

During the Late Iron Age the communities from Dacia experienced several transformations of their funerary practices, some resulting from the interactions with various incoming groups, others being determined by internal social-political evolutions. These transformations led to the gradual disappearance of “proper burials”, most of the corpses being disposed of in an apparently invisible manner. During the late phase only a small number of human remains were recovered and only from “non-funerary contexts”. Until very recently this phenomenon was related almost exclusively to some rather vaguely defined changes of religious nature, whereas the impact of the social-political structures and mechanisms, and the concepts regarding the changing relation between body and personhood were neglected. The paper aims to discuss the social-political transformations that led to the gradual disappearance of “proper burials”, as well as the content, significance and scopes of the funerary practices during the period in which bodies were not formally interred. The practical and symbolic transformation of the dead as social actors will also be discussed. Another aim is to propose some methodological means through which these practices and the deceased themselves can be archaeologically identified.

Ritual Butchering of the Dead – The Strange Archaeological Record of the Bandkeramik Site of Herxheim (Palatinate, Germany)

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In the Bandkeramik site of Herxheim, a settlement with a surrounding earthwork, more than 500 human individuals were treated in an abnormal way. After having been killed, they were handled like animals that are cut up for nutritional reasons. The cutmarks on the human bones show many similarities with those encountered in animal butchery – from the cutting off of the extremities, the taking out of the vertebral column, the scraping off of the meat from the long bones and the torso to the breaking up of the bones to get to the marrow. This treatment follows a repetitive and normative pattern of actions and the human remains are accompanied by a large number of specially selected artefacts. Human victims were part of a strange and complex ritual. Scientific analyses hint at a foreign origin of the humans that were sacrificed, butchered and probably also cannibalized in the course of extraordinary rituals. The mostly intentionally smashed artefacts were finally deposited in concentrations, together with the human remains, inside the earthwork around the settlement. It can be shown that these butchered and presumably cannibalized individuals were not buried but deposited as ritual waste inside the enclosure.

They Die, and Leave no Sign. On the Problem of Death Associated Rituals in the Chalcolithic of NE Romania

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One of the greatest challenges that the Chalcolithic Cucuteni culture (Vth - IVth millennia CAL. B.C.) forces upon Romanian archaeologists is constituted by the reconstruction of the attitude towards death of its population. The different archaeological realities observed have led to various interpretations: deposition of entire body, burial, deposition of body parts, ritual deposition, scattered bones/bone fragments, and ritual anthropophagy or a lack of unconcern for the dead. Our presentation will briefly review the different types of discoveries of human remains and will critically discuss their latest interpretations, presenting our own observations on 31 human bone fragments. We will further anchor our own discourse into an adductive line of reasoning, and we will adopt a philosophical platform rooted in a Heideggerian relational ontology. From this theoretical stance we will argue that the various contexts of human remains identified for the Cucuteni culture actually represent only stages of a complex manner of dealing with death. Acknowledgement: This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0885.

Old Material – New Perspective: Gathering Information from Fragmented Osteological Material from Bronze Age Stone-Cist Graves in Jõelähtme, Estonia

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Stone-cist graves are round structures with central cist(s) and one or more exterior circular walls. They were used throughout the Late Bronze Age (around 1200–500 BC) in coastal regions of Estonia. Although the graves appear to be meant for a single burial, usually remains of multiple individuals are found within them. In 1980s 36 graves in Jõelähtme in Northern