

The Materiality of Death: Bodies, Burials, Beliefs

Fredrik Fahlander & Terje Oestigaard (eds.)

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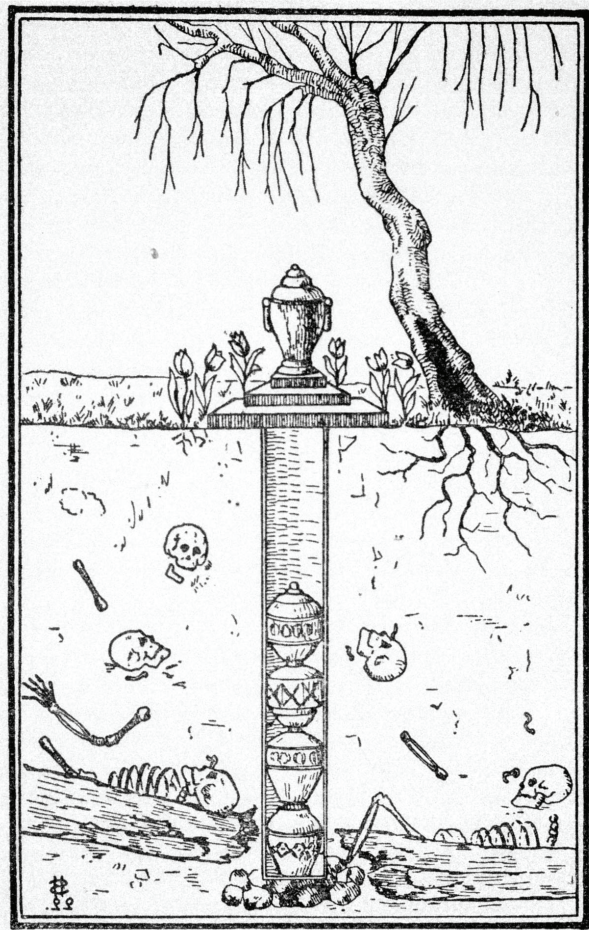
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Chapter 1

The Materiality of Death: Bodies, Burials, Beliefs

Fredrik Fahlander & Terje Oestigaard

The Importance of Death

Archaeology, as a humanist science studying the essence of humanity through history, is often faced with the ultimate expressions of humans' perceptions of themselves in society and cosmos: death. The archaeological record consists of innumerable testimonies of how humans in different cultures at various times have solved and given answers to the inevitable. Nevertheless, despite the fact that everyone will die and all humans face the same ultimate end, the solutions to this common destiny are as different and varied as there are traditions, cultures, beliefs and religions. Even to us, in our present modern and presumed enlightened society, death is still something unknown that cannot be perceived, visualised or represented (Bauman 1992:2f). Still, death and the knowledge that our time on earth is limited affect our choices in life in many ways. The importance of death in life is, of course, historically situated and can take many forms (cf. Ariès 1974, Walter 1994): One can be obsessed with the question of how to delay the soul from vanishing while the dead body is dissolving, or how to secure a safe journey of the soul to a proper afterlife. In modern western secular society, some respond to the inevitable fact of death by seeking to prolong life long enough to make their persona indefinite (Taylor 2003:28).

Indeed, death is an analytical entrance to humanity and humans' beliefs and perceptions of what matters most: life. The ideas of the essence of humanity as perceived by humans are manifested in death, and consequently, death highlights cultural values, morals and ethics apart from religious beliefs. Thus, death is more than just a question of the destiny of the deceased. Death lies at the bottom of all facets of humanity, and hence, it is a crucial factor in the development of societies (Parker Pearson 2001:203). "Death is the origin and centre of culture" (Assmann 2005:1) because death is not only threatening society (Hertz 1960, Goody 1962:26), but the solutions and responses to death are socially constitutive and formative for the future in a given society. Of course, death does not necessarily constitute a social problem, but might also offer other possibilities (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006). In a personal sense, death can be longed for, and even a relief for people in chronic pain. In a social sense, the death of the Other may open a social space and bring

about necessary social change. Moreover, the conceptions of death and the transformations of death into life and new social structures in society, together with beliefs of a life hereafter or realms where the ancestors are living or other transcendental states of being, are not merely spiritual or ideological, but they are materialised by the descendants and the living (fig. 1).

Death, Burial and the Grave

Burial archaeology, or the archaeology of death, is in many respects, not at least in popular beliefs, nearly synonymous with archaeology itself. Indeed, much of our data and material come from funerary contexts, and perhaps in reality we know more about death than of life in prehistory. It could even be argued that archaeologists are *too* occupied with death and burial, blind to the fact that we strive to develop representations or fictions of a living society. When Ian Morris worked with his thesis on Greek Iron Age burial customs he tried to explain to a neighbour, a researcher in modern history, what he worked with. When Morris described the nature of his research his neighbour looked confused and asked: "...what a lot of graves had got to do with history" (Morris 1992:xiii). Morris' neighbour's confusion is quite understandable from a layman's point of view, but to employ burial evidence in order to reconstruct or interpret past social structures, hierarchies, traditions, social identities, or sex/gender relations is seldom questioned by most archaeologists. This is a somewhat remarkable standpoint as making the switch from the realm of the dead to reconstruct the ways and ideas of the living may not be possible in many cases. Either way, any attempt to do so is bound to involve complex and intricate procedures. It is evident that excavating and analysing funerary contexts calls for some special methods and modes of reasoning in order to cope with the possibilities and constraints of complex burial data.

What a grave actually represents, how a burial is performed and by whom, and how we should interpret different properties and interments of a grave are complicated and difficult questions (fig. 2). Although there are a number of general approaches and theories which can be employed, we still need to recognise that



Fig. 1. Pieter Bruegel, *The Triumph of Death*.

there are no general rules that we can apply for all periods and areas (for discussion, see e.g., Parker Pearson 1999, Fahlander 2003). Still, there is surprisingly little explicit discussion of the most central concepts and aspects regarding death and burial in archaeology. Taylor addresses this phenomenon as the classical interpretative dilemma:

“Philosophers of science recognize the ‘interpretive dilemma’ in all attempts at archaeological explanation: in order to interpret something, I must have decided that there is something to interpret. Inevitably, by focusing on that something, I will have already formed some idea of what it is. I say I want to investigate the meaning of this or that burial, but I have already decided the most significant thing about it when I called it a ‘burial’. The possibility of understanding anything new and surprising is dramatically lessened” (Taylor 2003:37).

If we take a closer look at our most common conceptions we will find that our definitions sometimes restrain us from approaching our data in a less strict manner. For instance, a burial is generally understood as the result of a

series of ritualised practices performed in relation to death. In a similar sense a grave is generally considered as the place or container for a dead body. But how do cenotaphs and other bodily treatments and objects fit in this perspective? Nonetheless even though there seems to be a general way to dispose of the dead in most societies we frequently stumble across examples that are different and call for a more creative perspective.

Take, for instance, the Varna Burials in Bulgaria (c. 4500BC). About 25 percent of the graves at this site are empty, lacking the remains of a body. Nitra, in Slovakia, is another case that also contains numerous empty graves. Do these ‘cenotaphs’ represent individuals that have died far away, or perhaps at sea, leaving no body to be buried? Or do these empty ‘graves’ correspond to individuals that died an ‘unnatural’ death, or are they perhaps even statements for the socially, but not yet physically dead? (cf. Taylor 2003:236, 240). We can continue by question if a cenotaph, situated among other ‘proper’ burials, is more of a grave than a pit with remains of a dog buried together with grave goods?



Fig. 2. An illustration of a Viking Age cremation (Painting from the museum of Lindholm-Høije, Denmark).

At the Mesolithic site Skateholm, in Southern Sweden, more than 15 percent of the 87 graves contained buried dogs (see Fahlander in this volume). Burials of animals are often conceived in a similar way as cenotaphs, that is, the animals are assumed to represent something human (i.e., a shaman or a non-retrievable dead body). Taking these and similar cases into consideration, we may thus consider expanding our traditional conception of what a grave or a burial is and stop insisting that a dead human body needs to be involved. If we expand the notion of burial and grave beyond the human body we may also consider buried objects. Can we extend the definition of a grave to also include a final resting place for artefacts? Generally such buried materialities are classified as ritual or profane hoards, of which the first category has much in common with a burial (indeed, some dead bodies are disposed of in a similar way as hoards). The question is all about representation rather than symbolism. Ginsburg (2002:72) describes the case of a dead ruler that was buried twice at two different locations. One grave contains the body, while the other holds a material representation of the ruler. The interesting aspect of this case is that it was the grave with the representation that was considered the “real” one.

It may or may not be considered fruitful to relativise the concepts of death, grave and burial. For instance, Robert Chapman (1987:210) once argued that: “No progress towards these goals [a general theory and method of burial archaeology] will be made by negative, particularistic, cautionary tales drawn from ethnology.” It is nonetheless difficult to agree with Chapman and others

who strive for a general approach to death and burial in archaeology. One needs not to be a social constructivist or a post-modern deconstructionist to realise that the universal problem of death has an almost unlimited range of solutions. We may paraphrase Chapman and state that “No progress towards a deeper understanding of a particular place in prehistory can be made if drawn from stiff common-sense use of the concepts of death, grave and burial”.

The Materiality of Death

Priests in various religions often advocate theological explanations of life and consequently death, expressed in exegesis or recitation from sacred books emphasising the spiritual aspects of the body and being in earthly and divine realms. Such lofty religious perceptions and traditions are important because they influence culture and partly determine religion, but they fail to recognise one of the most fundamental aspects of death, namely its materiality. Whereas the beliefs in cosmological and transcendental spheres and what happens after death may be the same for everyone within a culture, religion or belief system, the way these ideas are understood and expressed by humans are material or involve material elements, and these materialities differ greatly within groups who believe in the same eschatological premises, consequences and Otherworldly realms. Thus, in order to understand death in society and religion, it is not sufficient turning to soteriology or eschatology as explained by priests or presented in sacred scriptures,

rather one has to emphasise *the materiality of death* in its many facets. Moreover, apart from exegesis and sacred scriptures, the beliefs or the places where these beliefs are acted out and transformed into rituals and practices are most often materialised in one way or another. Dialogues with the dead (e.g. Vitebesky 1993, Stylegar 1995) often take place in temples or sacred buildings and places where there are particular ritual objects which facilitate these interactions. Thus, both the places and media for dialogues with the dead have material properties, and spiritual interactions are often impossible without the materiality of death in a broad sense.

It is quite clear that the social world is not simply a matter of differently empowered individuals; people interact as much with materialities as they do with each other. The terminology is important here, and it must be stressed that the concept of materiality is not simply a variation of or synonymous to the concept of material culture. They share some similarities, but also some important differences. Whoever coined the term material culture is uncertain (Buchli 2002:2; Andrén 1997:135), but it is of lesser importance as the contents of the term vary between different research traditions as well as over time (Andrén 1997:151; Attfield 2000:35-41). In the dictionaries we find that material culture is generally defined as those objects manipulated or manufactured by humans. In some, but not all, features, biofacts and manufactures are also included. Without getting lost in details it seems safe to say that the concept of material culture comprises the results or leftovers from intentional and unintentional human practice. It is thus a one-way relationship: material culture is created by humans.

In recent years the term *materiality* has become increasingly popular in archaeology (DeMarrais, Gosden & Renfrew 2004; Tilley 2004; Fahlander & Oestigaard 2004; Miller 2005; Meskell 2005, Tilley *et al* 2006, Ingold 2007). There is nothing new or strange about certain terms that become popular in archaeological texts; for instance, during the 1990s it was almost impossible to find a paper that not contained terms like 'meaning', 'text' or 'context'. The problem with the newfound interest in the concept of materiality, however, is different. The term is just not a substitution for material culture, but embraces a greater variety of things and substances. In basic, the term materiality is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as: "the quality of being composed of matter; material existence; solidity; material or physical aspect or character". Such definitions may suffice for the *word* materiality, but the *social study of materialities* goes beyond such lexical definitions.

Post-processual archaeologists generally agree that material culture is *active*, but it is yet unclear what this really means. The active role of materialities in the social process seems not to be about their initiating and modifying agency, but rather about their presumed symbolic function. The general argument of post-processual or interpretative archaeology is rather that

material culture is active because it is "meaningfully constituted" (e.g., Hodder 1982:75; 1992:15). What is at stake here is that materialities can be social in other ways than as symbols loaded with meaning. Things and matter may have an almost determining effect on people. One can be constrained or triggered by objects and features, consciously or unconsciously. They may be produced or appropriated with specific intentions and yet influence future actions in an unpredictable way. Indeed, some objects are indispensable for a typical way of social life. Materialities also constitute nodes and steer appropriate or necessary movement within a site. Such a concentration of movement within a limited array of paths certainly affects the numbers and forms of social encounters, and in that way surely have an agglomerated effect of making contact surfaces smaller in number and smaller in size. The built-up environment is as much an active generator of social behaviour as it is constituted by it. Houses, buildings and the local setting of a hamlet or a small village function on different scales as nodes for repetitive action, owing to their inertness and resistance to change (Sartre 1991, Østerberg 1998:29f). Material objects and other fluid or solid matter thus have a *potential* of being active in the sense of stimulating, prompt or determining social action (cf. Gell 1998, Knappet 2002; see examples in Fahlander 2003:57ff, in press).

We may thus define the concept of materialities as those material objects and things that are involved in and variously influence social development. That means that there can be no clear-cut boundaries between so called natural objects and culturally modified objects. Materialities can involve a great variety of things, from artefacts, the landscape, layout and material of buildings and settlements, to trees and vegetation, animals, bodies and less evident material matters such as rain, ice and snow. What is socially significant, and to which degree, is thus something that need to be of concern in each given case. One special category of materialities that may suffice to clarify the distinction between the two concepts is the human body. There may be some that actually include the human body in the concept of material culture, but the majority would probably not see it that way. The body is, however, often an important materiality that has great effect on the outcome of social practice. The body as an actant has very little to do with the individual or person, but emphasises the appearance and bodily constitution in the process of subjectivation and categorisation as well as in practical ways of getting certain tasks done. Corporeal aspects such as body posture, sex, age, and variations in hair and skin colour are well documented aspects that certainly have great effect on the individuals' possibilities to do things as well as how they are valued and apprehended by others (Fahlander 2006a). Thus, approaching the material aspects of death has to be an inclusive and incorporative approach which aims to address the totality and the complexity of relations of the dead and the living.

Regarding studies of death, Metcalf and Huntington (1993) pointed out in their *Celebrations of Death* that archaeologists have made significant theoretical contributions (ibid:15), partly because a major part of the archaeological record consists of mortuary remains. Thus, the materiality of death has always been an archaeological source to interpretations and theoretical developments. “The Materiality of Death” has been emphasised by Meskell and Joyce (2003) who analysed Egyptian and Mayan death rituals, but otherwise the material dimension of death has rarely been made explicit. This is somehow natural consequence in anthropology which has a living empirical material (even in death) where it is possible to interview the descendants, participate in the funeral and observe the ancestral rites (e.g. Bloch & Parry 1987, Metcalf & Huntington 1993). In archaeology, the empirical data are material, but this fact has more been an implicit premise than a point of departure for theoretical elaboration with regards to the particular characteristics “a materiality of death” can contribute to archaeology in general and death studies in particular (e.g. Brown 1971; Chapman *et al* 1981; O’Shea 1984; Parker Pearson 1999; Arnold & Wicker 2001, Taylor 2003, Fahlander 2003, Oestigaard 2004a).

Although burials are within the sphere of beliefs transcending earthly and social categories, the archaeology of death tends to interpret funeral remains predominantly in terms of sex, age, and status. However, the important questions of what burials signify and represent in any given case cannot be regarded as being either socially or religiously determined. Neither is it sufficient to simply employ correlations between grave elements and interments in relation to the deceased without considering intra-cultural diversity (diachronic and synchronic variation). Hence, the materiality of death includes most aspects which are concerned with bodies, burials and beliefs, replacing a strict theological analysis of the meaning of death with an archaeological focus on materialities which “consider the implications of the materiality of form for the cultural process” (Miller 1994:400). This is because death is as much a social as it is a religious process, and both of these processes are material and they are actively materialised by the descendants.

Thus, there is a need to discuss and explore other ways of dealing with burial data. By discussing the materiality of death we wish to elaborate the following issues: 1) the materiality of the body – the decaying corpse, 2) the materiality of practice – the rituals, 3) the materiality of the interments – personal belongings and grave-gifts, 4) the materiality of the memory – the monument, 5) the materiality of social change – hierarchies and heritage, 6) the materiality of age, sex and gender, and 7) the materiality of eternity – ancestors and the Otherworld.

The Materiality of the Body: The Decaying Corpse

Death is material by its very nature. Defining death is difficult since it often involves ideas of a soul or other spiritual entities which are believed to continue existing and living in various metaphysical realms, however there is a universal aspect which characterises death: the corpse. The absence of life is physical, material and real; it is a dead body. It is this primary materiality of death which triggers human responses to the inevitable, and all funerals in one way or another solve the problem of the decaying corpse. Thus, the flesh of the dead body, which often is invested with cosmological meaning, requires a special and particular treatment by the descendants if the deceased shall reach the preferable divine or cosmological realms which are believed to exist within a given society or religion.

The treatment of the dead body normally includes two ritual processes; first is the initial preparation of the corpse by washing or anointing the body with oils or other substances such as perfumes or ochre (see Zagorska, this volume) and second, the disposal of the corpse. The first ritual process, which often involves purification rites (e.g. Oestigaard 2005), is difficult to trace in mortuary remains, but sometimes there are evidences of such practices. In a cremation at Winterslow in Britain a small pile of human eyebrow hairs from more than one individual were found together with a bronze razor. This indicates that during the funeral there was some kind of mutilation of the human body (Barrett 1994:123), but it is uncertain whether the eyebrow hairs were from the deceased or not, however at least one or several of the mourners have shaved parts of their body in the funeral, probably as part of a purification process which may have included a ritual shaving of the deceased. Ethnographically, the preliminary preparation of the dead body usually involves washing or some kind of ablutions which purify the deceased, which is a necessary precondition for the successive funeral rites. There might be other rituals before the disposal of the body that are more difficult to detect, although in numerous grave contexts there are remains of huts or enclosures which indicate that there has been a liminal period where the living conducted rituals before the dead were finally buried or cremated (see Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006).

It is generally common practice to make a sharp distinction between the living subject and the dead object. This is, however, not necessarily always true. The dead can very well continue to be individuals, or even agents, after death (see Gansum and Fahlander, this volume). It is also questionable to view the dead body as a single constant materiality. In some societies the *process* of the dead body, from being cold to stiff, to decayed and swollen by gases, to the dissolving of soft tissue where only the bones remain, is considered an important one, of which some stages require certain practices or rituals. The

dead are often regarded as unfriendly and possible hostile entities (Fuchs 1969), but the dead body does not necessarily need to be regarded a cadaver or horrible object (Nilsson Stutz, this volume). It may be highlighted, venerated or simply trashed like any other broken object (Fahlander 2008b).

The two most common ways to dispose of corpses are inhumation and cremation, but there are many other ways of disposing of a corpse within a religious or cosmological context. Air-burials and sea-burials have frequently been performed, but the flesh may also be 'smoked', 'roasted' or 'toasted' (e.g. Oestigaard 2000a), or it may be eaten as part of an endo-cannibalistic practice (Hertz 1960, cf. Taylor 2003:14, 57). Regardless of which treatment the flesh is given, the problem of the decaying materiality of the corpse is solved and ritually transformed because a mere human cadaver is in opposition to cultural and religious values as well as a threat to life in other existences. Hence, a funeral as a social and ritual practice prepares and transforms the flesh of the deceased whether this preparation involves consumption by fire (cremation), preservation of the flesh (mummification), fast or slow destruction of the body (air-burial or inhumation), or other forms of body treatments (Oestigaard 2004b).

The Materiality of Practice – The Rituals

The literature concerning ritual, its purposes and functions is vast (e.g. van Gennep 1960, Turner 1967, Bell 1992, 1997, Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994, Rappaport 2001). However, it has been more difficult to detect rituals archaeologically, and 'ritual' or 'ritualistic' is often applied to practices which we do not understand or of which we cannot make sense (Insoll 2004a). This is not satisfactory and thus it is necessary to trace and analyse the material manifestations and remains of religious practices and rituals (Insoll 1999, 2001, 2004a, 2004b) because although studies of beliefs and eschatology are complex, the material implications of an archaeology of religion are profound and can encompass all dimensions of material culture (Insoll 2004b).

Ian Morris once stated that: "A burial is a part of a funeral, and a funeral is a part of a set of rituals by which the living deal with death" (1992:2). It follows that, although there often are connections with ordinary life, ritual ought to be analysed through a religious spectre and not from a social one. This standpoint has dominated Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian archaeology for the last two decades, but is lately being questioned. For instance, Bell (1992) argues that the concept of ritual, religion and myth often are loaded with modern western Christian contents and concepts which have little or no relevance to prehistoric situations and even other contemporary societies (see Oestigaard & Kaliff, this volume). Insoll (2001:10) hints that ritual and religion are often related in complex webs with the material and the social context.

Just recently, Richard Bradley (2005) has pointed out how archaeologists often are blind to the many circumstances where ritual and profane are mixed rather than being exclusive.

Most archaeologists would probably concur that burials are mainly an outcome of specific rituals. Mortuary variability suggests that such rituals can have multiple material effects, that is, that the material outcome of rituals varies. The importance is hence to address the close relationship between performed practice and the material effects and remains. In many cases we are dealing with multiple rituals, each with typical material traces, or perhaps different rites are employed for different groups or categories of individuals. Rituals are thus likely to change over time, although the alterations may not be recognised by all participants. One example is the Stone Age grave field of Ajvide on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. The burial area expanded from the north to the south and it was possible to discern four different phases of burials with quite different accent on ritual over a period of a few hundred years. If all burials were grouped together as a whole under the cultural umbrella 'Pitted ware culture', these differences would have been masked and rendered invisible. Indeed, the material culture did not change much during this period of use at Ajvide, but analysed in terms of phases a number of inter-cultural changes in rituals and attitudes to death and dead bodies could be established (Fahlander 2003, 2006b).

Although beliefs are spiritual or ideological in essence, in practice they often materialise in rituals, albeit there are numerous rituals which are impossible to trace in the material culture such as prayers, dances etc. Nevertheless, following Pierre Lemmonier, who has focused on the social representations of technology, some rituals are possible to trace as technological activities (Gansum 2004a, Goldhahn & Oestigaard 2007). Lemmonier emphasises that technological activities 'always bring into play a combination of four elements: matter on which an action is directed; objects ("tools" or "means of work", including the human body itself); gestures and movements organized in operational sequences; and a specific "knowledge", conscious or unconscious, that may be expressed or not' (Lemmonier 1989:156). The materiality of rituals where they are parts of technological processes is particularly evident in death and the construction of mounds. A mound, for instance, is constructed by a series of intentional actions, and it is possible to analyse the purposes of the different strata. Since the constructions of mounds are crucial in those funerals which employ such monuments, one may expect that the way this is done is not coincidental but that the participants constructed the mounds based on religious and ritual principles, and hence, it is possible to follow these ritual sequences. The construction of huge grave-mounds was a very time consuming process, which could last for at least five years (Olivier 1999). The construction itself was a part of the funeral rite, which the

stratigraphy often bears witness to because mounds were not accidental heaps of earth and turfs, but meticulous constructions with different layers containing remains of fire, burnt human bones, ceramics, food offerings, huts, totem poles, etc. In some cases the mounds were ritual arenas where rites were conducted and subsequent rituals took place for a long period of time. Hence, it is possible to de-construct the ritual scenario and trace rituals through sequences in the stratigraphy, which contain distinctive material remains of practices (Gansum 2004b, 2004c, Gansum & Oestigaard 1999, 2004, Gansum & Risan 1999).

“By a de-construction of a mound into different rituals or actions within stratigraphic sequences, faces and time-sequences, it is possible to illuminate some of the practices and religious perceptions of the past. Each stratigraphic unit from the bottom to the top of the mound represents a distinctive and special ritual practice with its own meanings, prescriptions and performances” (Gansum & Oestigaard 2004:69).

Thus, one may follow and analyse the internal ritual sequences of a funeral through the stratigraphy of a burial and the different ritual practices which have been performed in a time sequence. Moreover, apart from the construction of the monument itself, a fundamental part of the funeral rites consisted of rites where the descendants gave gifts to the deceased. Although rituals per definition are intentional (albeit not necessarily understood by all participants), rituals concerning death and burial can still bring about a number of unintentional or unforeseen results. One interesting case is the Late Bronze Age cremation urn burials of Cottbus, Germany (Gramsch 2007). Through careful excavation of the contents of the urns it was possible for the researchers to understand that the fragments of burned bone were actually deposited in correct anatomical order (i.e., feet down and head up). These data suggest that the body was re-assembled again after the cremation - or perhaps that the way of picking up bones was highly ritualised (always beginning with bones at the ‘foot-end’ of the remains of the cremation pyre picking up remains successively). Of course, further and more precise studies of the data can probably indicate that one of the scenarios is more probable than the other, but the case nonetheless emphasises the need for both creativity and caution in studies of ritual.

The Materiality of the Interments: Personal Belongings and Grave-Gifts

During the funeral a large quantity of material objects are necessary both for the actual performance of the ritual and for the successful outcome of the rite. Although it is difficult to identify the inventory which was used by the descendants in the funerals as ritual equipment unless they are left in the grave (which would then be difficult to distinguish from other grave-gifts), there are two

categories of artefacts usually described as “grave-goods” which we find archaeologically; the deceased’s body items such as clothes and jewellery on the one hand, and grave-gifts on the other hand. These two categories are not absolute and may overlap since there are prescribed cultural and religious norms for how the deceased can appear in death during the funeral and what might be given as gifts to the dead. The deceased might be cremated or buried naked or with a certain type of clothing, from a simple blanket covering the body to the most costly and elaborate outfits which the deceased wore when he or she was alive. Or the funeral clothes may have had to be new and unused for the last rite and in some cases particular clothing has been prescribed which is only used for funerals. The personal items following the dead such as jewellery or weapons will always be a selection of his or her possessions, and hence, the descendants choose those objects which were mandatory or preferable for the fulfilment of the rite in accordance to cultural, ritual and religious norms.

Still, the distinction between personal items and other things placed beside the body is important. In the previously referred to example of Ajvide, it was possible to conclude that the eight cenotaphs never included a human body. They are almost identical to the ‘normal’ graves at the site in respect to shape of the grave pit, grave-gifts, orientation etc, but with the exception that none of them contained any pierced seal-teeth or hollow fowl-bone which was associated with personal adornments of dress (Fahlander 2003). In general, intentionally deposited materialities in the grave have been seen to mirror or represent the dead individual’s social persona. Binford (1971), building on Saxe (1970), explicitly formulated the theory that the wealth in graves corresponded to the deceased’s social identity and position in life. In some cases this will reflect the actual situation, but it neglects the participants’ ritual obligations and restrictions; not everyone is allowed to perform all parts of the rituals or be in a position to give any kinds of gifts to the deceased. The living participants may therefore be separated into two categories, the mourners and the opposites, because their roles in the ritual are radically different (Kas 1989:125). This implies that there are different groups of actors involved in a funeral with defined roles, which prescribe and limit their ritual commitments and possible participation (cf. Fahlander 2003, 2006b).

Hence, the objects following the dead either as personal objects or gifts may relate to different social relations various persons and groups had with the living. The first and primary group is generally assumed to be the descendants and closest family. In Hindu tradition the widow disposes off all her jewellery she received from her husband during their wedding if he died before her, and she marks her new social and derogatory social status by placing her jewellery on her husband’s chest on the cremation pyre. Hence, the gifts to the deceased are not only his or her personal belongings, but also objects



Fig 3. The old man Tei Tetuna by his grave, which he constructed for himself. Tei Tetuna had no one to bury him when he died and had a cist ready in his hut to crawl into when his time came. The bronze cross on top of the cist was a gift from a missionary. Whether Tei Tetuna was a Christian is uncertain (Heyerdal 1974:275).



Fig. 4. The pyramids at Giza. Photo: Terje Oestigaard.

which mark the descendant's new social status (Oestigaard 2000b, Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006). Thereafter will different persons and groups such as more distant relatives, villagers and acquaintances with various social and economic relationships pay their respect and perform their parts of the ritual in accordance to the existing hierarchies and prescribed norms. We need, however, to also be open to other scenarios in which only one or a few actually knew what happened to a dead body after the point of death. The intermediate phase between death and burial may be hidden from the major part of the population. Even the burial procedure itself can be a matter only for a few, excluding even the next of kin.

It can thus be a bit difficult to see how we can possibly relate meaning and cosmology to the practices of the disposal of the dead. There may be multiple layers of relations, for instance, one for the living and one for the dead. There may also be a third layer for the intermediate phase between death and actual burial. These different systems may or may not be reflected or related to each other. At least, they ought to be parts of a way of thought, that is, if we assume that death is always meaningful and that all individuals have access to what happens to the dead. Hence, by separating 'grave-goods' into different groups and spheres of social relations the living had with the dead, the materialisation of death extends beyond the dead to the social relations of the living (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006, Fahlander 2006b).

The Materiality of the Memory – The Monument

It has often been said that 'the dead do not bury themselves' (e.g., Bradley 1989), something that is not necessarily totally true (fig 3). However, cases in which the deceased had 100% control over what happens with the mortal remains after death are few, although some people seem to have had quite a great deal to say about the burial and burial act (e.g., Fahlander 2003). Notwithstanding the differing degree of involvement in one's own burial, it is safe to say that the largest archaeological monuments ever made in history are 'monumental memories' (Brown 1998:79) of the dead, which were intended or believed to last for eternity. Although religion is spiritual in essence, "ideology needs architecture for its fullest expression" (Kemp 2006:248), which includes both the manifestation of religions as well as manifestations of social order and hierarchies, which transfer the divine and cosmic order and laws to profane spheres. Thus, apart from eschatological beliefs, the most important religious ideas with cosmological consequences for people's future on earth are materialised, of which the materiality of death in general and funeral monuments in particular are the most splendid, extravagant and colossal.

There are different ways in which to materialise and monumentalise eschatological beliefs, and archaeo-

logically the Pharaonic mortuary cult in ancient Egypt was a watershed in Egypt and world history (fig. 4). The building of pyramids started at the beginning of the 3rd Dynasty during the reign of Djoser (ca. 2650 BCE). Djoser built a six-step pyramid 62,5 metres high. During the reign of Sneferu, the first king of the 4th Dynasty (ca. 2625-2585 BCE), new impulses and ideas emerged. Sneferu constructed three major and two minor pyramids, which together contained more cubic metres of stone than the Great Pyramid of his son Khufu (ca. 2585-2560 BCE). Khufu's pyramid is the world's largest pyramid; the sides are 230,37 metres and the height originally measured 146,59 metres. His successor Khafre (ca. 2555-2532 BCE) built the second largest pyramid at Giza. The development of the pyramids was a colossal statement of divine kingship. Three generations in the 4th Dynasty did the bulk of pyramid building, and later the pyramids became smaller and more standardised. From the Old Kingdom (ca. 2675-2130 BCE) 21 of the 23 major pyramids stand like sentinels in a 20-km stretch, including those at Giza (Lehner 1997:14-15).

Although monumental structures were built earlier than the Egyptian pyramids, monumental architecture has never witnessed a more intensive materialisation of death than what took place within some few centuries in Egypt almost five thousand years ago. However, regardless of the mere size of the monumental memories, the importance of materialising death and the dead in these ways puts the emphasis on the monuments as places of divine and cosmological interaction which facilitates that the dead become ancestors or takes place in heavenly realms and that the ancestors, gods or divine powers intervene among humans on earth or in this worldly sphere. The monuments are as much for the living as they are for the dead and the gods because they work and function in society. Through the monuments and ritual practices some humans attain divine legitimacy and become the gods themselves on earth.

Architecture gives shape to space because monuments of the past integrate the past and the present, and buildings are primarily the context of life (Gadamer 1997:134). The Monumentality is eternal because it transcends death and seems to have escaped time (Lefebvre 1997:139). "A spatial work (monument or architectural project) attains a complexity fundamentally different from the complexity of a text, whether prose or poetry...what we are concerned with here is not text but texture" (ibid:140). Hence, the materiality of monuments conveys different meanings of death, life and power than those presented in sacred texts. Materiality matters, and "the actions of social practices are expressible, but not explicable, through discourse: they are, precisely, *acted* – and not *read*" (ibid, original emphasis). In consequence, a religion materialised in monuments differs in essence and function from the same religion presented in written sources. Although the monuments are allegedly for the dead, their main role is for the living.

The Materiality of Social Change: Hierarchies and Heritage

Hegel wrote once that history is the record of “what man does with death” (Whaley 1981:1). Death creates society. Geertz has argued that a state funeral “was not an echo of a politics taking place somewhere else. It was an intensification of a politics taking place everywhere else” (Geertz 1980:120). Political rituals construct power and they are elaborate and efficacious arguments about power and how it is made. Display and even destruction of material wealth is one of the most prominent strategies within the frame of political rituals. Divine legitimacy is established through rituals since social and political order normally is seen as coming from divine sources (Bell 1997:129). Following Geertz;

“The state cult was not a cult of the state. It was an argument, made over and over again in the insistent vocabulary of ritual, that worldly status has a cosmic base, that hierarchy is the governing principle of the universe, and that the arrangements of human life are but approximations, more close or less, to those of the divine” (Geertz 1980:102).

Hence, although the dead is the alleged focus point of the funeral, the social changes and establishment of new hierarchies are often the most important outcomes of funerals, which directs the focus from the dead to the living (Fahlander 2003, Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006). The descendants and the living may have had their own interests and agendas. Those who built big monuments, controlled them, and then “the past was a cultural womb” (Kemp 2006:69) for the future and successive hierarchies. Death concerns not only the dead, but often more important, the living, who use the dead as a necessary and inevitable means for social change and recreation of society and hierarchies. It must be pointed out, however, that seldom are there any direct links between the life of the living and the way in which they dispose of their dead. Social differentiation in a society may look quite different than the materialisation of it (Leach 1979:34).

It may thus be questionable if burials are the best source of approaching social structure and stratification. O’Shea (1996:vii) argues that despite 20 years of refining and applying the Binford-Saxe approach, surprisingly little substantial has emerged. O’Shea argues that the focus has been too narrow, while emphasising questions of rank and ethnicity. There are so many different ways in which we may try to discern social distinctions through burial data and unfortunately some of them are not compatible with each other, which may lead to contradictory results. For instance, one may choose to find differences in variation of different things (number of artefact types), the weight of precious substances, the quantity of objects and their quality in terms of handicraft. And, of course, we must consider the possible importance of perishable materialities that may not be recoverable. To these aspects we also may add spatial differentiation or

substantially different burial construction. It is not above all doubt that we find the chief or big man in the greatest tomb and the most despised without ‘proper’ burial. One interesting example is the huge Bronze Age burial cairn of Kivik in southern Sweden. Due to its exceptional size and monumental appearance it has since the 19th century been believed to be the grave of a powerful chief. However recently performed osteological analyses and C14 determinations prove that theory wrong. It turned out that the chamber of the cairn hosted four to five different individuals, all in their early teens except for one adult. The carbon determinations also reveal that the individuals were deposited on at least three different occasions (c. 1400-1200, 1200-1000 and 900-800BCE). Interestingly is the adult individual who was the only one buried during the last phase and hence has little to do with the construction of the monument (Goldhahn 2005:224-54).

This leads to a paradox in social sciences which are mainly concerned with structural and societal change (e.g. Bourdieu 1990, Giddens 1984). Most analyses of social structures and changes place the emphasis on the most static aspects of society, that is, when people are alive. In general, the fastest, most drastic and lasting changes take place when a person dies because the social and political vacuum of the deceased has to be filled and society restructured regardless whether it is kings or commoners who have died. The deceased’s rights and duties have to be reallocated, which involve two aspects of the materiality of death. One is the recreation or allocation of power and social identities which can legitimately be done as part of the funeral or by materialising monuments which give hierarchies authority; the other is the reallocation of the material heritage and wealth in itself, and often these two are combined in the actual funeral rite.

The transmission of material heritage can take place *post mortem* or *pre mortem*, but the important is that it occurs within the total context of intergenerational transmissions (Goody 1962:273-280). Inheritance includes both sexual rights (access to wives and lineages) and physical properties. The living gains the dead person’s properties (ibid:311) for the better or worse, which also include debts, social obligations and asymmetrical power relations. Social aspects may therefore be emphasised in funerals because they are the outcome of the rites. On the one hand, the funerals re-define social relationships and reaffirm certain relationships of exchange (Strathern 1981:206), but on the other hand, death may also be used to challenge the continuity of former relationships. Hence, the materiality of death is an active medium by which the social structure is transferred, restructured, reallocated or even challenged, and monuments which represent the memories and authority of the dead are an effective means in this process.

The classic question of how to relate the particular and the general, or in social terms, the individual practices and the general normality, is a tricky one. Can we discern

the “norm” from the “queer” proper and how do we deal with ‘inter-cultural’ variability? One example that tries to come to grip with this issue is Chapman’s (2000) analysis of burials in later Hungarian prehistory. He argues that burial analyses are generally “heavily under-theorized”, especially concerning agency-structure relations (ibid:162). Chapman’s approach is in some respects similar to microarchaeology (Fahlander, in this volume) as he argues for detailed analysis of smaller groups of graves within a cemetery rather than analysing cemeteries as closed entities. In this way, Chapman wants to illuminate differences between local *microtraditions* and regional structures and norms (ibid:28). The local is not simply a reflection of the global or vice versa; small-scale actions can form microtraditions which are related to general structure/culture (ibid:69). The global structure is thus a ‘post-hoc etic statistical summary’ of a variety of local microtraditions (i.e. agencies). By contrasting a general and a particular analysis of the same material (burials of the Hungarian Copper Age), Chapman finds great variability locally between “households” but also general trends of global structures. Chapman seeks to show how global structures are actually results of “emic decision-making”, that social actors actually are the “creators” of their “culture specifics” by their active decisions and by their daily practices (ibid:161). Another approach to such complexes is through the concept of “death myths” (see Kristoffersen & Oestigaard, this volume) where each funeral is specifically designed and composed of different myth-themes which will secure for the deceased and the descendants the best possible cosmic outcomes.

The Materiality of Identity – Age, Sex & Gender

It is no surprise that burial studies foster questions of social identity. When we excavate graves we actually meet our foregoers, or what is left of them, and it is not strange that this encounter should evoke questions of who he or she once was. As discussed above, it is not an easy task to use burial data to reconstruct societal or individual identities. The dead are buried by others and there might be great differences in their view of the deceased and that of others. An individual identity is also generally a complex issue of varying situated roles and identities that transect each other in time and space. It is thus never certain that it was the individual’s profession or status that was considered most significant. The only truly individual materialities left in a grave are the deceased’s own bones. From a material perspective of burial it is thus difficult to speak in terms of gender and social status when the data only provides us with estimations of sex, height and age, and in special cases information on nutrition, diseases and possible cause of death (Russel 2004). One category of graves that illustrates the problem of social identity is the one of children. In archaeology, children’s graves have generally been displaced and neglected, and often regarded as insignificant. The lack of

care and grave interments in child burials are often taken as evidence of their low status or that the parents do not want to be attached too much emotionally before they have passed the most critical stages. But many graves of children are quite plentiful, in fact containing too many artefacts, which shatters the image of burial goods as representing the buried individuals profession and status. We can, for instance, consider those graves that contain tools that are too big for a small child to use. How do we explain that? A popular explanation is that dead children may inherit the prestige of the father and consequently be buried as if the child was an adult. Others have instead argued that such items may have been meant to be used by the child later on in its life ‘on the other side’. Child burials are a fascinating social category to explore because they make us look differently at familiar material. Most researchers agree that the category of children and the concept of childhood are diffuse and varied, changing through time and space as well as horizontally between sex, class and ethnicity. If we want to discuss ‘children’ in prehistory we need to do that in relation to adults and recognise that any category of age need to be analysed in relation to other social variables such as sex, class, corporality (bodily-mental) and ethnicity (cf. Heywood 2001:4-7, Fahlander 2008a).

An interesting study that does take the complex relations between age status and sex seriously is Nick Stoodley’s analysis of an Anglo-Saxon (400-600 AD) burial field (Stoodley 2000). His general perspective on burials is rather simple; he asserts that the function of the burials were to signal the position the deceased had in each household. This assertion allows him to identify a number of social thresholds of the life cycle that also reveal some differences between the sexes. Among the boys the presence of spears in the grave is the main signifying attribute of the first two stages. Spears are generally found among individuals older than the age of 3-4 (1st threshold), but it is first around 10-14 years of age (2nd threshold) that the majority of boys are buried with a spear. Related to the spears are knives, which are not present among boys younger than 3 years. The third threshold in a boy’s life cycle is reached by the age of 20-25 when they are buried with a ‘warrior-kit’ consisting of two or more weapons. The female children seem to reach similar stages in life, but differ in some respects in relation to the boys. The first threshold for girls is reached at the age of 5, and is symbolised by a single broach. The second threshold occurs at the age of 10-12, which corresponds to the one of the boys. At this stage, the child is buried with two or more broaches along with an increasing number of pearls. The third threshold also differs from the boys and is reached by the age of late teens. Now the females are buried with a full kit of jewellery, keys etc. Unfortunately, not all burial grounds are suited for this kind of elaborate analysis as very few contain both well preserved bones and a sufficient amount of interments or grave properties for analysis. However, as a methodological approach, Stoodley’s analysis is nonetheless inspiring.

The Materiality of Eternity – The Ancestors and the Otherworld

The materiality of death is not limited to the dead, their personal belongings, monuments and heritage, but it also includes their memory, powers, blessings, everlasting return and dialogues as well as the very physical properties of the places they inhabit in the Otherworld, which may have material correlates or actual presence in this world. Ancestors and spirits possess particular qualities from which the living may benefit or be harmed, and which cause a topography of death materialised in this world.

Cemeteries, temples and sacred places. The dead are often believed to live at the cemetery in a shadow existence in parallel with a life in other realms. Some persons have been unable to cross to the other side and live as ghosts and malignant spirits haunting the living; others rest peacefully in their grave, but ethnographically, cemeteries are generally seen as dangerous places which the living avoid. A common belief is that the dead are not dead, but they are alive, although not as a fully fledged human being, but nevertheless real and present (see Gansum, this volume). Thus, the dialogues and interactions with the dead may take different forms (see Gee, this volume). The living may interact with their ancestors for the benefit of the family or lineage, the descendants may conduct further rituals which will enable the deceased to finally cross to the Otherworldly realms if something went wrong during the funeral, or the living may please the dead by sacrifices or offerings aiming to avoid misfortunes and troubles caused by the dead. Apart from the burial place itself, communication with the dead may also take place in consecrated areas where there are either relics of the dead, statues representing the dead and their qualities, certain objects with supernatural powers, or shrines or altars which enable interactions with the ancestors and divinities. Temples and sacred buildings such as churches share the same common feature of being places where dialogues with the Other side are rendered possible regardless of whether this includes prayers or sacrifices and involves the ancestors or the gods. This materiality of death is not limited to cemeteries or monumental architecture in various scale, but it also includes natural places (Bradley 2000) where certain topographic features are links to the Otherworld which enable interaction with the dead.

Pilgrimage sites. Some temples and sacred places attain a particular position among devotees, which illuminates the complex process between *place* and *process*, as with the case of a widow-burning in India which became a pilgrimage site. Although widow-burning was abandoned by law as early as 1829 in India by the British colonialists, the practice has continued. The most ‘famous’ widow-burning or murder in the name of *sati* in recent times was, however, the one of the eighteen-year-old Roop Kanwar in Rajasthan in India September 4th 1987. According to the priests, she ‘chose’ death as an

obedient wife, but even when the *sati* took place there were people who doubted that this was a ‘true’ widow-burning because she was not burnt on the pyre together with her husband, but the cremation took place at a separate pyre a week later witnessed by thousands of participants. There are strong indications that this was a murder by her father-in-law, who built a temple at the spot where she was burnt. This temple became a popular pilgrimage destination, and it was her father-in-law who controlled the temple and received the donations, which made him rich according to local standards (Kumar 1993, Narasimhan 1998). Thus, her death became a reference point for thousands of others who have had no relation to her previously. This is a common feature of pilgrimage sites. The places where holy persons died or where saints conducted miracles become focal points for the living. The power of the holy enables the devotees to receive blessings, become healed or attain divine presence and interaction through material relics of the dead themselves or other materialised objects such as statues or shrines, which function as substitutes for the actual dead.

The Otherworld in this world. Although the divine abodes and spiritual realms of the dead often are perceived as being in an ‘Otherworld’ beyond this world, the dead may also live in this world. The eschatology and cosmology of a belief system may have earthly correlates or the dead may exist in different parallel worlds. Analysing a Christian context, Sarah Tarlow described the problem as such:

“Beliefs about death are rarely coherent, consistent and orthodox. People combine elements of theological teaching with superstitious or traditional folkloric belief and personal invention. Thus when we die we are variously understood to go directly to Heaven, await the Day of Judgement, rot in the ground, become ghosts, journey to another place, fall asleep and meet up with friends and relatives who have died before us. These different versions might be logically incompatible, but it is nevertheless possible for a single person to hold many of them at the same time” (Tarlow 1999:103).

In some religions or belief systems there is no other existence for the dead after death, but in most traditions there are beliefs of a physical place where the dead are living. Although heaven normally is seen as a transcendental sphere beyond this world, in the Jewish-Christian tradition it was believed that Hell or Gehenna had an earthly origin. Gehenna was seen as the place where sinners were punished. The name Gehenna – or Gehinom – is commonly believed to derive from “Vale [Hebrew: *Gei*] of Ben Hinom”, which was a place south of Jerusalem where a child-sacrificing cult had been prevalent during the First Commonwealth (Oestigaard 2003, 2004a).

Concluding Remarks

The materiality of death is without doubt a complex field of research and we have only touched upon a few aspects concerning the body, death, burial and beliefs: 1) the materiality of the body – the decaying corpse, 2) the materiality of practice – the rituals, 3) the materiality of the interments – personal belongings and grave-gifts, 4) the materiality of the memory – the monument, 5) the materiality of social change – hierarchies and heritage, 6) the materiality of age, sex and gender, and 7) the materiality of eternity – ancestors and the Otherworld. Of course, the list of themes and aspects can be made much longer but these examples will suffice to point out the complexity of burial analysis in archaeology. The following papers in this volume all further elaborate and extend the issues and questions raised in this introductory essay as well as contributing with fascinating case-studies from the Mesolithic to present day.

The majority of the texts in this volume were presented as working papers at the session, *The Materiality of Death – Bodies, Burials, Beliefs*, organised by Fredrik Fahlander and Terje Oestigaard at the XIIth European Association for Archaeologists annual meeting in Krakow, Poland in September 2006. The data and issues concerned in the papers of this volume range from the Mesolithic of Southern Scandinavia (Fahlander, Nilsson Stutz) and the Late Mesolithic and Neolithic of Latvia (Zagorska), to the European Bronze Age (Aasbøe, Bettencourt) and a number of texts concerning various Iron Age examples of Scandinavia (Gansum, Grön, Johansson, Kristoffersen & Oestigaard, Lindgren, Wickholm), but also the British Iron Age (Duffy & MacGregor) and Roman Italy (Gee, Rajala) are represented. One paper also presents a modern day example from Asia (Oestigaard & Kaliff).

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Bodies



Chapter 2

More than Metaphor: Approaching the Human Cadaver in Archaeology

Liv Nilsson Stutz

ABSTRACT Developments in body theory have had a strong impact on archaeology in recent years, but the concept of the body has tended to remain abstract. The term “body” is often used as a synonym for self or person, and the remains of bodies and body parts have often been approached theoretically as signs or symbols. While this has emphasized the importance of the body as a cultural construct and a social product, archaeologists have tended to overlook the equally important biological reality of the body. Bodies are more than metaphors. They are also biological realities. Maybe this becomes especially obvious at death, when the embodied social being is transformed into a cadaver, continuously in a state of transformation due to the processes of putrefaction and decomposition. In this transition, the unity of the mindful body and the embodied mind breaks down, and cultural and social control over the body can no longer be exercised from within, but instead has to be imposed from the outside. This article explores the friction between the culturally and socially produced body and the body as a biological entity at death. Through an approach that focuses both on the post mortem processes that affect the cadaver – and that can be seen as an ultimate materialization of death – and the practical handling of the dead body by the survivors, the author suggests a way toward an integrative and transdisciplinary approach to death and the dead body in archaeology.

The title of this article, “More than Metaphor,” stresses the importance of addressing the human body and human remains in archaeology, not only as metaphors and symbols, but also in all their materiality as concrete biological entities. This might at first glance seem redundant, considering the heritage of a traditional archaeology that has tended to treat human remains as any other objects to be studied and exhibited, or an archaeology that has regarded them as sources of biological information and handed them over to anthropologists for analysis of sex, age, paleopathology, etc. Indeed, this heritage still weighs heavily on the potential for other theoretical developments approaching the body through archaeology. But while it would be a problem not to mention the shortcomings of these attitudes, I have chosen to address another problem – one that stems not from the objectification of human remains, as much as from the abstraction of their nature.

Developments in body theory and theories of embodiment have had a considerable impact on archaeology over the past 15 years. However, while these multifaceted social theories contain many different layers and convictions, the strains that have become most influential in archaeology have emphasized the cultural and social side of the equation, and ignored the biological and physical side. The purpose of this article is not to counter these insights. There is no doubt that the notions of the socially shaped and culturally produced body, as well as notions of embodiment have had a crucial impact on archaeological thought and that they have enriched our

understanding of both the body and the past. What I want to draw attention to, though, is that these developments have tended to leave out an important part of the equation – the physicality of the body. Bodies are more than metaphors. They are flesh and blood, organs, ligaments and bones, gases and fluids. This becomes especially obvious at death, when the embodied social being is transformed into a cadaver, continuously in a state of transformation, an effect of the processes of putrefaction and decomposition. I argue that the recognition of this aspect of the body – long almost an exclusive domain for bioarchaeologists – deserves the attention also from archaeologists interested in developing insights into past experience of death and the body. Through a combination of theories of embodiment with an understanding of the human body as both a social and cultural product *and* a biological reality, this paper proposes an alternative way to approach mortuary practices in archaeology.

The Body in Archaeology

In archaeology, the bodies we encounter – that is, “the human remains” – were until recently seen as static objects or fossilized remains from the natural world. They were entirely separated from the social processes that shaped the body during life and death, and most often only studied closely by physical anthropologists in order to extract biological information. For archaeologists they often remained the background for the display of burial goods, or the décor of the burial features. Today this has

changed. Archaeologists are becoming increasingly interested in the human body, and a steady stream of books and articles on the subject has had a considerable influence on the field (Kus 1992, Meskell 1996, Rautman 2000, Hamilakis et al 2002, Joyce 2005, to only mention a few). This interest in the body does not mainly stem from an increasing collaboration with physical anthropologists, but from inspiration drawn from body theory, developed mainly in the social sciences and humanities (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987, Featherstone et al 1991, Lock 1993, Shilling 1993, Csordas 1994, Oudshoorn 1994, Strathern 1996, Hillman & Mazzio 1997, Turner 1996, 1997, Asad 1997, Coakley 1997, Crossley 2001, Franklin 2002, Faircloth 2003, Berdayes et al. 2004, Shahshahani 2004, Cregan 2006, etc). These writings orbit around the deconstruction of the Cartesian divide between the body and the soul, a division established already in the classical Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle (Manning Stevens 1997:265) and that can be found more generally in throughout Western thought, as a divide between mind and nature and culture and nature (Franklin 2002:180). To this was often added a more or less explicitly imposed hierarchy where mind and culture dominate and control body and nature, a paradigm that was used to justify among other things the oppression of women, the strategies of colonialism, even genocide. The problematization of these relationships, as well as the increasing interest in the body in social theory today, can probably be linked to multiple factors, including the effects of postmodern critique of modernity in social theory, the reaction against minimalism in art, the preponderant place of the body in popular culture and the increasing place the body “as a project” takes in our individual lives in our culture (see for example Shilling 1993, Franklin 2002). Body theory has become a vibrant and creative subfield for the social sciences for the reflection on the relationships between nature and culture, but also of body politics, experience and the notion of self and identity.

In the 1990s, these thoughts started to penetrate into archaeological thought through the subfields of gender archaeology and through the more general reflections on structuration, agency and practice. The central message in these studies was the recognition of the fact that the body does not have an a priori nature but is created and experienced through culture and language which *reveal* it (see Thomas 2002:33). Our understanding of the body is already an interpretation and we have no direct access to the *thing in itself* (*ibid.*). This understanding of the body fits comfortably into the understanding of the past in more general terms within the postprocessual framework of the 1990s, and as a consequence, this approach to the body easily found a place within contemporary archaeological theory. The reaction against previous understanding of the body as pure biological entity also inspired archaeologists to react against the stressing of “sameness” in the past (Fowler 2002:47), and rapidly became a part of an archaeology that combined with theories of agency focused on individual experience in

the past as a reaction against previous focus on collectives of people.

Archaeology, which not only is a discipline grounded in materiality, but also encompasses long time perspectives and transgresses the disciplinary boundaries between the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, lends itself well to be part of the theorizing of the body and is well positioned to contribute with a unique perspective. However, it is interesting to note that despite this disciplinary connection to materiality and natural science, the dominating writings on the body within archaeology long remained limited to the important yet abstract notions of the body, such as performance and identity expressed in dress, art or paraphernalia (Lee 2000, Shaffer et al 2000 etc) or produced through activities (Crass 2000, Peterson 2000, Hollimon 2000 etc), and the symbolism and objectification of the body and body parts (Thomas 2000). Even when the archaeological context for these reflections were burials, the physical reality of death and the changes of the body ensued by it, are almost completely absent. In archaeology the focus tends to remain on the individual and her or his relationships, identity, experience etc, not on his or her body *per se*. A movement toward the actual body could be seen in the introduction of the notion of embodiment and corporeality, which in archaeology came to encompass notions such as embodied knowledge, consumption (Boyd 2002) and sensory experience (Kus 1992, Hamilakis 2002, Morris & Peatfield 2002). This effort goes a long way to meet the demands of an interest in the “lived bodies” in a corporeal sense, as called for by Lynn Meskell (Meskell 2000:15). But nevertheless, with some notable exceptions – many present in the important volume *Thinking through the Body* (Hamilakis et al 2002, but see also Fahlander N. D.) – the reflections on the body produced within archaeology have retained a tendency to remain abstract (see also Hamilakis 2002:122), and while they have contributed to breaking down the mind-body split, they have nevertheless reproduced a focus on the mind at the expense of the body. This tendency of “mind over body” is by no means exclusive to archaeology, but it can be seen in many places within the critical theory from which archaeology has gathered much of its inspiration (see for example Shilling and Mellor’s critique of Giddens in Shilling and Mellor 1996, see also Franklin 2002:184).

Most surprising might be that even in the subfield of mortuary archaeology, possibly the one area where the physicality of the body might seem to be unavoidable, archaeologists have insisted on their position of sublimation. An example of this can be seen in Julian Thomas’ article *Death, identity and the body in Neolithic Britain* (Thomas 2000). When introducing his program for an archaeology of the human body, Thomas persists in focusing exclusively on the socially constructed body and makes the argument that we cannot project what he sees as modern notions of identity onto a Neolithic body (Thomas 2000:658). The purpose of the article is to

discuss death and the treatment of the dead bodies in Neolithic Britain, but in addressing bodily transformations, Thomas discusses architectural features in more detail than the actual bodies and the processes they went through (658pp). The article has many other merits, and the point of this critique is to underline a more general problem: that the actual bodies have remained conspicuously absent also in the archaeology explicitly devoted to them.

A similar tendency can be seen in a recent review article on the topic of the archaeology of the body by Rosemary Joyce (Joyce 2005). While the author argues that a more abstract and semiotic perspective on the body currently is being replaced by a more concrete notion of the experience of embodiment, a perspective that gives a more central role for an active body in the past, the review limits itself to areas of inquiry such as ornaments, performance, experience, personhood and identity. And again, while these concepts engage the body, the physical and biological aspects of it are nowhere to be found. More than anything, this probably reflects a general tendency within archaeology today: we are more than willing to discuss bodies, but we prefer to do so in an abstract way. It is also interesting to notice that the majority of the body theory oriented papers in archaeology that engage with the physical body focus on embodiment, while very few (e.g., Robb 2002) treat the human body as a biological entity in combination with their theoretical approach.

Thus, many authors have eagerly pointed out that the body is physical, corporeal and sensual, but few have taken that notion further by making it a focus for the analysis. The body as such remains conspicuously rare within the archaeology of the body. The reasons for this may be many. One explanation might be that the physicality of the body does not interest many archaeologists, despite our disciplinary focus on materiality. Many archaeologists are not trained in physical anthropology and do not see it as their task to reflect over the biological side of the human body. It is also possible that the debates concerning the more abstract concepts described above are more rewarding professionally, since they align with a now established disciplinary canon and appear to be intellectually more sophisticated. Maybe this also reflects a divide within contemporary archaeology, where those working on the development of theories on the side of social sciences and humanities and those who are more focused on the natural science side, do not communicate as effectively with each other, or share the same interests, to a degree that would really benefit the field as a whole. Finally, it is probably important to recognize the structuring power of taboos surrounding the dead and decomposing body in our society that only recently seem to be confronted in mass media culture that has pushed *post mortem* biological change in cadavers into the realm of general knowledge, through the success of TV series and books devoted to crime scene investigators and forensic work.

A Critical Suggestion

I do not argue with the insight that bodies are generated through practice and are culturally and socially (re-) produced. This is basic to theorizing about human experience. However, I want to stress the importance of complementing that understanding with a clear recognition of the biological and physical body within the archaeology of the body in general, and within the archaeology of death in particular. The body as embodied and biological reality has been undertheorized in archaeology, and I believe that synchronization of the different subfields within archaeology - encompassing the social science and humanities approaches to the body, as well as the natural science approaches to the body - would be beneficial for the field.

In her review article, Joyce (2005) makes the interesting observation that simultaneous to the interest in the body within archaeology described above, the frequency of articles devoted to the body from a bioarchaeological perspective has increased considerably as well. However, she notes that “these contributions are in no obvious way postprocessual” (Joyce 2005:141), which I interpret to mean that they are not concerned with the recent developments in archaeological theory devoted to the body and remain essentially positivist. This illustrates the current divide within archaeology today. Since the critique against processual archaeology in the 1980s, archaeological theory has moved away from the natural sciences. This move has contributed to an enrichment of archaeology, since it has instead included a range of important fields in the theorization of the discipline. Yet, it has also led to creating an unfortunate distance from the natural sciences, closing off some venues for interesting transdisciplinary developments, including those dealing with the body. In this article I want to make the critical suggestion that the archaeology of the body could benefit tremendously from an integration of these different perspectives. The focus on materiality in archaeology, which remains our cornerstone, suggests a notion of balance that in many ways defines our discipline. If we could approach the body with the complexity of recognizing the social *and* biological aspect of it within an all-encompassing transdisciplinary perspective, then archaeology could really contribute to the development of the understanding of the body over a long term perspective.

The archaeology of death and burial constitutes a field within archaeology where this combined approach can be successfully applied. Burial archaeology is a field that traditionally has interested both archaeologists and biological anthropologists. While the cooperation might not always have qualified as truly transdisciplinary, the field is rich with examples of successful collaborations around the shared interest in understanding the features, the bodies buried there and the societies that left them behind. To take this approach that combines archaeology and physical anthropology even further can be extremely

interesting. Through a deeper understanding of the biological body, which is something that physical anthropology and natural sciences can provide, we can better understand what death actually is: what it looks like and smells like. A biological perspective helps us to understand the materiality of death. The dead body also offers a wide range of entries into the study of the complex relations between nature and culture. After all, it is the biological and chemical processes that transform the body after death, and it is to these changes that the survivors respond to as they take care of the cadaver. Finally, this understanding offers an interesting methodological stepping stone, since it allows us to separate archaeologically what in a burial is the product of natural processes of decomposition, erosion, or bioturbation, and what can be identified as the result of the handling of the body.

It is this methodological approach that underlies the development of *anthropologie 'de terrain'* (Duday et al 1990, and for a more detailed description in English, please see Nilsson Stutz 2003). Through careful registration of the spatial distribution of human remains, structures and artifacts in the field, combined with knowledge in biology about how the human body decomposes after death, *anthropologie 'de terrain'* offers a unique approach to the detailed reconstruction of mortuary practices in the past, with its focused consideration of the treatment of the human body. The approach proceeds through a consideration of the relative chronology of the disarticulation of the human skeleton, along with the dynamics of the creation of empty volumes as soft tissues decompose, fluids drain, and the resulting empty spaces are filled in by penetrating sediment and, sometimes, mobile skeletal elements. The approach is detailed and analytical, and it aims at identifying the processes that produced the archaeological situation, noting which of these processes can be seen as part of the mortuary program (position of the body, treatment and preparation of the body, the nature of the volume in which the body decomposed, interaction and manipulation during or after the process of decomposition, etc) and which were natural processes (effects of putrefaction and decomposition, erosion, bioturbation etc). While the approach mainly has been used as an effective tool for excavating and analyzing burials, I suggest that it can also be successfully combined with two central theoretical approaches to the body in mortuary archaeology. First, this approach helps us to visualize the cadaver in a new way within the framework of archaeology. The basis for the methodology rests on a consideration of the processes of putrefaction and decomposition and thus integrates those processes at a basic level of understanding the archaeological burial feature. At the same time, it allows us to visualize the materiality and corporeality of death. Second, the constant focus on how dead bodies were treated allows us to visualize the mortuary ritual as practices in the past, a perspective that connects to the theories of embodiment. *Anthropologie 'de terrain,'*

while being an approach rooted in a biological understanding of the body, thus constitutes an interesting connection to contemporary perspectives on the body within archaeology that stem from the humanities and social sciences. An approach that combines all of these perspectives and that also can be successfully connected to the archaeological record might be one successful way of a truly transdisciplinary approach to the human body in mortuary archaeology.

The Cadaver

At death two things occur. A social being disappears and a cadaver emerges. Mortuary practices, no matter how variable, inevitably deal with these two aspects of death. Traditionally, archaeology has tended to emphasize the social loss, and most mortuary archaeology is devoted to reconstructing the living individual in the past or the context of that individual's life. The cadaver itself has received little or no attention. But by focusing on the cadaver as such we may be able to achieve interesting insights into the mortuary practices as well as into attitudes toward the body and death.

Once the vital functions cease, the body embarks on a journey of complete transformation. The first signs are relatively subtle, often starting with the formation of a film of cell debris and mucus on the cornea and a complete relaxation of the muscle tone, followed by a temporary rigor mortis and cadaveric hypostasis that contributes to discoloration of the skin. Once the processes of putrefaction and decomposition start, the changes accelerate and include further discoloration, swelling, emission of gasses and fluids, etc, all of which result in a complete transformation and eventually the almost complete consumption of the soft tissues of the body (for more details see Polson 1955, Knight 1991, Mant 1994).

A central question is whether or not we can assume that the death of the body and the emergence of a cadaver is a crisis only in our contemporary society or if it can be seen as a more universal aspect of human experience. Chris Shilling argues that the death of the body is a crisis exclusively in late modern society, a phenomenon that he links to the dominant notion of the body as a project (with death being the ultimate failure of that project), and to the fragility of the body as especially problematic for Westerners to accept (Shilling 1993). One reason for this crisis, according to Shilling, is the decline in religious faith and the absence of meaning-structure. Through the study of historical mortuary practices, Sarah Tarlow has been able to show convincingly that the crisis of the death of the body can be established quite early in the modern period and is not necessarily connected to a decline in religious faith (Tarlow 1999, 2002). I suggest that we can take this notion even further and look at death and the emergence of a cadaver as a general human experience – something that people in all cultures and all times have

had to deal with. This is not to say that all human societies perceive human cadavers in the same way, but rather that their presence in all cultures appears to require action of some kind.

While cadavers are not perceived by all cultures in the same way, the cadaver has interesting and fundamentally general characteristics that might reveal a universal crisis. A cadaver is not neutral. The post mortem changes in a dead human body transform it progressively, and these changes are irreversible. Again, this is not to say that a cadaver is necessarily always problematic or traumatic for the survivors. The place given to the post mortem changes may vary; they can be denied and hidden (as in our own society), accelerated (for example, through incineration), partially stopped (as in mummification or embalment) or played out and quite publicly exposed (as described for example in Hertz 1960 and Huntington & Metcalf 1979). But no matter the strategy, the cadaver is never ignored. It is always taken care of and disposed of in some culturally and socially structured way.

The biological changes are of course not the only things that have changed. Seen from the perspective where body and mind are inseparable, where the body is created and experienced through and revealed by culture and language, the cadaver poses an interesting problem. The cadaver is a body without life, without mind. It is a body incapable of communication and practices. The duality of the mindful body and the embodied mind has broken down, and it can no longer conform to social and cultural norms. Those have to be imposed from the outside through the mortuary treatment of the cadaver. From having been nature and culture, subject and object, it is now suddenly neither. Still, for a time, it remains recognizable as the person it used to embody. Thus, through the emergence of the cadaver, that person is neither present nor absent. Being no longer subject nor object, it qualifies into the category of the abject, as proposed by Julia Kristeva. In her book *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* Kristeva (1980) designates the cadaver as the ultimate abject, something outside of the order, something that cannot be categorized and that is threatening. This is not unlike the liminal category within Arnold van Gennep's (1999) and Victor Turner's (1967) ritual structure – where the liminal phase designates the “no longer” and “not yet defined.” As the natural processes of decay proceed, the cadaver will become less and less like the person it used to embody, and in response, the living – the survivors – act to control the transformation. As a response to the inevitability and irreversibility of change in the cadaver, the cadaver and death have to be created, staged and produced by the survivors. In this process the friction between the natural processes and the socially and culturally desired product create an interesting field of investigation for the archaeologist.

Rituals as Redefining

From this perspective, mortuary rituals do not only deal with the emotional and societal crisis that death causes, but also with the materiality of death: the cadaver. As I suggested earlier, I find it useful to envision the presence of the cadaver as part of the liminal phase within the ritual structure (Nilsson Stutz 2003:95pp). This idea in itself is not new but can be found already in the work of Robert Hertz from 1907, but what is new is the archaeological focus on the treatment of the cadaver as a significant phase for the understanding of the mortuary practices. Through the ritual structure, mortuary practices contribute to redefining the cadaver and transform it from the subject it used to embody, into an object from which the mourners can separate. The rituals thus redefine the cadaver and stage it in order to reinstall order and produce a proper death. Following a theory of ritual that draws on practice theory (Bell 1992), I have suggested that archaeology should focus on the actual ritual practices rather than underlying meaning (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 2006). The meaning given to the practices might change from one participant to another. It might change substantially over time, but the embodied knowledge about how to deal with death and the dead is shared, as is the experience of taking part in mortuary practices. And it is through the bodily engagement in the ritual practices that a world and structure is created. The participants have an embodied sense of how the ritual should be performed correctly. In the example of burials, this means that while the significance and meaning of the ritual might not be shared by all in a society, there is a shared sense of how humans should be buried. This embodied knowledge constitutes a core of practices that are so fundamental that they might not even be up for negotiation, except maybe in specific cases. At the same time, the experience of taking part in the ritual would also be embodied by the participants, possibly perceived as comprised of semantic references, but also as sensory experiences. They will carry the experience with them as embodied memories throughout their lives. In this way the rituals also contribute to structuring the world of the living community. The framework is by no means static and allows for change over time. However, it is important to recognize that this possible change also takes place within the dialectic framework of structure and practice. Archaeologically this should translate into recognizable patterns of the treatment of the body that we should be able to identify.

In a case study of the late Mesolithic mortuary practices in Skateholm in Southern Sweden, published more in detail elsewhere (Nilsson 1998, Nilsson Stutz 2003), I applied this approach of a double consideration of the body. Through a focus on the handling of the dynamic cadaver as a central component of mortuary ritual *and* an understanding of ritual rooted in notions of embodied practice, I approached these burials with the methodology of *Anthropologie 'de terrain.'* It was central for this approach, both on the methodological and theoretical

level, to focus on both the changes that the cadaver underwent after death and the way in which the survivors treated the cadaver as part of the mortuary practices. Through a careful analysis of the burials, I was able to reconstruct the handling of the body during specific instances in which mortuary rituals were carried out. Yet, I also identified a core set of practices that appear to be so fundamental that they were not even questioned by the participants. In the case of the burials at Skateholm, the great majority of the bodies were buried relatively soon after death. There is no indication that the processes of decomposition and putrefaction were advanced at the time of burial. The body was placed in a pit which was immediately filled with sediment. In a few instances there are indications that the body was wrapped before the burial or placed on top of some kind of material or platform in the grave. It thus seems as if the dead at Skateholm were buried in a way that denied or hid the processes of decomposition. On the site there appears to be three cases of incineration. While these have not yet been studied in such detail that a detailed account of the practices can be established, the use of incineration per se does not necessarily contrast to the dominating pattern, since incineration of the body also has the effect of hiding decomposition—it rapidly accelerates the process. Thus, we have an impression that most often, the death ritually staged at Skateholm in Late Mesolithic times had the effect of resembling life. We can further see this in the arrangement of the bodies in the burials. The bodies were placed in life-like positions, either as lying on the back or the side, or sitting up. The impression that they are arranged in positions that resemble those of living individuals is emphasized when two bodies are simultaneously placed in the same grave. In these instances the bodies are arranged to face each other or even to hold each other. It is of course still possible that these positions actually signaled death, but the point that I am making here is that the death that was staged in this way was not radically different from life. The integrity of the body – and maybe also the individual – was respected. This respect for the body seems to have persisted after burial since very few of the burials – placed in a zone close to the occupation site and other burials – were disturbed during the subsequent period of occupation. However, when we consider the few times this disturbance occurred (indeed, there are a handful of instances where the disturbances appear to be Mesolithic in age), it is interesting to notice that the living made no effort to correct the arrangement of now-skeletonized remains. It seems that as time passed after burial, the respect for the remains of the body became less important. Maybe this also coincided with a notion that some substantial time after burial, the dead individual had truly been separated from the living, having completed the passage to the next phase, integrating with the realm of the dead; in this stage, the remains of the dead would have become unproblematic for the living.

If the treatment of the body was based on a denial of decomposition and a respect for the integrity of the body,

it is interesting to take a closer look at two burials that stand out as exceptions. Grave 28 (fig. 1) contained a skeleton missing several bones, including the left radius and ulna, the left os coxae and the left femur. The analysis of the otherwise perfectly articulated remains has shown that these bones were removed at a late phase in the process of decomposition.



Fig. 1. Grave 28 of the Skateholm I cemetery with skeleton missing several bones, including the left radius and ulna, the left os coxae and the left femur (photo: Lars Larsson).

The analysis has also shown that the body was not placed in a coffin (a practice that would have made the extraction of the bones easier). However, in order for the extraction of the bones to be made without any significant disturbance of the anatomically articulated elements, the feature must have been prepared in advance. I have suggested that the body might have been covered by a

hide that could be removed to expose the remains for extraction. This practice shows that despite the denial of the processes of decomposition in the dominating mortuary program at the site, decomposition was familiar to the living, even as they acted to control and – in most instances – hide it. Grave 28 thus illustrates an interesting tension in the images of death and the dead at Skateholm. It is interesting to reflect over the role of the human bones extracted from the burial as they re-entered the world of the living. Did they represent the individual from which they were extracted, were they caught in their abject status, or had they become objects of death? It is possible that all these levels could be associated with the remains. This case is interesting to contrast with the discussion by Thomas, in his work of human remains in the British Neolithic (Thomas 2000, discussed above). For Thomas the human remains became objects and economic units when they circulated among the living. The nuance that he introduces focuses mainly on the relationships created between the giver and the receiver of these remains in the Neolithic society. The practices studied at Skateholm can add another layer of complexity in the archaeological understanding of human remains among the living. While they could be symbols, metaphors and objects of exchange, they should also be seen within the context that produced them: the cadaver, the post mortem processes and death. A reflection over these objects should probably include consideration of the sensory experience of decomposition and the embodied knowledge of this dimension of their origin. Of course, this does not need to be a necessary component of every understanding of them in the past or the present, but it seems nevertheless to be a central component of how we should approach them. This might even become increasingly important in the Neolithic, where the decomposition of the human cadaver seems to have taken on a strong presence among the living in the staging and visualization of death.

Another burial that stands out at Skateholm is burial 13. Here, the remains of an incomplete and partially disarticulated skeleton of a man were found in a small feature. The practice of so called secondary burial (or burial in multiple episodes) can be excluded, since many of the labile articulations (such as those of one hand and one foot) were preserved, while some more persistent anatomical connections had become disarticulated. One hand and one foot were also completely missing. Everything seems to indicate that the body was placed in the feature in a partial state while still being fresh. The spatial distribution of the bones could also indicate that the remains were placed inside a container. This burial contrasts very sharply with the dominating practices at the site. The integrity of the body is violated and the distribution of the bones indicates that the positioning of the body parts did in no way resemble that of a living person. There are several possibilities for an interpretation of this burial. One possibility could be that the body of the dead was treated intentionally in a way that violated the integrity of the person, and thus contributed to dehumanizing this individual. The reasons

for this could be a sanction for crimes committed in life, danger associated with the individual or the way of death. This kind of scape-goating is known from both the historical, ethnographical and archaeological record and could also be associated with strong individuals who were feared in death (see for example Artelius *N. D.*, Wickholm *N.D.*). If we consider this possibility we can also reflect over the structuring power of mortuary rituals had on the survivors who took part of them and embodied the memories, memories that could be recalled later on in life as reminders of the importance of staying within the boundaries of the structure. An alternative understanding could be that the individual was disfigured or dismembered in a violent death – whether accidental or not – and the survivors acted to hide this state in staging the transition to death ritually. This would indicate that the survivors spared themselves from being exposed to the abnormality of this particular burial. According to this interpretation, the burial would thus be an example of invention and change in order to stay as close to the norm as possible under exceptional circumstances. Whatever the interpretation we chose for this burial, the case remains an interesting reminder of the power associated with treatment of the cadaver – whether negative or positive.

Concluding Remarks

The interest in the body in contemporary archaeological theory has had a positive impact on our understanding of the past. Archaeology is a discipline grounded in materiality, encompassing a long term perspective and transgressing traditional disciplinary boundaries. As such, it also has the potential of contributing to the theorizing of the body. However, while archaeology has integrated many interesting thoughts inspired by the social sciences, it has not yet truly achieved the potential of its transdisciplinary character, and it has tended to disregard the materiality of the body. The ideas presented here, which bring to the fore a consideration of the body as a social construction *and* a biological reality, with a focus on the handling of the cadaver, is an attempt to make some modest steps in that direction within the realms of mortuary archaeology.

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Chapter 3

A Piece of the Mesolithic Horizontal Stratigraphy and Bodily Manipulations at Skateholm

Fredrik Fahlander

ABSTRACT The present text concerns theoretical and methodological aspects of burial archaeology, with special attention given to the graves of the Late Mesolithic site Skateholm in Southern Sweden. It is argued that 'burial-places' in general need to be discussed individually from a 'bottom-up perspective' in order to minimise the bias of general assumptions based on other data of the same region and time period. Such *microarchaeological* studies focus on social practice involved in the disposal of the dead as a mediating level between the local and particular on one hand and the normative and general on the other. The study suggests that the Skateholm site can be divided into four different phases of burial activity, each with significant changes in both burial ritual and in the view of dead bodies; one phase even suggests possible use of the site by two separate groups. Special attention has also been given to two diachronic horizontal patterns. One is the marginal placement of dead dogs and children at the borders of the main area, arranged as small clusters in the four cardinal points. The other concerns postdepositional manipulation of dead bodies and graves.

According to the culture critic Slavoj Žižek, the burial act is a symbolic practice par excellence. It is a situation forced upon the subject demanding some sort of action because of something that actually is out of the subject's control (death). Žižek's argument is that burial rituals are simply our way to make an irrational and completely nature given process the sense of a free choice (1996:247). I believe that Žižek has got a point here, death has no meaning in itself, except perhaps in a long-term evolutionary perspective. The social subject needs, however, to invent ways of dealing with the reoccurring fact of death in order to cope with existence and the loss of valuable or dear persons. The knowledge of our limited time-span and our ever-present mortality must have had a great impact on general ontology and cosmology in most past societies as well as in the present. Some argue that we in the contemporary, western world have alienated ourselves from death and the practices of burial, while others, such as Zygmunt Baumann, argue that we, although implicitly, are occupied with death now more than ever (1992:8). Indeed, death is something that the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan probably would have put in the realm of the Real, that is, something that cannot be satisfactory rewritten symbolically or imaginary (Lacan 1977:279f).¹ Nonetheless, such

alterations and paraphrasing of death is what people tend to do all the time. The problem for archaeology is that symbolic and imaginary alterations of the Real have few universal properties and that there are no 'natural' or typical ways for humans to deal with death. Consider the following quote from Metcalf and Huntington:

"What could be more universal than death? Yet what an incredible variety of responses it evokes. Corpses are burned or buried, with or without animal or human sacrifice; they are preserved by smoking, embalming, or pickling; they are eaten - raw, cooked, or rotten; they are ritually exposed as carrion or simply abandoned; or they are dismembered and treated in a variety of these ways. Funerals are the occasion for avoiding people or holding parties, for fighting or having sexual orgies, for weeping or laughing, in a thousand different combinations. The diversity of cultural reaction is a measure of the universal impact of death" (Metcalf & Huntington 1991:24).

The ethnographic record is full of different ways of dealing with death that range from obsession with bodies and bones of ancestors to mundane views of the dead as contagious trash. Faced with this great variability in attitudes towards death and dead bodies in contemporary societies alone, one certainly begins to wonder about the

¹ The *symbolic* is a network of references that makes things and relations intelligible to us. It is the general frame of reference, but not necessarily the final frontier of thought and practice. The *Real* is not to be confused with reality, it is rather what escapes (refuses) symbolisation and can concern traumatic and foreclosed matters or simply be something non-discursive and unthinkable. The *imaginary* dimension is the subjective (but not

necessary false) experience of the world (perceived or imagined). One facet of the imaginary is found in the relations between the symbolic and the Real as an intermediate 'layer' that masks an unsymbolised Real core. The imaginary thus functions like 'plaster' that fills the cracks and empty spaces of the symbolic order (see Fahlander 2003:24ff).

possibilities of properly approaching these issues in prehistory. There are, of course, a number of quantitative and qualitative archaeological approaches and methods which have been developed through the years, but there is still curiously little consensus about what burial data can tell us about the living. Indeed, burials constitute complex and problematic types of archaeological information, leaving a number of questions hanging in the air: Are they primarily an expression of cosmology, religion, and eschatology? Or is the burial event merely an arena for social strategies? Do the properties of a burial represent the life and world of the deceased individual or are they mainly determined by the funeral organisers?

Despite popular belief, we have little means of grasping prehistoric peoples' attitudes towards death and what may come after; but what we do have are fragmentary traces of how they dealt with death and dead bodies. Graves are the remains of some of the practices performed by the living after a body died. The type of practices that seem appropriate, necessary, or possible, may differ from case to case, but there are nonetheless a few aspects that usually need to be attended to. The most evident issue concerns the inevitable decomposition process of the dead body, which might turn the focus of the living away from grief towards a problem of disposal. The dead body soon will swell up, turning into a grotesque form. It will change colour and start to smell. The dead body needs to be taken care of in some way, whether it is left in the woods, sent out (or submerged) into water, buried, cremated, or embalmed. Either way, the dead body invokes, or demands, a response from the living and a number of practices are called for depending on burial traditions (cf. Williams 2004:284). There are at least three somewhat interrelated *processes* involved here: First, there is the decomposition process of the body, then there are the different stages of the burial ritual and the construction of the grave, and finally, the need to cope with space, that is, finding proper room for the dead in relation to landscape features, settlement, and the old dead. The important point to keep in mind is, of course, that it is normally only in the final stage of all these three processes that we meet the dead as archaeologists. It may or may not be possible to trace elements of previous stages, but the important issue I wish to emphasise here is the *temporality* of all these processes connected to death.

The Temporal Materiality of the Body

Most people would probably view the human body as a subject rather than an object, but the body is also a materiality, and as such, it may have great social effects besides conscious agency. The corporeal body as materiality has very little to do with the concepts of individual or person. Instead, it emphasizes the role of each body's appearance and physical constitution in the process of subjectivation and categorization as well as the varying abilities in getting certain tasks done. Corporeal

aspects, such as body posture, sex, age and variations in hair, and skin colour, are well documented aspects that certainly affect the individual's possibilities to do things. But, what may be more important is that corporeal aspects of the body also tend to invoke certain responses or attitudes from others. No matter how we may wish it to be, we are not alike in a bodily sense, and these differences (e.g., short/tall, child/adult/elderly, muscular/weak, sick, disabled etc), affect our means for agency and the ways in which others consider us (Fahlander 2006a). The corporeal body also undergo several biological stages in life (puberty, coming of age, menopause etc) as well as other changes in appearance related to achieved positions, accidents or bodily manipulations (Fahlander 2008). Some of these corporeal aspects are likely to function as active social signifiers, arranging and subjecting individuals into social categories or groups, like the way some phenotypic aspects such as sex, age, skin colour, etc. today are conventional bases for the construction of social categories and identity (Fahlander 2001:78ff). Which of the corporeal aspects that are socially significant in a given time and place, are, however, a question to investigate for each given case

The dead body has no intentional powers aside from the decaying material remains. Despite that, the dead body may by some still be seen as a social subject, sometimes even considered to have agency (cf. Williams 2004, Gansum this volume), but to most people, death transposes a subject to an object (or in Bruno Latour's terms: from actor to actant). Indeed, the dead body lacks the intentional ability to present itself as a social subject, but its material constitution may still potentially interfere with and initiate certain actions and responses among the living; in this sense the body is not very different from any other materiality (cf. Williams 2004, Fahlander in press). But, precisely as the living body undergoes an aging process and corporeal changes, the dead body soon go through a number of changes; it stiffens as a result of rigor mortis, it swells up because of gases, it starts to smell and leak fluids, etc. The dead body has because of this been considered by some as something repugnant and resentful. But, of course, the dead body need not necessarily be an abject by default, such value statements are defined out of culturally specific ideology and relations between binary oppositions such as pure and polluted, or dangerous and safe.² We might therefore be cautious not to be too presumptuous about what is repellent and not in different social contexts.

² In a sense, the post-mortem decomposition process reveals our symbolic or imaginary phantasms of the body because death exposes our bodies' real constitution. Under the skin we all consist of bone, blood, muscles, fluids, organs of varying viscosity and colour, but most of us prefer not to think about that. Slavoj Žižek has suggested, as a test, that we during copulation should attempt to picture our partner's body's real constitution of muscles, blood, organs and bone, and then try to continue with the act. Žižek's point is, of course, to illustrate how the real constitution of the human body is being symbolically rewritten in more idealised terms.

The main point is that the division between either living subject and dead object often is too simple. Both living and dead bodies are subjected to change and there can be great differences in, for instance, how a body in one stage of decomposition is viewed in contrast to a later stage when all soft tissue have decomposed and left only the bones bare.

The perhaps most persistent theme in burial archaeology is the inclination to assert that the properties of a burial are in some way related to the life of the buried individual. Indeed, many burials consist of a 'set' of objects, for instance a single individual buried with artefacts, and it is not strange that archaeologists tend to link them together. There is, however, nothing that states that the properties of the grave and burial act need to be related to the dead person's social persona. In some cases it rather seems like certain bodies, or even certain deaths, may need certain treatment, which may have little to do with the deceased's social persona (Taylor 2003:236, 240). The main problem in relating aspects of the grave and burial ritual to the buried is that the dead seldom have any influence over the process. Some have thus argued that mortuary variability rather reflects social aspects of the *funeral organisers* rather than of the buried individual (Fahlander 2003, Gansum 2002:252). If those responsible for the formation of the burial are primarily ritual specialists, the next of kin, or all members of the community, is thus a primary question to pursue in every given case. We may also need to consider scenarios in which only one or a few actually knew what happened to a body after the point of death. The intermediate phase may be hidden from the major part of the population. Even the burial itself can be a matter for a few, even excluding the next of kin and other close family members. Another aspect to consider is that the burial event can be employed for power displays or negotiations. For instance, social inequalities can be masked by less fashionable burials for those who actually have the power or wealth or by letting subjected groups have the same treatment in death as the elites and thus reproducing an illusion of a "good" (equal) society (Parker-Pearson 1999). The question of what a grave actually signifies; the dead individual, its corporeality, the way of death, the conceptions and strategies of the living, or a combination of them all, cannot be answered in general terms. Neither can there be only one unified approach that can tackle these uncertainties, thus, the issues have to be investigated on a case to case basis.

The Temporality of the Grave

Another process, or rather, a temporal issue, in burial analysis concerns the idea of burials as closed finds. Indeed, many burials seem to be the result of one single situation and thus function as 'time-capsules'. Nonetheless, we must be open to the possibility that graves and the bodies and bones contained therein may have been postdepositionally re-arranged and that some

graves represent a cumulative process of many separate situations. This is not only the case for Stone Age collective burials; it seems to have been frequent in the Bronze Age and Iron Age as well. One example is the huge Bronze Age burial cairn of Kivik in southern Sweden. Due to its exceptional size and monumental appearance it has since the 19th century been believed to be the grave of a powerful chief. Recently performed osteological and dental analyses of the bone fragments from the grave do, however, prove that theory less likely. Through these, it was discovered that the chamber of the cairn hosted four to five different individuals, all in their teens except for one adult. The carbon determinations also reveal that the individuals were deposited on at least three different occasions (c. 1400-1200, 1200-1000 and 900-800 BC.). Interestingly, the adult individual is the only one buried during the last phase and should hence have little to do with the original construction of the monument (Goldhahn 2005:223-54). Also more normalized Bronze Age cairns seem to have been reused during different occasions. A recently excavated cairn on the island of Hisingen in the south-west coast of Sweden is but one example that has been constructed and modified in different phases (Ragnesten 2005). Reconstruction and modifications of burials are also found in the Iron Age. For instance, some Iron Age ship settings, which are generally thought of as constructions for a single individual, have been found to contain several individuals buried in different phases (e.g., Sigvallius 2005). Another example is the complex and extended construction phase of the Viking Age burial mound of Oseberg in Norway (Gansum 2004). These examples are the result of a quite recent awareness of the possibility of later additions and modifications of grave constructions, which suggests that the number of similar cases are likely to increase in the future and thus call for our concern when we interpret burials.

The Temporality in Burial Places

Archaeologists have generally approached burial grounds in a rather unproblematic and one-dimensional manner. For instance, there is a tradition among archaeologists to treat burial places as entities in the sense that most graves are assumed to be more or less contemporary and constructed by one and the same group of people (i.e., like a burial ground or cemetery). That particular view, however, neglects the important synchronic and diachronic developments within a burial place, as well as ruling out the possibility that the site might have been used synchronously by independent groups. It is obvious that no burial ground suddenly exists; normally they slowly expand over time, often over a couple of hundred years. The later graves must thus not only be situated in relation to the local topography, but also in relation to previous graves and other features. Recently, many archaeologists have begun to consider these temporal aspects to a greater extent than before. For instance, Mike Chapman's (2000) intra-site studies of Hungarian Copper

Age grave fields are based on the idea that a number of sub-groups of burials can be distinguished and attributed to individual households. By keeping the analysis on a small scale level, Chapman was able to discern a number of local micro-traditions as well as some general aspects of a regional level (cf. Sestieri 1992). Another methodologically interesting example is Müllers' (2002) analysis of the Neolithic graves at Trebur in Germany. By performing statistical operations on a large number of carbon determinations, he could show that the burial place has expanded from three different zones and directions (fig 1). These three zones, he argued, must represent different phases of burial of either the same group of people, or possible three *different* groups that buried their dead independently of each other at Trebur. In either case, Müller's study illustrates both the need and the potential in intra-site analysis of grave clusters instead of simply treat them as a totality.

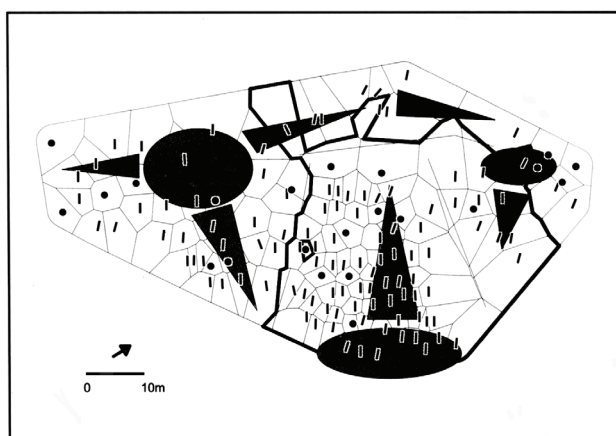


Fig.1. The graves at Trebur showing the three main burial clusters. The arrows show their horizontal expansion (modified from Müller 2002:156).

Burial as Social Practice

These three temporalities alone suffice to illustrate the great complexity that constitutes burial data. There is simply no way of assuming what a particular burial signifies and represents; that is rather the primary goal to sort out in any given case. The can be little doubt that burials are the main source for our fictions about prehistory, it is in this domain that we come across the most spectacular objects, often in undisturbed contexts. It is also difficult to ignore the fact that the bones of a burial once were an individual like us or, more specifically, an individual who died. These circumstances are certainly behind much of the fascination of burials in popular media, as well as among archaeologists, and it is perhaps in burial archaeology that we feel closest to the people whose material culture we excavate. That 'empathy' constitutes both an advantage and a weakness. Judging from recent literature, there seems to be a dividing line

among archaeologists between the 'social' study of burial and a religious ditto (Artelius & Svanberg 2005). Indeed, there are some differences; the social approach has by tradition closer ties to processual epistemology while the religious/eschatological one is more post-processual in character. The social approach is generally inclined to discuss issues of social structure, social identities and living conditions while the other tends to focus on beliefs, mentality and eschatological conceptions. But, of course, both strands of research deal with the social. The social fabric is not in reality divided into separate spheres (like religion, economy etc) that can be studied separately from the rest of life (Insoll 2001:10). In addition, archaeological evidence actually suggests that the sacred and the profane were generally less separated in prehistory than they are in contemporary Christian discourse (Bell 1992, Bradley 2005).

Despite this, most archaeologists would probably agree that burials are mainly an outcome of specific *rituals*, that is, a particular set of practices quite different from more mundane praxis. This has fostered an idea that ritual can (or even should) be studied separately and according to some 'typical' traits. The most popular is van Gennep's tripartite concept of *rite de passage* that distinguishes three phases in the ritual process, which, according to some, have universal status. But, are not the same premises also true for almost all bundles of social practice? We can easily divide everyday life activities such as playing, cooking, hunting etc, into phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation. Either everything is ritual or ritual is just another bundle of structured social practices (cf. Derrida 1995). In order to avoid any prejudgment of a particular case, burials can be studied as particular practices performed in relation to death. Such an approach can always later be deepened along a desired direction (social/ritual). It must, however, be noted that it seldom is a matter of choice about which sphere to pursue, surely some cases are definitely better suited than others for different questions.

In the following text, I will try to exemplify the importance of these arguments in an analysis of the Late Mesolithic settlement- slash- burial site of Skateholm, located in Scania in southern Sweden (fig. 2). Skateholm is a well suited example for a number of reasons. For instance, the seemingly close relation between the living and the dead at the site illustrates the problems in separating ritual from mundane social spheres. The postdepositional manipulations of graves and bodies highlight issues of how dead bodies are handled and viewed. The many individually buried dogs at the site can also help to illuminate the problems in viewing grave properties as related to the dead individual. Furthermore, the many postdepositional activities serve to question the issue of burials as closed finds of a single event, and the aggressive tendencies in some of these manipulations may shed some light of changing attitudes towards death and dead bodies.

A Piece of the Mesolithic: Skateholm

The Skateholm area includes one of the largest concentrations of graves of the Late Mesolithic in Northern Europe. The site is divided into several separate findspots termed Skateholm I–IX which were situated around what was a brackish lagoon during the Late Mesolithic (fig. 3). The two first areas (Skateholm I and II) contain the majority of the burials and are thus the primarily sites discussed here. Skateholm I is the larger of the two, comprising 65 graves and c. 200 features of a more domestic character, such as remains of postholes, huts and hearths (Larsson 1981:36, 1982:37, Bergenstråhle 1999:338). The most outstanding of the features is the centrally situated construction 10, which is interpreted as the remains of a hut (Strassburg 2000:251). The smaller Skateholm II is situated c. 150m southeast of Skateholm I and contains 22 graves together with about 100 other features (figs. 3 & 4). Perhaps the most interesting of the features is structure 24, which contained quite a lot of red ochre, animal bone (including dog) and a human milk tooth (Larsson 1990b:286).

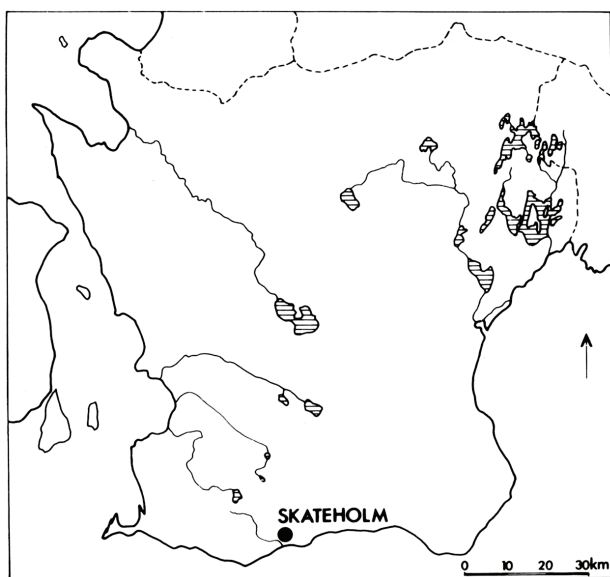


Fig. 2. Map of Southern Sweden and Skateholm (from Larsson 1988d:12).

All together 87 graves have been excavated at these two sites. The general form of the graves at both sites is the shape of an oval pit c. 0,2-0,4 m deep adjusted to the size of the buried individual. The general burial position is lying on the back with the limbs in extension, but variants of hocker and sitting positions are not uncommon (Nilsson Stutz 2003:256-8). The excavators interpret the Skateholm site as a typical hunter-fisher site, harbouring a few families quietly living at what at the time was a sheltered brackish water lagoon (Larsson 1988d, 2002). This idyllic image of the Late Mesolithic may, however,

be questionable. Much evidence from the time period - and the Skateholm site in particular - suggests that violence and aggression was no less frequent than in any other period (Strassburg 2000:162, Brinch Petersen 2001, Milner & Woodman 2005). Also, the traditional idea of Skateholm as predominantly a habitation site has been questioned. Strassburg has argued that Skateholm was primarily a ritual arena where a special category of 'dangerous' individuals, like shamans and such, were disposed (Strassburg 2000). Indeed, the other known similar clusters of graves from the Late Mesolithic in Northern Europe are small in number and may thus represent something unusual rather than the norm. Nonetheless, the osteological data from Skateholm are quite evenly distributed in terms of sex and age, which more or less refute the idea that the area was a disposal area of a specially chosen category of individuals. As we shall see, at closer look, the Skateholm site actually reveals a number of criss-crossing synchronous and diachronic patterns that suggest that the social life in the Late Mesolithic was substantially more varied and complex than what either traditional or queer perspectives can fully comprehend.

In this study I mainly focus on the graves and leave aside most of the other traces of activity and features. It is a necessary reduction that has to be made in order not to become mired in a too complex and large set of material. It is always risky to try to relate all traces from a site to each other into one single narrative. This is simply because the traces of a site are generally a result of both singular individual actions and cumulative, repeated actions of a larger group, performed over different extent in time. Many of these traces are thus not compatible or only vaguely related, which would, taken all together, result in a more misleading narrative that one based on a selection (Fahlander 2003:64ff). In this particular case, the main aim is to determine the development of the site and its internal relative chronology by focusing on the *practices* performed as related to the handling of dead bodies. Concerning the relative 'uniqueness' of the site, I will also try to minimise the regional and general, 'contemporary', analogies in my analysis. The data is thus deliberately not set in a comparative context.

There are, however, always problems in analysing archaeological evidence without first-hand knowledge of the excavation process; some aspects have to be taken at face value while others need to be questioned. The case of Skateholm is no different in this respect; rather, it is perhaps more complicated because results have been published over a number of years, continuously adding new data, re-evaluations and new analysis with each new report or article (a final publication volume is due to come within a few years). One example of this problem is the buried animal which first was reported to be a wild cat, and later on argued to be a fox, but which finally was determined as a young dog (Larsson 1984).

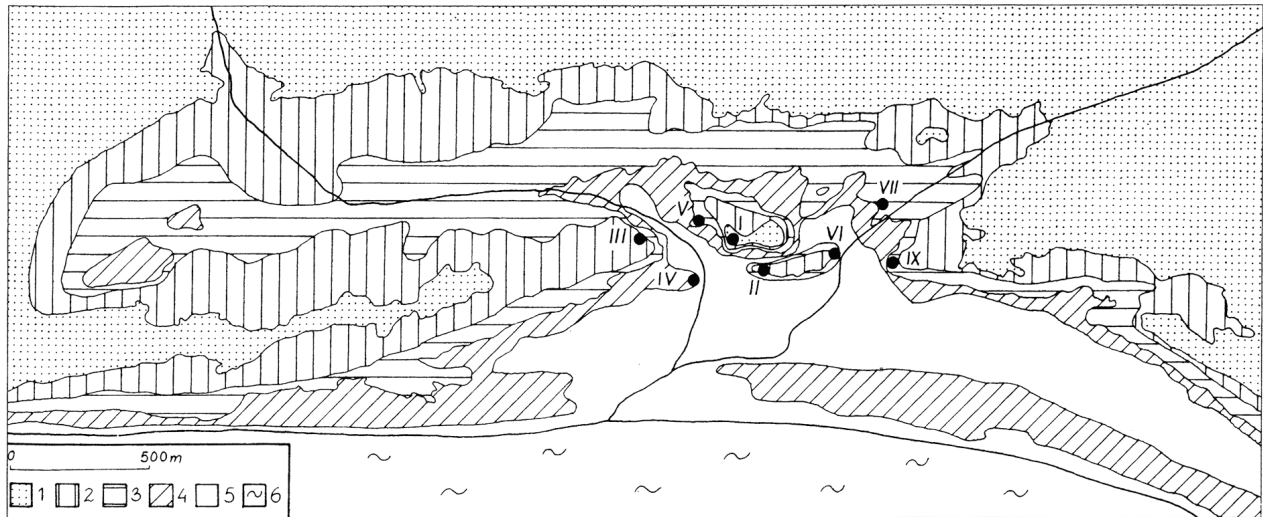


Fig. 3. The Skateholm area including sites I-IX. 1: area above 5 m asl, 2: 4-5m asl, 3: 3-4m asl, 4: 3-2m asl, 5: area less than 2m asl, and 6: contemporary sea level (after Bergenstr hle 1999:337).

Osteology	Skateholm I (63 humans, 9 dogs)	Skateholm II (22 humans, 4-5 dogs)
Sex:		
Males	11 (+5 insecure)	9
Females	10 (+6 insecure)	8
Undeterminable	42/31	5
Age:		
>20 years old	41	15
12-19 years old	8	3
0-12 years old	7	4
Undeterminable	7	0

Table 1. The sex and age estimations for the human bodies of Skateholm I and II. Note that the table is based on Nilsson Stutz's critical re-evaluation (2003, database on CD).

There are other examples of contradictions and uncertainties concerning the data (see B cklund Blank & Fahlander 2006:257), but the most problematic area concerns the sex and age estimations of the osteological data. In the early texts, Larsson sometimes seems to mix preliminary osteological estimations with assumptions of what artefacts in the graves represent, for instance, assuming that an axe in a grave indicate a male (1981:20, 26). In more recent texts he relies on Persson & Persson's (1984 & 1988) osteological analyses, which unfortunately are based on old fashioned methods and are in general not very reliable. Both Nilsson Stutz (2003: 172-173, 177f) and Strassburg (2000:155), who recently

worked with the Skateholm material, have made re-evaluations of the sex of a number of individuals. In this text I have chosen to follow Nilsson Stutz's critical examination of Persson & Persson's osteological data and Alexandersen's (1988) tooth morphological studies because her approach seems to be the most up-to date in a methodological sense.

The uncertainty regarding the data has great ramifications and somewhat hampers attempts to perform statistical or quantitative operations on the Skateholm material. One illustrative example is Robert Schmidt's (2004) recent analysis of the graves. Schmidt argues that because stone tools, especially the axes, are more frequently found in 'male' burials, than 'female' ditto's, a marginal category of 'women with stone' can be singled out. Schmidt then suggests that there were at least two different female genders during the late Mesolithic: One that worked with stone, and one that did not (2004:103). There can be many objections made to Schmidt's reasoning, but the uncertainty of the osteology and the unknown contemporality of the sample would still make such comparative analysis untenable. In addition, departing from a critical stance towards the sex evaluations, the data reveals no indications that this particular corporeal aspect was accentuated in the burials. On the contrary, there are very few indications that the properties of the burial are related to the buried individual. For instance, there are no clear patterns concerning the placement of grave interments such as ochre, axes, tools, amber etc in relation to different bodies. Some graves contain quite a lot of grave goods, while others are more or less empty aside from the bones of the buried. Does this imply that the people at Skateholm were hierarchically stratified but equal when it comes to sex/gender? Or are the graves and their interments simply determined by the composition of the participants in the burial act? In order to answer that

question we need to construct some sort of relational chronology to adhere to possible diachronic and synchronic variability in order to avoid confusing social variability with social change.

The Relative Chronology of Skateholm I and II

The dating of Skateholm I and Skateholm II rests upon a combination of stratigraphy, artefact typology and a few carbon determinations (Table 2). Larsson argues, based on uncalibrated carbon determinations, that both areas were inhabited continuously or recurrently for two or three hundred years (1983:22). Skateholm II is assumed to be the older phase, which is abandoned in favour of Skateholm I (1983:22, 1988a:69). Unfortunately, the carbon determinations do not support this scenario. Of all the graves on Skateholm I, only two (nos. 4 and 37) have been successfully dated through bone material and an additional five through charcoal samples from the fill of the grave.³ These determinations are generally unreliable because the samples are too small and the context is uncertain (Gob 1990:181ff). Furthermore, the general 'width' of calibrated determinations often spans several hundred years even when using 1 sigma (c. 62% probability). From a 'calibrated point of view', the carbon determinations are thus not precise enough to support any difference in date between the two sites (see e.g., Buck et al 1994).

Another argument in favour of a chronological difference between Skateholm I and Skateholm II is the difference in altitude between the two sites. At the transgression from the Late Mesolithic to the Neolithic, the water level in southern Sweden was approximately 5-6 meters higher than it is today (Gedda 2007). Larsson (1981:42, 1988c:84) thus suggests, based on a general rate of transgression, that the two sites were actually situated on two small islands of which the lower Skateholm II over time became submerged forcing people to move to the higher located Skateholm I (fig. 3). The problem with this scenario is that the difference in sea-level is too small to back up such an interpretation. Estimations of past sea levels have quite a large margin of error because of limited number of samples and the general width of the carbon determinations they are based upon. There are also great daily and yearly variations in sea-level, up to 1-2 meters, due to tides or heavy storms (Björk *et al* 2000).

Although the sea-level hypothesis is weak, it nonetheless seems probable that the accumulation of graves generally follow the rising water level and thus render the graves on the lower levels earlier and the ones on top of the ridge later (which also is indicated by one of the carbon determinations taken from the ridge, Larsson 1988d:100).

³ From Skateholm II there are only one grave dated (not yet published), but is claimed to be more or less within the same time span as the graves at Skateholm I (Eriksson & Lidén 2003:1).

There are also some typological differences found in the flint artefacts and distribution of ceramics of the non-grave features and cultural layers between the two sites. This suggests that at least the 'domestic' activities are generally earlier at Skateholm II (Larsson 1981:38, 1983:22f, 1985:369, Stilborg & Bergenstråhle 2000, but see also Larsson 1988d:98). Furthermore, antlers and tools made out of horn are found almost exclusively at Skateholm II, the only exceptions at Skateholm I are graves 22 and 28, which happen to be situated in the south-east and thus closest to Skateholm II (see Bäcklund Blank & Fahlander 2006:264f for more details).

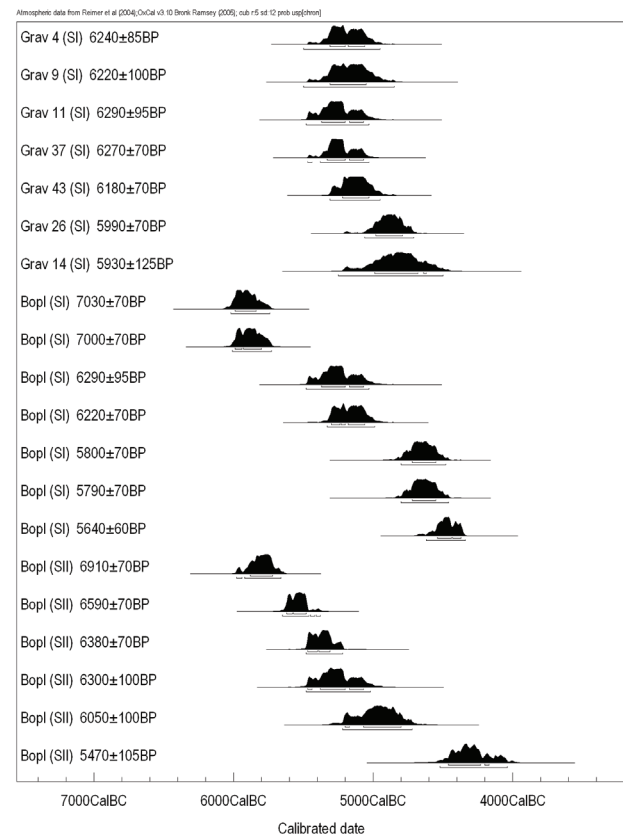


Table. 2 The carbon determinations from Skateholm I & II (Grav = grave, Bopl = feature/layer). The table is made by OxCal v3.10 and based on data from Gob (1990:181ff). Please note that grave 4 is erroneously named grave 2 by Gob (cf. Larsson 1981:42).

Of course, the evidence of such a general horizontal stratigraphy is merely circumstantial; to attain a more detailed image of how Skateholm developed over time we need to examine other aspects aside from carbon determinations and shoreline displacement. In order to facilitate a quick and easy visualisation of different scenarios, and to evaluate the chronological aspects of various data, ArcGIS[®] software has proven useful. Analyses be done by transforming a scanned image of the site plan to vector graphics and then converting all interesting features to polygons with the aid of appropriate software. These polygons can then be related

to other excavation data in an Access-database, which makes it possible to put multidimensional queries to the data that immediately can be displayed graphically on the screen. Such a procedure does not show any clear indications that corporeal aspects of the dead bodies were accentuated in the burials (based on Nilsson Stutz osteological evaluations). Neither are there any clear patterns between different grave constructions nor in the distribution of grave interments such as ochre, axes, tools, amber etc. But a closer look at the *practices* behind the burials does reveal some interesting patterns that may hint at a rough horizontal stratigraphy.

Towards a Horizontal Stratigraphy

In recent years there have been several attempts made to relate and serialise the burials at Skateholm (e.g., Strassburg 2000:256, Roth Niemi 2001:76), but unfortunately most of them are based on dubious determinations of sex and vague hereditary morphological traits (see Bäcklund 2005:22, Bäcklund Blank & Fahlander 2006). Despite the apparent 'normality' of the graves, there are nonetheless a few general patterns among the graves that could hint at a general development of the site. Most significant are a few categories of graves that stick out from the rest and which appear to be asynchronous patterns. For instance, all '*double-burials*' with more than one adult are found in the south-western part of Skateholm I (nos. 6, 14, 41, 4, 47, 62, 63). Adjacent to construction 10 we also find most of the *postdepositional manipulated burials* (nos. 4, 7 & 28, including grave 13 which contained an individual which was cut up before burial). Another interesting category are the five occurrences of *intersecting burials* (e.g., 1/2, 34/35, 40/41, 46/47, and 56/57). The most striking spatial pattern, however, is the apparent close relationship between *individually buried dogs and children* under the age of eight. On the southernmost part of Skateholm I there is a cluster of dogs buried together with two young children (nos. 9, 10, 15, 17, 18 and 65). The other dog- and children's graves are situated in the western (42 & 62) and eastern (19 & 23) edges of the main activity area. Although such graves seem to be lacking in the north, it is apparent that dogs and children are purposely buried at the boundaries of the site (fig. 4). A similar pattern is also found at Skateholm II, but here the dogs are buried at the eastern (XIX) and western (XXI) edges of the cluster and the children in the north (XII) and the south (XIII). It is indeed a striking pattern that needs to be examined in greater detail.

On the Fringes: Dogs and Children

Graves of individually buried dogs are not that uncommon in prehistory, there are even sites containing over a thousand buried dogs (Evans & Welinder 1997, Morey 2006, Trømborg 2006). Larsson (1990a, 1994:568) has suggested that the buried dogs may have

been substitutions for human bodies lost at sea. Strassburg reasons in similar lines but suggests that the dogs symbolise shape-shifters or shamans (2000:161, 213f). Also the idea of symbolic watchdogs has been raised. Munt & Meiklejohn (2007:167) suggest that the extreme southern position of the dogs at Skateholm I is intentional as a 'real or symbolic protection to the encampment'. They seem to take for granted that any dangers would only come from the sea and not from land, an assumption they never elaborate upon.

It has been fashionable in recent decades to favour ritual and 'mysterious' interpretations of archaeological data. In this case, the dogs of Skateholm make no exception. Contrary to the somewhat silly trend of ritualising the past, we could, however, argue that dogs simply were dear members of the household and buried as such when they died (cf. Morey 2006). The liminal treatment of dogs can then be explained by their low status as individuals; they are buried when they die, but only at the outskirts of the main burial area. The same reasoning may also apply for the similar placement of the children's burials. Generally, burials of small children are rarely as elaborated as the graves of adults and the bodies of dead children are often handled differently from the adult in most prehistoric time periods and areas (Baxter 2005, Fahlander 2008). Such seemingly subaltern status of dead children is often associated with an ambiguous identity in life. Indeed, the young child is in a social sense often displaced, or lost, somewhere in between a 'proper' gender, sex, identity, citizenship, wild-domestic, animal-human etc. This, however, does not necessarily mean that children cannot have high social status or importance of their own.

It is probably true, that children and juveniles seldom are the great producers, leaders or innovators in prehistoric societies. The way they are treated in death, and their social position in life, can nonetheless be very helpful when exploring the life of the adult world. Consider a grave where a newborn child is buried with a large harpoon which it never could have been able to use in life. Is this simply evidence for a social structure based on inherited prestige (cf. Strassburg 2000:200)? It could, of course, also simply represent a burial gift of one of the participating adults with little or no relation to the dead child. Here the dog burials may help us with an answer. The dogs at Skateholm have been buried with the same kind of artefacts as the humans (e.g., red ochre, flint tools or red deer antler). *Nota bene*, some of these interments were actual tools and one of the 'richest' graves at Skateholm (XXI) is actually given to one of the dogs (Larsson 1988b:23). The individually buried dogs make one question the supposed relationship between the burial interments and the buried individual/family. The most likely interpretation in this particular place must thus be that the burial interments represent some sort of collective effort, either by representatives or by the whole group.

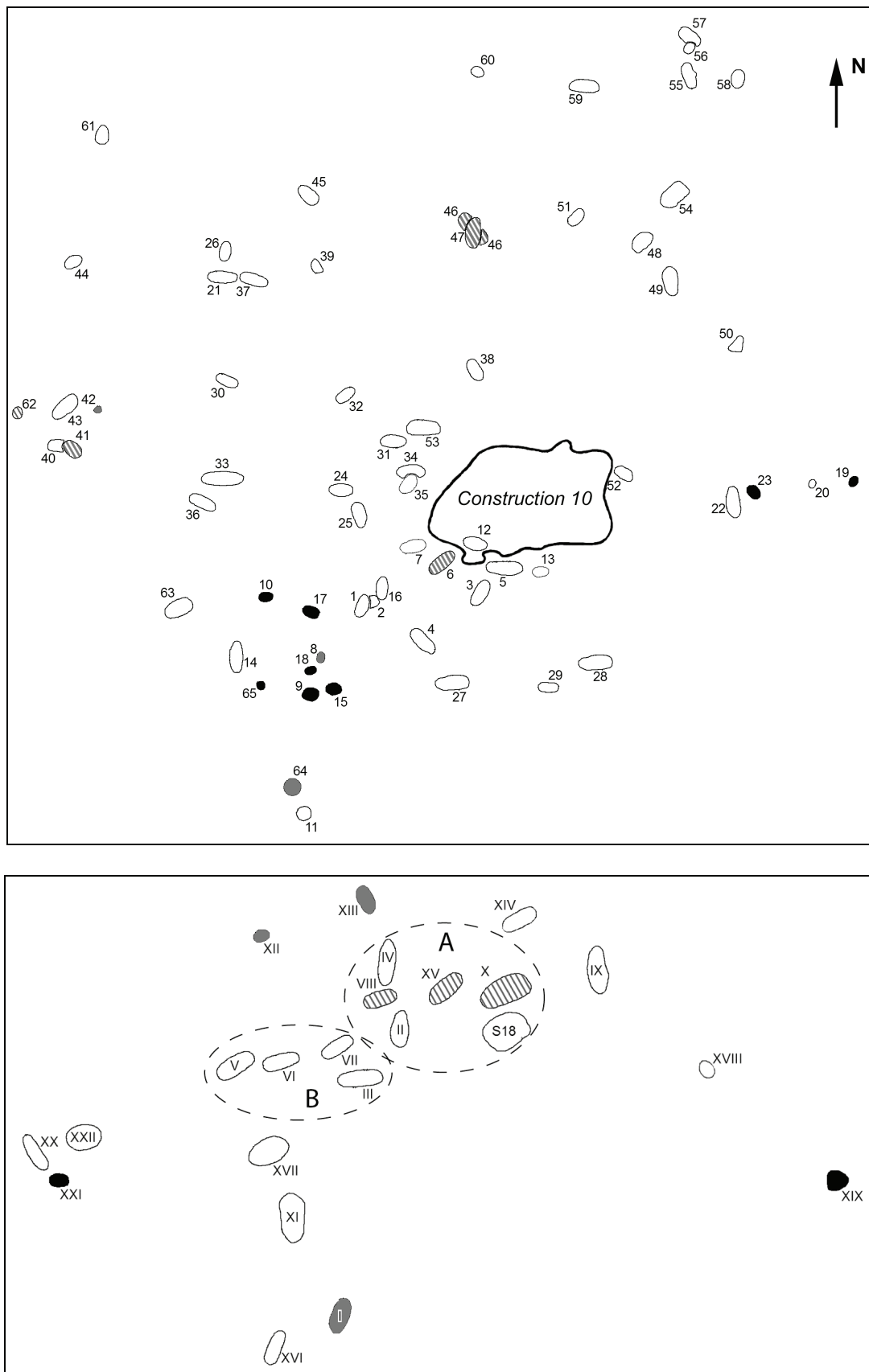


Fig. 4. Skateholm I (above) and Skateholm II (below): The graves with individually buried dogs (black), children under 8 years (grey), and graves containing dogs/children buried together with adults (hatched). (image constructed in ArcGIS).

Notwithstanding how we may understand the child-dog relationship, they still indicate differences between Skateholm I and Skateholm II which may hint at their chronological relations. For instance, Munt & Meiklejohn note that the role of the dog seems to change between Skateholm II and I as the buried dogs become less related spatially to humans and more frequently buried individually (2007:167). Their observation may be important, but it nonetheless stretches the data a bit too far as the number of cases is too limited. Instead, we can conclude that Skateholm I and Skateholm II most probably are two separate burial areas. Although Skateholm I at first sight seems to lack a northern cluster of child/dog burials, we will nonetheless find that both Skateholm II and the southern part of Skateholm I are in fact 'closed' in all four cardinal points by dogs and children (see fig. 6). Interestingly, the dogs and children are not 'alone' in these clusters. For instance, in the eastern and southern clusters of Skateholm I, we also find the two 'graves' consisting of burned human bones (nos. 11 & 20). These circumstances suggest that 'problematic' bodies are consequently buried east, west, north and south of the main area. The apparent 'normality' of the two adult graves (nos. 22 and 40) in the western and eastern clusters respectively may thus also belong to the same liminal category as small children and dogs. There is, however, nothing in the published data that may explain their placement; but it implies that other corporeal variable may have been at work as well.

If the extension of the burial area was determined already from the start, or if the dog-children horizon is a cumulative result, is an interesting question, but will have to remain to be answered until additional analyses can be performed. It is, however, evident that the buried dogs and children under the age of eight were intentionally placed at the edges of the main activity area and therefore comprise an asynchronous horizon separated from the general development of both Skateholm I and II (fig. 4).

You Only Die Twice: Postdepositional Manipulations of Burials and Bodies

"I'm gonna kill you. I'm gonna double-kill you, then I'm gonna put you in a shallow grave, then dig you up and kill you again. That's the beauty of a shallow grave." Homer J. Simpson⁴

Another interesting categories of burials at Skateholm are those that have been postdepositionally manipulated. Manipulations of the dead body are not an uncommon feature in prehistory (e.g., Baxter 1999, Andrews & Bello 2006). That burials are reopened, reused, robbed and manipulated in various ways are known from all periods of prehistory (e.g., Randsborg 1998, Fahlander 2003: 77, 111f, Olofsson 2006). There are many different reasons why bones, body parts or the whole body can be missing (Brinch Petersen 2006), but 'secondary action', or post-

depositional manipulations, of human bones are generally interpreted as being part of some kind of death cult or forefather veneration, a fiction inspired by various anthropological accounts. Another common explanation for missing or rearranged bones is due to an expanded burial ritual in which the body undergoes certain phases before the remaining bones are finally put to rest (e.g., Ahlström 2001:352f; Andersson 2004:17). There are, of course other possible interpretations. For instance, secondary actions taken against a grave and/or body can also be interpreted as an act of aggression towards the previously dead. Different groups may compete over a site or piece of land, and as a part of the struggle, some may find it effective to disturb the others' dead. It could also be aggressive acts on the individual level, the idea being that a dead individual is refused serenity in the afterlife because the grave has been destroyed or the bodily remains have been disturbed.



Fig. 5. Grave 28 (SI). One example of manipulated graves. The buried man's left radius and ulna, the left ox coxae and the left femur have been removed after the flesh has decomposed (Nilsson Stutz 2003:242, cf. Larsson 1988d:121). Photo by Lars Larsson.

At Skateholm, there are a few examples of post-depositionally manipulated burials. In some of these cases parts of the bones have been removed after the soft tissue has dissolved, for instance, grave 28 (fig. 5). Other examples are grave 7 (male 30-40 years old) and grave 35 (female 30-40 years old) which are both missing their left femur (Nilsson Stutz 2003:312). Instead of simply ritualising the past by interpreting these manipulations as a result of ancestor worship based on popular images of ethnography, we may consider an interpretation in which different groups or individuals mock each other by 'killing' the already dead through disturbing their graves. It can also be possible that graves and dead bodies are manipulated in order to influence the means of the dead as virtual actants in the world of the living. Such interpretations can partly be sustained by the intersecting or overlapping burials (Nos. 1, 35, 41, 47 & 56). They could result from unintentional mistakes because older burials have become invisible on the surface (cf. Strassburg 2000:256, Midgley 2005:70). However, the fact that several graves have been reopened and manipulated suggests that at least some graves were

⁴ Episode 11, season 17, "We're on the Road to D'ohwhere".

visible many years after the original burial. The reasons for deliberate overlapping can be twofold. Perhaps some would have liked to establish a connection to the previously deceased (cf. Nilsson Stutz 2003:330), but it could also be a matter of the opposite: An act of aggression towards a previously dead individual. The case of overlapping graves 46 and 47 speak in favour of the later hypothesis, in which latter grave is dug right through the former. It must have been obvious to the ones digging the new grave that they cut right through an older one.⁵

Notwithstanding how we like to interpret the post-depositional activities at Skateholm I, it seems evident that something strange is going in the area around construction 10 because all the manipulated bodies and most of the intersecting graves are found here. At least the postdepositional manipulations of the dead bodies (nos. 7, 28, 35) have got to be considered a consistent and intentional practice. In addition to the general horizontal stratigraphy we must therefore add not only the diachronic patterns of individually buried dogs and children, but also the manipulated graves next to construction 10 (it is also possible that some of the intersecting graves belong to this phase). There may certainly be additional synchronous or asynchronous horizons than those considered here, but these nonetheless suffice to sketch out the general development of the Skateholm site and provide a platform from which we can discuss possible social change or use of independent groups in the area.

Intra-site Changes and Phases of Activity at Skateholm

Departing from the indications of shore displacement, carbon determinations and, most conclusively, from the similarities and differences in burial practice, it seems reasonable to assume that the graves of Skateholm II constitute a *first phase* of burials at Skateholm. In general, the sample of 22 graves at Skateholm II is too small to determine any internal horizontal development. There are, however, two clusters of graves that stand out from the rest at Skateholm II (fig. 4). One consists of the five graves close to construction 18 which all have a very high Number of Artefact Types-index (II, VIII, IV, X, XV). In three of these graves we also find all double burials with adults and dogs. Right next to this group

there are another cluster of four graves (V, VI, VII and III), which do not contain any items at all - except for the dead bodies (Bäcklund Blank & Fahlander 2006). The difference between these two clusters (A and B) is especially striking concerning their spatial proximity. It can be argued that the first cluster of graves (A) is the oldest of Skateholm II, considering that they are situated on the most prominent space on top of the ridge. The other group of 'poor' graves (B) would thus represent a later stage. The difference may indicate either synchronous social differentiation or an asynchronous pattern, but there is no way in which we can tell which is more likely. We have to settle for the notion that Skateholm II seems to display internal differences regarding burial practice and the significance of non-human bodies.

In terms of analysing the view of death and dead bodies during this first phase, the differences between the two clusters of graves (A and B) indicate a *formative* phase characterised by variability and ambivalence in how burials are to be carried out. Many different bodies are buried, small children, dogs and adults of various sex and ages. The practice of placing dogs and children at the fringes of the main area is either a common practice from the start, or something that develops over time. The only significant exception seems to be that dogs can be buried centrally if together with an adult (which actually may be the oldest practice concerning dogs). The two instances where this occurs are in the proposed earliest cluster (A), which rather suggests that the fringe position of dogs is not an original, 'pre-Skateholm' practice, but rather locally developed as new dead need to be buried.

The next phase of burials is found in the southern half of Skateholm I. Here we find all types of bodies, adults, children and dogs properly buried. Some changes in grave interments occur and, as pointed out earlier, the closest burials (nos. 22, and 28) may constitute links with Skateholm II. This *second phase* of activity is somewhat ambivalent, as all kinds of dead bodies seem to have required a proper burial, but the lesser number of grave interments and the new practice of double adult burials may suggest that the ritual is of less concern during this phase. Of course, the double burials could also indicate a lack of inalienable objects or that fewer people were involved in the burial act. Indeed, the double burials may simply indicate a period of higher mortality. The pattern from Skateholm II of placing dogs and children in the four cardinal points is also present during this phase. One difference is that those clusters are much more distinct than earlier and also seem to include other possibly liminal bodies. It is not surprising to find the only two 'graves' containing burned human bones (nos. 11 and 20) in the eastern and southern cluster.

⁵ A further example of aggressive attitudes towards the dead is found in grave 13 (Skateholm I). It is a single case that does not fit any of the two discussed categories, but nonetheless shows evidence of hostility towards the dead. In the grave, a number of transverse arrowheads were found at an intermediate level in the grave (above the body) in such positions as they seem to have been shot down into the grave (Larsson 1988d). Whether this event was a part of the burial ritual performed at the same occasion or a later 'addition' is not clear.

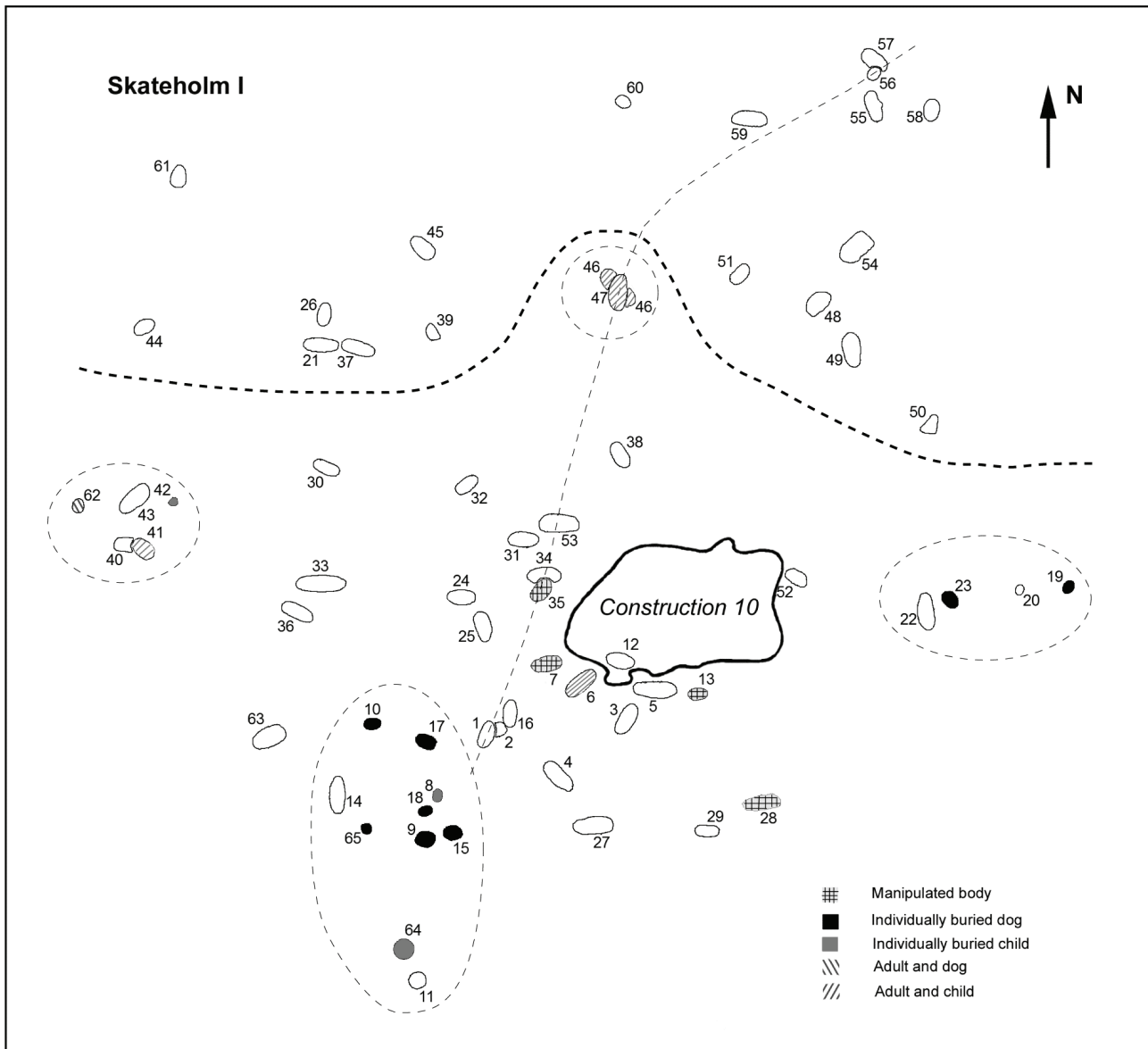


Fig. 6. The graves of Skateholm I. Graves with manipulated bodies, dogs or children are highlighted. The dotted circles indicate north, south, west and east clusters of special individuals. The dotted line running east-west separates the two major phases (2 and 3) of burial activity at Skateholm I. The north-south dotted line outlines the intersecting burials (image constructed in ArcGIS).

There are, however, complications in this area. The southern part of Skateholm I is confused by what must be later practices of a different kind. Construction 10 seems to play an important part in what can be considered a shorter *third phase* at Skateholm. Construction 10 (a hut?) is clearly later than grave 12, which it is superimposed upon. It is not too farfetched to assume that the postdepositional manipulations of the graves around this construction belong to the same phase (although the burials themselves are likely to have been constructed during phase two). It is thus probable that phase three only was a short intermediate period of occupation during which no, or only a few burials were constructed. Of course, it is possible that some of the intersecting graves may belong to this phase. The intersecting graves are

obviously younger than those they intersect and the majority are situated close to Construction 10. Such a hypothesis can, however, not be substantiated by the data at this point, but can only be regarded a possibility. It is nonetheless interesting to note that most of the intersecting burials run along a north-south axis across the area (fig. 6). Some of these instances with intersecting graves seem thus likely to have been intentional practices. Another special aspect of these graves is their general alignment. The ones that obviously are intersecting previous burials are all aligned in north-south direction (nos. 1, 35 and 47), which suggests that alignment can be another asynchronous formation. It is a bit striking that this alignment also includes grave 14 and grave 22, of the southern and eastern child/dog clusters respectively.

Phase	Area	Properties	Interpretation
1	Skateholm II, beginning on the ridge	High synchronous variability. All bodies are buried, Children and dogs are placed at the fringes. Dogs in the east and west, children in the north and south	Formation phase, great variability and little standardised ritual. Bodies of dogs and small children differentiated.
2	The south 2/3 of Skateholm I.	Less synchronous variability. All bodies buried (children, dog, adults). Children and dogs are placed in the fringes in all four cardinal points. Double adult burials. Fewer interments.	Ritual of less importance or fewer people involved in the burial act. Less separation of dogs and children. Double graves may indicate period of stress with higher mortality rate.
3	The middle of Skateholm I, centred around construction 10.	Probably no, or few burials, only post-depositional manipulations of the already buried. Possible construction of some intersecting and north-south aligned graves.	The dead body is charged (traumatic or mundane). Traces of veneration or aggression of the previously dead. New constellation at Skateholm associated with construction 10?
4	Northern part of Skateholm I	Little variability. No children or dogs buried. No double burials.	Consolidation phase? The return of the original inhabitants or possible a hybrid of different groups?

Table 3. Brief summary of the four phases of activity at Skateholm, their differences in burial practice and possible interpretation.

These two graves are quite ‘normal’ and do not fit the general pattern of liminality, hence they might belong to one and the same phase of burials as several other north-south aligned graves (including some intersecting ones).

Because only few or no burials were constructed during phase three it is difficult to interpret the attitudes towards death and dead bodies. Postdepositional manipulation in general, however, can be interpreted as the dead body has become charged with greater importance, or perhaps that death is more traumatic. The attitudes behind post-depositional can thus at the same time can be interpreted as a closer, less traumatic relationship to the dead body, perhaps in terms of veneration of real or imagined forefathers. But if we assume that the manipulation was carried out by another group, we can also discuss the practice in terms of mockery and aggression or simply disrespect for the dead of the other. Although phase three may only be a short intermission in the Skateholm narrative, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge as it so clearly highlights the fallacies in studying burial places as contemporary entities.

Finally, we need to consider the northernmost graves higher up the ridge. Of course, we cannot be certain whether the graves are related to third phase of occupation, or if they actually constitute a separate, fourth, and final phase. It is quite clear, however, that the burials of the north-eastern half of Skateholm I are a different cluster separate from those of phase two. The graves in this area do not exhibit any particular conspicuous attributes, but are generally ‘ordinary’ in term of construction and interments. This apparent homogeneity may thus be interpreted as belonging to a late consolidating phase. The occurrence of red ochre in

the northernmost graves separates them from the others but does not necessarily indicate a change in burial ritual. The remaining coloured soil is perhaps simply due to change in clothing (Larsson 1988d). The most interesting characteristic of this cluster is that no dogs or small children are buried here. These bodies are thus probably still regarded as liminal, and are either not buried at all or placed somewhere else (or simply disposed in such a way that they no longer are identifiably archaeologically). Thus, there is a change in practice regarding these bodies during this phase, but whether this also implies a radically different view of how these bodies/individuals are apprehended is unfortunately not determinable.

An interesting but awkward question is whether these graves are constructed by returning ‘original’ inhabitants, or if they are a product of a ‘new’ group that first established themselves in concurrence with construction 10 during phase three? A third possibility is also a hybrid of ‘old’ and ‘new’ individuals (of course, normal social variability within an ethnic collective can often be as great or casual as it can be between two separate collectives). If a new generation of people settled down at Skateholm during this phase, they probably had some recollection of the previous inhabitants in memory, myth or by remaining elderly individuals. It could thus be a case of taking up old traditions, but without fully understand them – hence the differences in burial practice. What we do know is that several of the individuals buried at Skateholm did move around. C13 analysis suggests that both dogs and humans circulated, especially along the west coast of Sweden (Eriksson & Lidén 2003, Larsson 1985:374, Strassburg 2000:140). Furthermore, studies of the animal bone from the cultural layers indicate that there was little or no activity during

the summer months of June to September at Skateholm (Carter 2004). This supports the re-evaluation of the shore-displacement effects previously discussed, suggesting that the Skateholm area was probably not an ideal site for continuous habitation. The question of 'multi-ethnic' use of the site, parallel or synchronous, is thus rather something to expect.

Towards a Bigger Picture: Skateholm and the Late Mesolithic

In sum, it can be established that the Skateholm area was occupied during at least four separate phases (most likely even more than that concerning the seasonality of the habitation). During all phases of activity at Skateholm, possibly except for phase three, a distinction between the bodies of dead adults and children below the age of eight was apparently made. The threshold for proper burial thus coincides with the age when the child has achieved most of the basic abilities most adults have besides the ability of procreation (Fahlander 2008). This could suggest that achievements and abilities were considered more important than corporeal bodily properties such as sex, or for that matter, kinship and status. Concerning the adults, no corporeal aspects such as sex and age seems to have been emphasized in death, but, of course, we cannot tell if this also was the case among the living. We know far too little about the burial ritual to properly be able to interpret placement, orientation and form of the grave, the variability on body position and bodily manipulations and grave interments in any reliable manner. The buried dogs may, however, provide us with some clues. The dog obviously occupied a special position in contrast to other animals. Although other animal bone are present in some graves, only the dogs was buried separately.

Traditionally, large tools found in child graves that are too big for the child to have used in life have often been explained as evidence of inherited prestige. But how do we then explain the tools in the dogs' graves? It seems rather far fetched to assume that they were intended to be used by the animal in an afterlife. From a general point of view, the simplest explanation must be that the burial interments were not primarily related to the buried individual. It make more sense to assume that the so called burial gifts in the Skateholm graves probably represent something more of a communal effort of the burial participants rather than that the dead were buried with their personal belongings or according to their social persona. This suggests that traditional Saxe-Binford inspired analyses, such as Schmidt's (2005) previously discussed study, is rather pointless. It seems that issues of personal identity, gender and social structure (beside the distinction of children under the age of eight) are not possible to answer in this particular case.

Concerning the horizontal stratigraphy, the present study confirms that the graves of Skateholm II most probably are earlier than most of the graves of Skateholm I.

Skateholm II constitute the first phase of burial activity and is 'framed' in all four cardinal points by graves of dogs and children, a structuring practice that is continued in phase two at the southern part of Skateholm I. The following third, possibly short-termed phase is associated with postdepositional manipulations at construction 10 in the midst of the area, but not necessarily with any burials. Finally, the 'normal' and less varied graves in the northern part constitute a fourth phase at Skateholm. During this final phase of activity, children and dogs are no longer buried at all. If the status children further declined or not during this phase is not possible to determine, but their position subaltern nonetheless seem to have remained. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine whether the different phases at Skateholm are the result of one and the same collective that repeatedly visited the site or if they may reflect the appropriation of the area by different independent groups, although it seems likely that some time passed between the second and third phases and that the latter was likely to be short termed with few or none burials.

The differences in attitudes towards death and dead bodies between the four phases at Skateholm clearly emphasises the importance of the temporal issues, i.e., the body, the grave and the burial place, raised in the first part of this text. The sometimes parallel synchronous and diachronic patterns in burial ritual emphasised in this study should be argument enough against interpreting all graves of a site from homogeneous cultural perspectives. Obviously, the burials at Skateholm cannot be interpreted from a one-dimensional perspective only – whether it is from a normative or a queer standpoint. It is interesting to note that the bottom-up approach actually tells a different story than the conventional processual and interpretative studies have done. Such a perspective has also evoked new questions that seldom are of concern in traditional analysis. The local, bottom-up approach surely has proven to complicate some common-sense matters, but it nonetheless forces us to look at the material and the social life of the Late Mesolithic differently. It becomes more complex, less stereotyped, and indeed, more fascinating.

But how do these local variations in burial practice relate to a bigger picture? Similar patterns concerning the placement of dogs and small children are not found in any other Late Mesolithic site. One infant burial at Bøgebakken (n. 21) can perhaps be regarded as liminally placed in the south, but this and other burial places from the same date are in general too small and often too poorly preserved to sustain horizontal analysis. However, many of the practices and elements discussed here are also found at other similar sites such as Tågerup, Vedbæk in Denmark or Zvejnieki in northern Latvia. This may indicate that some ideas concerning death and dead bodies extended over larger areas at the time (cf. Nilsson Stutz 2003:322). In order to properly relate these sites with each other, similar local bottom-up studies as the present are necessary in order to be able to relate the right

phase of one site with a contemporary phase of another. Such a comparative study would certainly prove interesting and additional analyses of other sites may possibly provide both earlier and later phases than those at Skateholm as well as some contemporary ones. It must, however, be emphasised that we can never employ such comparative study to reach a singular chronological ritual development of the Late Mesolithic in analogy with the construction of dendrochronologies made of overlapping, but different, wood-samples. It would only be expected to find great variation between different contemporary burials at different sites. It is also evident that similar lifestyles in similar environments often tend to lead to similarities in practice without the need for a common ideology or cosmology. This phenomenon can easily be

demonstrated by comparing the many similarities of a much later Pitted Ware site of Ajvide on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. Most of the characteristic elements in burial practices discussed here are also present at Ajvide and at many other sites occupied by hunter-gathering fishers at coastal sites (Fahlander 2006a). The rather large gap in continuity between the Late Mesolithic and the Middle Neolithic groups suggest that such similarities probably originate from similarities in subsistence, biotope and those materialities and practices that normally follow such a lifestyle. The same argument is, of course, also valid for any similarities between different roughly contemporary Late Mesolithic coastal sites.

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Chapter 4

Excavating the Kings' Bones: The Materiality of Death in Practice and Ethics Today

Anders Kaliff & Terje Oestigaard

ABSTRACT Is it unethical to excavate recent graves and cremated remains, but ethical to excavate prehistoric funeral remains? Most archaeologists will probably answer yes to these questions, although this is not straightforward and obvious. Western archaeologists often have an implicit Christian and ethnocentric worldview with regards to ethical questions concerning death, which in turn may become a new form of academic colonialism. We will address these issues with the cremated kings in Nepal after the palace massacre in Kathmandu in 2001. Less than a year later we excavated the kings' bones from these cremations in the riverbed, and asked one of the cremation priests who cremated the royals about death and ethics.

The materiality of death is inevitably an intrinsic part of archaeological practices since much of our data stem from funerals. Archaeologists have a special relationship with the dead. Physically, we come closer to them than most other people do, but in our work there is also an inherent distance. Our study of the dead is rarely a reflection of ourselves and our own mortality. The dead are transformed into objects in an impersonal study – dead bodies with a qualitatively different meaning than ourselves. On one level, this is of course unavoidable and quite understandable. Archaeology is not primarily a subject of self-reflection, although this is an interwoven and necessary component. Graves are central to archaeologists, but also to general human beliefs. The grave as an archetypal symbol is always present in Western culture, not only as a reminder of death and transience, but also as a symbol for something hidden and unconscious within ourselves. Ask anyone to evoke the thought of the dead in their graves and he or she will hardly remain unaffected. Few phenomena have such an intrinsic value of sentiment and symbol as death and burials. These strong feelings are not unique in our culture, but rather deeply inherent in the very being of man. Important and enduring rituals and beliefs concerning the dead can be seen in any culture, but they often differ considerably from the practices we are accustomed to today in Western societies. Accordingly, the ethical questions we as archaeologists must ask before investigating graves and human remains also differ, depending on the cultural and religious contexts in the past and the present (Kaliff 2004: 251-253).

Nevertheless, the way we deal with the physicality of death – the human body itself or its remains – is seldom questioned, and the way we deal with death is often based on implicit Christian prejudices which we apply to non-Christian graves and funeral practices. Moreover, ethical considerations are more often taken into account

concerning excavations of recent or Christian graves than prehistoric or non-Christian graves. Prehistoric graves are often treated as merely being a source material of antiquarian and scientific interest. A question rises: At what point does a grave cease to be a holy site or a resting place for the remains of a dead human being and transformed into only a cultural historical remain, which can be displayed in museums? This was what we aimed to find out or at least emphasise by excavating the kings' bones of the recently deceased kings Birendra and Dipendra of Nepal.

On June 1st 2001 King Birendra was killed and his son Crown Princess Dipendra shot in the palace massacre in Kathmandu, Nepal. King Birendra was cremated the next day at Pashupatinath, and the ashes and bones were immersed into the Bagmati River. The Crown Prince, who was in coma, was crowned as the king on June 2nd, but died the next day and was cremated on June 4th at Pashupatinath. The kings were cremated at the uppermost cremation platform (upstream) in front of the holy river Bagmati, which is the platform where only royals are allowed to be cremated. This implies that the bones in front of this platform could only stem from the dead kings. In February 2002 we picked up some of the kings' cremated bones from the riverbed before we put them back into the river. We then asked one of the priests who cremated the kings what he thought if the kings' bones were removed from the holy river. The answers we received challenged our perceptions of death, ethics and our practice of excavating dead people. Today, Christian graves are sacred, but we excavate graves from prehistory irrespective of other peoples' conceptions of death, which raises the questions: What is death? How does death matter in society today and in the past, and how should we treat the material remains of the dead, which we exhibit in museums? Is our West-European (Christian or secular) ethical framework relevant at all when dealing

with dead people belonging to other cultural and religious contexts?

When studying other living cultures as well as the past of our own geographical area, it is important to discuss these fundamental questions. Our scientific approach and ethical conceptions, including post-colonial theory, are basically part of a Eurocentric world view, which is not necessarily relevant for other cultural and religious contexts. Graves constitute one of the most important source materials for archaeology, at the same time the examination of a grave is always a personal meeting with the dead. Thus, archaeologists have a special relationship with death and dead people (Kaliff 2004). Nevertheless, it may seem strange that personal reflections in this area are so rare. In the borderland between scientific documentation and our personal feelings regarding life and death, it is perhaps possible for us to express something that goes beyond the archaeological interpretation, which nevertheless includes a general and universal respect for death and the dead. In other words, is it possible to combine a universal ethics in particular contexts, or are research ethical judgements personal opinions which are hidden, camouflaged or legitimised in post-modernism's haven of relativism?

The Dilemma

Which ethical problems do we encounter with regard to investigation of graves, and why? Sometimes it seems that archaeologists may have a harder time spotting the problems than laymen do. Among archaeologists, the most common or traditional viewpoint has often been that of the antiquarian or the "purely" scientific one: Only the cultural historical value is important. Any ethical problems, for instance regarding the sanctity of graves, are still often seen as a different problem which is not of archaeological concern. This lack of coherence may be one reason why the ethical discussions among Western archaeologists have increased during the last decades (e.g. Green (ed) 1984; Iregren & Werbart (eds) 1994; Vitelli (ed) 1996; Karlsson (ed) 2004). Nevertheless, symptomatic of this discourse in itself is that it is a reflection of Western thoughts and ethics. Even though they are often claimed to be "post-colonial", these theories and ethical guidelines and standards are most definitely defined and sanctioned by European or Anglo-American scholars and universities.

Scepticism and concern among Western scholars can often be based on a misguided guilty conscience about the mistakes of colonialism and the attempts in the past to use science to confirm what one wanted to see. Today's theories, however well-meaning and however different their perspective may be, unfortunately often contain the same kind of mistake in principal, based on today's kind of political correctness. What we in the West *want* to see today is often the counter to the image of colonialism. We would be wise to avoid making scholarly mistakes in the

opposite direction. The abuse of an interpretation in a particular period does not automatically mean that the interpretation itself must be wrong. Nor does it mean that what is politically correct in Western society today must be right, neither when it concerns the past, nor other contemporary cultures (cf. Kaliff 2007: 43-45). Thus, Europeans are not only the former colonialists, but also the dominant part in defining the post-colonial needs for the former colonised people in the world! Hence, perhaps post-colonial theory in reality is really nothing more than an intellectual new-colonialism in disguise of ethics and notions of universal rights and Western (Christian) values.

The question concerning research of graves in other cultural and religious contexts might then be problematic for at least two reasons. On one hand, it can represent a double standard regarding these issues where one falls into a colonial trap. On the other hand, one may ask the wrong questions and interpret the respective cultures not on their own premises, including their view of death and human remains, hence leading to biased conclusions and framed in a Eurocentric world view. And the question then arises: is this not also a colonial practice? Obviously, one can never free oneself from one's academic background and research horizons (e.g. Shanks & Tilley 1987a, 1987b, 1989), but an awareness of these problems may enhance our knowledge and further research. So, which ethical problems do we encounter in connection with the investigation of human remains, and why? Being resting places for the dead, graves (or what Western people consider a grave) are connected with our modern beliefs of death and burial. This evokes thoughts and emotions of our own perceptions of death and our own losses, which are not necessarily relevant to any other cultural context. In our opinion, the most important basis for achieving an ethical relationship to archaeological investigations of graves is a reflection of the existing problems, as they are experienced in the original context. There is no manual for this, since the perspective of the different problems is likely to vary from individual to individual, and definitely also between cultural contexts. Direct communication with the people concerned is, if possible, at least a good starting point.

This was our premise in February 2002, when we dug up the kings' bones in the river Bagmati by the Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu, Nepal, a place where between 5000 and 6000 cremations are conducted annually.

Cremation as Transformation

In Vedic practice (the ancient ritual system integrated into Hinduism), as in other Indo-European traditions, death is portrayed as a dismemberment of a whole, a fragmentation and decomposition. "If the process of aging is seen as a form of erosion whereby life and the body are gradually worn away, there is an inevitable end

to such a process. ... All life ends in death, just as all erosion ends in total collapse or pulverization" (Lincoln 1986: 119). Viewing ageing and death as a process like any other disintegration in the cosmos is therefore fundamental for an understanding of the outlook on death. This outlook guides the form of the rituals performed around a dead person. Death as a phenomenon is regarded as a dissolution of a complex composite whole; after a long process of decomposition, through the gradual decay of the body during life and finally through death and the rituals undertaken with the dead body. It should be stressed that the idea of death as a disintegration of the body does not require cremation, however this is a particularly clear way of marking the breakdown of the body into constituent parts connected to the elements. Other ways of fragmenting the body – defleshing, reburial, etc. – can also illustrate this disintegration. Even an inhumation can be perceived in the same way, as a slow return of the body to the elements (Lincoln 1986: 119-121).

The Hindu/Vedic cosmological myth is essential for the understanding of the cremation practice. The *Purusasūkta* ("The Hymn of Purusa") in the *Rigveda* (10.90) tells how the world was created when the gods cut up a cosmic giant, *Purusa*. It is this narrative which is the archetype for the Vedic offering as well as for the cremation ritual. The homology found in the creation myths – the fact that different elements in the cosmos are identical with the body parts of the sacrificed primordial being, is a fundamental cosmological idea (Lincoln 1986: 5-7). It means that an entity is created from the matter of another, and they are alternative guises of each other. Meat and earth, for example, are believed to be of the same material substance and thus one can change into the other. In the same way, the bones, the hard part in the soft meat, are equated with the stones in the earth and with the mountains, while hair is associated with plants (Lincoln 1986: 5-7). Fundamental to the rituals that people performed on the basis of the creation myth is that, in the same way as creation proceeds from the original body, this process can also be reversed. Just as creation is assembled from the constituent elements according to the origin myth, the process can be repeated through reversal in the form of sacrifices or cremation, in order to restore the elements to creation. (ibid: 33-35).

The actual cremation can be regarded as a sacrificial ritual. In Vedic times in India, when the custom of sacrifice was increasing in scope, the cremation ritual was viewed as a person's last sacrifice, in which his own body was offered to the flames. It was believed that the deceased would be reborn from the sacrifice to a new existence together with his ancestors. In Vedic texts this is called a person's third birth. The cremation was therefore regarded as a transition from earthly existence to the world beyond (Olivelle 1987: 389). Through cremation the entire body is transformed by fire. The deceased is returned to the gods, in other words, the body is restored to its different elements, given back to creation

in a way that corresponds to the original cosmological sacrifice through which the world was created from the parts of the victim (Edsman 1987: 340ff). The earliest textual evidence of the belief in death being associated with the division of a person into the different elements is found in an important hymn in the *Rigveda* (10.16.3). It contains a careful identification of the constituent parts of the body with the different parts/elements of the cosmos, reflecting the body of the original sacrificial victim: blood/water, breath/wind, and hair/plants. The basic feature is that death and the disintegration of the body restore matter from the microcosm to the macrocosm; from the body to the surrounding world (Lincoln 1986: 122-124).

Cremation is generally perceived as the most auspicious of funeral practices (fig. 1). The body and the cosmos are governed by the same laws. The householder sacrifices himself on his funeral pyre in order to not only be reborn, but also to perpetuate the regeneration of time and of cosmos (Parry 1994: 31). At death it is the men who give birth. The father pays his debts to the ancestors by giving the lineage a son, and the son repays his debts to his father by giving him a new birth (Parry 1994: 151-152). At the moment of the breaking of the skull and the releasing of "the vital breath", the death pollution begins. It is the repayment of the sin of burning the flesh. The deceased only dies when he is killed on the pyre, he is not dead before he is burnt, and it is only after the husband's cremation that a wife becomes a widow. Both the father and the son are reborn through the ritual, the father on another plane and the son as his father's replacement (ibid:181-184). Cremation is a ritual by which time and cosmos are also regenerated; a ritual by which the universe is recreated (Pandey 1969: 241, Lincoln 1986; Parry 1987: 74ff, 1994: 31, cf. Oestigaard 2000, 2005, cf. Kaliff 2007).



Fig. 1. Cremation at Pashupatinath, Nepal. Photo: Terje Oestigaard.

Fundamental in the process of cremation is fire as the mediator of and between the elements; it is the very embodiment of change and transformation. *Agni*, or the God of fire, is in Hindu mythology seen as "the cause of sexual union...When a man and a woman become heated, the seed flows, and birth takes place"; the heat of sexual desire. As a personified deity, *Agni* is an unscrupulous



Fig. 2. Due to the extraordinaire circumstances practical arrangements had to be made. King Birendra (to the right) is cremated at the royal cremation platform, Queen Aishwarya (in the middle) at a temporary platform and Prince Nirajan (to the left) at the cremation platform for the higher castes. Courtesy: Kantipur Publications Pvt. Ltd.

seducer of women, and an erotic death is often associated with the motif of self-immolation (O’Flaherty 1981[1973]: 90 f). (ibid: 91). Fire is also an extremely common apotropaic because it wards off evil spirits.). It has purificatory powers. *Agni* is the slayer of demons (Hubert & Mauss 1964: 26). Furthermore, *Agni* is entrusted with the task of handing over the offerings to the gods. Fire can be reduced to heat, and heat can be seen as the final property of life (like breath) (Knipe 1975: 37). Being a god himself, *Agni* is also the one who conveys the sacrificial gifts to the other gods. *Agni* is born, according to the Vedic account, from the pieces of wood in the fire drill used to light ritual fire. He is also found in the sky, in lightning and the sun, as well as in water in different forms such as rain, lakes and rivers. *Agni* is considered to belong to the domesticated sphere of life, with the home, the family, the kindred, and the tribe, and thus there is also a connection to the clearance of land for pasture and tillage (Staal 2001 [1983]: 73, 99; cf. Parmeshwaranand 2000: 40–48).

The cremation is painful and dangerous (Knipe 1975: 130), because the fire digests the body. Therefore cool water is given to the corpse, either by bathing or immersion before the cremation, in order to try to control the ritual. Finally, the corpse is again returned to the river as ashes. The ashes are often referred to as “bones”. Bones are considered the product of the father’s semen and thus a source to the future fertility (Parry 1994: 188), and at the same time they constitute a part of the body that has returned to their original element – the stones in the ground (Kaliff 2007). Death is related to three types

of cycles; firstly, the cycle of the personal life such as birth, marriage, and rebirth; secondly, the cycle of the year, especially in regard of the seasons and harvests, and thirdly, the cosmological cycles. Water is the most important life-giving element and in Hindu death rituals, which emphasises the ongoing re-creation of life and vital forces (Oestigaard 2005). Cosmogony is the re-creation of the world (Eliade 1987: 105). Cosmos is an ongoing process where “transformative sacrificial acts destroy in order to create, but they also cause life-giving powers to flow” (Read 1998: 145). In societies where religion holds “that human order was brought into being at the creation of the world tend to dramatize the cosmogony by reproducing on earth a reduced version of the cosmos” and there is “a tendency for kingdoms, capitals, temples, shrines, and so forth, to be constructed as replicas of the cosmos” (Wheatley 1971: 417). The rites create divine legitimacy because when rituals are the principal medium by which power relationships are constructed, the power or the material embodiment of the political order is usually perceived as coming from divine sources (Bell 1997: 129). Cremations are creations of both man and cosmos, and consequently microcosm, mesocosm and macrocosm are integrated in the procreative funerals.

Therefore, the funerals of royals have a particular meaning and importance in cosmos – they are to a certain extent the most important rituals in society – and consequently, one may therefore argue that the way the kings’ bodies were handled with regard to both the flesh and the bones represent if not the utmost norm, an

idealised form of cosmic principles, and at least not a desecrating practice.

The Scene and the Setting

Year 2001 was a tragic year for Nepal and the royal family. Ten royal members died at the Narayanhity Palace massacre on June 1st 2001. What actually happened is difficult to say and the truth may or may not have been revealed. According to the official story, the Late King Birendra invited his family to the traditional Friday evening gathering at the Royal Palace. The marriage of the Crown Prince Dipendra to his beloved was sanctioned by his mother Queen Aishwarya. Heavily intoxicated on a mixture of alcohol and cocaine, the Prince started shooting with rifles and machineguns, killing his family before eventually shooting himself. The royalty were rushed to the military hospital where the doctors tried to save their lives.

King Birendra died that evening, whereas the Crown Prince was kept alive on a respirator. Due to the death of King Birendra, Crown Prince Dipendra was declared the new monarch on June 2nd. Prince Gyanendra was appointed as the regent of the kingdom at the same time since King Dipendra lay unconscious at the hospital surviving only by the aid of a ventilator. King Dipendra died the next day and Gyanendra was crowned and became the new king; Nepal experienced three different kings in three days. The late King Birendra and the royals

were given state funerals on June 2nd (fig. 2). King Dipendra, who had only been king while he was in a coma, was cremated on June 4th at Pashupatinath. This was in accordance with the Hindu tradition prescribing that the deceased should be cremated within twenty-four hours after death.

At Pashupatinath there are three distinctive areas where cremations are undertaken (fig. 3). It could also be divided into two different areas, one for the higher castes – the Arya Ghat – and one for the common people – the Ram Ghat. At Arya Ghat there are two cremation platforms. The one closest to the temple and the linga is for royal cremations only. The second platform is for those who today are called wealthy people, but traditionally this has been the ghat for Brahmins. The six cremation platforms at Ram Ghat are basically for the common people or the third caste. The king's platform is located to the north, upstream from the other platforms. The cremation platform of the Brahmins is the northernmost of the platforms for non-royal people, and successively, the further south the more impure the castes, coming finally the sudras at the very south who have no platforms at all. The ritual space at Pashupatinath is hierarchically structured around the temple, with its famous Shiva-linga, and lined along the Bagmati River. Especially important for our study is that the cremation platform for the royals is the one upstream, which means that the bones in the riverbed just below this platform can only stem from the kings, and not the 5000-6000 others who are cremated here annually.



Fig. 3. The different cremation areas at Pashupatinath, with the royal platform at Arya Ghat upstream.
Photo: Terje Oestigaard.

As with all cremations in Hinduism, the ashes are immersed in the river and there are no relics kept or funeral monuments erected of the deceased. All the physical parts of the body are returned to their original shape, that is, the different elements connected with the body of the primordial being. The flesh is returned to the soil, the blood to the water, the hair to the plants, etc. The burnt bones from the fragmented body are passed into the riverbed, where they merge with gravel and stones. The deceased is, if not reincarnated again with the elements integrating into a new organism, believed to be released from the eternal round of birth and death.

The King is, however, in a special situation. He is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu when he is alive during his reign of the kingdom. He is then a living god on earth. On the 11th day after death he is believed to return to the heavenly abode of Vishnu.

The Importance of Rituals: *Katto* and the Funeral Priest

Based on the empirical data as presented below, one may argue that in this context the most important thing was that the rituals *were performed*, not *how or what was left*, but merely that they were carried out in accordance with what the participants believed was necessary and mandatory. Apart from monuments, the materiality of death includes two main categories with regard to the body: the flesh and the bones. Before proceeding to the bones, which we excavated parts of, it is of interest to see what happened to the flesh. The deceased kings were cremated, but as a part of the royal funerals there was an extraordinary ritual, which is only conducted for the kings, which has special emphasis on the flesh and the reconstitution of society and cosmos as well as enabling the king to become Vishnu in his heavenly abode.

The Funeral Priests are a special group of Brahmins – *Mahabrahmins* (“*Great Brahmins*”). The specialist who conducts the ritual is not only in service to the deceased’s soul and family, the funeral priest himself becomes the *pret* or *pitr* – the deceased’s soul – and he is worshipped as the deceased. Even before the chief mourner shaves his head, the Mahabrahmin should be shaved as if he was the *pret* himself. The Funeral Priest is also consubstantial with the deceased. The Nepali royal and aristocratic funerals are the most explicit rituals in this regard (Parry 1980), particularly the *katto*-ritual, whereby a Brahmin priest eats parts of the king’s body. “*Katto*” means literally “something not worth eating” (Shrestha 2001: 131). Traditionally it is a part of the dead body, and in particular the brain, which is eaten. The *katto* priest is seen as a “sin eater”. By eating the “uneatable” the priest becomes declared as an outcaste, and he is banned and chased out of Kathmandu valley. The ceremony ensures the salvation of the king’s soul, and the deceased’s body takes spiritual form on this day.

The role of the Mahabrahmin is crucial because he enables the soul to cross into the other world. The gifts to the Funeral Priest are in fact a symbolic representation of the gifts to the deceased, or more correctly, they are identical because the idea is that the departed receives the gifts in the next world. The ideal gifts are all standard requirements for daily life for one year – everything from food, clothes, furniture and money and so on. This has its rationale in the idea that the Funeral Priest *is* the deceased at the moment he receives and accepts the gift. The power to bless and curse the deceased enables the priest to negotiate and take advantage of size of the offering, emphasising that the gift will be received by the *pret*, and thus, the family has to offer a lot (Parry 1980:95-96).



Fig. 4. King Birendra’s *katto*-priest Durga Prasad Sapkota. Courtesy: Kantipur Publications Pvt. Ltd.

The 75 year old Brahmin priest Durga Prasad Sapkota ate the *katto* of the late King Birendra on the 11th day of mourning Monday June 11th at Kalmochan Ghat. The elephant was decorated traditionally, and the Brahmin was dressed as the king wearing a gold-embroidered

Nepali dress. The priest wore a replica of the crown, and he used clothes, shoes and other ornaments that belonged to the deceased king. He was sitting in a tented room which was furnished with offerings from the Royal Palace, such as sofa, bed, and study table, together with more personal belongings of the king, including his briefcase and walking stick. Thursday June 14th, the *katto* ceremony of king Dipendra was held at Kalmochan Ghat. Kalmochan Ghat is located by the Bagmati River where it is the border between the former kingdoms of Kathmandu and Patan, and when the *katto*-Brahman crosses the river, according to the tradition, the priest is not allowed to return again, and he is so highly polluted that the people would not even “see his face” again. When there were only petty kingdoms in Nepal, Kalmochan Ghat and Bagmati River represented the kingdom’s border, and the *katto*-priest was expelled from the kingdom by the symbolic crossing of the river. Nowadays the priest is expelled from the Kathmandu valley (Oestigaard 2005).

Durga Prasad Sapkota felt that he was forced to do the *katto*-ritual, and afterwards he felt cheated. He demanded a house and he was promised values worth 10,000 dollars, but he received only some 300 dollars, and he aimed to sell the king’s clothes and personal belongings he received for 10,000 dollars. He was living in his old house at Pashupatinath because he had no other options. According to him, the king’s flesh in the *katto* ritual was a relict myth from the past. He cooked the meal himself which consisted only of rice, vegetables and goat meat. Some people living in the vicinity of Pashupatinath believed, however, that the *katto*-priest ate the king’s flesh, and in particular the part of the brain where the “third” eye is located. The priests who cremated King Birendra said that some security guards collected small parts of the ashes from the king which were put into the *katto*-priest’s meals without Sapkota’s knowledge. It was only symbolic, they believed, but it was a part of the meal, because only goat meat would not have affected and polluted the priest in such a negative way. Sapkota could not walk openly in the streets anymore, and especially not at the Pashupatinath area. People treated him as being excluded from the community, and he was in essence sitting in the backyard of his house for a couple of years, feeling guilty and impure after the *katto* ritual. The other temple and funeral priests referred to Durga Prasad Sapkota as “the priest who became a *pode*”, meaning a “toilet-cleaner” or low-caste. Everyone, except himself and his wife, saw the *katto*-priest as the most polluted man in the nation. Sapkota, however, emphasised that he was still a Brahman, although he acknowledged that he was impure and a *katto*-Brahman. His wife also stressed that both of them were Brahmans, and they categorically refused to hear anything about low-caste status (Oestigaard 2005).

King Dipendra’s *katto*-priest was also deceived. Devi Prasad Acharya – a 65-year old Hindu priest – was promised that he would become wealthy if he performed the ritual. When he realised that he was cheated, he

stopped the ritual and demanded more money, bargaining with the Prime Minister. The priest wanted a house in addition to the king’s belongings he was offered, and Prime Minister Koirala promised him the house. The ceremony continued, and the priest ate the *katto*-meal. However, he received also only some 270 dollars, not a house, and afterwards he regretted that he performed the *katto*-ceremony for Dipendra (Oestigaard 2005).

An intriguing aspect regarding the meaning of rituals – including the ethics involved in the ritual obligations and participants’ commitments – is that both the *katto*-priests were deceived and cheated, even by the Prime Minister of Nepal. The importance was the completion of the rituals, not the way it was done. A *katto*-priest was mandatory for the rituals; keeping the promises regarding payments were not. Although this illuminates the flexibility of ritual praxis and logic, one cannot use this example to legitimise other insights into death rituals for two reasons; first, this was within the Nepali context executed by top politicians and religious experts and second, other practices may in the eyes of the devotees, descendants and members of the community be perceived as more desecrating and indeed as destroying the religious outcome of the rituals. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between the proclaimed and alleged cosmological importance and benefit of the *katto*-ritual and the actual performance of the rites illuminates not only parts of a ritual logic and religious flexibility (bearing in mind that this was the kings’ cremations and not ordinary cremations of commoners), but also ethics involved in religious practice. Although one may easily condemn the way the *katto*-priests were deceived, the rituals were, one may assume, religiously functional and consequently a success, and hence in this case, the aims may legitimise the means.

Excavating the Kings’ Bones

In February 2002, eight months after the funerals, there was little water in Bagmati River. At that point it was nothing more than a little stream, and most of the riverbed was openly exposed. Hence, we knew that if there were any remains from the cremations, we could find them in the sand just below the cremation platform of the royals. Since this platform is the uppermost and upstream at Pashupatinath, there could not have been any transportation of cremated remains from other cremations at this spot since all the other cremations were conducted further downstream.

As archaeologists we felt a fascination at the prospect of going into the river in search of the kings’ bones where they had been deposited after the cremations. Was it actually possible to trace the remains of these particular cremations, would the bones still be there, or had they been carried away by the water?



Based on the amount of scattered bones further downstream, not at all representative for the vast amount of cremations carried out on the Pashupatinath through the centuries (hundreds of thousands!), most of the bones actually disintegrate or are washed away by the river. At the same time the question arose: Was this ethically right?

Not only where these remains of people who died tragically only the year before, they were also kings. Not only that: from a Hindu perspective they were gods, incarnations of Vishnu. And since they now live in the abode of Vishnu as a part of Vishnu, the question was not only to dig up the kings' bones, but the divinities' bones at the most holy place in Nepal. In theory it is equal to if we had located the tomb of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, and now wanted to excavate his bones (notwithstanding the problem concerning finding such a tomb, if you believe in a bodily resurrection). Here we had a major difference: the religious and cultural context. Although Pashupatinath is a pilgrimage site and the holiest place in Nepal, the place where the ashes of the kings were immersed into the river was not a pilgrimage site regarding the kings' bones as *relics*. Bagmati River is holiest at this spot, but not because of the royal cremations, and not because of the human remains which were integrated in the riverbed.

After a couple of days' discussions, we eventually decided to search for the bones. While cremations were conducted only some few metres away further downstream, we began to dig carefully in the riverbed with our hands. Within a few seconds we found cremated remains which only could stem from the kings (figs. 5-6).

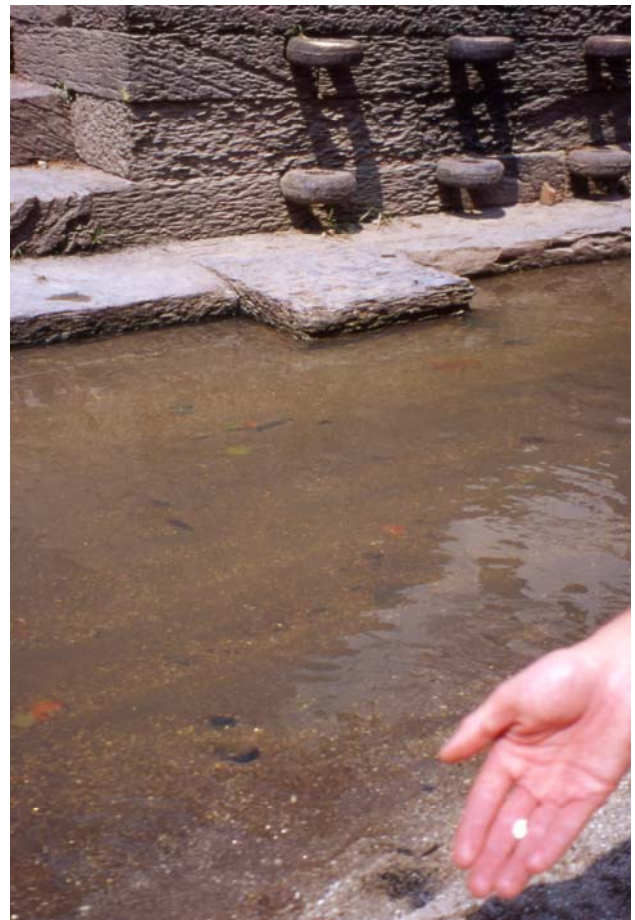


Fig. 5. The royal cremation platform is to the right and the ghat for high castes downstream. Photo: Terje Oestigaard.

Fig. 6. Cremated bones found in front of the royal platform. Photo: Terje Oestigaard.

We documented the finds and our work next to Hindu worshippers who did not take any offence, and did not even react to our presence. After that we put the remains back into the sand in the riverbed, and we left the bones as we found them in the river without taking any pieces with us. The fact that cremations were conducted by cremation priests just some few metres away from us indicated that we did not violate any taboos, and later that day we asked one of the cremation priests who had cremated the kings if it would have been wrong if someone collected the physical remains of the kings from the river. The priest did not understand the question, or more precisely, the question did not make sense to him. He could not see the use or reason in such an action. After the cremation was completed, the bones in themselves had no value – they were more or less equivalent to the sand and the stones in the riverbed. They were of the same element, and not particularly related to the deceased king anymore. The kings were in heaven as Vishnu, while the physical remains of the dead body had returned to its elements. The fact that there is no relic industry of this kind in Nepal, where the bones would have been sold, indicates that the bones are unimportant. This is contrary to the importance of relics of the saints in Christianity, not to mention all the forests which have been cut and where each little piece allegedly represents the original cross on which Jesus was crucified.

The cremated bones from the kings' bodies were now nothing more than the stones in the riverbed, in keeping with the old Vedic beliefs. The homology of the Vedic/Hindu creation myths is, as we have shown above, a basic cosmological idea. Flesh and earth, bone and stone, may be viewed as alternative forms in a continuous process, whereby one form is constantly being transmuted into another (Kaliff 2007). An example of this principle is shown at the Kaligandaki River, where almost all *saligram* in Nepal is found. From a geological point of view, *saligram* is an ammonite fossil and the remains of an aquatic animal that is preserved in rock. In the Hindu religion, on the other hand, *saligram* is an embodiment, a physical manifestation or visible incarnation of Vishnu. A burial at Nire Ghat – the largest cemetery along Kaligandaki River – is praised even though cremation is the most preferable. After some years, according to the local belief, the water will transform the deceased's bones into *saligram*. Thus, they have become an incarnation of Vishnu. The *saligram* stones are collected and sold throughout the country even though the local lore says that they are transformed from human bones (Oestigaard 2000).

Returning to Pashupatinath, the kings' bones were not holy themselves because then they would have been used for some sacred purpose. However, after thinking for some while the cremation priest we interviewed concluded that the bones should preferably stay in the river, if there were any remains left, since this marked that the cremations were completed. The elements of the

body should return to their original form – fire to fire, water to water, earth to earth. Nevertheless, remains from the pyres, clothes and flowers given to the deceased are collected regularly from the riverbed at Pashupatinath in order to avoid contamination of the river, not because they should not have been left in the river if possible, but because it will clutter up the stream. It is in this light the statement that the human remains had to be in the river should be understood. Nevertheless, shamans may, for instance, collect bones in the river for various purposes which are accepted within the Nepalese cultural context.

Whose Ethics?

The terms “emic” and “etic” were introduced by Marvin Harris (1964, 1979) to designate the difference between the native's and the anthropologist's point of view, and the question is: whose ethics are we going to use? If we use our ethics in other cultures, this may represent a new form of colonialism, or is it possible to find a kind of universal approach to this problem?

In our opinion, the most important basis for achieving an ethical relationship to archaeological investigations of graves and human remains is a matter of self-reflection, combined with a respectful approach towards the local culture. There is no manual for this, since the perspectives and judgements are likely to vary between cultural contexts, and from individual to individual. We think that one point of departure is the individual view of death and the dead people that we ourselves once knew, mourned and respected. We could also reflect on our own views – how would we like to be buried, and how permanent such a burial would be, for instance until some archaeologists turn up some centuries later.

Beliefs connected with death rituals and the handlings of bodily remains vary between different cultures. Our own culture, feelings and thoughts, as well as individual variations on this, are unavoidably mixed with our archaeological – or scientific – definitions and interpretations. It is impossible to deal with burial rituals or deposits of human remains, or even use the word grave or burial, without in some way associating to the definition of these terms in our own context. To a varying degree, this is also valid for many other archaeological terms, but the fact becomes especially clear when we use words that retain strong emotional connotations even today. In the archaeological object that we call grave, our whole repertoire of sentiments of death – anxiety, hopes, grief or even indifference – collide with the wish to perform a scientific description and analysis. The difference between two languages, our own sentiments and the will to describe objectively, is always present in scientific work, but with death and burial rituals it perhaps becomes even more apparent (Kaliff 2004, 2007).

To have an ethical approach involves listening to other peoples concerns, and not only your own (or your colleagues) preconceived ideas, which often seem to have priority in ethical debates. Exporting our own Western ethical thoughts is not the same as having a respectful attitude towards people of other cultures, but might be a new kind of colonialism disguised as post-colonialism; particularly in these cases since it implies different religious and eschatological consequences. In our actual case, we put the bones back into the river – but if we had kept them would it have been ethically wrong? Most Western researchers will probably say yes, but that is not an obvious standpoint and may represent an *etic* and not an *emic* perspective.

When we asked the cremation priest about it, the question in itself did not make sense, which indicates that we did not violate any taboos, or at least that it was not a big issue. We were extra careful to discuss this issue thoroughly with him. After all, the bones were symbolically transformed into stones, which may have various degrees of holiness, but not necessarily defined in the same way as from a Western, scholarly perspective. If Western colleagues and Western people in general would find our behaviour disturbing, this is another question. The most important, by far, as we see it, must be what the Hindu people using the Pashupatinath sacred area think about it. This must also be contextualised by the numerous prehistoric chieftains and kings who are collected, stored and displayed in showcases in Western museums. Is the question in reality just a matter of time? Current is unethical, prehistoric is ethical?

We will therefore follow Hammersley & Atkinson when they say that it is our view “that the most effective strategies for pursuing research should be adopted unless there is clear evidence that these are ethically unacceptable. In other words, indeterminacy and uncertainty should for the most part be resolved by ethnographers in favour of the interest of research, since

that is their primary task” (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 285).

Conclusion

An important question concerning archaeology and this case: Is your reaction concerning this, dear colleagues, ethically relevant at all? And the most important question, not with regards to contemporary cultures but prehistoric ones: whose ethics are we going to use? Are we back to our Western and Christian world view, which then turns from post-colonialism to colonialism? In practice, it often seems that excavating other (earlier) cultures’ remains of their dead is a good scientific practice, but we ourselves protect our/Christian graves. Or is this just because we know the Christian culture and ethics, but not the prehistoric ones? Bones from Christian burials are seldom just viewed as archaeological material. They are still seen as human remains and reburial discussions are frequent in the West among archaeologists as well as laymen. However, such a perspective is nearly always absent when it comes to prehistoric graves. The principles for treatment of (possible) ancestors who died before Christianisation are not covered by the same ethical rules as for those who died later. This is probably because we have not given the pre-Christian perceptions behind the burials the same type of ethical value as we do the Christian beliefs. There can be no sound ethical arguments for this reasoning, and it should rather be seen as an unconscious behaviour. Still, there are no living persons who could take on the ethical problems concerning pre-Christian Western graves, except for instance today’s Christian (or post-Christian Secular) Westerners themselves, or Muslims, Hindus, etc. Hence we have an ethical problem in our own backyard to deal with before making new colonial evaluations (in the disguise of self-righteous post-colonialism) regarding what is sacred and/or ethical in other contemporary cultures.

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Chapter 5

From Corpse to Ancestor: The Role of Tombside Dining in the Transformation of the Body in Ancient Rome

Regina Gee

ABSTRACT This article uses the house tombs of the necropolis of Isola Sacra as case studies of a type of funerary monument in the Roman world whose form was intended to encourage the visitation of those charged with the duties of funerary ritual, in particular dining tombside. The location, layout and decoration of the house tomb, in particular the provision of an attractive, high-status and comfortable site for dining, speaks to the owner's concern for the attentive and continuing presence of relatives and dependents to tend to the ancestral cult. Furthermore, the placement of these tombs on crowded and highly visible sites suggests that the post-burial banquets, dictated by custom and calendar, were viewed as publicly interactive performance intended to be viewed by the larger community.

Introduction

On specific festival days of the Roman calendar, cities of the dead swelled with the living as Romans traveled out to necropoleis and held funerary banquets in or near monuments to their beloved dead. These semi-annual banquets were the key ritual action for the transformation of the dead from polluted body to sanctified ancestor, and suggest this change in status was not fixed after burial rites and interment, but had to be perpetually renewed and renegotiated post-mortem.

Dining with the dead in the Roman world was a ritual activity insistent in its denial of the corpse and affirmation of the ancestral spirit in need of actual and symbolic sustenance, and this act of appropriation and provision formed the second element in the transformation, the creation of memory. The strongest physical evidence for the importance of this ritual comes from those tombs that encouraged visitation and dining by providing an appealing, high status and comfortable site for the banquet.

The layout and decoration of one particular type of funerary monument built in and around Rome in the second and third-centuries was a direct response to this desire by the owner for a living audience to remember and dine with the deceased. While the tomb facade engaged and presented information to an external audience that can be generally characterized as the both the "casual passerby" and those arriving tombside for ritual, the interior was for the latter only, visitors with some tie to the deceased. The decoration of the interior space with frescoes, stucco and mosaic enhanced the experience of being inside the tomb and rewarded those

who visited by providing an attractive space in which to make offerings.

The form of the monument as a collective tomb with loci for a number of individual burials was also a meaningful part of its communication to this "internal" audience, and for those who entered the tomb the message was pointed. Most of the visitors to the monument were also likely future occupants, and viewing the niches not yet filled would be for them a reminder of a promise extended by the tomb owner in exchange for their attendance to the needs of those already interred within.

The Roman House Tomb

The second and third-century tombs of Isola Sacra and the Vatican Necropolis are the best-preserved examples of this type of collective tomb, given the modern name "house tomb". Its form is derived from an earlier communal tomb type called a columbarium, in particular small-scale, above-ground columbaria built for either a family or a *collegium*, a professional, social or burial club. The popularity of the house tomb as a monument type is supported by examples found within many of the necropoleis skirting Rome, including those near the Via Taranto, Via Salaria, Via Ostiense, Via Appia, Porta Portuense and the Circonvallazione Gianicolense. The largest number of extant tombs survives at Isola Sacra, a cemetery along the west side of the Via Severiana between Portus Augusti and Ostia, while the best-preserved examples (with the exception of the roofs) exist in the Vatican Necropolis underneath St. Peter's in Rome.



Figure 1. Isola Sacra, Tombs 75, 77. Photo Regina Gee.

The general appearance of this type of mausoleum is as follows. They are aboveground chambers, barrel or cross-vaulted, square or rectangular in plan, with niches for both inhumation and cremation burials lining the interior walls. By the middle of the second century, house tombs had fairly standardized dimensions, typically ten by ten, twenty by twenty, or ten by twelve Roman feet. The earliest examples date to the Trajanic-Hadrianic period (98-138) and feature concrete exteriors faced with a combination of *opus reticulatum* and brick, with an increasing number of brick-faced facades appearing by the Antonine period (139-180). The principle façade, usually faced with a fine-grained red brick, is typically arranged with a central door framed by a travertine jamb and sills, a marble titulus inset above the door, and splayed windows either flanking or cut into the titulus (Fig.1).

Decorative architectural elements embellishing the tomb facades include projecting architraves above the door, marble insets for the windows, terracotta frames of varying degrees of elaboration around the titulus and windows, and an entablature, in some cases “supported” by pilasters of projecting brick. Several tombs from Isola Sacra and a single example from the Vatican Necropolis feature decorative terracotta plaques inserted into the facade near the top of the doorframe and the entablature (Fig. 2). Where extant examples of the upper section exist, a triangular pediment topped the façade.

The most common facing materials for the interior of house tombs were reticulate and block work in the earliest examples from the Trajanic/Hadrianic period,

changing to brick or brick and block work by the Antonine period, always covered with stucco and painted.

Many feature the generous use of molded stucco to create architectural frames around individual loculi, figurative friezes, and coffered ceilings. Frescoes enliven the spaces between niches as well as their interiors, and draw from the established decorative repertoire for both house and tomb of simple floral/vegetal motifs, animals, birds, portraits of the deceased and mythological scenes. The majority of extant pavements are black and white mosaics of geometric and vegetal designs. Examples of black and white and, less frequently, polychrome mosaic pavements with more ambitious figural designs survive from both Isola Sacra and the Vatican Necropolis, and the subjects include hunt scenes, Nilotic landscapes with pygmies, mythological scenes, and representations of the seasons.

The Tomb Owners

Inscriptional evidence tells us the owners of these tombs were almost without exception male and the head of household, and the names suggest that for the most part the occupants were non-elite but prosperous Romans, often freedmen or descendants of freedmen. In the text of the titulus, the public record of who was and could be buried within, the builder identifies himself as the dedicant and names his blood kin and his freedmen and their descendants as the group for whom he is providing a tomb. Occasionally, the tomb owner gave a space within a tomb as a gift to a friend of the family, and there are



Figure 2. Isola Sacra, Tomb 100. Photo Regina Gee.

also recorded instances of the sale of unused space within the family tomb as when at Isola Sacra, Valeria Trophime sold part of the enclosure in front of her tomb to C. Galgestius Helius.¹

The function of these monuments as a sort of architectural invitation to visit, dine and remember may have held increased importance for this group in Roman society, members of the *libertini* or freedman class. Legally, former slaves did not have a *familia* with its attendant history and thus lacked the personal and societal connection to ancestors Romans used as the foundation supporting the duties of creating and tending memory. Their response was to fashion a history for themselves to the best of their ability, using the immediate network of kin and dependents as the lynchpin holding together their post-mortem transformation into ancestral spirits needing tending and sustenance. In addition to relatives, the freedmen and freedwomen of the deceased, connected to the dead through ties of obligation

and loyalty, were often responsible for carrying out these visits to the tomb. There are also descriptions, like that of Artemidorus, of instances in which friends of the deceased, sometimes members of the same *collegium*, gathered at the “dwelling of the deceased” for a memorial dinner (*Oneirocritica* 5.82).

The House Tomb as *Monumentum*

The examination that follows considers these house tombs within the context of visitation, funerary ritual and activity relating to the cult of the dead in and around the tomb in the hope of elucidating the relationship between the appearance of these tombs and their function. This kind of analysis brings to the forefront the fundamental nature of the tomb as a *monumentum*, something built to evoke memory. As a *monumentum*, the house tomb functioned in several ways. It created a record of existence for a group of individuals. While the tomb itself did not architecturally resemble a Roman house, it did preserve the social hierarchy of familial relationships and in this sense, as Nicholas Purcell notes, the house tomb was more *domus* than *insula* in spirit (Purcell 1987:39).

¹ For the inscription see H. Thylander, *Inscriptions du Port d'Ostie* (Lund, 1951-2), 124.



Figure 3. Isola Sacra, Tombs 72, 73. Photo Regina Gee.

By looking at where the name was written, on the exterior titulus, for example, versus below a row of identical niches on the back wall, visitors could understand the relative importance of each individual within the larger family. In addition – and this aspect has been under examined in discussions of this type of monument – the house tomb offered a location or staging area near witnesses to the actions which build memory.

The concern for the perpetuation of the memory of the deceased in Roman funerary art has drawn the attention of several scholars in recent years. Penelope Davies discusses the particularly Roman concern with creating a “living memory” by means of funerary monuments, which were blatantly manipulative in their pleas for attention (Davies 96: 49-52 pp.). Michael Koortbojian's treatment of late republican and early imperial funerary reliefs erected by freedmen and their descendants focuses on the complex relationship among text, image and viewer in the evocation of memory (Koortbojian 1996:210-234 pp.). For a number of reasons the chamber tomb was an architectural form well suited to participate in the exercise of drawing the gaze in the pursuit of *memoria*. Romans who purchased them could employ a variety of enticements including size, decoration and

unique design features to encourage an external viewer to pause long enough to look at the monument and read the deceased's name. The attention of a person in the vicinity could be captured by the scale of the mausoleum, impressive in its sheer size whether standing alone or in a row of similar tombs. Builders focused attention on the principle facade through fine brickwork and the architectural decoration described earlier of entablatures, pilasters topped with terra-cotta capitals, and terra-cotta frames around the windows, and titulus. In some examples, attention to the decorative potential of the facade included using different colors for the brickwork, warm yellow for the pilasters, for example, against a red background (Fig.3).

An important part of the visual presentation was the titulus, the title deed, prominently and centrally displayed above the door in most cases. The titulus contained the all-important *nomen*, the tie that legally bound the tomb to a particular individual and spoke publicly of patronage and provision. The common placement of the titulus directly above the door, use of white marble to create a contrast to the surrounding red brick/terracotta frame and formulaic funerary inscription worked together to ensure the information was easy to find and to read (Fig. 1).



Figure 4. Isola Sacra, Tomb 87. Photo Regina Gee.

The importance of addressing viewers through the titulus is made clear on tomb 97 at Isola Sacra. Although the door is on the side of the monument, the titulus remains centrally placed on the wall facing the road, oriented toward the greatest number of potential viewers (Fig. 4).

The House Tomb as Site for Ritual Activity

Feast days listed on the official calendar as well as unofficial annual occasions regularly brought Romans out to the necropoleis encircling the city. Within the context of these semi-annual visits, the house tomb can be characterized as a locus for the staging of ritual.

While funerary cult practice was private in the sense that the family and friends performed the necessary activities, elements of the Roman constructions surrounding public performance, audience, and spectacle were also present. Moving in and out of the house tombs with lights, incense, flowers and offerings of food and drink, and dining outside in the tomb precinct were highly visible activities. The location of the tombs on publicly accessible land allowed individuals to be seen performing their roles properly in front of an audience consisting of

passersby on the nearby road and visitors to adjacent tombs. For these reasons, the enactment of ritual tombside does not fit easily into the category of either private or public activity, but rather belongs to the more mutable area of Roman social performance that combined aspects of both.

Like the rituals surrounding the funeral itself, graveside dining was a dynamic performance enacted to articulate and fix proper relationships between the living and the dead, and one of a series of rituals surrounding the cult of the dead concerned with separation, transition, and transformation.² The initial graveside banquet in honor of the deceased, the *Silicernium*, took place very soon after

² The series of ritual actions relating to proper burial included the ritual cleaning of the house (*exverrae*) after the removal of the body, the period of mourning (*feriae denicales*), the sacrifice of a pig to Ceres which cleansed the family of pollution and made the grave legal (porta *praesentanea*), and the ritual of cleaning and purification with fire and water after the funeral for those who had participated in the interment (*suffito*).

the burial.³ The *Cena Novendialis*, held the ninth day after interment, marked the end of the immediate post-burial period and the family's imminent return to society. Other traditional days for a sojourn to the cemeteries are listed in the epitaph of a Roman who made financial provisions for sacrifices in his memory on four annual occasions: his *dies natales*, the *Rosaria*, the *Violaria*, and the *Parentalia*.⁴ Of these, the *Parentalia*, also referred to as the *dies Parentales* or *dies Ferales*, was the only commemoration listed on the *Fasti*, the official calendar drawn up by the Rome's pontiffs. The *Parentalia* emphasized the role of near relations in honoring the memory of dead kinfolk. The final day of the *Parentalia* was called the *Caristia* or *Cara Cognati* and featured another meal at the tomb held in honor of the "dear kin".

Eating and drinking at the burial site, a tradition whose beginnings in the Roman world dates to between the twelfth and ninth centuries B.C.E., was integral to funerary cult practice (Torelli 1987: 27). Words relating to visits to the tomb included refreshment (*refrigeratio* or *refrigerium*) and in numerous examples of tomb decoration the theme of *refrigerium* is represented by one of the most ubiquitous motifs in Roman funerary art, two birds flanking a vessel. There are also representations of banqueting painted on the walls of tombs, and although some of these scenes may refer to the hoped-for pleasures of the afterlife, others seem to represent a meal enjoyed by the living. Funerary inscriptions encouraging the visitors to eat and drink are not uncommon, and the act of communal dining included consideration of the dead as well as the living. Pouring wine, honey, milk or blood into the container holding the remains of the deceased, often by means of a lead or terracotta tube inserted into the cinerary receptacle or sarcophagus, was a ritual act that reconnected the dead to the living in the context of the shared act of feasting. There are examples of chairs in the tomb for the deceased, inscriptions inviting the dead to share the refreshment, and in least one example the deceased is referred to as the host of the banquet who has invited guests to dine at his tomb.⁵ Visually, this idea of the ancestral spirit extending an invitation to visitors is charmingly embodied at Tomb 43 at Isola Sacra, which

features an inlaid terracotta image of the deceased standing at the open door of his tomb, his hand extended in a gesture of welcome (Fig 5.).

A consideration of the tomb furnishings and the nature of the refreshment consumed helps give a sense of the experience of banqueting as funerary cult practice. Within the cemeteries flanking Rome, examples of tombs with *biclinia*, masonry dining couches, survive at Isola Sacra (tombs 15, 86). Some evidence for dining facilities comes from inscriptions, such as two found near Rome which describe tombs with kitchens, wells and dining benches (*CIL* 6.8860, 6.29958). For those tombs that did not have benches built as part of the structure, another possibility is portable furniture brought to the tomb site, and in these instances the visitors may have forgone the more aristocratic and festive reclining dining position in favor of sitting at a table on chairs or benches (Hermansen 1989:44). A third-century funerary inscription dedicated to a woman named Secundula is useful for its discussion of the arrangement of a suitable space for dining and conversation. The dedicant, her son, describes creating a place for "passing the evening in pleasant talk" by covering the altar that marks Secundula's tomb with a stone tabletop to hold food and drink and piling cushions around it (*ILCV* 1570).

Although several ancient sources propose simple food as suitable offerings to the deceased, the living participants of the banquet did not limit themselves to the salted corn or lentils considered sufficient for the shades, and Lucian writes with a certain bemusement of the costly picnics carried to the grave, and questions whether the shades ever get their portion (*Charon* 22). Petronius lists expensive delicacies prepared for a fictional *Cena Novendialis*, and like any good satirist, must have drawn his observations from the foibles of contemporaries (*Satyricon* 65). Besides this literary evidence for fine dining, we have the physical remains of afore-mentioned cooking and preparation areas in or near tombs. The illumination of the site with torches and ceramic lamps is also documented. Practical considerations accepted – banquets typically occurred at night – there is evidence for the importance of lights within the cult of the dead, and candelabra as part of the typical furniture of the tomb.⁶ To this environment created for comfortable, torch-lit dining alfresco one must add flowers. Although primarily intended as offerings to the dead, the garlands attached to altars and scatterings of the traditional funerary flowers of roses and violets no doubt gave sensory pleasure to the visitors as well.

This consideration of amenities for the living did not alter the essential concerns with ancestral worship and appropriation during the graveside visits. Rather, when

³ Festus Paulus describes the *Silicernium* as a kind of sausage, *quo fletu familia purgatur*. See H. Lindsay, "Eating with the Dead: the Roman Funerary Banquet," in *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and the Roman World*, eds. I. Nielsen and H. Nielsen, (Aarhus, 1998), 72.

⁴ *die natalis sui et rosationis et violai et parentalib* (*ILS* 8366).

⁵ For the deceased as the host of the banquet, R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to the Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, 1997) 195; A.D. Nock, "Sarcophagi and Symbolism," *AJA* 50 (1946), 156. On stone chairs for the deceased in the tomb, see T. Klauser, *Die Cathedra im Totenkult der heidnischen und christlichen Antike* (Münster in Westfalen, 1927)13ff. An inscription found within a necropolis now within the grounds of the Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome expresses frank skepticism that the dead truly participated in the drinking (*ILS* 8156).

⁶ Ovid's *Fasti*, 2.562, describes the torches that light up the grave (*habent alias maesta sepulcra faces*). There is also a funerary inscription mentioning the importance of light, *ut semper vigilet lucerna nardo* (*CIL* 6.30102).



Figure 5. Isola Sacra, Tomb 56. Photo Regina Gee

Romans traveled to the tomb to banquet they brought with them the same social framework of convivial activity that shaped dining within the Roman house.

Inscriptional evidence together with early Christian writings on the subject of “inappropriate” behavior sheds light on the more ephemeral qualities of mood or atmosphere during these graveside visits.⁷ The spirit of these graveside gatherings seems to have been cheerful, even somewhat boisterous, fueled perhaps by wine and good food.⁸ The possibility of overindulgence is addressed as early as the republican period. Cicero in his discussion of Roman law notes with disapproval Romans moving away from the funerary laws of the Twelve Tables, with their prohibition of sumptuous display and drinking to excess (*De Legibus* 2.24). The fifth-century writings of early Christian leaders such as Augustine and

Zeno, while not objective records of behavior, are nevertheless valuable sources of information.

Their writings reveal a struggle between absorption and rejection of the pagan burial customs that flowed almost seamlessly into Christian funerary ritual in particular activities surrounding martyr cults. Augustine writes of the practice of “banquets and carousing” on saints’ feast days as a continuation of pagan graveside cult practice (*Contra Faustus* 20.21). Another commentary on the pagan tradition comes in the form of an admonition by Zeno, who found the customary heavy eating and drinking at graveside banquets inappropriate behavior for Christians (*Sermones* 1.16). After the banquet, some form of entertainment may have prolonged the convivial occasion, indicated by evidence of playing musical instruments, dancing and singing at the tomb (Quasten 1983: 153-60pp).

⁷ The examination of early Christian funerary cult practice is useful given the continuity in the forms of ritual activity from pagan to early Christian. On the stability of these burial customs, see MacMullen, 110-120; P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago, 1981), 24-25.

⁸ On the atmosphere of *hilaritas* as opposed to silence and sadness, see P. Testini, *Archeologia Christiana, Nozioni Generali dalle Origini alla Fine del Sec. VI* (Rome, 1958), 141.

The Tomb as a Site for Spectacle

Although family, friends, and dependents were responsible for serving the memory of the deceased, it is a simplification to characterize the cult of the dead as private ritual. To do so does not consider Roman social

constructions of performer and spectator, and more specifically those events that blurred distinctions between the roles. Recent scholarship examines the fluidity between the positions of viewer and viewed in the Roman world in a number of contexts, including public banquets, gladiatorial games, and funeral processions that carried the remains from house to tomb. One can add the series of post-burial visits dictated by custom and calendar to this list of publicly interactive performances. The public aspect of the cult of the dead arose due to the placement of the tombs along major thoroughfares and usually among other monuments, a location that increased the likelihood of an audience for the presence of visitors to the tomb.

The form and location of the chamber tombs of the Vatican Necropolis and Isola Sacra reveal their owners' desire for an audience. Tituli and external embellishments on facades oriented to the road signaled a desire to be looked at and commented upon. Utilization of the structure as a frame or backdrop against which visitors set up dining equipment and banqueting suggests this wish to draw the gaze was also present during the enactment of ritual. Under these circumstances, the tomb facade became a sort of *scaenae frons*, an architectural backdrop that enhanced the dignity and the theatricality of the banquet much like wall paintings of architectural "stage sets" in the Roman house. Even when the actual rites were not visible to non-participants, visitors arriving with flowers, food, libations and lamps, as well as the open door of the tomb itself, gave notice to anyone within the vicinity of the activity occurring at the site. Moreover, this observation was reciprocal in that during communal festivals individuals gathered at one monument could observe other families visiting nearby tombs and have their own presence witnessed in return. In some cases visual and verbal intercourse may have been heightened by relationships between families who had tombs near each other, as was probably the case for the Tombs F and L of the Vatican Necropolis, which both belonged to different members of the Caetennii family.

A particularly clear example of the public aspect of funerary ritual can be found at Tomb 15 of Isola Sacra. A *biclinium* is attached to the facade, one masonry bench for reclining on each side of the door, approximately eight meters east of the original Roman road (Fig. 6). From their position on the benches, the diners, framed by the monument behind them, would have been visible to travelers on the road as well as those Romans visiting the contiguous tombs to the north and south.⁹ In addition, assuming the conventional position with the left arm supporting the body would give the diners on the

northern bench a view of the contiguous tombs extending southward and vice-versa. A slight turn towards the west enabled the diners on both sides to view the road directly in front of them and complete the exchange of gazes between those at and those near the tomb.

This enactment of funeral ritual within public view defines the performance of some actions surrounding the cult of the dead in these exterior spaces as a type of *spectaculum*, in its original sense of something exposed to public view. Our contemporary perception of spectacle is both more scopophilic and pejorative than it was for Romans, for whom the experience of spectacle had a much stronger interactive element (Bergmann 1999: 10). The most commonly cited text concerning Roman funerary practice, the account by the Greek historian Polybius of the public funeral of a great man during the republican period, underscores the performative nature and high drama of the rites of this period, as the writer recounts with obvious admiration his witnessing of the *pompa*, the *laudatio*, and the animation of the ancestral *imagines* by actors (*Historiae*. 6.53). The Greek historian actually uses the word *theama*, spectacle, in his admiring description of the public funerary procession. Over time a shift occurred from this type of aristocratic funeral in the central civic space of the Forum to rites enacted within the private sphere of the house and the burial site. Written and visual evidence supports the contention that by the second century, the procession and oration as described by Polybius seem to exist no longer and the emphasis was on the *collocatio*, the laying-out ceremony in the atrium of the Roman house (Bodel 1999: 266). While the location and the primary audience change, continuity from the earlier public procession to the later private *collocatio* existed in the ties between mortuary rites, performance, and audience. Within funerary ritual taking place in the house, a sense of self-awareness concerning the performative aspects of mourning seems to have been present. Lucian criticized the extreme lamentations of the family at a *collocatio* because he believed their "over the top" performance was a calculated attempt to impress others present (*De Lucto* 10-15). The early second-century reliefs found on the tomb of the Haterii, often cited for the information they offer concerning funerary ritual, remind us of the presence of professional mourners and musicians, performers whose presence enhanced the *collocatio* through music and a hired display of grief.

This idea of spectacle is not limited to activity surrounding the *collocatio*, but extends to those repeated visitations to the tomb site throughout the year. The *Parentalia*, *Rosaria* and *Violaria*, were festival days that brought the populace en masse to the necropoleis surrounding the city at the same time every year in a repeated expression of collective identity. The rhythmic repetition of the festivals of the *Fasti* orchestrated individuals over vast areas to follow an annually recurring cycle of ceremonies as the establishment of shared experiences among various audiences (Bergmann 1999:22). One can imagine that on these days the cities of

⁹ L. Bek proposes an imperial model for performative or self-conscious dining in her discussion of the octagonal hall of the Domus Flavia as a *triclinium* whose arrangement facilitated "people watching from the wings", see "*Questiones Convivales*, The Idea of the Triclinium and the Staging of Convivial Ceremony from Rome to Byzantium," *ARID* 12 (1998): 90.



Figure 6. Isola Sacra, Tomb 15. Photo Regina Gee.

the dead would be filled with the living, as Romans spread out from the city into the suburbs to perform the required rituals at the site of the tomb. On festival days, the sheer numbers of Romans in the necropoleis heightened the synchronism between performer and audience, as visitors simultaneously held the positions of viewer and viewed.

It is not necessary to leave out those more individual visits to the tomb, those on the *Silicernium*, and *Cena Novendialis*. These occasions place the family and friends again at the charged locus of the tomb, but in these instances the most likely audience was the passer-by on the road rather than other families engaged in the same activity. In the case of those tombs within the field of vision of someone moving along the thoroughfare, the traveler's attention might be pulled or heightened by the contrast presented between the tomb that was a lively and lit space, full of movement and the sound of voices, and the quiet "unanimated" monuments surrounding it.

As an architectural setting for the performance of ritual activity, the chamber tomb is notable for the extent to which it blurred the distinctions between passive monument and active space, public performance and private duty, spectator and audience, and finally communal and individual. A question remains regarding the reason for this desire to pull the public gaze onto what was essentially a private ritual. Why was there a desire to watch and to be watched in return?

One possible answer lies within an expansion of the idea

of the transformative role of memory mentioned in the introduction. On the individual level, the presence of witnesses created a memory of the event simply by viewing it and the larger the audience the greater the potential for the creation of an event memory. Considering the idea of collective memory, the enactment of funerary rites within public view, especially when synchronized by festivals, had the power to display the overall stability and wellbeing of the community. A temporal system – in the example of funerary ritual fixed formally by the *Fasti* and informally by personal anniversaries – has the power to co-ordinate experience and creates a communal identity (Kondoleon 1999: 321). Of all of the rituals enacted within Roman society, those revolving around the treatment of the dead were the most deeply engrained, as the Fathers of the Early Christian Church could attest, continually frustrated in their attempts to move people away from pagan funerary practice.

To consider the chamber tomb in the context of ritual visitation, the expense of the monument expressed hope in the continued appearance of those with the charge of tending the memory of the deceased. Even when inactive, silent with the doors closed, the form of the house tomb with its provision of space for multiple interments and an attractive staging area for ritual communicated the idea that visitors had come and gone, and would come and go again in the future. The performative aspects of the funerary ritual enacted at the tomb site had resonance beyond individual families, if one understands ritual as ceremonial performances that aid in holding a large and

ethnically diverse society together. An important function of bringing private or domestic ritual into the public sphere was to “calibrate the concerns of the community as a whole onto those of the family and vice-versa” (Beard, North and Price 1998: 51). Witnessing and being

witnessed in return was a way of participating in communal identity while at the same time, through acts of *pietas*, contributing to the stability of the community itself.

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Burials



Chapter 6

Cremations, Conjecture and Contextual Taphonomies: Material Strategies During the 4th to 2nd Millennia BC in Scotland

Paul R J Duffy and Gavin MacGregor

ABSTRACT Models of changing mortuary and funerary practices in Northern Britain, between the 4th and 2nd millennia BC, generally emphasise progression from communality towards individualism. Such models influence concepts of poorly understood past practices such as prehistoric cremation. We would suggest understanding of such rites in prehistory are currently based on analogy and conjecture and are uncritically underpinned by the stereotype of an articulated individual on the pyre. This contrasts with wider evidence which clearly illustrates the currency of disarticulated remains in various arenas in British prehistory over time. Utilising specific recently excavated examples from Scotland this paper explores the role of contextual taphonomy in understanding the material residues of prehistoric cremation in Scotland and, based on current evidence suggests alternative ways in which such material may be understood.

The understanding of changing mortuary and funerary practices in Northern Britain, between the 4th and 2nd millennia BC, has been dominated by generalised models characterised by predominant forms of practice. Present interpretations emphasise progression from communality towards individualism (e.g. Lucas 1996; Thomas 1999; Bradley 2007): expressions of shared ancestral belonging through the reincorporation of disarticulated remains in chambered cairns slowly giving way to later reinforcement of power and status in life through individual inhumation, and later cremation, in cists, pits, barrows, cairns and mounds. Such models are based on diachronic blocks characterised by dominant practices, and problematically underpinned by the uncritical use of loaded descriptive terminologies (grave, burial, pyre, cremation). As such, the implications of the complexities of unique archaeological events are frequently lost.

Recent research arising from excavations carried out by Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD) complements suggestions that there are other ways in which such remains may be interpreted (cf. Fowler 2001; 2005; Brück 2006). Underpinning this is our firm contention that interpretation of the nature of practices which result in the deposition of human bone must be grounded in the specific details of contextual taphonomies: the nature and composition of the bone assemblage, the context of deposition and the evidence for potentially different stages in the transformation of human remains. As has been argued for the study of unburnt human remains (Roksandik 2002), such a perspective is potentially more illuminating about the actual nature of past practices, can assist in identifying multiple and alternative roles for human remains in social practices during the period, and for our research implies

that deeply grounded attitudes to the nature of the body and its role in mortuary and funerary rites established in the 4th millennium BC endured for several millennia after.

Understanding Pyres

Current thinking on the process of cremation in the past is restricted by limited evidence of the venues in which such events occurred. In particular, in situ prehistoric pyre sites are rarely described in British archaeological literature (McKinlay 2000). Understandings of British prehistoric pyre technology have thus, to date, been limited to analogy with later practices from Roman or Saxon periods, through reference to later contemporary written descriptions (e.g., McKinley 2006), or by ethnographic understandings of contemporary, predominantly Hindu, practices (e.g., Downes 1999, 27). Such models, we would suggest, have indirectly reinforced an implicit and unproven assumption that residues are the product of intact, articulated bodies being placed on the pyre and reduced to bone (Fig 2). Whilst this assumption undoubtedly holds true for later periods, deposits of cremated bone from prehistory in particular are more generally marked by incomplete and underweight bone assemblages, offering a generally ignored opportunity to raise interesting questions and engage in alternative discussions. The recent excavation of a Neolithic ‘mortuary structure’ has prompted our engagement with such discussions.

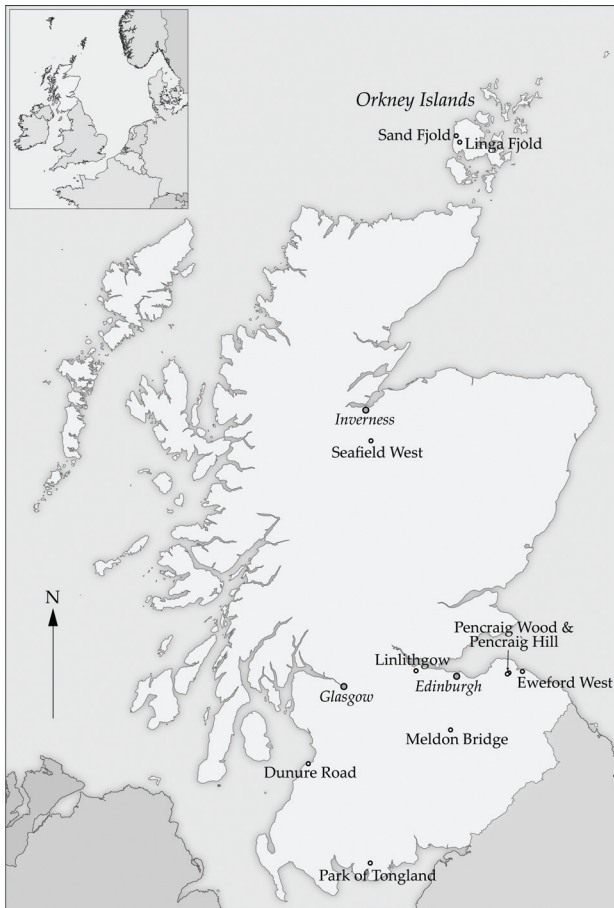


Fig 1: Location of sites in text.

Contextual Taphonomy

Pencairg Hill, excavated in 2004, is a ceremonial site with architectural elements that are typical of British wide tradition trapezoidal shaped monuments and two or three post timber structures dating from the early to mid 4th millennium BC (MacGregor & McLellan forthcoming, Fig. 3). Such sites have been typically interpreted as mortuary structures, used for excarnation and/or ossuaries (e.g. Kinnes 1991; Scott 1992), prior to the secondary burial of the bone elsewhere. However, in contrast to examples from southern England which predominantly contained deposits of unburnt bone, those from Scotland are generally associated with cremated human remains and part of a wider northern British tradition involving ‘crematoria’ (Kinnes 1991, 84-5). Thus the potential is that, in their final phase, such structures effectively functioned as pyres, burnt down with human remains in or on them (Kinnes 1991, 101).

The site at Pencairg Hill is, thus an unusual find in that it appears to be a rare example of a particular stage of human remains disposal. Significantly, it also comprised collapsed structural remains which critically, appeared to have been undisturbed following its collapse (MacGregor & McLellan forthcoming). This fact was established

through careful recording of the orientation of the grain of carbonised wood during excavation and identified the majority were still orientated in a limited and constant number of directions. These observations suggested that the skeletal material recovered from the pyre at Pencairg Hill was also *in-situ* and therefore broadly representative of what had been placed upon the structure at the point of cremation. The excavation thus presented a rare opportunity for bone location to be planned in detail and subsequently subjected to GIS analysis to establish how human remains may have been organised on the pyre (Fig. 4).

Analysis of the patterning of cremated remains failed to provide any evidence that a supine articulated corpse, or series of corpses, had been placed on the structure before burning. Instead the observed patterning appeared random and disorganised, despite the apparently organised nature of the wood timbers immediately below. Such observations contrast with reported experimental pyre burnings, which suggest that the cremated skeletal material can clearly be observed in anatomical position post cremation (McKinlay 1997). Similarly, the organised nature of the timbers indicated that deposition patterns were highly unlikely to be the result of post cremation pyre raking. Consideration of the specific contextual taphonomy of the material and the distribution of the skeletal elements themselves thus led us to the conclusion that the archaeological evidence did not support our initial hypothesis that intact bodies had been burnt on the pyre. Instead, the surprising conclusion of our investigations was that the body parts must have been disarticulated prior to cremation. Intriguingly, further research revealed this disarray of material broadly mirrors the excavation of one of the few suggested Bronze Age pyre sites excavated in Scotland in modern times, at Linga Fjold, Orkney (Downes 1995; McKinlay 1997). Although regrettably not fully published yet, summary reporting indicates a ‘heap’ of disordered cremated fragments was discovered and interpreted as the result from of pyre stoking and raking. Alternative reading of this assemblage, stimulated by the results from the site of Pencairg Hill, however, offer the intriguing possibility that further evidence could be found to support the theory that such patternings are the result not of cremation of supine articulated bodies, but of disarticulated body parts.

Although initially surprising, wider consideration of earlier mortuary practices witnessed from inhumed remains from chambered cairns suggest that such a manipulation and incorporation of disarticulated human remains at Pencairg Hill is entirely consistent with wider social treatment of human remains (e.g. Kinnes 1991, 103-105; see however, Lawrence 2006). This correlation in mortuary practices varies only through the specifics of mortuary rite and suggests different transformative pathways may have been underpinned by similar structuring principles.



Fig 2: Experimental Reproduction of a Prehistoric Cremation (Credit: Moira Greig).

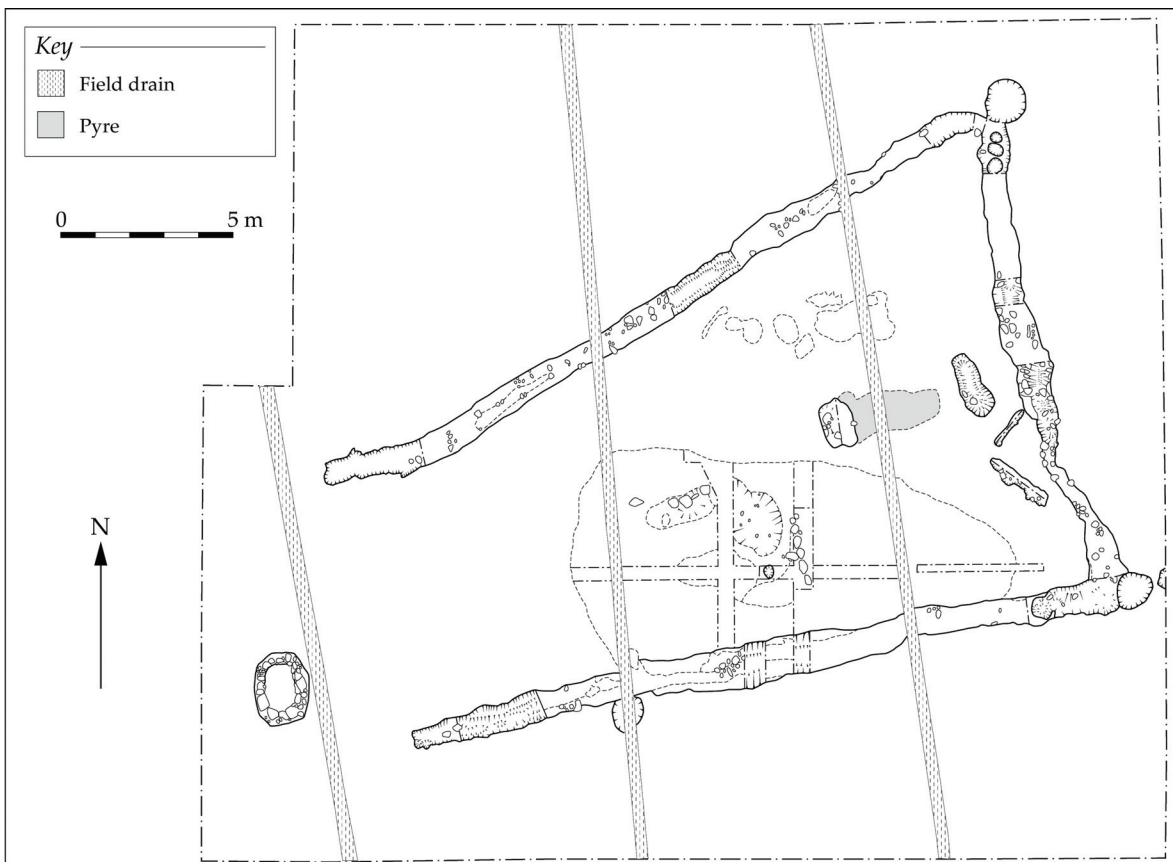


Fig. 3: Pencraig Hill: Site Plan.



Figure 4: Pencraig Hill: Distribution of Cremated Bone on Pyre

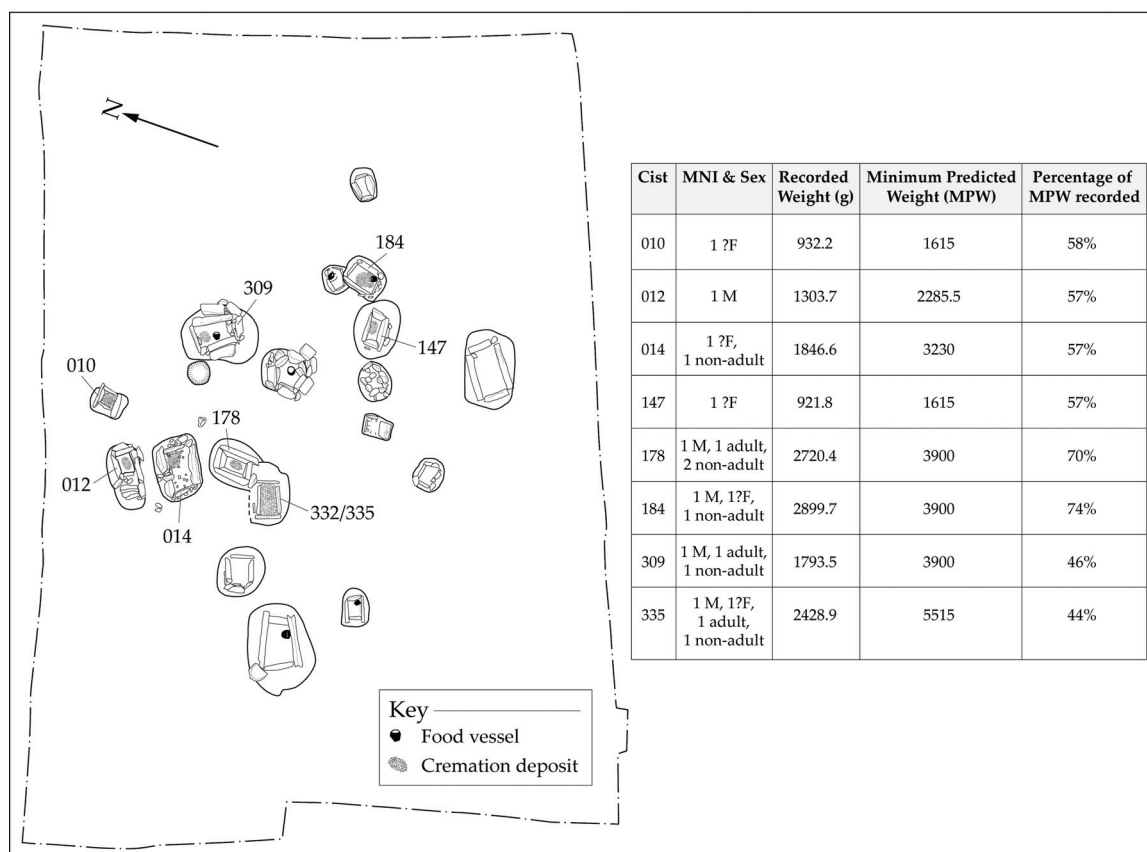


Fig. 5: Dunure Road: Cemetery Phase 1 and Table of Cremation Weights.

Wider Traditions

By the late fourth millennium BC, ceremonial sites such as Pencraig Hill were no longer used in the same manner: the timber components having been burnt down and / or sealed beneath cairns or mounds (Kinnes 1991; Scott 1992). The tradition of transformation, manipulation and deposition of *fragmentary* and *partial* bodies and body parts clearly continues, however, into the first half of the third millennium BC. For example, at the post-defined enclosure of Meldon Bridge (Speak & Burgess 1999, 26), a large pit surrounded by six stakes, dated to 2900-2100 BC, had held successive posts, a stake and an upright stone; the partial cremated remains of an eight year old child had been scattered in it. In another case, selected cremated human bone was put into a pit that was set in a circle of 11 stakes. Such traditions were not limited to the interior of such ceremonial enclosures. At Pencraig Wood, people had deposited small quantities of burnt human bone in pits during the third quarter of the third millennium BC (MacGregor & Stuart forthcoming).

The second half of the third millennium BC is traditionally seen to mark an apparent shift in practices with an increasing preference for cist inhumations. These are typically represented by the classic 'Beaker Burial' where anatomically correct crouched inhumations of individuals in cists, a form of practice which has dominated many of the models of the period. These traditions are characterised by inhumation of intact bodies, a focus which has led to social models and experimental practice that stress the ideological role of individualisation in mortuary and funerary rites (cf Thomas 1999) in all funerary practices across the period. However, increasing evidence for a wider range of mortuary and funerary practices during the period from Scotland, clearly indicates such models simplify the nature and inter-relationships of a suite of contemporary practices, and that use of fragmentary and partial body parts continues to be clearly observable in the archaeological record.

More complex deposits of human bone from this period, include multiple inhumations (e.g. Stevenson 1940; Dalland 1991), inhumations with moved and removed body parts (Ritchie 1958; Close-Brooks 1979; Parker Pearson *et al* 2005), partial cremations (e.g. Jobey 1980), cremated bone associated with inhumation (e.g. Clarke and Hamilton 1999) and similar variations can be witnessed with the tradition generally characterised by articulated crouched inhumations of individuals in cists associated with Food Vessels (Sheridan 2004). Such variations are perhaps encapsulated most clearly at Linlithgow. Here a cist had deposits of partial, disarticulated and mixed, unburnt and burnt bones of at least one adult, possibly male, four children aged about nine years and one child aged about five years which were deposited at the end of the third millennium BC (Cook 2000). At Sand Fjold, Orkney a similar succession of disarticulated unburnt bones and cremated bone were

deposited in a single cist from the early third millennium BC to the early first millennium BC (Dalland 1999), potentially reinforcing the more widespread nature of such traditions in Scotland.

Exploring this hypothesis further, additional evidence worthy of consideration can perhaps be seen in the recently excavated cist cemetery at Dunure Road, Ayrshire. This late third millennium cremation ceremony (Fig. 5), typical of sites which mark an apparent shift in practice at the beginning of late third millennium BC, (Sheridan 2007), produced evidence which indicates that cremation assemblage weights are up to 40 % less than would be expected for the numbers of individuals represented within the assemblages (Fig 5) (Duffy forthcoming). This pattern has commonly been recorded elsewhere, but is generally attributed to selective collection from the pyre (McKinlay 2006), or more recently to the complete combustion and/or natural scattering (i.e. by wind action etc) of the hard tissue. (A. Sheridan, pers. comm.). Again, however, such explanations rest on an implicit assumption that complete individuals are being cremated. Yet the scarcity of excavated pyre sites, or evidence for alternative arenas of disposal for the 'outstanding' portions of such cremations significantly fails to balance this taphonomic equation. We would suggest instead that this evidence can potentially be seen to illustrate a selective, if not discriminatory, attitude towards deposition of cremated human bone, in which, as before, parts rather than the whole are stressed. It may be that alternative, archaeologically invisible forums of disposal explain the absence of this missing material (Bruck 2006; McKinlay 2006). More critically, current evidence fails to support the generally held view that this selection is exclusively a post cremation occurrence. What is salient in light of our hypothesis is that such methods and arenas of burial practice represent a visible continuation of a tradition involving the conscious selection and disposal of partial and fragmentary sets of human remains, selections which have been demonstrated to occur elsewhere prior to disposal.

As cremation rites develop into the mid Bronze Age this phenomenon potentially becomes increasingly visible. In the later second millennium features at Dunure Road, for example, collections of partial sets of human remains (exclusively skull and long bone) occurred within an isolated pit, in front of a standing stone, and within the fill of the pit for the standing stone (Duffy forthcoming). Such patterning is reflected in contemporary examples from elsewhere, such as Park of Tongland, Dumfries and Galloway (Russell-White *et al.* 1992). Such deposits appear to become more visibly selective, often consisting almost entirely of skull and long bone elements, an assemblage characteristic reminiscent of the contents of chambered cairns from some two millennia earlier. Again, this selection is uncritically assumed to occur post-cremation, but we would suggest that, on the basis of present evidence, a continuing structuring principle

focussed on use of partial sets of human remains presents an equally valid hypothesis.

Intriguingly, closer scrutiny of the assemblages of cremated bone from Eweford West (MacGregor forthcoming), Dunure Road (Duffy forthcoming) and Seafeld West (Cresee & Sheridan 2003, 71), has also identified traces of linear incisions, or cut marks. Although such incisions are most frequently found on skull fragments, it is tempting to suggest these incisions could be evidence of defleshing or dismemberment of bodies, as has been suggested for Neolithic (Smith and Brickley 2004) and later Iron Age (Green 1998) examples. The possibility exists, therefore, that there was fragmentation of individuals prior to cremation and that the disproportionate amount of some individuals present in deposits could in part be due to such practices.

Different Perspectives

In considering the changing nature of mortuary and funerary practices in Scotland spanning from the fourth through second millennia BC it is easy for accounts of changing practices to focus on a sequence of typical modes of practice, each phase or step in the sequence of which is characterised by the predominant funerary rite placed in the dominant funerary arena: chambered cairn, cist, pit or urn. Such an approach sequence has traditionally uncritically subsumed diverse individual sets of archaeological data into general accepted social models: uniqueness is explored only where marked changes in predominant forms of practice are witnessed. Whilst it is clear that such traditions do exist, we suggest that a more complex historical dynamic to traditions of

mortuary and funerary practices exists during this period in Scotland, one in which the use of fragmentary and partial sets of human remains can repeatedly be identified.

In terms of how we model past social practice in Scottish prehistory, our hypothesis suggests that a range and complexity of rites took place throughout the third millennium BC and implies a range of material strategies within which human remains were deployed. Consequently, rather than explaining every deposit of cremated human remains from the second millennium BC in Scotland as the selected residues or inefficient raking and collection of the remnants of whole body cremations, it may be more useful to recognise that a variety of different social practices are potentially evidenced which result in superficially similar, but critically different physical residues. Such signs could indicate that partial remains, potentially of multiple individuals, were placed on pyres. Consequently, understandings of human bone deposition of multiple individuals in many arenas may require reconceptualisation.

In this light we would reiterate a call for more critical application of terminology, as well as more careful scrutiny of contextual taphonomy. The term pyre, for example, currently prejudges the character of practices: specifically a presupposition that it is always intact bodies which are cremated. Pyres, however, are most simply are a mortuary technology, deploying a fuel (typically manifest as a wooden pyre structure) to cremate human remains. As demonstrated at Pencraig Hill, critical analysis of the material residues of such actions can identify evidential signatures that can refute rather than reinforce such general hypothesis.

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Chapter 7

Ritual and Remembrance at Archaic Crustumerium: The Transformations of Past and Modern Materialities in the Cemetery of Cisterna Grande (Rome, Italy)

Ulla Rajala

ABSTRACT This article presents some preliminary results from the excavations of the *Remembering the Dead* project in the Archaic cemetery area of Cisterna Grande (Crustumerium, Rome, Italy). The article discusses the materialities of the tombs and the different postdepositional formation processes affecting them. It is acknowledged that we encounter transformed materialities, and thus, the concept of postdepositional history is introduced in this context. This concept is suggested to incorporate the way in which different postdepositional processes and events have affected human behaviour both in the past and in the present.

The concept of materiality refers to the processes of creating meanings and identities through the active use of material culture in the past (cf. DeMarrais *et al* 1996:16; Miller & Tilley 1996; Thomas 1996:82; DeMarrais 2004). Through the materiality of tombs people created and recreated symbolic meanings related to a crucial rite of passage, however, different religious beliefs and social conventions were interwoven into the rituals and practices, reflecting shared ideologies and social hierarchies (e.g. Parker Pearson 1999). In past communities the visible structures of tombs were also likely to be used to maintain the social memory and remembrance of the deceased (cf. Jones 2003; Williams 2003). The understanding of different aspects of funerary practices is not made any easier by the fact that in the process of excavation we encounter only partial, and in some cases, transformed materialities. Furthermore, the modern perceptions of past materialities and the discovery of them in the first place through the act of excavation create extra layers of interpretational bias.

The differences in the materiality of tombs and burials have an impact on modern understanding of the past. Rich and more exceptional burials tend to receive more attention than simpler tombs. Thus, when the burial custom of a period is considered poor, this can have a significant effect on the amount of resources that are directed in the study of its tombs. It is possible to argue that in the Latin area in central Italy the archaeologically observed decline in the quality and quantity of grave goods between the Orientalising period (c. 700 – 570 BC) and the Archaic period (c. 570 – 470 BC) has directly affected the study of the latter, both regionally and locally (cf. Colonna 1977). I have presented elsewhere (Rajala 2007) the consequences the modern perceptions of this past material change have for the archaeological

knowledge of Archaic Latin burial practices. In this article I want to discuss how depositional and postdepositional processes and the observations made during archaeological work affect our knowledge of Archaic Latin tombs. I will show that these processes can simultaneously both obscure and shed light on rituals and remembrance.

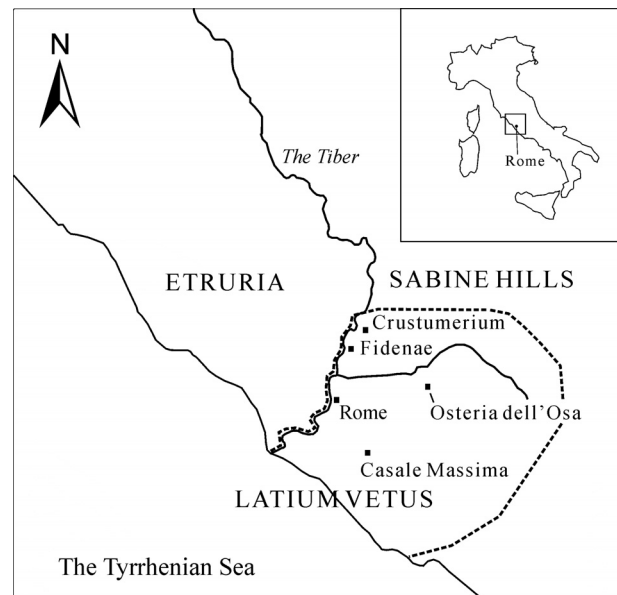


Figure 1. Ancient sites in central Italy mentioned in the text.

Our project *Remembering the Dead* has been excavating at Cisterna Grande in one of the cemetery areas of Crustumerium in Rome in central Italy since 2004.

Crustumerium (Fig. 1) was one of the Latin rivals of Rome in *Latium vetus*. It was located in the Tiber valley about ten kilometres north of Rome. The site of the town was settled during the Early Iron Age, the ninth century BC (Amoroso 2004). By the sixth century BC the whole town area was occupied (Amoroso 2002). The peak of the town was during the Orientalising period around the seventh century BC. Rome defeated Crustumerium and the neighbouring Fidenae in 500/499 BC. After that the town declined rapidly and finally vanished altogether in the early fourth century BC (Quilici & Quilici Gigli 1980; di Gennaro 1999; Amoroso 2000). Unlike Fidenae, Crustumerium has remained rural, providing an excellent opportunity to study its cemeteries and their social, ritual, temporal and landscape contexts.

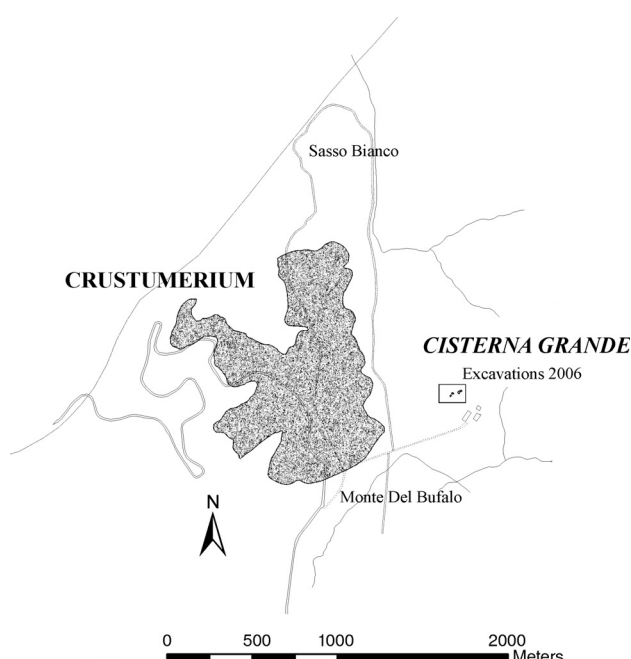


Figure 2. Crustumerium and Cisterna Grande.

Cisterna Grande (Fig. 2) is the third cemetery area at Crustumerium to undergo proper excavation. The largest excavated cemetery area is Monte Del Bufalo, located immediately outside the settlement in the southeast. Another main excavation area, Sasso Bianco, is located in the north of the ancient town (cf. di Gennaro 1990; 1999). Cisterna Grande lies on a sloping hillside in the northeast of the town near an ancient road cutting. Our area at Cisterna Grande was chosen for the excavations after recent looting suggested the presence of Orientalising tombs. Instead, the first tombs exposed were Archaic chamber tombs, and after realising their potential, the project has been concentrating on them ever since. The excavations in the cemetery area of Cisterna Grande have been carried out in collaboration with the Superintendency of Rome and Dr Francesco di Gennaro, the

director of this archaeological area. The main phase of the excavation project ran for four years (2004–2007) and the publication is planned to follow soon after. The main aim of the project is to study the metaphorical funerary representations of a Latin Iron Age and Archaic community. Tombs, with their burials, are physical evidence of past rituals, and as physical structures they form part of a wider ritual landscape. These landscapes are studied at a local level using digital and traditional methods. In addition to digital single context planning, the project makes use of GIS and virtual modeling. However, the limited knowledge of Archaic tombs (cf. Colonna 1977; Ampolo 1984; Naso 1990) makes all new field observations important.

In *Latium vetus* the excavation of an Archaic cemetery is a rare event. Therefore, the project is able to study less well-known burial customs and tomb types. The excavations have also exposed archaeological phenomena, which look unique and unusual at the present moment but may become better known and more commonplace in the future. These observations relating to depositional and postdepositional events and their consequences in the past and present are the topic of this article.

The Shared Ritual in the Archaic Period

In central Italy during the Orientalising period in the eighth and early seventh century BC the deceased were normally buried in trench (*fossa*) tombs. This tomb type was already in use earlier, during the Iron Age. In the best-known Latial cemetery of Osteria dell'Osa (Bietti Sestieri 1992), northeast of Rome, and at Crustumerium (Belelli Marchesini pers. comm.), it was dominant both during the Early Iron Age (c. 900 – 700 BC)¹ and Orientalising period. *Fossa* tombs were cut into local volcanic tuff in cemetery areas outside the settlements (e.g. Bartoloni *et al* 1997). The simplest *fossa* tombs are modest rectangular trenches, but later types have absidal or lateral niches for grave goods. The so called *tombe a loculo* have one or two large side niches (*loculi*) for the deceased and the grave goods. Most *tombe a loculo* were made for a single inhumation (*tomba a loculo tipo Narce*) but occasionally one tomb was prepared for a double

¹ It is evident that the recent dates derived from dendrochronology will change the absolute chronology of later Italian prehistory. At present the new findings have not resulted in a universally agreed date for the beginning of the Early Iron Age (Latial Period II in *Latium vetus*). The two suggested dates are 950/925 BC (Pacciarelli 2000:68, Fig. 38), and 1020 BC (Nijboer *et al* 2002:Table 1). The latter high chronology involves pushing the beginning of the Latial Period III of the Early Iron Age back in time, and subsequently, the beginning of the Latial Period II as well. The changes have significant implications for our understanding of social change. However, since no consensus has been reached and all other dates discussed in this article are based on the traditional chronology, new absolute dates are not applied.

burial (*tomba a doppio loculo tipo Monterano*), normally for a couple (a man and a woman) or for a woman and a child. Most of these tombs have relatively wealthy grave goods. In the cemetery areas of Crustumerium the deceased have a dozen or more pottery vessels, together with jewellery and/or other personal items (Paolini 1990; di Gennaro 1999). The richest tombs have bronze vessels and whole ceramic drinking sets with wine containers and cups (di Gennaro 1988; 1990a; 1999; 2001; Paolini 1990; Ceci *et al* 1997).

At the end of the Orientalising period in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BC there was a general transition to chamber tombs in *Latium vetus* (cf. Bedini 1980; 1981; 1983; 1990; Naso 1990; di Gennaro 1999; De Santis 2002). Like earlier tombs, chamber tombs were cut into tuff, but they generally accommodated more than one or two inhumations and are commonly thought to have been family tombs. Chambers are normally rectangular, room-like spaces, which are entered through an entrance corridor (*dromos*). The earliest chamber tomb at Crustumerium is from Sasso Bianco; it did not have a *dromos* but an entrance shaft (Paolini 1990). The first proper chamber tombs with *dromoi* are somewhat later, from the end of the seventh century if not from the beginning of the sixth century BC (di Gennaro 1999). Those early chambers did not have niches (*loculi*) carved into their walls although in some later ones and in many other places in central Italy they do (e.g. Santoro 1977; Bedini 1990).

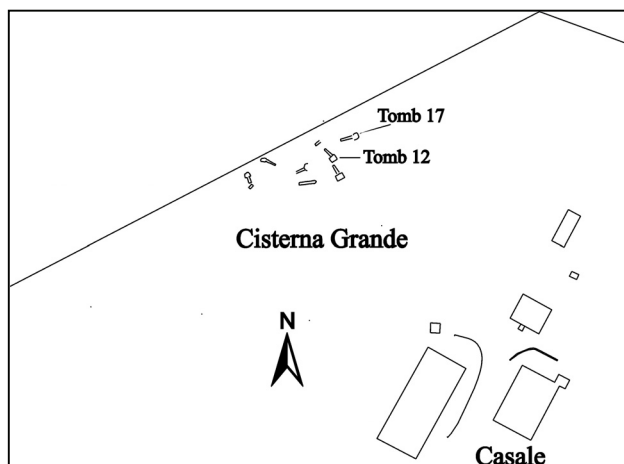


Figure 3. Tombs 12 and 17 at Cisterna Grande

The chambers excavated to date at Cisterna Grande (Fig. 3), although limited in number, have introduced a higher level of variability than expected. The chambers have different shapes, sizes, depths, orientations and designs, and the quality of finishing differs significantly. In addition, the *dromoi* differ in their lengths, widths, depths and the quality of finishing. Most of the tombs had door slabs and other blocking features still *in situ* at the entrance. Many were only blocked with irregular stones but others had large single slabs closing the doorway. On

the basis of the varied architecture one can recognise at least two, if not three, chamber tomb types that were used simultaneously. Nevertheless, the cemetery was not exclusively Archaic since our excavations have discovered one Late Orientalising trench tomb belonging to the later *tomba a loculo tipo Narce* type, preliminarily dated here to the late seventh century BC. However, the remaining six tombs are chamber tombs.

The first chamber tomb type consists of fairly large rectangular chambers with one or more *loculi* on the walls and additional burials in coffins or trunks on the floor. These chambers tend to have longer and deeper *dromoi* than the other type. Among these larger chambers there is one which may be viewed as more ‘monumental’, with its three-metre deep *dromos* and tent-like ceiling still intact. The second chamber tomb type is more modest with a low semicircular chamber, two slightly irregular *loculi* on the opposite sides of the chamber and a shallow, short and relatively narrow *dromos*. The stone surfaces were left relatively uneven, with clear pick marks visible. The latter type would have required much less manpower for its construction. Preliminarily, the hypothesis is that these different types reflect different economic and social standings of the families or individuals buried in the tombs. However, the scale of the differences seems to be subtle.

All burials recovered to date from our excavations at Cisterna Grande are inhumations. Most age groups and both sexes are represented. The deceased normally have one or more pieces of jewelry and/or weapons or tools with them. Interestingly, there is evidence for disarticulation and redeposition of bodies. On the basis of our excavations the reuse of *loculi* seems to have been common-place. The *loculi* tend to have been closed with tiles or with stones or the deceased were put into coffins although some were simply wrapped in shrouds.

Transformed Materiality and Postdepositional Histories

The local characteristics of the geology at Cisterna Grande make the chamber tombs quite exceptional. The bedrock of the hill is formed by numerous relatively thin, soft volcanic stone layers that cannot properly support the weight of tuff ceilings over the voids of the chambers. The ceilings of the chambers are normally of so-called *tufo giallo* and *cappellaccio*, the latter layer positioned below the former (cf. Fig. 4). The chambers have been dug through a layer of *breccia tufacea*, a loose mix of pumice, angular pieces and sandy matrix, into volcanic clay. The *loculi* are usually cut into *breccia tufacea* so that their benches are of volcanic clay. When volcanic clay is moist, this ‘stone’ can be cut like butter. This weakness of underlying *breccia tufacea* and volcanic clay has resulted in many chambers collapsing. As a consequence, excavators have to remove thick layers of stone.

The tombs, even if still intact, are not empty. Cisterna Grande lies in a slope with visible effects of water erosion resulting from episodic torrential rainfall, typical for the area in winter or during thunderstorms. During the excavations we have also exposed ancient gullies carved in tuff. Some of the water was definitely absorbed in soil and infiltrated into the chambers through structural cracks in stone. When the tombs lie relatively deep and there are no collapses, the clay forms annual ‘varves’. This clay matter, when dry, is hard, shiny and toffee-like but mud-like when wet. It is called *limo*, which actually means silt in Italian, but the term is generally used in archaeological contexts to describe certain clayey fills in chamber tombs (di Gennaro pers.comm.). Most of the tombs at Cisterna Grande have collapsed, and additionally, there seem to have been mudslide-type events filling in the voids; therefore, only in very few occasions any remains of varve-like formations have been observed. In the case of the smaller tomb type the chambers are filled with only a few massive layers of clay. On the other hand, larger tombs may only have one two fills together with a massive collapse fill of clay and volcanic clay (cf. Fig. 4). No matter if the tomb has collapsed or not, the result is that the excavators have to remove a large amount of clayey soil that has infiltrated into the chambers.

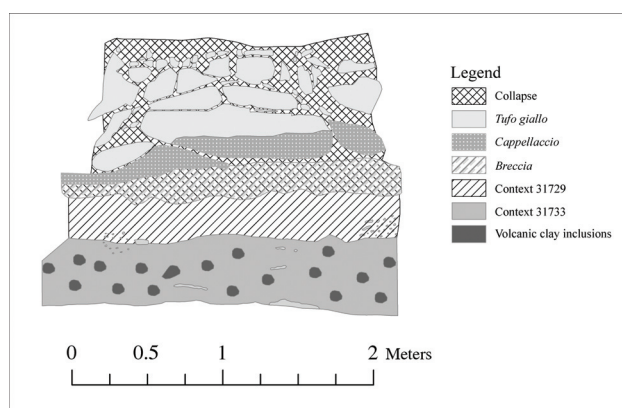


Figure 4. East facing section of the partly excavated chamber (original drawing by A. Canu & P. Musiela). The collapse layer consists of the shattered tuff blocks broken down more or less *in situ* approximately above the area where the arch of the door used to be.

Even if the tombs have not collapsed and have been filled in relatively peacefully, they are by no means in their original state. The area has been under cultivation more or less continuously since Roman times and the surface of the tuff has constantly been cut by the plough. After the introduction of modern deep ploughing this process has accelerated and the original uppermost margins of the entrance *dromoi* have been lost. The weight of modern machinery has apparently resulted in the collapse of even more tombs. Therefore, modern agricultural practices have increasingly altered ancient structures.

The above-described continuous processes, the infiltration of the *limo* clay and the erosion of the original surface, are two examples of *postdepositional processes* (e.g. Schiffer 1987; Goldberg *et al* 1993; Thorpe 1998). Even if their origins are different, one being natural and the other at least partly anthropogenic, they both change the state of the structure. In addition, the contents of the tombs alter in other ways when the bodies of the deceased are consumed and the materials of grave goods are partly or totally corroded. The infiltration of clay affects this process as well. The metal objects may have broken when the clay matrix shrunk during the dry season. The organic materials may have discoloured the clay and be replaced by it through time. Similarly, clay has replaced most of the bone and only a thin sheet of white surface remains of the bone matter. This replacement and the resulting deterioration of bone material are characteristic to the local geology and have direct consequences in the difficulty of sexing the deceased.

If infiltration and erosion are examples of processes, collapses in their turn are an example of *postdepositional events* (cf. Thorpe 1998:Figure 16). Naturally, if one wishes to be pedantic, a single act of ploughing results in a cutting event. However, some of the collapses are singular events whereas others are episodes in a series of events. Since not all the tombs have collapsed, and since every collapse is unique, the tombs at Cisterna Grande have different *postdepositional histories*.

Postdepositional history has been briefly mentioned earlier in archaeology in the connection of site formation processes (e.g. Conkey 1980:626; Hassan 1995:559). Naturally, the detailed descriptions of postdepositional processes at singular sites (e.g. Farrard 1993) or affecting a group of sites (e.g. Bar-Yosef 1993) can be seen as postdepositional histories even if the concept has not been used. Occasionally, processual archaeologists have also referred to different site building processes (Sullivan 1978) and pedoturbatory histories (Wood & Johnson 1979). In these contexts, however, postdepositional history is not used to describe a specific chronological narrative of one archaeological structure but to analyse generalised categories or to recognise possible disturbances which skew distributions or alter objects and assemblages.

Since the tombs at Cisterna Grande have been transformed by different events and processes during their postdepositional histories, we encounter only *transformed materiality* (cf. Edensor 2005:326). At Cisterna Grande decay and deterioration continues during the excavations. Since the walls of the chambers tend to be cut into soft volcanic clay, they are prone to crack and erode when exposed to the sunlight and dry heat of an Italian summer. The chambers continue to expand whilst the outmost layer of volcanic clay peels away. The resulting, slightly uneven, wall looks exactly like the

‘original’ walls of the tomb. Luckily, in most cases it is relatively easy to demarcate different transformations due to the distinctiveness of different fills resulting from the events.

Postdepositional history is part of the biography of a tomb. Biographical metaphor (Holtorf 1998; Gosden & Marshall 1999; Gilchrist 2000; Jones 2002:83-4, 86-9) emphasises the importance of interpretation and temporal change. In the case of funerary archaeology, it also underlines the necessity of creating the narrative of the transformed materiality of a tomb and the need of interpreting all field observations. Since a ‘life history’ includes the changes caused by the postdepositional processes (Schiffer 1987:13), it incorporates the transformations of the tombs as well as changing cultural meanings. These life histories seem to be all lightly different at Cisterna Grande although clear similarities can be observed between certain tombs. As a whole these narratives create a body of life histories that are part of the landscape history of the site. The full life history of the site (cf. Rajala 2002; 2003) includes firstly the use life of the cemetery during the pre-Roman period and then the long phase of deterioration while the area was under plough. Finally, in the present, tomb robbers and archaeologists transform the site for different purposes.

In this context of postdepositional history, post-depositional processes and events can be understood to relate to the life history of a tomb in two different ways. Firstly, formation processes can take place after a tomb’s proper use life without any human observation and awareness. However, postdepositional events can affect human actions directly both in the past and in the present. In this second case a postdepositional event may lead to the abandonment of a chamber or to the modification of its use. In the present, tomb robbers who try to find profitable objects to be sold illicitly may consider the sheer amount of physicality related to reaching the sparse grave goods and decide to leave them in peace. Archaeologists, on the other hand, have to consider different research strategies. The modes of digging and the time dedicated for recording different accumulation and collapse layers are factors to be taken into account. In addition, postdepositional processes and events affect the preservation of the chamber and its burials, and thus ultimately, our interpretations.

Postdepositional Events and Burials

In this section I will give some examples of the importance of postdepositional events and show how they have affected human behaviour. Since these are preliminary interpretations, the future analysis by my assistant Heli Arima (University of Helsinki) as part of her PhD work or further contributions by trench supervisor Maija Helamaa may arrive at different conclusions. Nevertheless, the narratives presented here

serve as an example of the kind of postdepositional histories the project can tell.

Tomb 12 (Fig. 3) lies in the middle of our excavation area, between Tombs 11 and 17. It is oriented northwest – southeast and it is an example of the larger tomb type. Its chamber was excavated over two seasons due to its numerous stone and *limo* layers. This suggests that Tomb 12 seems to have collapsed as a result of a series of postdepositional events. The consecutive collapses seem to have started early, already during or immediately after the use life of the tomb. This can be assumed on the basis of the location and condition of the skeleton 31241 (Fig. 5) and the remains of a coffin 31226. The skeleton lay on its stomach, totally articulated, next to the empty coffin on the chamber floor. On top of the coffin there were some smaller stones suggesting that a brief collapse event may have knocked the coffin. The fact that the skeleton was articulated with no anatomic parts missing shows that this event happened when the body had not yet been consumed.

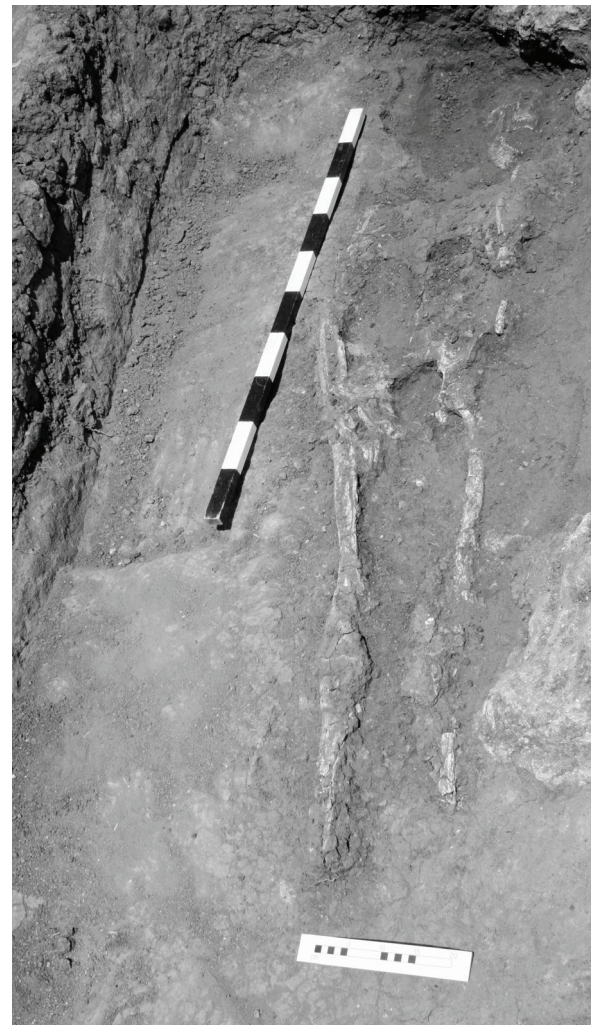


Figure 5. Skeleton 31241 in Tomb 12 (photo by H. Arima).

The situation in Tomb 12 was totally unexpected. The observations made about the coffin, the skeleton, the stones and the fills all contributed to the conclusion that we were facing an unusual, individual case. The uniqueness of the situation was acknowledged in recording, and the resulting narrative shows how the tombs can testify of their distinctive postdepositional history. However, we cannot be certain if the members of the family noticed that the tomb had started to fall into pieces or if the start of the postdepositional sequence affected their behaviour in any way. In any case, the skeleton remained on the floor unmoved and the blocking stones outside where all in place.

Tomb 12 and its many consecutive layers of collapsed *tufo* and accumulated *limo* also highlight the physical effort needed to reach the find layers. This also points to the extent which the structure of the chamber has transformed. It is impossible, therefore, to know the original form of the space where the final part of the burial ritual took place. Similarly, the same is also true of any of the collapsed tombs. None of them can be experienced as they originally were. We can only reconstruct their structure and create *reconstructed materialities* as the end product of our interpretation process. Their pristine architecture is forever lost, but we can infer it from the undamaged chambers at Crustumium and elsewhere in central Italy.

Tomb 17 (Fig. 3) lies higher up in the slope, north of Tomb 12. Its orientation is west-northwest – east-southeast and like Tomb 12 it belongs to the larger tomb type. The massive stone deposits in its chamber suggest that its ceiling collapsed as a result of one devastating episode. When the *dromos* of the tomb was excavated, it contained a series of fills instead of the normal single fill. Some of them were rubble sloping to the blocking slab of the tomb. In addition, there were numerous layers of irregular *tufo* blocks lying on stratified *limo* clay. From the outside and inside of the chamber it became apparent that the arch of the doorway had collapsed and part of the material had slipped into the *dromos*.

In this case, the postdepositional event seems to have affected the behaviour of the members of the past community. This is shown by the discovery of an inhumation at the beginning of the excavation. The burial and its blocking and/or marking stones were clearly placed into the uppermost fill of the *dromos*. Since the single fills of the *dromoi* are usually relatively findless, they are usually removed as swiftly as possible. This time the excavators had removed only twenty centimetres from the end of the *dromos* when they encountered a skeleton. The finding of the buried remains was totally unanticipated.

This skeleton 31707 (Fig. 6) was buried with some grave goods. The bronze *fibulae* and *bullae* discovered date the burial to the Archaic period. The inhumation is very similar to the Archaic ones found at Casale Massima

(Bedini 1980; 1983). Digging simple trenches was not entirely unusual during this period but digging one inside a filled *dromos* of a chamber is unheard of. The existence of an Archaic burial on a level over a metre higher than the floor of the *dromos* above a series of layers of collapsed material testifies that the arch had collapsed already during the Archaic period and the *dromos* remained covered by soil.



Figure 6. Skeleton 31707 in Tomb 17 (photo by U. Rajala).

This inhumation could be taken as evidence for the loss of the knowledge of Tomb 17. However, the simple trenches at Casale Massima (Bedini 1980; 1983) were cut into tuff. Thus, digging a trench into the fillings of a *dromos* and burying a new body at the site of a known tomb could be taken as a symbolic act of remembrance and preservation of burial rights. Di Gennaro (1999:17-18) has suggested that a group of *fossa*, a *loculo* and chamber tombs in the older cemetery of Monte Del Bufalo belonged to the same family since one of the

chambers cut into two earlier trenches, and thus, made the group unusually densely spaced. Alternatively, this could be interpreted as a sign of forgetting the existence of the earlier tombs and their location. Therefore, this group cannot be taken as an ultimate manifestation of the existence of family burial plots. On the other hand, the act of exceptional interment in the *dromos* of Tomb 17 can be interpreted as evidence for the Archaic ownership of funerary plots. This illustrates the will to maintain rights to the liminal space around the town area.

The example of Tomb 17 shows how the past post-depositional events have affected contemporary behaviour at Crustumerium. The collapse of the arch has denied a family any further use of the tomb. However, the people who have known about the event have wanted either to preserve or claim the rights to the plot or to show remembrance and affiliation. During the excavations in 2007 it became clear that the chamber was from a relatively early period, and the original burials were deposited in the end of the Orientalising period. Thus, the exceptional character of this burial is highly suggestive of being a consequence of the latter intensification.

Conclusions

The results from the excavations of the *Remembering the Dead* project at Cisterna Grande at Crustumerium have encouraged a review of the importance of the post-depositional processes and events and their effect on human behaviour. The Archaic chamber tombs here belong to at least two different types and they have also had different postdepositional histories. Some of the tombs have collapsed as a consequence of local geology. The collapses have either been rapid or occurred in stages over a longer period of time. All these alternatives can be induced from the material remains of the chambers and their fills.

As a consequence of these observations, the concept of postdepositional history has been used to describe and narrate the different fortunes of the tombs. Post-depositional history is thus a part of the life history of a tomb. Postdepositional histories consist of different postdepositional processes and events that can be either natural or a result of human agency. Together different histories of the tombs at Cisterna Grande make up a part of the biography of this site. Different histories have changed the outlook of the tombs and their original deposits, and therefore, they result with the transformed materialities of these tombs.

Different transformed materialities and postdepositional histories have affected human behaviour in different ways, both in the past and in the present. In the present the archaeological practices of the excavations reflect the physicality of removing deposits from the filled chambers and the importance of recording different collapse and accumulation layers. The investment in digging Archaic

chamber tombs also reflects the awareness of the importance of the findings regardless the time and effort involved. Nevertheless, the realities of removing spoil seem to deter looting.

The archaeological examples presented in this article demonstrate both the early occurrence of the post-depositional events and the actions they caused. In the case of Tomb 12 the collapses seem to have started immediately after the burial in the coffin was made during the Archaic period. The event that resulted with the momentarily overturned coffin was also the first in a long series of episodic collapses. We do not know if these episodes affected the past behaviour but in the present the existence of multiple consecutive collapses and accumulation layers slowed down the excavation of the tomb.

Tomb 17 in its turn is remarkable in many different ways. Not only does the existence of the Archaic inhumation in the uppermost part of the *dromos* fill show that the chamber collapsed during the use life of the cemetery but it also gives evidence for the application of burial ritual in the case when the burial chamber was not available. The co-existence of the chamber tomb and the exceptional inhumation as an entity is a proof of both remembrance and ownership. Its sheer fragile materiality affected our work and enabled unparalleled interpretation.

The current project at Cisterna Grande will continue, unexpectedly, for one more short season in early 2008. During this coming season we will expose the earlier use life of our final tomb (Tomb 18). After that, we will be able to summarise those unique narratives the excavated chamber tombs allow us to tell.

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Chapter 8

Reuse in Finnish Cremation Cemeteries under Level Ground – Examples of Collective Memory

Anna Wickholm

ABSTRACT This article presents site reuse in the cremation cemeteries under level ground, one of the dominant burial forms in Finland and Estonia during Middle and Late Iron Age (AD 450-1100). These cemeteries are sometimes erected on top of older burials and settlement sites. It is probable that either the memories of these other monuments or the landscape influenced the choice of location. Towards the end of the Viking Age occasional inhumations have been dug into the cremation cemeteries. The idea of making inhumations in an older cemetery suggests a degree of continuity even if the ideas changed. By re-using a site the dead becomes a part of a shared past and the same group of ancestors. The moraine hills were important places because they gave the people a stronger identity, especially during a time of change. The repeated rituals performed at the sites helped the people to sustain their collective memory.

Over the past decade Memory studies have become an increasingly important part of burial archaeology (e.g. Hallam & Hockey 2001; Lucas 2005; Van Dyke & Alcock 2003; Williams 2005). It seems that archaeologists have accepted the idea that the cemeteries are not only static containers for the dead, but also important places for creating and maintaining the collective memory. Past peoples did not passively read meanings of the surrounding landscape with its ancient monuments, they also manipulated them. Monuments, landscapes and specific sites evoked memories of mythical or historical events. These memories could have been reminiscent of certain persons, people or actions. Even though the concept of time was probably different to past people, they were naturally conscious of the passing of time (e.g. Tilley 1994; Johansen 1997; Zachrisson 1998; Bradley 2002).

Memory is a socially constructed phenomenon, associated with repeated actions that can be either inscribing or incorporating practices (Connerton 1989:72). While inscribing practices are needed to be taught and explained in order for them to be understood (e.g. learning the alphabet), incorporating practices have to do with bodily actions. Incorporating practices are thus practical experiences performed with the body, often called embodied memory. Embodied memories are maintained and remembered through repeated actions such as performing a certain ritual, learning how to type or ride a bicycle (*ibid*: 22pp; Bell 1992:118).

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs first introduced the term collective memory to a broader public. His main point was that personal memories and also the community's shared memories of the past are influenced by social processes. Therefore, our recollections are not completely personal; memory goes

beyond the individual capacity (Halbwachs 1992). "It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (*ibid*: 38). Different groups of people might in addition have completely different memories of the same event. The collective memory is thus connected to the social group that you experience it with, such as in families, among believers of a religion or in social classes (*ibid*). Memories are also often connected to a certain place. When we return to this place, even after a long time, it starts to evoke memories. Places can thus become sites of memory (Nora 1996; Holtorf 2001).

Secondary burials are sometimes found on top of older cemeteries. This re-use of sites that was formerly believed to be accidental has lately been understood as intentional behaviour (e.g. Zachrisson 1994; Gosden & Lock 1998; Bradley 2002). This article will present some cases of cemetery re-use from Finland, namely in cremation cemeteries under level ground. There are quite often layers from older settlement sites or burials under the cremation cemeteries.

The cremation cemeteries under level ground were used during several hundreds of years, and one particular cemetery might have been used for over 500 years. The connection between cremation cemeteries under level ground and older graves indicates that there is something special in the place or in the location of these cemeteries. There must have been a reason for the continuous burials at the site. Also, the long chronological continuity in these cemeteries suggests that the place remained important. The place of burial might have contained several different meanings, all connected with history, identity and social structures. Certain landscapes and sites are thus deeply rooted in both the individual and collective memories (Tilley 1994:27).

Well-organized cemeteries or messy and chaotic fields of debris?



Fig. 1. A part of the stone structure in Vainionmäki A cemetery in Laitila, SW Finland. Excavation layer 1. Photo: National Board of Antiquities 1993.

The cremation cemetery under level ground is a complex burial form currently known only from Finland, Estonia and the Karelian Isthmus in Russia. In Finland the burial form is commonly known from the historical counties of Finland Proper, Satakunta, southern Ostrobothnia, Häme, western Uusimaa, Savo and Karelia. This means that the northernmost frontier for this burial form goes around the 63rd latitude. The burial form has not been observed in the Åland Islands or the archipelago. What distinguishes the cemetery from others is that it is only faintly visible above ground, since it lacks an outer grave marker. The cemetery is built of stones of varying size that form a compact but irregular structure (Fig. 1). The burned bones and artefacts have been strewn over a large area on this stone pavement (Hackman 1897:82pp; Tallgren 1931:113p; Salmo 1952:12pp; Kivikoski 1961:161pp; Mandel 2003), and after this the grave goods have been covered with a layer of smaller stones. There are often only 5 cm of soil on top of these cemeteries. The lack of an aboveground structure and the flatness of this cemetery type transform it into an almost invisible cemetery, meaning that it disappears very easily into the landscape. Still, the cemeteries are often placed on small moraine hills, slopes or ridges, especially in western Finland. These hills are often situated in an agrarian landscape which makes them prominent in the surrounding topography (Fig. 2). It seems appropriate to say that the society buried their dead in an invisible way but still made sure that the hills of the ancestors were visible in the topography (Wickholm 2005).

The scattering of the grave goods and burned bones makes this a collective form of burial. The burned bones are scattered randomly into the cemetery in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish the burials from each other. Pieces from the same artefact can be found several meters from each other. It is possible that the bones from one individual are buried in several different places within the same cemetery, creating a burial form with a

very complex and mixed manifestation. The dispersal of the body seems to conceal the identity of the dead, and de-individualising the community at the same time. It is difficult to believe that this could have been the result of plundering, grazing animals or later activity (cf. Söyrinki-Harmo 1984:114; Taavitsainen 1992:7-10). The collective nature of these cemeteries looks therefore intentional (Meinander 1950:69; Keskitalo 1979:133; Söyrinki-Harmo 1996:103).

The material from these cemeteries is often quite rich, even though it is bent, broken and burned. Most of the grave goods have been on the funeral pyre and they also show signs of being deliberately broken before being strewn into the cemetery. Amongst the grave goods are imported swords of high quality from Scandinavia and Central Europe, many different domestic weapon and ornament types, Oriental and European coins and jewellery of both Scandinavian and Fenno-Baltic origin. There are often also scattered iron rivets implying that there have been at least occasional boat cremations (Karvonen 1998; Wickholm 2005; Wickholm & Raninen 2006).



Fig. 2. Stora näset cemetery in Karjaa, S Finland, is situated on a small moraine hill at the shore of Lake Lepinjärvi. Photo: Anna Wickholm 2005.

However, the data show that clearly discernible individual burials are also found inside cremation cemeteries. These are weapon burials, buried in pits, from the Merovingian period and early Viking Age (ca AD 550-850). A typical weapon grave consists of a shield boss, a sword, one or several spearheads, a seax and/or knives and sometimes horse gear (Fig. 3). This tradition seems to exist only for a short period of time; from the Viking Age onwards the weapons are also strewn about the cemetery. The amount of weapon graves is significant during the Merovingian period but it regresses towards the Viking Age. Hence, there is something special in these individual weapon burials that could derive from their different concepts of personhood or identity within the Merovingian period society. It is possible that the male elite felt a need to distinguish themselves from the

rest of the society during this time. This would have resulted in an individual burial practice during a time that was otherwise practicing collective burials (Wickholm & Raninen 2006).



Fig. 3. Weapon grave 4 from Vainionmäki A cemetery in Laitila, SW Finland. The weapon combination consists of a shield boss, a bent sword, a so called typical Finnish angon, a knife and a ringed pin. Photo: National Board of Antiquities 1994.

During the end of the Viking Age and the beginning of the Crusade Period (ca. AD 1000-1050)¹ the first inhumation graves appear inside the cremation cemeteries under level ground. It is important to point out that not all cemeteries contain inhumation graves and that there are usually only a few inhumations per cemetery. However, this practice could relate to the concept of memory. A closer study of these graves and their meaning will be presented in the next chapter of this article.

In Finnish research the cremation cemeteries under level ground have been seen as quite disorganised and difficult

to study. These cemeteries have often been understood as mere containers of grave goods, without a proper context, because the bones and the artefacts have been scattered in a random fashion into the cemetery. Most of the studies that have involved these cemeteries have concentrated on typological details of the artefacts (e.g. Salmo 1980:57; Söyrinki-Harmo 1996:102pp; Salo 2003:57pp). However, there are many possibilities to analyse them if only one looks beyond the mixed nature of the grave goods.

The cremation cemeteries under level ground are sometimes, as mentioned above, built on top of older cemeteries or settlement sites. These older remains are of various dates and thus quite heterogeneous. Previous research has seen this as random or accidental. It could, in my opinion, also be a result of an intentional way of reclaiming an older site. This is an additional activity which connects the site to memory. It seems that the hills, slopes and the ridges were places that were repeatedly visited throughout the centuries. This meant that as time passed the site received new meanings.

A break in the tradition

An interesting phenomenon occurs in the cremation cemeteries under level ground towards the end of the Viking Age. Occasional inhumation graves are now dug into the cremation cemeteries and at some places both inhumation and cremation is practiced at the same cemetery. This time could be understood as a transitional period in Finland between the practices of cremation and inhumation, and also of pagan and Christian times (Purhonen 1998:115pp, 143; Hiekkänen 2002; Wickholm 2006:201).

Over 20 cremation cemeteries with inhumations are known from Finland.² There are usually only a few inhumations per cemetery, but some bigger inhumation cemeteries that are built on top of older cremation cemeteries are also documented (e.g. Purhonen 1998:253; Pietikäinen 2006:4). As a result, the cremations become disturbed. One could ask why the cremation cemeteries were reused in this way. It is possible that the status, the personal character of the deceased or his/her affinity

² Cremation cemeteries under level ground containing inhumations:

Hauho Männistönmäki, Hauho Kalomäki, Janakkala Makasiinimäki, Kalvola Pahnainmäki, Uusikaupunki (Kalanti) Kalmumäki, Uusikaupunki (Kalanti) Varhela Vähävainionmäki, Uusikaupunki (Kalanti) Hallu Nohkola, Lammi Honkaliini, Lempäälä Lempainen, Lieto Haimionmäki, Mynämäki Franttilannummi, Raisio Mahittula, Raisio Siiri, Tampere Vilusenharju, Turku (Maaria) Ristimäki II, Turku (Maaria) Saramäki, Turku (Maaria) Virusmäki, Turku (Kaarina) Kirkkomäki, Tuulos Haaksivalkama, Tuulos Toivonniemi, Valkeakoski Kiiliä, Valkeakoski Jutikkala Kokkomäki, Ylöjärvi Mikkola.

¹ The Finnish Iron Age does not end with the Viking Age, as the case is in Scandinavia. In Finland the Viking Age is followed by the Crusade Period that in SW Finland ends ca. AD 1200, but continues in Eastern Finland and Karelia until AD 1300.

influenced who was buried inside the cremation cemetery (Wickholm 2006; Wickholm & Raninen 2006). The practice of inhumation burials among the earlier cremation cemeteries is mainly restricted to a certain period of time, which could be understood as a transitional phase in a religious, social and a political sense. However, the Crusade period (AD 1025/1050-1150) also has some difficulties. The inhumation burials are traditionally dated only on the grounds of their grave goods, e.g. typology. Unless coins are found in the graves, they are not possible to date precisely (Purhonen 1998). Without a proper chronology or radiocarbon dates these early inhumation graves inside the cremation cemeteries are problematic to date.

The Finnish Christianisation process is considered by researchers to have happened in three stages. The first stage, beginning in ca AD 1100, is identified by inhumation burials in east-west orientation that still contain grave goods, even though these goods are decreasing. This stage can not yet be considered as Christian, but as a time when religious ideas started to change. During the second stage, approx. AD 1150, the inhumation graves are without grave goods or alternatively they contain only a few items mostly related to the dress. This stage is distinguished by the first crusade to SW Finland in the 1150's by the Swedes, and by missionary activity. This was followed by colonisation of large areas of Finland. During the third stage, which started at the beginning of the 13th century, the church had already begun to collect taxes (Hiekkanen 2002:488-491). The inhumations from the cremation cemeteries are most likely predecessors to the first stage, but because of the lack of an accurate chronology it is likely that some graves also belong to the first stage.

The occasional inhumation graves that are found from cremation cemeteries could be explained in many ways. I do not consider these graves as Christian, but merely as a sign of breaking a tradition due to influences from new ideas. It is also possible that at least some of the inhumations were placed inside the old cemetery as a normal continuation, at a time when no other burial place was yet established. The people who were inhumed in the cremation cemeteries were probably part of the same group of people that had been using the cemetery for centuries. It is thus understandable that they would wish to be buried inside the old cremation cemetery with their forefathers, even if the burial tradition had begun to change. There are some cemeteries where inhumation and cremation have been practiced simultaneously, which means that the transition from cremation to inhumation happened slowly. However, there are also cremation cemeteries that were first used during the Merovingian period and again during the Crusade period after a 200 year break. This means that there was some other reason for returning to the place. The way these inhumations are placed in the old cemetery, either in the centre or at its boundaries, seem to resemble some sort of statement or desire to express continuity. These cemeteries are

particularly interesting in the view of commemoration. There might have been ideological or religious changes that contributed to this tradition. It is possible that the people needed to bond with their ancestor because of the pressures that the incoming new religion brought to the community. Hence, the old burial sites became important and they came into play once again.

The past in the past: continuity or repossessions of older sites?

Two different concepts of time are possible to distinguish in the reuse of ancient monuments and landscapes. First, there is the genealogical history, where a site has been in use continuously for a long period of time. The people who have been reusing the site can thus prove a direct link to their ancestors. Secondly, there is the mythological history that is not possible to associate with the immediate past of the people. This means that certain myths and stories can be associated with the place, but the people have no direct history to it anymore (Gosden & Lock 1998).

For an archaeologist it can be difficult to assess which kind of reuse is present at a certain site. As a rule, one can look at the time gap between the different actions that have been performed at the site. If a Bronze Age cairn is reused during Late Iron Age it is difficult to prove that there is a direct genealogic link between these two groups of people. It is thus possible that the people that are buried inside the cairn are not direct ancestors to the Iron Age people, but the place itself is important for some other reasons to the Iron Age society (Wickholm 2007).

As stated above, many Finnish cremation cemeteries under level ground have either an older settlement layer or an older cemetery under the cremation cemetery. Why are the cremation cemeteries under level ground built on top of these places? Was this intentional or merely accidental? In my opinion, too many sites have been reused in order for them to be the result of random selection of location for a new burial site. It is probable that the earlier burials or landscape features influenced the choice of location. It is likely that these locations were selected carefully and became embedded with different memories through time (Tilley 1994:26-29, 67; Williams 1997:2pp; Bradley 2002).

The traces of earlier cemeteries or burials found under these cemeteries are quite diverse. There are cremation pits and urn graves from both the Roman Iron Age and Migration period (e.g. Salo 1968:57-60, 87). Tarand graves and traces of cairns from Bronze Age and pre-Roman Iron Age are also found under cremation cemeteries (e.g. Kivikoski 1941a, Kivikoski 1941b; af Hällström 1946; Pietikäinen 2005).

It is possible that there is some kind of connection between burials from the Roman Iron Age (AD 1-400)

and cremation cemeteries under level ground. It seems that most of the re-used sites are urn graves and cremation pits from this time period. This means that the place of burial has either had a special character (e.g. topography) or that the burials have been marked somehow in the landscape. The small moraine hills or slopes might have been treeless, which would make them quite visible in the landscape. The grave markers might have been either stones or wooden poles. The cemeteries could also have been surrounded by a fence (Söyrinki-Harmo 1984:118; Seppälä 2003:49pp; Wickholm 2005).

If the graves were marked, it probably meant that they were also maintained by someone, possibly even throughout the centuries. This could have been the case especially for the individual weapon burials that were probably perceived differently due to their status or gender conceptions (Wickholm & Raninen 2006). If these sites were used also between the funerals for other ritual activities it is possible that the landscape was kept open. I will address this issue through some examples.

Franttilannummi, in Mynämäki, SW Finland, is a long-term cremation cemetery under level ground. The cemetery has originally been erected on top of a large moraine ridge and the cemetery layers cover almost the whole ridge (Salonen 1927; Salonen 1928). The earliest signs of burial are from the Roman Iron Age, but the cremation cemetery was in use between the Merovingian and Crusade period. The context is quite difficult to distinguish, because the moraine in the ridge has been utilised by the landowners during the beginning of 20th century. A big gravel pit has thus unfortunately destroyed the central parts of the cemetery. In 1927, private entrepreneur August Laine found an urn grave from the edge of the gravel pit during an independent digging. The finds were all reclaimed by the National Museum in 1928. The grave consisted of the remains of a wooden urn, pieces from a bone comb and a number of burned bones. The urn had been covered with a slab of red sandstone. This burial can be dated to the late Roman period (AD 200-400). Another early burial was found during archaeological excavations in 1928. This cremation pit was also covered with a red sandstone slab. The pit contained charcoal, soot and burned bones (Salonen 1928; Salo 1968:59pp).

These two burial forms, the urn and the pit graves, are reminiscent of the well-known Käsämäki cemetery in Turku, SW Finland, which consisted of approximately 90 burials dated to the Roman Iron Age (AD 1-400). This place has also given the name to the burial form known as the Käsämäki type. The type consists of urn burials, cremation pits and occasional inhumations, often with abundant metal finds such as imported weapons and jewellery (Salo 1968:192pp; Raninen 2005:40-44).

A few artefact finds from Franttilannummi also belong to the Roman period. These are, for example, two bronze fibulas and their fragments, some spearheads and a knife.

The above mentioned graves and finds can be dated to both the early and late Roman period with reasonable certainty (Salo 1968:59pp; 205pp). After this there seems to be a 200 year break in the continuity before the area is used again.

Franttilannummi cemetery is an interesting example not only because it is re-used but also because it has a long continuity. The cemetery was in use from the middle of the 6th century to the end of the Crusade period, which means that the cemetery was in use over 600 years. Additionally, 11 inhumation graves have been excavated from the cremation cemetery. These were all quite badly preserved, but the deceased had all been buried in a wooden coffin which had been covered with a stone setting. In particular, the female graves contained remains of jewellery and dress such as bronze spirals from both the headdress and the apron. One of the female inhumations also contained silver coins, the youngest of which had been minted between 1023 and 1029 (Cleve 1933; Purhonen 1998:248).

A similar example is known from the nearby Saramäki cremation cemetery under level ground in Turku. It was originally believed that the burial form started as early as the Roman period, because the oldest finds seem to have been mixed into the cremation cemetery (Rinne 1905:8-12). However, later excavations revealed that there had been older burials under the cremation cemetery. One of them was an urn grave of the above mentioned Käsämäki type. Inside the ceramic vessel two knives and a spearhead was found among burned bones. According to the director of the excavation, the burned bones had been very finely ground. The urn grave had been covered with a layer of stones (Tallgren 1919:7pp). Two other weapon graves are also known from this period. Both of them included a sword, one being a *Gladius*. The Roman period cemetery seems thus to have been abundant in finds. Amongst the finds are different types of arm rings, fibulae, knives, a pair of scissors and ceramics. Of special interest are the bronze end-fittings from two drinking horns of a type that probably originated from the island of Gotland. These are quite rare in the Finnish material. However, the fittings were unfortunately collected as stray finds from the cemetery and thus their specific context is uncertain (Salo 1968:57pp, 174, 204pp).

All Roman artefacts in the cemetery derive from cremations. Besides the urn grave and the cremation pits from the early Roman Iron Age (AD 1-200) there are also different stray finds from the late Roman period (AD 200-400) as well as sparse finds from the beginning of the Migration period (AD 400-550). It is possible that these finds derive from a partly destroyed tarand grave (Kivikoski 1939:16pp; Lehtosalo 1961).

If the finds from the Migration period are dated correctly, then it is possible that the place had been used continuously during the whole Iron Age, from the 6th century up to the Crusade period. If there was a gap, then

it was quite short, which could indicate that the memories stayed quite vivid to this place. Two weapon graves from the Merovingian period belong to the cremation cemetery under level ground. Four excavated inhumation graves, of which two were intact, date to the end of Viking Age or the beginning of the Crusade period. One of the intact inhumations belonged to a woman who was seemingly rich. It consisted for example of two round brooches of bronze with connected chains, a neck-ring, a penannular brooch, a bracelet and two finger-rings, all made of silver. Pieces of bronze spirals from the remains of the dress were also found (Tallgren 1919:1, 8pp; Kivikoski 1939:16; Purhonen 1998:255pp).

The best example of the past in the past is however found from Karjaa (Sw. Karis), on the south coast of Finland. Here, at Hönsåkerskullen, two earth-mixed cairns from the end of the Bronze Age were manipulated in different ways during the Iron Age. Two cremation pits from the Migration period were at the edge of one of the cairns, one of which with over 80 artefacts and 6.5 kg of burned bones. During the Merovingian period, a cremation cemetery under level ground was built on top of the cairn. The activity destroyed the earlier structure, and today the cairn is somewhat hard to detect. However, in the middle of the cemetery there is still a reconstructed rectangular stone coffin belonging to the original cairn. The other cairn, which until the 1990's was believed to be completely intact, had also been reused during the beginning of the Merovingian period. A weapon burial was found inside the cairn, near its edge. The burial was surrounded by a stone circle and consisted of 2 angons, one spearhead, two knives and some rivets and a mount that were probably from a shield boss (af Hällström 1946; Wickholm 2007).

It is safe to say that the earth-mixed cairns were visible in the beginning of the Merovingian period when the cremation cemetery under level ground was built. Even today, the cairn with the Merovingian cremation pit is still very prominent in the surrounding landscape (Fig. 4.). However, most of the reused sites have not been visible above ground. It is therefore relevant to ask how it was possible that both the Merovingian and the Viking Age society started to make cremations precisely above the older graves. I personally believe that it had to do with the manifestation of the collective memory. It is also possible that the Merovingian and Viking Age society wanted to express some kind of superiority over the older cemeteries and thus also the past. This might have originated from social, political or religious motivations.

Some interesting parallels to the cases from Franttilannummi and Saramäki are found in Sweden. During an excavation of a ship setting from 9th century in Vittene, in western Sweden, a cremation pit from the Pre-Roman Iron Age was found in the north end of the setting. According to the director of the excavation, the ship setting had been built at this place because of the older burial. The cremation pit had probably been re-

opened and a big stone had been placed on top of the burial as a marker. It is even possible that the cremation pit had been moved in order for it to fit inside the ship setting. There are also other similar examples from the same cemetery. Several Viking Age burial mounds seem to have been erected on top of Pre-Roman urn graves. It seems that the connection to the old burials has been emphasised by this behaviour (Artelius 2004:109-111). What is remarkable in the examples from western Sweden is that the reused sites have been cemeteries under level ground, not visible monuments like mounds or cairns. According to Artelius, these burials must have originally been marked by wooden poles and raised stones, but even after they had decomposed the site remained important on a mythical level (Artelius 2004:114-116). I agree with Artelius, but it is also possible that the graves have been tended by the community over centuries, creating a site of memory with "real" visible graves.



Fig. 4. The earth-mixed cairn from the Bronze Age at Hönsåkerskullen in Karjaa, S Finland, also contained a weapon burial from 7th century AD. Photo: Anna Wickholm 2004.

In England, Bronze Age barrows were routinely re-used, especially during the Roman Period. The barrows were used for ritual purposes through the deposition of coins or other artefacts in their interiors. Sometimes burials were also dug either directly into the barrow or in its immediate vicinity. During the Anglo-Saxon period, the re-use seems to have been even more widespread. At that time, Roman settlements and different kind of fortifications were used in addition to the Bronze Age barrows. The reason for making Christian burials inside barrows might be related to an ancestor cult. The tradition was still so strong during early Christian times that the church could not break the bond between the Anglo-Saxons and their ancestors (Lucy 1992:97-99; Williams 1997:4-22; Semple 1998:121-123; Petts 2002:198).

In Sweden, it seems that site re-use takes place routinely during the Viking Age. Torun Zachrisson has stated that this could have derived from a need for the Viking Age

people to re-connect to their ancestors. The Viking Age inherited right to own a farm, the *Odal*, was often expressed through ritual activity. It was important to take care of both the living and the dead. This right could therefore be displayed in the landscape by erecting a burial mound on top of a Roman or Migration period cemetery. This was not only an expression of strong family connections but also a will to belong to the same group of ancestors that had once possessed that place. It was important to take care of both the living and the dead (Zachrisson 1994; *ibid* 1998:120.)

Mats Burström has pointed out that Viking Age re-use is a sign of interest in the past. In his opinion, the Viking Age people wanted to express their own unique local character, especially during times of social or religious change. By re-using the past the society could confirm the stability of history, even though times were changing. Cemeteries were thus important places for identity and the collective memory. The importance lay in the monumentality and the visibility of the burial mounds (Burström 1991: 144pp; Jennbert 1993:76, Burström 1996:25, 32; Artelius 2004:115).

Towards a site of memory

By comparing the above-mentioned examples of site re-use from Britain and Scandinavia with the Finnish cremation cemeteries, one might make some conclusions.

When older settlement layers and burials are found under cremation cemeteries I believe it could be connected to the cognitive landscape. The Finnish cremation cemeteries under level ground have a prominent location in the landscape and their visibility might have made them into sites of memory. The burial site, as such, might have possessed characteristics that made it important. These reasons might have influenced how the site was selected to become a burial place. Over a long period of time people came back to this place to bury their dead and to perform their cult. Even though there might have been intermissions between the burials, the site still lived on in myths. Through time the site received new meanings that may no longer have been connected to the landscape, but rather to the cemeteries. It is thus possible that the older sites were not connected to the later cemeteries through a direct genealogic link. However, the place stayed known to the people because of the stories that were connected to it. This might have been the reason that the site was taken into requisition much later.

The ritual activity that took place at the cemeteries gave the place a specific meaning for several centuries; the cemeteries became sites of memory that also strengthened peoples' identity. However, this tradition only lasted for a short period of time. When the original phase of crisis was over new inhumation cemeteries were established at new locations. It was no longer important to manifest the bond to the ancestors. This could also explain why there are only a few inhumations inside the cremation cemeteries.

Conclusions

In this article, I have presented some features concerning the Finnish cremation cemeteries. The reuse points out that certain places, especially cemeteries, have had a special meaning for past people and their identity. Memories, myths and tales that were connected to these sites kept them important for a considerable amount of time. Cemeteries could thus have a mnemonic value. This knowledge might have been transferred orally as a long chain from generation to generation.

I see the cremation cemeteries under level ground as sites of memory: places that bind the past and the present together and that have maintained the collective memory. Past people could relate to these places and they knew that not only did their ancestors live there but that their identity was also buried there. The cemeteries thus became places where a common and shared identity was stored. "Who are we, where do we come from and where are we going?" were all questions that could be answered at these places.

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Chapter 9

Life and Death in the Bronze Age of the NW of Iberian Peninsula

Ana M. S. Bettencourt

ABSTRACT This paper examines funerary practices and contexts in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula during the Bronze Age in order to chart the different responses to death. These practices, understood as “social metaphors”, will serve as a basis for our interpretation of the different ways in which societies engage with the environment. The burial sites and associated rites are also analyzed as forms of legitimization and territorial possession, which function through the creation of “a sense of place”, able thereafter to transmit memory and contribute to the construction of the group identity.

All societies have procedures and rules for dealing with death. Funerary rites may therefore be seen as communication systems, which tell us much more about the living than about the dead (Thomas 1999) and which may be interpreted as social acts or as metaphors of the society. Death is a social act, and funerary practices are “symbolic productions”, in the sense intended by P. Bourdieu (1989), designed to help explain the relationship between the living and the dead (Barret 1994). They transmit memory, contribute to the construction of identity and foster social bonds, while legitimizing the possession of the territories where they occur.

Starting with these premises, we have analyzed the funerary contexts and practices of the NW of the Iberian Peninsula during the Bronze Age (i.e. over 1500 years) in terms of the mechanisms of memory and identity transmission (fig.1). However, it should be remembered that the discourse of death does not reflect society as a whole; it is merely one dimension, to be related to other discourses. Consequently, the interpretations made should be considered as fragments of a complex multifaceted reality.

The Data

Contrary to what is normally suggested in the international bibliography, the data on funerary contexts for the NW of the Iberian Peninsula are significant in volume, although rather uneven in character. In addition to older discoveries, which are sometimes problematic with regard to the information they impart, the last 20 years have seen the development of many new research projects and field surveys, thus bringing to light fresh information and enabling the radiocarbon dating of more sealed contexts (Bettencourt forthcoming a and b). Using this body of data, we have traced out a provisional interpretative sequence, which of course is open to discussion. We have not made use of traditional

periodization. Using the facts available today for the Northwest, we consider the beginnings of the Early Bronze Age to be between 2300 and 2200 BC and the division between the Early and Middle Bronze Age to be 18th and 17th centuries BC. Similarly, the beginnings of the Later Bronze Age are not well defined, despite the substantial body of available data that suggest the end of the 2nd millennium BC as a possible starting date. Its terminus is also problematic and probably occurred at different times between coast and hinterland; nevertheless, we could consider that it ends between the 7th and 6th centuries BC, the moment when changes took place that propelled these communities towards the Iron Age.

Between the end of the 3rd millennium and the end of the 2nd, it seems to have been relatively common for small or medium-sized monuments to have been built on *tumuli*, in stone and earth, sometimes with stone chambers or in a pit, and showing influences of megalithic technological processes (fig.2).

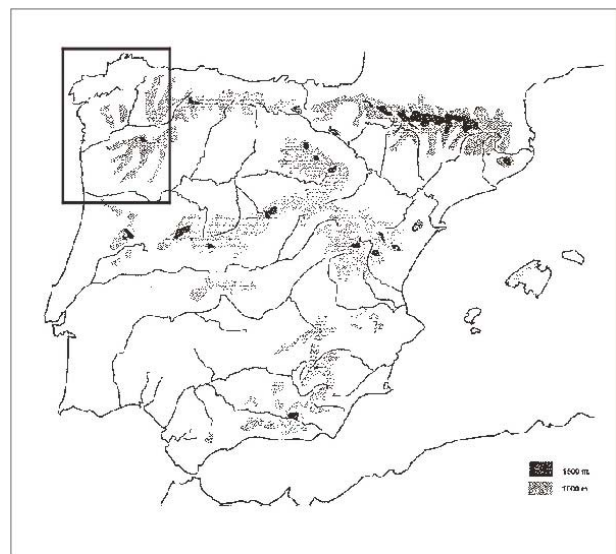


Fig. 1. Map of the Iberian Peninsula, showing the location of the northwest.



Fig. 2. Early Bronze Age tomb in the megalithic tradition: Outeiro de Gregos 1, Baião - Oporto (Early Bronze Age) (according to O. Jorge 1980).

They were usually built inside or on the edge of large megalithic necropolises, upon territory that had been sacred since the Neolithic. There is also evidence of the ritualistic manipulation of megalithic monuments. There are many examples of large dolmens where Bronze Age metal ornaments and ceramic vessels were deposited.

Some barrows, bounded by boulders and with a small central chamber and erected on sacred ancestral land, can also be included in the beginning of the Early Bronze Age. These are tombs without *tumuli*, with the funeral chambers constructed inside oval enclosures demarcated by natural or displaced outcrops, and their diachrony is yet unknown.

Within these traditions, there are places that appear to have become consecrated *ex nihilo* in the Early Bronze Age, generally occupying territories that were connected, directly or indirectly, to agricultural lands and sometimes located near to residential areas. This is the case of numerous necropolises of cist graves, common in the north of Portugal and Galicia, in which only one tomb contains metal, lithic and ceramic remains, such as Chedeiro (Cualedro, Ourense, Spain), Agra da Ínsua (Carnota, A Coruña, Spain), Quinta de Água Branca (Vila Nova de Cerveira, Viana do Castelo, Portugal), etc. (Fortes 1906; Luengo y Martinez 1965; Taboada Chivite 1971; Bettencourt forthcoming b).

This is also the case of tombs 1 and 2 of Vale Ferreiro (Fafe, Braga, Portugal). The first, which can be



Fig. 3.1. Tomb 2 at Vale Ferreiro, Fafe – Braga.



Fig. 3.2. Deposit from tomb 2 at Vale Ferreiro.

radiocarbon dated to the transition from 3th to 2nd millennia BC, is architecturally within the megalithic tradition, with a cist-shaped chamber and cairn, but was built inside a pit completely underground. The second, which is also subterranean, presumably covered with wood, contained two gold spirals, amongst other remains that can be dated to this period (Bettencourt *et al.* 2002; 2005) (figs. 3.1 and 3.2).

Surprisingly, recent research has shown that these places also remained symbolically active until the Late Bronze Age. Here, between the 18th and 15th centuries BC, a double pit was dug out, (grave? cult deposit?), and between the 13th and 10th centuries BC, a kind of “tomb house” was constructed. Thus, it is probable that other circular and oval-shaped pit structures, sometimes covered with gravel, could be tombs constructed throughout the Bronze Age. This hypothesis is supported by the existence of burial pits at Fraga do Zorro (Galicia, Spain) dated between the 19th and 17th centuries BC (Fábregas Valcarce 2001). The same seems to have happened in other sites in Galicia, where there is evidence of different types of burials and rites, such as Devesa de Abaixo, Pontevedra, Spain), lasting until the beginning of the first millennium BC (Vázquez Liz 2005).



Fig. 4. Aerial view of flat graves from the necropolis at Cimalha, adjacent to the settlement (Felgueiras – Oporto) (according to Pedro Pedro Almeida & Francisco Fernandes forthcoming, adapted).

New contexts and funerary practices also started to appear during the Middle Bronze Age, partially overlapping with these scenarios. These are inhumation cemeteries, located in the vicinity of or inside residential areas. These new sites differ from the previous ones in that the architecture of the tombs is much more uniform (only cists or flat tombs) and there is greater standardization in the deposited artifacts (generally one or more pottery vessels of similar shape). Some of these contexts seem to have lasted throughout the first millennium BC, i.e. during what is surely the regional Late Bronze Age.

A good example is the case of Tapado da Caldeira (Baião, Oporto, Portugal), close to the settlement of Bouça do Frade, lasting until the end of the second millennium BC. Here, along with the sub-rectangular flat-bottomed grave, cut out of the sandy clay between the 17th to 15th centuries BC, several different indications of worship were found (pits, with or without deposits, accumulation of ashes and coals), as well as a fireplace, built there between the 14th and 11th centuries BC (Jorge 1980; 1983). Another good example of the same sort of phenomena having occurred, the lack of corroborative radiocarbon dating, is Cimalha (Felgueiras, Oporto, Portugal), where a large necropolis of 163 flat graves dug in the sandy clay (fig. 4) (Almeida & Fernandes

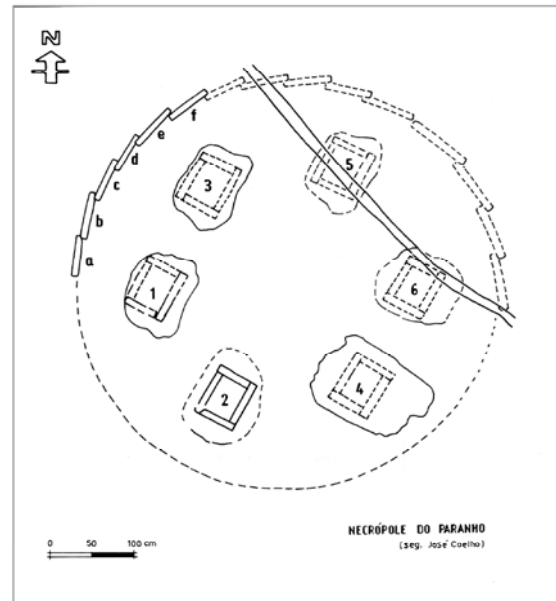


Fig. 5.1. Cremation necropolis at Paranho (Tondela - Viesu) (according to D. Cruz, 1997).

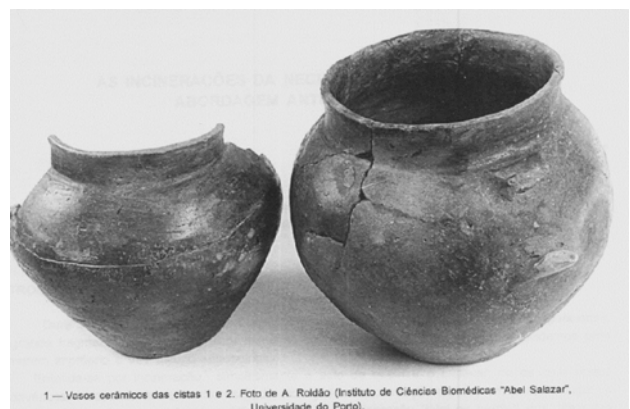


Fig. 5.2. Cremation vessels at Paranho (Tondela) (Late Bronze Age) (according to D. J. Cruz, 1997).

forthcoming) was apparently organized in stratigraphic sequence from the Middle to Middle/Late Bronze Age (Bettencourt forthcoming).

Finally, in the transition between the 2nd and 1st millennia BC and throughout the first part of the 1st, in the Later Bronze Age, funerary structures are more difficult to detect. However, the available data indicate a large diversity of practices (Bettencourt forthcoming a).

The symbolic appropriation of ancestral megalithic monuments was still taking place as regards other burial sites connected to ancestral territories, particularly in mountain areas. These were now distinguished by indications of funeral practices involving partial cremation (figs. 5.1 and 5.2) or with secondary deposits inside or in the vicinity of the ceremonial areas such as *Chao San Martin* (Astúrias, Spain) (Villa Valdés & Cabo Pérez 2003).

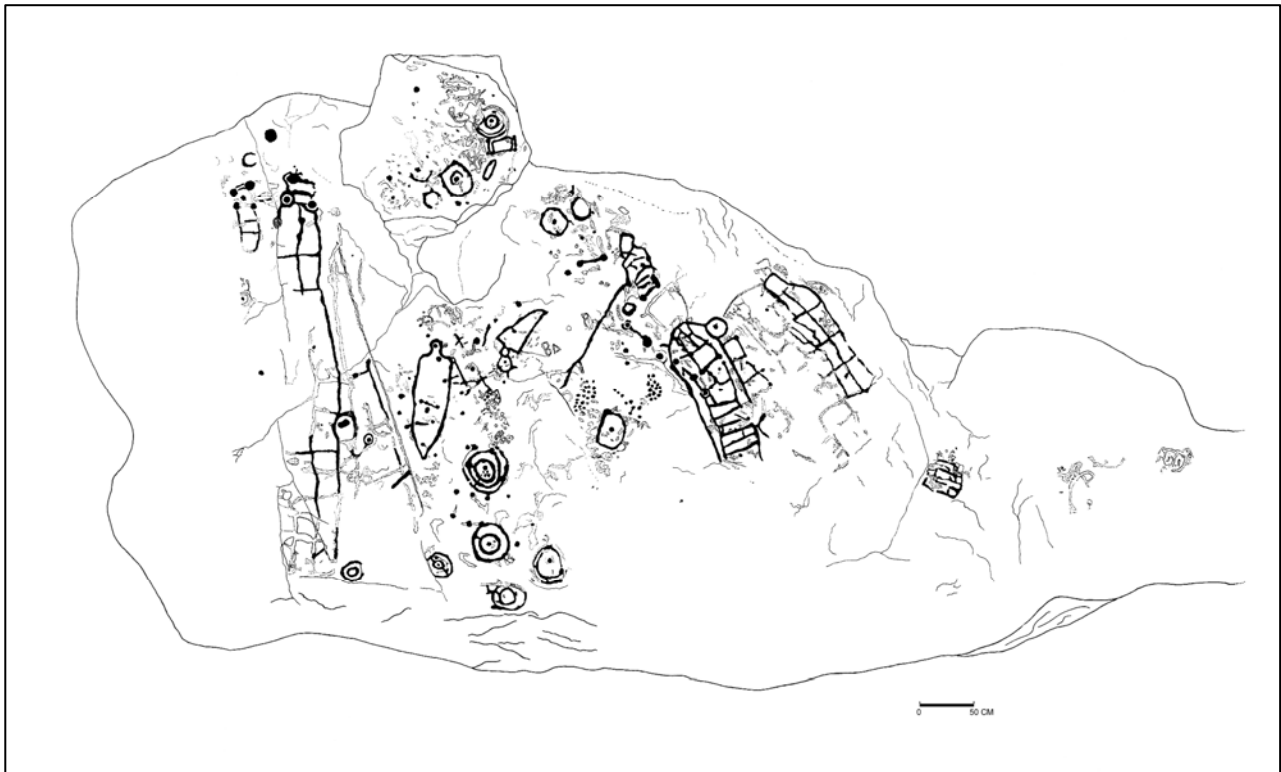


Fig. 6. Rock sanctuary at Monte da Laje with representations of daggers from the Bronze Age (according to E. J. Silva & A. M. L. Cunha 1986).

Discussion

Having briefly described the main characteristics of the Bronze Age tombs and funeral practices in northwest Iberia, I will now try to give an overview of how material evidence related to death can be interpreted as sites and tools of communication, and how these reinforced the social bonds of the communities that built and used them.

Throughout the entirety of the Bronze Age, and particularly during the Early and Middle periods, there is clear evidence of the symbolic appropriation of ancestral landscapes in the high lands and, simultaneously, the creation of sites *ex nihilo*, in the low lands.

In the mountainous areas burials and other rites performed inside funeral chambers or in the *tumuli* of former megalithic monuments demonstrate how these were appropriated and used symbolically, thus becoming a means by which the new emerging power legitimated itself principally during the Early Bronze Age where metal ornaments are usually found. Through commemoration ceremonies that could be cyclical or exceptional, communities would have visited the tombs of the ancestors, recreating or interpreting events from the past, thus demonstrating the ideological importance of history and their gallery of mythical and ancestral personages. As P. Bourdieu (1989) says, historical legacies are reified and incorporated in the service of a new ideological and social order. In the same way, the various types of monuments built in the Bronze Age,

inside or on the edge of large megalithic necropolises, could be interpreted as ways of keeping the traditional scenarios active, by endowing them with new significances and enabling new memories to be created around the site.

In the lowlands the new locations of representation and new types of construction (cists, flat graves and pits) seem in many cases to reflect a distancing in relation to the territories of the old ancestors, as well as an affirmation of new ideological conceptions. To support this hypothesis we can say that in almost every necropolis of the Early Bronze Age there is only one physical corpse buried with exceptional metal and lithic remains, probably the new ancestor that legitimates the occupation of the new land occupied by each community. Some of these new scenarios, such as Vale Ferreiro and probably Devesa de Abaixo and some of the people buried there, at the start of the Bronze Age, may have remained symbolically powerful for a long time, sometimes up to the Late Bronze Age. Thus, some of the human bodies (those whose peculiar tombs or special deposits conferred great social power) may be considered to be essential for the social process of legitimating the possession of new occupied territories by certain groups. At the same time, these places are likely to have undergone a process of mythification during the course of the Bronze Age by means of the different processes for the transmission of social memory: the inscribed or embodied memory (Connerton 1989). This interpretation accounts for the fact that around these primitive tombs actions were performed, cult objects deposited and new burials took

place. These burials were very simple in construction terms, with offerings of perishable materials, seeds or simple ceramic containers, normally roughly-hewn. Thus, gradually, they became special places that performed broader social and ideological functions. That is, they would function as memorials, thereby allowing the communities to develop historical and emotional ties to the environment, i.e. *“the experience of place”*, in the sense of C. Tilley (1994) and J. Thomas (1996). According to the latter author, *“...a deeper understanding of the landscape comes not from observing the land and hearing stories about it, but from inhabiting it in the course of everyday life”*.

In general terms, the new mortuary contexts of the Early and Middle Bronze Ages were now situated lower down, fully visible or in agricultural fields and well irrigated valleys, following the strategy of location near residential areas. Indeed, this tendency is also noted in the distribution of open-air Atlantic rock art sanctuaries in Galicia and Portugal (Bradley 2002) and since the Middle Bronze Age, in the votive metal hoards (Bettencourt 2000). The same metallic weapons that are deposited in the tombs of the Early Bronze Age are sometimes represented in the rock art revealing the symbolic appropriation of different landscapes through human actions concerned both with the world of the living and the world of the dead (fig. 6). Thus, during the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, scenarios of power seem to have moved away from the old sacred territories (except in some mountainous areas), with meanings now expressed through a greater variety of scenes and manifestations. In all these places, the different magical-symbolic prohibitions and rites would have functioned as mechanisms for the transmission of memory and generation of the collective identity in the service of the new system of land management and maintenance of the newly established order. Whatever social mechanisms might have led to the break up of the ancestral traditions and establishment of a new order (such as increased openness of the communities to the outside world; more interaction between different regional groups; the colonization of new territories motivated by technical advances and by the search for mineral deposits in a phase of “invention” or discovery of new magical/symbolic practices), it is likely that new

ideological and identity dynamics were gradually affirmed as part of the process of bolstering the new powers in a logic of change in continuity.

As the Middle Bronze Age advanced, the tendency to locate the necropolises in areas adjoining the residential sites or inside them and the “simplicity” of offered artifacts may indicate that death was gradually being integrated into the cycle of daily life (Bradley 2000) and being “tamed”, therefore losing its importance as a referent of social memory. This appears to be more evident in the Late Bronze Age when cremation was gradually implemented, suggesting the loss of importance of the physical body.

What was this transformation due to? Along with J. Barret (1994), I believe that the loss of importance of the ancestor cult, embedded in the megalithic monuments, will reveal the emergence of a new conception of space,

according to which the individual or the world of the living is preponderant. There seems to be evidence of the legitimization of territory, in the large number of metal hoards, in residential areas and in the rites and performances carried out by the living, manipulating new symbols, including a wide range of metal and ceramic objects, and other luxury artifacts. However, it is also possible that after the body had been destroyed, the memory and power of some actors was preserved in statue-menhirs, common in the northwest, which bear representations of weapons, and other symbols that are difficult to interpret (fig. 7).

To conclude, I would like to point out that, given the characteristics of the data and the embryonic nature of the study into the funerary practices in northwest Iberia, these interpretations should be considered essentially as working hypotheses. They could, perhaps, be used to orient further research projects within a perspective that is simultaneously phenomenological and semiological, and in which the landscape is considered not only

from an economic perspective but also valued as a place of experience about the world, a site of signification *“in which the sacred and profane, symbolic and practical were intimately interwoven”* (Hill 1993), and where settlements, rock art, metal hoards and burials are not dealt with as separate fixed entities but as dimensions of a whole pattern of social experience.



Fig. 7. Statue – Menhir of Muiño de San Pedro (Verín, Ourense, Spain).

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Chapter 10

Norwegian Face-Urns: Local Context and Interregional Contacts

Malin Aasbøe

ABSTRACT Face-urns are containers for burnt human bones and are predominantly dated to the Late Bronze Age in Northern Europe. Mainly found in Norway, Denmark, Northern Germany, Poland and Etruria, a few have also been located in Sweden. Though the use of face-urns spans a large area, their distribution shows that they tend to concentrate in specific regions. Despite the relatively high concentrations of face urns in these specific regions, their local distribution, form, and deposition suggest that they have been used for a small percentage of the population. Face-urns from Poland and Etruria have been associated with the aristocracy or an elite. Looking at their form and deposition, Norwegian face-urns show a striking resemblance to face-urns from the Legnica area in Poland. This article examines the local context of the Norwegian face-urns, the connection to the continent, and why a face-urn was chosen as a container for the remains of certain people.

Face-urns are defined by Broholm (1933:202) as “... *an urn which portrays a human face, parts of a human face (eyes or nose) or parts of a human body (hands or genitals)*” (author’s translation). Pots with a more or less stylized human face are known from different prehistoric periods and different European countries. In Denmark pots with faces are known from Neolithic times, and both Denmark and Norway have yielded pots with both stylized and plastic face decor from the Early Roman period. What distinguishes pots with facial features from the Late Bronze Age is that these were made specifically for use as cremation urns, while pots with face decor from other periods were used as grave gifts (Haavaldsen 1985, Lund 1990). In Norway pots with face decor from the Late Bronze Age have not been found in any other context than as cremation urns.

There are currently seven known face-urns from southwestern Norway (Haavaldsen 1985:25-33). All were found in the late 19th century and early 20th century, but until now they have never been the focus of extensive study. The face-urns date to the Late Bronze Age, and appear contemporary with similar urns found in Denmark and northern Germany, Poland and Italy (Etruria) and one or two examples found in Sweden. In Denmark and the north of Germany about one hundred face-urns have been found (Broholm 1948), approximately 2000 in Poland (Kneisel 2005), and several in Etruria. In Norway, face-urns are known from only two districts (Rogaland and Aust-Agder), while in Denmark and Poland they are spread over a larger area. However, in Denmark there tends to be a concentration to Jylland, and in Poland there is a marked concentration in the Danzig area. In Etruria the face-urns or “canopic urns” are mainly found in the area of Chiusi (Banti 1973, Haynes 2000). The form of the Norwegian face-urns has previously been regarded as

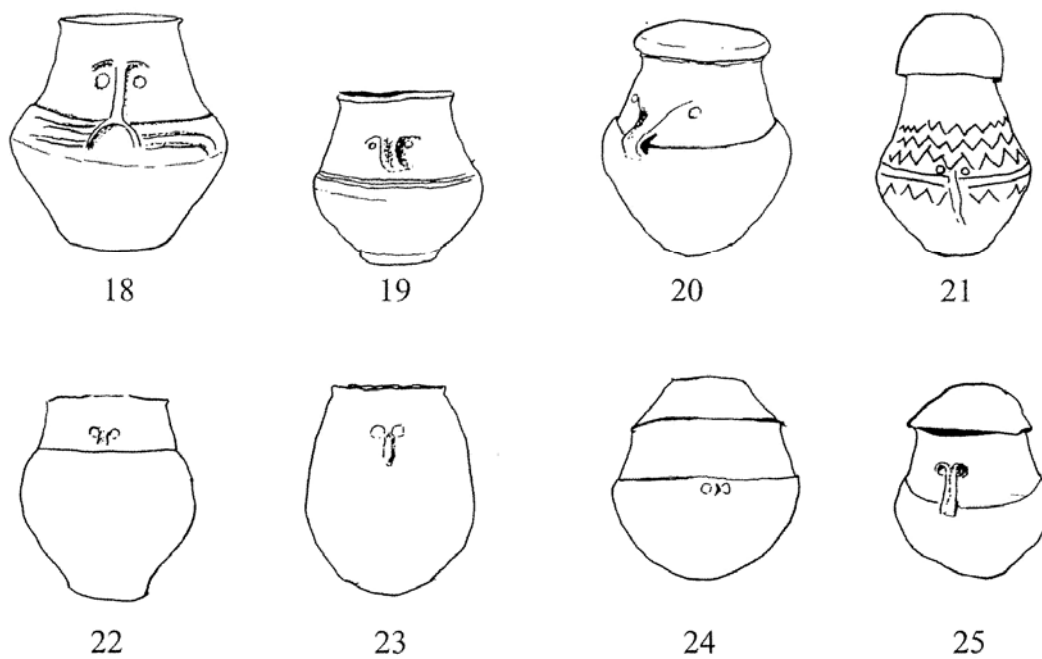
primarily influenced by the type extensively found in Denmark. However, in studying and comparing the Norwegian material and pictures of Danish and Polish urns, it became clear that examples from one specific area in Poland more closely share the features found on the Norwegian urns. Those that bear strong similarities to the Norwegian urns were found along the river Oder, in the Legnica area of southern Poland.

Looking at the local context of the Norwegian face-urns, it seems that they were used for the burial of the cremated remains of individuals with a specific function in Late Bronze Age society. They all have individual features, and are stylized in a manner that seems to portray the individual in an idealized way. Italian face-urns of this period are generally associated with the aristocracy or an elite. A sherd of a face-urn bearing a striking resemblance to the Italian form has been found in Norway. This article proposes the theory that the Norwegian face-urns were used by and for individuals with interregional contacts. The face-urns represent an everlasting idealized body for persons of importance and/or status in the local community. They may also be regarded as living ancestors in accordance with Helms’ theories about the importance of long distance contacts and the knowledge about what lies beyond the known world.

Dating

The dating of these urns has been debated for a long period, both in connection to the “cultural archaeology” and later in connection with the center-periphery model (Broholm 1948:162pp; Haavaldsen 1985:28p, Johansen 1986:84, Oestigaard 1999:345-364).

A SELECTION OF FACE-URNS FROM DENMARK



A SELECTION OF FACE-URNS FROM POLAND

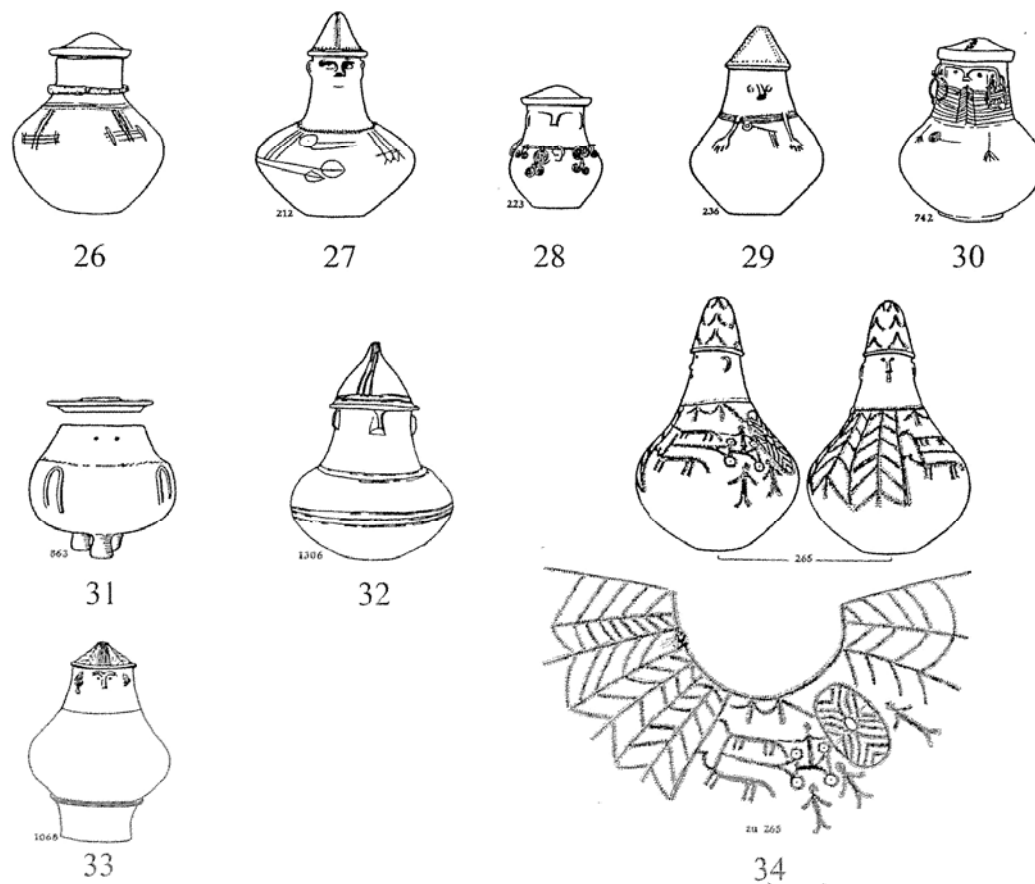


Fig. 1. A selection of face-urns from Denmark and Poland (from Aasbøe 2006).

The recurring themes in the debate have been which face-urns came first, who influenced who and what kind of relationship there was between the areas in which you find these urns. The Norwegian and Danish face-urns have been proposed to be both early examples of the phenomenon (Gjessing 1925, Bjørn 1926) and late examples (Broholm 1948:162) based on their simple decor. The research history will not be attended in this article, but for those interested, a more thorough study of the theme is presented in “*Sørnorske ansiktsurner – Et studie av lokal kontekst og interregionale kontakter*” (Aasbøe 2006).

There is, at present, insufficient evidence to categorically state which type of urn came first or where the face-urns originated. It is however more interesting to emphasise the fact that these urns are used in a similar way at the same time over a large area. Looking at the total number of face-urns and their wide distribution, it becomes clear that this type of urn has been the privilege of a small number of individuals in their respective local communities. Face-urns from Denmark, Poland and Etruria have been dated on typological grounds to the transition between Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Carbon dating of the burnt bone from two of the face-urns found in Norway has been possible. The results date

the face-urns to around 950 BCE (pers. com. Joakim Goldhahn 28.10.05).

Form, decor and material

The Norwegian face-urns are biconical. This means that the top and bottom of the urn are smaller in diameter than the widest point of the ‘belly’ of the urn. The point, where top and bottom can be said to meet, usually lies just below the middle of the pot, but in some cases it is located above the centre. Face-urns from Denmark, Poland and Etruria can also loosely be characterized as biconical. Looking more closely at the form, examples from one particular area in Poland show the closest resemblance to the Norwegian face-urns, while those from Denmark, the rest of the Polish examples and those from Etruria differ in a number of ways. The most notable difference can be seen in the transition from the neck of the urn to the belly. The face-urns from Poland (especially those from around the Danzig area) and those from Denmark, often have a narrowing between neck and belly marked by a groove or furrow (fig. 1). This makes them look more like vases than the face-urns from Norway and Legnica. The Norwegian face-urns and the face-urns from Legnica lack this type of marked transition from neck to belly.

With the exception of one of the Norwegian face-urns all have eyes in the form of pierced holes. These holes are located quite close together, just a few centimetres below the pot’s rim. Except from the eyes, the only decor found on Norwegian face-urns are noses, and only in two cases is there evidence of these. It was not possible to locate face-urns with eyes in the form of pierced holes from the literature regarding Danish face-urns (Broholm 1948).

Instead they had impressions and, in rare cases, modelled eyes or eyes carved in the clay. Among the face-urns from Legnica seven out of twelve have pierced holes as eyes’ appearance, and two have eyes in the form of impressions. The Legnica face-urns sometimes have a little nose and more seldom a tiny mouth. Other decor is absent. Apart from the Legnica finds, eyes in the form of pierced holes are rare and only found in areas with a large number of face-urns (LA Baume 1963:151-184). The face-urns from Poland and Denmark often have decor in the form of grooves and pictograms, unlike the Norwegian face-urns and the face-urns from Legnica (fig. 2).

There is no information about ceramic analyses of the face-urns in the literature. This is a source of information not yet explored. However, the structure and surface of the materials suggest that the Norwegian face-urns could have been locally made. Legnica is an area along the river Oder in the south of Poland and a strategic place to get even further south on the continent.

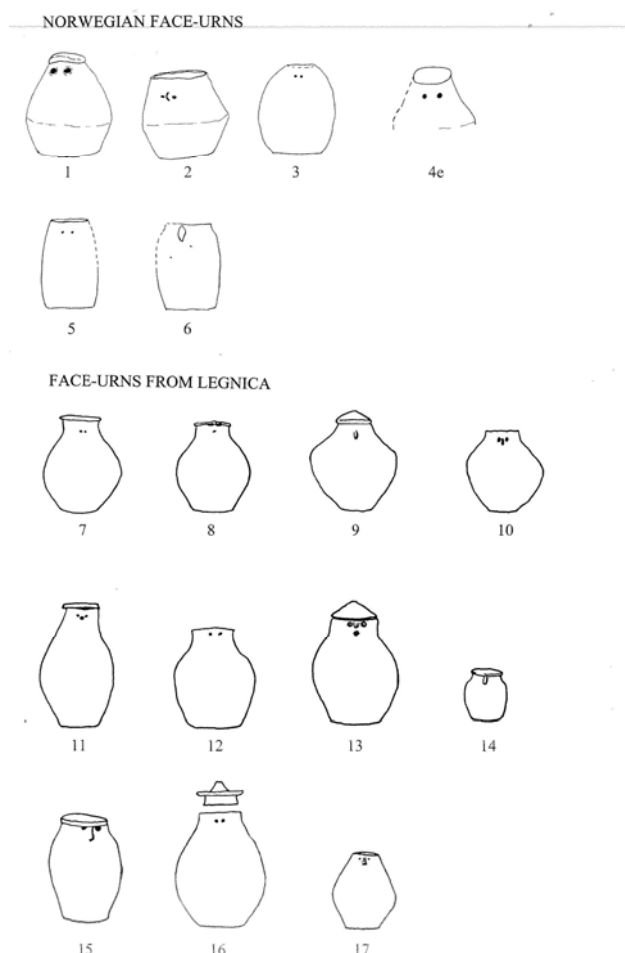


Fig. 2. The Norwegian face-urns and face-urns from Legnica, Poland (from Aasbøe 2006).

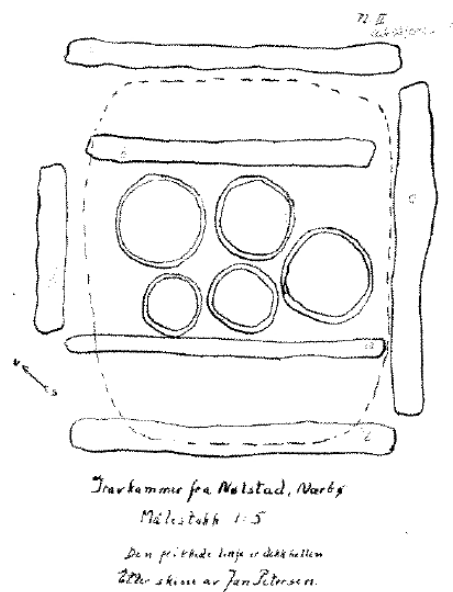


Fig. 3. The stone coffin to the left is the one in which two of the face-urns from Rogaland, Norway, were found (Njølstad, a sketch made by Jan Petersen. From the archives at Archaeological museum in Stavanger). The stone coffin to the right is from Zawory, Chmielno in Poland (Kneisel 2005:640).

Following the Oder River further south one gets to the Moravian pass with a connecting river to Donau. Pydyn (1999:62) has suggested a similar route between eastern Jutland and southern Sweden and the Lusatian culture further south, based on the Italian and Alpine imports and other cultural elements.

Like their Norwegian counterparts, the Legnica face-urns often have two holes resembling eyes, and in a few cases a little knob symbolizing a nose. They all seem to be imbued with restrictions connected to their look, and it must have been important to show the connection between these specific areas.

Not only does the look of the Norwegian face-urns share similarities with southern Polish examples, the conditions of deposition do as well. In several cases face-urns have been deposited in stone chambers of similar construction, such as the two face-urns found in the same chamber at Jæren, and also together with other urns lacking face decor (Aasbøe 2006). Møllerop (1987:38) has also noticed the coherence between the chambers in which the face-urns from Norway and Poland are found (fig. 3).

Osteological analyses of cremated bone from both Poland (in Kneisel 2005) and Norway (Holck 1983, 1997, Sellevold 2002) show that persons of both sexes and all ages could get a face-urn, except for face-urns with pictograms of military equipment (see Kneisel 2005 for further explanation). The deposition and the osteological analysis of the bones found in Polish urns has led Kneisel

(2005) to think of face-urns as possibly restricted to a person with a certain position, or abilities, from each generation.

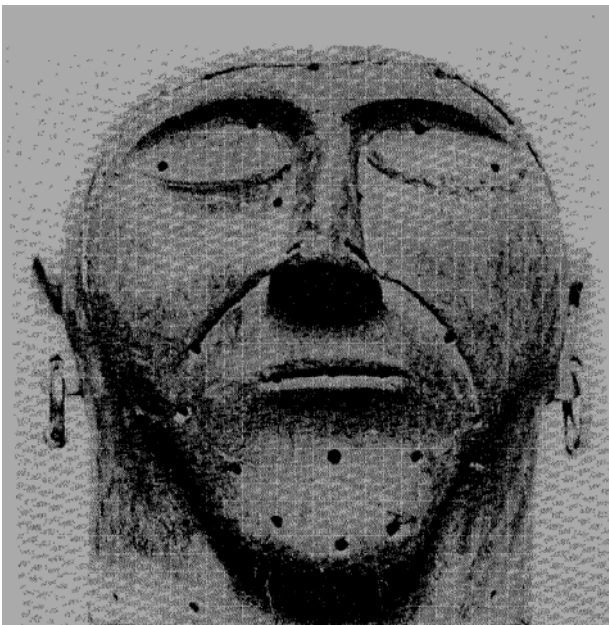
In Rogaland there are fragments from a face-urn with a striking resemblance to urns of Etruscan type. It comprises a small number of potsherds with a small amount of associated burnt bone, but no other details of the find context are known. This face-urn is exceptional however, as the urn's decor is more plastic than stylized. The bones found together with this urn belonged to a girl who was around the age of 12 years when she died (fig. 4).

The face-urns from Etruria can, like the ones from Poland, be more or less stylized. But many of the Etruscan face-urns share the same features even though they all show individualistic characteristics. They often have almond shaped eyes, thin lips, high cheekbones and a slim, straight nose. Some of them tend to have a "Mona Lisa-smile" on their lips. It could be that these features are a result of an idolization or an idealization. One can draw a simplistic analogy to the portraits of the nobility from the 18th century, displaying almost enigmatic or expressionless characters.



Fig. 4. Norwegian face-urn found in Rogaland (from the archives at Archaeological museum in Stavanger).

Fig. 5. Female head from a face-urn found in Chiusi (Banti 1973: planche 75a).



The local context of the Norwegian face-urns

The seven face-urns from Norway are, as earlier mentioned, all found in the southern part of the country, in the counties of Rogaland and Aust-Agder. Three of the four face-urns from Rogaland County were found relatively close together at Jæren within an area no greater than about 5 km in diameter. Two of these were found together in a stone chamber with three additional urns *without* face décor. The picture is somewhat similar in Aust-Agder County where three urns were found at Fjære within an area no more than 4 km in diameter. Two of the urns from Fjære were also found together in a stone chamber.

Jæren and Fjære are at present some of the best agricultural areas in their respective counties. These areas are both coastal and have a long tradition associated with seafaring, fishing and overseas contact. They also have access to inland resources such as game, fur, timber, and minerals. Soapstone quarries (probably already in use during the Bronze Age) are recorded near both areas. Several monumental mounds are found in these areas, and the areas show a large number of registered prehistoric finds and sites for all of the Norwegian prehistoric periods in the respective counties. These areas also show some of the richest concentrations in the country of imported artefacts and artefacts associated with the elite strata of prehistoric society.

Monumental mounds, imported goods, the resources of the area and their coastal location has led archaeologists to think of the Jæren and Fjære areas as possessing the potential for long distance trade contacts and likely locations for the concentration of power during the prehistoric period (Gjessing 1990, Myhre 1996 et. al.). One thinks of the social organization of society in the Bronze Age as hierarchical in the sense that some families had the possibility to acquire resources and goods that exceed what is necessary in daily life, and seek to accumulate power and gain prestige through redistribution of goods. In this hierarchical society the development of specialized production of different types of goods form the basis of an exchange system that included large areas. Metal artefacts and knowledge about metal production are assumed to be resources that generated long distance trade. So did trade with amber and glass.

For these families, or social strata in the society, long distance contacts and prestige goods are regarded as other important aspects in the strategy of gaining and retaining power. Prestige goods expressed social relations and status, and the gift/exchange economy was dependent upon social contexts such as feasts, marriage alliances and other organised social happenings (Cunliffe 1994:325).

Grave goods

There have been very few elaborate finds dated to the Late Bronze Age in Norway. Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that the building of large burial mounds stops, but a few exclusive items still appear among more modest grave goods. These items are often associated with personal hygiene, and are things like razors and tweezers. Among the grave goods found together with a Danish face-urn are some of the earliest objects in iron, a knife and a pin (Broholm 1948:156ff).

Some of the Polish face-urns have earrings, both of bronze and iron, with small pearls of amber or blue glass attached. Blue glass-beads and kauri-shells are imports from the north and central Italy that seem to replace bronze as prestige goods during the transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age (Pydyn 1999: 63). Amber is more seldom used in the area where it is produced, while in Southern Europe it is found in large quantities in rich graves. This has led to the assumption that amber had a symbolic value in the Nordic and Baltic region (Pydyn 1999:64, Jensen 2000: 78).

There have been only two documented cases of grave goods found together with face-urns from Norway. Together with the two face-urns found in the same chamber at Fjære there was a bronze knife. The face-urns found together in the same chamber at Jæren yielded a piece that probably belongs to the mouthpiece of ritual horse gear.

One speaks of an elite as already established and consolidated in this period, and the demands for elaborate grave goods and display may have been unnecessary. Instead the elite downplayed its wealth, power and the growing focus on the individual. Whilst society was probably rigidly hierarchical, the leading families may have tried to give an illusion of a more collective society (Larsson 1989, Vevatne 1996, Goldhahn 1999:158-163). Nevertheless, it was still necessary to separate a few special persons with dignified status from the commoners, and it was equally important, as Helms (1998) points out, to show off status among the elite itself. The display of dignified status was perhaps connected to the display of objects where the knowledge of how to make them, how to use them, and what they represented was more important than materialistic value.

Local context – The mound as “stage of reflection” and face-urns as “objects of reflection”

The most common grave finds from this period are cremated bones buried underground with no currently visible marker. The cremation residue was placed in a household pot, a wooden box, or a piece of fur or fabric. Only a very few burials were in funerary urns made exclusively for burial purposes, such as the face-urns

(Broholm 1933:156). The face-urns are all found in connection with larger grave mounds, either as secondary burials or, as in one case, an assembly of under level graves where a mound was constructed at a later date. This mound is placed directly upon the under level graves in such a way that the people who constructed it must have known about them (Aasbøe 2006). They were probably the reason the mound was erected at this specific place. These mounds as monuments appear to represent places important for the living and the dead. They act as a place connecting the past and the future to the present. They are a meeting point for the living and the dead.

Only a small percentage of the population was buried in mounds, and even fewer people were buried in mounds in which are found rock-art carvings on stone slabs (Syvertsen 2003). In the same mound as the two face-urns found together in the same chamber from Jæren, Rogaland, a stone slab with eight cup marks was also found. Jellestad Syvertsen (2003) regards rock-art in graves as being exclusive and carefully chosen for the occasion. She sees the carvings as metaphors representing a liminal and ambiguous state. As symbols they are suitable for expressing particular situations and conditions that are difficult to express by conventional means (Syvertsen 2003:78). Such a situation could be the death of a person who knew the “sacra” – secrets. Ingrid Fuglestad (1999:26) writes that the communication of “sacra” could be done in three ways. To display different objects is one of them. These objects are often figures with over- or under dimensioned bodyparts, they are bisexual or combining human and animal features. Turner (1967:103) calls such figures “objects of reflection” and they often play a role in the liminal stage in a certain situation. This then becomes a “stage of reflection”. The mound represents the final “resting place” for the Norwegian face-urns. Further the act of depositing the urns in the mound can be said to represent a “stage and reflection”. Burial mounds have been interpreted as material symbols of immortality (Nordenborg Myhre 1998:22) and through secondary burials, or other rituals connected to the mound, a connection is maintained with the ideal of the mythical past and ones aristocratic ancestors (Syvertsen 2003:125).

Objects of reflection can be seen as sacred or communicating sacred knowledge. They become a materialisation of human thought trying to transcend (Turner 1967:105). Syvertsen also sees rock art in graves as objects connected to persons with esoteric knowledge. The face-urns can be seen as such objects of reflection. They are immediately associated with the human body, even though they differ anatomically. The Norwegian face-urns are without gender, and seem to follow strict rules about how they should be portrayed. As mentioned they are in one case found in the same mound as a stone with cup marks, which strengthens this hypothesis further.

Death is the inevitable conclusion to human life, and represents the greatest threat to the ideas of continuity and order (Berger 1993:19f, Bloch and Parry 1982:21, Turner 1999). A person may be biologically dead, but not socially, therefore he or she may stand outside constructed categories that structure the society. Different individuals' death generates different kinds of crises (Hertz 1960:76f, van Gennep 1999:104). Persons who played a particular role that are not easily replaced, or those who had a more official role in the society expose society to a greater risk of chaos at their death and this influence may extend to persons beyond just the closest relatives. It is important to secure such a person's departure, and make sure it is done in the right way, perhaps to a higher degree than for a person who is not regarded as privileged (Berger 1993:18, 41).

It was probably also important to secure the continuity of such a person's function. This could be done by introducing a replacement. One, or perhaps an additional, way, of solving this, could be to regard the deceased person as still a member of the society and to secure the continuity by giving him or her a new everlasting body and a "home" that could be visited. Face-urns can be said to represent such everlasting new bodies. These new bodies could also be said to be idolized, or to have assumed the authority of ancestors.

The chambers containing more than one face-urn in both Rogaland and Aust-Agder were made of stone and placed in a mound that contained older graves. Fredrik Svanberg (2005) sees a pattern concerning aristocratic graves. They are often placed in chambers made of wood or stone, and seem to symbolise the house. This house-grave cult may have started with the constructions of real houses in connection with grave rituals. Post-holes have been found under mounds that appear to support this theory. The houses may have functioned as a "lit de parade". Svanberg sees this tradition as becoming more and more symbolically expressed, hence the chambers of stone or wood. The house-grave could have had some of the same significance as a heroon, a grave that separates itself from others as a result of visitors coming with offerings and gifts to the grave, and which are connected to a cult of heroes. The house-urns found in almost the same period as the face-urns, but in slightly different areas, have also been interpreted as representing houses with a more official or a special function and as urns for elite individuals.

All of the Norwegian face-urns are found in connection with a burial mound with more than one grave. Raimond Thörn is an archaeologist who sees the connection between ancestors and the ownership to land (Thörn 2005:340). Hornstrup sees the mounds in the Bronze Age as bearers of the people's religion, myth and history (2005:288). Myth and ritual are important aspects when society needs to be stabilized. Myth explains the society's construction, and reflects a constructed "reality" (Berger 1993:41f). Myth is communicated through actions and

rituals and at the same time legitimizes these rituals and actions. Rituals and actions include persons and objects "performing" the myth. Myths legitimising ritual can therefore also be said to legitimise persons and objects closely related to, or being a part of, the myth.

Helms (1998:4ff) shows how the elite and aristocrats refer to myths of origin and genealogy to legitimise their status and power. They refer to knowledge about distant and unknown places and "the others" to legitimise their superiority. "The others" can be foreigners, ancestors, the unborn and the aristocracy itself. Through knowledge about "the others" and other places they are more capable to secure the continuity of social structure and order. The "world" that exists outside the close, easily recognizable social order or society, "here and now", is associated with what Mary Helms defines as the "there-and-then" and "social-cum-cosmological Others". "There-and-then" is a part of the cosmological realm and represents both geographical distant places and the sphere of the ancestors. Persons who have knowledge about "the Others" or know "the Others" will themselves be defined as both "the Others" and "Us", and therefore be regarded as individuals with transcendental qualities or even "living ancestors". Objects associated with long distance contacts are therefore important to acquire to communicate social connections with the Others and also knowledge of the use and symbolism to which these objects refer. Face-urns are such objects, and their use, restricted to the grave, makes them a powerful symbol communicating specific knowledge about, and close contact with, the Others.

Conclusion

Based on the fact that face-urns are a phenomenon that occur over a wide area at the same time, but also because they seem to be restricted to certain people in certain areas, they can be said to symbolize contact with the outside world and the Others, and people who got such an urn could then be said to be part of "the Others". These individuals most probably represented the higher social strata in their respective communities, an aristocracy, and perhaps even living ancestors. To legitimise their status and power it would have been important to reflect a mythical origin and genealogy. By using face-urns at an official arena, as a burial, they become an official declaration – a manifest – where the users of face-urns, both living and dead, seek to be associated with other individuals using this type of urn. The face-urn is easily comprehensible as a symbol for a new body, but the more complex knowledge of these urns has probably been for only a few. Because the face-urn is so easily associated with the human body there must have been restrictions that prevented more people from using this kind of urn. In a way it could be said that this type of urn communicated different knowledge to different people. The commoners saw an idolized individual with secret knowledge, while the higher strata of the society saw close contacts with

persons of social importance outside the local community. The striking resemblance between face-urns from Norway and Legnica, and perhaps also Etruria, show that there was close contact between people from these areas. Alliances between leading families could have existed in the form of trade or marriage. As ancestors, marriage partners from outside the local community and foreigners represented, according to

Helms, "social-cum-cosmological Others". The presence of such individuals have been important at, among other occasions, funerals to demonstrate and legitimise the deceased and his/her family's status and right to authority (Helms 1998:11). This can explain the reason for the strong similarities between the face-urns in context, deposition and form.

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Chapter 11

The Use of Ochre in Stone Age Burials of the East Baltic

Ilga Zagorska

ABSTRACT One of the most characteristic features of Stone Age burials in the East Baltic is the use of ochre in the graves. The ochre was not in its natural state: it was a specially prepared product. The long duration of use of Zvejnieki burial ground, northern Latvia, spanning several millennia, provides an opportunity to observe changes in burial practices, including the use of ochre. The symbolic significance of the use of ochre is stressed. Settlement sites in the East Baltic have also produced evidence of ancient rituals involving ochre.

Ochre, or coloured earth, was one of the first pigments that humans came to know. The name 'ochre' comes from a Greek term meaning 'pale yellowish'. In its natural state, ochre is actually yellowish or orange, even yellow-brown in colour. When it is burned, the ochre is dehydrated and obtains a reddish colour (Enzyklopädisches Handbuch 1969:948; The Concise Oxford dictionary of Archaeology 2002: 295). Traces of the presence of ochre at living sites are recorded very far back in the Palaeolithic (Barham 1998:703–710). Later, in the Middle Palaeolithic, at Blombos Cave in South Africa, bars of ochre occur, engraved with marks. Red ochre has also been found in connection with human burials in caves in Israel, dated to 100 000–90 000 BP. In one of these caves, pieces of ochre were found in the same layer as burials and red-stained stone tools, while in another cave burials and red-coloured human bone was found (Hovers et al 2003:491–522). In Europe, ochre was widely used in cave art, occurring in this context in the Palaeolithic from the Atlantic seaboard in the west right up to the Ural Mountains in the east. Already in the Middle Palaeolithic, and up to the very end of the Stone Age and even later, ochre was also used at burial sites, constituting a component of the burial ritual. In the youngest period of the Stone Age – the Neolithic – it was also used to paint pottery.

Researchers emphasise the deeply symbolic and diverse meanings of the colour red, mainly expressed in the burial context. The colour red is reminiscent of natural substances sharing the same colour, such as blood. The presence of the colour red in burials is regarded as being connected with the concept of death and with the preservation of the energy of life, providing magical force for the route to the world beyond. In a wider sense, the use of ochre has been connected with the human spiritual world and the broadening of knowledge, and in the burial context it has been related to the beginnings of symbolic thinking (Bower 2003:277; Vianello:2004). However, researchers have also emphasised that ochre has not been

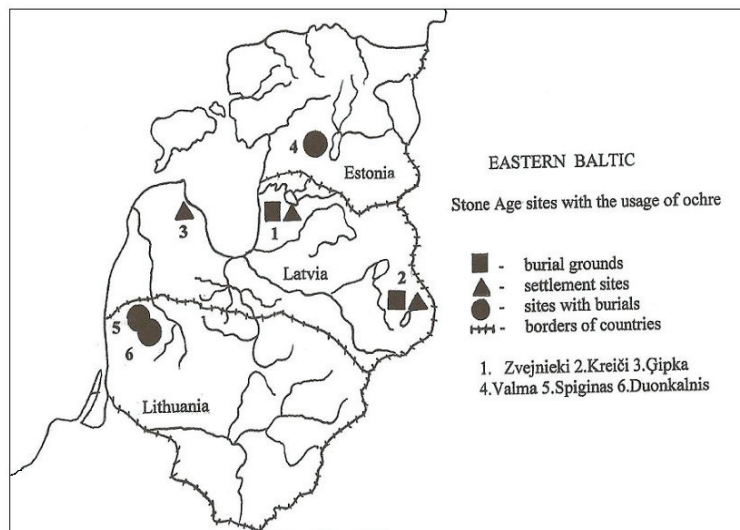
used in the same ways across space and time, and its presence or absence is not always comprehensible or interpretable (Hovers et al 2003).

Stone Age sites in the East Baltic also preserve traces of the use of ochre (Fig. 1). It occurs in both Mesolithic and Neolithic graves in Lithuania, Latvia and, in some measure, also in Estonia. These sites include Spiginas and Duonkalnis, on islands in Lake Biržulis, western Lithuania, the Zvejnieki burial ground in northern Latvia, the Neolithic cemetery of Kreiči at Lake Ludza in south-eastern Latvia, and in particular the burials at the Valma settlement site in central Estonia. Traces of the use of ochre have also been identified at Mesolithic and Neolithic residential sites, in special hearths or so-called 'ritual pits' at the Spiginas and Duonkalnis sites on the islands in Lake Biržulis, and at the coastal site of Ģipka in Latvia. This provides some opportunity for tracing the use of coloured earth at Stone Age sites in the East Baltic.

Ochre in Nature in Latvia

Ochre is a natural mineral pigment, containing iron oxides and hydroxides (Fe_2O_3). In nature, it may have a minor admixture of clay, sand, peat or freshwater lime. Ochre generally varies in colour from light yellowish brown to dark brown. It is deposited where iron-rich underground waters emerge at the surface: at riverbanks, wet meadows and peatlands (so-called bog or lake ore). The naturally occurring dense or loose limonites generally have small amounts of other minerals – calcites and silicates (Upīte 1987:118). Natural ochre deposits of various sizes occur throughout the territory of Latvia (Kuršs, Stinkule 1997:161–163). Natural deposits of ochre also occur along the shore of Lake Burtnieks in northern Latvia (Fig. 2). Ochre sources have never been systematically surveyed by geologists, but information about ochre deposits has been provided by people familiar with the region, and they have sometimes been

Fig. 1. The East Baltic region (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), showing sites where traces of ochre have been found: 1. Zvejnieki archaeological complex; 2. Kreiči settlement site and cemetery; 3. Ģipka settlement site; 4. Valma settlement site and graves; 5. Spiginas settlement site and cemetery; 6. Duonkalnis settlement site and cemetery.



found in the course of geological coring or identified in archaeological survey work. It is significant that such sources are to be found close to Stone Age settlement sites. Thus, for example, ochre has been found at several places near the outflow of the River Salaca from Lake Burtnieks, where there are at least three Neolithic settlement sites: Rīņpukalns, Kaulēnkalns and Līdaciņš (Fig. 2). The closest known natural sources to the Zvejnieki archaeological complex, on the north-western shore of Lake Burtnieks, were about 2 km away, at the mouth of the River Seda, east of the site, and at two locations on the opposite shore of the lake – downhill from the manors of Bauņi and Mīlīši (Fig. 2).

Zvejnieki Archaeological Complex

Lake Burtnieks is located in northern Latvia in a depression within an extensive drumlin field, formed by melting ice between 15000–14000 BP. The Zvejnieki archaeological complex developed on a long, gently-sloping former island in the lake. This island is an approximately 1600-m-long drumlinoid, stretching north-west to south-east (Eberhards et al 2003:30). Two Stone Age settlement sites and a corresponding burial ground were located in the south-eastern part of this island. Archaeological excavation of this monument was conducted by Francis Zagorskis (1929–1986) in the 1960s and 70s, in the process unearthing more than 300 graves (Zagorskis 1987, 2004). During the past decade, material from the cemetery has been radiocarbon-dated, and specialists from Latvia and other countries in northern Europe have investigated the natural situation of the burial ground, the course of its development and the material recovered from it, including the anthropological evidence (Larsson & Zagorska 2006). Importantly, the duration of use of the cemetery has been confirmed – it was in use for four millennia, from the 9th to the 5th millennium BP (Zagorska 2006:91–14). However, the cemetery material is so rich and diverse that it is still

providing new research possibilities and opening up new avenues of study with regard to burial practices, including the use of ochre in graves. Coloured earth, or ochre, was very widely used in the graves, and these practices changed over the course of time, resulting in diverse examples of Stone Age burial rites and beliefs.

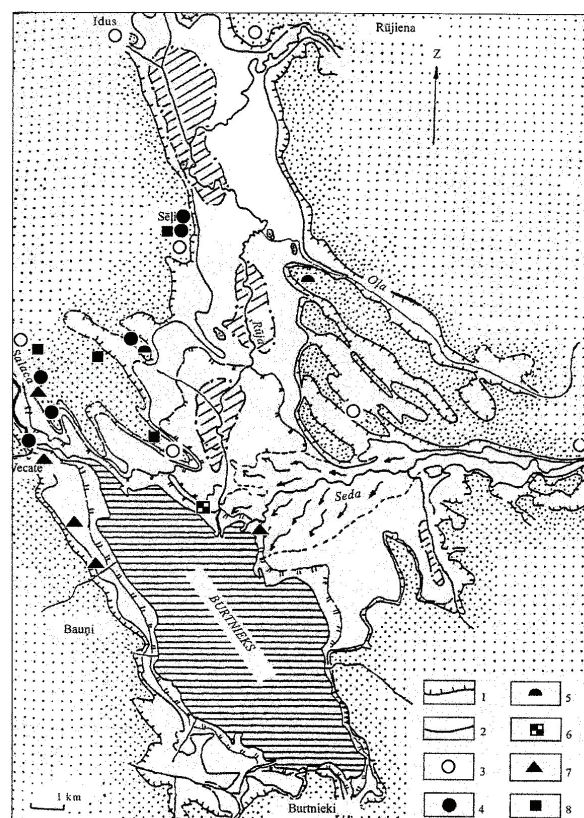


Fig. 2. The Lake Burtnieks Basin : 1. former shoreline; 2. present-day shoreline; 3. finds of flint nodules; 4. Stone Age settlement sites; 5. possible cemeteries; 6. Zvejnieki archaeological complex; 7. natural ochre deposits.

Ochre was used so intensively that in many cases the preserved parts of the skeleton were red or reddish, as were the flint, bone and even amber artefacts provided as grave goods. Many of these even had pieces of ochre stuck to them. Individual pieces of ochre were also found in the graves, possibly provided as grave goods.

It should be made clear from the outset that the ochre used at Zvejnieki burial ground was not in its natural state. Chemical analysis of ochre samples has shown that specially burned ochre, with a crystalline structure corresponding to haematite, was used in the graves (hema- blood from a Greek). The natural ochre had been burned at a temperature of 300°–500° C. In these samples, iron makes up only 20%–50%, with considerable quantities of other constituents, including quartz, clay minerals (illite and kaolinite) and dolomite (Upite 1987:118–120). This analysis indicates that a special substance was being prepared for burials, which could be used to line the base of the grave, be strewn over the body and sometimes even used to fill the grave. This substance could also be moulded over the face or body, in some measure embalming the corpse. This is confirmed by observations at the cemetery where in some cases the ochre was in the form of a powder, sometimes with a considerable amount of other constituents, and in other cases had been mixed into a mass predominantly consisting of blue or red clay.

The Ochre Graves

Ochre was used in the preparation of the grave and strewn on the burial itself. Slightly over half of the burials – 164 – involved the use of ochre. Among the ochre graves, there were 130 graves entirely strewn with ochre, with greater or lesser intensity, as well as partially ochre-strewn graves, where the red pigment had only been applied to particular parts of the grave – either on or next to the burial (34 cases, Fig.3).

The former island of Zvejnieki, nowadays a ridge, consisted of light, sand-coloured brown gravel and coarser gravel, in which the contour of the grave was easily distinguishable, particularly in cases where ochre had been used intensively, in which case the grave fill was dark red, or sometimes even shades of violet.

The ochre graves were very diverse. Generally, the depth of the grave, as measured from the present-day ground surface, was 20–50 cm, and only in particular cases did they reach a depth of one metre or more (Burial 57). Generally, the base of the grave was covered in an intensively red 5–10 cm layer of ochre, and the body itself was covered in ochre. The grave fill consisted of light grey gravel, sometimes with a minor admixture of ochre. Graves where ochre was used in this way sometimes also had a layer of intensively black, even charcoal-rich earth. The black earth had been strewn in the base of the grave, with a layer of red ochre above it

(Burials 5, 170, 206–208 and 263–264). In other cases, the grave, with an ochre-strewn individual lying in it, was filled with black, charcoal-rich earth, which sometimes contained flint flakes, fragments of animal bone and small fragments of bone implements. In other words, it had been taken from the occupation layer of the Stone Age settlements (Burials 86, 110, 119 and 170). In some cases, distinctly ochre-rich oval areas resembling the remains of fires had been created next to the body (Burials 207, 211, etc.). In many cases, the grave structure had been augmented with individual stones or stone settings. The intensively ochre-strewn burials more frequently contained grave goods – bone and flint spearheads, harpoons, arrowheads, daggers, awls, strings of tooth pendants and amber ornaments (Zagorskis 1987:51–72).

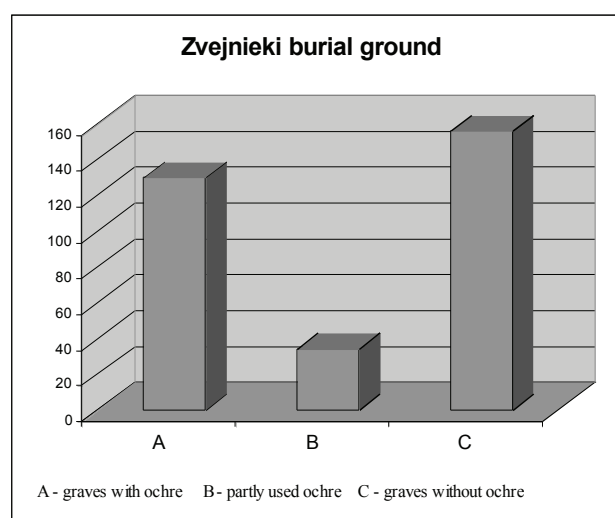


Fig. 3. Zvejnieki burial ground. Numbers of burials with the ochre (A), burials, partly strewn with the ochre (B) and burials without ochre (C).

In the partially ochre-strewn graves, the red-coloured earth was present in certain places near the skeleton, most commonly around the head. Sometimes the red ochre strewn around the head did not contain any other finds (Burials 39, 96 and 162), but in the majority of cases ochre was present if the head was adorned with strings of tooth pendants, which could even form very complicated headdresses, as in the case of Burials 146, 153, 160, 164 and 300 (Zagorska & Lõugas 2000:232–239). Apart from the head region, red ochre had also been strewn by the elbows, knees or feet (Burials 146, 164, 187 and 290). In some cases, the burial of a young child was discovered, in an ochre-strewn oval area up to 30–40 cm long, alongside an adult with no ochre (Burials 132 and 132a). In a double grave, containing an older woman and a younger man (Burials 254 and 255), the woman had been completely strewn with ochre, while the man was partly ochre-strewn (the head and the lower legs).



Fig. 4. The Zvejnieki burial ground. Graves dated by radiocarbon: Black trapezoids- Middle Mesolithic; hatched trapezoids - Late Mesolithic; black circles - Early Neolithic, black squares - Middle Neolithic, black triangles - Late Neolithic, black rectangles - Late Bronze-Early Iron Age.

Another characteristic of the Zvejnieki burial ground are collective burials, with between three (Burials 263, 264 and 264a) and six bodies (Burials 274, 275, 276, 277, 277a and 278) placed alongside each other. In some cases, they had even been laid at two levels, usually in opposed orientation. Such burials generally have copious amounts of ochre, although there were some cases of partially ochre-strewn burials. The collective graves are in all cases richly furnished.

Collective burials with so-called 'votive deposits' next to them are also very distinct: rounded areas, up to 30–50 cm in diameter, very intensively strewn with ochre, 8–10 cm thick, with scattered intentionally broken artefacts – bone hunting and fishing implements, flint spearheads and amber ornaments (Burials 206–209).

The most thoroughly ochre-strewn of all the burials at Zvejnieki burial ground are those of children, about 90% of which had an intensive layer of ochre, 3–10 cm thick. One third of the ochre-strewn child burials had grave goods: a bone female figurine (Burial 172), bone spearheads (Burials 27, 41, etc.), daggers and awls (Burials 260 and 272). However, the majority of the grave goods consisted of tooth pendant ornaments, with elk, wild boar, roe deer, aurochs and horse, as well as marten, badger, seal and dog teeth. In one of the child graves, the number of tooth pendants reached as many as 224. In another, where a child had been buried together with an adult male, the child's headdress, perhaps a cap, had been decorated with an elaborate tooth pendant ornament, with bear teeth marking the ends of the decoration (Zagorska et al 2000:237; Larsson 2006:260–262). Second in terms of the number of ochre-strewn burials in the burial ground were male burials, while the number of female burials with ochre was only half that of

the males. This is the picture of ochre use we obtain if we consider the cemetery as a whole, rather than dividing the burials chronologically. A more comprehensive view of burial customs, including the use of ochre, is obtained if we consider each period of the Stone Age separately, tracing stable, unchanging traditions, as well as particular changes in rites, over the course of time.

The Chronology of Zvejnieki Burial Ground and Changes in the Use of Ochre Over Time

From all of the above, we may conclude that the use of red ochre was one of the most important aspects of the Stone Age burial ritual. Based on archaeological typology, and partly also on the spatial distribution of the burials and the newly-obtained radiocarbon dates, it has been possible to assess the duration of use of the burial ground (Zagorska & Larsson 1994; Zagorska 1997; 2000; Eriksson et al 2003; Zagorska 2006). It turned out that the cemetery had been used during more than four millennia, from the Middle Mesolithic up to the end of the Late Neolithic, approximately spanning the 9th–5th millennium BP: cal 7310–7050 to 2890–2620 BC (Fig. 4 & 5).

All of the earliest burials, from the Middle Mesolithic, had been laid in heavily ochre - strewn layers of 3–10 cm thickness. The very earliest burial of the Zvejnieki archaeological complex, No. 305, was found not in the cemetery, but within the Mesolithic settlement. This male burial lay in the lowermost horizon of the cultural layer, in extended supine position, surrounded by a layer of powdered ochre. The grave goods consisted of a bone fish-spear and vertebrae of pike. The grave has been dated to 8240±70 BP (Ua-3634).

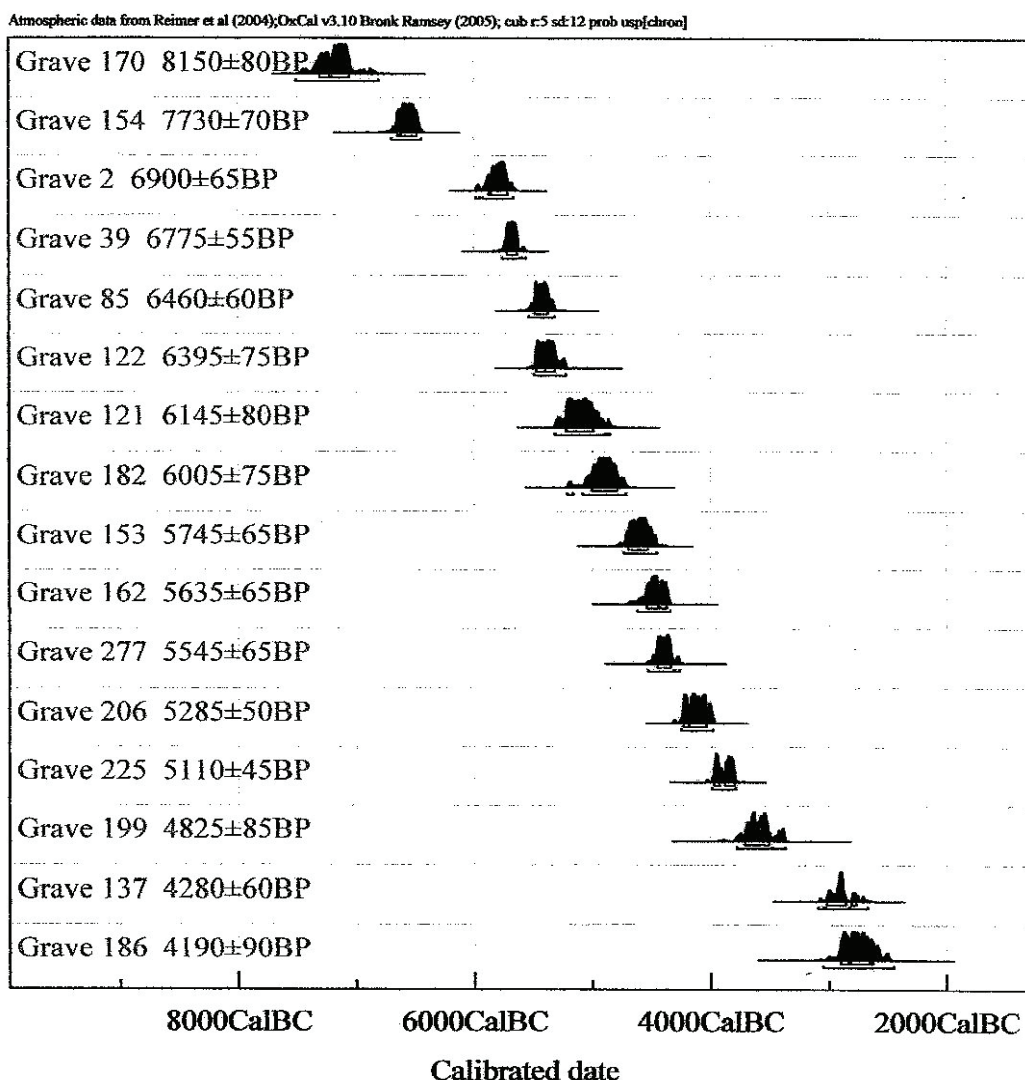


Fig. 5. Zvejnieki burial ground. The range of the radiocarbon dates from the Middle Mesolithic to the Late Neolithic

Likewise, the earliest known burial in the territory of the cemetery, No. 170, had been buried in an intense ochre layer, with a grave fill of black earth. The grave contained 167 tooth pendants, 41 of them forming an interesting headdress, consisting of teeth of elk, wild boar and aurochs (Fig. 6B). The grave has been dated to 8150±80 BP (OxA-5969). An elderly male (Burial 154) was unearthed in a 60 cm deep grave with a 2–3 cm thick ochre layer around skeleton, a grave fill of light grey gravel and stones placed at the both ends of the grave – on the head and the feet. The burial is dated to 7730±70 BP (Ua-3644). These three burials are the earliest so far discovered in Zvejnieki. It may be assumed that the cemetery was established in the second part of the Middle Mesolithic, and that ochre was already being very intensively used at that time. Richly ochre-strewn Mesolithic burials have been found in north-western Lithuania, where Mesolithic cemeteries were established on two islands, Spiginas and Duonkalnis (Fig. 1). At the

Duonkalnis cemetery, heavily ochre-strewn burials were found. In one double burial (male and female together, Nos. 2 and 3), the head of a 50–60 year old man had been decorated in a similar manner to that of a male at Zvejnieki – with 25 tooth pendants of elk and wild boar, and more elk teeth arranged above the face, covering the eyes and inserted in nostrils, ears and mouth (Fig. 6A). This male burial was in the centre of the grave. Buried to the left was a female, with a small pile of stones on the right, heavily strewn with ochre (Butrimas 1985:63–64). At the Spiginas cemetery, too, some ochre graves have been unearthed, the richest at this site being a female burial (No. 4), containing a considerable amount of ochre. The deceased had been decorated with animal tooth pendants (Butrimas 1992:4–10).

The male burial at Duonkalnis (No. 3) has been dated to 6995±65 BP (OxA-5924), while the Spiginas burials are older. The poorly preserved Burial 3 is dated to 7470±60

(GIN-5571), while Burial 4 has been dated to 7780 ± 65 BP (OxA-5925) (Bronk Ramsey 2000:244). All of these individuals, male and female, were perhaps prominent members of the Stone Age community.

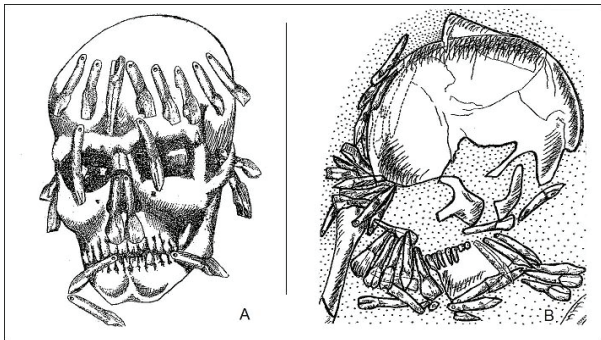


Fig. 6. Headgear consisting of tooth pendants, richly ochre strewn: A – Burial 3, Duonkalnis; B – Burial 170, Zvejnieki.

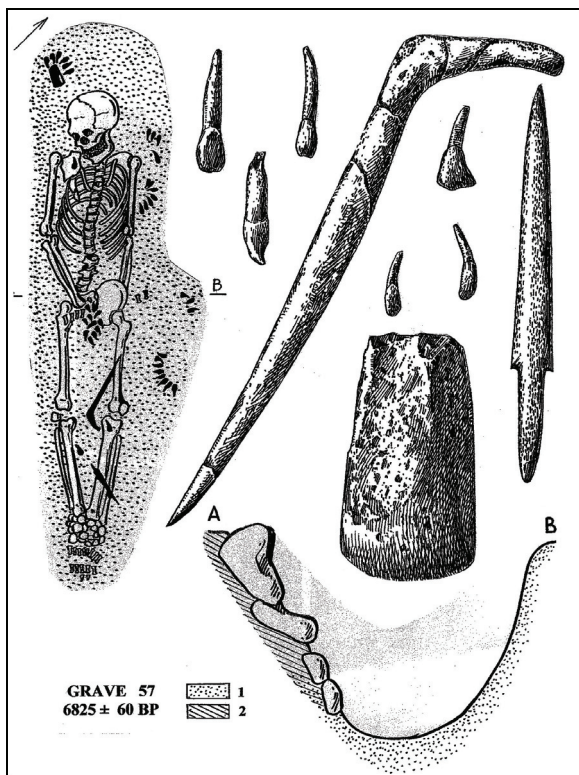


Fig. 7. Zvejnieki burial ground. Burial 57, cross-section of the grave and inventory. (1 – ochre, 2 – black earth).

The Late Mesolithic graves generally have a greyish grave fill, with stone settings and large amounts of red ochre, especially in the graves of children (No. 83). All of the burials dated to this period were richly ochre-strewn.

The dates obtained for 44 burials permit the pattern of use of red coloured earth to be sketched in for particular periods of the Stone Age. It should be noted that in this case only dated burials are used.

Burial 57, that of an elderly female (Fig. 7), was especially rich. The grave was deep – more than one metre, and the sides of the grave, beginning at the top, had been strewn with ochre. An intensive ochre layer surrounded the skeleton. The grave goods consisted of a stone axe, flint artefacts and animal tooth pendants (elk, red deer and aurochs). Some of the tooth pendants had been placed in groups at some distance from the skeleton, in a very intense patch of ochre. Perhaps they had been attached to grave goods made of organic materials which did not survive. This individual had been provided with a bone spearhead and an elk-head staff. The burial has been dated to 6825 ± 60 BP (Ua-3636). It was the richest female grave in the whole cemetery, confirming the special role of this person in the Late Mesolithic community.

During the Early Neolithic, some changes occurred in the use of ochre in the burial rites. The tradition of sprinkling ochre over the whole burial continued, as can be seen from some of the female burials (No. 121) and some male burials (No. 165). Likewise, in some double graves, consisting of a male and child (No. 122/123) or a female and child (No. 85 and 85a) ochre had been richly strewn over the deceased. In some cases, ochre came to be used somewhat more sparingly, sometimes being strewn only on particular parts of the body. It occurred mainly on the head region, and sometimes at the elbows, pelvis or feet. In particular, we may mention one young male burial (No. 153) and four male burials, whose heads had been strewn with red ochre (Nos. 162, 173, 178 and 300). In all cases, the deceased had been placed in extended supine position. The grave fill consisted of light-coloured gravel, sometimes with an admixture of black earth, the red ochre observable in the region of the head, often very intensively strewn. In some graves, there was only an ochre layer around the head (Nos. 162, 173 and 178), while in other graves (Nos. 153 and 300) rich headgear consisting of animal tooth pendants was found. Such an ornament was most clearly represented on male Burial 153. (Fig. 8).

The body had been placed in the grey gravel layer, with ochre at the head and black earth in the pelvic region. The layer of red ochre around the head was almost 10 cm thick. The head ornament consisted of 91 animal tooth pendants, which had evidently been attached to the headgear. Stretching across the head from one ear to the other was a band of dog, marten and badger teeth, in the middle of which there were eight elk teeth and one fairly large dog tooth. Strings of tooth pendants, consisting of dog, marten and badger teeth, hung down both sides of the head. In addition to this splendid headdress, the man had other grave goods as well: an implement made of wild boar tusk and a small bone point.

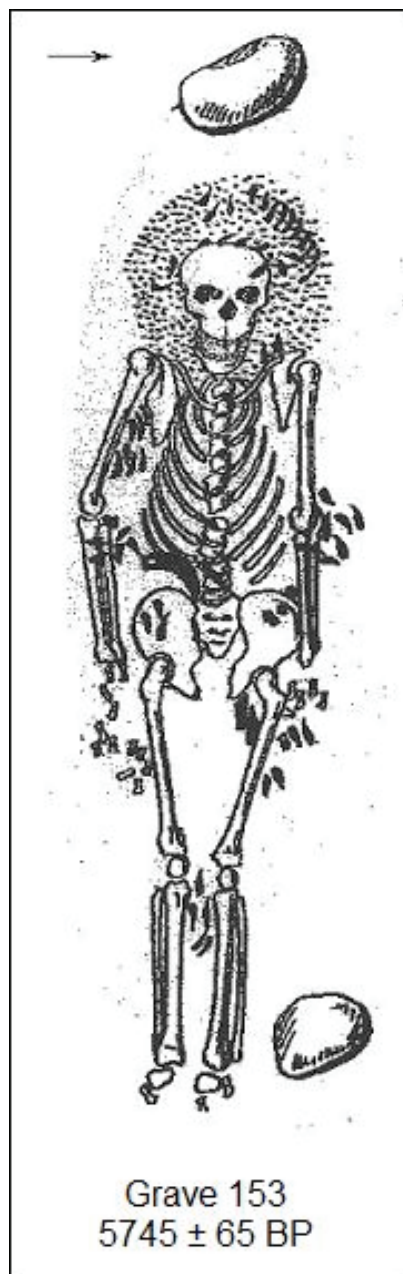


Fig. 8. Zvejnieki burial ground. Burial 153, partly ochre-strewn.

Apart from this, in the region of both elbows, there were bird bones, which may be interpreted either as stocks of food given to the deceased or as a special offering. The grave has been dated to 5745 ± 65 BP (OxA-5968). Another male burial, No. 300, was filled with black earth, having ochre only in the region of the head. The head was surrounded by an ornament consisting of 59 pendants, showing a very careful and rhythmic arrangement of animal teeth (wolf, badger, dog and marten). At the mouth, between the jaws, were two symmetrically arranged wolf molars. This impressive scene was augmented with hunting implements. The

grave has been dated to 5690 ± 45 BP (Ua-3642) (Zagorska 2006:98, Fig.4). Such headdresses, in heavily ochre-strewn patches, were found on several other male burials, setting them apart from the rest of the burials.

The dated burials of the Early Neolithic include some that have no evidence of the use of ochre (Nos. 197, 210 and 251). These were single graves with a grave fill of black earth taken from the settlement site. Thus, it is evident that different burial rites were being observed already in the Early Neolithic at the Zvejnieki burial ground, including a change in the use of ochre in the graves.

The middle Neolithic brought quite drastic changes to burial rites and the use of ochre in graves. A large proportion of the burials, mainly single burials, but also some collective burials, were devoid of ochre, the grave fill consisting of greyish gravel or black earth. Such graves generally contained no grave goods (Nos. 210 and 251), and only some produced a rich set of amber ornaments (No. 228) or potsherds (No. 199). Partly ochre-strewn burials were very rare. These included female Burial 256, where ochre was observed around the head and the right shoulder. There was still a stable custom of strewing children's graves with ochre. Burial 226, very richly strewn with ochre, was that of a young child (0–7 years), adorned with an ornament of 80 animal tooth pendants (dog, wolf, marten and seal). This burial has been dated to 5345 ± 60 BP (Ua-19814). In south-eastern Latvia, the Neolithic cemetery of Kreiči has been discovered, on the shore of Lake Lielais Ludzas, close to a settlement site of the same period (Zagorskis 1961:3–18). At this cemetery, 22 burials were found (Fig. 1). Only one of them, a small child buried together with a female, had been intensively strewn with ochre. This was also the most richly furnished burial in the entire cemetery, with an ornament of 42 animal tooth pendants consisting of elk and wild boar teeth, along with some bear teeth. Near the head was an amber plaquette, perhaps from the same necklace (Zagorskis 1961, Table II).

Multiple graves, in which three to six people were buried in one or two layers, are most characteristic of the Middle Neolithic,. A layer of black earth was laid on the base of the grave, with ochre strewn over the bodies and the grave filled with black earth from the settlement site. All of the skeletons were partly or entirely strewn with ochre.

A completely new feature of the burial traditions was the presence of so-called votive deposits: concentrations of grave goods in heavily ochre-stained patches at the edges of the graves (Nos. 206–209, 263–264, 264a and 274–278). Such offerings were observed next to single graves as well (No. 252). The votive deposits consisted of flint spearheads, scrapers and flakes, bone and antler implements, and amber ornaments. A deposit next to one group of burials, No. 206–209, contained 33 different objects, with some of the flint spearheads intentionally broken (Fig. 9). Two of the burials from this multiple grave have been dated, permitting precise determination

of the age: Burial 208 has been dated to 5345 ± 60 BP (Ua-19815), while Burial 206 is dated to 5285 ± 50 BP (Ua-3634).

Middle Neolithic graves are known from the north-western shore of Lake Võrtsjärv in central Estonia (Fig. 1). Within the territory of the Valma settlement site, some graves were unearthed, including a double grave of a young female and male. The female had ochre strewn in the pelvic region. Both burials had grave goods, consisting of bone and amber animal figurines, flint artefacts and a sherd of Comb Ware. The burial traditions and inventory are very similar to those at Zvejnieki (Jaanits, 1959, 39–40; Eesti esiajalugu, 1982, 68–70).

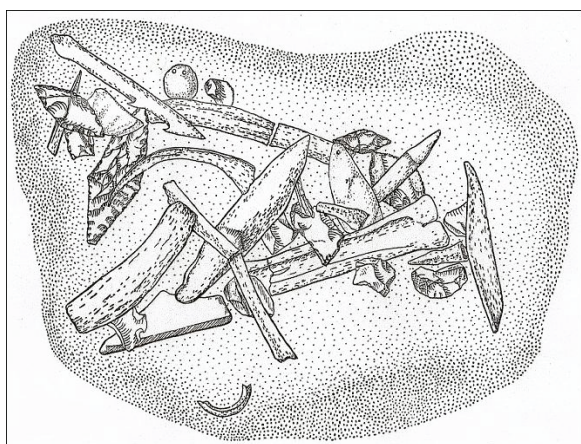


Fig. 9. The Zvejnieki burial ground. Votive deposit by multiple Burial 206–209: bone and antler artefacts, flint arrowheads intentionally broken. All heavily ochre-strewn.

Another very special and rare tradition, observed among the multiple burials at Zvejnieki, was the plastering the forehead and the face with greyish-blue or red clay, mixed with red ochre. Amber rings were found in the eye sockets, under this plastered clay, or mask, and these still had traces of red ochre on them. Such rings were found on the burial of a 7–14-year-old child (No. 206) and on three male burials: one young adult (No. 275) and two older men (Nos. 225 and 263). Burial No. 255 has been dated to 5110 ± 45 BP (OxA-5986) (Zagorska, 1997a, 435–440; Zagorska 1997b:42–50).

The closest parallels for this burial practice are to be found in Finland. In spite of the fact that bone has not survived in the acidic soil of this northern country, a large number of ochre graves, even multiple graves, with some human teeth and similar amber rings, have been unearthed (Miettinen 1992:24–40; Rätty 1995:161–170; Edgren 1959:22–24; Kukkonen et al 1997:3–12; Edgren 2006:327–336). Some similar traits are also observed in the north-western parts of Russia, on the southern shore of Lake Onega (Ivanišev 1996:82).

The graves dated to the Late Neolithic did not contain ochre. In this period, crouched burials without ochre predominate. This has been observed not only at the Zvejnieki burial ground, but also in burials from Late Neolithic settlement sites: Abora I and Kvāpāni II in south-eastern Latvia (Loze 1995:33–42) and Tamula in Estonia (Jaanits 1957:80–100). It appears that in the East Baltic the tradition of using ochre in burials had disappeared completely by the end of the Stone Age. This same development has been observed in Finland (Purhonen 1984:43–44).

Conclusions

As described above, ochre was used in the East Baltic during almost the whole of the Stone Age. Graves were most intensively strewn with ochre during the Middle and Late Mesolithic. At the beginning of Neolithic, the use of ochre decreased, with a more widespread tradition of strewn ochre only on part of the body, mainly the head. The use of ochre increased again in the Middle Neolithic, when the multiple graves appeared, associated with so-called votive deposits. Ochre has not been found with the Late Neolithic crouched burials.

In the older phase of use of the burial ground, female and male burials were intensively strewn with ochre, but later special attention was devoted to males, intensively sprinkling their heads, decorated with special headgear made from animal tooth-pendants or amber rings. These must have been prominent individuals of some kind in the community, good hunters or fishermen, or even shamans. Particularly, it is the individuals with ochre-stained clay masks who may be regarded as shamans. Special attention was given to children, using ochre in their graves throughout the Stone Age. These trends in the development of the ochre use are observed at Zvejnieki only, and do not pertain to any wider generalisation. Although there is some general pattern in the use of ochre in the Stone Age of Northern Europe, in each particular area the traditions of ochre use could have been different, and the development of these customs could have followed a different course.

The use of ochre has been widely observed on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea in the Stone Age, from the Denmark and southern Sweden in the west to north-western Russia in the east. We have little means of grasping the true sense of prehistoric people's attitude towards burial rituals, including the use of ochre (Larsson 1991:33–38; Fahlander 2003:74). Researchers' interpretations of ochre use are based mainly on ethnographic data.

It has been emphasised that the colour red was very important at moments of transition in a person's lifetime, in the passage from one state to another. In the prehistoric world, this might have applied to the transition to adult state, or to death – a transition to another world. For the

Khanty of northern Siberia, the colour white is associated with the Upper World, black is associated with illness, hunger and death, while red is a symbol of rebirth and regeneration (Zvelebil, 2003, 9). Both colours – black earth and red ochre – are observed in the Zvejnieki burials, often intensively combined in one grave. The red colour of ochre is often associated with the colour of blood, the most essential substance for life, and also important as the blood of the dead, connected with rebirth and the afterlife. The colour red appears to play an important ritual role among the Eurasian people (Okladnikov 1950:407–409). The red colour of ochre has often also been associated with fire – representing light, warmth and the hearth (Gurina 1956:230–232). Evidence of red-coloured remains of fire has also been found on east Baltic settlement sites. At the Mesolithic site of Spiginas, not very far from the graves, a rounded pit 40 cm in diameter and 5 cm deep was found, filled with red ochre. It contained a single flint blade (Butrimas 1992:9). At the Late Neolithic site of Duonkalnis a whole sanctuary, connected with burial rites, was discovered. A black burnt area, about 9 m in length, was unearthed, together with traces of post-holes around it. Close to this area, pits containing ochre, and burials were found (Butrimas 1985:63–64).

Traces of rituals connected with fire were observed at the Neolithic dune site of Gipka in western Latvia. A dark,

charcoal rich hearth was unearthed in the central part of the site. Ochre was present in the whole of the surrounding area. On the eastern side of this ritual area, a pottery vessel full of powdered ochre had been left, crushed by the overlying sand. Ochre had been used at this site to colour anthropomorphic clay figurines, which had been deliberately broken (Loze 2006:162–166). Some of the Finnish clay figurines, also deliberately broken, likewise showed signs of red ochre paint. The destruction of images of enemies, deceased tribal members or other menacing persons is a widespread magical practice among the northern Eurasian peoples (Nunez 1986:25–26).

All of the above indicates how important red ochre was in Stone Age burial rites, and how strong the symbolism of red ochre was in the life of the Stone Age communities of the East Baltic. The use of the colour red had become an essential, stable, standardised part of the burial ritual. It seems this was connected with care both for the deceased members of the tribe, and for the living, expressing the strong belief among the latter in a life beyond the grave. At the end of the New Stone Age in the East Baltic, with the beginning of changes in the way of life of the fisher-hunter-gatherers, the custom of using red ochre in burial rites also gradually disappeared.

Translated by Valdis Bērziņš

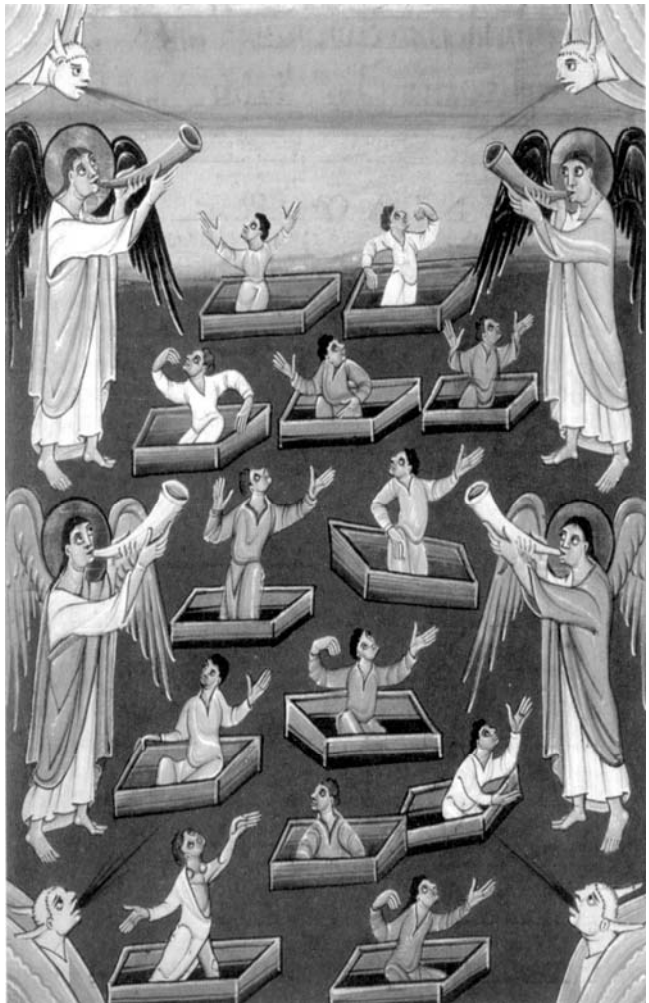
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Beliefs



Chapter 12

”Death Myths”: Performing of Rituals and Variation in Corpse Treatment during the Migration Period in Norway

Siv Kristoffersen and Terje Oestigaard

ABSTRACT Why are there variations in rituals and differences in funerary practices when the descendants share the same cosmological ideas and beliefs? The variation in the mortuary record cannot be solely explained as a representation of different religion or ethnicity. In this article we introduce the analytical concept “death myths” in order to explain parts of the ritual variation which exists in the archaeological material. In death we are not equal. The descendants compose specific rituals for each of the deceased in accordance with an overall “death myth” prescribing how and why certain rituals have to be conducted in order for the deceased to reach the preferable realms in the Otherworld. By using both archaeological and ethnographic data we aim to illustrate how “death myths” may have operated in the past.

Based on variation in corpse treatment during the Migration Period in Norway, we aim to trace possible identities, structures and ritual processes manifested in funerals by identifying which of these categories are *not* evident in the mortuary remains. By focusing on variation in burial customs in the same cist, within the same mound, and within a collection of graves of the same settlement unit, it was impossible to identify categories such as gender and economic status as relevant to variation in the funeral material. Still, there is variation over a theme in these funerals. By introducing the concept of “death myths” as a set of ritual possibilities whereby the descendants compose the rituals according to specific causes of death or aimed outcomes of the funerals, it is possible to shed new light on the variation in mortuary practices. Each funeral is composed according to myths prescribing the ideal death and death rituals which secure the deceased the best destiny in the Otherworldly spheres. Hence, the funerals are not a fixed set of ritual sequences, but an interaction between the descendants and the gods whereby the ritual practitioners compose and perform the most auspicious death rituals for the dead based on various “death myths”.

Similarities and differences in grave material may be understood from a perspective in which individual variation in burial customs is focused upon. Variation would then be a result of rituals being arranged in each individual case in order to assure that the deceased arrives at the intended or most favourable existence in the hereafter. One condition of such an approach is that at death we are not equal. Equality before death would in fact annul the role and function of the rituals. Equality in death is on the other hand the intention of performing the rituals – “*in death we are all equal*”. By focusing on the

rituals as ceremonies full of meaning that are performed by the survivors so that the deceased shall attain an optimal life in another existence, it is thus possible to analyse variation in the rituals as an expression for ritual arrangements and compositions. Such a perspective emphasises the rituals’ roles and importance in society; through performing various rituals, the survivors may not only assure the deceased an advantageous life in an existence in the hereafter, but also define and transform the society so that it is adapted to the divine world.

If the deceased was in a “perfect” state for the ancestors, gods and the divine world, both bodily and spiritually, the rituals would then theoretically have been unnecessary. Death rituals are performed because the deceased is not ready for the divine world: the rituals prepare the departed for the meeting with the gods and ancestors. Regardless of where and how one dies, or social and religious status, everyone shall pass through the same “door” at one point or another. Everyone has different “baggage” as a consequence of the life lived. These can be positive or negative factors that influence the life to come. The rituals can counteract unfortunate cosmic consequences and strengthen the positive aspects.

At the moment when the dead are “delivered” to the gods, everyone shall be equal or satisfy certain divine demands or criteria, and it is the role of the rituals to ensure that all are equal or fulfil these requirements in the best way possible. If one does not appear before the gods in a proper and prepared manner, one can end up with negative lives in the hereafter or not progress further at all, but live in a limbo-state here on earth.

In Old Norse religion, there are a series of examples of the deceased visiting the surviving family, with the result that the grave must be broken into in order to ensure peace for, and peace from, the deceased. In Christian folklore, murderers and suicide victims did not reach the thereafter. Children who were not baptised and not buried in the churchyard did not go to heaven according to orthodox teachings, but lived in a state of limbo. Which rituals and where they were performed, in addition to the life lived and the final burial have decisive meaning for the departed one's life to come. All these variables, among others, have been decisive for what happens in the hereafter.

This implies that there is an often implicit and undefined understanding and agreement as to what is the ideal death. The ideal death prescribes a set of rituals that define and structure all other death rituals. If the ideal death involves a certain set of rituals, then other deaths, social positions and statuses prescribe different forms of rituals that compensate and re-establish, or create conditions that correspond to the ideal death. Where it is possible to combine different rituals in order to obtain a special desired result, such practice will be based on a "death myth". "Death myths" prescribe how the survivors can create a divine and cosmological situation through the arrangement of different rituals where the deceased appears before the gods as though they had died the ideal death despite this not actually having occurred. The rituals create an ideal situation and "repair" cosmological consequences of having died in the wrong way or place, in addition to individual sin that must somehow be dealt with.

The analytical approach to burial customs through "death myths" will be illustrated through variation in corpse treatment beginning in the Migration Period of Western Norway, in the regions of Sogn, Voss and Hardanger (counties of Sogn og Fjordane and Hordaland). Here a grave typology is represented where both cremation and inhumation graves are found in close connection within various contexts; within the same cist, within the same mound and within collections of graves of the same settlement unit. The approach depends on access to an archaeological material which is distinguished by a certain degree of variability and which is found within a limited time and space. The chosen material fulfils such requirements.

The research areas represent smaller regions, which allow variations in burial custom to be considered within contexts where they can be related to the same sets of ideas, and to rule out larger trends in religious beliefs. In order to rule out long term changes in religious beliefs the chosen burials represent rituals performed within a fairly short period of time (for discussions on Migration Period chronology in western Norway, see for example Kristoffersen 1999). Furthermore, the Migration Period burials within the mentioned areas are numerous and distinguished by well equipped assemblages enabling the

tracing of variation, which again can be related to the concept of "death myths".

Late Roman Period and Migration Period in Western Norway

To begin with the more general characteristics in the area, they will be touched upon through the analysis of Jenny-Rita Næss from 1968 (Næss 1996[1968]); a study of variations in burial customs at Voss, a large inland village in the county of Hordaland in the western part of Norway. Also the nearby areas of Nordhordland, Sunnhordland, Hardanger and Sogn were discussed. For western Norway in general the two treatment principles, burned and unburned corpse treatment (cremation and inhumation), endure side by side throughout the entire Iron Age (ibid:130). Further, the continual use of mounds is typical as are grave constructions dominated by cists or chambers of stones/flagstones, the orientation of these not in accordance with the cardinal points, but rather determined by the view towards settled areas. The individual mounds are frequently used as common graves for one or several generations, often intensely during a short period, so short that the burial remains can only be separated by stratigraphy. The impression is that the variation in grave forms and corpse treatment is distinguished by nuances (ibid:122-123). At Voss, Næss has shown variations in corpse treatment and burial customs between the various parishes, and also a continuity of tradition within such units. Even so, the pattern is often broken by different corpse treatment in certain graves. There are no drastic geographic dividing lines in burial practices. The burial custom is comprised of individual elements, and it is the similarity in these elements and the variation in their composition that are distinctive, a composition that varies from place to place and where new elements may appear and be integrated in the prevailing tradition. Essential in Næss' explanation of these patterns is that corpse treatment is connected to the single individual more than to the group, neighbourhood and family¹.

The main focus of the following investigation is the relationship between cremations and inhumations. We will explore in depth examples where the relationship is clarified in various ways through a close connection between different corpse treatment in the examined grave contexts.

¹ Næss discusses several cases where unburned and burned burials/cremations and inhumations occur in the same context. In one case (the farm of Li in Voss) two women are buried in two different mounds in the early 400's A.D., with identical burial equipment and grave construction (Næss 1996[1968]: 108-111). One is burned, the other unburned. From the investigation it is also evident that burned female graves are more common than burned male graves. In addition, no burned male graves containing weapons occur.

Variation within the same cist

Bø, Voss municipality, Hordaland county

The *Byrkjehaugen* mound (fig. 1) was situated by Lake Vangsvatnet on the farm Bø. It was a large mound, which measured about 50 m in diameter with a height over 4.3 m (Shetelig 1912:90-103). The mound consisted of a central cairn of large blocks, covered by four layers of alternating clay and stones and a fifth layer of sand and earth. Shetelig concluded from the stratigraphy that the mound was built in one stage. Small collections of burned bones and charcoal were apparent in several places in the mound, including just above the ground level below two flagstones. He did not consider these collections to be graves, but remains from rituals performed during the construction of the mound.

The central cairn represents the core and starting point in the mound and contained what Shetelig interpreted as being the original and only grave construction: a long flagstone cist (3.7 x 1 x 1 m) with a stone paved floor. During the construction of the mound, the midpoint shifted toward north and the cist came to be situated a-centric and fairly close to the surface. This was, according to Shetelig, done in order to facilitate future burials. The cist contained three burials. The bottom grave was an inhumation, of a female, as indicated by the assemblage, and was placed on a layer of birch bark. Human bones with fragments of the skull were preserved (table 1). Over this grave, and completely covering it, was a cremation, which consisted of a 25-30 cm thick layer of coal and burned bone (table 1). With the exception of a bucket-shaped clay pot, the objects were quite burned and fragmented. Rivets and nails indicate the presents of a small boat.

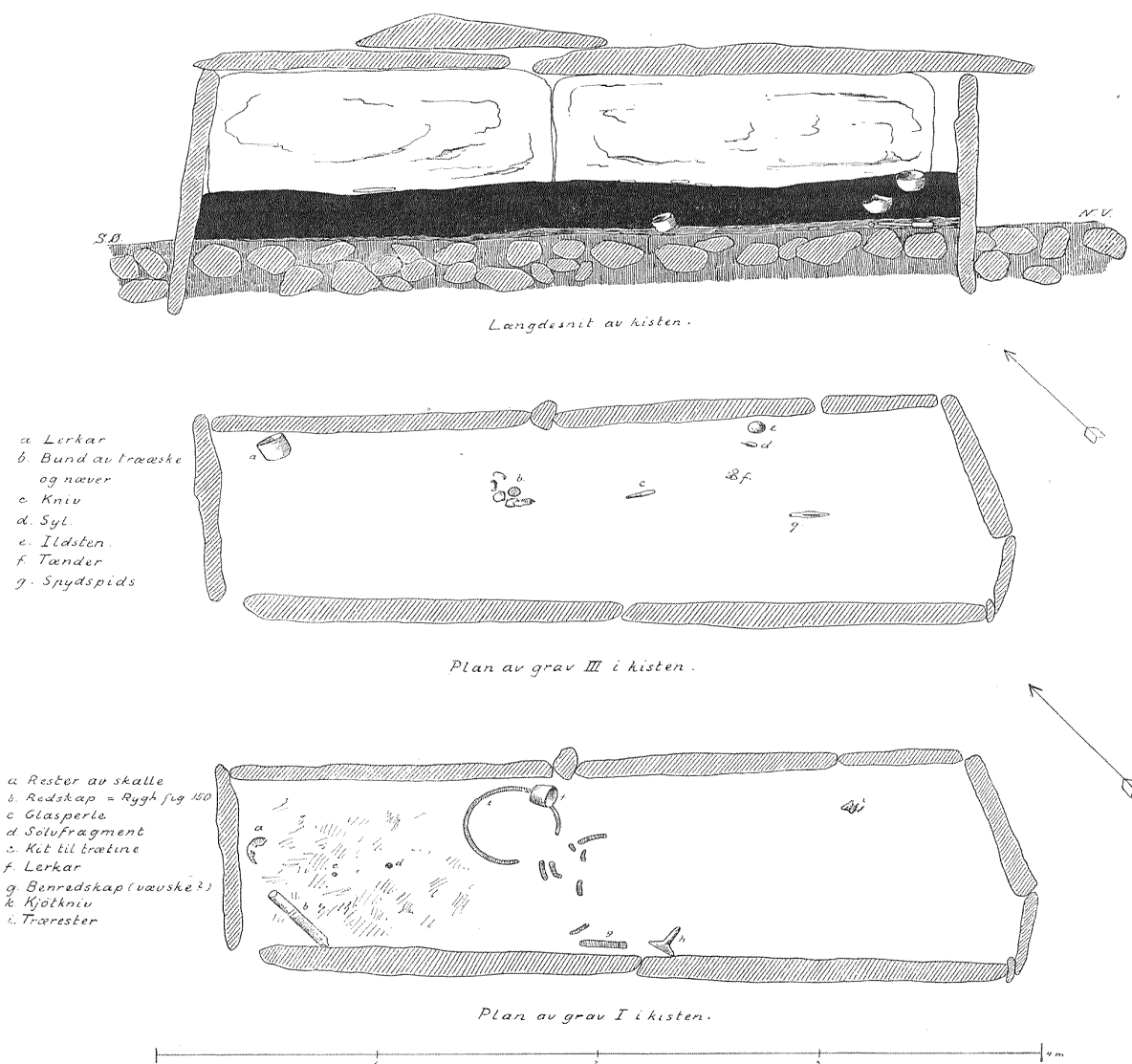


Fig. 215—217.

Figure 1. *Byrkjehaugen*, Voss municipality, Hordaland county. From Shetelig 1912, figures 215-217, p.96.

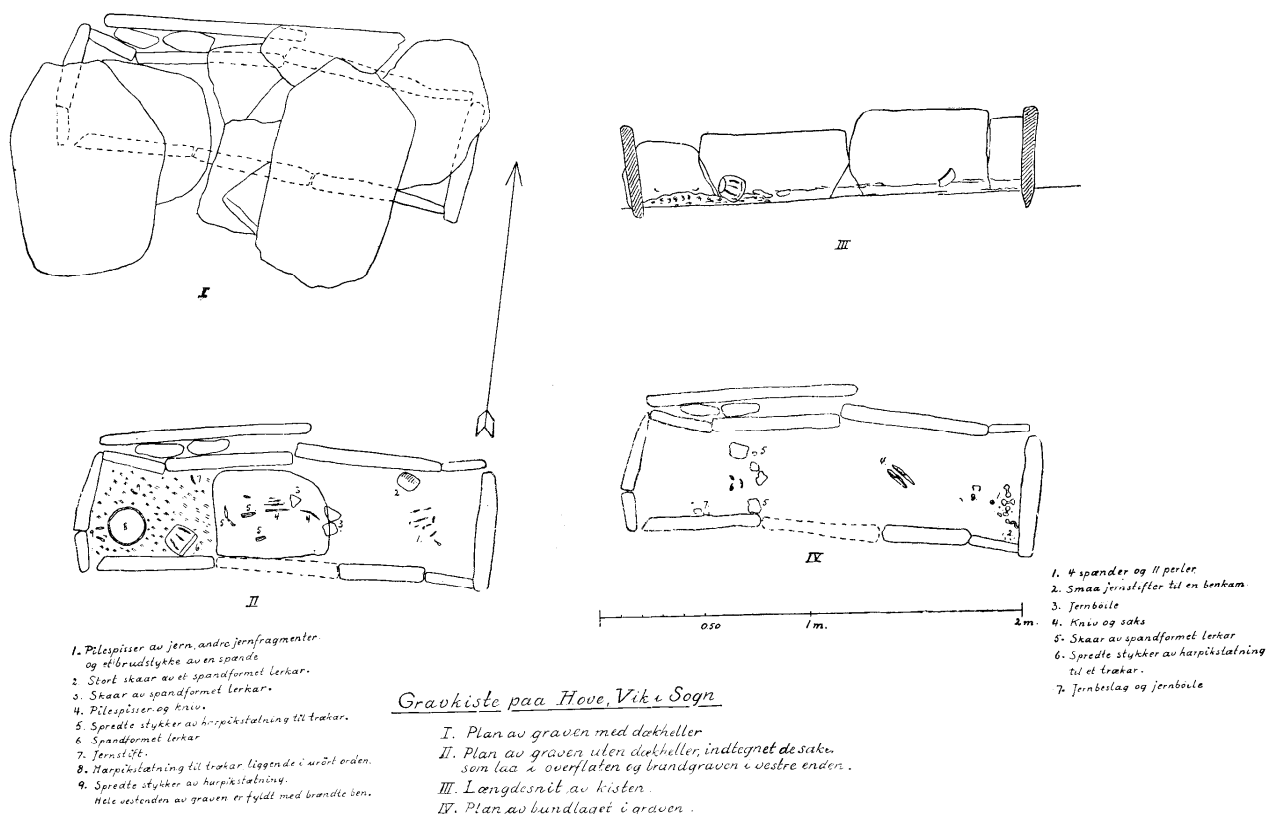


Figure 2. The cist at Hove, Vik municipality, Sogn og Fjordane county. From Shetelig 1917, plate III.

The bone determination suggests that there may have been several individuals in the grave, among them a young female (Næss 1996[1968]: 138). The top grave consisted of an inhumation of a male, based on the assemblage. Remains of teeth showed that he was placed in the opposite direction of the female in the bottom grave.

The typological relationship between the bucket-shaped clay pots in the three burials indicates that there is little difference in time between them. According to Shetelig, the individuals in the grave had belonged to the same generation, and were probably closely related in life. He compared the grave in *Byrkjehaugen* with a grave in a large mound at Kolve, also in Voss, where there was an inhumation in the bottom and a cremation on top in an acentric cist located in the mound. (see also Næss 1996[1968]: 151-152).

Hove, Vik municipality, Sogn og Fjordane county

The grave was located close to, but not covered by, a large mound with a diameter of 30 m (Shetelig 1917:15-30; Kristoffersen 2000:354). The mound constitutes one of several large mounds situated up on a high terrace on the Hove farm. The grave construction consisted of a long flagstone cist (1.8 x 0.4-0.5 x 0.4 m) (fig. 2) which

contained three burials. The bottom grave was a relatively well-equipped inhumation on a layer of birch bark, of, as indicated by the assemblage, a female (table 1)². Over the western part of the bottom grave there was an approximately 5 cm thick gravel layer, while over the eastern part was a cremation (table 1). When the cremation was placed in the cist, the inhumation had been cleared somewhat off to the side. The assemblage and the deposit of 26 bear claws suggested that there were two or more individuals in the cremation, possibly, based on the composition of objects, male and a female. The top grave in the cist consisted of an inhumation, probably a male, according to the assemblage, and probably plundered (table 1). All three burials date back to the late Migration Period and the difference in time between them was short.³

² Shetelig considered it possible that there also was a child in the burial. His assumption is based on the occurrence of two knives in the burial.

³ The conditions in the eastern part of the cist are, according to Shetelig, such that the unburned objects in the bottom and top graves cannot always be easily separated from one another.

Variation within the same mound

Lydvo, Voss municipality, Hordaland county

The *Sakrishaugen* mound was situated by Lake Vangsvatnet on the farm Lydvo. Excavated in 1988, it was then a mound of 19 m in diameter and 4.5 m in height (fig. 3), however it was originally larger (Randers 1988). It contained two cairns, one large and centrally situated and one smaller with an acentric location. The central cairn was covered by three clearly separate layers of earth and is considered by the excavator to have been built in several stages. The small cairn was covered by one layer of earth. A long cist built of huge flagstones (5.5 x 1.3 x 1.5 m) was centrally situated in the large

cairn. The cist contained an inhumation, probably plundered, with only a few objects left *in situ* (table 1).

The presence of sherds from a bucket-shaped pot dates the grave to the late Migration Period. A spinning wheel most likely suggests a female, but this was not necessarily the only individual in the cist. An older cremation, interpreted as such based on stratigraphic evidence, was situated close to the cist. The typological relationship between the bucket-shaped pots in the two graves indicates that the difference in time is short. The grave consisted of an up to 10 cm thick coal layer with a diameter of 1.7 m. The fill contained burned bones and fragmented objects (table 2). The smaller cairn was on

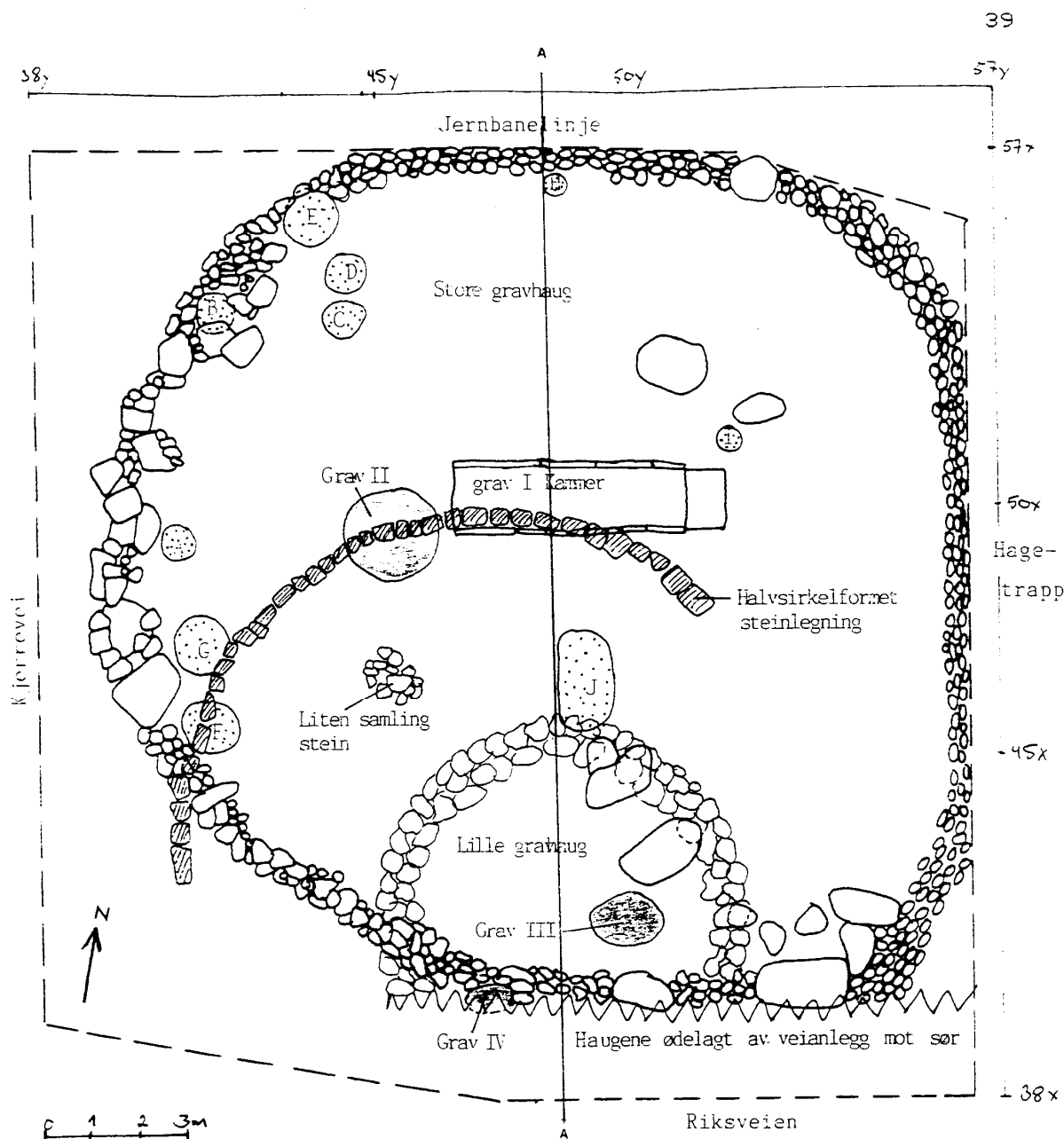


Figure 3. Ground plan from *Sakrishaugen*, Lydvo, Voss municipality, Hordaland county. From Randers 1988, fig. 3a.

the same level and towards the southern edge of the mound. It contained a Roman Period cremation in a coal layer, 10 cm thick and with a diameter of 1-1.5 m, covered by flagstones (table 2). Coals and burned bones indicate that there has been another cremation in this cairn, probably younger than the aforementioned.

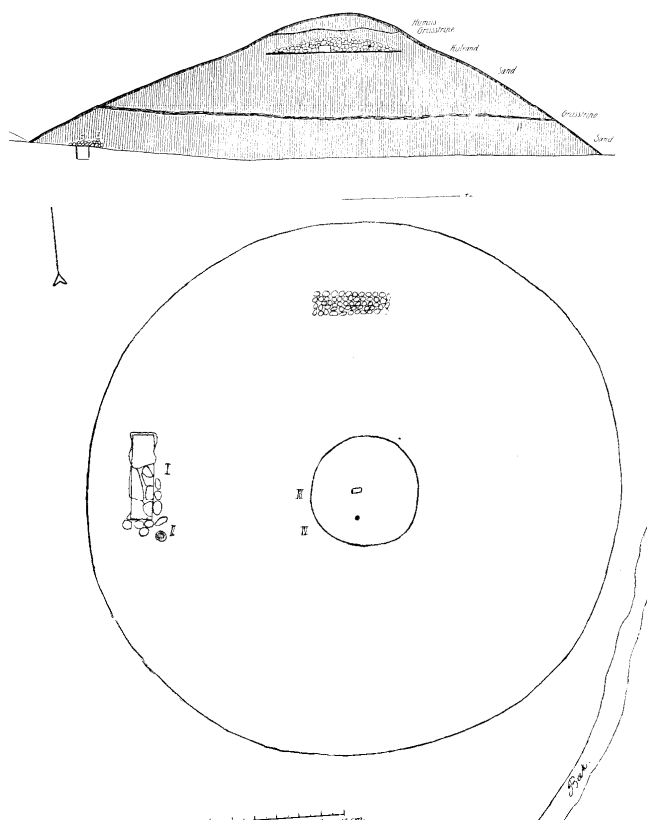
Kvåle, Sogndal municipality, Sogn og Fjordane county

This mound was situated high up on a terrace, overlooking the fjord, a few hundred meters from the Kvåle farm. It was one of the largest mounds in Sogndal, 17 m in diameter and 2.5 m in height (Ringstad 1988; Kristoffersen 2000:362-364; Kristoffersen 2001:507-513 and Kristoffersens catalogue in the accession list from Historsk museum, Bergen 1996). Excavated in 1983, the mound had a central cairn covered by several layers of earth and gravel. There were at least two graves located in the cairn. Centrally situated on ground level was a cremation located in a pit and a surrounding layer of blackened soil and coal with a diameter of 2.5-3 m. This was probably the primary and oldest burial in the mound. The assemblage indicates that the cremated individual was a male (table 2)⁴. Acentric in the mound, also on ground level and outside the coal layer, was a cist or frame construction of stone. This contained an inhumation with an exceptionally rich assemblage (table 2) on a layer of birch bark and covered by sand. Preserved bones suggested that the buried individuals were a female adult and a ten year old girl. The cist measured 4 x 1.2 m and was divided into two, with both individuals lying together in the largest section. The objects date the inhumation as well as the cremation to the early Migration Period, and there might be a short time difference between them.

Bondehaugen, Mundheim, Kvam municipality, Hordaland county

The *Bondehaugen* mound was situated on a terrace by the fjord, near houses on the Mundheim farm (de Lange 1918:1-25). At the time of the excavation the mound measured 24 m in diameter and 6 m in height, though it may originally have been larger. Situated on a natural rise, the mound fill consisted of sand and gravel and contained two cairns, one centrally situated high in the mound and one irregular and smaller acentric deposit situated on ground level. There were four graves in the mound, two in the central cairn, one in the smaller cairn and one close to this cairn (figs. 4 and 5). The central cairn contained two cremations, both with clean bones without the presence of coal. The primary one was centrally placed in the cairn, in a small flagstone chamber measuring 50 x 25-30 cm (table 2). The assemblage indicates that the cremated individual was a male (see note 4). Under the chamber was a layer of blackened earth with coal that covered the entire bottom of the cairn and stretched beyond its limits. It contained burned bone, four bear claws and pieces of a die that matched a die

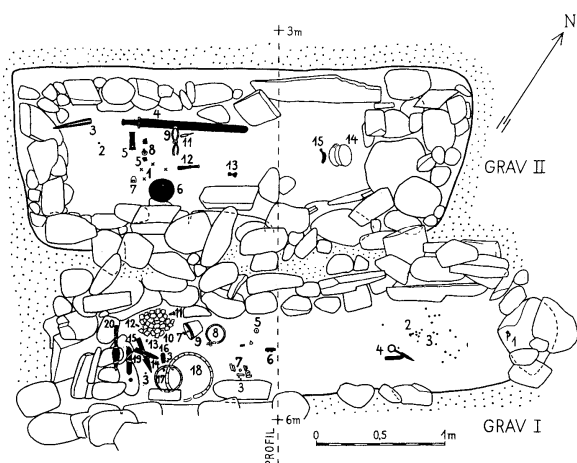
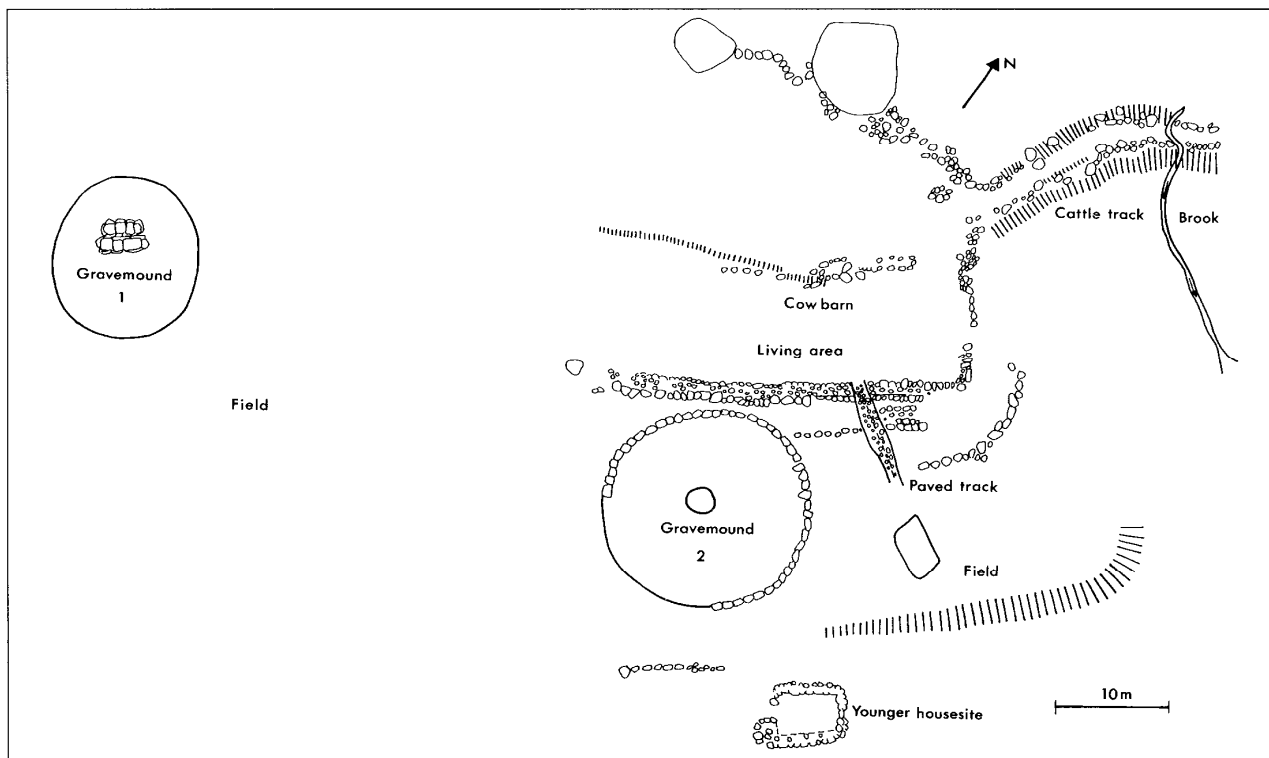
from the flagstone chamber. The layer is interpreted as a cremation patch or remains of the funeral pyre. Towards the edge of the cairn was the secondary cremation, with the bones placed in a wooden container a flagstone (table 2). The acentrically situated cairn contained an inhumation in a cist that measured 2.8 x 0.7-0.8 m. It was cut into the sterile soil below and covered by large flagstones. The deceased was placed on birch bark and covered by sand. Based on the assemblage, the buried individual was a female. A cremation was situated close to the cist but outside the irregular cairn. It consisted of clean bones without coal, placed on a flagstone without a container or cover. There were no bear claws among the bones. De Lange interpreted the inhumation to be the youngest burial in the mound and the cremation somewhat older. The four graves are all dated to the Migration Period, and he considered there to be little difference in time between them – hence the term *family grave* in the title of his paper.⁵



Figures 4 and 5. Bondehaugen, Mundheim, Kvam municipality, Hordaland county. Cross-section and layout. From de Lange 1918 figs. 1 and 3.

⁴ The burial contained no weapons, but did contain gaming pieces, which seems to occur mainly with male burials.

⁵ See also de Lange's reference to Shetelig's discussion of the graves from Døsen in Os (Shetelig 1912:121-149) and his own excavation at Nygård in Hafslo, Sogn (de Lange 1909) for similar "family graves" – at Nygård a female grave (the primary grave) and a child's grave in two flagstone cists at the base of the mound, in addition to a cremation in a clay pot (with bone pins and comb) in the top of the mound (all late Roman Period).



Figures 6 and 7. Modvo, Luster municipality, Sogn og Fjordane county. Survey of the farmyard and burial mounds with layout of the grave cists with inhumation graves. From Kristoffersen and Straume i Bakka et al. 1993, fig. 6 and fig. 40.

in front of the house site, occupying most of the farmyard (figs. 6 and 7). This mound, which is the oldest, is relatively low and measures about 20 m in diameter. It is built as a cairn with a kerb and covered by a thin layer of earth. A cremation was located in the centre of the cairn, a 2.3-2.5 m area with burned human bones (table 3) (Sellevold i Bakka et al. 1993:247). The cremation is typologically dated to the Late Roman or the Migration Period (Straume *ibid.*). The stratigraphy shows that the mound was erected during the earliest settlement phase on the farm. The younger mound, with a diameter of 12-14.5 m and a height of 0.5-1 m, was built of earth, gravel and rock. Two parallel stone cists covered with flagstones were located acentrically in the northern half of the mound. The cists contained three inhumations. Based on stratigraphy the northernmost cist constituted the primary grave consisting of a well-equipped weapon burial of a young adult, probably a male (table 3). The grave is typologically dated to the late Roman Period. The other cist contained two Migration Period burials, one male and one female. This determination was based on materials in the assemblage. The male's equipment was in disarray, something which may indicate that he represents the primary burial, and was disturbed when the female was buried.

Variation within collections of graves of the same settlement unit

Modvo, Luster municipality, Sogn og Fjordane county

The Migration Period farmstead Modvo is situated on a mountain slope overlooking the valley, in the direction of the fjord. There are two mounds on the farm site (Straume i Bakka et al. 1993:207-229; Kristoffersen i Bakka et al. 1993:201-202), one situated close to the path leading to the village, while the other is centrally placed

Identify and limit variation: which variables have been decisive in death rituals?

In the grave material of western Norway, there were no clear patterns regarding either a) corpse treatment – burned or unburned, 2) the grave property that showed general structures where there were variations on a theme, 3) the monument – mound or cairn or 4) internal construction inside the mound or cairn. The absence of clear patterns that can be connected directly to things like

gender or status is meaningful data, and in itself of great interest, as it may allow the determination of which relevant dimensions one can trace in the burial custom. By delimiting which identities and social or religious processes that *have been absent*, other structures, identities or relations can be made probable.

Cremation/inhumation does not represent different social/economic status or gender since both women and men have received the same types of corpse treatment. Double burials in the same mound may represent some kind of family relationship that is significant. Therefore the differences will not relate to various relatives or families that have different ethnic origin and religious connection. The differences in burial customs are within a superior and uniform religious understanding since the different practices can occur in one and the same grave, as at Byrkjegraven, which is most likely a family grave.

The wealth of the grave property and the size of the monuments may reflect social status, but the repertoire of objects that should be included and whether a mound or cairn should be built, not to mention whether the burial form should be cremation or inhumation, has been defined based on other terms. After eliminating gender, social status, different ethnicity and religion as possible explanations, other variables may be considered.

The cause of death may be an explanation for variations in burial customs. During the Viking Period, honourable death in war was the ideal death, while it was negative to die of disease in bed at an old age. To what extent there were similar conceptions during the Migration Period is more difficult to determine. The cause of death can also be related to various diseases or animal attacks, and last but not least death at childbirth. "Fortunate" or "unfortunate" deaths may prescribe different rituals. The rituals' roles can therefore counteract the negativity surrounding an unfortunate death.

An example from Hinduism which can shed some light on this issue is an old widow who died in her house in Katmandu, Nepal, with no sons to cremate her. This was doubly unfortunate. The ideal is to die with the legs in the holy Bagmati River; she died in her house. This is negative since it is assumed that the soul is emotionally attached to its home and be reluctant to leave the house and with that the body, which implies that the next reincarnation will be more difficult. Furthermore, it was negative that she did not have a son who could cremate her – she only had daughters, while sons are necessary in the death rituals to achieve the most perfect cremation. From a religious perspective, the deceased woman's possibilities were far from ideal, and based on normal understandings she would have an unfavourable reincarnation. Despite this, possibilities existed. Even though orthodox religions basically have a formal and authoritative view of cosmological conditions and structures, it is still possible to get around these by performing other extraordinary rituals. The family

therefore engaged a priest who carried out many long rituals that compensated for the negative circumstances. When he was done with the rituals, she was "nullified", and free from the negative cosmic encumbrances due to her dying in her home with no sons to cremate her. The cost for performing these rituals was nearly an annual salary for a poor Nepalese.

If corresponding ways of thought and processes have existed in the past, including expenses for building large burial monuments and giving expensive gifts to the deceased, then it will be expressed in variation in the rituals precisely because they are composed based on an ideal and a conception of how the "perfect" ritual should be. A parallel is found in Catholicism. The Catholic purgatory purifies the dead of sins before the person concerned can enter heaven. Everyone going to heaven must be pure and free of sin. They must be "perfect dead". This is a variant of the ideal death. If one dies free of sin, something which is impossible for Christians, then according to Catholicism one will not go through purgatory but directly to heaven. Since no one is free of sin, everyone must go through the fire, and the more sinful one has been, the longer one must burn away one's sins. This corresponds with performing various rituals in order to at any time come to the religious "zero" in the form of spiritual purity that allows the meeting with the divine. The fact that in the Middle Ages one could buy oneself out of purgatory through an act of indulgence shows the power in the idea of a "religious zero" that one must reach before one is good enough for God. The more money, the quicker the exit from purgatory; money took over for the rituals since rituals could not influence or reduce the time in purgatory. The logic is however still the same: the more money or the more rituals (which often cost money), the more one can reduce negative consequences in the hereafter, accelerate an advantageous situation and/or come to the divine starting line where the next life begins.

In Christianity, it is a requirement that one is pure before entering heaven. Corresponding purifying processes are found in Hinduism (see Oestigaard 2005). Even though, in theory, heaven functions on the "come as you are" principle, in Catholicism it is not like this in practice. Everyone can stand sinful, impure and sullied before God and ask for forgiveness, but one does not come in until one is pure. In Christianity, the rituals play a smaller role in this process. How it all happens is a bit vague and unclear, especially in Protestantism which does not have purgatory. In Hinduism, however, it is the family and the sons who purify their dead and take upon themselves their impurity as a "debt in advance" so that the deceased meets the divine world in a pure state. The sons and the whole family are therefore contaminated by death – most intensively the first 11-13 days, and the first year thereafter. Finally, the death rituals are infinite: they last the entire life. Therefore it is important to have a son who performs the rituals, because he as head of the household is the one who is ritually responsible (Oestigaard 2005).

To what extent there have been corresponding ideas during the Migration Period is difficult to express clearly, but it sheds light on structural aspects of the rituals' role and function in society and the cosmos. Furthermore, we have identified a desired function in rituals that counteracts negative consequences in an afterlife for incidents occurring in, or consequences of, this life. This differs in shape from prayer, but not in function. The words in a prayer vary based on what one has done: the goal is forgiveness. If a death ritual functions in the same way based on a "death myth", then an optimal life in a further existence is defined and recognised: the rituals are "tailored" through different ritual elements of action in the best interests of the deceased, the survivors and the gods.

Different "death myths" can prescribe various rituals and objects in the grave besides choice of corpse treatment based on criteria determined by deities in defined, qualitatively distinct and specific spheres in another dimension. If there are more kingdoms of the dead, then there are most likely also particular "entries", or in ritual terms; special rituals prescribed in order to come to the different kingdoms of the dead.

In Christianity, the rituals are, on the one hand, unnecessary, but on the other hand, fundamental for the deceased's life in the hereafter. The official doctrine imparts that whether one reaches heaven or hell depends solely upon what one has done as a human here on earth, evaluated and judged by God based on premises we have partial knowledge of, but otherwise the Lord's ways are inscrutable and we do not know what will happen. However, the same teaching has prescribed quite a few rituals that are necessary for people to come to this stage where one can be condemned, or else be rewarded with eternal life in heaven. Christianity does not differ in this respect from other religions where the rituals prepare the deceased for the meeting with the divine. Although the rituals in Christianity may seem simple, they have decisive meaning for the deceased one's further life:

1) Place: the deceased is to be buried in sacred earth in a graveyard. If one is not buried in holy ground, one does not go to heaven.

2) Burial form: Cremation was forbidden in Norway until 1898 when a law appeared allowing cremation. If one was cremated, one did not go to heaven.

3) Direction: The deceased shall lie in the coffin on their back with legs pointed towards the east and head in the direction of west so that the dead can rise upon resurrection. Today some graveyards are in fact oriented differently.

4) Resurrection: According to orthodox teaching, God needed at least the thigh bones and the skull for resurrection. Without this skeleton material, God could not incorporate the deceased into heaven, despite any

possible good deeds. The prohibition of cremation must be understood among other things based on this premises.

5) Priests and rituals: Rituals performed by priests within the church's institutionalised framework were necessary in order to enter heaven. Without baptism a baby could not go to heaven, even though it had not sinned. Christian burials without priests have been and are unthinkable.

In Christianity, the rituals were necessary so that the deceased arrived at the state where the person was condemned or rewarded for their actions. The survivors had to ensure that the deceased arrived at a place where God could take them into his countenance. If they did not do so, the deceased would go to hell no matter what or else end up in a limbo sphere independent of what good deeds they had done. Based on such a perspective, the death rituals themselves are an "initiation ritual" where the dead are prepared by the survivors for meeting with God. If the survivors do not perform these "preparations", then it does not matter what the deceased themselves have done in the way of good deeds. Through rituals, the survivors "initiate" and "present" the dead to God, so that the deceased can answer for his deeds, possibly first after a purifying process (purgatory) that makes everyone equally pure before God.

One interpretation is therefore that without the relatives' rituals, no one can reach God in order to receive their reward. Judgment and judgment day will arrive no matter what, but reward implies rituals performed by the survivors. This is a necessary condition in religion, otherwise the rituals will be unnecessary and pointless. For those who arrive in hell, the rituals have not had much meaning. Thus the role and function of the rituals in addition to peoples' place in society and the cosmos in relation to the gods can be determined: the rituals are necessary in order to ensure the most optimal life in the hereafter, but they are no guarantee. As it is stated in another connection, - they are necessary, but not sufficient prerequisites (Haaland 1991:14). In ritual terminology, humans are thus obliged to perform the rituals but the divine powers are not obligated to fulfil the mortals' wishes and goals expressed through the ritual practice.

Different existences in the hereafter should be able to prescribe various types of death rituals. Another angle of incidence can be status, not defined in economical or primary social terms, but instead religious status that legitimises social status. The role of the mistress of the house may be such a status and position and, although based on completely different premises, voves and norms will most likely have corresponding defined positions in the society that prescribed a special type of death ritual.

“Death myths”

– why are burial rituals as they are?

A ritual fulfils many aspects, from legitimising purely social hierarchies to merely having a spiritual or religious dimension (see Oestigaard 2006). The rituals have further practical functions that are important in this connection. There is a distinction between transcendental and cosmogonic religions, where the deities in the previous are independent of their own creation of cosmos and people, while in cosmogonic religions the gods are mutually dependent on people's rituals and offers. Christianity, Judaism and Islam are transcendental religions, while most of the prehistoric were cosmogonic (Trigger 2003:473). One of the functions of rituals must be understood in this context. The purpose of rituals is to influence the gods to do what we want or to attain a certain effect. Even in religions such as Christianity, prayer is a means or medium for attaining a desired goal. In other religions, fertility- and rain producing rituals in particular are active interventions by people with a clearly defined goal they wish the gods to fulfil. Rituals can produce the most important, practical results, which is one of the main reasons for performing rituals (Hocart 1954:33). If the rituals did not fulfil certain functions for people themselves, then they would be neither meaningful nor performed.

This is an aspect that to a large degree has been omitted in archaeological interpretations. If one begins with the premise that in death we are not all equal but that we shall be and that the rituals are the process that prepares the deceased for the further life, then parts of the burial customs may be understood. Variation in burial customs is an expression for different rituals having been performed according to certain objectives based on a given repertoire of ritual possibilities. Despite this, there is still a relatively large degree of homogeneity in burial customs. There are variations on a theme, which in its time must have been within a relatively strict and regulated set of rules that has prescribed what has and has not been allowed. The find amount, and not least that which is placed in the graves, is limited and represents only a small portion of that which would have been possible to give as burial gifts. The Oseberg grave is an exception, where it seems as though an entire farm is given on the boat. There are also other graves that are lavish. Otherwise, most burial rituals are performed within a superior whole which has both prescribed and limited that which has been possible to do.

It is this religious, defined code that is the “death myth” in its basic structure, where the ideal death and the ideal death ritual are prescribed. There has been a collective conception of how and why, and last but not least who can perform the various death rituals at a given time in a defined and limited place.

The “death myths” tell death's who, what, where, why and when. What should be done, by whom, the various

reasons for why there must be different rituals in order to attain the desired results both for the deceased and as a legitimisation foundation in society, and last but not least when the different ritual sequences or sub-rituals shall be performed and where: holy places define and legitimise the practices. All of these aspects cannot have been coincidental because had they been, the rituals would either not have worked or else the participants would have broken a succession of norms and taboos.

In order to understand the character of the “death myth” as a set of ritual possibilities and compositions, one can take a closer look at that which characterises myths. Myths operate on many different levels simultaneously. Mortals create their own picture of the gods: the gods are both like mortals but at the same time different. Between the gods and people there are heroes and characters that are partially divine, but at the same time human. The myths represent the truth for those who believe in the myths. Common for mythological systems is that the most important stories appear in several different versions. When myths are used in society and in religious connections, they are understood as being “true” and present: the myths describe and represent real events *here* and *now* (Leach 1969:7).

Leach once argued that “myth implies ritual, ritual implies myth, they are one and the same” (Leach 1954:13), but today most will argue that the relationship between rite and myth is more complex and that they contain qualitatively different aspects (e.g. Bell 1992, 1997, Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994, Rappaport 2001). Even so, there is a relation between rites and myths, and myths are made up of mythical themes. They are not static. These mythical themes can be arranged in such a way that they neutralise a chronological cause-effect outcome: if the son killed his mother in a myth, the mother can kill the son in another myth (O'Flaherty 1995).

A parallel to various mythical themes may be that which we see in the “death myths”, where there is variation on a theme, which has made plausible but also limited that which has been possible to perform of burial rituals: that is, ritual productions and compositions based on culturally prescribed and religion-defined rules. The actions have been part of a superior cosmologic whole that included the divine world and a further life in the hereafter. With that the death rituals can be connected to the mythology through the “death myths”.

Conclusion

The term “death myth” is an analytical conception and a manner of approaching the variations in grave material that seeks to identify which social and religious variables have been decisive for choice of burial custom. By analysing a death ritual *as a ritual* and observing its function in a cosmological context where *no one is equal*

when they die, a probable explanation is given for why variation in the performance of the rituals was necessary. A death ritual is a consciously-performed action of the survivors who wish to fulfil specific goals through the performance itself. In this connection, we have focused on the continuing life of the deceased, but the rituals have also had a function in social legitimisation for the survivors. The death rituals are just as important for the deceased as for the living (Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006).

By focusing on variation in burial customs in the same cist, within the same mound, and within a collection of graves of the same settlement unit, it has been possible to identify which identities, statuses and structures were not decisive for choice of burial custom. Since many of the examples we have discussed have been performed on the same farm and probably by the same family, neither ethnicity nor religion have been deciding factors since all the rituals have been part of a superior cosmological whole. Furthermore, social status in the form of gender has not had decisive significance since there are no clear patterns that can be related to either man or woman or one particular age group. The cause of death, however, may have been a central factor in the choice of rituals or

which ceremonial components have been combined for a complete burial ritual.

Parts of the grave goods relate to specific social and/or religion-defined roles, such as the mistress of the house, but besides these burial gifts there have been other ideas and structures that have prescribed most of the rituals that have been performed. To build a mound or a cairn may be viewed as a ritual in itself (Gansum & Oestigaard 2004). The choice of cremation or inhumation has cosmological significance. There is great variation on the inside of the mounds or cairns, among other things cist or no cist, and finally there is variation inside the cist itself, where there can be several burials. If we expect that those who performed the rituals were conscious about what they were doing and that they had different reasons for why they performed them just as they did, then they have performed and composed the rituals based on rules that have been generally accepted and legitimised through religion: "death myths". Whether or not they were specialists, the laity or family members who carried out the rituals have varied by period and location (Goldhahn & Østigård 2007).

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Table 1. Graves within the same cist

Byrkjehaugen B6227: Bottom grave	Inhumation: Iron weaving sword, beads, fragment of clasp, sherds from a bucket shaped pot, resin calking from a wooden vessel, bone items, among these a skin knife. Fragments of textiles. Human bones with fragments of the skull.
Grave in the middle section	Cremation: a layer, 25-30 cm thick, of coal and burned bone: Fragments of clasps, bronze pins and a silver ring, fragments of a leather belt with bronze belt ring and mountings and iron buckle, fragments of a comb of bone, flat bone pins, bone skin knife, spinning wheel, belt- and whet stone and bucket shaped pot. 60 small rivets and 12 iron nails, probably from a small boat. Burned bone (mixed with coal): human: several individuals, among them a young female. 14 bear claws and bones from a dog.
Top grave	Inhumation: Spearhead, firestone and a strike a light, knife, birch bark box and a bucket shaped pot. Human bones: Fragments of teeth. (fragmented find?)
Hove, B6691 Bottom grave	Inhumation: fragments of textiles, silver and bronze brooches, iron belt ring, knife, scissors, key, clay pots and wooden vessels, fragments of a casket and two bone combs. No bones preserved.
Grave in the middle section	Cremation: bone items: comb, pins, skin knife, spoon, arrow heads, bronze fragments (all burned). Bones: burned, clean bones without coals from two or more individuals. 26 bear claws (from more than one bear skin).
Top grave	Inhumation: arrowheads, buckle, iron ring and awl (strike a light?), bucket shaped pot and resin calking from a wooden vessel.

Table 2. Graves within the same mound

Sakrishaugen, Grave I (in large cist) B14491	Inhumation: spinning wheel, clasp button, sherds of bucket shaped pot (fragmented find). Human bones: 5 fragments. In addition 10 fragments of human bone just beneath the cist.
Grave II (grave below the cist) B14492	Cremation: a layer (10 cm thick, diameter 1,7m) of coal and burned bone: two bucket shaped pots, bone comb, bronze- and iron fragments. Burned bones, mixed with coals: 120g (the bones).
Grave III (grave under older cairn)	Cremation: a layer (8-10cm thick, diameter 1-1,5 m) of coal and burned bone: Fragment of bone comb, silver fibulae, sherds of clay pot, bronze- and iron fragments. Burned bones, mixed with coals: 60g (the bones).
Kvåle Grave in coal layer and pit: B13955-56	Cremation: bronze brooch, belt accessories, bucket shaped pot, handled pot, bone gaming-pieces. Burned, human bones. Bear claws.
Grave in cist: B13954	Inhumation: various silver and bronze brooches, clasps and pins, bronze spinning wheel,

	fragmented spindles, iron weaving swords, iron skin knives, various vessels of glass, clay and wood, wooden chest, a collection of tiny silver masks and different remedies, originally probably in a leather pouch: round, egg-shaped stones, mica, two small discs of glass - one with an eyelet, a ball of clay and a Stone Age adze. Human bones: Young female and a girl about 10 years.
Bondehaugen B6756 Grave in small cist of flagstones and cremation patch	Cremation: comb, dice and gaming-pieces of bone, shards of three clay vessels. Burned bones without coal mixing. Bear claws: 10.
Grave in a wooden bucket on a flagstone	Cremation: Bone pins, comb and fragments of other bone objects, shard of a bucket shaped pot. Burned, cleaned bones. Bear claw:1.
Grave on a flagstone without container	Cremation: bone pins, comb and skin knives. Burned, cleaned bones.
Grave in cist of flagstones	Inhumation: bronze brooches, silver pins, belt ring, bronze, knife and key of iron, bucket shaped pot, resin calking from a wooden vessel.

Table 3. Graves within the same settlement unit

Modvo B11432 Mound with cremation	Cremation with bones spread over a 2,3-2,5m area: shard of a clay pot and flat bone pin. Burned, cleaned human bones: 987 g: 928 human with most of the skeleton represented, probably of a young adult (25-35 years old). Burned animal bones: 59g.
B11430-31 Mound with two parallel cists of stones and flagstones	Inhumation: Weapon (sword, lance, shield boss and handle), brooch, belt buckle and belt ring, bronze, girdle stone, quartz, fragments of girdle box, wood, strike a light, knives and belt buckle, iron, clay vessel. Human bones: Fragments of teeth from an adult, 25-40 years old. Inhumation grave: Weapon: lance, spear-head, and fragments of a shield handle, iron; belt buckle, ring, mountings and strap end bronze; clay vessel. Brooches, beads of glass and amber, clay spinning whorl, knives, key and belt buckle, iron; resin for 3 wooden vessels, clay vessel.

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Chapter 13

Reproduction and Relocation of Death in Iron Age Scandinavia

Terje Gansum

ABSTRACT What is death? The answer is surely dependent upon who you ask. What death represents for the living is the most frequent asked question amongst archaeologists. What if we reversed the perspective and asked: What do the living humans represent for the dead ones? This may be an odd question to raise but if we accept that dead persons, or rather agents, interact with the living community in the Scandinavian Iron Age, or that the living society responded to such beliefs, this may have implications for our interpretation of the archaeological record. In my discussion of these matters I will explore some examples from the Icelandic sagas, and ask questions about dead agencies.

As archaeologists we trace past ways of handling and dealing with death. We also know that what people do is intimately connected to what they believe. We may, however, turn it the other way around and depart from the anticipation that belief may form material expressions, such as grave customs. I want to start a process where I take a closer look at the stories about the active dead. What kind of role or status did they have in these stories? If we anticipate that episodes in the sagas reflect commonly held beliefs, this may have archaeological consequences. Hence, my aim is to discuss ideas and issues concerning the role of the dead in Iron Age Scandinavia.

Before we continue I have to be explicit about what I mean when referring to death in this article. Since I will discuss the active dead, or dead people with agency, it is rather hard to outline definitions without taking metaphysical issues into consideration. These metaphysics are not commensurate with the methodological platform, which is based upon material culture. Thus, this may lead to paradoxical formulations due to the modern logical and the western rational way of thinking phrased in a scientific language.

I define death as a state of being, which is not defined in opposition to life. On the one hand, it is necessary to operate with a theoretical concept of death which draws upon anthropology and written sources (Bloch & Parry 1982). But on the other hand, as an archaeologist I will need a methodological and empirical definition of death that may be operational and traceable in the material culture (see Fyllingen 2003). In this way the methodological definition of death will be linked to a biological notion of death as a physical state appearing after life. At the outset this may seem to contradict the theoretical notion of death as death and not life, but that is what this article is about.

The question is whether people in the Iron Age Scandinavia believed that dead agents existed or not. We cannot know exactly what was going on in people's minds in Iron Age in Scandinavia, but let us read their stories with an open mind. It is obvious that the dead have not written the stories themselves so we will always look upon the dead from the perspective of the living. That is a challenge.

In earlier works I have argued that swords may be looked upon as bodies with their own personhood, given names and created through a ritual-technical process that may incorporate bones, both from humans and animals (Gansum 2004a, 2004b). The swords may inherit ancestral spirits through the bones used in the process of making steel. This interpretation of material culture may lead to more questions. Is this a way people relocated forces connected to death? Or are dead bodies the force of death itself in Iron Age Scandinavia? Bones, either from animals or humans, are often handled as "leftovers" from life. Maybe flesh and bones are as close as archaeologists may come to a materialised concept of death? It is from this perspective I want to look at the reproduction and relocation of death in material culture. This may broaden the possibilities and challenge old concepts of death that are common in studies of Iron Age Scandinavia.

Death may change, relocate and transform places, landscape and artefacts. Bjørnar Olsen proclaims that we need to re-emphasise the significance of the material world and look upon "things as members of collectives" (Olsen 2003:100). This may be a fruitful way to start analysing the transformation of material culture, where death has been implemented in one way or another (Andrén 2002, Gansum 2004b).

In written sources from the 12th and 13th centuries it is described that people were afraid of what the dead might do to them (see below). This may sound odd, but the dead

seemed to have some sort of agency and they were capable of acting in accordance with their own will. Seen from this perspective death is not the end of life. Death may be much more and something else. Hence, in order to understand death in ways similar to the way death was understood in the Iron Age, we have to broaden our perspectives. Death has to be dealt with in metaphors. It is a foreign place with unknown existence. What kind of pictures and associations are used to represent death? Darkness is without a doubt one of the most frequent metaphors. If we were to use this metaphor and draw upon this analogy, we may ask: Can we get to know darkness by using light? My answer is no. Instead of imposing our rational and Western thoughts of death on these descriptions, but rather trying to look at the dead as agents, we may get something out of these sources which sheds new light on both life and death in Iron Age Scandinavia.

Death, myth and agency

It is the history of the consequences, or the fore-meanings or past actions, which have important effects on the way we understand and continue conducting our lives (Gadamer 1993:267, Giddens 1993:295, see also Olsen 1991). Hence, what people believed must be of interest to me if I want to understand how they related to death. If people believed that death was something that had to be dealt with according to some schemes, rules or rituals, it will be of interest for archaeologists because these structures will influence the material record we are trying to interpret. My point of departure is that death may have agency, either as dead agents or as an ancestral force. If people acted and responded to such beliefs, they probably also organised and transformed the material world within this framework.

I will begin with one of the Norse myths, which have an interesting parallel structure. The mythological death is described in the poetic Edda. Balder, the good and wise god, was killed by his blind brother Hod. Balder's death was a tragedy and his mother Frigg sent a tenant to Hel, the goddess of death, with hope of getting Balder back. The tenant Hermod rode to Hel. It was a long way, and he kept it going for nine days and nine nights. On his way it was confirmed that Balder and his men were ahead of him. From this, we can draw the conclusion that Balder's body was complete and intact on his way to Hel. It seems that at the same time the gods in Asgard prepared Balder's cremation (Sturluson 2003:188). Odin whispered something in the ear of Balder, and gave him Draupne, his ring of gold. After some difficulties, the gods cremated Balder, his wife, and his horse. The cremation took place onboard on his ship Ringhorne, which was pushed out on the sea. Moreover, we can draw the conclusion that Balder was cremated, which is of importance and which will be discussed below.

This history has a mythological parallel structure. Balder rode to Hel, and the goddess of death was willing to return him on certain conditions. The tenant and Balder spoke and Balder gave him the gold ring Draupne, which he should return to Odin. The tenant rode home and this journey took the same amount of time as the passage to Hel. In the mythological logic Balder may return from Hel even after his body was cremated. It is also obvious that there was communication between the living and the dead. Thus, it is challenge to understand what kind of status the dead had. Let us turn to the descriptions in the sagas.

The agency of death in the Icelandic literature

If we take a closer look at the sagas, there are stories of dead creatures doing things that seem rude. The dead have to be killed again if the social order is to be reconstituted. The stories are told from the perspective of the living. We know that the living worshipped their dead forefathers in cultic praxis (Birkeli 1938, 1943, 1944). There are even archaeologists who have seen the opening of barrows as communication initiated by the living to gain power from the dead (Brøgger 1945, Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992). Now these works focus on the living world, but let us change the perspective and look upon the histories where the dead takes the active role.

Of course the stories are written by the living and we must be aware of source criticism. Christians wrote the texts some 200 years after the time they describe. Nevertheless, I will start with chapters 33 and 34 from *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*. The story is about Thorolf Halt-foot. We meet him when he and his son Arnkjell parted after a heavy discussion. Thorolf journeyed home and did not speak to anyone, but sat down in his high-seat. He sat there after the men went to bed, and in the morning, when people woke up, he was still sitting, and he was dead. The housewife sent a man to Arnkjell to tell him about the death of his father. And when Arnkjell and his men came to Kvam, the people were all full of dread, because all of Thorolf's face seemed loathsome. Arnkjell had to go behind the body and use his strengths to drag it out of the high-seat. He made a hole in the wall behind the high-seat and took the body of Thorolf out of the dwelling. They put the body on a sledge and dragged it up to Thorswaterdale. It took a lot of effort to get the dead up to the place where the body was buried (*The Story of the Ere-Dwellers* chapter 33).

As an archaeologist it is interesting to note that the burial was given rather little attention in the saga description. Arnkjell took precautions by taking his father out through the wall; this was done to prevent Thorolf from coming back through the door. People on the farm became afraid after the sun went down because they became aware that Thorolf did not lay quiet. Thorolf was walking again; or rather it was the dead Thorolf, with quite another agency and status. The language used to describe this situation

may be questioned, and analysed more thoroughly, but that is a task I can not get into here.

Now other things started to happen. The two oxen that dragged the body of Thorolf were troll-ridden, and all the cattle that came near the place where the dead Thorolf was buried went mad, and bellowed till they died. The deceased also haunted the herdsman at the farm, and one autumn night neither the herdsman nor the majority of the cattle came home. The following morning they found him dead nearby the grave of Thorolf. He was all coal-blue and every bone in him was broken, and the herdsman was subsequently buried beside Thorolf.

It is remarkable that they choose to bury the herdsman together with the body of Thorolf. Sheep and birds that came close to the grave died, and people heard deep sounds from Thorswaterdale. At night the roofs were ridden upon, and when the winter came, the dead Thorolf was seen home at the house many times, troubling his wife most. Seen from the living point of view, we should not be surprised if this was sexual harassment. She was so troubled by the deceased that she died. Again, we have to notice that she was brought up to Thorswaterdale and buried beside the body of Thorolf. If we leave the perspective of the living, and view this from the angle of dead Thorolf, he got himself a herdsman and a wife. He follows his own agenda that seems to be to conquest the valley.

“Thereafter men fled away from the homestead, and now Thorolf took to walking so wide through the dale that he laid waste all steads therein, and so great was the trouble from his walking that he slew some men, and some fled away; but all those who died were seen in his company” (The Story of the Ere-Dwellers chapter 34).

If we take a closer look at the situation we recognise that the dead agents have an agency of their own and they are in opposition to the living. In Norse mythology we hear that Odin chooses men to follow him to Valhalla. He took no precautions as to whether he let good men live or die, because his needs for warriors were of greater importance than the human society. The dead Thorolf is playing that role and strengthening his position by killing the chosen ones and scaring off the others. The human society is competing with the dead for control of the landscape.

Only Arnkjell's farm and men were not troubled by the dead. People fled the valley and called for Arnkjell to do something about the situation. The following spring Arnkjell and some of his men set out to Thorswaterdale to move Thorolf to another place. The twelve men broke in to the grave of Thorolf and found the body undecayed, and it was evil to look at. They put the dead on a sledge and when the two oxen should drag it up the hill, the oxen went mad and fled. The dead was now so heavy that he could not be moved far, so they buried the body of Thorolf in earth on top of the hill named Halt-foot's Head. A wall of stone was built to fence the mountain

head. There lay Thorolf quiet as long as Arnkjell lived, says the saga (The Story of the Ere-Dwellers chapter 34). People believed that the dead Thorolf had to be moved from the grave to a new location, and they reopened the grave. In the saga it is obvious that the grave construction was reopened several times, and it has to be understood as a dynamic ritual place (Gansum 2004c). Thorolf lay in the grave, but did not lay quiet, and the forces connected to the dead Thorolf were immanent in his body.

The other examples I want to draw upon are The Saga of Grettir the Strong (Grettir's Saga). The man Glam plays much the same role as Thorolf did in the story of the Ere-Dwellers. He reanimates and he kills people of both sexes with the same determined goal to conquer the valley (chapter 32-34). At last Grettir fights the deceased and kills him. At the end of the fight Glam casts a spell on Grettir: “And this I lay upon you, that these eyes of mine shall be ever before your vision. You will find it hard to live alone, and at last it shall drag you to death.” (Grettir's Saga chapter 35, for a similar evil see Landnåmsboken 1997:109-110, chapter 180). In the other saga, the eyes of Thorolf were also feared. Why do we always close the eyes of the dead? Is this a referent to a necrophobic motif (Birkeli 1944:184)?

The two stories are parallel in many aspects. This does not mean that they support each other as independent sources, but rather that the concept of the acting dead and the consequences of their actions were recognised. There are also stories where men go into grave barrows and opens chambers where they fight dead men (Grettir's Saga chapter 18). The dead have to be physically parted and in that sense killed again (Soga om Egil Einhendte og Ásmund Berserksbane 1989:34, Chapter 7). We may ask; what kinds of ontological status do the killed dead have? In archaeological literature there is documentation of bodies that have been exposed to so much violence that it is obvious that they have been ritually killed several times (Fyllingen 2003).

Discussion on the reproduction and relocation of death

In our language “corpses” do act, and we have to understand their agenda. They conquer and establish a regime led by themselves. The dead male does things to the living female that causes her death, and they are buried together. Seen from the living point of view it is awful, but seen from the point of view of death, he gets himself sexual satisfaction and in a short time he is rewarded with a wife. His powers grow as he gets more men. The dead community grows. It is a totally deserted landscape, but what is sound logic in the world of the living is not logical in the same way in the world of the dead. We face some of the same difficulties as we did with the death of Balder. The mythical parallel existence may explain the fact that dead may die again. This is recognised in Norse mythology where we are told that

people that came to Hel may also die. Odin woke up an old giantess, a volve, east of the door to Hel (Vegtamskvadet versus 4), and the giant Vavtrudne says that the dead from Hel goes to Niflhels deep (Vavtrudnesmål versus 43). There are several levels of death whereas Niflhel and the beach called Næstranda can be named. Hence, we may open our minds to more differentiated concepts of deaths in the Iron Age Scandinavia.

As an archaeologist I will depart from the corpse, i.e. from the material world. It is as dead as it gets in our physical view, but people may have experienced it in other ways and therefore acted upon beliefs, taking precautions from the acting forces. Corpses may be treated in many ritual ways (Kaliff & Oestigaard 2004). As archaeologists we seek explanations that support our own framework where dead and living are separate categories, and graves may be seen as a mirror of the living society. But what if we were wrong? Do death rituals tell us something about a new ontological position of the dead? What kind of connotation does the death society have to the concept we name grave field? Do we seek such questions? Do the graves tell us about the living and the precautions they took handling deaths? Removed bodies may tell a story of fear, but it may also be incorporated in the ontology of death and the differentiated statuses the dead may reflect in the archaeological record.

I think we ought to reconsider the many locations and relocations that are possible if the body was fragmented, either by cremation or partition. Cremation and inhumation are both practises dealing with corpses in Iron Age Scandinavia. Cut-marks are found on skeletal remains from cremated bones, and we have to consider parting of the corpse as a frequent practise (Holck 1987, Stylegar 1997, Oestigaard 2000, 2004). In Iron Age graves containing cremated bones there are approximately 2-300 grams of cremated bones, which is circa 10% of a cremated human body (Sigvallius 1994). I have reasons to believe that most of the bones never ended up in the constructions the archaeologists name graves (Gansum 2004c). The cremations seldom took place at the same spot where the constructions with bone deposits were erected. We can not be sure that the entire body was cremated, although it is possible. Burnt human bones are found in many different contexts and have given archaeologists difficulty with the traditional concept of grave (Hufthammer 1994:2, Johnson 1995:30-31). The mental picture of the body as something whole and holy may only mirror our Christian conception and may be totally anachronistic.

Many inhumations are not displaced after they were put into the ground, but there are examples of displacement and relocation of bones from inhumations (Krogh 1993, Stutz 2003). Often this documentation is interpreted as robbery or disturbance (Brendalsmo & Røthe 1992, Myhre 1994, Andersson 1997). I am not convinced by

these interpretations and have argued for alternatives; the mounds might be the location where the journey in the underworld took place and where the ritual communication depended on several openings (Gansum 2004c: 178-202). If we are allowed to think along these lines, new material culture studies may be operational and very relevant. Places may be changed, loaded or opened or closed to the living, or the flesh and the bones may be used for different purposes in death rituals (Andrén 2002, Oestigaard 2004).

The use of bones in transformation processes may also totally change the view on the material culture (Gansum 2004a). In excavations reports there are sometimes documented close relations between graves and smelting (Appelgren & Broberg 1998). There are graves inside furnaces that indicate a close connection (Appelgren & Broberg 1998:34-35). Birth and rebirth, death and fertility are discussed in the anthropological literature (Bloch, M. & Parry, J. 1989, Barndon 2001, 2004, Haaland 2004). The relation between iron and earth is also noticed in the literature (Burström 1990), but seldom treated in a symbolic perspective (Hjartner-Holdar 1993, Nørbach 1997, Englund 2002, Lyngstrøm 2002). The fact is that sometimes the production of iron was situated at cemeteries. If we consider bones as a material or vehicle for death, we may consider the smiths' ritual labour at the cemetery as a way of giving the artefacts the agency of death, far beyond life. Death was incorporated through bones. This may add to our understanding of the smith as having a liminal position in society. In the Norse mythology the dwarves gave artefacts souls and an agency of their own. If we view the production of steel in this perspective we may be able to understand why swords and other material entities had names (Gansum 2004b). In this sense, the "defence of things as members of collectives" that Olsen asked for (2003:100), is already there. Death agencies may be marked or strengthened by collective ornaments that interconnect death, objects and life in a social context.

Concluding remarks

I am aware of the fact that in early Christianity there were descriptions on how to prevent dead people returning to the living. Many of these conceptions are possible to find in the Icelandic sagas. It is also true that these concepts may have intervened with the Norse mythology long before the Christianisation of Scandinavia. Items, such as pieces of Jesus' cross, have played an important role as vehicle for death in the Christian world. In this short article I have tried out some thoughts on the ontology of death in Iron Age Scandinavia. I am certain that it will be met with sound criticism. My critique to archaeologists is that we have to be more specific when we put ourselves in the position of the living dealing with the dead. Death revalues and transforms material culture and changes the living human's minds. Excavating the mind is of utmost importance.

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Chapter 14

A Road for the Viking's Soul

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ABSTRACT The Viking Age bridge is a well-known ancient monument type in Sweden which for many years has been seen as an element in the process of building infrastructure in an emerging middle-age kingdom. In this article it is argued that the building of Viking Age bridges was a part of a religious ritual. The focus is on the connection between Viking Age grave fields, bridges and rune stones. The bridges can be seen as expressions for a religious need to materialise the death and the journey of the soul.

What did the Christian Viking think about what happened to his soul after death? How did he ensure that he would manage to get to paradise?

His pagan forefathers had no doubts. They were often buried together with a number of items that could help them to – and on – the other side. But the Christian may only have had a small personal item. Somebody, or something, had to help him. It was a time when heathen beliefs were still in use and known among people, and the Viking may not have been convinced that he did not have to take some measurements to ensure his place in paradise after death. Perhaps he made the preparations himself when he was still alive. If he didn't, his relatives could help him and his soul after his death.

Many of the rituals that were conducted in connection with death and burials will probably be hidden from us forever. On the other hand, there were rituals and habits that we can actually trace. There are numerous analyses and studies that are based on grave goods and the symbolic and practical meaning of them.

Another common category of analysis is the different shapes of the graves. For example, under the influence of the Christian religion graves became much less elaborate. They became comparatively simple pits dug in the ground, and the gifts that followed the deceased were sparse.

There is, however, another phenomenon that has not attracted much attention as a ritual or gift in connection with the dead and burials: the Viking Age bridge. There are numerous studies of bridges, and only a few of them observe and emphasise the sacred aspects of the bridges. The arguments for this focuses on the rune stones that are connected with the bridges, and also sometimes on ritual deposits which mainly consist of weapons (Lund 2005). Some authors have also pointed out that the bridge is a connection that leads you from one side to another, often in a liminal place. Very rarely has anyone connected the

actual bridge to the rituals of the burials. In this paper I will argue that the bridges are built for only – or mainly – one reason, namely for helping the Viking's soul to the other side.

Bridges, graves and rune stones - Some examples

Viking Age bridges are actually fords strengthened and improved by pavements, and they represent a certain amount of labour. Sometimes there is one or more rune stones beside the bridge, and sometimes, although not very often, we can also observe a grave mound or a grave field in close proximity to one side the bridge. Very few of these bridges have been archaeologically excavated. The one that is excavated and described by Camilla Grön in this volume is one of few examples. Furthermore, this excavation was also one of very few where the area surrounding the pavement was excavated. Another recent excavation, undertaken some 500 meters north of this example, revealed Viking Age graves close to the site of a former bridge (Andersson 1999).

The landscape of Uppland has a little more than 1000 known rune stones. About 75 of these have inscriptions which mention bridges. One has to say that many of them are no longer situated in their original places; rather they have been removed to other places like the church, the farm or have been used for other purposes. It is also worth mentioning that there surely are a lot more rune stones that have the function of marking a bridge. It is a very common pattern that the rune stones are situated close to a marsh land or a stream, where there very well could have been a bridge. In spite of the fact the inscriptions on many of these do not mention the word "bridge" you can draw the conclusion that they have the purpose of marking a bridge.

The inscriptions inform us that they are almost always produced in memory of somebody deceased, and erected

by someone who was closely related to the deceased's members of the family. These individuals are almost always within the nuclear family, namely son, daughter, mother, father, husband, wife. Very rarely has somebody else performed this act.

The rune stone and the bridge are both dedicated to the deceased. I will give you some examples of what the inscription of the rune stones can tell us:

One example is the stone that was erected at the site mentioned above, excavated by the county museum:

Ingifastr and Eysteinn and Sveinn had these stones raised in memory of Eysteinn, their father, and made this bridge and this mound. (U 135) (Fig.1).



Figure 1. The runestone nr U 135 with the inscription: *Ingifastr and Eysteinn and Sveinn had these stones raised in memory of Eysteinn, their father, and made this bridge and this mound.* Photo Bengt A. Lundberg, Riksantikvarieämbetet.

The mound that is mentioned has been gone for hundreds of years, but there is a possibility that it once covered the now excavated graves.

The most famous construction of this kind is probably the Jarlabanke Bridge in central Täby. As can be seen in the photo (Fig. 2) there is a road and rune stones. The road has been restored, but its origin lies in the Viking Age.

And what do the rune inscriptions tell us?

Jarlabanki had these stones raised in memory of himself while alive, and made this bridge for his spirit, and (he) alone owned all of Tábýr. May God help his spirit. (U 164)

This inscription is a sort of exception because it tells us that he made it for himself and was still alive while producing the monument.

There are also other examples:

Fastbjörn and Þórunnr had ... erected ... the bridge made in memory of Ingifastr, their husbandman. May God help his spirit. Ásmundr carved the runes. (U 859)

Þjalfi made the bridge in memory of Bolla(?), his daughter. Áli/Alli and Óleifr had (this) cut in memory of Þjalfi, their father; Inga in memory of her husband. May God relieve their souls. (U 867)

Þorsteinn and Vígi had this bridge made for Ózurr's spirit, their kinsman-by-marriage. This is now said for his soul: may God help. Ásbjörn made.(?) (U 947)

Finnviðr raised this stone in memory of his brother Þórðr, Þjalfi's son. May God and God's mother help his spirit. He made the bridge in memory of his brother and (so did) Ása, their mother. (U 200)

... raised ... in memory of Sveinn/Steinn, his son, and made the bridge for his soul. (He) ordered (it) to stand here ... (U 327)

... raised this stone in memory of Ormr, son ... in memory of himself and had this bridge made for their spirit and soul ... this memento ... in memory of... (U 345)

Gullaug(?) had the bridge made for the spirit of Gillaug, her daughter, and whom Ulfr owned (i.e. was married to). Æpir carved. (U 489)

As we can well understand they are all Christian, and they do emphasise this fact. Almost every single rune stone has a Christian cross or crucifix modelled in different types. About 25% of the inscriptions mention the name of God. And in connection with his name they always say a prayer "... may God help..."

The inscriptions also tell us something of their erectors' conception of death. As good Christians, they were convinced that the individual has a soul and spirit that in some way would get to paradise.



Figure 2. The Jarlabanke Bridge that Jarlabanke made for his spirit. Photo Bengt A. Lundberg, Riksantikvarieämbetet.

Discussion

Sometimes the inscriptions say that the bridge was built in memory of somebody. But quite often they say that they made the bridge for the soul of the deceased.

So why does the soul need a bridge or a road? Why was a bridge literally constructed for the soul? There is an element in some religions in which a bridge is necessary for managing to get to the other side in the afterlife. Concerning the Nordic heathen religion Camilla Grön in this volume mentions “Bifrost”. There is also another bridge called “Gjallarbro” in the world of the deceased. However – as far as I can see, and at least in the Bible – there is no conception of a bridge in the Christian religion, even though it is clear that according to Christianity the soul has to travel a very troublesome journey. Many hundreds of years later, according to some literary sources, it is said that it is considered a good Christian deed to build bridges and roads and that the person or landowner who did that will be rewarded in heaven (Holmbäck & Wessén, 1979:235). But that was stated in quite another historical context and is definitely not the same as the need of a bridge for the soul.

Therefore I would regard the two phenomena, the building of a bridge during the Viking Age, and the mentioning of a Christian deed, as expressions of two different cultural traditions.

Some facts and conclusions

Some of the known bridges have visible grave mounds and stone settings close to them. Furthermore; in two examples of scientifically excavated bridges and their close surroundings, where there were no visible graves before the excavation, we have been able to verify Viking Age graves. This can lead to the reasonable hypothesis that all Viking Age bridges of this character are closely connected to Viking Age burials.

We can see a connection between the paved construction, the graves at the grave field and the rune stones with their very explicit formulations. The inscriptions tell us clearly that the bridge was made for the soul of a deceased person whose name we also know.

The solid construction of a bridge can well be interpreted as a symbolic construction. The context can indicate that the work itself was a ritual and the purpose was sacral. A bridge can also be interpreted as an expression of a mix between the old heathen thoughts of a bridge and the Christian thought of the journey of the soul.

The tradition of burying the deceased with a certain amount of grave goods was a heathen tradition. This behaviour was however more or less out of fashion when Christianity became the one and only permitted religion. So one may have to elaborate another way to materialise and ease the journey of the soul. The bridge materialised

the way to the other side and made the concept of a soul's journey comprehensible and visible.

Therefore, one interpretation that seems most likely is that the building of bridges was not only carried out because the living persons needed a bridge for practical reasons in their daily life. It was not only a construction for transportation for the Viking Age farmer or the warrior's horse. It was made primarily for one reason, namely exactly what the formulation in the rune inscription says. They made it for his soul, and may god help him. To the other side, on his way to paradise!

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Chapter 15

A Road to the Other Side

Camilla Grön

ABSTRACT An excavation of a Viking Age road/bridge which was situated next to a Viking Age grave-field aroused many questions concerning roads, bridges, graves and phenomena connected to their role and significance for the people who actually used them and the grave-field. Based on a combination of different sources such as rune-stones, Norse mythology and excavation data, this article deals with the road and the bridge and its role as a means of transport to afterlife.

In 2004 the author had had the opportunity to excavate a bridge lane in Broby, Täby parish Upland, Sweden. Broby is situated about 25 km north of Stockholm in an area with a great deal of ancient, mostly Iron Age, monuments.

The excavation revealed that the bridge was about 36 m long and 2 to 5 m wide, widest on its southern part. It was entirely built of stones, even if some stones were placed upon a kind of organic material that *could* be twigs or wood chips, probably in order to protect the stones from sinking into the muddier areas. Smaller stones and stone material were used as filling to level out the surface of the bridge, making it even and thus easier to walk on. The edges were marked with larger stones or boulders every 1,6 meters, possibly just for aesthetic reasons – a specific detail that makes this bridge more or less a look-a-like to the well known Jarlabanke bridge in Central Täby, about 2 km northeast of Broby (figs. 1 and 2). As we can see in fig. 2, the Jarlabanke Bridge had both rune stones at the ends as well as upright stones or boulders built into the stone rows at the edges. The construction details and the typology dated the excavated bridge lane in Broby to the Viking Age, about 700-1050 AD (Grön 2005:12pp).

One special detail is yet to be mentioned: a foundation for a rune stone. It showed similarities to a large paved posthole in size, although it had no depth (fig.1). During excavation much effort was made to find a rune stone, or pieces of one, unfortunately with negative result.

However, two pieces of rune stones originating from two different stones have been found some 400 meters north of the excavated bridge in the old village of Broby (today's Broby Gård). At least one was used as a brick in an old cellar wall. (A third fragment was in fact found in Broby Gård in the early 19th century but unfortunately that piece is missing today) (Budtz 1992:161). We know, and we have come across several examples of this throughout the years, that rune stones have often been moved from their original places, especially in the early Middle Ages. Sometimes the rune stones were raised in a

new place by the church, but often they were used as building material, not only in churches but also in secular buildings. The shape of a rune stone is often oval or rectangular which makes it suitable for building material. Since they are only fragments of (two different) rune stones, the runic texts are also fragmentary. Neither do the fragments give any information whatsoever about the place where they once had been raised, nor are the words "bridge" or "road" to be read on any of them. Not even the almost classical rune stone phrase "NN raised the stone after NN" is to be found on either of them (for examples of rune stone inscriptions, see Åke Johansson's article). Nevertheless, I have suggested in other contexts that one or possibly both of these rune stone fragments found in Broby Gård may have been raised near the bridge that we excavated (Grön 2005: 16).

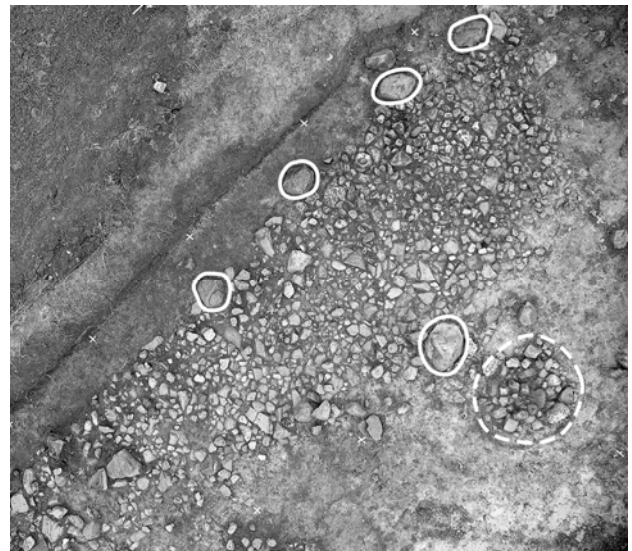


Fig. 1. Photo of the bridge. The contours of the boulders are marked with lines while the fundament for the rune stone is marked with a broken line. Photo. C. Grön.

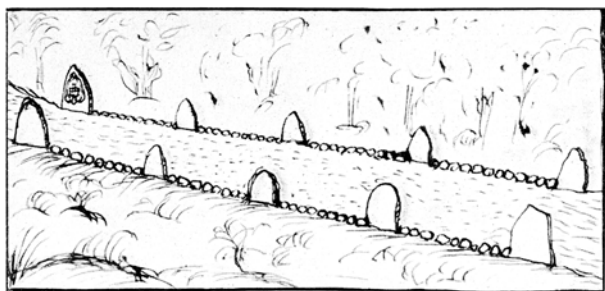


Fig. 2. A drawing of the Jarlabanke Bridge made by Peringsköld around 1700. Note the upright stones or boulders.

The burial ground

Now, where does the bridge lead? Well, to a burial ground which consists of 17 graves, most of them rectangular stone settings oriented in an east-west direction and containing skeleton burials. The grave gifts were few, if any; in most cases limited to a knife and/or a small piece of pottery. The burial ground was excavated simultaneously with the bridge lane. The graves were dated by their appearance, content, shape, form and C¹⁴-datings to the Viking Age and early Middle Age, that is to about 700-1100 AD. The same criteria have led us to identify some of the graves as, if not “pure” Christian graves, graves influenced by Christian ideas. The burial ground belongs to the transitional period between the pre-Christian and Christian era (Grön & Sundberg 2005).

Other bridge-lanes, bridges and pavings

There are several Iron age roads, bridges, bridge lanes and pavings in the area around Broby, especially around the Vallentuna lake. In figure 3 each number represents a bridge lane or bridge (no. 1 is Broby). Most of them haven’t been excavated but we know they indicate a bridge or a road from the rune stones that were raised beside them. Most of the rune stones bear the inscription: “...made this bridge” (the author’s translation), which is an unambiguous evidence of some kind of bridge or paving. The area is a kind of “land of rune stones” or “land of bridges”.

One of the bridges which have actually been excavated is Gullbro (no. 5 on the map, fig. 3). The excavation revealed two phases, of which the last one was dated to the Viking Age (Shierbeck 1995:14). Another, partly excavated bridge is the aforementioned Jarlabankebro (no. 6) where several minor excavations have been carried out throughout the years. This bridge has also been dated to the Viking Age, specifically to the 11th century (Andersson & Boje-Backe 1999:35). A third excavation that must be mentioned in this context took place in the immediate vicinity of Broby Bridge (no. 7 on

fig. 3). Next to the river Karby ån, along the road Frestavägen, there were three rune stones that mention both a bridge and a mound. The rune stones were moved in modern times to a safer place close by, due to concern over the effects of heavy traffic. The excavation revealed three skeleton graves dated to the Viking Age (about 1000 AD) and nine postholes. No clear traces of a former bridge were found, although some of the postholes *could* be remains of the bridge that the rune stones indicate (Andersson & Boje-Backe 1999: 1, 28).

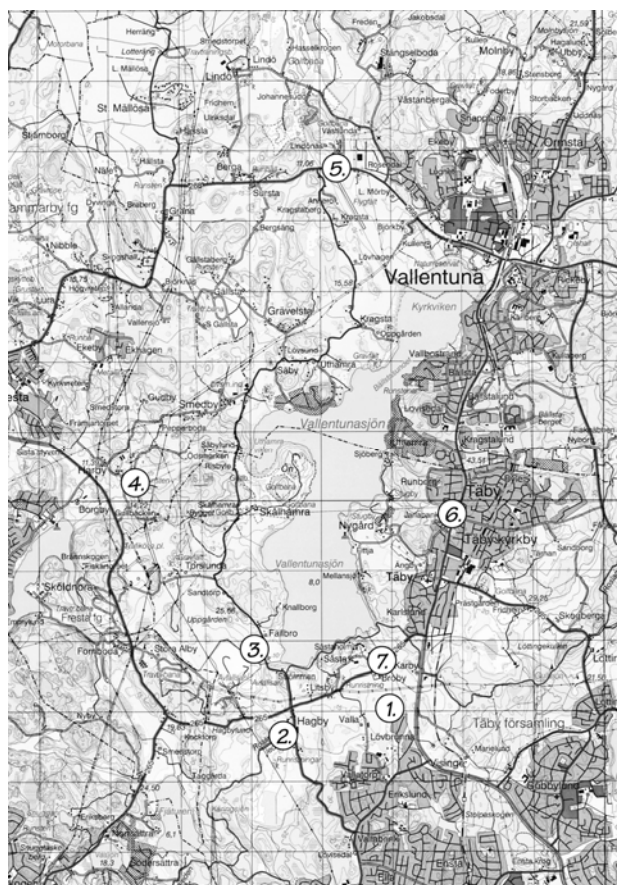


Fig. 3. Map with numbers of known bridges, bridge lanes or pavings around the Vallentuna lake. 1. Broby, excavated by the author. 2 Hagby. 3 Fällbro. 4 Harby. 5 Gullbron. 6 Jarlabankebro. 7 Broby.

Discussion

If we take a closer look at the bridges we will find that some of them are situated rather close to a burial ground or groups of graves. This is valid not only in the area around the Vallentuna Lake, there are examples from other parts of Uppland as well as other parts of Sweden. Graves and grave fields (from different times in our pre-history) are rather often situated close to roads, crossroads and bridges (see Rudebeck 2002). In several



Fig. 4. Clearing the bridge on an early autumn morning. Photo: C. Grön.

cases they seem to lead from the village or settlement to the burial ground – like the two bridges in Broby (nos. 1 and 7, fig. 3). Sometimes they lead from one burial ground to another, or from a burial ground to a group of graves – like Fällbro (no. 3, fig 3). A relationship seems to exist between the bridge and the grave or the burial ground. Even if the majority of the grave groups and fields have not been archaeologically excavated, we have solid reasons to believe that they have been in use during the same period as the bridge lane. The exteriors of the graves visible above ground and the ornaments on the rune stones indicate that they are contemporary.

The bridge lane was, of course, of great importance for transporting goods, cattle/livestock, people or anything else that had to go from one side of the bridge to the other. But what if it served a further, a more non-pragmatic purpose? The phenomena graves and roads/bridges have (naturally) been connected with travelling, from this life to afterlife, and the liminal phase in which the deceased is neither part of life nor afterlife (Rudebeck 2002:191). What if it was important that the deceased *literally* had to cross a bridge on their way from this life to afterlife as a part of the burial act?

Norse mythology tells us about *Bifrost* – a bridge made of fire that can be seen on the sky as the rainbow in daytime and as the Milky Way in night time. It leads from earth to Asgård, home of the gods and the actual place for the afterlife. Some sources refer to it as the bridge to *Hel* – the place reserved for the dead. Please note that *Hel* is not to be confounded with *hell*, the dwelling of the devil (Näsström 2001:32, 342; Thunmark-Nyhlén 1981:20).

The journey to the afterlife, as we know it from the Norse mythology and literature, is often described as dangerous and troublesome. It is possible, indeed plausible, that the journey was performed as a drama during the burial act in order to help the dead to the other side. The bridge used could be a real bridge or just a symbolic one, for example a thread over a stream (Nordberg 2003:82-84).

Most of the rune stones are considered to be Christian monuments, raised by early Christians (Gräslund 1996). A great number of the known rune stones bear the inscription “...NN raised the stone and made the bridge” (author’s translation, see also Åke Johansson, this volume). In my opinion it seems logical: if a rune stone is considered to be a Christian monument, the acts

described upon it – both raising a stone and making a bridge – must have some kind of Christian meaning, albeit with a pre-Christian origin.

Later on, even the early medieval church took interest in roads and bridges. The church encouraged the people to build, restore and repair bridges and roads, and considered this a holy act that pleased God. The purpose was to make it easier for the peasants and common people to get to church for their spiritual nourishment (Andersson & Boje-Backe 1999:34; Gräslund 1996:33).

By going to church, believing in God and paying taxes the good parishioner could make sure he was going to

paradise when his time came. Finally, it became a part of the indulgence.

Building a bridge was a costly project that required great resources of time and manpower. The time, effort and resources that were invested in building and maintaining a bridge bear witness of its importance, an importance that reached beyond life on earth. Norse mythology has it that the bridge literally led to afterlife.

Considering all these facts the bridge would consequently have an important function as a means for a safe journey and a proper arrival to afterlife. By crossing the bridge the surviving relatives made sure that the ancestor made it to the other side (fig. 4).

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Chapter 16

Stones and Bones: The Myth of Ymer and Mortuary Practises with an Example from the Migration Period in Uppland, Central Sweden.

Christina Lindgren

ABSTRACT Mortuary practises are an effective way of transforming meaning between the dead and material culture. One example is the use of large amounts of quartz debris found in stone settings from the Migration Period site at Lilla Sylta, north of Stockholm. The active use of quartz is seen as a metaphor for the cremated bones of a body, and it may not be just any body.

‘The fields have eyes, and the woods have ears.’
G. Chaucer. *Canterbury Tales*

In 2003 and 2004 the Department of Archaeological excavations, National Heritage Board UV Mitt, Sweden, excavated a gravefield from Migration Period at Sylta, Fresta parish in Uppland (Svensson & Andersson 2005). This gravefield has many of the characteristics of other Iron Age gravefields in central Sweden. The most common burial practice in eastern middle Sweden during the Iron Age is cremation. The cremated and crushed bones are usually placed in a container or a cremation layer. The cremated bones are then covered by a stone setting which can have many shapes. However, one thing that was found at Sylta was not that common, namely that several of the graves also included large amounts of crushed quartz. Quartz has been found previously in some Iron Age grave contexts. In some cases crushed quartz was found among the filling of stone settings. This particular custom of putting quartz in or on top of graves has been explained in many different ways over the years.

First there is the more common explanation that the quartz is not associated with the graves at all. Instead, it belongs to a Stone Age site underneath the graves. Quartz is the predominant raw material at Stone Age sites in this region of Sweden, and in several cases it is probably true that there is an unknown Stone Age site underneath the site in question (cf ex Baudou 1962, Blomqvist & Åhman 1998). Then there are the second and the third explanations that both put the quartz in the same context as the grave. These are either that the quartz belongs to the grave and is part of ritual beliefs (Runcis 1996), or that the white quartz has been used to cover the graves, giving them a spectacular look, all white and shimmering.

In the case of the Sylta gravefield I will suggest a slightly different explanation of why the quartz was put in graves, an explanation that is based on ideas of the materiality of both stones and bones. This concerns both the mortuary practices and the idea of the human body and how it can have different representations.

The Sylta area - a man made landscape

The gravefield at Lilla Sylta is a most common gravefield from the Migration Period in the region. It consists of some 50 stone settings, mainly rounded with a few triangular and square stone settings (Figs. 1-2). Cremation was the dominant burial practice. Along with the cremated and crushed bones there were also glass beads, clasp buttons, dress pins and bone combs (Fig. 3). The burial practice, the grave goods and the grave monuments looked nothing but ordinary.

The landscape around Sylta is typical for the region, with several higher hills with forest and lower arable areas, here facing down to the lake Fjätören in the south (Fig. 2). At Sylta four neighbouring hills were all used during the Migration Period (Fig. 4). One of them contained the above mentioned gravefield, another hill 250 m to the east had a single stone setting with clasp buttons (Holback 2005), the third hill was used for three large chamber tombs with finds of game pieces, glass and other prestige objects (Victor et al 2005). The fourth hill just close to the hill with the gravefield was used for a major farm, Kocktorp, dating to the Roman and Migration Period. This farm was of high status with a large hall building, terraced houses, and what probably was a founder's grave with many rich objects such as dress pins, clasp buttons, and silver (Edenmo et al 2005).

The first traces of human presence at Sylta can be confirmed by radiocarbon dates from the Late Bronze Age. During the Pre-Roman and Roman period there was a minor farm situated in the lowland just adjacent to the gravefield and the high status farm (Pettersson & Eklund et al). However, by 200 AD things began to happen and someone, probably the family who lived at Kocktorp, started to build more impressive monuments on the nearby hills, thus creating an almost scenic landscape.

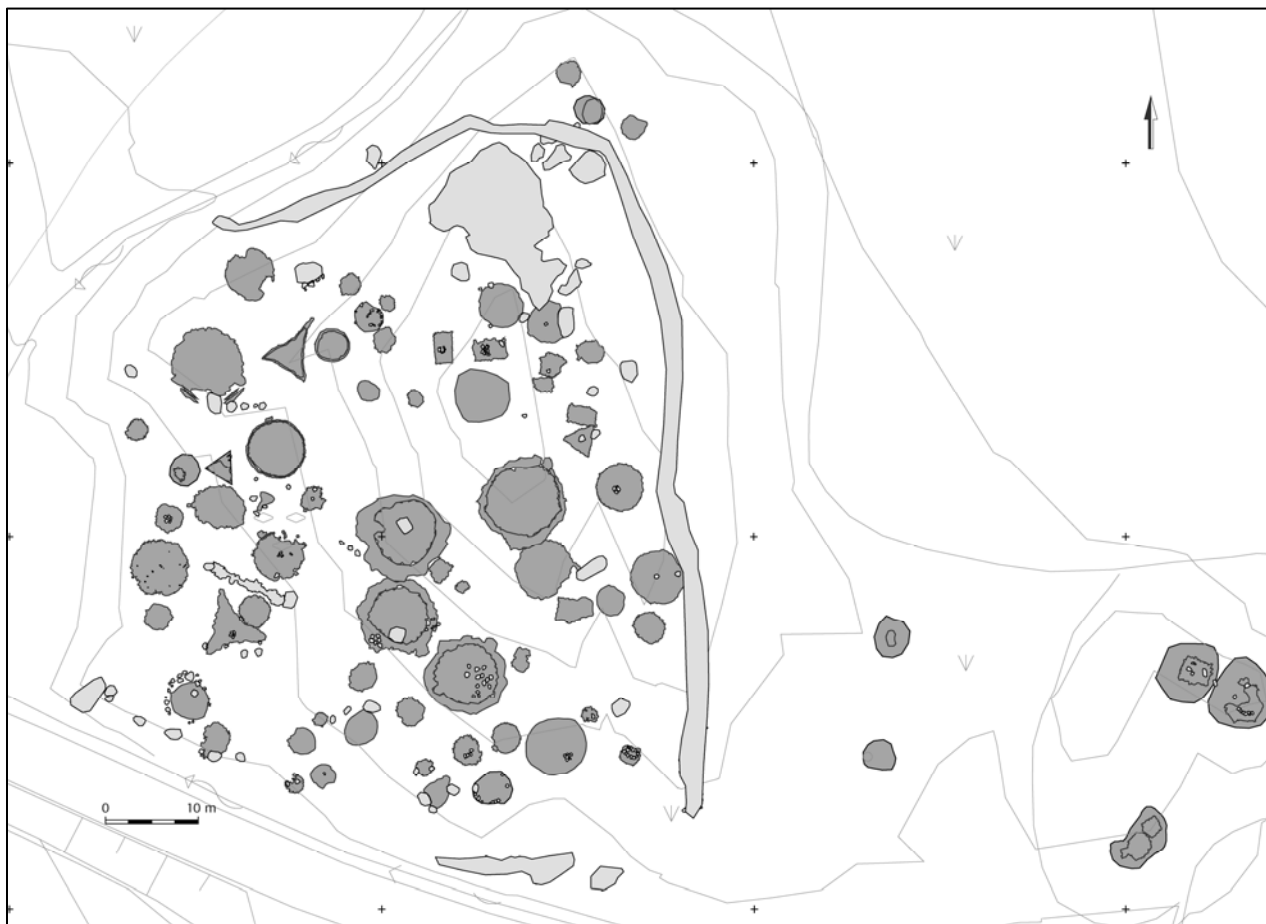


Fig. 1. Plan over the gravefield at Sylta with some 50 graves.



Fig. 2. Areal photo of the Sylta area with the gravefield to the left and the settlement with the three chamber graves to the right.

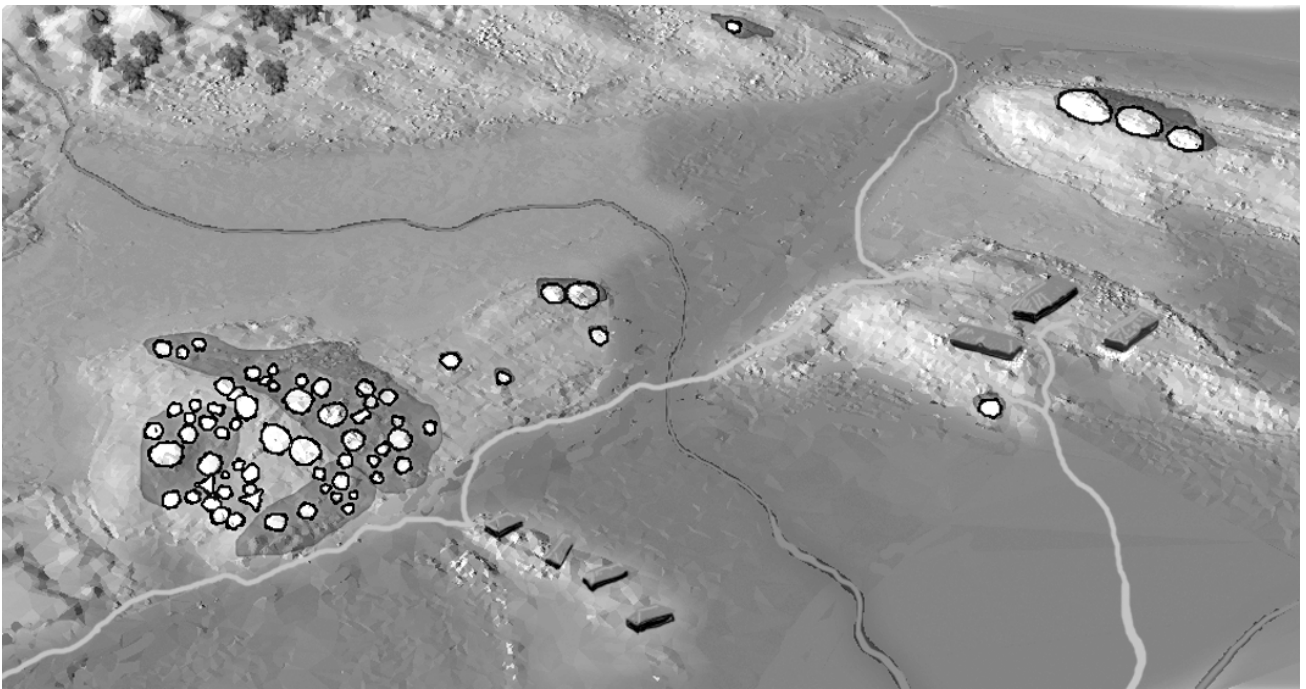


Fig. 4. An Iron Age scene at Sylta (From Edenmo in print).

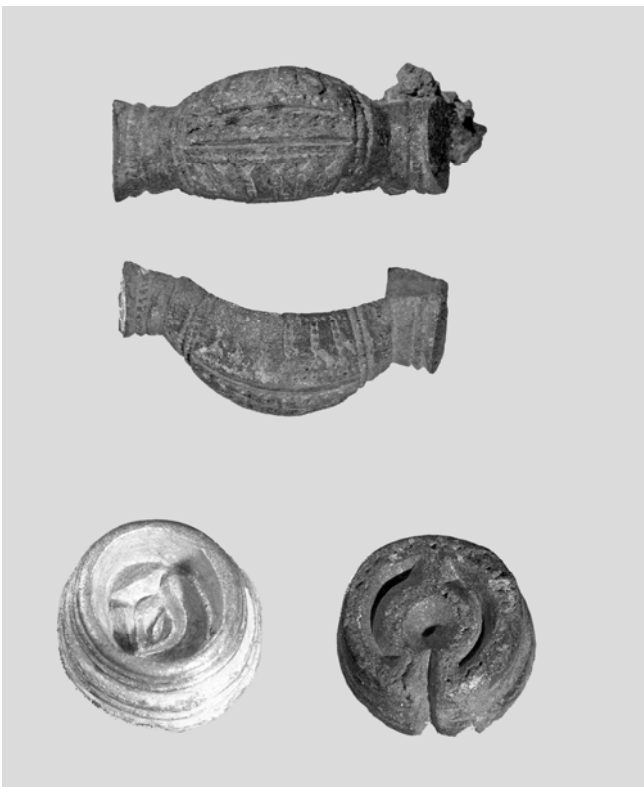


Fig. 3. Some of the grave finds from Sylta including clasp buttons and a brooch.



Fig. 5. Crushed quartz in one of the stone settings at the gravefield (Photo: Andreas Nordberg).

Coming from the shore of the lake Fjätören, one probably saw the large farm at Kocktorp with several of the grave monuments in the background. This must surely have been an impressive sight. However, only a couple of hundred years later it was all more or less abandoned, and there are very few traces of remains dated to the Viking period in the area.

Sylta is a very good representative of a high status, powerful, environment during a short period of time (the Migration Period) where a lot of effort was made to visualise and materialise the power of the family. The power of the Kocktorp family was not only aimed at impressing far away guests and visitors but was also materialised in ritual practice at the graveyard at Lilla Sylta.

Quartz and power

Two of the stone settings at the Sylta graveyard contained large amounts of crushed quartz. This was also the case with the three chamber graves on the nearby hill. The amount of flaked quartz in each of the stone settings and the chamber graves was some 60-65 kg. The sum of the weight of flaked quartz at an average Stone Age site in middle Sweden is about 10-20 kg. The quartz was not knapped from a core, as is the common technique of Stone Age tool production. Furthermore, the quartz clearly showed signs of having being worked, it was crushed and in some cases reconstructable, leading to the conclusion that the quartz had been deliberately crushed, either at the site or close by.

Quartz was also found throughout the grave monuments. It was not just on the surface but was found on top of the stone filling, part of the filling consisted of crushed quartz and it was even found underneath the filling (Fig. 5). Therefore, the crushed quartz was not just put there on top of the grave. It was constantly placed there through the construction of the stone setting. It was part of a practice that was carried out continuously while the monument was constructed.

The quartz was not from nodules picked on the beaches or in eskers; instead it was quarried from veins. In the



Fig. 6. Vein quartz is common in eastern middle Sweden. (Photo: Åke Johansson).

bedrock of eastern middle Sweden quartz is often found in veins (Fig. 6). This veined quartz was quarried from the Mesolithic and onwards, actually into our days when it was used in the making of porcelain and china (Lindgren 2004:24). The quartz from Sylta burials had to be quarried somewhere – but where?

During the excavation the nearby areas were searched for quartz veins but none was found. So the quartz at Sylta had to be quarried somewhere and transported to the burial ground. This may sound quite trivial and an easy task, but if you think of the amount of quartz that was found in the graves the work of locating, extracting and transporting the quartz to the burials in Sylta was quite a project. This was clearly not a single person enterprise. Instead it was a project that demanded organisation, resources, planning and involvement in areas far from Sylta region. This also emphasises the power of the agent behind this work, whose realms reached far beyond the farm and burials at Sylta.

The sort of power at work in this particular case is not the economic power over material resources and control of production. Nor is it the symbolic power and domination over land by the use of visual symbolic landmarks. Instead the power that is exercised at Sylta is the power of making a story, a myth came to life. For someone to be able to show the rest of the society: “See, I can make the story become true, I have the power to materialise myths and legends into our very lives” is a very effective way of empowering oneself. In one aspect it is an example of a type of religious power, a power that is exercised by priests. At Sylta in 500 AD there was no or at least not a very developed institutional religion. The religious power probably was tightly connected to the high ranked families.

Being powerful and wealthy also implies the ability to plan and carry out the task of bringing quartz to Sylta. In order to bring the myth to life you were also compelled to use your networks, distant contacts and arrange transports and so on.

Why quartz in graves?

While working on another project I stumbled across the Viking myth of Gylfaginning. Suddenly I realised that this also had bearing on how to interpret the quartz at the Sylta graveyard. In Gylfaginning the story is told of how the world was created by the fallen giant Ymer. It was these lines that caught my eye.

“They took Ymer and brought him to the middle of Ginnungagap. From him they made the earth, from his blood they made the seas and the lakes. The soil was made from his flesh *and the mountains by the bones; stone and gravel they made from his teeth and the bones that had been crushed*” (My emphasis).

Here the text mentions a relationship between a physical body and natural features. Such a relationship gives natural features a mythological association and vice



Fig. 7. The resemblance between crushed quartz (to the left) and crushed burnt bones (to the right) (Photo: Åke Johansson).

versa. If you perceive the world as a part of a body it will surely affect your perception, movement and use of the landscape. It also plays a part in defining certain features in the surrounding landscape and makes the natural meaningful. Even here the quartz could have played a role.

Looking at the quartz veins running through the naked rock may very well have been a reminder of the myth of the giant Ymer. The veins of white quartz against the dark bedrock could resemble bones or skeletons, petrified in ancient times (Fig. 6). The association between stones and bones is further emphasized when it comes to the treatment of cremated bones and the quartz at Sylta. They have both been deliberately crushed. Crushed quartz and burnt bones are both light in colour and consist of hundreds of fragments of different sizes and colour (Fig. 7). The relationship between the quartz and cremated bones is not only visual; they are also both processed in the same way.

So, through the use of a metaphorical line of thought quartz could be seen as parts of a giant's body. In this process the mythological giant Ymer was transformed into something physical, something real. It is not unusual that metaphors are used to elucidate different myths (Nordberg 2003:73). But why not stop at the fact that you actually could see traces of the giant's body in the bedrock around you? Why go through the trouble of setting up an organisation to extract the huge amount of quartz from the bedrock, transport it to the burial ground and make it look like cremated bones? Graves are very special places; they are not only places where you bury the dead. They can be seen in relationship to borders, where they give borders divine supremacy (Johansson 2003:116). They can also be seen as doors between different worlds, passages to the death realm (Nordberg 2003:80). In both of these examples the grave materialises more abstract contexts, making thoughts and beliefs visible and touchable. The high class farm at Sylta

was using the creation myths to create an identity and to make claims more legitimate which is often the purpose of creation myths (Hedeager 1997:32).

At this point I should point out that I am aware of the complexity of problems that arise when archaeologists use analogies. There are numerous problems connected with this scientific process. I do believe however that since we cannot dismiss analogy in archaeological reasoning, we might as well use it, but in a conscious way (Kaliff 2005:94). It can be useful as food for thought and in that sense it can make different interpretations more or less interesting, rather than just dismissing them.

The transformation of stone to bones was a process of relating the living, the buried person, and the society to a common mythological past. In this mythological past there were no clear boundaries between body and landscape, not even between giants and yourself. The surrounding landscape was not nature; it was your past, your ancestors, your history. It was your creation myth materialised in different topographical features.

This highlights two of the major differences between present day western societies and prehistoric ones. First, it is the division of the profane and sacral dimension of life. Second, it is the separation of nature and culture. For us it is natural to see the surrounding landscape, the nature as something else, something different from our cultural life. In our modern world it represents things like recreation and dreams of a different way of life, or even resources for our use. It is difficult for us to comprehend another view of the landscape, the nature. But we have to at least admit that it has not always been like this. So when the people at Sylta crushed and placed the quartz in the graves they had every reason to do so. It made them part of a common past, it created a meaningful nature and it made the religious stories real, and it gave physical qualities to abstract things.

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