

Chapter Title: What Actually is a 'Deviant Burial'? Comparing German-Language and Anglophone Research on 'Deviant Burials'

Chapter Author(s): Edeltraud Aspöck

Book Title: Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record

Book Editor(s): Eileen M. Murphy

Published by: Oxbow Books. (2008)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cd0ptg.7>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Oxbow Books is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*

2. What Actually is a ‘Deviant Burial’? Comparing German-Language and Anglophone Research on ‘Deviant Burials’

Edeltraud Aspöck

Abstract

‘Deviant burials’ are generally associated with bizarre practices like decapitations and strange body positions. Archaeologically ‘deviant burials’ are those that are different from the normative burial ritual of the respective period, region or cemetery. This paper will examine the research history of ‘deviant burials’ in the Anglophone and the German-language archaeological traditions. In both traditions the interpretation of ‘deviant burials’ started with the denial of the intentionality of these burials and then slowly moved to the insight in the 1960s and 1970s that ‘deviant burials’ are part of normal burial practices. By comparing the two research traditions we will see how the interpretation of ‘deviant burials’ has changed over time, in the context of two different archaeologies, finally arriving at two completely different approaches. This challenges the usefulness of the concept of ‘deviant burials’ as such.

Introduction

‘Deviant burials’ are first of all associated with bizarre practices like decapitations and strange body positions, bearing testimony to particularly unusual mortuary practices of the past, such as the ‘live burial’ at Sewerby, East Yorkshire (Figure 2.1). More objectively, the minimal definition of ‘deviant burials’ that most archaeologists would agree to is that they are burials different from the normative burial ritual of the respective period, region and/or cemetery. These differences may occur in body position or treatment, location or construction of the grave or types of grave goods.

The characteristics of German archaeology and the differences in archaeological practice between Germany and the Anglophone area have been outlined by Härke (1991; 1995; 2000). In the ‘culture-historical’ epoch of archaeology similarities between the two areas prevailed and the concept of an ‘archaeological culture’ can be traced back to the ideas of the German archaeologist Kossina (Härke 1991, 188). During the Nazi regime archaeol-

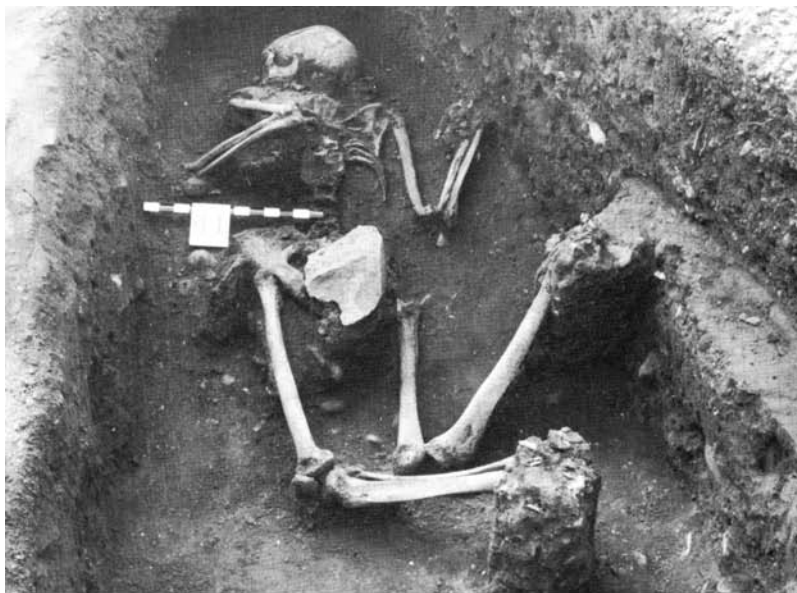


Figure 2.1. A so-called 'live burial' at the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Sewerby, East Yorkshire. The top image shows the grave during the excavation (Hirst 1985, plate 2b), while a reconstruction of the burial drawn by David A. Walsh is depicted at the bottom (Hirst 1985, frontispiece). Reproduced by permission of English Heritage.

ogy in Germany was utilised for political purposes, leading to a subsequent fear of over-interpretation and the desire to remove all ideology from archaeology after the Second World War (Härke 1991; 1995). Consequently, since 1945 German archaeology has been characterised by being mainly descriptive, with meticulous excavations and artefact studies connected with an almost complete absence of theoretical debate. This of course stands in sharp contrast to developments within the English-speaking world of archaeology. One exception to this has been in German burial archaeology of the Early Historic period, which in the 1970s had a lively debate on the social interpretation of burials, showing many parallels to the contemporary Anglo-American debate. Unfortunately there was no communication between the two traditions at this time (Härke 1991, 195–7; 2000).

This paper compares European German-language studies of 'deviant burials' with how 'deviant burials' have been studied in Anglophone archaeology. The review of German-language research is based on studies from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Switzerland, but the bulk of the studies come from Germany.

German-language Research on 'Deviant Burial' Rites

The term *Sonderbestattung* is the German-language equivalent to the English term 'deviant burial'. *Bestattung* being the German word for *burial*, the prefix *sonder-* means something *special* or *exceptional*. Most importantly, in contrast to the English term 'deviant burial', *Sonderbestattung* is a neutral term, and has neither a positive nor a negative connotation. 'Deviant burials' and *Sonderbestattung* are used to describe the same phenomenon.

Early Discussions

One of the main concerns of early studies of the '*Bestattung in Bauchlage und verwandte Bräuche*' ('face-down burials and related customs', Wilke 1933) was to prove that they were intentional practices. This was probably first stated in a 1931 paper, emphasising that unusual burials form a specific group of burials, and were not the result of accidents, soil pressure or carelessness (Wilke 1931). Early papers from the 1920s and 1930s were followed by a research gap until the 1960s, when the study of unusual burials together with the same approaches and interests of the earlier studies was taken up again. First there was an interest in the temporal and spatial distribution of unusual burials, and secondly in the beliefs surrounding them. Examples of unusual burials from all over the world and across all periods were listed (Wilke 1933; Kyll 1964), which led to the notion of a 'continuity' of these burial rituals from the Palaeolithic period until the middle of the twentieth century AD (Wilke 1933; Kyll 1964). Based on this assumption of 'continuity', Kyll (1964, 175) suggested that unusual burials were manifestations of latent archaic beliefs, forming very powerful rituals which 'emerged' at certain occasions when the living felt endangered. Furthermore it was suggested that these rituals might have been practiced secretly, because they were different from the prevailing belief systems of the leading social groups (Salin 1952, 216; Kyll 1964, 175). Interpretations were based on social anthropological research. The practice of turning the corpse face-down was viewed in connection with the animistic belief that the soul

leaves the body through the mouth, either as an attempt to prevent the soul from leaving the body, or from returning to it (Wilke 1933, 460; Kyll 1964, 178). Another explanation was that turning the body on the face for burial was meant to protect the living from the 'evil eye' (Wilke 1933, 457; Kovrig 1963, 86–102).

The Concept of Sonderbestattungen

The term *Sonderbestattungen* was created in the field of palaeodemography. The physical anthropologist Schwidetzky (1965), asked why human remains from cemeteries are not always a representative sample of a living population. In an analysis of ethnographic reports she found evidence for different treatment at death that would influence population statistics: different places or manners of burial for certain age, sex and social groups would lead to a statistically significant absence of certain groups in demographic statistics. Children were the population group most frequently reported as being subject to special burial rites (Schwidetzky 1965, 233). The large amount of evidence for special disposal within societies, and the fact that it was seldom reported that everybody received the same funerary treatment, left her sceptical about the validity of population statistics based on prehistoric cemeteries (Schwidetzky 1965, 243–4).

Subsequently, the term *Sonderbestattung* was adopted in archaeology, but with a different meaning, that of exceptional burials (Pauli 1975). *Sonderbestattung* therefore means something completely different in the two disciplines: in palaeodemography it is used as an explanation for statistically missing, or in other words invisible burials, while in archaeology it is used to classify special – visible – burials (Wahl 1994).

For a long time, possibly the most influential research on *Sonderbestattungen* has been Pauli's (1975) study *Keltischer Volksglaube* ('Celtic folk belief'). Pauli analysed amulet finds and unusual burial rites in central European cemeteries from 600 to 200 BC. He found an increased presence of amulets, frequently accompanied with unusual body positions and body treatment in graves from the end of the sixth to the fourth centuries BC. This period, at the end of the Hallstatt and the beginning of the La Tène period, was a time of profound changes in religious, cultural and political spheres manifesting itself in a peak of imported goods from the Mediterranean, resettling of hilltop settlements and radically new artistic expressions (Pauli 1975, 207–13). Pauli suggested that the increased use of amulets has to be understood in this context, as along with these changes came an uncertainty about future developments and a stronger individual urge for protection (Pauli 1975, 199). He developed his general hypothesis that times of profound changes caused an increase in amulets in graves as well as an increase in unusual burial rituals (Pauli 1975, 185–90). Like the custom of *Sonderbestattungen*, the belief in the power and effectiveness of amulets was thought to be part of a folk belief rather than official religion (Pauli 1975, 212).

Both Pauli and Schwidetzky based their research on ethnographic, historic and folklore accounts. Pauli categorised two main groups who received different treatment at death. The first were those who died a *mors immatura* (children, in some occasions also unmarried women) and the second group were what he called the 'dangerous dead', comprising individuals who were already different during their lifetime (like shamans, witches, medicine

men), or whose circumstances of death were different. At the same time it became standard practice to write one chapter on *Sonderbestattungen* as part of each cemetery analysis. Within individual cemeteries, different types of abnormal burials were identified and interpreted, resulting in a wide range of explanations including magical associations, surviving elements of previous populations (Kovrig 1963), burial rites as a final punishment (Fettich 1965), 'deviant burials' as a kind of sacrifice or substitute for human sacrifice (Pauli and Glowatzki 1979; Tempelmann-Macynska 1989) and burials of social outcasts, low status individuals or disabled people (Pauli and Glowatzki 1979; Neugebauer 1992; Lauer mann 2003). These interpretations were sometimes supported by historical or folklore evidence, but also many of them were *ad hoc* arguments without any theoretical foundations. A tendency towards morbid interpretations can often be seen as well as a projection of a 'dark side of the past' into these burial rituals (e.g. Pauli and Glowatzki 1979, 147–50). Nevertheless, from the 1970s onwards, *Sonderbestattungen* have had an established place in German-language burial archaeology. Furthermore, the link between these unusual burials and the unique treatment of certain dead as reported in ethnographies and folklore sources has also been established.

The Fear of the Dead

A fixed theme in German-language archaeology of 'deviant burial' rites has been the 'fear of the dead'. From the earliest studies (e.g. Wilke 1931) onwards authors referred to the fear of certain dead, often not specified, but commonly the fear of *Wiedergänger* (dead people returning) to lie behind the special treatment of some dead. Burial practices, but also post-burial manipulations of the grave and body, were frequently interpreted as practical measures to prevent the dead from returning. They include: face down body position; tightly bound bodies; feet tightly bound (trammelled by chains); amputated limbs; dislocated or missing skulls; and stone covers (e.g. Ament 1992, 4).

The idea of the un-restful dead has been obviously influenced by folklore and a lot of arguments are explicitly based on them. Unsurprisingly, in eastern European Slavic countries, where vampire stories originated and are still part of folklore tales, this tradition is even stronger. The vampire is supposed to be more dangerous than the *Wiedergänger* because not only is it returning to the living in the night, but it is also said to drain their blood (Grenz 1967, 255). Many 'deviant burials' from the Early Medieval period to the twentieth century have been interpreted as the remains of supposed vampires and as anti-vampire practices in the Slavonic areas of Germany, Poland, Czechia and Slovakia (Grenz 1967; Warnke 1982; Hanuliak 1995; 1999). Hanuliak has found a climax of anti-vampire practices in ninth to twelfth century AD Slovakia. He has linked this increase with social changes, connected with the crisis at the end of the pre-Christian, 'heathen' period (Hanuliak 1995, 133–5). This dominance of fear in the interpretations of *Sonderbestattungen* has rightly received criticism, mainly because it cannot be applied to such a variety of phenomena, ranging from decapitations to unusual grave goods (Torbrügge 1979, 51–2; Meyer-Orlac 1997, 5–8). Also there is a lack of specification of what is feared – the corpse, death in general, assumed actions of the dead – something which has been criticised (Meyer-Orlac 1997, 5–8), but in most cases it is quite clear that what was meant was the fear of the dead returning.

In Search of a Definition of Sonderbestattung

In a diagram Meyer-Orlac (1997, 10) described how the life and circumstances of death of every dead person are 'evaluated', leading to the burial ritual appropriate for that particular individual (Figure 2.2). The outer circle stands for the evaluation of life, and the inner circle for the evaluation of death. The idea is that various lives and deaths were assigned an extremely positive or extremely negative evaluation, which consequently was expressed in a 'deviant burial' rite. The section of these extreme evaluations has been called *sacer*, expressing an often ambivalent meaning, something that is accursed and divine at the same time (Meyer-Orlac 1997, 2).

Meyer-Orlac's paper is part of a volume that has come out of a 1990 conference in Switzerland on *Sonderbestattungen* in Bronze Age Eastern Central Europe (Rittershofer 1997).

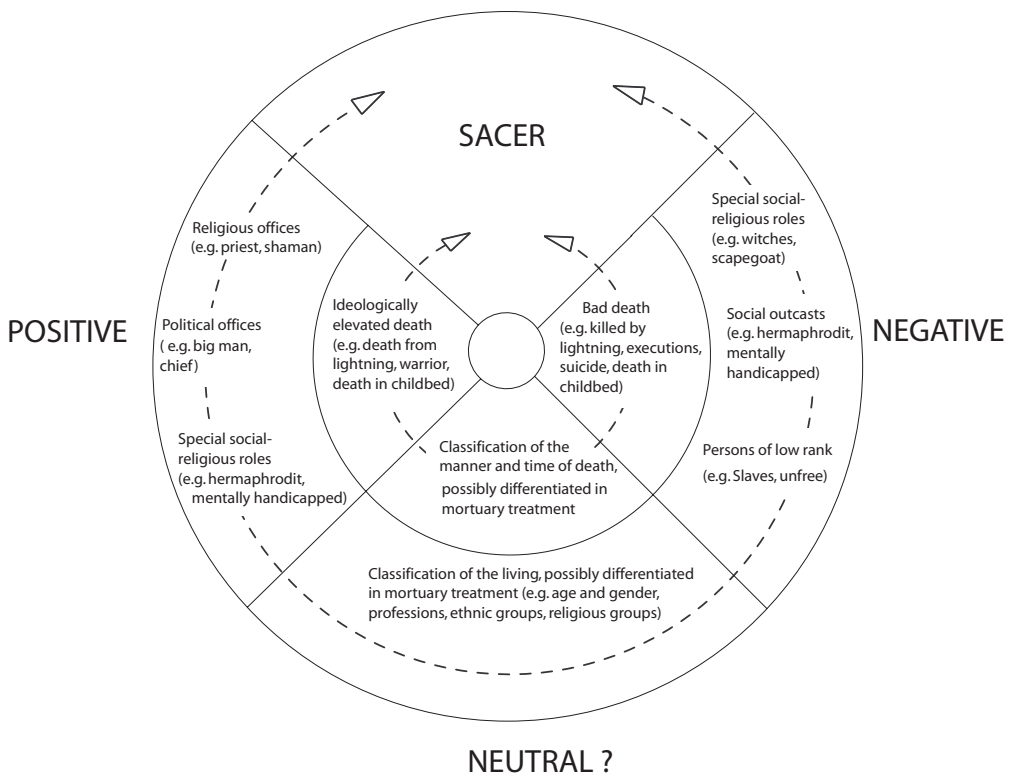


Figure 2.2. Diagram describing how the life and circumstances of death might be evaluated at a burial situation (drawn after Meyer-Orlac 1997, 10). Meyer-Orlac has suggested that extremely positive or negative evaluations might lead to a 'deviant burial'. These extreme evaluations have in common that they are ambivalent, expressed by allocating them the same area in the diagram, which is called *sacer* (Meyer-Orlac 1997, 2). Reproduction and translation permitted by Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH.

A wide range of different kinds of topics were addressed at this conference, ranging from settlement burials to pendants made of human skulls, all of which are listed in Table 2.1a. This shows how 'broad' the classification *Sonderbestattung* has become and how there has been a move away from the previously rather limited use of the word as a category of burial different from the normal burial rite within a certain period or cemetery. This is also reflected in other current publications, where the *translatio* (exhumation, transport and storage) of corpses and skeletons of martyrs, multiple burials and buried pots which contain placenta have been labelled *Sonderbestattung* (Table 2.1b).

Understandably, other papers are concerned with the actual definition and meaning of *Sonderbestattung*. First of all, the use of the same term for different (but ultimately linked) phenomena in archaeology and physical anthropology has been criticised (Wahl 1994). Another question has been whether there should be any statistical limitation placed on the term, or in other words, where does the category *Sonderbestattung* end and a 'subgroup' of burials begin (Wahl 1994, 104; Meyer-Orlac 1997, 1)? Other papers at the Swiss Bronze Age *Sonderbestattungen* conference have been concerned with establishing criteria to classify human remains recovered from settlements (Furmanék and Jakab 1997; Gedl and Szybowicz 1997; Schultz 1997). It has also been questioned whether post-depositional manipulated burials belong to the 'deviant burial' category and, if so, whether they should be called 'apparent deviant burials' (Schultz 1997, 11–13). Similarly, it has been debated if evidence of supposedly human sacrifice or executions belong to 'deviant burials' (Meyer-Orlac 1997, 1). The big concern with finding criteria for classification and the establishment of typologies has to be understood in the context of German-language archaeology as outlined in the beginning of the paper. It reflects the fundamental importance traditionally given to typology not only in German-language archaeology, but also within other archaeologies on the continent (Härke 1991).

An important criticism of the current study of *Sonderbestattungen* is that the category is simply used too often (Wahl 1994). Peter-Röcher (1997) has pointed out that archaeologists have been ready to call a minority of burial evidence of a period the 'normal' burial rite, only because it is concordant with our Western perception of what a normal burial rite looks like. At the same time, burials have been called *Sonderbestattungen* which are actually normal in the respective archaeological period but are conspicuous and exotic to our modern Western taste.

Anglophone Research on 'Deviant Burials'

Culture-historical Search for Normative Burial Rites

In Anglophone culture-historical debate, as with its German-language counterpart, initially there was a lot of doubt whether unusual burials result from deliberate burial practices. Explanations of Anglo-Saxon face-down burials or burials with strange body positions include the famous statements that the undertaker might have been drunk (Rolleston 1869, 477), or that he was too lazy to 'excavate a grave of sufficient length' (Leeds and Harden

(a) 1990 conference in Switzerland on 'Special burials in the Bronze Age of Eastern Central Europe' (Rittershofer 1997):	
Settlement burials	Lauermann 1997
Graves containing special finds	Coblenz 1997
Burials of children and of metallurgists	Coblenz 1997
A type of barrow	Breddin 1997
Graves without burials (cenotaph)	Plesl 1997
Post-depositional manipulated graves	Bönisch 1997; Meyer-Orlac 1997; Schultz 1997
Cremations lacking cremated bone	Eibner 1997
Un-cremated bones in cremation cemeteries	Plesl 1997
Sacrifice	Gedl and Szybowicz 1997
Cannibalism	Gedl and Szybowicz 1997; Grimm 1997
Pendants made of human skull	Coblenz 1997

(b) Other more recent studies:	
Burials covered with animal skulls	Peschek 1996
Exhumation, transfer and storage of the corpses or skeletons of martyrs	Glaser 1997
Double and multiple burials, succeeding burials	Lauermann 2003
Buried pots containing placenta	Frieser 2003

Table 2.1. List of evidence which has been classified Sonderbestattung in current German-language publications.

1936, 30). Another idea was that the ends of the grave were not vertical and when the corpse decayed, the skull, together with two vertebrae rolled backwards (Leeds and Harden 1936, 30). But also more recently, the intentionality of face-down burials and 'live-burials' has been questioned and it has been argued that this kind of evidence resulted from soil movements, connected with the decomposition of wooden structures at some time after deposition (Reynolds 1988). This is not the place to provide a detailed argument against that position, but to mention one counter-argument, the orderly body-position of some prone burials can hardly have resulted from the decomposing corpse turning in the grave due to wood decomposition and gas formation. Therefore while many will agree that post-depositional processes have to be more often taken into account (e.g. Nilssen Stutz 2003,

131–59), and that some cases are indeed ambiguous (e.g. the Sewerby live-burial in Figure 2.1; Hirst 1985, 38–43; 1993, 42–3) in the bulk of cases, body position or manipulation were deliberate and part of the burial ritual.

To return to the research history and culture-historical search for archaeological cultures, which were assumed to be the remains of a 'people' or race (Childe 1929, v–vi), it was Childe's belief that unusual burials were those of immigrants or, in other cases, that they were 'foreign rituals' which might have been introduced by chiefs from somewhere else (e.g. Childe 1947, 4, 7, 69, 125, 298). The same approach was taken by Faull (1977), who interpreted the Early Anglo-Saxon 'deviant burials' as those of Romano-British people.

The Deviant Social Persona

In contrast to culture-historical archaeology's search for norms, variability and differences in burial rituals became the focus of the ensuing processual branch of burial archaeology. Probably as a result of the frequent use of quantitative methods, the use of the term 'deviant' to refer to an unusual burial became common in this period, and it seems to have been first used in the work of Saxe (1970).

According to the 'processual' model, at times of death the survivors have a 'duty relationship' to the deceased and what gets symbolised in mortuary ritual is the so-called 'social persona', a composite of social identities, consisting of age, sex and the various social roles or membership affiliations of the deceased (Binford 1972, 225–6). The concept of a 'deviant social persona' was developed by Saxe (1970, 10–12). He basically argued that certain circumstances of life and death can alter the obligations of the burying community towards the dead person (their 'duty relationship'), who consequently loses the right to a normal funerary treatment and gets treated according to what is suitable for this category of 'deviant' dead. This means that the burial rite for this individual will not refer to the age, sex or status of the deceased, but would normally show less appreciation for that dead individual ('a shallow social persona'). Those circumstances that are considered 'deviant' and that alter what happens after death differ from society to society (Shay 1985, 222). This understanding of 'deviant burials' was quite a big step towards viewing them as an integral part of the normal mortuary behaviour of a community.

Saxe has suggested that in less complex societies it will not be distinguished whether a deviance is volitional or non-volitional, all will be perceived and treated the same. In more complex societies, along with the development of law and medicine, the notion of what constitutes a deviant life or death will become more differentiated and criminal acts (volitional), for example, will be treated differently from illness (non-volitional), with illness possibly being treated in the same way as a normal life or death (Saxe 1970, 11–12). This was expressed in Saxe's Hypothesis Seven: 'The simpler a sociocultural system, the less divergence will be evident in the treatment of different kinds of deviant social personae and conversely' (Saxe 1970, 118).

While Binford and Saxe have only used ethnographic evidence, the later studies of O'Shea (1984) and Shay (1985) have combined the ethnographic material with archaeological data. In his case study on three Native American groups from the mid-seventeenth to

the mid-eighteenth century AD O'Shea (1984) analysed the differences in the burial record and compared them with what was known about the groups from historical sources. Some forms of 'deviant burial' rites found in the cemeteries did not have any ethnographic precedents (O'Shea 1984, 250) and vice versa, disposal in a location other than the corporate cemetery of course did not show up archaeologically (O'Shea 1984, 254). O'Shea has doubted whether it is possible to recover all kinds of 'deviant burial' rites employed by a society, or to determine their precise meaning or significance with solely archaeological analysis (O'Shea 1984, 254). Shay's analysis of ethnographic and historical data, as well as sociological studies, has confirmed Saxe's model and showed that 'deviancy' can be valued high or low (Shay 1985, 223–5, 231; tables 1 and 2). Her application of the model to examples of 'deviant burials' has shown that the 'processual' model provides a logical explanation. For example, an exceptional Bronze Age burial of an adult male in Jericho who has been trepanned during life, did not show the usual treatment given to adult males (Shay 1985, 231). He did not receive secondary burial, a feature regarded as showing group affiliation by Shay, and the grave assemblage was poor in quantity and quality. Consequently, the burial did not reflect the social identities maintained by the deceased during his life, but treatment appropriate to the deviancy related to the particular circumstances of his death (Shay 1985, 231).

The Saxe approach has also been applied to human remains of the British Iron Age. For most of the British Iron Age the majority of people were disposed of in a way that did not leave direct archaeological traces and burials have rarely been found in the archaeological record. Wait's (1985, 120) interpretation was simply to equate most of the human remains of the British Iron Age with 'deviant burials', rites performed for 'a series of unclean and outcast statuses'. Other research on Iron Age human remains has shown patterns in depositional practices (e.g. Walker 1984; Fitzpatrick 1992). This suggests that the relationship between normal and 'deviant burial' rites in the British Iron Age is more complex, and that the concept of 'deviant burials' cannot be applied at all or at least in not as straightforward a manner as in other periods.

The Context and Meaning of 'Deviant Burials'

After the above studies, which can be summarised as 'processual', there was not much attention given to the theoretical study of 'deviant burials'. At the same time, as in German-language archaeology, 'deviant burials' have been studied in analyses of individual cemeteries and have been interpreted very similarly to those that occur in analyses of Continental cemeteries.

Current studies have embraced 'deviant burials' again and look at them from current perspectives in Anglophone theory. One is the specific meaning of places of deposition in a natural landscape or within areas of human activity. Reynolds (2002, 188) has interpreted the Early Anglo-Saxon 'deviant burials' within cemeteries differently from the ones of the later Anglo-Saxon period, which were placed on boundaries. In particular, research on out-of cemetery human remains has focussed on the place of deposition as a means of interpretation (Isserlin 1997, 92; Cleary 2000, 138). Taylor (2002, 144–69) has argued

that the 'liminal' character of bogs was an important aspect for the rituals performed on the so-called bog bodies. Based on ritual theory, Taylor as well as Williams have developed detailed scenarios for the deaths of the individuals who became bog bodies (Taylor 2002; Williams 2003). In Britain, disability and social inclusion/exclusion have gained attention as an academic topic in particular since the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 (Roberts 2000, 47). In an interdisciplinary volume on 'Madness, Disability and Social Exclusion' the question of how to find the disadvantaged and socially excluded in the archaeological and skeletal record has been addressed (Hubert 2000). Whether disabled people have been buried normally or differently may tell how they were perceived during their lifetime and provide information about the 'attitude' shown towards disabled people in past societies (Murphy 2000, 74–5; Papadopoulos 2000; Roberts 2000, 56).

In the above studies, all belonging to what is conventionally summarised as 'post-processual' approaches, the study of 'deviant burials' is given a more prominent position than it was in the previous 'processual' studies. 'Deviant burials' incorporate many of the aspects of 'post-processualism', such as individualism, agency and marginal groups in society. This is in contrast with the focus of processual studies on society as a system, in which 'deviant burials' were one part of burial practices, but otherwise unimportant. In the context of 'post-processual' archaeology 'deviant burials' are not only a by-product of mortuary practices of any society but also of major interest.

Comparing Anglophone and German-language Research on 'Deviant Burials'

The research on 'deviant burials' and *Sonderbestattungen* respectively in the two archaeological traditions shows parallels until the 1970s, but from then on they developed in different directions. Early in both traditions, 'culture-historical' approaches shared the notion that unusual burials originate in something completely different from the normal burials. This may be either due to a different belief or religion, or a different ethnicity or race. In the 1960s and 1970s the concept of 'deviant burials' developed. It was recognised that firstly, the postmortem treatment of a dead person, which is very different from what would normally be expected, is part of the mortuary rites in most societies. And secondly, what leads to this difference are special circumstances of the life or death of an individual.

This concept of 'deviant burials' developed simultaneously in the Anglophone and the German-language tradition. Although there was no communication between the two traditions the studies of 'deviant burials' share the same characteristics. Firstly, there were quantitative analyses of ethnographic accounts, leading to the conclusion that an unusual life or an unusual death can be the reason for a different mortuary treatment of some dead individuals. Secondly, hypotheses have been created which integrate the study of 'deviant burials' into the study of society (Saxe 1970; Pauli 1975; see above). This situation corresponds well with the overall picture, as German and Anglophone burial archaeology of that time generally show many similarities, and both were occupied with the social analysis of mortuary evidence (Härke 2000). But one important difference between the German

and the Anglophone studies of 'normal burials' was that German research was only based on historical sources, while the Anglophone studies derived their hypotheses from ethnographic cases (Härke 2000, 377). This does not apply to the study of 'deviant burials'. The interpretation of 'deviant burials' was also in German-language archaeology based on ethnographic analogies. This is interesting, as the research on *Sonderbestattungen* therefore forms an exception within German-language burial archaeology and in a way mirrors the abnormality of its research subject.

This tendency to study 'deviant burials' under different assumptions than normal burials, or to project ideas about macabre behaviour or rites of the past into them, is not restricted to German-language archaeology. One famous British example was 'Crime and punishment in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery' (Hawkes and Wells 1975). Based on an over-interpretation of the skeletal evidence of a female prone burial, and some random information from textual sources, the story of a gang-rape which was followed by pregnancy and then collective punishment was reconstructed. Unfortunately, this paper is one of the very few that can frequently be found quoted in Continental papers as well.

Interpretations of 'deviant burials' in cemetery analyses are quite similar in Anglophone and German-language traditions. The main difference is that the 'fear of the dead' is part of literally every interpretation of 'deviant burials' on the Continent. This has been criticised and interpreted as a phenomenon of *Zeitgeist* in Continental archaeology and anthropology since the eighteenth century, connected with the recognition that we still are not able to control death (Meyer-Orlac 1997, 8–9). However, there is a striking contrast between the roles the dead play in both archaeologies. While the British archaeologists venerate their ancestors (Whitley 2002), Continental, German-language archaeologists fear their dead. Archaeological interpretation, like all other research, does not happen on its own and is embedded into contemporary society (Shanks and Tilley 1987). In this sense, the interpretations of Continental archaeologists might reflect a general uneasiness towards recent dead after a history of wars on the Continent during the twentieth century, and in particular due to the Second World War.

Another line of research pursued in both traditions has been the investigation of the skeletal remains of 'deviant burials' (Pauli 1978; Pauli and Glowatzki 1979; Harman *et al.* 1981; Schleifring 1999). The idea has been that skeletal analysis might provide motives for differentiated treatment at death. However, in the majority of cases, there were no pathologies, signs of disease or other skeletal marks telling of conspicuous physical characteristics of the dead, which would have made them different during their lifetimes (Pauli 1978; Pauli and Glowatzki 1979; Harman *et al.* 1981; Schleifring 1999).

While similarities between the Continental German-language studies and the Anglophone research on 'deviant burials' prevailed until the 1970s, since then the development has diversified. In recent years, 'post-processual' emphasis on individuals and on people on the margins of society as well as ritual itself led to an increasing interest in 'deviant burials', which have been studied from all these perspectives. At the same time, Continental German-language archaeology has remained close to the archaeological evidence itself,

which has led to the discussion of mainly classificatory issues. However, sometimes Anglophone ideas and approaches have been adopted by younger Continental researchers or students, e.g. a German Master's thesis has looked at female 'deviant burials' from the perspective of female individuality (Hoffmann 1999). This also reflects a more general trend (Härke 2000, 16–17).

A final point concerns terminology. As I noted earlier, the German-language term *Sonderbestattung* refers to the exclusivity of these burials and is otherwise neutral. The English word 'deviant' has a negative and sexual connotation and might imply that first, the buried person was a social 'deviant' or that the burial ritual itself was perverse. The use of this term is problematic as a lot of interpretations actually follow that line. The use of the term 'deviant' began in 'processual' archaeology, when statistical methods were employed, which explains that the original meaning was in a neutral statistical sense – describing 'something that deviates from normal' (The Oxford English Dictionary 1989, 565–6). It has been pointed out to me that in North American and Canadian archaeology the term 'deviant' is avoided in favour of classifications such as 'unusual burials' or 'non-normative' burials and also in French these burials are called *extraordinaire* (extraordinary) or *atypique* (atypical) (A. Tsaliki 2006, pers. comm.). It is worth considering and applying alternative terms more widely in British archaeology as well.

Conclusions

Recent research on 'deviant burials' in the Anglophone debate and in Continental German-language studies has gone in two completely different directions. German-language studies have been concerned with trying to gain a closer definition of what actually makes a burial 'deviant'. But recent papers have shown the problems when trying to achieve a more precise definition than 'that *Sonderbestattungen* are burials different from the normative burials'. At the same time, Anglophone archaeology is not really interested in the classification of burials as being deviant or not. Current studies tend to analyse certain categories of 'deviant burials' in terms which are of current interest in Anglophone archaeology. This raises the question of the usefulness of the archaeological concept of 'deviant burials'.

Analyses of ethnographic evidence in both research traditions have shown that due to special lives or deaths some individuals do not receive a normal funeral but are treated differently after death. This different treatment may be apparent in the archaeological record. Ethnographic sources therefore support the existence of a group of burials, which are different from the normal burials and which are the remains of individuals who were excluded from a normal funerary treatment for differing reasons. What has to be emphasised is that what we call 'deviant burial' rites are at the same time an integral part of the normal mortuary practices of most communities. Being part of the funerary rituals of a particular society means that 'deviant burials' can only be studied in this context. Therefore, the archaeological definition of what a 'deviant burial' is, as well as their interpretation is only possible in the immediate context of any burial, which is either within a cemetery, region

and period of time. To conclude, what needs to be studied together with what is 'deviant' is what is 'normal'. Norm and exception – normal and 'deviant burials' – are ultimately linked together. The definition and meaning of 'deviant burials' can only be assessed in the context of the normal burial rituals, as well as other historical and archaeological evidence.

Acknowledgements

This paper is part of my Ph.D. research titled '*Deviant burials* as signifiers for periods of change from the Iron Age to the Anglo-Saxon period in Southern Britain' at the University of Reading. I want to thank my supervisors Heinrich Härke and Bob Chapman, as well as Richard Bradley and Linda Hulin for reading and commenting on drafts of this paper, and Eoin Lenihan for checking the English (all University of Reading). Gerhard Trnka (University of Vienna) kindly helped me with the search for previous research on *Sonderbestattungen*.

References

- Ament, H. 1992. *Das Alamannische Gräberfeld von Eschborn (Main-Taunus-Kreis)* (Materialien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte von Hessen 14). Wiesbaden: Selbstverlag des Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege Hessen. (The Alamannic Cemetery of Eschborn, Main-Taunus-Kreis, Germany).
- Binford, L. R. 1972. Mortuary practices: their study and their potential, pp. 208–43 in Binford, L. R., *An Archaeological Perspective*. New York and London: Seminar Press.
- Childe, V. G. 1929. *The Danube in Prehistory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Childe, V. G. 1947. *The Dawn of European Civilization*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Clarke, G. 1979. *Pre-Roman and Roman Winchester 2: The Roman Cemetery at Lankhills*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Cleary, S. E. 2000. Putting the dead in their place: burial location in Roman Britain, pp. 127–42 in Pearce, J., Millett, M. and Struck, M. (eds), *Burial, Society and Context in the Roman World*. Exeter: Oxbow Books.
- Faull, M. L. 1977. British survival in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, pp. 1–55 in Laing, L. (ed.), *Studies in Celtic Survival* (BAR British Series 37). Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.
- Fettich, N. 1965. *Das Avarzeitliche Gräberfeld von Pilismarót-Basaharc* (Studia Archaeologica 3). Budapest: Verlag der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. (The Avar-period Cemetery of Pilismarót-Basaharc, Hungary).
- Fitzpatrick, A. P. 1992. *Archaeological Excavations on the Route of the A27 Westhampnett Bypass, West Sussex, 1992, 2: The Cemeteries* (Wessex Archaeology Report 12). Salisbury: Trust for Wessex Archaeology.
- Furmánek, V. and Jakab, J. 1997. Menschliche Skelettreste aus bronzezeitlichen Siedlungen in der Slowakei, pp. 14–23 in Rittershofer, K. F. (ed.), *Sonderbestattungen in der Bronzezeit im Östlichen Mitteleuropa* (Internationale Archäologie 37). Espelkamp: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH. (Human remains in Bronze Age settlements in Slovakia).
- Gedl, M. and Szybowicz, B. 1997. Bestattungen in bronzezeitlichen Siedlungen Polens, pp. 24–41 in

- Rittershofer, K. F. (ed.), *Sonderbestattungen in der Bronzezeit im Östlichen Mitteleuropa* (Internationale Archäologie 37). Espelkamp: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH. (Burials in Bronze Age settlements in Poland).
- Grenz, R. 1967. Archäologische Vampirbefunde aus dem westslawischen Siedlungsgebiet. *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 16, 255–65. (Archaeological evidence of vampires in the west-Slavic area).
- Hanuliak, M. 1995. Ungewöhnliche Bestattungen in Siedlungsgruben des 9. bis 12. Jh. *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 36, 125–36. (Unusual burials in settlement pits of the ninth to twelfth century AD in Slovakia).
- Hanuliak, M. 1999. Vampirismus auf Gräberfeldern von der Wende des Früh- zum Hochmittelalter. *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 40, 577–85. (Vampirism in cemeteries at the turn of the Early to the High Medieval period in Slovakia).
- Härke, H. 1991. All quiet on the Western Front? paradigms, methods and approaches in West German archaeology, pp. 187–222 in Hodder, H. (ed.), *Archaeological Theory in Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Härke, H. 1995. 'The hun is a methodical chap': reflections on the German tradition of pre- and proto-history, pp. 46–60 in Ucko, J. (ed.), *Theory in Archaeology. A World Perspective* (Theoretical Archaeology Group series). London: Routledge.
- Härke, H. 2000. Social analysis of mortuary evidence in German protohistoric archaeology. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 19, 369–84.
- Harman, M., Molleson, T. I. and Price, J. L. 1981. Burials, bodies and beheadings in Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. *Bulletin of the British Museum of Natural History (Geol.)* 35, 145–88.
- Hawkes S. and Wells, C. 1975. Crime and punishment in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery? *Antiquity* 49, 118–23.
- Hirst, S. M. 1985. *An Anglo-Saxon Inhumation Cemetery at Sewerby, East Yorkshire* (Archaeological publications, York University, 4). York: University Archaeological Publications.
- Hirst, S. M. 1993. Death and the archaeologist, pp. 41–3 in Carver, M. (ed.), *In Search of Cult*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.
- Hoffmann, H. 1999. *Furcht oder Ehrfurcht? Besondere Frauen – Weibliche Sonderbestattungen*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation, Hamburg University. URL: <http://www.archaeologisch.de/totefrauen1.html> (08.03.2006). (Fear or reverence? Special women – female 'deviant burials').
- Hubert, J. (ed.) 2000. *Madness, Disability and Social Exclusion: The Archaeology and Anthropology of 'Difference'* (World Archaeology 40). London: Routledge.
- Isserlin, R. M. J. 1997. Thinking the unthinkable: human sacrifice in Roman Britain?, pp. 91–9 in Meadows, K., Lemke, C. and Heron, J. (eds), *The Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference Proceedings 6, 1996*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Kovrig, I. 1963. *Das awarenzeitliche Gräberfeld von Alattyán* (Archaeologia Hungarica, ser. nov. 50). Budapest: Verlag der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. (The Avar-period cemetery of Alattyán, Hungary).
- Kyll, N. 1964. Die Bestattung der Toten mit dem Gesicht nach unten. *Trierer Zeitschrift* 27, 168–83. (Burial of the dead with the face downwards).
- Lauermann, E. 1997. Sonderbestattungen im Bereich einer frühbronzezeitlichen Siedlung in Unterhautzentel, NÖ, pp. 42–6 in Rittershofer, K. F. (ed.), *Sonderbestattungen in der Bronzezeit im Östlichen Mitteleuropa* (Internationale Archäologie 37). Espelkamp: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH. ('Deviant burials' in the area of an Early Bronze Age settlement in Unterhautzentel, Lower Austria).

- Lauermann, E. 2003. *Studien zur Aunjetitz-Kultur im nördlichen Niederösterreich 2* (Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie 99). Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH. (Studies of the Aunjetitz Culture in northern Lower Austria 2).
- Leeds, E. T. and Harden, D. B. 1936. *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Abingdon, Berkshire*. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum.
- Macdonald, J. L. 1979. Religion, pp. 404–33 in Clarke, G. (ed.), *Pre-Roman and Roman Winchester 2: The Roman Cemetery at Lankhills*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Meyer-Orlac, R. 1997. Zur Problematik der ‘Sonderbestattungen’ in der Archäologie, pp. 1–10 in Rittershofer, K. F. (ed.), *Sonderbestattungen in der Bronzezeit im Östlichen Mitteleuropa* (Internationale Archäologie 37). Espelkamp: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH. (On the problem of ‘deviant burials’ in archaeology).
- Murphy, E. M. 2000. Developmental defects and disability: the evidence from the Iron Age semi-nomadic peoples of Aymyrlg, South Siberia, pp. 60–80 in Hubert, J. (ed.), *Madness, Disability and Social Exclusion: The Archaeology and Anthropology of ‘Difference’* (World Archaeology 40). London: Routledge.
- Neugebauer, J. W. 1992. Früh- und mittelbronzezeitliche Sonderbestattungen in Ostösterreich, pp. 433–44 in Lippert, A. and Spindler, K. (eds), *Festschrift zum 50jährigen Bestehen des Institutes für Ur- und Frühgeschichte der Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck* (Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie 8). Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH. (Early and Middle Bronze Age deviant burials in Eastern Austria).
- Nilsson Stutz, L. 2003. *Embodied Rituals and Ritualized Bodies: Tracing Ritual Practices in Late Mesolithic Burials* (Acta Archaeologica Lundensia 8, 46). Lund: Wallin and Dahlholm Boktryckeri AB.
- O’Shea, J. M. 1984. *Mortuary Variability: An Archaeological Investigation* (Studies in archaeology series). Orlando: Academic Press.
- Papadopoulos, J. K. 2000. Skeletons in wells: towards an archaeology of social exclusion in the ancient Greek world, pp. 96–118 in Hubert, J. (ed.), *Madness, Disability and Social Exclusion: The Archaeology and Anthropology of ‘Difference’* (World Archaeology 40). London: Routledge.
- Pauli, L. 1975. *Keltischer Volksglaube: Amulette und Sonderbestattungen am Dürrnberg bei Hallein und im Eisenzeitlichen Mitteleuropa* (Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte 28). München: Beck. (Celtic folk belief: Amulets and deviant burials from the Dürrnberg near Hallein and in Iron Age Central Europe).
- Pauli, L. 1978. Ungewöhnliche Grabfunde aus Frühgeschichtlicher Zeit: archäologische Analyse und anthropologischer Befund. *Homo* 29, 44–52. (Unusual burial evidence from the protohistoric period: archaeological analysis and skeletal evidence).
- Pauli, L. and Glowatzki, G. 1979. Frühgeschichtlicher Volksglaube und seine Opfer. *Germania* 57, 143–52. (Protohistoric folk belief and its victims).
- Peter-Röcher, H. 1997. Menschliche Skelettreste in Siedlungen und Höhlen: kritische Anmerkungen zu herkömmlichen Deutungen. *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 38, 315–24. (Human remains in settlements and caves: a criticism of traditional interpretations).
- Reynolds, A. 2002. Burials, boundaries and charters in Anglo-Saxon England: a reassessment, pp. 171–94, in Lucy, S. and Reynolds, A. (eds), *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*. Leeds: Meaney Publishing.
- Reynolds, N. 1988. The rape of the Anglo-Saxon women. *Antiquity* 62, 715–18.
- Rittershofer, K. F. (ed.) 1997. *Sonderbestattungen in der Bronzezeit im Östlichen Mitteleuropa* (Internationale

- Archäologie 37). Espelkamp: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH ('Deviant burials' in the Bronze Age in Eastern Central Europe).
- Roberts, A. R. 2000. Did they take sugar? The use of skeletal evidence in the study of disability in past populations, pp. 46–59 in Hubert, J. (ed.), *Madness, Disability and Social Exclusion: The Archaeology and Anthropology of 'Difference'* (World Archaeology 40). London: Routledge.
- Rolleston, G. 1869. Researches and excavations carried on in an ancient cemetery at Frilford near Abingdon, Berks, in the years 1867–68. *Archaeologia* 42, 417–85.
- Ross, A. 1967. *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Salin, E. 1952. *La Civilisation Mérovingienne, D' après les Sépultures, les Textes et le Laboratoire* 2. Paris: A. et J. Picard.
- Saxe, A. A. 1970. *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms Inc.
- Schleifring, J. 1999. Menschliche Skelette in Bauchlage vom kaiserzeitlichen Gräberfeld Groß-Gerau „Auf Esch“, pp. 625–35 in Herrmann, F. R. (ed.), *Festschrift für Günter Smolla* 2 (Materialien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte von Hessen 8). Wiesbaden: Selbstverlag des Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege Hessen. (Human skeletons in a prone position from the Roman period cemetery of Groß-Gerau „Auf Esch“, Germany).
- Schultz, M. 1997. Sonderbestattungen in der Bronzezeit aus der Sicht der Anthropologie, pp. 11–12 in Rittershofer, K. F. (ed.), *Sonderbestattungen in der Bronzezeit im Östlichen Mitteleuropa* (Internationale Archäologie 37). Espelkamp: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH. (The anthropology of deviant burials from the Bronze Age).
- Schwidetzky, I. 1965. Sonderbestattungen und ihre paläodemographische Bedeutung. *Homo* 16, 230–47. (Deviant burials and their palaeodemographic significance).
- Shanks, M. and Tilley, C. 1987. *Social Theory and Archaeology*. Cambridge: Polity in association with Blackwell.
- Shay, T. 1985. Differentiated treatment of deviancy at death as revealed in anthropological and archaeological material. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 4, 221–41.
- Taylor, T. 2002. *The Buried Soul: How Humans Invented Death*. London: Fourth Estate.
- Tempelmann-Maczynska, M. 1989. Totenfurcht und Totenglauben bei den Germanen im 4. bis 7. Jahrhundert n. Chr. aufgrund der sog. Sonderbestattungen und des Grabraubs. *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung* 106, 274–83. (Fears and beliefs about the dead among Germanic people from the fourth to the seventh century AD on the basis of the so-called deviant burials and grave robbery).
- Torbrügge, W. 1979. *Die Hallstattzeit in der Oberpfalz* (Materialhefte zur Bayerischen Vorgeschichte A 39). Kallmünz/Opf.: Verlag Michael Lassleben. (The Hallstatt period in Oberpfalz, Germany).
- Veit, U. 1996. *Studien zum Problem der Siedlungbestattung im Europäischen Neolithikum* (Tübinger Schriften zur Ur- und Frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie 1). Münster: Waxmann Verlag GmbH. (Studies of settlement burial in the European Neolithic).
- Wahl, J. 1994. Zur Ansprache und Definition von Sonderbestattungen, pp. 85–106 in Kokabi, M. and Wahl, J. (eds), *Beiträge zur Archäozoologie und Prähistorischen Anthropologie* (Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Baden Württemberg 53). Stuttgart: Konrad Theiss Verlag. (On the terminology and definition of deviant burials).
- Wait, G. A. 1985. *Ritual and Religion in Iron Age Britain* (BAR British Series 149). Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

- Walker, L. 1984. The deposition of human remains, pp. 442–63 in Cunliffe, B., *Danebury: An Iron Age Hillfort in Hampshire 2* (Council for British Archaeology research report 52). London: Council for British Archaeology.
- Warnke, D. 1982. Eine “Vampir-Bestattung” aus dem frühgeschichtlichen Hügelgräberfeld in den “Schwarzen Bergen” bei Ralswiek auf Rügen. *Ausgrabungen und Funde* 27, 3. (A ‘vampire-burial’ from the protohistoric cairn in the ‘Black Mountains’ near Ralswiek on Rügen, Germany).
- Whitely, J. 2002. Too many ancestors. *Antiquity* 76, 117–26.
- Wilke, G. 1931. Die Bestattung in Bauchlage. *Mannus* 23, 202–6. (Prone burial).
- Wilke, G. 1933. Die Bestattung in Bauchlage und verwandte Bräuche, pp. 449–60 in *Homenagem a Martins Sarmento*. Guimaraes: Sociedade Martins Sarmento, subsidiada pelo Ministério da Instrução publica e pela Junta de educação nacional. (Prone burial and related customs).
- Williams, M. 2003. Tales from the dead: remembering the bog bodies in the Iron Age of North-Western Europe, pp. 89–112 in Williams, H. (ed.), *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies*. New York: Kluwer/Plenum.
- Zeiten, M. K. 1997. Amulets and amulet use in Viking Age Denmark. *Acta Archaeologica* 68, 1–74.