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

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Cover Page



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STELLINGEN

Behorend bij het proefschrift 'In Touch with the Dead: Early Medieval Grave Reopenings in the Low Countries' door Martine van Haperen

1. 'Disturbance' and fragmentation of graves and other archaeological phenomena are social processes that merit study in their own right. It should therefore also be a focus point of excavators, conservation technicians and authors who publish excavation results and work to make archaeological data accessible for further study.
2. In the Merovingian period, people's interaction with the dead did not stop after burial. Rather, the funeral was only one stage in the continuum of consecutive mortuary practices that took place in early medieval communities.
3. The debate about reopened graves has long been held back by notions about the participants' presumed economic motivations. Archaeologists need to realize that these 'common sense' views are subject to the same burden of proof as any other and are not an acceptable default option when interpreting excavation data.
4. Grave reopeners preferred to reopen graves with gender specific grave goods and focused on men's graves over women's graves. This shows that gender was an important element during grave reopenings, as it was during funerals. Men seem to have been perceived as more important or as requiring more attention in the post-funeral process.
5. The similarities in both funeral and grave reopening practices across North-West Europe suggest a high degree of social interaction and cultural homogeneity between communities and regions. We should nevertheless be mindful of the small variations that are manifestations of local traditions and agency.
6. There is a large potential for mutual benefit for both the German and Anglo-Saxon archaeological debates in improved communication and cooperation between German data-centered research and Anglo-Saxon theoretical approaches to early medieval period.
7. Despite the relatively large number of excavated early medieval cemeteries in the Low Countries, we have only just begun to scratch the surface of the finer nuances of mortuary practice in the region. This is partly due to the lack of detailed excavation administration, but more so to the backlog of unpublished finds. Therefore another backlog program and more detailed excavation methods for new excavations are needed.
8. It is unfortunate that mathematical statistics are undervalued or even feared in many branches of post-processual archaeology. We would do well to learn from our colleagues working on osteological and botanical material, for whom it is standard practice to use statistics as a tool for assessing the significance of their results.
9. The treatment of corpses in the modern Netherlands is usually outsourced to paid professionals, suggesting that people are quite estranged from death. Surprisingly, rituals surrounding cremation offer new possibilities to keep the dead close. The burned bone is ground down into 'ashes' which can be kept in the home, worn in jewelry or tattooed onto the skin. It can be argued that the processing of the body via cremation disassociates it from death, making it easier for people to be comfortable with the deceased's remains.
10. For reasons of both environmental sustainability and hospitality towards students and staff who are vegetarian, vegan or suffer from allergies, Leiden University would do well to increase the plant-based meal options offered by the cafeterias and catering service.
11. The fact that this PhD finished her dissertation within the time allotted by the contract and simultaneously developed two food blogs is a testament to the benefits of creative procrastination.