

---

The Rhetorical Function of Levantine Burial Practices  
During the Chalcolithic Period:  
Form Function, and Symbolism as a Pedagogical Tool

MOLINE TUCKER MALLAMO  
LEE HONORS COLLEGE  
UNDERGRADUATE HONORS THESIS  
SPRING 2020

---

# Introduction

- The Chalcolithic Period is known for its highly ritualistic mortuary behavior – includes secondary burial
- Many aspects of this mortuary behavior remains a mystery for archaeologists
- Why was this mortuary behavior so highly ritualized?
- My theory: rhetoric that uses symbolism to target a particular audience in order to facilitate understanding



# Abstract

This undergraduate honors thesis project explores the rhetorical implications of burial practices from the southern Levant during the Chalcolithic period. The purpose of this thesis is to expound upon research that has already been conducted in order to offer additional, and sometimes alternative, theories to what currently exists in the literature. I argue that the forms and functions of the burial techniques were used, at least partially, as “tools” to teach cultural and religious beliefs regarding life, death, and the afterlife to the individuals in the community. The inferred relationship between the materiality and symbology of these burial practices provides clues into the rhetorical lens through which these various artifacts were seen in their original contexts.

## Identity & Burial

- Caves in the northern region of Israel were more based on family lineage, whereas caves in the southern region were based on broader community ties
- Why? Multiple caves were used in the southern region for burial, whereas the north used singular, monolithic structures (caves) for burial
- Ossuary fragments were circulated in the south, but not in the north – reason?

# Fertility Motifs

- The Chalcolithic Levant was comprised of agrarian societies; fertility featured prominently because of a need for subsistence – clay donkeys laden with baskets appear in excavated burial sites like Giv'atayim and Azor
- Rims of ossuary jars were sometimes decorated with triangles, a symbol of femininity
- Jar rims are also seen as liminal spaces which were symbolic of the female reproductive system

# The Rhetorical and Symbolic Use of Clay

- Clay features prominently in many accounts of the creation of humankind
- Ancient Mesopotamian myths refer to humankind being “birthed” from clay, e.g., the myth of Namma, who kneads clay and places it in her womb to give birth to the first humans
- Later stories from the Levant tell of humankind being formed from clay by God

# Returning to the Earth

- Ossuaries were oftentimes placed in caves
- Caves were usually very difficult to access
- My interpretation: caves were seen as the womb of the earth? Going back to the earth would indicate a full cycle; humans came from the earth and so go back to it after death in order to be born yet again



A Chalcolithic burial cave in Peqi'in, Upper Galilee



## Rhetoric and Pedagogy?

- What was the purpose of this highly ritualistic behavior?
- What impact did this mortuary behavior have on members of the community?
  
- I argue that these rituals were designed to *teach* and pass on beliefs regarding life, death, and the afterlife

Thank You!



## Sources for Images

- Images:
- [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Levant](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Levant)
- [http://www.antiquities.org.il/site\\_Item\\_eng.aspx?id=68](http://www.antiquities.org.il/site_Item_eng.aspx?id=68)