Social Endurance beyond Human Death

Gary M. Feinman and Patrick Ryan Williams

Field Museum

Abstract: This thematic essay considers how the death of an individual reverberates through human social networks and groups. The authors explore how societies endure in the face of individual mortality and how those challenges vary depending on who specifically died and how the social group is organized. The essay transitions from a consideration of death in mobile, small-scale populations to larger human aggregations that were organized in different ways. For example, the death of a leader has been characterized by markedly different cultural patterns and practices depending on the nature of leadership, legitimation, and succession. The case studies explore examples, from the origins of social memories to the roles of different monuments to the dead that reflected the links between leaders, their forebearers, and their followers.

Resumen: Este artículo explora cómo la muerte de un individuo repercute en las redes sociales y los grupos humanos en que este se insertó. Los autores exploran cómo las sociedades resisten y hacen frente a la mortalidad individual, y cómo los desafíos varían dependiendo de quién específicamente murió y cómo está organizado ese grupo social en particular. Este artículo revisa desde una consideración de la muerte en poblaciones móviles y de pequeña escala hasta las grandes comunidades humanas que se organizaron de maneras diferentes. Por ejemplo, la muerte de un líder se ha caracterizado por ciertos patrones y prácticas culturales marcadamente diferentes según la naturaleza del liderazgo, su legitimación, y su sucesión. Los artículos aquí contenidos exploran múltiples ejemplos, desde los orígenes de las memorias sociales hasta los roles de los diferentes monumentos erigidos en honor a los muertos que reflejaron los vínculos entre estos líderes, sus antepasados, y sus seguidores.

During 2022, the US death toll from COVID-19 passed one million. Of course, global totals and the many additional "excess deaths" tabulated by nations around the world portend a human impact even much more severe (Adam 2022; Schreiber 2022; Yong 2022b). Virtually every death leaves a personal void for some or many survivors, depending on the social networks that the deceased belonged to and the extent of their contacts. The ramifying effects—grief, mourning, ritual enactments—from the death of a military and political leader like General Colin Powell extend much more broadly than for most other citizens. Nevertheless, almost every death ignites a social response among those left behind, although the scale and specifics vary widely. Here, we briefly explore why death for our species has always been such a trigger for social response, albeit taking various forms. We ask why these repetitive practices become so encoded, enduring in human traditions and even materialized monumentally on landscapes? We also focus on underlying factors that underpin how and why these reactions vary depending on particular social contexts and the specific roles of the deceased.

Among the living, funerary rituals and interaction between the dead and their earthly descendants are ubiquitous; some researchers even argue that communication with deceased antecedents is a human universal and a key to understanding the underpinnings of religion more generally (Steadman,

Palmer, and Tilley 1996, 63). "Of all sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life—death—is of the greatest importance" (Malinowski 1954, 47). Ritualized mortuary activities take a wealth of different forms, and not every death receives an equivalent or as ritually full response. Yet it is worth pondering why funerary rituals and correspondence with the dead are such a fundamental aspect of humanity's cultural practice in the past and present (Jong 2016; Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley 1996)? In the archaeological record, funerary behaviors provide some of the earliest material evidence for human ritual behaviors (Pettitt 2011), as with the tomb of King Tutankhamen, among the most stiring and memorable windows into our species' past (Nilsson Stutz and Tarlow 2013).

Although humans generally have a sizeable capacity for selfishness, they also are exceptionally good cooperators. No other animal cooperates with non-kin at the scales that humans do, and in various global regions people established large-scale cooperative arrangements and dense social networks that extend back more than ten millennia. Death, especially sequential or mass death, leaves holes in human social networks and can undermine interpersonal institutions, creating grief and malaise (Yong 2022a). "For those grieving, even more normal times don't feel like old times" (Lee 2022). In other words, at death, gaps in social networks are opened, and people respond in different ways. Steps may be taken by those who do

remain to reestablish and patch ties. Alternatively, the interpersonal networks that were severed and disrupted could easily diffuse, splintering human groupings and institutions that foster cooperation (e.g., Bond 2017; Engelke 2019; Hobbs and Burke 2017; Lannutti and Bevan 2022). In essence, death can create new linkages in human networks or cause them to collapse. It is this particular nature of how death affects our relationships across social networks that has the greatest implications for resilience and continuity in human society.

From a cultural perspective, the dead often leave a pall. Cultural responses to death require "time because it takes time for the rent in the social fabric to be rewoven and for the dead to do their work in creating, recreating, representing, or disrupting the social order of which they had been a part" (Laqueur 2015, 10). The dead have two lives, one in culture and the other in nature. Humans are social beings grafted on a material body, the demise of which often punctures the social order. "The relationship between the two conceptions of the dead—mere matter on the one hand, and beings who have a social existence on the other—is what allows bones, ashes, and names to do their work" (Laqueur 2015, 10). What different "rituals have in common is that they provide a mechanism for people and societies to cope with death—both the loss of a social being, and the emergence of a dead body, which creates a new and practical situation to be dealt with by the survivors" (Nilsson Stutz and Tarlow 2013, 5).

Mortuary rites and ancestor communications are so globally and historically widespread because it is through funerary ritual, initial treatment of the body, interment or final disposition, mourning, and other postmortem observances that the dead are gently passed from this world and securely situated into the next. From there, they are integrated into memories and traditions, often folded into communities (see Muro Ynoñán and Feinman in this volume) and landscapes (see Lepper in this volume) where the remains of deceased (and associated markers and monuments) signal connections between peoples and place, and past with present. At the same time, the burial of the dead serves as an emotionally charged context in which relationships of affiliation, status, power, and inequality among the living are frequently negotiated and structured. The heightened emotional importance of death-related rites and their high potential to spark memories make them a potent arena to forge and reaffirm ties and to contend for equity and/or power (Hayden 2009). These long-term implications of how the death of individuals structures the lives and relationships of their survivors for decades or centuries to come are our primary focus in this essay.

Death and the Scale of Paleolithic Social Networks

Although death-prompted rituals and communications between the living and the dead are extremely widespread in time and space, specific funerary behaviors are incredibly diverse and, to degrees, culturally entrenched. Key axes of that variation rest on different historical worldviews and traditions, far too numerous and diversified (Jong 2016) to review adequately here (see also Muro Ynoñán in this volume). Nevertheless, there are relational patterns and processes between mortuary treatments, social scale, status, and the distribution of political power that eclipse local and cultural traditions, and long have been noted and investigated (e.g., Chapman 2013).

Across human history, societal scale is a key factor that undergirds variability in mortuary ritual and the material imprint of those behaviors. For anatomically modern humans and our immediate sapient ancestors, the earliest funerary rituals extend back to the Paleolithic, roughly 50,000 years ago, possibly somewhat earlier, but still tens of thousands of years after the advent of our species. In that era, global populations tended to be mobile, generally dispersed. Not only our species, but close relative of *Homo sapiens*, the Neanderthals, also practiced intentional burial. Early evidence came from Shanidar Cave in Kurdistan (Pomeroy et al. 2020; Solecki 1975), where 70,000 years ago these hominids were buried along with flowers from outside the cave. At the La Ferrassie site in the French Dordogne, a two-year-old child was intentionally interred more than 40,000 years ago (Balzeau et al. 2020). Modern *Homo sapiens* also practiced individual interments during the Paleolithic, such as the Cap Blanc Magdelanian burial that is now housed at the Field Museum (see Martin et al. in this volume). Such early burials generally were placed in caves, rock shelters, or other locations where people periodically or seasonally aggregated. For the Cap Blanc rock shelter interment, the presence of a long sculptured frieze on the cave wall indicates that this was a place to which the mobile Magdalenians regularly returned. In other similar Paleolithic contexts, the dead were interred, sometimes with artifactual accompaniments, which in certain contexts could be surprisingly ample (e.g., Riel-Salvatore and Gravel-Miguel 2013; Wengrow and Graeber 2015).

Investigators do not know why art, music, funerary behaviors, and other symboling became more prominent in the archaeological record (ca. 50,000 years ago). This shift has been termed the "sapient paradox" as it as yet has not been pinned to a specific biological change or linked to only a specific region (Renfrew 2007). A hypothesis advanced to understand this symbolic florescence ties these changes to increases in regional population densities (Powell, Shennan, and Thomas 2009), which occurred at that time.

6A The Magdalenian Skeleton from Cap Blanc

**Robert D. Martin, J. P. Brown, Stacy Drake,
William Pestle, and William Parkinson**

Field Museum

An almost complete human skeleton from the Cap Blanc site in the Dordogne region of southwestern France has been housed in the anthropological collections of the Field Museum in Chicago since 1927. At the time of its acquisition, it was the only virtually complete European Paleolithic human skeleton in the US, and this remains the case today (Figure 6.1). The Cap Blanc site is a rock shelter that is particularly notable because of a striking sculptured frieze extending some 40 feet along its back wall. The frieze includes exquisitely carved images of horses, bison, and reindeer. In 1911, during construction of a wall to protect the frieze and excavation to lower the floor sediments to increase its visibility, a human skeleton was discovered just a few feet from the base of the frieze (Lalanne and Breuil 1911). Unfortunately, the discovery occurred accidentally, resulting when a workman plunged a pickaxe through the right side of the skull, shattering it into several pieces. The individual was probably deliberately buried, as the legs were flexed into a characteristic "fetal position." No grave goods had been included during burial, although a small artifact identified as an "ivory point" was found near the skeleton.

Following their excavation, the encrusted skeletal remains were transported to Paris for expert removal of the surrounding matrix, consolidation of the bones, and initial study involving some reconstruction. In 1924, some years after the skeleton had been excavated, the Cap Blanc landowner, Monsieur Grimaud, shipped it to New York in hopes of selling it to the American Museum of Natural History at a price of $12,000. When negotiations for the sale eventually came to nothing, Henry Field (nephew of the Field Museum's founding director Stanley Field) quickly intervened and was able to purchase the skeleton for the bargain price of $1,000. He subsequently organized a public display of the individual in a specially constructed case, but the individual was laid out in an extended "anatomical" position rather than the original fetal position. Partly thanks to Henry Field's well-honed public relations skills, on the first day of its display the Cap Blanc skeleton attracted 12,000 eager visitors. Fanciful interpretations that probably drove this record-setting attendance included Field's suggestion that the individual might have been a young maiden who had carved the frieze, accompanied by the speculation that the "ivory point" had played a part in her death.

From the outset, the Cap Blanc individual was enigmatic in several respects. To begin with, the geological age remained somewhat uncertain, although the remains likely date to the Upper Paleolithic. Because of certain characteristic tools recovered from the Cap Blanc site (but not in association with the remains), a Magdalenian age is generally accepted. However, some artifacts from the site indicate an older Solutrean date. Despite initial confusion regarding the sex of the individual, the remains were eventually determined to be female. A major factor here was a detailed anatomical study of the skeleton published by Gerhardt von Bonin in 1935, which convincingly established osteological sex as female. Far greater uncertainty, which has persisted up to the present day, surrounds her age at death. Because the wisdom teeth (third molar teeth) had not fully erupted in upper or lower jaws, von Bonin inferred that the individual was aged about 20 years. Yet the rest of the skeleton—portions of which show a more advanced degree of ossification of growth zones in long bones and some evidence of wear and tear in the vertebral column—indicates that the individual had reached adulthood, with an age at death somewhere between 21 and 35 years.

Since 2004, researchers at the Field Museum in Chicago have been engaged in a detailed reexamination of the Cap Blanc individual, using a range of modern methods. Detailed anatomical investigation of the remains has included digital X-rays, CT-scanning, and virtual 3D reconstructions of the skull and pelvis. Information obtained has confirmed that the individual is female and has shed additional light on her likely age at death. Although there is relatively little wear on the erupted teeth, apart from some abrasion of the tips of the incisors, scanning has revealed that development of the unerupted wisdom teeth was anomalous and hence unreliable for inference of age. Moreover, internal imaging of her bones has indicated that their development was quite close to completion.

Virtual reconstruction of the skull from the CT-scans—including mirror imaging to compensate for the damage to the right side inflicted by that workman's pickaxe—indicated that the 1935 physical reconstruction crafted by von Bonin differed in certain key features. Overall, interpretations at that time were reflected by a general bias toward giving the skull a more "primitive" appearance, especially in the facial region. Using the CT-scans, individual bones—which had been firmly integrated with robust plaster in von Bonin's reconstruction—were painstakingly isolated and then gradually integrated into a corrected reconstruction following established anatomical guidelines. That virtual reconstruction was then used to generate a three-dimensional print of the skull for display. Moreover, a copy of that 3D print was dispatched to the renowned French paleoartist Elisabeth Daynès. She was commissioned to produce a captivating bust of the Cap Blanc individual that is now on public display at the Field Museum alongside the original skeleton and a print of the skull.

In tandem with the anatomical investigation, bone samples from the Cap Blanc remains were subjected to radiometric analyses with the aim of establishing a reliable geological age for the individual. However, two samples submitted for C14 dating at the Oxford University Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit in 2004 yielded distinctly

different, non-overlapping calibrated dates of 17000–16400 cal BP and 14900–13800 cal BP, respectively. In an attempt to resolve this problem, two additional samples were sent to the Oxford laboratory in 2006. Unfortunately, the new results were also distinctly different and did not overlap with one another or with either of the two initial dates: 12500–11900 cal BP and 9600–9300 cal BP, respectively. One possible explanation for the discordance between the four C14 dates, which extend over a range of over 7000 years, is that the Cap Blanc skeleton was contaminated with organic carbon-containing materials in preparations used to consolidate the bones. Further work is in progress to test the plausibility of this explanation and to seek additional dates with samples from relatively isolated parts of the skeleton.

In sum, although it seems well-established that the Cap Blanc individual is female, uncertainty about her geological age and the age at death has persisted up to the present day.

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Although mobility remained a key element of human life during the Paleolithic, there are indications that seasonal camps in certain places were occupied for longer durations and by larger numbers of co-residents (Wengrow and Graeber 2015). As the sizes and durations of aggregations increase, so do interactive densities and scales of cooperation. Humans are simultaneously both selfish and competitive (Carballo, Roscoe, and Feinman 2014), so human cooperation is generally strategically situational and contingent on the nature of social ties (Blanton and Fargher 2016, 31–32). Interpersonal networks and aggregations tend to be fluid (Birch 2013), even when specific settlements are more sedentary and temporally durable (Feinman and Neitzel 2019).

For mobile hunter-gatherers, networks of social relationships generally are dispersed, open, and ephemeral, changing as groups and individuals split apart and nucleate. But the most stable unit is small, made up of close kin (and those who are proximate) who have in-depth knowledge of each other (Apicella et al. 2012). These individual relations tend to be face-to-face, personal, and biographical (Coward and Gamble 2008); biographical in the sense that people have in-depth and specific knowledge of those to whom they have ties of deep personal familiarity and details about one another. As a result, most mobile

hunter-gatherer groupings are not purely egalitarian, as inequities are often manifest along the lines of age, sex, and ability (Cashdan 1980). Likewise, especially during aggregational episodes, leaders and specialists may arise, but their roles tend to be situational and ephemeral (Feinman 1995).

In general, prior to 12,000 years ago, most preserved funerary remains reflect these social contexts with mortuary placements made in the vicinity to where seasonal aggregations occurred. Nevertheless, as the size of aggregations tended to be limited to scores of people, the labor investments largely were modest (Magdalenian), simple cists or pits in which one or two individuals were situated (Riel-Salvatore and Gravel-Miguel 2013). Likewise, grave accompaniments generally were neither extremely ample nor costly in regard to either labor allotments or material acquisition. Many small ornaments, like beads, found in burials may be items that adorned the individual during life. Where burial populations are clustered and so a broader sample is comparable, individual differences in burials tended not to be extensive; many appear to reflect key attributes, like distinctions in age and sex. The positioning of mortuary interments in spots where people aggregated repeatedly likely provided incentives for the living to return, remember/honor their ancestors, and thus retain ties to other co-residents even following the deaths of

Figure 6.1. Magdalenian woman, a human skeleton from Dordogne, France, dated to the Upper Paleolithic (FM 42943).

people who may have been former forebearers or social intermediaries.

Although most Paleolithic interments were not particularly elaborate, select ones were, and these have been reported from the Dordogne to the Don (Wengrow and Graeber 2015). Most of these contexts contain at most a few individuals. But the interred in these rare contexts often were flooded with adornments, such as the thousands of mammoth ivory beads and perforated fox canines found in select contexts at the Sungir site in Russia. Although archaeologists do not uniformly agree on the meaning of these elaborate burials, they would seem to mark key individuals of skill or importance who in times of aggregation assumed a key role, which was commemorated at their death. Yet there is no indication that their situational and/or achieved status was necessarily transferred to their descendants. These represent some of the earliest examples of what might constitute wealth being interred with the dead. Earlier interments may have constituted intentional burial,

and even included grave offerings. It was these more elaborate burials, however, that may have manifested social differences in life and the input of substantial social resources into the chambers of the deceased.

Death and the Scale of Holocene Social Networks

In certain regions, there is ample evidence that human populations grew to higher densities toward the outset of the Holocene (ca. 12,000 years ago). In some of those places, such as the Levant in Southwest Asia, this led to larger, longer aggregations and eventually transitions from mobile lifeways to more permanent settlements. We know that in and of itself sedentism often fosters episodes of demographic growth (Bandy and Fox 2010), due to transport and child-spacing considerations, as well as the availability of weaning foods. Early weaning may shorten nursing, which may affect female fertility. Nevertheless, the specific suite of causal factors may not be uniform from region to region or case to case.

6B   The Mortuary and Commemorative Poles from Skidegate, British Columbia, Canada

Luis Muro Ynoñán and Gary M. Feinman
Field Museum

Located at the southern end of Graham Island, British Columbia, Skidegate is a village belonging to the Haida Gwaii Indigenous nation. According to local beliefs (Swanton 1905), the origin of this Indigenous nation dates back to the arrival of the "primordial ancestresses" belonging to matrilineal groups that settled down on the island some 17,000 years ago. Some of these powerful ancestresses include the Foam Woman, Creek Woman, and Ice Woman, whose spirits inhabit, even to the present, the surrounding glaciers. Centrally located within the Haida Gwaii archipelago, Skidegate was named after the chief who ruled the village in early 1880. Skit-ei-get, means "red paint stone," although European colonizers standardized the name of the village to Skidegate (Horwood 2014).

Skidegate, along with other Haida Gwaii communities, is recognized by its cultural traditions, art, language, and, particularly, totem poles. Monumental, elegant, and stylized, totem poles are made of massive trunks of red cedar that are carved and subsequently painted with intricate designs and motifs. Whereas the practice of creating ceremonial carvings in wood is relatively widespread among North American Indigenous groups, the level of perfection, monumentality, and stylization of the Northwest Coast poles is particularly distinctive. As Edward Malin (1996, 18) reminds us "Haida totem poles achieved an artistic significance without parallel in human experience." But the Haida Gwaii poles are more than visual and spatial markers or ornamented pieces of heraldic

art. For the Haida Gwaii people, the poles can be better understood as physical manifestations that embody the histories, desires, and rights of each member of the family that owns it (MacDonald 1983). They are consequently items with a deep historical significance. But it is, perhaps, their relationship with the ancestors and death, as well as their capacity to serve as a bridge with the afterlife, that makes these wooden carved poles particularly important for the Haida Gwaii people (MacDonald and Cybulski 1973). The images often displayed are crest figures, many of which represent supernatural beings or ancestors from whom families obtain hereditary rights and privileges. Poles thus proclaim and validate one person's lineage and importance.

Mortuary Poles

In Skidegate, poles are commonly erected for both remembering the dead and serving them as a means for transcendence (MacDonald and Cybulski 1973) (Figure 6.2). In both cases, poles enable the owners to reinforce their links with their lineages, ancestors, and deep family histories. Poles are thus objects of memory that enable the living both to live and remember. As members of the Haida Gwaii recount, when a high-ranking person passes, the clan goes into mourning for about a year. The members of the clan do not attend festivities; they are completely isolated. During this time, the remains of the person are treated according to each of the family traditions. Furthermore, the

clan gathers the necessary resources to hold what is called "an end of mourning ceremony." During all this time the spirit of the dead remains near the living. At the ceremony itself, the remains of the person are put into a box, "a funerary box," which is raised to the top of the pole with a plaque in front of it. Raising the deceased, and placing the body into the box aims to raise his or her spirit up, and shove it into the next realm. The ceremony is considered to be completed when the dead finally comes back, after one generation or two, in the form of a reincarnated entity (Jefferson 2009). The extra height that some of the poles present helps the soul of the individual find its way back to the village, once the process of reincarnation is over.

Commemorative Poles

Memorial poles reflect a similar process (Malin 1996). When a high-status individual dies, his or her spirit moves away from the community, so they need to be guided back home (Figure 6.3). Memorial poles are tall, with the bottom of the tree in the ground. These poles are quite high, some of the highest in the village; they act as a guiding beacon to enable the spirit to return to the community and have a longer process of entering the ancestral realm. For example, individuals who did not die in the village (e.g., persons lost in battle or at sea) need to be guided back home, as James McGuire, Haida native artist and member of the Haida Gwaii Museum in Canada, recounts (personal communication with the authors). The living can help the dead by putting up a kind of beacon near the pole so that those lost can be brought back home. Poles are raised only at very specific times in the year. It is only during the potlatch, an ancestral ceremonial feast at which possessions are given away or destroyed to display wealth or enhance prestige, when Haida people raise their dead and give them the last push they need to enter into the ancestral realm. For decades, the potlatch was banned by the Canadian government (Weiss 2018), but now it is a continuing expression of Haida identity.

Poles from the Field Museum Exhibition

Members of the Haida Gwaii community who were interviewed during the design process of the exhibit acknowledge that the models of poles displayed in it embody and personify important Haida Gwaii leaders. The pole shown in Figure 6.2 represents a much larger mortuary pole that once stood at Skidegate. Its original version was raised to honor and contain the remains of Wiiganaad, the Eagle Chief. The model of Figure 6.3 was raised by Chief Tl'aajaang Quuna to honor his uncle, Hungo Dass. Memorial poles are raised to honor individuals who passed away, and similar to the human body, mortuary poles are intended to decay and return to the earth, so the original ones are no longer standing (MacDonald and Cybulski 1973). Poles such as the ones displayed in the exhibit are wonderful examples of local traditions and beliefs about how Haida relatives progressively leave this plane of existence, according to those interviewed. Some of them acknowledge (or

hypothesize about) the relationship between the poles displayed and specific families and clans that are present today in Skidegate. McGuire, for example, acknowledges that the Wiiganaad pole is connected to Aay Aay Albert Hans, who is the chief of the Eagles of Skidegate clan and who was also interviewed. Although McGuire cannot be sure about the origin of the Sithlingun or the Salthling-ah pole, it could also be connected to Wiiganaad. The Hungo Dass pole could have been for a wife, of an opposite lineage, who was likely from a different clan. The interviewees all hold that the colonial influence of the patriarchy nowadays confuses the relationships that can normally be established between the poles, their motifs, and the clans they might represent.

Resilience and Endurance

The importance of the ancestors in the life of the Haida Gwaii people extends well beyond the extraordinary times created and reproduced during a potlatch. The ancestors are considered to walk with the Haida people every day, while the living deal with the present dangers of the everyday and remember the harms of the past. It is like "being guided by the stars," director of the Haida Gwaii Museum Nika Collison says. The poles are not meant to endure forever, the interviewees all argue. The poles eventually fall down and decompose, and so does the body of the deceased that was placed into the "mortuary box." Some poles from the 1800s are still visible, but many others are in process of returning to the earth (Jefferson 2009). Many poles (or parts of them) were taken away by Western collectors and museums, including the Field Museum, which took poles from Skidegate in 1892. Despite the cultural disruption caused by colonial regimes and then the Canadian government, poles remain a vivid expression of Haida culture, identity, and capacity of resilience (Weiss 2018).

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Figure 6.2. Haida Gwaii model: Wiiganaad's mortuary pole from Skidegate (FM 17839).

Figure 6.3. Haida Gwaii model: Hungo Dass's memorial pole from Skidegate (FM 17842).

With more permanent settlements and tended fields that required labor and resource investments or "sunk-costs" (Janssen, Kohler, and Scheffer 2003), individual and domestic departures from settled communities (fissioning) became a somewhat less viable option than in more mobile networks. Larger, denser settlements have a wide range of implications (Smith 2019) for human social networks, their complexity, and integration. As human density and community size increases arithmetically, the potential number of interpersonal interactions expands exponentially (Coward and Dunbar 2014; Johnson 1982). These social ramifications of such scalar increases have been widely referenced, albeit under various terms, including "scalar stress" (Bandy 2004; Johnson 1982), "social stress" (Düring 2013), "communications stress" (Fletcher 1995), "intracommunity conflict" (Ur 2014), and "density-dependent conflict" (Birch 2013).

With co-residence in larger, denser settlements, not only the number but also the nature of social ties change. The burdens of sustaining and servicing social relationships strain time-and-energy budgets, increasing demand on memory and social cognition (Roberts 2010). The specific scope of human cognitive capabilities is individually variable, and there is debate over precise capacities (Dunbar 2011). But there is little disagreement over the fact that constraints do exist and that they range around no more than several hundred interpersonal associations (Wellman 2012). That is, the biographical knowledge any one person might have of others is limited to fewer than 1000 individuals (and probably somewhat less). Thus, once proximate social networks exceed that size, the nature of relations shift (Coward and Dunbar 2014) so that ties with close affiliates (biographical) differ from those farther afield (categorical, role-based affiliations).

Similar differences in interpersonal ties were present in mobile networks as well, but the option to fission could diminish stresses. Furthermore, the proportion of people linked through weak ties (Granovetter 1973; 1983) becomes much greater as settlements expand. The size of networks and communities may grow, and still endure, only if individuals are able to cope not merely with increasingly large sets of social ties but also with a lesser familiarity and weaker links with an expanded set of contacts. The ability to stabilize weak ties represents an important adjustment for human existence in larger social formations that offsets the cognitive, temporal, and energetic costs of processing greater quantities of social information (Coward and Dunbar 2014). As the scale of population concentrations grows, personal interactions are mediated less by in-depth mutual knowledge and more through symbols and events

linked to place and status, by social roles (Sterelny and Watkins 2015).

The integration of relational networks, some with weak ties, and others with strong ties, allows communities to grow and expand rather than break apart. Shared ritual practices, and the associated material culture, can help scaffold and affirm weak ties, just as drinking, feasting, and reciprocal exchanges may solidify less intimate relations (Coward and Dunbar 2014; Nettle and Dunbar 1997). As the size of social affiliations scale up, there are collective challenges and opportunities to integrate and cooperate with people who are outside the sphere of regular, intimate interaction (Coward and Dunbar 2014; Dunbar 2013). For sustainability, the potential disruptions of fissioning, distrust, disputes, and free riders have to be managed, while collective action problems, such as defense and environmental perturbations, have to be faced. Deaths also pose challenges, through the voids left in social networks, the grief spurred, and the roles and duties left open.

Globally, the most common features of funerary rituals, especially for subalterns (nonrulers), promote social cohesion, sustainability, and solidarity in the face of loss. Mortuary rituals not only reaffirm community solidarity with the most grief-stricken, but they tend to feature feasting, drinking, shared singing or chanting, collaborative tasks, coordinated movements, such as funerary processions, and the recounting of shared memories, all activities that foster and affirm individual identification with the group (e.g., Roberson, Smith, and Davidson 2018; Whitehouse and Lanman 2014). Among sedentary peoples, bodies generally are interred or dispatched proximate to descendants, whether in or adjacent to dwellings, in local cemeteries, or in other public spaces. Often these locales are returned to by the living at regular intervals for reaffirmation rituals that reenforce social ties and cohere individual identities with a larger group. In Iraq 12,000 years ago at Göbekli Tepe and 5000 years ago at Stonehenge in England (mortuary monuments), as well as 2000–1500 years ago in Ohio (Hopewell), even before mobile peoples in those regions resided in permanent settlements (villages), they created monumental ritual landscapes where the dead were integrated into places and ritual events that structured affiliations (Charles and Buikstra 2002; Gresky, Haelm, and Clare 2017), both in the past and moving forward.

Here, we can see some of the early examples of the building of mortuary monuments to the dead, in collective rather than individual settings. Places become linked to the rites of death and reaffirm the group membership of the mourners who visit. Sometimes,

they become not just singular places, but entire landscapes memorializing the dead and reaffirming the living networks in which they participated. Memories of the dead, their collective inhabitance in special places, both bodily and perhaps spiritually, become places where social network ties are remade with seasonal or annual rituals. They reinforce and rebuild the networks damaged by the loss of individuals, and they create new linkages in social networks so that the death of a key individual does not cause the collapse of the social relationships. Indeed, the deads' final resting place and the rituals of memorialization over time serve to reinforce social networks through the periodic coming together to remember.

Death, Leadership, Succession, and Legitimation

As discussed, most human funerary rites conform to what Harvey Whitehouse (2021) characterizes as doctrinal forms of religiosity and ritual, involving repetition, coordination, cohesion, and the fostering of individual identities with the larger group. One exception to these practices is a subset of mortuary ritual associated with high-status individuals, rulership, succession, the accession of a new ruler, and the legitimation of the heir. Such death-related rituals are most often personalized, tinged with dysphoria, spectacle, and the creation of fear, especially when consecrated for divine kings and other autocratic rulers. For example, among Classic Maya kings, autosacrifice, drawing blood from one's genitals with a pointed tool to offer to the supernatural world, and sometimes human sacrifice, were incorporated into the sequence of rituals that began with the death of a ruler (Fitzsimmons 2009; Munson et al. 2014; Stuart 1984). Events that included the sacrifice of retainers or, perhaps, captives, dispatched with the ruler, also have been noted for the Royal Cemetery of Ur (Iraq), Early Dynastic Egypt, the Shang (China), and at Moche centers in Peru (Schwartz 2017). All of these were historic episodes when rule and governance was relatively autocratic.

Egyptian pyramids, elaborate Shang tombs, and Maya temples that housed subterranean crypts all required intensive investments of labor (see Nash in this volume). In most of these cases, constructions began for the mortuary housing of the rulers long before their deaths. Some Maya lords were buried in funerary monuments that were far removed from their palatial residences. In these cases, bodies were traversed through sites, sometimes across rivers, up and down stairs, with foreign dignitaries in attendance (Fitzsimmons 2009, 178–79). Such events were widely viewed spectacles.

Cross-culturally, the size and elaboration of funerary monuments (e.g., Binford 1971) and the degree to which succession is institutionalized (generally through customized rituals) after a ruler's death (e.g., Gerring and Knutsen 2019) is, at least to a degree, a reflection of societal scale. And yet, democratic and collective leaders and governors of large, urban societies generally do not receive the individualized treatments, rich material accompaniments, or lavish contexts afforded autocratic, personalist dynasts. A series of factors underlie this distinction. Autocratic rulers often do not merely claim to be conduits to the supernatural world, but wholly or partly divine. In consequence, a potential conundrum is raised when they are seen to be subject to a very human life crisis, death.

In addition, leaders of polities with collective or democratic forms of governance regularly change or cycle. In contrast, a principle of autocracy is the maintenance of power, and so a leader's demise presents a rare break in the sequence of rule. Furthermore, autocrats generally have a chosen successor, such as their offspring, and so in the absence of consent, the successor requires legitimation (Brownlee 2007; Helms 2020). Finally, autocrats—personalized rulers—prioritize loyalty to themselves, not to their nation or group. They aim to bind the personal identities and loyalties of their followers to themselves, and "identity fusion" is fostered through imagistic religiosity, dysphoria, fear, and spectacle (Atran 2016; Blanton 2016; Feinman 2016; Whitehouse 2021). The placement of the graves of collective or democratic leaders tends to conform more closely with general societal practices, so are positioned in domestic contexts, churchyards, or cemeteries. When monuments are erected to these collective-focused leaders, they tend to be modest and solemn as opposed to spectacular.

We should note, however, that autocratic rulers can become symbols for collectives and nation-states in the future, and their tombs or mortuary monuments may be adopted as symbols of national identity or destroyed in an effort to purge the common collectivity they represent. The Inca emperors' mummies were maintained in the palaces in which they resided during life by their relatives and heirs. They were convened in the great plaza of Cusco by the living emperor for consultation. The mummy bundles themselves and the places in which they resided were powerful institutions in Inca society. When the Spanish conquered Cusco and set up a puppet emperor, other heirs escaped to the jungle to form a resistance empire. Eventually, the Spanish destroyed or sent away the bodies of the Inca mummies to destroy the collectives of Inca power they held together. The Inca emperors were certainly powerful autocratic semi-divine rulers. Yet they represented Indigenous self-determination and became powerful symbols of native rights and a threat to the Spanish Crown in the new order.

Figure 6.4. Artist reconstruction of the Hopewell Mounds site with Mound 25 in the foreground.
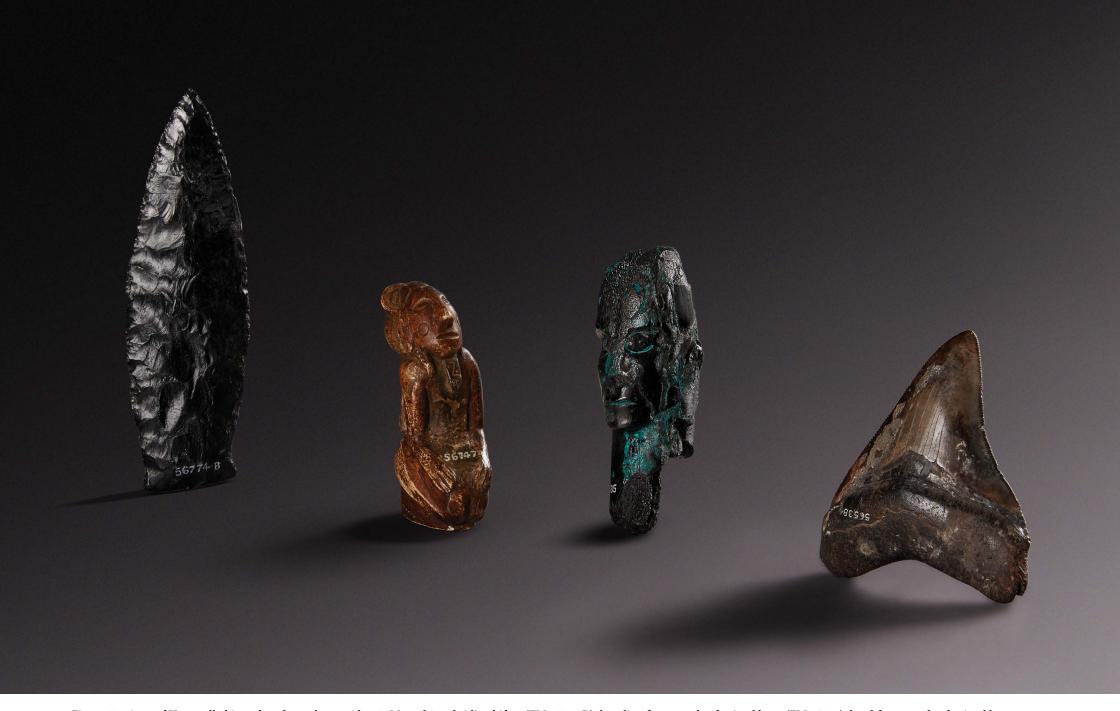
Figure 6.5. A set of Hopewell objects found together on Altar 2, Mound 25: obsidian biface (FM 56774.B); kneeling figure made of animal bone (FM 56747); head figure made of animal bone (FM 56735); and shark tooth from the Atlantic coast (FM 56538.1).

Figure 6.6. Hopewell large obsidian bifaces; obsidian sourced from Yellowstone National Park (FM 56805, 56772.C).

6C   The Hopewell Collective

Brad Lepper

Ohio History Connection

The Hopewell cultural collective formed among dispersed horticultural communities in the Ohio Valley at around 1 CE (Lynott 2014). Although many of the things that have come to define the Hopewell appeared first in the Illinois River Valley, the epicenter of the "explosion" of architecture, art, and ceremony that has come to define classic Hopewell was at the Hopewell Mound Group (Figure 6.4) in the Scioto Valley (Greber and Ruhl 1989, 64). Characteristic features of the Hopewell cultural collective included monumental earthen enclosures built in various geometric shapes or in irregular shapes that followed the outlines of the hilltops on which they were constructed. The Indigenous people did not live at the earthworks, but gathered there in large numbers for periodic ceremonies.

Artifacts that appear to have reflected a Hopewell identity include copper earspools and breastplates, sheets of mica cut into varied shapes, small smoking pipes often carved into naturalistic depictions of animals, oversized

spear points made from obsidian, and small blades made from Flint Ridge (Ohio) and Wyandotte (Indiana) cherts. These signature artifacts typically are found in mounds either as funerary objects or as part of large deposits, or offerings, not associated with a particular individual's burial.

Some of the more spectacular offerings were found in Mound 25 at the Hopewell Mound Group (Moorehead 1922) (Figures 6.5–6.6). Altar 2, for example, was a clay basin filled with more than 500 objects that had been placed on a roaring fire and then buried while the fire was still burning. This offering included obsidian spear points, small sculptures of humans or spiritual beings in human form, and shark teeth. Mound 25 also contained a deposit of 120 copper artifacts laid upon sheets of bark spread over an area 3 feet long and 2 feet wide, which then had been covered with more bark sheets before being buried within the mound. The artifacts in the deposit included 66 copper

axes, 23 copper plates, and several cut-outs in the shape of fish (Figure 6.7), probably the river redhorse, a bottom-feeder common in the rivers of eastern North America.

The various earthworks had different, but complementary, functions. Most were not burial mounds, but the nearly universal presence of buried ancestors associated with some part of each site suggests their presence was central to what the Hopewell were doing at these sacred places. The importance of the ancestors to what took place at the earthworks is further shown by the fact that Hopewell ceremonial leaders sometimes retained and modified the bones of particular ancestors to serve as sacred relics. They crafted arm bones into flutes and lower and upper jaw bones into pendants. Priests or shamans also cut off the heads of particularly special deceased persons, which, based on a stone figurine found at the Newark Earthworks, were then brought to certain ceremonies wearing earspools and with carefully combed hair. This suggests the ancestors were perceived to be not just present, but active participants in the ceremonies that took place at the earthworks.

These ceremonies included burial rites for select men, women, and children, which were more than funerals for the deceased. Instead they were part of World Renewal ceremonies enacted at the monumental earthworks, which functioned, as James Duncan (2015, 227) has proposed for an earthwork of a later era, as resurrection engines "not only for the living community of the Middle World, but also for the entire cosmos."

Many of the Hopewell earthworks incorporated alignments to the summer and winter solstices or to the pivotal points on the horizon marking the cycle of moonrises and moonsets. Hopewell priests likely used the calendrical capabilities of the earthworks to determine appropriate times for gatherings, but the celestial alignments of the architecture meant much more than that.

The late Vine Deloria Jr., a Standing Rock Sioux writer and activist, proposed that American Indian architecture in general involved representing and reproducing the cosmos in order "to provide a context in which ceremonies could occur. Thus, people did not feel alone; they participated in cosmic rhythms" (Deloria 2001, 25–26). The alignment of the Hopewell earthworks to these cosmic rhythms, therefore, may have served as a means to provide that context.

The great earthworks also served as nodes of social integration that brought dispersed communities together to jointly mourn the deaths of family members and to activate the monumental resurrection engines with their ceremonies. Weeks in advance, caretakers prepared the sites by burning off the prairie grasses that had grown up since the last gathering. Others harvested crops and wild plant foods, captured fish with weirs and nets, and hunted white-tailed deer and other game to feed the many participants who would come.

Many came as pilgrims bringing offerings of raw or worked copper, mica, or obsidian from their homelands, such as the necklace from Hopewell (Figure 6.8). Others came with their honored dead. In stately ceremonial processions they carried the ancestors through the varied ceremonial spaces where they may have undergone a prescribed sequence of rites particular to each location, such as ceremonies of mourning, spirit release, spirit adoption, and final interment in the mounds as cremations or extended burials (Lepper 2016, 54).

The large gatherings at these earthen cathedrals allowed people to connect with others from near and far. These personal connections formed the basis for social networks that could ensure access to valued commodities or to potential sources of aid during times of trouble. In addition, the gatherings provided opportunities for participants to meet a wider pool of potential marriage partners than they could find in their small local communities.

For reasons that are not fully understood, the Hopewell cultural collective began to come apart by 400 CE, resulting in the end of major ceremonial activity at the great earthwork centers. Nevertheless, these awe-inspiring places continued to be recognized as hallowed ground by the descendants of the Indigenous people who built them. The early archaeologist Warren Moorehead (1908, 41) recounted a story he had been told by an elderly resident of Oldtown, previously the site of a Shawnee village. The man's father had said that the pioneer Simon Kenton, who was fluent in the Shawnee language, "said the Indians had no tradition of the builders of Fort Ancient [not a fort, but a Hopewell ceremonial enclosure], but that they … visited the place en route to the Ohio [River] and did homage to the spirits of its makers."

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Figure 6.7. A pair of copper fish cut-outs from Hopewell Mounds site, Chillicothe, Ohio (FM 56176, 56177).

Figure 6.8. Hopewell necklace with copper pendants from Hopewell mounds (FM 56235, 56602, T2001.6.5).

Figure 6.9. Great Pyramid at Giza.

Figure 6.10. Taj Mahal, royal tomb of the Mughal ruler of India, Shah Jahan.

6D   Pyramids and Standing Stones: Monuments for the Dead

Donna J. Nash

Field Museum/University of North Carolina Greensboro

Monuments dedicated to the dead hold power over the living long after they are built. Architecture can transform how people experience a landscape or city for hundreds or thousands of years. The construction of elaborate edifices meant to memorialize the dead brought many people together, represent large expenditures of labor and resources, and manifest the power of individuals or groups to shape ideals, convey conceptions of the cosmos, legitimize the leadership of particular lineages, or dominate their domain long after death. Archaeologists use the features of mortuary monuments to discern differences and understand the role of the dead among the living.

Spectacular tombs, such as the Taj Mahal in India or the pyramids at Giza in Egypt are world famous (Figures 6.9–6.10). They are synonymous with the identity of nations where they were built. Despite the millennia that passed between them, both mortuary monuments signaled their builders' wealth and power, were conceptualized as afterlife abodes, and included quarters for living attendants. The eventual "residents" of these grand palatial graves each espoused royal ideology. Shah Jahan covered his cenotaph with flowers because he viewed himself as "the spring of the flower garden of justice and generosity" (Koch 2005, 147), whereas Khufu elevated his burial chamber, a complex feat of engineering, to position himself closer to the sun god and assert identification with the deity (Billing 2011; Verner, Posener-Kriéger, and Vymazalová 2006, 180).

Towering mortuary monuments were also built in the Americas. Like those in Egypt, many Maya constructions paired temples with tombs, and kings were adored as semi-divine beings upon their death. One example is Temple 1 at Tikal in Guatemala (Figure 6.11). The nine-level pyramid, which represents Maya beliefs about the universe, started by Jasaw Chan K'awiil, ruler from 682 to 734 CE, once featured his portrait above the entrance to the temple at its top. The project was completed by his son, Yik'in Chan K'awiil, 734–746 CE (Martin and Grube 2000). Elements of Temple 1 represent the three plains of the Maya cosmos: the underworld, the Earth, and the celestial (see Feinman in this volume, on Mesoamerican Cosmologies). Jasaw's remains were found under the pyramid, dwelling in the underworld, but his image in life faced the plaza from lofty celestial heights, much like the gods. His essence as ancestor was carved on the lintels inside the shrine, which may have represented the dark interior of a cave (Orton 2015). Only a select few could enter and experience its interior. The floating kingly father depicted on the lintel may replicate images from previous centuries of rulers with a powerful ancestor hovering above their head (e.g., Stela 31, Tikal).

It is quite possible that Yik'in purposely staged himself under the carved lintel to communicate with Jasaw, who legitimized his rule at Tikal. The portrait atop Temple 1 left little doubt to whom the pyramid was dedicated; such features emphasize the power of individuals and their lineages. Similar to the Taj Mahal and Khufu's pyramid, Tikal's Temple 1 required a great investment of labor and many resources, and put power on public display. The dead were not forgotten, but rather dominated the visual landscape long after their passing.

Impressive monuments built to commune with the dead can be more egalitarian in purpose when ancestors are broadly shared, or several are considered of equivalent status between lineages in a broader region. One of the earliest sites with monumental structures, Göbekli Tepe, dates to the tenth millennium BCE (Figure 6.12). It features megalithic T-shaped pillars in circular formations connected by benches and walls. Pillars depict different animals in relief, and a few are engraved with hands and clothing to represent humans. Among the 12 excavated stone circles, each is unique in its depictions. This may represent social divisions; however, the size of the stones, up to 12 feet in height, probably required coordinated efforts from several groups to put in place. Evidence indicates such gatherings involved feasting and possible beer drinking. There are no intact burials, but numerous skeletal fragments and pieces of modified skulls connect it with cultic activities celebrating the dead at smaller megalithic sites and cemeteries in Upper Mesopotamia, as well as farther afield in Israel, Jordan, and Syria (Gresky, Haelm, and Clare 2017). Like people, the enclosures were ritually buried upon abandonment. The broken heads of human statues, which lack distinctive features, were interred near the central pillars (Notroff, Dietrich, and Schmidt 2015). Decommissioning the site would have been of symbolic importance, which likely shifted the power it held over people elsewhere.

Göbekli Tepe may remind us of Stonehenge (Figure 6.13), a monument built, remodeled, and used between 3000 and 1500 BCE in Britain (Bayliss, Ramsey, and McCormac 1997). The eponymous standing stones were surrounded by a ridge and ditch etched into the chalklands and formed a circular ceremonial space of approximately 87 meters in diameter (Parker Pearson et al. 2020). Ritual constructions of this sort were created throughout the area; there was not a single, dominant place to celebrate the dead; however, Stonehenge had the greatest number of cremation burials placed between 3000 and 2400 BCE. Their presence is not obvious today but would have been

Figure 6.11. Temple I at Tikal, started by Jasaw Chan K'awiil and completed by his son Yik'in Chan K'awiil between 734 and 746 CE, reflects the power of Maya rulers.

an essential part of the sacred site. Many fragmentary remains were interred in the Aubrey Holes, which are interpreted as sockets that held the earliest standing stones erected at the site. Cremation burials were added during later ceremonies adjacent to the unfinished bluestones or elsewhere within the complex. The monument continued to be modified, the sarsen stones were added, and the blue stones were rearranged throughout the Early Bronze Age. The dead with few exceptions were interred elsewhere. A select set were buried with great labor and wealth in upland barrows on the surrounding ridges, which had a commanding view of the avenue that led pilgrims from the river Avon to Stonehenge (Allen 1997; Lawson 1997; Needham, Lawson, and Woodward. 2010). Henge monuments continued to be centers of community labor and celebration, even as the newly dead were entombed in other locales. Enduring sacred sites like Stonehenge may have been the domain of fictive forebearers described in legends and song. If this were the case, those bold enough to claim kinship with these entities could exert influence over seasonal celebrants who came from near and far in midwinter to observe the return of the sun with the barrows of leading lineages prominent on the horizon.

Monuments dedicated to remembering the dead are as diverse as the societies who built them. The tombs of Shah Jahan, Khufu, and Jasaw exemplify the ways in which the powerful expend great resources to maintain their position and that of their descendants. If the goal was to achieve immortal renown, they met it. Stonehenge and Göbekli Tepe were built by groups that chose to remember the dead for different reasons. At their inception such monuments may have mediated equality, but such omnipotent symbols in the landscape and the perceived importance of maintaining connections with the illustrious dead (real or fictional) can ultimately be a source of influence or a means to assert power through control of these places. Monumental tombs, whatever their form, make the dead impossible to forget; their role among the living may change over time, but their influence may be inescapable.

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The dead, and the monuments to them, have great symbolic power in almost every society on Earth. They continue to be touchstones for human social organization, be it political, religious, or economic power being sought by a social group. They are not always used in the way they or their descendants may have intended in life, but they hold great sway in the ways in which the world is constituted even today.
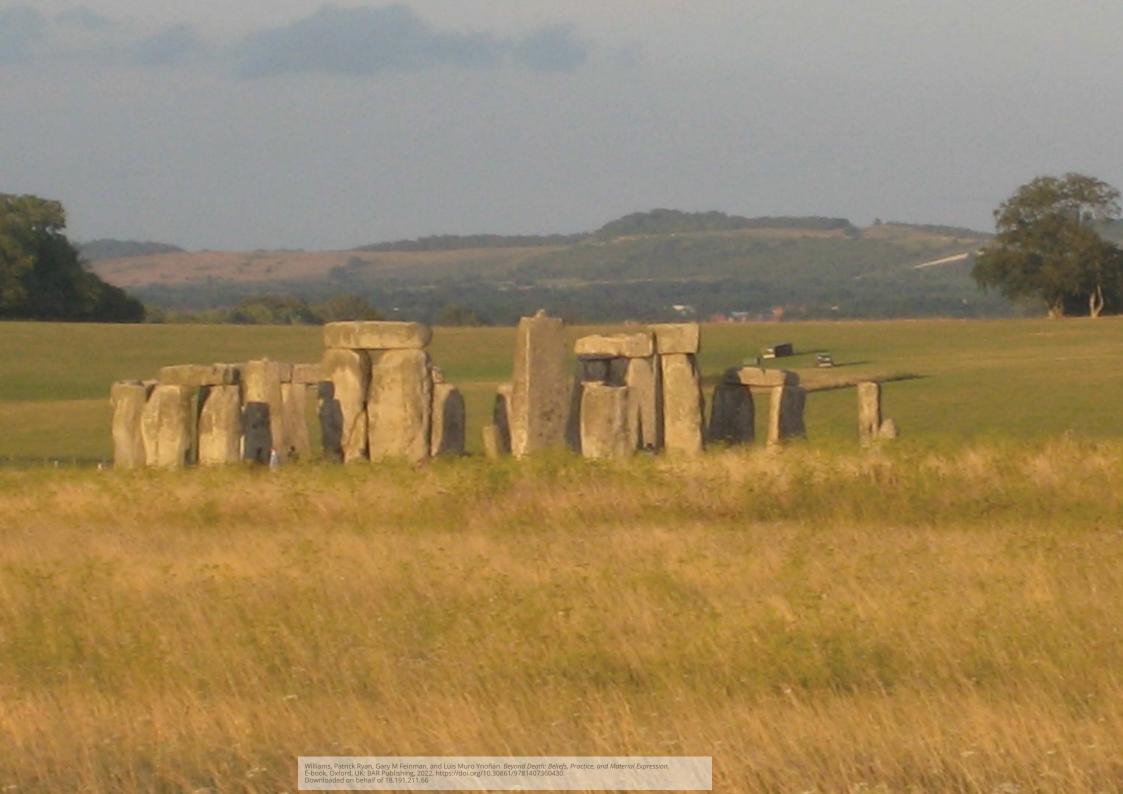
Death Is Not the End

For humans, physical immortality remains elusive (Zenou 2022), and so if our polities and groups are to remain sustainable, our social networks and institutions must continue to patch and bridge the voids left by death. Throughout human history, people have employed beliefs, memories, monuments, shrines, rituals, and other means in a sense to put the dead to work, using them to help address the problems that their absences and other factors create for the living and to foster the aims of those who endure. At this time of pandemic, loss, inequity, and war, the importance of remembrance cannot be overstated.

"Grief is the repeated experience of learning to live after loss" (Lee 2022). Collective sustenance and well-being

Figure 6.12. Göbekli Tepe's (Turkey) megalithic pillars framed communal monuments for commemorating the dead in the tenth millennium ʙᴄᴇ.

in the face of personal and untimely tragedies requires us to provide the mechanisms to acknowledge, channel, harness, and collectively memorialize those losses. Democratic, collective forms of governance require work, not just from leaders, but from all of us. Selfish ideologies, focused on consumption and emphasizing personal choice rather than citizenship and collective responsibility are in many ways incompatible long-term with democracy (Blanton et al. 2021; Porter 2021). Now, after over two years of staring death and trauma in the face, we must redouble our commitment to do that work and build community.

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Figure 6.13. Stonehenge (Great Britain), built between 3000 and 1500 BCE, contained cremation burials in addition to the famous standing stones and represents communal labor and commemoration.

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Appendix A

Spanish Translation of the Introduction (Chapter 1): Introducción

Patrick Ryan Williams y Gary M. Feinman

Traducido por Luis Muro Ynoñán

La muerte es universal, aunque esta es experimentada de diversas maneras por los diferentes pueblos y culturas. Desde una perspectiva global e histórica, la muerte tiene diferentes significados e implicancias para cada comunidad. A través de una reflexión sobre ella, e incorporando diversas perspectivas, podemos obtener una mejor idea del significado de la vida. La muerte es un fenómeno biológico, social y espiritual; y exploraremos en este capítulo sus diferentes significados, a través del tiempo y el espacio. La muerte se refiere al cuerpo, pero también a la esencia del propio ser; además, a los vivos quienes llevan los recuerdos y los genes de aquellos que fenecen. Se refiere al esfuerzo humano para prevenirla; a nuestra capacidad para cometer injusticias con tal de evitarla, y a nuestra humanidad para hacer frente a la pérdida. Finalmente, se trata de cómo seguimos adelante pese a ella, estando nosotros mismos íntimamente conectados los unos a los otros a través de lazos sociales, con una conexión se ve interrumpida por la desaparición de aquellos que están más cercanos a nosotros. La muerte, en su último acto, creará nuevamente vida.

Los autores de este volumen explorarán el papel de la muerte en nuestras vidas; cómo esta es entendida desde varias perspectivas; y cómo esta se cruza con la vida misma, el pasado, el presente y el futuro. Pese a que ni la exhibición ni este volumen pueden ser completamente exhaustivos en el tema, nuestro objetivo es ilustrar la diversidad de miradas, comportamientos, y creencias. Hoy en día vivimos en una sociedad que adopta una perspectiva en la que la naturaleza está separada de la humanidad; esta perspectiva mira la vida y la muerte de una forma distinta a aquellas percepciones religiosas y culturales de muchos otros grupos humanos, del pasado y presente. Para muchos en los EE.UU., la muerte es un punto final en nuestra biología. Esta representa un momento específico en el tiempo en el que la vida expira definitivamente y de una manera acotada, un camino finito con un principio y un final. Esta mirada tiene sus raíces en un empirismo que impregna nuestra visión modernista, arraigada en la ciencia y el conocimiento médico como una perspectiva generalizada de nuestro tiempo.

Pese a ello, e incluso en nuestra propia sociedad, las perspectivas alternativas de la muerte impregnan

mucho de nuestro propio entendimiento sobre ella. Y en las sociedades de todo el mundo aquella perspectiva empírica de la muerte, como un momento finito en el tiempo, un final sin renovación, y un punto de vista fatalista, es desafiada tanto por el pensamiento religioso como por las realidades vividas que enfrentan los seres vivos a medida que la atraviesan y experimentan. Para muchos, la muerte no es un mero punto final, o un "gran cierre," sino tiene un significado mucho más profundo en el ciclo de la vida.

La exposición diseñada a partir de la investigación que se expresa, también, en este volumen se nutre del conocimiento de muchas culturas del mundo, y del conocimiento obtenido del mundo natural, para así abordar diversas respuestas y puntos de vistas a varias preguntas existenciales sobre la muerte (ver Miller y Whitfield, este volumen). ¿Qué es la muerte? ¿Acaso tengo que morir? ¿Qué le pasará a mi cuerpo? ¿Qué le pasará a mi espíritu? ¿Cómo afectará mi muerte a los demás? Las respuestas a estas preguntas no se abordan secuencialmente en este volumen, puesto que cada historia, en realidad, tiene múltiples respuestas a las preguntas sobre nuestra propia muerte y la de los demás. Sin embargo, ciertos temas representados en esta colección de ensayos abordan algunas preguntas de una manera más explícita que otras. El tratamiento del cuerpo, por ejemplo, resuena muchos mas en los ensayos sobre la biología del ciclo de vida y la orquestación de rituales de duelo; mientras que el potencial del espíritu tiene una invocación mucho más evidente en los ensayos sobre la religión, la vitalidad, y la fuerza de vida.

Este volumen está organizado en torno a cinco ensayos temáticos, cada uno con cuatro breves casos de estudio que profundizan en varios de los temas de la exhibición (ver Figura 1.1). Los autores de este volumen son destacados científicos, académicos con raíces indígenas, y profesionales del mundo de los museos que han contribuido a la exposición como consultores, desarrolladores, diseñadores, y co-curadores, o siendo ellos mismos los curadores de la muestra. Muchos de los objetos exhibidos en la exposición, y fotografiados de una manera exquisita por la fotógrafa, Michelle Kuo, forman parte de la colección permanente de antropología del Field Museum. Varios otros objetos fueron adquiridos para la exposición y han pasado ya a formar parte de