



Micromorphological study of the conversion of a PPNB stone house into a funerary area at Tell Qarassa (Leja, Sirya)

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Recent excavation of a PPNB stone house at Tell Qarassa (Leja, Sirya) has revealed an important change in the use of space following abandonment of the living structure. What used to be a house until c. 9.3 ka cal BP was converted into part of a larger funerary area after abandonment. Geophysical, geochemical and micromorphological analyses of the complete archaeological deposit have been combined with the distribution study of funerary structures at the site.

On these bases we can now propose a number of hypotheses regarding the ways in which early household agglomerations were converted from living to funerary purposes. The abandoned building initially became a depression delimited by stones, possibly used for occasional food processing activities and tossing. The abundance of building elements and human bones in secondary position, suggests that during this phase the depression was filled with stones from the walls and other materials found in proximity of the building to raise the level of its floor. It was only later that the abandoned delimited open space was reused as a funerary area. Most of the inhumated bodies (18 in all) found in primary position were buried along the stone walls, suggesting these were used to facilitate burial, and possibly reconnaissance/relocation of the various bodies. In contrast, this space seems to have been mainly dedicated to agriculture during the latest periods of sediment deposition and soil growth, although sparse superficial burials suggest that the space was occasionally used for inhumation until historical periods.

Based on sedimentological analyses, radiocarbon dating and the distribution of the buried bodies within the analyzed stratigraphical sequence we suggest the existence of at least two burial phases, after abandonment of the stone house. In this context, the regularization of the area inside the building, and traces of massive combustion could have been connected to the conversion (possibly ritual) of this portion of the tell from a living into an inhumation area. Our observations bring new lights on little explored aspects of early Neolithization, as the abandonment and conversion of early household agglomerations.