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# DEATH EMBODIED



Studies in Funerary Archaeology Volume 9

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# DEATH EMBODIED

*Archaeological approaches  
to the treatment of the corpse*

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*Edited by*

Zoë L. Devlin and Emma-Jayne Graham



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## INTRODUCTION: EMBODYING DEATH IN ARCHAEOLOGY

*Emma-Jayne Graham*

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In April 1485, an unprecedented discovery was made on the outskirts of Rome. A marble sarcophagus, itself relatively unremarkable, was opened to reveal the well-preserved body of a young woman. Over four hundred years later, the nineteenth-century archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani collated a series of contemporary accounts describing the discovery, amongst which were the following evocative passages:

The body seems to be covered with a glutinous substance, a mixture of myrrh and other precious ointments, which attract swarms of bees. The said body is intact. The hair is long and thick; the eyelashes, eyes, nose, and ears are spotless, as well as the nails. It appears to be the body of a woman, of good size; and her head is covered with a light cap of woven gold thread, very beautiful. The teeth are white and perfect; the flesh and the tongue retain their natural colour; but if the glutinous substance is washed off, the flesh blackens in less than an hour.

(Diary of Antonio di Vaseli, cited in Lanciani 1892, 295–296)

... a young girl, intact in all her members, covered from head to foot with a coating of aromatic paste, one inch thick. On the removal of this coating, which we believe to be composed of myrrh, frankincense, aloe, and other priceless drugs, a face appeared, so lovely, so pleasing, so attractive, that, although the girl had certainly been dead fifteen hundred years, she appeared to have been laid to rest that very day. The thick masses of hair, collected on the top of the head in the old style, seemed to have been combed then and there. The eyelids could be opened and shut; the ears and the nose were so well preserved that, after being bent to one side or the other, they instantly resumed their original shape. By pressing the flesh of the cheeks the colour would disappear as in a living body. The tongue could be seen through the pink lips; the articulations of the hands and feet still retained their elasticity.

(Letter written by Daniele da San Sebastiano, cited in Lanciani 1892, 296)

The remains of the woman were transported immediately to the Palazzo dei Conservatori in order to be viewed by ‘a large crowd of citizens and noblemen’ (Antonio di Vaseli, cited in Lanciani 1892, 295) composed ‘especially of women attracted by the sight’ (letter dated 15th April 1485, among Schedel’s papers in Cod. 716 of the Munich library, cited

in Lanciani 1892, 298). These eyewitness accounts offer some sense of the incredulity that the discovery provoked, and the attention that the body of the woman received from the diarists and letter writers of Rome. She was evidently subjected to much prodding and poking by those who went to see her and, beyond the elasticity of her limbs, it was even reported that ‘if one drew the tongue out slightly it would go back to its place of itself’ (Lanciani 1892, 299). As well as assembling the evidence for the recovery of the sarcophagus and the human remains within it, Lanciani also commented on their unfortunate fate: after several days of exposure to the air, and the removal of the perfumed coating, the body rapidly turned black and decayed. He notes that she was ‘most abominably treated’, eventually being buried under cover of darkness at the foot of the city walls or possibly even thrown into the Tiber (*ibid.*, 301).

A discovery such as this was unusual in the fifteenth century but would nevertheless be extraordinary even today, when we might assume that this woman would become the focus of similarly intense (media) scrutiny. We have become so accustomed to our archaeological encounters with the people of the past taking the form of skeletal remains that the presence of malleable flesh, fluids and other organic materials still has immense emotive power, as the continued widespread interest in the recovery and subsequent investigation of mummified remains attests. This fascination with the customarily absent corporality of archaeological remains might also be linked with the modern desire to ‘re-flesh’ the bones of the long dead with increasingly sophisticated techniques of facial reconstruction which seek to enable people to connect more easily with, and to somehow understand better, the character of these people as living humans. The discovery, in 2012, of the remains of King Richard III in Leicester, and the rapid facial reconstruction which followed, provide an instructive example of how important this sort of encounter might be within both the public and academic consciousness (on facial reconstruction see Prag and Neave 1999; Wilkinson 2004).

Interestingly, Lanciani (1892, 301–305) parallels the treatment of the body of the unknown woman with that of another, much more poorly preserved young woman found in 1889. In this instance her sarcophagus, inscribed simply with the name Crepereia Tryphæna, was discovered embedded in clay on the right bank of the Tiber, close to the tomb of the emperor Hadrian. It was found to be filled with water and, when opened, ‘we were almost horrified at the sight before us. Gazing at the skeleton through the veil of the clear water, we saw the skull covered, as it were, with long masses of brown hair, which were floating in the liquid crystal’ (*ibid.*, 302). Ultimately, it became apparent that the ‘hair’ was in fact an aquatic plant which had attached itself to the skull whilst the body had been submerged by river water, although news of her apparently ‘prodigious hair spread like wild-fire among the populace of the district ... and its remembrance will last for many years in the popular traditions of the new quarter of the Prati di Castello’ (*ibid.*, 302). Presumably, it was the prospect that this girl, who had died some 1700 years before, might still retain the appearance of a recognisably living human (enhanced by the ethereal aura of the watery setting) that piqued the interest of scholars and public alike. It was this mirage of corporeality which caused Lanciani to juxtapose her discovery with that of the body of the unknown woman from several centuries earlier.

The preservation of a number of items within this second sarcophagus, including a jointed doll made from oak and a considerable number of items of jewellery and toilet equipment, as well as the skeleton itself, made it possible to determine that Crepereia Tryphæna had died at the beginning of the third century AD, was probably from a family of freedmen (former slaves), and had suffered from scrofula which had caused her ribs to become deformed. She had been betrothed to Philetus, whose name was engraved on an engagement ring worn on her left hand (*ibid.*, 303–304). Once the remains had dried out it became apparent that the young woman had been wrapped in a white linen shroud, and a wreath of myrtle with a silver clasp had been placed on her head (*ibid.*, 303). Other questions were posed by Lanciani (*ibid.*, 304) about this young woman: ‘At what age did she die? What caused her death? What was her condition in life? Was she beautiful? Why was she buried with her doll?’ The questions that he asked (and was able to answer) bear some similarity to the types of questions that archaeologists well over a century later might ask of the same discovery. Questions of identity, health and cause of death, as well as those relating to the presence of the doll (and other grave goods) would undoubtedly be at the forefront of any modern investigation, even if it is unlikely that one of the first questions asked by a 21st century archaeologist would be to consider the extent of her beauty! Nonetheless, scientific developments and, equally importantly, an increased concern with the study and interpretation of the treatment in death of the human body itself, mean that Lanciani’s enquiries satisfy our modern concerns only partially. It would not take long to compile a list of questions that *could* be asked of the evidence in the light of more recent post-processual, cognitive and bioarchaeological approaches to mortuary behaviour. The manner in which her body had been treated, both in life and death, would feature much more prominently in modern discourse: had she been embalmed or otherwise prepared and what evidence is there for the substances and materials used for this? How can we use the evidence for perfumes and unguents to reconstruct the sensory experience of her funeral and burial? How was her body arranged in her coffin and what might this mean? What was the significance of the shroud and what are its implications for the preparation of her body prior to burial? What can we learn from her remains about the health and death of members of the ancient community who suffered from disease and potential deformity? What part, if any, did the fact that she suffered from scrofula play in her experiences and identity whilst alive as well as the choices that were made about the manner and location of her burial? The list could go on.

### Archaeological bodies

The examples cited above highlight the two issues which form the core of this volume. Firstly, they remind us of the power of the dead body to evoke in the minds of living people, be they contemporary (survivors or mourners) or distanced from the remains by time (archaeologists or non-specialists), a range of emotions and physical responses, ranging from fascination to fear, and from curiosity to disgust. This need not be restricted

to the fleshed body, still recognisable as a once animate individual, but might extend also to skeletal remains which emphasise, and thereby remind us of the inanimate biological reality of death (see papers in Gowland and Knüsel 2006). What is more, the different nature of the preserved remains of the two Roman women highlights for us the variety of forms that a human body might take over the course of its life and death, and provides a glimpse into the range of responses that might affect the way in which these bodies are understood, experienced or treated.

Secondly, these human remnants of the Roman past which drew the attention of Lanciani and others emphasise just how central the human body is to burial practice. This may seem like an obvious point to make: of course there is a dead body at the centre of the funeral, except in unusual circumstances, otherwise there would be no need for the funeral in the first place. However, it is one that is often overlooked until, like the crowds in fifteenth century Rome, we are confronted with it directly, in all its fleshy, material glory. Archaeological interpretations are sometimes written in such a way as to suggest that the skeletons which we uncover, and therefore usually associate with past funerary practices, were what was deposited in graves, rather than articulated corpses. In these instances ‘body’ essentially means ‘skeleton’ and we have developed a collective tendency to think of the dead body in terms of bones and the living in terms of flesh and fluids. Even studies which prioritise a body-centred approach to funerary remains might still give disproportionate attention to the skeletal evidence and think primarily of the ‘bodies’ under scrutiny in such terms (Gowland and Knüsel 2006, for example, present an excellent collection of papers but many of the contributors write of ‘bodies’ when really they refer only to ‘bones’). Interaction with bones was, and continues to be, unquestionably important in some cultural contexts – bone might be defleshed prior to its final disposal through various means, as well as burials being reopened and whole skeletons or elements of them (re)moved or reinterred elsewhere – but evidence suggests that throughout history this has not been the norm. In the overwhelming majority of instances it was a fleshed cadaver, an actual *body*, that lay at the heart of funerary rites, and it is important that we remember that even those burials which involved secondary treatment, or which dealt with the disposal of already defleshed remains, also involved a fleshed corpse at the very beginning of that process (see, for example, Nilsson Stutz 2003 and 2008 on burials from Mesolithic Scandinavia, as well as Connor 1995 on the significance of the act of washing the corpse).

The choices made by past communities or individuals about how to cope with a dead body in all of its dynamic and constituent forms, and whether there was reason to treat it in a manner that singled it out (positively or negatively) as different from other human corpses, provide the stimulus for this volume. These choices and the motives which lay behind them would, of course, be much clearer to us if we excavated, more regularly than we do, preserved bodies like that of the anonymous Roman woman. It would be much easier to identify and decipher the decisions that were made at the moment of burial, and in the process which led up to it, if we could see, smell or feel for ourselves the materiality of the body with which past mourners or disposal practitioners were confronted, and around which funerary rites were performed. Unfortunately this happens only rarely, and even

when it does we are faced ultimately with a body which has been preserved at a particular moment in a series of potentially protracted activities. This is usually a moment subsequent to the final act in the mortuary process, once the body had been abandoned to the elements which, by chance or design, were responsible for ensuring its preservation. Here one might cite well-known examples of ‘bog bodies’ such as Lindow Man or Grauballe Man (Green 2001) or bodies preserved by extremes of temperature and aridity including the Pazyryk mummies of the Altai mountains (Parker Pearson 1999, 61–65; Rudenko 1970). Each of these might reveal much about the lives and deaths of individuals, but they nevertheless preserve their bodies at a particular moment of their death: their interment. Even the unknown Roman woman had been buried and the funerary process completed. What we do not find are bodies that were abandoned part way through the ritual process; bodies which had not yet been interred or cremated, or were awaiting the next stage of the preparation process. Moreover, even if we do, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to identify this fact. David Noy (2000), for example, has examined Roman cremations which ‘went wrong’ and left a body half-burned, but the most convincing evidence for such an event remains that provided by written sources and not archaeological data. We are therefore largely excluded from recognising and investigating these in-between stages of mortuary behaviour by the nature of the evidence available to us. Undoubtedly there must have been occasions on which the funerary procedure or even the moment of disposal itself was interrupted, but the ephemeral nature of these activities means that we must rely on our ability to work backwards from the end result of completed funerals in order to reconstruct the various stages, treatments, behaviours, emotions and rituals that they involved and the impact of the cadaver upon this (Weekes 2008). Moreover, even apparently preserved human remains might not always be what they seem. The realisation that the mummified bodies of Cladh Hallan on South Uist (Outer Hebrides) are actually composed of parts taken from multiple individuals, spanning several generations, provides us with an especially vivid reminder not to take our evidence at face value (Parker-Pearson *et al.* 2005; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2007; Hanna *et al.* 2012). Although a rare instance, this is certainly enough to make us question the meanings and significance that might be placed on the materiality of the corpse, as well as its variability and its manipulation at different stages of the mortuary practice and sometimes across significant expanses of time. It is therefore important that we do not lose sight of the fact that, for the majority of situations, what we excavate reflects only part of the story and in order to begin to comprehend the role that the corpse itself played in determining funerary behaviour it is necessary to explore ways of ‘re-embodying’ burial activities or, in other words, re-introducing bodily perspectives in their widest sense to our discourses on all aspects of past funerary ritual.

## Embodying death

Rather than advocate a single approach, this collection of papers is intended to provide a series of theoretically informed, but not constrained, case studies which focus predominantly

on the corporeal body in death. The aim of each of the authors is to ‘embody’ funerary practices by making the human body the central component of their investigations. With this in mind, contributors were free to choose how they wished to interpret the idea of ‘embodiment’ and whether they wished to define it in relation to a study of the bodies of the deceased, the living or in some cases with reference to both. The individual chapters in this volume therefore do not necessarily ascribe wholly to a strictly defined theory of embodiment; indeed some also incorporate insights derived more strictly from phenomenological approaches (notably Stoddart and Malone and to some extent Graham). It is also clear that a single theoretical approach is not always appropriate – there is a place, for example, for the individual body and ideas about bodily personhood within the world of embodiment which, according to some (Sofaer 2006a, 22), is more commonly defined with reference to the boundaries of a single body (see also Graham 2009).

Against this backdrop, the chapters presented in this volume all focus on questions about what people in the past *did* with bodies in their various material states, and what that can reveal about perceptions of different types of body, not only those that were no longer alive, but also with reference to a range of other identity categories associated with the body, including age, gender, status and power, physical capacity, disability and deformity. These are all factors which play a part in the creation of what Robb and Harris (2013) have recently termed ‘body worlds’ and raise a number of broad questions. How were ways of understanding and interacting with living and dead bodies related both to one another and to wider cultural contexts? How closely connected were understandings of the dead body to contemporary concerns about the living body? What was the impact of the dead body and the manner of its disposal on the materiality or experience of the living body? Consequently, the aims of the volume are threefold: to take account of the active presence of dynamic material bodies at the heart of funerary events and to explore the questions that might be asked about their treatment; to explore ways of putting fleshed bodies back into our discussions of burials and mortuary treatment, as well as interpreting the meaning of these activities in relation to the bodies of both deceased *and* survivors; and finally to combine the insights that body-centred analysis can produce to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of the body, living and dead, in past cultures.

### **(Re)introducing the body**

Within the humanities and social sciences, including archaeological and historical scholarship, it would appear that the human body needs no (re)introduction. Anthropological and sociological research concerning ‘the body’ and its role in religion, memory, mortuary ritual and identity negotiations has a long history (to cite merely a few examples from different disciplines: Asad 1997; Battaglia 1992; Busby 1997; Coakley 1997; Conklin 1995; Connor 1995; Hallam and Hockey 2001; Hallam, Hockey and Howarth 1999; Hertz 1960 [1907]; Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Shilling 2003; Sofaer 2006a; Tilley 2008; Turner 1996; Van Gennep 1960 [1909]). This has, in recent years, been matched

by innovative work on the archaeological body. The vitality and potential of this area of research is reflected by a number of major review articles which chart the rise and development of body-centred research in archaeology, as well as spotlighting its inherent complexities (Fisher and Loren 2003; Joyce 2005; Meskell 2000; Shilling 2008). Moreover, a number of multi-period edited collections have brought together work which takes a perspective on the human body in both archaeology and history (Borić and Robb 2008; Fahlander and Oestigaard 2008; Garrison 2010; Gowland and Knüsel 2006; Hamilakis, Pluciennick and Tarlow 2002; Harris and Robb 2013; Hopkins and Wyke 2005; Hughes, Rebay-Salisbury and Sørensen 2010; Montserrat 1998; Rautman 2000). Some of these have arisen as the product of major projects designed to address the human body from specific perspectives, such as the Leverhulme supported *Changing beliefs of the human body* project at Cambridge University (2005–2009) and the more recent interdisciplinary venture *Harnessing the power of the criminal corpse* based at the University of Leicester and funded by the Wellcome Trust.

Recent studies of the varied ways in which bodies might play an active role in constructing, shaping and maintaining not only society but also individual identities and experiences of the world, have become instrumental in altering the ways in which the people and communities of the past, and present, are understood. In addition to studies of the living body (Cleland, Harlow and Llewellyn-Jones 2005; Corbeill 2004; Meskell and Joyce 2003), body adornment and modification (Bazelmans 2002; Geller 2006), and representations of the body in art (Gillespie 2001; Joyce 2008; Osborne 2008; Squire 2011), the body in death has come to the fore as a central component of archaeological investigation. Themes which feature at the core of this research highlight its importance for extending existing understandings of the significance of the corpse for past social, religious and political relationships in a number of original and exciting directions: experiences of the corporeal body (Graham 2011; Nilsson Stutz 2003 and 2008; Tarlow 2002; Williams 2004), fragmentation of the corpse and circulation of body parts (Brück 2006; Chapman 2000; Fowler 2002 and 2004; Jones 2005; Thomas 2000), secondary treatment (Graham 2009; Weiss-Krejci 2001, 2005 and 2008), cannibalism or post-mortem mutilation (Bendezu-Sarmiento *et al.* 2008; Hamilakis 1998; Knüsel and Outram 2006), transformation of the cadaver by fire (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury 2008; Williams 2003), disability and deformity (Crawford 2010; Graham 2013; Hadley 2010) and the materiality of the body (Sofaer 2006a and 2006b; Thomas 2002). As a consequence, it has become increasingly evident that the dying and/or dead body creates not only problems but also opportunities for communities, and an acknowledgement and desire to understand the complexities of these responses is now beginning to frame studies of mortuary activities, mourning, commemoration, memory and other socio-cultural behaviours.

Nonetheless, as recently as 2008, the following statements could still be made in three separate works: that within archaeological discourse the human body is ‘both omnipresent and invisible’ (Borić and Robb 2008, 1); that ‘the body as such remains conspicuously rare within the archaeology of the body’ (Nilsson Stutz 2008, 21); and, from a sociological perspective, ‘the body is named as a theoretical space, but often remains relatively neglected

as an actual object of analysis' (Shilling 2008, 9). Liv Nilsson Stutz, working largely on the archaeology of Mesolithic Scandinavia, has been particularly vocal in this respect, calling repeatedly for studies which take heed of Lynn Meskell's observation that 'body' is too often used simply as a synonym for 'person' (1996, 14, cited in Nilsson Stutz 2003, 89). She argues that archaeologists must take account of the materiality of the dead, or in other words consider what an actual dead body *is*, not just what it represents, and the impact that this has on its treatment and the attitudes, perceptions and actions of the living. In particular she notes (2008, 19) that:

bodies are more than metaphors. They are flesh and blood, organs, ligaments and bones, gases and fluids. This becomes especially obvious at death, when the embodied social being is transformed into a cadaver, continuously in a state of transformation, an effect of the processes of putrefaction and decomposition ... the recognition of this aspect of the body – long almost an exclusive domain for bioarchaeologists – deserves the attention also from archaeologists interested in developing insights into past experience of death and the body.

The papers in this volume respond to this by examining the ways in which the materiality of the cadaver was implicated in the development or enactment of specific funerary behaviour. In some instances particular characteristics associated with the corpses encountered by past communities is shown to have had a direct impact on commonly held understandings and practices (Devlin; Graham). In others, it was the process of decomposition and the materiality of the human body in its skeletal state which made it possible for subsequent manipulations of remains of the dead to take place (Aspöck; Hofmann). These chapters also highlight the importance of variability within mortuary practice for our interpretations of the centrality of the dead body (Perego *et al.*; Rebay-Salisbury), as well as the significance of the location of living and dead bodies in time and space (Stoddart and Malone).

## Material bodies

Attention has been drawn to other problems posed by the materiality of archaeological bodies. Joanna Sofaer (2006a, 44) questioned the apparently fixed and unequivocal binary divide between a 'living' and 'dead' body, arguing that there is a need to problematise this perception: 'questioning the boundaries between life and death means that just as understandings of the living body cannot be taken as self-evident or given, nor can those of the dead body'. She argues (*ibid.*, 41) that existing approaches 'do not deal effectively with the specifically archaeological nature of the body as physically present but lifeless', critiquing proponents of agency, embodiment and phenomenology for not incorporating skeletal evidence into their interpretations and focusing largely on the living body. Moreover, she claims (*ibid.*, 45) that the 'the body does not merely reflect life but was once life itself,' pointing towards sociological studies which indicate that there might be various ways of describing a body as it moves from being 'alive' to being 'dead' which destabilise these binary oppositions. A body might, in other words, progress through different stages within the categories of 'alive' and 'dead' which, in turn, become more flexible than they might first

appear. For Sofaer (*ibid.*, 68), ‘the constitution of the body becomes key to its perception and categorisation as dead,’ meaning that without due attention to the materiality of the body in both life and death, as well as the stages of dying that exist in between, archaeologists cannot hope to grasp the significance of the body as the focal point of funerary ritual.

Barring discoveries such as those already described, and a minority of other mummified or preserved corpses, the bodies that archaeologists find are unequivocally ‘dead’ and usually have been for some time. The only other certain statement that can be made about them is that they were once alive, but as Sofaer’s comments emphasise, the stages of the materiality of that body in between these binary points of existence, and the ways in which it might be described, experienced or understood, are, like the stages of mortuary behaviour itself, much more difficult for the archaeologist to recover. Dying is in fact a highly dynamic process that cannot be fossilised in the archaeological record in the same way that the end condition (death) often is. It might be argued, moreover, that even this final state is itself no less dynamic, at least not in the beginning stages, as the body breaks down, putrefies and decays. There can, as a consequence, be multiple ways in which to be ‘dead’.

Responses to these dynamic processes of decomposition can be traced in the archaeological record through the funerary treatment of the body and the recovery of detailed information about how it was processed and finally disposed of. This sometimes involves the adoption of a so-called ‘archaeothantological’ approach to the taphonomy of human burials, as advocated especially by French archaeologists such as Duday (2006 and 2009), although unfortunately such a detailed approach tends to be employed inconsistently (Knüsel 2014). As the chapters presented here demonstrate, there is certainly value in attempting to explore the variety and range of these responses in more detail, based on evidence for how a body was treated and manipulated, as well as evidence for the ritual, social, political and even economic processes, which surrounded this behaviour. Knowing what we know about the biological body, it is possible to speculate about the different, and potentially fluctuating ways in which a body might be considered to be ‘dead’, even if we cannot say the same about definitions of ‘dying’. We can also comment on the state of death as a process that required negotiation, perhaps with different ways of ‘being dead’ coming to the fore at particular moments in funerary ritual (the uncorrupted bodies of saints discussed by Devlin offer a thought-provoking example). In turn, this offers insights which help to explain the particular treatment of the archaeological bodies that we recover, reminding us, most importantly, of the material nature of that body when it underwent such treatment, whether that was as a body recently dead and subject to rigor mortis, undergoing the process of advanced decomposition, or as the defleshed or dry bone that might be instrumental for secondary or ongoing treatment (Rebay-Salisbury; Aspöck). At the same time then, we might begin to bring together the dynamism of the funerary process with the dynamism of the body itself, offering opportunities to identify and investigate the extent to which these may, or may not, be interwoven.

### **Deviant, non-normative, variable or creative burial?**

It is worth noting that this volume provides an examination of the multiple and complex treatments of the corpse that took place in a variety of cultural and historical contexts, but what it does not set out to do is establish whether these might be considered normative or deviant forms of mortuary treatment. This is not, therefore, the place for a lengthy discussion of the terminology or debates related to so-called 'deviant' burial. These are addressed more specifically in the context of individual chapters, and have been discussed at length elsewhere (notably Aspöck 2008; Murphy 2008; Reynolds 2009). Nevertheless, as a term or category, 'deviant burial' necessitates at least some preliminary discussion, not least because many of the examples and case studies explored in the chapters presented here examine evidence that has been, or might be, described in relation to this term. As recent studies demonstrate, attempting to define the extent to which burial treatments can be described as 'normative' or 'deviant' is not always a particularly straightforward or even constructive exercise. In some cases, however, the investigation of funerary treatments inevitably involves a consideration of mortuary behaviour that differs in some way from that accorded to the majority of the rest of the burial community. The difficulty lies, of course, in determining how significant these choices might be and the range of meanings that might be attached to them. With this in mind, chapters in this volume by Aspöck, Hofmann, and Perego *et al.* explore evidence for practices which indicate that the bodies of some members of a community received differing degrees of funerary treatment in relation not only to the manner of their disposal, but also the subsequent manipulation of their remains in apparently secondary, or at least extended, rites. Nonetheless, rather than attempting to consign their evidence to neat binary categories, in each case the information available for these practices is interrogated by the authors in order to address more nuanced questions about what people in the past were choosing to do with dead bodies and their constituent parts, as well as what these decisions might signal. They consider, for example, the problem of how archaeologists make sense of the fact that there were often innumerable ways of interacting with deceased human remains: some which suggest that the bodies of certain people were perceived in more or less radically different ways from their peers, but others that might on closer inspection be revealed to reflect unusual, but nevertheless consistent, expressions of a shared funerary logic. Indeed, Hofmann prefers to speak of a 'field of relations' against which so-called 'deviant' burials might be set, as well as the need to incorporate the potential for 'creativity' into our understandings of what apparently constituted normative practice. Without denying the existence of 'deviant' or 'non-normative' burials, she stresses that it is necessary to be certain of the complexities and fluidity of the parameters against which these are compared.

Juxtaposing these critical perspectives on 'deviant' activities alongside others which examine apparently 'normative' burials, or at least with more easily recognisable, even if sometimes rather unusual encounters with the materiality of the corpse, provides us with an opportunity to consider a number of other issues. This includes the extent to which the identification of a range of possible funerary actions might mean that seeking ultimately to

categorise behaviour is not always productive or appropriate. Rebay-Salisbury, for example, emphasises the blurring of boundaries even between the rites of cremation and inhumation which are traditionally seen as uncomplicated normative customs; whilst Perego *et al.* consider the ways in which distinctive forms of marginality and marginalisation might be brought about and signalled within the funerary record. Importantly, these observations serve to reintegrate studies of deviance with those of bodily treatment, and vice versa. The continued artificial separation of these two avenues of enquiry concerning the handling of the bodies of the dead can only widen the gap further between what is considered normative and what is not. Instead, the chapters in this volume – and not only those concerned directly with definitions of deviancy but also those which address variations in bodily treatment and bodily experience – highlight the need to ask a range of new questions which draw upon both of these lines of enquiry concurrently. Not least, we find in our case studies numerous questions about where lines should be, or even can be, drawn. Even in the handful of papers presented here, the breadth of potential mortuary behaviours and the sheer range of bodily encounters that might be possible suggest that there have always been, and will continue to be, multiple ways in which funerary treatment might differ more or less from what was thought to be customary.

This, in turn, raises additional queries: how do we approach variations which ultimately came to be adopted as ‘the norm’? Here we might, by way of example, consider the transformation of imperial Roman burial customs from cremation to inhumation (Graham). It has never been, and probably never will be suggested that the first Romans to inhumate their dead against a prevailing tradition of cremation were engaging in deviant practice, yet if we take the term at face value and look at these burials in historical isolation, without the benefit of hindsight which tells us that inhumation was soon to be the most commonly practiced rite across the empire, that is exactly what they appear to have been doing. By choosing to inhumate, rather than cremate, these people opted to act in a noticeably different manner from the rest of society at Rome, and even if we might note that their actions were not viewed in a strongly negative light by their contemporaries (or at least not according to the few elite sources available to us), the use of such an obviously different rite would seem to align with the most basic definition of deviation from an established norm. Seen out of context, then, these earliest inhumations could point towards some degree of deviancy or perhaps even socio-cultural marginality. This is, subsequently, something that we might seek to explain in relation to the status of both deceased and mourner, their elite status perhaps prompting us to equate their decisions about funerary treatment with some degree of socio-political distinction or nonconformity. However, re-situated within the bigger picture of long-term variation and change, these burials become simply the first of many within a longer term trajectory and a continually developing funerary logic. In this sense deviancy might be viewed as a positive driver of change, rather than something to be thought of in purely negative terms.

## Deviant bodies?

If chapters in this volume consider apparent cases of ‘deviancy’ or ‘marginality’ from a number of alternative perspectives, including their relationship to socio-political exclusion (Perego *et al.*), what about the nature of the physical bodies themselves, rather than the socio-cultural personas with which they were associated: can bodies themselves ever be considered deviant? Is it possible, for example, to identify a relationship between *bodies* which differ in some way from societal expectations and mortuary practices that do not conform to traditional customs? Such an approach would address the concerns expressed by Nilsson Stutz noted above, who echoes Meskell’s observation that ‘body’ is too often used as shorthand for ‘person’ or ‘social identity’, making it possible to interrogate more closely the agency of the material body itself in directing funerary activities. Bodies might in fact be considered ‘different’ for a range of biological or material reasons, connected to a greater or lesser extent with the social role, identity or status of the person to whom they belonged. This might come about because of physical deformities or disabilities, but also as a consequence of biological changes to the physical appearance of a body brought about by ageing or bodily modification, as well as potentially disturbing ways in which it was animated or made to behave by the subject during life. Such bodies might be connected with the intentional result of particular religious convictions or the unintentional consequence of cognitive disorders or other conditions. Here we can note the example of the second century AD orator Aelius Aristides who spent two years living within the confines of the sanctuary of Asclepius at Pergamum, seeking a divine cure for his many ailments. These cures, prescribed by the god, entailed a series of ‘bodily trials’, such as fasting, purges, bathing in icy lakes and arduous journeys (Aelius Aristides *Hieroi Logoi*; Petsalis-Diomidis 2010). The regular performance of these (sometimes rather peculiar) bodily actions of Aristides marked him, and importantly also his body out from the rest of the secular and religious community. He was undoubtedly not alone in human history as someone who made his body behave in ways that other members of a community may have found unsettling or perhaps even worthy of admiration. Aristides was openly favoured by the divine and his body acted accordingly, displaying this fact for all to see. We do not know the circumstances of his funeral and whether his actions had lasting significance, but his example provides a glimpse of the unusual ways in which a living body might be made to behave. It also forces us to speculate on how far reaching the consequences of this might have been once that body was no longer subject to self-control. Were Aristides’ contemporaries in awe of his divinely animated (dead) body, and was it something to be treated with particular respect because of this, or was it something from which one should keep one’s distance?

Similarly, we might extend such questions to a dead body which, perhaps troublingly, did not ‘perform’ as expected, such as the partially uncorrupted bodies of saints examined here by Devlin. The lack of expected decay witnessed in cases such as that of St Edith might be considered a sign of ‘deviant’ behaviour (going against contemporary biological expectations) but, once again, for members of early medieval society this could be viewed as a positive deviancy: a sign of holiness. It may, then, be possible to place our view of

so-called ‘deviant’ mortuary practices alongside what we know about apparently ‘deviant’ bodies (in life and death) in order to make better sense of both and to explore the presence – or indeed absence – of connections between them. What this might in fact reveal, as recent studies have begun to suggest, is that a more comprehensive embodiment of funerary archaeology, as advocated here, has wide-reaching implications. Not only are we faced with the challenge of making sense of a great variety of mortuary-related practices, even within the same community, but we must also contend with the fact that the bodies which comprised that community might also display a considerable degree of disparity (Graham 2013; Southwell-Wright 2013). These are questions that await further study.

One final word must be said about the chapters collected in this volume: they explore a range of case studies from a variety of locations and past cultural contexts. It is not our intention, however, to provide a continuous overview of attitudes towards, and manipulation of, the dead body from prehistory to the medieval period, with snapshots illustrating interesting moments or apparently ‘typical’ (or indeed ‘atypical’) mortuary behaviour from each period. Instead, we hope that this selection of case studies will point towards the importance of observing the diversity of experiences that might have occurred at different times and in certain locations in the past. In doing so we are reminded of the multiple, and often conflicting, interpretations that might be placed on archaeological (and textual) evidence and the range of enquiries that might be made of that data. If nothing else, by reading this volume we might enquire of ourselves why we do not commonly ask the same questions or use the same methodologies as our colleagues working on historically disparate material. It is our hope that the studies presented here will make it possible to hold up a critical mirror to both ourselves and our methods, as well as the discipline of body studies itself. At the same time, by revealing a view of our own bodies, this metaphorical mirror reminds us that at the heart of ancient communities and their mortuary treatment rests not only the dead but also the living body. It is the interaction between these multifaceted dynamic bodies which provide a fulcrum for the volume, with individual chapters taking their leave from it in different but, we hope, exciting and thought provoking ways. We may no longer react to queries about the dead in the same way as the crowds in fifteenth-century Rome did when they peered at and played with the remarkably preserved body of the anonymous Roman woman, but we undoubtedly have as many questions as they did and must continue to investigate new ways of prodding and poking ancient bodies into providing us with answers.

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