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In touch with the dead : early medieval grave reopenings in the Low Countries

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5. Conclusion

Early medieval cemeteries all over North-West Europe contain graves that were reopened after burial. These post-depositional interventions often seem to have been carried out while the cemeteries were still in use. The participants dug pits into the graves, rummaged, displaced and fragmented some of the contents, and took out a selection of objects and perhaps also bones. Many other objects and bones were left behind. These reopened graves are often viewed as ‘disturbed’ since their original contents are not intact, which makes them less suitable for mainstream artefact-oriented research. Over the years, there has nevertheless been academic interest for these graves and the post-depositional interventions that affected them (Stoll 1939; Redlich 1948; Fremersdorf 1955; Sagí 1964; Christlein 1966; Koch 1973, 1974; Müller 1976; Roth 1977; Jankuhn et al. 1978; Pauli 1981; Lorenz 1982, Schneider 1983; Grünewald 1988; Dannhorn 1994; Beilner & Grupe 1996; Steuer 1998; Stork 2001; Knaut 1993; Codreanu-Windauer 1997; Aspöck 2005, 2011; Kümmel 2009; Van Haperen 2010, 2013, 2016; Zintl 2012; Klevnäs 2013, 2015, 2016a; Noterman 2016). Interpretations of this phenomenon have evolved from one-dimensional ideas about economically motivated grave robbery to attempts at placing grave reopenings in the context of early medieval society and worldviews. As the scholarly debate about this practice develops into a fully-fledged archaeological specialty and we gather more knowledge about the graves in question, the variety of opinions about its interpretation increases. This study examines data from the Low Countries, a region where little research into reopened graves has been done previously. Comparisons are drawn with the detailed studies of grave reopenings in Anglo-Saxon Kent and German Bavaria by Klevnäs (2013) and Zintl (2012), which are the only studies for this period and region which have a similarly large dataset and level of detail with which the material is examined.

The interpretive chapter takes a scenario-based approach that allows multiple views to be discussed side by side. Like Leskovar (2005), I hope that the incorporation of multiple narratives in the text will help to more honestly reflect the ambiguous nature of the data and its interpretations.

5.1 The graves

For this study I looked at the graves from eleven cemeteries that were excavated across the modern Netherlands and Flanders. This yielded data on a total of 1169 inhumation graves and 201 cremation graves. The largest cemetery is that of Broechem, which consisted of 431 inhumations and 65 cremations. The smallest number of graves was found in Oegstgeest, which yielded only eight inhumations and two cremations. All the cemeteries in the research area held at least a few reopened inhumation graves. There is no evidence for intentional reopening of cremation graves, but this could be due to taphonomic factors. Of all the inhumation graves included in this study, at least 208 were reopened after burial. When the graves with an indeterminate reopening status are taken out of the equation, the inhumation graves in the dataset have an average reopening rate of 41%. The reopening percentages vary between the cemeteries, with the highest (59%) in Posterholt and the lowest (16%) in Lent-Lentseveld. In some of the cemeteries, graves from certain chronological phases had much higher reopening rates than those from others. Siegmund (1998: 237-238) found similar reopening percentages in the adjacent German Rhineland. The reopening rates in the Low Countries and the Rhineland hover neatly between those found in German Bavaria and Anglo Saxon Kent. In the Bavarian cemeteries studied by Zintl (2012: 306), the reopening rates were relatively high at more than 50%. In Kent on the other hand, Klevnäs (2013: 35) found that in the most heavily disturbed cemeteries between 8% and 44% of the graves per cemetery had been reopened, with an average of 21%. On the less heavily affected sites, the numbers of reopened

graves were often limited to one or two per cemetery.

The differences in grave reopening rates between the cemeteries in the research area are probably related to their varying use periods. The cemeteries with the lowest reopening percentages have graves that date comparatively early such as Lent and to some extent Wijchen, and late such as Dommelen. Some of the cemeteries with a longer use period, such as Bergeijk and Posterholt, had very high reopening rates before the end of the seventh century, while very few graves from the last phase were reopened. Generally speaking, most of the reopenings in the research area took place in the later sixth and seventh century, with a few early cases in the fifth and a number of late cases in the eighth century. The graves all seem to have been reopened while the cemeteries were in use. Unfortunately, there is insufficient dating evidence from the research area to define distinct phases of grave reopenings. In addition to changes in grave reopening customs over time, the variations in reopening percentages between cemeteries may be due to local preferences and manifestations of agency on the part of the participants.

In 50 cases, it could be shown that the reopenings took place while the wooden grave containers were still intact, while 56 graves were reopened after the containers had decomposed and collapsed. According to Aspöck's dating method (2005: 251-252; 2011: 302-306), this means that approximately half the graves were reopened within approximately 35 years of the burial and 56 graves reopened more than 35 years after the burial. In Bavaria and Kent, Zintl (2012: 328) and Klevnäs (2013: 43-47) also found many graves that had been reopened while there was still an open space inside the wooden container. The chronology of grave reopenings in Bavaria and Kent is similar to that in the Low Countries. Reopenings seem to have taken place during all phases of the Merovingian period and occurred most frequently from the end of the sixth century and especially in the seventh century. In Kent they may have started in the early sixth centu-

ry and become more frequent in the seventh. The graves all seem to have been reopened while the cemeteries were in use (Zintl 2012: 301-304; Klevnäs 2013: 47-49).

There are interesting differences between the reopening rates of graves with men's, women's and neutral grave goods. Graves with men's objects had higher reopening percentages than graves with women's and neutral objects. The graves with so called neutral, non-gender specific grave goods had the lowest reopening percentages. The diggers seem to have purposely targeted graves with gendered objects over graves with gender neutral objects and graves with typical men's grave goods over graves with women's objects. A similar distribution of reopened men's and women's graves was observed in Anglo-Saxon Kent and German Bavaria (Zintl 2012: 313-314; Klevnäs 2013: 42), although the difference was much less pronounced than in the Low Countries. Only a small number of children's graves could be identified in the research area, but it seems that the graves of children, and especially those of adolescents were opened relatively infrequently compared to those of the population as a whole. However, children's graves were not completely avoided by the grave reopeners either. A similar pattern was observed in Kent (Klevnäs 2013: 41). In Bavaria, the graves of children and adults were opened equally often (Zintl 2012: 312-313).

Reopening practices

Like the funerary ritual itself, grave reopenings seem to have been a relatively homogenous practice across the territories of the modern Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and English Kent. Some graves were reopened in the context of an additional burial or intercut by a later grave, but most reopenings were independent events. There are exceptions, but in most cases the diggers made a pit, usually starting somewhere on top of the wooden container, and dug their way down into the grave. If the container was still intact, they would have needed to break into it. For some graves there are indications that the diggers removed the whole container lid but in other

cases they may have just made a hole in it. The reopening pits usually focused on the interior of the wooden container, especially on the area of the deceased's thorax/pelvis. The region around the deceased's head and legs/feet was less frequently affected by reopenings. The reopening pits were often wider in the upper levels of the grave, becoming more narrow and focusing on a specific area as they went down. In a few cemeteries, there may have been small differences between the ways men's and women's graves were reopened, but these were barely statistically significant. In addition, the differences that were observed did not correspond with the traditional hypothesis that men's graves were usually opened in the leg region and women's graves were opened in the head and chest area (for instance Stoll 1939: 8; Steuer 1998: 519; Stork 2001: 428; Effros 2006: 199; Bofinger & Przemyslaw 2008: 51). In most cases, the reopenings were probably small events where one or perhaps two graves were opened at a time. The number of cases where multiple graves may have been reopened simultaneously is relatively small, but it is possible that additional cases are hidden in the dataset. Most graves seem to have been reopened only once and with a single pit, but there are a few examples of burials with traces of multiple pits. It is often unclear whether these pits were dug simultaneously or whether they represent consecutive reopening events. There was no evidence for search trenches. The fact that the diggers were able to select specific types of graves, such as those containing objects associated with men, suggests that the graves were marked above ground. The nature of these markings is unclear as virtually no traces of them were found. In many cases, it could not be determined whether the intervention pits were backfilled after the reopenings. In some cemeteries the reopening pits' fills were rather homogenous, suggesting that they had been filled with a single load of soil. In a few cases however, the excavators noted layered fills in the pits, suggesting they were filled in stages over a longer period of time, as would happen with natural sedimentation. This suggests that various practices concerning

the backfilling of reopened graves may have existed side by side. The backfilling may have been done by the grave reopeners themselves, or by other people at a later time.

While most grave reopenings seem to have left the affected graves in a seemingly random and jumbled state, there are a few that showed evidence of deliberate manipulations of specific skeletal elements, especially skulls. These graves fall in the range of what is often called 'deviant' (Thäte 2007: 267-272; Aspöck 2008; Reynolds 2009; Gardeła 2013: 109-110, 120-121), except that in these cases the deviancy was created during a post-depositional intervention, rather than during the original burial. In grave 46 from Lent-Lentseveld the deceased's cranium had been placed on the pelvis. There were no cut marks on the skull and the vertebra and mandible were left *in situ*, indicating that the cranium was moved after the tissues connecting it to the mandible and spinal column had decomposed, probably during a grave reopening or by another series of events that gave people access to the decaying corpse. This grave also contained an additional skull bone from a second individual. Lent grave 15 contained the remains of a six year old child that had been curled up into a bundle. The child's skull was found a few centimeters above the body, separated from it by a layer of clay. Once again, there were no indications of a forceful *peri-mortem* decapitation. In grave 39 from Lent the deceased's skull was missing entirely. As in the other cases no cut marks were found on the remaining upper vertebra, so it was probably removed during a reopening. Similar post-depositional skull manipulations are also found in early medieval graves from other parts of Europe (Simmer 1982: 40-41; Aspöck 2011: 307-309, 315-316; Zintl 2012: 354-355; Klevnäs 2013: 76-78). In the Low Countries they are relatively rare, but this need not be an accurate reflection of past practices, as it could be due to the poor preservation of skeletal remains in most of the region.

Taking and leaving objects

The comparison between the objects found in reopened and intact graves revealed much variability, making it difficult to establish which objects may have been taken from, or added to the reopened graves. First and foremost, it was interesting to see that the reopened graves usually yielded many objects that had apparently been left behind by the diggers, usually within reach of the reopening pits where they were less likely to be overlooked. In most of the cemeteries, certain categories of objects were found more often in reopened than in intact graves. This pattern is probably at least partially caused by the fact that the graves of the cemeteries' last phase were usually furnished with fewer grave goods and were reopened less often than the graves of earlier phases, thus lowering the average number of objects found in intact graves. In addition, the people involved in grave reopenings may have actively selected graves with large numbers of objects and particular grave good types. However, it is also possible that the diggers sometimes added grave goods to the graves when they reopened them.

While all types of objects were probably eligible to be taken during reopenings, the diggers may specifically have targeted swords and seaxes, various kinds of women's dress accessories - especially beads and brooches - and possibly also a varying array of utensils such as small knives and pottery vessels. The grave reopeners may have been more interested in weapons of war such as swords and shields than in weapons typically used for hunting, such as lance heads and arrowheads. Belt fittings were often left behind in reopened graves, but some were probably also taken, as is attested by the incomplete belt sets found in a number of reopened graves.

Reopened graves contained many more indeterminate fragments than intact graves and recognizable objects from the reopened graves were generally less complete, indicating that the objects were often broken and fragments were removed during reopenings. This damage and fragmentation may to some extent have been accidental, resulting from actions that

were necessary to reopen the graves. However, several objects show signs of intentional damage, indicating that fragmentation may have played significant role in the reopening practice. The missing fragments may simply have been scattered on the cemetery's surface, but it is also possible that the diggers took them away from the site.

Bones

Very little research has been done on which bones are usually missing from reopened graves. This is a difficult subject because bones may disappear through natural decomposition. Klevnäs notes that there are no indications that the diggers in her research area targeted specific types of bones. She suggests that where bones are absent, the diggers may simply not have made an effort to backfill with the same material as was dug out (Klevnäs 2013: 52). Similar sentiments are expressed by Zintl for Bavaria (2012: 352-253). It is unfortunate that the poor bone preservation in most of the Low Countries does not allow us to answer these types of research questions. However, there are a few finds of human bone from non-cemetery sites that are relevant to this issue. At the Oegstgeest settlement a large number of disarticulated human bones were found in various contexts across the site, mainly in the fills of gullies and ditches. The majority of these scattered finds were long bones and skull fragments. The inhabitants may have selectively gathered and/or deposited bones from the extremities and the skull. The most striking example is a pit containing a star-shaped formation comprising the long bones of at least two individuals. Adjacent to this pit lay a second pit with selected bone fragments belonging to a minimum of six individuals. All bones of which the sex could be determined, belonged to men. The scattered bones found in these deposits may have originated from reopened graves in nearby cemeteries. The finds from the Meuse river near the town of Kessel are another example of early medieval human bones found outside a typical funerary context. The site was in use from the Late Iron Age to the High Middle Ages and part of the

material could be dated to the Merovingian period. Once again, the majority of the sexed bones were male. A similar site may have been located near Roermond. The bones from this site have not been dated yet, but a percentage of the retrieved objects are Merovingian. Such river deposits may have been one of the places where objects and bones from reopened graves were taken to. These human bone deposits and the reopened graves share a few noteworthy corresponding features. The most striking is their apparent focus on the remains of men. This could be an indication that the bones found in the deposits did indeed originate from reopened graves, or that the bone deposits and grave reopenings were influenced by similar worldviews and social practices.

5.2 The interpretations

The causes of and reasons for early medieval grave reopenings were probably complex and variable. In this thesis I have explored a number of different possibilities, focusing on the identity of the grave reopeners, the identity of the deceased, the participants' motives and the wider socio-cultural context. All the interpretations that were discussed may have been true for at least some of the grave reopening cases. They may have overlapped or excluded one another, depending on the context. The interpretations listed here are mostly oriented towards the material from the Low Countries, but may to some extent also apply to other areas of early medieval North-West Europe such as Anglo-Saxon Kent and German Bavaria, since the grave reopenings in these regions have a high degree of similarity.

The views on the role of grave reopenings in early medieval society vary greatly. Many scholars see grave reopenings simply as a means to regain some of the wealth invested in the lavish and costly burial practices. They feel supported by the law texts from the period, in which severe punishments are prescribed for grave robbery. However, this interpretation is contradicted by the selective ideological and symbolic aspects of these practices that have begun to become apparent in the recent re-

search, such as the preferential targeting of certain types of graves and grave goods while other graves and grave goods seem to have been deliberately left untouched. The high percentage of reopened graves suggest that reopenings were probably a socially accepted practice that could very well have been carried out by members of the burial communities themselves, rather than by criminals or outsiders.

Some authors have argued that the chaotic or violent ways in which grave reopenings were carried out are evidence of a disrespectful attitude on the part of the diggers. This is problematic because we do not know what constituted a respectful treatment of graves in the Merovingian period. Behaviors that appear disturbing or violent to us could have been both respectful or disrespectful depending on the intentions of the participants and the context in which they took place (Duncan 2005; Weiss-Krejci 2001: 775-778; Zintl 2012: 388; Gardela 2013: 107-108). However, it cannot be excluded that reopenings were used as a socio-political weapon in small scale conflicts in and between burial communities, as is for instance suggested by Klevnäs (2013: 83).

Alternatively, grave reopenings could have played a part in the formation of social cohesion. The motives for having grave reopenings may have been similar to those for having lavish burials in the first place. Here we could think of options such as relieving of stress created by the death (Halsall 1995: 253-261), strategies for remembering and forgetting the dead (Williams 2003; 2005; 2006) or a rhetorical strategy of the burying group to create and recreate central norms, ideas and values; and to present themselves and their dead to an audience of outsiders (Theuvs 2009). These considerations may also help to explain the local variations in grave reopening intensity. Factors such as lack or superfluity of wealth, differing levels of social stress, local traditions and the agency of the community could all have contributed to a lower or higher frequency of reopenings. Reopenings may have offered an opportunity to focus on the grave one more time, expose its contents, bring back

memories, create new ones and gather memorabilia or relics.

Ancestors

One of the interpretations I explored in detail is the idea that early medieval grave reopenings were a form of relic cult for ancestors, similar to the cult of saints' relics which also developed in this period (Van Haperen 2010). This interpretive scenario assumes that grave reopenings were carried out by people from the burial community itself, possibly the deceased's immediate kin, and played an important role in social life and people's relationship with the ancestors. This does not mean that early medieval grave reopenings in rural cemeteries were unauthorized saints' translations, but rather that both types of practices may have originated from a shared reservoir of worldviews and socio-cultural values. They may to some extent also have had similar characteristics, including the practical ways in which they were conducted and their socio-religious role as a medium for maintaining contact between the living and the dead. Like distributed saints' relics, the remains taken from reopened Merovingian graves could reach a wider audience and gain more prestige by being present and accessible in multiple locations.

The evidence for actual ancestor beliefs in early medieval North-West Europe is somewhat scarce, but not absent. From sources such as the tale about the conversion of King Radbod in the *Vita Wulframni*, the *Beowulf* and numerous other sources about the pre-Christian religions in early medieval Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia, it can be surmised that early medieval people in North-West Europe valued their ancestors and believed they had the power to influence the condition of the living. In various sources there is much emphasis on ancestry through fathers. If men were indeed considered to be more important ancestors than women, this could explain the higher numbers of reopened graves with men's objects and the predominance of men's bones in bone deposits found in the research area. The relatively low per-

centage of reopened children's graves also fits with the idea that grave reopenings focused on people who had a social standing or life history that would predispose them to becoming a powerful ancestor. The fact that the diggers focused their efforts on graves with gender specific grave goods and preferred to take objects strongly associated with male and female identities corroborates that gender was an important facet in the choice to reopen certain graves.

Klevnäs (2013: 83; 2015: 168) has a different perspective on the function of reopened graves in relation to the ancestors. She argues that the grave reopenings in her research area were performed by enemies of the deceased's family, who aimed to deprive the dead of symbolically significant objects. These activities could have served to take revenge on the burial community and injure the social standing and political power of the deceased's family. In my opinion, it is certainly possible that graves were sometimes reopened by hostile persons rather than by the deceased's family members. However, it is unlikely that all the grave reopenings in the Low Countries came about in this way. The sheer number of them seems to negate the possibility that these were all hostile attacks on graves. Klevnäs' interpretation has more foothold in Kent, where grave reopenings seem to have taken place less frequently. However, given the general similarities of grave reopenings in Kent and the remainder of Europe, it seems likely that they originated from similar, rather than from different intentions. It is nevertheless possible that hostile and non-hostile grave reopenings were carried out in similar ways, in which case there could be a percentage of hostile reopenings hidden in the dataset from the Low Countries.

Grave goods

The fate of the objects taken from reopened graves deserves special attention. When a grave was reopened, some or even most of its contents were usually left behind or even purposely redeposited when the diggers backfilled their pit. This shows that mining for objects or raw materials was often not the primary

aim. The idea that the diggers were targeting precious metals and gemstones is also negated by the fact that they seem to have preferred men's graves over those of women, even though the latter usually contained more jewelry. A specific selection of objects – artefacts and possibly also bones – were taken out, presumably to be employed in later activities. They may have been used in their original form, but they may also have been recycled and made into new objects. In their original state, the objects could have served as relics in the traditional sense of the word, enshrined and subjected to cult practices. If the reopening took place in a more hostile context, the grave goods could have been perceived as trophies. In addition to purely symbolic functions, the objects could also have been employed in more practical ways. This is most obvious in the case of artefacts made of precious metal, glass and pottery. Many of these could probably still be used in the same ways as before their deposition in the grave, although they may have required cleaning and refurbishing. Their known provenance could however have given them a special significance and restricted their use to specific functions, including ceremonial ones. Alternatively, if the objects were recycled, that could have made them unrecognizable as former grave goods. Metal objects especially could have been reworked into new items, either by disassembling them and reusing their parts in new items, or by melting and reformatting. However, such practices need not have served to hide the former grave goods' provenance. In fact, they could have endowed the new objects with a special symbolism and potency, which explicitly referred back to their origins and former state. Early medieval people seem to have deliberately created material mnemonic links with the real or imagined past. In this way they portrayed themselves as legitimate successors to this past, strengthening their claims to power. Former grave goods may have been particularly suitable for this purpose, for instance because their form and decoration recalled specific myths or because people re-

membered the way they had circulated within and between various communities.

Fear of the dead

Early medieval ideas about death and the afterlife may not only have included good powerful dead, like benevolent saints and ancestors, but also rather more ill-intentioned deceased, against whom measures needed to be taken to safeguard the living from their malevolent influence. The fear of revenant dead has traditionally been associated with so called 'deviant' or atypical burials, which differ from the local or regional funerary norm. In the Low Countries there are very few graves where bone material was sufficiently well preserved to allow recognition of deviant burials, but a small number of cases such as the skull manipulations from Lent-Lentseveld involve forms of atypical burial that can arguably be associated with necrophobia, specifically the fear of revenants. Interestingly, these graves probably acquired their unusual appearance during a reopening, rather than during the original deposition. Manipulations carried out during post-depositional interventions accord well with the written sources about measures that were taken to keep the unquiet dead from walking. Measures against revenants found in both written sources and archaeological excavations from early medieval North-West Europe include decapitation and amputation of limbs, stones placed on top of the body, burial in prone position, and restraining the corpse by tying up the limbs (Lecouteux 1987: 31-35, 180-181; Blair 2009: 546; Reynolds 2009: 61-95; Gardela 2013: 112; Klevnäs 2016a: 194-197). It seems likely that the fear of the dead played a significant part in early medieval interactions with graves. Practices carried out during both burials and reopenings likely aimed at managing the perceived risks involved in dealing with death, promoting a desirable outcome and setting up protective measures in the cases the dead were thought to be actively dangerous. The so-called deviant burials probably represent the extremes of a spectrum of practices that meant to safeguard the living from the dead.

5.3 Recommendations

Although there are many uncertainties and points of disagreement in the debate, it is clear that grave reopenings in the Low Countries and in other parts of North-West Europe played a meaningful part in the early medieval interaction with the dead. They therefore merit further study, both by enlarging the dataset and by studying the available data in more detail. However, such studies need to be facilitated by those who make this data accessible: the excavators, conservation technicians and those analyzing and publishing cemetery material. The tendency to regard ‘disturbed’ graves as less interesting and less valuable for research into early medieval society has often led to less than optimal care and attention for these graves in the excavation and post-excavation process. Occasionally there are even attempts to hide the disturbance, for instance in the case of conservation technicians who restore fragmented objects by smoothing over the cracks and filling up missing sections with resin, to make them look almost like they are new. These types of practices are detrimental to the study of reopenings. In this final section I will therefore make a few recommendations for all those working on cemetery finds who are willing to facilitate and promote the study of grave reopenings.

For excavators, the most important point is to pay detailed attention to the information that is encapsulated in the graves’ fills. If a reopening is only discovered when the excavation reaches the grave’s rummaged bottom – or worse, during post-excavation analysis – a lot of important evidence about the reopening is potentially lost. Grave fills may yield traces of the reopening pit and they can contain objects and fragments that were rummaged or mixed in during the reopening. They should therefore be excavated with the largest possible amount of care and documented meticulously. It is recommended to draw and photograph as many levels as is possible within the scope of the excavation and to record the exact height, location and orientation of each individual

find in the fill and on the grave’s bottom, including bones, stones and pottery fragments. Reopening pits and details of a grave’s construction are often more clearly visible in a vertical section of the excavated grave. Especially for deep graves it can therefore be worthwhile to document both levels and sections with drawings and photographs. This can be achieved in various ways, for instance by first levelling down one half or section of the grave and then another, or by preserving a narrow wall of soil between the excavated sections. Even if it is not possible to document sections in the field, it can still be very insightful to make a three-dimensional reconstruction of the grave during post-excavation analysis. For sites with preserved bone material it is imperative to have an experienced anthropologist in the field. They can make observations about the layout of the skeletons which give unique and valuable information about the decomposition process and the state of the skeleton at the time of a reopening that are not apparent to excavators not trained in field anthropology (Noterman 2016: 162-163). It is also important to pay attention to any signs of peri- and post-depositional practices on the cemetery that are not related directly to the graves, such as building post holes, pits or feasting remains.

Conservation technicians can make valuable contributions to the study of reopened graves by respecting the state of fragmentation and incompleteness of the objects that arrive in their laboratories. Fragmented objects can represent relevant past social action that merits study. Research into this subject is much hampered by restoration work that attempts to conceal the objects perceived imperfections and fragmented state. Both in museum displays and publication photographs it is often impossible to assess whether or not objects were originally broken or incomplete. Even in the rare occasions where researchers have the possibility to handle restored objects personally, it can be quite difficult to determine which parts are real and which are made of filler. Broken and incomplete objects tell their own fascinating stories, so it is well worth keeping

them that way, or at least making visible restorations that are easily recognizable. On a related note, I also want to make a plea for not being too zealous in removing debris and corrosion from objects. These layers often harbor remains of textile, wood, insects and other organic matter which can be at least as valuable to researchers as the objects themselves. An important task also rests on the archaeologists analyzing and publishing both old and new cemetery data. They are the ones who make the data available to other researchers. The finds from a site which was excavated well and restored with care, can still be inaccessible because a detailed publication is lacking. When available, detailed plans of every grave should be published, both reopened and intact ones. If reopening pit features were documented in the field, these should be included on the grave plans in the publication. If graves contained fragmented scattered objects, it should be indicated exactly where the different fragments were found. If section drawings or three dimensional reconstructions of the grave were made, include them in the publication. Also publish the heights at which bones and (fragments of) grave goods were found. This is all vital information for dating the reopening and reconstructing how it was carried out. If

the graves contained skeletal remains, it is important to have these examined by an osteologist and publish all the results from this analysis, including which bones were present and absent and their positioning in the grave. For the objects it is helpful to indicate whether they were whole and complete, and if they were not, how much of the fragments is missing. If the drawings in the catalogue show pottery and glass vessels as 'archaeologically complete' for typology purposes, include photographs showing the objects' true state or mention in the description that fragments are missing. Fragmentation and disturbance often reflect relevant past social action, and deserve the same amount of care and detailed study as intact remains.