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Cover image:
Terracotta Oil Lamp, Early Imperial, c. 1st century A.D.
Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Photo credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1906 (06.1021.292)
The scene depicts winged Victory holding a cornucopia (horn of plenty)
and to either side, Victory is flanked by two lares militares.

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Letter from the Editor

We are proud to present the eighth volume of the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology's Graduate Student Journal, *Chronika*. As the fourth student editor at the helm of *Chronika*, I have been given the invaluable gift of continuing an already successful publication, enthusiastically supported by so many people in so many organizations. Rather than get comfortable in our success, it is important that we strive to continue to expand in both the diversity of articles and authors, and in the audience we are able to reach with this publication. Peer reviewed graduate journals, like *Chronika*, are so important to keep running. They are not only a learning experience about the process of academic publication for all those involved, but also a chance to disseminate work for those early in their career.

There are many people who have helped in the publication process over the year, without which *Chronika* would not have been possible. We thank everyone, from our cosponsors, to the peer reviewers, authors, and editorial board. Last, but not least, I want to personally thank the former editors, who have not only paved the way for me, but have continue to be available for advice and help during the entire process. I hope to be able to do so as well in the future, for many editors and volumes to come. This volume, through no conscious choice of our own, focuses very heavily on death and the afterlife, but I assure it is not an omen for the future of *Chronika*.

Heather Rosch
Editor in Chief

The Ghosts of Christmas Past: Folklore, Archaeology, and Place Abandonment at Haffjarðarey, Western Iceland

Sarah Hoffman

On Christmas Eve in 1563, on a small island off the Western coast of Iceland, the priest and parishioners of the Catholic Church of St. Nicholas on Haffjarðarey decided to walk back to their farms over the frozen tidal flat. About half way home the ice broke and the entire congregation drowned. Overnight the church was abandoned and the cemetery deconsecrated. From ca. 1200 - 1563 the Church and Cemetery of Haffjarðarey served as the primary burial location for the entire region of Eyjahreppur. Twentieth century excavations at the site revealed the largest Icelandic cemetery population in this period, with numerous overlapping, intercut, and simultaneous burials suggesting a dedication to place surpassing that of other churches further inland. Whether the Christmas Eve event really took place is less important than the impact that the story would have had on the psyche of the surrounding population. Sudden and improper death, or death under unusual circumstances, were commonly associated with the conception of the restless dead—ghosts—in medieval Iceland. The production of this tale during the Protestant Reformation reinforced place abandonment at a once revered community sacred space. Abandonment of Haffjarðarey is tackled through the concept of topophobia and an interpretation of local folklore and bioarchaeological data. This paper focuses on the relationship between place and cultural practice at Haffjarðarey specifically related to socio-religious belief systems during a period of religious reformation.

Introduction

Munnmæli vestra herma, að margt kirkjugesta, er var Þar síðasta aðfangadagskvöld áður en kirkjan var lögð niður, hafi farizt á leið til lands.

It is said that the priest and many parishioners, on the last Christmas Eve before the church closed, died on their way back to land.

- Luðvik Kristjánsson, 1935

On Christmas Eve in 1563, on a small island off the Western coast of Iceland just north of Borganes, the priest and parishioners of the Catholic Church of St. Nicholas on Haffjarðarey were walking over the frozen tidal flat after mass when they fell through the ice to their untimely deaths.¹ It is unknown when this folk tale was first conceived, however the message that it contains is clear; the island is dangerous and should be avoided. In Iceland, folk tales such as this serve several purposes. Most importantly here are their effects on moral and social behavior as well as the ascription of historical and mythological significance to the landscape.² The fact that this event took place on Christmas, or Yuletide, would have had a considerable impact on the efficacy of this story. Saga literature, folk tales, and church records are full of incidents concerning revenge killings, death, and hauntings taking place on or near Christmas.³ This temporal confluence at Christmas-time has been attributed to the long periods of darkness where the dead and other supernatural beings have more power than the living.⁴ Adding to this temporal association is the manner in which the parishioners at Haffjarðarey died. Death at sea or by drowning was

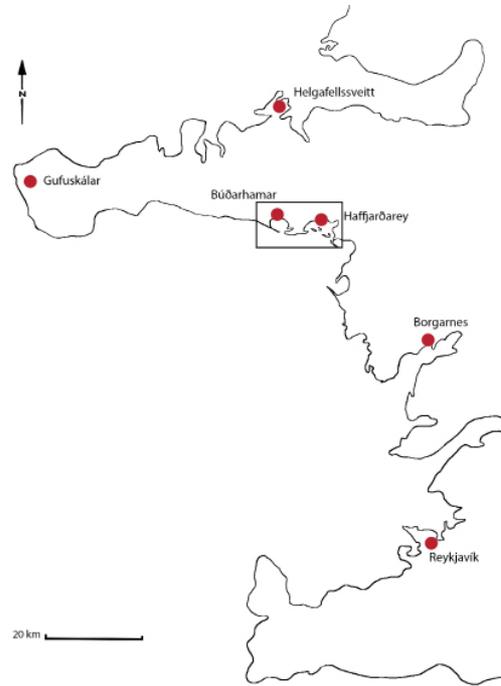


Figure 1: Western Iceland showing the locations of Haffjarðarey and Búðarhamar in relation to Reykjavík.

thought to result in deceased individuals remaining trapped between worlds.⁵ They would be both “innocent and unsatisfied,” virtually ideal conditions for the production of the restless dead.⁶ This paper argues that the folklore produced at Haffjarðarey would have directly referenced, and drawn upon, longstanding traditions regarding death at sea, ghosts, and the restless dead. In turn the production of this folk tale served to reinforce the abandonment of one of the largest Catholic Church parishes in medieval Iceland at the onset of the Protestant Reformation.

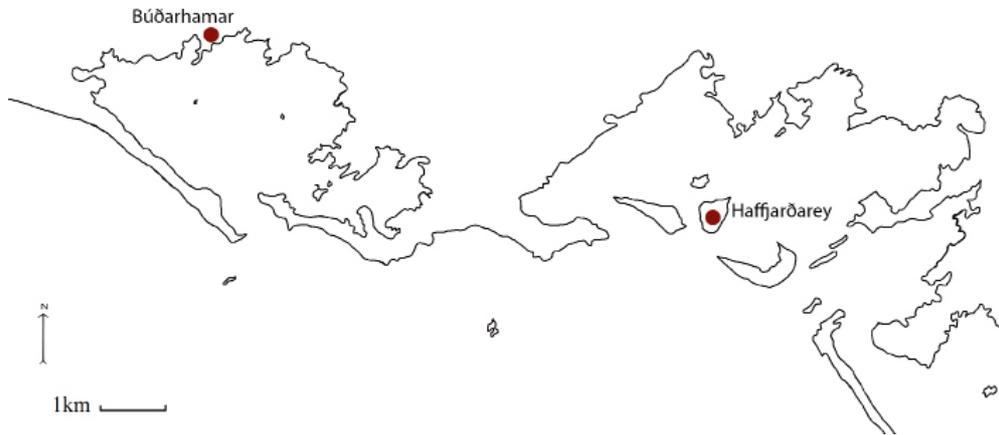


Figure 2: Showing the island of Haffjarðarey and immediate surrounding region.

Haffjarðarey (1200-1563)

Haffjarðarey (Hafsfjardarey or Bæjarey) is a small islet directly off the southeastern coast of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, approximately 50km north of the modern city of Borgarnes (Figs. 1 and 2).⁷ According to medieval máldagar (church property records), the church at Haffjarðarey was established in 1223 and was dedicated to Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of fishermen.⁸ During the course of this research project several concerns have emerged regarding this date. The máldagar listing all regional church properties within the bishopric of Skalholt was continuously updated until the 14th century, making it difficult to securely date any of the churches listed within it.⁹ In 1946 Jon Steffensen compared population data from an 18th century regional census to the cemetery population size from Haffjarðarey and determined that the cemetery must have been in use from at least the 11th century onward.¹⁰ Saga literature from the 13th century describes a wealthy land owner living on Haffjarðarey in the 11th cen-

tury. During a political dispute recorded in Eyrbyggja Saga, Thorstein of Hafsfjardarey is able to assemble an army and move an assembly site to Straumfjörður bay, directly adjacent to Haffjarðarey.¹¹ This saga has been demonstrated to include historically and archaeologically valid descriptions of important people and places within the landscape, and records some of the most notable episodes of hauntings found within the sagas.¹²

The presence of a wealthy family farm on Haffjarðarey in the 11th century fits with the pattern of church construction in early Christian Iceland. Almost all of the earliest churches in Iceland were paid for and constructed on the land of wealthy farmers.¹³ The various rights, duties (taxes), and properties of this church included: the beaches on the land belonging to the nearby farm at Hausthús, seal hunting rights along the coast, a tithe of homespun wool or vaðmal (a common form of currency), as well as some kind of image or statue of Saint Nicholas.¹⁴

While active, the church serviced the entire region of Eyjahreppur, today Eyja-og-Miklaholtshreppur, with ten farms and five smaller chapels within its purview, each of which would have likely had their own small cemeteries.¹⁵ As a large regional parish, Haffjarðarey is set apart from other contemporary churches that served single farms and smaller communities. The success of the parish was only amplified by the possibility of an international merchant population coming and going to the nearby trading site of Búðarhamar.¹⁶ This merchant community may have utilized church services, thus boosting production within the local fishing community and foot traffic at the local church. Close trade relationships with international entities from central and northwestern Europe were integral in the introduction of the new Lutheran faith. The church remained in use until 1563 when the land was deconsecrated during the Lutheran Reformation; the

last priest of Haffjarðarey is recorded to have moved to another parish in that year.¹⁷

Removal of the Dead

Skeletal remains from Haffjarðarey were removed from the site in three distinct phases, two of which are available for study today. By 1714 erosion had significantly affected the coastal island, and it is possible that human remains began to become visible on the surface at this time.¹⁸ In 1883 inhabitants of local coastal farms gathered the remains of approximately 109 individuals exposed on the surface of the island and reburied them at a newer church further inland.¹⁹ About 20 years later, in 1905, two researchers on a geological expedition from Harvard University, John W. Hastings and Vilhjálmur Stefánsson, visited the sites of Áftanes and Haffjarðarey and collected human remains from both sites that were later transported back to Boston.²⁰ This col-

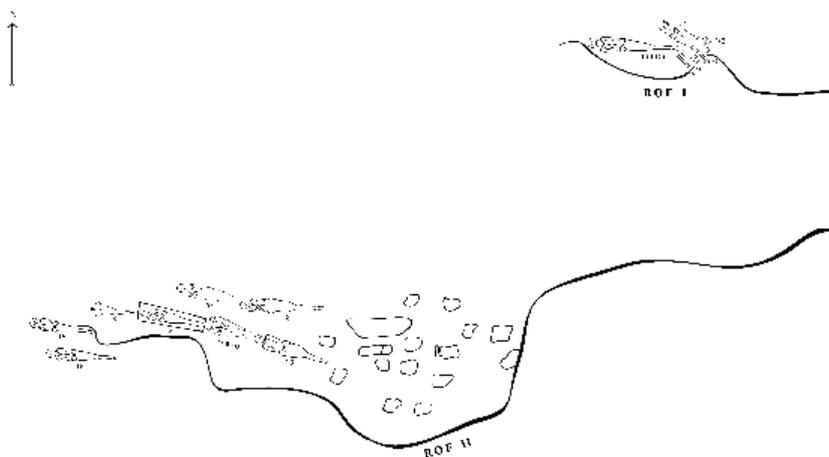


Figure 3: Site plan of Haffjarðarey by Kristjan Eldjarn showing multiple overlapping and intercut burials (after Steffensen 1946, digital image by Alana Tedmon).

lection includes the remains of approximately 61 individuals that were removed from the surface of the beach. This expedition was met with almost universal disapproval by the Icelanders, as Hastings and Stefánsson only had tentative permission from a local priest to take what was already exposed due to erosion.²¹

Finally in 1945 an archaeological team from Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (The National Museum of Iceland), led by Jon Steffensen and Kristjan Eldjarn, excavated the remains of approximately 67 individuals.²² Their excavations again focused on graves in danger of coastal erosion. The 1945 excavation uncovered 24 in-situ burials facing east-west, with several overlapping and intercut graves.²³ There were also vertically stacked burials as well as one enigmatic multiple burial containing the remains of at least 15 individuals (Figure 3).²⁴

Overall the cemetery population of Haffjarðarey (1883 [MNI= ~109], 1905 [MNI= 61], and 1945 [MNI=67]) totals to approximately 237, making it the second largest cemetery in Iceland from this period. It is surpassed only by the monastic hospital site of Skriðuklaustur (1493-1554) in East Iceland.²⁵ While skeletal pathology can provide insight into health within a coastal fishing community with heavy ties to international trade, it is the structure and landscape of this church and cemetery that are particularly relevant to a discussion of place, politics, religion and folklore.²⁶

Sagas and Folklore in Medieval Iceland

A predominantly Norse population settled Iceland in the late 9th century C.E.²⁷ These settlers brought with them a pre-Christian belief system that continued

to influence daily life even after the conversion to Christianity. This early settlement period saw the establishment of wealthy farms and a system of government lead by a semi-democratic regional community gathering called the Alþing.²⁸ It was at the Alþing of 999/1000 that the population voted on the issue of Christianity.²⁹ Unable to come to a decision the lawspeaker, a non-Christian himself, determined that Christianity should be the national religion of Iceland.³⁰ This determination was not without caveats. Specifically, several non-Christian practices were still legally allowed, including sacrifices made to non-Christian gods.³¹

The earliest Catholic churches were paid for and constructed on the property of wealthy farmers, who also occasionally acted as priests.³² When churches became financially independent from their farm counterparts, they took the land and property rights with them.³³ With the introduction and spread of Christianity in Iceland came literacy and writing. Some of the earliest records are the aforementioned church máldagar, listing properties, land rights, possessions, and saintly dedications of each church.³⁴ In the 13th century, priests, clerics, and those affiliated with churches and monastic institutions began recording what we now refer to as the sagas. Based in an earlier oral tradition of storytelling, the *Íslendingasögur* (Icelandic Family Sagas) describe the settlement period, the decades surrounding the conversion to Christianity, and the violent long-lasting feuds between prominent families in the 13th century.³⁵ There is a clear permutation of non-Christian beliefs well into the Christian period, highlighted by these saga and folklore traditions.

While archaeologists frequently draw upon the sagas for information regarding important places within the landscape, later folklore is not typically consulted in the same manner. Icelandic folklore, recorded long after the sagas in the 18th-20th centuries, is a treasure trove of information for place name studies.³⁶ This information is seen as providing a map of the “geographical, mental, historical, and spiritual” landscape in which the Icelanders resided from the settlement period to the modern era.³⁷ In fact, it was as a part of a large-scale early 20th century place name study that the story of the Christmas Eve incident at Haffjarðarey was first recorded. Many folk legends are parables used to teach lessons to a younger generation regarding social values and even unsafe places within the landscape.³⁸ They can provide factual and statistical data regarding historical social contexts, local beliefs, and traditional understandings and worldviews.³⁹

Many folklore legends focus on places and boundaries, both real and ephemeral. Real in that many folk tales create a literal map of the landscape, with places, roads, hills, mountains, rivers, bays, and beaches all having stories detailing how they acquired their names.⁴⁰ Ephemeral in the sense that some of these boundaries are between worlds, separating the living and the dead as well as the realms of creatures such as elves and ghosts.⁴¹ It is when these borders break down that the ephemeral world interacts with the real world. Legends featuring horrifying elements such as ghosts, the restless dead, revenants, trolls, ogres and the like frequently appear at times when these borders –or road maps- are impaired for whatever reason.⁴² This impairment can be related to moral confusion as well as

unforgettable events that might impact the local or regional psyche.⁴³ It is not surprising then, that many ghost stories, both in saga literature and folklore, take place during important transitional periods throughout Icelandic history. Specifically, during the conversion to Christianity (ca. 1000 C.E.), the Age of Sturlungs (ca. 13th century) when prominent families at war with one another altered the landscape through new farm ownership, when Norway – and later Denmark- gained control over Iceland (13th-14th centuries) and power was removed from local hands, during the introduction of novel international trade relationships which (14th-15th centuries) inverted the importance of farming and fishing, and during the Protestant Reformation which dramatically transformed the landscape through the closing of Catholic churches and monastic sites (16th century).

Discussion: Afturgöngur- Revenants and Reformation

Revenants

The afturgöngur -or revenants- that return to life to torment the living with death, madness, disease, or even general malicious shenanigans are not the ghosts that we see on television or in movies today. Rather they are solid corporeal beings that appear as the deceased before their death, and occasionally in folklore as revived skeletons or unseen forces (Figure 4).⁴⁴ The dead are easily recognizable to the living, except when they appear as symbolic pseudo-animal creatures that wreak havoc on farms or as allegorical madness and disease.⁴⁵ These restless dead often emerge as a result of improper death or unfinished business, frequently overlapping with Christmas



Figure 4: A woman in church confronts a skeletal revenant (after Booss 1984: 593).

or Yuletide. The *Saga of the Men of Flói* (13th century), *Eyrbyggja Saga* (13th century), and *Grettis Saga* (14th century) all describe incidents of malevolent life after death during the winter, at Christmas, or Yuletide.⁴⁶ In the *Saga of the Men of Flói*, a group of Christian men stranded in Greenland for the winter experience disease and madness as the result of one restlessly dead individual.⁴⁷ In *Grettis Saga*, the hero Grettir faces the undead Glámr at Christmas to put an end to the fear and madness that this revenant spread.⁴⁸ Finally, and most importantly to this paper, is the Christmas haunting that takes place in *Eyrbyggja Saga*.

Ghosts and hauntings are typically associated with specific events, places, and even buildings, however this fear is not static and, “must be maintained by the art of storytelling.”⁴⁹ *Eyrbyggja Saga* was first recorded from an oral history in the 13th century and copied several times

throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. The saga focuses on several powerful families in the Snæfellsnes Peninsula during, and directly after, the conversion to Christianity. This saga has been used by archaeologists to identify international trading sites along the southern coast of the peninsula, directly adjacent to the island of Haffjarðarey.⁵⁰ The haunting in this saga begins during the summer that Christianity came to Iceland in the year 1000, at a farm in Snæfellsnes.⁵¹ A wealthy woman from the Hebrides dies at a farm on the peninsula where she was living. The haunting begins when the inhabitants of the farm fail to burn all of her belongings upon her death. She then appears as a revenant to the individuals taking her body to burial, and a series of strange events begin to take place at the farm shortly after. Shortly before Christmas odd omens occur, a seal-type creature with an ox tail destroys stores of dried fish, and the farm owner and all of

his fishing comrades drown at sea only to return to haunt the farm. It is only when the (Christian) hero of the story takes action that the hauntings abate and all of the restless dead disappear.⁵²

All of the above episodes of hauntings take place during important episodes of religious and social transition and are set during Christmas and Yuletide. They are all said to take place before or during the conversion to Christianity, but feature Christian heroes, of course. They were written during the period when Iceland lost its independence to Norway and Denmark and was experiencing the violent socio-political events of the Age of the Sturlungs. Saga narratives typically take place during discrete periods of time, more specifically they have dates or reference religious holidays or seasons in order to place the narrative in time. On the other hand folklore, or folk legends, often has no solid dates in terms of when they take place or where they were first recorded. They are of undetermined age, passed from generation to generation within local regional memory and can be used as parables for younger children.⁵³

Several folk tales describe incidents of drowning at sea and unidentified bodies washing up on shore, some specifically at Christmas, all resulting in the production of the restless dead.⁵⁴ Folk tales such as these outline social protocols and general attitudes toward local and foreign dead bodies that appear on the coast.⁵⁵ This phenomenon was apparently well known to those living along the coast, especially those living near areas of shipwrecks, like Haffjarðarey.⁵⁶

Specifically relevant to the site of Haffjarðarey are two concepts that can be understood from folklore regarding

those who perish at sea. First, such individuals are regarded as being trapped between worlds, both “innocent” and “unsatisfied,” as they committed no specific crime in life, but receive no proper Christian burial.⁵⁷ Second, if an individual should come across a dead body, they must do something about it and cannot simply walk past, lest they be haunted for the rest of their lives.⁵⁸ Two folk legends exemplify these concepts: one of two brothers who go for an ill-fated walk on the beach at Christmas and the tormented love story of The Deacon of Myrká.⁵⁹

The first story concerns two brothers who were “probably asking for trouble” walking along an empty beach at Christmas when they stumbled upon a badly decomposed body.⁶⁰ Instead of doing something about it, they kicked the body and went on their merry way. As a result, they experienced strange forces trying to pull them toward the sea.⁶¹ One brother moved far away and the other was found dead not far from the site of the original body.⁶²

In the story of The Deacon of Myrká, a deacon in Eyjafjörður fell in love with a woman named Guðrún who lived on the opposite shore of a fjord valley. One day near Christmas, the deacon attempted to cross the frozen river to meet his beloved, only to fall through the ice to his death.⁶³ His ghost returned to torment Guðrún for two weeks, and while a priest was unable to help, a sorcerer “skilled in witchcraft” finally managed to exorcise the ghost.⁶⁴

These stories exemplify not only the restless dead as a result of death at sea or drowning, but also what happens when an unburied body is ignored and is not provided a proper Christian burial, a situation that also occurs in the sagas. These

stories serve to invoke fear, not only of death and the appropriate responses to it, but fear of the landscape in which they take place (topophobia).⁶⁵

And Reformation

At Haffjarðarey the church and cemetery were active from ca. 1200 to 1563 when the church was closed and the land deconsecrated. The church itself would have likely been a small structure constructed from turf, stone, and possibly driftwood in the same manner as other contemporary churches.⁶⁶ The church cemetery at one point contained the bodies of at least 237 individuals, not taking into consideration the likelihood that many bodies were disturbed or removed by coastal erosion prior to any collection, and the minor possibility that some burials remain unidentified and unexcavated on the island.⁶⁷ The burials that were excavated using mid-20th century procedures featured interesting cases of overlapping, intercut, and vertically stacked burials, a somewhat unique feature not typically seen in contemporary cemeteries.⁶⁸ These burials, as well as the presence of an enigmatic mass burial containing the remains of at least 15 individuals, suggest that the church needed to accommodate many burials within a short period of time, or ran out of space within the normal parameters of the cemetery.

A lack of space could be indicative of site popularity or may represent an episode of disease outbreak necessitating multiple burials within a short period of time. In terms of popularity, the church and cemetery at Haffjarðarey were ideally located to serve a coastal-based fishing community along the southern coast of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. Dedicated to Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of fish-

ermen, the church clearly catered to this community. The fishermen of this coastal region could easily access the island church by boat and apparently also walk to the church over the tidal flat at low tide.⁶⁹ While most churches served one farm, or a small group of close-knit farms, Haffjarðareyjarkirkja (the church at Haffjarðarey) served a large coastal region that encompassed at least ten farms and five chapels.⁷⁰ The site must have been in contact with the international trading port and/or assembly site at Búðarhamar that could only have added to the size of the parish community.⁷¹ All of these factors paint the picture of a widely popular and successful church parish; that is of course, until disaster struck.

The last Catholic bishop in Iceland, Jón Arason, was executed in 1550 during the height of the Lutheran Reformation.⁷² The 'new' religion was introduced into Iceland in the early 1500s by Hanseatic merchants from Germany and the Netherlands.⁷³ The reformation spread rapidly and was supported by the intellectual community of Iceland as well as the Danish Crown.⁷⁴ As with elsewhere in Europe, with the Reformation came the closing of many churches and monasteries.⁷⁵ When Haffjarðarey was closed, several new Lutheran churches were established further inland.⁷⁶ Given these facts, it would not have been unusual for a Catholic church such as that at Haffjarðarey to be closed during this transition. What is unusual is the story that developed out of this closing.

The Creation of a Haunted Landscape

In 1935 Luðvik Kristjánsson recorded a single sentence regarding the fate of Haffjarðarey in the midst of a document detailing place names and farm owner-

ship throughout Iceland.⁷⁷ He notes that this accident was likely related to the expansion of a stream in the tidal flat and undoubtedly was the rationale behind the closing of the church and cemetery.⁷⁸ As discussed above, within a coastal community death at sea was not an unusual phenomenon and those who died that way were resigned to a life after death trapped between worlds.⁷⁹ Hauntings associated with those who died at sea were not uncommon and the additional timing of the incident on Christmas Eve would inevitably invoke episodes from popular –even specifically regional– saga literature concerning the restless dead. Consider still that coastal erosion began to expose human remains on the surface of the beach in 1714 resulting in the abandonment of the only farm on the island. The social protocols discussed above concerning corpses that wash up on shore, may also apply to those slowly emerging from sand of the beach.⁸⁰

This story draws on longstanding traditions involving unusual deaths on Christmas and drowning at sea to serve a very specific purpose; reinforce the closing of the church by creating a fear of place (topophobia) based in traditional systems of belief. Clearly, a long-standing focal point within the socio-religious landscape, the church at Haffjarðarey had roots that reach as far back as the conversion to Christianity. If access to the church became dangerous due to the onset of coastal erosion, or religious transition necessitated its closure, it is possible that the surrounding community may have demanded more than a simple church edict to abandon the sacred landscape. The abandonment of the island was reinforced through the creation of this folklore. Eighteenth century exposure of human remains on the surface

only solidified the already present notion of danger at the island. Danger not only in the ability to access the site, but also in the presence of so many dead bodies that were literally rising to the surface. The gathering and reburial of these remains in the late 19th century recalls social protocol and moral demand outlined in numerous sagas and folk tales to provide a proper burial to those washed up on the surface of the beach. But for more than 100 years these remains were simply exposed to the elements, visible to any and all that might approach the island.

Conclusion

The site of Haffjarðarey is unique in many ways, specifically in its origins, location, popularity, size, international influence, and its abandonment. Whether through natural or socio-religious causes, the site was deconsecrated and abandoned. Unlike other closed religious houses, folklore describing mass death and danger developed to reinforce the closure. Regardless of historical accuracy, this site exemplifies the need to include such stories within the interpretation of place and landscape at archaeological sites. Archaeologists working within Icelandic, and wider Scandinavian archaeology, frequently use saga literature as road maps or in their interpretation of archaeological data. Folklore is not treated the same way, despite the fact that it can provide important information concerning social context and deeper meanings ascribed to the landscapes in which past populations lived and interacted on a daily basis.

Lucy Franklin writes that, “within landscapes, stories and legends help create histories which eventually come to be accepted as truths”.⁸¹ If there were other motivations behind the church closure,

such as Reformation policy or environmental change, these motives are overshadowed by the creation of a landscape of fear; fear that was necessary to ensure the deconsecration and abandonment of the church and cemetery at Haffjarðarey.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Kristjánsson, 1935 and Gestsdóttir 2014, 40.
- 2 Gunnell 2005, 70.
- 3 Gunnell 2005, 75; Gunnell 2009, 315; Pettit 2017, 31; Jakobsson 2008, 212.
- 4 Gunnell 2009, 315.
- 5 Gunnell 2005, 70-71.
- 6 Gunnell 2005, 70-71.
- 7 Pronounced Haff-yar-thar-ey. Hafsþjardarey is a seemingly older version of this place name recorded in saga literature and the *Diplomatarium Islandicum* and Bæjarey is frequently used to refer to a group of several islets within this tidal flat that may have at one time been one larger island.
- 8 Sigurðsson and Þorkelsson 1857-72, 421; Þorkelsson 1888, 80; Nielsson 1869, 98.
- 9 Vésteinsson 2012, 128.
- 10 Steffensen 1946.
- 11 Quinn 2003, 179.
- 12 Gardiner and Mehler 2007, 410-411; Chadwick 1946; Kanerva 2013; Kanerva 2014; Kanerva 2015; Tulinius 2011.
- 13 Friðriksson and Vésteinsson 2011, 55 and Hastrup 1990, 49; the presence/absence of this theorized farm and its relationship to the church and cemetery is the focus of the upcoming 2018 field season in Iceland.
- 14 Sigurðsson and Þorkelsson 1857-72, 421-423.
- 15 Sigurðsson and Þorkelsson 1857-76, 421.
- 16 Gardiner and Mehler 2007, 410-411.
- 17 Sigurðsson and Þorkelsson 1857-76, 421.
- 18 Steffensen 1946, 146.
- 19 Steffensen 1946, 146.
- 20 Pálsson 2005, 51-57.
- 21 Pálsson 2005, 53.
- 22 Steffensen 1946, 149.
- 23 Steffensen 1946 and Eldjárn 1945.
- 24 Steffensen 1946 and Eldjárn 1945.
- 25 Kristjánsdóttir 2015, 154.
- 26 Osteological analysis of the Hastings-Stefánsson collection was carried out in 2012/13 during the completion of the MSc. Paleopathology at Durham University. In June/July of 2017, with support from the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology (IEMA) Travel Scholarship, paleopathological and bioarchaeological analysis were carried out at Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (The National Museum of Iceland) on the 1945 Haffjarðarey skeletal collection. This funding additionally facilitated access to historical folklore records at the Örnefnasafn stofnunar Árna Magnússonar í Íslenskum fræðum (Onomastic Department of the Arne Magnusson Institute).
- 27 Helgason et. al 2000; Helgason et. al. 2001; Hallgrímsson et. al. 2004.
- 28 Hastrup 1985.
- 29 Jakobssen 2010, 7.
- 30 Hastrup 1985 and Vésteinsson 2000, 17.
- 31 Vésteinsson 2000, 17.
- 32 Jakobssen 2010, 8 and Mundal 2011, 114.

- 33 Hastrup 1985.
34 Jakobssen 2010, 8.
35 Lethbridge 2016, 56.
36 It should be noted that the sagas are also consulted for Place Name studies.
37 Gunnell 2009, 308.
38 Gunnell 2009, 315.
39 Gunnell 2009, 311-316.
40 Gunnell 2009, 308.
41 Gunnell 2009, 314.
42 Gunnell 2005, 70.
43 Gunnell 2005, 70.
44 Kanerva 2013, 111-112; Kanerva 2014: 220.
45 Kanerva 2011, 28-30.
46 Kanerva 2013, 111 and Kanerva 2014, 219.
47 Kanerva 2014, 219.
48 Kanerva 2013, 117.
49 Tuan 2013, 128.
50 Gardiner and Mehler 2007, 410-412; It is also in this saga that the aforementioned Thorstein of Hafsfjardarey appears.
51 Quinn 2003, 165.
52 Quinn 2003, 165-176.
53 Gunnell 2009, 309.
54 Gunnell 2005, 70-75.
55 Gunnell 2005, 70 and Gunnell 2009, 312.
56 Gunnell 2005, 70, and Edvardsson and Egilsson 2015 for an investigation of the Danish shipwreck at Haffjarðarey.
57 Gunnell 2005, 71.
58 Gunnell 2005, 71.
59 Gunnell 2005, 75. The story of two brothers was recorded in audio format in the mid-20th century, the storyteller insists that the event was local history rather than an allegorical folk tale. The Deacon of Myrká is recorded by Claire Booss in her 1984 collection of folklore from throughout Scandinavia.
60 Gunnell 2005, 75.
61 Gunnell 2005, 75.
62 Gunnell 2005, 75.
63 Booss 1984, 653-655.
64 Booss 1984, 655.
65 Tuan 2013.
66 Kristjansdóttir, Lazzeri, and Macchioni 2001.
67 This possibility will be investigated during the upcoming 2018 field season.
68 Eldjarn 1945 and Steffensen 1946.
69 Walking to the site is no longer possible as sea levels have risen to make this extremely unsafe see Saher et al. 2015. Also the author tried to reach the island 4 times on foot at low tide and sank hip deep into mud.
70 Sigurðsson and Þorkelsson 1857-76, 421.
71 Gardiner and Mehler 2007, 410-412.
72 Cunningham 2011, 65.
73 Cunningham 2011, 67.
74 Cunningham 2011, 67.
75 In Iceland there is the interesting incident of the raiding of the monastery at Viðey, see Cunningham 2011, 73.
76 Sigurðsson and Þorkelsson 1857-76, 421.
77 Unpublished manuscript: Hausthús. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum.
78 Luðvik Kristjánsson 1935: "*Talið er, að eftir því sem sundið stækkaði hafi slýs af kirkjuferðum í eyrna aukizt og hafi það orðið til þess, að kirkjan var lögð niður.*"
79 Gunnell 2005, 70-71.
80 Gunnell 2005, 71.
81 Franklin 2006, 145.
82 Tuan 2013.

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Fragmented Remains: A Case for Social Memory vs. Violence

Jason Rasmussen

This paper addresses the purposeful disarticulation and fragmentation of human skeletal remains as a form of burial practice. These burials date from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic periods in Central Europe and Britain and are occasionally associated with cave sites. The most famous of these burials was recovered from the site of Herxheim, Germany; Controversial interpretation has argued that the site represents evidence for ritual cannibalism and widespread interpersonal violence. However, it is equally plausible that these burial practices are a part of a systematic belief system of ritualized destruction of the body as part of a sacred act carried out to insure a proper funeral. It is argued here that several instances of supposedly violent acts are in reality the result of defleshing and disarticulative ritual associated with death and burial. Through a review of disarticulated and fragmented skeletal remains found at multiple sites in Europe; contemporaneous with the site of Herxheim, this paper compares purposeful ritual destruction of the body to episodes of violence. This includes an analysis of both human remains and accompanying material culture at the sites of Grotto Scaloria, Italy and Gough's Cave, England as well as others in the late Paleolithic and Neolithic (12,000 to 4950 B.C.E.).

Introduction

Death is complicated. While that statement is a trite platitude, it is also very true. The issue of death, what causes it, what comes after it, and how human beings react to it has been the origin of many famous works in human history. There are a host of questions regarding the conceptualization of death that are extremely important, and without question these conceptions affected the behavioral patterns of ancient peoples. However, they are beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, this paper is concerned with the complexity of what people do to a body once it is dead.

Across Neolithic Europe there were a wide range of actions that past societies took part in regarding the deceased members of their society. Traditional inhumations, cremations, single or collective graves and burial within the home are just a few examples of burial practice during this period. This paper suggests the possibility of purposeful fragmentation and intentional defleshing of human remains prior to burial as a form of funerary ritual across the Old World during the Paleolithic and Neolithic as opposed to popular cannibalism theories that have been suggested within the literature.¹

The Argument for Violence

Fragmentary remains discovered in archaeological contexts from the Neolithic period in Europe are often assumed to be associated with violent encounters between warring groups. These assumptions are presented as an action performed by the dominant groups over the bodies of their slain victims, and some authors have gone so far as to suggest that such acts of domination featured cannibalism.² These arguments are for skeletal fragmentation as an active process by humans instead of passive events resulting from taphonomic situations.³ This explanation was not always the default interpretation of European

Neolithic death and burial. Prior to the 1990s, Neolithic Europe was painted as a place of peace and relative egalitarian cooperation.⁴ However the discovery of the site of Talheim in Germany almost single handedly altered this perception of Neolithic in Europe forever.⁵

The site of Talheim dates to the later Linear-Band-Culture (LBK) period from approximately 5060-4670 B.C.E.⁶ Pottery fragments of LBK styles featuring scored bands with line patterns, long houses with southwest facing entrances, and ground stone axes are all typological features found in other communities of the LBK where more firm dates are possible.⁷ What makes Talheim unique is the presence of a mass grave with evidence for perimortem trauma, trauma that occurred at the time of death. Within the burial there were thirty-four individuals, including adult males, elderly men and women, and non-adults.⁸ Evidence for blunt force trauma to the back of the skull was identified on several individuals, with others featuring injuries consistent with projectile trauma, several of which still had arrows embedded in their bones. All were deposited into a single large grave (3 m x 1.5 m).⁹ It should be noted that none of these individuals were fragmented before burial, instead they were deposited as complete bodies into the mass grave immediately after death.¹⁰ Ancient DNA studies of the thirty-four individuals in the mass grave show that they were genetically related, supporting the idea that this act of violence was a targeted attack on a defined kinship group or community.¹¹ Possible motives for the attack range from the capture of women, the raiding for loot, and to hunter-gathers looking to force LBK populations out of their territory.¹² Motives for the attack at Talheim remain unclear largely due to the fact that we are not certain who attacked in the first place.¹³ We know violence between small groups did occur from time to time, more than simple interpersonal violence between paired single individuals. Since the discovery

of Talheim more massacre sites, with clear evidence of a single traumatic event producing multiple simultaneous casualties, have been unearthed, such as Schletz, Austria.¹⁴ Cases of burial with projectile points in the Greek islands¹⁵ and a number of healed signs of violence in skeletons from Britain have also been found.¹⁶ All of which show that we cannot interpret Talheim as an isolated incident. Violence was a fact of life, which does not mean that multiple traumatic deaths like that of Talheim were the norm. It also does not mean that burials featuring fragmentation are necessarily evidence of systematic violence between groups.

The Bioarchaeology of Intentional Fragmentation

The assumption that violence is the sole reason for fragmented remains limits the scope interpretation to one theory. This theory would state that the fragmented remains belong to groups of ‘others’ or ‘outsiders’ in direct conflict with the community doing the fragmentation. This includes the Neolithic sites of Herxheim, Germany (5300-4950 B.C.E.) where massive amounts of human remains have been found in pits/ditches around a habitation area.¹⁷ These remains have been significantly fractured and show evidence of burning.¹⁸ Boulestin and Coupey have gone so far as to propose that these remains were the result of systematic violence and cannibalism by the people of Herxheim on the surrounding communities as a show of dominant force.¹⁹ The crux of their argument lies in the fact that many of the bones show signs of butchery and processing that go beyond the minimum number of cuts or scrapings necessary to remove any lingering tissue from the bone.²⁰ They present this data in a cumulative pattern of cut marks across all of the skulls at Herxheim.²¹ There is a distinctive pattern of cuts along the sagittal margin along the anterior, superior, and posterior surfaces of the skull, but underneath there are relatively few cut marks. This is strange considering

this is where there are significant muscle attachments, vascular formations, and respiratory organs would be located.²² If these cut marks were solely to remove flesh one would expect to see more cutting at those locations instead of along the crown of the skull, which is covered primarily by the scalp and not muscle tissue. Dittmar and Mitchell in 2015 discussed surgical marks left on bone in the modern removal of flesh by medical students. These results differ greatly from the markings presented at Herxheim. To explain this difference Boulestin and Coupey suggest instead that such marks are to de-humanize the victims and destroy who they are as individuals as a means of domination.²³

Several of these skulls also appear to have been used for periods of time in a cultural or ritual context as ‘skull cups’ which appear in a great number of cases.²⁴ Similar cups have been found at the site of Gough’s Cave, England which dates to roughly 12,700 B.C.E., over 5,000 years older than the remains found at Herxheim or other LBK sites.²⁵ These cups are the result of deliberate fracturing of the skull along the frontal, temporal, and occipital bones to separate the skull cap intact, so it can be used as a vessel. The cups which were made in the site of Gough’s Cave, England follow a similar pattern of construction as those Herxheim.²⁶ If compared to the remains from Herxheim as presented by Boulestin and Coupey’s 2015 we can see a similar pattern was followed to produce these ‘vessels’. In both sites violence and cannibalism are cited as the motivation behind the creation of this type of artifact. This means that the assumption linking the behavior separated by thousands of years to a single motivation. That the creation of skull-cups and their use could only be a dominative or negative function of society. Some have taken this line of thought to a Malthusian extreme by stating that such acts were the result of “Crises Management” as ancient populations tried to adapt to the rapid change resulting from climate change

of the last ice age as cultures struggled to cope with the change.²⁷ Such explanations are expressed by Bauer et al. in the belief of sacrifice as the “destruction of precious things—the most precious being a human life”.²⁸ This argument assumes that the people of Herxheim or Gough’s Cave share our modern Western Judeo-Christian perception that human bodies are sacred or need to be preserved intact to convey memory or respect to the individual in life.

The number of individuals found at these sites are one of the major points that the authors of these papers make to suggest that violence was at work in these communities. For the site of Herxheim the minimum number of individuals (MNI) is at least 104. This includes all age groups of males and females as of the 2005-2010 excavations.²⁹ These remains were found in ditches which surrounded the habitation area of Herxheim after they had been heavily fragmented using stone tools, fire, and possibly even human chewing. The term “butchery marks” are used throughout their discussion of these remains due to their comparison to animal bones which come from known cooking/processing context and that show evidence of cutting to remove flesh for consumption purposes. These actions become standardized through the repeated process of cleaning an animal and preparing it for a meal, becoming ingrained in human behavior specific to the methodology of that community. Boulestin and Coupey present the idea that the defleshing process of human remains at Herxheim was violent and sadistic. They present this information in single image of their 2015 work where all cut marks across a spectrum of several individuals are layered on the image of a single skull. These images give the impression that the remains were savagely processed in the extreme to support their interpretation of cannibalism or otherwise generally negative role such actions would have represented in past societies.

This type of interpretation is common

when discussing fragmentary remains. Similar arguments have been made for fragmentation of human remains in the Paleolithic and beyond by Paul Pettitt in his book *The Paleolithic Origins of Human Burial*.³⁰ In this work he links the act of fragmentation to what he terms ‘the Cronos Compulsion’. He defines this as an instinctual or primal urge to “dismember, injure or consume parts of the bodies of one’s conspecifics”.³¹ He admits that this term comes from the classical Greek myth of the Titan Cronos who consumed his children whole before they could overthrow him as the chief deity. Yet Pettitt does not discuss the inherent negative connotations such a name has or how linking the myth to the practice of fragmentation or cannibalism portrays it as an act of domination or fear; one which ultimately seeks to destroy or erase individuals from existence.³² Also, by calling it a ‘compulsion’ he limits the ritual or cultural significance of fragmentation to some form of mental defect or savage holdover from when people were not yet separated from animals.

Defleshing and Fracturing of Bodies as Memory

By solely focusing on the violence of the defleshing process and jumping to the conclusion of cannibalism these interpretations limit the scope of complexity of past cultures and the post-mortem treatment of the deceased. The same can be said by only looking at the act of fragmentation or ritualized destruction as an inherently negative action revolving around the need to dominate or degrade those which it has been performed on, which is a very modern and Western concept of these issues. Issues of cannibalism and violence should also be viewed within the context of the American Southwest in Cowboy Wash.³³ Prior to work by Dongoske et al. the American Southwest was viewed in a similar way to the case of Neolithic Europe as presented here.³⁴ Their work looks at how the cultural acts of dismemberment

and consumption of human flesh can exist outside the contexts of violence and domination, instead as aspects of a complex set of beliefs designed to remember and celebrate the dead.³⁵ This is a different form of social memory than the modern world is used to.

The act of preservation in special locations such as libraries, museums and universities is the only way many in the modern world know how to maintain the memory of time, people, places or things in such a rapidly changing world.³⁶ But some cultures feel that 'selective memory or selective forgetting' is more important to the continuation of their cultural identities and that by 'losing' or forgetting certain aspects of one's past they free up their future to change or allows for them to actively change their history through manipulation of past events in the retelling of the tale.³⁷ Some communities, such as the modern Mapuche of Chile, see the destruction of objects which were personal belongings to powerful individuals like shamans as a means of dispersing the power or essence of that individual back into the cosmos so they can return in another form generations later.³⁸ These personal items such as jewelry, clothing, ritual drums, and headdresses are often seen as extensions of the deceased's physical body and thus must be destroyed to free the essence.³⁹ The Mapuche also practice selective forgetting and actively avoiding discussing the deceased individual for the purpose of letting the transgressions of the individual in life fade from memory so only positive associations can be made in future telling of their story, and to prevent ghosts of the dead from coming back to haunt the living.⁴⁰ While such similar practices are currently impossible to detect for Neolithic sites like Herxheim due to their intangible nature, they cannot be completely dismissed out of hand. But what we can observe is that the fragmentation of remains was not a one-time activity, and instead represented a repetitive action over long periods of time which appear to have some standardizations

or 'rules' much like the acts of selective forgetting and the destruction of items of personal connection.

The number of individuals found at Herxheim suggests that such actions occurred over successive events. Along with the standardization of cut marks shown already in this paper, this notion shows that the processing of individuals conformed to preconceived notions of how to perform the task which may have been present at Gough's Cave during the Paleolithic. Such sites are not limited to Herxheim, Gough's Cave, or Scaloria Cave. The examples presented in this work are just a sampling of sites which contain remains which were burned, fragmented, or show some signs of cut marks. The reason these examples were chosen for discussion was because they represent collections which were created over successive events in different areas of Europe.

Scaloria Cave (Grotta Scaloria in Italian) was originally discovered during the expansion of water-sewage lines into underground aquifers by Dottore Quintio in 1931.⁴¹ Since that discovery the cave systems of Scaloria, neighboring Occhiopinto caves, which are connected to the surrounding area, have been studied by several generations of archeologists, including the famed Marija Gimbutas from the 1970s to the 80s.⁴² Scaloria is one of the best dated Neolithic sites in Italy due to its long history of study. Thirty-two radiocarbon dates have been obtained showing that there were at least four major periods of activity for the cave use and the surrounding area.⁴³ Scaloria is an extremely complicated site comprising a habitation area outside the cave, multiple chambered cave systems which have collapsed since their use during the Neolithic, a water cult in the Lower Chamber, and a collective burial of highly fragmented human remains located in the Upper Chamber. The earliest date links to the 12th millennium B.C.E., suggesting that the cave was used by hunter-gathers as

shelter during the last Glaciation.⁴⁴ Ritual deposition of bodies in the Upper Chamber appears to have started around 5200 B.C.E., prior to the establishment of a water cult in the Lower Chamber.⁴⁵ Unlike Herxheim, ritual deposition has long been seen as the purpose for the fragmentation of remains at Scaloria, not warfare or cannibalism.⁴⁶

For years the remains of the Upper Chamber were essentially ignored due to the original excavators believing them to be representative of only a few individuals, whose burial was disturbed and crushed during a cave-in.⁴⁷ From the 1% of the Upper Chamber which has been systematically excavated, approximately 22 to 31 individuals have been recovered and analyzed.⁴⁸ The remains of these individuals, like those at Herxheim, are extremely fragmented through the use of intentional cutting with stone tools and fire while the body was still fresh.⁴⁹ These are the same type of markings found at Herxheim and often many of the same locations on each element. The population of Scaloria covers both male and female, young and old, with the exception of neo-natal remains, with a relatively high number of juvenile remains suggesting that there could have been a very high child mortality rate in Neolithic Italy.⁵⁰ In terms of overall health within this burial population, there are no signs of major pathological conditions. Cribra Orbitalia, often considered a sign of non-specific stress, healed ante-mortem fracture and infection were relatively uncommon.⁵¹

The remains were placed into pits inside the cave, close to the natural entrance to the cave during the Neolithic, and were scattered across the floor.⁵² John Robb notes that at least five distinct patterns of burial were practiced at Scaloria ranging from the placement of individual elements, full skeletons which have been actively defleshed, and fractured with and without grave goods (many also fractured at time of burial) and classical secondary burial treatment.⁵³ Different methods appear to

be associated with certain time periods of the depositions, but more study is needed to confirm this because the sample only comes from 1% of the Upper Chamber's total excavation area.⁵⁴

Comparing Herxheim and Scaloria

Unfortunately, these two sites use different standards of recording their data, but comparison between the data suggests similar elements were cut prior to deposition across both sites.⁵⁵ The cranium, mandible, scapula, and long bones are the elements most often and more heavily processed. As discussed earlier, many of the cuts on the crania at Herxheim were most likely for the shaping of skull cups, a type of modification not seen at Scaloria. These elements of the body are also the most heavily represented in both sites along with loose vertebrae.

Boulestin and Coupey argue that such cut marks represent the cutting of meat from bone in order to consume it.⁵⁶ On the other hand, at Scaloria, Knusel⁵⁷ and Robb⁵⁸ conclude that the marks are in line with known practices of secondary burial like those found in the Near East where bodies are cleaned of the remaining flesh before burial in a final location, and/or the ritual processing of bodies while they are still fresh in the form of long and complex funerary practice.⁵⁹ The placement of these cut marks are often associated with major muscle and ligament attachment sites, which would require human action in order to clean the bones. The cranium and mandible have a large number of such attachments due to the presence of muscles of the back/neck needed for chewing/speaking, which could be why these elements in both sites have the largest number of cuts and other modifications on their surfaces.⁶⁰ Often such cut marks on humans are compared to animal remains which have clearly been processed for human consumption. Butchery practices become standardized within communities and cultures as people perform the task over and over for a specific purpose.⁶¹ This

is often cited as evidence of cannibalism due to the fact that human bones have been processed like animals, but rarely do they discuss the fact that the skeletal/muscular system of mammals share many of the same elements and attachments due to similar needs of locomotion and structural support. Paleolithic-Neolithic populations still relied heavily on game animals, and it is not out of the realm of possibility that the knowledge to properly clean an animal for consumption would be widely known in these communities, and that such knowledge might be transferred to human remains in a funerary context. However, to further establish this assumption we would need to know about ancient populations' perceptions of the body, especially if these communities have similar cosmologies to South American hunter-gather tribes in which we see familial relationships in nature.⁶²

Conclusion

Systematic violence, like fractures on fresh vs dry bones, leaves its own fingerprint on human remains.⁶³ Warfare and conflict create certain types of marks such as substantial breaks in bones, cut wounds from hand axes, or blunt force trauma like that seen at Talheim. Some evidence for these kinds of markings are found at Herxheim and Scaloria in the remains, but much of it appears to be older trauma occurring many years prior to death which had healed.⁶⁴ If Herxheim was the site of mass executions for the sake of domination we would expect to find clear evidence of violence as the direct cause of death, similar to human remains found in Mesoamerica.⁶⁵ For the majority of remains at both Herxheim and Scaloria the cause of death appears to have been natural, or at least not violent in a way that would leave marks on the skeletons.

Strontium studies of the two sites are remarkably similar. The remains from both sites do not come just from the site itself, but from other communities from

the surrounding villages and towns. The individuals buried at Scaloria are from a large region surrounding the Tavoliere plain.⁶⁶ Many of these individuals from farther away are only represented by a single skeletal element such as a long bone (or fragments of it) with no matches biologically to the rest of the samples.⁶⁷ The frequency of cut marks on the bones for those outside the local region are significantly fewer, suggesting that they were not processed while fresh.⁶⁸ Robb has suggested that this is because these remains come from villages farther out and that a more traditional secondary burial practice was used, thus not requiring the cutting. Elements of those remains were then transported to Scaloria for the purpose of being commingled with other remains in some form of enchainment.⁶⁹ The preliminary strontium test at Herxheim shows similar situations where individuals from further away than the surrounding areas were brought to Herxheim. The bones of 'foreigners' in the pits/ditches are mixed in with more local individuals.⁷⁰ The Herxheim remains are often found with intentionally smashed pottery, which often corresponds to strontium studies of the surrounding communities.⁷¹

Boulestin and company, as discussed above, believe that such evidence points to the shipment of humans to Herxheim for the purpose of execution and ultimately cannibalization as a show of domination. But as pointed out, there is a distinct lack of perimortem trauma in the remains of Herxheim to support a systematic violent end for these individuals. This factor, coupled with the fact that local and not local individuals are processed in the same way and disposed of collectively, show that it is highly unlikely that acts of domination are at play here. Instead, a situation like that suggested by Robb for Scaloria is more likely, meaning that the site of Herxheim was a focal point for the caching of the dead as some form of collective identity and that the fragmentation is part of rituals

designed to ‘free’ the essence or personality of the living from the bones, similar to the examples discussed above from South America.

Similar arguments have been made for remains found in the New World at Cowboy Wash.⁷² This work looks at how sensationalized remains were traditionally viewed as signs of cannibalism based on the contact reports of Tanio by Columbus and his crew without any consideration to the ethnographic data of how cannibalism both ritual and symbolic actually functions in pre-contact societies. Instead Dongoske and coauthors argue that, similar to what has been argued here, the purpose for such actions was not ‘violence’, but actions that promote continuation and interconnectivity of the community. It is time that similar approaches are used to examine Neolithic populations of Europe.

Endnotes:

- 1 See Villa et al. 1986; Brothwell 1961; Boulestin et al. 2009; Kansa et al. 2009 and Carbonell et al. 2010 for arguments for cannibalism in Neolithic Europe.
- 2 Villa et al. 1986; Brothwell 1961; Boulestin et al. 2009; Kansa et al. 2009; Carbonell et al. 2010.
- 3 Pokines and Symes 2013 discusses fragmentation of human bone from natural processes such as weathering and soil chemistry.
- 4 Armit 2011, 51.
- 5 Armit 2011, 51.
- 6 Wahl and Trautmann 2012, 78.
- 7 Dolukhanov et al. 2005.
- 8 Wahl and Trautmann 2012, 98-99.
- 9 Price, Wahl, and Bentley 2008, 264.
- 10 Wahl and Trautmann 2012, 77.
- 11 Bentley 2007.
- 12 Wahl and Trautmann 2012, 99.
- 13 See Wahl and Trautmann 2012, 99 for a summary of possible motives for Talheim.
- 14 Teschler-Nicola et al. 1999.
- 15 Papatthanasidou 2012.
- 16 Schulting 2012.
- 17 Boulestin et al. 2009, 969.
- 18 Boulestin et al. 2009, 971-973.
- 19 Boulestin and Coupey 2015, 115-133.
- 20 Boulestin and Coupey 2015, 79- 100.
- 21 Boulestin and Coupey 2015, 81- 83.
- 22 Sampson, Montgomery, and Henryson 1991, 141-155.
- 23 Boulestin and Coupey 2015, 125-126.
- 24 Boulestin and Coupey 2015, 84.
- 25 Bello et al. 2011, 2.
- 26 Bello et al. 2011, 5 for Gough’s Cave and Boulestin; Coupey 2015, 83 for Herxheim.
- 27 Bauer et al. 2016, 171-195.
- 28 Bauer et al. 2016, 185.
- 29 Boulestin and Coupey 2015, 101.
- 30 Pettitt 2011.
- 31 Pettitt 2011, 9.
- 32 Pettitt 2011, 9.
- 33 Dongoske et al. 2000.
- 34 See White 2014 and Martin 2016 for arguments for violence and cannibalism in the American South-West.
- 35 Dongoske et al. 2000, 180-182.
- 36 Scantros-Ganero 2012, 52.
- 37 Scantros-Ganero 2012, 52-53.
- 38 Bacigalupo 2015, 200-225.
- 39 Bacigalupo 2015, 220.
- 40 Bacigalupo 2015, 220-225.
- 41 Elster et al. 2016, xxiii.
- 42 Elster et al 2016, xxiii.
- 43 Robb 2016, 46.
- 44 Robb 2016, 47.
- 45 Robb 2016, 47.
- 46 Knusel 2016, 147-148.
- 47 Elster 2016, 19.
- 48 Robb 2014, 41.

49 Knusel et al. 2016, 145.
 50 Robb 2014, 41 and Knusel 2016, 124.
 51 Knusel 2016, 126-128.
 52 Elster 2017, 18.
 53 Robb 2014, 41-42.
 54 Robb 2014, 41-42.
 55 See Boulestin and Coupey 2015, 63 for stats on Herxheim cut-marks; Knusel, Robb, and Talfur 2017, 166 for Scaloria Cave.
 56 2016, 70-76.
 57 Knusel et al. 2016.
 58 Robb et al. 2014.
 59 Villa and Mahieu 1991; Kuijt 2009.
 60 Boulestin and Coupey 2015; Elster et al. 2016.
 61 Bello et al. 2016, 731-739.
 62 Kohn 2012.
 63 Outram 2005; Knusel 2005.
 64 Orshiedt and Haidle 2012, 129-132.
 65 Berryman 2008.
 66 Tafuri et al. 2016, 1054.
 67 Robb 2014, 29.
 68 Robb 2014, 49.
 69 Robb 2014, 49.
 70 Boulestin and Coupey 2016, 126-128.
 71 Turck et al. 2012, 158.
 72 Dongoske et al. 2000.

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Figures in Transition: The Half-Open Door Motif on the Velletri Sarcophagus

Patricia Tabascio

When a Roman viewer encountered a sarcophagus with closed doors, it was understood as a metaphorical and physical division between the viewer's position in the realm of the living and the realm of the dead. However, this straightforward relationship between the viewer, door motif and realm for the dead beyond it can be complicated with the inclusion of other elements.

The Velletri Sarcophagus incorporates six scenes of mortal and divine figures in the midst of transitioning between the realms of the living and the dead. This sustained, and unparalleled reference to transition (and preferred utilization of a half-open door) signifies its importance to understanding the sarcophagus's intended message.

By way of analysing the details of each half-open door scene, their mythologies and contemporary parallels, this article will consider how the half-open door scenes on the Velletri Sarcophagus work together in order to create a cohesive program that uniquely prompts the viewer to contemplate the parameters of life, death, mortality and divinity.

Introduction

To encounter a door that is ajar signals to the viewer that the space beyond its permeable architectural barrier is accessible; that an individual is able to explore the area on the opposite side of the threshold on which they stand and depart this realm whenever they desire. When one perceives a half-open door in a funerary context, however, this rapport is altered in several ways. Commonly interpreted as representing the realm of the dead, or more precisely the doors to Hades,¹ an individual that encounters this motif on Roman sarcophagi is unable to penetrate the realm that the half-open door leads to without joining the departed's fatal and unalterable state.² This firmly distinguishes the metaphorical division between the realm of the living and the dead, as well as the physical division between the body of the living individual and that of the deceased enclosed within the sarcophagus's walls. This relationship is further complicated

when an open door with mortal and divine figures entering and exiting is rendered. Does this represent an invitation to enter? Is it a signal that the realm of the dead can be entered and then subsequently exited? Can this be achieved by anyone?

The Velletri Sarcophagus (Figs. 1-4) is a complex, second-century CE³ funerary monument that repeats the ambiguous motif of figures in the process of transitioning into and out of the realm of the dead. Discovered in a vineyard about four miles away from the town of Velletri in Contrada Arcione off of Via Ariana,⁴ the Velletri Sarcophagus had been uprooted from its original location by grave robbers and was reused by nine individuals (seven adults and two children), whose skeletons span the 12th and 14th centuries,⁵ leaving scholars unable to assert its original context and patron.⁶

The sarcophagus's monumental size (its measurements are 2.57 meters in length,

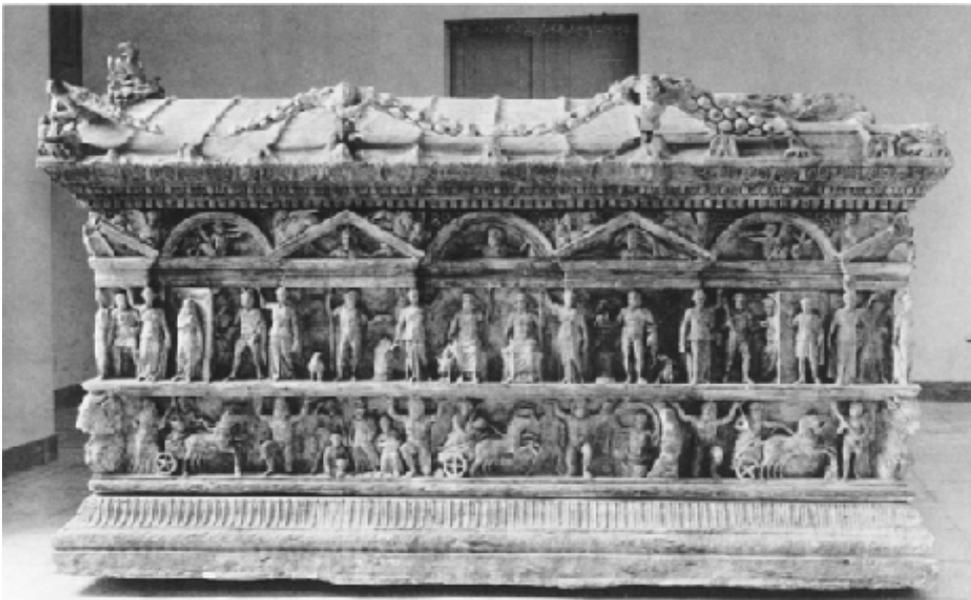


Figure 1: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Front, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico. (Lawrence 1965, Fig. 1; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).



Figure 2: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Right Short Side, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 3; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).

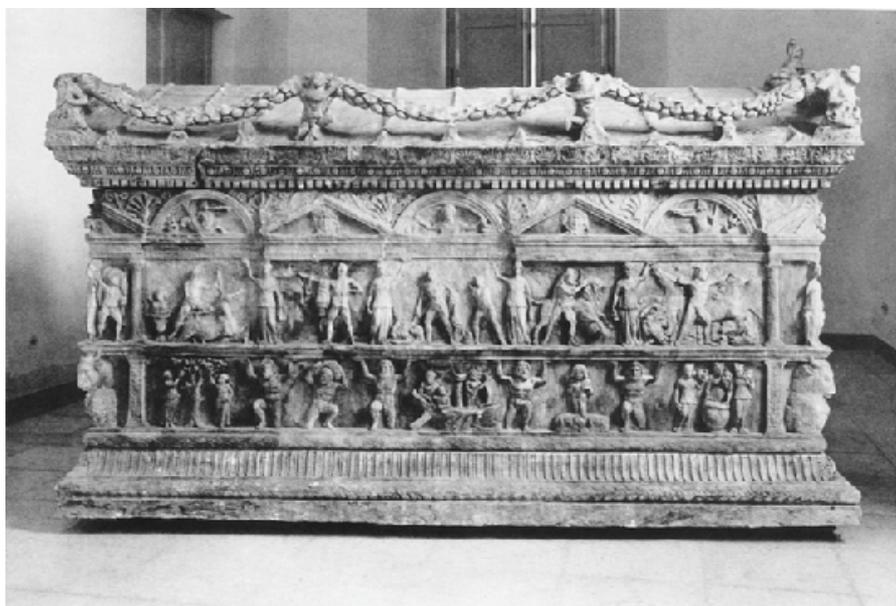


Figure 3: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Back, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 2; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).

1.245 meters in height and 1.45 meters in width),⁷ and segmentation into upper and lower tiers (which is the earliest known example of this configuration)⁸ makes the inclusion of its 169 figures possible. Simultaneously presented alongside the repeated half-open door motif are scenes that firmly take place in both the realm of the living and the dead that involve a variety of known mythological narratives in addition to secular individuals. Included are all 12 of Herakles's labors (Figs. 2-4), an animal sacrifice scene (Fig. 2), myths that detail suffering in the underworld (Sisyphus, Tantalus and the Danaides are all included) (Fig. 3)⁹ and an idyllic scene of shepherds (Fig. 4).¹⁰

On the whole, the sarcophagus' decoration prompts inquiries about its unique configuration, Greek rather than Roman focus¹¹ and its influence by the Second Sophistic intellectual movement.¹² However, the repeated employment of the door/transition motifs is particularly striking. Not only is the inclusion of multiple doors unparalleled on Roman sarcophagi, but its thematic repetition and its prominent placement on the Velletri Sarcophagus is necessary to understanding the vital conflation of life, death, mortality and divinity. This paper will therefore attempt to highlight the intention of incorporating the half-open door motif.

Figures in motion: entering and exiting the realm of the dead

A total of five scenes on the Velletri Sarcophagus contain figures in the midst of transitioning between the realms of the living and the dead, four of which are by way of a half-open door. The sustained reference to the theme of transition and the preferred utilization of the half-open door motif implies its significance to understanding the central message that is being dispelled. This observation therefore prompts the questions: why was the repeated depiction of figures in the midst of transition included



Figure 4: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Left Short Side, ca. determine the details of each scene and 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 4; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).

as part of this sarcophagus? What do these scenes communicate about death? How do they relate to the intended funerary function of a sarcophagus? In order to answer these questions, this section will first consider each threshold separately in order to determine the details of each scene and highlight any artistic parallels that may exist. This will provide the foundation needed to deduce how the half-open door scenes work together on the Velletri Sarcophagus in order to create a cohesive message.

Protesilaus and Laodamia

The first scene to consider is located on the front of the sarcophagus, particularly its upper register on the left side (Figs. 1



Figure 5: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Detail of Protesilaus and Laodamia, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 7; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).

& 5). It displays Protesilaus (clothed in a short tunic) being led through a half-open door by Hermes in order to reunite with his wife Laodamia for three hours. Hermes (who is already securely in the realm of the living) grasps Protesilaus' right wrist as he emerges from the half-open door. The precise moment of transition is rendered here, as it displays half of Protesilaus' body still beyond the half-open door in the realm of the dead. Laodamia waits outside the half-open door for her husband; she is adorned with a mantle fastened around her head, which drapes over most of her body.¹³

The Protesilaus-Laodamia scene on the Velletri Sarcophagus appears in a different formulation than that of the ca. 170 CE Protesilaus and Laodamia Sarcophagus from the Vatican Museum. The front of this sarcophagus exhibits scenes from several aspects of the myth: beginning on the left, Protesilaus is rendered stepping off of a boat, alluding to his arrival at Troy and subsequent death at the hands of Hector, who approaches from the right. In the following scene, Protesilaus lies lifeless on the ground as a shrouded shade emerges from his body and is met by Hermes.¹⁴ Immediately proceeding the scene of Protesilaus' death

is that of Hermes assisting Protesilaus in his exit from the underworld. The central scene displays the anticipated reunion of the married couple in front of a door. This scene is reminiscent of *dextrarum iunctio* scenes (where a male and female figure clasp hands in front of a closed door) that frequently decorate the front of sarcophagi.¹⁵ Glenys Davies interprets its centrally-placed inclusion as a summary of the sarcophagus' message of marital bond, the hope for reunion in death, as well as an allusion to virtues such as *pietas* and *concordia*.¹⁶ In the adjacent scene the shrouded shade makes his return to the realm of the living as he emerges from behind a seated Protesilaus, while Laodamia reclines on a *kline*, grief-stricken for her husband's departure for the underworld. Above her is a portrait of Protesilaus, situated in a shrine that honors deceased relatives. The final scene shows Protesilaus' ultimate return. He is once again accompanied by Hermes as they walk towards Charon, the ferryman, who will transport Protesilaus back to the underworld.¹⁷ A threshold to the right of Charon visually frames the entire scene and also acts as a means of denoting the barrier between the realms of the living and the dead.

Alcestis and Admetus

Alcestis, a daughter of Pelias, was to be married to King Admetus of Phraeae. On the day of his wedding, Admetus discovered that he was fated to die young (potentially as a result of failing to sacrifice to Artemis).¹⁸ Apollo persuaded the Fates to allow Admetus to live if a family member or friend would die in his place. After Admetus' parents refused, Alcestis volunteered to take her husband's place in the underworld and died for him. Herakles, a guest in Admetus' house during this event, ultimately rescued Alcestis from the underworld, where she was permitted to live out the rest of her life until death took her in old age.



Figure 6: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Detail of Alcestis and Admetus, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 10; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).

The detail of a hooded Alcestis' exit from the underworld with the help of Herakles is rendered on the right side of the Velletri Sarcophagus, mirroring the scene of Protesilaus and Laodamia on the front (Figs. 1 & 6). Admetus is depicted as waiting outside of the half-open door in the realm of the living.

Alcestis' departure from the underworld also decorates the short side of the Rape of Persephone sarcophagus in the Uffizi Gallery (from ca. 170 CE). Grasping her hood, Herakles guides the veiled Alcestis from under the archway to her right. Here, Herakles is bearded, holds a club in his right hand and has a lion's skin in his possession, as on the Velletri Sarcophagus.

Hades and Persephone

While the remaining scenes on the front of the sarcophagus do not render figures at half-open doors, one scene shows figures in transition and all remaining scenes are significant to interpreting the half-open doors' prevalence.

The enthroned Hades and Persephone are

positioned in the center of the upper, and most prominent register (Figs. 1 & 7). They are sculpted on the sarcophagus' primary side, signaling their importance in the decorative program of the sarcophagus as a whole. This observation is further emphasized by the entire register beneath, a scene which precludes Hades and Persephone's union in the underworld. Interestingly, this particular formulation of Hades and Persephone is unparalleled.¹⁹ Scenes exhibiting these two divinities either display the abduction of Persephone or if the two gods are shown enthroned in the underworld, the scene always includes Hermes in the midst of retrieving Persephone for her six-month return to the realm of the living, as in the Rape of Persephone sarcophagus in Casino Rospigliosi. Notably, on a sarcophagus that chooses to display so many figures moving between the two realms, an artistic decision was made to defy a scene's artistic precedent.

The lower register of the front side prefaces the Hades and Persephone scene that surmounts it, demonstrating how that scene came to be by displaying the Rape of Persephone (Figs. 1 & 8). The



Figure 7: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Detail of Hades and Persephone, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 29; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).



Figure 8: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Detail of the Rape of Persephone, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 12; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).

center shows the main act of the rape and abduction of Persephone – Hades guides a four-horse chariot to the right as he carries Persephone, who has her right arm flung up over her head in a state of distress. The chariot charges towards the cave in the next register to the right, signalling an entrance into the underworld.

Entering Hades by way of a cave was widely understood as a valid entrance into the realm of the dead in antiquity, such as the supposed cave entrance located at the Bay of Naples. Despite this, the cave motif was seldom utilized with a single example found in the third century CE Tomb of the Nasonii. While the majority of the hypogeum's wall paintings are fugitive, the seventeenth-century engravings of Pietro Santi Bartoli have recorded their decoration.²⁰ The panel that is of particular interest is the lateral painting that depicts Herakles emerging from a cave with Cerberus.²¹

The patera scene

The central scene on the Velletri Sarcophagus's right short side (Figs. 2 & 9) has been the subject of much scholarly debate,²² as it lacks a precise typological parallel. Nonetheless, it consists of known components. In this scene, an older, bearded male figure hands a *patera* to a beardless male figure. The bearded male wears a mantel that drapes over one shoulder and fastens around his waist, leaving his torso bare. The beardless male is naked with the exception of the chlamys that is fastened around his neck; holding a sceptre, he steps into the space beyond the half-open door. This door is distinct from all the other doors that decorate the sarcophagus as it opens inward.

What this scene is meant to convey has been interpreted in several different ways. Klauser relates it to the flanking Labors of Herakles scenes, in that it shows Zeus admitting Herakles to Olympus.²³ As Haarløv points out, however, this interpretation is doubtful



Figure 9: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Detail of the Patera Scene, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 19; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).

because of the absence of attributes that commonly accompany the two figures. In each of the labor scenes, Herakles is rendered with a lion skin and/or a club, as well as sporting a beard. Additionally, the ordering of the labors (which holds true to the chronology of the mythologies) would be disrupted.²⁴ The reading that the scene displays Herakles entering Olympus also conflicts with all other half-open door scenes on this sarcophagus. Whether exiting or entering the realm of the dead, the three other half-open door scenes unanimously distinguish the other side of the door as Hades. It is therefore doubtful that this half-open door scene would defy this precedent. Subject to the same criticism that Haarløv gives to Klauser, Andreae retains the interpretation that the beardless male figure is Herakles but instead views the other figure as Hades and that it shows a *katabasis*. Andreae concludes by stating that the scene shows an entrance into the underworld as a result of the presence of the *patera*.²⁵ Bartoccini and Lawrence eliminate

the mythological interpretation all together, agreeing that the beardless figure represents the deceased, not only because the figure possesses portrait features, but because his possession of a *patera* can be understood as his bringing a libation to the god of the underworld.²⁶ Libations were also poured by the family of the deceased (directly into the sarcophagus by way of a pipe, called *profusio*)²⁷ at ceremonies following the funeral. They then interpret the second, bearded figure as his familial ancestor.²⁸ Haarløv echoes this interpretation and observes parallels between this scene with Greek grave stelai (rightfully so, as the Velletri Sarcophagus possesses Greek influence). One stele he calls upon is from Piraeus and shows a standing, younger man (Hippomachos), who is propped up by the staff nestled under his left arm,²⁹ shaking the hand of an older, seated man (Kallias). Friis Johansen instead thinks that the scene shows a father with his son, but is uncertain as to what the scene represents: is it a father mourning the loss of his son or the other way round?³⁰ Recent scholarship has favored the deceased-ancestor interpretation put forth by Bartoccini and Lawrence.³¹ I am also in favor of this interpretation, as it is the only hypothesis in which a convincing artistic parallel has been provided.

Herakles and Cerberus

The remaining scene that employs the door motif is on the Velletri Sarcophagus' left short side. It shows Herakles exiting the underworld with Cerberus, which is the 11 of his 12 labors (Figs. 4 & 10). This motif has many parallels in the Roman funerary realm. For instance, these two figures dominate the center scene of the ca. 180 CE Strigilated Sarcophagus from the Capitoline Museum. The Tomb of the Nasonii also employs this motif on one of its lateral walls, which features Herakles emerging from a cave instead of a door.



Figure 10: The Velletri Sarcophagus, Detail of Herakles and Cerberus, ca. 150-170 CE from the Velletri Museo Civico (Lawrence 1965, fig. 33; courtesy American Journal of Archaeology and Archaeological Institute of America).

Aiding the mourner: the didactic component of figures in transition

Scholars have, for the most part, maintained a similar position when interpreting the inclusion of mythological narratives on Roman sarcophagi from the Antonine period:³² that their display encourages the viewer to associate the deceased with the same virtues and values that the protagonists possess.³³ For example, the utilization of the 12 labors of Herakles, which span the upper registers of the right short side, back and left short side of the Velletri Sarcophagus, is one common method of paralleling the *virtus* of the hero with the deceased on marble sculpted sarcophagi.³⁴

This interpretation has also been applied to mythological narratives that include figures in transition between the realms of the living and the dead. For instance,

sarcophagi that depict or merely allude to Alcestis' sacrifice, which also appears on the Velletri Sarcophagus, solidifies her as an *exemplum pietatis*.³⁵ In addition, Alcestis' inclusion in sarcophagi decoration not only promotes the application of the same set of virtues to the deceased, but it also reminds the viewer that the continued imitation of these virtues in life could result in their reunion in death.³⁶

While the above interpretation has the potential to explain the intended function of half-open doors on the Velletri Sarcophagus, I propose an alternative method for understanding their inclusion – that its five transition motifs invite the viewer to reflect upon death, life and mortality, ultimately assisting with their mourning process.

My interpretation stems from the artistic decision to compress the wider narrative of each of the four half-open door scenes in favor of highlighting the moment of transition from one realm to the other. Concerning the Protesilaus-Laodamia and Alcestis-Admetus scenes, the emphasis on the moment of transition and the imminent reunion of the spouses brings about an alteration of the mythologies' typical decoration and ultimate iconographic significance as it is known on other Roman sarcophagi from the period. For instance, the previously considered Protesilaus and Laodamia Sarcophagus from the Vatican displays the entirety of this myth on the sarcophagus' front. While the Vatican sarcophagus highlights Protesilaus' four transitions between life and death by the assistance of a divinity, the central scene, which is reminiscent of *dextrarum iunctio*, is what ultimately influences the decoration's central message of marital love and feminine devotion, paralleling the relationship the deceased shared with their partner with that of the mythological couple.³⁷

More similar in form and overall message is the Alcestis-Herakles scene on the short

side of the Rape of Persephone sarcophagus in the Uffizi Gallery. It contains decoration of Persephone's abduction and imminent transition into the underworld on the front, Herakles leading Alcestis out of Hades on one short side and Hermes escorting Eurydice out from the underworld on the other short side. The sarcophagus' message is therefore centered around the transition between life and death and the ability of all female mythological figures included as part of the decoration to traverse this boundary with help from a divinity. Where it differs from the Velletri Sarcophagus is the omission of Alcestis' husband waiting for her return in the realm of the living. The Protesilaus-Laodamia and Alcestis-Admetus scenes on the Velletri Sarcophagus thus fall somewhere uniquely in the middle of their respective parallels – it displays whom among the living are affected by the ability of their deceased loved ones to temporarily return to life and also isolates the *precise* moment of transition, as both Protesilaus and Alcestis have half their bodies in the realm of the living and the other half on the other side of the door. The depiction of figures straddling the boundaries of the realms of life and death is also portrayed on the remaining two half-open door scenes – Herakles' foot and half of the creature he guides remains in the realm of the living, while the deceased-ancestor scene displays the departed with his foot in the realm of the dead.

The inclusion of the repeated half-open door motif showing the precise moment of transition between life and death helps the viewer in their process of mourning the deceased. It may initially seem that this hypothesis assumes that the various scenes showing figures emerging from the underworld to be reunited with their loved ones provides a sense of hope that Herakles or Hermes will too assist the deceased in their miraculous return to life. This is, of course, not what I am suggesting, for it is the inevitability of death which the half-open door scenes allude to that assist in the

mourning process. As Elsner has suggested, not only do the exit scenes on the Velletri Sarcophagus reinforce that the boundary between life and death is only permeable for select, mythological figures,³⁸ but that it also possesses a didactic component. Furthermore, Protesilaus' temporary return to life only left his wife to grieve to an even greater extent than after his initial death,³⁹ leaving the viewer to wonder if Protesilaus' short return was even worth the aftermath.

This reading of the front's half-open door scenes raises a further consideration: in both the Protesilaus-Laodamia and Alcestis-Admetus exit scenes, although they return to the realm of the living, both mythological figures eventually return to Hades permanently. For Protesilaus, his return to the underworld is almost immediate, while Alcestis is permitted to live out her life until death takes both her and Admetus in old age. Both scenes therefore act as a helpful visual reminder that death is unavoidable, even for those chosen few brought back to the realm of the living temporarily.

The conclusions pertaining to the two half-open door scenes above also pertain to the remaining decoration on the front, detailing the abduction of Persephone. Furthermore, the Protesilaus-Laodamia and Alcestis-Admetus exit scenes prompt the viewer to recall aspects of Persephone's mythology that are not artistically rendered, specifically the detail that she is required to spend half of every year with Hades in the underworld. Like Protesilaus and Alcestis, Persephone is able to break free from Hades with help from the transitional divinity Hermes, but is required to ultimately return. This feature of her mythology is further reinforced through Persephone's static positioning in the central scene. Interestingly, the Velletri Sarcophagus's central scene defies the artistic precedent set by all other surviving, parallel scenes by way of omitting the figure of Hermes, who collects Persephone for her six-month stint in the realm of the living. The formulation of the center scene

is additionally noteworthy as a result of the decision to not show transition when all those surrounding it show figures moving between the realm of the living and the dead. The conscious decision to render Persephone in a static state therefore is intrinsic to communicating its message about the inevitability of permanently crossing the metaphorical threshold from life into death. All scenes on the front of the Velletri Sarcophagus therefore provide a visual commentary on the ancient understanding of death and what the viewer already knows to be true – that all, even those few mythological figures permitted to exit Hades for a time, must ultimately return to the underworld and thus confront Hades and Persephone in death.

The viewer would subsequently move on to the right short side and perceive the half-open door motif of the deceased receiving a *patera* from his ancestor and entering Hades. This scene seeks to reinforce the message expressed on the front; immediately after viewing the front and the messages it communicates about the inevitability of joining Hades and Persephone in death, the mourning viewer is able to approach the deceased-ancestor scene with a sense of understanding that death was the departed's ultimate fate, as it will also be the viewer's in time. While obviously metaphorical in its artistic formulation, the deceased-ancestor scene visually articulates the genuine and compulsory transition from life to death that is alluded to on the front and that the deceased experienced. This interpretation and similar artistic rendition of parting with a loved one at death has been previously expressed by Friis Johansen⁴⁰ concerning similarly formulated Classical Greek funerary stelai.⁴¹

The final half-open door scene is of Herakles exiting the underworld with Cerberus. The 11th labor of Herakles is not only included to complete the entire labors cycle on the Velletri Sarcophagus, but it may additionally contribute to and reinforce the

message of the other transition scenes, as it displays a divinity that possesses a unique ability to traverse the realms of the living and dead.

Conclusion

As it has been alluded to throughout this paper, inclusion of an artistically rendered half-open door in a funerary context has the potential to be interpreted several ways: as a method of aligning the virtues of a hero with the deceased,⁴² signalling untimely death⁴³ or the hope for reunion beyond life.⁴⁴ However, the anomalous decoration of the Velletri Sarcophagus (both in terms of its unique paring of mythologies and artistic rendition of each myth) requires an alternate lens which one should interpret its message.

By way of considering the Velletri Sarcophagus' prominent placement and repeated use of the half-open door, rendition of the precise moment of transition, associated mythologies (when applicable), and contemporary parallels that meticulous inclusion of the half-open door intends to aid the mourning viewer, which is achieved through the repeated nod to the inevitability of death for both the deceased and the viewer, and the prospect of reuniting with the deceased in death.⁴⁵

Endnotes:

- 1 Brilliant 1992, 203; Haarløv 1977, 44.
- 2 Platt 2012, 220.
- 3 The Velletri Sarcophagus dates to the second century CE (Elsner 2012, 185; Lawrence 1965, 222; Newby 2016, 247; Platt 2012, 224), but narrowing down its creation during this hundred-year period has proved difficult. Considering the decoration from comparable sarcophagi and additional factors such as its customization, it is reasonable to date the artifact to 150-170 CE (Jongste 1992, 9-10; Platt 2012, 224).
- 4 Bartoccini 1958, 129; Thomas 2011, 407.
- 5 Thomas 2011, 407.
- 6 Edmund Thomas suggests that the sarcophagus was originally located in the villa of Fontana Sant'Antonio, as it is the villa closest in proximity to its findspot (Thomas 2011, 408). Several other scholars have instead argued that the sarcophagus was made for the family of the Octavians, a recognized family in Velletri (Bieber 1966, 65; Wagener and Ashby 1913, 399), and that its original location was the villa of San Cesareo (Wagener and Ashby 1913, 413-14).
- 7 Bartoccini 1958, 134.
- 8 Elsner 2012, 185.
- 9 Lawrence 1965, 218.
- 10 Ewald 1999, 171-85.
- 11 Elsner 1998, 146.
- 12 Mayer 2012, 102; Thomas 2011, 392; Wood 1978, 504.
- 13 Haarløv 1977, 43.
- 14 Ewald and Zanker 2012, 394.
- 15 Huskinson 2012, 84.
- 16 Davies 1985, 636-637 & 638.
- 17 Tonybee 1971, 44.
- 18 Lesky 1925, 20-42.
- 19 Lindner 1984, 86-90.
- 20 Borg 2013, 244; Messineo 2000, 66-73; Platt 2012, 216.
- 21 Borg 2013, 245.
- 22 Haarløv 1977, 28; Klauser 1960, 143; Lawrence 1965, 213.
- 23 Klauser 1960, 143.
- 24 Haarløv 1977, 28.
- 25 Andreae 1963, 53-6.
- 26 Haarløv 1977, 28.
- 27 Tonybee 1971, 51.
- 28 Haarløv 1977, 28; Lawrence 1965, 213.
- 29 Friis Johansen 1951, 40.
- 30 Friis Johansen 1951, 40.
- 31 Elsner 2012, 186; Newby 2016, 241-245; Platt 2011, 223.
- 32 Ewald 2010, 265; Ewald and Zanker 2012, 229; Grassinger 1999, 110-28; Gessert 2004, 219; Jongste 1992, 9-11 & 32; Koortbojian 1995, 114.
- 33 Ewald 2010, 265; Gessert 2004, 223; Koortbojian 1995, 114.
- 34 Ewald and Zanker 2012, 229; Jongste 1992, 11 & 32.

35 Gessert 2004, 219.
36 Wood 1978, 510.
37 Zanker 2012, 169.
38 Elsner 2012, 186.
39 Elsner 2012, 186.
40 as outlined by Glenys Davies
41 Davies 1985, 629.
42 Ewald and Zanker 2012, 229; Jongste 1992, 11 and 32.
43 Wood 1978, 504.
44 Wood 1978, 504.
45 Davies 1985, 629.

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Ephemeral Creatures: Infant Death and Burial in Ancient Rome

Kipp Tremlin

*Since the publication of Mark Golden's essay, "Did the Ancients Care when their Children Died," contention over the degree to which Roman parents distanced themselves from the deaths of their infant children has become a center of debate. Although many scholars have refuted the notion that the majority of Romans met the unfortunate death of a young child with ambivalence, few have addressed the practice of child abandonment and exposure in Roman society. This study provides a synthesis of recent works on the archaeological, literary, and epigraphic evidence for Roman practices regarding infant death and burial in the Italian peninsula from the first century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E. In placing the Roman practice of child exposure and abandonment into conversation with these recent findings, this study underscores the liminal place of the infant in Roman society while demonstrating the emotional turmoil that Roman parents faced when confronted with the death of an infant. **

Introduction

“The omnipresence of death coloured affective relations at all levels of society, by reducing the amount of emotional capital available for prudent investment in any single individual, especially in such ephemeral creatures as infants.”¹

In the spring of 2013, the British Museum, in conjunction with the Archaeological Superintendency of Naples and Pompeii, opened its *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herulaneum* exhibit. The collection featured several artifacts related to everyday life in the cities, including the only surviving example of an ancient Roman cradle.² Originally discovered containing the corpse of a small child and the remains of its bedding, the cradle is a touching reminder of the now invisible dramatic lives of ancient Roman mothers and their infants.³ Estimates for the infant mortality rate in ancient Rome are grim; nearly half of all children did not survive to their tenth birthday and approximately 20-40% of babies died within their first year.⁴ Some early modern historians have correlated high infant mortality rates with a decrease in parental emotional investment in their newborn children. Edward Shorter, in his text, *The Making of the Early Modern Family* argues that early modern mothers held a “traditional” view of indifference toward their infant’s fate as a result of “material circumstances and community attitudes.”⁵ Further developing this point, Lawrence Stone, in his monograph *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England: 1500-1800* concludes that high infant mortality rates among early modern families encouraged a limited investment in children, which solidified a view of the family as “a group of replaceable surrogates.”⁶

Influenced by these arguments, some ancient historians have used evidence of high infant mortality rates to suggest that parents in ancient Rome similarly held a sense of indifference toward the death of their infants.⁷ Keith Bradley suggests that while parental attitudes certainly varied, the use of

wet nurses indicates “parental indifference” and “emotional distancing.”⁸ Peter Garnsey best articulates the idea, writing: “One would expect parents to be more deeply affected by the deaths of older children than those of the very young.”⁹ This “demographic determinism” theory – which argues that Roman families were generally indifferent to the death of their children as a result of the high likelihood that they would die young – has been at the heart of several debates over how ancient Romans mourned and buried their dead infants.¹⁰

Recent works by authors such as John Pearce, Margaret King, and Valerie Hope¹¹ have begun to push back on the idea that the Romans were indifferent toward the deaths of their infant children. While these treatments have made remarkable headway in examining the grieving process of Roman parents, they tend to focus on either the literary or archeological realms, but neither both. In an attempt to provide a much-needed synthesis on the issue, this paper seeks to corroborate the literary, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence on the subject within the geographical boundaries of the Italian peninsula from approximately the first century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E. It attempts to put these findings into conversation with the often-ignored practice of child exposure in Rome. A review of grieving practices and social expectations for bereaved parents found in ancient literature will be presented first, followed by a discussion on the archaeological and epigraphic evidence concerning infant burials. The last section will seek to put these findings into conversation with the often-ignored practice of child exposure in ancient Rome. Analysis of this information reveals that prior to being accepted into the family, infants – especially newborns – held a marginal role in society and therefore received limited funerary treatment. Those who were accepted into the family, however, were dearly loved and mourned for upon their death. Moreover, evidence suggests that the Romans did care when their children died

young, even in the face of practices such as child-exposure.¹²

Born to Die: Infant Burials and Mourning in Classical Literature

The literary sources available to us manifest themselves in the form of legal and philosophical texts. These documents represent the cultural expectations of how a proper Roman family was expected to act publicly after the death of a young child. Hope notes in her book *Roman Death*, in the elite imagination “an infant should not be mourned for ... and the death should be accepted as Nature’s choice.”¹³ Influenced by Stoic and Epicurean schools of philosophy, some ancient writers used the marginal status of babies within Roman society as evidence for the need to limit one’s public mourning following their death.¹⁴ While these sources appear to support the “demographic determinism” argument of parental detachment presented above, it is important to remember that average Roman citizens did not always live up to elite cultural expectations.¹⁵

A brief overview of the legal and ritual practices concerning childbirth provides telling insight into how infants were viewed in Roman society. According to Mireille Corbier, the first sign that a child was accepted into the family after birth was the command for it to be “put to the breast.”¹⁶ According to Soranus of Ephesus (*Gyn.* 2.5) the child was placed directly onto the floor after it was born in order for it to be thoroughly examined for defects before the *paterfamilias* decided whether to “raise up” the infant and accept it into the family.¹⁷ While Corbier doubts whether the ceremonial “raising up” of the child at birth actually occurred, scholars have noted the parallels between this ritual and mortuary rites preformed after death.¹⁸ As will be discussed below, this ritual also played a key role in the practice of child exposure. Full acceptance of the young child into its family and into society as a whole was recognized more formally on its name

day (*dies lustricus*), which occurred eight days after the day of birth (*dies natalis*) for boys and nine days after for girls.¹⁹ The need for a transitional period during this first week could potentially be related to the high rate of infant mortality in following the premise put forth by Bradley and Garnsey.²⁰ This liminal period, however, does not indicate that the child was in any way less loved or considered taboo. Instead, the infant was relegated as holding limited human status. Commenting on this trivial status of the infant before its first week of life, Plutarch explains (*Quaest. Rom.* 102) that, at this time, “the child is more like a plant than a human being.”

The liminal state of the newborn in Roman society is further illustrated by the legal and cultural practices of child burial and mourning handed down to us from the literary sources. Plutarch, writing about a discussion with his wife concerning the death of their daughter Timoxena, delineates the different burial practices reserved for dead infants in the first century C.E.:

For our people do not bring offerings to those of their children who die in infancy, nor do they observe in their case any of the other rites that the living are expected to perform for the dead, as such children have no part in earth or earthly things; nor yet do they tarry where the burial is celebrated, at the graves, or at the laying out of the dead, and sit by the bodies. For the laws forbid us to mourn for infants, holding it impiety to mourn for those who have departed to a dispensation and a region too that is better and more divine (Plut. *Consolation to His Wife*, 11).

Plutarch’s description of the lack of formal burial practices for infants is further elaborated by Pliny the Elder (*HN.* 7.15.72) who writes, “it is the universal custom of mankind not to cremate a person who dies before cutting his teeth.”²¹ Juvenal, too, comments (*Satire* 15, 138-40) on the remorse felt for “children who are too young for the pyre.”

The limited burial practices for infants were matched by a cultural and legal prohibition on public mourning. In his letter above, Plutarch references the laws of Rome's second legendary king, Numa (715-673 B.C.E.), who set limitations on the timeframe for parental mourning based on the age of the lost child.²² While Plutarch, writing in the second century C.E., dates Numa's rule to the seventh century B.C.E., Hope has shown that concepts of designated periods for mourning persisted into the second and third centuries C.E.²³ In his *Opinions*, the Roman lawyer Julius Paulus re-codified Numa's laws for his third-century audience. Paulus writes that children under the age of six could only be mourned for one month (*Sent.* 1.21.2-5). According to Hope, it is unclear whether the Romans enforced or even intended to enforce these laws, suggesting instead that they more likely represented public "guidelines."²⁴ As author Beryl Rowan makes clear, however, Numa's laws regarding mourning reflect that in Rome, "the young child... did not qualify for full recognition of its existence and individuality until the age of 10."²⁵

Elite views concerning mourning and the loss of a young child are perhaps best embodied by the philosophical writings of the time. Ancient philosophers gave those who were grieving guidance for facing the loss of a loved one. The Epicurean and Stoic schools of philosophy, founded in Athens by Epicurus (341-271 B.C.E.) and Zeno of Citium (334-362 B.C.E.) respectively, were particularly popular fields of thought that sought to demystify death.²⁶ Advocating for the bereaved to accept and to move past the death of a loved one, philosophers often pointed to an infant's marginal place within society in order to argue that the loss should be less emotionally upsetting than that of an older child or adult. Cicero, writing in 45 B.C.E., notoriously explained the elite philosophical view, writing: "The same people think that if a small child dies, the loss must be taken calmly; if a baby is in the cradle, there must not even be lament. And yet it is from the latter (the elite) that nature has more cruelly

demanded back the gift she has given" (*Tusc.* 1.39). Cicero makes clear that for the elite, the emotional loss over the death of an infant was something that proper Romans would not allow themselves to display publicly.

Certainly, many parents failed to live up to this cultural expectation. A famous example can be seen in the emperor Nero, who deified his four-month-old daughter after her death in 63 C.E.²⁷ Contemporaries, including the historian Tacitus, mocked Nero for his lack of emotional self-control (*Ann.*, 15.23). The grief of parents like Nero and the chastisement they received presents another insight into elite views of infant deaths. Seneca the Younger (4 B.C.E.-65 C.E.), writing to console his friend Marullus over the death of his infant son, best summarizes the cold idealism of the Roman elite: "Is it Solace that you expect? Accept reproach instead. You are like a woman in the way that you take your son's death; what would you do if you had lost a close friend? A son, a little child of uncertain promise, is dead; a fragment of time has perished" (*EP.* 99.2-3). Seneca's chastisement of his friend demonstrates not only the philosophical ideal of meeting the death of a child with acceptance, dignity, and self-control, but also depicts a clear example of a grieving father.

As the case of Nero as well as other examples in the writings of Cicero and Seneca illustrate, the elite philosophical view that formal mourning for the death of newborns should be repressed was often at odds with the grief of bereaved parents. Already it is possible to see that even though the Romans may not have considered infants as full-status human beings, they cared deeply for them and reacted strongly to their passing. Moreover, the ways in which grieving parents buried and commemorated their dead children further illustrates the divide between elite public expectations and private realities.

Infant Burial, Epigraphy, and Images in Archaeology

Archaeological excavations in the Italian peninsula refute the modern notion that Roman parents were indifferent to the deaths of their young children. Recent finds demonstrate that infant burials are present among larger Roman necropoleis and that a high level of care for the treatment of their bodies is evident.²⁸ In her excellent synthesis of recent excavations on the Italian peninsula, Maureen Carroll notes that while young children under the age of 12 months were regularly buried in Roman cemeteries, they are vastly underrepresented in comparison to the projected infant mortality rate.²⁹ According to her estimates, the graves of infants typically constitute less than 10% of the total burials in excavated Italian cemeteries.³⁰ Outside of the Italian peninsula, the findings of John Pearce, working in Roman Gaul and Britain, are similar with some occasional exceptions. Addressing this gap, Pearce warns, “in the cemeteries where few infants burials are attested, the arguments that infants were deliberately excluded may be difficult to prove.”³¹ Indeed, Pearce acknowledges several issues associated with infant graves including the fragility of infant bones and potential burial in remote locations, which pose a challenge to excavation.³²

Recent archaeological evidence concerning the treatment of infant bodies contradicts the elite assertion that very young children were not cremated. A tomb containing multiple burials examined by Sébastien Lepetz and William Van Andringa at the Porta Nocera cemetery at Pompeii provides a poignant example.³³ According to Lepetz and Van Andringa, the original burial contained the inhumed remains of a two-year-old, who received a full funeral, as well as a cremated adolescent.³⁴ The tomb was then subsequently reopened and closed two more times during which time the cremated remains of two more adolescents were added to the burial.³⁵ The authors note that this tomb poses significant differences compared to what is found in the literary record. A child clearly past the point of teething was inhumed while an infant of only six months was cremated.³⁶ In her own analysis of the graves, Carroll notes that the way in which the six to nine month old child is positioned (Fig. 1) “suggests that the child’s head might have been supported on a small cushion.”³⁷ While this claim is uncertain, the pit grave did contain grave goods in the form of a *balsamaria* (a ceramic container for oil) placed around the two-year-old’s head as well as an oil lamp and libation pipe.³⁸ These



Fig. 1. 6-9 month old Infant buried in amphora, mid first century outside the Porta Nocera cemetery, A. Gailliot/École française de Rome; courtesy of W. Andringa.

infant graves at the Porta Nocera necropolis complicate our understanding of infant mortuary practices as they contradict what was indicated in the literary sources. They also demonstrate the extent to which some parents went in order to ensure a careful burial for their children.

In her study of 29,250 Roman tombstones across the Roman Empire, author Margaret King argues that funeral monuments, while subject to some demographic and statistical challenges, are an invaluable tool for understanding often ignored groups such as female children and mothers.³⁹ King's findings reveal that of the 29,250 sampled tombstones, only 1,357 commemorate children ages 0-4.⁴⁰ In a more recent synthesis of Italian tombstones, Carroll reveals that infants under the age of one year represent 1.3% of a sample of 31,000 funerary monuments.⁴¹ These surveys demonstrate that, in the Italian peninsula, infants are vastly underrepresented in the existing epigraphic evidence, especially those under the age of one.⁴² As King notes, however, this vast underrepresentation should not be seen as evidence that parents did not grieve for their dead. It is more likely, as King asserts, that this underrepresentation is the result of the financial challenges in erecting a funerary monument for a potentially frequent event.⁴³ The few extant funerary monuments for infant graves provide us with a wealth of evidence that parents loved and were emotionally affected by the loss of their young children.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the claim that Roman parents reacted deeply to the death of their infant children can be found in the epitaphs.⁴⁴ King reports that infants age 0-1 were the most likely to receive unique epitaphs on their grave stelae (13.2%).⁴⁵ King also found that female infants (48.1%) were about equally as likely to receive an epitaph as male infants (45.9%).⁴⁶ King recounts an interesting example of a gravestone from Rome indicating that a "Martials" lived for "one year, five months, and two and a half hours."⁴⁷ This meticulous desire to indicate

the number of hours and even minutes spent with the child reflects a clear emotional loss on the part of the parents who raised it. Some exceptional verse epitaphs have been studied that more visibly display the grief parents endured over the loss of an infant. One well-known inscription put up by the parents of a young girl named Telesphoris, who died before her first birthday, provides an illuminating glimpse into the everyday world of Roman grief and bereavement:

To the Spirits of the Departed. Telesphoris and her husband, parents, (did this) for their sweetest daughter. It is necessary to lament about this sweet girl. Better that you had not been at all than, become so beloved, so soon to return from whence you were born to us. Because of your birth, grief has been caused for your parents. Half a year and eight days she lived; like a rose she blossomed, and like a rose she immediately withered.⁴⁸

The underrepresentation of infant memorials and graves gives credence to the literary sources' assertion that small children held a marginal status in both life and death.⁴⁹ Yet the surviving testaments to their memory, such as Telesphoris's above, make the assertion that these children were not loved or cared for untenable.

The physical images of infant children on funerary monuments, while exceptionally rare, reflect another strategy for the bereaved to preserve the memory of those lost.⁵⁰ Mander argues that there was a strong preference for picturing children as older than they actually were at the time of death.⁵¹ The grave stele of Sextus Rufius Achilleus, who died before his first year and yet is depicted as much older boy, is a prime example of this trend.⁵² The desire to depict an infant as an older child or little adult on a gravestone, according to Mander, highlights the lost hopes and aspirations that parents held for their child's lost potential.⁵³

The Unwanted: Infant Exposure

Robert Knapp expresses a common sentiment in his text *Invisible Romans*, writing, “the exposure of children is one of the most difficult things for moderns to come to terms with in the ancient world.”⁵⁴ The issue of child exposure proves pertinent to the discussion of how Roman parents dealt with the death of their young children, and yet it is often given little attention in the historiography on the subject. Built on the foundation myth of the child exposure of Romulus and Remus, the practice of exposure was codified into the law of the Twelve Tables, which mandated that “a dreadfully deformed child shall be killed.”⁵⁵ While it is hard to estimate the rates of child exposure in ancient Rome, Corbier notes, “the exposure of newborn babies in Rome was perfectly legal and socially expectable.”⁵⁶ Examples of child exposure abound in the higher echelons of Roman society.⁵⁷ According to Suetonius, the emperor Claudius is said to have exposed his wife’s child with an ex-slave (*Cl.* 27) and Augustus rejected the child of his granddaughter Julia (*Aug.* 65).⁵⁸

Researchers agree that Roman parents used child exposure as a form of contraception, and while many issues played a role in the decision to abandon a child, economic considerations were most often the determining factor.⁵⁹ Although John Riddle suggests that the Romans may have been well versed in herbal techniques for limiting pregnancies, W.V. Harris notes that abortions were still “notoriously risky” and that many Romans would most likely have favored the use of traditional techniques such as exposure.⁶⁰ Economic factors leading to the decision to abandon a child seem to have been present in both rich and poor families. Many children were certainly born into poor Roman families, who could not support them.⁶¹ Plutarch (*De Amore*, 5) expressed this sentiment stating, “the poor do not bring up their children....”⁶² Mark Golden and Harris both suggest that the rich may also have had an economic incentive to expose some of their children.⁶³ By limiting their descendants, wealthy Romans could ensure that their

desired heirs would receive the full benefits of their wills. The Roman Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus illustrates this point through his harsh criticism of the practice:

But what seems to me very terrible is that some who do not even have poverty as an excuse but are prosperous and even wealthy none the less have the effrontery not to bear later-born offspring in order that those born earlier may inherit greater wealth... So that their children may have a greater share of their father’s goods, they destroy their children’s brothers (Musonius Rufus, *Frag.* 15).⁶⁴

What then are we to make of the practice of child exposure in the context of infant commemoration and burial? While some scholars have pointed to the practice of infant exposure as a sign of parental ambivalence toward their young, the economic factors behind the decision reveal a unique characteristic of the relationship between parents and their infants. We must not lose sight of Corbier’s emphasis that “the rejection of the child by exposure takes place before it is regarded as having attained full human status and integration in the family.”⁶⁵ The *paterfamilias*’s decision to expose the child (as noted above) was made during the initial rituals surrounding its birth or before its assimilation into the family on its name day. Because human status was limited to a child’s adoption into the family, the decision to expose the newborn was made based on the concerns of the living family, including the ability to provide for any existing young children, as well as themselves. Mark Golden’s cultural comparison of abortion in the United States and Roman child-exposure, while certainly provocative, hints at some of the difficult questions regarding this practice.⁶⁶ Golden theorizes that women in the United States often do not seek to terminate their pregnancies out of disdain or resentment for their potential children. Instead, Golden posits, “it is arguable that many of these women choose to abort when they do largely in order to provide a better

environment for other children they have or will have in the future.”⁶⁷ This reasoning seems to have some credibility in the realm of child-exposure in ancient Rome based on the evidence indicating that economic incentives played a major role in the decision to expose infants.

Conclusion

A synthesis of literary, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence indicates that infants, especially newborns, held a marginal status in society and received limited funerary treatment during the Late Republic and Imperial periods. Literary sources reveal that the Roman elite attempted to regulate the public mourning of young children through codified laws and cultural norms. Private letters and written histories, however, depict the struggle between these cultural expectations and lived private realities. Although the Romans may not have considered very young children to be fully human, epigraphic and archaeological evidence overwhelmingly supports the claim that Roman parents cared for and were heavily grieved by the loss of their infant children. Burials revealing the protective treatment of young bodies as well as the cremation of very young children demonstrate the willingness of some parents to break from tradition in order to commemorate their dead. In answering Golden’s blunt question then, the evidence confirms that the Romans did care when their children died young even in the face of practices such as child-exposure.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Stone 1977, 651-2.
- 2 Information on the British Museum’s old exhibit can be found at (2017, http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/pompeii_and_herculaneum.aspx)
- 3 Mols 2007-2008, 149; MacGregor 2012.
- 4 For a review of infant mortality estimates see Carroll 2014, 160.
- 5 Shorter 1975, 169.
- 6 Stone 1977, 651-652.
- 7 See Bradley 1991, 29; Bradley 1986, 220; Garnsey 1991, 52; Golden 1988, 154-155.
- 8 Carroll (2011, 115) has rejected the notion that common Roman citizens would have been able to afford the use of wet nurses; see also Bradley 1986, 220.
- 9 Garnsey 1991, 52.
- 10 Pearce 2001, 125.
- 11 Hope 2009, 138-139; King 2000, 117-118.
- 12 Although this work is principally a literature review, my argumentation is greatly indebted to the many scholars who have made major contributions to the field, namely Maureen Carroll and Margaret King.
- 13 Hope 2009, 137.
- 14 For ancient literature on limiting mourning of infants see Tac. *Ann.*, 15.23; Sen. *EP* 99.2-3; Cic. *Tusc.* 1.39; Hope (2009, 20, 122-132) provides an excellent discussion on Roman legislation that limited public mourning for adults and small children.
- 15 Pearce 2001, 125; Hope 2009, 137.
- 16 Corbier 2001, 60.
- 17 Corbier 2001, 58.
- 18 Corbier (2001, 58) elaborates on the concept of rising up the child; for connections between rituals at birth and death see Hope 2009, 71.
- 19 Corbier 2001, 55.
- 20 Bradley 1991; Bradley 1986; Garnsey 1991.
- 21 While both inhumation and cremation were widely practiced in Rome, Hope (2009, 81) notes that cremation had become the dominant rite by the first century B.C.E.
- 22 Rawson 2003, 346.
- 23 Hope 2007, 123.
- 24 Hope 2007, 123.
- 25 Rawson 2003, 104.
- 26 Hope 2009, 19.
- 27 Hope 2007, 182.
- 28 See Carroll, 2011; Lepetz and Van Andringa 2011.
- 29 Carroll 2014, 160; Carroll 2011, 103.
- 30 Carroll 2014, 160.
- 31 Pearce 2001, 137.
- 32 Pearce 2001, 137.
- 33 Lepetz and Van Andringa 2011, 122-123.
- 34 Lepetz and Van Andringa 2011, 122-123.
- 35 Lepetz and Van Andringa 2011, 122-123.
- 36 Lepetz and Van Andringa 2011, 122-123.
- 37 Carroll 2001, 106.
- 38 Lepetz and Van Andringa 2001, 122.

- 39 King 2000, 150.
 40 King 2000, 137.
 41 King (200, 124) notes that in an older study conducted in 1983 of 16,10 tombstones, Hopkins found that children ages 1-4 constituted 13% of all inscriptions, see also Carroll 2011, 111.
 42 Carroll 2011, 111
 43 King 2000, 137.
 44 King 2000, 147.
 45 King 2000, 144.
 46 King 2000, 144.
 47 Martials is the only name provided on the tombstone, see King 2000, 139; for a full reading of the tombstone see S.D. Ehrlich 2012, 194.
 48 Mander 2013, 29.
 49 Our understanding of whether infant grave markers were erected mainly by elite or non-elite Romans is obscured by shifting trends in grave commemoration, see Hope 2009, 162-163; While the cost of erecting a monument certainly plays a role in this discussion, King (2000, 113) notes that scholars are still divided as to whether the cost of the typical tombstone would or would not have been accessible to a wide majority of the public.
 50 For further discussion on realistic images of funeral materials from the Roman Empire see Dasen's (2011, 130) work on wax masks discovered in France.
 51 Mander 2013, 28.
 52 This stele was discovered in the Italian peninsula, see Mander 2013, 28; Bodel 2017, 88; Infants were not always depicted as older children or little adults. Carroll (2011, 112) provides the example of the grave stele of Aeliola who is depicted as an infant wrapped in swaddling.
 53 Mander 2013, 27-28.
 54 Knapp 2011, 70.
 55 "The Twelve Tables," IV 1; Harris 1994, 2-5.
 56 Corbier 2001, 66.
 57 For a famous example of the practice of child exposure in Roman Egypt see Rowlandson 1998, 295.
 58 For more on exposure in Suetonius see Harris 1998, 13; Corbier 2001, 60.
 59 Riddle 1992; Harris 1998; Golden 1988; Corbier 2001.
 60 Riddle 1992, 15; Harris 1998, 14-15.
 61 Harris 1998, 6.
 62 Harris 1998, 6.
 63 Harris 1998, 7; Golden 1988, 159.
 64 Musonius Rufus, *Frag.* 15 quoted in Harris 1998, 7.
 65 Corbier 2001, 71.
 66 Golden 1988, 158.
 67 Golden 1988, 158.
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A Woman's Virtus? Perceptions of the Female Gladiator

Thomas Kocjan

*In a response to the claim presented by Kathleen Coleman (2000), that female gladiators entered the arena only as an exceptional addition to a male-centric activity, this paper offers some reasons why female gladiators entered the arena. To achieve this, it is necessary to investigate other instances of the female entering the male-sphere, such as the female Roman prostitute, to construct parallels and arrive at a possible explanation. By drawing on surviving inscriptions and depictions of female gladiators, brothel graffiti at Pompeii, and the moralizing attitudes of the ancient sources such as Cicero, it will be argued that like the female Roman prostitute, female gladiators rejected Roman social values and norms. Living as infames – social and legal outcasts – the “gladiatrix” found herself within a dichotomy of the elite (femina) and non-elite (mulier) woman. This distinction is present within the imperial edicts of Septimius Severus and is repeated elsewhere when female gladiators are mentioned. Whether elite or non-elite women, female gladiators in the Roman world showed a certain type of womanly virtue which is exemplified in their rejection of the traditional mores, and in the countercultural pursuit of martial training.**

Introduction

The topic of female gladiators during the Roman period has been difficult to address. The scant amount of archaeological evidence and the biases of the ancient sources are both a cause of concern and an opportunity to make dangerous assumptions. Instead of discussing whether female gladiators were considered a novelty or an exceptional addition to the male-centric gladiatorial arena as Kathleen Coleman suggests,¹ this paper will attempt to discover some of the reasons why, if at all, female gladiators entered the arena. It is not unreasonable to consider that female gladiators had no differing reasons to enter in this profession than many of their male counterparts, and this will be considered below. Naturally, the ancient sources will not disclose such information explicitly. Rather it is necessary to draw upon other instances of the female entering the masculine sphere, such as the Roman prostitute, where evidence is present archaeologically and receives a strong treatment in the ancient sources, to make parallels and arrive at a possible explanation. It will be argued that like the Roman prostitute, female gladiators existed in a state of rejection of the Roman social values and norms, living as *infames* within the dichotomy of *femina*, the lady, and *mulier*, the woman. A discussion on the impact of elite and non-elite women as gladiators and the reactions by ancient sources will follow.

Background

Before a discussion on the female gladiator is made, it is necessary to make a few general points on the cultural and ideological complexities, which inform current knowledge of the world in which Roman women operated. The Romans saw women as by nature both responsible for and representative of the private and domestic spheres, which prioritized the family and household tasks.² Women were measured against certain standards and

ideals, including the ability to bear children, remain loyal to their husbands, and exhibit their expertise in household tasks.³ Kristina Milnor makes the argument that since the domestic life of a Roman woman was for the most part static, there was little reason to record the life of a good woman.⁴ Only in exceptional circumstances and concerning the lives of late republican and imperial women are there recordings of their deeds. The funeral oration and subsequent epitaph given by Murdia's son (*CIL VI 10230*) is indicative of the dichotomy between the private and domestic sphere of Roman women, resulting in Murdia's domestic virtues being put on public display.⁵ This is further compounded by the fact that many women in the late republic began to conduct business *sui iuris*, without the need for involvement from male relatives, due to Augustus' social legislation.⁶ Women conducting their own business affairs could not be ignored even by the likes of Cicero (*Att. 12.51.3*) and became integral in banking and loan making. What also could not be ignored, however, was the status of the female prostitute in Rome as both pervasive and marginalized.

Evidence of the Infames and the Social Rankings of Women in Roman Society

The female prostitute in Rome is described in our sources as a shameless figure who donned the toga.⁷ Catherine Edwards argues that in comparison to the courtesan, who wore expensive clothing, the wearing of the toga was a prostitute's display of her recognition as a marginalized figure and was thus a display of the anti-male citizen.⁸ Using prostitutes in invective speech was a way for the moralizing Roman elite to attack their political opponents. One such example was Cicero's attack on Clodia, the sister of his enemy Clodius, and his description of her as a *meretrix*, the term for a legally registered prostitute (*Cael. 48-50*). The dichotomy of the prostitute as pervasive and marginalized is further complicated by the argument that

prostitution in Rome contributed greatly to its economy.⁹ While it makes sense to assume that low-status women in Rome were a marginalized group, there were further instances of marginalization for women as a whole in this society. Within the definition of “respectable” women, Thomas McGinn argues that there were two classes of *mulieres* in Rome. Best described in terms of their respective religious cults, the *mulieres humiliores*, less respectable women, were a category of women which included prostitutes who were assigned to cults worshipping Fortuna Virilis, the manly, while the second group, the *mulieres honestiores*, more respectable women, worshipped Venus Verticordia, the promoter of chastity.¹⁰ As will be seen, there was a certain ambiguity present in the discussion of female qualities from the ancient sources. Some qualities were praised, while others which were seen as “manly” were berated.

Life for elite male citizens in Rome during both the republic and empire was fiercely competitive, placing a heavy emphasis on political life and rhetorical ability. A man that failed to play within the gender norms ran the risk of being labelled as effeminate. Thus, the presence of “manly” virtues in women was seen as a threat in a society in which men were expected to both perform and prove their manliness.¹¹ In women, however, there seemed to be two senses of “manliness” that were on the one hand, negative, and on the other, positive. In the negative sense, the use of immorality to negatively describe women and using that as an attack on their husbands was done by Cicero (*Philippics* 2.48, 99). The description of a masculine Fulvia was further used by Velleius Paterculus (2.74) and by Cassius Dio (48.10) in a condemning sense, though likely as a veiled attack on her husband, Lucius Antonius. In the positive sense, the praising of Lucretia by Valerius Maximus (6.1.1) and how her suicide led to the overthrow of the Etruscan kings is one example. Her pudicitia brought her into the

public sphere. Yet as Milnor notes, Valerius describes her as a *virilis animus*, manly spirit/state of mind, in a *muliebre corpus*, female body.¹² How her *animus* could be interpreted as “manly” requires further investigation. For Foucault, moderation was a key virtue of men and the same was expected from women, thus moderation in reference to women would have been in virile terms.¹³ In order for a woman to be moderate it was necessary for her to establish self-dominance and this was by definition a virile act.¹⁴ To illustrate this, Foucault refers to Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* (10.1), where Socrates praises the virile merits of the wife of Ischomachus, whom Ischomachus has educated himself. Praising a woman’s merit occurs because Socrates believes manliness can be taught to women (*Xen. Symposium*. 2.9; 2.19). The mocking of prostitutes in the ancient sources seems rather ambiguous as they are not chaste, yet they are presented as antithetical citizens.

Prostitutes lost their legal citizenship and gained an unsavory social reputation, yet their inclusion at religious festivals suggests that they were not completely excluded from Roman society.¹⁵ Prostitutes were present at festivals such as the *Ludi Florae*, celebrated in April and associated with the goddess Flora. This festival featured a licentious and pleasure-seeking atmosphere and the participation of prostitutes can be assumed from Juvenal (6.104, 246-7). Yet in this passage, Juvenal seeks to mock women who were obsessing over gladiators. Prostitutes danced naked and fought mock gladiatorial combats in the *Ludi Florae*, and the particular woman Juvenal describes training in the manner of a gladiator *omnis implet numeros dignissima prorsus / Florali matron tuba* (6.249f). The description of her equipment seems to suggest that she is training as a *secutor*, a heavily armored gladiator more appreciated and lauded in the Roman mindset, yet mocked by Juvenal nonetheless. The participation of women in the religious context such as the *Ludi Florae* was generally both important and separate

to that of men. The role of women in the religious context was thus important enough to merit segregation of “respectable” women from “non-respectable”.¹⁶ According to McGinn, prostitutes were promiscuous, while wives were supposed to be sexually loyal to their husbands, and unmarried respectable women were supposed to be sexually inactive.¹⁷ Prostitutes exchanged their services for payment, while the Roman wife did not demand material rewards and instead used the dowry to signify the idealized seriousness of the type of relationship brought through marriage.¹⁸ Finally, the bond of marriage was thought of as affective, while the transaction with the prostitute was not. The fact that female prostitutes were categorized and assigned their own cult is significant, as it is indicative of an incomplete marginalization.

Because female prostitutes were mostly poor and non-citizens, they would have also lived in conditions that perpetuated that status. They were generally slaves or ex-slaves, who likely lived in similarly servile conditions. Not only were they excluded from voting or holding public office because of their gender, but their profession further isolated them. There is also the possibility however, that contrary to the view of the Roman elites on prostitutes, the role of a prostitute was sometimes taken on as a temporary status, which served as a means for re-integration into the working class.¹⁹ Graffiti from Pompeii seems to suggest that female prostitutes may have been aware of this social isolation, and lived in an environment of social deviance.²⁰ When discussing the social conditions of the prostitute, it is necessary to illustrate the parallels in the condition of *infamia* that prostitutes and gladiators suffered along with all entertainers.

Gladiators were drawn from a multifarious group of marginalized persons. There were slaves and freedmen, with many also being *ingenui*, freeborn, criminals *condemned ad ludus*, and prisoners of war

as well.²¹ Those who voluntarily entered the gladiatorial career were subject to slave-like treatment by contract.²² Anyone who entered into service as a gladiator suffered from the socio-legal condition of *infamia*. This meant a loss of full citizen status and could also be a consequence of civil and criminal trials.²³ The ancient sources despised *infames* on moralist grounds, claiming that those with *infamia* could not be trusted, were unsuitable for marriage, and any wealth accumulated by them was illegitimate however legal.²⁴ This effect did not seem to occur in the Greek east, where entertainers and gladiators alike were treated with great respect and were made up of wealthy aristocratic individuals.²⁵ Leppin argues that there were two types of legal *infamia*. The first, the *praetorian infamia*, came about during the republic, and the second, a type of *infamia* which followed the former from the end of the republic.²⁶ The second type seems to have been more structured, as it mentioned specific groups who would be subject to *infamia* and included entertainers.²⁷ *Infamia* itself however, as described by Cicero (Leg. 1.90.50-1), was not necessarily brought by the consequences of the courtroom, but was also a social imposition brought on by acts considered shameful. This type of *infamia* was associated with the offender regardless of the legal outcome.²⁸ Entertainers at Rome found themselves in a doubled status. In their role as a key part of festivals, they were both praised and mistrusted. Yet they were able to influence the political sphere while having no legitimate claim to political power.²⁹ Edwards argues that the gladiator was a profession associated with transgressive sexuality in that they were the objects of desire.³⁰ In this way they were subject to *infamia* by the public gaze regardless of elite or non-elite status.

The “*Gladiatrix*”

It seems appropriate to now discuss some of the evidence on the status of female gladiators. Perhaps the most convincing

piece of archaeological evidence for female gladiators is the first or second century C.E. slab from Halicarnassus which depicts two female gladiators. On the slab are two women, named “Amazon” and “Achillia” respectively. Kathleen Coleman argues that the inscription and how both women are shown with their helmets removed demonstrates that they had both received *missio*, or reprieve from their fight.³¹ The fact that both of these gladiators were granted *missio* is in itself significant. If Coleman is correct in assuming that the gladiators depicted on this slab were each other’s opponent, it was uncommon for both fighters to be granted *missio*.³² This suggests that this particular event was exceptional and worthy of being recorded on a commemorative slab.

What is interesting is what Coleman suggests the possible reactions to this particular relief were meant to be. Since the relief depicts the women without their helmets, but with their helmets on either side of the relief, it makes sense that this image is not mocking or satirical – adding to the significance in the monumentality suggested by the choice of medium.³³ As evidence from the ancient sources show, particularly from the *senatus consulta* of 11 C.E. and 19 C.E., the primary opposition in the attitude towards women as gladiators was their social rank, not their gender.³⁴ This also suggests that many free born Roman women may have been training for spectator sports, and the *consulta* were a means to close a loophole.³⁵ This leaves open the possibility that women may have had similar motivations as men for entering spectator sports, such as the fame and glory that accompany martial training. The persistence of the senate in their attempts to prevent women from the gladiatorial arena suggests that a precedent for women in the arena had existed.³⁶ Cassius Dio (66.25.1; cf Martial *Spect.* 6) notes that women as *venatores* were present at the dedication of the Flavian Amphitheatre in 80 C.E., and that this presence was tolerable if the women

were not of the senatorial or equestrian orders.³⁷ Dio also mentions (76.16.1) the ban on elite women entering the arena in the late second or early third century C.E. during the rule of Septimius Severus. It is uncertain if this was an empire-wide ban, but the boast by a certain Hostilianus at Ostia during the third century C.E. needs to be addressed. The highly fragmentary inscription at Ostia (*EAOR IV.I no. 29*) reads:

[---]+sa [---H]ostilīan[o]
 [--- II v]ir(o), q(uaestori) aerar[ī] Osti
 ensum, flam(ini) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum),
 cur(atori) lusus Iuvenal(is),
 [---] qui primus om[niu]m ab urbe condita
 ludos cum
 [--- edidit] item? ---]or(---?) et mulieres [a]d
 ferrum dedit, una cum
 5 [--- Sa]bina u[x]orē fecit sibi et
 [---]nio Agon[---]
 [---c]orporis togat[ens(ium)]
 [---]VM+[---]
 -----?

What is of interest here is that Hostilianus claims to be the first person (*primus om[niu]m*) since the foundation of the city (*ab urbe condita*) to arm women (*mulieres [a]d ferrum dedit*).³⁸ If Coleman’s interpretation of this inscription is correct, then it suggests that other games featuring female gladiators had been established elsewhere, meaning that Hostilianus’ boast was that he was the first to have women fight at Ostia.³⁹ Lastly, the choice of wording in *mulieres is* significant. The ban by Septimius Severus targeted elite women, and as discussed, the term *mulier* refers to a woman who was not elite. Hostilianus was then either not going against this ban, or it did not apply to him in some other way.

The literary sources on elite women appearing in the arena are silent on the appearance of non-elite women. This is significant as it suggests that the latter must have appeared in order to have created such a reaction about the former.⁴⁰ Anna

McCullough notes that the difficulty in addressing the topic of female gladiators is that it represented a nontraditional practice, which in itself was subject to the biases of its reporters.⁴¹ What is out of place here, is that the Augustan period saw no mention of female gladiators in its moralizing literature. The oddity lies in the *senatus consultum* of 22 B.C.E. which Levick argues was the first instance of a ban on women from the arena.⁴² This legislation was aimed at banning elite women, but McCullough suggests that non-elites may have already been involved with gladiatorial combat at this point.⁴³ The very fact that non-elites were not considered noteworthy would explain their absence from the literature of this period.

In the literature that mentions women as gladiators, the wealth of their private sponsors seems to indicate that female gladiators were an indulgence of the wealthy elite.⁴⁴ Their mention in the imperial games then, is an association and appropriation to the emperor's wealth and his ability to provide the most ostentatious games.⁴⁵ The damnation from the sources on female gladiators is a result of the negative connotations associated with the elite class taking part in an activity which also included the non-elite. McCullough notes that literary evidence of non-elite women, though not explicitly stated by the authors, do not have the same negative connotations of shame and astonishment.⁴⁶ The issue here is that the authors are more concerned with the overturning of social order rather than gender. The noblewoman training like a gladiator is a source of concern for Juvenal (6.253) because of the threat she poses to the social order by equating herself in status to that of a non-elite woman.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Performers in the arena included women, who were at times forced to fight by emperors (Suet. *Dom. 4.1*). Among them also were foreign women, such as the Ethiopians

as described by Dio under the reign of Nero (Dio 62[63]3.1). Tacitus also mentions that elite women took part in gladiatorial matches under Nero (*Ann. 15.32*).⁴⁸ Cornelia Ewigleben argues that the majority of the spectators would not have been concerned with the questions of morality that the elite pose in their attitudes towards spectacle.⁴⁹ This would have contributed to the immense popularity not only of the games themselves, but also allowed an avenue for the entertainers themselves to enjoy an equivalent of the modern celebrity status.

The fate of gladiators in the arena rested upon their ability to demonstrate both to the *exhibitor* and the crowd that they upheld several critical Roman virtues: *virtus* (manly courage), *disciplina* (discipline), *clementia* (clemency and moderation), and *iustitia* (upholding the law).⁵⁰ Womanly virtue was not an anomaly, nor was it exotic. Its presence is noted in Greek philosophical discussions, and a rejection of social values in Rome for what a woman should be is attested to the role of the female prostitute. The female gladiator, when seen as an elite woman, training and mocked in satire, was an expression for the desire to seek martial training, and served as a possible commentary on the traditional role of women in Roman society.⁵¹ The unmentionable non-elite woman, however, did not enter the arena to make a statement on Roman mores, but, like their male-counterparts they had little other choice, rendering gender irrelevant in the bestowment of *infamia*.

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Endnotes:

- 1 See Coleman 2000.
- 2 Milnor 2011, 610; cf. Cooper 2007.
- 3 Milnor 2011, 611.
- 4 Milnor 2011, 611; cf. Hemelrijk and Woolf (eds.) 2013. See F. Cenerini's, and C. Holleran's respective chapters for a fuller discussion on the sway of women as benefactors and as merchants in the Roman west.
- 5 Milnor 2011, 611.
- 6 Milnor 2011, 612.
- 7 McGinn 1998, 156-171; cf. Plaut. *Mil.* 791-793; Non. 868L; Mart. 2.39, 10.52; Juv. 2.70.
- 8 Edwards 1997, 81.
- 9 McGinn 2011, 644.
- 10 McGinn 2011, 644; see also Manas 2011.
- 11 Milnor 2011, 614-5.
- 12 Milnor 2011, 614-7; cf. Bremner and Formisano 2012.
- 13 Foucault 1985, 83.
- 14 Foucault 1985, 83-4.
- 15 McGinn 1998, 24; 2011, 653-4.
- 16 McGinn 2011, 653.
- 17 McGinn 2011, 657.
- 18 McGinn 1998, 81, 184.
- 19 McGinn's (2011, 654) reference here is likely an expansion of the social death and rebirth theory that Wiedemann (1992) brought about in his discussion of gladiators.
- 20 McGinn 2011, 652, 654-5.
- 21 Wiedemann 1992, 103.
- 22 Leppin 2011, 667.
- 23 Edwards 1997, 69.
- 24 Leppin 2011, 671.
- 25 Mann (2009) argues that gladiators in the Greek east likened themselves to the status of Greek athletes.
- 26 Leppin 2011, 671-2.
- 27 Leppin 2011, 672.
- 28 Edwards 1997, 69.
- 29 Leppin 2011, 662, 670.
- 30 Edwards 1997, 68.
- 31 Coleman 2000, 487-8.
- 32 Coleman 2000, 488, 491.
- 33 Coleman 2000, 497; Brunet (2014, 485-6) also suggests that women fighting and exhibiting Roman martial values would have been inspirational.
- 34 Levick 1983, 97-115.
- 35 Vesley 1998.
- 36 McCullough 2008, 199.
- 37 Coleman 2000, 497.
- 38 Whether *ab urbe condita* refers to the foundation of Ostia or to Rome itself remains unclear. The exact meaning of *mulieres [a]d ferrum dedit*, also needs clarification. It is certain that Hostilianus did not put women to death, which would normally use a form of *recipere*; cf. *OLD s.v. ferrum* §4. Rather, this phrase seems to point to a gladiatorial fight; cf. *OLD s.v. ferrum* §7.
- 39 Coleman 2000, 498.
- 40 McCullough 2008, 199.
- 41 McCullough 2008, 201.
- 42 Levick 1983, 107; see also Brunet 2014, 488.
- 43 McCullough 2008, 201.
- 44 McCullough 2008, 202.
- 45 McCullough 2008, 202-3; see also Wiedemann 1992, 176-180.
- 46 McCullough 2008, 204-6.
- 47 McCullough 2008, 205.
- 48 See Brunet 2004, 154 for a discussion on the games Tacitus and Dio mention.
- 49 Ewigleben 2000, 138-9.
- 50 Leppin 2011, 667. Wiedemann (1992) also stressed that gladiators who fought in the arena did so as a means for (re)integration into Roman society, and so their demonstration of these Roman virtues was a means to that end.
- 51 Vesley (1998) discusses inscriptions from the *CIL* which provide for a possibility that girls in an organized setting outside the domestic sphere received martial training through the *collegia iuvenes*.

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Ritualized Body and Ritualized Identity:

Nina Mazhjo

Being one of the Roman mystery cults, Mithraism was organized around particular initiation rituals, which all new initiates had to pass before entering the Mithraic brotherhood. Relying on Bell's concept of "redemptive hegemony," this research examines the aim of Mithraic initiation rituals in relation to cultic hegemony and the redemption promised by the Roman mystery cult of Mithras. This paper argues that how the initiates internalized the cultic concepts and doctrine through ritual performance and acquired a ritualized body and a ritualized identity. Here, I suggest that the Mithraic ritualization was a social process that legitimized the cultic hegemony within the ritualized bodies and sustained the hierarchical power structure and secrecy of the Mithraic brotherhood.

Introduction

Originally the Indo-Iranian god of contract, Mithras, appeared in the Roman world as the central figure of the Roman mystery cult of Mithras. The question of Mithras' origin has been the subject of Mithraic studies longer than a century.¹ However, the issue of origin is not the only difficulty in Mithraic studies. The diversity of extant primary sources generally complicates interpretations of the Roman cult of Mithras as well. While the evidence for the worship of the god in Iranian context is based on literary sources (texts and royal inscriptions), the primary sources for the mystery cult of Mithras in the Roman Empire are mostly limited to artifacts dating from the first four centuries CE, and some texts and commentaries written by Roman authors.² For decades, scholars have, however, interpreted the extant Roman artifacts only in the light of Persian texts and royal inscriptions.

Thus, the surviving evidence regarding Mithraic initiation rituals is very limited; the seven initiation grades and their hierarchical nature have frequently been discussed by scholars mostly in relation to the Mithraic mysteries and the cultic doctrine. Accordingly, the discussion on the Mithraic initiation can be grouped into two main questions: 1) what initiation rituals did the Mithraists perform? 2) How were these initiation rituals connected to the Mithraic dogma and liturgy? Indeed, the initiation rituals are remarkable in the historiography of Mithraism, since its modalities are crucial to grasp the cultic doctrine and to find ways to interpret the cosmological and liturgical concepts, which are expressed through the initiation rituals. As Roger Beck puts it, "what is remarkable about the Mithraists' action is not the strangeness of the ritual or its intent but the integration of the ritual and its sacred space of performance and stage set."³ However, more recent research on Roman Mithraism focused on initiation rituals in relation to the socio-religious aspect and the power structure of Mithraic

brotherhood rather than on trying to understand them as isolated phenomena in relation to the cultic doctrine.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to explore how the Mithraic initiation rituals prepared individuals for entering the cultic society, and how it sustained the hierarchical structure and religious authority of the Mithraic brotherhood. The main aim is to comprehend the Mithraic initiation rituals as an act of social performance in which an initiate internalized the Mithraic doctrine, distinguished himself from others, and ultimately acquired a new cultic identity as a Mithraist. In other words, I intend to look at the Mithraic ritualization as a process which indoctrinated the initiate through unfolding and reproducing the Mithraic theology and cosmology as well as maintained the social structure and the religious hegemony of Mithraic brotherhood.

Here, I argue that Bell's practice theory offers an insightful way to approach the issue at hand, and therefore utilize it to discuss how Mithraic initiates internalized Mithraic concepts and values through performing the initiation rituals, and how this cultic procedure sustained the socio-religious structure of Mithraic brotherhood. Practice theory focuses on what is done as a ritual and interprets ritualization as a productive process where an individual acquired a consensus on meanings and values through his participation in the ritual. According to practice theory, this consensus is the main aim of the ritualization.⁴ Viewed from this perspective, ritualization is a strategy by which an individual internalizes meanings and values, obtained a new ritualized identity and differentiates himself from others. For Bell, the ritual that produces this consensus is established by a reliable source, which she calls "redemptive hegemony." Bell notes that "Practice is: 1) situational; 2) strategic; 3) embedded in a misrecognition of what it is in fact doing; and (4) able to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world,

or what I will call “redemptive hegemony”.⁵ It is through the concept of “redemptive hegemony” that Bell analyzes ritual power and power relations that are reproduced and localized through ritualization: “redemptive hegemony suggests that relations of dominance and subjugation characterize human practice. These relations, however, are present in practice using the practical values, obligations, and persistent envisioning –as both an assumption and an extension of the system– of a state of prestige within this ordering of power.”⁶ In this sense, redemptive hegemony as a system of power relations imposes a framework for action through a ritual performance that distinguished ritualization from other forms of social practice.⁷

Here, I begin by examining the Mithraic vessel from Ballplatz (Mainz)—an archaeological artifact that comprises one of the primary sources on this subject, and I move on to review the dominant interpretation of the data that the vessel bears of the Mithraic initiation rituals. Then, I return to Bell’s practice theory and attempt to define the aim of performing initiation rituals in the context of the Roman mystery cult of Mithras.

As mentioned above, material evidence that reveals the details of Mithraic initiation rituals are rare. As Beck notes, in the extant remains “Mithraists depicted myth rather than ritual, things done by their god, not things done by themselves as initiates.”⁸ Indeed, the Roman cult of Mithras focused on the mythological narrative of the god’s acts. The Mithraic cult vessel of Ballplatz, therefore, is an extraordinary source, as it illustrates some unique scenes of the initiation rituals as the imitation of the god’s action, and provides information on where initiates, initiators, and *mystagogues* are positioned in performing the initiation rituals. In this way, it provides an important centerpiece for the discussion of actual ritual acts and their performative background, values, and meanings.

Archaeological Evidence: The Cult Vessel of Mainz

The pottery vessel known as the “Mithraic vessel of Ballplatz” and dated to 120–140 C.E. was unearthed in 1976 at the Mithraeum in Roman Mogontiacum, the modern city of Mainz on the west bank of the river Rhine in Germany. The report of this excavation was published in 1994.⁹ Following this report, Roger Beck published an article entitled “Ritual, Myth, Doctrine, and Initiation in the Mysteries of Mithras: New Evidence from a Cult Vessel” in the *Journal of Roman Studies* in 2000. Later, in 2008, Huld-Zetsche provided more details on the Cultic vessel of Mainz in her book *Der Mithraskult in Mainz und das Mithräum am Ballplatz*. As Huld-Zetsche notes, the cult vessel of Ballplatz represents seven masculine figures in two scenes, which will be treated separately below.

Scene A: The Imitation of Mithras’ Water Miracle

Scene A consists of three figures. The first man on the left wears a Persian cap (the cap of Mithras) and kneels, holding in his hands a drawn bow. The second figure on the right wears a short garment and gazes at the smaller figure with his mouth open. In front of him and in the middle of the scene stands a naked figure, smaller than the other two.¹⁰ One can think of the small naked figure as a Mithraic initiate, the seated Bowman dressed in Mithras’ garb as the Mithraic father, and the last figure standing on the right as the *mystagogue* guiding the initiate throughout the cultic rituals.¹¹ Beck interprets this ritual as the replication of Mithras’ water miracle taking place in the real world in which the boundary between the sphere of the Mithraeum and the sphere of divinity breaks.¹²

Undoubtedly, the Persian cap of the first figure identifies him as a Mithraic father. The Persian cap is the specific headgear of Mithras, and also the sign for the grade father. Regarding the third figure, the *mystagogue*,

Beck argues that the details of the hand's gesture and his open mouth reveal some similarities to the iconography of the orator's handbook. He believes that this iconography refers to speech, not a specific version of the speech, but speech in itself: "It makes clear something that we might perhaps assume but could not otherwise know for certain, that the ritual has *legomena* as well as *dromena*, things said which match the things done."¹³ For Beck, the act depicted here is "the representation of reason through language."¹⁴ Thus, these gestures and the open mouth may recall the sacred linguistic performance and the significant role of the *Logos Spermatikos*—the reason which creates all things in the cosmos.

However, it appears that speech is not only the presentation of reason -*Logos Spermatikos*- through language, as Beck argues, but also a tool by which the Mithraic redemptive hegemony, as the reliable source of power in the Mithraic brotherhood, was deployed to create the cultic reality and the framework of action and also to impose its dominance through the process of ritualization. In other words, the Mithraic ritualization uses language to create the reality, to produce the cultic meanings and values, and to give a consensus on those meanings and values through ritual performance. Language is the tool that localized power relationships within the ritualized bodies, within the Mithraic social bodies.

Scene B: Mystagogue Indoctrinates New Initiate

This scene, which is bigger and placed on the opposite side of the vessel, depicts four standing males. The first figure wears a breastplate. The second man, wearing the Persian cap, holds a rod positioned downwards. The third person brandishes a whip, while the last figure represents a standing man who holds a rod positioned upwards.

Beck proposes that this scene portrays a part of

the initiation rituals, which trains the initiate in Mithraic cosmology. Accordingly, the two figures holding the upward and downward rods resemble the Mithraic torchbearers *Cautes* and *Cautopates* and imitate their role in accompanying the Sun who is identified with the third figure in this scene.¹⁵ Then, based on Porphyry (*De antro Nymphs.*), Beck points out the way *Cautes* and *Cautopates* - the second and fourth persons with the raised and lowered torches - are positioned in the scene and resemble the equinoxes, the gates through which the human souls enter and leave the world: "up and down, paired in spatio-temporal opposition: sunrise and sunset, moonrise and moonset, spring equinox and fall equinox, [...]and so on; hence, they signify oppositions of genesis and apogenesis, [...]and, esoterically, the descent of souls into mortality and their ascent into immortality."¹⁶

In this sense, the first figure here is the initiate into the cult, the second and fourth persons represent *Cautes* and *Cautopates* on their seats at the world's gates, and the third figure is *Heliodromus* (the Sun Runner) who imitates the role of the god Mithras in controlling the ascending and descending paths- the souls' genesis and apogenesis. Beck thus concludes that scene B depicts the stage of the initiation rituals, in which knowledge of the Mithraic doctrine is imported to initiates: "nothing, then, precludes reading Scene B of the Mainz vessel as a representation of initiates miming within their Mithraeum the cosmology and the destiny of souls ascribed to them in the *De antro*."¹⁷ For Beck, performing this ritual in the reality of Mithraeum broke the boundary between the actual reality of the Mithraeum and the world of divinity,¹⁸ and enabled the initiate to grasp the Mithraic cosmology and to internalize the Mithraic beliefs and concepts.¹⁹

Recontextualizing the Initiation Rituals: Ritualized Bodies and Social Identities

However, while Beck's interpretation sees these scenes as the imitation of the god's deed

and ties the ritual performance to the Mithraic doctrine and theology, an alternative scenario may contextualize the initiation rituals in the perspective of socio-religious structure of cultic society, and to interpret the initiation grades in relation to the religious hegemony and power structure of Mithraic brotherhood.

In a somewhat controversial approach, Manfred Clauss suggested that the Mithraic initiation grades were indeed priestly grades of Roman Mithraism. Clauss uses a regional approach and argues that only 17% of the evidence from Rome and Ostia²⁰ reveal any details regarding initiation grades, in Danubian provinces only 15%, and only one record among more than 100 inscriptions of Dacia. According to Clauss, the archaeological data shows that the initiation grades did not concern all Mithraists but instead articulated a hierarchy that shaped the priestly system of the Mithras cult. For Clauss, from this interpretation arises questions of how the complex Mithraic cosmology was understandable for all initiates. In his opinion, this was not the case. Rather, Clauss states that Mithraic cult practice was not understandable for all initiates, yet was simple for the priestly initiates who already had a high level of knowledge of the Mithraic astrology and cosmology.²¹

Gordon, however, criticizes Clauss' interpretation and argues that if all the members who underwent the seven grades of initiation were priests, there would be no need for such hierarchical categories. In other words, it would have been nonsensical to create different titles for the members if they were all priests. Gordon argues that, contrarily, the Mithraic hierarchy incorporated a set of initiation rituals that indoctrinated new initiates (members) and established authority in the hands of those who were qualified to employ this set of rituals.²² Accordingly, the 'Mithraic fathers' would be the main characters of the cultic community.

Albeit, the question remains how the Mithraic

fathers used this set of initiation rituals to train the initiates and to legitimize their hegemony. According to Gordon, the key to answering this question is the body. Gordon's focus on the body is unique among recent works and deserves more attention, particularly because he takes Bell's practice theory into account.²³ Drawing on Bell, Gordon links the bodily experience of humiliation and subjugation to the promise of redemption: "the liberation is freedom from the power of death; humiliation is a necessary precondition to salvation."²⁴ Through performing the initiation rituals by the *Mystagogus*, the initiate experienced abasement and liberation, humiliation and redemption—which is exactly what mystery cults promised to their initiates.²⁵ Then, by emphasizing the role of the ritualized body as the mediator between the world of ritual and the world of everyday life, Gordon suggests that the bodily experience of humiliation ultimately tied the procedure of ritualization to the real world of cultic society and justified the hierarchical structure of Mithraic society and the power of initiators which was perceived as redemptive power. He mentions: "what the initiate subjectively feels is that this social order based upon deference and subjugation of the inferior is right and proper, indeed redemptive; and he responds by dedicating his votive in honor of Mithras thankfully in *honorem domus divinae, pro salute d.n. imp..., pro sal. Augg. nn., or num. aug.*"²⁶

Taking these issues into account, it is time to address the proper contextualization of the Mithraic initiation rituals, and the final function of these bodily rituals in the Mithraic brotherhood. Addressing this, Bell argues that the boundary between "the sacred and the profane, the divine and the human" is broken "in a few careful minutes" of performing ritual.²⁷ Thus, the Mithraic initiates experienced a special relationship with the divine realm in the minutes of ritualization and obtained a consensus on the cultic meanings and values which abstracted them from their former situation and identify them with their ritualized bodies. It was

through ritualized bodies that the initiates acquired ritualized identity and experienced the redemption promised by the cult.

Furthermore, the Mithraic society was a brotherhood, but, more importantly, a mystery brotherhood. Thus, it can be argued that the Roman Mithraic brotherhood's resilience relied on training individuals not only to understand the Mithraic meanings and values, but also to preserve the absolute secrecy about the cult. Therefore, the Mithraic brotherhood needed a systematic authority for controlling, handling and balancing its internal structure. This concentrated authority, which Gordon identifies with the Mithraic priesthood, is exactly what Bell calls "redemptive hegemony."²⁸ In other words, the Mithraic priesthood, through their authoritative social position, established a set of rules and practices - the Mithraic initiation rituals - which enabled them to legitimize their hegemony over the cultic society. In the context of Roman Mithraism, then, ritualization should be regarded as a process of socialization where the initiates became prepared to enter the brotherhood and experience the Mithraic redemption. In Bell's words, the Mithraic ritualization was more than just an individual process—it was a social process in which the Mithraic society reproduced its social structure and imposed its hegemony over this cultic hierarchy.

Endnotes:

- 1 See Gordon 2017; Beck 2006, 28-30; Beck 2004, 3-23.
- 2 Such as Porphyry, Procluse and Origen.
- 3 Beck 2000, 164.
- 4 Bell 2009, 90.
- 5 Bell 2009, 81.
- 6 Bell 2009, 84.
- 7 Bell 1990, 310.
- 8 Beck 2000, 149.
- 9 The report of this excavation was published entitled "Das Mainzer Mithrasgefäß" in the first volume of *Mainzer archäologisch Zeitschrift*. Later in 2008, argued
- 10 Beck 2000, 175.
- 11 Beck 2000, 149-50.
- 12 Merkelbach also believes that this scene represents the "Water miracle", but he does not further elaborate his thoughts or provides an interpretation. See Merkelbach 1994.
- 13 Beck 2000, 154.
- 14 Beck 2000, 153.
- 15 Beck 2000, 157.
- 16 Beck 2004, 90.
- 17 Beck 2004, 161.
- 18 It is necessary to mention that Beck's astrological-cosmological interpretation relies on Porphyry's essay (*De antro nympharum* 24-5) and mainly on the platonic discourse (See *The Republic* 10.614). In this sense, Beck sees ancient mystery cults as the production of the Roman culture in Antiquity. In Antiquity, ancient astrology was a quite common theme in religious and philosophical schools. Amongst these, Mithraism internalized ancient astrology in its cosmology and doctrine more than other mystery cults. See Beck 2006, 129-33; Beck 2004, 92-3.
- 19 Beck 2004, 164.
- 20 Half of the archaeological evidence comes from Rome and Ostia.
- 21 Clauss 2001, 132.
- 22 Gordon 2001, 253-4.
- 23 See Gordon 2009.
- 24 Gordon 2001, 260.
- 25 See Johnston 2004, 98-99.
- 26 Gordon 2001, 266.
- 27 Bell 1997, 78.
- 28 Bell 1997, 81.

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Quaternary Geomorphology and Viewshed Analysis of the Garniai I

C.B. Troskosky, V. Podėnas, N. Dubinin

*The Garniai I Hillfort in northeastern Lithuania was occupied from the Bronze Age during the Lithuanian Late Bronze and again disturbed during the Modern Era. The local geomorphic landscape of the site was formed by Terminal Pleistocene and Holocene glaciation and sedimentation, the majority of which predated the original occupation by millennia. These geological processes influenced the cultural development of the site in the Bronze Age and its preservation into the present. The surrounding landscape and environment of the Garniai I Hillfort is key to understanding, as best we can, the lives of the people who occupied the site. Geospatial interpretation of landscape with a specific focus on the Late Bronze Age occupation of the region are here used to interpret the effect of site Quaternary geologic history on occupation history. A viewshed analysis of three contemporary or quasi contemporary hillforts all located on glacial kame terraces including Garniai I was employed with the intention of determining their relationships to one another. This analysis resulted in the identification of the likely relationship between the sites if they were occupied contemporaneously as well as the potential identification of new areas for archaeological study within the region which would give more insight into these results. **

Introduction

Hillforts in Lithuania and Latvia are unusually numerous compared to other parts of Eastern Europe, reaching a maximum in Utena County, Lithuania which has over 190 hillforts located within a 2,780 square mile area, all of which were occupied during the Late Bronze Age or later.¹ The appearance of Hillfort settlement patterns in the European Bronze Age has been associated with attempts to gain control over significant trade routes.² However, matching established models of societal development in Central or Northern Europe to East Baltic Bronze Age would require overlooking significant differences: first, there is significantly less bronze consumption than in neighboring regions to the South and West;³ secondly, these communities used mostly bone or stone for their tools, weapons, and ornaments;

thirdly the imitations of European Bronze Age traditions took a wide variety of forms. There are no apparent trading routes in the region of importance to Scandinavian or Polish Bronze Age groups. In a regional context, the communities in the Eastern Baltic are still largely unstudied and the regional archaeological record for the period is not directly comparable to that of any surrounding regions. The appearance of hillforts and earliest development of hillfort societies is still insufficiently documented due to the relatively paucity of modern investigations in the region on sites dating to this time period which is later than in the South or West.

Garniai I is a hillfort situated amongst the hills of the Aukštaičiai lift, near the Kriauklė rivulet that runs through the neighboring lakes Kibinėliai and Pelakys (Fig. 1). A swamp surrounds the hillfort to

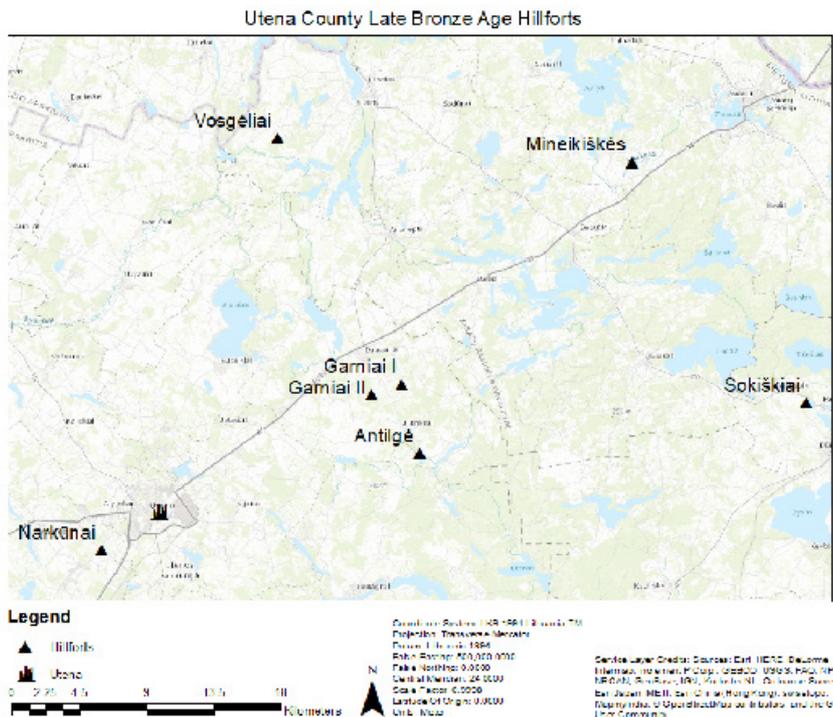


Figure 1: Potentially contemporaneous Late Bronze Age hillforts in northeastern Lithuania mentioned in the paper. Discussion focuses on Garniai I, Garniai II, and Antilgė.

the north and a narrow dry depression lies to the southwest. An isolated ovoid hill was chosen as the prehistoric hillfort location and had been subject to different formational processes since the Last Glacial Maximum. The current hillfort courtyard, the area between the glacial berms which surround the site, is approximately 75 m in length (SW-NE) and 35 m in width (NW-SE), with a relief of approximately 20 m above the Kriauklė rivulet at the base of the hillfort slope (some 200 m above the modern Baltic Sea level). The nearest hillforts which could have been settled contemporaneously to Garniai I are Antilgė, 4.8 km to the southeast and the uninvestigated Garniai II hillfort 2 km to the SE of Garniai I, which based on preliminary testing could also represent a Late Bronze Age occupation as well. These two hillforts, which are known to have archaeological components that are contemporary or quasi-contemporary with the occupation at Garniai I, are within an aerial distance to Garniai I appropriate for overlapping viewshed. They are mapped in Figure 1.

The incredibly high regional density in hillfort sites in Utena County compared to the rest of the East Baltic is likely related to a long term prehistoric settlement preference for elevated locales in the region, as well as a remarkably suitable geologic landscape for hillfort settlement. Therefore an investigation into the particulars of this geologic landscape as well as an investigation of the viewsheds of local hillfort sites with contemporaneous or quasi-contemporaneous components is necessary to elucidate the relationships between hillfort settlements.

In this study the quaternary geologic landscape of Garniai I was viewshed along with its two nearest contemporary or quasi-contemporary neighbors for overlap in viewshed to determine the possible relationships of the sites to each other in various configurations of cohabitation.

This was done in an attempt to discern the nature and extent of the relationships of the sites to each other. This case study will serve as an example of how geospatial and geologic information may be utilized to derive information about settlement patterns within groups of sites which lack good extra-regional correlates and have relatively low excavated sample sizes.

The Nature of the Late Bronze Age Occupation of the Garniai I Hillfort

Hillforts in the South East Baltic region during Late Bronze Age (1100–500 BC) were permanent prehistoric settlements. Each housed an individual community likely representing multiple family units. Estimated community size reached from 40 to 120 in individual hillforts.⁴ The chronology of the Bronze Age in the Southeastern Baltic has been reconciled with the Scandinavian dating scheme and there is a comprehensive discussion in the relevant literature.⁵

Cultural horizons at Southeast Baltic hillforts are generally well developed, thick, and rich in finds. These finds include thousands of pottery fragments, zooarchaeological remains, paleobotanicals, bone, stone and metal artifacts. Routinely recovered features include pits, postholes for buildings, and hearths. Occasionally the remains of defensive structures, generally palisades, are present.⁶ It is likely that the settings and possible fortifications at Late Bronze Age hillforts in the Southeast Baltic reflect an intentional societal structure with regards to site placement. This could be either based in mutual social tension over resources between local communities or mutual networks of collaboration between local communities. There is very limited data to represent the direct interaction of outside groups within the region (which has no copper, tin, or other significant concentration of Late Bronze Age wealth or the raw materials for other prestige goods).

Since limited metal imports became more important in the region contemporary to the practice of establishing hillforts in Eastern Lithuania, the possibility of conflicts over access to metals and metallurgical technology could have been a factor in the inception of this new, more nucleated and networked settlement practice.

The layout of the structures within settlements' hillforts in northeastern Lithuania was varied but primarily focused on two modes of settlement planning. Buildings were either erected several meters from the palisade and concentrated to one side of the hillfort,⁷ or they were concentrated near the palisades leaving an open court, as evidenced at the hillfort of Ķivutkalns in Latvia.⁸ It is likely that the former layout mode was present at Garniai I.⁹ Defensive buildings were generally still modest in the Southeast Baltic during this time period, consisting mostly of simple palisades. Therefore natural relief with an enhanced viewshed of the landscape may have been a major factor in deciding to settle at a particular location if site security was a major concern.

The Garniai I hillfort was established sometime between the 8th and 6th centuries B.C., based on regionally diagnostic artifacts and 14C dates, and represents the permanent settlement of a community for at least several decades.¹⁰ After the abandonment of the hillfort, settlement ceased at the site and was not resumed by its previous residents or any other potential occupants. The next major evidence of land use, observed during the 2016–2017 excavations, consisted of plowmarks of indeterminate age which partially penetrated an anthropogenic clay layer containing 20th century refuse.

Landscape change at Garniai I is better documented in the modern period. Local informants interviewed during the course of the archaeological investigation describe cultivation of rye during the Soviet Period and the use of heavy machinery which

changed the relief of portions of the hillfort significantly. The systematic coring of the hillfort courtyard during the 2016 archaeological survey¹¹ revealed that most of the cultural layer remains only in the southern part of the courtyard. Much of the site is now buried in clay of anthropogenic origin that relates to Soviet Period attempts at field replenishment. These attempts both ruined the site's agricultural potential and subsequently shielded the deposits from additional deflation. There is a high possibility that the Bronze Age cultural layer was destroyed in at least half of the area of the hillfort courtyard prior to Soviet activities through agricultural land use and during the attempted Soviet Era agricultural rejuvenation. The remains of these portions of the cultural layer now either lie downslope or were pushed into the Kriauklė rivulet. For a Late Bronze Age single component hillfort in the region this is extremely good preservation within the excavated sample.

Pleistocene and Holocene Landscape Development of the Region

Eastern Lithuania was glaciated during the regional Nemunas Phase of retreat of the Fennoscandian Ice Sheet. Retreat of the ice lobe associated with the study area began at least 18 ka B.P. based on Beryllium-10 dates returned from terminal Gruda Moraine.¹² Results from the same study indicated that the Middle Lithuanian Moraine, which is of greatest significance to this paper, was formed as a moraine position ca. 13.5 ka B.P.¹³ The Middle Lithuanian Moraine Belt is important to this study as the Pleistocene geomorphology related to the formation of both the landform on which the Garniai I hillfort is located and the surrounding region would have formed during this period.

Moraine positions do not represent static passive events in glacial ice retreat, rather they represent periods of time when the glacier was alternately advancing and

ablating forming a multitude of depositional environments along the ice margin. These features, commonly referred to as *kames* or *kame terraces* are often tectonic in nature. This results in the creation of high elevation till deposits via the deformation of earlier deposited till. These landforms are then subjected to lacustrine, alluvial, and eventually aeolian processes.¹⁴ These deposits are distinguished either by stratigraphically undifferentiated mixed till or by alternating deposits of material related to secondary postglacial depositional processes occurring on previous morainic landforms which are characterized by a non-uniformitarian relationship with Walther's Law of the lateral conformity of depositional environments with vertical stratigraphy. This is because these deposits have been thrust tectonically by glacial readvance on top of each other, forming a landform comprised of unconformable early periglacial landform deposits.

These glacio-tectonic landforms can and should be classified separately from stratified sand and gravel deposits, which can also form in ice marginal settings and be set above the deglacial landscape as representing completely different mechanisms for deposition.¹⁵ In the Utena County Region of Lithuania, where the Garniai I hillfort is located, the vast majority of Higher landforms are associated with tectonic kame formation against stagnant ablating chunks of ice abandoned by the glacier.¹⁶ These can be identified by numerous associated kettle hole depressions which have or had formed postglacial and holocene lakes in the region. Large regional lakes occur in periglacial depressions caused by seasonal glacial fluvial scour of basal till in the river valleys between upland morainic landforms, which were subsequently impounded when isostatic uplift cut off their outlets from local base level.

Following the retreat of Nemunas Ice from the region to the North Lithuanian Moraine

System ca. 13.3 ka B.P. the area surrounding the Garniai I hillfort was a primary discharge area for a significant amount of glacial frontage. During this period of time large braided river systems should have been active in the region creating the conditions for the deposition of Loessic and very fine sandy deposits in sheltered areas.¹⁷ This loess cover, which was less pronounced, would have formed less noticeable thinner deposits or been quickly integrated into the local existing topography through soil development or brought again into aeolian transport for deposition elsewhere in less exposed locations.

The landscape of Eastern Lithuania went through a normal series of vegetation regimes following deglaciation, with the initial tundra being superseded by coniferous forests, followed by mixed/broadleaf forests in the uplands with continued pine dominance in regions of coarser till. This has been documented in a series of pollen cores.¹⁸ By the Middle Bronze Age a typical subboreal regime covered the upland slopes while open areas consisted primarily of prairie/meadow species in varying amounts. Human activity can be noted by the presence of *Cerealia*-type pollen and its associated weeds in a number of the cores. Woodland clearance would have started to affect both soil development and sedimentation by this time.

The Stratigraphy at Garniai I

A stratigraphic sequence was obtained by bisecting the natural and cultural deposits at Garniai I during the 2017 field season. This geological trench was cut into the natural glacial rampart of the site and may be viewed as representative of site stratigraphy as it relates to the nature of the landform on which the hillfort was located and the nature of the geologic deposits on that landform which were available to residents during the period of Late Bronze Age Occupation and the concurrent formation of

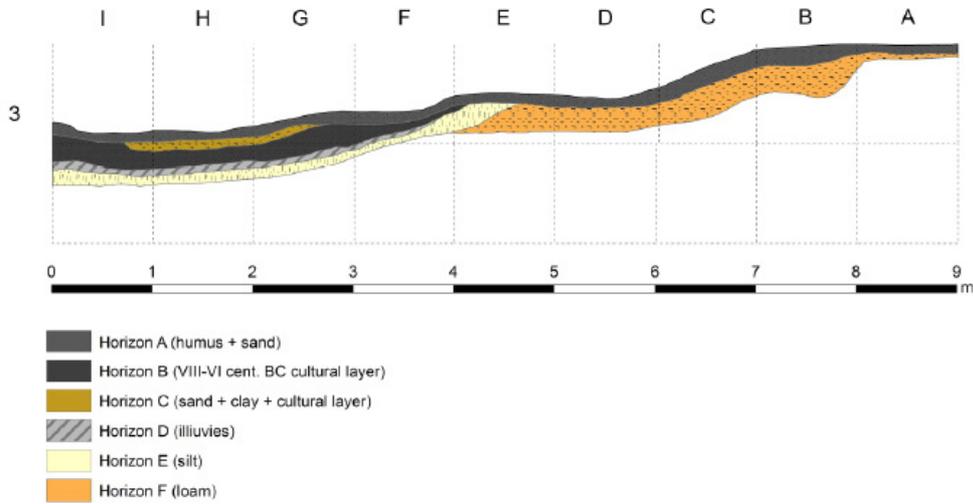


Figure 2: Cross section of Geologic Trench, Garniai I hillfort (2017). Horizon F is till of glacial origin (loam being a mixture of sand, silt, gravel, and clay), Horizon E is the Aeolian Silt Mantle which forms the matrix of the overlying cultural layer. The superpositioning of the silt layer in this section indicates that it formed after the initial glacial landform blanketed the original topography (Drafted by Vytenis Podėnas, used with permission).

the archaeological deposits. A cross section of the Geologic Trench may be found in Figure 2.

The hill chosen for the hillfort location is a typical morainic kame composed of a mixed (multi depositional environment) ground moraine tectonically pushed into an upland till landform composed of poorly sorted gravel, sand, silt and clay. It is likely that this accounts for the saddle or rampart at the site which is geologic in nature and the central court, which mark the hillside as unique. This bowl-shaped court, which formed the majority of the settlement area, was partially filled or filled and partially ablated with a unit of a uniform white silt with fine sand which likely dates to later Moraine positions and is pre-occupation in age. The stratigraphic superposition of this white silty unit is clearly visible in the geologic trench dug in the 2017 field season (see Figure 2).¹⁹ It was likely much thicker prior to the Bronze Age habitation and disturbance from modern agricultural

activities, resulting in deflation and minor cultural mixing. All Bronze Age features are embedded into this layer and it serves as the matrix for the Bronze Age cultural horizon.

Deposition at the site during the Terminal Pleistocene was fixed by tundra vegetation followed by successions of vegetation of the hillside. It was most likely opened for erosion again with deforestation associated with the Bronze Age cultural layer, which is not a uniform feature of the site but appears to be restricted to those areas which contain the white silty layer. This is unlikely to be a factor of the tyranny of preservation, but rather a deliberate choice by Bronze Age residents as this layer is much easier to work with for the construction of structures and the digging of pits than the underlying till. There is a discontinuity in the stratigraphic sequence which is obscured by limited modern and potentially pre-modern plowing of the site. This is evident in the presence of plow traces between the dark cultural layer

and the overlying nearly uniform clay. This clay is of modern anthropogenic origin and it is unknown how much of the cultural layer was lost to anthropogenic activity before the failed Soviet Era attempt at field replenishment effectively capped the site with this clay. The clay appears geologically homogenous and was of great consternation in the development of a geological profile of the site as no depositional process for its emplacement could be identified until its origin was determined as anthropogenic through ethnographic interview in the 2017 field season.

In the 30 years since that capping event a poorly developed but relatively deep loamy inceptisol, with modern artifacts and a few Bronze Age artifacts eroded or turbated out of context, has formed out of the clay parent material. This represents the terminal deposit at the site at the time of excavation in 2016 and 2017.²⁰

Cultural Deposits

The finds recovered from the excavations at the Garniai I hillfort represent a fairly large sample considering the size of the site and the area excavated. The previous recovery of limited bronze casting materials at the site indicated that it was likely regionally important as it had any bronze working material at all. The recovery of an antler double button²¹ (Figure 3) reinforces this interpretation. Regionally produced double buttons made of antler, bone or amber from this time period are known from the Baltic countries. They trend north to south from the Estonian coast into the Eastern Baltic interior and are in imitation of styles of similar bronze buttons recovered from further west into the Nordic Bronze Age Sphere in Sweden.²² These buttons in the Eastern Baltic Context have associations with an elite status for burials in Baltic states.²³ It is likely that, in the absence of available bronze in the East Baltic, these buttons served as high-status items as local cultures were exposed to and to some extent

adopted Nordic and Lusatian Bronze Age ideas. In this context the use of these items may have been culturally restricted.

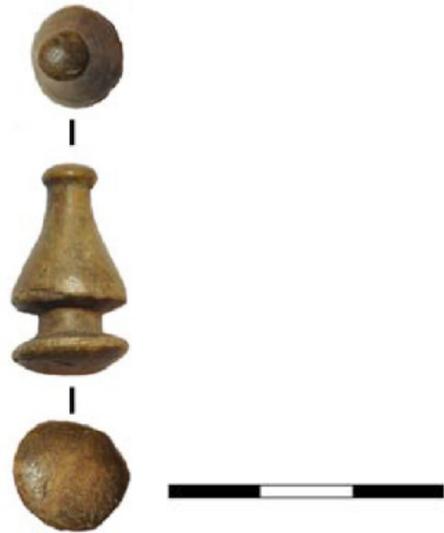


Figure 3: Double button recovered during the 2016 field season. Modified from Civilyte et al. 2017.

Geospatial Analysis of the Garniai I Hillfort Region

Viewshed is defined as the area that can be seen from a given point or series of points. Viewshed analysis was conducted on the Garniai I, Garniai II, and Antilgė hillfort sites. Open source GIS software (QGIS 2.18) and ESRI ArcMap 10.4 was used. High resolution (1 m) LIDAR data allowed for the creation of a topographic vector layer. The Geospatial Data Abstraction Library (GDAL) from the Open Source Geospatial Foundation allowed for the creation of a contour layer using the LIDAR data in QGIS. Once the contour layer was created, it was saved as a shapefile for analysis in ArcMap. In order to do any kind of viewshed analysis, a raster file format is usually needed.²⁴ In ArcMap, Spatial Analyst was used to create a 1m resolution raster file using the Topo to Raster function. The

The viewshed suggests that the hillforts were multifunctional sites which would allow for an extended viewshed over the nearby topography. This would include, but is not limited to, bodies of water in the foreground and background and pastures for herding fauna. None of the three hillforts examined had a viewshed which allowed for the direct observation of their neighbors. Instead, they were situated in a manner which maximized the viewshed of their surrounding environment. This would allow for the detection of friendly neighbors, insidious neighbors, non-neighbors, or untended herds of animals from a distance allowing the time necessary for a socially appropriate response. This would include both violent and non-violent interaction and the likely quiet appropriation of animals conflict. The viewshed configuration would have been highly useful in the management and protection of grazing animals, which was most likely their primary function in active viewing. Additionally, all three sites are oriented for an extended visual warning of inclement weather, which commonly moves very quickly and violently through the region from a limited number or directions seasonally. Where viewsheds do overlap it is at least several kilometers from the site itself in the extended areas of both of the site's catchments. This is too far off to allow for either to have easy vision of the ground terrain which is hummocky. The terrain also would not allow for a rapid response to the areas at the peripheries of the viewshed.

The viewshed represents a lack of concern about the everyday goings on of neighboring settlements. The combined viewsheds form a nearly 360 degree arc of shared vision (see Fig. 7). There is a conspicuous additional gap in the viewshed coverage of the combined viewshed of all three sites of the region immediately to the west of the sites. There is an additional smaller gap in the North. One possible explanation for these gaps is that they represent missing settlements within the network which have

not yet been discovered and excavated. Neither are lowland areas. These areas are labeled A and B in Figure 8.

A critical note must be made here that these relationships rest on the assumption that the visual inventory components of this viewshed analysis are discrete and non-universal. Essentially the assumption that the viewshed from any point above a critical elevation will not contain an identical assemblage of landscape features. As noted above, the regional geomorphology is heavily influenced by glacial processes which leave a non-random patterning of the environment at a landscape scale. The authors freely acknowledge that such a result is possible but not probable as all such points are assumed to not contain archaeological sites and the viewsheds of the known sampled archaeological sites show identical variation with respect to orientation (Fig. 4, 5 & 6). They also acknowledge a certain provisional circularity to this logic which will be discussed in more detail below.

Conclusions

This study represents a very basic attempt at employing geospatial analysis to the Late Bronze Age Period sites in Northeastern Lithuania. Considering the coarseness of the data and the relatively understudied nature of the time period in the region, the study illustrates the utility of geospatial analysis, in this case viewshed analysis, at even very early stages of archaeological project arcs. The analysis offers the preliminary conclusions that the three hillforts used in this study were not actively observable to one another, but rather there were some shared points in the viewshed at the periphery of the study area. If the sites were occupied contemporaneously, it also suggests, based on their spatial position and their viewshed alignments, that they formed part of a laterally organized settlement network with no hierarchical settlement organization.

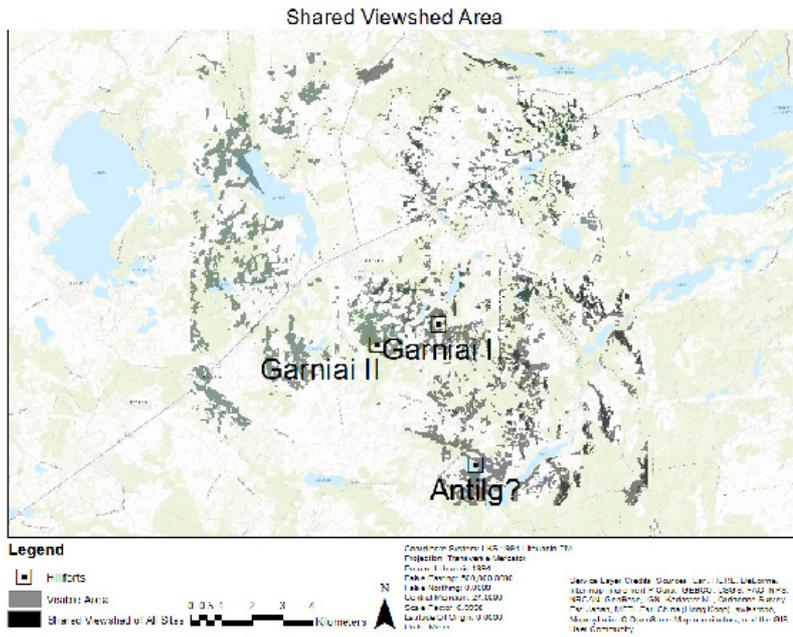
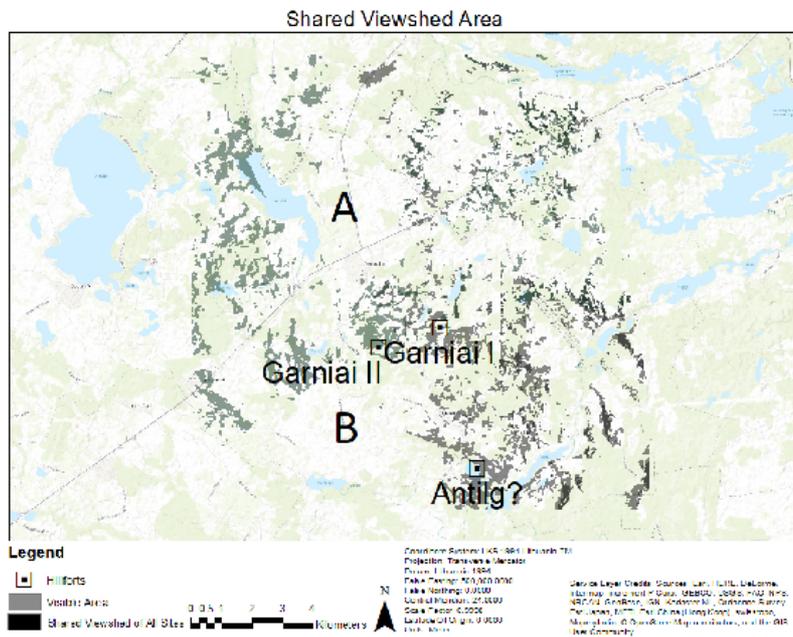


Figure 7: Shared viewshed of possible contemporaneous hillforts



Shared viewshed of possible contemporaneous hillforts with gap areas A & B.

The critical next step in corroborating the results of this preliminary study would be the construction of such a comprehensive viewshed analysis for every elevation above a certain threshold (or which met certain other conditions) to construct a comprehensive dataset that these results could then be tested against on a broad regional scale. Such an exercise was unfortunately outside the scope of available time for model construction and resources for ground truthing (for viewshed) as of the date of this publication. With such an inventory the statistical significance of recurrence of viewsheds characteristics at archaeological sites could be calculated against the background noise of the non-random geomorphic patterning of landscape itself. It would also correct for the necessary circular logical constructions for our modeling noted above. It is unfortunately also important to note that this geomorphological bias and resultant background noise is not recognized or acknowledged as often as it should be in archaeological viewshed analysis.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Baubonis et al. 2017.
- 2 Krause 2008; Earle et al. 2014; Čivilytė 2014.
- 3 Sidrys & Luchtanas 1999.
- 4 Luchtanas 1992; Lang 2007.
- 5 Sidrys & Luchtanas 1999; Lang 2007; Čivilytė 2014.
- 6 For extensive studies of representative hillforts see Krzywicki 1914a; 1914b; 1917; Tarasenko 1934; Indreko 1939; Grigalavičienė 1986a; 1986b; Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1986; Graudonis 1989; Vasks 1994; Sperling 2014.
- 7 Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1986; Grigalavičienė 1986a; 1986b.
- 8 Vasks 2007.
- 9 Podėnas et al. 2018.
- 10 Čivilytė et al. 2017.
- 11 Čivilytė et al. 2017.
- 12 Rinternecht et al. 2008.
- 13 Rinternecht et al. 2008.
- 14 Bitinas et al. 2004.
- 15 Bitinas et al. 2004; Bitinas et al. 2012.
- 16 Bitinas et al. 2004.
- 17 Rinternecht et al. 2008.
- 18 Kabailienė 2006.
- 19 Podėnas et al. 2018 *in press*.
- 20 Čivilytė et al. 2017; Podėnas et al. 2018 *in press*.
- 21 For a discussion on the significance of this type of find see Luik & Ots 2007.
- 22 Ling et al. 2012; Luik & Ots 2007.
- 23 Bezenberger 1900; Šturms 1936; Denisova et al. 1985; Lang 2007.
- 24 Llobera 2003.

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IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship Report

Finding Forts: A Forgotten Landscape in Southeast Romania

Nathaniel Durant

For the 2017-18 academic year and through the help of the IEMA research grant, I was fortunate enough to travel to the University of Exeter in Devon, England to work alongside Dr. Ioana Oltean. My research focuses on the frontier environment and defenses of one of the most turbulent and active regions of the late Roman Empire, the province of Scythia Minor, located in southeast Romania. Especially in the wake of numerous contemporary events such as the Syrian migration crisis and the sudden exit of Britain from the European Union, the focus on national borders and border control has never been greater. Frontiers, both present and ancient, act as dynamic areas of cultural interaction where goods, ideas, and populations are exchanged but also regulated and controlled. While theories surrounding the definition and role of frontiers can be seen to partially originate from those of the former British Empire, these concepts have since been expanded and applied to a number of other cultures.

During the 3rd to 6th centuries A.D., the frontier province of Scythia Minor was repeatedly overrun by foreign invasions from the north. While this external stress may have not been on a daily basis, the sporadic yet destructive nature of the invasions, as well as the repeated indications in the archaeological and historical records of foreign occupation of Roman land suggest that a purely linear and static depiction of the frontier during this period may not be useful. Additionally, the military crises that plagued the empire in this period indicate that the Roman administration could

not effectively deal with the defense of its perimeter. In the wake of these invasions, the forts and settlements in this region may have opted for the control and defense of their own surrounding area independently, rather than working together as a frontier system. In this project, I address whether the Late Roman frontier in Scythia Minor during the 3rd to 6th centuries is better modeled as a series of fortifications occasionally working in collaboration but, more often than not, concerned primarily with the control over their immediate neighboring area and localized defense. The Late Roman frontier is then defined not just as a linear feature, but rather as a zone of control that exists well beyond its installations and, in periods of successful defense, the area between such fortifications.

This analysis relies on the accurate identification and landscape contextualization of any relevant sites within the area under study, but not all sites mentioned by written evidence have been located on the ground. For example, one of the ancient registers of the Roman Empire, the 3rd century Antonine Itinerary, mentions two important sites by name (Vallis Domitiana and Ad Salices) whose remains have not yet been attested archaeologically. I have successfully narrowed down their possible locations using ArcGIS based on the registrar distances from nearby sites, but a more systematic above-ground survey of archaeological structures is needed. Unfortunately, site location in Romania has often proved difficult based on traditional satellite imagery as much of the land in the area of Scythia Minor has been subjected to post-WWII disturbances under significant agricultural and industrial communist projects. These modern developments and practices such as deep plowing have generally resulted in the severe obliteration of archaeological remains, whether as surface or subsurface features

potentially revealed by cropmarks. However, a series of recently declassified aerial reconnaissance surveys taken by the RAF, USAF, and Luftwaffe during WWII (now stored in Washington D.C. and Edinburgh) predate much of this later development and thus act as a valuable resource for locating and identifying now invisible sites. The combined study of such aerial photographs and existing satellite data has already resulted in the discovery and identification of previously unknown sites in areas of southern Scythia Minor, but its northern regions, containing the traditional line of the frontiers along the Danube and coast have yet to benefit from this methodology.

The first month (October) of my project was spent preprocessing the imagery I had already acquired as well as making inquiries regarding the material stored in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, I was not able to purchase all the needed imagery from Edinburgh, but was able to find an alternative solution. During the Cold War, the Corona satellite was launched by the United States government in order to provide detailed surveillance of the Soviet bloc which fortunately includes much of the region of my study area. Thus, by purchasing a number of these declassified high-resolution images, I was able to fill in much of the study area covered by the inaccessible photographs. Following the data collection, the following two months of the project (November and December) was spent georeferencing all processed photograph archival material from the province of Scythia Minor in a digital database and GIS.

The final three months (January-March) consists of identifying and GIS mapping subsurface phenomena in the aerial photographs based on cropmarks and other distinguishing features. Interpretation of historical photographs can often be

difficult and depends highly on the level of preservation and clarity of the individual picture. Poor archival conditions, physical and chemical deterioration of the photo and any subsequent markings made upon it can all negatively impact the identification of any features and even destroy valuable visual data. However, with my training in photo interpretation coupled with the meaningful discoveries of archaeological features already made in southern Scythia Minor, I am confident that these photographs will provide significant information about the location of minor frontier installations along the northern half of the Roman province. All crop marks from the aerial photographs will be noted as potential archaeological sites. Those that fall within my calculated area for Vallis Domitiana and Ad Salices will be given special consideration so as to serve as regions of interest for future ground research. This summer, I hope to travel to many of these areas of interest identified from the photographs to conduct ground surveys and determine whether any significant material culture or anthropogenic features can be identified at these sites.

The results of this project should make up a significant component of my PhD and integrate well with my previous work. I have also undertaken the development of a GIS-based predictive model aimed towards identifying the most probable locations of Roman forts (again focusing on Vallis Domitiana and Ad Salices) based on the spatial and geographic characteristics of established fortifications in the province. Therefore, any potential fortifications identified from the WWII and Cold War photography, once established as Roman through ground confirmation, can serve as valid test points to either validate or fine tune the model based on the spatial characteristics of these new forts. Even without the discovery of any clear fortifications, past

research with these photographs in other regions of Romania has already proven how they can reveal key markers in the landscape such as roads and settlements which can improve the understanding of the layout of the Roman province.

WWII aerial photographs are a resource that can provide valuable information about past landscapes, both those in the time of the photo and before. As many sites in Romania have become invisible to modern satellite imagery due to excessive agricultural and industrial development in areas, the cropmarks present in these photos offer an unprecedented view of these areas and can be used to place them within the modern landscape. While it can be difficult to identify the frontier site as Roman purely based on its aerial imagery, the date of each site can be corroborated by ground survey. By combining the newly discovered sites with those already identified, I will create a new comprehensive spatial view of the Late Roman frontier in Scythia Minor and examine when these sites worked as a unified front against invasions or rather concerned themselves only with the nearby areas. With this newly created landscape, it will be possible to gain a much better understanding of the method of control that the Romans used on the frontiers of their empire and how such methods compare to other civilizations in the ancient and modern world.

IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship Report

The Olynthos Project

Alice Chapman

Introduction

Thanks to the IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship, I was able to participate in my second season as a ceramics analysis team member with the Olynthos Project. The Olynthos Project, which began in 2014, is a multi-disciplinary project which uses excavation, field survey, geoarchaeology, faunal and botanical analysis, and ceramics analysis to more fully understand not only the Greek household, but also the interactions of neighborhoods and cities.

The City of Olynthos

The city of Olynthos was built on two hills in the region of northern Greece called the Chalcidice. The first settlement at Olynthos was on the smaller South Hill. Although there is evidence of a Neolithic settlement on the South Hill, the site was later abandoned until the 7th century B.C., when a city of small houses and shops grew up along four main roads, two running north-south and two running east-west (Cahill, 2002). The cityscape of Olynthos changed significantly during the Peloponnesian War, when a rebellion of the cities in the Chalcidice from the Athenian empire caused neighboring communities to seek shelter in the easily defensible site of Olynthos. This movement of people, called an *anikismos*, caused a huge population boom in the city and perhaps as much as tripled the number of people residing in the small city (Cahill, 2010). Thus, around 432 B.C., a new city was built on the North Hill. This city was built in an orthogonal plan with blocks of ten houses, which were arranged in two rows of five houses back to back

separated by a narrow alley. The typical house on the North Hill at Olynthos was centered around a large courtyard with a transitional space on the north side of the courtyard called the *pastas*. The *pastas* led into a set of rooms used for cooking, bathing and domestic activities, called the *oikos* complex. Many of the houses at Olynthos had *andrones*, men's quarters, which were connected to the rest of the house via the courtyard. The *andron* was the home of the Greek symposium, a drinking ritual, in which men, reclining on banqueting couches, would consume mixed wine and otherwise entertain themselves. These rooms were often lavishly decorated with wall painting and pebble mosaics. The famous Bellerophon Mosaic from Olynthos is just one example of this type of decoration. The new city on the North Hill was built up over time and new housing blocks were added as the community expanded and the need for housing grew (Cahill, 2010). An example of this type of expansion was the creation of a suburb called the Villa Section in the early fourth century B.C., which did not maintain the grid plan of the main city, although it probably still lay within the city walls (Cahill, 2010). Despite its rapid growth, the Classical city at Olynthos was not long lived. It was destroyed and sacked by Philip II and his army in 348 B.C. and was never reoccupied, although Cahill argues that the city remained in used until 316 B.C. (Cahill, 2010).

The city was excavated extensively by David M. Robinson in the 1920s and 30s. During his work on the site, he uncovered over one hundred houses, making Olynthos one of the most important sites for the study of Greek houses in the ancient world. Although his archaeological methods are widely criticized, he laid the foundation for a broad understanding of the nature of the Greek city, which would not have been possible without his work. Robinson did archaeological work on both the North and South Hills, although it is only on the

North Hill that his excavations have led to the conservation of houses open to the general public. The Olynthos Project seeks to fill in the gaps left by Robinson's more crude archaeological methods and also to use modern methods and technologies to gain a fuller understanding of the site of Olynthos.

The Olynthos Project

Since 2014, an excavation led by Dr. Lisa Nevett (The University of Michigan), Dr. Bettina Tsigarida (The Hellenic Ministry of Culture) and Dr. Zosia Archibald (The University of Liverpool), has sought to answer important questions about the ancient city of Olynthos. The project combines field survey, excavation, and geophysics to accomplish these goals. The field survey, led by Dr. David Stone (The University of Michigan), uses the collection of diagnostic artifacts to understand the area around the city, the extent of the urban space and possible production areas in the agricultural fields, which surround the hill. The excavation of the site is focused on two areas, one on the North Hill and one on the South Hill. On the North Hill, the excavation of a single house is being used to answer questions about the stratigraphy of the site, since Robinson's recording of stratigraphy was woefully limited, as well as answer questions about domestic space in Olynthos. Using geophysics, an area of the South Hill was also identified and trenches were opened in 2016. These trenches, which were expanded in 2017, are providing valuable information about the layout of the older city as well as providing information on the periods of occupation. In addition to this, geochemical analysis, microdebris analysis, borehole core sampling, electrical resistivity tomography, and phytolith analysis provide important information on the use of domestic space and how that changed over time.

My Participation in the Olynthos Project, Summer 2017

As a ceramics analysis team member with the Olynthos project, my role in the excavations was to contribute to the sorting of ceramic material from both the survey and excavations. Days at Olynthos began early, with a brisk walk to the site at dawn. The ceramics team was responsible for sorting a wide variety of ceramic material including coarse kitchen wares, fines wares, terracotta roof tiles, and decorated wares of both local origin and Athenian import. Each day, the ceramics team was responsible for collecting pottery from drying screens and sorting it into various types based on the coarseness of the material ceramic and its possible function, keeping out diagnostic pieces for later analysis. Once the sherds were weighed and recorded, the team would then use diagnostic sherds to try and identify certain shapes in an attempt to understand the types of assemblages at Olynthos. With the help of experts like Dr. Chevdar Tzochev, an amphora specialist, Dr. Nikos Akamatis, a red figure specialist, and Dr. Anna Panti, a specialist in the local wares of northern Greece, we were able to identify the origins of imported goods, interpret complex decorative scenes from the smallest sherds, and start to understand the duration of the settlement on the older South Hill. After primary processing was completed, our team leader, Dr. Bradley Ault, began secondary processing, making a detailed analysis of important artifacts and taking high resolution photographs for publication.

Conclusion

Thanks to the IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship, I was able to participate in this exciting interdisciplinary program for my second season. My time spent at Olynthos was invaluable to my dissertation research, which focuses on

women in domestic spaces in the Greek world. The IEMA Research and Travel Scholarship allowed me to jumpstart my dissertation research by giving me the opportunity to examine objects used by women in the domestic space in context. It is with this in mind that I would like to thank the IEMA Board, the Department of Classics, the Department of Anthropology, and Milton Ezrati for giving me the opportunity to travel to Greece to participate in the excavations and continue my dissertation research at Olynthos.

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Interview with Dr. Megan Daniels, 2017-2018 IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow

Heather Rosch

Dr. Megan Daniels is currently the Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. She received a Masters in Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology in 2009 from The University of British Columbia. Her Doctorate in Classics was completed in 2016 at Stanford University, with a dissertation entitled, "The Queen of Heaven and a Goddess for All the People: Kingship, Religion, and Cultural Evolution between Greece and the Near East. She currently works as a pottery analyst on the Burgaz Harbors Project in Turkey and the Zita Project in southern Tunisia.

Dr. Daniels, what are your current research interests and goals, and what projects are you currently working on?

Overall, my research goals involve striking a balance between producing big history narratives of the formation of ancient Mediterranean societies and conducting finer-grained analyses that examine the nuances and trajectories of local developments. My two primary research interests speak to this goal, and center on the social roles of religion in the eastern Mediterranean in the Iron Age and Archaic period and on the broader study of migration and mobility in human history. I am currently working on several articles and book chapters that stem from my dissertation work, along with two edited volumes – one on data sciences and social sciences approaches to ancient Mediterranean religions and the other stemming from the IEMA conference on human migration and mobility. I am also crafting a monograph proposal for my dissertation, which examines the long-term history of ideologies of divine kingship between Greece and the Near East. Finally, I am involved in ongoing studies of ceramics from various sites in the Mediterranean for projects that examine local dynamics of maritime economies and cultural transitions across various periods.

Your work as the IEMA post-doc has centered on human mobility and migration in archaeological studies. How did you get interested in this subject?

Much of my work examines long-term cultural interrelations between Greece and the Near East through the intersection of shared political ideologies and religious practices. One area I am constantly challenged on is the mechanisms by which these shared ideas and practices get disseminated – e.g., through trade, diplomacy, population movement, or the amorphous concept of “diffusion”. In many ways, we see the effects of long-

term interaction between different cultural groups, but lack the framework to articulate how and why such interactions took place in specific times and places. There has been a lot of fascinating work going on in related fields (e.g., biological sciences, skeletal biochemistry, etc.) along with new models of Mediterranean history on human mobility. I saw a great opportunity with this conference to bring together scholars working within and across these fields to discuss how we can best approach the question of how to study and account for past human movements.

Whose work did you find the most inspiring for your own?

My mentors and advisors at Stanford, in particular my dissertation advisor Ian Morris, were always an inspiration for me, especially through their willingness and enthusiasm to work far beyond the confines of classics and to produce research that was both ambitious and assiduous in making arguments about human developments over the long term. I have also been inspired by scholars who have boldly paved the way towards much bigger histories of the Mediterranean – for instance, Sarah Morris, Carolina López-Ruiz, Cyprian Broodbank, among others – histories that take into account the numerous human groups who made up life in this fascinating part of the world. Finally, I am inspired by earnest attempts by various scholars to engage classics, ancient history, and archaeology with modern-day concerns. I think as scholars we should strive, in some capacity, to act as public intellectuals throughout our careers. I am very excited to have a spokesperson from the International Organization for Migration speak at our conference to frame our conversations on the causes and consequences of human migration in modern-day terms.

What have been the most rewarding aspects of the IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow position?

What have been the most challenging?

The most rewarding aspects have been working across anthropology and classics, in both teaching the graduate seminar and planning and implementing the conference. The interest in and enthusiasm for the conference and its subject matter from students, faculty, and staff has been energizing and rewarding, and I have truly enjoyed my time here because of the people and their support. The opportunity to engage with graduate students from anthropology and classics through the graduate seminar as well as through professionalization workshops has been extremely rewarding. The most challenging aspect is coming up now – namely, bringing all the nuts and bolts of the conference together, from the grand vision and goals right down to the nitty-gritty aspects such as travel logistics and catering. It definitely takes a village!

How do you think your work as the IEMA postdoctoral scholar will add to archaeology and related fields?

Human movement is a phenomenon that lurks in the background of all that we study as classicists, ancient historians, and archaeologists. In many ways, we are still hamstrung by outdated paradigms in accounting for these movements and their effects on communities over time. I hope that this conference and the edited volume that results from it, both of which draw together scholars tackling this issue in innovative ways, will act as a resource for further discussions and research on human migration and mobility. The ultimate goal is to provide robust interdisciplinary studies on this topic that can enable theorizing comparisons across time and space.

What advice would you give current graduate students working on their dissertation?

Feedback and criticism are your friends! Always look for opportunities to have your work assessed, whether that be through

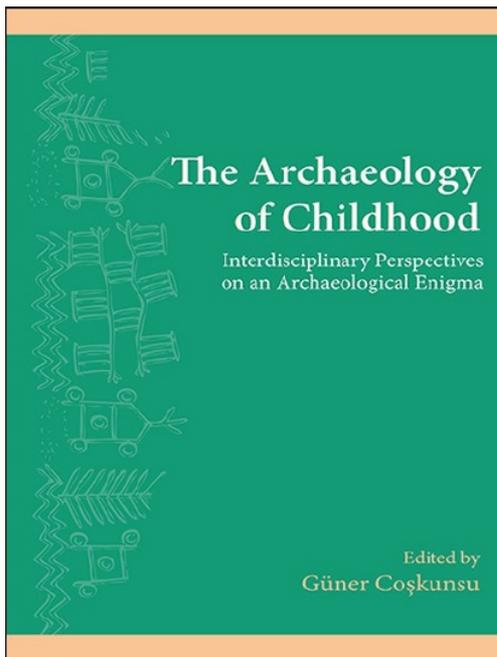
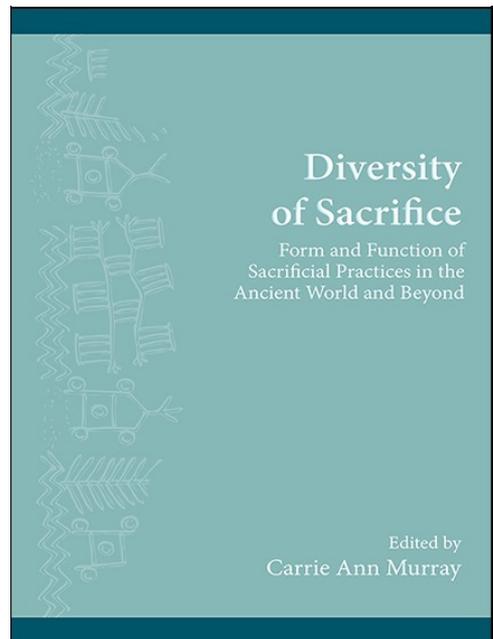
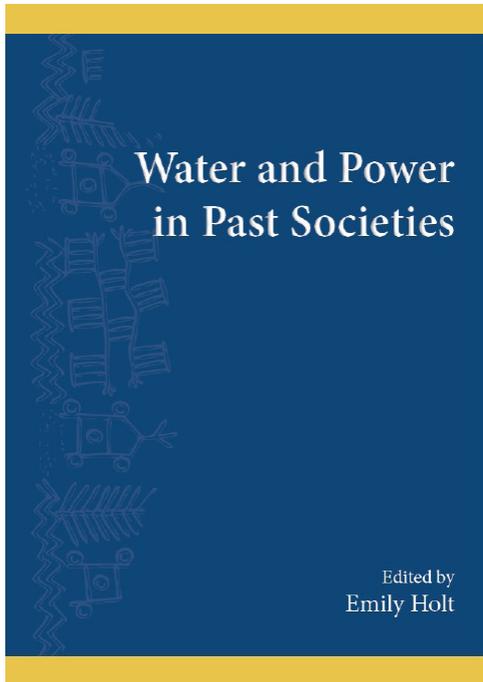
reaching out to your advisor(s) on a regular basis, workshopping ideas with your peers, presenting at conferences, or submitting work for publication. Soliciting feedback and criticism is one of the best ways to grow as a scholar, but it is also a huge hurdle for graduate students (it certainly was for me). I wish I had done it more often and earlier on in my career. Some of my greatest critics have helped me become a better, more reflective, and more accountable scholar – and ultimately more confident in my work. Try not to look at critical feedback (including your dissertation defense) as some awful hurdle you have to overcome, but rather as a calling or an opportunity to grow as an intellectual. This outlook will help you find joy in your work, and you will eventually look forward to critically engaging with others over it, as well as acting as a thoughtful and reflective critic yourself, both for your own work and the work of others in your field.

What projects or research endeavors do you hope to pursue in the future?

I'm working on developing a new digital humanities project that examines the development of cross-cultural religious practice in the Iron Age eastern Mediterranean. This project would bring together several decades-old physical site reports in an online database format to compare trends in assemblages over the course of the ninth to sixth centuries BCE. This work dovetails with my monograph project on ideologies of divine kingship between Greece and the Near East, namely in looking at sanctuary assemblages across different sites as proxies for elite investment in and control over religious practice in the formative period of the Iron Age. Overall, I am interested in exploring, through my monograph and this new project, the cognitive and cultural roles of religion in information and reforming ideas of sovereignty and divinity in Mediterranean societies over the long term. I am also continuing work as a ceramicist on assemblages from Turkey, Greece, and

Tunisia, and am planning a new fieldwork project with colleagues from Simon Fraser University on the island of Kefhalonia in western Greece, which would investigate patterns of Bronze Age diet and mobility through settlement and mortuary/skeletal evidence.

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