Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

In the Context of 8th-6th Century B.C.E. Babylonian, Assyrian and Elamite Funerary Practice

Yasmina Wicks
Honours Thesis 2012

From left to right: bronze “bathtub” coffins from Arjän, Râm Hormuz, Ur (PG1), Ur (PG2) Nimrud and Zincirli
Abstract

Central to this thesis are a small number of unique bronze “bathtub” coffins found in 8th–6th century B.C.E. Babylonian, Assyrian and Elamite burial contexts. These fascinating burial containers have not previously been subject to an in-depth analysis, but rather have been treated by archaeologists as little more than convenient receptacles for a body and numerous precious objects deemed more worthy of scholarly interest. This thesis takes the opportunity to narrow this gap in scholarship, by firstly drawing together the available evidence for the excavated coffins, investigating the method and place of their manufacture, and establishing a possible date range for their production and use. Then, to progress towards an understanding of the bronze “bathtub” coffin burials within the broader context of regional funerary practices, they are incorporated into an analysis of Neo-Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Elamite mortuary evidence, with a particular focus on burial typology, grave goods and burial location.

The use of the bronze “bathtubs” as burial receptacles also demands that they be viewed in light of Mesopotamian and Elamite beliefs about what happens to people upon their death, and what the funerary ritual should involve. This thesis therefore explores the coffins in the context of these beliefs and then, building upon this analysis, considers possible ideological aspects of the coffins with emphasis on motifs, form and material, and why these may have been appropriate in a burial context. Underpinning this study is the principle that mortuary evidence is the product of intentional behaviour and that the bronze coffins, and indeed all burial containers, were not simply incidental to the funerary process. Instead they represent a deliberate choice by the burying group and each would have been the central feature of an emotionally and symbolically charged burial act.

One feature of the bronze coffin burials that emerges throughout much of the analysis is their undeniable role in the expression, or even construction, of social rank. This role is consistent across all of the burials, which evidently belonged to individuals (or burying groups) of extremely high-status (measured by wealth). Based on the understanding that the bronze “bathtubs” were used in the construction and maintenance of socio-cultural ideology in Babylonia, Assyria and Elam, the known historical interaction between these three cultures is examined in the final section of the thesis, with a view to establishing the extent to which the coffins can be considered as belonging to a shared funerary practice.
Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... i
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................... v
1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 1
2. Literature Review ......................................................................................................................... 3
   2.1. Death and Burial in Ancient Mesopotamia and Elam ................................................................. 3
   2.2. Early-Mid First Millennium Death and Burial ........................................................................ 5
       2.2.1. Burial Data ......................................................................................................................... 5
       2.2.2. Beliefs about Death, the Afterlife and Funerary Ritual .................................................... 10
       2.2.3. The Bronze Coffins ......................................................................................................... 10
   2.3. Closing the Gap ...................................................................................................................... 12
3. Methodology .................................................................................................................................. 13
   3.1. Method ..................................................................................................................................... 13
   3.2. Limitations and Biases ........................................................................................................... 16
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus ............................................................................................ 18
   4.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 18
   4.2. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins ................................................................................................ 18
       4.2.1. The Ur Coffins ................................................................................................................... 18
       4.2.2. The Nimrud Coffins ......................................................................................................... 20
       4.2.3. The Arjān Coffin .............................................................................................................. 24
       4.2.4. The Rām Hormuz Coffins ............................................................................................... 26
       4.2.5. The Zincirli Coffin ........................................................................................................... 28
       4.2.6. Unprovenanced Examples ............................................................................................... 28
   4.3. Manufacture ........................................................................................................................... 31
   4.4. Workshops ............................................................................................................................. 33
   4.5. Dating ...................................................................................................................................... 35
5. Burial Typology .................................................................................................................. 37
  5.1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 37
  5.2. Babylonia ...................................................................................................................... 37
    5.2.1. Burial Typology ................................................................................................. 37
    5.2.2. Grave Goods ....................................................................................................... 41
    5.2.3. Burial Location ................................................................................................. 41
    5.2.4. Summary Discussion ......................................................................................... 42
  5.3. Assyria ......................................................................................................................... 43
    5.3.1. Burial Typology ................................................................................................. 43
    5.3.2. Grave Goods ....................................................................................................... 46
    5.3.3. Burial Location ................................................................................................. 47
    5.3.4. Summary Discussion ......................................................................................... 47
  5.4. Elam ........................................................................................................................... 48
    5.4.1. Burial Typology ................................................................................................. 48
    5.4.2. Grave Goods ....................................................................................................... 50
    5.4.3. Burial Location ................................................................................................. 51
    5.4.4. Summary Discussion ......................................................................................... 52
  5.5. Summarising the Burial Data and a Return to the “Bathtub” Coffins ......................... 53

6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral ................................................................................. 56
  6.1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 56
  6.2. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral in Mesopotamia .................................................. 56
    6.2.1. The Underworld ................................................................................................. 56
    6.2.2. The Ghost ......................................................................................................... 58
    6.2.3. The Funeral ....................................................................................................... 60
    6.2.4. Ongoing Care for the Dead ............................................................................... 65
  6.3. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral in Elam ................................................................. 67
6.4. Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins in the Context of Beliefs about Death and the Afterlife and Funerary Ritual ............................................................................................................. 69

7. Ideological Aspects of the Bronze “Bathtub” Burials .................................................. 72

7.1. Introduction ............................................................................................................. 72

7.2. Location, Orientation and Body Arrangement ....................................................... 72

7.2.1. Location ............................................................................................................. 72

7.2.2. Orientation and Body Arrangement .................................................................... 73

7.3. Form, Material and Iconography of the Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins ....................... 74

7.3.1. Form .................................................................................................................. 74

7.3.2. Material ............................................................................................................. 76

7.3.3. Iconography ...................................................................................................... 80

7.4. Social Rank ........................................................................................................... 81

7.5. Conclusions .......................................................................................................... 84

8. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins in Historical Context ................................................. 85

8.1. Introduction .......................................................................................................... 85

8.2. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin in the context of Assyrian, Babylonian and Elamite Interaction .............................................................................................................. 85

8.3. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin: a Shared Funerary Tradition? ............................... 91

9. Conclusions and Further Directions ......................................................................... 94

9.1. Conclusions .......................................................................................................... 94

9.2. Future Directions .................................................................................................. 95

Appendix 1. Figures ...................................................................................................... 99

Appendix 2. Texts .......................................................................................................... 126

Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins ...................................................... 135

Works Cited .................................................................................................................. 161
List of Figures

Figure 1 – Map indicating main sites mentioned in text.
Figure 2 – Plan of Ur showing location of the giparu of Kurigalzu within the temenos wall.
Figure 3 – Ur PG1 and PG2 burial chambers.
Figure 4 - Ur bronze “bathtub” coffins PG1 and PG2 with contents.
Figure 5 – Ur “bathtub” coffins PG1 and PG2 in situ.
Figure 6 – Ur PG1 coffin handles.
Figure 7 - Side-strips from PG1 and PG2.
Figure 8 – Plan of the southern section of the North-West Palace of Ashurnasirpal showing room 57, which overlies Tomb III.
Figure 9 - Nimrud Tomb III and antechamber showing Coffin 1, 2 and 3.
Figure 10 – Coffin 2 in situ and in the Mosul Museum.
Figure 11 - Coffin 2 in the Mosul Museum.
Figure 12 - Location of the Arjān Tomb on the left bank of the Marun River.
Figure 13 - Image and line drawings of the Arjān tomb chamber and contents.
Figure 14 - Line drawings of the Arjān coffin and contents and photograph of the coffin.
Figure 15 – The Arjān coffin handles, lid handle and lid fragment.
Figure 16 – Approximate location of the Rām Hormuz burial chamber on the left bank of the Ala River.
Figure 17 – Location of the Rām Hormuz chamber.
Figure 18 – Rām Hormuz tomb chamber with bronze coffin fragments in situ and line drawing of the burials.
Figure 19 – Fragments of the Rām Hormuz west coffin and east coffin in the National Museum of Iran.
Figure 20 - Plan of Zincirli palace indicating room L8 where the bronze “bathtub” was found.
Figure 21 – Bronze “bathtub” from Zincirli and handle detail.
Figure 22 – Bronze “bathtub” said to be from Dailaman-Amlash with side-strip detail.
Figure 23 – Fragments of the “Ziwiye coffin rim.
Figure 24 – Relief images from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (858-824).
Figure 25 – “Ziwiye” side-strip fragments.
Figure 26 – Parthian bronze coffin and skeleton reportedly found near Khorramabad in Lurestan.
Figure 27 – Bronze “bathtub” said to be from eastern Anatolia.
Figure 28 – Aspects of manufacture indicated in photograph of Ur PG1 and line drawing of the Arjān coffin.
Figure 29 – Bronze coffin handles: a. Ur PG1 coffin; b. Arjān coffin; c. Rām Hormuz coffin; d. Zincirli coffin.
Figure 30 – The Arjān coffin bronze lid fragment.
Figure 31 - Burial types: a. tomb chamber; b. earth/pit grave; c. sherd grave.
Figure 32 – Single pot burial types.
Figure 33 – Double-pot burial types.
Figure 34 – Jar burials types.
Figure 35 – Burial types: a. ceramic box-shaped coffin; b. bowl; c. “bathtub” bowl; d. oval coffin.
Figure 36 – “Bathtub” coffin burial.

Figure 37 – Assyrian burials: a. brick grave; b. composite grave.

Figure 38 – Floor plan of the kings’ tombs under the Old Palace at Aššur.

Figure 39 – Stone sarcophagus of Shamshi-Adad V (Tomb II) at Aššur.

Figure 40 – Reconstructed lid of Ashurnasirpal’s sarcophagus from Tomb V at Aššur.

Figure 41 – Reconstruction of possible method of placing the lid on Ashurnasirpal’s sarcophagus in Tomb V at Aššur.

Figure 42 – Humaidat tomb chamber: stone sarcophagus; tomb chamber plan; terracotta U-shape coffin with lid; stone slab doors on pivots separating the antechamber and main chamber.

Figure 43 – Humaidat tomb chamber demonstrating use of double stone-slab doors in the arched doorway separating the tomb and antechamber.

Figure 44 – Yaba’s stone coffin in Tomb II of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud; Yaba’s funerary tablet in the niche of Tomb II; storage jars and a cremation burial in alabaster jar in a niche in the wall of tomb II.

Figure 45 – Neo-Elamite modelled clay funerary heads from Susa.

Figure 46 – Coffin from Susa; line drawings of coffins from graves 129 and 130 at Babylon.

Figure 47 – Persian period bronze “bathtub” coffin from Susa.

Figure 48 – Double-handled “coffin” from Alaca Höyük.

Figure 49 – Terracotta “feeding tube” in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud Tomb II; terracotta coffin from Susa with feeding hole.

Figure 50 – Kurangun open air sanctuary relief panel showing god with flowing water.

Figure 51 – Early Dynastic period basin from the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu (Tello), c. 2500-2300 B.C.E.

Figure 52 – “Bathtub” shaped depressions in the floor of rooms interpreted as bathrooms in Sargon’s palace at Khorsabad and the Northwest Palace at Nimrud.

Figure 53 – Fragments of a glazed panel from Khorsabad depicting a goat standing on a rosette.

Figure 54 – Kneeling terracotta figurine from the Gula Temple at Isin and the altar of Tukulti-Ninurta I.
[...] mankind

They took [...] for his destiny.

[...] you have toiled without cease, what have you got?

Through toil you are wearing [yourself] out,

You are filling your body with grief,

You are bringing forward the end of your days.

Mankind, which is like a reed in the cane-brake, is snapped off.

Man and woman in full flower of youth

[...] death.

No one can see death.

No one can see the face of death.

No one [can hear] the voice of death.

But savage death snaps off mankind.

For how long do we bring families into existence?

For how long do we make wills?

For how long do brothers divide the inheritance?

For how long is there to be jealousy in the land(?) among sons(?)?

For how long has the river risen and brought the flood?

So that dragonflies drift on the river,

Their faces staring into the face of the sun god?

Suddenly there is nothing.

The prisoner and the dead are alike,

Death itself cannot be depicted,

But Lullu - man - is incarcerated.

After they had pronounced the blessing on me,

The Anunnaku, the great gods, were assembled,

And Mammitum, creatress of destiny, Decreed destinies with them.

They established life and death.

Death they fixed to have no ending.¹

¹ Lines 4-32 of a late Babylonian version for the Epic of Gilgameš (Lambert 1980, 55).
1. Introduction

From the perspective of ancient Mesopotamians, death was an undesirable but universal and inevitable fact of life which, much like today, was met with varying degrees of emotional acceptance. Textual and archaeological records of both Mesopotamia and neighbouring Elam reveal that death and the dead were of great concern for the living, whose beliefs about the hereafter demanded the maintenance of mutually beneficial links between living and dead family members. The first step in the creation of this link was the burial of the corpse in an appropriate place, accompanied by a funeral and the performance of the correct death rituals.

Almost all of our archaeological evidence for Mesopotamian and Elamite mortuary practice is in the form of inhumation, and because the act of burial is significant, imbued with meaning and often carefully planned, these inhumations provide access to the intentional behaviour of the burying group and may be used with care to make inferences about beliefs concerning death and the afterlife and the construction of social ideology. In the last few decades scholars have moved away from early diffusionist/historical approaches, which tended to view burials as “objects”, to focus instead on social and cultural aspects of mortuary practice, although this shift has occurred at a significantly slower rate for the archaeologists of Mesopotamia and Iran. Arguably the most overlooked aspect of the mortuary record in these regions has been the burial container, which would have in fact been the central feature in the emotionally and symbolically charged act of burial.

In a step towards rectifying this oversight, the present thesis focuses on a small corpus of bronze U-shaped burial receptacles from Mesopotamia and Elam, dubbed “bathtub” coffins for their characteristic apsidal shape, reminiscent of 19th and early 20th century bathtubs. This unusual corpus includes a total of nine excavated bronze “bathtub” coffins dating to the 8th-6th centuries B.C.E., two of which were found buried side-by-side at Ur in southern Babylonia, three together below the floor of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud in

---

3 Pearson 1999, 8.
4 Laneri 2007, 1.
5 The centrality of the coffin has been emphasised by Preston (2004, 178), who notes that “its close physical association with the corpse (which is often the material and emotional focus of the mortuary ritual) means that it may be highly charged symbolically. It is therefore an aspect of the mortuary record that can be informative for reconstructing attitudes towards death within societies that practised this form of burial.”
7 Note: all dates henceforth will be B.C.E.
northern Mesopotamia, and another three in the Zagros foothills of southwest Iran; one in a subterranean chamber at Arjān and two more in a chamber at Rām Hormuz. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this highly distinctive coffin type is that it occurs in burial contexts belonging to three cultures which are usually considered to be quite separate. One further bronze “bathtub” was excavated at Zincirli in North Syria, but had not been deposited in a mortuary context. A handful of other whole and fragmentary unprovenanced examples are known, but because they are without context will remain peripheral to the analysis.

The first aim of this work is to draw together the meagre published evidence for these coffins, which is presently spread across a range of disparate publications, and present them for the first time as a corpus to allow for a more cohesive discussion of aspects such as their archaeological contexts, the methods and place of their production, and their dating. This is an essential starting point, since the coffins are usually discussed only individually and rarely in any detail. It is the valuable objects found inside the coffins that have been the focus of scholarly attention and the coffins themselves only of interest as the subject of very limited art historical analysis and as a means for dating the assemblage of objects they contain.

The foundational premise of this thesis is that these few enigmatic bronze coffins left to us today were situated in a much broader picture of funerary practices in Mesopotamia and southwest Iran during the 8th to 6th centuries B.C.E., and their place within this overall picture demands exploration. Thus following a description of the corpus, the scope of the analysis is broadened to include other burial types found in Babylonia, Assyria and Elam so that the bronze coffins can be placed within this wider context. The conceptualisation of death and the afterlife and funerary practices of these societies, known through both texts and archaeology, are then examined and used as a framework for considering the possible meanings invested in the bronze coffins by the burying societies.

The coffins are approached as a corpus because of their near-identical appearance and manufacture methods and their relatively short time-span of production and use by three closely interacting societies. In the final section of the thesis the historical interaction between Babylonia, Assyria and Elam is examined in an attempt to establish the extent to which the corpus represents a shared funerary ideology and practice. To summarise, despite the fact that the coffin is a central feature in the burial act, the role of the bronze “bathtub” receptacles in the context of death and burial has been all but forgotten; a gap in the scholarship that I hope to narrow somewhat in the course of the ensuing discussion.
2. Literature Review

2.1. Death and Burial in Ancient Mesopotamia and Elam

In the last thirty years the topic of death and burial in ancient Mesopotamia and Iran has tentatively emerged as an area of scholarly interest. Prior to this time, the large volume of burial data, mostly recovered during early-mid 19th century excavations, had been primarily employed for the development of ceramic sequences and art historical analyses. Discussions of funerary practices were generally limited to imaginative reconstructions of grand burial ceremonies, with little interest shown in the systematic study of the excavated funerary material. Reflecting the perceived pre-eminence of textual studies over archaeology, any discussion of attitudes toward death and the hereafter tended to rely on Sumerian and Akkadian literature, drawing in archaeological evidence only to support particular textual interpretations. The recent interest in burial data may be partially attributed to the increased possibilities for analysing skeletal and other organic remains in comparison to the early periods, when this evidence was often ignored or discarded, but also reflects more widespread changes across the field of archaeology, which now employs burial data as a means for reconstructing mortuary practices, and pays particular attention to social aspects of funerary ritual.

Today both textual and archaeological evidence for funerary practices are incorporated into general overviews of ancient society in Mesopotamia and Iran, and analyses of site-specific funerary material are regularly published, yet it may still be observed that remarkably few publications have been wholly devoted to the theme of death and burial, and even regional typologies remain lacking or are in dire need of updating. The main publications presently available reveal the continued preference for using textual material in studies of funerary practices, and Bendt Alster’s (1980) edited volume *Death in Mesopotamia: Papers*

---

8 Such as those of Charles Leonard Woolley for Ur (Woolley 1930, 71-3) and Frank Hole for Susa (2010).
9 Potts (1997, 220) lists the main distinguished scholars who have written on these topics as: Meissner 1898, 59-66; Schötzinger 1978, 48-61; Afanasieva 1980, 161-9; Steiner 1982, 239-48; Cassin 1982, 355-72; Bottero 1982, 373-406; Tsukimoto 1985; Groneberg 1990, 244-61. See also Bottero 1980, 25-52; Jacobsen 1980, 19-24; Cooper 1992; Jonker 1995. For the privileging of the textual record see Zettler (1996, 81-2). The notion that the archaeological record may serve as ‘supplementary’ material to texts is still prevalent (see for example Scurlock 1995, 1883).
10 One such instance is the regular mention of the few examples clay ‘feeding’ pipe leading into a coffin or tomb, which seemingly provides physical, tangible evidence for the feeding of ghosts, a regular feature of texts (for example, Scurlock 1995, 1889).
11 For the interest in reconstructing funerary practice and the embedded social aspects of funerary ritual, see Laneri 2007, 1.
12 For example Pollock 1999, 196-217; Potts 1997, 220-35. See also Scurlock 1995.
2. Literature Review

*Read at the XXVIth Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale,* which is almost wholly centred upon textual evidence relating to beliefs about death and the afterlife, remains the major work on the topic. A more recent offering by Gerdien Jonker (1995), *The Topography of Remembrance: The Dead, Tradition and Collective Memory in Mesopotamia,* draws again primarily on textual evidence to provide an analysis of Mesopotamian practices pertaining to the commemoration of the dead, and similarly Dina Katz’s (2003) *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources* and Véronique Van der Stede’s (2007) *Mourir au pays des deux fleuves* look to Sumerian and Akkadian texts to study death in Mesopotamia, occasionally drawing in supporting archaeological evidence.

The major exception to the general underrepresentation of archaeological material in studies of Mesopotamian death and burial is the Early Dynastic period Royal Cemetery at Ur. The conspicuous consumption of wealth and apparent evidence for human sacrifice uncovered at this site has elicited continued debate surrounding third millennium funerary practices, religious beliefs and socio-political power structures, and has dominated the literature on death and burial. These burials and corresponding third millennium Sumerian conceptions of death and the afterlife are well-represented in general works about death and burial in the ancient world, while other periods are usually absent. Most recently Nicola Laneri’s (2007) edited volume *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* demonstrates this bias. In addition are numerous dedicated articles and Andrew Cohen’s (2005) *Death Rituals, Ideology, and the Development of Early Mesopotamian Kingship: Toward a New Understanding of Iraq’s Royal Cemetery of Ur,* which offer interpretations of Sumerian funerary ritual and the ideology of the Ur “royal” burials. The other primary area of interest has been mortuary practices of the earlier prehistoric Ubaid and Uruk periods in both Iran and Iraq. The most notable studies of this material are by Frank Hole and Susan Pollock, both of whom apply anthropological perspectives to their analysis of funerary ideology.

Death and burial practices after the third millennium have generally garnered little attention from scholars, and this statement is particularly true of the early-mid first millennium, for which scholarship is most clearly lacking. With this general background in

13 For a review of this literature see Pollock 2007, 209-10.
14 In this volume the chapters on funerary practices for Mesopotamia are “Sumerian Funerary Rituals in Context” by Dina Katz (pp. 167-88) and “Death of a Household” by Susan Pollock (pp.209-22), which
15 For example, Winter 1999; Sürenhagen 2002; Pollock 1991.
16 Pollock 1999, 196-217; 2007, 211-12; Hole 1989. Both of these authors have devoted substantial attention to the interpretation of the earliest periods of the site of Susa in Khuzistan, Iran.
2. Literature Review

place, the following sections outline literature specifically relevant to this period: 2.2.1: Neo-Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Elamite burial data; 2.2.2: analyses of beliefs and practices surrounding death and burial in the early-mid first millennium; and 2.2.3: bronze “bathtub” coffin literature.

2.2. Early-Mid First Millennium Death and Burial

2.2.1. Burial Data

Mesopotamian mortuary practices vary considerably across time and space, and we still lack a full or clear picture for any period.\(^\text{17}\) Most 8th-6th century burials in Babylonia, Assyria and Elam were poorly excavated during the early stages of the development of archaeological techniques and they have generally been insufficiently published in site excavation reports, if at all.\(^\text{18}\) The situation is equally dire, if not more so in Elam, where, as Javier Álvarez-Mon has lamented, the preliminary nature of excavation reports and failure of the excavators to produce comprehensive archaeological reports places any “critical, in depth, discussion” of funerary practices beyond reach.\(^\text{19}\)

In an assessment of funerary archaeology in ancient Iraq, Marie-Thérese Barrelet has highlighted that the data obtained, and now available to us, is dependent upon the interests and strategies of the excavators.\(^\text{20}\) The attitude of Sir Charles Leonard Woolley towards the burials at Ur is particularly revealing, and is important for scholars studying Mesopotamian burials to bear in mind, as it has serious consequences for analysis and interpretation of data:

> Generally speaking the interest of a grave lies in its contents. All graves containing anything at all, even a single pot, were duly noted in the field, and all the information so obtained has been utilised in the study of the pottery, but where that single pot was of a common type no further importance was attached to the grave and the latter was not included in the tabular analysis which, by such elimination, was reduced to manageable proportions.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{17}\) Seymour 2011, 784.
\(^\text{18}\) Hausleiter 1999, 127; Sürənəhən 2002, 325.
\(^\text{19}\) Álvarez-Mon (2005a, 119) makes this comment in relation to the enigmatic Elamite funerary heads from Susa. The planned MDP publication dedicated to the burials at Susa remains unpublished (Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 228).
\(^\text{20}\) Barrelet 1980, 3.
\(^\text{21}\) Woolley 1962, 52.
As well as the selective recording and publishing of funerary material, systematic excavation has focussed on large urban tell sites, so that if burials occurred outside these locations they are unlikely to have been found unless by accident. The taxonomic processes affecting the survival of various burial types are also an important consideration, and of course some methods of corpse disposal would have left no trace in the archaeological record.

Archaeologists like Woolley were more interested in making sensational finds and obtaining attractive and interesting pieces for the museums funding their work than the methodical recording and removing of stratigraphic layers, which was a task fraught with difficulty. As a result, publications of burial material are constrained by often unreliable stratigraphic contexts and highly selective and often poor and inconsistent recording in the field. Few burials were recorded with clear indications of orientation, body arrangement and other details that could be employed in studies of burial ideology, and the rare analysis of skeletal remains was directed towards questions of ethnicity. Usually the ‘worthless’ parts of the finds such as the burial container and skeletons were discarded, removing valuable data for the study of funerary practices. Even for relatively recent burials analyses of skeletons, soil and other organic materials including residues in ceramics, which might help reconstruct funerary rituals, are generally unavailable. For excavators of Babylonian, Assyrian and Elamite sites, burials were mere repositories of valuable objects and thus, ironically, while so much of the material published in art books and sitting on museum shelves was found in burials, we still know almost nothing about funerary practices.

**Babylonia**

Large numbers of Neo-Babylonian burials have been excavated at Babylon, Ur and Uruk, with several more at Isin, Kish, Nippur, Sippar, and Tell el-Laẖm. A selection of graves from the Merkes housing area at Babylon were published in 1926 by Oscar Reuther.

---

22 Barrelet 1980, 7; Cooper 1992, 23.
23 Cooper 1992, 23; Seymour 2011, 784.
24 The same problem applies for the excavations at Susa (Álvarez-Mon et al. 2011, 4). While stratigraphic methods have improved infinitely since these early periods, even archaeologists today bemoan the difficulty of assigning burials to stratigraphic layers on tell sites. For example Bartl (2011, 1) reports that at Tell Fekheriyeh it is rarely possible to determine the exact floor level from which the graves were dug into the ground due to later disturbances and pits.
25 This point has also been made by Baker (1995, 209) who notes that at Ur, for example, 400 burials were excavated but details of findspots and stratigraphy are mostly absent in Woolley’s (1962) excavation report.
26 Dalley 1998, 2.
27 Barrelet 1980, 3.
2. Literature Review

These are laid out by type and a limited number of sketches and photographs provided. A sample of the burials from Ur were presented by Woolley in 1962, several decades after their excavation, but his simple typology and tabulated burial data are not supported by visual material. The Uruk burials have been more recently published in a dedicated volume, *Uruk: Die Gräber* by Boehmer et al. (1995), in which the site’s 450 Neo/Late Babylonian burials are divided into very clearly defined types, with further division into sub-types. Finally, the burials at Nippur, Isin, Kish, Sippar and Tell el-Laḥm are published in the barest detail in their respective site excavation reports, in all cases without supporting images.

The Uruk volume offers by far the most complete publication of the burials at any of these sites and its detailed typology, accompanied by extensive photographs and line drawings, was a major resource for establishing burial types in this thesis. However, even this volume is not without its problems. Reviewers have noted that its detail is uneven, plans are only sporadically provided, grave goods are often not included and detailed skeletal information is available for only the 30 or so burials excavated since 1985 because the earlier excavators generally did not keep or analyse skeletal remains.

Presently just two scholars, Eva Strommenger and Heather Baker, have attempted to develop burial typologies and synthesise the data from across these sites. Strommenger arranged Reuther’s published graves from Babylon into a relative sequence and her work, a short article “Grabformen in Babylon” (1964), remains central to the study of southern Mesopotamian burials. Drawing heavily on Strommenger’s work, Heather Baker (1995) extended the scope of analysis to the remaining Neo-Babylonian sites. In her chapter “Neo-

---

28 Reuther 1926, 151-265.
29 Woolley 1962, 52-3, 57-87. Some of the items from the burials, particularly the jewellery, are displayed in the plates.
30 Additional information on the burials is included where available. For example, the skeletons from a limited number of the more recent burials had been analysed and the results are included. Pie charts are used to demonstrate the relative frequency of each type, followed by overviews of burial orientation, location and so on (Boehmer 1995, 36-9).
31 The Nippur burials were published by D. E. McCown and R.C. Haines (1964, 117-44); the Isin burials across a number of reports edited by B. Hrouda (1977; 1981; 1987); P. R. S. Moorey (1978) published a selection of burials from Kish; at Sippar a small selection of burials were published by Haerinck (1980); and F. Safar reported burials in his 1949, “Soundings at Tell Al-Laham.” *Sumer* 5: 154-64. As is the case for Woolley’s Ur report, selected objects from the burials are shown in these publications, but rarely the entire assemblage together with the coffin.
32 Emberling 1997, 170; Dunham 1999, 139. Furthermore, while maintaining a sympathetic stance regarding the limitations of this work due to the practices of early archaeologists, Emberling has criticised the publication on the basis that it focussed purely on grave form typology and chronology, failing to exploit the potential to analyse the Neo/Late Babylonian burials together with the objects and texts found in the houses with which they are associated. For Emberling, “while this is a useful beginning, one cannot help thinking that these data may yet provide richer insights into Mesopotamian society.”
2. Literature Review

Babylonian Burials Revisited” she aimed to provide an updated synthesis of all burials published in excavation reports (approximately 1,000 in total), including new material that had become available since Strommenger’s article, and to broaden the analysis beyond the typological to include other aspects of mortuary practice including burial location, treatment of the corpse, grave offerings and social differentiation. While Baker’s work is an extremely valuable contribution, since the publication of the Uruk burials her typology has been clearly in need of revision.

Assyria

Generally speaking, Neo-Assyrian burials have been only partially published or not at all. An exception to this is the site of Aššūr, which is by far the most significant Neo-Assyrian site in terms of the burials yielded and their publication. The primary source for this material is Arndt Haller’s (1954) Die Gräber und Grüfte von Assur, which presents 440 Neo-Assyrian burials (mostly dating to the late 8th and 7th centuries) according to a basic typology. An additional 165 graves were published by Peter A. Miglus in 1996, bringing the total number to 605. Five burial chambers of Neo-Assyrian kings found under Aššūr’s Old Palace were also published by Walter Andrae (1938), and recently in greater detail by Steven Lundström (2009), and excavations in the ‘domestic wing’ of Ashurnasirpal’s northwest palace at Nimrud during 1989-1991 yielded four additional royal tombs belonging to Assyrian queens, which were published by Muzahem Hussein and Amer Suleiman (2000). A limited number of Neo-Assyrian burials from lesser-known sites including Humaidat, Dūr Katlimmu and Tell Fekheriye (in Syria) have also been published.

In 1999 Arnulf Hausleiter incorporated the typologies of Haller and Miglus into a concise report, which offers a useful collation and quantification of the Aššūr burial data.
2. Literature Review

Hausleiter noted that a more general study of Neo-Assyrian grave types and chronological development had not yet been attempted;\(^{42}\) a situation which remains true today. Moreover, any study of Neo-Assyrian burial types must rely on an extremely limited body of evidence, predominantly from Aššur, which cannot be assumed to be representative of all Neo-Assyrian burial practices.

Elam

During the 20\(^{th}\) century, fieldwork in southwest Iran concentrated on Susa, a large tell site on the Susiana plain where thousands of burials were excavated but very few recorded and published. As a result little is known of burial practices in Elam.\(^{43}\) Only a small number of the burials at Susa are clearly attributable to the Neo-Elamite II period (725/700-520); four funerary vaults from the Eastern Necropolis near the Apadana reported by Roland de Meccquenem (1943) and seven carefully-recorded burials from the Ville Royale II published by Pierre de Miroschedji (1981).\(^{44}\) Two additional Neo-Elamite II burials were recorded by David McCown at Tall-i Ghazir on the Rām Hormuz plain during his 1946-48 excavations and published by Elizabeth Carter in 1994.\(^{45}\) The bronze coffin burials at Arjān and Rām Hormuz complete our Neo-Elamite funerary evidence.\(^{46}\) It is important to note that the territory of Elam is characterised by its combination of highlands and lowlands, and that archaeological work has been heavily biased towards lowland areas, while the mountainous Elamite stronghold regions are poorly known.\(^{47}\) Presently any burials outside the large lowland tells have been found only by accident. Due to the extremely limited data available, no attempt has yet been made to develop a Neo-Elamite burial typology.

---

\(^{42}\) Hausleiter 1999, 131.

\(^{43}\) Potts 2012, 48. Carter (1998) particularly emphasises the lack of interest in archaeological context by the early excavators at Susa.

\(^{44}\) Meccquenem’s Eastern Necropolis burials are labelled A, B, C, D (Meccquenem 1943, 48-51; see also Miroschedji 1978, 213-17) and the Ville Royale II burials are T.734, 762, 693, 672, 674, 705, and 707 (Miroschedji 1981, 24-8, figs. 10-11, 29, 31-2, 41, 42, pls. Pl VIII, IX, XV).

\(^{45}\) These burials (L and M) were located in the Fort Mound alongside three slightly earlier (Neo-Elamite I) graves (K, E and F). These date attributions are based on analogies of their pottery assemblages to the Neo-Elamite ceramics at Susa (Carter 1994, 71). See also Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 233. McCown did not publish these burials, but Carter (1994, fn. 4) later retrieved his field notes from the Oriental Institute archives and published some of the detail in her work.

\(^{46}\) The only other possible burial dating to the period in question is a pit burial (47 in DD43) at the site of Malyan containing a single adult male. However, it does not appear to be related to Elamite culture and it has been proposed that it belongs to a nomadic population in the region (Carter 1994, 66).

\(^{47}\) Nissen (2004, 139) has pointed out that the mountainous areas of Elam are not well known to archaeologists, but were the one continuous factor in Elamite history, a safe haven in times of political pressure, ultimately enabling political and cultural continuity. For example, in 710 Sargon reports that the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte fled into the mountains (Stolper 1984, 46) and similarly Ashurbanipal reported that when he attacked Elam in 646, the king fled into the highlands (Gerardi 1987, 196).
2. Literature Review

Summary of the Burial Data

The works cited above address only single sites or regions and do not attempt to compare data from all three regions. Occasional cross-references or analogies are made between Assyria and Babylonia, but Elamite burials are not incorporated at all in discussion of Mesopotamian burial types and vice versa. In my view it is worthwhile examining the burials of all three regions together given their geographical proximity and the known levels of interaction between the people living in these areas. The overall lack of burial synthesis is unfortunate, because a good understanding of burial material across these sites could provide a more solid foundation upon which to build interpretations of mortuary practices. Presently the literature reveals a general failure to establish clear ways of referring to burials across regions, between sites, and even between authors, and the lack of well-defined terminology for burial types, orientation, positioning of the body and other relevant detail is presently a hindrance to any analysis of burial practices. This situation, however, is unsurprising in view of the problematic nature of the burial data and its incomplete publication, which has negated the possibility for examining Assyrian, Babylonian and Elamite burial practices of the early-mid 1st millennium in any meaningful way.

2.2.2. Beliefs about Death, the Afterlife and Funerary Ritual

Just two works have been dedicated to the discussion of first millennium beliefs about death and the afterlife and aspects of funerary ritual, and both centre on the practices of royal families. John Nicholas Postgate’s (2008) “The Tombs in the Light of Mesopotamian Funerary Traditions”, published in New Light on Nimrud, provides a succinct overview of the textual and archaeological evidence presently available for Neo-Assyrian funerary traditions. Seth Richardson’s (1999) “An Assyrian Garden of Ancestors” focuses on establishing the locations in which rituals for the memorialisation of the dead could occur, and draws on both textual and material evidence from a far wider range of sources than Postgate. Apart from the works of these two scholars, the possibilities for integrating the small number of relevant texts with the rather large body of archaeological evidence from southern and northern Mesopotamia remain underutilised.

2.2.3. The Bronze Coffins

Literature concerning the bronze U-shaped coffins of Mesopotamia and Iran is presently scarce. The burial assemblages have been published in either excavation reports or brief

---

48 The lack of terminology for discussing burials has also been highlighted by Barrelet (1980, 7).
2. Literature Review

Journals or book chapters, all of which deal minimally, if at all, with the coffins themselves. The only bronze coffin burial that has been subject to comprehensive analysis is the Arjān tomb, published by Javier Álvarez-Mon in 2010. The archaeological context of this burial is thoroughly described, and a brief description and short general discussion of all bronze coffins known to-date is provided, including aspects such as iconographic motifs and manufacture. The author touches on issues concerning the archaeology of death and burial, and the broader picture of the use of these bronze coffins across time and space, but delves little into other contemporary burial practices or the social significance and ideology surrounding the coffins. The overall priority of the author in this work is the analysis and contextualisation of the assemblage of grave goods within their mid-first millennium artistic milieu. The rather scarce and scattered publications of the remaining bronze coffin burials, which make little reference to the burial containers themselves, are discussed further in section 4.2.

The only synthetic work on the bronze coffins is John Curtis’ (1983) “Late Assyrian Bronze Coffins” published in *Anatolian Studies*, which quickly became out-dated following the emergence of several more coffins. In this article Curtis provides analyses of the coffins’ iconography, form and manufacture to establish them as products of an Assyrian bronzeworking tradition. His overall priority, however, is to establish an accurate date for their production as a possible means for dating the burials, and the coffins were analysed almost entirely in isolation from their burial contexts. In 2008 Curtis followed up this article with a briefer, slightly updated, discussion in *New Light on Nimrud*, which included the three Nimrud coffins that had been excavated since his initial publication.

An unfortunate aspect of the literature relating to the bronze “bathtub” coffins is the inclusion, and even emphasis on, the unprovenanced examples said to be from northwest Iran. The interest generated by these pieces as a result of their unusual iconography far exceeds that of the provenanced examples. In particular, a number of fragments belonging to a purported ‘coffin’ from “Ziwiye” with inscribed human figural iconography have been the subject of much discussion and debate, and are widely published across a range of volumes

---

49 The context is described insofar as the details were made available to the author through the limited prior publication of the tomb and personal correspondence with the individuals directly involved in excavation of the objects and analysis of the skeletal remains (Álvarez-Mon pers. comm.).
51 Curtis published a brief update to include the Nimrud coffins in 2008, but the Rām Hormuz coffins were not included.
2. Literature Review

on ancient Near Eastern art. However, as will be highlighted in this thesis (section 4.2.6.), there are numerous inherent problems with the inclusion of these materials in studies of the bronze coffin corpus.

As a general rule, the excavated coffins from Ur, Nimrud, Arjān and Rām Hormuz have been treated merely as containers for holding valuable grave goods and a body, and little interest has been shown in the study of these unusual burial receptacles in their own right. Their method of manufacture and decoration are occasionally addressed in some depth, but most often they are primarily of interest as a means for dating the assemblage of objects they contain, which in turn are rarely considered in light of their nature as deliberately deposited funerary material. This restricted treatment of the coffin corpus and the scholarly emphasis on the decorated fragments, which lack archaeological context, can be seen as symptomatic of the object oriented, art historical emphasis of Near Eastern archaeology.

2.3. Closing the Gap

As has been demonstrated in this literature review, the material and textual evidence for early-mid first millennium Mesopotamian and Elamite mortuary practice has yet to be subjected to a thorough analysis. While this thesis cannot aim for such an undertaking, it does hope to somewhat narrow the specific gap in the scholarship on the bronze “bathtub” coffins by collating and analysing them as a corpus, placing them in the wider context of 8th – 6th century funerary practices of Babylonia, Assyria and Elam, and examining their use within these three separate, yet interconnected cultural areas.

---

52 See for example Parrot 1961, 144; Porada 1965, 124-7.
3. Methodology

3.1. Method

As stated in the introduction, the first aim of this work is to bring together the known bronze “bathtub” coffins to provide a platform for their analysis as a corpus. In order to achieve this, the bare details of archaeological contexts including location, the arrangement of the body in the coffin, grave goods, descriptions of the coffins and observations regarding their manufacture were collected from the limited number of available sources, mostly in the form of short articles. The detail in these sources is extremely inconsistent and occasionally contradictory. Where discrepancies exist between publications, the descriptions provided by the excavators, where available, have generally been used in preference to those of secondary commentators except where the excavator has been clearly proved incorrect. In each case details of these discrepancies are highlighted for the reader. The main publications and the collated data are provided in section 4.2. (with additional detail in appendix 3), followed by an analysis of the manufacture, possible workshops and a date range for production and use (sections 4.3-4.5). The unprovenanced ‘coffins’ and ‘coffin fragments’ that have made their way into museums and private collections are excluded from this study because they cannot contribute meaningfully to this analysis. The problematic nature of this material is more thoroughly discussed in section 4.2.6.

To provide a broader framework of mortuary practice within which the bronze coffins can be placed, burial data is drawn from Neo-Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Neo-Elamite site excavation reports and typological analyses, and the results are presented by region in section 5. The Neo-Babylonian burials are addressed first because they are greatest in number and the most systematically published of the three regions, providing a convenient platform from which to discuss the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Elamite burials. The differences in the typologies and terminology used in these publications make any attempt to synthesise the material extremely problematic. Often a variety of terms are used between regions or even sites to refer to a single burial type. Sometimes even at a site level one archaeologist may employ different naming systems and define different types or subtypes to the next. As an example, the table below demonstrates the variations in terminology for U-shape and oval-shape coffins and single pot burials.
3. Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oval-shaped coffin</th>
<th>U-shape coffin</th>
<th>Single Pot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reuther (1926)</td>
<td>Ovalsärge</td>
<td>Hockersärge</td>
<td>Topfgrab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecquenem (1931)</td>
<td>Bath-tub shaped sarcophagus</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Jar burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safar (1949)</td>
<td>Trough with both ends rounded</td>
<td>Trough with one rounded and one straight end</td>
<td>Urn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haller (1954)</td>
<td>Wannensarkophage</td>
<td>Hockersarkophage</td>
<td>Topfgrab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolley (1962)</td>
<td>Oval larnax</td>
<td>Larnax with one rounded end and one straight end</td>
<td>Single-pot burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strommenger (1964)</td>
<td>Ovalsarkophag</td>
<td>Hockersarkophag</td>
<td>Topfgrab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghirshman (1970)</td>
<td>Bathtub</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jar burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haerinck (1980)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Walled vessel with one apsidal end</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis (1983)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Late Assyrian type bronze coffin</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zorn (1992)</td>
<td></td>
<td>True “bathtub” coffin</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Højlund and Andersen (1994)</td>
<td>Bathtub coffin</td>
<td>Bathtub coffin</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table demonstrating variances in burial nomenclature.*

Terminology issues will continue to vex the studies of burial evidence until clearer typologies are developed and scholars attempt to agree on the terms to be used. In this thesis, where there are variances in the labelling of burial types a selection has been made and the reasoning for this provided. While a full revision of Neo-Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Elamite typologies is beyond the scope of this thesis, adjustments are made to the available typologies where there are clearly more types represented in the excavation reports than have been accounted for in typological studies, and these changes are noted.

The picture of Mesopotamian and Elamite beliefs about death and the afterlife, and their funerary rituals provided in section 6, relies upon evidence that may be broadly grouped into ‘textual’ and ‘archaeological’. The third category of evidence available to scholars of

53 This distinction is somewhat problematic since, as Seymour (2011, 776) points out, the category of text is of course also “archaeological”. Textual evidence includes ritual texts, hymns, prayers, lamentations, magico-medical texts, omens, curse formulas, mythology, lexical texts, royal inscriptions, royal annals, and royal and private correspondence (Scurlock 1995, 1883). The archaeological evidence for mortuary practice includes burial location (house, cemetery, necropolis, intra/extramural), the type of grave (single or collective grave, earth grave, tomb), entombment (inhumation or cremation; in mats, coffins, sarcophagi, urns), the grave goods
3. Methodology

Mesopotamia and Iran is ‘iconography’,\(^{54}\) yet, despite the extensive iconography showing the dying and the dead across a range of artistic media, any obvious depictions of funerary ceremonies are conspicuously absent in all three regions. As discussed in the preceding literature review, texts have been the preferred source of information about Mesopotamian and Elamite funerary practice and significantly less interest has been shown in the archaeological evidence. The scope of this thesis does not allow for a correction of this bias, but archaeological material is included in the analysis where possible. Translations of relevant texts have been included as an appendix (appx. 2) and disagreements between scholars on aspects of these translations are noted where they are deemed relevant to interpretations in this thesis. Textual evidence is altogether lacking for Neo-Elamite funerary practices, but since scholars have demonstrated a high degree of cultural continuity with the preceding Middle Elamite and subsequent Persian periods,\(^{55}\) texts from these periods are included in the discussion.

Moving into interpretation, section 7 explores the possible meanings of the bronze coffins for the burying society in light of the beliefs and ideology surrounding death and the afterlife. Aspects of the burials that scholars usually assume to have symbolic significance, such as location, orientation and placement of the body are addressed, and then the form, material and iconography of the coffins themselves are considered. Specific attention is paid to the question of why the particular form and material might have been selected for a burial container, and the notion of light-reflecting materials (including bronze) as manifestations of the divine, a theme pursued by Assyriologists and art historians,\(^{56}\) will be applied for the first time in a funerary context. The emphasis on the material aspects of the coffin, particularly the use of bronze, has been inspired and influenced by numerous works on materiality theory, of which only a limited number are directly referred to in text.\(^{57}\)

Finally, section 8 presents a historical analysis of the relationships between Babylonia, Assyria and Elam as a foundation for discussing the extent to which the bronze coffin burials might be considered a ‘shared’ funerary practice. Notably the date of the burials, particularly those from Ur and Nimrud, remain imprecise. No attempt is made in this thesis to more

\(^{54}\) For a brief summary discussion of these three data categories more broadly in studies of Mesopotamian ‘religion’ see Seymour 2011, 775-7.

\(^{55}\) Potts 1999, 259; Álvarez-Mon 2012, 756.

\(^{56}\) For example Cassin 1968; Winter 1994; 1995; 2000.

\(^{57}\) For recent overviews of this topic see Johnson 2010, 224-6; Knappet 2012.
3. Methodology

closely date or redate the coffins. Instead the broad, but reasonably secure, late 8th-mid-6th
century range is accepted as a basis for analysing the use of the coffins in their historical
contexts.

3.2. Limitations and Biases

The fundamental limitation of this work is the inadequate excavation, recording and
publication of the bronze “bathtub” coffins. While images and descriptions of the valuable
objects inside the coffins are widely published, the coffins themselves are generally very
poorly described and photographed, and in all cases the overall archaeological context of the
burials is not well understood. Access to the detail in the original Arjān, Rām Hormuz and
Nimrud reports is also limited by their publication in Persian and Arabic.

The apathy towards funerary data in both Mesopotamia and Iran, and resulting lack of
comprehensive studies of burial remains, are a major hindrance to any broader analysis of
funerary practices. Presently we must rely largely on burials whose date, location and
relationship both with each other and the other archaeological material around them are
mostly unknown due to the poor understanding of stratigraphic contexts.58 The selective
recording and publication of burials largely rules out the development of accurate typologies
and any possibilities for statistical analyses.59 The evidence is also extremely biased towards
intramural burials due to the preferential digging of large tell sites in Mesopotamia and Iran,
and towards corpse disposal methods that involve burial, particularly burial types that
preserve well in the archaeological record.60 The general failure to analyse skeletons and
other organic remains also limits the potential for studies of mortuary practice.

In many ways this thesis also perpetuates the bias towards textual materials. But an
attempt is made to maintain awareness to the fact that texts do not necessarily document
practice, but rather project “idealising precepts”,61 and therefore it is likely that we should

58 Baker (1995, 209-10) notes that even the relevant ceramic typologies have not been well-established to assist
with dating, and the historical labels “Neo-Assyrian”, “Neo-Babylonian” and “Achaemenid” still cannot be used
with any real precision.
60 Cooper 1992, 23; Seymour 2011, 784. We cannot assume that burials will provide us with a representative
sample of those who lived and died in a specific society, as there is much variability in treatment of the dead. It
has often been noted that the number of burials found in excavated areas could only represent a small percentage
of the overall population and that group burials exhibit unrepresentative age and sex ratios, suggesting that
burials were placed in locations outside the urban centres or other archaeologically invisible disposal methods
were employed, such as aquatic disposal. Inadequate excavation techniques are also likely to have missed many
simple earth graves. There may be different disposal treatment based on, for example, age or gender. For
61 Richardson 2007, 192.
3. Methodology

find some non-correspondence between the ‘ideal’ presented in the text and the archaeological evidence. In the course of the discussion the disjunctions that Assyriologists often ignore in their attempts to marry archaeological data with texts will be highlighted where possible.

One final bias, which permeates throughout scholarship on the bronze coffins and feeds into this study, is the view that the bronze coffins were an imitation of the more ubiquitous terracotta U-shaped coffins, which appear in the archaeological record as early as the Middle Assyrian period. This thesis devotes more attention to the terracotta U-shape coffins than any other burial type in line with the assumption, based purely on their form, that they must be linked to the bronze coffins. However, this is a prejudice of modern scholars, and it may be that the bronze coffins were not seen as an imitation at all, but were perceived by the burying groups as a different type of burial bearing little or no relationship to terracotta U-shape coffins.
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

4.1. Introduction

This section provides an introduction to the corpus of bronze “bathtub” coffins, including a brief overview of relevant publications, information on archaeological context, and a description of each coffin where possible. The apsidal, or U-shape, bronze coffins are all of the same basic construction; they are made of sheet bronze, have two long, straight side walls and are squared off at one end, rounded at the other. They are also characterised by an overhanging rim and a pair of handles placed side-by-side just below the rim at both ends. The coffins vary slightly in size, ranging from 1.11-1.47m long, 0.57-0.68m wide, and 0.51-0.60m deep. Of the nine excavated examples presently available for analysis, five were recovered from sites in present-day Iraq and three from Iran in burial contexts dating between approximately the late eighth and mid-sixth centuries. An additional example was excavated at Zincirli in North Syria, but there is no evidence to suggest that it had been used as a coffin (see fig. 1 for coffin locations). A few more examples, both whole and fragmentary, have appeared on the antiquities market, purportedly from areas in northwest Iran and eastern Anatolia, but as I will argue in section 4.2.6, these examples are best excluded from studies of this coffin corpus.

4.2. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

4.2.1. The Ur Coffins

Two bronze “bathtub” coffin burials, PG1 and PG2, were unearthed by Leonard Woolley during the 1925-6 excavation season at Ur in Babylonia. Woolley initially published the burials in The Antiquaries Journal, and many years later in the full excavation report Ur Excavations, Vol. IX: The Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods. John Curtis noted that these two publications contradicted each other on a number of points. The detail in this section is supplemented by appendix 3 in which all available details are provided.

62 The precise dimensions of each individual coffin are included in appendix 3.
63 Based on the lack of evidence for such use, I am hesitant to define this example as a burial container and place it under the rubric of “coffin” (contra Curtis 2008, 165-6; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 24).
64 Including details of the precise archaeological context, the date of the burials and their contents (Curtis 1983).
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

returned to Woolley’s original field notes and established that sometime following excavation, the grave goods and skeletons from the two coffins had been confused with each other and were incorrectly listed on the excavation report. Curtis untangled the data and re-distributed the items to their correct coffins, and his work on these burials is generally followed below. In 2003 a further valuable contribution to the data available for these burials was made by Theya Molleson and Dawn Hodgson, who published their analysis of the skeletal remains from both coffins.\(^70\)

The two bronze coffin burials cut across the southwest wall of the c.1400 Kassite period giparu of Kurigalzu (a religious complex) and PG2 was alternately reported as lying “directly under” or “close to” the temenos wall of Nebuchadnezzar (604-562) (for a plan of the site see fig. 2).\(^71\) The coffins were placed closely together in brick vaults and the presence of wood remains in the burials suggests that the coffins had wooden lids and/or were housed in an outer wooden container (fig. 3).\(^72\) Each coffin contained a female individual wrapped in linen and wool textiles.\(^73\) The 25 year old occupant of PG1 was placed with her head in the squared end of the coffin on her right side in a semi-flexed position (fig. 4).\(^74\) In addition to the skeleton, a number of valuable objects and bones of a sheep-sized animal were recovered from the coffin.\(^75\) The bottom half of coffin PG2 had corroded away and the female skeleton, which was significantly smaller than that in PG1, was too poorly preserved to allow for age identification.\(^76\) Woolley’s field notes indicate that she too was arranged with her head in the square end of the coffin, but in a flexed position on her left side, rather than her right (fig. 4). A number of valuable goods were included in PG2 but animal bones are not recorded.\(^77\)

While the PG2 bronze coffin was badly corroded and its lower portion is mostly missing, PG1 is well-preserved and provides one of the best examples for analysis (figs. 5

\(^70\) Molleson and Hodgson 2003.
\(^71\) Unfortunately the burials are not marked on any of Woolley’s site plans, but in his Ur catalogue they are reported as having been “found lying W by E close to Temenos wall at S corner of KP” (see Curtis 1983, 88). According to Curtis (1983, 88, 91) Woolley’s field notes describe PG2 as being underneath the temenos wall, but the Ur catalogue instead states that both were found close to the temenos wall.
\(^73\) Woolley (1926, 379) assessed the textiles as being “linen and wool cloths”.
\(^74\) Molleson and Hodgson (2003, 121) report that staining of the bones somewhat confirmed the positioning of the bodies in both PG1 and PG2 as depicted in Woolley’s rather rudimentary field sketches.
\(^75\) Woolley 1962, 53-6; Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 121. The coffin yielded a glazed pottery jar; 3 gold earrings; a bronze bracelet; 2 triangular bronze fibulae; 3 strings of beads (the first comprising 45 agate beads, the second 66 amethyst and gold beads, and the third 27 carnelian beads); and a broken bone comb. According to Curtis (1983, 88) objects from PG1 were incorrectly ascribed to PG2 in Woolley’s (1962, 69) publication.
\(^76\) Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 122.
\(^77\) The surviving burial goods were: 2 glazed pottery jars; a gadrooned bronze bowl; a wooden bowl with two lug handles; gold earrings; a string of beads (15 agate beads, 14 cylindrical gold beads with ribbed decoration, and 1 carnelian bead); a bronze mirror; remains of a wooden box; and remains of a basket (Curtis 1983, 89-91).
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

and 6). The vertical side-strips of both coffins are chased or engraved with the repeated motif of a goat (or mouflon) standing on a rosette, and are the only excavated examples to exhibit decoration on the coffin body (fig. 7). At approximately 1.11m long, these are the smallest coffins in the corpus.

Because the archaeological context of these burials is so poorly understood their dating is contested. Woolley originally provided a 700-650 date, but later placed them in the Persian period based on their similarity in form to the U-shape terracotta coffins, which he had dated with greater certainty to the Persian period, and an incorrect belief that the fibulae found in the coffins were not known in Babylonia until the Persian period.78 His assertion that the burials had been “dug down into the buried ruins of the ancient giparu from a Persian house of which every brick had disappeared”, 79 was a circular argument based on the assumption that Mesopotamians generally buried their dead under houses and in my view has been correctly dismissed by Curtis, 80 whose analysis of the grave-goods offers a more reliable late 8th-mid 7th century date.81 His 8th century higher limit is also based on the assumption that the bronze coffins were introduced from Assyria into Babylonia at approximately the same time as the terracotta versions, which first appear during the period of Neo-Assyrian domination beginning with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727). The “unmistakably Assyrian” goat/mouflon and rosette motif is cited as additional evidence that these coffins are an “Assyrian type”, a notion that has become well-accepted.82

4.2.2. The Nimrud Coffins

Three bronze coffins were discovered at the Neo-Assyrian royal city of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) during 1989 restoration works on Ashurnasirpal II’s (883-859) North-West Palace.83 In 2000, Muzahem M Hussein and Amer Suleiman published their excavation report Nimrud: A City of Golden Treasures, which includes a brief, poorly-written English language section

78 Woolley 1962, 55-6, 68; Curtis 1983, 87. However, if PG2 was directly under the temenos wall of Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar as Woolley reported in his field notes, they should predate the construction of the wall and thus could not be Persian (Curtis 2008, 163).
79 Woolley and Moorey 1982, 260.
80 Curtis 1983, 91.
81 Curtis 1983, 86, following Strommenger 1964, 170-1. According to Curtis (1983, 91-2) the three gold earrings and gadrooned bowl found in the burials may point to a date in the late 8th century, while the glazed jars suggest that a date in the first half of the 7th century is more likely (a date earlier proposed by C. Wilkinson 1960, 220). However, Curtis (2008, 165) has recently extended the date for the aforementioned jars back into the 8th century.
82 Curtis 1983, 85. For the acceptance of these coffins as an “Assyrian type” see for example Ibrahim 2002, 163; Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 120; Alvarez-Mon 2010a, 27.
83 See appendix 3, coffins 3, 4 and 5. The work was carried out by the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and Heritage under the direction of Muzahem M. Hussein (Damerji 1991, 9).
describing the findspot of the coffins, with basic, often unclear, detail regarding their orientation, dimensions and contents.\textsuperscript{84} Michael Müller-Karpe et al. published an analysis of the skeletal remains in the edited 2008 volume \textit{New Light on Nimrud}, which also includes Curtis’ update on the bronze coffin corpus incorporating the Nimrud examples.\textsuperscript{85} Analyses of the textiles and numerous gold objects found in the coffins have been the subject of several articles,\textsuperscript{86} but unfortunately descriptions of the bronze coffins are unclear or absent and the only available images are of Coffin 2, which was photographed alone in situ and again by John Curtis in 2003 while it was on display in the Mosul Museum.\textsuperscript{87}

The three Nimrud bronze coffins were found together in the antechamber of Tomb III, one of four vaulted burial chambers located under the ‘domestic wing’ of the palace (figs. 8 and 9).\textsuperscript{88} According to inscriptions on the tomb chamber door and sarcophagus lid, this tomb was built for Ashurnasirpal’s wife Mullissu-Mukannišat-Ninua\textsuperscript{89} and evidently incorporated into the original planning and construction of the palace.\textsuperscript{90} The tomb chamber underlies Room 57, which is thought to have served as an administrative office for palace officials during the 8\textsuperscript{th} century (fig. 8).\textsuperscript{91} A steep stairway leads down a shaft into the antechamber, where the three bronze coffins block the entrance to the main tomb chamber. The large stone

\textsuperscript{84} Hussein and Suleiman 2000, 113-128. Joan and David Oates (2001, 84-8) also discuss the archaeological context of the Nimrud coffins in their volume \textit{Nimrud: An Assyrian Imperial City Revealed}, an overview of excavations at Nimrud. But add little to the information provided by the excavation report. They do, however, speculate further on the circumstances that may have led to the deposition of the coffins in their unusual context. Summarised versions of the excavations with minor additional details have been published as short articles by Hussein (2002, 148-9; 2008) and Damerji (2008, 82).

\textsuperscript{85} Müller-Karpe et al. 2008; Curtis 2008.

\textsuperscript{86} An analysis of the textiles was published by E. Crowfoot (1995) and, a year later, by Toray Industries Inc. (1996) “Report on the Analyses of Textiles Uncovered at the Nimrud Tomb-Chamber” \textit{Al-Rafidan} 17: 199-206. The latter publication noted a cotton fragment missed by Crowfoot. This is the earliest known example of cotton in Mesopotamia (Alvarez-Mon 2010b, 207 fn. 4). For the gold objects, see Harrack 1990; Damerji 1999; Kamil 1999; Al-Rawi 1999; 2008.

\textsuperscript{87} Curtis has kindly provided his two original photographs for this study.

\textsuperscript{88} Inscriptional evidence reveals that at least two of these tombs belonged to queens of the Assyrian monarchs Ashurnasirpal II (883-859), Shalmaneser III (858-824), Tiglath-pileser III (744-727), Shalmaneser V (726-722), and Sargon II (721-705). None of these women (Mullissu-mukannisat-Ninua, Yaba, Banitu, and Ataliya) had been previously known by name (Brinkman 1997, 4). It is usually assumed that the “domestic wing” was an area that housed the palace women, however, only one residence of an Assyrian royal woman has so far been identified, and this is in Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh (Russell 1998, fn. 134).


\textsuperscript{90} The chamber had clearly been constructed prior to room above. The sarcophagus of the adjacent Tomb II (under room 49) had also clearly been included in the initial construction of the palace. The large sarcophagi were placed first, then the vaulted chamber was completed, followed by the rooms above (Oates et al. 2001, 84).

\textsuperscript{91} The large number of administrative texts included a group of tablets from the time of Adad-Nerari III (830-783), some of which belonged to a palace scribe, and a later group of tablets dated to the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, belonging to the ‘treasurer’ or ‘steward of the royal household’ (\textit{masenna}). The presence of the texts seems to suggest that this was their office, and because they were located in what has been designated the “female” area of the palace it is assumed that these high officials were eunuchs (Oates and Oates 2001, 88).
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

ean double-doors separating the antechamber from the tomb were sealed with mud-brick on the antechamber side for reasons not apparent. The tomb itself seems to have been looted in antiquity and all that remained was the large, empty, stone sarcophagus of Mullissu-Mukannišat-Ninua set into the floor.

All three of the coffins were entirely buried in debris at the time of their discovery. Coffin 1 lay against the east wall directly on top of Coffin 2, and Coffin 3 lay against the west wall. Coffin 1 was oriented with its rounded end to the south, while 2 and 3 were placed in the opposite direction, with their rounded ends to the north (figs. 9 and 10).

The three bronze coffins contained a total of 13 secondary burials; the only secondary burials within this corpus. Coffin 1 contained the incomplete skeletons of a 20-29 year old adult (probably female), a foetus and four children ranging in age from 3 months to 11 years old. Coffin 2 held an 18-20 year old female and a 6-12 year old child. And Coffin 3 contained the skeletal remains of five adults: two males, two females and another individual whose sex has not been determined.

A total of 449 valuable objects were found in the coffins and scattered on the antechamber floor, but the excavation report does not clearly ascribe their find-spots.

---

92 Hussein and Suleiman 2000, 116. The archaeologists initially approached the tomb through the hole in the main chamber made in antiquity.
93 There is a contradiction in the description of this tomb. The excavation report by Hussein and Suleiman (2000, 115-6) states that Mullissu-Mukannišat-Ninua’s sarcophagus was entirely devoid of bones, jewellery and so on, and was probably never actually used, a position maintained in an article of Hussein’s published in 2002 (p.148). However, Oates and Oates (2001, 84) report that the coffin contained a few bone fragments and a stone bead. Several large round-headed green and yellow glazed “wall nails” (or “pegs”) were also found on the walls at the level of the lid, but their function is unknown. Oates et al. (2001, 84) and Hussein (2002, 148) suggest that they made have held a textile or canopy over the sarcophagus. Its stone lid with two large stone loops on top may have facilitated its placement and two stone knobs were for the sealing of the coffin (Oates et al. 2001, 84; Hussein 2002, 148).
97 Only a few bones were present from each skeleton according to Müller-Karpe et al. 2008, 144.
98 Oates and Oates 2001, 86. Crowfoot (1995, 115) stated that the textiles that were the subject of her analysis were found in the “bronze coffin of Tomb 2”. Since Tomb 2 did not in fact contain a bronze coffin, it is unclear whether we should assume that these were from bronze coffin 2 from the Tomb III antechamber. The excavator, Hussein and Suleiman (2000, 116-7) does not, however, mention textile remains in coffin 2 or any other of the bronze coffins, so it may be that Crowfoot’s textiles instead came from Tomb II as proposed by J. Curtis in a republication of the article in New Light on Nimrud (2008, pp. 149-54; see especially editor’s note on p.154).
100 Müller-Karpe 2008, 147. This interpretation is also backed up by the bone evidence which reveals that some burials had not originally been placed in bronze coffins (for detail see appx. 3, coffin 5).
The dimensions of the three coffins vary slightly, and all are larger than those from Ur. The excavator reports the presence of “copper friezes” around the upper and middle part of Coffin 1, but this statement is not clarified with a corresponding image. Coffin 2 has two handles placed vertically side-by-side at either end (figs. 10 and 11), and Coffins 1 and 3 are assumed to be of the same form. The context of the Nimrud bronze coffins is the best-recorded of the corpus, but its oddities make it extremely difficult to interpret. It has been proposed that the secondary placement of numerous bodies in the coffins, the finds of several valuable items on the antechamber floor, and the sealing of the tomb with mud-brick indicate their hasty and secret placement, perhaps connected with royal power struggles.

If the coffins were deposited at the same time, the earliest this event could have occurred is the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, as evidenced by the presence in one of the coffins of a duck-weight dated to his reign. The use of Room 57 as an office during the 8th century and into Tiglath-Pileser III’s reign is cited as further evidence for this date by David and Joan Oates. Finds of objects belonging to Sargon’s (721-705) queen Ataliyā in nearby Tomb II indicate that the tombs in this part of the palace were still in use in the late 8th century.

102 J. and D. Oates (2001, 86) incorrectly reported that the Nimrud tubs are “surprisingly small, only 1.3m in length”, citing a reference to Curtis (1983, no page reference), who published this article seven years before the Nimrud coffins were even discovered! For correct dimensions (as per the excavation report by Hussein and Suleiman 2000, 116) see appendix 3, coffins 3, 4 and 5.

103 Hussein 2000, 116. No differences between the coffins are noted in the excavation report.

104 The accession of Sargon II or the disputed succession upon the death of Sennacherib are two examples cited by Oates and Oates (2001, 87). Damerji (2008, 82) believes that the placement of two courses of brick between the tomb and the antechamber, and the presence of a broken gold beaker base and other gold fragments underneath the brick wall “would indicate that the main burial chamber was cleared in a great hurry and items from it were placed in the coffins.” Some scholars, however, have argued that the coffins in the antechamber are unrelated to the main tomb of Mulilissu-Mukannišat-Ninua (Melville 2004, 44, following Schultz and Kanter (1998: 103) Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz 45). The identity of the bodies is unknown, but the presence of male burials in the domestic quarter of the palace, a designated female domain, has indicated to some that these were male members of the royal family, or more likely palace eunuchs. This interpretation is somewhat reinforced by the find of a seal of a eunuch courtier from the time of Adad-Nerari III (830-783) and a gold bowl belonging to the eunuch turtānu Šamši-ilu, a high official during the period 782-45 (Mattila 2000, 38; Oates and Oates 2001, 86-7) One of the males was a “powerfully built” male aged 55-65 years and Oates and Oates suggest that he could have been the owner of the inscribed gold bowl. Šamši-ilu is first attested c. 800 during the reign of Adad-Nerari III (830-783) in the Antakya stele (RIMA 3 A.0.104.2) and eponym as turtanu of the years 780, 770, and 752. For further discussion of the identity of Šamši-ilu see Mattila (2000, 110-11). Chief Eunuchs of the king were held in extremely high regard and could become extremely powerful (Tadmor 2002) We hear of them being given tax exemption and generous land grants (see Kataja and Whiting 1995, text 26: 1-39; text 36: 7-9).

105 This interpretation is based on the large number of administrative texts found, one group belonging to Nabu-taklata’a from the time of Adad-Nerari III (830-783) and Shalmaneser IV (782-773) (see Mattila 2000, 38), and a later group dated to the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727), belonging to the ‘treasurer’ or ‘steward of the royal household’ (masennu). The reasoning behind this dating, however, is not made explicit (Oates and Oates 2001, 88).

106 Published in Al-Rawi 2008, 138.
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

Since Ashurnasirpal’s Northwest Palace remained in use until Nimrud’s destruction in 612, in the absence of any other solid dating evidence I would argue that it is preferable to consider 612 as the only absolute terminus ante quem for deposition of the coffins.

4.2.3. The Arjān Coffin

The first of three Neo-Elamite bronze “bathtub” burials found in the Zagros piedmonts was discovered in 1982 on the left bank of the Marun River during dam construction near Arjān in Khuzistan province (fig. 12). A rescue excavation of the tomb was conducted by F. Towhidi and A. M. Khaliliān from the Office of Historical Remains. Shortly afterwards the excavators published a short “Report on the Study of the Objects from the Arjān Tomb, Behbahan” in Persian, which was partly reproduced in an English language article by Abbas Alizadeh. Further publications of various materials from the tomb have since appeared in a number of journal and book articles. The Arjān burial became the most comprehensively published of the bronze coffin burials with the 2010 release of Javier Álvarez-Mon’s The Arjān Tomb. Álvarez-Mon’s work primarily focuses on the objects found within the coffin, placing them in the context of the historical interaction of Assyria and Elam and the emergence of the Persian Empire. This work thoroughly describes the context of the burial, and includes a brief, up-to-date discussion of the evidence for the bronze “bathtub” coffins presently available.

The Arjān tomb is a rectangular subterranean chamber, comprising three stone-lined, gypsum-plastered walls, a plastered floor, and a stone slab ceiling coated with bitumen (fig.

---

107 Pedde 2012, 857. It did, however, decline somewhat in importance from the time of Sargon II when first Khorsabad and then Nineveh took primacy (Oates et al. 2001, 68-9). The site continued to be used after this date, with certain rooms cleared for “squatter” occupation (Oates et al. 2001, 63-5).

108 After this time some of the site was levelled, but there appears only to have been “squatter” occupation of the site (Oates et al. 2001, 63-5, 165). The domestic wing under which the tombs were situated appears not to have been resettled, although according to Hussein et al. (2000, 94) there is some indication that this area was used for burials.

109 Alizadeh 1985, 51; Stronach 2003, 252. The site is approximately 10km north of Behbahan. Arjān is a well-known Sasanian town, but surveys have revealed presence at the site going back to the prehistory (Alizadeh 1985, 51). For further details of the coffin see appendix 3, coffin 6.

110 Alizadeh 1985, 51.

111 Towhidi and Khaliliān 1982.

112 Alizadeh (1985) includes a small section on the tomb chamber and the coffin itself, drawing analogies between the Arjān coffin and the then-available examples from Ur and Zincirli, as well as uncritically including the several other unprovenanced examples said to originate from archaeological sites in northwest Iran.


114 Insofar as the details were recorded and made available to the author.
13). The nature of its eastern wall remains unclear because it was disturbed by the bulldozer during the construction work. No construction was noted above or surrounding the tomb and it is not known if the burial was marked on the ground surface, although two large jars lying directly on top of the chamber may have served to mark it in some way (fig. 13). The single bronze coffin housed in the chamber contained the skeleton of a 40-50 year old male laid on his side in a flexed position with his head at the round end (fig. 14). Also in the coffin were textile fragments (including cotton) and 98 gold bracteates, and a gold ‘ring’ inscribed in Elamite with “Kidin-Hutran, son of Kurluš”, an individual whose identity remains speculative. A number of additional metal objects were recovered from the floor of the tomb including a silver jar, bronze bowl and bronze candelabrum bearing the same inscription. Fragments of a decorated bronze coffin lid with two handles on top (fig. 15), the only bronze lid known to-date, were found underneath the coffin itself. It had presumably been dislodged during the flooding of the tomb which left the chamber and coffin filled with

115 Alizadeh 1985, 51. Vatandoust (1996, 69) states that the stones used are “limestone”. The stone-lined tomb chamber construction is common in the highlands, while the gypsum plaster appears to imitate vaults in lowland Susa (Alizadeh 1985, 67).
116 Whether the east wall had an entryway was uncertain because of the damage (Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 21-22). Vatandoust (1996, 69) describes this fourth wall as being of mudbrick.
117 According to Vatandoust (1996, 69) the tomb was “surrounded by mud-brick masses”, however, no other author has reported this detail. Álvarez-Mon (2010a, 21) proposed that the two large vessels atop the chamber could have served as grave markers. Some stone tombs in neighbouring Push-t-e Kuh were marked by a circle of stones or one (or more) headstones and it is suggested that others could have been marked by wooden constructions or earth mounds (Overlaet 2003, 6-63). These possibilities may also apply for Arjān.
118 The skeletal remains were unfortunately not recorded and abandoned in the tomb during the excavations. They were later collected for analysis by Mr. E. Amirlou (2004, 8), who suggested that the single remaining clavicula indicated that this was a male. The sex of the interred appeared also to be reinforced by objects found in the coffin, amongst which there is a notable lack of typically ‘female’ goods (see Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 29).
119 Mo’taghed (1990, 89-92). The precise original placement and purpose of the textiles is unknown, but because of their small size and delicate and valuable nature Mo’taghed (1990, 136-8) dismisses the interpretation that these were “pillows” (for interpretations of the textiles as pillows see Alizadeh 1985, 52; Vatandoust 1996, 71). Along with the single Nimrud cotton sample these are the oldest cotton remains recovered in these regions and reveal that cotton had been introduced for elite use by this time, possibly from Dilmun where it was certainly being grown by the Persian Empire period (Álvarez-Mon 2010b, 207, fn. 3). A broken hollow silver rod/tube may also have been present in the coffin, although there is some confusion over this fact. According to Alizadeh (1985, 54-5) it had already been removed from the tomb by the time the excavation team arrived and its precise context is unknown, but that “on the basis of its shape and value we assume that it had been placed in the coffin as part of the deceased’s princely regalia.” Carter (1994, 72) and Álvarez-Mon (2010a, 120-21) appear to accept Alizadeh’s interpretation and report simply that it was found in the coffin. Álvarez-Mon interprets this unusual object as a filtering device for drinking wine, or perhaps more likely beer. For the inscription see Vallat 1984; Potts 1999, 303; Stronach 2005, 180; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 10, 272-3.
120 The remaining objects were all made of bronze: a lamp, jar, lion-headed beaker and thirteen chalices (Alizadeh 1985, 51; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 121, 167).
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

a 20-25cm layer of sediment and may also have shifted the coffin into its slightly diagonal alignment within the tomb (fig. 13).  

The lower section of the coffin exhibits a heavy patina as a result of its inundation in water, but has otherwise survived well and offers a good, complete piece for analysis (fig. 14). This example is distinguished from the Ur and Nimrud examples by its handles, which are ribbed with smooth inner sides rather than plain (fig. 15), and by its lid, which had a bronze handle fixed on top at either end and registers of lotus and bud motif decoration along the outer edge (figs. 14 and 15). The coffin body itself, however, is undecorated. Fragments of decayed rope were still tied around the side-handles of the coffin and may have originally held the lid in place.

Scholars initially favoured an 8th century date for the burial, but this proposition has been quite conclusively disproved. The inscriptions instead provide an approximate date of c.646-525, which is further narrowed to the first half of the 6th century by analyses of the grave goods. Most recently Álvarez-Mon has dated “the assemblage to c.600 BC, and the engraving of the inscriptions and the act of burial to about a generation later, c.570 BC.”

4.2.4. The Rām Hormuz Coffins

During “development activities” in 2007 the final two bronze coffins in this corpus were discovered in a stone-lined chamber buried under several metres of sediment on the left bank of the Ala River, approximately 7 kilometres northeast of Tepe Bormi (figs. 16 and 17). A rescue excavation was led by Arman Shishegar of the Iranian Center of Archaeological

Curtis 2008, 166; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 23.
Alizadeh 1985, 52; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 23.
Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 23. Álvarez-Mon et al. (2011, 20) state with apparent (and unjustified in my view) certainty that the lid was “firmly secured by ropes to the handles on the sides”, while Alizadeh (1985, 52) suggests that the rope may have been used to lower the coffin into the chamber.
Alizadeh (1985, 56) was a proponent of this early date.
Vallat (1984, 4) dates the inscriptions based on paleographic grounds.
D. T. Potts (1999, 303) ascribes the group of bronze Arjān chalices to his Neo-Elamite IIIB (605-539) period based on their similarity to a similar group from burial 693 at Susa (for these vessels, see Miroschedji 1981, fig. 40). D. Stronach (2003, 252) adds that the bronze candelabra and ring also point to a date in the Neo-Elamite IIIB. An in-depth analysis of the evidence provided by the foregoing authors and the objects in the coffin led Álvarez-Mon (2010a, 3) to conclude that the burial belonged “between the end of the 7th century BC and the first half of the 6th century BC” (see also Stronach 2005, 179).
Álvarez–Mon 2010a, 273; forthcoming c, 16.
Shishegar 2008, 4. For further details see appendix 3, coffins 7 and 8. This site is probably ancient Huhnur (Henkelman 2008, 17, fn. 29; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 204; both following Nasrabadi 2005).
Research who published a short article (in Persian), which lists the finds from the tomb and attempts to date the burial by the few inscribed objects it contained.\textsuperscript{130}

The burial location is comparable to that of Arjān; on the left bank of a river in relative isolation, with no architectural structures noted around the chamber (fig. 17).\textsuperscript{131} Each coffin contained a single female inhumation accompanied by an extraordinary array of jewellery and other prestige items. The excavator indicates that the bodies were laid on their right side in a flexed position with the arms bent at the elbow and head in the round end of the coffin “facing north”, although the latter claim is not consistent with the accompanying line drawings (fig. 18). The occupant of the coffin on the eastern side of the chamber was approximately 17 years old and wore a gold bracelet with a gemstone inscribed with the female Elamite name \textit{a-ni-nu-ma/ku}. The individual in the western coffin was aged 30-35 years and her burial goods included two inscribed gold ‘rings’, one bearing the Elamite inscription “\textit{Shuttur Nahnunte son of Indada}”, the other a (probably) female name \textit{La-ar-na}.\textsuperscript{132} One of the more surprising items amongst the plethora of grave goods not attributed by the excavator to a particular coffin is a cat’s eye agate bearing a three line Sumerian inscription and the name “\textit{Kurigalzu}” in Akkadian, referring to the Kassite king Kurigalzu I (1390-1375) or Kurigalzu II (1345-1324).\textsuperscript{133} On a “natural sandy bench” against the tomb’s west wall were animal bones, numerous large storage vessels and several small glazed vessels deposited in a pile.

Only the squared end of the west coffin and the curved end of the east coffin survive, and both are covered in a thick layer of green mineralisation. They are not described at any length in the excavation report, which provides only a photograph of the fragments in situ (fig. 18). Recent photographs taken in the National Museum of Iran suggest that these coffins were constructed in the same way as the previous examples (fig. 19), except for their handle

\textsuperscript{130}Shishegar 2008.
\textsuperscript{131}A wall was noted by Arman Shishegar at Rām Hormuz, but this detail was not noted in the report (Álvarez-Mon, personal correspondence).
\textsuperscript{132}Shishegar 2008, 8.
\textsuperscript{133}Shishegar 2008, 4. Other finds include: cotton textiles with golden attachments, daggers/dagger handles, rings, bracelets, bangles, broaches, earrings, pendants, hairpins, a plethora of beads of various types, precious and semi-precious stones, silver, bronze, stone and faience vessels, a strainer, candelabras, figurines including the ‘fish ladies’ in bronze and silver, ivory or horn “game pieces” and a white scarab seal depicting a stylised human figure. Kurigalzu II was known for his successful attack against the Elamites and capture of Susa, where he dedicated a statue recording his victory (Oates, 1986, 92). Notably an inscription “\textit{KA.DU [kind of stone], Kurigalsu, the king}” was also found on a rectangular carnelian stone of a headdress (IM 105966), from Tomb II at Nimrud (Harrack 1990, 11; Kamil 1999, 13, 16-17, no. 9). Al-Rawi (2008, 134-5) states: “I believe that the stone edited here was the original one, and the golden headdress could have belonged to Kurigalzu himself and was later modified to suit an Assyrian queen. On the other hand it could be simply an amulet to protect Kurigalzu against headaches.”
arrangement which differs significantly; a thin, undecorated handle is mounted horizontally on the lower left section of the squared end of the ‘west’ coffin and a vertical handle on its long side. A single vertical handle is fixed to the curved end of the ‘east’ coffin (fig. 19). It is only possible to guess at the original arrangement of handles, but they clearly deviate from the other known examples. No decoration has been reported on these coffins.

A date of c.585-539/520 for the Rām Hormuz burials is suggested by the reference to Shutur-Nahhunte and the style of inscriptions on two gold ‘rings’ found in the coffins. Analyses of the objects in the coffins, which have yet to be studied and published, may eventually help to clarify this date.

4.2.5. The Zincirli Coffin

In the early 20th century a U-shaped bronze receptacle was excavated at the North Syrian site of Zincirli by Felix von Luschan and Robert Koldewey of the German Oriental Society, and published in the fifth Zincirli excavation report. The empty receptacle was discovered in a bitumen-lined room interpreted as a ‘bathroom’ in Block L (described as an “outhouse”) (fig. 20), but was found on top of a 17-23cm thick layer of earth, suggesting that it had not originally belonged in this room. This undecorated example is of the same construction as the aforementioned coffins, differing only in the handles’ banded pattern and half-rosette shaped attachments (fig. 21). The coffin is believed to predate Assyrian destruction of the site (c.670). While the Zincirli example can be included in a discussion of manufacture, is not relevant to an analysis of funerary practices since there is no evidence to suggest that it had been used as a burial container.

4.2.6. Unprovenanced Examples

One of the major problems concerning the bronzework of the regions covered in this study is that a significant portion of it has not been excavated. Unprovenanced bronze

---

134 Photographs kindly provided by J. Álvarez-Mon, with the permission of the National Museum of Iran.
135 However, if any were present it would be difficult to see under the green patina.
136 Shishegar 2008, 10.
138 Andrae and von Luschan 1943, 119, 171.
140 This bathtub is described by W. Andrae (1943, 118-9) as being made of copper with bronze handles, but the composition would not have been tested, and the excavator surely simply assumed it was “copper”. Woolley similarly referred to the Ur coffins as being of “copper” (see for example Woolley 1962, 53).
141 This is particularly true of Iran. See Moorey (1988, 26-7) for a discussion the predominance of unprovenanced bronzes, particularly in the mountainous regions surrounding Mesopotamia.
coffin examples *reportedly* from Iran are a complete tub from Dailaman-Amlash (fig. 22),\textsuperscript{142} two side-strip fragments in the Ashmolean Museum,\textsuperscript{143} and a few decorated side-strip and rim fragments supposedly belonging to a coffin that contained the infamous “Ziwiye” treasure (figs. 23 and 25).\textsuperscript{144} Another bronze receptacle published in a 1997 Museum of Anatolian Civilizations catalogue, which significantly differs in appearance, is described as being from “eastern Anatolia” (fig. 27).\textsuperscript{145} Also reportedly now in this museum are another two coffins with incised decoration on their vertical side-strips, allegedly from the Erzincan area.\textsuperscript{146}

The engraved iconography on the “Ziwiye” fragments has been a central focus in studies of the bronze “bathtubs”. The side-strips exhibit the combined goat (or mouflon) and rosette motif seen on the Ur examples (fig. 25),\textsuperscript{147} and fragments of what seems to be a rim are engraved with what has been described as a typical Assyrian composition depicting tribute bearers (or perhaps prisoners), reminiscent of those on the obelisk of Shalmaneser III (figs. 23 and 24).\textsuperscript{148} Several authors have given these fragments and a plethora of looted and fake “Ziwiye” objects archaeological-historical context and value by treating them as archaeological materials from a single find spot, often described as a ‘burial’, and today they are generally accepted by scholars as ‘archaeological’ material.\textsuperscript{149}

---

\textsuperscript{142} See appendix 3, coffin 11. This coffin was last seen in possession of a dealer in Cologne, Germany (Curtis 2008, 167).
\textsuperscript{143} See appendix 3, coffin 13. This side-strip’s size and appearance certainly suggest that it was cut from a bronze coffin. See Moorey 1971, 259-60.
\textsuperscript{144} See appendix 3, coffin/s 12. Godard (1950, 13) refers simply to “la cuve de bronze qui contenait le trésor de Ziwiye”, implying that the fragments can be attributed to an actual archaeological find-spot. The pieces are now distributed between the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Museum in Tehran, and private collections (Curtis 2008, 166-7). For “Ziwiye” see Godard 1950, 13-18; Barnett 1956; Wilkinson 1960, 213-20; Ghirshman 1964, 307. More recently see discussion by Curtis (1983, 85-6; 2008, 167-8). Muscarella (1977, 197; 2000, 76) uses quotation marks around “Ziwiye” to emphasise that, despite the way it is discussed in the scholarship - as emerging from a single find spot - none of the so-called “Ziwiye” treasure was excavated, and at least some of it in fact derived from modern factory sites. Another unexcavated example from Khorramabad in Luristan was reported in 2005 (see appx. 3, coffin 16 and fig. 26).
\textsuperscript{145} See appendix 3, coffin 14. Alvarez-Mon (2010a, 25) reports that it has a lead cladding, but based on the covering visible in the photograph I assume the intention was to describe it as “leather” cladded.
\textsuperscript{146} As reported by Curtis 2008, 167 (see appx. 3, coffin/s 15).
\textsuperscript{147} Ghirshman (1950, 182) instead defines these as ibexes, while Porada (1965, 124) refers to them as gazelles.
\textsuperscript{148} Wilkinson (1960, 214-7, 219) describes these scenes in detail. Parrot (1961, 144) describes “a procession of tributaries exactly like the one on the obelisk of Shalmaneser III”. See also Barnett (1956, 116) and Alizadeh (1985, 59), who further elaborates that the scene “consists of an Assyrian dignitary receiving foreign tribute bearers, who are presented by Assyrian officials. The dignitary is accompanied by palace guards and four soldiers.” Ghirshman (1950, 182, fig. 2, fn. 1) claims that the scene on the curved portion of the rim parallels an image on a glazed brick panel at Nimrud, but does not include the image to which he refers.
\textsuperscript{149} For an interpretation of the “Ziwiye” fragments as belonging to a great Scythian king’s burial see Ghirshman (1964, 99); for a Median “chieftain’s” burial see Barnett (1962, 91-4). Muscarella (2000, 76) has more recently noted that the conception of “Ziwiye” as a recognisable archaeological deposit that yielded many hundreds of gold, silver, bronze and terracotta objects remains quite firmly entrenched in modern scholarship. Confirming this entrenchment in the scholarship of Iranian archaeology is a recent article by Heidemarie Koch (2004, 375) “the [Ziwiye] artefacts had all been put into a sarcophagus, a huge bronze tub with one curved end.” According
While I see no reason to deny the authenticity of the rim and side-strip fragments, their centrality to discussions of the bronze coffin material and use of their iconography to date coffins found in proper archaeological contexts is of concern. In addition to the problem of their lack of provenance, a number of points should be highlighted. Firstly, the side-strips measure 0.80m, making this ‘coffin’ well above the standard height of about 0.60m, which raises doubt over its original form and function. Secondly, the decoration is suspicious on several counts. The fact that after the early discovery of decorated coffins at Ur no further decorated examples were excavated places a question mark over the authenticity of the decorated fragments. The “Ziwiye” side-strip fragments are also decorated on both sides, meaning that the inner face of the coffin would have been decorated, an obvious oddity for a burial container and certainly in contrast to the Ur examples which are decorated only on the exterior surface. The rim decoration is even more surprising since no other coffin rim is decorated and the rims were presumably covered with lids. Moreover, the tribute scenes, which replicate images found on Neo-Assyrian monuments, seem entirely out of place in a purported burial context and human figural scenes have not been noted on any other burial container. On the sum of this evidence, the possibility that the decoration represents a modern addition to fragments of authentic sheet bronze objects (coffins or otherwise) should be seriously considered. These unprovenanced objects most emphatically should not be used to date the coffin corpus and without archaeological context they add nothing to our understanding of early-mid first millennium funerary practices or beliefs, and as such will

---

4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

Many early attempts were made to use the “Ziwiye” iconography for dating the Ur coffins, whose archaeological context was unclear. Based on his analysis of the “Assyrian” scenes Barnett (1956, 111-16), for example, dated them to later in the 7th century. Based on his own analysis of the iconography Wilkinson (1960, 220) brings Barnett’s date back into the early 7th century. See also Alizadeh 1985, 58-9; Curtis 1983 85; Moorey 1971, 259-60.  
Moorey 1971, 259.  
An observation also made by Moorey (1971, 260) who comments on the surprising choice to decorate the inner side of a coffin. He therefore prefers the interpretation that these were once bathtubs and adds that the iconography on the rim of the “Ziwiye” example “seems more appropriate for contemplation by the living rather than concealment with the dead”.  
This observation is extended to all coffin and sarcophagus types as well as the various burial container types outlined in sections 5.2.1, 5.3.1 and 5.4.1. Porada (1965, 124) has also noted the such representations are unexpected in a funerary context: “the fact that there is no coffin known from Western Asia with such factual secular representations as those on the rim of the Ziwiye trough makes one think that the vessel would have been better suited for holding tribute rather than a corpse.” Furthermore, in discussing the iconography on the “Ziwiye” fragments, Curtis (1983, 93) notes that while presentation scenes are a “classic” feature of Assyrian art, the fact that the tribute bearers are ushered into the presence of someone who is evidently not the king is an oddity.  
A simple analysis under a microscope might reveal whether these are modern additions, but to my knowledge the “Ziwiye” object have not been subjected to such scrutiny. For the tell-tales signs of modern engravings that may be detected using a microscope see Craddock (2009, 173).
remain peripheral to this study. Presently the unexcavated examples can at best suggest a more widespread use of bronze coffins than the excavated evidence suggests.\textsuperscript{155}

4.3. Manufacture

The combined evidence provided by images and descriptions of the coffins suggests that the Ur, Nimrud, Arjān, Zincirli, and perhaps the Rām Hormuz coffins were manufactured in the same way. For all complete (or near-complete) examples available for visual analysis, it is clear that the coffins’ walls are comprised of two separate sheets of bronze, one worked into a U-shape, the other a half-rectangle, by hammering and annealing, presumably over an appropriately-shaped hard object.\textsuperscript{156} When placed together the two sheets form an enclosed, elongated U-shape. Cast bronze strips were placed on both the internal and external surface to cover the resulting vertical joins on the long sides of the coffin, and a single row of rivets down the length of either side of the strip secures the two bronze sheets together (fig. 28).\textsuperscript{157}

In his description of the Ashmolean Museum side-strip fragment, Roger Moorey indicated that two cast bronze decorated strips had been “riveted on either side of an irregular fragment of sheet bronze, overlying an iron core”,\textsuperscript{158} but to the best of my knowledge iron cores have not been noted for other coffins.\textsuperscript{159}

Following the assemblage of the coffin walls and side-strips, the outer edges of a U-shaped bronze sheet base were hammered up over the bottom of the exterior surface,\textsuperscript{160} and

\textsuperscript{155} There may of course have been many more such coffins that were lost through the common practice of recycling bronzes in antiquity, and many more which have not yet been revealed to us. To show just how widely this recycling occurred, Eleanor Guralnick (2004) offers the interesting example of large cylindrically-shaped sheets of decorated Assyrian bronzes that probably once covered Assyrian doorposts, columns or “column standards”, reused in the production of a bronze kore, fragments of which were recovered from Olympia in Greece. Guralnick (2004, 220) points the trading of abundant scrap metal at the end of the Assyrian Empire, which resulted in the re-use of these sheets, not melted down but simply reworked into a new form, thus retaining their original decoration. The reusable nature of bronze is also emphasised by Winter (1988, 193).
\textsuperscript{156} Analysis of the microstructure of the Arjān coffin body clearly showed that it had been hammered and annealed (Vatandoust 1999, 139). Smaller vessels were usually hammered into shape by raising with the use of an anvil, or sinking into an appropriately shaped depression in wood or stone (Gunter 1995, 1547; see also Maryon 1949, 94-8), so perhaps the same methods would be required for shaping these larger containers. Evidence of hammering would have been removed by planishing using fine hammers and finished by filing, planing or scraping, and polishing (for such ancient processes see Craddock 2009, 158).
\textsuperscript{157} Moorey 1971, 259; Curtis 1983, 85; 2008, 163. The process of manufacturing rivets has not been discussed, but an analysis of a rivet belonging to a bronze bowl from Nimrud suggests that rivets were made by placing small cast bronze buttons or pellets in a hollow rounded die and hammering a tube into it so that the metal was forced up the tube to form the stalk; a process known as “reverse extrusion”. The metal seems to have been worked in this way while it was hot. This method of production was established via metallurgical analysis and published by Lang et al. (1986, 115) (see also Hughes et al. 1988, 315).
\textsuperscript{158} Moorey 1971, 259.
\textsuperscript{159} Although presumably only an analysis of an example that has been damaged, such as the Ashmolean strip, might reveal such a core. Moorey does not suggest as much, but if iron cores were indeed used, perhaps they were used to strengthen the structure of the container.
\textsuperscript{160} The edges of the base clearly cover the side-strips, thereby indicating this order of assemblage.
fixed by two rows of rivets (fig. 28). At the top of the coffin another two rows of rivets fix a strip of sheet bronze around the entirety of the interior surface. This strip folds outwards to form an overhanging rim or lip (fig. 28), which presumably facilitated the placement of a cover such as the Arjān lid to seal the coffin.

Two cast bronze handles are riveted vertically side by side at the centre of either end of the coffin, just below the rim (figs. 28 and 29). The only variation is seen on the Rām Hormuz examples, but these are too incompletely preserved to establish the original number of handles and their arrangement. The handle grips are either plain (Ur PG1 and PG2, Nimrud Coffin 2, and probably Rām Hormuz), partly banded/ribbed (Zincirli), or completely ribbed with a smooth inner surface (Arjān). The handle attachments on the Ur coffins are a half-oval shape, on the Arjān coffin they are circular, while the Zincirli attachments are rosette-like (fig. 29).\(^1\) The shape of the Nimrud and Rām Hormuz attachments cannot be assessed based on images and reports currently available.

The Arjān lid appears to have been made from a U-shaped sheet of bronze, topped at either end by a plain, thin, riveted bronze handle aligned along the long axis of the coffin (figs. 14 and 15). A bronze band was reportedly riveted around its circumference to form a rim;\(^2\) however, the available images do not reveal the presence of any rivets and instead suggest the edges of the lid were hammered outward to create this rim (fig. 30).

To-date only the Arjān coffin has been subject to metallurgical analysis, which revealed that the body was made from a cast tin-copper alloy (11.96% tin, 85.36% copper) hammered down to sheet and later cold worked and annealed into shape.\(^3\) The elemental composition of the cast bronze handle was a slightly lower 10.51% tin and 83.58% copper, with a surprisingly high 4.437% lead content.\(^4\)

In terms of decoration, several of the coffins are much too corroded or fragmentary to assert with any real certainty that they were not originally decorated, and therefore

---

\(^1\) The Zincirli handles as described by Andrae (1943, 119).
\(^2\) Alizadeh 1985, 52; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 23.
\(^3\) Vatandoust 1999, 139, Table 2. While the addition of 2% lead for casting is advantageous as it increases the fluidity of the alloy (Craddock and Giumlia-Mair 1988, 319), Vatandoust (1999, 134) has highlighted that this higher level of lead would result in very poor mechanical qualities; disadvantage that must have been acceptable for these handles. The body is virtually lead free (Vatandoust 1999, 139), but this is a necessary property of all sheet metals as the presence of lead results in cracks during hammering (Craddock and Giumlia-Mair 1988, 319). Another notable example of surprisingly high lead levels in the handle components of a sheetmetal object occurs in the Nimrud bowls analysed at the British Museum. The handles are fixed to a carved cast metal bar bearing a high lead content, sometimes with ribbed decoration, which is in turn fixed to the body of the bowl. The reason for the addition of lead is not readily apparent (Hughes et al. 1988, 312-3).
judgements regarding whether or not decoration was exceptional cannot be made. The only excavated examples obviously exhibiting decoration on the coffin body are those from Ur, whose exterior side-strips are chased with the repeated motif of goats (or mouflon) standing atop rosettes (fig. 7). The addition of simpler decorative elements is suggested by reports of a “copper frieze” on Coffin 1 at Nimrud, but nothing further may be said about this frieze in the absence of published details or images. The remnants of the Arjān coffin lid exhibit at least three registers of incised (or chased?) lotus flower and bud decoration running along the outer edge (fig. 15). Both this motif and the goat and rosette have been described as “predominantly” Assyrian.

4.4. Workshops

Stressing the similarities between the bronze coffins, scholars have suggested that they were all produced in closely associated workshops linked to Mesopotamian urban centres during to the period c.750-650 (or slightly later), and were perhaps even manufactured in the same workshop. The main reasons cited for this argument include similar measurements, design and manufacture. However, I would suggest that there is enough size variation to indicate that the coffins had not been hammered around the same object, as might be expected if their production took place in the same workshop. The range of styles in which the handles were cast has also been overlooked in discussion about workshops. I would argue that the prioritisation of similarities to establish a relationship between the coffins has led scholars to overlook their differences, which might instead point to their production in separate workshops. However, our knowledge of bronze workshops in the relevant regions during the early-mid first millennium remains extremely limited, and there are presently little grounds upon which to found any argument concerning bronze production practices.

In seeking possible workshop locations, all regions in which these bronze receptacles have been recovered are suitable candidates. Both Álvarez-Mon and Curtis have advanced

---

165 The body of the Arjān coffin is plain, and decoration has not been reported for the Nimrud coffins. Likewise, decoration is not evident on the remains of the Rām Hormuz coffins (pers. comm. J. Álvarez-Mon). It is, however, possible that heavy corrosion has masked any chased decoration on the Nimrud and Rām Hormuz examples.

166 Curtis (1983, 85) refers to the technique used as chasing, but later (2008, 167-8) describes the motifs simply as being “incised”.

167 Notably the rows of rivets shared by all of the coffins had a decorative effect, but were obviously primarily functional.

168 Álvarez-Mon (2010a) describes the motif as either incised (p. 23), engraved (Pl. 8 caption), or as a chased “frieze” (Table II, p. 26 and p. 27).

169 Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 27.


171 This observation does rely, however, on the assumption that these were shaped around such an object.
the argument that they were made in an Assyrian court production centre.\textsuperscript{172} Curtis points to Assyria as the origin of the coffin type, and has long promoted Assyria as a vibrant bronze-working centre during the Neo-Assyrian period,\textsuperscript{173} a notion which is supported by the large volume of raw materials taken as booty or sent to Assyria as tribute.\textsuperscript{174} Even prior to the discovery of the Nimrud coffins, Curtis believed that these objects were produced in Assyria because of its centrality within the geographic distribution of the coffins.\textsuperscript{175}

Curtis has also entertained the possibility that the coffins were made in Ur or Zincirli under “Assyrian political domination”.\textsuperscript{176} While archaeological evidence for bronze-working in first millennium Babylonia is extremely poor,\textsuperscript{177} Brinkman has adequately demonstrated via textual evidence that Babylonia possessed active bronze production centres.\textsuperscript{178} Irene Winter has argued that North Syria was similarly home to an important metal working tradition, although production centres are yet to be uncovered, and that bronzework from this region was highly prized throughout the ancient world.\textsuperscript{179} Sargon’s annals indeed suggest that some of the best bronze-work comes from this region,\textsuperscript{180} and it cannot be ruled out as a potential locale for production of the coffins. Finally, Moorey has suggested that the Ashmolean side-strips could have been made in a “west Persian workshop under strong Assyrian influence”.\textsuperscript{181} We know that highly skilled metal workers in Elam also produced...

\textsuperscript{172} Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 274; Curtis 1983, 93.
\textsuperscript{173} See Curtis (1988) for his most forthright argument on Assyrian bronze-working. Moorey (1994, 264) and Brinkman (1997, 8) are also strong proponents for the existence of important metal-working centres in Assyria, with the probable involvement of foreign craftsmen.
\textsuperscript{174} Numerous tribute and booty lists attest to this situation (see Walker 1988, especially p.111). Here Walker (1988, 111) notes that much more bronze (and other materials) was removed as part of the Assyrian sacking of towns than was given as tribute. As well as alloying tin and copper, the scrap “ḫušee” bronze taken as booty and/or received as tribute by Neo-Assyrian rulers was available to Assyrian metal workers (see for example king Samsi-Adad V text A.0.103.2 in Grayson 1996, 191).
\textsuperscript{175} Curtis 1983, 93. Curtis does, however, admit that while the goat and rosette motif has been defined as Assyrian it cannot be used as the basis for assigning the coffins to an Assyrian production centre because decorations could easily have been added after the coffin left its place of manufacture.
\textsuperscript{176} Curtis 1983, 93. Alternatively, he proposes that they were exported to these regions after their manufacture in Assyria.
\textsuperscript{177} For a summary of evidence from various sites in southern Mesopotamia see Braun-Holzinger (1988).
\textsuperscript{178} Some of the vast range of bronze objects produced by Babylonian metalworkers from at least the alloying stages include plates (batû), bowls (mukarrišu and qabuttu), cups (kāsu), kettles (ruqqu), cooking pots (mušaḫḫinu), strainers (šaḫša), coolers (mukassitu), storage containers (kandu and šappu), lampstands (kallu), lanterns (šašitu), washing bowls (namsû), libation bowls (munaqqitu), censers (muqattirtu), grates (kišukku) and even kettledrums (lilissu) (see Brinkman 1988, 140). Braun-Holzinger (1988, 119) also argues for the production of a significant amount of bronze in Babylonia during the earlier half of the first millennium.
\textsuperscript{179} Winter 1988, 193, 204, 207. See also Guralnick 2004, 203; Hodos 2007, 70.
\textsuperscript{180} The king took a personal interest in observing this production (see Dalley 1988, 101, 105). Interestingly, many of the storerooms at the Northwest Palace of Nimrud contained valuable tribute and treasure bearing Sargon’s name and in room “U” an inscription tells us that he had used this room in order to store treasures captured from the king of Carchemish, which surely included bronzes (Russell 1998, 698).
\textsuperscript{181} Moorey 1971, 260
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

outstanding bronzes in the 12\textsuperscript{th}-13\textsuperscript{th} centuries,\textsuperscript{182} but later Elamite bronze production is relatively unknown.\textsuperscript{183}

In my opinion, while Assyria appears the strongest contender, the question of workshops for these coffins must for now be left open. And with the knowledge that the Arjān coffin was made of a cast alloy hammered down to sheet, which was only later worked into shape,\textsuperscript{184} we need not assume that the entire manufacturing process occurred at a single site. It is possible that sheet bronze was fabricated elsewhere and delivered to workshops for manufacture of the coffin. Such a scenario for production of palace doors is alluded to in a Sargon II text, which reports five “doors to be coated with bronze sheet” “I shall send word; they will bring the sheets together with […] to Dur Šarruken, and we shall set to it and make them.”\textsuperscript{185} Future metallurgical analysis of the coffins might confirm this suggestion, or conversely may reveal that the sheet bronze and coffin components were cast from the same batch of metal in the same workshop.\textsuperscript{186}

4.5. Dating

The corpus outlined above represents a highly distinctive burial type, which is all the more surprising because the few known examples are spread over a rather wide geographical area, employed by what are considered three separate cultural groups. According to the present state of knowledge, their use spans approximately 200 years. Scholars generally favour a mid-late 8\textsuperscript{th} century date for their initial appearance, although it seems difficult to rule out earlier production, particularly if we provide for the possibility that they were reused. It is even tempting to suggest that these coffins may be the bronze “bathtubs”

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[182] Moorey 1974, 25.
\item[183] It has been tentatively proposed by Muscarella (1974, 248) that some of the decorated bronze beakers said to be from western Iran with “Babylonian” elements were actually products of Elam, although this is extremely speculative given that the objects are without provenance.
\item[184] Vatandoust 1999, 139.
\item[185] Parpola 1987, 63-4 (letter 66, K 943/ABL 462). Similarly a letter to Esarhaddon reports that “we have melted down 23 minas of gold in the agate-standard, including the votive gifts. They will hammer it as thin as the king, my lord, commands. Later, they will use it for gilding”, implying that the processing of the gold occurs in a separate location to that in which it is worked into sheet, after which it was presumably stored until “later” when “they” would use it for gilding. Letter 28, “Report on Gold and Silver Work for the Temple of Sin” (text ABL 1194, lines 4-6), in Cole and Machinist 1998.
\item[186] An interesting possibility for further understanding manufacture is opened by the analyses of a series of bronze bowls from Nimrud, some with a curved bar with two loops riveted onto one side, through which a handle is passed. These components have been tested for their metal composition and it was noted that the percentages of trace elements were so similar in all components of the bowls that they seem to have been frequently made of the same source metals, thus indicating all components were made in the same workshop at the same time (Lang et al. 1986, 113; Hughes et al. 1988, 313). Presently the availability of the required data is confined to the Arjān coffin and many of the trace element readings in the Arjān coffin body and handle were simply listed as N/A, thus I am reticent to make any suggestions regarding its production. This would, however, be an interesting point to pursue if more data becomes available in the future.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
4. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin Corpus

mentioned in several 11th-9th century Assyrian texts, which pour into Assyria amongst masses of other bronze objects. However, U-shape coffins made of terracotta are attested at Aššur as early as the Middle Assyrian period and the bronze coffins appear to be a translation of this local shape, rather than an imported one. At present we cannot firmly establish a period of production for these coffins, but their known burial contexts almost certainly fall within c.750-550 and this date range provides a starting point for placing their use in context.

187 Texts from earlier periods contain references to many types of bronze containers and vessels. Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076) reports that from the land of Katmuḫu in the mountainous region to the northwest of Assyria (see Parpola and Porter 2001, map 3: E3 for probable location) he carried off five na-ar-ma-ak ZABAR. These items are translated as “bronze bathtubs”, and are presumably much larger than the 180 ruq-qi (“copper kettles” or cauldrons) he removed (Grayson 1991, 15, text A.0.87.1, line 30). The CAD (N1 360) translates narmaktu as washbowl or wash basin, which appear to have ritual or medical contexts. narmaku is translated as a (metal) vessel for pouring water over a bather; a bathing place or bathtub built into a room of a house; a bathtub; or (ritual) bathing. Tiglath-Pileser donated one “bathtub” to the god Aššur (Grayson 1991, 16 text A.0.87.1, lines 58-62). From Urratinaš, he collected large bronze “bathtubs” (Grayson 1991, 15 text A.0.87.1, lines 49-50). Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884) reports receiving tribute including a nar-ma-ak-tu ZABAR (bronze “bathtub”) from the city of Anat on the Euphrates in Syria (Grayson 1991, 174-5, text A.0.100.5, line 72). For the location of Anat see Parpola and Porter 2001, map 10: B1; Herzfeld 1968, 46-7. In the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, more “bronze bathtubs” are paid as tribute when the Assyrian king approaches Carchemish, and he receives tap-hi (“bronze tubs” or alternatively “metal cauldron”) from Zamua, a province in the Zagros northeast of Assyria (see Parpola and Porter 2001, map 11: A1 for probable area). He also receives “bronze tubs, bronze pails, bronze bath-tubs” from Sangara, king of the land of Hatti (Grayson 1991, 217, text A.0.101.1, line 64-6, 206). It is notable that we do not have iconographic evidence for objects that look like our “bathtub” coffins as we have for bronze cauldrons (ruq-qi) on the bronze Balawat gates, where are they depicted as tribute during the reign of Shalmaneser III (858-824) (see King 1915, 23, 25-6, 32, Pls. XIII, XIV, XXV, XXVI) It should be emphasised that the translation of object names on tribute lists and their links to specific objects is problematic, and none of the references to “bathtubs” occurs in association with terms for “coffin”, “grave” “burial” or any other word that might suggest a funerary context. However, if one were to argue that these receptacles were in fact once intended for bathing (including ritual bathing) as Moorey (1971, 260) has maintained, they would not be expected to appear in texts as funerary objects.

188 Presently the mid-6th century marks a clear end-date for their production. A single bronze coffin from Susa dates to the late 5th century (appx. 3, coffin 10; fig. 47; J. de Morgan 1905, 29-58; J. and A. G. Elayi 1992, 268-9), but its more rectangular form is distinct from the Ur, Nimrud, Arjān and Rām Hormuz coffins.
5. Burial Typology

5.1. Introduction

As a starting point for situating the bronze coffins into the wider context of funerary practices in the 8th-6th centuries, the present chapter is dedicated to the description of excavated Neo-Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Elamite mortuary remains. This material is dealt with by region and the established burial typologies are outlined, followed by overviews of grave goods, including food remains, and burial location. In a final section the evidence is summarised and the U-shape coffin considered in this overall context. The reader should bear in mind throughout that the burial data for these regions is extremely inconsistent and incomplete for the reasons highlighted in the preceding sections 2 and 3.

5.2. Babylonia

5.2.1. Burial Typology

For the Neo-Babylonian period in southern Mesopotamia burial data is available from the sites of Babylon, Ur, Uruk, Isin, Kish, Nippur, Sippar, and Tell el-Lahm (for locations see fig. 1). The modes of corpse disposal in use at these sites may be broadly categorised as follows:

- **tomb** – a barrel or corbel mud or baked brick vault with multiple (consecutive) interments (fig. 31a). The corpse was laid out on the floor and moved aside for the later burials.

- **plain earth/pit** - simple pits in which the corpse (wrapped in cloth or reed matting) was directly placed (fig. 31b)

- **"sherd grave"** - simple pits in which the corpse was covered or encased in pot sherds (fig. 31c)

---

189 Despite the criticism levelled at scholars who focus on burial typologies, the method of disposal of the dead body is an important aspect of death and burial, and is often linked with, for example, the identity of the interred.

190 Potts (1997, 223) points out that animal interments and food offerings may be included within the category "grave furnishings".

191 As reported by Woolley (1962, 52-3) at Ur and Reuther (1926, 174-182) at Babylon. This type is not discussed by Baker.

192 Woolley 1962, 53; McCown and Haines 1967, 118; Baker 1995, 217; Boehmer et al. 1995, 37. At Uruk only 3.7% of the excavated (surviving) graves were plain earth or "sherd graves" (Boehmer et al. 1995, 37), while at Nippur earth graves accounted for about two fifths of excavated graves (McCown and Haines 1967, 118).
5. Burial Typology

- **single pot** – the corpse was placed in an open vessel with either a ring-base, a round bottom, a round bottom with a perforation (“hole-ring”) in its centre, or a flat bottom. The vessel size range is c.25-87cm high and c.20-92cm diameter. The pots often had wooden lids, and were laid on their side or stood vertically in the grave shaft. Several single pot burials types may be defined:
  - Ring-base pot alone (fig. 32a), or covered with a sherd (fig. 32b) or with a flat-bottomed bowl (fig. 32c)
  - Flat-bottomed pot covered by a flat bottomed bowl (fig. 32d)
  - Round-bottomed pot with a perforation alone (fig. 32e), or covered by a sherd (fig. 32f) or a flat-bottomed bowl (fig. 32g)
  - Plain round-bottomed pot alone (fig. 32h), or covered with a sherd (fig. 32i) or a flat based bowl (fig. 32j)

- **double-pot** - two open vessels, of the same basic range of types as single-pot burials, are placed with their rims together and often sealed with bitumen. One pot sometimes has a rim with a smaller diameter so it could be inserted into the other.

Two pots were employed in the following combinations:
  - two ring-base pots (fig. 33a)
  - one ring-base and one round-bottomed pot with a perforation (fig. 33b)
  - one ring-base and one plain round-bottomed pot (fig. 33c; this is the most common type)
  - two round-bottomed pots with perforations (fig. 33d)

---

193 Baker does not include this burial type, but I have added it here based on the published Uruk “Scherbengräber” burials 105-6 (Boehmer et al. 1995, 47-8) and Sippar’s “tombes à tessons” T. 129-140 (Haerinck 1980, 63-4).
194 Measurements based on Uruk data (Boehmer et al. 1995, 47-8).
195 Woolley 1962, 53; Baker 1995, 216. At Babylon they sometimes had wooden lid and one had traces of bitumen on its neck with impressions of rope (presumably to seal a lid), while another had a lid of spirally-woven palm-fibre rope spread with bitumen (Baker 1995, 215).
196 These single pot (Einzeltopfgräber) burial types are defined by Boehmer et al. (1995, 54-65) for the site of Uruk, where single pot burials accounted for 16.7% of all graves in Neo/Late Babylonian periods. They also occur at Babylon, Isin, Kish, Nippur, Tell el-Laḥm and Ur. Baker’s Type 3 “Jar burials” are in fact the same as Boehmer’s “single pot” burial. I have used “Single pot” in preference to “Jar burial” in order to maintain the distinction between the large open-vessel (pot) burial types and the closed-vessel (jar) burials. Baker notably does not discuss any of the (usually ovoid) jars in her report.
197 Traces of bitumen are often found inside the pots or around their mouths (Boehmer et al. 1995, 36, 130).
199 The Uruk jar, pot and double-pot burial types published by Boehmer et al. (1995) show far more variation than Baker’s work (1995, 210-12) suggested. Boehmer et al. (1995, 66-129, 37) note that the various types of Doppeltopfgräber together accounted for 69.6% of all graves. Double-pot burials have been found at Babylon, Isin, Nippur, Tell el-Laḥm, Ur and Uruk, but Baker (1995, 210, 212-3) has argued that this burial type went out of use c.700, except at Uruk where they are the characteristic burial form found in Neo-Late Babylonian housing areas and continue until the 6th century.
5. Burial Typology

- one round-bottomed pot with a perforation and one round-bottomed pot (fig. 33e)
- two round-bottomed pots (fig. 33f)

- *jar* - a single jar ranging in height from c.28 to 72 cm (most 45-55 cm) and 26-44 cm in diameter at the widest point of the belly (but generally varying little from c.30 cm):²⁰⁰
  - Ring-base jar (fig. 34a)
  - Ovoid jar (fig. 34b)
  - Ovoid jar with neck cut/broken off alone (fig. 34c), covered by a sherd of another pot (fig. 34d) or a flat-bottomed bowl (fig. 34e)

- *pot and jar* - the open (broken) end of the jar is placed inside a pot (fig. 34f).²⁰¹

- *box* - ceramic box-shaped coffin (fig. 35a)²⁰²

- *bowl* – a vessel with bowl base and curved sides, usually oval in form and often with an identical bowl placed over the top as a lid (fig. 35b)²⁰³

- *“bathtub” bowl* - bowls with curved sides terminating in a rim with one straight and one curved side (fig. 35c)²⁰⁴

- *oval coffin* - terracotta burial container with high sides and two rounded ends, occasionally inverted and placed over the body and burial goods (fig. 35d).²⁰⁵

- *“bathtub” coffin* - terracotta apsidal/U-shape coffin with palm wood/baked brick/unbaked brick/ceramic lid (fig. 36).²⁰⁶ Occasionally handles are placed at either end or

---

²⁰⁰ These jar burial (Flaschengräber) types and measurements are based on Boehmer et al. (1995, 48-54).
²⁰² This is Reuther’s (1926, 203-4) “Kastensärge” (“box coffin”), which is absent from Baker’s (1995) typology.
²⁰³ Woolley 1962, 53; McCown and Haines 1967, 120. This form is found from the early 7th century at Babylon, Kish, Nippur and Ur (Baker 1995, 217).
²⁰⁴ Baker (1995, 217) interprets these as a transitional between bowls and bathtub coffins.
²⁰⁵ This coffin type was found at Babylon, Kish, Nippur, Tell el-Laḥm and over 30 were recovered at Ur. Notably it does not appear at all in Uruk during this period. Woolley recorded that the Ur examples measured approximately 1.4 x 0.6 x 0.5 m and were sometimes inverted and placed over the body (Woolley 1962, 53). Oval coffins are often referred to as “bathtub” coffins and the extension of the description “bathtub” to embrace the terracotta oval-shaped coffins found in earlier periods of Mesopotamia and Iran confuses discussions surrounding this coffin type. For example, while Strommenger’s oft-cited 1964 article states that the earliest “bathtub” coffins originate in Aššur in the Middle Assyrian period, while Álvarez-Mon (2010a, 23-4) reports that the earliest examples of “bathtub” coffins appear in the (earlier) Old Elamite period. Strommenger is referring specifically to the apsidal-shaped coffins, while Álvarez-Mon is referring to the “oval coffin”. For now it is preferable to maintain a distinction between the oval coffins and the coffins with one squared end.
²⁰⁶ In one example at Nippur a second inverted coffin was used as a lid. At Babylon the coffin and lid were sometimes spread with bitumen and/or covered with palm-matting and the coffin secured with twisted reeds or palm-fibre ropes (Baker 1995, 213).
5. Burial Typology

Usually decorated with one or more impressed rope-like bands running around the outer surface of the walls.\footnote{Two from Isin have handles (Hrouda 1981, 41, graves 44 and 44a) and one with side handles appears at Babylon (Reuther 1926, taf. 78).}

- \textit{bronze “bathtub” coffin} - bronze apsidal/U-shape coffin

Burials are almost always individual inhumations, except for the rare occurrence of a cremation,\footnote{Three cremations were found in a “bathtub” coffin at Babylon (Baker 1995, 219).} or an adult placed with a child or neonate.\footnote{Baker 1995, 219. At Uruk Boehmer (1995, 36) reports that the only instance of a double burial is that of a young child with an adult in burial 239.} The body was usually placed in a flexed position on either its left or right side, with one or both hands at the head or in front of the body between the chest and pelvis.\footnote{This observation was made by McCown & Haines (1967, 118) at Nippur, and also holds true for the other published burials. Baker (1995, 219) also reports that “inhumation was almost invariably crouched”, although the term “flexed” is preferable.} Some general correlations between burial type and age group have been observed. Children are often buried in single pots and oval coffins, while jar, bowl and “bathtub” bowls are almost always infant burials.\footnote{See discussion in Baker (1995, 220). Oval burials seem to have been the preferred method for juvenile burials. In Babylon all but one of the oval coffins contained children (Baker 1995, 216). Of the five found in Nippur only three contained skeletons, all of which were children, and those found at Tell el-Lahm also contain child burials (McCown and Haines 1967, 119). For bowls Baker (1995, 217) states that two thirds of those she analysed were infant burials. Woolley (1962, 53) reports that at Ur bowl burials are “always burials of small children”. The “Bathtub” bowls have only been found at Babylon and for these only one infant and one immature individual have been identified (Baker 1997, 217).} Adults were usually buried in double-pots, usually just large enough to accommodate a person placed in a tightly flexed position prior to the onset of rigor-mortis.\footnote{Because these were primary inhumations, it is assumed that the bodies were placed prior to rigor mortis (Boehmer et al. 1995, 36-8).} “Bathtub” coffins appear to have been used only for adults, who were arranged on their side in a flexed or tightly flexed position with their head at either the rounded or squared end.\footnote{Of the 18 “bathtub” coffins found at Nippur, all were adults (McCown and Haines 1967), all three at Sippar belong to adults (two are young adult males, the sex of third skeleton is not reported) (Haerinck 1980, 55-6, 60), and those at Babylon and Uruk similarly all appear to have also been adult (Reuther 1926, taf. 67-72; Boehmer et al. 1995, taf. 184, 185). Line drawings of the Babylon coffins demonstrate that the head could be at either end (Reuther 1926, taf. 67-72). At Ur, Woolley (1962, 53) reported that the head was placed at either the curved or straight end and at Sippar Haerinck’s (1980, pls. 5.1, 7.1) plates show that tomb 144 the head is placed at the squared end, while in 138 it is in the curved end. Similarly images in the Urak publication demonstrate that the head could be placed at either end (Boehmer et al. 1995, taf. 184 and 185). The reports do not indicate a preference for placement of the burials on a particular side, although it is notable that all of the skeletons photographed or sketched in “bathtub” coffins at Uruk and Sippar lay on their left side (see Boehmer et al. 1995, taf. 184, 185 and 187; Haerinck 1980, pls. 5.1 and 7.1, burials T. 144 and T. 138) and almost all at Babylon are placed on their left (Reuther 1926, taf. 67-72). The bodies could also be covered with matting; at Uruk traces of reed matting were found over the body of U-shape “bathtub” coffin grave 534 (Boehmer et al. 1995, 138).} All ages from infant to adult are represented in earth/pit burials.\footnote{McCown and Haines 1967, 118; Baker 1995, 217.} Excavators have reported that there was no obvious
5. Burial Typology

preference for burial orientation, and that space constraints such as walls dictated the placement of burial containers.\textsuperscript{216}

5.2.2. Grave Goods

Grave goods are generally found inside the burial container with the deceased.\textsuperscript{217} Most burials collated by Baker contained a small number of pots and/or personal adornments including seals, or utensils, and textile remnants are often preserved on or near the skull.\textsuperscript{218} Metal vessels were found in 36 of the burials and were slightly more likely to be buried with men, while women were strongly correlated with beads and more likely to be buried with gold, silver, or bronze ornaments.\textsuperscript{219} Fibulae and metal (mostly bronze) vessels were particularly associated with “bathtub” coffins,\textsuperscript{220} and at Merkes more than half of burials containing gold and/or silver were “bathtub” coffins, while none were pot burials.\textsuperscript{221} Food remains, the most common being date stones and bones of sheep/goats or occasionally fish, have been found inside the burial container and/or in the fill above, in the latter case associated with burned material and sometimes hearths above the grave.\textsuperscript{222} Notably the bronze coffin PG1 at Ur contained the humerus and ulna of a small ruminant animal.\textsuperscript{223}

5.2.3. Burial Location

In large southern Mesopotamian tell sites the use of urban space is prone to change and intramural burial does not necessarily equate with sub-floor burial as cemeteries sometimes spread over previously inhabited areas or disused monuments. Evidence for the connection of

\textsuperscript{216} Woolley 1962, 53; McCown and Haines 1967, 118.
\textsuperscript{217} Woolley 1962, 53.
\textsuperscript{218} In Baker’s (1995, 220) study 85% of all burials contained grave goods, while at Nippur the excavator reports that approximately half contained grave goods, with one quarter including personal ornaments (McCown & Haines 1967, 118). A total of 23 graves included cylinder seals and 45 have stamp seals (Baker 1995, 219).
\textsuperscript{219} 50% of female graves contained beads versus just 5% of male graves (Baker 1995, 219-20).
\textsuperscript{220} Braun-Holzinger 1988.
\textsuperscript{221} Baker 1995, 220. McCown and Haines (1967, 147) reported that the “bathtub” burials at Nippur were noticeably the most wealthy. A glance at the catalogue of Ur burials (Woolley 1962, 68-87) also reveals that the U-shape coffins were associated with substantially more wealth (in metals) than other recorded graves.
\textsuperscript{222} At Babylon date stones were found in the bend of the knee in a pot burial, and along the right side of body in a “bathtub” coffin, while a second “bathtub” contained date stones at the deceased’s feet near bones of a small ruminant animal. Carbonised date stones were mixed in with the fill of several graves, most of which had evidence for burning at the top, sometimes in the form of a hearth used more than once. The ash in these hearths sometimes contained date stones, and in one case (grave 106) included animal bones with wood carbon (Baker 1995, 219). At Nippur was found a ceramic box burial with dates, pomegranates and some figs by the hip, and several graves with animal bones (all bathtub coffins) and one jar burial with fish bones (McCown and Haines 1967 135, IB246). The fill of a “bathtub” grave at Uruk also contained barley, date stones, and sheep bones. Organic remains in the fill could mean use of refuse as backfill, but fires suggest some (ritual?) activity associated with or following the burial (Baker 1995, 219). Two pit graves (covered with baked brick) at Sippar, T. 142 and 143 each contained bones of young sheep or goat, though the sex of these animals cannot be determined (Bökönyi 1980, 87-8).
\textsuperscript{223} Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 121.
5. Burial Typology

burials with a building above is often absent, and an assessment of sub-floor burial relies on evidence such as burial alignment with walls, or the assumption that sub-floor burials were the norm.\(^{224}\) Present evidence in fact suggests that cemeteries and sub-floor burials were used contemporaneously.\(^{225}\) Notably, it was not uncommon to find a range of burial types interred under the same room.\(^{226}\)

5.2.4. Summary Discussion

The Neo-Babylonian typology reveals that a wide variety of burials were used contemporaneously with the Ur bronze coffins, and Baker in fact highlighted that one of the most visible overall trends among southern Mesopotamian burials during the period 750-500 is an increasing diversity of forms.\(^{227}\) The overall picture painted by the Neo-Babylonian burials is not one of a wealthy society, or at least not one which placed emphasis on the deposition of wealth in burials.\(^{228}\) Thus in a period where a limited few burials might contain a little gold and silver or a small metal vessel, the large bronze coffins appear quite striking. In Babylonia there is a notable absence of ‘royal’ burials,\(^{229}\) and the terracotta and bronze “bathtub” coffins represent the most wealthy of the extant burials. Texts report that late

---

\(^{224}\) Burials on the surface are often said to belong to houses which are entirely eroded away, resulting in a very circular argument for subfloor burial. As Baker (1995, 218) suggests, it would be interesting to study these burials in relation to the changing use of urban space.

\(^{225}\) Subfloor graves were found at Sippar, Nippur, Isin, Babylon and Uruk, and two cemeteries at the latter. At Uruk it was reported that 1-1.5m deep pits were dug into the floors, or sometimes the paving of “streets” or “squares” and the pot placed inside, supported by the pit wall or bricks (Boehmer et al. 1995, 36). At Nippur a small room at the corner of TA house C has been identified as a burial room and a small room in House 4 at Babylon also yielded a group of burials (Baker 1995, 219). McCown and Haines (1967, 147) report that cemeteries were used during the Akkadian period and that excavations suggest they may also have been used in later periods. Excavation reports from Kish and Ur are unfortunately not useful for establishing burial location (Baker 1995, 218). Stommenger correctly argued contra Reuther that Babylon burials were intramural, but the low numbers of burials at the site nonetheless suggest that more than one location was being used. The same is true of Uruk, where cemeteries have in fact been located to confirm this situation; “bathtub” coffins were found in a cemetery in area H/24-25 at and another spread densely over the Eanna enclosure wall of Sargon II (Baker 1995, 218).

\(^{226}\) In a house at Babylon, for example, a jar was said to be found together with two “bathtubs” (Baker 1995, 215), and two oval coffins, an oval bowl & a “bathtub” coffin were found here in a small room in House 4 (Baker 1995, 219).

\(^{227}\) In the early first millennium, disposal of the dead was usually in double pot graves (Baker 1995, 220).

\(^{228}\) Even taking into account the fact that most excavated graves were empty or plundered, Woolley (1962, 56-7) reported that at Ur “the grave furniture of these periods is poor”, adding that “there was little except the purely personal objects which ordinary piety would leave on the body - bead necklaces, with their accompanying amulets, seals, finger-rings and bracelets and […] fibulae which fastened the garments. Occasionally a metal or wooden vessel, or one of glass, might replace the commoner clay; tools and weapons are very rare.” It is difficult to make inferences about the wealth of the society from these observations, however, since emphasis may have been placed on elaborate mourning rituals rather than deposition of wealth in the graves (see for example Cohen 2005, 23).

\(^{229}\) Bearing in mind of course that for at least some of the period relating to the bronze coffins, Babylonia was ruled by Assyrian kings. For the absence of royal burials in Babylon during the Neo-Babylonian Empire see Wiseman (1985, 114), who proposes that the kings may have been buried in bronze U-shape coffins.
5. Burial Typology

second and early first millennium Babylonian kings were buried in palaces, but such burials have not yet been recovered. It is possible that disposal methods leaving no archaeological traces were also practiced. For example, the Chaldean kings who often ruled over Babylonian cities during the Neo-Babylonian period seem to have been returned to their homeland in the marshy areas in southern Mesopotamia for a “swamp burial”.  

5.3. Assyria

5.3.1. Burial Typology

Based on the available evidence from Aššur, Nimrud, and a limited number of small sites in northern Mesopotamia the following Neo-Assyrian burial types may be delineated: 232

- **tomb** – a mud or baked brick vault containing single or multiple interments
- **plain earth/pit grave**
- **“sherd grave”**
- **brick grave** – a loose term covering a range of graves involving bricks (e.g. the pit may be lined with bricks or roofed by bricks stood upright and leaning in towards each other to form a triangular pediment) (fig. 37a) 233
- **single pot** 234

---

230 The Dynastic Chronicle suggests locations for the burials of the second Sealand Dynasty rulers in the late 2nd millennium (1025-1005), two of the three rulers of the Dynasty of Bazi (1004-985) and the sole member of the “Elamite” Dynasty. The location is as generally a palace, with the palace of Sargon (presumably Sargon of Akkad) specified on all but one occasion, when the palace of Kār-Marduk is reported (Beaulieu 1988, 1).

231 Both Strabo (Geography XVI.1.11) and Arrian (History of Alexander VII.22.2) report that Alexander the Great encountered the ancient royal tombs of Babylonian kings and princes built in the lakes and marshlands of lower Mesopotamia during his inspection of the Babylonian canals. Arrian describes the tombs as partly or entirely submerged in the water with reeds growing on and around them. The source of this story for both authors is Aristobulus’ lost History of Alexander the Great (Beaulieu 1988, 3). The practice of swamp burial is also reported back in the late 2nd millennium by the Dynastic Chronicle, which states that Ea-mukin-zēri, a ruler of the second Sealand Dynasty was buried in the “swamp of Bit-Ḫašmar” (Beaulieu 1988, 1). The practice seems to have been associated with the cult of Enki, as suggested by the 3rd millennium “Reform Texts” of Urukagina of Lagash in which burial in the “reed thicket of Enki” is listed amongst prevalent burial practices. According to Beaulieu (1988, 2-3), burial in the reed thickets seems to have considered to be quite normal by the authors and the attestation of this burial type for over two millennia suggests that this method of corpse disposal was far more widespread and usual than cuneiform sources suggest. Cohen (2005, 80) does not, however, connect the “Reed of Enki” with water at all, but simply sees it as a cemetery. It has been posited that a swamp burial was intended as an ignoble end (in contrast to palace burial) for punishment of usurper kings such as Ea-mukin-zēri, but this notion can probably be dismissed; Ea-mukin-zēri was probably being returned to the traditional ancestral burial area (Beaulieu 1988, 4).

232 Unless otherwise stated, the type description is the same as that provided in the Neo-Babylonian section.

233 Brick tombs are Haller’s “Ziegelgräber” type. The majority of the 45 early Neo-Assyrian (or Assyrianising?) graves at Tell Fekheriye in Syria fall into this type. They are rectangular mudbrick cist graves with a triangular pediment of mudbricks standing on edge, not unlike some of Haller’s (1954, 33) “Ziegelgräber” tombs at Aššur (Bartl 2011, 1-2).

234 I have redefined Hausleiter’s “jar” category, which appears to correspond with Haller’s (1954, 39-45) “Topfgräber” type, as “single pot” burials.
5. Burial Typology

- **double-pot**
- **jar**
- **oval coffin**
- **“bathtub” coffin**
- **“composite grave”** – more than one burial container type used, sometimes a coffin with the end removed placed together with another vessel to create a larger container allowing the corpse to be extended on its back (fig. 37b)

At Aššur the most common burial types are “sherd graves” and coffins, each representing 30% of the total number of excavated graves. Inhumations are often single, but graves and tombs sometimes contain the remains of more than one skeleton, in which case the earlier burial/s are moved aside to make room for the new body, making it difficult to attribute assemblages to particular individuals. As in Babylonia, cremations are rarely attested. In pot and coffin graves the adult corpse was laid on its side in a flexed position, but smaller children were extended.

Earth, “sherd”, brick graves and tombs permit the extension of the body on its back or side.

In terms of correlation of age with grave type it can be only stated that both children and adults are represented in all burial types except for

---

235 This type is Hausleiter’s “double-urn” (1999, 130) and Haller’s (1954, 45-9) “Doppeltopf” or “Kapselgräber” (“capsule” grave). Double-pot burials are common at Tell Fekheriya, but note that Bartl uses the term “double-jar”. The use of “pot” is preferred in order to maintain a distinction between closed-vessels (jars) and open vessels (pots). Bartl reports that the body was flexed and placed inside two vessels pushed together with their openings facing each other and are often fixed in position by mud-bricks placed between the edge of the pit and the jars (Bartl 2011, 1-4).

236 Haller’s (1954, 74-9) “Wannensarkophage”. There is a great deal of variation in size within this category, with some coffins requiring that the body be placed in a flexed or tightly flexed position, while others allowed the body to be extended.

237 Haller’s (1954, 54-8) “Hockersarkophage”. These measure on average l. 60-100 x w. 50-65cm x h. 50-60cm.

238 See Haller 1954, 85-93. At Aššur Terracotta U-shape coffins dating to the 8th-7th centuries had a pair of handles at either end and often a band of rope decoration below the rim (Haller 1954, 55, figs 66-7). Another was found at the Nabu Temple at Nimrud (Curtis 2008, 168). A clay U-shape tub from Zincirli, dated 8th-7th centuries has a rope-like band around the body, running just under the rim and through a pair of double-handles at either end. It contained the poorly preserved remains of a skeleton (Andrae and von Luschan 1943, 139-40, figs. 192, 193). At Khirbet Katouniyeh a terracotta u-shaped “coffin”, with 2 bands of “applied cable ornament” and two handles at each end (one broken off on each side) was found in use as a grain bin. It was thought to be a waster due to its distorted sides (Curtis and Green 1997, 11).

239 Note that the use of the term “coffin” has been used to replace Hausleiter’s “sarcophago [sic]”. Hausleiter’s (1999, 130) quantification of burial types at Aššur results in the following proportions: “sherd graves” (30%) sarcophagi (30%) jar and “double urn” (9%), tombs (8%), earth graves (8%), “composite graves” (8%), “brick-covered graves” (7%).

240 See generally Haller 1954. The majority of graves at Tell Fekheriya were brick graves in which the body was extended on its back.

241 Note that the use of the term “coffin” has been used to replace Hausleiter’s “sarcophago [sic]”. Hausleiter’s (1999, 130) quantification of burial types at Aššur results in the following proportions: “sherd graves” (30%) sarcophagi (30%) jar and “double urn” (9%), tombs (8%), earth graves (8%), “composite graves” (8%), “brick-covered graves” (7%).

242 Haller 1954, 14.

243 Haller 1954, 130. A rare cremation was found in a niche in tomb II at Nimrud (fig. 44) (Hussein and Suleiman 2000, fn. 52).

244 Husseini and Suleiman 2000, fn. 54.
5. Burial Typology

jars, which are limited to infants. Details of the sex of the interred individuals are not recorded for Aššur.

The large vaulted chamber tombs of Neo-Assyrian kings and queens have been recovered under the Old Palace at Aššur and Nimrud respectively (figs. 38 and 8). These tombs are characterised by their vaulted mudbrick architecture and are of the same basic construction: a corridor with steps leads from the ground level down into an antechamber, which is separated from the main vaulted tomb chamber by an arched doorway with stone slab double-doors mounted on pivots (fig. 44). The chambers that have been firmly attributed to kings and queens based on inscriptions are all equipped with a large stone sarcophagus (figs. 39, 40, 41 and 44). These were clearly set into place prior to construction of the chambers and would have been part of the original planning of the palace. An analogous subterranean chamber housing a stone sarcophagus and a U-shaped terracotta coffin has also

---

244 Haller 1954, 38. The same situation can be observed at Tell Fekheriyē where double-pot and brick burials were used for children and adults, and ovoid jars for infants (Bartl 2011, 1-2).

245 Andrae 1938, 136; Russell 1998, 698; Richardson 1999, 169. At Aššur the burials were found on the southeast side of the adjacent to residential suites. Here a series of five vaulted brick tombs were added during Ashurnasirpal’s renovations (Badawy 1966, 11; Andrae 1938, 137). In Tomb 3 were hundreds of fragments of a basalt sarcophagus with a five-line inscription of Aššur-bēl-kala. In the same tomb a complete limestone sarcophagus was also discovered but it was uninscribed (Grayson 1991, 109). The tombs of Ashurnasirpal (Tomb V) and Shamshi-Adad V (823-810) (Tomb II) are identified by inscriptions (Andrae 1938, 137). At Nimrud, 1988-1990 Iraqi archaeological work in Assurnasirpal’s northwest palace ‘domestic wing’ revealed four sub-floor vaulted mudbrick chambers (Tombs I-IV) containing a total of 16 individuals. Based on inscribed objects found in the tombs, the interred are presumed to include at least four Neo-Assyrian queens (the wives of Assurnasirpal II, Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC), Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC) and Sargon II). Pedde (2012, 857) notes that these burials were all under “unpretentious looking” rooms. At Nimrud, Max Mallowan (1966, 114-16) found a terracotta sarcophagus under the floor of Room DD, about five feet down, and another burial at the far end of the same room. Reade (2008, 101) has proposed that the large vaulted complex underneath room 74 may also have been used for burials, but was cleared out as part of a desecration of the tombs during the destruction of the palace.

246 Assurnasirpal’s 3.75 x 7.30m tomb contained a large basalt sarcophagus with a series of knobs on the long sides with corresponding knobs on the heavy stone lid, presumably used to seal the sarcophagus. The lid also bore three pairs of handles that may have been used for putting it in place (figs. 40 and 41). Shamshi-Adad V’s coffin also has four thick handles (fig. 39) (Andrae 1938, 138-9; Badawy 1966, 11). Tombs II and III at Nimrud, attributed to Yaba and Mullissu-Mukannišat-Ninua, both contained stone sarcophagi, while the other two chambers (Tombs I and IV) whose intended occupants are unknown, instead contain large sarcophagi of terracotta. Tomb I is a 2.5 x 1.85 x 2 m chamber brick-built chamber with some bricks naming Assurnasirpal II (883-859 BC), possibly in a secondary context. A (1.85 x 0.65 m and 0.67) sarcophagus set into the floor. An antechamber is not mentioned for this tomb. According to Damerji (2008, 81) the lid of the coffin had been sealed with bitumen. Harrack (1990, 7) reports that this coffin was of baked clay and contained the undisturbed remains of a man. Tomb II was a 2.75 x 2.30 x 1.40 m chamber entered via an antechamber through a doorway closed off by stone slabs. An inscribed stone tablet referring to Queen Yaba, wife of Tiglath-pileser III, was found in a niche in the antechamber and additional niches held stone vessels containing organic material and a cremation (fig. 44) (Damerji 2008, 81-2). The tomb contained a monolithic sarcophagus at the northern end, oriented east-west, with a stone slab lid (fig. 44). The sarcophagus held the skeletons of two females interred some 50 years apart and masses of gold and other precious objects. Tomb IV, entered via an antechamber paved with limestone (Hussein 2008, 83), contained a terracotta sarcophagus with terracotta slab lid. Niches in the chamber contained a bronze lamp, small alabaster vessels, and glazed pottery (Hussein 2002, 149).

247 Hussein and Suleiman 2000, 103.
been recovered from Humaidat near the Tigris River, 25km west of Mosul (figs. 42 and 43).\footnote{Ibrahim 2002, 164. The chamber was originally published by J. K. Ibrahim and A. A. Agha (1983) in Sumer 39: 157-71 (in Arabic).} Like the Aššur and Nimrud tombs the dimensions of the sarcophagus suggest it was placed prior to the construction of the tomb.\footnote{Hausleiter 1999, 141.} An early Neo-Assyrian vaulted baked brick chamber tomb at Dūr Katlimmu also exhibits basic similarities to the examples referred to above.\footnote{Hausleiter 1999, 135.}

### 5.3.2. Grave Goods

Hausleiter studied the contents of 93 undisturbed individual burials at Aššur and noted that most individuals were buried with 1-3 pottery items of the same forms as those used in houses and palaces.\footnote{Hausleiter 1999, 142.} These are predominantly small bottles, middle-sized flat bowls and ovoid jars for “short-term storage of limited quantities of food and food consumption” (i.e. ‘serving’). One of the vessels, usually a bowl, is often positioned near the mouth.\footnote{Hausleiter 1999, 142.} Also relatively common are small, often glazed, bottles and pots thought to have been for essences.\footnote{Hausleiter 1999, 142.} Vessels for processing/cooking and long-term storage are not represented.\footnote{Hausleiter 1999, 142.} However, at least two large vaults (Nimrud Tomb II and Humaidat) contained large storage jars (figs. 43 and 44). Hausleiter observed that 38% of his selected graves contained only ceramics, while the remainder included objects such as seals, fibulae, pins, alabastra and glass vessels, bronze bowls, weapons and jewellery, and concluded that weapons and jewellery were most indicative of high status.\footnote{Hausleiter 1999, 141-2} The king’s chambers at Aššur were all

\begin{itemize}
\item The chamber was originally published by J. K. Ibrahim and A. A. Agha (1983) in *Sumer* 39: 157-71 (in Arabic).
\item A large stone sarcophagus (2.2 x 1.3 x 0.85m) covered with terracotta slabs sat width-ways on the stone-paved chamber floor (Ibrahim 2002, 158).
\item A silver ring, six beads, a fragment of a bronze needle and three ceramic items were found on the chamber floor (Kreppner and Hornig 2010, 108).
\item The slightly earlier Tell Fekheriye burials, however, are characterised by the deposition of a large jar, containing a nipple-base goblet, and bowl covering its mouth, placed near the head of the deceased in either the grave pit, or next to/on the mud-brick cist graves (Bartl 2011, 2) The jar is notable for its large size in comparison with observations regarding the ceramics at Aššur.
\item A similar observation may be made at Dūr Katlimmu where the three included ceramic items were a cylindrical beaker, a fragment of a tripod bowl and a beaker with a flared rim (for these vessels see Kreppner and Hornig 2010, 108). The maximum pottery any grave contained was 14 items, and Hausleiter (1999, 141-2) grouped the pottery as follows: bottles/jars ranging from small bottles to 20cm high jars (49%); bowls, which are mostly flat bowls with 16-20cm diameter and some very small bowls used as lamps (23%); necked jars (15%); beakers (6%); small, sometimes glazed pots (5%).
\item While seals, bronze bowls, fibulae and other jewellery can appear in graves with lower numbers of ceramics, the likelihood of the presence of jewellery increased proportionately with the number of vessels present and
\end{itemize}
empty, but Yaba’s tomb and the bronze coffins in the antechamber of Mullissu-Mukannišat-
Ninua’s tomb contained masses of gold jewellery and other riches. The Humaidat tomb
yielded numerous ceramics and metal vessels, and in the plundered Dūr Katlimmu chamber
remains of jewellery were scattered on the floor. In terms of food offerings, analyses have
not been conducted on the pottery at Aššur to help establish their contents, but grain remains
have been found in a few. At Tell Fekheriye, bones of the extremities, shoulder blades and
skulls of small sheep or goats are found in the grave or on top of the fill.

5.3.3. Burial Location

Most graves and tombs at Aššur are interpreted as having been under house floors or in
“tomb rooms”. However, the general lack of stratigraphic clarity makes it difficult to link
graves with any particular building periods and it is also possible that in some cases
cemeteries had simply covered ruined building areas. The Nabu temple at Nimrud
contained six burials which have been interpreted at belonging to servants or priests. Some
graves were found inside or immediately outside disused temples and palaces, again
evidencing the changing use of urban space. The Humaidat tomb is a surprising contrast to
the other burials discussed, because it was found by the Tigris River away from any
settlement areas and no other constructions were noted around it.

5.3.4. Summary Discussion

The large vaulted chambers excavated at Aššur, Nimrud, Humaidat and Dūr Katlimmu
are associated with individuals who had access to significantly more wealth than individuals
deposited in other burial types. This is inferred not only by the number and value of the

---

256 Ibrahim (2002, 158) reports that the Humaidat tomb held a considerably wealthy burial assemblage including ceramic and metal objects. The skeletons in both coffins were “smashed” and their sex is not mentioned. The wealth of the 20-22 year old female individual interred in the Dūr Katlimmu chamber is suggested by the scattered remains of jewellery and costume found in the debris of the plundered chamber (Kreppner and Hornig 2010, 107, 110).

257 Hausleiter 1999, 135.

258 Bartl 2011, 3.

259 Some burials were clearly inside houses while others had seemingly no connection with architectural ground plans, and therefore according to Hausleiter (1999, 131) “differ from the usual custom of burial practice inside houses”.

260 Damerji 2008, 81. These excavations were directed by Muyesser Said al-Iraqi and the burials included one oval (1.0m x 0.65m) and one rectangular (1.05m x 0.48m) terracotta sarcophagus decorated with a twisted rope.

261 Hausleiter 1999, 131.

262 Ibrahim 2002, 158.

263 The kings’ tombs were empty except for their sarcophagi (Postgate 2008, 177).

---
5. Burial Typology

grave goods, but also by the cost of chamber tomb construction.\(^{265}\) As seen in Babylon, the U-shape ceramic coffins are the most likely to contain numerous metal objects, including items of silver and gold, as well as semi-precious stones.\(^{266}\) The Nimrud bronze coffins are difficult to situate in the overall context of burial practices. They are most striking because their bronze material is in contrast to the vast number of ceramic burial containers. The numerous secondary burials they contained also come as a surprise since, as the typology outlined above demonstrates, Neo-Assyrian burials are all primary inhumations. The presence of numerous fragmentary skeletons and valuable items in three bronze coffins stacked in an antechamber sealed off from the main chamber of Tomb III is clearly not the outcome of normal Neo-Assyrian funerary processes. No obvious indications of the usual burial rituals involving careful placement of a particular set of objects or even any food remains were noted. It is not known who was deposited in these coffins, but they were presumably linked to the palace. Bronze coffins were unlikely to have been intended for kings or queens, who were evidently destined for burial in stone sarcophagi, but were surely used for high-status individuals, whether royal family members or high officials. Analyses of the Nimrud skeletons by Müller-Karpe et al. revealed that the individuals in the bronze coffins and the presumed queens in the stone sarcophagus from Tomb II were all in surprisingly poor health for high-status members of the community.\(^{267}\) However, presently our only other Neo-Assyrian skeletal data comes from the Dūr Katlimmu chamber tomb at,\(^{268}\) and we entirely lack comparative material from the remainder of the population from which inferences might be made about social status.

5.4. Elam

5.4.1. Burial Typology

The limited burial material from the site of Susa, supplemented by that at Tall-i Ghazir, Arjān and Rām Hormuz, allows for the identification of five basic Neo-Elamite burial types:\(^{269}\)

\(^{265}\) For the expense of chamber construction see Kreppner and Hornig (2010, 110).

\(^{266}\) See Haller (1954, 55-7) for the U-shaped coffins from Aššur, and Mallowan (1966, 114-15) for a ceramic “bath-tub” shaped coffin with a female skeleton and rich grave goods under room DD at Ashurnasirpal’s palace at Nimrud.


\(^{268}\) Kreppner and Hornig 2010, 110. Al-Fakhri (2008, 91) reports that skeletal remains of over 120 males found in a well at Nimrud were stored and awaiting further analysis. These have not been published to my knowledge.

\(^{269}\) Of these five types, only three (tombs, pit/earth burials and pots) were identified by Roland de Mecquenem (1931, 334), followed by Ghirshman and Steve (1966, 8). However, the bronze coffin burials have since been
5. Burial Typology

- **tomb** – vaulted, mud or baked brick chambers with a plastered interior and paved floor.
- **pit/earth burial**
- **brick burial**
- **pot**
- **bronze “bathtub” coffin in a tomb** – a bronze coffin enclosed in a rectangular, stone-lined, plastered tomb chamber, with a stone-slab (or vaulted?) roof (figs. 13 and 18)

Tombs were used for multiple interments of all age groups from infant to elderly, and often remained in use for a relatively long period. Each new corpse was laid out on a brick paving and older interments were pushed aside, or sometimes the new burial was simply placed on top of the others. In tomb 693 at Susa some of the burials appear to have been covered by earth and bricks, but the disarticulated skeletons tell us nothing about the arrangement of the body. The individuals in brick and pit graves at Susa were extended and laid on their back or side (either right or left), or in a semi-flexed position on their side. At Tall-i Ghazir the individuals were laid on their back in an extended position with hands excavated and should now be added, and Miroschedji’s (1981, figs. 8 and 9) report clearly indicates that “brick burials”, as rather loosely defined for the Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods) should also be included. The tomb most accurately dated to the Neo-Elamite II is T.693 (level 7B) from Susa, which is a vaulted, sundried-brick underground chamber c.1.3m high, its interior covered with plaster in accordance with the long tradition of plastering brick vaulted funerary chambers at this site (Miroschedji 1981, 25-7; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, fn. 27; fn. 112 The contents of vaulted chambers A, B, C and D excavated by R. de Mecquenem in the Eastern Necropolis (east of the Apadana) suggest that they too were used in the Neo-Elamite II period. Chamber C appears to have continued in use from the 12th century until the late Neo-Elamite period. Further vaults, whose contents suggest their usage in Neo-Elamite II were found under the Apadana Central Court. (Mecquenem 1943, 48-51; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 273). Burial L at Tall-i Ghazir is a brick chamber coated by grey-green plaster, with a mud slab lid (Carter 1994, 71). Álvarez-Mon (forthcoming b, 13) notes that this chamber echoes both the plastered Susa vaults and the (stone) slab-covered Arjān chamber.

- **Pit/earth burials** are recorded for this period at Susa (burials 672, 674, 705 and 707), and Tall-i Ghazir (Burial M) (Miroschedji 1981, 27-8; Carter 1994, 71). Burial T. 2346 (a male pit grave in the Apadana-Ville Royale) is also roughly dated to the 8th-6th centuries by its material) (Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 273).

- **Susa burials** 734 and 762 are pits with mudbricks placed around the edges and a mudbrick covering (Miroschedji 1981, 25) refers to these burials as “tombs”, however, they are here categorised based on their similarity to the “brick graves” of Neo-Babylonia and Assyria. Of the “Neo-Babylonian” and “last Elamite Epoch” burials, Mecquenem (1931, 34) states that the body could be laid in a “jar”, and Ghirshman and Steve (1966, 8) also use the term “jars”, however, these are clearly the “pot” burials as defined for the Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian burials.

- **Burials** 693 and C at Susa were used for several burials, while the Tall-i Ghazir chamber burial L contained one adult skeleton and fragments of an infant skull (Carter 1994, 71).

- Ghirshman and Steve 1966, 8. In burial 693 at Susa the disarticulated skeletons of at least six individuals were found; two adult males, two females, a 6-7 year old child and an infant (Miroschedji 1981, 26-7; Álvarez-Mon forthcoming a). The chamber seems to have been used for a relatively long period during the Neo-Elamite II, and it is thought that it was re-opened for deposition on three occasions (Álvarez-Mon forthcoming a).


- See Miroshedjī 1981, figs. 8-9.
5. Burial Typology

placed on the abdomen and head oriented south.\textsuperscript{278} In the Arjān and Rām Hormuz containers, the body was placed on its side in a flexed position with the head in the rounded end of the coffin. None of the Neo-Elamite pot burials have been published to allow for further elaboration on body placement.\textsuperscript{279} It can also be noted that no clear general preference for orientation has emerged for these Neo-Elamite burials.\textsuperscript{280}

5.4.2. Grave Goods

Small bowls, cups and jars were often placed near the head and feet of the interred,\textsuperscript{281} or occasionally placed under a hand.\textsuperscript{282} Tomb 693 contained over 150 earthenware vases and several metal vessels with analogies to the numerous examples in the Arjān and Rām Hormuz tombs,\textsuperscript{283} and Miroschedji reconstructed a standard assemblage for each individual as: 4-5 large amphorae closed with bowls; 2-3 globular jars; a pithos; and numerous glazed vessels. The Arjān and Rām Hormuz tomb yielded many metal vessels, and the latter also a substantial volume of ceramics including large storage amphorae, cups, bowls and other vessel types, as well as various glazed and stone vessels. The absence of any obvious wares related to cooking is equally observable in Elam as in Babylonia and Assyria, but in contrast are the large storage vessels recovered at Rām Hormuz and in Susa tomb 693. Personal items such as seals, pins and daggers were found in tomb 693,\textsuperscript{284} and the Arjān and particularly the Rām Hormuz burials contained outstanding assemblages of personal items. Perhaps the most extraordinary inclusion in Neo-Elamite graves are the enigmatic clay funerary heads at Susa, reportedly from 8\textsuperscript{th} and 7\textsuperscript{th} century burial vaults (fig. 45).\textsuperscript{285}

\textsuperscript{278} As depicted in Carter 1994, figs 8-12.
\textsuperscript{279} However, according to Ghirshman and Steve (1966, 8), the position of the bones in most pot burials suggests that the corpse was bound/tied in order to be placed into the vessel. Mecquenem (1943–1944, pl. II) apparently thought the jar burials were reserved for youths and adolescents, but according to Carter (2011, 45 fn.2), photos published by Ghirshman suggest that some jar burials were adults.
\textsuperscript{280} At Tall-i Ghazir, however, the five Neo-Elamite burials were oriented south (Carter 1994, figs. 8-12).
\textsuperscript{281} See Susa burials 734, 762, 705, 707 (Miroschedji 1981, 24-8). Similarly at Tall-i Ghazir three conical cups and a small amphora-shaped jar were placed at the feet of the interred individual in grave L, while 3 conical cups were placed at the feet in M and two glazed "lugged pots" by the hip (Carter 1994, figs. 11-12. Note: Carter refers to the amphora-like jar as a "pointed-based jar").
\textsuperscript{282} Burials 674 and 705 at Susa (see Miroschedji 1981, 27-8).
\textsuperscript{283} Álvarez-Mon 2010a, fn. 112; forthcoming a, 5.
\textsuperscript{284} Álvarez-Mon 2010a, fn. 112; forthcoming a. 5. This individual in Tall-i Ghazir burial M also wore an iron bracelet on each wrist and faience beads around the neck (Carter 1994, fig. 12).
\textsuperscript{285} Amiet 1966, 482-5, figs. 362-4. Álvarez-Mon (2005, 120-1) includes two additional heads now in the Louvre Museum, the much damaged nos. 17 and 21. Such heads, found next the skulls of the interred, were also occasionally recovered from earlier periods at Susa. Their relative rareness suggests that their use was either exceptional or that they did not survive well in their contexts, or were even missed as a result of poor excavation methods (Ghirshman and Steve 1966, 2; Álvarez-Mon 2005a, 114). Ghirshman (1970, 224) noted that there were otherwise no apparent differences in grave assemblages between those with/without heads.
Food and drink were often deposited in front of or around tombs at Susa,\(^{286}\) and a few of the storage containers inside chamber 693 contained the remains of dates.\(^{287}\) Animal bones are often also present. They are reported for tomb 693, the Tall-i Ghazir burials M and L where they were placed just beyond the feet of the individuals,\(^{288}\) and the Rām Hormuz chamber where they were found a “natural sandy platform”.\(^{289}\) A small container in the Rām Hormuz chamber also revealed tiny fragments of (presumably animal) bone.\(^{290}\)

### 5.4.3. Burial Location

Poor knowledge of Susa’s stratigraphy and the inadequate recording of the site make distinguishing between cemeteries and sub-floor burials a problematic task. Mecquenem believed he was excavating large necropolis mounds, including the Eastern Necropolis where he found his Neo-Elamite burials, but his assertion is far from confirmed.\(^{291}\) Meanwhile Miroschedji was certain that 693 was an underground chamber associated with a building above. As in Babylonia and Assyria, changing use of urban space may have made it difficult for excavators to establish whether subfloor burials or cemeteries were used. Much has been made of the burial of the Elamite royalty in the “sacred grove” mentioned by Ashurbanipal;\(^{292}\) however, this assertion is founded upon a contested reading of a Neo-Assyrian text (appx. 2, text 1),\(^{293}\) and nothing is otherwise known of these groves. At Tall-i Ghazir the burials were recovered from what has been termed an “Elamite Dump”, perhaps a

\(^{286}\) Ghirshman and Steve 1966, 8.


\(^{289}\) Animal bones were not reported for the Arjān burial, but if they were placed in the chamber outside of the coffin, they would be unlikely to have survived the inundation of the tomb.

\(^{290}\) Álvarez-Mon, pers comm.

\(^{291}\) Mecquenem 1931, 334; 1944, 133, pl. I. Carter (2011, 45) reports that in the 1960s Roman Ghirshman’s excavations in the Ville Royale A demonstrated that burials during the 2nd millennium were often under house floors. Ghirshman and Steve (1966, 10), however, noted that no burials were found under the large houses identified in the Ville Royale, and it is still unclear how many of the “family vaults” excavated were linked to an above-ground dwelling. Carter (2011, 57) proposes that most people were buried under their own house floors, while royalty were buried outside the major urban centres (in temple complexes).

\(^{292}\) Vallat 1998; Álvarez-Mon forthcoming c, 4.

\(^{293}\) The theory of burial inside sacred groves is based on a particular (and problematic) reading of a Neo-Assyrian text in which it is purported that Ashurbanipal claims that he pillaged the tombs of kings in sacred groves: “Their secret groves, where no foreigner had penetrated, where no foreigner had trampled the underbrush, my soldiers entered and saw their secrets; they destroyed them by fire. The tombs of their kings, ancient and recent … I have devastated, I destroyed them, I exposed them to the sun, and I carried off their bones to the country of Aššur” (Vallat 1998). Henkelman (2008, 443), however, points out the problems concerning the reading of these two sentences as interrelated.
5. Burial Typology

In contrast to these urban burials, the Arjān and Rām Hormuz tombs were placed on the left bank of a river away from major settlement areas.

5.4.4. Summary Discussion

The archaeologists who have attempted to deal with the burial data from Susa have created a simplistic link between typology and the social statuses of the interred, according to which earth burials represent the poorest people or slaves, people in jar burials were of higher standing, and the wealthiest were buried in baked brick vaulted family tombs. For the Neo-Elamite period, however, there is simply not enough data to confirm or deny this suggestion, and the bronze “bathtub” burials have not yet been incorporated into this picture. Notably, no royal tombs have been located at Susa, although some scholars cite Ashurbanipal’s report that at Susa he “pulled down and destroyed the tombs of their earlier and later kings” as reasonable evidence that the kings were probably buried here. We also have a fascinating story concerning the attempted robbery of the “golden” coffin of Cyrus II (the Great) retained in Arrian’s *The Campaigns of Alexander*. Bearing in mind that Cyrus was roughly contemporary with the individuals interred in the bronze coffins at Arjān and Rām Hormuz, one may speculate that if indeed there had been such a coffin, it was also made of a “golden” looking copper-tin alloy.

The Arjān and Rām Hormuz burials, and perhaps that of Cyrus, are unique in that they are the only known coffins for this period. This is surprising situation since coffin use is not only quite common in Babylonia and Assyria, but also in the earlier and later periods of

---

294 McCown did not indicate any architecture associated with the burials suggesting that here may be a cemetery rather than sub-floor burial tradition (Carter 1994, 70).

295 For this link see Ghirshman and Steve 1966, 8; Vallat 1998. Carter argued instead that because more than one type of interment could be found under one house Elamite burial practices probably involved some kind of multi-stage funerary rite in which the body was moved from one stage to another. She also proposes that this practice continued into the Neo-Elamite II period (Carter 2011, 48, fn. 5).

296 Carter 2011, 50.

297 *Arrian’s The Campaigns of Alexander* (Book VI, 29) relays a report in Aristobulus that thieves attempted to rob Cyrus’ “golden” coffin, causing it considerable damage in the process. Alexander ordered the coffin to be repaired, and its lid, which had been successfully removed by the robbers, to be replaced. The report states that the coffin was placed on a table in the tomb along with a range of other prestige items including a ‘hammered gold’ divan and numerous textiles, jewellery and weapons. The tomb was said to be in a grove, surrounded by “various sorts of trees”.

298 The composition of the Arjān coffin was approximately 12% tin, and bronze takes on a golden appearance when the tin proportion reaches approximately 10% (Vatandoust 1999, 139; Fleming et al. 2006, 35-6; Fleming et al. 2011, 106). Notably Cyrus’ burial is in contrast to all other burials discussed above in that it is situated above the ground, although perhaps it was still considered to be in a house. A clear change in funerary practices begins with Darius; royal burials in cut chambers with relief façades, high up on rock cliffs. Ernst Herzfeld (1941, 218-9) associated this change with an introduction of Zoroastrianism by Darius. A closer analysis of burial practices in Elam may eventually help to confirm the proposed Elamite identity of Cyrus (for the question mark over Cyrus’ long-assumed Persian ethnicity see Potts 2005, 13-14).
5. Burial Typology

Elamite/Iranian history. In this regard, a photograph in the Mecquenem archive of a single oval coffin distinguished by the presence of rope-like decoration typical of Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian coffins is suggestive of contemporary use in Elam (fig. 46). Since so few Neo-Elamite burials are known, it is possible that a far broader range of burial types, including coffins, were in use but have yet to be excavated. Presently, however, the Arjān and Rām Hormuz burials remain distinctive for their unparalleled use of coffins and also for their rectangular, stone-lined, plastered tomb chambers (at Arjān capped by stone slabs and coated with bitumen), which are otherwise unknown in Elam. They are also unique in their location in apparent isolation from settlements or other burials. The extraordinary level of wealth deposition at Rām Hormuz is far in excess of any other known burial in Elam and points to either previously unattested wealth, or perhaps significant social changes.

5.5. Summarising the Burial Data and a Return to the “Bathtub" Coffins

The typologies outlined above demonstrate that many burial modes were in use during the early-mid first millennium Assyria and Babylonia and most are found widely across southern Mesopotamia and at Aššur in the north. Our present evidence for Elam suggests that far fewer burials types were used, but the burial data remains much too scarce for drawing any firm conclusions. A set of common characteristics among Mesopotamian burials defined by Marie-Therese Barrelet are useful to reiterate here with the addition of the limited data from Elam: a) burials were almost always underground b) the remaining burial

299 Mecquenem (1931, 334) reports the regular use of oval coffins during c.2500-1500, but afterwards these drop away and none are attributed to the Neo-Elamite period. A summary of Mecquenem’s finds by Miroshchedji (1978, 227) confirms the absence of Neo-Elamite coffins. However, terracotta coffins were in wide use again in Parthian period with a new elongated type. A bronze coffin of a more rectangular shape belonging to the Persian period (appx. 3, coffin 10; fig. 47) was also recovered, by Jacques de Morgan (1905, 29-58) at Susa. A. G. Elayi (1992, 268-9) date the burial to the late 5th century based upon two Aradian shekels find inside the coffin and the Achaemenid jewellery adorning the body.

300 It seems unlikely that terracotta coffins disappeared altogether and it is possible that some of the many coffins in photographs from Mecquenem’s archives may close this gap. Third millennium bitumen-coated wooden coffins were recovered at Susa (Carter 1976, 234), and it is possible that such coffins continued in use but have been missed in excavations. At Susa, secondary burials of long bones collected in beakers and skulls deposited in vases have been reported (Vallat 1998), but to my knowledge none are attributed to the Neo-Elamite period. Ghirshman (1964, 9, fig. 20) and Ghirshman and Steve (1966, 8) stated that jars were used as repositories for bones that were collected from family vaults that had become too full and “bulk-buried”, jumbled in a jar that was hidden near the built tombs (see also Carter 2011, 48). Likewise cremations are not reported, though they are known from the preceding Middle Elamite period at Choga Zanbil, where Ghirshman was surprised to find cremation burials since none were found at Susa (see Carter 2011, 56).

301 It has been said that these tomb chambers represent an amalgam of the plastered mudbrick chambers Susa, and the Iron Age III stone-lined, slab cist tombs (some communal) found in cemeteries of the highland Push-ī-e Kuh region (Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 21). For the Push-ī-e Kuh burials see Overlaet 2003, 62-70; Haerinck and Overlaet 2004.

302 For southern Mesopotamia, Barrelet (1980, 6) noted that there was hardly any regional variation in typology and that burial types were neither region-specific, nor specific to certain periods; i.e. they are widely used over space and time and cannot be attributed to particular cultures.
5. Burial Typology

containers were ceramic (wood and basket coffins would not survive) c) the orientation and position of the body do not show any visible trends d) cremation is rarely attested e) burials with multiple interments were deposited over time. Another common element across these regions is the presence of food remains in and/or around the burial and placement of serving vessels, often near the head or feet of the interred. Provision of personal items such as jewellery and seals is also important, with significant variation among individuals in terms of the number and type of items. In all regions the dead could be buried underneath houses in close proximity to their living family members or alternatively in cemeteries, although it can be extremely difficult to distinguish between these locations in the archaeological record.

To consider the bronze “bathtub” coffins in the context of the other burials outlined above, it may firstly be observed that their form seems quite at home in Assyria, where the U-shape coffin emerges in the Middle Assyrian period, and also in Babylonia where U-shape burial containers in terracotta are relatively common from the 8th century. In southern Mesopotamia they are found most frequently at Ur (156 examples), Babylon (29 examples) and Nippur (18 examples), and in northern Mesopotamia have been recovered at Aššur (22

---

303 Barrelet 1980, 5.
304 The earliest U-shape coffin is attested in Assyria in the Middle Assyrian period and this type is assumed to have been Assyrian in origin (Strommenger 1964, 166-7, 171). Alizadeh (1985, 57) reports that “similar but not identical and considerably smaller examples from the Hittite period might indicate an earlier date and different origin for them [the terracotta U-shaped coffins]”, however, based on images of these objects, excavated at Alaça Hoyuk (in Koçay and Akok 1966 pls. 7 and 107), I recommend that Alizadeh’s suggestion be summarily dismissed. These deep, rectilinear, terracotta vessels (fig. 48) seem not to share any similarities with the coffins of Assyria, Babylonia and Elam beyond the presence of a pair of handles mounted vertically side by side, and nowhere does the excavation report suggest that these objects were used in funerary contexts (see excavation report by Koçay and Akok 1966). Alizadeh’s lack of clarity in discussing these objects led Álvarez-Mon (2010a, fn. 35) to report that Alizadeh was referring to bronze coffins, when in fact this was a reference to a terracotta container.

305 Eva Strommenger (1964, 166-7, 171) demonstrated that the U-shape coffin arrived in association with the earliest fibulae in southern Mesopotamia in the late 8th century and places their end-date at the 4th century. At Babylon Reuther (1926, 212-45) noted that from its arrival in the 8th/7th century the U-shape coffin form, distinguished by its high sides in relation to length and typified by the bronze coffins, became gradually lower and longer until the Parthian period when this “Stülpgräber” type could accommodate a fully extended body and the coffin was often inverted and placed over the top of the body. Boehmer et al. (1995, 136) date the earliest Uruk examples slightly prior to the late 7th century and McCown and Haines (1967, 147) report that the type first appears in Nippur during the Assyrian period (Baker 1995, 215 specifies a date of c.650-625). Haerinck (1980, 53-4) believes that at Sippar they post-date 605 and probably date to sometimes in the 6th century. Moorey and Woolley date these burials much later than most scholars. Despite the extremely unclear stratigraphy (noted by Baker 1995, 218), Moorey (1978, Microfiche 1 D01) claims that the Kish examples dated to 5th cent or later and Woolley (1962, 53) refers to those at Ur as the “specifically Persian” “larnax with one rounded and one straight end” or simply “Persian coffins”.

306 For Ur see Woolley (1962, 67-77, graves P.3 to P.158), for Babylon Reuther (1926, 218-229, burials 112-140) and for Nippur (McCown and Haines 1967, 119), 4 were found at Isin (Baker 1995, 214) more than one at Kish (Baker 1995, 214), 3 at Sippar (Haerinck 1980, 55-6, 60, graves T. 138, 144 and 145), at least 3 at Tell el-Lāḥm (Safar 1949, 162), and 10 at Uruk (Boehmer et al. 1995, 137-9, burials 531-540).
5. Burial Typology

examples) and Humaidat (one example). In Elam, however, apart from the bronze coffins at Arjān and Rām Hormuz, coffin use in this period is unattested.

For all regions it was noted that the terracotta “bathtub” shaped coffins were associated with higher levels of wealth deposition than other burial types and to an even larger degree the high value of the objects in the bronze coffins indicates that these individuals (and presumably the family mourning them) had access to significantly greater wealth than the majority of the society. They are also all placed in chamber tombs, which are in turn linked with a high level of wealth.

Food remains were present in the Ur PG1 and Rām Hormuz burials, and the presence of large food storage vessels at the latter is notable. This Elamite practice of placing large jars in and around tombs in general distinguishes Elamite from Mesopotamian burials where, except in the Nimrud and Humaidat chambers, we find only serving vessels. The absence of food and ceramic evidence at Arjān is probably related to the flooding of the tomb, which allowed only for the survival of metal objects, and food remains were similarly not reported for Nimrud, presumably as a result of the secondary deposition of the burials.

In terms of location, it is not clear whether the Ur coffins were connected specifically with a building above, or were in a cemetery. At best we can suggest that, along with other terracotta “bathtub” coffins located against Nebuchadnezzar’s temenos wall, they seem to be associated with a location that was traditionally a sacred zone. The Nimrud bronze coffins are in line with the Mesopotamian practice of burying under floors, but their placement in a hastily sealed antechamber remains puzzling. Finally, the Elamite bronze coffins are in contrast to all other Elamite burials which were placed under houses or in cemeteries, and presently represent the only known deposition of the dead outside the urban centres of Elam, and are exceptional for their riverside location.

To summarise, in the context of the mortuary evidence in each of the three regions the bronze “bathtub” coffin burials are in some ways in accordance with other practices and in other ways strikingly in contrast. In particular, because the burial containers remaining to us are almost always ceramic, or occasionally stone, it is the bronze material itself which makes the bronze “bathtub” coffins so enigmatic and warrants their analysis as a distinctive burial container corpus.

308 Woolley 1962, 62, graves NB 42-44.
6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral

6.1. Introduction

Studies of beliefs about death and the afterlife in Mesopotamia, and to a lesser extent Elam, draw upon a wide range of textual evidence written in different cities over a considerable period of time.\textsuperscript{309} These beliefs were subject to change over time, not least because of Mesopotamia’s ethnic, social and political changes.\textsuperscript{310} Not only must we deal with differences over space and time, but also what often appear to be internally inconsistent belief systems.\textsuperscript{311} These factors, together with the representation of the ‘ideal’ in texts, make the simple application of beliefs about death and the afterlife to the archaeological evidence a problematic exercise. Nonetheless, as will be shown in the following discussion, textual and archaeological evidence may together allow for an outline of certain elements of the Mesopotamian and Elamite view of death and the afterlife and aspects of funerary practice in the 8\textsuperscript{th}-6\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

6.2. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral in Mesopotamia

6.2.1. The Underworld

When a person died in Mesopotamia they had to be segregated from the living in the Underworld; “the land of no return”.\textsuperscript{312} The Underworld was conceived as an underground city much like the urban centres on earth, with temples, palaces and streets, referred to as Urugal (‘Great City’), a term also meaning ‘tomb’ or ‘grave’.\textsuperscript{313} The Urugal was presided

\textsuperscript{309} As noted by Penglase (1995, 192), the dates of the Mesopotamian literary sources on death and the afterlife range from the Sumerian to Neo-Babylonian times, a period of approximately 2,000 years, and the texts come from all over Mesopotamia.

\textsuperscript{310} Graf 2004, 277.

\textsuperscript{311} The incoherence of the “internal disposition” of the Mesopotamian beliefs about what happens when a person dies, particularly in the early periods, is noted by Jean Bottéro (1992, 274-5). Timothy Insoll (2004, 7) points out that religion does not necessarily function within a logical framework, but is also a system constructed through a long tradition of thought about the essential concerns of the human condition including, of course, death. As Tarlow (1999, 47) has argued, a preoccupation with reviewing ideas to (ideally) ensure the abolition of inconsistencies is primarily the curse of the academic! She adds that in the modern West we might “believe that when a person dies he or she rots in the ground. We also believe that the dead person is merely sleeping until the resurrection, that the dead exist as ghosts, that they go straight to heaven, and that they have met up with friends and relatives who predeceased them. Rationally, it’s very hard to make all these fit together.”

\textsuperscript{312} Graf 2004, 477.

\textsuperscript{313} The Sumerian Urugal/Erigal ‘Great City’ was probably inspired by the Sumerian urban landscape (Horowitz 1998, 351; Geller 2000, 43; Graf 2004, 478). Urugal also has the more common meaning qabru ‘grave’ (see \textit{CAD Q} 17-18), but both meanings are clearly related since those lowered into graves were to enter the Underworld (Horowitz 1998, 293). The term (Urugal) is not the only word for grave; the euphemism ki-mah, literally “exalted place,” was also used (Geller 2000, 43).
over by Ereškigal, the goddess of death, two male gods, Nergal and Ninazu, the (usually 600) Annunaki, and the sun-god Šamaš who was traditionally involved as the Underworld arbiter. The governmental structure of the city essentially matched that on earth. In cosmological terms the Underworld was the lowest region of the universe, lying either directly below the earth’s surface, or separated from it by the *apsû*, the watery realm of the god Ea, which sometimes had to be crossed in order to reach the Underworld. Alternatively the *apsû* itself could be conceived as a netherworld.

The Underworld was approached by either a river or a road, along which the dead faced a long and harrowing journey. Often upon arrival they had to be ferried across the Ḫubur River, which flowed on front of the seven gates to the Underworld. The texts most concerned with the Underworld, *Ishtar’s Descent to the Netherworld* and *Gilgameš*, paint an image of a dark, silent, dusty, barren and overpopulated place where inhabitants are forced to eat dirt and clay and drink putrid water. Once the dead arrived, they were judged (assigned their fate), which would be a more comfortable one if they could make rich offerings to the deities. Thus a person’s conditions and hierarchical position tended to be

---

314 Sürenhagen 2002, 325.
317 Texts reveal that changes in the political system on earth were reflected in the netherworld system (Graf 2004, 478).
318 Textual evidence suggests that the Mesopotamians believed the dead needed to cross either the Khabur River or the Absû to get to the Underworld (Scurlock 1995, 188), although a number of texts seem to ignore the existence of the waters of the *apsû* between the earth’s surface and the Underworld (Horowitz 1998, xiii). The set-up of the Underworld is not referred to any known text describing the creation and organization of the universe (Lamber 1980, 58-9). Earlier the Sumerians had conceived of the universe as being one horizontal dimension, and the *kur*, the place of the dead was an imagined landscape somewhere in the distant mountains. It was not until the Akkadian period that the vertical conception of the universe appears in texts (Geller 2000, 49; Katz 2003, 245).
319 Horowitz 1998, 4, 17, 334; Geller 2000, 48. Bottéro’s (1992, 274) assertion that the *apsû* was “confused with” the netherworld has been intentionally avoided, as it does not allow for real differences in the conceptions of the universe between contemporaneous groups of people (surely there was scholarly debate as to how it should be conceived) or changes across time.
320 Horowitz 1998, 351. For this journey they set out to the west to cross a gloomy, endless desert, an area of desolation, of hunger and thirst, filled with wild animals and demons, exposed to all sorts of attacks (Bottéro 1992, 276).
321 The seven gates are the most often mentioned of the features of the Underworld (Horowitz 1998, 358). New arrivals were ferried across the Ḫubur by a boat man “Humuṭṭabal”, the boatman of the Underworld, with the head of an Anzu-bird, four hands and feet” (Horowitz 1998, 356). The exact location of both the Ḫubur and the gates is not specified in geographically meaningful terms (Lambert 1980, 59).
322 Specifically *Gilgameš* (Ninevite version, tablet VII) and the Akkadian version of *Ishtar’s Descent*, the latter preserved in two manuscripts from Ashurbanipal’s library (Bottéro 1992, 276; Schneider 2011, 46).
323 Schneider 2011, 47-8; Graf 2004, 278. Overpopulation was the logical consequence of a place where the balance between birth/death rates did not exist (Sürenhagen 2002, 325).
replicated in the afterlife, pending proper burial and care by their family. The act of burial was particularly paramount. Holes in the earth’s surface apparently interfaced between the earth’s surface and the Underworld, and while it is never made explicit, it seems that placing the corpse in a hole facilitated the passage of the dead person’s ghost to the Underworld. Although gods descended freely to the Underworld, if a dead human was not provided with a ritual inhumation they could not get in and would be left to wander restlessly on earth for eternity.

6.2.2. The Ghost

After a person died two entities remained: the bones (esemtu) and the ghost (etemmu). The ghost was created at the moment of death, and had an “airy, impalpable” form that resembles, represents or substitutes for the deceased. This ghost possessed the very human need for food and drink, and the most common surviving grave goods are ceramic vessels, suggesting provision of these for the deceased. It was the responsibility of the dead person’s family, most particularly the inheritor(s), to provide this sustenance.

Texts reveal that the Mesopotamian world was populated with ghosts who terrified the living with their ghostly screams and appearances, and caused a plethora of physical symptoms ranging from grumbling stomachs to death-inducing illnesses, as suggested by attribution of these problems to ‘hand of ghost’ (appx. 2, text 2).

325 Finet 1987, 242; Bottéro 1992, 279.
326 Potts 1997, 221. Bottério (1992, 273-5) states that while this interface is not explicitly documented, “Such a view certainly has to be related to the traditional way in which corpses were treated in Mesopotamia; they were always shrouded, and put in the earth in a trench, in a tomb, or in a cave.” It is, however, worth keeping in mind that it is only those bodies which were placed under the ground that would have been preserved.
327 Saggs 1965, 106; Bottério 1992, 275-6. We are not informed of other ways of humans gaining access to the Netherworld such as those that must have been used by the divinities such as Nergal, Ereshkigal, Inanna/Istar and Dumuzi who descended into it (Bottéro 1992, 275-6).
328 Bottério 1992, 271; Cooper 1992, 27.
329 For the esemtu see the CAD E, 341-2 and the etemmu see CAD E 398. According to Cooper (1992, 25) and Cohen (2005, 99) the word etemmu should be translated specifically as ghost, rather than “spirit” or “soul” because living beings do not have one; the term is only associated with the dead. Bottério (1992, 271), however, uses both terms interchangeably with “ghost” when referring to the etemmu and Katz (2003, 235) claims that two entities (the body and soul) co-existed during the life of the human being; an assertion for which there is no evidence.
331 Seymour 2011, 784.
333 Scurlock 2006, 1, 5. Scurlock’s (2006) work provides a useful compilation and analysis of texts pertaining to the problems caused by ghosts and the ritual and/or medical treatments for these afflictions. Many of these are Neo-Assyrian period texts deriving from Nineveh, Nimrud and Aššur (Scurlock 2006, 2, fn. 5-10). Symptoms caused by ‘hand of ghost’ included head or neck aches; ringing or pain in the ears (ghosts in the ears); aches and pains, particularly those on only one side of the body; nausea and flatulence (ghosts in the intestines); numbness; dizziness; shortness of breath; fever; paralysis; neurological disorders such as confused states; depression and odd behaviour. Interestingly, medical treatments could include fumigants in which ground
in one’s house was a traumatic experience in itself, but even worse foreshadowed personal disaster.\textsuperscript{334} Ghosts were thought to torment their victims because they had not been buried correctly and/or were not receiving their offerings.\textsuperscript{335} The victims of a ghost affliction might be either directly punished for failing to fulfil their duty of caring for family ghosts or harassed by an unknown ghost who had no-one to care for them.\textsuperscript{336} Therefore the proper burial of the corpse and adequate care for the ghost were vital for the wellbeing of both the ghost and the living.\textsuperscript{337} The peaceful rest of the \textit{ešemtu} (bones) was also paramount and the fear of the tomb being opened and exposing the body and ghost is evident in inscriptions from the Nimrud Tombs II and III (appx. 2, texts 3, 4 and 5), which curse anyone who “\textit{breaks open the seal}” of the queens’ tombs, and removes any of the objects from her coffin or places another body inside.\textsuperscript{338}

Treatment for ghost affliction was often the burial of a figurine representing the dead person accompanied by all the correct rites that should originally have been performed. The figurine might be placed in a jar or copper/bronze \textit{tamgusu} vessel with a metal lid, sometimes in their own family tomb or that of another family for ongoing care.\textsuperscript{339} Alternatively, on the annual day of mourning when the shepherd god Dumuzi returned to earth, rites were enacted for the unburied dead and the god could be petitioned to take stray ghosts back with him to the Underworld.\textsuperscript{340} However, not all ghosts were unpleasant. In fact the ghost of a well-buried and cared for person was potentially very useful to the living, as indicated in a letter to Esarhaddon regarding the crown prince Ashurbanipal (appx. 2, text 6):

\begin{quote}
human bones or skulls served as a main ingredient, and such fumigants might be burned inside a human skull. Dust from tombs or thornbushes growing out of graves could also be used in prescriptions for treating the afflicted (Scurlock 2006, 5-20, nos. 65: 1-2, 104: 3, 211:2, 252: 1, 264: 1, 265:1, 279-87, 333: 2).
\textsuperscript{334} Scurlock 2006, 8.
\textsuperscript{335} Scurlock 2006, 50.
\textsuperscript{336} Ghosts could also be sent by the gods as punishment for some wrongdoing including cultic offense, or an evil sorcerer could set a ghost upon a person for no apparent reason (Scurlock 2006, 83). Precisely how a ghost might be able to escape the Underworld and come back onto earth is not described, but they do appear to pass from the Underworld through cracks in the earth’s surface (Bottéro 1992, 284; Horowitz 1998, 360). In the myth of \textit{Ishtar’s Descent}, the kurgarrû could access the netherworld due to their asexual character. The Underworld demons who roam about the desert were the only other beings that could cross between the Underworld and earth, also because of their asexual character (Pongratz-Leisten 2001, 222).
\textsuperscript{337} Bottéro 1992, 271.
\textsuperscript{338} The latter process referred is to by Bottéro (1992, 285) as a post-mortem adoption! See also Scurlock 2006, 52. For the family tomb see Scurlock 2006, 22, 50-1, nos. 218: 18-19, 226: 36, 230: 12-13. Alternatively, the ghost/figurine could be given three days’ worth of travel provisions/offerings and cast out into the river in a sailboat at sundown to the netherworld (Scurlock 2006, 54-5, fn. 848, 850).
\textsuperscript{339} Bottéro 1992, 285; Dalley 2007, 19. Dumuzi’s death and disappearance into the netherworld was celebrated in the last day of the month named after him (June-July).
\end{quote}
6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral

_The gods Aššur (and) Šamaš ordained me to be the crown prince of Assyria because of her (the dead queen's) truthfulness. (And) her ghost blesses him in the same degree as he has revered the ghost._

Being in touch with the Underworld authorities and with knowledge of the future, the ghost could also be invoked on behalf of living kin for protection against evil demons, or to act as a diviner.341

6.2.3. The Funeral

While many texts offer an insight into Mesopotamian attitudes towards death and beliefs about the afterlife, funerary rites and burial practices are rarely described, and never in detail.342 This fact coupled with archaeologists’ lack of attention to the mortuary record leaves us largely in the dark about the processes following a person’s death.343 Relevant texts dating to the period covered by this thesis are: Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus’ stele from Harran, which outlines his mother Adad Guppi’s care for earlier deceased kings and also refers to her own funeral (appx. 2, text 7); a 7th century text from Nineveh in which an Assyrian king (either Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal) reports on the funerary ceremonies for his father, who had also been king (appx. 2, text 8); three funerary inscriptions from Tombs II and III at Nimrud (appx. 2, texts 3, 4 and 5); and a limited number of letters to Esarhaddon (appx. 2, texts 9-13). Notably all of these texts provide insights only into royal death ritual.

An important function of funerary ritual was the reallocation of the dead person’s social position.344 Thus the rites for the dead were primarily the responsibility of the ṭāqīdu (the inheritor(s)) whose performance of the appropriate rituals legitimised their position as the new head of the family.345 For Neo-Assyrian kings, the funeral and ongoing maintenance of the dead king played a vital role in ensuring smooth succession, and accordingly the failure to retrieve the king’s body after his death for an appropriate burial was seen as disastrous.346 It is significant that we find kings interred at Aššur even after the Empire’s capital was moved to Nimrud.347 Aššur retained a special ideological meaning because it was the place where the

---

341 Saggs 1965, 106; Bottéro 1992, 283. Cooper 1992, 28. Scattered texts suggest that necromancy was practiced in Mesopotamia. In this practice the ghost is induced through a hole in the ground and is supposed to enter into a skull provided as its mechanical means of communication (Finkel 1983-4, 5, 13).
342 Sürenhagen 2002, 324.
343 Cooper 1992, 24.
345 Cooper 1992, 29.
347 Ashurnasirpal moved the chief Assyrian royal residence and administrative centre from Aššur to Kalhu in approximately his fifth year and began rebuilding it on a massive scale (Russell 1998, 655).
6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral

royal house originated, it housed the temple of Assyria’s patron god, Ashur, and it was the resting place of Neo-Assyrian kings including Ashurnasirpal II, and Shamshi-Adad V (823–811).\textsuperscript{348} The burial location away from the kings’ home and city is unusual in the wider context of Mesopotamian funerary practice, but is better comprehended if a link between burial and coronation is recognised. As successor the new king was responsible for the burial and care for his father, and by enacting the appropriate rituals as the rightful inheritor of the dead king’s rule he could ensure a smooth succession under the aegis of Ashur, the god who bestowed Assyrian kingship.\textsuperscript{349}

Some suggestion of the steps that (ideally) followed a royal death is provided by a letter to Esarhaddon following the execution of a substitute king and queen (appx. 2, text 9):

\textit{We prepared the burial chamber. He and his queen have been decorated, treated, displayed, buried (and) wailed over. The burnt-offering has been burnt, all omens have been cancelled, (and) numerous apotropaic rituals, bīt rimki (and) bīt salā’ mē ceremonies, exorcistic rites, erṣaḫunga-chants (and) scribal recitations have been performed in perfect manner.}

**Preparation of the body**

The treatment of the corpse seems to have involved the use of oil. Nabonidus reports that his mother’s body was “\textit{anointed with sweet oil}”, and queen Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua’s inscription (appx. 2, text 4) commands that if her tomb be opened, “\textit{anoint (me) with oil}”.\textsuperscript{350} The Nineveh text refers instead to the laying of the body in oil, “\textit{father my begetter in kingly oil I gently laid [in] that secret tomb}.” References to the use of oil, perhaps as a preservative, and even honey (an antibacterial agent) in royal Mesopotamian mortuary treatment are also found in the works of ancient Greek authors.\textsuperscript{351} It is also possible that

\textsuperscript{348} Ashurnasirpal was buried in grave V and Shamshi-Adad in grave II (Pedde 2012, 854). An inscribed brick found at the “royal sepulchre” at Aṣšur suggests that Sennacherib may also have been buried at Aṣšur: “\textit{The palace of repose, the eternal abode, the house established firm as heaven and earth, belonging to Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria.”} (translation by Luckenbill 1924, 151; see also Postgate 2008, 177). It seems also that Esarhaddon’s wife Ešarra-ḫamat was buried at Aṣšur as indicated by a fragmentary text found at the site (Leichty 1995, 957; Postgate 2008 177).

\textsuperscript{349} Richardson 1999, 170. For Achaemenid Persia, Mark Garrison (2009, 39/79) has similarly noted the strong links between the concept of coronation and royal burial rites, as does Henkelman (2003, 157), who observes that “conducting one’s predecessor’s funeral was a pivotal opportunity to stress the transfer of power and the legitimacy of their kingship.”

\textsuperscript{350} For use of perfumed/aromatic oil for anointing the corpse in Mesopotamian funerary practice, see also Finet (1987, 240).

\textsuperscript{351} Various classical authors report that Babylonians customarily buried their dead in barrels or sarcophagi filled with honey, which is known to have antibacterial properties (see Herodotus \textit{Histories}. I.198; Strabo \textit{Geography} XVI.1.20). If we are to believe various versions of the Alexander Romance, the corpse of Alexander the Great
desiccation (smoking or dehydration) was sometimes used as a preservative measure, as suggested by a microscopic analysis of one of the skeletons in Tomb II at Nimrud, which revealed that the bones had been heated to 150-250°C for a period of several hours.

The clothing and decoration of the body was also essential. Nabonidus reports his mother’s body was “wrapped in fine wool garments and shining white linen”, and Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua (appx. 2, text 4) asks that someone “clothe (me) with a shroud”. Dress and personal adornment were seen as symbolic of a person’s social status, which was ideally maintained in the netherworld, and appear as a vital aspect of power in Ishtar’s Descent myth.

The funerary display

After the preparation of the body, there was some kind of funerary display referred to as taklimtu. The Nineveh text reports that this display was made before the god Šamaš, and a royal letter concerning a funeral (appx. 2, text 10) suggests it occurred more than once: “The sun having risen for an hour, the display takes place; the sun having risen for one hour and a half, [the disp]lay takes place again.”. Martin Stol notes that one of the most important events during the annual period of mourning over the death of the god Damuzi is the display of his body, and his interpretation of taklimtu as the lying-in-state of the dead body is generally accepted. Jo Ann Scurlock, however, excludes the notion that the dead body was shown, arguing that taklimtu involves only the display of grave goods.

was treated in the same way: laid to rest in a golden sarcophagus filled with honey (Henkelman 2011, 115). The fragments of Persika by Ctesias of Cnidus, which survive through other authors (Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 20) also include an anecdote about the opening of the tomb of a Mesopotamian king Bellias or Belos (the identity of the king referred to is debated) by Xerxes during his stay in Babylon (see appx. 2, text 17). The anecdote is preserved in two sources: Aelian’s Varia Historia and Photius’ summary of Persika. In this story Xerxes opens the king’s funerary monument and finds the body lying in a glass sarcophagus filled with oil to “about a palm’s width short of the rim” (Henkelman 2011, 112; Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 185). While the story falls within the realm of legend, we know that oil was used in Mesopotamian mortuary practice.

Müller-Karpe 2008, 144.

Alternatively Wiseman (1985, 114) translates that she was clothed “in a splendid coloured and bejewelled robe”.

In the myth Ishtar prepares for her trip with her finest clothing and jewellery, but is tricked into handing them over as she passes through the seven gates and arrives in the Underworld naked and powerless (see Pollock 1991, 180). She is stripped of her crown, earrings, the beads around her neck, toggle-pins at her breast, girdle of birth-stones around her waist, bangles on her ankles and wrists, and her garment (Dalley 1989, 156-7); a list which reflects those items actually placed in graves of high-status females, sometimes in large numbers

This Assyrian word taklimtu derives from the verb kullumu “to show” (Stol 1988, 127). Kuhrt (1995, 525) and Leidty (1995, 955), for example, refer to the display of the body at the funeral.

Scurlock (1991, 3) considers the Nineveh text as the best evidence that the display was not of the corpse (whose placement in the tomb is mentioned in the preceding lines), but of the objects which were put in the tomb alongside the sarcophagus after the display. She also cites a text in which an offensive ghost is given kispu offerings and a taklimtu display is made for him, arguing that the dead body is surely not meant here (Scurlock...
6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral

Burial

After the display the body was interred with the grave goods in the *kimahhu* (grave, tomb or coffin) and the burial rites performed.\(^{357}\) The Nineveh text suggests that grave goods could include both the dead person’s own possessions and gifts for the Underworld deities and resident ghosts:

*Objects of gold and silver, everything worthy of a tomb, the regalia that he used to love, I [...] placed with my father in the tomb. I offered gifts to the princely Anunnaki and the spirits who dwell in the Underworld.*

In addition to personal items and gifts, texts from earlier periods indicate that offerings in the form of provisions for the journey to the Underworld were essential. Ceramics for solid and liquid food intake are found in most graves suggesting that in practice this ideal was widely adhered to,\(^{358}\) although it is difficult to know whether such vessels would have been considered suitable for travel or were instead intended for a final meal before departure,\(^{359}\) or even perhaps for the ghost’s regular return for sustenance. Goods seem to have been placed in the graves for a variety of reasons and generally it is not possible when looking at the archaeological evidence to suggest which are to be interpreted as travel provisions, personal belongings, or gifts for those in the Underworld.\(^{360}\)

After placement of the body and goods, the *esemtu* and *etemmu* had to be sealed off from the living and the appropriate rituals performed. In the Nineveh text the new king reports that “I sealed the entrance to the sarcophagus, his resting-place with tough bronze and cast for it a potent spell”.\(^{361}\) The importance of the sealing of the tomb is revealed in Yaba’s curse (appx. 2, text 3) against anyone who “breaks open the seal of that tomb, above (earth), under the rays of the sun” (see fig. 44 for Yaba’s curse tablet in situ). The burial rites apparently involved a “funeral burning” (*šuruptu*) or “burnt offering” (appx. 2, texts 9-11),

---

\(^{357}\) Finet 1987, 240; Sürenhagen 2002, 326. *kimahhu* in Akkadian is derived from Sumerian ki.mah (Sürenhagen 2002, 326). See also *kimahhu* in the *CAD K* 370-1.

\(^{358}\) Sürenhagen 2002, 326-7. The assumptions about the use of the vessels found in graves are made based on texts, which state that such offerings should be made; the common positioning of a vessel, usually a bowl, close to the mouth or head of the person has indicated its function as a drinking vessel provided for the voyage. At Aššur, some grain remains have been found, but an analysis of the ceramics has not yet been conducted to establish what liquids may have been provided to the dead (Hausleiter 1999, 135).

\(^{359}\) It is possible that some of the vessels found in graves were used during a ritual meal associated with the burial (Hausleiter 1999, 135).

\(^{360}\) Sürenhagen 2002, 326-7.

\(^{361}\) Alternatively Deller (1999, 70) interprets the entrance as the gate of the tomb.
6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral

and it is assumed that the torches or censers mentioned in funerary texts were used for this ritual performance.\(^{362}\) It is likely that the pouring of libations was also a standard element of funerary ritual.\(^{363}\)

Banqueting was evidently central to the funeral ceremony and the Nineveh text lists 300 sheep and 30 oxen as funerary offerings, presumably at least some of which were to provide meals for the guests.\(^{364}\) Nabonidus too “slaughtered fat rams” when the people from all over the empire gathered to mourn his mother.\(^{365}\) Animal and food remains have been reported both inside burial containers and in grave fill, sometimes with evidence for burning at the top of the grave, and are presumed to be associated with ritual activities performed during or after the inhumation.\(^{366}\) It is not known whether the corpse (or the ghost) was considered to be a participant in this feast.

**Mourning**

The family was expected to mourn its dead according to established custom.\(^{367}\) This involved weeping, scratching, and tearing at the body and hair and ‘marking’ by wearing dirty, matted hair and a dirty, ragged garment.\(^{368}\) Nabonidus’ text suggests that for Babylonian royalty the period of mourning was seven days. Those who came from around the Empire to mourn his mother:

\[\ldots\] made a great lament, scattered dust on their heads. For seven days and seven nights they walked about, heads hung low, dust strewn, stripped of their attire. On the seventh day...all the people of the country shaved and cleaned themselves.

Those in mourning seem to have spent a period of time in isolation, and the wearing of white clothing appears to have been associated with the transition from mourning back to ordinary life. The practice of dressing in white for a period of two days is suggested by letters

---

\(^{362}\) Assyrian exorcists used torches and censors for purification purposes, and it is likely that their use in this context was also for purification (Parpola 1983, 8). Postgate (2008, 179) suggests that it was the incense burners, rather than torches that were probably being specifically referred to in relation to the šuruptu.

\(^{363}\) Two Old Babylonian texts clearly refer to the pouring of libations as part of death ritual (Cohen 2005, 28).

\(^{364}\) Postage 2008, 179.

\(^{365}\) This text reveals the importance of mourning in diplomatic relations. For an analysis of mourning in international relations see Artzi 1980.

\(^{366}\) Food remains have been reported at Babylonian sites (Baker 1995, 219) and at Tell Fekheriye (Bartl 2011, 3).

\(^{367}\) Bottéro 1992, 280.

\(^{368}\) Cooper 1992, 24. As described by Cohen (2005, 46), “marking is a change in one’s appearance and/or grooming habits that function as a sign”. Men were involved in public displays of mourning, but only women seem to have engaged in scratching at the face and breast and tearing out hair (Scurlock 1995, 1886).
sent to Esarhaddon, probably during the mourning of his wife Ešarraḫamat (appx. 2, texts 12-13).  

6.2.4. Ongoing Care for the Dead

In Mesopotamian society ties were not severed with a family member after his or her death. The living descendants were required not only to bury their corpse according to custom, but also to provide ongoing care for their ghost, relieving the harsh conditions of the Underworld. Nabonidus’ report on his mother’s devotion to deceased kings indicates the kind of attention a king may enjoy after his death:

_I every month without interruption in my finest garments made them a funerary offering of oxen, fat sheep, bread, best beer, wine, sesame oil, honey and all kinds of garden produce, and established abundant offerings of sweet smelling incense as a regular due, and placed it before them._

Memorial rites needed to be completed in proximity to the interment and an appropriate burial place where the bones could rest peacefully and the ghost receive his or her food was necessary prerequisite for their correct performance. The sub-floor burial chambers at Nimrud and Aššur with their monolithic sarcophagi and even vaults underneath family homes demonstrate that ensuring a suitable place for interring family members often demanded forethought. Texts bear witness to the importance of ancestors’ physical remains and their burial location. For example, after his defeat by Sennacherib in 700, the king of Babylonia, Merodach-baladan II, collected the bones of his ancestors and fled with them to safety across the Persian Gulf (appx. 2, text 14). Later we hear of Assyrian king Ashur-etil-ilani (626-618) organising for the remains of his officer Shamash-ibni to be sent in a coffin to his native town, Bit-Dakur, and placed “in the house of the fortress” (appx. 2, text 15). Deliberate violation of ancestors’ bones as a punishment for rebellion is attested twice in the records of

---

369 Simo Parpola (1983, 194-5) suggests that after a period of liminality, during which the king stayed in isolation, the wearing of white was involved in the reintegration into normal life (Parpola believes that white was a symbol of a “merry life”).
370 Skaist 1980, 123.
372 Bayliss 1973, 123-4. These are possibly Assyrian kings, indicating that the rites could be performed by non-kin. No other references to the burning of incense as part of the funerary cult are known.
373 Bottéro 1992, 280; Cooper 1992, 27. For an opposing argument, which highlights that the cult of the dead could be performed away from the grave in the presence of a figurine of the dead person see Katz (2003, 200, 210-12).
374 Interestingly we find that for some house purchases the transfer of the ownership of the tombs was also specified in the contract (Sürenhagen 2002, 326).
375 Luckenbill 1924, 99 (lines 6-10). See also Potts 1999, 268; Dalley 2007, 21.
376 For discussion of this text see Van der Stede 2007, 109.
Ashurbanipal (appx. 2, texts 1 and 16). This punishment would conceivably affect both the dead individuals, who must wander eternally without rest or sustenance, and the living family (or wider society) who will be plagued by illness and misfortune at the ‘hand of ghost’. Furthermore, it removed an important part of the ideological foundation for the power of the dead person’s family.

The inheritors (pāqidu) were responsible for making funerary offerings (kispu), pouring fresh water (me naquī) and calling the dead person’s name to perpetuate their memory. There is debate over precisely what “kispu” implied, but it certainly involved the feeding and watering of the dead, and is characterised by its regularity. Jean Bottero interprets it as a periodical offering made during a family ceremony in a designated part of the house, usually at the end of the month. These ceremonies were held for both family members in living memory and earlier ancestors collectively referred to as kimti. The precise logistics of the feeding of the dead are not certain, but openings on the earth’s crust were thought to allow contact between the earth’s surface and the Underworld, and the pipes (arūtu) described in texts as being inserted into the tomb for the pouring of liquids may have relied on this principle. The occasional presence of clay or lead pipes leading into tombs seems to reinforce the idea of conduits for nourishing the dead (fig. 49).

---

378 Cooper 1992, 28; Henkelman 2011b, 117.
380 The dead needed to be provided with their food and drink according to an as-yet unknown schedule (Bottéro 1992, 281). According to Cooper (1992, 29) kispu can refer to either the food offerings made to the dead or to the ceremony itself. Sürenhagen (2002, 325) understands kispu as referring to a broader range of responsibilities toward the dead: equipping them with appropriate status symbols; supplying provisions for the journey to the Underworld; providing gifts for the Underworld gods; regularly sacrificing; protecting the grave to ensure the peace of the dead.
381 This timing is associated with the disappearance of the moon (Bottéro 1992, 281). Postgate (2008, 180) postulates that at Nimrud the kispum may have taken place in rooms directly above the tombs, in two of which were found brick boxes thought to have held food and drink offerings.
383 Horowitz 1998, 361. Texts indicate that water and warm soup were poured via a pipe “in the dust of the netherworld” (Katz 2003, 207).
384 Bottéro 1992, 281; For arūtu see CAD A2 324. It may be possible that the circular hole in the lid of Ashurnasirpal’s coffin (Grufte V) at Aššur (Lundström 2009, abb. 70.4), which is about 5 cm in diameter, was used for the delivery of sustenance. The grain bin “coffin” from Khirbet Katouniyeh has a 1.5cm diameter “drain plug” at front bottom (Curtis & Green 1997, 11), and it seems possible that if the coffin were placed over the dead (rather than in it), this could have served as a libation hole.
6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral in Elam

While François Vallat claims that “death seems to have been the principal pre-occupation of the Elamites”, presently there is in fact little evidence to assist us in understanding Elamite beliefs about death and the afterlife or for reconstructing their funerary rituals. For the Neo-Elamite period in particular we are entirely lacking in relevant texts and have only a few adequately published burials to study. However, a limited number of second millennium texts suggest that, like Mesopotamians, Elamites believed in some kind of existence after death in a dark and miserable Underworld. Seven important Middle-Elamite period tablets found in a funerary vault at Susa suggest that after death the person faced a difficult journey along a road to the netherworld under divine protection, and a judgment by the god Inšušinak. Inšušinak and his chariot also sometimes appear in connection with the journey itself. A fascinating feature of Old-Elamite to Neo-Elamite period burials, which presumably ties into beliefs about the afterlife, is the occasional placement of a modelled clay human head beside that of the deceased. Unlike other aspects of Elamite death and burial, these heads are unique to Elam and altogether absent from the Mesopotamian funerary record.

Archaeological and textual evidence point to the same concern with the care and feeding of the dead seen in Mesopotamia. Graves usually contained some kind of bowl, cup or

---

385 Vallat (1998) bases his opinion upon two major assumptions; that most religious buildings were connected with the dead, and that the most important Elamite gods were associated with the journey to the Underworld.
386 Potts 2011a, 812.
387 Elamite funerary texts indicate the Underworld was “a fearful land of gloom and deep darkness” (Álvarez-Mon 2005a, 121, following Steve and Gasche 1996). Álvarez-Mon warns, however, that “given the fact that our information comes from limited samples of texts and locations, we have to be cautious about imposing similar beliefs on all periods, regions, and inhabitants of Elam.”
388 These texts from the Apadana area at Susa were published by Bottéro 1982, 393–406; André-Salvini 1992; Steve and Gasche 1996 (for full references see Carter 2011, 46). The texts indicate that food and drink were provided to the dead for their difficult voyage (Bottéro 1992, 281) and that the dead person was accompanied by Inšušinak’s assistants Išnikarab or Lagamal and at the end is presented to Inšušinak for judgement (Vallat 1998; Koch 1995, 163).
389 Carter (2011, 52) suggests that this connection is “worth further study”. The idea of a chariot travelling along the road to the Underworld also appears in Mesopotamia in a passage from The Death of Ur Nammu, in which the king travels in a chariot to the gates of the Underworld (Horowitz 1998, 355).
390 Spycket (1995, 31) proposes that these are portraits of the dead person. Álvarez-Mon (2005a, 121) adds that they may also have been family members whose function was perhaps to protect and escort the deceased on their descent into the netherworld.
391 Spycket (1995, 32) has observed that the heads are absent from Mesopotamian graves.
392 Other similarities in terms of beliefs are revealed by the presence of Mesopotamian divination practices and deities (Potts 2011, 812) including the annunaki who are mentioned in a text from a grave at Susa (Potts 2012, 48). These commonalities are unsurprising in view of the Mesopotamian influence over the lowland areas of southwest Iran throughout its history, with the strongest influence during the period 2500-2000 (Potts 2011, 812), and presumably also result somewhat naturally from their geographical proximity.
6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral

combination of vessels at the head and feet,\footnote{Ghirshman and Steve 1966, 8. In his study of Elamite civilisation, Walther Hinz (1973, 65) noted that Elamite graves almost always contained a clay jar and that even the poorest person was always buried with a clay pot at their feet. Vallat (1998) states that the pottery was “intended to receive funerary offerings.”} as seen in several of the Neo-Elamite burials at Susa and Tall-i Ghazir. Food was deposited in jars in front of Elamite tombs, while some coffins bear a small hole in their lid suggesting delivery of nourishment to the dead, and ceramic ‘feeding tubes’ have been found in association with at least one tomb (fig. 49).\footnote{Hinz 1973, 65.} At the Middle-Elamite site of Choga Zanbil, archaeological evidence for feasting in rooms above a series of burial chambers has led scholars to believe that Elamites performed regular ceremonies related to the ancestors buried below.\footnote{Tomb B VII T.J. 4 at Susa contained a (21st century) terracotta coffin with a drainage hole, which was placed upside-down over a crouched burial (Ghirshman 1970, 224). Ceramic ‘feeding tubes’ (very elongated jars and/or parts of drains) were found in association with built tomb (TC 10) in VR A X (Carter 2011, 49, following Steve and Gasche 1996, 342–43, fig. 8). There were also channels along which water could be poured into the graves (Hinz 1973, 65).} A Middle-Elamite period text found in the Haft Tepe funerary complex reveals the ongoing provision of food and drink, and maintenance of the burial site.\footnote{Carter (2011, 56) proposes that such feasts were held to honour the ancestors interred below.} It refers to the assigning of quantities of flour, beer and sheep to six guards with details of how these provisions were to be expended during various festivals and offerings, including sacrifices before Inšušinak’s chariot during regular festivals.\footnote{The text is written in Babylonian and appears on a stele found in a courtyard above a series of Middle Elamite burial chambers at Haft Tepe (Kabnak). It was published by Erica Reiner (1973).} A contemporary text from Susa indicates that funerary rituals were conducted in front of statues of the deceased.\footnote{Reiner 1973, 93-6. These tasks also appear to be mentioned in the administrative texts found in the area of the workshops to the south of the Haft Tepe tombs (Carter 2011, 52; following Herrero and Glassner 1990, nos. 8–10).} Statues of the King of Susa, Tepti-ahar and his “servant girls” were to be placed in “the house”, presumably a baked brick tomb,\footnote{Carter 2011, 52.} inside which four women are locked at night-time to sleep at the statues’ feet.\footnote{Reiner 1973, 94.}

Administrative texts from the Persian period similarly reveal the allocation of resources for the ongoing care of the dead,\footnote{Reiner 1973, 95-6.} and it is unlikely that this practice temporarily ceased during the Neo-Elamite period. It may be of note that burial 693 at Susa yielded jars containing dates, and both this tomb and the Tall-i Ghazir burials contained remnants of animals, although it is difficult to assess whether these indicate an ongoing pattern of feeding, or instead directly associated with the inhumation. However, the numerous large storage jars, serving vessels and animal remains in the Rām Hormuz tomb chamber certainly point to a
Neo-Elamite practice of providing ongoing sustenance to the dead, and Ashurbanipal’s reference to depriving the dead Elamite kings of their food and water (appx. 2, text 1), seemingly reinforces this view.

6.4. Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins in the Context of Beliefs about Death and the Afterlife and Funerary Ritual

The bronze coffins should be viewed within the overall context of death and burial outlined above. In line with the Mesopotamian, and presumably Elamite, beliefs the coffins were all interred under the ground so that the ghost could enter the Underworld. They were sealed with lids of either bronze (Arjān) or wood (Ur) and placed inside chambers, which delimited the space between the living and the dead and ensured the safe and peaceful rest of the bones. So long as the coffin and chamber remained closed and the bones undisturbed, the ghost could come up for his or her offerings and return to the Underworld again. In the case of the Nimrud coffins, the bones had clearly all been disturbed and were in a secondary context. A range of rituals seem to have been developed to deal with situations in which the burial had been less than ideal, so perhaps we may envisage some kind of reburial rites performed at the time of their placement in the antechamber.

Prior to interment in the coffins, the corpses had presumably been treated with oil and clothed according to the individual’s social identity. Remains of expensive cotton garments decorated with embroidery and gold bracteates survived in the Arjān and Rām Hormuz coffins and textiles were found also in the Ur coffins.402 The Nimrud coffins yielded many rosettes, discs and beads that were probably attached to clothing, but textile fragments are not recorded.403 The emphasis on adornment is visible in the plethora of jewellery in the Nimrud coffins and the Rām Hormuz females were also equipped with a multitude of pins and various types of gold and semi-precious stone jewellery.404 Such rich items should have ensured the position of these individuals in the netherworld, whether they were to be retained or given as gifts to the gods and other ghosts. The females in the Ur coffins had a more modest grave assemblage, including a small amount of bronze and gold jewellery, and a

402 The remains of a garment or shroud containing a fringe with embroidered rosettes and a presumed upper garment ornamented with golden bracteates (Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 33). Fragments of cotton textile and gold clothing attachments were reported also for Rām Hormuz (Shishegar 2008, 8). The females in the Ur burials were also wrapped in what Woolley (1926, 379) assessed as being “linen and wool cloths”.
bronze bowl and mirror (PG2 only), perhaps all intended as personal items. The inscribed gold ‘ring’ and dagger interred in the coffin with the Arjān male are likely to have been personal status symbols.

The prestigious grave goods and perhaps the body would have been displayed and the appropriate rituals performed. With our present understanding of the šuruptu funeral burning it is possible to suggest that the bronze candelabra found in the Rām Hormuz and Arjān tombs were used in performing the funerary rituals. That the funerary rites involved sacrifices and perhaps feasting, and that the dead were provided with offerings is suggested by the remains of animal bones in the Ur PG1 bronze coffin. The Nimrud coffins contained ceramic and metal drinking vessels, bowls and jugs, but surprisingly the kinds of serving vessels usually interred inside burial containers were not recorded for Arjān or Rām Hormuz, and the Ur coffins yielded only a few small glazed pots and a bronze bowl, none of which were placed by the head. At some point during the funerary event the burials were sealed off, perhaps after the sacrifice or meal in view of the presence of the animal bones in the Ur PG1 coffin.

The individuals would have been mourned for a period and provided with their kispu offerings thereafter. Evidence for continued offerings in the Arjān, Ur and Nimrud coffins is not obvious. However, funerary inscriptions at Nimrud make reference to offerings of water, beer, wine and grain, and it can probably be assumed that the ghosts of the dead interred in the bronze coffins of Tomb III had at some point been provided with such offerings. At Rām Hormuz the presence of large storage vessels, animal bones on the chamber “offering bench” and perhaps even the bone fragments in a small container strongly suggest the ongoing care for the dead interred in these coffins. Only fragments of coffin lids have been recovered, so it is not known whether holes were provided for the delivery of food, but it is likely that the coffin served as a contact point between the ghost and the living carers.

---

406 Álvarez-Mon (2010a, 77) suggests that the ring was probably reflective of the individual’s elite or royal status. Personal symbols of power are thought to have been placed in the grave to maintain elite differentiation and identity in the Underworld (Finet 1987, 242; Bottéro 1992, 279).
407 For the candelabra see Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 144-50; Shishegar 2008, 8.
408 Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 121.
410 At Arjān such vessels may simply not have survived, while in Rām Hormuz they may have been present, but not recorded in Shishegar’s (2008) report as being inside the coffins.
411 Richardson 1999, 169.
6. Death, the Afterlife and the Funeral

While the bronze coffins are usually seen simply as containers for holding a body and other objects of greater interest, to the society who used them they would have represented much more. They were the central feature of the funeral at the moment of burial, and were chosen by the burying group as an appropriate resting place for the remains of a newly deceased family member and location where their ghost would return to feed. The coffins ultimately provided the surface that acted as a boundary separating the living from the dead and surely had a meaning all their own that deserves to be explored.
7. Ideological Aspects of the Bronze “Bathtub” Burials

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted that the bronze coffins, like mortuary evidence more broadly, are not merely “incidental residue” but represent the direct and purposeful culmination of conscious behaviour. However, the limited scholarship on the bronze coffins has failed to foreground this notion and continues to view them merely as containers, dating tools, or as evidence for the spread of Assyrian influence (as discussed in section 8), a situation that arguably results from the object-oriented and culture-historical nature of Middle Eastern archaeology. Since mortuary evidence is linked to the social ideology, religion and thinking of the burying community, this section is dedicated to an investigation of selected ideological aspects of the bronze “bathtub” coffin burials, namely the burial location, orientation and body arrangement; the form, material and iconography of the coffins; and the manifestation of social rank.

7.2. Location, Orientation and Body Arrangement

7.2.1. Location

Burial location and landscape contexts encode cultural beliefs and sometimes provide insights into social practice or even reveal the incorporation of the dead into cosmologies. We have seen that for Mesopotamians the placement of the dead under the ground served to segregate them from the living and facilitate their entry into the Underworld. This segregation does not imply the severing of family ties however, and concern with maintaining a link with dead family members residing in the Underworld certainly underlies the placement of the dead in bronze “bathtub” burials below the palace floor at Nimrud. The Ur coffins were found in an urban area traditionally associated with a temple but, unlike at Nimrud, we can only guess as to their precise context. The Arjān and Rām Hormuz burials differ markedly in

---

412 For mortuary remains more generally see O’Shea 1981, 39.
413 See for example Ross and Steadman 2005, 2; Pollock and Bernbeck 2005, 2-3.
414 Härke (1997a, 24-5) refers to these aspects of burial practice as reflective of society, but many scholars now follow Michael Parker Pearson (1982, 112) who dismissed this simplistic notion, perceiving that funerals express an ideal and are part of the active construction of society, not simply a reflection of it.
that they are situated on the left bank of a river away from settlement areas. The contrast between burying “bathtubs” under the floor in Mesopotamia and beside rivers in Iran is striking, but it may be proposed that in fact both reflect notions about the *apsû* and death.

The previous chapter noted that in Mesopotamia the *apsû* cosmological zone sometimes had to be crossed to get to the netherworld or could even be conceived of as the netherworld itself. This realm was conceptualised as the corpse of the god *apsû*, cast into an eternal slumber, and was also the primordial element from which the deity Ea fashioned human beings. It therefore had clear associations with both death and life (and even rebirth?). We know that Babylonians sometimes returned their dead to the *apsû* for “swamp burial”, and even find that cult statues damaged beyond repair were wrapped up with precious metals and other divine property in linen textile and thrown into the river to return to their “father” Ea.

While, the *apsû* is usually envisaged as the water of the water table below the earth’s surface or as marshes and swamps, it is also known to manifest as rivers on the earth’s surface, and it is possible to suggest that the burial locations beside rivers in the Zagros foothills have some kind of cosmological association. Elamite beliefs connecting river waters with the *apsû* are in fact alluded to in the depiction of a deity holding an overflowing *apsû* vessel on a relief carving at the Kurangun open air sanctuary, set high on a cliff above the Fahliyān River (fig. 50). The probable identification of the deity as Inšušinak, who acted as judge in the Underworld, provides a connection between rivers (where the burials are placed) and the netherworld.

### 7.2.2. Orientation and Body Arrangement

In ancient Mesopotamia burial orientation is known in some cases to specifically relate to aspects of the individual’s identity such as sex or age. Too few bronze “bathtubs” have

---

416 This practice could of course have been more common, but burials outside urban areas have generally only been found on occasion by accident.
417 The term may also simply be used as a synonym for netherworld, according to CAD “*apsû*” A2 196.
418 Horowitz 1998, 111, 334-5; Lambert 2000, 76; Leick 2001, 20-3. The *apsû* was said to be the corpse/body of the god *apsû* who was slain or put into an eternal slumber via a magic spell by Ea (Sumerian Enki), which explains why the subterranean waters are still, unlike the turbulent ocean (Horowitz 1998. 110-11).
419 Hurowitz (2003, 156) proposes that this ceremony be seen in light of Mesopotamian beliefs about death, burial and the afterlife and may be associated with burial in Babylonian swamps associated with Ea.
421 An *apsû* basin is possibly also carved below. This outdoor sanctuary exhibits a continuity of use, and presumably a corresponding continuity of beliefs about water, extending to the period during which bathtubs were employed in burials. For the Kurangun open air sanctuary relief, see Potts (2004). See Potts (1999, 182) for dates extending its use from the early 2nd millennium to the 8th century.
422 Potts (2004, 152-4) identifies the god with the flowing water as “Ea=Napirisha, epithet of Inšušinak”, but notes that at this particular location the god’s Underworld role is not evident in particular at Kurangan.
been found to allow for discussion of orientation, but it may be noted that excavators of contemporary burials in all three regions have generally been unable to ascertain any orientation preference. In funerary archaeology the layout of the corpse in the burial is also considered significant and can be specific to particular groups. As an indication that body arrangement was indeed an important aspect of Mesopotamian mortuary practice, an extant Neo-Assyrian text describing the ritual burial of a figurine (representing a deceased person) commands that its face be turned to the left. For the burials outlined in section 5 it can only be generally observed that the bodies were tightly flexed inside vessels as space necessitated, and tended to be laid out in a more extended position in tomb and earth, “sherd” or brick graves. In U-shape coffins the body was almost always laid on one side in a flexed or tightly flexed position. The head was placed at either the square or round end in Mesopotamia, but at the round end in all three Elamite examples. Presently no links have been proposed between body arrangement and identity in these coffins, but this would be an interesting point for further research.

7.3. Form, Material and Iconography of the Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

7.3.1. Form

The distinctive “bathtub” coffin form, produced in both terracotta and bronze, was a conscious choice by the burying community and would have possessed its own meaning and significance. Apsidal-shaped coffins first emerged in the Middle Assyrian period, and one may speculate that they had been inspired by some pre-existing form. The closest analogy discovered in the archaeological record to-date is a U-shaped limestone basin from the temple of Ningursu at Girsu, which bears relief carvings of goddesses clasping flowing *apsû* vases to their chests (c.2500-2300) (fig. 51). Texts indicate that such basins for the *apsû* water,

---

424 Notably their very general observations did not take sex, age or other differences into account. At Ur, Woolley (1962, 53) reported only that burial orientation was determined primarily by a need for space-efficient arrangements underneath floors, and at Nippur McCown and Haines (1967, 118) arrived at much the same conclusion. Miroshchadij’s (1981, fig. 8) report on Susa also does not immediately suggest any particular orientation, but if more data were available at this site, an examination of burial orientation and body placement may be enlightening. However, as Wason (1994, 101) notes, while position and orientation is usually recorded in excavation reports, it is rarely possible to infer any specific meaning from this burial aspect.

425 Pearson 1999, 6, 54.

426 Scurlock 2006, fn. 816.

427 Six U-shape coffins have been attributed to the Middle Assyrian period (Haller 1954, 54).

428 Black and Green 1992, 139, fig. 114. This basin was reconstructed from 26 fragments. Its function is clear because it bears an inscription that explicitly describes it as a basin (Sutur 2000, 62).
which was essential for ritual purposes, were an integral component of the Mesopotamian temple complex.\textsuperscript{429}

Just as striking are a series of apsidal depressions found in the floors of Neo-Assyrian palace ‘bathrooms’. One such depression in Sargon’s palace at Khorsabad was reported as being 1.30m long (fig. 52), and is remarkably similar in size, as well as shape, to the bases of the bronze “bathtub” coffins.\textsuperscript{430} The walls of the ‘bathroom’ in which it was found were decorated with procession scenes and the southeast wall bore a niche where a circular hole in the floor slab connects with a drain, strongly suggesting a ritual function. The interpretation of these rooms as palace bathrooms is questionable and despite widespread dismissal of the possibility, the size and shape of the depressions indicate the original placement of (bronze?) apsidal basins or “bathtubs”, probably for ritual purposes.\textsuperscript{431} It may be possible to propose that the distinctive coffin shape was a translation of an important ritual basin form into a funerary context, and provides yet another link with the apsû. An analogy to this proposed adaptation of a ritual form into a burial container is found on the island of Cyprus, where ceramic and limestone “bathtubs” appear in cultic contexts from the 13th century and come to be employed as burial receptacles from the 11th century.\textsuperscript{432} For Cyprus it is suggested that the funerary use of the tubs was related to an interest in ensuring the spiritual purity of the dead.\textsuperscript{433} While the notion that the bronze “bathtubs” were associated with bathing was dismissed by Curtis,\textsuperscript{434} it is possible that these apsidal receptacles were used in cultic contexts for ritual/ablution purposes, and that in a funerary context the specific form was associated with the purification of the dead.

\textsuperscript{429} Gudea’s ‘Cylinder A’ inscription demonstrates that the fashioning of a basin for the pure apsû water was an integral aspect of a temple’s foundation (see Wilson 1996, 103).

\textsuperscript{430} Loud (19, 22-3) describes a depression 15cm deep and 1.3m long cut into the stone paved floor. It was suggested that a metal tub was placed here either for the king to bathe in, or perhaps for the “purification rites that are often mentioned in Assyrian tablets.” Similar depressions in the floors of palace “bathrooms” have been noted in the Governor’s Palace and the ZT wing of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (fig. 52) (Mallowan 1966, p. 41, fig. 7, plan III, rooms 17, 26). It is also worth noting here that the bronze “bathtub” found at Zincirli was located in a room interpreted as a bathroom based on the room’s slope and the presence of bitumen between the mudbricks on the floor (Von Luschan 1911, 303-5).

\textsuperscript{431} Both Geoffrey Turner (1970, 190-4) and Curtis (1983, 87) dismiss the likelihood that these contained bronze “bathtubs” based on Mallowan’s observation that no metal fragments or metal staining has been observed in any of these depressions.

\textsuperscript{432} Dothan 2003, 202-6; Collard 2008, 7, 156-7; Gilmour 1995, 165-7. Such bathtubs are also found in the Levant and in Aegean palatial and cultic contexts, presumably for purification-related rituals, which suggests to some scholars that a cultic connection existed between the Aegean, Cyprus and the Levant (for example Karageorghis 1998, 281; Dothan 2003, 202).

\textsuperscript{433} Collard (2008, 117-8) argues that their ritual libation/purification and burial use may have in turn evolved from their original practical functions. Notably the involvement of holy and sacred water in funerals for libations and washing of the corpse is quite common (Oestigaard 2011, 39).

\textsuperscript{434} Curtis (1983, 86-7), does however suggest they may have been used as baths after their use as coffins.
7. Ideological Aspects of the Bronze “Bathtub” Burials

7.3.2. Material

Like the apsidal form, the bronze material was a purposeful selection by the burying group, and it is the choice of this material that distinguishes these coffins, since no other form of burial container made in bronze has yet been found. The appearance of bronze coffins in a distinctive form known already in terracotta hundreds of years prior to the 8th century leads to the questions of why such an innovation occurred and why this particular material might have been appropriate in a funerary context. In recent decades a branch of archaeological theory broadly referred to as “materiality” has focussed on the active role of the material world in shaping society, rather than being simply a reflection of it. The subject of materiality is approached from a broad range of theoretical angles into which this thesis cannot delve, but the main premise that I wish to highlight and apply to the bronze coffins is that the equation between the ideological and the material should be more balanced and that artefacts have particular properties and ought to be investigated in their own right.

To begin with, it is a valuable exercise to consider materials within the social context of their use. For pre-modern societies raw materials were part of the natural world around them; a world which was animate and imbued with moral qualities. Mesopotamian texts most particularly reveal that nature and its products were indivisible from the divine. Alasdair Livingstone and Stefan Maul have analysed textual references to raw materials and highlighted that, contrary to the general conception of Mesopotamian deities as strictly anthropomorphic, plants, wood, semi-precious stones and metals were often equated with particular gods, as were the finished objects manufactured from these products.

---

435 This perspective emerged as a reaction against firstly New Archaeology models in which “objects were shorn of their ideological component” and secondly post-processual/contextual models in which we find “objects abstracted as ideas in people's heads” to the point at which the materiality of the world was irrelevant (Boivin 2004, 63).


439 For example, scholars such as Jean Bottéro and Thorkild Jacobsen (see Porter 2009b, 155).

440 Livingstone 1986, 177-9. For Maul’s opinion, refer to Porter (2009a, 8; 2009c, fn.1). Gebhard Selz (1997) also noted that material objects appeared in Sumerian lexical texts of “gods” and that offerings were provided for non-anthropomorphic entities including various metals. Ritual texts, some of which date to the Neo-Assyrian period, describe offerings presented to gods who appeared in the form of crowns, city gates, temple doors, weapons, harps, kettledrums and so on (Porter 2009a, 4-5; 2009b, 156-7, 178). These are either marked with the DINGIR determinative sign or directly referred to as gods (Porter 2009c, 161). Debates persist over whether
7. Ideological Aspects of the Bronze “Bathtub” Burials

Livingstone notes that copper (urudu) and tin (annaku) can appear as Ea and Ninmaḫ respectively (though bronze (siparru) is not mentioned).⁴⁴¹ Notably Ningirimma (the daughter of Ea) has been associated or even equated with the basin (often made in bronze) and usually appears as a purifier of rituals.⁴⁴² These observations have implications for the way that the bronze coffins were seen by the burying group, namely that they were fashioned from divine materials, and may also have been divine in their finished basin-like form. To broaden the scope to consider the majority of surviving (ceramic) burial containers, clay is not linked to a particular god, but is nevertheless said to come from the apsû and can be reached by digging just below the earth’s surface.⁴⁴³ It is therefore worth considering that clay had specific significance in a mortuary context.

The reflective properties of metals made them prime candidates for the imposition of ideas about divine forces. In an analysis of the varied and evocative Mesopotamian vocabulary for referring to brightness and light, which includes the words namrirrû, rašubbatu, šalummatu, puluḫtu and melammu, Elena Cassin highlighted the positive and auspicious connotations inherent in their meanings.⁴⁴⁴ Irene Winter has subsequently employed these notions of the positive value of light in her analysis of the ancient Mesopotamian visual (aesthetic) experience of the material world. She emphasised that buildings, sculptures, and various other objects exhibiting visually observable qualities of shine, brightness, brilliance and radiance were strongly associated with ritual purity and believed to manifest the divine.⁴⁴⁵ The physical attributes of metals, which made them appear

---

⁴⁴¹ Livingstone 1986, 105, 182. For siparru see CAD S, 296-9; for annaku see CAD A2 127-30. The word zabar, and probably also zappar, are used in reference to bronze in Elamite texts (Henkelman 2005). Zabar is also translated as “copper” (see Giovinazzo 2004).
⁴⁴² Livingstone 1986, 180-1. Washing bowls or basins are usually found in bronze, which seems to suggest the ritual aspects of bronze (See bronze narmaktu “washing bowls” in Parpola 1987, text 158, line 11, and narmaktu in CAD N 360. Note that the word also means “ritual bath”).
⁴⁴³ Horowitz 1998, 337.
⁴⁴⁴ Cassin 1968, 2-8. Melammu was a radiant aura sometimes depicted as a halo of stars around deities (Halloway 2002, 181). For a sample of the many Assyrian texts in which brightness and radiance have associations with prosperity and stability, see Hunger 1992, texts 115 (lines 13, r.1-4), 9 (lines 3-5). Texts include phrases such as “the awesome radiance of the gods”, “brilliant as the heart of the Heavens” and we hear of a metal crown which possesses a “glistening splendour that shines like the day, its radiance (melammu) touches the heavens, its appearance is gleaming red, like Šamaš it casts its radiance over the lands”, and “glittering bronze” bull statues are “sons of Šamaš” (Walker and Dick 2001, 128-53, 192-207).
⁴⁴⁵ Winter 1994, 123. Thus an emotional/religious experience was induced in the viewer upon looking at light reflective objects (Winter 2000, 26, 29-30).
7. Ideological Aspects of the Bronze “Bathtub” Burials
to emit light, encouraged their comprehension as positive, divine and even ritually pure. Thus we find that temple walls, sacred horns and divine statues were endowed with a holy shine by their metal cladding or clothing.\[446\]

Relevant to this argument is Dorothy Hosler’s observation that in Mesoamerican society luminosity, colour and sound production qualities of metals were vital aspects of their materiality,\[447\] and archaeometallurgical analyses demonstrate that craftsmen experimented extensively with copper alloys to develop materials that satisfied the cultural requirement of ‘divine’ gold and silver colouring and at the same time possessed the mechanical properties of sound and strength needed for certain objects.\[448\] The cultural value placed on luminosity and even colour gleaned from Mesopotamian texts, and the attachment of this value to metals, should encourage a similar investigation into Mesopotamian metal production, which we know was associated with the divine and would have had ritual and ‘magical’ aspects.\[449\] The metals themselves were probably also imbued with magical properties, since it is well-established that semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli and even rock forms like limestone were considered to possess various healing and protective powers.\[450\] To return to the bronze coffins, it may be that the colour-morphing ability of tin allowed for the production of a golden-hued copper-tin alloy burial container endowed with a protective divine aura to

\[446\] The pure and holy are thought to shine and things that shine manifest the sacred. Temple walls were covered with metals and Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian temples are said to shine like the sun, the day, or the sunrise (Winter 1995, 2573). We also know that gold, silver and bronze attachments were made to decorate the garments of divine statues, and presumably made the gods glitter or shine in the light (Oppenheim 1949).\[447\] Hosler 1994; 1995.\[448\] Hosler 1995, 102. For example, they cast bells for ritual use in different sizes and shapes, and used a range of bronze alloys, the composition of which could be adjusted to provide a broad spectrum of colours; high-arsenic and high–tin alloys replicated silver and gold (gold was associated with the power of the sun and silver with the moon) (Hosler 1994, 138). Tools and utilitarian bronzes tended to be in the range of 2-5% tin or arsenic, which was sufficient level to give strength to the metal, while the higher levels of tin and arsenic were restricted to status objects (Hosler 1995, 101). The experimentation with concentrations of elements in copper alloying and techniques for preferential surface colour suggest a relationship between an interest in these material properties of metals and production techniques (Hegmon 1998, 267). According to Hosler (1995, 113) “ancient metallurgy emphasized certain physical properties, sound and color, which expressed fundamental religious beliefs, and that those beliefs were embodied in, and perpetuated through the technology and its products.” For the use of high levels of tin for a golden alloy and arsenic to replicate silver in the Near East see Weeks (2012, 307, 309).\[449\] In Mesopotamia bronze production was connected with the divine; Nergal was responsible for mining and smelting and Ea for metalworking and decoration (Dalley 1988, 97-100). Paul Budd and Timothy Taylor (1995, 133) have argued that the ritual and “magical” aspects of metal working were not eliminated until the Industrial Revolution when the line was drawn between material science and religion. Tin in particular exhibits almost magical colour-permutation properties (Gillis 1999, 143-4). It may be possible that the coffins were the product of some kind of ritual manufacture like the Mesopotamian bronze kettle drums for which ritual production instructions have been recovered (Horowitz 1991, 1).\[450\] Collon (1987, 100) emphasises the perceived properties of stones that we learn from texts: “lapis lazuli meant power and divine favour; crystal signified enlarged profits and a good name and green marble would bring favour upon favour.” A Neo-Assyrian text from Nineveh dating to the reign of Sennacherib reports that limestone was obtained for the construction of palace construction specifically for its protective qualities; curing headaches and lifting the spirits (Russell 1997, 300).
relieve the dark and miserable conditions of the underworld, and at the same time solid enough to hold a corpse.

In the context of our understandings of Mesopotamian beliefs, which demanded the maintenance of a physical division between the living and the dead, the impermeable quality and perhaps strength of bronze made it appropriate for a burial container. Two very curious textual references relate to these aspects of bronze/copper; in one the king’s tomb or coffin is sealed with “strong” bronze (or copper) (appx. 2, text 8), and in the other, an exorcism text, a figurine representing the unburied dead person is placed in a copper container for “extra protection” prior to burial. It is not clear in either of these passages whether the strength or protection afforded by the bronze/copper and which made it appropriate for use in these funerary contexts was physical, magical, or even both.

Moving on to further possibilities presented by the physical properties of the coffin material, in light of their burial context it should be pointed out that bronze possesses preservative properties which assist the survival of bone and other organic materials. There is presently no obvious indication of any awareness to this fact, but it is a worthwhile proposition to keep in mind since ancestral bones clearly played such an important ideological role in Mesopotamian and Elamite society. It is also notable that bronze could be fashioned into the required apsidal shape and was strong, but at the same time light enough to be portable; features which are likely to have been desirable in these specific funerary contexts.

At approximately 12% tin, the Arjān coffin would have had a rather golden appearance (Vatandoust 1999, 139). Stout Whiting (1995, 42) in fact states that “the more or less 10% tin bronze popular in ancient Mesopotamia is virtually indistinguishable in colour and shine from 18k gold. It is relevant here to note that West Semitic texts delineate nēḥšēt muṣḥāt tābā (“good yellow bronze”) from normal bronze by its colour and special value (it was considered valuable like gold, presumably because of its golden appearance). These texts date to mid-fifth century, but the author of this paper evidently found the notion of yellow bronze relevant to a discussion of the Assyrian period (Mitchell 1988, 271, 273). Analyses of a series of bronze products from Hasanlu in Iran have strongly suggested that use of tin and antimony (which imparts a silvery-golden colour) is likely to have been related to an interest in changing surface colour (Fleming et al. 2011, 116, 124).

McGinnis 1987, 4; Deller 1987, 71; Postgate 2008, 179; Kwasman 2009, 117.

Scurlock 2006, 51, fn. 816. Scurlock states that the copper (URUDU) vessels were used for extra protection (against the ghost).

The importance of considering the physical properties of materials has been particularly emphasised by Boivin 2004, 69; 2005, 175-8.

Copper ions are bactericidal and because they kill microorganisms, bone impregnated by copper ions will be well-preserved at the macroscopic and microscopic level (Muller-Karpe et al. 2008, 147). It has been suggested that the Arjān textiles were in contact with bronze, which would have preserved them while the coffin remained intact (Mo’taghed 1990, 75). Hair is also known to survive well in burials when in contact with copper and bronze objects (Mays 2010, 23).

We do not find any suggestions in texts, for example, of the ability of bronze to preserve organic materials.
If we direct attention to the inconveniences and constraints presented by the material world, much of it inherited from predecessors,\textsuperscript{457} we stumble upon the question of what was to be done with the highest status royal family members when all of the stone sarcophagi placed prior to the construction of the palace were filled. Obviously it was not possible to simply add another to accommodate each new queen. Since one of the major precursors to innovation is the development of new needs\textsuperscript{458} it is plausible that the bronze coffin, made in a culturally appropriate form and material, and strong enough to hold a body, yet portable enough to carry down stairs, along underground corridors and through narrow tomb chamber doors, was devised as a response to the constraints of the material world.

7.3.3. Iconography

The goat/mouflon and rosettes on the Ur burials are the only iconographic elements that have been detected on the coffins.\textsuperscript{459} The addition of motifs onto a burial container, especially those involving animals, surely confers symbolic meaning,\textsuperscript{460} however, this particular motif is unknown elsewhere except on a glazed brick fragment from Khorsabad (fig. 53) and its significance remains unknown.\textsuperscript{461} For a possible link between the goat/mouflon and rosette in specific reference to death we might look to the myth of Ishtar's Descent in which the goddess Ishtar, who is sometimes depicted as a rosette, sends her consort, Damuzi, who is usually associated with the goat or sheep herd, down to the netherworld.\textsuperscript{462} Alternatively, because the motif has not been observed on any other excavated coffin, it is certainly possible to propose that it had specific relevance to the identity of the interred women. In this regard it has been suggested that those interred in the bronze coffins were entu priestesses, whose office is believed to have been connected with astrology.\textsuperscript{463} Thus if we consider that in astrological texts the planets (including Venus/Ishtar) are described as ‘wild sheep’ (bibbu),

\begin{itemize}
\item[F457] Fletcher 2010, 467.
\item[F458] Renfrew and Bahn (2005, 152-3) have noted this common factor in innovation, noting that while a new innovation may be applied (in this case the bronze material), its shape or decoration may retain its familiarity. In this way the innovation will be accepted more easily.
\item[F459] The rectangular panels inserted between the goat and rosette motifs on Ur PG2 are not discussed in the available scholarship, but may also be significant.
\item[F460] Animal art might sometimes be merely ‘decorative’, but it often has various kinds of symbolism, and this symbolism may even be transformed in burial contexts (Härke 1997b, 193).
\item[F461] Curtis (1983, 85; 2008, 164) describes this motif as “unmistakably Assyrian”. He notes that although similar goats normally kneel before palmettes, this particular motif appears on a glazed brick panel from Khorsabad dating to the reign of Sargon II (721-705). The panel is fragmentary and we see only the lower portion of the goat’s legs (and a head which may belong to the same animal), but the similarity is nonetheless evident.
\item[F462] Penglase 1995, 194. For the specific association of the goat and rosette with Damuzi and Ishtar in a funerary context, see Cohen (2005, 130-3).
\item[F463] Clay (1915, 68) believed that, since the moon god Nannar was the father of the stars of night, “bearer of signs for the people”, it is not improbable that the entu office was related to astrology.
\end{itemize}
the rosettes and mouflon on the coffins may be a direct reference to the role of these women.\textsuperscript{464} The Arjān lid’s lotus and bud registers also should not be overlooked, but we may presently only guess as to whether they were symbolic or merely ‘decorative’.\textsuperscript{465}

7.4. Social Rank

It is generally assumed that social inequality manifests itself in the ritual and wealth differentiation of the dead,\textsuperscript{466} and this is particularly true for ancient Near Eastern state societies where rank very strongly, even invariably, correlates with the energy expenditure on the mortuary process.\textsuperscript{467} Included in the calculation of energy expenditure are the grave form, the grave goods and the ceremony itself; the latter which might involve parading, banqueting and so on.\textsuperscript{468} However, burial practice does not unambiguously reflect social status.\textsuperscript{469} More correctly it is the interplay between a particular society’s social organisation and ideology (i.e. the meaning and significance of death) that will influence their mortuary practices.\textsuperscript{470} Following on from the previous analyses of Mesopotamian and Elamite beliefs about death and the afterlife and the location, orientation, layout, form, material and iconography of the bronze “bathtub”, an examination of the expression of social rank in the bronze coffin burials is pertinent.

The relationship between the social categorisation of an individual in life and treatment in death is an important aspect of funerary archaeology.\textsuperscript{471} The individuals buried in bronze coffins are clearly delineated as high status by their grave goods. This is evident in the number of objects in the burials, particularly the quantities of non-utilitarian objects; the presence of foreign materials, including cotton textiles; and the inclusion of vessels in metal rather than ceramic.\textsuperscript{472} Texts clearly reveal the ideology behind the practice of burying individuals with rich grave goods; those who are exquisitely clothed and adorned and equipped with rich objects, and who have the most impressive valuables to offer the

\textsuperscript{464} The 7 planets are the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn and Jupiter (Horowitz 1998, 153).
\textsuperscript{465} To quote Alvarez-Mon (2010a, fn. 276): “In an Assyrian context, while there is no written evidence stating that the lotus flower itself was considered a sacred symbol of immortality and renewal, the fact that this motif is repeatedly depicted in monumental reliefs, in particular in the hand of either a king or noble attending an important ceremonial event, indicates its powerful symbolic value.”
\textsuperscript{466} Drennan and Peterson 2012, 78.
\textsuperscript{467} Schiffer 1987, 86.
\textsuperscript{468} Wason 1994, 78.
\textsuperscript{469} For example Tarlow 1999, 11.
\textsuperscript{470} Wason 1994, 67.
\textsuperscript{471} Chapman 2000, 189.
\textsuperscript{472} According to Wason (1994, 93-4) status can reliably be inferred when the differentiation in the number of utilitarian and non-utilitarian objects between graves is great, where there are differences in source materials (local versus distant), and where there are differences in raw materials among specific objects or between burial types.
7. Ideological Aspects of the Bronze “Bathtub” Burials

Underworld gods, will maintain their high status and enjoy a more comfortable existence.\(^{473}\) At the same time they will reaffirm their living family’s social position.\(^{474}\) There is also a clear link between high rank and tomb chambers, which as we have seen were consistently used by wealthy members of society across Assyria, Babylonia and Elam, and which housed all of the bronze coffins.\(^{475}\) Unlike grave goods, the ideological grounds underlying the link between elite (wealth-based) status and chamber tomb burials are not revealed in texts.

In addition to their rich grave goods and placement in a chamber tomb, these individuals are set apart from the rest of society by their burial in a large bronze coffin of a type that was usually made in clay. Because in antiquity metal industries were tightly controlled and supported by a small minority amongst the ruling group,\(^{476}\) we may assume that these coffins would only have been available to the highest elite. And while bronze is usually considered a “utilitarian” metal, it was not employed exclusively for its technological efficiency,\(^{477}\) but was also a candidate for prestige object production by virtue of its ‘metalness’.\(^{478}\) It is particularly important to bear in mind that when cast with higher tin content it replicates the appearance of gold, allowing the metalworker to imitate the visual qualities of this prestigious metal while maintaining a level of strength suitable for a coffin.\(^{479}\)

\(^{473}\) It is not known whether these were personal belongings or gifts, and whether they were made upon the person’s death. The Arjān ‘ring’, bowl, candelabrum and beaker appear to be produced in the same workshop, if not by the same hand (Alvarez-Mon 2010, 274). Could this suggest specific production of a set of gifts for the person upon their death? For a discussion of ‘gifts or possessions?’ see Pearson (1999, 85-6).

\(^{474}\) Black and Green 1992, 180.

\(^{475}\) Kreppner and Hornig (2010, 110) have noted that a chamber tomb is a “costly” type of burial. It has been argued that the construction of the Arjān tomb in particular, with its well-cut, stone lined plastered walls and large capstones would have required significant manpower, skills and organisation and, together with the bronze coffin and rich grave goods, we should see this type of burial as having been within reach only for the most wealthy and powerful Elamites (Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 22, following Overlaet 2003, 63).

\(^{476}\) Moorey  1974, 27.

\(^{477}\) Wells 1991, 89-91.

\(^{478}\) P. R. S. Moorey (1994, 253) argues that metal alloys have not always been employed simply for their utilitarian purposes and value placed on the hardness of bronze must not be overemphasized. According to Stech (1991, 88), even utilitarian metals would have had social meanings and been candidates for prestige object production because of their qualities of “metalness” and attractive metallic appearance.

\(^{479}\) As tin content increases, the colour becomes golden: fresh pure copper is pinkish; 6.9-10% tin gives an orange-golden colour; 12%+ content turns the bronze golden; and 20% tin content makes the golden hue paler (Fleming et al. 2006, 35-6; Fleming et al. 2011, 106). The imitation of gold could possibly have been the main early intention behind tin alloying (Pigott 1996, 159-60; Fleming et al. 2011, 106) and the preference for high-tin bronze in the manufacture of decorative/status items suggests that bronze may have been valued nearly (or as much) as gold itself. In his study of a selection of bronzes from Iran, Vatandoust (1999, 132), for example, noted tin levels of functional objects were around 6%, but much higher in decorative bronzes, indicating an interest in imitating gold. Similarly metallurgical analyses on a series of bronze bowls from Nimrud revealed a higher proportion of tin (averaging 10.7%) than bronze used for fibulae and utilitarian items such as hooks, arrow heads and weights (4-9%) (Hughes et al. 1988, 313). “Tin sweat” during the casting process can also provide a near-golden surface for bronzes with as low as 8% tin. (Fleming et al 2011, 128; see also Meeks 1986).
Javier Álvarez-Mon has consistently stressed the elite nature of the Arjān and Rām Hormuz tomb and their contents, and his point may be reiterated here and extended to all of the bronze coffin burials based on the foregoing discussion. When all of the bronze coffin burials are considered side-by-side, we may gain the impression that the Ur interments were comparatively ‘poor’. Yet I would emphasise that the level of differentiation observable in mortuary contexts are contingent on the practices of the particular culture in a specific historical period, therefore an assessment of the relative position of a burial within its contemporary society is more relevant than a direct comparison between societies. In this regard, section 5 clearly demonstrated that the bronze coffins represented the highest-status of the surviving burial types in Babylonia and Elam, although they were slightly lower in Assyria where kings and queens were buried in stone sarcophagi. In every case the interred person (or burying group) clearly controlled significantly more resources than the majority in their respective societies. Analyses of skeletal remains could potentially support or rule out such assertions, because osteology and paleopathology data provide more direct insights into the living conditions of individuals during their lifetime, but presently the available skeletal data is scarce, limiting the possibilities for such analyses in the regions and periods in question.

A rare and fascinating exception is a recently published skeletal analysis of the individuals in the Ur PG1 and PG2 bronze coffins. This report highlights that both females spent a significant proportion of their time in (pious?) kneeling positions with their toes curled under (for this position in religious context see fig. 54). It is not known whether the status of these individuals was linked with religious power, but Penelope Weadock has proposed that they were entu priestesses of the moon-god, who were traditionally the

480 Most recently Álvarez-Mon (forthcoming a, 15) has stated that “the luxurious characteristics of the materials together with the royal inscription strongly suggest that the females buried at Ram–Hormuz enjoyed royal status.”

481 Wason 1994, 68.

482 Wason 1994, 72-6. In studying relations of equality and inequality skeletal remains indicate health status and circumstances of death, thereby providing evidence on the relative deprivation of various subpopulations (Paynter 1989, 369). While the Nimrud and Ur skeletons have been analysed, comparative material from the remainder of the population is not available.

483 Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 121-2. Activity patterns on the human skeleton indicate particular behaviours (see Knudson and Stojanowski 2008, 399) and this finding is all the more significant because both women exhibit the same behaviour. The skeletal analyses raise interesting questions; are we expected to assume that high-status ladies were accustomed to spending their days in squatting and kneeling positions? Perhaps a careful analysis of textual and iconographic evidence, and preferably more skeletal evidence from temple areas (and other locations as a control) could bolster Weadock’s interpretation of these women as religious figures.
7. Ideological Aspects of the Bronze “Bathtub” Burials

daughters of kings. In view of this surprising find, Weadock’s proposition that these were religious figures may be worth further exploration.

7.5. Conclusions

The main aims of this section were to demonstrate that the bronze “bathtub” coffins were far more than convenient, utilitarian metal containers for holding a corpse and grave goods, and that there are numerous ideological aspects of both the coffins and their contexts which are valuable to study. This inquiry into the possible meanings invested in the coffins has revealed that their material, bronze, may have been envisaged as being imbued with ‘magical’ protective properties in addition to its visually-perceptible reflective, gold-like, attributes. Because bronze seemingly ‘emits’ light it is probable that like sacred buildings and divine statues the coffins were endowed with positive agency. In the coffins we may recognise a possible duality of existence between the real and understood character of objects; the interplay between the material and the mind. The physical and seemingly magical properties of copper and tin, and the ability of humans to alloy them, allowed for the invention of a strong and portable burial container in a high-status, golden material, which shone like (and perhaps even embodied) the divine. Moreover the choice of a pre-existing material form associated with the apsû may, in a funerary context, symbolise ideas about purity or even about a return to the primordial eternal state. In sum, the coffins represent the direct and purposeful culmination of conscious behaviour, behind which lie the socio-religious ideologies of the burying communities and the socio-economic status of elite groups who are linked across time and space by their use of a distinctive burial container.

484 Weadock 1975, 112. Nabonidus (555-539) records that he restored the Ur giparu, the ancient quarters of an order of entu women and seat of divination connected with the temple of Nannar, or Sin, and built a residence for his daughter, Bel-shalti-Nannar, and had her consecrated to the office of a votary (Clay 1915, 66-7).

485 For discussion of this duality see Needham (2005, 193).
8. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins in Historical Context

8.1. Introduction

The survey and analysis of funerary practices presented in this thesis has revealed that the bronze “bathtub” coffin corpus represents a burial type that is most distinguished by its material and is unusual in the context of the Mesopotamian and Elamite burials that remain to us today. The corpus is all the more surprising because the few examples that have been recovered are geographically distributed across the regions of Babylonia, Assyria and Elam, which are considered to be separate cultural areas. This final chapter will place the bronze coffins within the historical frame of the mid-late 8th century to mid-6th century Assyria, Babylonia and Elam, considering the factors that may have resulted in their wide appearance, and whether the bronze coffin corpus represents a distinct socio-cultural phenomenon that may be described as a shared funerary practice.

8.2. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin in the context of Assyrian, Babylonian and Elamite Interaction

The connections between Assyria, Babylonia and Elam extended beyond the geographical to include also political, military, intellectual, religious and social interaction (including intermarriage), with formal contacts between the ruling classes.\Footnote\footnote{Brinkman 1986, 204.} For the first one hundred years of our period (i.e. the mid-8\textsuperscript{th} to mid-7\textsuperscript{th} century) the available historical sources are predominantly Assyrian and offer little more than a biased picture of the political and military supremacy of the Neo-Assyrian kings.\Footnote\footnote{From these sources we learn that the Neo-Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser cemented Assyrian control over Babylonia in 734, placing Assyrian administrators and establishing a dual Assyrian-Babylonian monarchy which remained in place until 626. He introduced administrative reforms including reorganisation of the Assyrian provinces (Oates 1986, 113-4; Brinkman 1997, 2). The late Neo-Assyrian kings expended significant effort and resources to maintain this power in Babylonia, taking various approaches to administering the important but troublesome region (Brinkman 1986, 199). Control of Babylonia was essential to Assyrian prosperity, providing important tax revenues and having power to cut off key trade routes (Melville 1999, 34). Tiglath-Pileser and Sargon II attempted to maintained good relations with the urban populations of Babylonia endowing them with special privileges and maintaining Babylonian religious institutions (Melville 1999, 17; Strawn et al. 2006, 343). Tiglath-Pileser took the title “king of Sumer and Akkad”, implying control over Babylonia, but left Babylonian king Nabonassar on the throne, intervening only when Nabonassar needed assistance fending off the Chaldeans. However, after Nabonassar’s death Tiglath-Pileser placed Assyrian administrators in Babylonia (Oates 1986, 114). Sargon II (721-705) ruled Babylonia simply as the king of Babylon, but his successor Sennacherib (704-681) installed the puppet-king Bel-ibni, a Babylonian raised in the Assyrian court. He soon replaced Bel-ibni with his own son, Aššur-nadin-šumi (Strawn et al. 2006, 343-4), who}
between Assyrians (usually supported by Babylonian urban populations), and Chaldean tribal leaders in Babylonia’s far south who repeatedly attempted to shake off Assyrian overlordship with the assistance of Elamite kings who at this time were a significant political and military force. The focus of the historical sources on political conflict has led to a one-dimensional characterisation of the relationship between the three regions as wholly antagonistic and the more positive aspects of their cultural interaction are often overlooked. A rare exception that offers an insight into more peaceful relations is provided by Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon’s 674 bilateral adê treaty (a peace or nonaggression treaty) with the Elamite king Urtak which ushered in a period of relative calm for Babylonia and 10 years of peaceful interaction between Assyria and Elam. This insight is an important one, and the possibilities for positive interaction between Assyrian, Babylonian and Elamite cultures, particularly at the elite level, have important implications for the use of the bronze coffins across all three cultures.

It was during the latter half of the 8th century when Assyria was reaching the height of its power and influence under Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727), that the traditionally Assyrian U-shape terracotta coffin type began to appear outside of the Assyrian homeland, particularly in

Brinkman 1986, 199; Gerardi 1987, 285. These relations are known primarily through Babylonian and Assyrian sources including the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle series, Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, annals, and political correspondence (Stolper 1984, 44; Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 2). Due to the paucity of Neo-Elamite textual evidence we lack a corresponding Elamite voice, a situation which has led scholars to feel that we are to some degree “prisoners” to the external sources (Brinkman 1986, 199; Potts 1999, 259). These sources are disinterested in relaying cordial relationships between the king and his fellow rulers, and give exaggerated accounts of the king in battle, taking booty and/or receiving tribute from the conquered (for discussion on the nature of Neo-Assyrian sources, see Tadmor 1997). The Chaldeans from the marshy lower courses of the Tigris and Euphrates had ruled in Babylon since the 8th century (Oates 1986, 112). To explain Elamite involvement Carter (2007, 141) suggests that Elam was interested in protecting the commercial advantage they enjoyed when Babylonia was in control of international trade routes. Elam, which had only re-emerged in historical sources in 743 after centuries of near-absence (Stolper 1984, 44-5), seems to have been viewed by Assyrian kings as an equal and they were apparently disinterested in incorporating Elam into their empire, venturing little further than the border regions until the reign of Ashurbanipal (Brinkman 1986, 199; Gerardi 1987, 256).

According to Parpola and Watanabe (1988, XVII) this treaty was evidently a fully bilateral agreement. The treaty itself does not survive, but is known through various other snippets of correspondence. A letter from Esarhaddon dated 674/3 reveals a tone of equality and emphasises the peaceful relations between Assyria and Elam. (Parpola and Watanabe 1988, XVII). That the relationship remained strong for some years is suggested by Ashurbanipal’s surprise at the breaking of this agreement by the Elamite king: “Urtaku, king of Elam […] whose attack I had never seriously considered and whose hostility I did not expect” (Parpola and Watanabe 1988, XVII).
8. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins in Historical Context

southern Mesopotamia, but also as far away as the Levant. It is also now that the bronze coffin emerges in the archaeological record. The wider geographical distribution of the U-shape coffin, and the increasing range of burial practices in Mesopotamia more generally, should be seen in context with the Assyrian practice of placing administrators out in the provinces and implementing large-scale deportation, which resulted in the spread of cultural practices, including those related to death and burial. Scholars have also emphasised that local elites in the periphery areas of the Empire often adopted practices from the heartland, and this certainly has relevance for the U-shape coffin, which was clearly an ‘elite’ burial type and presumably worthy of emulation. However, it is difficult to establish whether this traditionally Assyrian burial type was employed by local elites, or simply bears witness to the presence of Assyrian administrators.

It is well-accepted that the appearance of the earliest examples of terracotta “bathtub” coffins in Babylonia in the 8th century can be linked to the increased Assyrian control over the region, but the mechanics behind the transfer of this burial type have not yet been considered in any depth. Based on the historical context of this period, we may ascertain three main possibilities (or a combination of these) to explain the spread of the coffins: (i) they were used in Babylonia for burying Assyrian administrators and other personnel; (ii) they were used by local Babylonians wishing to adopt Assyrian culture; (iii) they were a

---

490 Ceramic “bathtub” coffins with one straight and one round end appear in the Levant in the last quarter of the 8th century at Tell Abu Hawam, Amman, Dothan, Tell el Far'ah, Jerusalem, Tell el-Mazar, Megiddo, Tell el-Qitaf, Khirbet el-Qôm (Stern 1982, 85; Bloch-Smith 1992, 222-4; 2003, 112). Seven “bathtub” coffins dating to slightly later were also found underneath the floors of the 7th century palace of Uperi in Bahrain. One contained a bronze “wine set”, including a strainer, shallow bowl and two situlas (Højlund and Andersen 1995; Boucharlat 1999, 1349).

491 For this period of expansion and consolidation of the Empire see Kuhrt (1995, 493-501).

492 Deportations were enacted for economic purposes and to discourage rebellion (Brinkman 1997, 2). The Neo-Babylonian kings continued the Assyrian policy of deportation, settling people from all over the empire in Babylonian cities (Van de Mieroop 2004, 282-4).

493 For the appearance of terracotta U-shape coffins in the Levant and the Persian Gulf, although it has not been determined whether the burials belong to local elites emulating Assyrian practices or Assyrian ex-patriot officials.

494 Parpola (2003, 101-2) states that Assyrians took a top-down approach to their management of the empire, focussing attention on elite groups to assist in the integration of the regions of the empire; lavishly entertaining and honouring them at the royal court. Exiled princes and aristocratic youths at court also received an Assyrian education. Matthews (2003, 143) has similarly stated that peripheral elites may adopt elements of core ideologies of the empire such as religion and burial rites.

495 The U-shape terracotta coffins found at Amman and Dothan in the courtyard of an Assyrian-style building represents an unprecedented practice of burying within settlements, and since Assyrian officials were posted in distant provinces it seems possible that these were in fact Assyrian burials. For the sharp contrast between these burials inside and those outside of town, see Zorn 1993, 222. The Tell el-Farāḥ tubs were also found in a room of a palace and exhibit strong similarities to those at Zincirli and Assur (see Bloch-Smith 1992, 189, 223).

496 Curtis 1983, 86.
natural outcome of Assyrian and Babylonian interaction on religious, intellectual and social (particularly intermarriage) levels.

To consider the first possibility, a number of Assyrian government officials, soldiers and merchants were present in Babylonia on a temporary basis, but there is no clear evidence for an Assyrian ‘community’ to whom the coffins may specifically belong.\(^{497}\) It is thought that Assyrians may have resided in Nippur during the reign of Kandalānu (647–627) when the city was directly controlled by Assyrians and served as their base for operations in the south,\(^{498}\) and it is possible that the several terracotta “bathtub” coffins at Nippur belonged to this group. The general resistance of Babylonians to Assyrian cultural influence during the period of Assyrian domination\(^{499}\) certainly strengthens the case for the coffins belonging to Assyrians. Perhaps a future analysis of grave goods may help to resolve this question.

Despite this resistance, the possibility of the adoption of burial practices at an elite level is not out of the question. The old elite Akkadian families who traditionally controlled the administrative and religious institutions of Babylonian urban centres, particularly in the south at Ur, Eridu and Uruk, had historical ties with Assyria, and Babylonian scribes and courtiers were sent to Assyria for their education to strengthen these ties and promote loyalty.\(^{500}\) The Babylonian groups who maintained these strong links with Assyria were perhaps more inclined to adopt aspects of Assyrian culture. Ur in particular was governed from the early 7th century by a powerful and fiercely pro-Assyrian gubernatorial dynasty founded by Ningal-iddin, later succeeded by his son Sîn-balāssu-iqbi (665–650) who is particularly known for having commissioned his own vast building and restoration programmes.\(^{501}\) Even in this prosperous period of relative independence,\(^{502}\) Ur’s inhabitants were under constant

\(^{497}\) Just two individuals of clear Assyrian descent appear in economic documents from Babylon (one in 662 and the other at the end of Kandalānu’s reign). Also, Aššur-bē-la-usur, either an Assyrian or member of a family who wanted to demonstrate loyalty to Assyria by taking the god’s name, was qīpu of Eanna (at Uruk) at some point between 665-648. (Frame 1992, 49-50).

\(^{498}\) To add support to this view, Frame (1992, 49) points to the presence of Assyrian palace ware at the site.

\(^{499}\) Frame (1997, 55) makes this argument in his study of the god Aššur, who does not appear to have been worshipped in Babylonia.

\(^{500}\) Brinkman 1984, 26.

\(^{501}\) As an indication of the level of status he enjoyed, Ningal-iddin himself dated documents by his own regnal years (Woolley and Moorey 1982, 224; Brinkman 1984, 81). Many of Sîn-balâssu-iqbi’s foundation inscriptions provide his own name and title and that of his father, and just two are known to have been dedicated to Ashurpani pal, suggesting that governor was relatively independent (Woolley and Moorey 1982, 224).

\(^{502}\) For Ur’s independence, see fn. 16 above. Like other the cities in southern Babylonia, Ur certainly benefitted from its location on trade routes to and from the Persian Gulf and because of its longstanding religious importance. It is possible that the Assyrian kings were also (at least partially) responsible for the prosperity of some of these cities (Frame 1992, 249). According to Brinkman (1984, 17) “temples in the large Babylonian cities remained powerful institutions with their splendid liturgical ceremonies, prestigious officials, lucrative prebends and extensive properties”.
threat from Chaldean tribes and wary of Arab movements to and from the desert, relying on Assyria for protection.\textsuperscript{503} Given the strength of the relationship of Ur with Assyria, we could suggest that Assyrians had been present in the city and were buried in the U-shape coffins, or alternatively that members of elite urban families perceiving the benefits of emphasising cultural links with Assyria adopted this burial type. The third main possibility is that the use of the coffin both here and elsewhere in Babylonia resulted from close social contacts with Assyria including intermarriage at an elite level.\textsuperscript{504}

We presently cannot know at what precise point the bronze coffins first appeared in Babylonia, or indeed whether the bronze coffins were an Assyrian innovation, since it cannot be ruled out that after the introduction of the terracotta version it was in Babylonia that they first began to be produced in bronze. Conversely, in the absence of clear contextual evidence at Ur, it may be that the PG1 and PG2 burials actually post-date the collapse of the Assyrian Empire (c.614) and that bronze coffins were unknown here until the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Based on the contents of the burials, a date in the early-mid 7th century during the period of the powerful governors of Ur does, however, remain preferable.

Contrary to the situation in Babylonia, no clear evidence suggests that Elam was ever administered as a province of either the Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian Empire.\textsuperscript{505} Furthermore, the names engraved on various objects from Arjān and Rām Hormuz tombs were clearly Elamite, so it is unlikely that the bronze coffins were introduced by foreign administrators. We do know that, despite a focus in the sources on direct rivalry with Assyria, high-status Elamite political refugees spent considerable time in the Assyrian palace. The most pertinent example is the 10-year stay of Humban-Haltash III and Tammaritu of the house of Urtak, along with their families and supporters, at Ashurbanipal’s court at Nineveh

\textsuperscript{503} Brinkman 1984, 81. In 680, under the governor Ningal-iddin, we hear that Ur was besieged by Sealand governor Nabû-zer-kitt-lišir, who was driven out by Esarhaddon (Reynolds 2003, XXVI, letters 82 and 85).

\textsuperscript{504} As early as the 9th century Assyrian king Adad-nerari II (911-891) and Babylonian ruler Nabû-šuma-šakun exchanged their daughters for marriage to establish a good relationship (Parpola and Watanabe 1988, XVIII). Several scholars have proposed that Sennacherib’s wife Naqia/Zakutu, the powerful wife of Sennacherib, mother of Esarhaddon, and grandmother of Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šamukin, was Babylonian, although this is not accepted by all scholars (e.g. Melville 1999, 12-15, 25). Esarhaddon’s wife Ešarra-h̄amat has also often been viewed as a Babylonian (e.g. Oates 1986, 121). However, Melville (1999, 62) argues that here is neither any clear evidence that Ešarra-h̄amat was Babylonian.

\textsuperscript{505} Initial attempts to turn Elam into an Assyrian province failed when the two kings Assurbanipal had installed quickly defected and ruled independently of Assyria (Henkelman 2008, 15), and it remains uncertain as to whether Elam became a province of Assyria from Susa’s fall until 612 (Potts 1999a; 288-9). Some scholars have advanced the idea that part of Elam was under Babylonian control from Nebuchadnezzar II’s reign onward but this is generally dismissed (Zadok 1976, 61; see Potts 1999, 291).
prior to assuming the thrones of Elam and Hidali respectively.\textsuperscript{506} It may be that these or other Elamite visitors assumed the Assyrian practice of burying in bronze U-shape coffins. It is also apparent that from at least Esarhaddon’s reign Assyrian-Elamite intermarriages occurred,\textsuperscript{507} so the coffin burials found in Elam could be attributable to multicultural elite families.

Elam and Babylonia enjoyed an even stronger relationship because of their geographical proximity, shared political, economic and religious interests, and intermingling of their populations, and several Babylonian rulers, most of them probably Chaldean, are known to have sought refuge from the Assyrians in Elam.\textsuperscript{508} Texts suggest the movement of rich goods in the form of lavish gifts from Babylonian leaders seeking the favour of Elamite kings,\textsuperscript{509} and it is not altogether impossible that bronze coffins moved into Elam by such means. And in addition to their Chaldean links, Elamites maintained contacts with the urban inhabitants of Babylonia, which apparently involved intermarriages.\textsuperscript{510} Presently there is no suggestion that the bronze coffins were an Elamite innovation, and their appearance in Elam could be attributable to interaction with either Babylonians or Assyrians. And while the burials postdate the Assyrian Empire, the use of this coffin type could nonetheless result from significantly earlier cultural interaction.\textsuperscript{511}

\textsuperscript{506} After the 664 death of Urtak a usurper, Te’umman, set about eliminating his competition who then fled to Assyria. Assurbanipal reports: “Subsequently Ummaniqas, Ummannappa, and Tammaritu, sons of Urtaku, king of Elam, fled before Teumman’s murderous rage and grasped my royal feet […] Even though he repeatedly sent his officials to demand the extradition of Ummaniqas, Ummannappa, and Tammaritu, I did not grant their extradition.” (A. C. Piepkorn 1933, 61, Historical Prism Inscriptions of Assurbanipal, Assyriological Studies 5, Chicago, quoted in Parpola and Watanabe 1988, XX). The group who fled to Assyria included not only Urtak’s three sons, but also their relatives and followers, who stayed for 10 years in Assyria (Stolper 1984, 50). It is difficult to know whether such intermarriages were relevant to the majority of the society (Potts 2012, 48).

\textsuperscript{507} A letter from Esarhaddon to Urtak following the adê treaty appears to reveal the practice of intermarrying royal children: “I am well, your sons and daughters are well […] may Urtak, king of Elam, my brother, be well, may my sons and daughters be well.” (Parpola and Watanabe 1988, XVII; Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002, XXI), although Luukko and Van Buylaere (2002, XXI) suggest that the children may have simply been political hostages.

\textsuperscript{508} Brinkman 1986, 199, 202-3; Oates 1986, 112. In 709, for example, the “Yakinite” Merodach-Baladan had fled from Babylon to Elam (Dietrich 2003, XXI, letter 68). Moving beyond the ruling class, an extremely interesting letter to Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šamukin from a group of Babylonian petitioners reveals the presence of Elamites in Babylon. These petitioners request that the privileged status (kidinnūtu) granted to the inhabitants of Babylon be extended to the foreign (including Elamite) women living there (Reynolds 2003, XXX, letter 158).

\textsuperscript{509} Stolper 1984, 46, 49.

\textsuperscript{510} Contacts were particularly maintained with the family of Gahal. The Elamite king installed Nergal-ushezib of the Gahal family on the Babylonian throne in 694 and an Elamite princess (the sister of Tammaritu) married into this family (see fn. 148). (Brinkman 1984, 30).

\textsuperscript{511} Or alternatively, considering that Assurbanipal boasted of destroying Elamite burials, one wonders whether the presence of a Neo-Assyrian bronze “bathtub” in the late 7th century Arjān tomb following the fall of the Assyrian empire might be linked to a similar looting of Assyrian burials, with the removal and reuse of coffins.
It is valuable to also reflect upon the historical circumstances in Elam at the time of the bronze coffin interments at Arjān and Rām Hormuz. Most scholars envisage that from Ashurbanipal’s sack of Susa to the emergence of the Persian Empire in 539, Elam was in a state of general decline and fragmentation into essentially independent polities dominated by petty kings or warlords.\footnote{For example Stolper 1984, 44-5; Gerardi 1987, 257; Miroschedjī 1990a, 75-8; Stronach 2003, 258. Potts (1999a, 259) states that under intense Assyrian pressure, Elam was probably no longer a unified state linking the highlands of Fars and the lowlands of Khuzistan as it had been in the Middle Elamite Period, and that individual cities (e.g. Hīdalu or Madakūtu) were no longer bounded by a single king. According to Potts the rock reliefs of Kuł-e Farah and Shekaft-e Salman appear to relate to “petty kings” in the highlands, not subject to those kings mentioned by the Assyrians. Potts (2010, 122-4) has recently continued to argue along these lines.}

From this viewpoint it could be asserted that because mortuary ritual is a powerful tool for the negotiation of social order, the coffins and their wealth of grave goods were part of an attempt to legitimise power in an unstable political environment, and represent an idealised rather than direct reflection of social relations.\footnote{Pollock 1999, 196; Chapman 2000, 188. The funerary record was once looked upon as passively reflecting society (Fogelin 2007, 55, 64), but as Tarlow (1999, 11) writes, scholars are increasingly inclined to “contextualize mortuary practice as one of many expressive and structuring aspects of a wider society.”}

Alternatively, scholars have more recently argued that during this period of supposed decline Elam in fact experienced a renaissance.\footnote{Henkelman (2008, 11-13) proposes that a coherent elite may have surrounded a ruling dynasty, with a centralised political organisation rather than fragmentation. Elam is notably still referred to as a unified whole in later Assyrian documentation, and the short reigns of Neo-Elamite kings need not indicate political instability. (Potts 1999, 295). P. Amiet, P de Miroshedjī, M. J. Sève and F. Vallat (in Potts 1999, 295), and more recently Henkelman (2008) and Álvarez-Mon (2010a) have pointed to varying degrees of Neo-Elamite renaissance. The survival and continuation of various Elamite institutions into the Persian period testifies to the strength of Elam and return to normal activity once Assyrian pressure subsided (Henkelman 2008, 19). Elam’s military activity and building projects in the post-Assyrian period certainly suggest a Neo-Elamite renaissance free of external interference and a prophecy in Jeremiah of Judah (597-586) suggests Elam’s independence between Assyrian and the early years of Nebuchadnezzar II (Potts 1999, 295, 299). A reference to the return of cult statues from Uruk to Susa in 626 after Nabopolassar’s defeat of Assyria “The gods of the land of Susa which the Assyrians had carried off and settled in Ereh those gods Nabopolassar let return to the city of Susa” (B.M. 25127, lines 16-17, in Wiseman 1956, 51) is also cited as evidence for the presence of an authority at Susa who was worthy of receiving the statues and in command of sufficient troops to be of interest to the Babylonian king (Potts 1999, 290; Henkelman 2008, 17). However, this begs the question as to why Elam did not participate in the final destruction of the Assyrian Empire in 612 (Potts 1999, 290-5).}

It is significant for this argument that the areas in which the burials were found had been enjoying population growth throughout this period.\footnote{For example, surveys of the Rām Hormuz plain and small-scale excavations at Tall-i Ghazir show continuous occupation and even population growth from the late 2nd millennium to well into the Achaemenid period (Carter 2007, 151).}

8.3. The Bronze “Bathtub” Coffin: a Shared Funerary Tradition?

While we do not know the precise social or political roles of those interred in the bronze coffins of Babylonia, Assyria and Elam, their elevated status is very clearly expressed. Viewing the bronze “bathtub” coffins within their historical context, Álvarez-Mon judges that...
they belonged to a Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian elite burial tradition, the ideology of which was emulated by the Neo-Elamite rulers. It is indeed possible that the use of the coffin was part of a process of emulation, although its precise meaning would have changed since the symbolic referents of material culture in ritual contexts (particularly mortuary contexts) tend not to cross cultural or ethnic boundaries because they are specific to internal social order. However, based on the forgoing discussion, the notion of Elamite emulation of Babylonian and Assyrian elite seems an overly simplistic proposition. If royal (?) Elamites hoped to emulate Assyrian royal practices, we might expect them to have chosen the stone sarcophagi of Assyrian kings and queens, but they do not seem to have done so. It is more likely, in my view, that their geographical distribution reflects a complex history of interaction involving intermarriage, extended visits, employment, and even deportation between regions at all levels of society.

It remains possible that all of the burials belong to individuals who were Assyrian, or of Assyrian descent, although the practice of ascribing burials to ‘ethnic’ identity is problematic because burial type, grave goods and funerary rites may relate to any number (or combination) of identities which the burying group may have wished to emphasise for the particular individual. On the one hand it might be argued that these burials belong to multi-ethnic populations with shared culture, including beliefs about death. On the other, there have been significant variations between the burials noted throughout this study. The deposition of a single individual in a bronze coffin housed in a plastered, stone-built underground chamber, on the left bank of a river, away from the settlement area at Arjān and Rām Hormuz represents a markedly different tradition to the bronze coffin burials in the urban centre of Ur.

516 Álvarez-Mon 2010, 274.
518 Melville (2004, 44-5) too has noted that the stone sarcophagi represent the highest-status coffin type. In his report on Aššur, Andrae (1938, 138) commented that for the large stone Assyrian sarcophagi the immense amount of effort required to obtain/mine the material (probably still with the use of stone hammers). Needless to say they would have been difficult to transport/put in place. It is of course possible that fashions had changed, and in the 7th century the bronze coffin had become the favoured burial type.
519 Elamite soldiers were taken into the Assyrian army and Elamite commoners were invited to live in Assyria in a period of famine during Assurbanipal’s reign (Brinkman 1986, 203; Gerardi 1987, 125). There are also specific recorded instances of Elamite deportees being moved into Assyria and elsewhere around the empire in the 7th century. Some were conscripted to the Assyrian army, some sent to Nimrud, Samaria, and even Egypt (Potts 1999a, 288). Ashurbanipal reports that after his destruction of Elam “Daughters of kings, the sisters of kings, together with the older and younger families of the kings of Elam, officials, mayors of those cities as many as I conquered, chiefs of bowmen, governors, chariot drivers, cavalry, archers, eunuchs, craftsmen, all the army, as many as there were, people, male and female, small and great, horses, mules, donkeys, cattle, and sheep, which were more numerous than grasshoppers, I carried away to Assyria.” (Strawn et al. 2006, 367). One legal document from Aššur records the sale of a captive Elamite woman and her daughter as domestic slaves (Faist 2009, text VAT 9755).
520 Theuws 2009, 307-9; 315.
and sub-floor funerary vault at Nimrud. Differing relationships of the living with the dead are suggested by these burials and it is difficult to suggest whether the coffins belong to the same symbolic domain in all three cultures, although it is probable that similar concepts of the ghost, the underworld and even the *apsû*, underlie these particular mortuary choices.

In sum, while the coffins themselves appear virtually identical, the burials are distinct from each other, and I would hesitate to describe them as representing a ‘shared funerary practice’ spanning the three regions. Based on the present evidence, they are better viewed as belonging to three separate arenas in which they each played a role in ideological production. Without a more precise date for the burials the possibility of understanding the use of these coffins within a more specific historical context will continue to elude us. Nevertheless, the presence of such distinctive burial containers in these three regions can certainly be considered an outcome of their close interaction across the 8th – 6th centuries. With further study the bronze “bathtub” coffins may eventually in their turn be added to the sum of evidence for this interaction.

---

521 Smith (2007, 165) convinces that the construction of elite graves should be seen as the production of ideology, rather than its expression or representation. Part of this ideology production would have been the performance of ritual action accompanying the burial (see for example Cohen 2005, 3, 7).
9. Conclusions and Further Directions

9.1. Conclusions

As this thesis has demonstrated, the bronze “bathtub” coffins of Babylonia, Assyria and Elam represent a highly distinctive and rarely-attested burial type used by three cultural groups over a period of approximately 200 years. Apart from differences in size and handle styles, it has been demonstrated that the bronze coffins were all manufactured in a very specific way. It is not possible, however, to know where their centres of manufacture were, but Assyria and perhaps North Syria are presently the most likely locations. Presently the “bathtub” coffin is the only known form of burial container made in bronze and this makes it striking against a background of ceramic and stone types. The rarity of the bronze “bathtub” coffin and absence of any other kind of container in bronze may reflect the low chance of survival in regions where bronze recycling was prevalent, or it may alternatively indicate that burial in a bronze container was quite extraordinary, and perhaps reserved for individuals of a particular social identity or accessible to only a small number of high-status groups.

In many ways the bronze coffin burials fit comfortably within the milieu of Mesopotamian and Elamite mortuary practices and beliefs. They were all found in chambers below the ground so that conceptually the ghost of the dead could make its way to the Underworld while the bones rested peacefully in their coffin. The presence of food and vessels in the tomb or coffin is quite standard and relates to Mesopotamian and Elamite customs connected to the time of inhumation or ongoing memorial practices involving the feeding of the ghost. The inclusion of rich personal items in the burials also ties in with the notion that one could maintain one’s status in their continued existence after death. The secondary context of the Nimrud burials is exceptional since primary inhumation was the norm, but the presence of three coffins containing numerous individuals in a sealed antechamber becomes explicable in view of evidence for the importance of performing rituals in proximity to the bones and the practice of collecting family bones for safekeeping when a city was under threat. It is the Arjān and Rām Hormuz burials that remain most perplexing in the context of the early-mid first millennium burial practices because of their riverside location and the use of coffins, which are otherwise unattested in Elam. However, if more mortuary evidence becomes available for the Neo-Elamite period, particularly in the highland areas, we may find that these burials adhered more closely to normal practice than presently seems the case.
9. Conclusions and Further Directions

A major point to reiterate is that the coffins would have been a central part of the burial process and are likely to have been symbolically charged. It can be assumed that their symbolic aspects extend beyond the rare examples of engraved decoration to include also the specific choice of both their form and material. The textual evidence for the imposed notions of magical and divine properties of materials and objects must be balanced with the actual physical materiality of the coffins to understand why a bronze U-shape container might have been appropriate in a funerary context. The use of particular forms of burial is known to relate to social identity, and the strongest common association between the bronze coffins is the high socio-economic status of the interred individuals. Seen in historical context it is clear that the intensive interaction between northern and southern Mesopotamia and Elam led to the shared use of a very distinguished coffin, but the extent to which these coffins belong to a system of shared funerary practices and ideology beyond the expression of social status must for now remain unknown.

9.2. Future Directions

From the evidence for mortuary practice and associated beliefs about death and the afterlife outlined in this thesis we may infer that death and the ongoing relationship with the dead had a foundational effect upon the quotidian in Mesopotamia and probably also Elam. The pervasive concern of the living with death and the dead has been, in my view, vastly underestimated and overlooked in comparison to the attention paid to this aspect of society in, for example, ancient Egypt.\footnote{Recently, for example, M. Bommas (2011, 159) stated “Life in ancient Egypt was distinctively influenced by funerary belief and the way that death was treated in Egyptian culture.” Perhaps the lack of emphasis on death in Mesopotamia arises from the fact that Mesopotamian funerary places were mostly hidden amid the urban ruins and lacked the sheer monumentality of those in Egypt which have garnered so much scholarly attention.\footnote{That everyday existence of many Mesopotamians was conditioned by the fact that they lived in their family houses together with their ancestral dead has been emphasised by Richardson (1999, 171).}} The dead were ever-present in Mesopotamia, where people went about their life in a world potentially populated by disgruntled ghosts who caused noises, visions, and the commonest of pains and ills. Mesopotamians and Elamites often lived in their family houses with deceased family members who demanded protection, care and the ongoing provisioning of economic resources.\footnote{Bayliss (1973, 117-118) argues that piety towards dead kin is linked with the well-being and continuance of posterity and that this attitude of piety towards ancestors is illustrated in royal inscriptions expressing respect towards monuments of previous kings. For example, Sennacherib records that he faced with limestone blocks the brickwork “both of works for the living and of graves befitting the dead” (Bayliss 1973, 124).} This relationship between the living and the dead is, however, reciprocal as nicely expressed in the following: “I will pour cool water down your water-pipes; cure me that I may sing your praises”\footnote{Of course this statement represents an ideal, because in practice the existence of numerous ghost exorcism texts}.\footnote{Of course this statement represents an ideal, because in practice the existence of numerous ghost exorcism texts}
indicates the (assumed) negligence of the living, and the regular pushing aside of bones in tombs contradicts the requirement to respect the peace of the dead.

The clear importance of death and the dead in Mesopotamia and Elam demands that attention be directed toward the much neglected archaeological evidence for mortuary practices, which can eventually provide a far more expansive view on the topic than those studies that have narrowed in on texts. The way forward for the field must begin with the development and agreement upon nomenclature for burial types and greater care in employing terminology for discussing aspects such as body arrangement and orientation.\textsuperscript{525} As Carl Knappett has recently pointed out, typological work in archaeology should also extend beyond the descriptive and move into the explanatory, because much potential exists for questioning why humans create new artifactual categories.\textsuperscript{526} This point has been addressed in the present thesis in relation to the bronze coffins, but deserves a more in-depth analysis than is possible here.

Despite the centrality of the burial container to the deeply significant and meaningful burial act, and the fact that burials are “one of the most formal and carefully prepared deposits that archaeologists encounter,”\textsuperscript{527} scholars have been content to view pots, jars, coffins and stone sarcophagi as largely incidental objects that are occasionally useful for dating purposes, and sometimes hold valuable items for analysis and museum display.\textsuperscript{528} At best, the interpretation of grave type (in conjunction with grave goods) extends as far as the labelling of the socio-economic status of the interred as ‘poor’ or ‘princely’, while other lines of enquiry, such as the factors informing selection of burial type, and burial container form and material have remained marginal. This thesis has underscored the need to clarify burial typologies to provide a foundation for moving beyond the descriptive into more interpretative analysis. In addition careful attention should be devoted to grave goods, extending beyond a culture historical and art historical focus to consider the possible meanings behind the

\textsuperscript{525} The terminology varies vastly across publications, and most often falls into Sprague’s (2005, 28-33) “to be avoided” category. For example, the undesirable terms “crouched”, “foetal position”, “communal burial”, “grave furniture/furnishings/trapping/gifts/offering”, and interchangeable use of “sex” and “gender”.

\textsuperscript{526} Knappet 2011, 158.

\textsuperscript{527} Pearson 1999, 8.

\textsuperscript{528} In fact the use of pots and jars in particular because they are used throughout a number of areas in Mesopotamia and exhibit little change over time (Barrelet 1980, 6). There are many additional questions that we might ask of even the ceramic containers, for example: Were they made from special \textit{apsû} clay that had to be obtained from some special place? Were they ritually manufactured with the mixing in of other ingredients that were considered to have particular (protective) properties? Were they perhaps just made by the regular pot-maker or simply pulled out of the family storeroom on demand? These are questions that have not been asked; instead containers were usually smashed open for the retrieval of the goods inside, perhaps photographed, and then discarded.
9. Conclusions and Further Directions

particular choices and placement of items, and aspects such as their ritual function.\textsuperscript{529} Great potential exists for exploration of the notion that the material objects interred with individuals are a key aspect of the communication of their social identity and in a funerary context play a significant role in the symbolic construction, maintenance and even subversion of social norms.\textsuperscript{530}

As observed in this thesis, the available burial data is extremely problematic. Yet it may be hoped that in the future careful recording of burials and scientific analysis of the skeletal remains, residues in vessels, and organic matter in and around the burial, for example, will provide new possibilities for understanding mortuary practice and enable the placement of the bronze coffin burials within a clearer context. Notably scholars of Mesopotamia and Elam have avoided participating in theoretical discussions of death and burial. However, I believe that when more carefully-excavated burial data eventually comes to be published, studies of funerary practice can be greatly enhanced through attention to the insights of archaeologists working with mortuary evidence in other regions and the use of their theoretical approaches in combination with understandings of local historical factors.

Various techniques for scientific analysis also have much to add to studies of mortuary practice. For example, the availability of analysed skeletal material from a broader sample of the population is important for our understanding of the bronze coffins. The findings from these analyses may help inform us as to lifestyle differences and thus relative rank, and even aspects such as gender and age difference. Analyses might also reveal whether these were local or foreign individuals.\textsuperscript{531} The study of other organic materials is important for gaining a more complete understanding of the types of offerings made to the dead and vessel function.\textsuperscript{532} Studies of the burial assemblages both inside the coffins and the chambers themselves may provide insights into the identity of the individuals and also help to reconstruct aspects of the funerary ritual.\textsuperscript{533} For the coffins themselves, analysis of elemental composition and isotope analysis might lead us closer to an answer as to whether these near-

\textsuperscript{529} The studies of Winter (1999) and Cohen (2005) in relation to ritual evidence from the third millennium burials at Ur offer interesting approaches that could be useful to employ. Cohen (2005, 16-17) particularly emphasises that analyses of Mesopotamian death ritual need to consider the mourners, the corpse, and the ghost together, rather than individually as is usually the case.

\textsuperscript{530} Gowland 2009, 147.

\textsuperscript{531} Via stable isotope analysis (see Mays 2010, 265).

\textsuperscript{532} Cohen (2005) and Wi\textsuperscript{nter (1999) both analyse vessel function. Winter (1999, 251) concludes that 3 of the vessel types found in the Ur graves were associated with a ritualised performance of washing and anointing the corpse, and that the vessels used in this preparation then interred with the body (see also Cohen 2005, 73).

\textsuperscript{533} The presence of daggers in the Rām Hormuz female burials presents an interesting opportunity for analysis of gender construction in Elamite society (note “gender” as distinct from “sex”; see Sofaer 2006, 155).
identical burial containers were products of the same workshop. All of these finer details may help to reach conclusions regarding the broader issue of whether the bronze coffins belonged to a wider ‘shared’ funerary practice.

The Elamite burials present the most exciting possibilities for future research since they are both quite well-dated and fall into a pivotal but poorly understood period of history just prior to the emergence of the Persian Empire. From one angle we might study these striking burials in terms of the manipulation of the dead during political unrest. But from another angle, which is particularly pertinent following the recent discovery of the Rām Hormuz tomb with its display of hitherto unimagined wealth, these burials may serve to challenge the view of the mid-7th to mid-6th centuries as a period of Elamite decline. They can potentially add further evidence to the argument for an Elamite renaissance and the political, economic and cultural strength of Elam moving into the Persian period.534

Above all, analyses of the extensive mortuary remains of Mesopotamia and Elam belonging to all levels of society will help us to gain further insight into the way that these people grappled more broadly with the condition imposed upon them by the gods, who “established life and death”, but “death they fixed to have no ending”.535

534 In this regard we may note the presence of a bronze coffin (though differently shaped) in the 5th century at Susa, which perhaps suggests some continuity of burial practice (see appx. 3, coffin 10).
535 Quote from Lambert (1980, 55).
Figure 1 – Map indicating main sites mentioned in text, with locations of bronze “bathtub” coffins marked by a star (source: USGS)
Figure 2 – Plan of Ur showing location of the *giparu* of Kurigalzu within the temenos wall (from Woolley 1965, pl. 47).

Figure 3 – Ur PG1 and PG2 burial chambers (after drawings in C. L. Woolley’s field notes) (from Curtis 1983, fig. 3).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 4 - Ur bronze “bathtub” coffins PG1 (left) and PG2 (right) with contents (field sketches by C. L. Woolley, after Molleson and Hodgson 2003, fig. 23; line drawings with labelled grave goods from Curtis 1983, fig. 1).

Figure 5 – Left: Ur “bathtub” coffins PG1 and PG2 in situ (from Woolley 1962, pl. 17a); above right: Ur “bathtub” PG1 (from Woolley 1962, pl. 17b); below right: Ur “bathtub” PG2 (from Barnett 1956, pl. XVI).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 6 – Ur PG1 coffin handles (photograph courtesy of J. Álvarez-Mon, taken in the British Museum).

Figure 7 - Side-strips from PG1 (left) and PG2 (right) (after Woolley 1962, pl. 18).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 8 – Plan of the southern section of the North-West Palace of Ashurnasirpal showing room 57, which overlies Tomb III (after Curtis 2008, plan 4b).

Figure 9 - Nimrud Tomb III and antechamber showing Coffin 1 (left), 2 and 3 (right) (from Hussein 2002, figs. 14 and 15).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 10 – Left: Coffin 2 in situ (from Oates and Oates 2001, Pl. 3a); right: Coffin 2 in the Mosul Museum (photograph courtesy of J. Curtis 2003).

Figure 11 - Coffin 2 in the Mosul Museum (photograph courtesy of J. Curtis 2003).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 12 - Location of the Arjān Tomb on the left bank of the Marun River (from Álvarez-Mon 2010a, pl. 3).

Figure 13 - Image and line drawings of the Arjān tomb chamber and contents (after Álvarez-Mon 2010a, pl. 4).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 14 - Line drawings of the Arjān coffin and contents (left) and photograph of the coffin (right) (from Álvarez-Mon 2010a, pls. 6 and 7).

Figure 15 – The Arjān coffin handles, lid handle and lid fragment (after Álvarez-Mon 2010a, pl. 8).

Figure 16 – Approximate location of the Rām Hormuz burial chamber on the left bank of the Ala River (within black rectangle) (image from http://wikimapia.org/#lat=31.2773499&lon=49.6393361&z=13&l=0&m=b&v=8, accessed 25 October 2012).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 17 – Location of the Rām Hormuz chamber (from Shishegar 2008, p. 2).

Figure 18 – Rām Hormuz tomb chamber with bronze coffin fragments in situ and line drawing of the burials (from Shishegar 2008, p. 1 and 5).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 19 – Fragments of the Rām Hormuz west coffin (left) and east coffin (right) in the National Museum of Iran (photo courtesy of J. Álvarez-Mon).

Figure 20 - Plan of Zincirli palace indicating room L8 where the bronze “bathtub” was found (from Frankfort 1952, fig. 4).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 21 – Bronze “bathtub” from Zincirli and handle detail (from Andrae and Von Luschan 1943, pl. 57b-d).

Figure 22 – Bronze “bathtub” said to be from Dailaman-Amlash with side-strip detail (from Curtis 1983, pls. XXVIa, XXVIb).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 23 – Fragments of the “Ziwiye coffin rim (photograph from Parrot 1961, fig. 176; line drawings from Wilkinson 1960, figs. 2-6).

Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 25 – “Ziwiye” side-strip fragments (Barnett 1956, pl. XV).

Figure 26 – Parthian bronze coffin and skeleton reportedly found near Khorramabad in Lurestan (from http://www.cais-soas.com/News/2006/April2006/07-04.htm, accessed 23 October 2012)

Figure 27 – Bronze “bathtub” said to be from eastern Anatolia (from the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations Catalogue 1997, fig. 318).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 28 – Aspects of manufacture indicated in photograph of Ur PG1 (photograph courtesy of J. Álvarez-Mon 2011), and line drawing of the Arjān coffin (after Álvarez-Mon 2010a, pl. 7).

Figure 29 – Bronze coffin handles: a. Ur PG1 coffin (photograph courtesy of J. Álvarez-Mon 2011); b. Arjān coffin (after Álvarez-Mon 2010a, pl.8); c. Rām Hormuz coffin (photograph courtesy of J. Álvarez-Mon 2012); d. Zincirli coffin (from Andrae and Von Luschan 1943, pl. 57d).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 30 – The Arjân coffin bronze lid fragment (image courtesy of J. Álvarez-Mon 2011).

Figure 31 - Burial types: a. tomb chamber (from Reuther 1926, taf. 51-52) b. earth/pit grave (after Boehmer et al. 1995, taf. 49) c. sherd grave (after Boehmer et al. 1995, taf. 51).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 32 – Single pot burials: a. ring-base pot alone; b. ring-base pot covered with a sherd; c. ring-base pot covered with a flat-bottomed bowl; d. flat-bottomed pot covered by a flat bottomed bowl; e. round-bottomed pot with a hole-ring alone; f. round-bottomed pot covered by a sherd; g. round-bottomed pot covered with a flat-bottomed bowl; h. plain round-bottomed pot alone; i. plain round-bottomed pot covered with a sherd; j. plain round-bottomed pot with flat based bowl (after Boehmer et al. 1995, taf. 152, 158, 161, 163, 167, 169, 170, 178, 187, 188).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 33 – Double-pot burials: a. two ring-base pots; b. one ring-base and one round-bottomed pot with a hole-ring; c. one ring-base and one plain round-bottomed pot; d. two round-bottomed pots with hole-rings; e. one round-bottomed pot with hole-ring and one round-bottomed pot; f. two round-bottomed pots (after Boehmer et al. 1995, taf. 236, 348, 376, 423, 451, 472).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 34 – Jar burials: a. ring-base jar; b. ovoid jar; c. ovoid jar with neck cut/broken off; d. ovoid jar and flat-bottom bowl; e. ovoid jar covered by a sherd of another pot; f. pot and jar (after Boehmer et al. 1995, 52, 53, 56, 59, 60, 75).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 35 – burials: a. ceramic box-shaped coffin; b. bowl; c. “bathtub” bowl; d. oval coffin (Reuther 1926, 56, 63, 78, 62).

Figure 36 – “Bathtub” coffin burial (from Boehmer et al. 1995, taf. 184).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 37 – Assyrian burials: a. brick grave (after Haller 1954, abb. 20); b. composite grave (after Haller 1954, abb. 119a, taf. 19).

Figure 38 – Floor plan of the kings' tombs under the Old Palace at Aššur (after Haller 1954, abb. 186).

Figure 39 – Stone sarcophagus of Shamshi-Adad V (Tomb II) at Aššur (from Andrae 1938, taf. 66).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 40 – Reconstructed lid of Ashurnasirpal’s sarcophagus from Tomb V at Aššur (from Lunström 2009, abb. 70.4).

Figure 41 – Reconstruction of possible method of placing the lid on Ashurnasirpal’s sarcophagus in Tomb V at Aššur (from Andrae 1938, Abb. 58).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 42 – Humaidat tomb chamber. Top left: stone sarcophagus; top right: tomb chamber plan; bottom left: terracotta U-shape coffin with lid; bottom right: stone slab doors on pivots separating the antechamber and main chamber (from Ibrahim 2002, figs. 2, 4, 7, 8).

Figure 43 – Humaidat tomb chamber demonstrating use of double stone-slab doors in the arched doorway separating the tomb and antechamber (from Ibrahim 2002, fig. 6).
Figure 44 - Left: Yaba’s stone coffin in Tomb II of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (from Yaba maintomb_, http://www.aina.org/onaolnimrudadmaintomb, accessed 17 July 2012); above right: Yaba’s funerary tablet in the niche of Tomb II (from http://www.aina.org/onaolnimruratetablet, accessed 17 July 2012); below right: storage jars and a cremation burial in alabaster jar in a niche in the wall of tomb II (from Oates and Oates 2001, pl. 2b).

Figure 45 - Neo-Elamite modelled clay funerary heads from Susa (from Amiet 1966, pgs. 482, 484).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 46 – Left: coffin from Susa (image from the archives of Roland de Mecquenem http://www.mom.fr/mecquenem/photo/afficher/id/416, accessed 19 July 2012); right: line drawings of coffins from graves 129 (above) and 130 (below) from Babylon (from Reuther 1926, taf. 71).

Figure 47 - Persian period bronze “bathtub” coffin from Susa (from Harper et al. 1992, fig. 54).

Figure 48 - Double-handled “coffin” from Alaca Höyük (from Koşay and Akok 1966, Lev. 7 e253).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 49 – Left: terracotta “feeding tube” in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud Tomb II (from Hussein 2002, fig. 10); right: terracotta coffin from Susa with feeding hole (from the archives of Roland de Mecquenem, http://www.mom.fr/mecquenem/photo/afficher/id/57, accessed 19 July 2012).

Figure 50 - Kurangun open air sanctuary relief panel showing god with flowing water (inset line drawing from Potts 2004, fig. 4; photograph from U. Seidl, 1986. Die Elamischen Felsreliefs von Kurangun und Naqsh-e Rustam, Iranische Denkmaler, Deutches Archäologisches Institut. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 51 - Early Dynastic period basin from the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu (Tello), c. 2500-2300 B.C.E. (from Black and Green 1992, fig. 114).

Figure 52 – “Bathtub” shaped depressions in the floor of rooms interpreted as bathrooms. Left: Sargon’s palace at Khorsabad (from Loud 1936, fig. 26); right: Northwest Palace at Nimrud (from Mallowan 1966, fig. 7).
Appendix 1. Figures

Figure 53 – Fragments of a glazed panel from Khorsabad depicting a goat standing on a rosette (after Botta 1949-50, pl. 155).

Figure 54 – Left: kneeling terracotta figurine from the Gula Temple at Isin (from Hrouda 1981, taf. 25); and right: altar of Tukulti-Ninurta I (from www.templodeapolo.net---Altar-de-Tukulti-ninurta-I, accessed 5 October 2012).
Appendix 2. Texts

Text 1: Ashurbanipal’s Destruction of Elam (Ashurbanipal’s Annals)

Ashurbanipal reports on his destruction of Susa in his annals:536

“The sepulchres of their earlier and later kings, who did not fear Assur and Ishtar, my lords, (and who) had plagued the kings, my fathers, I destroyed, I devastated, I exposed to the sun. Their bones I carried off to Assyria. I laid restlessness upon their shades. I deprived them of food-offerings and libations of water”.

Text 2: A Troublesome Ghost (text KAR 267/BMS 53)

A Neo-Assyrian text dealing with the removal of a troublesome ghost:537

“Šamaš, the frightening ghost who for many days, has been fastened to my back and cannot be dispelled (which) continually pursues me all day, frightens me all night, continually steps forth as a persecutor, continually stands the hair of my head on end, presses my temple, continually gives me vertigo, dries up my palate, paralyzes my flesh, dries up my whole body … whether it be the ghost of my kith and kin or the ghost of one who was killed in a military defeat or a roving ghost - this is he; this is a representation of him. Šamaš, in your presence have I sought him out and garments for him to clothe himself with, shoes for his feet. A girdle for his waist, a waterskin (filled with) water for him to drink, (and) malt flour have I assigned him. I have given him travel provisions. May he go to where the sun sets. May he be entrusted to Nedu, great doorkeeper of the Underworld, may Nedu, great doorkeeper of the Underworld, strengthen the watch over him.”

Text 3: Funerary Tablet of Yaba (ND 1989/68, IM 125000)

An alabaster tablet found in a niche in the wall leading to the burial chamber of Tomb II with an inscription of Yaba, the wife of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727).538

“By the name of Shamash, Ereshkigal and the Anunnaki, the great gods of the earth, mortal destiny overtook Yaba, the queen, in death, she went to the path of her ancestors.

536 Translation in Henkelman 2011b, 117, following Luckenbill 1926-27, 310.
537 Translation of Neo-Assyrian text KAR 267/BMS 53: lines B6-17 by Scurlock (1988, 207).
538 Translation Al-Rawi 2008, 120, text 1.
Appendix 2. Texts

Whoever, in the future, be it a queen who sits on the throne or a palace lady who is a concubine of the king, removes me from my tomb, or puts anybody else with me, and lays his hand upon my jewellery with evil intent or breaks open the seal of that tomb, above (earth), under the rays of the sun, let his spirit roam outside in thirst, below in the underworld, when libations of water are offered, he must not receive with the Anunnaki as a funerary offering any beer, wine or meal. May Ningishzida and the great door-keeper, Bitu, the great gods of the underworld, afflict his corpse and ghost with eternal restlessness.”

Text 4: Funerary Tablet of Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua (ND 1989/470, IM 124996)

Marble tablet with a funerary inscription of Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua, the wife of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859), from Tomb III at Nimrud:539

“Belonging to Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua, queen of Ashurnasirpal, king of Assyria, [mother(?)] of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, […] No one later may place herein (anyone else), be it a palace lady or a queen, nor remove this sarcophagus from its place. Anybody who removes this sarcophagus from its place, his spirit will not receive funerary offerings with (other) spirits: it is a taboo of Shamash and Ereshkigal! Daughter of Ashur-nīrkad’a’inni, chief cup-bearer of Ashumasirpal, king of Assyria. Anyone later who removes my throne from before the shades of the dead, may his spirit receive no bread! May someone later clothe (me) with a shroud, anoint (me) with oil and sacrifice a lamb.”

Text 5: Sarcophagus Inscription of Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua

Funerary inscription of Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua on the stone lid of the sarcophagus of Tomb III, Nimrud:540

“Belonging to Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua, queen of Ashurnasirpal, king of Assyria, of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. No one later may place herein (anyone else), whether a palace lady or a queen, nor remove this sarcophagus from its place; whoever removes this sarcophagus from its place, his spirit will not receive funerary offerings with (other) spirits: it is a taboo of Shamash and Ereshkigal - daughter of Ashur-nīrkada’inni, chief cup-bearer of Ashurnasirpal, king of Assyria.”

539 Al-Rawi 2008, text 2.
540 Al-Rawi 2008, text 3.
Text 6: The Queen’s Ghost and the Crown Prince (K. 1152 / ABL 614)

Letter to Esarhaddon probably pertaining to the appointment of his son Ashurbanipal as crown prince:

“(Beginning lost) [The crown prince] explained [it as follows]: “The gods Aššur (and) Šamaš ordained me to be the crown prince of Assyria because of her (= the dead queen's) truthfulness.” (And) her ghost blesses him in the same degree as he has revered the ghost: “May his descendants rule over Assyria!” (As it is said), fear of the gods creates kindness, fear of the infernal gods returns life. Let the [king, my] lord, give order (remainder lost).”

Text 7: Nabonidus Text (Stele of Nabonidus from Harran)

The stele of Nabonidus from Harran gives details of his mother Adad Guppi’s attention to earlier deceased kings. Here she describes the rites she performed:

“I every month without interruption in my finest garments made them a funerary offering of oxen, fat sheep, bread, best beer, wine, sesame oil, honey and all kinds of garden produce, and established abundant offerings of sweet smelling incense as a regular due, and placed it before them”.

The stele also reports Nabonidus’ attention to his mother after her death:

“She died a natural death in the 9th year of Nabonidus, king of Babylon. Nabonidus, king of Babylon, the son whom she bore, laid her body to rest wrapped in fine wool garments and shining white linen. He deposited her body in a hidden tomb with splendid ornaments of gold set with beautiful stones…He slaughtered fat rams and assembled into his presence the inhabitants of Babylon and Borsippa together with people from far off provinces, he summoned even kings, princes and governors from the borders of Egypt on the Upper Sea, to the Lower Sea, for the mourning…and they made a great lament, scattered dust on their heads. For seven days and seven nights they walked about, heads hung low, dust strewn,

541 Parpola 1970, text 132 (see Parpola 1983, 120 for commentary).
542 Bayliss 1973, 123-4. These are possibly Assyrian kings, indicates the cult could at that time be performed by non-kin and by a woman (Bayliss 1973, 119). The stele text is also discussed by Wiseman 1985, 114; Cooper 1992, 19.
543 Cooper 1992, 19, following J.B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 561. Wiseman (1985, 114) interprets the first part of the passage as “he prepared her corpse for burial, clothing it in a splendid coloured and bejewelled robe and anointing it with sweet oil before it was placed in a secluded or hidden place.”
Appendix 2. Texts

stripped of their attire. On the seventh day…all the people of the country shaved and cleaned themselves.”

**Text 8: Nineveh Text (K.7856 + K.6323)**

Four fragments from Ashurbanipal’s library at Nineveh belong to a 7th century text in which an Assyrian king reports on the funerary ceremonies for his father, who had also been king. The text is thought to be by either Esarhaddon writing of Sennacherib, or Ashurbanipal writing of Esarhaddon.544

**Obv. col. I**

“[…] The father my begetter in kingly oil I gently laid [in] that secret tomb. I sealed the entrance to the sarcophagus,545 his resting-place with tough bronze and cast for it a potent spell. Objects of gold and silver, everything worthy of a tomb, the regalia that he used to love, I showed to Shamash and placed with my father in the tomb. I offered gifts to the princely Anunnaki and the spirits who dwell in the underworld.

**Col. II**

[...] 1 [...] 1 [...] 2 [...] 16 headdresses [...] 5 šiknu-garments, 15 lots of šaharratu-garments, 8 lots of bit-ahi garments, 6 šipirtu-garments, 4 pairs of sandals, 5 wrap[s], 5 shaw[ls], 5 lower garment[s], 3 gamidu-garments, 4 white headdresses, 4 lots of šaharratu-garments, 4 lots of bit-ahi-garments, 4 šiknu-garments.

**Rev. col. I’**

[...] 2 ... 1

**Col. II’**

[...] 9 times (?) [...] to Gilgamesh unridden horses I slaughtered and put them in the tomb. 1 statue on a base, 1 gold Elamite headdress, 4 red kusitu-garments, 4 [...] 4 lower garments, 4 coats, 1 [...] 1 [...]

**Col. III’**

544 This text survives in four fragments from Ashurbanipal’s library at Nineveh (Postgate 2008, 179). Translation by McGinnis 1987, 4-5.
545 Alternatively Deller (1999, 70) interprets this as the gate of the tomb.
Appendix 2. Texts

1 rug with a black border (?) [...di]shes, 1 gold *kappu*-dish, 2 gold chains, 2 silver cups, 10 horses, 30 oxen, 300 sheep, [all] this (of) the king of Urartu, 1 bronze [be]d with feet, [...]  

*Col. IV*

The ditches cried out and the channels replied; the surface of all the trees and fruit turned dark. The orchards wept, which in the grass [...] grew weak [...], the thresholds howled, the walls[s] wailed.”

**Text 9: Esarhaddon and the “substitute king” (K. 168 / ABL 437)**

A letter written to the king Esarhaddon describes the process after the substitute king and queen were put to death:

“We prepared the burial chamber. He and his queen have been decorated, treated, displayed, buried (and) wailed over. The burnt-offering has been burnt, all omens have been cancelled, (and) numerous apotropaic rituals, bit rimki (and) bit salā’ mē ceremonies, exorcistic rites, eršaḫunga-chants (and) scribal recitations have been performed in perfect manner.”

**Text 10: Royal Funeral (K. 12 / ABL 670)**

Letter, perhaps dating to the reign of Esarhaddon, which deals with the funeral of a member of the royal family or a substitute king:

“To the king, my lord, (from) your servant Ištar-šumu-ēreš: Good health to the king, my lord! May the gods Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my lord. What the king, my lord, wrote to me: “Ask Bēl-nāser, Bēl-īpuš and (other) Babylonians whom you know”, I have (now) asked (them), (and) they said to me as follows: “The sun (literally: the day) having risen for

---

546 This reference to the king of Urartu is now doubted. Kwasman (2009, 118-9) reports that while *kur.urī* was originally interpreted by MacGinnis as “king of Urartu”, it in fact means “king of Akkad” and that, the reading “king of Akkad” fits the succession of Esarhaddon, when his sons Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin ruled in Nineveh and Babylon respectively and that Ashurbanipal would have been responsible for arranging the funeral and his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin would have contributed considerably to the grave goods (Kwasman 2009, 119, following George 2003, 485 n. 134). Postgate (2008, 179), however, seems to accept the translation “king of Urartu”.

547 Parpola 1970, 229, text 280; (see Parpola 1983, 270-2 for commentary); See also Parpola 1993, letter 352 (text K.168/ABL 437).

548 Parpola 1970, text 4 (see Parpola 1983, 6-7 for commentary).
an hour, the display takes place; the sun having risen for one hour and a half, [the disp]lay takes place again. [Thereafter] your [bu]rnt-offering [is burnt]; the display [. . . . (break) Bēl-ī[puş] said [as fol]lows: “When the display has been finished, two torches should be moved past the place where the king is staying, one to the right, one to the left, and (then) brought out. Or on the 5th day, when the king goes out, an exorcist should move a censer (and) a torch along.”

**Text 11: Organising Funerary Rites (ABL 378)**

Letter to Esarhaddon regarding the organisation of funerary rites (probably of his queen Ešarra-ḫamat) including accommodation for the mourners, where they are to stay during the required period of separation:

“To the king, my lord, (from) your servant Marduk-šākin-šumi: The best of health to the king, my lord! May the gods Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my lord! May Ištar of Arbela give happiness and health to the king, my lord! May she sate the king, my lord, with old age and fullness of life! May she present the king, my lord, with long-lasting days! At present I am, continuously, performing the ritual and [shall bu]rn the burnt-offering. They are collected in one storehouse [of (?) the city [0? ]. As regards those women about whom the king, my lord, sp[oke], the house where they are (now) staying is not suitable for eating, drin[king] and pouring of [ointment] of head, since they are (really) numerous (and) the whole crowd is staying there together. (So) if it suits the king, they should be settled to the original place. Or, provided we can perform the ritual before the 14th day, let them go out to the river. Let the king, my lord, write to his servant how we (should) perform the ritual, how they (should) go where (they are) to go, how it is convenient, (and) we shall act accordingly. Also as regards the aforementioned slavegirl who is with them, what is it that the king, my lord, says (about her)? Should the ritual be performed upon her together with them? Or […] (Remainder lost)”

**Text 12: The Re-integration of the King after Mourning (1) (K. 4780 / ABL 26)**

Letter to Esarhaddon regarding the post-mourning re-integration rites:

“[To the king, my lord, (from) your servant Marduk]-šākin-šumi: The best of health to the king, my lord! May the gods Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my lord! [May they s]ate

---

the king, my lord, with old age (and) fullness of life! [In the evening] (and) the night [of the 2]0th day [ before the star Si]rius (Break) If it is convenient, the king, my lord, should put on white clothes on the 20th, (and) ask for food at a polished table. (As) the king, my lord, knows, [I]his house of mourning […]”

**Text 13: The Re-integration of the King after Mourning (2) (ABL 379)**

Letter to Esarhaddon regarding the post-mourning re-integration rites: 551

“To the king, my lord, (from) your servant Marduk-šākin-šumi: The best of health to the king, my lord! May the gods Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my lord. As regards the white clothes about which my lord wrote to me: “How many days should I wear them?” , the king should wear them on the 20th and the 21st - two days are enough. On the 22nd he will be dressed normally (again). The king, my lord, should act (therein) as usual […]”

**Text 14: Merodach-Baladan Flees with his Ancestor’s Bones**

In the year 700 Sennacherib’s Annals record his defeat of Babylonian king Merodach-Baladan who flees with the bones of his ancestors across the Persian Gulf: 552

“In open battle like a hurricane (deluge) I cast down Merodach-baladan, king of Babylonia, the Chaldeans and Aramaeans, together with the armies of Elam, his ally. That one fled alone to the Sea-land and the gods of his whole land, with the bones of his fathers, (who lived) before (him), (which) he gathered from their coffins, and his people, he loaded on ships and crossed over to Nagitu, which is on the other side of the Bitter-Sea (Persian Gulf).”

**Text 15: The Corpse of Shamash-ibni (baked clay cylinder – unknown provenance)**

This small baked clay cylinder. The Assyrian king Ashur-etil-ilani, (626-618) sends the corpse of his officer, Shamash-ibni, to his native town, Bit-Dakur, where they were to be placed in a room of the fortress. 553

---

552 Luckenbill 1924, 99 (lines 6-10).
553 Clay 1915, 60-1 (text 43: 1-4) translated this mortuary inscription on a small baked clay cylinder, said to have been found at a site called Tel Khaled near the present course of the Euphrates.
“The coffin of Shamash-ibni, the Dakurite, to whom Ashur-etil-ilani, king of Assyria, showed favour, and from [the mountains] to Bit-Dakur, his land, brought him, and in a sarcophagus in the house of the fortress, without contention, caused him to rest. Whoever thou art, whether a prefect, or a ruler, or a judge, or a prince, who art established in the land, against that sarcophagus and esitti (remains?) thou shalt not commit sin. Its place protect, good shelter spread over it. For that, may Marduk the great lord lengthen thy reign, place his good protection over thee. Thy [name] thy seed, and life of thy future days, [may he If a prince, himself, or a prefect, or a ruler, or a judge, or a viceroy, who comes to the land, sin against that sarcophagus and esitti, alter its place, remove to another place, or someone incite him to evil, and he hearken may Marduk, the great lord, his name, his seed, his offspring, his descendants, destroy in the mouth of the peoples. May Nebo, the oppressor of the adversary, shorten the number of his future days. May Nergal from misery, pestilence, and calamity not protect his life.”

**Text 16: Ashurbanipal’s Punishment of the Rebels**

Ashurbanipal’s Annals record that he punished rebellion by making the rebels crush (or grind up) ancestral bones: 554

“The bones of Nabu-shumu-eresh which I took from Gambulu to Ashur, those bones I made his sons crush opposite the gate in Nineveh.”

**Text 17: Xerxes at the Tomb of Belus (Ctesias’ History of Persia, Book 13)**

Ctesias’ tale describing the opening of an ancient Mesopotamian kings’ tomb is preserved in Aelian, Historical Miscellany, 13.3 [L]. 555

“When Xerxes, son of Darius, excavated the tomb of ancient Belus, he found a glass sarcophagus,” 556 inside which the corpse was lying in oil. However, the sarcophagus was not full: rather, the oil came up to about a palm’s width from the rim. A small stele lay beside the sarcophagus, on which was written: “Things will not go well for anyone who opens the tomb and does not fill the sarcophagus up.” On reading this, Xerxes was fearful and ordered his

---

554 Strawn et al. 2006, 368.
555 Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 185-6.
556 Henkelman (2011, 115-6) notes that there is no evidence for sheet glass before the first century B.C.E., so the idea of the coffin being of glass is presumably fanciful.
men to pour oil in as quickly as possible. But it did not fill up. And he ordered them to pour oil in once again. But the level would not increase and eventually he gave up pouring the oil in and squandering it in vain. After closing up the tomb he went away very troubled indeed. But the stele was not wrong in what it predicted; for after gathering 700,000 men to fight the Greeks he came off badly, and then after returning he died in the most shameful way a man can die, by having his throat cut by his son in bed at night.”
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 1 - Ur PG1 (coffin 1 of 2)

Region: Southern Mesopotamia (Babylonia).

Excavation/Museum Details: Excavated by L. Woolley during the 1925-6 excavation season at Ur. Presently housed in the British Museum (BM 118604).

Coffin Dimensions: l. 1.123m, w. 0.63m, d. 0.58m

Handles: Double handles at both ends; plain/undecorated handles with half-oval base for attachment onto coffin body.

Lid: Wooden lid (material has been identified as poplar).

Decoration: Chased decoration of goats (or mouflon) standing on rosettes on the vertical side-strips. This motif is described as distinctly Assyrian.\(^{557}\)

Distinctive Features: The Ur coffins are the only excavated examples with decorated side-strips.

Preservation: Well preserved tub body and handles.

Burial Location Description/Context: PG1 is one of two bronze “bathtub” coffins housed in brick vaults cutting across the south-west wall of Kassite king Kurigalzu’s giparu (c.1400 BCE). This building may have been used until the end of the Kassite period, but its history is unclear. The burials were found just to the south of a late Assyrian period north-south oriented building, which is cut in half by the temenos wall of Nebuchadnezzar (604-652 BCE).\(^{558}\) J. Curtis has (rightly) argued that there is little foundation for Woolley’s later statement that the two coffins were dug into the giparu ruins from a Persian house for which not one single brick remains.\(^{559}\) Unfortunately the burials are not marked on any of Woolley’s site plans.\(^{560}\) The cut for burial PG1 is lined with “mixed and broken burnt bricks” creating a pit 1.80 x .85 x .80m. It is covered by a flat roof of broken brick originally supported by 10cm thick iron girders running along the top of the long side walls (one girder survived, while only the imprint of the other remains). The 12-16cm layer of decayed wood on the chamber floor beside the coffin together with the smooth, flat surface of the mud that had oozed out from between the bricks of the chamber walls led to the suggestion that the walls were panelled or built up against a square, wooden coffin which housed the bronze receptacle.

---


\(^{558}\) Only some poorly preserved walls of the building remain and below it were found some typical late Assyrian apotropaic figurines. Its bricks were the same size as those of the Ningal Temple by Sin-balassu-iqbi, leading Woolley to also assign this building to him.


\(^{560}\) But they are reported as being “found lying W by E close to Temenos wall at S corner of KP” See Curtis (1983, 88), following Woolley (1962, 379).
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Orientation: Not indicated on the Ur excavation report. The bodies inside the two coffins are placed on opposite sides (PG1 on its right; PG2 on its left), but both face the same direction.

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: One female, approximately 25 years old. Placed with the head at the coffin’s straight end and the body semi-flexed on its right side with knees flexed and arms flexed at the elbow.\(^{561}\) The body was wrapped in linen and woollen cloths.

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: Some of the bones of PG2 appear to have been mixed with the PG1 skeleton. Analysis of the bones indicated habitual squatting (as a position of rest) and kneeling with toes curled under. The coffin was preserved well enough to hold liquid and thus the bones became stained green in several places from the copper-impregnated liquid.

Animal Bones Present: Humerus and ulna of an immature sheep-sized animal.

Objects inside Coffin: Objects from the coffins were linen and woollen textile (for wrapping and/or resting under the body), glazed pottery jar; 3 gold earrings; bronze bracelet; 2 triangular bronze fibulae; 3 strings of beads (the first comprising 45 agate beads, the second 66 amethyst and gold beads and the third 27 carnelian beads), a broken bone comb.\(^{562}\)

Objects outside Coffin: No objects.

Additional Information: The Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian buildings on this site are interpreted by P. Weadock (1979) as successive buildings of the *giparu* by Sin-balassu-iqbi and Nabonidus, although their form and area is unknown, and in fact the only wall which appears to have been cut through is that of the Kassite period *giparu*. Weadock proposed that the burials belong to royal *entu* priestesses who had resided in the *giparu* complex.

Date: Late 8\(^{th}\) – 1\(^{st}\) half of the 7\(^{th}\) century. The two burials post-date the Kassite period *giparu* complex into which they are cut, and pre-date the temenos wall of Nebuchadnezzar (604-652 BCE) under which the second burial was supposedly found (an alternative report in the Ur catalogue states that the burial was found “close” to the temenos wall). Initially Woolley placed the graves in the period 700-650 BCE, but later changed them to the Persian period.\(^{563}\) R. D. Barnett saw the coffins as Neo-Assyrian, but the burials dating to c.600 (Neo-Babylonian period).\(^{564}\) J. Curtis found no grounds for attributing the burials to a Neo-Babylonian or Persian archaeological context. Instead he turned to the objects in the burials to provide dates. Three gold earrings and the gadrooned bowl seemed to point to a date in the late 8\(^{th}\) century, while the glazed jars suggest that a date in the first half of the 7\(^{th}\) century is

---

561 There has been significant debate regarding the correct terms for describing burial positions, and I have chosen here to follow the terminology and definitions provided by Sprague (2005, 29-31). The description is based on the depictions of the bones in L. Woolley’s field notes, published in Molleson and Hodgson (2003, 120-2, fig. 23). The authors corroborate the arrangement of the body based on the distribution of copper stains on the bones. Curtis (1983, fig. 1) also redrew the coffins and their contents. Woolley’s (1962, 56) final report therefore incorrectly states that this skeleton was placed on its left side.

562 According to Curtis (1983, 88) objects from PG1 were incorrectly ascribed to PG2 in Woolley’s (1962, 69) Ur publication. Drawing on excavation field notes, Curtis had corrected the list of finds (see pp. 88-9).


564 Barnett 1956, 115.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

more likely. An iconographic analysis of the goat/mouflon and rosette motif reinforced Curtis’ date which has now been generally accepted in the available scholarship. It has been suggested that the burials date more precisely to the period of Neo-Assyrian domination of Babylon (688-648).


See Curtis 1983, 91-2. Here Curtis argues that pottery typology is too poor to use as a dating tool. Woolley (1926, 279) initially attributed the burials a 700-650 BCE date, but later reassigned them to the Persian (Achaemenid) period based on analogies with terracotta coffins securely dated to the Persian period, and his (incorrect) belief that fibulae were rarely found prior to this period (Woolley 1962, 55-6, 68; see Curtis 1983, 87). P. R. S. Moorey (1971, 259-60) also believed the coffins were significantly earlier than the burials themselves, attributing them to the late Assyrian period, but the burials to the Persian period based on “objects” found in the coffins; a view he reinforced in his revised account of Woolley’s excavations at Ur (Woolley 1982, 261).

See Molleson and Hodgson (2003, 120) who base this date attribution on Curtis’ (1983) assumption that these are Assyrian-type coffins.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

**Coffin 2 - Ur PG2 (coffin 2 of 2)**

**Region:** Southern Mesopotamia (Babylonia).

**Excavation/Museum Details:** Excavated by L. Woolley during the 1925-6 excavation season at Ur. Presently housed in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. ⁵⁶⁷

**Coffin Dimensions:** l. 1.113m, w. 0.57m, d. 0.54m.

**Handles:** Double-handles preserved at curved end; plain/undecorated handles with half-oval base for attachment onto coffin body.

**Lid:** Wooden.

**Decoration:** Chased decoration of goats (or mouflon) standing on rosettes on the vertical side-strips. This motif is described as distinctly Assyrian. ⁵⁶⁸

**Distinctive Features:** The Ur coffins are the only excavated examples with decorated side-strips.

**Preservation:** Very corroded, most of the lower section is missing.

**Burial Location Description/Context:** PG2 is the second of two bronze “bathtub” coffin burials housed in rough brick vaults cutting across the south-west wall of Kassite king Kurigalzu’s *giparu* (c.1400 BCE) (see **Coffin 1** for further detail of this context). PG2 is reported to have lain directly underneath the temenos wall of Nubuchadnezzar, although in the Ur catalogue it is simply described as being “close” to the temenos wall.

**Orientation:** Not indicated on the Ur excavation report. The bodies inside the two coffins are placed on opposite sides (PG1 on its right; PG2 on its left), but both face the same direction.

**Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin:** One adult female (precise age not determined), significantly smaller than the female in PG1. Placed with the head at the coffin’s straight end and the body in a flexed position on its left side with knees flexed and arms flexed at the elbow. The body was wrapped in linen and woollen cloths.

**Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains:** The bones were poorly preserved in comparison with those in PG1. Also unlike PG1, the bones are not stained green from the copper. This is presumably because the base had corroded away, allowing the water to drain out. Analysis of the bones showed habitual squatting (as a position of rest) and kneeling with toes curled under, bones also indicate shoes were worn. Assuming the bones have been correctly attributed, the left hand appears significantly smaller than the right, perhaps wasted through injury.

**Animal Bones Present:** Not reported.

**Objects inside Coffin:** Linen and woollen cloths (for wrapping and/or resting under the body); 2 glazed pottery jars; gadrooned bronze bowl; wooden bowl with two lug handles; gold earrings; string of beads (15 agate beads, 14 cylindrical gold beads with ribbed decoration, and 1 carnelian bead); bronze mirror; remains of a wooden box; remains of a basket.

---

⁵⁶⁷ Museum number not available.
Objects outside Coffin: No objects.

Additional Information: As per Coffin 1.

Date: Late 8th – 1st half of the 7th century. For detail see Coffin 1.

Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 3 - Nimrud Tomb III Antechamber/Bronze Coffin 1 (coffin 1 of 3)

Region: Northern Mesopotamia (Assyria).

Excavation/Museum Details: Discovered during the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and Heritage’s 1989-90 excavation season at the North-West Palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) in the ancient city of Kalhu, led by Muzahem M. Hussein. Housed in the Mosul Museum. One of the coffins (Bronze Coffin 2) was on display in 2003 and is the only coffin for which images are available.

Coffin Dimensions: l. 1.30m, w. 0.515m, d. 0.594m.

Handles: Double handles at both ends.

Lid: No lid found.

Decoration: Excavation report indicates decoration of “copper friezes” wound around the upper and middle part of the coffin. No images are available to clarify this statement.

Distinctive Features:

Preservation: Unknown.

Burial Location Description/Context: One of three bronze “bathtub” coffins found in the antechamber of a barrel-vaulted vaulted crypt (Tomb III) located under the floor of room 57. While reconstructing areas of the domestic wing (or “harem”) in the North-West Palace built by Neo-Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859), excavators discovered four vaulted burial chambers. Three bronze “bathtub” coffins were found in the antechamber of the third of these (Tomb III), which according to an inscription on the large, empty stone sarcophagus in the main chamber and an inscription on the chamber door, belonged to Ashurnasirpal’s wife Mullissu-Mukannišat-Ninua. The tomb is directly south of Tomb II of Tiglath-Pilaser III’s queen, Yaba (which is under room 49), and underlies room 57, which is interpreted as having been the office of royal officials during the 8th century. This interpretation is based on finds of a large number administrative texts; one group from the time of Adad-Nerari III (810-783), some of which belonged to a palace scribe, and a later group dated to the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727), belonging to the ‘treasurer’ or ‘steward of the royal household’ (masenmu). The tomb is approached by a steep stairway leading down a shaft and into the antechamber where three bronze coffins were placed, perpendicular to and blocking the entrance to the main chamber. Coffin 1 lay against the east wall directly on top of Coffin 2, and Coffin 3 lay against the west wall. Coffin 1 was placed with its rounded end to the south,

---

569 Tomb II contained inscribed objects of Yaba the palace woman of Tiglath-pileser III, Baniitu the palace woman of Shalmaneser V and Ataliya the palace woman of Sargon, but just two skeletons. Stephanie Dalley (2008, 171) argues that Yaba and Baniitu are in fact the same person.

570 Of room 57, Oates et al. (2001, 65) state: “Particularly striking is the position of two rooms which form a central focus within the domestic wing, rooms 49 and, immediately to the south, 57. They lack the ablution rooms that normally accompany the residential suites but contain, beneath their floors, the two richest tombs discovered until now at Nimrud. The walls of these rooms, and in particular the large cross wall to the north, are noticeably thicker than the usual walls in this area. Tablets were found in room 57, crushed under a limestone slab (p. 202). Surrounding room 49, and presumably protecting the tomb against water seepage, is a brick-lined drain some 70 cm wide, which carries surface water into a sump in courtyard 56.”

571 The presence of the texts seems to suggest that this was an office and, because this was a “female” area of the palace, that these high officials were eunuchs (Oates and Oates 2001, 88).
while 2 and 3 were oriented with their rounded ends to the north. The tomb was separated from the antechamber by large, arched, stone slab double doors, which were sealed with two courses of mudbrick on the antechamber side. The tomb itself was empty except for a 2.38 x 1.32 x 1.25m stone sarcophagus set into the floor, and is thought to have been looted in antiquity. The sarcophagus’s stone lid had two large stone loops on top that would have facilitated its placement and its two stone knobs were for sealing the coffin. The tomb chamber had clearly been constructed prior to room above, indicating that the tomb and large stone sarcophagus of Assurnasirpal’s wife were incorporated during the planning stages of the palace.

**Orientation:** North-South. According to the plan published in the excavation report (Hussein and Suleiman 2000, fig. 13), the round end of coffin 1 was to the south, facing the opposite direction to coffins 2 and 3, which were placed with their rounded ends to the north.

**Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin:** Secondary burial containing six individuals (only a few bones of each were present): an adult of approximately 20-29 years (possibly female); an 8-11 year old child (probably a boy); one 7-11 year old child (probably a girl); another 7-11 year old child; a 3-9 month old baby; and a fully grown foetus (8th-9th lunar month). The excavator suggested that the head had been placed in the square end of the coffin. The sarcophagus of the adjacent Tomb II (under room 49) had also clearly been included in the initial construction of the palace. The large sarcophagi were placed first, then the vaulted chamber completed, followed by the rooms above (Oates et al. 2001, 84).

**Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains:**

**Animal Bones Present:** Animal bones are not reported. However, “large bones” of an unspecified type were later said to have lain on the antechamber floor outside coffin 3.

**Objects inside Coffin:** A total of 449 valuable objects were found in the coffins (and some on the floor) in the antechamber, but the excavation report does not clearly describe which objects were found in each coffin. Much-discussed objects which cannot be attributed to a particular coffin are the seal of a eunuch courtier (810-783); a gold bowl of Šamši-ilu (782-45); silver vessel with a Hittite hieroglyph; a gold stamp seal (ND 1989/334, IM 115644), of
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Ḫama, queen of Shalmaneser IV (782-773); a 15 mina duck-weight dating to the reign of Tiglath-Pilaser III (744-27).

**Objects outside Coffin:** Pottery, large bones and a round glass bottle were said to have lain in the antechamber outside coffin 3.

**Additional Information:** Notably the Nimrud examples are the only secondary burials found in bronze coffins.

**Date:** Mid/late 8th century to possibly the late 7th century. The coffin burials in the antechamber are considered to be later than, the main tomb of Mullissu-Mukannišat-Ninua. The deposition of so many bodies and precious objects in these relatively small containers, the presence of objects on the antechamber floor, the packed-in nature of the coffins and the sealing of the tomb door together paint a mysterious picture, but it has been proposed that the coffins were probably deposited secretly and in a hurry perhaps as a result of a royal power struggle. It is not known whether the body of Mullissu-Mukannišat-Ninua and/or any of her burial goods had been moved into a coffin in the antechamber, but the excavators suggest that her stone sarcophagus had never in fact been used. The use of room 57 as an office during the 8th century until the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) and the presence of the stone duck weight dated to his reign encourage the belief that these secondary burials were deposited in the antechamber during or after his reign, but it is much more difficult to propose a date for the original burial of the “bathtubs”. The Northwest Palace at Nimrud was in use until its destruction (614) at the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and there presently seems to be no reason why the burials could not date to this time. However, in the reign of Sargon II (721-705) the Neo-Assyrian capital moved to Khorsabad and then Nineveh, so it might be argued that from later in Sargon’s reign we would not expect to find elite ladies living and being buried within this palace, which would agree with the evidence provided by the burials of the other ladies of the palace, the latest of which belongs to Sargon’s queen Ataliya.


---

579 According to Al-Rawi (2008, 136) a solid gold stamp seal (ND 1989/334, IM 115644), of Ḥama, queen of Shalmaneser IV (782-773) was found in Tomb III (image in Hussein and Suleiman 2000, 399, Pl.183). The outer edge of the seal bears the inscription: “Belonging to Ḥama, queen of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Adad-nirari”.

580 Oates and Oates 2001, 87. The accession of Sargon II or the disputed succession upon the death of Sennacherib are two examples cited by Oates and Oates.

581 Oates and Oates 2001, 88. Nimrud did, however, decline somewhat in importance from the time of Sargon II when first Khorsabad and then Nineveh took primacy (Oates et al. 2001, 68-9). After the destruction of Nimrud some of the site was levelled, but there appears only to have been “squat” occupation of the site (Oates et al. 2001, 63-5, 165). The domestic wing under which the tombs were situated appears not to have been resettled, but according to Hussein and Suleiman (2000, 94) there is some indication that this area was used for burials.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 4 - Nimrud Tomb III Antechamber/Bronze Coffin 2 (coffin 2 of 3)
Region: Northern Mesopotamia (Assyria).
Excavation/Museum Details: See Coffin 3.
Coffin Dimensions: l. 1.40m, w. 0.49m, d. 0.57m.
Handles: Double handles at both ends.
Lid: No lid found.
Decoration: Decoration not evident.
Distinctive Features: -
Preservation: Quite poor. Completely missing its squared end.
Burial Location Description/Context: See Coffin 3.
Orientation: North-South. According to the plan published in the excavation report (Hussein and Suleiman 2000, fig. 13), the rounded end of coffins 2 and 3 were oriented north.
Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: Secondary burial of a well-represented female aged 18-20 years and fragmentary bones of a 6-12 year old child.
Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: The adult female from showed transverse linear enamel hypoplasia lesions which indicate she had been struck by a serious illness in infancy or early childhood.
Animal Bones Present: See Coffin 3.
Objects inside Coffin: Objects specified for this coffin,583 are a spouted gold ewer, a gold crown, gold plates and jewellery, two gold-capped cylinder seals (one carnelian, the other lapis), a frit beaker with a gold base, and clothing tassels.584 It was reported by the excavator that the child wore the gold crown and it was “much too large for her”, however, Müller-Karp et al. who published an analysis of the bones in 2008 claimed that the older female wore the crown.585 See also Coffin 3.
Objects outside Coffin: See Coffin 3.
Additional Information: -
Date: Mid/late 8th century to possibly the late 7th century. For detail see Coffin 3.

583 By Oates and Oates 2001, 86.
584 There is confusion in the sources concerning finds of textiles in coffin 2. E. Crowfoot’s (1995, 113) article on the textiles found at Nimrud reports that “the queen’s body inside the bronze coffin of Tomb 2 was covered with what first appeared to be a solid layer of brittle dark brown wood…[but] lines, which at first suggested to the eye the graining of fine wood, proved to be folds, in some areas probably fine pleating or goffering, and it was clear that a mass of delicate fabrics had been present, clothing and wrapping the body, or lying piled up over it.” It was also suggested that some of the green staining on the linen textiles from Tomb 1 probably resulted from contact with the bronze coffin. However, Tomb 2 was made of stone and neither tomb chamber 1 nor 2 contained bronze coffins. When Crowfoot’s article was republished in New Light on Nimrud (2008), John Curtis added a brief editor’s note at the end pointing out that a bronze mirror was present in Tomb 2, which may account for the green stain, and also suggested that perhaps Crowfoot had meant to refer to the bronze coffins (also numbered 1-3) which actually came from Tomb III (see “Ed.” p.154, following D. Collon 2007). At any rate, these textiles are comparable with those from Ur, published by Hero Granger-Taylor in J. Curtis’ (1983) article on the bronze tombs in Anatolian Studies (see pp. 94-5).
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

**Coffin 5 - Nimrud Tomb III Antechamber/Bronze Coffin 3 (coffin 3 of 3)**

**Region:** Northern Mesopotamia (Assyria).

**Excavation/Museum Details:** See Coffin 3.

**Coffin Dimensions:** l. 1.47m, w. 0.68m, d. 0.575m.

**Handles:** Double handles at both ends.

**Lid:** No lid found.

**Decoration:** No decoration reported.

**Distinctive Features:** -

**Preservation:** Unknown.

**Burial Location Description/Context:** See Coffin 3. Coffin 3 was on the west side of the antechamber, next to the other two, its rounded end facing north as for coffin 2.

**Orientation:** North-South. According to the plan published in the excavation report (Hussein and Suleiman 2000, fig. 13), the round end of coffins 2 and 3 were oriented north.

**Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin:** Secondary burial of five adults: two men, 30-39 years and 55-65 years; one individual (probably male) of 35-45 years; and another two individuals (probably female) of 35-55 years old and the other over 55.

**Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains:** the Müller-Karpe et al. bone report states that three adult men and two women could not have been buried together in one of the coffins because the coffin is too small and the skeletons are far too incomplete for the bodies to have been placed directly into the coffin one after another. It also notes that some skeletons exhibit extensive green stains caused by impregnation with copper ions from the bronze coffin, while others are hardly stained at all. The greener the stain, the closer the position of the bone to the bronze wall or floor of the coffin. Most of the long bones of the two men on coffin 3, for example were deposited along the coffin walls. Further, because copper ions are bactericidal it preserves bones at both the macro and microscopic levels. The poor preservation of some of the bones at a microscopic level strongly suggests, therefore, that they were not originally placed in bronze coffins and had already reached an advanced level of decay when they were deposited in the coffins secondarily. The bones of the eldest male in the coffin (55-65 years) suggest that he was in good physical condition. Three of the individuals were suitable for an analysis of the paranasal sinuses, which revealed that they all suffered from chronic inflammatory processes of the frontal and/or the maxillary sinuses (simple colds could have been the reason for this), which suggests damp, cold housing conditions and/or an insufficient immune system. Such problems are as a rule significantly more frequently found in individuals of the lower class than in those of the upper class. Several individuals showed pathological changes on the internal lamina of the skull vault the result from inflammatory processes of the meninges related to disease (pachymeningitis, meningitis, meningoencephalitis, perisinuous processes). The picture given by these skeletons is a level of poor health usually associated with the lower social classes.

---

586 Müller-Karpe et al. (2008, 147) unfortunately do not specify which individuals were represented by the bones that were deposited later.
Animal Bones Present: See Coffin 3.
Objects inside Coffin: See Coffin 3.
Objects outside Coffin: See Coffin 3.
Additional Information: -
Date: Mid/late 8th century to possibly the late 7th century. For detail see Coffin 3.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 6 - Arjān Coffin

Region: Southwestern Iran (Elam).

Excavation/Museum Details: Discovered in 1982 on the left bank of the Marun River during dam construction near the northern limit of the site of the ancient town of Arjān, approximately 10 kilometres north of Behbahan in Khuzistan province. A rescue excavation undertaken of the tomb was conducted by F. Towhidi and A. M. Khaliliān from the Office of Historical remains. Now housed in the Tehran National Museum.

Coffin Dimensions: l. 1.32m, w. 0.60m, d. 0.60m.

Handles: Double handles at both ends. Handles have a vertical-ribbed exterior surface and smooth interior surface, with a circular base. Decayed rope remained tied to the handles.

Lid: Found underneath the coffin were fragments of the only known example of a bronze lid. It appears to have been a single U-shaped sheet with bands of lotus and bud decoration along its edges, with a single bronze handle on top at either end, aligned along the long axis of the coffin. It has been reported that a bronze band was riveted around its circumference to form a rim, however, the available images seem to reveal a hammered fold at the edges of the lid but do not suggest the presence of any rivets or the addition of a band of bronze sheet.

Decoration: The coffin body is undecorated, but the lid exhibits three bands of chased lotus and bud decoration run along its edge; a decoration said to be predominantly Assyrian.

Distinctive Features: Ribbed handles and bronze lid.

Preservation: Bottom section exhibits a heavy patina due to the flooding of the tomb up to a level of approximately 40-50cm, but is otherwise well preserved.

Burial Location Description/Context: Discovered at the site of the ancient town of Arjān, approximately 10 kilometres north of Behbahan in Khuzistan province, on the left bank of the Marun River in an underground chamber. The rectangular 2.5 x 1.36 x 0.9m chamber comprised three stone-lined walls and one (eastern) wall of earth, topped by a ceiling of five large stone slabs. The walls and floor were gypsum plastered and the stone ceiling coated with bitumen. The tomb had flooded at some point up to a level of approximately 40-50cm and both the chamber and coffin were found filled with a 20-25cm thick layer of sediment. This flooding may have shifted the coffin into its slightly diagonal alignment within the tomb and resulted in the dislodgement of the bronze coffin lid, fragments of which were found underneath the coffin. No additional construction was noted above or surrounding the tomb, although two large jars were found lying directly atop the tomb chamber. Remains of carbonized material were also were also reportedly found on the ground surface but this material was not analysed.

Orientation: The chamber is orientated east/west, but the coffin was found at a northeast/southwest diagonal angle, presumably as a result of the flooding.

587 Arjān is a well-known Sasanian town, but surveys have revealed presence at the site going back to the Prehistoric period (Alizadeh 1985, 51).
588 Alizadeh 1985, 52 and Álvarez-Mon (2010a, 23) state that it was riveted around the edge to form a rim.
589 Vatandoust (1996, 69) describes the tomb as being “surrounded by mud-brick masses”, however, no other author has reported this detail.
590 As reported by Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 20.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: One male aged 40-50 years. The reconstruction of the burial shows an inhumation with the body laid on its side in a flexed position with the head in the round end of the coffin. The gold “ring” (see below) appears to have been placed in the left hand. It has been suggested that the “flexed position of the body with the arms crossed and resting on the chest [and] the ring seems to have positioned in the left hand of the deceased at the time of interment.”

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: The skeletal remains were unfortunately not recorded and abandoned in the tomb during the excavations. They were later collected for analysis by Mr. E. Amirlou, who suggested that the single remaining clavicula indicated that this was a male.

Animal Bones Present: None reported.

Objects inside Coffin: gold bracteates; gold “Arjān” ring; iron dagger; bronze bowl; silver rod/tube (?). Fragments of folded cotton textiles under the skull.

Objects outside Coffin: candelabra; silver beaker; silver jar; bronze jar; bronze lamp; bronze chalices.

Additional Information: This tomb construction is common in the highlands, however the gypsum plaster seems to imitate vaults in Susa. The bowl, ring, candelabrum and silver jar bear the inscription “Kidin-Hutran, son of Kurluš” (an individual whose identity remains speculative).

Date: Late 7th – mid-6th century BCE. The 8th century date proposed by A. Alizadeh has been conclusively disproved. François Vallat dated the inscriptions on objects from the Arjān coffin to c.646-525, while D. T. Potts ascribes the group of bronze Arjān vessels to his Neo-Elamite IIIB (605-539) period based on their similarity to those from the Neo-Elamite burial 693 at Susa. D. Stronach adds that the bronze candelabra and ring agree with a date in the Neo-Elamite IIIB. An in-depth analysis of the evidence provided by the foregoing authors and the objects in the coffin led J. Álvarez-Mon to conclude that the burial belonged to the period “between the end of the 7th century BC and the first half of the 6th century BC”.

Note: flexed position is used here in preference to the often-used “foetal”, following Sprague 2005, 30.

Quoted from Alizadeh 1985, 53.

The sex of the interred appeared also to be reinforced by the objects found in the coffin, amongst which there is a notable lack of typically ‘female’ goods (see Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 29).

There is some confusion as to whether the silver rod/tube was present in the coffin. According to Alizadeh (1985, 54-5), it had already been removed from the tomb by the time the excavation team arrived and its precise context is unknown, but that “on the basis of its shape and value we assume that it had been placed in the coffin as part of the deceased’s princely regalia.” Álvarez-Mon (2010a, 120-21) appears to accept Alizadeh’s interpretation and report simply that it had been “removed from the coffin”. Álvarez-Mon interprets this unusual object as a filtering device for drinking wine, or perhaps more likely beer.

The precise original placement and purpose of these textiles in the tomb is unknown, but Mo-taghed (1990, 136-8) dismisses the interpretation of these as a “pillow” (see for example Alizadeh (1985, 52) and Vatandoust (1996, 71), based on their small size, delicate and valuable nature.

Alizadeh (1985, 56) and Stronach (2003, 252), following Vallat (1984, 4), who dates the inscriptions based on paleographic grounds.

Potts 1999, 303.

See Álvarez-Mon 2010a, 3.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

**Coffin 7 - Rām Hormuz/East Coffin** (1 of 2 coffins)

**Region:** Southwestern Iran (Elam).

**Excavation/Museum Details:** Discovered during “development activities” in 2007 and a rescue excavation was undertaken by the Iranian Center of Archaeology Research (ICAR) archaeologist Arman Shishegar. Presently held in the Tehran National Museum.

**Coffin Dimensions:** One of the coffins measures l. unknown, w. 0.67m, d. 0.57m.

**Handles:** A single undecorated vertically-mounted handle survives at the curved end.

**Lid:** No lid found.

**Decoration:** No obvious traces of decoration.

**Distinctive Features:** See Coffin 8 (“west coffin”) below.

**Preservation:** Two large fragments of the curved end of the coffin have survived. The remains are fragile and covered with corrosion deposits.

**Burial Location Description/Context:** Located 7km southeast of Rām Hormuz (49°40’ E, 31°15’ N) next to the Ala River. The two coffins were contained in a chamber approximately 9m below the highest point of the modern mound and 21m above the level of the river. As a result of the frequent flooding of the river, the tomb was buried beneath sediment. The coffins were housed in a rectangular stone-lined and mortared (with sand/gypsum/mud) tomb chamber measuring 4.5 x 2.2-2.3m. The excavator believed that the “stepped” nature of the walls of the tomb suggest that the chamber had an arched ceiling.

**Orientation:** Reported as “buried facing north”. The plan of the burials, however, suggests a northwest orientation of the burial.

**Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin:** One female approximately 17 years old. The excavation report suggests that the body was laid on its right side in a flexed position with arms bent at the elbow.

**Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains:**

**Animal Bones Present:** Animal bones were found on a “natural sandy bench” with along other offerings.

**Objects inside Coffin:** A golden bracelet whose central gemstone bears the female name a-

- **ni-nu-ma/ku** in Elamite was worn by the female in the coffin. In addition the following objects were found in the coffins: cotton textiles with golden attachments, daggers/dagger handles, rings, gold and silver bracelets, bangles, broaches, earrings, pendants, hairpins, a plethora of beads of various types, precious and semi-precious stones, silver, bronze, stone and faience vessels, candelabras, figurines including the ‘fish ladies’ in bronze and silver, ivory or horn “game pieces” and a white scarab seal depicting a stylised human figure. Also amongst the finds was a cat’s eye agate with Sumerian inscriptions set into a golden brooch.

One side of the agate bears the name of Kurigalzu, which may refer to the Kassite king Kurigalzu I (1390-1375) or Kurigalzu II (1345-1324), while the reverse side bears three lines of illegible inscription. Unfortunately the excavator’s report does not designate any of these finds to a particular coffin.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

**Objects outside Coffin:** A “natural sandy bench” against the western wall of the tomb was apparently used for offerings. Here were found animal bones, a number of “large storage crocks” with cups or mugs placed over their mouths and a number of small glazed jugs were found in a pile.

**Additional Information:** -

**Date:** The burials may date to the Neo-Elamite IIIB period (c.585-539/520 BCE), as suggested by the style of inscriptions on two gold “rings” found in the coffins.

**Bibliography:** A. Shishegar 2008.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 8 - Rām Hormuz/West Coffin (2 of 2 coffins)

Region: Southwestern Iran (Elam).

Excavation/Museum Details: See Coffin 7.


Handles: An undecorated horizontal handle is mounted low on the left side of the squared, short end of the coffin. An additional undecorated vertical handle is present on the long side of the coffin. The handles are mounted much lower than the handles on the other known coffins. Extensive corrosion makes the handle attachments difficult to distinguish clearly.

Lid: No lid found.

Decoration: No obvious traces of decoration.

Distinctive Features: The handle arrangement as described above.

Preservation: A portion of one side and the straight end is preserved. The remains are fragile and covered with corrosion deposits.


Orientation: Reported as “buried facing north”. The plan of the burials, however, suggests a southeast orientation of the burial.

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: One female approximately 30-35 years old. The excavation report suggests that the body was laid on its right side in a flexed position with arms bent at the elbow.

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: -


Objects inside Coffin: Two inscribed gold “rings” were found. One bears the Elamite inscription “Shutur Nahhunte son of Indada” while the other is inscribed with the (probably) female name La-ar-na. The remainder of the objects are as per the “east coffin”.

Objects outside Coffin: See Coffin 7.

Additional Information: -

Date: See Coffin 7.

Coffin 9 - Zincirli Coffin

Region: North Syria (today’s southern Turkey)


Coffin Dimensions: 1.29 x 0.62 x 0.59cm.

Handles: Double handles on each end; handles decorated with 3 sets of 4 bands and semicircular “rosette” bases. The Zincirli handles as described by Andrae (1943, 118).

Lid: No lid found.

Decoration: Undecorated.

Distinctive Features: Said to be made of copper with bronze handles.

Preservation: Missing fragments from around upper edges; otherwise intact.

Context: The palace (bit hilani) of Zincirli (ancient Sam’al). Room L8 of an ‘outhouse’; a bitumen-lined room described as a ‘bathroom’. This was because the gaps between the baked bricks on the floor were filled with bitumen, and the floor sloped down towards the centre of the room. However, the tub was found on top of a 17-23cm thick layer of earth, suggesting it had not originally belonged to this room.

Orientation: Not available.

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: N/A.

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: N/A.

Animal Bones Present: No.

Objects inside Coffin: None.

Objects outside Coffin: N/A.

Additional Information: P. R. S. Moorey suggested, based on the supposed “bathroom” context of this find, that the bronze coffins may have originally been used for bathing and only considerably later been employed as burial receptacles. Moorey 1971, 160.

Date: Pre-670 (prior to Essarhaddon’s destruction of Zincirli).


599 The Zincirli handles as described by Andrae (1943, 118).

600 Moorey 1971, 160.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 10 - Susa Bronze Coffin of a “Persian Princess”

Region: Southwest Iran (region of Khuzistan)

Excavation/Museum Details: Excavated by J. de Morgan at Susa in 1901 during the fourth year of his excavations at the site.

Coffin Dimensions: 1.65 x 0.96m at the rim, 1.29 x 0.66 m at the base, 0.56m deep.

Handles: Handles not reported.

Lid: Lid not reported.

Decoration: Undecorated bronze; straight at both ends with rounded corners

Distinctive Features: according to J. de Morgan, it was probably originally made of a single bronze sheet (Morgan 1905b: 37, fig. 67).

Preservation: The coffin was broken in several pieces.

Burial Location Description/Context: In a vaulted tomb found 4m south of an “Elamite temple” at a depth of 6m below the surface.

Chamber Description:

Orientation: North-south orientation.

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: One elderly (?) female.

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: -

Animal Bones Present: None reported.

Objects inside Coffin: two alabaster vases, necklaces, bracelets, amulets, pearls, earrings, two silver coins dated to the mid-fourth century BCE, 14.8cm silver bowl with a geometrical design and central rosette of 16 petals.

Objects outside Coffin: Not available.

Additional Information: There have been reports that J. de Morgan found two Persian period bronze “bathtub” coffins at Susa in a vaulted tomb, one empty and one with a body/goods.601 This report is not, however, supported by de Morgan’s documentation and appears to be an error.

Date: Late 5th to Mid-4th century BCE. While J. de Morgan dated the burial to 350-332, it has more recently been dated to the late 5th century based upon two Aradian shekels find inside the coffin and the Achaemenid jewellery adorning the body.602


---

601 Curtis and Tallis 2005, 47.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

**Coffin 11 - The Dailaman-Amlash Coffin**

**Region:** Northwest Iran (Amlash) - Gilan Province

**Excavation/Museum Details:** Unexcavated, said to be from the region of Amlash. In 1983 the tub was reportedly in the possession of an antiquities dealer from Cologne.

**Coffin Dimensions:** l. 1.27, h.0.53-8m

**Handles:** Double handles at both ends; plain/undecorated handles with half-oval base.

**Lid:** Not available.

**Decoration:** Chased decoration on the side-strips depicting goats standing on rosettes.

**Distinctive Features:** -

**Preservation:** Very well-preserved, complete tub.

**Burial Location Description/Context:** Unprovenanced.

**Orientation:** N/A.

**Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin:** N/A.

**Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains:** N/A.

**Animal Bones Present:** N/A.

**Objects inside Coffin:** N/A.

**Objects outside Coffin:** N/A.

**Additional Information:** -

**Date:** Assumed late 8th/early 7th century based on iconography.

**Bibliography:** J. Curtis 1983, 85.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 12 - “Ziwiye” Coffin Fragments

Region: Northwest Iran – Kurdistan Province

Excavation/Museum Details: Unexcavated. Reported to be fragments of a tub which held the “Ziwiye” treasure.\(^603\) Fragments in the National Museum of Iran/Metropolitan Museum.

Coffin Dimensions: Several fragments of a rim and a vertical side-strip fragment comprising two cast bronze panels riveted together. The side strip fragment is c.80cm long.

Handles: -

Lid: -

Decoration: Both the inner and outer panels of the side-strip fragment bear chased decoration of five goats (or alternatively mouflon, ibexes, or gazelles) standing on rosettes.\(^604\) The rim fragment has a chased “Assyrian tribute” scene with a beardless Assyrian dignitary, attended by servants and foreign dignitaries wearing floppy hats, spotted robes and shoes with upturned toes. This decoration is said to relate to Scythian occupation in northern Iran.

Distinctive Features: The iconography on the rim fragments is distinct from any other decoration found within the bronze “bathtub” corpus, though it has been compared with images on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III.

Preservation: Fragmentary.

Burial Location Description/Context: Unprovenanced.

Orientation: N/A.

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: N/A.

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: N/A.

Animal Bones Present: N/A.

Objects inside Coffin: N/A.

Objects outside Coffin: N/A.

Additional Information: According to Roger Moorey these very long strips do not appear to belong to the same kind of object as the known coffins. There has been seemingly endless speculation as to what kind of burial (or hoard) these receptacles contained. Ghirshman argued that it was a full-scale Scythian royal burial, while Moorey argued that it was probably just a hoard, not a burial.\(^605\)

Date: Assumed late 8\(^{th}\) century based on iconography.


---

\(^{603}\) The hoard (including the fragment) was reported by Godard to have been found in a 7\(^{th}\) century citadel at Ziwiye.

\(^{604}\) Moorey (1971, 259) reports these as being “engraved” motifs. Ghirshman (1950, 182) defines the animals as ibexes, while Porada (1965, 124) refers to them as gazelles.

\(^{605}\) Moorey 1971, 259-60.
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 13 - Ashmolean Museum Fragment

Region: Northwest Iran.

Excavation/Museum Details: Unexcavated – now in the Ashmolean Museum.

Coffin Dimensions: Described by P. R. S. Moorey as two cast bronze panels, riveted together on either side of a fragment of sheet bronze overlying an iron core (which is not further described). The fragment had evidently been cut from a much larger object. At the bottom of the outer face is a 3 cm high strip of sheet metal secured with two rows of rivets. The sheet turns under and originally would have been part of the base of a tub. At the top of the fragment two rows of rivets attach what appears to be an overhanging sheet metal ring to the inner face. The panels are 0.50m high and 0.096m wide, with the greatest dimension of the object reaching 0.135m.

Handles: -

Lid: -

Decoration: The inner and outer surface bear engraved decoration, depicting four goats standing on rosettes. The decoration on the outer surface is quite damaged by corrosion, while the inner surface is much better preserved.

Distinctive Features: Decoration on both the inner and outer surface.

Preservation: Fragmentary.

Burial Location Description/Context: Unprovenanced.

Orientation: N/A.

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: N/A.

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: N/A.

Animal Bones Present: N/A.

Objects inside Coffin: N/A.

Objects outside Coffin: N/A.

Additional Information:

Date: Assumed late 8th century based on iconography.

Bibliography: P. R. S. Moorey 1971, 259-60 (catalogue number 494B).
Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 14 - “Eastern Anatolia” Coffin

Region: Eastern Anatolia

Excavation/Museum Details: Unexcavated. Purchased in “eastern Anatolia” and now held in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara.

Coffin Dimensions: Approximately 1.35m in length (width and depth unavailable).

Handles: Two sets of horizontal side-handles.

Lid: Not reported.

Decoration: Undecorated, but covered with a leather (?) cladding. 606

Distinctive Features: Leather (?) cladding, small rim, and horizontal side handles.

Preservation: Complete tub.

Burial Location Description/Context: Unprovenanced.

Orientation: N/A.

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: N/A.

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: N/A.

Animal Bones Present: N/A.

Objects inside Coffin: N/A.

Objects outside Coffin: N/A.

Additional Information: -

Date: Attributed to the 7th century.


606 Álvarez-Mon reports “lead [leather?] cladding”
**Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins**

**Coffin 15 - “Eastern Anatolia” Coffins (2 coffins)**

**Region:** Eastern Anatolia

**Excavation/Museum Details:** Unexcavated. Both coffins are reportedly from the Erzican area and now held in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara.

**Coffin Dimensions:** Not available.

**Handles:** Not available.

**Lid:** Not reported.

**Decoration:** Reported as having inscribed decoration on the side-strips.607

**Distinctive Features:** -

**Preservation:** Unknown.

**Burial Location Description/Context:** Unprovenanced.

**Orientation:** N/A.

**Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin:** N/A.

**Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains:** N/A.

**Animal Bones Present:** N/A.

**Objects inside Coffin:** N/A.

**Objects outside Coffin:** N/A.

**Additional Information:** -

**Date:** -

**Bibliography:** Museum of Anatolian Civilizations: Museum News no. 6 (July 1995); J. Curtis 2008, 167.

---

Appendix 3. Catalogue of Bronze “Bathtub” Coffins

Coffin 16 - Luristan Coffin

Region: Western Iran (Luristan, near Khorramabad)

Excavation/Museum Details: Unexcavated. Known only through a 2005 press report stating that a bronze coffin containing a body with a gold face mask had been found. No further reports have emerged.

Coffin Dimensions: Not available.
Handles: Not available.
Lid: Not available.
Decoration: Not available.
Distinctive Features: -
Preservation: Not available.
Burial Location Description/Context: Unprovenanced.
Orientation: N/A.

Number/Arrangement of Bodies in Coffin: One body with a gold face-mask, additional detail unavailable.

Additional Information Concerning Skeletal Remains: -
Animal Bones Present: N/A.
Objects inside Coffin: Not available.
Objects outside Coffin: N/A.
Additional Information: -
Date: Described as “Parthian era”.

Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Mecquenem, R. de. 1944 “Note sur les modalités funéraires Susiennes et leur Chronologie.” *RBibl* 52: 133–42.


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Shishegar, A. 2008. (In Persian) *Discovery of a Tomb Attributed to Members of King Shutur-Nahhunte Dynasty, son of Indid (or Indattu), Neo-Elamite III period (c. 585-539 BC)*, Institute of Archaeological Research, Ministry of Culture and Tourism Heritage. Tehran


Works Cited


Works Cited


Winter, I. J. 2000. “The Eyes have it: Votive Statuary, Gilgamesh’s Axe, and Cathected Viewing in the Ancient Near East.” In Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance:
Works Cited


Woolley, C. L. 1930. ‘Ur of the Chaldees’: *A Record of Seven Years of Excavation.* London: Ernest Benn Limited.


