Performing Death

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Abstract: Death affects the living in multiple and complex ways. Social groups across time and space have designed diverse coping strategies to deal with the pain, frustration, and anger that the loss of a loved one produces on the living. Mortuary rituals play a critical role in how humans deal with emotions associated to death. Rituals are important in processes of remembering and forgetting. They also offer the possibility to reconfigure and restitute the social relationship of the living: forging, challenging, and reinforcing (new) social orders. When we die, we continue influencing the relationships between others long beyond our physical presence. This chapter offers perspectives about the performance of death, the agency of the dead, and how our existence transcends and continuously gives shape to the memories, actions, and hopes of the living. Case studies present examples of non-Western practices orchestrated around the preparation, both physical and symbolical, of the body before its eternal journey to the afterlife.

Resumen: La muerte afecta a los vivos de formas múltiples y complejas. Los grupos sociales a lo largo del tiempo y el espacio han diseñado diversas estrategias para afrontar y lidiar con el dolor, la frustración y la ira que produce en los vivos la pérdida de un ser querido. Los rituales mortuorios juegan un papel fundamental en la forma en que los humanos lidiamos con las emociones asociadas con la muerte. Los rituales son importantes en los procesos de memoria, pero también de olvido. Ellos ofrecen la posibilidad de reconfigurar y restituir las relaciones sociales entre los vivos: forjando, desafiando, y/o reforzando (nuevos) órdenes sociales. Cuando morimos, seguimos influyendo en las relaciones entre otros, aún mucho más allá de nuestra presencia física. Este capítulo ofrece perspectivas sobre la escenificación de la muerte, la agencia de los muertos, y cómo nuestra existencia trasciende y continuamente da forma a los recuerdos, acciones, y esperanzas de los vivos. Los artículos que este ensayo contiene exploran ejemplos no Occidentales de la ritualización y la escenificación alrededor de la muerte.

"Death may be the greatest of all human blessings."
—Socrates

"Our dead are never dead to us, until we have forgotten them."

—George Eliot

Epicurus once said that death should not worry us, because as long as we exist, death is not here, and when it comes for us, we no longer exist. Through death, we become aware of our finitude. However, whereas for many of us death might be imperceptible and perhaps sudden, for those that we leave behind, death is a deeply affective experience producing feelings and emotions from which they can hardly escape. Death affects us in multiple and complex ways, and, as Damien Hirst reminds us, it is perhaps the impossibility of comprehending it that that causes us the most anxiety, terror, and fear.

Throughout time and space, humans have created diverse ways to cope with the pain, frustration, and anger produced by the loss of a loved one. Rituals have played a critical role in how humans deal socially with the sensations of emptiness, chaos, and crisis that death creates. Rituals are important in the processes of remembering, as well as forgetting. They also offer the possibility to reconfigure or restitute the social order of the living: forging, reinforcing, and challenging (new) social relationships and meanings.

But social relationships and meanings are not just cognitively constructed. They are forged through actions and experience. Unlike ritual—often framed within religious structures and liturgies—performances are actions that, because of their aesthetic, theatrical, and dramatic nature, forge meanings through the body, movement, and nonverbal language. Whereas all rituals are performances, not all performances are rituals. Yet, they both constitute means of expressing emotions in moments of crises and disruption: from the large-scale funerary spectacles celebrated by the Inca of Cusco to the small-scale Japanese household commemoration rituals. Social actions orchestrated around death, whether collective or individual, ritual or not ritual, forge potent meanings that enable us to reconfigure our position in the world. We could say, then, that human beings face the tragedy of death through actions, and that the human experience with death is, above all, performative.

Both rituals and performances around death have been critical in the social evolution of human groups, and have contributed to the formation of communities, identities, social hierarchies, and religious beliefs. Such rituals and performances, with a special emphasis on those from the pre-Hispanic Andes, my own area of expertise, occupy a central theme of this chapter (Figures 4.1–4.7). The power of action, perhaps even more than thought, lies in its capacity to activate emotions, memories, and experiences, and thus constitutes a powerful tool to heal

Figure 4.1. Nasca bird whistle, which produces a high-pitched sound reminiscent of the sounds made by native desert hummingbirds (FM 171064).

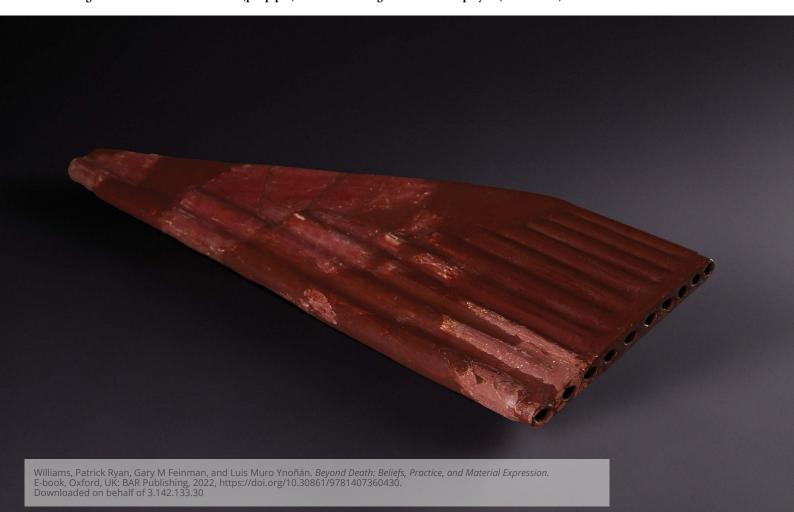**Figure 4.2. Nasca ceramic *antara* (panpipes) created haunting melodies when played (FM 170214).**

Figure 4.3. Wari/Tiwanaku replica ceramic trumpet from Moquegua, Peru. Original dates to ca. 800–1000 ce and was from a cist burial (FM 359535).

Figure 4.4. Lambayeque whistling vessel, where a whistling sound is created as liquid moving from one chamber to the other forces air to pass through the tube (FM 169918).

Figure 4.5. Moche drummer representation with a deformity which may have made them a ritual mediator between the living and the dead (FM 100153).

the emotional and affective disruption produced by the loss. I focus, then, on the importance of the actions, which, when orchestrated around both death and the dead, become important forces for both life and the living.

Funerary Behaviors in Evolutionary Perspective

Discussions about when humans began to grieve and mourn have usually been framed within evolutionary models of behavior. These models indicate that social behaviors were acquired as cognitive capacities of humans developed. However, responses to death do not seem to be exclusive to the human species. As this exhibit shows, animals also appear to grieve. Mammals and primates, among other animal species, produce sounds and gestures, and make use of their body as a whole, to signal frustration, irritation, and being upset, when encountering the dead body of one conspecific. In spite of that, evolutionary scientists do no necessarily grant these responses the status of "behaviors," but mere reactions.

Although with skepticism, the idea that early hominids could have developed a certain type of funerary behavior, understood as conscious acts to revere the dead, is becoming further accepted by specialists (see Feinman and Williams in this volume). Nonetheless, some have argued that the formulation of the category "dead"—as something other than a "sleeping individual" who refuses to wake up—could only have occurred when spoken language was fully developed (Renfrew 2016, 4). Modern *Homo sapiens*, with their advanced linguistic capacities, would be the only hominid species that produced a conceptual differentiation and, thus, a verbalization, of the term "death." This could have ultimately led to the distinction between those with life and those without. Once this process was achieved, it is believed that a self-awareness could have emerged, and with that a notion of identity and *otherness* (Pettitt 2018). The inclusion of personal adornments and ornamentation in early burials would have been a manifestation of the process of the formation of individuality. Therefore, the funerary behavior could, in fact, be a distinctive feature of the human beings through evolutionarily acquired capabilities.

But these early funerary behaviors might have been deprived of religious meanings. Although performative and highly symbolical, the act of burying the dead by early humans did not necessarily imply a belief in a deity or deities. Religion entails action and conduct designed to please the divine forces that rule us (Insoll 2004). While many have held that religion first emerged among human groups settling down and experimenting with plants and animals in the Late Paleolithic period, evidence actually seems to suggest that religion was the factor that triggered the first processes of sedentism and domestication in the Old World (Thomas 2011), and

that death and the dead might have had a key role in that process. It is very likely that the necessity of returning to the grave sites to honor the dead planted the seed for the emergence of a mystic religious belief that fueled, in turn and along with other factors, the permanence of the human groups in specific places in the landscape.

This process could have been first seen in sites such as Çatalhöyük (7100 BCE) in southern Anatolia, and was intimately linked to the construction of spatial identity and social memory (Hodder 2010; 2014). At this site, early houses also became sites of burial. Multiple bodies were placed beneath the floors of the houses, which were cyclically replastered as new architectural elements were added. What is interesting at this site is that the houses were spatially and consciously organized, transformed, and ornamented around the dead, who were revered through symbolic art on the house's walls. Moreover, the documentation of bodies lacking skulls suggests, for example, that the skulls were intentionally removed and circulated among diverse household units, where special spots were reserved for their placement. There is even evidence that the skulls, and other body parts, were theatrically manipulated in household ritual performances. Therefore, it is generally through repetitive, cyclical, and conscious actions in the domestic space that the dead (as an inert body) became a deceased (an esteemed and revered dead), and that performances around death acquired a much deeper religious meaning.

Inscribing Meanings on the Bodies: Personhood, Identity, and Status

Identity and Personhood

The notion of inscribing (and imposing) a particular identity on the dead seems to have had a much later manifestation within human history. Both funerary identity and personhood are idealized notions of one individual that are culturally constructed. They often respond to the community's necessities, aspirations, and hopes, and they are ritually "inscribed" on the dead through funerary performances. Whereas "identity" is related to the individual's age, sex, class, race, group affiliations, and so on, "personhood" "refers to the state or condition of being a person" (Cerezo-Román 2015, 354), and as such, it is constructed across life through social relationships and interactions with the material world (Fowler 2004; Gillespie 2001). During the funerary performances, multiple identities and personhoods can be constructed and inscribed on both the living (mourners) and the dead. The progressive stages of the mortuary rituals, as suggested by van Gennep (1960)— separation, liminality (transition), and (re)incorporation—enable the deceased to pass "from being biologically dead into a transitional stage, and [the deceased] only later becomes socially dead"

(Cerezo-Román 2015, 354). During this transformative process, the personhood of the participants (living and dead) is reconfigured through processes of dissolution, creation, negotiation, and transformation of their social identities, and, only in a few cases, the deceased also becomes an ancestor: a named and esteemed deceased who is revered through long-term ritual service and tendance (Hill 2016).

The body of the dead plays a special role during this process, as the inscription of a funerary identity and personhood is ultimately achieved through actions that involve its direct modification, both physically and symbolically. The Chinchorro mummies (5000 bce) discovered in the Atacama Desert, in modern-day Chile, could be considered the earliest expression of this practice and its complexity, with processes that enabled the preservation of the body through mummification. After literally skinning the dead and removing their muscles and organs, the Chinchorro reshaped (or rehumanized) the corpses using sticks, reeds, clay, and sea-lion skin. Wigs made of human and animal hairs were also attached to the bodies, which were then decorated with black and red pigments, indicating a particular sense of the aesthetic and beauty (Arriaza 1995). In a mortuary practice that long pre-dated the ancient Egyptians, the Chinchorro mortuary practices provide critical information about the emergence of the concepts of the self and soul in semi-nomadic groups of hunters and gatherers in South America. It is perhaps the intention of preserving the human qualities of the body that suggests the emergence of a much more articulated notion of an afterlife, as well deities, among early groups in the Americas.

In cultures with more complex religious systems there existed a belief that changes on the body mirrored changes in the soul (Kus 1992). Therefore, the preservation of the material dimension of the body guaranteed, in some ways, the preservation of its immaterial dimension. In this sense, the successful construction of the "new persona" (new personhood) is subject to processes that unfold both in the world of the living and the dead—the latter being governed by mythological gods. For example, for the ancient Egyptians the body had to be as carefully cared for as the soul, and the correct realization of the rituals of mummification accompanied by magical recitations and spells, as described in the Book of the Dead (see Teeter in this volume), paralleled the progressive advancement of the soul of the person toward the afterlife.

But for the ancient Egyptians, the body was perceived as something more than a surface of inscription or canvas for identity. It was considered a plane of convergence between the self, experience, and subjectivity. Death, then, brings together the *lived experience* of the individual that is molded through gender, sexuality, identity, power relationships, and so forth (Meskell 2004).

Ranking, Hierarchy, and Status

But we cannot deny that, through death, the body also becomes a means to construct and display hierarchy, ranking, and status—notions that are also ritually built. In many cases, and particularly in premodern societies, the dead body was treated in ways analogous to how the individual was treated in life, with important individuals buried lavishly and eloquently. Luxury costumes and body ornaments were distinctive markers of identity and class and, as such, were carefully placed within burials as a way to display (and fossilize) the status that prestigious individuals acquired in life.

In non-Western premodern societies, mortuary rituals were particularly centered on the body: its embellishment, ornamentation, and use to inscribe desired notions of beauty, power, and status. Whether socially acquired or familiarly inherited, status was expressed through the quality and complexity of grave goods. Grave goods were either exclusively manufactured to accompany the dead or also passed on, by the dead's family, from generation to generation, as relics. This usually reinforced the ancestral ties of the dead and allowed them to legitimate their position in the society: in the world of the living and of the dead.

For example, pre-Columbian cultures that thrived on the desert coast of Peru invested a great deal of energy, labor, and resources to guarantee such an outcome. In many cases, the sophistication of the burials was an expression of the wealth and power of the family or community to which the individual belonged. Whereas archaeologists have traditionally linked economic wealth with the level of complexity of the society, it is now commonly accepted that the investments seen in ancient burials show, instead, preoccupations of a religious, ideological, and eschatological nature. Societies such as the Moche, Nasca, and Chancay of ancient Peru constructed complex underground chamber tombs made of adobe bricks or mud and, many times, decorated with mural paintings and niches. Whereas the Moche invested significant labor and resources for the production of ceramic and metal objects to be placed within the tombs, the Nasca and Chancay did so for the production of refined textiles and other items (see Slovak in this volume). High-quality decorated textiles were used to wrap the bodies of important individuals, and their level of decoration and complexity was an indicator of the status of the person as well as his or her power as an ancestor.

Figure 4.6. Chancay *chicha* vessels with paired figures holding cups (FM 1416, 5802).

4A   Chancay Burials

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Famed for their sophisticated textiles, black-on-white painted pottery, and human clay figurines known as *cuchimilcos*, the Chancay culture flourished during the Andean Late Intermediate Period (LIP) (1000–1470 CE). Chancay sites were concentrated in the Chancay and Chillón valleys on Peru's arid central coast, with Chancay cultural influence extending northward and southward into the Huara and Rimac Valleys, respectively (Lumbreras 1974; Stone-Miller 2002). Despite more than a century of research, surprisingly little is known about Chancay's sociopolitical structure (Krzanowski 1991). Instead, most scholarship has focused on Chancay art and mortuary practices. Indeed, the majority of excavated Chancay materials derive from funerary contexts, including those on display in the Field Museum's *Death: Life's Greatest Mystery* exhibition. Although associated with death, these objects tell us much about the then-living Chancay community.

Thousands of Chancay burials have been discovered at various sites throughout the central coast (Dorsey 1894; Horkheimer 1963; Kaulicke 1997; Kroeber and Uhle 1926; Lothrop and Mahler 1957; Reiss and Stübel 1880–87; Watson Jiménez 2019). Tomb forms range from deep circular, rectangular, or L-shaped pits to more shallow rectangular structures. Tomb chambers were dug directly into hard gravel or sand or otherwise lined with rectangular adobes or *tapia* (Lothrop and Mahler 1957). Many burial chambers were capped with cane rooves (Ravines 1981). Tombs contained either single individuals or multiple interments (Kaulicke 1997), with the deceased most often interred as mummy bundles, or *fardo funerarios*—a tradition that flourished on the central coast during the preceding Middle Horizon Period (550 CE–1000 CE) and continued throughout the LIP.

Fardos were elaborate constructions in which the deceased's body was enshrouded and enveloped in multiple layers of textiles and vegetation, forming a large rectangular or ovular mummy bale. At the center of the *fardo* was the body of the deceased, often bound by ropes in a seated, flexed position, although variation in the position of the body has been observed (Watson Jiménez 2019). Immediately surrounding the body, wads of cotton, grass, and other absorbent organic materials often were placed (Lothrop and Mahler 1957; Watson Jiménez 2019). The bundle was covered with either a plain or decorative cotton or wool textile and, especially in the early half of the LIP, capped with a false head or mummy mask. Mummy masks were square or rectangular in shape, often small cotton sacks, stuffed with leaves and embellished with shell or wooden eyes, a wooden nose, and a cotton-thread mouth (Menzel 1977). Sometimes the mummy masks would be capped by a wig of hair or topped with a woven straw headband. Rarely, mummy masks were decorated with silver or copper objects (Horkheimer 1963; Menzel 1977).

Often the mummy mask was obscured by an additional layer of textile (Reiss and Stübel 1880–87). The outer bundle was then bounded by a series of corded, knotted ropes and placed at the base of the tomb. The continuity and consistency of Chancay *fardos* across multiple sites indicates that funerary rituals were widely shared and largely consistent among members of Chancay society.

On the other hand, the envelopment of the body was almost certainly an intimate, individualized activity between the deceased and the living community. We have no way of knowing who or how many people participated in preparing the body for interment, although there likely were at least two to three individuals owing to the complexity of the process (Cornejo Guerrero 1991). The inclusion of small ceramic vessels, gourd bowls, coca leaves, weaving needles, metal bracelets, and other small objects embedded and enfolded within the layers of the bundle (Slovak 2020; Watson Jiménez 2019) suggests a highly personalized component to death and burial among the Chancay. It is possible that these objects were personal keepsakes of the individual or mementos that belonged to family, friends, or community members that were then gifted to the individual at death (Figures 4.6–4.7). The proximity of these objects to the body itself suggests that these items were essential to the deceased's identity and/or well-being. That they were incorporated into the final physical embodiment of an individual's existence renders them powerful, meaningful symbols of personhood.

In addition to grave goods placed within the *fardo*, objects such as pottery, gourd bowls filled with maize, cotton, and other vegetation, weaving baskets replete with spindles and spindle whorls, fishing implements, and so-called "God's eyes," or woven designs made out of yarn or fiber upon a wooden cross, were included in graves alongside individuals. Many of the aforementioned objects appear to have been placed in specific tombs because of their association with the deceased, likely because these things belonged to, or were used by, the interred individuals in life. Grave 121, a Chancay-period tomb excavated by George Dorsey (Dorsey 1894) at the archaeological site of Ancón, Peru, in 1891 and currently housed at the Field Museum, beautifully illustrates this point. Containing the remains of three *fardos*—Mummies 170, 171, and 172 (identified by Dorsey as an adult female, adolescent female, and child, respectively)—Grave 121 included a number of artifacts of an intimate nature, such as an intricately constructed weaving basket containing the sticks of a loom and several spindles still wound with thread. Near to the smallest mummy, Dorsey (1893) encountered 70 spindles, all of which were painted and incised with geometric and zoomorphic imagery. Also accompanying the deceased were a pair of remarkably preserved hair combs—small

Figure 4.7. *Cuchimilco* figurine, perhaps representing an ancestor, that accompanied the Chancay dead to the grave (FM 5803).

rectangular objects that fit in the palm of one's hand. When observing these objects, it is easy to imagine the human fingers that held the spindles, or the hair that would have been held back by the exquisite cotton and wooden hair combs. Based on the personal nature of these objects, it is likely that they belonged to one or more of the individuals found in the tomb.

Importantly, mortuary ritual did not end with an individual's interment. Instead, among the Chancay, as was true for many other ancient Andean cultures, funerary rites continued to be performed after an individual's death. Evidence for bundles being opened and reconstituted (Reiss and Stübel 1880–87), additional individuals being placed in burial chambers at later dates, and ritual feasting occurring near to tombs (Uhle [1912] 1968) suggest that the dead were continually remembered, grieved, honored, and celebrated. The Chancay tomb, therefore, appears to have been at once a formal commemoration of death and a dynamic component of Chancay life.

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But it is not only the objects themselves and how they were potentially used that is relevant, but also how and when they were placed in the funerary contexts. The action of placing, arranging, and rearranging the grave goods, occurring before, during, and after the burial act itself, is also charged with potent symbolism for the dead, and slight variations in the spatial patterns of the objects within the context might indicate relevant aspects of the personhood of the individual and his or her social and political ties. For example, many Moche elite burials present evidence of multiple reopenings and reenterings; in each, new elements of non-Moche affiliation were added. Wari objects placed near the head of individuals could have indicated a new political affiliation of the individual and his or her community at large.

Coffins are also particularly relevant items within the burials, as they constitute potent conveyers of status and hierarchy. They not only served as the first receptacle of the body of the individual, but also embodied his or her essence, as well as capabilities. The capacity for acquiring these items, especially the most refined, could have been fairly limited by the common people, as described, for example, in the historical texts recovered from the Egyptian community of workmen at Deir el-Medina. Overall, decoration, iconography, and symbolic codes depicted on them could have aimed at boosting the capacities of the deceased, both in the realm of the living and the dead. For example, in many cases, the Moche coffins, made of wood or canes, were usually decorated with metal plaquettes representing parts of the human body, namely, legs, arms, and masks mimicking human faces, with the intention of humanizing the coffin, giving the coffin its own agency. One particular Moche coffin from the Late Moche cemetery of San Jose de Moro, Jequetepeque Valley, was also decorated with metallic plaques similar to fishnets and wave designs, mimicking a reed boat navigating and giving the coffin a capacity of movement and transportation (Muro Ynoñán 2010). A similar metaphor can also be found in modern coffins of traditional societies in northwestern Africa (see Bandana in this volume, on Ghanaian fantasy coffins).

The Powerful Dead: Commemoration, Affect, and Memory

As pointed out above, not all the dead had the same importance or were equally esteemed by society. Individuals converted into ancestors were particularly revered for long periods of time after their death and their influence on the society determined the renovation of new social and political ties among the living (Hill and Hageman 2016). Remembering some ancestors in particular could imply forgetting others. As Borić (2010, 65) reminds us, through practices of construction of social memory "the memory of the dead might be both recollected and then collaterally lost."

In the past, the conversion of specific individuals into ancestors sought to promote the transcendence of the remembrance of such individuals both in memory and history, and this allowed the living to engage in new forms of rituality and sociality. For instance, as described in many colonial documents, ancestors played a key and active role in the social, economic, and political life of the communities of ancient Peru. The ancestors (and their representations) were often consulted, even about domestic decisions, and in both elite and non-elite residences, spaces were delimited exclusively for such consultative practices. Performances of ancestor commemoration in ancient Peru were complex and, in many cases, constituted long and large-scale events. Communities gathered in public plazas at times likely defined by ritual calendars. Remarkably, in the cemetery of San Jose de Moro, evidence of large-scale feasting has been documented around the tombs of elite members, who were transformed into powerful ancestors through lavish mortuary spectacles (Muro Ynoñán 2019). Here, feasting events entailed the preparation and consumption of abundant amounts of foodstuff and maize-based beer (*chicha*), which were stored in ceramic containers near elite mortuary structures for months, if not years. Similar to pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, in the Andes there was a metaphoric relationship between the maize's lifecycle and the life/death cycles of the people; once the maize was converted into beer, and then stored for commemoration rites, its aging paralleled the aging of the ancestors and, thus, therefore, their empowerment (Lau 2013).

The consumption of alcohol, in particular, during feasting and banquets of ancestor commemoration, seems to have been a means, and not an end in itself. Chicha beer prompted a specific form of sacrality, which was facilitated through intoxication and drunkenness. The ingestion of hallucinogenic substances during these events could have also promoted heightened states of consciousness through which communication with the ancestors was facilitated and benefited. Contemporary Peruvian shamans, for example, still make use of psychotropic substances to increase the sensorial experiences during divination and propitiatory performances that involve the participation of ancestral and natural spiritual forces (*apus*).

But commemorative performances required, in many cases, the real and physical presence of the body of the ancestor. A common practice, seen in pre-Hispanic societies across America and elsewhere, involved the reopening of tombs and the removal of the all or parts of the body of the dead. Heads, hands, and limbs of prestigious individuals, once removed from the burial, became true relics and were passed on from family to family (within the same lineage) as a way to solidify the ties of family members with powerful ancestors, who were sometimes considered the founders of given lineages. For many, the body and its parts were not a mere *representation* of ancestral power, but were the *true* source of political and religious power.

The Incas from Cusco took this notion further. The *mallqui*, the royal mummy of the Inca emperor, whose remains were preserved in sacred chambers at the temple of Coricancha in Cusco, was taken in a procession to the public plaza of imperial Cusco, Huacaypata. Here, the *mallquis* of all the emperors, spatially arranged based on their importance and "age," were revered and consulted. Commemoration rituals involved offerings of food and drink to the *mallquis,* as well as the celebration (and reenactment) of their achievements during their reign. For the Incas, the *mallquis* were more than ancestors participating in the political life of the community; they were the source of political and religious power in the empire and, as D'Altroy (2016, 404) puts it, "were considered as the point of convergence between a dualistic view of the reality: between life and death, time and space, past and present, vitality and causality, knowledge and epistemology." They were so venerated by the Incas that the Spanish *conquistadores* sought their capture and destruction, which they eventually accomplished.

Experimenting with the body of the ancestors in real life was, therefore, critical for the commemoration and production of affect in relation to them. This notion has parallels in other cultural realities. For example, in modern Indonesia, the real presence of the body of the deceased and its movement around the house or houses of the family defines the social interactions of relatives whose actions are centered on continuing to please the deceased. The body of the dead remains at home for a very long time, months and even years, while the mortuary rituals are prepared. The deceased is dressed, re-dressed, perfumed, and fed properly, and also participates in social and family events. For Indonesians, the loved one is not dead, but only "sick" until finally buried.

Figure 4.8. Canopic jars used to contain and preserve the viscera of the mummified individual (FM 31380, 81, 82, 83-A115240d_001A), and embalming hook used to remove the brain from the nose (FM 30368).
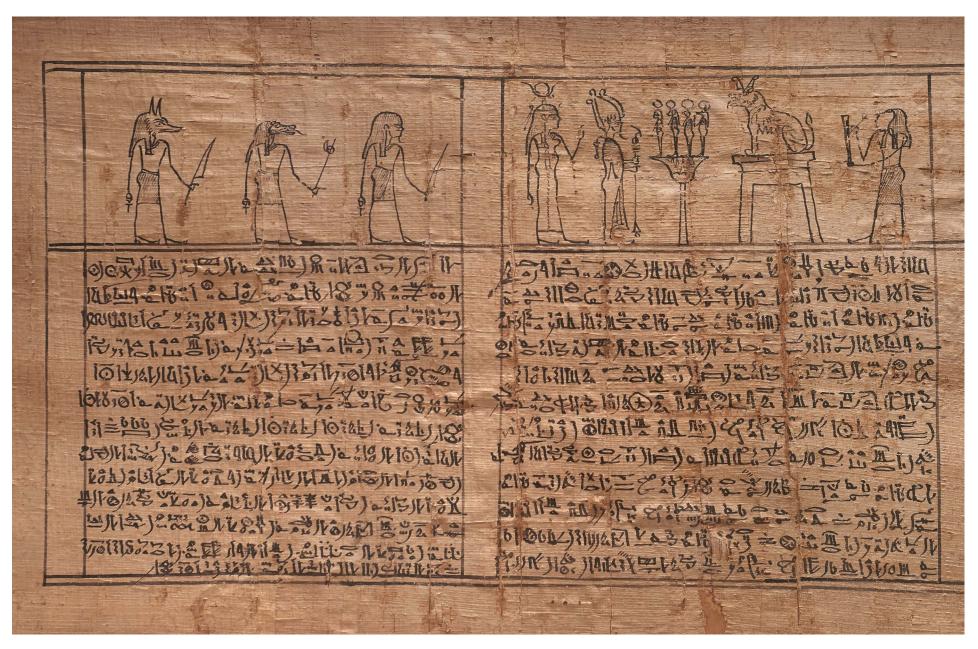
Figure 4.9. Egyptian Book of the Dead, detailing how the heart of the dead will be weighed against the feather of truth in view of the gods (FM 3132-A115261d_027d).

4B   Egyptian Mummification

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The ancient Egyptians believed that following the successful judgment of their moral worth, the deceased became an imperishable god who dwelled forever in the afterlife. The preservation of the body was thought to be essential to this eternal life because the spirit (the *ka* and *ba*) needed an earthly home.

The key to Egyptian mummification was the removal of moisture. Until about 2900 BCE, bodies were buried in direct contact with the desert sand that acted as a natural desiccant. As burials became more elaborate and the deceased was placed in mats or coffins, new techniques of artificial preservation were developed and, by at least 2560 BCE, desiccation was aided by the removal of the internal organs.

By about 2450 BCE, after their death both men and women were thought to become Osiris, the god of the dead. Legends relate that Osiris was murdered and dismembered, and that his wife Isis gathered the pieces of his body and bound them together with linen, allowing for his revivification. This was the mythical basis for human mummification and renewed life—the linen wrappings of a mummy imitated the bindings of Osiris and promised eternal life among the gods.

Although mummification was the ideal, it was not always practiced. Throughout ancient Egyptian history, members of the non-elite were still buried in desert graves where they were naturally preserved, and there are examples of affluent individuals who were not artificially mummified (Toivari-Viitala 2001, 223; Cooney 2011, 36).

In the fullest form, mummification was an elaborate and expensive process that ideally took 70 days, an interval based on observations of the decans—stars that rose above the horizon every 70 days, an appearance equated with rebirth (Hornung 1990, 136). The corpse was taken to the embalming workshop, called a *wabet*, the "pure place," where it was cleaned, and the stomach, liver, lungs, and intestines removed through an incision made on the left side of the abdomen. The kidneys and reproductive organs were usually not removed, and there is inconsistency whether the heart was left in place. The brain was usually removed through the nose. From about 500 BCE, quicker and less expensive methods of injecting caustic solutions into the body and skull could be employed (Figures 4.8–4.13).

The body was then packed with natron (sodium carbonate or bicarbonate), a salt that occurs in the Wadi Natron northwest of modern Cairo (whence "Na" for sodium on the periodic table). Once dry, a process that took about 40 days, the body was wrapped in meters of linen, often with layers of resin, or later bitumen (a petroleum product), that acted as an adhesive and waterproofing. Stone or faience amulets might be positioned on or between the wrappings. Depending upon the family's budget, the bandaging could be extremely elaborate, with each finger and toe being individual wrapped. Usually, a large linen shroud was wrapped over the mummy and tied with linen strips.

The four internal organs were separately dried and placed in canopic jars (Figure 4.8). The Four Sons of Horus—the gods Duamutef, Qebehsenuef, Imseti, and Hapi—protected the organs (stomach, intestines, liver, and lungs, respectively). Until about 1200 BCE, all four gods shown on the lids of the jars had human heads; thereafter they were shown as a jackal, falcon, human, and ape. The brain was discarded. In many cases, a large stone scarab, usually inscribed with Book of the Dead Spell 30, was placed on the chest as a substitute or spokesman for the heart (Figure 4.9).

Once finished, the mummy was released to the family for burial. In some eras, a wood or stone tag with the name and age of the deceased was hung around the neck to ensure that the finished mummy was delivered to the correct family.

Animal Mummies

Animals were also mummified. Some dog, cat, and gazelle mummies were once beloved pets. Some bulls, crocodiles, and falcons that dwelled in temples were considered to be the earthy incarnation of a god, and they were mummified and buried in elaborate coffins. A much larger number were "victual mummies," fowl or choice pieces of bovines that were preserved and placed in the tomb as food for the mummy.

By about 600 BCE, the majority of animal mummies were produced as offerings to the gods. They included dogs, cats, birds, monkeys, mongooses, shrews, crocodiles, bovines, fish, and other animals. They were associated with a specific god through shared traits. For example, the shrew's keen eyesight was equated with that of the falcon who represented the gods Horus and Re, and the cat with the fierce lioness Sekhmet. These animals were raised commercially by temple staff, then killed, mummified, and sold to pilgrims who offered them to the god in hope of the deity interceding on their behalf, as related by inscriptions that ask the god to grant "life and prosperity," to the donor. Once a year, amidst processions and rituals, the priests would transfer the mummies to the temple catacombs.

Figure 4.10. Egyptian model house, also called "soul house" (FM 31594), and leather sandals belonging to an elite Egyptian individual (FM 110847).

Donation of animal mummies was not only a common practice but a big business, and it has been estimated that four million mummified birds were deposited in the ibis catacombs at Saqqara alone (Ikram 2005, 11).

The majority of animal mummies were not eviscerated, but rather dried with natron, or dipped in a preservative and aromatic like turpentine. In contrast, the linen wrappings could be very elaborate, with different colored linen strips creating herringbone or diamond patterns, and the exterior painted with the animal's features. Some animal mummies were placed in coffins, others in clay pots, and yet others were simply stacked in the chambers of the catacomb.

The Embalmers

Our fullest documentation about embalmers dates to the seventh–first centuries BCE and consists of contracts, receipts, and letters. As a result, the written sources relate more about the administrative side of mummification than the processes involved. Embalming was a male-dominated profession, but a few women also functioned in that role (Cannata 2020, 118, 495–96, 574). Embalmers (*kes* or *cheryw-heb*) and the ranks of funerary priests were professionals organized into associations with rules about their behavior and mutual support (Reymond 1973, 23–29; Cannata 2020; Donker van Heel 2021). They were assisted by funerary priests ("lectors") who recited the protective spells and sequence of actions.

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Ancestor Simulacra

But when the real body is absent, societies make great efforts to produce representations, or even simulacra, of ancestors. Simulacra were the exact representation or imitation of an ancestor. For some societies, simulacra were more than representations, they were the embodied personification of the deceased and, as such, an ancestor in his or her own right (Alberti and Bray 2009). The physical manipulation of images, symbols, objects, figurines, or simulacra of ancestors gave the living a sense of "control" of the dead, propelling the dead's conversion into a tangible expression for easy experimentation: an object amenable to worship.

Many times, the placement of these simulacra in specific spaces of the household or the community bestowed sacrality on such spaces, as ancestors were seen as "inhabiting" those spaces through their physical presence. These spaces become, too, loci of encounter and interaction, ornamented with elements that reinforce their sacrality. Ancestor simulacra were the center of symbolic actions and performances that were orchestrated both on ordinary and extraordinary occasions. At home, these spaces were constantly revered, offered, and evoked during domestic tasks.

Pre-Hispanic cultures of the Andes such as Recuay, Pucará, and Chiripa produced real-size ancestor imagery in the form of lithic sculptures, and the people's engagement with this imagery was active and deeply emotive. Ancestor imagery was placed in patios and plazas in an upright position, as if standing, and it was impossible to pass by without giving them "recognition" and "acceptance." Despite their recurrence, representations of ancestors showed differences between one another, suggesting a desire to display a particular individuality. The face, for instance, was an important locus of recognition and was a means for the adscription and recognition of individual and group identity (e.g., through facial markers and paints). Likewise, different types of facial and ear ornaments, headdresses, and other bodily ornaments could have indicated an identity, affiliation, or rank among the ancestral entities themselves (Lau 2013). In addition, the head was an essential locus of interaction and was considered the prime vehicle of communication and direct mediator between the social actors and ancestors. As Lau (2013, 64) states: "the physical interaction was directed to the ancestor's ears (songs), nose (aromas), and mouth (feeding). The eyes were an important means for co-presence and ubiquity. The always oversized and wide-open eyes marked the ancestor's capacity to witness, observe, and give acquiescence of living people's action."

Figure 4.11. Shabti figure of individual placed in burial (FM 31605.A and .B), and scarab amulet (FM 238009), symbolizing immortality and resurrection, top and bottom.

Figure 4.12. Mummified remains of an Egyptian cat (late first millennium BCE), perhaps an offering to the cat-headed goddess Bast or a revered pet (FM 111505).

Figure 4.13. Shabtis: figures of individuals placed in the burials to act as servants for the deceased in the afterlife (FM 31024, 31029, 24423.1, 31031).

In general, the inability to interact with ancestors, either in their real or representational form, could have been seen as a critical rupture with the divine forces, and the physical absence of the ancestor as something tragically irremediable. If the capacity to materialize the presence of the ancestor into something tangible was absent, then that could have symbolized the oblivion of, and disaffect by, that powerful ancestor (see Kusimba in this volume).

Sensoriality and Experience

Sensorial perceptions are important aspects of death-related rituals and performances. Although many have argued that senses must be understood as culturally constructed, linguistically determined, and essentially arbitrary and unfettered by the external world, we cannot deny that memory is "put to work" when senses are properly stimulated (Connerton 1989). Yannis Hamilakis (2013) argues that sensorial experiences from the past are not ephemeral but, rather, material phenomena, as they require contact with the material in order to be activated. However, performance scholars argue that the body does not need the material to activate its own stimuli, as the body remembers through its own corporeal and kinetic memory (Giannachi, Kaye, and Shanks 2012). During death-related rituals and performances, sight, sound, touch, hearing, and smell, and other senses, either working independently or synesthetically (all together), are, ultimately, the means through which we connect with emotions and activate memory. We can safely say that the effectiveness of the production of meanings, emotions, and memory during funerary performances is highly reliant on the level of stimulus of our senses.

Music and auditive sensations are key in the ritual experience of the death, and it is particularly the control and the manipulation of sound, in its various manifestations, that were sought in the past (and even in the present) to create augmented sensorial experiences. Wind instruments (and their potent vibratory amplitude), such as the ones documented in archaeological contexts from the Andean region (Figures 4.1–4.3), were likely used as means of overture of mortuary performances, as well as of invocation of the ancestral presence. In the ancient Andes, flutes, panpipes, *pututo* conch trumpets, and whistles—as well as the still poorly studied whistling bottles that produced sound through an interplay of water, air, and matter within the ceramic bodies (Figure 4.4)—were played in performance settings, such as the circular sunken plaza of Caral (3000 BCE) or the underground galleries of Chavín de Huantar (1200 BCE). In general, music set the mood and enabled the initiation of an extraordinary time, of liminality, when the participant begins a process of social reconfiguration.

Wind instruments as the ones displayed in this exhibit were manufactured using materials such as bone, ceramic, and reed, and it is believed that the zoomorphic depictions rendered on some of them had a relationship with the type of sound the instrument could reproduce—and even instruments generating meaningless or clangorous (to modern ears) sounds could have been highly desired in ritual settings. Nasca whistles with bird representations, for example, produced sounds as high-pitched as the ones produced by desert hummingbirds from the south coast of Peru, and the connection between these particular animals and the Nasca ancestors seems to have been manifested through their representation in gigantic geoglyphs drawn on the desert, which can only be seen from the sky and mountains.

Although still poorly studied, musicians in Andean funerary rituals could have fulfilled particularly important roles, not only through their performative skills, but also their capacity to create sounds and vibrations that were considered "stabilizing" of the chaos (La Chioma 2018). Cosmogonic myths ethnographically collected in the Amazon region, for example, highlight the role of music and musicians in the process of both creation and destruction of the world. As recounted by Eduardo Huárag Álvarez (2018), for the Amazon native people from the Marañón Basin, the world is believed to have been created by a female musician-priestess who, with the help of their ancestors and other divine forces, travels around the woods while playing a flute. This flute was then hidden in her genitals.

The role of musicians was greatly appreciated in the past and, perhaps, was a symbol of status and prestige. In iconographic representations, Moche musicians are depicted lavishly dressed and participating in large-scale funerary performances and processions celebrated in Moche temples, along with ritual officers, dancers, and skeletal figures representing ancestors. Musicians with particular disabilities (e.g., lip and nose deformation) were considered mediators between the world of the living and the dead: they had the capacities to transit between different worlds, linking the mundane and spiritual (Figure 4.5). Moche Musicians typically played percussion instruments (drums and rattles) during the ritual enactments and, sometimes, used their own body to produce sounds. Percussive sounds helped create paused rhythms marking time during rituals and, as Jerry Moore has noted, percussion, and drumming in particular, could have been key in large-scale Chimú funerary spectacles to drive away evil spirits, encourage the soul on its own flight, summon the spirits, and create social solidarity through a shared sensitive experience (Moore 2006). Similarly, for the Moche, it has been proposed that rattles were rhythmically played during funerary spectacles in order to "awaken" the ancient ancestors (Bourget 2006) and help reopen the underworld, so the newly converted ancestor could emerge victoriously from it.

4C   The Ghanaian Fantasy Canoe Coffin: A Box with Proverbs

Foreman Bandama

Field Museum

When unmitigated against, death may mark the end of many people's dreams, but throughout the world many families use burials and associated grave goods to ensure that the wishes of the dead are met. Beyond wishes, funerary objects are used to communicate and celebrate deceased's occupation, familial identity, and social position (Otto 2019). In Ghana in West Africa, a combination of chance and curiosity in the face of the changing colonial and postcolonial dynamics surrounding death, leadership, and community relationships led to a twentieth-century tradition of elaborate fantasy coffins.

Under the British colonial law dating back to 1888, Ghanaians were forced to use public cemeteries, as opposed to the traditional, relatively private, burial under house floors. By the 1930s, the people of Ghana were already warming up to the idea of abandoning basket- and mat-wrappings in favor of coffins (Gundlach 2017). The transition to fantasy coffins was spurred by the Ga people's long tradition of figurative palanquins that were used exclusively by the chiefs (Secretan 1995; Bonetti 2010). A palanquin is a one-passenger box or seat carried on two horizontal poles by four or six bearers. Both figurative palanquins and fantasy coffins relied on a deeply rooted practice of commissioning crafts, but skewed access to wealth and power meant that the elites were the ones who had the luxury and political muscle to commission the best works.

For a long time, Ghanaians and their neighboring communities used palanquins (also commonly known as sedan chairs) as figurative royal coffins. In the 1950s, among the Ga people, the dominant ethnic group of the region of Accra in Ghana, what started off as a routine figurative royal palanquin for a local chief turned into reality when a cocoa-pod-shaped palanquin was used as the actual coffin of the commissioning chief, who died unexpectedly before the festival (Kreamer 1994). The unique coffin drew many admirers beyond royalty. Inspired by the enthusiasm of the crowds at the chief's funeral, Seth Kane Kwei (1925–92), one of the cocoa-pod-coffin carpenters made an airplane-shaped coffin for his grandmother who died not long after the first palanquin coffin event. His grandmother grew up in Teshie, a coastal suburb near Accra's airport and was fascinated by the idea of planes, but she never got the chance to fly. By burying her in an airplane-shaped coffin, Kane Kwei ensured that his grandmother would fly into eternity but, more importantly, this seeded the idea that even commoners can choose to celebrate death in palanquin coffins.

Several local people began to request customized fantasy coffins soon after the airplane coffin event (Figure 4.14). As the practice became widespread, the Ga people gave these coffins a new name: *Abebuu adekai* meaning boxes with proverbs. The motifs of the coffins revealed a number of things: (1) the message for perpetuity of one's profession (for instance, a fisherman would be buried in a boat-shaped coffin); (2) the dreams and aspirations of the deceased, such as a plane or a luxurious car; (3) character or temperament, such as a coffin in the shape of a red-hot chili pepper for an assertive person; or (4) status (for instance, certain animal shapes such as the elephant were reserved for high-ranking officials) (Van Der Geest 2000; Otto 2019; Gundlach 2017).

The tradition never lacked admirers and soon its popularity spread beyond the borders of the Ga people of the Accra region, to the Ashanti region (Kumasi), the Ewé region, and even as far as parts of Togo. It also did not take long for the fantasy coffins to catch the attention of Western museums which began collecting and commissioning several examples for their own museum displays in the 1970s. Seth Kane Kwei remained one of the household names, together with a few others, such as Joseph Ashong, popularly known as Paa Joe (Otto 2019). Kane Kwei and Paa Joe have since been featured in several art festivals, shows, and galleries around the world because of these fantasy coffins. It was within this context that the canoe-shaped Ghanaian Fantasy Coffin which appears in this exhibition was produced by Seth Kane Kwei himself in 1989. The shape is consistent with the motifs of Ga fishermen, who used to carve and place a little dummy-canoe on the graves of their deceased, long before fantasy coffins were introduced (Potocnik 2018). The canoe-shaped coffin was on display at a gallery in Los Angeles, and was produced just three years before the death of Kane Kwei. His family continued the workshop and its tradition, and the workshop is now managed by his grandson, Eric Adjetey Anang, an artist and master coffin maker himself (http://www.kanekwei.com/past-events). The business is generally a high earner, with a typical fantasy coffin costing nearly as much as an average Ghanaian earns in a year.

The commissioning and acquisition of fantasy coffins for museum and art gallery displays necessitated additional changes. For instance, coffins destined for burial were typically made from light wood such as *Altonia boonei* but those manufactured for Western museum displays are now made from hard wood such as *Terminalia superba* or African mahogany (*Khaya ivorensis*; http://www.kanekwei.com/past-events).

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Death as Politics and Politics as Spectacle

For some societies, life goes with death in such an important way that life cannot go on if death is not "performed" first. The spectacularity and exuberance of some mortuary performances, and the great investment of labor, time, and energy put into them, make these enactments arenas for political consolidation and negotiation, as well as subversion. Clifford Geertz (1980), for example, notes that the poetics and aesthetics of funerary spectacles were indispensable for constructing institutionalized power in nineteenth-century Balinese Negara. The tangible images of the ruler's body and state buildings and the collective acts of their public display were critical to what many individuals consciously recognized as the established social order. The dramatic displays of state symbols not only constituted a political strategy of governance, but were the state in their own right: "theatre-states" (Geertz 1980, 93). In this sense, the state was (re)created insofar as death was celebrated under public scrutiny as the corpse of the ruler personified statehood.

But the power of death and its deep influence on politics and governance have clear correlates even in our day. The large and spectacular funerary processions that preceded the burial, for example, of the US former president John F. Kennedy, the Argentinian first lady Eva Peron, and Pope John Paul II are eloquent displays of the potent symbolism of the dead body, as well as the real power that is inscribed in it while seen by, and moved through, thousand if not millions of spectators. The funerals of these important individuals produced profound impacts on the societies to which they belonged, and time and space were particularly reconfigured while their deaths were "performed." The deaths of these charismatic leaders shocked people at first, but then people collectively participated in their funerals, while witnessing an exuberant display of state paraphernalia and religious emblems that visually reinforced political discourses of domination and hierarchical power structures. Walking through their tombs, visiting their memorial monuments, whether collectively or individually, and living through their predicaments are clear signs of how death, power, and politics are particularly intertwined with each other.

This has important parallels in both the past and present. In fact, Foucault (1977) argued that, in premodern times, power was exercised through spectacle, and that institutionalized discipline in particular was manifested through "was what was seen, what was shown, and what was manifested" (quoted in Inomata and Coben 2006, 26). Namely, power was body-centered and exercised through control of the body's freedom and of its emotions and perceptions. The conversion of ancient political and religious leaders into gods or goddesses through complex rituals of deification had potent effects on the viewers and the ways they perceived political and social reality. As happened in ancient Rome and Angkor, the "god-king after corporeal demise went on to a condition of immortality" (Renfrew 2016, 9), and this immortality and divinity of the sovereign constituted the basis of the political articulation and legitimacy of the system as a whole. From the deceased buried beneath the house floors of Çatalhöyük to the Incan mummies paraded through the Coricancha plaza, it was the power of what was seen and shown through such spaces that sedimented, in the witnesses' minds, a perception, as well as justification, of a given political and social order. And this happens even in our times.

Now, death continues to be intimately linked to politics and power along with inequality and inequity. While death is a universal phenomenon, it is not experienced in the same way by groups across the globe. As this exhibit also shows, economic, social, racial, and ethnic differences also determine the ways in which people suffer, and display their suffering, when facing death. In Latin America, my own home region, experiences around death are tragically disproportionate. While some bury their deceased with great pomp, others, from historically marginalized groups, cannot even find the bodies of their loved ones, because they were victims of armed conflict, forced migrations, institutionalized violence, or gender-based crimes, among other causes. Whereas in developed nations, to not bury your loved one with the deserved love and affection might often seem unthinkable, in developing nations some people have been deprived of their right to know what has happened to their missing relatives.

Figure 4.14. Ghanaian wood coffin of a canoe with rowers by Seth Kane Kwei, ca. 1981 (FM 361842.1-.12).

Figure 4.15. Ancestral shrine at Bungule, Kasigau, Taita-Taveta County, Kenya.

4D   Tsavo Shrines

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Throughout our history, humankind has developed myriad ways to remember the dead, from leaving them in their homes to burying them at sea. Many of these ways leave no trace, so we may never fully appreciate how some communities memorialized the dead. We can, however, understand the pain they endured and continue to endure when we lose loved ones. Still, there remains a considerable bias in how the dead were remembered. Today's archaeological record mostly recounts the narratives of the elite, whose relatives could afford to inter the remains of their loved ones. For the most part, the remains of commoners were often discarded in the wilderness. However, archaeologists utilize the few memorials available to determine how each society viewed and dealt with death.

A Field Museum anthropological archaeology expedition in the Tsavo National Park in southeast Kenya recovered several hundred graves, cemeteries, cairns, and skull interment sites (Kusimba and Kusimba 2000). These memorial sites belonged to ancestors of Kenyan people who inhabited the Tsavo plains until they were designated a national park in 1948. These memorial sites provided the most substantial evidence of identities, mortuary behavior, and the people's belief systems during the precolonial period before many converted to Christianity and Islam. The cairns housed the remains of the pastoral Oromo; the graves were variously attributed to the agropastoral Wambisha and Wataita, who inhabited the Tsavo plains before warfare instigated by drought, disease, and the slave trade forced them to migrate to the Taita, Saghala, and Kasigau Hills. These migrants were to eke out a living on the congested hill for the next four centuries, after which peaceful coexistence was reestablished following the abolition of the slave trade and the advent of European colonial rule in the late nineteenth century. How did the people of southeast Kenya maintain relationships with the ancestral shrines which they abruptly abandoned in the Tsavo plains? How and in what ways did their new refuge residences influence their mortuary behavior and practices?

The Field Museum expedition recovered evidence indicating that as they moved to new, more congested hills, these refugees radically changed how they memorialized their ancestors. Slavery, famine, disease, and other crises had forced them to adopt a nomadic lifestyle which involved them regularly moving with little warning. Many adopted a mortuary behavior pattern of migrating with their ancestors. Beginning from the sixteenth century, instead of burying the dead in graves, they began to disinter their ancestors' skulls and built shrines for them wherever they settled. To maintain strong bonds between ancestors and their descendants, the ancestors were regularly propitiated with gifts of food and drink. They reciprocated by protecting their descendants from calamities and crises like drought, diseases, sterility, and witchcraft. Large partially broken pots and gourds found at interment sites were used in the ceremonial feasting that occurred at these sites.

Our team recovered four such shrine sites in the Tsavo region. One was located in a deep ravine in Sungululu village near Wundanyi town. This one contained 26 skulls, including one of a sheep. The second was found in Kajire, a rocky promontory above the central zone of habitation on Saghala Hills, which included more than 300 cranial remains arranged in different areas of a composite of rocky outcrops. The third was found in Bungule in the Kasigau Hills (Figure 4.15). The Bungule shrine bore 45 individuals. The fourth was the shrine in Makwasinyi, Kasigau Hills, which contained 25 individual skulls.

Elders from the Sungululu community related that the skull of sheep stood in for an ancestor who was lost to the community in a slaving raid. His body was never interred with the ancestors and his mortal remains never returned to his community after his disappearance. Yet he is remembered by those he left behind, and the skull of an animal fulfills his place in the relocated shrine in the Tsavo Hills. Sometimes, an individual's removal from his community marks his social death, as his physical death and mortal remains are never seen by those family members who were ripped from his existence.

Informants confirmed that the groups of cranial remains represented their patrilineage of ancestors. Individuals would be buried in graves for two years, following which the deceased's skull would be disinterred and placed in a cranial display niche. Only married individuals with children were disinterred. Although the practice of disinterring ancestral skulls declined in the 1920s following conversion to Christianity and the colonial decree which discouraged the practice, informants argued that the skulls' rituals continued into the 1950s. The shrines of Tsavo remind us that physical death does not mean an end to familial relationship. Shrines ensure continuity and permanence between the dead, the living, and the unborn.

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Death and performances around it are continuously used to model experiences in the world. Don Handelman (1990) introduces the term "technology of events" to indicate how the logic of design of public spectacles dictates the way in which one perceives social and political reality. His proposed typology of events—"events that present," "events that model," and "events that re-present"—makes explicit reference to the constant manipulation of the design, as well as the internal setting, of the events in order to project and impose on participants desired notions of society, performances of death being an advantageous opportunity for such a process.

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, death should not worry us to the extent that we will not really face the aftermath of our own death. But perhaps this is an unfair characterization and death should worry us, after all, as this will be a continuous arena of dispute for justice and dignity for those that we leave behind. And although death always finds its own ways to make us face the imbalance of power present in our society, death also presents us with the opportunity to reinterpret, subvert, and openly criticize the preexisting social orders, fighting through the power of our actions and performances.

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Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Death

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Abstract: Jewish and Christian perspectives on death are examined in this thematic essay, and emphasis is given to Christianity, the area of the author's expertise, with comparisons to Judaism within each of the topics to be explored. The essay examines the origin of death, living while dying, dying and the dead, and, finally, what is thought to be beyond death. Importantly, Judaism and Christianity look forward to the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one (Judaism) or his return. This messianic outlook means that what is beyond death is not only personal or communal eternal life, but, more centrally, the reign of God throughout the whole of reality. The case studies explore examples of Christian and Jewish traditions, including syncretism with Indigenous religions and perspectives from other world religions.

Resumen: En este capitulo se examinan las perspectivas judías y cristianas sobre la muerte. Se da énfasis al cristianismo, el área de especialización del autor, con comparaciones con el judaísmo dentro de cada uno de los temas a explorar. El ensayo examina el origen de la muerte, el "vivir muriendo," el morir y los muertos y, finalmente, lo que se piensa que hay más allá de la muerte. Es importante destacar que el judaísmo y el cristianismo esperan la llegada del Mesías, el ungido (judaísmo) o su regreso. Esta perspectiva mesiánica significa que lo que está más allá de la muerte no es sólo la vida eterna personal o comunitaria, sino, más centralmente, el reino de Dios en toda su extensión. Los artículos aquí contenidos exploran ejemplos de tradiciones cristianas y judías, incluyendo el sincretismo con las religiones indígenas y las perspectivas de otras religiones del mundo.

Religion and Death

It is often argued that the origin of religion is fear, especially fear of forces beyond human control and particularly death. From ancient thinkers, like the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE), to Enlightenment thinkers such as Scottish philosophers David Hume (1711–1776) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), the origin of religion and ideas about the gods and an afterlife originate in the fear and wish-fulfillment of death. God is to be worshipped and obeyed in order to diminish fear and relieve guilt, or rituals and practices are meant to provide relief from fear and its causes. Whether or not that is a sufficient explanation of the origin of religion, there are good reasons to doubt it. The fact remains that the world's religions do provide realistic responses to the fact of human death. However, it is also true that the religions insist that death is not the final word or the meaning of finite reality. Whether in Hindu ideas of rebirth (Figures 5.1–5.3), Buddhist ideas about Nirvana as extinguishing the fire of desire and releasing the person from the cycle of suffering, Christian conceptions of Heaven as union with or vision of the Divine, or belief among Indigenous religions in the power of ancestors to aid one in the present life, religions hold that death is not the ultimate horizon of human existence. This double perspective must be kept in mind as this essay explores death in Judaism and Christianity. That is, religions realistically face the fact of death and yet also insist that it is not

the ultimate truth of human existence. It is this double perspective on death that allows one to compare and contrast religious traditions.

I emphasize Christian perspectives on death, the area of the my expertise, and compare to Judaism within each of the topics to be explored. Of course, every religious tradition is exceedingly complex, with many different beliefs and practices internal to and shared between religions. Given that reality, a comprehensive treatment of Judaism or Christianity, much less their comparison, is impossible. Accordingly, I will examine the origin of death, living while dying, dying and the dead, and, finally, what is thought to be beyond death. Importantly, Judaism and Christianity look forward to the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one (Judaism) or Christ's return (Christianity). This messianic outlook means that what is beyond death is not only eternal life, but, more centrally, the reign of God throughout the whole of reality.

The Origin of Death

Judaism is more a religion of practice, unlike Christianity with its many creeds and doctrines. Life is valued by Jews almost above all else. The Talmud, the basic compendium of Jewish *Torah* (law or teaching), even states that, since all people are descendants of one man (Adam), to take a life is like destroying the world. To save a life is to save the world. Death as a