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# Theorizing residential burial in Cajamarca, Peru: An understudied mortuary treatment in the Central Andes

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## ABSTRACT

The internment of individuals within domestic spaces, or residential burial, is common cross-culturally for sedentary societies around the world and has been noted by archaeologists and ethnographers. Here we provide a comparative synthesis of the literature on residential burial and present the interpretations that have been proposed by previous authors. We then focus on residential burial in Andean South America, where many disparate cases have been described for sites dating to the past nearly 10,000 years, but have not been examined as a whole. Finally, we present new data on residential burial from the Cajamarca highlands of northern Peru and contextualize these data with reference not only to other Andean cases, but also to the other interpretations presented. We suggest that the burial of very young individuals under domestic floors at the site of Yanaorco may be related to the their ages; these individuals had not yet achieved personhood in the community and therefore could not be buried in the traditional places alongside their ancestors and adult relatives. The living may also have sought to keep these young decedents close to home with the belief that the young possess a special connection to the dead and to the gods.

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## 1. Introduction

The interment of deceased community members within domestic spaces is ubiquitous throughout the Holocene. As soon as humans became partially or fully sedentary and created permanent domestic architecture, many communities practiced residential burial. Residential burial has been documented from sedentary and food-producing societies in Egypt (Stevens, 2009) and the Neolithic Near East (Andrews and Bello, 2006; Hodder and Pels, 2010; Kuijt, 2001; Kuijt et al., 2011), to Africa (DeCorse, 1992), East Asia (White and Eyre, 2011), North (Sullivan and Rodning, 2011), South (Bawden, 1996; Donnan, 1964; Donnan and Mackey, 1978; Nash, 2014; Quilter, 1989), and Mesoamerica (King, 2011; Manzanilla, 2002; McAnany, 1995, 2011). In the last several hundred years, residential burial has also been described for 19th century Europe (Durham, 1943), and both ethnohistorically and archaeologically at 18th century African slave communities in Jamaica and in West Africa (Armstrong and Fleischman, 2003; DeCorse, 1992). Despite an extensive literature on the social

meanings of mortuary practice cross-culturally, discussions of domestic burial and its relation to the living are scant, save a few exceptions (see Adams and King, 2011a and contents therein). Many archaeologists have reported on the presence of human burials in dwellings and under house floors in Andean South America, but these cases are relegated to description and a review of the subject has not been published (Nash, 2009). In this article, we aim to address this void. First, we present a synthesis of the most common interpretations for residential burial from the broad global literature. We then synthesize some of the published cases of residential burial from Andean South America and how they articulate with the prevailing interpretations. Finally we present a case study of residential interment from the Late Intermediate Period (AD 1000–AD 1465) site of Yanaorco in the Cajamarca highlands of Peru (Toohey, 2009, 2011, 2012) and attempt to contextualize it within the Andean literature and more broadly within the interpretive framework provided.

## 2. Residential burials: perspectives and interpretations

Alfred L. Kroeber (1927) was the first scholar to note burial within the household, mentioning the practice in Amazonia, northeastern South America, and Africa. A half of a century later,

Binford (1971) linked residential burial to age of the deceased with the observation that infants and children were often interred within private domestic spaces, while adults were interred in public contexts. More recent mortuary studies on residential burials have shifted focus to social memory and reproduction, social landscapes, and relations of power, with special emphasis on the relationship between the living and the dead, rather than the identity and status of the deceased (Adams and King, 2011a and articles within this issue; Nash, 2009; Parker Pearson, 2000; Silverman and Small, 2002). Here, we take the position that interring the dead within the domestic built environment provides the living with a daily, intimate, and direct connection to the deceased and we assume that this was intentional (after Adams and King, 2011b: 3). We utilize the term 'residential burials' to describe those "burials that occur within houses as well as burials in outdoor living areas, where everyday domestic activities occur and where a clear spatial relationship between the living area and the domestic structures exist" (Adams and King, 2011b: 3), potentially including graves in front of and adjacent to houses, burials in patios, and burials in domestic platform mounds. Dependent upon the specific case, the presence of a residential burial may or may not be shared or public knowledge beyond the limits of the inhabitants of the household. It may not even be visible or physically noticeable or marked. For example, a subfloor burial might not be more than a simple rise or depression in the floor of a room, so it is not displayed or performed in the same way that an above ground structure might be. In contrast, mortuary structures and spaces such as benches, or mounds, or dedicated mortuary rooms may visibly mark graves.

While the inclusion of the dead into the lives of the living unites different types of residential burial, considerable variability exists in the identity and treatment of the interred. Here we delineate the five most common interpretations of residential burial from comparative contexts; we emphasize that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive and there can be considerable overlap in the interpretations.

### 2.1. Sociopolitical stability

When residential interment is the predominant mortuary treatment, the practice has been linked to stability of the sociopolitical landscape (Parker Pearson, 2000: 86–87; White and Eyre, 2011:70). Following Childe (1945), Parker Pearson (1982, 2000) argues that the simpler, relatively low-cost practice of domestic burial is linked to periods of local political stability. More ostentatious mortuary displays were reserved for periods of social and political instability, when different parties were staking claims for legitimacy or control over local resources. In periods of sociopolitical competition, families, factions and communities might invest more labor in the construction of visible, public, mortuary monuments and related events in order to mark their claim to particular socially meaningful spaces. The shifts between these different mortuary treatments would be cyclical and archaeologically visible (Parker Pearson, 2000: 86–87; White and Eyre, 2011:70).

### 2.2. Identity and social roles

The patterning of residential burial may also pertain closely to a society's conceptualizations of personhood, identity, gender, age and social status. If residential burial follows social and political dynamics (a la Binford, 1971), then we might expect a clear delineation by sex or age in the spatial patterning of burials, such as what was found in late prehistoric and postcontact towns in the southern Appalachians of North America (Rodning, 2011; Sullivan and Rodning, 2011). While high status and senior males were emplaced in public buildings or mounds, women, particularly older women whose authority was tied to clan and household, were often interred within and adjacent to houses (Sullivan and Rodning, 2011). Here, residential burial is primarily reserved for adult females, especially accomplished ones, although not exclusively, and it reflects the political power and influence of women and of the households in these communities (Sullivan and Rodning, 2011). In Egypt, infants and fetuses were interred in households and archaeologists have speculated that this reflects the desire of kin to keep them close and assist them on their journey to the afterlife or that the liminal status of infants was a way for the living to communicate with the divine (Stevens, 2009).

### 2.3. Ancestralizing

Commemorating the dead within residential structures may have been a means of creating ancestors ('ancestralizing') to ensure the household's prosperity and reanimate the spirit of the deceased (McAnany, 1995, 2011: 136, 140). With this interpretation, residential burial depends upon the identity of the deceased and whether or not the deceased can become an ancestor, which is culturally specific and may be tied to age, gender, or social status, for example. In Oaxaca, King describes the residential burial of adults and hypothesizes that only adults could serve as ancestors, with specific access to rights, property, and services available to those individuals who had "true" social identity (King, 2011: 51). Since children had not attained social identity, they would usually be buried elsewhere. Under this interpretation, we would expect only those individuals who could become ancestors to be inhumed as residential burials, leaving a discernible bioarchaeological signature based on age, gender and perhaps social status.

### 2.4. Social memory

Since many scholars view the house as a locus of social memory (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Joyce and Gillespie, 2000; Hodder and Cessford, 2004), burial within the house is interpreted as another means of perpetuating a multi-generational social memory of the connections between the living and the dead and may also have legitimized the local descent group and its claim to a house or territory (Andrews and Bello, 2006; Byrd, 1994; Conlee et al., 2009; Gillespie, 2002, 2011; Grove and Gillespie, 2002; Hodder, 1990; Hodder and Cessford, 2004; Hodder and Pels, 2010; Isbell, 2004; Kuijt, 2001; Kuijt et al., 2011; Moore, 1985; White and Eyre, 2011: 59, 69). Many of these studies draw on the work of Connerton (1989) and are explicit in the connection between these archaeological households and the "house societies" defined by Lévi-Strauss (1982). In contrast, some scholars emphasize the role of residential burials in the creation of social memory for social cohesion and reproduction, rather than their role in asserting legitimacy (Adams and King, 2011b; Adams and Kusumawati, 2011).

For example, Armstrong and colleagues have documented house-yard burials immediately adjacent to domestic architecture in a Jamaican slave community and they suggest that burial was just as much a domestic function of this space as socializing, cooking, and gardening (Armstrong and Kelly, 2000:382; Armstrong and Fleischman, 2003). This practice was related to similar domestic burial patterns in West Africa (DeCorse, 1992), where the "presence of ancestors in the yard served to link the people to the community and the community to its past" (Armstrong and Fleischman, 2003: 58). While ancestralizing and social memory overlap, not all of the interpretations that invoke social memory and social reproduction also describe the creation of ancestors. Under this interpretation, residential burial is not exclusively to create ancestors nor is it contingent upon sociopolitical stability and scholars are unified in that residential burials create social