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Grave Encounters

Ontological aspects of post-burial interaction in the Late Iron Age of central eastern Sweden

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From being largely a marginal issue, literature on post-burial disturbance in the past has grown rapidly the last decades – especially in Late Iron Age research (e.g. Williams 1998; Gansum 2004; Pedersen 2006; Artelius 2010; Artelius & Lindqvist 2007; Olsson 2007; Thäte 2007; Wickholm 2008; Lindqvist 2010; Hållans Stenholm 2012; Lund 2013; Gardela & Kajkowski 2015; Fahlander 2016; Klevnäs 2016). In Sweden, and Scandinavia in general, re-openings and post-burial actions are found in all prehistoric periods but increase significantly during the Late Iron Age (c. 8th to 11th centuries AD). In a recent survey, Thäte (2007:166, see also Pedersen 2006:348) calculates a rate of sites containing reuse to be 12% in Norway, 23% in Denmark (including parts of North Germany), and 20% in Scania of southern Sweden. For central eastern Sweden, a recent estimation is c. 20% which also includes superimpositions of older graves (Hållans Stenholm 2012:10ff, 131). Even though these disturbances do not represent a uniform phenomenon, post-burial interaction seem to be an integrated part of Late Iron Age burial practices of southern Scandinavia

The targets are generally older graves of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (Lindqvist 2010; Fahlander 2016). The reasons for post-burial interventions are many, ranging from grave robbery and attempts to amend a failed burial ritual, to spectacles to commemorate a person's

reputation and negating memory and history (Wickholm 2008; Price 2010; Fahlander 2010; Aspöck 2011:299; Klevnäs 2015:196-99). A particularly popular theme is the idea that old graves were strategically employed to negotiate ideology. For instance, to bury the dead in relation to old dead, or to superimpose an old grave with a new one, is argued to constitute ways among the living to claim genealogy in order to legitimize status or rights to territories (Zachrisson 1994, 2017; see also Andersson 1997; Williams 1998). In Scandinavian Late Iron Age research, such social models have become very influential – suffice to mention Hållans Stenholm's (2012, 43) recent survey of Scandinavian research in Iron Age post-burial practices, in which three main themes are distinguished: the past and the ancestors as a legitimizing principle, the mound as a representation of the past and ancestors, and reuse of mound as a ritualized practice in order to legitimize ownership and status.

A problem with such models is that burials are reduced to mere representations of status, genealogies, families and generalized ancestors. What seems to be neglected is that burials primarily are about the disposing of the dead. Unlike other types of material manifestations of power, graves are only rarely constructed before someone dies. In this sense, graves are rather poor gambling pieces in social negotiations other than in very special cases. Another critical

argument concerns the fact that the majority of the reuse and intrusions are performed on rather small and inconspicuous stone settings, which constitute a rather modest basis for spectacles of power. Moreover, the reused features are usually quite old such as Bronze Age mounds (Lindqvist 2010) and more than 500-year-old stone settings (Fahlander 2016:151; see Hållans Stenholm 2012). The majority of post-burial actions were thus probably not performed on known graves of particular individuals. It has been argued that also unknown graves can represent “general ancestors” and constitute links to a distant past. However, there is cause for caution here. The

western contemporary view of the past that emphasize heritage and roots can actually be quite foreign for many peoples. Contemporary small-scale societies comprise many different ways of relating to the past (Lucas 2005, 62f). Some view past and present in a similar way as day and night, others are argued to more or less live in an ongoing present, and some even seek to erase time (see also Gell 1992: chapter 10; Gosden & Lock 1998). Moreover, the strong emphasis on lineage in the Icelandic sagas are not necessarily representative for the whole of Late Iron Age Scandinavia. It is rather a typical feature of migrating groups that lack local roots in their

Figure 1. Location of Broby Bro in central eastern Sweden (map by author).

new homeland (see Hastrup 1985:74). This cast some doubts over the emphasis on genealogies and ancestors in Iron Age archaeology and stress the importance to explore other ways of approaching post-burial actions in the past.

One interesting premise is to investigate ontological aspects of how old graves and their content may have engaged people in the Late Iron Age and what responses they may have provoked. In this text, I will elaborate on these matters based on a recently excavated Iron Age burial ground in Broby Bro, situated in the county of Uppland, c. 20km north of Stockholm in east central Sweden (figure 1). In Broby Bro, several ordinary small stone settings from the Early Iron Age have been subjected to quite substantial modifications during the Late Iron Age. The post-burial interaction display an ambiguous relation to the old dead. On the one hand, a relation is established by rebuilding, but on the other, there is little or no reverence for the original cremated remains. The post-burial actions in Broby Bro show many similarities with other contemporary sites, but the ways in which they are executed fit the general explanatory models poorly. In this sense, Broby Bro is a suitable case-study for exploring alternative ways of understanding interactions with older graves during the Late Iron Age.

*Post-burial interaction at Broby Bro,
AD 900-1200*

The Broby Bro area comprises at least five burial grounds from the pre-Roman Iron Age to the early Christian period (c. 11th century AD). Two of them, RAÄ 36 and RAÄ 620, have recently been subjected to excavation which revealed a number of interesting post-burial interactions. RAÄ 36 is situated on a slightly elevated impediment and consists of c. 50 stone settings from mainly the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age, a stone cairn, one rectangular and two round mounds from the 10th century, as well as at least two inhumations from the 11th century. The site was established during the Early Iron Age, abandoned in the Roman Iron Age, and was again put to use after

a period of c. 500 years during the 10th and 11th centuries. RAÄ 620 is situated in slightly sloping cropland c. 35m south-west of RAÄ 36 and comprise of 19 inhumations from the 11th century (Andersson 2011). The inhumations are buried in wooden coffins in 60–80 cm deep, stone-filled pits. The way the burials are arranged in rows suggests that they once had some kind of superstructure that now is lost due to later agriculture. This hypothesis is supported by 18th-century maps that picture mounds in the area, but also by the graves A7000 and A16500, which have their superstructures intact (a cairn with a round kerb).

The exact horizontal stratigraphy and development of the last phase of burials at RAÄ 36 and RAÄ 620 are not evident. The finds of cremated bones in the plough-soil at RAÄ 620 and the position of A16500, at the very brink of the impediment suggests that there is continuity between the two groups of inhumations. Such a scenario also resonates well with similar contemporary sites such as Valsta, Lilla Ullevi, Vittene or Bogla (e.g. Andersson 1997; Artelius & Lindqvist 2007; Artelius 2010; Hed Jakobsson & Lindblom 2011). Because the post-burial practices comprise both secondary added cremations and inhumations it suggests a continuity from when the RAÄ 36 was put to use again in the 10th century. The oldest inhumations would thus be those on RAÄ 36 which over time expanded west towards RAÄ 620 (figure 2). It is interesting to note that from a visual point of view, the superstructures of the old Early Iron Age cremations and the much later inhumations probably blended quite seamless together.

The earliest example of interaction with the older graves at Broby bro is a rectangular stone setting containing an urn cremation from the 10th century (A150000), which was placed slightly asymmetrically on top of a round stone setting from the Early Iron Age (figure 3). This is the only example at Broby Bro of a cremation burial superimposing another cremation. The large stone kerb lining the superimposing grave is dug down into the southwestern part of the stone packing of the earlier grave, but otherwise

Figure 2: Layout of RAÄ 36 and 620 in Broby Bro and the mentioned features. Black ovals are inhumation burials and grey areas are modern clearing cairns. The dotted line outline the extent of the burials of RAÄ 36 (modified after Andersson 2011:57 and Andersson & Fahlander ms).

left it and the layer of cremated bone intact. The tilted position of the new grave leaving a part of the original burial visible is a trait that A150000 has in common with the other cases of added burials at Broby Bro.

An expression of a quite different relation towards the earlier dead is found five metres west of A150000. The feature A8000 is a much larger (13x8m) rectangular construction that superimposes a round stone setting dated to the pre-Roman Iron Age (c. 407-209 BC, 2s). This case involves a much more substantial interference. The new construction covers the old grave completely and in its centre a large pit was dug into the stone packing, removing most of the cremated bones (only a few single fragments

were found in the filling in and around the pit). In its place were two large stone slabs positioned. One of them was halfway buried down in the old grave as to provide a flat surface on its top. The second block was placed in upright position next to the buried one (figure 4). In conjunction to this, a rectangular kerb of stones was also erected and the interior filled with soil that created a concave mound covering all but the tip of the second stone slab. The pointed slab may thus have functioned as a marker indicating the centre of the concealed stone setting. It has not been possible to precisely date the time when the old burial was rebuilt. An indication is, however, found in another rebuilt grave in the area. A7000 was also originally a round stone setting from the

Figure 3: A round Early Iron Age stone setting with an undisturbed pit with cremated bone (light grey) superimposed by a Late Iron Age rectangular structure containing a cremation urn (dark grey).

first century AD that has been manipulated in a similar manner. The core of the stone setting had been dug out, removing all traces of the original burial, and a large slab with a flat surface was put in its centre (figure 5). Also, this older grave was expanded with a larger kerb (although retaining the original round shape) and built up with soil to a mound. The interference and manipulations could in this case be stratigraphically related to an east-west oriented 11th-century inhumation burial containing an elderly (c. 50–60 y. old) woman placed in the south-eastern half of the mound.

Figure 4 Left: The layout of the rebuilt stone setting A8000. In the middle is the original stone setting into which centre two large boulders have been dug down. A rectangular kerb is also added to the original round grave and filled up with soil. Right: the inserted stone slabs in the centre of the grave (after Andersson & Fahlander ms).

Figur 5 Left: The layout of the rebuilt stone setting A7000. The original stone cairn (black) has been rearranged to form an additional cairn (grey) over the inhumation burial in the south-eastern half of the construction. Right: The large flat stone slab placed in the centre of the original stone setting (modified after Andersson & Fahlander ms).

The many similarities in *modi operandi* between A7000 and A8000 suggest that both interventions are contemporary (11th century AD). It is important to note that the labour invested in the reuse of these cases is quite extensive. The addition of the large and flat stone slabs in the centre of the original graves fill no obvious purpose, but taking the effort into account they must have been considered important. Because the substantial added kerb of A7000 is not centred on the added inhumation, but demarcate the shape of the original stone setting, it is not simply a matter of reusing the stones of the old grave. Thus, also in this case, the old grave was still the main focus of the new construction although the original remains of the central cremation were removed.

In addition to these large-scale interferences, also traces of less substantial and less visible post-burial actions are present at Broby Bro. One example is a flat and inconspicuous Early Iron Age stone setting, which was reused for an 11th-century inhumation burial (A16000). Also in this case, the centre of the stone setting was removed but without adding stone slabs or kerb

(figure 6). The inhumation was, as in A150000 and A7000, situated in the south-eastern half of the round stone setting and contained the unburned remains of a young 14 – 20-year-old individual. In this case, however, the pit was dug through a deposit of cremated bone, leaving just a crescent of the originally circular cremation layer. There is, however, no way to determine if the thin layer of cremated bones were recognized or not when digging the pit for the coffin, but in either case, also this reuse show a similar disregard for the cremated remains as the other Christian post-burial interactions. A few metres east of A16000 are also two additional small round stone settings that are not yet excavated. It is, however, possible to visually establish that the stones of both these constructions have been rearranged, leaving a void in their respective centre. One of them has an east-west oriented rectangular extension in the southern half that resembles the other stone filled inhumation pits in size and form (figure 2). The following excavated set of graves on the eastern slope of the impediment, however, shows no signs of later interferences.

Partial connections: relating and reluctance

There are three aspects of the post-burial interactions at Broby Bro that particularly stand out. To begin with, all the affected graves are quite ordinary and inconspicuous. They do not occupy any particular prominent spot on the impediment that could explain why they were chosen. In fact, there is little in their original shape, size or morphology that may have initiated such extensive post-burial interactions. The second noticeable aspect is the ambiguous character of the reuse. It is not possible to determine the nature of a “pagan” attitude to the previously dead from the single case of the superimposed cremation (A150000). In this case, the original burial was left untouched while the added cremation was placed within a new rectangular construction. The inhumations, however, all display an indifferent relation to the original burial. While a relation to an old grave was obviously sought after, there seems to have been less regard for the original cremations. In A7000 and A8000, the original cremations were removed, stones were rearranged, large stone slabs were dug down, and substantial new kerbs were added. A relation to the old monuments was obviously sought after, but the actions show no apparent traces of inclusion or care for the original cremated remains – on the contrary – the eradication of the original cremations rather point in an opposite direction.

The third aspect that deserves closer attention is the substantial gap in time (c. 1000 years) between the old graves and the later reuse. To put things in perspective, the intrusions in Early Iron Age graves at Broby Bro were made in graves that at the time were older than the added inhumation burials are in relation to us today. It should also be noted that there are more recent graves in the area from Vendel/Viking Ages on the hillocks nearby, but these seem to have been left untouched. People in the 10th and 11th centuries in Broby Bro evidently preferred to reuse some of the oldest graves in the area when they began to inhumate their dead in a Christian fashion. The dead in these graves are

Figure 6 The layout of the inhumation burial in an older stone setting, A16000. The grey areas indicate the remaining layer of cremated bone (modified after Andersson & Fahlander ms).

not likely to have been known after so long time has passed, especially considering that the area was abandoned for a couple of centuries before the 10th century. It is hence tempting to suggest that it was precisely the unknown status of the graves on RAÄ36 that made them accessible and suitable for reuse.

A matter of faith? Christian relations to the pagan pasts

The inhumations at Broby Bro are all assumed to be Christian. They are east-west orientated inhumation burials in which the dead are placed on their backs with the head in the west (with one exception of a child). The interments only include small personal items such as coins and knives, but not combs, animals or food. The many contemporary rune stones in the local area also clearly state a belief in the Christian faith (Andersson 1999, 4f). In the 10th and 11th centuries, during the period of Christianisation, interferences with older heathen graves are often associated with the change of faith. These

post-burial actions are hence understood in terms of hostility towards the pre-Christian dead, religious insecurity, a lack of proper knowledge of the Christian doxa, or as a token of religious dualism or syncretism (Gräslund 2001; Pedersen 2006:351; Artelius 2010:215; Hed Jakobsson & Lindblom 2011:89; Lund 2013:51f; Runer & Sillén 2014:33; Tesh 2015). In a few cases, heathen ancestors are argued to have been 'rescued' by reburying them in a Christian manner (Andersen 1995; Staecker 2001). There are, however, some discrepancies at Broby Bro that do not exactly conform to Christian practice. One example is the continued use of the mound as a superstructure for the inhumations. Another example concerns two instances where a fire has been lit on a coffin lid (graves A554 and A591). In the first case, a cow's tooth was also placed on top of the coffin (Andersson 2011:14f, 23). Similar examples of non-Christian elements are found in other sites with presumably Christian inhumations (e.g. Wikström 2010:103; Runer & Sillén 2014:26; Holback 2016; see also Holloway 2008). Such actions probably were meaningful and/or rational for one or several individuals that performed them, but need not be related to issues of syncretism or religious ambiguity. For instance, if we look at the early Christian period in continental Europe that are better bestowed with literary sources, there is plenty evidence for a continued use of Roman funerary meals, libations, ritual fires, the deposition of snails, and animal sacrifices at Christian tombs well into Carolingian times (Effros 2002:143, 186). None of this was sanctioned by the Christian clergy, but in this case, we know that both the dead and their families have been Christian believers for many generations. Effros (2002:143) suggests that these odd practices probably have more to do with mourning, *Parentalia* celebrations, or family traditions than with religion and eschatology.

The reuse of pagan graves needs thus not to concern matters of deeper religious consideration and meaning. For example, when stone cists became popular for Christian burials in Merovingian Europe (5th–6th c.), it was not

uncommon to reuse old Roman pagan stone sarcophagus for Christian burials. If the original were decorated with inappropriate imagery, this was simply cut away (Effros 2002:67, 104f). The church did not sanction the reuse and the aim is believed to be mainly pragmatic; it is easier and cheaper to reuse and modify an old sarcophagus than to make a new one. There is no indication that this reuse was related to an emerging interest in the past or to establish relations with fictional or real ancestors. There is, of course, a substantial difference in reusing and moving a stone cist for new burials and to reuse small stone settings for new burials. The point here is, however, that not everything about a burial has to concern religion and eschatology and that reuse of ancient graves need not to be related to symbolism, ancestors or establishing relations with the past.

Thus, if the apparent ambivalence of the Late Iron Age inhumation burials is not due to religious syncretism or an expression for ambiguity and reluctance to abandon the old ways, how are we to understand the post-burial interactions in Broby Bro? Why some burials were manipulated and altered in these particular ways is a bit of a conundrum. The superimposition of the cremation burial A150000 indicates that the interest in the old graves begun before the practice of inhumation became the norm. This does not exclude the possibility that the actions were influenced by the change of faith, but it is apparently not the main factor. The social model emphasizing a strategic use of the past in terms of genealogy do neither fit the way in which the post-burial interferences has been executed at Broby Bro. The remains of the old dead were removed and the affected graves are far too old and inconspicuous to have been remembered. It seems apparent that the traditional models are insufficient to make sense of the substantial and ambiguous interferences. In fact, we seem to lack suitable concepts and terms to understand these practices among the recently Christianised. One way to make progress is to discuss the practices from an ontological point of view and to avoid categorize the archaeology

from contemporary dichotomized concepts such as Pagan-Christian, past-present, life-death etc.

Ontologies of death, burial and the materiality of the dead

In recent anthropology and archaeology, there is an emerging interest in so-called "ontological turn" in which people, things, and animals are perceived as relationally constituted rather than being discrete categorical entities (e.g. Alberti & Bray 2009; Watts 2013). A main tenant in this movement is to allow for other ways to experience the world that is not necessarily in accordance with western scientific categorization. In a similar sense, as advocated by actor-network theory and other symmetrical perspectives, it is argued that western binary categories, such as culture-nature, living-dead, or human-nonhuman may not be as strict in some ontologies (Fahlander 2016). Instead, it is suggested that the potential alterity of other societies needs to be taken seriously.

Holbraad (2010) argues that when ethnographers study small-scale societies, analytical concepts such as e.g. gender, religion, social structure tend to remain more or less static throughout the study, working mainly to categorize the assembled data. As an alternative, he suggests that we should approach the Other from an ontological point of view, allowing for alterity by focusing not so much on what we expect to find, but what there actually is to see. Such an ontological inquiry is not about the deconstruction of traditional concepts, but about reconstruction – an empirical perspective that is open for other ways of categorizing the world (Holbraad 2010; Holbraad & Pedersen 2017:5; see also Fahlander 2008). The "ontographical" approach can "open fertile spaces" and help making the apparently absurd or strange understandable (Salmond 2014:24). The focus on ontology thus allows us to examine alternative aspects of the post-burial actions at Broby bro beyond traditional preconceptions about death, faith, burial, and personhood.

One way of discussing post-burial actions is thus to elaborate on the different ways in which old burials and graves appeared in the Late Iron Age. From a modern Christian perspective, we traditionally view a grave as the resting place for a specific individual. This normally does not change as long as the grave is maintained. It could, however, be helpful to view the grave and the dead body in a less static manner and instead recognize how the grave becomes and how its relations change over time. After all, a grave is a dynamic feature. The decaying body is in a constant state of change, from corpse to bones to ultimately disappearance of any visual traces. Could this process in some way be related to ideas of personhood and the individual? Is there a boundary when a corpse no longer represents the buried person? Is there a point in time when it is not even considered a human being at all? In similar reasoning; is there a stage when a grave is no longer seen as a proper human burial (Kümmel 2005)? Perhaps such a transient perspective of becoming can be useful when discussing re-use and post-burial actions could help to understand some of the variability?

Howard Williams (1998:97) has suggested that the ancient human remains that occasionally were found by the Anglo-Saxon gravediggers may not necessarily have recognized the remains as dead individuals or ancestors, but could have spawned mythical and transcendental associations. He exemplifies how the poem *Beowulf* in the late 1st millennium portrays the past as a foreign, mythological past of an ancient race whose world was enmeshed in supernatural powers. As such, the *Beowulf* poem presents an example of how the early Christians may have viewed the ancient dead as traces from another (lost) world that not necessarily needs to be related to present social conditions. Furthermore, the early Christian texts, such as the poem *Beowulf* and *Liber Monstrorum*, frequently hint at a fluid ontology where the real and transcendental intersect (Orchard 2003; 2004). A similar ontology is also found in the early Christian Scandinavian texts such as the *Norröna corpus* and the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae*

pontificum. Suffice to mention the occurrence of shape-shifters, one-legged himantopods, cyclops and immaterial entities with a certain agency as supernatural beings (Fahlander 2014; Perabo 2017). It is, however, important not to read these texts in dichotomizing terms setting a pagan ontology against a Christian. They may not share same ideas, culture, practices, ideology or faith, but the fluid mythical ontology of the ancient texts is nevertheless as much part of the early Christian ontology as it is pagan. It is hence not far-fetched to suspect that the pre-Roman graves at Broby Bro may have evoked a wider set of associations among the early Christian community in the 10th century. The old graves were most probably recognized as graves, but the way in which they were encountered in the landscape raises the question how the pre-existing ancient graves and their content actually were comprehended.

If the old graves at RAÄ 36 were considered as something otherly, the post-burial interactions in these cases need not necessarily be directed towards dead ancestors, nor a deep past, but as different ways of relating to something indefinite. For example, the appearance of the old stone settings differs a lot from the soil-filled cairns of the Later Iron Age. The old ones are much more carefully laid out in flat symmetrical circles that often include a rounded stone as a grave marker in the centre. Today, we know that these particular graves are the oldest ones in the area, but to the early resettled Christians of the 10th and 11th centuries, these features were certainly of unknown date and origin. Considering the unknown status of these graves, they may easily have been imbued and associated with a range of properties and/or powers. It is important here to differentiate between the graves and the cremated remains. It seems apparent that the recently dead could benefit from being buried in close relation to these structures, but only after the cremated remains have been removed. Apparently, the graves were associated with benign aspects that encouraged reuse, while the cremated remains represented something unwanted or potentially dangerous. If the cremated bones not necessarily were associated with a dead

individual they may have constituted a special type of *materiality* imbued with powers and/or agency that demanded actions. As a matter of fact, there are indeed examples of human bones imbued with magic powers during the Late Iron Age (e.g. Stoklund *et al* 2004; see also Gilchrist 2008; Bill 2016). Whatever the cremated remains were thought to be, they were apparently unfit to be included in a Christian burial assemblage. This aversion might have been grounded in a fear of contamination or unwished effects if cremated remains and inhumed bodies were to be included in the same grave. To combine the remains of two individuals in the same construction can constitute a way of merging bodies together, creating a “duovidual”, a hybrid, or even a new entity (Fahlander 2013). The concept of merging entities is by no means a foreign concept in Late Iron Age mythology, suffice to mention the floating boundary between humans and animals (Price 2002; Hedeager 2010; 2011:81-96), the Cristian trinity, or the cremation as a means of unify animals, humans and artefacts by fire (Williams 2005; Fahlander 2014). Perhaps this was something that the new Christians wanted to avoid by removing the remains of the ancient dead from the reused graves? This would justify the ambivalent relation to the ancient dead and their graves at Broby Bro.

Summary

The establishment of a Christian burial ground during the 11th century AD in Broby Bro apparently begun with a newfound interest in the oldest and perhaps most “exotic” burials in the area. At least two Early Iron Age small stone settings have been significantly rebuilt before the dead became buried in traditional rows at RAÄ 620. What really stands out is the apparent lack of reverence for the cremated remains of the ancient dead, the vigorous character of the reuse, and the apparent structured action in placing the inhumation in the south-eastern part of the round burials as well as adding kerbstones. They post-burial interactions at Broby Bro thus constitute a challenge; we have no ready-made

models or analogies to understand such ambivalent relation to the ancient dead. In this text, it is argued that we need to take the issue of alterity seriously to avoid categorizing the post-burial practices into contemporary western dichotomizing concepts. Inspired from recent research within the “ontological turn” it is suggested that we need to rethink familiar concepts such as burial, grave, individual, death and mortal remains and explore other dimensions of the old burials as they may have appeared to the recently Christianized Late Iron Age community at Broby Bro. It seems apparent that the cremated remains had to be removed in order to reuse a grave for a Christian inhumation. The practice of burying large stone slabs in their place indicates that the cremation remains were considered problematic which demanded substantial efforts. It is likewise apparent that the original superstructure was important. It is telling that the new kerb of A7000 followed the form of the original stone setting and not the added inhumation burial. The graves were not simply reused, but rather rebuilt and partly disarmed.

Why a relation to the old grave rather than to the ancient dead was preferred is difficult to determine. The long periods of abandonment of RAÄ36 suggest that the groups of partly overgrown graves represented materialities that the Christian community probably had to relate to in some way or another. It is suggested here that these burials were not chosen because of their age, but because of their alterity. If the graves were only accidentally encountered and had little meaning for the gravediggers we would probably not have seen such substantial and structured rebuilding of the old burials. Instead, the old graves must have been apprehended as important materialities when the location of the new Christian burial ground was chosen. The cremated remains of the old dead were, however, apparently something that was assumed to be less benign and needed to be removed before the Christian corpses could be added. Hence the cremated remains are more likely to represent an unruly materiality imbued with potential dangerous powers, rather than as mortal remains

of dead individuals or ancestors. In sum, the post-burial interactions at Broby Bro illustrate the potential of approaching the Other from an ontological point of view, allowing for alterity by focusing not so much on what we expect to find, but what there actually is to see. The study also emphasises the fallacies in perceiving the past from the view of the present, instead of allowing every past to have their particular array of perspectives on possible pasts and futures to come.

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