four days breaking into it, we being [present] all five. We opened the tomb and we entered it. We found a bashed (?) lying on sixty… chests (?). We opened it. We found […] of bronze; a cauldron (?) of bronze; three wash bowls of bronze; a wash bowl, a ewer (for) pouring water over the hands, of bronze; two keb-vessels of bronze; two pewenet-vessels of bronze; a keb-vessel, an inker […]-vessel […] of bronze; three irer-vessels of bronze; eight beds of ornamented copper; eight bas-vessels of copper. We weighted the copper of the objects and of the vases, and found it to be [500] deben? (approx. 45.5kg), 100 deben (9.1kg) of copper falling to the share of each man?. We opened two chests full of clothes; we found, of good quality Upper Egyptian cloth, daiw-garments…, ideg-cloths, 35 garments, [seven garments of] good quality Upper Egyptian cloth falling to the share of each man. We found a basket (?) of clothes lying there; we opened it and found 25 rewed-shawls of colored (?) cloth in it, five rewed-shawls of colored (?) cloth falling to the share of each man]… (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 192)

It is noteworthy that even though these men pillaged they still respected the institution of the gods and ancient Egyptian eschatology. From the papyral evidence it is clear that the robbers were opportunistic. Some papyri give evidence that looting was carried out not only by those who had built the tombs, but also by necropolis officials, along with members of the burial party such as those who prepared the tomb, the priests, and mourners (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 191). Looters looked for precious jewels, gold and silver, glass, and other raw materials which could turn a fast profit.

**Archaeology: Yuya and Thuyu (KV46)**

KV 46 was discovered and excavated by James Edward Quibell in 1905 as part of an expedition financed by Theodore M. Davis. This tomb belonged to Yuya and Thuyu, non-royal officials who were the parents of Teye, the wife of Amenophis III, and the grandparents of Tutankhamen (Reeves 2000, Forward).
Yuya was a priest of the god Min at Akmim and, after the marriage of his daughter to the Pharaoh, he was made commander of the cavalry and gained the privilege of being buried in the Valley of the Kings (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 76). Thuyu, the wife of Yuya, was the “mistress of the robes” of the temple of Min at Akmim (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 200). This burial would have taken place in the 18th Dynasty around 1390 BC, during the reign of Amenhetep III (Theban Mapping Project). The tomb was found in a state of disarray, the outer barrier into the tomb had been breached and re-sealed clumsily (Reeves 1990, 149). In order to access the burial chamber, the thieves had made it through the staircase entryway, the corridor, and another stairway, each delineated by sealed walls (Figure 3.2).
There were artifacts scattered around corridor (B) and stairwell (C) including a wooden staff, the yoke of a chariot, and a large stone scarab covered in gold foil. Inside the burial chamber (J) the tomb furniture and grave goods were in complete disarray (Figure 3.3). The lids to the sarcophagi had been displaced; Yuya’s was crooked, Thuyu’s thrown off and in the corner. Boxes had been opened and burial furniture destroyed or in such a state of disorder they appear to have been thrown around in the process of pillaging. At the time of discover it was clear that the tomb had been ransacked (Reeves 1990, 150).
However, some of the funerary furnishings remained, including gold finger sheaths on Yuya’s hands, and high quality chairs and chests, though smaller precious objects had been taken. The mummies of Yuya and Thuyu were disturbed though not completely stripped; their funerary masks were pulled off but their mummies remained preserved with some small objects in the wrappings (Figure 3.4; Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 177).

It is thought that the tomb of Yuya and Thuyu was disturbed either two or three times after it was originally sealed. The cosmetics and oils that would have been placed in boxes and jars in the tomb could only have been taken while fresh so the initial looting probably occurred soon after burial (Reeves 1990, 149). The looters seemed to have been in a rush or interrupted, as they did not completely loot the corpses of Yuya and
Thuyu, indeed they must have abandoned the gilded stone scarab in the corridor upon realizing that it was not solid gold. It is noteworthy that the only lavish items remaining are composed in part of gold and silver leaf. Looters would not have taken these objects as the gold or silver leafing was worth less than the effort required to remove it from the object (Reeves 1990, 149). Following this disruptive event, it seems as though officials of the Valley of the Kings tried to superficially restore the tomb, we see repair bowls filled with plaster around the gate, Thuyu was covered with a sheet, and a few boxes were refilled. A second or possibly third robbery occurred during the interring of individuals in KV3 and KV4 based on the evidence of intrusive sealings found that date to Ramses III and XI (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 177).

Archaeology: Ramses VI (KV9)

KV9 was discovered by M. Loret in 1898 and the mummy was unwrapped by G. Elliot Smith in 1905. The tomb of Pharaoh Ramses VI is located just off of the main axis, wadi, in the east valley of the Valley of the Kings. Ramses VI was the son of Pharaoh Ramses III and Queen Isis, and the brother of Ramses IV and V, both of whom had short reigns. Construction of the tomb was initiated in Dynasty 20 under Ramses V but finished under Ramses VI, who changed the decorative representations of Ramses V and cartouches with the name of Ramses V to reflect the tomb’s new owner. It is unclear whether Ramses VI removed the mummy of Ramses V or they shared a tomb. KV9 is well-preserved and decorated in sunken reliefs from “the Book of Gates, Book of the Heavenly Cow, Book of the Dead, Imydwat, Book of the Day, Book of the Night, Book of the Earth, astronomical scenes, the resurrection of Osiris, deities, and enigmatic compositions” (Thebes Mapping Project, KV9).
Ramses VI appeared to have been a middle-aged man at the time of his death. In his book, *The Royal Mummies* (republished in 2000), Smith discusses the “distorted and manipulated” remains of Ramses VI, “the head and trunk…literally hacked to pieces and when the mummy came to be rewrapped it was necessary to obtain a board on which to tie the fragments of the body and given some semblance of the form of a mummy” (2000, 92). G. Elliot Smith attributed the destruction of Ramses VI’s remains to ancient tomb robbers looking for scarabs, amulets, and other valuables hidden in his wrappings (Figure 3.6). Smith dedicates quite a few pages in his general survey of the royal mummies to describing the damage to Ramses VI. Here are a few notable lines from his survey:

The shroud of fine linen, which had enveloped the whole body, was already pulled aside from the upper part of the mummy, where the underlying wrappings
were in a state of great disorder... I found a distorted and mutilated right hand and forearm of a man, but they did not belong to this mummy. In the place where the neck of the mummy should have been I found the separate left hip bone (os innominatum) and the rest of the pelvis. The right elbow and the lower half of the humerus were found lying on the right thigh and the head of the left femur was alongside the upper end of the fragment in front of the abdomen. (Smith 2000, 92)
Since the recorded robbery, archaeological evidence indicates that the tomb of Ramses VI had been consequently broken into and then renovated multiple times (Reeves 1990, 117). This tomb has been open since antiquity and has been the subject of many grave-robberies and thefts. Papyrus Mayer B records the testimony of grave robbers looting KV9. An inscription on the ceiling of burial chamber J dated to year nine of Ramses IX is thought to refer to an inspection of the tomb after a reported theft (Reeve and Wilkinson 1996, 192; Thebes Mapping Project). Papyri show us that the tomb was disturbed throughout the New Kingdom Dynasty 20, the Greco-Roman era, and the Byzantine period, the reliefs, grave goods and furniture having since been repaired and restored (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 192-193). It is also possible to see the attempt to rewrap Ramses VI, “his left upper arm was torn off at the shoulder but put in its proper place… an attempt had thus been made to put the arm into the position in which it was customary to place it” (Smith 2000, 93). However, the reburial was done
haphazardly, the mummy having been reinterred with pieces of other individuals, and the anthropoid coffin Ramses VI was reburied in originally having been constructed for a priest during the reign of Tuthmosis III (Dunand and Lichtenberg 2006, 196).

Interpretation: Contradictions, Inviolability of the Body, and Agency

The two cases of grave robbing detailed in this chapter highlight two sequences of events in ancient Egyptian looting. The looting of the tomb of Yuya and Thuyu appears to have been interrupted midway, meaning that the mummies remained almost completely preserved but the tomb itself was damaged and ransacked. The robbing of Ramses VI involved the complete destruction of the mummy and tomb followed by repair of the latter and the patchwork reassembly of the former. In cases in which tomb robbing was suspected or discovered, depending on the resources available and the status of who had been pillaged, there would be an attempt made to repair the damage. In other instances, especially in cases in which those involved were non-royal, the tomb would be resealed but not necessarily restored.

There is a contradiction in the seeming brutality toward the corpse after its burial. We find textual and archaeological evidence for pharaohs taking tombs from royal ancestors and relocating their former occupants, enemies of the deceased breaking into the tomb to scrawl graffiti on the walls, and prevalent grave robbing in which looters ripped apart mummies and tombs in order to access valuables (Baines and Lacovara 2002). All of these ideas, when juxtaposed, present ancient Egypt as a society that was very much focused on the needs and concerns of the living, rather than those of the dead.
The deceased occupied an interesting place in New Kingdom eschatology. According to mythology, mummification was absolutely necessary for the dead to reach the afterlife. The corpse had to remain intact and all of its grave goods were to stay in place and undisturbed for the corpse’s use in navigating the underworld and reaching the afterlife. According to New Kingdom beliefs the corpse was absolutely sacred and inviolable and had to remain undisturbed.

The ‘Harpist’s Song’ is a song inscribed on the wall of an 18th Dynasty tomb. According to the first two lines of the song the original was written in the funerary chapel of the Pharaoh Intef who is thought to have been Wahankh Intef II, 11th Dynasty, interred at Thebes. Following is a translation of the Song by Richard Parkinson:

The Song which is in the chapel of Intef, true of voice, which is before the singer with the harp:

This great one is well! Good is the destiny, good the destruction! For a generation passes, and another remains, since the time of the ancestors, those gods who existed aforetime, who rest in their pyramids, and the blessed noble dead likewise, buried in their pyramids. The builders of chapels, their places are no more. What has become of them?

I have heard the words of Imhotep and Horedef, whose sayings are so told: what of their places? Their walls have fallen; their places are no more, like those who never were. None returns from there to tell their conditions, to tell their state, to reassure us, until we attain the place where they have gone.

May you be happy with this, forgetfulness giving you benediction. Follow your heart while you live! Put myrrh on your head! Cloth yourself with fine linen! Anoint yourself with true wonders of the divine rite! Increase your happiness!
Be not weary hearted! Follow your heart and happiness!
Make your things on earth! Do not destroy your heart
until that day of lamentation comes for you!
The Weary-hearted does not hear their lamentation;
mourning cannot save a man from the tomb-pit.

Chorus: Make holiday! Do not weary of it!
Look, no one can take his things with him.
Look, no one who has gone there returns again.
(Parkinson 1991, 145-146)

This song describes the ambivalent attitude toward death in the New Kingdom,
recounting both the benefits and the losses that come when one dies. On one hand, the
song is associated with lavish funerary celebrations, the first stanza refers to the well
being of the ‘noble dead’, still buried in their mighty tombs and pyramids. However, on
the other hand, the song reveals the fears surrounding death and insecurity concerning
the treatment of the corpse. Indeed the second stanza introduces doubt and discusses
the mutability and impermanence of the monuments, that “even the sages of the Old
Kingdom have no monuments left” (Parkinson 1991, 145). Parkinson comments, “in the
last verse the singer urges carefreeness, with phrases which present this as the only
appropriate funeral preparation. In the mixture of tones a balance between despair and
hope, the endurance and decay of the dead is achieved” (Parkinson 1991, 145).

Even though there is a contradiction between the time-consuming and intensive
preparation of the corpse and associated funerary rites, and the rampant grave robbing
and disturbing of graves for the attainment of wealth, power, or a good burial location,
there was still a fundamental belief that the corpse necessarily had to remain intact in
order for the abk to reach the afterlife. There were curses written on walls, legal penalties
for those caught trespassing, and a huge amount of effort put in to make sure that the
New Kingdom tombs were left undisturbed. With all these institutions in place to ensure
that the mortuary institution was respected and that the elite mummies remained unmolested, those that did disturb the corpse were transgressing funereal rules and acting against eschatological structures stating that the corpse was inviolable. The grave robbers were directly exercising their agency by proceeding to loot and destroy the tombs and mummies despite structural rules that did now allow this.

This chapter showcases an instance of people exercising their agency despite existing institutions, violating those structures, and violating the sacredness of the corpse. The people who looted and robbed the New Kingdom tombs in the Valley of the King were fully aware of the effort entailed to ensure the safety of the tomb and the preparation of the dead. They were aware that the religious institution as well as the legal framework prohibited the robbing of the tombs. Despite these structures, the people made a choice to act against the rules and violate the taboos surrounding the ancient Egyptian dead. They literally transgressed the sacred charge of the tomb and the corpse by breaking into the tombs, stealing valuable grave goods, and tearing about the mummies in order to access amulets and other valuables that had been placed in the wrappings.
CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I was curious as to how archaeologists may be able to use an agentive interpretation to explore the mindset and motives behind those who open a tomb and manipulate the corpse. I opened my introduction with a short vignette inspired by my past excavations to familiarize the reader with post-depositional manipulation. I then worked through three case studies that showcase this phenomenon being triggered by different situations and motives, and explained how agency, or lack thereof, came into play in the act of manipulating the dead body. Throughout this piece I have worked within a Durkheimian philosophical framework in which the corpse is sacred and inviolable, and within a structural model that interpreted mortuary rites as necessary to reinforce that dead body’s sanctity and reorganize society following a loss. In understanding if those who dug up the corpse were acting within or against certain structures I found it necessary to contextualize the case studies within textual and archaeological evidence. This helped create a clear picture of why the manipulation was done and whether or not the motives behind the disturbance of the corpse reinforce or dismantle the structures which determine its treatment.

In two of the three case studies that my thesis has delved into; the destruction of the corpse because of its feared evil power, and the manipulation of the remains for some political purpose, institutional structures were upheld and buttressed. In my final case study, the destruction of the corpse in order to loot its valuables, the agency of the plunderers was exercised in that structural rules necessitating the careful treatment of the dead body and its remaining intact were disregarded. My third case study was the only
one in which agency was demonstrated. Grave robbing is most certainly a case of agents acting against structures that necessitate the completeness of the corpse and tomb in order for the deceased to reach the afterlife. The looters decided that attaining the valuables in a burial was more important than abiding by existing structures. Therefore, the grave robbers were deliberately acting, fully aware of eschatological institutions, to destroy the corpse and loot the tomb and in doing so the actors violated the structures and violated the corpses.

At this point it is worthwhile to point out a shortcoming in my thesis. In this project, I have worked within a strict binary of agency and structure. While I think that overall some of the case studies I dealt with were indeed straightforward and categorical, for example ancient Egyptian grave robbing, others fell on a spectrum. For example, I identified the Winnall II grave disturbance as a structural response to an eschatologically recognized fear. However, the community who used Winnall II were Christian, albeit in the transition. The anxiety and fear of the evil, rising dead originated in their pagan religion, not Christianity, therefore, this case falls on a spectrum between agency and structure. If we define the dominant eschatological structure as paganism, the people were acting according to existing structures, if we define it as Christianity, the people were exercising their agency and acting in a manner inconsistent with and subversive of dominant beliefs. Further, in the Maya case study, while there is definitely precedent for a political use of human remains, the specific usage of Tuun Kayawak’s corpse is unparalleled; Jasaw Chan K’awiil could therefore be seen as exerting his agency in spite of structures dictating the use of the corpse. For the purposes of this thesis, I utilized a binary system of agency and structure and allocated each case study accordingly. However, in reality, all of the events described fall on a spectrum with some more solidly
on one side than others. In the future, it would be beneficial to examine these and other case studies on a spectrum as opposed to using a binary system.

The common thread in these three case studies is that self-interest is associated with the decision to disturb the corpse. In all three cases, the agent’s decision to open burials and manipulate the corpse was motivated by self-preservation or personal advancement. The Anglo-Saxon and Viking disturbances of burials were spurred by a fear of the dead and the thought that the only way to keep the community safe was to crush, decapitate, or distort the corpses. The Maya lords of Tikal and Maasal disturbed the corpse of Tuun Kayawak in order to showcase the political relationship between their states. The ancient Egyptian plunderers were acting with greed in their choice to steal from the corpses, placing their desire to gain wealth above the interests of the deceased as outlined by eschatological structures.

I hesitate to put forth universalizing statements concerning the conditions in which agency is practiced in the decision to manipulate the corpse. The ancient Egyptian grave robbing case stands out amongst the other two case studies as an example of agentive action ignoring and subverting structural norms. However, burial looting does not always involve a conscious decision to act in disregard of structures. For example, modern Columbian looting of ancient burials occurs in relation to eschatological institutions. According to María del Rosario Ferro, who spent five years living with the Indians of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta for her PhD dissertation at the University of Bogotá, the looters themselves felt as though they had entered into a pact with the devil (del Rosario Ferro 2012). They acknowledged and accepted the negative ramifications of their decisions and believed that they were cursed due to their plundering burials. While the looters were violating and stealing from the corpse, they were doing so aware and
afraid of structural rules and outcomes and therefore were not demonstrating their agency in the same way as the ancient Egyptians robbers. At this point it is impossible to say anything universalizing about the agency involved in disturbing the corpse. However, I do believe that the decision to open a tomb represents a decision not made lightly; rather it is the final option for many in the pursuit of safety, political power, and wealth.

The agentive approach within the comparative method was hugely useful in considering whether or not the charge of the corpse, and the structures that determine that charge, is violated. Using Hodder (2000) and Bell (1992) to build my method was beneficial in that I was able to consider the individual intention involved in actions that may negate the universal structures of mortuary rites, and I was forced to define how I use agency and structure in this thesis. Further, I think there was an advantage in comparing case studies cross-culturally and across time. I was able to take a more four dimensional approach to the general study of the phenomenon of post-burial manipulation, understanding its occurrence in response to a myriad of factors and not limited to one particular region or culture.

However, there were some limitations to my study. In incorporating three different case studies from vastly different cultures, it was difficult for me to grapple with the huge amount of data. I tried my best to take into consideration all that was necessary to come to an appropriate interpretation, however, I wish I had been able to develop each case study further. For example, I think it would have been particularly helpful to be able to analyze each case study in terms of multiple comparative examples within the same culture but set in a different regional area. This would have given me a better idea of how far reaching the structural norms dictating mortuary behavior were.
The limited nature of this type of project necessitates a limit to the avenues that could be explored here. These avenues would have clarified some of the flaws.

Nonetheless this study is a demonstration of the value of the agentive approach and comparative method as a useful means for archaeologists to explore burials in which there appears to have been disturbance of the corpse after its final deposition. In the future, it would be helpful to consider this as a method through which to study the experiences of those reopening burials within the context of their time in a manner which incorporates possible religious, political, and economic motives in considering the apparent violation of the corpse.

Archaeology is another means by which the corpse is manipulated after its final burial. Archaeologists excavate and study the corpse for academic and scientific purposes, to discover what they can about that culture, their artifacts, and how the deceased may have lived. In many cases we are not respecting the structures that determined how that corpse was treated as most corpses were buried with the intention that they would remain underground, not with the intention that many years later academics would dig them up and bring them into labs to measure them for things such as: disease, stature, cause of death, and diet. Archaeologists may violate the structures of the cultures in which the people they studied lived, however, they are acting in line with the structures that exist in the modern world which suggest that academic exploration is a worthwhile purpose for which ancient corpses may be dug up and studied. It is noteworthy that archaeological excavation and study does not occur without pushback. In many places, archaeology is protested and condemned. NAGPRA was created as a legal framework through which Native American tribes could protect heritage sites and have material culture and human remains repatriated. In Israel, the orthodox Jewish
community protests, at times violently, the excavation of human remains, even if the remains are pre-Jewish. Regardless of this, other archaeologists, and myself, are acting within the structural boundaries which limit and govern our society. By acting in the name of the academic institution, and while we may violate certain ancient eschatological structures, we are not violating our own.
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