

Review of: Wendling, H., Augstein, M., Fries-Knoblach, J., Ludwig, K., Schumann, R., Tappert, C., Trebsche, P. & Wiethold, J. (Hrsg.) (2019). *Übergangswelten – Todesriten: Forschungen zur Bestattungskultur der europäischen Eisenzeit. (Beiträge zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte Mitteleuropas, 86). Langenweissbach: Beier & Beran.* 331 Seiten, 201 Illustrationen, Karten, Diagramme. ISBN 978-3-95741-089-4.

Bettina Arnold

This volume is one of a series published under the auspices of the AG Eisenzeit, an Iron Age Archaeology Working Group that has been organizing annual symposia at various archaeological conference venues in Europe since 1990. The papers included in this volume were presented either at the 8th German Archaeological Congress held in Berlin, Germany in 2014 or at the AG Eisenzeit conference in Hallein, Austria in 2015. The editors are to be commended for including an unusually large number of chapters written by women (although they still account for less than 50 % of the papers); the geographic distribution of the chapters in the volume, by contrast, reflects the particular spheres of activity of the editors and as such the focus is mainly on central Europe. The Iberian Peninsula is not represented at all and there is only one paper from France, for example; at the same time, it is good to see numerous chapters dealing with the Iron Age in eastern Europe, which has traditionally been less well documented in such publications. The second half of the title of the volume explicitly references Iron Age mortuary ritual, the focus of the first twenty chapters that were part of the Hallein conference. When translated into English the first half of the title references transitional worlds in general, including but not limited to mortuary ritual, and the remaining chapters encompass several reports on ongoing projects related to the European Iron Age that were presented in Berlin, some of which can be considered more broadly to fall under the latter heading. Contributions range from six to nineteen pages in length and are of necessity relatively superficial in their treatment of complex subject matter, a characteristic of most conference proceedings.

In spite of the restricted scope of the chapters, several of the contributions provide novel perspectives on various subjects of interest to scholars who study the myriad ways in which Iron Age central European populations disposed of their dead, ranging from the interpretation of

disposal practices to the use of grave goods as a proxy for mobility, social identity and ideology. The majority of the chapters focus on the challenges as well as the interpretive potential posed by archaeological data derived from the disposal of the dead (WENDLING, WEISS-KREJCI, KAISER & MANSCHUS, ŠEINER, TAILLANDIER ET AL., LAVELLE & STÖLLNER, BRÖNNIMANN ET AL., STEGMAIER, RAMSL, BALZER, PABST, MÜLLER-SCHAESESEL) while others used particular categories of material culture associated with mortuary contexts to discuss issues related to ideology, migration, and social identity (GRÜNBERG, GLANSDORF, GLESER & FRITSCH, LETTMANN, FRASE, REEPEN, TONC). Chronological (AUGSTEIN) and demographic analyses of cemetery data, including infant mortality and disposal (BEILKE-VOGT) and an intriguing and novel study of death linked to pregnancy and childbirth (REBAY-SALISBURY) make up another group of papers.

Several themes emerge from these studies that illustrate the extensive and varied nature of funerary practices and regional interactions between the various cultural zones represented by the papers between about 800 BC and the immediate pre-Roman period in central, northern and eastern Europe.

The WEISS-KREJCI chapter presents a comparison between several contemporary funerary contexts and provides a useful discussion of the erroneous assumption that the dead have a reasonable expectation of being able to rest in peace; various forms of disturbance and manipulation, including the complete removal and destruction of interred remains, are in fact quite common in contemporary societies and there is no universal commitment to allowing the dead to remain undisturbed. On the other hand, she dismisses the idea of post-mortem agency outright (without citing an extensive recent treatment of this topic by DEBRA MARTIN & JOHN CRANDALL, 2014). Somewhat inexplicably, although there are numerous scholarly publications in English on the discovery and analysis of the body of King Richard III in a Leicester carpark in 2012, she cites only an online news report by the Guardian from 2015.

The chapter by GRÜNBERG presents a largely art historical analysis of a type of La Tène period sheet bronze drinking flagon often decorated with ornate patterns in the area of the neck and shoulder, which she interprets as a reference to the human form, specifically neck ornament associated with women. While this is an intriguing idea it runs up against a number of issues, not the least of which is the small sample size and the range of temporal and geographic contexts on which this group

of objects is based. Similar arguments could be made about the placement of decorative motifs on earlier Iron Age ceramic vessels, which clearly were subject to particular rules, but interpreting those rules as a reflection of ideological constructs across several different cultural contexts cannot be supported on the basis of the existing evidence. In an extensive discussion of the Master/Mistress of Animals motif there is no mention of an English-language publication focused specifically on this iconographic by Martin Guggisberg which would have been relevant to her discussion (GUGGISBERG, 2010).

GLANSDORF'S contribution focuses on special deposits in a group of LT D1 cremation burials in the Saarland, the territory of the Treveri tribe. To illustrate his discussion of the various possible permutations of cremated bone deposits he includes an illuminating and useful schematic representation of depositional patterns and practices associated with this category of mortuary treatment. Also intriguing is the evidence of a ceramic object from one of the burials that may have served as a beer or mixed beverage filter, one of several contributions to the volume that highlight the importance of analyzing containers found in Iron Age burials whenever possible to determine their contents. Another interesting observation is the ubiquity of oak as the wood of choice for cremations in the region at this time. The selective use of oak in central European Iron Age mortuary contexts, where it was preferred for the construction of burial chambers as well as funeral pyres, suggests that it may have had a symbolic significance specifically associated with death and/or the transition to the afterlife. A second useful graphic provides a way of conceptualizing the complex relationship between grave goods associated with the deceased individual vs. those more likely to represent the community of the interred person. Objects that can be identified based on rarity of occurrence as tied to the individual can skew statistical correspondence analyses; it is important to distinguish between these categories of material culture before designing quantitative approaches to data sets.

GLESER & FRITSCH discuss wine amphorae and fragments of mill stones in late Iron Age burials in the Hunsrück-Eifel region, focusing specifically on feasting and wine consumption. The millstone deposits, which are interpreted as a grain/flour sacrifice, represent new and interesting evidence for a particular kind of pars pro toto mortuary offering and the possibility that prestations of wine accompanied the burial rite is also new and in-

triguing given the flour/body—wine/blood associations. On the other hand, the amphora and millstone deposits are unique to the Bierfeld "Vor dem Erker" cemetery for the moment, so it is difficult to know how generalizable these observations may be to mantic rituals in this period.

LETTMANN'S contribution focuses on adult-sized ring ornament that appears to have been repurposed for subadults in the early La Tène cemetery of Werneck-Zeuzleben in the Schweinfurt region. Use wear and life course analysis are combined in a creative way in this chapter, which presents a compelling case for ascribed status. It seems likely based on the distribution of the ring ornament in the burials that in this region as in other area of Iron Age central Europe subadults were classified as "not-male" until they reached a certain biologically or socially determined age. The drawbacks of this approach are that it requires good preservation conditions and graves outfitted with bronze objects that are decorated, allowing wear levels to be quantified. Neither precondition is always present, limiting the applicability of the approach outlined here. The discussion of other contexts in which evidence of extreme wear and potential recycling has been noted is extremely useful as is the observation that combinations of new and curated pieces appear to have been patterned and presumably had a meaning that cannot as yet be determined based on the evidence available.

BEILKE-VOIGT discusses the special treatment of infants, most of which appear to have died before tooth eruption, in the early La Tène period in the German-speaking areas of central Europe during which adult cremations are the norm in many regions. Infants in the 35 sites included in this sample are often found inhumed in settlement contexts rather than in cemeteries frequently enough for this to be considered a special form or mortuary ritual rather than an example of deviant disposal. The various, often contradictory, explanations that have traditionally been posited for the "non-normative" disposal of infants makes it clear that the variety of contexts is extreme and that a single interpretation is unlikely to cover all contingencies. An intriguing suggestion is that the infants buried under thresholds or outside the walls of houses may have been intended to guard these liminal spaces. The author concludes that infant inhumation clearly predates the arrival of the Romans and was not introduced from Italy to central Europe; she argues that disposal in settlement contexts should be viewed as one of several prescribed mortuary treatments reserved for a particular age and possibly status category.

REBAY-SALISBURY presents an in depth and nuanced study of the evidence for pregnancy and female mortality in the Iron Age of central Europe. She is one of the first scholars to address this question in a systematic fashion drawing on ethnographic analogy and a wide range of archaeological evidence. The statistics provided make this article an important contribution to the literature: she estimates that between 10 and 15% of women died in childbirth or as a result of complications associated with pregnancy in Iron Age Europe, a sobering reminder that the contemporary mortality levels of 5.8 and 3.3% in the United States and western Europe, respectively, are a recent aberration. Female adults of childbearing age are twice as frequent as comparably aged males in Iron Age cemeteries, so it can be assumed that at least some of these individuals died in the course of pregnancy or as a result of complications during or after giving birth. Some of the more interesting new approaches to determining cause of death in these cases includes testing soil samples from the pelvic region as well as preserved bone for estrogen levels. The complicated nature of the evidence is illustrated by a massive multi-page table of all known examples encountered by the author in the course of her research, which, combined with the extensive references, makes this a useful resource for scholars with an interest in this topic.

ŠEINER'S contribution focuses on unusual burial practices in the Roman Iron Age that can be attributed to an "Old Germanic" belief system, in particular non-normative depositions of human and animal remains. The paper is largely descriptive and includes a discussion of the different kinds of sources available as well as the theoretical principles governing this kind of synthetic analysis, which the author concludes is limited. Deposits of dogs and the possibility that they were used as proxies or scapegoats are discussed in some detail and provide one of the more interesting aspects of the chapter.

KAISER & MANSCHUS present a social structural analysis of the Billendorfer Culture cemetery of Niederkaina in eastern Saxony based on the tri-partite system of the rites of separation developed for funerary practices by cultural anthropologists in the early to mid-20th century. The sample of 1185 burials and the long use-life of the cemetery, from the middle-to-late Bronze Age through the late Hallstatt period (1400-500 BC) allows a complex funerary cycle to be identified that appears to have included transport of some of the deceased individuals to the cemetery as well as offerings of food and possibly other comestibles

during and possibly after the actual deposition of the body. A complex flow chart is provided outlining the mortuary ritual documented in the cemetery and particular categories of grave goods are identified as associated with each of the stages involved in the more elaborately outfitted chamber graves. This is one of several chapters in the volume that reference evidence for post-funerary prestations, suggesting that this type of activity may have been more common and widespread in Iron Age central Europe than previously assumed. Another common theme is the re-opening of burials to remove, add or otherwise manipulate bodies and objects, activity that was previously mainly ascribed to looting but is increasingly emerging as a sanctioned aspect of the funerary cycle itself in most time periods and regions. The authors make a good case for including differences in the ritual process in analyses of grave good presence/absence or quantity/quality in order to provide a more powerful approach to understanding mortuary practices.

TAILLANDIER ET AL. present the evidence for non-normative burial practices at the early La Tène necropolis of Pierre-de-Bresse "L'Aubépin" in Burgundy, a rescue excavation carried out in 2014 that uncovered the burials of two subadults and three adults. Even in such a small sample three of the themes seen in other contributions to the volume appear here – possible recycled/repurposed ring adult ring ornament in a child's grave, evidence for a food offering and evidence for the opening and manipulation of burials and their contents. The chapter is in English, but there are numerous typos in the images and awkward phrasing in the text that should have been noted and corrected by the editors.

LAVELLE & STÖLLNER also produced an English text, in this case focusing on the Simonbauernfeld cemetery on the Dürnberg near Hallein in Austria where a dozen burials have yielded evidence for multi-stage funerary practices that included the re-opening of some graves and manipulation of the bodies they contained. They suggest that these post-funeral activities may have been part of a collective system of memorialization practiced by members of this La Tène period salt mining community. Like several of the authors in this volume, they argue that mortuary ritual served as one of the primary mechanisms for creating and maintaining social cohesion in the form of a dynamic and recurrent discourse between the living and the dead. Editorial oversight could have helped with the occasional grammatical and syntactical errors in this chapter also but overall this

is a useful reinterpretation of the present state of knowledge regarding this well-known and extensively excavated funerary complex.

WENDLING'S second contribution to the volume also focuses on the Dürrenberg, in particular the evidence for secondary burial and manipulation of remains and material as a reflection of thanatological beliefs as well as social relationships. It is quite common to find more than one individual in a single burial chamber and determining the sequence of events associated with the use of funerary spaces, bodies and material culture indicates that a complex system of stages appears to have characterized the mortuary program at the site. He uses the Römersteig cemetery as a case study and notes that only seventeen of the sixty-six recorded burials appear to have been unaffected by post-depositional activity of some kind, arguing that individuals interred together were socially or biologically related in some way.

The relationships between interred individuals and how status affected their disposal is also the focus of the chapter by AUGSTEIN on Hallstatt period cemeteries in north-eastern Bavaria. This is the only paper in the volume to at least infer that the intersection of numerous variables impacts the expression of identity in the mortuary context although the concept of intersectionality as such is not specifically mentioned. Recent publications in the Anglo-American literature that apply this concept to the central European Iron Age also are not cited (cf. GHISLENI ET AL., 2016). Tumulus cemeteries made up of mounds that share party walls at sites like Beilngries and Riedenburg-Untereggersberg and cases where individuals were buried in separate superimposed chambers in the same mound are discussed in terms of possible social configurations. She concludes, as do several of the other authors, that the actual deposition of the body is clearly not the only or even the most important action taken by the living and that we should consider Iron Age cemetery contexts as theaters of ongoing performances rather than locations of synchronic events.

BRÖNNIMANN ET AL. engage in a micro-analysis of the La Tène period cemeteries uncovered during the extensive rescue excavations conducted on the terrain of Basel-Gasfabrik in Switzerland. The analysis of micromorphological and taphonomic processes indicates that here, too, there is evidence of a complex series of activities associated with the deposition of the dead, which does not always appear to have occurred immediately after the construction of a grave pit or shaft. As noted in several of the other chapters, infants were

preferentially deposited in settlement contexts while formal burial was reserved for adults (although whether all adults were accorded a formal burial remains an open question). Histological analyses conducted on preserved bone indicate that the bodies recovered from formal cemetery contexts resemble one another but differ from fragmentary human remains from settlement contexts. The study demonstrates that combining conventional mortuary analysis with histological and taphonomic data has the potential to provide new insights into funerary processes.

The Iron Age cemetery of the Burrenhof associated with the Heidengraben oppidum in southwest Germany is the subject of an attempt by STEGMAIER to make a case for the presence of an ancestor cult at this location from the late Bronze Age through the late La Tène period. The tumulus cemetery consists of at least 37 mounds erected between 800 and 450 BC, with most of the interments dating to Hallstatt C and D. Isolated finds recovered in the vicinity of the mounds, which were largely leveled by agricultural activity, suggest the cemetery may have continued to be used either for interments or other activities into the later La Tène period. A pit discovered between the mounds dating to the late La Tène period contained burned animal bone that Stegmaier interprets as the remains of ritual offerings as well as iron knife fragments, ceramic sherds, including one with a hole that may have been used as a spindle whorl, and a Manching 2 type silver coin. A system of ditches that runs through the cemetery are harder to interpret but may represent an attempt to cordon off sections of the cemetery at different times, serving to direct as well as restrict human movement through this ritual landscape. The separation of sacred and unconsecrated space using physical demarcations like ditches, trackways or deposits, is another theme that links several of the chapters in the volume.

Another example of possible multi-phase mortuary activity is presented by RAMSL in the context of La Tène period burials and cemeteries in north-eastern Austria. Bi-ritual burials containing both inhumations and cremations at the cemeteries of Pottenbrunn and Mannersdorf as well as the more recently excavated necropolis of Oberndorf and Ossarn are discussed. One of the more intriguing examples comes from a weapon-bearing male inhumation at Pottenbrunn that was reopened in order for a cremation to be placed in the grave, with the cremation urn containing the remains of a second individual placed directly on top of the sword at the right side of the inhumed

individual. Another burial from Ossarn contained the cremated remains of at least three individuals as well as an adult inhumation. The evidence for a complex system of rites of passage is reconstructed and represented graphically, revealing evidence for the creation of sacred space before as well as after depositional events, which may on occasion have spanned more than one generation.

Another well-known early La Tène site which has produced evidence for a complex ritual landscape centered on a mortuary complex containing several high-status elite graves in tumuli is described in the chapter by BALZER. The Glauberg in Hessen is an important hillfort settlement which made headlines in 1994 when two male burials containing drinking equipment and gold personal ornament as well as a sandstone carved figure outfitted with a neck ring and other objects like those in the richer of the two graves were discovered at the foot of the plateau. A third elite grave was discovered in 1999 and an extensive system of ditches and what has been interpreted as a processional way leading up to the largest of the extant tumuli indicate that landscapes rather than individual sites or features must be considered holistically if complexes such as this are to be understood. Here as in several other Iron Age contexts discussed in this volume the bodies of the dead are found in ritual contexts that are not strictly mortuary, including ditches and other boundaries, marking the transition between the sacred and quotidian worlds. Ceramic vessel fragments found in the ditches may be the remains of offerings of food or alcoholic beverages, echoing similar deposits described in several other chapters.

The focal role played by the individual whose grave contained not only weapons, drinking equipment and gold ornament but also the remains of a headdress replicated in the sandstone statue discovered at the Glauberg is discussed in more detail by PABST in the next chapter. Both the physical remains of this central character in the Glauberg mortuary landscape and the anthropomorphic figure that likely once stood on the summit of the tumulus in which his body was interred are conceptualized as the catalyst and staging area for the creation of an ongoing narrative linking object, image and ideological beliefs about the afterlife in this cultural context.

MÜLLER-SCHIESSSEL'S chapter attempts a cross-cultural analysis of the social ramifications of death and burial that ranges from the Upper Paleolithic cemetery at Sungir to the Kofun period tombs of Japan, with parallels drawn from these contacts in a discussion of Iron Age mortuary practices as

represented by a select group of Hallstatt and early La Tène sites. The broad geographic and temporal scope of the essay makes an indepth analysis difficult and many of the observations are by now a bit shopworn: the fact that the dead don't bury themselves, that burials are not a mirror of daily life, and that the survivors of deceased individuals may engage in a form of "*fighting with corpses*" etc.. The main focus is on grave goods and energy expenditure, which is problematic given the impact of intersectional variables such as gender, age, social role and relationship networks on the contents and staging of a burial. This is the last chapter focused explicitly on the theme of mortuary ritual.

The contribution by HANSEN ET AL. reports on limited excavations on the Alte Burg hillfort not far from the Heuneburg on the upper Danube in southwest Germany; the discovery of a shaft containing human remains has contributed to the interpretation of the site as the location of ritual activity that may have been linked to the Heuneburg both literally and socio-politically. This chapter represents a segue from the contributions that more obviously relate to mortuary analysis and those that deal with migration and inter-group contact as examples of transitional worlds, including the contribution by FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZE on the evidence for mobility in the Champagne region in France, the Hunsrück-Eifel area in Germany and the Przeworsk in Poland and the CIESIELSKI chapter focusing on the Holstein culture pin head from Konin-Grjec, also in Poland, which is considered evidence of migration from the Jastorf area. Frase reviews historically documented Iron Age burials in Saxony in his contribution, which is a straight-forward treatment of the existing documentary and material evidence and its potential for future research, while REEPEN discusses the importance of Westphalia as a liminal zone between the La Tène and Jastorf culture areas, which selectively adopted material culture and concepts from both areas while maintaining a largely local mortuary tradition. Finally, TONC presents evidence for contact between the Jastorf and La Tène culture areas in southern Pannonia, with amber and fibulae serving as proxies for cultural interactions in the second and first centuries BC. Here again the adoption of the foreign and the new appears to have been selective, occurring against the backdrop of an innate conservatism and retention of local traditions.

The volume is a valuable resource for scholars concerned with understanding the complex world of mortuary practices in Iron Age central Europe but I do have a few quibbles, especially

with regard to the English-language citations in the survey chapters, including the introduction and the first chapter by Wendling. The usual suspects in early Anglo-American mortuary studies are present (JAMES BROWN, 1971 and P. J. UCKO, 1969) and a few recent syntheses (MIKE PARKER PEARSON, 1999) and approaches to statistical analyses (FELDORE MCHUGH, 1999) are included. However, it is disappointing to find no acknowledgement of the extensive English-language literature on Iron Age mortuary archaeology in central Europe even when at least some of that work is indirectly referred to in several of the contributions.

References

- Ghisleni, L., Jordan, A. M. & Fiocoprile, E. (eds) (2016). "Binary Bind": Deconstructing Sex and Gender Dichotomies in Archaeological Practice. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 23(3), special issue.
- Guggisberg, M. (2010). The Mistress of Animals, the Master of Animals: two complementary or oppositional concepts in early Celtic art? In B. Arnold & D. Counts (eds). *The Master of Animals in Old World Iconography*. (pp. 223-236). Budapest: Archaeolingua.
- Crandall, J. & Martin, D. (eds) 2014. The Bioarchaeology of Postmortem Agency: Integrating Archaeological Theory with Human Skeletal Remains. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 24(3), special issue.

Prof. Dr. Bettina Arnold
Department of Anthropology
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Sabin Hall 229
3413 N Downer Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53211
USA
barnold@uwm.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3359-8152>