



# BEYOND DEATH

EXPLORING THE USES OF DEAD BODIES,  
FUNERARY OBJECTS, AND BURIAL SPACES  
THROUGH TIME

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, VIENNA

2-4 MAY 2018

Organizers:

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No registration fee



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Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology

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## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

### BEYOND DEATH

This conference explores the uses and meanings of dead bodies, objects, and burial spaces over long periods of time. As this topic is most fruitfully approached from a wide range of perspectives, *Beyond Death* includes contributions from the fields of archaeology, literary studies, social and physical anthropology, and history. This conference raises one or several of the following questions: How is it that the dead become flashpoints of controversy, interest, and identity for the living? How have interactions with dead bodies and related artefacts been used in different time periods and cultures to underwrite, rewrite, or overturn narratives of national or community origin? How and why do material remains come to embody the past in the present, collapsing essential distinctions in temporality?

The Beyond Death conference is one of the outputs of the HERA UP-funded project DEEPDEAD (*Deploying the Dead: Artefacts and Human Bodies in Socio-Cultural Transformations*). DEEPDEAD is a collaboration involving literary scholars, archaeologists and anthropologists in the UK, Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The project examines historic and prehistoric encounters with human remains and artefacts in order to shed light on their cultural and social power. Through a series of case studies juxtaposing distinct eras, cultures, and types of evidence, the DEEPDEAD project focusses on what is constant and what is locally and historically specific in our ways of interacting with the long-dead. Identifying the meanings and mechanisms of past interactions with the dead in order to inform our understanding of present-day discoveries and dilemmas is one of the goals of the project.



The DEEPDEAD project (2016–2019) is funded under the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) Joint Research Programme III: The Uses of the Past ('Deploying the Dead' – UP CRP [no. 15.055]) and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 649307.

For more information see <http://www.deepdead.eu/>

# PROGRAMME

## WEDNESDAY, 2 MAY 2018

18:00 INAUGURAL LECTURE

**Paul Pettitt, UK**

*Hominin Evolutionary Thanatology. The Long-Term Evolution of Mortuary Activity from Face-to-Face to Place*

c. 19:15 WINE RECEPTION

## THURSDAY, 3 MAY 2018

09:15–09:30 **Estella Weiss-Krejci, Austria & Sebastian Becker, Austria**

*Introduction*

### THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PRACTICES

09:30–10:00 **Julia M.H. Smith, UK**

*Martyrs, Bones and Bodies. Rethinking the Origins of Christian Relic Cults*

10:00–10:30 **Astrid A. Noterman, France & Alison Klevnäs, Sweden**

*Interacting with the Dead. Grave Disturbance in Early Medieval Europe*

10:30–11:00 COFFEE BREAK

### THE LONG-DEAD AS MEDIATORS OF RELATIONSHIPS

11:00–11:30 **Naomi Howell, UK**

*Saracens at St Albans. The Heart-Case of Roger de Norton*

11:30–12:00 **Miriam Edlich-Muth, Germany**

*Dissolving Subjects in Medieval Reliquaries and Twentieth-Century Mass Graves*

12:00–12:30 DISCUSSION

12:30–14:30 LUNCH BREAK

### PRACTICES OF RE-USE AND RECONSTRUCTION

14:30–15:00 **Antonius C.G.M. Robben, Netherlands**

*The Materiality of Mourning. Urban Death and the Rebuilding of Postwar Rotterdam*

15:00–15:30 **Robert Schumann, Germany**

*Reuses of Ancient Burial Grounds in the Metal Ages of Southern Central Europe. A Diachronic View on the Perception and Appropriation of Older Monuments*

15:30–16:00 **Roman Gundacker, Austria**

*Visitors, Renovators and Usurpers. Glimpses from the History of Egyptian Sepulchral Monuments*

16:00–16:30 COFFEE BREAK

## PERSPECTIVES ON TROPHIES

- 16:30–17:00**     **Maria Teschler-Nicola**, Austria  
*Complex Varieties. The Human Remains from the La Tène Central Settlement of Roseldorf (Lower Austria) and their Archaeothanatological Evidence*
- 17:00–17:30**     **Johannes Feichtinger**, Austria & **Johann Heiss**, Austria  
*Headhunting in Vienna*
- 17:30–18:00**     DISCUSSION
- 19:30**             SPEAKERS' DINNER

## FRIDAY, 4 MAY 2018

### CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES AND RESPONSES TO THE LONG-DEAD

- 09:30–10:00**     **Mike Parker Pearson**, UK  
*Burial and Reburial at Stonehenge*
- 10:00–10:30**     **Harald Meller**, Germany  
*Interacting with the Dead. Queen Eadgyth and the Soldiers from the Mass Grave at the Site of the Battle of Lützen – Case Studies from the State Museum of Prehistory Halle (Saale)*
- 10:30–11:00**     **Ladislav Šmejda**, Czech Republic  
*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust: necrosols as part of our post-mortem materiality*
- 11:00–11:30**     COFFEE BREAK

### FICTION &/VS. REALITY. LITERARY APPROACHES TO THE LONG-DEAD

- 11:30–12:00**     **Philip Schwyzer**, UK  
*Shakespearean Exhumations. Richard III, The Princes in the Tower, and the Prehistoric Romeo and Juliet*
- 12:00–12:30**     **Sarah Briest**, Germany  
*Cavalier about Death. Lancelot's Relation to Mortality in Chrétien de Troyes' Knight of the Cart*
- 12:30–13:00**     **Sebastian Becker**, Austria & **Estella Weiss-Krejci**, Austria  
*Reading between the Bodies. Archaeological Writing and Memory Work*
- 13:00–13:30**     DISCUSSION
- 13:30**             END OF CONFERENCE

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# ABSTRACTS

Wednesday, 2 May 2018

## Hominin Evolutionary Thanatology. The Long-Term Evolution of Mortuary Activity from Face-to-Face to Place

**Paul Pettitt**, Department of Archaeology, Durham University

The practices of burial and fragmentation of the human body are central concepts in human evolutionary archaeology, and graves, burial mounds and tombs unquestioned features of almost every known archaeological period. Culturally, we do not find it odd to burn or bury our dead; to conduct elaborate social activities around death such as funerals and expressions of mourning. But how did these evolve, and in what social contexts? I will present here a long-term model of the evolution of such behaviours, drawing on the newly emerging discipline of evolutionary thanatology. I propose that over the evolutionary scale, the movement, covering and consumption of the body has extremely deep (insect) roots, on which primate-level social elaboration of activities increased as hominin groups grew in size, until the point around 100,000 years ago when social complexity was such that transient face-to-face mortuary activity was no longer sustainable. At this point, the landscape began to have a meaningful association with the dead. Viewed in the context of the psychology of hunter-gatherers, the rather odd set of burials from the European Mid and Late Upper Palaeolithic make sense, as ritual containments, as to the final Palaeolithic cemeteries, which emerge in the context of increasing sedentism. I will illustrate this talk with new examples of collaborative research with primatologists and Palaeolithic archaeologists.

Thursday, 3 May 2018

## THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PRACTICES

### Martyrs, Bones and Bodies. Rethinking the Origins of Christian Relic Cults

**Julia M.H. Smith**, Faculty of History, University of Oxford

Previous scholarship on the emergence of the Christian cult of saints' corporeal relics has relied on two points of departure: assumptions about the polluting effect of contact with the dead in the ancient world, and legislation declaring it sacrilege to interfere with tombs. By contrast, I shall start from a brief review of what we know burial practices in the fourth- and fifth-century Roman world. This suggests that, the provinces where the use of human body parts as relic is first attested are also those where burial conventions enabled easy access to corporeal remains. I shall also suggest that the history of the translation of saints' relics has not taken proper account of the distinction between transferring the remains of a dead person; separating the bones of a skeleton for distribution; and cutting, breaking or otherwise fragmenting a bone.

### Interacting with the Dead. Grave Disturbance in Early Medieval Europe

**Astrid A. Noterman**, UMR 7302 CESCUM, UMR 6273 CRAHAM & **Alison Klevnäs**, Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies, Stockholm University

One of the most intriguing chapters in Merovingian-period archaeology is an outbreak of grave disturbance which stretched from England to Transylvania, peaking in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Thousands of recent burials were reopened and rifled, with grave-goods and human remains removed or scattered. Traditionally labelled as grave-robbery (*Grabraub*), this early reopening has been recognised since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but until recently little comparative work had been carried out between sites or regions, and there was almost no systematic research into its causes. The phenomenon has generally been perceived as an obstacle to cemetery analyses and interpreted as an activity driven by common-sense material motives.



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In recent years, substantive empirical research is being carried out in England, Germany, France, the Low Countries, and Austria (reopenedgraves.eu). New research methodologies have been applied to the study of disturbed graves (archaeothanatology), and collaborations developed between archaeologists, but also with historians. Results so far include significant new findings about the date, extent and nature of the practices, which appear to be closely related to the burial rituals themselves.

This paper will give an overview of the research to date and introduce a new project being launched this year by the authors. Based at Stockholm University and funded by the Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*), the project will study early medieval reopening practices as a source for past understanding of such fundamental concepts as death, the body, commemoration, ownerships and ancestors.

## THE LONG-DEAD AS MEDIATORS OF RELATIONSHIPS

### Saracens at St Albans. The Heart-Case of Roger de Norton

**Naomi Howell**, Department of English, University of Exeter

In 1872, a curious object was discovered under the paving of St Alban's Abbey. At the base of a cylindrical hole near the east end lay a decayed round wooden box. This was soon identified as the heart-case of Abbot Roger de Norton (d. 1291). Separate burial of the heart was fairly unusual for monks, still more so when the body was interred within the same building. The container, too, is unlike others of the period, for it clearly originates in the Islamic world and bears a benedictory Arabic inscription in Kufic script. Probably created in eleventh- or twelfth-century Afghanistan, the box was already more than a century old at the time of its reuse and burial.

The box participates in a contemporary fashion for real and feigned Arabic text on high-status objects. Yet, as this paper will explore, it also highlights a complex relationship with the Saracen world. For the clergy of thirteenth-century St Albans, the Saracens were strangely close to home – or rather, their distance from contemporary St Albans could be seen as a matter of time rather than space. Matthew Paris's *Vie de St Auban* presents itself as the work of a 'miscreant Saracen' who became a Christian after witnessing the death of Britain's first martyr, Alban. Elsewhere (*Gesta Abbatum*) Matthew elaborates the story, describing how a Life of St Alban in a barbaric tongue was discovered in the course of tenth-century excavations at the Abbey. There is thus a fascinating reciprocity: the same earth that gives up the 'Saracen' story of the Christian saint, later receives back into itself the Christian heart of Roger de Norton in its Saracen container.

## Dissolving Subjects in Medieval Reliquaries and Twentieth-Century Mass Graves

**Miriam Edlich-Muth**, Department of English, University of Düsseldorf

In 2009, following a lengthy legal battle, an official court decree ordered the excavation of private land located on the grounds of a former concentration camp in Jamlitz, Brandenburg. The decision was based on extensive evidence that this land was the site of a mass grave containing the remains of Hungarian, Polish and German Jews who had been murdered during the Holocaust. The dispute, in which the burial rights of the as yet undiscovered human remains had come head to head with the rights and wishes of the landowner became the focus of intense public debate. This cross-period paper compares the assumptions and values underlying this dispute with contemporary responses to medieval relics and reliquaries. In doing so, it invites reflection on how individual self-perception and social identities can be shaped and threatened by engaging with human remains and the shifting and subjective contexts that inform their meaning.

## PRACTICES OF RE-USE AND RECONSTRUCTION

### The Materiality of Mourning. Urban Death and the Rebuilding of Postwar Rotterdam

**Antonius C.G.M. Robben**, Department of Anthropology, Utrecht University

The German and Allied bombing of Rotterdam during the Second World War caused nearly one thousand civilian dead and severely damaged the city. Unlike in most other bombed European cities, no efforts were made to rebuild the centuries-old houses and restore the old centre. The rubble was dumped into city canals

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to create new avenues and improve the traffic circulation. The municipal government and urban planners downplayed the old centre's historical value and dismissed the yearning for pre-war Rotterdam as misplaced romanticism. Was the clearing of ruins and the construction of an entirely modern city a way of mourning the dead and the destroyed centre? This presentation examines the relation between a place of death and a place of urban reconstruction as the materialization of a dual process of mourning and recovery. Survivors coped with the loss of affective bonds to the dead and the historic centre by nurturing the emergent social and place attachments in a dynamically developing urban environment.

### **Reuses of Ancient Burial Grounds in the Metal Ages of Southern Central Europe. A Diachronic View on the Perception and Appropriation of Older Monuments**

**Robert Schumann**, Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, Hamburg University

The reuse of ancient burial grounds in prehistory is a practice that has long been testified through archaeological investigations for several periods in European prehistory. As for example burial mounds form a distinctive feature in the landscape - partly even nowadays - the perception and appropriation of these does not come as a big surprise. Still, this appropriation and reuse for burials or other non-funerary activities offers insights into cultural practices that are only recently frequently discussed in the field. Normally these reuses are interpreted as ancestor worship - be it of putative or real ancestors - or the use of these monuments for legitimization of power structures and social distinction by elites. The diversity, frequency and distribution of such reuses nevertheless indicates that through time older monuments are reused not only by social elites but also by other parts of these culture groups and by different forms of settlement communities. In this talk, I want to show how the different culture groups of the Bronze and Iron Ages in southern Central Europe reuse ancient burial places as well as objects and discuss similarities and differences through time and space. These findings show the importance of the long gone in Bronze and Iron Age Europe and will be contrasted against different possible interpretations of the appropriation of the past.

### **Visitors, Renovators and Usurpers. Glimpses from the History of Egyptian Sepulchral Monuments**

**Roman Gundacker**, Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology, Austrian Academy of Sciences

The Egyptian ideal was to establish an everlasting mortuary cult in order to ensure eternal life for the deceased in yonder world. In most instances, families became unable to afford the cult or became extinct after a few generations; even royal monuments were abandoned over time. Their tombs and memorials then remained uncared for and were left to an uncertain future. However, over time, some of those monuments evolved to local attractions for visitors, some were piously restored, and some were usurped for reuse or dismantled in order to process the building materials for new edifices.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON TROPHIES**

### **Complex Varieties. The Human Remains from the La Tène Central Settlement of Roseldorf (Lower Austria) and their Archaeoethnological Evidence**

**Maria Teschler-Nicola**, Department of Anthropology, Natural History Museum Vienna

Our knowledge about the history and culture of the Celts is based only on a number of ancient written sources, iconographic evidence and archaeological findings from various sites across Europe; particular finds help elucidate aspects of the Celtic ideology, especially customs that revolved around certain sacrificial practices and the collection of corporeal trophies (e.g. the 'Head Cult', also known as 'headhunting'); the notion of an immortal soul also played a key role in this context. Recently important insights into the Celt's 'ideas of the afterlife', manifested in their burial and/or trophy customs, could be gleaned from the famous La Tène settlement at Roseldorf, Lower Austria, which is characterized by a variety of square ditch arrangements that are interpreted as 'sanctuaries'. The paper discusses finds recovered from the 'sanctuaries', which among

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others include intentionally destroyed material objects and a plethora of food waste (animal bones) together with gnawed, cut and hacked human skeletal fragments. The various bioanthropological and thanatological traces observed at Roseldorf will be discussed from the perspective of trophy-taking practices and complex multi-stage mortuary rituals.

## Headhunting in Vienna

**Johannes Feichtinger**, Institute of Culture Studies and Theatre History, Austrian Academy of Sciences & **Johann Heiss**, Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences

Usually heads of the enemies served as a clearly understandable symbol of victory, produced lust through fear, and satisfied the need for exoticism. Heads of enemies could be counted and used to pay off premiums during wars. They were (and still are) used for apotropaic purposes. With the head of a former regent the end of an epoch as well as and the end of an evil-doer could be announced. In the year 1683, Viennese students could promote their prowess in battle and indicate the weakness of the enemy when they ran through the town carrying heads of Turks on their lances. Business could be increased by selling dried heads of Turks on a market at Leipzig. Among others, the head of the Ottoman grand vezir Kara Mustafa who was defeated at the gates of Vienna in 1683 had been exhibited for almost three hundred years in the Viennese burghers' armory. This public exhibition of heads of the enemies contributed to the maintenance of the hostile image of the enemy, and at the same time offered a reassuring guarantee that the enemy was defeated.

## FRIDAY, 4 MAY 2018

### CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES AND RESPONSES TO THE LONG-DEAD

#### Burial and Reburial at Stonehenge

**Mike Parker Pearson**, Institute of Archaeology, University College London

Stonehenge is the largest known cemetery in Britain from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. Recent scientific analysis has revealed much about the people buried here – when they were buried, their age, sex and pathological conditions, and their origins. This predominantly cremation cemetery has been excavated at various moments in the last century, and the history of the burials' modern treatment has been as fascinating as their prehistory, involving conflicts between archaeologists, government ministers and modern-day druids.

#### Interacting with the Dead. Queen Eadgyth and the Soldiers from the Mass Grave at the Site of the Battle of Lützen – Case Studies from the State Museum of Prehistory Halle (Saale)

**Harald Meller**, Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie – Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte, Halle (Saale)

Investigating the deaths of human beings, their wider contexts, as well as the grave goods of the deceased represent essential parts of archaeological work. Through interdisciplinary cooperation and the combination of both classical and modern skills, new opportunities for archaeology arise, enabling us to learn more about the life of the deceased than even contemporary written sources are able to tell us. The archaeological discovery of skeletal remains which were identified as belonging to Princess Eadgyth of Wessex, King Otto I's first wife, led to the question of how to proceed with archaeological remains of certain individuals. Completely different possibilities but also challenges and obligations opened up with the discovery of the mass grave from the Thirty Years' War at Lützen. The presentation of the find in the context of the state exhibition *War – decoding its archaeological traces* 2015/16 in Halle (Saale) has shown that ethical responsibility and respectful interaction do not pose a contradiction to scientific work and modern exhibition practice.



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## Ashes to ashes, dust to dust: necrosols as part of our post-mortem materiality

Ladislav Šmejda, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic

This presentation aims to juxtapose scientific knowledge on the formation of cemetery soils and the perception of this type of research by the media and the public. Necrosols taxonomically belong to anthropogenic soils or technosols. Their characteristics include the presence of human remains and a mechanically disturbed soil profile. Human intervention contributes dominantly to changes in the physical and chemical properties of cemetery soils.

During the decomposition of buried cadavers, chemical substances are released from the putrefying body mass to the surrounding soil. This process affects, for a limited time or even permanently, the chemistry of the soil surrounding the body. There is also a great deal of variation in the extent of these changes in various parts of the grave in respect to the body. The scale of soil transformation by burial depends, among other things, on the intensity and length of use of cemetery plots. The impact of decomposed human bodies on the chemistry of necrosols is usually long-lasting and remains detectable by modern analytical methods for millennia. The material substance of the dead thus persists in the environment, either in the locally fixed or dispersed form, and interacts with the biosphere in a number of ways.

Experience gathered during the DEEPDEAD project revealed that the human imagination and excitement related to the post-mortem destiny of our mortal remains leads to a constant fascination and ongoing debate, framed by diverse religions and worldviews. Interestingly, publication of 'objective' analytical results and their interpretations in standard scientific outlets can elicit a number of contrasting responses in the media and communities across the globe.

## FICTION &/VS. REALITY. LITERARY APPROACHES TO THE LONG-DEAD

### Shakespearean Exhumations. Richard III, The Princes in the Tower, and the Prehistoric Romeo and Juliet

Philip Schwyzer, Department of English, University of Exeter, UK

This paper explores how Shakespeare's plays have been invoked and characterised in relation to three celebrated archaeological events over the last century: the exhumation of Richard III (2012), the forensic examination of the putative remains of the Princes in the Tower (1933), and the discovery of a pair of embracing prehistoric skeletons (2007). In the case of Richard III, archaeological and dramatic truths were seen as fundamentally opposed, with the hard evidence of archaeology triumphing over Shakespeare's fiction. Eighty years previously, on the other hand, Shakespeare's plays were cited as evidence that bones interred in Westminster Abbey really belonged to the murdered sons of Edward IV. In 2007, when the remains of a young man and woman were found locked in an embrace in a prehistoric grave near Mantua, the combination of the posture and the location led inevitably to the skeletons being dubbed the 'Neolithic Romeo and Juliet'; in this case, archaeological and dramatic truths were hailed as mutually confirming. As I shall conclude, the contest of authority between Shakespeare and mortuary archaeology remains a surprisingly live issue, one that may shed light on what is at stake in the public fascination with both.

### Cavalier about Death. Lancelot's Relation to Mortality in Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Cart*

Sarah Briest, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

In one of the defining scenes of Chrétien de Troyes' late 12th-century romance *The Knight of the Cart* (*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*) Lancelot lifts a massive tombstone in a mysterious cemetery of the future. This feat is confirmation that Lancelot is the hero destined to free all prisoners from Gorre, the land from which no one returns. In other close encounters with mortality the 'greatest knight alive' nearly falls to his death, fights to the death, suffers starvation and privation, and even attempts suicide. He crosses into an allegorical underworld or otherworld (Gorre) across the cutting blade of a sword bridge, earning 'stigmata' in the process, and succeeds in freeing the hostages – only to be held back himself (temporarily). This paper will look at Lancelot's roles as courtly lover and liberator, and, in particular, at his relation to death in the first extant narrative that features King Arthur's best knight and – in subsequent adaptations – the instrument of his downfall.

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## Reading between the Bodies. Archaeological Writing and Memory Work

**Sebastian Becker**, Austria & **Estella Weiss-Krejci**, Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria

The cemeteries, graves and bodies of the long-dead have always been a key topic in archaeology, but the ways in which archaeologists write about them has received comparatively little attention. That is rather unfortunate as the writings of archaeologists not only provide us with information concerning the context and relation to other archaeological finds but also constitute a form of memory work, and thus a field of research in its own right. While modern research and the application of scientific methods has tremendously aided us in not only understanding why specific dead came to die and why they were buried in a certain way but also answering questions on a larger scale (e.g. ancient migrations, population related diseases), it is first and foremost through texts that the long-dead continue to have a presence in our collective cultural memory. At a deeper level, and conversely, archaeological texts about dead bodies often incorporate and respond to societal attitudes towards death; as a matter of fact, it is the societal preconditions that determine the kinds of question that archaeologists ask of the dead when they 'interrogate' them. Hence, apart from generating archaeological data, the archaeological literature concerning dead bodies provides a key resource to address epistemological questions and to explore the ways in which long-dead bodies are transmogrified into emblems of cultural memory.