

---

# TRAC Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

---

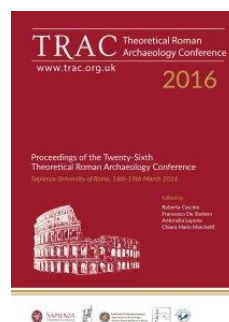
[www.trac.org.uk](http://www.trac.org.uk)

## Paper Information:

Title: Disturbed, Damaged and Disarticulated: Grave  
Reuse in Roman Italy  
Author: Liana Brent  
Pages: 37–50

DOI: [http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC2016\\_37\\_50](http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC2016_37_50)

Publication Date: 23/03/2017



## Volume Information:

Cascino, R., De Stefano, F., Lepone, A., and Marchetti, C.M. (eds) 2017.  
*TRAC 2016 Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Theoretical Roman  
Archaeology Conference*. Rome: Edizioni Quasar.

## Copyright and Hardcopy Editions:

The following paper was originally published in print format by Edizioni Quasar for TRAC. Hard copy editions of this volume may still be available, and can be purchased direct from Edizioni Quasar at <https://www.edizioniquasar.it/>.

TRAC has now made this paper available as Open Access through an agreement with the publisher. Copyright remains with TRAC and the individual author(s), and all use or quotation of this paper and/or its contents must be acknowledged. This paper was released in digital Open Access format in April 2019.

---

# Disturbed, Damaged and Disarticulated: Grave Reuse in Roman Italy

*Liana Brent*

---

## *Introduction*

Places of burial in the ancient world are often characterised as liminal spaces that evoke mixed reactions, namely fear and respect for the dead. In the often-cited passage from Petronius' *Satyricon*, the freedman Trimalchio elucidates his wishes for his final resting place by reading his will at a dinner party (Petr. Satyr. 71). Petronius satirises Trimalchio's desire to control his own fate after death and his seemingly excessive prohibition of any kind of damage or violation against his tomb monument. Trimalchio wishes emphatically for it to be inscribed that the monument should not pass to the heir (*HMHNS*), and he includes a provision in his will that he should not receive injury when dead (Toynbee 1971: 75; Hope 2000: 124; Carroll 2006: 82–83). Furthermore, Trimalchio stipulates that one of his freedmen will be in charge of being a guardian of his eternal resting place to prevent anyone from running up and defecating on his tomb. It is important to note the prohibitive inscription and the provision of a tomb guardian, both of which seek to prevent insult or injuries aimed at the monument and the memory of the deceased, rather than Trimalchio's physical remains.

This passage provides a useful entry point into the general topic of Roman tomb violation. The topic has been explored through an abundance of anecdotal, epigraphic, and juridical evidence (Giorgi 1910; Cumont 1930; Creaghan 1951; de Visscher 1963; Robinson 1975; Kaser 1978; Ducos 1995; Thomas 2004; Carroll 2006; Rebillard 2009). These studies consider transgressive acts against the monument or memory of the deceased, but tend to ignore the human remains inside the tomb. Thus what is missing from the discourse on Roman tomb violation is the human body – the corporeal remains that precisely constitute the tomb as a *locus religiosus*, and the presence of which makes the act of tomb violation both possible and contradictory (*Digesta* 11.7.2.5; Ducos 1995; Thomas 2004). As John Scheid has argued, by shifting the focus from prescriptions and rituals to *gestes funéraires* and the material traces of ancient religious practices in mortuary contexts, Roman archaeology would be well positioned to investigate a variety of new topics (Scheid 2000; 2008), including post-burial activities and how they affected the entombed body.

This paper addresses questions about Roman encounters with bodies after funerary rites were carried out and completed. Why did Romans reopen burials? Relatedly, how did the state of the corpse or skeletal remains at the time of grave reopening influence the manner of

reuse or post-depositional manipulation? My primary interest is what happened in post-burial encounters with intentionally or accidentally exhumed individuals, as well as the types of evidence that we use to understand these experiences. This paper explores how post-depositional activities affected decomposing and disarticulated human skeletal remains through a case study from the Roman cemetery at Vagnari. I argue that the addition of individuals and the manipulation of human skeletal elements were often the creation and maintenance of corporeal connections between the deceased and the living, rather than acts of tomb violation, as we might be tempted to understand these phenomena from epigraphic and legal sources.

Particularly useful for the study of post-depositional processes are the well-established methods of *anthropologie de terrain* or archaeoethanatology, which rely on collaborative efforts between archaeologists and field anthropologists with training in human osteology (Duday *et al.* 1990). Duday and colleagues advocate for careful registration of the spatial distribution of human remains, grave structures, and artefacts during field excavation by those with knowledge of biology and how the human body decomposes after death – what is generally referred to as burial taphonomy (Duday *et al.* 1990; Duday 2006; Duday 2009; Duday *et al.* 2014). This involves consideration of the diagenetic factors that affect corporeal decay in the physical, chemical, and biological environment of a grave, as well as the micro-stratigraphic level of archaeological recording, which can help identify and understand changes and modifications that occurred at the grave site and within wider funerary and social contexts (Scheid 2008).

Too often in archaeological site reports, reopened and reused graves are glossed over as disturbed and therefore a category of dismissible evidence, and as a result, they have been edited out of archaeological histories (Cherryson 2007; Gleize 2007; Van Haperen 2010; Aspöck 2011; Klevnäs 2013; Bolla 2015). Close attention to post-depositional bodily transformations and skeletal manipulations can help determine which graveside activities may have been part of continuing or consecutive funerary rites, which ones reflect mal-intentioned practices like opening tombs and removing grave goods for ancient or modern looting, and which overlapping burials belonged to different chronological phases. Differentiating between these phenomena in the archaeological record – to the extent that published cemetery reports permit, as well as to the extent that we can develop methods for doing so in future field projects – allows us to highlight a range of activities that do not require us to discard burials as ‘disturbed’ and therefore uninformative.

### *Forgotten Bodies*

In a recent book called *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*, Thomas Laqueur explores the ways in which dead bodies have been handled, stolen, dissected, desecrated, represented, and revered (Laqueur 2015). Although his focus is on the transition from churchyard burials to modern cemeteries, which occurred between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries in western Europe, his attention to the deep history of concern for the corpse reminds us that the dead body is dually situated between nature and culture, and that the presence of the dead is a universal concern for human beings, while the ways in which the corpse occupies the imagination of the living is culturally specific.

The words used to describe human remains in Latin literature and inscriptions highlight Roman ways of connecting or distancing living and deceased bodies. *Corpus* (body), *cadaver* (corpse), *ossa* (bones), and *cineres* (ashes or remains) do not refer necessarily to the nature of the funerary practices and corporeal treatment, but rather to conceptions of the post-mortem body and the risk of contamination for the living (Allara 1995). Referring to a body as a *corpus* – a term that is equally applied to the living – connects the deceased with the world of the living in three ways: by preserving a sense of vitality, by controlling the type of corporeal corruption and decomposition that accompanies death, and by supposing a place of burial that confirms the new identity of the deceased (Allara 1995). The use of *corpus* helps to combat the risk of rupture that death causes; conversely, *cadaver* signifies involuntary decomposition, a lack of control over the fate of the body, and the *insepulti* (unburied). The latter point reminds us that the disposal of a corpse did not necessarily ensure an undisturbed place for human remains, although modern scholars tend to treat burial as the last stage of contact with the corpse.

Drawing on anthropological and sociological work by Van Gennep, Turner and Hertz, scholars commonly refer to death as a passage or transition in the three-stage rites of separation, liminality, and post-liminal aggregation (Hertz 1907 [2004]; Nilsson Stutz 2003: 30–32). A three-stage process of mourning and funerary ceremony focuses on the activities of the living to acknowledge the death of a social member (separation), followed by the creation of a new identity for the deceased (liminality). After disposal of the body, a period of mourning seeks to reintegrate members of the surviving community (post-liminal integration) (Van Gennep 1909 [2004]). Relatedly, and in the context of Roman funerary activities, mourning rites sought to purify the bereaved family through a series of symbolic actions upon the separation of the deceased from the living, which culminated in burial, a sacrifice and a funerary banquet (Scheid 1984: 118). These approaches, though largely informative about pre-burial practices, do not take into consideration what happens to the body or skeleton in post-depositional rites or what happens in instances of grave reopening, nor the impact of these encounters on the living or the dead. If funerary rites end with disposal of the deceased body and reintegration of the living into society, then the focus on mortuary ritual causes us to forget about the afterlife of a tomb and the body within, until excavated by an archaeologist (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005).

The deceased body has not only been forgotten in the study of post-burial rites, but even in the excavation of mortuary contexts (Nilsson Stutz 2008). Henri Duda reminds us that the goal of funerary archaeology is to reconstruct funerary rites, but a flagrant epistemological aberration has been the study of mortuary contexts without consideration of the human remains. Thus he writes ‘[O]ne often has the unfortunate impression that the deceased had been placed as an offering to a ceramic vessel or to a flint projectile point, rather than the other way around’ (Duda 2006: 30). Indeed, to nineteenth and twentieth century archaeologists, tombs – especially those from Greek and Roman antiquity – were primarily interesting for their marble statues, inscriptions, and objects of artistic value, whereas the scientific and cultural importance of skeletal remains was not yet recognised. Accordingly, human skeletal remains were removed from burials, without recording details about their position, age or sex. The historical emphasis on objects over bodies in Roman burials is surprising when considered against the centrality of the body in legal definitions of a tomb.

### *Roman Tomb Violation*

Entire sections of the *Codex Theodosianus*, Justinian's *Digest* and *Codex* are devoted to the topic of *violatio sepulcri* (Scott 1932; Watson 2009). From the opinions of various jurists, it is clear that a tomb required a body for it to become a *locus religiosus*. Ulpian states that a sepulchre is where the body or bones of a person are buried, but that not the entire place chosen for a burial becomes religious, only as much of it as covers the body (*Dig.* 11.7.2.5; Ulpianus 25 *ad ed.*; Watson 2009). In contrast to the definition of what constitutes a tomb, violation refers to compromising the integrity of the monument by the removal of statues, columns or any of the tomb's materials. According to the so-called *Opinions of Paul*, anyone who erases an inscription on a monument, overturns a statue, or removes anything which belongs to it like a stone or a column, is considered to have violated the tomb (*Sent. Pauli* 1.21.8; Scott 1932). A dichotomy emerges, then, in the definition of what constitutes a tomb in Roman law, since a body was required to make a tomb religious, but the body itself was not protected under the definition of *violatio sepulcri* in Roman law until comparatively late (Rebillard 2009: 59–62).

As Rebillard and Thomas note, it was not until the second half of the third century A.D. that the profanation of cadavers became a crime in civil law, when *violatio sepulcri* was extended to the body in addition to sanctions against damaging a monument (Thomas 2004: 60–66; Rebillard 2009: 59–62). The body was the essential requirement for establishing the tomb as a *res religiosa*, and exhumation or reopening graves was forbidden by law, since it negated the religious status of the tomb by removing its constitutive element, not because contact with decomposing corpses was considered a form of pollution in a legal context (Thomas 1999: 97; Thomas 2004: 60; Rebillard 2009: 62). Before late antiquity, *violatio sepulcri* extended only to objects: materials, stones, and ornaments; the body was not protected in itself, but only to the extent that its presence was a requisite for a tomb to be a *locus religiosus* (Ducos 1995).

Funerary epitaphs, predominantly dated to the first and second centuries A.D., convey what has been identified as a sense of anxiety about tomb violation. As Maureen Carroll points out, these imprecations apply mainly to the integrity of the monument and can be viewed as an apprehension about *damnatio memoriae*, the erasure and eradication of name, image, and memory after death (Carroll 2006: 79). John Creaghan argues that epitaphs with prohibitions against tomb violation largely predate legal sanctions, and that, in turn, the development of legal provisions made it unnecessary to inscribe comminatory statements on epitaphs (Creaghan 1951: 154). A compilation of funerary inscriptions from the city of Rome examines six types of prohibitions and evidence for *iura sepulcrorum* (the laws of burials): selling family tombs; introducing a foreign body into a tomb; opening or disturbing bones; building in the area of a funerary structure; defacing the epitaph, and acting against the wishes of a tomb's founder (Caldelli *et al.* 2004: 402–403). Although recent interpretations of the legal evidence demonstrate that *violatio sepulcri* as a crime did not extend to the body until the third century A.D., protection of the body was nevertheless a concern in Latin funerary epitaphs before it became a legal crime.

The funerary altar of Gaius Tullius Hesper, for example, demonstrates this apprehension about the fate of the deceased's remains in the late first or early second century A.D. (*CIL* VI, 36467). From the inscription, we learn that the deceased made the altar for himself as a place to contain his bones (*ossa*). He also stipulates a curse for anyone who violates, disturbs or removes them. In this instance, the exhumation of bones – as synecdochic for the human body – from a permanent place of burial requires a double punishment for disturbance: pain for the body of the violator, as well as rejection by the infernal gods, which implies denial of the type of eternal burial from which Hesper would be deprived in the event of disturbance. While legal and epigraphic material provide great insight into the topic of tomb violation, law tends to minimize the importance of the body, despite its centrality as the constituent element of a tomb, and despite inscriptions that reveal concern for the body. Archaeology offers long-term perspectives on the body, through the lens of which we can further examine Roman concerns about post-burial treatment.

### *Towards an Archaeology of Disturbance*

Turning to the question of grave disturbance in the archaeological record, it is important to ask: what are the defining characteristics and how common was it? How can we determine if disturbance was intentional or unintentional, and whether it was aimed at the grave, its contents or the body? Inattention to disturbed, damaged, and reused burials has hindered the development of excavation methodologies and theoretical frameworks for interpreting cases of tomb violation in their broader social, religious, and legal contexts. A number of recent studies, however, propose a vocabulary for analysing grave reopening activities. Terminology ranges from neutral associations such as 'consecutive mortuary rites' and 'post-depositional activities' to the negative implications of 'grave robbery,' when reopening is motivated by economic and material concerns (Gleize 2007; Duday 2009; Van Haperen 2010; Aspöck 2011; Klevnäs 2013; Van Haperen 2013).

One important study is Klevnäs' work about grave robbing in Anglo-Saxon England. She compiles a list of indicators of ancient grave reopening and disturbance that includes the following features: skeletal remains or grave goods in disorder; missing part of an otherwise well-preserved skeleton; traces of a secondary cut into the grave fill; additions to the grave contents and later artefacts in the upper fill; and traces of absent artefacts such as metal corrosion stains or pottery fragments left behind (Klevnäs 2013: 131–134). These factors are complicated by poor or differential preservation, empty graves, secondary burial or reuse, natural bone tumble, the collapse of structures within a void, as well as unusual burial positions, delayed burial, burrowing animals, agricultural damage, and modern robbing or vandalism.

While Klevnäs' work positively draws attention to the possibilities of identifying reopened or disturbed graves, she considers grave robbery as the principal motivation for this activity. Bolla explores other possible reasons for grave reopening in Roman Italy such as: metal shortage; Christian search for relics; unintentional reopening during agricultural field-work; tomb repairs; creating a permanent burial for a temporarily buried body; adding or removing individuals; appropriating or burying the body of a political or military figure to symbolically assume or legitimate power; propitiation; desecration; and beliefs about reve-

nants (Bolla 2015: 363–364). These possible reasons for grave reopening have been documented predominantly in textual evidence, although there are archaeologically attested cases, especially for the addition or removal of individuals from existing graves.

Working on medieval cemeteries in France, Yves Gleize focuses on the material evidence and identifies three main scenarios for reusing inhumation graves: *réduction*, *vidange*, and *superposition* (Gleize 2007: 188). The first (*réduction*) describes the consolidation of at least the larger bones within the same space where the initial deposition was made, often in a sarcophagus or container; a *vidange* refers to the removal of some bones; and a *superposition* signifies the overlay of a deceased body on top of the corpse or skeleton of the original occupant of a grave (Gleize 2007: 189). Superposition may or may not involve manipulating or repositioning the bones of the tomb's original occupant at the time of the additional deposition (Gleize 2007: 190). In these scenarios, grave reopening frequently causes skeletal disarticulation. As the living come into contact with the deceased, they may find the remains in a very different condition than at the time of burial or on their last encounter, if there was one. The case study of superposition and skeletal manipulation, to which I now turn, will allow us to explore how we can reconstruct the sequence of these actions, the time scales between depositions, as well as the practical considerations when grave reuse did not occur in a burial container or sarcophagus.

### *A Case Study from Roman Italy*

In the well-known Roman cemeteries of Pompeii, Ostia, and Isola Sacra, large tomb monuments for individual and collective burial are frequently adorned with inscriptions and sculpture, in stone, brick, mortar, or less permanent media. Less frequently integrated into studies of Roman death and burial are the semi-urban and rural field cemeteries that have been excavated throughout Italy, including those found at Gubbio, Foligno, Musarna, Portorecanati, Urbino, and Vagnari, to name a few. In non-monumental cemeteries, there were various options for interring the deceased in a subterranean burial: in a shroud or wooden coffin, directly in a pit, lying on a row of *tegulae* or tiles, in a pseudo-sarcophagus with stones or tiles lining the bottom and sides of the grave, etc. (Graham 2015: 48). The grave cover could include some combination of wooden boards, stones, mortar, flat tiles or a gabled '*cappuccina*' tile structure that formed an inverted V over the burial.

A recently excavated burial from the imperial cemetery at Vagnari in the Italian region of Puglia offers an excellent case study for disturbance and reuse. The site is identified as an imperial estate and is closely associated with a *vicus*, or village, where evidence for tile, iron, lead, and glass production, as well as wine and grain storage, have been found (Small 2011; Carroll 2014). In the absence of inscriptions, the legal status of those who lived, worked, and were eventually buried at Vagnari is unknown; they may have been slaves, freeborn or freedmen (Small 2014: 11). More than 130 burials dating mostly to the second and third centuries A.D. have been excavated at Vagnari since 2002 under the direction of Alastair Small (2002) and Tracy Prowse (2003–present) (Small *et al.* 2007; Prowse and Small 2009; Prowse 2016). *Cappuccina*, occasionally with rock or mortar reinforcements, is the most common type of grave cover and has been documented in 95 cases. Other graves in the cemetery were simple

pit burials or were covered with a layer of flat tiles. The graves are predominantly oriented on a northeast-southwest axis, although there are several instances of burials with other orientations that overlap or intersect with each other. Most burials contain an assemblage of grave goods, including ceramic, glass and bronze vessels, lamps, coins, nails, and items of personal ornament (Small *et al.* 2007: 138–149; Brent and Prowse 2014: 101).

Burial 308 was a gabled structure *alla cappuccina*, with large rock reinforcements on the north side (Fig. 1). The west end was missing an end tile and there were numerous cracks in some of the cover tiles, but the grave cover otherwise appeared to be sealed when it was excavated in 2015.

Once the tile cover was removed, a cranium was identified at the centre of the grave on the northern side (individual A), beneath an extended, primary burial (individual B) (Fig. 2). After the skeleton of individual B was removed, there was a layer of soil approximately 10 cm thick between individuals. The lower limbs of individual A were fairly well preserved, but only faint traces remained of the pelvis, thorax, and right radius and ulna (Fig. 3). The cranium of individual A was found resting on the proximal end of the right femur, while parts of the mandible and some mandibular teeth were found to the north of the right humerus, which was rotated, its anterior surface was facing down (or inferiorly), rather than in proper anatomical position like the left humerus. Fragments of *tegulae* were found at the edges of the burial once both skeletons were removed. They likely formed part of the earlier grave cover, which was disturbed and partially removed. It is apparent that Burial 308 at Vagnari was used consecutively for two individuals. In the past, there would have been no further explanatory framework for this ‘disturbed’ burial, yet the order of events and time between depositions are vital aspects of the post-burial history of this grave.



Figure 1: Burial 308 at Vagnari, showing a *cappuccina* burial with rocks reinforcing the grave cover on the north side (author's photo).





Figure 2: Burial 308 at Vagnari, showing individual B in an extended position, with the cranium of individual A to the north of B's right femur (author's photo).



Figure 3: Burial 308 at Vagnari, showing individual A, with the cranium on top of the right femur (author's photo).

## Discussion

I propose the following sequence of events: at the time of deposition, the corpse of individual A was laid in an extended, supine position in a burial that was planned for only one corpse. The head was still attached at the neck and was originally at the eastern end of the burial. The tile fragments at the edges of the burial were part of the grave cover for the first deposition, but they were disturbed when the grave was opened, by which time decay and decomposition of the first corpse had already begun. A large heap of tiles that may have belonged to the original grave cover was found immediately to the north, on top of Burial 318. Decomposition of the first body took place in a space that was probably empty under the original tile grave cover, until sediment filtered in through cracks between tiles. Some of the labile anatomical connections – that is, those that degenerate fairly quickly – were not preserved: hand and foot phalanges were found scattered throughout the grave. More persistent connections, such as those of the foot tarsals, were still in place.

At the time of reopening, individual A's head was elevated and resting against a tile fragment at the eastern end of the grave. The entire skull (cranium and mandible) was lifted, but only the cranium was repositioned by the pelvis, since the mandible detached and separated from the rest of the head during this repositioning. The muscles and ligaments had already decayed, since the anatomical connection at the temporomandibular joint was lost (Duday and Guillon 2006: 132). Neither the first nor the second cervical vertebrae were recovered at the time of excavation. The absence of these vertebrae may result from generally poor preservation, which was made worse by the taphonomic event of grave reopening. Likely at the same time that the cranium was repositioned, the right humerus was flipped posteriorly and angled towards, if not beyond, the northern extent of the original grave pit. The right radius and ulna were too fragmentary to allow us to detect their position. Afterwards, two large rocks were placed to the north and south of individual A's knee joints, at the same level as the disarticulated cranium, and a layer of soil was deposited on top of individual A.

The pelvis was unfortunately too poorly preserved to be used for sex estimation, but the individual is of gracile proportions with unfused cranial sutures, so likely a young adult and possibly female. The fragmentary state of individual A's thorax, in comparison to the good preservation of the lower limbs, is consistent with the type of disturbance that results from opening a grave when decomposition was mostly complete. The arrival of sediment underneath the *cappuccina* grave cover protected the lower limbs from disturbance, and equally made the thorax susceptible to fragmentation and removal. The missing bones were not the product of differential preservation within the grave, but, because damage to individual A was limited to the eastern half of the grave, the bones were likely shovelled out by the gravedigger who excavated into the burial fill to make room for the second deposition.

Individual B was also interred in an extended position, following almost exactly the same east-west orientation as individual A, in a pit that appears to be too small for this more robust individual, who was an adult male. This scenario corresponds to a superposition with some skeletal manipulation, as outlined by Gleize. The generally poor preservation of the thorax and upper limbs, in contrast with the well preserved lower limbs, may be partially attributed to the effects of compression from the weight of the grave cover, as well as to the

action of the soil, which degrades small bone fragments. The presence of the rock and cranium to the north of B's lower limbs created a wall effect that supported the right leg during decomposition, maintaining the right patella on top of the right femur. In contrast, the left patella fell to the south, beyond the space originally occupied by the body, and was accompanied by the lateral rotation of the left tibia. The fact that there was no commingling of skeletal elements belonging to individuals A and B confirms the presence of a layer of soil between the individuals, which prevented the bones of individual B from falling into empty spaces that were freed by the decomposition of organic material below.

There were at least four or five ceramic vessels scattered throughout this burial. Several fragments recovered outside the sealed grave cover have edges that join with pieces from the interior of the burial, including fragments from three different vessels that were found immediately underneath skeleton A. The ceramic vessels were likely deposited with the initial burial but were disturbed at the time of reopening. Also found outside the sealed grave cover and mixed in above individual A were fragmentary subadult bones that were limited to a few deciduous teeth and an unidentified long bone. This suggests that yet another individual was part of this complex, multi-stage burial scenario. These observations are consistent with the indicators of post-depositional activity that Klevnäs outlines.

Burial 308 from Vagnari raises questions about the approximate timeline for corporeal decay: how long does it take for a body to decompose and how does grave reopening affect this process? Radiocarbon analysis of bone was performed at the University of Salento's Centro di Datazione e Diagnostica (CEDAD) and calibrated using OxCal Ver. 3.10. Dates ranging from A.D. 235–405 for individual A (95.4%) and A.D. 228–405 for individual B (95.4%) indicate a potentially wide amount of time between the depositions, but contextual and taphonomic observations suggest that the individuals were interred fairly closely within that period.

Studies of corpse taphonomy conducted on exposed cadavers in Tennessee provide general timelines for organic decomposition. The time for a corpse to be reduced to skeletal remains can range from two weeks in the heat of the summer to several years (Bass 1997: 182–185). Despite the different conditions for exposed and buried corpses, the main variables are the same: temperature, humidity, and acidity, all of which affect the rates of decomposition and the preservation of bone. The sequence of corporeal decay, including the preservation or loss of labile and persistent anatomical connections at the time of reopening, helps us to establish a relative chronology for the decomposition of an individual buried in a temperate environment (Duday and Guillon 2006: 127). Given the loss of certain anatomical connections in the skull and right glenohumeral (shoulder) joint, the time between depositions in Burial 308 at Vagnari was likely more than a few weeks, and probably in the order of several months or a few years.

### *Conclusion*

The example of Burial 308 at Vagnari is an interesting and rare case, within a *cappuccina* burial, of a consecutive superposition that ultimately damaged the individual buried there first, at a time when the body was already decomposed. Burial 308 prompts us to consider how the grave structure itself could inhibit or be conducive to reuse. Most studies of reuse

tend to focus on sarcophagi where the body decomposed in a void space (Gleize 2007; Bolla 2015). In contrast, gabled *cappuccina* burials do not lend themselves as easily to opening and reuse because of the gradual arrival of sediment that fills in through cracks in the grave cover. The rocks that were positioned as a layer between the two skeletons could be interpreted as the material traces of a religious action, perhaps expiation, re-sanctification, or as the act of establishing a separative layer between individuals. The addition of large rocks on the exterior of the grave cover may signal the acknowledgement of disturbance to a pre-existing tomb and an attempt to ameliorate or contain the damage, as well as an attempt to protect and secure the newly interred corpse.

Various interpretations of the relationship between these individuals are possible. They may have been related biologically as siblings, cousins, or as a parent and child; they could have been associated as kin, peers, age-mates, or by marriage, so the act of interring them together and creating corporeal connections was intended to signify the continuity of relationships in death (Hockey and Draper 2005; Bolla 2015). The individuals could also have had no relationship while living and reusing the grave could simply have been more convenient than creating a new one. Conversely, the time between deaths and the amount of effort to manipulate skeletal elements in this environment suggests that there were strong motivations to connect bodies. The later gravediggers of individual B made efforts to keep parts of individual A inside the grave when they repositioned the disarticulated cranium and left the lower limbs undisturbed. If the goal of disturbance had been to reuse the space without consideration of the previous occupant, then there probably would have been greater disturbance of individual A or an emptying of the grave. Instead, taphonomic considerations explain the varying levels of preservation and the absence of certain skeletal elements. While the exact relationship between individuals remains unknown, the actions of the later gravediggers indicate that this was a scenario of deliberate reuse that necessitated a repositioning of the decomposed remains, in order to accommodate an individual who was larger than the size of the existing grave. Collectively, these actions illustrate how the state of the body at the time of reuse provides discernible evidence for the intentional manipulation of bones.

The general interpretation of disturbed burials is augmented by close examination of the interaction between the decomposing corpse, the structures that supported it, as well as any subsequent post-depositional manipulation. By employing the empirical methods of archaeothanatology, there is greater possibility for social and contextual interpretations of *gestes funéraires*. Even when the integrity of the body or the articulation of the skeleton is compromised by subsequent depositional events, we need to think more critically about the ways in which we interpret disturbance in the archaeological record and the information available about the taphonomic processes and the decomposition environment. We thus realize how much we can learn about reopening, looting, and violation that has previously been overlooked.

From a legal perspective, opening a sealed grave that was originally intended for one individual represents an infraction, in which the removal, disturbance or exposure of grave furnishings and bones compromises the status of the tomb as a *locus religiosus*. By shifting our attention from prescribed, normative burial practices to actual types of disturbance, post-depositional modification or contact with bodies in the process of decomposition, we see that

reopening and reusing tombs were common practices in the Roman world. Sometimes the damage was unintentional while family members or professional gravediggers were digging new graves, and at other times, reuse was intentional for familial or social connections, as the case study explored here. What has traditionally been considered tomb violation takes on different significance when the careful handling and rearrangement of decomposed remains is set alongside ritual practices in cemetery contexts. Reuse may not be an act of disturbance or violation as traditionally defined, but may reflect practices of connecting bodies in graves that were already used. Such corporeal connections occur precisely because the deceased continued to have a social and biological presence in funerary and commemorative practices.

Department of Classics, Cornell University

### *Acknowledgements*

I wish to thank Tracy Prowse for permission to use material from the Vagnari cemetery and for her continuing support. I am grateful to Éric Rebillard for his insightful comments on multiple drafts of this paper. Additional thanks to Henri Duday for stimulating discussion about the case study, to Sturt Manning and Verity Platt for their feedback, to the Vagnari landowner dott. Mario de Gemmis Pellicciari and the Soprintenza per i Beni Archeologici della Puglia. Funding to attend TRAC 2016 was generously provided by the Mario Einaudi Center for International Research and the Cornell Institute for European Studies, as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (#752–2012–2023). The Cornell Institute of Archaeology and Material Studies provided funding for radiocarbon dating.

### *Bibliography*

#### *Ancient Sources*

- CIL VI. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vol. VI, pars IV. Inscriptiones urbis Romae Latinae. (Edited by C. Huelson 1902). Berolini: G. Reimerum.
- Paulus (Translated by S.P. Scott 1932). *The Civil Law*. Cincinnati: The Central Trust Company.
- Petronius (Translated by J.P. Sullivan 2011). *Satyricon*. London: Penguin Books.
- Ulpian (Translated by A. Watson 2009). *The Digest of Justinian* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

#### *Modern Sources*

- Allara, A. 1995. Corpus et cadaver, la 'gestion' d'un nouveau corps. In F. Hinard and M. Lambert (eds) *La Mort au Quotidien dans le Monde Romain*. Paris: De Boccard: 69–79.
- Aspöck, E. 2011. Past 'disturbances' of graves as a source: taphonomy and interpretation of reopened Early Medieval inhumation graves at Brunn am Gebirge (Austria) and Winnall II (England). *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 30: 299–324.
- Bass, W.M. 1997. Outdoor decomposition rates in Tennessee. In W.D. Haglund and M.H. Sorg (eds) *Forensic Taphonomy: The Postmortem Fate of Human Remains*. Boca Raton: CRC Press: 181–186.
- Bolla, M. 2015. Sepoltura non perpetua: la riapertura delle tombe e il caso concordiese. In F. Rinaldi and A. Vigoni (eds) *Le Necropoli della Media e Tarda Età Imperiale (III-IV secolo D.C.) a Iulia Concordia e nell'arco Altoadriatico. Organizzazione Spaziale, Aspetti Monumentali e Strutture*

- Sociali. Atti del Convegno di Studio (Concordia Sagittaria, 5–6 Giugno 2014)*. Archeologia del Veneto 4. Rubano: Grafiche Turato edizioni: 357–378.
- Brent, L. and Prowse, T. 2014. Grave goods, burial practices and patterns of distribution in the Vagnari Cemetery. In A.M. Small (ed) *Beyond Vagnari: New Themes in the Study of Roman South Italy. Proceedings of a Conference held in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh, 26–28 October, 2012*. Munera 38. Bari: Edipuglia: 99–109.
- Caldelli, M.L., Crea, S. and Ricci, C. 2004. *Iura Sepulcrorum* a Roma: consuntivi tematici ragionati. In *Libitina e Dintorni. Atti dell'XI Rencontre Franco-Italienne sur l'Épigraphie*, Roma: Edizioni Quasar: 309–427.
- Carroll, M. 2006. *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carroll, M. 2014. Vagnari 2012: new work in the vicus by the University of Sheffield. In A.M. Small (ed) *Beyond Vagnari: New Themes in the Study of Roman South Italy. Proceedings of a Conference held in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh, 26–28 October, 2012*. Munera 38. Bari: Edipuglia: 79–87.
- Cherryson, A.K. 2007. Disturbing the dead: urbanization, the Church and the post-burial treatment of human remains in Early Medieval Wessex, c. 600–1100 AD. *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 14: 130–142.
- Creaghan, J. 1951. *Violatio Sepulcri: An Epigraphical Study*. Ph.D. Thesis. Princeton University.
- Cumont, F. 1930. Un rescrit impérial sur la violation de sépulture. *Revue Historique* 163: 241–266.
- De Visscher, F. 1963. *Le Droit des Tombeaux Romains*. Milan: Giuffrè.
- Ducos, M. 1995. Le tombeau, *locus religiosus*. In F. Hinard and M. Lambert (eds) *La Mort au Quotidien dans le Monde Romain*. Paris: De Boccard: 135–144.
- Duday, H. 2006. L'archéothanatologie ou l'archéologie de la mort (archaeoethanatology or the archaeology of death). Trans. C. Knüsel. In R. Gowland and C. Knüsel (eds) *The Social Archaeology of Funerary Remains*. Studies in Funerary Archaeology 1. Oxford: Oxbow Books: 30–56.
- Duday, H. 2009. *The Archaeology of the Dead: Lectures in Archaeoethanatology*. Trans. A.M. Cipriani and J. Pearce. Studies in Funerary Archaeology 3. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Duday, H., Courtaud, P., Crubezy, É., Sellier, P. and Tillier, A.-M. 1990. L'anthropologie 'de terrain': reconnaissance et interprétation des gestes funéraires. *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* 2: 29–49.
- Duday, H. and Guillon, M. 2006. Understanding the circumstances of decomposition when the body is skeletonized. In D. Schmitt, E. Cunha and J. Pinheiro (eds) *Forensic Anthropology and Medicine*. Totowa: Humana Press: 117–158.
- Duday, H., Mort, F.L. and Tillier, A.-M. 2014. Archaeoethanatology and funeral archaeology. Application to the study of primary single burials. *Anthropologie* 52: 235–246.
- Gilchrist, R. and Sloane, B. 2005. *Requiem: The Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain*. London: Museum of London Archaeology Service.
- Giorgi, G. 1910. *Le Multe Sepulcrali in Diritto Romano*. Bologna: L. Bertrami.
- Gleize, Y. 2007. Réutilisations de tombes et manipulations d'ossements: éléments sur les modifications de pratiques funéraires au sein de nécropoles du haut Moyen Âge. *Aquitania* 23: 185–205.
- Graham, E.-J. 2015. Corporeal concerns: the role of the body in the transformation of Roman mortuary practices. In Z. Devlin and E.-J. Graham (eds) *Death Embodied: Archaeological Approaches to the Treatment of the Corpse*. Oxford: Oxbow Books: 41–62.
- Hertz, R. 1907 [2004]. A contribution to the study of the collective representation of death. In A. Robben (ed) *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing: 197–212.
- Hockey, J. and Draper, J. 2005. Beyond the womb and the tomb: identity, (dis)embodiment and the life course. *Body and Society* 11: 41–57.

- Hope, V.M. 2000. Contempt and respect: the treatment of the corpse in ancient Rome. In V.M. Hope and E. Marshall (eds) *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*. London/New York: Routledge: 104–127.
- Kaser, M. 1978. Zum römischen Grabrecht. *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 95: 15–92.
- Klevnäs, A. 2013. *Whodunnit? Grave-Robbery in Early Medieval Northern and Western Europe*. BAR International Series 2582. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Laqueur, T.W. 2015. *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nilsson Stutz, L. 2003. *Embodied Rituals and Ritualized Bodies: Tracing Ritual Practices in Late Mesolithic Burials*. Acta Archeologica Ludensia 46. Stockholm: Almqvist Wiksell International.
- Nilsson Stutz, L. 2008. More than a metaphor: approaching the human cadaver in archaeology. In F. Fahlander and T. Østgaard (eds) *The Materiality of Death*. BAR International Series 1768. Oxford: Archaeopress: 19–28.
- Prowse, T.L. 2016. Isotopes and mobility in the ancient Roman world. In L. de Ligt and L.C. Tacoma (eds) *Migration and Mobility in the Early Roman Empire*. Studies in Global Social History 23. Leiden/Boston: Brill: 205–233.
- Prowse, T.L. and Small, A.M. 2009. Excavations in the Roman cemetery at Vagnari, 2008: Preliminary report. *Fasti Online*. Available at <http://www.fastionline.org/docs/FOLDER-it-2009-131.pdf>. [Last Accessed 31/10/2016].
- Rebillard, É. 2009. *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*. Trans. E. Trapnell Rawlings and J. Routier-Pucci. Cornell Series in Classical Philology 59. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Robinson, O. 1975. The Roman law on burials and burial grounds. *The Irish Jurist* 10: 175–186.
- Scheid, J. 1984. *Contraria facere*: renversements et déplacements dans les rites funéraires. *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli. Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo Classico e del Mediterraneo Antico, Sezione Filologico-Letteraria* 6: 117–139.
- Scheid, J. 2000. Pour une archéologie du rite. *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 55: 615–622.
- Scheid, J. 2008. *Pour une Archéologie du Rite: Nouvelles Perspectives de l'Archéologie Funéraire*. Collection de l'École Française de Rome 407. Rome: École Française de Rome.
- Small, A. 2011. *Vagnari: il Villaggio, l'Artigianato, la Proprietà Imperiale = The Village, the Industries, the Imperial Property*. Bari: Edipuglia.
- Small, A. 2014. *Beyond Vagnari: New Themes in the Study of Roman South Italy: Proceedings of a Conference held in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh, 26–28 October 2012*. Munera 38. Bari: Edipuglia.
- Small, A. et al. 2007. Excavation in the Roman cemetery at Vagnari, in the territory of Gravina in Puglia, 2002. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 75: 123–229.
- Thomas, Y. 1999. *Corpus aut ossa aut cineres*: la chose religieuse et le commerce. *Micrologus* 7: 73–112.
- Thomas, Y. 2004. *Res religiosae*: on the categories of religion and commerce in Roman law. In A. Pottage and M. Mundy (eds) *Law, Anthropology, and the Constitution of the Social: Making Persons and Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 40–72.
- Toynbee, J.M.C. 1971. *Death and Burial in the Roman World*. Aspects of Greek and Roman Life Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Van Gennep, A. 1909 [2004]. Rites of passage. In A. Robben (ed) *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing: 213–223.
- Van Haperen, M. 2010. Rest in pieces: an interpretive model of early medieval 'grave robbery'. *Medieval and Modern Matters* 1: 1–35.
- Van Haperen, M. 2013. The distributed dead: personhood from the perspective of reopened graves. In B. Ludowici (ed) *Individual or Individuality? Approaches Towards an Archaeology of Personhood in the First Millenium AD*. Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung 4. Hannover: Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum 89–94.