

*INTRODUCTION*

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## **In Search of the Unusual in Early Modern and Modern Burial Traditions**

Titta Kallio-Seppä, Sanna Lipkin, Annemari Tranberg,  
Tiina Väre, and Ulla Moilanen

### **From Traditional . . . to Unusual**

Mortuary culture includes various attitudes and practices associated with the dead. In a Christian context, this usually means a preparation for death, the disposal of corpses according to the accustomed practices, and the commemoration of the deceased. Incidents that disrupted peoples' expected futures sometimes led to burials that did not follow the normal traditions among the communities. This volume provides examples of incidents that led to burials or memorialization that somehow deviated from what was considered the norm in those times, cultures, and locations. The chapters present research material and case studies from Finland (at that time part of Sweden or Russia), Sweden, the US, Britain, Ireland, Iceland, and Russia with a temporal scope from the sixteenth century to the early twenty-first century. The aim is to give a northern perspective on the complex topics of death, burial, and memory in the post-medieval era.

The circumstances of the deceased themselves, their death, or their living environment, could all result in a different kind of burial (see Moilanen 2021). An "unusual death" could be caused by various factors, such as epidemic, war, premature birth, social status, or having a disability. Such incidents may have been relatively rare, concerning only a portion of people, such as families or even just a single person. Other examples concern wider geographical areas or certain groups of people performing a certain task, such as soldiers.

The terms traditional and unusual are discussed in this volume within research material of Christian contexts. Unusual body positions, grave orientations, and burial places outside the churchyard have often been interpreted from a negative point of view and seen as an indication of humil-

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iation or an expression of disrespect and rejection (Arcini 2009; Reynolds 2009; Riisøy 2015). These interpretations are usually highlighted in the Christian context, where the burial tradition is easily seen as homogenous and without variation (see Mui 2018: 65, 301; Mytum 2004: 17, 19). It may be true that these burials represent a minority, which is why they are often called “atypical.” From this perspective, it would be easy to believe that burial places far away from the church represent social exclusion or that the graves with unusual orientation or a distinctive way of treating the corpse indicate punishment. After all, it is the church and the churchyard that form a clearly defined social space, where the good members of the congregation were interred. Similarly, by placing the corpse in the grave facing west, the deceased was granted a possibility for resurrection on Judgment Day. However, the simplistic views of atypical burials have been criticized during recent decades, and a more nuanced picture has emerged (e.g., Aspöck 2008; Gardela 2013, 2017; Gilchrist and Sloane 2005; Mui 2018; Moilanen 2018, 2021; Toplak 2018; Scott, Betsinger, and Tsaliki 2020). It also seems clear that the mortuary customs have been influenced by the individual choices of those responsible for the burial. In many situations, the corpse itself has had postmortem agency. An unusual manner of death or unexpected circumstances at the time of death could have led to distinctive treatment of the corpse or to it being buried in a special burial place. For example, prone burials, in which the individual is placed on his or her stomach face down, sometimes occur in Christian cemeteries. The modern interpretations of these seemingly dramatic burials range from the symbolism of penitence (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005: 154; Toplak 2018) to a complex mixture of magic and superstitions deriving from local stressful events (Moilanen 2018, 2021). Therefore, unusual ways to bury or commemorate the dead do not necessarily convey only negative meanings. The cases presented in this volume highlight the diversity of ways of treating the dead in a Christian context.

However, burial practice in the past did not always come without problems, especially in the northern American context, where burial grounds are often on the land that belonged to Indigenous people but was colonized by Europeans. As these lands were forcefully occupied, it is rightful to ask if holding the Christian cemeteries and repeating the commemoration practices (particularly those of a patrimonial nature) is in accordance with the measures taken to prevent the destruction and pillage of the Indigenous burial sites (Barker 2018: 1144), and whether appropriate actions have been taken to restore the memories of these burial sites as an effort for reconciliation and decolonization (Van Dyke 2020; Wadsworth, Supernant, and Dersch 2021).

In Europe, and the Nordic countries, history of colonization can be approached from a slightly different angle. For example, Finland, which

was part of Sweden until 1809 when it became the Grand Duchy of Russia, was not only a subject of both Swedish and Russian colonization but also that of the United Kingdom. From the early nineteenth century onwards these processes were closely interrelated with the industrialization of the country (Lipkin 2021). Yet, Finnish legislation and practices allowed activities towards the minority groups that can be defined as colonial. In the Nordic countries the effects of colonialism are not as tightly related to land occupation as they are in North America. Traditionally, the Indigenous people, the Saami, have lived in Sápmi (northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and parts of Russia bordered by the Barents Sea), but the borders of this area have been challenged and contested; the Saami have lived also in the southern parts of these countries. Colonialism of the Saami has been studied in relation to the Swedish mining industries in Sápmi, as well as to the early modern collection of Saami material culture and the repatriation and reburial of the anatomical collections (Ojala 2009, 2018, 2020). However, the Saami were not the only ethnic minority group living in the Nordic countries. For example, we still know very little of the living experiences of the Roma (Wong 2020), or how the Karelians were buried in Finland (Lipkin and Kuokkanen 2014).

Despite the common and contemporary religious continuum from Catholic faith to Reformation and Lutheran religion, the Nordic countries cannot be thought of as one cultural region in terms of understanding death and afterlife. As testified through folklore, church records, and other written sources, the old traditions and beliefs continued their flourishment in the communities including the minority groups. This led to local ways to commemorate the dead (Lipkin 2020), and it is not always possible to distinguish between the traditions of the majorities and minorities.

### **Case Examples from the “North”: Burials from the Early Modern Times to the Present**

This book was developed from an interest and a need for a compilation that brings together examples of deviant burials, especially from early modern and modern times. We wished to ask: What in the burial customs indicates unusual death or unusual ways of remembering and what does it mean? What makes archaeologists consider a burial to be unusual? What kind of ethical questions are related to the handling of unusual deceased or researching them?

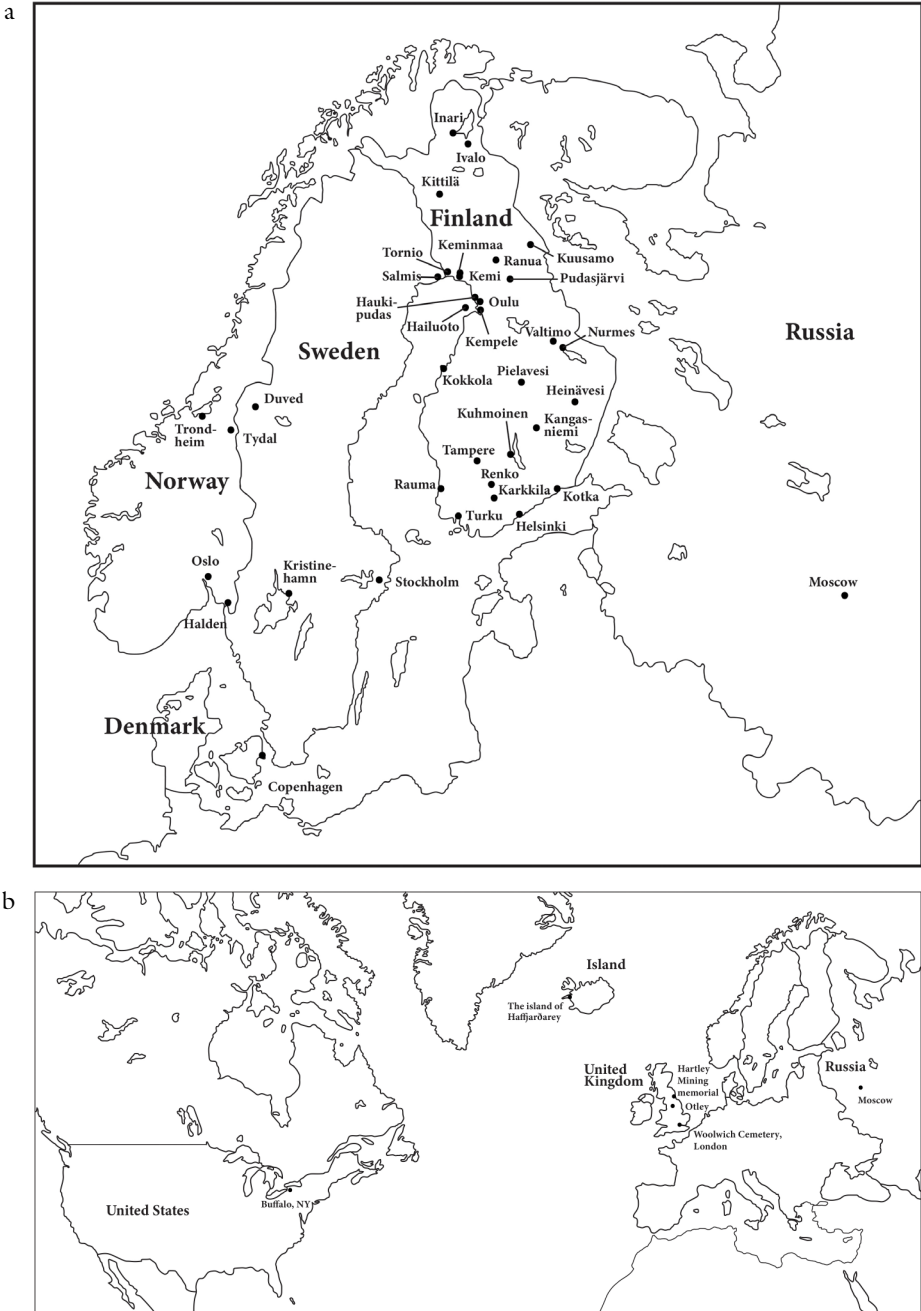
For this volume, we wanted to broaden the perspective on unusual burials with a wider range of chapters covering a larger geographical area (Figure 0.1a.–b.) and tying the chapters together under a theme “North.”

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Figures 0.1a.–b. Locations of the research sites and material discussed in the chapters. © The Museum of Tornio Valley, Emma Laitila.

The concept of “North” is considered relative as its implications vary with respect to the standpoint of the observer. Thus, instead of fixating on high latitudes we have approached the concept from a perspective of such relativity. The sites introduced here all represent relatively northern locations within their own cultural or national contexts. Additionally, we have used the climates typical to Nordic areas as an integrative factor, even representation, of “northernness.” Due to the influence of the Gulf Stream, the Nordic countries enjoy comparatively temperate climates for their latitude. For instance, those countries in corresponding areas of North America experience much harsher climates, while climates resembling Nordic ones are impacting much more southern locations on this continent. Thus, instead of geographical location or a concept that can be defined in absolute numerical terms, in this volume, “North” refers to a kind of an experiential, “qualitative,” even sensory attribute that all the introduced sites share.

A wider geographical coverage entails a broader range of burial traditions and historical events affecting the burials. According to Liv Nilsson Stutz and Sarah Tarlow (2013: 2), special kinds of burials, such as those that seem to have been outside normal society, have attracted interest among scholars in recent years. For example, atypical burials are addressed from bioarchaeological perspectives and often contain data from prehistoric times (Murphy 2008; Betsinger, Scott, and Tsaliki 2020; Evans 2020). Our temporal scope is in early modern and modern periods, ranging from the sixteenth century to the early twenty-first century.

We can approach the time frame by using a periodicity describing the changes in burial traditions from the early modern times to the present. Tony Walter (1994) described three consecutive cultural periods: traditional, modern, and neomodern, to understand and conceptualize death and changes in burial customs. According to Walter, the traditional period was strongly rooted in the burial traditions of a community where death was a frequent, and often sudden, visitor and considered to be the result of a sin. Thus, dying was more or less considered part of everyday life and family and neighbors were responsible for preparing the deceased for the burial. During the modern era, from the nineteenth century onwards, death was medicalized and slowly distanced from the surroundings of the home to hospitals, where death and burial were handled by the nuclear family and professionals. The present neomodern era has raised a high level of individuality; people often plan their own funeral beforehand and the bereaved organize the funeral according to the wishes of the deceased, not according to old traditions. These historical phases are said to be simplified ideas of social life at the time, and the phases followed each other, with traditional tending to give way to modern and modern to neomod-

ern. The research data and questions in this volume use data from the first traditional and modern phases.

During the traditional phase, the beliefs relating to good and bad death were strong. From the Middle Ages until the mid-nineteenth century, death was considered omnipresent. From then on, death would be effaced, shameful, and forbidden, and in time disappear (Ariés 1974: 85–88). Philippe Ariés described this situation as follows:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, under the influence of the Counter Reformation, spiritual writers struggled against the popular belief that it was not necessary to take such pain to live virtuously, since a good death redeemed everything. Because of the belief there was a moral importance in the circumstances surrounding a death. It was not until the twentieth century that this deeply rooted belief was cast off, at least in industrialized societies. (1974: 38–39)

A sudden death, criminal death, or a death with special features (such as one caused by an epidemic) that left no time to prepare for the afterlife in the form of religious rites assuring redemption was considered a “bad” death (e.g., McNeill 2004).

## Different Sides of the Unusual and Atypical

Burial has a twofold meaning. From an individual’s perspective, it is usually done in respect for the deceased (Lempiäinen 1990). From society’s viewpoint, it is a means of disposing of remains before they become contaminated and a threat to the living (Jenner 2005). When death occurs, relatives usually follow the burial rituals laid down by the custom of the society. This book introduces a selection of cases that address the issue of unusual deaths, burials, or ways of remembering deceased loved ones. It explores not only what past individuals and groups wished to remember, and what have been the unwanted or unpleasant aspects of death, but also the ethical questions involved in the study of those whose death can be considered unusual. The chapters combine theoretical views related to social memory of death and memorializing the deceased and their resting places during the premodern and modern period. The case studies introduce readers to varied views on “otherness” that are visible in burial customs, memorialization, and research history. In many cases, the unusual and atypical features become less dramatic with thorough contextualization, and instead of curiosities, they can be seen as part of the normal and nuanced mortuary culture (c.f., Aspöck 2008; Murphy 2008; Betsinger et al. 2020; Moilanen 2021).

The individual chapters of this volume are grouped according to a few common themes. These include how memorials, graveyards, and epi-

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demics are viewed from the concepts of inequality, disease, and sudden death; different reasons for atypical burial places; generational memories and the folklore of unusual death; and unusual causes of death. All the chapters discuss two or more of these themes. The Afterword, written by Milton Núñez, provides further examples from Scandinavian archaeological material and research.

*Memorials, Graveyards, Epidemics: Inequality,  
Disease, and Sudden Death*

Times of fatal tragedies or epidemic diseases often evoke distinct funeral and memorial practices. This is especially relevant today. While writing this introduction the world has passed the milestone of twenty million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus disease, COVID-19. Lockdowns and physical distancing have prevented people from participating in the funerals of their loved ones. Due to high death rates, regional cemeteries have become full and the deceased have been buried outside their hometowns. To prevent the spread of the disease, the dead have been buried in their hospital clothes and no proper commemoration with relatives has been possible. This has raised feelings of anxiety and sadness towards the prevailing situation. In Bergamo, Italy, one of the places hit hardest during the early stages of the pandemic, the *Guardian* (19 March 2020) described the struggles that the large province faced when thousands of people suddenly died of the virus. Coffins awaiting burial were said to be lined up in churches and those who died at home were kept in sealed-off rooms for days before the actual funeral. Thus, the need to bury the dead quickly prevailed; for instance, on Hart Island in New York City, unidentified individuals were laid in temporary mass graves. This historical potter's field was established in the mid-1800s and has been used during numerous other epidemics, such as the Spanish Flu (*New Yorker*, 10 April 2020).

In an historical sense, people's reactions and burial practices have been similar throughout the centuries, and deviations from normal burial customs have resulted from the spread of scary epidemics. The uncontrollably rising mortality rates that fatal epidemics can cause have forced societies to replace their normal funerary customs in order to mitigate the effects of rapidly mounting body counts. It is common for specific graveyards to be established for victims of the epidemic. These themes are dealt both in Sanna Lipkin's and Titta Kallio-Seppä's and Tiina Väre's contributions (Chapters 1 and 3). Even though the disease itself does not care who becomes sick, we are provoked by inequality based on social reasons. In the past, this led to the spread of diseases being blamed on certain groups of people, such as the Irish in Buffalo in 1832 (Goldman 1983: 49). Both

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the lower status and difficulty of identifying the dead could affect the ways the dead were commemorated, and if the removal of these graveyards later became concurrent, the human remains could be handled disrespectfully.

The notoriety of the plague-causing bacteria, *Yersinia pestis*, is unparalleled. The plague has not disappeared as a disease and outbreaks occur regularly in parts of South and North America, Siberia, South Asia, and Africa (CDC 2018; Gage and Kosoy 2005; Raoult et al. 2013). In the past, case mortality rates of up to 90 percent could be observed, but since the 1940s, *Y. pestis* infections have been curable with antibiotics (Smadel et al. 1952; Butler 2014). Even today, despite the advances of modern medical science, such infections can be fatal in as many as half of cases (Spickler 2013; Butler 2014).

Another disease that could cause past societies to collapse into chaos was cholera, which could quickly kill half of those infected. For example, in connection to the earthquake of 2010 in Haiti, case mortality rates of 15–25 percent were recorded, while proper medical care could reduce mortality to as low as 2 percent (Fisman and Laupland 2011). Throughout history, the spread of cholera has been blamed on causes such as spoiled rice, miasmas, chemical or organic cholera poison circulating in the air or water, and even invisible insects (Vuorinen 2002: 120–25; Fisman and Laupland 2011). Theories concerning the causes of diseases in the past bear little resemblance to current theories. Instead of being able to categorize diseases according to their true etiology, physicians in the past could describe only the symptoms to classify them. The complete ecologies of the pathogens causing plague as well as cholera were discovered only in the nineteenth century (Howard-Jones 1974; Vuorinen 2002: 120–25, 110–13; Kallioinen 2009: 171). Kallio-Seppä and Väre (Chapter 3) identify, via several Finnish examples, a theory of infectious disease transmission based on the effect of miasmas and how that theory affected the official instructions to control the spread of the diseases. Many severe infectious diseases were then ordinary to contemporary people. However, the mental imprint that these diseases left on social memory must have been strong. Both the plague and cholera required societies to reassess many of their normal functions, such as burial practices.

Even though the pandemics comparable to these killers seem to be a concern of the past, various outbreaks are possible even today. This, as well as the havoc that such situations wreak, is being clearly shown today with the rapid emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by a coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) of zoonotic origin, which was transmitted to humans. The current pandemic is not a one-off incident. Even though epidemics have been successfully controlled during the past century by the development good hygiene practices, sufficient immunization coverage, and effective antibiotics, diseases are likely to return unless careful global



attention is paid to the proper medication protocols and vaccine education. During the past few decades, epidemiologists have given repeated warnings about the rise of new, dangerous, far-reaching epidemics that may reach pandemic proportions (e.g., de Jong et al. 1997; Ferguson et al. 2006; Fan et al. 2019). After more than a hundred years of significant breakthroughs in the fields of modern medicine, we are obliged to listen and act based upon the quantities of worrisome predictions published in scientific journals throughout the previous decades.

Graveyards and memorials are important for the living. A tombstone serves as a message for posterity and a reminder for the bereaved (Casey 2000: 226–27, 274). Remembering takes place through activity (Soja 1989: 120, 129). “Being with the dead” (Ruin 2019) is a central human need and the absence of religious belief does not change that. A sense of community with the living and the dead are essential in a culture of death. As demonstrated by Ilona Kemppainen (Chapter 4), although atheists do not believe in a literal afterlife, a sense of connection between generations and individuals is necessary. Until 2007, Finnish secular cemeteries were private ventures of particular freethinkers’ associations; people were not only buried there, and the local community maintained the cemetery. During the early twentieth century, secular burials were often also power displays of the worker’s movement.

Pierre Nora’s (1989) term “realms of memory” refers to the role that spaces have in constructing social identity and bonding communities. Spaces are given meaning through social action in them (Halbwachs [1925] 1992, 1980). A place of remembrance is created through and by traditions and ceremonies, while building a collective memory (Rowlands and Tilley 2006: 502). In the US in the nineteenth century, commemoration was performed through Sunday walks at the burial grounds (Baugher and Veit 2014: 133–34), which made the memorials significant. Lipkin (Chapter 1) considers the commemoration of certain Buffalonian middle- and high-rank children with unusual grave markers that exhibit both their innocence as children and their social status. Commemoration according to the status of the deceased was important, and is usually manifested by burial location, memorial, coffin, and funerary attire. Even though a few Russian nobles, including the members of tsar’s family were murdered using poisons, as verified by Tatiana Dmitrievna Panova et al. (Chapter 9), they were buried according to their status in stone coffins in the Ascension Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin. According to neutron activation analysis, Tsarina Anastasia wore a headdress made of silk thread wrapped with thin silver strips gilded with gold.

Whereas high status can lead to an unusual burial, the same may apply to people of low status. Lipkin (Chapter 1) reviews how the social status of the deceased in nineteenth-century Buffalo affected the treatment of hu-

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man remains during massive removals of city's abandoned burial grounds. Whereas the remains and memorials of the higher classes were relocated to new cemeteries, many pauper burials were left behind to be found during future inspection work or were buried in less favorable places. Similar segregation was put in place by the winning Whites (mainly the business owners and farmers) during the Finnish National War in 1917 when, as Kemppainen (Chapter 4) states, the nonreligious burials of the Reds (the working class) were both carried out and desecrated by the Whites' shaming descriptions of "dog's cemeteries." These mass burials were made outside of the Lutheran cemeteries.

In addition to unusual memorialization, Lipkin, Kallio-Seppä and Väre, as well as Harold Mytum (Chapters 1, 2, and 3), consider forgetting as a cultural and social phenomenon (Connerton 2008, 1989). For example, after the completion of a significant archaeological excavation project, city officials are considering an acceptable way to memorialize the once forgotten remains unearthed at the former site of the Erie County Poorhouse. Restoring the dignity and memory of the lives that were forgotten is important for the local communities. In Buffalo, the cemeteries have not purposefully been forgotten, whereas the epidemic cemeteries in Finland were forgotten and erased from the visible scenery (Kallio-Seppä and Väre, Chapter 3). Additionally, remembering can prevent a recurrence of tragic events, as described both by Mytum and Sarah Hoffman (Chapters 2 and 7), but it can also contribute to recovery from the crisis, ergo dealing with losses seeks to achieve community balance, and can also prevent recovery from a crisis. However, maintaining remembrance requires activity, either in maintaining signs or in keeping the activities associated with it alive (Rowlands and Tilley 2006: 512). It is either prescriptive forgetting, which allows social healing and a continuity in life, or it can be humiliated silence, which does not provide justice for the tragedies that form certain types of commemoration traditions and sense of communal identities. Hoffman (Chapter 7) points to the importance of the landscape as the enabler of the preservation of the folkloric memories of the unexpected deaths of the last priest and thirteen parishioners the church of Saint Nicholas on the island of Haffjarðarey in western Iceland. These individuals drowned on their way from the island where the church was located back to mainland on Christmas Eve in 1563, which eventually led to an abandonment of the church and the cemetery. Mytum (Chapter 2) examines commemoration of deaths from the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occupational accidents in the context of the far greater incidence of communal and institutional forgetting. Commemoration can take place at the burial location, the place of the accident, an appropriate community location, or on portable material culture; sometimes combinations of locales were used. In the British and Irish examples that Mytum

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provides, the deaths of mariners at sea and those caused by industrial accidents were often commemorated in different ways. Some maritime deaths were considered tragic and attracted a communal fund to erect a memorial, while others did not. The same process of forgetting was also the norm for terrestrial occupational losses. The danger of forgetting was that lessons were not learned and that history could indeed repeat itself. This was seen in the maritime, mining, and construction industries.

### *Peculiar Burial Places, Memories, and Folklore of Unusual Death*

Graves and the memorials of death tell of the deceased as well as of the buriers, the social status of the deceased, and the structure of the community. There are many determinants—circumstances being one—of ceremonies, practices, and monuments. But, how should an unknown deceased who is far from his home church and family be buried? And how should tragic deaths be remembered? Living arrangements, unusual events or tragedies, and even epidemics may lead to peculiar burial places. Kristina Jonsson (Chapter 5) deals with deaths, burials, and commemoration of Carolean soldiers who perished during the retreat from Norway to Sweden during the Great Northern War (1700–21). In December 1718, around 3,700 soldiers died due to bad weather conditions, hunger, and illness during a retreat to Jämtland crossing the mountainous border region. Approximately one-third of the soldiers of the “Carolean death-march” were buried close to the battlefields and retreat routes. King Karl XI’s “Church Law and Order” from 1686 would have recommended the right to be buried in a churchyard with proper ceremonies, but at the time of crisis this was bypassed. Only a limited number of the dead soldiers were granted a proper Christian churchyard burial.

In Finland, convenience and lack of proper routes to transport the dead to be buried in the churchyard during summers created a need to establish temporary burial grounds on islands. Tiina Väre and Juha Ruohonen (Chapter 6) review eighteenth- to nineteenth-century eastern and northern Finnish temporary island burials sites where people living in the hinterlands were buried during summers. Only when there was enough snow to ride a sledge could the dead bodies be transported to parish churches, which were often several dozen kilometers away. These temporary burials were reused over time.

In the past, islands were important both in terms of practicality and religious liminality. As Hoffman shows (Chapter 7), in medieval and post-medieval Iceland the islands reached by tidal flats were not isolated places but important economic and community centers that were easily reached by all members of the community. Simultaneously, due to their liminal and social nature, they were selected to be sacred places where

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churches and cemeteries were established. Contrary to the Icelandic example, the Finnish “Death Islands” (described by Väre and Ruohonen) were isolated and the dead were buried there because of their liminal nature. Death itself is often considered a liminal space between life and afterlife and this space and the decomposing cadaver exposed threat to the living. It was considered important to escort the dead through this dangerous liminal space, which was done through ritual and under social control. The rituals of the liminal space, in this case the burials at isolated islands, gave control over this stage and provided a means of coping with fear of haunting bodies (Hertz [1907] 1960: 36–37, 83; Turner 1992; Eilola and Einonen 2009: 198–99; Lipkin 2020). The possibility of haunting was highly related to the peculiarity of the death or the unusual burial.

The connection between the smell of the rotting corpses (miasmas) and the spread of epidemic disease also caused great fear. At that time, the traditional funerary practices and socially valued final resting place represented a person’s status in society and as a good parishioner (e.g., Pihlman 1989; Watts 1997: 18). Epidemics such as the plague typically resulted in sudden and “bad” death that left no time to prepare for the afterlife in the form of correct religious rites (McNeill 2004: 127, 178–80). The threat of being denied a proper burial must have added to the fear of epidemic diseases.

In traditional folk belief, deviations may have caused more stress, because of the belief that the dead needed proper handling to prevent them from returning and haunting the living. As Annemari Tranberg (Chapter 8) concludes, the power of death (*Väki*) was ferocious and not only remained in dead body but was also embedded in the items put in the coffin. Both body parts and woodchips inside the coffins were contaminated with *Väki* and, as such, were powerful mediators in magic of both healing and mischief purposes. Sometimes it was important to soothe the power of death and the dead bodies lying under church floors, and this was done by dropping coins below floors (Lipkin 2020). The brooms and wooden dolls placed below floors may have been left behind as a result of healing magic being performed.

Fear of death and peculiar death often led to folkloric stories about the event, such as the drowning of parishioners in Iceland (Chapter 7) or ghost stories related to the Carolean death march (Chapter 5). These communal memories may even remain vivid centuries later and lead to places being named after their use generation after generation, as the “death islands” were in Finland (Chapter 6). Additionally, some burial sites used during epidemics have been remembered and made a visible part of the local history and social memory (Chapters 1 and 3).

## *Unusual Cause of Death*

Burial practices sometimes appear to indicate that the dead individual had received a burial according to their social standing and, as such, does not expose peculiarities. Only detailed research of human remains reveals that the actual cause of death may be peculiar. In Sweden and Finland, autopsies were performed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to identify suspected suicide or crime victims. According to folkloristic traditions, the social deviance of murder and suicide victims has been emphasized. It is commonly thought that these individuals could not be buried in the same manner as ordinary people, and that they were feared to be touched (Eilola and Einonen 2009). However, examining Finnish case studies, Ulla Moilanen et al. (Chapter 10) demonstrate that despite folkloristic traditions, the actual archaeological evidence of autopsied human remains indicates that the individual's socioeconomic status during life defined how they were buried. The treatment of autopsied individuals also reveals care and compassion which are not often associated with atypical cases.

The neutron activation analysis by Panova et al. (Chapter 9) revealed mercury and arsenic poisonings of the members of the tsarist family and another noble man buried in the Kremlin in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In 1560, the first wife of Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich the Terrible—the first Russian Tsarina Anastasia Romanovna—was poisoned with mercury. Increased mercury content was also recovered in the bone remains of the son of Ivan the Terrible, Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich (died in 1581), and Knyaz Mikhail Vasilievich Skopin-Shuysky (died in 1610). The study of Tsarina Anastasia's burial offers new facts about her life (Panova 2018: 279–91). Two variants of the causes of the death are presented in historical literature: she either died from poisoning (Birkin 2002: 13–15) or of exhaustion due to frequent childbirth. The authors suggest that the question of the cause of death of the young first wife of Ivan the Terrible is now resolved.

As this Russian material and other chapters show, the official memory may often be only a part of the story, or even an incorrect one. Archaeology and new multidisciplinary research techniques and methods can reveal forgotten and hidden stories.

This book seeks to give a voice to international research cases and subjects that are often diminished to atypical, deviant, or negative interpretations. We seek to demonstrate that when taking a closer look at unusual mortuary culture we can bring forgotten human destinies into focus and widen our perspective on the historical ways to handle and commemorate the dead.

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Unusual Death and Memorialization

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