(Re-)Constructing Funerary Rituals in the Ancient Near East
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(Re-)Constructing Funerary Rituals in the Ancient Near East

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Photo on the cover: The entrance to the Royal Hypogeum at Qatna with one of the ancestor statues (photo: Konrad Wita).
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Preface of the Editor of the Series

The present volume inaugurates a new sub-series of the University of Tübingen publication series Qatna Studien, which is entitled Qatna Studien Supplementa. While the main series is devoted to the publication of primary data and material from the University of Tübingen’s excavations at Tell Mishriq/Qatna, the sub-series is intended to present general and comprehensive research connected to the Tübingen Qatna Project. It will include the proceedings of workshops and conferences by, or in association with, the Qatna Project, as well as syntheses of various aspects of research at Qatna and comparative studies emanating from research problems at Qatna. The overall frame of these publications encompasses the cultures of Syria and its neighbouring regions in the second millennium B.C., but also with reference to the third and first millennia where it is reasonable for comparative or contrastive aspects.

The first volume fits closely into this framework. It presents the papers read at an international symposium held in Tübingen between 21st and 23rd of May, 2009. The conference entitled “(Re-)Constructing Funerary Rituals in the Ancient Near East” was organised by the University of Tübingen post-graduate school Symbols of the Dead (Sybole der Toten), which is linked to the Qatna Project and which addresses topics arranged around specific research problems emanating from the interpretation of royal burial data at Qatna. This international symposium was, in fact, the first of a series of three conferences organised by the post-graduate school Symbols of the Dead. The other two meetings – held in London in May 2010 and again in Tübingen in November 2010 – will soon be jointly published in one volume of the series “Contributions to the Archaeology of Egypt and the Levant” of the Vienna Academy of Sciences.

The Tübingen post-graduate school has the full title: Symbols of the Dead. Approaches of Archaeology, Natural Science and History of Religion to the Study of Funerary and Memorial Contexts in the Ancient Near East. This indicates that it implies an interdisciplinary approach to investigate graves and grave goods, and their symbolic values. The research of the school focuses on the cult of the dead (with particular reference to burial rituals), funerary banquets, ancestor cult, and on concepts of the netherworld. Methodologically, it extends from scientific investigations of materials from the Qatna royal tomb to broad discussions on the interpretation of ritual activities and funerary concepts in a regional and diachronic perspective. The aim of the post-graduate school is to enhance our understanding of concepts of death, the treatment of the dead, the burial rites, and the ancestral beliefs in the regions of Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia from the third to the first millennium B.C.

The post-graduate school started in April 2008 and was financed by the University of Tübingen until April 2011. The university initiated this kind of PhD network (“Promotionsverbund” or “Mini-Graduiertenkolleg”) in order to foster the education and career of young researchers at our university within three-year terms. Six PhD scholarships were granted in this period, each dedicated to a dissertation project in connection with the aims of the post-graduate school. The scholarship holders (2008 – 2011) were Panayiotis Androu, Stefan Heitmann, Tina Köster, Sarah Lange, Matthias Lange, and Katharina Tein. In addition, two members without university scholarship were included, Anne Wissing and Li Sang, who also write dissertations on related topics of burial rituals. The dissertation research topics were the following (abbreviated titles): a comparative study of burial and death rituals in 2nd mill. B.C. Syria (PA); the scientific analysis of metal artefacts as grave goods at Qatna (SH); the scientific analysis of stone vessels as grave goods at Qatna (TK); the funerary banquet of the 2nd mill. B.C. (SL); religious concepts of the treatment of the dead in 2nd and 1st mill. B.C. Syria and Palestine (ML); the ancestor cult in Syria in the 3rd and 2nd mill. B.C. (KT); 3rd and 2nd mill. B.C. burial practices at Tell Mozan in Northeastern Syria (AW); 3rd mill. B.C. burial practices in the Middle Euphrates Valley between Tell Banat and Gre Virike (LS).

The Tübingen post-graduate school Symbols of the Dead is jointly directed by Peter Pflaizner (professor of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at the IANES/ Institute for Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Tübingen University) as speaker of the school, by Herbert Niehr (professor of Old Testament and Ancient Oriental Religion at the Faculty of Catholic Theology and at IANES, University of Tübingen), and by Ernst Pernicka (professor of Archaeometry at the Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology at Tübingen University). They also jointly acted as supervisors of the schools’ dissertation projects.

The first international symposium held by the Symbols of the Dead post-graduate school, which forms the content of the present volume, was held for three days in the Tübingen Castle, where the IANES and the Institute of Prehistory are located. Its title

1 For more information see: http://www.promotionsverbundao.uni-tuebingen.de.
“(Re-)constructing funerary rituals in the Ancient Near East” reveals its aim to discuss how funerary rituals can be reconstructed from archaeological, philological and ethnographical data and how they were constructed both by the former societies and by modern scholars. The intention of this meeting was to bring together our young researchers of the post-graduate school and distinguished international scholars with a long-standing expertise in reconstructing funerary rituals. The young Tübingen scholars took the opportunity to publicly present and discuss their research for the first time, while the experienced invited scholars shared insights from their own investigations and engaged in critical discussions of the student’s projects and presentations. From the side of the post-graduate school Li Sang, Panayiotis Andreou, Anne Wissing, Sarah Lange, Tina Köster, Stefan Heitmann and Matthias Lange presented on their PhD research. As invited scholars we were happy and honoured to welcome Christoph Kümmel (Bonn), Alfonso Archi (Rome), Barbara Helwing (Berlin/Tübingen), Glenn Schwartz (Baltimore), Dominik Bonatz (Berlin), Candida Felli (Pisa), Antoine Jacquet (Paris), Behzad Mofidi Nasrabadi (Mainz), Priscilla Keswani (Princeton), Andrea Kucharek (Heidelberg), Steven Lundström (Berlin/Wien), Robert Wenning (Münster), Roland Hardenberg (Tübingen) and Marlies Heinz (Freiburg).

The topics of the lectures ranged from the third to the first millennia B.C. With regard to the third millennium, aspects of ancestor veneration in Ebla (Archi) and indications of extended funerary rituals in the regions of Northwestern Syria (Sang, Helwing, Schwartz) were addressed. A special focus lay on the second millennium, with contributions on the different stages of the burial process in Syria (Felli) and at Tell Mozan in particular (Wissing), on the funeral and ancestor cult at Mari (Jacquet), on funerary rituals in Palestine at Jericho (Andreou) and in Iran at Haft Tepe (Mofidi Nasrabadi). A look at Egyptian funerary rituals completed this comparative geographical survey (Kucharek). In addition, the funerary banquet at Ugarit was addressed (S. Lange) and a comparison of mortuary practices between Ugarit and Enkomi was drawn (Keswani). Furthermore, the results of scientific analysis on grave goods, i.e. stone vessels (Köster) and metal artefacts (Heitmann) from the Royal Hypogeum of Qatna were presented. Regarding the first millennium, presentations focused on images in death rituals of the Syro-Anatolian city states (Bonatz), the burial of the Assyrian kings (Lundström), the role of Phoenician burial stelae (M. Lange), and critical observations on the cult of the dead in Palestine (Wenning). General, supra-chronological contributions were dedicated to theoretical considerations on the ancestor cult (Teinz), to a discussion on the meaning of interments and grave goods (Kümmel), and, finally, to a view on funerals and memorials from an ethnological perspective (Hardenberg).

I am very grateful to both the students and the invited lecturers who submitted their contributions to be printed in this volume. Special thanks are due to Marlies Heinz (Freiburg), who enthusiastically accepted the responsibility of evaluating the conference and submitted her synthesis to be printed in this volume. Thanks are also due to Anne Wissing for taking the burden of assembling the volume and carrying out the editorial work and typesetting, assisted by Alice Bianchi. Marion Etzel and Olof Cannon have to be thanked for formal preparations and language-check of the manuscripts. The printing process was again facilitated by the smooth cooperation of the Harrassowitz printing house.

Our utmost thanks go to the University of Tübingen and its administrative institutions. The university not only fully financed our post-graduate school from 2008 to 2011, but also generously provided the necessary financial means to organise the international symposium and – jointly with the Unibund of Tübingen University – to print the proceedings of the conference.

Finally, I want to highlight the enormous contribution of the PhD students of our post-graduate school in organizing the 2009 international symposium. They carried out all preparatory, organisational and administrative steps, as well as the scientific planning of the conference in a perfect manner, demonstrating an extraordinary degree of independence and responsibility. They diligently cared for every single aspect of the conference: the selection of the speakers, the invitations, the programme, the travels and accommodations, the arrangement of the venue, the supporting programme, the receptions, and so on. Thus, the conference could never have been as successful and pleasant if it were not for the painstaking preparations, professionalism and enthusiasm of the PhD students.

Tübingen, August 2012
Peter Pfälzner