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THEME ISSUE: Images of Afterlife

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The Finnish Death Studies Association (FDSA) was founded March 28th 2011 in Helsinki by scholars interested in the field of thanatological research. The aim was to create an organization that could create a more public interdisciplinary dialogue about death and dying in Finnish society.

The purpose of the association is also to advance the domestic death studies and professional education, create synergy between Finnish and international professionals and researchers, and last but not least, to promote discussion about researching, studying and working in the field of death and bereavement research. With the website (www.kuolemantutkimus.com) and open access online journal (www.thanatos-journal.com) the association wishes to provide information about future events both in Finland and abroad, publish articles, book reviews, research reports and other texts concerning the vast and colourful field of death. Find out more about membership from our website.

Thanatos is a peer-reviewed, multi-disciplinary and a scientific web-journal published by the Finnish Death Studies Association. We publish twice a year a journal that consists of articles, short and long research reports, book reviews, columns and seminar reports. The primary publication language is Finnish, but we accept manuscripts in English and Swedish as well, however, the costs of proofreading are the responsibility of the author. The journal is peer-reviewed, which means we use fellow scholars in determining the potentiality of the manuscript for publication.

Thanatos aspires to advance dialogue between interdisciplinary scholars and professionals working in the field of death and dying. The association welcomes all ideas for publications and for future theme issues. We are aiming for broader discussions over the traditional scientific boundaries and to enhance a more holistic way of dealing with subjects such as hospice care, suicide, bereavement, materiality around death and dying, aging, (im)mortality and so forth. Join us at www.kuolemantutkimus.com.

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editorial

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https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/1/images_editorial.pdf**Editorial: Images of Afterlife****Marja-Liisa Honkasalo**

University of Turku

Kaarina Koski

University of Turku

Kirsi Kanerva

University of Turku

What would human life look like if it were not about images of this world and the otherworld? Could such a life sustain people, their societies and cultures in an appropriate way? These are questions, which preoccupy the contributors to this special issue. The goal of this volume is to gather a large scale of discussions to highlight how the questions may be taken seriously. Also, the aim is to show how the questions are meaningful for the scholars working in these areas or for those who are interested in the study of death more generally. The papers of this volume originate from the conference “Images of Afterlife”, organized by the research project *Mind and the Other*, at the University of Turku.

Why are the images of afterlife important? In this issue we ask how they do matter to us as researchers? There are two notions, afterlife and afterworld, which often run parallel to each other in scholarly discussions. In the Christian tradition, the spatial notion of the afterworld has been in use; heaven is a good example of this. Afterworld also points to a place with practices and common activities, which are carried out after one’s death. According to anthropological research, the otherworld in several cosmologies can be a lively place with ancestors, animals and plants (e.g. Cátedra 1992). The notion of afterlife, on the other hand, refers frequently to existential and temporal dimension of what happens after death. Philosophers, such as William James, commenced discussions about immortality which has led to logical rather than theological notions of the continuation of this life into the otherlife.

The images of afterlife are rich and manifold in various cultural, historical and religious contexts, as well as in a variety of symbolic expressions in artistic, media and popular culture. The representations of afterlife reflect cultural values, fears, anguish and punishment as well as hope. This is how Christianity has guided Western societies and researchers – us – to think, and it is indeed difficult to envisage images of afterlife without any cultural sedimentation of the Christian images, as for instance Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang (1990) demonstrate in their book *Heaven: A History*, (see Christian Jedan in this special issue). However, we argue among many other scholars in the domain of the studies of

cultures that the images of afterlife do reflect this life in a variety of ways and are based on the cultural beliefs and representations as well as ethics, which are considered important at any given time.

The present Western societies are frequently defined as secular. According to several authors, secularity means that faith has lost its cultural authority and the religious organizations have lost their power. However, this seems not to be case entirely, since there is an increasing number of active spiritual movements. The present development has made some researchers, like Professor Peter Nynäs from Åbo Akademi describe the current situation as “post-secular”. He writes that what we are facing currently are mere new modes of religiosity. The post-secular trends are present also in the imagery of the afterworld, for instance densely in pop culture but also in what authors such as Christoffer Partridge (2004–2005), Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2004) and Sarah MacKian (2012) have brought about as trends of re-enchantment, disappearance or privatization of religion, and spirituality-beyond-religion, respectively.

How has afterlife – the life and existence of souls and minds (or bodies) after death – been imagined in different historical, social, political and cultural contexts and how is it imagined today? It is equally important to discuss the change as the continuation. It seems that emotional and social bonds and ties between this life and the other that follows remain similar, although the sources of the afterlife images change. Despite the changes, something seems to continue. For example, bonding with the deceased in the afterworld seems to be an idea that humans widely share, independent of their cultural or religious backgrounds.

But does the bonding only occur with the dead? Is it only the life beyond and the contacts with the deceased that matter? Is temporality of the afterworld only one-dimensional?

According to the vast literature on the images and belief systems, some conceptions of the afterlife persist even though people may declare themselves as secular atheists, sceptics or whatever. Could we think that the continuity of this life, after one’s death, is important as well? An example is presented in a thought-provoking way by Professor Samuel Scheffler in his recent book *Death and the Afterlife*. Scheffler is a philosopher and works at the NYU in New York. In his book Scheffler posits himself in the discussion by writing that he does not believe in the existence of an afterlife in the similar manner as it is normally understood. However, he takes for granted that other human beings will continue to live after his death and in this meaning there will be an afterlife. To prove his argument he makes a thought experiment with two scenarios. In the first, the doomsday scenario, as he calls it, he asks us to imagine that the world will be completely destroyed thirty days after our death, in a collision with a giant asteroid. He asks how this knowledge will affect our attitudes during the remaining part of our lives. He claims that this knowledge affects people’s subsequent motivations and choices how to live. To what extent would people remain committed to the current projects and plans? He argues that the reasons to engage in them might weaken, even cease altogether. In addition, the emotional investment in them might decrease. The scholars working for instance with cancer research and attempting to find a cure would probably not see motivation for their research any longer because their results may take long and probably the cutting off future may make them, or their implementation, impossible. The same could happen with artists, social scientists and scholars working in the humanities too.

Scheffler argues that the “doomsday scenario” highlights some very crucial phenomena of human values. People do not care only about their own experiences. The afterlife really matters to people and it matters in more than one way. “What happens after our death matters to us in its own right, and, in addition, our confidence that there will be an afterlife is a condition of many other things mattering for us here and now”, he writes (2013, 32).

As human beings, we attach meaning to the survival of particular people who matter to us. We have a tendency to personalize our relation to the future and we hope that some people, at least our loved ones, would survive after our death. Some of us think that the doomsday scenario presented by Scheffler only describes that the afterlife that matters to us is a personal one, that we care only about the afterlife of people who are closest to us and most dearly loved. However, with his second example he wants to demonstrate that this particularistic relationship to the afterworld is not the whole story. He makes another example using the novel "The Children of Men", written by the novelist P. D. James. In the novel the writer presents a scenario in which all people would become infertile after 30 years. This scenario, according to Scheffler, brings about as much horror among people as does the doomsday scenario. This makes Scheffler to draw a conclusion which is more radical than the first one. People's reaction to the imagined extinction does not portray particularistic relationship only to the loved ones but also to those who we do not know and have never met and to those who we are not able to meet because they come after us. The existence of people who we do not know, as well as the existence of the people we love, matters more to us than our own survival.

What matters to us depends, according to Scheffler, on our confidence in the existence of the afterworld. It is not the personal or personalistic afterworld that matters but the existence of life after we have passed away. The infertility example is interesting also when considering temporality. The afterworld is not directed only forwards one-dimensionally but the reverse is also true. What matters is the life of those humans who come after us. The disappearance of the humankind is a horrifying scenario because "our conviction that things matter is sustained by our confidence that life will go on after we ourselves are gone. In this respect, as I have argued, the survival of humanity matters more to each of us than we usually realize; indeed, in this respect it matters more to us even than our own survival" (ibid., 81).

Scheffler's argument lets us think critically of some crucial values of today's society, such as individualism, neglect and devaluation of sociality.

*

In the contemporary West, the collective of explicitly Christian religious representations is challenged and completed by individual conceptions and beliefs, which, in turn, derive from various different cultural sources. The keynote speakers of the conference "Images of the Afterlife" highlighted a variety of social and cultural sources. Professor Tony Walter, one of the keynote speakers emphasized the meaning of social bonds in this regard. The contemporary social change seems to replace the "one-directional" images of reunion with the dead family members and loved ones with angels, with powerful liminal beings, able to cross the boundary between life and death. The angels seem to portray with increasing intensity in the contemporary imaginary. How the angels are now compared with their historical representations in art history was the theme of Professor Altti Kuusamo, who portrayed the modern origins of the Christian figures, including angels, and the variety of their cultural shapes in early modernity. He demonstrated how the fine arts witnessed the transformation of the image of angels from divine troops to personal helpers and guardians. Professor Jussi Kotkavirta analyzed psychoanalysis as the central cultural script that defines the modern Western subject's ways of thinking of death. The fourth keynote speaker, Professor Laura Huttunen, focused her lecture to the very question of afterlife imaginary of the survivors that is broken because, due to political violence, the persons to be imagined and their bodies are missing. She delineated a present-day political view into the shaping of the images of the afterworld. Applying examples from the Yugoslavian Civil war, she discussed the meaning of sociality and failed ritual in relation to death and the afterworld.

*

This special issue of *Thanatos* contains three articles and three reviews. Together, the papers serve as a meaningful illustration of the significance of the questions we, as editors, wanted to pose. In the first article, Christopher Jedan analyzes the consolatory function of the conceptions of afterlife. As a philosopher of religion and ethics, he argues that the consolatory modes of the conceptions of afterlife, both the idea of fulfilled life, as it was formulated in ancient Greek tradition, and the later Christian idea of consolation against the threat of death, are entangled with each other. Instead of shifting the focus away from worldly life, they help to “intensify” its meaning, as Jedan puts it. Portrayed from this perspective, the main thrust of both modes of consolation is to dignify fundamental life-choices. The author thus invites us to think about how a biographic closure is constructed: as a bucket list or as a bouquet of the deceased’s virtues.

In her article, archeologist Marja Ahola reinterprets Finnish Middle Neolithic earth graves in Kukkaroski burial ground, which was excavated in 1970s. Applying ritual practice theory, she challenges the previous assumption that Finnish Stone Age burials would just have been simple inhumations. Even though skeletal material is missing in Finnish Stone Age graves, the excavations unearthed red ochre and fire, imported materials such as flint, amber and slate, as well as complex grave structures. A careful analysis of these indicates a complicated mortuary practice and a belief system which involved taking care of the deceased. In addition, graves on top of each other and shared grave goods are interpreted as a way of connecting with past generations. Ahola’s reinterpretation provides new insights into the Neolithic belief systems and burial practices.

In their article on afterlife imagery in contemporary Sweden, the sociologists Annika Jonsson and Lars Aronsson study how afterlife imagery is conveyed among people ranging from spiritualists to atheists. Based on internet data and interviews, the authors claim that what was common to all groups, ranging from believers to atheists was that the modes of imaging were about relations: about social bonds between the living and dead. The results strengthen the ideas of earlier studies where the relationship-centered imagery was prominent. Why this is the case in society that becomes more privatized and celebrates the ideas of autonomy, remains an interesting topic for further studies.

Lucy Bregman, a religious studies scholar, discusses in her paper afterlife imagery among North American Protestants in the twentieth century. She brings forth how, based on contemporary sources such as funeral sermons, up until mid-twentieth century there prevailed the idea of “natural immortality”. According to this idea, people in all cultural and historical contexts have believed in the immortality of the soul. Afterlife imagery of natural transitions, such as birds that migrate appeared frequently in sermons. During the twentieth century, however, this imagery was criticized by theologians for its Platonism, and challenged by the death awareness movement and the medicalization of dying. As a consequence, it disappeared from Protestant funerals, and in Bregman’s words, was replaced by “a focus on mourners, and celebrating the life of the deceased.”

Tiina Väre, Milton Núñez, Jaakko Niinimäki, Juho-Antti Junno, Sirpa Niinimäki, Rosa Vilkkama and Markku Niskanen discuss in their archeological study the naturally mummified corpse of an early 17th-century Vicar of Kemi parish, Nikolaus Rungius. The Vicar in question died in 1629 and was buried under the old Keminmaa Church in Finnish Lapland. According to local lore, Väre et al. points out, Vicar Rungius had stated before his death that “If I speak the truth, my corpse will not decay”. The review presents latest findings based on a computed tomography scanning conducted in 2011, and discusses the afterlife of the mummy of the Vicar through centuries, and the significance of his

dead body, which has not decomposed, but by an early twentieth-century scholar “in its own way” was “still spreading the gospel.”

In his paper Milton Núñez, Professor emeritus in archaeology, introduces two unusual burials from Hailuoto island in the north-west of Finland; of a farmer who is supposed to have hanged himself in the eighteenth century and was buried on an uninhabited island, and of a beheaded, craniofacially deformed adult male whose buried, coffinless corpse had been pinned down with two stakes sometime around 1450–1610 AD. Núñez discusses the burials in the light of archaeological, bioanthropological and ethnohistorical data, and considers whether the burial methods may have been intended to prevent the posthumous restlessness of the two corpses. Núñez’s text offers an example of a culture that expected its dead members to continue their existence in the afterlife and participate in the lives of the living – unless their dead bodies were physically prevented from getting up or returning to inhabited areas.

*

This special issue of *Thanatos* is based on the conference “Images of Afterlife” that was held at the University of Turku on 22–24 October, 2014. The editors had responsibility of the conference together with the research project *Mind and the Other* (The Academy of Finland, 266573). Altogether more than 70 participants took part in the conference from ten countries and 55 papers from a variety of academic disciplines were presented. This interest illustrates the importance of the theme and its examination from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Biographical notes:

Marja-Liisa Honkasalo (MD, PhD) is the person in charge of The Research Center of Culture and Health at the University of Turku, Finland (see www.utu.fi/ktt). She has published widely on cultural meanings and the experience of illness, death and especially suicide, on the ethics of suffering and on the social and political embeddedness of human agency. Her theoretical interests originate in the ethics of suffering. She has been the principal investigator of several large research projects and currently she leads the interdisciplinary project *Mind and the Other* (see mindandother.com), that focuses on ‘uncanny’ experience, largely defined as ‘supernatural’ in the contemporary West. Theoretically, these kinds of experiences challenge the boundaries between mind and the world, emotions and rationality, the self and the other and between life and death, which all make visible some central issues important in the understanding of the human mind, its acts and modalities. Please contact: marja-liisa.honkasalo@utu.fi

Kaarina Koski (PhD) is an adjunct professor (docent) of folklore studies. She works currently at the University of Turku as a lecturer of folkloristics and a postdoctoral researcher in the research project *Mind and the Other*. In her publications, she has analyzed preindustrial belief legends concerning death, ghosts, graveyards and the Lutheran Church, as well as the theoretical issues of narrativity, genre, cognition and conceptualization. Later she has turned her attention to contemporary phenomena and written about contemporary beliefs and uncanny experiences, as well as participatory internet culture. Contact: kaakos@utu.fi

Kirsi Kanerva (PhD) is a cultural historian. In her research, she has concentrated on the history of emotions in medieval Iceland and the role of the restless dead in medieval Icelandic saga literature. Contact: kirsi.kanerva@utu.fi

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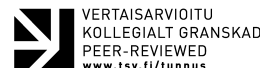
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articles

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The Consolatory Function of Conceptions of the Afterlife: Perspectives from the History of Ideas

Christoph Jedan

University of Groningen

Abstract

What is the consolatory function of conceptions of the afterlife? In order to counteract widespread misperceptions about consolation, which is negatively associated with religion and played out against philosophy, I examine the interface between ancient philosophical consolation and early Christian consolation. I suggest that both modes of consolation are closely related, sharing important characteristics, *inter alia* by setting the idea of a fulfilled life against the threat of death and by describing the fulfilled life in terms of a revisionist, virtue-centred account of human flourishing. I argue that conceptions of the afterlife are an optional component of ancient consolations. Instead of shifting the focus away from worldly life (as has frequently been claimed), they help to ‘intensify’ it. Their main thrust is to dignify fundamental life-choices and thus to facilitate biographical closure.

Introduction

And that is the source of comfort a conception of the afterlife brings. One may fear the ceaseless agony of an eternal afterlife in hell, but one is at least assured that there will be a life: one’s own life, the core of who one is. One’s joys may end, but one’s life will not. And so a conception of the afterlife brings with it some comfort, no matter how fearsome its consequences may be. (May 2009, 14)

This introductory quotation is typical of today’s philosophical literature on death. Informed by Freudian psychoanalysis and the existentialist pathos of Heidegger and Sartre, a contemptuous attitude towards religion is never far away. Whereas philosophy courageously “confronts death in its finality” (May 2009, 19), religion, particularly Christianity, offers consolation by the simple fact of promising a continued existence after death. In such rough-and-ready analyses, religion, consolation and the afterlife are not only conceptually conjoined but the concepts are employed negatively to indicate an ultimately immature denial of the finality of death.¹ In the present article I seek to contravene such rough-

¹ In effect, the philosophical literature on death exhibits a surprising disconnection from trends in the field of death studies and lacks crucial conceptual frameworks such as ‘continuing bonds’ (see e.g. Klass, Silverman, and Nickman 1996) and “symbolic immortality” (see below).

and-ready analyses via an historical route. We ought to come to terms with the fact that there was a time in Western culture when consolation was not thought of as a near-synonym for Christianity. The pre-Christian Hellenistic culture saw the inception of a tradition of consolation for death by means of arguments. The tradition was continued in early Christianity, and early Christian modes of consolation show important commonalities with the pre-Christian philosophical literature. These commonalities not only defy clear-cut oppositions between philosophy and religion but they point to more complex perspectives on the consolatory function of the afterlife than rough-and-ready analyses might allow.

I propose, therefore, to re-examine the historical evidence, in particular with respect to consolation up to the first century CE. An examination of the near-contemporaries Seneca and Paul of Tarsus allows us to analyse the overlap between philosophical and early Christian consolation, and thus to come to a more adequate understanding of the consolatory function of the afterlife in that era. Such an improved understanding could in turn stimulate fresh analyses of conceptions of the afterlife in later ages. I begin with a short genealogy of the philosophical consolatory tradition, after which I discuss passages on consolation in the letters of Paul of Tarsus.

Before we can proceed, however, a reflection on terminology is in order. In his recent, much-acclaimed Tanner lectures "Death and the Afterlife", Samuel Scheffler uses the term "afterlife" to designate the existence of a human posterity to one's life (Scheffler and Kolodny 2013). "Afterlife" in Scheffler's sense thus covers an aspect of what Robert Jay Lifton – well-known in the field of death studies, but not in philosophy – called "symbolic immortality" and which he distinguished from immortality understood in a "literal" way (Lifton 1974; Lifton 1976). Such "literal" or "real" immortality is frequently discussed by philosophers and theologians as "personal immortality". Its defining characteristic is that death does not completely extinguish the human person: there is a central aspect of the human being that persists through death *and will never cease to exist*. Owing to the course that Western culture has taken over the past 2000 years, we tend to equivocate the "afterlife" with "personal immortality". In spite of the extent to which it has become a cultural orthodoxy, I do not want to follow this equivocation. I draw attention to ancient texts that do not share – at least not as a matter of course – the idea that if an aspect of the human person survives death, it will go on *forever*. The understanding of the afterlife presupposed in this article will thus avoid the italicized phrases. "Afterlife" denotes no more than that death does not completely extinguish the human person and that there is a central aspect of the human being which persists after death.

Presenting the Ancient Philosophical Consolatory Tradition

The ancient philosophical consolatory tradition has its undisputed endpoint – as well as an important bridgehead to the medieval consolation literature – in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.² More controversial are the beginnings of the ancient consolatory tradition. Premised on the assumption that a (now lost) consolatory letter or treatise *On Grief* written by Crantor (ca. 335–275 BCE), a member of Plato's academy, was the first significant written work of consolation,³ much attention has been devoted to its reconstruction (e.g. Johann 1968; Baltussen 2013, xv). However, this starting-point is not convincing. It ought to be acknowledged (1) that the consolatory tradition has deep roots in (funerary)

² Edition and translation, e.g. Boethius 1973.

³ See e.g. Scourfield 1996. For the remains of Crantor's literary output, see Mette 1984.

oratory that predate Crantor's text,⁴ and (2) that the tradition extends far beyond texts which allude to grief management in their titles. The classicist J. H. D. Scourfield (2013) has rightly emphasized the difficulties of identifying a sharply-delineated genre of "the consolation", and has suggested viewing consolatory writings as a continuum ranging from the "delivery of consolation to specific individuals in specific circumstances" to texts that reflect on conceptual issues at stake in the provision of consolation and which might therefore rightly be called "reflective-mode" or "metaconsolatory" texts. (Scourfield 2013, 20) Building on Scourfield's work, I have suggested elsewhere (Jedan 2014b) that we leave the question of genre behind and rather focus on texts which provide *consolatory arguments* – persuasive speech acts aimed at showing why grief and despair ought not to have the last word. From this perspective, we can distinguish a continuing consolatory tradition that transcends the boundaries of theology and philosophy and extends from Antiquity until the present day (Jedan 2014a).

Plato's *Phaedo*, written about a century before Crantor's *On Grief*, is a case in point. The text purports to render the discussions between Socrates and his friends just before the philosopher's death. While the text might be read at a superficial level as an analysis of arguments for an immortal soul, it also contrasts Socrates' calm resolve in the face of death with the disconsolation of his friends and thus points to philosophical arguments as key ingredients of consolation. The *Phaedo* has been suggested as the *Urtext* of philosophical consolations (Boys-Stones 2013), but that would be to overstate its importance in the consolatory tradition. The *Apology*, a text that Plato composed considerably earlier than the *Phaedo*, was far more of a reference-point for the subsequent tradition. I suggest that the *Apology* was the iconic text defining what philosophical consolation was to be about, since it contains the famous "Socratic alternative" – that is the argument that death is no evil regardless of whether it is an annihilation of the self or the transition to a supremely attractive afterlife – which defined consolatory discussions for the following centuries (Jedan forthcoming; Jedan 2014b). There is more on the "Socratic alternative" below. For our present purposes we may assume that the ancient consolatory tradition can be traced back at least to Plato's *Apology*, that is the early fourth century BCE, and that it has roots extending even more deeply into (funerary) oratory. The ancient tradition reaches forward to Boethius' early sixth-century CE *Consolations of Philosophy*.

To retain the focus on Plato's *Apology* for a little longer, this text not only informs the later consolatory tradition but it is immediately relevant to our inquiry. The historical setting of the *Apology* is as follows: Socrates, whose public questioning was felt to be a nuisance by members of the old elite and many of the new democrats alike, was accused of impiety and subversion at the beginning of the fourth century BCE. In a public trial he was sentenced to death by a majority vote. Plato represents Socrates as comforting his supporters. Socrates makes it clear that he is not harmed by the sentence of death and proposes his famous "Socratic alternative", the argument that death is no evil, whichever of two scenarios might be true (40C–40E, trans. Tredennick, repr. in Plato 1961):

Death is one of two things. Either it is annihilation, and the dead have no consciousness of anything, or, as we are told, it is really a change – a migration of the soul from this place to another. Now if there is no consciousness but only a dreamless sleep, death must be a marvelous gain. [...] If on the other hand death is a removal from here to some other place, and if what we are told is true, that all the dead are there, what greater blessing could there be than this, gentlemen? Put it in this way. How much would one of you give to meet Orpheus and Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die ten times over if this account is true. [...] And above all I should like to spend my time there, as here, in examining and searching people's minds, to find out who is really wise among them, and who only thinks that he is. What would one not give, gentlemen, to be able to question the leader of that great host against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or the thousands of other men and women whom one could mention, to talk and mix and argue with whom would be unimaginable

⁴ The fifth-century orator Antiphon is credited in ps.-Plutarch, *Vitae Decem Oratorum* 833C, with having invented and marketed a technique of grief management (*technê alupias*). Even if this is *ben trovato*, it goes towards showing that in later Antiquity the deep roots of argumentative grief management and its connection to oratory were appreciated.

happiness? At any rate I presume that they do not put one to death there for such conduct, because apart from the other happiness in which their world surpasses ours, they are now immortal for the rest of time, if what we are told is true.

The text continues with Socrates' exhortation to his audience, emphasizing the underpinnings of the Socratic alternative (41A–41D, trans. Tredennick, repr. in Plato 1961, my italics):

You too, gentlemen of the jury, must look forward to death with confidence, and fix your minds on this one belief, which is certain – that *nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death*, and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods. [...] When my sons grow up, gentlemen, *if you think that they are putting money or anything else before goodness, take your revenge by plaguing them as I plagued you*; and if they fancy themselves for no reason, you must scold them just as I scolded you, for neglecting the important things and thinking that they are good for something when they are good for nothing. If you do this, I shall have had justice at your hands, both I myself and my children.

Four points merit our particular attention in the *Apology* 40C–41D. First, it is striking that the afterlife is not embraced as a certainty; instead, Socrates formulates an alternative, without favouring any one of the available options: death results either in non-existence, which Socrates likens to a deep, dreamless sleep, or it is the beginning of something new, travelling to a wonderful place, where Socrates will meet heroes of the past. But – and this is the crucial point – whichever of the two death might be, it is *not* an evil; both scenarios are extremely attractive. So the afterlife is invoked as a possibility, an optional benefit, but its existence or non-existence does not touch or add to the value and meaning of the life lived. (Cf. e.g. Weyhofen 1983, 119)

Second, if there is an afterlife, it is valued, not on account of its providing a mere continuation of existence (as May and many others claim), but because it *dignifies* fundamental life-choices. If there is an afterlife, it should repeat and thus confirm the supreme worth of Socrates' activity in this life. As Socrates ironically states, he will surely continue his dialogues and “test” the virtue of the other inhabitants of the netherworld – to him this is “unimaginable happiness”. With this characterization the Socratic afterlife is cast in terms of a cognitive fulfilment.

Third, Socrates' invulnerability to death is premised on his view of a fulfilled life. It is the well-lived life that is as it were at any point complete and thus is not tragically interrupted by death.

Fourth, Socrates states emphatically that death cannot harm “a good man”. This places the focus upon the virtues: for someone who has lived virtuously, death is no evil. The same message is conveyed when Socrates implores his audience to challenge his sons with questions about their virtue. The emphasis on virtue shifts the focus from *what* someone has achieved – a list of plans, attachments or projects and an assessment of his or her “welfare level” – to *how* someone has gone about the task of living. This is a clever move indeed: a list of plans, attachments and projects, wishes for personal welfare – which we all in our “normal mode” find highly significant – is in principle endless, and death would always curtail something important. So, for consolation to be possible, one has to change one's perspective. Virtue is exemplified in whatever one does; virtue brings about biographical closure. With this, Socrates' consolation is an exhortation for the living to rethink what is truly important in life. His addressees should undergo a cognitive transformation and adopt his highly revisionary account of human flourishing – it is virtue that counts, not non-moral goods such as the achievement of projects.⁵

⁵ The Socratic exhortation thus cuts across distinctions between “objective” accounts of the quality of life, and “subjective”, first person accounts.

I suggest that this Socratic consolation defines the intellectual space for later consolations. Despite all minor variations, these four characteristics continue to serve as a template. (1) Even where later consolations favour one option in the Socratic alternative above the other, they feel bound to react to the other; (2) where they do affirm an afterlife, this serves a specific function beyond the mere continuation of human existence; the afterlife dignifies fundamental life-choices and is cast in terms of a cognitive fulfilment; (3) they set the idea of a fulfilled life against the threat of death; and (4) in order to describe the fulfilled life, they provide a revisionist, virtue-centred account of human flourishing.

The defining role of Socratic consolation for the later tradition also shows in Epicureanism, a school apparently remote from the mainstream of ancient consolation.⁶ Epicureanism has received much attention for its explicit denial of the afterlife, contending that death is the annihilation of the sentient human being, and since only things that can be experienced have an impact on well-being, death ought to be considered a matter for indifference.⁷ However, Epicureanism remains within the Socratic consolatory framework not only because it chooses the first option in the Socratic alternative and defends it explicitly against the second one but also because, crucially, it theorizes how life can be completed. Contrary to many modern interpretations playing out Epicurean hedonism against virtue, the available evidence shows that Epicurus and his followers did look to virtue as completing life.⁸

Let us now fast-forward to the first century CE. Seneca's consolatory letter addressed to Marcia, a Roman noblewoman, is the earliest extant large-scale consolatory letter in Latin. Writing in the year 40 CE or thereabouts, Seneca tries to assuage Marcia's grief over her accumulated losses. First, her father, historian Cremudius Cordus, had been forced to commit suicide; more than a decade later, her beloved second son Metilius died. I shall show that Seneca's letter displays the four characteristics identified above.

First, the Socratic alternative defines the structure of Seneca's letter. Seneca begins with the first option in the Socratic alternative. Death might be no more than the termination of life, but this state of non-existence is a peaceful one, "a release from all suffering", to be compared to the state before we were born. (Seneca, *Ad Marciam* 19.5–6; trans. Basore = Seneca 1935) A little later, however, he develops the second option in the Socratic alternative, the scenario of a supremely fulfilling afterlife. I quote the key passage in translation (*Ad Marciam* 25.1–3):

He is complete – leaving nothing of himself behind, he has fled away and wholly departed from earth [...]. A saintly band (*coetus sacer*) gave him welcome – the Scipios and the Catos and, joined with those who scorned life and through a draught of poison found freedom, your father, Marcia. Although there all are akin with all, he keeps his grandson near him, and, while your son rejoices in the new-found light, he instructs him in the movement of the neighbouring stars, and gladly initiates him into Nature's secrets, not by guesswork but by experience, having true knowledge of them all; and just as a stranger is grateful for a guide through an unknown city, so your son, as he searches into the causes of celestial things, is grateful for a kinsman as his instructor. He bids him also turn his gaze upon the things of earth far below; for it is a pleasure to look back upon all that has been left behind.

Nevertheless, Seneca adds a significant twist to the Socratic alternative. Whereas Socrates is prepared to understand the afterlife in terms of unspecified traditional sayings as a never-ending existence, Seneca follows Stoic doctrine: the history of the cosmos is cyclical; at certain intervals, the world as we know it is consumed by fire and is created anew. From the scarce evidence we have in early Stoic teaching, virtue seems to have carried with it the benefit of more lasting prospects for the soul: the virtuous soul persists until the next conflagration and will then be broken down into its elements. (See

⁶ The school was founded by Epicurus (341–270 BCE) around 300 BCE.

⁷ For the outpouring of treatments in the 20th century, see Fischer 1993.

⁸ See e.g. Epicurus' *Letter to Menoikeus* 127–32 and *Vatican Sayings* 17, both reproduced in Long and Sedley 1987, 21B and 21F.

Jedan 2009, ch. 1) Metilius' afterlife and that of his saintly companions is not infinite in duration: it lasts as long as the cosmos and is ended only by the unfolding of an eschatological scene. Metilius' soul and those of his companions will be dispersed into their elements; the only point of stability in this grand cosmic spectacle is the Divine element ("God"). Consistent with Stoic doctrine, Seneca offers an afterlife as consolation, but this afterlife falls short of a literal or real immortality, that is an existence without end. What does not end is the divine author of the world process (*Ad Marciam* 26.6–7):

[At some point in the future] all the fiery matter of the world that now shines in orderly array will blaze up in a common conflagration. Then also the souls of the blest, who have partaken of immortality, when it shall seem best to God to create the universe anew – we, too, amid the falling universe, shall be added as a tiny fraction to this mighty destruction, and shall be changed again into our former elements.

Happy, Marcia, is your son, who already knows these mysteries!

Clearly, this is an instance of what we can describe with Lifton as "symbolic" immortality. Full continuity does not lie with the individual but with the Divine element steering the cyclical development of the world. Metilius and his companions take pride in being part of this grand process, and so should Marcia. In effect, Seneca revisits the first option in the Socratic alternative and thus brings both options closer together. Interestingly, the fact that in the Stoic world-view cosmic cycles will repeat themselves, so that there will be recurrences of Metilius' existence as well as that of his saintly companions, is not used as a consolatory argument. There is no knowing why this option is not considered. Perhaps the Epicureans' scathing critiques of ideas about re-incarnation and recurrence had made it difficult to sustain.⁹ All this shows that rough-and-ready analyses of consolation being the result of mere continuity are an oversimplification. In the ancient consolations, images of the afterlife are not primarily about the continuance of individual human life; in the *Ad Marciam*, the image of the afterlife celebrates the prospect of the divine element taking complete control of the cosmos, at the expense of individual human life.

With regard to the second characteristic, it is notable that Seneca *extends* the Socratic afterlife scenario: for Plato's Socrates, the afterlife is a place to meet other presumably virtuous men, the saints and heroes of Greek literature. This is also the case here, but in addition there is the personal tone of the afterlife reuniting the deceased Metilius with a loved one, his grandfather, who "keeps his grandson near him". But this personal touch notwithstanding, just as in the Socratic afterlife, the afterlife awaiting Metilius vindicates and dignifies fundamental life-choices. Metilius is allowed to join a "saintly band" of those who prioritized virtue above non-moral goods, even their own lives. And the afterlife enjoyed by the saintly band is cast in terms of cognitive fulfilment: Metilius "rejoices in the new-found light" and will be initiated by his grandfather "into Nature's secrets" (*Ad Marciam* 25.1–3).

In respect of characteristics (3) and (4), the turn of phrase "he is complete" evokes two senses of completion: (a) his soul, the true core of Metilius, enjoys the afterlife; and (b) a sense of biographical closure, since death has not harmed Metilius by leaving important projects tragically unfinished or by thwarting important desires. The biographical closure needed for this invulnerability to death is produced by emphasizing virtue as key to human flourishing, just as in Socrates'

⁹ As demonstrated by Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (Lucretius Carus 1975, trans. Rouse, rev. Smith). In *De rerum natura* 3.670–869 Lucretius first offers the Epicurean rebuttal of an immortal pre-existing soul that is incarnated at birth: there is no memory of earlier incarnations, and there is no continuity between different incarnations, in the sense that children have to learn the world anew. He then considers a rejoinder that comes at least close to the Stoic view: even if Lucretius' arguments point to the materiality of the soul and show that there is no pre-existing immortal soul which could exist in separation from the body, material constellations (including material souls) might recur in cosmic cycles, so that the same individual might exist a number of times. Lucretius' answer points to the necessity of mental continuity between the different recurrences that would be needed for identity across those recurrences. Since this mental continuity must be lacking, cyclical recurrence cannot secure a sense of continuity.

consolation. The emphasis on virtue is perceptible in the passage quoted above, associating Metilius with the virtuous “saintly band”, but Metilius’ virtues are also extolled earlier on in the letter. As would be expected in the context, Seneca places particular emphasis on the credentials of Metilius as an excellent son (e.g. *Ad Marciam* 24.2–3).

We can thus see that Seneca’s *Ad Marciam* follows the template of Socratic consolation in the *Apology* by incorporating the four characteristics: Seneca explores both options in the Socratic alternative, attributes to the afterlife the function of dignifying fundamental life choices, and sets against the terror of death a revisionist idea of biographical closure based on virtue.

Christian Consolation: Paul

Let us now turn to the early Christian movement. I focus here on the earliest Christian writings, the letters of Paul of Tarsus. There is scholarly debate about the authenticity of some letters attributed to Paul, but this need not concern us here since I focus on epistles that are generally acknowledged to be authentic: *1 Thessalonians*, *Philippians*, *1 Corinthians* and *Romans*. The epistles were most probably written between ca. 51 and ca. 58 CE, in remarkable historical proximity to Seneca’s letter to Marcia (see for more information e.g. Ehrman 2004).

The undisputed Pauline epistles, I suggest, offer consolatory strategies that are surprisingly similar to those found in Plato’s *Apology* and Seneca’s *Ad Marciam*. In terms of the four characteristics outlined above, we find first that the Socratic alternative structures Pauline consolation, in the sense that although Paul defends the afterlife he reacts to the alternative option that death is the radical end of human life. This alternative option was not only generally available in the background culture but it must have also been affirmed even by affiliates of the new-founded Pauline communities; otherwise, we should be unable to understand why Paul engages with it in some detail in *1 Corinthians* and *1 Thessalonians* in a clear attempt to negotiate the doctrinal contours of his churches. So far as Paul is concerned, belief in an afterlife is not a merely optional benefit; it is at the heart of Christian consolation (*1 Thessalonians* 4:13–14 Revised English Bible (REB)):

We wish you not to remain in ignorance, friends, about those who sleep in death; you should not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again; so too will God bring those who died as Christians to be with Jesus.

Belief in the resurrection of Christ is all-important in this context, since Christ’s resurrection ensures the truth of his role in salvation. Thus Paul battles ferociously against the position that death might be the end (*1 Corinthians* 15:12–19 REB):

Now if this is what we proclaim, that Christ was raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised; and if Christ was not raised, then our gospel is null and void, and so too is your faith; and we turn out to have given false evidence about God, because we bore witness that he raised Christ to life, whereas, if the dead are not raised, he did not raise him. For if the dead are not raised, it follows that Christ was not raised; and if Christ was not raised, your faith has nothing to it and you are still in your old state of sin. It follows also that those who have died within Christ’s fellowship are utterly lost. If it is for this life only that Christ has given us hope, we of all people are most to be pitied.¹⁰

¹⁰ In the context of this article, I have to demote an interesting complication to do with Paul’s ideas on resurrection. The imagery of resurrection is suggestive of a new creation of the human being, which would pose problems for the continuity of the human being across death; however, talk of resurrection is conjoined with language that evokes continuity despite the new creation (cf. e.g. *1*

As to the second characteristic, in Paul too the afterlife is more than a mere continuation of a person's existence. It is the *specific shape* of this existence that counts: being (re-)united with Christ is the primary consolatory motif.¹¹ (Re-)union with Christ also has the import of dignifying the believers' fundamental life-choice for Christ as saviour. As in Seneca, so it is that Paul's conception of the afterlife combines the social aspect of union with a community of saints and the aspect of cognitive fulfilment, expressed in the following optical metaphor (*1 Corinthians* 13:12–13 REB):

At present we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but one day we shall see face to face. My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God's knowledge of me.

Concerning the third characteristic, as for Plato and Seneca, so for Paul the well-lived life is at any point complete. This is evocatively expressed with the simile "the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night", but the followers of Jesus will not be wrong-footed (*1 Thessalonians* 5:1–4 REB). From this perspective, Paul can view the length of his own life, and the question of whether it is preferable to live or die, with a degree of detachment comparable to the detachment exhibited by Stoic philosophers (*Philippians* 2:20–4): Whether or not he will continue to live is for Paul himself a matter of indifference; only for the sake of the Philippians might it be preferable.

Regarding the fourth characteristic, biographical closure is provided by a revisionist, virtue-centred account of human flourishing. This is confirmed, for instance, by *1 Thessalonians* 5, where Paul assures the Thessalonians that they will not be caught unawares by the day of the Lord since they are all "children of light, children of day", used here to evoke their virtues. Moreover, the sequel to the above-quoted passage in *1 Corinthians* confirms the importance of the virtues for the well-lived life. Paul emphasizes the virtues of faith, hope and love (*1 Corinthians* 13:13 REB): "There are three things that last for ever: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of the three is love." The fact that the three theological virtues structure the afterlife, too, is yet another way in which Paul's conception of the afterlife dignifies fundamental life choices.

Conclusion

This analysis of exemplars of consolatory literature up to the first century CE has shown that historiographies which oppose "philosophical" and "theological" ways of dealing with death do not fit the evidence. Striking commonalities extend far beyond the use of religious vocabulary in both philosophical and theological consolation literature. I have argued that the conceptual framework visible in Plato's *Apology* structured both philosophical and theological consolations for centuries to come.

Ancient consolations aim at cognitive transformation. Their audience is asked to rethink what it finds important in life and what brings the necessary biographical closure. The ancient consolations steer away from a list-perspective over plans, attachments and projects. Such a list could in principle be endless, since death would always tragically interrupt something important. Instead, ancient consolations emphasize the importance of virtue. Virtue makes a life complete, so that death does not tragically interrupt and destroy what was important in life. From this perspective, ancient consolations argue that death is at no point an evil for a well-lived life.

Corinthians 15:35–8), comparable to the soul-based continuity in the second option of the Socratic alternative. (For a recent theological discussion, cf. Wright 2010.)

¹¹ *1 Thessalonians* 4:17–18 REB: "we shall always be with the Lord. Console one another, then, with these words."

The personal afterlife is an *optional component* of this common conceptual framework, and it functions in a markedly different way from that posited by commentators such as May. Indeed, May criticized conceptions of the afterlife for conjuring up a continuity which compromised the finality of death and the due importance of worldly existence. Ancient consolations, however, do not place emphasis on mere continuity: not only is the afterlife an inessential component but it can be temporally delimited, as in the case of Seneca's *Ad Marciam*. What *is* important is that the afterlife confirms and dignifies fundamental life-choices – in particular, the deceased person's commitment to the virtues. The consolatory function of the afterlife in ancient consolations does not so much consist in the deceased being somehow still "there", but in helping the consol and to see the deceased person's life as complete. Paradoxically, in ancient consolations the afterlife supports biographical closure and helps to attribute due weight to worldly life.¹²

How can these findings inform an analysis of later conceptions of the afterlife and its consolations? If the above analysis is right, it might be worthwhile to look afresh at the rhetoric of biographical closure in later ages – such as might be found, for instance, in today's funerary orations. In the literature, biographical memorialization is highlighted as a crucial element in this oratory (e.g. Bregman 2011, ch. 12) and set against belief in an afterlife (e.g. Davies 2005). What we need, however, is a closer analysis of the subtle interplay of biographical memorialisation and invocations, however tentative, of the afterlife. Much hinges, moreover, on the question of *how* biographical closure is constructed. It makes an important difference whether biographical memorialization is effected by way of repeating the deceased's "bucket list" or by way of narratives that describe the life of the deceased in terms of his or her virtues, as seems to happen frequently. In short, the present findings invite us to explore the manifold ways in which present-day approaches to consolation sustain an ancient tradition.¹³

Biographical note:

Christoph Jedan is professor of philosophy of religion and ethics at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Bonn (1999) and was awarded a Habilitation at the Humboldt University of Berlin (2006). Among his research interests are ancient Greek and Roman virtue ethics and the intersections of religion and philosophy. His book publications include *Willensfreiheit bei Aristoteles?* (2000), *Modalities by Perspective: Aristotle, the Stoics and a Modern Reconstruction* (2002, with N. Strobach), *Stoic Virtues: Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Ethics* (2009), *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban* (2010, co-editor, with A.L. Molendijk and J. Beaumont), and *Constellations of Value: European Perspectives on the Intersections of Religion, Politics and Society* (2013). His current research focuses on consolation across philosophical and religious traditions. With Eric Venbrux, he edited "Dood en troost" [Death and Consolation], a double themed issue of the *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 68 (2014) 1–2. Contact: c.jedan@rug.nl

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¹² Davies 2008, "intensive living" (or the "intensification of life") is not the corollary of modernization and secularization, but it is already an essential ingredient of the ancient consolatory tradition.

¹³ My thanks for their helpful suggestions go to two anonymous referees for *Thanatos*.

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Abstrakti

Kuolemanjälkeistä elämää koskevien käsitysten lohduttava tehtävä: näkökulmia aatehistoriasta

Mikä on kuolemanjälkeistä elämää koskevien käsitysten tehtävä lohdutuksen näkökulmasta tarkasteltuna? Voidakseni kyseenalaistaa laajalle levinneitä harhakäsityksiä lohdutuksesta, joka on kielteisessä mielessä liitetty uskontoon ja jota on pohdittu filosofian valossa, tarkastelen yhtymäkohtia antiikin filosofisen lohdutuksen ja kristillisen lohdutuksen välillä. Esitän, että kummatkin lohdutuksen muodot ovat läheisessä yhteydessä toisiinsa ja jakavat tärkeitä erityispiirteitä, muun muassa sijoittaessaan kuoleman uhkaa vastaan ajatuksen täysimääräisestä elämästä ja kuvatessaan täysimääräistä elämää revisionistisesti, tehden selkoa yksilön kukoistuksesta tämän hyveisiin keskittyen. Väitän, että kuolemanjälkeistä elämää koskevat käsitykset ovat vaihtoehtoinen osatekijä antiikin lohdutuksissa. Sen sijaan, että nämä käsitykset siirtäisivät huomion pois maallisesta elämästä (kuten on usein väitetty), ne auttavat tekemään siitä ”intensiivisempää”. Niiden päätarkoituksena on tehdä perustavanlaatuisista elämänvalinnoista arvokkaita ja näin ollen helpottaa elämänkaaren päättymistä.

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https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/1/ahola_neolithic.pdf**Tracing Neolithic Funerary Practices from Finnish Ochre Graves – a Case Study from Kukkaroski Comb Ware Burial Ground****Marja Ahola**

University of Helsinki

Abstract

Finnish Stone Age earth graves are often referred to as “simple pit graves”, fostering the illusion of an equally simple funerary rite. In this article, the complexity of Stone Age funerary practices and grave structures are explored by reinterpreting the Middle Neolithic burial ground of Kukkaroski in the light of ritual practice theory. As can be observed from the Kukkaroski material, the Finnish ochre graves show evidence of a complicated mortuary practice, where the deceased were cared for in various ways. Furthermore, at the Kukkaroski burial ground new graves were made in connection with old burials, indicating a close connection with past generations. This combination of care and connection seems to be at the core of Neolithic funerary rites for earth graves.

Introduction

Without any written sources, knowledge of Stone Age belief systems relies on archaeological research, especially on information provided by Stone Age burials and other places of ritual activity. For example, by interpreting the iconography and locations of Finnish rock art, it has been suggested that the paintings bear evidence of shamanistic cosmology (Lahelma 2008). Finnish Stone Age graves have not, however, been subjected to similar analysis, and the complexity of burial practices in Stone Age Finland has not been well understood. This is due to the fact that unburnt bone material – the main indicator of an inhumation – is generally not preserved in Finland’s acidic soil. In the Finnish tradition, the Stone Age graves are therefore often referred to as “inhumations in simple pit graves” (e.g. Edgren 1966, 90–96; Edgren 1984, 48; Vikkula 1986, 12; Miettinen 1992, 13; Purhonen 1998, 27–31), which falsely gives an impression of a simple funerary practice.

Furthermore, the total amount of the Stone Age burial sites in Finland does not compare to the amount of contemporary settlement sites (Huurre 1998, 270–271), indicating that only a part of the population were buried to these sites. Indeed, it has been proposed that a multiplicity of funerary practices co-existed during Stone Age (e.g. Brinch Petersen and Meiklejohn 2003; Löhmus 2007; Larsson 2008; Fahlander 2012), and variation in the handling of the dead can be seen in both Mesolithic and Neolithic contexts, for example in cremation burials documented among contemporary ochre inhumation graves, and in burned human bones found occasionally scattered among settlement

site debris (Brinch Petersen and Meiklejohn 2003; Katiskoski 2003; Koivisto 2010). Some funerary practices might even be invisible to the archaeological record.

In this article I will focus on the ochre graves, and argue that even though the skeletal material is missing, the evidence of a complex funerary practice relating to the ochre graves can be seen in the other material remains. As a case study, I will re-interpret the ochre graves of the Middle Neolithic Comb Ware burial ground of Kukkarikoski in Western Finland (see Figure 1), and argue that when considering an earth grave, taking care of the deceased and forming a connection to past generations were the two key elements of Neolithic funerary practice. These elements can be seen, for example, in the artifact material, burial features, and in the practice of ritual reuse of an old burial site.



Figure 1. Location of the Kukkarikoski burial ground. Basemap by National Land Survey of Finland, 2005.

Approximately 60 Stone Age grave sites associated with Mesolithic (ca. 8900–5200 cal BC) and Neolithic (ca. 5200–1800 cal BC) hunter-fisher-gatherer societies are known in Finland (Lappalainen 2007b, appendix 1). The graves are called “red ochre graves” because of the practice of using red-coloured ochre in an earth grave. There are some quartz flakes and stone artifacts known from the Mesolithic ochre graves (e.g. Edgren 1984, 23; Halinen 1999, 173), but especially during the Middle Neolithic Typical Comb Ware period (4000–3500 cal BC), the ochre graves of people using comb-stamped pottery were richly furnished with amber and slate jewellery and flint artifacts (Edgren 1966, 97–106; Halinen 1999, 173–174). From the later part of the Neolithic period, earth graves of the Corded Ware culture (2700–2300 cal BC) are also known. These graves lack ochre, and the material culture of the burials, consisting of Corded Ware vessels and axes, indicate a different funerary practice and belief system to that of the Comb Ware tradition (Edgren 1984, 76–77).

Even though sporadic fragments of human teeth and other bone material have been found from some sites (Salo 2015), the lack of unburnt bone material complicates the interpretation of the grave features. Ochre features without any skeletal material have therefore been interpreted as graves because of their size, shape, and associated artifacts, which are consistent with grave goods (Edgren 1966, 97–106; Halinen 1999, 173–174). Despite the fact that the lack of organic material makes the Finnish material difficult to interpret, the term “simple pit grave” is still misleading: a careful examination of the grave structures has also shown evidence of plastered skulls (Miettinen 1992; Edgren 2006), food offerings (Katiskoski 2003), traces of ritual fire (Purhonen 1980; Vikkula 1986), as well as wood, bark, and stone structures (Torvinen 1979; Purhonen 1980; Vikkula 1986; Edgren 2006). It might seem that the archaeological evidence

for Stone Age funerary practices associated with these ochre graves has been well described, but the lack of human bone material, combined with the lack of applied theory and interpretation, have maintained the illusion of a simple burial – an issue which this article aims to address.

Tracing Neolithic Mortuary Practice

Slowly Changing Ritual Practice

When studying a prehistoric period that lacks written and oral sources, our source material for ritual practices is limited to the physical remains of past actions. Even though the task of tracing ritual practices from such material might seem impossible, it must be kept in mind that funerary rites, especially the practices involved in funerary rituals, are inherently conservative and preserve ways of doing things over a long time (Parker Pearson 1999, 195). Even if we do not have the advantage of written and oral sources for Stone Age funerary practices, we are able to compare the material culture of death over a long period of time, and thus observe both continuation and change from the physical remains of the ritual.

In this article, Neolithic funerary practices are approached from the perspective of ritual practice theory. Drawing from Catherine Bell's ritual practice theory framework (1992), Liv Nilsson Stutz (2003) has argued that prehistoric funerary practice can be interpreted as an embodied practice, where the bodily practices involved in the mortuary rite are more important than the meaning of the practices. It is even argued further, that among the Stone Age communities the symbolic value of the practices may have been vague:

It is possible that if we would have the opportunity to ask the people at Skateholm and Vedbæk/Bøgebakken why they did what they did, they would have given us replies such as: “this is the way it has always been done,” or “this is the way that our ancestors told us to do,” or something equally general. However, according to practice theory this is not a problem, because the central aspect of the ritual is not what it refers to (since that is not constant and may even be unknown) but the bodily experience of it. (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 319)

The conservative and preserving nature of mortuary rituals might thus have been developed by repeating the ritual practice as it had been done before – even if the original meaning of the action was already forgotten. According to practice theory, the search for the meaning of these actions should therefore be abandoned, and the focus should be put on the way the ritualized actions can be seen in the physical remains of mortuary practices (Berggren and Nilsson Stutz 2010).

When the focus of the interpretation shifts from meaning to practice, the fragmented material from the Finnish ochre graves is no longer as limited. Indeed, the physical remains of the ritual practices can be seen in the use of ochre, in the grave structures, and in the artifact material. Even though these categories are artificial, and even overlapping, when approached from the perspective of practice theory they provide new insights into the material.

The Use of Ochre

Since the Finnish graves lack skeletal material, the practice of ochre use is an important indicator of a Stone Age grave. The tradition of using red, iron rich pigment in earth graves is known already from the Palaeolithic period and, though

the amount and intensity of ochre changes over time, it was also commonly used in Mesolithic and Neolithic hunter-gatherer burials (e.g. Grünberg 2013; Zagorska 2008). Even though often present in Stone Age graves, the specific means of application or deposition of the ochre is unknown. Ochre could have been strewn over the deceased, used to line the base of the burial, to embalm the body, or to fill the grave (Zagorska 2008, 117). Ochre has also sometimes been found on the head, pelvis, or on the elbows and feet of the deceased (Boric 2002, 31; Zagorska 2008, 117–122). From the Finnish perspective, it is important to note that if not used only in the filling, the practice of ochre use is often connected with the handling of the deceased, and the location of the ochre has therefore been used to indicate the location of the body (e.g. Miettinen 1992; Katiskoski 2003).

For example, at the Comb Ware burial ground of Hartikka in Central Finland, ochre of varying intensity often covered the whole grave, but since fragments of tooth enamel were found in the heaviest layer of ochre, it seems plausible that the head area was covered with a thick layer (Miettinen 1992, 12). For the Finnish ochre graves, the intensity of ochre is indeed another important tool for interpretation. For example, at the bottom layer of Kukarkoski grave 1a, presented in more detail in the next chapter, several ochre features of varying intensity can be noted (see Figure 2). Drawing from the example of Hartikka, it could be possible that the most intensive ochre deposits indicate the location of the deceased, whereas the other ochre features could relate to a possible inner structure of the grave. The line of ochre dots crossing the southern end of the grave might be, for example, remains of organic artifacts painted with ochre.

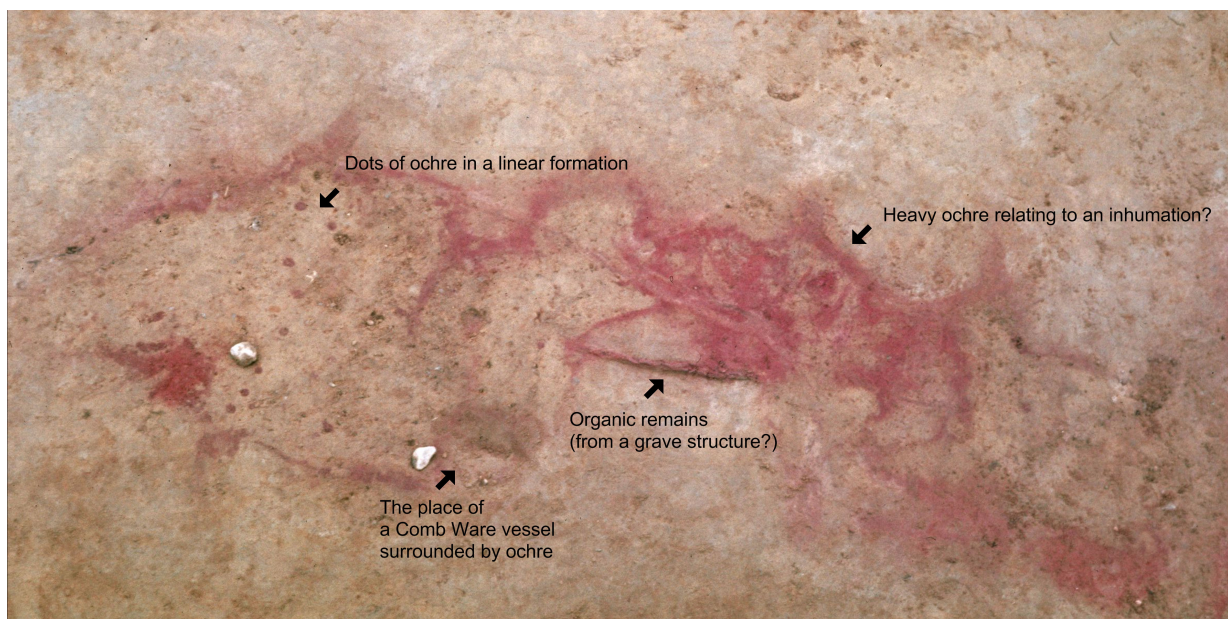


Figure 2. The ochre feature and organic remains of grave 1a at the depth of 90 cm. The intensity of color red has been heightened in order to see the borderlines of the ochre better. Photo by Finland's National Board of Antiquities, 1975. All modifications by the author.

During the Finnish Neolithic, the use of ochre was not limited to mortuary practices. Rather, it seems that ochre played a significant part in Finnish Neolithic ritual practices, even though more utilitarian uses must have also existed. For example, Neolithic clay idols bear marks of ochre paint (Núñez 1986), and both a clay idol (Edgren 1966, 51) and a fossilised shell have been found in small ochre pits (*ibid.*, 63), indicating votive deposits. Most importantly, the contemporary rock art of Fennoscandia was also painted with ochre (Lahelma 2008), connecting the Middle Neolithic ochre graves to the shamanistic cosmology of the rock art (e.g. Nilsson Stutz 2006, 232). Even though it is not within the scope of this article, this connection raises the opportunity to use similar ethnographically informed approaches on grave material as have been used in rock art studies (e.g. Lahelma 2008, 11–14) and to, for example, approach the graves from the perspectives of death and afterlife as seen in the pre-Christian folklore of the Baltic Finns.

The Grave Structures and Evidence of Body Wrappings

The physical remains of mortuary practices can also be seen in the borders and constructions of the graves, and in evidence for the handling of the body. In the Stone Age graves of the Baltic region, the shape and size of the grave is usually adapted to the physical parameters of the body or bodies, which could be arranged in various ways, although the extended supine position and flexed position seem to be predominant (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 333–335; Löhmus 2007, 37–40).

In recent studies concerning Stone Age mortuary practices, the focus has been placed on the human remains (e.g. Nilsson Stutz 2003; Tõrv 2015), and interesting insights have been gained by using archaeoethanatology – a cross-disciplinary method combining taphonomic knowledge with osteology, anatomy, and archaeology (e.g. Nilsson Stutz 2003; Tõrv 2015). For example, an archaeoethanatomical analysis of the Mesolithic cemeteries of Southern Scandinavia (Nilsson Stutz 2003) has shown that the core mortuary practice in the Mesolithic graves was a primary burial, where the natural processes of decomposition were hidden by burying the individual underground and filling the burial pit immediately. The body was carefully positioned in the grave in a lifelike manner, and sometimes placed on a platform or paddings in order to separate the body from the floor of the burial pit. In some cases, the body was also protected by wrappings. In most cases, artifacts and ochre were placed in the burial along with the dead.

When a similar analysis was conducted on the preserved skeletons of Neolithic Comb Ware burials in Latvia and Estonia, it was noted that the burials seem to continue the Mesolithic core practices in the handling of the body (Nilsson Stutz 2010a, 139–140; Tõrv 2015). Since the Finnish Middle Neolithic ochre graves belong to the same cultural tradition, this observation makes knowledge of Mesolithic mortuary practice relevant comparanda for Finnish ochre graves, and even though the Finnish ochre graves lack the body, archaeoethanatomical knowledge can also be applied to the interpretation of the burial feature.

For example, when evidence of a wrapping has been noted in the position of the skeleton, traces of an ochre colored body container were occasionally suspected in the layer of ochre surrounding the body (Nilsson Stutz 2006, 231). This observation is important for the Finnish material, since it indicates that evidence of wrappings could also be derived from the burial feature. As Liv Nilsson Stutz (personal communication March 24, 2015) has suggested, the inhumation sized areas of heavy ochre documented in many Finnish graves might actually be the remains of ochre colored wrappings. It must be noted though, that evidence of body wrappings occur also without the use of ochre, for example, in the Neolithic Lyalovo graves from the Russian Upper Volga region (e.g. Figure 5 in Piezonka et al. 2013, 62). Since Comb Ware pottery has its roots in the same area (e.g. Núñez 1990), similarities between the Lyalovo and Comb Ware funerary practices could also easily exist. Since the Lyalovo graves contain a limited set of artifacts encompassing mainly organic materials, and ochre is only rarely used (Piezonka et al. 2013, 61), similar graves might, however, go unnoticed in the Finnish material.

Aside from evidence of wrappings, traces of possible inner structures have also been documented from Mesolithic and Neolithic graves, indicating that varying practices may have been used to protect the body of the deceased. In Mesolithic contexts, bodies or body parts have been lifted from the floor of the grave by deer antlers, small stones, and even by a swan's wing (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 335). In a unique Danish Mesolithic underwater burial, the deceased was placed in a dug-out canoe and wrapped in or covered by sheets of bark (Grøn and Skaarup 1991, 49). This burial introduces yet another burial practice, even though the Mesolithic core practices can still be seen in the way the body was protected.

Evidence of bark is also present in several Neolithic graves. For example, in the Tamula I Comb Ware settlement, several burials yielded branches and birch bark at the bottom of the graves (Lõhmus 2007, 38). Fragments of bark have also been found from the Finnish Comb Ware burial grounds of Hartikka (Miettinen 1992, 12), Nästinristi (Vikkula 1986, 10), and Kolmhaara (Edgren 1966, 30, 43). At the latter, well-preserved ochre-stained bark was documented in several layers above the ochre layer, indicating that a bark wrapping or covering was used to protect the deceased (Edgren 1984, 48; Edgren 2006, 328).

The Artifacts

Even though the Mesolithic and Neolithic ochre graves are similar in their structure, there are clear differences in their material culture. During the Mesolithic period, earth graves in the nearby regions of Finland were furnished with animal teeth pendants and bone and stone artifacts (e.g. Gurina 1956; Zagorskis 2004 [1987]). From the Middle Neolithic period onwards, amber and flint artifacts appear in the burials (e.g. Halinen 1999, 174; Zagorskis 2004 [1987], 87). At the same time, changes also occur in an increasing number of collective burials (Zagorska 2006, 121), and while Mesolithic burials rarely overlapped each other (Nilsson Stutz 2004, 88), the positioning of burials amongst older graves becomes more common during the Neolithic (Nilsson Stutz 2010b, 38–39). These new practices make the Neolithic burial grounds look different, and have been interpreted as reflecting new ways of life associated with the emergence of the Neolithic world (e.g. Nilsson Stutz 2010b, 39; Herva et al. 2014).

Amber and flint do not appear naturally in Finland, and can thus be seen as imported goods. The Neolithic flints are mainly eastern imports from the area of modern day Russia, and amber from the Baltic region (Edgren 1984, 55–57). In many cases, the flint artifacts – for example blades and knives – found in Comb Ware burials are in pristine condition and show no signs of use, indicating the prestige value of these items (Vuorinen 1982, 67–68). The amber found in the Finnish Neolithic graves is usually worked as an adornment, and is often accompanied by ring-shaped artifacts made of slate (Edgren 1984, 49).

Judging from the placement of the amber items in better preserved graves (e.g. Zagorska 2001; Piezonka et al. 2013, 62), the artifacts were probably used as individual pendants, or as dress adornments which sometimes covered the whole body of the deceased. This observation is, of course, important for the Finnish material, since it helps to locate the deceased in the grave. Amber ornaments have also sometimes been found in the eye sockets of the deceased, while the head region was intensively strewn with ochre, and in some cases plastered with a layer of clay (Zagorska 2001, 112). This tradition can be seen in several Comb Ware graves from the Baltic area (Edgren 2006). It resembles a death mask, and has been interpreted as part of the new practices adopted with the Neolithic world (e.g. Edgren 2006, 333; Nilsson Stutz 2010a, 140).

The practice of using amber, flint, and slate in an ochre grave underlines the special significance of these materials to the Middle Neolithic funerary rite. Even though the ritual meaning of these artifacts is hard to discern, the positioning of the adornments in the grave resembles that of the location of the ochre, and can thus be connected with the handling of the deceased. Furthermore, the practice of covering the eyes of the deceased suggests that the ornaments were not just decorations, but also held symbolic value.

Funerary Practice at the Kukkaroski Burial Ground

The Kukkaroski Burial Ground

The Kukkaroski burial ground and settlement site is situated in Lieto municipality in Western Finland. The Kukkaroski site lies nowadays in a rural landscape marked by a quick flowing rapid. During the Middle Neolithic Period, the shoreline at the Kukkaroski site was 34.5 metres above the present sea level, and the landscape differed considerably from the present day. The rapid that marks the landscape today was not formed yet, and the Neolithic settlement of the Comb Ware people was situated around a sheltered cape of a large island. The adjacent burial ground of thirteen burials and four hearths was on a hill slope, nearby the settlement, between 38- and 39-metre elevation contours (Torvinen 1979, 37–38; Torvinen 1980).

The Kukkaroski burial ground was excavated by archaeologist Markku Torvinen during 1975–1976 and 1980. All the excavations were conducted as trial or rescue excavations, and therefore the area has not been excavated in its totality (Torvinen 1978, 2). The interpretation in this article is based on the documentation of the 1970's and 1980's excavations. Since the burial ground with its artifacts has been published, although only in Finnish by Torvinen (1979), for the purposes of this article the material is summarized in Table 1.

Nine ochre graves can be identified from the Kukkaroski burial ground. These graves have been typologically dated to the Typical Comb Ware period (Torvinen 1979, 74–75). A single radiocarbon dating supporting the artifact typology also exists (see Table 1). The most intensive area of the burial ground is at the northern corner of the excavated area, where a cluster of overlapping graves can be noted (see Figure 3). As can be observed from Table 1, the overlapping ochre graves (graves 1 and 1a) were furnished especially richly, while the graves placed slightly further away had less artifacts (graves 2, 3, 5, 6, 7), or even none at all (graves 4 and 8). A tradition of using a dark, sooty soil as a filling and considerably less ochre – if any – can also be observed in four structures (graves 10, 11, 12 and 13). A similar tradition is also known from the Zvejnieki burial ground, where several Middle Neolithic graves were filled with gray or black earth, while ochre and artifacts were used more sparingly (Zagorska 2001, 117–120; Zagorska 2008, 101–102). Since the finds from the Kukkaroski dark-filled graves were found in the filling of the graves – in contrast to the ochre graves – they also differ in the positioning of the finds.

A Corded Ware grave (grave 9) was also found among the ochre graves, indicating the long term use of the site. This burial was furnished with a Corded Ware vessel, and radiocarbon dated to the Middle or Late Neolithic (see Table 1). Interestingly, similarities between graves 10 and 11 and the graves of the Volosovo culture of central part of Russia, contemporary with the Corded Ware culture, have also been seen in the positioning of the long axis of the dark-filled graves perpendicular to the ancient shoreline (Kostyleva and Utkin 2006). Similar grave positioning can be observed, for example, in the Lyalovo-Volosovo burial ground of Saktys IIa (Piezonka et al. 2013). As grave 10 cuts the overlapping ochre graves (see Figure 3), it is plausible that the structure indeed belongs to a later phase of use. No radiocarbon dates, however, exist.

¹ Even though the Kukkaroski site is referred to as Neolithic, the subsistence of the society was based on hunting and fishing. This is because the beginning of the Neolithic period for Finland is marked by the appearance of pottery, not by the adaptation of agriculture (e.g. Edgren 1984, 27–29). However, during the Neolithic Period in Finland, a growing rate of sedentism, the appearance of rock art, and a change in material culture via extensive exchange networks can be seen. This indicates new ways of life and thought that are associated with the Neolithic, even though full scale cultivation was not yet practiced (Herva et al. 2014).

The Kukkarkoski grave structures and artifacts:														
Burial no:	Artifacts:	Human skeletal remains:	C14 uncal BP	Lab no:	2 δ (95,4%) cal. BC	Dated material	Size (L x W cm):	Depth (from top soil):	Orientation:	Amount and position of ochre:	Filling:	Traces of fire:	Natural stones at the burial layer:	Evidence of inner structure:
Burial 1	75 amber pendants in various shapes, a flint blade and a fragmented flint blade						c. 200 x 100 cm (at the depth of 20-30 cm)	c. 50 cm	N-S	heavy ochre especially at western side of the burial layer along with amber pendants, some large blotches of ochre at the eastern side of the pit	ochre stained soil, upper levels possibly destroyed in modern land use		small stones	
Burial 1a	50 amber pendants in various shapes, one of them anthropomorphic, six flint blades, a fragmented flint sculpture, a stone mace, two fragmented slate rings, a slate knife, a grinding stone, a small Comb Ware vessel, 17 flint flakes, two quartz flakes	possible decomposed bone material at the north end of the grave, not collected	4890 \pm 150 BP	Hel-832	4036-3358 cal BC	carbonized wood from the bottom of the grave pit	c. 400 x 200 cm	c. 114 cm	N-S	heavy ochre at the northern end of the grave, medium ochre surrounding the grave feature	ochre stained, one water-polished pebble	blotches of soot in the filling and at the burial layer	small stones	carbonized wood at the floor of the grave
Burial 2	9 amber pendants in various shapes, three slate rings						c. 260 x 120 cm	c. 80 cm	N-S	light ochre feature covering the floor of the grave, ca. 1 m southwest of the grave feature, a small ochre feature containing two flint blades	coarse sand, small stones and sherds of pottery.	blotches of soot in the burial layer	small stones	
Burial 3	4 amber pendants and a flint blade						c. 150 x 200 cm	c. 40 cm	SE-NW	ochre feature covering the floor of the grave, additional blotches of ochre at the western side of the pit	ochre stained, sherds of pottery	blotches of soot in the filling	small stones	
Burial 4	<i>no finds</i>						c. 80 x 50 cm	c. 50 cm	SE-NW	mixed area of ochre, possibly partly destroyed in modern land use	ochre stained			
Burial 5	3 amber pendants, two small stone adzes, three flint flakes, a quartz flake, a stone flake	teeth fragments (<i>Infans II-Juvenils</i>)					c. 160 x 250 cm	c. 60 cm	SE-NW	heavy ochre covering the floor of the grave in two oval shaped features	ochre stained	blotches of soot in the burial layer	small stones	
Burial 6	one amber pendant, three flint blades, six flint flakes						c. 200 x 150 cm	c. 65 cm	N-S	two blotches of ochre at the southern end of the grave floor	ochre stained		small stones	
Burial 7	a flint artifact, a flint blade						c. 200 x 100 cm	c. 40 cm	SE-NW	ochre feature covering the floor of the grave	ochre stained	blotches of soot in the filling, positioned next to a hearth		
Burial 8	<i>no finds</i>						c. 150 x 110 cm	c. 65 cm	SE-NW	mixed area of ochre, possibly destroyed in modern land use	ochre stained	blotches of soot in the filling		
Burial 9	a Corded Ware vessel		4320 \pm 170 BP	Hel-831	3496-2488 cal BC	carbonized wood from the bottom of the grave pit	c. 200 x 120 cm	c. 55 cm	SE-NW	no ochre	gravel, fragments of charcoal	blotches of soot in the filling		dark feature surrounding the walls and the floor of the grave
Burial 10	a fragmented flint blade (from the filling)						c. 180 x 65 cm	c. 40 cm	ENE-WNW	light ochre surrounding the grave feature	dark soil, fragments of charcoal, flint blade placed next to large stones	heavy soot at the burial layer, blotches of soot in the filling	small stones	dark feature of 80 x 5 cm at the depth of ca. 25 cm in connection with large stones
Burial 11	a flint blade (from the filling)						c. 280 x 70 cm	c. 45-60 cm	E-W	light ochre covering the floor of the grave	dark soil, small stones, flint blade positioned at the center of the structure	heavy soot in the filling	small stones	overlapping layers of ochre and dark soil at the floor of the grave
Burial 12	<i>no finds</i>						c. 200 x 70 cm	c. 40 cm	SE-NW	no ochre	dark soil			
Burial 13	three flint flakes, a quartz flake, a stone flake (from the filling)						c. 200 x 60 cm	c. 45 cm	SE-NW	light ochre in the filling of the grave	dark soil, fragments of charcoal	heavy soot at the burial layer, blotches of soot in the filling		

Table 1. Summary of the Kukkarkoski grave structures and find material. Based on Torvinen 1975, 1976, 1978, 1979 and 1980. C14 dates were calibrated using OxCal v. 4.2.4 Bronk Ramsey (2013) with atmospheric curve IntCal13 (Reimer et al. 2013).

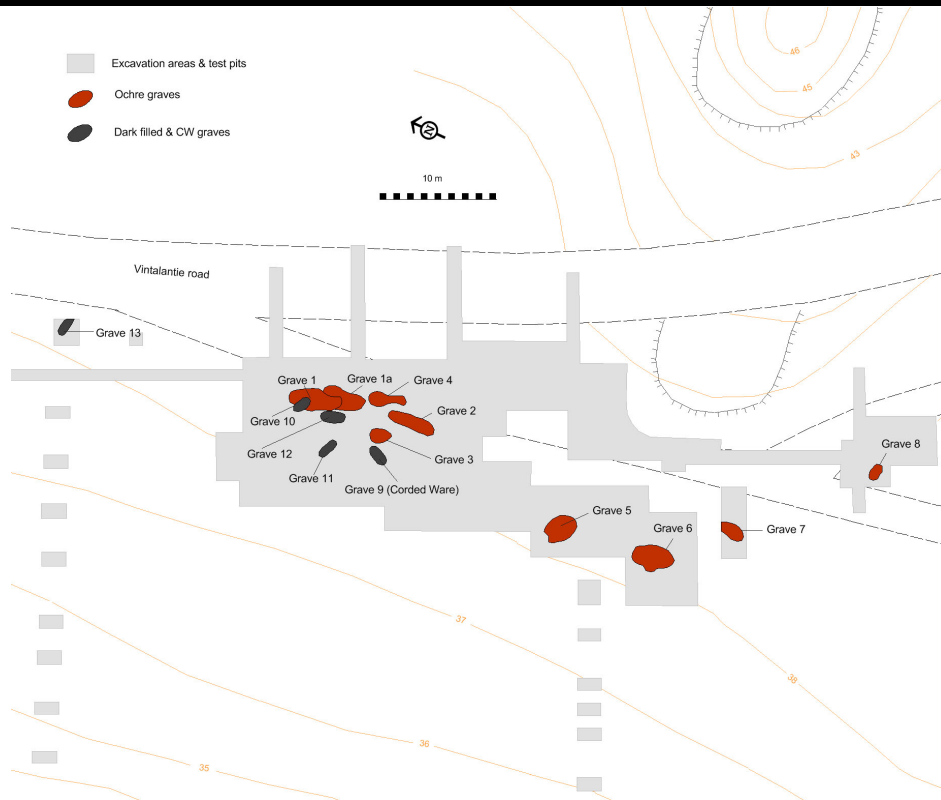


Figure 3. An overview map of the Kukkarokoski graves. The figures refer to height measurements in meters above sea level. Map by Marja Ahola, 2015 (based on Torvinen 1978, 146 and Torvinen 1980, appendix 24).

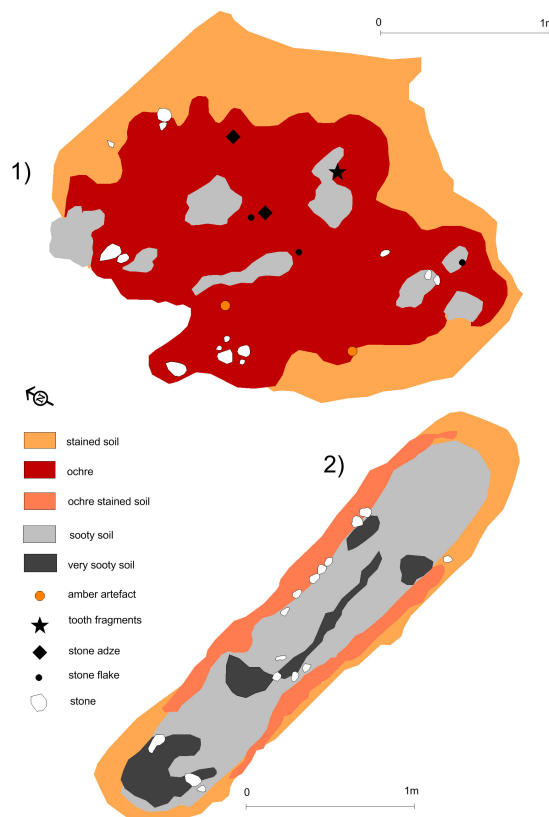


Figure 4. The distribution of ochre, sooty soil and artifacts in graves 5 and 11. 1) Grave 5 at the depth of 40 cm illustrated with find material from layers 3–6 (30–60 cm). Map by Marja Ahola, 2015 (based on map drawn by A.-H. Nieminen, 1976). 2) Grave 11 at the depth of 30 cm. Map by Marja Ahola, 2015 (based on map drawn by M. Ranki, 1975).

Caring for the Deceased

As seen from Table 1, evidence for various funerary practices is present. The use of ochre, present in various amounts in most of the graves, is clearly an important part of the funerary practice. The appearance of a heavy layer of ochre in some of the graves could even indicate an ochre colored wrapping. For example, at the bottom layer of grave 5, a heavy layer of ochre forms two oval features side by side, indicating a collective burial of two wrapped individuals (see Figure 4). Evidence for tight wrappings could also be seen in the narrow shape of the dark-filled graves 11 (see Figure 4), 12, and 13. This idea is strengthened even further by the overlapping layers of red ochre and dark soil documented in grave 11.



Figure 5. Grave 7 and a hearth. Photo by Finland's National Board of Antiquities, 1976.

Along with the use of ochre, traces of fire in blotches of soot and charcoal are documented both in the filling and on the floor of the graves. Even though the hearths of the burial ground have not been radiocarbon dated, their location right next to the ochre graves (see Figure 5) seems to suggest contemporary dating, and the use of fire as part of the funerary practice. Along with soot, pottery sherds perhaps related to funerary feasting were also documented from the filling of some of the graves.

From the Kukarkoski Corded Ware grave, the presence of a dark feature, covering the walls and the bottom of the pit, was documented. This feature has been interpreted as the remains of an animal hide (Torvinen 1978, 40–41), but no further analysis has been carried out. Possible inner structures seem to have also been present in other graves. For example, in grave 10 the remains of a possible covering were noted at a depth of ca. 25 cm (Torvinen 1979, 61), and that of a platform at the bottom of grave 1a (*ibid.*, 40). The small stones present in the graves might have been used to raise parts of the bodies, but in the filling of grave 11 the stones were placed in a linear formation, possibly on top of the body (see Figure 4).

The material culture of the Comb Ware culture is well represented in the Kukarkoski ochre graves, with different combinations of flint, amber, and slate artifacts in nearly all of the burials (see Table 1). Even though plastered skulls cannot be interpreted from the Kukarkoski material, the placing of the artifacts seems to be typical of Comb Ware burials. For example, in grave 2, amber and slate ornaments were found together at the northern end of the grave (see Figure 6), possibly on the chest area of the deceased (Torvinen 1979, 46–47). Torvinen (1979, 47–48) has included two flint blades in the inventory of grave 2, but these blades were actually located in a small ochre feature outside of the burial feature (e.g. Torvinen 1978, appendix 26), and might thus suggest a votive deposit. Such deposits are also known from Zvejnieki burial ground (Zagorska 2001, 114).

Figure 6. Amber pendants and slate jewelry *in situ* in grave 2. Photo by Finland's National Board of Antiquities, 1975.



At the first glance, the Kukkaroski artifact material seems very typical for Comb Ware graves. Some anomalies do, however, exist. For example, the two halves of a single flint blade were collected from two different graves (Torvinen 1979, 62), a curiosity I will return to in the following chapter. Furthermore, in grave 5 two small adzes were found, making this burial stand out from the others. Since axes and adzes are not common in ochre grave inventories (e.g. Lappalainen 2007a, appendix 2), the burial differs from most of the Finnish ochre graves. A similar pattern can be seen at the Zvejnieki burial ground, where only four graves of the total number of over three hundred were furnished with axes or adzes – two of these graves being burials of children and two of women (Zagorskis 2004 [1987], appendix 1). Since the teeth fragments found from the grave 5 belonged to a child or a juvenile (see Table 1), it could be plausible that such artifacts were used only rarely, with the age and the sex of the deceased as a significant factor.

The Special Grave 1a

Standing out from the rest of the burials are the overlapping graves 1 and 1a, with their very rich find material and heavy use of ochre. In particular, grave 1a seems to be exceptional in many ways, and has even been previously interpreted as a shaman's grave (Seger 1982, 30). Even though an exceptional burial does not always equal a shaman burial, grave 1a was dug deeper and larger than any other Kukkaroski structure (see Table 1). It is also located at the bottom of the overlapping graves. Along with amber, flint, and slate artifacts, the burial was furnished with several secular artifacts – such as a stone mace, a grinding stone, and a slate knife – not typical for Comb Ware burials (e.g. Lappalainen 2007a, appendix 2). The Comb Ware vessel from the burial has only four parallels in the Finnish assemblage (e.g. Katiskoski 2003, 101–103), and one parallel in the Zvejnieki burial ground (Zagorskis 2004 [1987], 69), indicating that pottery vessels are a rarity in Comb Ware graves.

The most intriguing artifacts from grave 1a are an anthropomorphic amber pendant (see Figure 7) and a fragmented flint sculpture – both unique in the Finnish ochre graves. Interestingly, both artifacts are connected to the rock art tradition: many flint sculptures bear a resemblance to the iconography of rock art (Zamyatnin 1948; Kashina 2002), and

several anthropomorphic amber pendants have been found in a deposit in front of a Finnish Neolithic rock art site (Lahelma 2008, 133). It thus seems plausible that these anomalous grave finds are related to ritual activities that could have taken place at the rock art sites.

Figure 7. The anthropomorphic amber pendant from grave 1a. Photo by Marja Ahola, 2015.



The size and distribution of the ochre and the find material on the eastern and western sides of the burial feature seem to indicate a collective burial (see Figure 8). If the heaviest layer of ochre was placed on the head and chest area of the deceased, grave 1a could have contained two separate inhumations at the northern end of the grave structure. The cluster of amber and slate pendants at the eastern side of the grave – including the anthropomorphic amber pendant – would thus have covered the eastern inhumation, while the inhumation at the western side of the grave might have

received less artifacts. The flint artifacts of the burial were placed on opposite sides of the grave structure, indicating careful positioning of different types of materials or artifacts. The fragmented flint sculpture was situated in the cluster of flint artifacts at the eastern side of the grave, and can thus be associated with the inhumation that also received the anthropomorphic amber pendant.

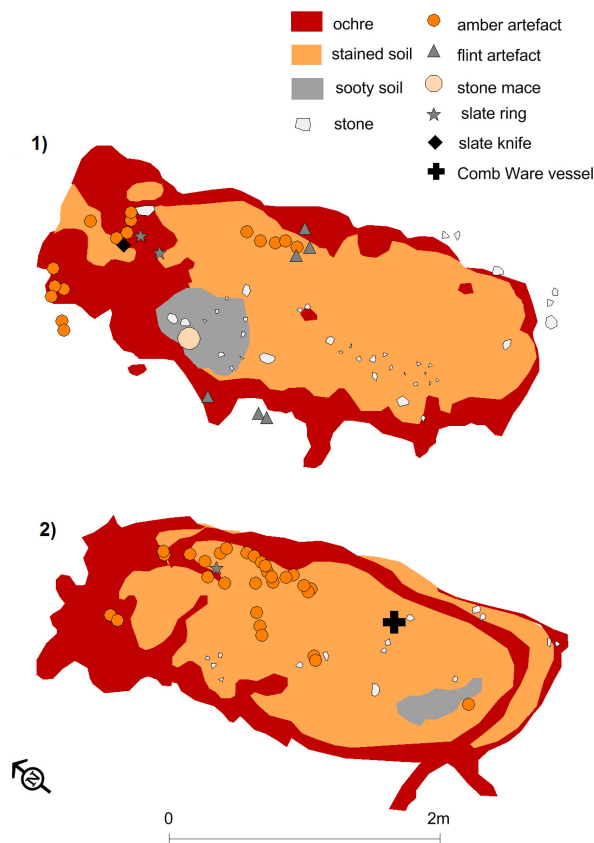


Figure 8. The distribution of ochre and the artifacts in grave 1a. 1) Grave 1a at the depth of 80 cm illustrated with find material from layers 13–15 (70–80 cm). Even though not visible at the depth of 80 cm, at the depth of 70 cm blotches of ochre covered the amber and flint artifacts that seem to fall outside the burial structure (e.g. Torvinen 1975, appendix 16). 2) Grave 1a at the depth of 85 cm illustrated with find material from layers 16–17 (85–90 cm). Maps by Marja Ahola, 2015 (based on maps drawn by M. Ranki, 1975).

At a depth of 90 cm, the heavy layer of ochre is located slightly lower on the east side of the grave, and disappears from the west side (see Figure 2). This could represent yet another inhumation placed at the bottom of the grave. Next to the heavy layer of ochre, organic material, possibly from a platform or some other structure, can be observed. Furthermore, a curious “empty space”, perhaps relating to votive deposits or some other ritual activities, can be observed at the southern end of the grave structure (see Figures 2 and 8). Aside from the round ochre blotches, a few amber discs were also documented from this area. At a depth of 95 cm, the heavy layer of ochre representing the inhumation disappears, and is replaced by four traverse lines of ochre that have been interpreted as the last remains of the inner structure (Torvinen 1979, 40).

Connecting with Past Generations

The Neolithic practice of positioning new burials amongst older graves is clearly present at the Kukarkoski burial ground. Since the burials are earth inhumations, and no signs of grave monuments have been recorded, the new graves might have been made on top of the old ones by accident. Linking the present and the distant past through continuous activities around old monuments is, however, also a central part of prehistoric ritual life (e.g. Bradley 2002). Since most of the overlapping graves of Kukarkoski burial ground are in a cluster above grave 1a, this burial might indeed have been considered special, and new graves were therefore made on top of it on purpose.

Following from the excavation maps and photographs, it can be noted that grave 1a was overlapped by grave 1, which is connected with a very large area of ochre. This area was originally interpreted as the top soil of graves 1 and 1a (Torvinen 1978, 13–14). Grave 1 can, however, be seen as a clear N-S structure at the depth of 20–30 cm (e.g. Torvinen 1975, appendix 6), and grave 1a as a clear structure at the depth of 80 cm (e.g. Torvinen 1975, appendix 13), while the large ochre layer – overlapped by grave 10 – covered a much wider area. As a flint blade² was also found in the ochre (Torvinen 1975, appendix 44), this area could also indicate a partly destroyed ochre grave. A similar phenomenon was also noted with grave 11, which was possibly dug through an earlier ochre grave (Torvinen 1975, 9). The remains of the overlapped grave were, however, not documented.

Graves 1 and 10 also unusually “share” grave goods, as a half of the same flint blade was placed on both burials (Torvinen 1979, 62). Even though the stratigraphy of the graves is not free from ambiguity, this phenomenon strengthens even further the idea of an intentional connection: perhaps half of the blade was placed on the old grave when the new grave was dug, or perhaps the blade was found when grave 10 was made and it was deliberately broken in two in order to make a connection with the old burial.

Since the dark-filled graves overlap ochre graves, are oriented differently, and differ also in the placing of their grave goods, they might belong to a later phase of use. The artifact typology of these burials does not, however, differ from that of the ochre burials, and since grave 10 even shares grave goods with an ochre grave, these graves can only be dated by new AMS-dating. A more straightforward example of a reuse is the Corded Ware grave that clearly belongs to a later cultural tradition, although the vague 1970’s radiocarbon dating (see Table 1) even suggests a recurrent use. It must be noted, however, that the oldest reliable radiocarbon dates from Corded Ware contexts in central Europe date to 3000–2900 cal BC, and thus the presence of Corded Ware culture in Finland before this cannot be considered possible (Mökkönen 2011, 11–12).

² Catalogue number NM 19727:32 (The Archaeological Collections of the National Board of Antiquities, Finland)

Even though Corded Ware funerary practices seem to have been strictly regulated with grave goods that underline Corded Ware identity (Larsson 2009, 60, 354–355), Corded Ware graves are occasionally found at ochre burial grounds in Baltic area (e.g. Ahola in press). Since the Corded Ware people of Neolithic Finland were very likely immigrants (e.g. Neuvonen et al. 2015), the phenomenon could easily be interpreted by issues of power, in which the new people seek to take control over the important places of the originating cultures. The Kukkaroski Corded Ware grave does not, however, cut or overlap any of the ochre graves, and is, on the contrary, positioned among the older graves (see Figure 3). Since it has been proposed that the Corded Ware culture assimilated the local Fenno-Ugric language from the coexisting hunter-gatherers (Sajantila et al. 1995), it is plausible that other cultural phenomena were also exchanged. The location of the grave could thus indicate an assimilated burial practice in which the Corded Ware people wanted to form a connection with the ancestors of the new land by reusing old ochre burial grounds (e.g. Ahola in press). This could have been an act of power and control, but at the same time, the importance of past generations could have been something both cultures shared.

Discussion

The re-interpretation of the Kukkaroski burial structures shows that evidence for funerary practices can be discovered without preserved skeletal material. From the Kukkaroski material, it can be observed that the use of ochre in earth graves was still a core element of Neolithic Comb Ware funerary practice – an embodied tradition spanning thousands of years. Another clearly visible element of Middle Neolithic funerary practice is the characteristic assemblage of amber, flint, and slate artifacts present in nearly all of the Kukkaroski Comb Ware graves. Evidence of wrappings and inner structures can also be seen in the Kukkaroski graves. These elements were possibly used to protect the body and separate the deceased from the floor of the burial pit – a tradition known already from the Mesolithic period. It thus seems that, in addition to incorporating the Neolithic material culture of death, the Kukkaroski Comb Ware burials also continued the ancient Mesolithic core practices.

Even though the material culture of the Comb Ware culture seems to be strictly regulated, the Kukkaroski graves also showed variation in their artifacts. For example, some of the Kukkaroski graves lacked artifacts entirely – a phenomenon that is also known from other Comb Ware burial grounds (e.g. Katiskoski 2003; Luho 1961), which can mean either the use of unpreserved organic materials or a differing individual treatment of the deceased. By comparing the graves to each other, it was possible to note that graves 5 and 1a contained a very unique set of artifacts, which indeed indicate individual treatment of the deceased, perhaps connected with the age and status of the individual. It must be noted, however, that along with the unique artifacts, these burials were also furnished with the characteristic amber, flint, and slate artifacts, underlining the special meaning of these materials.

By interpreting grave 1a further, it became evident that this burial was very special. The grave was dug deep, and furnished with a rich set of artifacts. Among the artifacts were an anthropomorphic amber pendant and a fragmented flint sculpture, which connected the burial to contemporary rock art. Even though no rock art sites are known from the vicinity of the Kukkaroski burial ground (e.g. Lahelma 2008, appendix 3), this grave connects the Comb Ware ochre graves of the Kukkaroski burial ground to the shamanistic cosmology of the rock art – a phenomenon worth further research.

Furthermore, connection with previous burials seems to be an important element in Neolithic funerary practice. At the Kukkaroski burial ground, this connection was formed by making new graves on top of old ones, by sharing grave

goods, and by using the same burial ground for several hundred years. In the case of the Kukarkoski burial ground, it is also noteworthy that most of the overlapping burials are connected spatially with the special grave 1a, indicating that this burial continued to hold some special value even after the primary funerary rite. The Corded Ware grave shows that the Kukarkoski burial ground was a special location in which even other Neolithic communities buried their dead. It thus seems plausible that connection with past generations was an important part of the Neolithic belief system.

Concluding Remarks

In the light of the evidence from the Kukarkoski burial ground, it is evident that the Middle Neolithic ochre graves cannot be referred to as “inhumations in simple pit graves”. Instead, they clearly illustrate the complexity of Neolithic funerary practices and the associated belief system. As the Kukarkoski graves show, when the deceased were given an earth grave, they were ritually cared for, and were given a regulated set of grave goods and coloured with ochre – as had always been done before. It is thus evident that even though the emergence of the Neolithic world can be seen in the material culture of the ochre graves, the Neolithic Comb Ware funerary rites still continued the Mesolithic core practices.

The re-interpretation of the Kukarkoski graves also provides further insights into the Neolithic belief system, as unique grave goods connected the ochre graves to the shamanistic cosmology of contemporary rock art. The long term use of the Kukarkoski burial ground also underlines the importance of the place. At this special location, new burials were made in connection with the old ones, indicating a close connection with past generations. This combination of care and connection seems to be at the core of Neolithic funerary practice.

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Biographical note:

Marja Ahola is working as a doctoral student in the Doctoral programme for History and Cultural Heritage at the University of Helsinki. Her PhD thesis deals with Finnish Stone Age burials and belief systems. Contact: marja.ahola@helsinki.fi

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Abstrakti

Suomen neoliittisten punamultahautojen hautauskäytäntöjen jäljillä: Tapaustutkimus Kukkarkosken kampakeraamiselta kalmistolta

Suomen kivikautisia hautoja kutsutaan usein “yksinkertaisiksi kuoppahautoiksi”. Termi tuo mukanaan ajatuksen yksinkertaisesta hautarituaalista, illusion, jonka artikkelissa esitetty keskineoliittisen Kukkarkosken kalmiston uudelleentulkinta kumoaa. Kuten Kukkarkosken aineisto osoittaa, suomalaisissa punamultahautoissa näkyy jälkiä monimuotoisista kuolemaan liittyvistä käytännöistä, joissa vainajista on huolehdittu lukuisin eri tavoin. Kukkarkosken kalmistolla uusia hautauksia on tehty myös vanhojen hautojen yhteyteen, mikä viittaa läheiseen yhteyteen menneiden sukupolvien kanssa. Nämä piirteet näyttävät olevan kuoppahautausten osalta neoliittisten hautarituaalien keskiössä.

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https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/1/jonsson_aronsson_continuingbonds.pdf**Afterlife Imagery in Sweden: The Role of Continuing Bonds****Annika Jonsson**

Karlstad University

Lars Aronsson

Karlstad University

Abstract

This article investigates how images of the afterlife are conveyed both on- and offline by people in Sweden identifying as mediums, spiritualists, spiritual, agnostics or atheists. It also explores whether the images encountered can be traced back to a relational or non-relational social imaginary. In this particular context, a relational imaginary facilitates relationships between the living and the dead. Such relationships are referred to as continuing bonds in a growing body of work. In contrast, a non-relational imaginary may promote relationships between human and non-human beings or ignore relationships altogether. The ambition is thus twofold – to excavate images of the afterlife and to discuss what separates these images on a deeper level in terms of the concept of the imaginary. The empirical material consists of face-to-face interviews and online observations.

Introduction

This article explores how images of the afterlife are conveyed both on- and offline by Swedish (or Swedish speaking) persons identifying as mediums, spiritualists, spiritual, atheists or agnostics. An image is here understood as a mental picture that is often verbalised as an idea or an argument. The article also establishes the origin of these images, following the arguments made by Abby Day (2011) in her book *Believing in Belonging*. The book is based on a study carried out in northern England in 2003–2004 with roughly 250 participants. When comparing her results with results from similar studies, Day argues that people in countries assumed to be secularised and individualised often hold relationship-centred beliefs. Likewise, people’s “supernatural” experiences tend to be socially forged. She writes (*ibid.*, 196):

By not asking religious questions I was able to draw out beliefs that could only be explained through theories of belonging: atheists who believe in ghosts, for example. Many of my informants often experienced continued belonging with deceased loved ones in what I describe as the sensuous, social supernatural, in contrast to other scholars who would describe such experiences as “religious”.

The tendency among scholars to interpret experiences of the deceased as present in terms of religion, she emphasises, obscures what tends to be at the heart of these experiences, namely love, loss and human capacity to form relationships. However, she recognises that religion sometimes is an important factor and therefore distinguishes between people with a *theocentric* and an *anthropocentric* orientation. While the former attributes meaning to God and involves an experience of a relationship with the divine, the latter focuses on other humans, in particular the deceased loved ones.

Day's (2011) way of describing and analysing the participants' experiences of their deceased rhymes well with current research carried out under the "continuing bond flag". The concept of continuing bond is commonly used to explore how the living form and maintain relationships with the dead by, for instance, holding on to objects and photos (Unruh 1983; Gibson 2008), partake in off- and online remembrance (Woodthorpe 2011; Haverinen 2014), and using spiritualist mediums (Walliss 2001). The term was established by Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman and Steven L. Nickman in 1996, in order to initiate a multidisciplinary debate about the non-pathological relationships people may develop with their deceased. Although Day (2011) does not use this concept, her notion that people may, on the level of belief, be orientated toward other humans (pre as well as post death) pinpoints the core in much of the research on continuing bonds. Likewise, researchers interested in continuing bonds have something to offer Day. They reveal, for instance, how these bonds challenge the taken for granted boundaries between the living and the dead and how the "social being does not necessarily come to an end with death" (Valentine 2008, 175). While Day investigates beliefs in a broader sense and adds the concept of continuing bond to her idea of an anthropocentric orientation, we create a "thicker" analytical tool when investigating images of the afterlife.

As stated above, the purpose of our research is to explore images of the afterlife in Sweden and discern the origin of these images in the context of spirituality-beyond-religion, to use Sara MacKian's (2012) terminology (where atheists and agnostics also may fit in). A majority of the individuals interviewed offline and observed online define themselves as spiritualists, spiritual or something similar. Admittedly, we do not know what specific label every single person observed online would have preferred, but they were all publicly involved in conversations about life after death, ghosts, "the other side", and so on. We also interviewed six individuals defining themselves as either atheist or agnostic, since it is clear that such people also may convey images of the afterlife (Bennett & Bennett 2000; Day 2011; Valentine 2008). In relation to Day's research we ask: When analysing images of the afterlife in a primarily spirituality-beyond-religion context, is it possible to make distinctions between an anthropocentric (continuing bond) orientation and a non-anthropocentric orientation?

Even though the study was conducted in Sweden, we have not set out to make cultural/national comparisons. Instead our goal is to learn what images of the afterlife exist within this given setting and to understand more about the *social/relational* or *other* underpinnings of these images. With that said, the Swedish context is, of course, significant and needs to be sketched out. Ulf Sjödin (2003) claims that belief in the paranormal, such as beliefs in an afterlife, is more accepted today than they were in the '70s. He goes as far as to suggest that (ibid., 203) "the para-normal no longer is para-normal, but rather normal." Research on Swedish youth, indeed, shows that one in five persons believe in reincarnation, but as Sjödin points out, studies taking other afterlife possibilities into account reduce the number claiming to believe in reincarnation by two-thirds. He concludes that paranormal beliefs are probably not very central in young people's lives, although he argues that the decline in traditional, organised religion has led to an increased interest in existential questions overall. All in all, it is a slightly bewildering report, but what we take from this is that it is hard to know even what questions to ask in this area.

As Anders Sjöborg (2013) notes, large, quantitative surveys designed to map out beliefs can be a mixed blessing – they do map out something, but not always what was intended. He describes how he discovered, when conducting interviews as a complement to questionnaires, that students in upper secondary schools in Sweden used the word “atheist” in very different ways. While some said that they did not participate in organised religion, others actively held traditional, secular beliefs. His research, based on 1 850 questionnaires, showed that 30% of the students identified as atheist, 11% as spiritual, 16.7% as believer, 12.3% as seeker and, finally, 10.9% as religious. In a survey carried out in Sweden by Sifo in 2012 with 1 000 respondents, every fifth person claimed to have been in contact with or sensed the presence of a deceased (Sifo 2012). While we have access to a great deal of statistics in this area today, it is difficult to know what the numbers actually tell us. According to Ann af Burén (2015), the majority of Swedes are semi-secular, that is, they inconsistently mix various religious beliefs and atheist notions, and this undoubtedly creates yet another challenge.

Christopher Partridge (2004), historian of religion, suggests that a re-enchantment is taking place in the West, connected to the decline of Judeo-Christian beliefs as well as the pop cultural turn towards ghosts, vampires and fantasy realms. The increasing interest in the supernatural should, he claims, be seen as evidence of a real shift when it comes to mythology and worldviews. In Sweden, Liselotte Frisk and Anders Åkerbäck (2013) demonstrate that alongside the process of secularisation, there is an opposite process of sacralisation taking place. They use the term post-secular to denote a culture where religious, or spiritual, aspects may appear in everyday activities such as yoga or mindfulness. David Voas and Steve Bruce (2007, 57), however, assert that “meditation, yoga, bodywork and aromatherapy may all go mainstream but their spiritual content will be drained off”. They also point out that things that are commonly understood as part of spirituality often belong to pseudo-science, the idea of energy flows being a good example.

Researchers, in short, disagree on what orientations, to use Day’s terminology, are out there and what meanings to ascribe to a number of cultural phenomena that could be, but need not be, connected to belief. Investigating images of the afterlife conveyed by people in different settings (on- and offline) and trying to understand the origin of these images is one way of penetrating this question empirically.

The Social Imaginary

Although orientation (as in an anthropocentric or theocentric orientation) is a central concept in the arguments made by Day (2011), we found it difficult to use it in our analysis because it remains somewhat vague throughout her text and, when we tried to apply it to our material, it generated more questions than answers. While we understand her arguments, we needed a concept that felt familiar and hands-on usable. We chose the concept of the social imaginary.

In *After Method*, sociologist John Law (2004) highlights the role of imagination in the making of reality. He exemplifies with Uluru, or Ayer’s Rock as it is also known. Aboriginal people have a locally grounded, religious explanation as to how the rock came to be, and modern science quite another. Two different realities appear side by side, each generating different sets of certainties and possibilities. Whereas the Euro-American understanding prides itself on being independent, singular and prior, the Aboriginal reality allows for multiple accounts depending on the purpose. As Helen Verran (1998, 242), historian and philosopher of science, points out, Aboriginal Australians possess a “vast repertoire by which the world can be re-imagined, and in being re-imagined be re-made”. Imaginaries can thus work to both stabilise and destabilise, depending on the content and how they are underpinned by ideals and power relations.

In *Modern Social Imaginaries*, philosopher of social science Charles Taylor (2004) describes how a new imaginary stressing equality and human rights eventually came to play a key role in Western modernity. The idea that people, regardless of position in society, should enjoy a certain security started out as a philosophical argument and ended up being embraced by the vast majority. According to Taylor (2004, 2) “the social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather, it is what it enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society.” When we look for imaginaries then, we look for a deeper layer of understanding which surfaces, or is manifested, in multiple and, presumptively, consistent ways. This is what we believe Day (2011) is aiming for when referring to an “orientation”. An imaginary, which is usually conveyed in “images, stories, and legends” (Taylor 2004, 23), is prescriptive – it propels actors in certain directions. Joanna Latimer and Beverly Skeggs (2011, 397) highlight how actors, when propelled, also create their social environment, since an imaginary constitutes “a way of thinking the world into being.” Imaginaries are collective, but the collective in question could be society at large or a particular group in society (Taylor 2004).

When analysing the empirical material, we looked for people’s experiences, ideas, arguments, warnings, advices, wishes, words et cetera that alluded to different imaginaries, specifically a relational (anthropocentric) imaginary, putting continuing bonds and the social first, and what tentatively could be termed a non-relational imaginary, emphasising other aspects. We paid particular attention to stories told about extraordinary experiences and descriptions of spirits/souls, “the other side”, and, obviously, the afterlife.

Method and Material

The empirical material consists of semi-structured interviews and online observations. As Joseph A. Maxwell (2013) has argued, using different methods allows researchers to arrive at more nuanced understandings of phenomena. Above all, it gave us the possibility to compare different materials. The 15 interviewees, aged between 25 and 67, were chosen for different reasons. Five of them work as professional mediums and are of special interest since they are the authorities (when there are any) in the spirituality-beyond-religion (MacKian 2012) area. They can be expected to influence public conversations, thus strengthening or weakening imaginaries, to a higher degree than others. Mediums perform “deathwork”, as Tony Walter (2005, 383) puts it, just like a coroner or a therapist. They offer interpretations of the deceased to the living, but what separates them from other deathworkers is their claim to actually accessing the deceased. The remaining interviewees were chosen through a snowballing sampling process (Thompson 2002). When informed about the research agenda, the primary interviewees were able to identify other appropriate informants who they knew either to be engaged in what we understood as the making of continuing bonds (they did not use the concept) or holding a specific view of the afterlife. Our only initial criterion was that the interviewees should identify, or speak, as spiritualists, spiritual (or something similar), atheists or agnostics.

The interview questions depended on the informant. Mediums were asked what they thought happen to people after physical death. Are the deceased turned into spirits or similar ethereal beings, and what, in that case, do they consist of, a consciousness, some kind of energy et cetera? They were also asked in what ways physical death might alter people, more specifically what is left of them that is recognisable to the living. Do the deceased retain personality and emotionality? Other questions concerned how they, as mediums, perceive spirits, whether spirits can be trapped here on earth, if and why they visit the living, and how space and time work in the “spirit realm/s”. Of the remaining ten interviewees, one was identified as a spiritualist, three as agnostics, an additional two as spiritual (or “spiritually curious”), and four as atheists. These interviewees were primarily asked questions about their experiences of losing loved

ones. We wanted to know what the relationship was like when the person in question was still alive and how the death was treated in the family and/or among friends. When relevant, we asked questions about what happens after death and if it is possible to communicate with the deceased. A majority of the non-believers, that is, atheists and agnostics, conveyed images of the afterlife without being asked any leading questions.

The online observations were carried out on four homepages run by mediums as well as on four bigger sites dedicated to the supernatural, spiritual or similar, where the members shared their experiences and discussed or advised on a number of issues connected to life after death, visits from the other side, reincarnation, and so on. We did not become members of the sites, and thus the accessible content was limited. We only examined conversations of certain length, since these obviously appeared more important to the members than shorter conversations. Some threads were up to three years old and others were still active, and this determined if one observation was enough or if revisits were needed. The conversations chosen typically contained words like “afterlife” or “spirits” in the headline, or phrases like “My grandmother visits me” and “The other side”. The conversations were copied into a document, running into 95 pages. It should be noted that the aim was not to investigate the sites themselves or to make generalisations about the overall content on the sites, but to examine images of the afterlife.

The homepages run by the mediums were treated in much the same way. Certain topics presented by the mediums were chosen for analysis. As a rule, the interviewees, sites, members on the sites, and the homepage owners have been thoroughly anonymised. However, four of the interviewed mediums, all well-known nationally and in some case internationally, preferred to be named. They are Vendela Cederholm, Terry Evans, Jörgen Gustafsson and Anna-Lena Vikström. The names of the other interviewees have been altered.

The issue of what kind of reality online that communication and experiences are part of has been discussed. Norman Denzin (1999, 108) asserts that life online is simply a continuation of life offline, that the “cybernarratives are grounded in everyday lives and biographies of the women and men who write them.” Previous studies demonstrate that religious identities online do not differ that much from religious identities offline, since all religious identities in contemporary society are “performed and mediated” (Lövheim 2013, 52). They are not written in stone, but need revision and continuous work, whether digital or enacted in face-to-face situations. As Heidi Campbell (2013) points out, however, online religious communities tend to function quite differently from offline religious groups. They are more loosely organised and members may display very different levels of commitment. This is of course important to take into account when, for instance, interpreting the labels people use online. We have chosen to name one of our categories “spiritual” for this specific reason – it is vague enough to encompass people with an interest in spiritualism and/or the “supernatural”, but it does not specify any particular level of commitment.

The Afterlife as a Better Place

One of the most prominent ideas conveyed, both off- and online, was that the deceased end up in a better place. From a Christian, highly generalised, perspective this notion evokes the image of heaven, but the idea is present in numerous cosmologies and mythologies. As one of the interviewed mediums summed it up: “*They’re not in pain on the other side and they don’t have problems the way we do, they’re happier*”. On her homepage, another medium asserted that “*they leave their sorrows behind, it’s another existence all together*”. This idea also prevailed on the sites whenever the afterlife was described and discussed. Even though a few members online voiced concern regarding where their dead loved ones had gone, the overarching notion was that life taking place after physical death is better in all respects. Cederholm (medium) believed

that when we “*cross over*” (die), the best in us can be highlighted. We become more loving as we, for example, gain insight into our previous wrongdoings. She has encountered bitterness in the spirit world, but only on a few occasions. Vikström (medium) claimed that all of the spirits that she has been in contact with reported that they were well and Evans (medium) too asserted that the “*light world*” is a higher form of consciousness, which provides the ultimate wellbeing for its residents.

Even though the online observations mostly confirmed the supremacy of this idea, at least when it came to family members, partners, relatives and friends, conversations and comments about hauntings and unwanted visitors were quite common as well. Sara Duppils (2013, 73), active in religious studies, investigates beliefs in “alternative, existential dimensions” on a Swedish site called *The Ghost Web*. She points out that hauntings tend to be attributed primarily to unknown spirits. The interviewed mediums were not in agreement on this topic. According to Evans the place-bound spirits do not want to or cannot go into the light due to unresolved, emotional issues. They thus exist in a kind of in-between world. Another medium suggested that spirits could become confused and simply fail to realise that it is time to move on. Geographer Edward Relph (1976) states that place can be experienced on a scale from insidedness to outsidedness, where the latter extreme means that the place is observed in terms of its exterior properties only, and serves, at best, as a background to activities. In contrast, insidedness means that the individual experiences a natural sense of belonging and truly identifies with a place. When it comes to the place-bound spirits, or ghosts, two versions appear – in one version they are tied to a place in a problematic way and exist in a form of outsidedness, and in the other version they are too much part of a place to let go – the insidedness itself becomes the problem.

David, who identified as an agnostic leaning toward atheism, explained in the interview that he has never sensed the presence of the deceased. Questions posed by the interviewer were open-ended in respect to whether presence could be interpreted as “just a feeling” or as a supernatural experience. Interestingly, David immediately framed the topic as the supernatural. On the issue of sensing presence he said, “*I’ve feared that I would, perhaps I’ve seen too many movies, when people come back... It’s not a good thing*”. David’s perception reflects the idea that a spirit’s place-boundedness signifies that something has gone wrong, but in his case this idea can be traced back primarily to horror movies. When asked about the titles of influential movies, his answer was that “*they’ve all fused into a sort of composite*”.

Partridge (2004), alongside others, argues that popular culture is often overlooked when we are to make sense of people’s experiences and beliefs today. He states that series such as *X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can inspire people to relate to the world in new ways. Taking this point seriously, the idea that an imaginary can be inspired by movies and popular culture (which, in turn, might be built on religious motifs) seems evident. Indeed, notions on where the deceased are but also on where they *should* and *should not* be constitute an important part of the imaginary because it propels individuals in different directions. While some, who believe that their dead loved ones are in a better place, look forward to getting in touch with them, others, like David, only fear contact. An imaginary (inspired by Christianity) favouring the idea that the deceased end up in a heaven-like environment seems to facilitate positive relationships with the deceased simply because the dead are believed to be at peace.

Michael, an atheist sometimes flirting with agnosticism, talked about how he used to spend a lot of time at his grandparents’ place in the countryside when he was younger and how their passing away meant not only losing two significant others, but an entire world. When describing the loss, he drew a parallel to the experience of reading *The Neverending Story* as a boy. He said: “*I really don’t know whether there’s any difference between my grandma and*

Atreyu.¹ *That grandma used to live in this world doesn't seem to matter that much anymore*". While this may seem like a harsh statement belittling the existence of real humans, it is, we suggest, more accurate to understand it as evidence of how deeply moved Michael was by Ende's novel. Further, it means that, just like Atreyu, his grandparents will live forever, encapsulated in a world that is now, in one sense, as unreal as *Fantastica* (where Atreyu lives). Paul Heelas and Benjamin Seel (2003, 233) discuss the significance of literature such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* for the status of imaginary worlds and state that it probably influences people by "providing a taste of re-enchantment".

In line with this, the atheist interviewee Jessica referred to her deceased grandmother as a "Moggie". Moggie is the imaginary friend of Alfie Atkins in the illustrated children's book by Gunilla Bergström.² There are over 20 books in the Alfie series, the first of which was published in 1972. In the books, Moggie is visible as a ghost-like, semi-transparent boy and Alfie treats him as he would any friend. To Jessica, her grandmother is like an imaginary friend – someone who knows her intimately and to whom she can talk without the fear of being misunderstood. Together with her sister Linda, Jessica also referred to the same grandmother as a guardian angel – someone who looks after them from an indistinct above. Walter (forthcoming) analyses how the once-human angel imagery, which appears to have become more common during the 21st century, constitutes a vernacular resource for people when exploring their relationships with their deceased. He suggests that this image may help people to make sense of loss, regardless of their beliefs or lack thereof. Duppils (2013) also notes the tendency by the members on *The Ghost Web* to refer to the deceased as guardian angels.

Although Michael, Jessica and Linda did not imagine their deceased relatives and friends in a better place in a clear-cut way, they still preserved them beyond the matter-of-fact world. It could be argued that their images of the afterlife were empty since they lack religious content, but we better be careful when making such suggestions. As Day (2011), af Burén (2015) and others have shown, a belief is not always easily decipherable in contemporary society – maybe the Moggie-analogy contains more existentially important ingredients than one might think.

Emotions, Memories and Relatability

Another prominent feature of the empirical material was the strong focus on emotions and memories. Cederholm (medium) posed the question "*what is a spirit?*" and answered that it is everything but the physical body. It is feelings, experiences, knowledge, personality, perceptions and thought. A spirit, in other words, retains emotional registers and personality and these traits supposedly do not fade with time. On the same note, a medium wrote on her homepage that "*death does not rob them of their memories [...] Your memories wouldn't vanish just because you moved to another country*". All mediums interviewed claimed that spirits primarily convey feelings. In contact with mediums, the spirit and the message it carries are interpreted through its personality and emotional mode. The task of the medium is to interpret these messages as objectively as possible. Some of the mediums further explained that they use their intuition or receive messages through associations. Several of them also distinguished between being in contact with a spirit and experiencing memories. Memories that can be experienced are usually limited to a specific event (or and person), which is somehow repeated

¹ Atreyu is the one of the main characters in Michael Ende's epic fantasy novel from 1979. In the novel, a boy named Bastian reads about *Fantastica*, a world threatened by something called "The Nothing". At the same time, the empress of *Fantastica* is dying and a young warrior called Atreyu is sent out to find a cure. In the end, Bastian himself is included in the story and travels to *Fantastica*. In the movie from 1984, *Fantastica* was renamed *Fantasia*.

² Alfons Åberg in Swedish.

and picked up by receptive people. In short, once-human spirits are primarily seen as constituted by feelings and memories, or rather, this is what is important about them.

We suggest that a deeper understanding is at play here, making the dead, or those who have “crossed over” ordinary people from the perspective of the living. They are able to feel what we feel; thus they are capable of human relationality. However, in regard to the notion of a better afterlife where spirits let go of pettiness, sadness and other emotions that are commonly conceived of as negative but that also make humans human, this seems to create something of a paradox. The idea that once-human spirits end up in a carefree heaven-like afterlife, which was embraced by mediums and members alike, collides with the image of the very same spirits as emotionally human-like. If you are able to leave your sorrows behind and become an enlightened being, supposedly a whole range of human emotions would cease to be significant. The mediums, then, emphasising the transformation humans go through when they die, ended up in an interesting doubleness.

While the mediums, both on- and offline, agreed that the self is never lost (although it is transformed through insights and spiritual growth), a member on one of the sites initiated a lengthy discussion concerning precisely whether those “on the other side” are imbued with emotions or not. Another member answered: *“Of course you have feelings! You’re the same person, with the same thoughts, memories, feelings and personality. The only thing lacking is the physical body.”* The first, topic-initiating member responded that *“feelings are a chemical process taking place in a biological body”* and from that point the debate got quite heated. Overall, the conversations on the sites were characterised by a friendly, interested and slightly therapeutic tone, and therefore we believe the heated state to be significant – it reveals something about the importance of the topic. It should be noted that the topic-initiating member referred to above was the only one (in our material) to question the emotional content of spirits/souls. It is not strange that the conversation aggravated many of the members. If the deceased are unable to feel or remember, they have lost the traits required to interact in a meaningful way with the living. They then become The Other and are, in a relational sense, truly lost. In terms of continuing bonds, this means that the living would have to rely solely on memories of the deceased, as a deceased person has transformed into a different kind of being. As sociologist Christine Valentine (2008) shows, people maintaining continuing bonds quite often experience these bonds as reciprocal and this is a great comfort. From a continuing bond perspective, it is, for that reason, crucial to keep the deceased as human and relatable as possible.

Some members were seeking forgiveness for the way they had acted towards their dead loved ones (while the person was still alive). In one case a widower described the drawn-out process of his wife’s death and confessed that he could not be there for her all the way, since he was too exhausted. Other members intervened to offer him consolation, as in most cases where members addressed issues of guilt and shame. Presumably the consolation factor is one of the reasons why members choose to write about difficult things on these sites. In all the instances we observed where a member expressed similar regrets, the “rescuers” portrayed the deceased as sympathetic and all-knowing beings who would never hold a grudge against the living. As with the mediums, this creates a bit of a conflict, since it turns the deceased/spirits into compassionate, angelic creatures. A piece of their humanity/relatability is, as it were, sacrificed for the benefit of the living.

Similarly, other members wanted confirmation that it was in fact true love: *“If he loved me, why doesn’t he give me a sign?”* Such questions were posed mainly by members with female nicks (online names), but it is of course impossible to determine the gender of each member based on that. Lack of signals from boyfriends or husbands, occasionally girlfriends, friends or relatives caused quite a lot of distress and no wonder – it could indicate that the bond was broken or indeed had never been as solid as it seemed. Some also worried that the deceased would be jealous of new boyfriends

or girlfriends. The interviewed mediums expressed no concerns regarding issues like these. One even talked about the fact that so many of her customers dwelled on them with distaste. Trying to get spirits to leave “love confirmations”, she said, was the worst thing about working as a medium. Here, the relational imaginary of the members (and medium customers) and the non-relational imaginary used by the mediums end up on a collision course.

All of the deceased/spirits referred to, by mediums and members alike, kept their gender and apparently age. One of the mediums underlined that this is only to be recognisable to the living in communication. Keeping gender and other basic identity markers intact enhances relatability in a society where no such changes are supposed to occur. It further allows, we suggest, emotional content in individuals to be imagined as eternal.

So far it seems clear that in most cases a vast majority of the members on the sites used a relational, continuing bond facilitating imaginary. The idea that souls may form “soul families” and that you thus live all your lives surrounded by the same people was, in line with this, voiced every now and then by the members. The mediums, however, switched between a relational imaginary and a different more holistic imaginary, where the deceased were seen as spirits/souls in their own right. None of the interviewed mediums fully supported the notion of “soul families”, but one of the online mediums advocated this view.

Communication, Space and Proximity

A third noticeable feature of the empirical material was the prevalence of conversations about the possibilities to communicate with and being seen, heard et cetera by the deceased/spirits. One medium was asked on her homepage whether a dead boyfriend felt jealous because there was a new boyfriend in the picture. She answered that “*they’ve got their own lives to live.*” This notion was put forward by mediums both on- and offline, as well as by some members claiming special knowledge in this area. It established a distance between the living and the dead and worked to encourage the living to go on with their lives. A majority of the members on the sites would, in contrast, regularly comfort each other by saying things like “*your grandfather is always with you.*”

Interviewee Paula, who identified as a spiritualist, lost her husband, Leif, to ALS two years ago. She believed that his soul is on a journey and that, in time, it will disappear completely from this realm. While having problems describing the exact journey, certain elements were very clear. After a lived life the soul harvests the knowledge, so to speak, in a disembodied state. It might then be reborn here on earth or go somewhere else; this is unclear. Leif will be reachable for some time after passing over and then he will enter another existence or a domain further away. While certain ideas place the soul/spirit of the deceased permanently close to the living, other notions, then, grant the soul a more independent existence. This affects the communication and relationship as a whole. Paula, due to her spiritualist belief, imagined that the spiritual continuing bond she has with Leif is temporary. In the interview she ended up stressing the importance of the non-spiritual, mundane bond, that is, the bond based on memories and (collective) memorialisation.

As stated above, most of the members believed that the soul of their deceased would stay in place. This idea was mocked by the atheist interviewee Alice, who deemed it utterly egotistic, and it was also problematised by a few of the members on the sites. If the soul remains bound to lives lived here on earth, then physical life takes centre stage in a way that does not fit with the idea of a heaven-like afterlife. Interestingly, only a handful of conversations addressing this issue turned up in our online material. It was, generally speaking, perfectly valid for the members to fixate the deceased to physical life on earth, even though it endangered the idea of a separate and better afterlife. We interpret the lack of conflict

regarding this issue, or the silence rather, as evidence of the supremacy of the relational imaginary. Continuing bonds, spiritual or mundane, depend on the presence of the deceased. Allowing for conflicts regarding this issue would therefore be counterproductive. The silence is thus presumably not a coincidence, but a consequence of the wish to picture the deceased as both close to the living and comfortingly carefree.

The interviewed mediums all adhered to the idea that the souls or spirits (these concepts were used interchangeably), although able to approach the living to offer advice and the like, are preoccupied in other realms. As already touched upon, the mediums perceived themselves as primarily conveying the emotions that the spirits project. But what can be said about the proximity? Gustafsson (medium) stated that everything takes place in his head. A spirit projects images into his brain, which turns him into a catalyst between the spirit world and this world. This notion was not shared by the other interviewed mediums, who described using all senses – vision, hearing, smell, taste and sensation – when communicating with the spirits. The “spirit space” construed by Gustafsson but also, in different respects, by all the interviewed mediums, is intensely relational because *it is* emotions, experiences and atmospheres.

Vikström (medium) suggested that there are an infinite number of dimensions, or spirit worlds, but that distance does not exist, and a third medium underlined that it is not for us to know what the other side looks like. Cederholm (medium) claimed that the past, the present and the future are interwoven and the other mediums took similar stances, saying that time does not exist in the light world, that previous life and future life are lived concurrently and so on. The conception of time that they do acknowledge appears to be what Bodil Jönsson (1999) terms experienced time, that is, time as experiences and not temporal units.

Looking at the mediums’ descriptions, things are either very different on the other side/in other dimensions, or we simply do not know anything about it. Communication with the spirits, however, does not seem to be suffering because of this. As Walter (forthcoming) points out, the contemporary trend (among believers and non-believers alike) to imagine the beloved dead as angels rests on the Christian premise that love concurs all. If the space and time differences described by the mediums were acknowledged in detail, explaining communication between the living and the dead could become rather difficult. As in the case above, we suggest that the lack of disagreement when it comes to communication with once-human spirits is informed by the idea, or feeling perhaps, that love concurs all. Yet again it seems obvious that the mediums are balancing two imaginaries – one relational and one non-relational. On the one hand, they stress the independence of the once-human spirit and, indirectly, the Otherness of once-human spirits. On the other hand, communication with the once-human spirits is possible and even though they dwell in a very different or entirely unknown world, this world is (to the mediums) a world of emotions and memories.

Surprisingly few of the members on the sites discussed space and time in relation to their deceased. A couple of references to string theory in quantum physics were made, the idea that the afterlife will be whatever you believe was voiced, and comments like “*it is not for us to know*” appeared here and there, but overall this was not an interesting topic. Communication with the deceased, on the other hand, was. Mediumship was discussed as well as the possibility to receive messages from the dead in dreams and in other ways. That the dead can take the shape of an animal was a frequent idea. One member described how her mother visited her in the shape of a squirrel every now and then and others would depict special meetings with, above all, butterflies, birds, dogs and cats. On the whole, the ideas voiced online permitted more interaction between the living and the dead than those conveyed by the interviewed mediums.

The afterlife portrayed both on-and offline appeared to be quite lonely. The interviewed mediums did not describe spirits socialising or traveling together, and the only communication they referred to was between human spirits and

living humans. Likewise, the members did not talk about communication with a collective of souls or spirits, but only with specific individuals. They sometimes stated things like “*she’s with grandpa now*”, and seemed to picture dead loved ones reunited with family or kin on the other side, but they did not elaborate on this topic. On the whole, once-human spirits did not seem to communicate with each other.

Day (2012) suggests that people’s way of relating to their deceased is a modern form of ancestor veneration. Ancestor veneration evokes the concept of collectivity. Interestingly, the continuing bonds we have encountered are not first and foremost between the living and the dead as collectives, but between separate individuals. The bonds are evidently chosen most of the time – not forced onto people. It is possible that the absence of collectives in our material poses a challenge to Day’s theory about modern day ancestor veneration, depending on what this concept it taken to include. It has been suggested that, despite detraditionalisation and increased individualism, people’s need of relationships and connectedness is as strong as ever (Smart 2007). What has changed, however, is that people are able to choose their (non-birth family) relationships more freely. This is clearly mirrored in our data. In most cases, it is not feelings of obligation that motivate people to seek communication with their deceased, but love and longing, occasionally guilt and shame.

Conclusion

We wish to stress that it is unclear what the members on the sites would have told us if interviewed instead of merely observed. The overall consensus on the sites indicates that the sites function as “spaces of belonging” (Lundby 2011, 1231), which means spaces where you are supposed to form a community around, for instance, an interest in the supernatural. This is a limitation of the study and a logical next step would be to conduct complementary interviews with a selection of members on the sites.

When it comes to the results, an overarching conclusion is that it is important to pay attention to illogical “gaps” when we are to understand images of the afterlife and the origin of these images. We have presented several such gaps, or apparent incongruencies, in our analysis. Depending on what these involve and their prevalence, we suggest that they either prove the strength of a certain imaginary (like the relational imaginary used by the members) or mark the collision between different imaginaries (like the two imaginaries used by the mediums).

The online material was quite homogeneous insofar as both members and mediums mainly used a relational imaginary facilitating continuing bonds and the presence of the dead. Emotions and experiences took precedence over holistic views and notions that removed the deceased from the earthly realm. Since the members were all believers or “spiritually interested”, the fact that they routinely conveyed images of the afterlife was not unexpected. The fact that they mainly used a relational imaginary is not as easily explained, however, and needs to be further explored. Our guess is that online communities might function as “support groups” to a higher degree than other communities and that the members on the observed sites to a large extent helped each other handling loss.

The people who were interviewed represent, in terms of beliefs, a more mixed group. Ten interviews were conducted with people ranging from spiritualist to atheists. The atheists and agnostics did not talk about souls, spirits or other dimensions, but five out of seven still conveyed images of the afterlife. Sometimes these images were elaborate, as in Michael’s use of *The Neverending Story*, sometimes brief, as in Jessica and Linda referring to their grandmother as an angel. Admittedly the images conveyed by the non-believers differed from those conveyed by mediums (or spiritualists, rather)

and the members on the sites, but ultimately it seems to boil down to the same thing – it allowed them to picture their deceased *somewhere* or at least *as something*. Only Alice (atheist) and David (agnostic) did not convey any images of the afterlife, although David entertained the possibility that the dead might come back if dissatisfied. Just like the members on the sites, then, most of the interviewees were informed by a relational imaginary that allowed them to somehow picture their deceased and so characterise the bond between them.

In contrast, the interviewed mediums (and to some extent the online mediums) combined a relational imaginary with another, more holistic imaginary that granted spirits an independent existence and made them less human-like. They spoke, of course, as professionals and representatives of spiritualism in Sweden, and it is regrettable that we do not have room to analyse this aspect of the interviews here. This probably shaped the conversations we had with them to some extent. The only time when the relational imaginary of the “non-professionals” collided in a noticeable way with the non-relational imaginary of the “professionals”, however, was when people sought “love confirmation” from the spirits. While this was a serious topic to a significant number of the (female) members on the sites, the interviewed mediums (and the online mediums to some degree) appeared indifferent to or even annoyed by the wishes of the living in this area.

Biographical notes:

PhD Annika Jonsson (communicating author) is a senior lecturer at the Department of Social and Psychological Studies, Karlstad University, Sweden. In 2014 she was awarded an international postdoc and has since been a visiting scholar at the Centre for Death and Society (University of Bath) and Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (University of Edinburgh). Her research interests include personal, interactional and cultural dimensions of continuing bonds. Contact: annika.jonsson@kau.se

Lars Aronsson is professor of Human Geography at Karlstad University, Sweden. His research interests over the years have mainly centred on the concepts of place, time and space, culture issues, local and regional planning and development, tourism, and continuing bonds and agents and spaces of afterlife. Contact: lars.aronsson@kau.se

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Abstrakti

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan, millaisia kuoleman kuvastoja itsensä meedioiksi, spiritualisteiksi, agnostikoiksi ja ateisteiksi mieltävät ihmiset online- ja offline-ympäristöissä ilmentävät. Tekstissä tutkitaan myös, ovatko kuvastot jäljitettävissä sellaiseen kuvitteelliseen todellisuuteen, joka perustuu sosiaalisiin suhteisiin. Artikkelissa esitettyjen tulosten mukaan sellainen todellisuus helpottaa suhdetta elävien ja kuolleiden välillä. Tällaisiin suhteisiin viitataan käsitteellä "jatkuvat siteet" (*continuing bonds*) myös laajemmin. Tämän vastakohtana suhteisiin perustumaton kuvitteellinen todellisuus saattaa edistää suhteita ihmisten ja ei-inhimillisten olentojen välillä tai sivuuttaa suhteet täysin. Artikkelin tavoite on näin ollen kaksitahoinen: tarkastella kuolemanjälkeisen elämän kuvastoja ja pohtia kuvitteellisen todellisuuden käsitteen kautta, mikä näitä kuvastoja syvemmillä tasolla erottaa. Artikkelissa käytetty empirinen aineisto koostuu henkilökohtaisista haastatteluista ja online-havainnoinnista.

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The Eclipse of “Natural Immortality”

Lucy Bregman

Temple University

Abstract

North American Protestants up until mid-20th century relied on imagery from nature and home to evoke pictures of the afterlife that would resonate with everyday experience. Protestant funeral sermons were an ideal occasion for these. “Natural immortality” rests on the assumption that people everywhere at all times believed in the immortality of the soul; it makes death a smooth transition and departure, not annihilation. Which images made this belief more real? Because Jesus’ resurrection was merely an historical example of a universal process, it did not dominate even the most orthodox and traditional funeral sermons. Instead, imagery of natural transitions appear again and again: caterpillar into butterfly, birds that migrate, journeys from one place to the next. Even when nature is assisted, the imagery is familiar: a rose grows in a greenhouse, but then is transplanted by order or the master gardener. In addition, the equation of “Heaven our home” with one’s earthly first home appears in these sermons, to make death a homecoming. Natural immortality de-emphasizes surprises, disjunctions and discontinuities between this life and the afterlife, as well as minimizing loss and mutilation.

This imagery suffered challenges from theology for its Platonism, then from the death awareness movement, and from the medicalization of dying during the twentieth century. It has disappeared from Protestant funerals, supplanted by a focus on mourners, and celebrating the life of the deceased.

Introduction

It is sometimes hard to track the quiet disappearance or shrinking of images and ideas. The sudden appearance of new ones is more noticeable, but the fading out of older motifs is a story that happens under the radar. This is the case with the images discussed in this paper, which were once the central themes of most Protestant funeral sermons right up through the 1960s in North America. They did not disappear with a bang, but faded and lost their power. “Like butter scraped over too much bread,” in the words of Bilbo the hobbit in *The Lord of the Rings*, these images grew tired. When the death awareness movement of the 1970s (which publicized the phrase death and dying) burst on the American cultural scene, it offered new, replacement images for death and grieving. The older ones were by then not missed, and certainly nobody protested in the streets or in front of churches to bring them back. The death awareness movement claimed that American society had nothing but denial and silence with which to encounter death. The reality was more

complex, but the imagery we discuss here had lost its prominence and power, gone into eclipse already for public occasions of death rituals.

The material for this study comes from funeral sermons, preached by Protestants in the United States from the beginning of the twentieth century until the present. Not just any sermons; these sermons were considered worthy to be anthologized and published, selected as samples in pastors' manuals such as *Cyclopedia of Funeral Sermons and Sketches*. (Hallock 1926; also Blackwood 1942; Christensen 1967; Daniels 1937; Ketcham 1899; Mansell 1998 and Richmond 1990) While not all Protestants in the United States wrote out sermons in advance (some groups, such as Pentecostals, may have valued spontaneous preaching over written texts) the anthologies represent a wide range of mainline denominations and geographic regions. They include what look, from hindsight, both conservative and liberal voices, although current use of such labels may be anachronistic, as we will see. These sermons come from Christian funerals presided over by pastors, who saw themselves as legitimate providers of the meanings of death and afterlife to their congregations and often to the wider civic community. They saw themselves as the center of Christian American culture, on hand to awaken thoughts of death when something needed to be said. This is especially true of anthologies and manuals from the first half of the twentieth century, the era in which natural immortality imagery reigned uncontested in Christian imagination. So while we cannot claim that in all ways they express Americans' meanings of death, they were given center stage when other voices – especially Roman Catholics and ethnic minorities – were not. Whatever changes occurred, Protestants continue to anthologize funeral sermons and write pastors' manuals, genres that remain helpful for clergy although the contents have shifted (earlier collections included sections of suitable poems to be read at the funeral, for instance).

Natural Immortality Imagery

The images we speak of here are those which depend upon natural immortality, the belief that the soul moves without trauma out of this life and into another realm in the same manner as other natural transitions easily observed and understood. Advocates of natural immortality assumed that always and everywhere human beings had accepted the soul/body duality, and the idea of death as hopeful transition rather than complete annihilation. This belief implied that images drawn from the natural world – birds migrate, caterpillars become butterflies, plants grow – were entirely fitting, and capture exactly the sense that an afterlife is really another stage of the human life-cycle. Or, to put this another way, there is nothing absolutely supernatural in the transition from this life to another; it is an expected, regular event analogous to growth of plants from seeds, and the return of birds every spring. Even images that seem to imply disruption – the transplanting of vegetation – are smooth, expected and domesticated within this ideal of natural immortality. These images and their fading out from Protestant preaching are the topic of this paper.

Let us take one clear example. One popular poem, “The Rose Still Grows beyond the Wall” expresses this exactly.

A rose grew on the shady side of a wall.
 As it grew and blossomed fair and tall,
 Slowly rising to loftier height
 Through which there shone a beam of light.
 And it followed the light through the crevice length,
 And unfolded itself on the other side.
 Shall claim of death cause us to grieve,
 And make our courage faint or fall;
 Nay, let faith and hope receive,
 The rose still grows beyond the wall. (Hallock 1926, 213)

Although this appears not only in a collection of materials suitable for funeral sermons, but also in an anthology of *America's 100 Favorite Poems*, we focus upon its use to support a funeral message here. It and many similar poems were recited by the preacher within the funeral sermon, and expressed his overall message of hope. This was the doctrinal content on a huge number of funeral sermons up through the 1950s. Heaven, very real, was also very imaginable; the realm "beyond the wall" was enough like this world so that natural images and familiar situations could easily be used to depict it.

Heaven's Nearness
 It seemeth such a little way to me,
 Across to that strange country, the Beyond.
 And yet not strange, for it has grown to be
 The home of those of whom I am so fond.
 They make it seem familiar and more dear,
 As journeying friends bring distant countries near. (Hallock 1926, 182)

Images of natural immortality accomplish this basic task to make the Beyond, the Other, seem close and familiar, and to turn death into a next stage of natural growth. So, too, as in these two poems, spatial and place analogies are entirely appropriate; no preacher had any qualms about them. While a phrase such as "the Beyond" might sound otherworldly, natural immortality domesticated this otherness. Heaven was near, familiar, and could be imagined using the most familiar images of all: as one's first home, and as a natural rather than alien place.

Now this belief in natural immortality fit entirely within the underlying purpose of funeral sermons for Protestant Americans up until recent decades. This purpose goes back as far as anyone can trace within Christianity. The funeral was the occasion for the preacher to remind his congregation of their ultimate destiny and destination. "Last week he was in his office; today we bury him. Are you living under the power of the world to come?" (Ketcham 1899, 18) In short, the funeral-goers were the future dead. (See Bregman 2012, 17ff.) Their situation as current mourners was trivial and temporary by comparison. This is probably the most basic difference between these messages from the relatively recent past, and those heard today.

The domestication of the Beyond was not entirely one-sided. To balance the small-scale coziness of home as an image for Heaven, there were equally-natural motifs of travel and voyages. The most frequently-recited funeral poem was "Crossing the Bar," by Alfred Lord Tennyson. If you went to enough funerals prior to 1950, you could have memorized this poem, just from hearing it recited within sermons. In the poem, the voyage from the harbor's protection into the open ocean ("crossing the bar") evokes and retains a sense of mystery and adventure which many of the natural immortality images suppress.

Sunset and evening star
 And one clear call for me!
 And may there be no moaning at the bar
 When I put out to sea.

Twilight and evening bells
 And after that the dark!
 And may there be no sadness of farewell
 When I embark.

For though from out our bourne of time and Place
 The flood may bear me far,
 I hope to see my Pilot face to face,
 When I have crost the bar. (Wallis 1953, 27)

Note, by the way, that this poem shares with the (far inferior) growing rose poem, the injunction not to mourn. Natural immortality makes grieving a short-sighted and inferior response to death, an attitude by now banned from most funeral sermons, and incomprehensible to those of us raised on post-death awareness movement ideals. This same theme appears in the brief poetic allegory which returns us to plants and domestic settings:

Gathered Lillies
 And he asked, Who gathered this
 Flower? And the gardener answered,
 "The Master!" and his fellow
 Servant held his peace. (Hallock 1926, 64)

Gardening may not be strictly "natural," but it was a suitable site for expected growth, transplantations and harvests, and therefore unsuitable to convey deep grief and loss.

Natural Immortality and Christian Belief

Natural immortality according to these sermons, was a universal belief, shared by humans everywhere. It was not a product of distinctive Western philosophies, nor of Biblical revelation, and no cultural variations were acknowledged. Every preacher assumed the Bible taught natural immortality – but as a reflection of the common consensus of humankind, not as a special doctrine shown only to the people of Israel and to Christians. While Protestants disagreed over many doctrinal issues, on this belief they did not. Given this assumption, the resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes a special case of an already-present expectation, for Jesus is the historical example who confirms the universal truth. There was thus no need to focus funeral preaching centrally on Jesus' resurrection, and by later theological standards these early twentieth-century sermons are woefully un-Christocentric. What Christians needed to know about death and afterlife was actually given already, not only in the Hebrew Scriptures but indeed everywhere that birds and bugs demonstrated how natural immortality was the universal law.

Does the Bible actually support natural immortality? While today one might wonder at the lack of Biblical deathbed scenes explicitly illustrating such an idea (people in the Bible die and "slept with their fathers," or die like Stephen with a miraculous vision of Christ in Heaven), this absence did not trouble preachers in the least. It was instead absolutely conventional to read all Scripture references to the restoration of Jerusalem as references to Heaven, where everyone is alive and happy and children play in the streets. (Bregman 2012, 31ff.) This added to the sense of Heaven as a yearned-for homeland. Yet one may also look back on this imagery and say that the profusion of Victorian-era poems supplied what the Bible itself did not when it came to specific natural immortality imagery.

Within this framework of belief, Jesus, as the man whose true home was Heaven, his Father's house, was important in support of natural immortality, not as a resurrected initiator of it. Jesus as "homesick" was depicted as a role model in some sermons. (Shepfer 1937, 42) Most of all, his teaching that "In my Father's house there are many mansions" (John 14:1-2, King James Version) was and still remains one of the most popular funeral texts. Not only was Heaven Jesus' home, it was ours as well. Under the sway of natural immortality, this conflation of Home and home overcame the strangeness of the open ocean in "Crossing the Bar." It allowed for a vivid sense of Heaven's nearness such as in this example, from the sermon preached at the funeral of the pastor's brother:

Brother, farewell! We have lived many years together in our earthly father's house. Here are the rooms where the loved ones used to gather. I see the trees under whose shade we sat... Today thou art in thy Father's house above. I am still on earth. Someday I will meet thee there. (Schuh 1925, 185)

Note that this funeral must have been held at the dead man's own family home – no longer at all likely in the USA – and this would add immensely to the sense of familiarity and continuity. We can clearly picture that the dead brother's new environment will be one of trees and rooms and familiar faces, only marginally different from what the surviving brother can see out the window. So support for natural immortality came through countless anecdotes that focus on Heaven as home, vivid depictions of the first home in this world, especially featuring pious mothers. Some appeal to a sense of nostalgia for simple rural lives, although balanced by the real memories of hardships.

It is true that all these images come from funerals, where the sermons, hymns and appropriate poetry (older Protestant funerals always included poems, recited by the preacher as part of the sermon) emphasized natural immortality and the non-traumatic, non-disruptive transition to move toward that other place. Those who died violently or unnaturally (for example, in mine disasters) were funeralized using this imagery of natural immortality, for the doctrinal principles of Christianity outweighed the individual biographical situations.

As a contrast, some persons who look back on the old days with intense ambivalence recall a more violent and troubling portrayal of the afterlife. For example, philosopher John Casey gravitates to the old-fashioned Irish Hellfire sermon he remembers delivered to teen-agers at revivals (Casey 2009, 1–10). These are truly otherworldly, filled with supernatural horrors, and were intended to frighten young men into faith and chastity. He felt even at the time he heard them that these ideas were absurd and unreal, but they were vivid and memorable. Protestants too, in their own revival meetings might have invoked scarier and more dramatic pictures of the world to come. But not at funerals. Even the few examples of funerals for suicides avoided pictures of Hell, although all could agree in public that suicide was a terrible sin. (For example, Schuh 1918, 129) Perhaps some of us share with Casey a fascination with Gustav Doré's famous illustrations for Dante. These enhance the sense of the three transcendent realms as unnatural, dreadful and sublime. I cannot stress enough that natural immortality goes in exactly the opposite direction. It makes the otherworld not strange, but near and dear. To think in Philip Ariès' categories, the popular images from early 20th-century funeral sermons try to evoke the ideal of tamed death (Ariès 1974, 13–14) while what may fascinate today are variants of wild death, focused on mutilation, loss and destruction. But remember that natural immortality was deeply believed in and trusted by Christians. It was not a weird idea to ponder as Casey does its alternative. It was assumed as true, as a basic reality of the human condition.

Natural Immortality Challenged by Theology

Today, in parallel anthologies of funeral sermons and in manuals, natural immortality will not be found at all. There is no trace of it, and funeral sermons cover entirely different themes and have a different underlying purpose. Even by the 1950s, you can tell that natural immortality has faded; the anecdotes are weaker, the images pallid, the confidence that marked sermons from 30 years earlier is more strained. Moreover, the caliber of the poetry deteriorated dramatically, in part because most twentieth-century literature cannot be invoked to support natural immortality. Yet nothing new appears in these collections. It was not until the 1970s, that something radically new was introduced, replacing worn and faded materials with what now seemed contemporary and relevant and real.

We speak here about funeral sermons, what gets said in the most solemn and official situations of public Protestant worship. It is one of the differences between past and present that there is a real split between these public messages, and what to many people is still their favored imagery for an afterlife. In greeting cards and private memorials, natural immortality does survive. I counted 75 hits on the internet for “The Rose Still Grows,” all but one for private memorial sites by friends and families to honor a deceased loved one. (The one exception was posted by the Marin County Rose-Growers Society.) But what gets heard publically at a religious occasion is very different. Moreover, the increasingly popular less religious memorial services, organized by family or held at the funeral home, are even less likely to focus attention on the world to come. These have become celebrations of the life of the deceased, looking back on the past, and addressed to current mourners not to the future dead. Moreover, the entire imagery of caterpillar-into-butterfly, particularly, has become contested as no one could have imagined 100 years ago. Put bluntly, it has become New Age, part of a message that seems to deny death’s reality altogether, and is no longer fully and unsuspectingly Christian. It is not that bugs no longer turn into butterflies – but this natural phenomenon is no longer an automatic source for inspiration regarding Christian understandings of death. What happened, and why would not one of these older sermons be preached today?

Let us avoid using secularization as an answer to this question, as if that alone explained such a quiet but basic change. If Marx, Nietzsche and Freud had all sat in the pews listening to sermons proclaiming natural immortality, they would have silently squirmed and inwardly revolted against a belief they believed to be illusion. But they would not have doubted that natural immortality was what Christianity – and indeed all religion – truly taught. It was a pillar of all faith everywhere, as universal a belief as the preachers insisted. One can imagine silent squirmers present at these sermons, although there is no direct evidence for them in the published texts. While the congregation needs to be reminded of where each may be next week and all will certainly be one day, they do not need to be rationally convinced of natural immortality vs. Enlightenment sceptics.

Indeed, the challenge to natural immortality on religious grounds came from an entirely different quarter. In early twentieth-century Protestant theology, a movement to recapture the prophetic stance of the Reformation, a movement that became known in the U.S. as Neo-Orthodoxy, reinvigorated theology. This movement, associated with the names of theological giants Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, was promulgated in the U.S. by the Niebuhr brothers, Reinhold and Richard, and by Paul Tillich who emigrated to the U.S. during the 1930s. This movement perceived itself as a response to the crisis of European history, World War I and the rise of totalitarian ideologies – in short, to events seemingly far from the placid ordinary individual deaths ritualized by most funerals. With vigor and intellectual depth, Neo-Orthodox thinkers presented Christian faith in opposition against its cultural domestication, responding to large-scale historical issues that challenged Western ideals and assumptions. Neo-Orthodoxy encouraged theologians, church leaders and those they trained as future leaders to focus attention away from personal death, Heaven and the world to come as the earlier generations had understood these. The agenda of Neo-Orthodox theology did not exclude personal death, but focused on eschatology as the ultimate dimension of salvation history. The return of exiles to Jerusalem was one stage in this large-scale history, and not an allegory of individual transition to Heaven. Very quickly in the American seminaries that trained mainline Protestant pastors, this movement became the dominant style of religious thought. Reinhold Niebuhr’s writings may have evoked disagreement over his political agenda, but its central theme of how faith, history and society interrelate took pastors very far from the concerns of natural immortality. Niebuhr and others could write on Christian views of human beings without invoking any of the ideas and images we discussed earlier.

One theme of this movement was a vigorous rejection of Platonism in favor of what thinkers such as Niebuhr called “the Biblical view of man,” or “Biblical anthropology.” For a really eloquent presentation of this kind of argument, the

opening section of Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* is an exemplary source. (Niebuhr 1941, 12–18) Here we do have a direct challenge to natural immortality as we have portrayed it. Newer theologies set up a direct opposition between Greek and Hebraic, platonic philosophy and the doctrine of man which was authentically part of Biblical thought. While platonic thought was dualist, dividing humans into body and soul, the Bible was holist, where human historical embodiment always mattered. God is not the savior of disembodied, timeless entities, but of real peoples embedded in their own conflicts and triumphs over enemies, their own visions of national destiny and transcendent power. Read this way, it is understandable how Biblical passages about the return to Jerusalem simply do not translate into statements about Heaven our home. Even if the belief in the soul's undying transcendent existence had been and still was widespread, it was not necessarily authentically Christian. The easy analogies between growing plants and the life everlasting were rejected, not because of scientific materialism but because Biblical thought did not support them. Here, in this essay, I will not debate the validity or plausibility of this claim. It is still argued over; is the Hebrew Bible really so committed to holism as these thinkers wanted it to be? Is Platonism a disastrous mistake, or the most appropriate philosophical framework for the ancient Church to have used for its message? (For an extended discussion of this question, see Cooper 1989) I can only insist that a generation of pastors trained in these newer theologies were unlikely to recite "The Rose Still Grows" at funerals, even if their congregations would have found its message comforting.

The sharpest and most infamous attack on Platonism and natural immortality came from Biblical scholar Oscar Cullman, in an essay on "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Body?" first published in America in 1956, and then placed in a short edited volume that included rebuttals. Cullman began with a vivid contrast between the peaceful, non-traumatic dying of Socrates, and the horrifying and painful dying of Jesus. Jesus in Gethsemane is anguished and terrified; death is "God's enemy," not a friend nor something to be welcomed. Cullman's contrast might have targeted almost every funeral sermon in the older anthologies; *all* look more like Socrates than Jesus! Jesus is not afraid of death "as a coward is afraid," but because death is genuinely to be feared as a personified cosmic negative and evil power. (Cullman 1965, 14–20) While the figure of Satan makes no appearance in Cullman's essay, we may say that the portrayal of death, particularly its personification as an enemy, takes some satanic qualities and conflates these into death as a power that stands against God. So, Jesus' resurrection is not a completion of a normal universal pattern; it is a giant victory, a once-and-for-all inbreaking of divine power to smash death-as-enemy. Death is now defeated, although not entirely. Cullman compares the post-resurrection situation to D-Day¹; it is not yet V-E Day², the end of the European war, but the decisive battle has been won. (Cullman 1965, 53) The military imagery here, very deliberately relied upon by Cullman and many who followed him, is entirely at odds with the peaceful transitions of natural immortality. It will also be contested by the post-death awareness rejection of death as an evil personified force. Regardless of the accuracy of Cullman's portraits of Socrates vs. Jesus, or of any of his other historical claims about the Biblical view of man, this dramatic account carried the day for enough pastors so that numerous fairly recent sermons depend upon its. Nor has the accusation of Platonism faded out of theological writing as a criticism of popular ideas, ancient or modern, as we will see.

Did Neo-Orthodox theology, and Cullman in particular, really succeed in squelching natural immortality? In shifting Christians' hopes away from immortality and toward resurrection? Surveys show that ordinary persons do not resonate to these nuances, do not separate what theologians want to keep distinct. But funeral sermons introduced the theme of death as enemy and Jesus' resurrection as death's defeat, and became far more Christocentric than in earlier decades.

¹ The starting date of the Battle of Normandy (June 6, 1944).

² Victory in Europe Day.

Indeed, the big story of Christ's death and resurrection is now the theological core proclamation of the Gospel at a Christian funeral, at least in the ideal. (Krieg 1984 states this really well, although he wants some space for the little story of the individual now funeralized). Gone is homesick Jesus, in other words, along with bugs and growing rose bushes. At this level, then, based on anthologies of funeral sermons, there is no doubt that the theological vision of Neo-Orthodoxy succeeded in its challenge to what had come before.

And yet, there are limits to this, and areas where Cullman failed to carry the day. It is much harder to relate D-Day and V-E Day to the quiet peaceful death of an elderly parishioner, for whom death did not appear to be an enemy, than it was to use natural immortality imagery. The latter might still have had power to express such a death's meaning for family and friends of the deceased; but these sentiments just no longer appear at the funeral sermon. Website memorials continue with "The Rose Still Grows beyond the Wall," as if to spite Cullman. Sympathy cards also do not sport military meanings, but rely on flowers and butterflies. Even very Christ-centered sympathy cards in the religious section of American card shops do so. More than 50 years after Cullman, this is probably more than cultural foot-dragging. But our discussion assumes that theology matters – at least for pastors educated at seminaries. Was that the only cause of natural immortality's eclipse?

The Triumph of Medicalized Death

When reading the texts of older funeral sermons by mainline Protestants, one senses already a challenge from cultural changes in the background. While the views of Enlightenment skeptics (our silent squirmers) are never mentioned, other challenges to the dominance of religious perspectives are. The funeral industry begins to come into its own as a profession in the late nineteenth century, and by the first half of the twentieth, there are complaints by pastors about the pagan and ostentatious funerals in vogue. These are decried as pagan because they focus on the body and display, rather than the soul – an ironic criticism in the light of later Neo-Orthodox suspicion of Platonism. In a perceptive analysis by Paul Irion (Irion 1966) he diagnosed the problem not as paganism or secularization, but instead showed how funerals by 50 years ago already served several constituencies. Clergy are no longer fully in charge of their meanings. Families and funeral directors and factions in the wider community all count by mid-twentieth century; each weighs in on what they want from the funeral. In this setting, the religious purpose and message of funerals gets diluted, and the result is what Irion called a "pseudo-religious funeral." (Irion 1966, 86) "Pseudo" means here that vaguer and fuzzier messages and meanings triumph, and no one is entirely satisfied. Manuals for pastors on how to conduct funerals vividly reflect this process of negotiation and accommodation among various interested parties, although by all accounts the professional relations between pastor and funeral director are usually very good. Note that by Irion's day, this process was normal; it did not only apply to quirky or unconventional funerals such as often grab the attention of the media.

Is this sociological process enough to account for the eclipse of natural immortality imagery in funerals? Are there not still other forces at work? If we say secularization, and mean by this that people have ceased to believe in Heaven, or any afterlife, the answer for Americans at least, is no. Recent surveys show that 80% of Americans say yes on this matter, up from 75% a few decades ago. The exact content of the afterlife believed in may be more variable, but the assent to this is definitely still very high.

But the same loss of complete dominance over funerals by clergy has its parallel in a much more dramatic and complete loss of control over the process of dying itself. This is the rise to power, early in the last century, of what we may call medicalized dying. To illustrate, Cullman's military imagery of death as defeated enemy may not show up in

sympathy cards, but how are the deaths of important persons in America announced in public? “X lost his battle with cancer today,” is now the normal American wording, with the medical cause so prominent that any idea of transition beyond the hospital is suppressed. The disease must be named, and death is above all a medical fact expressed via military imagery. Not only do a large majority of deaths happen in hospitals and nursing homes, but the medicalization of dying and death has permeated everywhere in our thinking. (For a recent indictment of this medicalization, noticed by every advocate of the death awareness movement and by theological and philosophical writers, see Verhey 2011, 11–67) While in the early part of the last century, funeral sermons were light on biographical details and never dwelt on the medical causes of the death (some of these were unknown, but all were irrelevant) now funeral and memorial sermons require mention of the circumstances and often the medical diagnosis is an important element. Although there have been valiant attempts to reclaim dying as human experience away from total medicalization, these did not succeed. When we think death and dying, we think hospitals, diagnoses, prognoses and all the difficult biomedical ethics dilemmas that come with them. This is absolutely obvious when teaching American college students; this is their first language for apprehending death’s meaning. Unfortunately, it has in most cases become our only language.

Medicalization permeates everywhere, and this certainly includes basic assumptions about what is natural. For the medical/biological model of the life-span, the cycle of life goes from birth through growth, then decay and death. This makes many deaths premature, and in that sense unnatural, such as when children die of cancer while their parents survive them. Absolutely no one prior to the contemporary era would have thought this way, as infancy and childhood were the times of the highest death rate from the beginning of human history. Shifts in demography, and the medical ideal of a full life-span, have radically impacted all of us. When we hear “There is a time to be born and a time to die,” (Ecclesiastes 3:2) we assume that the latter comes at the end of a long, full life, not just whenever God decides we’ve lived long enough. Older sermons assumed the latter. A long life or a short one, one’s length of days was determined by God’s will, and his will is always just and holy.

Equally relevant to the topic of this essay, within this picture of the natural life-span, there is little or no room for natural immortality. The butterfly emerges from the cocoon, and the rose bush grows – but we today assimilate these into our medical model of this-life transitions. It becomes hard to tack on an extra life-state or transition, completely outside this medical and organic image of full and completed life. The full impact of death’s medicalization on theology and the practice of religion has been hard to measure. It may be that this is the underlying source of Cullman’s and others’ enthusiasm for holism over Platonism.

In the light of this connection, we may speculate that what went on in sermons from the earlier half of the twentieth century, with their abundant use of natural immortality images, is that they resonated with the experiences of persons from yet an earlier generation. These would be the middle-aged and elderly who grew up without the medical model so dominant, and also when deaths of the very young were frequent and normal for families. The transition in demography occurred in North America between 1870 and 1920, roughly. By the 1950s, the persons born into a high infant mortality situation but who had survived to old age, were the ones most likely funeralized. And by the 1950s, about 80% of Americans died in hospitals, where the medical framework was the only official language available. Funerals may have preserved older images, suitable for those who survived into the newer era of medical triumphs, yet still unfamiliar with the newer, more medically-oriented way to talk and think about death in public. It is important to realize how that medical language and framework was already in place by the 1920s and 1930s. What we now think of as high-tech medicine followed from it, rather than being its cause. By this time, the cultural era later perceived as filled with silence and denial of death, was in full sway. Medical facts were what people could talk about and think about, to the extent that they could say anything public about death. The religious message, while privately believed, was also far

more isolated and disconnected from everything else in the environment for dying. In a short time, it would be replaced by a new message far more in tune with the newer experiences of dying and death.

Impact of the Death Awareness Movement: Death as Current Loss

The death awareness movement's dramatic impact on American imagery for death and dying is very evident in the new model of funerals and funeral sermons, showing up suddenly in the 1970s. (Bregman 1999) Now, *Preaching to Mourners* (the subtitle of one pastor's manual) is what the latter are about; those present are no longer addressed as the future dead. The current grief and loss of the congregation matters, and the message of hope is addressed to them. The dead person, safely in the hands of God, is less needy than those stunned and stricken by loss. For in this model, death is a loss, and images of rupture, shock and abandonment are appropriate to express that loss. (Bregman 1999, 99–131) Within this experience, the word of the Gospel sounds like *A Trumpet in Darkness* (Hughes' 1985 vivid title) a sign of courage and presence to overcome despair. At its best, this led to a theological focus on loss and grieving as categories worthy in themselves, as they had not been earlier. It also meant that a Cullmanian message totally based on the resurrection of Jesus was pastorally misplaced, to put it mildly. Funeral liturgies revised once to reflect Cullman had to be revised again in the light of this focus on grief as religiously significant. Although this collision is interesting in itself, neither side relied upon older imagery of natural immortality.

Indeed, the latter was singularly unhelpful to capture the loss dimension of all transitions. We have already noted poetic injunctions not to mourn, a subtheme of natural immortality. In the brief poem about "Gathered Lillies," taken as signs of natural immortality, the servant who holds his peace knows and accepts this message. A newer post-death-awareness version of such a poem, could one be found at all, would have the first servant wail and grieve that the lilly was no longer in the garden spot where it had grown. There was an empty place for it, a sign of lost beauty. It would not truly compensate for this that the flower gave pleasure to others elsewhere. Such a revised poem is, to put it bluntly, unimaginable; we simply do not find this kind of imagery anywhere in today's anthologies of funeral sermons.

Instead, when spokespersons for death awareness ideas want to stress that death is natural, and therefore we should accept it, they mean death as loss and ending. "There is a time to be born, and a time to die," and this is the framework for natural today. Natural no longer includes immortality, as it would have for all the preachers in the earlier era, and before. Nature now refers to the organic life-cycle, which comes to an expected and appropriate close for all living beings. At a funeral, people gather to celebrate a life, to look backward at the person whose times to be born and to die are over. While natural immortality, with its caterpillars into butterflies and transplanted flowers, saw a next stage as completion, normal and universal, it is difficult to fit in an extra stage or state beyond "a time to die." Nothing in what has come before will have prepared us for it, which was the deepest function of natural immortality imagery.

It is ironic that the most recent critique of these contemporary mourners-centered death rituals comes as a renewed attack on Platonism. Two heavyweights in American funeral theology, Thomas Long and Thomas Lynch, launch a diatribe against bodiless memorials where mourners' etherealized memories take center-stage over the real, material remains of the deceased. They jibe that American religion "majors in spirituality, and minors in materiality" (Long and Lynch 2013, 99) and call for a return of bodies to remind us of our connections to earth and community. They hate the fact that the dead person is often no longer present at his/her own funeral. Long and Lynch want the bodies back, they want the dead once more invited to their own funerals. (Ibid., 53ff.) What they barely mention is the destination of the dead and eventually the living, beyond the grave. What they would never want is reappearance of Heaven our home, or

homesick Jesus, or any of the growth and migration images that once supplied the emotional richness of older funerals. Natural immortality, with its growing roses and nearby Heaven, cannot function as a valid religious resource for Long and Lynch, let alone for death awareness influenced pastors and preachers whose focus on mourners' memories is now the norm for American death rituals. Ironically, the preachers of 100 years ago who loved such messages, would have been shocked at what they would view as the pagan focus of these two contemporary Christian authors. For those who preached natural immortality, it was intrinsic to the authentic Christian message to exalt the soul over the body, and the platonic language was necessary to protect the vision of the Gospel, rather than being an impediment to it.

As the current debates initiated by influential critics reveal, natural immortality is among the forgotten ingredients of the past. It is forgotten by advocates of memorials aimed at mourners, it is forgotten by critics of these. Long and Lynch may be nostalgic on other points, just as the death awareness movement is when it comes to the good old days when they claim death was a natural event. But natural immortality is not a potential resource today. While the dead person may have once been present during the funeral, he or she and the whole congregation heard the otherworldly and very dualistic message that accompanied the dead, the message of an otherworld near to this one in analogies and experience. "Last week he was in his office. Today we bury him. Are you living under the power of the world to come?" What once filled sermons and was held by all to be the central Christian teaching about death, is now truly in eclipse.

Biographical note:

Lucy Bregman received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School. She is now Professor of Religion at Temple University in Philadelphia PA. She is the author of multiple books on death and dying, including *Death in the Midst of Life: Perspectives on Death from Depth Psychology and Christianity* (Baker Book House, 1992), *Beyond Silence and Denial: Death and Dying Reconsidered* (Westminster, 1999) and *Preaching Death: the Transformation of American Funeral Sermons* (Baylor, 2012). She edited *Religion, Death and Dying* (Praeger, 2010) a 3-volume anthology, and *Death and Dying in World Religions* (Kendall Hunt, 2009), an undergraduate textbook. Contact: bregman@temple.edu

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Abstrakti

"Luonnollisen kuolemattomuuden" katoaminen

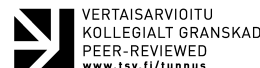
Aina 1900-luvun puoliväliin saakka Pohjois-Amerikan protestantit turvautuivat luonnosta ja kodista ammennettuun kuvastoon luodessaan kuolemanjälkeisestä elämästä kuvia, jotka jokapäiväisessä kokemuksessa saivat aikaan vastakaikua. Protestanttiset hautajaisseremoniat olivat näille ihanteellinen tilaisuus. "Luonnollinen kuolemattomuus" käsityksenä perustuu oletukselle, että ihmiset kaikkialla kaikkina aikoina ovat uskoneet sielun kuolemattomuuteen; käsitys tekee kuolemasta kitkattoman siirtymisen ja lähtemisen, ei tuhoutumista. Millaiset kuvat tekivät tästä uskomuksesta todellisemman? Koska Jeesuksen ylösnousemus oli vain historiallinen esimerkki universaalista prosessista, se ei hallinnut edes kaikkein puhdasoppisimpia ja perinteisimpiä hautajaissaarvoja. Sen sijaan luonnollisen siirtymisen kuvastot ilmenevät niissä yhä uudelleen: toukkana, josta tulee perhonen, muuttolintuina, matkana yhdestä paikasta seuraavaan. Jopa silloin kun luontoa avustetaan, kuvasto on tuttua: ruusu kasvaa kasvihuoneessa, mutta siirretään sitten pääpuutarhurin käskystä. Lisäksi saarvoissa rinnastetaan taivaallinen koti yksilön synnyinkotiin, mikä tekee kuolemasta kotiinpaluun. Luonnollinen kuolemattomuus tekee yllätyksestä, erosta ja tämän ja kuolemanjälkeisen elämän välisestä jatkumattomuudesta vähemmän todennäköisen, ja myös lieventää menetystä.

Tämä kuvaston haastoivat myöhemmin teologian esittämät epäilykset sen platonistisuudesta, kuolematietoisuus-liike ja 1900-luvulla tapahtunut kuoleman lääketieteellistyminen. Kuvasto on kadonnut protestanttisista hautajaisista ja korvautunut keskittymisellä surijoihin ja edesmenneen elämän ylistämiseen.

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https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/1/vare_et_al_fame.pdf**Fame after Death: The Unusual Story of a Finnish Mummy and Difficulties Involving its Study****Tiina Väre**

University of Oulu

Milton Núñez

University of Oulu

Jaakko Niinimäki

Center for Medical Imaging, Physics and Technology Research, University of Oulu and Oulu University hospital

Juho-Antti Junno

University of Oulu, Medical Research Center, University of Oulu and Oulu University hospital

Sirpa Niinimäki

University of Oulu

Rosa Vilkama

University of Oulu

Markku Niskanen

University of Oulu

Abstract

The cool, ventilated milieus beneath the floors of old Finnish churches are responsible for the natural mummification in church graves. One good example of such preservation are the remains of an early 17th-century vicar of Kemi parish, Nikolaus Rungius. He died in 1629 and was put to rest under the old Keminmaa Church in Finnish Lapland. The parish began exhibiting his preserved body in the 18th century after which Vicar Rungius – a locally revered man of cloth in life – gained wide posthumous fame. His dead body became a powerful means to encourage and strengthen people's faith. The mummy has maintained a human form but has lost its right forearm. On top of that the computed tomography scanning conducted in 2011 revealed that the head was not normally attached. It is unclear when it happened or how but a suspicion arose that once the neck was damaged the head could have fallen to the ground and shattered. A serious concern was whether the head of the mummy was really that of Vicar Rungius as a headless vicar would undoubtedly have prompted a substitution with another mummified head in order to maintain a powerful incentive to the parishioners' faith.

Church Burials and Mummification

With the consolidation of Christianity in the 13th to 16th century, the elite in the Swedish Österland and Eastern parts of Norrland (later Finland) gradually adopted a centuries-old Christian habit of burying their dead beneath churches. Initially, the grave sites beneath churches were reserved for the clergy, but fairly soon these church burials became popular also among the other members of the elite and peaked in volume during the 17th and 18th centuries. (Talve 1988; Lempiäinen 1990a; Paavola 1998, 36.)

Church doctrine deems the burial site as irrelevant to the salvation of the soul. However, among the parishioners a church burial was considered more prestigious and consequently was more expensive providing extra income to the parishes. Such burial became a way to show off one's wealth and status. Even underneath the floor the site and the type of the grave were significant, as the order beneath the floor reflected that above it. Below the floor – in some cases merely centimetres from the feet of the parishioners – the deceased were close to their loved ones, and hence, more likely to be remembered. Additionally, a peaceful rest was better guaranteed beneath the churches than in the poorly maintained churchyards of the period. During winter, when the ground was frozen solid, temporary burial in church was naturally also a practical option. (Cajanus 1927, 29–30; Pylkkänen 1954, 40; Rimpiläinen 1971, 333–334; Talve 1988; Havia and Luoto 1989, 569–570; Lempiäinen 1990a; Paavola 1998, 44, 46.)

The practice had raised controversy from the beginning. In Northern Ostrobothnia it was discontinued by the end of the 18th century, and finally prohibited in 1822 after more than a century of increasing opposition by the most eminent authorities from the both state and church. (Pihlman 1988; Nilsson 1989, 156; Lempiäinen 1990a; Paavola 1998, 40–43, 87, 112–115.) Yet, the prohibition was not always obeyed and the last church burials date to nearly a century later (Cajanus 1927, 30; Satokangas 1997).

As a consequence of this practice, some of the deceased ended up in cool, ventilated environments that preserved their soft tissues (Paavola 1998, 148; Núñez, Paavola and García-Guixé 2008). Due to this there still are mummified human remains in several old Finnish churches built prior to the late 18th century. In the old Keminmaa Church in Finnish Lapland (Figure 1) such conditions led to the natural mummification of the remains of a late vicar of Kemi (now Keminmaa), Nikolaus Rungius (ca.1560–1629). These remains are probably the most famous example of natural mummification in Finland, although even in the same church there are also more perfectly preserved remains.



Figure 1. The old stone church of Keminmaa was built in the early 16th century. It is located in the delta of Kemi River in Keminmaa, Finnish Lapland. In summer time the mummified remains are still exhibited to tourists in the church. Photo: Tiina Väre, 2011.

The remains of Vicar Nikolaus Rungius

The parishioners must have become aware of the mummification of Vicar Rungius' remains by 1704, when a new coffin was ordered to replace the old, rotten one (The Church's income and expenditure accounts 1700–1716 [Oct. 9, 1704] IITI:2, General ledger, Archives of Kemi parish, OMA; Itkonen 1976, 20; Kallinen 1990). Vicar Rungius was not particularly well-known priest during his life but his fame spread only after his death as apparently already in the 18th century the parish began to exhibit his preserved body to anyone interested (Huurre 1983; Kallinen 1990; Vahtola 1997).

According to local lore Vicar Rungius had preached “If I speak the truth, my corpse will not decay” (e.g. Fellman 1906, 324). There are very few preserved written records from his time, and no transcripts of his sermons have survived. Therefore, it is unclear if he did indeed say what is generally claimed. Nevertheless, he and his parishioners may have been aware of the mummification processes taking place in the church graves since it was not an uncommon event. At least other priests may have been buried underneath the church before Vicar Rungius (Paavola 1997; Paavola 1998, 77–78). Whenever a new burial was made, the parishioners could catch a glimpse of those buried earlier – especially, as some of the caskets were equipped with opening devices (Paavola 1998, 146, 157, 162). At the time it was even common for vergers or other parish employees to conduct crypt tours – often against a small fee (Paavola 1998, 147; Olsson 1956, 18–19). Perhaps the vicar, too, was expecting such a fate for his remains, and may even have believed that the preservation of flesh in the church graves actually took place through divine intervention. After all, before the rise of modern scientific thought this was often the accepted explanation for many otherwise inexplicable occurrences now known to be natural (e.g. Numbers 2003). However, the possible role of the coldness in the preservation of the remains was suggested already in the 1860s (Calamnius 1868, 201).

Vicar Rungius' dead body defying the rules of nature served as a living proof that encouraged and strengthened the people's faith – much in the same way as the saintly “incorrupts” of the Catholic Church, but in a full Lutheran environment and nearly two centuries into the Reformation. It is likely that the legend about his incorruptibility only came about when the mummified state of his remains became apparent and the remains could be used to attest the veracity of the Church doctrine (Cajanus 1927, 28; Kallinen 1990).

Current State of the Remains

The remains of the Vicar are no longer in pristine condition. In 1892 a bishop's visitation report stated that they had been damaged by both rodents and men, and that the coffin should be equipped with a lock. It appears that since then the parish representatives have had control over the access to the remains, whereas prior to this they could rather effortlessly be reached by anyone. (Minutes of the Bishop's visitations [Sep. 17, 1892], The Collection of the Diocesan Chapter of the Diocese of Oulu Eb: 32, OMA; Itkonen 1976, 14; Oikelmus 1950; Kallinen 1990.)

The mummy is for example missing its right forearm (Figure 2), which is already mentioned in a story published in 1868. Local stories explain what happened in various ways: Sometimes the mummy was vandalised by a lazy sexton or drunken trespassers, whereas in other versions the forearm had been taken as a souvenir by an anonymous American visitor. (Calamnius 1868, 201–201; Castrén 1894, 58; Cajanus 1927, 28; Kallinen 1990.) The latter story agrees with the fact that in the past human remains were highly valued for both magical and medicinal purposes (Heikkinen 1969, 27–34; Tittonen 2008) and for example Egyptian mummies were looted as souvenirs for centuries (Aufderheide 2003, 518,

521). Additionally, the popular pigment still used in the 19th century, appropriately known as “mummy brown”, was manufactured using the grinded body parts of mummified individuals (Woodcock 1996).

The computed tomography (CT) imaging of Vicar Rungius’ remains conducted in the spring 2011 revealed the loss of six cervical vertebrae (C1–C6) (Niinimäki et al. 2011; Väre et al. 2011; Figure 3). This led to suspicions of also the head having become fully detached from the rest of the body at some point. The mummified tissue is relatively frail, and it is possible that both the forearm and the neck have damaged while lifting and moving the mummy to a new coffin, which is something that undoubtedly has taken place several times during the past three centuries (Itkonen 1976, 20; Kallinen 1990).



Figure 2. The mummy of Vicar Rungius no longer has its right forearm. Although several stories explain what happened, the actual cause of the damage ripping off the tissues of the forearm and leaving the proximal end of his right humerus bare is unknown. Photo: Tiina Väre, 2011.



Figure 3. The computed tomography imaging conducted on the remains revealed six cervical vertebrae to be missing (red circle) above the seventh which is indicated by a red arrow. Already the external appearance is peculiar as the head is resting directly above the rib cage. Photo: Tiina Väre, 2011. CT image: Jaakko Niinimäki, 2011.

Considerations of Authenticity

Over the centuries the mummy has functioned as an unofficial tourist attraction and was probably even an important revenue source to both the locals hosting the tourists, and the parish, which collected fees from the visitors eager to get a glimpse of the famous mummy that proved the Bible’s truth. However, there is no absolute certainty about whether these particular remains actually have belonged to Vicar Rungius, although in a document dating to 1728 the burial site of the vicar has been indicated to be the same as where these remains had been found (Cajanus 1927, 28–29; Kallinen 1990).

Regardless, the damages on the head and neck region raised the question of whether the mummy’s present head was really that of the Vicar’s. If indeed the head had become detached and fallen to the ground, it may not have survived undamaged as even living skull bones break and shatter easily on impact. In such case a headless vicar may have prompted the substitution with the head of another mummy in order to maintain what was seen as a strong incentive to

the faith of the parishioners. Centuries of burials beneath the Keminmaa old church would also have produced an abundant supply of potential substitutes of mummified body parts. Between 1698 and 1784 around 100 individuals were buried under it. In 1799 once the new church of the parish was completed the burials under the old church restarted after a short break and probably continued until the turn of the 20th century. (Paavola 1997; Cajanus 1927, 30; Satokangas 1997; Paavola 2009.) This was much in defiance of the general 1822 prohibition, but also the bans of burials in unused churches in 1871 and 1879 (Lempiäinen 1990b; Paavola 1998, 43, 86–87). As the premises inevitably became increasingly full with burials the older remains were removed to make room for the new (Itkonen 1976, 21; Paavola 1998, 46, 168–172). To this day, there are several disarticulated bones left lying around underneath the floors of old churches (Väre et al. 2014).

During the period of church burials, the dead and the living were obviously much closer to each other. As with death itself, the handling of the deceased might not have been such a taboo as it is to most of us now. Even going to visit one's relatives, at least during other burials, may not have been considered of bad taste or macabre (Paavola 1998, 146). According to statements of later parishioners, in some churches the clothes of the deceased in church graves had even corroded due to frequent touching by curious visitors (Ojanlatva 1997). This does not, however, mean that the relationship between the dead and the living would have been straightforward. On the contrary, it was defined by complicated ambivalent attitudes toward the deceased, whose powers were also feared (Koski 2011, 89–90, 94–97, 240–243). We must bear in mind that also Vicar Rungius' mummy was not in its present glass-lid coffin before the 1950s but could be visited at the original burial place under the chancel (Oikelmus 1950; Kallinen 1990), where the lighting must have been very dim (Cajanus 1927, 23). If the substituting of the head would have actually taken place, it may have remained unnoticed by everyone except those involved in the accident or repairing of the remains.

Enhancing or even fabricating mummified remains is not unheard-of. As in the case of Vicar Rungius, mummified human remains – or their counterfeits – have been used to reinforce the establishment many times in the course of history. (Aufderheide 2003, 159–161, 534–536.) Vicar Rungius' case bore an uncomfortable resemblance to the case of the alleged mummy of the Prince of Viana (1421–1461), which served as an important symbol of Catalonian identity. A recent thorough study of these remains revealed that the mummy had eight lumbar vertebrae instead of normal amount of five, and that there was other evidence of manipulation. Moreover, DNA analyses finally confirmed that the mummy comprised of the remains of three different individuals, none of which showed any genetic affinities to the prince's undisputed relatives. (UAB 2008.)

In comparison to the Prince of Viana, the case of Vicar Rungius' remains was less problematic. No additional body parts were recovered and no evidence of manipulation surfaced in the studies although the missing tissues around the neck suggested that the head may be separate. However, as the data obtained from the CT imaging allows recurrent investigations, we are able to further scrutinize the scans layer by layer in order to exhaustively detect every lesion or anomaly. Thus, we have confirmed that although the skin and other tissues are badly torn in the region of the head, neck and back, there appears to be continuous narrow band of soft tissue still connecting the head to the torso (Figure 4). This means that while the damage allowed the cervical vertebrae to fall out, the head never became fully detached but remained conjoined through this strip of soft tissue, which obviously implies that the head is original and belongs together with the rest of the mummy.

Even if the remains have belonged to one single person another question that arises is whether we are, indeed, dealing with Vicar Rungius' mummified remains as there still is no proof of the mummy's authenticity. Although nothing in our studies suggests otherwise, in absence of further proof there is a possibility that the remains assumed to have belonged to the vicar may actually be someone else's.

Figure 4. The red arrow is pointing at the strip of soft tissue connecting the head and torso verifies that the head of the mummy is original. Photo: Jaakko Niinimäki, 2011/2014.



Significance of the “Mummy of Rungius”

It is, after all, debatable whether the significance of Vicar Rungius' remains depends upon their authenticity. It may not be what makes these remains interesting to tourists or meaningful to the local parish people. Rather, their significance lies on what they represent: that is the stories, personal meanings, reinforcement of the local identity and, perhaps above all, the consolidation of faith connected to them throughout the centuries.

In the 18th century, when most legends concerning him presumably arose (Kallinen 1990), his fellow men of cloth started to write about him (Calamnius 1868; Fellman 1906, 324; Cajanus 1927; Itkonen 1976). During the 20th century Vicar Rungius and the faith of his remains was discussed rather widely in the national press. In the 1940s, during the World War II the mummy was even used in war propaganda and especially in the 1970s and 1980s the schism concerning whether it is suitable to publicly exhibit the remains got attention in the press. This also made the local lore connected to the remains available for broader audiences. (Borg 1944; Maunula 1974; Knihtilä 1982; Huurre 1983; Kallinen 1990.)

To this day the mummy still continues to be an important attraction to tourists passing by or heading to the Kemi area in the summer time. Today his visitors are not charged. Yet still in the early 1980s an entrance fee was collected and the revenue used to organize the maintenance of the old church and to hire the tourist guides (Knihtilä 1982).

After such a long coexistence with the local people the mummy may be considered as a part of their local identity as well as an important source of tradition. Additionally, to a modern visitor it functions as a reminder of the limitedness of our earthly existence. To others the appeal of the remains seen as a concrete proof of the power of faith over death is undoubtedly deeply religious. Such aspect is further substantiated by the religiously inclined legends explaining the preservation. These religious implications connected to the remains of Vicar Rungius also strongly advocated for the continuation of their exhibition when the ethicalness of this activity was under debate. (Maunula 1974; Knihtilä 1982;

Kallinen 1990) After all, as Cajanus (1927, 28) has maintained, in its own way Vicar Rungius' dead body is still spreading the gospel.

There are several other mummified human remains whose study could further enlighten the past living conditions. However, at the moment their research is hindered by various practical problems. For instance, the fragile mummified tissues combined with rotten coffin materials and the confined spaces under the churches complicate the procedures related to CT studies. Additionally, when the research involves human remains it requires discrete consideration of ethical issues. To begin with, it is always important to adhere to respective demeanour towards the subjects but once the research is dealing with deeply personal aspects of human life such as the bodily functions or the health also the importance of anonymity is highlighted. In a way the unusual history of the remains of Vicar Rungius puts them in a special position when it comes to consideration of the research ethics. The curio-nature of his remains may be even further emphasized if the possibility of their research is denied. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic general guidelines concerning the research ethics and standards have been created to support the study of archaeological human remains (Code of ethics, BABAO). In any case, the information gathered through paleopathological study may be relevant even in terms of developments of modern medical research.

Biographical notes:

Tiina Väre (corresponding author) is a PhD student of archeology at the University of Oulu with a special interest in paleopathology and stable isotope studies. In her current doctoral research she studies the story of Vicar Rungius and his mummified remains and applies novel multidisciplinary research methods. Contact: tiina.vare@student oulu.fi

Milton Núñez is a Professor Emeritus of archeology in the University of Oulu. He is especially interested in the study of past health and nutrition with the aid of paleopathology and stable isotope analyses. Contact: milton.nunez@oulu.fi

Professor Jaakko Niinimäki is a radiologist (MD) with special interest in archeological skeletal materials. Contact: jaakko.niinimaki@ppshp.fi

Doc. Juho-Antti Junno is an adjunct professor and a biological anthropologist with special interest in the anatomy of the spine. Contact: juho-antti.junno@oulu.fi

Sirpa Niinimäki is a post-doctoral researcher in archaeology at the University of Oulu. She is specialized in osteological research performed both on actual bones as well as bones and soft-tissue in digitized format. Her special interests include the reconstruction of physical activity. Contact: sirpa.niinimaki@oulu.fi

Rosa Vilkkama is a PhD student at the University of Oulu and specializes in paleopathological research on diet, nutrition and dental health in late medieval and early modern northern Finland. Contact: rosa.vilkkama@oulu.fi

Dos. Markku Niskanen earned his doctoral degree in biological anthropology from the Washington State University. He is currently a senior research fellow and a docent of bioanthropology and osteoarchaeology at the University of Oulu. His primary research interests include human skeletal variation and adaptation. Contact: markku.niskanen@oulu.fi

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Abstrakti

Kuolemanjälkeisestä maineesta: epätavallinen tarina suomalaisesta muumiosta ja sen tutkimiseen liittyvistä ongelmista

Vileä, hyvin tuulettu ympäristö vanhojen suomalaisten kirkkojen lattioiden alla luo olosuhteet luonnolliselle muumioitumiselle kirkkohautoissa. Hyvänä esimerkkinä tällaisesta säilymisestä voidaan pitää 1600-luvun alkupuolella eläneen Kemin seurakunnan kirkkoherran Nikolaus Rungiuksen muumiota. Kirkkoherra kuoli vuonna 1629 ja hänet haudattiin Suomen Lapissa sijaitsevan Keminmaan vanhan kivikirkon alle. Hänen muumioitunut ruumiinsa on seurakunnan toimesta ollut näytteillä 1700-luvulta lähtien, minkä jälkeen kirkkoherra Rungius – jo eläessään paikallisten kunnioittama kirkonmies – saavutti laajalle levinneen kuolemanjälkeisen maineen. Hänen ruumistaan tuli merkittävä keino rohkaista ja lujittaa ihmisten uskoa. Muumio on säilyttänyt ihmismuotonsa, mutta menettänyt oikeanpuoleisen kyynärvartensa. Sen lisäksi vuonna 2011 suoritettu tietokonetomografia paljasti, ettei muumion pää ollut normaalisti kiinni torsossa. On epäselvää, milloin ja miten pää on irronnut, mutta sen irtoaminen herätti epäilyksen, että niskan vahingoittutua pää oli saattanut pudota maahan ja rikkoontua. Olikin pohdittava, onko muumion pää todellakin kirkkoherra Rungiuksen, sillä kirkkoherran päättömyys olisi epäilemättä nopeasti johtanut pään korvaamiseen jollain toisella muumioituneella päällä seurakuntalaisten uskon vaikutusvaltaisen kannustimen säilyttämiseksi.

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https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/1/nunez_remedies_against.pdf**Remedies against Revenance: Two Cases from Old Hailuoto (Karlö), North Ostrobothnia, Finland****Milton Núñez**

University of Oulu

Abstract

Hailuoto is fairly large island in the northern Bothnian Gulf that was settled in the 11th century. A small auxiliary chapel began to operate on the island in the early 15th century and Hailuoto became an independent parish in 1587. Since then Hailuoto has developed its rich own island culture, which includes many tales of apparitions and hauntings. Among them there is a story of the alleged revenance of a man that had hanged himself on the island in the mid-18th century. According to local lore, the deceased could not rest in peace in churchyard consecrated soil and kept wandering about and disturbing people. For this reason his body had to be exhumed and taken by boat and buried in the woods of Hanhinen Island, where a stone setting still marks the grave. Interestingly, the 1761 church registers confirm the burial of the suicided man at that same place. The information about a second unusual burial comes from archaeological research. The excavation of the Hailuoto Church ruins was conducted by Oulu archaeologists during 1985–1987 and produced dozens of late medieval and early modern burials, including a somewhat isolated, coffinless grave that contained the remains of a beheaded adult male. The individual had suffered from severe congenital craniosynostosis (premature cranial suture closure), which had led to considerable head and facial deformation. But even more bizarre was the fact that the skeleton was associated with two wooden stakes: one through his chest and the other right next to his detached cranium. This paper describes and discusses the details surrounding these two unusual burials in the light of archaeological, bioanthropological and ethnohistorical data.

Introduction

Being an archaeologist specialized in Biological Anthropology, my research deals more with afterdeath than with afterlife. It was nevertheless through my work with human remains that I stumbled into the interesting events described here. Hailuoto (ca. 65°N 24.7°E) is a fairly large off-shore island (ca. 200 km²) situated about 20 km west of the city of Oulu, on the North Ostrobothnian coast (Figure 1). Its highest points emerged from the sea early in the 1st millennium AD and, thanks to the region's powerful isostatic uplift (ca. 1 m/century), Hailuoto had grown to a size suitable for farming some 1000 years later, when the first settlers seem to arrive. As the population increased, a local wooden house was turned into an auxiliary chapel of the mainland parish of Salo (Saloinen) in the early 1400s (Mathesius 1843, 140; Pettersson 1972, 8; Paavola 1988, 10–11), and Hailuoto finally received its independent parish status in 1587. Being an island, Hailuoto has since then developed and preserved a rather unique local culture that has caught the interest of researchers (Paulaharju 1914; Paulaharju 1961; Julku and Satokangas 1988; Markkola and Merilä 1998; Merilä 2003).

The local lore contains numerous tales about ghosts and hauntings, including the two unusual burials that will be discussed here.

The Luukas Man

According to Ahti Paulaharju (1961), the so-called “Luukas man” (*Luukkaan mies*) is supposed to have hanged himself some 250 years ago. The legend tells that, due to his witchcraft (*noituutensa vuoksi*), the dead man could not rest in peace in the consecrated ground of the churchyard and was continuously wandering about and disturbing the living – in other words, hauntings by a revenant. For this reason his body had to be exhumed and taken by boat to be buried on Hanhinen Island. His grave is said to be marked by a stone setting known as Äijänhauta (Geezer’s³ Grave) or Lukaan Äijänhauta, at the top of Äijänkangas (Geezer’s Hill), on what used to be Hanhinen Island (Figure 1).

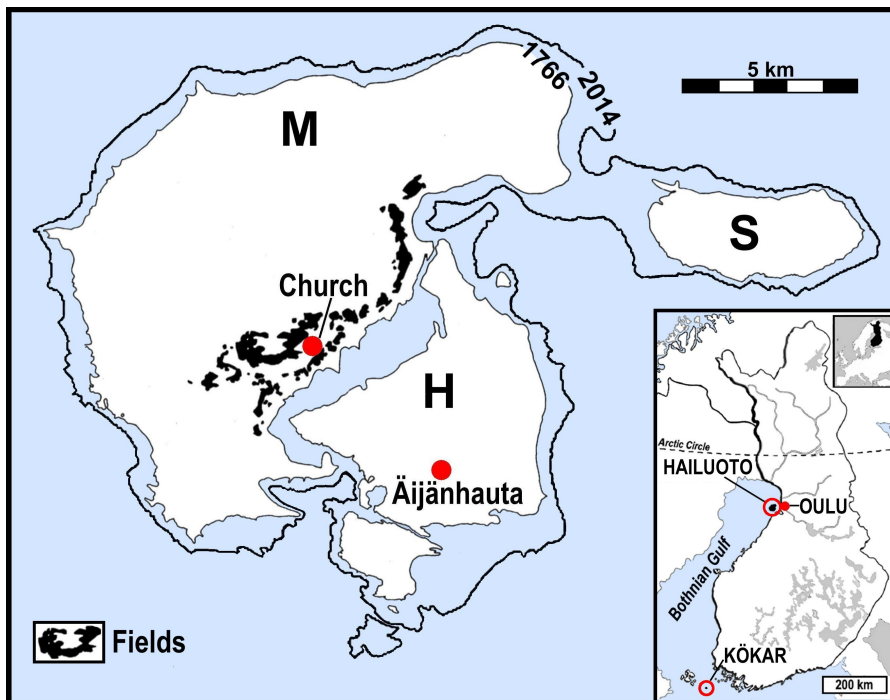


Figure 1. Map of Hailuoto Island with the configuration of its shores in 1766 and today and the location of sites mentioned in the text: Hailuoto church, Äijänhauta, Kökar, and the city of Oulu, which includes the Haukipudas church. It is based on a 1766 map (Hicks 1988, 38) that depicts the existing settlement and cultivation fields and shows that Hailuoto consisted then of three islands: the main island (M) with the settlement and church, uninhabited Hanhinen (H) with Äijänhauta, and Santonen (S).

Interestingly, the official National Land Survey map of Hailuoto shows that at least the places mentioned in the legend, Äijänkangas and Äijänhauta, are real. There is the bog of Hanhisjärvensuo on what once was Hanhinen Island with the Äijänkangas hill and, on its summit, there is the symbol for ancient monuments denoting the location of the Äijänhauta stone setting⁴. That the place has a spooky reputation is attested by a description of Äijänkangas by a local as “*a real scary place, at least at night time with all its restless phenomena*”⁵ (Markkola and Merilä 1998, 40). Even more interesting yet is that some elements of the legend are actually recorded in the church burial records of Hailuoto parish for 1761:

³ It is difficult to find an equivalent for the term *äijä*. In Swedish it would be something like *gubbe*. In English one possibility would be “old man”, but not quite. The closest I could come up with was “geezer” in the American sense.

⁴ The fate of the stone setting is unclear. The archaeologists that were to survey the site in 1976 failed to do it due to bad weather, long distance and the fact that it was less than 500 years based on its position at 5 m a.s.l. (Erä-Esko 1976). Äijänhauta was nevertheless still intact in the 1980s, but Merilä (2003) writes that it now lies under a pile of logs.

⁵ Finnish original: *Kaikin puolin pelottava paikka, ainaskin öiseen aikaan rauhattomine ilmiöineen.*

On 25/1 in this parish took place the deplorable event of farmer Henr. Pramila hanging himself; since it was a suicide, on 10/3 he was buried aside in the woods of Hanhis Hill by executioner Rönblad⁶ (HisKi Project database, Hailuoto, 25th January 1761).

The entry makes no mention about a churchyard burial and subsequent exhumation, but the final burial on Hanhinen Island is there. The question that arises is whether the first part of the legend dates back to 1761, or if it is just an addition acquired during the past 250 years. The 44-day interval between death and burial would seem long enough for burial, exhumation and reburial. On the other hand, according to the Code of 1734, the corpse of suspected suicide victims had to remain unburied until there was an inquiry and a ruling on the person's state of mind (Persson 1998, 124–125; Miettinen 2012, 109–110), which could take some time. If the “self-murderer” was deemed sane it meant a burial aside in the forest, if not a quiet burial at the churchyard fringes (Luef and Miettinen 2012; Miettinen 2012, 11).

It was perhaps during this waiting period – possibly further stretched by frozen soil – that the legend of the hauntings arose. At any rate, the tales about hauntings and burying the suicide victim on a separate island suggest fear and some sort of preventive measure against the potential revenance of someone that had undergone an unnatural death.

Suicide was regarded as a grave condemnable sin in medieval and early-modern Europe, including the Swedish Kingdom of which Finland was then part (MacDonald and Murphy 1990; Minois 1995; Seabourne and Seabourne 2001; Luef and Miettinen 2012). Self-murder was equated with other severe crimes like arson, bestiality, incest, murder, sodomy and witchcraft. According to King Kristoffer's Law from 1442 (*Konung Kristoffers landslag*), the corpse of self-murderers was to be taken to the forest and burnt in a pyre, but there was a clause allowing those that were not mentally sound when committing suicide to be buried at the fringes of the churchyard (Luef and Miettinen 2012, 107; Werner 1998, 34–38; Oravisjärvi 2011; Miettinen 2012, 8). Although King Kristoffer's Law officially remained in force until the 1734 Code was implemented in 1736, the treatment of self-murderers had begun to become more lenient by the end of the 17th century: corpses were seldom burnt and the executioner merely buried them at an isolated place in a bog or forest (Werner 1998; Jarrik 2000; Miettinen 2012). This was the procedure prescribed for mentally sound self-murderers in the new 1734 Code, and evidently the one applied in 1761 to farmer Pramila, the Luukas man.

It is worth mentioning that rulings in favor of insanity were common in unclear cases (Werner 1998, 73; Miettinen 2012). Nevertheless, the legislation aimed to punish self-murderers by effectively severing all their secular and religious links with the community, and it was supposed to function as a powerful deterrent for future suicides. By prohibiting their burial in consecrated ground self-murderers were denied the possibility of salvation, but at the same time people believed that those individuals became restless souls that could return to haunt the living (e.g. Pentikäinen 1969; Achté and Lönnqvist 1982; Persson 1998, 102). Haavio cites an interesting comment about such souls by a North Ostrobothnian man born in 1862: “*Restless souls are those that have killed themselves, who fly in the air until the actual death date that that had been decided by God.*”⁷ (Haavio 1948, 33; see also Nygård 1998, 134)

It is possible that the legislators and judges were aware of the people's fears and adopted certain antirevenance elements like burial in isolated places and corpse burning – sometimes even sentencing stakings (Miettinen 2012, 14–15; Sandén 2014, 33–34). The fact that farmer Pramila's corpse did not undergo an apotropaic burning may have contributed to the haunting stories and eerie atmosphere attributed to the place (Äijänkangas) associated with his grave (Äijänhauta).

⁶ Swedish original: *D 25/1 skedde wed denne församl. den bedröfweliga händelsen at bd. Henr. Pramila strypte sig sielf hwarföre han d. 10/3 såsom en sielfspillning af skarprättaren Rönblad blef afsides i skogen nedgräfwen på Hanhises backa.*

⁷ Finnish original: *Sijattomia sieluja ovat itsensä tappaneet, jotka lentivät ilmassa niin kauan kuin se tulee se oikea kuolinpäivä, minkä Jumala on määrännyt.*

The Individual in Burial 203

Hailuoto's small early 15th-century wooden chapel was in use until 1620, when the construction of a larger wooden parish church around it was completed. This second church building, albeit with additions and modifications, continued to be used until it was destroyed by fire in 1968. In the 1980s Oulu University archaeologists excavated an area of 155 m² within the burnt church ruins (Figure 2). The investigations revealed over 250 burials made there between 1400 and 1756⁸ and produced over 400 coins, 29 from the late medieval period (Paavola 1988; Paavola 1991; Paavola 1998). Of particular interest is burial 203, which lies somewhat aloof and furthest to the east of the medieval chapel. The individual there was probably buried at the edge of the churchyard associated with the first wooden chapel from the 1400s and, consequently, it must predate the construction of the larger parish church building in 1610–1620.

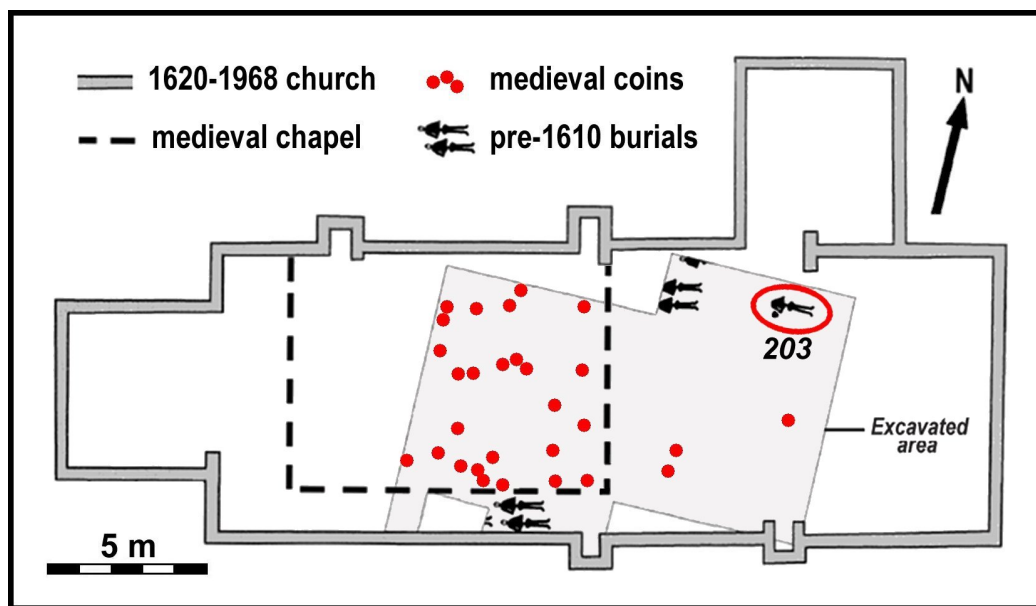


Figure 2. Plan of the 1985–1987 archaeological excavations within the foundations of the burnt Hailuoto parish church with the approximate location of the original medieval chapel based on the distribution of medieval coins and pre-1610 graves. Observe the detached position of burial 203 at what could be the edges of the medieval churchyard. Based on Paavola 1988, 27.

A series of peculiarities were observed in this early coffinless grave. One was that the individual in it had been beheaded and the severed head placed near the right arm. But even more surprising was the presence of two wooden stakes: one through the individual's chest, the other by the skull (Figure 3). The second stake was right next to the skull and its position suggests that it may have been pinning down the head by the hair or, more likely, some kind of now-gone material wrapped around it (Figure 4). The first thing that the combination of a wooden stake through the chest and beheading brought to the minds of the excavators in 1987 was popular vampire fiction – something that may have negatively influenced the subsequent study of the exceptional features in grave 203.

⁸ The practice of burying important members of the parish beneath churches began in the late 16th century and continued until the late 18th century, when it gradually ceased due to health ordinances – in the case of Hailuoto in 1756.

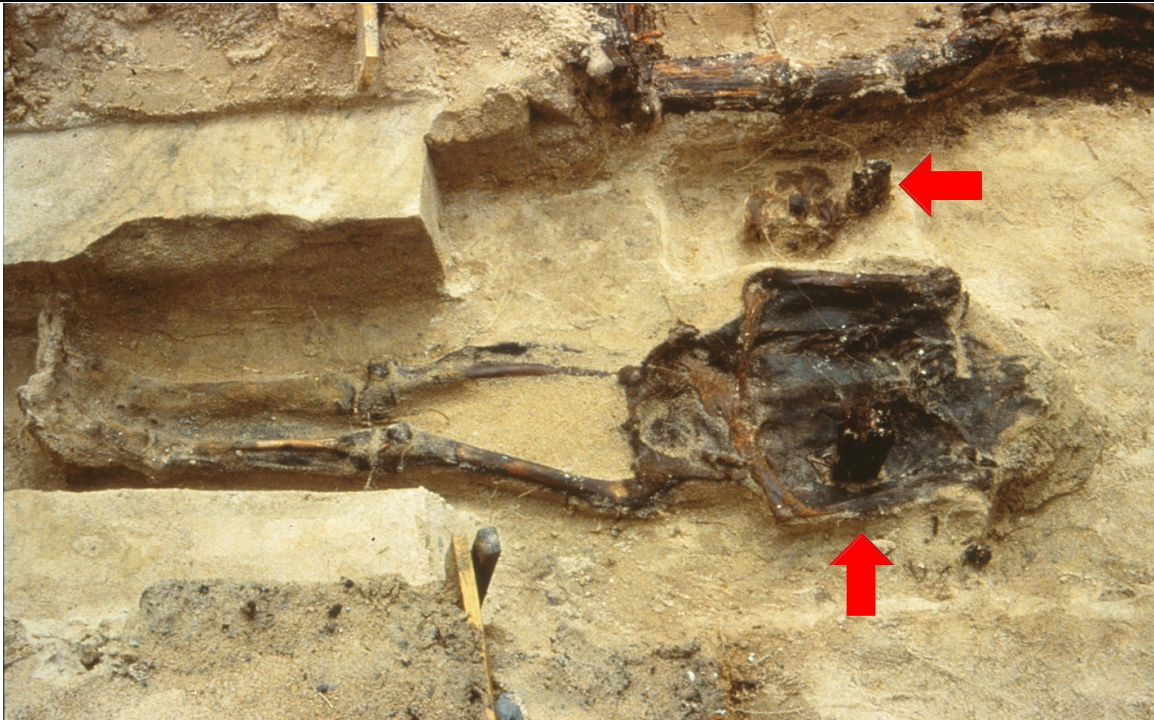


Figure 3. The individual in grave 203 seen from the north. The stakes through the chest and by the skull are shown by arrows. Photo: Laboratory of Archaeology, University of Oulu, 1987.

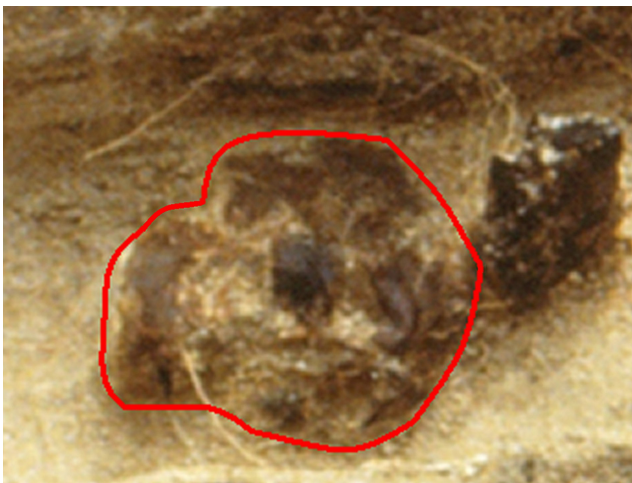


Figure 4. Close up of the partially excavated skull in grave 203 (outlined in red) and the stake right next to it. Photo: Laboratory of Archaeology, University of Oulu, 1987.

A closer look at the skull in grave 203 reveals more unusual details (Figure 5). The individual had suffered from a congenital head malformation due to craniosynostosis – that is the premature closure of cranial sutures. We are dealing with an adult male ca. 168 cm tall and aged between 25 and 40 years. He had a congenital cranial deformity characterized by a conical projection in the bregma region and facial dysplasia, with the upper half of the face as if having been pulled upwards and backwards. All this is consistent with oxycephaly, a rare form of multiple craniosynostosis that involves the premature closure of the coronal and, at least, lambdoid sutures (Aufderheide and Rodríguez-Martín 1998, 54). It is possible that the weird looks imparted by the man's craniofacial deformation may have played a role in his being executed and/or the use of wooden stakes in his burial.

Severe oxycephaly is very rare and usually fatal. Premature suture closure limits the rapidly growing infant brain, which then expands towards the still open anterior fontanel – hence the bulge at bregma (Figures 5–6). Unless treated with surgery, severe oxycephaly generally leads to an early death (Figure 6A–C), but there are nevertheless some cases of survival (Figures 5, 6D). In those individuals that survive to adulthood, however, the disorder tends to interfere with their physical and/or intellectual development. This may have been the case with the man in grave 203, whose erratic behavior in life may have led to distrust or fears that materialized as the unusual procedure observed in his burial.



Figure 5. The excavated cranium from grave 203. Observe the marked conical bulge in the bregma region and the deformed face, with its upper half as if pulled upwards and backwards. Photo: Laboratory of Archaeology, University of Oulu, 1987.

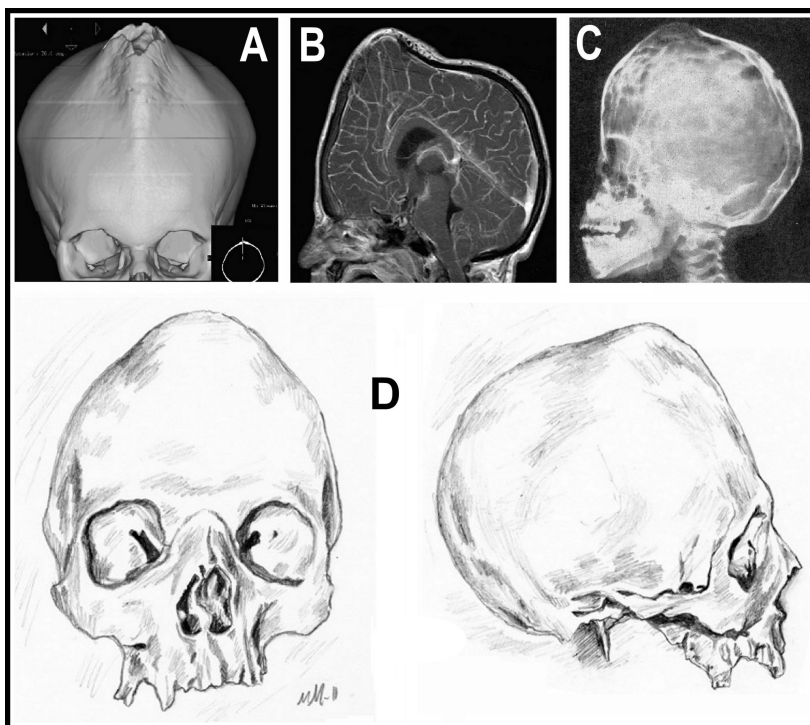


Figure 6. Severe oxycephaly cases: Post-mortem CT (A) and MRI (B) of a Saudi child aged 4 years, showing how the growing brain has expanded into the anterior fontanel and deformed the bones in the bregma region (Jamjoom et al. 2009). Radiography (C) of a Finnish infant aged 1.5 years, showing the “beaten copper” texture typical of the high intracranial pressure caused by the growing brain (Laitinen 1956). Frontal and lateral views (D) of the cranium of an Austrian man that survived the disorder into adulthood (Weber et al. 2008).

Stratigraphically, the stakes clearly form part of the burial. They go through it, and both grave and stakes lie below an undisturbed sandy layer. Moreover the sand separates burial 203 from coffins 12 and 98, which were deposited later beneath the 1620 church floor, most probably after the church had been enlarged by shifting its western wall in 1686 (Paavola 1991; Paavola 1998, 128). Furthermore, the stakes were found precisely through the individual’s chest and right next to his skull (Figures 4–5), as if their function was to pin both body and head to the ground. It is very difficult to see the position of these stakes as merely coincidental.

Despite the strong stratigraphic evidence, until recently the significance of the stakes has been dismissed or ignored (Paavola 1988; Paavola 1991; Paavola 1998; Núñez 2011). There was probably some apprehension about the potential sensationalism, but the main reason was that the conventional radiocarbon date of the chest stake differed from that of the man's left tibia by 230 radiocarbon years⁹:

A sharpened stake had been driven through the dead man's chest, approximately around the heart. There is nevertheless no reason for dramatic interpretations because similar wooden objects were observed nearby and around the excavated area, and because a younger date was obtained from the wooden stake.¹⁰ (Paavola 1988, 19.)

However, the discrepancy in dates can be easily explained by the so-called marine reservoir effect. It consists of an offset between the radiocarbon ages of organisms that derive their carbon from terrestrial environments and those that obtain their carbon, fully or partly, from marine environments. This generally causes marine-derived samples to erroneously yield older dates than contemporaneous terrestrial samples. Scientists have been aware of this phenomenon for some time (e.g. Olsson and Eriksson 1965; Olsson 1980; Stuiver et al. 1986), but the determination of the actual age offset of specific samples has remained problematic due to the many variables involved (e.g. Jull et al. 2013; Lougheed et al. 2013; Neves Fernandes 2013).

One would expect an age offset from the bones of the individual in grave 203. The $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ of his right tibia was -19.6% (Jungner and Sonninen 1996, 55), which suggests a mixed terrestrial-marine diet when compared with the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ values of roughly contemporaneous populations from the region. The mean $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ of 10 individuals from Haukipudas, Oulu, just 25 km east of Hailuoto, was $-21.2 \pm 0.7\%$ (Arosén 2014), which corresponds to the more terrestrial diet typical to the upper class individuals buried beneath the Haukipudas church floor in the 17th and 18th centuries. On the other hand, the mean $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ of $-18.0 \pm 0.4\%$ from 22 individuals buried between 1400 and 1700 in the Kõkar churchyard, points to a diet with an important marine component as one would expect from the Åland archipelago (Núñez et al. 2006, 340). The $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ value of -19.6% falls halfway between those of Haukipudas and Kõkar and agrees well with the idea that the individual from grave 203 had a mixed terrestrial-marine diet. This in turn would lead to dates erroneously older with respect to the contemporaneous, fully terrestrial wooden stake ($\delta^{13}\text{C} = -28.3\%$).

Although it is not possible at this point to estimate the actual age offset of the tibia from grave 203, one can get a rough idea from the radiocarbon date yielded by a fully marine, Bothnian Gulf ringed seal that had died in 1906 and showed an age offset of 355 radiocarbon years (Olsson 1980, 668; Oinonen 2011, 85–86). The problem of the reservoir effect and age offset of the skeleton from Hailuoto grave 203, will be discussed in more detail in a forthcoming paper, but this brief discussion will suffice to show that there are no reasons to believe that the individual and the stakes in grave 203 are not contemporaneous. To echo the words of my good friend and colleague, Dr Gunilla Eriksson from Stockholm University, the offset of 230 radiocarbon years between the stake and the tibia is absolutely reasonable (personal communication).

Having established the likely contemporaneity of the individual and the stakes, we can now turn to the actual date of grave 203 itself. Since the radiocarbon age of the tibia is erroneously too old, we must rely on the date of the stake: 1430–1680 cal AD. However, burial 203 must have taken place while the small medieval chapel was in use and before

⁹ The date of the tibia was 550 ± 80 BP (Hel-2481) or calibrated (2σ) 1276–1484 cal AD, while that of the stake was 320 ± 80 BP (Hel-2476) or calibrated (2σ) 1433–1682 cal AD.

¹⁰ Finnish original: *Vainajan rinnan läpi, suurin piirtein sydämen kohdalle oli työty kärjestään teroitettu puu. Dramaattisen tulkintaan ei kuitenkaan ole aihetta, koska samanlaisia puita oli myös lähituntumassa ja siellä täällä kaivausalueella, ja koska puulle saatiin nuorempi ajoitus.*

the construction of the new larger church building during 1610–1620 (Figure 2), which would place burial 203 roughly between 1430 and 1610. Allowing a couple decades for the age of the wood, the date most probably falls within 1450–1610 AD.

The presence of wooden stakes in grave 203 can be seen as a clear attempt to keep the strange-looking individual in his grave. Both staking and beheading were described as measures for neutralizing Scandinavian revenants by Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum* some 800 years ago. Book I relates that Odin had gone to Pheonia (Finland?), where he had been killed by the locals, and about the events following his burial:

Even in his death his abominations were made manifest, for those who came nigh his barrow were cut off by a kind of sudden death; and after his end, he spread such pestilence that he seemed almost to leave a filthier record in his death than in his life: it was as though he would extort from the guilty a punishment for his slaughter. The inhabitants, being in this trouble, took the body out of the mound, beheaded it, and impaled it through the breast with a sharp stake; and herein that people found relief. (Elton 1894, 32.)

The same treatment is also given to Aswid's corpse by Asmund in Book V: "I cut off his head with my steel, and impaled his guilty carcass with a stake" (Elton 1894, 201). Furthermore, the beheading and/or burning of corpses to stop revenants (*draugr*, *haugbúi*) are sometimes described in the Icelandic sagas (e.g. Ström 1942, 168; Chadwick 1946, 55; Sayers 1996, 245–246; Kanerva 2015).

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine whether the man in grave 203 had been beheaded through an execution, or whether the head had been severed postmortem as a precaution against revenance¹¹. One possibility is that he was executed for a crime and that the unnatural death compounded by his weird looks prompted the staking to keep him in his grave. An execution would at least agree with the location of the burial somewhat aside from the early chapel (Figure 2), in what could be the fringes of the medieval churchyard (Paavola 1988; Oravisjärvi 2011). Another possibility is that the man had died of natural causes and was beheaded and staked at his burial because of fears generated by his looks and, possibly, erratic behavior in life. An even more interesting, though less likely, variation would be that, due to alleged hauntings after his burial, the corpse had been unearthed and then beheaded and staked to stop the revenant activity.

One may wonder about the contradiction of why a man feared enough to prompt the staking of his corpse would be buried in the fringes of the churchyard. There were certainly plenty of woods either on the main island or the other two ones, which already existed in by 1400 AD (Hicks 1988). The reason may be that, despite the fear he inspired, the unfortunate man from grave 203 was after all a member of the Hailuoto community. He was a fellow islander and belonged there regardless of his possible offense, unnatural death, and the fear that his deformity may generate. Possibly in addition to the fear there was a feeling of pity for this unfortunate deformed, possibly mentally backward, man that had grown up on the island and was known to all. Furthermore, though rightly judged and punished according to the law, people may have felt that he did not have fully comprehended the committed offence.

In any event, the stakes through the chest and by the skull of the deformed beheaded man in burial 203 are a clear and deliberate attempt to keep him in his grave, regardless of whether the reason was his crime, deformity, unnatural death, hauntings or a combination of these.

¹¹ Unfortunately the excavated human remains have been returned to the Hailuoto parish and reburied.

Dread of the Dead

Ethnohistorical sources suggest that the dead were both revered and feared by Finland's inhabitants before their Christianization, which was a gradual process spanning from the 12th to the 18th century. The dead relatives continued to form part of the kin group and there was a series of rituals that the living were to perform in order to reinforce and preserve this relationship; dead ancestors were in turn expected to help insure the wellbeing and continuity of their surviving kin. (Waronen 1898; Krohn 1915, 40–58; Paulaharju 1924, 69–143; Harva 1948, 488–511; Holmberg 1964, 3–71; Kempainen 1967: 27–49)

At a time when some pre-Christian traditions were fresh in peoples' memories, even still being practiced in non-Christianized areas, Bishop Mikael Agricola wrote: "Food was brought to the graves of the dead, where people mourned, wailed and wept."¹² (Agricola 1551, 15)

On the other hand, neglect of the responsibilities towards the dead could incite their anger and even retaliation (Waronen 1898, 20–46; Paulaharju 1924, 130–131, 176–177; Holmberg 1968, 17–36; Pentikäinen 1969; Achté et al. 1985, 64–68; Pentikäinen 1990, 27–31). There were nevertheless a series of preventive measures that could be taken to insure that the dead would stay away from the living before their burial and that they remained in their graves afterwards (Paulaharju 1924, 69–143; Holmberg 1964, 17–36; Pentikäinen 1990, 44–81; Vilkkuna 2001).

The most significant ceremonies arise out of a desire to do everything possible for the departed on their last journey, and from precautionary measures by the living against the dead, as these are believed to seek companions with whom to enter the other world (Holmberg 1964, 17).

Safety from the buried dead is probably behind the widespread prehistoric and historic tendency of placing both temporary and permanent burial grounds separate from dwelling places: often on islands, but also on the far shores of rivers or lakes, or on wooded hills surrounded by cultivated fields (e.g. Paulaharju 1924, 162–169; Cleve 1943; Manker 1944; Pentikäinen 1990, 11–12, 35–43; Laitinen 2001; Mönkönen 2001; Ruohonen 2002; Ruohonen 2010; Wessman 2010, 70–71; Núñez 2015). Referring to Eastern Carelia, where the Orthodox Church allowed the utilization of the old family and village cemeteries well into the 19th century, Jokipii (2001, 19) states that the dead were buried at cemeteries located usually on islands and, where there were no water basins, on wooded hills surrounded by fields – some sort of islands on dry land. Dwellings and burial grounds were not very far from each other due to the mentioned periodical rituals connected with the dead relatives, but there was a clear and deliberate physical separation between them.

The advent of Christianity brought the dead to the consecrated "islands" of churchyards. Supposedly those buried there were peacefully awaiting Doomsday, but pre-Christian traditions continued to influence how people perceived and related themselves to death and the dead. Possibly a certain guilt about not performing the traditional ancestor rituals (cf. Vilkkuna 2001) made people uncomfortable around the dead and those things related to them. The fear of the dead may have lingered long after any possible guilt about ancestor betrayal had been forgotten, as suggested by the following comment from an early 20th-century context:

*When I was a child people were afraid of ghosts, of the buildings where corpses had been kept, even those where the coaches used to transport them were stored. At night one would run when passing such places, like by the churchyard*¹³ (Koski 2011, 89).

¹² Old Finnish original: *Coolludhen hautijn Rooca wietin, ioissa walitin, parghutin ia idketin.*

¹³ Finnish original: *Monet lapsuuteni aikaiset ihmiset pelkäsivät kummituksia, riisiä ja aittoja joissa säilytettiin hautaamattomia ruumiita, jopa ruumisvaunujen säilytysluonetta. Varsinkin pimeässä niiden paikkojen ohi piti ihan juosta niin kuin hautausmaankin ohi.*

It must have been difficult when weather conditions often forced people to live close to the corpse of relatives for weeks/months before it could finally be buried in the churchyard (Núñez 2015), and the situation would have been much worse when a suicide corpse had to remain unburied until there was a court ruling. The dread of the dead is known to have been greater in the case of unnatural deaths. It was believed that the souls of those that had undergone unnatural deaths became trapped between the realms of the living and the dead and could then end up haunting, even harming the living (Paulaharju 1924, 174–178; Haavio 1948; Pentikäinen 1969, 126–131; Achté and Lönnqvist 1982; Pentikäinen 1990, 88–95). Apparently the most dreaded were those individuals that had committed suicide. “[Sweden’s] folkloric archives are full of stories from the 1800s and early 1900s about the fear that those restless spirits could generate and the measures that the living took to reduce their harmful effects. The most feared of all were the suicides, those who had deliberately abandoned the path that God had set out for them.”¹⁴ (Persson 1998, 102)

Similar apprehensions about the dead may be responsible for certain unusual features observed in some graves from Finland’s late Iron Age. Finnish archaeologists have described the occurrence of stones¹⁵ or weapons in positions that suggest that they were meant to secure the deceased to the ground (e.g. Nordman 1924, 79–82; Pälsi 1938; Cleve 1943, 58; Cleve 1948; Keskitalo 1950; Kivikoski 1955, 67; Kivikoski 1963, 36–37, 42, 58, 60–61, 68–69; Kivikoski 1964, 200, 249; Hirviluoto 1976; Cleve 1978, 86–89; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982, 21; Sarkki-Isomaa 1986; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1988, 194–196; Edgren 1993, 251; Purhonen 1999, 165, 253; Wickholm 2006; Wickholm 2009; Wessman 2010, 98–107), and parallel manifestations have been reported from the Circum-Baltic region (e.g. Gräslund 1980, 76; Nordberg 2002; Mägi 2004; Artelius 2005; Artelius 2009; Gardela 2013). Since the proportion of such “deviant” burials is small, they probably have to do with specific individuals that were for some reason feared by the community. These “dangerous dead” (cf. Blair 2009) may have been, as in more recent times, evil doers, sorcerers or persons that had suffered unnatural deaths.

Final Remarks

I have described two cases of unnatural deaths on Hailuoto that were apparently connected with preventive measures against revenance at burial. One has to do with the burial of a suicide victim in the forest of an uninhabited island in 1761. Local folk tales blame haunting for this measure, but it is not clear if they arose then or afterwards. The other case concerns securing the corpse of a beheaded and congenitally deformed man to the ground with wooden stakes sometime between 1450 and 1610 AD.

Since both cases come from a small island that held a population of only a few hundreds, one cannot help wondering how many more such events would have taken place and may be awaiting discovery on the Finnish mainland. On this basis I would advise Finnish archaeologists to pay more attention to post-medieval features and encourage archive researchers to keep their eyes open for this sort of data.

¹⁴ Swedish original: *Folkminnesarkiven är fyllda av berättelser från 1800-tal och tidigt 1900-tal om den fruktan som dessa osaliga andar kunde ge upphov till och de åtgärder som de levande i sin tur vidtog för att minska deras skadliga verkningar. Allra mest fruktade var självspillingarna, de som självant hade avbrutit den väg som Gud hade utstakat för dem.*

¹⁵ The widespread use of burial cairns and stones in level-ground cremation fields could also be connected with the idea of keeping the dead in their graves.

Biographical note:

Milton Núñez (PhD) is professor emeritus in archaeology at the University of Oulu. He has worked with ancient human remains for many years and, more recently, he has been working with stable isotopes, Finnish mummies and the subject of morbidity and mortality in Finland during 1750–1850. Contact: milton.nunez@oulu.fi

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Abstrakti

Kummittelunvastaisista keinoista: kaksi tapausta vanhasta Hailuodosta (Karlö) Pohjois-Pohjanmaalta

Hailuoto on suurehko, 1000-luvulla asutettu saari Perämerellä. Pieni sivukappeli aloitti toimintansa saarella 1400-luvun alkupuolella, ja Hailuodosta tuli itsenäinen seurakunta vuonna 1587. Näistä ajoista lähtien Hailuodossa on kehittynyt oma rikas saarikulttuurinsa, johon kuuluvat osana myös monet kuolleiden ilmestymisestä ja kummittelusta kertovat tarinat. Yksi näistä on kertomus saarella itsensä hirttäneen miehen väitetystä kuolemanjälkeisestä palaamisesta 1700-luvun puolivälissä. Paikallisen perinteen mukaan edesmennyt ei voinut levätä rauhassa kirkkomaan siunatussa mullassa vaan kuljeskeli ympäriinsä ja häiritsti ihmisiä. Tämän vuoksi miehen ruumis piti kaivaa ylös, ja se kuljetettiin veneellä haudattavaksi metsikköön Hanhisen saarelle, missä on säilynyt haudan paikkaa merkitsevä kivimuodostelma. Myös vuoden 1761 hautausrekisteri vahvistaa itsemurhan tehneen miehen hautaamisen juuri tuolle paikalle. Tieto toisesta epätavallisesta hautauksesta on peräisin arkeologisesta aineistosta. Oululaiset arkeologit suorittivat Hailuodon kirkon raunioiden kaivaukset vuosina 1985–1987. Tuloksena oli kymmenittäin myöhäiskeskiaikaisia ja varhaismoderneja hautauksia, mukaan lukien yksi jossain määrin muista eristetty, arkuton hauta. Se sisälsi jäänteet, jotka olivat kuuluneet aikuiselle miehelle, jolta oli katkaistu pää. Kyseinen yksilö oli kärsinyt vakavasta synnynnäisestä kraniosynostoosista (kallon ennenaikaisesta luutumuksesta), mikä oli johtanut huomattavaan pään ja kasvojen epämuodostumaan. Vielä omituisempi yksityiskohta oli se, että luurankoon oli liitetty kaksi puista sauvaa: yksi lävisti sen rinnan ja toinen oli aivan irrotetun kallon vieressä. Tässä katsauksessa kuvataan ja tarkastellaan näihin kahteen epätavalliseen hautaukseen liittyviä yksityiskohtia arkeologisen, bioantropologisen ja etnohistoriallisen aineiston valossa.

lectio praecursoria

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https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/1/miettinen_lectio_on_suicides.pdf**Lectio Praecursoria November 7, 2015:
On Suicides Today and in Seventeenth-Century Sweden and Finland****Riikka Miettinen**

University of Tampere

The doctoral defence of Riikka Miettinen and her dissertation in the field of history, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden: The Crime and Legal Praxis in the Lower Courts*, took place at the University of Tampere on November 7, 2015. The opponent was Professor Jonas Liliequist (Umeå University) and Professor Mervi Kaarninen (University of Tampere) acted as the Custos.

Suicide is considered not only an individual tragedy but also a serious public health problem in the modern world. Globally, more people kill themselves each year than are killed by any other type of violence, including in all wars, terrorist acts and homicides – yet, the latter are given significantly larger attention. For example, in 2010 self-harm took more lives than war, murder and natural disasters combined. Also, as well known, suicide is considered a relatively significant cause of death among Finns, and especially Finnish young men. Although suicide rates appear to have gone down significantly during the past 25 years in Finland, most Finns have still been bereaved or at least somehow affected by suicide. Self-killing, like death in general has a history – the ways people die have changed profoundly over the centuries, as have the beliefs and customs related to death. Empirical studies on the history of suicide suggest that killing oneself was altogether significantly less common in premodern times. Nevertheless, suicide and self-destructive behaviour appears to be something inherent in humans, and known and reported throughout history and in almost all cultures.

Still, suicide is considered an exceptional act – and research topic. Taking into consideration the importance, prevalence and significant effects of the phenomenon, one can say that suicide, and research on suicide, is viewed as a marginal topic and field quite unfoundedly. The discussion of the topic both in the scientific field but also in general in our society is characterized by marginalization, and even silence.

This conflicting silence was one of the reasons I started to examine the history of suicide. We know fairly little about suicides in Sweden and Finland before the modern times. Also, early on I discovered that studying the legal, social and cultural history of suicides offered interesting perspectives into early modern Sweden and Finland, and was a fruitful

way to understand the culture, society and mentalities of the era. As Émile Durkheim showed in his classic work in sociology, suicide is tied to various social and cultural forces and structures; studying its occurrence and forms as well as attitudes towards it is a useful instrument to examine many macroprocesses and paradigms, like secularization, medicalization and other changes connected to 'modernization'.

It must be taken into consideration that, in practice, the only sources available describing suicides that took place in seventeenth-century Sweden and Finland are different types of judicial documents – the only reason we know about past suicides is that killing oneself was considered a punishable crime. The Church or other institutions were not interested and did not document suicides, at least before the state ordered pastors to compile demographic data, including information on causes of death in the *Tabellverket* since the mid-1700s. However, long before that, suicides were felonies that were investigated and sentenced in the secular courts and crimes of which the sentenced's corpse or remains were punished. Though first criminalized relatively late in the Swedish Realm compared to most other European regions, in the King Christopher's Law of 1442, self-killing remained as a crime quite long in the north, until the late nineteenth century. Suicide was no longer mentioned in the Swedish Penal Law of 1864 while in Finland it was decriminalized when the Criminal Code of 1889, still largely in use today, came into effect.

Thus, the best way to study early modern suicides is to turn to the documents generated by the secular courts of law. Reading the typically long and detailed lower court records about the investigations of people's deaths and the suspects' possible motives, past and more recent behaviour and mental states reveals a great deal of information not only about the past ideas on human behaviour and agency and the world views but also about the everyday life in general. Continuously, as the local office-holders and witnesses discuss the backgrounds and evidence of suspicious deaths and attempt to classify the death and the deceased's sanity or insanity postmortem, the lower court record texts manifest, or mirror, stereotypes and what was considered ideal, normal or expected, for example in one's behaviour.

As a modern reader of early modern lower court records, I was initially puzzled by why people who had killed themselves were sentenced and their corpses punished after death. It is obviously foreign to us that how and why can someone still be affected by law when one is dead – and why suicide in particular was considered criminal. However, the concepts of one's liability and responsibilities were different in the medieval and early modern views: a grave sin that breached God's commandments, like suicide, required an atonement and punishment, and its effects continued even after the corporal death. Shameful disposals and burials outside the church grounds excluded the sinner from the Christian community and from the bodily resurrection.

In the present research I studied not only suicide in seventeenth-century Sweden and Finland but also, by examining the lower court proceedings involving suicide cases, the legal culture and judicial practices during this interesting century. The lower court activities and the investigations on suspected suicides showed that 'the judicial revolution' was certainly on-going but far from complete by the end of the century, at least in the sense that the actions and interests of the local communities rather than the state and professional elites continued to have the most significant influence in the trials and the classifications were still negotiated mostly by the laymen in the local scene. The judicature and state officials pivoted on the participation and cooperation of the bereaved and other locals not only in the indictment but at all stages of the investigation. If the letter of the law did not seem suited, it could be interpreted flexibly and in a way best suited in the situation. The judicature was not blind or 'objective' as the social reputation and status of the suspect or accused was central for the portrayal, explanations, classifications and treatment of the case in the lower courts.

Moreover, reading the typically quite complex negotiations about the nature and causes of the death, motives for suicide and the mental state of the accused, showed how culture-specific, context-dependent and situational 'suicide', or sanity and insanity, as categories, are. The categorization in seventeenth-century Sweden did not entirely correspond with the modern concept of suicide. In practice, there were a variety of acts and deaths called and labelled under the umbrella term 'suicide' – some of which were acts we would not see as suicide today.

This research on the history of suicides has made me question what is a 'suicide' and can we even talk about it as a monolithic category. Although the definition of suicide as the deliberate destruction of one's own life has remained much the same for thousands of years, it is far less simple to identify or classify a death as a suicide. The classification of a death as a suicide was – and is – a complex social event; it is arrived at after interpreting various circumstances surrounding the death and the background of the deceased in light of prevailing definitions and attitudes towards suicide as well as theories or assumptions about the personal history, states of mind and motives of people who kill themselves. In seventeenth-century Sweden and Finland, not only the assumptions of 'causes' to kill oneself but in general, the deceased's reputation or image and the quality of his or her local social ties influenced the classifications.

In part, the same applies even today. In making sense of sudden, obscure deaths we attempt to track down clues from the personal history of the deceased; like in 17th-century, we have stereotypes on what kind of persons, and especially, in what types of situations people kill themselves. Like the early modern officials and lower courts searched for clues of insanity, past sins and misfortunes and bad character of the accused, the modern investigators tend to track down signs of depression and substance use. It is often thought that most people who kill themselves leave a suicide note – and in general that 'suicides' are easily recognizable. This is certainly not the case. The influences of our cultural imagery of suicide can be seen, for example, in the recent media and internet discussions on several missing persons in Finland. Also, the gender, age and other social positions of the deceased influence the death classifications as well as how a particular suicide is explained. For example, like in early modern Sweden and Finland, suicides by women are more often interpreted to be driven by 'emotional' or relationship issues.

Historical research on suicides can challenge the current assumptions, beliefs, attitudes and practices concerning suicide and the suicidal. Also, learning about the historical background helps us understand how much our own attitudes and responses to suicide, as well as views of suicide as a 'bad' death, are the results of deep-rooted customs and of the long-lasting religious and judicial hostility towards self-killing.

Although times have changed, and killing oneself is no longer a crime – nor in most circles considered a sin – the historical and cultural forces have heavily influenced modern discussions on suicide and euthanasia. The historical burden of suicide as a shameful, stigmatizing act as well as the grief of the bereaved make suicide a tricky subject and topic. Like the endless debate on the legalization of euthanasia shows, suicide is still not considered an acceptable way to die. Like all research on suicide, historical research breaks the silence surrounding suicide, and perhaps helps us to understand and challenge our cultural views.

announcements

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Announcements

Symposium: Idealized Deaths

Death Studies Symposium 11–12 February 2016, Jyväskylä, Finland.

Registration for the conference is open until **January 15, 2016**. For more information and preliminary programme, please visit <https://finnishdeathstudies.wordpress.com/>

Surukonferenssi 2016: Surun monenlaiset muodot

21.–22.3.2016, Tampere.

Ilmoittautuminen Surukonferenssiin on avattu! Ilmoittautuminen ja lisätietoja Surukonferenssin kotisivuilta: surut.fi/ilmoittautuminen.html

Call for Papers: Wild or Domesticated – Uncanny in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives to Mind

An interdisciplinary conference organized by Mind and the Other Research Project, 20–22 September 2016, Helsinki, Finland (The House of Science and Letters).

Deadline for abstracts is **March 15, 2016**. Abstracts (max 400 words) should be sent to: wildordomesticated@gmail.com

For more information about this event, venue and important dates, please visit: mindandother.com/events/

Finnish Death Studies Association Celebrates its Anniversary in 2016

The Finnish Death Studies Association was founded five years ago, in April 2011. Planning for a conference that will be organised in Autumn 2016 to celebrate this milestone is in progress. Stay tuned for updates on the homepage at kuolemantutkimus.com