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Bad Death at Sandby borg

*A Bioarchaeological Analysis of Intergroup Violence and
Postmortem Agency of Unburied Corpses*

Clara Alfsdotter



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Licentiate Thesis
Clara Alfsdotter

**BAD DEATH AT SANDBY BORG: A BIOARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
OF INTERGROUP VIOLENCE AND POSTMORTEM AGENCY OF
UNBURIED CORPSES**

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Abstract

The subject of corpses from mass violence is surprisingly unexplored, even though the materiality of the corpse carries strong symbolic capital in conflicts. The aim of my PhD research is to create new knowledge about the implications of unburied corpses that stem from intergroup conflicts, and subsequently to add knowledge concerning how intergroup violence is organised to achieve desired social agendas.

In the licentiate thesis presented here, I research the conditions for postmortem agency and how treatment of corpses can be studied in prehistory, specifically through the material remains of unburied corpses from the Sandby borg massacre. The Sandby borg case study is explored through a bioarchaeological perspective. Inside the Iron Age ringfort, the remains of at least 26 individuals have been recovered hitherto. Several of the dead display traces of lethal intergroup violence. By integrating osteology, archaeology, taphonomy and social theories, I show how bioarchaeological research can contribute to the understanding of past postmortem agency in relation to intergroup violence as a social process. The thesis is comprised of four articles.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who play vital parts of this PhD journey, and I will start from the beginning of mine. I want to thank my boss Mikael Eboskog who pushed for my employer, Bohusläns museum, to be part of this research school. I also want to thank you for unfailing support and for keeping my work load bearable during the intense time of writing this lic. I owe many thanks to my colleagues in the Sandby borg project, you have made my working life a thrill. Special thanks to Helena, Ludde and Per who welcomed me into the project with open arms. None of this would have happened if it was not for you. Thank you, Daniel, for vital support when I embarked this journey, for an endless supply of photos and for always cheering me on. Thank you, Delia, my co-worker, friend and fellow traveller. We made a promise from the very start to follow this through together, and I must say that (apart from some minor crises) so far, so good!

I want to thank the management group and the board of GRASCA for making the research school happen, especially Cornelius. Thanks to my fellow PhD students for being a great support. Anders, if it was not for your professionalism, always relevant critique, and your unfailing patience, this work would not go under the name 'research'. I will always cherish the moment when you started referring to my first 'article' as an 'article' and not simply 'a text'. Thank you, Roger, for being Mikael's partner in crime. I want to thank my external advisors Anna and Liv. Anna, thanks for always letting me pick your brain, for great collaboration and for emotional support. Thank you, Liv, for welcoming me to Atlanta, for giving me the tools to work with archaeothanatology and for ever so sharp feedback on my texts. I owe thanks to the staff and students at the Forensic Anthropology Center at Texas State University, who kindly received me at their facilities. Special thanks to Michelle and Danny for helping me find material relevant to my research. Thank you Björn for making my working and private life both easier and better.

The Knowledge Foundation, Bohusläns museum and Linnaeus University provide the financial support of this research, for which I am deeply grateful.

Introduction

Violence is perceived as a fundamental human trait, but how does violence work and why is it used? Having worked on a contract basis with the human remains during the excavations of the Iron Age ringfort ‘Sandby borg’ and subsequent analyses since 2014, several questions have kept recurring to me. The two skeletons that had been exhumed prior to my participation in the project indicated what we now know, that a massacre took place inside the ringfort some 1500 years ago and that the dead were left to rot within the ringfort walls.

Excavating and documenting these human remains before they are removed from their context has spurred my eagerness to develop methods and theories that can advance the understanding of the processes behind these human remains. What led to the mass violence witnessed in the bones? What social processes do the human remains bear witness to? Why were these individuals not buried, and how were their corpses perceived in their contemporary setting?

In my research, I study how corpses from intergroup conflicts can be used to achieve consequences beyond the act of violence. The subject of corpses from mass violence is surprisingly unexplored, despite extensive academic research on the body and of mass violence as separate themes, both within the social sciences and the humanities (Anstett & Dreyfus 2014). This knowledge gap was recently recognised by anthropologist Elisabeth Anstett and historian Jean-Marc Dreyfus who led the interdisciplinary research project *Corpses of Mass Violence and Genocide*. They studied how different societies have coped with the production of cadavers from mass violence and how corpses were used for symbolic, social, religious, economic and political purposes during the 20th century. Structural mass violence in forms of massacres and genocides met new metrics during the last century. Anstett and Dreyfus formulated the importance of recognizing the impact of corpses in the context of mass violence as:

[...] the fate of the body, and more particularly that of the corpse, in our view constitutes a fundamental key to understanding genocidal processes and the impact of mass violence on contemporary societies. The study of how the dead body is treated can lead us to an understanding of the impact of mass violence on contemporary societies – from the moment of the infliction of death until the stage when the bodies of the victims are reinstated in a peaceful society. (Anstett & Dreyfus 2014,3)

Since the 1980s, forensic exhumations of mass graves from genocides and wars has become standard practice (Renshaw 2011). Human remains, as material evidence of crime, play a crucial role in the understanding of the body in human rights investigations, the attitude to death and of commemoration (Laqueur 2002,72; Renshaw 2011,15). The treatment of corpses from mass violence is not only interesting in a cross-cultural contemporary setting but needs to be studied in deep history in order to develop a cross-temporal understanding of this human behaviour. As evidenced by interpersonal trauma in human remains from around the world violence has occurred in varying scale throughout the traceable human past (Keeley 1996). The study of human remains provides strong material evidence of interpersonal violence in prehistory. By combining osteological study of human remains, archaeological context, comparative material and social theories, the question of past treatment of corpses in intergroup conflicts and their social implications can be addressed. This needs to be done from an understanding that mass violence does not occur as a single event but as part of a socially transformative process that has consequences beyond the violence itself (e.g. Pérez 2010, 2012).

Intertwined with the research of corpses from mass violence is the research of death. Archaeological research has much to contribute in regards to contextualising both death and violence today. The knowledge of past conditions and of human behaviour is valuable for discussions and understandings of today's challenges (e.g. Fowler 2016; Klevnäs 2016; Nilsson Stutz 2016). Within the Graduate School in Contract Archaeology (GRASCA), several areas of research were identified as vital in order to increase Swedish contract archaeology. My research foremost relates to the areas of 'Maximizing societal impact' and 'Determining society's need' through advancing the knowledge of corpses from intergroup lethal conflict as a social phenomenon and subsequently of death and violence as social processes. Whose deaths that have consequences and are given attention is a pressing issue today when refugees die en masse while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea, racial oppression has lethal consequences due to lack of social care (or due to police violence) and structural gendered violence causes deaths worldwide every day. Interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological developments on death and mass violence are needed in order to contribute to current political debate and developments (cf. Nilsson Stutz 2016). It is in line with this discourse that I see my contribution.

Within my research, I study how unburied corpses from intergroup conflicts may exert agency (i.e. *postmortem agency* after Crandall & Martin 2014) in their contemporary setting and by that contribute to social transformation. The research contributes to both the understanding of motives and outcomes of violence, how death is perceived and used over time, and ontologies of the corpse itself.

I regard a bioarchaeological perspective – in itself interdisciplinary – integrating human osteology, archaeology and social theory (cf. Knüsel 2016), as fruitful in the pursuit to develop both methods and theories regarding mass violence and death.

Aim

My aim is to create new knowledge about the social implications of unburied corpses that stem from intergroup conflicts, and subsequently add knowledge regarding how intergroup violence is organised to achieve desired social agendas. In order to be able to study the treatment of corpses in the deeper past, I needed to use and further develop osteological methods that allow tracing unburied corpses. I also need to develop the theoretical understanding of post mortem agency.

The bioarchaeological case study for my licentiate thesis is the Sandby borg massacre. Inside the Iron Age ringfort, located on the (now Swedish) island Öland, the remains of at least 26 individuals have been recovered after excavating a mere 9% of its interior. Several of the dead display traces of lethal intergroup violence. The remains of young and old are found inside the buildings and out on the ringfort street.

Licentiate research questions

- What does the analysis of demography and the violence evidenced in the human osteological material from Sandby borg say regarding the killing strategy of the perpetrators?
- What was the postmortem fate of the victims in Sandby borg?
- How can I, through the case study of Sandby borg, illustrate how postmortem agency and violence as a social process can be studied?
- How does the bioarchaeological analyses and results inform our understanding of Sandby borg in an Iron Age context?

Relationship between licentiate and doctoral theses

In Swedish academia, a doctoral degree can be completed in two stages, where the first requires writing a licentiate thesis. The licentiate is put forward after two years of full time studies, including one semester of full-time course work. The second half of the four-year PhD education leads to the doctoral thesis.

Within the PhD project, I research cross-cultural and cross-temporal uses of dead bodies in intergroup conflicts in order to achieve consequences beyond the violent act itself. The PhD project will provide both an historical perspective on lethal intergroup violence, and possible social implications of the treatment of corpses from mass violence in both past and contemporary society.

Within this research, I aim to contribute to the current understanding of postmortem agency of unburied corpses in relation to mass violence. Closely correlated to this issue is the perception of death and corporeality.

In the here presented licentiate, the research is conducted through a bioarchaeological perspective where the human skeletal material from Sandby borg is used as a case study. This is done in order to develop an understanding of how the phenomenon of postmortem agency can be explored in prehistoric conflicts. In connection to this, I research how the treatment of corpses during its liminal phase correlates to social order and disorder. To be able to discuss these theories in relation to my bioarchaeological case study, I trace the handling of the dead in Sandby borg. Given that the treatment of the dead is culture specific, the situation in Sandby borg is compared to the contemporary standard funerary treatment. The violent event itself is analysed; the demography of the victims, the type of violence used, whether the killing was indiscriminate, the efficiency of the killing, the body positions and when possible – the course of events. The analysis is carried out in order to further contextualize the violence in order to discuss the event, the actions of the perpetrators and possible motives behind and outcomes of the violent encounter.

The licentiate thus relates to the doctoral thesis in the sense that within the licentiate I research the conditions for how postmortem agency and the treatment of corpses can be studied in archaeological material, specifically in a prehistoric intergroup conflict where the corpses have not been buried. In the coming doctoral thesis, I will connect the archaeological research to cross-temporal usage of corpses from mass violence and investigate the current value of such knowledge.

My participation in the Sandby borg project

The ongoing research project *Frozen in Time - histories of life and moments of death at Sandby borg*, funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond) since 2016, and led by Kalmar County Museum in collaboration with Stockholm University, runs parallel with GRASCA.

Limited excavations have been carried out yearly at Sandby borg since 2011 (see article I). These were initially funded by initiatives through Kalmar County Museum who are leading the excavations. Prior to my participation, the human remains from individuals 1 and 2 were excavated and analysed by Helene Wilhelmson. Her results were published in her dissertation (Wilhelmson 2017). Since 2014 I have been contracted (through my employer Bohusläns museum) by Kalmar County Museum as a field osteologist and for the subsequent analysis of human remains. Currently the analysis of the material is undertaken as part of my GRASCA research project (November 2015 and onwards). All results regarding the human remains from Sandby borg as accounted for here are based on analyses made by myself over the years (including individuals 1 and 2). The preliminary osteological results have been presented in the Sandby borg report series (Papmehl-Dufay & Alfsdotter 2016; Gunnarsson et al. 2016; Alfsdotter in press).

A recent, more detailed, trauma analysis presented in article II was carried out in collaboration with Anna Kjellström, external advisor and participant in the *Frozen in time* project. In addition, Kjellström conducted parts of the taphonomic analysis (zone preservation, fracture analysis and weathering of *humeri* and *femora*) that are accounted for in article III.

All osteological observations in the field were made by me. Regarding individual 1 and 2, my archaeoethanatomical analysis was based on photographs kindly provided by Helene Wilhelmson and Nicolo Dell'Unto along with photo documentation from Kalmar County Museum. I conducted the archaeoethanatomical analysis (see article III and associated supplements) under the supervision of external advisor Liv Nilsson Stutz, who received me at Emory University in Atlanta during the initiation of the archaeoethanatomical analysis.

Summary of articles

Article I: A moment frozen in time: evidence of a late fifth-century massacre at Sandby borg

Status

The article was published in *Antiquity*.

Authors

This paper was co-authored with Ludvig Pappmehl-Dufay and Helena Victor, archaeologists and project leaders for the Sandby borg project. The archaeological data is based on the excavations carried out from 2011 and onwards by Kalmar County Museum (as reported in the Sandby borg report series). All osteological analysis, descriptions and interpretations are my work. My writing contribution was substantial and includes the sections 'Body positions, spatial context and trauma', 'Demography of the massacred', 'The season of the massacre', and 'A moment frozen in time'. The discussion section was written in collaboration.

Aim

This paper contextualises Sandby borg in a Migration period perspective. The aim was to present the site, the excavation results, to account for how we know that a massacre took place and why we argue that the ringfort was subsequently abandoned, creating a 'frozen moment' of both everyday life and the violent event.

Material and methods

The argumentation builds on analysis of osteological material, archaeological artefacts, stratigraphy and architectural observations, macro-botanic studies and previous research.

Conclusions

A massacre took place inside the ringfort, leaving a frozen moment of both everyday life and of the massacre. The human remains encountered thus far are biased in regards to sex but not in regards to age. Beyond the investigation of the violent event, this site provides unique possibilities to study Migration period everyday life. Contemporary human remains that have not been subjected to cremation are rare, making the Sandby borg skeletons a contribution to Migration period research of non-cremated osteological material. The massacre took place during the middle Iron Age, probably during the late 5th century as indicated by artefact typology.

The season of the massacre and subsequent abandonment was likely between late spring and early fall, as indicated by animal osteological remains. The artefacts encountered bear witness to extensive networks and great wealth. The assault was probably connected to local political instability following the dissolution of the Western Roman empire rather than the result of outright plunder.

Article II: The mass killing at Sandby borg: Interpersonal violence and the demography of the victims

Status

The manuscript was submitted to European Journal of Archaeology.

Authors

This article was co-authored with external advisor Anna Kjellström who is participating in the Sandby borg project through the research project run by Kalmar County Museum. Writing, reviewing and editing was carried out by both authors. Data curation and a preliminary trauma analysis was conducted by Alfsdotter (in Gunnarsson et al. 2016; Alfsdotter in press). The article presents analysis of trauma conducted by both authors. The article builds on excavation documentation and osteological analysis previously conducted by Alfsdotter (Papmehl-Dufay & Alfsdotter 2016; Gunnarsson et al. 2016; Alfsdotter in press).

Aim

In this paper we advance the knowledge of the violent event, the perpetrators and the victims. We present the demography of the dead, trauma patterns, trauma type and body positions. The results are further contextualised in order to discuss the event, the acts of the perpetrators and possible motives behind the assault. We address the questions of who were killed and how they were killed.

Material and methods

Human remains were analysed following standard anthropological protocol. The trauma pattern is compared to previously published archaeological osteological trauma patterns. Comparative archaeological sites are discussed as well as weapons and weapon tactics. The material is briefly discussed in comparison to research on modern mass violence.

Conclusions

At least 26 individuals were left unburied in the houses and on the street. Perimortem sharp, blunt and penetrating trauma consistent with interpersonal violence was identified on eight individuals (31%). Additionally, the location and body positions of the remaining individuals imply that they were killed during the same event. In several cases, the lesions were found at the back of the bodies, and no typical defence injuries have been identified, suggesting a surprise attack with little defence. The perpetrators were seemingly plentiful, striking at the same time. The massacre was carried out effectively judging from the economic distribution of trauma, the non-modification of the bodies and the uncollected valuable items. Though most injuries were inflicted on crania, a clear trauma pattern could not be established. If comparing to recent mass killings the effective Sandby borg slaughter could be the result of a dispassionate killing stirred by sociopolitical instability. The decision to kill the Sandby borg inhabitants was probably a decision based on a feeling of past injustices and the understanding of the Sandby borg group as a threat. The choice to kill children indicates that a fear of future conflict was felt by the assassins. The motive behind the massacre was likely to gain power and control.

Article III: A taphonomic interpretation of the postmortem fate of the victims following the mass killing at Sandby borg

Status

The manuscript was submitted to *Antiquity*.

Authors

Co-authored with Anna Kjellström. Writing, reviewing and editing was conducted by both authors. Analysis of femora and humeri in terms of preservation, degrees of weathering and fracture analysis by Kjellström. Archaeothanatological analysis, thermal analysis, data curation and proposed new parameters for void decomposition is the work of Alfsdotter. The article builds on excavation documentation and osteological analysis previously conducted by Alfsdotter (Papmehl-Dufay & Alfsdotter 2016; Gunnarsson et al. 2016; Alfsdotter in press).

Aim

Through reconstructing the taphonomic conditions at Sandby borg, the aim was to understand the postmortem fate of the human remains. Different techniques were applied as tools to facilitate the understanding of the postmortem setting by separating environmental factors affecting the body from human actions.

Material and methods

The analysis of the human remains from Sandby borg was conducted through different taphonomic techniques: the preservation of femora and humeri in accordance to the zonation system by Knüsel and Outram (2004), degrees of weathering of femora and humeri by Behrensmeyer (1978), fracture analysis of femora and humeri (Outram 2002,4), and archaeothanatological analysis (e.g. Duday 2009; Nilsson Stutz 2003). Analysis of thermal alterations of bones and stratigraphic interpretation was integrated in the study to understand the taphonomic processes.

Conclusions

The results from the taphonomic analysis of the Sandby borg skeletons proves it unlikely that the bodies were manipulated postmortem. The bodies in Sandby borg have decomposed in voids. The thermal alterations evident on some of the skeletons stem from perimortal burning. We understand the modest heat-induced lesions as the result of active hearths and a smouldering roof that was lit in connection to the assault, but that eventually self-extinguished.

We propose two new observations for ‘unrestricted void’ taphonomy. The first is that abduction of limbs can indicate bloat and can thus be indicative of a primary deposit of the body and a void decomposition. The second observation is that decomposition in unrestricted voids allow quicker drainage (or at least a larger spatial distribution for the putrefaction mass) than ‘restricted voids’, thus reducing extensive lateral displacements of skeletons. Lateralisation of femoral heads and splaying of pelvic girdle, often observed in void burials, might consequently be the effect of partial submersion of the corpse in its putrefaction mass rather than the result of gravity alone.

Article IV: Social Implications of Unburied Corpses from Intergroup Conflicts: Postmortem Agency Following the Sandby borg Massacre

Status

The manuscript was submitted to Cambridge Archaeological Journal.

Authors

This article was written by Clara Alfsdotter.

Aim

The aim was to demonstrate how postmortem agency can be studied in the deeper past. I investigated the social response to the biological deaths in Sandby borg in order to understand the contemporary implications of leaving the corpses from the massacre unburied.

Material and methods

I built a theoretical framework that allows contextualising postmortem agency in relation to osteological material from lethal intergroup conflicts, where Sandby borg was used as a case study. The framework was constructed through integrating the empirical material with strands of previous research within the humanities and social sciences: social implications of lethal intergroup conflicts, the liminal phase of the corpse, the ontology of death and postmortem agency.

Conclusions

The corpse carries strong political and symbolic capital and is therefore useful in the process of social change. It evokes strong emotions as the biological death demands a social response. The response in the case of the Sandby borg massacre, where the victims were not cared for, was probably one of horror, disgrace and terror. The gain for the perpetrators was likely political power through redrawing the biography of the victims, the spatial memory and the political landscape. A 'bad death' and the denial of rite of passage might have led to eternal separation from sympathizers and the end of regeneration for the defeated. The assault could have been the response to previous wrongdoing or diverging political opinions. Possibly, the attack was not politically sanctioned but rather infused by political discordance. Sandby borg was left as a monument of terror.

By combining theories of postmortem agency, biocultural response to dying and death, and of violence as a social and political tool, this study shows that we can gain insight into how collective violence can be organised to achieve consequences beyond the violence itself while gaining a deeper understanding of the biocultural process of dying. The theoretical framework put forward enhances the bioarchaeological understanding of social processes and analysis of lethal collective violence in general, and postmortem agency of unburied corpses from intergroup conflicts in particular.

Conclusions

The hypothesis that a massacre took place in Sandby borg is confirmed by the interpersonal trauma identified in the remains of eight of the twenty-six individuals excavated so far. The osteological taphonomy in combination with the stratigraphy and the spatial relation to artefacts, show that the assault was contemporary with the material record. The archaeoethanatomical analysis confirm that the dwellings were not reused following the advanced decomposition of the bodies. The understanding of the indoors spatiality is increased by the results of the skeletal taphonomical analysis. The course of events during the massacre can in some cases be traced, such as individuals falling over one another, a man falling over an active hearth and the probable succession of three perimortal blows to one man's body. The season of the assault, as indicated by the age of slaughtered lambs, was likely between late spring and early fall (article I). The perimortal fire modification on some skeletons bear evidence of a limited fire breaking out in one of three fully excavated houses in connection to the massacre (article I and III).

The osteological results show that the killing was indiscriminate in regards to age and that the attack surprised the inhabitants who had limited opportunity to defend themselves. The perpetrators were numerous and they struck at the same time. The massacre was carried out effectively with no traces of overkill. If comparing to recent mass killings, this can indicate that the Sandby borg slaughter was dispassionate, perhaps ordered. The killing of children indicates that the perpetrating group experienced the Sandby borg dwellers as cancerous and feared future conflict (article II). Mass killings seldom happen during peaceful times but occur during continuous social turmoil (e.g. Dutton et al. 2005). The motives behind the Sandby borg massacre were likely to gain power and control. This connects to the analysis of theoretical aspects of postmortem agency (article IV). The results indicate that the perpetrators likely gained political power through redrawing of the biography of the victims, the spatial memory and the political landscape. Through the taphonomic studies presented in article III, we know that the Sandby borg corpses were not treated according to the contemporary normative funerary practice. The corpses were left to decay in the ringfort without rites of passage. Returning to article IV, this might have led to an eternal liminal phase for the Sandby borg inhabitants who thus exerted eternal agency in the living society. The corpse carries strong political and symbolic capital and is therefore useful in the process of social change.

Given the non-handling of the Sandby borg victims, it is reasonable to argue that they suffered a bad death (article IV). Perhaps neighbours were either restricted from burying the dead, or the very fact that they suffered a bad death led to the unwillingness to handle the corpses.

The denial of funerary treatment probably affected the way in which the inhabitants were perceived in contemporary society. The lack of installation of a proper death probably led to shame, disgrace, hindering of regeneration and an eternal separation from the living, not only physically but also mentally. The denial of rites of passage can be seen as a last act of violence. Metaphorically speaking, the dead bodies bore witness to the end of life inside the ringfort and thus the extinction of networks, wealth and power connected to Sandby borg.

The taphonomic analysis (article III) was important in order to understand the postmortem fate of the Sandby borg corpses. While conducting the archaeothanatological analysis, it became clear that there was a discrepancy between the joint dislocations diagnostic for void burials and the Sandby borg skeletons. As clear indications for a void decomposition was however evidenced in the Sandby borg skeletons, the issue of the difference between void *burials* and an indoors decomposition was raised. As I had spent two weeks at the Forensic Anthropology Center at Texas State University studying outdoor human decomposition, observations regarding decomposition processes in different voids helped understand the discrepancy between ‘restricted’ and ‘unrestricted’ voids, for which a hypothesis is given in article III. In addition to methodological development for the understanding of unburied corpses, my research helps to bridge the historical divide between osteology and taphonomy (see discussions in Robb 2013; Knüsel & Robb 2016).

My results show that postmortem agency can be studied in prehistoric settings through a bioarchaeological perspective integrating social theories on death, postmortem agency and intergroup violence, osteological and contextual analysis, careful taphonomic analysis and comparison of the treatment of the dead with the prevailing normative treatment. In relation to Migration period Öland, my research contributes to the understanding of society in several regards. To begin with, the materiality of corpses in rites of passage was important. Additionally, the non-normative treatment of the unburied dead in Sandby borg shows that the disregard of the corpses was culturally significant. The outcome was likely increased power for the perpetrators. Furthermore, the character of the Sandby borg massacre, as presented here, indicates that the assault was part of a local power play (as previously suggested by Victor 2015). This strengthens the understanding of the Migration period as politically unstable on Öland, and that the Sandby borg dwellers were perceived as a threat by the assaulting group. This gives reason to believe that conflicting groups constituted contemporary Öland society. The effective killing in addition to the lack of traces of overkill in Sandby borg (such as mutilation) indicates that the killing was instrumental. An instrumental killing could in turn be expected if the killers were given orders to kill the dwellers, rather than the killers being familiar with the victims. The current analysis shows that the obliteration of the ringfort inhabitants and the disregard towards their dead bodies changed the spatial, biographical, and political landscape.

Results of licentiate thesis in relation to forthcoming research

Through a bioarchaeological perspective I have hitherto shown how the phenomenon of postmortem agency can be explored in a prehistoric intergroup lethal conflict. I have theorised the social implications of violence beyond the act of violence in terms of agency exerted through the materiality of the unburied corpse. I have researched how the treatment of corpses during its liminal phase correlates to social order and disorder.

I have illustrated how violence can be analysed archaeologically as a social process rather than merely a puncturing event. In relation to the entire PhD project where I aim to research cross-cultural and cross-temporal uses of dead bodies in intergroup conflicts, the licentiate has thus shown how this question can be addressed in the deeper past by integrating osteology, archaeology, taphonomy and social theories. Consequently, archaeological research can contribute to the understanding of postmortem agency and intergroup violence as social processes. How this knowledge can contribute to the current state of affairs will be explored in forthcoming research. My ambition is that the research will lead to new approaches and services that can be offered by contract bioarchaeology. An example is the methodological development of tracing the treatment of unburied corpses taphonomically, which can possibly be of interest both archaeologically and forensically. Another is how bioarchaeology can offer new perspectives in order to contextualize current political challenges in terms of the ontology of death, postmortem agency and intergroup violence over time.

Swedish summary (sammanfattning på svenska)

Introduktion

Syftet med avhandlingen är att studera innebörden och konsekvenserna av hur lik behandlas i gruppkonflikter, vilket relaterar till hur massvåld organiseras för att framkalla åtrådd samhällsförändring. Trots att humanistisk och samhällsvetenskaplig forskning om dödligt organiserat våld liksom forskning om kroppen är omfattande som separata teman, så är fenomenet lik från gruppkonflikter förvånansvärt utforskat (Anstett & Dreyfus 2014). Arkeologisk forskning har mycket att tillföra ämnet *postmortem agency* (efter Crandall & Martin 2014) eller 'postmortalt agentskap' i ett historiskt sammanhang och därmed bidra med viktiga infallsvinklar när det gäller samtida hantering av döda kroppar i gruppkonflikter.

Inom företagsforskarskolan GRASCA har flera kunskapsluckor identifierats. Min forskning förhåller sig främst till 'Determining society's needs' och 'Maximizing social impact' då jag adderar kunskap om våld som en samhällsprocess genom att studera hur man använder lik i olika gruppkonflikter.

Genom studiet av mänskliga kvarlevor vet vi att våld mellan personer har förekommit under hela den spårbara mänskliga historien (Keeley 1996). En kombination av humanosteologiska analyser, arkeologiska sammanhang, jämförelsematerial och samhällsvetenskapliga teorier kan användas för att studera hur lik från gruppkonflikter har behandlats och vilka deras samhälleliga konsekvenser har varit i det förgångna. Detta görs utifrån förståelsen att dödligt gruppvåld inte utgörs av en enstaka företeelse, utan är en del av en samhällsprocess där våldet har konsekvenser utöver individens död (Pérez 2012, 2012).

Hur kan kvarlämnade lik från gruppkonflikter utöva agentskap i det samtida samhället, och därmed bidra till samhällsförändring? Licentiatavhandlingen avgränsas till att undersöka hur vi kan studera postmortalt agentskap i förflutna gruppkonflikter. Detta görs genom fallstudien Sandby borg på Öland, där en massaker ägde rum för cirka 1500 år sedan varefter kropparna lämnades obegravda. I doktorsavhandlingen kommer den arkeologiska forskningen att kopplas samman med hur man använt lik från gruppkonflikter över tid, liksom värdet av den kunskapen idag.

I licentiatavhandlingen bedrivs forskningen ur ett bioarkeologiskt perspektiv som integrerar humanosteologi, arkeologi och samhällsvetenskapliga teorier. Jag anser att detta är ett fruktbart angreppssätt för att utveckla både teorier och metoder om postmortalt agentskap i konflikter. I järnåldersborgen Sandby borg har offrens kroppar lämnats obegravda inne i husen och ute på gatan.

Ben från minst 26 individer har identifierats efter att nio procent av borgens yta grävts ut. Flera av skeletten uppvisar spår av dödande våld.

Frågeställningarna för licentiatavhandlingen är:

- Vad kan de bioarkeologiska analyserna av demografi och trauma säga angående överfallsstrategi, dödandet och möjliga motiv bakom massakern i Sandby borg?
- Vilket var Sandby borg-offrens postmortala öde?
- Hur kan jag, genom fallstudien Sandby borg, visa hur postmortalt agentskap och våld som samhällsprocess kan studeras?
- Hur kan de bioarkeologiska analyserna och resultaten bidra till vår förståelse av Sandby borg i en järnålderskontext?

Kort sammanfattning av artiklar

Artikel I: A moment frozen in time: evidence of a late fifth-century massacre at Sandby borg

- Samförfattad med Ludvig Pappmehl-Dufay och Helena Victor, artikeln är publicerad i *Antiquity*.

Artikeln sätter det vi idag vet om Sandby borg i ett folkvandringstida perspektiv. Vi argumenterar för hur vi vet att en massaker ägt rum och att borgen därefter övergivits. Övergivandet har bidragit till ett 'fruset ögonblick' av både vardagslivet och massakern. De döda är av alla åldrar men bara individer av manligt kön har identifierats hittills. Massakern ägde förmodligen rum i slutet av 400-talet. Årstiden kan begränsas till mellan sen vår och tidig höst. Artefakterna från borgen visar på långväga nätverk. Massakern var sannolikt kopplad till lokalpolitisk instabilitet i efterdyningarna av Västros fall.

Artikel II: The mass killing at Sandby borg: Interpersonal violence and the demography of the victims

- Samförfattad med Anna Kjellström, manus är inskickat till *European Journal of Archaeology*.

Utifrån bioarkeologiska studier av demografi, trauma och kroppsställningar fördjupas kunskapen om dödandet, om förövarna samt om offren. 26 individer har hittills identifierats i borgen. Den arkeologiska kontexten och skelettens tafonomi visar att individerna dött vid samma tillfälle. Perimortala skador, som orsakats genom våld, har identifierats på åtta individers skelett. Flera hugg har träffat baksidan av kroppen och inga pareringsskador har identifierats.

Detta tyder på att anfallet var en överraskning och att offren inte var i stånd att försvara sig. Förövarna var många och slog till vid samma tillfälle. Massakern var effektivt utförd utan spår av manipulering av kropparna efter döden. I jämförelse med moderna massakrer så skulle detta kunna innebära att dödandet i Sandby borg var instrumentell, frammanad under sociopolitisk instabilitet. Det är troligt att förövarna upplevde Sandby borg-borna som ett hot och att invånarna ansetts ha haft orättvisa privilegier. Motiven bakom massakern var sannolikt att vinna makt och lokal kontroll.

Artikel III: A taphonomic interpretation of the postmortem fate of the victims following the mass killing at Sandby borg

- Samförfattad med Anna Kjellström, manus är inskickat till *Antiquity*.

Genom att rekonstruera de tafonomiska förhållandena i Sandby borg vid tiden under och efter massakern fördjupas förståelsen för offrens postmortala öde. Olika tafonomiska tekniker användes för att kunna särskilja miljöfaktorer från mänskliga handlingar. Resultaten visar att det är osannolikt att liken har manipulerats efter döden. Kropparna har förruttnat i tomrum inomhus och utomhus. Eldpåverkan på några skelett visar att det brunnit när kropparna var färska. Vi tolkar detta som resultatet av brinnande eldstäder i husen, samt i ett av husen som resultatet av ett pyrande tak som delvis föll in och självsläckte. Troligen tändes vissa tak på i samband med massakern. Vi föreslår två nya observationer för arkeothanatologiska studier av kroppar som förruttnat i tomrum då Sandby borg-skeletten uppvisar andra disartikuleringsmönster än kroppar begravda i kistor: Abduktion av lemmar (rörelse av extremiteter ut från kroppens centralaxel i frontalplanet), kan vara resultatet av 'bloat' och därmed indikera att skelettet fortfarande ligger där kroppen legat under förruttnelsens tidiga skede. Förruttnelse i tomrum som inte är rumsligt begränsat (golv snarare än kista) vilket tillåter bättre dränering av kroppsvätskor som produceras under förruttnelsen. Följaktligen kan de karaktärer som anses diagnostiska för förruttnelse i tomrum (ofta kistor) vara skeletala placeringar orsakade av vätskor, och inte uteslutande en effekt framkallad av tyngdkraften. Ruttnande kroppar i kistor är sannolikt delvis översvämmade under en period.

Artikel IV: Social Implications of Unburied Corpses from Intergroup Conflicts: Postmortem Agency Following the Sandby borg Massacre

- Författad av Clara Alfsdotter, manus är inskickat till Cambridge Archaeological Journal.

Ett teoretiskt ramverk byggs i denna artikel för att kunna kontextualisera postmortalt agentskap i förhållande till humanosteologiskt material från gruppkonflikter med dödlig utgång. Sandby borg används som fallstudie.

Liket besitter stort politiskt och symboliskt kapital, och är därför användbart i samhällsförändrande syften. En biologisk död kräver oftast en samhällelig aktion (någon form av ritual), men så var inte fallet i Sandby borg. De obegravda kropparna i Sandby borg möttes förmodligen av känslor av skräck och skam. Vinsten för förövarna var troligen politisk makt genom omskrivningen av offrens biografi, historien och platsminnet. Sandby borg lämnades som en terror-monument. Förnekandet av begravningsriter samt en 'ond död' ('bad death') kan ha lett till att offren för evigt blev separerade från de levande och berövades återfödelse. Studien visar hur teorier om postmortalt agentskap, biologisk och kulturell död kan problematisera våld som ett politiskt redskap, samt hur postmortalt agentskap kan studeras i det förgångna.

Slutsatser

De bioarkeologiska analyserna visar att en massaker har ägt rum i Sandby borg. Resultaten av de tafonomiska analyserna och den arkeologiska kontexten visar att den materiella kulturen och skeletten är samtida, samt att borgen inte användes efter att liken skeletterats. Förståelsen för rumsligheten i husen ökas genom resultaten från den tafonomiska analysen. Massakerns skeende kan i vissa fall spåras, såsom individer som fallit över varandra. De tafonomiska analyserna, i kombination med jämförelsematerial, visade att kropparna i Sandby borg inte har hanterats enligt rådande norm (begravning som ofta föregåtts av kremering). En hypotes för metodutveckling av arkeothanatologisk förståelse av förruttelse av lik i tomrum har presenterats. Min forskning bidrar till pågående utveckling av integreringen mellan osteologi och tafonomi (se diskussioner i Robb 2013; Knüsel & Robb 2016).

Animalosteologiska resultat indikerar att massakern ägde rum mellan senvår och tidig höst. Den humanosteologiska analysen visar att det i begränsad utsträckning har brunnit i anslutning till anfallet. Individer av alla åldrar dödades, men inga kvinnor har bekräftats ännu. Anfallet var ett överraskningsanfall där offren inte var i stånd att försvara sig. Förövarna var många, och dödandet var effektivt. Inga fall av övervåld har iakttagits (utöver att lämna kropparna obegravda, vilket kan anses vara en våldshandling i sig). Dödandet av barn indikerar att förövarna fruktade fortsatt framtida konflikt. Massakrer äger ofta rum under tider av stor samhällsoro, under pågående konflikter. Motiven bakom Sandby borg-massakern var troligen att vinna makt och kontroll över lokalsamhället. Genom att lämna kropparna obegravda kunde man skriva om offrens biografi och det geografiska minnet. Kvarlämnandet av liken kan ha lett till en evig limbo för offren som därmed utövade 'evigt' agentskap i samhället. Det är troligt att kropparna inte togs omhand av meningsfränder eftersom att offren genomgått en 'ond död'. En alternativ tolkning är att kvarlevande hindrades från att begrava kropparna, vilket skulle förstärka förståelsen av massakern som ett sätt att vinna lokal kontroll. Förnekandet av begravningsritual kan ha fungerat som en sista våldshandling. Metaforiskt vittnade liken om livets slut i borgen och följaktligen utplånandet av sociala nätverk, rikedom och makt kopplad till Sandby borg.

Mina resultat visar att postmortalt agentskap *kan* studeras i förhistorien genom ett bioarkeologiskt perspektiv. I relation till det folkvandringstida Öland bidrar min forskning till ökad kunskap i flera frågor: Kroppens materialitet var viktig i begravningsriten. (Icke-)behandlingen av kropparna i Sandby borg visar att hanteringen var kulturellt signifikant. Förövarna ville vinna makt och kontroll, och Sandby borg-invånarna ansågs troligen som ett hot. Massakern var sannolikt del av ett lokalt maktspel (såsom tidigare föreslagits av Victor 2015).

Detta stärker bilden av folkvandringstiden som en socialt och politiskt turbulent tid.

Forskningen presenterad här visar hur fenomenet postmortalt agentskap kan studeras i förhistoriska gruppkonflikter. Jag har teoretiserat våld som en samhällsprocess i fråga om hur den döda kroppens materialitet påverkar de levande (och döda) samt hur behandlingen av kroppar i sin övergångsfas korrelerar med social ordning och oordning. Fortsatt forskning kommer att relateras till rådande politiska utmaningar i fråga om postmortalt agentskap i situationer av organiserat dödligt våld.

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