
Abstract

Ancient Death Ways – proceedings of the workshop on archaeology and mortuary practices, contains articles of the work in progress presented and discussed at the Ancient Death Ways 2013 meeting, which was organised around three main themes: current research, landscapes of death, and defining death. The diversity of case studies and subjects tackled by the participants reflects the richness of the field of archaeological research concerning death studies. This book does not aim to be a treaty on the archaeology of death in 2013, but rather a straightforward outcome of the sessions. The series of eight articles is introduced and closed by two commentary essays from two of the moderators of the workshop.

Keywords: Mesolithic, Neolithic, death, funerary archaeology, mortuary practices, archaeothanatology, cremation, ritual practice, GIS, landscape archaeology

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PREFACE

Ancient Death Ways has been an annual workshop at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University, Sweden, since 2012. It is part of the Stone Age Seminar in Uppsala arranged by the Department in collaboration with the Societas Archaeologica Upsaliensis (SAU). The aim of the workshop is to bring together researchers currently working with mortuary practices and/or human remains from prehistoric archaeological sites and to work in an interdisciplinary environment, by opening the debate to all scholars and disciplines somehow involved in these subjects. This format emphasises the interaction and exchange of ideas as well as an updated debate on theory, methods and ethics, within a vibrant network.

This volume contains articles of the work in progress presented and discussed at the 2013 meeting, which was organised around three main themes: current research, landscapes of death, and defining death. We also had the privilege to invite Prof. Chris Scarre and Dr Rick Schulting as key lecturers for this two-day meeting. The diversity of case studies and subjects tackled by the participants reflects the richness of the field of archaeological research concerning death studies. This book does not aim to be a treaty on the archaeology of death in 2013, but rather a straightforward outcome of the sessions. The series of eight articles is introduced and closed by two commentary essays from two of the moderators of the workshop.

We would like to thank all other participants of the 2013 workshop, whose work for different reasons is not present in this volume: Amy Gray Jones, Chris Scarre, Elin Fornander, Frands Herschend, Fredrik Molin, Karl-Göran Sjögren, Lukasz Pospieszny, and Sara Gummesson. Sebastian Liahaugen, our student assistant, was of invaluable help in order to make the workshop run smoothly. We are indebted to Jill Kinahan, who besides proofreading, contributed to this volume with valuable comments. We are also grateful for the logistic support provided by the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University.

The Occasional Papers in Archaeology (OPIA) series has published monographs, proceedings and dissertations produced at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University since 1989. From the
present publication OPIA is an open peer-review series with an online editorial logbook where the process of the refereed system is published in open-access. The logbook of this volume can be found here: http://www.arkeologi.uu.se/Forskning/Publikationer/peer-reviewed-opia/

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*Kim von Hackwitz & Rita Peyroteo-Stjerna, Uppsala, February 2015*
Why do we care about the dead? Why do we, as researchers of the past, care about the disposal of the dead? It would be easy to say: because the people of the past cared about the dead and therefore about the disposal of them. In many cases that would be true, but perhaps not always and more importantly it misses the target. People, now and in the past, do not primarily care about the dead – they care about the living. Therefore the loss of the living becomes an issue both personally and socially, and so does the body that both is and is not the person you know (Nilsson Stutz 2003).

A dead body can be preserved and beautified (mummies, Lenin); it can be removed from sight (inhumations, burial at sea), and it can be destroyed with extreme prejudice (Tibetan sky burials, Western cremations with ash dispersal). It can even be left with little or no care as to its fate, with the living moving on to another place. Just about anything you could (and couldn’t) imagine has been done to the dead body at one time or another in the past; nothing is holy – or rather, anything can be construed as holy: putting bodies in jars on the porch; covering them with flowers and sticking a cigarette between the teeth; hiding them away on an island; hurling insults at them; chopping them up and mixing them together with the remains of animals; eating parts of them; disinterring them every few years and running around with them, singing and dancing, or filling their veins with embalmment fluid and plastering them with makeup.

Is there any method to the madness inflicted upon dead human bodies? Certainly.
Is there a clear way to deduce the causality of mortuary practices as they relate to cultural practice and cosmology when we know little or nothing about the latter? Doubtful.

Despite the many hopeful attempts by archaeologists over the past 200 years or so, anything from functionalism to contextualism has been shown to be inherently flawed in this regard. Stratified societies can create elaborately hierarchical mortuary practices that mirror social structure – except when they choose to cloak that stratification behind egalitarian funerals. The disenfranchised in turn may use the burial to challenge and subvert their position though elaborate display. We cannot be certain that strictly defined gender roles in burials reflect everyday reality, or vice versa. We cannot know for certain that a sword included as a burial gift was ever wielded by the deceased, that the brooch clasped on the shoulder was not in fact the parting gift of a relative and never worn by the dead in life.

We can only surmise, hypothesise and conjecture. To do so often involves anthropological comparisons with one or several societies that have been studied in the past 100–200 years. This is a method that has been rightly criticised as often devolving into ‘pick your favourite’, finding parallels where it suits the researcher, without proper consideration for history and context. Still, without cross-cultural comparisons we are in danger of becoming hopelessly stuck in our own subconscious cultural preconceptions about the dead and their treatment. Used properly, anthropological and sociological comparisons challenge us to think not just about ‘others’ but about ourselves, to yank us out of our comfort zone and make us aware of how complex and varied human experience can be. Few things do so more profoundly than having to deal with the manipulation and modification of the dead. This is where our own ‘rational’ way of dealing with the dead is faced with all those other ‘irrational’ modus operandi. What were they thinking!

Since archaeology was mainly developed in the West by people raised within Judeo-Christian ideals, a ‘grave’ is usually defined as a construction (anything from a hole in the ground to a pyramid) preferably somewhat removed from human residence and containing just one human body (inhumation or cremation). Parts of human bodies were more challenging, as were bodies of several individuals, or human bodies turning up in what appeared to be non-funereal contexts on settlements, for instance. Despite a growing awareness about the variation present in mortuary practices in later years, these treatments of dead
bodies are still causing us consternation (Larsson 2009a, Larsson & Nilsson Stutz in press). On the one hand, it is by now widely accepted by archaeologists that even a deposition of a few charred remains may be designated as a burial. On the other hand, should one piece of human bone automatically mean that a feature should be referred to as a grave? Can a construction which looks like the typical burials of a certain group, but is devoid of human remains, still be considered a burial? Are we just too focused on the concept of ‘grave’ and ‘burial’? Are we putting too much emphasis on human remains just because to us the human body enjoys special importance? Not just culturally, but legally as in enjoying special protection by the law concerning antiquities in many countries.

Figure 1.1. Memorial raised for the victims of the Estonia ferry disaster of 1994. The stone walls contain the names of 815 of the 852 who perished, as the families of 37 asked that their names not be included. At the base of the tree is an iron ring with the coordinates of the site of the ferry. The memorial was constructed by Galärkyrkagården, traditional cemetery for the Navy since late 18th century, and next to the Vasa ship museum. Photo: Tage Olsin/Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Keeping those things in mind is important, but we should not let uncertainty cripple us to the point where we say nothing about anything. Perhaps a better starting point than the ‘grave’ is the treatment of the body itself. We seem to take for granted that many cultures take an interest in the dead body, when we
really should ask ourselves *why*. Why is the human body of such pervasive interest to humans? I do not mean the dead body, I mean the body: alive, dead or depicted. No other animal takes such an extreme interest in their body. Yet humans manipulate, modify, alter, cover, reveal and occasionally obsess over their bodies to a degree that is quite staggering. More importantly, we impart metaphorical meaning to our bodies, to parts of the body, and to the senses like smell, sight, sound, touch and taste. Most of the time we are not even truly aware that these values are culturally and not biologically constituted until it is pointed out to us. Emotion residing in the heart? Why not the liver as the Aztecs thought? And isn’t it in the heart where sense and thought resides, like Aristotle argued? If we should choose one part of the skeleton to preserve, which one is the most important? The skull, or the hand, or the pelvis? Why preserve the brain of dead leaders and not their genitals?

The growing field of neuroscience and cognition has found common ground with philosophy and linguistics in studying the complex interplay between the brain and the body, undermining the persistent Cartesian dichotomy in the West (Lakoff & Johnson 1999; Larsson 2009b: 38ff). Not only do humans use bodily metaphors to make sense of the world and immaterial concepts, but the way the body interacts with the physical realm profoundly modifies our mind and emotions. We say that a difficult decision ‘weighs’ upon us; victory is ‘sweet’; our prospects may be ‘bright’ but a suggestion can leave us ‘cold’. Bodily metaphors are of course also culturally situated, but what they have in common is that all humans use the body and its senses as a way of making sense of the world. Experiencing physical sensations like Heavy:Light, Warm:Cold, Dry:Wet, Fresh:Rotten, Dark:Bright will therefore inform our perception of more intangible values, especially in the setting of a funeral which is emotionally charged.

Dealing with death and dead bodies often falls under the equally problematic term ‘ritual’. Understanding mortuary traditions is to a certain extent the same thing as understanding why humans have rituals at all: what they are for, how we identify them in prehistory and to what extent they may inform us about past beliefs and cultures. Some theories have focused on the functional aspects, others have delved into the symbolic ones. Here too we find an increased focus on ritual as a form of practice (e.g. Bell 1992). We may not always understand the reason for or use of rituals; indeed, sometimes the reason and use seem lost in time even to the practitioners, but we can see how the act of doing, performing, acting out something is very much at ‘the heart’ (to use a metaphor) of ritual. Bodies and physical experiencing
are integral to ritual: movement or stillness, communality or isolation, sound or silence, eating or fasting, heat or wetness. It is practice and repetition through which memories and emotions are created and re-activated.

Figure 1.2. Mictlantecuhtli, Aztec god of the dead. Ceramic sculpture from Templo Mayor, Mexico. He is partly defleshed and from his stomach hangs a massive liver, residence of one of the three souls of the body: the ihiyotl associated with vitality, courage and passion. Photo: David Flores (CC BY 2.0) (www.flickr.com/photos/magdav/).

Rituals that include dead human bodies are not essentially different from rituals that use any other object (animals, axes, pots, incense, colour, flowers, musical instruments, etc). But it could be argued that they have the potential to be especially potent because they make use of an object with immediate resonance to all the participants – the body. The challenge for archaeologists then is to try and ascertain, in as much detail as possible, in what ways the bodies were manipulated and modified in the mortuary process. To map out how the living interacted with the bodies of the dead: before, during and after the depositions we have uncovered.

Is the body treated as a unit that needs to be kept intact? Is destruction of the flesh a stage that is elaborated and highlighted? By what means is this done, e.g. by cutting and mechanical cleaning, using fire, or letting it decompose naturally? Are bodies mixed together or kept apart, are bones removed? Is the placement of the body strictly regulated or highly varied? Are
the surroundings where the living performed these tasks visible, hidden, dry, wet, dark, bright, familiar and/or exceptional? What would these acts have entailed for the persons performing them? What sights, sounds, smells and physical experiences would they have had in the process?

Figure 1.3. Kotsuage, the Japanese Shinto mortuary ritual. The relatives gather by the newly cremated body and pick up the bones to place them in an urn, starting from the feet and moving upwards so the dead is not placed ‘upside down’. The most important bone is the hyoid, tongue bone, located between the body and the head. Sometimes the remains are separated into different urns to be shared among family members, left at the temple, or even buried in collective company graves. Autumn Snake, Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0).

Were the living seemingly occupied by the notion of proper bodily display even in death? Did they have a vested interest in the appearance of the (dead) body? Do they elaborate and highlight the biological processes that must inevitably happen (decay) in a way that suggests that they try to co-opt them, to be perceived as the instigators rather than as the helpless observers (see Bloch 1988)? Are the dead allowed to be dead or must they mimic an ideal life? Is individuality and separateness negated through the removal of body parts or mixing of bones? In short, what steps did the living have to take to reach the result which we archaeologists now face? Is the dead body
something to be accepted as it is, or something to be created, manipulated and modified to fit a norm?

Virtually all societies do modify the dead to some extent. What the living produce through this modification is far more than a means to dispose of a dead body: through this process they have reflected upon and become aware of their own living bodies. This experience will inform them, consciously and subconsciously, from thereon until the next time. Studying what is modified and how the body is treated by the living, is therefore an opening into the experiences and value systems of those that tried to make sense of that which is the root of all our senses: our own bodies and our own selves.

References

MESOLITHIC SKULL CULTS?

Rick J. Schulting

Abstract

While long known as a feature of the Near Eastern Neolithic, there is growing evidence for the special treatment of the human head in Mesolithic Europe. This takes the form of secondary deposition of crania and mandibles, often in unusual contexts, including as ‘grave goods’ with other burials; cutmarks suggesting decapitation, scalping and defleshing; and the deposition of fleshed heads in pits, as well as, most recently, on stakes in shallow pools. After reviewing this evidence, discussion turns to its interpretation. Possible links with the ‘ancestors’ are explored, and ethno-graphic support for their importance among hunter-gatherers is reviewed. If accepted, there may be implications for the expression of territoriality in the Mesolithic. The blurring of the lines between revered ancestor and enemy when interpreting the treatment of human heads is emphasised.

Keywords: Near East; Palaeolithic; ‘skull cups’; Ofnet; violence; ancestors

Introduction

The human head holds four of the body’s five main senses – sight, hearing, smell and taste – and shares the fifth, touch. Taken together with the uniqueness of facial features and their expressive capacity for communicating emotional states, it is not surprising that cultures around the world evince a strong interest in the head, in its embellishment with cosmetics and

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with adornments, in the elaboration of hair styles, and the wearing of head gear, as well as its prominent iconographic presence in what can be broadly termed ‘art’. And in death, if the corporeal remains are manipulated at all, it is the head that is often singled out for special treatment. There is a rich ethnographic record documenting such practices, and for many periods of the historic and prehistoric past there is abundant archaeological evidence for the importance attached to the head, although specific meanings may be debated (Armit 2012; Bonogofsky 2006a, 2011; Hoskins 1996a). But the archaeological record becomes progressively more difficult to read the further back in time one moves, if only because it tends to be far more fragmentary and incomplete. Nevertheless, a number of both old and recent finds combine to suggest a special interest in the human head in Mesolithic communities in various parts of Europe and adjacent regions of Southwest Asia and North Africa. But aside from being of some intrinsic interest, what does this behaviour tell us about people’s views of themselves and their world? This contribution presents a survey of some of the evidence for practices involving the human skull in Mesolithic Europe, with brief forays into the aforementioned adjacent regions, touching upon both earlier and later periods before returning to the paper’s central theme: Is there evidence for a Mesolithic ‘skull cult’, and, if so, how might it be understood?

**Plastered ‘skulls’ and ancestors in the Near East**

With the dramatic evidence provided by cached human crania over-modelled with pigmented clay and inset shells for eyes, a ‘skull cult’ has long been seen as an aspect of the early Neolithic cultures of the Near East (Figure 2.1). The best-known examples are those from first John Garstang’s and then Kathleen Kenyon’s excavations at the PPNB (Pre-Pottery Neolithic B) settlement at Jericho (Kenyon 1956). Others have been found at ’Ain Ghazal, Beisamoun, Kfar HaHoresh, Nahal Hemar, Yiftahel, Tell Aswad and Tell Ramad (Arensburg & Hershkovitz 1989; Ferembach 1970; Ferembach & Lechevallier 1973; Goring-Morris 2000; Milevski et al. 2008; Rollefson 1985; Stordeur & Khawan 2007). The practice continued into the later Neolithic, as seen at Çatalhöyük and Köşk Höyük (Bonogofsky 2005; Croucher 2012). While they are often referred to as plastered ‘skulls’, many known examples are crania, i.e. lacking the mandible (Bienert 1991;
Bonogofsky 2001; Goring-Morris 2000; Strouhal 1973). This is an important but oft-overlooked terminological distinction².

The source of the modelled crania (or less frequently skulls) is reasonably clear, as a number of intra-mural burials at the same sites lack their crania, which had been carefully removed, often leaving behind the mandible with the rest of the skeleton (Kuijt 1996). It is partly this that has led to their wide acceptance as indicating ancestor veneration; if they were, on the other hand, the decapitated heads of enemies, as recently argued by Alain Testart (2008), we would expect to find the mandible and uppermost cervical vertebrae, as well as evidence of peri-mortem trauma (see ensuing debate in *Paléorient* vol. 35.1). In fact the mandible is present in many cases, for example, the plastered skull of an adult male from Jericho (Strouhal 1973, Plate 3,

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² The skull consists of the cranium and the mandible, whereas the cranium lacks the mandible. Since the mandible easily becomes detached from the cranium as the corpse decays, its presence indicates an intact head. One or more upper cervical vertebrae would also be expected to be present in this case. A cranium, conversely, may have been collected at any time (e.g. by digging into a grave and removing it) and so does not have the same connotations.
Mesolithic Skull Cults?

J 5758); an adult female from Beisamoun (Ferembach & Lechevallier 1973, Plate II), as well as a number of the spectacular examples from Tell-Aswad (Stordeur & Khawan 2007). However, the presence of vertebrae, while not unknown, is rare, and no evidence of peri-mortem injury has been reported. Arguing more strongly against their interpretation as trophy heads is the ubiquity of the practice of removing skulls or crania from burials in the region at this time, suggesting it was the normative mortuary practice, and the general absence of evidence for the cutmarks that would be required for decapitation (cf. Kuijt 2009).

The skulls or crania of only a few individuals were selected for modelling, on criteria that are unknown. A widespread interpretation, beginning with Kenyon’s publication of the Jericho finds, is that they are the remains of venerated elderly male ancestors. Ancestor veneration in turn is often seen as going hand-in-hand with farming societies (Bar-Yosef 1992; Cauvin 1994; Garfinkel 1993) – hunter-gatherers, in contrast, are seen as having little interest in ‘ancestors’, and hence, in head cults (cf. Meillassoux 1972). We return to this point below. The suggestion that ‘skulls’ are exclusively those of men, and particularly older adult men, while fitting with the ‘venerated ancestor’ hypothesis (e.g. Bienert 1991; Strouhal 1973), is problematic given that examples involving the crania of young men, women and indeed children have long been known (Bonogofsky 2001, 2004, 2006b; Ferembach 1970; Ferembach & Lechevallier 1973; Kurth & Röhrer-Ertl 1981). However, sexing plastered crania is difficult, so that for some researchers the jury is still out as to whether females are represented (Goring-Morris 2000: 124). What can be said is that, although a small number of juveniles may be represented, the overwhelming majority are adult.

While the plastered ‘skulls’ have understandably received the most attention, the removal and secondary deposition of crania was common in both the PPNB and preceding PPNA, especially for adults (both male and female) but also occasionally for children and infants (Kuijt 1996). This practice is known from at least the Late Natufian (Bar-Yosef 1998; Belfer-Cohen 1988), with a number of examples extending it into the Early Natufian (Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 1996; Neuville 1951). Thus, if there is a relationship with ‘ancestors’, it is not one that emerges only with early farming societies in the Neolithic. On the other hand, it could be argued that the appearance of a cult of the ancestors was one aspect of the wider changes taking place within the Natufian, ultimately leading to domestication and farming in the PPNA (Cauvin 1994). As noted by Michelle Bonogofsky
(2004), the presence of women and perhaps children in the corpus of modelled crania and skulls has arguably received insufficient attention in terms of the prevailing interpretation (which emphasises male ancestors), but is not necessarily a problem, since the ‘ancestors’ are not an essentialist category in any case, but are actively created from a complex set of beliefs. Ian Kuijt (2008) has discussed some of the dual processes of remembering and forgetting in relation to the modelled skulls in their transition from specific persons to undifferentiated ‘ancestors’. For our purposes here, the important point is that the elaborate treatment of the skulls/crania of a small number of select individuals in the PPNB had earlier antecedents in the removal of crania as part of a secondary mortuary rite extending back through the PPNA and into the Early and Late Natufian.

That the special treatment of the head need not have anything to do with the development of farming, even in incipient form, is seen in the existence of a range of practices involving the cranium and/or skull across Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Europe, to which we now turn.

**Palaeolithic antecedents**

As with later periods, there is the need for an element of caution in recognising evidence for special treatment of the human skull in the Palaeolithic. To a large extent this relates to the circumstances and early date of recovery, often in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. The elements of the human skull are both relatively robust and easily recognised, as well as having been highly sought after by the fledgling science of physical anthropology. One might argue that in the prehistoric past as well as when recovered archaeologically, human skulls embody identity in a particularly powerful and compelling form. For the living individual, of course, facial features provide the most immediately accessible means of inter-personal recognition (Bruce & Young 1986; Young & Bruce 2011). When combined with skin, hair and eye colour, hair styles and the use of ornamentation the head can become a marker of group affiliation (artificial cranial modification and dental ablation might also be mentioned in this context). Ironically, when recovered archaeologically, the main concern of physical anthropologists was (and to an extent remains) similarly the identification of different racial groups and populations through craniometrics. Cranial remains in particular were thus more likely to be recovered, retained and described in publications. In the case of disturbed skeletal remains – which feature strongly in the archaeo-
logical record of the Palaeolithic — it is not always clear whether or not postcranial remains were present.

With this caveat in mind, there is still clear evidence for a special interest in heads in the Upper Palaeolithic, particularly in the Magdalenian. Jörg Orschiedt (2013) has provided a recent survey of the evidence, noting a dominance of cranial and mandibular remains, many exhibiting cutmarks, that can only be explained by deliberate selection. At Brillenhöhle (Baden-Württemberg, Germany), for example, there is evidence for careful defleshing of crania as well as postcrania, including cutmarks in positions indicating decapitation and scalping. This is interpreted by Orschiedt as occurring in the context of a complex mortuary treatment rather than as evidence of violence or anthropophagy (cannibalism). Secondary burial is indicated for the well-preserved cranium (sans mandible) of an adult male at Rond-du-Barry (Auvergne, France), reportedly found within a setting of stones (de Baye des Hermens & Heim 1989). No cutmarks are reported, so this might have involved the intentional retrieval of the cranium from a burial, with concomitant implications for marking or remembering grave locations. A striking but unfortunately poorly documented example of post-mortem modification involves the isolated cranium of a young female from Mas d’Azil (Ariège, France), into the orbits of which had been placed bone discs carved from deer vertebrae (Leroi-Gourhan 1964). These have unfortunately been lost.

A well-known aspect of manipulation of the dead in the Magdalenian involves the preparation of so-called ‘skull cups’. These are modified human crania, exhibiting cutmarks indicative of defleshing, and the removal of the facial area and basicranium through repeated blows, leaving a crudely shaped ‘cup’, though there is no evidence for their use in this capacity. Orschiedt (2002a) does suggest, however, that the example from Brillenhöhle was used to carry the small number of postcranial remains — many also bearing cutmarks — found at the site, as they all fit into the modified calotte. There are multiple examples from the sites of La Placard (Charente, France), Istaritz (Gironde, France) and Gough’s Cave (Somerset, England) (Bello et al. 2011; Breuil & Obermaier 1909; Buisson & Gambier 1991; Le Mort & Gambier 1991).

A series of broadly comparable practices was carried out on human remains in the Epipalaeolithic Iberomaurusian and early Holocene Capsian cultures of North Africa. Both cranial and postcranial remains show evidence of
post-mortem treatment, including defleshing and the use of red ochre. Occasionally, the head appears to have been the subject of more elaborate treatment than the rest of the body (Belcastro et al. 2010; Humphrey et al. 2012; Mariotti et al. 2009). One suggestion for the evidence of cutmarks, defleshing and dismemberment is that it relates to preparation of the body for transport to an appropriate burial location by mobile hunter-gatherers (Haverkort & Lubell 1999), an argument that has also been made in relation to secondary burial and ‘skull’ removal in the Natufian (Hershkovitz & Go- pher 1990).

An intriguing discovery from the Capsian site of Faïd Souar II (Algeria) consists of the front half of an adult skull, sectioned part-way through the parietals, with two drilled perforations, one on either side of the cranial vault (Vallois 1971). Originally discussed as a mask or a trophy, a recent re-analysis notes the lack of use-wear within the perforations, suggesting that, whatever its use, it was either very short-lived or infrequent (Adoudia-Chouakri & Bocquentin 2009, Fig. 1a–c). This specimen is also remarkable for a carved bone ‘tooth’ inserted into the abscessed socket of the right maxillary second premolar (ibid., Fig. 1d). Whether this was done while the individual was living, or after death is uncertain. Ironically, dental ablation of the upper central incisors was a common practice in the Iberomaurusian, becoming less frequent and more variable in terms of the teeth removed in the Capsian (Humphrey & Bocaege 2008). Perhaps initially an initiation rite, its meaning may have changed through time. Given its high visibility, dental ablation would have certainly acted as a marker of identity at some level, though this likely would have varied geographically and chronologically. In the Capsian, more females than male are affected, suggesting that the practice was at least partly gendered at this time (ibid.).

Mesolithic

While ‘skull cups’ do not appear to feature in the Mesolithic, other practices involving crania are reminiscent of those seen in the Late Upper Palaeolithic (this need not imply any direct continuity of the tradition, nor uniformity of meaning). The clearest example is perhaps that at Grotte Margaux (Dinant, Belgium), where an adult female cranium dating to the Preboreal exhibits numerous cutmarks on its zygomatic processes and on various parts of the cranial vault, the former suggesting cutting of the muscle attachment sites to facilitate removal of the mandible, and the latter scalping (Toussaint 2011).
Cutmarks consistent with scalping have also been noted on Late Mesolithic remains, including a child’s cranium from Dyrholmen (Jutland, Denmark) as well as examples from Ålekistebro (Sjælland, Denmark) and Drigge (Rügen, Germany) (Brinch Petersen 2006; Degerbol 1942; Terberger 1998). Probable cases of scalping that have survived have been found at Skateholm in southern Sweden (Ahlström 2008) and Zvejnieki in Latvia (Jankauskas 2012). Presumably most or all of these examples relate to trophy taking, as the hair is widely believed cross-culturally to be a powerful bodily substance. Cutmarked and fractured postcranial remains too were present at Dyrholmen, so treatment there was not restricted to the skull, and indeed the possibility of cannibalism has been raised (Degerbol 1942). The same applies to the large human bone assemblage from La Grotte des Perrats, where there is abundant evidence for reduction of the body, including cutmarks and peri-mortem fracturing, again interpreted in a context of anthropophagy (Boulestin 1999).

In other cases there is more subtle evidence for special treatment of the skull. The presence of the small bones of the hands and feet of some 12 individuals at the Early Mesolithic site of l’Abri des Autours, Belgium, in conjunction with a dearth of cranial remains, suggests that at least some complete bodies were originally interred, with the skulls subsequently taken away for deposition elsewhere (Cauwe 1998: 84). Erik Brinch Petersen (2006: 46) draws attention to a headless Mesolithic skeleton found at Vænge Sø, eastern Jutland, but, recalling the discussion above, it is unclear whether this was intentional removal or due to disturbance.

There is abundant evidence for the special treatment of the human cranium and mandible in the Mesolithic sites of the Iron Gates, including Lepenski Vir. Here, for example, an extended adult skeleton was placed in a pit (Grave 7) dug through the plastered floor of one of the site’s trapezoidal houses (Srejović 1972: 120, Fig. 61). As with other intramural burials at Lepenski Vir, this occurred in a structured space west of the hearth interpreted as a household ‘sanctuary’ by the excavator, Dragoslav Srejović. The pit was later enlarged and an additional human cranium (7/II), an auroch skull and a red deer skull with attached antlers were deposited (Bonsall et al. 2008). The human cranium was placed at the left shoulder of the extended skeleton; intriguingly, another cranium was found in this same position in Burial 54e (ibid.: 186 and Fig. 8). Conversely, other extended burials, otherwise largely intact, lacked the skull (e.g. Burial 54c, ibid., Fig. 7). As with examples in the Near East (no direct connection is being implied), the lack
of cutmarks indicates that the skull/cranium was removed only after the flesh, muscles and ligaments had decayed, a period requiring some years. New excavations at Vlasac document an example in Burial H63, a fully articulated adult female lacking the cranium and mandible, but with the uppermost cervical vertebrae in situ (Borić et al. 2014: 23); the atlas has been slightly displaced, perhaps when the cranium was removed (Figure 2.2). Human crania are also found in isolation, as in the case of ‘Burial’ 122, a cranium found above the hearth of building 47 (Bonsall et al. 2008, Fig. 13; Borić & Dimitrijević 2007). Some of the partially articulated and disarticulated remains have been suggested to represent secondary burial in conjunction with excarnation (Bonsall et al. 2008; Srejović 1972).

Figure 2.2. Burial H63 at Vlasac, an otherwise complete, articulated adult female skeleton missing the cranium and mandible (photo courtesy of Dušan Borić).

Given that skulls were often removed, but crania alone found in secondary deposits, it remains to account for the mandibles. Some at least were found set around large stone-lined hearths, as for example in building No. 40 at Lepenski Vir, together with a series of vertically set stone slabs mimicking the mandible’s triangular shape (Srejović 1972: 119, Fig. 64). It is tempting to suggest that the symbolism here revolves around either feeding the an-
cestors, or having the ancestors ‘bless’ the food cooked on the hearth. The mandible in question is that of an adult female, perhaps linking women with the hearth and provision of the family and community (Radovanović 1996). While this relationship is commonly assumed ethnographically, it is rarely demonstrable archaeologically. Even in this case, the situation is likely to be more complex than indicated in such a straightforward reading. And given the difficulty of reliably sexing isolated mandibles on morphological criteria alone, the connection itself is tenuous.

Interpretation of the practices surrounding the human skull at Lepenski Vir and other Iron Gates sites are complicated by the intensity of activity taking place over a number of centuries, concentrated amongst closely associated structures and graves. There is a significant amount of disarticulated human bone – cranial and postcranial – across Lepenski Vir, some of which presumably represents disturbed earlier burials. The cranium may simply have received more careful treatment if disturbed than other elements. However, this is unlikely to be the full explanation. As the aforementioned examples demonstrate, in some cases intentional removal of the skull from a burial can be inferred, the lack of cut-marks on the vertebrae and their continued presence in the grave indicating that the flesh had fully decayed when this was done. In a recent overview of Iron Gate Mesolithic burial practices, Boroneanţ and Bonsall (2012: 49) note examples from Lepenski Vir, Vlasac and Schela Cladovei. Detached crania (mandibles are also removed but are not typically recovered with the crania) occur as isolated finds, in small groups, and as inclusions in other graves. With the evidence from these and other sites, it appears that skull removal was common in the Iron Gates Mesolithic (Bonsall et al. 2008; Borić et al. 2014; Boroneanţ & Bonsall 2012; Radovanović 1996). Srejović (1972: 123) interprets the treatment of human remains, and especially skulls, at Lepenski Vir as part of a cult of the ancestors.

Without doubt the most spectacular finding in recent years in European Mesolithic studies is the site of Kanaljorden (Östergötland, Sweden). Here was found a number of human crania set on stakes on a submerged stone platform within a small, shallow lake adjacent to the river Motala Ström (Hallgren 2011). Again, an important detail is that few mandibles were present, indicating that rather than heads, these were at least partially decomposed crania. Complicating this picture, however, is the fact that one of the crania was found to contain brain matter, indicating that either it derived from a relatively recently deceased individual, or that it was retrieved from a location with excellent preservational properties – such as would be supplied by the anaerobic conditions of small
lakes and bogs. As with most discussions concerning the special treatment of human heads, the question arises as to whether this is a complex mortuary treatment carried out by one’s own group, or related to the taking of enemy heads as trophies. These alternatives, rather than being mutually exclusive, can be seen as opposite sides of the same coin: if the power to act or to intercede on behalf of the living is imputed to the dead, and in particular to the distillation encapsulated by the head, then taking that power away from an enemy forms part of the same logic.

Kanaljorden aside, some of the most compelling evidence for practices involving human heads in the European Mesolithic comes from the sites of Ofnet, Kaufertsberg (Bayern) and Hohlenstein-Stadel (Baden-Württemberg) in south-west Germany and Mannlefelsen (Alsace) in north-east France (Birkner 1914; Ehrhardt 1936; Schmidt 1908; Thévenin & Sainty 1980). These sites are of particular interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, and unlike the examples discussed up to this point, the presence of the mandible and one or more upper cervical vertebrae (Figure 2.3) unequivocally indicates that these were flesged heads when deposited, presumably not long after removal from the body, though this last aspect is open to further discussion: Ian Armit (2006) has suggested that the heads may have been dried and curated. The presence of soft tissue is further confirmed by the presence of cutmarks on the vertebrae (Frayer 1997; Orschiedt 1998, 2002b, 2005; Wahl & Haidle 2003). Secondly, there is considerable evidence for trauma on the crania. All three individuals at Hohlenstein-Stadel – an adult male and female, and a young child – show peri-mortem blows (occurring at or around the time of death) (Orschiedt 1998; Wahl & Haidle 2003). The child’s cranial vault is enlarged and distorted, a condition consistent with hydrocephaly (Czarnetzki 1983, cited in Orschiedt 1998: 156) (Figure 2.4). Untreated, the condition is invariably fatal. It may arise in infancy, leading not only to obvious shape changes in the child’s head, but also to behavioural changes (Bannister & Tew 1991). The rapid onset and highly visible nature of the condition may have been seen as inauspicious, and may have led to the killing of the child together with its parents (although the genetic link has not been confirmed) (Gronenborn 1999: 135; Schulting 2006).
Figure 2.3. Atlas and third cervical vertebra with cutmarks, adult male (no. 15) from Ofnet (photo courtesy of Jörg Orschiedt).

Figure 2.4. Hydrocephalic cranium of young child from Hohlenstein-Stadel, with a peri-mortem injury to the upper left parietal (photo courtesy of Jörg Orschiedt).
The single adult male skull at Mannlefelsen exhibits both cutmarks and peri-mortem injuries according to a recent re-analysis (Boulestin & Henri-Gambier 2012). No injuries have been reported for the young adult male skull from Kaufertsberg (Orschiedt 2005), though of course this need not mean that this individual did not also die violently.

In terms of the number of individuals involved, Ofnet clearly stands out from the other sites. In 1908 two ‘skull nests’ were found within Ofnet cave, Bavaria, comprising a smaller group of six skulls in one pit, and a larger group of 28 in another (Schmidt 1908). The exact number is unclear, which is not surprising given the fragmentary nature of the remains, the presence of many younger children with more fragile and unfused crania, and the early nineteenth century date of recovery. All of the skulls – or rather heads at the time they were deposited – were oriented facing west, while the cave itself opens to the south-west, leaving it uncertain whether they faced the entrance or the cave wall adjacent to it (Burkitt 1921: 188–189; Hofmann 2005); the importance of direction is suggested by the Kaufertsberg skull, which Judith Grünberg (2000: 80) has suggested was positioned to look out across the valley. A number of the Ofnet skulls were covered with red ochre and abundant red deer and shell bead ornamentation. Many have commented on the site’s unusual demography (Orschiedt 2002b, 2005; Peter-Röcher 2002), which seems to indicate an overrepresentation of children and a paucity of adult males relative to a living community: of the 14 or 15 adults in the two pits, nine or ten are female and five are male (Frayer 1997; Orschiedt 2002b, 2005). Both points are debatable. Firstly, subadult presence and mortality would be expected to be high at this time (it is the underrepresentation of young children that is the anomalous feature of many archaeological cemeteries) (Bocquet-Appel 2002; Weiss 1973). And secondly, given the relatively small number of individuals involved, the female–male ratio (10:5) in fact does not depart significantly from 50:50 (one-tailed binomial \( p = 0.151 \)).

While the exact number is uncertain, many of the Ofnet crania show evidence of peri-mortem trauma in the form of stone axe blows (Frayer 1997; Gieseler 1951; Mollison 1936; Orschiedt 1998, 2002b, 2005). With the claimed percentage affected varying between ca. 20% and 60%, this in itself strongly suggests that burial assemblage is far from reflecting a normative mortuary rite (though see Orschiedt 1998, 2002b, 2005). This is further supported by the injuries found on the skulls from Hohlenstein-Stadel and Mannlefelsen. This may be a mortuary rite specifically for those dying violently (cf. Hofmann
2005: 207), though this raises the question of why so many children are represented at Ofnet, unless this is indeed a massacre site (and not all the crania need necessarily provide evidence of injury, as some individuals may have been killed in other ways). One problem is that so little is known of other contemporary burial practices in the region. In any case, the ritual importance of the head is indicated. Their careful placement within pits, together with red ochre and, at Ofnet, abundant bead ornamentation, together with their shared orientation, all speak of these heads being perceived as having special power. Thus, the evidence from SW Germany and NE France suggests that the term ‘skull cult’ might not be inappropriate (Jochim 2008), though this depends on exactly what the term is taken to mean. Certainly an interest in the head can be seen, but whether their careful treatment qualifies as veneration – a central feature of the definition – is unclear.

The main point of controversy regarding Ofnet has from the beginning revolved around its chronology. The initial debate focused on whether the ‘skull nests’ should be attributed to the Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic or Neolithic (Glowatzki & Protsch 1973; Mollison 1936). As Naber (1974) points out, even before any direct dating was carried out, the recorded stratigraphy and closely associated microliths supported a Mesolithic date. A series of radiocarbon dates confirmed this attribution (Hedges et al. 1989).

The next issue, still unresolved, relates to whether deposition of the skulls occurred over some centuries, or over a much shorter period, perhaps even as a single event. If the latter, and given the evidence for peri-mortem trauma, the possibility of a massacre presents itself, a position taken by David Frayer (1997). If the two pits are contemporary, the 34 men, women and children could well represent an entire hunter-gatherer band – an extraordinary level of violence for this period. Jörg Orscheidt (1998, 2002b, 2005), on the other hand, has argued that the range of radiocarbon dates obtained on the remains is more consistent with repeated deposition spanning some centuries. The available dating is simply not good enough to decide between these two alternatives (Brinch Petersen 2006; Jeunesse 2012; Jochim 2011).

A new dating programme is currently underway, with the specific aim of assessing the duration of use of the two pits at Ofnet. While it will not be possible to positively identify a single event, higher precision dates combined with Bayesian modelling should be able to distinguish between deposition occurring over more or less than a generation (Figure 2.5). If the dates are consistent with a generation or less (i.e. approximately 20 years), it would strongly support the massacre hypothesis.
Figure 2.5. Graph showing modelled simulations of 23 radiocarbon determinations centring on ca. 7500 BP with errors of ± 30 years, assuming true periods of deposition of 50, 100, 150, 200 and 250 years. While simultaneous deposition as a single event cannot be definitely proved, the models demonstrate that it should be possible to distinguish deposition over a generation or so (i.e. less than 50 years) from that occurring over a longer period.

A different practice again is seen at the large Mesolithic and ‘Neolithic’ cemetery of Zvejnieki, Latvia. Special treatment of the head here did not involve its removal, but rather the coating of the face with a layer of coloured clay and the laying of perforated amber disks on the eyes (Larsson & Zagorska 2006). Only a small number of individuals were treated in this way, comprising three or four out of the more than 300 present (Zagorskis 2004). As Nilsson Stutz et al. (2013: 1026) note, this would have transformed the face of the deceased prior to burial, but it then would no longer have been visible. This transformation was thus intended for the world of the dead, not to be seen by the living, other than for a brief period – and possibly by a limited number of people – before burial. In this sense the practice differs markedly from the plastered ‘skulls’ of the Neolithic Near East, which it otherwise brings to mind (cf. Edgren 2006: 333). The documentation of the use of amber disks in burials at Zvejnieki has facilitated wider recognition of the practice in other parts of the Baltic where bone does not survive. Thus, paired amber rings with clay plugs found at the Corded Ware Culture sites of Kokemäki Pispa and Laukaa Hartikka in Finland can now be interpreted as having lain on the eyes of the deceased: rings and lens-shaped discs of slate may have served the same function (Edgren 2006).

3 In the eastern Baltic the term ‘Neolithic’ simply denotes the presence of pottery. The ‘Early Neolithic’ here is the equivalent of the Ertebolle of southern Scandinavia.
An ethnographic aside: ancestor veneration, trophy skulls and angry spirits

No formal definition of ‘head cult’ or ‘skull cult’ has been provided here, beyond noting that it typically entails an element of veneration of the human head. The evidence for formal deposition in the Mesolithic is sufficient to posit a ritual context, though whether and to what extent this equates to veneration is open to debate. But assuming it does, what follows? In the introduction to this paper, the putative links between ancestor veneration and farming were noted (in the form of the extended Near Eastern tradition, dating back to the Early Natufian, of cranium/skull removal and the subsequent PPNB tradition of plastered ‘skulls’). Can such links be supported for hunter-gatherers, and, if so, what do they tell us? Using a sample of over 100 societies from the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF), Dean Sheils (1975) investigated the structural correlates of ancestor worship. His findings clearly linked ancestor worship with unilineal descent, and with the presence of polygyny. While a statistically significant relationship ($p = 0.01$) between ancestor worship and agricultural level was also identified, Sheils felt this to be spurious, an outcome of the fact that farming societies were more likely to exhibit the other traits, and that these were the more important causal factors. Regardless, what is important to note here is that, using the data provided (Sheils 1975), eight of 23 hunter-gatherer societies (ca. 35%) exhibit some form of ancestor worship. While this is significantly less than seen in horticulturalists (49 of 62 societies, or 79%), it does show that ancestor worship is far from uncommon in hunter-gatherers. Nor, it might be remarked, did Sheil’s study include any of the complex fisher-hunter-gatherers of the Northwest Coast of North America, where ancestry certainly featured strongly, to the extent that heraldic art, hereditary leadership and institutionalised slavery existed (Donald 1997).

If some form of ancestor worship did feature in the Mesolithic, it might imply a stronger sense and expression of territoriality, as is often proposed in relation to the presence of formal cemeteries, usually in the context of farming societies (Goldstein 1981; Saxe 1970). But it is clear that hunter-gatherers can also act territorially (Elder 2010), indeed in some cases extremely so (i.e. the use of lethal violence in response to boundary transgression). It is in such contexts that the distinction between the ancestor veneration and the taking of trophy heads can become blurred. There is sufficient ethnographic and archaeological evidence for the practice of head taking among hunter-gatherers that this – like expressions of territoriality and a
marked interest in ancestors – should come as no surprise. The cultures of the Northwest Coast clearly demonstrate all of these features. A mid-nineteenth century painting by the artist and traveller Paul Kane (1859) documents the return of a Songhees (Central Coast Salish) war party to their village near what was then Fort Victoria (now Victoria, British Columbia). A standing figure in the prow of the first of two canoes is shown holding up a head, while a corresponding figure in the second canoe is depicted holding a head in each outstretched arm. An additional head appears to be stuck on a pole in each vessel’s stern. Though this image may be a composite of a number of scenes witnessed by Kane, there is more than enough corroborative evidence for events precisely of this type that there is no question of its veracity (Boas 1916; Drucker 1951; see recent review in Lovisek 2007). And, lest this behaviour be seen as brought about by the undoubted disruptions caused by Euroamerican contact (Ferguson & Whitehead 1992), the archaeological record supports the considerable time-depth of the taking of trophy skulls. Dating from around 200 BC to AD 400, skeletons at the Boardwalk site, Prince Rupert Harbour (British Columbia) show considerable evidence for interpersonal violence, with some graves including elaborate weapons (e.g. carved whalebone clubs). Trophy skulls were found in at least one burial and in one cache at Boardwalk, and have been recovered from other sites in the area (Cybulski 1978, 2014).

The issue of differentiating between a ‘venerated ancestor’ and a trophy head is not seen as problematic in itself (though identifying which is in play in any particular instance of course remains difficult), since they can be interpreted as two sides of the same coin, an outcome of the belief that the head holds or concentrates the life force (Hoskins 1989, 1996a, 1996b). The ways in which this is harnessed are diverse, but often involve corporeal remains. In some ethnographically known instances, however, heads were simply discarded in the bush after being taken on raids, it being the act of taking the head that was of paramount importance – it is unlikely that evidence of such practices would be forthcoming archaeologically. But in many other cases, heads, whether of ancestors (however defined) or enemies, were retained, sometimes only for a short period, and sometimes for many decades. Here again, the division between the two can be blurred, as among the Naga hill tribes of north-east India, who took the heads of enemies but converted them into their own ‘ancestors’ who were meant to sustain fertility of both people and crops (Hoskins 1996b).
Moreover, while often presented and discussed as two extremes – ancestor veneration or enemy trophies – the skull may be interpreted in other ways when found separated from the postcranial skeleton. The heads of the deceased may have been treated in certain ways depending on the circumstances surrounding death, and have had more to do with appeasing angry spirits than with either veneration or trophy-taking (cf. Whitley 2002). The distinction may blur when the angry spirits belong to those who died violently; indeed, this recalls the careful treatment of the buried skulls at Ofnet and Hohlenstein-Stadel. Seen in this context, the mortuary rites carried out by the survivors or by perpetrators (whether or not seen as a massacre, the evidence for lethal violence remains) may not differ substantially. The dangerous power of the dead can also be harnessed by shamans and sorcerers. This could potentially involve very elaborate ritual treatment that would nevertheless again have nothing to do with either veneration or trophy-taking. Sorcerers among the Kwakwaka’wak (Kwakiutl) and Nuxalk (Bella Coola) of the central coast of British Columbia used human skulls robbed from graves to curse people, inserting into them pieces of clothing or other personal items of the intended victim (Boas 1891: 612–613; McIlwraith 1948: 741–742). Among the Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka) of western Vancouver Island, the voices of the dead were believed to have the power to call whales, and so chiefs used the corpses of the recently deceased to entice them towards their villages where they could be hunted more easily (Drucker 1951: 170–171). While the entire corpse featured, the focus was on the head, a tube being inserted through a hole made in the back of the neck into the mouth through which to call the whale. Numerous additional examples from the ethnographic literature and indeed more recent contexts could be cited, but these serve to make the point. On the other hand, it is likely that societies attributing such powers to the deceased also practised some form of ancestor veneration and trophy-taking: both certainly featured among the Nuxalk and Nuu-chah-nulth. The ‘coin’ in this case simply has more than two sides.

Mesolithic ‘skull cults’?

While the available evidence is patchy and open to various readings, the overview presented here suggests the likelihood of widespread beliefs and practices involving the human head in Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Europe. This is not to imply uniformity, as there are indications of marked regional variability. The best example of this is the carefully placed detached heads
from a number of sites in south-west Germany, most notably Ofnet, and north-east France. And while only a small proportion of individuals may be involved, the application of clay ‘masks’ and amber or slate discs on the eyes of the deceased seems to be a distinctive feature of the eastern Baltic. Given the millennia separating Zvejnieki and the Finnish Corded Ware sites, this tradition may be a longstanding one. This need not be surprising, as there are other elements of northern Eurasian hunter-gatherer societies that seem to be widespread and persistent, for example, the use of elk-head imagery; this is found in the Baltic area, including Zvejnieki, and at sites in western Russia, most notably Oleni ostrov (Karelia, Russia) but also others (Kozłowski 1989; Larsson & Zagorska 2006). Marek Zvelebil (2008) discusses this and other shared motifs and symbolism in the region. The Mesolithic sites of the Iron Gates provide evidence of a different practice, involving the retrieval of the cranium, and sometimes also the mandible, from burials wherein the flesh had already decayed. While crania were redeposited in various ways, the mandibles were occasionally incorporated into elaborate hearth structures, with rich symbolic potential. Kanaljorden is different again, with partially decomposed heads set on wooden stakes in a shallow pool of water adjacent to a large settlement. Whether this practice will turn out to be more widespread remains to be seen, but it is unlikely to be unique.

As well as differences, there are tentative suggestions of commonalities, though these need involve nothing more than ways of thinking about the human head shared across many cultures. For example, a number of the cases discussed in this paper imply, to varying extents, an emphasis on the eyes and on the act of watching. This is seen most incontrovertibly, of course, in the addition of shell eyes on the modelled crania and skulls of the PPNB. The isolated cranium of a young female with deer vertebrae discs inserted into the orbits at Mas d’Azil provides an intriguing, if currently unique, example from the Magdalenian. For the Mesolithic, there is use of amber discs for eyes at Zvejnieki, though here the dead did not gaze upon the living, but upon an underworld. Given their early date of excavation, the situation at Ofnet and Kaufertsberg is not clear, but the skulls at both may have been placed to look out of their respective caves, albeit from underground. In any case, it may be significant that all reportedly faced the same direction, perhaps hinting at the importance of a particular view, though its specific meaning escapes us. Views to an underwater otherworld may have played a role for the heads on stakes at Kanaljorden, which may never have risen above the water.
What the examples discussed above all share is the recognition that the human skull is a rich and varied source of powerful symbolism. Indeed, this belief is shared much more widely through time and space, and is arguably a defining human characteristic, associated as it is with both personal and group identity. To partially answer the question posed at the beginning of this paper, there is plausible evidence for ‘skull cults’ in the Mesolithic (as indeed there is for the Upper Palaeolithic and for the Neolithic), as evidenced by varied practices involving the head in both its fleshed and bony forms.

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References


Mesolithic Skull Cults?


Mesolithic Skull Cults?


Abstract

To handle death may be a difficult task for the living. The death of a person creates a turbulent situation that needs to be resolved. Ritual actions and burial practices performed within the framework of the prevailing social norms are a way to deal with conflicts and changed power relations. This paper deals with such issues exemplified by the Pitted Ware burial practices seen in the burial ground at Ajvide, Eksta Parish on Gotland. The burial expressions observed from this site indicate the use of different rituals in the treatment of the dead. These are visible by bodies buried in the supine position in single, or sometimes in double or triple graves, while some consist of individuals in a “package” where the body must have been in a state of decay when buried. Well over a thousand identified human bone fragments found in the cultural layers indicate bodies that may have been exposed above ground or used secondarily and ultimately dispersed in the area. Empty graves and graves with missing bones also indicate that bones of deceased ancestors may have been of importance in the death rituals that assured a “Perfect Death”.

Keywords: death; death and society; archaeology and burials; Stone Age; Pitted Ware; Ajvide

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Some background ideas on death and the ritualisation of the dead

This study deals with ritualised death practices as they are observed in the Pitted Ware Culture (PWC) sites on the Island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Map of the Baltic region and the location of the Ajvide site on Gotland (after Bägerfeldt 1992: 6).
The main site used in this case study is the well excavated burial ground at Ajvide (Burenhult 2002). I consider this site to be one of the best representatives of the Middle Neolithic era when it comes to the treatment of the dead within this tradition. Of course, one can never be certain if the buried individuals are representative of the PWC or if they represent a section of the society, or whether there were other burial practices as well. However, the site studied includes males and females, as well as all different age groups. Some individuals have been given more burial gifts and others less, and some have exotic items and others not. This suggests that the buried individuals may represent a cross section of the society. Pitted Ware burial norms have been discussed some years ago, and generally I agree with Andersson (2004) who suggests that we cannot simply argue that burials that are missing bone elements always have been accidentally destroyed (although this also may have happened) in prehistory or by more recent farmers; instead we need to see them as representing stages in the burial processes, where ancestral bones were part of ongoing treatment.

Death is generally explained as the end of life; however, the end of life may not be that evident, since it is widely thought that the body needs to be treated, as well as the spirit needing to leave the body so as not to disturb life for those left behind (Fraser 1933: 49). Treatment of the dead is usually deeply rooted in traditional ritualised actions, and such rituals usually make the situation easier to deal with since they follow a more or less predetermined pattern. One may ask if there is such a thing as a perfect death. It may be questionable; however, I consider that rituals tied to death make an effort in that direction in trying to deal with the situation. Rituals are needed in all transitions of life and are designed to take care of the critical transformation of personal changes in a way that is acceptable, as well as predictable to all in society, because they are founded in tradition, practised by the collective habitus of the society, and, if carried out in the right way, things should not go wrong. The concept of death is of course central in archaeology, since it is only in death, through dealing with burials, we are in close contact with the people who created the material remains that we usually find in cultural layers. Some may argue that the actions we observe in graves are ritual actions that are detached from ordinary life and therefore have nothing to do with the living society, and it is often mentioned (discussed by, for example, Richards and Thomas 1984; Bradley 2003) that what we cannot understand we put into the “ritual box”. This may sometimes be the case, but such arguments are probably used since today we usually divide “normal” from “ritual” activities. I see here ritual practice as something that
was deeply rooted in the structure of action, also seen in daily activities. The ritual activities were of course not activities strange to past society; it may in some cases look that way in our eyes (for example, when skulls are missing and human remains are spread around). I do not think prehistoric man made an effort to act in a “weird” fashion; why should they? Therefore the structure of ritual may also have been the structure of other actions in the living society. Victor Turner (1969) stated that it is in the liminal phases, performed in rituals, that the fundamental building blocks of the society are exposed. If one thinks in this way, the layout of a burial ground may be understood and seen as quite logical in its organisation. It may also be easier to understand why different individuals were treated in various ways. If they were behaving as they did in ordinary life, the ritualised actions of death may be understood, since they then in a sense followed ordinary thinking. Life is never lived exactly the same way; illness is not treated in exactly the same way, and to follow this line, death is not treated in exactly the same way. Different ways and strategies during life, for example, using different resources at different seasons, gave a good living, as different strategies for the dead gave a supposedly controlled departure for the dead, and a safe and useful situation for the living. Death of a person is of course a big change for the person that died, as well as for the family and other affected persons that survive. Death can be seen as a natural thing, as well as an unnatural thing, depending on how the person died. Death may also stir up conflicts and change power relations among the survivors. Ritual actions, undertaken in connection with the death of a person resolve such situations and stabilised the situation (Bell 1992: 171–173).

More recently, the focus on ritual studies has changed from a perspective of understanding rituals to detecting ritual practices (Berggren & Nilsson Stutz 2010: 176). This view is based on Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas on practice theory, where practice is working through habitus expressing experiences stored among its inhabitants in the social body (Bourdieu 1977: 11–20). However, studying the actual results of practices of course also generates a new understanding of ritualised repeated behaviours. And being embodied knowledge these actions are highly structured and meaningful (Berggren & Nilsson Stutz 2010: 177). However, ritual actions carried out through habitus are socially learned behaviour that is only available if the society’s members are willing to practice it, i.e. as long as they want to preserve it in their memory. Memory based traditional societies are, according to the French historian Pierre Norá, open, spontaneous and subjective societies (2001: 366) and can thereby change depending on the needs of the group, or perhaps in this
case, the individual to be buried. Therefore, we can see general social expressions, as well as individual variations in burial rites. Burial rituals are a collective action driven by some general ideas on how it should be done, and are ongoing events carried out by individual actors or agents. By viewing the phenomena in this way one can depart from the general social structures that habitus offers, even if such structures are always present in the background, and instead view the actual execution of the act as central, and not focus on why it was performed (Giddens 1984: 5–9).

Other questions that sometimes appear in discussion concerning burial treatment and gifts is that we do not know if such acts/things given to the dead were tied to the dead person’s status/actions in life or if they were expected to be useful for the dead in the afterlife, or if they indicate the preferences of the person (or group) who contributed the gift. These questions can of course never be fully answered; however, what we can detect is the habitus of the practice tied to burial acts/gifts. Therefore, studies of buried individuals and their treatment can uncover such practice driven actions and are therefore interesting in themselves. These practices construct each death according to habitual practices and uncover general, as well as individual expressions.

Some anthropological ideas on the ritualisation of the dead

The concept of ritualisation may be applied when discussing rituals used in social control or communication. According to Catherine Bell (1992: 89) the concept of ritualisation can be applied to distinguish ritualised practices from other practices, and display how such actions are carried out in different strategies. Since burials and their expressions are formalised they are expressions of socially defined actions used in a certain way by the group (Geertz 1980: 123–124), and therefore they indicate a ritualisation of the dead. Following the discussion by Bell (1992: 197–223) the death of a person is a case that concerns society in its social expression of control, particularly with social positions, and is therefore of great importance in the shaping of power relations and belonging within the group.

The treatment of the dead body can be a prolonged action since the body of a deceased person can be seen as something scary and dangerous, which needed different treatment to make the spirit leave the body in a peaceful way, to not disturb the living. A general goal is to prepare the body in dif-
ferent ways and ensure that the flesh is removed from the bones. If this goes well, the bones themselves can be used to give strength to individual actors and/or the society. In this usage, bones are mixed up into the ground or placed at ceremonial sites, etc. (Handy 1927; Henry 1928; Wallin & Solsvik 2010). When the bones become a part of the material culture, they give power to genealogies that may turn into legendary ancestral stories connected to the gods. However, such anthropological suggestions concerning death as a transformation or regulation of power relations, etc. are of course difficult to claim and tie to archaeological remains. A possible way is through the study of definite actions taken in connection with the dead as expressed by funerary practices. The valuable thing with these practices is that they in fact show us something through the observable remains that were left behind. Such traces are found at the Gotlandic PWC sites, seen for example in pig bone deposits that indicate feasting or sacrifices in relation to the burial of the dead, and there are differences among the buried individuals when it comes to burial practices, as well as how the body was placed in the grave, and which gifts were bestowed (Wallin 2010). It is through these practices we may understand something of the complex relations with the dead. Some of these relations I will describe in more detail below.

The Ajvide burial ground

The aim of this paper is to give examples of ritual practices that can be observed within the PWC sphere especially on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. This choice is due to a longstanding interest in the PWC sites on the island (Wallin 1984; Wallin & Eriksson 1985; Wallin & Martinsson-Wallin 1991, 1992a, 1992b, Wallin 1995a; Wallin & Martinsson-Wallin 1996 Wallin & Sten 2007; Wallin 2010). Another, more important reason, is that the PWC sites with burial grounds on Gotland are the best preserved in Sweden, due to the calcareous ground. There is nothing to compare them with on the mainland, and the Gotlandic case may therefore give some general insight into and suggestions for the entire PWC complex. In this paper I have focused on the well-known PWC site at Ajvide, Eksta Parish, since it is the most thoroughly investigated burial site on the island (Burenhult 2002; Österholm 2008). I also do this because the Department of Archaeology and Osteology at Gotland University, now Uppsala University, Campus Gotland, has been running the archaeological excavations at the site for many years (1999–2009) and we are about to carry out research on the
enormous amount of excavated material of which the burials are central to the understanding of the site.

**Chronology and spatial relations**

A total number of 58 $^{14}$C dates is now available from this site (Wallin & Martinsson-Wallin in press). Dated contexts include a “settlement” of cultural debris dated to ca. 3100–2900 BC, and the burial ground itself which, according to the $^{14}$C dates, was established about 200 years later than the initial phase of the site. Furthermore, all burials are found in pits excavated through the cultural layer that contained animal bones and pottery shards. This means that the site selected for burials was used earlier as a fishing/hunting/feasting ground. The burial ground at the site can be divided into two phases, the first at ca. 2900–2600 BC, and the second from around ca. 2600–2300 BC. During the latter phase, larger ritual areas indicated by dark soil and high frequencies of bones and pottery shards were established among the old burials. New burials were also placed in relation to the earlier burials that in several cases were consciously manipulated by these ritual activities. This is indicated by the high amount of fragmentary human remains (Lundén 2012: 8, Fig.1) also found in these areas of dark soil (Östergren 1997: 163–164).

In summary, the burial ground at Ajvide consists of 85 burial pits (including 8 empty pits, sometimes interpreted as cenotaphs), containing 89 skeletons. Some of these burial pits contained just a few bones or dispersed human remains; however, the general manifestation is that of a single buried person. Some included two or three skeletons. These burial pits appear in clusters, as well as in smaller groups and pairs (Wallin & Martinsson-Wallin in press; Wallin in press). Other general observations are that females and males from all age groups are represented, as well as newborn to juvenile children. According to osteological determinations, males represent about 60% of the burials, and females about 40%, which may indicate a somewhat skewed representation. There are about 25% children/juveniles which also is a moderately low number; however, bones from children are fragile and may also be more difficult to detect in the field. The general view is that anybody could be buried, although the under representation of females and children/juveniles suggests that there might have been other alternatives. Detailed studies of the burial site display clusters of graves as mentioned above, initially suggested by Fahlander (2003). The $^{14}$C dates give an interesting new platform for novel interpretations. Fahlander (2010) suggests a chronological trend of Ajvide running from north to south, but instead,
new dated samples and a re-evaluation of earlier dates, show that each clus-
ter includes early as well as later dates. This means that the entire site was
used as a burial ground from ca. 2900 BC. I suggest that the clusters show
that family groups used different parts of the site, an interpretation also
supported by the fact that the clusters include persons of different dates,
age and sex (Wallin in press). To continue this reasoning, the term ‘burial’
needs to be discussed in relation to such practices at Ajvide. First of all, we
need to define all rituals tied to the dead that can be traced at the site, and
secondly, we need to define the variations within each ritual practice.

Archaeological descriptions of observed differentiations in
the ritualisation of the dead at Ajvide

Several burial practices can be deduced by studying the existing remains.
Andersson (2004: 10–16) described some of these practices concerning
missing bones, cutting into graves, and positioning of new burials in relation
to older ones. However, if such treatments should be seen as different initial
expressions existing at the same time or if they are to be seen as practices
that might have been necessary for some of the individuals and added on as
a long burial process, is still not possible to determine without more detailed
chronological analyses. What can be pointed out is the existence of different
practices (body treatments) that can be detected, observed and described
which I attempt to do here.

The first practice (individual burials, sometimes with heads removed
and/or with other remains removed)

In the single grave practice (Figure 3.2), an individual (either female, male or
juvenile) is buried in the supine position in a rounded, oval or squared pit
dug into an old cultural layer. The prevailing orientation is with the head
towards the northern sector, however, there are burials oriented in other
directions. The skeleton may also be placed slightly on its side or, as in a
few cases, in a flexed position. There are also several examples of individu-
als buried in double or triple graves, meaning that two or three individuals
were buried in the same burial pit, sometimes side by side and sometimes
two in a row. Usually the whole body is found in the pit (in 58% of the cas-
es), but in several cases the skeleton is missing the skull as well as the upper
part of the body, or in some cases other parts of the body (in ca. 19%),
which indicates that the bones had been removed at some point, probably
in connection with conscious actions which may be tied to new ritual ac-
tions that can be related to the establishment of the so called “dark areas” located within the burial ground area. However, the concept of “single” graves may be misleading since seven graves at Ajvide are double graves and two triple graves, and if looking at the dispersal pattern of all graves, 86% of all individuals are buried within approximately one metre from the neighbouring grave, sometimes side by side, or actually cut into another burial (Wallin in press).

![Figure 3.2. The first practice: individuals buried in supine position in single, double or triple graves. Some skulls and upper parts of the body, or in some cases, other bone elements are missing (Photo: Göran Burenhult).](image)

**The second practice (package burials or re-burials of body parts)**

Three of the burials were so called “package graves”, which means that the dead were probably not placed in the grave before reaching a state of decomposition. This means that the pretreatment must have been carried out in the open air, or the corpse must have gone through a preliminary burial, with a secondary burial carried out later in the process. Both males and females, as well as juveniles, are found in these graves. They are closely connected to another individual, or, as in one case, include four individuals in one package (Norderäng 2007: 16). However, this treatment is not commonly observed, since less than 5% of the burials were treated in this way. Other phenomena are burial pits that include fragmentary skeletons or just a few human bones. These cases, numbering about 14%, may indicate re-burial of bone elements as a secondary burial practice. Together package
burials and possible reburials of bone elements make up almost 20% of the cases (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. The second burial practice: package burials, buried fragments and burned human long bone fragments found in the cultural debris (Photos: Göran Burenhult, left and middle right; Erik Nylén upper right and Johan Norderäng lower right).

The third practice (dispersed human remains)
In total at least 1122 dispersed fragmented human remains have been found from all over the site at Ajvide (Figure 3.4), and at all different depths of the cultural layers (Lundén 2012: 6; Kristiansson 2006). This indicates that these fragments generally do not derive from graves destroyed in recent times. If that were the case, then all graves would have been more or less disturbed, since human fragments are found close to complete skeletons, perhaps especially in the so called “dark areas” which occur within the burial ground. This suggests that some of the dead were exposed to the open air and that
the bones were spread around, or that some individuals were dug up and the ancestral bones were used and/or manipulated in different ways.

Ritual cannibalism has also been mentioned when it comes to dispersed human remains (Grönroos 1913; Welinder 2009), however, this may be difficult to ascertain. One human tibia from the nearby PWC site at Hemmor (that also includes dispersed human remains) was possibly cut into two pieces that are partly burnt (Wallin 1995b; Hedemark et al. 2000). Burnt and partly burnt human remains have also been reported from some areas at Ajvide, especially from the uppermost dark area (Norderång 2009: 7–8). About 42% of all burials at the Ajvide site are missing parts of the skeleton,
or include just some human remains or are empty graves (Table 3.1). This fact may indicate that dispersed human remains have been the result of a conscious act.

Table 3.1. The number and percentages of different burial practices and features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burial practices</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete skeletons</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing heads/upper part</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentary/fragments</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty grave</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fourth practice (cenotaphs or empty burial pits)
Eight of the burial pits were empty (Figure 3.5). They generally have the same oval shape and dark colouring as ordinary burials and also include some customary burial gifts, however, there are no human remains.

These burial pits have been called cenotaphs, with the interpretation that they represent individuals that have died or disappeared, perhaps on the sea or abroad on voyages, etc. (Burenhult 2002: 33). Another possibility is that these individuals have been dug up (Ulaya 2011: 47) and may in fact have formed some of the “package” individuals or represent the dispersed bone fragments.
The fifth practice (other burial places?)
It may also be the case that not all individuals were buried at the burial ground. This is probably not possible to ascertain. However, it may be suggested based on the fact that the proportion of females and juveniles are somewhat underrepresented at Ajvide. It has also been observed that there are no old women at the PWC site located in Visby (Wallin 2010). Alternative burial grounds may be, for example, the sea itself or other exposed locations. However, it is relevant to discuss these circumstances since only a total of ca. 220 graves from the PWC period have been found on all known Gotlandic burial grounds. These sites generally have a time depth that represents about 900 years of human history. The actual number found seems in this perspective to be quite low. Of course many more graves may be detected if more burial grounds were uncovered and the number also increases if the dispersed human remains are taken into consideration.

A conclusion of death practices at Ajvide
Only by studying the authentic burial act can we claim that there was not just one way to inter the body during the PWC time. The most common burial position seen in single graves is when the person was placed in the
supine position. This may be an initial burial phase, which in some cases needed further treatment. The burial process may have led to some individuals being removed, completely or partially, from the grave. In some cases the human remains have been re-buried as a package; in others, the bones have been used and finally spread or left on the ground, or re-buried in a pit. Such secondary treatments are common in different social structures from hunters to stratified societies (Hertz 1960; Larsson 2009: 376–392). In some cases the individual might not have been buried in the ground at all, and instead left in the open air and then spread on the ground during ritual activities and usages of the ancestor's bones. It is therefore possible that the remains of most individuals therefore just disintegrated and slowly disappeared into an ultimate perfect death. The bones connected to the ancestral ground and mixed into the accumulated material debris can also easily be tied to genealogies and in this way become the mythological forefathers that have been protecting the ground since time immemorial.

**General Discussion**

The following definition of habitus offers a final foundation in the concluding discussion of this paper:

The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentials in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus.

(Bourdieu 1977: 78)

When documenting the different practices seen in the Ajvide burial ground one may claim that different individuals in that society were treated individually, and that the framework of how normative behaviour was performed had such regulated improvisations as stated in the citation above by Bourdieu. It is possible though, to recognise the PWC norms and their variations through archaeological detection and survey, but only if we treat the differences as expected variations and not as later “disturbances” to the single norm implemented by our western society that expects such rational norms. So, when accepting the variations (not uncritically, but only if they can be seen as repeated actions), as they are described in this paper, their meanings may be understood as a complex of actions undertaken in relation to the dead. When associating this knowledge with ideas on how memory societies
are described (Norá 2001) it may be understood that changes and variations are habitually used as a norm since change performed by its actants are performed to keep stability (Sahlins 1997: 250). Such actions, which by us can be called inventions, are seen as part of the old traditions since they are carried out by its inhabitants, and thereby in the situation seen as normal (Giddens 1979: 200; Sahlins 1985: 144). These variances can be detected only with distance from the outside. This phenomenon can be compared with Bourdieu’s concept of méconnaissance or a kind of false consciousness, which may be seen as an assumption as to how symbolic actions are accepted as valid expression within a system of social conventions (Broady 1988: 3).

From the specific perspective of the Gotlandic Middle Neolithic society, their burial rituals and the ritualisation of the dead body, it is clear that death was not a simple act in this society. It is evident that the body was buried and treated in different ways and that the bones were used and spread on the ground by different actions. How then can death be defined? Perhaps the observed practices can indicate that death of a person need not be seen as a definitive end point; instead the different practices indicate prolonged actions that in this way may define the Pitted Ware Death as a continuous action which suggests that the deceased committed the surviving perhaps for generations.

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Cremating Corpses – Destroying, Defying or Deifying Death?

Terje Oestigaard 1

Abstract

Cremation as a funeral practice is unique in the sense that through fire as a medium the dead are actively incorporated into other spheres and realms. The problem of decaying corpses has been solved through history in one way or another, irrespective of culture. Although Christianity has seen cremation as destructive and negative, obliterating death and destroying the corpse, consequently hindering resurrection, in other cultures and time periods the cremation fire has been a positive and transformative medium. It is through transformation that the deceased is revitalised and gains new life in another existence, and it may even enable divine existences. Thus, with different comparative cremation practices in the past and the present, this paper discusses concepts of death.

Keywords: bodies; corpses; cremation; flesh; funerals

Introduction

What characterises cremation as a funeral practice is first and foremost the use of fire as a way of disposing of the deceased’s flesh. In Western thought fire, and in this case the cremation fire, is often conceived of as destructive, annihilating flesh. This perception is, however, not only culture specific, but throughout cultures in the past and present cremation has been viewed as not necessarily destroying but transforming the dead. It is used in multiple ways to ex-

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press particular cosmological conceptions. Thus, with fire as the medium and the body as the agent cremation offers numerous possibilities of understanding death, what it is and what it signifies. I analyse this, first by a theoretical introduction to corpses and decaying human flesh as an entrance to understanding death, before proceeding with ethnographic and archaeological examples discussing how cremation, representing many different funeral practices, can shed light on these questions. The underlying premise is that without turning to phenomenological or ahistorical definitions, the only way to understand various concepts of death is to empirically analyse what the descendants do in actual practice when they perceive death and how they handle bodies for the life hereafter and for their perceived existence.

Definitions of death and conceptualizing corpses

In thanatology, the scientific study of death, four different deaths are distinguished: 1) **Social death** is the condition where relatives, friends or the community exclude the dying from the living, treating the dying as already dead. The person becomes a thing without life. 2) **Psychological death** is the condition where the dying person accepts the forthcoming death and isolates him– or herself from relatives, friends or the community. 3) **Biological death** is the condition where we as thinking human beings cease to exist. The body becomes a vegetative organism completely dependent on help from others to survive, i.e. on respirators or artificial breathing machines. 4) **Physiological death** is the condition where the vital organs have stopped working, first and foremost the heart or the lungs. Thus, from a scientific and technical point of view there are different definitions of death, and the transition from life to death is not clear-cut. In a broader sociological perspective, one may extend and include other aspects of death: 1) **medically**, death is the end of the life; 2) **socially**, death is a change among the living, directing the attention from the dead to the descendants; 3) **ritually**, death is a transformation of life, and finally, 4) **religiously**, death is an extension and continuity of life in an otherworldly existence (or worldly reincarnation) (Oestigaard 2004).

Thus, death is a multiple process involving different stakes and realms. Defining a clear-cut distinction between life and death is difficult since death is a gradual transformation. Still, death has certain characteristics irrespective of cultures and religions. The absence of breath and a cold and stiff body are two such characteristics, but perhaps seeing the absence of life while looking straight into the eyes of a dead person is the most revealing of the
changes that have happened: there is no life. The body has become a corpse. Hence, it is easier to conclude when a body is a corpse than to define exactly why it is a corpse. Moreover, in many cultures and religions, the mind and soul still reside in the body as corpse before the actual funeral rites. In Hinduism (Figure 4.1), the soul is only released during cremation when the son ritually cracks open the skull with a bamboo pole. The father is not dead before the soul leaves the skull through the cremation. The cremation is therefore a double life-giving transformation; the father attains a new incarnation by being reincarnated and the son takes his father’s place in society and religion, but by conducting a ritual homicide – life-giving for the father, while at the same time the father is not properly dead before being on the pyre. The son also commits a religious crime, which he has to repent and mourn through purification rituals (Parry 1994: 181–184). In Christianity too, the soul is also variously believed to continue existing and residing in the corpse and the grave until Doomsday and resurrection. Thus, culturally and religiously, corpses and death are not solely characterised by the absence of the soul, but direct attention to the qualities and properties of the flesh of corpses, and the role and function of funerals in general, and in this case, cremation in particular.

Figure 4.1. Cremation at Pashupatinath, Nepal. (Photo: Terje Oestigaard).
Flesh and funerals

‘Life is between the first and the last breath. Thus, the life force is the kind of air which enters the body and makes it living’ (Murthy 1995: 18). Bodies do not have consciousness but consciousness has bodies (Malik 1995: 76), and this is a beginning to further conceptualisations of corpses. The human flesh has an ambivalent character defining both what a human is and is not. Starting with the living body, the world and our existence are always structured around the body, and all perceptions of spatiality and temporality are anchored in the body (Merleau-Ponty 1995: 138). ‘The flesh…is the coherent ensemble of my powers and non-powers. Around this system of carnal possibilities the world unfolds itself as a set of rebellious or docile potential utensils, a set of permissions and obstacles’ (Ricoeur 1990: 230–231). Descartes called the flesh the ‘third substance’, a medium and matter bridging the gap between space and thought, and although Descartes is known for the Western dichotomy of mind and matter, this does not hold true, even in Western traditions and not the least in other traditions. Lakoff and Johnson argue for a philosophy in the flesh because reason is not disembodied following the Cartesian tradition, but the mind is embodied. As a consequence, no Cartesian dualistic persons exist in which mind and matter are distinctive and separate entities. The mind is inherently embodied, and as a result reason is shaped by the body, but in very different ways (Lakoff & Johnson 1999). This directs attention to the body or flesh of corpses – dead people, and at the outset there are at least two characteristics regarding conceptions of corpses.

Firstly, a corpse will soon start to rot and the flesh will deteriorate (Figure 4.2). In all cultures irrespective of religion, rotten corpses are seen as unclean. Apart from the mere physical and practical aspects of decay, a corpse is not like other organic and rotting material; it has been a human, a beloved or respected member of society, and a relative. Purity indicates completeness and impurity lack of completeness (Valeri 1985: 33), and particularly with regard to corpses and concepts about humans and humanity this could not have been truer, or in the words of Turner (1991: 96): ‘they are at once no longer classified and not yet classified’. What is unclear in a society is unclean; transitional persons are particularly polluting and such transitions are controlled by concepts of pollution and taboo (Douglas 1994: 97). The decaying flesh of a dead person is highly polluting, affecting the descendants from days to years and even their whole lives. In the transitional periods, the materiality of the deceased’s flesh is the most dangerous and polluting,
implying that most often only a few people in the succeeding generation are able to take care of this polluted and embodied matter, in practice, often one of the sons or a ritual specialist. The flesh of corpses is heavily imbued with culture and cosmology, not only with regard to descendants and relatives, but importantly for the deceased him– or herself.

Secondly, therefore, although the flesh on dead bodies starts to decompose, attaining highly ambivalent and polluting qualities, even during this process the flesh may maintain the overall cosmic qualities it acquired through the person’s lifespan as a moral agent, directly affecting the future destiny in the afterworld or in other incarnations. Although it is difficult to state explicitly how such conceptions were envisaged in prehistory, examples from Hinduism and Christianity with their ancient historic and archaeological trajectories may give ideas of the role and perceptions of the flesh in culture and cosmology: sin is embodied in the flesh. In most world religions, it is the body which is sinful – sins are embodied – and bodies are what separate souls from eternal and divine realms. According to Hindu beliefs, the more sinful a person has been, the longer the cremation rite takes, since the time it takes to burn the body depends upon the deceased’s embodied sins. In Varanasi, I was told that the pyre of a sinner could burn for at least six hours whereas a normal cremation usually took a couple of hours (Oestigaard 2000a: 30). As a striking example, when the Chief Minister of Bihar in

Figure 4.2. Decaying corpse, Nepal. (Photo: Terje Oestigaard).

Secondly, therefore, although the flesh on dead bodies starts to decompose, attaining highly ambivalent and polluting qualities, even during this process the flesh may maintain the overall cosmic qualities it acquired through the person’s lifespan as a moral agent, directly affecting the future destiny in the afterworld or in other incarnations. Although it is difficult to state explicitly how such conceptions were envisaged in prehistory, examples from Hinduism and Christianity with their ancient historic and archaeological trajectories may give ideas of the role and perceptions of the flesh in culture and cosmology: sin is embodied in the flesh. In most world religions, it is the body which is sinful – sins are embodied – and bodies are what separate souls from eternal and divine realms. According to Hindu beliefs, the more sinful a person has been, the longer the cremation rite takes, since the time it takes to burn the body depends upon the deceased’s embodied sins. In Varanasi, I was told that the pyre of a sinner could burn for at least six hours whereas a normal cremation usually took a couple of hours (Oestigaard 2000a: 30). As a striking example, when the Chief Minister of Bihar in
India was cremated in Varanasi in 1983, the corpse hardly burnt at all despite the size of the pyre, and the supposed reason was allegedly the enormous burden of sins accumulated through his corrupt earnings (Parry 1994: 127). In contrast, when the holy Buddhist monk and saint Milarepa died,

The flame at the base took the form of an eight-petaled lotus blossom, and the curling tips of the fire unfolded into the eight auspicious emblems and the seven royal insignia. Even the sparks took the form of goddesses bearing many offerings. The chants of worship and the crackling of the dazzling fire sounded like the melodious tones of various musical instruments, such as violins, flutes, and tambourines. The smoke permeated everything with the fragrance of perfume and, in the sky above the funeral pyre, young gods and goddesses poured a stream of nectar from the vases they held, and offered abundant delights for the five senses. (Lhalungpa 1979: 182–183).

A holy body burns differently from a sinner’s, and perhaps nowhere is that more evident than in the Christian Purgatory, which the pure and holy bypass completely. The sinners’ stay in the burning fires of Purgatory depends on the degrees of sins embodied in the flesh – the more sins, the more purgation. In fact, this perception of the burning embodied sin in Purgatory challenged understandings of Hell: if the sins are embodied and burnt away in Purgatory, how can Hell be a place of eternal damnation in fire? This theological problem was eventually solved by the French bishop William of Auvergne (1228–1249) by introducing Hellfire as distinct from the Purgatorial fire, the latter having the earthly qualities of consuming by burning or destroying. Hellfire, on the other hand, burned without consuming since the damned should be tortured for eternity. Thus, in Purgatory the fire was designated to expiate and purify, but not in Hell (Bernstein 1982; Le Goff 1984: 245).

Thus, approaching death and corpses from a perspective emphasising the qualities of the flesh directs attention to the role and function of funerals. In death, society and descendants have to solve at least three problems: first, the deceased moves from being a social person and living human to becoming an objectified and polluted thing, a decaying corpse; second, the future destiny in otherworldly realms such as Heaven or Hell, or becoming an ancestor, is to a large extent dependent upon the actual funeral conducted by the descendants – if they don’t do it correctly, they may ruin an otherwise benevolent metaphysical existence, and thirdly, the deceased and his qualities have to be incorporated in the resurrection and the re-structuring of the societies, and from this perspective the dead also fulfill important functions
among the living. In all these spheres the deceased’s flesh is of vital importance: rituals separate death from life – the dead from the living and eventually transform the dead to another sphere.

Various death rituals transform the corpse in different ways, but in general they all include the destruction of the flesh and the release of the body’s immutable elements (Hertz 1996: 43), although the bones are not necessarily totally destroyed and can be used in other contexts.

Thus, as a minimalist and tentative definition of a funeral as a cultural and cosmological practice and process, it is ‘at least a ritual preparation of the flesh of the deceased’ whether this preparation is consumption by fire or preservation of the flesh through mummification (Oestigaard 2005: 202). The dissolution of the flesh may also involve ritual consumption, which in its extreme form may represent cannibalism, but most often the problem with the flesh is solved in other ways. Regardless of the chosen funeral practices, the differences in body preparation methods are to various degrees invested with cosmological meanings, often combining and defining microcosm and macrocosm. The descendants have to solve the same problem: how to release the soul from the flesh when the soul is embodied in the flesh?

All funeral practices are cultural, ritual, and religious processes, including social and cosmic scales but to highly varying degrees, and the prescribed practices determine the duration of decomposition of the flesh. A cremation shortens this period considerably by the use of fire as a medium, and the main question in this chapter is therefore whether cremation destroys, defies or deifies death. The answer to this question is yes in all three regards – but in very different ways in different cultures and religions through time. As a point of departure, one may say that a ‘cremation is not one, but many funeral practices’ (Kaliff & Oestigaard 2013; Oestigaard 2013), because the ways fire as a medium is used and attributed transformative, life-giving or destructive qualities and capacities vary significantly cross-culturally and in different religions, as does the uses of the bones in other contexts after the flesh has been decomposed. Cremation is thus a truly multi-functional and multi-purpose ritual in culture and cosmology with a particular emphasis on one aspect of death: the deceased’s flesh. By discussing how cremation may destroy, defy or deify death one may also get broader insights into how and on what premises one might define or understand death.
Defying death

To ‘defy’ can be defined as to challenge the power of someone or something. Defying death can thus imply at least two aspects. First, by using funeral rites to challenge other power relations and hegemonies, since competing religions and cosmologies are often co-existing, choosing one particular funeral practice, which others in the same community perceive as heresy, may therefore be a political statement in a given context. Second, although defying and even denying death may at the outset seem counter-intuitive and futile since everybody by necessity will die, there still exist some few, small extreme groups denying and transcending death. Common to both these approaches of defying death, cremation as a funeral practice may be used as a cosmological means and expression.

Cremation as a distinct way of expressing different beliefs and cosmologies is perhaps most evidently seen in relation to Christianity from the Roman era until cremation was legalised in many European countries in the nineteenth century. In France, for instance, King Charlemagne forbade not only cremation as a funeral practice, but in 785 AD he also introduced the death penalty for those who cremated their deceased.

The Norwegian Viking Age (ca. 800–1000 AD) is world renowned for the Viking ships Oseberg and Gokstad. Both these are unburnt and there are a number of others as well. One of the most spectacular, and forgotten Viking ship in Norway, which may also be the largest one, is that burnt at Myklebostad in Western Norway. This ship was part of a grand cremation around the turn of the tenth century – a time and period where the Christianisation of Norway had started as well as the process of unification and formation of the Norwegian kingdom. Although there is no exact dating of this large Viking ship cremation, this funeral is remarkable in a comparative Viking Age context (for a lengthy discussion, see Oestigaard 2007), because it can be seen as a deviation from existing practices. At the outset, one may identify some features characterising this funeral:

First, compared to the Oseberg and Gokstad burials, it is a cremation. Although cremation was still a common funeral practice in the Viking Period, its dominant position during the Migration Period was gradually replaced by inhumation which culminated with Christianity. Cremation as a practice was declining, and this is the largest cremation of a Viking ship known in Norwegian history. Second, one of the most spectacular finds in this cremation
burial was the urn (Figure 4.3). However, urns were not a common Viking Age practice. During the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period (until ca. 550 AD) the use of urns in cremations was common, but with the transition to the Late Iron Age (from ca. 550 AD) this practice disappeared with some exceptions in Norway, and the production of pottery ends abruptly with the transition to the Merovingian Period (ca. 550 AD). As a result, ceramic urns were not made locally and in the Late Iron Age the common practice was that bones were scattered in the cremation patch. Third, the urn seems to have Irish or Celtic origin and together with the intentional destruction of weapons in the mound may indicate that older symbols and practices were explicitly and deliberately in use.

Figure 4.3. Myklebostad and the urn. Source: Bergen Museum.

Thus, by analysing the whole ritual repertoire that took place at Myklebostad in a comparative Viking Age context, it seems that there had been a revitalisation of earlier and older funeral practices and beliefs. The massive dimensions of the cremation, including the burning of the ship, strongly manifest the pagan religion and its practices with continuity from the Migration period and the Early Iron Age. As a ritual, this funeral bears
more resemblances to the Migration period than it does to the Viking Age. However, it might not be a Renaissance of older beliefs as such, because after this massive funeral the Myklebostad tradition ends rapidly. Thus, it seems to be the last effort to mobilise politically and religiously on a grand scale in a period characterised by political unification of the kingdom of Norway and an increasing process of Christianisation. As such, the cremation ritual might be interpreted as an attempt to defy death and the current or coming Christian cosmology by revitalising the older cremation practices on a much larger scale. As Clifford Geertz summarises the essence of political rituals in another context: ‘A royal cremation 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). In any case, the Myklebostad tradition was lost in the political and religious contest that unfolded, and such grand cremation rituals were never conducted again.

Hence, cremation may be a means for different purposes, and it may be used to challenge other religions and their cosmologies, including worldviews and conceptions about death and the afterlife. Defying and denying death may, however, also be done in a very direct and forceful way by transcending symbolism through explicit practice. This is difficult to trace in the archaeological record, but contemporary ethnography may reveal some insights regarding extreme conceptions of death, human flesh and eternal life. The Aghoris are a very small Hindu sect of holy men, probably one of the most extreme sects existing in the world. Some estimates are that only about 200 sadhus practise this type of asceticism, others that there are about 1000 Aghoris, and among themselves there are huge controversies regarding who are the true Aghoris and who are not (Figure 4.4).

Being an Aghori is difficult or impossible to grasp for an outsider, even for many Hindus, but Robert Svoboda, as a disciple of a great Aghori guru, wrote a comprehensive trilogy of his guru Viamalananda (Svoboda 1993a, 1993b, 1998). From one perspective, Aghora is a kind of ‘super form’ of Hinduism – it is everything of Hinduism in an intensive, concentrated and extreme form. The Aghoris expressly force the logic to its limit, not only symbolically and metaphorically, but also practically, and their actual, practical path is in essence the only logical consequence of the religious doctrines, at least according to themselves. Whereas common Hindus follow the Right-Hand Path searching for the ultimate reality through the path of purity, the Aghoris follow the Left-Hand Path emphasising the practitioners’ absolute internal purity in order to protect themselves from external impuri-
ties derived through rituals, which may involve necromancy, intoxicants, sex, or other polluted activities. The Left-Hand Path has been described as the ‘fast, terrible and intense’ path (Svoboda 1993a: 12).

Figure 4.4. The holy Aghori guru Tyaginath, Pashupatinath. (Photo: Terje Oestigaard).

The Aghoris perceive themselves as already dead and an Aghori’s most profound expression of love is ‘You will cremate me’ (Svoboda 1993a: 34). It is the body that dies, not the soul, and by being dead while being alive and holy has implications for the ritual practices since a soul can be holy only if the body is equally pure. Therefore, one test for the Aghori is to eat his own faeces with real love and devotion, and if he does, he has advanced on the spiritual path. This is perversion in common sense, but not from their perspective, because the basic thought and logic is the true oneness with all
existence – it is the devotee who ate the food which was pure when entering
the mouth; it has only been a part of the body; he produced the faeces, and
the only thing between the delicious food (mouth) and the faeces is the sub-
tle body of the devotee. If the faeces are impure then the body is impure,
and consequently then the devotee (and his soul) is impure and imperfect.
When an Aghori reaches this stage, he may eat whatever he finds: dead
dogs, slops from the gutter, and even his own flesh (Svoboda 1993a: 181–
183). They may also eat flesh directly from the cremation pyres, and by lit-
ernally consuming death, they prove to themselves and others that they have
bypassed mortality – they are the living dead.

Aghoris prefer cemeteries for living and devotion. ‘I used to sit there all day
and all night. I would cook my rice in a fresh skull each day, without even
cleaning out the bits of brain’, the guru Viamalananda said, ‘The smashan
[cemetery] is the ideal place for worship of Lord Shiva because death is the
eternal reality and Lord Shiva is the Destroyer, the very embodiment of
death. You will always find Him among the dead, amidst spirits, corpses, and
the ashes of burnt bodies. Manikarnika Ghat is Shiva’s favourite haunt’ (Svo-
boda 1993a: 84). In addition, the Aghoris use a lot of intoxicants, but im-
portantly, ‘you must drink the drink, you must not let the drink drink you, lest
you become its slave and be lost. You must always retain your control’ (Svo-
boda 1993a: 171). Being an Aghori implies going beyond all limitations, and
the body is the biggest limitation in this world. From an Aghori’s point of
view, using drugs has certain advantages in this process; it is a contest be-
tween the drug and the Aghori – who is the stronger? Will the drug overcome
the Aghori? If the Aghori masters the intoxication, this is due to the force
magnified by his concentration – the mind controlling matter (the subtle
body). Being bitten by cobras is also a practice, testing the Aghoris’ endur-
ance. In practice, however, the heavy use of drugs leads some to this path of
living because of the possibilities of misuse, and consequently, there are in-
ternal disputes regarding who are the true Aghoris (Svoboda 1993a: 173–176).
Tyaginath, the most holy, renowned and powerful Aghori at the Pashupati-
nath temple in Kathmandu, after several interviews, said that he had never
eaten human flesh: it was only the charlatans who did that – he was spiritually
too superior and in no need for such rituals (Oestigaard 2005).

The last example put emphasis on the body and human flesh as the most
potent expression of the limits of life – and death – and literally the fluid
borderlines between them in the process of defying death to enable eternal
immortality. However, the Left-Hand practice is for good reason very rare,
and this turns attention from pollution and defying death to the Right-Hand path, purity and deifying death: cremation is one of the ways where the dead can become part of the divine realms and become divinities themselves.

**Deifying death**

From the perspective of seeing a funeral as ‘at least a ritual preparation of the flesh of the deceased’ (Oestigaard 2005: 202), a very special funeral practice is described in one of the Vedic texts. In most understandings of cremation and mummification they are seen as opposites regarding preparation and consumption of the flesh, but in fact they might be complementary. The *Satapatha Brahmana*, an early Indian commentary on Vedic rituals describes this relation and the building of the Fire Altar as an elaborate ceremony carried out to obtain immortality for the king, royalties, and other important persons (Levin 1930a: 29). In this tradition, the corpse was first mummified or embalmed before being cremated, thus the body or the flesh were ritually prepared to acquire certain life-giving capacities before being burnt. The mummification in the burial rite equals the Fire Altar ritual immortalising the person ‘and in this way, having encompassed that mortal form by these two immortal forms, they make it immortal. Thereby then Prajapati became immortal, and in like manner does the sacrificer become immortal by making that body (the altar) immortal’ (Levin 1930a: 33). This has to be seen and understood as part of the cremation and the purifying role of the fire – Agni. The body or the corpse had to be mummified or made sacrificially pure by the removal of all ‘foul matter’ before life was restored to it, and only such a corporeal body was fit for the flames. Mummification could restore the body, but not bring life back to it (Levin 1930b). Thus, mummification restored the body whereas cremation revitalised it (Levin 1930c: 65), both parts of the funeral process aiming to immortalise the deceased.

In the history of holy and divine persons, one of the most special historical cremations is that of Buddha. When he felt that he was near the end, he informed his disciples and followers about his forthcoming death. One of the disciples was concerned about the funeral of the king of kings, and Buddha described how his own funeral should be conducted:

> They wrap the body of a king of kings, Ânanda, in a new cloth. When that is done they wrap it in carded cotton wool. When that is done they wrap it in a new cloth – and so until they have wrapped the body in five hundred successive layers of both kinds. Then they place the body in an oil vessel of iron, and cov-
er that up close with another oil vessel of iron. Then they build a funeral pile of all kinds of perfumes and burn the body of the king of kings. And then at the four cross roads they erect a dāgaba (a mound or barrow) to the king of kings. (Levin 1930a: 31)

This funeral practice corresponds to a large extent to what is described in the Satapatha Brahmana, with an emphasis on meticulous bandaging, embalming and finally, the building of a funeral pyre by perfumed woods. In the process of deifying death, according to the Buddhist scriptures, Buddha’s ashes or charred bones were put into different urns and buried in different parts of the country. It was the custom to bury the bone-relics of lamas and erect mounds called stupas over them (Datta 1936: 290), and remains of Buddha’s ashes were also buried at Swayambhunath in Kathmandu, Nepal.

This deifying practice has implications for the deifying process of the laity even today. In the Tibeto-Burmese village Manang in the Himalayas, the deceased were cremated in a special crematorium, which was a foundation to a chorten, a small stupa – and all stupas refer to the original stupas in which Buddha’s ashes were buried. Three chortens in a row symbolise the Three Jewels in Buddhism: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, Buddha being the Enlightened one, Dharma the essence of the religion, and Sangha the community of worshippers or a monastic order of monks and nuns (Thurman 1994: 14–15). Some days after the deceased has been cremated in the chorten, the burnt human bones together with ingredients like wheat, buckwheat, chilli, garlic, bark of juniper, ashes, and rice, are ground into a powder and mixed with clay by the deceased’s relatives (Figure 4.5). The clay is made into 108 figures called chatafars, symbolising small chortens, and the chatafars are placed into other chortens – in family memorials as well as distributed at various places in the village and beyond (Figure 4.6). Thus, by cremation and the use of the bones in the clay figures, symbolising the original stupa in which Buddha’s ashes were buried, the deceased take part in this process of cosmological deification (Oestigaard 2005).
Figure 4.5. Bones ground together with other ingredients like wheat, buckwheat, chilli, garlic, bark of juniper, ashes, and rice. Manang, Nepal. (Photo: Terje Oestigaard).

Figure 4.6. Chatafars – clay figures containing human bones. Manang, Nepal. (Photo: Terje Oestigaard).
Archaeological deification of the deceased may take other forms. As I have previously argued in *Sacrifices of Raw, Cooked and Burnt Humans* (Oestigaard 2000b), cremations take place at varying temperatures ranging from below 200 degrees to 1300–1400 degrees. The lower temperatures are in particular interesting because the cremations bear strong similarities to preparation of food, and the cremated remains are often buried in food utensils. One may interpret this as a food offering of the deceased to the deities, and through divine consumption the dead become part of the cosmic and divine realms. Similarly, in other contexts at extreme high temperatures matching the temperatures where bronze and iron are smelted, there is evidence that the dead have been cremated in the smithy, uniting technology and cosmology (for longer discussions, see Gansum 2004, Goldhahn & Oestigaard 2007, 2008). In the process of making steel from iron, bones are necessary, and a technological process where both human and animal bones have been added may explain why the swords in the Viking Period had identities, immanent powers, and names such as Tyrving, Gråsida, Kvernibitt, Gram, Fethrei, Bastard and Skrep, among others. As Gansum says, ‘we cannot be sure whether they used human bones in the process of making steel, but symbolically and ritually it seems likely. In this way ritual, technology and symbolism is fused together’ (Gansum 2004: 44).

These three examples – the Buddhist clay figures, food offerings and smelting of the deceased into objects – may illuminate very different and distinctive ways in which cremations as multiple funeral practices are part of deifying the dead.

**Conclusion**

Defining death is a challenge because death is most often more a transition than a fixed point or a final stage. Thus, there might be continuity in, contradictions of, or overlapping perceptions regarding, what death is or when death occurs. Whereas the dead to various degrees may for the better or worse influence life on this side, although in many cases may not, it is nevertheless also a widespread belief that the way the right descendants conduct the funerals may, in some cases significantly, define and decide the destiny of the deceased on the Other side, Christianity included. For Christians in earlier periods, being cremated or buried outside the cemetery as a consecrated and holy space would have hindered a place in paradise. The descendants’ direct responsibility for the welfare of the deceased is more evident in other cultures and religions, and the relations with death and the
dead, including ancestral propitiations and sacrifices, may never start or end – they have always been, and are at the core of culture, tradition and cosmology.

Since the sphere of death is so wide, it has been argued that for analytical purposes, an emphasis on the flesh of the corpse is a useful approach to the study of death and understanding of what death is – in the past and present. The problem of the flesh has to be solved, and has always been solved, in one way or another, and it is perhaps the single most specific characteristic common in all funerals, however different various funeral practices may be. The particular qualities of multiple cremation practices are furthermore – archaeologically as well as ethnographically – well suited for such analysis since fire is the medium which most rapidly and effectively consumes human flesh, but with highly diverse meanings in culture and cosmology.

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References


DREAD OF THE DEAD – LIVING IN THE VICINITY OF DEAD RELATIVES IN FINLAND 1751–1850

Milton Núñez

Abstract

For 15 years Oulu archaeologists have been studying Finland’s 1750–1850 parish records to understand the demographic conditions that may have existed in late prehistoric/medieval times. In addition to information on morbidity and mortality, we found marked differences between the date of an individual’s death and the date when he/she was finally buried in consecrated ground. The delay seems to be mainly related to distance to the parish church and seasonal conditions hindering the transport and/or burial of the corpse. To assess the influence of the environment, three parishes were selected on the basis of their situation: Rovaniemi (66.5° N), Viitasaari (63.0° N) and Pukkila (60.7° N) near the south coast. The study utilised the records of 12 994 individuals with known death and burial dates from these parishes. It appears that many people had to carry on with their lives for weeks or months – sometimes in proximity to the relative’s corpse – before the final physical and emotional separation took place with the burial ceremony at the parish church. We present the “death-to-burial time” figures for the three parishes during 1751–1850 and use historical sources to discuss the solutions applied to these problems and the possible impact of burial delays on the lives of mourning relatives.

Keywords: Finland 1751–1850; death to burial time; temporary burials; “death/corpse islands”; fear of the dead

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Introduction

Risking being seen as a determinist, I would venture to say that the environment plays a part in moulding various aspects of culture, including those related to worldviews and religious beliefs. We would, for example, be very surprised to see giraffes depicted in Fennoscandian rock art or reindeer representations in Africa. The same applies to mortuary procedures and rites. Having grown up in a warm tropical country, I am used to burial taking place within 24 hours after death. However, to my surprise this is not the situation I have come to observe in Finland, both present and past. Here again the environment plays an important role in the differences.

On the other hand, despite environmental similarity, there are obvious differences in the location of the burials of the agrarian cultures in Iron Age Sweden and Finland. In Sweden and Åland burial grounds usually lay next to or at least in eye contact with dwellings, whereas in mainland Finland they tended to be farther from the dwelling sites, often on islands (Figure 5.1; cf. e.g. Cleve 1943; Kuusela et al. 2013; Wessman 2010: 70–71). Referring to East Karelia, where the Orthodox religion allowed the survival of the old village cemetery traditions well into the 19th century, Jokipii states: There the dead have been buried in cemeteries that are usually located on islands and, where there are no basins nearby, on forested hills surrounded by cultivation fields (Jokipii 2001: 19). This description agrees well with the location of the burial grounds of Finland’s agrarian Iron Age culture.

Obviously these differences have to do with culture. They apparently lie in the western (Scandinavian) and eastern (Finnish) perceptions of death and the dead. In much of Finland the dead were both respected and feared, and were to be kept at a safe distance. Ethnohistorical sources describe various preventive measures to ensure that the dead stayed away from the living before their burial and that they remained in their graves afterwards (e.g. Holmberg 1964: 17–36; Pentikäinen 1990: 69–76). Archaeologists have also described cases of iron points and knives having been “nailed” to the coffin lids of 12th–13th century Finnish graves (e.g. Keskitalo 1950; Purhonen 1998: 241; Sarkki–Isomaa 1986; Wessman 2010: 194–196; Wickholm 2006; cf. also Artelius 2005; Nordberg 2002), but such manifestations are very few and probably have to do with specific individuals.
All was eventually homogenised with the advent of Christianity. In Sweden and Åland family burials gradually shifted from farmsteads/villages to parish churchyards. In Finland the consecrated grounds of churchyards became literally the “islands” that kept the dead safely within. However, apprehensions about what the dead might do to the living before they were finally set to rest in hallowed ground continued to exist. The fears about a corpse would have increased when its burial was delayed, and our research shows that intervals of weeks, even months, between death and burial were not uncommon in some parts of the country during 1751–1850.

**Intervals between death and burial**

During the past 15 years Oulu University archaeologists have been working with the death statistics of 1751–1850 parish records using data from the Finnish Genealogical Society. Since these 100 years represent a time when living conditions were in many ways comparable to those in the late prehistoric and medieval periods, we hoped that these data could shed some light on the demographic conditions that may have existed in earlier periods. The studies have indeed provided important information about morbidity and mortality in Finland during 1751–1850 (e.g. Núñez 2000; Núñez et al. 2012;
Moreover, as a by-product we became aware of the marked time differences that existed between the day that many individuals died and the day when they were finally laid to rest in consecrated ground.

The length of the intervals between death and burial was thought to be related to such local environmental factors as distance between the deceased’s home and the parish church, and seasonal conditions that hindered the transportation of the corpse to the church and/or its burial in frozen ground. In order to assess the possible environmental effects we chose three small parishes (population within 700–6000 during 1751–1850) on the basis of their geographical situation (Figure 5.2):

- Rovaniemi (66.5° N) on the Arctic Circle
- Viitasaari (63.0° N) inland in the western part of the lake district
- Pukkila (60.7° N) ca. 35 km from the Baltic via the Borgå river

Figure 5.2. Finland with the location of the study parishes and some sites mentioned in the text.
The study involved the records of 12,994 individuals with known death and burial dates: 2,304 from Rovaniemi, 6,555 from Viitasaari, and 4,135 from Pukkila. The results (Table 5.1, Figure 5.3) indicate that many people may have had to carry on with their lives for weeks/months in the vicinity of their deceased relatives’ remains before the final physical and emotional separation took place with the burial ceremony at the parish church. The problem of close proximity to the corpse was often solved through the use of temporary burial sites, but sometimes this was not possible and corpses had to be laid in one of the buildings of the farmstead/village throughout the winter months. These were nevertheless partial solutions, since the exhumation and/or transport and the final burial ceremony in the churchyard had still to come.

Table 5.1. Number of deaths and mean intervals between the death and burial dates in days (M DBI) in the different months during 1751–1850 in the three study parishes (see also Figure 5.3). The maximum DBI values for each parish are included. The mean death to burial interval for all 12,994 deaths in the three parishes during the studied 100 years was 12.9 days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Rovaniemi (max DBI 490 d)</th>
<th>Viitasaari (max DBI 327 d)</th>
<th>Pukkila (max DBI 48 d)</th>
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<td>194</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole year</td>
<td>2304</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>6555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dread of the Dead

Figure 5.3. Graph showing the mean number of days elapsed between death and burial in the different months in the three studied parishes during 1751–1850 (cf. Table 5.1). The curves represent from top to bottom Rovaniemi (R), Viitasaari (V) and Pukkila (P).

Not surprisingly the death-to-burial intervals (DBI) seem to increase with latitude. This had to do with differences in climate, but there was also the factor of the distances to the parish church, which could vary from 50–100 km, depending on the district. The peaks and valleys shown by the curves of the graph in Figure 5.3 are more or less explainable through local conditions. In general the DBI values tend to be lower in the warmer months than in the colder months.

Rovaniemi DBI values fall to their lowest (13–15 days) in the summer months to increase gradually to the maxima of the winter months (19–21 days). Obviously these higher values have to do with difficulties with digging in frozen ground. Interestingly the DBI drop sharply during March–April to rise again to 21 days in May. The lower March–April values could be partly due to weakening of ground frost and/or improved travelling conditions with more daylight hours. The May high is probably related to deteriorating travelling conditions during the spring thaw.

Viitasaari DBI values drop below 10 days during the warmer April–September period. They rise sharply in October, reaching a maximum of 18 days in November to fall to 10–12 days during December–March. The slightly higher winter values may be related to frozen ground, but the 18-day November peak may be due to waiting for the onset of snow cover and/or frozen lake conditions suitable for sleigh transportation.
Pukkila DBI values are all well below 10 days throughout the year. They rise to around 8 days in the coldest months (December–February) and fall to around 3 days in the warmest months (June–August). One interesting feature from Pukkila is the relatively large number of people that were buried on the same day that they had died. The number of such cases in Pukkila was 58 (14.0%) compared to 23 (3.5%) in Viitasaari and 9 (3.9%) in Rovaniemi.

This raises the question of whether there was any specific reason(s) for some individuals being buried immediately after their death. A scrutiny of the data shows no connection between the immediate burials and the individuals’ sex. The male-female ratio is around 1:1 in both Pukkila (29:29) and Viitasaari (12:11). The figure for Rovaniemi is 7:2, but the number of cases (9) is too small to draw conclusions. Causes of death do not appear to have played a role either. Both the great variety of causes of death among the immediate burials and the fact that none of them occurs in greater quantities than the others seem to support this assumption. The factors that do appear to be significant are the individuals’ age and the time of the year that the deaths took place. The great majority of immediate burials fall within the warmer April–October months: 48 (81%) in Pukkila, 16 (70%) in Viitasaari, and 8 (89%) in Rovaniemi. Moreover, the individuals buried immediately were mainly children below 15 years and, to some degree, elderly people aged over 50 years. This is obvious in Pukkila, with 83% children and 10% elderly, and Viitasaari with 52% children and 35% elderly. The corresponding figures for Rovaniemi are again less clear with 56% children and 22% elderly. Those in the remaining age group of 13–50 years total only 4 (7%) in Pukkila, 3 (13%) in Viitasaari and 2 (22%) in Rovaniemi. In any event, in addition to shorter distance to the church in the smaller parishes, the main reasons for immediate burials seem to have been favourable warm weather and the dead individuals’ lack of anchoring in the group. The children were too young for that, and most of the close relatives and friends of those aged over 50 would already have died.

**The lingering corpses**

It is clear that the families living in farmsteads and villages far from the parish church often had to wait to lay their dead relatives to rest. Usually when someone died in late spring or summer, the relatives had to bury him/her in a temporary grave, often on a so-called “death island”, and then later ex-
hume and transport the corpse to be buried in the distant churchyard (Jokipi 2001; Laitinen 2001; Mönkkönen 2001; Pentikäinen 1990: 35–43).

*His mother died in the Kujanki farmstead, near a lake also named Kujanki, which has an island; and she was temporarily buried on that island for three months, until winter, when she could be taken by sleigh to the parish cemetery. That is the reason for the abundance of Kalmoniemi [death points] and Kalmosaaari [death islands].*

*You find them in nearly every lake. . . . There the dead have rested while waiting to be taken to consecrated earth* (according to a woman from eastern Finland in the 1930s, documented in Mönkkönen 2001: 49–50).

There were indeed hundreds of such temporary burial islands in Finland (Jokipi 2001) and they bear many names such as: *Kalmasaari* (death island), *Ruumissaari* (corpse island), *Kuolinsaari* (island of the dead), *Hantasaari* (grave island), *Kallosaari* (skull island), *Arkkusaari* (coffin island) (Jokipi 2001; Ruohonen 2010). They are found mainly in the interior of the country, where farmsteads/villages were sparsely spread and the journey to the parish church was long (50–120 km) and without proper roads. In areas lacking islands, other easily dug sandy places like river/lake banks or fossil dunes and beaches were generally chosen.

As mentioned earlier, the use of islands and similar places for burial purposes goes back to prehistoric times. The Iron Age tradition of family/village burial grounds survived long after the arrival of Christianity in the mid-12th century, particularly in areas outside the more densely situated parishes of southern Finland (Figure 5.4). It was not until the 17th century that the Lutheran Church began to demand that all the dead should be buried in churchyards, finally making this official with the 1686 Church Ordinance (Karl XI 1687). It nevertheless took decades before the law reached full compliance, particularly in distant isolated villages; but in many places it led to the practice of temporary burials.

The use of temporary burial sites came gradually to an end in the 19th century, as Finland’s road network improved. Yet, the Church Ordinance of 1869 still allowed half a year between death and burial (Jokipi 2001: 22; Loimaranta & Heliövaara 1939). It is worth adding that many “death islands” and similar sites have also been used for permanent burials in times of epidemics, famine and war, as suggested by several field investigations (Koivunen 1990; Laittinen 2001; Núñez 1988; Ruohonen 2002, 2010; Vilkuna 1980).
Figure 5.4. Parishes of mainland Finland around 1600 AD and modern municipalities with one or more known “death islands”. Church sites are marked with crosses and the approximate boundaries of the old parish by thick solid lines. Municipality boundaries are from the 1940s and appear as dotted lines. The location of the parishes of Karkku (K) and Rautalampi (R) and Nurmes (N) are also provided. (Jokipii 2001; Jutikkala 1959; Niukkanen 2009).
In addition to the painful task of digging up the body of a recently deceased relative, it must have been unpleasant to handle and transport a decomposed corpse dozens of kilometres to the parish church. The stench must have been powerful even with a closed coffin. Solutions for mitigating such conditions were found at least in some areas, as in the Karkku and Rautalampi parishes.

In the old days . . . the corpses were taken [by boat] to be buried at the Karkku parish, but they had been dried first. A plank was placed on the spruce branches and the corpse was left to dry on the plank. There were no maggots this way (according to an 80 year old man, recorded in Valonen 1948: 91).

It is told that the dead were more or less embalmed with pitch tar and linen and birch bark wrappings held together by birch-bark cords, and then covered with the island’s dry sand to wait for sleigh transportation to the Rautalampi church in winter. It is also said that after the aforementioned treatment, corpses could also be placed up a thick-branched spruce, where thanks to the spruce aroma and the pitch tar they would dry up and become almost like wood (according to a local merchant, recorded in Laittinen 2001: 80).

Interestingly, these accounts are reminiscent of the descriptions of “death islands” (dödens ö, dödholm) and corpse-drying practices recorded among Sweden’s Sámi (Elgström 1922: 36–41; Manker 1944: 87–90).

Dread of the dead

Needless to say all the mentioned delays together with the burial and exhumation procedures must have been hard on the families that had to wait a long time for the final physical and emotional separation from their deceased relatives. Also, the prolonged proximity of the relative’s corpse must have been a distressing factor, given the fear the people traditionally felt about the dead (Koski 2011: 220–227; Mönkkönen 2001: 45).

When I was a child many people were afraid of ghosts, the buildings where unburied corpses had been kept, even those where the coaches used to transport the dead were stored. Especially at night one had to run when passing those places, just like the churchyard (a woman in 1930 telling about her childhood, recorded in Koski 2011: 89).
The fears associated with places connected with the dead are also reflected in many of the anecdotes compiled by Simonsuuri (1999).

It was believed that *kalma*² could spread from a corpse to the living and cause disease or death. Hence several preventive measures were taken to avoid the *kalma* contagion. The deceased’s eyes were closed soon after death and often kept that way with coins. It was feared that upon seeing a loved one the deceased might want to take him/her along as company. For the same reason, the person that washed the corpse should not be a relative or a member of the deceased’s household (in some areas the opposite). The deceased’s clothes and sheets were taken to be burnt at a safe place, usually on a specific cairn beyond the fields or by the lake shore. The danger of *kalma* contagion lay in dead individuals and all objects and places connected to them (Holmberg 1964: 17–36; Koski 2011: 220–225; Paulaharju 1924: 98-10; Waronen 1895: 25–30).

> There were strict warnings, not only against touching corpses, it was also feared that one could get *kalma* contagion from the churchyard soil ... from the tomb crosses, which were not to be touched, and specially the children were forbidden to do so. The same applied to the planks where corpses had lain, the vessels used to wash the dead body, and the places where the deceased’s things had been burnt (according to an informant in 1934, documented in Koski 2011: 221).

When the use of temporary burial places was necessary, these were preferably sought on islands or headlands on the far side of the lake. It was thought that the dead could not move across water (Pentikäinen 1990: 81). A much worse alternative was when, usually in late winter, the corpse could not be placed in a temporary grave and had to be laid in one of the farmstead/village buildings until it could be taken to the parish church (Jokipii 2001: 39; Pentikäinen 1990: 70–72). Such buildings were regarded as “contaminated” and thus dedicated solely to that purpose. The danger of *kalma* contagion supposedly ended with the blessing ceremony and burial in consecrated ground at the churchyard (Mönkkönen 2001: 45), but this did not necessarily apply to the churchyard itself (Koski 2011: 220–225).

Dread was compounded in the case of untimely deaths connected with accidents, murder, executions and, particularly, suicide. It was believed that the souls of those that had undergone such violent deaths tended to disturb,

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even harm, the living (Haavio 1948; Pentikäinen 1969, 1990: 95). A good example is the tradition about a man that had committed suicide in the parish of Karlö (Hailuoto), Ostrobothnia, about 250 years ago (Paulaharju 1961). His grave is still marked by a stone circle known as Äijänhauta (Gubbens grav, Geezer’s Grave) at the top of Äijänkangas (Gubbens moskog, Geezer’s Dune) on what used to be the isle of Hanhinen (Hansisen saari) in the 18th century. According to local lore, the dead suicidal man could not rest in peace in the consecrated ground of the churchyard and continuously wandered about disturbing the living – in other words, a revenant. For this reason his body had to be exhumed and taken by boat to be buried in the dune of Hanhinen’s (Hanhisen) isle mentioned above. Interestingly, the story is corroborated by a briefer but parallel account in the 1761 parish records:

On 25/1 in this parish took place the awful deed that farmer Henrs. Pramila hanged himself, and since it was a suicide, he was buried aside in the forest of Hanhis hill by the executioner Rönblad on 10/3 (Freely translated from the 1761 parish records3).

There is another possible example, also from Kärlö, of the fears inspired by those who had experienced a violent death and the measures taken to keep them in the grave. I am referring to the late 14th century grave of a beheaded man (Paavola 1988). The decapitated adult male suffered from oxycephaly, a congenital premature suture closure disorder that had led to a major craniofacial distortion (Núñez 2011). It is possible that this condition may have played a role in his execution. Whatever the reason, the excavators found a wooden stake going through the individual’s chest and another next to his detached cranium (Figure 5.5).

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3 D 25/1 skedde wed denne församl. den bedröfweligahä ndelsen at bd. Henr. Pramila strypte sig sielf hrwarföre han d. 10/3 såsom en sielfspilling af skarprättaren Rönblad blef afsides i skogen nedgräfwenpå Hanbisens backa.
Concluding remarks

At the suggestion of the workshop organisers I made an attempt to extrapolate my results to Stone Age situations, but soon came to realise that it was problematic. On the one hand poor preservation has left very little information about Stone Age graves and mortuary rites in the Finnish mainland. On the other, it is difficult to place the situation of 18th–19th century Finland within Mesolithic/Neolithic context. The only possible factor that may have affected both periods would have been frozen ground in wintertime. In Mesolithic/Neolithic times the cold would have hindered decomposition until spring or, alternately, fire could have been used to soften a ground patch big enough for a shallow pit.

It appears that during Mesolithic/Neolithic times the dead were generally buried at dwelling sites (Edgren 1993: 61; Lappalainen 2007), which in turn would imply no fear of the dead. However, we cannot really tell whether the dwelling sites were abandoned or continued to be inhabited after the first burial. The practice of abandoning dwellings or dwelling sites after a death
Dread of the Dead

has been recorded among some culture groups, like the Yerkla Aborigines (Howitt 1904: 450), the Navaho (Levy 1978: 397) and even the Sámi (Holmberg 1964: 23; Scheffer 1674: 126). The Kukkarkoski site, in Lundo (Lieto), for example, was on an island and has yielded evidence of Comb ware occupation and ten ochre graves from that period (Torvinen 1979); but did the Comb ware occupation continue after the first burial took place? We should perhaps bear in mind that many of Finland’s Mesolithic/Neolithic burials were made on islands and that there are well known island cemeteries associated with the same or related culture complexes, such as Oleni Island in Lake Onega and Zvejnieki in Latvia (Gurina 1956; Zagorska 2006; Zagorskis 1987).

Returning to early modern times, it is worth mentioning that, though not dealing with the Stone Age, this paper touches all three topics of the workshop. Deathscapes are represented by the “death islands”; postmortem manipulation by local temporary burial, exhumation and reburial in the parish churchyard. Defining death, which is the third and proper topic of this paper, has been difficult to fit to the size limitations of the workshop articles. The main problem has been the numerous variants that existed throughout the country, and has forced me to make some generalisations.

How did people perceive death in Finland 1751–1850? It is clear that they were quite familiar with it. The burial records for the 100 year study period indicate that the life expectancy at birth in these three parishes was only 25–30 years and that 39–49% of children died before the age of 5 (Núñez & Garcia-Guixé 2011; Núñez et al. 2012). Though it was painful, the society was probably prepared to cope with the expected high loss of small children. The death of adult family members would have had a greater emotional and social impact, however.

Death was seen as a clear separation from the world of the living, though not necessarily a complete break from the relatives (Pentikäinen 1990: 27–28). The old ideas about lingering dead made people feel uncomfortable around corpses and the objects related to them. The fear of kalma contagion was very real, and the same applied to the ideas about restless souls, particularly those of individuals that had undergone untimely deaths. There were also feelings of dread in connection with churchyards. These “islands” of consecrated ground held the relatively harmless though scary kalma- or kirkonväki (churchyard folk), who were to be avoided (Krohn 1915: 65–68; Koski 2011).
All these notions were the result of several layers of many traditions that had evolved and become syncretised through centuries/millennia (Hyry et al. 1995: 82). In addition to ancient elements, some going perhaps as far back as the Stone Age, there were the powerful resilient feelings about honouring, respecting and fearing ancestors characteristic of Finland’s agrarian Iron Age society. All these were then strongly modified – though not obliterated – by new ideas brought by three forms of Christianity: Catholic, Orthodox and Lutheran. The old funeral traditions where the group honoured the deceased relative before burial in the family/village graveyard had ensured that the dead stayed there in the company of other dead ancestors. The same applied to the ancestors’ cult of regular food offerings and feast meals on specific days each year (Agricola 1551: 17; Castrén 1754: 46–47; Harva 1948: 488–511; Holmberg 1964: 37–71; Krohn 1915: 40–58; Paulaharju 1924: 131–143; Pentikäinen 1969; Waronen 1895).

In the old days, people were able to honour and pay their respects to their dead relatives and ancestors at the local family/village burial grounds which, though separated by water or fields, were easily reached. These places were harmless as long as the obligations of the living relatives toward the dead were fulfilled. But after the centralisation of burials in parish churchyards this was no longer possible for many, and the inability to do so may have brought insecurity to those living far away from parish churches. Were the churchyards, the “islands” of consecrated ground, powerful enough to keep the dead within? These doubts and fears may have been the starting point of the so-called karsikko tradition and other measures meant to confuse the dead and impede their return to their former home and living relatives (Holmberg 1964: 25–26; Vilkuna 2001).

The church promoted the idea that those buried in the churchyard were peacefully at rest waiting for the final Judgment Day. However, superstitions rooted in ancient pre-Christian beliefs persisted and had a profound influence on how people perceived and related to death and the dead.

Summing up, although physical death was fairly well defined in Finland’s 18th–19th century society, there was also a strong belief in various after-death phenomena (kalma contagion, revenants, ghosts, churchyard folk). Despite the church claims that the dead were peacefully awaiting Judgment Day, people had their doubts. According to ancient traditions, the living and the dead coexisted in two separate, side by side realms. The two worlds could be kept harmoniously apart as long as the proper relative/ancestor devotion
norms were followed but a violation of these could bring harm to the living. The practice of burial in churchyards was felt as an infringement of the old norms and led to anxiety about what the dead might do. The fear was particularly real in connection with unburied corpses and, as we have seen, many people were often forced to live in their close proximity for weeks.

Acknowledgements

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DEATH IN PLACE: RITUALS IN PRACTICE

Rita Peyroteo-Stjerna 1

Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relations between mortuary ritual practice and the active role of memory in the construction and reconstruction of place by hunter-gatherer groups. The data for this preliminary study are drawn from the Mesolithic shell midden sites located in the Tagus and Sado valleys in Portugal, where ca. 374 human burials have been excavated since the late nineteenth century. The aim of this essay is to rehearse a holistic approach to the study of the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, by sewing together the spheres of death, memory and place.

Keywords: hunter-gatherers; death; memory; ritual practice; place; Tagus and Sado valleys, Portugal

Introduction

The Mesolithic shell middens located in the Tagus and Sado valleys in Portugal are known for the unusually large number of human burials. These sites with burial grounds have been interpreted as hunter-gatherer territorial claims to establish control over economic resources (Arnaud 1989: 621), and as a base line argument for the origins of social complexity (Bicho et al. 2013). These interpretations are valid and plausible; however, these approaches do not address the question of how these sites have been kept

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meaningful and socially recognised during their long chronology of use. Furthermore, these classic approaches tend to ignore hunter-gatherers as agents of history, somewhat perceived as highly adaptive humans with a functional responsive behaviour.

Here, regardless of functional or symbolic interpretations, I wish to suggest that mortuary ritual practice plays a key role in the construction and maintenance of these places, because this social practice is a powerful memory aid. With this approach I wish to stress the active role of memory, performed by mortuary ritual practice, key in the construction and reconstruction of these places. This aspect of social memory, the memory transmitted through bodily practices, has been widely neglected, particularly in hunter-gatherer studies, which some authors have rightly criticised (Sassaman & Holly 2011). In this view, and in the scope of hunter-gatherer studies, landscapes are meaningful social environments rather than mere repositories of natural resources.

Following the open character of the Ancient Death Ways Workshop, in this essay I wish to rehearse a holistic approach to the study of the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, by sewing together the spheres of death, memory and place, which I aim to develop in future studies.

Shell middens in the Tagus and Sado valleys

The archaeological sites under analysis are located in Portugal, some of them having been discovered and excavated since the late nineteenth century. These sites are characterised by the anthropogenic accumulation of marine animals, terrestrial fauna and stone artefacts. This type of site is known as shell midden after its most visible feature, the sea shells. Here, in the southwestern Atlantic coast of Europe, the rise of sea levels during the Atlantic climatic optimum (ca. 8350–6300 cal BP) resulted in the formation of large estuaries. The typical coastal sites known for the Pre-boreal and Boreal (ca. 11480–8350 cal BP) are now consigned to interior estuarine regions, by these new ecosystems (Araújo 2003). Today, far from the sight and influence of marine waters, these Late Mesolithic shell middens can be very large archaeological sites, many of them with well preserved human remains (Figure 6.1).
This new form of settlement is accompanied by a different relation to death. New born babies, children, young adults, men and women were carefully buried in these places. In the shell middens of the Tagus and Sado valleys burial practice is a common form of disposal of the dead. From the 12 middens identified in the Tagus valley, six have human burials (Figure 6.2) in a total of at least 262 individuals (Bicho et al. 2013; Cunha & Cardoso 2001, 2002–2003; Jackes & Meiklejohn 2008; Meiklejohn et al. 2009; Roksandic 2006). Similarly, in the Sado valley, there are 11 middens known, six of which with human burials (Figure 6.3) in a total of ca. 112 individuals (Cunha & Umbelino 1995–1997). The archaeological data regarding this practice of inhumation (i.e. burial) is in clear contrast with previous and contemporaneous sites in the region; burial as a mortuary practice is known in the Iberian Peninsula; however, it was never a common practice (Peyroteo-Stjerna in press).

Figure 6.3. Sado valley: shell midden sites with human burials. Site/Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) (Cunha & Umbelino 1995–1997): Arapouco/32; Poças de S. Bento/15; Cabeço das Amoreiras/6; Vale de Romeiras/26; Cabeço do Pez/32–36; Várzea da Mó/1
According to the currently available radiocarbon dates (Table 6.1) the chronology of the human burials in the Tagus valley ranges from ca. 8422 to 6687 cal BP. The data is more limited for the Sado valley, with only three human burials dated so far (Table 6.2) ranging from ca. 8175 to 7333 cal BP. I am currently running a radiocarbon programme to upgrade the available data, in the scope of current research on the mortuary practices in these two valleys. Nevertheless, for this chronology, this concentration of human burials is unique in the Iberian Peninsula and also one of the largest and oldest concentrations known in Europe.

These sites are also rich in faunal remains (Detry 2007; Lentacker 1986, 1994; Rowley-Conwy 2004) providing evidence for the consumption in situ of a varied range of food resources, both marine and terrestrial (Umbelino 2006; Umbelino et al. 2007). According to these studies there is no evidence for domesticated plants or animals, except for the domestic dog (Detry & Cardoso 2010). Stone tool production is also well documented for all stages of the chaîne opératoire (Araújo 1995–1997; Marchand 2001; Nukushina 2012). The relatively few ceramic fragments found in some of these contexts are attributed to later occupations, to the Early and Late Neolithic (Diniz 2010).

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2 Tables 6.1 and 6.2: Samples were calibrated through OxCal v4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2009) using IntCal13 curve (Reimer et al. 2013) for terrestrial samples. Marine samples and human samples with mixed diet were calibrated using Marine13 curve (Reimer et al. 2013) and regional ΔR accordingly; ΔR= 140±40 14C yr BP for the Tagus valley and ΔR= –100±155 14C yr BP for the Sado valley (Martins et al. 2008). Marine diets (%) were calculated following Ambrose (1993) using assumed marine and terrestrial endpoints of –12 and –21‰ respectively (Schulting & Richards 2001). The (*) δ13C values were obtained by accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) during the process of 14C measurement and not independently by isotope-ratio mass spectrometry (IRMS) (C. Umbelino, personal communication, December 2014). The offset is variable and although the AMS- and IRMS-based values may be highly correlated (Schulting & Richards 2001) with an average offset lower than 2‰, it can be as high as 10‰ (Taylor & Bar-Yosef 2014). Only IRMS-based δ13C values should be used for dietary reconstructions or other isotopic-based environmental analysis such as reservoir corrections (Millard 2014:557; Taylor & Bar-Yosef 2014) and for this reason, these values and the respective calibrations should be interpreted with caution.

<table>
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<th>Site</th>
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<th>Lab. Ref.</th>
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<th>Marine % (±10%)</th>
<th>δ¹³C‰</th>
<th>Years cal BP, 95%</th>
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<td>19th cent.</td>
<td>TO–359 7</td>
<td>6960±70</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>–17,2</td>
<td>7743–7434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabeço da Arruda</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>19th cent.</td>
<td>TO–354 7</td>
<td>6970±60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>–19,0</td>
<td>7847–7564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabeço da Arruda</td>
<td>CA-00-02</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>TO–10216 10, 11</td>
<td>7040±60</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>–17,9</td>
<td>7860–7567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabeço da Arruda</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>19th cent.</td>
<td>TO–360 7</td>
<td>6990±110</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>–17,7</td>
<td>7916–7441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabeço da Arruda</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>Beta–127451 4, 5</td>
<td>7550±100</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>–19,0*</td>
<td>8422–8012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cova da Onça</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>1915?</td>
<td>Beta–127448 4, 5</td>
<td>7140±40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>–17,2*</td>
<td>7925–7640</td>
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<tr>
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<td>CT</td>
<td>19th cent.</td>
<td>TO–135 8, 10, 12</td>
<td>6810±70</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>–15,3</td>
<td>7560–7246</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Beta–127499 4, 5</td>
<td>7120±40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>–16,8*</td>
<td>7850–7590</td>
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<tr>
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<td>41</td>
<td>19th cent.</td>
<td>TO–134 8, 10, 12</td>
<td>7160±80</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>–16,7</td>
<td>7935–7591</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moita do Sebastião</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19th cent.</td>
<td>TO–132 8, 10, 12</td>
<td>7180±70</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>–16,8</td>
<td>7940–7615</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moita do Sebastião</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19th cent.</td>
<td>TO–131 8, 10, 12</td>
<td>7240±70</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>–16,1</td>
<td>7959–7639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moita do Sebastião</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19th cent.</td>
<td>TO–133 8, 10, 12</td>
<td>7200±70</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>–16,9</td>
<td>7960–7639</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<th>Site</th>
<th>H. sapiens</th>
<th>Excavation</th>
<th>Lab. Ref.</th>
<th>Age BP (±10%)</th>
<th>Marine % (±10%)</th>
<th>δ13C ‰</th>
<th>Years cal BP, 95%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Arapouco</td>
<td>2A</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Sac–1560 1,2</td>
<td>7200±130</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>–16.9*</td>
<td>8175–7655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabeço das Amoreiras</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Beta–125110 1</td>
<td>7230±40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>–20.8*</td>
<td>8156–7945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabeço do Pez</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Beta–125109 1</td>
<td>6760±40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–22.6*</td>
<td>7675–7570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabeço do Pez</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Sac–1558 1</td>
<td>6740±110</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>–19.3*</td>
<td>7752–7333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Places in the Landscape**

A common geographic trait of these sites is their location by the palaeo-estuaries of large rivers. In the Tagus valley all sites are located in low terraces right by the shores of the palaeo-estuary, subject to occasional floods. This location close to the aquatic resources seems to be the privileged area of settlement. At Sado, however, some large sites are placed further inland and all are located at relatively higher altitudes. Here, a location with good visibility through the valley seems to be more important than the proximity to aquatic resources (Diniz & Arias 2011: 147).

In both valleys there are sites with and without human burials, but the distribution of sites with burials seems to follow a different pattern. In the Tagus valley the sites with human remains are concentrated in the Muge area, with the exception of Cova da Onça, located by the tributary Magos (Figure 6.2). In contrast, in the Sado valley, the human burials are not concentrated in any specific area of the valley, with one exception for the sites of Cabeço do Pez and Vale de Romeiras (Figure 6.3).

There is a fundamental difference in site formation in these two valleys, which is reflected in their stratigraphic complexity and ultimately in the spatial arrangement of the burials in the sites. In the Tagus valley, these artificial mounds are formed by the superposition of cultural layers and can reach 4 to 5 metres in classic vertical stratigraphy (Roche 1965, 1967). In contrast, the middens in the Sado valley are relatively shallow and visually difficult to identify. Here, the site formation is mainly on a horizontal logic.
of occupation with a current stratigraphic width of 60 to 80 cm at most (Arnaud 1989; Diniz & Arias 2011; Larsson 1996). This stratigraphic difference is possibly related to the relative location of the sites to aquatic resources but also to ecological constraints under study (Diniz & Arias 2011). The stratigraphic argument supports once again the secondary importance, for reasons still under investigation, of the shell element in the Sado valley middens in comparison to the Tagus sites.

Another common characteristic seems to be the placement of the burials in clusters within the sites, as observed from available field records from the old excavations. The excavation strategy in the 1950s in the Sado valley, when more than 100 burials were recovered, consisted of opening long narrow trenches along the recognised limits of the site. Then, if human remains were found these trenches were expanded. In all sites the human remains were found in one trench, later expanded as the main excavation area. One exception is the large site Cabeço do Pez, where the site plan from 1956, in the archives of the National Museum of Archaeology in Lisbon, shows two areas with human remains. Although the records are sparser for the Tagus valley, this seems to be also the case at least at Cabeço da Arruda, Moita do Sebastião and Cabeço da Amoreira. Unfortunately there are no records for the other sites with human burials in the Tagus valley. In the Tagus valley most of the burials known were recovered from the bottom layers of the shell middens. However, there are some cases of burials through the stratigraphy and in the upper layers, confirmed by recent field work in both Cabeço da Arruda (Roksandic 2006) and Cabeço da Amoreira (Bicho et al. 2013; Roksandic 2006). Similarly, in the Sado valley, most burials were found in the sandy bottom layers. In general, in both valleys, the burials seem to be spatially organised in tight areas within a much larger area of the site. The relation between these burial clusters with the remaining areas of the sites remains an open question.

For reasons still to be clarified, the settlement strategy was slightly different in the two valleys. However, I would like to emphasise a core set of common practices for the treatment of the dead. In both Tagus and Sado valleys, the natural processes of decomposition were hidden, buried underground – or at least covered with piles of shells and sediment. As demonstrated by Nilsson Stutz (2010) in her study on early mortuary practices in the Baltic area, here as well, the last image of the dead was ritually staged as lifelike (p. 136): the bodies were carefully laid in their final place – in the form of a primary burial. Also, in both valleys, the respect for the integrity of the body
is clear. The location of the graves was remembered and respected, and earlier graves were seldom disturbed by later graves.

**Places for the dead?**

Despite the unusual number of human burials, these sites have been studied almost exclusively from the perspective of settlements for the living. Models of seasonal occupation have been proposed (Arnaud 1989; Marchand 2001); detailed studies on palaeo-diets (Umbelino 2006) and palaeo-populations focused on the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition have been done (Jackes & Lubell 1995; Jackes & Meiklejohn 2008), and just very recently some brief syntheses on mortuary practices have been published (Jackes & Lubell 2012; Jackes *et al.* 2014; Roksandic & Jackes 2014; Roksandic 2006; Umbelino & Cunha 2012). Although the dead have been the main reason why these sites have been excavated and internationally recognised, their place in archaeological interpretation has been largely ignored. The following painting by the French archaeologist H. Breuil (1949) (Figure 6.4) illustrates this perspective well, making no allusion to mortuary practices. Interestingly, by this time, more than 200 burials had been recovered from the Muge shell middens. The painting is accompanied by a page long text with just a very brief reference to burial practices:

> They must have lived in straw or reed huts quite near their heaps of shell-fish, in which they often buried their dead; the bodies were generally doubled up. (Breuil 1949: 93)

This apparent disregard for the *place of the dead* is certainly related to general research trends. In practice, however, problems in terminology could also explain this seeming disinterest. Questions of terminology are important because they influence our interpretations, and here I would like to highlight some terms that may be useful when analysing archaeological contexts with human remains.
First, we may consider the disposal of human remains in one single structure. Assuming that the intentionality of the mortuary practice is confirmed, one must take into account the number of individuals, and most importantly, the tempo of disposal. Accordingly, funerary deposits in one single structure can be: individual, multiple or collective deposits (Figure 6.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual deposit</th>
<th>Multiple deposit</th>
<th>Collective deposit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• one structure</td>
<td>• one structure</td>
<td>• one structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• one individual</td>
<td>• two or more individuals</td>
<td>• two or more individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• simultaneous or successive deposit in a short period of time</td>
<td>• successive deposit in a more or less long time interval</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.5. Terminology: funerary deposits in one single structure.

One single funerary structure defined for the mortuary remains of one individual is an individual deposit. This structure can be as simple as a pit dug in the soil or as complex as a pyramid for a pharaoh. A ceramic pot containing the cremated remains of one individual also belongs in this category.
The distinction between multiple and collective deposits is based on the tempo of disposal. These terms are often used interchangeably. However, these expressions reflect specific cultural options that should be clear by the use of appropriate terminology. The simultaneous disposal of two or more individuals in one funerary structure is a *multiple deposit*. Multiple deposits can also include the successive disposal of various individuals, but in a short time frame between each disposal, as in contexts of mortality crisis related to catastrophes, massacres or plagues (Duday 2009: 98). The mortuary practices in a *collective deposit* follow a very different cadence. A collective funerary structure is used over a more or less long period of time where two or more individuals are deposited during separate events. Passage graves and dolmens are good examples of collective funerary deposits. These are single funerary structures successively re-opened for the deposit of new individuals over a period of time.

After considering the different types of disposal of human remains in one single structure, according to the number of individuals and time frame, we can focus on contexts with *more than one funerary structure*, i.e. cemeteries. Essentially, a cemetery accommodates a number of funerary structures regardless of the number of individuals and tempo of disposal. In its simplest definition, a cemetery can be defined as a funerary complex that accommodates more than one funerary structure, organised in a more or less complex manner (Duday 2009: 13). In modern cemeteries it is not uncommon to find the three types of funerary deposits described above: individual, multiple and collective (Figure 6.6), but this seems to be less common in earlier periods. As a last observation on terminology, I have chosen to avoid the term *necropolis* and opted for the term cemetery instead. Necropolis is a common term used in archaeology and it has been used to cover a variety of categories when human remains are found in archaeological contexts, including cemeteries. Besides its vague definition, the term has an urban connotation derived from the Hellenistic Greek language, “the city of the dead”, which may not be the most suitable for deeper chronologies.
Figure 6.6. Terminology: a cemetery accommodates more than one funerary structure and can include all three categories of single funerary structures.

Accordingly, the burial grounds known for the shell middens in the Tagus and Sado valleys can be considered cemeteries by definition. Through a period of time, various individuals have been buried in these sites, mostly in simple individual structures and organised in a more or less complex manner (Figure 6.7). This observation does not exclude other interpretations of further uses of these sites. This observation implies solely that at least part of these sites was used as a cemetery over a more or less long period of time, in a more or less continuous manner.

As mentioned, the practice of inhumation was not common in the Iberian Peninsula, neither for previous chronologies nor in contemporaneous sites (Peyroteo-Stjerna in press). Yet it is common mortuary behaviour in these valleys during the Late Mesolithic and apparently since the first episodes of use of these sites. This particular form of dealing with death, with the constitution of cemeteries, is a key aspect in the life of the last hunter-gatherers of this region, and should not be overlooked.
It could be argued that in these semi-sedentary societies (Arnaud 1987, 1989), this concentration of human burials was essentially a practical need. These bodies would simply be buried on location, as a way of dealing with a decomposing corpse. This practicality was possibly one motivator for this mortuary behaviour. However, considering the longevity of use of some of these cemeteries, in contrast with the relatively low number of buried individuals, it can be suggested that only a segment of the population received this treatment. Additionally, there is a clear respect for the integrity of the body in the long term, hence a practice that goes beyond the practical need of hiding a decomposing corpse.

The processual interpretations link these Late Mesolithic cemeteries to hunter-gatherer territorial claims to establish control over economic resources provided by the new environmental conditions in these estuaries (Arnaud 1987, 1989). These are valid and persuasive arguments. However, I argue that the economic motivator cannot be sustained on its own. Furthermore, the construction and maintenance of cemeteries in these early
chronologies has been regarded as an indicator of social complexity. According to this view social complexity will be mirrored by mortuary complexity (Binford 1971). This may be factual in certain contexts; however, I argue that in these sites this correlation is not necessarily valid, as these cemeteries are not necessarily more complex than other funerary practices that do not engage in construction of cemeteries.

This particular approach to death, with the development of cemeteries in open air sites, as opposed to a concealed death in caves or in remote places, reveals a relation of death to a daily landscape. Thus, instead of focusing on economic constraints and issues of social complexity, I would like to emphasise the role of mortuary practices in the construction and maintenance of these locations as meaningful places remembered over generations. In this perspective, these locations are not only a repository of resources but spaces that hold experiences, events and memories (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). The commitment of the living to the formation and maintenance of these cemeteries is a positive indicator of the importance of the dead in defining space and place (Wright 2013: 414) in the long term. In practice, consciously and/or unconsciously, death plays a role in the collective memory of these sites.

**Topographical relationships of Death**

Barrett (1996) highlights how mortuary rituals structure the topographical relationships of death. Following Van Gennep’s (1960) threefold division of rites of passage, Barrett identifies critical spatial differences in the rites involved in primary burial (i.e. inhumation), secondary burial and cremation. As opposed to inhumation, secondary burial practices and cremation afford a spatial and temporal separation between the initial rites of liminality and the concluding rites of incorporation (Barrett 1996: 397). Conversely, the mortuary rituals involved in a primary burial will settle both the place and the moment of the transition of death (Barrett 1996: 398) in a permanent place in the landscape.

Inhumation and respect for the body as a whole were significant elements in the mortuary practices of the last hunter-gatherers of the Tagus and Sado valleys. Here, the dead were not removed from daily landscapes. Rather, they were granted with a formal and permanent location possibly in the heart of the social and daily life of these hunter-gatherers.
In this perspective, these sites, as with other early cemeteries, reveal a new conceptual link between the dead and the landscape (Pettitt 2011: 263). Through the development of a place for the dead, the experiences and consciousness of the participants take a material and spatial form with important implications in the construction of a conceptual landscape. This angle in the perspective is important because in fact, as some authors have argued (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003), places are not in the landscape but in people’s minds.

**Memory in the Landscape: Rituals in Practice**

The stress on memory emphasises the role of ritual practice in the construction of the landscape. This approach acknowledges the archaeological record of burial practices as material traces of memory construction. In this perspective, mortuary rituals are key elements in the construction of places. Following this, I would like to argue that it is through mortuary ritual practices that these sites are remembered and kept meaningful in the landscape.

Memory, here as shared memory of a social order, requires certain mechanisms to be maintained and transmitted within the social group over time and across generations. Memory can be inscribed in monuments and texts. In archaeological contexts, monuments are evident traces of memory and commonly emphasised, but incorporated memory leaves archaeological traces as well (Preucel & Meskell 2004: 216; Van Dyke 2010: 279). Memory can be materialised in representations, objects, ritual behaviours and places (Van Dyke & Alcock 2003), and ritual behaviour in particular, can be revealed through the observation of the remains of mortuary practices in the archaeological context.

As Connerton (1989) demonstrates, embodied or incorporated memory, manifested through performative rituals and physical behaviour, is much more effective in the production and transmission of social memory. In his work *How Societies Remember*, Connerton (1989) shows through various case-studies that memory is transmitted in non-textual and non-cognitive ways through ritual practice. This is shown to be a powerful system to enhance memory because ritual practice is a formalised, sequential and repetitive performative language that implies continuity with the past (Connerton 1989: 45). Thus, Connerton (1989) argues, incorporating practices through embodied behaviour provides a particularly effective system of mnemonics.
Nevertheless, inscribed memory is commonly considered the privileged form for the transmission of the memories of a given society. In archaeology, this aspect of social memory, the memory transmitted through bodily practices has been widely neglected, particularly in hunter-gatherer studies, as authors such as Sassaman and Holly (2011) have pointed out. However, it has been shown that systems of inscription, even the more complex, do not correlate to the capacity of a society to remember (Connerton 1989: 102). Thus, following Connerton’s (1989) premises, mortuary ritual practices are determinant in the process of memorialisation of these places.

Death in Place

The topographical placement of the dead within the landscape of the living is a key element in the social dynamics of the last hunter-gatherers of the Tagus and Sado valleys.

Memory could be reproduced some other way, but here the dead were granted a permanent location through the construction and maintenance of cemeteries, affording them a concrete place of memory.

In this essay I have considered the spheres of death, memory and place were intricate components in the life of the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. It is my view that archaeological interpretation can be enhanced if these spheres are approached in a holistic manner. Among other possible features and interpretations, these shell middens are mutually a place for the dead, and a place of ritualised codes. In this context, death rituals play a central role in the life of these hunter-gatherers in developing a sense of community within the landscape, as well as maintaining the social ties in both life and death.

Acknowledgements

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LOCATION! LOCATION! – WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DEFINING FACTORS IN THE PLACEMENT OF MEgalithic Tombs in the Landscape?

Anne Birgitte Gebauer ¹

Abstract
This paper investigates the placement of megalithic tombs in the landscape. According to Renfrew’s model, the monuments should appear individually in an even scatter across the landscape as markers of ownership to the land related to each settlement. This model does not, however, explain the clustering of tombs seen in many areas. Three models are proposed as explanation of the sitting of megaliths in the landscape. According to model one the tombs are placed marginally and sometimes overlooking the domesticated landscape; according to the second model the megalithic monument is superimposed on older house foundations. These models describe two different spatial relationships to the community and might produce the same distribution pattern as described by Renfrew. The third model suggests that megaliths were erected as markers of the transition to liminal zones in relation to the dead and the other world including burial sites, enclosures, wet areas and river crossings. Repeated construction of funerary monuments reinforced the significance of the individual tomb as well as the burial site and its social and cosmological connotations. Megaliths were used to highlight key nodes of communication at the boundary of everyday life and the liminal zones as well as the significance of the routes leading towards these places.

Keywords: Funnel beaker; megalithic tombs; landscape analysis; location models; communication routes

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Introduction

In his model of megalithic tombs as territorial markers in segmentary societies, Renfrew suggested that a dispersed distribution of tombs would be the norm, but he also realised that in some areas the megalithic tombs were concentrated in higher numbers than predicted by this model (Renfrew 1979: 221). In order to understand this variation, the location of megalithic tombs is studied in relation to the community, to sites for the ancestors and to other ritual sites such as bog deposits and enclosures, as well as roads and water. Three models are proposed as explanation for different locations of the tombs:

*Model 1: Location marginal to residential area*
*Model 2: Location on top of earlier farmstead*
*Model 3: Location related to liminal zones associated with burial grounds, enclosures, and communication routes.*

**Model 1: Location relative to the community**

The information on Funnel beaker communities is limited, but single farmsteads of one or two houses appear to be the basic unit. These houses are never clustered in a village settlement. The houses show no signs of repair or rebuilding and settlements were probably short-lived. In Denmark more substantial settlements do not appear before after the construction period of megalithic tombs in the Middle Neolithic A, period II (MNA II).

In the first model for location of megaliths relative to the community, the tombs are placed in the hinterland at some distance away from the settlement (Figures 7.1a and b) (Müller et al. 2013; Sjögren 2010). The Oldenburger Graben is an example of this zonation of the landscape: the habitations and activities for the living are located at lower elevations, while the tombs are placed slightly further inland and higher up, visible to inhabitants in everyday life (Brozio 2010: 30). This pattern is ubiquitous in Northern Germany and southern Scandinavia in the middle Funnel beaker period (Tilley 1996: 197). A field-walking project on the Black Isle peninsula in Scotland confirmed that such monuments are indeed located at the edge of the currently inhabited landscape, in marginal and prominent locations overlooking the areas of settlement (Philips & Watson 2000).
In the Fallbygden area in Sweden, Sjögren (2003: 346, 348 Fig. 13.23) has described this spatial patterning in terms of the ideological dimensions of the landscape (Figure 7.1b). The area of the dead is situated high and dry on the rocky plateau at the border of the wild woods; the domesticated landscape used by the living is found at lower terraces, while ritual offerings are made in the wetland below. A conscious decision was made to keep the
Location! Location!

world of the ancestors at a distance from the community, but also to keep the tombs within the margins of the domesticated landscape.

Model 2: Location relative to the community

The second model for the location of megalithic tombs relative to the community concerns those cases where the monuments are situated on top of house foundations. At Rastorf in Schleswig-Holstein a single farmstead and three megalithic tombs were sited in the hills above a contemporary causewayed enclosure on the river shore about one kilometre away (Brozio 2011: 25). After destruction of the house dating from the late early Neolithic Fuchberg period, the site was cultivated before it was turned into a burial ground beginning with a round dolmen that was later included in a long dolmen. The round dolmen is dated at Middle Neolithic A period I (Mischa 2013: 86–87 Fig. 4; Müller 2013: 64–65 Figs 12, 13). A similar situation is found at Damsbo Mark near Sarup, where house foundations were found beneath two long dolmens and a passage grave (Andersen 2009: 33–37; Andersen in prep) (Figure 7.2).

Important questions may be raised about the connection between these houses and the burials. Is the superposition of the monument and the house foundation intentional or accidental? The accuracy of the spatial relationship between the two types of structures is the primary indication of intentionality. Even though both settlement and burial monument might date to the same stylistic period as at Damsbo Mark, the actual time period between abandonment of the house and construction of a burial site is unknown as absolute dates are missing. Apparently the exact location of the houses was still known, though a certain time lag is suggested by plough marks at the house foundations found at Rastorf and the two long dolmens at Damsbo Mark.
Figure 7.2. Model 2. Megaliths are situated on top of house foundations: Two long barrows (A121 and A2) and a passage grave (A1) at Damsbo Mark near Sarup (reproduced from Andersen 2009: 33, Fig. 11).

Were these houses normal residential sites or did they serve other purposes such as mortuary houses as Rønne (1979: 5) has suggested in the case at Bygholm Nørremark in Denmark? Certainly the siting of the burial chambers in the long dolmens A2 and A121 at Damsbo between two roof-bearing posts suggests an intimate relationship between house and grave reminiscent of early Neolithic graves of the split-tree trunk or Konens Høj type (Andersen in prep.). Another argument against the houses at Damsbo being normal residential sites is the limited amount of associated waste ma-
terial and cultural layers. Is this a result of waste management or does it point to a ritual function of the houses (Andersson 2004: 137; Andersen 2009: 35–37)?

The houses conform to domestic architecture of the Dagstorp type (Larsson & Brink 2013: 331, Fig. 14.2) in contrast to the square and horseshoe-shaped structures as well as trapezoidal palisades of the Niedwits type related to funerary structures (Rzepecki 2011). Assuming that they are domestic houses, what was the relationship between the inhabitants and the people buried in the monument? Burial on land cleared, inhabited and cultivated by ancestors might validate important family relationships and notions of ownership to the land as expressed in Model 1. Positioning of megaliths directly on top of house foundations might signal an even more direct linkage between an individual or specific social group and the tomb.

Nevertheless, this link between the living and the dead was only a spatial connection. While the monuments stayed in place, settlements would presumably relocate from time to time due to the rotating system of land use as well as settlement expansion due to population increase (Müller 2013: 73). If closeness to the scattered farmsteads were of paramount importance as suggested by this second model, a dispersed pattern of tombs in the landscape would be expected. In many areas, however, clustering of tombs is the rule rather than the exception. At Sarup, megaliths are clearly found in smaller or larger clusters, but in spite of years of fieldwork, it is still difficult to relate this pattern of spatial structuring with the settlements found in the area. So what other factors might influence the location of megalithic tombs?

Model 3: Location related to liminal zones associated with burial grounds, enclosures, and communication routes.

Model 3.1: Location relative to ancestral sites

One criterion for the location of tombs appears to be that a site might already have been designated as an area for the ancestors. At Lønt in southern Jutland, Denmark, a megalithic cemetery was located on a plateau next to two causewayed enclosures (Figure 7.3). The cemetery included 11 tombs with a maximum distance between them of 180 metres; in comparison the nearest tombs were about 2–3 km away (Klatt 2009: 33 Fig. 11). The tombs were clustered in three groups of three to four monuments and an individu-
al passage grave. A uniform orientation of the chambers as well as shared choices of raw materials supports the spatial impression of the cemetery and the tomb clusters as belonging to close-knit social groups with shared norms and values (Gebauer in press).

The spatial union of the megalithic tombs shows that such cemeteries clearly had a socially integrative role. Besides, these clusters demonstrate a remarkable stability in the use of certain areas for funerary purposes. Equally impressive is the longevity of the social affiliation with these clusters of monuments. Rebuilding of tombs in close proximity cannot be explained as a need to physically accommodate human remains. The continued construction might be tied to different social affiliations, differences in social status or religious conviction, very likely in a competitive environment as described by Tilley (1996: 164–166).

Interestingly, several of the founder graves in these clusters were built on residential sites as suggested by Model 2. However, once an area had been designated as a burial ground, tomb construction was repeated at the same site. These burial sites became memorials to a local group or several social groups from a larger area but appear to be disassociated from the more scattered habitations at places like Rastorf (Mischa 2013: 86), Damsbo Mark (Andersen 2009: 33–35; Andersen in press) and Lønt (Jørgensen 2000: 73, Fig. 16).

Figure 7.3. Lønt area with cluster of 11 megalithic tombs and two enclosures, the Lønt enclosure 200 m to the north and the Langelandsvej enclosure 600 m to the west (reproduced from Pedersen & Witte 2012: 79).
**Model 3.2: Location relative to wetland deposits**
Regarding their relation to other ritual sites, megalithic tombs and wetland deposits tend to concentrate in certain areas in the landscape, but the most important connection between these two phenomena is probably that both are associated with water (Ebbesen 1982; Koch 1998: 139). Substantial and long-term bog sacrifices took place at the intersection of several rivers in northern Zealand. In spite of these important sacrifices which include pots, thin-butted flint axes, cattle and humans, neither domestic sites nor megalithic tombs show any clustering in relation to the wetland (Sparrevohn 2009: 49, Fig. 4). Rather the location of these sites appears to conform to Model 1 and the placement of wet area deposits, domestic sites and tombs within three different zones in the landscape.

**Model 3.3: Location relative to water**
Proximity to water is an important factor in the location of megalithic tombs. In Denmark a higher density of tombs is found within a distance of 4 km from the coast than inland; in fact most megalithic tombs are located within 1,5 km from a watercourse or the coast (Madsen 1982: 215). At Damsbo near Sarup, a string of tombs were deliberately positioned on terraces along the coast in order to provide each monument with a sea view (Figure 7.4). At tombs in Northern Brittany as well as at Lønt, having the sea as a backdrop was preferred (Gebauer in prep; Scarre 2002). The importance of a view of the sea as well as visibility of the tombs from the sea might relate to the significance of marine communication. Megalithic monuments might have functioned as landmarks for navigation, portage and safe arrival (Philips 2003: 382), or in some areas as markers of important fishing grounds (Bradley & Philips 2004: 132). Both in a marine and in a terrestrial environment the tombs served as legal claims to the local resources, but also symbolised the political and social ambitions of the social group owning the monument. In addition the boundary between the land and the sea might also have been a symbolic marker and a liminal zone between everyday life and the world of the dead (Scarre 2002: 100).
Model 3.4: Location relative to causewayed enclosures

A strong spatial association is seen between causewayed enclosures and megalithic monuments with concentrations of tombs occurring near almost all of the enclosures from the middle Funnel beaker period. In a comprehensive model of the Funnel beaker as a segmentary society, the enclosures were assigned a role as regional centres, while the megaliths were seen as representative of local communities (Madsen 1982). However, the relationship between the causewayed enclosures and clusters of megalithic tombs was not just strictly a matter of hierarchical social organisation, but might have been more fluid. Activities at the enclosures appear to be of very short duration, highly spectacular and involving hundreds of people (Andersen in prep.). The close spacing of the enclosures supports the impression of the temporary significance of these monuments. At Lønt two enclosures were
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only 0,6 km apart (Figure 7.3), while at Djursland, a number of enclosures were located only 4–6 km apart along the Kolindsund fjord (Boas 2001: 8). In part the construction of the enclosure might have operated at the same level as the megalithic tombs with digging of the surrounding ditches having been undertaken by family groups (Müller 2011: 23).

Causewayed enclosures were created as liminal zones that allowed contact with the spirit world. The enclosures were clearly bounded sites located at focal points in the landscape marked by natural features as well as manmade barriers. Secluded locations off the beaten path were clearly preferred; a separation from everyday life is reflected in the fact that no houses or plough marks have been found at the enclosures (Klatt 2009: 72).

The close spatial association between tombs and enclosures has been explained by commonalities in the ritual activities taking place at the two types of structures. Possibly the ritual functions at the causewayed enclosures as well as the megalithic tombs both derived from activities once associated with the long barrows: enclosed places of assembly associated with ditches and serving as burial sites (Beck 2013: 83). Likewise an exchange of human bones might have taken place between the enclosures and the megaliths (Andersen 2000: 29).

An intimate relationship between tombs and enclosures is also revealed by the seemingly coordinated construction of these two types of structures at sites like Albersdorf and Büdelsdorf (Müller 2011) as well as Lønt (Gebauer in prep).

In general there is an impression of some degree of coordination between the construction and use of the tombs and the enclosures. Local differences in the role of the enclosures in relation to the tombs is nevertheless suggested by variations in the distance between the two types of structures. Enclosures are located in the immediate vicinity of Lønt and Sarup, but at a few places the distance to the nearest megalithic tomb is more than 1500 metres (Klatt 2009).

**Model 3.5: Location relative to roads**
Enclosures are often located near later prehistoric or medieval roads that may have succeeded Neolithic roads (Klatt 2009: 73). The location by watercourses and possible roads suggests that although a secluded location was selected for the enclosures, accessibility was important perhaps both with
regard to gathering of people and in terms of exchange and distribution of
goods (Klatt 2009: 76). Radiating lines of megalithic tombs found at enclo-
sures like Büdelsdorf and Markildegård suggest that the monuments were
aligned with procession routes leading to the enclosures (see also Klatt
2009: 38, Fig. 16; Müller 2013: 73). Besides the tight relationship in the
building and use of the megaliths and the enclosures, the tombs were posi-
tioned strategically to overlook access to the enclosures. Highlighting the
road through the location of burial monuments is a powerful way to assert
ownership of the route (von Hackwitz 2009: 247). While the visibility of the
tombs was increased by their location along a road, the monuments also
enhanced the significance of the road and served as markers of the transi-
tion to liminal space at the enclosures.

Spatial association between tombs and routes of communication is suggest-
ed elsewhere by long barrows and megalithic monuments as well as the later
stone packing graves aligned with routes through the landscape (Bakker
traffic was intensified during the second half of the fourth millennium BC
due to the introduction of cattle traction and vehicular transportation (Jo-
nahnsen 2006: 46). Roads may have had a special significance in Funnel
beaker society because they led towards important places, were used in the
quest for certain materials or served as procession routes. Roads or tracks
may have had a history described by the people, ancestors and spirits who
travelled it and left their mark on the countryside (Ingold 1987: 153). One
example is a river crossing at Værebro Å where an 8 kilometres long line of
megalithic tombs marked the access route on either side of this crossing. A
number of deposits in the wetland area indicate that this was a special place,
possibly a liminal zone (Figure 7.5). Again ancestral monuments were posi-
tioned along an important communication route as markers of a key node
of communication between a road and a waterway and also of the transition
to a liminal zone in the wetland.
Figure 7.5. A line of megalithic tombs stretching over a distance of 8 kilometres on either side of the Værebro river crossing. Numerous Neolithic wetland deposits of hoards, single objects and human bones (undated) were found at the crossing. Funnel beaker period finds marked in red. After Danish digital soil maps version 1.0 in 1:25,000, copyright GEUS. Digital elevation map and 4 cm map copyright Kort & Matrikelstyrelsen (G. 15–03) (after Sparrevohn 2009: 53, Fig. 7).
Conclusion

To sum up, two models have been suggested regarding megaliths primarily located in association with the local community. In Model 1 distance is created between the ancestors and the living by placing tombs at the margins of everyday life and the agricultural landscape, sometimes overlooking the inhabited land. In contrast, Model 2 describes a spatial connection between a previous household and a funerary monument. Both models might produce a scattered distribution of tombs similar to Renfrew’s model of territorial markers. The difference between the two types of location in relation to the community might be that tombs located according to Model 1 celebrate the ancestry of a lineage, while tombs situated according to Model 2 were erected as markers of a family or an individual.

The custom of burying the dead on settlement sites, as reflected in Model 2, might follow a tradition seen at Mesolithic and very early Neolithic sites (Andersson 2004: 140). However, these early sites with graves found at contemporary settlements show an actual cohabitation of the living and the dead (Nielsen & Petersen 1993: 77). At later Funnel beaker sites, the connection was only spatial with domestic and funerary structures being separated in time. A certain distance to the dead is preferred in both models one and two, but interestingly there is a different emphasis on the spatial connection.

A third model is proposed for the location of megalithic tombs as markers of the transition to liminal zones in the landscape. In a way this is a reversion to Sjögren’s (2003) suggestion that megalithic tombs defined the boundary between the domesticated landscape and the wilderness. However, the liminal zones in this third model were not confined to the local community, but related to liminal areas defined by human constructions such as funerary monuments and enclosures as well as communication routes in the landscape. The concentration of monument construction at certain sites suggests that specific focal points and features in the landscape had a regional significance in terms of cosmology, but probably also in terms of communication and political control. Megalithic monuments were probably built in part to legitimise and consolidate control over people and places; most likely the larger tomb clusters described in Model 3 reflect regional levels of social organisation perhaps comparable to that of the enclosures. Clearly, the megalithic tombs served different roles in Funnel beaker
society in terms of relations to the living, as markers of identity at the local and the regional level, and as mediators of transitions to the spirit world.

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References


LANDSCAPES OF MORTUARY PRACTICES
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Abstract
This paper focuses on the question of how a landscape perspective can contribute to the understanding of mortuary practices. By applying basic GIS methodology, we argue that it is possible to add additional dimensions to an understanding of the management of burials. The starting point is that the selection of locations and spatial relations of burials should be considered an expression of the norms and values that were important for the society that created the burials and organised the landscape. To illustrate this we use two case studies: The Passage Graves of Karleby, Falbygden and the Pitted Ware burials in Eastern Middle Sweden, Lake Hjälmaren.

Keywords: Mortuary practices, Landscape archaeology, GIS, Neolithic, Sweden

Introduction
The archaeology of Stone Age mortuary practices has to a large extent focused on describing and understanding burials. Enquiries have treated individual characteristics of the dead, such as age, sex, physical status and health. Focus is given to the ways in which the deceased was handled after death.

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Landscapes of Mortuary Practices

The structure of grave constructions and associated artefact records has also received considerable interest in studies of Stone Age mortuary practices. In the next step such sets of information have been used for reconstructing the grave ritual (e.g. Oestigaard, this volume; Törv, this volume), but also for inferring ethnicity and social status of the dead as well as social and ritual conventions surrounding the funeral act (e.g. Wallin, this volume).

This paper will discuss how a landscape approach and a GIS frame of reference can contribute to one of the main questions discussed at the Ancient Death Ways workshop: How can a landscape study enrich the understanding of past mortuary practices? The discussion during the workshop focused to a large extent on how GIS methods could be applied in various ways by archaeologists investigating different aspects of death in addition to the more frequently used methods, such as osteology and material culture studies. The discussion focused on the possibilities of integrating various data using GIS, more than the ability to use the method to study the burial ritual.

However, GIS has proven again and again to be a powerful tool when it comes to the processing of large amounts of spatially distributed data, to the modelling of ancient landscapes and for calculating various socio-spatial relationships, such as regions, territories and more. The vast majority of such studies do regularly incorporate prehistoric burial sites (e.g. Bradley & Philips 2004; Lindholm 2006; Löwenborg 2010; Phillips 2003; Sjögren 2003; von Hackwitz 2009, 2012). By viewing burials in a larger landscape context, including other activities conducted in other places, it is possible to shape an idea of what kind of places that were selected for burials and also their relationship to areas that were not used for burials. The selection of locations and spatial relations of burials should be considered an expression of the norms and values that were important for the society that created the burials and organised the landscape, i.e. the burials were situated in a socially constructed and culturally meaningful landscape. From such perspective, the landscape is not only a context to the mortuary practices, but provides a series of additional insights to the ritual that may not be easily retrieved by a conventional study of burials. So therefore, it is perhaps better to turn the question around and ask “Why should we not use GIS in modelling the past or apply landscape theories to understanding prehistoric burial customs?”

In the paper we will use Swedish Stone Age materials for combining two separate research traditions – mortuary practices and landscape archaeology. In the first part we will introduce some theoretical considerations by the
conceptual framework of landscape and briefly introduce the main methodology for landscape approaches, i.e. Geographical Information Systems (GIS). The second part of the paper constitutes two case studies.

Figure 8.1. The location of the case studies: Lake Hjälmaren in the middle part of the map and the Karleby/Falbygden area in the southwest.

The first case discusses megalithic passage graves in south central Sweden where locations seem to have been fundamental for maintaining a landscape organisation that separated the material evidence of grave ritual from the living human landscape (i.e. Axelsson 2010; Sjögren 2003). The second case discusses the Pitted Ware Culture sites in eastern middle Sweden (Figure 8.1). Here, a landscape approach and GIS methodology is used to provide
valuable insight regarding the burial remains found on these sites. The result questions the conventional view that the rituals manifested norms associated with different ethnic groups, placing the Pitted Ware Culture and the contemporary Boat Axe Culture in a dichotomy.

**Landscape**

Over the 1980s–90s landscape gradually became a central theoretical concept in archaeology. The concept can be conceived of as a reaction against ecosystem theories and ecofunctionalism for describing and understanding human-environmental relationships. Even if the concept of landscape was not fully in use until then it is still possible to argue that the landscape dimension has been a fundamental feature of archaeological research since the early development of the discipline (Trigger 1989: 247–249). The pioneers of the nineteenth century used landscape variables, such as distribution of archaeological finds and elevation above sea level for reconstructing postglacial shorelines and for establishing relative chronologies (e.g. Molin & Nordlund 1999). The cultural historical frameworks of the first half of the twentieth century used space and time – two fundamental dimensions of landscape – for identifying culture areas and cultural change (Malmer 1962). Material evidence found in graves was a fundamental marker for cultures within this framework. In the latter half of the 20th century the research focus changed to understanding the systemic properties of the landscape, and the explanatory frameworks rested to a large degree on ecofunctionalism. The subsequent post-processual reaction stressed a human centred view of the landscape through studies on symbolism and phenomenology (e.g. Tilley 1994). Monumental sites and visual qualities of the landscape were a fundamental trait of this research.

Current landscape research provides an integrated view and acknowledges that the landscape is constituted in the intersection of the cultural, social and environmental dynamics acting over both the long and the short term (Crumley 2006). The landscape is both the medium and the outcome of human mind and agency in the environment. From this perspective the placement of a burial area or a grave is the result of choices that were and are made by individuals of a certain society in relation to the landscape they live in.
The study of landscapes necessitates a methodology with the capacity to handle complexity and cross scale systems analysis. GIS is a computer aided system of methods for research on spatial data. Today, GIS are essential for applied research on connections between the history and geography of human activities and processes of the bio-physical landscape (Conolly & Lake 2006). Both case studies of this paper will apply GIS methods to analyse and visualise Stone Age mortuary landscapes. It might however be worthwhile pointing out that the tools used are relatively basic and that they are available in most modern GIS software. Hence, the case studies can be considered examples of how GIS in a quick and efficient way can be used to explore relationships in archaeological distributions, for example, in the initial phase of an archaeological study. However, it is still essential to acknowledge that the most important tool for a landscape study is the question that guides it, since this determines suitable GIS tools and selects the data required for the intended study.

The Passage Graves of Karleby

Falbygden in the province of Västergötland, Sweden, constitutes a regionally distinctive environmental setting which is characterised by a hilly upland plain with calcareous brown soils constituted on limestone bedrock. The plain is punctuated by a series of diabase capped plateau mountains (Sjögren 2010). During the Neolithic time period Falbygden attracted farmers and livestock herding peoples. They seem to have been part of a larger European complex of ritual and ceremonial practices, which is recognised through the prominent record of monumental passage graves (Sjögren 2010). A passage grave is a megalithic grave constructed by large boulders, which are placed to form a burial chamber and a transverse shaft that leads into the chamber. The burial chamber is often covered by a mound. Passage graves were mainly built around 3300–2900 BC after which they were used for a few centuries, but some finds have shown that the passage graves were intermittently in use up until the Iron Age (Axelsson 2010). For a detailed review of previous research on the passage graves of central Västergötland we refer to Persson and Sjögren (2001), Sjögren (2003, 2010) and Axelsson (2010). It can however be noted that the initial research focus was on the burial structures, the human remains and the material culture that occurred in the tombs. Recent research has developed more sophisticated methods for studying the graves and their contents. Current research has situated the megalithic graves in wider multi-scalar contexts – extending from the indi-
vidual grave to the inter-regional comparative frame – and has also incorporated GIS analyses (e.g. Axelsson 2010; Sjögren 2003, 2010). This case study will draw on findings from previous research, especially Sjögren (2003, 2010) and Axelsson (2010), which has provided several interesting insights into the landscape organisation of the passage graves.

One interesting insight is that the construction of the tombs on the plain seems to have mirrored the geological sequence of the mountains of the plateau, since they in general have limestone bases and diabase superstructures. This observation implies that the construction of the tombs contained a strong reference to the surrounding landscape (Axelsson 2010; cf. Tilley 1994: 87–109). Another interesting pattern is the spatial separation between the passage graves and the contemporary Neolithic settlements, suggesting that the living and the dead occupied separate landscape elements. The settlements were mainly associated with low-lying areas, while the passage graves were associated with limestone ridges. In addition, it seems that the topographic structure of the landscape affected the visual relationships between settlement areas and the funerary areas with passage graves (Sjögren 2003).

The analysis will focus on the latter feature of the mortuary landscape by undertaking an analysis of the passage graves and the subsequent cist graves of the late Neolithic. The graves are located within or in the vicinity of the current parish of Karleby, located directly north of the plateau mountain Ålleberg (Figure 8.2). In Karleby at least 12, or possibly 14, passage graves are currently known (Sjögren 2010). They are located more or less in a line along a limestone ridge running in a north-south direction. A number of archaeological settlement indications have been recorded in the parish, of which 17 have been dated to the Neolithic Funnel Beaker period. Settlement remains are located adjacent to wetlands and grouped to two areas directly north of Ålleberg and one directly to the east of the tombs, towards a larger bog. Sjögren (2010) has noted that the distinction between passage grave areas and settlement areas is also apparent in other areas of Fallsbygden, although maybe not as clear as in Karleby. Karleby’s rich archaeology and distinct topography provides a rewarding setting for a landscape study of Neolithic mortuary practices.

The purpose of the following analysis is to explore the landscape organisation of the mortuary practices. This will be done by GIS application including the Neolithic graves, the topographical setting and the additional archaeological site locations related to settlement activities and land-use.
The data set is derived from the National Heritage Board’s digital database for archaeological sites and monuments, FMIS. Main tools used in the analysis are Kernel Density Modelling and Viewshed Analysis, two tools that are generally available in most current GIS software. The case will illustrate how a landscape approach even using only basic GIS tools can be valuable for exploring and visualising fundamental principles of a prehistoric landscape organisation, hence providing insights into general principles of Neolithic mortuary practices.

Figure 8.2. The main data set is based on the National Heritage Board’s database for archaeological sites and monuments FMIS and the topographical setting. Elevation data ©Lantmäteriet i2012/921.
The first step of the analysis is to use the records from FMIS for modelling the landscape elements of the living people. This will be done by an interpolation method that basically aims to ‘measure the intensity’ of settlement activities in the landscape. The Kernel density interpolation method calculates the density of settlement activities in a neighbourhood, i.e. the method identifies areas in the landscape in which people conducted activities to a degree that resulted in archaeological remains. By transforming the points and polygons of FMIS into larger contiguous areas, it is possible to form an idea of the focal activity or settlement areas, since these intensities can be conceived to reflect people’s everyday activities (Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3. The result of the kernel density analysis; areas in purple are considered to reflect people and their everyday activities. Elevation data ©Lantmäteriet 2012/921.
The main characteristic of the passage graves is perhaps their monumentality. The construction of a passage grave demanded labour, coordination and effort. The location chosen for a passage grave was for this reason probably not randomly selected; this can be appreciated by the previously mentioned construction reference to the sequence of the plateau mountains or just by viewing the map over Karleby, where the majority of the passage graves are associated with elevated areas in the landscape (cf. Axelsson 2010; Sjögren 2003). Judging from their monumentality and their elevated locations, it can be assumed that one important function of the graves was to be seen. Therefore, the passage graves will be analysed through a viewshed analysis. Viewshed analysis has conventionally been used in phenomenological studies aiming at gaining insights into prehistoric people’s landscape perception (Axelsson 2010; von Hackwitz 2009).

Numerous studies have discussed viewshed analysis and criticisms have pointed out that the method involves various problems and that it puts too much weight on vision and aesthetic qualities of landscape (Axelsson 2010; von Hackwitz 2009: 165). In this case the viewshed analysis is mainly used for assessing the topographical structure of the landscape in relation to the Kernel densities. Figure 8.4 illustrates the settlement kernel densities and the total viewshed of all passage graves. A total viewshed is modelled on one observer point on each passage grave. By merging the total visibility with the kernel density it is apparent that tombs and settlement activities form two relatively distinct landscape elements, which supports the notion of spatial separation as suggested in previous research (Axelsson 2010; Sjögren 2003).

In the latter part of the Neolithic a different burial tradition appears as seen through the occurrence of stone cists. It can be noted that the late Neolithic cist graves appear within the same landscape elements as the passage graves, two of them in the near vicinity to the passage graves in the north, three of them in a previously empty zone between areas with passage graves. This suggests continuity in terms of landscape organisation of funerary practices, although the new type of grave construction implies change and the possibility of further enquiries to changing mortuary practices in the Neolithic.
In order to explore the landscape organisation of the Neolithic mortuary practices further it can be worthwhile to experiment with other observer points (Figures 8.5–8.7). Figure 8.5 is a viewshed constructed by placing an observer point on the top of the mountain of Ålleberg, looking out on the plain; Figure 8.6 simulates a walk along the eastern limestone ridge on which the majority of the passage graves are situated; Figure 8.7 is based on a total viewshed calculated from the settlement remains in FMIS. In the three experimentations it can be noted that the main features of the dual landscape organisation are generally repeated. If a person had looked out over the plain, she would probably have been able to see the monumental
graves, but the settlements would not have been in the direct line of vision. The same would have applied if a person had walked along the ridge, inferring that the monumental graves might have been part of what can be considered a “communicative topography” (von Hackwitz 2009: 155). The majority of the passage graves seem to have been outside the direct view or in peripheral vision for observers in the settlement areas. Hence, the extended analyses suggest that a basic structure exists in the landscape organisation and, in addition, the structure repeats itself if experimented with. It appears as if the passage graves and the cists were situated in places most easily seen from along ridges and smaller heights. The settlements were placed in low-lying positions of retreat, near pastures and areas suitable for cultivation. Together the two landscape elements supplement each other.

Sjögren states that the Neolithic world-view which was materialised in the construction of the passage graves, was directly linked to the landscape, and that “the megaliths by their physical presence would have demonstrated the validity of the dominant ideology in a forceful way” (Sjögren 2010: 12). This case study highlights how the ideology is manifested by the distinct organisation of activities associated with the living and the dead, and certain landscape qualities were important for how these activities were ordered.

Hence, the landscape was not only a context for undertaking rituals, but a fundamental feature, or even a medium for the rituals.
Figure 8.5. Viewshed constructed by placing an observer point on the top of the mountain of Ålleberg. Elevation data ©Lantmäteriet 2012/921.
Figure 8.6. Illustration of a total viewshed based on observer points of a simulated walk along the eastern limestone ridge on which the majority of the passage graves are situated. Elevation data ©Lantmäteriet i2012/921.
The Pitted Ware burials in Eastern Middle Sweden

The Middle Neolithic Pitted Ware Culture (3200–2300 BC) is often regarded as a material remnant of an egalitarian marine hunter gatherer group living in coastal areas. The culture is a direct development from the Early Neolithic Funnel Beaker Culture (4000–3200 cal. BC). Even though the culture is centred in present Sweden, there is a more widespread comb- and pit-decorated pottery culture in Finland, the Baltic States, Poland, the Kali-
ningrad region and northern Russia (Milisauskas 1978: 187). The more or less contemporary Boat Axe culture (2800–2300 BC), on the other hand, is usually perceived as a separate material connected to an agro-pastoral society living in the interior where they practised agriculture and livestock herding (cf. e.g. Forssander 1933; Knutsson 1995; Tilley 1982). It was a part of the wide spread Corded Ware Culture found over a large area covering most of central, eastern and northern Europe. Consequently, the Middle Neolithic landscape has been divided in two different types of landscapes based on the location of two different types of sites – a coastal area and an inland area holding two different groups of people. The two cultures are most often explained as expressions of ethnicity. The dualistic model of the Middle Neolithic society has been criticised by several researchers. They believe that the cultures should instead be understood as expressions of various phenomena within a society and that ethnicity as a concept is difficult to apply to prehistoric material (Carlsson 1987; Gill 2003, Svensson 2006a, 2006b; von Hackwitz 2009, 2012).

The sites where the Pitted Ware Culture is found often hold burial remains in the form of graves and/or scattered human bones. The scattered bones have been interpreted as deriving from destroyed graves (Knutsson 1995: 166–168) or as part of a burial tradition including reburials (Andersson 2004; Larsson 2009: 264–336). Furthermore, the burials have often been used to emphasise the dichotomy between the Pitted Ware Culture and the Boat Axe Culture, where the former is described as a mobile, un-ritualised and egalitarian society where the burials vary in appearance, as they are not part of a ritualised burial tradition, unlike the Boat Axe Culture burials that are more uniform in their design (Knutsson 1995: 166–168; Tilley 1982). However, this has been shown to be a simplified picture. Regional studies actually suggest that the burial customs within the Pitted Ware Culture include a greater dissimilarity than that found between the two different cultures (see discussions in von Hackwitz 2009: 27–66, 2012).

The following case study is based on three previous publications (von Hackwitz 2009, 2012; von Hackwitz & Stenbäck 2013) and puts forward how GIS methodology can provide new information regarding burial remains from Pitted Ware Culture sites in Eastern Middle Sweden in general and the area of Lake Hjälmaren in particular.

Lake Hjälmaren is situated in the middle of Sweden and is the fourth largest lake in the country, with a surface area of 458 square kilometres. It is situated
between the provinces of Västmanland, Södermanland and Närke. Several glaciofluvial eskers cross the area in a north-south direction as landscape relics from the inland ice. There are plenty of archaeological and historical remains found on and nearby the eskers as they have a (pre-) history as being used as roads (Malmer 2002: 138) and because they contain light sandy soils that comprise good farming land. During the time in question the area consisted of a lake with brackish water connected to the Littorina Sea.

The Pitted Ware Culture was in use over a long period of time, about 1000 years. During this period the shoreline displacements led to a reallocation of the settlements as the water withdrew from 35 m.a.s.l. to 25 m.a.s.l. Not only did this process release new land that changed the settings for the inhabited landscape, it gave new areas that could be occupied. In the lowland areas this change was drastic as only a few metres can change the landscape picture quite radically. For that reason it is necessary to examine how the changing topographies affected the choice of locations and the boundaries of possible territories in which the Pitted Ware sites were situated. This means considering the physical characteristics of the landscape, such as rivers, heights, lowland, shore areas etc. that constituted the landscape (cf. Zedeño 2000).

Middle Neolithic territories have been reconstructed in a previous paper using GIS methods including recalculated sea levels, reconstructed wetland areas, water catchment analyses and the use of combining rivers and lakes that divide the landscape into natural regions based on topography (von Hackwitz 2009: 207–211, after Löwenborg 2006). The method benefits from taking into account the communicative topographies (see above) that connect different areas, instead of giving the archaeological record prevailing dominance. Around Lake Hjälmaren there are two larger water catchment areas with different outlets – Norrström in the north and Nyköpingsån in the south-east. Within these larger catchment areas there are several smaller areas divided by watersheds. Through GIS-based analysis these smaller catchment areas were connected to create naturally formed regions based on whether or not the catchments were interconnected by crossing rivers which function as bounding elements (cf. Binford 1983; Jordan 2003). The data used for the calculations consist of modern water catchment data from the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute

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3 A water catchment area constitutes the area from which all run-off water comes together in a point or in a stream. A watershed is the boundary between two such areas. Typically, a watershed is a height where the rain falls on two different sides forming two different water catchment areas (Conolly & Lake 2006: 258-260).
In order to determine whether the catchments were connected by water, they were placed over a topographic map containing streams and other water. The regions were then manually outlined in ArcGIS. After this, the areas were applied onto a reconstruction of the middle Neolithic landscape with calculated shore levels. The reconstructions of the area around Lake Hjälmaren resulted in a division of the landscape that contradicts the previous dualistic model of a coastal – inland divided landscape. Instead, the different territories covered areas where both the Pitted Ware Culture and the Boat Axe Culture were situated (Figure 8.8).

Figure 8.8. Naturally formed regions around Lake Hjälmaren marked by different colours. The thick line divides the two larger water catchment areas Norrström and Nyköpingsån and the thinner lines inbetween mark smaller water catchment areas. An area in the south (white) with no data falls outside the two catchment areas. The eskers are grey. 25 m.a.s.l. (after von Hackwitz 2009: 209, Fig. 6:3).

In one of these territories a closer examination of the relationship between nature and culture, and the design of the social landscape was carried out by adding known sites and stray finds (Figure 8.9). The majority of the stray
finds can be found on both Pitted Ware sites and Boat Axe sites and are thus non-cultural.

Not only did the placement of the archaeological record verify the territory, but it also showed a clear relation between the two Middle Neolithic Cultures as the stray finds were located along the reconstructed waterways that linked the two different sites. The stray finds were in turn defined as different types of sites; settlement areas, depositions of axes and burials. Together with the Pitted Ware sites found in the crossroads of land and water, and the Boat Axe sites located at the inland roads on the eskers where the different territories met, the stray finds populate the territory and give a glimpse of the Middle Neolithic movement within the territory.

Figure 8.9. An area in the eastern part of Lake Hjälmaren was used to reconstruct the Middle Neolithic landscape including waterways, eskers, elevation data, defined stray finds and sites. Sites A-D = Pitted Ware sites where B is a “double site”; sites E and F = Boat Axe sites. 25 m.a.s.l. (modified after von Hackwitz 2009: 219–221, Figs 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8)
Furthermore, by including the sites and stray finds of the previous, Early Neolithic, period it became evident that the movement that existed in the landscape during the Early Neolithic was repeated in the subsequent periods even though the conditions in the landscapes changed as the waterways became more narrow. This maintenance of the landscape is therefore primarily understood as an act of upholding the waterways, the roads and the crossroads as they served as the basis of social relationships in the landscape (von Hackwitz 2009: 214–216, Fig. 6.5).

As the calculated Hjälmaren territories include both Middle Neolithic cultures, the question of the relationship between them becomes more intriguing. This is further demonstrated in the following GIS analysis carried out in an attempt to reconstruct Stig Welinder’s theory regarding the acculturation of the Pitted Ware Culture (von Hackwitz & Stenbäck 2013; Welinder 1978). In 1978 Welinder published his article *The acculturation of the Pitted Ware Culture in Eastern Sweden* where he used a method to distinguish between the inner and the outer archipelago by denoting the proportion of land and sea surrounding the Pitted Ware sites from different time periods. To calculate the water bodies he used a 4 km radius around 53 sites. His results suggested that the younger Pitted Ware Culture sites not only followed the retreating shore line, but became more concentrated on the outer archipelago. This change in location was induced by the expansion of the Boat Axe Culture around 2800 BC. Furthermore, he notes that the relocation of the Pitted Ware Culture sites most likely also reflects a situation where the resources became fewer and the culture’s economy became more specialised. As a result, the Pitted Ware Culture economy became more sensitive to various types of disturbances and in the end an acculturation was inevitable.

Welinder’s hypothesis was re-evaluated by using new archaeological and geological data, such as the laser scanned elevation data NNH4, and refined GIS methodology to calculate the shorelines during different times. The model is based on a *shoreline method* from archaeological sites combined with an *isolation method* built on analyses to determine when lakes were isolated

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4 LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) is a remote sensing technology that uses laser light to distinguish and measure surface features. In Sweden the data is accessible through a new high-resolution digital elevation model, NNH. NNH has a high accuracy with a point density of 0.5–1 points per square metre. It is provided in two formats, both in raw LIDAR data and in a comprehensive grid format with two metre resolution (see Lantmäteriet: Product description: GSD-Elevation data, grid 2+; Product description: Laser data).
from the sea (Sund 2010; for method description see von Hackwitz & Stenbäck 2013: 3). In order to mirror Welinder’s methodology, each site was given a buffer area with a radius of 4 km. The calculations of the surrounding land and sea area were subsequently done using the reconstructed shorelines and then summarising polygons within polygons, i.e. counting the total areas of land and water within each single buffer. The result was surprising as it revealed a completely contradictory picture: as the Boat Axe Culture begins to appear inland, the Pitted Ware sites are located from the outer to the inner archipelago, demonstrating a geographical relation to the Boat Axe sites instead of separation (Figure 8.10). This is not only due to the land uplift but seems to have been a conscious act forming the social landscape (von Hackwitz & Stenbäck 2013: 15–21).

Consequently, GIS based regional studies that take into consideration how the Pitted Ware sites were situated in the natural, the cultural and the social landscape show that there are several aspects that point to a different picture from the conventional dualistic model:

a) Pitted Ware sites and Boat Axe sites are part of the same territories in which movement between the two different types of sites has taken place using existing land and water ways.

Figure 8.10. The diagram shows the divergence in site placement between the Early and Late Pitted Ware sites according to percentage of surrounding sea (after von Hackwitz & Stenbäck 2013: 20, Fig. 9).
b) The territories were already in use during the Early Neolithic and the placement of the Middle Neolithic sites shows a maintenance of the historical landscape. As the landscape changed due to land uplift, this points to an act of resilience.

c) As the Boat Axe sites appear around 2800 BC, the Pitted Ware sites are relocated to have a closer geographical relationship with them.

The function of the Pitted Ware sites in Eastern Middle Sweden has been suggested as marine landmarks in line with the Neolithic monumental sites on the Swedish islands Orust and Tjörn, as well as the Orkney Islands. For all three areas, GIS based viewshed analyses propose that the sites were strategically located towards main exits and entrances of water routes (Bradley & Phillips 2004; Phillips 2003; von Hackwitz 2009: 164–171). Tim Phillips interprets the monuments on Orkney as landmarks for sea travelers and therefore they were positioned on places which were visible from the sea (Phillips 2003). The placement of these monuments recalls the placement of the Pitted Ware sites. The marine landmark theory is further supported by the fact that monuments, as well as the Pitted Ware sites, often hold material that indicates that they should not be interpreted as ordinary settlements (von Hackwitz 2009: 204–206). Presence of exotic materials and objects, graves, fragmented human bones and pottery deposited on the shore suggests that they should be interpreted as assembly sites where people from a large geographical area gathered in order to maintain social contact, perform various rituals and bury their dead. The reliable availability of marine resources in the coastal area rendered these meetings possible.

For that reason, the coastal and the Pitted Ware sites can be seen as important areas of interaction for part of a larger community in a mosaic of topographies and sites, including the Boat Axe sites. As such, it is possible that the burials found on these sites can be interpreted as more and other than a tradition belonging to a particular ethnic group.

Final remarks

The two case studies both highlight the argument that the landscape was not only a context to mortuary practices and ritual during the Neolithic but also an important setting which to some extent can be distinguished by GIS-methods. However, it should be mentioned that there is a certain risk of projecting our current perceptions of death, life, ritual, culture, ethnicity
and everyday life onto the Neolithic landscape. Just because the concepts have such a strong connection to measurable topographical and archaeological relationships in the landscape, we acknowledge them as valid concepts for analysis. The ideology that triggered the various practices in the landscape might, however, still be very difficult to grasp.

References


Abstract

The question of reusing old excavation data in archaeothanatological analysis is addressed in the present paper. The case of the Tamula XXII burial, excavated in 1961, is a good example for presenting the potential and constraints of archival sources in applying archaeothanatology for reconstructing past funerary practices. For thorough analysis, all available sources – textual and visual – were used, while the skeleton kept in the collection contributed to the final analysis. The sketchy description of the burial made on site is replaced by a more elaborate description making it possible to understand the position of the skeleton in a more complex manner. In short, the re-interpretation had two important results: (1) the deceased was not in a prone but supine position with additional elevation behind the back of the corpse; (2) the primary burial in a bark container was possibly reopened after the initial burial.

Keywords: archaeothanatology; source criticism; hunter-gatherer burials; Tamula, Estonia
Introduction

The focal point of a funeral is the deceased. Therefore, the centre of mortuary archaeology – the study of past funerary practices – is also the deceased. Or is it? In order to describe the core of mortuary archaeology, I borrow the words of Mike Parker Pearson (2012 [1999]) from his frequently cited book *Archaeology of Death and Burial*. Parker Pearson has stated the aim of his book as follows: *This book is not so much about what can be learned from human skeletons concerning these issues of demography, diet, health and body modification per se, nor is it about physical processes affecting human remains and their decay after their deposition*. Rather it is about the archaeological study of funerary practices that the living *perform for the dead* (Parker Pearson 2012 [1999]: 3; my emphasis). I agree with him in bringing mortuary practices into the centre of mortuary archaeology. First and foremost, a burial record is about past funerals and not so much about demography, diet, health and body modifications. However, it is more difficult to concur with the idea of reconstructing past funerals when the analysis of *physical processes affecting human remains and their decay after their deposition* is discarded. This kind of approach lacks source critical evaluation and preempts the complete reconstruction of past practices. I strongly advocate becoming mindful and critical about this kind of approach in mortuary archaeology (see also Nilsson Stutz 2003: 132, 140). To overcome this, the body of the deceased and the processes affecting it post mortem have to be core of the analysis. I argue that the culturally meaningful practices become intelligible only when the whole array of taphonomic agents are included.

Easy to say, but how should one proceed? Substantially one has to acknowledge that the burial record – the body of a deceased with accompanying finds and features – does not reflect past realities in a straightforward manner. It is an outcome of complex cultural and non-cultural processes. Nevertheless, this knowledge has been neglected in many studies (e.g. Beckett & Robb 2009 [2006]). To precede it is crucial to answer the question of how to distinguish cultural processes from non-cultural processes. Following the methodology of archaeothanatology that enables to reconstruct the relative chronology of taphonomic processes that have affected the formation of the burial record, it is possible to reach from skeleton to the initial burial. Through the profound description of the whole burial focusing on the cadaver and its decay the culturally meaningful practices are brought forward.
Archaeothanatology is ideally applied during the excavations. But the Tamula XXII burial was excavated decades ago when no archaeothanatological considerations were taken into account. Should material excavated earlier be discarded from the attempt to reconstruct past practices? I agree with researchers who claim that the rejection of old excavation data is not necessary (e.g. Harris & Tayles 2012; Nilsson Stutz 2003; Willis & Tayles 2009). As the methodology poses several requirements to the sources the reanalysis of old excavation data is more challenging, yet not impossible. Thus, I discuss the possibilities and limitation of archaeothanatology in (re)interpreting a burial excavated decades ago. On the basis of the case study of the Tamula XXII inhumation, I will address the following questions:

• How were the sources for reconstructing past mortuary practices created?
• What kind of requirements should sources meet for archaeothanatological analysis?
• To what extent is archaeothanatology applicable for analysing old excavation data?

Through the analysis of a single burial I would like to point out the possibilities that archival sources offer for making new reconstructions and interpretations about hunter-gatherer mortuary practices.

**Archaeothanatology — tracing mortuary practices**

Archaeothanatology\(^2\) (Fr. *anthropologie de terrain*) was developed in France in the 1970s and 1980s as a cross-disciplinary approach (Duday 2009: 3; Nilsson Stutz 2003: 131, 141) towards the study of the burial record. It is a method based on taphonomy that combines knowledge of osteology, anatomy and archaeology. As opposed to the traditional approaches to the excavation, documentation and analysis of archaeological funerary features, archaeothanatology determines both the biological and social components of death (Duday 2009: 3). The fundamental part of the study is the decay of the corpse, which both influences its close surroundings and is influenced

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\(^2\) The term was first introduced by Henri Duday and Bruno Boulestin in 2005 (Duday 2009: 3). This taphonomic approach towards mortuary record was initially called *anthropologie de terrain* (field anthropology). The failure of the term to convey the true content of the analysis was recognised by many researchers (see Duday 2009: 3; Nilsson Stutz 2003: 158). Nevertheless, the term was not neglected and no thorough discussion on the matter has followed.
by it in return. Via the observation of a skeleton, accompanying artefacts, and other burial features in the field, a chronology of the effects of various taphonomic agents is established. It is an elaborated description of the whole skeleton and each of its elements in anatomical means; it includes the immediate surroundings of the body, and involves the description of spatial relationships between the skeleton and grave goods. It is not just a description; it explains the position of any single element with the engagement of taphonomic agents. This leads first to the recognition of whether or not the deposition under study is an intentional burial at all (Duday et al. 1990: 30). Then the culturally meaningful practices are segregated from the natural processes (see Duday 2009; Duday et al. 1990). The main internal and external processes that are involved in the decomposition of the cadaver and affect the formation of the burial record are outlined in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1. Internal and external factors of the taphonomic behaviour of the cadaver (after Roksandic 2002; Duday 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal taphonomic factors</th>
<th>External taphonomic factors</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Time between death and burial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cause of death</td>
<td>Treatment of the body prior to the burial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Burial environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Burrowing activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body mass</td>
<td>Burial environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathology</td>
<td>Weathering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ideally, archaeothanatology is applied in the field by a specialist (Duday 1978, cited in Roksandic 2002: 101), which ensures us high resolution data about the burial record. Regardless of Henri Duday’s (2009 [2006]: 30) claims that only in rare cases is it possible to obtain all the essential information about the burial afterwards, despite the quality and abundance of the excavation archives, archaeothanatology can be applied to old excavation data (e.g. Harris & Tayles 2012; Nilsson 2006; Nilsson Stutz 2003; Willis & Tayles 2009). However, archaeothanatological analysis has ‘strict’ requirements for the archaeological record created in the field. The most important ones are listed here (after Duday 2009; Nilsson Stutz 2003). Instead of written descriptions, one should focus on visual material: photographs and detailed drawings. What affects the analysis most is the resolution of photographs and granularity of drawings. The more details, the more reliable the reconstruction can be. Detailed written descriptions cannot be ruled out either, as they give insight into what the archaeologist claims to have seen in the field. In the best case scenario, all of the above mentioned documents complement and do not contradict each other. As the aim of the analysis is
to reconstruct the relative chronology of the decomposition of the skeletal articulations, the sources should allow us to capture the information about the surrounding environment and grave structures; three coordinates for each bone; exact position of every single bone and knowledge – presence/absence – about bones with labile articulations (Duday 2009, 2009 [2006]; Duday et al. 1990: 31).

With materials from previous excavations not all the requirements will be met, allowing solely fractional analysis. I argue that one should not be afraid of incomplete analysis and results as long as all the available sources are used for accomplishing the relative chronology of the post mortem processes. The latter is especially important for the development of the methodology itself. To allow others to assess the credibility of the analysis, the course of the analysis has to be made visible with all of its variances and the doubts that the archaeologist has.

Creating sources and being critical about them

Archaeologists create their sources themselves. Paradoxically, in creating something new, i.e. documentation, they destroy the contextual relations between different features in the site. Observations and documentation that the later analysis relies on, are highly dependent on researchers’ preconceptions and questions asked. During the excavation researchers tend to find only what they are looking for and thus record features that they are familiar with. This allows reanalysis of archaeological sources, yet due to the selective nature of the sources not all the aspects are later on accessible. For archaeoathanatological analysis detailed field documentation is a premise.

Here I rely on the documentation about a burial recorded decades ago (Table 9.2). Tamula cemetery\textsuperscript{3} (Figure 9.1) was discovered by a local photographer in 1938. The site was excavated in 1930s and 1940s by Richard Indreko and Harri Moora, during six field sessions from 1955 to 1989 by Lembit Jaanits. The exact dating and the duration of the settlement and cemetery are problematic as the possible reservoir effect had not been taken

\textsuperscript{3} Also referred to as Tamula settlement site (Jaanits 1957; Ots 2006), settlement site and cemetery (Indreko 1945) or Tamula I settlement site and cemetery (Jonuks 2009; Kriiska et al. 2007).
into account while analysing the human remains\textsuperscript{4}. Nevertheless, at this point the site was dated to 4340–3360 cal. BC, conforming to Typical and Late Combed Ware Cultures (Kriiska \textit{et al.} 2007: 106). The total 25 inhumations with their magnificent grave inventory (Jaanits \textit{et al.} 1982: 81–82, 99) have initiated several studies on Stone Age religion (Jaanits 1961b; Jonuks 2009; Kulmar 1992), artefact typology (Ots 2006) and also attempts to describe the mortuary treatment (Jaanits 1957; Lõhmus 2007, 2008).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure91.png}
\caption{Location of Tamula cemetery in south-eastern Estonia.}
\end{figure}

Despite the abundance of previous research on Tamula cemetery, several problems appear with the sources. Table 9.2 shows sources available for each burial. It appears that the excavation reports – usually the primary source – for field seasons from 1955 onwards are absent. For the first time since the excavations in Tamula, the excavation diaries were used here with

\textsuperscript{4}This is a wider problem in Estonian Stone Age human remains worth series of articles on its own.
the courtesy of Jaanits\textsuperscript{5}. This means that now all the burials are covered by written descriptions made on site. The article about new burials from Tamula (Jaanits 1957:VIII–XXI) corresponds more or less with the field descriptions. But as it is written in German, some nuances have been lost in translation. Unfortunate in the context of archaeothanatology, is the lack of photographs. Only eight burials out of 25 are covered by at least one photograph. Instead, all burials (except IV and V) were sketched.

For the present analysis I have chosen Tamula XXII burial. This grave of an older adult male was excavated in 1961 and, according to Jaanits, it was the most magnificent burial (L. Jaanits, pers. comm., 18 Dec 2007) in the site. No grave goods accompanied the deceased. As it was discovered after the publication of “Neue Gräberfunde…” (Jaanits 1957), the only very sketchy description to date was published in the miscellany about the general prehistory of Estonia (Jaanits et al. 1982: 82). Compared with others Tamula XXII is well documented: it is exceptional with its ten photographs (Figure 9.2); there is also a diary entry and a drawing, as well as preserved bones.

\footnote{5 The excavation diaries are still in the possession of Jaanits.}
Table 9.2. Source material on the burials from Tamula cemetery: 0 – not present; 1 – present.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burial no.</th>
<th>Archaeologist</th>
<th>Year of excavation</th>
<th>Report description</th>
<th>Excavation diary</th>
<th>Drawing(s)</th>
<th>Photograph(s) (no. of photos)</th>
<th>Skeleton</th>
<th>Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Indreko</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (3)⁶</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Indreko 1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Indreko</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Indreko 1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Indreko</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Indreko 1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Moora</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Moora</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Moora</td>
<td>1946</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Moora</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits et al. 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (5)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1955</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>XVI</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1955</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Jaanits 1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>XVII</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVIII</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIX</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXI</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1956</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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<td>XXII</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jaanits et al. 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIII</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIV</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXV</td>
<td>Jaanits</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁶ As not all the materials from the excavations conducted by Jaanits are archived, more photographs may turn up during the ongoing discussions between Jaanits and the author.
Instead of being an advantage, the abundance of sources became one of the biggest challenges in analysing and interpreting Tamula XXII burial. All three primary sources – diary entry, drawing (Figure 9.3) and photographs – contain distinct information about the burial. They complement each other. But they also contained contradictory information about the burial. The most considerable conflict becomes obvious when comparing the diary entry and the anatomical position of the bones visible in the ten photographs (Table 9.2). While describing the position of the skeleton, Jaanits mostly uses cardinal points in order to give the location of single bones in relation to others. This makes his description difficult to follow; nonetheless, with some effort it becomes understandable. According to Jaanits, the skeleton lay in the grave in a prone position with its lower limbs in tight flexion from the knees. Its vertebral column was slightly curved and its right arm was beneath it and pelvis. The left arm was somewhat abducted from the vertebral column and flexed from the elbow. The full diary entry is as follows:

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7 AI – Institute of History at Tallinn University.
The head of skeleton no. XXII was directed to the northwest, feet to the southeast. The deceased was placed in the grave, which was dug into the peat beneath the cultural layer. The borders of the grave were well observable due to the fact that the grave-pit was padded with birch [and pine] bark. Grave itself was short: only 108 cm long and trapezoidal in its shape. Its width at the head-end was 66 cm and at the foot-end 55 cm. The deceased was placed in the grave upside-down, facing downwards. Due to the shortness of the grave the head was pressed towards the wall of the grave cut and because of the sinking of the cadaver resp. skeleton, the skull was a bit higher than the rest of the skeleton. The vertebral column was a bit curved and some of the vertebrae were deviated [from their original place]. Mandible lay south of the skull close to the ribs. Left arm was southwest from the vertebral column, it was flexed from the elbow. Right arm was beneath the vertebral column and pelvis. The cadaver was probably placed in the grave half sidelong so that its right shoulder and arm were left under the body. Pelvis was also facing downwards. Legs were bent upwards from the knee and probably pressed down in a way that tibiae were directly on top of the femora. Both feet were bent outwards. Skeleton was covered with birch and pine bark. The same bark layer covered the bottom of the grave, so that in the corners of the grave bark layer was descended. The thicker pole was at the height of 58 cm [from the topsoil] and approximately at the same height was the skull [parietal bones]. Head-end of the grave – where the bark started – was 63 cm [from the topsoil] and bottom 77 cm [from the topsoil]; the bottom of the foot-end rose a bit, and was 67 cm deep [from the topsoil]. No grave goods were found. (Jaanits 1961a; my translation and emphases)
Figure 9.3. An extract of the excavation plan (drawn by Jaanits) with the Tamula XXII burial (AI 4-1-29-2). Note the position of the vertebral column, which cannot be distinguished on the photographs, but is in accordance with the written diary entry. 1–bones; 2–wooden poles; 3–borders of pine and birch bark layers.

Analysis of mortuary practices

Archaeothanatological description of the skeleton
The photographs uniquely allow us to follow the course of the excavation, to identify elements of bones, and to observe the bark container. In describing the burial I have chosen to rely mainly on one of the photographs (Figure 9.4) as it has the highest resolution for observing the position of single
bones in the soil. These observations indicate that at the moment of documentation, the bones had not been moved. Furthermore, it is probably the source that is least influenced by the archaeologist. Through the detailed description of the skeleton I demonstrate that the initial body position was markedly more complicated than previously thought and reveal the individual acts behind the burial.

The cranium presents its posterior and lateral right sides. Jaanits describes the superior part of it as having immediate contact with the wall of the grave (Jaanits 1961a). The mandible is disarticulated from the cranium, lying in the area of the right shoulder and presenting its inferior and posterior sides. It should be noted that the position of the mandible in the drawing (Figure 9.3) and in the photograph (Figure 9.4) differs. In the drawing the mental protuberance is directed toward the SE. Analysis of the sources revealed that the burial was first drawn and then, after more studious cleaning, the photograph was taken. Thus, the initial position of the mandible is presented in the drawing.

The presence of the vertebral column is only schematically indicated in the drawing. It is impossible to differentiate between the cervical, thoracic and lumbar vertebrae, and their side of appearance. Jaanits states in the diary that single vertebrae were dislocated from the vertebral column. Little information is known about the thoracic cage. No ribs or sternum are visible.
either in the photograph or in the drawing. The presence of the ribs is only mentioned in the diary to indicate the location of the mandible in relation to them (Jaanits 1961a). These bones are also absent from the collection.

Obvious movements occurred in the area of both shoulder girdles. The right clavicle is lying vertically in the upper part of the right hemi-thorax presenting its superior surface. The left clavicle presents its inferior surface lying vertically in the middle of the right hemi-thorax. From the drawing and the photograph it appears to be lying very close to and in the same general axis as the left humerus. The drawing indicates that the vertebral column is in front of the sternal end of the left clavicle. Neither of the scapulae is observable in the documentation.

The right upper limb is partially articulated. It is lying to the lateral right side of the thoracic cage. The position of the right humerus indicates a disarticulation of the scapula. It is in adduction as the bone is slightly rotated inward and presents its anterior-lateral sides. The right radius and the ulna are in close connection to the distal end of the right humerus. Their proximal ends are in loose articulation with one another, but their distal ends have drifted apart from one another by several centimetres during the process of decomposition. The right radius presents its anterior side and the right ulna presents its anterior-lateral side. The left upper limb is only partly visible in the documentation. The left humerus presenting its anterior side lies in the upper part of the right hemi-thorax, partly behind the vertebral column. Its distal end is positioned directly to the lateral left side of the vertebral column and to the immediate medial side of the wooden pole. None of the articulations of the left elbow are maintained. The left radius is in the general direction of the medial axis of the body. It presents its anterior side and its distal half is positioned behind the left iliac blade. The position of the left ulna is unclear. It is not observable in the drawing, but in the photographs a long bone which could be the left ulna can be observed lying perpendicular across the area of the abdomen. This allegation is confirmed by the fact that all the other long bones are identified in the drawing and in the photograph and by the presence of the left ulna in the collection. The position of hand bones is not observable in the documentation, but their presence is affirmed by the fact that some of them were recognised and collected during the excavations.

Even though the position of the pelvis cannot be observed in detail, it appears to be intact. The left iliac crest that is in immediate contact with the
wooden pole located to its lateral side allows us to conclude that the pelvis presents its anterior side. The photograph indicates that the pelvis was slightly rotated to the right. Both lower limbs are extended at the hip and tightly flexed at the knee, bringing the legs and the feet behind the thigh and pelvis. Both femurs present their anterior sides. The positions of patellae do not appear in the documentation. They are also absent from the collection. The individual bones of the feet are impossible to examine in detail, however, in the photograph several of the metatarsals of the right foot are observable in articulation. After Jaanits’ (1961a) description we may conclude that the feet are bent laterally (abducted from the ankle). These bones are partially present in the collection.

Traces of pine and birch bark in close proximity to the skeleton were documented. From the photograph (Figure 9.2) a distinct layer of bark behind the skeleton can be distinguished. Jaanits (1961a) describes that the grave was padded with bark and the cadaver was also covered with it. From the drawing it becomes obvious that the bark layer beneath the body was spread over a larger area than the one covering it. The drawing also makes it possible to conclude that the layer covering the body consisted of large segments, not single pieces of bark here and there. The archaeological evidence indicates that the body was initially placed in the grave that was padded with bark and then the upper part of the body was covered with a bark layer. These were sealed with wooden poles from both lateral sides of the body.

**Practices: position and movements of the bones**

It has never been questioned whether Tamula XXII is a burial or not. Its location in a cemetery and the careful arrangement of the body strongly indicate an intentional deposit, i.e. burial. The presence of the majority of the skeleton and a more or less proper anatomical position of bones points to a primary burial. The absence of single bones can be explained by loss during the excavation or partially unsatisfactory exposure and documentation. Therefore, this older adult male was interred as a fleshed body into its final resting place where the entire process of decomposition took place.

**Space of decomposition**

The decomposition of the body took place in a dual burial environment. The dislocation of bones and their subsequent movements in the upper part of the body make it possible to conclude that this area had a delayed infilling and an empty space was created in the region of the cranium, thoracic cage and the lumbar vertebrae. The presence of the bark in the grave also
contributed to the creation of empty volumes as it decomposed subsequent to the body and thus delayed the infilling of the grave with the surrounding sediment. The empty volume concentrated to the right side of the body. Possible movements toward the left side of the body were prohibited by the close proximity of the grave structures, i.e. wooden poles. Noteworthy is that the empty volume was located beneath the body, not in front of it. This was created both by the initial position of the body – extremely arched back, which created a ‘natural’ void beneath the lower part of the thoracic and lumbar vertebra, and by an additional support beneath the thoracic cage and cranium, that helped to stabilise the upper part of the body. The exact character of the additional elevation beneath the upper part of the body cannot be described. It could be argued that this must have been made of an organic matter that was fully decayed.

Unlike the upper part of the body, no significant movements occurred in the region of the lower body. The persistence of the extension of the thighs at the hip and the flexion of the lower limbs at the knees indicates that no additional empty volumes at the level of pelvis and/or thighs existed. The situation described here would be possible with an immediate infilling. This is supported by the absence of the bark layer there.

Initial body position
The position of the bones presented in the photograph gives a general impression of the initial body position (Figure 9.5), even if significant movements have taken place in the upper part of the body. As these movements obey relatively straightforward and logical rules dictated by the timing of the destruction of various articulations and gravity that in turn are affected by the initial body position of the deceased and the space of decomposition (Duday 2009 [2006]: 35), these differences can be explained and the initial body position reconstructed.
The upper body lay on its back, both of the upper limbs extended at the shoulder, forearms slightly flexed at the elbow, the right one supinated and the left pronated. The information about the thoracic cage is fragmentary; therefore, the reconstruction of its initial position in the grave has to be based on indirect evidence. According to the position of the pelvis and the lower limbs, I argue that the corpse was placed in the grave on its back. The constrained position of the lower limbs elevated the upper body creating a ‘naturally’ arching back at the level of the lower thoracic and the lumbar vertebrae. The significant movements of bones in the area of the upper body – the shoulder girdle and the forearms – indicate that in addition to that ‘natural’ empty volume, an additional elevating feature was used to stabilise the position of the body (see also Nilsson Stutz 2003: 233). Unlike the reconstruction here, Jaanits described the body being placed prone (Jaanits 1961a). The left iliac crest and the position of the lower limbs observed on the photograph disprove Jaanits’s argument. The lower limbs were extended from the hip joint presenting the anterior side of the thighs. The left thigh had a slight medial rotation. The legs were tightly flexed at the knees, lying behind the thighs. Despite the absence of z-values of the single bones it could be said that the body was slightly rotated to the right. The latter is indicated by the movements of bones in the upper part of the body, the
position of left iliac blade, both upper limbs, and affirmed by the medial rotation of the left femur. The presence of wooden poles on the left lateral side of the body contributed to the rotation, too. Due to the poor documentation, the exact position of the cranium, the hands and the feet was not possible to reconstruct with certainty.

Bark container
The positions of the bones and the presence of pine and birch bark in close proximity to the skeleton supports Jaanits’ first interpretation about the burial. The grave was padded – the area of 108cm x 66/55cm – with bark and then the deceased was placed into the grave, which was again covered with bark. The drawing suggests that the bottom of the grave was entirely covered with bark, but the layer in front of the cadaver did not shroud the whole body, leaving the lower limbs uncovered. The intact position of the left humerus and also minimal movement of the pelvis allows us to suggest that the body was more or less immediately shrouded by the bark layer (i.e. like a blanket). The wooden poles at the lateral sides of the body were there to retain the position of the bark.

Reopening of the grave?
The positions of the cranium and the axial skeleton are at variance. The initial position of the cranium cannot be determined with certainty. Nevertheless, when considering the axial body, which presents its anterior side, and the side of appearance of the cranium the latter must have moved/been moved significantly during or after the process of decomposition. In addition to the rotation of the cranium the mandible has lost its temporo-mandibular connection and is not in immediate contact with the cranium. The mandible has moved significantly. Although it becomes evident from the field documentation that archaeologist moved at least some bones before recording them, this was not the case with the cranium. Regardless of the fact that he did not recognise all the bones in the field (e.g. described the femurs as being the tibiae), the position of the cranium was clear to him. It was the departure point of his interpretation (Jaanits 1961a).

According to the previous observations two feasible explanations of the post-depositional movements of the cranium may be proposed. The movements of the cranium could have been an outcome of the decomposition of the cadaver in a space with delayed infilling and an initially elevated head (e.g. cushioned head). The movements of bones at the level of the shoulder girdle and the position of the vertebral column support the idea of
an additional empty volume behind the back. The secondary empty volume behind the cranium and in the area of the right shoulder would have made the dislocation of the cranium and the mandible possible (e.g. Duday et al. 1990: 38; Nilsson Stutz 2003: 224, 233).

The alternative, and more intriguing, explanation includes human interference after the initial burial. The bark layer covering the upper part of the cadaver made the grave easily accessible after the initial burial. It is possible that the grave was re-opened after the body was decomposed; the skull was taken out and placed back into the grave facing downwards as it was documented in the field. This interpretation could also be confirmed by the fact that Jäanits described the superior part of the cranium as being pressed immediately against the NW wall of the grave cut. This would have restricted the movement of the cranium in the burial environment with an empty volume. The reopening of the grave may also help to explain some of the movements of the bones in the upper part of the body.

It is difficult to favour one of these explanations. First, the documentation leaves us with unanswered questions. For instance, no later disturbances of the grave which could support the idea of reopening of the burial were recorded. Surely, we may argue that the excavation techniques applied decades ago were not meticulous enough to recognise the signs of later disturbances of the grave. Thus, the reopening of the grave cannot be excluded. Whatever the situation was in the field, the present documentation does not allow making any conclusive interpretations here. Moreover, parallels arguing for the feasibility of both of these explanations can be found in the literature. Evidence for manipulation of crania/heads from the Mesolithic/Neolithic (i.e. hunter-gatherer) burials in Europe (e.g. Fahlander 2010; Hallgren 2011; Schulting this volume) and elsewhere have become more abundant during the last decades. The presence of a secondary empty volume, which would have contributed to the post-depositional movements of the cranium, behind the cadaver has been observed in Skateholm II (grave XV; Nilsson Stutz 2003: 224).

Discussion: old sources and new interpretations

Although the excavation techniques and the documentation of burials and the settlement layer in Tamula were considered advanced in their own time (Schmiedehelm 1952: 1) they are partly insufficient in the context of ar-
chaeothanatological analysis. The bones have not been cleaned meticulously enough, no z-values of single bones were recorded, and only some of the bones were collected (Moora 1946). In addition, the excavation records lacked depth. Nevertheless, as shown during the detailed analysis of the Tamula XXII burial, these shortcomings can be revealed and thus their importance in the analysis considered. The second point is that in order to “return to the field” and conduct archaeothanatological analysis all available sources – archival, published as well as the skeletons – should be exploited. In the course of their critical evaluation both inner and outer source criticism should be considered and the incompatibilities of the sources must be made evident. Only then can plausible and verified interpretations be made.

Archaeothanatology itself could be considered a tool to critically evaluate sources and help to gain a better understanding of past interpretations. In the case of Tamula XXII, the inaccuracy of the written description became evident during the analysis. Thus, primacy in the analysis was given to the photographs and the drawing. The irrelevance of written texts for reconstructing past burial practices in the framework of archaeothanatology has been stressed earlier (e.g. Nilsson Stutz 2003). Written texts might not be detailed enough. Secondly, textual sources are interpretations, where the archaeologist describes what she/he thinks she/he has seen. Field drawings tend to possess similar qualities. Thus, even if the sources lack depth in conducting the full analysis, the principles of archaeothanatology may help us to rule out the most unlikely interpretations. Here it is exemplified by the misinterpretation of the initial body position of the deceased. This might have resulted from Jaanits’ want of background in human osteology and anatomy. He without doubt had good intentions in describing the skeleton, but lacked the necessary skills for recognising the position of bones and subsequently the entire body. It also has to do with focal point of interest. His diary and article (Jaanits 1957) demonstrate that he paid attention to artefacts and their relation to nearby features. The same critique – not regarding the skeleton – is applicable to most other archaeologists (see above; Duday 2009 [2006]: 30). I argue that we have to be mindful and critical toward the approach that treats human remains in burial context as “offerings to a ceramic vessel or to a flint projectile point” (Duday (2009 [2006]: 30). In Estonia the potential of human bones in the analysis of mortuary behaviour has only recently began to be appreciated. The knowledge about taphonomical changes in the burial environment started to spread in the 1980s and 1990s. Despite this recognition taphonomic approach has not been applied excessively.
Applying archaeothanatological methodology to past excavation data is not straightforward and entails various problems that have to be solved case by case. The present case demonstrated that the general way of recording the skeleton lacks details for carrying out full archaeothanatological analysis. It is not enough to state the overall position of the body. The position of limbs with no references to their anatomical position and lateralization will not help us further in understanding past practices. Nevertheless, high resolution visual material may provide us with pertinent information and, in combination with critical analysis of other sources, the possibility to reconstruct past practices remains.

Conclusions

My critical analysis of the sources, both past records and material remains, makes it possible to follow various decomposition processes that have resulted in the situation that Jaanits faced in the field. So, I can state that Tamula XXII was a primary burial in a bark container. The initial body position was more complicated than previously thought: literally, I turned him from a prone to a supine position with naturally arched back, lower limbs extended from the hip and tightly flexed from the knee. The interrelation between the exact position of the skeleton and the burial environment steered me to the reconstruction of the initial burial with a probable reopening event afterwards. The possible reopening event of the primary burial adds at least one step to the handling of the deceased in hunter-gatherer societies, making the burial practices more dynamic. Even though the majority of inhumations refer to the respect for the integrity of the human body and the hiding of putrefaction, the loose human bones and manipulation of cadavers in other regions have hinted that there is more to it than that. Possibly manipulating corpses was a more common practice – whatever the reasons might have been – than we have been ready to accept so far.

There are still many unanswered questions that derive from the source material, but by making the process of analysis visible, my arguments for the above statements can be scrutinised and eventually revised. Thus, by means of archaeothanatological analysis of the old excavation data, a more complete and secure picture of past practices can be drawn.
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References


Closing Ancient Death Ways: 
**THE ETHICS OF MANIPULATING THE DEAD**

*Malin Masterton*¹

While we spend great effort on finding, handling and studying human remains, the dead are only instruments and not our ultimate object of study. The sites of burials are arguably formed for the living, by the living and may or may not correspond to how the now deceased person would have wished it to be. As Mari Tõrv points out in her article (this volume), the dead may be the focal point of a burial but it is the activity of the living that we study. We want to know how past persons lived, how they made sense of the world and how they took care of each other. Burial sites can give us signs of how personal identity was understood, how a community was structured or what was regarded as important tools and materials. For these purposes we use the dead, their physical remains and their burial materials, to understand the past.

Whenever we humans use someone or something for our own ends, we have to consider the impact of this activity on others and whether our practices raise ethical concerns. Most human societies handle their dead with great care and respect (Alfonso & Powell 2008). We have also been made aware that there is great variation in how that respect is expressed. The question is then, ought we to handle ancient human remains with the same, or at least similar, care and respect when we use them in archaeological studies? I will approach this question through ethical reasoning, based on a

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session title from the conference: *Current Research on the Manipulation of the Dead*. The choice of the word *manipulation* instantly grabbed my attention, probably because of the debate in molecular biology that was ongoing during my undergraduate studies in the late 1990s. The somewhat unexpected resistance to genetic technology by the public was, in part, put down to the negative connotations associated with the terminology of genetic manipulation (Straughan 1990). The scientific community argued that a public discussion would be less biased and more objective if the terminology was changed, as it later was, to genetic modification. I will discuss ethical aspects of manipulating the dead that we, now and in the past, do when we handle physical remains for a burial or in research.

**To manipulate or to modify**

Although the negative reaction of the public toward genetic manipulation played a part in the change in terminology, it was also argued that modification was a more apt description. So let us compare the lexical definitions of the two concepts and consider if a change in terminology would be more suitable in archaeology as well.

**Manipulate**
1. To handle or control in a skilful manner
2. To control or influence (a person or situation) cleverly or unscrupulously
3. To control or change by artful or unfair means so as to serve one’s own purpose

**Modify**
1. To make less extreme
2. Make partial or minor changes to something
3. To make basic or fundamental changes in, often to give a new orientation or to serve a new end

(The definitions are abbreviated and adjusted, based on suggested definitions in the online dictionaries [Merriam-Webster 2014; Oxford Dictionaries 2014]).

The first part of manipulation comes from the Latin word *manus* meaning hand, which is obvious in the meaning ‘to handle’. The negative connota-
tion to the word can be seen in the second and third sense of the word, but there is scope for a positive, or at least a neutral, meaning of manipulate. The word ‘control’ appears central and this control can at best be skilful, clever or artful, and at worst be unscrupulous or unfair. In contrast, the word ‘modify’ describes change, but lacks the association of ‘to control’. The purpose of research is to gain understanding and increase our knowledge. Of course, with a good understanding and knowledge of a situation we can more readily take control and change the situation to serve our own ends. Therefore I hold that ‘to manipulate’ better describes how we use human remains in archaeological research. The choice of word to describe what the living do with their dead as part of a burial tradition is harder to give a single answer to given the great variations in how the dead are handled. ‘To manipulate’ would perhaps be more appropriate in cases where extensive effort has been made to alter the remains of the dead. ‘To modify’ may be a more suitable term in cases where little appears to have been done to/with the dead. For the sake of simplicity I will use the term manipulation in the following discussion. The next two parts focus on possible ethical aspects in 1) the manipulation of the dead as part of burial arrangements and 2) the manipulation of human remains for the purpose of research.

1. Manipulation of the dead: handling the recently deceased

The burial of a recently deceased person is in part for practical reasons: we have to handle a dead body in some way since doing nothing is rarely an option. However, the time and effort put into burials indicate that they mean and meant much more than providing a practical solution to the disposal of human remains. The where and the how of a burial can be a display of a living person’s status and power rather than the dead person’s. Following a cultural tradition for burial can give a sense of stability for the living at a time of disruption and loss. Rituals give space for displaying strong emotions and may provide a sense of closure for the living. Manipulating the dead body may be thought to prevent the return of the dead. For all these reasons, along with many more, a burial is for the purpose of the living and in a sense the dead body can be seen as a prop that is used ‘to serve one’s own purpose’. Perhaps it is the very transcendent nature of the dead body that gives it its strong symbolism, the recently alive but now dead person is at the same time present and non-present (Nilsson Stutz 2008). If burials centre around the dead body but only serve the purpose of the living, the human remains may be (ab)used just for their powerful emotive meaning. Whether such treatment could be condemned in any way I will leave unsaid. Instead I will question the idea that the dead are absent at their own burial
and that manipulations of human remains are for the purposes of the living only. It is hard to take a normative stand on how and for what purposes a community chooses to handle/manipulate their dead. Perhaps the only action that is morally condemnable is inactivity: to do nothing with the dead and not to respond at an emotional level in the presence of death.

For a human being, death is a state of no control, similar in many ways to when we are asleep or unconscious. In those states a human being is in a very vulnerable position, with no ability to decide for example who can see them. When another human being is in a vulnerable state, it calls for ethical and respectful handling of the situation. Dignity means being worthy of honour or respect (Oxford Dictionaries 2014). We can regard ourselves to be worthy of respect, i.e. self-respect, but to some extent we always rely on others to acknowledge our worthiness. Acknowledgment of others is of utmost importance when we are in a state where we cannot uphold our own self-respect. A basic principle is therefore that in a state of vulnerability, the responsibility is on those around to uphold basic dignity. Death means that others must maintain basic dignity, or in some situations, restore dignity. How to handle the deceased with dignity is a major question in my current area of research on identification efforts in disasters. Slow response by the authorities can for example trigger criticism of an undignified situation where the deceased are left exposed, as in the Hurricane Katrina disaster (Nicosia 2009). Traumatic deaths disrupt our normal funerary rituals and efforts must be made in order to restore dignity to the dead. When the military Hercules plane from Norway crashed into Kebnekaise on the 15th of March 2012, the bodies of the five victims were highly fragmented. A Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) team was called in and Norwegian soldiers helped to retrieve as many of the human tissues as possible. The identities of the victims were officially confirmed on the 10th of April, but the DNA identification work continued until all fragments that weighed more than 100 grams had been identified (Masterton & Montelius 2014). An increasing number of resource-rich countries have DVI teams, which provide a systematic approach to achieve identifications in challenging circumstances. One of the stated reasons for this work is that “human beings have the right not to lose their identities after death” (INTERPOL 1996). In the Hercules crash the official identifications apparently did not suffice to counteract the loss of identity that the crash had caused and further body parts had to be identified so that the affected families could bury their dead (Masterton & Montelius 2014).
The technologies used in DVI serve the purpose of re-establishing the link between the social identity (the name of a person) and the biological identity (the human body), when that connection has been lost. Since DNA-technologies enable analysis of small tissue fragments from the dead, the task of identifying victims in a large open disaster such as at the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers on the 11th of September, 2001, proves to be extensive work. More than ten years after the terrorist attack, stored tissue fragments from more than 2700 victims are being tested with the latest technology in the hope of identifying the missing (Tweedie 2011). With our tools, we can handle and control the remains of a person in a skilful manner and we regard this manipulative activity as ethical. With activity, skill and control we understand our actions as restoring dignity to victims after an undignified catastrophe that killed members in our community. While we cannot separate the purpose of handling the dead for our own purposes and the purpose of showing respect toward the dead person, I have argued for the possibility that funerary rituals serve the purpose of the dead as well as the living. It can be the case that the dead body is used only as an object, a prop, to serve to our own purposes, but equally a burial ritual can be directed towards the dead person as a sign of respect and upholding dignity for someone in a vulnerable state. Our actions reveal something about our ideas on identity, status and the meaning of death: they do so today just as much as for people in the past.

2. Manipulation of the dead: using the dead from the past in research

We regularly manipulate the dead in our research on ancient human remains: in a skilful manner we handle the bones and use them to our ends for gathering information. The question is whether there are ethical aspects to consider in this activity. Can the use of past human remains for our own ends be unfair or unscrupulous (implying a lack of moral standards)? The first step in attempting an answer to that question is to consider whether or not past human remains have a moral standing, i.e. whether we have fundamental moral concerns toward human remains. The beings and entities that we acknowledge to have a moral standing are included in our so called moral sphere. How that judgement is to be made and ultimately the scope of that sphere is an area of considerable debate. All I will do here is to

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2 Our moral sphere can be restricted to living human beings or expanded to include certain other living beings, such as gorillas, or even abstract entities such as the environment. If ancient human remains are excluded from our moral sphere, there would be no difference in doing research on old bones compared to research on other inanimate objects such as...
point towards some possible arguments for and against the position that past human remains have a moral standing.

Pro-arguments that past/ancient human remains have a moral standing:

1. Human remains evoke an emotional response in most of us, which indicates that they are objects worthy of our care.
2. We treat human remains of the recently dead with the utmost care, and if a dead person lacks family and friends, we as a society have a duty to handle their body with respect and care. Ancient human remains can be regarded as a dead person who lacks family and friends and the duty of care therefore falls onto society.
3. The onus is on us to demonstrate how we do not have any moral duties toward ancient human remains when we use them for our own ends. If someone was buried in a particular way, the onus is on us to argue why we have good reasons to remove their remains from that place and manipulate their bones.

We know that human remains, ancient as well as recent, evoke emotions in many of us. The first argument emanates from the intuitive differentiation made between human remains and other inanimate objects, lending support to the thesis that human remains have a moral standing. The challenge is that not everyone may experience this emotional response, or it may be argued that it is learnt behaviour to have this response. The emotional response argument appears to be a weak argument, which primarily can be used to motivate ethical discussion. The second argument has its starting-point in how we choose to handle our dead with the utmost care and respect today. By analogy, we ought to show some level of care and respect to ancient human remains, unless there is a relevant difference between the two situations. A recurring objection is that the reason we show care and respect toward the dead is because the family and friends would otherwise be distressed, and so it is the living who have a moral standing, not the dead (Callahan 1987). Ancient human remains do not have family and friends who can be offended and therefore there cannot be any moral duties toward the dead. By extension, this stance has some questionable conclusions, for example, that we have no duty to show care and respect to a recently dead person if they are without family and friends.

(Read more in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy under the term: moral standing).
The third argument has its basis in the fact that we are well aware that the dead have been carefully placed in a burial and we exhume their remains to serve our own purposes. There is no way of knowing what a past person hypothetically would have thought about being exhumed in some distant future. Perhaps they could not have cared less, but since there is no way of finding out the past person’s hypothetical wishes, we ought to assume that the handling of their remains is against their wishes.

Moving on to some contra-arguments of the moral standing of human remains:

1. The dead do not exist and therefore cannot have any interests; we cannot do them any harm.
2. We do not know how a past person would have wanted to be treated or not be treated.
3. There are other legitimate interests that deserve our attention more than any possible interests of the dead.

The first argument I have argued against at length in my thesis (Masterton 2010) and as an abbreviated chapter to a volume published by The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee (Masterton 2013). In brief, the argument is that as long as there are traces of the dead, aspects of the dead remain and with these aspects there may be associated interests. The second argument is tied to the discussion for the third argument in favour of human remains having a moral standing. A more potent argument contra this position is that even if we wanted to show due care and respect, we are unable to do so since we cannot recreate the past person’s context. We live in a different time and place, and even if we performed the right movements for example, those actions would not carry the right meaning. We can of course base our handling of human remains on our ideas of what showing respect entails, but we cannot know that this solution would have been in accordance with the wishes of the now dead person. The way to avoid this issue completely would be to stop exhuming human remains, or at least to return human remains to the burial site after examination. If we are not willing to do so, we return to the third pro-argument stating that the onus is on us to explain how our practices are ethically motivated. The third contra-argument may admit that human remains enjoy moral standing, but given all other beings in the world with relevant interests that are highly pressing, the possible interests of the dead cannot be prioritised over those of the living. This is an important point since each of us have a great number of interests and expressed wishes, but interests must almost always be weighed against
other interests. Only careful attention to particular situations involving manipulation of human remains can begin to discern whether interests of the dead are legitimate and must be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

By handling or manipulating the dead body we can maintain the relationship between the dead and ourselves. According to Kantian ethics it is not in and of itself unethical to use others as instrumental to our own ends, as long as we treat them as ends in themselves as well: “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only” (Kant 2008). Kant’s quote is often cut short, leaving out the word “only”, which would mean that we may never use others instrumentally. Of course, we could not go around our daily business if we had to adhere to such a strict principle of ethics. If we stand by this Kantian principle, the key question for us as researchers is whether we, in our manipulation of the dead, also treat them as an end and never as a means only.

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