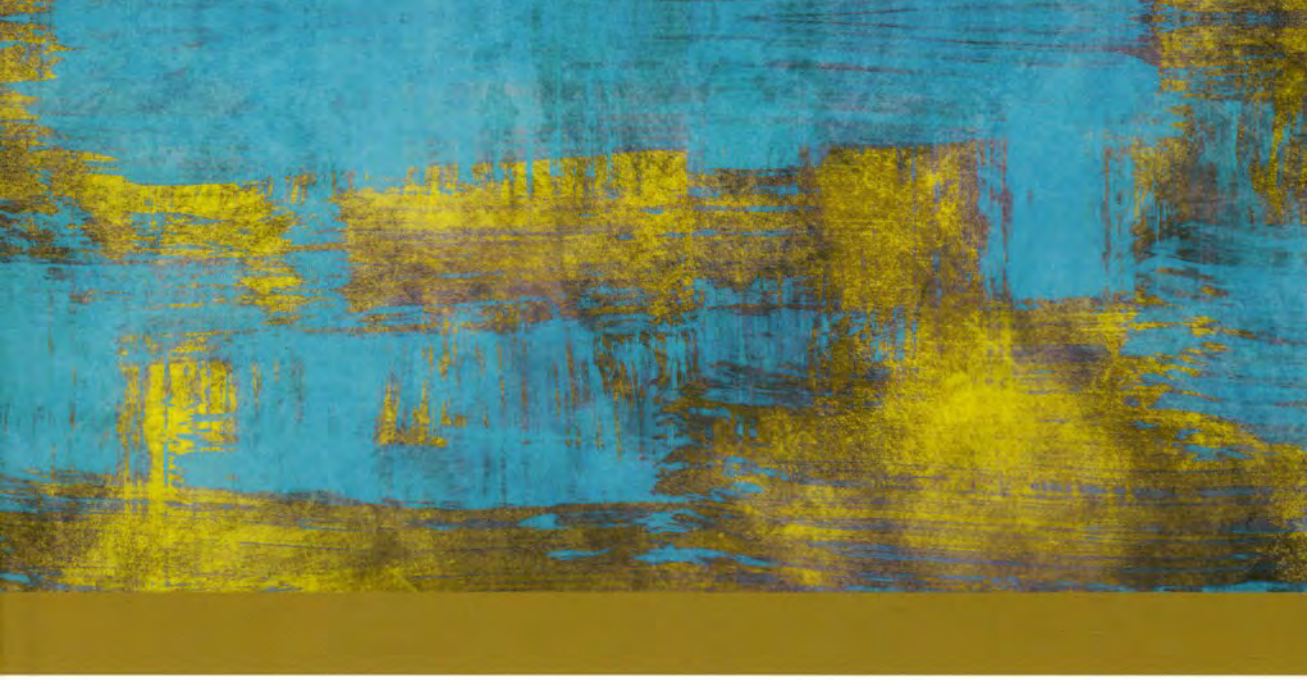

THE MATERIALITY AND SPATIALITY OF DEATH, BURIAL AND COMMEMORATION

Edited by
Christoph Klaus Streb and Thomas Kolnberger

The Materiality and Spatiality of Death, Burial and Commemoration

Death, dying and burial produce artefacts and occur in spatial contexts. The interplay between such materiality and the bereaved who commemorate the dead yields interpretations and creates meanings that can change over time. Materiality is more than simple matter, void of meaning or relevance. The apparent inanimate has meaning. It is charged with significance, has symbolic and interpretative value—perhaps a form of selfhood, which originates from the interaction with the animate. In our case, gravestones, bodily remains and the spatial order of the cemetery are explored for their material agency and relational constellations with human perceptions and actions. Consciously and unconsciously, by interacting with such materiality, one is creating meaning, while materiality retroactively provides a form of agency. Spatiality provides more than a mere context: it permits and shapes such interaction. Thus, artefacts, mementos and memorials are exteriorised, materialised and spatialized forms of human activity: they can be understood as cultural forms, the function of which is to sustain social life. However, they are also the medium through which values, ideas and criteria of social distinction are reproduced, legitimised or transformed.

This book will explore this interplay by going beyond the consideration of simple grave artefacts on the one hand and graveyards as a space on the other hand, to examine the specific interrelationships between materiality, spatiality, the living and the dead.

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Introduction: the materiality and spatiality of death, burial and commemoration

Christoph Klaus Streb and Thomas Kolnberger

Materiality is more than simple matter void of meaning or relevance. It is charged with significance, and has symbolic and interpretative value, perhaps even a form of selfhood. This is particularly true concerning the materiality of death. The physical properties of things have consequences for how objects are used or perceived. Human remains are a very particular matter; they represent a specific form of *recalcitrant* objects, because they literally *remain* and request explicit care in designated environments. Indeed, death, dying and burial produce artefacts and occur in spatial contexts. These contexts are organised in terms of a spatiality that depends on a society's 'choices of activities and its technical mastery. Spatiality is analysed on basis of the main components of the working of territories, namely appropriation, habitat, circulation, exploitation (or production) and administration (or management)' (Pumain, 2004). Spatiality, as the condition of being spatial, is understood here as having volume, i.e. three-dimensionality – taking up space and providing the context that permits and shapes such interactions with things. This idea is at the heart of this special issue. Thus, artefacts, mementos and memorials are conceptualised as exteriorised, materialised and spatialised forms of human activity. They can be understood as cultural forms that seek to sustain social life as a form of bonding beyond physical death. However, they are also the medium through which values, ideas and criteria of social distinction are reproduced, legitimated or transformed to also distinguish between the deceased. The interplays between such materiality, spatiality and the bereaved who commemorate the dead was the focus of an international conference organised in March 2017 by the University of Luxembourg.[1] This special issue includes papers presented at that conference and others submitted in response to a subsequent call for papers for this journal.

Shared insights into the materiality and the spatiality of death

Our focus on materiality pertains to haptical *things* which, in their physical existence, occupy a position in space. They also have a duration of time – a temporality. This angle has been recently explored as *materialities of passing*, which refers to the de facto handling of decaying matter 'and the vanishing of life through which the passage of time may be observed; with things passed on prior to dying, what the anticipation of

death and with the material forms with which people attempt to transcend or interact with the ultimate nothingness of those who have – or that which has – passed' (Bjerregard, Rasmussen, & Flohr-Sørensen, 2016, p. 6).

This special issue takes its cue from James Deetz's seminal *In small things forgotten* (1996), in which he addresses the seemingly plain objects of everyday life all around us, which can create meaning even after a long time has passed, breaking the ground for what has become historical archaeology. The relative overrepresentation of historical and archaeological contributions, while not intended by the editors, is in hindsight less surprising, given many archaeologists' interest in the nexus of materiality and space, especially in interaction with humans, dead or alive. The focus on material remains and their evolving significance and relevance may also be linked to the work of Kenneth Foote (1997) on so-called landscapes of violence, i.e. spaces of past tragedies, and their changing meanings for future generations, or Sharon Macdonald's (2008) research into the painful material architectural legacy of Nazi materiality and space at Nuremberg, which has yielded fascinating perspectives on what impacts such architecture have on people – still today. What emerges from these examples is that materiality of artefacts as well as the space they take do something to people. Things, space, the living and the dead are all intertwined. We may not always be aware of it, but this interrelationship is at the heart of who we are. Ian Hodder (2012) has called this relationship between humans and things *entangled*, and while his work sheds light on the complexity of this relationship, one may argue that it falls short of considering spatiality as an additional dimension.

When investigating the materiality and the spatiality of death, burial and commemoration, post-phenomenological research offers new perspectives. It refuses to be textuality-driven and is opposed to the object-centred nature of thinking (Ash & Simpson, 2014; Verbeek, 2005). Rather, things can be agents: 'Like humans, objects can make things happen, but unlike humans, no alternative decisions are possible for them' (Langer, 2010, p. 86). Thus, artefacts do more than fulfil their functions: they shape relationships, but don't make them. Alfred Gell (1998) calls this property 'secondary agency of the non-human world'. In such a world, there is a strong correlation between material things and space: objects are inherently spatially extent and their position in space – be it at random, be it on purpose – shape a place, for instance, a cemetery (Habermas, 1999, p. 77). Thus, in their individual sets of approaches, the so-called *material turn* and the *spatial turn* share a strong correlational denominator: the production of space as agency of things. A cemetery, to stay with our example, is not 'a container space', merely containing objects, but 'a relational space' (Maddrell & Sidaway, 2010; Woodthorpe, 2010, p. 121). It is a historically evolved spatiality that has become 'reified in a series of sedimented enactments' (Law, 2002, p. 96).

How can we disentangle this knot of spatial and temporal relationships? The authors suggest starting with the analysis of an *event horizon*, a stratigraphy of object-oriented events by archaeological means. The stratum doesn't always need to be unburied, since it may belong to a present-time cemetery. According to Sørensen, an archaeology of contemporary material culture 'does not so much pursue the intentions and perceived strategies of contemporary individuals. Its strengths instead reside in taking material forms seriously and allowing them to formulate implicit as well as explicit agendas, taking its point of departure in the affective agency of materials rather that the verbalized or written narratives of human agents' (2010, p. 116). Thus, there is no

need to trowel a site's surface for isolating contexts; it is possible to establish sequences of grave object *sedimentation* without dissolving the context of this single surface by physical excavation. Old and brand-new graves share the same horizon, in which the old has never stopped being present. To paraphrase Heidegger, they are constantly *ready-to-hand* (*zuhanden sein*) for the grave owners, which makes them *present-at-hand* (*vorhanden*) for scientific analysis.

The cemetery, with its nested enclosures, is an entity that allows one to investigate 'material things as an ever-changing bundle of relations, to emphasize the way they are constantly fluid and in flux' (Fowler & Harris, 2015, p. 128) (compare Geismar & Horst, 2004 or Pels, Hetherington, & Vandenberghe, 2002), for two reasons: First, a typical cemetery contains this active surface fairly rigorously by its peripheral limits; second, this dynamic surface is subdivided into self-similar units of which the flux and flow can be charted, detected and correlated.

It could be hypothesised that the extraordinary space referred to as a cemetery, graveyard or burial ground is the result of the abovementioned multiple interrelationships between materiality and subjects (Streb, 2017). To study the constituting materiality and space, we suggest a multidata and multimethod approach that goes well beyond conventional historical archaeological research, a field typically very much concerned with this particular source of data. (Streb, Kolnberger, & Kmec, 2019).

The materiality and spatiality of death, burial and commemoration

In this special issue, we deal with not just one but a multitude of *places* for the dead to reside, in whatever shape or form, beyond the consideration of simple grave artefacts on the one hand and graveyards as a space on the other. We present historical and contemporary examples of the nexus between mortal remains and their burial places, i.e. the corporeality of dead bodies in relationship to their specific locations. The area of investigation is mainly continental Europe – Germany and France).

Historically, the Christian belief in the Resurrection of the Flesh made a definite place of custody mandatory for mortal remains: the churchyard. Based on archaeological evidence, **Hauke Kenzler** describes the origins and development of medieval and post-medieval cemeteries in Germany. Burials as interments are ritual acts of location, the spatial fix of which is a key aspect of funeral customs. In this context, Kenzler points to convergences and divergences between the spatial and ceremonial orders of Catholic and Protestant traditions over time. Dead bodies of Christians were not simply inhumated; they were accompanied by various objects: coffins, clothing, grave goods that referred to the person as belonging to the mortal and ephemeral world, making the *naked* corpse complete before the eternal soul was to meet its maker.

In the area of investigation, charnel houses were part of any God's acre until the Reformation, at most until the Age of Enlightenment. **Elizabeth Craig-Atkins, Jennifer Crangle, P.S. Barnwell, Dawn M. Hadley, Allan T. Adams, Ian Atkins, Jessica-Rose McGinn** and **Alice James** offer new perspectives on this particular curation of human remains. The case study of a medieval parish church in England is unique, yet also sheds light on medieval charnelling practices across Europe. The locations of the bone deposit

and the micro-location of bones within sacral architecture are interpreted here as secondary burial in the sense of a ritual, where the skeleton remains are sought to be placed – even at this stage – as closely as possible to the church altar.

Human bones have a special presence and agency, and not only to the mourner and prayer. They can be professionally *consumed* as objects of scientific investigation. Their affordance to examine and contextualise them make bodily remains irresistible objects, not only for osteoarchaeologists. While new ethical standards have fundamentally changed procedures, **Natalie Polzer** investigates the same agency as *consumption* by the *tourist gaze*. Her ethnographic approach further reveals the vicissitudes of the non-decaying corpses as an ongoing co-presence of the dead. In Polzer's interpretation, the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo (Sicily, 17th to late 19th century) as a place and its individual mummies work as a generator of cultural and social meaning. While mummies are a well-known solution to the problem of the decaying materiality of the human flesh, cremation represents the other extreme: the annihilation of any bodily form. Embalming takes an intermediate position.

Anne Carol links the rise of embalming to the rise of the modern cemetery and its multiplication of plot allocation. In France, the 1830s was the *golden age* of embalming. This technique of post mortem preservation prolonged the bodily familiarity of the deceased at his or her finest, while the new cemeteries became the place for mourning and the grave the spatial centre of the cult of the dead. Nowadays, it often seems as if materiality, at least in European context, is more an obstacle to be overcome than a quality to be preserved. However, following Carol's argumentation, it is not a paradox that the (current) rise in cremation rates (also in France) goes hand in hand with the renewed success of embalming.

Philippe Charrier and **Gaëlle Clavandier** explore the question what to do with bodily remains where there was no (independent) life. They distinguish between four categories: foetal death in utero, pregnancies terminated for medical reasons, late-term miscarriages and stillbirths (infants who are born alive but are not viable). These categories can be linked to different places foreseen for lifeless infants in today's French cemeteries.

The burial site remains important today, to administrators and the bereaved alike. Cremation transcends all types of limits. It has had a profound impact on burial location: the potential dispersion of 'sites'. In some cases, human ashes can even be transformed into new materiality such as synthetic diamonds, which make the remnants of a deceased hypermobile. **Anna-Katharina Balonier, Elizabeth Parsons** and **Anthony Patterson** investigate the limits of cemetery regulation of this development in Germany and the illusion of 'natural' burial.

Thorsten Benkel and **Matthias Meitzler** offer a sociological exploration of body and materiality. Based on practical research conducted on the thanatopractical environment (cemeteries, hospitals, hospices, forensic departments, and so on) in Central Europe, their theoretically well-informed contribution summarises approaches and perspectives on the nexus of bodily remains and their locations.

Note

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Post-medieval burial customs in Germany – an archaeological perspective on materiality and spatiality

Hauke Kenzler

ABSTRACT

People generally behave conservatively when dealing with their deceased as very few alterations in the funerary customs are detectable over centuries or even millennia. There were certain periods, however, when this was different and more rapid and radical changes occurred. There is, for example, a marked change-over in mortuary practices in central Europe during the transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern era following the years around 1500. Another major shift becomes visible in the 18th and 19th centuries. This paper serves as an overview concerning the archaeological research on the changing burial customs from the high medieval period until the early 20th century in Germany. Only a few excursions across the modern state borders into the wider German-speaking area are made. The main focus lies on the later post-medieval times with a special emphasis on the different beliefs in Catholic and Protestant areas and their archaeological manifestation. Of course, explanations for the discovered changes will also be suggested. Graves were used as a means of symbolic communication between this world and the hereafter. Therefore changes in burial custom – such as the location of the cemeteries, the location of the individual graves, and their furnishing with graves goods – always express changes in living culture as well.

1. The rediscovery of medieval and post-medieval cemeteries

In comparison to the early medieval period, and even high and late medieval times, the archaeological research of post-medieval graves – especially those of the 18th century and later – is still limited. Due to the numerous written and pictorial sources, it was assumed that no new knowledge concerning funerary practices could be gleaned. Thus, Christian burials were considered free of grave goods and their archaeological excavation had a somewhat dubious touch in professional circles because of their young age. If any documentation was done at all, they were regarded as disturbances of more important features, such as church walls. This attitude has shifted only within the last 25 years thanks to an increasing societal acceptance of medieval and post-medieval archaeology in general (see Kenzler, 2011, 2016; Thier, 1999; Wittkopp, 1997). The mortal remains of marginalized social groups – particularly those of executed criminals (Auler, 2008–2012), inmates of administrative detention facilities (Reitmaier, 2017), or concentration camps (Kola, 2000) – have received increased attention by archaeologists.

But even with this budding enthusiasm, the study of younger graves is not easy. Given that no excavations for research purposes may be carried out on known cemeteries, archaeology relies solely on observations during construction projects. This means that all funerary-related archaeological excavations are salvage excavations, done by governmental heritage departments or private companies and not by universities.

Only because the practice of burying the deceased within city boundaries was abandoned in the 19th or early 20th century, archaeological investigations are possible today. The Prussian states, for example, had determined in 1794 that no bodies were allowed to be buried within inhabited areas (Fischer, 1996, pp. 36–40). Thus, large communal cemeteries were established outside the gates of the towns. The older burial grounds then quickly vanished from the public memory. The catholic cemetery in front of the Weender Gate in Göttingen may serve as a prime example of this phenomenon (Großkopf, 2015). The catholic cemetery's last burial was carried out in 1910. Yet when conducting renovations to the church in 2011, just over one-hundred years later, the discovery of the first of 148 skeletons by a mechanical excavator proved to be a big surprise. Even in such cases when the church develops such projects, the existence of a former burial ground on the premises is unknown. Although the existence of a cemetery around every parish church has to be assumed, very often it is just good luck when a professional archaeological excavation of a post-medieval cemetery becomes possible.

But even when the excavations can be planned in advance by the heritage departments, the results are often unsatisfactory. Most excavations are limited in terms of their duration and the investigated area. Often only a few burials of much larger cemeteries are able to be examined, with the remainder subjected to destruction from pipe laying, lightning protection, or drainage systems around churches (Figure 1). In response, the heritage departments are trying to avoid expensive excavations by minimizing building activity on former cemeteries. It must also be noted that the preservation and restoration of grave goods is an extremely time consuming and costly process, because of the different materials and the sometimes very large number of finds, especially in post-medieval graves. Lack of money to fund such necessary processes is also the main reason why anthropological studies are usually missing.

Nevertheless, excavation results of about 100 post-medieval burial grounds have already been published for Germany, with the cemeteries of the 18th and 19th centuries making up the smallest number and with Protestant burial grounds outnumbering the Catholic burial grounds. Yet an essentially larger figure is still waiting to be scientifically processed. The many excavations of crypts, which are often carried out by building or art historians, are not even included in the aforementioned number (e.g. Fingerlin, 1992; Ströbl & Vick, 2007). The rapidly increasing archaeological interest in medieval and post-medieval burial grounds brought many new facets to light, which can now be compared over larger regions and across different denominations. Developments in Germany can now also be assessed in a transnational context alongside the already-published reports from other European countries (Jonsson, 2009; Tarlow, 2015).

2. Approach

To illustrate the differences between high and late medieval (Orthodox) and post-medieval (Catholic and Protestant) burial customs and ultimately the motives behind

Figure 1. Bayreuth, Germany.
Typical exacavation of a churchyard, in this case a drainage ditch around the Heilig Dreifaltigkeit (Holy Trinity) church in Bayreuth (Bavarian State Department of Monuments and Sites).

them, different aspects must be compared. For this purpose, the focus will go from a broad to a narrow scale. To begin, the burial ground as a whole will be considered, followed by an examination of the individual grave and its furnishings. Hasty burials near places of execution, on battlefields, or other exceptional varieties will be left unconsidered (e.g. Auler, 2008–2012; Lütgert, 2002; Maier, 1989).

On a cautionary note, archaeology can only detect specific aspects of the funeral ritual. Nothing can be said about the granting of the last sacraments in the Catholic belief or about the celebration of the Last Supper by the Protestants. The announcement of death, bell-ringing, wake, funeral procession, and funeral services are ultimately withdrawn from view. On the other hand, to a large extent written sources remain silent on the archaeological results. Not everything was written down and not all commandments were obeyed. Only in the synthesis of the different sources a more or less complete picture can be obtained.

3. The cemetery and its organization

The religious changes that came about during the Reformation demanded modifications in the location of the burial grounds and the position of the individual graves. How these modifications were enforced and how they subsequently affected Catholic burial grounds will be briefly presented. Significant changes, however, continued to occur well after the Reformation.

3.1. Medieval cemeteries

In the Christian Middle Ages, burials were usually placed around the church and therefore within the towns or villages (Figure 2). A burial *ad sanctos* was of great importance. In the medieval churchyard, the dead profited from the beneficial effects of the relics of the saints and the divine service nearby. The purview of the relics, calculated for actual distances by various synods, determined the size of the consecrated churchyard. A Roman Council essentially restricted the effect of the relics onto a vicinity of 60 steps for the main churches and 30 steps for the chapels in the year 1058 (Werner & Werner, 1988, p. 247). They therefore established, in an idealized way, a circle around the church that could not be expanded at will (Sörries, 2002, p. 90). Equally fundamental was the idea of purgatory as a place for the

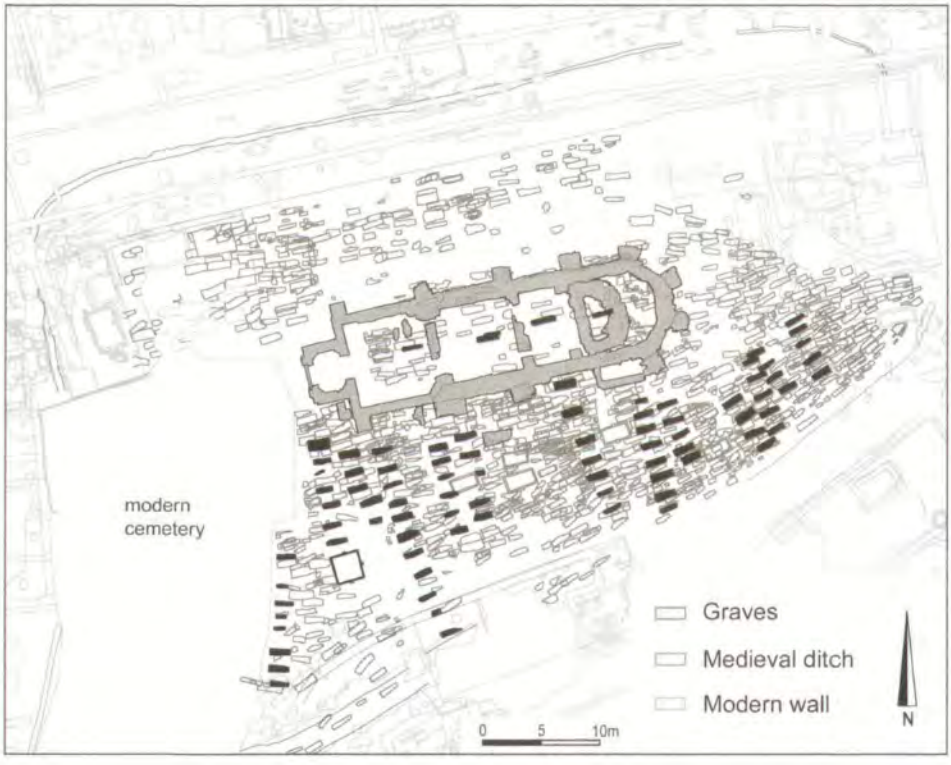

Figure 2. Excavation plan of the cemetery of Breunsdorf near Leipzig, Germany.
The excavated graves date from the first half of the 12th to the late 19th century. Some of the more obvious 17th to 19th century grave rows are marked in black (after Kenzler, 2002, fig. 12).

cleansing of the soul. This idea was outlined conceptually by theologians in the 12th century but was already centuries older. Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) already mentioned exemplary rescues through posthumous intercessions and masses (Kuhl, 2005, pp. 56–57).

During excavations, the frequent overlapping of graves became visible within the enclosed churchyards. These show the limited space for burials as well as the minor importance of occupying an individual grave *in aeternum*. Only to stay within the churchyard, which was included in the celebrations of the divine service, was essential. By no means must the anonymity of graves be evaluated as impiety. Even in death the individual was part of the community and expected his or her resurrection on Judgement Day. This alliance also extended up to the living, who used the churchyard not only for ecclesiastical actions, but also mundane purposes, such as a meeting and market place, theatres, meadows for livestock, orchards, or hay-fields (e.g. Illi, 1992, pp. 37–39).

Any inner order, apart from the general orientation of all burials to the east, is hardly recognizable in high and late medieval cemeteries. The only cemetery to be completely excavated and published thus far is the one around the parish church of Breunsdorf near Leipzig. Here, the density of graves increased towards the church and therefore towards the saints. Children who presumably died unbaptised or were stillborn were sometimes buried along the eaves and behind the choir, where they would be continuously blessed by the gutter water (Kenzler, 2002, p. 150). But this custom seems to be more typical for post-medieval times (cf. Ulrich-Bochsler, 1990).

The church itself can be understood as a roofed cemetery. Although councils and synods from the 6th century onwards often prohibited burials inside churches, these restrictions did not resist the pressure of everyday life. Most importantly the council of Mainz in 813 committed: *'Nullus mortuus infra ecclesiam sepeliatur, nisi episcopi aut abbates aut digni presbiteri, vel fideles laici'* (MGH, 1906, p. 274). So bishops, abbots, worthy priests, and faithful laymen had a fundamental claim to a burial inside the church. Consequently such a burial meant high prestige and the church became the most sought after burial place. Here, a clear hierarchy in the placement of graves is visible, with the most popular places in front of the altars (cf. Scholkmann, 2003, pp. 212–214, figs. 11, 12).

To handle the overcrowding of the churchyards, which was increasingly regarded as injurious to health while also avoiding the removal of the dead from the purview of the saints' relics, ossuaries were erected. The bones that were found when new graves were dug, in particular the long bones, the pelvises, and the skulls, were carried to these houses. The ossuary, which needed to be situated within the enclosed churchyard, served as the place for a secondary burial. The first evidence in the written sources are from the 12th century, when the population in Germany increased massively. With the synods of Münster and Cologne in the years 1279 and 1280, the erection of charnel-houses became obligatory (Wolf, 1980, p. 157). On some cemeteries it became a rule that all mortal remains were to be taken to the ossuary in an increasingly shorter time after inhumation. Furthermore, the public presentation of the dead served as a *memento mori*.

3.2. Post-medieval cemeteries

The Reformation and its refusal of posthumous intercession cleared the way for a separation of the church and the burial ground. Luther wrote in 1527: *'Denn ein*

begrebnis solt ja bilich ein feiner stiller ort sein, der abgesondert were von allen oertern, darauff man mit andacht gehen und stehen kuendte, den tod, das Juengst gericht und aufferstehung zu betrachten und zu beten'[1] (Luther, 1901, p. 375). The Reformer therefore wanted the cemetery to serve as a place of rest and peace for the dead and reflection for the living. In fact, many cemeteries were transferred outside of the towns in Protestant areas in the 16th century, additionally motivated by the aforementioned problem of overcrowding. The closing of monastic burial grounds in the Protestant towns intensified the situation.

An example from Leipzig shows that despite the resistance of the orthodox elites, the relocation of the burial ground could be achieved through profane hygiene-focused political arguments. Reformed councillors initiated and supported the relocation in spite of the objections of the clergy. Georg of Sachsen adopted the hygienic reasons and in 1536 he forbade all burials inside of Leipzig. The Lutheran town council thus used the fear of epidemics and the wide-spread anticlerical atmosphere as tools for the realization of its reformatory aims (Koslofsky, 1995). With some temporal delay, Catholic towns also followed the Protestant example. In rural settlements with their smaller populations, both denominations retained burial around the parish church within the settlement which is often visible to this day.

3.2.1. Layout

Since cemeteries had sufficient space after their relocation away from the settlements and were no longer used for sacred and secular purposes alike, their appearance gradually changed. But not every new burial ground began as a well-maintained facility. The majority of the new 16th century cemeteries lacked any inner order, as confirmed by both written and archaeological sources. This may have been supported by the loss of a focal point; namely the church, and even more so the altars, since a hierarchy of burial places was absent. However, it was difficult to implement the new paradigms against a centuries-old tradition. So very often the graves remained scattered and the grounds appeared thoroughly neglected (cf. Fischer, 2001, pp. 20, 31; Sörries, 2002, p. 90).

For example, excavations at the municipal cemetery of Prenzlau, located in the district of Uckermark and dating back to 1577, revealed rows of corresponding tombs only for the late 17th and 18th centuries (Ungerath, 2003, p. 133). In the cemetery of the rural settlement Breunsdorf, no change could be observed even years after the Reformation. When the new belief had been introduced in Breunsdorf in 1542, the order of the graves did not change until the late 17th century. The excavation plan of that period shows a clear movement away of the church wall and a striking array (Kenzler, 2009, fig. 4) (Figure 2). Later cemeteries would then produce the neat tomb rows as mostly visible today (e.g. Großkopf, 2015). Only urn burials lead to new designs, after the first crematorium of Germany was established 1878 in Gotha.

Yet in some of the newly-founded town cemeteries of the 16th century, the dead were immediately buried in orderly rows and were provided with a gravestone (Fischer, 2001, pp. 18–19). A well-known example is Nuremberg, where burials inside the town were already prohibited before the introduction of the Reformation in the year 1520 (Pilz, 1984). The Johannis Cemetery, with its simple, lined sandstone slabs, still reflects the state of the 16th century (Figure 3). The lack of a social hierarchy of the burial places was sometimes compensated by facilities in the style of a Campo Santo. The most

Figure 3. Johanniskirchhof Nürnberg.
The Johannis churchyard in Nuremberg preserved much of its original appearance (Photograph by H. Kenzler).

prestigious burial places lay here in an arcade on the inside of the cemetery wall. Even though all inner-town burials were banned in Leipzig, burial grounds such as the Johannis Cemetery (Alter Johannisfriedhof) were still created (Koslofsky, 1995).

As the individual marked-grave site was created step-by-step, the grave became the favoured place for mourning. Although this development in case of the influential townspeople coincided with the time of the Reformation, it is not causally related to it. Also in Catholic cemeteries, individual places of burial with tomb stones, names, biographical dates, and further personal information became established. At this point, reference should be made to the combined Catholic and Protestant burial grounds as a result of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Even with mixed occupancy, however, the dead of the various denominations usually remained spatially separated.

3.2.2. Church burials

After the relics had lost their importance through the Reformation and authorities sought to separate churches and burial grounds, it is surprising that burials inside churches continued in Protestant times. Examples of excavated early-modern graves in churches are numerous. Burials inside churches continued well into the 18th century as the Reformation led to no prohibition. Only due to hygienic necessities and under the impact of buckling church floors or collapsing crypts were church burials finally stopped (cf. Kenzler, 2002, p. 154). Thus, this burial tradition only continued because of status and prestige. The reformers could not act against the will of rich and influential families. Martin Luther himself was buried in the Castle Church of Wittenberg by the order of Elector Johann Friedrich in 1546.

Differences between Catholic and Protestant church burials do not exist in either the group of persons who were buried there nor in the shape of the graves. Often both denominations used expensive crypts or chamber tombs. However, differences occur in

the exact location inside the church. For example, a tomb with stairs descending under the main altar of the St. Johannes Church in the town of Crailsheim could be constructed because the altar had lost its meaning as a *sepulcrum* for relics (Fehring & Stachel, 1967, pp. 30–31). The use of the entire church as a burial ground, sometimes with an accentuation of the middle axis, is also striking. The burials within the church of Breunsdorf, dating to the end of the 17th and the entire 18th century, are clearly oriented on the central axis and aligned on the altar or the baptismal font (Kenzler, 2009, p. 148, fig. 4) (Figure 2). In Catholic areas, archaeological investigations record a striking modification from the beginning of the 17th century onwards in the case of priest burials. These were often laid out with the head towards the altar, so they could be oriented from north to south or lie with their head in the east. A written instruction that priests should be buried in this way is mentioned for the first time in the *Rituale Romanum* of Pope Paul V in 1614. The rite emphasizes the special role of the priest and is one of several changes that were introduced in the course of the Counter Reformation (Mittelstraß, 2007, pp. 23–24).

3.2.3. Charnel-houses

Through the creation of new, more spacious cemeteries, ossuaries in turn became redundant. The existing houses were supposed to disappear in Protestant areas, since they were reminders of the old belief and an ossuary-cult was practiced around them (cf. Illi, 1992, pp. 131–133; Sörries, 2002, pp. 255, 392). The display of mortal remains also stood against the required peace of the dead. Their removal, however, was not always easy. Thus the inhabitants of Vilshofen on the Danube refused to clear their ossuary in 1592 in spite of the prospect of a good payment. In the end, the ossuary was bricked up (Werner & Werner, 1988, p. 252). The charnel-house in Breunsdorf existed until the 17th/18th century when the dead were re-buried in a shared pit in the cemetery (Kenzler, 2002, p. 153, fig. 3). In most Catholic areas, the ossuaries remained in function until the creation of new, larger burial grounds. But they also fell out of fashion as individualised burials became highly sought after. In order to preserve the bones in the charnel-houses from the anonymous Mass, a practice began that led to the painting of skulls with names and life dates, similar to a tombstone, at the end of the 18th century (Werner & Werner, 1988, p. 260).

4. The individual grave in the burial ground

There is no fundamental difference between the denominations as far as the shape and the marking of the graves is concerned. There are several changes, however, to what was usually practiced in the High and Late Middle Ages and still at the beginning of the early modern period.

4.1. Medieval graves

The typically-disordered layout and the many overlaps of burials in medieval churchyards vividly prove that permanent markers of graves were not present. On most late medieval depictions of churchyards only a few wooden crosses are to be seen. Also, wooden posts or boards could serve as temporary signs (Illi, 1992, p. 42) and are archaeologically verified from excavations in Konstanz (Berzin, 1999, p. 130).

The shape of the burial was very simple. Into the prepared pit, the corpse could be placed in a linen shroud or a wooden coffin. Historians often claim that burials without coffins were the rule during the Middle Ages (e.g. Diefenbach & Sörries, 1994, p. 37). The reason for this opinion lies perhaps in the numerous prohibitions of burials in coffins that were handed down from the 16th century onward. For example, a burial using a coffin is declared inadmissible for Zwickau in 1561 (Langer, 1907, p. 5). Yet, these prohibitions go together with times of epidemics, massive population growth, and efforts to move cemeteries outside of towns. One may assume that hygienic reasons and overcrowding were the primary motive behind the restrictions of the slowly-rotting coffins.

The archaeological record shows a more differentiated picture, but does not allow any chronological or regional grouping. The number of burials without coffins, compared to those with coffins, differs widely in the examined cemeteries. For instance, all of the deceased from the 11th to the 13th century – excavated around the church, which was discovered under the Rathausmarkt in Schleswig – were buried in coffins made from wooden boards (Lüdtke, 1997, p. 24). In the burial ground of the Holy-Ghost-Hospital in Konstanz, coffins were only seldom used (Berszin, 1999, pp. 129–130). In the Frauenkirchhof in Dresden, coffins were used in one tenth of all burials from the 11th to 15th century (Gliwitzky & Beutmann, 2006, p. 158). Coffins were, on the other hand, absolutely normal even in some rural contexts during the entire High and Late Middle Ages, as discoveries from Breunsdorf (Kenzler, 2002, p. 151) or Groß Lieskow near Cottbus (Petzel & Wetzel, 1984, p. 87) show. The use of a simple wooden coffin was apparently not a financial question or one of high social status.

4.2. Post-medieval graves

It is only with the 17th century that the first clear modifications begin for the majority of burials. As has been noted above, orderly rows of graves, all situated at the same generous distance between each other, can be generally observed from this time on. Thus an individual burial plot could be occupied for a longer period of time. The general orientation towards the east also dissipates. One of the best documented cemeteries is the one in Schwyz, Switzerland. Since the end of the 17th century, some of the excavated graves were facing towards the paths and were therefore to the visitors of the cemetery (Descœudres, 1995, p. 78). An increased importance on individual memory by relatives and friends of the dead can be observed, which superseded the old burial patterns even in Catholic areas.

Above ground, graves were normally marked by a tombstone, which is thus difficult to prove archaeologically. The u-shaped foundation of a tombstone behind the head of a burial in the Cottbus cemetery (Petzold, 2004, fig. 5) is a rare exception. All tombstones known from Breunsdorf were discovered in secondary use. These stones were removed from the graves and used as building material in local farmsteads or to secure the bank of the village brook. The individual commemoration in Breunsdorf lasted for about 100 years, as is shown by some well dated tombstones in connection with building activities that were documented in the written sources (Kenzler, 2002, p. 160).

During the 17th century the use of a coffin for the burial became the rule, but it was still admissible to be buried without a coffin until late into the 19th century. Only the introduction of mortuaries with a storage time of 48 hours made the utilisation of coffins

urgently necessary, due to hygienic reasons (Sörries, 2002, p. 262). Beginning in the Baroque period, the coffin was used more and more for representation, because it was visible to everyone during the laying out. Elaborate forms and expensive materials were first used by the nobility but trickled down to the funerals of urban inhabitants and eventually those in rural settlements. Consequently the inside lining with cloths and pillows differed according to the status and wealth of the deceased. This is equally valid for Catholic and Protestant areas. Denominational differences exist solely in the symbols found in paintings or metal fittings. Protestant coffins, for instance, were often painted with biblical quotes (Diefenbach & Sörries, 1994, pp. 39–40).

5. The appearance of the burials

The most obvious differences between medieval, Catholic, and Protestant burials concern the grave goods.

5.1. The appearance of medieval burials

Medieval burials of common people are homogeneous and simple. They lack any individuality. Burials in the 8th century do not differ from those in the 15th century. The dead lay full length on their back and were oriented to the east. On Judgement Day, the return of Christ was expected from the direction of the rising sun and of Jerusalem where Jesus died. The arms normally lay alongside the body. Particularly toward the end of the Middle Ages they could also be crossed on the stomach or chest. Another possibility would be that the hands were folded in the lap or on the stomach in a gesture of prayer (Kenzler, 2002, pp. 151–152), therefore depicting a religious act in the archaeological record.

The majority of the burials in Christianised Europe did not contain grave goods after the 8th century. In older literature, their absence is usually explained by the adoption of the Christian religion while ignoring the fact that several generations still continued to practice the supposed pagan custom of furnishing the grave with material goods. There are also specific Christian items in early medieval graves, such as the well-known gold-leaf crosses. It must also to be made clear that there was no Christian prohibition of grave goods in the Middle Ages. Numerous contemporary writings, in which the robbery of graves is denounced, show that the church still expected and tolerated grave goods until the beginning of the 10th century. The church did not subject the enclosure of grave goods to punishment. On the contrary, the practice continued in the case of the nobility and the clergy without the church having protested against it (Reindel, 1995, pp. 142–144). Grave goods that emphasised the official functions and the status of the elites find multiple archaeological confirmations (e.g. Brandt, 1988; Meier, 2002). The reason why this custom eventually ends for the majority of burials cannot be answered here. Changes in the right of property as well as an increase in grave robberies might have more likely played a role. Following another theory, donations by the bereaved to the church as an institution replaced the values previously used to supply the graves.

Grave goods are a rare exception in average high or late medieval burials. Metal belt mounts and shoe buckles point to a clothed body (Sándor-Pröschold & Sanke, 2002, pp. 303–305). Small metal hooks and eyes may have been part of the usual dress

or a specific burial gown. In the widest sense pilgrim badges, which were sewn onto the clothing, can be counted as dress accessories. Their inclusion in the grave was certainly founded in the religious belief of the buried persons, who hoped for compensation for the cumbersome pilgrimage in the afterlife. The most frequent pilgrim badge of the Middle Ages, known from church burials from the 11th up to the 14th century, is the scallop shell from Santiago de Compostela (Haasis-Berner, 2002). Wooden crosses, which were uncovered inside the coffins of some burials in the late medieval Frauenkirchhof in Dresden (Gliwitzky & Beutmann, 2006, p. 158), are also Christian items. Other grave goods are very rare and most of them probably held personal meaning for the buried persons.

5.2. The appearance of post-medieval burials

When compared to the medieval period, the Reformation caused no immediate change in the furnishing of the graves. The custom of grave goods can be seen to a greater extent beginning in the 17th century and among Catholics and Protestants alike (Kenzler, 2009, p. 150). From this point on, not only the clerical and secular elites, but almost all classes of population are represented. As far as it can be postulated by the hitherto selective investigations, the custom presumably began to spread from the nobility and clergy to the urban townsfolk, and then to the monastery communities and the rural population. Especially the 19th century knew highly developed and standardised sets of grave goods.

5.2.1. Clothing

Since the Baroque period, most of the deceased were buried dressed. The main reason being the ubiquitous practice of the laying out of the body. For the middle class and in the countryside, the laying out was done at home. Persons of higher status were presented in the church (Goy, 1969, p. 205). The dead had to be dressed and prepared adequately, since the laying out served as the representation and ultimately the public presentation of their status. Almost all of the deceased in Breunsdorf were buried in their festive clothing until well into the 20th century. The women wore their own jewellery such as rings, brooches, earrings, necklaces, and hair pins (Kenzler, 2009, p. 146, fig. 6). Many further examples of burials in festive or everyday clothing can be found. Dresses in a more or less good state of preservation or with obvious signs of use have, for example, been recorded archaeologically in the tomb of the Grafen of Sulz in Tiengen am Hochrhein (Fingerlin, 1992), the Domhof in Passau (Mittermeier, 1993, p. 32), the churchyard of Wörth in the Staffelsee (Haas-Gebhard, 2000, p. 285), or the Praemonstratensian monastery in Speinshart (Sándor-Pröschold & Sanke, 2002, p. 300).

Apart from the regular dress, the deceased could also be dressed in a special burial gown. These burial gowns are found with both denominations and might already be a reaction to the very expensive supply of the dead. This had already been described for the rural settlements of the dioceses of Bamberg and Nuremberg in the time around 1800 (Goy, 1969, p. 205). On the other hand, such gowns do not have to be simple at all. In the Johannes church in Crailsheim, bodies were found that were wrapped in wide garments and richly adorned with silk ribbons and affixed bows (Fehring & Stachel, 1967, p. 29).

5.2.2. Religious objects

Significant differences between the two denominations exist in regard to the objects that refer to the belief of the buried person. As a rule in Catholic areas, paternosters or rosaries were placed in the graves, where they can be found around the hands folded in prayer. Since the 17th century, the standardized rosary with a given number of beads can be found in almost all graves (Figure 4). Only burials of babies or children may be excluded (e.g. Fingerlin, 1992, p. 182; Grünewald, 2001, p. 24; Haas-Gebhard, 2000, p. 285; Mittermeier, 1993, pp. 29–31; Sándor-Pröschold & Sanke, 2002, pp. 309–311, 340). The inclusion of the rosary cannot always be regarded as an expression of popular belief. In some cases, its use was forcefully introduced as seen by a decree of Duke Maximilian I. in 1640 that commanded the negligent rural population to acquire a rosary (Mittelstraß, 2007, p. 23–24). The rosaries from the graves were typically the personal possession of the deceased or the family. This is evidenced by the numerous excavated pendants, pilgrim medals, crucifixes, and amulets affixed to the rosaries and produced an individualized appearance.

Less common are the so-called 'Totenkreuze' among Catholics. These are crosses the dying had in their hands while asking for divine assistance and consolation (Fingerlin, 1992, p. 181). These crosses could also be given into the hands of the body during the laying out. Throughout the early modern period, they were elaborately worked and sometimes contained relics. They were not always in the possession of the family but were lent out to the needy. Hence, they seldom went into the grave. One such cross was found in Passau (Mittermeier, 1993, pp. 31–32, fig. 34).

Religious objects in Catholic graves are presumably closely connected to the Counter Reformation, which put a strong emphasis on symbolism that stressed the Catholic

Figure 4. Dominikanerkirche in Bamberg, Germany.

Catholic burial with rosary and book from the Dominican church in Bamberg, dating from the second half of the 18th century (Bavarian State Department of Monuments and Sites).

identity. Since the Reformers had eliminated comparable symbols and also refused the pilgrimage, the lack of corresponding grave goods in Protestant burials is not surprising. Only the occasional hymnbooks give direct information concerning the beliefs of the deceased. In Breunsdorf, seven graves from the end of the 17th up to the 19th century contained remains of books (Kenzler, 2002, pp. 157, 162–164). Three of these were church burials and therefore indicate a higher social status. Further finds from excavations are extremely rare, although book clasps in comparison are normally well preserved. The same is true for books in Catholic burials. Only a few books, which are interpreted as prayer books, were found in Passau (Mittermeier, 1993, p. 31).

5.2.3. Further grave goods

An entire series of objects from early modern and modern graves belong to the personal possession of the dead. For instance, in Breunsdorf, eyeglasses, keys, and tobacco pipes were discovered (Kenzler, 2002, p. 157). Further objects from this category are known through ethnological studies, such as cards, bottles of alcohol, or cigars (Zender, 1959, p. 39). Even today such grave goods are not unusual in inhumations, as can be gathered from conversations with undertakers. Since these types of objects are rare in the archaeological record and the majority date to the 18th and 19th century, it can be assumed that this is a comparably young custom. The most extensive archaeological research has dealt with the findings of tobacco pipes in grave contexts (Kluttig-Altmann, 2007). The tobacco pipes always show traces of use and were apparently smoked eagerly by the buried persons, which can be evidenced by characteristic signs of wear on their teeth. They were probably laid into the coffin by relatives or friends as a last act of favour. Although the majority of examples come from Protestant areas, pipes were also found in Catholic burials. Other personal possessions found in Catholic graves were almost exclusively items referring to social status, such as a bronze spoon or an iron dagger as seen in Passau (Mittermeier, 1993, p. 32). The same is true for a sword dating to the first quarter of the 16th century, from the monastery in Speinshart (Sándor-Pröschold & Sanke, 2002, pp. 324–325) and another from the second half of the 17th century, found in the protestant Johannes church of Crailsheim (Fehring & Stachel, 1967, pp. 28–29).

Children's graves of both denominations were furnished in the same manner. For the late 18th and the 19th century dolls, grave goods such as miniature dishes, or baby bottles are typical (Scheidemantel, 2017, p. 473; Ströbl & Ströbl, 2015, fig. 7). Before that, equivalent grave goods do not seem to occur.

Funeral crowns belong to the grave goods denoting status. They signified blameless girls and boys or young women and men who died unmarried. The custom might refer to the weddings of dead persons known in antiquity. It enabled the unwedded deceased to marry, since marriage was seen as the climax of life. The idea could have been picked up in the wave of enthusiasm for classical antiquity during the Renaissance. More compatible with Christian belief is the interpretation of the funeral crown as an honour that was only bestowed in the instance of honourable moral conduct. The oldest evidence of the use of funeral wreaths or crowns can be found on the tombstones of noble children in the 16th century (cf. Lippok, 2009).

Coins are common finds in graves, particularly in burials of the 18th to the 20th century. Before this period, they can occasionally be found but remain coincidental and are strongly limited to certain regions (Kenzler, 2002, p. 157). Motives for their placement into the coffin lie in a toll for the passage to heaven's gate, to buy a place in the

cemetery, or in a symbolic price for the personal possessions, which the deceased in question received so as not to bring disaster onto surviving family members. It cannot yet be determined whether differences in the geographical distribution of the custom or the location of coins in the coffin correspond to denominational borders.

There still is a great number of additional grave goods which were enclosed as an exception or part of a fixed burial custom. Many objects are known from ethnological studies alone (cf. Zender, 1959–1964), since they were made of organic material which decays in the ground under normal circumstances. Therefore, nothing is known about the temporal origin of these customs. Denominational differences have not yet been identified.

5.2.4. Objects of taboo

Of special interest is a number of items with which the deceased had contact or which belonged to his or her worldly possessions that were prohibited from use by the decendants. For that reason they were placed into the grave in some regions and destroyed in others. For the area and time examined in this paper, the objects used for the preparation of the corpse, in particular the washbowls, are best known.

Many times, washbowls were recorded archaeologically on urban and rural burials grounds of the 18th to 20th century (cf. Kenzler, 2011, pp. 26–30, fig. 8; Thier, 1999, pp. 147–150, fig. 3) (Figure 5). Their inclusion in particular has been comprehensively documented for Breunsdorf. Here, almost every burial between the 18th and 19th century contained a deep vessel with a wide opening. Only in the early 20th century did this burial custom gradually vanish (Kenzler, 2002, p. 156). The interpretation that these were indeed washing vessels, whose further use would bring misfortune or death, is based on extensive ethnological investigations (cf. Zender, 1959, p. 41; 1959–1964, pp. 273–274, fig. 29). However, all other objects which were used during the preparation of the deceased for the laying out could bring disaster to the living

Figure 5. Weinberg Cottbus.

18th and 19th century washbowls and stoneware pots from the Protestant cemetery on the Weinberg in Cottbus (Petzold, 2003, fig. 121).

(Zender, 1959–64, pp. 269–273). Scissors, razors, and combs should certainly be mentioned from an archaeological perspective, although they were found far less frequently in the coffins in Breunsdorf (Kenzler, 2002, p. 156).

The placement of medicine in the grave dates also from the 18th to the 20th century and is archaeologically observable through glass vials or small stoneware pots (Figure 5). This custom is also known from different sites (Thier, 1999, pp. 146–147), but again documented extremely well for the Breunsdorf cemetery. This custom becomes particularly common starting from the 19th up to the middle of the 20th century (Kenzler, 2002, p. 156). Like the washbowls, the medicine previously used by the deceased was an object of taboo (Zender, 1959–64, pp. 264–265).

Unlike the carefully selected and arranged clothing or the religious objects, washbowls, medicine vessels, or other taboo objects should not be seen during the laying out. Therefore they were hidden under the body, under a blanket, or under the pillow (Kenzler, 2002, p. 157).

If one maps the ethnological and archaeological evidences of the furnishing of graves with washbowls on a map together with the distribution of the denominations in the German Empire, it becomes very obvious that the washbowls are almost exclusively found in Protestant burials (Figure 6). The picture becomes even clearer when one considers the intentional destruction of washbowls as well, which were not placed into the coffin in this case (Kenzler, 2011, fig. 8).

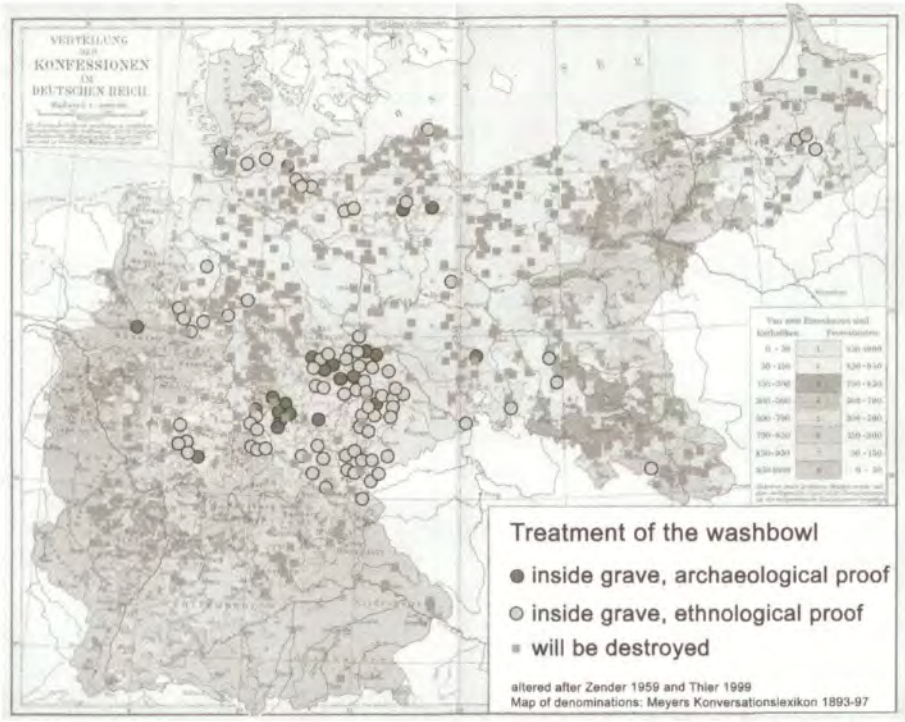

Figure 6. Map of religious denominations and destribution of washbowls, German Empire.
Washbowls in the funeral rite as a distinction between Catholic and Protestant burials (supplemented and altered after Zender, 1959, fig. 29 und; Thier, 1999, fig. 3).

5.2.5. Possible explanations

Why taboo objects are found in Protestant graves, but not in Catholic ones, is a matter of conjecture. Protestantism had separated the world of the dead from the world of the living in a way Catholicism had never done. Nothing more could be done for the soul of the deceased Protestant. Intercession on behalf of the dead was rejected as well as the role of the saints as intermediaries for salvation. As a consequence, the traditional burial places in the churchyard and the church were replaced more consistently than in Catholic belief through cemeteries outside the gates of the towns. The culture of mourning turned more and more to this world. It was not the dead that stood in the centre now, but the living (Fischer, 2001, pp. 15–16). The radical change of the burial customs in Protestantism, in addition to a general sense of insecurity in the first one or two generations, may eventually have led to an increased fear of death and the dead that later led to the development of 'superstitious' ideas.

This would also explain the late origin of the custom to place taboo objects into the coffin or to destroy them. Although the archaeological basis is still too small for such statements, the placement of washbowls or medicine inside the coffins seems to appear more frequently in the rural areas than in the towns. This would support the thesis that not progressive, hygienic ideas but instead popular belief was the origin of the custom. The washing of the dead in Catholic as well as Protestant areas was provided through a neighbourhood service. This is surely why vessels belonging to the family of the deceased were used. In the latter half of the 19th century, there were certain women in the towns who took over the washing and other tasks around the dead as a form of local service. The first commercial undertakers also established their businesses during this time (Fischer, 2001, p. 48), thus putting an end to the inclusion of washbowls.

New historical inquiries are surprising, since they prove that the Protestant church only regained influence on the funeral ritual from the middle of the 19th century onwards in many German states (Rehlinghaus, 2014) (Figure 7). In Berlin and Braunschweig, only 20 to 30% of the deceased Protestants had a clerical funeral at

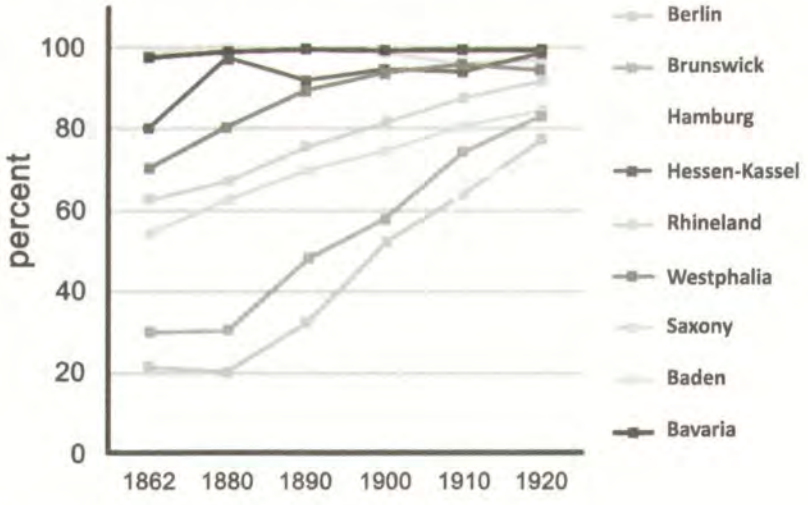

Figure 7. Evolution of Protestant funeral rites.
Protestant funeral rites in German states (after Rehlinghaus, 2014, fig. 2).

that time. During the entire 18th and most of the 19th century, a funeral without the presence of a pastor, sometimes with speeches of laymen instead, became the rule. Often there was no burial ceremony and even no relatives were present at the funeral. Theologically, the pietistic movement supported individual piety instead of the clerical demonstration of belief. At the same time the opinion turned against the excessive rituals of the Baroque period. Moreover, a growing rationalism made religion unnecessary in the opinion of its supporters and lead to widespread secular and anticlerical attitudes. Thus, popular beliefs, and therefore also the furnishing of graves, could have developed more freely in a Protestant context. Only the new clerical control lead to a more solid theological and more standardized funeral ritual with less regional differences.

There are still many more exciting aspects to discover within burial ceremonies, particularly among Protestants in the 18th and 19th centuries. For instance, there are some burials of young women in the cemetery in Großhermsdorf near Leipzig, dated to the end of the 19th and beginning 20th century. The corpses of which were bedded on pieces of broken glass, mostly from windowpane but from bottles and other vessels as well. The belief behind this custom is yet unknown (Scheidemantel, 2017, p. 473, fig. 20).

6. Conclusion

Religious rites find a firm anchoring in the material culture of most societies, so the study of graves allows the archaeologist to recognise changes in common ideas of belief. Social actions and material signs are used very consciously as a criterion of distinction between different ideas of belief and social groups. Social developments and evolving religious beliefs, however, require a certain amount of time until they are manifested in the burial custom.

The Reformation in Germany (Figure 8) initially led to no visible change in the excavated burials. The Reformers did not wish to change the simple, unfurnished medieval graves. But the end of posthumous intercessions must lead to a spatial expression. Thus, a strong effort of many towns to separate their cemeteries from the churches and to move them outside of the gates becomes visible. Yet this change in the location may have been enforced due to hygienic reasons and therefore soon affected Catholic areas as well. But if an individual burial place expressed the high social status of the deceased or their family, such as in church burials, the grave would remain untouched.

Therefore, the significant changes in burial customs since the late 16th and the early 17th century don't tie directly back to the Reformation. Only two or more generations later, however, Catholic and Protestant burials become distinguishable by their grave goods. These changes are mainly due to an individualisation of death in wide parts of the population during the Baroque period, in comparison to the anonymous dead of earlier eras. Death was now increasingly used for the representation of social status through the family of the bereaved.

Yet the dissolution of old pattern of belief through the Reformation paved the way for these changes. The fact that Protestantism offered alternatives to the previous belief meant the end of a universal religious interpretation and burial practice. Changes not only occurred

Figure 8. Location of places mentioned in the text (Map by H. Kenzler).

with burials in Protestant areas, but – in particular through the Counter Reformation – also in the Catholic parts of Germany. Now, material culture is not only used to express status, but to separate the denominations from each other. Catholic priests were buried differently than laymen were. Rosaries were given in almost all Catholic graves, whereas comparable requisites of belief are very rare in Protestant graves.

On the other hand, objects of taboo such as the tools for the preparation of the corpse (e.g. washbowls, combs, and razors) or medicine previously used by the deceased are exclusively found in Protestant burials. In certain cemeteries there is not a single grave from the 18th and 19th century without them. It was believed that anyone who would use these items would have to follow the deceased into the grave. Obviously, the greater separation of the dead from the living played a major role here, which lead to a greater fear of the dead in Protestant areas since these ideas were a matter of common belief and therefore were not supported by the church. In fact, a common anticlericalism in Protestant areas can be perceived already for the 18th century.

Eventually, the taking over of many services around the funeral by commercial undertakers put an end to most of the described customs. Today there are hardly any differences between Catholic and Protestant burials in terms of their material remains.

Note

1. 'For a burial should truly be a fine, quiet place, separate from all places, where one could go and stand with devotion and contemplate death, judgement day, and resurrection and pray.'

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Charnel practices in medieval England: new perspectives

Elizabeth Craig-Atkins, Jennifer Crangle, P. S. Barnwell, Dawn M. Hadley, Allan T. Adams, Ian Atkins, Jessica-Rose McGinn and Alice James

ABSTRACT

Studies of English medieval funerary practice have paid limited attention to the curation of human remains in charnel houses. Yet analysis of architectural, archaeological and documentary evidence, including antiquarian accounts, suggests that charnelling was more widespread in medieval England than has hitherto been appreciated, with many charnel houses dismantled at the sixteenth-century Reformation. The survival of a charnel house and its human remains at Rothwell, Northamptonshire permits a unique opportunity to analyse charnel practice at a medieval parish church. Employing architectural, geophysical and osteological analysis, we present a new contextualisation of medieval charnelling. We argue that the charnel house at Rothwell, a subterranean room constructed during the thirteenth century, may have been a particularly sophisticated example of an experiment born out of beliefs surrounding Purgatory. Our approach enables re-evaluation of the surviving evidence for charnel practice in England and enhances wider narratives of medieval charnelling across Europe.

The curation of human skeletal remains was an important facet of medieval funerary practice, and the proliferation of charnel houses during the Middle Ages is a European-wide phenomenon (Walker Bynum, 1995, p. 203). However, English charnel houses have received little scholarly attention in comparison with their continental counterparts. This is arguably because few survive intact, and almost all have long since been cleared of their human remains (Gilchrist & Sloane, 2005, pp. 41–42). This paper presents the first comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluation of a surviving English parish charnel house, integrating new architectural, archaeological and osteological evidence. Setting this evidence within its regional and national context, we present a response to assertions that 'much about the development of the charnel house is obscure' (Walker Bynum, 1995, p. 204) and 'how ... charnels were used remains unclear' (Harding, 1992, p. 128). Our research provides important new insights into the relationships between the living and the material remains of the dead during the medieval period, and presents a model for the future study of medieval charnel practice.

Medieval charnel houses

The first documented medieval charnel houses appear in Germany in the mid-twelfth century, and they proliferate across the continent during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Walker Bynum, 1995, pp. 203–204). While studies of continental charnel houses are more numerous than those of their English counterparts (e.g. Enlart, 1929; Höpflinger, 2015; Müller & Höpflinger, 2016; Musgrave, 1997; Zoepfl, 1948), many continental examples have undergone significant alteration since the medieval period or were post-medieval foundations. For example, the charnel house at Sedlec, Kutná Hora, Czech Republic, probably originated with the construction of the Gothic church in the fifteenth century, but the charnel was rearranged into its current form in 1870. The charnel in the 'Golden Chamber' of St Ursula's, Cologne, Germany was rearranged in the seventeenth century, while the bones in the Catacombs of Paris, France, derive from clearance of several urban cemeteries which began in the late eighteenth century (Koudinaris, 2011, pp. 57, 96, 105–108). Such well-known examples do not reflect medieval practices, although continental scholarship readily acknowledges that charnel houses were a widespread feature of medieval religious practice and community cohesion, providing 'a source of spiritual salvation and comfort' (Musgrave, 1997, p. 65).

In England, charnel houses have, in contrast, often been regarded as meeting a functional need for somewhere to store human remains disturbed by intense use of burial grounds, especially in growing towns (Harding, 1992, p. 128; Garland, Janaway, & Roberts, 1988, p. 236; Marshall, 2002, p. 40; Orme, 1991, p. 169; Rodwell, 2012, p. 25–28). Nonetheless, a handful of studies have recognised that charnel houses played a significant role in medieval funerary practices. An account of the motivation for the construction of a charnel house appears in a charter of 1300 from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. Seeing the disorderly state of the monastic cemetery, the abbot requested the 'charnel chapel to be built, as an act of piety and charity ... of shaped stone, and in future bones could be placed in it or buried under it vaults', and provided with two chaplains to serve this 'most celebrated place' (Gransden, 2015, pp. 222–223). The charnel house, which survives in ruins, was a substantial structure (18.0 m by 6.7 m internally) comprising three vaulted alcoves and plastered internal walls; three arched openings in the north and south walls are now blocked, but were probably formerly passageways to permit ready access to the bones. The chaplains must have celebrated Mass either in an upper storey – if there was one, but it is difficult to say from the surviving fabric – or amidst the bones. By the sixteenth century, the charnel house had gone out of use, and the building was reused as an ale-house, smithy and private mausoleum (Gransden, 2015, p.222–223).

The charnel house at St Paul's Cathedral, London, must have existed before 1278, when a chantry for Roger Beyvin was established in the chapel above it (Rousseau, 2011, p. 75). The construction and maintenance of this chapel was a community affair, with contributions made in 1282 by the mayor of London and the commonality of Londoners for its upkeep and for a chaplain who would pray for named individuals and 'all the faithful departed' (Rousseau, 2011, p. 75). Again, this charnel house had disappeared by the sixteenth century. John Stow's 1549 *Survey of London* records that the year before 'the bones of the dead couched up in a Charnill under the chappell were conveyed from thence into Finsbury field ... amounting to more than 1000 cartloads', and the buildings were then demolished (Rousseau, 2011, p.77; Stow, 1603/1971, p. 329).

At Exeter cathedral, Devon, a chantry priest was endowed in 1322 by Bishop Walter Stapledon to chant services 'in the chapel which is situated in the churchyard ... commonly called "charnere"'. This building was described in the 1540s by Leland as a two-storey structure, with the lower storey below ground (Orme, 1991, p. 165). Excavation in the 1970s of the heavily robbed remains of this building suggested it was at least 12.0 m by 6.5 m internally and that the subterranean crypt was entered from the chapel above via stairs. The excavation report describes the 3 m deep crypt as containing an orderly pile of skulls and long bones *c.* 1 m deep; it is regrettable that there are no surviving photographs or plans of this deposit (Henderson & Bidwell, 1982, p. 169; Thomas Cadbury pers. comm.).

The 1316 foundation charter for the 'Carnary Chapel' in the cemetery at Norwich cathedral states that 'in the carnary beneath the said Chapel of St John we wish that human bones, completely stripped of flesh, be preserved seemly to the time of the general Resurrection' (Gilchrist & Sloane, 2005, p. 42). The chapel was staffed by secular priests, and the charnel vault beneath was administered by the sacrist, who received a large share of the offerings made in the chapel above (Gilchrist, 2005, p. 102). Gilchrist likens the circular windows in the lower room of this surviving two-storey structure to thirteenth-century foramina shrines, pierced with round holes to provide access to the relics within, and she has argued that the chapel 'invoked the cult of saints' relics and promoted dialogue between the living and the dead' (Gilchrist, 2005, pp. 105, 250–251). The Carnary Chapel was purchased by the adjacent Great Hospital in 1550, and was being used as a school by 1554, with the lower room let to grocers and wine merchants (Gilchrist, 2005, p. 208).

These examples all suggest that charnel houses were constructed for the respectful housing of human remains, but their founders also endowed chaplains to oversee prayers for the dead and acts of charitable piety. They were substantial structures, comprising a subterranean charnel room with a chapel above. However, these few documented charnel houses derive from high-status religious complexes, and do not necessarily reveal how charnel houses may have operated at a parish level (see Gilchrist & Sloane, 2005, p. 41). Moreover, the potential of these examples for further research is limited: in some cases, the buildings have been cleared and demolished; in others they were converted for secular use, resulting in substantial changes to their fabric. The rare example of a charnel house still containing human remains beneath the church of Holy Trinity in Rothwell, Northamptonshire is, then, of critical importance to developing new understandings of medieval charnelling at the parish level (Figure 1). It offers unique opportunities to undertake new architectural and archaeological examination of a charnel house within its original funerary and ecclesiastical context; to evaluate the antiquarian literature describing medieval features which no longer survive; and to analyse the skeletal remains to assess their origin, population structure and the chronology of charnelling.

Holy Trinity, Rothwell, Northamptonshire

The charnel house at Rothwell is first mentioned in 1712, when John Morton, rector of the nearby church of Oxenden, described 'the great Multitude of Men and Women's Sculls that lye heap'd up in the famous Charnel-House at *Rowel*' (Morton, 1712, p. 474).

Figure 1. Location of the charnel house of Holy Trinity church, Rothwell (Illustraions: ATA and IA).

The circumstances of its discovery were clarified in 1855 by Mathew Bloxam, who claimed that, some 150 years earlier, workmen digging a grave in the south aisle of the nave of the church, 'broke through the crown of a vault and discovered – what had long before hid in oblivion – a vaulted crypt, in which were piled up ... a collection of human sculls and bones to the height of upwards of four feet' (p. 2). Numerous antiquarian papers discussed the Rothwell charnel house, but their interpretations were largely based on guesswork, fanciful claims or misunderstanding, and the only detailed modern study is a histological analysis of the impact of damp on bone degradation (Garland et al., 1988). Since the charnel house is not mentioned in medieval documents, to provide fresh insight we undertook a programme of research comprising the following approaches: 1) a new architectural survey of the charnel house and church; 2) osteological analysis, including radiocarbon dating; 3) geophysical survey using ground penetrating radar (GPR); 4) critical analysis of the antiquarian record; 5) survey of regional comparisons in other parish churches; and 6) examination of the context of

the charnel house within a contemporary theological context, especially concepts of Purgatory.

The crypt and its architectural relationship to the church

The crypt, of two equal bays, is 9 m (east-west) by 4.5 m (north-south) with a rib-vaulted ceiling (Figure 2).[1] While difficult to date conclusively, it is likely to be thirteenth-century, given that the arches have two centres rather than the four of the later Perpendicular period. A scar in the masonry of the roof of the west bay may derive from collapse of this section, seemingly corroborating Bloxam's (1855) account of the rediscovery of the charnel. Auguring through the floor in the 1980s established that it comprised homogenous clay to a depth of at least 1 m, apparently a natural deposit (Garland et al., 1988). The walls are constructed of semi-dressed and coarse rubble stonework, and the only entrance is in the west wall. The surrounding fabric suggests that the doorway is in its original position, but while some features are consistent with a thirteenth-century date, the imposts had clearly been reset and the stops at the bottom of the jambs are not of this date, suggesting later reworking, probably in the eighteenth century. The south wall incorporates two large splayed openings, one placed central to each bay, now infilled with breeze blocking; the openings were presumably once barred since there are no rebates for glazing or shutters. The internal openings have plain chamfer mouldings and shallow pointed arches. The flat sills are, however, modern replacements of splayed ones visible in early twentieth-century photographs. Outside the windows were once large light wells; archive photographs taken during installation of a ventilation system in the late 1990s reveal they were bounded by neatly coursed stonework on the eastern and western sides (Figure 3).

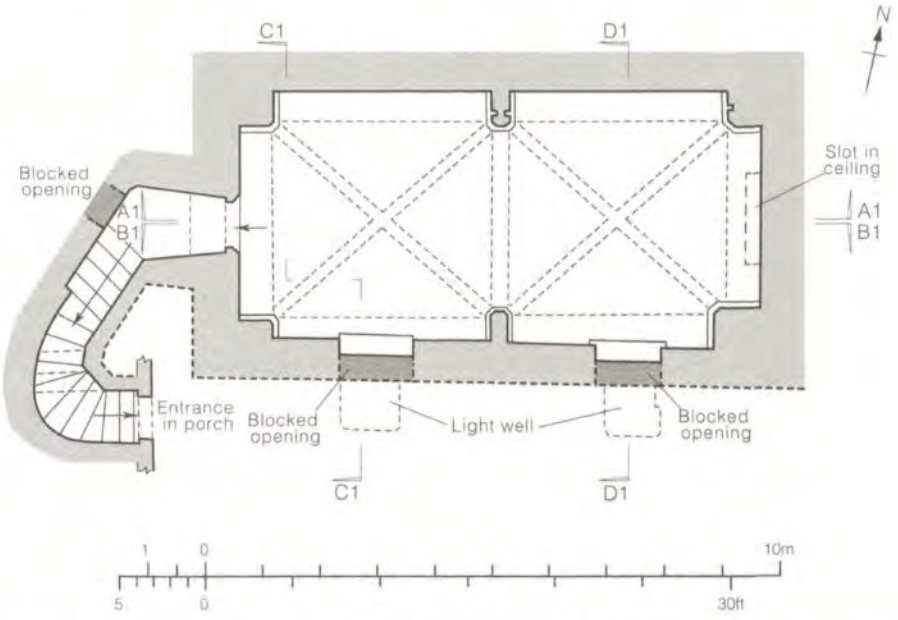

Figure 2. Measured plan of the surviving structure and fabric of the charnel house (Illustration: ATA).

Figure 3. Exterior view of the east window into the charnel house photographed during archaeological work in the late 1990s, with an uninterrupted view of the bones within (Photograph reproduced with permission of Holy Trinity church).

The walls and ceiling of the crypt were evidently once finished with gypsum plaster, now badly degraded by damp (Garland et al., 1988, p. 252). Ephemeral traces of painting are visible on the east wall, which comprise red and black paint distributed in long strokes separated by solid beige fields. Antiquarian accounts claim that it depicted the Resurrection (e.g. Bloxam, 1855, p. 2; Sharp, 1879, p. 58; Wallis, 1888, p. 36). None of them provides an illustration, but Bull (1912) reported seeing 'representation of a small foot and the calf of a leg' (p. 228). We enhanced these areas using polynomial texture mapping, which revealed additional detail and original brushstrokes (Figure 4). However, this method also confirmed how little of the original painted plaster surface remains, meaning that the original subject of this image cannot now be reconstructed. The painting has prompted speculation that there was once an altar there (Sharp, 1879, p. 58) and we were given permission to remove the human remains stacked against the east wall to explore this possibility, but this revealed no trace of possible altar footings.

A staircase of 17 steps, first described in 1855 (Bloxam, 1855, p. 2), descends through 180° clockwise to the charnel house from the west wall of the south porch. However, these steps are clearly not the original means of access to the crypt since the brick-built porch and brick-vaulted top of the staircase are both post-medieval alterations, and medieval slabs containing indents for brasses were reused for six of the treads (Figure 5). The stone coursing of the upper walls is notably poorer than that at the bottom of the stairs, suggesting it is later, and perhaps contemporary with the reconstructed porch. The stairs probably existed by 1712, as Morton had entered the charnel house, removing some of the bones, but they may have been relatively recent. Indeed, the form of the doorway into the crypt suggests some eighteenth-century reconstruction to facilitate access.

At the foot of the stairs blocking of the north wall suggests the location of a former access route to the crypt. Antiquarians speculated that this was the entrance to a tunnel heading outside the church (e.g. Wallis, 1888, p. 34), but, in fact, it seems far more likely

Figure 4. The two best-surviving sections of wall painting from the east wall of the charnel house. Top: unprocessed photograph. Bottom: false-colour polynomial texture maps of the same surfaces, which shows enhanced contrast and texture of both the plaster and brush-strokes. Yellow indicates areas of increased depth, where plaster has fallen from the wall (Images: IA).

Figure 5. Example of a section of grave cover reused as a stair tread. The lobular recess would have originally held a brass insert (Photograph: ECA).

that it led towards the nave of the church. To assess this, we undertook a GPR survey, which revealed a void in the south aisle where such a staircase from the crypt may have ascended (James, 2017). (Figure 6). While the GPR results do not show this void communicating directly with the crypt, this could be explained by rubble infilling of the

Figure 6. Schematic interpretation of the results of GPR survey in the southern cemetery and south aisle of Holy Trinity church (Image: AJ, ATA and IA).

former access route. Such a deduction is consistent with the visible blocking in the wall at the bottom of the stairs.

Holy Trinity was a church of some significance and wealth in the medieval period. Its origins were as a minster, and the earliest architectural phases discernible, of the late pre-Conquest period, reveal it to have been cross-shaped, comprising an unaisled nave, with three small porticus at the east end and a central tower, typical of late Anglo-Saxon minsters (Barnwell, 2016, pp. 158–167). The subsequent architectural development of the church is complex and mostly not of direct relevance to the current argument, but rebuilding on an exceptional scale during the 1270s and 1280s provides the context for the construction of the crypt. The detailed sequencing of the rebuilding cannot be recovered, but our new analysis suggests it can be treated as one, possibly slightly extended, phase. The chancel was flanked by four-bay chapels in the form of aisles; that to the south, now partially

demolished but evidenced by the blocked arches of the former arcade, was perhaps slightly earlier than that to the north. The transepts were upgraded, that at the south also being enlarged to extend further south than now, on the evidence of a compound column embedded in the south wall, and the nave aisles were replaced with the present ones, wider and taller than their twelfth-century predecessors, that at the south with the porch, which was later remodelled. The nave aisles were raised, and the tower arch modified, reflecting the new proportions of the arcades. The late thirteenth-century date for this rebuilding is suggested by the form of the south aisle windows, of three lancets under an arch, the re-set south window of the south transept, with a spherical triangle over two lights, and the tower arch with naturalistic foliage on the capitals (Historic England Archive, NBR no. 107400; Bailey, Pevsner & Cherry, 2013, pp. 552–555; new analysis by P.S. Barnwell during the current research). The south wall of the crypt provides the foundation for the outer wall of the widened aisle making it almost certain the two are contemporary. If the crypt had pre-dated the present south aisle its vault would have had to have supported the south wall of the narrower, twelfth-century aisle, which seems unlikely. Thus, a thirteenth-century date for construction of the charnel house is indicated by its architectural relationships to the more securely dated church above and by characteristics of its own form.

In the south wall of the aisle is a piscina, for the washing of vessels used during Mass. This reveals the location of a former altar, although it is not clear which, if any, of the five altars referred to in late medieval wills it was (Serjeantson & Longden, 1913, p. 400). The altar stood above the east end of the crypt, mirroring the juxtaposition of chapel and charnel characteristic of free-standing charnel houses, such as those at Norwich and Exeter, and probably also Bury St Edmunds and St Paul's (Figure 7). The close relationship between crypt and altar is reinforced by a now-blocked slot behind the vaulting at the east end of the crypt; it rose to the church floor in front of the altar, perhaps

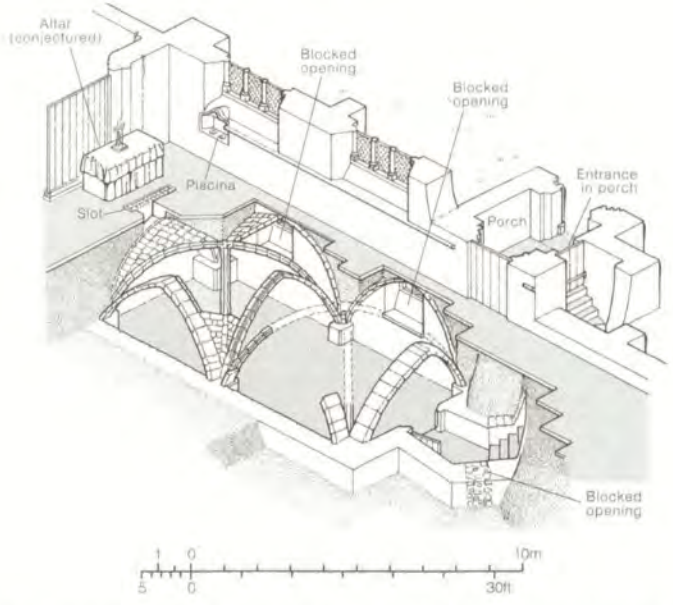

Figure 7. Cutaway illustration of the charnel house showing the relationship with both extant and conjectured features of the medieval chapel located directly above (Illustration: ATA).

permitting light to shine directly onto the wall painting below or to facilitate the transmission into the crypt of the sound of the Mass. This evidence suggests provision for liturgical activities in the chapel related to the charnel, to which we shall return.

The charnel

The disarticulated human skeletal remains are now stacked in two wooden crates placed centrally within each bay, which were installed in the late 1990s, with most of the crania placed on wooden shelves lining the north and south walls (Figure 8). A 1915 sketch reveals that the arrangement they enclose was already in place by then (Percival, 1915, p. 10). This is how the bones had been restacked in 1911, on the advice of anatomist Parsons (1910, p. 485), as a means of mitigating the deleterious effects of the damp environment. Some of the smaller bones were apparently then reburied in the cemetery (Bull, 1912, p. 226). However, antiquarian reports and early twentieth-century photographs reveal an earlier arrangement for the charnel. The long bones were formerly stacked with the long axis perpendicular to the north, south and east walls of the crypt, divided by even bands of crania, with other skeletal elements placed behind (Bloxam, 1855, p. 2; Parsons, 1910, p. 485; Sharp, 1879, pp. 58–59, 66) (Figure 9).

We believe that this orderly arrangement of the charnel reflects its medieval form. Certainly, it is consistent with the description of the medieval charnel excavated at Exeter discussed above, and arrangements recorded in more detail at two other charnel houses where the medieval form of the charnel has been excavated *in situ*. For example, at St Mary Spital, London, the charnel comprised a collapsed stack of crania and long bones against one wall of the well-preserved remains of a subterranean room (11 m by 5.6 m) comprising six vaulted bays. This room was connected by masonry stairs to a chapel above, which became a private house in 1540 (Gilchrist & Sloane, 2005, p. 41; Thomas, 2004, pp. 34–35). At St Peter's, Leicester, the charnel was in a freestanding

Figure 8. Current arrangement of human remains in the charnel house in two central stacks with crania arranged on shelves on the north and south walls (Photograph: JC).

Figure 9. Early twentieth-century photograph of charnel house showing the arrangement of human remains prior to documented restacking in 1911 (Photograph reproduced with permission of Rothwell Heritage Centre).

Figure 10. The charnel house at St Peter's, Leicester, during excavation, showing the earliest phases of charnel (Photo reproduced with permission of University of Leicester Archaeological Services).

room, 3.3 m by 2.4 m, adjacent to the parish church. The building was demolished in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, but excavation revealed that the earliest phases of charnel comprised long bones mainly stacked perpendicular to the walls, with skulls interspersed with them. This arrangement is identical to that at Rothwell prior to restacking (Gnanaratnam, 2009, p. 78) (Figure 10).

The date of the Rothwell charnel has attracted much speculation. The anatomist Parsons (1910, p. 485) used craniometrics to identify brachycephalic (rounded) and dolichocephalic (longer) head shapes, both of which he assigned to the later medieval

Table 1. Results of radiocarbon dating of five crania from Rothwell charnel house, undertaken by the ^{14}CHRONO Centre, Queen's University Belfast. Dates were converted into calendrical dates using calibration curve Intcal 13.14c.

Sample description	Radiocarbon lab ID number	Uncalibrated date (years before present, bp, where present is 1950)	Calibrated date/s (years AD to two standard deviations, with associated probability in parentheses)
Cranium with perimortem radiating fractures across parietals. Indeterminate sex, adult	UBA-32256	590 ± 26	1300–1368 (72.1%) 1381–1411 (27.9%)
Male, adult. Labelled '20'	UBA-32257	563 ± 33	1305–1364 (55.4%) 1384–1428 (44.6%)
Probable female, adult. Labelled '115'	UBA-32258	717 ± 27	1257–1300 (96.4%) 1369–1380 (3.6%)
Cranium with evidence of anatomical dissection. Probable male, adult	UBA-32259	144 ± 25	1669–1708 (16.9%) 1718–1781 (31.3%) 1798–1827 (12.3%) 1831–1888 (21.9%) 1911–1945 (17.5%)
Probable male, adult. Labelled '33', and '154'	UBA-32260	213 ± 26	1646–1682 (35.6%) 1737–1758 (6.8%) 1761–1804 (45.1%) 1936–1950 (12.5%)

period. Subsequent authors speculated that they represent two chronologically different burial populations, medieval and post-medieval (Trevor, 1967, p. 3); but the basis of this argument is unsound (Stout, 2013). Material culture reportedly found among the bones during the 1911 restacking, including mid-thirteenth-century tiles depicting an animal, knight in armour and priest (Percival, 1915), has also been used to date the charnel, but this was probably residual from cemetery soils brought in with the bones. We undertook radiocarbon dating of five crania, selected with the permission of the Church of England, to provide the first empirical dating evidence for the human remains (Table 1). Three yielded dates from the late thirteenth to early fifteenth centuries, one of which presented the only osteological evidence for perimortem trauma observed among the visible skeletal remains: multiple, radiating cranial fractures across the parietals indicate death from a blow to the head. Despite the small number of dates obtained, they enable significant refinement of the chronology of the site and refute antiquarian attribution of the bones to a single mortality event – such as the Black Death (1348) or various medieval or early modern local battles (Wallis, 1888, p. 35). The other two crania yielded dates spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one of which displays evidence for anatomisation in the form of a single transverse saw cut, probably arising from an autopsy. Given the evidence of the anatomisation, these crania may derive from the deposition of unwanted medical specimens by the various visiting nineteenth-century surgeons and anatomists, such as Parsons. Perhaps their perception of the former role of the room for the storage of the Christian dead sanctioned its use centuries later.

Despite the two late radiocarbon dates, there is little reason to doubt that the remains are mainly of medieval date. The skeletal material presents staining consistent with long-term contact with soil, and its disarticulated state is consistent with having been brought into the church after a period of earthen burial during which the interosseous ligaments had completely decayed. Some antiquarians attributed the charnelling to disturbance of the cemetery in 1593, when a range of almshouses known as the Jesus Hospital was

constructed by local gentleman Owen Ragsdale just beyond the south-east corner of the present churchyard; they believed that the crypt had formerly been a 'funeral chapel' (Parsons, 1910; Wallis, 1888, p. 36). This interpretation assumes that the medieval churchyard extended beyond its current footprint, but all evidence suggests it was, on the contrary, rather smaller. The southern boundary of the churchyard, *c.*47 m to the south of the church, encompasses an area of land purchased from a local landowner on 19 April 1867 (Diocesan Faculty Records, Northamptonshire Record Office PD/CC/7 Acc. no. 1980/246). To assess whether the area might have been used for burial at a much earlier date, we undertook a GPR survey (James, 2017). The low density of sub-surface anomalies located is consistent with its use for limited interments, suggesting that it was not within the medieval churchyard, contrary to antiquarian speculation. GPR also demonstrated that a boundary shown on the 1819 Enclosure Map *c.*17 m south of the church was substantial and coincides with a drop in the ground level of 1.5 m. It, therefore, seems unlikely that the charnel derived from a distinct disturbance event that contracted the churchyard; rather, the intermittent disturbance of burials in a small and over-crowded churchyard may have been instrumental in a gradual accumulation of charnel.

The Church of England prohibits the large-scale dismantling or removal of the charnel from Rothwell for study. Therefore, standard osteological methods could not be used to reassess the number of individuals represented (e.g. White & Folkens, 2005, p. 339). Nevertheless, it was possible to estimate a minimum number of individuals (MNI). There are exactly 500 crania on the shelves lining the crypt walls, with another *c.*175 on the surface of the stacks and piles. Early twentieth-century photographs and a collapsed section of the east section reveal few cranial elements, suggesting it is unlikely that many more crania were hidden within the stacks. The number of long bones is more difficult to calculate, relying on the numeration of small visible sections which must be multiplied to represent the complete stacks, and then divided by the number of long bones in the complete skeleton to achieve an MNI. If all the long bones were femora, which is evidently untrue based on osteological inspection, the MNI estimate would be 6,835. If all bones of the upper and lower limb were present in equal numbers, the MNI estimate drops to 1,367. The true figure lies between these two values. Despite its imprecision, the long bone count provides conclusive evidence that there are more individuals than the number of skulls, and that the MNI is most likely in the low thousands. Our assessment accords with that of c. 2,500 published by Garland and colleagues some thirty years ago (1988, p. 239), which presumably used similar, if unspecified, methods.

Our analysis also has the merit of revealing that antiquarian assessments of the scale of charnel may sometimes contain much of value. In the 1870s Samuel Sharp undertook a visit 'accompanied by gentlemen of the medical profession' in order to 'obtain correct information' on the human remains, about which he 'had entertained very erroneous impressions' (Sharp, 1879, p. 57). The result of this visit was a calculation based on approximate measurements of the volume of the bone piles, which he assessed at 1275 cubic feet (36.1 cubic meters). He produced two calculations, one based on the numbers of complete skeletal remains and another just on skulls that could be fitted into a cubic foot and cubic yard, respectively, and concluded that there was a maximum number of between 3543 and 3825 skeletons in the crypt. He was entirely confident that claims by Sir George Whyte-Melville (1862) that it contained the remains of over 30,000 people

were unbelievable, and suggested that to house such numbers of remains the crypt would have needed to be four times as large as it is.

Antiquarian assertions about the charnel abound, such as Whyte-Melville's (1862) claim that it represents battle victims, including Vikings allegedly identifiable by their 'most stalwart size' and evidence of weapon wounds. However, Whyte-Melville evidently misinterpreted taphonomic damage and distortion to crania arising from waterlogging and pressure from overburden of earth, as our analysis of accessible skeletal remains identified only two examples of cranial trauma: the aforementioned individual we radiocarbon dated, and one other well-healed example, which was, therefore, not fatal. We selected a sample of 104 crania, based on adequate levels of preservation and completeness from the shelves lining the room, and undertook a demographic assessment utilising standard methods (White & Folkens, 2005). This identified 45 males, 46 females and 16 individuals that could not be assigned a sex (McGinn, 2015). Assessment of age at death based on closure of the latero-anterior cranial sutures (Meindl & Lovejoy, 1985) suggested adults of varied ages are represented, although this method is not sufficiently precise to provide a full demographic profile. Among the 500 crania displayed on the shelves, only one was immature, which may be accounted for by the likelihood of immature crania fragmenting due to their thin and porous bone and lack of fusion at the sutures. Immature bones are, however, visible within the stacks, suggesting children are not absent from the population. The results are consistent with the unpublished osteological analysis of the charnel from Leicester, which focused on the femoral heads of 84 individuals, identifying 22 males, 18 females and seven immature individuals (mostly adolescents with only one infant) (Jacklin, 2009, pp. 106–107). In sum, our analysis of the accessible skeletal material at Rothwell, the first using modern analytical techniques, indicates a population of several thousand men and women of all ages with no indications of selective inclusion based on any aspect of skeletally observable identity, shared lifeways or manner of death.

Rothwell in its regional context

To set the Rothwell charnel house in its contemporary context, other medieval crypts in Northamptonshire were examined as part of our project. The crypts at Oundle and Irthlingborough are both below the south transept, while that at St Peter's, Brackley, is beneath the east bay of a two-bay chancel chapel (Historic England Archive NBR nos. 107382, 107346 and 107378, respectively). That at Oundle dates to *c.* 1280, contemporary with Rothwell, while the other two are perhaps early fourteenth-century. All three have deeply splayed openings in more than one of the exterior walls, and all are covered by vaults: two bays at Oundle, as at Rothwell; a single quadripartite bay at Irthlingborough; a single octopartite bay with central column at Brackley. On the basis of current stair positions, the entrance at Oundle appears always to have been external, but at the others it was internal. At none of the three is there any evidence of additional means of communication with the church above, like the slot at Rothwell, although in all three it is almost certain that there was an altar located directly above, Oundle having a piscina in the transept.

At Kingsthorpe (Historic England Archive, NBR no. 44022; Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England [RCHME], 1975–84, vol. 5, microfiche, pp. 304–309),

Towcester (Historic England Archive, NBR no. 44031) and Northampton, All Saints (RCHME, 1975–1984, vol. 5, microfiche pp. 344–353 with plan on p. 63), crypts underlie eastern extensions of the chancels with which they are contemporary, dating from the second half of the fourteenth or the early fifteenth century. These later crypts are similar in form to their earlier counterparts, save that the vaulting is more elaborate as would be expected in the Perpendicular era. Those at Kingsthorpe and Towcester are both located beneath the high altar, with no evidence for communication between crypt and altar; a recess to the east and side wall benches at Towcester are the result of twentieth-century alterations. Access at Kingsthorpe appears always to have been from outside, while at Towcester it was not altogether conveniently contrived through what was probably a vestry to the north of the chancel. At Northampton, the crypt was partly blocked off following rebuilding after the great town fire of 1675, but appears to conform broadly to the same type: it lay under the medieval chancel, had a ribbed vault with a central octagonal column and window-like openings to the east, and appears to have been built at the same time as the pre-fire chancel. There is no definite evidence that any of these crypts was ever used for charnel, but the similarities of form and location in relation to the church above are striking, and suggest a common function.

Towards a theological context for charnel houses

The theological context for the use of charnel houses in medieval English parish churches has not previously been considered in any detail. Our research at Rothwell offers sufficient new insight into the form and function of a parish charnel house to present an original discussion of this topic.

The obvious context for the late-medieval construction of semi-subterranean rooms in which to house charnel is the maturation, during the middle of the thirteenth century, of what became, in 1274, the Doctrine of Purgatory, the defining belief of late-medieval western Christianity. Belief in Purgatory was far from new in 1274; all that formally changed then was that it became non-negotiable (Le Goff, 1984). At its simplest, the belief was that on death the body remained in this world until the Last Judgement or Second Coming, while the soul was separated from it: the most virtuous souls went to Heaven, where they awaited the Last Judgement in a state of contentment, but not complete fulfilment because they remained separated from their bodies; irredeemably wicked souls went straight to Hell, to be burnt by fire and tortured by demons for eternity; most souls fell between the two extremes and were therefore sent to Purgatory, where they were purified by fire before they joined the virtuous in Heaven (Tugwell, 1990, pp. 110–155). The actions of the living could reduce the time a soul spent in Purgatory, and such a soul was guaranteed ultimate salvation. More than that, the living, by helping souls in Purgatory, performed a work of charity which counter-balanced some of their own sins as well as helping the dead. While those in Purgatory could do nothing further to help themselves, they, therefore, provided a vehicle for assisting the living; and, while alive, they could have enhanced that possibility by arranging the funding of works of prayer or worship once they had died. The most powerful form of 'good work' was the endowment of celebrations of the Mass, the central act of worship which re-performed the crucifixion of Christ, brought Christ's living presence into the church, and gave those who

participated in it by seeing it various benefits; the participants, in turn, prayed for the donor of the Mass, thereby reducing their time in Purgatory (e.g. Burgess, 1991). It was from this that the idea of the chantry evolved during the thirteenth century: an endowment to secure the services of a priest to chant Masses in the name of the deceased. The wealthy could endow a perpetual chantry which paid a priest to chant Mass daily or weekly for ever; the less wealthy could endow 'temporary' or fixed-term chantries for as long as they could afford, right down to a short sequence of Masses in the days or weeks following death, or annually on the anniversary of death (e.g. Burgess, 1991).

Allied to this were the implications of medieval beliefs concerning the fate of the body and the significance of images. Because the body remained on earth to be re-united with the soul at the Last Judgement, the dead were in some way present. It follows that a person buried near an altar could still benefit from the Masses being chanted there, and some kind of memorial would prompt the prayers of living worshippers, to mutual benefit. From this arose the desire to be buried within the church, which, until the thirteenth century, was restricted to the influential (Saul, 2009, p. 114). However, there was insufficient space for everyone who wished to be buried inside the building in an individual grave, still less with a monument, even a floor slab; burial within the church was the preserve of those who could afford to pay for it. This may provide a context for the provision of charnel houses: created to allow a larger number of people than would otherwise have been possible to benefit from burial in proximity to an altar. Various features of the Rothwell crypt are consistent with this view. Although there was no altar in the crypt itself, it was located below an aisle which contained an altar. Those whose remains were in the crypt were not, however, merely proximate to the altar, but, by means of the slot which rose from the east end to near the altar, could 'hear', and therefore participate in, the Masses chanted above (see also Crangle, 2016, p. 210). Furthermore, assuming antiquarian reports that the painting on the east wall was of the Resurrection are correct, the little light which would have percolated down through the slot would have illuminated it and reminded those semi-present in the crypt of the certainty of salvation and of the means of achieving it which was performed at the altar above: it was not uncommon for effigies on tombs to be associated with paintings which only they, not the living, could 'see' (e.g. the tomb of Alice de la Pole at Ewelme, Oxfordshire: Rosewell, 2008, Figs. 212–215). At the same time, the openings in the south wall let in sufficient light for passers-by to see the bones within, prompting prayer for them, to mutual benefit.

Rothwell may, then, have been a particularly sophisticated example of an experiment born out of beliefs surrounding Purgatory. The intention may have been a means of sharing the benefits of church burial more widely than would otherwise have been possible, while addressing the problem of space within the cemetery. As later medieval wills reveal, some people continued to request individual burial in particular places within the church (Serjeantson & Longden, 1913, p. 400), but the crypt offered the possibility either for everyone to benefit, or for members of a burial club or guild to do so. That such an arrangement in parish churches was not ubiquitous is not surprising: it was expensive to build; it required lasting management for exhuming and moving decomposed skeletons; and because the benefits of burial within the church were not available immediately there had to be time for decomposition, so it was imperfect. But it may perhaps reveal an attempt to grapple with the challenges posed by the new belief and to find an egalitarian solution to the problem of space within the church.

Figure 11. Two thirteenth-century stone grave covers now in the Lady Chapel of Holy Trinity church. The emaciated heads, shoulders and feet are visible through the coffins (Photograph: JC).

The fact that some other communities, such as Kingsthorpe and Towcester, built crypts at a later date may indicate that it was an experiment which did not entirely fail. By the late fourteenth and the fifteenth century, however, there may have been an additional factor: the rise of interest in the macabre, and the popularity of images and stories of death as an antidote to the contemporary love of life and of worldly possessions (Ariès, 1981, pp. 110–132). One manifestation of this is the depiction in wall paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead, of which there are about 20 known treatments in England, including ones nearby at Raunds, Northamptonshire, and at Peakirk in the Soke of Peterborough (Carleton Williams, 1942). The subject derived from a series of late thirteenth-century Franco-Flemish poems (Glixelli, 1914), and shows the encounter of three rich men, hunting or travelling, with three dead men, often depicted as skeletons, who caution them 'as you are so were we; as we are so you will be'. A more particular, and much rarer, manifestation of the same culture is the so-called *transi* tomb (Saul, 2009, pp. 211–234), in which a conventional effigy is paired with a shrouded one or a cadaver, an example of which is found at Towcester – the tomb of Archdeacon William Sponne, rector from 1422 to 1448, and founder of a chantry college in the church (Thompson, 1911, pp. 99, 113, 155). It is possible that there was a link between this kind of culture and late medieval interest in charnel houses in which the dead could be seen, perhaps particularly at Towcester where the crypt was built during or immediately after Sponne's tenure of the parish. Interestingly, two grave covers currently in the Rothwell Lady Chapel, almost contemporary with the

crypt, may reflect something of a similar interest in the dead, for they depict emaciated corpses partially visible in their coffins (Figure 11).

Conclusions

On the continent, medieval charnel houses were widespread, and many more survive than in England, where evidence of their medieval form and function has largely been lost. Consequently, understanding of English charnel houses has largely been based on a small number of well-documented examples situated within high-status ecclesiastical contexts, none of which survive intact. The extent, nature and significance of charnelling at parish level is, by comparison, poorly understood, and this is why the rare survival at Rothwell of a medieval parish charnel house with human remains still within is so significant for our understanding of the role of charnel practices in medieval Europe. In this paper, analysis of the fabric of Rothwell church and charnel house, the human remains, and the funerary landscape beyond have contributed to a range of novel insights. The thirteenth-century room was well-lit, decorated with a wall painting and accessible, probably from the nave. Skeletonised human remains stacked around the walls represented all sectors of the medieval population with no evidence of selectivity. Although the bones were most likely removed from their graves as the space was needed again for new interments, their subsequent treatment suggests charnelling held both theological and liturgical significance. The bones would have been able to hear the Mass taking place in the chapel above, thus receiving the benefits of this experience in addition to prayers offered for the unnamed dead which would have offered salvation for their souls in Purgatory. The human remains could also be seen from outside by passers-by, who might be stimulated to imagine their own fate after death and take time to offer prayers for their ancestors, and hope future generations would do the same for them; sentiments prompted more widely by wall-paintings and funerary monuments.

Despite the translation and reburial of human remains being commonplace in the Middle Ages (Crangle, 2016), no rite for it has been preserved amongst English liturgical texts. However, the most likely form of rite would have involved a re-enactment, with the exhumed bones, of the Office of the Dead, perhaps followed by a Mass of Requiem, as was often provided on the anniversary of a person's death, followed by immediate reburial using an adapted version of the burial rite of the Use of Sarum (Collins, 1958, pp. 152–162), the set of liturgical texts and customs used throughout southern England (Barnwell, Craig-Atkins, & Hadley, in prep).

Many charnel houses seem to have gone out of use as a result of the Reformation, being cleared of charnel and sometimes demolished in the sixteenth century (Crangle, 2015, pp. 377–379; Litten, 1991, p. 8). The surviving example at Rothwell is therefore crucial for the development of models with which to interpret more partial evidence elsewhere. The Rothwell charnel house may also have gone out of use at the Reformation, to be rediscovered only only at the start of the eighteenth century, but it appears that intense local fascination with the charnel, reflected in much antiquarian discussion, prevented it from being cleared out unlike so many other examples. Our survey of Northamptonshire crypts has revealed that several churches in the vicinity had rooms of similar form, location and, potentially, function to that at Rothwell, raising new indications of the scale of parish charnelling. Moreover, antiquarian accounts of English charnel houses written before they

were cleared or destroyed hold the key to finding more examples of medieval charnelling, so long as their projections of their own contemporary concerns onto the past are recognised, as we have shown here (Crangle, 2016, pp. 165–166, 378–381). Indeed, our study of Rothwell suggests that there would be considerable merit in re-examination of the antiquarian accounts of charnel houses across the country, setting them within their architectural context (e.g. Fisher, 1898; Green, 1796; Hasted, 1799, pp. 152–188; discussed in Crangle, 2016, pp. 165–166). This study of Rothwell has offered a new model with which to evaluate the surviving evidence for charnel practices in a more critical manner, and to enable the integration of charnel houses in England into wider narratives of medieval charnelling across Europe.

Note

1. A digital 3D model of the charnel house was created as part of the architectural survey for this project and is freely available for download (Craig-Atkins, Maddock, Hadley, & Scott, 2017, https://doi.org/10.15131/shef.data.5368459.v1).

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Material specificity and cultural agency: the mummies of the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily

Natalie Polzer

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily as material objects that become agents of cultural meaning on regional and universal levels through processes of human praxis. Informed by three theoretical notions: materiality, spatiality and Daniel Miller's understanding of consumption, the analysis focuses on two ongoing events: the commoditization of the Catacombs as a tourist site and the scientific investigation of the mummies and their environment by teams of experts from the Sicily Mummy Project. These events are identified as processes of consumption, that is, praxes through which engagement with a material object confers it with the agency to generate cultural meaning. In general, the scientific investigation of the mummies as repositories of medical data has enabled their universal cultural agency as 'biological archives'. By contrast, arguably, the unique historical materiality of child mummy, Rosalia Lombardo, has enabled her agency as a metonym for contemporary, regional Sicilian identity.

This study investigates a particular case of the agency of material objects in the generation of cultural meaning, in light of Daniel Miller's theoretical understanding of materiality and consumption. As manufactured objects of material culture, the mummies residing in the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily, generate cultural meaning at different levels that correlate with two factors: (1) the historical circumstances of their preservation and burial; and (2) their consumption as objects of tourist interest and of scientific investigation.[1] A selection of mummies prepared by the Capuchin friars in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries and the child mummy, Rosalia Lombardo, who was embalmed in 1920, have recently undergone a scientific investigation by teams of experts working with the Sicily Mummy Project. Through this process, the mummies have become cultural agents at both regional and universal levels of meaning (Polzer, 2018).

The many recent publications, popular and expert, about mummies, mummification[2] and other mortuary practices,[3] evidence an abiding secular Western attention to diverse ways of engagement with human remains, including processes of burial and commemoration (Hallam & Hockey, 2001). Informed by the theoretical frames of material cultural studies and spatiality, this study is part of a larger project that addresses a specific

phenomenon: the function of the human dead as material objects with an agency to construct social and ideological networks of meaning through human engagement. The project as a whole attends to two sets of human bodies, which have become enduring, material artefacts through human technological enterprise: the soft-tissue mummies housed in the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo, Sicily, and the hard, plastinated cadavers displayed in the contemporary, international *Body Worlds* exhibitions. The project is neither concerned with religious beliefs and secular ideologies concerning death and afterlife, nor with the cultural history of Western practices of burial or commemoration (Ariès, 1981; Laqueur, 2015); rather, its focus is the social praxis of handling and displaying human remains as material artefacts and the transformation of social meaning generated thereby. A working assumption of this project holds that human care for the dead evidences a long-standing cultural pattern that historian Thomas Laqueur calls 'the work of the dead' (2015); namely, that ideological meaning and the social structure of living human communities is expressed and generated, on an ongoing basis, by the diverse ways in which living humans attend to human remains.

A particular instance of the 'work of the dead' occurred in the first decade of the twenty-first century: teams of scientific experts affiliated with the Sicily Mummy Project subjected a selection of the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs to scientific examination. In this process, the child mummy, Rosalia Lombardo, received remarkably singular treatment. After undergoing scientific investigation twice (Panzer, Gill-Frerking, Rosendahl, Zink, & Piombino-Mascali, 2013; Panzer, Zink, & Piombino-Mascali, 2010), her casket was moved to a new location in the Catacombs and displayed in a singular way. Arguably, Rosalia's specific historical materiality, marked by the recent spatial changes to her display, render her cultural agency quite different from that of the other mummies that were examined.

Methodology and theoretical approach

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Palermo, Sicily in May 2015. No formal interviews were conducted at this preliminary stage of the research. Multiple participation-observation experiences took place in the Catacombs and in two local Palermo cemeteries, the cemetery immediately adjacent to the Catacombs and a larger public cemetery as a site of comparison. Fieldwork also included spontaneous, informal conversations with research librarians at the Palermo National Library and the Franciscan Library, and with two Capuchin friars who work in the Friary library.

Material culture studies is a theoretical approach that emerged in the 1990s, charged by the theoretical innovations and practical applications of cultural anthropologist Daniel Miller and his research community at University College, London (Miller, 1987, 1998a). Responding to structuralism, a cognitive approach dominant in post-World War II British and continental cultural anthropology (Miller, 2005, p. 6–7), Miller maintains that 'the best way to understand, appreciate and convey our humanity is through attention to our fundamental materiality' (Miller, 2010, p. 4). Material artefacts produced and/or engaged with by human beings are not viewed as passive, inert semiotic or representational indicators of human cultural ideological values and individual identities; rather, the material objects that surround us and with which we engage on an ongoing basis are active agents in the generation of cultural systems of meaning, motivation and

enduring practice. Using Latour's theoretical work on agency and Bourdieu's theoretical construct of *habitus* (Miller, 2005, pp. 6–8, p. 11), Miller stipulates that material objects, by virtue of their specific materiality, have active agency on personal (Miller, 1998b, p. 131), local and global levels (Miller, 1998a, p. 17). This agency is released by their engagement in practice, that is, it is '...through the materiality of praxis' that material objects become agents in the creation of human culture (DeMarrais, 2004, p. 12).

Material culture studies is a transdisciplinary approach that is used to advantage in social science and humanities disciplines to preserve the 'specificity of the material domains relevant to...[each] discipline' (Miller, 1998a, p. 6). The broad diversity of subjects covered in the *Handbook of Material Culture* (Tilley, Keane, Küchler, Rowlands, & Spyer, 2008) evidences the transdisciplinary range of the approach and the specificity of the material domains in which it is applied: home furnishings, food, landscape and place, monuments and memorials, colour, sound, sight and clothing, among others. Spatiality, the theorization of the nature and management of socially structured space, has a significant role in framing the social agency of material objects (Miller, 1998a, p. 15; Hallam & Hockey, 2001).

The identification of human remains as a specific material domain falls under the aegis of the field of mortuary archaeology (for instance, DeMarrais, Gosden, & Renfrew, 2004; Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2004, 2008; Meskell, 2005a; Oestigaard, Anfinset, & Saetersdal, 2004; Williams & Giles, 2016), which explores the behavioral and social aspects of mortuary practices in past societies, under the assumption that 'mortuary ritual is a direct reflection of the 'social organization...belief and agency' of human communities (Charles, 2005, p. 15). Mortuary archaeologists generally consider the dead human body to have unique materiality since it undergoes a natural, biological process of physical disintegration, a process normatively marked by practices of funerary rites, commemorization and mourning (Stutz, 2008). Oestigaard calls the unique materiality of the dead human body a 'fluid materiality' and views the technological processes of mummification and cremation as 'extreme solutions to the problem of the materiality of human flesh' (Oestigaard, 2004, p. 23). Indeed, mummies can be isolated as a specific sub-domain of the materiality of the dead human body inasmuch as they are manufactured artefacts that extend the material presence of the dead by arresting the fluid process of decay (Meskell, 2005b, p. 60).

Through innovative interdisciplinary theoretical and analytical approaches, the field of bioarchaeology has recently been transformed into 'a discipline that bridges the biological and social sciences' (Stone, 2018, p. 4). While previously, analysis of the biological aspects of archaeological human remains fell under the aegis of the 'hard' sciences, skeletal human remains are now explored for their 'physiological embodiment of social processes' (Gowland, 2017, p. 178). With some exceptions, such innovation has not yet occurred in the field of mummy studies. Similar to the field of mortuary archaeology before its recent transformation, mummy studies is currently experiencing a disciplinary gap between research informed by: (1) science-based approaches, which '...are [assumed to be] necessarily fixed, universal and trans-historical'; and, (2) social theory-based approaches that '...deal with the body as an object that is contextually and historically produced' (Sofaer, 2006, p. xiii, p. 10). This gap is clearly evident in the research reviewed for this project. A scant few recent publications in mummy studies utilize both scientific and social science approaches, notably Meskell's study of ancient

Egyptian mummies as material culture (2005b; also Cornell, 2004; and on the Greenland mummies; Hart Hansen, Meldgaard, & Nordquist, 1991/1985). However, mummy studies is overwhelmingly a 'hard science' discipline dominated by medically related fields, particularly paleopathology. Paleopathology investigates mummies as objects of medical research that contain biological data to be uncovered by dissection and more sophisticated medical technologies (CT scan, radiography) (Cockburn, Cockburn, & Reyman, 1998). Its goals are strictly medical: to determine '...how the diseases we presently suffer have evolved...and...clues to control present and future affliction' (Aufderheide, 2003, p. 536). The gap between scientific and social theory approaches in mummy studies is blatant in the encyclopedic *The Scientific Study of Mummies*, which devotes more than 500 pages to the paleopathological study of mummies and scant 50-odd pages to their social and cultural meaning (Aufderheide, 2003).

Another gap is evident in the treatment of the materiality of the human body in material culture studies. The human body as a material object of medical scrutiny is, in my view, surprisingly absent from the many domains covered in the *Handbook of Material Culture* (Tilley et al., 2008). The objectification and social construction of the human by the medical sciences has, indeed, been heavily theorized over the past 30 years in both the social sciences and the humanities (Stutz, 2008, p. 20), but not, seemingly, in material cultural studies. Perhaps this absence is caused by an unconscious reluctance on the part of contemporary practitioners of theory to attribute active agency to human bodies undergoing medical scrutiny, which are assumed to be passive objects of the 'medical gaze'.

I identify the recent scientific investigation of the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs as a process of consumption, following Daniel Miller's theoretical understanding of the concept. Miller has noted a particularly contemporary feature of the agency of material objects in the creation of human culture. By contrast to Marx, who singled out the process of production as especially significant, Miller holds that it is the process of consumption that charges a material object with cultural agency (Miller, 1998a, p. 11, 2008). However, one identifies the precise nature of consumption, it constitutes an interactive praxis between humans and material objects that charge the latter with the power to construct social relations, identity and ideological networks. The mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs are, arguably, material objects that have recently undergone two distinct, intensive processes of consumption: (1) their recently enhanced status as objects of tourist consumption (all of the mummies); (2) their consumption as objects of scientific investigation (a select few).

The Capuchin Catacombs – history and research

The mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs are not, strictly speaking, archaeological objects, but bodies buried in a unique kind of open-air cemetery. The Catacombs of the Capuchin Friary in Palermo functioned as a place of burial from the early seventeenth to the late nineteenth centruies. The first underground corridor was opened in 1599 to serve as a burial site for Capuchin friars, dug into the hill immediately west of the Friary church, Santa Maria della Pace (Farella, 1982, pp. 78–79). The bodies of deceased friars were placed uncovered in the underground corridor, to accommodate then the current devotional practice of the veneration of the dead (Da Castellamare, 1938, p. 49). Apparently, in the

case of early burials, the mummification process occurred spontaneously, caused by the constant temperature of the underground environment. Later the friars began to prepare mummies anthropogenically. Corpses were placed horizontally on slanted slabs of stone in designated rooms, 'collatoi', for approximately one year. This process caused desiccation by draining bodily fluids (Farella, 1982, p. 100). After mummification, bodies were clothed in their religious habits and arranged along the corridors, most often upright in wall niches. From the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries the original corridor was progressively expanded into a large quadrant with four corner rooms used as chapels. During this period, the site became a popular place of final rest for renowned members of the military and the local bourgeoisie; by the mid-nineteenth century, it had become a public cemetery open to all who could afford it (Farella, 1982, pp. 84–92).

Sicily boasts other catacombs connected with religious orders (National Geographic Society, 2009); but only the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo were a place of burial open to the lay population. After the unification of Italy in the late nineteenth century, mummification and disposition in the Catacombs were prohibited by municipal law due to hygienic rationales (Panzer et al., 2010, p. 1124) and an outdoor public cemetery, still in use, was opened immediately to the west (Farella, 1982, pp. 92–94). A recent count estimates 1252 mummies in the Catacombs (Piombino-Mascali et al., 2011, p. 25) that have survived mold, bacterial infestation, fire, flood damage and the bombardment of the invading Allied forces during World War II (Piombino-Mascali et al., 2012, p. 342).

Publications concerning these mummies fall into three categories: popular presentations, historical studies and reports of the recent scientific investigations under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project. The Palermo mummies are a staple of popular literature on mortuary practices and the history of mummification (Crisp, 2004). Currently, the Catacombs cast the allure of 'dark tourism', namely tourist attraction to sites featuring the bizarre and macabre, an academic sub-discipline of cultural studies (Sharpely & Stone, 2009). Indeed, the many 'coffee table' photo books and photo-rich web sites that are aimed at popular audiences highlight the mummies as objects of gruesome fascination (Cenzi, 2014; Facchi & Lanzi, 2001; Fernandez, 1980; Palermofor91days.com, 2017). Two historical monographs on the Catacombs authored by Capuchin clergy have appeared in the past century (Da Castellamare, 1938: Farella, 1982). Da Castellamare's work, heavily hagiographic, has an explicit theological agenda – to revive the practice of the veneration of the dead within the Capuchin order (1938, p. 7). To date, Farella's monograph remains the only truly critical publication that addresses the social and cultural history of the site, despite its conservative historical methodology.

Since 2007, scientific research on the mummies has been conducted under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project, an ongoing enterprise of teams of scientific experts in various fields: paleopathology, paleogenetics, paleobotany, entomology and microbiology (Sineo et al., 2008). The Project's publications fall firmly in the 'hard', biological sciences and assume the goals, methodologies and investigative technologies relevant to these disciplines. Dubbed a 'precious bioanthropological resource' (Piombino-Mascali et al., 2012, p. 341), the objects of investigation are considered repositories of significant, quantifiable biological data, both the mummies themselves (Panzer et al., 2013, 2010; Piombino-Mascali et al., 2012, 2011; Sineo et al., 2008) and their physical environments (Piñar et al., 2014; Piñar, Piombino-Mascali, Maixner, Zink, & Sterflinger, 2013). Indeed, to date, there has been but minimal consideration of the site or the mummies from the perspective of social theory. A short

section on Robert Hertz's notion of secondary burial (1978/1907), included in the initial report (Sineo et al., 2008, pp. 26–27) and cited in several subsequent publications (Piombino-Mascali et al., 2012, pp. 342–343; 2011, p. 25–26), is the only attempt to view the Catacombs' mortuary practices in light of social theory.

The mummies as disenfranchised dead

Like the residents of other cemeteries that have fallen into disuse as active places of burial, the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs no longer have an active part in the social fibre of the local living community. Since the notion of an open display cemetery is alien to current sensibilities, it is difficult for contemporary visitors to imagine the Catacombs in their nineteenth-century heyday. Judging from the fieldwork, contemporary Sicilian cemeteries constitute vibrant, public social space shared by the stationary dead and the ambulant living. Unlike the 'garden cemeteries' of North America and Central and Northern Europe, which consciously remove the dead from the social space of the living to create quiet, contemplative environments (Laqueur, 2015, pp. 271–312), contemporary public cemeteries in Palermo are veritable 'booming necropolises', micro-cosmic urban neighbourhoods, in which the living interact intensely with each other and with their dead. Visitors engage in private meditation and prayer and vocally converse with their dead. Living visitors spend leisure time, as well as moments anxiously stolen from work or lunch break, constructing and tending the visual montages and floral displays on gravesites, sitting in the shade of cypress trees in the heat of the afternoon, reading, and fraternizing with neighbouring living visitors to their dead. Indeed, the extravagant visual montages and grave goods displayed on recent gravesites suggest a healthy measure of social rivalry and artistic competition between the living families of the dead.[4] There is no reason to doubt that the intensive social life enacted in the cemeteries of contemporary Palermo is but a continuation of practices that once took place in the Catacombs.

After the Catacombs were no longer an active public cemetery, its mummies gradually became socially disenfranchised, as their living visitors died in turn, and social engagement between the living and the dead was transferred to outdoor public cemeteries. According to my friar informants, the last mummy to be actively visited by family was, predictably, Rosalia Lombardo, the last one to be interred in the Catacombs, who was visited by a niece until the mid-twentieth century. Currently, the mummies are utterly disenfranchised from the local, living community; no longer active 'ancestral bodies', they are visited by tourists rather than descendants and have become irrelevant to local spheres of social structure and meaning. Indeed, my casual conversations with Palermo residents evidenced a unanimous expression of the little interest that locals have in the Catacombs; they know that they exist, but never think to visit them. With one exception, a member of an NGO trying to foster international professional interest in Sicily, informants uniformly expressed surprise that my interest in the Catacombs was beyond that of ephemeral tourist curiosity (Polzer, 2018, p. 7).

'The work of the dead' as consumption

Arguably, the 'work of the dead' (Laqueur, 2015) performed by the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs has undergone recent transformation through two processes of consumption that have enabled their cultural agency on levels transcending local

community boundaries. The mummies have recently become material objects of consumption for: (1) tourists; (2) the teams of scientific experts. Miller notes how the consumption of material objects through their purchase renders them agents in the creation of identity and cosmological meaning for individual shoppers (Miller, 1998b). Certainly, the tourist experience of material objects when visiting target sites is not precisely identical, since, in the case of tourism, the object of purchase is experienced ephemerally rather than acquired. However, a tourist's experience of material objects can be viewed as consumption, inasmuch as their materiality has agency in creating cultural meaning. Tourism in the Catacombs is scarcely new; indeed, the Catacombs have been a tourist attraction since the mid-nineteenth century for English and American travellers on the Grand Tour (Browne, 1853, pp. 23–25; Stephens, 1991/1837, pp. 204–205). However, very recently the site has been developed in a process of commoditization to make it a more economically profitable tourist enterprise. This process is evidenced by changes in the site management and by its inclusion in 'dark tourism' itineraries (Curran, 2014; Palermofor91days.com). My friar informants related that up to the end of the twentieth century, the day to day administration of the site had been handled by the friars themselves. There was no fixed entrance fee for tourist visitors; only voluntary donations were accepted and a small array of souvenirs was sold. Around 2010, a professional manager was hired to assume all duties related to tourism: gift shop stock and sales, admission, signage, security and general maintenance. A fixed entrance fee, 3 Euros, was established. Profits from the enterprise are used by the Capuchin order to fund social aid projects in local, poor neighbourhoods: soup kitchens, emergency relief and immigration and refugee aid (Polzer, 2018, p. 8–9).

Since the fieldwork for this project was preliminary, interviews and questionnaires aimed at the tourist visitors were not conducted to investigate which material features of the mummies and the site are especially significant triggers of the agency during the tourist experience of consumption. However, judging from the initial fieldwork, the following material features of the mummies are especially proactive: (1) the absence of smell in the site; (2) specific body parts and their degree of preservation; (3) the mummies' clothing and its degree of preservation; and, (4) the age and gender of the mummies at the time of their deaths. Remarks on the surprising absence of the smell of putrescence were frequently overheard during my 2015 fieldwork. Indeed, early nineteenth century tourists recorded similar responses: 'There is no offensive odor and the visitor would scarcely know, if he did not see them, that he was surrounded by the dead' (Browne, 1853, p. 25). Remarks were also overheard about the sometimes very well-preserved clothing worn by the mummies. The silk garments worn by female mummies are, in some cases, in a remarkable state of preservation, with complex fabric patterns and minute hand-stitching clearly evident. The male mummies' woollen suits have suffered more damage, but are often well enough preserved to evidence eighteenth and nineteenth century masculine provincial high fashion. The linen garments of both men and women (shirts, caps, lace) are also often in a good state of preservation, as well as some of the muslin clothing worn by children and the unmarried women housed in the 'Chamber of the Virgins'. The mummies with well-preserved skin and head and facial hair elicited frequent comment by visitors, by contrast with skeletal mummies. Child mummies whose skin was visibly covering the bones, also elicited special response. Future fieldwork is expected to provide more concrete data on tourist response to the

mummies' material qualities, a response that transforms them from passive objects of the tourist 'gaze' to active agents in generating social meaning.

The recent scientific investigation of the mummies is understood as consumption in two ways: (1) just as food consumption isolates and processes nutrients for the benefit of the maintenance of the individual human body, the goal of the scientific research is to isolate and process biological data for the benefit of the medical welfare of humankind; (2) the scientific engagement with the mummies' materiality functions like Miller's notion of consumption in that it charges them with the agency to influence networks of social identity and ideological constructs. Notably, the consumption of mummies by the research teams of the Sicily Mummy Project is very different from the kind of consumption by autopsy of ancient mummies performed, on occasion, by paleopathologists.[5] As Catholic bodies buried in sacred ground, the mummies in the Catacombs are legally protected from invasive and destructive forms of scientific examination (Piombino-Mascali & Zink, 2011, pp. 224–225). Regrettably, this protection does not always extend to ancient mummies (Pringle, 2001, pp. 17–18).

The mummies as agents generating social meaning

In the publications consulted for this study, the mummies are usually represented as passive objects of the investigation under the hands of active scientific experts wielding state-of-the-art medical technology, who exploit them as 'biological archives' or repositories of biological data. This representation dominates both expert and popular presentations, perhaps most concisely illustrated in the recent National Geographic documentary on Sicily's mummies (2009). The active agents in this film are human and machine: the scientists investigating the mummies and the sophisticated technology that exposes their biological secrets. The film effects dramatic suspense through its presentation of scientists manoeuvring bulky radiographic machinery through tight corridors and down narrow stairs and positioning the passive, fragile mummies for investigation (Polzer, 2018, p. 11).

The theoretical frame of materiality transforms this active-passive paradigm of the agency. Through the process of scientific investigation understood as consumption, the mummies have been transformed from inert, passive objects into agents generating cultural meaning that transcends local boundaries. Their new agency appears on two social levels. All of the mummies have become significant 'universal bodies' by virtue of the contribution of their biological data to humanity for medical research. The unique materiality of Rosalia Lombardo has made her an agent of identity on a regional level, informing a peculiarly Italian form of regional identity politics.

The function of archaeology, particularly mortuary archaeology, in the articulation of twentieth and twenty-first century national identities has been a salient subject of recent critical focus (Díaz-Andrew & Champion, 1996; Williams & Giles, 2016). Moreover, mortuary archaeology has recently had a key role in global political trends: the self-assertion of minority groups living in hegemonic nation states (McClelland & Cerezo-Román, 2016, p. 39) and the challenge to hegemonic nationalist history (Pringle, 2001, pp. 136–142). Since the nineteenth century, Italian political identities have maintained a strong regional profile compared to other Western European nation-states (Levy, 1996) owing to historical, legislative, political and linguistic factors (Lepschy, Lepschy, & Voghera, 1996;

Lyttleton, 1996, p. 34). In line with a current global trend of claims for political and cultural sovereignty by small, ethnically and/or linguistically distinct regions (Minahan, 2016, pxviii), contemporary Sicily manifests Italy's tendency to regionalism in a movement towards cultural and political self-determination. In recent years, a Sicilian political movement seeking independence from Italy has gained strength, which is reflected not only in a struggle for political and social autonomy, but also in various regional enterprises seeking to strengthen Sicilian regional identity, culture and economy (Mendola & Alio, 2014; Minahan, 2016, p. 383).

Both popular and critical presentations of the Sicilian mummies evidence a focus on regional Sicilian identity. Predictably, the National Geographic documentary stresses the regional character of Sicilian mummies and the process of mummification (2009). The scientific research under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project also stresses Sicilian regional identity, but only selectively. The Project's preliminary publication has a marked regional focus, with its three first authors hailing from the University of Palermo (Sineo et al., 2008). This publication highlights the role of the mummies in the creation of contemporary local and regional identity. The paleo-genetic analysis of the mummies is deemed to enable scientists 'to trace back the origins of the Sicilian population' and to determine the relationship between genetic inheritance and local historical epidemiological demographics (Sineo et al., 2008, pp. 159–60). Anthropological analysis will 'provide...a deeper knowledge of the ancient Palermo inhabitants and their social and emotional responses to death' (Sineo et al., 2008, p. 161). The conclusion invites public funding by stressing the importance of the site 'for Sicilian history and culture' (Sineo et al., 2008, p. 162).

With one significant exception, subsequent research under the aegis of the Sicily Mummy Project does not maintain this regional focus. However, the agency of the mummies, Rosalia Lombardo in particular, in regional identity politics is maintained in the work of Dario Piombino-Mascali, a founding members of the Sicily Mummy Project and, according to his LinkedIn profile page, its director from 2007–2018 (Linkedin.com, 2017). Beyond his dedicated scientific interests, Piombino-Mascali's multi-faceted engagement with the Capuchin Catacombs appears to be connected with his assertion of Sicilian regional identity. Arguably, for Piombino-Mascali the mummies are ancestral bodies on a new level – regional ancestors of Sicily, rather than ancestors of a familial line. His involvement with the mummies is multifaceted: scientific research, university educational programming, popular engagement and expert advisor and administrator of Sicilian sites featuring mummies. Piombino-Mascali has assumed the public face of the Project, evidenced by his central role in the National Geographic documentary (2009), his presence on social media (Academia.edu, 2017; Linkedin.com, 2017) and his commitment to preserving the mummies as a significant Sicilian cultural resource.

Perhaps owing to his early training in anthropology (University of Pisa: MA Anthropology 2002, PhD Physical Anthropology 2007), his work on Sicilian mummies is uniquely broad in its disciplinary scope. As well as his work in paleopathological investigations of the mummies (Panzer et al., 2013, 2010) and reports on the Sicily Mummy Project (Piombino-Mascali et al., 2012, 2011; Sineo et al., 2008), Piombino-Mascali has published popular (2009, 2008) and expert (Piombino-Mascali, Aufderheide, Johanson-Williams, & Zink, 2009) publications on a uniquely Sicilian contribution to the history of modern medical science, namely, the development of

embalming practices in the early twentieth century. Indeed, he was instrumental in the rediscovery of the embalming formula of local chemist, Alfredo Salafia (1869–1933) (Piombino-Mascali et al., 2009). Piombino-Mascali is also engaged in educating a transnational public about the Sicilian mummies. He has founded and co-directed an annual Mummy Studies Field School with the University of Nebraska, first held in July–August 2016 (My World, 2017; UNL Announce, 2016). This project publicizes the Sicilian regional profile on a transnational level, as international students engage in 'hands on' research experience with mummies in Sicily. The fact that Sicilian is identified, along with Italian, as his mother tongue on his CV, evidences his strong commitment to Sicily, his 'native island,' and to the Sicilian regional identity that permeates his career profile (Academia.edu, 2017).

The mummies' agency to generate social meaning directly correlates with their consumption by means of scientific technology. Specifically addressing the development of cremation as a mortuary practice in nineteenth century Europe, Laqueur describes the paradoxical role of innovative technology in the power of the dead to generate social meaning. On one hand, the late nineteenth-century promotion of the then technologically sophisticated process of cremation shows how pragmatic modernism aimed to strip the human body of ideological and religious significance. On the other hand, the practice of cremation resulted in novel culturally meaningful ways of engaging with the dead (Laqueur, 2015, pp. 485–548). The scientific investigation of the mummies using state-of-the-art medical technology is similar since the imputed universal authority of technology and medical science (Sofaer, 2006, p. xiii) enable the mummies to become relevant to humanity as a whole.

The discourse, both popular and expert, implicitly communicates the sense that the mummies themselves have agency, in that their initial preservation is understood as the conscious creation of valuable medical resources for generations unborn. Obviously, this notion is factually presumptuous; however, it is a strong discursive sub-text, an implied projection of the mummies' intended agency in the purposeful improvement of future human life. Perhaps this trope can be compared to ideologies underlying the twentieth-century science of cryonics. Cryonics is a technological process for the integral preservation of recently deceased human remains by freezing, anticipating future resuscitation at whatever time medical science would be sufficiently advanced to heal conditions that caused initial death (McKie, 2002). Although mummies could scarcely ever be resuscitated like carefully frozen cadavers, the notion that dead human bodies were preserved in the past to be accessed in the future, is similar in the two cases. However, cryonics aims to resuscitate humans as individuals; the mummies yield data with universal application (Polzer, 2018, p. 11).

The view of mummies as 'biological archives', repositories of valuable biological data, can have regional significance, namely, in genetic demographic history (Sineo et al., 2008, pp. 159–160); however, its relevance is usually projected as universal, as articulated by Heather Pringle: 'In years to come, medical researchers struggling to outwit all manner of deadly parasites – from viruses to bacteria, rickettsis to amoeba, fungi to protozoa – could turn to the mummified dead in search of new weapons. Sealed in their preserved cells is an astonishing molecular archive of disease, a record of misery and malady far more ancient and far more complete than any noted on rice paper, papyri, clay tablets, or stone' (2002, p. 81). Here, mummies are viewed as agents of human

salvation, through the projected causal connection between their past preservation, their present materiality and the medical needs of future humanity.

The special case of Rosalia Lombardo

Rosalia Lombardo, the last mummy buried in the Catacombs, has recently undergone a unique process that exemplifies how the specific materiality of the human dead has the power to create culture through praxis. The management of space, as well as her specific materiality, is of significance. The two different praxes that inform this process are: (1) her scientific investigation; and, (2) her subsequent reburial in a new casket in a different part of the Catacombs. Her spatial reorientation is understood as a type of 'second burial', a mortuary practice in which human remains are transferred from one physical place to another, normatively during a protracted ritual sequence: mourning, commemoration and the gradual disintegration and final disposition of the corpse (Hertz, 1978/1907). Rosalia's second burial is a practice that, arguably, displays her specific agency on two levels: (1) her universal role as a child in the Western ideological arena of family values; (2) her possible status as a metonym for Sicilian regional identity.

Rosalia's agency as a metonym for regional, Sicilian identity is generated by the specific historical facts of her materiality. After perishing from pneumonia at the age of 2 in 1920, Rosalia was embalmed by local chemist, Dr Alfredo Salafia, who later became an internationally acclaimed pioneer of embalming science (Piombino-Mascali et al., 2009). Her body, in a glass-topped, wooden casket, was originally placed in the Catacomb's Chapel of Santa Rosalia where it remained until the first decade of the twenty-first century when two stages of scientific investigation were conducted (Panzer et al., 2013, 2010). Subsequently, the wooden casket was placed in a larger, sealed metal and glass display case and was moved to 'the Family Room', a chamber at the far periphery of the Catacombs that features a variety of mummies of men, women and children, alone and in nuclear family groups.

Rosalia has always been a unique Catacombs resident. Her 1920 internment required special legal dispensation since burial in the Catacombs had been prohibited since the late nineteenth century. Lying in her wooden casket with her head and face visible through the glass, covered with a satin sheet as though asleep (Panzer et al., 2013, p. 402), her doll-like appearance and remarkable preservation earned her the nickname 'the Sleeping Beauty (National Geographic 2009). Always a major tourist attraction, she was the mummy star of the National Geographic documentary, in which members of the scientific research team and a representative of the Capuchin order rhapsodize about her life-like appearance (2009). Certainly, she is the only mummy residing in the Catacombs who is regularly identified by name – all other mummies that have undergone scientific investigation remain anonymous. Over and above her extraordinary state of preservation, Rosalia is the only mummy to have been examined twice by Sicily Mummy Project teams, first with radiographic technology in 2008 (Panzer et al., 2010), then with mulit-detector CT technology in 2010 (Panzer et al., 2013). Finally, Rosalia is the only mummy to be explicitly marked by translocation from one space to the other and by the display in a double casket. She is the only mummy explicitly marked with contemporary technology, namely, her state-of-the-art outer display case made of glass and a shiny silver alloy.[6] The other

mummies in the Catacombs that have undergone scientific investigation have been marked with special labels; however none of them, to my knowledge, have been displayed in any new way.

Rosalia's new spatial context signals a shift from the ideological arena of the sacred to that of the secular. Although the entire Catacombs are consecrated space, the Family Room is a more ambiguous sacred space than the Chapel of Santa Rosalia, her former location. Indeed, the notion of designated family rooms bears quite a secular, contemporary ring. As the Catacombs grew from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, mummies were arranged according to a sacred-profane spectrum correlating with their social status and gender (Farella, 1982, pp. 72–74, 78–79). Capuchin friars and other clerics reside in the holiest space, the corridors nearest to the church. Lay males reside in the next branching corridors; important military figures, and wealthy male members of the bourgeoisie are closer to the church than presumably less socially significant lay males, while women and children reside in the farthest and newest corridors. The Family Room's display is singular. Not only is it the farthest room from the church, but also only here are mummies displayed as family groups rather than according to sacred and/or social hierarchy. Thus, Rosalia is now displayed as a child in a family context. Arguably, she has been from an ideological arena dominated by the religious hierarchy to one dominated by transnational, secular family values.

Rosalia's role as a bearer of universally relevant biological data is minimal, by contrast with the anonymous mummies who have undergone scientific investigation. The accounts of her scientific scrutiny are chiefly concerned with the historical materiality of her preservation, namely, the extraordinary success of the Salafia embalming method (Panzer et al., 2013; Panzer & Piombino-Mascali, 2010). In my view, the praxis of scientific investigation marked by her spatial displacement and new display makes it possible to view Rosalia as a unique metonym for a specifically Sicilian contribution to the evolutionary process of the history of science. Owing to previous tourist visits to the Catacombs, I myself have been able to compare the effect produced on the tourist viewer of Rosalia's former mode of display in the Chapel, and that of her present mode of display in the Family Room. The difference is striking, especially the effect generated by the stark contrast between her sleek, high-tech outer display case and her inner wooden casket, that, in my view, visibly manifests evolutionary scientific progress. Embalmed by a regional scientific pioneer, investigated twice by twenty-first-century scientific experts with sophisticated medical technology, she is now the centrepiece of display in a room that displays secular family ideologies. Arguably, Rosalia has become a mummified spokesperson for regional Sicilian identity. The glass cover of the wooden casket is a window into the religious Sicilian past; the shiny, high-tech, outer case shows the potential of the secularized Sicilian present and future. In this case, praxis engaged with her specific historical materiality has enabled her to assume this role.

Future research

This paper invites several specific and general avenues for future research. The next stage of this project will involve fieldwork to collect data from sources that will require ethical clearance and a multi-lingual research team. Relevant data will be obtained

through interviews and questionnaires with: (1) members of the local Palermo population (including individuals whose biological ancestors rest in the Catacombs); (2) representatives from the Capuchin order (especially those living in the adjacent Friary); and (3) tourist visitors. The research teams of the Sicily Mummy Project will also be interviewed. The informants' identification of and response to the material features of the mummies and their environment will be specifically elicited. Discourse analysis of postings on Dark Tourism websites will be conducted. Finally, I hope to attend the UNC Sicily Mummy Field School as a participant-observer.

As far as broader research topics are concerned, analysis of the response of living humans to the specific materiality of mummified, as opposed to skeletal, human remains (Stone, 2018) must be more consciously and critically theorized. Moreover, my findings recommend a comparative study of how mummies in particular, and the dead in general, work in the formation of local, regional and transnational identities in different contemporary geographic and cultural contexts; for instance, the cultural role of mummies in contemporary Chile, Peru, Myanmar and Sicily. Such comparison would prove fruitful, and as yet minimally addressed, a way in which to understand the cultural difference in our age of transnational globalization, as the dead continue their work from beyond the grave.

Notes

1. Dario Piombino-Mascali, the head of the Sicily Mummy Project and the curator of the mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs, has been a generous source of electronically communicated information. I offer him my special thanks.
2. Popular studies include: Cenzi, 2014; Facchi & Lanzi, 2001; Fernandez, 1980; Pringle, 2001; Quigley, 1998. Recent scientific Mummy Studies publications include: Aufderheide, 2003; Beattie, 1999; Beattie & Geige, 1988; Cockburn et al., 1998; Hart Hansen et al., 1991/1985; Meskell, 2005b.
3. Recent popular books on pre-modern ossuaries and the display of human skeletal remains include: Inge, 2014; Kondounaris, 2013; Redman, 2016. For discussion of the practice of excarnation and partial body burial: Rebay-Salisbury, Stig-Sørensen, & Hughes, 2010.
4. For UK practices with different cultural nuances see: Francis, Kellaher, & Neophytou, 2000; Hallam & Hockey, 2001, pp. 147–153.
5. See Pringles's description of invasive autopsies performed on ancient Egyptian mummies by paleopathologist Arthur Aufderheide (2001, pp. 21–37).
6. For a good photo of Rosalia's current display situation see the blog site of the UNL Mummy Studies Field School at Sicilymummystudies.blogspot.com Monday 11 July 2106.

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Embalming and the materiality of death (France, nineteenth century)

Anne Carol

ABSTRACT

At the end of the 1830s, embalming became fashionable in France. Unlike traditional embalming reserved to the elites since the Middle Ages, the new, private form of embalming concerned ordinary people who could not bear seeing their passed beloved ones decompose and decay to dust. This rise went hand in hand with the multiplication of timeless plots allocation within cemeteries created by the decree of 1804, on which families could build tombs destined to shelter their dead. Embalming hence belonged to the 'funeral transition' between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century as described by R. Bertrand: the concern for the dead was not characterised by the concern for their soul but rather for the material remains. The cult of the dead focused on the grave in the nineteenth century: embalming was perhaps a necessary step within this materialisation: during a limited period of time, the certainty of having a fully preserved body under the grave was necessary in order to function as a place of memory and as a cornerstone of the cult of the dead.

Between the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, the French funeral culture underwent profound changes. Régis Bertrand, heir of one the pioneers of the history of death in France, Michel Vovelle (1983),[1] has proposed the concept of 'funeral transition' (Bertrand, 2011) to characterise such change. It defined the time interval and mental process by which an old funeral regime is substituted by a new one, founded on different places, different rites and different relationships between the living and the dead.

Among these novelties, two are of particular interest. The first novelty is spatial: the centre of this funeral system shifted from the church to the cemetery: it was henceforth there where funeral services found their conclusion and climax, and where mourning people went, later, in pilgrimage, to visit their dead. The second is material: the dead body, more than the soul, became the object and medium for a cult of the dead; for this reason, its integrity and location stability took a growing importance. This cult crystallised itself on the grave that both hosted the corpse and signalled its presence.

It is in this context that I wish to evoke a little-known aspect of the cult of the dead which developed in France since the 1830s and regressed at the end of the century: embalming (Carol, 2015). How to interpret this fashion which spread among the bourgeoisie? My

hypothesis is that the romantic popularity of embalming constitutes a form of transition within the funeral transition, a necessary step in these changes which affected funeral materiality and spatiality.

From traditional embalming towards romantic embalming

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, embalming remained in France as it was during the eighteenth century: a rare and unusual practice, expensive, complex and reserved to the social elite.

Before the French Revolution, only kings, princes and prelates were embalmed; (but) part of the nobility started to employ it by imitation. Apart from the case of the King at the end of the Middle Ages, whose long and complex funerary rite required the conservation of the body, the reasons why such treatment was applied to those privileged individuals remain a matter of debate among historians to this day. However, they most likely have to do with the traditional conservation of saints in the catholic religion.

The Revolution applied new political principles, and the concerned social fringe was displaced: 'great men' were henceforth revered with such privilege. After his death in 1791, a public autopsy of Mirabeau was performed as if he was a king, and he was embalmed before being carried to the Pantheon, a church transformed into a national necropolis by the authorities. The Empire prolonged such logic: Napoleon made his most valiant officers (i.e. Morland, Lannes) as well as senators embalmed. Projects of renowned mummies galleries emerged, which attendance would educate the living, especially the young generations (Robert le Jeune, 1801).

The techniques remained the same as in the past (Dionis, 1767): the body was eviscerated and emptied of its brain: the eyes were removed, all cavities were filled with powders and aromatic herbs, the fleshy parts were incised in various places to reach the bones, and 'stuffed' (sic) with the same desiccating and anti-putrid substances. The body was rubbed with balms, enveloped in several layers of bands impregnated with preservatives, and finally was confined in a sealed coffin. Although it is difficult to understand the logics at work in this treatment of the body, beyond that of the distinction, it can however be assumed that the goal pursued was to produce a dry *artefact*, rot-resistant, which would not turn into dust and completely disappear. However, this artefact was not destined to be exposed and its dismemberment seemed the inevitable counterpart to eternal conservation.

Things changed during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Honorary embalming reserved to the elites persisted, but a new kind of request emerged and differentiated itself from the former on at least four points. First it was a private request, coming from the families that lost one of their own; often a child, a teenager, a young spouse, whose death seemed all the more unfair as child mortality was declining at that time (Guimard, 1809). Furthermore, such request was sentimental: it did not proceed from a desire to honour but from the incapacity to bear the decomposition of the cherished one. It also imposed new conditions on embalmers: the body had to be as little mutilated as possible, the face had to resemble the living. Indeed, it was a matter of *being able to* watch those rests from which one could not get separated from; mourning parents requested embalmers to place the deceased, once the operation finished, in a glass coffin, which some would keep until their own death.[2]

> 'The feeling guiding a family when it was determined to embalm one of its member, was completely different. It was sometimes pride, but more often affection, and even though when it was pride, it would be shrouded behind the mask of affection. One could not get separated from a cherished object, but rather rescue it from the tombstone's void to keep watching, talking to and loving it. One would be pleased to keep wishful thinking, reanimate through thought those insensitive remains, to awaken them with love, to return them the affective sensitivity of memories. Then, when the cold reason would take away with its hand of ice any wishful thinking, would still remain the immortal soul of the friend, the father, the mother or the lover, who listen from above, and look down at the earth with love. As a result, embalmers would often be imposed to not let the face covered, to not open it, to not separate any parts from the body, and finally to preserve the face, as much as possible, with the appearance of life' (Boitard, 1839, p. 316).

Just as the ancient one, modern embalming aims to perpetually preserve material remains of the deceased: but not at any price. Highly mutilating techniques were not suitable any more, and surgeons, chemists, anatomists and naturalists were intending their best to innovate even the smallest details, combining subtle incisions and prolonged immersion in chemical solutions, at the price of tedious and uncertain operations.

That barrier vanished at the end of the 1830s; conservation techniques coming from anatomy were then transferred to the funeral sphere. The French pioneer was an industrial from Paris (self-taught chemist and pharmacist), Jean-Nicolas Gannal (1791–1852). At the beginning, Gannal was intending to meet the needs of the scientific community which wanted to have at its disposal and for as long as possible the corpses destined to the amphitheatre. Inspired by the work of the Italian researcher Tranchina presented to the public in 1835, he designed a new conservation technique. It consisted of injecting conservatives via the carotid arteries and a syringe rather than treating the body from the exterior. Gannal was rewarded by both the Academy of Medicine and the Academy of Science which were funding and supervising his work. But since 1837, he changed perspective: he applied for an industrial patent 'for indefinite conservation processes on corpses, or new mummification and embalming techniques destined to replace the different means employed for burial thus far'.

Why this turning point? Gannal felt the evolution of funeral sensibility and the demand of his contemporaries: it was necessary to preserve the body, but also to respect its integrity and keep the resemblance. In a book published in 1838, *Histoire des embaumements et de la préparation des pièces d'anatomie (History of embalming and the preparation of anatomical parts)*, he presented such requirement as an anthropological fact, a form of invariant of humanity which he traced back to Egyptian Antiquity, in vogue at that time.

Gannal was not only an inventor, but also a businessman and a trader. The patent, which protects both the technique (the injection) and the preserving liquid (which composition remained secret, although derived from arsenic), guaranteed him a monopoly position. As a matter of fact, he prosecuted those trying to imitate and compete with him, while publically condemning the cruelty of those still employing the old techniques, as in the embalming of the king Louis Philippe's son, in 1842. He also ensured the success of his technique by relentless solicitations, to families, doctors and priests. Finally, he created a dealership network, the only authorized in the province to practise his method. His book was translated to English in 1840 and edited in the

United States. The Gannal method was hence exported to the Americas and the Civil War would provide a fantastic opportunity to diffuse it (Trompette & Lemonnier, 2009).

The golden age of embalming

Success was met. Within a loosely binding legal framework, Gannal multiplied embalming procedures: 5 in 1836, 16 in 1837, 25 in 1838, 20 in 1839; the year 1840 marked a change, with 108 treatments, then 86 in 1841, 105 in 1842 and again 105 in 1843. Since that date, however, embalming faced two setbacks (Carol, 2015).

The French medical profession actually organised a counteroffensive. On the one hand, doctors were worried about a monopoly which would exclude them from a potentially lucrative market; on the other hand, they were irritated by the ceaseless attacks of Gannal who was accusing them to be incompetent while forbidding them to use his technique. The physicians found a champion, Marchal de Calvi, who volunteered to defend his rights: practising 'embalming in the Gannal way' he was sued, with the support of his profession. The trial is the opportunity to see how embalming had become naturalised. Marchal defended the idea that human remains could not be considered as a commodity and emerge as an industry; their conservation being a legitimate right for all. According to him, embalming should not be taken away by a few as it benefits all humanity. In order to convince the judges, Marchal compared Gannal to a surgeon who would refuse to share with his peers a new amputation technique, and hence take it away from patients (Marchal de Calvi, 1843). His demonstration convinced: Gannal lost the trial, and the injection technique was released to the public domain; only the preserving liquid remained protected by the patent; but the use of arsenic was rapidly banned for forensic reasons.

In 1845–1846, Gannal lost another battle, scientific this time. To his own request, the Academy of Medicine proceeded to a comparative test between his method, based on a new secret formula, and that of a young competitor coming from the medical world, Jean-Pierre Sucquet. Two corpses embalmed by each contender were buried on 21 May 1845, then unearthed on 14 July 1846. The duel turned into defeat for Gannal: his subject had not resisted putrefaction, while that of Sucquet had (Poiseuille, 1847). There was therefore room for competitors: the number of proclaimed embalmers increased in the absence of professional regulations whereas Gannal's business stagnated. Doctors, surgeons, pharmacists, chemists and undertakers turned into embalmers in competition for customers.

But who are those men and women who request the embalmer's services? The account books[3] and lists presented in advertisements allow us to answer that question to some extent. They contained, without surprise, traditional customers such as the aristocratic elites or religious dignitaries where the logics of distinction still functioned. But embalming also penetrated the bourgeoisie of companies, liberal and intellectual professions: that of doctors, politics, artists, solicitors, lawyers or professors. It sometimes even reached lower social classes, when Gannal mentioned bailiffs, boarding school teachers or shopkeepers. During the middle of the century, the dream of keeping pristine the body of a loved-one had thus become an ideal; a costly ideal nonetheless, between 500 and 2000 francs, which made it inaccessible to the ordinary folks.

Whatever the price, advertisements always guaranteed the preservation period. The differences lied elsewhere: in the various degrees of sophistication that the services performed on the body. Competition between embalmers was crystallised on three aspects. The first was the respect of the body's integrity. The 'new' embalmers would take care of distancing themselves from the old and mutilating methods, in order to promote the modernity of their own procedures. They also intended to always improve on that particular aspect; incisions for the injection were reduced to the minimum, as hidden as possible: on the groin for example, instead of the neck. The second challenge was that of decency: embalming supposed in fact procedures that repelled the families. These were promised to be reduced to the strict minimum, and especially regarding undressing – even completely avoided – the deceased body (Carol, 2012b). Such concern was observed during the same period in the legal verification of the death, during which doctors tried to reconcile technique efficiency with the mourning's sensibility (Carol, 2014). In the 1860s, an embalmer even proposed to suppress the injection and make the preserving liquid absorbed by the mouth (Audigier, 1866). The third challenge was that of resemblance. The corpse had to resemble the deceased at his finest. Embalming also had to erase the marks of disease or agony and to beautify the dead, exactly as in the post-mortem photography – another funeral ritual that tried to conserve the dead in a different way (Héran, 2002). Such a result was obtained by the use of cosmetics, dyes added to the injected liquid and even prosthetics (i.e. glass eye, wax), and by the staging of the dressed body, most of the time, frozen in an eternal sleep. Such 'sleep' was ambiguous: embalmers did not even agree with each other on the use of cosmetics. Sucquet was reproaching his competitor Gannal to be 'heavy handed' and to try to over-mimic life. According to the former, the deceased had to resemble, yet still had to look dead, without being repulsive (Carol, 2012a).

Materiality and spatiality

How to explain the emergence of the embalming demand at that time? What was sought exactly when one had a dead embalmed? Indeed, affection for the loved ones is insufficient to explain those new requirements.

Embalmers had their own answer: they used to justify their practice by two means. On one hand, embalming had a historical legitimacy: embalming had existed since antiquity, if it was only performed on rare occasions, it was because its knowledge and technique were being lost and its price had become prohibitive. On the other hand, embalming was morally legitimate: it was a duty the living owed to the dead, especially within the family. Unlike animals, humans take care of their dead; and the more refined a civilisation is, the more important the respect for the dead is. Embalming used to constitute its most achieved form: it conserved piously the remains and repaired the loss. In the end, embalmers have invented a form of 'tradition' to justify their practice (Sucquet, 1872). In reality, embalmers used to confuse two things: on the one hand, the family's concern to provide decent funerals, to treat the corpse decently and on the other hand, the attachment to human remains, once they had been buried. Yet, both have not always gone hand in hand.

During centuries, the concern to bury in blessed ground was accompanied by a relative lack of interest regarding the conservation of the remains. In churchyards, these were destroyed by the ground or were subject to periodic exhumation, in order to make room for the new arrivals.

Bones were then gathered in an ossuary where identification became impossible and thus remains became anonymous, irrespective of individual coherence. The most important was to save the soul of the deceased, to shorten its time in the purgatory via donations, prayers and masses. In France, only public figures disposed of an identified and durable grave, often within the church, marked by a slab or a funerary monument in a chapel. However, the living did not often come there to spend some time and meditate about the loss (Bertrand, 2011). From the moment the body had been properly buried, the place did not matter any more; nor did the body itself. Spatiality and materiality did not matter much in the relationships between the living and the dead.

The situation progressively changed, with the funeral transition, in a different political and sensitive context. The decree of 12 juin 1804 (23 prairial an 12) founded in France the contemporary cemetery (Bertrand & Carol, 2016). The State assigned it with two functions: a hygienist function and a commemorative function. The first was the most important: it was about creating a collective facility capable of consuming the corpses without risking to jeopardise the health of the living. The decree carefully regulated their location, the precise depth of the pits, their spacing and the tomb's rotation period (five years) in order to avoid ground saturation and dangerous miasma emanations. But the decree also authorised mourning people to leave ephemeral distinctive signs on these temporary graves: it provided for the exceptional plots boon for the construction of durable graves, in order to honour the memory of philanthropists. It is known how the cemetery evolved during the nineteenth century, under the demand pressure: possession of a plot became very quickly a distinctive sign of a bourgeoisie greedy to remain as such in the long-term, and their number increased rapidly; even more so rapidly that mayors profited from the plot sales. The royal order of 1843 followed the movement and created a standardised system of plot attribution, which price varied according to the duration: 15, 30 years or permanent.

Unlike the initial biopolitical project,[4] users took over the cemetery. The multiplication of plots had transformed the necropolis, originally designed as sites for corpse consumption, into sites for conservation. It is hence the location of the grave which became the spatial centre of the cult of the dead. And this was only possible because it protected the remains whose material fate mattered to the extent that people were trying to control it in the future as long as possible.

What is the role of embalming in this process? The two movements are linked, including chronologically; the embalming vogue was contemporary of the rise of plots. Moreover, contemporaries used to highlight in their advertisements the convergence of objectives:

> 'We are far from advising its use in all circumstances; we would not understand, for example, the advantage of resorting to it if the body, embalmed and sealed between poorly-joined pinewood planks, would be put in the ground (...) we understand even less the families monuments, vaults and graves, without preservation of the bodies. Indeed, without embalming, what could be the use for such mass of stone, marble or granite? What would it hold after a few years? Any funeral monument which would not have been proceeded by embalming (...), would be a non-sense, or simply the manifestation of the family's vanity more concerned to display its own prosperity than affected by sincere grief. Thus, embalming and family graves are two inseparable considerations in our eyes' (Very, 1842, p. 20).

In reality, embalming, plots and coffins are the three faces of such need, almost neurotic in its conservative impulse: coffins, increasingly sophisticated, became at the same time protections against exterior ravages and casket to protect the corpses from corruption. Embalming also took another meaning within other body conservation practices: the last portraits (masks, funeral photographs) fixed the image of the deceased (Héran, 2002); private reliquaries used to depict the locks of its hair... However, unlike those illustrative or metonymic processes, embalming achieved the ideal of preservation in the most literal and material sense.

The convergence is such that Gannal's first projects planned different treatments for the bodies depending on their destinations. In an confidential report addressed in 1842 to the Prefect of the Seine and the Commissioner of Police of Paris (the order fixing the duration of plots attribution was not signed yet), the embalmer reminded that Parisian cemeteries produced harmful emissions, and that space could be insufficient; he therefore proposed three injection modes. Traditional embalming would be destined to bodies placed within lifelong or temporary plots for 50 years. A 'temporary preservation' injection would be performed on corpses buried within purchased plots for twelve years minimum. Regarding corpses destined to mass graves, Gannal simply proposed to perform a 'dissolution injection'. The dissolution injection would hasten the destruction of the body while avoiding putrefaction, its dangers and horrors: 'Whatever the time at which bodies are visited, it remains odourless, of similar aspect; only it softens and resorbs to water' (Gannal, 1842). This proposition calls for two comments. On the one hand, the so-called imperative of material conservation of the body depended on the durability of its location; it disappeared when the grave was provisional. On the other hand, this imperative was experienced according to social standards, hence creating a two-tier cemetery: for the wealthy, a place of preservation more or less complete; for the penniless, a place of consumption – as planned by the decree of 1804. However, Gannal's proposition was not implemented and embalming continued to develop.

Embalming in the funeral tradition

The history of embalming in France follows a curious chronology. A century after its invention, it almost fell into disuse whereas it thrived in the United States. When Jacques Marette decided to learn it in the 1960s, he was forced to go to England and to the United States, from where he brought back what would henceforth be called, *thanatopraxia* (Marette, 1999). It is easier to describe embalming abandonment than to explain it. Its decline took several forms. On one hand, in the 1870s, its practice was restricted to a limited social fringe; the landslide had not occurred, the small bourgeoisie was standing apart and embalmers were disputing each other in a shrinking market. In Paris, it reached a maximum of a hundred operations per year at the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, its meaning became honorary again: were embalmed great men, public figures, or those who considered themselves as such. It was more about distinction than affection. In addition, technical promises were not fulfilled; the growing number of self-proclaimed embalmers was accompanied with a deterioration of services and the multiplication of disappointing failures. Legal constrains were stronger: families had to request an official authorisation in order to embalm their dead. Finally, Pasteurism imposed more stringent technical standards.

Next to prestigious embalming, increasingly expensive and complex, developed a temporary type of embalming, openly promoted by traders. It was about treating the corpses which were about to travel to reach their last abode, or simply to allow them to hold until their funerals. Embalming was hence a practical complement of corpse's exhibition and of the 'visit' to the dead; it permitted to delay funerals and allowed sufficient time for the family to gather. It also permitted to fight against the alteration of the body, unbearable to the relatives, but also to neutralise the toxicity of the corpse. It was hence a pragmatic goal. In embalmers' registers, those 'temporary' injections were more frequent at the end of the century, and one can think they constituted the bulk of the undertakers' work. Some traders used to even propose customers products or devices for rental in order to disinfect corpses at home.

Eternity is therefore, less and less, the horizon of embalming. Wanting to keep the body of a relative, especially nearby, seemed unhealthy, in every sense of the word. How to explain such disenchantment of the embalmed body in the chronology of the funeral transition? I hypothesise that embalming marked a transition between two systems of relationship between the living and the dead. It would be a transition from the pre-Revolution, ancient system where neither the body nor the grave acted as a reminder of the dead, to a modern system where, according to Jean-Didier Urbain, the grave sufficed to signal the bodily presence of the dead and constituted the sole support of its cult (Urbain, 1978). Between the two, the body, during a brief time, crystallised the anxiety of the loss, dissolution and forgetfulness. The best mean to ward it off was to place rot-proof corpses into eternal monuments. Romantic embalming carried on as long as the materialistic presence of the body was necessary to give meaning to the grave, as long as it had to shelter it, literally not metaphorically. Gradually, the bodies became useless to the cult which had developed around the grave. So, during a limited period of time,a short transitional period during the great funeral transition, the certainty of having a fully preserved body under the grave seemed necessary in order to function as a place of memory and as the cornerstone of the cult of the dead.

Nowadays, embalming has little in common with nineteenth century embalming (Lemonnier, 2011). Legally speaking, it is only required in the case of corpses transportation; yet, more than half of corpses receive *thanatopraxia* cares dispensed by qualified and supervised professionals. These treatments do not aim for eternal preservation: besides, the law forbids it. Decomposition is suspended by chemical injection until the funerals; according to the thanatopractors, grieving is morally more 'comfortable' in front of a body purged of any repulsive scars. The materiality of the body is not a quality to preserve any more, but rather an obstacle needed to be overcome, and, for the matter, the kin rarely asked the embalmer for details about the preservation period. Moreover, the growing success of embalming goes hand in hand with that of cremation. It does not make the body disappear, but transforms it so that its appearance has vanished and what subsists is a mere material residue without any resemblance to the living. Ashes are not always buried, and their dispersion, although supervised in nowadays French legislation, weakens again its tenuous materiality. Far from the incorruptible body sheltered under its slab, it is hence on multiple and discontinued materialities that the cult of the dead now relies.

Notes

1. To the contrary of Philippe Ariès (1991) the huge synthesis of M. Vovelle has not been translated and remains little known to non-French speaking historians (cf, for instance, T. Laqueur, 2015). But he was read by Thomas A. Kselman (1993), and about the new cemeteries, Richard Etlin (1987).
2. Glass coffins, in order to keep the body at home and to create a kind of domestic mausoleum, seem to have been employed only for children or young people, and during a very short time at the beginning of the nineteenth century in France. It is difficult to interpret from a small number of cases, even if it reminds the staging of the relics, as well as the myth of the sleeping beauties such as *Snow White*. See Stéphanie Sauget (2017).
3. Gannal accounts are conserved at the Municipal Library of Bordeaux.
4. Seen as a governance through the bodies (Michel Foucault).

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Ephemeral materiality: a place for lifeless infants in cemeteries

Philippe Charrier and Gaëlle Clavandier

ABSTRACT

Stillborn infants were long excluded from Western cemeteries. They had no status, could not be baptized and could not be put to rest among the dead of their communities. After a long period of change, the loss of a child at birth now involves new norms and practices. This evolution has been the topic of a great deal of research on the handling of perinatal bereavement. In this article, we take an anthropological approach instead and focus less on the experience of parenthood than on the material aspect of these bodies and of the traces they leave behind. In France, following recent reforms, stillborn infants and non-viable fetuses can now be given graves and their interment can be handled either by families or by the local municipality. This process is made up of different phases. The first takes place in the hospital delivery ward, where parents meet their deceased child and tangible memorial traces are created. The second phase is the burial. The third involves the process of memorialization. This ephemeral materiality is part of the social recognition of 'children' who die before birth. New kinds of funerary treatment are helping to humanize bodies and to ritualize 'almost-births' and 'almost-deaths'.

Stillborn infants were long excluded from Western cemeteries. They had no status, could not be baptized and could not be put to rest among the dead of their communities. After a long period of change, the loss of a child at birth now involves new norms and practices. This evolution has been the topic of a great deal of research on the handling of perinatal bereavement. In this article, we take an anthropological approach instead and focus less on the experience of parenthood than on the material aspect of these bodies and of the traces they leave behind.

In France, following recent reforms, stillborn infants and non-viable fetuses can now be given graves and their interment can be handled either by families or by the local municipality. This process is made up of different phases. The first takes place in the hospital delivery ward, where parents meet their deceased child and tangible memorial traces are created. The second phase is the burial. The third involves the process of memorialization.

This *ephemeral materiality* is part of the social recognition of 'children' who die before birth. New kinds of funerary treatment are helping to humanize bodies and to ritualize 'almost-births' and 'almost-deaths'.

1. Introduction

This article examines the place occupied by stillborn infants and more recently by fetuses[1] in Western cemeteries, specifically in France. We focus here on the handling of the material aspect of these bodies and on acts of remembrance for these 'children who have died before birth' as members of a category whose social recognition has recently emerged in a number of European countries (Charrier, Clavandier, Gourdon, Rollet, & Sage Pranchère, 2018; Faro, 2014; Flohr Sørensen, 2011; Peelen, 2011; Woodthorpe, 2012).

Up through the 19th century, children who died after birth, those whose births were recorded in parish registries and from 1792 onwards in civil registries, were buried in cemeteries, either in family crypts or in spaces devoted to children (Urbain, 1978). This longstanding practice, rooted in the Christian tradition, was a way of integrating deceased children into the community and into their families, but under the condition that they had been baptized (Alfani, Castagnetti, & Gourdon, 2009; Gourdon, Georges, & Labéjof, 2004). Stillborn infants were thus excluded (Gélis, 2006). In reaction to this marginal status, substitutional practices developed, including intrauterine baptisms, emergency or conditional baptisms administered at birth and respite sanctuaries (*sanctuaires à répit*) for baptizing the stillborn in cases of miraculous revival. Such practices served to requalify these deceased bodies and to integrate them into the circle of the living, and hence into the circle of the dead (Gélis, 2013). However, most children who died prior to birth or while being born, or early-term miscarried fetuses, did not receive a funeral in the proper sense of the word, even though it was permissible to carry out some mortuary rites for them (Portat, Detante, Buquet-Marcon, & Guillon, 2016).

Over the course of the 20th century, as French society grew increasingly secularized, the way people dealt with stillbirth or, as it is now referred to, 'perinatal death' (*décès périnataux*),[2] changed significantly. This new sensibility developed within a specific context, namely the decrease in neonatal and infant mortality corelating to the new medicalization of childbirth (Beauvalet-Boutouyrie, 1999). This means that infants can now be seen as members of the family as soon as they are born or even before; (Charrier, & clavandier, 2013) the focus has shifted from the number of children in the family – *l'enfant en nombre* – to the individual child who counts – *l'enfant qui compte* (Léridon, 1995). The death of a child either at birth or during pregnancy has thus become an immeasurable loss.

In this context, new norms have developed regarding professional support for perinatal bereavement (Earle, Komaromy, & Layne, 2012). The people affected (women, men, couples) have begun to be assimilated with mothers, fathers and families, and the fetus has become a baby, or even a child,[3] even though nuances remain within this classification depending on the degree of appropriation of these new norms by the different actors involved. Their experiences may vary based on religious or cultural values, the term of the pregnancy, family or individual histories or the number of previous pregnancies. Numerous discourses and practices help consolidate this parental investment in the fetus, which is reflected in the treatment given to a stillborn child's body. It is first of all handled with care in the hospital delivery room, and the next step is to find a legitimate and acceptable destination for it, one that feels suitable for the families involved as well as for the professionals and institutions. In other words, once a parent-child relationship has begun to develop during pregnancy (Bleyen, 2012;

Komaromy, 2012), it becomes difficult to eliminate something that, from the strict viewpoint of French law, can be qualified as a piece of human anatomy. Promoted to the rank of babies (Memmi, 2011), stillborn children and those born alive but not viable become 'small bodies' with a legitimate place in the realm of the dead (Charrier, & Clavandier, 2015b).[4] Over the past 15 years approximately, spaces devoted to perinatal death have begun to appear in Western cemeteries and in particular in France.

There are a number of stages in the journey of these bodies. First, in the hospital delivery room, parents are systematically offered the opportunity to 'meet' their lifeless child, which humanizes the body. Next, some bodies, and in some areas the majority of them (the proportion varies according to what is available in different maternity wards), receive funerary handling and are inhumated or have their ashes scattered in a cemetery. Finally, families can use special areas in cemeteries to fulfill their need for a place of remembrance, whether or not they have organized a funeral.

This paper will focus on the situation in France, which has two notable specificities. First, both for a funeral to be held and for the civil records administration to record a lifeless child, a birth or delivery certificate is necessary[5]; this medical certificate is not based on the viability of the child but rather on the presence of a body, whether or not it is completely formed.[6] Also, concerning burials, in spite of important changes since the 1980s including an increase in the practice of cremation,[7] the traditional 'family tomb' is still the organizing principle behind French cemeteries, which are secular and managed by municipalities.

2. Methodological approaches

The situations that we are examining here fall into four types de cases: fetal death *in utero*, pregnancies terminated for medical reasons,[8] late-term miscarriages and infants born alive but not viable. According to current laws in France, this concerns pregnancies lasting a minimum of 15 weeks of amenorrhea, which can lead to the production of a medical certificate of delivery and are distinct from voluntary pregnancy terminations (abortions). All of these situations lead to a certain type of handling of the bodies; we will here study their funerary treatment.

While the main focus of our paper is the place of these bodies in cemeteries, it first seems necessary to discuss the very specific moment at which the fetus becomes a body, which in turn leads the actors involved to treat it as such and not as waste or as anatomical material. The acts carried out in the delivery room thus prefigure the funerary treatment that will follow. From a methodological standpoint, we have concentrated on formal arrangements and gestures and more broadly on the relationship with the body. Our approach is close to that defended in *The Matter of Death, Space, Place and Materiality* (Hockey, Komaromy, & Woodthorpe, 2010). The study of the materiality of the bodies,[9] objects and places involved is essential in order to understand the evolution of our relationship with death in contemporary Western societies, without referring only to discourses on death itself. This approach is rare in French-language publications in France, where, 'for the most part, dead bodies, human remains and cadavers constitute the unthinkable for research in the human sciences' (Anstett, 2016). This remark can be extended to material funerary culture, which is very widely studied by archaeologists and ethnologists in Anglophone countries but remains nearly absent from sociological research in France.

This approach has the advantage of being sensitive to the problem of the line between intimate experiences and the broader evolution of sensibilities; we were able to study the private appropriation of collective spaces.

> 'Mementoes, memorials, words and artefacts can be understood as external cultural forms functioning to sustain thoughts and images that are conceived of as part of the internal states of living persons. These relations between internal and external domains are subject to change over time as well as to cross-cultural variation. Perceptions of memorializing practices and their emotional resonance are often acutely sensitive and receptive to changes in broader social orientations and attitudes' (Hallam & Hockey, 2001, p. 4).

The possible paths followed by the bodies of fetuses and stillborn infants have become more complex and more diverse, splitting into different sequences and locations. In part for this reason, we chose the body itself in its materiality as the anchor point of our research, rather than any one category of actors or institutions. We also payed particular attention to the spaces through which these bodies transit or where they are stored, and the objects that can be used as symbols of its presence, or absence. In other words, it is the mode of existence of these lifeless children that we examine here. A number of our publications have already concentrated on the administration of human remains, their trajectories and their ultimate fate. This approach allowed us to avoid reducing our focus to the very specific moment of time immediately surrounding birth.

We carried out a survey from 2013 to 2015 in nine French cities (Lille, Lyon, Bron, Paris, Saint-Etienne, Tours, Rennes, Béziers, Grenoble) in order to gain access to a variety of situations.[10] Some of these cities are major urban centers and some are small towns. Some of them set up systems for handling perinatal death as early as the 1990s, while others only began to deal with this question more recently, in the 2000s. We interviewed healthcare professionals, funeral industry workers and members of local administrations (civil records, cemetery management) and we carried out observations in funeral parlors, crematoriums and cemeteries. We met with more than 70 people during this research project. We will focus here on graves, particularly in the frequent cases in which families do not organize a funeral service themselves. This perspective emphasizes the involvement of public actors in the creation of these places of burial and of remembrance.

Evolution of the legal framework concerning lifeless children in France

In France, since 1993, a number of laws and circulars have modified the status of 'lifeless children'. A stillbirth certificate can be delivered by the civil registry office in two sorts of cases: for stillborn infants (the length of gestation is set at 180 days by the circular of March 3) and for those born alive but not viable, whatever the gestational term.

The circular of 30 November 2001, specifies the conditions for recording births in the civil registry by including criteria of viability at birth, set at 22 weeks of amenorrhea based on the recommendations of the WHO, or at a weight equal to or above 500 g. A child who dies after a live birth but who does not meet at least one of these two criteria can be declared as a 'lifeless infant', and one who is delivered past the 22-week term or above 500 g must be declared in the civil registry as having been born and as having died.

In 2008, the viability criteria were removed from civil registry regulations concerning 'lifeless infants'. Since the decrees and orders of August 2008, the unmarried parents (or the single mother) of a 'lifeless child' can request the attribution of a 'family record book' (*livret de famille*) and have the child recorded in the 'deaths' column of the book; the 'certificate of stillbirth' can be produced if a medical delivery certificate is presented to the civil registry office. The 19 June 2009 circular specifies that for this certificate to be delivered there must be a formed body present (whether or not it has malformations) and it must have reached the stage of sexual differentiation. This certificate is a civil status record that is non-mandatory and is issued in accordance with the family's wishes.

3. 'Fabricating' bodies and traces of memory in the maternity ward

Since the 1980s and 90s, in France as in most Western countries, sensibilities have evolved and the way we view the loss of a child during pregnancy has changed, both from the point of view of the families as well as of the professionals around them. This experience is now assimilated with bereavement, which in turn leads to the rethinking of what ultimately happens to these infants' bodies (Memmi, 2011). Beyond offering a brief meeting or a moment of contemplation immediately after delivery (Bleyen, 2018), hospital workers have had to find a new way of handling the bodies with dignity and of extricating them from their former status as hospital waste.

Whereas they used to be whisked quickly out of sight, these bodies (whose gestational age may be as young as 15 weeks, sometimes weighing no more than a few hundred grams) are now being given a new kind of consideration (Dumoulin, 1998). Protocols put in place by hospital workers, with midwives at the forefront, encourage an encounter between the parents and the 'baby', who is now a member of the family (Bleyen, 2012; Komaromy, 2012). These practices, once marginal, have become systematic,[11] in an attempt to prevent the onset of pathological grief. They have spread all over Europe, North America and Australia, as described by Memmi (2011, p. 81–87).

It has become necessary to maintaining the notion of a body continuously, all the way from the maternity ward to the cemetery. Even in cases where this body, sometimes damaged or extremely tiny, is only represented by objects (or memorial traces) that give it a degree of density, these remains are treated as the body of a deceased person during their entire journey.

3.1. Ensuring the presence of a body in the delivery room

The status of these bodies, which were viewed and treated until recently as waste material, has changed dramatically (Dumoulin & Valat, 2001). As part of a new value system, various procedures and gestures now help to humanize deceased fetuses. Hospital staff encourage a meeting with what is now perceived as a baby and tell the parents to hold it in their arms and to speak to it.

Here, we are witnessing a fiction that transforms the fetus into a 'being', even if it never lived, physiologically speaking, or if it was not viable.[12] This presentation is only made possible by disqualifying the body from its fetal state so that it can turn into a baby (and into mortal remains), which can and indeed must be cared for and given an appropriate funeral. Thus, the presentation of the body in the delivery room has led to normative practices that focus on two dimensions: that of parenthood (Charrier & Clavandier, 2015a; Peelen, 2011), and that of the expression of emotions (Bleyen, 2012; Komaromy, 2012). While not all affected couples or individuals agree with this approach, and some prefer not to see the body, hospital workers nonetheless encourage this type of interaction. They believe that this meeting, even if it is very brief, can help start the grieving process and can favor its resolution, whereas in the past the opposite approach was favored by medical workers: the body was whisked out of sight with the objective of drawing the parents' attention away towards the next pregnancy (Rousseau, 1988).

3.2. Creating memories at the moment of delivery

This foundational encounter is, however, limited in time. The body is removed from the delivery room to be taken to the mortuary or to be autopsied. To help compensate for the brevity of the meeting, midwives systematically produce mementos and encourage parents to keep them (Bacqué & Merg-Essadi, 2013; Dumoulin, 1998; Glatigny-Dallay, 2013). These material traces may take the form of a handprint or footprint, a hospital ID bracelet or a lock of hair. The most common records are photographs. The body is carefully arranged, dressed or diapered. Sometimes hospital workers attempt to make the body more 'presentable' and lifelike by applying makeup and by editing digital photos (Clavandier, 2017; Layne, 2012; Souffron, 2015).

> 'On a situation in which the stillborn child's body is damaged: *We take a polaroid photo, then we touch it up on the computer and produce something that's presentable. We modify the first image, but we don't change its general aspect, so you can still easily see that it's the baby from the first photo* (...). *You can still recognize its little hands, its little feet, and its face... at least part of its face, and we dress it in a very pretty little romper...*' - interview, hospital doctor

Post-mortem photographs are made to look as close as possible to the kind of pictures of sleeping newborns that might be found in family photo albums.[13] Despite its tiny size, its near weightlessness and its disfigurement, this body is considered a human body. These material traces of its existence, which we can liken to relics, may be kept within the private family circle or may be used in funerary rituals, placed inside a casket or exposed at the cemetery. Along with the new kind of treatment given to these bodies, such pieces of memorabilia humanize the handling of perinatal death. The remains are thus no longer considered mere pieces of human anatomy, even if they may still be treated as such from an administrative standpoint. Everything possible is done to soften technical gestures and to liken them to ritual, funerary gestures.

3.3. Maintaining the materiality of the body

Regarding the ultimate fate of these bodies, French law stipulates that the family can hold a funeral service if it has obtained a medical certificate of delivery (though some cities require the lifeless child to have been recorded in the civil status registry as well). If no action is taken within ten days following delivery, the hospital takes charge of the disposal of the body, either through collective cremation or by individual cremation or inhumation at the shared expense of the institution and of the municipality, by collective agreement (circular of 19 June 2009).

These contemporary practices are in stark contrast with older practices, which involved destroying fetuses along with amputated members and organs in hospital incinerators, or more recently in crematoriums (Dumoulin & Valat, 2001). Now, even when families do not arrange funerals for them, the bodies or the ashes of fetuses (in cases of collective cremation) are given funerary treatment. Starting within the past ten years, all stillborn or non-viable fetuses are likely to follow the same path as the bodies of people who lived, whether or not their families take the initiative of holding funeral services. This helps materialize and solidify the presence of lifeless children within the public space.

'The parents want to be sure that it will be treated with a bit of decency; that it won't be treated like waste, the way it could have been in the past. It's a cremation, even if it's a collective one, and it will be done with special care. It's not going to end up in the trash. So it is a cremation, and that counts as respectful handling.' - interview, pediatric psychiatrist

A recent debate about the production of ashes shows the degree to which the preservation of material traces has become a priority. Some crematoriums state that it is impossible to recover the ashes of infants or fetuses following a cremation.[14] Other crematoriums collect them and place them in an urn in order to give them to the family, perhaps to be scattered. What might appear to be a simple matter for technical discussion between businesses providing cremation services in fact reveals the need (for those who experience this as parents, as well as for the professionals working alongside them) to produce traces of these bodies and to ensure that they are given some kind of funerary treatment. When ashes cannot be produced for technical reasons, crematoriums may create substitutional symbols in the form of medallions placed with the body or bodies during the cremation process.

All of these elements show that in France the principle of a final resting place now applies to lifeless children (Clavandier, 2017; Rousset, 2014). Their journey ends with the integration of their bodies into the social space dedicated to the dead. In French cemeteries, special arrangements have been made in order to provide a place for these 'tiny bodies'.

4. Making a place for perinatal death in the cemetery

French cemeteries fall within the remit of local municipalities but are also subject to regulations that apply throughout the country. They contain two kinds of burial plots: renewable private ones for paying families, and 'common' plots, which can be used free of charge for five years. The zones reserved for lifeless children are governed by the same regulations but offer a third possibility: here, bodies can be buried or ashes scattered without a funeral being held.

These spaces mark the territory of the dead, at a time when mortality among the very young has considerably diminished. The vast majority of the graves in them belong to children who were not technically born and did not acquire legal personhood. The names given to these areas, 'garden of angels', 'garden of lights', 'white garden', 'children's square', 'butterfly space', are evocative of unlived, incomplete childhoods.

Studying these spaces dedicated to lifeless children has led us to distinguish three different types of them. The first aims to humanize collective cremations by creating spaces for remembrance within the cemetery. The second integrates lifeless children recorded in the civil registry into society by giving them graves. The third emphasizes a ritual dimension by allowing families to attend a public farewell ceremony.

4.1. Collective spaces for ashes

The first type of space follows administrative recommendations that state that if the family does not hold a funeral, the healthcare institution must handle the disposal of the

Figure 1. Space devoted to perinatal death and to infants (circled heart-shaped field) Southern Cemetery in Tours (Photograph by the authors, October 2014).

body following the ordinances that apply to human anatomical parts.[15] In order to make this procedure more suitable to contemporary sensibilities, these acts and procedures are now surrounded with careful recommendations. For the health workers involved, it is no longer a matter of eliminating body parts by incinerating them; instead, they organize collective cremations exclusively for fetuses.[16] These cremations follow a funerary process: they take place in crematoriums and the ashes are gathered afterwards in an urn (or replaced by a medallion). They are then scattered in a memorial garden or well, or the medallions are placed in a specially made receptacle.

In Rennes, the 'White Garden' was created as the result of discussions between local hospitals and the managers of the cemetery. The latter had observed some atypical uses that were being made of the cemetery in recent years (Flohr Sørensen, 2011; Woodthorpe, 2012). Bereaved parents had taken over memorial spaces, including the area devoted to those who have donated their bodies to science, and had filled these zones with objects very clearly associated with early childhood (teddy bears, pinwheels, other toys). This place of contemplation was being appropriated by groups for whom it was not intended. This presented a problem for the managers, who worried that the families of body donors might be disturbed by the presence of these objects. The obvious desire of these other families to leave some kind of material trace of their loss led to the creation of a specially dedicated site. This took the form of a decorative garden around a small lighthouse-shaped column with a receptacle at the top through which ashes could be dispersed into an underground well. There is also a mosaic on the ground on which memorial objects can be placed, a totem pole with first and last names, a children's art box, benches, a memory tree. Everything in this area – the design, the materials and colors used, the statements it makes – is connected with childhood, and the offerings left here by families add an ephemeral and joyful touch. This space combines multiple functions: it serves to localize remains (in this case, ashes) and provides a place for contemplation and remembrance and for leaving memorial offerings.

Figure 2.a.b. White Garden, Eastern Cemetery in Rennes, and Garden of Angels, Béziers crematorium (Photographs by the authors).

These specially reserved areas can be seen more and more frequently in French cemeteries. They follow a wide variety of configurations. Some take the form of cenotaphs, such as the stele at the crematorium in Béziers. Here, bereaved families have left their mark by placing numerous small white angel figurines around the base of the stone. This creates a visual unity that reinforces the symbolism of this place of remembrance while still leaving room for individual expression.

4.2. Places of inhumation

The second type of space fits in with recent legal and regulatory changes meant to help find a compromise for the disposal of the bodies of stillborn infants. These spaces can be used when the family does not ask to recover the body in order to hold a funeral. The idea is that if a medical certificate of delivery is produced the bodies can then follow the 'classical' funerary path and be given a grave.[17] To do this, agreements are signed between hospitals, municipalities and funeral parlors. Concretely, this means that each body receives an individual grave, most often through inhumation. This is not the most widespread type of situation, but it does orient current regulations (circular of June 2009). Beyond merely being a way to handle the disposal of bodies, this can be explained by an impulse to support families in their bereavement and, implicitly, to accommodate the proscription of cremation in certain religions (Jewish and Muslim in particular). This option is remarkable because, although 'children's squares' have existed for a long time in Western cemeteries (Vovelle, 1981), they used to exclude the stillborn. Today, lifeless children, at least some of them, are leaving their liminal position in 'terrestrial limbo' in order to reside legitimately in the world of the dead. This situation depends more the services and arrangements that are locally available than on the wishes of the families.

In Lyon, at the La Guillotière cemetery, a number of areas reserved for children's graves have adopted the general name 'Children's Square'. The same regulation applies here as in the common burial plots, which allow for inhumations lasting 5 years. This regulation, which has applied to the municipality and to the *Hospices Civils de Lyon*[18] since an agreement signed in 2003, is intended to leave parents enough time to plan the burial of their child, if they wish, while still imposing a timeframe. This concerns all lifeless children recorded in the civil registry if the family does not organize a funeral

within ten days following delivery. The bodies are buried in individual caskets in small plots. Here, enrollment in the civil registry suffices for a burial permit and 'human anatomical parts' are explicitly requalified as mortal remains.

Figure 3.a.b. 'Children's Square', La Guillotière cemetery, Lyon, and 'Children's Space', South Cemetery, Lille (Photographs by the authors).

The individualization of graves is not the exclusive work of families. In Lyon, as well as in Lille (below) the graves are individually marked. Cemetery staff inscribe the father and mother's names based on information available in the civil registry, followed by the child's first name (if one has been given), and the date of delivery. Although the lifeless infant does not have the legal status of a person, the indications on the grave marker follow a classical format in providing his or her identity. The parents' involvement, even if they haven't organized the funeral themselves, tends to center on funerary furnishings and objects.

4.3. Collective farewell ceremonies

Simultaneously with the creation of spaces in cemeteries, public farewell ceremonies were first developed[19] in hospital chapels and in crematoriums. This new type of ritual has the particularity of being collective: it is at the same time a way of honoring the memory of lost children and a medium for expressing loss. In Paris, at the Père-Lachaise crematorium, a ceremony is organized each trimester. Based on hospital records, all people who have experienced perinatal bereavement during this period are invited to attend. The ceremony takes place in one of the reception rooms and shows a great deal of similarity to funeral services. It is composed of readings from texts, musical passages, and testimonials, and then refreshments are served. The participants are then invited to sign a guestbook and write testimonials in it.

The bodies are not directly present. They are represented by an urn and a medallion with a handprint (Michaud Nérard, 2012). This medallion is intended to reconstitute the presence of the bodies and to represent all of them collectively. It is placed on the 'coffin' before cremation,[20] recovered afterwards and placed in an urn, which is present during the entire ceremony and then placed in a receptacle inside the stele in the 'Garden of Lights' in the Thiais cemetery. In sum, these medallions follow a path similar to that of bodies.[21]

Figure 4.a.b. Urn and medallion - Testimonial, Père Lachaise crematorium, Paris (Photographs by crematorium staff and by the authors).

In Lille, the same type of ceremony is organized by an association called *Nos tout-petits* ('Our Tiny Ones') and leaves a great deal of room for testimonials from parents. Here, there are no medallions but rather tealight candles that are lit during a ceremony in remembrance of all the children, each called by a first name and identified by a separate candle. The ceremony ends with fresh flowers being placed on the stele at the crematorium.

5. Appropriating spaces of contemplation and remembrance in cemeteries

The spaces and ceremonies that we have just described are not necessarily initiated by families, for some do not choose to hold a funeral. The absence of a funeral does not, however, imply the absence of a grave or of acts of remembrance or memorial objects.

5.1. Spaces dedicated to childhood

Funerary spaces dedicated to lifeless children offer means of remembrance that are suited to the specificities of perinatal bereavement, for which the issues may not be the same as in bereavement involving a person who lived, due to the brevity of the period of shared life.

The way in which families take possession of these funerary spaces, either soon after the time of death or several years later, sometimes following a new birth, reveals some unusual customs. Unexpected props for grieving can be found here, generally objects that relate to childhood and to the experience of parenthood (Woodthorpe, 2012). Even though the types of funerary spaces vary considerably (individual graves, spaces for scattered ashes, headstones, etc.), there can be no doubt that these are areas dedicated to deceased children. In addition to the classic lanterns and statues of baby angels, other frequent offerings include stuffed animals, toy cars, figurines and infant teething toys, including the emblematic Sophie the Giraffe©. These are complemented by the

presence of natural objects such as pebbles, seashells, bits of driftwood, the sorts of objects that young children collect, sometimes staged or arranged into little scenes of play. In some French cemeteries – similar to what is typically found in Northern European countries such as Denmark (Flohr Sørensen, 2011) – children's art projects (painted rocks, perler bead crafts...) are left on graves and it is sometimes difficult to tell whether these are the result of a parent's projection of the lost infant or the work of a sibling.

5.2. Ephemeral and mobile props for grieving and remembrance

These new materials for grieving and memory are ephemeral and moveable, which makes these areas unique within the French context, where a veneration of formal gravesites is deeply ingrained. Graves here are usually marked by a stable, mineral and immutable character. This difference in comparison to traditional graves can be seen in the types of materials used and the kinds of memorial traces left on infants' graves. Tim Flohr Sørensen, studying on the same sort of spaces in Denmark, also insists on this aspect: 'The unfixed and temporary ornamentation of the grave is altered and moved about regularly, testifying to frequent visits by the bereaved' (Flohr Sørensen, 2011, p. 165). These grave scenes shift and evolve as families move objects around, replace them, etc.

Texts are not engraved on a tombstone like traditional epitaphs. Instead, they are written on chalkboards or pieces of slate, on pebbles or ribbons, on objects that can be removed, modified or flipped over, or that naturally break down over time. These inscriptions can be brief, a simple first name, a qualifier or diminutive, such as 'We love you, Babylove' or 'Maélan, little prince' (*On t'aime Bibounette d'amour, Maélan petit prince*). They can contain longer messages evoking loss and affection, but also insisting on the insertion of the child into the family in the case of individual graves. The parents sign their names or use the terms 'Dad' and 'Mom':

> 'Elise, our rose who blossomed and withered so quickly, you are forever in our hearts and minds. You are with all our love' [in French, followed by a variation on the song *Sorry Angel* by Serge Gainsbourg, then four initials and the words 'Love and kiss BB' in English].

Figure 5.a.b. Messages on slates, community cemetery of Bron (Photographs by the authors).

In this spirit, trees may be used as a prop for ribbons or drawings with messages for the deceased child, which are tied onto the branches. By extension, families also attach

infant booties, shoes, stuffed toys, lanterns, all sorts of objects that are ephemeral or seasonal. This temporary character continues with the presence of other attributes that we would probably never have imagined finding in a cemetery, like decorations for Christmas or with a springtime theme.

The use of natural materials also helps differentiate these areas from the rest of the cemetery. Wood, seashells and pebbles are frequently used for groundcover in children's areas, whereas such materials are absent from the graves of adults in France, though they are more commonly used in Anglophone countries and Northern Europe (Madrell, 2009). These materials ensure a degree of continuity between decorative areas and spaces between burial plots in the cemetery, where nature is increasingly present, and the graves themselves.[22] There are also many metal or wooden animal figures, the kind sold in garden supply shops, here given a new purpose, just like the miniature greenhouses that now tend to be used instead of glass jars for protecting stuffed animals or drawings from the weather. None of these objects has any apparent funerary properties. However, they are lightweight and mobile and can evoke the realm of the familiar and the familial. It is easy to move them around or take them away and to make the grave evolve with each visit.

Figure 6.a.b. Details, La Guillotière cemetery in Lyon and community cemetery of Bron (Photographs by the authors).

The most emblematic objects, which can be seen as allegories of the lightness and movement of childhood, are pinwheels, mobiles and windchimes in all sorts of shapes and colors, ranging from simple paper pinwheels to very elaborate whirligigs in the shapes of insects or flowers. Their movement in the shifting breezes contrasts with the immobility of the traditional French cemetery, where the dominant metaphor is that of rest and sleep, as Jean-Didier Urbain states in *La société de conservation* (1978). They create an unusual ambiance. The butterfly, which is the new figure of intercession like the earlier figure of the angel, is also a common theme that can be found in the shape of gravestones, the names given to these areas and the terms used to address the children in messages.

5.3. The accumulation offerings and the management of cemetery spaces

These objects, so clearly connected with childhood, do not seem to have any funeral connotations on the surface. However, this is the type of space in which such signs are reconfigured and reassigned within a new funereal system of reasoning (new to France, at least). Some of these infant graves are more obviously or explicitly grave-like, as in the cases of the small covered tombs or urn alcoves offered to parents in certain cemeteries,

Figure 7. Animals, tealights, windchimes... landscaped cemetery in Tours (Photograph by the authors).

but their symbolic and material environment is identical to the other collective spaces. These visible manifestations deviate from classical funerary norms, not only in style but also in their overabundance. In contrast with the extremely lightweight and fragile nature of these bodies, or ashes, or even the absence of either of these, the way in which they are gathered into a single space (either because their ashes are mixed together or because their graves are all in one area) concretizes and reinforces the materialization of loss, which is confirmed by the accumulation of commemorative objects.

This type of accumulation is not seen in any other type of space in French cemeteries, at least not on this scale. It has led to newly adapted cemetery management practices. Collective spaces for the scattering of ashes, called Memory Gardens (*Jardins du souvenir*), as well as spaces dedicated to the memory of the dead who are 'without bodies' (such as those who gave their bodies to science) or ossuaries, have no distinctive signs (there are no names, no memorial objects). Only perishable flowers are permitted. In the case of lifeless children, the situation is different because the accumulation of objects has become the norm; the abundance of objects allows us to take stock of the significance of perinatal death in contemporary society. This is after all a concrete reality that affects many families, and furthermore, a pregnancy that is not carried to term can now be perceived as a death and be treated as such, both individually and socially. These piles of offerings and messages create a feeling of presence and materialize both the loss itself and its commemoration.

Figure 8.a.b.c. Details, Eastern Cemetery in Rennes and Strasbourg Cemetery (Photographs by the authors).

These grave offerings pile up into mounds that fan out over time, which can cause problems for cemetery staff, who sometimes have to remove objects because they have deteriorated or because there are so many of them.[23] Sometimes one symbolic object is left in place after a number of similar objects are cleared away. Despite these difficulties, the staff show great indulgence and an understanding of the specificities of this type of grief. These areas and their surroundings are not intended to be used as playgrounds, but it is accepted when children (siblings of the deceased) play there. They are not supposed to be areas of uncontrolled self-expression either, but the cemetery staff tolerate it when objects go beyond the individual grave or spill over into intermediary zones, such as the spaces between graves. These areas are voluntarily managed with greater flexibility than other parts of the cemetery, especially considering that they are also used by people, especially women, who went through this experience in the past before areas devoted to perinatal death began to exist.

> 'Parents who lost a baby in the past, for whom the earlier, furtive burials intensified their pain, make use of these monuments as well, to reshape, reformulate and re-experience this loss. For them, the public acknowledgment that the monuments offer to a certain extent compensated for the earlier neglect of their experiences of loss and grief'[24] (Van Poppel, 2018).

Despite the necessity of managing these spaces and keeping them orderly, cemetery workers share a sense of deep empathy and a high level of tolerance for these bereaved parents (Woodthorpe, 2012).

6. Conclusion

Spaces dedicated to stillborn babies in French cemeteries show a clear break with older practices and contrast with the traditional view of cemeteries as places of eternal rest and immutability. More broadly, they are changing the norms and the spatial framework of cemeteries.

For one thing, children who died before birth or soon after birth are gathered together into a united group with a clear presence. Whether this choice is made by families or by public authorities, these 'tiny ones' are kept together in a community of infancy that has its own space within the cemetery.[25] The majority of these children are not buried in the family tomb, which does not prevent their families from maintaining a connection with them; parents, grandparents and siblings can take possession of these places even if they never hold a funeral.

Furthermore, these little islands of children's graves are clearly distinguishable from other parts of the cemetery. The layout, the symbolic references, the materials used and the way these spaces are managed have nothing in common with traditional French cemeteries. Instead, they are part of the ongoing renewal of cemeteries. These new areas are neither 'non-places' (Augé, 1992) nor mere peripheral zones on the edges of cemeteries.

Despite their uniqueness, it is not impossible that these unusual forms and modes of expression may be representative of a movement that reaches beyond its initial focus, namely perinatal death. Three observations should be considered. In the first place, the development of cremation and the scattering of ashes in nature can lead to new rituals within the cemetery that compensate for the absence of a body in the mortuary space. These new kinds of rituals can already be seen in cases in which bodies are donated to

science, in large-scale catastrophes or when burial plots are reclaimed. Second, the people who design these new areas devoted to the memory of lifeless children (cemetery staff) and those who make use of them are often young and little accustomed to traditional funerary practices; they tend to invent new customs surrounding this type of death. Third, the practices and spaces that we have described here are without a doubt not directly descended from earlier manifestations of the traditional French cemetery but instead are representative of memorial practices imported from Anglophone cultures, for these are better matched to contemporary values and norms.

Considering the reconfiguration of our relationship with death and with funerals that is currently under way (Clavandier, 2009) these practices will probably continue to develop, and perhaps will become fully generalized, despite their present unusualness. However, two specifically French characteristics that can be noted in cases of perinatal death are a strong attachment to the material body, shown through the tribute payed to it, and the firm anchoring of all human remains within the space of the cemetery.

Notes

1. The term 'fetus' is used here because in France, starting in 2008, it became legally possible to record all births attested by a medical birth certificate in the Civil Registry; these remains can be provided with a grave.
2. Death of a fetus or a neonate.
3. According to French law, in the case of stillborn children or those born alive but not viable, there can be no establishment of parentage, for children 'born' lifeless do not acquire legal personhood. Nonetheless, in civil records (stillbirth certificates, *actes d'enfant sans vie*), the terms 'father' and 'mother' are used.
4. Until fairly recently stillborn children were not supposed to be buried in cemeteries, but historians and archaeologists have found that some of them were nonetheless buried at the edges of cemeteries, near respite sanctuaries, at the feet of crosses, or under the thresholds of homes (Gélis, 2006).
5. Stillbirth certificates make it possible to record stillborn infants in the civil registry, as well as non-viable infants born living.
6. See the inset below on French law and its recent changes.
7. In France, the rate of cremation is close to 35%, which is on the lower end of average for European countries.
8. In France, a pregnancy can be terminated for medical reasons up until its full term.
9. In this text, we are dealing with the bodies of stillborn children and fetuses, not those of parturient women.
10. This research project was financed by the Funeral Services of the Foundation of the City of Paris, *Fondation de France*.
11. Parents are systematically offered a chance to see the fetus in 97% of French maternity wards, whatever the stage of pregnancy, from 14 weeks amenorrhea onwards (Observatoire de la fin de vie [French National Monitoring Center for End-of-Life Conditions], 2016).
12. The term 'fiction' is used here because stillborn children, as well as non-viable fetuses who exit the womb alive, are not 'born' from the standpoint of the law.
13. The 'parents' can thus show these photographs to their other children and to their friends and relatives or can share them more widely over the Internet. The idea is to present the body of a baby, not that of a fetus and certainly not that of a cadaver.
14. The bones of children aged less than one year have not attained a sufficient level of calcification to resist the temperatures of cremation furnaces. There is therefore no *calcius* to be reduced to ashes.

15. This type of cremation always takes place outside of the crematorium's usual public operating hours.
16. The use of the term 'cremation' instead of incineration helps break away from the idea of eliminating hospital waste material.
17. Inter-ministerial circular, 19 June 2009.
18. The Civil Hospices of Lyon is the institution that represents all the public hospitals in the Lyon area.
19. These can take place following collective cremations as in Lille or can occur regularly on a fixed schedule, such as every trimester, as is the case in Paris.
20. These are collective cremations, for cases in which the family has not taken on the cost of a funeral.
21. Individual medallions with the child's first initial, those given to families who organize the funeral themselves, can also be placed in this type of reliquary, which is then buried.
22. The *'zero phyto'* policy forbids the use of phytosanitary products for the upkeep of cemetery gardens, for ecological reasons and to protect the health of cemetery staff.
23. The objects are then stored in the file cabinets of the administrative office of the cemetery in case any family members come to recover them.
24. Referring to L. M. C. Faro. *Postponed monuments in the Netherlands: manifestation, context, and meaning*. Ridderkerk, Ridderprint BV.
25. This is why collective cremations, if they are carried out with ritual care, are perceived as acceptable.

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The unnaturalness of natural burials: dispossessing the dispossessed

Anna-Katharina Balonier, Elizabeth Parsons and Anthony Patterson

ABSTRACT

The rise of natural burials has not been without controversy. Traditionalist funeralists and a number of mourners struggle to reconcile new immaterial, anti-symbolic practices with those of old. Drawing from an extensive ethnographic study of German cemeteries of both traditional and natural denomination, and by employing a spatial theory approach, we consider the impact that the rise of natural burials has had on all parties in the funeral industry. In particular, we find that those who initially profess a keenness to mark the death of a loved one according to the new conventions of natural burials frequently become disillusioned with their choice. They are unwilling to fully embrace novel mourning practices which eradicate the material symbols that memorialise the deceased. In effect, natural burials dispossess the already dispossessed.

Introduction

> '"To be dead here, and to lie inconspicuous in the cool forest earth must be sweet. Oh, that one could sense and enjoy death even in death! Perhaps one can. To have a small, quiet grave in the forest would be lovely. Perhaps I should hear the singing of the birds and the forest rustling above me. I would like that." Marvellous between trunks of oaks a pillar of sunbeams fell into the forest, which to me seemed like a delicious green grave. Soon I stepped out into the radiant open again, and into life' (Walser, 1917/2013, no pagination).

In his work 'The Walk', Swiss writer Robert Walser imagines being buried in a forest. One hundred years later, this dream can become a reality in a natural burial ground. In this paper, we explore the rise of the natural, woodland burial ground in Germany and find that this neo-romantic notion of being one with nature is a key driver behind their growth. However, we also find that these new natural mourning spaces are not as ideal and idyllic as they may first seem.

The cemetery as a space for body disposal has long been a subject of interest in death studies (e.g. Davies & Rumble, 2012; Francis, Kellaher, & Neophytou, 2000, 2005; Rugg, 2000; Rugg & Holland, 2017), sociology (e.g. Miller & Rivera, 2006; Vanderstraeten, 2009; Woodthorpe, 2010a, 2010b), consumer behaviour research (e.g. Baker, Baker, & Gentry, 2016; Canning & Szmigin, 2010; Canning, Szmigin, & Vaessen, 2016) as well as

human geography and landscape planning (e.g. Clayden & Dixon, 2007; Clayden, Green, Hockey, & Powell, 2015; Maddrell & Sidaway, 2010; Worpole, 2003). The traditional cemetery has been understood as a 'geography of grief' (Arffmann, 2000, p. 125), a 'cultural landscape' (Francis, 2003, p. 222), a 'repository for dead bodies' (Firth, 2005, p. xx), a 'dark resting place' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25) a 'space of emotion, commerce and community' (Woodthorpe, 2011, p. 259), and a 'material outcome of sets of interests and influences' (Francis et al., 2000, p. 34). However, this body of literature has for the most part focused on the landscaping and usage of the space without exploring how these spaces frame and condition visiting behaviours. Focusing on contemporary burial spaces and expanding the research beyond a predominant British context allows us to explore the genesis of the cemetery in a differing regulatory and cultural context.

In line with contemporary debates regarding the spatiality and materiality of death, burial and commemoration, (the theme of the *Transmortality International* conference at the University of Luxembourg in March 2017), this paper explores the link between space and mourning behaviours, i.e. how they are framed and mediated by the space of the cemetery. We explore consumer experiences of natural burial grounds and contrast them with those of more traditional cemetery spaces. The paper is organised as follows: to provide some background we begin by presenting the customs and traditions that have historically governed the use of cemetery spaces, we follow this with an exploration of mourning practices and how they constitute cemetery space. This is followed by a consideration of the rules and regulations that operate in cemeteries to frame and delimit these mourning practices and behaviours. Finally, the natural burial ground, an alternative to the traditional, municipal cemetery, is presented as a new burial concept, which is analysed for its romantic ideals and radical realities.

Cemetery spaces

Rugg (2000, citing Curl, 1999) defines the cemetery as a 'burial ground, especially a large landscaped park or ground laid out expressly for the deposition or interment of the dead, not being a churchyard attached to a place of worship' (p. 260). She also observes that it is a 'principally secular' (p. 264) institution. We follow suit in sidestepping 'religion' in this paper and instead focus exclusively on the cemetery as a public space. The cemetery serves as a burial space or 'repository for dead bodies' (Firth, 2005, p. xx). It is an essential element of a town's landscape but has a reputation of being feared and avoided (Foucault, 1986; Warning, 2009). This is a result of the advancement of atheism in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when people started to pay closer attention to the material dead body. Prior, importance was attributed to the 'immortality of the soul' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25) and its resurrection. However, in paying closer attention to the body, it became known as a vessel of illness and of death itself (ibid). Cemeteries therefore became places of fear: At night, the cemetery becomes a 'black hole', a 'no-place', to be avoided (Warning, 2009, p. 172). Consequently, cemeteries were relocated from central church gardens to the outskirts of towns. This exclusion from the city and society turned the cemetery into a city itself – a *necropolis* (Firth, 2005) – where bereaved families possess a 'dark resting place' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). Even today, cemeteries retain negative connotations and are often seen as functional spaces for

body disposal which are visited out of obligation, compulsion, or guilt (Francis et al., 2000; Woodthorpe, 2010b).

The cemetery landscape

In addition to burying dead bodies, cemeteries have been understood as offering four major functions (Arffmann, 2000): a hygienic function, a place for sorrow, contact with eternity, and marking of social status. According to German law, human remains – both as corpse and cremated remains – must be buried underground and cremains cannot be scattered. Inhumation of the body or burial of the cremains are required so they can decompose fully and hence comply with hygiene regulations. Further, cemeteries are established places of sorrow, where mourners can visit the dead, tend their graves and nurture transcendental bonds (Francis et al., 2000; Gusman & Vargas, 2011; Woodthorpe, 2010b). Arffmann (2000) asserts that 'there must be a place for the tears to fall and for [one] to say, "It is here!"' (p. 125). He observes that the bereaved need a tangible location in which to mourn and reflect, one in which they might feel the presence of the dead. Arffmann (2000) further suggests that a cemetery is a place where one can come into contact with eternity. While this might be true for most countries, where graves are allocated in perpetuity, German cemeteries require the re-use of grave plots. After a specified period of rest,[1] the buried corpse is thought to be fully decomposed and the grave may be re-used for another body (Wirz & Keldenich, 2010). Equally, a period of rest is granted to cremated remains, during which the urn may not be moved.

Finally, as Firth (2005) observes the cemetery can be a space where families communicate their 'wealth, social status and aesthetic taste' (p. xix). Identity work may take place through the (re)construction of the deceased's image as well as the construction of the family's identity through funerary rites and practices (Francis et al., 2005; Reimers, 1999). Individual mourners also reflect on their own selfhood particularly through consideration of their relationship with the deceased.

Moreover, Woodthorpe (2011) sees the cemetery as a 'simultaneous space of emotion, commerce and community' (p. 259). Sadness and feelings of loss are present in the cemetery, as are emotions such as anger, frustration, and a natural urge to protect the dead (ibid). The commercial aspects of a cemetery are twofold. On the one hand, Woodthorpe's research suggests that the cemetery, as a business, needs to manage its income and invest in maintenance strategies. On the other hand, the cemetery offers a space of commerce for external service providers such as stonemasons and private cemetery gardeners (Balonier, 2017). Lastly, Woodthorpe suggests that the cemetery landscape has a communal atmosphere, one where mourners collectively benefit from the careful management and curation of the space. Furthermore, for Francis et al. (2000) a cemetery can provoke 'a shared sense of community among mourners and provide informal support' (p. 42) in times of bereavement.

Mourning practices: engaging in cemetery space

Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, and Anderson (2010, referring to Sherry, 1998; Tuan, 1977) assert that '*space* traditionally refers to something anonymous whereas *place* distinctively accounts for the meaningful experience of a given site; that is, it is "consumed

space"'(p. 512). In this regard, the cemetery as an entity is a public space, constituted by private practices of *placemaking* (Miller & Rivera, 2006; Wingren, 2013). Each grave plot is a *place* maintained and designed by the individual bereaved, who contributes to the overall aesthetics of the cemetery *space*. This distinction is important in the context of this paper as it acknowledges the cemetery as a space constituted through practices (Löw, 2008).

Cemeteries are said to grant 'death its own space' (Kastenbaum, 2016, p. 79) so it does not invade ours, which is why it is enclosed in order to corporally and psychologically separate it from the rest of social life (Maddrell, 2010). Yet it is still an important space for mourners who seek a continuous connection to their deceased. Gusman and Vargas (2011) observe how important it is for the bereaved to take care of and maintain their deceased's plot. Not only is it perceived as a 'social duty' (p. 218) toward the deceased, but it is also to avoid making a 'bad impression on other visitors' (p. 218). They further observe gravesite maintenance as a '"normal" activity, which makes it possible to feel that life is going on in spite of the death of the loved person, recreating, at least in part, a familiar situation' (p. 218). The bereaved try to find normality in their grief through ritual activities, which help them with their loss. Watering plants and weeding are ordinary household chores, which are performed in a similar fashion in the cemetery. 'By maintaining the grave, survivors demonstrate an on-going emotional involvement with the deceased' (Francis et al., 2000, p. 43) which is reflected to the wider mourning community.

Further, Firth (2005) asserts that the bereaved seek to honour their dead through gravesite memorialisation but at the same time might wish to communicate the family's affluence or social status. Similarly, Hallam, Hockey, and Howarth (1999/2005) assert 'that personal/social identity is constructed in life through social interaction, that is, by reference to others, [hence] it is only logical that this should continue to be the case in death' (p. 114).

In relation to these bereavement practices, Francis et al. (2000) observed visitors talking to their deceased and asking for guidance or their blessing. Practices of continuing bonds such as maintaining and interacting with the plot are seen as a 'proxy act of physical contact' (p. 43) with the deceased, and reflect an intimate relationship which is also sought to be projected visually onto the plot. Through gravesite decorations the bereaved not only mark the location of burial, but the grave is a tangible focus for their grief, serving as a 'tool through which people can communicate with others, both dead and alive' (Woodthorpe, 2010b, p. 122).

According the Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008), cemeteries are 'where the absent is made present' (para. 1.3). The cemetery is where the dead are memorialised and symbolically made present through marked graves. Canning and Szmigin (2010) assert that bereaved need 'to maintain the individuality of the deceased through some kind of personal space or memory' (p. 1132). Practices of continuing bonds acknowledge that 'dead people [are] both absent (in that they [are] no longer actively interacting in an embodied sense with other people) and present (in the use of objects on graves, which many people visit to "be" with them)' (Meyer & Woodthorpe, 2008, para. 1.7).

The regulation of cemetery space

Cemeteries in Germany are highly regulated spaces. They are enclosed by walls or fences to identify them as *other* places (Foucault, 1986; Walter, 2005) or 'separate place[s] with

a special purpose' (Rugg, 2000, p. 262). The German term 'Friedhof' literally translates to 'enclosed court' and has nothing to do with 'peace' (= Frieden) which is a common misconception. For comparison, the English 'cemetery', the French 'cimetière', and the Italian 'cimitero' are rooted in Greek and translate to 'sleeping place'.

Strict regulations and statutes dictate who may be interred (i.e. often only people living in the catchment area), the layout of each plot, the design and measurements of the individual headstone or grave marker, and the level of maintenance required (Wirz & Keldenich, 2010). These regulations also dictate when, how and where a body (or cremated remains) can be disposed of; namely, human remains must be buried within designated cemetery premises. Rugg (2013) criticises these regulations as the bereaved have 'little option but to comply' (p. 229). The cemetery ideal, which evolved in the nineteenth century, saw the space as a 'sanctuary of spirituality, decency and decorum' (Murray, 2003, p. 130) and hence was supposed to combine functionality and aesthetics. This implied a universal understanding of cemetery usage (Woodthorpe, 2011) and appropriate or legitimate behaviour (Deering, 2010; McClymont, 2016). To ensure this, cemeteries are managed and policed by the municipal authorities who ensure the safety of the visitors as well as the peace of the interred dead.

Study context: the rise of natural burial grounds

Yarwood, Sidaway, Kelly, and Stillwell (2015) acknowledge Germany's progress when establishing the first form of forest cemetery in the early twentieth century, but dismiss it as not articulating 'green credentials in the forms that have developed in Britain' (p. 173). However, they fail to address a burial concept, which has been in place in Germany since the early 2000s: the concept of the *natural burial ground*. In contrast to the *forest cemetery* – where individual grave plots with headstones are aligned according to the growth of the trees in a designated cemetery space (see Davies & Rumble, 2012) – natural burial grounds use trees as grave markers under which cremains are buried with no indication of the exact location of the urn. These burial grounds only allow burials for cremated remains and are located in designated woodland areas away from settlements. The urn is fully compostable, thus, the cremains and the urn are said to become 'one' with nature (Frevert, 2010). The aforementioned period of rest is extended in these burial grounds and can last up to 99 years, depending on the respective statutes.

In Germany, this form of burial was first introduced and privately operated by the FriedWald GmbH[2] (Frevert, 2010), and has since also inspired municipalities to implement their own burial areas in woodlands. Since their first opening in 2001, FriedWald has developed over 60 locations German-wide (FriedWald, 2018). With the legal requirement to bury human (c)remains, this has become an appealing alternative to cemeteries. This burial concept promotes the *natural* appeal of woodlands and seeks to inspire a bodily and transcendental return to nature (Frevert, 2010). Headstones and any other kind of gravesite marking or decoration are strictly forbidden in these spaces. According to a study undertaken by Aeternitas (2013), 26% of participants[3] said they would contemplate an alternative, woodland burial (compared to 19% in 2004). This shows a slow but significant increase in the popularity of the 'natural' burial concept. Although it was not possible to find a reliable source for exact burial figures – as these are not collected centrally or communicated to the public – the opening of an increasing

number of natural burial grounds in Germany (at least 60 locations in the past 18 years, see FriedWald (2018)) reflects an increase in consumer demand.

Methodology

This paper is based on a larger ethnographic study which explores the spatial and material elements of body disposal in German culture (Balonier, 2017). The findings presented in this paper emerge from 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork in German cemeteries. The primary focus was on two types of burial grounds and their competing rationales: the traditional municipal cemetery and the natural burial ground. Eight burial grounds in the South-West of Germany served as research locations. Four of these were municipal cemeteries and four were natural burial grounds. Of these four natural burial grounds, two are operated by municipalities and two are operated by private service providers. The locations were visited regularly by the first author over the research period, who kept a diary with reflections on these spaces, their overall layout and design, their management and their usage by other visitors. In addition, 13 interviews were conducted with death-related professionals associated with the cemeteries, including undertakers, stonemasons, and cemetery gardeners. Discussions covered their work in the cemetery, their experience with bereaved consumers, and their opinions about the current competition in the market. Further, 18 bereaved individuals were interviewed about their perceptions and usage of the cemetery and their experience of the prevailing rules and regulations. A list of participants mentioned in this paper can be found in Table 1. Interviews with professionals were conducted on their work premises. The locations for interviews with non-professional informants varied and were adjusted to their preferences (Gentry, Kennedy, Paul, & Hill, 1994). These interviews were conducted in their own home, on a bench in a park, or in the researchers' office. Permission for the study was granted by the university's ethics committee and the associated guidelines were followed surrounding participant protection and anonymity. All photographs

Table 1. List of participants referenced in this paper.

Name	Background	Case of Death discussed
Ben	Bereaved participant	Grandparents, time frame of bereavement not specified, municipal cemetery, inhumation, infrequent visits, experiences the cemetery as unpleasant and constraining
Caroline	Bereaved participant	Grandparents, time frame of bereavement not specified, municipal cemetery, inhumation, infrequent visits, family tensions regarding grave maintenance
David	Bereaved participant	Grandparents, time frame of bereavement not specified, municipal cemetery, inhumation, frequent visits, maintains the grave, enjoys the atmosphere of the cemetery
Henry	Cemetery gardener	Brother of father-in-law, time frame of bereavement not specified, buried in natural burial ground, cremated, no visits to this specific plot, expresses his negative experience with the natural burial ground
Lucy	Bereaved participant	Father, three years ago, buried in natural burial ground, cremated, frequent visits, maintains and individualises the plot, experiences the traditional cemetery as constraining
Luke	Bereaved participant	Mother, six years ago, municipal cemetery, urn plot, cremated, frequent visits, experiences the cemetery space as structured and managed
Valerie	Administrator of woodland burial ground	N/A
Molly	Bereaved participant	Father, 10+ years ago, municipal cemetery, cremated, almost no visits, experiences the cemetery as a space with too strict regulations

shown in this article were taken by the first author and permission for publication was granted by the burial ground operators.

After transcribing the interviews and observation diary, NVivo 10 was used as a tool to analyse the data. The data was coded and categorised into themes in order to organise them. Themes included material and spatial elements such as grave types and designs, mementos, visiting practices and routines, experiences with the cemetery regulations, landscape developments, and general content/discontent. Taking a hermeneutic approach to data analysis, the focus, shaped by the authors' collective academic expertise in consumption-related phenomena, was on the 'dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings' (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868).

Obligation and constraint in the traditional cemetery

When questioned about their general perceptions of municipal traditional German cemeteries, mourners tended to focus either on their material aspects, ('crosses and headstones', 'paths and neat lawns') or their symbolic/atmospheric elements ('reflecting family history', 'spaces for calm'). While many responses were relatively detached observations, for some informants the strict management and spatial regulations of these spaces were an issue:

> 'In general, I find that the rules and regulations in the cemetery are too strict. [...] They are quite strict [...] when you neglect the plot, with the fines and all. [They] check whether your plot is maintained. [...] So much control. [...] They should really loosen up a little. For example you can't walk your bike through it. Or when I had a conversation I was told off for talking too loudly. Can you believe it?' – Molly, bereaved informant

As Molly observes, the regulations that govern these spaces delimit the sorts of behaviours permitted (i.e. no talking loudly) and also the items that may be brought into them (i.e. no bikes). They also entail an element of policing mourning practices and behaviours themselves. Fines levied for unkempt plots are unwelcomed at the financial level, but they are also discomforting as they say something about mourners commitment to their deceased relative or friend. As such the requirements of these regulations extend to govern the intimate practices and relations of mourning through 'expected' levels of commitment enacted through regular attendance and maintenance of graves.

> 'These visits sometimes have an element of constraint, I think. [...] Everything is so framed. And you walk through the aisles and look left and right [...] and then you stand quietly in front of the grave. I can think of nicer ways.' – Ben, bereaved informant

While rules and regulations operate to govern behaviours in cemeteries, these behaviours are also governed through the physical design and layout of the cemetery space. As Ben comments above, 'everything is so framed'. He is referring to the way in which the formal layout of the graves requires certain behaviours, as he observes, 'standing quietly in front of the grave'.

It is not only the formal layout of the cemetery that seems to constrain behaviour but also its general aesthetic or atmosphere which is hard to define but is created through layout, design, structure and even the location of these spaces. Capturing this aesthetic

is difficult. '[L]aid out according to a rigorous plan' (Foucault, 1986, p. 27), cemeteries are managed and landscaped by the municipality and are separated from the surrounding town through walls or fences. Such design succeeds in separating the space from all other spaces. At the same time it appears that they 'have to be framed so that people know how to act' (Jacobs & Appleyard, 1987, p. 116). Respecting the dead and attending to grave maintenance are both behaviours folded into cemetery regulations and management.

When mourners talked about spatial aesthetics, they referred to 'beauty', in particular the beauty of nature as contrasting with the formal, manmade (and therefore rather unbeautiful) aesthetic of the traditional cemetery.

> 'I think it is rather constraining. [...] I don't think it looks nice, the one by two metres thing *[she refers to the outline of a grave plot]* where everyone puts three tulips on, I don't think that's nice. [...] With a headstone, I don't think that is beautiful. With a tree and some lawn, I like that, when you are in touch with nature.' – Lucy, bereaved informant

> 'For what it's worth, I think a cemetery can be more natural. *[Interviewer: 'What do you mean with natural?']* It shouldn't be as neat and accurate, the paths are paved, everything is aligned. It seems rather sober and stinted. I don't think a cemetery needs this. I don't mind the uneven stairs or the hedges and weeds. [...] I think it is good if it grows a little more freely.' – Luke, bereaved informant

Here, respondents find the formal and managed aesthetic of traditional cemeteries (i.e. the formal alignment of the grave plots, the paving of paths) to be 'sober or stinted' and 'not necessarily beautiful'.

Overall, mourners seem to perceive and experience traditional cemetery spaces as constraining. They clearly resent the existence (and policing) of cemetery rules and regulations and in addition they seem to want to break free from the behaviours that are prescribed and framed by the physical layout and aesthetic of traditional cemetery space. Yet, when probed they struggled to express how they would like to behave differently. The initial appeal then, of a radically different approach to burial space, one, which is seemingly more natural and unstructured, seems to lie in the fact that it is an 'alternative' to the traditional, formal space of the cemetery, and thus might allow for a more varied tapestry of behaviours.

The natural burial ground as alternative

The growth in popularity of natural burial grounds might in part be understood against this backdrop of a general malaise with the formalities of traditional burial grounds. As an administrator of a privately operated natural burial ground explains:

> 'It is not a static cemetery. It grows, you see. [...] In the cemetery you can't just say, "I want this or that plot", they are all aligned and usually sold linearly. And then you have all those regulations regarding the headstones. It mustn't be higher than this, and the writing must be that, and the colour should be this and so on. And here it is like this: you choose which tree you want. You tell us your preferences, if you want an oak tree, or a beech tree, if you want a bent trunk or a straight trunk.' – Valerie, administrator of a natural burial ground

Alternative burial grounds rely on the existing layout of the forest and incorporate the trees as grave makers without adding elements like headstones. The trees are used symbolically

as a grave marker with no maintenance obligations. In contrast to a traditional cemetery with framed plots and static headstones, the trees continue to grow as a reminder of the continuation of life while also connecting to the past and the memory of the deceased. Valerie emphasises the freedom for bereaved individuals, to choose a tree whose growth might align with the deceased's personality thus highlighting the 'potential of the memorial tree to sustain memories and the identity of the deceased' (Clayden & Dixon, 2007, p. 258).

Further, the alternative of a natural burial type seems to meet the bereaved needs for a less rigid burial space, where they can break free of maintenance obligations, municipal regulations and spatial limitations. It comes as a relief at a time when increasing mobility and relocation for work or other personal reasons makes the regular visiting of grave sites difficult (Fenzel, 2012; Wickel, 2011). The cemetery as a space for mourning and remembrance seems to have become outdated. This is where the natural burial ground aims to draw the mourners' attention as they advertise the forest as a positive alternative to the traditional cemetery. When discussing natural burial grounds, respondents continually emphasised associations between nature (especially trees) and a much broader sense of life and living.

> 'I don't like the rigid cemetery. [...] Here you have something to touch, the nature. It is different with headstones on graves. They speak demise to me. The trees speak life.' – Valerie, administrator of a natural burial ground

> '[Buried] underneath a tree would be great. [...] Or even if you plant a tree and it grows. [...] I mean, this way you really are becoming one with the tree.'– David, bereaved informant

Here the conception of life extends to perpetuity, the urge towards the continuation of life after death and immortality. Davies (2005) expresses this as 'ecological immortality', which is 'the intrinsic relationship between the human body and the world as a natural system within which the ongoingness of life is grounded in the successive life and death of [...] all things' (p. 86). Similarly, Francis et al. (2000) see a relationship 'between person and nature, where an ecologically managed woodland reconfigures the landscape' (p. 47).

Realities of the natural burial ground: managed nature

Evidently a tree burial is associated with the romantic ideals of nature as liberating and unruly (as opposed to formal and managed). However, observations suggest that these 'natural' burial spaces are as equally constructed and managed as traditional burial grounds (see e.g. Balonier, 2017; Foucault, 1986; Rugg, 2013).

The opening sentence on the welcome board of one of the natural burial grounds visited reads, *'[We] offer people a burial site where they already feel comfortable in their lifetime: the forest'*. This wording hints at a continuation of existing experiences of nature; this is undoubtedly in contrast to the managed, manmade environment of the traditional cemetery. Yet, as a closer investigation of natural burial grounds reveals, their nature is quite managed.

Accessibility

While a German municipal cemetery is designed for public access – often provided with a bus stop nearby – the natural burial grounds visited in this study were located in forests and required a long walk or the effort of driving on narrow forest paths to reach

them. The purposely built car park at the burial site seems to contradict the 'natural experience' as visitors drive through the forest to reach the grounds. Also, this remote location makes visits difficult for elderly people, people with walking difficulties, or people who do not have a car.

Upon arrival, the welcome board displays information as well as the statutes of the burial ground. The first poster reads:

> 'Opening hours: Entrance to the grounds [...] is permitted daily one and a half hours after sunrise and one and a half hours before sunset.' – Article 4, statutes

Apparently, even though it is located in the middle of the forest with no clear boundaries, there are opening hours to the burial ground. This seems surprising, as the forest itself does not have access restrictions. Municipal cemeteries are gated to restrict access to opening hours, but natural burial grounds are supposed to blend in with the surrounding forest. They have neither gates nor fences. Yet, a walk through the first set of trees showed that this is an equally marked and managed space.

As shown in Figure 1, the paths are highlighted with mulch, which differentiates the burial ground's paths from the surrounding forest paths. In addition, the trees left and right of the path are marked with coloured plastic ribbons; each colour indicating the price range for the trees still available for burial. An additional element, which visually punctuates the forest setting, is the presence of portable toilets (see figure 1). These toilets are located near the 'entrance', next to the car park. They are surrounded by a wooden fence to blend in with the environment; yet, their blue colour and the fact that these toilets operate with chemicals conflict with their 'natural' woodland setting. Added elements like these indicate that these spaces are highly managed and need to cater for the visitors' needs.

Visibility

In addition to the incongruity of 'nature' in the natural burial ground, there are other elements, which indicate discrepancies in relation to these alternative burial spaces.

Figure 1.a.b.c. Coloured plastic ribbons and mulch to indicate trees and paths; portable toilet (Photographs by A. K. Balonier).

Francis et al. (2000) identify the cemetery as a space which 'sustain[s] important, largely unacknowledged functions in personal, family and community life' (p. 34). However, natural burial grounds are located in distant woodland areas and are hence disconnected from society. They are almost invisible, as Valerie observes:

> 'People don't necessarily realise that they are walking through a burial ground. They are marked as such, yes, but there is no fence hindering anyone walking through the woods. It is a part of it.' – Valerie, administrator of a natural burial ground

As such, the dead are not only absent from the world of the living but their grave plots have also become invisible. A traditional cemetery is linked to history and ancestry, memorialising the deceased's life, giving them their space for a peaceful rest while acknowledging their former presence among the living by marking their individual plot. In contrast, natural burial grounds are integrated into existing public forests, the plots of which are not marked individually, leaving their exact location unidentified. The exact burial location is not indicated and the tree is assumed the proxy-memorial.

Lucy describes how she overcame the fact that her father's urn plot was blending in with the forest floor.

> 'I replaced the grass on the plot [and] I maintain that piece of grass, I cut it and so on. [...] Since it looks a little different it is funny in a way.' – Lucy, bereaved informant

Natural burial grounds advertise that 'nature takes over the maintenance' (FriedWald, 2018) and prohibit any form of material grave marking. Yet, it seemed important for Lucy to overcome this by planting a different kind of grass to mark the burial site of her father's urn. A grave plot is a 'concrete, material symbol of the dead person' (Gusman & Vargas, 2011, p. 205), which Lucy makes an attempt to replicate. It is a visible memory of the deceased where the bereaved seek 'to keep [the deceased's] identity alive and to regenerate their relationships even after death' (Francis et al., 2005, p. 214). This seems only possible where the location of burial is visible. In a forest burial where the ground is evened out and the burial site concealed, this seems to be a problem for the bereaved visitors.

Further, these burial forests are located away from cities making regular access difficult. This was also noted by Molly when she reflected on how her family had contemplated a burial plot for their father.

> 'My father loved to be outdoors and I would have preferred a tree burial where the deceased gets a tree in the forest. [...] I would have preferred that but they are far away from [where we lived] and that is why we did not choose it. My little brother was only 12 when my dad died and for him it would have been really difficult to visit. [...] We didn't know if any of us would need to visit [...] and that is why we chose the [town's cemetery] where we can go more easily.' – Molly, bereaved informant

Molly's family made a conscious decision in favour of an accessible and identifiable burial plot, which allows everyone to visit their father freely and in their own time.

Burial grounds in the woodlands may be inaccessible for the bereaved. Further, Clayden et al. (2015) question whether 'death become[s] forgotten if quietly folded away into the landscape' (p. 1). As such, this emerging alternative encourages a disconnection of family bonds. Likewise, Baker et al. (2016) assert that the absence

of a visible and visitable marker such as a grave plot or a headstone, can disrupt the mourning experience. Henry spoke of his father-in-law, who chose to bury his brother in a natural burial ground.

> 'My father-in-law regrets it now because he never visits. [...] It is far and you don't have the possibility to bring flowers or anything. [...] It was done for the sake of convenience and now no one is really happy about it.' – Henry, cemetery gardener

Henry's father-in-law made an irreversible decision in favour of a natural burial plot. Even though, at the time, it seemed appropriate to bury the cremains in a forest ('they wanted something different for him'), the family now regrets this decision because the plot is not present in the family's life. It is neither easily visitable, nor a visible memorial for their family member. Rather, it is a tree in a forest, which they never visit. Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008) assert the importance of gravesite visibility as the absence of the deceased can be overcome by making their burial plot present. Henry's family failed to create such a visible and visitable memorial for their deceased and are now faced with the sheer *absence* of the plot.

In summary, natural burial grounds are located in forests outside of cities and remove the deceased from the town and hence from everyday social life (Rumble, Troyer, Walter, & Woodthorpe, 2014). They are distanced from their families and no longer *present* in the community. This also impedes visiting routines which are intended to ensure a continuous connection with the dead (see e.g. Francis et al., 2000; Holloway, 2007; Reimers, 1999; Woodthorpe, 2010b).

Accommodating material engagement with the deceased?

The analysis of the appeals of a natural burial ground revealed the two major selling points for this novel burial alternative. On the one hand, there is the otherness of the burial space, the 'natural' and 'green' mourning environment without *memento mori* or structural constraints. On the other hand, there is a lack of mandatory maintenance obligations, which prevail in the traditional cemetery. However, natural burial grounds have one specific regulation, namely the ban of any kind of gravesite marking or decoration, which includes figurines, toys, and especially candles.

> 'We have people who still put up candles and decorations. This is not only dangerous but it is also against our policies and our concept of a *natural* burial ground.' – Valerie, administrator of a natural burial ground

With the first opening of a natural burial ground in 2001, the concept is still fairly recent in Germany. The bereaved consumers might have been intrigued by the idea of an alternative, nature-oriented burial ground; however, their embedded cultural practices of gravesite decoration and visiting routines have not yet adapted to this new environment. Francis et al. (2000) identify these practices as vital for the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved which indicates that they are not easily abandoned. The tending of the grave can be seen as a 'proxy act of physical contact' (Francis et al., 2000, p. 43) with the deceased, while gravesite decorations allow mourners to *materially* externalise and communicate the deceased's identity and their relationship with the bereaved. However, the placing of objects contradicts the philosophy of a 'natural' burial ground as

the trees are supposed to be the sole memorials. This inability to materially externalise grief seems to result in a conflict between the operator of the grounds and the bereaved families.

On visits to natural burial grounds the first author found that bereaved visitors had placed memorial objects underneath the trees, left flowers or, on one occasion, carved a name into a tree trunk. Among the objects found near or on trees were rocks inscribed with names, flowers, toys, and figurines (see Figure 2).

One particular act, the carving of a name into the bark of a tree, indicates a violation of the expected respect toward the forest and the trees. Caroline expressed the importance of sustainability and respect toward nature in our interview.

> 'Also the respect for nature, when you think of it. No one would think of carving something into the trees here.' – Caroline, bereaved informant

Such violations of respect toward the burial ground, but also the violation of placing decorations, can result in an administrative fine of up to 500 Euros (according to the statutes displayed on the welcome board).

Staff members at one of the locations collect the mementos placed by the trees, gathering them on a bench in a clearing of the burial ground. The bench is abuzz with figurines, personalised rocks, and toys, which visitors have placed by the trees over the years (see bottom picture of Figure 2). The quantity of these mementoes shows that bereaved individuals seem to have an urge to materially externalise their grief, be it through the placing of a personalised object, a message, or to mark that someone was *there* to visit. The burial ground regulations do not seem to stop the bereaved from practicing this kind of material memorialisation. These objects can transform into sacred and valued memorial objects when associated with death and remembrance. Ahmed (2004) refers to these kinds of objects as *affective* as they have the ability to circulate emotions 'between bodies and signs' (p. 117). The location of their placement and the nature of their giving are considered sacred in the sense that the deceased, for whom they are brought, is valued beyond their death. As 'material objects [they] can become extensions of the body and therefore of personhood' (Hallam & Hockey, 2001, p. 43).

Culturally, bereaved individuals are used to materially expressing their grief through memorial objects and seem to have difficulties refraining from this practice in the forest. This conflict between culturally embedded, traditional gravesite practices and natural burial ground regulations was also noted by Valerie.

> 'We have cases again and again where people put up decorations. In our grounds, the forester takes objects like flower arrangements and disposes of them. When there are figurines or similar objects, these are stored by the forester for a certain period of time. In case someone comes back to the plot and finds their marble angel is gone and they call us up and say "it cost 200 Euros". When this repeats itself or when there is a candle burning – which is an absolute no-no for the danger of forest fires – [...] we write a letter to all the affected parties.' – Valerie, administrator of a natural burial ground

Despite the regulations, about which the bereaved are regularly reminded through newsletters or personal mail, the foresters still find items placed underneath or on the trees. The idea of 'natural' memorials in the form of a collective tree seems to contradict with the mourners' need for individual memorialisation and gift-giving at the gravesite (Woodthorpe, 2010b). Grave markers and decorations help the

Figure 2.a.b.c.d.e. Objects of memorialisation found in natural burial grounds (Photographs by A. K. Balonier).

bereaved remember and memorialise their loved ones (Francis et al., 2005; Turley & O'Donohoe, 2012). A memorial 'offer[s] a form of immortality' (Holloway, 2007, p. 160) for the deceased but also symbolises a continuous link between the deceased and the bereaved. Artefacts are incorporated into the funeral services and later at the gravesite in order to 'remember the dead but also to foster social identities and relationships between the living and the dead' (Turley & O'Donohoe, 2012, p. 1333). Objects can tell narratives of death and loss but can also reflect the identity of the deceased and help in 'preserving the memory of the departed loved one' (p. 1333). Yet with the constraints of the natural burial ground, the bereaved are robbed of these practices and with them, the ability to materially express their grief. While gifts to the dead have a therapeutic effect, such gift giving is not possible or tolerated in natural burial grounds.

Discussion

This paper has demonstrated three things. Firstly, that the German municipal cemetery is an example of a delimited burial landscape which frames the behaviour of the bereaved and places constraints around their mourning experience with rules and regulations. Secondly, the rigidity and formality of the traditional space is challenged by the natural burial ground, an emerging alternative for burial and remembrance, as the traditional cemetery seems to 'no longer serv[e] the needs of bereaved people' (Clayden & Dixon, 2007, p. 241). The plots are less visible and the deceased cannot be commemorated in the same way as the bereaved are used to in the traditional cemetery. Thirdly, our research reveals tensions between culturally embedded gravesite practices and the reality of these 'natural' burial grounds.

Upon closer analysis we find that neither the municipal cemeteries nor the so-called 'natural' burial grounds are naturally existing spaces. They are both purposefully selected areas, enclosed or marked, and managed by an administration. This adds to our understanding of the dichotomy of culture and nature. MacCormack and Strathern (1980) assert that 'culture is distinct and contrasted with nature' (p. 1) and further explain that 'culture is not nature, but nature is entirely a cultural concept' (p. 4, referring to Schneider, 1972). As the findings of this study demonstrate, this is applicable to the concept of the natural burial grounds found in Germany. These spaces are as constructed and managed as the municipal cemetery.

As a contrast to the traditional cemetery and their control and constraint, natural burial grounds are a 'trend towards an emerging partnership, founded on a more reciprocal relationship, between person and nature, where an ecologically *managed* woodland reconfigures the landscape' (Francis et al., 2000, p. 47, emphasis added). Our findings reflect a very human search for a closer relationship between nature and culture, where nature is perceived as positive and healing, as indicated in the quote by Robert Walser at the beginning of the paper. Yet, in order to achieve this there is still an element of *management* involved. '[C]onsumers imagine, manage, and experience nature through a variety of cultural discourses, practices, and technologies' (Canniford & Shankar, 2013, p. 1051). We have found that natural burial grounds are not 'natural' in their existence and operation but are highly mediated by the market and 'molded to the commercial context' (Arnould, Price, & Otnes, 1999, p. 60). Arnould and Price (1993) observe that consumers of natural environments expect 'a wild, clean, natural, isolated, and "noncommercial" setting' (p. 29), but instead find 'culturally institutionalised areas' (Canniford & Shankar, 2013, p. 1053).

Nevertheless, natural burial grounds enjoy great popularity, since '[c]onsumers commonly frame nature as the opposite of culture in romantic consumption events that offer sublime, magical, or primitive experiences' (Canniford & Shankar, 2013, p. 1063). They might even enjoy the absence of memorials and welcome a burial alternative where the bereaved are not distracted by other plots, but can experience a more intimate connection with the forest as well as with the deceased who is buried under any one tree. In the end, our findings show that 'nature is not an ontological separate category' (Canniford & Shankar, 2013, p. 1063) but is constructed in and through mourning practices. As Szpotowicz (2015, drawing on Ortner, 1972) observes 'culture as an entity [...] has the ability to act upon and transform nature' (p. 11).

Conclusion

The German cemetery is not only the designated space for body disposal but has further been identified as 'a mirror image of our society' (Käßmann, 2008, p. 2) as it reflects our understanding and management of death. It is a space for collectivity, public remembrance, heritage, culture, and rituals, which gradually change as society changes. However, since the introduction of an alternative burial form, the natural burial ground, the traditional cemetery faces unprecedented competition. Mourners find the rules, regulations, and formalities of the traditional cemetery constraining and counterpose the natural burial ground against these experiences as offering an idealised alternative. Yet, we find that these idealised alternative spaces have constraints of their own which similarly limit mourners in their expressions of grief. Traditional material and symbolic ways of memorialising the deceased are prohibited in natural burial grounds. In effect, natural burials dispossess the already dispossessed.

Notes

1. According to German law, grave plots may be re-distributed after 15 to 30 years, depending on the kind of grave and local policies. The 'period of rest' is the period, in which the body may not be touched, moved, or removed as the deceased is laid 'to rest'. On average, this period is 20 years.
2. A GmbH is the German equivalent to a British PLC.
3. Total number of participants: 1,005.

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Materiality and the body: explorations at the end of life

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ABSTRACT
Questioning the material status of a dead body is a challenge: On the one hand, a corpse seems to be nothing more than the physical remains of a person that once was – and is now gone. On the other hand, the dead body is still the material representation of the social identity that used to 'inhabitate' this body. Not least for it's striking similarity, one person's corpse is thus often considered the post mortem status of his or her 'self'. When taking a closer look at the difference between living (in the sense of 'ensouled') bodies and their allegedly materialistic counterparts, the separating effect dissolves. As a consequence, certain concepts of sociological theory become interpretable in a truly trans-frontier manner. By drawing upon empirical data from original research carried out by the authors concerning dying, death and bereavement, this article is an attempt to approach the materiality of the dead body in the light of it's various forms of social utilisation.

The particular role materiality plays in the life of people does not decrease when life becomes non-life. The dying process, death and rituals of commemoration also depend upon or rely on materiality, as every funeral ceremony undoubtedly demonstrates. But what is the position of the (dead) body? Is it a representation of the person 'it used to be' or a bodily element joining the ranks of other materialities involved? This question is hereinafter reflected from a sociological perspective.[1]

Theoretical approaches

Mankind is surrounded by things. In a metaphorical sense, flesh and stone (cf. Sennett, 1996) nowadays generate a symbiotic unity that cannot be separated from each other. Materiality, then, is nothing opposite to man, but rather a component of a heterogeneous world that is – when it comes to these intertwined poles – usually perceived as homogenous. It has become impossible to evaluate the social world without looking at its dependence upon material things. In fact, writing down this sentence could not be achieved without using a combination of devices and artefacts that help transform a thought into a written text. It has become the unquestioned nature of people to create and shape material to serve aims that cannot be reached without it.

It is not surprising that French sociologist Bruno Latour, in his Actor Network Theory (ANT), speaks of a social identity of artefacts (Latour, 2005). In Latour's point of view,

what is inanimate can indeed be socially active, and artificially created things can have a social impact; they might even impose force on or within a process of interaction. Getting in touch with material for Latour is synonymous to creating a network that encompasses the human and the material part as equal parts. In Latour's perspective, social reality is not exclusively crafted by people putting themselves into relation to other people, but by devices, items and biological entities as well. They too create relationships and connections, the aforementioned networks, and they too constantly influence and alter the world we all live in. For Latour, phenomena of nature – such as microbes – or those natural occurrences caused by mankind – like the ozone hole – are indeed actors because their actions lead to (more or less direct) re-actions by other actors. Therefore, within a network, not every element of the 'alliance' must necessarily be an artefact. Then again, materiality does not solely consist of artificial creations, anyway. A tree can be considered both 'natural' and a 'thing'; it has weight, size and matter, but is not in every case the result of purposeful human action. Yet trees and humans, or say: a specific tree and a chainsaw operated by a person, can become a network and do indeed become networks all over the world, all the time. It is a network that also embraces the exploitation chain of the wood, the employment circumstance of the forestry worker and many additional aspects.

Latour's theory is not the first to attribute an interactionist element to material things. French sociologist Jean Baudrillard wrote about *Le Système des Objects* as early as 1968 (Baudrillard, 2006).[2] Numerous other contributions can be found in various scientific fields, albeit the topic is debated the most in philosophy (Guzzoni, 2008) and sociology (Appadurai, 2003). It is also relevant in ethnology (Hahn & Neumann, 2018) and archaeology (Knappett, 2011).

From a sociological point of view, it is important to acknowledge the contribution of social philosopher Helmuth Plessner. In 1927, Plessner claimed that there is a comparison scale on which the various *levels of the organic* can be juxtaposed (Plessner, 1975). In essence, Plessner's findings show that humans are the most complex species, for they have no natural instincts or restrictions, like animals do. Animals, on the other hand, are rather determined; the degree of determination depends on the species, yet most animals are more capable and thus more independent than plants. Plessner deduces his famous claim that man has an *eccentric positionality* from this context. The eccentricity stands for human's capacity to live almost everywhere on the planet (including below the surface of the sea, in the sky and even in space); it derives from the fact that people, other than animals and plants, do not have instincts (or likewise restrictions and driving forces) that limit the scope of their actions. Concerning artefacts, Plessner basically holds that they do not have an organic status. They are therefore fully dependent on outside forces: Without the assistance of someone/something with organic status, a desk simply won't move by itself (except, of course, in séances and spiritualism!).

Plessner also had to deal with the fact that animals (and plants, for that matter) are both material objects and 'alive' at the same time. What factor is the more determinating one? This obviously depends upon cultural and especially upon judicial criteria. (For instance, according to German civil law, an animal harmed has to be treated like a thing. If you run over your neighbour's dog, you have to pay expenses for the replacement of a similar dog.) One could say, of course, that a person, or

rather: the human body, is just as much a mixture of materiality and liveliness. The difference between these two sides of the coin becomes more interesting when the *dead body* is under scrutiny. Is a corpse still a person and therefore a social agent – or is it merely a thing?

The ambivalent relevance of the body

As always, the answer to this question depends on the person asked. Take, for instance, a physician. Medical experts are not automatically experts for the dead body, nor for the process of dying. Some doctors will hardly ever encounter a corpse apart from during their studies at medical school. Admittedly, this is not true for forensic pathologists. As our empirical research in the field of autopsy shows, the dead body *does* become a material being almost akin to an artefact once it is put on the dissecting table. At least this is what we are told. During visits to more than 12 sites of forensic research in Germany and Austria, we have witnessed numerous post-mortem examination procedures, conducted many interviews and learned that it is considered inevitable by the experts to deem a deceased person a 'working object' (Benkel, 2018; Benkel & Meitzler, 2018a; Meitzler, 2018). The proper treatment according to textbooks could not be administered if dead bodies were (still) regarded as people with personality and subjective character traits.

A different expertise is provided by funeral workers; that is, people employed in different settings and contexts connected to death, bereavement and sepulchral rituals. We have observed this field in the German-speaking countries since 2011 and were able to witness, at numerous occasions, the handling of dead bodies, both on the front and on the backstage (Goffman, 1959) of funeral services. Here, the deceased person is anything but a sheer material object. In contrast, death does not eliminate the 'humanity' of a dead person/body. Following the experts' often routine statements, the corpse is still very much the person associated with it. Accordingly, the dead body is seen as the central element of most funeral rites (Benkel, 2015); it is obviously both the symbol and the material at the centre of a person's final farewell from their social surrounding. This is surprising given the fact that in Christian tradition, the dead body is just the container which the soul inhabits until the moment of death, when both disintegrate. On the other hand, even in the light of this tradition, which actually hails back to ancient Greece and is thus older than Christianity, the physical remains of a person are only the material benchmark onto which rituals of grief and acceptance can connect.

It is interesting to note that Plessner, while not especially concerned with matters of the life-end, also pondered about this discourse. In his theory, the living body is considered a *Leib*. It is the combination of both the physiological and the cognitive aspect of a person. In contrast, a *Körper* is the sum of the 'material values' of person.[3] Whereas Körper is commonly used in the German language as an equivalent for both (as is 'body' in English), a living person, according to Plessner, is always a Leib. Körper is something you own, something you carry around – but Leib is what you *are*. Transferred to the phenomenon of the dead body, the distinction of Leib and Körper shows that, since soul, or mind, or character, or psyche or whatever one may call it are gone for good, there is nothing left but a material thing. That which is buried will still undergo certain changes, such as decomposing, yet these are not aspects of life, but of death. The loss of life reduces the mortal remains to a thing. Whatever

happens to it, whatever transformation still occurs, the dead body – looking at it in the light of Plessner's levels of the organic – is above all things materialistic.

It comes as no surprise that 'political' materialism, famous, e.g. as an outline for the theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, among others, rejects the idea of the Leib. From this point of view, all aspects unattached to the body's physical attributes are speculative. (It would be quite interesting to look at this sort of materialism in the light of Latour's ANT, but this is not the focus of this paper.) For Marx, a living body is a person and a person has a living body. A dead body is just the same, albeit without life. There is no 'surplus' that would transfer somehow, somewhere at the moment one dies, and therefore, to Marx, everything he used to be during lifetime is assembled in his grave at London's Highgate Cemetery.

Funeral culture as practised today in western industrialised nations is pluralistic and heterogeneous (Benkel, Meitzler, & Preuß, 2019). This reflects a general tendency in dealing with the end of life: 'One needs not to be a social constructivist [...] to realize that the universal problem of death has an almost unlimited range of solutions' (Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2008, p. 3). But it does no harm being one, for the social constructivist viewpoint is especially useful in elucidating the background of this development. Today, the dead body is only rarely treated purely as a material object – not least because laws prohibit it. This accounts for judicial provisions as well as for social norms, both of which are based on allocations of meaning acquired through knowledge distribution.

During our years of research, we have encountered a person whose last will was to have his body cremated and the ashes scattered on the floor. The members of his family were to collect them with a broom and throw them into the trash can. In this scenario, the dead body is supposed to be no more than waste ready for disposal, according to its 'owner'. It is not hard to guess that most people confronted with this story reject the notion. In most cases, a funeral is arranged in a way that puts the dead body into the centre of the action, as if it were a substitute or representation of the 'lost' person. At the very least, it points at the missing social performances that the deceased person was associated with during his or her lifetime. It does not seem unsuitable to claim that the dead body, under these circumstances, is involuntarily transferred into a sort of physical 'aim' or even 'excuse' for all social (inter-)actions surrounding it.[4]

For a long period, 'doing things for the dead, and especially the folly of funeral practices and monuments', was considered an irrational act, a burden, something not in accordance with the laws of nature or the rules of reason (Laqueur, 2015, p. 37). This has changed due to a cultural divide whose after-effects still impinge present-day practices. Speaking of the dead, Laqueur holds that 'we cannot bear to give them up' (p. 54) since so many institutions and regulations are based on the idea of the dead still being in touch (one way or the other) with the living.[5] But much of this happens on a symbolic basis. Funeral rituals do not provide any services for the dead, but rather create solidarity and the image of stable social order to the members of the community the dead person belonged to. They also ensure that the established patterns of community life are retained, such as the strict detachment between ambit of the living and the sphere of the dead. This is marked by the displacement of corpses – independent of the propinquity the bereaved may still sense emotionally. All of this is done for the purpose of *order*. Maintaining order, first and foremost, is the core element of all rituals (Douglas, 1996). So, in funeral culture, the corpse plays a role that is traditionally established, but

at the time of ritual performance is actually neglectable within the procedure. This becomes strikingly clear if one considers the fact that in some cases, e.g. after plane crashes or shipwrecks, no dead bodies are found, but funeral practices often take place nonetheless. From a sociological point of view, the presence of the material remains of a person is not needed for the performative action that accompanies his or her final farewell.

The two bodies of the dead

We started our qualitative research on graveyards in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, with additional field trips to about two-thirds of the other European countries (Benkel, 2012; Benkel & Meitzler, 2013). In total, we have examined almost 1,100 cemeteries. One of our objectives is the status of social bonds during the process of dying and after death, with specific regard to the body. It is quite enlightening to be able to draw conclusions for actual social change based on the development of grave designs and inscriptions. Graves themselves, as material expressions and cultural landmarks of death and dying, already pose an interesting and valuable topic for scientific examination.

First, let's put the human body into focus. Based on our findings, we differentiate between *the two bodies of the dead* (Benkel, 2013, pp. 58–65; 2016, pp. 21–27). While we join Plessner in accounting a living person a Leib, we assume that the moment of death creates two different shapes. The first body, the biological coating of human life, is deemed invisible after death. It is last seen during the lying in state (if this ritual is indeed realised) and then vanishes into the coffin, or, if cremated, into the urn. From that moment on, the first body is usually no longer perceptible and exists in *knowledge* only. One can tell that this site holds a loved one's mortal remains – but one cannot capture sensual evidence for it once the burial is finished.

The second body is the image of a person visible in recollections. If the bereaved remember the dead, they will ideate them as they knew them from previous social interactions. They will envision living people, which usually means: living *bodies*. This cognitive process is independent of the persons' material facets enshrined on the cemetery. Interestingly, the second body also has a material surrogate at its disposal. As our studies show, more and more people are depicted at their gravesites by means of photographs, sculptures, engravings, sketches and other portrayals. During lifetime, these artefacts were hardly more than representations – two-dimensional ones – of 'three-dimensional' people, that is, of more or less average people engaged in everyday interactions. After death, these images become their second body. They are the focal point of mourning at the gravesite. Our interview material indicates that almost no one contemplates his or her corpse when pondering past experiences with a defunct person. What actually happens is that pictures in the mind meet with pictures on the graves and melt into the dead persons' second body, an item oscillating between subject and object (Benkel & Meitzler, 2014).

Given this distinction, there is no reason that the graveyard should be considered a place restricted to matters of death and threnody only. We, as sociologists, much rather think of the graveyard as a stronghold of parasocial interaction. As parasocial, we conceive those interactions which are 'incomplete' because they are unilateral: the impulse for interaction comes from one side, but cannot and will not be processed by the other. Typical parasocial situations occur between celebrities appearing in media and their viewers. The viewers may

feel emotionally attached to their idols, but the relationship stays one-sided, since celebrities usually do not observe and acknowledge their fans the same way as fans look at them. The teenager that feels 'understood' and represented by his or her star normally is a rather obscure person to the celebrity he or she admires. Another typical example of parasociality is the treatment of pets. Many pet owners reckon that their companion understands their interaction proposals. They misinterpret learned behaviour as an immediate social response. It seems that the dog (more strongly than the cat) reacts to human instructions out of understanding for the purpose of these instructions. Yet, humans will never be able to tell what is going on in the mind of an animal – as long as they can't be one.[6]

Graveyards are parasocial in terms of their function as meeting points between the living and the dead. It does not matter how the bereaved act at a gravesite; for whatever they do, it will eventually be nothing more than dealings with materiality. The primary goal of their attention and caring is the dead persons' first body, which is merely a material thing (as shown above), but it is invisible and out of reach for them. Taking care of the tombstone, planting, decorating it with jewellery or with pictures and artefacts (such as commodities used by the dead person during lifetime; Figure 1) may give the feeling of somehow being connected to the dead, but this is, of course, dependent on the cultural or religious frame. If ideological aspects are left out, it is materiality alone that marks the border.

Since dead bodies are unattainable to the living, the materiality of the grave serves as hypostatised representation of the deceased person. It is *his* grave, it is *her* tombstone, although most people don't select either one by themselves during their lifetime. The material compounds erected before, during and after the burial are attributed to the dead, but not initiated by them.[7] As mentioned above, their second bodies can (re-)appear here

Figure 1. Toys used by a child during lifetime have become funerary objects (Photographs by T. Benkel, M. Meitzler).

in the shape of photographs or other visualisations. Pictures that in most cases are generated by cameras without any thought, let alone any direct reference to death, can and do become a signal for 'border crossing' after the death occurred. Already without physical reach, the deceased are brought to a different kind of addressability by their transformation into a part of the material ensemble that adds up to their resting place.

In a way, cemeteries are located between life and death, or rather between existence and nonexistence. On the one hand, they serve as bureaucratic institutions installed for the retention of corpses, but on the other, due to its parasocial aspect, graveyards, and burial sites in general, are places of (inter-)action. Even though the material dimension seems to dominate the graveyard – and how would one deny that the first thing that comes to mind when talking about graveyards are collections of tombstones? –, it cannot be separated from the spectrum of social references acted out by the living, aimed at the dead. Neither site would be able to fulfil its intention or purpose if it were lacking the other. The cemetery, therefore, has to be regarded as a network of interaction partners *à la Latour*. A graveyard without visitors drawn to it by a psychological need or a sense for a social obligation would not require stones, planting and so on at all. It would have to be considered a storage unit for dead bodies only. Vice versa, spaces for the recollection of the deceased could not be operated as such without material elements. It is obviously not sufficient to most people to simply be aware of the location where their loved ones are buried.

In some instances, the process of mourning demands a material indication at the spot of dying – and not only at the resting place of the body. A famous example of this is crosses deployed at car crash sites (Figure 2). Originally hailing from Southern Europe, these crosses have become a common spectacle, especially on country roads all over Europe. Here, the materialistic 'signature' of the place determines its significance for only a small group of people, but at the same time, its relevance is understood by everyone.

Figure 2. The inscription on the flagstone says, 'The best son' (Photographs by T. Benkel, M. Meitzler).

The case is similar with memorial sites. Here, too, nobody is interred, so no (first) body is present. This does not prevent the second body to appear either on the walls of a monument as picture or in the mind of visitors as a remembrance. Sometimes, the memorial sites serve as a more important place of grief than the grave does; that is especially true if the memorial is established at the place of death or nearby. One such tragic incident happened in 2010 at the German music festival *Love Parade* in Duisburg. It was a mammoth event attended by more than 1.4 million people. Because of overcrowding and flawed security measures, a mass panic occurred. Trapped between a tunnel underpass and a ramp, 21 people died and 541 were wounded (Connolly, 2010). The locus of the fatalities has since become a place of remembrance. The victims' graves are located in different countries (Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and others), so when it comes to their first bodies, they can only be mourned separately and independent of each other. At the Duisburg scene, however, they can be mourned as a collective and their second bodies are represented in various forms (Figure 3). The spatial aspects between the death site and the gravesite differ tremendously, and mourning can (and probably will) occur at either site, but the presence of the first body is not the crucial element. The representation of the person's second body, be it materialistic (as in photographs) or cognitive (as in recollections), is the decisive aspect.

Spaces of death and dying

Every place on earth can be a death site, but only a small portion of those places where people actually die have a corresponding reputation. It is surprising that hardly anyone seems to wonder what the deadliest place in the world actually is – the square meter where

Figure 3. Love Parade – an abandoned freight yard now serves as memorial site (Photographs by T. Benkel, M. Meitzler).

most people have died? Just like the question about the historical date that the most people have died at once, this is a riddle that not all too many people are interested in solving. (Out of curiosity, we did some research and found that the tsunami catastrophe associated with Khao Lak might be the most disastrous space and time frame in recent decades, with more than 200,000 people dead within just a few hours; Beaumont, Doherty, Ramesh, & Chung, 2009.) There are no credible statistics that we know of, but a 'normal' death site nowadays is likely neither a beach nor a war field. Most people die in places where the material aspect – both in terms of the equipment used by experts and regarding the spatial resources – is already arranged for life-threatening situations. Although many people, when asked, would prefer to die in their everyday surrounding, that is, within the materiality that encompasses their social existence alongside their loved ones (Hoffmann, 2011), the actual numbers show (for Germany just as much as for other European countries) that the factual place of death is most likely the hospital.[8] This is astonishing insofar as the hospital, with its team of specialists and medical apparatus, is a place to sustain life, not end it. Since life and not death is the primary objective in the medical sector, the infirmary is an unlikely location to die. Then again, where else should people go to pass away, if not into the hospital cot? Dying has become a specific praxis performed almost exclusively within those settings where it is already awaited. In other words, ever since the hospital started to implement palliative care units, and even earlier, when it began to install postmortem rooms, it created a materiality that 'demanded' specific actions and omissions that add up to the experience of dying – and ultimately, to death. In essence, dying thus becomes something that is attributed to a person by pundits that intent to make sense of this body in these specific circumstances (see Schneider, 2014 for more details).

The rise of the hospices has changed some of that. Since the late 1960s, starting in England, institutions have been established where dying is not an exception that usurps the institutions' assignments but is the core element for which the institution has been constituted in the first place. From a material perspective, the hospice is quite similar to a hospital, with beds and nurses, facilities and schedule patterns. One difference lies in the fact that there has been a growing demand for a location outside the hospital – with its primary objective of curing people – where the dying can be adequately supplied with whatever their specific situation demands. After all, healing is hardly congruent with the care of the dying.

Another difference, especially interesting from a sociological point of view, is the knowledge of the actors. In a hospice, life is not sustained but is administered towards death. This may sound harsher than it is: Although the hospice is the place that patients (the vast majority of them) will not be able to leave alive, it deservedly holds a positive reputation. During our empirical research, we did ethnographical visits to hospices (both for adults and for children) and found that, although death is a fate within tangible reach for them, people do not panic or become violent because of the inescapable condition they are caught in. Society finally has managed to arrange for a place where dying is not an exception and not an accident. In a way, patients in hospices are in a position between life and death. They are entrapped in the 'being towards death' that Martin Heidegger mentions, albeit in a different context, in his book *Being and Time*, published originally in the very same year as Plessner's treatise (Heidegger, 1996, p. 233). A closer look reveals that it is the material and especially the spatial issue of hospices that embodies Heidegger's idea, for Heidegger claims that living inevitably means dying. Dying is a process that starts with the first-second one is born.

People in a hospice are one of the few social groups whom their residence and its material features bestow a state of dying.[9]

Whether a person is transformed from Leib to Körper in a medical or a nursing context is irrelevant for the follow-up: The end of life, although a 'physical' incident (at least in the traditional sense), needs approval. The pronouncement of death has to be considered the material piece of evidence for said transformation. (It is indeed material as it is a piece of paper.) Without the proper document, no person is deemed dead, no matter what condition the physical remains are in. One could argue that death itself is conclusive by looking and examining the body since it indicates 'signs' of death. The body, therefore, can often be perceived as dead by the material evidence it bears. This is especially true for car accidents, violent crimes, downfall from great heights, most suicide methods and so forth. But it is probably less true for heart attacks during sleep or similar subtle occurrences.

From a sociological and particularly from a social constructivist point of view, the materiality of the body is never more than what people conceive it to be. How can there be objectivity when so many facets of death and dying are independent of the physical issues involved? (For an extensive coverage of this problem, see Benkel & Meitzler, 2018b). Materiality is, and that is what Latour, among others, is underlining, a quality by itself, yet materiality 'makes sense' only under specific social conditions. 'The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived', Mary Douglas claims (Douglas, 1996, p. 69). A person's body can be dead and alive at the same time, regarding the viewpoint of the observer. A physician may call a person dead, whereas a devout bystander would claim that in heaven there is no death. How the body is dealt with thus hinges on knowledge, mindsets and the *definition of the situation* (cf. Robert, 2010).

While the pronouncement of death is the next stop after what seems to be the 'objective' threshold between life and non-life (to use a term more appropriate than 'death'), the final destination, no doubt, is the graveyard. It is a place that offers rich opportunities for research. Although it is a spot where the material décor is much more in the foreground than in any other location concerned with sepulchral matters, the graveyard, as we already pointed out, is also a social site. When the bereaved visit their graves they more or less, some by action, some only in thoughts, interact with the deceased. Above we have briefly mentioned the parasocial substance that occurs in these situations. Some people may consider this parasocial aspect the most important function that a grave and therefore a cemetery can offer. One can dispute, but it is hard to deny that, by mourning, by gardening, by praying, by placing objects, etc., a social – and therefore 'vital' – feature enters a mainly materialistic domain. Sociologist Norbert Elias stated that graveyards, especially park cemeteries, disguise the fact that the site is actually the burial ground for hundreds, if not thousands of dead bodies. Not only do trees, green spaces, flowers, plants, small brooks and fountains distract from the actual function of the place; it is also, by transferring Elias' thought towards the topic of materiality, a masquerade, because one set of materiality covers another. The greenness of the graveyard is an accepted material feature (see Francis, Kellaher, & Neophytou, 2005 for the historical background). Headstones, tombs and other signs of mortality are another type of materiality that gain their justification from the specifics of the place. Since this park is not only a park but also – and primarily – a location *named* a cemetery, these material reminders of life's end do not come as a surprise. Without being interlinked with dead bodies *directly*, they still seem to be

'at the right place'. It would be a surprise, however, were they placed at 'illegitimate' locations, that is, places where no further hint at death and dying was present (with legitimacy, of course, being quite a variable matter – just think of Halloween decorations). A neutral observer would not be baffled about something akin of an antic gravestone sunken into the ground of an ancient war field, but would most likely be astonished to find a brand new gravesite in the backyard of a kindergarten. It all depends on the reputation and naming attributed to a place.

But then, what about this other material quality without whom the whole idea of a graveyard would stop making sense? Although, as we have noted above, the dead body is the central element when death is approached from an empirical (and not ideological) point of view, it is nonetheless no recognisable part of the concept. As a matter of fact, corpses are not 'bodies that matter' (Butler, 2011), but bodies disposed into invisibility. While the transformation from Leib to Körper often occurs within social settings, some of them even before observers (as is the case in hospitals and hospices), all further transformations are kept in secret. Here, we have a materiality that is efficacious enough to create feelings of disgust and repulsion even by the sheer thought of it. It is tempting to believe that this is the cause for the invisibility of the dead body. However, it could also be the opposite: Maybe the corpse is considered irritating and annoying *because* it is branded as useless and contagious? This is probably why we are not used to the glass casket that Disney's Snow White used to rest in. There are only a few famous exceptions, Lenin being the most prominent one, where a dead body is saved from the obscurity of the grave. The materiality that Lenin's body has (or is said to have) even 95 years after what traditionalists call his death could almost create envy among other dead people since they are not allowed to display a similar physical appearance... To sum up, the dead body, on the one hand, is an almost irreducible material component for the graveyard, and it is also the one ingredient that is least graspable.

On graveyards, legitimate material elements are not, or only peripherally, pointing at what constitutes death in terms of human (and bodily) experience. In that sense, Elias is right when he claims: 'Death is a problem of the living' (Elias, 2001, p. 3). It is commonplace that 'the dead do not bury themselves' (Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2008, p. 8). Nothing done for mourning purposes is directed by the deceased. Nothing on cemeteries is erected by them. And nothing that happens on graveyards reaches the dead (as far as we know; but science is always open for new evidence!). Materiality does 'surround' death but gives no testimony of it. We already mentioned the second body of the dead. It is the legitimate, that is, the only accepted state a body is allowed to appear in after death – or rather, after the burial. This body, though, is neither a body nor dead. On graveyards, it is materiality only insofar that it consists of photographic paper, of an engraving in the headstone or of the matter pivotal for sculpting. This materiality does not resemble the body – not the Leib, and not the Körper either. If one takes additional manifestations of the second body into consideration, its material condition becomes even more questionable. In thought or as a digital image, the second body is left with hardly *any* material foundation.

According to W. J. T. Mitchell, it is advisable to distinguish *pictures* and *images* (Mitchell, 1986). To Mitchell, *pictures* are the material 'pieces of evidence' for something that has happened, say, a trip to the beach. In the same moment, the picture is created by camera or mobile phone, the mind creates an *image* of the exact same situation and it is this image that people come back to when they remember that day at the beach.[10]

When people get older, their recollections grow with them and change. A picture may alter materially, but its motif does not change – therefore pictures (in the material sense) are more reliable for 'true' depictions of the second body. Then again, seeing a dead person dear to one's heart on a picture will inevitably also resurrect memories associated with that person. Those, too, are second body manifestations.

Amidst all that, the second body of the dead usually isn't even dead. An estimated 99.8% of photographs we found on gravestones[11] depict living people, not deceased ones. The 'deadness' of the first body is not reflected upon in its second body counterpart. Some critical observers, Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag among them, do allege that a photograph always connects time with death; therefore, all images subliminally hint at the pictured persons' demise (Barthes, 1981; Sontag, 2001). Concerning headstone pictures, this contention is already superseded by reality: The end of life is not the future, but the past. The liveliness images evoke can thus be regarded as a 'fake life' second body since they represent both a physiological and social status long gone and irreversibly so. Then again, this evocation obviously serves the needs of the bereaved, at least more so than according to images of rotting corpses.[12]

In the field of virtual graveyards, e.g. websites where people can create online memorials in commemoration of their loved ones, all materiality vanishes. The computer technology used to access these portals is material, of course, but whatever occurs on the screen is not. This at least true if the juxtaposition of the first and second body is considered because it is this differentiation that makes the question 'material or not?' relevant. Online, or in remembrance, it is almost irrelevant. Still, commemoration, even if it unfolds without material references, needs the 'fake-materiality' described above.[13] This at least the impression that our research and our empirical data lead us to.

To draw a conclusion, we want to stress that the sociological diagnosis by Latour and others regarding the social 'self-sufficiency' of materiality can be confirmed by examining recent alterations in funeral culture. On the one hand, the physical body disappears as soon as it is transformed from Leib to Körper. On the other hand, the second body appears in the exact same moment and disguises as a portrayal of the Leib, whereas in fact it hardly provides a material 'anchor'. Mourning the dead and acknowledging their accomplishments relies on materiality, but the materiality in the centre of these social gestures is in constant transformation. In other words, the nature of materiality mutates along with the social change. It is not lost along the way – at least not in the light of current developments. Materiality, then, can even emerge as an immaterial entity, as our findings on the dead persons' second body suggest.

Notes

1. This article is based upon ethnographic research conducted mainly in Central European countries. The scope of the methods comprises semi-standardised interviews, visual/secondary data analysis and especially fieldwork on graveyards, in hospitals and hospices, in forensic departments, in workspaces of professionals dealing with death and dying, in the crematory and other pertinent places. Research started in 2011 and is still ongoing.
2. In his book, Baudrillard claims that 'it is objects which today observe our being born, which accompany our death... and which survive us' (cited in Kellner, 1995, p. 4).

3. It has been proposed to translate Leib and Körper with 'body' and 'corpse'. We hesitate to pursue this recommendation since 'corpse' *principally* suggests a dead person – whereas Körper can also be construed as a *feature* of a living person (e.g. its weight, measurement and so on).
4. Some of these actions generally express bereavement. These are the more 'dramatic' sides of the ritual drama set in motion at the funeral, for the word bereavement 'conveys a sense of a person's being deprived, of having something stripped away against one's will, of being robbed' (DeSpelder & Strickland, 1996, p. 250). Other components are more clearly rooted in the normative order underlying the procedure, as Emile Durkheim stated at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Durkheim, 1995).
5. This complies with the idea of death being a transition, rather than an end – as championed by Arnold van Gennep in his famous study on *The Rites of Passage* (1960, first published in 1909). In it, van Gennep points out that funerals, like childbirth, betrothal and marriage, is borne by ceremonies that mark the junction between before and after, with *after* not necessarily representing a loss (Stagl, 1986).
6. This is the core argument in Thomas Nagel's famous essay on *What is it like to be a Bat?* (Nagel, 1974). Whereas Nagel argues that one can speculate and conclude, but never *experience* an animal perspective, we would like to point out that the bat, of all species, is the most likely candidate to bridge this gap, at least if you are a firm believer in the myth of Dracula and his vampire pike join.
7. In recent years, however, the number of people arranging their own funeral rites, including the design of their headstones, graves and so on, has risen. This is especially true for Germany, where we met people that went to see their local graveyard for the purpose of visiting their own (empty) grave. Some of these resting places even have pictures on them, which lead to the interesting situation of people looking at their final residence and, at the same time, looking *themselves* in the eye.
8. It makes for an interesting thought experiment to imagine a world where people would not die in hospitals, but in their own comfortable beds. Homes that used to be comfort zones detached from the stressful demands of the outside world would suddenly become places attached to dying and death. It is doubtful that all too many people would welcome such a 'homecoming' unaffected.
9. Other homogenous groups that come to mind are prison inmates on death row, some (but probably not all) patients accommodated in palliative care units in hospitals and suicide assassins. The latter are especially interesting in regard to the factuality of their 'being towards death' since their knowledge and will are more decisive for it than material features. (They don't use as defined a material as prison bars and medical devices.) Regarding material configuration, an assassination can be performed 'modestly' insofar that it can be done by means and things in common use in every-day life, like knives, cars and so on. This is different to, for instance, death by plane crash; yet both demonstrate that materiality *that puts people to death effectively* (if not always by intention) does not necessarily have to be 'adjusted' for that purpose beforehand.
10. A similar thought can be found in Robert Hertz' classic study on *Death and the Right Hand* (Hertz, 1960). Here, Hertz distinguishes objects and (mental) pictures.
11. Our collection of photographs taken on graveyards numbers more than 63,000. It should be noted that we have not taken pictures of all instances of the second body we encountered – the total number we have seen is far higher.
12. No rule without exception, it seems: From roughly 2015 on, we have found an increase of pictures of dead bodies presented *as such* in gravestone photographs. In most cases, these are pictures of small children draped as if sleeping. This is no new phenomenon, but rather a renaissance of a photographic strategy broadly used in the early twentieth century (Benkel & Meitzler, 2016; Linkman, 2011).
13. Support for this claim comes from the fact that a lot of virtual graves resemble physical ones by incorporating material elements that are at first sight not really useful online, such as (images of) candles, headstones, flowers and so forth.

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