GRAVE

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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF POST-DEPOSITIONAL INTERACTIONS WITH THE DEAD

Edited by
Edeltraud Aspöck, Alison Klevnäs & Nils Müller-Scheeßel

Studies in Funerary Archaeology Vol. 14

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Front cover: Photo shows a disturbed Early Bronze Age grave at Weiden am See, Austria (Photo: Edeltraud Aspöck, modified by Gerrit Müller-Scheeßel).

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1. The archaeology of post-depositional interactions with the dead: an introduction

Edeltraud Aspöck, Alison Klevnäs and Nils Müller-Scheeßel

During excavations we often encounter mortuary deposits which show evidence of disturbance. Graves, especially inhumation burials as opposed to cremations, readily show signs of disorder. Human bones may be displaced and intermingled with grave goods, or traces of pits or damage to coffins or other containers may show that others have been digging before the archaeologists arrived. This book explores past human interactions with mortuary deposits, delving into the different ways graves and human remains were approached by people in the past and the reasons that led to such encounters. The primary focus of the volume is on cases of unexpected interference with individual graves soon after burial, that is, re-encounters with human remains which do not seem to have been anticipated by those who performed the funerary rituals and constructed the tombs. But in addition, reuse of graves at later stages also features in some of the case studies, as well as practices concerning double or collective graves in which reopening and manipulation of previous deposits is required when the "new" dead are added. Multiple types of post-depositional practices may frequently be seen in the same period and region and sometimes at the same burial site or even in a single grave.

The observation that graves were often deliberately disturbed in the past is long-standing, but the phenomenon has not been a popular subject for research, until recently remaining on the margins of archaeological discourse. Undisturbed mortuary deposits show how bodies were deposited, which grave goods and furniture were there originally and – subject to natural taphonomic alterations – frequently offer collections of valuable artefacts for study and display. As "closed contexts", undisturbed graves have long been valued as important methodological tools for establishing typologies and chronologies. For social analysis of cemeteries, complete sets of grave goods and skeletal evidence that is as exhaustive as possible are basic requirements. In "disturbed" graves we cannot say for certain the number or types of grave goods that were once deposited and, if an interment has been heavily interfered with, we may not know how the body was placed, and in some cases not even how many individuals were initially present. Accordingly, for most of their history, disturbed graves were generally deemed interesting and worth analysis only according to the degree that they still showed evidence of the original deposition. However, paradigms in mortuary archaeology have changed: recent research has moved away from researching the normative and the typical, and with this move interest in post-depositional practices has been rising (*e.g.* Aspöck 2008; Murphy 2008).

    One consequence of the perception of all deliberate re-entries into burials in the past as essentially damage to the archaeological record was limited interest in the reasons for post-depositional interferences in graves. The go-to explanation was that ancient "grave robbers" in search of valuables would be accountable for the traces of disturbance seen by modern excavators in most if not all cases (Fig. 1.1; Fig. 1.2). Indeed, as this book shows, this interpretation was invoked whether it was early medieval cemeteries in Europe or the tombs of the Maya that were found disturbed. Thus for a long time an understanding prevailed that in the past, graves were seen – at least by the robbers and their affiliates – principally as hoards of objects valuable and useful to the living for materialistic reasons. And since motives for "grave robbing" seemed plain and self-explanatory, the behaviour as such never aroused much interest in scholarly discourse. This paradigm remained a vigorous part of archaeological narratives for a long time, indeed perhaps still remains so. It has been influential in particular in periods with large-scale occurrence of grave reopening and object removal, notably the Early Bronze Age of central Europe and the early Middle Ages of western and central Europe, and was only occasionally challenged by those looking into the evidence more closely.

    In the last decade or so, in-depth research has begun into what is now preferably described under more neutral categories such as "post-burial interventions", "grave reopening" or "post-depositional

Fig. 1.1: Image from the 15th-century illuminated manuscript "The Decameron" illustrating the robbery of the grave of Archbishop Filippo Minutolo. The image represents the only known ancient illustration of an act of grave robbery. Paris, Bibl. de l'Arsenal, ms. 5070 réserve, f° 54v (Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France).

Fig. 1.2: "Grave-robbers" looting the landscape (Neugebauer 1991, fig. 34. Concept: J.-W. Neugebauer, Drawing: Leo Leitner 1983, Courtesy of Christine Neugebauer-Maresch).

practices". Both the new interest and new terminology are based on awareness that the reopening of a grave is in many cases by no means a criminal act, nor laden with the negative sentiment implied by the term "robbery". For these reasons, we avoid the term "grave robbery" when presenting a range of recent approaches to the topic in this volume, even though it is sometimes intended as simply a technical term for past interference with mortuary deposits. We contend that "grave robbery", used equally for the description of archaeological evidence and its interpretation, mixes different stages of the research process and is therefore misleading. It also depletes interpretative power in those contexts in which reopening does in fact appear to have been motivated by illicit acquisition, which themselves provide opportunities to interrogate ideas about the dead and their kin as property-holders. Instead, we prefer more neutrally descriptive terms such as "reopening", "deliberate disturbance" or "manipulation". These sometimes come across as awkward neologisms, especially when the individuals who reopened graves are denoted as "reopeners" or "manipulators", but these alternative terms help to avoid preconceptions about the nature and motives of reopening across contexts. Use of such alternative terms has become more and more commonplace in studies critical of previous models of interpretation.

The papers gathered here give new insights into the forms and motivations for past re-entries into graves in archaeological contexts across the world. They demonstrate that the reopening of burials in the past is an important source for past cultural practices, embedded in social notions of what is proper, what is necessary and what is possible. In the remainder of this introduction we will first introduce previous research and outline how the study of post-depositional practices emerged as a new subfield in funerary archaeology. Then comes discussion of methodological developments in the excavation, analysis and interpretation of reopened graves. Finally we give an overview of different types of practices for which graves were reopened, discussed in relation to the case studies in this volume. We will focus on recent developments – and the challenges that they entail – which make this area of research a fascinating and rewarding topic.

Post-depositional practices: emergence of a new subfield in mortuary archaeology

The fact that at least some graves in most archaeological periods are not closed contexts, but have been entered and disturbed in the intervening centuries was noticed early on in the development of the archaeological discipline. Mentions of graves "robbed in antiquity" are to be found in many publications from the 19th century onwards (*e.g.* for early medieval Europe Cochet 1854; Brent 1866; Nicaise 1882; Lindenschmit 1889). However, for the reasons set out above, there was little incentive to explore the subject more systematically, beyond a few celebrated cases in which written sources provide both explanatory frameworks and sensational detail, such as the New Kingdom of Egypt (*e.g.* Silverman 1997, 196; Aston, this volume) and the Scandinavian Late Iron Age (*e.g.* Brøgger 1945; Bill and Daly 2012; Klevnäs 2016). Hence until very recently only a handful of conferences and publications dealt specifically with the subject, with little shared discussion of general methodological and interpretative possibilities.

Such interest as was demonstrated in graves disturbed soon after burial arose largely within German-language scholarship, where it was stimulated by the high numbers of rifled interments discovered in the early medieval row-grave cemeteries characteristic of the former borderlands of the Roman Empire. The colloquium titled *Zum Grabfrevel in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit* (On the desecration of graves in pre- and proto-historic times) which took place in Göttingen, Germany in 1977, was one of the first major events dedicated to the topic of disturbed burials. The proceedings (Jankuhn *et al.* 1978; Pauli 1981; Lorenz 1982) were probably the first extensive publication examining post-depositional practices and remain a seminal reference for research concerned with the reopening of burials in pre- and protohistoric Europe. Grave-robbery in Germanic legal history was the starting point for the colloquium; in general the papers show the traditionally steering influence of textual and legal sources on archaeological approaches to reopening. Roman and early Germanic law codes include strong condemnation of interference with burials, which combined with modern cultural preconceptions, shaped an enduring perception of post-depositional practices as unlawful activities and promoted the idea that entering a grave must at all times be a form of sacrilege. As implied by the use of the term *Grabfrevel* in the title, disturbing the peace of the dead was characterised as an illicit activity, probably carried out by strangers, outcasts and criminals, perhaps during night-time or after the cemeteries had been abandoned, with the aim of plundering and taking as many precious goods out of graves as possible, without regard for the buried human remains.

The 1977 colloquium focused mainly on the early medieval period but also included contributions on grave disturbance in Bronze Age central and northern Europe (Raddatz 1978; Thrane

1978), Iron Age central Europe (Driehaus 1978), the Roman Empire and Merovingian kingdoms (Behrends 1978; Krüger 1978; Nehlsen 1978; Raddatz 1978; Roth 1978; Schmidt-Wiegand 1978), and Viking Age Scandinavia (Beck 1978; Capelle 1978; Düwel 1978). Helmut Roth's article on *Grabfrevel im Merowingerreich* is still widely cited, as it represented by some distance the most in-depth investigation. This large-scale overview of regional and temporal patterns was based on a quantitative survey of reopening levels in a large number of early medieval cemeteries and remains a starting point for research into grave disturbance in the period.

Following the Göttingen colloquium, discussions of grave disturbance continued mainly in the form of subsections in cemetery publications. Graves excavated to high standards frequently revealed useful detail about reopening events, but the focus was largely on single sites (*e.g.* Simmer 1988; Kokowski 1991; Perkins 1991; Thiedmann and Schleifring 1992; Codreanu-Windauer 1997), with occasional explorations of evidence in particular regional contexts (*e.g.* Adler 1970; Rittershofer 1987; Brendalsmo and Røthe 1992; Randsborg 1998; Tamla 1998; Plum 2003). A notable exception was the lively discussion around central European Early Bronze Age reopening in the 1980s and 90s. Excavations of a number of Early Bronze Age cemeteries in eastern Austria were carried out by Johannes-Wolfgang Neugebauer and Christine Neugebauer-Maresch (Neugebauer 1991; Neugebauer-Maresch and Neugebauer 1997; Savage 1997, 253; Sprenger 1999) with a deliberate focus on questions about the prolific reopening and object removal frequently seen in this period (compare Müller-Scheeßel *et al.*, this volume). Neugebauer identified elements of violence and lack of respect for the human remains and, as a result, reproduced the prevailing picture of grave robbery as an illicit activity that was carried out by "armed bands" (Neugebauer 1991, 127–128; 1994; Fig. 1.2). Similarly François Bertemes (1989, 130) examined disturbed graves in the area of the middle Danube, claiming that in each community there would be unwritten laws, for example stipulating that the grave and the remains of the dead should not be touched. An alternative explanation was offered by Bernhard Hänsel and Nándor Kalicz (1986, 52) who argued that in this period valuable grave goods were recovered and returned to the families and heirs after the period of fleshy decomposition, during which the corpse skeletonised – the idea of a "decent interval" after which it may be acceptable to interfere with burials is frequently put forward (Klevnäs 2013, 49–51). Meanwhile growing awareness of the reopening phenomenon, at least in the periods in which it is most common, led to its more frequent mention in general discussions of burial custom (*e.g.* Steuer 1982; Bartelheim and Heyd 2001; Effros 2002; 2003).

Since 2000 a new wave of studies has appeared in the form of research dissertations, showing a new dynamic in this field of research (*e.g.* Aspöck 2002 [2005]; Kümmel 2007 [2009]; van Haperen 2007 [2010]; Klevnäs 2010 [2013]; Zintl 2012 [2019]; Noterman 2016; van Haperen 2017). These are characterised by stronger theoretical awareness and a critical attitude towards the catch-all "grave-robbery" explanation. More neutrally descriptive terminology is used, and alternative explanations are systematically considered (Aspöck 2005; Kümmel 2009; van Haperen 2010; Klevnäs 2013). Meanwhile the French-language literature in particular has developed a detailed vocabulary for describing processes of grave disturbance and reuse, such as the "reduction" of skeletonised remains when they are moved aside and concentrated together to permit secondary burials (*e.g.* Boulestin and Duday 2006; Duday 2009; summaries in Noterman 2016; 2015; Gleize, this volume).

As well as historiography and methodological discussion, these new studies provide detailed analyses of the evidence for reopening in early medieval cemeteries from the low countries, northern

France, Austria, southern Germany and lowland England (see Zintl, this volume). There is also recent work on 7th-century Romania (Dobos 2014) and Poland a couple of centuries later (Gardeła 2017), and evidence continues to emerge from Lombard burials in Hungary and Italy (*e.g.* Barbiera 2005; Bóna and Horváth 2009). Interest in the phenomenon is thus widespread and transnational, but discussions have often stayed within silos limited by period and place specialisms, and especially by language barriers. In particular, it remains the case that the Anglophone research sphere has to date shown relatively little interest in the reopening of graves, despite the reuse of monuments and the memory practices in mortuary ritual forming such an important topic in discourse of the last two decades (*e.g.* Williams 1997; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2014; 2016; Bradley and Williams 1998; Semple 1998; 2013; Jones *et al.* 2012; Hill and Hageman 2016).

The starting points for the present volume were two conference sessions held at the annual meetings of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) in Oslo in 2011 and Glasgow in 2015. These introduced the topic to a wider audience of archaeologists, but perhaps more importantly brought into dialogue researchers with an interest in burial disturbance from several continents. The huge response to the call for papers for the first session, "Past disturbances of graves: the reopening of graves for grave-robbery and other practices" in 2011 confirmed the increasing interest in this topic and showed the breadth of case studies and methodological development on which researchers can now draw (Aspöck and Klevnäs 2011). This was probably the first time an entire conference session had focused on the material evidence for grave disturbance, as the 1977 colloquium in Germany had its main weight on the written sources (two subsequent German symposia were also focused on written sources; Kümmel 2009, 52). Arguably, it was at the EAA in Oslo that research on post-burial interventions was finally established as a recognised subfield in mortuary archaeology.

The papers presented in Oslo encompassed a broad range of phenomena, geographical areas and archaeological periods. However, reflecting the research interests of the organisers, one focus was grave disturbance in the Merovingian kingdoms of early medieval Europe, where four presentations on different regions clearly showed how approaches to this phenomenon have changed since 1977 (Stephanie Zintl, Alison Klevnäs, Martine van Haperen, Edeltraud Aspöck). Based firmly in the physical evidence for how the graves and their contents were treated, they showed that early medieval grave reopening can no longer be seen as the activity of gangs of strangers and criminals, nor as solely driven by material motive, but more complex cultural interpretations must be sought. The formation of a research group on early medieval grave reopening was one outcome of the conference (Grave Reopening Research 2019). In the present volume, Zintl summarises the current discussions and presents archaeological evidence against long-standing assumptions in explanations of early medieval grave reopening.

Beyond the early medieval cluster, two contributions in Oslo addressed Viking Age evidence: the social biography of objects which were removed from Scandinavian Viking Age mounds (Julie Lund, see Lund 2013; 2017), and removal of objects from Viking Age graves in Norway (Lars Erik Gjerpe), a widespread phenomenon for which evidence is presented in this volume by Camilla C. Wenn. One paper traced the reuse of Roman period tombs in Turkey across several centuries (Wenn), others the reuse of megalithic tombs (Mara Vejby), secondary burial practices and body manipulations in Eneolithic Romania (Lazar Catalin, Theodor Ignat and Radian Andreescu) and another the reopening of graves of the Ural Bronze Age Alakul' kurgan cemeteries interpreted as part of ancestor cults (Andrey Epimakhov). Estella Weiss-Krejci's paper on the many different types of grave reopening among the ancient Maya appears in this volume.

Methodological presentations included the prediction of grave reopening through 3D-modelling of burial mounds (Alexandru Morintz) and the osteological analysis of traces from grave reopening by comparing peri-mortem and post-mortem bone lesions and fractures (Christine Keller and Maria Teschler). Two papers dealt with the neglected topic of reopened cremation graves, which present more difficulties in recognition and analysis than disturbed inhumations. When cremation graves from the Late Bronze Age of Lower Lusatia/Brandenburg were reopened, typically from a few years to a few decades after the original deposition, the bone was deposited on the ground and bronze grave goods were taken out (Eberhard Bönisch). Cremation graves were frequently reopened in the Early Iron Age Pomeranian culture in Poland, probably to add new urns, with regularities in the practice suggesting a ritualised custom (Karol Dzięgielewski).

One point which was made several times during the session was that grave disturbances are more frequent than assumed: reopening is all too often not recognised or documented if excavators do not already associate the possibility with graves of a certain period (Aspöck and Klevnäs 2011). Once disturbed graves are described and the phenomenon becomes a recognised part of the archaeology of a locality or period, there may be an increase in reporting of reopened graves.

Problems with dating were repeatedly brought up as recurring across contexts: unless reopening happens shortly after burial it is difficult to date with precision, which creates difficulties with interpretation and a danger of mixing up different phenomena. Reopening that happened soon after burial is likely to be associated with completely different practices and meanings from graves reopened centuries or millennia later. And of course, activities which look similar in the archaeological record may have had quite different motivations. There was a lively discussion about to what degree it is possible to discover intentions behind grave reopening at all. This was against the background of use of ethnographic sources and some recent attempts to search for general models and rules (Kümmel 2009; Zintl 2010). For graves which were reopened soon after the original deposition it was pointed out that a precondition for interpreting the reopening is understanding of the original burial practices. Hence there is a need to discuss reopened graves in the context of the respective cemetery and historical/archaeological context, a point which recurs in many of the contextual case studies presented in this volume. But we saw in case after case that once reopening is seen as part of broader mortuary behaviour – practices relating to death and the dead in a given period – re-entered graves have great potential as archaeological sources about past societies.

The session "Grave disturbances: the secondary manipulation of burials" at the EAA in Glasgow in 2015 (Campell 2015) was organised by Nils Müller-Scheeßel and Mattej Ruttkay to build on the Oslo conference. Again it aimed to offer a forum for discussion of evidence from all periods, with presentations spanning the Neolithic to the Middle Ages. Taking the concept of reopening as a cultural practice as a foundation rather than a question, it invited contributions which would address methodological issues, from excavation procedures to taphonomy to theory. Four papers from the session appear in this volume: Holger Wendling presented on the ways in which consecutive burials and manipulated graves in the Iron Age cemeteries of the Dürrnberg region in Austria seem to reflect ancestral bonds; Daniela Heilmann described the reopening of stone cists in the Macedonian Early Iron Age; Nils Müller-Scheeßel and colleagues shared new evidence from recent excavations of Early Bronze Age burials in south-west Slovakia; and Yves Gleize explored the widespread reuse of graves and manipulation of human bones seen in early medieval south-western France. Other presentations explored body manipulations in the Eneolithic cemetery at Sultana-Malu Rosu in Romania (Catalin Lazar); possible efforts to prevent the dead walking

in late 1st millennium AD cemeteries in Finland (Ulla Moilanen); the use of microtaphonomy for understanding post-depositional processes (Edeltraud Aspöck, see below); and new perspectives on Merovingian reopening (Alison Klevnäs, see Zintl).

Meanwhile we see the surge in interest in this topic continuing with the well-attended conference in Bytów, Poland on "Limbs, bones, and reopened graves" (Gardeła and Kajkowski 2015), the completion of further Master and PhD dissertations (*e.g.* Vinoy 2018 on reopened graves in the Roman Iron Age of Denmark) and publications investigating evidence in new periods, such as on grave reuse and post-burial practices in pre-Roman Apulia (Hoernes *et al.* 2019). A most positive development is that researchers increasingly integrate post-burial interactions with buried human remains into wider treatments of mortuary customs, changing beliefs, and the ontology of the body (*e.g.* Fahlander 2018). Retrieval of human remains from graves as part of ongoing rituals has even reached popular consciousness via the History Channel series *Vikings*, in which communication with the dead features in several episodes (Williams and Klevnäs 2019).

Finally, the topic has begun to attract significant research funding, starting with a post-doctoral project titled "Microtaphonomy and interpretation reopened graves" (2013–2016; FWF T595), based in Vienna, in which Aspöck developed a taphonomy-based method for application to reopened graves from the early Bronze Age to the early Middle Ages. A new three-year project at Stockholm University is bringing together the recent research on reopening in the Frankish-influenced zone of 6th- and 7th-century Europe to investigate the nature of community and changing beliefs about life and death (Swedish Research Council; Grave Reopening Research 2019), while for the preceding Late Antique centuries researchers in Bern are examining grave robbing and the reuse of funerary material in the project "Plundering, Reusing and Transforming the Past 2019". Grave manipulations informed the HERA project DEEPDEAD (2019), which explored historic and prehistoric encounters with long-dead bodies. In the immediate future, Roman Period and Late Antique grave manipulations will be the subject of a session at the Roman Archaeology Conference for the first time in Split in 2020 (RAC 2019).

Methodological developments in the excavation and analysis of reopened graves

With the growth of the study of post-depositional phenomena, methodologies for their investigation have been a major area of development. For a long time grave deposits were generally understood as capturing one moment in time – the point when they were placed in the ground – and then as more or less static after that, beyond natural processes of deterioration. Excavation methodologies focused on the recovery of the main deposit, with post-depositional practices often not documented or not included in published reports even when they had been observed. This approach was sufficient to answer many of the questions which absorbed burial archaeology during much of the last century: key information about investment in funerary displays or about social status can be recorded by treating the grave as a single context. It has therefore been common practice to identify the grave cut and then dig down to the main deposit of human remains plus any container and artefacts before drawing and photographing what has been found. An inhumation grave is thus typically illustrated only by a two-dimensional plan of the skeletal and artefactual remains lying on the grave floor. This presents obvious difficulties for depicting disturbance features such as intrusive cuts or objects at multiple levels in the fill (Fig. 1.3; see also Müller-Scheeßel *et al.*, this volume, Figs 10.3 and 10.8).

Fig. 1.3: Excavation of a disturbed Early Bronze Age grave at Weiden am See, Austria (object 229, MNR 32026.13.03, Gst. 1023/439–444). The positions and unfragmented condition of the bone show that the wooden coffin was still intact when they were moved. Top left: a heap of dark refill that entered the coffin after reopening and covered the disturbed area of the skeleton. Bottom right: left humerus and scapula were still connected (by either soft tissue or fabric) and moved together when the grave was reopened (the metal boxes are used to collect undisturbed soil samples for micromorphology) (Photos: Edeltraud Aspöck).

Researching post-burial activities carried out by humans requires understanding of post-depositional processes in general, including the natural ones which may occur in graves. After establishing a disturbance was caused by human activity, a whole set of further questions need addressing:

1. How did decomposition of the body and/or other natural processes affect the final state of the reopened grave?
2. What was the original appearance of the grave before the reopening?
3. When did the reopening of the grave take place?
4. How was the grave re-entered?
5. What kinds of manipulations took place (were human remains, objects and grave furniture removed, altered, deposited)?
6. When and how did the refilling of the grave/closing of a tomb take place? Was the grave refilled/closed immediately by human activity, or did it refill slowly and naturally, or were there several episodes of refilling?

Thus identifying, analysing and interpreting post-depositional activities requires more data than is necessary for many other research topics in funerary archaeology. For example, during excavation of a grave pit it may be necessary to stop several times to record features such as the outlines of reopening pits and position of finds in the grave fill. Then comprehensive documentation of the actual mortuary deposit(s) is necessary, as well as giving sufficient detail about the disturbed areas of a grave. This level of attention to reopening evidence is not yet standard practice at excavations, meaning that, as the chapters which follow repeatedly raise, insufficient documentation is still one of the main hindrances to research into grave disturbance.

From an evidential point of view, one of the most crucial features of a reopened grave is the possibility of finding information on the state of preservation of the body and furnishings at the time when the grave was disturbed (Figs 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5; Sági 1964; Neugebauer 1991; Neugebauer-Maresch and Neugebauer 1997; Aspöck 2005; 2011; Klevnäs 2013; Noterman 2016). This can indicate how much time passed between deposition and reopening. In particular, from the position of the skeletal remains in inhumation graves it is frequently possible to tell whether the corpse was already fully decomposed or still fully or partially articulated, or if skeletal remains may have been held together by other organic material, such as leather shoes or fabric from clothes or a shroud (Figs 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5). The latter conditions of course point towards a shorter period of time between deposition and reopening. Further, if the body was buried in a coffin or otherwise covered with a lid, especially a perishable wooden lid, the position and preservation of the human remains frequently show whether it still lay within an empty cavity in which skeletal remains and artefacts could be moved, or whether the grave was already refilled, which leaves different traces in the archaeological evidence (Figs 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5). The time between deposition and reopening is one of the most important pieces of information for discussing reasons for post-depositional interactions with human remains. It also reveals what scenario the persons who entered the grave encountered, in particular the state of decay the body was in, which may also have influenced the actions taken (see Wendling, this volume).

The states of preservation of bodies and furnishings thus provide key criteria for categorising grave disturbances, and in recent years these have been systematically applied to Early Bronze

Fig. 1.4: Early medieval grave in Vitry-la-Ville, France (grave 224) where the body still was still articulated and the coffin preserved when it was reopened (Tixier 2019; Photo: G. Grange. Courtesy of Éveha).

Age and early medieval reopened graves (*e.g.* Aspöck 2005; 2011; Klevnäs 2013; Müller-Scheeßel *et al*., this volume). This work builds on earlier studies, notably by the Hungarian archaeologist Károly Sági (1964), who recognised the importance of the documentation and consideration of taphonomy and classified reopened burials accordingly. Further crucial advances in field documentation and the categorisation of states of decay were made by Johannes-Wolfgang Neugebauer and Christine Neugebauer-Maresch in their excavations of the heavily disturbed Early Bronze Age cemeteries Gemeinlebarn and Franzhausen I in Austria (Neugebauer 1991; Neugebauer-Maresch and Neugebauer 1997). Despite the pressure of excavating under rescue conditions, graves were excavated in spits and documentation included drawings of the outlines of the reopening pits at various depths, which were also included in the final publication of the cemetery – an example of best practice which remains rare to this day.

The rapidly developing field of archaeothanatology (Duday *et al*. 1990; Duday 2006; Duday 2009; Aspöck *et al*., in press; Gleize, this volume) provides new and important taphonomic methods for the analysis of post-depositional practices. Archaeothanatology is an approach which proceeds from detailed documentation of the positioning of skeletal elements at excavation to analysis of the dynamic processes that formed the mortuary deposit, to reconstruction of its original layout. Archaeothanatological analyses were at first focused on undisturbed mortuary deposits, but newer studies have been dedicated to reopened graves, demonstrating their ability
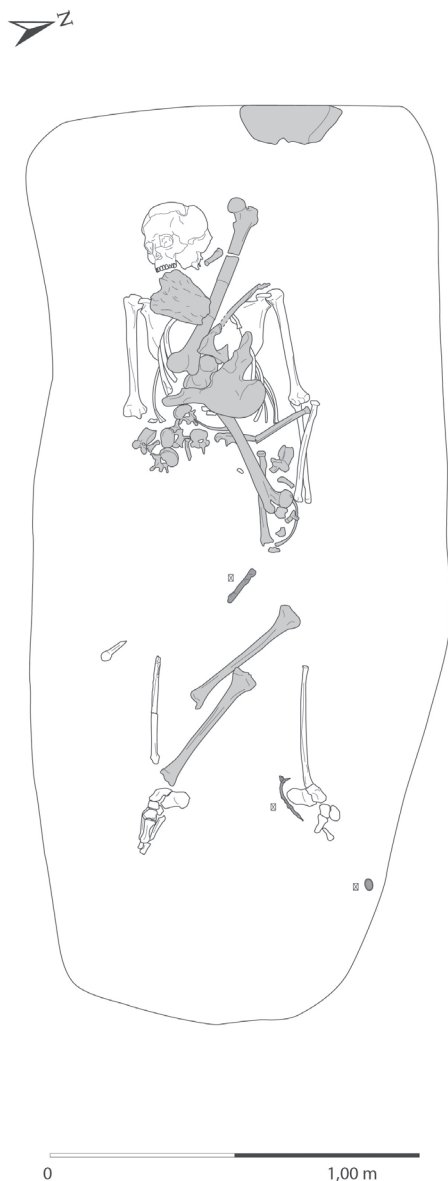
Fig. 1.5: An early medieval grave reopened when the skeleton was already disarticulated but the coffin still intact from Illfurth, lieu-dit Buergelen (Alsace, Haut-Rhin), France (grave 22). The displaced bones (shaded) were distributed on top of undisturbed parts of the skeleton and the bones were found in close contact with each other with no sediment in between. There was no fragmentation of bone; even the most fragile elements were intact (Astrid Noterman, based on Roth-Zehner and Cartier 2007; Courtesy of Antea Archéologie).

to contribute to a range of disturbance-related questions (Noterman 2016; Aspöck *et al.*, in press). For example, a picture of the state of decomposition of human remains upon reopening is built up from detailed observations of the articulations of the human remains, providing more systematic analysis than was previously carried out. But perhaps most usefully, an archaeothanatological approach is able to provide information on areas which traditional archaeological methods did not reach, in particular the reconstruction of the original layout of a grave before reopening. This helps to answer some crucial questions surrounding the reasons for the reopening of graves, such as if specific types of graves and individuals had been targeted. The third important area where archaeothanatology contributes is the distinction between natural and human processes in the formation of a reopened grave. Many different environmental factors have to be taken into account and criteria for the timing of reopening need to be defined for different types of natural environments and funerary remains. In this volume, Yves Gleize presents the results of an archaeothanatological approach to the treatment of human remains during reuse of graves in early medieval southern France.

Further new excavation and documentation techniques have enabled more detailed observations about processes of grave reopening. In a recent pilot study by one of the authors, an Early Bronze Age reopened grave in Weiden am See, Austria was excavated with a microarchaeological protocol, employing single-find recording, wet-sieving of sediments and extensive sampling for soil micromorphology (Fig. 1.3; Aspöck and Fera 2015; Aspöck and Banerjea 2016; Aspöck 2018). Based on this detailed documentation, a high-resolution picture of the natural and human processes that contributed to the formation of the excavated remains could be reconstructed (Aspöck 2018, fig. 8). Micromorphology made it possible to identify the extension of the

reopening pit, which was hard to discern visually at excavation; it showed that the grave was immediately refilled after the reopening; post-depositional transformation processes (*e.g.* the effects of decay of the body on the formation of sediments) could be identified; and a detailed stratigraphical sequence of the formation process was gained (*e.g.* showing that surfaces were exposed for some time). Three-dimensional modelling helped to identify the connections between the formation processes in the two deposits in the grave (Aspöck and Fera 2015; see also Wilhelmson and Dell'Unto 2015).

In this high-resolution case study, archaeothanatological description and recording were extended to the disturbed human remains: the exact positions of all the disturbed bones were recorded and their position in relation to the estimated original position of the body was used to create a reconstruction of the movement of bone (Fig. 1.6; Aspöck 2018, fig. 7 and tab. 2). The results showed that only one person could have been in the grave at a time and that the coffin must still have been intact

Fig. 1.6: In the high-resolution study (Aspöck 2018), the position of the skeletal remains were analysed in relation to the estimated original position of the body in order to reconstruct bone movement. First, the cranium had been moved to the empty space to the south of the thoracic cage, and then the mandible either fell off during movement or was intentionally positioned to the west of the cranium (Concept: Edeltraud Aspöck, Graphics: Stephanie Fragner).

in order to allow the movement of bones without damage, since no fractures or lesions related to the reopening of the grave and there was little bone loss. The reopener broke into the coffin in the area of the skull. First the cranium and mandible were put aside (Fig. 1.6), then they worked their way down to the pelvic girdle, shifting bone to either side while at the same time removing bronze objects – which are still indicated by green marks on the bone, although only a fragment of a bronze pin remained in the grave. Some of the bone was still in articulation, maybe due to differential preservation within the coffin or organic material holding skeletal elements together. It was possible to carry out the reopening without any tools, since all bones and artefacts would have been within reach of hands. Care was taken to avoid bone damage, which contradicts the prevailing view that foreigners and strangers, unheeding of local customs, must have been responsible for the removal of objects.

High-resolution studies such as the example from Austria are important because they provide reference points for future analyses where less data is available. Such time-intensive and costly investigations cannot be applied to all graves, but experimental examples show the potential of the evidence. Still, many important observations about post-depositional practices can be made during any excavation, whether carried out for research or in advance of development. Recent best-practice excavations show that when reopening is treated as a significant episode in the biography of a cemetery, considerably more evidence can be observed and recorded than has traditionally been the case (Zintl 2019). For the future, it is important to pay particular attention to any traces of

grave disturbance in the field and to fully document these features. This means that, especially wherever disturbed graves have previously been found nearby, standard excavation protocols need to include the recording of evidence from grave reopening such as intrusive pits, finds in grave fills and displaced skeletal elements. Furthermore, this information needs to be published and entered in cemetery catalogues and databases to allow researchers to analyse and interpret reopening practices.

Interpretation of past interactions with the dead

Ethnographic openings

In the 1990s and 2000s, as a reaction against the previously narrow perspective focused on robbery, archaeologists began to widen the discussion by reasoning that many motives for entering a grave after a burial are recorded in ethnographic and written sources – all of which potentially manifest in archaeological evidence (Baitinger 1992; Aspöck 2005; 2015b; Kümmel 2003; 2009). Instead of repeating old stereotypes of grave robbery, it was shown that a wide range of interpretations could potentially apply, and should be evaluated and narrowed down.

An extensive resource for historic and ethnographic evidence related to the reopening of graves can be found in the volume on pre- and proto-historic grave robbery by Christoph Kümmel (2009). His analysis of ethnographic data from the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) showed that manipulations of graves have taken place frequently cross-culturally – there is no evidence for grave reopening being a universal "taboo". In particular reopening of graves for secondary burial practices has very often been documented – although this might, at least in part, reflect the interests of ethnographers (Zintl 2010, 230). Evidence for removal of objects from graves was also frequently recorded as well as ritual practices in which parts of corpses or skeletons were given magical or economic value. But negative motifs, such as deliberate destruction and fear of revenants, were more rare. However, as Kümmel notes, illegal practices may well be underrepresented in ethnographic sources, because those studied may prefer not to talk about them. He also pointed out that ritual and practicality can go hand in hand without anybody acknowledging or even noticing contradictions. He concluded that the reopening of graves usually takes place soon after burial, with ritual reasons being the most frequent ones followed by the "legal and illegal removal of grave goods" (Kümmel 2009, 224).

Kümmel defined a number of axes and categories for classifying reopening activities, including the degree of illegality, level of secrecy, whether they were carried out by the same ethnic group, and whether they led to economic gain (Kümmel 2009, 128). Many of these aspects surface in the case studies which follow and are evaluated in relation to patterns in the burial incursions: once natural reasons for post-depositional alterations of a deposit have been distinguished from changes caused by human interaction with a grave, questions like those posed above are used more or less explicitly to inform interpretation of the remains. Where more than one grave is affected, questions are typically asked about whether particular types of graves are affected, whether individuals of a particular age or sex are affected, whether there are regularities in the reopening methods used and the ways grave contents were treated, and whether all the graves were re-entered at the same time. Recurring points of contention include whether those reopening a grave seem to have come from the burying community itself, whether they acted under time pressure, whether they sought to cause damage or only to take objects, and the degree of "respect" they show for the original form of the

burial, including by re-sealing it. However, as is often the case in archaeological evidence, very different reasons for grave reopening may leave similar traces. For example, removal of objects may be looting or for magical activities, among a span of other possibilities. Conversely, the same intentions may result in quite different archaeological evidence – necromancy, to continue with the same example, may require the retrieval of anything from a spoonful of grave soil to a single finger to a whole body. This means that interpretations at this level based on material remains are typically questions of likelihood and argumentation, rather than proof.

However, one aspect which archaeological examples may be better placed to address than ethnographical or historical evidence is that of the temporal range in reopening and reuse. Kümmel's study showed that cross-culturally, the time which had passed between burial and reopening played an important role through its correlation with the strength of the social relationship between the buried dead and those who reopened the graves (Kümmel 2009, 224). After a certain time, the attention paid to graves usually decreases, and the relationship of the living to the human remains and to the grave furnishings may change radically (see also Aston, this volume, on ancient Egypt). On the other hand, as Fredrik Fahlander's example of the reuse of ancient graves in the Christianisation period of Sweden demonstrates, human remains from the deep past can become powerful substances. Piecing together evidence to place reopening acts on a temporal continuum – from during funerary processes to soon after burial to centuries later – is therefore central to archaeological analyses (Aspöck 2005, 226–230; 2015b), and features heavily in the examples which follow. However, the changing nature of the relationship between the dead and the living as time passes should be taken as a research question to be investigated through disturbance events, rather than an *a priori* way of understanding them.

From archaeological evidence to interpretation

While opening up our frameworks for understanding reopening evidence has brought forward a new range of possible explanations, the most convincing interpretations are well-grounded both methodologically and in relation to the mortuary customs of their specific archaeological context. In the following, the case studies in this volume will be discussed in reference to evidence known from archaeological, historical and ethnographic resources. Chapters in the book are ordered in reverse chronological order, going back in time from the most recent case studies. The weight of contributions is on pre- and protohistoric European graves, but the discussion also includes reopening practices of the Maya, ancient Egyptians and late first millennium Khazar nomads.

Reuse of graves and additional burial are discussed in seven papers, corresponding to the relative frequency of these customs. Also common are multi-stage funerary rites – those which involve reopening of graves for the recovery of the human remains after some time (*e.g.* Hertz 1960 [1907]; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). This topic is largely outside the scope of this book, which is dedicated to unexpected instances of grave reopening, not part of the funerary cycle of the buried individual. However, where multi-staged funerals were practised, we may assume that the reopening of graves was a very common way of interacting with the dead. For the ancient Maya, for example, some written evidence points to such practices being part of the wider repertoire of interactions with buried remains (Weiss-Krejci, this volume).

However, reopening may still be part of funerary rites – but of another individual. The reopening of graves for the burial of another body is a frequent practice, documented in historical, ethnographic and archaeological resources across all periods (Fig. 1.7). In the studies presented here, how grave

Fig. 1.7: Painted skulls in the charnel house in Hallstatt, Austria. In the 19th and 20th centuries it was customary to paint skulls exhumed from cemeteries in the eastern Alpine region (Photo: Edeltraud Aspöck).

reuse was carried out is shown to be highly informative about past ideas about existing graves and the dead who were buried in them. In all but one case reuse happened not long after the burial of the first individual and certainly within the general use period of the cemetery, with the exception of Fredrik Fahlander's exploration of the treatment of different materials when bodies were added to ancient cremation graves in conversion period Sweden. The addition of consecutive burials to existing graves was common in many parts of Merovingian Europe (Lüdemann 1994; Stoodley 2002) and seems to bear a relation to reopening motivated by grave good retrieval (Klevnäs 2013, 74–77), but has so far attracted little research. In this volume Yves Gleize shows that in the cemeteries of southern France certain types of graves, funerary containers and individuals attracted reuse more frequently than other graves. Furthermore, chronological changes to these practices suggest that these ideas changed over the course of the 6th to 7th centuries AD and in relation to the general changes in cemetery organisation. In early medieval Poland Leszek Gardeła identifies patterns of reuse which are highly regular in relation to gender. This case study also shows that although the reuse of graves was not typically part of funerary practices, only occurring in a minority of cases, there were clear rules about how reuse of graves had to be performed. Or, as Daniela Heilmann discusses in her study of Iron Age graves from Macedonia, practices of reuse may be a minority but

should still be seen as part of the variety of mortuary practice and not as illegal or "deviant". All these three papers feature archaeological evidence of "reduction" (Boulestin and Duday 2006), in which the remains of the last individual(s) who were buried in a grave were moved aside to make room for a new body. Hence in these cases the corpses had been allowed to decompose before the graves were reused.

The evidence from Iron Age Dürrnberg in Austria differs from this pattern, as some of the bodies were still articulated when tombs were reopened for new bodies (Wendling, this volume). Burial practices in the Dürrnberg tell of complex interactions with human remains with multiple reopenings, which Holger Wendling relates to an ancestor cult. Reuse of burial space for consecutive burials is also common among the Maya (Weiss-Krejci, this volume) and in ancient Egypt, where written evidence shows that in Late New Kingdom Thebes tombs were not only reused legally by family members and non-family members alike, but that cases of illegal reuse of a grave may well have ended in court (Aston, this volume).

Meanwhile Fredrik Fahlander discusses reuse of thousand-year-old graves in the 10th to 11th centuries AD in Sweden. He observes an ambiguous approach where a relationship with older, pagan grave monuments of unknown origin was desired and must have been seen as benevolent for the successful funerals of the new dead. On the other hand removal of the old cremated remains from the graves indicates that these specific materials were not understood in a positive way, but potentially associated with unruly and malevolent properties. The reuse of graves centuries or even millennia later differs from the other types of reuse discussed in this book, as the funerary customs and material remains in these graves were not understood in the same way as at the time when they were constructed. However, the treatment of different materials from ancient graves gives us insights into the ways in which Late Viking Age people may have understood their own burial rites, and it shows the depth of time over which burials may still be deeply meaningful to the living.

Common causes of post-funeral entries into graves more widely include ancestral rites and ancestral appropriation, veneration and commemoration of important individuals, political disputes and desecration of monuments associated with powerful figures (Fig. 1.8; Verdery 1999; Robben 2000; Crossland 2009). The very diverse post-funerary practices of the ancient Maya included ancestral rites and practices pertaining to dead body politics including tomb desecration and exhumation for the purpose of political reconciliation (Weiss-Krejci, this volume). Similarly Irina Shingiray (this volume) investigates the complex multi-stage funerary and post-depositional practices of the Khazar nomads in the Lower Volga region. There the frequent reopening of graves for the manipulation of the dead, purification and feasts indicates practices pertaining to ancestor cults. However, Shingiray suggests that veneration of ancestors was complemented by fear of
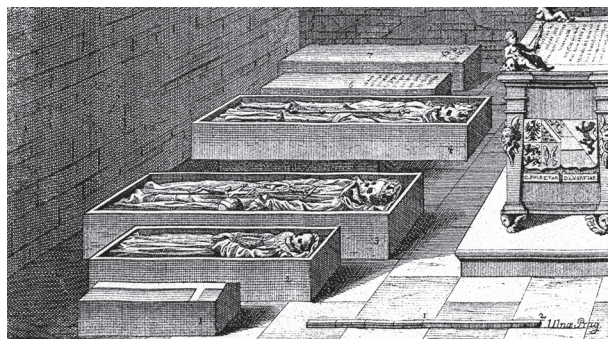

Fig. 1.8: In 1590, nine members of the House of Luxembourg, two other individuals, and anonymous bones were exhumed and reburied into a new crypt at Prague Castle, which had been founded by Emperor Rudolf II from the Habsburg dynasty. Rudolf II's coffin can be seen to the right (engraved by Salomon Kleiner in 1743, Weiss-Krejci 2018, fig. 5.9).

the malevolent dead. Grave reopening had to be negotiated with ancestral authorities and provides an invaluable resource for nomadic cultural practices.

Reopening of graves to fight *revenants* and other types of unruly dead individuals is a popular topic. Beliefs in the unquiet dead are documented in a variety of early sources and led to the reopening of graves to "re-kill" troublesome corpses (Lecouteux 1987, 31–35, 66–80; Barber 1988; Caciola 1996; Aspöck 2015a; Klevnäs 2015b). Reopening as a result of beliefs in the walking dead may also appear where mortuary practices are thought to have failed and had to be corrected (Goody 1962, 151). In this volume, Leszek Gardeła investigates medieval graves in Poland for evidence of such happenings, but does not find substantial evidence to support this interpretation.

A frequent topic of debate is whether removal of objects, bodies or body parts, or other materials from a grave should be seen as evidence for ritualistic practices and whether the selected items may have had important immaterial properties in the past. It is well documented in written sources from a wide variety of cultural contexts that graves have frequently been reopened for retrieval of contents which were given a special meaning, including as relics or objects to legitimate power (Fig. 1.9; *e.g.* Geary 1994, 49–67) or to produce magical substances (*e.g.* mummy medicine; Aufderheide 2003, 515–518). In this volume, Estella Weiss-Krejci suggests that certain jade objects removed from graves may have had transcendental meaning as "other-than-human-persons" (Hallowell 1960) for the ancient Maya. In the Maya area the removal of human bone from graves happened frequently and has been likened to the taking of relics (Somerville and Braswell 2016).

Fig. 1.9: Catacomb saint Coelestina was exhumed from the Roman catacombs and transferred to Altötting, Bavaria, in the 18th century (Photo: Estella Weiss-Krejci).

In other cases grave good removal seems to have been driven by more directly materialistic motives and so pertains to grave robbery in the more narrow understanding of the term. This does not relate only to valuable artefacts: graves have been plundered for bodies for profit too, most infamously to provide bodies for dissection in medical schools of the 19th century (Fig. 1.10; Richardson 1987). Yet looting seems to be most readily favoured as an explanation when the removed items are understood as holding exchange value today. In this volume, evidence of straightforward looting of grave goods was identified in some instances of Iron Age, ancient Egyptian and
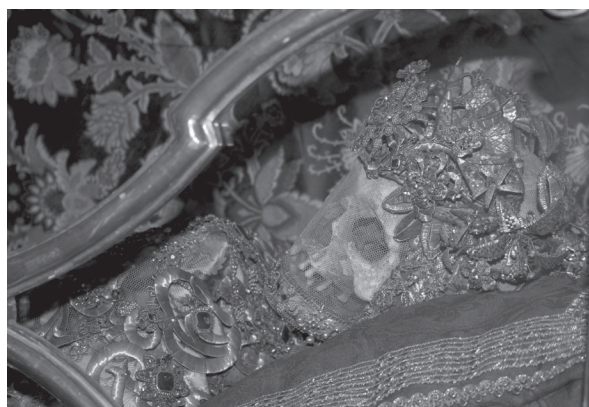

Fig. 1.10: "The disturbers of the dead put to flight". Bodysnatchers in a church cemetery disturbed by the braying of an ass. Mezzotint, 1771 (Credit: Wellcome Collection. CC BY).

Maya graves (Weiss-Krejci, Wendling, this volume). Nils Müller-Scheeßel *et al.* suggest that grave good removal at the Early Bronze Age cemetery Vrable presents an act of appropriation related to a collapse of the settlement structures. Based on written and archaeological evidence, David Aston (this volume) identified different types of grave good removal in Ancient Thebes (1200–950 BC), all of which seem materialistically motivated. Opportunistic robbery at the funeral, for example by the undertakers, and looting by gangs of professional robbers are documented in the period and were deemed illegal. However, active removal of treasures from royal burials in the Valley of Kings by the state was part of an official campaign to "renew" tombs. After removal of valuables the mummies were rewrapped and tombs resealed.

Considerable research on the removal of grave goods from early medieval graves has been carried out in the last two decades (Aspöck 2005; Kümmel 2009; van Haperen 2010; Klevnäs 2013; Dobos 2014; Noterman 2016; van Haperen 2017; Zintl 2019; Noterman *et al.* forthcoming) and shows remarkable consistency in the 6th to 7th century chronology of the practice across a huge swathe of Europe from Romania to south-eastern England. There is also a broad consistency in the selection of artefacts for removal, with swords and brooches favoured over the whole area. However, interpretations of these results diverge. Aspöck (2005; 2011), for example, argues for retrieval of grave goods after their function was fulfilled, since rules for retrieval of grave goods are observed. Meanwhile for Steuer (2004), the reopening of burials is a reflection of the fundamental social changes during the early Middle Ages. Elite families competed for wealth and influence, and Steuer sees the reopening and subsequent destruction of burials as targeted attempts to obliterate the memory of the families who did not succeed. Generally, as in this example, the reopening of graves is most often seen as a reflection of social crisis. However, Klevnäs (2013; 2015a), has taken a somewhat different line, suggesting that certain inalienable goods were taken to damage social standing of the kin networks in which they had previously circulated, and that this served as a kind of substitute for violent feuds between certain families, which became more difficult as royal power grew. In this view, the reopening of burials could reflect the growing power of the state, rather than weak social control. In this volume, Stephanie Zintl summarises the results from three large-scale regional studies (Klevnäs 2013; van Haperen 2017; Zintl 2019) and turns them into arguments against some of the long-established narratives of early medieval "grave robbery".

The appeal of swords in particular appears to be a long-term theme in reopening in first millennium Europe. In this volume Camilla C. Wenn discusses evidence for reopening and damage observed in Viking Age graves in southern Norway targeting swords in particular. The evidence in this case allows multiple interpretations, ranging from deliberate destruction of these objects as a way of eliminating their metaphysical aspects and with them some potential threat from the deceased, to making the sword fit for the afterlife through ritual damage, to collection of parts of swords and bodies as objects of veneration by the local community or family. Reopening may have been related to religious change, as it occurred during the gradual process of Christianisation in the region.

This brings us back to one of the key issues which recurs throughout the interpretations of reopening weighed up in this volume: to what extent should re-entries into graves necessarily be regarded as anomalous and indicative of social change or disruption? We increasingly realise that it was enormously common in many places for burials to be reopened and used, in a great variety of ways, by subsequent communities, to the extent that this must be regarded as a possible, if unplanned, part of the biography of any interment. Burial as a means of disposing

of the dead has, after all, the inbuilt ambiguity that although body and grave goods are ritually and visually cut off from the living, they are still physically present in this world for anyone willing to disinter them.

Conclusions

With the study of post-depositional practices in graves a new subfield of mortuary archaeology has emerged. The case studies presented in this volume show that the reopening of graves and even the removal of objects need not be seen as a diminishment of the archaeological resource. Rather, manipulated graves can be seen as enriched, at least where it comes to their value as sources of cultural-historical interpretation. In reopened graves we find evidence not only of funerary customs, but also of secondary practices, which provide a further layer of information about past understandings of the dead and all their ritual, material and monumental accoutrements.

However, studying post-burial activities challenges mortuary archaeology with its demand for new and different data. Researching grave disturbance means investigation of non-static funerary deposits, introducing a new series of dynamic processes into what could previously be treated as the final resolution of a ritual sequence. It requires understanding of background post-depositional processes, which is why taphonomic methods such as archaeothanatology have gained popularity. Equally important are excavation protocols adapted to anticipate the possibility of secondary interventions in graves, and awareness of the research potential of such evidence from the field onwards. Without informed excavation, reporting and analysis of disturbed remains we lose a valuable resource.

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2. Unruly bones and efficacious stones: materialities of death in early Christian post-burial interactions in central eastern Sweden

Fredrik Fahlander

Introduction

In Sweden, and Scandinavia in general, reopenings and post-burial actions are found in all prehistoric periods but increase significantly in the Late Iron Age during the 9th–11th centuries AD (Pedersen 2006; Thäte 2007; Hållans Stenholm 2012). The affected monuments are generally older graves of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (Lindqvist 2010; Fahlander 2016) and the most common type of post-burial interaction are superimpositions where larger mounds cover one or more older stone settings. Besides such less intrusive engagements, there are also more elaborate manipulations of older graves and structures where objects have been added or removed and where old graves have been included in the construction of new ones. For example, in Vittene in the county of Västergötland, a Viking Age ship setting incorporated an older pre-Roman cremation at the "bow"-end of the new monument (Artelius and Lindqvist 2007, 88). Another example from the same region is found in Dalstorp where a Viking Age woman was buried in an older mound from the Migration Period. On top of the mound were also seven spears which had been thrust into the layer of bones (Artelius 2009). Interpretations of such post-burial practices in pagan times vary from practical considerations to elaborated social schemes. Grave robbery was previously a frequently advocated reason for post-burial activities (as elsewhere, *e.g.* Effros 2002, 56; Aspöck 2011, 299), while in recent decades Late Iron Age post-burial actions have generally been understood in ideological terms. For instance, burying the dead in relation to forebears, or superimposing an old grave with a new one, is argued to constitute ways for the living to claim genealogy and legitimise status or rights to territories (Zachrisson 1994; Andersson 2005; Hållans Stenholm 2012; see also Williams 1998). Another theme that relates to the Dalstorp example concerns various supernatural conceptions about the dead. Written sources like the Old Icelandic texts, for example, include several accounts of graves that have been tampered with to prevent the dead from interfering with the living by adding or removing things from the grave (Nedkvitne 2004; Hofmann 2015; see also Gansum 2008; Klevnäs 2015, 196–199).

Interferences with older graves also continue in the period of Christianisation (*c.* 10th–11th centuries AD). The majority of these post-burial actions are performed on older "pagan" cremations and are generally associated with the change of faith. It is argued that pagan ancestors were "rescued" by being reburied in a Christian manner (Andrén 2000; Staecker 2001). For example, the Danish king Harald Bluetooth allegedly removed his father Gorm from his original mound to be buried in

a newly built church (Andersen 1995; Nedkvitne 2004, 141; but see Rosborn 2010). Although such instances may have occurred sporadically, actual examples are few in the archaeological record. That post-burial interventions were normally performed on several hundred-year-old graves rather indicates that the actions were not directed to graves of particular individuals. One illustrative example is the sequence of interferences performed on a large mound at Valsta in the county of Uppland. The mound containing a cremation burial was constructed in the early 9th century and partly superimposed five earlier stone settings. The mound was reopened *c.* 200–300 years later (*c.* AD 1050–1150) and three stone cists (presumably containing Christian inhumations) were built in a "cross-like" manner into the inner stone cairn inside the mound. Not too long after, the mound was again opened in a way which left the inhumation burials partly destroyed (Andersson 1997, 58).

To understand the full complexity of such practices we need to question our common conceptions of graves, death and mortal remains. This is explored here though an ontological approach to the materiality of the grave and the physical remains of the dead (Fahlander 2014; Jervis 2018). From this point of view, interference with old graves and mortal remains are not always about memory, identity and ancestors. Graves are not only a final resting place for the dead, they are material features that affect people engaging with them (Fowler and Harris 2015). The same agentic potential is also inherent in the remains of the dead, the cremated fragments and bones (Williams 2004; Crellin 2017). In this text, I elaborate on these issues through a recently excavated Iron Age burial ground in Broby Bro, situated in the county of Uppland, *c.* 20 km north of Stockholm in eastern central Sweden (Fig. 2.1). At Broby Bro we see quite substantial modifications of ordinary

Fig. 2.1: Location of Broby Bro in central eastern Sweden.

small stone settings from the Early Iron Age which at the time were already 1,000 years old. These post-burial actions present an ambiguous relation to the old dead. On the one hand, a relation is established by rebuilding old graves, but on the other, the original cremated remains have been removed before the reuse. In this sense, Broby Bro is a useful case study for exploring alternative ways of understanding Christian interactions with pagan graves during the conversion period.

Post-burial interaction at Broby Bro

The Broby Bro area comprises at least five burial grounds from the pre-Roman Iron Age to the early Christian period (*c.* 300 BC–AD 1200). Two of them, Täby 36 and 620, have recently been subjected to excavation revealing several interesting post-burial interactions (Fig. 2.2). Täby 36 is situated on a slightly elevated impediment and consists of *c.* 50 stone settings mainly from the pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age, a stone cairn, three rectangular, and three round mounds from the Late Iron Age, as well as at least two inhumation burials from the 11th century AD. The site was abandoned in the Roman Iron Age and after a period of *c.* 500 years was put in use again during the 10th century and into the 11th century. Täby 620 is situated in slightly sloping cropland

Fig. 2.2: The layout of Täby 36 and 620 in Broby Bro and the mentioned features. Black ovals are inhumation burials and grey areas are modern clearing cairns. The dotted line outlines the extent of the burials of Täby 36 (modified after Andersson 2011, 57 and Andersson and Fahlander ms).

c. 35 m south-west of the impediment and comprises 19 inhumations from the 11th century AD (Andersson 2011; 2015). The dead are buried in wooden coffins placed in 60–80 cm deep stone-filled pits. The way the burials are arranged in rows suggests that they once had superstructures that now are lost due to later agriculture (see Tesch 2017, 15). This is supported by 18th-century maps depicting mounds in the area, and inhumation burial A16500 at the very brink of the impediment that still has an intact superstructure (a small cairn with a round kerb). This, together with finds of cremated bones in the plough-soil in the area, suggests that the Early Iron Age burial ground (Täby 36) originally extended further to the west than the surviving burials on the impediment today indicate, overlapping with Täby 620. The oldest inhumations would thus be those on Täby 36 which over time expanded westwards at Täby 620 towards the stream *Gullån* (Fig. 2.2). Such horizontal stratigraphy also resonates well with similar developments at other contemporary sites (Tesch 2015; see also Artelius and Lindqvist 2007; Artelius 2010).

All of the interventions into older graves in the area are made on the earliest graves of the Early Iron Age. The oldest case concerns a 10th-century cremation (A150000) which was placed as to partly superimpose an older stone setting from the pre-Roman Iron Age. The stone cairn of the old grave is slightly disturbed in the south-eastern part but leaving the original burial of cremated bones in the centre intact. The subsequent Christian post-burial actions show a similar, yet different, approach to the old graves. One example is A7000, which was originally a round stone setting from the 1st century AD and was rebuilt during the 11th century when a Christian inhumation was added. The core of the stone setting had been dug out, removing all traces of any original burial, and a large stone slab with a flat surface was placed in its centre (Fig. 2.3). Moreover, the
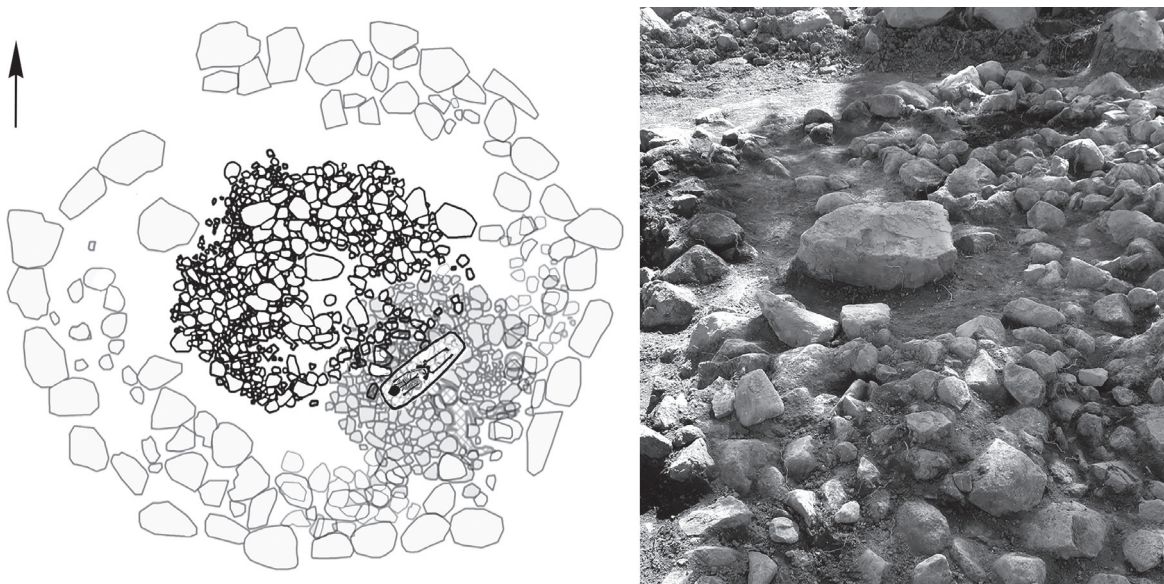

Fig 2.3: Left: the layout of the rebuilt stone setting A7000. The original stone cairn (black) has been rearranged to form an additional cairn (grey) over the inhumation burial in the south-eastern half of the construction. Right: the large flat stone slab placed in the centre of the original stone setting (modified after Andersson and Fahlander ms).

old cairn was expanded with a kerb of large flat stone slabs and built up with soil into a mound. The interference and manipulations could, in this case, be stratigraphically related to an east–west oriented inhumation burial from the 11th century containing an elderly (*c.* 50–60 year old) woman placed in the south-eastern half of the mound. The new kerb and mound thus retained the shape of the original stone setting and not the new burial.

A different yet similar rebuilding was also made to the feature A8000, a larger (13 m × 8 m) rectangular construction superimposed on a round stone setting dated to the pre-Roman Iron Age (Fig. 2.4). This case also involves quite substantial interference with the old grave. The new construction covers the old grave completely and in its centre a pit was dug into the stone packing, removing most of the cremated bones (only a few single fragments were found in the filling in and around the pit). In its place two large stone slabs were positioned. One of them was buried halfway down in the old grave so as to provide a flat surface. The second block was placed in an upright position next to the buried one. In conjunction with this, a rectangular kerb of stones was
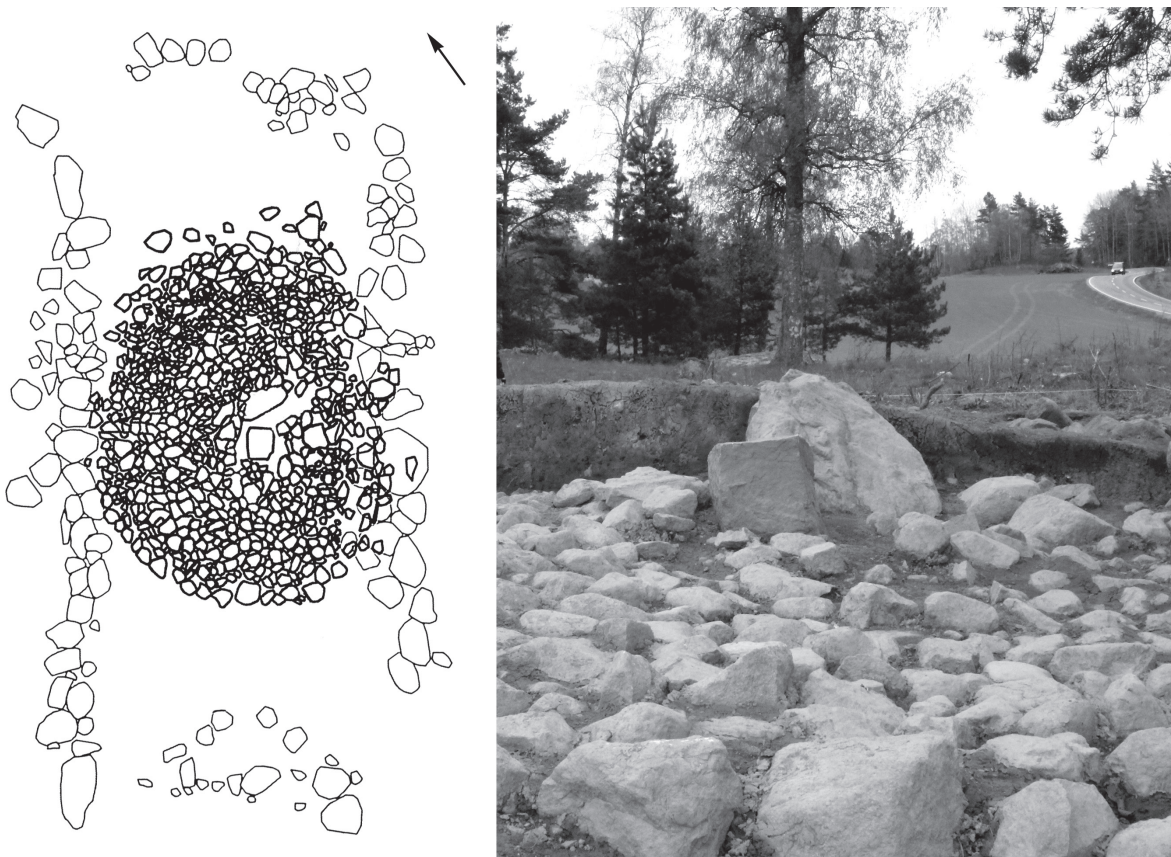

Fig 2.4: Left: the layout of the rebuilt stone setting A8000. In the middle is the original stone setting into the centre of which two large boulders were dug down. A rectangular kerb was also added to the original round grave and filled up with soil. Right: the inserted stone slabs in the centre of the grave (after Andersson and Fahlander ms).

also erected and the interior filled with soil that created an oblong mound covering all but the tip of the second stone slab. The pointed slab may perhaps have functioned as a marker indicating the centre of the concealed stone setting. It has not been possible to precisely date the time when the old burial was rebuilt. However, the west–east orientation of the mound and the many similarities in *modi operandi* between A7000 and A8000 suggest that the interventions are contemporary (11th century AD). Unfortunately, A8000 was not completely excavated due to a group of very large slabs in the south-eastern side of the construction. The original round stone setting is also disturbed in this area which together could indicate that a Christian inhumation was indeed added to this feature too. It is important to note that the labour invested in the reuse in these cases is quite extensive. Although the addition of the large and flat stone slabs in the centre of the original graves served no obvious purpose, taking the effort into account they must have been considered important. Further, this is not simply a matter of reusing the stones of older graves, since the added kerb of A7000 is not centred on the later inhumation, but demarcates the shape of the original stone setting. Thus in this case as well, the old grave was still the main focus of the new construction although the original remains of the central cremation were removed.

In addition to these large-scale interferences, there are also examples of less substantial and less visible post-burial actions. Feature A16000 is a flat and inconspicuous Early Iron Age stone setting which was reused for an 11th-century inhumation burial. Also in this case the centre of the stone setting was removed, but without adding a stone slab or a new kerb (Fig. 2.5). The inhumation was, as in A7000, positioned in the south-eastern half of the round stone setting and contained the unburned remains of a 14–20-year-old. In this case the pit was dug through a deposit of cremated bone, leaving just a crescent of the originally circular cremation layer. There is, however, no way to determine if the thin layer of cremated bones were recognised or not when digging the pit for the coffin, but in either case, this reuse also indicates that it was necessary to remove any traces of a previous burial in the centre of the grave before adding a Christian inhumation. It is tempting to assume that no stone slab was needed in the centre because no central cremation had been found.

A few metres east of A16000 are two additional small round stone settings that are not yet excavated. It is, however, possible to establish visually that the stones of both these constructions have been rearranged, leaving a space without stones in their respective centres. One has an east–west oriented rectangular extension in the southern half with the same orientation, size and shape as the
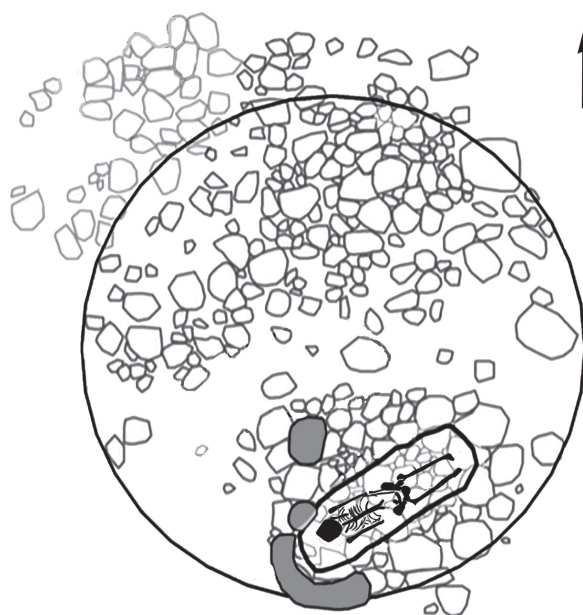

Fig 2.5: The layout of the inhumation burial in an older stone setting (A16000). The grey areas indicate the remaining layer of cremated bone (modified after Andersson and Fahlander ms).

other stone-filled inhumation pits (Fig. 2.2). The other excavated set of graves on the eastern slope of the impediment, however, shows no signs of later interference (Magnusson and Claréus 1979).

Similar post-burial interferences are found at other contemporary sites during the conversion period – although their implementation varies locally (see examples in Fahlander 2016). At Broby Bro, four aspects of the post-burial interactions particularly stand out. To begin with, all the affected graves are quite ordinary and inconspicuous. They do not occupy any particular prominent spot in the landscape that could explain why they were chosen. Secondly, there is a substantial gap in time (*c.* 1,000 years) between the old graves and the later reuse. To put this in perspective, the intrusions in Early Iron Age graves were made on graves that at the time were older then than the added inhumation burials are in relation to us today. The more recent graves from the Vendel and Viking periods on the impediment and hillocks nearby seem all to have been left untouched. The third noticeable aspect is the ambiguous character of the reuse. The inhumations all display an indifferent relationship to the old burials. A relation to the old grave was obviously sought after, but apparently first after the original cremation was removed and the centre sealed with large stone blocks. Especially in A7000 and A8000, considerable work has been laid down to dig up the original cremations and place large stone slabs in its place, as well as adding substantial new kerbs. It is significant that the new and larger monuments successfully enclosed the older stone settings but not the cremated remains of the old dead. Finally, there is a consistent pattern in how the new inhumations were placed in the south-eastern parts of the old round stone settings.

Interestingly, these post-burial actions do not concord with the general lines of interpretation described in the introduction. For example, because the dead in these graves cannot have been known after such a long time, it can hardly be a matter of relating to specific ancestors. Moreover, since the cremated remains were also removed from the old graves it is not likely to be about creating bodily links to general ancestors either. The same arguments must also lead us to reject the idea that pagan ancestors were included in Christian monuments to save their souls. It could perhaps be argued that the people who, after 500 years of absence, reused the old impediment for burial wanted to legitimate claims to the land by appropriating the oldest burials in the area. This, however, does not resonate well with the modest appearance of the old graves, nor with their being enclosed within the new and enlarged constructions. To understand this type of post-burial interaction we need to find other potential reasons. In the following I will look more closely at a number of material circumstances related to the change of faith and the tangible implications of the practices of cremation and inhumation respectively.

The materiality of faith, death and burial

The inhumations at Broby Bro are all considered Christian. They are east–west orientated inhumation burials in which the dead are placed on their backs with the head in the west (with one exception of a child). The interments only include small personal items such as coins and knives, but not combs, animals or food. The many contemporary runestones in the local area also clearly state a belief in the Christian faith (Andersson 1999, 4–5; 2011; 2015). The main question here, however, is what kind of Christianity are we dealing with in the rural area of Broby Bro. Christianity in the period of conversation is different in many respects from the later institutionalised form from the 13th–16th centuries up to the Protestant Reformation (Nilsson 2010; Tesch 2017). For example, in

Broby Bro during the 10th century there was no church or consecrated graveyard and it is uncertain if there were any persons educated in Christian learning present at the funerals. A closer look at the burials also reveals that not all conform strictly to the Christian norm as outlined above. There are some interesting discrepancies such as continued use of the mound as a superstructure for the inhumations. There are also two instances where a fire has been lit on the coffin lid (graves A554 and A591). In the first case, a cow's tooth was also placed on top of the coffin (Andersson 2011, 14–15, 23). Similar examples of non-Christian elements are found in other sites with presumably Christian inhumations (*e.g.* Wikström 2010, 103; Runer and Sillén 2014, 26; Holback 2016; see also Holloway 2008; van Haperen 2010).

In Scandinavian archaeology, such inconsistencies in burial practice have been understood in terms of syncretism or hybridity, while old pagan rituals are assumed to continue alongside the new faith (Gilchrist 2008; Tesch 2015; 2017). This need not always be the case. For example, on the continent, there are plenty of similar examples of Roman-style funerary meals, libations and ritual fires, the deposition of Roman coins, quartz stones, fossils, cattle teeth, snails and animal sacrifices in Christian tombs well into Carolingian times (Effros 2002, 143, 186; Gilchrist 2008). None of this was sanctioned by the Christian clergy, but in this case, we know that both the dead and their families have been Christian believers for many generations. Effros (2002, 143) argues that these odd practices probably have more to do with mourning, *Parentalia* celebrations, or family traditions, than with religion and eschatology. This seems also to have been the case for the reuse of older burials in Christian contexts. For example, when stone cists became popular for Christian burials in Merovingian Europe (5th–6th centuries), old Roman pagan stone sarcophagi were sometimes reused for Christian burials. If the originals were decorated with inappropriate imagery, this was simply removed (Effros 2002, 67, 104–105). The reuse was thus pragmatic; it is easier and cheaper to reuse and modify an old sarcophagus than it is to manufacture a new one. There is no indication that this reuse was related to an emerging interest in the past or to establish relations to fictional or real ancestors. There is, of course, a substantial difference in reusing and moving a stone cist for new burials and reusing small stone settings for Christian inhumations. The point here is, however, that not everything about a burial has to concern religion and that reuse of ancient graves need not be related to the buried individual.

The above examples suggest that we need to understand these kinds of post-burial practices in their own terms and relationships without contemporary dichotomised concepts such as pagan-Christian, past-present, life-death *etc.* In addition, as Effros' example of reuse illustrates, we need to be more concerned about the material circumstances of burials approached from the ground-up rather than from top-down generalisations. Instead of viewing the change of faith as a continuous history of *mentalités*, it is useful to try to understand each burial from their specific pasts and futures. Every burial is an event, performed at a certain time and place, and at the time not part of the beginning or end of a tradition (Fahlander 2018). This perspective resonates well with recent ontological approaches in archaeology and ethnography (Alberti 2016; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). A main tenet of this movement is to allow for other ways to experience the world that do not necessarily follow western scientific categorisation. Instead, the potential alterity of other societies needs to be taken seriously. Holbraad (2011, 17) suggests that instead of asking if a group of people attribute life and agency to stones and animals "we should be asking what *concepts* of humanity, agency, subjectivity, and more, our anthropological engagement with them might yield, and be fully prepared to be surprised by what we find". In the case of the post-burial actions at Broby Bro we should thus be prepared that *our* concepts of burial, religion, Christianity,

and death are not necessarily the same as a thousand years ago. Such an ontological inquiry is not about deconstruction of traditional concepts but reconstruction – an empirical perspective that is open for other ways of categorising the world (Holbraad 2010; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, 5; see also Fahlander 2008). Such an "ontographical" approach can thus "open fertile spaces" that can help make the strange post-burial actions in Broby Bro understandable (Salmond 2014, 24).

Ontological consequences of death and burial

In modern Christian ontology, a grave is traditionally viewed as the final resting place for a specific individual. This normally does not change as long as the grave is maintained. However, it might be more helpful to recognise how the grave *becomes* over time (Fowler 2013; Crellin 2017). To do this, we need to unpack concepts such as "cremation" and "grave", and include the real, practical aspects and the affective properties (*qualia*) of the involved materialities (*e.g.* the bones, corpse and the grave). For example, the burned bones that were removed from the old graves would probably have been recognised as cremated remains of a body (although not necessarily human). There are, however, certain general differences between Early and Late Iron Age cremations. The bones from the Early Iron Age in Broby Bro were generally cremated at lower temperatures which make the remains different in texture, colour and fragment size (see Sahlström and Gejvall 1948, 155). The fragments are also often cleaned from soot and the assemblages rarely include animal bones. These increase in numbers from the Migration Period onwards (Bennett 1987, 184; Sigvallius 1994, 118), so that in some Late Iron Age urns there are no human remains at all among the cremated animal bones (Sigvallius 1994, 62, 133; see Bond 1996, 78). In the late part of the period, other material such as unburned bones, stones, seeds and artefacts such as amulet rings, are also included in the urns (Gräslund 1980, 54; Sigvallius 1994, 128). Thus, although the Early Iron Age cremations could still appear fairly recent because of the good preservation of cremated bones, they would yet appear odd and unfamiliar when "excavated" in the 11th century. From a material and ontological point of view, the Early and Late Iron Age cremations were not necessarily conceived as the same.

The superstructures of the Early Iron Age graves also stand out from the later ones in which the forebears of the early Christians were buried. In general, the graves become more uniform during the course of the Iron Age, towards the dominance of round mounds in the Viking Age (Bennett 1987, 20). In contrast, Early Iron Age superstructures can be quite elaborate and of varied shapes and forms. The stones were normally chosen with care to make up a smooth slightly curved surface, while the kerb is likewise made up of equally sized and similarly shaped stones. Some of the graves, such as the reused one in A8000, also have a larger round egg-shaped stone in the centre. The Early Iron Age graves at Broby Bro would thus have evoked many different associations in the early Christian community of the 11th century (see Williams 1998, 97). It is significant that the old constructions already existed on the impediment when the area was re-populated in the Late Iron Age. This raises ontological questions about how the pre-existing ancient graves and their content were apprehended. Were they simply recognised as "old burials" of previous inhabitants or as something other and unknown? The reuse of these particular features instead of more recent ones indicates that they were indeed distinguished as different. The carefully constructed superstructures with their elaborate patterns of different stones would have incited some level of curiosity that potentially included certain agentic abilities (see Gell 1998; Robb 2015, 172). In this context, it is important to recognise that ideas of animacy and

even animism in various forms are not only found in pagan religion. Gilchrist (2008, 121; see also Lund 2013), for example, interprets certain odd materialities found in Christian coffins as apotropaic amulets placed there to "transform or protect the corpse for resurrection". There is thus no need to oppose Pagan and Christian ontology on this matter. The process of conversion did not bring order to chaos or replaced magic and animism with rationality. The early Christian ontology comprises as much vitalist, animist and magical thinking as the pagan. For example, the early Christian texts, such as the poem *Beowulf* and *Liber Monstrorum*, the Old Norse corpus, and the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* frequently hint at a fluid ontology where the real and supernatural intersect (Orchard 2003; 2004; Perabo 2017). It is also apparent that certain objects can have agentic and even animic abilities in Christian ontology. For example, a type of sympathetic magic can be found in the concept of *Ad Sanctos*, the cult of relics, and the idea of consecrated soil. Icons and religious imagery were also accepted as powerful and agentic (Freedberg 1989). The ways in which the old superstructures and cremated bones have been handled is a strong indication that they were considered efficacious and agentic in some respect. However, in order to minimise speculation on *what* generative abilities the ancient graves may have been associated with, I will focus on what the early Christians may have sought after when they reused and included the old graves in their burials. What real and tangible aspects did the old graves have to offer in an early Christian ontology? Why did the cremated bones need to be removed and why were some old graves enclosed in new constructions?

Early Christian relations to bones and stones

A main tangible difference between the old ways and the Christian burial practices in central Sweden is the change from cremation to inhumation. It is certainly possible that some cremation burials also are "Christian" just as some east–west oriented inhumations in coffins may only mimic continental burial practices (Artelius 2010, 109, 154). Be that as it may, the two ways of disposing the corpse are quite different – especially in relation to the dead body. The Christian way of inhumation instead of cremation was more or less a prerequisite for the resurrection on the Day of Reckoning, which at this time was expected to occur within the near future (Gilchrist 2014). Inhumation, however, is not only a matter of belief but also entails physical consequences with potential ontological effects. For instance, corpses are not passive objects but go through a range of processes during the decomposing process that not only alter the appearance but also express a certain animacy. Bodies swell, start to smell, leak substances *etc.* (Roach 2004). The way some corpses allegedly managed (or were manipulated) to avoid decomposition and stay "incorruptible" a long time after death was commonly taken as a sign of holiness and a characteristic of saints (Nedkvitne 2004, 106; Jeremiah 2012). In Christian ontology, the corpse thus became an important object for care (Nilsson 2010, 34). The superstructures of the Christian inhumations would have looked similar to the Late Iron Age cremation graves on the surface, but differ substantially underground. One noticeable consequence of inhumation is related to size. To bury a corpse requires a much larger pit to accommodate the body. The pits also needs to have a certain depth to avoid interference from animals. As such the pit need not be rectangular but because the Christian corpses at Broby Bro are buried in rectangular coffins, that is normally the case.

Although not everything concerning burials needs to be justified by or related to faith, eschatological beliefs certainly play an important part in burial practices. It has been suggested that while

pagan burials tend to emphasise the status, power and reputation of the dead, the Christian burials became more concerned with the care of the soul (Nedkvitne 2004, 55). This is probably a simplification of both the pagan and the Christian understanding of graves and burial but it is important to recognise that there was not yet any concept of purgatory in the 11th century, and the grave was still considered the resting place for both body and soul (Nilsson 2010). Examples of such concerns for a proper resting place of the mortal remains are found in the early Christian texts. In the *Saga of the Greenlanders*, for instance, a couple of hunters encountered two dead men that had died of starvation. Instead of just burying the corpses on the spot, they boiled the bodies to deflesh their bones which were brought back to be buried in a Christian graveyard (Nedkvitne 2004, 147). Interestingly, traces of such care of the mortal remains can be found in the configuration of the early Christian burials in general and the post-depositional actions in particular. Consider, for instance, the rather deep inhumation pits at Broby Bro. The average depth of 60 to 80 cm is quite extensive (see Reynolds 2009, 110), and filling the pits with stones is not really necessary – especially as the corpses were placed in wooden coffins and the graves covered by cairns. Similar substantial efforts are also found in other contemporary early Christian graves, such as aforementioned mound A1 at Valsta and a large stone cist at Skälby, close to Broby Bro (Andersson 2017, 221). The main point of such extra measures was not likely to reflect the status of the buried individual because they were subterranean and invisible. This is also the case for the reuse in A7000 and A8000. In addition to the deep stone-filled pits and cairns, it is significant that the older stone settings were enclosed by the new constructions. Although it can be argued that people in the area knew what lay beneath the new monuments, it is more likely that the old graves were considered beneficial to the Christian inhumations. It is not possible to determine if it was their age, unknown status, their elaborate appearance, or a combination of all three that associated them with such efficacious properties. It is, however, evident that the graves and the cremated remains are differentiated. Apparently, it was believed that the recently dead could benefit from being buried in the old graves, but only after the cremated remains have been removed. Thus, whatever the cremated remains were thought to represent or do, they were evidently unfit to share the same grave as a Christian corpse. The superstructures, on the other hand, seem to allude to order, structure and permanence (perhaps even an allure of embellishment). Their apparent resilient properties were further reinforced by burying the coffins deep into the ground as well as by the addition of substantial kerbs and mounds as in A7000 and A8000. The old graves that were thus not reused for practical reasons but rather because they were anticipated to fill a benevolent role perhaps similar to the apotropaic amulets discussed by Gilchrist (2008). They were part of a strategy to secure body and soul until the Day of Reckoning.

Summary: unruly bones and efficacious stones

Post-burial interaction with human remains in the Late Iron Age is generally discussed in terms of strategies to legitimate claims of land and ancestry or to restrict the agency of the dead. The early Christian post-burial interaction with certain pagan burials in Broby Bro, seems, however, to be less about identity or memory. The establishment of a Christian burial ground during the 11th century AD in Broby Bro begun with the reuse of the oldest and most divergent burials in the area. At least two Early Iron Age small stone settings were incorporated in new monuments and three additional stone settings were adjusted to accommodate new bodies. What stands out in this reuse is the removal of the original cremations, the vigorous character of the reuse, and how the inhumations are placed not

in the centres but asymmetrically in the south-eastern parts of the new monuments. There are similar cases of post-burial practices at other sites (Fahlander 2016) but they have no direct parallels in either Christian tradition or the literary sources of the period, nor do they fit the common interpretative models.

However, viewed from an ontological perspective, emphasising tangible aspects of practice and material qualities, we can suggest that the old burials were reused because they were believed to be benevolent for the Christian corpses. For example, the manner in which some of the old stone settings were "wrapped" and enclosed within the new monuments implies that they were not primarily symbolising or representing something but were included to *do* something. This resonates well with the early Christian use of *e.g.* amulets, relics and icons that evidently were considered agentic. Because the origins of the reused graves were unknown to the Christian community, the consistent choice of type of graves for inhumation is likely to be based on their physical qualities (*e.g.* permanence, otherness and elaboration). It is not possible to define precisely what powers, agency, origins and age these burials and their cremated remains were associated with. However, based on their tangible qualities, it is argued that they were considered as supporting the Christian aspiration to keep the dead body intact and undisturbed until the soon-to-come Day of Judgment. Such an interpretation also concords with other practical means used to secure the corpse (*e.g.* burial in deep, stone-filled pits underneath a cairn). The cremated remains, on the contrary, were evidently comprehended as unruly materialities imbued with potential malevolent powers. The fact that they differ in several respects from the more familiar Late Iron Age cremations may have played a part in this process. In fact, they need not have been considered human at all (see Williams 1998, 97). In either case, the cremated bones had to be removed in order to reuse a grave for a Christian inhumation. It is not possible to determine what happened to the old bones but the practice of burying large stone slabs in their place indicates that the cremation remains were considered problematic and most likely agentic, which demanded substantial efforts to keep in order. The efforts to avoid some materialities and employ others in the pursuit to preserve the corpses may seem "pagan" at first but would not be foreign to early Christian ontology. Instead of explaining post-burial interaction from binary generalisations of death and burial, the case of Broby Bro illustrates the potential of a symmetrical approach that also considers the potentially generative effects incited by the involved materialities – in this case, unruly bones and efficacious stones.

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3. Grave disturbance in early medieval Poland

Leszek Gardeła

Introduction

In the 18th century Dom Augustin Calmet, French Benedictine and author of a famous work on vampirism entitled *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits, et sur les vampires, ou les revenants de Hongrie, de Moravie etc.*, expressed his concern about a range of disturbing events that had occurred around that time in central Europe (Calmet 1751; translation after Summers 2005 [1929], 27): "In this present age and for about sixty years past, we have been the hearers and witnesses of a new series of extraordinary incidents and occurrences. Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, Poland, are the principal theatre of these happenings. For here we are told that dead men, men who have been dead for several months, I say, return from the tomb, are heard to speak, walk about, infest hamlets and villages, injure both men and animals, whose blood they drain thereby making them sick and ill, and at length actually causing death. Nor can men deliver themselves from these terrible visitations, nor secure themselves from these horrid attacks, unless they dig the corpses up from the graves, drive a sharp stake through these bodies, cut off the heads, tear out the hearts; or else they burn the bodies to ashes. The name given to these ghosts is Oupires, or Vampires, that is to say, blood-suckers." Calmet's account contains one of the earliest descriptions of grave reopenings in Poland which were conducted with the intention to prevent the dead from rising. He is rightly regarded as one of the pioneers of vampire research, and it seems that while writing his book, he was convinced that revenants were not merely a creation of the vivid imagination of uneducated folk, but that they actually existed. This conviction seems to have been shared also by a number of other authors who touched upon similar phenomena in later years (see a valuable overview of 18th- and 19th-century studies on vampirism in Summers 2005 [1929]; for further comments and overviews, see Keyworth 2007).

Although many works on revenants, ghosts and demons were written after the publication of Calmet's book, it was Montague Summers who released the first serious English-language study of the living dead. His book entitled *The Vampire: his kith and kin* (reprinted as *Vampires and Vampirism*), which discusses vampirism from a theological and philosophical point of view, quickly became a classic and it is still widely used by scholars today (Summers 2005 [1929]). Summers' studies demonstrate with clarity that the fear of revenants, who leave their graves to harm or kill people and animals, is a widespread phenomenon known not only in the Slavic area but also among many other peoples around the world. A vast collection of accounts that he assembled show

explicitly that throughout the ages people performed a wide range of rituals (often of very violent nature) to protect themselves against the undesired return of the dangerous dead. Some of these rituals involved reopening graves and manipulating, exhuming or burning the bodies to ashes. Occasionally, traces of such practices can be found in the archaeological record.

Based on this evidence and other comparative studies (*e.g.* Summers 2001 [1961]; Wright 2001 [1924]; McClelland 2006; Keyworth 2007; Barber 2010; Lecouteux 2010) it is possible to isolate three general types of preventive measures that could be undertaken to prevent undesired revenant activity – namely, various ritual acts performed *before* and *during* the funeral and those conducted *after* the dead had been buried. The post-burial acts, which are of main relevance to the present study, often involved reopening the grave and manipulating bodies or objects that accompanied them. For example, the allegedly dangerous dead could be exhumed, transported and reburied in a different location or their bodies turned face down, staked, decapitated or burned to ashes *in situ*. Although there are many descriptions of such apotropaic rituals, we must bear in mind that the practices involving the disturbance of graves, manipulating bodies and exhuming the dead, however violent they might seem to us today, do not have to be associated only with the fear of revenants – the motivations for conducting such acts, depending on the culture, region and period in history, were manifold and could convey various feelings towards the deceased, not only negative ones (*e.g.* Jankuhn *et al.* 1978; Aspöck 2005; Soma 2007; Kümmel 2009; van Haperen 2010; 2015; Klevnäs 2013; see also papers in Gardeła and Kajkowski 2015).

With these ideas in mind, the present paper will focus on examining and interpreting archaeological examples of grave disturbances in early medieval Poland, a period by far predating the writings of authors like Dom Augustin Calmet and other collectors of 18th- and 19th-century folklore. Do reopened graves from this part of Europe reflect the fear of revenants, as some scholars have previously suggested (*e.g.* Sikorski 2000; Żydok 2004), or do they convey other meanings? How can we convincingly interpret such findings if we lack contemporary written accounts describing grave reopenings in early medieval cemeteries in Poland? Is it possible and methodologically justified to use sources that originate from early modern times to explain unusual mortuary phenomena from the period between the 10th and 13th centuries? In order to provide answers to these questions, early medieval reopened graves cannot be studied in isolation, as has often been done before, but examined in a systematic manner and with a bigger picture in mind. Assessing a wider corpus of evidence from various sites across Poland reveals consistent patterns of ritual behaviour, and these, when set into a comparative perspective, can consequently lead to new and more sophisticated interpretations. Before we begin examining reopened graves in further detail, however, it is first necessary to set the stage for this study and devote some space to a general overview of mortuary practices in early medieval Poland.

Mortuary practices in early medieval Poland

Before the acceptance of Christianity in the second half of the 10th century (*c*. AD 966), funerary practices in the area of what is today Poland mainly involved cremation (Kostrzewski 1960; Zoll-Adamikowa 1975; 1979; Gardeła 2017, 27–68). The dead were laid on pyres and burned with various portable objects and occasionally with animals, too. Their ashes were then gathered and placed in ceramic or organic containers before committing them to the ground. It is possible, however, that on some occasions human remains were loosely scattered on fields and in forests or perhaps thrown into the water. In contrast to cremation graves from Scandinavia and the Anglo-Saxon world, those

from Poland are still relatively understudied. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that none of these graves display evident traces of reopening and therefore they will not be considered any further in this study.

By the first half of the 11th century, inhumation had become the dominant funerary practice in Poland (for overviews see Rajewski 1937; Zoll-Adamikowa 1966; 1971; Miśkiewicz 1969; Wachowski 1975; Rębkowski 2007; Gardeła 2017; 2019; 2020a). Between the late 10th and 13th centuries the dead were usually buried in flat graves with or without additional containers for the body (*e.g.* coffins, chests, boats), although recent studies have shown that some individuals were interred in shrouds. Social elites in this period manifested their own status and that of their deceased through spectacular funerals and through the provision of various exclusive objects, sometimes of foreign provenance (*e.g.* Gardeła 2018; 2019; Gardeła *et al.* 2019a; 2019b). It is possible that chamber graves – which over the last decade or so are being found more and more often in early medieval cemeteries in Poland – belonged to people who represented the highest echelons of society (Janowski 2015; Błaszczyk 2017).

Iron knives are among the most common types of objects buried with the dead. Small utensils (*e.g.* spindle whorls, strike-a-lights, whetstones, keys), jewellery (*e.g.* so-called *kabłączki skroniowe* or "temple rings" – typically Slavic female head adornments), vessels (made of clay, wood or metal), equestrian equipment and weapons (swords, axes, spears and arrowheads) are also occasionally found in graves. The often small and unspectacular assortment of objects buried with the dead is important to acknowledge when we debate the motivations which may have stood behind the practice of reopening graves in Poland. In contrast to the Merovingian world or Viking Age Scandinavia and Iceland (*e.g.* Soma 2007; Klevnäs 2013; Hofmann 2015; Noterman 2015), it seems that in most instances in the area of Poland there was no intention to (re)move or rob objects; the main focus was rather on manipulating body parts or bones of the dead.

Reopened graves are often considered in the context of an intercultural phenomenon of "deviant burial" – *i.e.* a set of practices which differ considerably from what is regarded as "normative" among a given society in a particular time and area (*e.g.* Aspöck 2008; Murphy 2008; Reynolds 2009; Gardeła 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2015a; 2017; 2020b; Gardeła and Kajkowski 2013a; 2013b; 2015). In Poland, disturbed graves – especially those in which human remains were (re)moved, burned or manipulated in other ways – have often been seen in a rather simplistic manner and mainly as reflecting the fear of vampires/revenants (Sikorski 2000; Żydok 2004). As we shall see below, such an interpretation can be put to question, and a careful analysis of the different variants of grave disturbances may reveal alternative motivations for these practices.

Variants of grave disturbances in early medieval Poland

Grave disturbances of various kinds have been noted at numerous archaeological sites in Poland, but they have only recently become the subject of detailed analyses and interpretations. The most thorough study of these phenomena has been published by Gardeła, Kajkowski and Szczepanik (2015), examining selected instances of reopened graves from a number of regions (known in Polish as *województwa* or voivodeships) including Greater Poland voivodeship, Masovian voivodeship, Kuyavian-Pomeranian voivodeship, Western Pomeranian voivodeship, Pomeranian voivodeship and Lesser Poland voivodeship. Although their survey does not embrace the full corpus of evidence for grave disturbance in Poland, it is extensive enough to identify and isolate several general variants of

and motivations for these practices: 1. reopening graves to add further bodies, 2. reopening graves with the desire to remove particular body parts or bones, 3. reopening graves with the intention to maim, immobilise or annihilate the dead. Since an extensive analysis of all examples of disturbed graves from early medieval Poland is beyond the scope of this paper, I will focus here only on selected and the most illustrative examples of such phenomena (Fig. 3.1) and expand some of the previously proposed interpretations.

Adding bodies to pre-existing graves

Based on the evidence which has been gathered so far (Gardeła *et al.* 2015; Sikora 2015; Gardeła 2017), it appears that the most frequent reason for reopening graves in early medieval Poland was to add further bodies to pre-existing graves. In archaeological parlance, such practices are sometimes referred to as "secondary burials" (*e.g.* Sikora 2015). The term "secondary burials" can be misleading, however, because it has various definitions depending on the cultural context (*e.g.* Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Larsson 2003, 162, 229–230; Aspöck 2005, 227). In the case of Neolithic archaeology, for example, it is understood as a tradition "whose most important aspect

Fig. 3.1: Map of sites with reopened graves in early medieval Poland discussed in the article.

is that the deceased is not considered properly buried until a second ceremony is held, when there is sorting, cleansing and/or reburial of the bones" (Larsson 2003, 162). In the case of the early medieval graves from Poland, however, the term "secondary burials" simply means that a pre-existing grave is reopened with the intention to add another body. To avoid terminological confusion, in this article I will refer to such instances as "consecutive burials".

The best documented, most numerous and varied evidence for such practices has been recorded in the cemetery at Dziekanowice in Greater Poland. The cemetery at Dziekanowice is one of the largest in the region and has been excavated and recorded to a very high standard, which offers the opportunity to conduct various specialist analyses of particular graves and their contents (Wrzesińscy 1992; 1993; Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński 2001; 2002; 2003; Wrzesiński and Wyrwa 2011). The cemetery was in use between the second half of the 11th and the 13th century and comprised over one thousand graves of men, women and children. The dead were usually interred in supine position, but some deviations to this rule have also been noted (*e.g.* Gardeła 2015b). Although most of the deceased were buried without any containers, some were interred in coffins or special wooden constructions built inside the grave pits (known as chamber graves). A number of graves were furnished with objects including jewellery, coins, tools or small utensils, clay vessels and occasionally weapons. The majority of graves at Dziekanowice are single, but a relatively large number of double graves has been recorded (Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński 2001; 2002; 2003; see also Gardeła and Kajkowski 2014 for a detailed discussion on double graves in early medieval Poland). Analyses of the arrangement of bones and other features of some of these double graves show that they initially contained only one individual and that the second body was added after some time had passed (Fig. 3.2). Careful analysis of the evidence from Dziekanowice makes it possible to distinguish at least two variants of this practice, and due to the good preservation, we can reconstruct elements of the process by which the acts of reopening were conducted:

– The grave was reopened in such a way that the skeletal remains of the initially buried individual were undisturbed during the process of digging. Afterwards, the original grave pit was expanded and the second body was laid in a flexed position parallel to the initially buried individual (*e.g.* grave 13–14/95).
– The grave was reopened and the skeletal remains of the initially buried individual were collected, moved and piled at the foot end of the pit (*e.g.* graves 51–79/99, 50–50a/95; 40a–40b/96). The second body was then buried in the same grave pit, exactly in the place where the first individual originally lay.

It is interesting to note that in all graves of the second type, the initially buried person was *always* male, while the added individual was *always* female. Similar tendencies to those that have been noted at Dziekanowice are known from a range of other sites in Poland and this may suggest a consistently repeated ritual practice. Further examples of this custom have been recorded, for example, in the cemeteries at Wolin Młynówka (Western Pomeranian voivodeship), Złota Pińczowska (Świętokrzyskie voivodeship) and Komorowo (Greater Poland voivodeship). We shall examine them more closely in turn.

The cemetery at Wolin Młynówka contained both cremation and inhumation graves and was used between the 9th and 12th centuries (Wojtasik 1968, 219–221). The dead – including men, women and children – were usually buried in supine position in single graves. The graves were
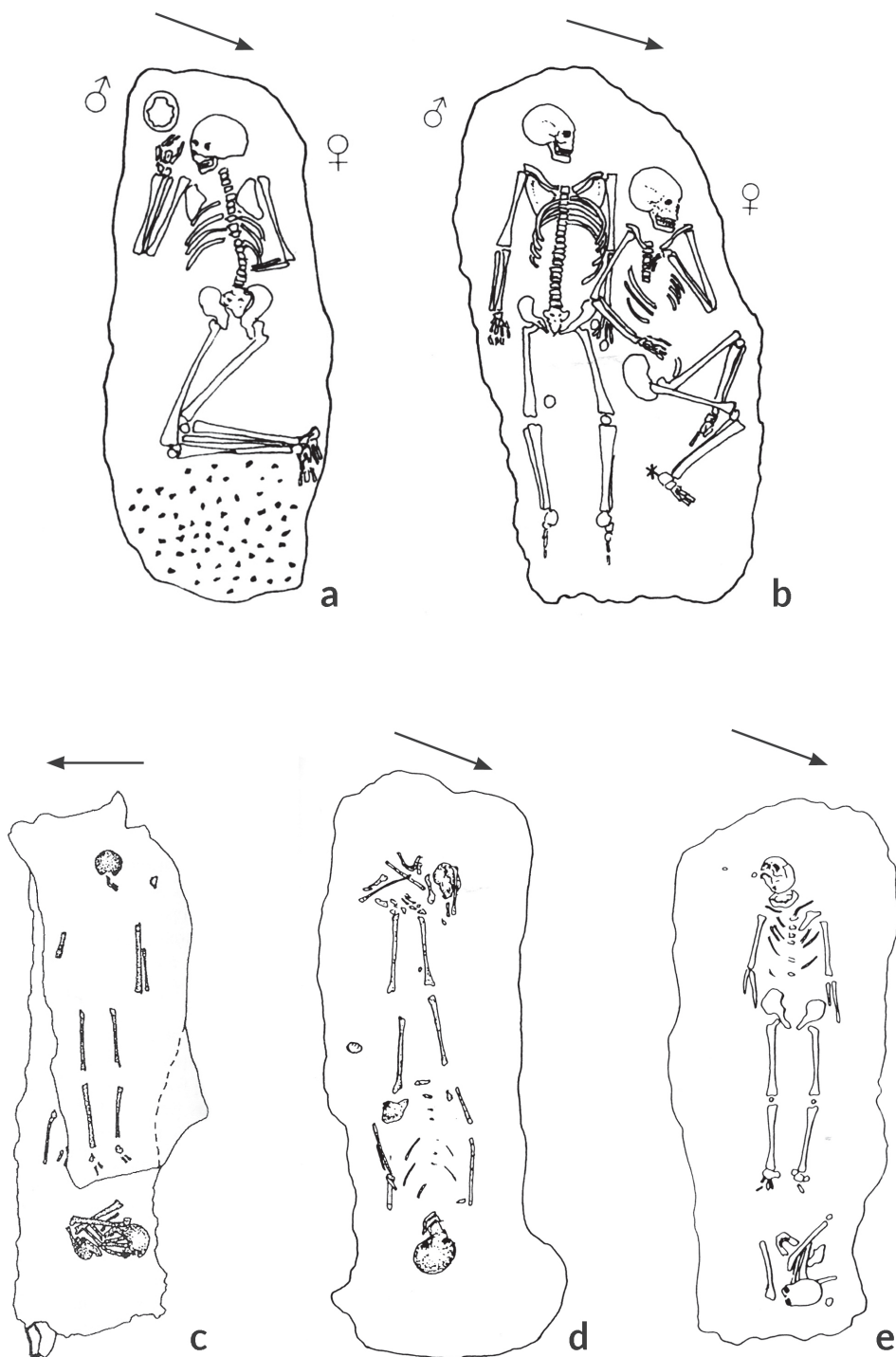
Fig. 3.2: Examples of reopened graves from Dziekanowice (a: grave 79–79a/94; b: grave 13–14/95; c: grave 51–79/99; d: 50–50a/95; e: 40a–40b/96) (redrawn after Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński 2002, 80, 83, 85).

rather modestly furnished with ceramic vessels, jewellery and other small items (*e.g.* beads, knives, pendants, spindle-whorls). Apart from a few graves with arrowheads and one which contained what has been interpreted as a fragment of a chainmail (Wojtasik 1968, 199–200), there were no weapon graves at this site. Traces of a few so-called "deviant burials" have also been recorded, including individuals interred in a prone position (Wojtasik 1968, 206–207; Gardeła 2015b; 2017).

A number of graves from Wolin Młynówka appear to have been disturbed, but it is rather difficult to determine whether this occurred intentionally in the early Middle Ages or as a result of some other post-depositional factors (*e.g.* intrusion of animals, taphonomic processes *etc.*). One very probable example of intentional reopening is seen in grave 84 (197ab) which contained two individuals – a male and a female (Fig. 3.3). The woman lay in a supine position and at her feet was a pile of bones belonging to a man. The arrangement of the bones is strikingly similar to what has been observed at Dziekanowice, and there is a strong possibility that this was originally a single grave of a man to which a female individual was added after his soft tissue had decomposed. In his report, Wojtasik (1968, 46) observes that a number of animal bones and small undetermined objects have been found in the fill of the grave pit. These may have been included accidentally, for example during backfilling, but it is not unlikely that they were used as part of some special rituals.

Yet another interesting example of "consecutive burial" is known from the cemetery at Złota Pińczowska. This site was excavated during several archaeological campaigns in the 1960s which ultimately led to the discovery of 133 inhumation graves. All graves were flat, oriented west–east and arranged in rows. Most of the dead were buried singly, but two examples of double graves and one exceptional triple grave have been recorded. The dead were occasionally accompanied by objects including jewellery, knives and various utensils. Containers for the bodies, in the form of wooden coffins, have been noted in several instances and there is also evidence for burying the dead in shrouds (Miśkiewicz 1967, 128). An interesting example of intentional reopening is displayed by grave 107 (Fig. 3.4). It contained two individuals – a young girl and an adult man, both placed in one coffin. The girl was around 12 years old when she died and she was buried in a supine position (Miśkiewicz 2010, 144). She had as many as twelve temple rings (*i.e.* female head adornments made of bronze, probably attached to an organic headband) distributed around her head, a small green bead around her neck and an iron knife by her left side. At her feet were the remains of a wooden bucket and piled up bones of a man as well as another iron knife. In a recent re-evaluation of this grave (Gardeła *et al.* 2015, 243–246), an attempt has been made to reconstruct the scenario of events which could have led to such an unusual arrangement of skeletal remains. It has been demonstrated that originally the coffin contained the body of the man, who may have been accompanied by a wooden bucket and a knife. After some time had passed and the man's corpse had skeletonised, the grave was reopened and the body of the young girl was added. This situation, with a consecutive interment of a female individual in the grave of a man, is reminiscent of instances that have been recorded in the cemeteries at Dziekanowice and Wolin already discussed above. The only difference is that at Złota Pińczowska the grave contained a coffin and that the added female was a relatively young girl. In the original report from the excavations at Złota Pińczowska, Miśkiewicz (1967, 129) interpreted grave 107 in a rather sensationalist way – as evidence of human sacrifice where the man had been killed and cut up to accompany the young girl. In the light of new research, this interpretation can no longer be sustained and an alternative reading will be proposed below.
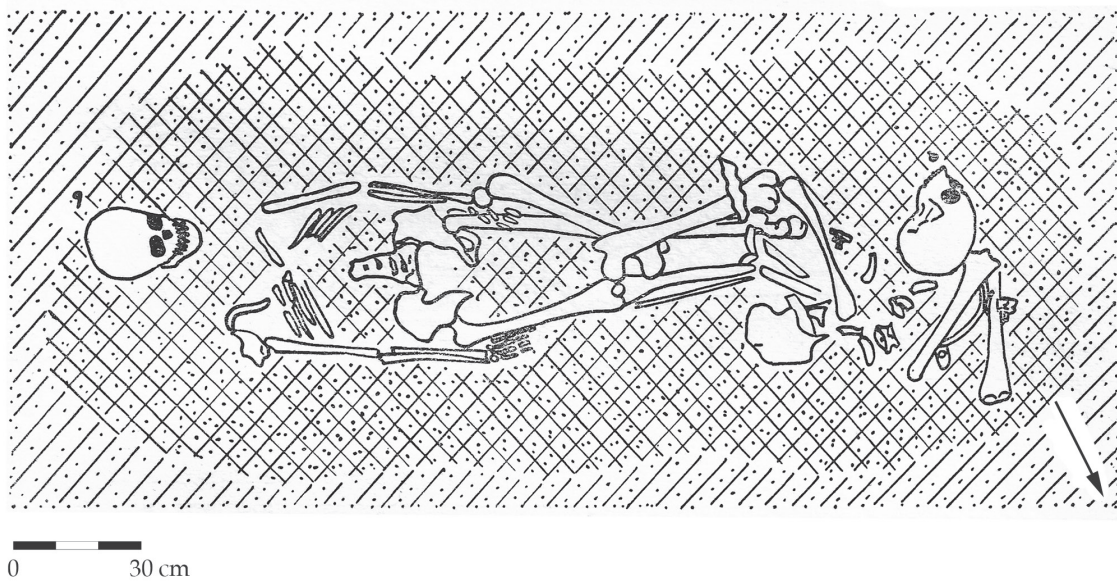
0   30 cm

Fig. 3.3: Reopened grave 84(197ab) from Wolin-Młynówka (redrawn after Wojtasik 1968, 46, tab. XXXV).

Fig. 3.4: Grave 107 from Złota Pińczowska. Grave plan reproduced after Miśkiewicz 1967, 104. Artistic reconstruction by Mirosław Kuźma (Courtesy of Leszek Gardeła and Mirosław Kuźma).

Finally, it is worth noting an unusual example of a "consecutive burial" (graves 21–22) that has been discovered in an early medieval cemetery at Komorowo in Greater Poland (Malinowski *et al.* 1994, 22–24, 33) (Fig. 3.5). In this case, the initially buried individual was an adult man whose grave contained two iron spurs and a small wooden bucket covered with iron sheet. During the process of reopening, the bones of the man and the objects that accompanied him were carefully moved to the foot end of the pit and piled together to make space for an adult woman. She was buried in a supine position, with her right hand extended along her side and the left hand placed on her pelvis. There were no objects accompanying her in the grave. This situation closely resembles those discussed above, the only difference being that the man's grave was furnished with riding equipment (spurs). As this case clearly demonstrates, those who reopened the grave were not interested in acquiring grave goods and indeed these were carefully redeposited during the consecutive burial of the female.

The examples examined above, where the originally buried individual is always male and the added individual is always female, are remarkably consistent in their appearance and in the ways the human remains are treated. This implies that there may have been some very specific idea which led to burials being performed in this way. Unfortunately, due to the lack of textual sources which could reveal the meaning of these practices with clarity, we are forced to speculate. One possibility, previously suggested in several articles by Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński (2001; 2002; 2003) is that these graves belong to married couples and express a desire to bury two lovers together in the same pit. Such an interpretation could perhaps be possible in the case of Dziekanowice, Wolin and Komorowo where the deceased are adults, but it may not have been exactly so in the case of the young girl from Złota Pińczowska. I would argue that in interpreting this puzzling funerary custom, it is vital to pay special attention to the specific area in the grave where the bones of the initially buried individuals were moved – as we have seen, it is consistently the foot end of the pit. The immediate impression that placing human bones at the feet of another person signals some form of subservience or submission (in this case it would imply submission of a man to a woman) may not necessarily be correct. In order to better understand the meanings of the foot end spaces in Slavic early medieval graves, it is necessary to examine more closely what kinds of objects are usually buried there. Interestingly, among items deposited at the feet of the deceased in Slavic cemeteries in Poland are vessels made of wood or clay and occasionally weapons, knives, horse-riding equipment (in the form of spurs and stirrups) as well as various small utensils, perhaps with amuletic function (*e.g.* ceramic eggs). Vessels such as wooden buckets, bowls or ceramic pots (some of which may have contained food or drink) are a particularly interesting category of objects deposited at the feet of the deceased. In a recent article, Kurasiński (2015) has provided an extensive analysis of the meanings of stave-built buckets in Slavic funerary contexts and he has argued for their important ritual role, perhaps associated with feasting and the cult of the dead (for comparative evidence see Lee 2007; Gardeła 2016 with references). He observes that the contents of vessels may have been intended to nourish the deceased on their way to the otherworld. If this was indeed the case – and there are indeed good reasons to believe so – then the foot end of the grave could be seen as a space designated for rather special "gifts" potentially intended for an otherworldly journey. In this light it may be argued that perhaps the practice of piling the bones of deceased men at the feet of women (some of whom may have been their partners) was an act through which the mourners wanted to provide a guide and/or guardian who would lead them on their journey to the afterlife. Alternatively, the space at the foot end could be the space *of* the otherworld and intended
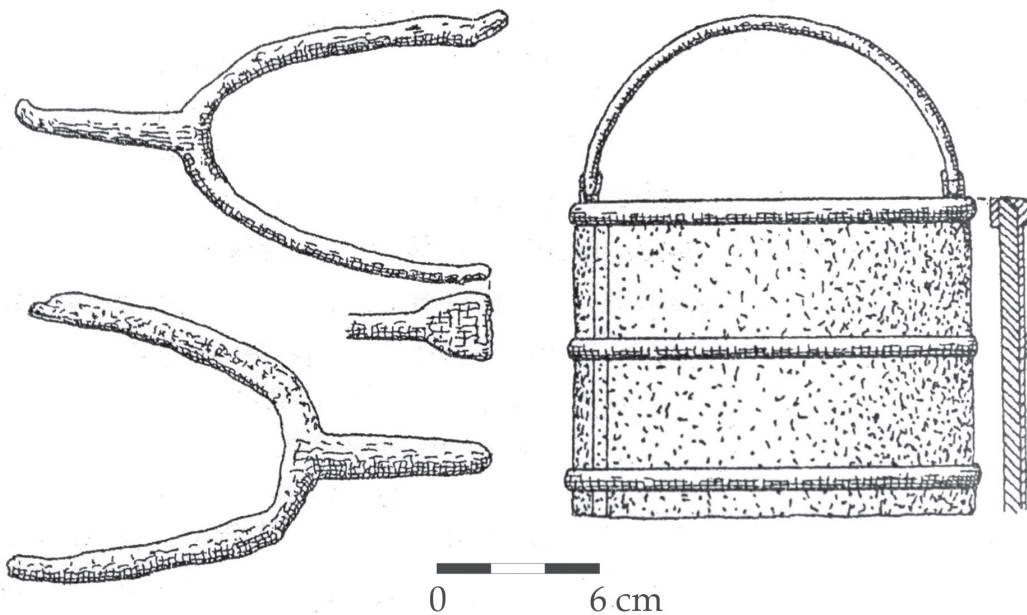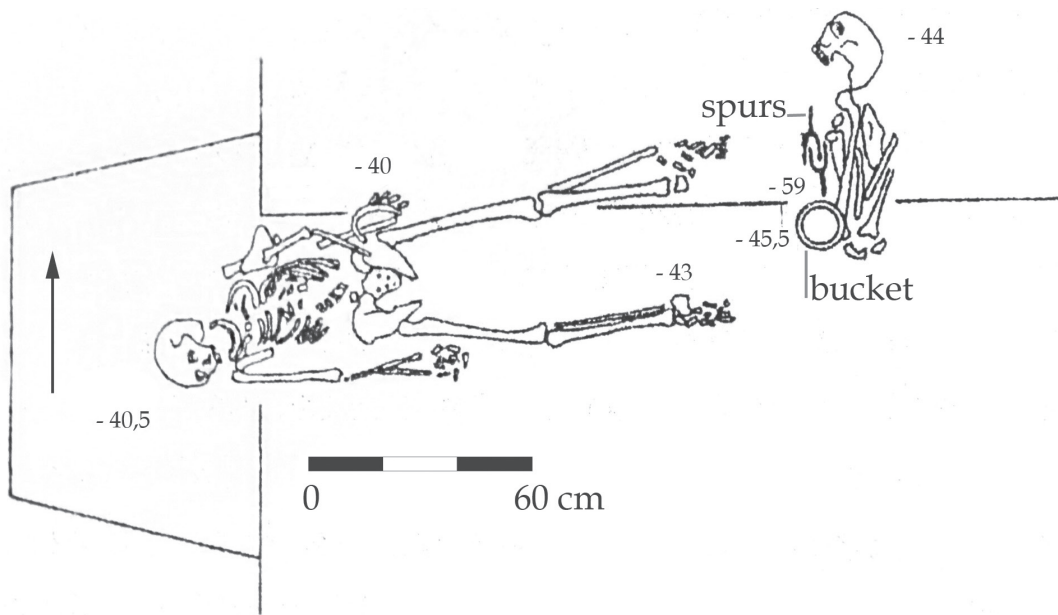
Fig. 3.5: Graves 21–22 from Komorowo and the grave goods that accompanied one of the individuals (redrawn after Malinowski et al. *1994, 23).*

for food and individuals that belong there. There are no extant medieval textual sources that could support this interpretation although there are some hints in Slavic ethnography (*e.g.* Fischer 1921; Biegeleisen 1930). It is nevertheless important to emphasise that in each of the cases examined above, the bones appear to have been piled in a very orderly manner and with considerable care, which implies a sense of affection rather than negative feelings which one would associate with, for example, the fear of revenants. In this light, I find it difficult to sustain previous arguments of scholars like Żydok (2004) or Miśkiewicz (1967) that consecutive burials of the type discussed here reflect anti-revenant practices or human sacrifices.

(Re)moving bones and objects and annihilating the dead

We have now examined instances of reopening pre-existing graves with the intention of adding further bodies. As we have seen, these acts often involved moving the remains of the initially buried individual and redepositing them at the foot end of the pit or coffin. In addition to graves of this type, there seem to have been other variants of post-burial manipulations in early medieval cemeteries in Poland. These involved reopening graves with the intention of (re)moving particular body parts, yet not to make space for another body, but rather with some different idea in mind. Examples of such practices have been noted, among others, in the cemeteries at Cedynia and Dębczyno, both in Western Pomerania, and we shall examine them more closely below.

There are two early medieval cemeteries at Cedynia located at sites 2 and 2a (Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982; Porzeziński 2008). They are relatively large by Pomeranian standards, each with several hundred graves, mostly inhumations. Among the buried dead were both men and women. Some child graves have also been found. The deceased were usually interred supine without any containers for the body, but in some instances coffin burials have been noted. Most graves do not contain any objects, but some are furnished with small utensils, jewellery or weapons (*e.g.* Janowski 2014). Both cemeteries at Cedynia also include graves with "deviant" characteristics. Three individuals were buried prone and there is also a group of intriguing graves in which the heads/skulls of the dead were removed and substituted with stones (Fig. 3.6) (Porzeziński 2008; Gardeła and Kajkowski 2013a; Gardeła 2015a; 2015b; Gardeła 2017). In several instances stones were placed directly on the deceased – perhaps reflecting a ritual intended to hold them in the grave. As for the graves where stones substitute for the heads, it is very difficult to determine if the individuals had been decapitated prior to committing their bodies to the ground or whether the graves were reopened after the funeral and the heads cut off and then removed from the pit. Given the prominent location of the Cedynia cemeteries in the landscape, it is possible that some of the individuals buried in a "deviant" way were criminals and that their decapitated heads were displayed (on posts?) on the surface, perhaps serving as a warning against committing crimes (on this possibility, see Gardeła 2015a; on decapitation as a form of punishment in early medieval Poland, see Grajewski 1956, 193–197; Gardeła 2017, 116–159). Unfortunately, in general the documentation from both sites at Cedynia does not provide enough details to determine these issues with clarity.

Although it is not stated explicitly in the available reports, one of the "deviant graves" from Cedynia (site 2, grave 789) displays signs of possible reopening and, at first glance, appears very similar to instances recorded at Dziekanowice and elsewhere (Fig. 3.7). This grave belonged to an adult woman (aged 35–40) buried in a supine position with her arms extended along the sides of the body. At the woman's feet (and partly over them) lay a cranium with piled tibias and femurs
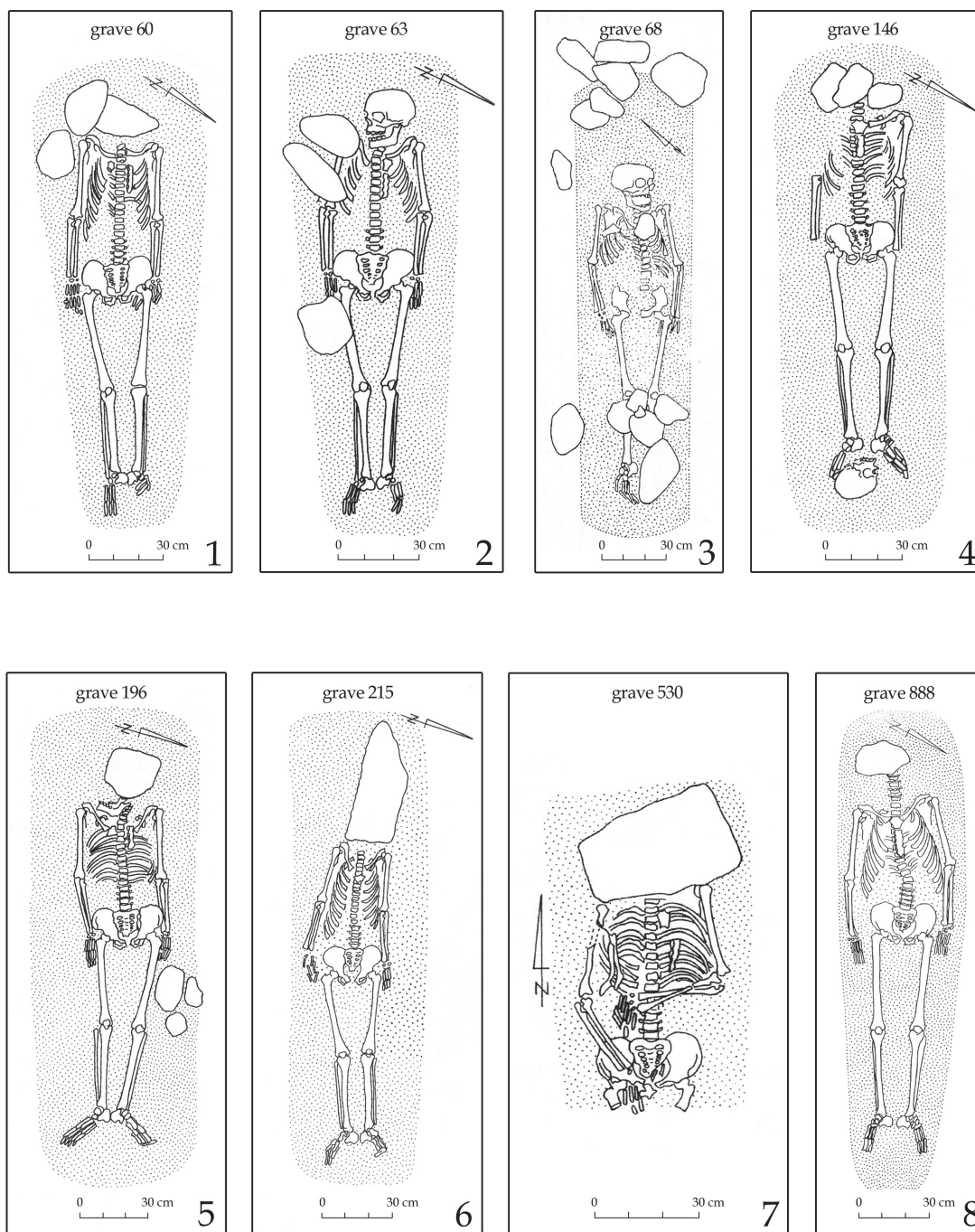
Fig. 3.6: Examples of graves from Cedynia where stones are placed directly on the deceased or substitute for the heads (redrawn after Gardeła 2015a, 120).
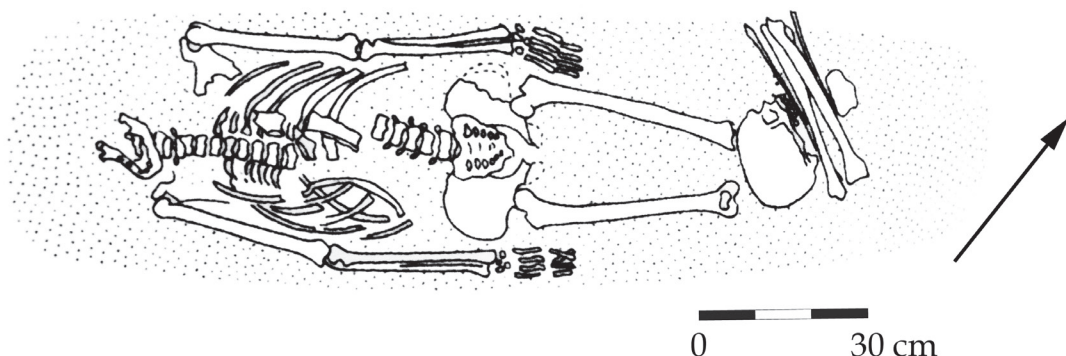
Fig. 3.7: Grave 789 from Cedynia (redrawn after Porzeziński 2008, 34).

(Porzeziński 2008, 16; 23; 34). It has been suggested that the woman was decapitated and that this was an act intended to prevent her from rising as a revenant (Porzeziński 2008, 16). Given the peculiar features of this grave, such an interpretation is not unlikely, but there is also an alternative possibility that the cranium belongs to another individual and that the grave represents an example of consecutive burial similar to those discussed earlier above. At the moment, and without aDNA analyses, it is impossible to determine if the cranium belongs to the female skeleton or not. What is particularly striking, however, is that – judging by the available site report – despite the displacement of the cranium, the mandible of the female remained intact in the head area. In order to separate the cranium from the mandible, the soft tissues must be in an advanced state of decomposition which lends support to the idea that the removal of the cranium occurred long after the woman had been laid in the grave – perhaps the cranium was ripped or lifted off rather than being cut off? All this makes a strong case for this grave having been reopened. Unfortunately, without further osteological analyses, not much more can be said about this curious case.

Several graves with evident traces of reopening have been discovered in an early medieval cemetery at Dębczyno in Western Pomerania (Sikorski 2000). Grave 1 held the remains of a mature woman (aged 45–50) and as many as three cuts were dug to access its contents (Fig. 3.8). The first was in the head area, and it was intended to gain access to the woman's head. The head was then removed and placed face down in another cut located above the chest and pelvis. A third cut was dug in the foot end of the grave. The acts of reopening led to a displacement of a number of objects originally buried with the deceased – among them were temple rings, a silver coin and an iron knife. It is uncertain whether anything was taken from the grave, but it seems that the main intention of those responsible was to remove the head/skull of the deceased. The violent and apparently rapid manner in which the reopening was conducted lends support to the interpretation that this case could indeed reflect an act intended to protect the living against a potential revenant. In order to make sure she would not return, she had to be decapitated post-mortem and, as we shall see below, there is good support for exactly such acts in Slavic ethnographic materials.

Grave 10 from Dębczyno displays another elaborate variant of reopening. It belonged to a female individual who was initially buried in a coffin or an earthen pit lined with wood. According to a reconstructed scenario of events provided by Sikorski (2000, 131–132), sometime after the funeral
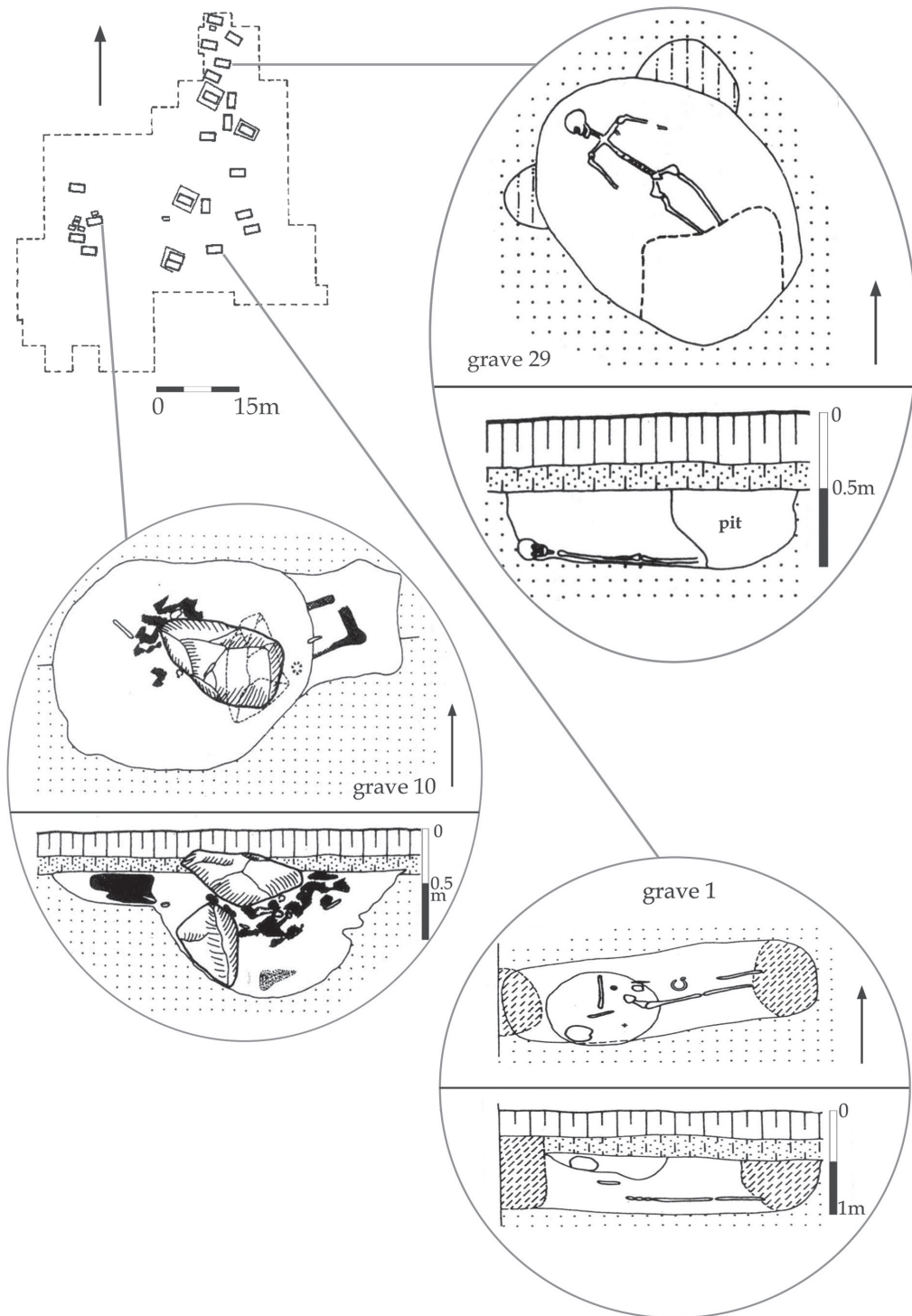
Fig. 3.8: Reopened graves from Dębczyno (redrawn after Sikorski 2000, 128–131).

a deep oval cut was dug and the woman's remains were removed together with some fragments of wood. However, only parts of the skeleton were taken and the lower limbs were left behind. The pit was then filled with a liquid substance containing calcium. Afterwards, a large granite stone was placed in the grave and the pit was filled with sand up to half its depth. The final acts involved starting a fire (as implied by charred wood remains discovered inside the pit), cremating the previously recovered bones *in situ* and ultimately covering them with a large pink sandstone.

The third reopened grave (no. 29) from Dębczyno belonged to an adult man who was aged between 25 and 35 when he died (Sikorski 2000, 130). At some point after the funeral a cut was dug in the foot end and the man's lower legs were removed. It is possible that in this instance the intention was to prevent an alleged revenant from walking or alternatively to acquire bones which could be reused or sold, for example as relics.

Overall, the cemetery at Dębczyno is exceptional as it contains several different variants of reopened graves which display features suggesting a rather negative approach towards the deceased. The acts of reopening were conducted in a clearly premeditated but somewhat disorderly and/or rapid manner and do not display the same care for careful removal and redeposition of the bones as seen in the instances examined in the previous section of this paper. In my view, this is the only site in Poland where an argument for reopening with the intention to maim and/or annihilate the dead can be sustained. Nevertheless, we should always acknowledge that the reasons for non-normative treatment of the dead may have been manifold or ambivalent. Some burials which look odd or violent to our eyes may signal completely inverse meanings – for example, religious devotion and piety or special care and affection towards the deceased (*cf.* Arcini 2009; Toplak 2015).

Grave disturbances in Polish ethnographic accounts

We have now examined various examples of grave reopenings from different areas of early medieval Poland. Most of these disturbances were intended to add further individuals to pre-existing graves and the vast majority display considerable care in handling and moving the remains of the initially buried individuals. This implies that the people responsible for these acts operated with respect and/or affection and that there were no negative undertones of such disturbances. Only the exceptional case of the cemetery at Dębczyno demonstrates different motivation of the reopeners, who probably intended to maim and/or annihilate individuals suspected of being revenants.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this paper, there are no contemporary textual sources that inform on the motivations which could have stood behind the acts of reopening graves in Polish cemeteries between the 10th and 13th centuries (for an extensive discussion of medieval textual sources from other cultural milieus, see Caciola 1996). However, there is a relatively broad corpus of ethnographic accounts which explain the intentions of such practices in early 20th-century Poland. Most of these accounts were collected and published in the works of prominent Polish ethnographers such as Adam Fischer (1921, 357), Henryk Biegeleisen (1930, 101), Kazimierz Moszyński (1934) and others, but due to linguistic barriers, they are largely unknown to international scholars. Therefore, it seems valuable to present some of them here and examine whether or not they could be used to explain some of the funerary phenomena observed during excavations of early medieval cemeteries (for more detailed analyses, see Stanaszek 2016; Gardeła 2017).

According to extant ethnographic accounts from Poland, graves of people who died a bad death were most often subject to reopening. Writing in the early 20th century, Biegeleisen (1930,

101) mentioned instances of reopening graves of suicides, turning their bodies prone, decapitating them and placing their severed heads face down. In other cases, when suicides were believed to cause post-mortem threat or terror, their bodies were exhumed and buried in a different location, far away from the village. It seems that the custom of reopening graves and turning the bodies of alleged revenants prone was particularly popular in south-east Poland and in the area of Lublin and Rzeszów (Baranowski 1981, 62). In some instances, however, the act of reopening, followed by decapitation of the corpse, did not suffice and the revenants were still believed to pose a threat to the society. To be completely sure the dead would not return, their bodies were exhumed once again and their limbs cut off and burned to ashes at the borders of the village (Udziela 1922, 154–155). In general, the main reasons for reopening graves which emerge from early 20th-century ethnographic accounts are those motivated by the fear of revenants.

In the light of an earlier survey of reopened graves from the early Middle Ages (Gardeła *et al.* 2015) and in the context of additional cases discussed in the present paper, it seems that late ethnographic materials can be used to illuminate and explain only some variants of early medieval reopenings, namely those which involved the removal of bones and/or their cremation – the violent nature of these acts (*e.g.* at Dębczyno) strongly suggests that they could have been conducted with anti-revenant intentions in mind. However, recently published re-evaluations of prone burials from the area of Poland (Gardeła 2015b; Gardeła 2017, 91–115) demonstrate explicitly that late ethnographic accounts have to be approached with considerable caution. In all cases of prone burials that have so far been discovered in Poland, it is clear that the dead were interred prone during the initial funeral, and not turned face down after an act of reopening stimulated by the fear of revenants. The same can be said about the majority of graves with traces of decapitation – the severing of the head seems to have occurred *before* committing the body to the ground and not after reopening the grave. Of course, it is not unlikely that in some instances the individuals lying in their graves in a prone position or with their heads decapitated were originally buried somewhere else and exhumed at a later time (as described in ethnographic sources) to be interred in a "deviant" manner, but this is impossible to verify with the methods that we have today. All this shows that we should be very careful in immediately labelling unusual burial phenomena as reflecting the fear of dangerous dead and in projecting 20th-century ethnographic accounts directly onto early medieval materials.

Conclusions

The final conclusion that arises from this study is that when the evidence for reopening graves in early medieval Poland is analysed systematically and in an interdisciplinary perspective, it appears that the main reason for these practices was not for robbery or protection against revenants, but rather to add consecutive bodies to pre-existing graves. Given the careful treatment of the bones and their respectful (re)deposition, as well as lack of traces of intrusive cuts or any other signs of rapid or violent behaviour which would point to robbery or anti-revenant practice, it is plausible to argue that these were socially sanctioned acts, perhaps performed by the relatives or friends of the deceased who knew where a particular grave was located and what it contained. The performance of such consecutive burials was probably dictated by strong bonds that had existed between the dead, who happened to pass away at different times and who could not be buried simultaneously.

We can speculate that the individuals buried in Dziekanowice, Komorowo, Wolin Młynówka and Złota Pińczowska were lovers, married couples, close friends or family members, but given

the current state of research and lack of specialist analyses of the osteological material (*e.g.* aDNA analyses), the identities and mutual relations between these people still remain a mystery. It is hoped, however, that this study will inspire scholars to examine these and other future discoveries of reopened graves in a more critical way than before and with the employment of various methods of scientific inquiry. Situating the Polish graves in a wider cross-cultural context could also bring very fruitful results and new ideas on the deeper meaning of grave disturbances in early medieval Europe.

Acknowledgements

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4. Disturbed relatives: post-burial practices among the nomadic Khazars of the Lower Volga (7th–8th centuries AD)

Irina Shingiray

Introduction: grave disturbances

In archaeological practice, the diverse post-burial treatments of the dead that often constituted a significant part of the extended mortuary process present a relatively new focus of research (*e.g.* Flerov 2007, 121; Nilsson Stutz 2008, 23; Klevnäs 2013). While lengthy funerary rites are well established for some periods, notably the European Neolithic, archaeologists working with other spatial and chronological contexts have often detected grave disturbances, but rarely attributed them to the agency of the relatives of the dead or to any intentional rites performed by a burying community (Aspöck 2008, 17, 23–24). Instead, these actions were typically ascribed to such agents as "robbers" or "rodents" (Flerov 2000 and 2007; Kruglov 2001, 413–415; Zhironkina and Tsitkovskaia 2005, 536; Klevnäs 2015, 157, 160). And because of the presumed distortion of the data acquired from these disturbed graves, such burials in many cases have been poorly (if at all) documented and studied, but more often declared and discarded as a loss of data (*e.g.* Flerov 2007; Klevnäs 2016, 456).

Meanwhile researchers have begun to pay closer attention to post-depositional taphonomic processes that are triggered by corporeal decay in burials and which often cause movement in the grave environment, independent of human intervention (Mant 1987; Roksandic 2002; Nilsson Stutz 2008; Duday 2009). This has allowed archaeologists to document the patterned nature of skeletal and sediment disturbances in interments, and thus to more securely recognise and acknowledge the phenomena which are the products of post-burial ritual actions, such as intentionally reopened graves and bone manipulations. As a result, researchers have started to recognise the value of these disturbed graves in their own right and to re-think death, funerary, post-funerary and commemorative activities as processes which often involved complex and multi-temporal ritual actions (Flerov 2007; Weiss-Krejci 2011; Tarlow and Nilson Stutz 2013; Aspöck 2015, 89; Hill and Hageman 2016b).

When it comes to the interpretation of these rituals, scholarly opinions diverge. According to Edeltraud Aspöck (2008, 28), European "Continental" archaeologists have stressed "fear of the dead" as the main reason for grave disturbances, whereas the Anglophone archaeological milieu preferred to invoke rites of ancestral veneration. From a modern rationalist vantage point, researchers rarely regarded post-burial ritual grave disturbances as a "norm", ascribing such graves to "revenants" or "deviants" – the walking dead and social outcasts (see Barber 1988; Murphy 2008; Blair 2009;

Reynolds 2009). This was often the case even when in some cemeteries the proportion of such burials represented a normative trait rather than a deviation (Kruglov 2003, 50; Aspöck 2008; 2011; 2015, 86). However, when archaeologists noted that some disturbed graves were overlaid by ritual debris and traces of sacrifices, they connected such practices with rites associated with ancestral cults (Parker Pearson 1999; Whitley 2002; Rakita *et al.* 2005; Rebay-Salisbury *et al.* 2010; Hill and Hageman 2016a).

In fact, cross-cultural anthropological research also suggests that rituals associated with the reopening of graves and diverse post-burial treatments of the significant dead have been very common around the world in the past and present (see Hertz 1960 [1907]; Humphreys and King 1981; Bloch and Parry 1982; Robben 2004; Graeber 2007 [1995]; Flerov 2000; 2007; 2013; *etc.*). The anthropologist Robert Hertz (1960 [1907], 41–42) noted that, despite the variability of cross-cultural practices, many people shared a concept of death as an extended liminal process during which the transition of the deceased's soul into the realm of their ancestors was mirrored through the physicality of its bodily decomposition, whereby the end of the soul's journey was marked by the reduction of the corpse to its bones – to its imperishable parts (see also Lincoln 1977, 247–248, 256; 1991, 14–15; Henninger 1987, 284–285). This notion of death as a journey was often materially articulated by placing various means of transportation (*e.g.* horses, boats, wagons and carts) into the graves for the departed in order to alleviate and hasten their final trip and to allay the living of their qualms and fears. Subsequently, relatives in mourning visited their dead and for culturally diverse reasons ritually reopened graves or tombs while the dead still lingered in the memories of the community (see for instance, Danforth 1982; Antonaccio 1995; Lucas 1996; Graeber 2007 [1995], 203; Flerov 2000, 9–10; 2007; Thomas 2000; Rebay-Salisbury *et al.* 2010; Devlin and Graham 2015; Hill and Hageman 2016b; *etc.*).

As a consequence of the full or partial skeletonisation of the corpses, people are able to move, rearrange, add, extract, rebury or crush the bones of their dead relatives or community members depending on their system of beliefs and values. These may include fear, magic, various environmental and practical considerations, and particular religious understandings of human creation, death, regeneration and personhood. No matter the ideology, these ritual actions seek to release the recent and potentially harmful dead into the otherworld by "dissolving away their identities" and assimilating them into the category of depersonalised and relatively benevolent ancestors (Thomas 2000; Graeber 2007 [1995], 212). During the liminal period of bodily decomposition, the curation and manipulation of the bones of the significant dead by the living that is usually carried out in a ritualistically patterned (and often archaeologically detectable) way may allow communities to re-establish and re-negotiate their relationships with those powerful deceased (Rakita 2009, 150; Devlin 2015; Hill and Hageman 2016b, 56).

This paper contributes to the topic of grave disturbances by focusing on a group of reopened burials from the 7th–8th centuries AD, which belonged to a community of Khazar nomads from the Lower Volga region (mainly from the modern-day Republic of Kalmykia, Russian Federation). My case study, based on evidence from previous excavations, aims to demonstrate that pastoral nomadic people also performed complex post-burial actions involving reopened graves, skeletal manipulations and multi-temporal post-burial rituals – practices that are often attributed exclusively to sedentary groups (Flerov 2000, 19; 2007, 190). Nomads periodically left their habitation sites following their annual pastoral cycle, but they returned and revisited their sacred places and ancestral

graves on a regular basis. Moreover, the nomads ritualised these sites since they represented spaces of nomadic political authority, identity and connectivity with their landscape and the community at large (Shingiray 2017, 120).

After a brief overview of the archaeological background on nomadic Khazar burials and prevalent interpretations of the disturbed graves in Russian archaeological scholarship, I will turn to my case study. By analysing a sample of graves from the Lower Volga region and supporting my findings with relevant textual sources, I will advocate an ancestor-focused approach as most suitable for understanding the post-burial performances and beliefs of the nomadic Khazars. I will stress some aspects of the materialisation of the nomads' relations and interactions with their dead, including the process of ancestralisation, as I focus on their post-burial practices: grave reopening, sacrifice, purification and memorialisation.

Archaeological background

The Khazar imperial confederation that dominated the Western Eurasian Steppe from the 7th through the 10th centuries AD consisted of many different nomadic and sedentary communities with different economies, beliefs, burial and post-burial practices in the vast territory from the Caucasus to the Middle Volga and from the Caspian to the Black seas (see Artamonov 1962; Golden 1980; 1992; Pletneva 1999). The ruling dynasty of the Khazar Empire and at least some elements of its nomadic elite splintered away from the First Turkic Empire that ruled the Eurasian Steppe from the middle of the 6th and into the 7th centuries AD prior to the emergence of the Khazar confederation. Consequently, nomadic Khazar beliefs, rituals and material culture were influenced by Inner and Central Asian cultural currents (Semenov 1988; Ivanov 2000, 7, 20; Ivanov and Kopylov 2001, 129; Kopylov and Ivanov 2007). Just like the Turks, the Khazars were regularly engaged in war, raids and trading activities, which allowed them to forge diverse political alliances with the neighbouring states and communities. It also sustained their access to the prestige goods that were necessary for the welfare of their polity based on the mechanism of wealth redistribution.

Research on the Khazar Empire experienced tremendous difficulties in the 20th century, not only because the topic was extremely politicised in the Soviet period (Pletneva 1999), but also because the main subjects were nomads, and the evolutionary Marxist paradigms that dominated the field were poorly suited for the study of nomadic empires (Shingiray 2012). Since Soviet scholars could not envision an empire that lacked an agricultural centre and that was ruled by nomads, archaeological research concentrated mainly on the settled regions – the imperial outliers and among tributary groups (Shingiray 2012). Therefore, in terms of the burial and post-burial practices of the diverse Khazar groups, the regions with predominantly sedentary populations, which left behind numerous relatively compact grave fields with catacomb, pit and niche-graves, are much better studied and understood archaeologically, especially the Northern Caucasus (*e.g.* Flerov 2000; 2007), the Middle Volga (*e.g.* Stashenkov 1995; Matveeva 1997; Bagautdinov *et al*. 1998) and the Don River watershed (*e.g.* Flerov 1993; 2007; Aksenov 1999; Zhironkina and Tsitkovskaia 2005).

By contrast the Khazar core territory, in particular the steppe region between the Lower Don and the Lower Volga rivers which was inhabited by communities of pastoral nomads and formed the backbone of the Khazar Empire, is poorly investigated. This region is characterised by dispersed kurgan graves, which were often interred in or next to older mounds which had been constructed

Fig. 4.1: Regions of concentration of nomadic disturbed graves from the Khazar period (the area in light grey represents graves of the Sokolovsky Type dated to the 7th–8th centuries which trend toward the Lower Don and Lower Volga interfluve and the area in dark grey represents the concentration of Oghuz type graves of the 9th–early 11th centuries in the Lower Volga steppe; the graves analysed in this chapter are marked by black dots: 1) Dzhangar-1981(31/2); 2) Idzhil-I-1981 (1/1); 3) Kermen Tolga-1979 (1/1); 4) Bolshoi Tsaryn-1977 (2/1 and 5/9); 5) Dzhangar-1985 (6/1); 6) Krivaia Luka-XXVII-1979 (5/1).

from the Bronze Age onwards and were located along the nomads' migration routes and near their seasonal camps. Kurgans – earthen mounds raised over one or more burials – rarely form concentrated cemeteries in that landscape. The dispersed nature of these kurgans (and the Khazar-period graves contained within them) contributes to the misleading archaeological impression of the nomadic Khazars as an "invisible community" (Shingiray 2012, 190). Moreover, these graves are usually identified, excavated and recorded only during salvage excavations and most often by non-specialists in medieval archaeology; thus, they remain poorly represented in archaeological publications and little analysed (Vlaskin and Il'iukov 1990, 138; Ivanov 2000, 4, 6; Ivanov and Kopylov 2001, 81; Kruglov 2003, 16; Bezuglov and Naumenko 2007, 74; Flerov 2007, 184; Chkhaidze 2013, 254).

In terms of spatial and temporal distribution, as it is currently understood, the nomadic graves of the Khazar period fall roughly into two groups (Fig. 4.1). The first chronological group, which dates predominantly to the 7th to 8th centuries AD and is provisionally called the Sokolovsky Type, gravitates to the steppe of the Lower Volga-Don interfluve (Vlaskin and Il'iukov 1990, 150; Ivanov 2000; Kruglov 2005; 2003, 13; Chkhaidze 2013, 253). The second group, known as the Oghuz Type, centres mainly on the steppe that surrounds the Lower Volga river in the north-western Caspian region, and dates from the 9th to the end of the 10th and beginning of the 11th centuries AD (Ivanov 2000, 23; Kruglov 2001; 2003). Although poorly researched, archaeological evidence strongly suggests that those communities were based on kinship organisation and adhered to various currents of religious beliefs linked to Tängriism, Mazdaism and various forms of animism (Pletneva 1999; Kruglov 2003; Shingiray 2007; 2017). In the course of the 9th–10th centuries, the introduction of Islamic religious rites gradually began to influence the material culture of these communities (Kruglov 2003, 16–17; Shingiray 2007; see also Golden 1992, 244).

Previous interpretations

Researchers working on Khazar burial archaeology in a variety of regions have long observed that the graves of this period were disturbed on a mass scale. But it was not until the archaeologist Valerii Flerov (1993; 2000; 2007), who has excavated extensively in the North Caucasus and the Don River regions and written several books dedicated to the topic of post-burial practices in the Khazar polity, that those disturbed graves became the focus of systematic scholarly attention. Flerov and other archaeologists who followed his lead argued that the Khazar-period grave disturbances found in large proportions at cemeteries in different regions from the Ukrainian steppe to the Volga-Don interfluve and from the Middle Volga to the North Caucasus were a result of deliberate ritual actions (*e.g.* Matveeva 1997; Aksenov 1999; Kruglov 2001; 2003). On the basis of detailed stratigraphic investigations, these researchers ruled out the possibility that robbers and rodents could have been responsible for disturbing the bulk of those graves. They observed, for instance, that some grave pit contours of disturbed burials had peculiar shapes that suggested careful and intentional re-entry of those graves by persons who were probably familiar with the original interments. They also noted that the stratigraphy and content of the secondary grave fill often included intentionally broken objects, such as ceramics, cauldrons, bows and other weapons, as well as charcoal, chalk and burned soil – namely the traces of purification rituals performed in a post-burial and post-grave re-entry context. Occasionally, disturbed graves were sealed with stones and wooden planks (when available), and eventually with layers of mound fill undisturbed by any subsequent actions.

In addition, Flerov (2007, 130–136) pointed out that these burials usually contained grave goods, some of which included items of gold, silver and other valuable materials, which would make the hypothesis of grave looting unsubstantiated.

Moreover, archaeologists noted the repeated patterns of post-burial skeletal manipulations within many of the disturbed graves of the Khazar period – a practice that manifested intentional ritual actions performed probably by kin groups on the remains of their deceased relatives: women, men, adults and children (Matveeva 1997, 53; Flerov 2000, 9, 70; Kruglov 2001, 409, 411). On the basis of numerous burial studies, Flerov (1993, 45; 2000, 13; 2007) demonstrated that such graves were often reopened soon after interment, with the parts or most of the skeleton disturbed or displaced before full skeletonisation had taken place, since some of the bones were still joined together. He also observed that post-burial removal of the feet was the most common practice, which he claims was performed in order to make the dead stay in the grave, while disturbance of the ribcage, especially its left side, the side of the heart, was another very common trait (2000, 12, 71). Other skeletal parts targeted during these rituals were hands (one or both), leg bones, vertebrae and the skull (with or without the mandible). Flerov (2000; 2007; 2013) and his followers (such as Matveeva 1997; Aksenov 1999; Kruglov 2001; 2003) attributed all these post-burial disturbances to rituals connected with the maiming of the dead.

Another widely seen post-burial practice, also interpreted as preventing the dead from walking and harming the community, was crossing the femurs or the lower leg bones of the skeletons (Flerov 2007, 112). Some researchers explain such practices as intended to confuse the dead, and others rely on religious prescriptions (for instance recommended among some Mazdean communities) that stress the unusual path that the dead have to travel into the otherworld and the desire to shorten that trip in order to minimise the pollution of the elements caused by the dead body (Meitarchiian 2001, 32; Zhironkina and Tsitkovskaia 2005, 542). This fear of the deceased and the potential harm, sickness and pollution that the decaying bodies were believed to be able to impose on the living (had the latter neglected to perform the preventive and purifying rituals) have been truly pervasive among pre-modern communities (Meitarchiian 2001, 145–146). For the same reason, it is well-known from numerous archaeological and ethnographic cases that people often cut the tendons on the feet and knees of their deceased (Vinogradova 1993; Levina 1996, 119; Flerov 2000, 13; Balabanova and Pererva 2006, 274; Mays *et al.* 2017). Flerov noted that people were especially fearful of those deceased who had died before their time (usually before 40 years of age), of an unnatural death, in childbirth or those who practiced magic – individuals who continued to maintain a link with the world of the living (2000, 13; also Vinogradova 1993).

In sum, Flerov and many other archaeologists who investigated Khazar burials fully embraced the interpretation of ritual reopening of disturbed graves connecting it with fear and maiming of the dead (Matveeva 1997; Aksenov 1999; Flerov 2000; 2007; Kruglov 2001; 2003). But can people's fear of revenants, deviants and pollutants alone explain the sheer number of disturbed graves left behind during the Khazar period? And what about such rituals among the nomadic people whose seasonal movements and changes in habitation places should have affected their ability to perform such rites if the need arose? In fact, maiming of the dead as a monocausal explanation for the disturbed graves found among the settled communities of the Khazar empire allowed archaeologists like Flerov (2000, 19; 2007, 190) to assume that those post-burial practices were reserved exclusively for the settled people and did not include nomadic groups. Ostensibly, poor archaeological coverage and understanding of the nomadic Khazar graves has contributed to such interpretations.

Flerov's supposition regarding nomads was however undermined after a substantial number of nomadic burials of the Oghuz Type (9th–11th centuries AD) from kurgans dispersed in the Khazar territory of the Lower Volga steppe were analysed. Up to 90% had been disturbed by patterned ritual intervention as a result of various post-burial activities (Kruglov 2001; 2003; Flerov 2007, 189–190). Evgenii Kruglov (2001, 408–409; 2003, 54–55) observed features in these graves that resembled those from the previous chronological period: the bodies were often turned and legs were crossed; some bones were scattered or removed. In some cases skulls were moved from their original position and turned upside down; in others, only the leg bones or the upper and the lower parts of the skeletons were disturbed. According to the author, the main parts of the skeleton that were ritually disturbed were the skull, the ribcage in the place of the heart, hands, leg bones and feet (Kruglov 2001, 413; 2003, 28). Kruglov (2003, 54) stressed that, for him, there was no doubt that the relatives of the deceased themselves disturbed the remains of their dead in the graves – and this was often done prior to the complete skeletonisation. It is very possible, he noted, that initially the graves were not filled with much earth, otherwise it would have been difficult to penetrate the fill without breaking any bones; and considering that the bones were usually located at the same level at the bottom of the grave and rarely scattered "chaotically", the reopening took place before the tissues connecting the bones had disintegrated (Kruglov 2003, 54).

In his interpretation of motivations for the Oghuz grave interventions, Kruglov (2003, 52) followed Flerov, explaining the ritual as "the maiming of the dead". He also noted (2003, 50, 52, 57) that even though by the 10th century the Oghuz nomads were converting to Islam, the ritual of the maiming of the dead seems to have intensified and became a normative post-burial performance. However, he suggested that while disturbances were ubiquitous in the common Oghuz graves, in the burials of their military aristocracy – namely those male graves which contained horses and weapons – it was practiced more rarely. In spite of his close following of Flerov in his interpretation of the disturbed graves (as an outcome of the maiming of the dead), Kruglov's detailed study of the nomadic Oghuz type burials is very valuable for understanding the funerary and post-funerary ritual processes among the nomads of the Khazar Empire, and it provides a diachronic framework for understanding ritual and religious transformation from the 7th–8th to the 9th–10th/11th centuries. Moreover, this new research in turn compelled archaeologists to pay closer attention to the post-burial practices of the Khazar nomads from the previous chronological phase – namely from the 7th–8th-century Sokolovsky Type burials, a sample of which is discussed below.

Sokolovsky Type burials

At present, the Khazar Sokolovsky Type graves, which date to the 7th–8th centuries AD, remain largely unpublished and have not been subjected to a systematic study regarding post-burial practices. Nevertheless, a preliminary survey of these graves predominantly from the Lower Don region suggests that at least 75% were disturbed (Ivanov 2000, 17; Ivanov and Kopylov 2001, 126), and in some areas this figure is close to 100% (see Klein *et al*. 1972; Vlaskin and Il'iukov 1990, 137, 147; Maksimenko 2002, 40; Kruglov 2003, 28; Aleinikov and Kuz'min 2013; Chkhaidze 2013; Il'iukov 2013; Larenok 2013). Recent archaeological research and a reassessment of old reports and sporadic publications of these burials in different regions continue to reveal that the nomadic graves dating to this phase of the Khazar Empire were disturbed *en masse* following the ritual patterns described above. Some differences in burial construction, however, are important to note.

Overall, these burials are most commonly represented by individual male and female inhumations in niche-graves placed under kurgans. A niche-grave consisted of an excavated grave pit (usually about 2 m deep) plus a grave niche of roughly the same horizontal parameters as the pit, which was typically dug out at the southern side of the grave pit and partially lower than the pit. The bottom of the grave pit then served as a step into the grave niche below and as a support for a wooden separator that was often used to block the niche with the deceased in it from the earth fill of the grave pit. As a rule, the deceased was placed at the bottom of the niche on some organic bedding and was accompanied by a tacked horse or more often its synecdochic body parts: the skull with horse bridles, legs, stirrups and sometimes a saddle. Such remains of tacked horses are usually interpreted as "transporters" or "mediators between the worlds" (Vlaskin and Il'iukov 1990, 152; Ivchenko 1999, 68). Moreover, a coin was often put in the mouth of the dead – a rite that also had to do with the notion of the "travelling soul" after death (Meitarchiian 2001, 123).

A "last meal", indicated by the bones of the assorted body parts of one or several dismembered sheep or horses, was placed together with a knife and a ceramic pot and/or a pitcher inside the burial niche next to the deceased. In many cases, the buried were supplied with grave goods such as amulets, items of personal adornment: buckles, belt sets or plaques, earrings, rings; and also weapons: bows, arrowheads, quivers and occasionally swords; and in some cases dice, coins, beads, mirrors, spindle-whorls and sheep knucklebones (*astragali*) (Fedorov-Davydov 1984; Vlaskin and Il'iukov 1990; Ivanov 2000; Kruglov 2005, 428–429). Overall, the nomadic dead of the Khazar period were buried with a relatively stable set of grave goods – objects that were neither too numerous nor too rich on average in terms of the content of precious metals of silver and gold (Flerov 2000, 84; Ivanov 2000, 19–20).

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of these Sokolovsky burials is the presence of a ditch, which could be square, circular or (rarely) rectangular in shape, and which was dug out in the earth surface prior to the construction of the grave proper. After careful stratigraphic observation, several archaeologists have noted that a ditch was usually dug out first to mark a ritual space that was later used for commemorative activities that often included fire burning and animal sacrifices (Fedorov-Davydov 1984, 80; Vlaskin and Il'iukov 1990, 150; Kopylov and Ivanov 2007, 119–120, 127; Chkhaidze 2013, 246). At some point after a body was interred, a number of sheep and/or horses were sacrificed and their remains were put into or near the ditch that surrounded the grave, while the ditch was consecrated or purified by the use of fire. Subsequently, the ditch was filled in and covered up together with a grave by an earth mound (kurgan) or by additional mound fill if the grave was constructed in the already extant kurgan. The mound fill often consisted of several layers of soil and organic matter: these were structured deposits, which were in some cases clearly detectable in stratigraphy and which were probably implemented during several ritual stages. This process and its temporality have been archaeologically verified in a number of cases due to the distinctive stratigraphic sequence left behind by the above-described burial and post-burial actions (Fedorov-Davydov 1984; Vlaskin and Il'iukov 1990; Ivanov 2000, 19; Maksimenko 2002; Flerov 2007, 184; Kopylov and Ivanov 2007; Chkhaidze 2013). In addition, well preserved stratigraphic deposits in the mound fill demonstrate that these Khazar nomadic graves were reopened prior to the construction of the actual kurgans since the latter are devoid of any traces of post-constructional disturbance due to grave re-entry.

As research on these poorly investigated burials of the Sokolovsky Type continues, it is increasingly evident that the practice of disturbing or reopening graves was not reserved for the

sedentary communities in the Khazar period, but was also a normative ritual process among the nomads. And in spite of various challenges associated with a study of dispersed nomadic graves in the steppe, it is important to understand the nomads' intentions in engaging in such post-burial practices – whether they were related to kinship, ancestor cults, religion, material motives or fear of the dead. Monocausal explanations for such actions are hardly convincing. Instead, more nuanced interpretations are needed based on archaeological data – such as kurgan and grave stratigraphy and content, ritual features, sacrifices, skeletal treatments and remains of grave goods – all kinds of evidence that relates to the materialisation of the nomads' interactions with their deceased relatives and other significant individuals in their community. These nuances, in turn, serve as a basis for more meaningful interpretations.

The materiality of death reveals the dynamics of how the living redefine their relationships with the dead, how they control the bodily transformation of the deceased and "stage" the death process (Nilsson Stutz 2008, 23; Nilsson Stutz and Tarlow 2013, 5–6). Such interactions with the dead take different ritual (burial and post-burial) forms and actions (Fahlander and Oestigaard 2008, 12) that include the reopening of graves, the manipulation of the remains of the dead, feasting, offerings, sacrifices, purification rites and memorialisation (see also Rakita *et al.* 2005; Hill and Hageman 2016a). Most of these practices are directly connected with ancestral cults, but at the same time they tend to articulate social meanings, tensions and renegotiations of power involved in the death process.

Below, I present a sample of the disturbed graves of the Sokolovsky Type from Kalmykia and focus on some archaeological nuances that manifest people's preoccupation with their dead relatives including multi-temporal manipulation, memorialisation and ancestralisation of the deceased. While I do not reject Flerov's opinion that the fear of the dead was an important motive for post-burial grave re-entry, I would like to stress that his opinion reflects only one side of the complex relationship of the living with their dead which can be demonstrated on the basis of the archaeological data. Although Flerov (2000, 14; 2007, 191) perceived many post-burial practices as kin-related localised affairs that were especially pronounced in the communities who revered their ancestral dead (2000, 14; 2007, 191), he did not see how ancestral rituals and those related to the maiming of the dead could be compatible. Flerov (2007, 194) concluded that due to the reverence of the ancestral dead relatives by the living, and their mutual obligations, the only reason that prompted the living to disturb such graves could have been atavistic fear of the dead (2000, 14). Alternatively, I would propose that ancestral veneration and fear of the dead are not mutually exclusive but interrelated beliefs, and so are the ritual practices associated with them. I argue that the archaeological evidence from the graves below demonstrates that people spent considerable energy and resources staging the death of their deceased relatives. They also performed various burial and post-burial rituals which can be linked to fear and veneration of their ancestors, as well as to the renegotiation of power with the latter.

Disturbed graves of the Khazar nomads from the Lower Volga steppe (7th–8th centuries)

The majority of the known burials of the Khazar period from the Lower Volga steppe were unearthed in the 1970s–80s as a result of a number of Soviet hydro- and agricultural development projects that demanded rapid salvage excavations in that remote region. Therefore, the quality of their archaeological record is uneven. Since then, relatively little archaeological research has been carried

out in that territory, which is poorly suited for agriculture and other types of land use. Thus, the older rescue excavations are often the only information we have regarding these graves. And the archaeological information presented here is derived mainly from such older preliminary reports, which, with very few exceptions, remain unpublished.

    Another major issue is that hardly any osteological studies have been carried out on skeletal remains from these burials. Although the general preservation of the bones is very good in those deep graves dug out in the loess soil in the arid steppe environment (see also Roksandic 2002, 108), in many cases the osteological material excavated several decades ago has not been adequately or at all preserved and stored for further examination (see Balabanova and Pererva 2006, 275). This, for instance, precludes any determinations of post-burial manipulations that could have left corresponding markings on the bones of the dead, since such data are not available. It also limits information on age, sex and gender of the deceased. Most of the cases below are said to belong to males – mostly representatives of the military elite – on the basis of gendered goods contained in those burials. However, without more rigorous studies of those skeletons, such an assumption has to be treated with caution. The absence of corresponding female graves in that region remains puzzling, and could be a result of the small sample size of such excavated graves.

Dzhangar-1981 kurgan 31 grave 2

This Khazar period niche-grave (Fig. 4.2) was interred in an already extant kurgan – one in a group of 37 burial mounds investigated in 1981 during a salvage excavation (Shilov and Tsutskin 1981, 63–68). The mound (0.4 m high and 10–11 m in diameter) contained a broken ceramic pot and horse bones in its fill. In the southern sector of the kurgan close to its centre, a burial pit of amorphous shape was excavated revealing a Khazar period grave 2, which was dug into an earlier Sarmatian-period grave 1, partially destroying it. The grave was surrounded by a sub-square ditch (0.25 m deep), which, as shown on the kurgan profile image, was filled in with soil that differed from the mound fill. The grave pit fill contained fragments of ceramic vessels, bronze and iron objects, pieces of wood, a shell and a sheep bone. There were horse skull and leg bones, an iron stirrup and sheep skull and leg bones placed at the bottom of this grave pit, and below its south-east wall, a burial niche was constructed, which contained a skeleton of a male individual (Fig. 4.3) (at the depth of 2.05 m), a portion of a sheep skeleton including ribs and vertebrae, a ceramic pot and a ceramic spindle-whorl near the head of the dead. A spindle-whorl is usually a "gendered" artefact in the burial contexts of the nomadic Khazars, and its placement near the head of the deceased male, most likely suggests its ritual use as an amulet. The man's skeleton was in a supine position with arms and legs placed along the body, and with right forearm moved slightly away from the body. The left hand and the right foot were missing. The ribcage was significantly disturbed especially on the left side with ribs scattered in disarray; at the same time, the spine vertebrae, although twisted to the right side, apparently remained intact. It appears that before full skeletonisation occurred, the corpse was slightly turned to its right side – the same direction that its face was oriented. As a result of this move, or due to the deliberate disturbance of the left ribcage, the body was separated from the bones of the left arm which remained *in situ*, but unnaturally distanced from the rest of the skeleton – although this displacement could have also taken place due to the taphonomic processes. Even though the stratigraphy of the grave fill was not recorded in detail, the amorphous shape of the grave pit at the top, the presence of the artefacts and pieces of wood in the grave fill, together with the skeletal disturbances characteristic of ritual activities in reopened graves in other burials of
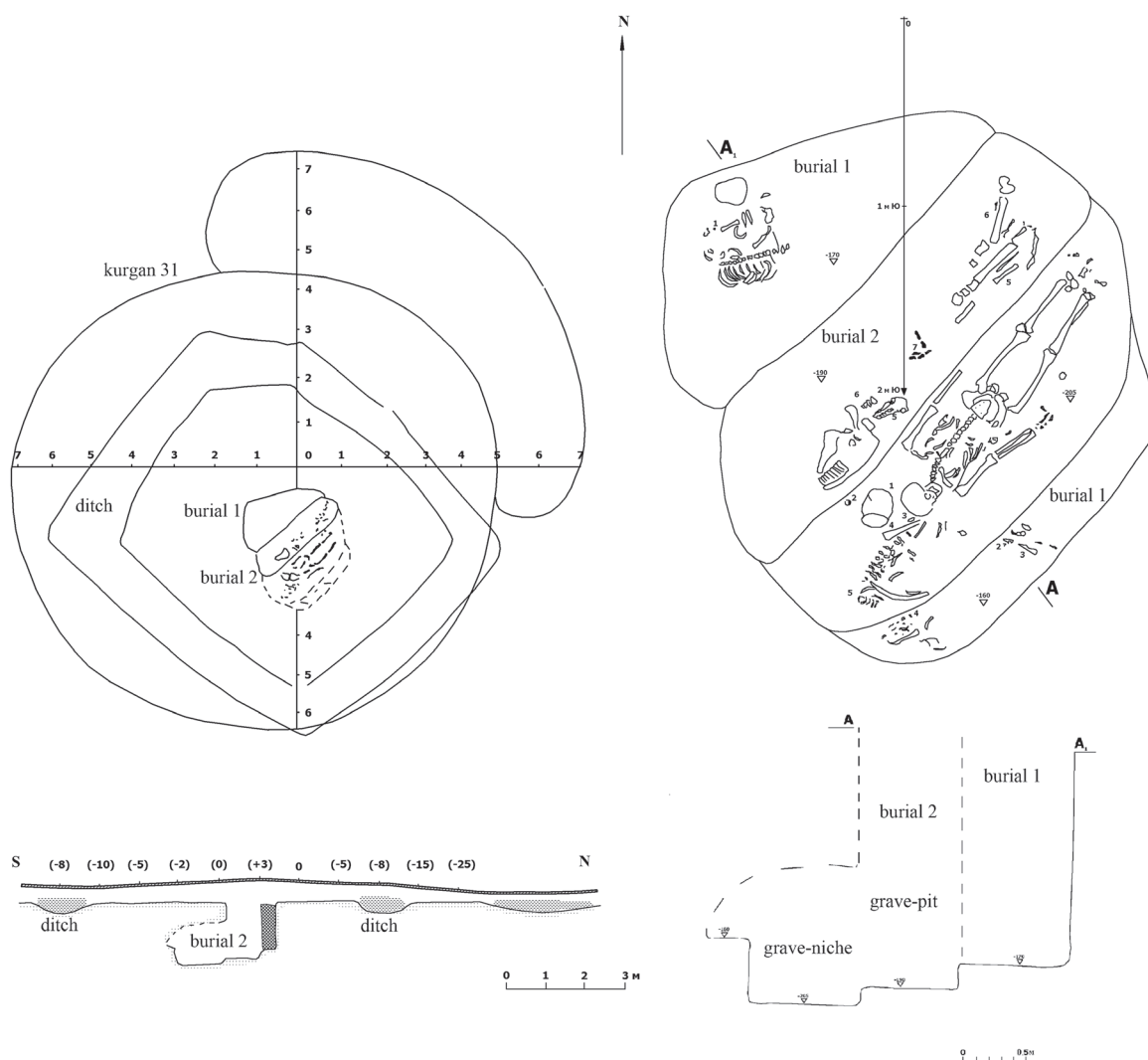
Fig. 4.2: Plans and profiles of kurgan 31 and grave 2 from the Dzhangar-1981 kurgan group (modified after Shilov and Tsutskin 1981).

this type, strongly suggest ritual re-entry and disturbance of the deceased man in this grave, which was subsequently refilled and sealed with a mound fill. The multi-temporal ritual deposits in the kurgan-, ditch-, and the grave fill, some of which may attest to sacrificial and feasting activities, suggest that the nomads were involved in extended post-burial activities at the grave of this man, whose age has unfortunately not been determined.

Idzhil-I-1981 kurgan 1 grave 1

This burial (Fig. 4.4) was excavated during the same year and the same salvage project as the previous one, but in the nearby site of Idzhil (Shilov and Tsutskin 1981, 85–88). Under a small mound (0.45 m

high and 9.5–10 m in diameter), which
contained no finds in its fill, and near its
centre, there was a single burial pit oriented
south-west–north-east and surrounded by a
circular ditch (0.6–0.7 m deep). In the grave
fill, there were fragments of animal bones
and iron objects, horse teeth, a human rib
at different levels; below, there was a frag-
mented horse skull and fragments of iron
stirrups and horse bits, bone plaque pieces
with ornament and without it, iron plaque, a
bronze buckle, fragments of sheep skull and
jaw; down below (at the depth of 1.76 m),
there were more animal bones found next to
a human skull (Fig. 4.5), and below those (at
the depth of 1.82 m), a piece of ornamented

Fig. 4.3: Photo of grave 2 in kurgan 31 from the Dzhangar-1981 kurgan group (Photo: Evgenii Tsutskin).
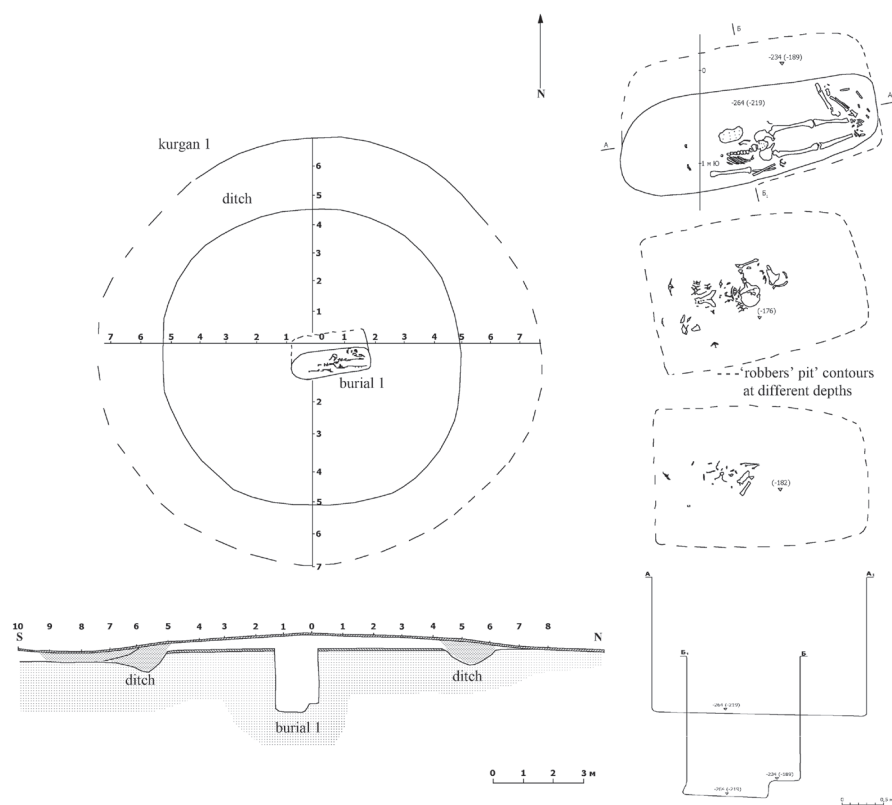

Fig. 4.4: Plans and profiles of kurgan 1 and grave 1 from Idzhil-I-1981; the grave plan is recorded at several depths and the dashed contour marks the outline of the secondary intrusion pit (modified after Shilov and Tsutskin 1981).

bone plaque for a bow and an iron arrowhead were located near a human scapula, scattered animal bones and fragments of iron and bronze objects, including a bronze seal-ring. In the grave fill, there was also a bone amulet with a hole made for an attachment. At the bottom of the grave (at the depth of 2.19 m), there was the rest of the human skeleton in a supine position with extended legs and the right arm (Fig. 4.6). The left arm was missing with only finger bones left *in situ*, but in the place of the arm, there was a soil stain with traces of oxidised bronze. The right humerus had traces of oxidised iron. To the north (left) of the left tibia, there were horse legs with hooves *in situ* and long bones of some small animal. Although the authors of these excavations did not specify in their textual description of this burial that it was robbed, the text in the legend of the plan image of this burial pit shows the contours of the "robbers' pit" in the upper part of the grave. Judging from the plans and photos of this burial, the grave was initially constructed as a typical niche-grave, whereby a grave pit was dug out and an oval-shaped niche was constructed in the southern wall at the bottom of the pit. A human body was placed in the burial niche (an oval outline of which is clearly visible in the southern part of the grave pit in the plan) and the horse remains were put at the bottom of the grave pit in a position slightly higher than the niche. During the subsequent grave re-entry, or "robbery" according to the authors, a secondary intrusion pit (marked by a dashed

Fig. 4.5: Photo of grave 1 at the depth of 1.76 m from the top level of the grave fill in the kurgan 1 from Idzhil-I-1981 (Photo: Evgenii Tsutskin).

Fig. 4.6: Photo of grave 1 at the bottom level (2.19 m depth) where the skeleton was found in the burial niche in the kurgan 1 from Idzhil-I-1981 (Photo: Evgenii Tsutskin).

contour line on the grave plan) was dug out in the original grave fill, and the upper part of the human skeleton and of horse bones were significantly disturbed. Some human skeleton bones went missing, such as the left arm; the left rib cage was largely disturbed; and the skull, the shoulder blades, as well as one or more ribs were moved upwards within the secondary grave fill and scattered in disarray, which indicates that the human body was completely skeletonised by then. A fractured horse skull together with some horse bones and a human rib were also located in the grave fill more than half a metre above the actual burial at the bottom of the pit and in the niche. It is possible that the grave intruders took some objects from this grave, which could be indicated by the bronze oxidised stain in the place of the missing left arm, but it is also possible that the bronze object deteriorated *in situ*,

or that this object was extracted from this burial together with the missing arm. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the actions of the grave intruders had to do with ritual practices, because the disturbed grave was filled back in with the burial soil with traces of objects in it, including the amulet, and the horse skull was placed in the fill after which it was probably ritually smashed or fractured.

Kermen Tolga-1979 kurgan 1 grave 1

This small kurgan (Fig. 4.7; 0.15–0.2 m high and 10 m in diameter) was one of 34 mounds excavated as a result of a salvage project in 1979 (Tsutskin 1979, 7–18). The kurgan contained a single burial located in its western sector. Under the mound fill, at the level of the buried soil, a sub-rectangular grave pit was located, which contained a dark circular ashy feature (40 cm in diameter), which suggested some ritual use of fire. Below this feature, 0.7 m into the grave fill, the excavating team discovered a human phalanx, and at the depth 0.9 m, there was another phalanx. At the depth of 1 m, the grave fill contained a sheep vertebra. At the bottom of the burial pit a grave niche was found which contained the skeleton of a mature male in supine position whose legs and arms were placed along the body (Fig. 4.8). The male's body was slightly turned to his
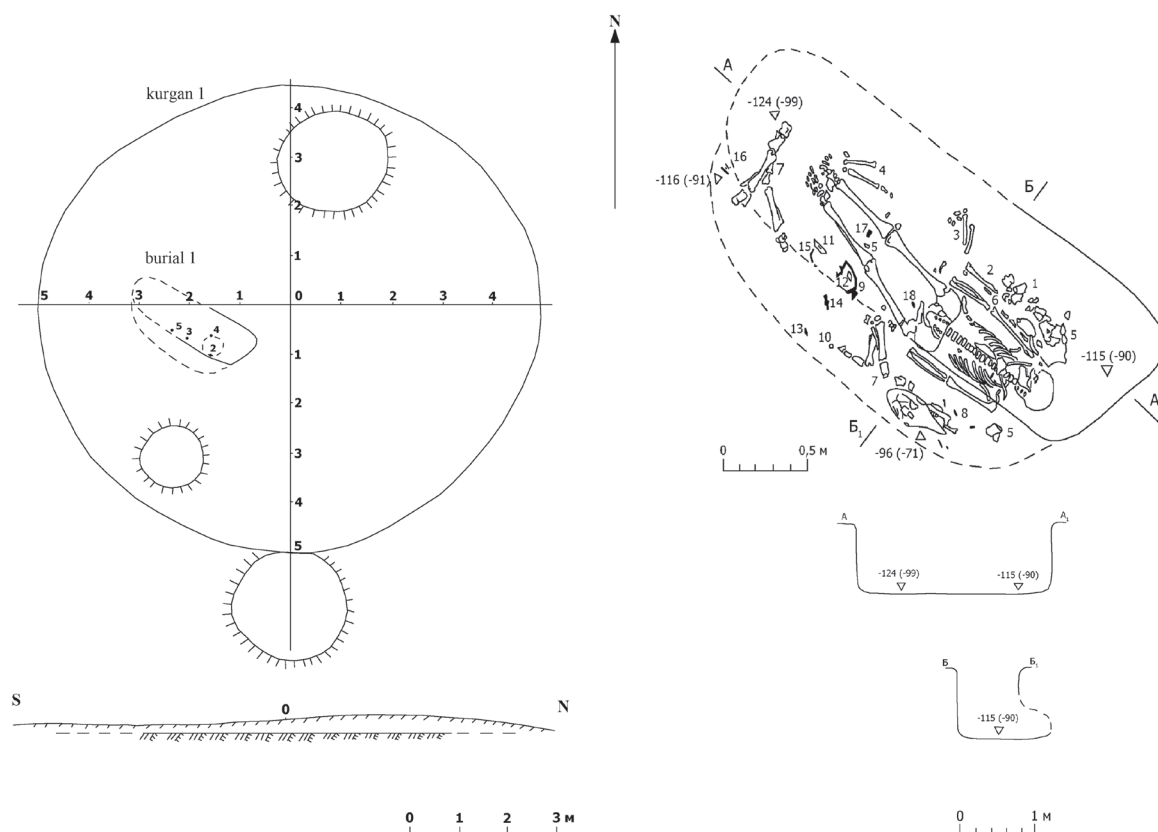

Fig. 4.7: Plans and profiles of kurgan 1 and grave 1 from the Kermen Tolga-1979 kurgan group (modified after Tsutskin 1979).

right side, and his lower spine was twisted to the left. The author of the report noted that perhaps this disturbance could have occurred due to "rodents". The left hand of the skeleton was absent, and the bones of his right hand were not *in situ*. The feet were drawn together, and the phalanges and metatarsals of both feet were pointing straight down. This unnatural position of the feet is often interpreted as a deliberate ritual undercutting of ligaments, which was mentioned above (Levina 1996, 119; Balabanova and Pererva 2006, 274). To the right of the male skeleton, there were bones of a dismembered body of a sheep, an iron knife and a broken ceramic vessel, the main part of which was

Fig. 4.8: Photo of grave 1 in kurgan 1 from the Kermen Tolga-1979 kurgan group (Photo: Evgenii Tsutskin).

placed on the right in front of the man's face, but other vessel fragments were located on the left side of the man's head near his left shoulder. On the left side (south-west) of the male, there was a horse skull (with iron bits) and leg bones; the front legs of the horse were to the south of the man's left femur, and the hind legs were to the north-west of the human feet; several fragments of iron stirrups and bone plaques, a round iron buckle, and an iron arrowhead were placed in the space between the front and hind legs of the horse. The horse leg bones were *in situ* (deposited while still connected by tendons and/or flesh), but both pairs of legs were placed in a way that they were slightly crossed – namely one was on top of the other. Since the stratigraphy of this grave was poorly visible, it was not recorded as a profile plan. However, the human phalanges and animal bones present in the grave fill, which was sealed on the top with a layer of grave soil saturated with ash, suggests that after a burial disturbance, a ritual action was performed in order to consecrate or purify the grave. The characteristically twisted spine, manipulated feet, and the missing hands of the skeleton, together with a fragmented vessel scattered around the head of the dead, follow the pattern of other disturbed graves of this type, and testify to the ritual performance of post-burial actions that involved body manipulation, animal sacrifices and purification.

Bolshoi Tsaryn-1977 kurgan 2 grave 1 and kurgan 5 grave 9

Among a group of kurgans excavated near Bolshoi Tsaryn in 1977, there was a small mound 2 (Fig. 4.9; 0.3 m high and 16 m in diameter) which contained a niche-grave in its centre oriented north-east–south-west and surrounded by a ditch dug out at the level of the buried soil at the distance of 4–5 m away from the central burial (Tsutskin 1978, 4–13). Along the perimeter of the ditch, mainly below the buried soil, there were numerous concentrations of sheep and bovine bones and a ceramic fragment; and in the eastern sector of the ditch, there were 11 horse skulls deposited without mandibles, probably as a funerary sacrifice. The grave pit had an amorphous shape at the top and was filled with mixed soil which contained a ceramic fragment. At the bottom of the grave pit (2.37 m deep) in the area of transition from the grave pit into a burial niche, there was an accumulation of blackish soil with traces of either ash or rotted organic material. The burial niche (3.27 m
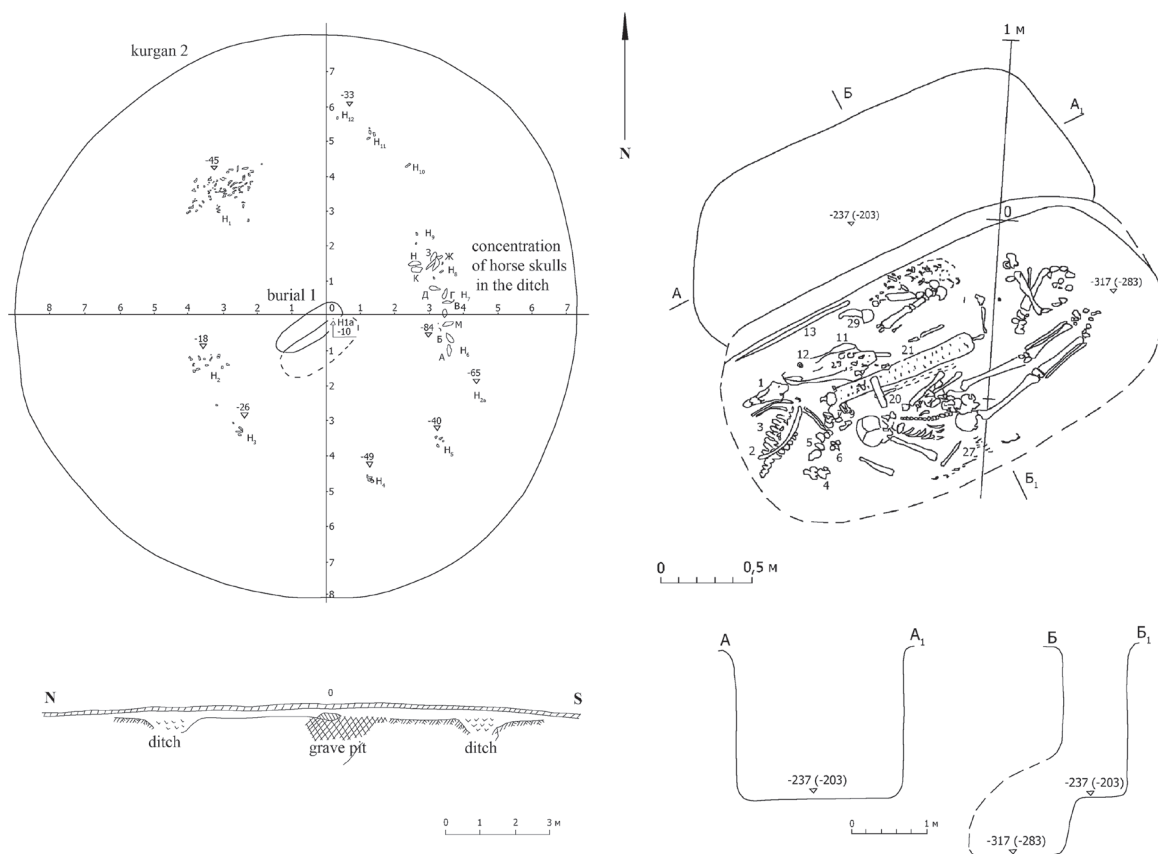
Fig. 4.9: Plans and profiles of kurgan 2 and grave 1 from the Bolshoi Tsaryn-1977 kurgan group (modified after Tsutskin 1978).

deep) contained a skeleton of a young male in a supine position (Fig. 4.10), whose skull was turned on its right side and separated from the spine that was bent to the left side. The author of the excavation suggested that perhaps initially there could have been a pillow placed under the deceased man's head, which, when decayed, caused the skull to separate from the rest of the body. Considering the distorted position of this skeleton, this hypothesis is unlikely. It looks like the skeleton was deliberately disturbed before the major defleshing of the body had occurred, while the skull with its still attached mandible was separated from

Fig. 4.10: Photo of grave 1 in kurgan 2 from the Bolshoi Tsaryn-1977 kurgan group (Photo: Evgenii Tsutskin).

the rest of the body. Although significantly bent and twisted, the spine and the right side of the ribcage remained more or less intact, in contrast, the left ribcage and the clavicle bones were completely disturbed, mixed and left in disarray (due to "rodents", according to the author). The right humerus was located under the jawbone of the deceased, and the forearm bones were displaced (also due to rodents, according to the author): the radius was perpendicular to the humerus and the ulna was to the south of the skull. The left scapula was in a vertical position; the left humerus was displaced; the ulna was found parallel to the humerus and the radius was pointing toward the stomach; in the area of

Fig. 4.11: Detail from grave 1 in kurgan 2 from the Bolshoi Tsaryn-1977 kurgan group (Photo: Evgenii Tsutskin).

the stomach, several phalanges were found; the left side of the pelvis was elevated. The legs were *in situ*, but the feet bones were disturbed (by "rodents", as once again noted by the author). To the west of the human skull, there was a sheep skull, the lower portion of the horse spine with some ribs, the lower portion of a sheep spine and a fragmented ceramic pot with a vertically placed sheep femur and iron knife. The skull of the horse with horse bits in the mouth was placed east of the sheep skull and over a pair of sheep legs. To the left (north) of the human skeleton, there were 2 more sheep legs, a birch bark quiver, an iron arrowhead, an iron battle axe, a long wooden object and fragments of leather footwear, fragments of other iron objects which probably belonged to the remains of stirrups, and a saddle located next to a pair of crossed horse legs. Another pair of horse legs (Fig. 4.11), which were also deliberately crossed, were located next to the man's lower legs. Under the skeleton and north-west to it, there were the remains of a wooden structure or a hollowed out log in which the deceased was placed and one vertical side of which was found along the entrance to the burial niche. This burial has some typical traces of ritual reopening and disturbance: the grave pit had an amorphous shape and contained artefacts, the vessel in the grave was fragmented, the human spine was bent and twisted and the skull was separated, only the left side of the ribcage – the side of the heart – was disturbed, the hands were missing, the arm and feet bones were scattered, and after re-entry, the niche was either closed off with wood or a purification-by-fire ritual was performed in the grave pit after the skeleton had been disturbed. The ritual commemorative activities at this grave of a young male warrior (who died prematurely) were multi-stage and truly impressive events as manifested by the numerous horse, sheep and bovine sacrifices and feasting activities, the traces of which were found as ritual features and deposits in and near the ditch and in the grave. The acts of mandible removal from the horse skulls deposited at the ditch of the mound suggest a complex and multi-temporal ritual performance which was staged after this young man's death.

In this Bolshoi Tsaryn group of kurgans, archaeologists also excavated the largest kurgan 5 (1.4 m high and 40–46 m in diameter), which was constructed in the Bronze Age and contained 10 burials, one of which, burial 9 (Fig. 4.12), belonged to the Khazar period (Tsutskin 1978, 24–25, 29–31). The kurgan fill was full of animal bones and ceramic sherds, which clustered in
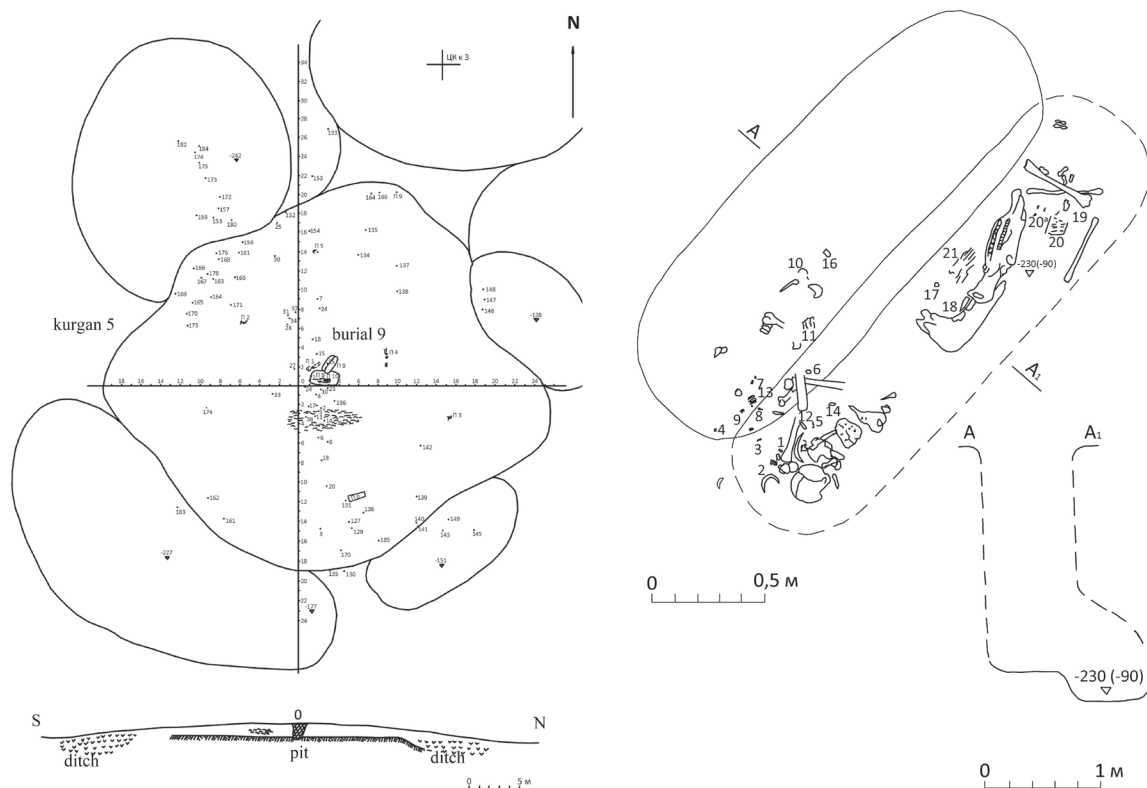
Fig. 4.12: Plans and profiles of kurgan 5 and grave 9 from the Bolshoi Tsaryn-1977 kurgan group (modified after Tsutskin 1978).

the centre, in the north-west sector of the mound, and in its ditches. The Khazar-period niche-grave was dug out in the centre of the kurgan (damaging the northern side of an extant Bronze Age burial). The niche of the grave (2 m long and 2.3 m deep) was oriented north-east-south-west and located on the south-east side of the grave pit. The fill of the latter contained a mix of human and animal bones along with fragments of wood and iron starting at a depth of 0.1–0.15 m all the way to the bottom. The grave was severely disturbed. The grave niche contained two main clusters of human and horse skeletal remains: the south-east side of the niche contained a skull of a mature male and one of his femurs (to the north), fragments of wood and iron (including a horse bit) and the crossed bones of horse legs at the boundary of the grave niche and the pit. The north-east part of the niche contained the rest of the male's leg bones, some of which were in a crossed position with the phalanges scattered around; it also contained a horse skull with some bronze oxidisation (probably from horse tack decorations), a bone buckle, a birch quiver, tanged iron arrowheads and fragments of wood. The archaeologists hypothesised that this burial was disturbed during the installation of a geodetic marker at the top of this kurgan – the highest in the group; yet there was no sign of such a marker *in situ*, although there was a large pit (1.5 m deep) in the centre of the kurgan. The cause of this disturbance is therefore difficult to ascertain,
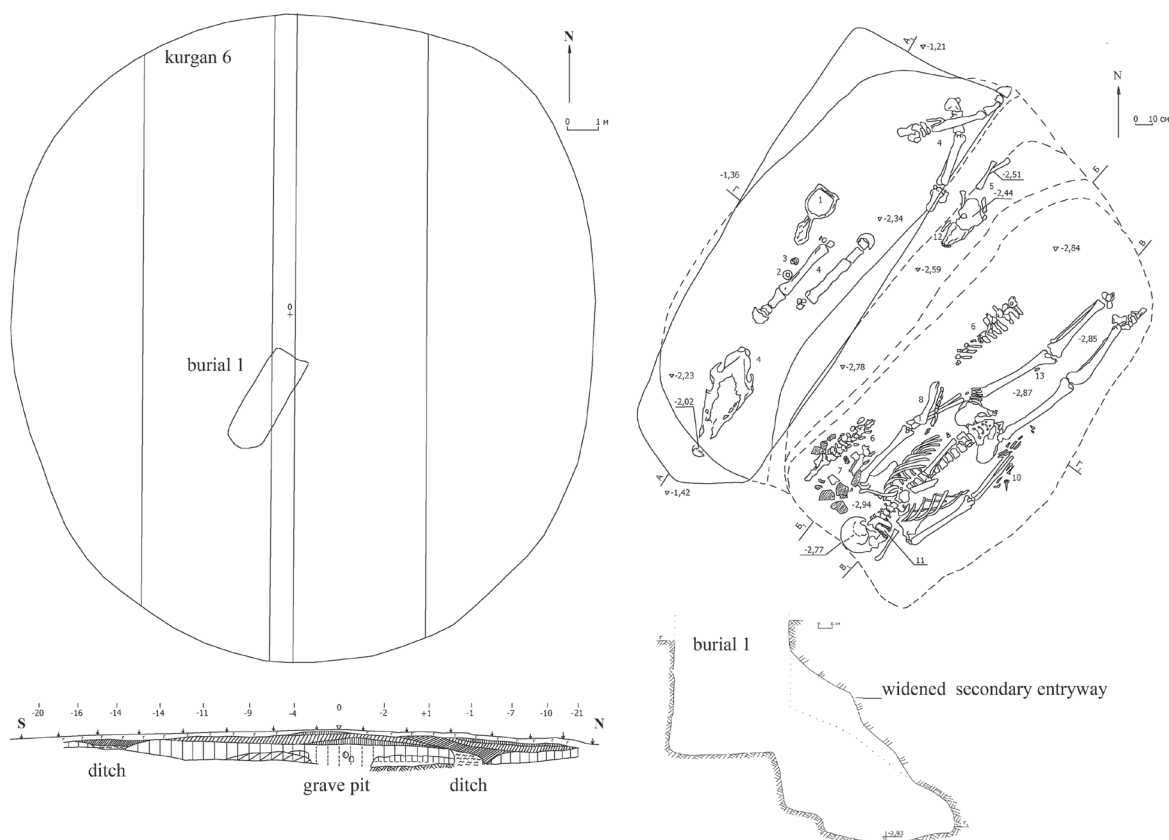
Fig. 4.13: Plans and profiles of kurgan 6 and grave 1 from the Dzhangar-1985 kurgan group (modified after Tsutskin et al. *1985).*

especially due to the absence of the grave's stratigraphic profile. However, the repeated pattern of the crossed leg bones (described above) of the male and the horse suggests post-skeletonised manipulation of this person's remains. This is confirmed by his scattered and missing skeletal parts and also by the disturbance of the horse skull, and the presence of multiple bone and arte-fact fragments in the grave fill.

Dzhangar-1985 kurgan 6 grave 1

This small kurgan (Fig. 4.13; 0.31 m high and 14 m in diameter) was rescue-excavated in a group of 8 mounds in 1985 (Tsutskin, Safronov and Nikolaeva 1985, 1–3, 26–30). Under the mound fill south of its centre, excavators located a segment-shaped burial pit (oriented north-east–south-west) which was much wider at the top than at its bottom. The grave pit was surrounded by a ditch of unspecified shape which was constructed under the mound fill. The grave pit (1.4 m deep) had a large sub-rec-tangular burial niche (2.93 m deep) with several steps constructed below its south-east wall. As often happens with this type of niche-grave, the burial niche was filled with earth either as a result of a collapse or due to the excavation of a secondary pit for the purpose of burial re-entry. In the grave

niche, excavators unearthed a supine male skeleton (about 40 years of age), whose arms and legs were placed along the body, and whose head was oriented to the south-west with its facial bones turned to the right (east). His legs were also slightly twisted to his right side relative to his spine that remained straight *in situ*. Although the authors of the excavations are very laconic in their textual description of this skeleton, the unusual position of some of its bones visible on the drawn plan and the photograph deserve closer attention. The right ribcage of the man's skeleton was probably disturbed, while most ribs remained *in situ*; and while the left clavicle bone was *in situ*, the right one was placed in front of the man's face, which could only have happened had the body become partially decomposed. The bones of the right hand were also displaced, and the phalanges of the left foot were absent. Moreover, the right foot was unnaturally pointed straight down, which, as was mentioned earlier, suggests that perhaps the foot ligaments were deliberately cut post-mortem (see Levina 1996, 119; Balabanova and Pererva 2006, 274). An iron knife and a sheep femur were placed across the man's left forearm, and another sheep bone was put over his stomach area parallel to his spine. To the left of the human skeleton, there was a dismembered horse spine and a fragmented ceramic vessel. The horse skull and two pairs of legs were placed at the bottom of the grave pit at the entrance to the burial niche. The upper legs of the horse were placed parallel to each other and there were an iron stirrup, a ring and some other iron fragments of horse accoutrements found nearby; the horse's hind legs were placed in a crossed position. A sheep skull and leg bones were situated on the next step below the entrance to the burial niche. Besides several iron objects located in the grave, there was a silver (probably early Umayyad) dirham found inside the man's mouth, which was a burial ritual widely known in Eurasia and, according to the authors, had to do with the journey of the deceased to the otherworld (see also Kruglov 2005, 429; Ekengren 2013, 187). Although the stratigraphy of this grave fill was not described in detail, it is apparent from the grave profile that the entrance into this niche-grave was widened by a secondary pit, the excavation of which most likely caused the collapse of the niche top. By widening the entryway into the niche, it was possible to reach the man's body without disturbing the skeletons of the horse and sheep placed at the bottom of the grave pit and on the step. The preservation of part of the narrow portion of the entryway into the grave niche also suggests that this secondary intrusion was carried out with caution, which is an unlikely characteristic of robbers. The ceramic vessel was probably ritually broken. The man's body was disturbed in a similar pattern as has been noted previously: the turning or twisting of the body to the right, the displacement of bones in the ribcage, missing hand and foot bones – all manipulations that were carried out most likely by relatives of the deceased quite soon after the initial burial, but before the body became fully decomposed. Yet, simultaneously, the relatives ritually supplied the deceased with a sumptuous "last meal" and a ritual coin in order to propitiate the dead and provide him with safe passage to the otherworld.

Krivaia Luka – XXVII-1979 kurgan 5 grave 1

This kurgan (Fig. 4.14; although nominally located in Astrakhan province) was excavated as part of the same larger rescue project mentioned above. This Khazar-period grave is the only one from the sample of graves presented here that has been published so far (Fedorov-Davydov 1984). Under this kurgan (0.7 m high and 46 m in diameter), there was a square-shaped ditch (1 m deep). A niche-grave (Fig. 4.15; 1.60–1.70 m deep) oriented north-north-west–south-south-east was constructed in the western side of the space demarcated by the ditch. A burial niche contained the supine skeleton of a middle-aged male, whose head was oriented southwards and whose face was turned to the left (west). His arms and legs were placed along the body, his hands were near the
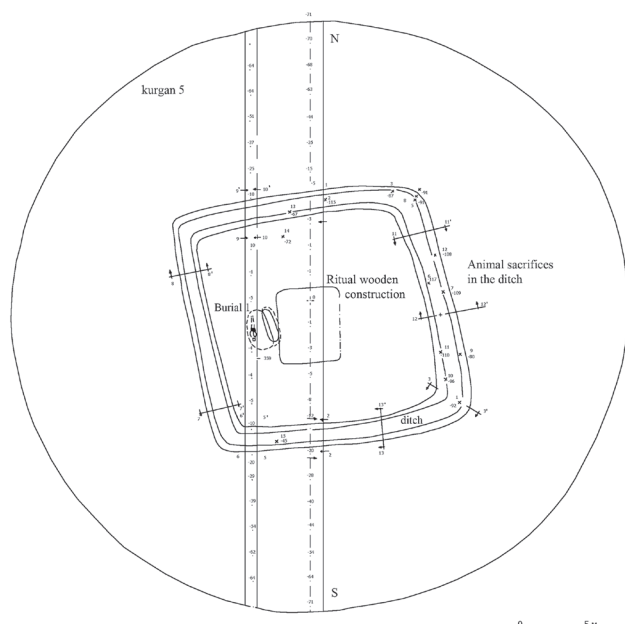
Fig. 4.14: Plan of kurgan 5 from the Krivaia Luka-XXVII-1979 kurgan group (modified after Fedorov-Davydov 1984).
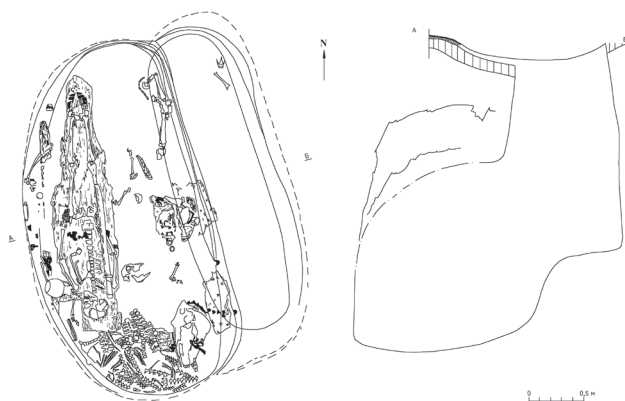

Fig. 4.15: Plan and profile of grave 1 in kurgan 5 from the Krivaia Luka-XXVII-1979 kurgan group (modified after Fedorov-Davydov 1984).

pelvis *in situ*, and his feet were drawn together and unusually stretched out, which once again appears to be caused by a ritually cut foot ligament as has been mentioned above. Although not noted in the text, but shown on the image, the left ribcage of the skeleton is evidently disturbed, while the right side seems to be intact. The deceased was placed on a reed bedding and covered with wooden planks with the exception of his head. His grave offerings included 25 pieces of meat represented by 1 horse or bovine and 24 sheep rumps, a ceramic pot and a pitcher, a sheep leg with an iron knife embedded in it and some other sheep parts including a skull and more legs. To the right (east) of the dead, partially on the sloping step and partially over the wooden planks in the grave niche, there was a horse skull with a bridle and a variety of silver, bronze and iron plaques and other accoutrements, horse legs, stirrups and the remains of a wooden saddle. The corpse was buried with some weapons: a sword, a knife, a bow and a quiver with arrows, and a marble mace head, as well as with some silk clothing and a number of golden and silver decorations: plaques, silver belt buckle, a gold earring, *etc*. After this grave was filled in, the whole space enclosed by the ditch was covered with a layer of clay up to 10 cm thick, and in its centre, another layer of organic material was placed and overlaid by a rectangular wooden construction which did not cover the grave pit (located to its west). Inside the eastern side of the ditch, over a layer of soil fill, a whole skeleton of a sacrificed sheep was placed, and 15 other clusters of sheep and cattle bones were located in different parts of the ditch. Subsequently, this ritual area including the ditch was covered by two layers of mound fill. Ostensibly, this was a complex and multi-temporal funerary process that involved several sequential post-burial ritual phases: the preparation of a burial space and a ditch, a grave excavation, a number of sumptuous commemorative sacrifices in the grave and its closure, the reopening of the grave, manipulation of the feet and the left side of the ribcage of the dead,

multiple sacrifices in the ditch and filling it up, and the final construction of a burial mound with structured deposits in several steps. The archaeologist German Fedorov-Davydov, the author of these excavations, noted that the sequence of burial and post-burial ritual events performed or staged at this grave – a sequence that was also manifested through archaeological stratigraphy – suggests that the ritual actions extended to the period that the soul of the dead had to travel on the path to the otherworld (Fedorov-Davydov 1984).

Fedorov-Davydov (1984, 91–92) mentioned another Khazar niche-burial with a square ditch (hence of the Sokolovsky Type) from kurgan 12 excavated in a group of burial mounds called Krivaia Luka-IX-1974. Unfortunately, because the author considered it to have been completely destroyed by "robbers", he did not publish the plans and stratigraphy of this grave, but only mentioned that the human bones with the exception of the phalanges of the left hand were completely scattered around the burial niche. He also mentioned that animal bones located at the bottom of the grave pit, namely, a horse skull, two sheep skulls and rumps, five horse rumps, and one of a bovine were also disturbed by the intruders. It is worth noting that this grave contained a usual set of grave goods that included a couple of belt ornaments made of silver, which stayed in the grave.

Nomadic Khazar ancestors and their materiality

The evidence of these ritual burial and post-burial performances at the nomadic Khazar grave sites suggests that the nomadic communities spent considerable resources staging the death of their deceased relatives. The above-described ritual features and deposits, sacrifices, reopened graves, manipulated bodies and grave goods, acts of purification and sacralisation, and memorialisation through the construction of structured deposits and burial mounds that mark the site in the landscape attest to the nomads' veneration of these deceased, and the possible ancestralisation of some of them (such as those from the graves of Bolshoi Tsaryn and Krivaia Luka). Yet, the materiality of these staged rituals sends a mixed message. While the riding horses were tacked and prepared for the "last journey", their legs were crossed; while the vessels with drink were placed in graves, their bodies were smashed; and while the deceased were supplied with their possessions and food for the road, their corpses were twisted and manipulated, and some body parts were removed. In order to apprehend these seemingly incongruous intentions to damage and revere the deceased at the same time, I will draw on some sources regarding the materiality and ancestral beliefs of the nomadic Khazars.

In AD 922, on his mission to the court of the king of the Bulghars in the Middle Volga, the caliphal envoy Ahmed Ibn Fadlan is said to have passed through the country of the nomadic Oghuz Turks, who, just like the Bulghars, constituted the core tribes of the Khazar Empire. In his description of the customs of the Oghuz nomads, Ibn Fadlan writes about their burial rites, noting that they dig a large ditch shaped like a chamber, put the deceased body dressed in a tunic and girdle into the grave together with his bow, a wooden cup filled with alcohol, and all his wealth beside him, and build the roof covering it with a construction that resembles "a yurt made of clay" (Ibn Fadlan and Montgomery 2014, 209). Then, they sacrifice a number of his horses (ranging from one to several hundred animals depending on the wealth of the deceased) and feast on them leaving behind the legs, heads, hides and tails that they "nail to pieces of wood" and call them "His horses which he rides to the Garden [Paradise]" (Ibn Fadlan and Montgomery 2014, 209). Sometimes, according to Ibn Fadlan, they do not slaughter horses for several days, but then, an elder reproaches them by saying that he had seen the deceased in his dream who said the following: "You see me here in front

of you. My companions have gone before me. My feet are cracked from following them. I cannot catch up with them. I am left here, all alone." Consequently, they fetch and sacrifice his horses at the graveside, and in a couple of days, the elder comes and claims to have seen the deceased again who said the following: "Inform my household and companions that I have caught up with those who went before me and have recovered from my exhaustion" (Ibn Fadlan and Montgomery 2014, 209; also Ibn Fadlan, Lunde and Stone 2012, 18).

What Ibn Fadlan refers to in this passage, is that the Oghuz nomads revered their dead and appeased their "disturbed" deceased relatives with posthumous sacrifices and propitiations by performing post-burial rituals at their graves (and other auspicious places). Not all the dead were honoured, as the author stresses: "a poor man or a slave" was simply tossed into the desert and left there (Ibn Fadlan, Lunde and Stone 2012, 18; Ibn Fadlan and Montgomery 2014, 209). Those, however, who were in possession of a household, companions, property and power, were worthy enough to be sent off on their journey into the afterlife where they would achieve their ancestorhood and continue their spiritual existence after death and their affairs in the lives of the living.

In the framework of this mutual alliance, service and system of obligations, the living invoked their potent dead in times of need. For instance, the 10th-century Iranian historian al-Tabari noted the Khazars' cult of the dead in the context of the 7th century when they were locked in warfare with the expanding forces of the Umayyad Caliphate. According to this report, after the death of the prominent caliphal military commander Ibn Rabiah in the Khazar territory in 652, the Khazars preserved his bodily remains in a vessel and used them in their rituals to make rain and seek victory in war (Tabari and Humphreys 1990, 95–96). Even though the slain commander was not one of their own, but had been their enemy, the Khazar nomads sought to harness the power of this prominent deceased individual since they perceived him to be a "cosmological agent" (to borrow a term from Hill and Hageman 2016b, 49). Thus, in the process of what researchers call the "ritual economy of ancestralization" (Lucas 1996), they physically manipulated his remains, causing the dissolution of his persona and his re-establishment as an ancestor by means of whom they sought to achieve their desired benefits.

Ancestors possessed unassailable authority in societies largely based on kinship, such as those of the nomadic Oghuz and the Khazars. These powerful dead, who were dangerous and benevolent at the same time, required continuous service and sacrifices since they were perceived as beings who bound communities together and ensured their prosperity, fertility and good health (Parker Pearson 1999, 26–27). If not properly cared for, ancestors could turn into malevolent forces bringing on death, disease, plague, pollution, misfortune and other forms of "ancestral violence" with which the living had to cope either by performing placations or by reversed violence inflicted on the dead (Graeber 2007 [1995], 182). Nobody wanted to see the vexed ghosts of their disturbed deceased relatives in their dreams or to have the dead return. If the ritual conciliations and propitiations did not stop the ghosts or bad dreams, the physical manipulation of the dead was pressed into service. This tense relationship between the living and the dead was at the centre of nomadic culture, threatening and constraining and simultaneously offering new possibilities for regeneration and health (Shingiray 2017). Such struggle was ideological, emotional and material. Ancestral beliefs structured the ways in which nomads approached dead bodies within their communities, but the actual encounters with the bodies of particular deceased would have required renegotiations of their power and could lead to the transformation of such beliefs in that society (see also Devlin 2015, 68).

In ancestor-focused communities, such as those of the Khazar and Oghuz Turks, where the living and the dead were perceived as a social totality, mutual obligations were not severed after corporeal death. Instead, relations continued through the metaphor of a "kin body" which among many Turkic communities was semantically represented by bone (*söök*) – the material manifestation of the trans-generational "life force" and a mnemonic device that also conveyed the meaning of "kin, generation …, remains, graveyard" (Sagalaev and Oktiabr'skaia 1990, 39). The Turkic expression *söögun tudar*, which has the meaning "to bury" or "to take part in funerals", literally meant "to hold his bone" (Sagalaev and Oktiabr'skaia 1990, 39). The metaphor of the bone was also applied to social divisions, namely into the "white bone" and the "black bone" communities, which represented the elite and the commoner groups respectively – a ranking system extant among the nomadic Khazars as alluded to by the Islamic sources (al-Istakhri in Dunlop 1954, 96; Golden 1980, 103; see also Sagalaev and Oktiabr'skaia 1990). Thus, the rituals of curation or manipulation of the bones of particular ancestral dead, which represented the "life essence" of the community at large while referencing its cosmological origins, also reiterated the inequalities, constraints and social divisions within those communities (see Helms 1998, 170–171).

The power of dead ancestors to impose restrictions, divisions and taboos upon the living by means of social constraints and the threat of ancestral violence – what David Graeber calls the "negative authority" objectified by sacred spaces of ancestral graves and bones – embodied people's "hidden intentionalities" and ways through which people acted upon the world (Graeber 2007, 53–72). In this context, the ancestral bones and the graves that contained them represented "vehicles of power" (Graeber 2007, 53–72; Shingiray 2017, 120). Physical and mnemonic curation, as well as the manipulation of these bones during burial and post-burial actions – *e.g.* holding ancestral bones, circulating them, severing limbs, scattering body parts and sacrificing to them – allowed people to renegotiate ancestral constraints and taboos and re-establish new relationships of power. The nomads supplied the deceased with horses, but they also crossed or tied their legs. The nomads constructed ritual ditches and burial mounds to memorialise their ancestors in the landscape, but they also constrained the skeletonised bodies of their dead relatives by separating them from the living and locking them up under layers of earth and ritual deposits. When the nomads were oppressed by "the dictatorship of dreams" (Graeber 2001, 136) imposed by the authority of their dead relatives, they reopened the graves of the bothersome deceased and manipulated or removed their limbs, preventing them from maleficent actions.

Yet in times of necessity, the Khazar nomads tapped into this double-edged "negative authority" and its materiality by using ancestral bones, namely their kin-body, in order to ask for benefits (as was shown in the passage by al-Tabari cited earlier). By the same means they sought to achieve justice and defend their claims, which can be seen from the following story. The Islamic 10th-century author Ibn Hawqal related an anecdote about the Khazar King's judgment – a king who arbitrated between a merchant's adopted son (a former slave) and his son by blood. The merchant had died in the absence of the latter son and his inheritance was disputed by the two and had ended in a deadlock: "The king then undertook to try the case between the parties and, having assembled all the judges and the people of the city, held a court… So he said to the son, 'Do you really know your father's grave?' 'I have been told of it,' he replied, 'but I did not see his interment, to be sure of it.' Then he asked the slave who made the claim, 'Do you know your father's grave?' 'Yes,' said he, 'I had charge of his burial.' Then the king said, 'Away, the two of you, and bring me a bone, if you find any.' The slave went to the grave, removed a bone and brought it to him. Then he said

to the slave who claimed to be the merchant's son, 'Bleed yourself,' which he did, and the king gave orders that his blood should be cast upon the bone. But the blood went from it and adhered to no part of it. Next the son was bled, and his blood was cast upon the bone and adhered to it. Then the king punished the slave severely and handed over him and his wealth to the son" (Ibn Hawqal in Dunlop 1954, 215–217).

The use of ancestral bones as a material metaphor for kin-body, which symbolised relations, obligations and entanglements between the living and the dead, was an enduring paradigm in the nomadic consciousness. For instance, an old Azerbaijani Turkic saying which has survived to this day attests to the resilience of these conceptions: "Relatives may eat your flesh but they won't throw away your bones" (Kazimova 2011, 42).

Conclusion

In this paper, I focused on the disturbed graves of the Khazar nomads from the Lower Volga steppe, who performed complex and multi-temporal burial and post-burial rituals, which included the reopening of graves, manipulation of their dead, purification and often sumptuous feats of animal sacrifices, and memorialisation of those grave sites. I interpreted the post-burial rituals of the Khazar nomads as practices pertaining to their ancestor cults, which included both ancestor veneration and the fear of the malevolent dead. These beliefs in my opinion were not contradictory, but complementary, in the worldview of those people whose society was symbolised by the concept of a kin-body. Imbued with this ideology, the ritually disturbed graves served as vehicles of power for the nomadic negotiation of ancestral authority and presented important loci of cultural continuity and change.

Although these ancestral rituals were durable, they were not timeless experiences for the nomadic Khazars. The lives, deaths and beliefs of those communities have to be viewed in the context of the intense cultural and political transformation during the second half of the 1st millennium AD when they lived their lives. The nomads were incorporated into an imperial polity, then, they survived its subsequent collapse, a boom in transcontinental trade, and exposure to diverse religious currents, including those of Islam by the 9th–10th century. It seems, however, that the ancestral cults prevailed through this period of Islamisation as well, when religious notions of the body, the soul, death and nomadic personhood began to be altered. Moreover, as has been mentioned above, the practices of ritual grave disturbances went hand in hand with Islam and the communal preoccupation with the dead became even more intensified (Kruglov 2003, 16–17, 49, 52; Shingiray 2012, 211). In the course of such political transformation, the ancestral graves were the loci of the nomadic Khazar cultural continuity, even though the burial and post-burial practices and their material culture were subject to long-term change.

Acknowledgements

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5. Things we knew about grave robbery: reassessing ideas on how and why graves were reopened in the Merovingian period

Stephanie Zintl

Introduction: row grave cemeteries and the "problem" of reopened graves

Ever since the beginnings of archaeological excavations in the 19th century, the so-called row grave cemeteries (*Reihengräberfelder*) from Merovingian times attracted much attention from researchers and the general public alike. The carefully laid-out graves, often containing weapons, jewellery and other fascinating grave goods, were arranged in often large cemeteries (*e.g.* Losert 2003; Lohwasser 2013; also see Koch 2001, 30–42) and sometimes even in the eponymous rows (see Ament 2003). They not only contained attractive artefacts which both antiquarians and museums liked to collect and display (and continue to do), but they also seemed straightforward to understand: the supine inhumations, usually in single graves, do not differ much from today's burial customs, or at least from what we expect an orderly burial should look like. The graves I focus on in this article lack, at least to some extent, both of these features which have made early medieval graves appealing: their orderly layout has been wrecked, skeletons dislocated and fragmented, and most of the artefacts removed.

Graves which have obviously been opened again sometime after the funeral are remarkably common in cemeteries from Merovingian times (see Jankuhn *et al.* 1978; Steuer 1998; Kümmel 2009, esp. 167–180), though their frequency differs significantly from site to site (Roth 1978, 60–61; Siegmund 2000, 115–122; for Bavaria: Losert 2003, 477). They were noticed by excavators from the earliest explorations in these cemeteries (see Roth 1978, 53–54), and were usually met with little enthusiasm (*e.g.* Chlingensperg-Berg 1890, 52). To many archaeologists it felt like someone had destroyed the original context before they could study it – though only a few expressed their disappointment as straightforwardly as Hermann Ament (1992, 6): "… so that only a dozen graves are preserved as the archaeologist wants them to: undisturbed and with grave goods" [author's translation] (more examples in: Roth 1978, 55 note 16; Kümmel 2009, 20–21 note 7). Reopened graves were often rather seen as an obstacle to archaeological research than a phenomenon shedding light on past people's actions (a fact already criticised by Helmut Roth in 1978, esp. 55–56 note 18). Furthermore, drawing on both the excavators' common-sense reactions and on early medieval written sources, especially the *leges* which mention grave robbery as an offence (Nehlsen 1978), it seemed self-evident in most cases what had happened to the graves. The phenomenon was called "grave robbery" and mostly also interpreted as such: illegal actions aiming for the removal of grave goods for personal material gain.

"grave robbery"
implies

illegal   removal   of grave goods   because of materialistic motives

illegal?   removal of something?   grave goods?   motive: personal gain?
                                           (only grave goods?)

accepted / tolerated   contact with something   dead person or   religious/ ritual / magic/
required / neccessary   add / alter /   (parts of the) grave mnemonic / social / political /
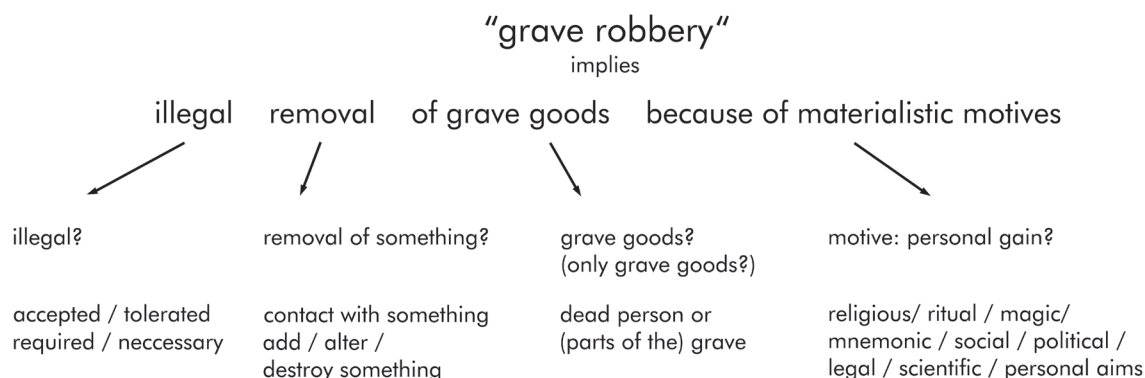   destroy something   legal / scientific / personal aims

Fig. 5.1: Grave robbery? (concept S. Zintl, drawing S. Köglmeier).

The term grave robbery was a considerable hindrance to more in-depth studies on reopened graves: if we already know what had happened, why study it? Another key reason for the relative lack of systematic research on the topic lies in the traditional focus on the graves' furnishings, concentrating on typology, chronology and chorology, on trying to deduce *e.g.* wealth or social rank, ethnic origin or contact networks from the finds. In many cases, conclusions on grave reopening have been drawn on the basis of limited data, with only some seemingly clear examples presented, and an interpretation put forward on the basis of these few "most interesting" cases, but without investigating the findings in more detail or analysing them on the basis of all graves in a cemetery (this was also criticised by Kümmel 2009, esp. 103–107).

Although it was noted that the term grave robbery is both too narrow and too judgemental to properly describe the archaeological record and that it does not account for all possible explanations (Steuer 1998, 516; Fig. 5.1), detailed terminological critique only arose relatively recently (Aspöck 2003, 225–226; Kümmel 2009, 19–26; 109–115; Noterman 2016, 85–101) and finally led to attempts to separate descriptive terminology and interpretation, with less interpretative terms such as "reopened" or "manipulated" being used to describe the affected burials (see also Zintl 2019, 14; 115–116).

Together with growing interest in reopened graves (see below), it has also become easier to study them in detail: better excavation techniques and new, now-standard tools, including basic technical advancements like the advent of digital photography, have significantly increased the information available to researchers. Rescue excavations continue to add to the number of sites that can be studied, giving us a more reliable statistical basis, and new computerised tools such as databases make it easier to handle the often vast quantities of observations. A regional study on grave reopening in cemeteries near Regensburg, Bavaria, conducted for the author's PhD thesis (Zintl 2019), revealed that the quality of excavation data available for studying reopened graves improved significantly between the early 1980s and the most recent excavation in 2009 (Zintl 2019, 113–115). Even if today's excavation standards of course still leave room for improvement (see Duday 2009), they already provide us with a good base for studying questions which until recently were not accessible. Based on the new data emerging from recent studies, this paper seeks to reassess some recurring ideas and explanations on *how* and *why* graves from Merovingian times were opened and how their contents were treated by the reopeners.

Recent studies on reopened graves: Bavaria, Kent and the Low Countries

In burial studies, there has been growing interest in recent decades in modes of behaviour seen as deviating from (conceived) norms (Aspöck 2008, esp. 27; Aspöck 2013, 25–26; Gramsch 2013, 509–510). However common their occurrence, reopened graves are usually seen as resulting from such digressive behaviour. Several theses written after the turn of the millennium focus on the topic (Aspöck 2005; Kümmel 2009; van Haperen 2010; Klevnäs 2013; Noterman 2016; van Haperen 2017; Zintl 2019).

The following discussion is based mainly on results of a regional study on reopened graves which was conducted for the author's PhD thesis (Zintl 2019). The findings will be compared to two other recent regional studies (Klevnäs 2013; van Haperen 2017). Each study comprises several cemeteries and is, thus, conducted on a broader basis than the traditional chapters on "grave robbery" in cemetery publications (*e.g.* to name three outstanding examples: Grünewald 1988, 33–43; Knaut 1993, 29–37; Codreanu-Windauer 1997, 28–34). The three studies analyse in detail for *all* burials of their respective sample if and (if applicable) how each burial was opened, when they were opened, and how the graves' contents were treated by the reopeners.

My study (Zintl 2019) on grave reopening in the region of Regensburg, Bavaria is based on ten burial places of differing sizes (Fig. 5.2) and two single graves (each the only burial excavated in a bigger area). In total, the sample consists of about 600 burials dating from the later 5th to the first half of the 8th centuries, though burials from the 7th and early 8th centuries are strongly overrepresented. All burial places except for one were excavated completely, and all were recorded
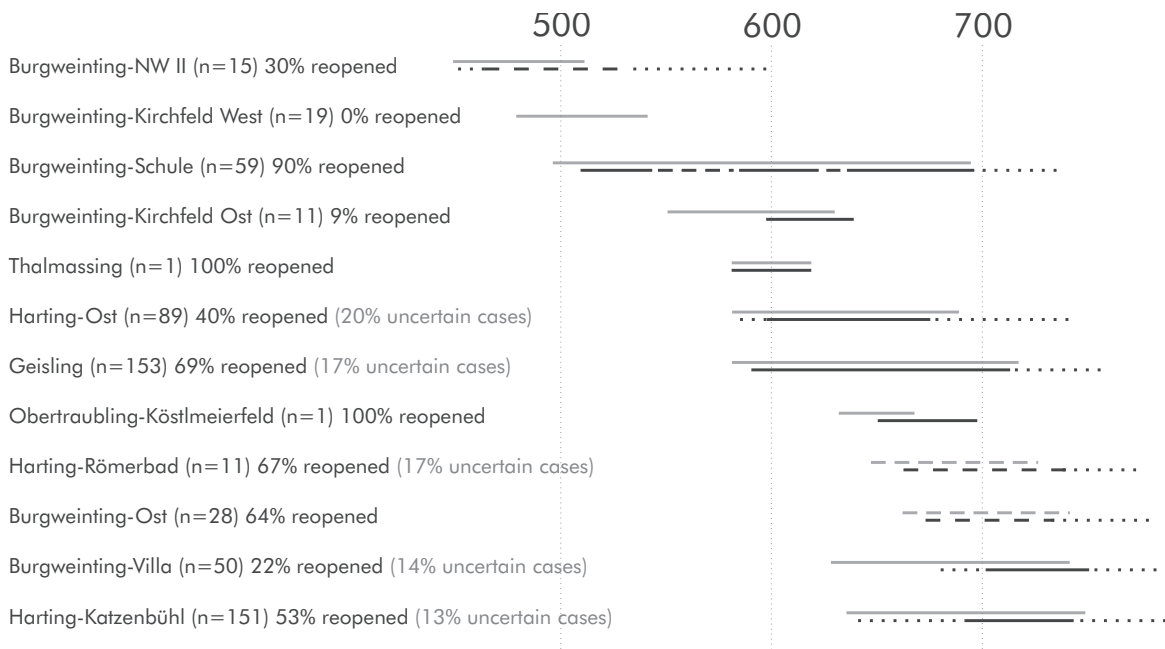

Fig. 5.2: Grave reopening in burial places near Regensburg, Bavaria (n = number of burials per cemetery). The grey line indicates when the cemetery was used for burial and the black line beneath it indicates the dating of grave reopenings. Uncertain cases (possibly reopened) were only included if exceeding 10% (concept S. Zintl, drawing S. Köglmeier).

to modern standards. Grave reopening is very widespread in this region, with all burial places except for one small grave group affected. In total, 325 burials (out of 597) show clear traces of intentional reopening; resulting in an average of at least 54% of the burials reopened, with another 15% insecure cases (possibly reopened, or disturbed in other ways), and only 31% of the burials definitely not opened.

Alison Klevnäs (2013) studied cemeteries from a much bigger region, namely the county of Kent in south-eastern England; though only some cemeteries were analysed in detail after narrowing it down to the ones with sufficient data quality for research on grave reopening. The seven well-recorded cemeteries with clear traces of ancient reopening from Kent also span all of the Merovingian (or Early Anglo-Saxon) period, dating from the 5th to the early 8th centuries. Here, 193 burials show clear traces of intentional reopening – which adds up to 15% reopened burials on average, the share ranging from 8% to 44% in different burial places (Klevnäs 2013, esp. 33–35, 42, 83, 141, tab. 4).

Martine van Haperen (2017) studied 11 burial places from the Netherlands and Flanders, with 1169 inhumation graves in total. Together the burials span the time from the 5th to the middle of the 8th centuries. The share of reopened graves ranges between the numbers from Kent and Bavaria, with at least 208 graves reopened – that is 41% of the graves on average, excluding insecure cases. (In the Regensburg region, excluding insecure cases, the average would be 64%.) In the Low Countries the share of reopened graves varies from 16% to 59% in different cemeteries. Despite the drawback of poor bone preservation in most parts of her study region, Martine van Haperen's findings (van Haperen 2017, esp. 47–148, 184–188) provide valuable comparative material.

Other recent, and noteworthy studies on grave reopening in France (a PhD thesis by Astrid Noterman 2016) and Romania (an overview by Alpár Dobos 2014) follow slightly different approaches which make their results more difficult to compare with the three above-named studies; but they offer valuable insights, also in themes not studied in such detail by Klevnäs, van Haperen and myself, such as Noterman's survey of written sources on grave reopening and the French method of archaeothanatology, and also show that the phenomenon extends well beyond Kent, the Low Countries and Germany.

When were the graves opened?

For well-excavated burials, it is often possible to date – within the approximations that apply to most archaeological dates – how long after burial a grave was reopened by examining how the bones and finds were dislocated: were they moved around in a hollow, and thus at a time when a wooden coffin or burial chamber was still largely intact? Was the skeleton still articulated? (On dating methods see Aspöck 2005, 242–243; Kümmel 2009, 146–155; Zintl 2019, 83–88.) In sufficiently well-recorded cemeteries, this method allows us to narrow down *when* they were opened for a significant percentage of the graves, providing us with a good base for judging questions which have been asked for a long time, such as: who opened the graves? Why? What relationship did these people have to the graves in question? Do we look at random acts, or are there certain patterns which might, for instance, hint at some sort of ritual behaviour? Being able to date how long after burial the opening occurred, and when in historical time, helps to exclude some interpretations which have been put forward, while strengthening others – and dating is something that works well with archaeological methods, but has only rarely been tried on a systematic basis for reopened graves so far (exceptions are: Sági 1964,

389–392 (with circular reasoning based on historical assumptions); Knaut 1993, 35–36; Codreanu-Windauer 1997, 31–32; Aspöck 2005; Müller and Grömer 2015, 43–47; see also Roth 1978, 65–67; for bronze age graves: Neugebauer 1991, 112–121).

In all three of the above-named study regions (Klevnäs 2013; van Haperen 2017; Zintl 2019), a significant number of the graves were opened within roughly one generation after the funeral. In all cases, graves were opened while the cemeteries were still used for burial. In Bavaria and the Low Countries datable reopening occurs from the 5th to the first half of the 8th centuries, with maybe a (relatively long) peak from the later 6th and throughout most of the 7th centuries (van Haperen 2017, esp. 134–138; Zintl 2019, esp. 295–301). This means graves were reopened throughout the Merovingian period, over more than two centuries. In Kent, grave reopening also peaks in the later 6th and the 7th centuries, spanning a period of at least a century. On the present evidence it seems to start later and cease slightly earlier than on the European continent, but there are a few possible earlier reopenings also in Kent (Klevnäs 2013, esp. 47–49). It might be that, in Kent, only the peak of grave reopening is visible so far, due to the lower share of reopened graves (only 15%) and the relative scarceness of datable reopening (as compared to the more recent excavations in the Bavarian sample), while the earlier and later "outliers" from the European continent have not been detected there as yet.

Did people know the buried person's gender before they opened a grave?

One recurring theme in regards to reopened early medieval graves is the assumption that the reopeners knew who was buried there or at least were able to tell the deceased person's gender *before* they started to dig. This assertion can be traced back to publications at least as early as Hermann Stoll's publication of the cemetery in Hailfingen in 1939. Stoll deduced that people had such prior knowledge because of the preferential opening of women's graves at Hailfingen and the differing patterns of disarticulation in male and female skeletons (Stoll 1939, 8). Similar statements and reasoning can be found in cemetery publications almost to the present day (*e.g.* Pescheck 1996, 9; Blaich and Geschwinde 2007, 112; Bofinger and Sikora 2008, 51–52; Lohwasser 2013, 50; older examples summarised by Müller 1976, 122; Roth 1978, 56; contra: Müller 1976, 122–123; Codreanu-Windauer 1997, 29–31).

In the Regensburg region graves of men, women and children were all equally likely to be opened – even though children's graves could be told apart by their usually smaller grave pits even before starting to dig. Of 560 burials with anthropological findings on age at death about 55% of adult and 54% of child graves were opened, and of 455 sexed individuals about 60% of men's and 51% of women's graves were opened (Table 5.1) (Zintl 2019, 287, 347; please note that the higher share of reopened men's graves mirrors an as yet unexplained predominance of male burials in 7th-century cemeteries with high opening rates). The findings for Kent and the Low Countries partly differ from the Bavarian sample, with graves of children less likely to be opened in both regions and indications for a slight preference to open men's graves – an impression which still has to be checked on a wider base for Kent, while the more pronounced results for the Low Countries are difficult to compare to Bavaria because of the predominantly poor bone preservation there: the buried persons' gender mostly had to be inferred from grave goods, effectively excluding poorly and unfurnished graves from the analysis (Klevnäs 2013, 40–42; van Haperen 2017, 132–134, 150–151).

Table 5.1: Age at death of individuals whose graves were reopened, based on twelve burial places near Regensburg, Bavaria (total number of burials: 597). The total number of grown-up individuals is larger than the age groups (adult/mature/senile) taken together because borderline cases which could not be classed into one of the anthropological age groups were included here. Numbers larger than 100% are due to rounding (anthropological analyses by: Ramona Schleuder, Eva Kropf, Michael Pohl and Julia Gresky, and Olaf Röhrer-Ertl).

Age-at-death	Number of individuals	**Reopened** / uncertain cases / **not reopened**	
		Absolute numbers	Percentage
Grown-ups (older than 20 years)	439	**242** / 51 / **146**	**55%** / 12% / **33%**
Children and juveniles (0 to 19 years)	121	**68** / 17 / **36**	**56%** / 14% / **30%**
Children (0 to 12 years)	91	**49** / 15 / **27**	**54%** / 16% / **30%**
Age-class *adult* (20 to 40 years)	192	**97** / 23 / **72**	**50%** / 12% / **38%**
Age-class *mature* (41 to 60 years)	166	**94** / 20 / **52**	**57%** / 12% / **31%**
Age-class *senile* (older than 60 years)	34	**24** / 3 / **7**	**71%** / 9% / **21%**

In none of the three regional studies were there any indications that the graves of men and women were opened in different ways (Klevnäs 2013, 51–57; esp. 52–53; van Haperen 2017, esp. 139–140). There is no evidence that opening cuts were directed to specific areas of graves with regards to the buried person's gender. In the Regensburg sample, slight differences in the treatment of male and female inhumations can be detected once the skeleton is reached: for some men's graves the disturbance concentrates on the hip area, while in women's graves a larger part of the skeleton tends to be dislocated (Zintl 2019, 305–309). This suggests that the reopeners aimed for the grave goods – which in women's graves were placed from the neck (brooches, jewellery) to the knees (possibly more brooches, a chatelaine or other things hanging from the belt), while in men's graves many of the more common finds were usually concentrated at the hip (belt with fittings, bag with contents, seax). This shows that people sometimes adapted the way they opened a grave once they could see whether it was a man's or a woman's burial, but they did not target different areas of the graves from the beginning.

The often-cited prior knowledge frequently seems based on a few selected examples or the misleading assumption that differential disturbance of the skeletal remains would show that people had knowledge of the deceased's gender before opening a grave. The detailed recent studies did not reveal any indications for such prior knowledge.

Left-behind "robbing hooks" and robbers in a hurry?

In a few reopened early medieval graves, iron rods found in the fill have been interpreted as tools left behind by the robbers (Eching-Viecht grave 65 (Dannhorn 1994, 300–301); Pfakofen grave 74 (Codreanu-Windauer 1993, 123); Lauchheim, no grave number (Stork 1997, 429 fig. 489); Erpfting grave 233 (Schwenk 1998, 65–67 fig. 2.11)). In contrast to the wooden tools from Bronze Age graves in Denmark (Thrane 1978) which inspired these interpretations, the early medieval "robbing hooks" in fact lack a proper, solid hook for extracting grave goods, being in effect only iron rods (Fig. 5.3). Most of these rods are probably the last surviving remains of wooden folding stools, a find group only identified relatively recently when remains of a better-preserved stool were found

in Schleitheim, Switzerland (Fig. 5.4; Leicht 2002, 193–195; Burzler *et al.* 2002, vol. 2, 160–161, 182–183, Taf. 61–63, 81; on folding stools in general see Gütermann 2011). The frames of such stools were made of wood, with a seat of leather or other organic materials, and an iron rod holding together the wooden frames. The rod is usually the only part that survives in the archaeological record, and it has only lately been realised that it indicates the presence of such a substantial piece of furniture. As most stools were placed on top of or next to the coffin, the rod is often found in the opening pit or left at the side of the grave if it was opened.

Even without the lucky find of the better-preserved stool from Schleitheim, the interpretation of robbing hooks would have been doubtful if studied in detail. As soon as the cemetery of Pfakofen, with one of the first examples of such an iron rod interpreted as a robbing hook, was studied and published in its entirety by Nelo Lohwasser, she raised doubts about the interpretation: since comparable finds came from undisturbed graves, they must have been used for some other purpose than extracting grave goods (Lohwasser 2009, 160–162; in the 2013 publication the reference to folding stools has been added: Lohwasser 2013, 111–114). So while it is still likely that tools were used to search through grave contents, and while the way the bones were dislocated sometimes even suggests the use of something with a hooked end, we have still not conclusively found (or perhaps correctly identified) one of these tools. This is not just a technical detail: the idea of abandoned tools in the fill of disturbed burials carried with it a vivid, and probably misleading, picture of illicit deeds and fleeing robbers.

Fig. 5.3: An iron rod from grave 74 in Pfakofen, Bavaria, which had been interpreted as "robbing hook", but which in fact was part of a folding stool (see Fig. 5.4). The iron rod was found at the undisturbed foot end of the reopened grave, its length is 60 cm (the other longish object there is a spindle made of bone). Drawings not to scale (drawing: Lotte Soraya; published in: Lohwasser 2013, Taf. 19 no. 16; Taf. 122 no. 74; Courtesy of Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege).
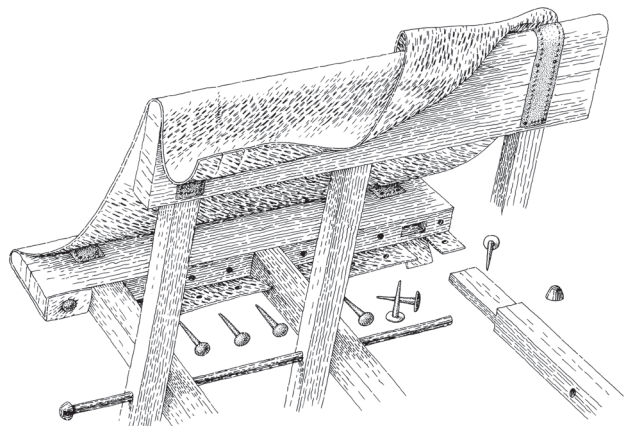

Fig. 5.4: Reconstruction drawing of folding stool from grave 551 in Schleitheim, Switzerland (drawing: Ruth Baur; published in: Burzler et al. 2002, vol. 2, Taf. 63; Courtesy of Kantonsarchäologie Schaffhausen).

Things to be taken from the dead: history of research, methodological problems, and ways to side-step them

The ways the graves were opened and the ways their contents were treated show that removing objects was a main aim. However, by no means were all the contents taken. The question of which grave goods were removed, which were left, and the reasons for this selection, is discussed very often and frequently at length in the numerous publications of early medieval cemeteries (see Zintl 2019, 36–41). One major reason for the predominance of these questions lies in Helmut Roth's paper from 1978 which was and still is the standard reference publication for almost anyone who encounters reopened graves in an early medieval cemetery. In this paper, Roth discusses the idea of certain things being taboo and thus not removed from reopened graves (Roth 1977; 1978, 67–74).

The objects which, according to Roth's findings, could not be taken include spearheads, vessels, bead necklaces and possibly finger rings. Further, he notes that one brooch out of an assumed set of four was often left behind, as well as – most importantly – objects with Christian symbolism. The latter was first noticed by Ursula Koch for the cemetery of Berghausen where disc brooches with apparently Christian symbolism were left behind in five graves (Koch 1973; 1974). While Roth backs his statements with an extensive collection of examples, he does not attempt any interpretation as to why spearheads or beads had to be left behind beyond the general idea of taboo or a "second field [next to materialistic objectives] probably residing undefinably in a mental/spiritual sphere" [author's translation]. He links the left-behind objects with Christian decoration and the spread of grave reopening in general with the advance of Christianity, again without going into details of any causal link (Roth 1977, 289–290; 1978, 74). Roth's findings have subsequently been complemented with observations from other cemeteries and sometimes modified or critically re-examined for certain find groups. In particular it has been argued that spearheads and vessels may have been missed because of their typical placement towards the sides of graves, and that beads may have been overlooked because of their small size (this critique has been recurring since the earliest review, see Pauli 1981, esp. 468; also see Lorenz 1982, esp. 737–739). Attempts to explain the reasons behind the apparent choice of objects have, however, remained comparatively rare and often vague, mostly concentrating on the possible influence of the spread of Christianity, or on the idea that certain objects, especially those with religious or apotropaic significance, might have been left behind to appease the dead person whose grave was disturbed (Grünewald 1988, 42–43; also see Knaut 1993, 36–37; Groove 2001, 31–32; Höke 2013, 38–41).

One reason for the focus on object removal may be that this question seems researchable even if the reopened graves were not recorded in much detail: you could still compare which things were left behind to which were found in undisturbed graves. This sounds simple, but it is not: we do not know what is missing. Fragments, rust stains or a general incompleteness of the burial assemblage can give valuable hints, but they are not always sufficiently reliable for further interpretations (see below). Comparing objects left behind in reopened graves to the ones from undisturbed graves, and thus trying to find out what is missing by, basically, simple subtraction, is fraught with methodological problems: the reopeners might have targeted certain graves, for example the most richly furnished ones. Such a selection would render a simple comparison of find numbers impossible, as the furnishings would have been different even *before* some graves were opened – and there are indications for such a selection: in the Regensburg region people seem to have aimed for all furnished burials, no matter how rich the furnishings were, and only left the unfurnished ones undisturbed. In some

cemeteries almost all graves had been opened (Fig. 5.2), while in other sites a share of the graves remained undisturbed – but these un-opened graves were almost completely unfurnished, while fragments in reopened graves show that these had been richly furnished (Zintl 2018; 2019, esp. 181–183, 230–231). This rules out a comparison of find numbers as, at least in some sites, the undisturbed graves contained almost no finds anyway.

To sidestep these difficulties, I recorded for each find from a reopened grave where it was found: was it left in a disturbed part of the grave, indicating it was accessible or maybe even handled? Or was it found in an undisturbed part, and thus probably never seen by the reopeners? This line of enquiry proved very fruitful, because it revealed which things

Fig. 5.5: Grave 30 from Burgweinting-Schule, Bavaria with a massive rust stain and remains of the rust-soaked sheath; the sword (most probably a seax) was removed by the early medieval reopeners (photo: M. Hensch; Courtesy of Firma ArcTron).

were left behind even if they were accessible and most probably visible, and which were removed whenever accessible (Zintl 2019, 112–113).

One of the most reliable indicators for removed objects are left-behind fragments; though, even with these, we should keep in mind that some things might have been already broken and fragmentary at the funeral. To my knowledge, there is no comprehensive study on the state objects were in when they were put into the graves, so far. Generally speaking, most seem to have been used to varying degrees, but still usable; but there are a few exceptions looking either brand new, with certain things even made for burial, like gold foil crosses (Knaut 1994), or, on the other end of the spectrum and only rarely noted in cemetery publications, objects looking flashy but actually already too broken to be usable any longer (Gairhos 2010, 185–186).

Rust stains and greenish copper oxide stains hint at objects now missing (Sprenger 1998, esp. 418–420; Zintl 2019, 78–79). However, a stain may have been caused by an object removed by the reopeners, or by an object which decayed completely, or maybe the allegedly missing object was merely dislocated but left in the grave. In some cases, stains on bones are more likely to have been caused *after* the grave had been opened, by dislocated fragments, than by objects which had been placed close to that part of the body at the funeral. There are reasonably unambiguous cases, of course, but they are rare (*e.g.* Burgweinting-Schule, grave 30, Fig. 5.5).

Taboo? Artefacts with Christian connotations and/or apotropaic significance

Following Ursula Koch and Helmut Roth, later authors have often paid particular attention to objects with (possibly) Christian decoration apparently left behind on purpose (*e.g.* Reiß 1994, 42; Groove 2001, 31–32; more examples in: Kümmel 2009, 64 note 186; Zintl 2019, 37 note 175; a summary in: Aspöck 2005, 237; Kümmel 2009, 79–81; on objects with Christian symbolism more generally see Ristow 2012, 16–26). In some cases two insecure arguments seem to back each

other: for example that a simple crosswise decoration may be seen as a Christian cross, and that the object in question was possibly left behind on purpose, which then leads to the assumption that the cross must have been seen as Christian by the "robbers" as the object was "obviously" left behind because of its Christian decoration.

However, although most authors are aware of the dangers of such circular reasoning, there are almost no attempts to tackle another methodological problem: how can we cross-check if objects bearing Christian symbolism were left behind more often than other things? There is a risk of confirmation bias: every (possibly) Christian object found in a reopened grave adds weight to the hypothesis that these things were left behind on purpose, while any Christian objects that were removed are unobservable.

One exception is Christoph Kümmel's case study on the early medieval cemetery of Munzingen. There the lack of undisturbed graves – more than 90% had been opened – ruled out any comparison of find numbers from reopened and undisturbed graves. Instead, Kümmel studied whether objects with possibly Christian decoration were overrepresented in reopened graves in comparison to objects without decoration. This was not the case, indicating they were not treated differently by the reopeners (Kümmel 2009, esp. 258–259).

As this topic has been so prominent in previous research on grave reopening, I paid special attention in my regional study to the treatment of objects which might have had Christian, otherwise religious ("pagan"), magic or apotropaic significance. The detailed analysis of whether such objects were left in parts of the graves accessible to the reopeners did not reveal any special treatment: objects with possible religious and/or apotropaic significance were sometimes removed, but not in a systematic way. Belt plates, strap-ends and fittings with decoration were treated exactly like belt plates, strap-ends and fittings without decoration: ones attached to shoes or to the clothing of the lower legs were usually found in undisturbed parts of the graves, while ones belonging to the belt were left behind in disturbed parts – if they were left behind: wire-inlaid belt sets are as incomplete in reopened graves as belt sets without decoration.

Other objects with possible apotropaic or otherwise magic significance, such as copper-alloy *Zierscheiben*, pendants made of pierced animal bones, antler or animal teeth, plus the collections of copper-alloy and iron rings which hung from women's belts and were possibly used as a rattling charm, are remarkably rare in reopened graves, and are mostly found in undisturbed parts of the graves. This suggests that such amulets were usually taken, if accessible; though a few iron and copper-alloy rings in (probably) disturbed parts of some graves indicate they were not always removed thoroughly (Zintl 2019, 309–311). There is thus no indication that these objects, nor a certain subset of the rather broadly defined object group "possibly religious, magic, or apotropaic", were taboo for the reopeners in any way.

For the Low Countries, Martine van Haperen (2017, 174) also concludes that "there certainly do not seem to have been any taboos on the removal of particular grave good types". Even though van Haperen does not discuss removal patterns for the – admittedly multifaceted – object category "amulets" in much detail, her meticulous study of object removal makes clear that such a pattern would not have gone unnoticed, if present (see van Haperen 2017, 181, 187, 47–178). For Kent, Alison Klevnäs notes that reopened graves "tend not to contain the kind of apparently amuletic objects" ascribed to "cunning women" in the British literature, but "numbers are too low […] to conclude for certain either that such objects were taken, or that this kind of burial was avoided by robbers". Bracteates were not found at all in reopened graves in Kent, but again numbers are too low to be interpretable; while, on the other hand, and in contrast to the findings from Bavaria,

girdle-hangers and other objects hanging from women's belts were "consistently left behind [in reopened graves in Kent] even when in good condition". Klevnäs interprets this as a sign that girdle-hangers etc. were "too closely tied to the possession of the wearer for transferral" and because of this not taken by the reopeners (Klevnäs 2013, 65–74, esp. 69, 72–73).

The objective: material gain?

Even though removing objects appears to have been a main aim, remarkably many artefacts were left behind in almost all reopened graves in Bavaria, as well as in Kent and the Low Countries, including in the disturbed parts of graves (Klevnäs 2013, 65–74, 83; 2015, 162–163; van Haperen 2017, 47–148, esp. 143–144; Zintl 2019, 118–276). Many of these items are fragmented or parts of incomplete sets, bearing witness to the removal of other furnishings; but the substantial numbers of artefacts left behind are still surprising, especially as even small pieces of metal could have been recycled. In all three study regions, reopened graves are more likely to contain finds than undisturbed graves (Klevnäs 2013, esp. 66; van Haperen 2017, 143–144; Zintl 2019, 291–295, 323–324). Apart from hinting at a preferential opening of richly furnished graves (Klevnäs 2013, 66; van Haperen 2017, esp. 151; Zintl 2019, 291–295, 323–324), or maybe rather the avoidance of unfurnished graves (as can be shown for late Merovingian times in Bavaria, and possibly also the Low Countries, see Zintl 2019, esp. 323–324; van Haperen 2017, esp. 144), the numerous finds from reopened graves indicate that people did not try to remove everything thoroughly. For Bavaria, and similarly for the Low Countries (van Haperen 2017, 47–148), analysis of the positions of the finds shows that in almost every opened grave objects and materials which would have been still (re-)usable were left behind even in parts which must have been visible and accessible to the reopeners (Zintl 2019, 118–276).

That objects were left behind has frequently been noted and is sometimes explained by the "robbers" being in a hurry (*e.g.* Fremersdorf 1955, 29; Knaut 1993, 31), but this cannot sufficiently explain their frequency. Whoever re-entered these burials did so in a manner designed to efficiently reach their contents, but apparently did not try to thoroughly collect or glean everything within reach. From a modern perspective, this does not seem reasonable: after deciding to open a grave with a skeleton or possibly even a half-rotten corpse in it, and after spending the time and labour to dig down at least one and a half metres, we would assume one would at least try to gather everything that is accessible. Most furnishings would have decayed beyond usability within a relatively short period of time, but glass beads, for example, could be washed and reused, and metal objects could be recycled (see discussions in Klevnäs 2013, esp. 65, 72–74, 157–162; Klevnäs 2015, esp. 163–164; Zintl 2019, 60–61, 309–318, 335–337; van Haperen 2017, esp. 143–147). That the reopeners did not try to collect as many of these useful things as was possible without much extra effort shows that profit maximisation, as it is understood today, was not a main objective.

Patterns of object removal in Bavaria and beyond

Some distinct patterns can be observed in how the reopeners treated certain object types. Interestingly, those patterns – and, thus, maybe also the rules and motivations that lie behind them – are remarkably consistent between different cemeteries and also regions: the findings on the Bavarian material and in many aspects similar results for Kent and the Low Countries also tally with Alpár Dobos' recent summary of evidence from reopened graves in Romania (Dobos 2014, 153–157).

There are no indications anything was taboo and consistently left behind, with the possible exceptions of combs and knives (for details see Zintl 2019, 316). Knives are very common in reopened graves in all the research areas, and almost all were found in disturbed parts, often displaced and thus probably even handled by the reopeners. Combs display a similar pattern in Bavaria, though they appear more often than knives untouched even if lying in disturbed parts of the graves. Both combs and knives are often fragmented, indicating they were either accidentally broken or possibly sometimes destroyed on purpose. Were they of little interest due to their low value, or not removable for other reasons, or both? Were they, as Klevnäs (2015) has argued too closely connected to the dead person who probably used them in their lifetime? Or, as van Haperen (2017, esp. 132–133) noted for the Low Countries that reopeners seem to have specifically targeted graves with gender-specific objects: were combs and knives of no interest because they were not gender-specific? My results in Bavaria align with Klevnäs' observation that in Kent reopened graves are – on average – more likely to contain a knife than graves in general. She suggests "that the avoidance of knives has its root in their cultural meaning, rather than in practical considerations" (Klevnäs 2013, 67) and sees a main reason for both their frequent deposition in graves and the fact they were not taken by the reopeners in knives being too closely connected to the living as well as the dead person (Klevnäs 2015, 175–177). The same could be suspected for combs.

Location within the grave is also crucial when looking at dress accessories such as buckles and strap-ends. In Bavaria, the ones belonging to shoes or the clothing of the lower legs were almost never displaced or removed, as the foot end of the graves was rarely opened. The same is true for spurs. By contrast, belts were usually placed at the hip and thus in an area highly likely to be disturbed. Remaining fragments and incomplete sets show that metal parts of belts were removed, but inconsistently. An unexpectedly high number of belt fittings were left behind in reopened graves, usually lying in parts that were accessible and which had been rummaged (Zintl 2019, 315–316). Belt fittings are not discussed in such detail for Kent, the Low Countries or Romania, but their treatment seems to be comparable to Bavaria: metal parts of belts were sometimes removed, but also often left behind in disturbed parts of graves (see Klevnäs 2013, 65–74; 2015; Dobos 2014, esp. 157; van Haperen 2017, 47–148, esp. 145).

Glass beads, supposedly taboo according to some previous researchers (Roth 1977; 1978, esp. 69; Sachenbacher 1993, 169; Höke 2013, 40, 46), were frequently removed from graves in the Regensburg region. Beads are a find group especially suitable for statistical analysis due to their often large numbers per grave. Because of this, I made an exception from my general rule not to compare find numbers from reopened and undisturbed graves (in contrast to Zintl 2019, 311–312, the graves from Burgweinting-Kirchfeld and -Nordwest II were included in the present study). The results are clear-cut: in 47 reopened graves with beads, on average 13 beads were left behind, with numbers ranging from only one bead to an impressive 165 – predominantly tiny – beads left behind in grave 27 in Burgweinting-Schule. In contrast to this, the 26 undisturbed graves with beads contained 40 beads on average (with numbers ranging from 1 to 169 beads per grave) (Table 5.2). This confirms a notion also described by others: the remaining beads are often only a meagre remnant of the former necklace (Knaut 1993, 33; Codreanu-Windauer 1997, 32; Groove 2001, 30; Pöppelmann 2010, 192; Dobos 2014, 156). Similarly, for the Low Countries statistics also show that "the average numbers of beads in reopened graves are in nearly all cases much lower than in the intact graves" (van Haperen 2017, 47–148, esp. 145). In Kent, reopened and undisturbed graves are equally likely to contain beads, and at least one complete necklace was moved but rejected by reopeners in a grave opened soon after

Table 5.2: Comparison of number of beads in undisturbed and reopened graves in the region of Regensburg, Bavaria (sample size nearly 600 graves, see Zintl 2019). Each "x" stands for one grave. Due to the high proportion of reopened graves, there are only 26 undisturbed graves with at least one bead, as opposed to 47 reopened graves which (still) contained at least one bead.

Reopened graves	Number of beads per grave	Undisturbed graves
xx xxxxx xxxxx xxxxx xxxxx xxxxx	1–5	xxxxx x
xxx xxxxx	6–10	xxx
xxxx	11–15	x
xxxx	16–20	
	21–25	xxxx
	26–30	x
	31–35	x
x	36–40	x
x	41–45	x
	46–50	
	51–100	xxxxx x
x	101–150	x
x	151–200	xx

burial. On this basis, Klevnäs suspects the reopeners may have avoided bead necklaces (Klevnäs 2013, esp. 68–69; 2015, 163–164, 178–179) – but as she only recorded presence or absence, but not the number of beads, her results cannot be compared to the ones for Bavaria and the Low Countries. To conclude, at least for continental Europe, the alleged taboo against taking beads is probably a misinterpretation of the fact that often some beads, and sometimes even large numbers of beads were left behind, often lying in disturbed parts of the graves (also see van Haperen 2017, 145). The results for Bavaria and the Low Countries show that beads were removed, but not each and every bead.

Some object types stand out as they were taken whenever accessible: in Bavaria these are all sorts of weapons (with the notable exception of arrowheads), brooches and possibly also arm rings and earrings. For the last mentioned, numbers in the Regensburg region are too low to be reliable, but the few finds seem to indicate that arm rings and earrings were usually only left behind if not visible to the reopeners (Zintl 2019, 312–313). For brooches, the picture is much clearer. There is positive evidence for missing brooches, namely fragments of iron needles from brooches and, in one case, copper oxide stains on the skeleton. Further, brooches are strongly underrepresented in reopened graves: apart from two exceptions (in both cases a pair of small brooches), none of the 115 anthropologically sexed reopened women's graves in the Regensburg sample still contained a brooch (Zintl 2019, 313). All types of brooches were removed: 5th- and 6th-century bow brooches and small brooches usually worn in pairs as well as 7th-century single brooches. As previously noted by Roth (1978, 67–73) and many others (*e.g.* Knaut 1993, 33), brooches were a main aim for the reopeners. While the findings for the Low Countries appear inconclusive (see van Haperen 2017, 145–146), this also holds true for Kent (Klevnäs 2013, 68): brooches were removed consistently.

The same can be said for swords, both spathae and seaxes, which have also long been identified as primary targets (*e.g.* Roth 1978, 70–73; Knaut 1993, 33; Codreanu-Windauer 1997, 32–33). Findings for Kent (Klevnäs 2013, esp. 70–71; 2015), the Low Countries (van Haperen 2017, 47–148, esp. 144), Bavaria (Zintl 2019, 313–314) and also the survey of Romanian cemeteries by Alpár Dobos

(2014, 156) all confirm this view. In the Regensburg region only 11 of the 138 reopened men's graves still contained a sword (in all cases a seax); and of these, only one was found in a part of the grave accessible to the reopeners (on this exceptional grave see: Wintergerst 1997, 283–294; Zintl 2019, 271, 274–275). All other remaining seaxes are either from undisturbed parts of the graves (six examples) or are insecure cases. Residual fragments of sheaths and/or characteristic metal fittings show for at least 13 graves that a sword was removed (the finds hint at a spatha in two cases, the others were most likely seaxes). Swords were thus always removed if accessible, with very few exceptions. Further, as was also noted in other cemeteries and emphasised for Kent, the left-behind fragments of sheaths and rust stains also show that some were not in a good condition but already heavily corroded when they were taken from the graves. This has considerable implications for the motives for their removal (see Codreanu-Windauer 1997, 33; Groove 2001, 30; Höke 2013, 41–42 note 190; and Klevnäs 2013, esp. 70–71, 74; Klevnäs 2015, 164–165)

In contrast to Helmut Roth's argument (1978, 71–73), in the Regensburg region not only swords, but also other weapons were removed if accessible. Both spearheads and shield bosses are very rare in reopened graves, with only eight spearheads and four shield bosses from 138 reopened men's graves. Of these only one spearhead had been displaced and left in the fill of the grave, while all others were found in undisturbed parts of the graves (*i.e.* six spearheads, two shield bosses; one spearhead and two shield bosses remain unclear). These observations and left-behind metal fragments belonging to shields show that both spearheads and shield bosses were removed if accessible (Zintl 2019, 314–315). Like some other researchers (*e.g.* Pauli 1981; Klevnäs 2013, 70; Dobos 2014, 156–157), I suspect the left-behind spearheads observed by Roth and others could in most cases be explained by their peripheral placement in the grave, outside an (assumed) coffin. In my sample, with – to my knowledge – the first detailed analysis of this question, spearheads and shields were usually only left behind if not accessible to the reopeners.

The only weapons which were often left behind even if in clear view are arrowheads. Their treatment resembles the treatment of belt fittings: there are no indications that arrowheads were actively avoided, but nor were they consistently removed. Arrowheads were found in 24 reopened graves in my study region, and in 14 of those were lying in disturbed parts of the grave, and often also had been moved. Similar observations were made at the site of Künzing-Bruck (situated in eastern Bavaria, outside the study area) where arrowheads were found in 28 graves, even though about 95% of the 128 graves there had been opened (Hannibal-Deraniyagala 2007, 7–10). Correspondingly, but without going into details, Dobos (2014, 157) notes for Romania that "[t]he only category of weapon frequently left in the grave is the arrowheads"; and in the Low Countries arrowheads were often left behind, too (van Haperen 2017, 47–148, esp. 145). Thus, in and beyond my study region, arrowheads were treated unlike all other weapons.

… and what these patterns may tell us

Arrowheads are smaller and easier to produce than other weapons, and thus were both easier to overlook and – presumably – of lower material value. Still, their differing treatment by the reopeners coincides with other observations on arrows in the burial rite: in contrast to all other weapons – which are most common in the graves of adult men – arrowheads are common in children's graves (on weapons and age at death see Sasse 2001, 113–120; Brather 2004; Brather *et al*. 2009; Gutsmiedl-Schümann 2010, 95–111; on arrows see esp. Sasse 2001, 117; Losert 2003, 444; Lohrke 2004, 98, 105; Brather 2004, 29; Gutsmiedl-Schümann 2010, 99–100). This indicates

they did not have the same meaning as other weapons: bows and arrows are long-range weapons maybe used for hunting or leisure rather than fighting (or displaying the potential ability to fight). It is likely that arrowheads were not removed thoroughly because their significance differed from other weapons (also see van Haperen 2017, 154).

Weapons and especially swords, as well as women's brooches and jewellery, are among the most valuable (read: costly) objects in graves from Merovingian times (Steuer 1997, 392–393). At the same time, they were also valuable in another sense of the word: weapons could signal rank and power (the latter also in a very direct way). Although written sources should be read with caution as they follow their own imbedded rules and most are of post-Merovingian date, they indicate that precious weapons and jewellery were used as gifts for forming alliances between people of both coequal and differing rank and did not necessarily belong to the sphere of trade (Bazelmans 1999; Härke 2000; Le Jan 2000; Reuter 2000; Klevnäs 2015, 169–174; Zintl 2019, 36–37, 338–340; an exploration of the concept of gift exchange and grave reopening in: van Haperen 2010). Klevnäs suggested swords and brooches played a special role in "creating networks of debt and obligation" (Klevnäs 2015, 179) and may have had an "element of personhood ascribed to them" (Klevnäs 2015, 173) and the ability to carry stories of their former uses and owners; and that their consistent removal from reopened graves, also noted in Kent, might be explained by these qualities. Though I doubt Klevnäs' interpretation of grave reopening as transgressive and mal-intentioned acts (Klevnäs 2015, 166–168; Zintl 2017; Zintl 2019, 343–348), my thoughts on possible explanations for the consistent removal of weapons, brooches and possibly arm rings and earrings go in the same direction (Zintl 2019, 338–340).

Another quality shared by the object groups which were thoroughly removed is that they are strongly connected to either the male or female gender – in contrast to, for instance, combs and knives. As was emphasised by van Haperen (2017, 132–133) the reopeners seem to have been especially interested in gender-specific grave goods. Still, the inconsistent removal of other gender-specific objects, especially beads and metal parts of the male belt, indicates that this only applied to certain gendered objects from the graves. Thus, the ability to signal certain roles and/or a certain status (displayed in different ways depending on a person's gender) appears a more likely reason. Also, while the composition of, for instance necklaces or the object assemblages hanging from women's belts apparently left some room for variation, the combination and mode of wearing of both weapons and brooches appear more strongly regulated. Possibly, the consistent removal of weapons and brooches stems from similar underlying reasons as their comparatively standardised deposition patterns.

More generally, the findings in Bavaria, and similarly the Low Countries (van Haperen 2017, 158), suggest that objects were of more interest the closer they had been to the (living and/or dead) body. The reopeners usually aimed for the centre of the grave and the middle and upper part of the dead body or skeleton, while other parts of the graves were mostly ignored. There are, for instance, no observable attempts to enlarge the opening pit to reach a spearhead or shield boss at the side of the grave, even though, in some cases, the reopeners may have noticed wooden parts of the shield or the spear while digging (Zintl 2019, 314–315). This shows that even though (at least in Bavaria) spearheads and metal parts of shields were quite thoroughly removed if accessible, they were not of enough interest to adapt the way a grave was opened to get them (see also Klevnäs 2013, 70). Again, this strongly indicates the main motivation for grave reopening and object removal lies in the objects' meaning and their connection to the buried people, and not in profit objectives.

Removing things – where to?

It is usually assumed that the removed objects were taken away to some other place, either to use them again or recycle the materials (see Baumeister 2004), or possibly as a kind of reminder of the dead (van Haperen 2010; 2017, 165–168). For bones missing from the graves, on the other hand, it is mostly assumed that they were only displaced by the reopeners and left on the surface where they eventually decayed. One notable exception is van Haperen (2010; 2017, 122–127, 165–168), who discusses both intentional removal and possible further uses of human bones from reopened graves, and also mentions finds of human bones in early medieval settlements and river deposits in her study region.

However, on the current lack of evidence for widespread reuse of grave furnishings we cannot exclude that objects from reopened graves were left on the cemetery's surface, as appears to have been the case at the rather earlier cemetery of Slusegård in Denmark, where – as a lucky exception – the cemetery's old surface was preserved (see Lind 1991; Crumlin-Pedersen 1995, 87–91). Though comparable finds from early medieval cemeteries are not known to me, it is possible that things could have been dug up and either discarded after handling them in the act of reopening, or, possibly, displayed on the grave's surface or collected and curated elsewhere within the cemetery's boundaries, without re-entering the ground.

Conclusion

Although reopened early medieval graves are frequently discussed in site reports, research remained rather cursory and often anecdotal for a remarkably long time. The traditional label "grave robbery" implied that we already knew what had happened to the graves and why people had opened them. This and the focus on material motives often prevented further questions even being asked.

However, the last fifteen years have seen a noticeable increase of interest in the phenomenon, starting with a critical re-evaluation of terminology, methods and possible interpretations of grave reopening (Aspöck 2005; Kümmel 2009). A number of in-depth studies now allow reassessment of observations and interpretation of how graves were opened and which motives may have lain behind the deeds. The three regional studies discussed here show that graves were opened while the cemeteries were still used for burial. The reopeners targeted graves within recent memory and were familiar with contemporary burial customs. While opinions diverge on the question of whether the graves were more likely to have been opened by kin or enemies, and whether the reopenings were seen as hostile acts or rather as ritual treatment of one's own graves (see van Haperen 2017, 188–189), the findings of all three studies show concordantly that the widespread reopening of early medieval graves cannot be adequately explained with material objectives.

The oft-cited "taboo" against removing objects with Christian, or otherwise religious or apotropaic significance cannot be confirmed and rather seems to be an over-interpretation of isolated cases. At the same time, the studies reveal distinctive and consistent patterns in which object groups were systematically removed. The specific removal patterns give us a new angle to look at objects from Merovingian times and their significance (see Klevnäs 2015). Reopened graves can tell us more about early medieval people's relation to the graves, the dead in them, and the things buried with them. Grave reopening does not conflict with the often lavishly furnished burials of Merovingian times (Zintl 2019, esp. 330–348). To the contrary, it highlights several aspects of that burial rite and thus seems closely and intricately linked to it.

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6. Disturbance of early medieval graves in south-western Gaul: taphonomy, burial reopening and the reuse of graves

Yves Gleize

In early medieval cemeteries, graves sometimes contain the co-mingled bones of several individuals. For many years, these disturbed deposits have created questions for historians and archaeologists. Studies of early medieval grave disturbances were often based only on textual sources or imprecise analyses of bones deposits. Many hypotheses were proposed to explain these usages. Were they funerary practices or unrelated to the burial process? With the development of the field methods known as archaeothanatology (Duday 2009), it is now possible to analyse the organisation of disturbed bones in graves more precisely. This methodology requires the full documentation of the position of bones in the grave and thus the deposition patterns. With this data recorded it becomes possible to ascertain if a body (primary deposit) or only dry bones (secondary deposit) were initially placed in a grave, or to determine the original presence or absence of funerary containers and architecture (*e.g.* tree trunk coffins, wood covers). Generally, it is important to distinguish taphonomical processes, such as the decay of human remains or coffins, from anthropogenic facts. And, for those determined to be actual cases in which graves were opened, it is necessary to distinguish whether they resulted from funerary practices or later interventions.

   In early medieval contexts, one of the main causes of disturbance of existing graves is their reuse. Interpretations of reuse practices are often limited to identifying burial practices contrary to the law and possible familial graves. Insights provided by textual sources are very few, and studies of the bones and their patterns of deposit have been for the most part too hasty. An archaeothanotological analysis of a number of early medieval graves, located between the Loire and the Garonne in south-western Gaul, focuses on the heterogeneous nature and complexity of these practices: they vary according to a series of parameters, including chronology, the architecture of the grave and the location of the burial within the cemetery (Gleize 2006). Their study is fundamental to understanding the dynamic organisation of funerary spaces and provides insight into the evolution of burial practices and the perception of the dead in the early Middle Ages.

Introduction and methods

During the early Middle Ages in Western Europe (5th to 10th centuries AD), the antique pattern of situating funerary spaces along roads and in the suburbs was gradually transformed. Grave groupings around "founder" burials and edifices such as urban churches and private oratories increased

(Young 1977; Ariès 1981; James 1989; Dierkens and Perin 1997; Halsall 2010). Progressively, over the course of centuries, cemeteries were integrated into towns and villages. In the south of Gaul, this phenomenon was accompanied in the 6th century by an increase in the use of sarcophagi, and a decrease of the deposition of objects in graves. Archaeologists and historians have also noted the presence of the remains of several skeletons in what appear otherwise to be primary individual early medieval graves. Many hypotheses have been offered to explain this phenomenon. However, the premise of discussions has often been that these may have represented shared familial graves, with additional bodies added to initial burials, and that such practices were contrary to the law. However, the complexity of bone deposits in the graves requires more detailed exploration: this is a complex phenomenon that shows significant variability and cannot all be explained in the same way. Studies of the skeletal remains, which have not received significant attention, have traditionally been limited to a counting of the bones (sometimes only the skulls) without consideration of their positions in the graves. The reopening and destruction of graves often left the deposits looking like nothing more than a heap of bones at the time of excavation, making more detailed descriptions seem both impossible and valueless. However, the methodology of archaeothanatology (Duday 2009), which involves documentation of the position of bones and their deposit patterns, has allowed studies to progress significantly in the last thirty years. With these methods, for example, it is possible to ascertain if a body (primary deposit) or only dry bones (secondary deposit) were initially placed in a grave. Archaeologists can also avoid the common error of decontextualising these practices, since it is necessary to interpret these disturbances of bones using archaeological data such as the type of funerary space used, the location of the grave and its dating.

In France, recent research on the early Middle Ages (Crubézy and Raynaud 1988; Blaizot 1997; Farago-Szekeres 1997; Gleize 2006; Noterman 2016b) has demonstrated the importance of studying the bones found in a secondary position in individual graves. Such analyses, which are still too uncommon, must precede any interpretations of these practices and any comparisons with textual sources. A number of questions allow us to understand the timing of the deposition of bodies and bones and how they evolved over time:

– How many individuals were present in the grave?
– Were they deposited as complete cadavers or as bones?
– Were the deposits simultaneous or did they take place over time?
– Were the bones disturbed as new bodies were deposited in the grave?
– Who were the buried individuals (*e.g.* age at death, sex)?
– How do we make sense of these disturbances in documenting the history of particular cemetery spaces?

In describing the manipulation of bones, archaeothanatological methods should be used before comparing the resulting data to archaeoanthropological data. The groupings of bones inside the grave must be analysed to understand the origin and the causes of the disturbances. It is necessary to understand if the manipulations of bones inside the grave took place during deposition of a body or after. Previous buried skeletons could be disturbed during the reuse of a grave for a new body. However, the reuse of a grave is not always a simple disturbance but it relates to the uses of graves during longer time spans and their memorial dimension. To understand these practices, it is necessary first to distinguish them from other types of disturbances.

In this essay, an analysis of graves in the south-west of Gaul, I will first present non-anthropological disturbances and touch upon the issue of so-called grave robbery, and then will move to an analysis of the reuse of graves. These practices must be discussed in relation to other archaeological and anthropological data from graves (such as grave furniture, the location of the grave in the necropolis, biological identity (*i.e.* age at death, sex, stress markers), and so on) to move beyond simple descriptions and offer some possible explanations for these practices.

Disturbances unrelated to the reuse of graves: N- and C-transformations

The arrangement of human remains discovered during an excavation is the consequence of a series of taphonomical processes between the time of the burial and the archaeological excavation centuries later (Efremov 1940; Duday 2009). Even if the nature of these archaeological site formation processes (Schiffer 1983) is sometimes indefinite, anthropologists must be aware of their existence. At a general level, these processes can be divided into two types of phenomena: naturally-occurring transformations (N-transformations) and anthropogenic transformations (C-transformations), the latter being either deliberate or accidental (Schiffer 1983). The identification of bone displacements with regard to the general position of the body and the reconstruction of the burial environment around the body in the grave (including empty spaces caused by decomposition of the body, coffin, shroud, and so on) (Duday 2009; Blaizot 2014) are crucial for differentiating between C- and N-transformations.

Animal activities, taphonomy, flooding: N-transformations in practice

In some cases, modifications of the positions of bones may be due to the activities of scavenging animals, which can be identified by the evidence of subterranean dens or gnaw marks left on bones. However, in early medieval graves one of the most common causes of such modifications is the deterioration or disappearance of the funerary container. For example, during the decay of the cadaver in the grave, the decay of coffins made of perishable materials or the collapse of the walls of a grave can cause numerous bones movements, some of them large, due to the force of gravity (Duday 2009; Blaizot 2014). To highlight such modifications, the analysis of deposits has to take into account the features of the grave that are no longer existent. So, in several cases of sarcophagi studied here (Gleize 2006: Usseau, Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac, Richelieu), such movements were explained by the collapse of a wooden floor or stretcher that created an empty space under the skeleton (Gleize 2012) (Fig. 6.1).

Other disturbances may be due to other natural processes. In certain graves, small-sized bones (such as phalanxes or the hyoid bone) or low density bones (ribs and vertebrae) may be found dozens of centimetres from their initial position without the other bones of the same individual having moved substantially. These phenomena are observed particularly in sites known to have experienced raised water levels (Clarensac (Fig. 6.2)) or those located close to estuaries (Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac). In such cases, the displacement of bones is likely to be due to flooding (*e.g.* Voorhies 1969; Boaz and Beherensmeyer 1976).

These displacements are even clearer if they concern the last individual buried in a collective burial. For example, in a sarcophagus in the necropolis at Fief Dampierre of Usseau (Fig. 6.3), the hyoid bone of the last buried individual, which should have been in front of the cervical vertebrae, was found in front of the left tibio-femoral joint. The same individual had bones of the feet displaced to both sides of his skull. The recurrence of displacements related to bones of similar types characterised by a small size or a low density suggests the presence of a concentrated flow of water
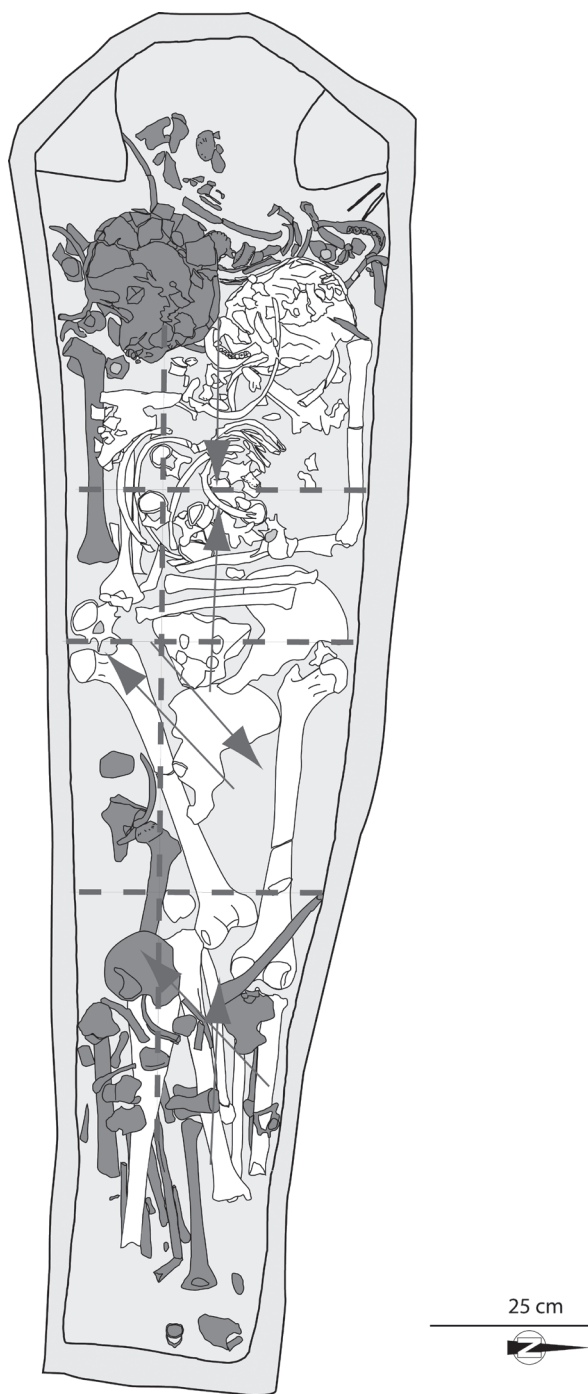
Fig. 6.1: Sarcophagus of the necropolis of Usseau (Deux-Sèvres, France) presenting bone displacements (arrows) due to fractures (dashed lines) in a floor under the last deposited individual (white bones).

25 cm

(such as a stream) during a past flooding of the grave. Similar phenomena have already been documented (Duday 2009) and must not be interpreted as anthropological manipulations. Conversely, however, it is important to note that not all displacements can be explained by the infiltration of water (Gardrat 1860–1867).

In an experimental study (Gleize and Peressinotto unpublished), we tested the influence of the water on bone displacement in the grave of an adult skeleton in an anatomical position. If the water had simply risen in the grave, such movements would have been impossible. However, the formation of micro-flows helps to explain the movements of small osseous remains. Uneven water penetration in several locations of the grave could have led to the creation of one or more micro-currents. The movement of more substantial remains is much rarer and depends not only on strong currents but also the arrangement of bones. In the case of an unsealed sarcophagus, the water flowed more easily through gaps between the tank and the cover than through the bottom. Movements of bone caused by water can also be identified by the displacement and grouping of bones of the same density such as those of the hands and feet.

Human disturbances of graves: C-transformations

Once N-transformations have been ruled out, the anthropogenic manipulation of bones (C-transformations) should be closely studied to differentiate human activities before and during deposition from disturbances caused by subsequent reopenings, whether accidental, for example during building work, or intentional, for the removal of objects or body parts. In the literature the latter practice has become known as "grave robbery", but recent studies have shown that this term is misleading, as it was not predominantly carried out for materialistic reasons in this period (Salin

Fig. 6.2: Burial T15 in the medieval cemetery of Clarensac (Gard, France) (Courtesy of O. Boyer and Service régional archéologie d'Occitanie).

1962, 262–267; Roth 1977; Thiedmann and Schliefring 1992; Effros 2002; Kümmel 2009; Van Haperen 2010; Aspöck 2011; Dierkens 2011; Klevnäs 2013; Chenal and Barrand Emam 2014; Noterman 2016a; 2016b; see Zintl, this volume). Bone disturbances due to so-called grave robbery can take many forms, depending for example on whether there was still an empty space from a funerary container around the body when it was reopened (*e.g.* Aspöck 2011; Noterman 2016b; Aspöck *et al.*, this volume). However, in general, these disturbances are often easy to distinguish from the reuse of graves. Many early medieval burials were typically disturbed for removal of objects before the funerary containers were completely filled with sediment, that is to say, the activity took place within a generation or so after burial, which typically led to little bone damage, and often left bone spread across the base of the former funerary container (*e.g.* Aspöck 2011; Zintl 2012; Klevnäs 2013; Noterman 2016b). Often the disturbance is limited to a certain area of the grave, while skeletal remains are still *in situ* in other areas. In graves where all perishable structures had collapsed and which were fully filled with sediment when they were reopened, this leads to the dislocation of bones within the area of the reopening pit only. Another characteristic of such graves is the fragmentation of bones as, for example, in the grave S35 of the necropolis of Font-Pinette. However, in the case of non-perishable grave structures, such as stone sarcophagi, containing several skeletons, empty space is likely to be preserved for a much longer time and the opening of the preserved cover provides access to entire *in situ* skeletons. Reopenings not associated with funerary practices in this type of grave may be identified when all the skeletons in the same grave appear to have undergone identical disturbances. For example, in a sarcophagus of the necropolis Fief Dampierre (Usseau), a large number of bones of all the individuals were pushed in the same direction (Fig. 6.4). During such movements, the medium-sized (*e.g.* vertebrae) or small bones might remain in the same position at the bottom of the grave because they were the least likely to be disrupted by such actions.

Fig. 6.3: Displacement of the hyoid bone (black arrow) and the left cuboids (white arrow). Grave 34 in the necropolis Fief Dampierre of Usseau (Deux-Sèvres, France).

Early medieval texts testify to the problem of "grave robbery". Although there is not much evidence for the interdiction of the manipulation of corpses and their dislocation before the 4th century (Thomas 1999; Rebillard 2009), there were popular fears concerning the "violation of graves" which were condemned in the 1st century AD (Thomas 1999). The survival of this antique protection of the grave may be seen in the majority of the barbarian laws: Ripuarian (at the beginning of 7th century), Visigothic (at the end of 7th century), Salic (6th century) and Burgundian (6th century) laws all punished the violation of graves (*corpus exspoliaverit* or *sepulchrorum violatricem/violatorem*). Visigothic legislation specified that following the violation of a grave, it was necessary to put back in order "the body of the deceased and all which surrounds him" as was the case in Roman law (Thomas 1999, 87). For example, a letter of Gregory the Great (*Letters*, IV, 30) testifies to the importance of protecting a grave because people died miraculously when the grave of a certain Laurent was opened in error. In addition, the ban on the violation of graves and the condemnation of perpetrators were formulated in numerous councils (Février 1987) and sacramentaries (Henron 1992).

Finally, epitaphs testify to attempts to protect graves against violation (Le Blant 1892; Effros 1997). At Antigny (Vienne), a sarcophagus is engraved with the inscription "Theobald's stone should not be lifted" (*Teodovaldo labede non revolvatur*) (Le Blant 1892). Such an epitaph may be compared to an inscription discovered in Saint-Denis; the stone specified that "that no one should hurt the grave" (*nulle lesit sepultus*) (Wyss 2004). The need for protection may also have led to the sealing of certain sarcophagi as observed in the necropolis of Chasseneuil-sur-Bonnieure (Gleize 2006; Poignant 2010).

Fig. 6.4: Anthropogenic disturbances following deposits (displacements schematised with arrows) at Usseau. Sarcophagi 83 (Y. Gleize) and 68 (C. Scuiller).

These elements of protection for graves are important even if they do not offer evidence of the actual pillage of tombs. The archaeological cases of pillage but also the repetition of laws and epitaphs attest the frequency of the reopening of graves during the early Middle Ages. If "grave robbery" is an illicit activity, then it is necessary to specify the practices and the possibilities for reusing a grave legally during the early Middle Ages.

Disturbance and reuse of graves

A diversity of disturbances: case study of the province of Bordeaux

Many disturbances of early medieval burials are related to the reuse of graves in the area under study. In a funerary context, a grave could be reused *in situ* (primary reuse) or in a place different from its original use (secondary reuse), for example when a coffin is moved to another context, such as the example of Charlemagne's burial in a reused Roman sarcophagus. The reuse implies the desire to retain the function of an element by integrating it into the same or a new context. Several legal and hagiographical texts of the early Middle Ages attest to the reuse of graves, with additional burials added, while graves containing skeletons of several individuals are commonly found from the Merovingian period across Western Europe, from Spain to Germany. To explain the process, scholars such as Édouard Salin (1952, 212–216) referred to early medieval texts that might explain such phenomena: their interpretation oscillated between the practice of multi-generational family graves and seeing these as "deviant" practices (*e.g.* Lex Salica, XVII).

To understand these practices and account for their variability, it is important to describe and compare grave disturbances in specific archaeological contexts. The phenomenon of reuse was thus studied in a target area to limit the impact of regional factors: in this case, the ecclesiastical province of Bordeaux (Gleize 2006). Originally a Roman province, *Aquitania secunda*, this region is historically well-defined. Located in the north of today's Nouvelle Aquitaine, Bordeaux contains a large number of excavated early medieval necropolises. Early explorations of Merovingian burials in this region frequently revealed graves containing several skeletons, such as in Civaux (Routh 1738). Some epitaphs linked the names of two individuals on the same steles or tomb covers: *Aeternalis* and *Servilla* at Civaux, *Ismaimalla* and *Siggifledis* at Doué-la-Fontaine, and *Daveldes* and *Dumnolentus* and *Lopecena* and *Dedimia* at Rom (Uberti 2015). However, the stones do not offer evidence as to whether these individuals were buried at the same time.

Among the early medieval cemeteries that have been excavated to a higher standard in the recent past, several different forms of sites (including large rural necropolises and groups of scattered graves) were selected and analysed. In total, a corpus of 11 funerary sites representing 786 graves was established (Fig. 6.5). The overall proportion of reused graves was 22.5%, with the rates varying a great deal between sites (Table 6.1). Using detailed documentation of the skeletal remains in the excavation data (such as position of the body, and grouping of the displaced bones) and biological data (age, stature, robustness of the skeleton), a minimum number of individuals (MNI) for each grave was calculated and the representation by type of bones was reached. With the identification of individual skeletons and the analysis of the position of their bones, the deposit patterns could be analysed to estimate their relative chronology.

The graves containing the remains of several individuals revealed a diversity of funerary practices. Simultaneous deposits (contemporaneous burials of two or multiple individuals), for instance, were rare and often not easily demonstrable. For example, at the necropolises of Chadenac and
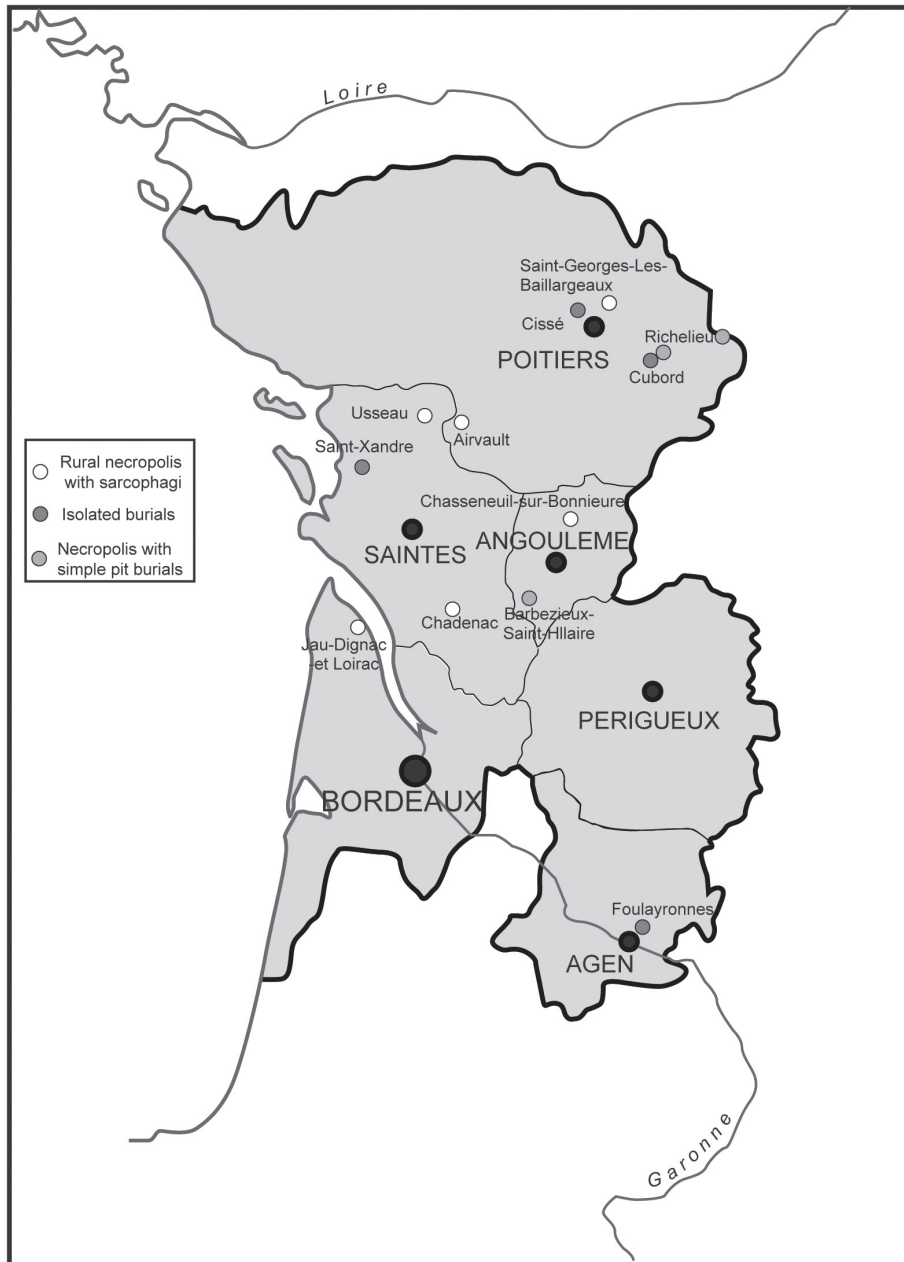
Fig. 6.5: Location of the different funerary sites under analysis.

Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac (Gleize 2006; 2015), the observation of the position of bones suggested the burials were consecutive, with graves usually reused after the remains of the first occupant had decomposed.

It was possible to distinguish two kinds of primary reuses, namely whether the grave was reused to bury an entire cadaver or a collection of bones. The first type of reuse consisted of a

Table 6.1: Percentages of reused burials in different funerary sites of the ecclesiastical province of Bordeaux.

Site	Total of excavated burials	Total of analyzed burials	Total of reused burials	% of reused burials	% of reused sarcophagi	Average number of individuals in sarcophagus	Type of majority reuse
La Mamot	181	66	9	13.6	50	2	Superposition
Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac	28	28	11	39	73	2	Superposition
La-Maison-Neuve	2	2	2	100	100	4	?
Chadenac	472	313	78	25	51	2	Reduction
Chasseneuil-sur-Bonnieure	117	116	51	44	44	2	Reduction
Richelieu	35	34	3	8.8	100	3	Reduction
Airvault	28	16	2	12.5	12.5	1	Reduction
Cissé	6	6	2	33	100	3	Reduction/ Superposition
Foulayronnes	26	26	8	30	87.5	3 (4)	Reduction
Cubord-le-Claireau	172	146	10	7	100	2–3	Reduction/ Superposition
La-Font-Pinette	33	33	1	3	100	5	

secondary deposit of bones – bone exhumed elsewhere and then reburied. The reuse of graves for the deposit of additional bones was rare and often limited to one long bone or skull. For example, on the site of Mamot, the anthropological comparison showed that the bones in secondary position in a sarcophagus came from a partly destroyed grave close to the sarcophagus. Transfers of bones in a zone of the necropolis of Terrier-de-la-Chapelle at Chadenac (SP30, 31, 32, 33) may, perhaps, be correlated with the deposition of a new sarcophagus (SP32) on the location of an older grave (Gleize 2006).

In the majority of cases, however, the graves were reused for the burial of intact bodies. The bones of the last occupant(s) could be moved to the edge of the grave and/or reduced to a part of the grave (Fig. 6.1). In the second case, the position of bones differed from anatomical logic and their grouping (known as *reduction*, Boulestin and Duday 2006, 153) attested that they were totally removed then partially reintroduced to the grave and deposited in front of and under the new body, rather than, for example, simply being moved aside.

Another practice observed was superposition (Fig. 6.6), in which the existing skeleton(s) were covered by the simple superposition of a new corpse. In such a case, the bones of the previous occupant of the grave were moved little, with often only the most voluminous bones (skulls, hip bones and long bones) disturbed.

Deposition of the skulls of previous occupants on both sides of the head of the newly buried body has frequently been observed in (Gleize 2006, 449) and outside the region under study (*e.g.* Salin 1952). It is presumably related to the importance of the head for contemporary community members. This usage also suggests that the bones of the previous occupants were visible during funerals. The presentation of a body in a grave was surely important. In some cases, the new body was laid on a wooden board or floor placed on top of the bones of the previous skeletons (Usseau, Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac and Richelieu) (Fig. 6.1) (Gleize 2010). In addition, at Usseau, the previous skeleton was covered during the reuse by a layer of gravel (Fig. 6.3).

In general there is no evidence that graves were reused more than twice, but there are instances in which individual graves had been reused as many as five times. When the number of individuals was more than three, it is often difficult to identify the practices for each burial and the nature of these deposits (bodies or bones). In a few examples (Chadenac, Foulayronnes and Font-Pinette), a portion of the removed bones were deposited in a pit near the reused sarcophagus (Fig. 6.7) (Gleize 2015). These graves often contained more than four individuals and the archaeothanatological analysis attests that the majority of small bones were buried in the lateral pit and that the long bones were reburied in the graves. Finally, sometimes a variety of manipulations, such as reduction and superposition or reuse for body and bone, were observed in the same grave that had been reused several times. For example, in a sarcophagus at Cubord-le-Claireau, two individuals had been buried on top of each other (superposition) and then a femur was deposited on the last skeleton.

A common practice but neither widespread, nor forbidden

The practice of grave reuse, although frequent, was never used in the majority of graves in any of the studied sites: reuse varied from a single interment to about half of the graves at a site (Table 6.1). All the identified types of reuse occur across all sites. Although the proportions of reused tombs varied significantly, the size of the cemetery does not seem to have had any measurable influence on the proportion. For example, both large sites such as Chadenac and small isolated groups such as Foulayronnes contained a substantial proportion of reused graves.

With respect to the frequency of these practices, we have to wonder about the opposition to these practices in contemporary legislation. In early medieval legal texts, there is no indication of concerns regarding the deposition of bones in an already occupied grave. Texts about the reuse of tombs

Fig. 6.6: Sarcophagus 169 (Jau-Dignac et Loirac). Some bones of the first buried individual (in red) were displaced when a new body (in yellow) was superimposed. Then the third individual (in green) was superimposed after the right femur of the second interred was placed on his left.
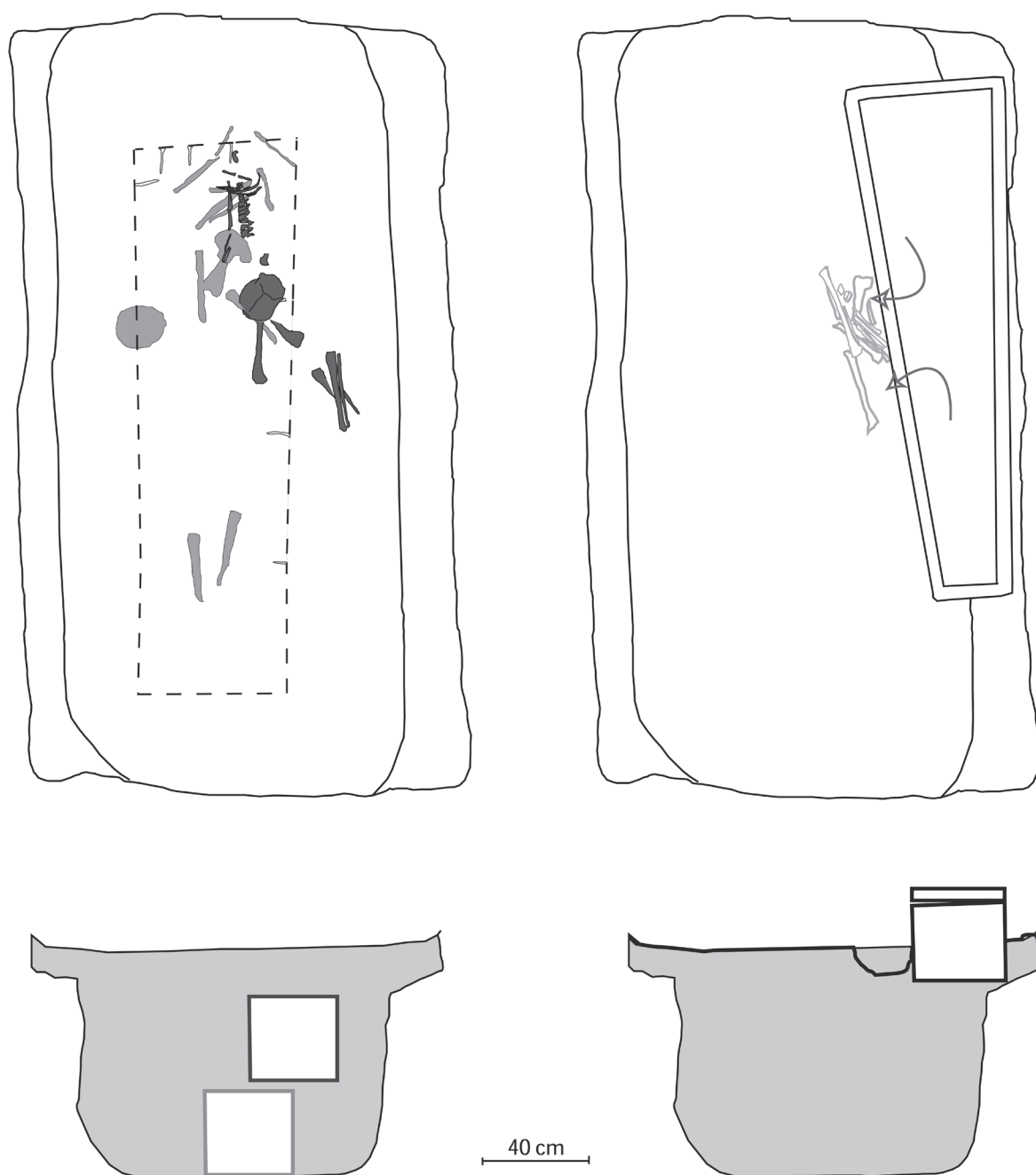
Fig. 6.7: Burial 4 (La-Font-Pinette at Barbezieux-Saint-Hilaire). To the left, the first burials were in the pit and to the right of the installation of the sarcophagus with a pit for reduction. Below, cut schematising the various events in the pit.

are relatively rare. There are several hagiographical texts, in particular those written by Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great, that testify to the reuse of graves in which the former occupant had been reduced to bones. This was the case, for instance, during the burial of the bishop Reticius (*Liber in gloria confessorum*, LXXIV) or an unnamed monk (*Dialogues*, II, 33, 2). The Synod of Auxerre (561–605) and Salic law (middle of 6th century) both stipulated that it was forbidden to lay a corpse atop another. At roughly the same time, the Council of Macon in AD 585 (*Concilia Galliae*, *Concilium Matisconense*, XVII) forbade the reuse of a grave should the corpse within it not yet be decomposed. These bans seem to have been connected to cases in which families sought to deposit a body on top of another body or lay a grave on top of a grave.

However, in the majority of studied burials, the cadavers of first occupants seem to have been decayed. This consciousness of the degree of decomposition in cases of reuse raises the question of the perception of the body of the deceased at the start of the Middle Ages and of its implication in customs involving manipulation of graves and of the bones interred within them. These practices must be put in dialogue with the reorganisation of funerary space in the early Middle Ages, as well as with the multiplication of the translation of relics. With new notions of bodies during this period, were some conjunctions of these phenomena related to the practice of reusing graves?

Chronological data in the region under study shows that reuse of graves in the form of the reduction of skeletal remains formed the majority of cases during the 6th century but decreased during the 7th century, in favour of reuse by superposition of additional bodies (Gleize 2007). These results are compatible with observations made in southern France (Crubézy and Raynaud 1987). Texts from the 6th century mention only a ban on superimposing bodies, making no mention of those bodies buried over earlier burials that had been reduced to bones. The decrease of disturbances in the form of reduction may testify to a change in the perception of bones and bodies during the 7th century (Gleize 2007). In view of the textual sources and the frequency of the practices observed in contemporary necropolises, it is difficult to recognise an effective legal ban against the reuse of graves and any manipulations of bones in existing graves (Treffort 2004).

Causes of the reuse of graves

The variability in the types of reuse is most probably due to different beliefs and concepts around bones and cadavers. Therefore, it is also necessary to analyse the possible motivations and reasons for burying an additional body in an occupied grave.

Nature and visibility of the grave

The type of grave was a very important factor in determining its reuse (James 1979, 163). The preservation of an empty space and a cover in a grave facilitated its reuse. Thus the majority of reused graves in the corpus were stone sarcophagi (Table 6.1). At the sites in which there were few sarcophagi (1–4), they are all reused. Of the roughly twenty stone cists in our corpus, approximately 50% were reused. The frequent preservation of the original cover of the grave offers evidence of a certain amount of care taken during the reopening of the tomb. The site of Maison-Neuve at Cubord is particularly exceptional: a sarcophagus containing the remains of five individuals is closed by its original lid. Meanwhile at Chasseneuil-sur-Bonnieure, several lids of reused sarcophagi reveal repairs.

Fig. 6.8: Plan of the necropolis of Cubord le Claireau with different types of funerary deposits.

The possibility of reusing a grave required the burial to be accessible and visible, or at least for there to be knowledge of its location. In several cases, the cover of sarcophagi seem to have appeared at ground level allowing fairly easy identification of their location and facilitating reopening. In other cases, steles were used to identify graves, such as at Foulayronnes, where two marked cists were reused.

Within individual funeral spaces, reused graves were not necessarily evenly distributed. There might be variations according to the accessibility and the position of the graves in the funerary space. In the necropolis of Cubord-le-Claireau, for instance, the proximity of a path in the funerary space seemed to favour reuse as did the ground-level burial of a sarcophagus in a cemetery otherwise characterised by graves dug into the ground (Fig. 6.8). The rate of reuse also increased with the density of graves, such as at Chadenac and at Usseau. Near buildings, the proportion of reused graves varied. At Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac, for instance, reuse was more common outside than inside the edifice, which has been identified as a private church. However, these spatial differences should not be only considered in a pragmatic way. They may well correspond to decisions to use

the space differently, in particular as a reflection of the identity of different subjects and groups, or the desirability of burial in particular areas of the cemetery.

Reuse of graves and identity

Even if early medieval texts proposed a normative vision inspired by antique traditions, they nonetheless put emphasis on the protection of the grave and attested to the possibility of reusing graves by an authorised group. In Salic law, violation of graves was condemned by a much stronger penalty (100–200 *solidi*) than the unauthorised reuse of a grave (62 *solidi*). The emphasis was more heavily focused on the protection of the grave against violation as "property" than the actual reuse of the grave. The reuse of graves and thereby some disturbances could be related to the identity of the deceased and the memory construction of his or her respective social group.

Early medieval texts indicated that the holders of rights to tombs could have family links with the previous occupants (in the case of a couple or a sibling pair). Gregory of Tours specified that the bishop Reticius was buried with his wife (*Liber in gloria confessorum*, LXXIV) and two lovers were also buried together (*Historiarum libri decem*, I, 42, *Liber in gloria confessorum*, LXXIII). Saint Benedict of Nursia asked that his sister be buried in his grave so that he could later join her (*Dialogues*, II, 33, 2). These texts certainly show the religious perspective of the authors of these texts as they relate to their families. However, links of patronage could also exist. For example, Gregory the Great cited the case of a priest buried with a monk (*Dialogues*, II, 33, 2).

In few examples, individuals sharing certain discrete traits, such as anatomical anomalies with a possible genetic origin, thus indicating biological closeness were buried in the same grave (Gleize 2006). In the case of a sarcophagus at Chadenac, for instance, which was reused in a short period of time, several skeletons buried within it had a posterior bridge of atlas vertebrae. This characteristic is a strong familial trait (Saunders and Popovich 1978; Selby *et al.* 1955). Similarly, evidence for or the absence of stress manifested in the linear hypoplasies of tooth enamel (Goodman and Rose 1990; Boldsen 2007; Nakayama 2015) could suggest that the individuals buried together had earlier lived in the same socioeconomic environment and therefore may belong to the same families or the same social group (Gleize 2006). A palaeogenetic study by Marie France Deguilloux *et al.* (2014) on skeletons from the necropolis of Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac identified individuals sharing the same maternal lineage in two sarcophagi. These results indicate that in certain cases individuals interred in the same grave were biologically linked.

In some cases, age at death seems to have been the reason for individuals being buried together. For example, groupings of individuals older than 50 years were observed at a variety of sites (Usseau, Chasseneuil-sur-Bonnieure). In few cases, certain small sarcophagi (less than 150 cm in length) contained several immature subjects such as at Usseau (graves 58 and 59). More often, however, adult graves were reused for children. At Chadenac, for instance, there were chronological differences in practices of reuse. The children buried at the beginning of the usage of the necropolis (early 6th century) were buried in coffins or tile burials, whereas at the end of the period (7th to 8th centuries), all children's burials reused adults' sarcophagi, usually in superposition to the adult remains (Chasseneuil and Chadenac). Because of the small size of immature individuals, it is possible that the bones of the previous occupants were disturbed little or not at all during the deposit of these additional occupants.

There are indications that the stature of the deceased may sometimes have had an impact on the type of grave reuse. At Cissé, the bodies buried directly next to the only sarcophagus at the site were of a larger stature than the length of the sarcophagus. At Fléac, a stone cist for an adult was installed next to a small-sized sarcophagus containing an immature individual (Bolle 2001). However, this does not apply to all sites. At Font-Pinette at Usseau, for instance, the head of the second dead body had to be bent to allow deposition into a sarcophagus that was too short (Fig. 6.3).

Reuse, spaces and memory

Biological identities thus do not explain entirely the reuse of graves. Even if social identities are often difficult to capture in archaeology, a comparison of osteological and archaeological data might provide some insight. It is thus important to consider the integration of the reuse of a grave in the funerary space and the environment around the grave.

In the necropolis of Font-Pinette, there was only one case of reuse. It was the only stone sarcophagus present at the site, which was reused four times. Before the installation of the sarcophagus, the pit was used for a wood-nailed coffin and was then reused for a second burial. So on the same funerary location, seven bodies were buried successively (Fig. 6.7). This phenomenon is exceptional for the site because no other grave on the site was reused. This case demonstrates the presence of a desirable funerary location. Perhaps the identity of the first interred individual might explain the importance of this location. This man was distinguished by his significant stature in comparison with the general early medieval population and it is possible to propose that he may have had a prestigious social rank and that his identity played an important role for the local community (Gleize 2015). This raises questions as to the preservation of the memory of this particular individual over time and the resulting desire to reuse his funerary location, which became a reality with the installation of the only sarcophagus used on the site.

It is also clear that other interments might be installed near reused graves. Groups of burials close to reused graves were observed in several sites such as Cissé, Cubord Claireau and Mamot (Gleize 2006; 2015). In this case, the attraction of the grave (often a sarcophagus) presumably resulted in both its reuse and the burial of individuals near the grave ("spatial polarisation"). Nonetheless, it is not possible to explain why certain bodies were buried in reused graves and others were buried beside them. Was it due to the size of the cadaver, the absence of authorisation, or the presence of an un-decomposed body in the grave? However, these observations provide evidence for certain desirable positions in the funerary space and the attraction of the sarcophagus as the structuring element in a funerary space. The reuse or proximity of unique graves testifies to their use as spatial or social markers, or perhaps both.

In large necropolises with multiple sarcophagi, such observations are more difficult to make due to the density of graves. But at the site of Chadenac (Fig. 6.9), reuse was more frequent in the eastern portion of the site where sarcophagi were most numerous. In this zone, one may also see the apparently attractive effect of certain graves. At some sites, the distinct use of the funerary space seems to reveal the presence of different social groups. For example, in different necropolises (Jau-Dignac-et-Loirac, Airvault, Chadenac, Usseau and Fief-Dampierre), private edifices and churches attracted only a particular type of burial. Also the reuse of such particular burial locations was limited, unlike the rest of the funerary space (Fig. 6.9).

These practices testify to the possibility of burial that was closer to particular individuals and to the desire to embed certain of the dead in a specific funerary context. They offer evidence for the importance of the memory and the forgetting of the dead. But the construction of funerary memory during the early Middle Ages does not always require the knowledge of the precise location of a grave or the precise identity of a dead (*e.g.* Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letters*, III, 13, 1; Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria confessorum*, LX and XXXVI). Therefore the construction of memory depended in part on the status of the individuals, the choices of following generations and the evolution of funerary spaces.

Conclusion

In south-western France, archaeological excavations commonly attest to the disturbance of early medieval graves. The analysis of these disturbances requires us to distinguish between anthropogenic and natural processes and to determine if graves were reused to accommodate subsequent bodies. Using archaeological and anthropological data, the present study was carried out on several early medieval cemeteries in south-western France and analysed the variability of the manipulation of bones. The majority of disturbances observed were due to the reuse of graves. The manipulation of bones during the reuse of graves was varied and depended on different factors – it cannot be explained by only one reason. However, archaeological and anthropological data allows us to understand this complex phenomenon on the basis of individual sites.

The data suggest that reuse was not a random practice. The possibility of opening a grave does not testify necessarily to detailed planning, but, in contrast to older interpretations, it could be shown that reuse of graves was authorised for certain groups and certain individuals. Osteological analyses offer evidence that individuals in the same grave seemed to share social links. The accessibility of a grave had an impact on whether it would be reopened for the burial of a new body; a certain pragmatism must have influenced the decision to reuse a grave rather than to install a burial close to another grave.

In the absence of planning of the use of the cemeteries and of the establishment of an authority overseeing the use of cemetery spaces, the choice of the group was surely paramount. However, the reuse of a grave might also be the result of the lack of space, desire for the integration of a particular burial in the funerary space, and of distinctiveness of the space. The ambivalence of these situations might be explained by changes over time and space in the same necropolis. These choices also reflected complex patterns of dynamic organisation that renders investigation of the primary causes very difficult. Overall the reuse of graves in a funerary space can be analysed only if the general use of the burial space is considered.

The reuse of graves must be integrated into the archaeology of death and our views of human remains. The evolution of these practices seems to provide evidence for changes in mentalities, perhaps with a decrease in the manipulation of human remains during the 7th century. These manipulations inform us about the changes that formed part of the dynamic organisation of necropolises and the evolution of funerary spaces. Studies of bone manipulation and the reuse of graves should be used to compare different configurations of and evolution within funerary spaces. The study of the reuse of graves shows how a critical analysis of osteological data adds greatly to discussions of the use of funerary spaces and of the care of the dead during the early Middle Ages, a period for which textual sources are rare.
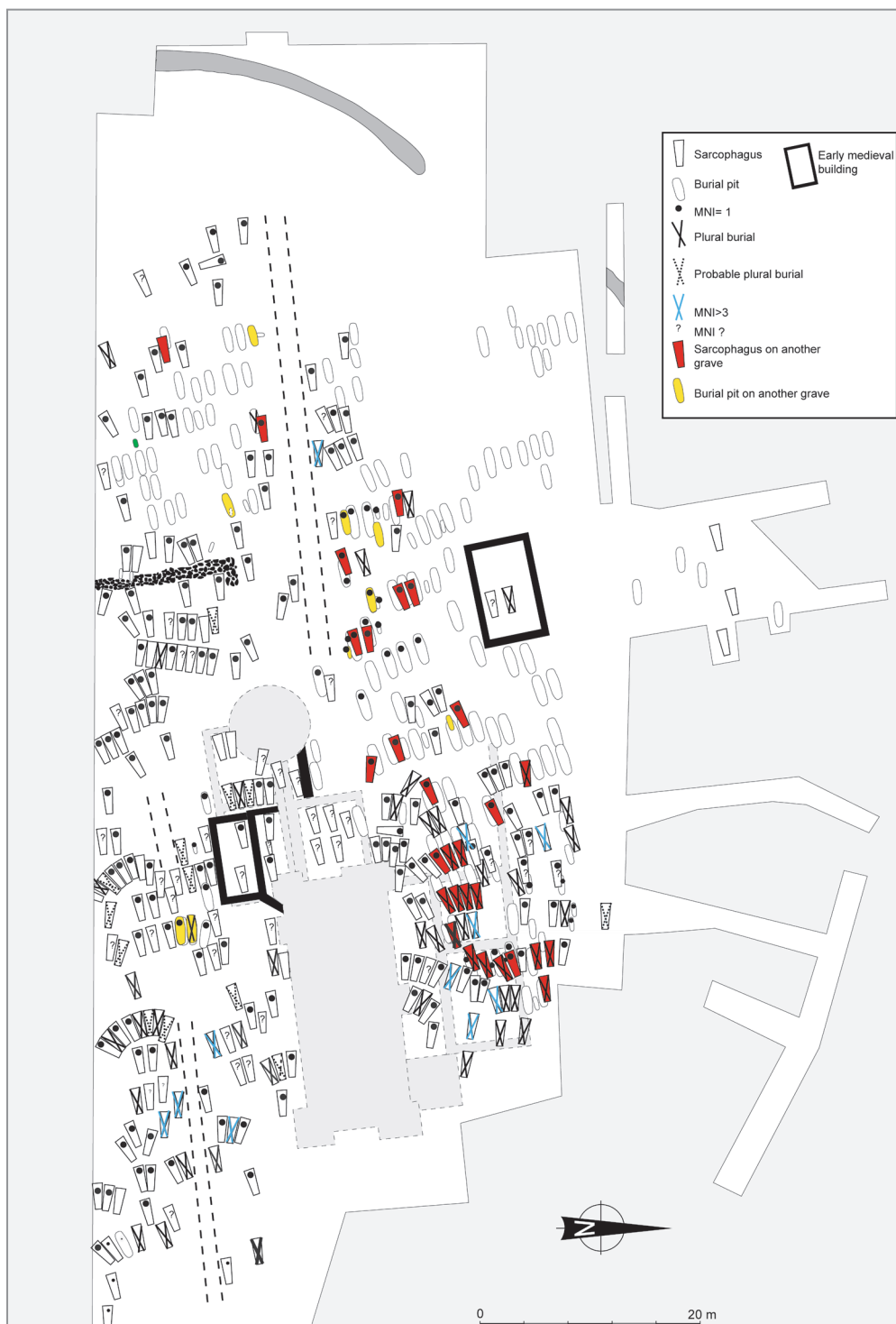
Fig. 6.9: Plan of the necropolis of La Chapelle at Chadenac with the repartition of the reused burials.

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7. What happened at Langeid? Understanding reopened graves after time has taken its toll

Camilla C. Wenn

Some cases of grave reopening are easy to detect, as with large plundering holes in great mounds such as the famous case of Oseberg in Norway (see *e.g.* Bill and Daly 2012), but on other occasions the phenomenon is observed only through carefully piecing together the various data from an excavation. During the 2011 excavation of 21 Viking Age pit graves in the Setesdal Valley in south-central Norway, one grave was found to have a visible intrusive cut at the surface, and the excavation and the post-excavation analyses further supported the interpretation that this grave had indeed been reopened in the past. However, a number of other graves also showed irregular traits in certain aspects, although they were not recognised as reopened graves during excavation. Even though preservation was generally poor, the post-excavation work has revealed large amounts of new information about the graves, and the people and objects buried in them, and not least about the treatment of the graves at a later stage. One indication was the fairly systematic destruction of swords in the graves. Another lay in the correspondence between "empty" areas in graves and diverging stratigraphy. Initially appearing to be a one-off occurrence, the reopening of graves might actually have been fairly common.

This paper will give a short presentation of the cemetery at Langeid, followed by the possible evidence of reopened graves, as well as comparison with other reopened graves. The discussion focuses partly on the validity of the interpretations of reopening evidence, and partly on the possible motives for the re-entering of graves.

The Langeid site

The Langeid site was excavated in 2011 by the Museum of Cultural History (*Kulturhistorisk museum*), part of the University of Oslo (Fig. 7.1). Six fields lying on terraces above the Otra River, to the east, were investigated, revealing human activity from the Early Mesolithic until the medieval period, with a clear focus in the 2nd–5th centuries AD (Fig. 7.2; Loftsgarden and Wenn 2012; Wenn *et al.* 2016; Glørstad and Wenn 2017; Wenn forthcoming). The 21 pit graves were the only features dated to the Viking Period, although there was probably a contemporary settlement close by (Wenn *et al.* 2016). The graves followed the edge of a natural terrace facing the river. The graves were roughly man-sized or larger, although with three notably smaller
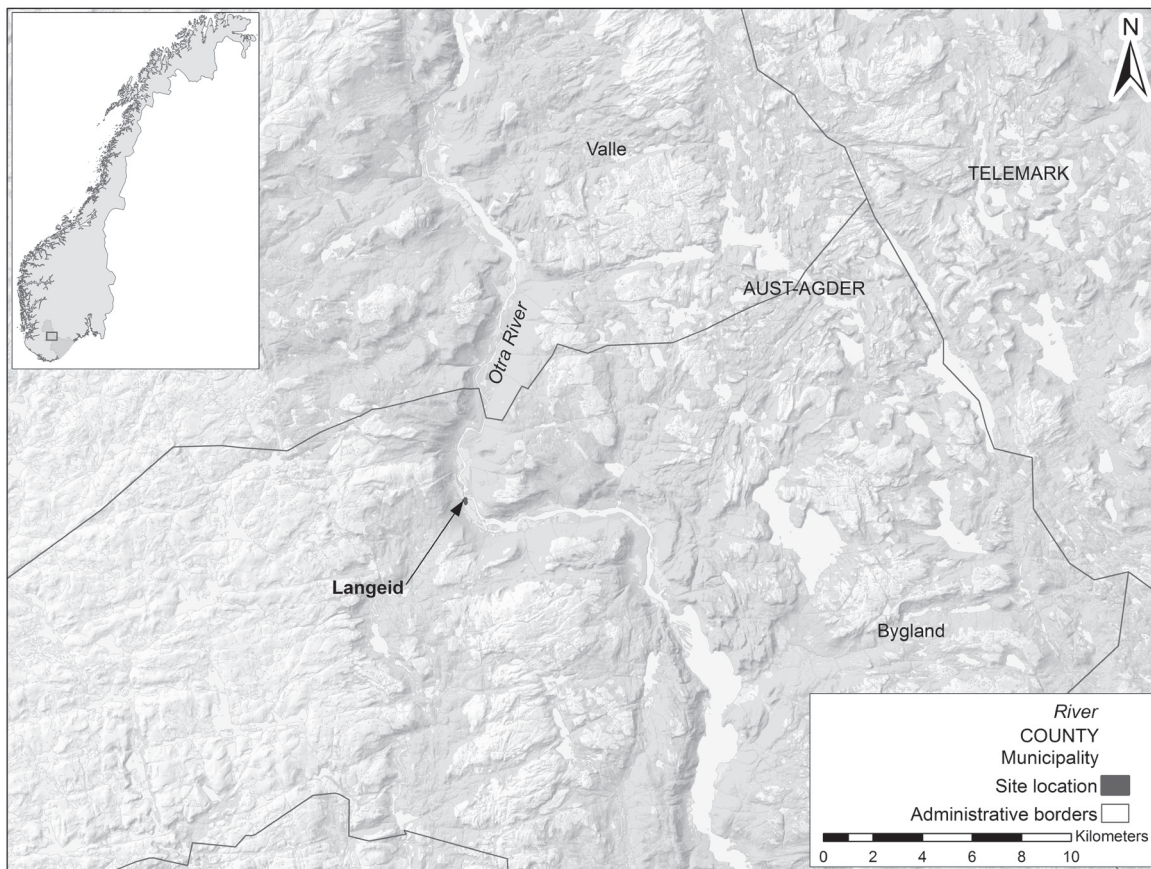
Fig. 7.1: Site location: the Otra River running down the Setesdal Valley with Langeid (Map: C.C. Wenn).

exceptions. They showed considerable variation in depth, number and types of grave goods, internal and external constructions and markers, and burial customs. No consistent patterns have emerged in these variables, or in the placement of the graves within the cemetery. There was no apparent chronological development or distribution in terms of gender, status or wealth (further descriptions of the graves can be found in Wenn *et al.* 2016; Glørstad and Wenn 2017; Wenn forthcoming).

The subsoil consisted of fairly loose, coarse sand and pebbles, providing well-drained fields, but with severe consequences from an archaeologist's point of view. For one thing, much of the archaeological stratigraphy was indistinct, as the organic components in the soil had been washed out. Secondly, preservation of organic material was abysmal. Wood and textiles were found occasionally, either as a corrosion product around iron objects, or fragmented around copper alloy objects, but we must presume that there were more that are now gone. Iron objects were for the most part badly corroded, and hardly recognisable before X-raying, although within the corrosion crust their original outlines could generally be observed.

Human remains were generally not recovered because of the soil conditions, a phenomenon not uncommonly observed in southern Norway. Only three graves yielded human bones, all of them

Fig. 7.2: The excavated areas at Langeid in the landscape: the cemetery and one foot ditch at upper right and second foot ditch to the lower left (Plan: C.C. Wenn).

cremated. Considerations of gender, age, status, occupation and so on are therefore mainly based upon the combinations of grave goods, along with the size and construction of the grave, and the interpretations are open to discussion (see *e.g.* Glørstad and Wenn 2017; Wenn forthcoming; Wenn *et al.* 2016 on the Langeid graves; a more general discussion of this challenge in Norway is found in Stylegar 2010. The challenges to such interpretations have gained new momentum after a grave from Birka has been reinterpreted in the light of new bio-archaeological evidence, see *e.g.* Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017). Four graves appeared to have contained double burials, and so an estimated 22 inhumations are likely in addition to the three cremations. Two of the double burials have most likely contained an original inhumation, to which a cremation was later added, while the other two probably held double inhumations. For the double inhumations it was not possible to ascertain if the people had been buried at the same time or not. The stratigraphy did not show any apparent signs of a second burial event, but due to the preservation conditions, such traces may have disappeared over time. The three very small graves have been interpreted as possibly belonging to children. For the rest of the graves, the finds suggest 12 male and 9 female burials, along with one undetermined cremation.

Weapons and possible weapons were fairly common as grave goods, together with various items for everyday use. Textile-working equipment and other more specific tools also occurred. Jewellery was not very frequent. As discussed in a separate article, items related to trade and exchange appeared in an uncommonly high proportion of graves (Glørstad and Wenn 2017). Six graves stood out among the rest due to the number and/or quality of the grave goods.

Evidence of reopened graves at Langeid

Grave 29 showed clear evidence of a reopening, which appeared immediately after removal of the topsoil. A roundish intrusive cut containing brown, organic fill extended into the trapezoidal north–south pit of the grave, characterised by yellow, sandy fill (Figs 7.3 and 7.4). The intrusive cut could be followed to the bottom of the grave pit, where it had been dug through a wooden platform, of which organic traces remained in the rest of the grave. Not only was the fill of the intrusive cut markedly different from the rest of the grave; it was also nearly devoid of objects, apart from occasional iron fragments, while the untouched floor of the grave was covered with objects. Two oval brooches, three glass beads and one amber bead, a weaving sword, two spindle whorls, scissors and two wool combs suggested a female burial along one side. Other finds included two axes, five knives, two sets of fire strikers and flints, two whetstones, two sickles, a comb, a bronze pin, a possible bridle, the upper and lower guard and parts of the blade of a sword, as well as various unidentified iron objects. The sword in particular may hint at a male burial, and the double sets of various items further support the interpretation that the grave contained two burials. Around the edges of the intrusive cut the objects seemed to be lying in confusion: this applies to the two oval brooches, the axes, beads and knives, as well as the sword fragments.

Several insights can be gained from this. Firstly, the brown fill was secondary, the result of refilling, intentional or gradual, after the grave was reopened, and indicates a cut made for entering the grave. Secondly, the many objects lying in disarray outside the brown fill are likely to have been affected by the reopening. As a consequence, although only the remains of a wooden platform in the bottom were visible, it is likely that the grave had a lidded container or coffin: otherwise the grave goods would have lain in soil at the time of the reopening, making it unlikely they would have been moved around, at least not without disturbing the stratigraphy. As it is, a hole seems to have been dug, through which it was possible to grab a number of objects. This would imply that the reopening took place before the grave structures disintegrated. Thirdly, the fragmented sword is interesting. The guards had been removed from the tang, which was not recovered. The blade had been broken, and only parts were left in the grave. When excavated, the sword fragments were found to be spread out over a substantial area.

In grave 29 the visible intrusive cut made it possible to excavate the grave with a focus on documenting the reopening as well as the grave itself. This was not the case for any of the other graves, but working through the documentation afterwards has revealed that several graves show similarities to the situation in grave 29.

Swords were found in seven graves, but only in two instances were they complete. In grave 28, a fragment of a sword blade was found by the southern short side of the grave, while the upper guard lay in the northern part by the eastern long side. In the corrosion on the guard textile fragments were encrusted, indicating that corrosion had already set in at the time when the grave was reopened and the sword broken. In the case of grave 11, the tip of a sword blade, the tang
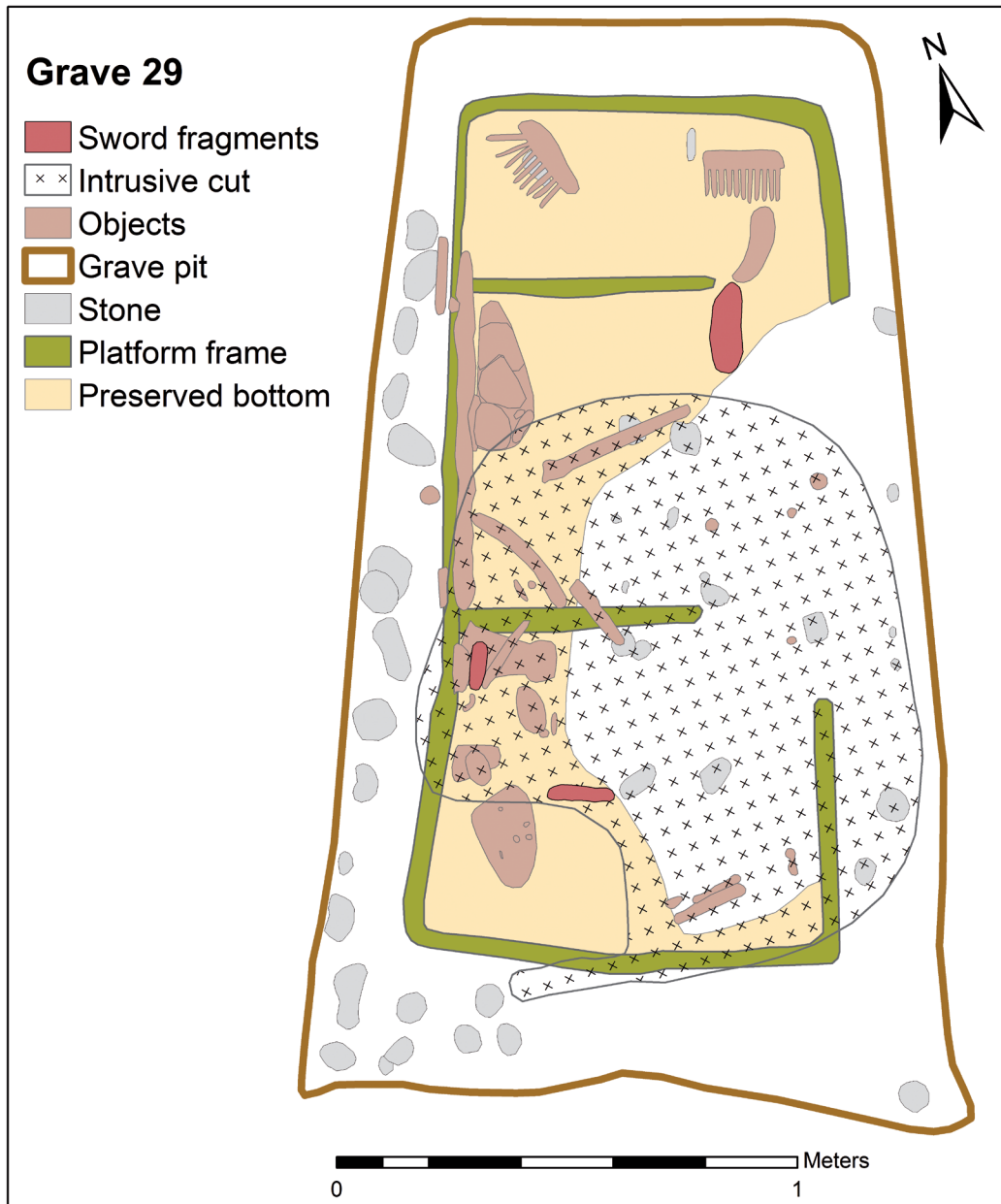
Fig. 7.3: Grave 29 with intrusive cut and sword fragments marked out (Map: C.C. Wenn).

and other possible blade fragments were dispersed within the grave pit. Grave 14 contained part of a sword blade, lying along the western part of the northern long side. In grave 9, the upper and lower guard of a sword were found together in the middle part of the grave.

In short, in all the cases where one or both guards of a sword were found, they had been force-fully taken off the tang onto which they had originally been affixed. Where the tang was recovered,

Fig. 7.4: Grave 29. To the left is the grave before excavation, the intrusive cut being clearly visible by the darker colour. To the right the fill in the cut has been removed, as well as the fill in the rest of the grave down to the floor with objects: it can be seen how the cut has gone through the floor of the grave, and any structures and objects have been removed (Photos: C.C. Wenn, Courtesy of Museum of Cultural History).

there was no sign of the guards. Although preservation at Langeid was not good, the condition of other iron objects makes it seem highly unlikely that some parts of a sword should have corroded into oblivion while others remained, and particularly that a tang inside a guard should have disintegrated completely. If the absence of these pieces were due to natural processes, one would expect the sword fragments to be found "in order", rather than randomly spread about. The missing pieces indicate that the swords were not just broken, but that parts were also removed from the graves.

Paralleling the fragmented state of the swords are observations made in a 10th-century grave mound at Lunde in the municipality of Vinje, Telemark County. The pommel and cross-guard of a sword were found in the mound, as were a knife, a bridle, an iron handle and several rivets (Kile-Vesik and Glørstad 2016, 27–29). The objects did not appear to be *in situ*, but rather spread out in the fill in the reopened mound (Kile-Vesik and Glørstad 2016, 34–35).

Likewise, at the Viking Period burial ground of Gulli in the municipality of Tønsberg, Vestfold County, swords had been broken and partially removed in two of the graves (Gjerpe 2005, 69, 89–90). Grave reopening was frequent at Gulli, and other objects as well as bodies were similarly found to have been intentionally broken, moved and/or removed (Gjerpe 2005, 145). At Langeid no particular object type except the swords was observed to be systematically broken or missing, though there are many indeterminate iron fragments that might have revealed a pattern, had they been identifiable.

The other indicators of a reopening that were found in grave 29 in addition to the broken sword, *i.e.*, the intrusive cut and/or fill irregularities and areas without objects or with fragmented or displaced objects, occur to various degrees in other graves. One such example is grave 6, containing a male and a female burial. The majority of the objects were recovered from the middle section of the grave, along the waistlines of the bodies, so to speak, but a fair number of objects also came from the western part, presumably the foot of the grave. The eastern part was nearly devoid of finds, and had different fills than the western part. A couple of glass beads were found, but at a distance from each other. In the western part, there was a fairly easily recognisable difference between the pit fill, yellowish and sandy, and the burial, brown and organic. The pit fill also contained a number of fist-sized stones in alignment; such a feature was lacking in the eastern part, or rather, the stones here seemed to form a heap. The eastern side lacked the distinction between pit and burial fill, and seemed mixed. The eastern end has been interpreted as the head of the grave, and if it was reopened, then the head and upper body areas seem to have been targeted. The number and types of finds in the grave puts it at the same level as grave 29 and grave 18, another double grave, both of which contained two oval brooches. It is thus possible that grave 6 may have had brooches, and possibly also more beads, which were removed. If this is the case, it would, however, be the only case of the removal of brooches.

Grave 15 showed a very clear stratigraphy in the southern half, including what was probably the bottom of a coffin or a platform – a highly organic fill of rectangular shape. In the middle of the grave this rectangle morphed into irregular shapes, and then disappeared in the northern half (Fig. 7.5). All object finds, including silver coin fragments and hack silver, were found in the southern part. Grave 11 had few finds, though the fragmented sword, in combination with an axe, indicated a male burial. The western half had some very distinct strata, possibly suggesting the existence of a shroud or the like. The eastern half was rather more uniform, though with some distinction, as in the western half and in other graves, between the sandy pit fill and a more organic fill. The subtle differences observed in the western half were, however, absent. Grave 14 was similar, showing clear stratigraphy in the west, with multiple finds, and a stratigraphically more uniform eastern part, with iron fragments. In grave 28, several objects were found *in situ* in the northern part of the bottom of the grave, while other objects were found in the upper fill of the grave pit, which was up to 42 cm deep, among them a glass bead and a small whetstone. The southern part was nearly empty, apart from a fragment of a sword blade along the southern short side, far from the upper guard.

Other graves were almost empty, with hardly any preserved stratigraphy. In these cases it is possible that the grave was intact, and that the deceased received few grave goods and had a simple burial. However, some of the finds seemed to be fragments of larger objects, and so it might, conversely, be argued that the lack of finds, or occasional broken objects, in combination with the observation that hardly any stratigraphy was preserved, are actually signs of grave reopening.

Grave 8 is a peculiar case. It stood out, both because of four large postholes outside the grave cut itself, suggesting a superstructure such as a grave house, and because of the high-quality grave goods. A large battle axe with a brass fitting (Vike 2016) and an extraordinary sword with decorations in gold, silver and copper alloy on the hilt stood out among the finds from the cemetery. The symbols on the hilt include spirals, rhombic figures, letters and, most surprisingly, a hand with a cross, indicating a Christian origin of the sword (Wenn *et al.* 2016; Glørstad and Wenn 2017; Wenn forthcoming). In addition, two silver coin fragments were found in an organic fill, possibly a purse, as well as a lump of birch tar. While the coins and the birch tar were found inside the faint remains
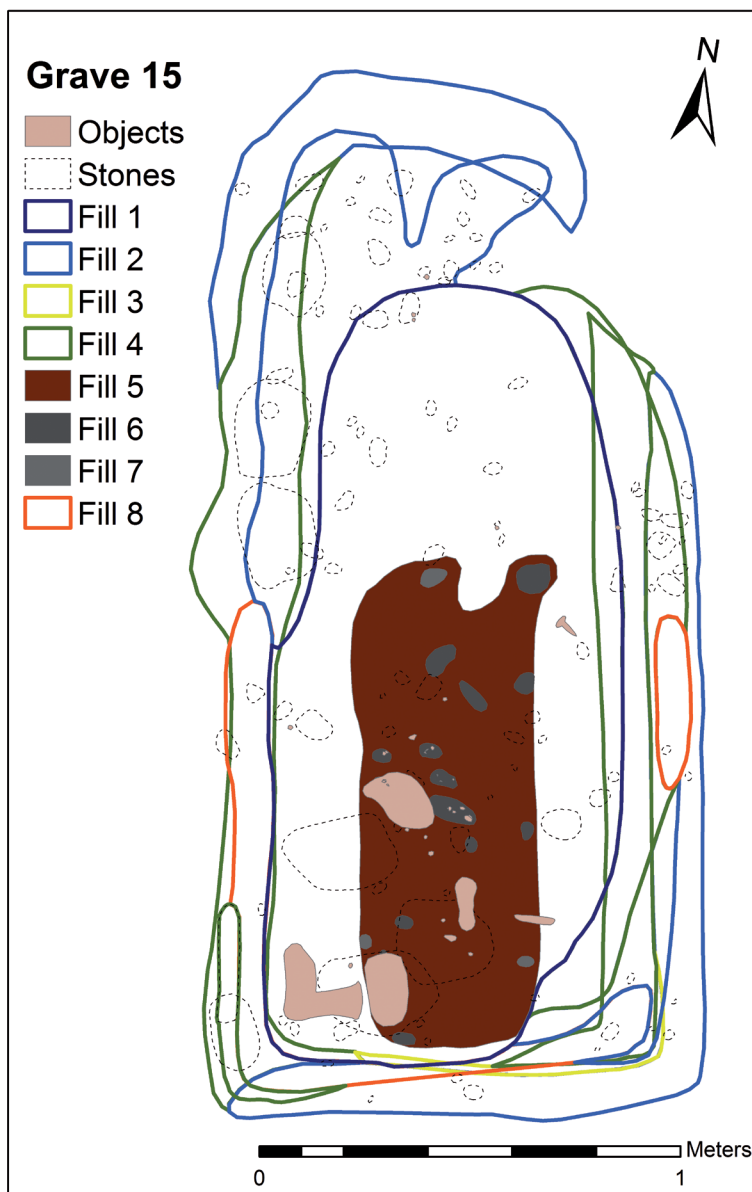
Fig. 7.5: Grave 15. Fill 5 represents the remains of the coffin or platform, and fill 6/7 represents spots of highly organic remains. Other fills are indicated as outlines, but were generally less organic. The northern part is irregular, and it was difficult to trace the fills during excavation. Notice the apparent lack of object finds in the northern part compared to the southern part (Plan: C.C. Wenn).

of a coffin, probably 20–30 cm high, at the bottom of the 60 cm deep grave pit, the weapons had been placed outside the coffin, on either of the long sides. Two elements might suggest a reopening of the grave. Firstly, although this was clearly the grave of an important person, the number and variety of finds was very limited. Weapon graves are often, but not always, characterised by an
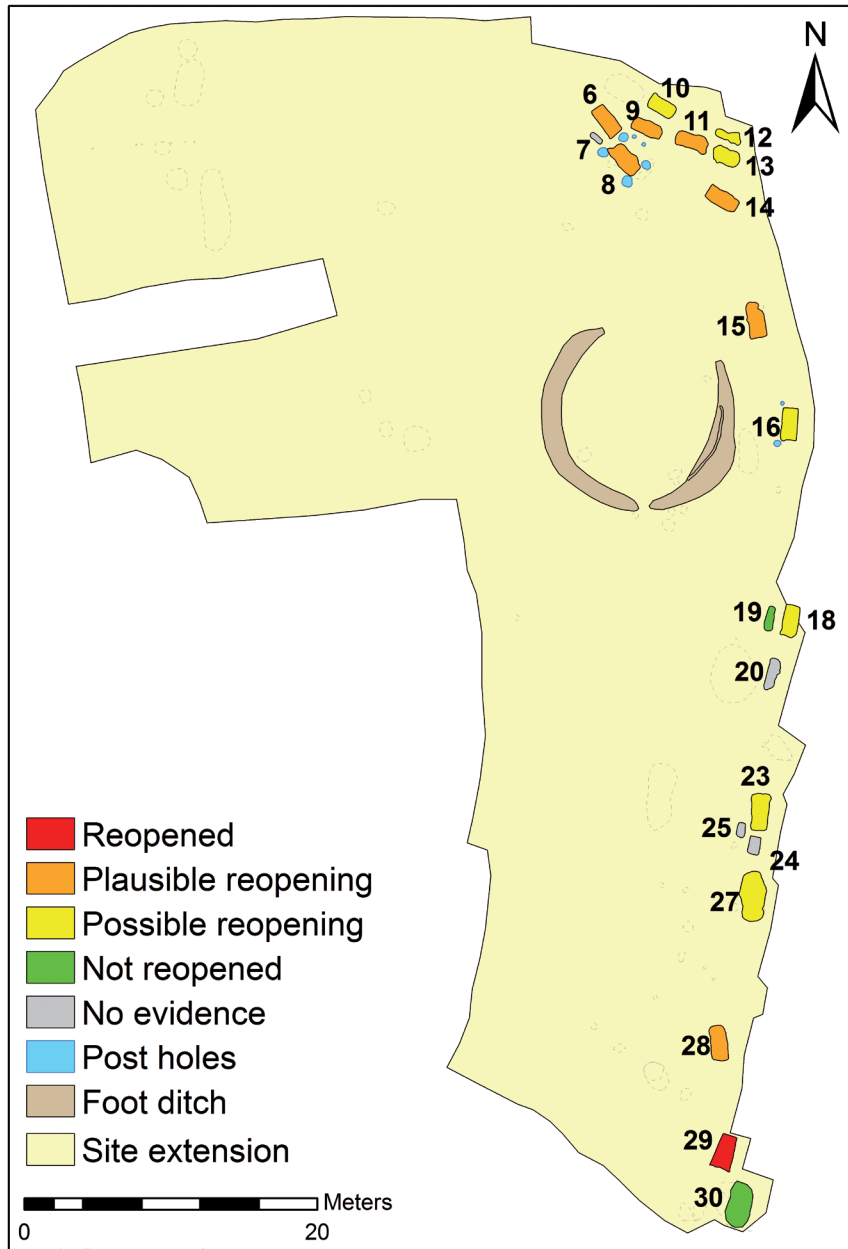
Fig. 7.6: The graves marked according to potential reopening, with grave numbers (Plan: C.C. Wenn).

increase in the number, types and/or exclusiveness of the weapons in accordance with the (presumed) social status of the deceased. The simpler graves have just an axe; better-equipped graves will have swords, shields, arrows and/or spears, sometimes including weapons decorated in precious metals and/or imported weapons. Thus, there might seem to be something lacking in grave 8. If not a full set of weapons, at least a shield would be expected, as well as other personal objects, such as a

knife, flint and fire striker. The lack of shields, or rather shield bosses, was observed also in the other graves with weapons. The situation in one of the graves at Gulli should be noted, where a sword and a shield boss had been intentionally broken and spread out in the grave (Gjerpe 2005, 69).

Secondly, the stratigraphy in grave 8 can be questioned. At the bottom of the grave, there is a clear distinction between the sandy and gravelly yellow fill in the pit, and the darker, more organic fill in the coffin. Somewhat more puzzlingly, this difference is evident also in the upper part of the grave, where, logically, one would expect to observe everywhere a fill more similar to the pit fill. If the grave was reopened, this might explain why so few grave goods, but of high quality, were found. The reopening might have focused on the coffin, the perpetrators removing whatever items of interest were inside, and leaving the sword and the axe, being ignorant of their position outside the coffin.

Assessing the evidence: conditions, likelihoods, and some severe challenges

Apart from the intrusive cut, the markers observed in grave 29, and to some extent in the other graves, are not, in themselves, absolute indicators of grave reopening, and others may be more relevant in other situations. One grave was indisputably reopened, but more should surely be included (Fig. 7.6).

Stratigraphical inconsistencies

The main issue here is the soil in the grave. In an ideal situation, it would be possible to document grave reopening through visible intrusive cuts, where individual processes may be identifiable, that is, not just the cut itself, but also the movements of the perpetrators, how different objects have been moved or removed, broken and/or dropped outside their original context, strata revealing how the cut was refilled, *etc*. The Langeid excavation was a rescue excavation, where time limited possibilities, and the priorities selected when excavating the graves so as to be able to finish on time meant that ideal excavation and documentation methods could not be implemented. Traces that might have contributed to a further understanding of the reopening processes may thus have escaped us.

Similarly, it has not been possible to go through all object fragments found in the graves to establish which ones fit together, as time was limited, and the material was large and in bad shape. Further, the stratigraphy, as explained above, had been partially obliterated by a millennium of water seepage. While the cuts for the grave pits were generally easily defined, a number of other features at Langeid were less clear. Despite these limitations, fill changes such as the ones described above are considered to be a plausible indication of grave reopening, at least in cases where there are notable inconsistencies within the grave, and where these inconsistencies are supported by other markers.

Uneven distribution of grave goods

This is probably the most challenging marker. Does the absence of objects mean they were never there, or that they were removed? Are unidentifiable fragments actual objects, or parts broken off larger objects – and in the latter case, did the breakage occur before or after the burial? Depending on the character of the grave goods, another option is just as plausible, namely that

there were objects in the graves, but, being made of perishable materials, they are long gone. At Langeid, it is easier to argue for grave reopening where such absences in material correspond to other markers, in particular stratigraphical inconsistencies. In graves that have both areas that are virtually empty, and areas with a range of objects, the uneven distribution of objects will be more convincing as a sign of reopening than in the case of graves with generally few objects, especially if the stratigraphy reinforces the interpretation. The latter is the case for three uncommonly small graves; they all have very similar stratigraphy throughout, and the objects found in them seem mostly random, as for instance a piece of slag and a fragment of a soapstone vessel in grave 7. A knife in grave 24 may be considered a grave good. The question remains whether these graves only had sparse grave goods or grave goods of perishable materials, or if they have been thoroughly emptied.

Graves 12, 13, 16 and 27 were among the normal-sized graves, but with limited grave goods. Graves 12 and 16 contained pointed iron fragments that may come from a linen or wool comb; graves 12 and 13 each had two spindle whorls; grave 13, one bead; grave 27, two beads; grave 16, a flint and birch tar; and grave 27, a possible comb. Additionally, all graves yielded occasional iron fragments. In the case of grave 12, erosion is a likely culprit for the absence of finds: the entire northern long side was gone, and the remainder was very shallow. Although graves 13 and 16 were also to some extent eroded, the depth should be sufficient to have kept the bottom intact, and thus also the strata containing the grave goods, judging by other graves at the site. Grave 27 was up to 58 cm deep, and, though heavily eroded along the eastern long side, the bottom was well preserved. In none of these cases was a reopening evident, but as some of the iron fragments found may have come from larger objects, post-burial activity is possible. The difference in object distribution as well as stratigraphic indications in graves such as 6 and 15 offer far more plausible cases of reopening, and highly targeted at that.

Intentionally broken or removed objects

The broken swords that were found in five of the graves are reminiscent of instances of intentionally bent swords in graves (for instance C36770a, C34272, C10649, C29299a in the Museum of Cultural History collections), sometimes accompanied by other broken weapons. In these cases the swords have been broken prior to the burial, and there is no evidence the graves have been reopened to destroy the swords; rather, the swords seem to have been intentionally "killed" before burial. The practice of killing swords is much older, and has been documented at least as far back as Bronze Age Greece (Lloyd 2015), though the motivation for the practice probably changed over time and between regions. The saga literature contains several references to swords in descriptions of *haugbrott*, breaking into grave mounds (*e.g.* Brøgger 1945; Klevnäs 2016). Usually the objective here seems to be to repossess the sword, however, not to break it.

Swords are the only object type at Langeid that can be proved to have been systematically handled during reopening. It is possible that other objects were targeted as well, but there are no signs they were systematically broken, though they may well have been removed. Brooches are one group which may be supposed to have been somewhat more frequently represented in the graves – however, negative presence does not provide confirmation of such actions. At Gulli, one reopened grave contained only a single oval brooch, which is an uncommon situation, and it is presumed that the other one of the pair had been removed. On this basis, double grave 6 at Langeid might be

a likely candidate for the removal of brooches. Four graves are considered to have double burials. Grave 30 has a primary female burial at the bottom of the pit, and a later, presumed male, burial at the top, while graves 6, 18 and 29 each had two individuals, probably a male and a female, in the pit. Graves 18 and 29 both had pairs of oval brooches, while grave 30 had a silver brooch or pendant. Grave 6, on the other hand, had no brooches. The southern part of the grave, presumably the head end, judging from the distribution of grave goods, was very disturbed, and two separate beads were found here.

Following other studies of grave reopening, and taking into account written sources such as the sagas, one might expect other objects than swords to have been disturbed, whether broken or removed, as well. Shields, or at least shield bosses, are in general found frequently together with other weapons, but none have been recovered at Langeid. Following the example from Gulli (Gjerpe 2005, 69), one might suspect shield bosses (and the rest of the shield) to have been removed from the graves when they were reopened. The combination of weapons in graves is, however, not a straightforward matter, and shields may not have been included in the Langeid grave goods at all. For instance, in the Merovingian period it has been demonstrated that, while shields were frequent in graves in the coastal areas of southern Norway, they were virtually absent in the inland valleys (Gudesen 1980, 101–102).

A peculiar object that may have been present in several graves was the wool or linen comb. Two complete combs were found in grave 29, but iron fragments of the same type appeared in a further two graves. As far as the author is aware, these are not objects found to be missing or intentionally broken at other sites, but the possibility of their having been handled during grave reopening should be kept in mind.

A second category of broken or removed materials in graves comprises the bodies of the deceased. Targeting particular areas of the grave, and thus presumably the body, was documented at Gulli. Most of the reopening cuts were where the head of the deceased would have been, and it has been suggested that the heads may have been removed from the graves (Gjerpe 2005, 144–146). At Langeid, this remains unknown to us, as any non-cremated bodies were completely decomposed at the time of excavation. Ascertaining the position of the body in the Langeid graves is challenging, and in none of the graves can it be unequivocally determined, although in some of the graves jewellery in particular is indicative of the location of the upper body. In general, the evidence suggests that it was most common to be buried with the head in the southern or south-eastern part of the grave. In the case of graves 6, 11 and 29 this corresponds to the seemingly reopened area. Graves 14 and 15 have no evident head end, but in both cases reopening seems to have taken place in the northern/north-eastern part. Graves 8 and 9 have neither clear indications of the head end nor of limited areas likely to have been reopened. The targeting of heads is thus possible also at Langeid, but far from positively established. The cremations did not seem to have been touched; as for the inhumations, of which there are probably more than 20, it is entirely possible that the bodies were completely or partially removed, hacked to pieces or handled in other ways during the reopening, but on the other hand they may have been left intact.

What happened, how and to whom?

Table 7.1 gives an overview of which markers appear in each grave, the likely gender of the deceased and the estimated likelihood of reopening. The broken swords have been given more weight than other markers, followed by fill irregularities. Uneven distribution and/or lack of finds

are noteworthy, but do not carry a strong argument for reopening. In four graves, the preservation and contents do not allow for this kind of interpretation, and only two graves show no convincing evidence of having been reopened. Several graves do, however, have one or more possible markers of grave reopening. Seven graves have markers that make a reopening of the grave plausible, while a further seven are considered possibly reopened; the data here are limited, but one or two markers have been recognised.

Looking at the gender distribution, graves with male burials appear to be overrepresented, even when taking into account the general gender distribution on the site. Two male-female double graves were probably reopened, as well as six male graves. No single female graves can be proved to have been reopened. There are several possible explanations for this. For one thing, the all-male graves generally have more grave goods than the all-female graves, making it easier to observe an uneven distribution of finds. Secondly, the deliberate destruction of swords is more easily recognisable, and provides a more convincing argument for grave reopening than the fill irregularities and poverty of finds in female graves (leaving aside the discussion of whether or not swords are indeed gender-specific to males, and of gender-specific objects in general). As for the two affected double burials, graves 29 and 6, in both cases the reopening seems to have disturbed both burials.

Table 7.1: *Potential markers of reopening per grave, gender and estimated likelihood of reopening (F: female; M: male; C: child; 0: unopened grave; 1: reopening possible; 2: reopening plausible; 3: reopening certain; −: inconclusive).*

Grave no.	Distinct fill	Fill irregularities	Broken sword	Uneven distribution of finds/fragmentation	Lack of finds	Erosion	M/F/C	Likelihood of reopening
6		X		X			M+F	2
7					X		C	−
8		X		X			M	2
9		X	X	X			M	2
10				X			M	1
11			X	X			M	2
12				X	X	X	F	1
13				X	X	X	F	1
14		X	X	X			M	2
15		X		X			M	2
16				X	X		F	1
18			X				M+F	1
19					X		?	0
20						X	M	−
23			X				F	1
24					X		C	−
25					X		C	−
27					X		F	1
28		X	X	X			M	2
29	X	X	X	X			M+F	3
30				X			F+M	0

Summing up the evidence of reopened graves at Gulli, a slightly different picture emerges (Gjerpe 2005, 142–146). Seven out of 20 graves had been reopened, eight were intact, and five were too poorly preserved to permit assessment. Reopening was twice as frequent in male as in female graves, but the numbers were too small to allow a significant conclusion. Gjerpe points to the fact that graves associated with high status, such as chamber graves and boat graves, are more likely to have been reopened than other graves, though the picture is somewhat ambiguous. Returning to Langeid, this consideration is interesting, but not unproblematic. At Langeid, most of the graves are fairly similar in size and type, and typical high-status grave types, such as chamber graves or boat graves, were not found, a possible exception being grave 8, which was probably furnished with a superstructure, possibly a grave house. The status of the graves is therefore defined primarily on the basis of the grave goods. However, there is rarely evidence that the less well furnished graves were *not* reopened, and the possibility thus remains that they may have had a rich assemblage that has been removed. Thus, the lack of grave goods and a well-defined stratigraphy in certain graves create uncertainty in relation, firstly, to the distribution of wealth in the graves, secondly, to the question of whether these graves were reopened, and thirdly, to understanding which graves were selected for reopening.

The inconsistency in the location of the secondary cuts in relation to the positioning of the dead and the grave goods suggests a limited time frame for the reopening of the graves. Reopening was mostly carried out in the southern/south-eastern parts of the graves, but occasionally the northern/north-western part had been targeted. This may imply an intimate knowledge of how the graves were laid out and where to seek the desired items. As mentioned above, grave 8 presents a peculiar case, with a near-empty coffin and exclusive weapons outside it. Could this indicate a more distant relation to the burial and/or the deceased? If the grave was reopened, do the remaining weapons indicate that the perpetrator was distant in time, or simply not present at the rituals? The unusual position of the weapons remains to be explained as well: were they placed outside the coffin as a result of changing rituals or traditions, or could it be a deliberate move to confuse potential perpetrators (Wenn *et al.* 2016)?

The reopened graves and related examples – why were they reopened?

Reopened graves in themselves are not a novelty, especially in the later 1st millennium of Northern Europe, and several studies have discussed how to recognise them, and ways to interpret the disturbances (Klevnäs 2007; 2015; 2016; Kümmel 2009; van Haperen 2010; Aspöck 2011; Lund 2013). There is much evidence of reopened graves in Norway and the neighbouring countries, covering a long period of time, and the Viking Period *per se* has its fair share.

The term *haugbrott* is often used when discussing the reopening of Viking Age graves. Occurrences of *haugbrott* have been considered limited in number and targeted towards people who had a particular position in their contemporary societies (Brøgger 1945, 3; Brendalsmo and Røthe 1992; Myhre 1992, 283) and were buried in monumental graves underlining their importance. The saga literature points to several main motives: plundering valuables, entering the grave so that a relative could procure the sword or other power symbols from their ancestors, or ending cases of the dead returning to harass the living, usually by beheading the corpse (Rindal 2004, 199), also as a way to prove valour and conquer a potential danger or as a meeting with the world beyond (Beck 1978, 217, 223). It has been proposed that Viking Period grave reopening could express

power politics in action, where new rulers were destroying their predecessors' symbols of power, in this case the grave mounds, symbolising hereditary rights (Brendalsmo and Røthe 1992; Bill and Daly 2012). The Langeid graves do not seem likely candidates for the latter. For one thing, the reopened pit graves do not comply with the semantic meaning of *haugbrott*, as they do not have mounds (*haug*). More importantly, the graves at Langeid and their grave goods give much the same impression as at Gulli, not of elite burials, but rather of burials of people who were reasonably well off, though not in any way exceptional. Grave reopening as a reaction to previous rulers does not seem an appropriate explanation in the case of multiple reopened graves of more or less equal standing. Other motivational factors listed above may still be valid for these somewhat simpler graves, though.

The purely economic motive for grave reopening does not seem valid, either in general, or at Langeid. Again, as we do not know what is not in the graves any more, it is possible that valuable objects may have been removed, but the general impression shows a different focus, the destruction of swords being the prime example. There is likewise evidence that graves that were probably reopened had their valuables still left in the grave, although they had in some instances been moved as a result of the reopening, for instance the oval brooches in grave 29. Grave 15 had several silver coin fragments and other hack silver, and grave 6 had complete equipment for weighing, with scales, weights, coins and other hack silver.

In discussing the motives for reopening, the later use of the local area may give some indications. For graves lying close to later churches and sites functionally related to churches, the disturbance of graves may be a reaction against pre-Christian cult, as has been suggested for graves at Gamla Uppsala and Vendel (Klevnäs 2007; 2015). While the chronology of the cemetery suggests that the burials at Langeid are some of the latest pagan burials in the area, there are no traces of Christian worship at the site. The terrace with the cemetery held a very limited number of remains other than the graves, and most indicated earlier activities. The only later activity was a cultivation layer along the western part of the terrace, dated to *c.* cal AD 1010–1150. While only a small part of the Langeid area was excavated, and the likelihood of a settlement contemporary with the cemetery is high, there are no sources indicating the establishment of a church nearby. Settlement has most likely continued, but on the terrace above, while the lower terraces have mainly been used for grazing and cereal production – which is the general pattern for settlement in the valley, then as now. Churches were probably built in the century or so following the latest burials, but they were several kilometres from Langeid, near other settlements in the valley.

Concern about revenants may be a possible explanation for the reopened graves at Langeid, but unfortunately the evidence is too scarce to permit any conclusions. The general lack of human remains makes it next to impossible to establish whether the bodies were manipulated in any way, and if so, whether this represented intentional action directed at the bodies, or the consequence of rummaging for items in the grave. As described above, the intrusions mostly seem to have focused on the head ends of the graves, and the condition and in some cases complete absence of objects in the areas targeted indicate thorough removal. It is possible that not only objects but also body parts were removed. If they were not removed, they may have been intentionally dislodged, heads may have been severed, or the bodies may have been removed, either partly or in their entirety. Manipulation of bodies seems to appear fairly frequently during grave disturbances, although it is not always possible to establish if it is intentional or a by-product of other actions (see *e.g.* Bill and Daly 2012 on the Gokstad and Oseberg burials; Gjerpe 2007; Klevnäs 2007, 2015; Aspöck 2011).

Related to the manipulation of bodies is the possibility of *translatio*. Traditionally, the concept is used for moving holy objects, such as relics, from one location to another, but it may also describe the process of moving bodies, or parts of bodies, to a new burial site, presumably by relatives, typically during a period of conversion. A possible case of bones being moved from a pagan to a Christian cemetery can be found at Keldudalur, Iceland (Zoëga 2015, 119), and relocation of bodies from Christian cemeteries, usually coinciding with the transition from household to communal cemeteries, has also been attested. Icelandic Christianity laws of the 12th century even outline how bones should be removed from decommissioned cemeteries (Zoëga and Bolender 2017, 81, with further references).

Returning again to the swords, in view of their fragmented state, robbery for economic or use value is highly unlikely, and likewise, they are not likely to have been reappropriated by kin or others close to the deceased for further use (Jochens 1996, 98–99). Aspects such as the magical properties of swords, their status as special objects or heirlooms, with a significance that transcends their straightforward use as a weapon, do, however, feature prominently in the interpretations of why the swords were attractive objects for the living, and would often be removed from the graves during reopening (see *e.g.* Soma 2007; Aspöck 2011, 313; Klevnäs 2015; 2016). Julie Lund (2008, 66) argues that intended burial, or even accidental loss, of swords and other objects, for example in graves, ritual deposits, *etc.*, signify the conclusion of the social life of the objects, though the objects are still imbued with other aspects. Can the deliberate destruction of the object be a way of concluding, ending, also the metaphysical aspects of the object? Would it be possible that by terminating the end of the life of the object, one would also terminate the threat of the deceased returning? It would depend on how closely the object was connected and identified with the deceased.

Another possible interpretation could be that by breaking the sword, more than one meaningful object was created, where each fragment could stand as a *pars pro toto* of the original object, in this case enabling the deceased to keep the sword in the afterlife, and providing the living, whether close relatives, the local community or others, with an object of singular significance? A comparison might be made to the use of relics, where, for instance, a splinter of the True Cross or a phalange from a saint represents a larger religious entity, and creates a node of cult. Similar parallels have been made for the Dutch cemetery at Bergeijk-Fazantlaan (van Haperen 2013). In the disturbed graves, not only objects, but also bones from the human remains were missing from many of the graves. It is suggested that such bones and objects may have been objects of veneration in the local community or by the family, similar to relics, and that by distributing fragments the power of the ancestor was extended further out. For the objects, this would imply that they were closely associated with the owner, and that the owner and the object made up an entity of qualities, which were in some sense transferrable. Whether this could in some way be the case for the broken swords (or other objects treated similarly) is at this point speculation, but might merit further investigation.

Religious shift and grave disturbance – a possible connection

Grave 8 stood out among the graves in terms of grave goods and physical appearance, and the sword, of indisputably Christian origin, is unique among the grave goods at Langeid. At the time when the cemetery was in use, the coastal areas of southern Norway were already Christianised, and the burials there almost exclusively Christian by the mid-10th century (Rolfsen 1981; Glørstad 2014, 52; Larsen 2014, 67). The religious shift was imminent in the Setesdal Valley as well. A runic inscription at Evje, some 60 km further down the valley, testifies to the rise of Christianity in the region at about

the same time (Spurkland 2005, 96–99). Although churches in Setesdal are first attested in the early 13th century, it has been argued that the first ones were established already in the mid-11th century (Larsen 2014, 67). Several of the medieval churches in the upper Setesdal Valley were built on or by pagan burial grounds, indicating a strong consciousness of the pagan places, the older religion being taken over and possibly crushed – although an alternative idea has also been advanced. According to early Christian legal documents, the ancestor cult was important in the old Norse religion, where the dead were biologically dead, but socially still alive (Steinsland 1995, 20–25). It has been argued that the erection of churches on the pagan burial grounds underlines the importance of the ancestor cult, which in this scenario is not seen as opposing the new religion (Reitan 2006, 269–270).

So, was grave 8 a pagan grave with a Christian sword, or a Christian grave with grave goods in the pagan style? Both alternatives may be argued, and both may have some impact on how the grave disturbances in the cemetery are interpreted, as the timelines are fairly limited. We have argued that the weapons may have belonged to a warrior in the retinue of the Christian King Canute the Great, probably around 1013–1016 (Wenn *et al.* 2016, 204–206; Wenn forthcoming), and the grave would thus be later than this. The Ethelred coin in the grave gives a *terminus post quem* of *c.* AD 975, while the weapons belong in the late 10th or early 11th century. Other graves, such as 6 and 15, have *termini post quem* of 983 and 991, respectively, and any reopening would have happened after the burial. I have argued above that, although there may be some gap between the burials and the reopenings, it is not likely to have been a long one. The wooden structures inside the graves must have been more or less intact, although corrosion on the iron objects had started. If we accept grave 8 as a more or less Christian burial, implying that the people who buried that person were Christian, this may be in the timeframe for the reopening of the other graves, which may indicate that the grave reopenings were Christian in origin. That is to say, the time between the late burials, including graves 6, 8, 15 and 29, and the Christianisation of the community would have been limited to one or two generations at the maximum. It should be noted that, while the use of the Langeid cemetery is discontinued in the 11th century, there are examples of continued use of the same burial places from pagan to Christian times in the Setesdal Valley (Larsen 1981, 33; Glørstad 2014, 53), and it is possible that the latest burials at Langeid may be hybrid in character.

The religious transition and reactions thereto might be reflected in the occurrence of three cremation burials at Langeid, one of them radiocarbon dated to the 11th–12th century, thus very late, and well into the period when the conversion is supposed to have been completed. Possibly, this could be considered to represent conscious opposition to the new religion and its burial customs, as has been suggested for other late Viking Age sites (Oestigaard 2014; Wenn *et al.* 2016, 180–181, 204–205). Interestingly, the Christian connection is also seen in the sword mentioned above, decorated with a hand holding a cross. King Canute demanded that his retainers convert to the Christian faith, and if this background for the sword is correct, it may be that the sword returned to Norway with its owner and they both received a proper pagan burial (Wenn *et al.* 2016).

Certainly, the late date of grave 8 may, in itself, account for an unusual burial. If it is considered a thoroughly pagan burial, with a sword that happened to have Christian symbolism, then there seem to be elements lacking in the grave. If not a full set of weapons, at least a shield would be expected, as well as other personal objects. The lack of shields, or rather shield bosses, has been noted also for the other graves with swords. If, instead, it is interpreted as a Christian grave, it would show evidence of the past influencing the new burial rites, but in such a case reopening may be less likely. The stratigraphy in the grave gives no conclusive evidence on the question of grave reopening.

Any religious background to grave reopening at Langeid will be tentative. As the reopening cannot be firmly dated, it is certainly possible that they happened in the sphere of religious change. The intentional removal of body parts or complete bodies is an interesting element of grave reopening, but unfortunately not one that can be discussed for Langeid, due to the poor preservation. The possibility of grave reopening partially for the *translatio* of bodies, presumably by relatives, to Christian burial grounds should not be excluded, however.

Concluding remarks

The study of the Langeid graves and their contents provides some insights into the widespread reopening of Viking Age graves, although it is far from establishing firm answers. Despite large-scale changes within the graves due to natural processes, it is possible to establish the likelihood of grave reopening in several burials through systematic studies of preservation, object distribution and stratigraphy. The reopening has parallels to other sites and should be understood in a wider context, while still endeavouring to explain the particularities of the site. The site underlines the importance of thorough documentation and post-excavation analyses for a firmer understanding of post-depositional processes.

The reopened graves at Langeid, while far from unique, do differ somewhat from the usual picture of Viking Age grave reopening, particularly the one provided by the written sources. They are not the monumental graves of the upper echelon in society, but seem rather the graves of a local community with significant connections to the outside world. The main effect that can be observed is deliberate destruction of objects in the graves, rather than removal of objects, and this suggests a different motivation for grave reopening than in cases where objects are removed. Likewise, the grave reopening at Langeid, coming so late in the period, cannot be interpreted independently of the religious shift, although the actual impact of religion cannot be established. The graves suggest, together with other cited examples of approximately the same wealth, that grave reopening in the Viking Age covered a fairly wide spectrum of society, and that motivations for grave reopening may have been highly varied.

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8. Iron Age ancestral bonds: consecutive burials and manipulated graves in the Dürrnberg cemeteries (Austria)

Holger Wendling

The Dürrnberg – salt mines, settlements and burials

The Dürrnberg, a microregion known for its unique remains of prehistoric salt mines, settlements and burials scattered across a highland area on the northern slopes of the Eastern Alps, is one of the most famous Iron Age landscapes in central Europe. Overlooking the entry of the Salzach river into the largely flat Salzburg basin, it integrates control over vital mineral resources in an ideal setting for supra-regional economic contact and cultural communication. Giving direct access to the Alpine passes, the Salzach river valley and its tributaries connect the northern Alpine basin with northern Italy and the region around the *Caput Adriae*. This blend of underlying economic factors accounts for the area's fundamental role as a focus of cultural and economic exchange (Wendling 2014). Encircled by mountains, the differentiated hilltop landscape consists of several elevations, hills and summits separated by shallow depressions and deep valleys. Occupation and funerary zones are scattered across the uneven micro-region (Fig. 8.1). The religious landscape of mounds and burials at the Dürrnberg is closely associated with unique traces of prehistoric occupation and economic activity in the famous Iron Age salt mines. In addition to detailed studies on what has been called a "special economic zone", the Dürrnberg offers a unique dataset for research on mortuary practices, social relations and religious thought of an Iron Age community from around 600 BC to 50 BC (Zeller 2001).

The prosperity of the Iron Age community is most obviously displayed in the abundant and precious grave furnishings of the almost 400 graves which have been excavated so far. Graves and burials are dispersed across the alpine hilltop area either in large groups of barrows, smaller cemeteries or as isolated tumuli. During the late Hallstatt and Early La Tène periods inhumation burials were deposited in wooden chambers which were covered by earthen mounds. Frequently, the initial burials were followed by one or more inhumations or cremations, which were subsequently placed into the original chamber. During this process of consecutive funerals, previously buried individuals were rearranged, dismembered or recollected. Recent research aims to understand this consecutive treatment of dead bodies and the reconfiguration of funeral architecture. Following this reassessment, it may be argued that the option of collective burial in a single chamber or the subsequent addition of supplementary and directly super-imposed chambers was related to specific cultural, social and religious conventions. Furthermore, differences in post-funeral treatment of the body according to the

Fig. 8.1: The Dürrnberg seen from north. Iron Age burials and settlements are unevenly dispersed across the mountainous area above the Salzach river valley (Photo: H. Wendling).

state of decomposition probably reflected varying concepts of ancestor worship in a liminal phase of transition from life to death. The emergence of monumental funeral complexes by the gradual merging of single burial mounds vertically and horizontally represented social relations but also enhanced collective cohesion and strengthened the identity of the burial community.

Multiple burials – a dispute

In the early days of archaeology, Johann A. Seethaler (1762–1844), a Hallein judge and amateur historian and archaeologist, referred to a peculiar Dürrnberg phenomenon of Iron Age burial customs. In addition to single inhumation graves, he mentioned multiple burials as a distinct local curiosity. He distinguished several individuals of different sex, age and social rank found together in graves in an adjacent or "storey-like" arrangement. However, Seethaler did not trace these complex burials in human action or ritual, but considered natural taphonomic processes as the reason for relocation of skeletons and grave disturbance. Yet, without any knowledge of vertical succession of settlements and burials, he interpreted scattered sherds in burial mounds as relics of feasting and ancestor worship and thus presented the first account of Iron Age mortuary rituals (Seethaler 1831, I. §1). Some 100 years later, chronological, social and cultural interpretations became much more prolific under the influence of both archaeological and bio-anthropological perspectives. State archaeologist Martin Hell (1885–1975) used shared skull characteristics of individuals in an early

La Tène period multiple burial (grave 96) to suggest a "family burial" (Fig. 8.2). According to Hell, the group was buried together at one single date as victims of a plague or accident (Hell 1929, 161–167). His interpretation was still regarded as valid when the grave was re-published in 1974 and became one major example in the first in-depth discussion of Iron Age multiple burials or "mass graves" (Pauli 1978, 54–60). With double, triple or multiple burials as the most characteristic feature of Dürrnberg funerary culture, as Ludwig Pauli (1944–1995) argued, they had to be decisively distinguished from consecutive burials which imply a distinct chronological sequence. Pauli considered consecutive burials as a rather uncommon phenomenon and assumed there would be only a few examples of

Fig. 8.2: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Eislfeld", grave 96. A collective burial was initially interpreted as a multiple burial of an Iron Age family (Hell 1929, fig. 1).

individuals successively placed in one single grave chamber, or into the burial mound, or into a new separate grave chamber built on top of an older one (Pauli 1978, 63–65). Thus, Pauli referred to the established definition of multiple burials (*Mehrfachbestattung*) of several individuals buried at one single moment as opposed to consecutive or collective burials (*Nachbestattung* or *Kollektivbestattung*) which indicate a succession of individual burials (Veit 1993, 4–5; Eggert 2012, 59–60). Remarkably, Pauli explicitly stated that there were no signs of post-depositional manipulation of bodies or grave goods in the area and thus pointed to a singular funeral event, *i.e.* multiple burials, as the major characteristic of Dürrnberg burial customs (Pauli 1978, 59). However, he did not elaborate on any motivation or reasons for contemporary communal burials.

Extensive rescue excavation during recent decades has considerably enhanced the dataset of Dürrnberg features and graves and altered our understanding of burial customs. Using this new information, Kurt Zeller (1980, 166) suggested complex rituals of consecutive burial as a reason for the frequent association of several bodies in one single grave. He considered reopening of chambers and successive inhumations in collective graves (*Kollektivgräber*) as the most common trait of Dürrnberg Iron Age funerals (cf. Eggert 2012, 62–63). Moreover, he was the first to describe in detail multi-storey constructions of burial monuments, *i.e.* the vertical succession of grave chambers on top of each other (Zeller 1980, 174–178). Similar to consecutive burials within burial mounds, Zeller (1980, 178) interpreted those successive installations as a sign of "rooted family traditions" or "distinguished and close social relations" to the individuals who had been buried in a central or basic position, on the basis of spatial proximity.

During the last few years, the Dürrnberg Research Department initiated a comprehensive reappraisal of published burial data, and intensified the investigation and publication of previously unpublished features and objects. By 2019, this innovative research programme has covered 283 graves comprising *c*. 600 buried individuals and sheds new light on details of grave construction,
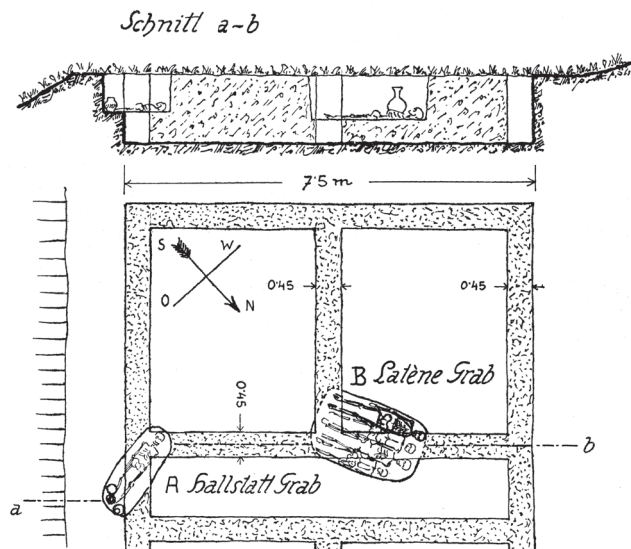
funeral rites and treatment of the dead, as well as on consecutive burials, and Iron Age social differentiation and religious life in general. The Römersteig cemetery contains almost all aspects of local burial culture mentioned above, making it possible to test previous hypotheses on funeral practices at Dürrnberg. Thus, it helps to understand more profoundly the intrinsic reasons which formed the local archaeological record. Together with the burial sites that have been analysed since 2012 and those which are currently being worked on, it will be incorporated into a comprehensive study of burial culture in a major centre of the early Iron Age world.

The Römersteig necropolis

The Römersteig necropolis, excavated from 1979–1982, provides particular information on the socio-religious background of Dürrnberg multiple burials, especially ritual aspects and grave manipulation (Neugebauer 1981; Wendling and Wiltschke-Schrotta 2015). Situated on the north-eastern fringe of the Ruedlkopf hill, the site offers a unique sequence of settlement residue, funeral monuments and remains of ritual activity. Traces of Hallstatt period dwellings which are followed by strata and graves of an Early La Tène period cremation zone indicate a remarkable shift in practical use and ideological designation of the area (Fig. 8.3). In LT A2, a first set of wooden grave chambers and stone packings

Fig. 8.3: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Römersteig". La Tène grave chambers and an area that was used for cremation in La Tène A1 (Copyright Dürrnbergforschung Keltenmuseum Hallein).

covered by earthen burial mounds succeed those burnt traces of funeral pyres and layers of ashes and charcoal. Until LT C1, including a presumed hiatus in LT B2, additional grave chambers were built, more tumuli were heaped up and consecutive burials were placed into existing chambers. At the end of the funeral activity, the cemetery consisted of 20 burial mounds or several single chambers which were combined to interrelated grave complexes. In total, it comprised 66 inhumations, 18 cremations and 14 "archaeologically identified individuals" without human skeletal remains.

The architecture and form of the Römersteig graves follow the typical layout of Dürrnberg burial monuments. Both during Hallstatt and La Tène periods, block-built grave chambers were covered by an earthen mound (Pauli 1978, 32–33, 43–45; Zeller 1980, 163–165; Wendling and Wiltschke-Schrotta 2015, 311). With an average size of the chambers of 2.7 × 1.7 m, only some of the smallest features attain dimensions of regular coffins. Stone packing around the wooden chambers need not necessarily be interpreted as serving as protection against grave robbery, but may stabilise the construction or be installed as a symbolic feature which once had an apotropaic or magic purpose (Egg and Zeller 2005, 353). Sometimes, stone linings delimit the base of the mound and additionally stress its monumentality. Grave complex K195 is framed by a rectangular stone feature and was thus probably covered by a pyramidal mound (Wendling and Wiltschke-Schrotta 2015, 157–158, 311). The chambers but also the stone architecture surrounding them may have had a distinct symbolic connotation as appropriate residences for the deceased in the afterlife. The notion of the chamber as the "House of the Dead" is ostentatiously illustrated by the construction of a wooden saddle roof in grave 352 in the Hallersbichl-cemetery. As a functionally unnecessary architectural element, this construction provides a clear reference to the underlying beliefs and ideas of the afterlife (Wendling 2017).

Most of the dead were inhumed lying on their back with arms next to their bodies. Differentiated by sex and age, grave furniture consists of jewellery and weaponry and a set of ceramic vessels. Commonly, two bowls and a large vessel contained liquid and solid foodstuff and were complemented by a piece of meat and a heavy cutting knife. In a high proportion of chambers, the positions of skeletal remains and grave goods indicate massive post-depositional disturbance which cannot be ascribed to natural taphonomic processes (compare Fig. 8.9). More than two-thirds of all analysable cases provide evidence of intentional manipulation or relocation of previously buried individuals. Only 17 out of 66 archaeologically verifiable and scientifically testable corpses remained undisturbed. Nineteen bodies were removed and relocated as a complete whole, while the remains of 28 individuals were rearranged and moved to the sides or corners of chambers. While the spatial demands of successive interments required some clearing of previous bodies, the highly differentiated treatment of the dead indicates motives beyond functional needs.

Grave robbery

The desire for material wealth has frequently been assumed to be a fundamental motivation for intrusions into ancient graves. Central European Iron Age disturbed graves with apparently plundered grave inventories have therefore often been considered to have fallen victim to contemporaneous grave robbery. However, recent research has shown that more complex and diverse explanations for grave violation are required (Kümmel 2009, 82–96). Various incentives for subsequent manipulation are attested in historical and ethnographic contexts. These include desecration, disturbance

caused by fear of revenants, appropriation and removal of cultic relics, and intrusion as part of a multi-sequenced funerary ritual.

Sometimes, traces of unsystematic, hasty intrusion into a grave chamber and deliberate extraction of special items may indicate "negative" purposes. At the Römersteig cemetery, traces interpreted as ancient grave robbery can be observed in grave 195#1 with the corpse and pelvis of the deceased male being substantially disturbed or destroyed (Fig. 8.4, top). No traces of presumed precious items remained in the grave (Wendling and Wiltschke-Schrotta 2015, 160–161). The clear limits of the disturbed area indicate a deliberate search for the sword or belt fittings, while both the

Fig. 8.4: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Römersteig", grave complex K195. In the later grave 195#1 (top), massive disturbance of the body indicates grave robbery aiming at the sword and belt of a Celtic warrior. In preparation of the final burial, the chamber of the initial grave 195#2 (bottom) was modified and reduced by insertion of additional wooden walls (Copyright Dürrnbergforschung Keltenmuseum Hallein).

undisturbed remains of the corpse and evident ignoring of other parts of the chamber may suggest that the intruders were well aware of the position, sex and furnishings of the deceased. The features and the date of this La Tène B2 funeral support the notion of an incident that happened soon after the end of burial activity at the site while access to the chambers was still readily possible. During the robbery, the intruders seem to have deliberately re-deposited a bowl belonging to an earlier, La Tène A, inhumation which was found turned upside down in a higher level within the mound. Alternatively, the vessel may also have been ritually rearranged during the later burial in order to appease the dead and as a plea to pardon the desecration of the grave (Neugebauer 1981, 466; Kümmel 2009, 143–144).

In contrast to grave robbery and its negative connotation of grave disturbance, including neglect of piety and economic motivation, a regular, apparently socially accepted post-sepulchral

Fig. 8.5: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Eislfeld", grave 126. The skull of an earlier burial was removed when a second chamber was erected on top of the primary grave (Copyright Dürrnbergforschung Keltenmuseum Hallein).

appropriation of grave goods may have been exercised. Reasons for this may have involved relic-cults or the profane recovery of private or inherited property. Ethnographic and historical accounts describe dispute and conflict raised on those socially relocated items during the liminal phase of death, while property rights of the deceased frequently expire after a certain time (Rolle 1980, 27; Moore 1981).

Extraction and relocation of bodies and body parts

Similar to the post-funeral retrieval of material items, the extraction of bodies and body parts has to be considered a matter of socially accepted intention and thus does not *a priori* bear any negative connotation. At the Römersteig necropolis, limited preservation of features and skeletal remains prevent any proof of extracted body parts. At other Dürrnberg cemeteries, however, examples of this peculiar phenomenon occasionally occur. At grave 126 of the Eislfeld necropolis, the skull of an individual was removed when a consecutive grave chamber was built on top of an earlier feature (Fig. 8.5). The rest of the skeleton, including the mandible, and all grave goods remained untouched (Rabsilber *et al.* 2017, 281; Zeller 1980, 175–176). Similar post-depositional relocation occurred at grave 67 of the same cemetery, where the skull of a Hallstatt period woman was found *c.* 50 cm away from the mandible which remained *in situ* (Moosleitner *et al.* 1974, 28–29; Pauli 1975, 113). Both examples of special treatment of the skull may be part of religious concepts involving the ritual appropriation of the human head. Different aspects of "Celtic" skull-cults are attested both in ancient Greek and Roman written sources and in archaeological context (David 1995, 91; Härtl 2005). Removed skull relics may thus have been used to produce distinct perforated bone disks which were used as amulets in order to prevent harm, induce their magic on their bearer or to represent religious or social power. As objects of high symbolic value the discs could have been an integral material component of Iron Age ancestor worship (Insoll 2011, 1048–1049; Wiltschke-Schrotta and Wendling 2015).

The lower left extremity of the buried individual in grave 76 of the Eislfeld necropolis is missing. Former interpretation as a result of intravital amputation is not confirmed by anthropological re-examination (Rabsilber *et al.* 2017, 123; *contra* Moosleitner *et al.* 1974, 41, Taf. 203, 2; Pauli 1975, 114). In contrast, lack of pathological traces at the bone indicate a post-funeral manipulation of the body when muscles and tissue at tibia, fibula and the foot skeleton already were in an advanced stage of decomposition. The lower leg may also have been disturbed and relocated during modern construction work (Moosleitner *et al.* 1974, 41, Taf. 203, 2).

The situation is equally obscure at grave 19 at the Moserfeld-Osthang cemetery, in which a number of wealthy grave goods remained undisturbed and untouched next to the skull and the first cervical of a little child. It is a matter of debate whether a partial and selective burial of the skull occurred or whether the postcranial skeleton was removed some time after the funeral (Penninger 1972, 57; Pauli 1975, 113, 179–180; 1978, 635; Tiefengraber and Wiltschke-Schrotta 2012, 44). Apart from the removal of body parts from the chamber, features similar to the relocated female skull mentioned above indicate the decisive and systematic disarticulation of bones and body parts and their rearrangement within the grave context. The male individual in grave 79 received a special and multi-stage treatment after burial (Moosleitner *et al.* 1974, 45–46, Taf. 204, 2.3; Pauli

1975, 113–114). Its left arm was probably removed and both the unnaturally "upstanding" skull and backbones rearranged after excarnation (Fig. 8.6). These manipulations together with the innominate bones which had been placed on top of the chest, and a wooden beam put across the remains may represent magic action against an undead revenant (Moosleitner *et al.* 1974, 46; Pauli 1978, 67–68).

Substantial body manipulation also occurs at grave 229#2 at the Römersteig cemetery. The floor of the grave chamber is covered with human skeletal remains which are partly disarticulated, but also preserved in full anatomical connection (Fig. 8.7). The lower extremities and the hip bones of a young male (individual 6) had been carefully placed in the south-western corner of the chamber. According to sex and age, these parts can be correlated with the thorax and skull of

Fig. 8.6: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Eislfeld", grave 79. According to the deliberate position of the skull and upper backbone, and the deposition of the pelvic and other bones on the chest, the male individual was massively manipulated (Copyright Dürrnbergforschung Keltenmuseum Hallein).

individual 4 in the opposite part of the chamber. These traces indicate a deliberate dissection of the body which was still substantially connected by muscles, fibres and tissue (Wendling *et al.* 2015, 206, 214–215, 320).

Thus, selective extraction of body parts is quite convincingly traceable, whereas evidence of complete removal of bodies can only be verified in a few special cases. In grave 192#2 of the Römersteig cemetery, for example, the central area of the chamber is void of human remains but preserves some objects which indicate the former disposal of a female individual (Fig. 8.8). In preparation for another presumed funeral, the bones of this "missing" body may have been mingled with the remains of earlier inhumations which are dispersed or concentrated along the chamber walls. However, the corpse may have also been removed completely from the chamber for unrecoverable reasons. A similar situation in grave 201 rules out other explanations for the absence of the human remains, *e.g.* disparate preservation of bones. Neither does tomb raiding explain the removal, for the remaining sword rather seems to be too precious an object to be left in the grave alone (Moser *et al.* 2012, 24). This supports the assumption of a deliberate removal of the complete body and associated parts of garments and jewellery.
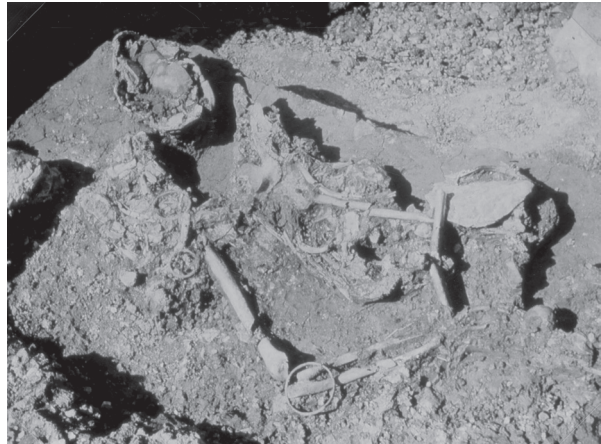
Consecutive burials and manipulation of bodies

Close social bonds probably tied those individuals who had been buried either in one single chamber or in different spatially associated chambers and graves. At the Dürrnberg, however, biological relations can only be substantiated by epigenetic markers at the teeth of four individuals buried in grave 156 (Wendling and Wiltschke-Schrotta 2015, 273–274). Beyond those direct links, varying
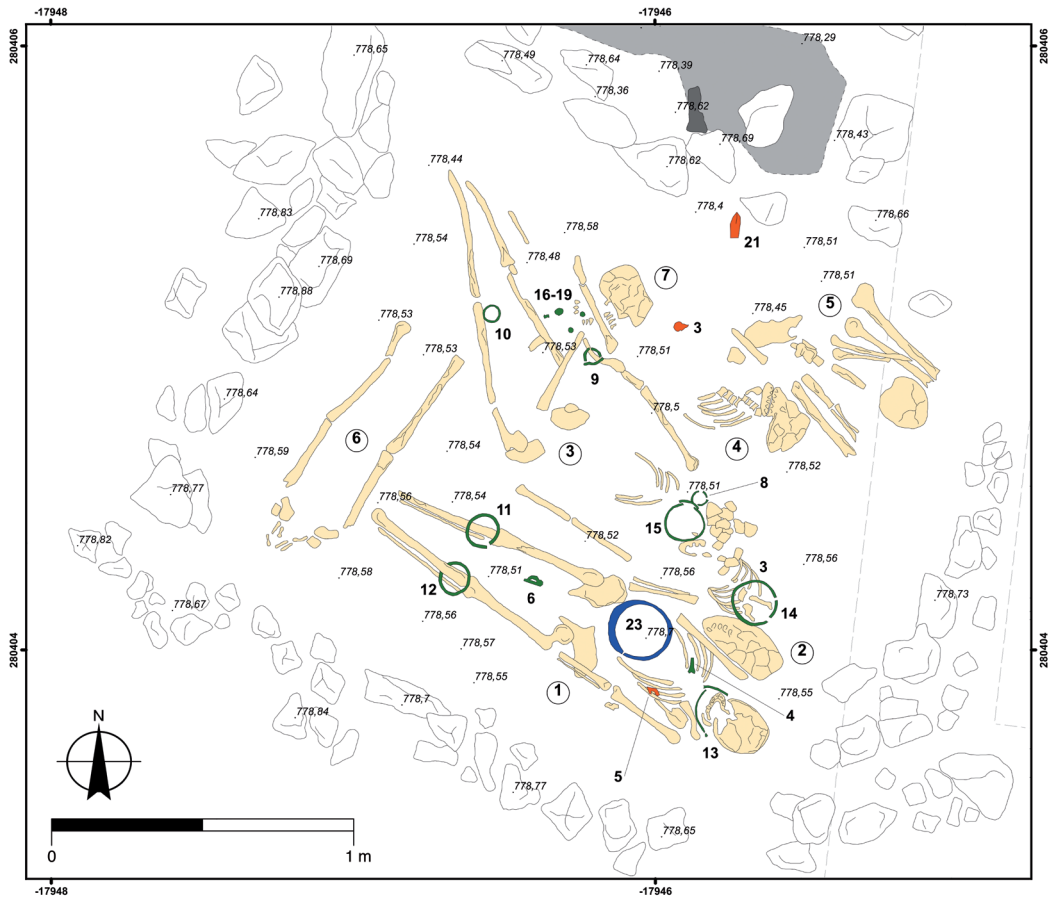
Fig. 8.7: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Römersteig", grave 229#2. Both articulated skeletons and relocated remains indicate complex processes of subsequent funerals (Courtesy of Dürrnbergforschung Keltenmuseum Hallein).

social connections can be assumed according to the proximity and spatial association of individuals, graves, chambers and mounds. The quality of these social bonds remains unclear and is a matter of conjecture on the basis of historical and ethnographic analogies. These include a multitude of relations, such as those of clients, dwelling or supra-site communities, but also clusters corresponding to age, sex, gender, lineage and religious belief (David 1995, 91). Notably, at the Dürrnberg's salt-mining district, occupation and professional specialisation may have fostered networks which were displayed in mortuary practice.

Evidence of collective, *i.e.* successive burials in one grave chamber entails questions on technical aspects of permanent accessibility. Giant Hallstatt period tumuli at Strettweg and Klein-Klein (Styria, Austria) feature wood-faced aisles or *dromoi* leading towards an entrance to the chamber which was closed by a door or blocked by removable stones (Egg 1996, 6–9). There are no traces of similar installations at the Dürrnberg monuments, but some subtle hints of access via the chamber roofing as for example at a burial at the Simonbauernfeld cemetery (Lavelle and Stöllner 2018; 2019).
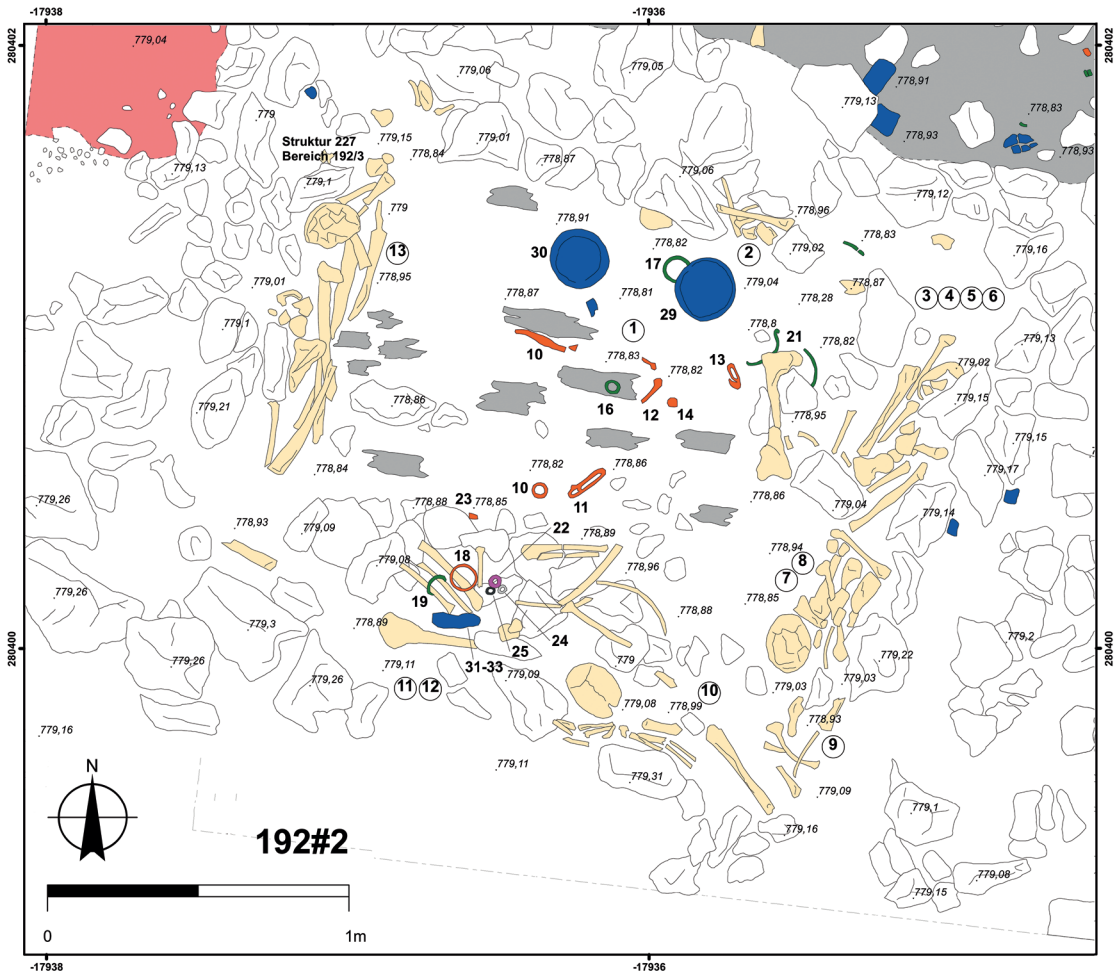
Fig. 8.8: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Römersteig", grave 192#2. Human skeletal remains were rather carelessly piled along the sides of the grave chamber. The empty space in the centre may indicate the removal of a complete body (Copyright Dürrnbergforschung Keltenmuseum Hallein).

Reappraisal of the Dürrnberg cemeteries provides proof of sequential burials by detailed analysis of the succession of disposed individuals and grave goods. Furthermore, among these collective burials, the dead were treated and rearranged in different ways, apparently according to the state of decomposition described earlier (Fig. 8.9). Thus, variations in form and position of funeral deposition and later relocation suggest marked differences between lately deceased individuals and those who had been buried some time ago. Examples of carefully relocated bodies in anatomical order in grave 229#2 have been discussed before (Fig. 8.7). It seems as if the bereaved wanted to use space as efficiently as possible without severely altering position and connectivity of the ancestral remains. A body still connected by fibres, muscles and tissue was carefully separated and disposed in opposite corners of the chamber (individuals 6 and 4). Both this deliberate manipulation and the

deviated body (3) spatially respect earlier and subsequent burials. Both phenomena show that those who had died not long ago were treated in a markedly considerate and careful manner.

Other contexts create a different picture: remains of 16 or 17 individuals, who had been consecutively buried in grave 192#2, were rather unwarily pushed to the sides and into the corners of the chamber (Fig. 8.8). However, some bones were deliberately bundled and grouped together. Some of the bone concentrations are mixed with grave goods from earlier burials. The low number and quality of those remaining items may suggest that some objects were extracted during subsequent funerals. Apart from grave furniture, the empty space in the centre of the chamber

Fig. 8.9: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Römersteig". Absolute and relative proportion of different types of skeletal manipulation and relocation.

indicates a final burial which apparently had been removed from the grave, possibly in preparation of subsequent burials. Yet, these missing remains may also be disguised among those bones that are piled on the sides of the chamber.

The Römersteig cemetery thus indicates two clearly distinguishable methods of treatment of the dead. Recently buried, articulated individuals were carefully treated and meticulously rearranged, whereas remains of former burials had been rather cursorily moved aside. The selective manipulation according to degree of decomposition may indicate different stages of funeral ritual and ancestor worship (Veit 1997, 294–295). Thus, the unrotten bodies, still resembling the living individuals, may have been conceived as being in transition between life and death. This liminal stage as a major critical situation in human existence exacts distinct *rites de passage* and the strict compliance to special ritual behaviour (Turner 1964; 1969, 95). External physical integrity may have been integral to the unobstructed transcendence into the other world. Possibly, fear of altering the unchanged, physically present individual gave further reason to leave the bodies untouched (Müller-Scheeßel 2005, 340, 351). Ethnographic examples prove the notion of full fleshy decomposition marking the end of this transitional phase and the final entrance of the deceased into another sphere in numerous traditional societies (Küster 1919–22, 923). Subsequently, the remaining bones were not individually attributed, but decisively mingled in order to visualise the incorporation into a mortuary or ancestral community (Insoll 2011, 1051–1052; Müller-Scheeßel 2005, 347–348). Similar beliefs of menace to social order by pre-skeletal human remains prevail at recent societies which depose of their dead in collective burials (Hertz 1905/06, 53–57; Veit 1993, 37). Furthermore, the de-individualisation may have secondarily disguised social inequality which was often ostentatiously displayed in funerary ritual and grave fittings in the first place (David 1992, 350; 1995, 96–97). However, neither the reduced "significance of single grave monuments" (Müller-Scheeßel 2005, 346) nor the commingling of human remains indicate socio-economic equality of the living community.
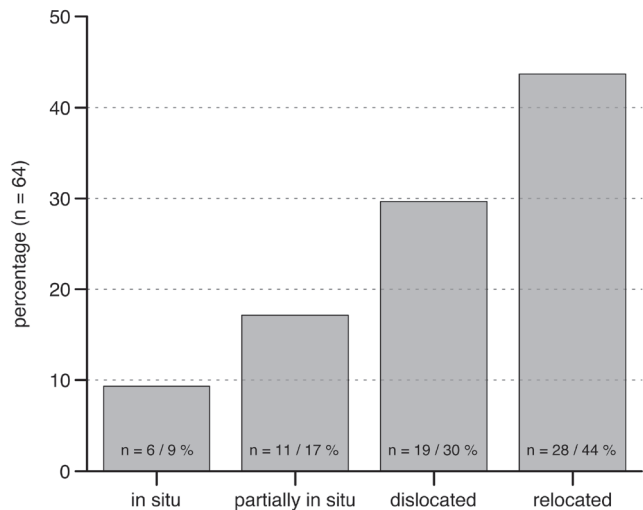
Extraction of body parts, for example the skull from grave 124, may relate to a cult of relics which used memorabilia to commemorate prominent ancestors. As mobile *mnemotopia*, the relics provided tangible access to the past and visualised genealogic roots which legitimised social and economic rights (Assmann 2005, 59–61; Insoll 2011, 1048–1051; compare Wendling 2016). Similar mental concepts may have allowed for the removal of grave goods which need not necessarily be considered an iniquity. The property of the deceased may have lost its personal affiliation during the liminal transition into the ancestral world and thus be reverted to the living community (Rolle 1980, 27). This notion implies the role of grave goods as reversible mnemonic devices or cultic *semiophores* in material culture (Veit 2005, 32–34). Their performative character would rather have had an ostentatious effect in funeral ceremony than in the disclosed and invisible space of the grave chamber (David 1995, 97). The variability of post-funeral treatment of the dead body illustrates forms of collective commemoration which are attested in modern preliterate societies. Their "communicative memory" extends some three or four generations into the past and fundamentally depends on active participation and experience of living persons. Beyond this retrospective phase of factual history, the "collective memory" expands into a mythical and rather ominous past which is conveyed by legendary myths of strong sacred and religious character (Assmann 2005, 48–49; 2006, 492, 494).

A similar system of dualistic memorisation could have caused the specific dichotomy in Dürrnberg Iron Age treatment of the dead. Recently deceased persons remained in direct memory of the bereaved, had to be physically preserved and decently buried. When the dead moved out of communicative memory and eventually became "ancestors" in a general, rather supernatural sense, their remains became elements of a nebulous past in collective memory which did not invoke physical integrity of the ancestral remains. The temporal dimension of this two-phase funeral division cannot be assessed adequately with archaeological methods. On the one hand, the period of decomposition is subject to a whole range of imponderable natural parameters while on the other hand, bodies could be preserved by various methods a fairly long time. Mummification could have been used to appease and respect the dead in a time of mutual danger. Similarly, it could have prolonged the liminal phase of transition from life to death in order to maintain the deceased as a peripheral part of the living community (see Pauli 1975, 174–179). Relative chronology according to grave fittings does not imply a coherent temporal pattern which fits to the aforementioned time spans. However, discontinuity in funeral activity in some Römersteig graves may indicate a hiatus which approximately reflects the period of direct, communicative memory, *i.e.* some 50 to 80 years (Wendling and Wiltschke-Schrotta 2015, 301–308).

Collective memory – collective cemeteries

Collective burials in single grave chambers, and manipulation of human remains are only two components of Iron Age Dürrnberg burial customs. Other characteristic features include the architectural rearrangement of graves and chambers, and the spatial correlation of tumuli. After an extensive funeral activity in grave 195#2 the structure of the chamber seems to have become insufficient to incorporate more individuals. In order to compensate the collapse of the western and southern walls of the grave chamber and subsequent influx of sediment, collateral block walls and stone revetments were installed (Fig. 8.4). Additionally, the remains of earlier burials were covered with soil and a new timber floor. In contrast to a merely functional approach, the main goal was rather not to minimise work expenditure (Müller-Scheeßel 2005, 344). The reduction of size rather combines a practical

need with an architectural solution which acknowledges the undisturbed spatial preservation of ancestral remains.

One of the most incisive examples of vertical enlargement of burial mounds is grave complex K124 at the Eislfeld cemetery (Zeller 1980, 174–179; Rabsilber *et al.* 2017, 260–290, 731–732). The basis of the multi-storey complex is chamber 126 with an inhumation of an adult man dating to the first phase of Dürrnberg occupation in Ha D1 (Fig. 8.10). Approximately one generation later, another chamber was set on top of this apparently quite well preserved lowermost structure. The upper part of the mound was carefully cut off and the second chamber placed on top in the same orientation. Yet, a ceramic vessel in standing position with its neck cut off and redeposited in the stone packing of the second chamber shows that the northern part of the first chamber had partially collapsed. Obviously, a vivid memory of the first individual and his funeral setting led to a decisive placing of the secondary individuals at the opposite side of the chamber, so as to

Fig. 8.10: Hallein, Dürrnberg "Eislfeld", grave complex K124. Vertical succession of grave chambers 126–125–124 in a multi-storey funeral structure (Copyright Dürrnbergforschung Keltenmuseum Hallein).

grant the original ancestor an unhindered view of the sky. Furthermore, the removal of the skull together with the untouched grave furniture suggests close social bonds which were based on direct remembrance within a period of communicative memory. In a third phase of grave construction during La Tène C1, the tumulus was cut a second time and a final chamber placed on top. Again, the deceased was deliberately located towards the west in order to prevent an exact superposition to the subjacent burials (Zeller 1980, 177). The three super-imposed chambers and the consequent vertical accumulation of their mound resulted in a 12 m wide monument which is one of biggest Dürrnberg tumuli. The subsequent addition of graves to an initial mound in grave complex K194 at the Römersteig cemetery produced another prominent example of vertical and horizontal growth of single monuments at the Dürrnberg. During some 100 years (La Tène A2–B1), an oval grave monument developed by continuous addition of single grave structures which eventually formed a homogeneous, 30 m wide complex with adjacent mounds (Fig. 8.11). In the end, the single components which formed those cellular conglomerates of progressively accumulated mounds could hardly be distinguished at all (Augstein 2018; Baitinger 1999, 132–135; Müller-Scheeßel 2005, 343). The vertical and horizontal growth of mounds and entire cemeteries increased status and prestige both of the funerary community and its ancestors. The living community thus explicitly
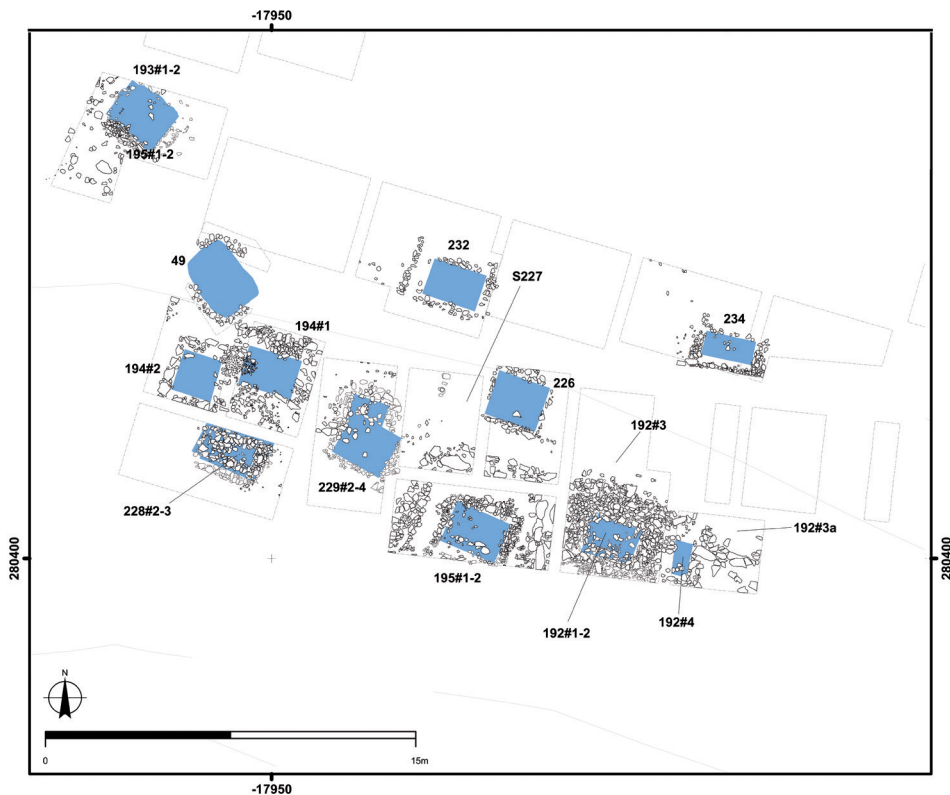

Fig. 8.11: Hallein, Dürrnberg Grave group "Römersteig, Westgruppe". Comb-like vertical and horizontal accumulation of grave monuments created a comprehensive grave monument (Copyright Dürrnbergforschung Keltenmuseum Hallein).

drew upon ancient, ancestral bonds and created a physical network between this and the nether world. Consequently, the funeral monument did not only reflect direct social relations but also enhanced collective cohesion and consolidated communal identity.

Acknowledgements

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9. Disturbing the dead: reopening of stone cists in the Macedonian Gevgelija and Valandovo plains

Daniela Heilmann

Introduction

When Stanley Casson discovered a stone cist grave near the necropolis of Chauchitsa at the beginning of the 20th century, he described it as "rifled in antiquity" since the covering stones had been removed and human bones were found scattered outside the stone cist. Within the cist, he further observed another intact – undisturbed – skeleton and concluded that the burials took place successively in this grave construction. At that time, Casson regarded the whole grave context as an evidence of an "illegal" burial in an older grave, which he saw as an unauthorised and punishable act (Casson 1918/1919, 8–9). In addition to the grave from Chauchitsa, many further examples of grave disturbances have been discovered in the region of the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains up to the present day, allowing a study of grave disturbances in the context of the general burial customs.

Our understanding of Macedonia's Iron Age (8th–6th century BC) more widely, as well as the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains in particular, is mainly based on the study of cemeteries. During the First World War, British and German military personnel discovered grave constructions which soon became the subject of unsystematic excavations (Dragendorff 1919; Pingel 1970). These findings became more widely known through the publications of single grave contexts as well as cemeteries from the regions of Gevgelija, Chauchitsa and Bohemitsa (Casson 1918/1919; 1919/1920; 1925; Rey 1932). From the 1970s on, local excavations have significantly bolstered our knowledge of the period.

Due to the typical custom of burying individuals separately in stone constructions, some 227 published grave contexts are currently available as a basis for further analysis in the region (Dedeli [95], Glos [2], Marvinci-Lisičin Dol [18], Gevgelija-Milci [53], Gevgelija-Suva Reka [59]). In the following, the burial norm that emerges from this dataset will be contrasted with the reopening of graves and disturbing of their contents. To fully assess the differences in burial ritual, it is necessary to illustrate how the bereaved dealt with the deceased in as much detail as possible.

Generally, Iron Age burial rituals in the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains are relatively uniform. The deceased body was laid down in a supine position in a stone cist, which was erected for the single burial and closed with either a monolith or several smaller stone slabs. Norms regulating the typical furnishing are identifiable, although there is a certain degree of individualism in the

selection and combination of grave goods. Variations in the offerings of pottery are hardly in evidence; instead the ensembles are rather standardised, correlating mainly with the age and gender of the deceased.

The burial groups of the Valandovo and Gevgelija plains are comparable regarding the organisation of the cemeteries, the grave architecture, treatment of the body as well as the furnishing of the deceased individuals. Only a section of the whole funerary process is of course observable – topics like grief and mourning, for instance, are hardly accessible in cultures without writing and/or images, but will most probably have been an integral component of the burial rituals. However, graveyards are observable and can therefore be analysed and even deciphered as "containers" of artefacts established by death and burial (Benkel 2013, 47).

Against the background of this ritual behaviour, another practice seen in the same cemeteries needs stressing. In several cases stone cists include more than one individual arranged in a specific way: while one individual follows the general rule and is laid in a supine position, the disarticulated bones of one or two other individuals are deposited at one side of the cist with associated grave goods. Most probably, these stone cists had been reopened, and the individuals moved to one side in order to prepare the cist for another burial. Since this practice occurs several times within the necropolis, the phenomenon can be considered as part of the ritual behaviour at these cemeteries.

In this paper, I will follow Aspöck and Gramsch who each argue for the need to focus on variability in burial rituals and in order to do so, to include all ritual activities exhibited by a certain community in their cultural praxis (Aspöck 2013; Gramsch 2013, 512–513). Assuming that variability in burial rituals is the norm produces interpretations which focus more on the various ritual actions themselves than on the apparently rigid features created by fixed norms.

In order to incorporate the case study presented here into a more general picture of transformation processes, I will briefly discuss the well-known model of rites of passage (Hertz 1960; van Gennep 1986) including the further refinements by Victor Turner (1964), which explore how certain reactions in form of structured activities of the bereaved as well as rites of separation follow the biological death of an individual. Even if most parts of the model are difficult to align with archaeological evidence, some parts of *rite de passage* of the deceased can be identified. By highlighting certain aspects of the model concerning the liminal phase after the burial and its completion, a glimpse is possible into the way the burial community dealt with their deceased after a certain period of time, allowing a new interpretation of the whole burial custom, and in particular establishing the meaning of the reopening practices as part of the burial customs.

Burial practices

Considering cemetery organisation, grave constructions and body rituals, as well as the ritual of furnishing burials with grave goods, helps us to understand certain aspects of the standard burial ritual in the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains. Several flat grave cemeteries dating to the Early Iron Age are known in these micro-regions located along the Lower Vardar Valley (Fig. 9.1). Published and therefore available for further analysis are the sites Dedeli-Meleznik (Mitrevski 1991), Marvinci-Lisičin Dol (Videski 1999), Gevgelija-Suva Reka (Pašić 1975–1978; 1977; Ristov 1992) as well as Gevgelija-Milci (Georgiev 1979; Pašić 1987; Husenovski 1997; 2017; 2018).

The stone cists of Dedeli-Meleznik are arranged around a central area with a diameter of roughly 10 m where no graves or other features have been registered (Fig. 9.2). Since the grave constructions
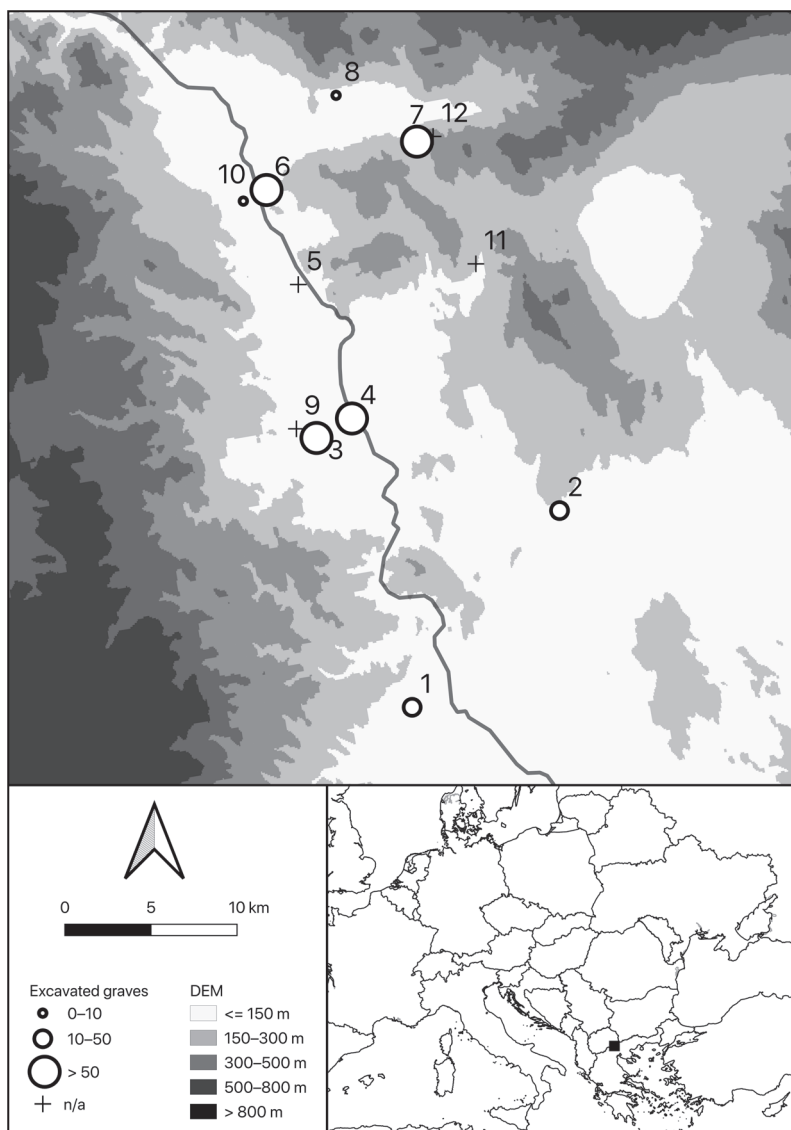
Fig. 9.1: Flat cemeteries dating to the Early Iron Age in the Lower Vardar Valley: 1 Bohemitsa; 2 Chauchitsa; 3 Suva Reka (Gevgelija); 4 Milci (Gevgelija); 5 Glos (Grčiste); 6 Marvinci-Lisičin Dol; 7 Dedeli; 8 Železnište (Valandovo); 9 Raul (Gevgelija); 10 Bišov Javor; 11 Bolovan (Furka); 12 Karakuš.

are not oriented towards the central space, no satisfying interpretation of the function of the area has been advanced so far. Stone cists show orientations in all cardinal directions with no clear relation to gender; instead, it seems that the orientation depends on the inner organisation of the cemetery (Mitrevski 1991, 77). The western and eastern parts of the cemetery especially clearly show an arrangement of the stone cists in rows with the orientation of the graves dependant on their neighbours (Fig. 9.2). It is likely that the stone cists were visible for a certain time or were
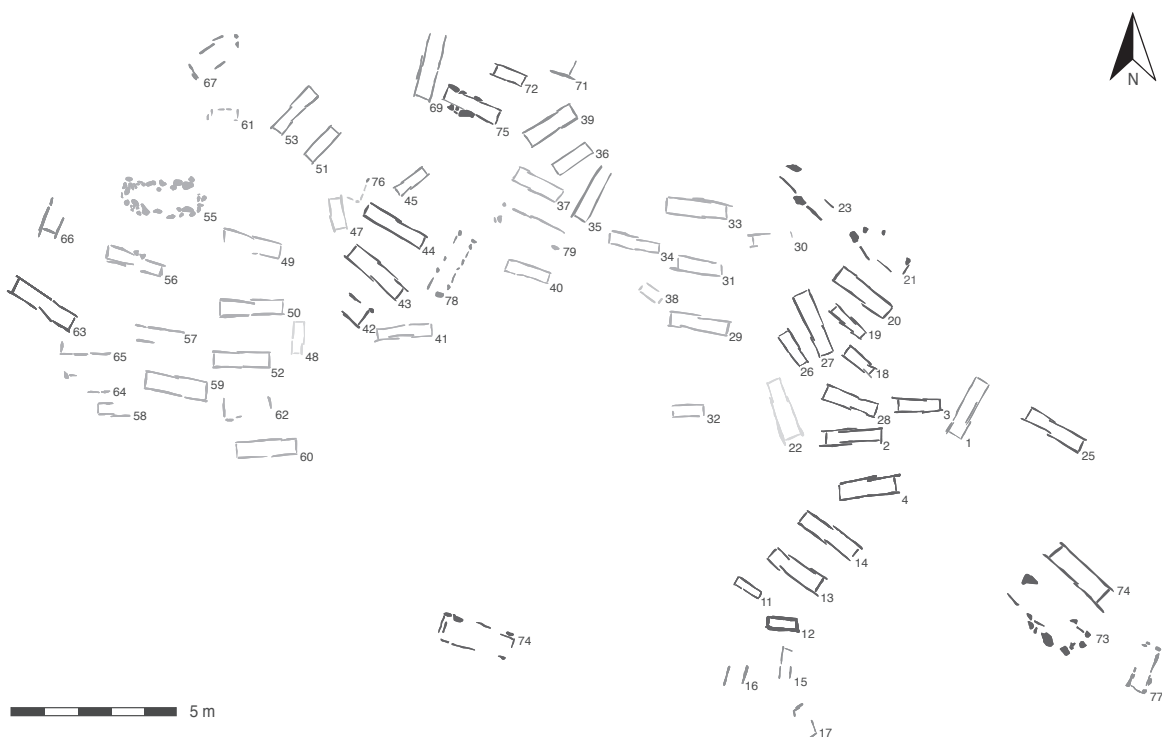
Fig. 9.2: Orientation of the stone cists of Dedeli-Meleznik: light grey – west–east; medium grey – north-east–south-west; dark grey – north-west–south-east (after Mitrevski 1991, plan 1).

marked on the surface. The organisation of the middle part is not sufficiently clear, probably for reason of chronology, but an arrangement in rows is also visible there. As Mitrevski (1991, 43) already pointed out, the cemetery was probably used by several social groups, which he regarded as families.

The stone slab cists were constructed with an orthostat at the head and foot ends of the grave each constituting the front and back wall, whereas the sides were constructed of two, three or more flagstones. As a covering, a monolith or several smaller stone slabs were used (Mitrevski 1991, 40–41). Occasionally the floor was paved with stones, but usually the individual was laid on the ground (Ristov 1992, 99). Pebble stones of small sizes were used inside and outside the cists to stabilise the grave construction. Traces of clay in between the stone slabs indicate a similar purpose (Ristov 1992, 99). The constructions vary in length between 0.67 m and 2.4 m; it is assumed that they were made according to the size of the deceased individual. In some cases, this is verified by anthropological analysis (*e.g.* Dedeli grave 51 with a length of 1.20 m (Mitrevski 1991, 30) and the graves 7, 16 and 34 of Suva Reka with stone cists varying 0.96 m to 1.40 m in length all contained the remains of children).

The erection of a stone cist marks the creation of a chamber intended to receive a deceased individual together with personal belongings and attire as well as grave furnishings. In general, the grave chambers mainly house single primary burials: that is to say, a recently deceased individual was buried without the intention to recover it again (Duday 2009, 15). About a third of the

graves (32) in the Dedeli cemetery were still covered with stone slabs at excavation and therefore provide excellent information about how the body of the deceased was treated during the burial ritual. About half of the inhumations (14) were well preserved and clearly attest to an extended supine position, with upper limbs typically laid down parallel to the body. In general, the bones are in anatomically correct positions, suggesting that the deceased was buried shortly after death and left undisturbed.

A number of patterns of furnishing are clearly identifiable in the inventories of the closed grave contexts. Small stone cists – interpreted as grave architecture for children (see above) – mainly show miniature jugs whereas combinations of pouring and drinking vessels such as jugs with cut away necks, *cantharoi* and cups are typical goods for adult individuals (Heilmann 2014, 90–91). Adult graves with weapons and additional equipment (razors, whetstones, knives and tweezers) are clearly distinguishable from those graves lacking spearheads and tools. On the basis of this clear dualism, and graves with anthropological data that support the categorisation of weapon graves as male graves and those without as female ones, a division in furnishings assigned to the male as well as female sphere is proposed. Due to the non-standardised, variable sets of furnishing it is difficult to clearly distinguish social hierarchies within the group of adult individuals. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that among the female graves, relatively rich assemblages occur.

To conclude, the flat grave cemeteries are spatially delimited areas in which the graves are the individual components that form a public space used by a certain group. The orientation of the grave constructions towards each other indicates a relation between them and/or the buried individuals. After the death of an individual, a (symbolic) integration in a pre-structured environment is conducted as part of funerary ceremonies. Hence, the cemeteries can be seen as spaces of collectivisation (Benkel 2013, 56). The general polarity between individual and collective – between "I" and "we" – is reproduced by maintaining, mirroring or re-shaping the identity of the deceased individual as well as the community.

The different social groups burying their deceased in the flat cemeteries along the Vardar Valley are connected through remarkably uniform burial customs. The grave constructions as well as the manner in which the bereaved dealt with the body are standardised. No difference is made based on age, gender or the status of a dead individual within the community. Children received the same treatment as adult individuals, which suggests that they were fully integrated into the community as individuals. Personal belongings as well as dress and jewellery are differentiated by age at death and sex. This is contrasted by a strong standardisation in the offering of pottery forms.

"Disturbed" graves

Following on from this brief overview of the burial customs in the region of the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains in the Iron Age, the focus of the second part will be on the just under 10% of excavated stone cists which can be seen to have been reopened and reused for another inhumation. Whether this activity represented an unauthorised burial disturbance or a culturally accepted act or ritual will be discussed after the observations have been presented. The sample here includes the cemeteries of the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains as well as additional examples from the Upper Vardar Valley.

At least two possibilities of "disturbing" the graves can be distinguished. The first case is an action which can be described by the term "reduction", meaning the accumulation of an individual's

skeletal remains within the grave construction and the place of its primary burial (Boulestin and Duday 2006, 164; see also Sprague 2005, 63; Gleize, this volume). In the case of the graves known from the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains, not only the bones but also grave offerings have been "reduced". In the second case, the bones have been placed outside the grave construction but in direct contact with it.

"Reduced" individuals – skeletal remains collected and deposited within the stone cists

Within the necropolis of Dedeli-Meleznik, seven graves include an undisturbed skeleton in supine position with the disarticulated remains of one or two individuals deposited inside the stone cist (Table 9.1). The most likely explanation is that the original primary burial was moved and deposited to one side of the grave together with its furnishings – "reduction". The stone cists in question are scattered across the whole burial ground, except in the eastern part where no reopened stone cists have been registered. Whereas the orientation of these cists varies based on their location within the cemetery, the size of the affected cists is relatively uniform (1.7–2.1 m): the larger cists exclusively contain several individuals.

Male as well as female individuals were "reduced". Grave 33 from Dedeli-Meleznik (Fig. 9.3) contains two adult individuals. The bones of the reduced individual are found together with a razor – typical for male graves – whereas wired spirals as well as certain pendants characterise the individual in the supine position as female (Mitrevski 1991, 26). The reverse is also possible. The individuals registered in grave 29 (Fig. 9.4) have been skeletally sexed, showing that the bones of the collected individuals reduced to one side of the cist are determined as the bones of an adult woman and a child. An adult male individual was found lying supine together with a razor and a whetstone (Mitrevski 1991, 24). A similar situation is offered by grave 79 (Fig. 9.4), though it is more difficult to interpret (Mitrevski 1991, 36). Together with the collected bones, a double needle with triangular head was registered, among other objects. Double needles of this type are usually parts of female grave inventories – compare Marvinci-Lisičin Dol graves 8, 9 and 11 (Videski 1999). The supine individual was furnished with a spearhead. The interpretation is complicated by the fact that a spiral wire and a bronze pendant – usually typical for female individuals – were also found near the skull. Since the costume is incomplete (the headdress usually consists of two

Table 9.1: Overview of graves with disturbances.

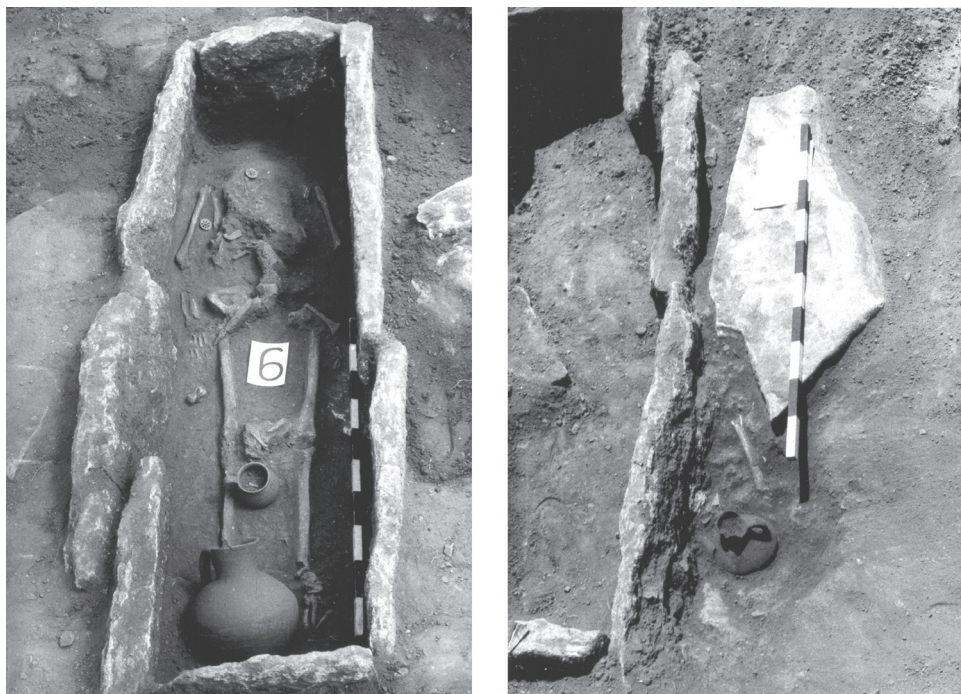|	*Individual in supine position*	*"Reduced" individual*	*Number of individuals/grave*
Dedeli Grave 33	simple (female?) attire	razor (male?)	2
Dedeli Grave 29	male ind.	female ind. / child	3
Dedeli Grave 79	parts of (female?) attire	spearhead (male?)	2
Dedeli Grave 53	child	adult ind.	2
Dedeli Grave 81	2 children	female (?) attire	2+?
Dedeli Grave 56	2 children	spearhead (male?)	2+?
Dedeli Grave 43	objects can't be assigned to individuals		2
Dedeli Grave 44	?	male attire/spearhead	2
Suva Reka Grave 75	male	female adult	2
Suva Reka Grave 76	?	male adult	2
Suva Reka Grave 45	child	2 male adult	3
Milci Grave 6	?	?	2

Fig. 9.3: Gevgelija-Milci: Grave 6 (left) with long bones and jug (right) deposited at the flagstone of the stone cist (photo: National Museum Gevgelija).

spiral wires) one can suggest, however, that these objects belonged to the "reduced" individual but had been overlooked and left lying near the male individual.

Children are also buried within stone cists initially laid out for adult individuals. Grave 53 (Fig. 9.4) contains a "reduced" adult individual together with a fragmented jug with cutaway neck. Between the femora of the supine child a pyxis pendant was found (Mitrevski 1991, 30). Judging by a grave from Gevgelija-Milci, this seems to be the usual position. There, grave 54 includes a single burial of a child furnished with a pyxis pendant found between the femora (Mitrevski 1988, 86). The bronze pendants from Dedeli grave 53 found near the head of the child could just as well belong to the "reduced" individual, left over by the process of collecting the remains of the first inhumation.

Even more intriguing is the example of Dedeli grave 81 (Fig. 9.4), a large stone cist containing two children. One individual was buried in the western part, with only fragmented pottery found nearby, and another child was registered in the eastern part, together with several bronze objects as well as a miniature jug, a so-called *olpe* (Mitrevski 1991, 37). The *olpe* is interpreted as belonging to one of the child burial. However, all the other objects are usually typical for adult individuals. The pair of spiral armlets and spiral wire as well as the biconical beads are undoubtedly parts of a female costume. The double needle, by contrast, is typical for male individuals. However, no skeletal remains from adult individuals are mentioned in the description of the grave. The possibility hence remains that belongings were left behind in the grave when an earlier burial was removed. This finding is comparable with Dedeli grave 56, which is also a large stone cist containing two
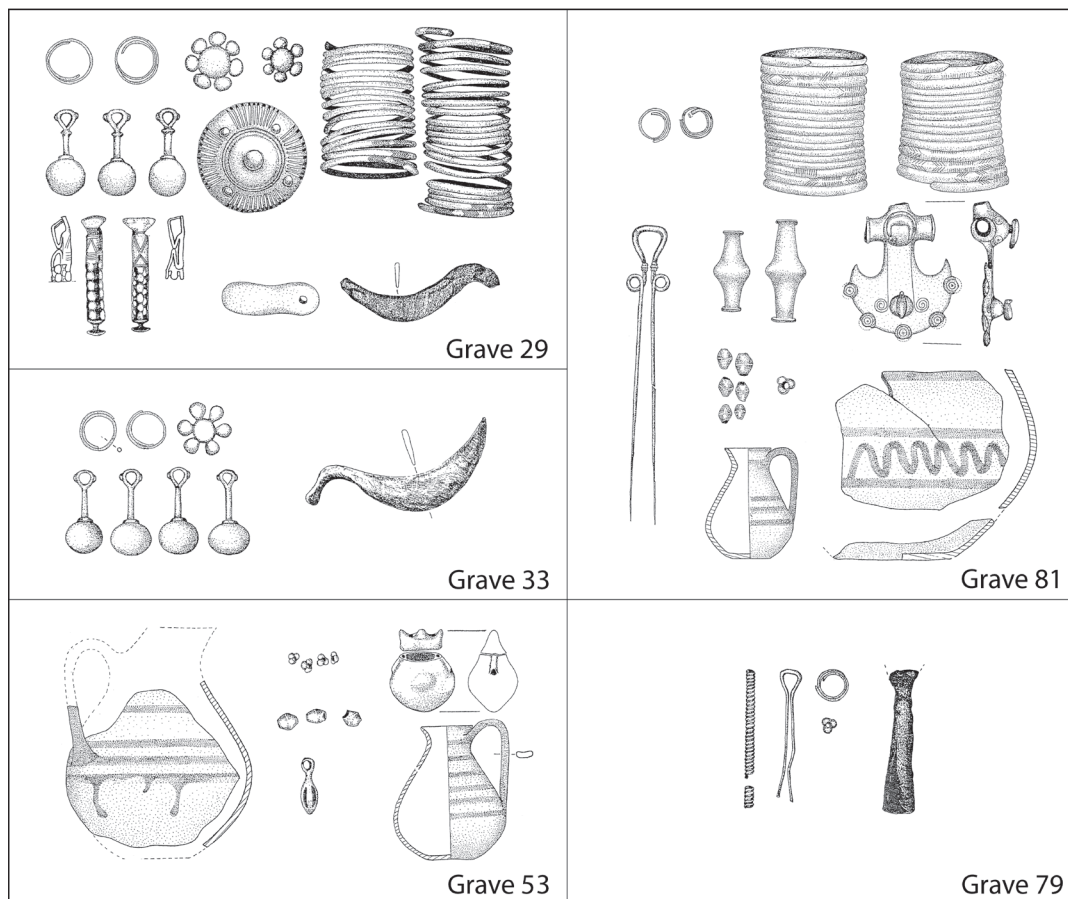
Fig. 9.4: Inventories from disturbed graves from Dedeli (after Mitrevski 1991).

children: this grave revealed a fragmented spearhead, suggesting a former burial of an adult male individual (Mitrevski 1991, 32).

Similar observations can be made in the necropolis of Gevgelija-Suva Reka. Graves 75 and 76 of this necropolis are placed side by side with the same orientation (Ristov 1992, 98–99). In both cases the "reduced" individuals are anthropologically determined as 40+ years old at death, one being female (grave 75) and the other male (grave 76). In both cases, parts of costumes or weaponry were found among the collected bones. Furthermore, Ristov (1992, 98) describes the bones deposited at one side of the cists as incomplete, supporting the assumption of the partial removal of skeletal remains. Grave 45 contains the remains of two male individuals (40+ years old) collected in the southern part of the graves with typical inventories (spearheads, knives, pottery). A child without any artefacts is registered in an extended supine position (Pašić 1975–1978, 27). From the necropolis of Milci-Gevgelija one grave (number 6) is published that contains some skeletal remains of a second individual between the femora of the individual buried in supine position (Pašić 1977, 46).

The analysis of the grave contexts allows several observations to be made. The phenomenon of "reduction" of an individual mainly concerned adult individuals, whereas smaller stone cists, *i.e.* children's graves, show no signs of reopening. Along with the bones, personal items have also been

Fig. 9.5: Gevgelija-Milci: Grave 65/67 with pit cut into the rock and deposited bones at the flagstone of the stone cist (photo: Boban Husenovki).

part of the reduction process, meaning that both the bones and objects were moved to the edges of the stone cists. It is worth noting that components of female attire which could be considered prestigious – belt compositions, amber necklaces, fibula sets – have not been found among the "reduced" material. This leads to the assumption that these objects were removed or that "reductions" did not concern individuals that had held a position of higher status within the community.

Skeletal remains deposited outside stone cists

Deposits of single bones outside the graves provide evidence for another type of post-funerary activity. As was already noted, grave 6 from Gevgelija-Milci contains the remains of a second individual. Directly at the south-western edge of the stone cist a small stone construction is registered containing the femora of an adult individual together with furnishings. Moreover, a jug with a cutaway neck was found above some long bones on the north-western flagstones of the same grave (Georgiev 1980, 40) (Fig. 9.3).

Features 65 and 67 from the same necropolis shed further light on the burial rituals and the treatment of the skeletal remains of the deceased. Directly on the western flagstone of the stone cist (grave 65, supine inhumation) a shallow pit with the same orientation was cut into the rock (Fig. 9.5). The central point of this shallow pit contained the collected remains of an individual together with its personal belongings. The skeletal remains comprise long bones, teeth and vertebrae as well as bones from feet and hands. In contrast, fragments of the skull have been found inside the stone cist of grave 65 by the southern edge. The inference seems likely that the individual found in pit number 67 was initially buried in the stone cist and secondarily deposited – after the decomposition process – in the pit nearby. This is supported by the fact that more than 70 small metal decorations from clothing were found with the skeletal remains in the pit. However, one button of equal type was registered in stone cist number 65 (Husenovski 1997, 93–94).
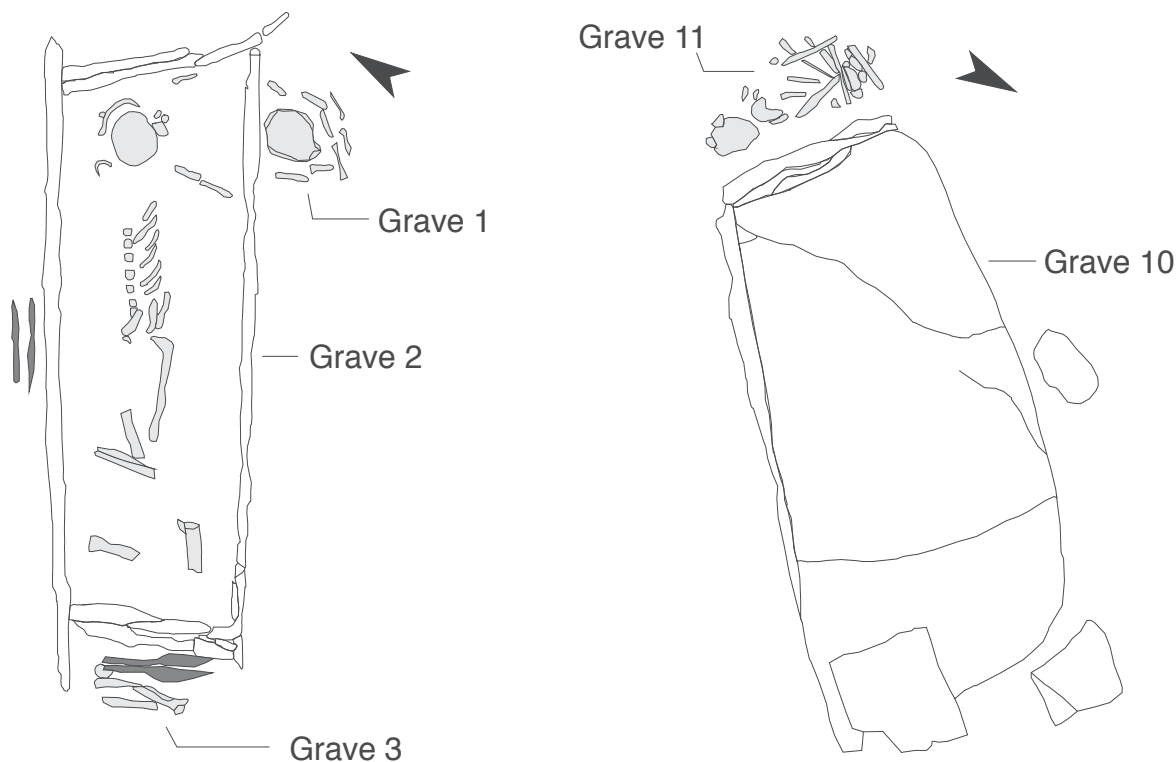
Fig. 9.6: Skopje-Varvara: Graves 1, 2 and 3 as well as Graves 10 and 11 (after Ristov 2015, fig. 10, 16).

Comparable findings have also been recorded in the Upper Vardar Valley in the necropolis of Varvara near Skopje (Fig. 9.6), which contains stone cist graves dating to the later Iron Age (Ristov 2015). Two graves are especially pertinent to our interest in understanding post-funerary grave disturbances. The stone cist in grave 2 contains a supine individual without any furnishings, anthropologically determined as 40+ years of age. Directly on the eastern flagstone the skeletal remains of two individuals (female, 20–39 years and 0–6 years) have been deposited. Across from that, on the western flagstone, two spearheads are recorded without any bones. In addition, on the southern narrow side beneath the feet of the deceased in the stone cist, the skeletal remains of a total of four individuals are recorded (male, 40–59 years; female, 20–39 years; 0–6 years; one individual of undetermined age). Two spearheads were located underneath these bones (Ristov 2015, 26–27).

The skeletal remains of four individuals were found in front of the narrow side of grave 10 (two male individuals, 40–59 years; female, 13–19 years; 0–6 years). Interestingly, the remains are combined with personal belongings as well as costume which dates to different horizons. This suggests that the bones were not deposited at once but over a longer period of time (Ristov 2015, 33–35).

Reopening as part of (extended) burial customs

Within the spatially determined topographies of the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains, burial norms comprise the construction of a stone cist individually adapted to personal body height as well as the selection of a suitable location in the cemetery, which most likely hinged on social relationships

established in life. The clothing of the deceased and furnishing with personal belongings is specific to every individual and no uniform costume for the deceased seems to be prescribed. By contrast, the ritual of offering certain pottery, such as drinking and pouring vessels, is highly standardised. Even if the graves show individual variation in details, structurally they are comparable and thus clearly recognisable by a certain community. Consequently, burial customs must have been negotiated by the bereaved, who were consistently reassured by the fact that graves were always created in a certain way.

Against the background of establishing a solid stone cist which usually remains undisturbed and protects the deceased individual, the disturbance of certain graves appears unusual and cannot be explained by pointing to chronological or cultural reasons manifested in the material culture. However, these disturbances are not executed in an arbitrary way. The deposition of the bones together with personal belongings on one side of the grave or their removal from it and careful deposition by the flagstones of the cists follow a repeated pattern. Therefore, these disturbances detectable in the flat grave cemeteries of the Early Iron Age should be considered part of extended burial customs. The reopening of the stone cists and the dislocation of the bones were not the result of systematic grave opening with the intent to remove grave furniture. Instead, these are actions executed by parts of the burial community and probably tolerated by the local group members. By treating disturbed as well as undisturbed graves as expressions of the same ritual behaviour, a more profound understanding of the way communities in the Macedonian Iron Age dealt with death and afterlife can be achieved. To illustrate the results, they are to be discussed in the following from the viewpoint of rites of passage.

The alternating conceptualisation of the dead and the meaning of transitions

According to cultural anthropology, burial rites fall into the category of rites of passage, which are divided into three stages: separation, transformation and re-incorporation (Hertz 1960; Turner 1969; van Gennep 1986). With the death of the individual, the dissolution of the deceased from the living society is initiated. This is succeeded by an intermediate phase when the deceased is neither part of the living community nor of the ancestor's world – the liminal phase Turner (1969) appropriately called the "betwixt and between". A change of status is only achieved with the last phase, the re-integration into the community (see also Aspöck 2013). Based on some well-documented examples, the transformation phases of the deceased can be seen as parallel to those of the living. The phase of both spatial and social separation is followed for the living by the phase of mourning, which ends after a specific period of time, whereupon rites of re-integration or incorporation into society are performed.

According to van Gennep (1986, 142–159), separation rites are generally less complex than the transformation rites of the liminal phase. The biological death of an individual initiates separation rites, which include for instance the preparation of the corpse, the transport of the deceased to the place of burial or the closure of the grave construction. Death is usually seen as a catastrophic event and disrupts the ordinary life of the concerned community. When an individual dies, a transformation from a human being into a corpse occurs and the subjectivity of the individual seems to be destroyed, a process that involves the de-individualisation of the human being (Benkel 2013, 116). However, furnishing the corpse with personal belongings, constructing a grave chamber and putting the corpse on public display all serve to perform a re-individualisation or re-interpretation of the deceased. Grimes (2013, 129) emphasises the eventful character of the burial rituals. The abstract phenomenon "death" is transferred to an individual. By performing rituals as well as constructing a grave and displaying the re-individualised deceased, death is objectified and the community is able to react to the occurrence (see also Müller-Scheeßel 2013, 51–52).

In the case of the flat graves of the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains, the furnishing and protection of the dead body seem to have been most important at the point in time when the burial took place and for an unknown period afterwards. Disturbing the grave was apparently not possible or would probably have infringed upon moral standards. After the separation phase, both the deceased individual and the bereaved enter the liminal phase. The bereaved are subject to social restrictions depending on their degree of kinship, whereas the state of the deceased is ambiguous and cannot be clearly determined. This contradictory condition is associated with a state of impurity that can also be associated with the putrefaction of the body. Only when the decomposition of the body is complete can the individual be transformed into a state of purity again and the phase of transformation comes to an end (see Hertz 1960; Turner 1964; van Gennep 1986). An essential characteristic of the liminal phase is isolation – which in turn affects both the mourners and the deceased. In the case of the burying communities in the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains, the biological transformation (body to skeleton) is controlled within the necropolis and the stone cist, apparently without outside influence. The process of transformation is not visible, nor is the liminal phase – which according to Turner is performed in secrecy in other cases as well (Turner 1964, 45–49). However, in the case of many graves from the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains the "result", the end of the transformation process (see Gramsch 2013, 515–517), was made visible by reopening the stone cist. Within the model of the rites of passage, the end of the liminal phase coincides with the complete decomposition of the body. Rituals accompanied by communal feasts are performed which re-integrate the mourners into society and the deceased into the world of ancestors. Detailed ideas about the rituals of re-incorporation are far beyond our knowledge in the case study from Macedonia. However, after the completion of the transformation phase the community evidently had a viable and legitimate option to disturb the grave and to "destroy" the arrangement. After the decomposition of the corpse, other ritual activities emerged regarding the treatment of the skeletal remains. The fact that at least parts of the skeletal material were removed on some occasions and deposited outside the grave without another construction being created for the remains leads to the assumption that the protection of the bones was no longer a priority. However, an immediate proximity between the skeletal remains and the further inhumations inside the stone cists remained, possibly expressing (social) bonds which lived on. Further, the integrity of the body and its display in a delimited space were no longer important factors. The perceptibility of the individual was destroyed by dispersing the arrangement of the furnishing. Even if the offerings were still intermingled with the bones, parts of the furnishing seem to have been removed or are found scattered in or outside the stone cist. The deceased had ceased to be regarded as a recognisable individual and the attitude towards the deceased had changed; the skeletal remains were probably no longer thought to possess agency or power. Only once the process had been completed could the stone cist be used for another inhumation. How the mortal remains were treated therefore depended on the role the living ascribed to the deceased, based in turn on their own ritual state. In the transition phase the deceased was probably still seen as an individual, playing an active role in the community by influencing the activities of the bereaved performing the requisite rites. Only after the transition could the deceased be seen finally as part of the ancestors' world with a different kind of influence on the world of the living.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to show how the comprehension of different ritual actions executed by a burial community can lead to a more complex picture of the burial custom in general. To accomplish

this, the "ritually controlled" grave disturbances were described against the background of the usual rite of the undisturbed primary burial. This comparative analysis of the burial rites makes it possible to show that only those stone cists were considered for reopening which were initially laid out for adult individuals. According to the archaeological evidence both male and female individuals have been "reduced" or removed from the graves. By contrast, men, women and children are found as additional burials in pre-existing stone constructions. As no prestigious goods have been observed in graves with signs of disturbances, the possibility remains that they have been removed from the graves.

While there is thus a clear polarity between disturbed and non-disturbed graves, no cultural or social differences are to be inferred from this alone. Instead, further analysis needs to take into account the larger ritual context. Due to the low numbers of grave disturbances within the analysed cemeteries they can be classified as unusual, but not as "deviant" (Aspöck 2008) or "illegal" as Casson (1918/1919) once suggested. As the grave goods as well as at least parts of the dress items remained in or near the grave, the reopening of the graves for the purpose of robbery can be excluded. Even if prestige objects are missing from the graves, the reason for the opening of some stone cists is not to be found in the pure appropriation of valuable objects but in the preparation of the burial place. The appropriation of objects by the bereaved is indeed conceivable, but could have represented a legitimate act. The disturbances are executed in a largely uniform way and can therefore be considered a ritually performed action. The choice of the place of a burial within the cemetery as well as the spatial proximity of certain deceased individuals seem to have played a crucial role. This spatial dimension can also be assumed to have affected the choices involved in placing a corpse within a grave construction that already contained the bones of the previous burial.

As the disturbances within the cemeteries of the Gevgelija and Valandovo plains are therefore part of the general burial custom it is possible to integrate these findings into the analysis of the burial record in general. Furthermore, the application of established anthropological models that illuminate the phases of social transformation after a burial bear the potential to integrate the different ritual actions into a more comprehensive picture of how the communities dealt with death, their deceased and probably their ancestors.

Acknowledgements

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10. In search of the *modus operandi*: reopenings of Early Bronze Age burials at Fidvár near Vráble, south-west Slovakia

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Introduction

Within the prehistory of central Europe, the Early Bronze Age is the period in which considerable grave disturbances can be observed for the first time. Although individual graves were richly furnished in earlier times too – those of the Early Neolithic Linear Pottery, the Chalcolithic graves of Varna or the Late Neolithic Bell Beaker, for example – these were never opened as systematically or at such a high rate as in the Early Bronze Age. The grave openings have long been interpreted as "grave robbery" (*e.g.* Raddatz 1978; Thrane 1978; Rittershofer 1987; Stuchlík 1990; Neugebauer 1994; Randsborg 1998; Sprenger 1999; Bátora 2000b; for critical discussion see in particular Kümmel 2009). This has led to some very imaginative descriptions; especially well-known is that of Neugebauer (1994, 143 fig. 13), in connection with the cemetery of Franzhausen in Austria, where he argued that the many disturbances are to be seen as the work of "outlaws" who systematically plundered cemeteries.

Based on research carried out in the last few years in the Early Bronze Age fortified settlement of Vráble, known as Fidvár, and its cemetery, we would like to present a balanced interpretation of the phenomenon of Early Bronze Age grave openings. We will mainly focus on the questions of whether a possible *modus operandi* of grave openings can be determined and whether the grave openings were carried out by relatives or strangers. This approach follows directly on from the differentiation made by Kümmel (2009, 122), among others, into emic or etic agents on the one hand and actions approved or abhorred by the community on the other. The problem can be reduced to three questions:

– When were the graves opened?
– Who opened the graves?
– Why were the graves opened?

The answer to one of the questions is inextricably linked to that of the others, of course.

The graves excavated in Vráble since 2009 are at the centre of this essay; however as shown below, the development of the settlement is also of decisive importance for understanding the grave openings happening nearby.

Site and excavation methodology

The Early Bronze Age fortified settlement of Vráble lies on a flood-free loess terrace on the left bank of the Žitava River, one of several north–south tributaries of the Danube (Fig. 10.1). The first research was carried out there in the 1960s (Točík 1986), but the true extent of the site was only revealed by extensive geophysical investigations carried out since 2008 (Falkenstein *et al.* 2008; Rassmann *et al.* 2017). The results of these surveys suggest that Vráble was a settlement of up to 12 ha in size, divided by three concentric ditches of differing widths and depths (Fig. 10.2). The ditches represent different phases within the settlement development between approximately
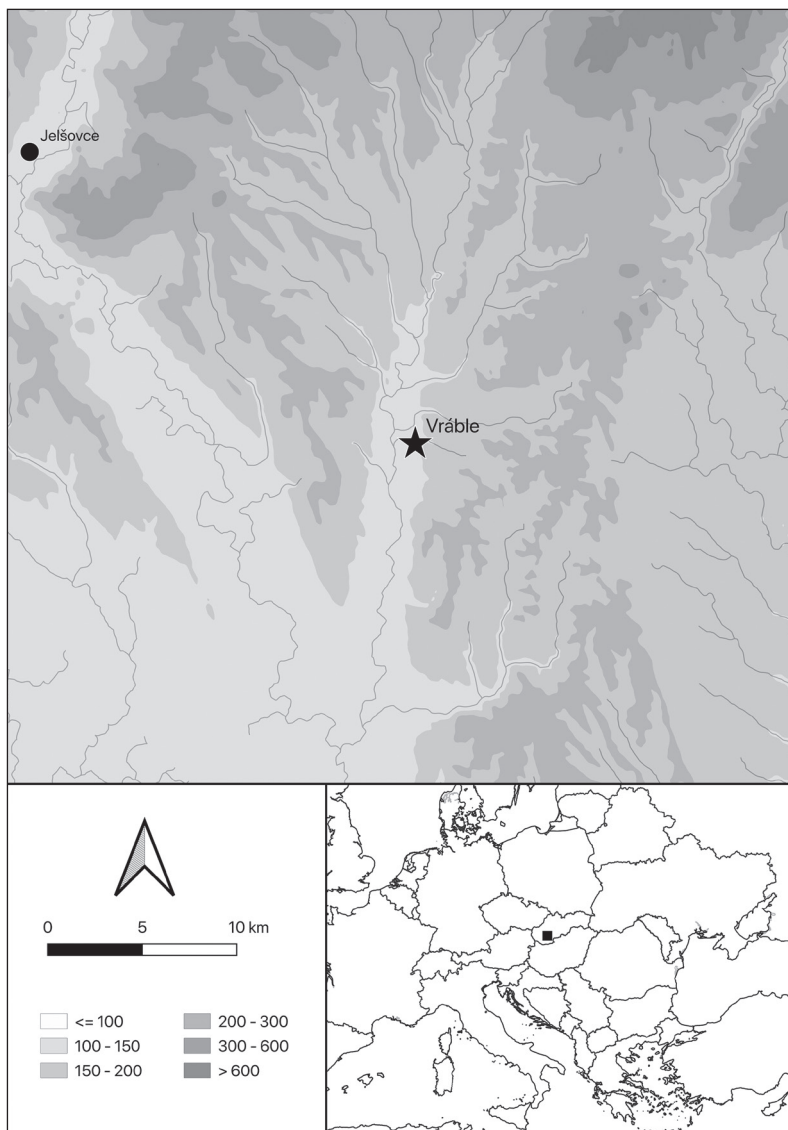

Fig. 10.1: The location of Vráble Fidvár in south-west Slovakia and other sites mentioned in the text (Graphics: Nils Müller-Scheeßel).
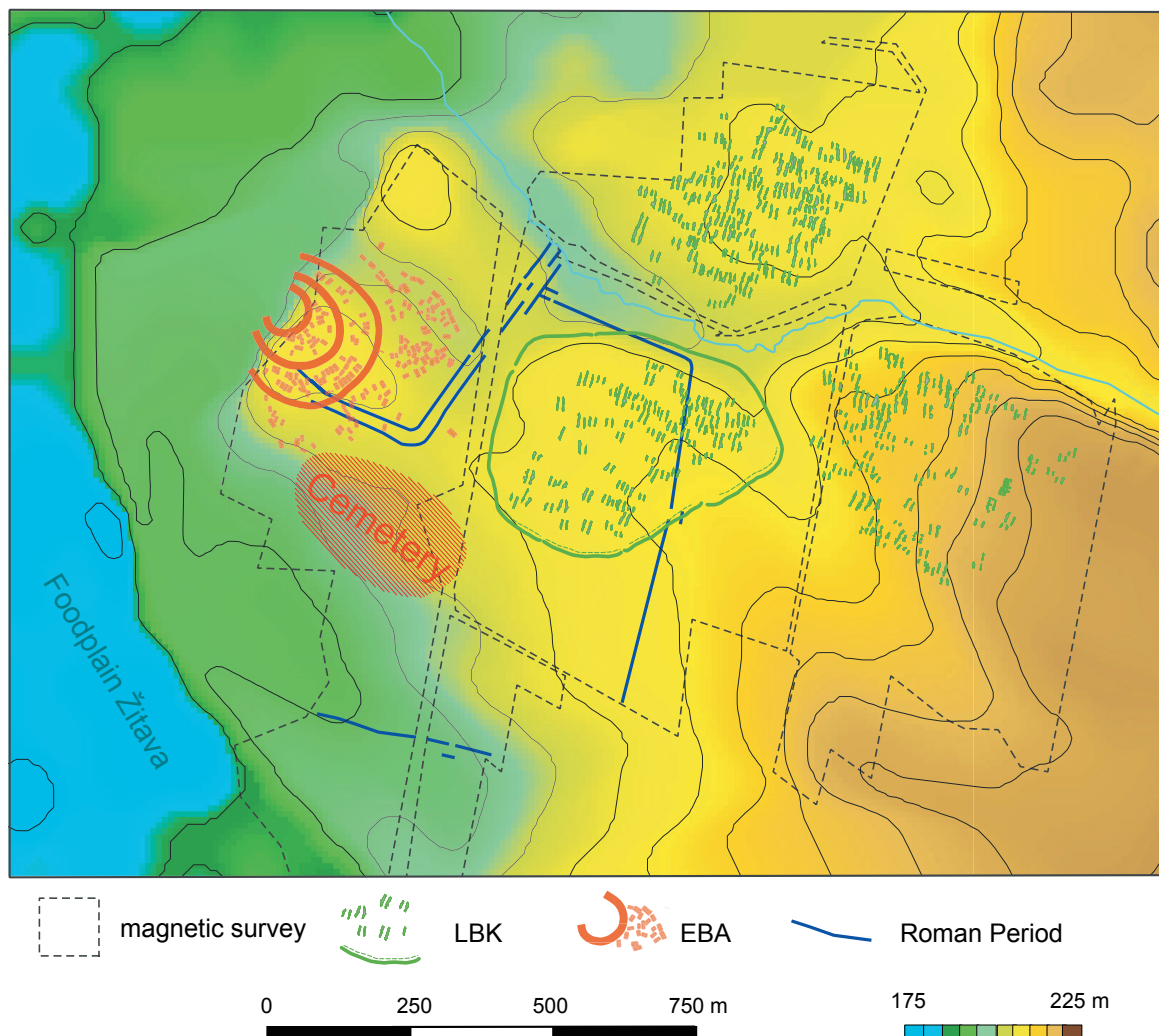
Fig. 10.2: Vráble Fidvár. Schematic plan of the settlement according to geophysical prospections (Graphics: Romano-Germanic Commission).

2000 and 1600 cal BC (see below). Further, the settlement is surrounded by dense pit fields, which presumably served for centralised storage. About 150 m south of the settlement is the cemetery which is the focus of the current paper.

In the magnetic image the graves themselves are not visible, but only the reopening shafts. Certain shaft-free areas can be discerned, and it was confirmed during the excavation that no graves were actually dug in these areas. It seems viable to interpret these grave-free areas as access routes and the ensuing grave groups as belonging to families. That there are virtually no overlaps is a clear sign that the graves were visible on the ground. In the contemporary cemetery of Jelšovce (Bátora 2000a), about 25 km from Vráble, excavations found 250 graves per ha. With a total cemetery area of maximum 5 ha as implied by geophysical prospection, it follows that about 1250 graves can be expected.
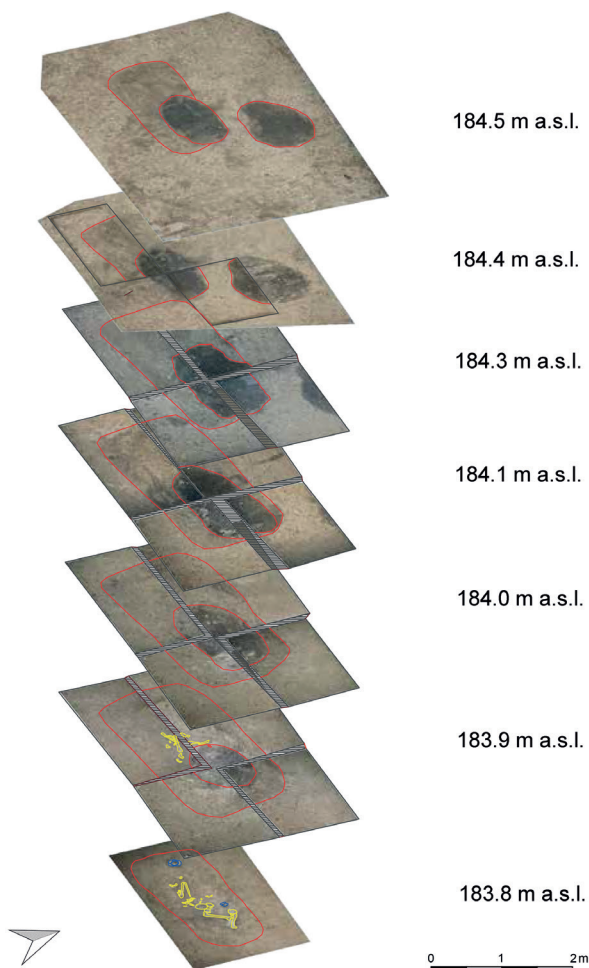
184.5 m a.s.l.

184.4 m a.s.l.

184.3 m a.s.l.

184.1 m a.s.l.

184.0 m a.s.l.

183.9 m a.s.l.

183.8 m a.s.l.

0 1 2m

Fig. 10.3: Vráble Fidvár. Exploded view of Grave 516 with horizontal layers virtually pieced together (Graphics: J. Kalmbach, Romano-Germanic Commission).

Between 2009 and 2017, a total of 43 graves were excavated. The excavation strategy was designed in an interdisciplinary dialogue between archaeologists and physical anthropologists. The goal was to gain precise observations on the depositional processes regarding the funeral rites and the practice of reopening graves. To this end, each grave was investigated in sections and then in artificial spits of 10–15 cm thickness. For each grave we thus usually have several ground plans and two profiles – one along the main axis of the grave and one perpendicular to it – which are crucial when it comes to the interpretation of the features (Fig. 10.3). Additionally, all finds – burial goods as well as the often dispersed bones of the buried individual – were measured three-dimensionally, so that they can be placed securely in relation to the ground-plans as well as projected into the profile sections. In our view this is a satisfactory compromise between the needs of efficient excavation and the responsibility to glean as much information as possible (see Aspöck 2018 and the introduction to this volume for a different, even more meticulous approach).

Burial practices of the Early Bronze Age

Early Bronze Age burial practices are very well known from countless graves (*e.g.* the cemetery of Jelšovce: Bátora 2000a). They show a strong regularity with relatively low variability. One of the few undisturbed graves of Vráble, grave 544, may serve as an example (Fig. 10.4). The skeleton of a woman was found about 1 m below today's surface. She was laid on her left side, so that her head pointed approximately to the east. The arms were bent and lay in front of the face, while the legs were crouched. Several spirals and larger rings were found on both sides of the head, a bronze needle was found near the chest and a ceramic cup near her feet.

In south-western Slovakia, the dead were generally deposited bipolarly, *i.e.* depending on sex, with the head pointing west in the case of men or east for women as in Grave 544. The direction in which the dead looked was approximately south. Accordingly, the side of the body on which the dead were laid differed: the left side for women, the right side for men. Compared to other

Fig. 10.4: Vráble Fidvár. Grave 544, a female aged 26–45 years (Copyright Romano-Germanic Commission).

graves, the woman of Grave 544 was comparatively "poorly" equipped: in many graves, more than one ceramic vessel was deposited, and in one grave animal bones from a meat offering were found. Small gold rings were discovered quite frequently, for example in two undisturbed graves of infants (Grave 530, 596). Some graves contained traces of coffins, which probably consisted of halved and hollowed tree trunks. Since the shape of many reopening shafts indicates that cavities still existed at the time of opening (see below), it seems possible that all graves were equipped with a coffin, even if, as in the case of Grave 544, no remains have survived.

The volume to be dug out for the rectangular burial pit mostly measured 1–3 cubic metres, as in the case of Grave 544 (1.5 cbm), but in individual cases up to 8 cbm were removed. In particularly well-preserved grave pits the traces of the grave tools used for this purpose can be seen on the pit wall. The wavy line indicates that it was not spades that were used for digging, but pointed sticks. We can assume that this also applies to the opening of the graves.

Of the 43 excavated graves, only five were undisturbed, which corresponds to 12%. This means that in Vráble nearly 90% of all graves were reopened. Since the affected graves are scattered over a distance of 200 m and numerous reopening shafts are also visible in the magnetic image, it can be assumed that this rate applies to the entire cemetery. All finds in the graves from Vráble, the ceramics as well as the metal objects, belong to a later phase of the Early Bronze Age. This is also underpinned by the C14-dates which delimit a time period between 1900 and 1700 cal BC (see below).

Patterns of disturbance

The reopening shafts

Ironically enough, the reopening shafts are much easier to discern than the actual grave pits. This applies to the excavated features as much as to the magnetic image, as mentioned above. While the grave pits were filled with pure loess, the shafts show a dark humus filling, which is often finely layered. This indicates that the shafts had been open for a long time and were filled naturally by the sedimentation of the topsoil. The backfill contains finds from the graves – above all human bones, but also ceramic fragments or even the above-mentioned gold rings – which indicates that after reopening some of the grave content lay on the surface in the vicinity of the shaft and was then washed in again. In at least two cases (Graves 22 and 515), human bones from one grave probably ended up in the shaft of another.

Most of the intrusive shafts are more or less cylindrical in shape and extend vertically downwards to the base of the grave (Fig. 10.5). However, there are exceptions. In the case of the deepest burial, Grave 512 (Fig. 10.6), which reached 2.2 m below today's surface, the grave was reopened over the entire length of 2.5 m, and the shaft only narrowed to a diameter of 1 m from about 1 m depth. In other cases the shaft is inclined, so that it ends at the opposite end of the grave from its starting point. Finally, there are also some blanks, *i.e.* shafts that did not hit a grave, and at least two graves (Graves 25 and 510) into which two shafts were driven from different ends of the grave.

The size of most of the shafts, 1 m in diameter, allows the conclusion that the actual work was carried out by only one person at a time. An exception could be graves such as Grave 512, where the opening would have been possible over the entire length and width of the grave by several people working simultaneously.
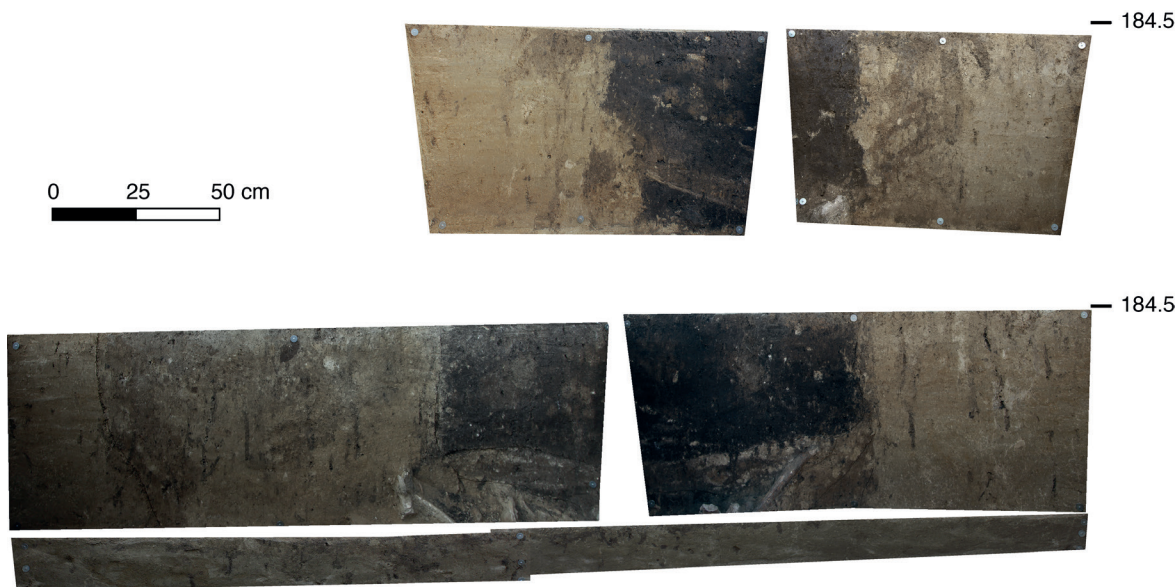

Fig. 10.5: *Vráble Fidvár. Grave 516, a female aged 26–35 years, fotogrammetry of profile sections (Copyright Romano-Germanic Commission).*
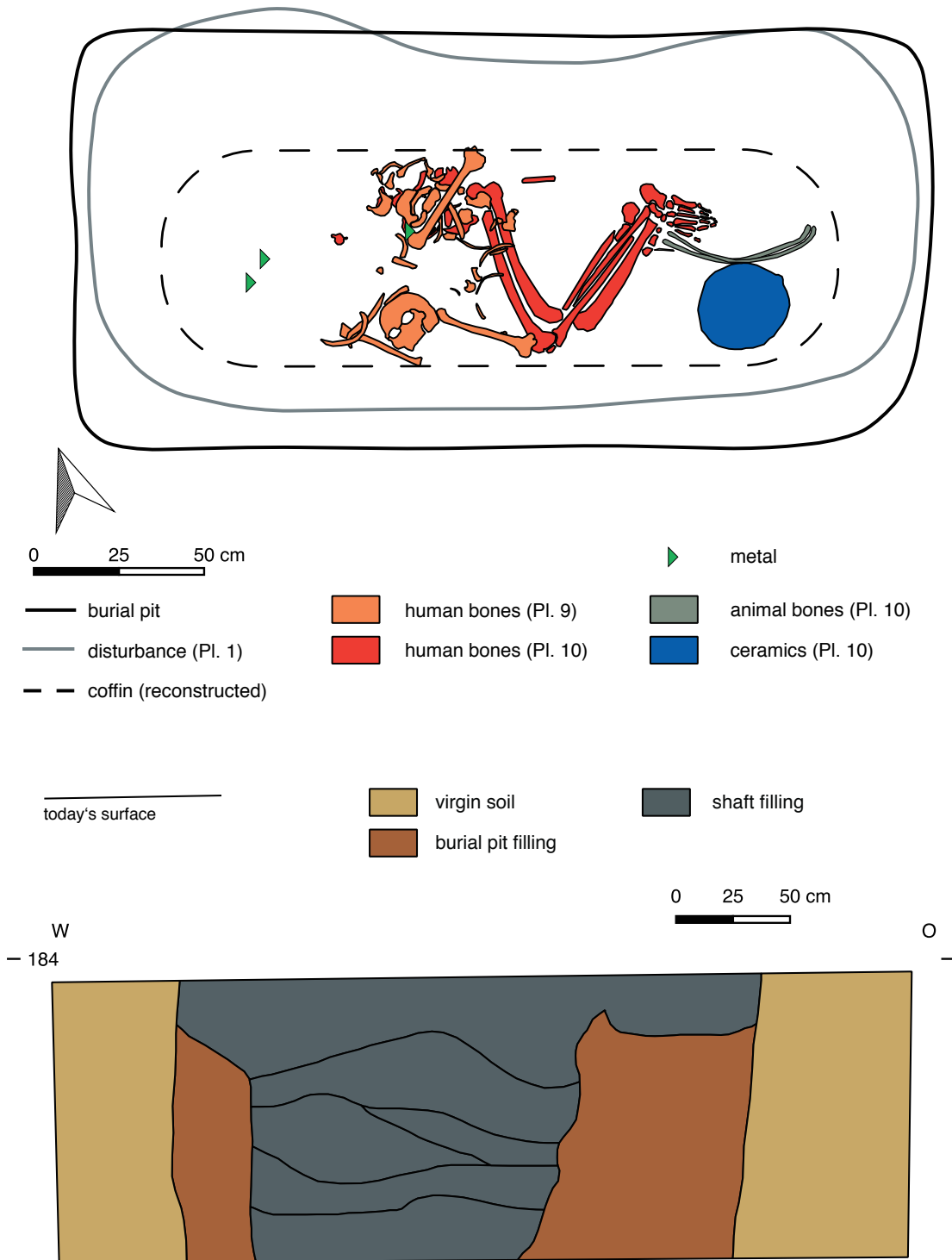
W
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0   25   50 cm

burial pit
disturbance (Pl. 1)
coffin (reconstructed)

human bones (Pl. 9)
human bones (Pl. 10)

animal bones (Pl. 10)
ceramics (Pl. 10)

metal

today's surface

virgin soil
burial pit filling

shaft filling

0   25   50 cm

Fig. 10.6: Vráble Fidvár. Grave 512, a male aged 36–45 years (Copyright Romano-Germanic Commission).

Interface between shaft and coffin

As far as the original locations of the bodies can be reconstructed, the shafts seem to have aimed at their upper parts. The change of shaft direction which is sometimes observable may also be related to this preferred target. Some 20 to 30 cm above the bottom of the grave pit, the shaft filling often extends much further west or east, depending on its position (Grave 515, Fig. 10.7), or sharply changes its shape (Grave 516, Fig. 10.5). This is best explained by the existence of a cavity such as a coffin, which the reopeners encountered after piercing the upper half of the coffin and which made additional digging unnecessary. After the shaft was abandoned, this cavity was then partly filled with the dark brown humus filling mentioned above.

Treatment of human bones

The treatment of human bones at the site is difficult to subsume under a single pattern or *modus operandi*, especially since in some cases the bones are strongly fragmented. What is certain is that the persons responsible for the manipulations have displaced the bones considerably.

Unless Grave 513 was a cenotaph, a grave in which grave goods were deposited (in this at least one ceramic bowl), but no human corpse, then the human bones were removed completely. In other cases it seems as if all the bones had been pushed together at one end of the pit (Graves 515, 527). In Grave 512 the disturbed bones (upper body and cranium) were gathered in the middle of the shaft (Fig. 10.6). The location of the cranium is particularly remarkable, since the gold rings originally deposited on both sides of the skull were still *in situ* (see below). In other graves the long bones were concentrated in one place. In the case of Grave 519 (Fig. 10.8), they were stacked on top of each other slightly above the bottom of the grave pit – possibly on or to the side of the wooden coffin – parallel to the longitudinal axis of the grave (similar to Grave 518). In grave 511, on the other hand, they were leaned against the wall of the shaft or the original wooden coffin at the south-west end. Finally, in Grave 548 some of the bones were definitely arranged in a deliberate manner: at the western end of the grave the long bones were stacked in several layers on top of each other, and the cranium was placed on top of this heap (Fig. 10.9).

Treatment of burial goods

It is difficult to make definitive statements about the grave goods possibly taken from the graves. An investigation of greenish copper oxide discolorations on bones as emphasised in the work of Sprenger (1997; 1999) at other contemporary sites is still pending and would anyway concern only the bronze grave goods.

The fact that the shafts were aimed primarily at the upper part of the body meant that the ceramic grave goods, which were mostly placed in the foot area, or – in the case of Grave 512, the additional meat offering – remained undisturbed. Even if they are disturbed, the fragments are often found in the backfill of the shaft. Metal burial goods, on the other hand, are found almost exclusively in the disturbed areas. These are mostly fragmented needles as well as small and large rings or spirals. Golden rings were discovered in the intrusive filling (Graves 519, 541, 560), in another case *in situ* to the left and right of the former position of the skull, which, however, was strongly displaced (Grave 512).
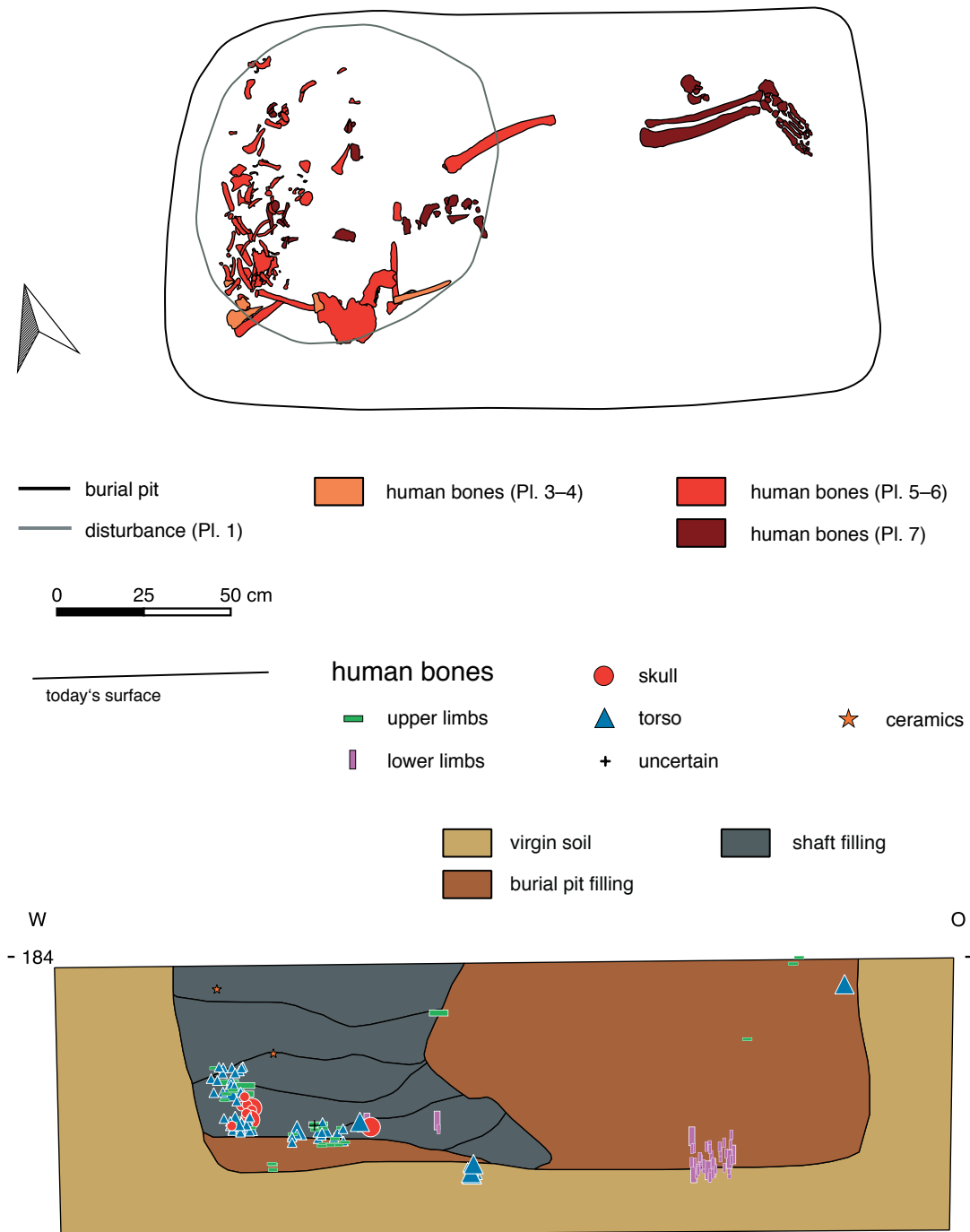
Fig. 10.7: Vráble Fidvár. Grave 515, a male aged 26–35 years (and a few bones of another individual aged 7–10 years) (Copyright Romano-Germanic Commission).
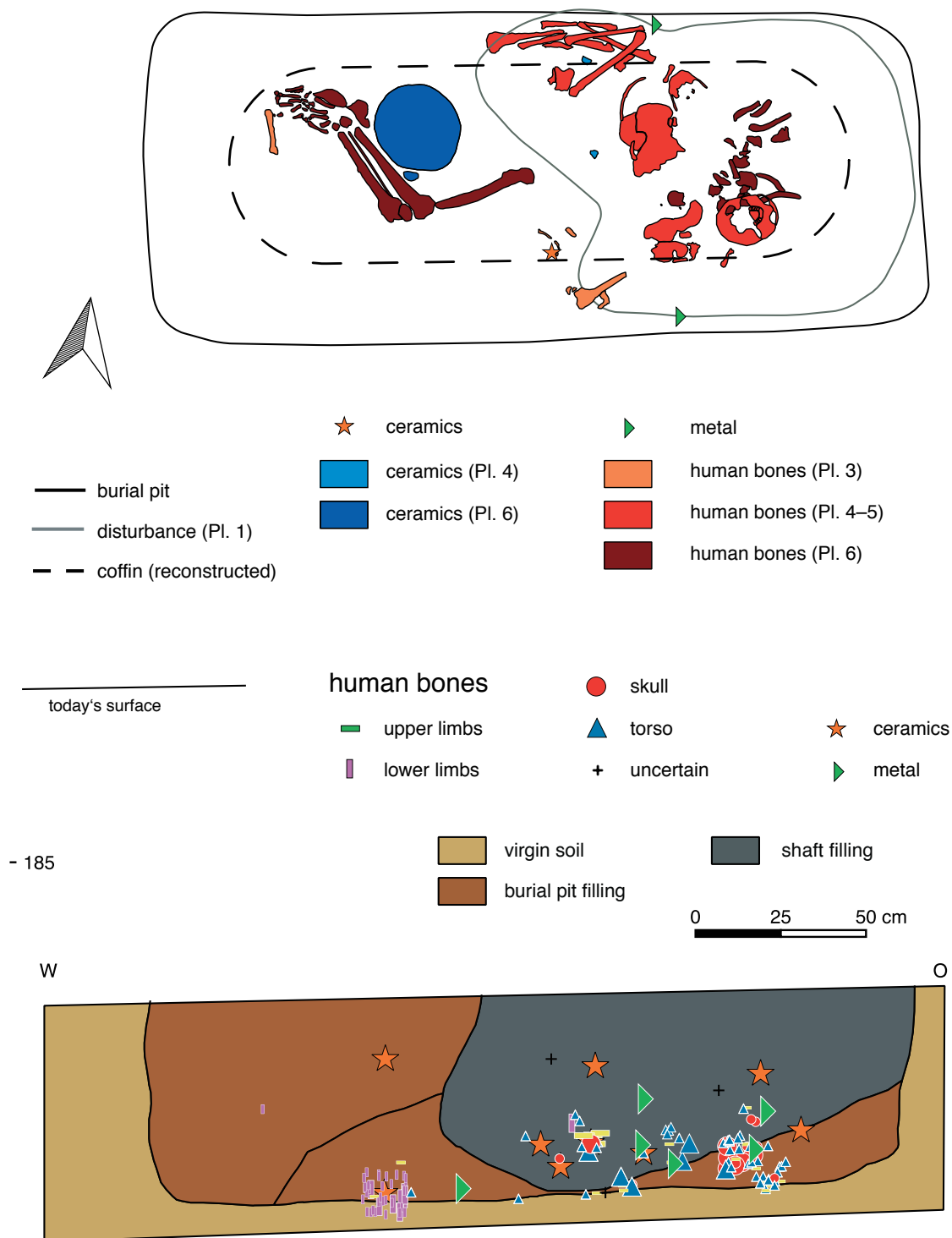
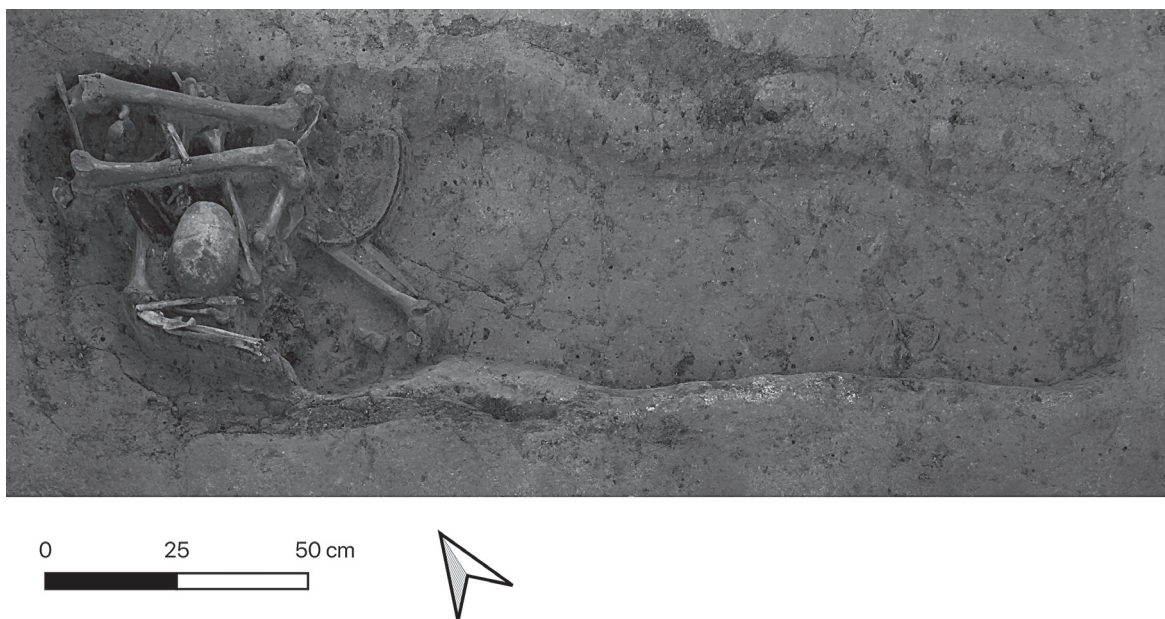*Fig. 10.8: Vráble Fidvár. Grave 519, a female aged 36–45 years (Copyright Romano-Germanic Commission).*

Fig. 10.9: Vráble Fidvár. Grave 548, a female aged 36–45 years (Copyright Romano-Germanic Commission).

Discussion

When?

Three parameters are important for estimating the temporal distance between the interment of the body and the grave opening (see detailed discussions in Aspöck 2003; Klevnäs 2013; and introduction to this volume):

1. the condition of the wooden coffin (if present);
2. the condition of human bones and grave goods;
3. observations on the reopening shafts themselves.

On point one, the shapes of some of the shafts as well as the backfilling indicate that at the time of the opening there was a cavity which may have been the former coffin. In addition the position or the displacement of the bones is in many cases only conceivable if one assumes the existence of a cavity. This means that the wooden coffin had not collapsed yet, but was at least partly still intact.

For two, in the vast majority of cases the human bones are so strongly displaced that one can assume a complete dissolution of the tendon and muscle connections. This is especially true for graves with long bones stacked on top of each other. On the other hand, there are also some graves with contrary observations: this is especially true for Grave 513, where no skeletal remains at all were recovered, and Grave 516. In the latter both femora including the pelvic bones were obviously moved from the western to the eastern part of the grave, but the connection between the hip bones and the femoral heads remained intact.

The first-rate preservation of some skeletal parts (*e.g.* Graves 512, 519) and *in situ* situations (gold rings of Grave 512) presupposes a partial sedimentation, *i.e.* that fine sand had washed into the coffins from the surrounding grave pit filling in sufficient quantity to embed the bones or grave goods, which probably took some time (see Aspöck and Banerjea 2016).

Finally on point three, the fact that some graves show more than one reopening shaft already hints at more than one event. Since the shaft was obviously a means to an end, it can be assumed that the first shaft was already largely backfilled before the second shaft was dug, so that it could not simply be re-used.

Taken together, these observations give a heterogeneous picture of the timing of the grave openings. While for some graves it may have been only a few weeks or months before they were reopened, for others it was certainly years. In the case of graves with several shafts, it could even have been decades. However, in the terminology of Kümmel (2009, 128) all cases would be classified as "close in time".

Due to the existence of more than one shaft per grave in some cases, it is certain that the graves were not opened in a single event, but that there must have been several episodes. No statement can be made as to whether the openings happened continuously or periodically.

Who?

For an educated answer to the question of "whodunnit?" (Klevnäs 2013), the timing of the opening of the graves in relation to the existence of the burial community is central. For Vráble, we are fortunate to have archaeological and radiometric data from both the settlement and the cemetery. Comparing the C14-dates of the settlement with those of the burials (Fig. 10.10), we see a complete overlap. The settlement took off around 2000 cal BC, and activities there clearly only stopped after 1600 cal BC, albeit on a smaller scale towards the end. This is probably more than 100 years later than the last of the excavated graves was dug. If we take into account that in at least some cases either the skeleton was not completely disarticulated or the coffin was still intact, this definitely implies that the reopening of graves happened during the lifetime of the settlement.

So what was the relationship between the people who opened the graves on the one hand and the buried people and the burial community on the other? It was pointed out above that the spatial arrangement of the graves suggests a likely grouping according to family affiliation. This would mean that the burying persons, presumably relatives and friends, would have had good knowledge of the graves and the buried persons in them. Such exact knowledge, however, is lacking in the layout of the reopening shafts, as some of them lead nowhere or change their direction. Also in the cases of the graves with several intrusive shafts, one could expect that within the family it would have been handed down that this grave had already
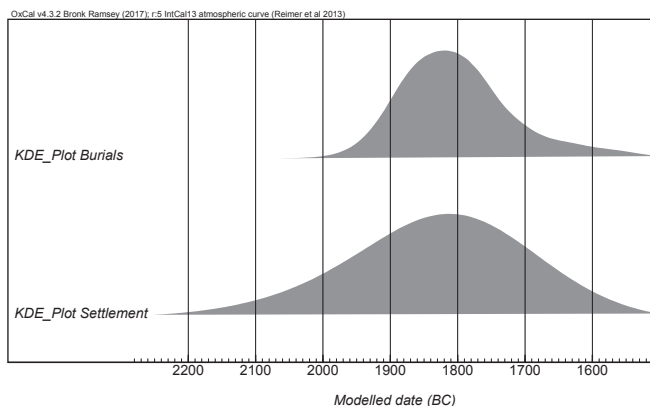

Fig. 10.10: Vráble Fidvár. KDE-plot of radiocarbon dates from the settlement (n=131) and the cemetery (n=20) (Graphics: Nils Müller-Scheeßel).

been opened, before a second shaft was driven in. All this leads to the conclusion that the opening of the grave was carried out by persons who were at least not directly present at the burial.

The opening itself shows no sign of diligence or special care in relation to the grave, the deceased or the grave goods. In no case does it seem to have been of importance to treat the bodies or objects in the graves in a special way. In the vast majority of cases, the stacking of bones seems more like a measure to remove the bones out of the way. The same indifference is found in the treatment of shafts afterwards – they were open for a long time before they were filled naturally. Since the settlement was still inhabited at least 100 years after the last opening, the inhabitants of Vráble obviously saw no reason to fill the shafts.

Taken together, we can safely assume that the inhabitants of Vráble were aware of the reopening activities in the cemetery. The open question is whether they themselves were involved, despised the action or were indifferent to it. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the grave openers were probably not recruited from the buried person's closest kin. Of course, this does not exclude that the opening was not carried out by grandchildren or great-grandchildren of the deceased. Finally, despite the initial investments in time, energy and the expense of the burial goods used to furnish the graves, the treatment after their opening shows indifference on the side of the inhabitants. The open shafts do not seem to have forced them to act in any way. Therefore, from the indifferent treatment of the burials during reopening, it does not necessarily follow that the openers could *not* originate from Vráble. Therefore, at the moment the question of whether the actions can be classified as "out-group" or "in-group" in the terminology of Kümmel (2009, 128) must remain open.

Why?

Before we come back to the unsolved question of who opened the graves, we will tackle the "why": for what purpose or motive were the graves reopened? The list of possible motivations is long (for different possibilities see the papers in this book; for a comprehensive overview Kümmel 2009). We will deal here with the three most popular:

1. post-burial ritual practices;
2. economic greed;
3. aggressive action against the buried and their community.

Answers:

1. Although post-burial ritual practices show great variability cross-culturally, in the case of Vráble such an explanatory approach seems unconvincing. First, the graves were not designed to be reopened. This is implied by the considerable depth of the graves, the massive wooden coffins and the compact filling of the grave pits. Furthermore, nothing has been added to or removed from the graves that would be recognisable as a symbolic deed. While the addition of objects would potentially be easier to recognise, no pattern is discernible. Grave goods with possibly high symbolic significance were left in the graves in varying combinations (including bronze jewellery, gold earrings, ceramic goods). There is also no evidence of the removal of certain bones as relics. It is also unlikely that objects of organic material were the primary targets for removal, given the sometimes considerable timespan between the burial and the opening of the grave. In these cases, objects made of organic material would have either already decayed or been considerably damaged.

2. Most frequently, the opening of Early Bronze Age graves is considered to be economically motivated, as being the result of "grave robbery" in a narrow sense. The fact that the upper body was most often targeted by the shafts is a central argument in favour of this interpretation. The upper body is the location where most of the metal grave goods were concentrated, *i.e.* those objects that were most likely to be convertible by re-melting. Meanwhile the lower body region usually remains untouched, where the ceramic vessels are located, which are not convertible into other forms. Against the background of this argumentation, however, the bronze and gold objects that frequently appear in the grave filling seem strange. In view of the relatively low yield in pure metal weight (Sprenger 1999), one could expect that special attention would also be paid to smaller fragments. Also the gold rings remaining in Grave 512 seem in need of an explanation, especially in view of the considerably higher effort compared to other graves to dig the shaft in that case. This find also makes it clear by way of example that an economically motivated opening by close relatives – for example "to retrieve the grave goods of the grandmother as a dowry" – is extremely unlikely. They would certainly have known what could have been found where in the grave.

3. The devastation of burials of other ethnic groups as part of aggressive actions is well known from ethnography (Kümmel 2009, 224) and should therefore also be taken into consideration for Vráble. However, apart from the potentially aggressive act of opening graves *per se*, there is little evidence that the opening would have been particularly destructive. One could expect, for example, that the dead and their grave goods would have been removed from the graves and scattered around. But this is not the case. One gets the impression that the bones were pushed back and forth, if necessary also stacked in a corner, if they were in the way, but not that the aim was destruction.

As with the "Who?", there is therefore no clear answer yet to the "Why?". While post-funeral burial rites seem rather unlikely, economic or aggressive motivation directed against the buried is also convincing only to a limited extent. For purely economically motivated action, the procedure does not seem efficient and consistent enough, for an aggressively motivated one, it does not seem to be sufficiently destructive. A classification of the grave opening as positive in the sense of Kümmel (2009, 128) is therefore difficult to justify; whether the actions were perceived negatively or neutrally by the burial community, however, cannot be said at this point.

Bringing the evidence together

Although the question about the "When?" can be answered with relative certainty, the "Who?" and the "Why?" are far more difficult. Certain hypotheses can be definitely rejected – such as the interpretation of the grave openings as part of burial customs – but the evidence is contradictory and does not permit any immediately plausible or one-dimensional interpretations. In view of the uneven results pointing into different directions, it seems time to step back and view the cemetery of Vráble in the context of the development of the contemporary settlement (Bátora *et al.* 2012).

The settlement of Vráble Fidvár started as a small ditched hamlet shortly before 2000 BC. The next step was the erection of a further and much larger ditch sometime after 2000 BC. In the following decades, the settlement grew even larger as is testified by traces of houses in the magnetic image in the areas beyond the outermost ditch. With a size of up to 12 ha, the settlement must have housed 1000 inhabitants or more during its heyday. However, in the final stage, a third ditch was erected, which encircled a smaller area than before. This decline can also be seen in the C14-dates (Fig. 10.10). As a model this development can be conceptualised as a kind of concentration

(and later dispersion) process. At the same time of Vráble's upswing, settlements in the vicinity were abandoned, so that it seems that people moved from smaller settlements to the central site of Vráble. It is difficult to envision this rise in population having causes other than massive pressure, either from within or from the outside. In view of the massive ditches an imaginary or real threat from the outside seems the most likely explanation for this development. Given the many houses which burned to the ground, and since excavations found buckets full of grain still in one of the houses (Schlütz and Bittmann 2015, 277), the burning was certainly not due to fire deliberately set by the residents. It is tempting to link this destruction to outbreaks of violence.

Comparing the dating of the settlement and the burials, it is evident that both datasets culminate at the supposed peak of the settlement around 1800 cal BC. The simultaneity of the abandonment of the cemetery with the decline of the settlement suggests a causal connection. If there was a real threat from the outside, it is imaginable that the settlement was devastated and the cemetery plundered in the same catastrophic event when an ambush from outside aggressors actually took place. However, there still remains the enigma of how such a large scale plundering would have been set into practice. We certainly cannot presuppose long-term sieges for Early Bronze Age societies, and at least the very deep grave 512 took many hours to reopen.

If there is indeed a causal relationship between the decline of the settlement and the reopening of graves, it is therefore more likely that the reopenings happened *after* the reconfiguration of the settlements with the erection of the smaller ditch by the (new?) inhabitants of Vráble. Their indifference towards the open shafts suggests that they did not relate to the fate of the graves, which in turn could mean that they were not even related to the buried individuals. This raises the question of how representative the cemetery is for the population of Vráble. In view of estimates of the number of inhabitants of up to 1000 for a settlement period of at least 400 years, it seems clear that the entire population cannot have been buried in the cemetery with an estimated 1250 burials (see above). If one considers the ups and downs of the settlement and therefore assumes an average number of 500 people who lived in the settlement at the same time, an average life expectancy of 25 years would lead to at least 8000 deaths. The estimated 1250 burials would represent the deaths of just 31 years during the heyday of the settlement with 1000 inhabitants. In fact, from numerous Early Bronze Age contexts, even from Vráble itself, there are human skeletal remains from the settlement areas (*e.g.* storage pits), of individuals who evidently were not suitable for burial within the cemetery (Müller-Scheeßel 2013).

This means that even if the population of Vráble after the catastrophic event was still more or less the same, it is very likely that no family ties existed to those buried in the cemetery. In this case, the opening of the graves could have represented an act of appropriation, with neither the aim to destroy the graves, nor to remove all grave goods completely, but rather to ensure that no-one would confuse those buried in the cemetery with their own ancestors. Material gain could then have been an added benefit.

The graves with multiple shafts show, however, that even after this event graves were still opened or reopened. Possibly this happened after the final end of the settlement around 1600 cal BC.

Conclusion

The approach of looking at the disturbance of graves from a criminal point of view undoubtedly has its advantages: it forces us to ask essential questions. It also means, however, that the related

actions are automatically considered under the heading of "crime", which makes their unprejudiced assessment more difficult. The present case study has clearly shown the advantages and problems of such an approach: while some questions, in particular the opening of the graves and the temporal aspects, can be answered relatively clearly, the archaeological observations do not provide simple answers for others. For Vráble, we are in the fortunate position of having not only information about the graves, but also about the settlement that belongs to them. Based on the synopsis of all data, it was suggested that the opening of the Early Bronze Age graves should be seen as an act of appropriation after the presumably violent collapse of the settlement structures that had existed until then. This does not necessarily presuppose that the grave openers acted with negative feelings, as is nearly always assumed in the prevailing discourse.

However, it remains open why the extensive grave openings not only happened in Vráble, but also elsewhere in Early Bronze Age societies in south-west Slovakia and beyond. Generally it can be observed that the percentage of reopened graves increases during the Early Bronze Age (Bátora 2000b; see also Rittershofer 1987, 18). If in the early phase of the Bronze Age, only 20% of the graves are disturbed, the proportion rises up to 80% in the late phase. Vráble's findings with nearly 90% of reopened graves fit very well into this high proportion. So, what happened in Vráble also happened elsewhere. The same challenge of integrating local and supra-regional developments into one convincing model is, however, faced by all other interpretations as well. While the present contribution is certainly not the last in this direction, in view of the data quality, Vráble might play an important role in future steps to solve the problem of Early Bronze Age grave reopenings.

Acknowledgements

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11. Disturbance of graves among the ancient Maya

Estella Weiss-Krejci

Introduction

As attested by archaeological research and hieroglyphic inscriptions, the ancient Maya who populated a region that is now southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, north-western Honduras and northern El Salvador (Fig. 11.1) from the Preclassic to the Postclassic period (1000 BC to AD 1500) (Fig. 11.2) frequently re-entered the tombs of their forebears removing objects and bones (Fitzsimmons 1998; 2006; 2009, 142–169; Krejci 1998; Chase and Chase 2003; 2011; Weiss-Krejci 2011, 22–36; Scherer 2015, 96–99, 128, 173; Hageman 2016, 225–230; Źrałka *et al.* 2016). This behaviour has long been seen as stemming from diverse phenomena including grave robbery, especially for the purpose of taking jade jewellery (Shook and Kidder 1952, 113, 121–122; Coe 1990, 866–867), accidental disturbance in the course of subsequent construction (*e.g.* Smith and Kidder 1951, 19; Adams and Trik 1961, 121–123; Coe 1965, 31), the reuse of graves for the placing of additional bodies (*e.g.* Shook and Kidder 1952, 121; Hammond *et al.* 1975) and deliberate tomb desecration by the lower strata of society during site abandonment (Pendergast 1979, 183–184; 1982, 139).

Thanks to the advances made in the decipherment of Maya writing plus bioarchaeological analyses, over the last three decades ritualistic reasons such as multi-stage burial rites and ancestor worship, as well as politically motivated dead-body politics, have been added to the range of possible rationales (*e.g.* Grube and Schele 1994; McAnany 1995; Chase and Chase 1996; 2003; 2011; Fitzsimmons 1998; 2006; Houston *et al.* 1998; Stuart 1998; Bell *et al.* 1999; Weiss-Krejci 2001; 2011; Eberl 2005). However, such a diversified picture also brings difficulties, because any explanation given for the disturbance of a grave can be re-adjusted to support alternative explanations. Based on a selection of case studies, I will present and discuss these different interpretations.

Maya funerary customs and ideology

In order to determine the purpose of re-entry into graves, both Maya burial practices and eschatological views must be briefly introduced. Although there is a great deal of variation in burial practices across the Maya region, one shared characteristic is the absence of large communal spatially segregated cemeteries. Instead, the deceased were laid to rest underneath the floors of residences or in areas surrounding them, within benches in residences, within separate shrines, in ceremonial platforms and temples (sometimes directly encased in the structure fill), under plaza
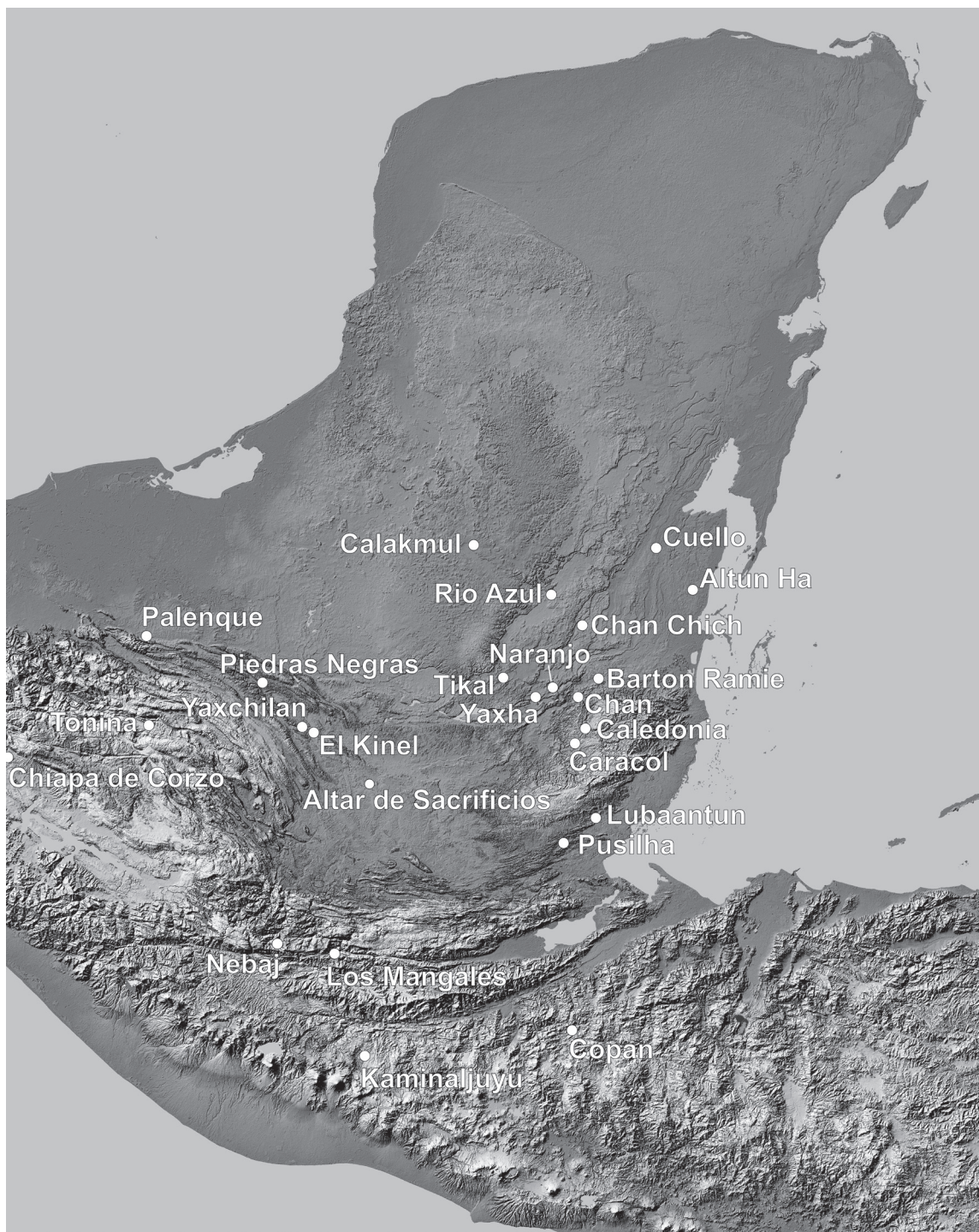
Fig. 11.1: Map of the Maya area with the location of sites mentioned in the text (background: relief map NASA/ JPL/NIMA).

Period		Date	Kaminaljuyu	Tikal
Postclassic	Late	1500 / 1400 / 1300	Chinautla	
	Early	1200 / 1100 / 1000	Ayampuc	Caban
Classic	Terminal	900	Pamplona	Eznab
	Late	800		Imix
		700	Amatle	Ik
	Early	600 / 500	Esperanza	Manik 3
		400		Manik 2
		300	Aurora	Manik 1
Preclassic	Terminal (Protoclassic)	200	Santa Clara	Cimi
		100	Arenal	Cauac
		AD 1 / BC	Verbena	
		100		
	Late	200 / 300	Providencia	Chuen
		400		
	Middle	500	Las Charcas — Late	Tzec
		600	Las Charcas — Early	Late Eb
		700		
		800		Early Eb — Late
		900	?	Early Eb — Early
		1000		

Fig. 11.2: Maya chronology and Kaminaljuyu and Tikal ceramic complexes.

floors or in caves (*e.g.* Ruz Lhuillier 1968; Welsh 1988; Robin and Hammond 1991; Prufer 2005, 205–215; Wrobel *et al*. 2014; Scherer 2015, 172–173). Grave types comprise simple or stone-lined pits (refilled with sediment) and mortuary chambers (crypts and tombs) of variable sizes cut into the architecture or into the bedrock (Welsh 1988, 16–18). Some graves hold single bodies; others served as burial spaces over an extended time, a fact underlined by the presence of multiple bodies, tomb corridors and stairways (Chase and Chase 1996; Weiss-Krejci 2004, 292–293). Some bodies

were placed on litters (*e.g.* Hall 1989, 171–173), some inserted into stone sarcophagi (*e.g.* González Cruz 2011; Scherer 2012), and others into ceramic containers (*e.g.* Iglesias Ponce de León 2003).

While most corpses were buried in the flesh, a few – usually those pertaining to the upper class – underwent elaborate treatments such as wrapping, embalming, excarnation and painting with red ochre and cinnabar (Bell *et al*. 2004; Tiesler 2006; 2007; Wagner 2006; Weiss-Krejci 2006a; Duncan 2014; Scherer 2015, 76–79). Cremation was practiced in the Maya region only from the Terminal Classic to the Postclassic (8th to 15th centuries AD) but even then, it constituted a rare treatment (Weiss-Krejci 2006a, 76–77; 2006b, 55–56). For the most part of Maya history, cremating fresh corpses was probably inhibited by ideas concerning the soul and the afterlife. However, there is evidence for the use of fire during post-depositional rituals on top of or inside tombs throughout Maya history (*e.g.* Shook and Kidder 1952, 64; Stuart 1998, 417–418; Fitzsimmons 2006; 2009, 101; Scherer 2015, 128–129).

Crypts and tombs in ceremonial contexts tend to contain a large number of artefacts, including prestige items made from materials that are exotic or relatively rare (Krejci and Culbert 1995). A combination of some of the following objects have proved to be significant definers of the wealth of a Maya burial: a large number of ceramic vessels (with the exception of the Late Classic western region where ceramics in elite graves do not abound); polychrome ceramic and carved stone vessels; substantial jade offerings including carved jades; mosaics and ear flares made of jade, obsidian and shell; large quantities of shell ornaments, whole unworked *Spondylus* shells and stingray spines; carved animal and human bones; obsidian and flint lancets and "eccentrics"; and red pigment found on artefacts and bones (Ruz Lhuillier 1968; Welsh 1988; Krejci and Culbert 1995; Scherer 2015).

The Maya believed that multiple "souls" or co-essences existed within the body of a single person. One of these essences is the "breath soul", which is identified with flowers and jade jewels and was believed to leave the body upon death (Houston and Taube 2000, 267–270; Eberl 2005, 43; Houston *et al*. 2006, 142–147). Another co-essence is the *way* (plural *wayob*), a kind of spirit companion with disease-bearing properties, which shares bonds with but moves independently of a person's body. Whereas the monster-like *wayob* of the dead inhabit a dark and nasty underworld (Houston and Stuart 1989; Grube and Nahm 1999; Scherer 2015, 46–47), the floral breath soul is eventually destined for a lovely paradise called Flower Mountain (Taube 2004; Scherer 2015, 56). One of the means by which the floral souls, especially those of the elites, journey from the tomb to the otherworld is along ropes and through portals. The underworld, Flower Mountain and depictions of ropes appear widely in Maya art; portals ("psychoducts") have been identified in the archaeological record (Hull 2006, 44–47).

Reasons for grave disturbance

Accidental disturbance and the reuse of graves

Among other forms of interference, both intercutting and accidental disturbance have been reported at the sites of Altar de Sacrificios (Smith 1972, 255), Altun Ha (Pendergast 1990, 86–88, 256), Barton Ramie (Willey *et al.* 1965, 88, 113–116), Caracol (Chase and Chase 2003, 271–272; 2011, 86), Cuello (Hammond *et al*. 1991, 358; 1995, 122), Nebaj (Smith and Kidder 1951, 26) and Tikal *(*Adams and Trik 1961, 121–123; Haviland 1985, 152). Accidentally re-entered tombs and crypts were usually infilled, resealed and covered up. In a few instances, a dead body was placed within

the overlying fill (Chase and Chase 2011, 86). Accidental intercutting of graves in the course of subsequent construction seems frequent, but in hindsight not all of these "accidental" intrusions reported in the archaeological literature may have been unintentional.

The placing of sequentially deceased people into one and the same burial space over an extended period of time was also common among the ancient Maya (Weiss-Krejci 2003, 369; 2004). Examples of reused graves are Tombs A-1 and A-11 at Kaminaljuyu (Kidder, Jennings and Shook 1946, 48–53), Los Mangales Burial 5 (Sharer and Sedat 1987, 139), Tonina Burials III-1, IV-3, IV-6 and IV-9 (Becquelin and Baudez 1979, 134–151), the tomb in Structure 146 at Lubaantun (Hammond *et al.* 1975), several tombs at Caracol (*e.g.* lower tomb in Structure A 34 and a tomb in Structure A 3) (Chase and Chase 1996; 2003; 2011), the tomb in Structure A 1 at Caledonia (Healy *et al.* 1998), Chan Chich Burial CCB-16 (Houk 2017, 209; Novotny *et al.* 2017, 146–151) and Burials 3 and 5 at Chan (Novotny 2012, 247; 2013). Older bodies were moved to the side to make space for new arrivals but grave goods were probably not taken out.

Collective burial chambers into which bodies are deposited in a sequential order are a hall-mark of multi-generational, descent-based, corporate groups (*e.g.* Waterson 1995, 49–50; Parker Pearson and Regnier 2018, 52–53; Weiss-Krejci 2018, 112–119). Such tombs, if used over several generations, can display traits such as reburial of temporarily stored corpses, reburial of exhumed individuals and/or removal of bodies from the crypt (Weiss-Krejci 2004). Chan Burial 3, a cist grave with five individuals, which was used across the Late Classic period and held a combination of primary burials and at least one reburied body (Kosakowsky *et al.* 2012, 299; Novotny 2012, 241–243, 247; 2013, 60), may be one such example.

Looting and tomb desecration

Grave robbery was brought up in the 1940s as a plausible explanation for objects and bones missing from Maya graves. The following abridged account provides an impression of Shook and Kidder's reaction to this phenomenon during the excavation of Tomb II of Mound E-III-3 in 1948, the largest and highest mound at the Guatemalan highland site of Kaminaljuyu.

> We did not suspect […] that we had been forestalled by the ancients. […] we patiently continued remov-ing the fill […] until all the chamber floor was cleared except for a small area in the middle […]. Here, experience had shown us, was always the wealth of jade ornaments. We informed the proper government officials, the press, and the avid band of followers who insisted they wished to be present for the final unveiling, that on a given day at 4 P.M. the spectacular richness of Tomb II would be open to view. […] We confidently began that day removing with the utmost care the last thin layer of earth in the tomb's center. More and more earth was cleared away, less and less remained, time moved along, and nothing was coming to light. Visitors began arriving and by the fatal hour of 4 P.M. the upper areas surrounding our excavation were packed solidly with people staring down cold-eyed upon our very red faces. […] Our feeble explanation about ancient vandals mumbled to the waiting audience was received coldly and with obvious scepticism; and many surely felt that our pockets should be thoroughly examined for the missing jades. (Shook and Kidder 1952, 65)

The traumatic experience described by Shook and Kidder was probably one of the reasons why they extensively addressed the topic of grave robbery in their publication (Shook and Kidder 1952, 113, 121–122). Both Tombs I and II had been entered in ancient times. Whereas the upper layers of Tomb I had been largely destroyed by modern brick workers, Tomb II still contained enough evidence to show what remained, what had probably been removed, and at what point
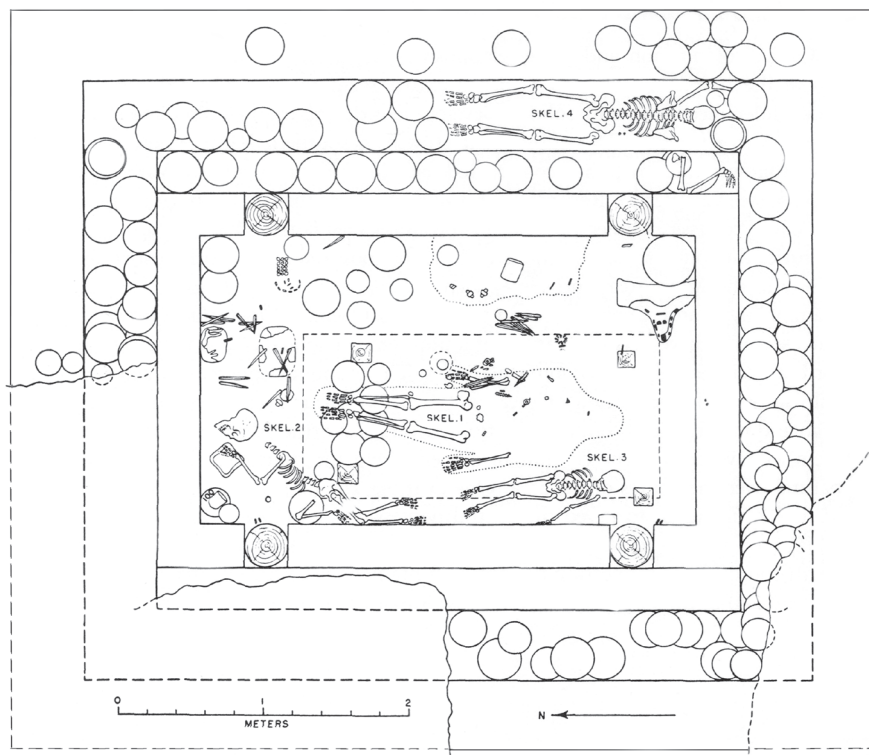
Fig. 11.3: Re-entered Protoclassic Tomb II, Mound E-III-3, Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala (Shook and Kidder 1952, fig. 15; Courtesy of the Carnegie Institution).

in time the re-entry had happened (Fig. 11.3). The body of the principal occupant of Tomb II had been painted with brilliant red, then clothed or wrapped and laid extended on a mat-covered wooden litter. The tomb contained more than 150 ceramic containers, fish teeth, stingray spines and other objects, but only a few scattered jade beads, one fuchsite ear flare and an incrusted mask or headdress. The bones of the legs and the arms from the fingers to the elbows lay in perfect order but nothing remained of the pelvis, upper body or head. Re-entry had happened after the flesh and muscle attachments of the deceased had completely decayed and roof beams had collapsed. The adobe floor, which had been laid on top of the tomb roof, showed evidence of burning, probably ceremonial, but more floors had been added before the roof beams collapsed and a funnel shaped crater formed allowing renewed access to the tomb. There was also evidence for earlier disturbance of the tomb: two holes with cut-through pottery lying in them (Shook and Kidder 1952, 64–65).

Since in undisturbed tombs the area of the head, neck and breast are usually lavishly decked with jade ornaments, Shook and Kidder reached the conclusion that whoever disturbed the grave had been in search of jades, for in Tomb II only the head and the upper part of the body were disturbed, where earplugs and necklace and breast ornaments would have been found (Shook and Kidder 1952, 121). However, they were not able to decide on the purpose of the deliberate taking of jades:

It may be that this matter of grave robbing is not of great importance. Then again it may be. In archaeology you can never tell. In study of the undocumented past one enters many alleys […] for one cannot foresee to what insight even the least promising may lead, not only as to the course of events, but also as to the psychology of the vanished peoples, as to their ways of thinking, and their feelings in regard to their fellow men, both living and dead. (Shook and Kidder 1952, 122)

Kaminaljuyu is by no means the only highland Maya site with evidence of tomb re-entry during the Late and Terminal Preclassic. Several tombs at Chiapa de Corzo had also been disturbed. Tomb 1 (Fig. 11.4) held the body of one adult individual, which rested on a mat or some type of litter. Soon after the timber beams which supported the roof slabs had collapsed, "robbers" dug down from the surface. When excavated, the tomb contained six ceramic bowls and one made of limestone, a pearl, two mosaic earplugs, remains of a mosaic nacre pectoral, a prismatic obsidian blade capped by a shank studded with shark teeth and two human femurs, one elaborately carved (Agrinier 1960). But apart from a few jade beads no other green stone ornaments were left behind. The skull was completely smashed and scattered (Lowe and Agrinier 1960, 39–42). Tombs 4 and 5 had met similar fates (Lowe and Agrinier 1960, 42–46).
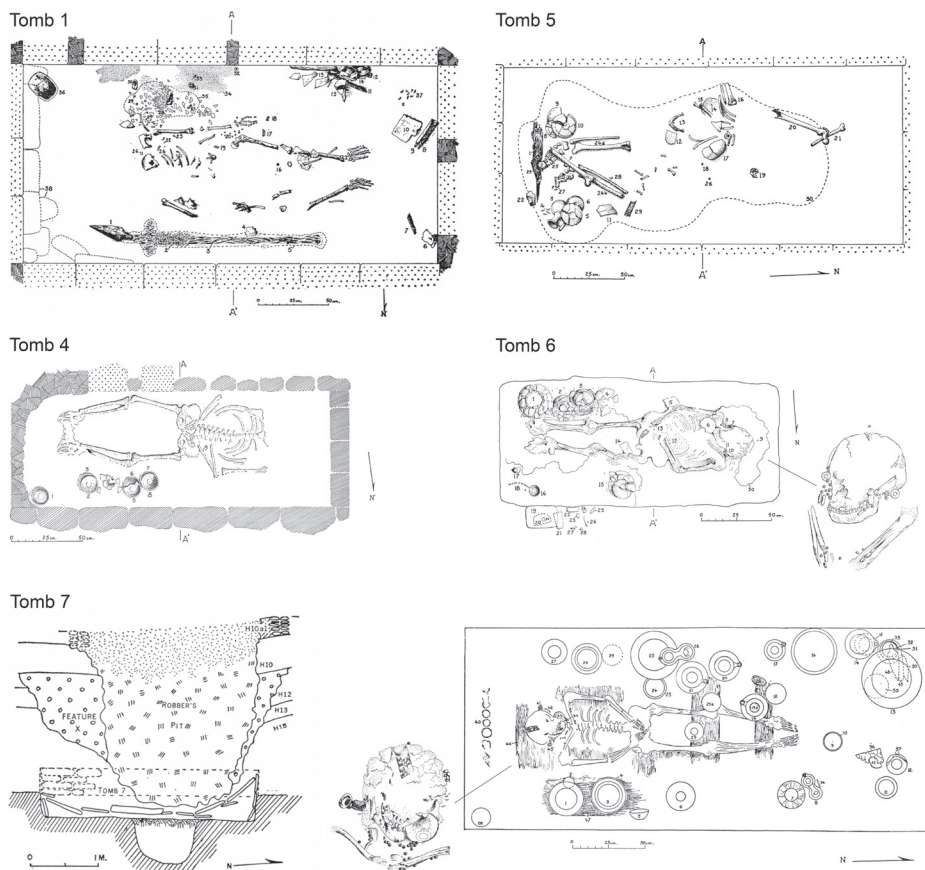

Fig. 11.4: Re-entered Protoclassic Tombs 1, 4 and 5 and undisturbed Tombs 6 and 7 (missed by looter's trench), Mound 1, Chiapa de Corzo, Mexico (Lowe and Agrinier 1960, figs 36, 40, 42 and 45–49a; Courtesy of the New World Archaeological Foundation).

From the 1950s on, evidence which was interpreted in terms of grave robbery and desecration also emerged in Classic period tombs (AD 250–900) of the Maya lowlands such as at Piedras Negras (Coe 1959), Tikal (Coe 1990) and Altun Ha (Pendergast 1979; 1982). In Piedras Negras Burial 10, the body of the main individual had been removed, jade beads were scattered on the ground and there was evidence of a fire in the grave (Coe 1959, 126–127). Tikal Burials 200 and 8 had been completely sacked (Coe 1990, 399–403, 487–490). Burial 22, which probably once held an important Early Classic lord, judging from its location at the heart of the North Acropolis, was also partially emptied out. Only one jade fragment and one jade ring remained and almost the entire skeleton was gone. On the other hand, ceramics, shells, pearls and alabaster ear flares were not taken (Coe 1990, 307–311) (Fig. 11.5).
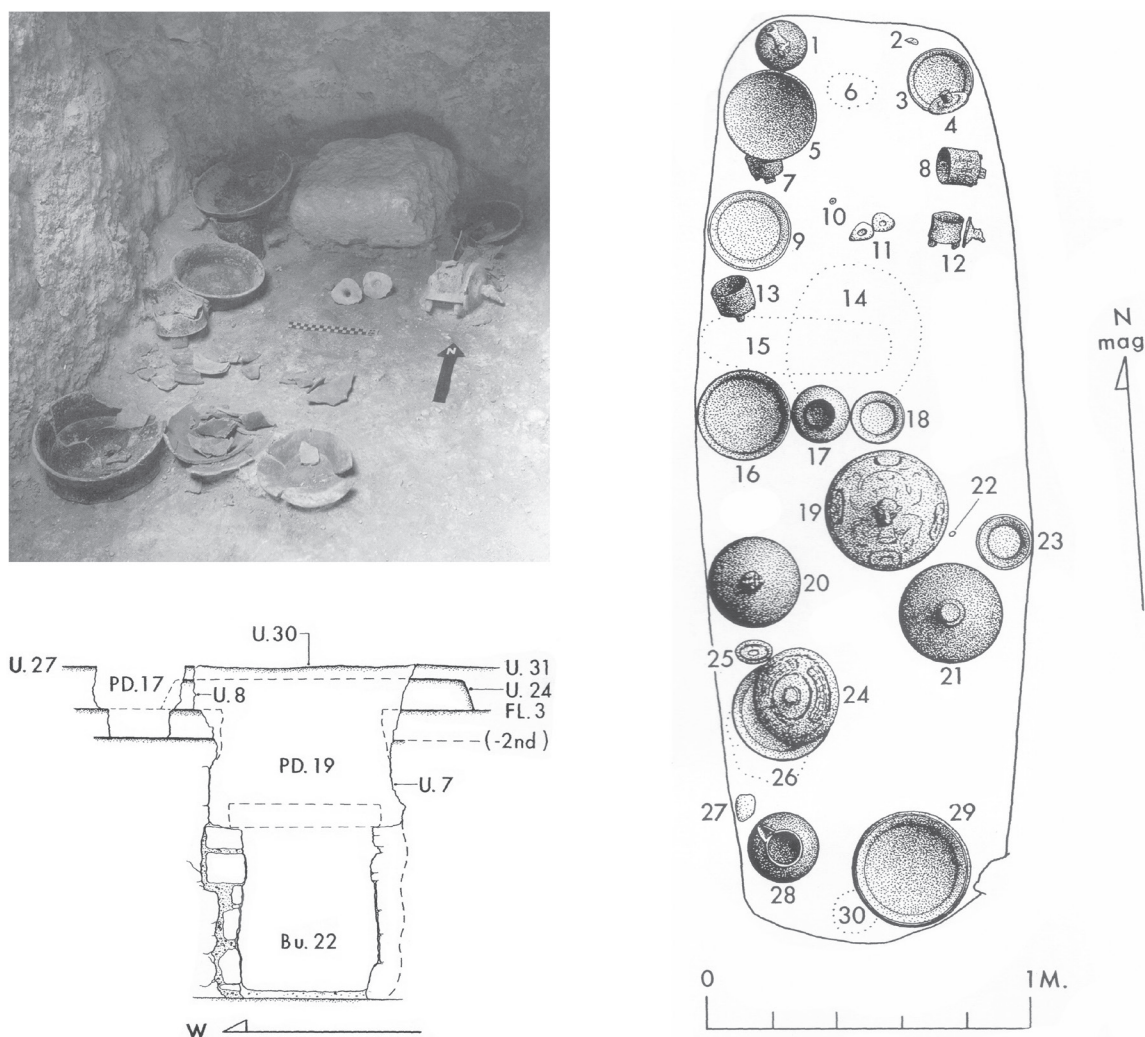

Fig. 11.5: Photo, plan and section of re-entered Early Classic Burial 22, Structure 5D-26, Tikal, Guatemala (Coe 1990, figs 86a, 86b and 328; Courtesy of the Penn Museum).

It seems that some remains deriving from graves and tombs were reburied in what Tikal archaeologists coined "problematic deposits" (PD). These are characterised by jumbled and incomplete human remains (*e.g.* PD 216: Haviland 1985, 158), sometimes with signs of burning and breakage, and broken artefacts and monument fragments from different time periods and of diverse provenience (Coe 1990, 930–931). Jades are rare in these deposits, and if present at all, consist only of isolated small pieces and beads (*e.g.* PD 22: Coe 1990, 324–327).

It seems that tomb reopening and the re-deposition of grave contents occurred at specific time periods at Tikal. Whereas Burials 8, 22 and 200 were cleared out very late in the site's history, in the Eznab period (AD 850–950) (Coe 1990, 866), not long before the so called "Classic Maya collapse", Mundo Perdido tomb PNT-021 of the Terminal Preclassic Cimi phase (AD 150–250) was re-entered during the 4th century AD, at a time when the Mundo Perdido group started to decline (Laporte 1995, 21). The excavations at Tikal also showed that not every attempt at finding tombs was successful. Unit 11 in Structure 5D-73 of Tikal is an old tunnel (Fig. 11.6) drilled in the Eznab period to search for a tomb in the centre (Coe 1990, 871). The diggers missed Burial 196, one of the richest tombs of Tikal, which has been attributed to the Tikal king Yik'in Chan K'awiil (Martin and Grube 2008, 50).

At Altun Ha five tombs are considered to have been sacked, all in the Terminal Classic. These are Tomb A-6/1 (Pendergast 1979) and Tombs B-4/3, B-4/4, B-4/5 and possibly B-4/1 (Pendergast 1982). Tomb A-6/1 was additionally burned. Pendergast speculates that it was the lower-class population at the time of the collapse that still knew where the tombs were located. To him this was deliberate tomb desecration by the lower strata of society during site abandonment (Pendergast 1979, 183–184; 1982, 139).
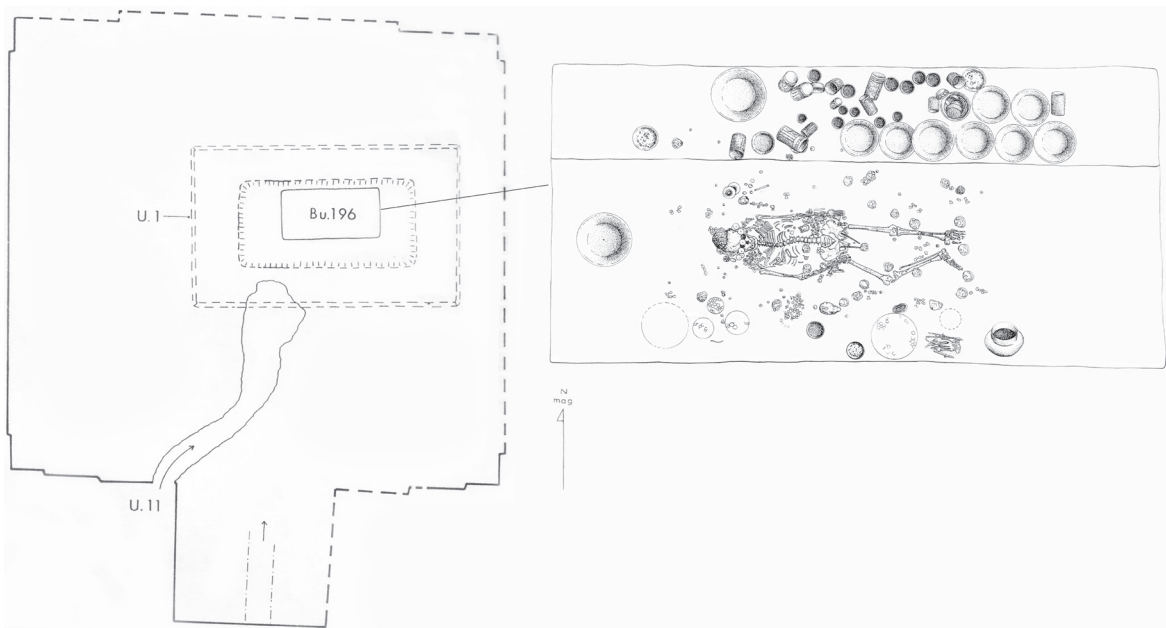

Fig. 11.6: Terminal Classic Looter's tunnel (Unit 11) that missed Late Classic Burial 196, Structure 5D-73, Tikal, Guatemala (Coe 1990, figs 282, 283c; Courtesy of the Penn Museum).

Multi-stage funeral rites, royal ancestral rites and politically motivated exhumations

In the 1990s, when substantial progress in the decipherment of Maya texts carved on stone panels, altars and stelae was achieved, it also became evident that tomb re-entries carried a ritual and political component. Several small disk altars from Tonina talk about "tomb firing" rituals held one *tzolk'in* (a period of 260 days) after the death of the individuals portrayed on them (Stuart 1998; Eberl 2005, 112–115). Considering the closeness in time to some death dates, these rituals could have easily been part of multi-stage funeral rites.

However, in many instances, decades and even centuries had passed between the death of a person and the rites of commemoration. Piedras Negras monuments tell us that kings "censed" the tombs of their predecessors to maintain links to the past and legitimise their power in the present (Fitzsimmons 1998; 2009, 147–155). Some of these rites were probably directed at true consanguineal ancestors, but veneration of appropriated ancestors may also have occurred (at Copan's Hunal Tomb, bones were painted with cinnabar as part of a re-entry: Bell *et al*. 2004, 133). Piedras Negras Stela 40 depicts Ruler 4 in AD 746 scattering incense into a vent leading to his mother's tomb. The censing took place on the 83 *tzolk'in* anniversary of the death (AD 686) of Ruler 2 (83 *tzolk'in* are the equivalent of *c.* 59 solar years). Ruler 4 was not Ruler 3's son and therefore the reference to Ruler 2 may have had special importance (Martin and Grube 2008, 148).

Burial 13, which was discovered during the Piedras Negras 1997 field season, was identified as the tomb of Ruler 4 (died AD 757), which according to the texts had been entered by Ruler 7 in AD 782 (Martin and Grube 2008, 150). The excavations revealed the remains of one adult and two adolescents and many worked jade and shell objects. The entire deposit was disturbed and intensely burned at some time, but obviously the objects had not been taken (Houston *et al*. 2003, 138–139). This stands in contrast to the above mentioned Piedras Negras Burial 10, in which only tiny jade beads, which may have been simply overlooked, remained. Thus, the question arises whether the two graves were disturbed for different reasons. Was Burial 10 possibly the target of an ill-intentioned attack?

That tomb desecration was a form of dead-body politics among the ancient Maya is attested by the inscriptions (Eberl 2005, 158–162). Desecration as an act of war is recorded on Naranjo Stela 23, which refers to the hostile opening of a grave and scattering of bones of the Yaxha king Yax B'olon Chaak in AD 710, a few months after Naranjo's military victory over the nearby site of Yaxha (Eberl 2005, 161; Martin and Grube 2008, 76).

It has been proposed by Grube and Schele (1994) that a pending threat of attacking enemies was the reason for the exhumation depicted on Tikal Altar 5 (Fig. 11.7). The scene takes place in AD 711 and shows the Tikal king Jasaw Chan K'awiil I and a lord from another polity with the skull and long bones of Lady Tuun Kayawak eight years after her death and burial (Eberl 2005, 97–99). These two kings were former enemies and through the joint exhumation and re-deposition were given a chance to celebrate their newly gained alliance (Martin and Grube 2008, 46). Although rescue exhumations (when a dead body that is in some kind of danger of being destroyed, stolen or simply coming under the dominance of an enemy force is exhumed and re-buried elsewhere) are common throughout the world, the scene on the altar looks very staged, which speaks against rescue retrieval and probably for an exhumation for the purpose of political reconciliation (Weiss-Krejci 2011, 42). The story on Altar 5 has been linked to an archaeological deposit found under Stela 16, which is paired with Altar 5 (Stuart 1998, 408). The deposit yielded a human skull and
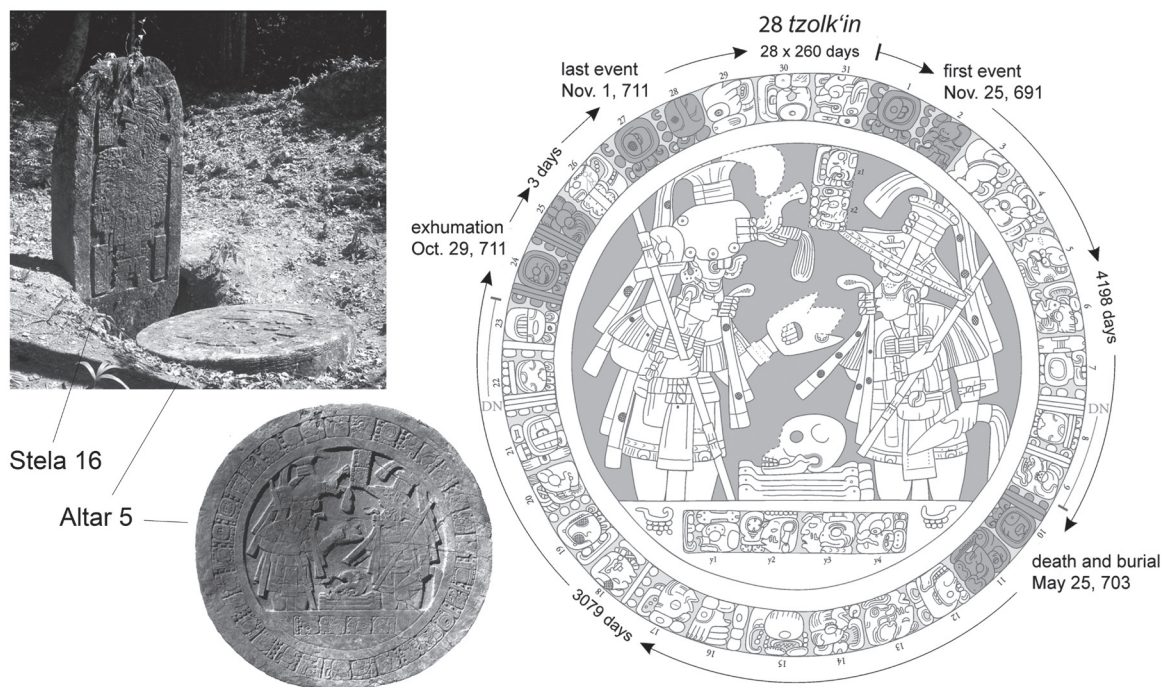
Fig. 11.7: Late Classic Stela 16 and Altar 5, Tikal, Guatemala (Photos: Walwin Barr and William R. Coe, University of Pennsylvania Tikal Project); Drawing by Estella Weiss-Krejci (based on Jones and Satterthwaite 1982, 37 and Grube and Schele 1994, 3; Courtesy of the Penn Museum).

bones (an adolescent of undetermined sex) in exactly the same position as depicted on the altar (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982, 37; Weiss-Krejci 2011, fig. 2.3d).

In the Maya area, bone removal from graves is of considerable antiquity but the patterns vary substantially as the following examples will show. Several pieces of evidence suggest that the earliest grave at the Central Plaza of Chan, Burial 1, a Middle Preclassic simple cist, was re-entered on two occasions, once in the Middle and once in the Late Preclassic. The corpse had originally been buried fleshed, but was disturbed at a later point in time. The right humerus was found beside the right femur and the bones from the cranium, torso and left arm were missing. Above the burial had been placed carefully arranged human bone fragments and jade, serpentine and shell objects, which might derive from the grave (Novotny 2012, 232, 235–236; 2013, 58–59). Chan's Central Plaza was undoubtedly a sacred space with plenty of evidence for Middle Preclassic ritual activity (Kosakowsky *et al.* 2012, 292–293). The single individual within the grave may have been a member of the founding family of Chan, whose grave was revisited twice in Preclassic times (Kosakowsky 2012, 306). The skeleton in Early Classic Chan Burial 20, a simple crypt in the West Plaza, was also missing bones, in this case the lower legs and feet, which had probably been removed during a re-entry episode (Novotny 2012, 240; 2013, 60).

Throughout the Yaxchilan kingdom, selected skeletal elements were also removed from graves. At the Late/Terminal Classic subordinate centre of El Kinel, three graves were missing

bones. The otherwise perfectly articulated Burial 4 was missing both radii and ulnae and some carpals (Scherer *et al.* 2014, 207). The lower legs of Burial 10 had also been removed (Scherer *et al.* 2014, 206). In Burial 1, teeth, tibia and bones of the feet were absent (Scherer *et al.* 2014, 208). Since there was no indication of pre-depositional body treatment to explain the absences, Scherer comes to the conclusion that the bones had been taken later and were spiritually charged objects which could be used in rituals to access the souls of the dead (Scherer *et al.* 2014, 215; Scherer 2015, 96–99).

At some point in antiquity, maybe still in the Terminal Classic, when Pusilha in southern Belize ceased to be a city, Pusilha Burial 8/4, the Terminal Classic grave of Ruler G, was entered from the top by moving the capstones. There are no traces of fire and the intruders did not come for the jades, because a cache vessel full of jade, multiple ear flares, three carved diadems and the possible pieces of a mosaic mask were left in the tomb. The only thing that was clearly missing were bones from the lower half of the body. Somerville and Braswell suggest that the taking of relics may have motivated this tomb re-entry. In this case, the tomb was not properly resealed (Somerville and Braswell 2016, 280–281).

Although there is no clear pattern yet as to which bones were preferably taken – sometimes it was the head, sometimes the long bones, sometimes the chest bones – all these bone removals were entirely deliberate.

Discussion

The objects most frequently taken from purposefully re-entered tombs and crypts are jade ornaments and selected bones of the skeleton. For the ancient Maya, jade was a socially highly valued material (Hammond *et al*. 1977). Due to the polysemic qualities of jade, determining the reason why they were removed is a complicated matter. Gradations of value of jade objects existed and stone quality and especially colour mattered (Andrieu *et al.* 2014). This is not surprising given that sight, vision and perception played important roles in ancient Maya society (Houston and Taube 2000, 281–287). Workmanship, size and artefact category may have been significant as well. Especially jade ear flares and carved pendants (Fig. 11.8), notably anthropomorphic ones, required special skills and time to produce since jade is a very hard material. Additionally, jade ear flares and pendants were insignia of rulership and thus embodied royal power (Taube 2005; see also Saunders 2002). Presumably small jades were less desired, because they are relatively frequent and have been found in graves pertaining to all strata of Maya society (Krejci and Culbert 1995, 106; Andrieu *et al*. 2014, 141). In re-entered and emptied tombs, they were often overlooked or purposefully left behind, such as in Piedras Negras Burial 10. It was therefore not the material alone that determined the value of and interest in jade.

Certain jade objects could have encapsulated the essence of the departed person, as suggested by Houston and Taube based on a 16th-century text from the Maya highlands, which relates that jade objects served to capture and store the breath soul of deceased rulers (Houston and Taube 2000, 267, 270). Alternatively, jade objects such as flares and pendants could have been regarded as "other-than-human persons", a term coined by Hallowell (1960). This concept of "other-than-human" personhood is based on the idea that non-humans are animate subjects with a life force and not ontologically distinct from humans (see also Harrison-Buck and Hendon 2018; Hendon 2018).

Fig. 11.8: Late Classic jade ear ornaments in the shape of flowers from Tomb 1, Structure XV, Calakmul, Mexico and jade pendant from Cache 1, Structure F-1, Altun Ha, Belize (Photos: Estella Weiss-Krejci).

One way or the other, jades could have held properties similar to human bone relics, which can be classed with what Weiner (1992) has called "inalienable possessions". As discussed by Novotny (2013, 55) for the Maya site of Chan, their power is based in their use history that cannot be transferred to other people or objects. These bones are "imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners" (Weiner 1992, 6). This opens the possibility that Maya bones were also a potential source of conflict between competing kin and religious groups that claimed rights to and responsibility over these relics, a process that is well known from medieval Europe (*e.g.* Geary 1978) and has been discussed by Lambek (2013) for Madagascar. Among the "irrevocable forces" that work to separate inalienable possessions from their owners are theft and political manoeuvres (Weiner 1992, 6).

In this respect, it is interesting that purposeful re-entries during which bones and jades were extracted coincide with times of crisis in Maya history. Kaminaljuyu Mound E, Tomb II was constructed in the late Verbena or early Arenal phase around AD 50 (Inomata *et al.* 2014, 401) but was entered not long before the end of the Arenal phase, maybe around AD 150, which marks Kaminaljuyu's decline, maybe "during periods of weakened theocratic control or the fall of a dynasty" (Shook and Kidder 1952, 121). At Copan, the tomb of the sovereign Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat was also entered and burned when the ceremonial activities in the Main Group had ceased (Becker and Cheek 1983, 410–420; Viel and Cheek 1983, 556; Martin and Grube 2008, 212). At Tikal and Altun Ha, large tombs were disturbed in the Terminal Classic. Tomb re-entry in order to procure relics may have been a reaction to the waning power of Maya kings. Something along these lines has been suggested by Coe in his discussion of the tombs at Tikal:

> Another explanation (and not really at odds) is pillage with no goal but self-authentication. Claims had to be legitimized in the midst of a commonplace political scramble involving contested blood ties to the anciently entombed lords. Ultimately one of them stood, no longer to be doubted, for in his left arm he cradled the skull recouped from Bu. 22, and he wore the obligatory jewelry just methodically sacked to symbolize half a millennium of historic power. (Coe 1990, 872)

However, economically-motivated looting and a trade in these objects should not be ruled out, nor should desecration during wars. It should also not be assumed that those who opened a tomb are always identical to those who re-sealed it. There exists large variability concerning the archaeological signature of re-sealed graves and, from a pan-Maya perspective, no clear pattern has emerged. In many instances, capstones were replaced and floors patched up (Chase and Chase 2011, 88), fire was frequently involved (Fitzsimmons 2006), and in some cases the placement of white marl and offerings was part of the re-sealing process (Wagner 2006, 62; Duncan 2014, 267).

Conclusion

This chapter has presented several examples of different types of grave disturbances from various parts of the Maya region and highlighted some characteristics which distinguish these types of disturbances from each other. Today we know that we are probably looking at a range of disparate phenomena including accidental grave disturbance, sequential burial, tomb visits, "tomb renewal" ceremonies, ritual funerary and non-funerary exhumations and reburials, relic taking, desecration and probably looting. These accidental and purposeful behaviours and intentions result in different archaeological signatures that are not always easy to distinguish from each other. Studying these phenomena more systematically, paying closer attention to the stratigraphy of re-entry and looking out for patterns, in the future will provide better information about people's perception of the dead and the political and economic situation at the time when these interactions took place.

Since the times of Shook and Kidder's work in the Maya highlands, the investigation of the disturbance of graves has turned into a promising archaeological endeavour. Instead of treating posterior interferences as regrettable activities hindering archaeological investigation, today one can appreciate them as a method to unmask social processes and societal ideals.

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12. "It was found that the thieves had violated them all"[1]: grave disturbance in Late New Kingdom Thebes

David A. Aston

Introduction[1]

"Furnish your station in the valley, the grave that shall conceal your corpse, set it before you as your concern, a thing that matters in your eyes, emulate the great departed who are at rest within their tombs" (Lichtheim 1976, 138). In ancient Egyptian didactic literature, such as the quoted "Instruction of Any" (Lichtheim 1976) of Late New Kingdom date, the wise are always told, among many other things, to make a tomb. Of course the construction of a tomb for the dead is not unique to Egyptian civilisation; what separates Egypt from other contemporary cultures is the expenditure invested in funerary monuments (Assmann 2005, 409), leading some Egyptologists to dub it a "mausoleum culture" (Baines and Lacovara 2002, 7). The dead were seen as both beneficent and yet also malicious to the living, with the recent and the distant dead being viewed differently (Harrington 2013, 146–150). While the distant dead disappeared into a morass and were often blamed for bringing nightmares, illness and crop failures to the population at large, the recent dead were in general more benign. It would appear that, based on the extant letters to the dead (Gardiner and Sethe 1928; Harrington 2013, 34–37), the recently deceased could actively intercede beneficently on behalf of the living, in return for which it was expected that the latter took care of the tombs and provided any cult activities necessary for the well-being of the tomb owner. Conversely the dead could also bring bad luck to those deemed neglectful of their proper duties. Therefore the tomb ought to be sacrosanct; any interference with it being likely to bring untold disasters on the heads of the perpetrators. In effect, however, the upkeep of the proper cult activities probably only lasted for at most two or three generations before living memory connections to the deceased tomb owner faded out.

Grave disturbance in ancient Egypt is, of course, a large topic which cannot be covered in a single paper (Peet 1930; Phillips 1992; Näser 2008; Strudwick 2013a; 2013b). Consequently I will limit myself to an examination of what happened to tombs, mummies and grave goods in Late New Kingdom Thebes, concentrating on the Twentieth and Twenty-first Dynasties (*c.* 1200–950 BC; Table 12.1), since this period is well covered by both textual and archaeological sources. In this paper I will discuss what happened to tombs in terms of reuse, usurpation and other tampering, followed by an examination of the burials found within them in so far as they were robbed, recycled or otherwise disturbed. Ancient Thebes, modern Luxor, lies approximately 500 km south of Cairo

		Dynasties	Years BC
		Archaic Period (Dynasties 1–2)	3650–2685
		Old Kingdom (Dynasties 3–6)	2685–2160
		First Intermediate Period (Dynasties 7–10)	2160–2055
		Middle Kingdom (Dynasties 11– early 13)	2055–1750
		Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties late 13–17)	1750–1576
New Kingdom	Dynasty 18	Ahmose	1576–1551
		Amenophis I	1551–1530
		Tuthmosis I	1530–1517
		Tuthmosis II	1517–1504
		Tuthmosis III	1504–1450
		Amenophis II	1450–1420
		Tuthmosis IV	1420–1382
		Amenophis III	1382–1344
		Akhenaten	1344–1328
		Smenkhare	1328–1326
		Ankhetkheperure	1326–1325
		Tutankhamun	1325–1316
		Ay	1316–1313
		Horemheb	1313–1299
	Dynasty 19	Ramesses I	1299–1298
		Sety I	1298–1290
		Ramesses II	1290–1224
		Merenptah	1224–1214
		Seti II	1214–1208
		Amenmesse	1208–1206
		Siptah	1206–1200
		Tauseret	1200–1198
	Dynasty 20	Sethnakte	1198–1195
		Ramesses III	1195–1164
		Ramesses IV	1164–1156
		Ramesses V	1156–1152
		Ramesses VI	1152–1144
		Ramesses VII	1144–1137
		Ramesses VIII	1137
		Ramesses IX	1137–1118
		Ramesses X	1118–1115
		Ramesses XI	1115–1086
		Herihor	1086–1080
	Dynasty 21	Smendes	1080–1054
		Amenemnisu	1054–1050
		Psusennes I	1050–1001
		Amenemope	1001–992
		Osochor	992–982
		Siamun	981–962
		Psusennes II	962–943
		Libyan Period (Dynasties 22–24)	943–720
		Kushite Period (Dynasty 25)	720–664
		Late Period (Dynasties 26–31)	664–332
		Ptolemaic Period	332–30

and is home to one of the largest ancient Egyptian cemeteries yet discovered. Stretching for several kilometres from Dra Abu el-Naga in the north to the Wadi el-Barriya in the south, the Theban necropolis contains more than a thousand New Kingdom "elite" tombs, although only about thirty have been discovered intact (Smith 1992; Fig. 12.1). Whilst over a thousand seems impressive, and even allowing for the vagaries of archaeological chance, there are simply not enough tombs for the number of people who must have lived and died during this period, the more so as the non-elite left very little trace in the archaeological record (Strudwick 1995). It is possible that the burials of the lower classes were placed in an as yet unlocated cemetery. At Amarna, burials of the non-elite were interred in simple pit graves situated several kilometres away from the rock cut tombs of the higher echelons of society (Kemp 2009, 11–27). In 1994 John Romer, using the list of tombs given by Porter and Moss (1960; 1964), plotted the extant number of New Kingdom tombs which date from the beginning of the Eighteenth to the end of the Twentieth Dynasty against the number of years these dynasties cover (*c.* 1576–1080 BC) concluding that, at Thebes, on average only about eight decorated tombs were constructed per decade (Romer 1994, 215–218). Since then, however, the number of known decorated tombs has doubled, not least through the work of Friederike Kampp (1996, 623–725). However, even if sixteen tombs were built in every decade, the underlying problem still remains; there simply are not enough tombs for everyone. Moreover it is not that simple: most known New Kingdom tombs at Thebes date to the Eighteenth Dynasty (*c.* 1575–1300 BC), with fewer constructed in the Nineteenth Dynasty (*c.* 1300–1200 BC), and distinctly fewer during the Twentieth Dynasty (*c.* 1200–1080 BC) (Strudwick and Strudwick 1999, 141). Whilst this may in part be explained by the movement of the capital from Thebes to Akhetaten (Tell el-Amarna) under Akhenaten (*c.* 1344–1328 BC), from Akhetaten to Memphis under Tutankhamun (*c.* 1325–1316 BC) and from Memphis to Per-Ramesses under, probably, Sety I (*c.* 1298–1290 BC), Thebes still remained an important religious centre throughout the entire New Kingdom. One possible reason for the marked decline in the number of new tombs is that the necropolis had simply run out of space; although most of it was in use throughout the New Kingdom, it would appear that the "Upper Enclosure" at Sheikh Abd el-Gurna was abandoned because it was full after the reign of Amenophis III (*c.* 1382–1344 BC).

A typical Eighteenth Dynasty tomb consists of an entrance courtyard leading to a decorated rock-cut chapel in the shape of an inverted "T". A burial shaft is cut from either the open courtyard or one of the transverse arms of the inverted "T" down to an undecorated burial chamber, and so in these tombs the actual burial space is thus generally somewhat inaccessible (Fig. 12.2). Textual evidence indicates that during the Nineteenth Dynasty a number of different types of tombs were being created in which both the tomb chapel, which was accessible above ground, and the tomb

Fig. 12.1: View into the "intact" tomb of Tutankhamun. Valley of the Kings tomb KV 62. Griffith Institute Tutankhamun Archive, Burton photograph 9 (Courtesy of Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).

chamber located below ground, were often decorated. It was thus still possible for Nineteenth Dynasty elites to construct and decorate tombs. By the Twentieth Dynasty, this same textual evidence indicates a distinct lack of work being carried out on private tomb construction when compared with the previous two dynasties, which may suggest that by this time there simply was no more space for the siting of new tombs. However, as a result of economic factors – Twentieth Dynasty Thebes was suffering from raging inflation, spiralling grain prices, food shortages, with the state not paying wages leading to strikes – it is more likely that most people probably could not afford to build a "real tomb" with a painted tomb chapel (Helck 1993; Cooney 2007). Whilst a moderately sized tomb could be decorated in about three and a half months (Amer 1981), the cost of decorating a tomb was equivalent to about twenty months' worth of wages (Cooney 2008, 91). When this is added to the costs of the actual funeral equipment necessary for a "good burial", which, in itself, did not come cheap (Cooney 2007), it is not surprising that most people would have foregone the luxury of making their own tomb.
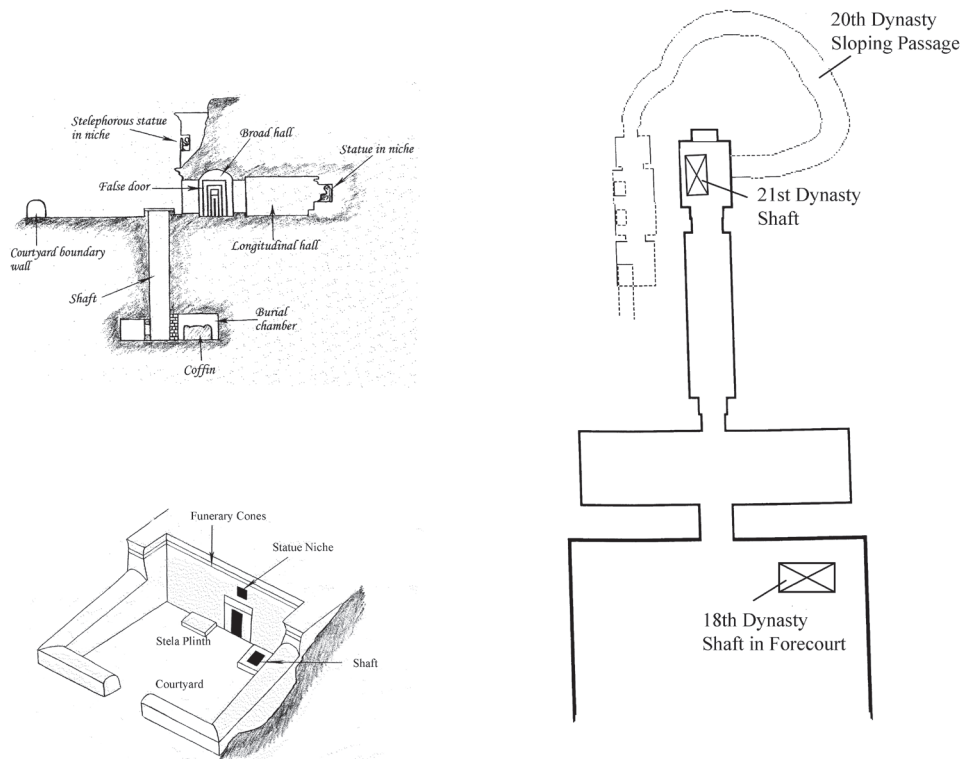
Fig. 12.2: Plan and section of a typical Eighteenth-Dynasty tomb with Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Dynasty modifications (Based on Kampp-Seyfried 2003, fig 7; Dodson and Ikram 2008, fig. 288; Harrington 2013, fig 26).

The reuse of tombs

Existing tombs were therefore reused. Around sixty elite tombs are known to have been in use in the Twentieth Dynasty as evidenced by royal names mentioned in their decoration, or, less reliably, on stylistic grounds (Hoffmann 1991, 87–91; 2004, 49–50; Kampp 1996, 146–148). Those which show signs of being "reused" or "usurped" generally tend to be the typical T-shaped Eighteenth Dynasty tombs, in which the original burial was usually left undisturbed, while sloping corridors were cut from the cult rooms leading down to new burial chambers, which are thus very accessible. With the notable exception of the tomb of Imiseba, Theban Tomb 65 (Bacs 2011), additional decoration relating to these new (Twentieth Dynasty) burials was generally minimal. With the advent of Dynasty 21, it becomes increasingly difficult to decide what is, and what is not, original to the Twenty-first Dynasty, and it seems that no new tombs were constructed at this time. Instead existing tombs were adapted and the descending corridor found in many Twentieth-Dynasty tombs was replaced by a shaft, usually within the tomb chapel itself, rather than in the courtyard as was common during the Eighteenth Dynasty, making the burials once again "inaccessible" (Kikuchi 2002, 353).

However, the question remains as to how the new "owners" of these tombs came to be in possession of the by-now ancient structures. Egyptologists are fortunate in having at their disposal a large number of written sources in the forms of ostraca and papyri, most of which stem from the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina, which relate to the everyday happenings of ordinary people (McDowell 2001). Deir el-Medina was founded in the early Eighteenth Dynasty, and abandoned at the end of the Twentieth, with, not surprisingly, most of the extant records coming from the latest period of its use, and these records vividly show how the reuse process occurred.

Reuse by family members

One of the more expected reuses of tombs is by succeeding generations of family members, and indeed there is certainly evidence that some, such as the Eighteenth-Dynasty tombs of Ramose, Neferkhawet and Useramun, and the Nineteenth-Dynasty tomb of Sennedjem were in use by members of the same family over several generations (Dorman 2003). Based on this, Polz (1990, 307) has suggested that certain tombs were taken over by people tracing some remote connection to the original owner, but this idea was dismissed by Strudwick (2009–2010, 254), although with the proviso that we do not actually have any proof to gainsay it. Rather we actually do have some evidence in support of the inheritance hypothesis. In ostracon BM EA 5624, which can be dated to Year 21 or 22 of Ramesses III, an unnamed speaker, almost certainly a workman named Amenemipet, who recurs on ostracon Florence 2621, and Papyrus Berlin 10496, successfully argues his legal right to an old tomb which was in the possession of his family since Year 7 of Horemheb some 125 years earlier (Allam 1973, 43–45; Kitchen 1983, 475–476; McDowell 2001, 68–69; Demarée 2002, 15–16; Cooney 2014b, 19–22).

Legal reuse of tombs/burial spaces by non-family members

There is some evidence that a burial chamber could be legally given away or bought and sold. The ostracon IFAO 881 comprises two lines reading "one gives/sells the *shetyt* burial chamber of Wa…." (Černý 1972, 60–61; Cooney 2008, 85). Although somewhat enigmatic this would appear to show that a tomb which was no longer wanted could be transferred from one person to another. That "a place of burial" could also be purchased is clear from the Papyrus Bulaq X (P. Cairo 58092), in which a certain Huy provides a coffin and "place of burial" for his parents (Janssen and Pestman 1968, 140–147), the latter apparently being a reserved space within a larger burial property. Essentially this papyrus deals with a dispute between Huy's son, Khay, and his aunts and uncles over the inheritance of the property of the lady Tgemy, Huy's mother and Khay's grandmother, since in Egyptian law the property is inherited by the one responsible for the burial of the deceased. Khay argues that as Huy alone provided the grave goods and buried both his parents, then Huy alone, and thus in his turn, Khay, should inherit the property. While not stated this seems to be an attempt on behalf of the aunts and uncles to deny Khay his grandmother's inheritance, since there is no extant record of any dispute between Huy and his siblings.

There is at least one case of an old, ruined tomb which is no longer claimed being inspected and then given to a new owner. The ostracon Madrid 16.243 refers to "this day of inspecting the tomb of the guardian Amenemopet by the three captains of the [necropolis] in order to hand it over [to] the workman Menna. [List] of everything that was in it: A coffin…" at which point there are five more lines which are illegible (Kitchen 1989, 335–336; Cooney 2014b, 24–25). It is unfortunately not explained why the tomb was given to Menna. Madrid 16.243 is reminiscent of the similar, but

complete text recorded on ostracon Deir el-Medina 828 and ostracon Vienna H.1 (Kitchen 1983, 504–505; McDowell 2001, 69–71; Cooney 2014b, 23) in which a ruined tomb opposite that of the scribe Amennakht, son of Ipuy, is opened in the presence of several witnesses, including two policemen, and the contents listed. At the conclusion of this inspection the tomb is resealed, but there is no mention of donating it to a new owner. However, based on the evidence of Madrid 16.243, it is unlikely that, at a time when tomb space was at a premium, an unclaimed tomb would have remained unattributed for long.

Illegal usurpation

In addition to texts which concern legitimate re-assignments of tombs, there are also a number of texts which refer to clear illegal usurpations, in the sense that the people concerned had no legal right to the use of the tomb. Papyrus Berlin P.10496 includes a mention of a complaint made by the same workman named Amenemipet whom we have perhaps already met on ostracon BM EA 5624, against an unknown person, possibly Penmenefer, his nemesis in the disputed tomb case, whom he accuses of throwing the body of his wife out of the tomb of his father (Kitchen 1983, 476–478; Cooney 2014b, 21), presumably so that the perpetrator can use the tomb for his own purposes. A different form of usurpation is found in a list of accusations apparently brought before the court, listed on papyrus Milan RAN E 0.9.40126 + papyrus Milan RAN E 0.9.40128 line x+4, where there is mention of a person who is accused of entering the tomb of a steward of (the estate/temple of) Sety I, erasing the steward's name and then giving the tomb to an Amun temple scribe (Demarée 2010, 57).

Re-appropriation of grave goods

While the above deals with what happened to the tombs, both the archaeological and textual evidence make it clear that it was more common that the grave goods buried with the deceased were disturbed in the sense of being robbed or recycled.

Opportunistic robberies

Opportunistic robberies, undertaken at the time of burial, are well recorded, and for our time period can be seen in the family tomb MMA 60. Probably originally made in the Eighteenth Dynasty, since the subterranean parts consist of a shaft with associated burial chamber, it was utilised for the burial of four members of the same family in the Twenty-first Dynasty (Winlock 1924, 24–28; 1926, 19–30; Roehrig 1988). A famous ostracon, Manchester 5886 (Gardiner 1913; Robinson 2016; Fig. 12.3), shows that at the actual burial only a small number of people, one of whom can be interpreted as a priest as he clearly wears a jackal (Anubis) headdress, would have descended the shaft to manoeuvre the coffin into the burial chamber, with the mourners remaining at ground level. This ostracon is interesting because it also shows that two coffins are already interred within one side chamber which is clearly bricked up, while the burial party are sliding the coffin of the newly deceased into a second chamber. Scenes from the Eighteenth-Dynasty tombs of Ramose, Theban Tomb 55 (Davies 1936 II pl. 73; 1941 pls. 26–27), and Pairy, Theban Tomb 139 (Dodson and Ikram 2008, 113 fig. 139; Winlock and Arnold 2010, 15 fig. 8; O'Neill 2015, 43–45, 84 fig. 3.12), show that at the same time as the coffin is brought to the tomb, all the associated grave goods are also brought in, and this is confirmed by archaeological evidence.

Fig. 12.3: Ostracon Manchester 5886 (Courtesy of Manchester Museum, University of Manchester).

Plans of intact tombs clearly indicate that the coffin would have been the first item to have been placed in the tomb chamber, and then various grave goods would have been placed around, and on top of it, that is to say the tomb was not provisioned before the time of the actual burial. It thus follows that if only a small number of people are actually present in the tomb chamber when the coffins are being laid to rest, then this small number of people have a window of opportunity to rob the burials unnoticed (Näser 2008, 453–454; 2013, 649), and this indeed seems to have been the case in MMA 60. The coffins belonging to three of these individuals, Henettawy B, Djedmutesankh A and Henettawy C, originally had gilded faces, which had been hacked away in antiquity, either before, or at the same time as the next burial, that of Menkheperre C, found intact, was placed in the chamber. However, this is only part of the story since the mummies of Henettawy B and Djedmutesankh A had also been rifled in antiquity, for in both cases the outermost layer of bandages had been carefully retied over the disturbed inner ones. Significantly neither were found with any bracelets, finger rings nor pectorals

that were still present on the mummy of Henettawy C, and one would presume that such items would have originally been provided for all three women. Sticky fingerprints indicate that these disturbances must have taken place while the bodies were being embalmed, so one cannot but suspect that the undertakers were responsible. Winlock (1942, 113–114) rather picturesquely describes what he found at the moment he excavated this "intact" tomb:

> The mummies of Hent-towy, daughter of Ist-em-Kheb, and of Nesit-Iset lay just as they had been placed in the grave, and we had every reason to believe that they were still intact. The tapes, the outer sheet, and the Osiris sheet were neatly and carefully folded on the bodies, and stitched up the back. Everything was in perfect order at first, and then gradually as we unwrapped them, we began to find more and more confusion among the bandages over the chest. The truth dawned on us when we found at last, on both mummies casts in the resin of the metal pectoral hawks themselves gone. Then we noticed that the heart scarabs in both cases had been taken out and then put back carelessly;[2] that around the torn bandages on the chest there were the marks of fingers sticky with resin on layers of linen that should have been clean; and finally, that the left hand of Nesit-Iset had been laid bare in a search for finger rings. There can be little question as to what had happened here. The mummies had been rifled before they were even completely wrapped, and that must have taken place in the undertakers' own establishments. Fortunately for us, pieces

of metal jewelry only were being sought, and papyri or heart scarabs were useless to the thieves. But what a picture do we get for the moralists!

Similarly when tombs were reused, whether legally or not, it must have been tempting for the burial parties to ransack the earlier burials if they had not already been so violated. There are also several instances where the cutting of one tomb collides with another. During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties this is noticeable in the Valley of the Kings, where the tomb of Siptah broke into the anonymous tomb KV 32, Ramesses III broke into the Nineteenth Dynasty tomb of Amenmesse, and that of Ramesses VI hit the earlier anonymous tomb KV 12 (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996, 29, 155, 159; Brock 2016, 117–119). Such collisions would also have opened a window for opportunistic robberies of anything still remaining in the earlier tombs.

Professional robbers

A series of documents, collectively known as the Tomb Robbery Papyri (Peet 1920; 1930; Capart *et al.* 1936; Fig. 12.4), which date to the reigns of Ramesses IX and Ramesses XI, vividly demonstrate the existence of professional gangs of tomb robbers. Essentially these papyri deal with accusations and court cases brought against a number of different people accused of tomb robbing. Papyrus BM 10221, dated to Year 16 of Ramesses IX, refers to a complaint that the tomb of Amenophis I had been broken into and robbed, and relates that a commission was sent to investigate this allegation, only to find that this tomb was still intact. At the same time the commission also inspected several other tombs of the Eleventh- and Seventeenth-Dynasty kings, located in Dra Abu el-Naga, all of which were found to be intact, with the notable exception of that of King Sobekemsaf and his wife, Queen Nubkhaes. Also included in this survey were four tombs of Divine Votaresses, two of which were found to be intact, and two violated, while all of the tombs of "lesser personnages" examined were robbed (Peet 1930, 30). However, that a number of other royal tombs, not mentioned in papyrus BM 10021, had indeed been robbed is clear from Papyri London BM 10053 recto and London BM 10068 recto, which refer to objects stolen from the tomb of Isis, wife of Ramesses III, by a gang of eight who then sold or gave them to a large number of others (Peet 1930, 72–82; Strudwick unpublished). Papyrus Mayer B (Liverpool M 11186), shows that a gang of five were responsible for breaking into the tomb of Ramesses VI (Peet 1920, 19–20), whilst Papyrus Mayer A (Liverpool M 11162) refers to a number of tombs broken into in the Valley of the Queens (Peet 1920, 12). That the culprits who robbed the tomb of king Sobekemsaf were indeed caught is clear from Papyrus Leopold II, also dated to year 16 of Ramesses IX. Essentially this papyrus consists of the confession given by the stonemason, Amenpanefer, who records that he and a fellow stonemason, Hapiwer, fell into the habit of occasionally robbing tombs. Then in Year 13 [of Ramesses IX, so four years before the date of the confession] they joined forces with the carpenter Sethnakhte, the painter Hapi-o, the carpenter Irenamun, the field labourer Amenemhab, the water-pourer Khaemwase and the boatman Ahay to rob tombs "in accordance with our regular habit and we found the tomb of king Sobekemsaf … [and] I, together with the other thieves who are with me, have continued down to this day in the practice of robbing the tombs of the nobles and people of the land who rest in the west of Thebes. And a large number of people of the land rob them as well, and are (as good as) partners (of ours)" (Capart *et al.* 1936, 171–172; *cf.* Peet 1930, 48). This same Amenpanefer and most of his confederates also appear in Papyrus London
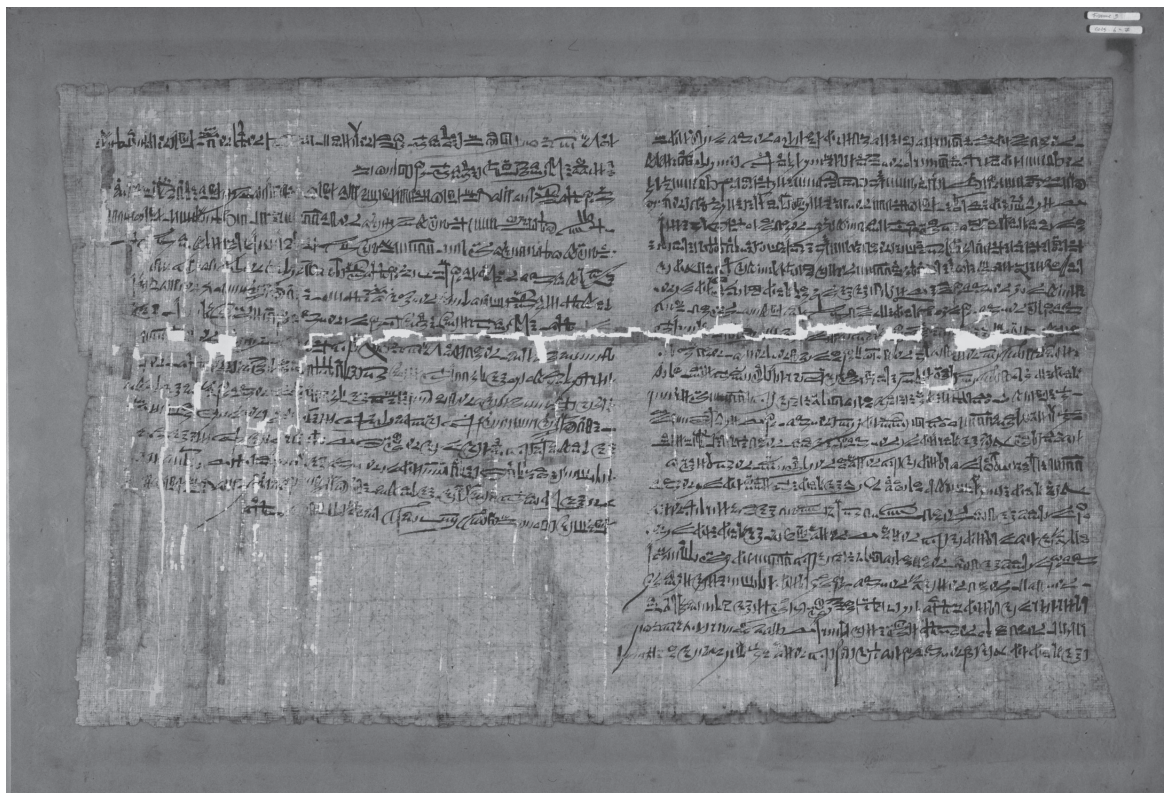
Fig. 12.4: One of the Tomb Robbery Papyri, London BM 10221 (The Abbot Papyrus) (Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum).

BM 10054, in which they admit to breaking into several other tombs. BM 10054 is a somewhat disjointed papyrus which contains several jottings, many of which are unrelated to each other, but some of these entries refer to other tomb robbers (Peet 1930, 60–63). Clearly, therefore, tomb robbery within private tombs was commonplace, although there are few records of any punishment. It would appear that only when thieves dared to rob royal burials, did the government of the day become involved in apprehending the culprits (Strudwick unpublished).

These tomb robbery papyri also show that the most valued items likely to be stolen were linen garments, easily disposable without trace, and above all metal objects, usually in the form of amulets and bronze vessels, but most often silver and gold, which was stripped from the inlaid coffins (Phillips 1992, 163–164; Strudwick 2013b, 344–345; unpublished). This was sometimes done in the tomb itself, but often, it seems, the thieves opened the coffins, threw out the occupant, and transported the empty coffins to the (unidentified) Island of Amenemopet, where they were set on fire in order to collect the molten metal, as recorded in papyrus BM 10054 (Peet 1930, 61). Other stolen materials were remade into new items. Papyrus London BM 10053 verso, which deals with objects stolen from a temple rather than a tomb, reveals that as well as metal objects, wood was also much prized. In one instance it is reported that the scribe Sedi gave four stolen boards of cedar to the woman Teherer, who had them made into a coffin for herself (Peet 1930, 119).

Official robberies

The tomb robbery papyri show that in Year 16 of Ramesses IX, most of the kings' tombs were still intact, whereas practically all the private tombs investigated were found to have been disturbed; however the fact that such an enquiry took place at all may have given the state the idea that countless amounts of wealth were tied up in the gold and other precious items associated with earlier burials, and by late in the reign of Ramesses XI, the High Priest and military commander, Paiankh, was giving explicit instructions to the scribe of the necropolis, Butehamun, to locate an intact tomb (Papyrus London BM 10375 – Wente 1967, 59–65; 1990, 195), so that Paiankh could appropriate some of the wealth ostensibly buried therein, presumably to fund his ongoing campaign in Nubia (Reeves 1984 I, 300–301; 1990, 277). However this was evidently not really legal, and clearly did not go unnoticed since in the letters Papyri Berlin 10487, Berlin 10488 and Berlin 10489 we find Paiankh writing to the scribe Tjaroy (10487), his employee Paysheweben (10488) and his wife Nodjmet (10489), using exactly the same words:

> I have noted all matters about which you have written. As for this matter of these two policeman saying "they said these words" join up with Nodjmet and Paysheweben (10487)/Nodjmet (10488)/Payshuben (10499) as well as the scribe Tjaroy (10488/10489) and send and have these policemen brought to my house and get to the bottom of their words in short order and then slay them, place them in two baskets, and throw them into the water by night. But do not let anybody of this land find out about them. (Wente 1990, 184–185)

Similarly starting in the reign of Ramesses XI, and continuing into the early reign of Psusennes I (*c.* 1040–991 BC), the state also began to actively "plunder" the royal burials in the Valley of the Kings ostensibly to "renew" them (Reeves 1990, 276–278; 2017; Taylor 1992, 186; 2016, 360–362; Jansen-Winkeln 1995, 66–67). During these "renewals" we may suppose any items of value would have been appropriated for the royal treasury, and, in this sense, it should not be forgotten that the Twenty-first Dynasty royal burials at Tanis contained a number of items which may have come from the Valley of the Kings; Psusennes I even being buried in a sarcophagus which had clearly been removed from the tomb of Merenptah (Montet 1951, 111–126), while the Twenty-first Dynasty High Priest of Amun, Menkheperre A may have appropriated a sarcophagus from KV 5, the tomb of the sons of the Nineteenth Dynasty pharaoh Ramesses II (Damarany and Cahail 2016, 27). Fortunately most of the pharaohs once buried in the Valley of the Kings are still extant, their coffined bodies being found in the so-called "Royal Cache" in 1881, or in the tomb of Amenophis II in 1898. The coffins found in the royal cache had all been stripped of their gilding, which had undoubtedly been melted down and reused. At first these "renewals" were undertaken with care, the buried person often being carefully resealed within his or her original tomb. This is most obvious in the "intact" tomb of early Eighteenth Dynasty queen Meryetamun, whose burial was "restored" in Year 19 of Smendes I (*c.* 1050 BC). She was found, newly wrapped – obviously the mummy would have been unwrapped to extract any metal pectorals and jewellery buried on the body – in her original tomb, within her original coffin, albeit the latter had been stripped of its valuable inlays (Winlock 1932, 16–24). The manner in which the royal dead and their coffins were treated by these "restoration teams" was often somewhat callous. For example, several of the bodies display holes punched through the top of the skull, which Reeves (2017, 434) suggests is evidently the result of standing the mummy on its toes and striking hard with a sharpened adze, permitting the bandages to be torn down from top to bottom to access the jewellery wrapped within. Some of the coffins show equally rough

treatment: that of Tuthmosis III (Cairo CG 61014), for example, once richly gilded, had had its surface thoroughly adzed-over to remove every scrap of gold leaf – with the official identity of the perpetrators conveniently indicated by the fact that the king's name and titles had been left intact on the inner surface of the coffin case for purposes of identification. However, not all of the royal dead and their coffins had been treated in such a devastating way: along with those bodies which were hacked and badly broken the Royal Cache yielded some of the best-preserved mummies ever found. What appears certain is that as the dismantling of the royal burials progressed, a callous indifference set in, reflected today in the widely varying condition of the mummies and coffins which have come down to us. Reeves (2017, 436) has plausibly argued that as time went on the "renewal" of these royal burials took place on a conveyor-belt system, so that King A would have been taken out of his coffin, unwrapped so that the jewellery could be removed, rewrapped in new linen, and then placed in an already "refurbished" or completely new coffin, whilst his own coffin was stripped of its valuable inlays. King B would then be taken out of his coffin, "renewed" and then placed in King A's original now-stripped coffin and so on.

Re-cycling of grave goods by family descendants

While the above texts all relate to what is in effect tomb robbery, the reuse of grave goods by family members who may have entered the tombs of their ancestors in order to reuse family "heirlooms" is not likely to have been recorded. What is more it would be extremely hard to recognise within the archaeological record – the finding of an obvious antique within a tomb does not necessarily mean that said antique was plundered from an earlier grave. However, there is one essential item that often shows signs of reuse. Over 50%, or more than 400, of all known Twentieth- and Twenty-first-Dynasty coffins bear clear evidence of having been recycled (Cooney 2014a, 46; 2017, 103–109; 2019). Often this consists of a simple changing of the name, but in many cases the coffins are also modified stylistically, such as being adapted for the other gender, or are simply painted over to adapt them to a newer style. In essence this is not so difficult since, while the typical "yellow" coffins of the late Twentieth and Twenty-first Dynasties show a continuous line of development, the changes are not so marked as to be incapable of adaptation. As an example of the recycling of grave goods by family members, one may quote the "intact" family tomb of Sennedjem, Theban Tomb 1 (Toda 1887; Shedid 1994). When found it contained twenty-two individuals, nine of whom were interred within coffins and thirteen without, along with a host of typical Nineteenth Dynasty grave goods. In addition to the nine coffined burials, the outer wooden coffins of Sennedjem and Khonsu were found dismantled in a corner. Traditionally it is assumed that the un-coffined bodies are poorer family members, unable to purchase a coffin, but who benefitted from burial with richer members of the family (Näser 2001, 463; 2013, 655; Cooney 2007, 278). Cooney (2011, 15), however, now believes that these "poorer members" were originally buried in coffins which had been removed, redecorated and then used by other individuals in Dynasty 20. Based on the large number of reused coffins extant, this hypothesis seems very likely, if unprovable.

The move from single burials to cache burials

From what has been written above, it is evident that by the end of the Twentieth Dynasty and into the early Twenty-first Dynasty, the making of new tombs had been all but abandoned, and those

which existed were being reused and/or usurped with increasing frequency. Moreover the burials themselves were frequently being disturbed with accompanying grave goods being robbed and/or recycled. One might have supposed that this would have led to a change in funerary customs, and it may be thought that burials would be kept together for greater security. Indeed a number of Twenty-first Dynasty caches, of which the largest contained 153 burials, are known (Aston 2009, 164–202, 221–231; Cooney 2011, 17; de Sousa 2018; Aston in press) but what is odd is that these caches, at least in the case of non-royal cache burials, cover a remarkably short space of time during the reigns of Psusennes II, last king of the Twenty-first Dynasty, and Sheshonq I (*c.* 943–922 BC), first king of the Twenty-second Dynasty. Considering that tomb robbery had been taking place on a widespread scale during the Twentieth and earlier part of the Twenty-first Dynasties, why was there a move, only at the end of Dynasty 21 to collect together large numbers of burials for increased security? Kara Cooney (2019, 108) has made the interesting suggestion that it was precisely at the beginning of the Twenty-second Dynasty that the "yellow" coffins were going out of fashion, hence there was no longer a ready market for these old-fashioned coffins. Before then, with certain adjustments, Twenty-first Dynasty coffins could be reused *ad infinitum*. Presumably as long as it was considered justifiable to reuse earlier coffins, legally in the case of family members, illegally in the case of opportunistic robberies, there was probably no incentive for the families concerned to move the burials of their ancestors into less accessible areas. Indeed Cooney (2017, 108) even proposes that these coffins could have functioned as "parish coffins": rental objects, easily assigned and re-assigned as time and money demanded. However, what is more likely is that during the reigns of Psusennes II, and his successor, Sheshonq I, there was a major re-organisation of the Theban necropolis. In this re-organisation existing elite burials were collected and re-interred in several cache tombs. Security measures associated with this new re-structuring of the necropolis were apparently so successful that the caches and subsequent Theban burials of the Twenty-second Dynasty remained undisturbed to the end of the Pharaonic period, perhaps even down to the early years of the 19th century AD (Taylor 2010, 229).

Deliberate vandalism in ancient times

For the Egyptians an afterlife was dependent on the preservation of the corpse, hence the amount of care utilised in the preparation of the mummy. It thus follows that despoliation of the corpse would deprive the owner of its afterlife. It is therefore possible for people bearing grudges against the deceased to actively destroy the dead body. Unless, however, one found an "unrobbed" tomb in which the tomb owner's corpse was actually desecrated, as opposed to being broken up during tomb robbery in the search for items to steal, this would be hard to prove in the archaeological record. That it happened, or at least was feared, is however seen in a number of threat formulae (Morschauser 1991, passim; Harrington 2013, 128–129) which record all the dire happenings that will befall anyone who undertakes such an act, the most serious of which is death by fire – an event which by its nature destroys the body and hence the afterlife. What is more easily recognisable is the deliberate destruction of a tomb. While such acts of vandalism may be the result of private feuds (Baines 1989, 139–142), others may have been carried out by political enemies, particularly in the cases of tombs of people close to royalty and vulnerable to later kings' repudiation of their protectors' predecessors (Helck 1957, 537–547). It is thought, for example, that the tomb of the High Priest of Amun, Ramessesnakht, was deliberately destroyed by a rival faction during the so-called

"War of the High Priests" (Rummel 2018, 265–267). Older tombs could also be dismantled and their building materials reused in the construction of new tombs; but this was not something which significantly affected Thebes during the Late New Kingdom, since so few tombs were built here at this time. However, that this was feared is seen in an inscription, Boston 1972.651, from the Eighteenth-Dynasty tomb of Tjawy, which cautions: "as for any man, any overseers of work, and any necropolis workers who shall undertake any work [in this tomb] to make a tomb for another man, he shall not be buried in the west and he shall be in the displeasure of the gods…Khenty-amentiu and Wennofre will abandon him" (Simpson 1972, 78).

Modern disturbance

Visible tombs of the Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties continued to be reused or usurped from the Twenty-second Dynasty well into Roman times (Strudwick 2009–2010, 253), but it seems the chaos usually observed in them by modern archaeologists (Fig. 12.5) stems from the early years of the 19th century AD. It is true that above ground tomb chapels were sometimes inhabited by Coptic Christians, who often defaced the ancient tomb paintings but apparently did little or no damage to the concealed tomb chambers. In medieval times a trade grew up for the sale of *mumiya*, which was used for both medicinal and cosmetic uses (Fagan 1975, 44–47; Dannenfeldt 1985; Germer 1998, 95–101; Strudwick 2013a, 647–648), however this seems to have had little effect on the availability of mummies.

Indeed it was only at the beginning of the 19th century AD with the Napoleonic expedition of 1798, the discovery of the Rosetta Stone and subsequent decipherment of the hieroglyphs, and the opening of the country to European explorers, that antiquarian interest was again awakened in Egypt in general, and Thebes in particular. These early travellers, active from around 1810 to 1835, can be divided into two units: on the one hand there was a group of very talented artists focused on recording as much as possible, of whom David Roberts is perhaps the most famous; and on the other a bunch of collectors intent on making their fortune by amassing vast heaps of antiquities for sale, of whom the most memorable are Bernardino Drovetti and Henry Salt, both of whom collected antiquities on an industrial scale, and whose compilations formed the beginnings of the Egyptian collections of most major European museums (Thompson 2015, 129–189; Taylor in press). Fortunately these early travellers generally left detailed accounts of their voyages, many of them describing discoveries of apparently "intact" tombs, including descriptions of evidently Twentieth- to Twenty-First-Dynasty burials (d'Athanasi 1836, 57–59, 119–122; Aston 2017, 13–19). In order to supply these antiquities collectors, the local Theban inhabitants would search for tombs, but on the assumption that the collectors only wanted complete and easily portable items, they would often destroy more than they salvaged. On watching the discovery of a tomb in the 1820s, Edward Lane (2000, 239) wrote that he "once saw a tomb of this kind opened and examined. The pit was eight feet by four in width and twenty-five feet deep. At the bottom were two small chambers, one opposite the other: one of these was empty: the entrance of the other was closed by a wall of crude bricks [compare Fig. 12.3]. The latter chamber contained four mummies; each in a chest…The three inferior mummies were broken up on the spot; the other was carried away to be examined more carefully…". Evidently the tomb chamber closed by a wall of crude bricks had survived intact until then. During the second half of the 19th century, often as a result of the paintings and

Fig 12.5: View into the Valley of the Kings tomb KV 40 at the time of its excavation by the University of Basel Kings' Valley Project (Courtesy of University of Basel Kings' Valley Project).

collections made by this first band of travellers, an obsession with everything Egyptian came to dominate fashion, architecture, literature and funerary design. Alongside this Egyptomania, tourism developed manifold and, with it, a desire to bring home souvenirs (Ikram and Dodson 1998, 64–72; Baber 2016). Such mementos included mummies, funerary objects and, often, reliefs cut from tomb walls. Graves which had survived intact for almost 3000 years were now finally and irretrievably destroyed.

Conclusions

It is this widespread destruction during the 19th century AD which makes it almost impossible to contrast the Egyptian ideas of tomb preservation and grave disturbance in the archaeological evidence. Texts reveal an ideal scenario in which one should build a magnificently decorated tomb for oneself and spouse, with the tomb remaining undisturbed for all eternity. However, while this ideal is expressed in normative mortuary monuments and texts, the archaeological evidence and

a small number of sceptical texts show the contrast between this ideal and evidence of neglect, destruction and re-use, particularly in the medium- and long-term (Baines and Lacovara 2002, 5).

Some texts show an awareness of the issue of grave disturbance; for example some of the so-called Harper's Songs (Lichtheim 1945) pessimistically ask what has happened to those who went before, since their monuments have fallen into disrepair, it is as if they never existed, and much better you spend your time in eating, drinking and making holidays. Meanwhile threat formulae indicate that the builders of the tombs feared, and perhaps expected, that their tombs would be disturbed in some way, which makes one wonder why so much time and expenditure was invested in making elaborate sepulchres in the first place. One explanation may be that going through the motions of tomb construction, burial and mortuary cult was enough, and that it was not important whether this was done correctly and the cult maintained (Baines and Lacovara 2002, 26). The extant texts which have come down to us indicate that phases of deliberate tomb robbery on a wide-scale, as opposed to possibly legitimate grave disturbance by family members, only occurred in times of severe economic stress. In prosperous times, not only was there little incentive to extract the wealth buried in tombs, but the cemeteries may have been better guarded.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   Papyrus London BM 10221 4.2 – Peet 1930, 39.
2   Heart scarabs are generally inscribed with the name of the deceased and are thus difficult to reuse.

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