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A controlled comparative analysis of secondary burial practices : sacred space symbology and the dead

Sharon K. Moses
The University of Montana

A Controlled Comparative Analysis
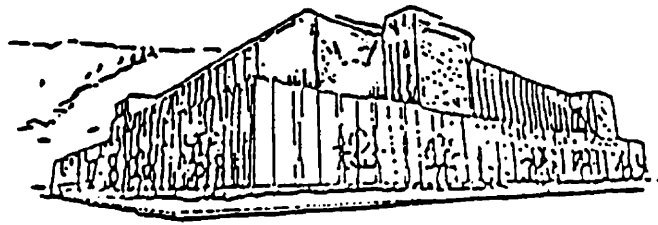
of Secondary Burial Practices:

Sacred Space, Symbology and the Dead.

by

Sharon K. Moses

B.A., Journalism, University of Montana--Missoula, 1992

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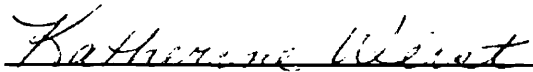
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Approved by:

Katherine West

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

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A Controlled Comparative Analysis of Secondary Burial
Practices: Sacred Space, Symbology and the Dead

Chair: Katherine Weist, Ph.D. *K Weist*

Abstract

   Social anthropology has largely focused upon kinship and
institutionalized economic interests that influence death
rituals, primarily to benefit elites within stratified
societies. It is the goal of this work to:
1)look for common factors emphasizing the philosophical and
cosmological beliefs in the development and origination of
burial customs that are not necessarily specific to elites;
2)determine whether these beliefs may have contributed to
the origination of secondary burial practices or harboring
of the corpse or its dismembered parts in living space for a
limited or indefinite period of time;
3) search for the concept of the sacred, if any, suggested
by the spatial placement of the dead and their associated
symbologies;
4) determine the significance, if any, that fear of the dead
plays in secondary burial practices.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Problem

Interest in death rituals has come in and out of vogue among social anthropologists since the late nineteenth century (Metcalf and Huntington 1997). Such studies have not delved too deeply into their origins and development, but have historically focused upon kinship issues, social structure and economic interests that influence death rituals. Thus, cosmologies and ideologies of past and present cultures have tended to be interpreted through structural and/or functionalist paradigms (Durkheim 1915; Piaget 1968; Radcliffe-Brown 1952).

It has been within the last two decades that renewed interest in religious ideologies has occurred, opening new doors of study. It is <u>not</u> the intention of this study to suggest that burial practices are uninfluenced by political, economic and status-related interests(Cannadine and Price 1987; Carr 1995). However, the philosophical and religious ideologies may reveal other motivations and merit equal attention, and so will be the primary focus in this study.

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Goals of Study

The focus of this study is revisiting the spiritual practices, beliefs and, ultimately, concepts of commoners which may have originated the appropriate burial space and placement of the dead in ancient as well as contemporary cultures. By doing so, the goals are to seek possible patterns, and how those patterns influence ideologies which in turn may manifest themselves in a very basic foundation block in any culture: its mortuary customs and resultant attitudes toward the dead.

The scope of this study will include an analysis of possible cross-cultural ideological and sociological traits conducive to development of secondary burial practices. Also examined will be religious concepts which prescribe that the corpse or its dismembered parts must occupy living space for a limited or indefinite period of time.

The cosmologies and burial practices of the cultures examined in this work are in some ways at odds with the historically "typical" Western European perspectives about the dead. The majority of Western beliefs, herein identified as Christian beliefs, historically demanded separation between the living and the dead (Dawson 1958). The Western perspective will be used as a point of reference in this work only to illustrate for cross-cultural

comparative purposes, that non-Western cultures perceive their dead differently and therefore treat them differently. This is not to imply that one perspective is superior in any way to the other, but only to illustrate that religious beliefs in any society are important factors for understanding communal behavior and sense of identity.

The dead in Western tradition are typically interred in clearly delineated areas, i.e. cemeteries, which are considered "consecrated" ground. Consecrated ground as defined in this Western context, is ground blessed and thus considered sacred as opposed to profane by those who are recognized as representatives of the Christian religion. All that is not sacred, therefore, is profane (Elaide 1957:32-36).

Among the goals pursued here will be to search for meaning in the spatial relationships between the dead and the living and whether these relationships constitute the concept of "sacred space" in the cultures under study. As we have not yet determined that this concept is valid within those cultures, I offer a tentative definition at this time:

Sacred space is a culturally created concept, defined by religious ideology and manifested by observance that certain places are special and apart from others in a supernatural sense.

Western beliefs regarding consecrated ground prescribes exceptions in burial practices under certain circumstances. Interment there was deemed inappropriate when the deceased was perceived as atypical, in a spiritual sense, to the majority of the populace. An example would be those who have been imbued with sainthood or martyrdom - or having first achieved what is perceived as a spiritually immortal status in a realm beyond human weaknesses and faults (Andrea 1997:99-127). The attainment of this status in Western belief systems is rarely acquired and demands great altruistic sacrifice, pain, suffering or even death in defense of Christian ideals.

In life, saints and martyrs serve as a moral pattern for the living. In death, their bodies become a material symbol of the "holy" (Andrea 1997:99-127; Dawson 1958:33-35). The corpse becomes imbued with supernatural power. Relics, or parts of these special individuals, were and are kept in churches, monasteries and other perceived sacred places and to bestow blessings, healing, or other believed supernatural powers upon the living (Andrea 1997: 428). Fear of the corpse in these cases was profoundly circumscribed and replaced with feelings of reverence.

In contrast, those denied interment in consecrated ground were those who violated the tenets of Western belief

systems either in conduct or ideology. Their lives were viewed as patterns of immorality or lacking in spiritual virtue and thus, were historically consigned to unconsecrated or "profane" ground (Elaide 1952, 1957; Murray 1984:200-214). It was not uncommon for criminals, non-Christians, and others considered outside the perimeters of acceptance to be buried much farther from the boundaries of habitation, many times in unmarked graves. Fear of these dead was defined and reinforced through culturally prescribed and constructed folklore, symbols and avoidance behaviors.

This study examines non-Western cultures with socially prescribed inclusion of the remains of the dead among the living and extended handling of the corpse in secondary burial rites. Burial practices considered include but are not limited to: burial within living spaces (i.e. burial of the dead under the floor of the family home), re-interment and/or reuse of burial sites, and relic keeping. Relic keeping as defined by the focus of this study, is the keeping of parts of the corpse (i.e. the skull, limbs, etc.) by the surviving family members of the deceased. Furthermore, relics are not limited only to those having acquired a special status through atypical personal acts of sacrifice or beneficence, as defined in Western tradition,

but include individuals in non-remarkable contexts of their social roles in the community or within the family unit. The social implications of this intertwining between the living and the dead, possible spatial relevance of placement in terms of cosmological origins and implications upon changing cosmological themes, is a neglected topic in social anthropology.

Elements commonly found in Western tradition such as a general fear or revulsion of the corpse and suspected spiritual malignancy (ghosts) which may linger after death, are significantly circumscribed in other cultures (Bendann 1930). The cultures studied in this work will demonstrate that supernaturally prescribed time frames for contact with the corpse, particularly in secondary burial practices is not only acceptable but desirable. To what degree, if any, does fear play a role in burial rituals of these cultures? Does spatial placement indicate a concept of sacred space at work within other belief systems? It will be my intention to support my analysis with the theories as posited by Douglas (1966), Elaide (1957, 1952), Turner (1967), and Van Gennep (1960). To define sacred space, a culture must demonstrate through beliefs, behaviors and ideology that the concept of that which is sacred is separate, spiritually and materially different, from that which is not. Boundaries,

real or fictive, must be identified.

This study will focus on individuals who are not necessarily of the nobility, priesthood or other elite classes within a social stratification, but includes the practices and beliefs of commoners. The development of beliefs and burial practices may give clearer definition to understanding the process of social cohesion in ancient and contemporary circumstances. While this work is not dedicated to searching for a universal theme of cosmology, it is seeking identifiable traits which may illuminate the process of diversification among cosmologies and, ultimately, the process and development of all belief systems.

Methods

A controlled, cross-cultural comparative method will be the basis for the research undertaken in the body of this work (Sarana 1975). As noted, the cultures selected for this study include two ancient and two ethnographic sources. They were selected on the basis of their obvious unrelatedness to one another in terms of time frame and geographic location, thus precluding a parent culture giving rise to the other. Yet, despite these divisions they all share practices that attract the scrutiny of this study:

secondary burials and, to the Western eye, ambiguous boundaries in burial placement. The cultures under examination in this work are:

(Archaeological):

1. The Natufian culture (Jericho) - of the Jordan River Valley, 10,000 - 5500 B.P. (Bar-Yosef 1991; Kenyon 1957; Kuijt 1996; F. Valla 1991).

2. The Maya - of the preclassic and classic period of Mesoamerica c. 300 B.C.- A.D. 860 (Coe 1995; Fagan 1995; Gallencamp 1991; McAnnany 1995).

(Ethnographic):

1. The Merina of Madagascar (Bloch 1971; Graeber 1995).

2. The Berawan of Borneo (Metcalf 1976; 1977; 1982).

Historically, the comparative method has been used primarily in anthropology as a tool to determine common sources or origins for a group's social structure, institutional practices or mythological beliefs. Friedrich Max Muller, a nineteenth century scholar, was particularly interested in the synthesis of man, nature and intuition of the divine as merged into culture through myth and symbol (Ries 1994).

Within the auspices of comparative religious studies, values, philosophy, and the universality of religion also

provide anthropologists incentives to explore the vastness of cultural expression as well as the similarities common to all of humankind. Simply put, it is a procedure employed to determine and define cultural similarities and differences, and the causes for them. (Lessa and Vogt 1965; Ries 1994; Sarana 1975).

E. B. Tylor, the nineteenth century traveler-turned-anthropologist (Langness 1997:21-27), advocated the general use of cross-cultural comparisons to illustrate the evolutionary process from less to more complex societies as reflected in their religious systems. He posited the concepts of animism and polytheistic belief systems progressing toward monotheism. At risk of the reader misconstruing this study as employing a similar evolutionist-based standard, I will preclude that concern by clarifying that the pitfalls of cross-cultural comparisons in absence of context, is recognized and acknowledged here. No assumption will be employed advocating a common origin or evolutionary development for cultures with necessary stages, thereby negating the need for historical context, in the body of this work.

It is important to make the distinction that, while the purpose is to find identifiable cross-cultural similarities in cosmological traits that may contribute to their

diversification, it is also understood that common features as manifested do not always mean common origins, nor that the motives or beliefs are the same.

In the process of this interpretive analysis, the context and historical circumstances of the culture are taken into consideration. Any attempt to explain the diverse mortuary practices without this consideration would reduce the analysis to an over simplified and inaccurate matching game.

To illustrate this pitfall, consider the symbology of the Christian cross versus the symbol for the cosmological meanings of the four directions as observed by most native North American Indians.

During the early years of seventeenth century missionary endeavors in the American southwest, some of the Jesuit priests misunderstood the meanings of the four directions as they were depicted (typically portrayed with specific colors and shaped in the form of two lines intersecting - identifiable as a "cross"), and which adorned many items in Indian material culture.

To these early Jesuit missionaries it appeared that the Indians may have already had occasion to be familiar with the cross of their Savior and thus elicited, rather prematurely, the hope that their "lost sheep" were well on

their way to Christianity with supernatural intervention. These observances and speculations on native "crosses" have been recorded in various diaries and church journals of the period.

Obviously, the Christian cross and the native concept of the four directions may have been similar in physical representation, but are quite different in cosmological belief and background. This misguided cross-cultural comparison was to become obvious to all within a relatively short period of time.

For this reason, caution will be applied to the comparisons in this study, cognizant of similar misinterpretation. As many factors as possible will be considered before application and identification of specific social traits or causal relationships can be suggested.

The Comparative Approach Any comparative study must answer three questions: 1) *what* determines the elements to be compared, 2) *how* will elements be compared, and 3) *why* is the comparison worthwhile?

This is a controlled study because four diverse cultures have been identified as possessing the elements of interest and will function as the subjects for analysis. In this case, mortuary practices, attitudes toward handling the

dead and spatial relationships in burial are determined to be the aspects important for analysis. Perpetuation of ideology and cosmology through an institutionalization of practices, material culture, spiritual symbols, rituals and other repetitive or seemingly prescribed behaviors will be categorized as "culture traits."

The two archaeological cultures to be studied in this work are admittedly much more limited than information offered by ethnographic cultures. The information on prehistoric cultures will lend itself to a particularly etic interpretation. Thus, while the material record can provide quantitative data, the analysis of and cosmological inference from them will be of a qualitative rather than a purely quantitative conclusion, in keeping with the social anthropological perspective of this study.

To approach *how* comparisons will be made, it is first necessary to identify the units of comparison. In this work as previously stated, the units shall be identified as culture traits as found in material manifestations, behaviors as related and demonstrated by the individuals in the ethnographic studies, or by evidences of burial rituals left behind in archaeological sites. The mortuary and religious culture traits exhibited by subject cultures to be analyzed are best defined by Gopala Sarana:

A unit may be a trait, an institution, or a community or an
aggregate of these.... A trait is a construct. Its form is
determined by the context, not by any quality inherent in
it....A trait may be a material or nonmaterial aspect of a
culture....(1975:18-22)

The significance or the *why* of this work, will be
toward identifying cosmological culture traits related to
the attitudes about the dead and its implications in social
cohesion. A general hypothesis will be tested that, in the
non-Western cultures studied in this work, religious beliefs
and concepts of identity affect spatial relationships
between the dead and living, rendering boundaries vague or
overlapping. As perceptions of identity and religious
ideology change, spatial boundaries between the dead and the
living become more pronounced. Identity and the afterlife
are not contingent upon connection to the ancestors and the
body ceases to be a sacred symbol of that connection.

The answer to this question would lend more insight
into the role of beliefs in social cohesion and identity
maintenance as evidenced through symbols, material culture,
and burial practices whether in an archaeological or social
context. Burial practices and rituals have long been shown
to support and reflect the political and economic
hierarchies that operate within a stratified society (Bell
1997;Cannadine and Price 1987). Yet substantially less
attention has been paid to the relationships between
supernatural belief systems and the subsequent motivations

they provide such as how the dead can still affect the living in a society (Carr 1995:105-195).

Therefore, while the political and economic aspects of burial rituals are acknowledged and will play a part in the comparative analysis, the focus of this study will be more toward the relevance of the philosophical motivations for social behavior demonstrated through belief systems, symbols and how the dead are perceived.

Although the concept of comparison for the sake of establishing types and typologies may be a concern, it is not the aim of this study to pigeonhole religious belief systems into rigid categories and plot their process of change accordingly.

Theory

The majority of known cosmological beliefs suggests humans follow a system of transitional stages. Each stage, according to Van Gennep (1960), is seen as a "rite of passage." Under this paradigm, there are primarily three stages that reoccur throughout an individual's life. These are: 1) rites of separation, 2) rites of transition, and 3)rites of incorporation. These stages have significance not only for the individual, but for the community around them.

> Whatever the intricacies of the pattern, the order from
> birth until death must often consist of successive stages
> best represented in rectilinear form. Among certain
> peoples...it is circular, so that all individuals go through
> the same endless series of rites of passage (Van Gennep
> 1960:194).

Rites of passage could be characterized as any stage from one status to another, such as the change from childhood to adolescence, single to married, wife to mother, life to death, etc. and can be biological, cultural or spiritual, as identified and perceived by that society. These changes may be real or fictive and determine new socially prescribed expectations of the individual or the community.

These rites are interconnected processes of any community in that, what individual members experience, they do not experience alone. The community, families, and others affected by each rite of passage must participate in them directly or indirectly. Rites of passage vary in content according to the cultural constructs of each society.

The study of burial practices and perceptions of the dead can be examined through this paradigm. When an individual dies, he passes through the first stage, which is one of *separation* from the living. Preparation of the body and concomitant burial rituals that accompany death would encompass the *transition* of the individual into the realm of the dead, as prescribed by a culture. Finally, the

reincorporation begins when the burial rites are completed. For the deceased, the soul, if there is a concept of such, or the body is believed to have joined the world to which it has been sent. For the living, there is a reincorporation of the surviving family members back into the community from this association with death.

It appears to the Western eye that secondary burial practices may indicate a different schedule of rites of passage for the body and/or soul of the deceased. Furthermore, interment within a domain usually prescribed for the living, also suggests there are different perceptions of separation, transition and reincorporation in non-Western cultures and that methods of social interaction and cohesion may differ as well.

Metcalf and Huntington have noted reactions in Western culture toward death:

> There is the simple but often searing fact of separation
> from the loved one; the realization that he or she will no
> longer enjoy the fruits of life; the suddenness with which
> death strikes. There can be fear for one's own life, and
> fear of the power of death in general. There may be anger,
> directed diffusely at the deceased, or at the persons or
> powers held responsible. Finally, there are various strong
> reactions to the corpse itself (1997:43).

In the context of secondary burial practices and relic keeping found in non-Western cultures, a question arises as to what degree, if any, fear plays in the perceptions of the dead. Does the separation and transition of death hold the same meanings in non-Western cultures? What powers are the

dead or spirits of the dead imbued with in an altered scenario?

The significance of the corpse and the reactions to it are essential to the study of burial and spatial relationships between the dead and the living. This work will explore the non-Western cultures which are the object of this study, to determine whether a religious construct hereafter referred to as "sacred space," is a viable concept in their social structure.

Cultural rules governing its contact with the living and the dead can be quite revealing. Its importance to commoner and elite alike is manifested in those rules and rituals which prohibit or provide guidelines for contact. Universally, it has been posited that the corpse is perceived with some degree of fear (Bendann 1930; Douglas 1966; Elaide 1957;) under varied circumstances, and in the majority of cultures as having the potential to intrude supernaturally upon the living, most often in a negative sense:

> That a corpse is regarded as uncanny, and that it is
> supposed to contain a certain power for evil, is emphasized
> most significantly...The amount of influence which a dead
> body can radiate, is often in proportion to the rank and
> sanctity of the deceased...The universal attitude toward the
> corpse is mystical and supernatural, and the contact from it
> is alarming (Bendann 1930:84).

Subsequent taboos and the avoidance of the corpse during specific phases of the ritual process establish boundaries

which are observed in most cultures. Victor Turner's study
of ritual and "liminality" (Turner 1967:93-112) associates
this crucial phase of controlled contact between the corpse
and the living with Van Gennep's "transition stage" (Van
Gennep 1960:1-14).

Liminality as defined in the context of death,
describes a transcendence of the corpse out of regular time
and space. It is an interim state when it neither belongs
to the realm of the living nor has its essence completely
joined the dead. In effect, it is both and has temporarily
transcended the social order. The corpse is a
"transitional-being," or "liminal persona" (Turner 1967:95)
and as such may still influence the living.

> The symbolism attached to and surrounding the liminal
> persona is complex and bizarre. Much of it is modeled on
> human biological processes.... They give an outward and
> visible form to an inward and conceptual process....The
> symbols...are drawn from the biology of death,
> decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that
> have a negative tinge (Turner 1967 as quoted by Metcalf and
> Huntington 1991:71).

The ambiguity of the corpse in the liminal state
creates fear because it fails to fit appropriately into
socially recognizable categories (Douglas 1966). In Western
culture, this dilemma is dealt with by removing the corpse
to appropriate spaces for liminal beings, i.e. the morgue,
funeral parlor, or cemetery (Dumont and Foss 1972; Kalish
1980; Wilkins 1990).

In this schema, "transitional beings are particularly polluting" (Turner 1967:93). Douglas elaborates further on the concept of pollution in that anything that holds an ambiguous status, or falls within any transitional/liminal state, does not fit within the social order. The concept of "dirt" or a polluting factor, equates defilement or danger.

> Danger lies in transitional states simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others (Douglas 1966:97).

The rituals surrounding death act as a cohesive between the living and the dead, and typically serves to acknowledge and perpetuate the supernatural elements of the cosmological belief system while at the same time unifying the sacred with the profane. Mortuary ritual harnesses a socially perceived power to effectively influence the social order of the living during this period of liminality of the dead (Douglas 1966:95-114).

Ritual has been used during mortuary practices in many cultures to reinforce the life cycle and power of the deity(s), and to reaffirm fertility or ensure success in life. Ritual institutionalizes social order as well as providing an social outlet for paying respect to the dead in formal farewell (Cannadine and Price 1987; Metcalf and Huntington 1991).

Turner (1967)and Bendann (1930) posit that there is

also a psychological connection between the condition of the corpse as a metaphor for the condition of the soul or of the social order for the living.

As the body decomposes, the social order becomes increasingly precarious and potentially negative. Taboos are normally in place that prevent contact with the corpse after this transitional period comes to a close. The corpse's positive or neutral qualities during the liminal phase of its transformation - before the process of putrification becomes observable - give way to a decidedly negative tendency of supernatural influence.

From this place of transition, the corpse is finally removed to spaces designated appropriate for the dead and as it becomes necessary to protect the living. The doors between the living and dead, the sacred and profane, close (Elaide 1960).

Dire consequences are prescribed both supernaturally and socially for those who would violate those boundaries as well as ramifications for the entire community. The corpse becomes a source of pollution and can only be redeemed by its interment in sacred space. This will preclude its negative proclivities as well as answer to its spiritual needs. To maintain this boundary, a unique combination of reverence and fear are typically employed (Bendann 1930:57-

88).

Finally, an obvious element at death is the emotional crisis this creates for those most closely associated with the deceased. The emotional element displayed and motivations for them at death and during the practice of mortuary rituals is as diverse as the cultures themselves. Emotional reactions and underlying sentiments are fickle and cannot be assumed as universals in a cross-cultural context when analyzing attitudes about death (Metcalf and Huntington 1997:43-59).

Emotions do not easily lend themselves to the overall examination of spatial relationships in burial practices, although some might argue that emotions affect selected locations for placement of the corpse. Expression of emotion can be so varied as to merit a singular study in and of themselves - ritual weeping; withholding of emotion or stoicism, grand display of grief, vocalizations, ritual self mutilation etc. All of these posit interesting aspects of the social and psychological climate in a cultural study of death. Although the importance of this aspect of the death experience is not denied, for the purposes of this study the emotional elements of sorrow per se, will not be pursued. Sorrow as a concept may have many inducements and include other elements which would be too complex to explore under

the configurations of sacred space and symbols as outlined for this work.

Folklore and Boundaries

Religious beliefs are typically reinforced by local folklore in many cultures. Many folklores and religious taboos reveal the horror associated with human beings who have crossed the boundaries imposed by the liminality of the corpse purposefully, in ignorance, or due to evil machinations of the spirit world (Barber 1988; Metcalf and Huntington 1991:89-90; Turner 1967:104-105; Wilkins 1990:102-103).

After the corpse was deposited in sacred ground in Western society's mortuary practices, prescribed taboos and burial treatments ensured that the corpse stayed within its rightful space and did not infringe in negative ways upon the living.

Apotropaics, otherwise known as the methods with which to negate the potential evil influences of wayward corpses or their spirits, included anything from pacifying the spirits of the dead to outright trickery (Barber 1988). It is not uncommon for many cultures to fear the possibility of a corpse reanimating itself or for its spirit to plague the living - thus the need to maintain the boundaries between living and the dead with sacred space.

Methods of prevention in Western cultures (Barber 1988:46-65) included burying a corpse face down, reasoning that reanimated corpses would be inclined to chew. Left face up, they would eventually chew their way out of their graves. At times, the additional practice of tying the mouth shut or placing a block of wood or stone beneath the chin served as a preventative measure. Other methods involved placing a charm in the mouth that would prevent the corpse from chewing or to ward off evil spirits who would wish to use it for reanimation (Barber 1988; Murray 1984).

There are cultures worldwide (Bendann 1930; Wilkins 1990) that have taken the practice of symbolically or realistically binding a corpse's hands, feet, knees, etc. in an effort to keep it restrained after death. In some European traditions, sharp spikes were driven into the corpse while in the grave to secure it in its place.

Among the grave goods commonly found in archaeological sites, foods and containers of liquid (water, wine, etc.) are not unusual (Wallace 1966:64; Wilkins 1990:112-115). However, aside from the interpretation of these goods as provisions for the dead, a more macabre interpretation has been offered in some cultures that still practice such mortuary food offerings. Namely, that the provisions are for the consumption of the corpse, but also as a precaution

to keep the corpse from developing a craving for human

flesh.

> It is believed that the presence of such food will relieve
> the ...need for human blood and flesh. The practice of
> providing food for the dead is, of course, common throughout
> the world and throughout history, either to prevent corpses
> from becoming restless or, more simply, because it is
> assumed that the realm of the dead is analogous to that of
> the living and they need to eat (Barber 1988:48).

Water, in many European cultures is believed to hold a

mystical ability to "capture" spirits who are attracted to

reflections or who may not cross over water as a

supernatural boundary (Andrea 1997; Barber 1988; Wilkins

1990). Often in pre-Christian Europe, water that was used

to cleanse the bodies of the dead in preparation for burial,

was conscientiously stored. This was later poured around the

grave site after the funeral rites, thus inhibiting the

spirit or corpse from crossing the grave's boundary and

wandering among the living. During prescribed periods of

mourning in Western societies, mirrors, having the

reflective quality of water, were frequently turned to face

the wall or covered with cloth. This was to keep it from

attracting the recently departed and thus enabling them to

linger in the familiar dwellings they inhabited when alive.

Containers of water within tombs may serve the double

purpose of keeping the spirits from wandering by enticing

them through reflection, or to quench the thirst of the

corpse.   Candles and lamps are placed in graves to ensure

that the spirits of the dead do not wander in the darkness, but have a means to see a way to heaven or to keep them from breeching the boundary of burial places into living space.

Finally, there also exists the isolation of certain dead away from sacred space depending upon their cause of death. As presented previously, these have historically been the suicides or criminals who have been executed. For them, the corpses and their spirits are perceived as too polluted, or unsacred from their actions in life to be allowed in sacred ground (Barber 1988; Wilkins 1990). However, this presents a problem in maintaining a boundary between their spirits and the living. Generally, mortuary practices in these instances included burial in isolated and unmarked places, as far from living habitations as possible, or at crossroads where the spirit may be confused. It was an anathema in Western beliefs, for travelers to find themselves near crossroads after dark or in inclement weather.

It is of particular interest then, for the body of this work to address the differences and commonalities between the four subject cultures chosen, which may lend insight as to why the overlap of burial and living spaces may have been acceptable to them. In light of this comparison, Western reactions might include psychological discomfort and

cultural malaise at harboring the deceased within the home for extended periods of time before burial; at practicing secondary burial; at burying the dead beneath the home or ritually handling the bodies to comfort their spirits' or finally, at keeping dismembered parts of family members' corpses as relics.

In the examination of the ancient cultures for this study, it will be impossible to completely deduce the myth and other spiritual beliefs that surrounded the secondary burial practices unless there are some historically contemporaneous sources which can provide additional insight. The material evidences left behind in the burial sites themselves can but give a suggestion as to the significance placed upon the mortuary practices in secondary disposal of the dead and indication as to whether sacred space was a viable concept to them. That all of the material grave goods and the context of their position to the deceased must be considered before an adequate interpretation can be inferred is obvious, given the multiple interpretations that can be made from them.

For the ethnographic studies, we have the advantage of understanding contemporary attitudes and circumstances in a living culture. Assessment of subtle conditions otherwise missed in analysis of ancient cultures, may give a more

holistic picture of spatial relationships and the dead. These spatial relationships will be explored to determine whether they are indicative of a concept of sacred space.

Metcalf and Huntington (1997) have stated that mortuary practices are one of the most entrenched aspects of a culture. Over time and through exposure to other funerary practices of other peoples, change and incorporation of new behaviors usually occurs incrementally unless externally imposed by a dominating culture. Perhaps this is because humans are less inclined to change so fundamental a behavior as mortuary practices, which are connected to their perception of the soul and the afterlife.

The cross-cultural comparisons pursued here will attempt to comprehend the gap between spiritual beliefs that imply a belief in separate realms of existence, and yet exhibit mortuary practices that appear to the Western eye to deny that separateness. The format that will be followed in each of the cultural studies will include: 1) an overview of the locations (geography) and environments, 2) an historical perspective on interaction with other groups and the shaping of identity, and finally, 3) specific mortuary customs, symbols and spatial relationships between the living and the dead.

The ancient city of Jericho, located in the Jordan
River Valley in Palestine, has been dubbed by some scholars
as the oldest known town in the world (Kenyon 1957) because
of its establishment approximately 3000 years before any of
its neighbors in the Fertile Crescent. This places its
earliest occupation at approximately 8000 B.P. Its
occupation spans the beginning of the Neolithic through the
Bronze and Iron Ages to the present day,(the modern town of
Jericho is now located just outside of the original site).
Occupation has been interrupted intermittently over the
centuries for relatively brief periods from 3-10 years, to
50 in another, with a long hiatus of 300 years in the late
Neolithic.

Situated in the great rift that is known as the Jordan
River Valley, the site of Jericho is also the lowest
geographically located town in the world at 900 feet below
sea level (Kenyon 1957). A "trough" was created
in the Jordan valley by the continental drifts of 2 million
years ago, which was also responsible for forming the Great
Rift Valley of east Africa.

The trough runs north to south between two well-known
bodies of water and is bordered by mountains or desert. Its
soils are rich and fertile, a remnant of the alluvial floods

that occurred when the valley was formed. Abutting the trough on the east side is an abrupt geographic land raise of approximately 3000 feet. On the eastern side of Jericho this takes the form of the mountains of Moab and Gilead. To the west between Jericho and the Mediterranean sea coast are the Judean hills, which gradually give way to more carved and precarious cliffs.

Jericho lies on the plain of this geographic trough, which at its greatest span is about 12 miles wide. It is located approximately 55 miles south of the Sea of Galilee and approximately 10 miles north of the Dead Sea. The Jordan River, which begins in the high altitudes of Lebanon, flows down this valley to the Sea of Galilea and ends in the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea harbors a high salt content through intense evaporation and lack of water flow, and consequently, cannot support life. In the region of Jericho, there is a spring which comes from an underground reservoir fed from rains that originate in the nearby Judean hills. Kenyon posits that this factor has been its primary key to prosperity through time. This constant and protected underground source of water has created an oasis at the site of Jericho.
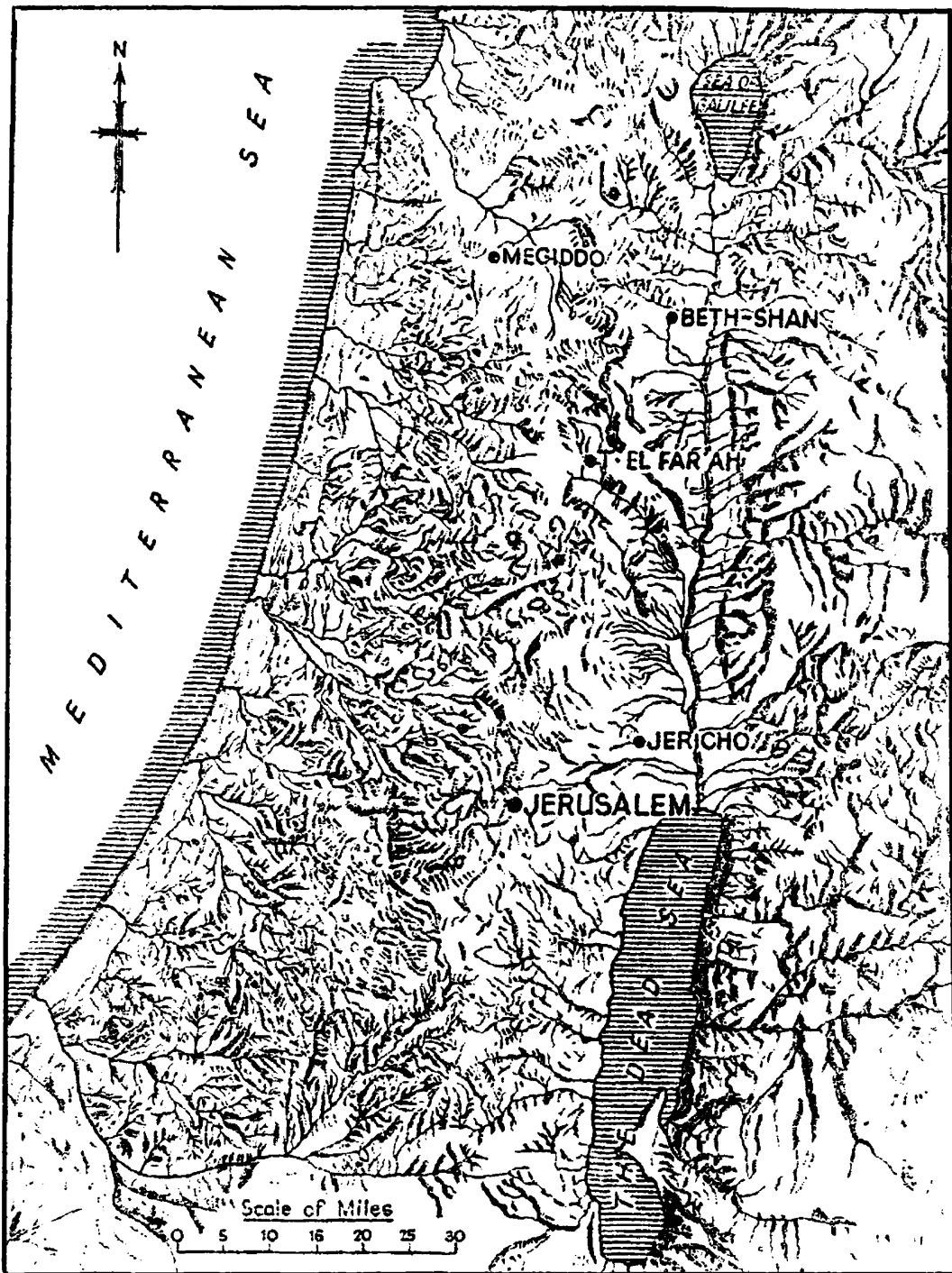
Map of Jericho and Jordan River Valley
(after Kenyon 1957:24)

Natural geographic boundaries and limited water sources

in the surrounding landscape have made of Jericho a

strategic and obvious gate to surrounding areas. Travelers
from the east had to pass through this area on the way into
Palestine or toward the Mediterranean. Those north or south
would find the Jordan Valley the most passable route rather
than winding through the mountain ranges. Conversely,
Jericho was not a core settlement in the region. It was an
important stopover for those whose long distance travel
necessitated this route, but one that was far from being a
hub.

Because of its significance in Christian biblical
accounts, the site of Jericho has been excavated many times
since 1867. Its archaeological attraction has been
primarily its famed Wall, with focus of most fieldwork
aimed at establishing its historical links and context to
the times of Joshua (Bar-Yosef 1986:157-162).

However, long before Biblical accounts of Joshua and
the Wall of Jericho, estimated at 1375 B.C., there were
earlier occupants with whom this work is concerned. Since
Jericho has been labeled the oldest known human occupation
site, it is necessary to divide its occupations into
manageable time frames.

The Natufian is divided by Kuijt(1996)into several
periods: 1) Early Natufian (12,500 to 11,000 B.P.), 2) Late
Natufian (11,000 to 10,300 B.P.), 3) and Prepottery

Neolithic A or hereafter referred to as PPNA, (10,300 to 9300 B.P.). A second pre-pottery group whose architectural styles differed but whose mortuary practices are similar are identified as Pre-pottery Neolithic B peoples, who occupied Jericho between 9300-7500 B.P. In the discussion that follows, it is the archaeological remains dating from about 8000 B.P. are most revealing of burial practices and relic keeping that are relevant to this study.

Because of its long occupation, the Jericho site is a classic *tell* (Cole 1959). A tell is an artificial mound built up over time by human inhabitants; each successive group of occupants builds atop ruins of the old, generating a growing mound of refuse, buildings, dirt and more ruins (Bar-Yosef 1986).

It is amidst some of the lowest excavated deposits of the tell that the first evidences of what will be referred to as the "Skull Cult" was found.

This is a pre-pottery period in Jericho's existence. The first recognizable sedentary group lived in beehive shaped huts constructed of handmade and unfired mud brick. The brick style has been dubbed "hogback" (Kenyon 1957) for identification due to the rounded top side, flat bottom side and an overall oval shape that differentiates them from other, later occupants of Jericho.

The hut floors were packed mud with no other surfacing and were sunk approximately two steps down from the outside entrance. Beneath the floor was a layer of cobble stones over which the mud was packed. This cobbling subfloor extended substantially deeper, almost like a footing, along the walls of the hut. There is later evidence that the underground streams and water sources flooded, cutting through some of these early domestic dwellings. It can be speculated that Jericho's underground water tables may have fluctuated more and rainfall may have been considerably more frequent than it is today. The cobble filled trenches could possibly have been used to drain runoff and muddying of their floors and walls in a wetter climate. Wood was used in beams and planks for support structures (doorways, steps, etc.) The Jericho of today must import much of its wood, as surrounding trees and availability have long since been depleted even in this oasis environment. However, in the early days of the Neolithic period, there is evidence that tree growth was much more abundant until a significant climatic change occurred:

> ... the Ice Ages of Europe ...ended about 10,000 B.C. In the Mediterranean and Near East, the counterpart of the Ice Ages was the Pluvials, in which areas now desert must have been fertile....After long periods of flourishing town life, increasing desiccation as conditions approached those of today...represent a period of retrogression,... and a gradual adaptation of settlement to new and less favourable conditions. (Kenyon 1957:76-78).

Tools were fashioned from flint of an unknown source and a great deal of game, indicated by plentiful animal bone, was used as well. Greenstone was used for ornamental pieces (possibly as amulets) but no specific shape has been attributed to them. Bowls and other utensils are made of roughly-shaped stone and limestone. Wood was probably also used for utensils, but little remains to identify such tools.

Mortuary Customs

Under the floors of several of these beehive style dwellings a number of skulls have been found buried in deep pits. These skulls are unadorned: there is no painting, etching or clay molding upon them that might reveal religious or personal symbols. The pits are barren of other materials usually found in grave sites, i.e. jewelry, tools (flint arrows, etc.) or other items of a personal nature. The absence of grave goods, with exception of the special treatment of skulls.

The skulls are consistently arranged together in groups, sometimes in a circle, and usually facing inwards. The use of circular arrangement and direction of skull positioning is the only indication of a spiritual or social symbology observed in the burial. Some house burials have

more than one group collected, as in one instance there were

three separate groups, but all were arranged to face in the

same direction as the others.

There is no indication as to what grouping criteria was

used or why. Written accounts of the excavations have

offered no insight. Perhaps kinship affiliation, membership

in a social order, or some other criteria played a role.

The skulls appear to come from a mixture of gender and

age groups. Infant burials offer the only exception,

apparently age functioning as a criterion for separation

from other social members.

> "Young children and infants, who usually account for 40% of
> the total observed burials in the PPNA period, were usually
> buried singly, without grave goods and often interred in
> shallow graves roughly dug out of previous deposits. In a
> few rare cases, the cranium was removed from an
> infant...(Kuijt 1996:319).

What is clear from the physical evidence, however, is

that the skulls were apparently collected *after* the bodies

had been disarticulated from decomposition. Skeletal

remains of the rest of the body which were usually interred

extramurally (externally located from the house, but

typically within occupied parameters, i.e. immediate yard

areas) indicate that the process of collecting the skulls

resulted in the disarticulation of the rest of the bones,

which were no longer securely attached by tissues.

In other sites of Late Natufian burials found in towns

el-Wad, Kebara, Nahal Oren, there existed the practice of

placing limestone blocks flat over a grave site to mark the location of the head (Bar-Yosef 1991; Kuijt 1996). Excavations of these burials have shown that in absence of a limestone block, rings of smaller stones encircled the approximate location of the head. Once the body had decomposed sufficiently to facilitate easy cranial removal, the delineated area of the head was disinterred, and the skull reburied within the house.

Archaeological records indicate no discernable evidence of injury or wound to the remaining bodies. It does not rule out death from other causes which may not readily show violence, such as strangulation, disease, or poisoning. If the cause of death for these individuals were other than violence, this would seem to suggest that the skulls collected were neither taken as trophies of executed persons nor those killed in battle. Furthermore, skulls were interred under the floors of domestic homes of what appears to be an egalitarian society. Just as there are no grave goods found during this period, similarly, home sites fail to show obvious signs of class stratification.

An exception to the pattern of nonviolent cranial removal was associated with the discovery of a mud-plaster basin found in a room of a house near an infant burial (Kenyon 1957; Kuijt 1996). Although the single, extramural

infant burial nearby was intact, there were five infant craniums located intramurally (within the house) in a pit beneath this plaster basin. Evidence indicates that at the time these infant skulls were collected, many of the C1 through C5 vertebrae (neck segments) were still attached to them, some showing evidence of blade cuts.

This indicates that when these skulls were collected, they were still attached to the bodies, not in a significantly decomposed state, and had to be severed to separate them from the body. There is insufficient evidence to say definitively that this indicates the practice of infant sacrifice, but neither can it been disregarded at this time. The evidence is inconclusive as to whether this structure may have been a public building or temple rather than a home site. The only differentiating feature was the plaster basin found on the floor.

The "beehive" style of architecture and its occupants were in place for a significant length of time, although exact dates are conjectural. Then, for reasons unknown, the inhabitants vacated Jericho. According to Kenyon (1957), after a three to ten year gap, based upon streambed changes and yearly flooding evidence through part of the site, (the evidence is ambiguous; there is speculation that it may have taken more than ten years for stream silt to have built up

to the levels seen in the soil stratigraphy), a new occupation occurs.

These new inhabitants lived in handmade, unfired clay brick houses with roofs consisting of reeds plastered with mud. The bricks were no longer the "hogback" style of the earlier occupants, but more rectangular with rounded ends and flattened tops. Thumb grooves along the base of the brick were also a distinctive practice, and used to assist in setting the mortar.

Gone also were the beehive shaped huts. Most domestic homes were rectangular with rounded edges. The typical floor plan seems to indicate a large room (generally 7 meters X 4 meters) with smaller rooms and niches branching off from it. Some of the house niches were too small to function as habitation space, and it is speculated that they were storage areas – but accounts give no indication as to what, specifically, was stored.

Homes were built around a courtyard area, where hearths have been found for cooking. As the outdoor courtyards became cluttered with kitchen refuse and grime, a layer of dirt and clay was brought in and packed down to create a fresh floor area. Some of the homes' entry/exit ways into the courtyards show evidence of built up frames to accommodate this increase in courtyard levels.

On some floors, they used lime plaster to surface clay floors, burnished to a smooth, high polish. Most of the floors were red or cream colored and when the plaster was intact, was as convenient to maintain as modern floors (Kenyon 1957:55).

Floors that were not plastered were hard packed clay covered in reeds or rush mats. As the mats wore out, they were topped by fresh mats and the old mats served as padding underneath. These floors tended to begin as sunken floors, in obvious allowance for the build up that would occur.

The new occupants of Jericho were also a pre-pottery people. Dishes, bowls and other household items were made of wood or carved from the limestone. Water and other containers were most likely made of skins or wood and have not left their mark on the archaeological record.

Knives, scrapers, borers and arrowheads have been found to be fashioned primarily from local flint, although obsidian obtained from the trade route now makes an occasional appearance. Hunting was still an important supplemental food source, but grains seemed to have been the mainstay of these people. Sickle blades have finely serrated edges, and are numerous. Those that have been

found have a high build up of silica (from cutting grain stalks) indicating high usage. Grinding stones are common. The most notable absence of tools appears to be a complete lack of picks or hoes, axes or other equipment one would expect to find in a sedentary, agricultural community.

There is no definitive evidence that these people wove or engaged in spinning for cloth. Kenyon (1957) found several small stone disks that were speculated to be spindle whorls, but this interpretation is nonconclusive. Bone pins made from animal foot bones have been found in burial sites at this stratigraphic level. Bone fasteners and carved malachite and shell beads could have been used as clothing ornaments or jewelry. Some bone beads have been found carved in the shape of a human head.

**Carved animal bone bead in shape of human face.
(After Kenyon 1957:121)**

Green stone is still used and high polish items that resemble miniature axes have been found. This, as previously noted, is a mystery in light of the absence of regular axes and heavy tools in the material record:

> These small green stone objects are not pierced for
> suspension, which one would have expected whether they were
> intended for amulets or as ornaments. It is difficult to
> believe they were functional in any way...(Kenyon 1957:58).

Kenyon continues to refer to these carvings as amulets wherever they occur for wont of a better descriptive word. They appear to have a significance all their own and have thus been ascribed to an unknown religious or ideological belief system.

Throughout the daily lifestyle of these people, material indications are that they were an established sedentary group with a mixture of nomadic culture traits. It is possible that they were more mobile than later groups who would come to harbor domestic animals. It is unknown precisely from what area these new peoples may have migrated from.

Their architecture is clearly different from the previous occupants. However, whether they were completely foreign and new inhabitants, in some way related to the first group (perhaps an admixture returning to an abandoned site), or simply shared some of the same religious beliefs, there continued an observance of the practice of collecting

skulls for secondary burial as the norm (Kenyon 1957). In support of this, Bar-Yosef (1991) and Kuijt (1996) have also shown that the burial practice of cranial removal was a common practice at this time.

Similar to the first group, skulls appear to have been collected from disarticulated skeletons. The absence of signs of violence prevails. However, in one instance, many skulls were found together, suggesting at least one event of mass death - disease or other catastrophe. The possibility of a battle in this case, cannot be entirely disregarded (Kenyon 1957).

There appears to be a second mass burial during this time, wherein the skulls were not disarticulated from the skeletons and the bodies were not interred beneath home dwellings. Rather, the bodies were interred within a tower. This departure from the usual burial practice has raised several questions.

Kuijt (1996) has noted that there were twelve bodies, both male and female of varied ages, and they had been interred at the foot of the tower's stairwell:

> The bodies were pushed through a hole cut into [a] wall...on the east side of the tower...interred head first with heads and torso on the fill at the base of the stairs and the legs and feet toward the entrance.

> The architectural context of these burials, the number of individuals, and the absence of secondary mortuary treatment stand in stark contrast to the common mortuary practices at Jericho and all other PPNA sites...(1996:324).

Bar-Yosef (1986:157-162) posits that the use of the tower for this mass grave is possibly an indication of a change in organization or a symbolic and ritual departure from other practices. It has been speculated that the tower served more than fortification purposes alone. The tower stands at the eastern end of Jericho and has two "outer skins" (Kenyon 1957:69) of stone, indicating different time periods of remodeling or reconstruction. Inside are oddly shaped rooms on the northwest side whose function has not been determined.

The location of the grave site at the foot of the stairs with dirt and cobble fill, effectively closed off the entrance and ability to ascend the tower, thus significantly changing or altering the access and use of the tower for reasons undetermined. There are no indications of violent death.

Kenyon's observations of the tower burial are that it was "simply because it was a convenient hole" (Kenyon 1957:68). Because of the lack of evidence of violent death, she also dismisses the idea that these individuals were interred there out of a death-in-duty scenario, killed in defense of the tower, yet she does not offer an explanation for the absence of cranial removal, nor the difference between the cranial removals that continued to be a practice

at this time.

Kuijt (1996) has offered that the tower could have been used for ritual purposes unknown, as part of a cosmological scheme. In his hypothesis, the tower could have served as more than a fortification but as a pinnacle of sacred space, similar in concept perhaps, to a church. Thus, cranial removal would not be necessary. Bodies interred in an apex for the sacred would have no need of cranial removal.

> ...the burial of these individuals was related to ritual use of the tower, perhaps as a means of delineating sacred space within the community by ritual practitioners, and that the burial of individuals in the tower probably symbolized the same beliefs as those expressed through cranial removal...the ritual act of placing these individuals in the tower replicated or mirrored the beliefs expressed through cranial removal and, therefore, symbolically replaced the need for actual cranial removal (1996:324-325).

If correct, the differentiated placement and the spatial relationship of the bodies in this instance would be considered an acknowledgment of the concept of sacred space. As Elaide (1960) explains:

> For religious man, space is not homogeneous;...some parts of space are qualitatively different from others...there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous...For religious man, this spatial nonhomogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that is sacred-the only *real* and *really* existing space-and all other space, formless expanse surrounding it (1960:20).

The habitants of Jericho still generally grouped and buried skulls beneath the main room floors of their homes at this time, leaving the disarticulated remains in extramural graves. This indicates a differentiating of space or creation of sacred space. There was one exception to

subfloor placement. An elderly male's skull was found at the intersection of two walls, indicating possibly a specific purpose to this placement near the foundation, such as a dedication. No matching disarticulated skeleton in an extramural grave was found.

At this time skulls, except for the topmost part of the cranium, are covered in clay and plaster. There is an attempt to mold features of the individual with cowrie shells superimposed for eyes. Some of the craniums bear brown painted markings, although it is unclear what significance they have. There have been no infant-only skull groups found and no suggestion of infant sacrifice during this occupation.

Because these pre-pottery peoples also occupied Jericho for a significant period of time (several hundred years) it is clear that this custom was not a fleeting practice, nor one that only occurred in the aftermath of conflict (i.e. collecting trophies or enemy relics). The burial of such skulls occurs in many different layers of household excavations and is consistent through time, according to Kenyon's notes, and thus indicates a long history of observance:

> As we have cleared layer after layer of superimposed homes in the various areas excavated, beneath almost every single floor we have found burials....The action of enemies can obviously not be involved in all these cases. It does therefore seem probable that the removal of the skull was a

general practice, and that they were kept as mementoes of
dead members of the family...(Kenyon 1957:64).
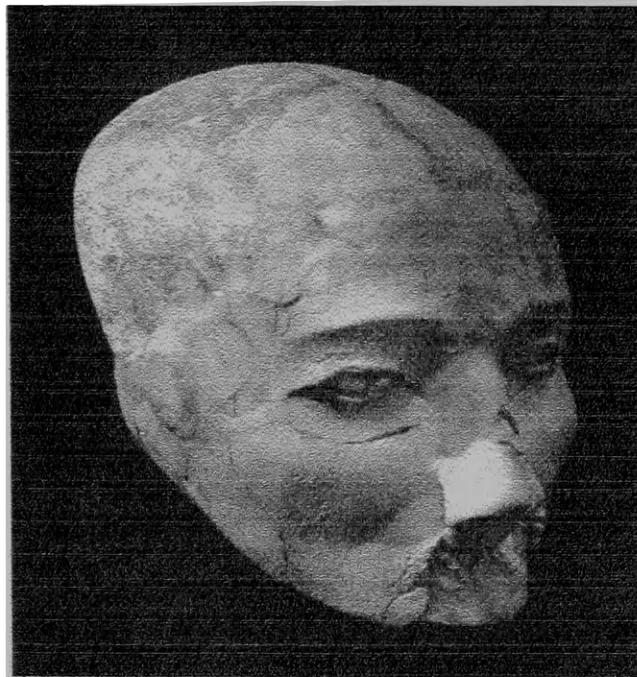
Jericho clay/shell adorned skull (after Kenyon 1957:123)

Before this period of occupation is over, new

architectural evidence of a thriving and growing ideology or

belief system becomes evident. Homes, aside from burials

beneath their floors, begin to show evidence of personal

"shrines." Niches sectioned off from the main floor plan of

houses appear. In one, a carved volcanic rock (from Nebi

Musa, about eight miles distant), was intended as a column

for a pedestal stand. As Kenyon notes:

> There can be little doubt that we have ...a cult object, a
> recognition that there was a supernatural force which could
> be anonymously represented in this way...in conception...of
> the Semitic ritual stone, the *mazzebah* (1957:59).

By 7000 B.P., another group of newcomers occupied Jericho. It has been difficult to determine exact dates for their new occupation, due in large part to the fact that these people excavated parts of the tell in order to quarry clay. This marks the onset of pottery use at Jericho.

In many documentations, these are referred to as the Neolithic Pottery "A" and "B" peoples. It is unclear as to whether there was a full scale takeover of the site or, if the former occupants once again abandoned it to the newcomers.

Strangely enough, the Neolithic A peoples show no signs of having built residences at Jericho. There appears to be a large scale campsite set up over the top of the pre-pottery peoples' ruins, but no actual walls, housing, etc. of their own were erected. These were a nomadic people in transition to sedentarism. Their pottery styles were fully formed, suggesting they brought the knowledge of pottery making with them from elsewhere, although earliest examples of it were crude. There is no evidence of organized town living as is the case in the pre-pottery peoples' occupation, and no public areas. The evidence exhibited indicates a more "villager" style of life than "town dweller" with masses of people camping at random all about the tell.

The Skull Cult practices are completely gone by this period. In fact, no burials are found for this period at all. It is possible that these semi-nomadic peoples, still employing nomadic mortuary practices, exposed their dead above ground to the elements and thus there are no burials with which to illuminate their culture or religious beliefs. One artifact with human likenesses was found that may indicate a new symbology for the importance of ancestors, lineage or community.

A plaster representation of a man, woman, and child, were found with paint used to indicate all the features except the eyes. Representations of the eyes still employed the use of cowrie shells similar to the practice of the former inhabitants. The artifact was two-dimensional (flat) rather than a three-dimensional clay modeling as found applied over the skulls of the Skull Cult.

It has been speculated that this is an image of a "divine family" or a triad of sorts that may have replaced the skull in ideology(Kenyon 1957). The locus of wisdom and spirituality shifted away from ancestors represented by specific heads or skulls of individuals.

By the Neolithic "B" inhabitants, pottery had become more refined and styles are similar to those of the people who inhabited Byblos (a seaport on Syrian coast), and Sha'ar

ha Golan (near the Sea of Galilee). If these are not the

places of origin, then at least a clear establishment of

trade or interaction is indicated. Anthropomorphic carvings

made on various stones match those found belonging to a

religious cult in Golan. Thus, there existed a definite

link in spiritual beliefs by this time between Jericho and

the rest of Palestine, possibly Syria and the Fertile

Crescent.

Other town sites developed all along the Fertile

Crescent during this period. Evidence suggests that most

of these early villages and towns were a composite of

populations arriving from many different locations and

bringing with them varied social ideologies, skills and

levels of technology including pottery making styles.

Inexplicably, by 5500 B.P., at the end of the Neolithic

"B" peoples' inhabitation, Jericho ceased to thrive. A

period of 300 years ensued before Jericho was a viable town

again.

Around 5200 B.P., Jericho was once again infiltrated by

semi-nomadic peoples. This time, spatial placement of the

dead was outside of living space. A cemetery where multiple

bodies were interred per tomb, was removed from residential

areas. A cemetery was located on the slope of a hill not

far from the tell of Jericho proper. Shafts that averaged

4-5 meters deep were dug into the slope with several single room tombs approximately 4.6 meters in diameter carved out of the limestone. A collection of 113 skulls were found, placed in formation around the edge of a single chamber in a marked return to the burial practices of skull arrangement of more than 300 years earlier. All the skulls were facing inward toward the center of the chamber. The bodies, which were deposited within the center of this skull arrangement, had been cremated. There is evidence that the bodies and skulls were all deposited in the chamber at one time. Reasons for this are speculative; perhaps a seasonal interment, mass disaster or disease. No evidence of mass violence can be found in this instance.

It is quite possible that these nomadic peoples practiced seasonal burial as the norm during their early stages of occupation. Other multiple graves have been found, suggesting a similar communal burial. It is possible that those who died during interim times were put elsewhere to decompose while they awaited burial. Then, in various stages of decomposition, were put into the tombs, skulls were detached and placed according to burial custom, and the remaining bodies were cremated at one event.

As the occupation of Jericho progressed, we begin to see interments occurring at the time of the death. Skulls

also cease to be disarticulated from the bodies and cremation of the entire corpse becomes common. Burial chambers appear to become lineage tombs with few individuals rather than earlier mass graves that appeared to be communal (Kenyon 1957).

Treatment of previous interments as tombs were revisited to bury the new dead have been characterized as careless (Kenyon 1957). Corpses seemed to have been unceremoniously pushed to the back or sides of the tomb to make more room.

Burial goods show evidence of a stratified society as grave goods vary from personal affects and jewelry to daggers, knives and sickles, pottery, food, containers of water and later, furniture.

Summary

The culture traits of the mortuary practices in Jericho display a strong belief in an afterlife or the importance of the dead to the living. It is apparent that during the earliest stratigraphic levels, the society was egalitarian and a strong common background assisted in conformity in burial practices. Ancestor worship or some reverential perspective of the dead is apparent. It is possible they believed wisdom, strength, or other personal qualities of

the dead could be imparted upon the living with burials beneath immediate living space. Families observe specific skull placement and later, extend treatment and adornment of the skulls.

As new groups infiltrated Jericho, they brought with them varied ideologies and religious beliefs. These seemed to be incorporated into existing cosmologies and later, altered placement of the dead into a separate space. As Jericho became more urbanized, rank and subsequent accommodations become more obvious in the tombs. In some instances, superficial burial accommodation is observed. Some of the pots for water are old or patched articles which would not be good for everyday use among the living; ladles are sometimes broken and placed in the containers with only the intact handles showing. Although the ritual is observed, this lack of concern for quality grave wares may reflect a deterioration in the depth of reverence toward the dead. Exceptions appear to be in cases of individuals of higher rank or importance wherein conspicuous ceremony may be important.

Chapter 3: Culture Study #2 (Archaeological)

Maya

Archaeological evidence to date reveal that the ancient Maya of Mesoamerica practiced secondary burial and interment beneath domestic homes as early as 1000 B.C. in the Middle Pre-Classic times (McAnany 1995), and continued these practices throughout the Classic era (Coe 1995).

The occupation of ancient Mayan civilization was established in what is now known as Tabasco, Chiapas Yucatan, Campeche, and Quintana Roo (Mexican states), Guatemala, Belize, and the western edges of Honduras and El Salvador of Central America (Coe 1995; Henderson 1997). Combined, their territory was roughly the size of the state of New Mexico (Von Hagen 1961).

The geography and climatic patterns of this Central American regions have not changed substantially since those times. The environment is varied, but is basically comprised of two primary zones, highlands and lowlands.

Highlands are defined as areas that are at least 1,000 feet above sea level. Highland mountains are a volcanic formation and can include snow at the highest points, up to 13,000 feet above sea level. The mountain ranges that stitch throughout Central America are made up of these volcanoes, some of which are still considered active today.

There is a dearth of water sources in the highlands

with lakes and rivers a scarcity. Deep ravines and ridges

are punctuated with valleys and tropical rain forests. The

topsoil layer is fertile but thin, and built upon a strata

of volcanic pumice and ash. Along the upper regions of the

Rio Negro and middle Rio Motagua rivers, lie corridors of

Map of Mesoamerica/Yucatan Peninsula (after Coe 1995:10)
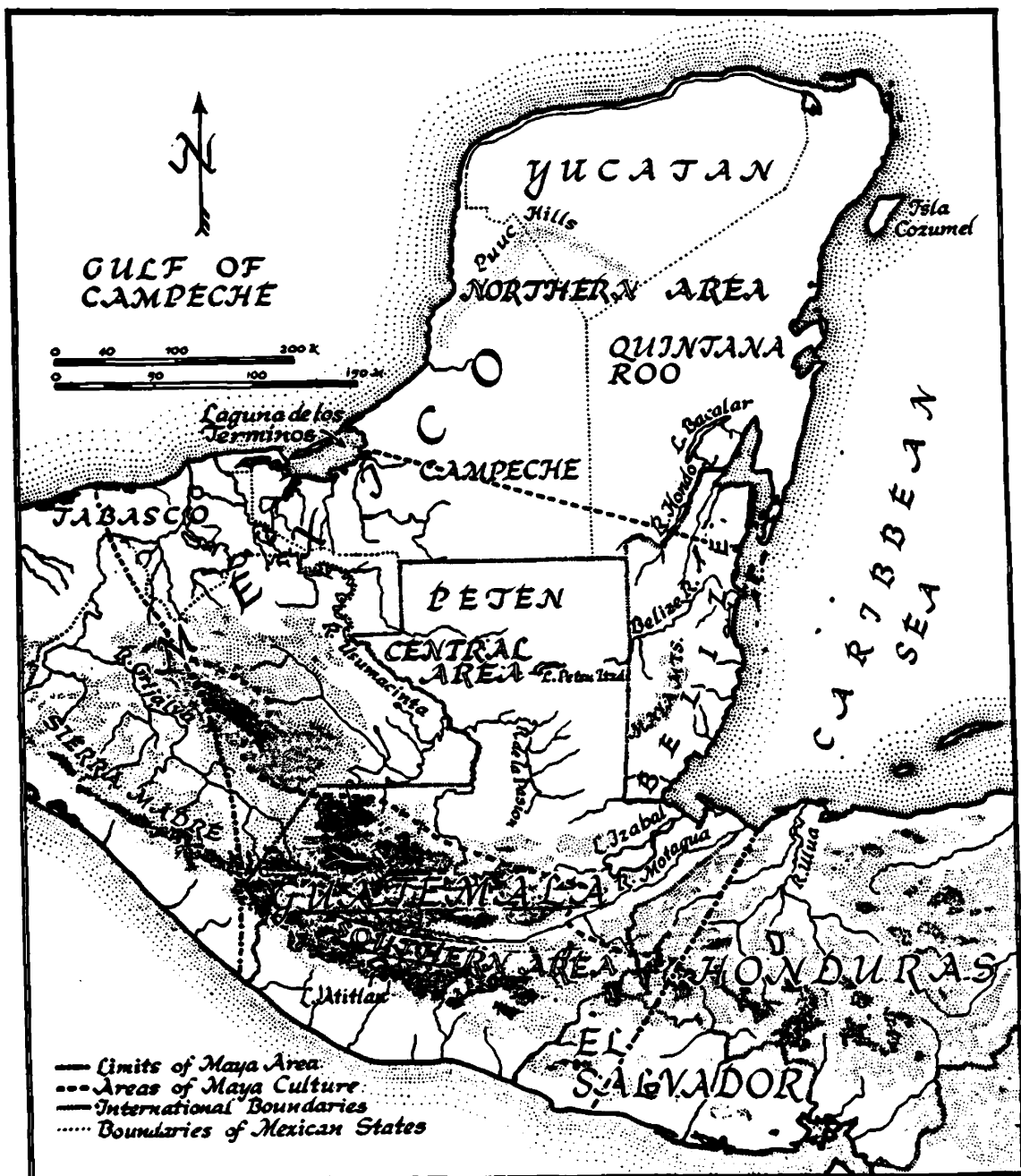
desert between the various ecological zones.

Rainfall is typically restricted to the rainy season from May to November. Rainfall and soil quality has defined the plant life as well. Upper regions of mountainous areas are primarily covered in grass and pine. The moisture concentration found in ravines and valley bottoms give way to denser foliage and where hardwood trees such as oaks can be found.

PALEO-INDIAN		15,000?– 7000 b.c.
ARCHAIC		7000 – 2000?
PRECLASSIC (Also called Formative)	Early	2000 – 1000
	Middle	1000 – 300
	Late	300 – a.d. 250
CLASSIC	Early	250 – 550
	Late	550 – 800
TERMINAL CLASSIC		800 – 1000
POSTCLASSIC	Early	1000 – 1250
	Late	1250 – THE SPANISH CONQUEST

Maya Chronological Chart (after Gallencamp 1987:57)

The subsistence practices of early Middle Classic natives included agricultural plots built upon terraced slopes where maize, squash, beans, peppers and sweet manioc (a starchy root - used for making bread, meal or tapioca) were grown. Swidden or slash and burn techniques were the norm in pre-classic to early classic times (see Maya chronological chart), and plots could only yield ten seasons before exhaustion. Fallow periods to rejuvenate thin soils typically ran fifteen years or more (Coe 1995).

The lower in the zone, the deeper the soil layer, and more continuous use could be made of the growing plots - as much as fifteen years with only five in fallow compared to the higher regions (Coe 1995).

Much of the lowland is typified by soil layers built upon limestone, as much of the Yucatan peninsula is made up of a limestone reef. Natural cenotes (water cisterns), which are nearly nonexistant in the northern Yucatan and highlands, are created out of sink holes in the subsurface limestone. These natural cenotes pock mark the lowlands in areas of heavier rainfall and provided more water sources for inhabitants. As Maya civilization grew, the highland and lowland inhabitants learned to create underground cisterns called *chultunes*.

More permanent lakes and rivers are also found in the

lowlands. However, lowland temperatures are notoriously

hotter and dry up many of the smaller tributaries and

outlets during the dry season. Rainwater evaporates in a

relatively short time. Water filtering through the top

soils are quickly drawn up by plant life; any remainder

drains through the porous limestone very rapidly.

The Mesoamerican rainforest leaves a deceptive illusion

of plentiful moisture, when in reality the floral and faunal

life have creatively found ways to conserve water and take

advantage of the rainy season when it is in effect. Early

Spanish conquerors suffering from chronic water shortages

and ignorance of cenote locations, characterized

Mesoamerican outposts, particularly in the Yucatan

Peninsula, as "very difficult."

> Water,...was the one element the Yucatan Mayas could not
> command. Although water was everywhere, there was often not
> a drop to drink. Great quantities of rain fell, varying from
> 39 inches a year in the driest parts...to over 150 inches in
> the wetter zones. During January and February there were
> light rains...June through August were heavy rain
> months...Still, there was no way to hold the rain. There
> are no rivers on the Yucatan peninsula...Water, or the lack
> of it, was the curse of the Maya paradise...and drought and
> its disastrous consequences play an important role in native
> Maya literature. (Von Hagen 1961:209-211).

Besides more agricultural opportunity and available

water resources for the inhabitants, faunal life in the

lowlands was far more abundant than in the highlands. Fauna

included deer, turkeys and other large birds, monkeys,

peccary, and cats (jaguar, tapirs). Unlike the highlands,

the lowlands of the Peten, which included regions of Belize,

and Guatemala are described by Coe (1993) as:

> "relatively deep and fertile, those of the Yucatan (except
> for the Puuac area), are the reverse (1993:17).

In Preclassic times, much of the highland inhabitation

were scattered, small populations. Lowland populations had

grown considerably larger by Classic times (A.D. 250) and

lowlands came to sustain major population centers such as

Tikal.

Agricultural techniques became more complicated as

subsistence demands increased with population. Maize plots

called *milpas* (Coe 1995) were utilized to produce more

yield. Other methods of agricultural intensification

included irrigation canals and building raised fields upon

seasonal swamp beds for those areas where large populations

could not be sustained by simple swidden methods (Coe 1995;

Fagan 1995; Henderson 1997).

Despite radical differences in ecological zones and

water resources, Mayan populations were not isolated from

one another by natural geographic boundaries. Trade routes

networked throughout the Maya region, and regional food

items (cacao), feathers, shell, obsidian, jade, and

specialty pottery and other crafts connected widely

separated city states.

Despite the networking, however, it would be a mistake

to assume that the Maya civilization was a unified one.
Contrarily, major cities by the Classic period were city-
states with adjunct rural towns and outposts, typically in
competition and frequently in hostility to neighboring
centers. Alliances between them formed and dissolved with
frequency, depending upon the strength of the units and the
changing goals of any one of their kings (Coe 1995;
Gallenkamp 1985; Henderson 1997).

Travelers and merchant traders were constantly under
duress of attacking and opposing forces who could rob or
kill them as they made their way through differing rulers'
domains.

> ...four regional centers--Tikal, Copan, Palenque and
> Calakmul--had emerged by A.D. 731, all of which...controlled
> extensive territories administered under their jurisdiction
> by second-, third-, and fourth-order centers allied with
> them. In addition, this hierarchy of sites was constantly
> changing...lower-ranking cities altered their status through
> population growth, military conquest...

> ...militarism obviously played an important role in Classic-
> period society. Raids and skirmishes constantly took place,
> touched off perhaps by territorial disputes, feuds between
> rulers of neighboring cities (Gallencamp 1985:119-120).

Merchants frequently traveled with or snared small
animals along the way to offer in sacrifice to the Merchant
God, Ek Chuah, to ask for protection and safety for their
journey (Coe 1993;Miller and Taube 1997).

Despite architectural and technological advances and
complexities in Maya culture, one must remember that Maya
accomplishments were developed within a Neolithic

technology. The wheel was never used in transportation or other mechanical devices, and metal was not forged for weaponry or domestic use. In fact, the Maya did not use gold or copper for ornamentation and other wares until post Classic times, when metal first filtered into the Maya region from the north from Aztec trade, and from the south from Panama (Henderson 1981; Von Hagan 1961).

Mortuary Customs

Despite population growth and Maya social changes from village life to city states by the Classic period, the practice of ancestor worship of Preclassic times remained a constant.

Much has been made of the Mayan priesthood and royalty, and their practices of human sacrifice and bloodletting to appease deities, fulfill obligations, ensure fertility, and control the weather.

Yet equally evident is that this practice of corpse interment was not only employed by elites and in public centers but by commoners in their households. That relics, specific parts of the disarticulated corpses, were kept not only by elites for the sake of trophies and dedications, but of family members as remembrances of cherished forebears and for the spiritual power they imparted to their descendants.

Ancestors of elites and commoners alike were held in esteem.

The term "ancestor worship" has recently been the focus of academic discourse and attempts to differentiate it from "ancestor veneration" (McAnany 1995). Although scholars may differ in use of terms, the basic premise is that ancestor worship casts the focus on a belief system surrounding the dead, whereas ancestor veneration focuses upon how the belief system is employed as a tool of political and social agendas and in validation of descendants' rights, properties and wealth. In the discussion of the Maya beliefs within this paper, I will employ the model of "ancestor worship." This model and its perspective of spiritual beliefs revolving around the dead, is cohesive with the focus of this work, rather than the socio-political agendas that they eventually came to buttress.

In any discussion regarding the spiritual belief system of the Maya, it is important to establish the parameters of the Maya world, both of the living and the dead:

> Yucatec philosophy held that the universe is unified, that the physical world is inextricably intertwined with other realms...Space is not bounded by the limits of the terrestrial world, but embraces the heavens and the underworlds as well...A host of supernatural entities inhabits the universe...Space and time are inseparable...In this sense, the Maya supernaturals are also dimensions of the universe...they do not occupy their sectors exclusively, for all of the universe is continuous (Henderson 1997:48-55).

There are thirteen levels of heaven and nine of the underworld (Tedlock 1996;Thompson 1970). References to

heaven or celestial layers and the earth are frequently

connected as "sky-earth" (Tedlock 1996). In Popol Vuh, the

Mayan book of creation mythology as translated by Tedlock,

the name of the underworld is Xibalba which, in Quiche Mayan

means "Place of Fear" (Tedlock 1996:34).

Before the development of urban centers and city state

formation of the Classic Maya, pre-Classic Mayan belief

systems claimed strong connections between the underworld,

the earth and the celestial regions (Miller and Taube 1997;

Thompson 1970). This connection represented in the symbol

of the ceiba tree, considered sacred in Mayan cosmology.

The importance of the ceiba tree appears repeatedly in Maya

art and stone carvings throughout the pre-Classic and

Classic periods, indicating that the symbol maintained its

place of importance amidst changing cosmology, political and

economic concerns (McAnany 1995; Miller and Taube 1997).

Early Maya groups believed the sky-earth was linked to

the celestial heavens and the underworld (Xibalba), by the

roots (which reached down into the Land of the Dead) and

limbs (which reached into the thirteen levels of heaven) of

the giant ceiba tree. After death, spirits try to climb the

limbs to attain the highest level of heaven possible,

although most reside in Xibalba, the Underworld. If an

individual died violently (war, sacrifice) or in childbirth,

a place in the higher reaches of heaven was secured (Miller and Taube 1997).

Common people perceived ancestors and the dead as guardians over the living. The dead were in a position to aid and protect their descendants and simultaneously, maintain a place in the world of the living (Schele and Freidel 1990).

Throughout Maya mythology recounted in Popol Vuh, themes of ancestors imparting success or blessings to their descendants is emphasized (Tedlock 1996). First Father is lured into Xibalba (the Underworld). Through trickery, the Xibalbans defeat First Father on their ballcourt and he is subsequently decapitated. His head, which has been put on a calabash tree, causes life to spring forth and the tree becomes fruitful. His head spits into the hand of a demon woman who becomes First Mother and she gives birth to twins. These hero figures called First Lord and First Jaguar (or Twins), are dutiful sons and return to the Underworld when they are grown to retrieve their father and outwit the Xibalbans. First father is brought forth by the Twins and is resurrected as a beneficent maize god.

Maya iconography frequently depicts human heads in place of ears of corn and corn kernels are referred to as "little skulls") during planting and harvest among commoners

(Gillette 1997:38-81. The Maya commoner and elite alike frequently bound the heads of their young children to cause the skull to grow in an oblong shape. This was considered a great badge of beauty and its practice is attributed to imitating the shape of ears of maize (Gillette 1997:23).

Pre-Classic and Classic period excavations of commoners' house mounds have shown that the practice of burying the dead beneath the floor of their homes was common (McAnany 1995). The importance of the concept of ancestors as guardians and maintaining a place among the living is reflected in the term "vehe." This word, used by contemporary highland Maya for "house," is the same term used to refer to the "grave" (McAnany 1995:20).

Common families in the pre-Classic period generally occupied a house for a generation or two and moved, usually not far from the original site (Von Hagen 1961). This observance was in deference to the dead buried beneath the main floor. Not because the house was no longer inhabitable, but because it was "full" of interments of family members and couldn't accommodate further burials. In a sense, the house had been outgrown, but not by the living. Households were small, so several deaths within a 15-20 year period was enough to warrant moving again.

When commoners moved, it was not unusual to practice

secondary burial. An esteemed member of the family or even a child would be exhumed from the household floor and reinterred beneath the floor of a new home. In personal excavation experience (summer fieldwork, Belize 1998) in a late pre-Classic site in a northern Belize called Chan Cahal, secondary burial was indicated in two of the five sites and were those of children between eight and fourteen years of age. Chan Cahal and its core area are approximately fifteen miles southwest from the site of Lamanai, an important trade route city located on the New River. It is likely that Chan Cahal was a satellite city of Lamanai.

The residences of lowland commoners at Chan Cahal were in context of ancient agricultural fields and were an agrarian class population. Possible house sites were identified by mounds standing in unnatural geographic symmetry to the surrounding landscape. Common dwellings were determined to be thatch roof constructions supported by corner poles built up over a base of cobble and dirt. The rainy season lasts from May to October in this region and is formidable. Mounding of homes was probably a measure to facilitate drainage. Although most of the wood and thatch house materials left no detectable traces, the hearths and burials were left intact and indentations in the

stratigraphy indicated placement of the foundation poles.

Commoner burials at this site indicated that three of five burials were plastered over with a limestone mixture after interment, creating a new floor. The dead were buried in all five cases near the hearth or toward one corner of the structure. Although extensive use of pottery was indicated in the middens (located directly at the back entrance of each structure), no pottery was placed in the burials as grave goods.

Items found in these burials were typically pieces of obsidian and in two cases, a single jade bead. In three burials, drilled shells (suggesting use as ornamentation or jewelry) were also found.

The question arises, *How did the practice of interring the dead beneath floors originate*? Perhaps the answer can be found in the negotiation of identity, time and sacred space. As tentatively articulated in the introduction to this work, the spatial relationships between the dead and the living would help to indicate whether there was such a concept as sacred space in the cosmologies in this case.

It has already been demonstrated that the Maya cosmology perceived regions of underworld, earth and sky as intersecting planes (Henderson 1981). The commoner in pre-city state Maya culture, believed in the power of dead to

act as preternatural guardians. The ancestors are perceived
as linked to the sacred ceiba tree. I posit that interring
the dead in such a manner represented the connection between
the worlds found in the mythology of the sacred ceiba tree.
The body served as a symbolic marker of that connection
between the Underworld, sky-earth, and the heavens. The
ancestors as guardians and markers of the sacred, were
interred beneath homes, not to removed areas. This
differentiated the sacred from the profane. Through myths
and burial practices using a specific relation of the dead
to the living, the Maya created sacred space.

> ...myths and rites disclose a *boundary situation*...A
> boundary situation is one which man discovers in becoming
> conscious of his place in the universe (Elaide 1957:34).

Identity for the Maya seems to have been intertwined
with their concepts of levels of existence and the
predictable cycles of time (Schele and Friedel 1990:64-95).

Subsistence patterns changed incorporating agriculture
and new technologies to accommodate the growing population.
Maya culture and social structure became more complex and
lineage appears to have grown in importance as resources
became limited and the competition for them grew. Ancestor
worship became ancestor veneration, as rights to land and
water became an issue.

> The practice of ancestor veneration ultimately is not about
> the dead, but about how the living make use of the dead
> (McAnany 1995:162).

McAnany (1995) describes what she terms as the "principle of first occupancy." Maya families whose claims to land gone fallow or challenged by other families, became dependent upon adjudication through lineage as to which family gained preference.

I posit that what began as a cosmological tie to the land, became a political and economic system and the beginnings of social inequality. Social stratification became more pronounced as the city-states grew, adding a merchant class, military class and other gradients of social class besides royalty (Coe 1995; Henderson 1981).

Excavations at the core area of Chan Cahal (personal field notes, summer 1998 - Belize), indicate the site had been occupied since Formative time through the Classic period. Differentiation in burial practices between the core (elites and upper class populations) was substantial.

The core area was located approximately three miles northwest from the commoners' residences. It was strategically located upon the crest of an escarpment, and a 360 degree view of all approaches to the main temples and royals' residences was possible. Two more burials were uncovered during the summer session. One was clearly a dedicatory sacrifice and the other was indeterminate, possibly a previous elite's burial. A clay pot was

discovered interred at the base of the main temple steps. It was approximately ½ meter in diameter and 3/4 meter high and contained the skeletal remains of a child approximately two or three years of age.

Within the pot were two jade ear spools, a stingray spine, several pieces of obsidian, shell and jade beads, and organic floral remains. The lip of the pot was carved with the face of the Maya water god.

The second core-area burial was interred near the intersection of two stone walls. It was unclear as to whether this child, approximately nine to twelve years of age, was also a dedicatory sacrifice or possibly a mid-level elite home burial. A temple wall, constructed over the top of this burial made the site ambiguous. This was a secondary burial; the skeleton was disarticulated and incomplete and was not encased in a pottery vessel. Parts of the cranium and several teeth were found. Some pottery sherds and shell beads were discovered with the remains (personal summer field notes, Belize 1998).

The femur bones and skulls in elite burials are commonly removed. Examination of bones and historical documents indicate that they were usually removed sometime after decomposition.

> Found in the pages of the Codex Madrid...an exhumation scene contains a verb that has been deciphered as *pasah* ("was opened")...indicate that eight years passed between death and

exhumation of this important female personage...(McAnany 1995:47).

> ...after cooking [the heads] they cleaned off the flesh and
> then sawed off half the crown at the back, leaving entire
> the front part with jaws and teeth. Then they replaced the
> flesh...with a kind of bitumen [and plaster] which gave them
> a natural and lifelike appearance...these they kept in the
> oratories in their houses and on festive days offered food
> to them...(Von Hagen 1961:293-296).

Mortuary art and symbols helped to perpetuate the message of the importance of relics to elite family members and the legitimacy of their lineages to power:

> Each of the male figures in the lower friezes carries a
> human femur in his hand--the femur of his ancestor...Another
> image directly linked to the ancestor is the skull-and-
> crossbones motif present in Maya and, in fact, all
> Mesoamerican iconograpny...and signifies more than death and
> decay. It was a sign of completion and rebirth from
> ancestral bones...symbolic of generation
> continuity....(McAnany 1995).

The practices of ancestor worship had been harnessed by the elites to contribute and perpetuate social system of economic inequality and ultimately, of divine heredity. Wooden statues or icons were carved to represent ancestors complete with features molded upon them in clay. The backs of the heads were similarly hollowed out and the ashes from cremated remains were deposited there. These ancestral icons were prized family heirlooms, and although were found most often among the elites' personal possessions by the sixteenth century, could also be found among commoners (Von Hagen 1961).

Summary

While not isolated, the Maya world and its trade routes
connecting different regions with shared goods and ideas,
was precarious for the inhabitants and travelers. The
environment is one of highland and lowland, with many varied
ecological systems. The equatorial proximity of Central
America gives rise to heavy rainfall and tropical rain
forests and remains climatically much the same today as it
was in pre-Classic times. The result is a deception in
water abundance in some places and flooding and drainage
problems in others.

The Maya empire grew from egalitarian village existence
to independent city states. These complex city states were
in continual competition and usually hostile with one
another, except where alliances were in effect. The
instability of the region was reflected in the stelae of
downfalls and conquests by one king over another and of
human sacrifices held, typically with captives or purchased
individuals to appease blood hungry gods.

However, the early culture traits of the Maya religion
include belief in ancestors as preternatural guardians,
thereby maintaining a place among the living. Burial
practices of interring the dead beneath homes was a
reflection of this cosmology and created concepts of sacred

space as part of the home.

Family lineages became crucial in maintaining claims to land and resources as populations grew. Iconography of ancestors in mortuary art and relic keeping of skulls and femurs served as holy relics and deeds to lineages and land.

Linguistically, the ideology of living space and dead space, or sacred space, reflected the interaction between the realms was continuous and necessary. This core belief was so ingrained that the word for home was the same as that for grave.

Beyond practices of human sacrifice and dedications made in human blood and bodies encased in public structures (i.e. temples, shrines,etc.), the practice of ancestor worship is clearly indicated in that mortuary practices that commoner and elite alike observed secondary burial and relic keeping to honor their loved ones. These practices are indicated in graves dating to pre-Classic times. Mortuary practices would become more ritualized and an avenue for political and social stratification by early Classic (A.D. 250), but original intentions were to honor the dead and imbue descendants with their blessings, power and an opportunity to remain among the living:

> ...both the powerful and the humble buried their dead under the stones of their courtyards so that their ancestors could remain with them and hear the sounds of their descendants' children playing over their heads (Schele and Freidel 1990:45).

Chapter 4: Culture Study #3 (Ethnographic)

Merina of Madagascar

The island of Madagascar is located in the India Ocean and is situated approximately 240 miles from Africa's southeastern shores (Clewell 1949:211). Much of the ethnographic information on the Merina in this section has been derived from the work of Maurice Bloch (1971).

The Merina of Madagascar live in an area called Imerina located in the north central plateau of Madagascar. Imerina is a folk concept and is not defined in the legal sense as a specific county or state with specific boundaries on a map. Roughly speaking, in the center of the ancestral Merina kingdom of Imerina is Tananarive, the historical capital of the kingdom and now the capital of Madagascar. Imerina is approximately "40 miles north, 35 miles south, 30 miles east and 30 miles west of Tananarive" (Bloch 1971:5).

The plateau is situated at the top of a mountain range and rests about 4300 feet above sea level. The soil is mixed with clay and offers poor avenues for agriculture. However, in the valleys where there is more topsoil and irrigation is possible, the Merina have built terraced rice fields from which they make their living. Other resources include fruit trees: oranges, bananas, plum, and mangos; vegetables also supplement the food source and those that

will grow include maize, onions, sweet potatoes, taro,

beans, and a variety of other greens.

Map of Merina of Madagascar (after Bloch 1971:6)
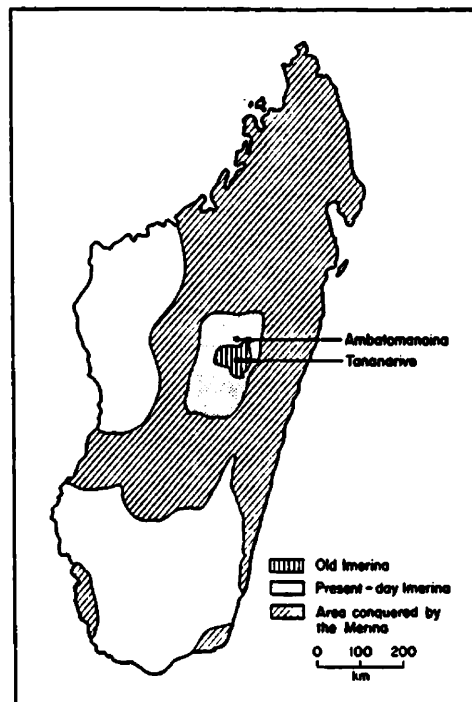
Map I. Madagascar

In open areas the Merina hold livestock (cattle, pigs,

sheep, chickens, turkeys and geese) in places where there is

sufficient pasture and pen area to care for them. The sheep

do not produce enough quality wool for commercial use and

chickens do not produce an abundance of eggs, due to the limited nutritional sources of feed for these animals. Thus, most livestock the Merina own are for family food supplement or for aiding in transportation, plowing fields and manure for fertilization.

The Merina class themselves in two categories: one they call *fotsy*, meaning white and includes people who are assumed descendants of the historically "free" Merina of Malay, French, Indonesian, or South-East Asian background. The other group frequently referred to are called *mainty*, meaning negroid and considered descendants of the slaves of Madagascar. These divisions are culturally defined, according to the Merina's own historical perspective of their ancestry. Criteria for determining upon which side of the division an individual falls is primarily one of judging physical attributes. The rest of the population is made up of outsiders to Merina ancestry, namely newcomers or *vazaha* (foreigners): Europeans, Africans, and what the Merina refer to as the "oceanian negroid."

The ethnological origins of the Merina are obscure, although linguistically they have been linked with the Malayo-Polynesian groups. That migration occurred is clear, but it has not been determined exactly when or how. With the great admixture of peoples and newcomers on the

Madagascar island over the centuries, it is difficult with any degree of accuracy to make such a determination.

There are ruins of fortresses, walls, moats and village sites dotting the countryside in Imerina. Many are overgrown and reclaimed by the elements. The Merina simply refer to them as their ancestral places and beyond retold myths, much of the histories of these ancient places have been lost.

Besides the ruins of dwellings are the ruins of tombs, often built with the most care from megaliths and fortified with their own walls. These structures have survived where many other types of architecture do not. It is also upon these structures that the Merina place most importance.

The Merina divide their values into the two catagories of legitimacy and importance. The first is referred to as "Malagasy times," or "Malagasy custom." These are considered "of the ancestors," or *razana*, (Block 1971: 3-10) and hold the most value. The second are those things that are new, called *vazaha*, and are particularly things that have been introduced since Madagascar became an important location for eighteenth century trade routes, and later by French colonization and European contact.

This attitude of "old" versus "new" continues today in Madagascar and plays a key component in understanding the

Merina concepts of tomb, sense of place, the ancestors and in dealing with the dead. To the Merina, the ancestors have throughout memory held a place of esteem and were pivotal in imparting blessings upon the living for success in life, fertility and social order through kinship.

Today, as the Merina have dispersed throughout Madagascar, they have developed a system by which ties to the ancestors is still maintained and socially prescribed for legitimacy within its society, despite the location where an individual lives or which new *vazaha* religion they practice.

The Merina divide themselves beyond free descendants and ex-slave categories. Where one's ancestors originally hailed from is determined by location of family tombs that are still maintained. These regional groups are in turn important to the Merina in contemporary times, not for the resources or dollar value of the land, but for the ranking system in a hierarchy of social status this imparts.

Superior social status does not impart special benefits within the society in terms of access to resources or other economic values. Rather, it is a system that determines how individuals may relate to one another, work together and otherwise interact. Although individuals may die, the group to which one belongs is perceived as "never dying" (Block

1971:41). The ancestral identity is an entity in its own right, demanding special observances primarily in the placement of the dead. Furthermore, the priorities of the living tend to revolve around the family tomb and the ancestral home region called the *tanindrazana*.

The social order is dictated by the *tanindrazana* of each individual. Merina have practiced endogamy, with marriages between cousins a preference. This is done in order to strengthen family ties and the right to family tombs for one's own burial.

In order to adequately observe this, it is important to know who individuals are related to. In social contexts, individuals may exchange information as to what *tanindrazana* their ancestors come from. Thus they identify themselves indirectly to others as to their place in the social hierarchy and to the extent of relationships that can be observed between them, namely marriage.

Although the Merina claim patrilineal descent groups, in practice it appears that this is not a steadfast rule but an ideal. In reality, mother's lineage may be elected over father's, if this affords the individuals leverage into a better *tanindrazana* and tomb group for burial.

Anyone, no matter how far sanguinely removed in relatedness, are all considered "children of the same womb"

in Merina social order. Being related automatically obligates the individuals to interact and be of assistance to one another in ways that non-relatedness does not.

In today's world, the Merina often do not live within their *tanindrazana*. Primarily this is due to the condition of the lands and economic opportunities of these regions, which has been substantially depleted since European contact. Many Merina have migrated to cities and towns where greater opportunity to make a living is available. Yet, they are tied to their ancestral regions no less than those who still inhabit them. This sense of place is so ingrained in Merina culture and concept of self that, although an individual or family may live in other areas for many years or generations, they never consider these places truly home. It does not matter how long ago the family actually lived upon their own *tanindrazana*; the *tanindrazana* is the only true home. Nor do they recognize land holdings (although legal) as rightfully theirs outside of their *tanindrazana*, as any land not of their own ancestors is obviously ancestral land of another. (It is only over time and the further dispersal of Merina population that land inheritance will change this condition).

Mortuary Customs

A Merina must be buried within a family tomb within their original *tanindrazana* territory. No greater distress can be suffered than to be left "alone" (Bloch 1971:138-171) in a foreign place (any place outside of the *tanindrazana* is foreign) and buried alone. Therefore, the typical Merina requests to be included in a tomb group by the time they marry - in their early 20s. A tomb group is a network of family descendants from the *tanindrazana* who may or may not even know one another. It is the tomb group whose job it is to annually contribute to the upkeep and maintenance of family tombs on the *tanindrazana*.

Most Merina choose a group either from their father or mother's family line. Preference is usually determined by descent or emotional ties to a particular side. Marriage to a cousin helps alleviate concerns about which family tomb group spouses belong and dividing of incomes to support two separate tombs. On those occasions when spouses are from outside groups, the practice typically involves returning to one's own family tomb and *tanindrazana* upon death.

Once having chosen a tomb group, it is unusual for individuals to switch to another later on. This is because much money is invested over the years and to switch is to lose that already invested. Also, it is difficult to appeal

to a group for inclusion at a late date, as individuals who have not been contributors over the years may encounter opposition to their inclusion from established members.

The average Merina spends approximately three times as much income on family tombs (maintenance or building new ones when they become full) than on their own homes (Bloch 1971). The most important house, is that of the dead, not the living. This is particularly so since it is understood that family members will inhabit a tomb far longer than a house and that you must honor the family by building a structure as indestructible and aesthetic as the group can afford.

That the Merina have been absorbed in tomb and ancestor kinship for social structure over the generations is evident in the ruins of tombs still visible today. However, with the advent of missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Christian church has come to create obstacles to which Merina culture and values have had to adapt.

The first Christian churches to make their presence known in Madagascar were primarily Protestant. As first missionary arrivals in 1860s, Protestantism became associated with the old traditionals and kings considered true Merina (Bloch 1971:16-30). These families of free descent continue to be the higher ranked families in Imerina

class hierarchy. Conversely, the arrival of the Catholic church is associated with the arrival of the French in the late 1890s and coincided with the arrival of the slave population in Madagascar. Thus, Catholicism became associated with those of lower status descent.

Despite the boundaries between "old" and "new" in the value system of the contemporary Merina as a differentiation between ancestral versus new or introduced culture, Christianity has become entwined in the Merina mind with the ancestors and is considered "old," or a place of high value. Thus, when the missionaries objected to the "barbaric" tomb rituals and practices involving the dead as non-Christian, the Merina reconstructed their spiritual views to take on some Christian aspects and legitimize them.

> The contrast with being a barbare is being a Christian.
> People continually pointed out...how they were not barbare
> but Christian, while other people with less access to vazaha
> [new] goods and culture were barbare...not being barbare is
> a major preoccupation of the Merina. Christianity has come
> to Imerina in a gradual way...To the Merina Christianity is
> not something foreign which conflicts with traditional
> values. This explains how many Merina can describe
> Protestantism as "the religion of our ancestors" (Bloch
> 1971:14-30).

The Merina do not consider their spiritual beliefs to revolve around ancestor worship and would deny it today with the current attitudes about Christianity and barbarism. Yet, to keep the links of the tanindrazana and the ancestors, the Merina have employed the use of churches for legitimization and to keep relatives and tomb families

connected. Church officials are paid by the families to provide representation and officiate over family business in their absence.

Most church monetary support comes from the *tanindrazana* descendants, called *originaires* now living outside of the *tanindrazana*. Local residents offer limited support with their rural incomes and understand also that the *tanindrazana* is not their own. Most of them are what the Merina would consider newcomers - of mixed European, French or other ethnic groups whose origins are outside of Imerina and who do not observe lineages and tomb groups as a vital part of their identity. Furthermore, most of the *originares* who own the land live in urban areas. Those actually living upon the *tanindrazanas* are typically renters and lease holders who farm or maintain herds for a living and consider another region as their ancestral connection. Of those who do consider themselves Merina (in the sense of identity and mortuary obligations), only a few reside upon their own *tanindrazana*.

The practice of interring corpses in the family tomb several years after the death has occurred via secondary burial ritual, is a reflection of the depth of Merina commitment to the ancestral cosmology and social order.

The Merina do not inter their dead beneath their homes

or what could otherwise be designated as immediate living space. However, the *tanindrazana* can be interpreted as a symbolic "home," regardless of whether the individual was or ever has lived there. Interment in a family tomb of one's own *tanindrazana* is a necessary negotiation of identity for anyone who considers themselves true Merina. Thus, there is an indication that the spatial relationship between the dead, the ancestors and the living are bound together.

The act of using the body as a marker of one's place in a cosmology, is a part of the creation of sacred space. The body is not a discarded vessel after death in such a society, but a symbol to be utilized in reaffirming the unique cosmology:

> ...man might recover the symbolism of his body, which is an anthropocosmos (Elaide 1952: 36).

Economic success, acquisition of lands and other properties outside of the *tanindrazana* are not enough to legitimize a permanent burial in these places. In fact, to leave a family member interred anywhere else other than in his or her *tanindrazana* is considered shameful and a reason for unrest in the dead (Bloch 1971: 139-145). Despite economic hardships and difficulties incurred in securing a secondary burial, most Merina go to great lengths to raise the funds and services required to follow through with a secondary burial even of family members they hardly know.

Immediately following death, funerals generally take place within 24-48 hours. Usually, the deceased has died away from their *tanindrazana*. With such a quick burial schedule, there is usually not enough time to contact relatives and others from the same *tanindrazana*. Therefore, temporary first burial is practiced as the norm.

The local village, neighbors, friends and a few nearby relatives will gather to bury an individual, most often in earthen graves (rarely in a tomb not of their ancestors). This loose gathering of mourners will provide simple body wrappings called *lamba mena*. The body stays in the location of its first burial until much of the flesh has decomposed (about two years) from the bones (Bloch 1971:145). This amount of time is usually sufficient to contact immediate family members residing in other areas, and for them to make arrangements for the secondary burial.

The family is ultimately expected to finance an exhumation and transport the corpse to its *tanindrazana*. They will also pay for a larger ritual, *the famidihana*, performed when placing the dead in the family tomb.

Opening of family tombs is typically limited to once per year. When multiple deaths occur, or children (who cannot be placed in a tomb without the corpse of at least one adult to accompany it), secondary burial is not only a

norm, it becomes a necessity. And finally, individuals who have died of diseases or with other contagion cannot be relocated to the family tomb until the bones have been completely defleshed (Bloch 1971: 138-161).

Douglas (1966) has posited that the concept of "pollution" (in this case for burial practices) is that which is perceived as defilement of the sacred. This does not necessarily mean hygienic concerns, but that which does not fit into the categories of sacred or profane in an ordered way. When the body serves as a symbolic marker or "anthropocosmos" (Elaide 1952:36), it is important that the marker is perceived as clean and acceptable for inclusion in sacred space.

> ...body symbolism is part of the common stock of symbols, deeply emotive...But rituals draw on this common stock of symbols *selectively* (Douglas 1966:122). Emphasis added.

The *famadihana* is very costly to the family, and planning for it begins immediately after they have been notified of a death. Astrologers are contacted to determine the exact day for the corpse to be exhumed and reinterred. Temporary shelters are constructed for the family that will arrive from many locations. Sometimes, a family member will have had a home constructed on the family's land (which stands empty most of the time if the individuals do not actually live there) and this will be cleaned out and prepared for many guests. The church officals in the area

are retained to see to details until the family can gather.

The *famadihana* is a large affair, with relatives, neighbors and friends invited. Besides housing them, food, gifts and other necessities must be provided. Typically the local church will hold a Christian service for the deceased for which they must also be paid.

1. Door
2. Trap-door
3. 'Beds' with corpses
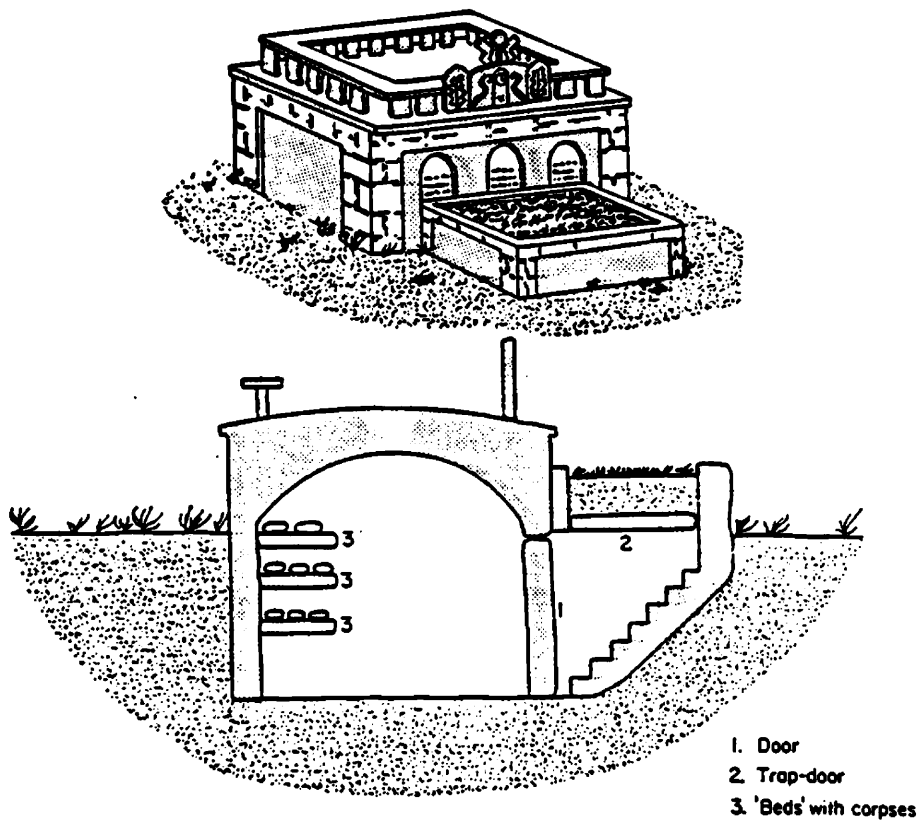
Fig. 7. Merina tomb and section.

Merina tomb (after Bloch 1971:113)

The family then gathers at the tomb and elders give

prayers and "call the dead" spirits (Bloch 1971:145-155), leaving rum and honey in jars as offerings the night before the interment. Selected members then begin to dig out the door of the tomb which rests below ground level. To the most immediate family members of the deceased, the *famadihana* is a very traumatic event. Seeing the corpse that has been exhumed is most upsetting to them. The overhanging fear of death is also prevalent among the participants because it is believed that *famadihanas*, although necessary, can also bring death to others. Reasons for this can vary with mistakes made in planning the correct day of exhumation and interment, to offending other spirits of their deceased with incorrectly performed ceremony.

The belief in danger and the subsequent fear of the dead or the spirits of the dead, are attached to the transition states as posited by Van Gennep (1960), or the liminal stages as explained by Turner (1967). Douglas explains this concept of fear and danger further:

> Danger lies in transitional states, simply because
> transition is neither one state nor the next, it is
> undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another
> is himself in danger and emanates danger to others
> (1966:97).

It is common for many of the men to have imbibed of alcoholic drinks to assuage their fears before and during the procession; women generally dance themselves into a frenzy and trance along the way (Bloch 1971:154-156).

Before digging, the grave diggers rub a special protective lotion on themselves to protect them from death. Charms that were buried during the last interment at the enclosure of the door are carefully collected to be put back when the tomb is sealed again, along with the new ones that will be added. These charms are meant to keep the spirits of the dead with the tomb and not follow the living outside when they depart.

The Merina believe there are three souls in each person (Bloch 1971:126;160-169). At the time of the secondary burial, the main soul, the *avelona* is believed to change its form. It merges with the ancestral tomb, literally transforming the tomb by imbuing it with supernatural power. This soul has lost its individuality an is referred to now as *ambiroa*, although according to Bloch (1971:124-126) some informants considered the two souls one and the same.

The tomb radiates with collective souls' power. It is a common practice for Merina to leave small jars of water in a tomb for a year to be retrieved with the next *famadihana*. The water is believed to draw supernatural power from the *ambiroa* and is later sprinkled (similar in concept to Christian holy water) in family members' homes as a blessing. Finally, the last soul called the *fanahy,* is the embodiment of the moral character displayed by the deceased

in life. This soul is ephemeral and does not maintain an individuality.

The newly interred corpse is rewrapped in the *lamba mena*; other corpses within the tomb may also be rewrapped according to their condition. The *famadihana* (for rewrapping of the corpses only)is performed as often as the financial resources of the family allows. Usually this means every two to five years, not including instances of secondary interments.

The participants, particularly the women, then go about the tomb, touching the bodies of the dead, lifting the corpses in various stages of decomposure, and carrying them about on their backs while dancing and singing. The men join in and the entire group is united in carrying the corpses, swaying and singing in an exuberant way. When this is done the corpses are thrown to the floor; sometimes this practice is brutal enough that corpses' bones are audibly broken(Bloch 1971:159).

Graeber (1995) has examined the *famidihana* practice of dancing with the corpses during secondary interments or when revisiting tombs to rewrap them in new burial shrouds. The violence displayed in the rough handling and "dancing" with the corpse is meant to allow the living to act out their fears and violence toward the dead, according to Graeber.

The fear stems from the violence that the Merina feel the ancestors are capable of exhibiting toward the living, should they feel offended by lack of attention (i.e. to rewrap their shrouds, maintenance of tombs) or some other slight from their descendants. This violence may come in the form of bad luck or untimely death among family members.

The rewrapping of the *lamba mena* or burial shrouds every few years coupled with the movement associated with dancing and handling of them, speeds the process of decomposition and results in the body's reduction to bones and dust much sooner than by natural means:

> After 20 years and several famadihana, they have been quite literally pulverized; even the skeletons have largely crumbled, and there is little left to serve as a reminder that the thing has once had human form...it is usually impossible to tell what was once body from what was once cloth...(Graeber 1995:263).

This process also aids in the promotion of "forgetting" the individual (Battaglia 1992:3-18) while maintaining the "social memory" and importance of the ancestors. After the corpse has deteriorated to little more than a few bones and cranium, the bodies may be combined with others in similar condition and wrapped as a single bundle. It is typical for the identity of individuals to become indistinguishable from the corpse bundles and their names forgotten by their descendants within a generation of their death. Merina tombs display no individual name markers.

When the *famadihana* is over, the corpses are returned to resting places about the tomb, the newest interment getting the most prized place. Older corpses are moved to sites of lesser prestige. The woven mats they rest upon are replaced by new ones, and the women take the old mats home to sleep on. It is believed that doing so will increase their fertility.

Summary

The island of Madagascar has been home to many natives who are linguistically linked to others of the Malayo-Polynesian family. Indonesian, Asian, African, and European admixtures since the eighteenth century have created a significant impact on the contemporary Merina ethnic identity and concepts of self. Christian missionaries have also become integral, but incorporated with Malagasy/Merina ancestral beliefs to create a hybrid system that, to the Merina perspective, is still loyal to their traditions.

Merina identity is inextricably entwined with the *tanindrazana*, which is viewed as the only legitimate "home." This concept of the *tanindrazana* as home is true for anyone claiming Merina identity, regardless of whether the individual has an established home elsewhere or has never inhabited their ancestral region. Burial of individuals

living away from the *tanindrazana* is considered temporary.

It is incumbent upon immediate family members to finance a

secondary burial in a family tomb located upon the family's

tanindrazana.

The creation of sacred space (Elaide 1957) occurs when

a boundary is established within cosmological belief system,

differentiating one area from another as a "center" or point

of connection closer to the cosmological universe. The

ancestral lands of the Merina are a place where the spirits

of the ancestors are located, and from where they influence

the daily lives of their descendants. In pre-European

times, the tombs were constructed of rock and other natural

resources readily available. There is little to distinguish

one tomb from another in terms of elaboration. By post-

contact era, visible change in the tombs' elaborateness can

be seen and vary according the association with the trade

routes and economic changes they brought. Social status has

become clearly defined in the amount of economic investment

a tomb group can afford.

Merina traditions insist that the corpse be returned to

its ancestral home in order to join the ancestors. In this

way, the corpse becomes a symbol for "the ancestors" and

marks a place in the cosmological schema for the deceased

and his or her survivors. After a time, the individual

identity, soul, and corpse of the deceased becomes undifferentiated from the tomb itself, which has become a place radiating supernatural power.

Culture change through ethnic admixture, infusion of new religious beliefs, and changing economic and political structures, have altered and added new importance to the concept of "the ancestors." Ancestor worship has provided the contemporary means for social order and class structure based upon identity linked to one's *tanindrazana*.

Chapter 5: Culture Study #4 (Ethnographic)

Berawan of Borneo

Borneo is the third largest island in the world and is part of the Malay Archipelago (Clewell 1949). It lies in the South China sea, and is surrounded by the Philipine islands (to the northeast), Celebes islands (to the east), Java (to the south) Sumatra (to the west) and South Vietnam and Cambodia to the northwest). The majority of ethnographic information used in this section is from the works of Peter Metcalf (1976, 1977, 1982).

Borneo's contact with cultures from the outside have been occurring, according to archaeological evidence, as far back as the 5th century B.C. Considering its close proximity to other island chains as well as mainland Asia, this is not surprising.

India's traders frequented the waters of the South China sea on their way to China, stopping to trade along Borneo's coast as early as the 5th century B.C. Buddhism and other aspects of Indian culture were introduced during this period as well as those of China in art, writing, and mythology. Javanese and Sumatran contacts brought Muslim ideologies, and finally by the 16th century, Europeans began establishing trading posts in Borneo bringing Christian missionaries and western values.
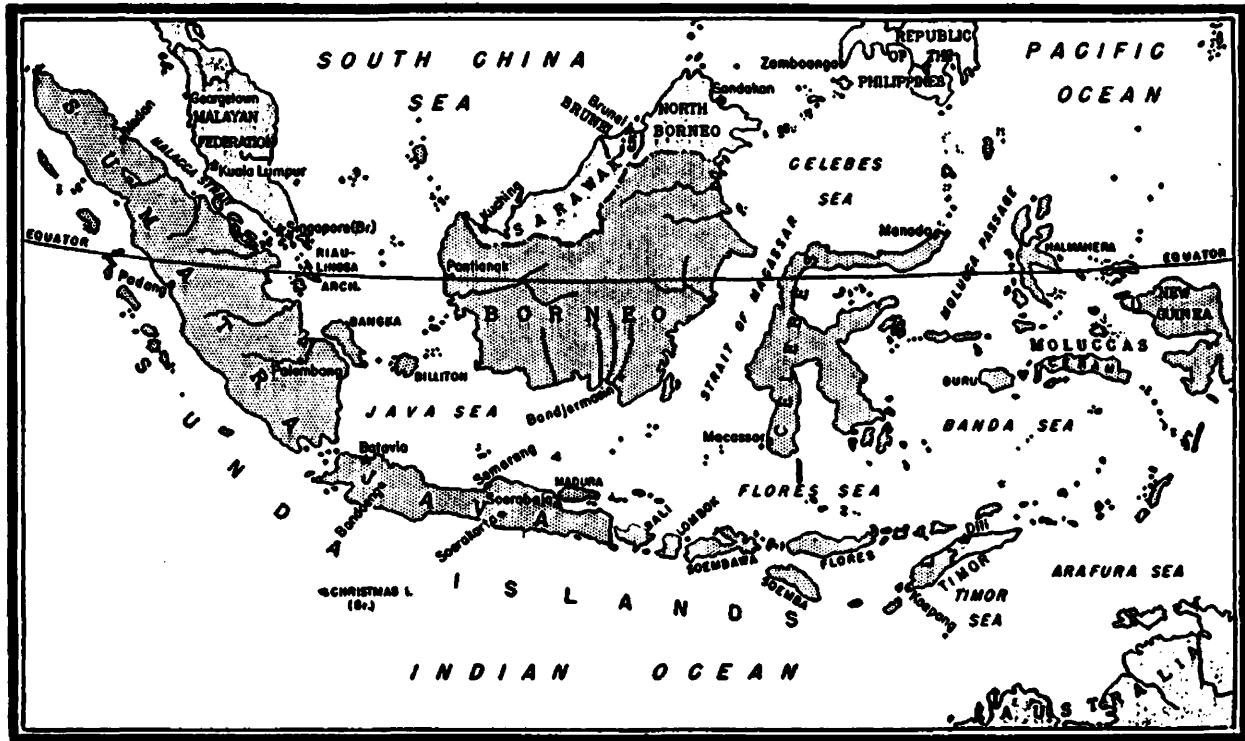
For a time the British and Dutch were in control over regions of Borneo beginning in the mid 19th century, staking out strategic areas for ports and trade (Metcalf 1977).

At this time, James Brooke, associated with the East India Company, attempted to stabilize Borneo to facilitate better commerce. He was rewarded in 1847 by the British government with an appointment as consul-general to Borneo for having effectively dealt with Borneo's increasing problems. These problems included piracy along Borneo's coasts and the chaos of intertribal warfare among Borneo natives, all of which threatened British trade. British territories in north Borneo (Sarawak) lasted until 1963 when they became states of Malaysia. Only Brunei remained a British protectorate, becoming fully independent in 1984. Dutch influence in south Borneo (Kalimantan) ended in 1947 when the area became part of Indonesia. It became fully independent in 1984.

Today in the Baram district of Sarawak, home of the Berawan, there are recognized specific categories of population: 1) the coastal peoples who are primarily Chinese and Malay, 2) the Iban, 3) the Penan and finally, 4) the *orang ulu* - which translates into "the people from upriver" (Metcalf 1976).

The *orang ulu* are a collection of Borneo natives. They

are divided also into three major groups: 1) the Kayan, 2) the Kenyah, and 3) the Kelabit.

The *orang ulu* groups now reinforce their ethnic identities through opposition to all other groups whose origins lay outside of Borneo, even though their own tribal makeups are comprised of intermarriages through warfare, alliances and migration.

Of these groups, it has been long thought that the Berawan were a part of the Kenyah. Linguistic analysis has shown that the Berawan are not linguistically a part of the Kenyah at all, but are a part of the lower Baram linguistic group called Rejang-Baram (Metcalf 1976).

This in part, explains why the Kenyah do not practice secondary burial while the Berawan (who were allegedly a Kenyah tribe), do. The Berawan themselves have been aware of their separateness from the Kenyah but when asked, typically do not go out of their way to differentiate themselves.

Today, the Kenyah are the most successful *orang ulu* group and inclusion with them may bring a measure of acceptance or status to the Berawan. However, in reviewing Berawan origin stories (as sung in death songs), the Berawan place themselves in a region called the Usan Apau plateau before the Kenyah, who also claim origins there. This would

mean the Berawan, who would then be a more ancient group,
are in a position of nobility over the Kenyah. The
principle is similar to "older" aristocratic families versus
"newcomers." This position of status based on origin is
not observed in modern times. Metcalf (1976) has posited
that perhaps the explanation is simply that the Berawan do
not wish to share their origin stories casually. Since they
are a small population and have always been outnumbered by
the powerful Kenyah (and could not hope to overcome the
latter), the point may have been considered moot.

The majority of natives in Sarawak live communally,
including the Berawan, in structures called longhouses.
Longhouses average 25 feet in width and can be up to 400
yards long (Clewell 1949:257-270), housing anywhere from 50
people to several hundred. They are constructed of wood and
usually built several feet above the ground on piles.
Livestock, canoes and other property are housed below the
longhouses.

Apartments are partitioned off inside for each family
unit and depending upon family size, a veranda may be built
off the back side. A lane along the front serves as the
public walkway. Each apartment has its own fireplace
constructed of a clay basin within a wooden frame and a
trapdoor in the ceiling, which serves a dual purpose for

light or ventilation.

The Berawan, like the other *orang ulu* tribes, construct their longhouses beside major river courses. The Berawan have lived primarily along the Tinjar and Tutoh rivers of north central Sarawak. It is a rule of thumb that everywhere a longhouse community has been or exists, its community graveyards are adjacent or directly across the river from them. Remaining mausoleum graveyards mark time periods, habitation and leaders of the era long after the community is gone.

The life of a longhouse is generally 15 to 20 years (Metcalf 1977) and depend upon "powerful leaders" to hold the communities together. When no such leader exists or dies without a strong replacement, the longhouse dies with them. In those instances, families disperse and live in small farms or build small longhouses for themselves and extended family members until a new leader arises to draw the band together again. The Berawan have preferred the longhouse lifestyle over nuclear residences.

The Berawan have imitated elements of the Kenyah culture in style of dress and decoration but have also maintained their own practices, specifically that of the *nulang* - or, secondary burial. There was a period in the 1890s when the Berawan were temporarily confederated with a

Kenyah group known as the Sebop. During that time, a mutual exchange and blending of burial practices occurred.

As a true Kenyah group, the Sebop did not practice secondary burials, although they did inter their dead in above ground mausoleums. After several generations with the Berawan, however, they were witnessed to have altered their primary rites from a few days to up to 50 days in the case of important leaders (Metcalf 1976). The Berawan, at this time, continued to practice the *nulang* – or secondary burial – but dispensed with the ritual of defleshing the bones. The term *nulang* originally meant "to bone" (Metcalf 1976) due to traditional Berawan practice of defleshing corpses for secondary burial ceremonies. However, since the time of their close association with the Sebop (and which may have been the beginning of the misconception they were Kenyah themselves), the Berawan discontinued this practice at the turn of the 20th century.

Mortuary Customs

Berawan burials in more recent times have consisted of two major ceremonies (Metcalf 1982; Metcalf and Huntington 1995). The onset of the first is at the death of the individual and lasts anywhere from four to ten days. The first ceremony will be referred to here as the funeral.

The corpse is generally taken into the kitchen area and laid near the hearth, preferably with its hands in the hearth. Rice is placed in its mouth and it is left there briefly.

The deceased is then dressed in his or her finest clothing and jewelry and displayed seated in a special chair built for this purpose. The chair keeps the corpse in an upright position as though in life, and is a seat of honor.

It is during this time that the surviving spouse and children live a very deprived existence: not bathing, wearing the same clothing for the duration, eating little, and frequently lying down next to the deceased. Mats are placed on the floor and hangings are strung up around the dead, creating partial enclosure although they are seated within the main room of the apartment. A plate or bowl is suspended from the ceiling in front of the body. Each time the family members eat, an offering of food is placed upon it. If the spouse smokes a cigarette, one is placed in the fingers of the deceased so that they may share it.

Borneo climate is hot and humid and the decomposing condition of the corpse can only but add to the further discomfort of the family during this time. The body is on display typically for two to five days. By that time, the body is showing signs of decomposition and it is usually

placed in a jar (meant for burial) or a carved out log that will serve as its coffin. The status of the deceased within the community will determine the number of days the rituals and funeral will last. Average, good standing citizens' funerals have a duration of about five days. Those of poor community standing (thieves, low character) average about two. Funerals of higher status families (longhouse leaders), typically can last the maximum of 10-11 days (Metcalf 1982).

It is also during this time that there is a great deal of fear for and about the corpse. It is considered the most "dangerous" (Douglas 1966;Metcalf and Huntington 1995:90-91; Turner 1967) time for the living and the dead. The soul may still be hovering about the corpse. The Berawan believe that the soul, called the *telanak,* may be wandering about the longhouse. Although the deceased may have been gentle natured and loving in life, the *telanak* may come to resent its liminal status (Turner 1967) and bring about chaos or even death to others.

During this time the corpse is also open to evil or malicious spirits that may be in the vicinity. The transitory status of both body and soul (Van Gennep 1960) create an opportunity for an evil spirit to inhabit a corpse and reanimate it, creating a monster. For this reason, much

care is taken to watch over the body - either by the spouse or oldest child (if considered old enough to undertake such a responsibility) or other close family member. Upon any sign that the corpse has been invaded, i.e. strange sounds in the night, perceived movement of the limbs, etc., a shaman is called upon to administer rites to drive the invading spirit out. Everyone in the longhouse is subject to disaster or death until the corpse is secured after this liminal period.

An obligation to assist in keeping away malicious spirits is shared by the entire community. Much noise and celebration goes on, particularly during the nighttime hours. Fires and lights are kept continually lit as it is believed that demons dislike the light.

After this period, the body is placed in its rough wooden coffin or a jar. The jars are expensive Chinese pottery. The incorporation of jar burials may have occurred as a result of Berawan exposure to Chinese culture. The jar burial was a widespread practice across Asia and the Near East since the late Bronze and early Iron Age (Riotto 1995).

A typical adult sized jar stands approximately two and a half feet high. At its widest expanse it is about 18-20 inches across. Jars are cut at this widest point and the body inserted in a fetal-like position. The jar is then

resealed with damar gum (Metcalf 1977). At the bottom of
the jar, a small hole is cut and spout inserted. This is
for the liquescent run off as the body decomposes. This is

Berawan jars (after Metcalf 1982: 82)
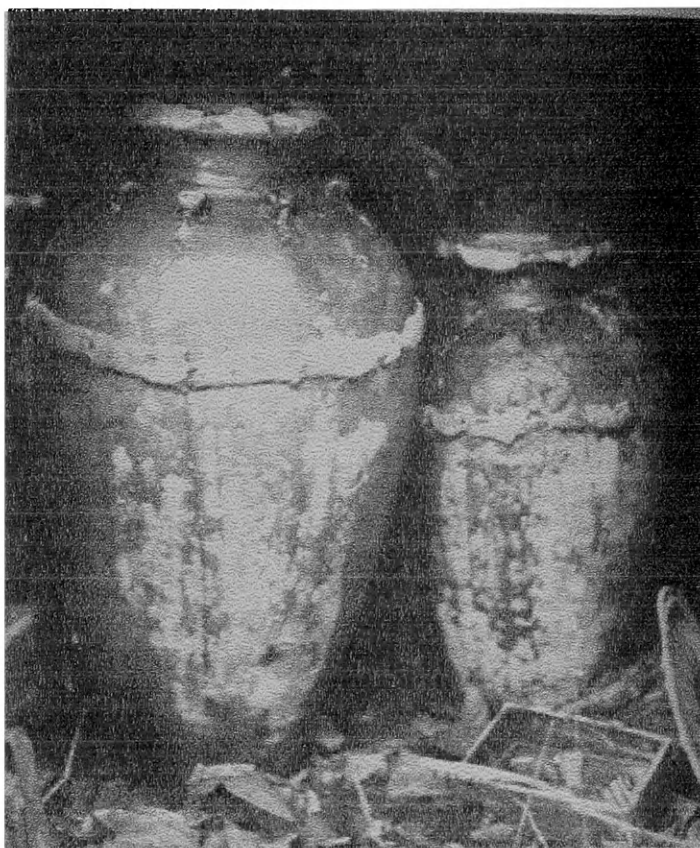
later sealed before its final interment.

The majority of Berawan funerals and interment take
place by the end of the ritual display and gathering of the

community of two to eleven days. At this time, death songs are sung and the body is transported by boat across the river to the burial ground.

The second ceremony, called the *nulang* or secondary burial is performed less often. In reality, most Berawan are never truly "buried" in the sense of being interred, but for reasons of convenience in discussion of the matter, this work will classify the practice as a secondary burial.

In these cases, the body is placed in its container (coffin or jar) and instead of proceeding with the final stage of the funeral, is placed upon a raised platform beside the longhouse. It is elevated by posts, generally behind the apartment where the individual once lived. Here it stays for a period of about eight months up to five years while the body putrifies and decomposes down to the bone.

In preparation for the *nulang*, family members who have opted for this ceremony begin stocking up on foods and other supplies that will be necessary to hold a feast and gathering not only of the immediate community, but of relatives called in from other locales.

The *nulang* is, as the Berawan have described it, a "great feast" (Metcalf 1995) and serves the purpose to gather family together, and celebrate the soul's entrance into heaven, or the land of the dead. The difference

between the funeral and the *nulang* is very distinct.

The funeral serves the purpose to formally honor the dead and provide them with the instructions needed to find their way to heaven in the proper way. Its subtle rituals throughout the corpse display are meant to take precautions to protect the corpse and ensure no harm will come to the family and community.

The *nulang* is a celebration (Metcalf 1982) and assumes the soul has already entered heaven. It is not a solemn ceremony but is characterized by feasting, family reunion and comradery. The *nulang* is considered important for the dead from the Berawan perspective, to honor the departed soul's joining the ancestors. However, this can also be interpreted as an opportunity to renegotiate status among the living, as anyone who can amass the resources necessary for a *nulang* may do so. Once accomplished, a family may acquire greater respect in the eyes of the community although this does not translate into material gain or increased access to resources, other than more status at the time of one's own death.

The *nulang* lasts several days and is a succession of feasting and ceremonies - namely, the singing of "death songs" and retelling of their origin myths.

When the *nulang* is not provided, it is usually due to

economic constraints. Since the majority of Berawan burial practices end with the initial two to eleven day display and funeral, this may be an indication that the *nulang* ceremonies grew out of status negotiation.

The content of the songs sung in chronological order at the funeral and at the *nulang*, provide the Berawan with the opportunity to recount their ancestral history and origin mythology. They also provide specific instruction at the time of the funeral, to direct the soul to the land of the dead. The songs read like a script for the deceased: washing, dressing, walking away from the longhouse, entering a canoe and paddling upstream (complete with names of other communities and geographic points the soul will pass along the way) (Metcalf 1982).

Toward the end of their performance, the songs recount how the Berawan used to live side by side with the dead and that it was only after they left their homeland that they led a separate existence. The belief in reincarnation lingers on the edge of contemporary Berawan cosmology. Despite the introduction of Christianity, many believe that after the *telanak* joins the ancestors (heaven), they are eventually reborn, although no explicit explanation has been presented on how and when this occurs. There are cases of Berawan praying for a swift "return" of loved ones who have

suffered an untimely death (Metcalf 1982:252-254). Naming children is sometimes based upon supernatural indications of who they once were.

Berawan identity and world view, is very much entwined with ancestral death songs. Performing them reaffirms the family and the community as a bounded group and their sense of place in the world.

> The death rites are the most compelling of communal rituals...To consistently fail to attend them is to renounce membership in the community. Even when a person of little social standing dies, everyone should contribute something to the funeral...every family will make at least a token contribution of money or rice to enable the family who has suffered the loss to carry out the funeral properly (Metcalf 1982:21).

During the interim between the first ceremony and the *nulang* which may be up to several years, the family constructs a mausoleum of carved bilian wood (Metcalf 1977: 121-135). Two of the most used mausoleum styles are the *salong* and *lijeng*. The *salong* is a mausoleum built several feet above ground supported by two to five posts. It is the largest mausoleum and is meant to be reopened as necessary to house several coffins or jars. The *lijeng* is a single standing post, elaborately carved with tribal emblems and reminiscent of Pacific Northwest Coast totem poles. The top most segment of the post is hollowed out, enough to fit one jar within it.

Other mausoleums styles that were less utilized include

the *salong tanah*, which is a vault that is partially underground to house several dead, or a *kubor*, which is also underground but intended to hold one individual only. Beyond style according to band and region, no explanation is evident as to what determines which style is selected. However, it is evident from most graveyards of past longhouse communities that the leaders and most community members in post-European contact were housed above ground either in a *salong* or *lijeng*.

The design of the *salongs* and *lijeng* reflect Berawan mythology. *Bagong*, or the gingerbread curves and carvings on the planks that trim the mausoleums, typically embody the motif of the "big spirit design" - that of a nature spirit, and is also found on the center post supporting the salong (Metcalf 1977).

The second most popular design is the "water spirit." The water spirit form is that of a dragon and is affiliated with Berawan leaders and their families. Its appearance is a status symbol as well as an ancestral reference to the river and its importance to the Berawan origin stories. Human face designs have been culturally borrowed from the Kenyah, and were supposedly used only by Berawan upper classes to denote their superior social status.

However, before one can attach too much importance to

this ideology of social status in Berawan mortuary symbols,

it is important to note that, according to Metcalf:

> Berawan status is much more fluid, and anyone who feels that
> his rank (pakat) is sufficient, simply assumes the right to
> the design. In effect, anyone who is wealthy and powerful
> enough to build a *salong* is *ipso facto* of sufficient rank to
> employ the coveted designs (1977:132-133).

The use of specific symbols are accessible in an

ongoing negotiation of status, to those who can afford to

build a *salong* worthy of displaying them.

During the early part of this century, the natives

began using china plates to adorn the sides of the mausoleum

in the place of eyes of figures (rounded side out). These

plates were obtained in the extensive trade networks already

established in Borneo by that time. In fact, a German trade

group seeing the popularity of the plates for native burial

practices, began manufacturing plates already drilled with

small holes in the bottom to facilitate attachment (Metcalf

1977). Older mausoleums exhibit the use of readily

available sea shells before the availability of the china

plates.

Today, most of Sarawak and Borneo in general, have felt

the influence of Christian beliefs infused into the cultural

religious system. Traditional mortuary practices,

particularly the *nulang* and interment above ground, became

much frowned upon. Pre-Christian traditions are now

practiced only by the Berawan longhouse of Long Teru along

the Tinjar river and at Long Jegan where the "Bungan revivalist cult still hold out against the steady encroachment of Christianity" (Metcalf 1977:133).

But even in these instances, most of the above-ground *salong* have given way to the below ground *kubor* vaults and single graves. This practice seems easier to reconcile with Christian presence.
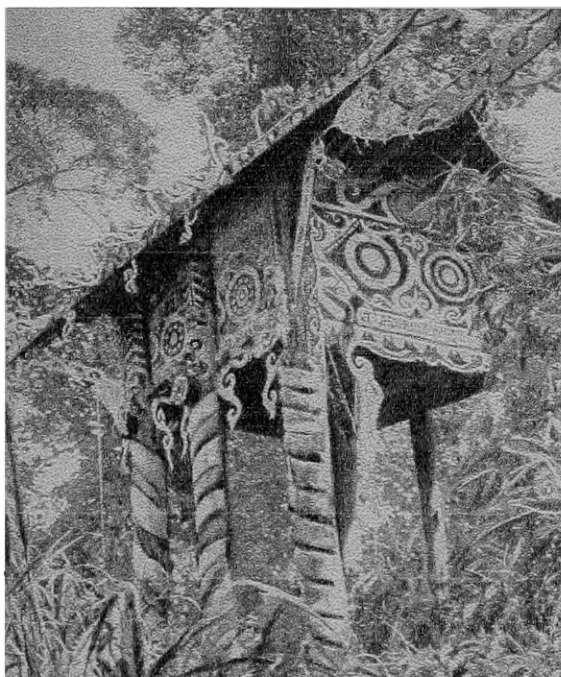
Salong Mausoleum (after Clewell 1949:267 - C. Hose photo).

The use of concrete has become the norm rather than the elaborately carved bilian wood mausoleums of past generations, an extremely hard wood that is

naturally resistant to the elements. The imported concrete is notoriously of poor quality. Some of concrete poured for *kubor* vaults are today experiencing deterioration in the humid Borneo climate.

The Berawan still expend a great deal of energy and economic investment in their funerals, although the motivations appear to have shifted from a religious ideology in origin to one of status negotiation during the last 200 years. An average income ranges about $5.00 per day; the expense of a Berawan *nulang* (for feasting, accommodating relatives and *kubor*) run about $1,000 to $2,500 (Metcalf 1982). There is no discernable improvement in the lifestyle upon completion of the *nulang*.

Summary

Borneo islanders have been in the crossroads of many cultures, borrowing and sharing culture traits for many centuries from their Asian and Indian neighbors, including elements of their religions. The North China Sea in which Borneo is situated, made it an important trade port, particularly by the British and Dutch by the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when Christianity was introduced.

The Berawan are a north central Borneo tribe (of Sarawak region) that recently (within the last 300 years)

moved into the Tinjar and Tutoh river byways along with other migrating groups like the Kenyah (Metcalf 1976).

The creation of sacred space is evident in the Berawan mythology of their origins. There are clear boundaries perceived (Elaide 1957) differentiating between the land of the dead, where the ancestors reside and is sacred, and that which is living space, or profane. The period of liminality (Turner 1967) ranges from two to eleven days before a funeral is performed in order to accommodate burial preparations, such as securing or building a burial vessel. The *nulang* extends the liminal period of the corpse even more so, as it may sit in waiting after the initial funeral for several months up to several years.

Berawan mythologies employ the use of the river, a symbol of the journey of the Berawan people from their point of sacred origin or "center" (Elaide 1952) and which must be used symbolically when laying the dead to rest. Burial practices before the use of jars acquired in trade, were primarily coffins carved out of a section of bilian tree, an extremely hard wood that naturally resists deterioration (some discovered are over 100 years old and are in better condition than the contemporary cement constructions) (Metcalf 1976). These coffins were carved in the shape of a canoe, again symbolizing the connection between the living,

the dead and the river to sacred space.

It has not been pinpointed precisely when Berawan secondary burials came into practice, but the use of jars arrived with trade from China. It is quite possible that distinction between using them or the traditional bilian wood (upper class typically use the jars or those wishing to show status) became an issue at that time. Secondary burial practices, or *nulang*, are an opportunity for the Berawan to gather family and community members in a strong kinship bond, reaffirming their unique ancestral beliefs of origin and sacred space through their death songs.

The performance of the death songs in a ceremony lasting several days at a *nulang*, acts to freeze time or return the Berawan to a sacred event, creating a distinction between regular time and sacred time:

> ...cosmology equally implies [through enacting rituals] the creation of time (Elaide 1957:77).

Elaide explains how the concept of sacred time bonds a community in the ritual performance of mythologies:

> ...reactualization of the cosmology...implies
> *starting time over again at its beginning*, that
> is, restoration of the primordial time, the
> "pure" time...the sins and faults of the
> individual and the community ...are annulled
> (Elaide 1957:77-78).

Despite many outside influences, the mythologies of origins and performance of the death songs in mortuary rituals, has maintained the strongest resistance to change.

Today, Christian presence and religious pressures have all but obliterated secondary burial practices among the majority of the *orang ulu* groups.

Catholic concepts of purgatory have been used by the Berawan to justify traditional ideologies about the liminality of the soul and corpse. In cases where extended days are used in funerals or the *nulang* is applied, many converted Berawan still claim their Christianity in this way.

Although secondary burial is only occasionally practiced and the death songs still sung, a major concession has been the turning away from above ground *salong* and *lijeng* burial to the underground, single vault system of *kubor*. Part of this concession was made easier due to the availability and popularity of concrete, which many Berawan have begun to use as the new mode in burials. As concrete is nearly impossible to utilize in above ground, post-supported burials in the jungles of Sarawak, the *kubor* as a traditional method was far more amenable to the change. Concrete can readily be poured to line *kubor* vaults and as an encasement over the top.

Chapter 6 - Findings and Discussion

The method of this study has been to examine four distinct cultures and their cosmologies as reflected in their burial practices. By doing so, the goals were to:

1) look for similar philosophical and cosmological beliefs each culture may have shared and how these beliefs may have been operative in the origination of burial customs that was not specific to elites;

2) determine whether these beliefs may have contributed to the origination of burial practices wherein secondary burial or extended possession of the corpse or its relics within living space was the norm;

3) find meanings, if any, suggested by the spatial relationships in placement of the dead in proximity to the living and living spaces, i.e. the creation of "sacred space" as defined by Douglas (1966), Elaide (1957) and Turner (1967).

4) determine whether fear of the dead is significant to the burial practices and if so, in what way (Douglas 1966; Turner 1967).

The uniqueness of this examination lay in the outward appearance of each of the selected cultures' perceptions of the corpse, the spatial relationship between the corpse and the living, and the boundaries between them perceived as

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flexible or even non-existent to the Western eye.

The question posed was whether these societies possessed a concept of sacred space. Sacred space was given a tentative definition in the introduction of this work:

Sacred space is a culturally created concept, defined by religious ideology and manifested by observance that certain places are special and apart from others in a supernatural sense.

Throughout this study, I have attempted to reinforce this concept with theories that support it through the configuration of boundaries (real of fictive), the mythology of supernatural forces (i.e. origins, land of the dead), the perpetuation of the belief systems through behaviors (including burial practices) and symbols (Elaide 1952, 1957).

I have attempted find the locus for the burial practices studied, and why beliefs about the dead were linked to living spaces or found in secondary burial treatment of the dead. These burial practices included effort or resources expended that seemed disproportionate, to the Western eye, to the amount of return gained among commoners. For this reason, I have looked more deeply into the religious ideologies that may be a greater motivational factor among common people, in the initial creation of the

burial practices under study.

It has long been the standard in analyzing mortuary practices of ancient and historic peoples, that the basis of differences in prescribed ritual (i.e. burial) were rooted in social organization and stratification (Binford 1971), as a means of fulfilling political agendas and personal aggrandizement of resources. Furthermore, in the history of applied theoretical approach, the study of religious or cosmological belief systems has been relegated to the category of epiphenomenon or elements considered peripheral to the interpretation and reconstruction of social structure. In such a theoretical approach, besides a functional explanation for social practices, each society would be constrained by external and circumstantial influences such as environmental and economic factors (Harris 1974). Under this premise, what may appear to the Western eye as unusual cultural practices can still be explained by assigning causal priority to material conditions, without legitimizing the philosophical factors involved.

When selecting for religious, philosophical or other "non-functional" concerns, the HRAF (Human Area Resource File) commonly used by anthropologists has shown that:

>Social and philosophical-religious variables
>were found to affect mortuary practices five to
>ten times more frequently than circumstantial
>and physical variables(Carr 1995:156).

In the past, studies involving mortuary practices were aimed at determining quantifiable relationships in a positivist approach to give "empirical credibility to the archaeological investigation of social organization through mortuary practices" (Carr 1995:152). Correlations and statistical relationships can thus be plotted and do suggest a connection between "non-functional" behaviors and a society's methods of dealing with the dead.

Although elements of political, economic and status issues can be found in all of the cultures studied, the impetus for burial practices did not seem to originate among the common people with a premeditated intent of significantly improving their place in society. Thus, while a logical and rational explanation can be given in each case as burial practices were molded, their seeds were rooted in ideology, which is not necessarily motivated by material concerns. The behaviors exhibited seem likely to have begun as a reaffirmation of such religious ideologies.

Over time, changes in beliefs and practices (incorporation of new ideologies, population change, subsistence intensification, and complexity of social organization), can change a religious ideology into an

avenue by which social stratification was perpetuated and reaffirmed.

The study of the four cultures in this work reveal important commonalities in cross-cultural themes revolving around their burial practices:

1) identity and origin myths, 2) creation of sacred space/time, 3) importance of sedentarism and agriculture, 4) earth-based religious ideology, 5) and the body as symbol. Conversely, there are differences in several areas as well: 1) concepts of soul, 2)elements of fear, 3)burial placement.

Commonalities

As outlined in Chapter two, the Neolithic peoples who first inhabited the city of Jericho most likely selected the area because of its proximity to an underground and protected water source. Their original identity is not known, nor precisely where they came from. Jericho's topographic setting was rough, although not isolated, and the geography prohibited a free flow of traffic other than those on the way to other destinations.

Likewise, the Maya were not isolated, but their geography inhibited free travel as well. The highlands and lowlands of Central America and the Yucatec Peninsula are built upon rugged volcanic mountains (highlands) limestone

reef (Yucatan lowlands) where water is a premium, or lowland areas where the rainy season can bring flooding. The rainy season determined drought or plenty for the rest of the year in many places and natural cenotes were necessary to maintain expanding populations. Mayan city-states were largely autonomous, competing and in conflict with neighboring city states, making travel unstable.

The Malagasy peoples of Madagascar, the Merina, inhabited internal regions of their island, and also were not isolated. Their location along the eastern edge of Africa was one of the busiest trading routes since the eighteenth century , known for its slave trade, spices and ivory. Today, many Merina have moved to urban areas where opportunities for improved lifestyles are available. Yet, for those who maintain a traditional Merina identity, they deny the legitimacy of "newcomers" or *vazaha*, and much of the ideologies and material gains made possible with *vazaha* society.

Borneo natives, specifically the Berawan, lived in the internal reaches of this island in the North China Sea. It too, was an important point in the trade routes between China, India and later the British and Dutch colonizers. The terrain of north central Borneo is tropical rainforest, with areas of vegetation so thick it is nearly impassable

without teams of workers to slash and clear the pathway.

Natives and traders utilized the river system as the only

reliable and convenient passage to the interior of the

island. It is not surprising that the river figures as a

primary symbol in the reconstruction of their origin myths.

The power of place, whether sacred or simply as a

central locus for those who live in or access it, has come

under scrutiny in the last decade (for example, Carr 1995;

Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Kuijt 1996; Metcalf and Huntington

1997; Mizoguchi 1993; Schele and Friedel 1990). It is

possible that reactions to transitory populations or those

viewed as "newcomers" must have influenced these cultures in

the negotiation of identity and their cosmological views of

their world.

Zones of contact have been studied in contemporary

times by James Clifford (1997) and he comments on

complexities that may also give insight to earlier times:

> These instances of crossing reflect complex regional and
> transregional histories...the currency of culture and
> identity...can be traced to their articulation of homelands,
> safe spaces where the traffic across borders can be
> controlled (1997:4-7).

That Jericho maintained a fortified wall is evidenced

by the earliest levels of its pre-pottery peoples by 7000

B.P. The Maya, Merina, and Berawan all employed the

difficult terrain of their homelands to offer at least some

control over the traffic into their lands. Merina stone

wall ruins are found scattered throughout the region and are
second in number only to those of ancient family tombs.
It has been posited that ethnic identity is more fiercely
defended within a group when in opposition to outsiders or
in close proximity to "The Other" (Banks 1996; Jenkins
1997).

While all of these peoples exchanged trade items and
ideas, their cultural identities were fiercely maintained
with origin myths and religious ideologies until they were
either conquered or dispersed. Neighboring groups inhabiting
the same areas relied upon the same resources and as
populations changed, so too did the subtleties of their
cosmologies to accommodate it. What perhaps began as a
religious ideology proclaiming ties to the land and the
creation of sacred space, became harnessed by a growing
stratified society to afford a mechanism for preferential
access to those resources or as a statement of status.

In discussing the development of "divine kingship"
through lineage, McAnany (1995) says:

> Few would dispute that divine kingship in the
> Maya lowlands emerged from the agrarian matrix
> of Formative society...emergent elites
> appropriated the practice of ancestor veneration
> and converted it to an institution that cemented
> the transmission of political power...(1995:163-
> 164).

The Jericho population did not leave enough evidence in
the material record for more than a suggestion that origin

beliefs were important to them. Some of the flints used came from areas not of the local geography and thus were either traded for or were brought with them from whence they came, but this has not been conclusively determined. Green stone amulets and ornaments (Kenyon (1957) describes them as looking like "miniature axes") show an allegiance to some form of symbol. Yet, no usable axes of this nature for have been discovered in their tool assemblage. Was this symbol reflective of an element within a supernatural belief system or of a membership whose core was elsewhere? Counterparts to these symbols and amulets have not been found within a reasonable radius of ancient Jericho to be attributed to shared ideas among regional groups.

Furthermore, skulls that were collected show specific arrangement in the burial site. Varied age groups and gender is evidenced by the skeletal remains of the decapitated trunks, typically buried extramurally in relation to the dwelling. This differentiation between the body and the cranium implies a difference in importance and an emerging symbology (Elaide 1952, 1957). Spatial placement indicates the creation of boundaries or one area as "special" in comparison to another (Douglas 1966; Elaide 1957). The exclusion of the trunk of the corpse indicates that it was deemed inappropriate to the intramural interment

of the cranium. Douglas (1966) asserts that once you have

created sacred space, you also by implication create the

concept of "pollution" or that which can defile the sacred.

Sometimes two or three separate groupings were found

buried in the same stratigraphic levels. Does this indicate

family ties and kinship groups, or perhaps clan or totem

groups? Unfortunately, we may never know. Yet it appears

that ancient peoples of Jericho felt it necessary to

differentiate skull groups (not by age, except for infants,

and not by gender) - therefore, kinship lines, or clans seem

feasible alternatives, suggesting an importance of genealogy

or origins and identity in an early egalitarian society.

The Maya belief system revolved around their origin

myths and was later utilized by the lineages of their elites

(Coe 1995; McAnany 1995; Gallenkamp 1987; Henderson 1981;

Schele and Freidel 1990). That this was also important at

the commoners' level throughout the pre-Classic era as well

has been posited by McAnany:

> ...ancestor veneration was a critically
> important organizing force in all sectors of
> Maya society - among commoners and nobles alike
> (1995:7).

Maya concept of sacred places is inextricably entwined

with sacred time (Schele and Friedel 1990:64-96) and became

more pronounced with the rise of complex city state society.

The performance of ceremonies at specific times in

conjunction with their sacred calendars, ensured favorable blessings from the gods.

Origin myths among commoners and elites of pre-Classic and Classic Maya reflect a series of creations of humankind from mud, wood and finally corn dough (Tedlock 1996; Thompson 1970). The sacred ceiba tree that unites the underworld, Xibalba to the sky-earth, and the celestial regions acts as the axis or "center" point (Elaide 1952:27-56) from which humanity ascends into being and by which the ancestors access the living and function as guardians. The body, particularly the skull, acts as a marker and a symbol of the regenerative powers of the ancestors and the beneficence of their blessings.

The Merina of Madagascar have bound their identities and social order upon their origin mythologies and family ancestry. In order to relate to one another in the contemporary world, even among strangers, it is necessary to know from what family line (and thus what region of Madagascar - *tanindrazana*) an individual is from. Without such knowledge, social faux pax might be committed. This is a reflection of contemporary status-keeping, but also an indication of the importance of place and the ancestors in Merina cosmology. Differentiation of ancient Merina tombs is not visibly discernable until trade items and access of

regions to the trade routes occurred.

The importance of maintaining clear ancestral lines is so important that endogamy historically and currently dictates the most appropriate marriage partners. And finally, personal identification with a specific *tanindrazana* is ultimately what determines in which tomb individuals can be buried – the most important decision in a Merina's life.

Although the Merina do not inter their dead beneath their homes (many are now residing in urban places) or keep relics, the body is still an important symbol for the connection to the ancestors and the sacred or what Elaide (1952:36) refers to as "anthropocosmos." The importance of this symbol for religious ideology's sake rather than material or status gain cannot be denied. The economic hardship a Merina family assumes for secondary burial of family members does not win them substantial reward in this life. Their religious ideology dictates that importance is found in securing their souls a rightful place with the ancestors.

The Berawan of Borneo rely heavily upon their origin myths for personal identity. Each performance of the funeral and *nulang* incorporates symbology of the origin myths and thus, creation of the sacred (Elaide 1952, 1957).

The Berawan do not bury their dead, but inter them in hand carved coffins or jars stored in mausoleums.

The use of the river and water symbols in the funeral procession is open to all Berawan and necessary in the re-enactment of taking the body "home." These symbols were used regardless of social standing in earlier times. Coffins were originally constructed of bilian wood in canoe shapes. With trade and the exchange of ideas (jar burials, ceramic plates in place of shells on mausoleums), status became more pronounced and reflected in length of ceremonies and burial options.

The body itself maintains an extended liminality (Turner 1967; Van Gennep 1960) while it is neither dead nor living, but somewhere in between until it is formally "buried." During this phase, the body was publically displayed and served to unite the community and family. All were expected to participate in watching over the corpse against supernatural dangers (Douglas 1966) and in assisting the family (Metcalf 1982).

To fail to participate in this pre-burial ritual, was to jeopardize one's identity as a Berawan. Now, the length of the observed liminal period of the corpse in burial rituals have become as much a sign of economic means and negotiation of status for the Berawan, as a need to unite

the community in common identity.

In each of the cultures examined, it was noted that the people led a sedentary lifestyle in villages, hamlets or towns indicating organization. Agricultural practices were also in evidence in early times at varying levels. From sophisticated raised fields and irrigation, to plots wherever they could be sustained, cultivation of domesticated plants lent support to the expanding populations. Some hunting and gathering was practiced in all cultures studied to supplement nutritional need. Overall, a sedentary lifestyle and agrarian society appear to be an element common to these cultures in the formation of an Earth-cult cosmology.

Specific places of the Earth or its flora and fauna held special meanings, were imbued with spirits from the Other World, or held magical power which could be manipulated. Commoners and nobles alike adorned themselves, their structures, and their utensils with symbols of the sacred world about them. Specific lands, rivers and other locations were deemed sacred by virtue of the role they played in origin myths or the spirits believed to dwell there.

In all cultures studied, it is apparent that the corpses or their dismembered parts serve as markers to

reaffirm an important belief system. The Jericho peoples collected the skulls of the deceased some time after death and decomposition of the body, and arranged them beneath the floor of their homes.

The belief that the skulls may have been trophies of enemies or individuals other than families members is unlikely, in that the practice of interring these skulls continued over generations, crossed age and gender groups, and do not typically show evidence of violent death. These skulls are not found under public buildings - as one would expect in sacrificial or dedicatory practices, but beneath domestic dwellings of all kinds. In the earliest occupation of Jericho, there is no evidence of class stratification in burial treatment (Kuijt 1996) nor in the structures the skulls are interred beneath. Such evidence may indicate, at least in the earlier stages of this burial practice, that its roots were ideologically or cosmologically based.

Secondary burial was common among the Maya. Homes in the pre-Classic period were occupied for approximately one or two generations and vacated after several burials were placed beneath the dwelling floor (Von Hagen 1961). Often among common people, a family member was exhumed, bundled and re-interred beneath the floor of a new home when moving was necessary.

The Merina secondary burial is the norm also, and the bodies of the dead are re-interred in family tombs after a brief interment (a few months to two years) at the location of their death if away from the ancestral territory. The importance to the Merina of being buried in a family tomb cannot be underestimated. All sense of identity and peace in the afterlife are dependant upon this factor. If one cannot be buried and thus mark a rightful place among the ancestors, the soul is doomed to wander eternity alone - the equivalent of a Merina "hell."

For the Merina, the standing ancestral tomb was a monument and symbol of the ancestors. All of the dead interred within became a "collective" symbol. Names and other individual identifiers of those placed inside a tomb are absent among Merina. Within generations, the names and identities of specific individuals are long forgotten, and are referred to only as "the ancestors." Ruins of tombs that were erected well before the arrival of the Europeans are testament to this traditional practice. Only their existence upon a known *tanindrazana* identifies them as tombs of a particular ancestral line.

The Berawan dead are kept on display in the family apartment for days. Having the dead displayed so marks the unity of the family and unites the longhouse community.

However, when the dead are buried, like the Merina, there are no external markings on the mausoleums or *kubors* to indicate individuals interred there. Rather, as the longhouse community relocates approximately every twenty years (Metcalf 1977), the graveyards are remembered with a community identity and individuals' names are forgotten.

Differences:

The concepts of the soul in early Jericho culture may never be known. Although we may speculate that religious ideologies as reflected in their burial practices seem to indicate a connection with ancestors, there may yet be other reasons for their special interment patterns we have yet to discover.

In each of the other cultures studied, basic commonalities were found in religious ideologies and possible factors contributing toward their formation. Yet, differences within those ideologies do exist. The Maya conceived of the soul and body originally created from mud of the earth, then sacred wood, and finally corn dough - born into the world through various creation phases - and ascended the sacred tree to attain higher levels of heaven upon death.

The level of heaven attained was determined primarily by the mode of death. Warriors and women who died in

childbirth were awarded higher levels (Gallenkamp 1987;
Henderson 1981; Thompson 1970). Moral conduct in life seems
to have little influence on the fate of the soul. After
death, the role of the soul was to act as guardian over the
living.

The Merina of Madagascar believe in three souls. Upon
death, the *ambiroa* and the *avelona* are perceived as one.
This soul incorporates itself with the tomb, imbuing the
tomb and the *tanindrazana* with supernatural power. This
power is perceived as so strong that it can influence the
living with good fortune or bad, including death, depending
upon its collective state of disposition toward the living.
The third soul, the *fanahy,* is the embodiment of the
character and morals of the person when living. In
Christian-influenced religious ideals among contemporary
Merina, it is this soul that attains the Christian heaven or
hell (while the ancestral soul desires union with the
ancestors).

The Berawan also view the soul as joining the ancestors
in a collective way, but with reincarnation into a new body
a possibility. In this way, souls may rejoin the community
again and again.

The concept of fear, according Douglas (1966) is
inherent in the state of liminality (Turner 1967) because

liminal beings are not a part of the social order. They do

not belong to any group completely and as such, they may

pose danger to the social order. Fear of the dead to some

degree, is universal (Bendann 1930; Douglas 1966; Turner

1967).

> It is...interesting to know that marginal status
> produces the same reactions the world over, and
> that these are deliberately represented in
> marginal rites (Douglas 1966:101).

Elaide (1957) suggests that fear may be found wherever

a religious ideology and the concept of the sacred has been

articulated. To suggest that the sacred exists, suggests

that the profane exists, and that which is profane may

threaten the sacred or visa versa, directly or indirectly.

In the cultures studied, the degree of fear shown

toward the dead differed. The people of Jericho left no

evidence in the material record as to what extent fear may

have played a role in their religious ideologies. However,

if we accept the theories regarding the formation of the

sacred as presented in this work, we must accept that the

occupants of Jericho must have also, to some extent,

realized fear.

The Maya feared death but celebrated it at the same

time (Henderson 1981; Schele and Friedel 1990; Gallenkamp

1987) because their everyday lives were entwined with their

mythologies. It is interesting to note that the word for

the underworld *Xibalba* meant "Place of Fear" where the Lord of the Dead resides (Miller and Taube 1997;Thompson 1970). It was believed that the majority of the dead resided here unless a higher level within the heavens was achieved through special manner of death.

The Merina have a fear of the power the dead can wield upon the living. They hold *famadihanas* every few years to placate the dead with new death shrouds and attention to the tombs so the spirit of the ancestors will not take revenge.

And finally, the Berawan fear the corpse and the spirits that may be about during the time of corpse display and its liminal status, because that is when the living and the dead are most vulnerable (Turner 1966). It is a time when the power of the displaced or resentful spirit of the dead may cause more death or ill fortune in the community. It is a time when evil spirits in the vicinity may attempt to reanimate or otherwise use the corpse for evil purposes. After the corpse has been sealed in its coffin or jar and interred (after funerals) or stored for a *nulang*, there does not appear to be undue fear of the dead at that time.

Burial placement among the cultures studied also differed. The Jericho culture interred the bodies extramurally and redeposited the craniums intramurally beneath their homes. The Maya commoners interred the entire

bodies of family members beneath their houses, while elites tended to inter skulls or decorate them with shell and jade and keep them as relics. Femurs were also a common relic among the elite and served as symbols of lineage and power (McAnany 1995). Both commoner and elite maintained family heirlooms of carved wood in the form of an ancestor, and deposited cremation ashes (cremation became more popular in the Classic period) sealed into the hollowed out back of the head (McAnany 1995; Thompson 1981; Von Hagen 1961).

Merina did not inter the deceased beneath their homes, but in a tomb upon ancestral ground. Interment there was and is crucial in Merina religious ideology and identity, and expense is not an acceptable excuse for allowing a family member to remain buried outside of one's *tanindrazana* (Bloch 1971). Although living space interment is not practiced, secondary treatment and periodic handling of the corpse is the norm.

The Berawan keep the corpse in living space for extended periods of time whether on display or in storage, anywhere from a week to five years. Final burial is removed from the community by a short distance (usually across the river) but this is deemed necessary in order to uphold the ritual of transporting the dead home, a re-enactment of the origin myths, returning the soul to the Land of the Dead

where, according to Berawan mythology, the dead and living dwelled side by side (Metcalf 1982).

Discussion Summary

Although there may be differences between the cultures studied in the way corpses are treated between death and burial or actual location for the burial, there seems to be an overriding theme of sacred symbology that the corpse itself comes to represent. Time, origins, kinship and identity are all represented through burial practices. The most salient theme appears to be that soul's peace and the success of the family and community are ultimately bound together through the ancestors.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

When the traits of the cultures studied are viewed with a cross-cultural comparative approach for contextual meanings, it is my belief that a pattern does emerge. It is unfortunate that not more is known about the Jericho pre-pottery peoples and subsequent populations in the Jericho river valley. As stated in the introduction, the interpretations of archaeological cultures were by necessity etic and limited.

The overall patterns emerge that personal identity within these groups are very much bounded to their religious ideologies and that these ideologies are linked with the ancestors and the Earth. As I have taken care to state in the introduction and throughout, the focus of this study was on the philosophical and religious ideologies, particularly among common people, which provided the initial impetus for their burial practices. It has been my goal to isolate possible origins in these ideologies and commonalities shared by the cultures studied that may indicate a pattern.

I would posit that each culture was deeply motivated, through its sedentary existence and reliance upon agrarian subsistence to form a cosmology that incorporated the Earth as a locus to the supernatural world. Following this ideology, fertility, harvest and the blessings or

guardianship of the ancestors become a natural incorporation into the death ritual.

Creation of sacred space appears to be a factor in all cultures studied. The cultures studied suggest through their mythologies, world views, artifacts and burial practices that sacred space is a center upon which to live, and if possible, to inter your dead. Perceptions in communities that believed they dwelt upon sacred ground, demonstrated that the home was a sacred focal point for interment of the dead. As noted in the Maya language, "vehe" is a word meaning house and/or grave (McAnany 1995:20). Domestic dwellings are built around and upon sacred ground and burial rituals are a re-enactment of the mythology of the sacred place of origin.

Mircea Elaide posits this concept of sacredness among what he has termed as "religious man" as:

> ...man desires to dwell at a center, where there is the possibility of communicating with the gods. His dwelling is a microcosm; and so too is his body. The homology house-body-cosmos presents itself very early (1957:172).

This is a departure from the Western perception of sacred space as a compartmentalized commodity that can be negotiated separately of origin beliefs. The concept of heaven in the cultures studied is another expression of the world around them, either overlapping with living space or time (Maya), or at a location that can be found and

inhabited by their ancestors.

The Western view is that the natural world is profane; that heaven is a place removed and so too is the spirit world. To attain heaven in a Western perspective, one must remove one's self from the natural world in a psychological and spiritual sense. Once deceased, there is no interplay with the living. This removal, in Christian belief, is necessary to separate the spirit from the profanity that is nature. In pre-Christian Europe, many traditions (pagan) reflect a similar concept of the sacredness of nature - but this was overwhelmed and reconfigured by the Christian era.

While the cultures examined indicated a varying sense of a Creator spirit, the salient feature in the belief systems was one of the integral importance of the ancestors. This was reaffirmed repeatedly in mortuary art forms, (i.e. body parts as family emblems, a sort of "family crest"), in performances articulating religious myths and origin stories, and the perception of the soul residing with ancestors rather than with a Creator god. It is not surprising then, with this view, that the corpse takes on a different meaning.

Burials done beneath homes or secondary burial rituals performed away from home included handling the remains. This seems to be a means to create a sense of unity among family

and community, demonstrate the honor and ritual due the deceased, and maintain a place and a role for the dead among the living.

Sacred time was connected to origin myths and sacred calendars. This is a departure from Western beliefs in that specifically Christian doctrine places sacred events within the framework of "real" history (Elaide 1957:68-116). Although there are sacred stories that take place in mythical time in Western beliefs (such as Genesis stories) they are couched in real places with real historical figures (kings, pharaohs, etc.). The real and the mythical become intertwined, but only in the past. Sacred time becomes a static historical event, not one that is necessary to re-enact in burial rites in order to aid the soul's journey home.

Each mortuary ritual and treatment of the dead in the cultures studied replay the themes of the sacred time and create, for the participants, a sort of timeless quality that everything is occurring in sacred time and that sacred time is now - not historically removed.

Finally, it is apparent also, that as societies continue to incorporate outside religiosities in the course of external domination or infusion, the economic, political and subsistence intensification become overriding concerns.

The ancestors and their place begins to lose its sacred hold on the living and become material symbols as society becomes more stratified.

None of the cultures studied could be termed industrial. However, the ethnographic cultures of the Merina and the Berawan were certainly influenced by the industrial world. The encroachment of industrialized views lessens the connection, or the sacred, and begins the deterioration or "desacralization" of spaces.

In studying the Jericho culture, signs of desacralization began to show in the treatment of the corpses as class stratification also became obvious and burial goods appear. Older bodies in multiple interments were treated carelessly (Kenyon 1957) and grave goods were sometimes less than best wares (patched vessels and broken ladles, etc.).

Ultimately, as desacralization in a sedentary community occurs, changes in tradition and world view follow. Boundaries are more rigidly upheld between the dead and the living and the dead become profane.

> "Of all the sources of religion, the supreme and final crisis of life--death--is of the greatest importance.(Malinowski as quoted by Geertz 1973:162).

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