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Restless corpses: 'secondary burial' in the Babenberg and Habsburg dynasties

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The historically documented burial samples of the Babenberg and Habsburg dynasties allow a detailed analysis of the circumstances that led to dismemberment, evisceration, disturbance, exhumation and reburial over a millennium. The results may provide deeper and more broadly applicable insights into relevant cultural formation processes of elite burials.

Key-words: Habsburg, Babenberg, Maya, mortuary behaviour, secondary burial, formation processes

Introduction

Distinguishing various *formation processes* that shape the state of burials is a major challenge for archaeologists. One such process is *secondary burial*. In many archaeological reports the term is loosely applied to burials where corpses show signs of alterations and do not represent complete and fully articulated bodies (Williams & Beck 2001: 1). The causes of 'secondary burial' formation vary widely (Orschiedt 1997) spanning both *cultural formation processes* (treatment of the corpse, reclamation and disturbance processes) and *environmental formation processes*, e.g. 'faunalturbation [sic]' (Schiffer 1987). Nevertheless, in the archaeological record the reasons behind disarranged bones may be obscured.

This article discusses 'secondary burial' formation in two dynastic mortuary samples. The need for such analysis developed out of the author's focus on ancient Maya mortuary behaviour (Krejci & Culbert 1995). Disarticulated skeletal remains are frequent in the Maya area and are variably interpreted as dismembered victims of sacrifice, exhumed and reburied venerated ancestors or disturbed corpses (Krejci 1998: 218; Sievert 2001). Some disarticulated and incomplete skeletal parts have been identified as the remains of Maya rulers or have been discovered in 'royal' contexts (Welsh 1988; Martin & Grube 2000: 150). Since many tombs probably held the remains of members of ancient Maya royal houses, the interpretation of

the differing states of body articulation may be supported by a cross-cultural analysis of formation processes of dynastic mortuary records.

The Babenberg and Habsburg dynasties

Mortuary records from historic Europe provide useful comparative data sets, since special treatment of the deceased and continuous rearrangement of the dead are not only prevalent but also well documented, revealing the underlying motivations. Burial records from Babenbergs and Habsburgs and data from related European dynasties allow a detailed analysis of the circumstances that led to 'secondary burial' formation from the Middle Ages to modern times.

The Babenbergs enter history in 976 when Leopold I was given a small margravate in the present day province of Lower Austria. As margraves and dukes, the Babenbergs ruled Austria for 270 years (Lechner 1976). Their holdings were taken over by Rudolph I of Habsburg in 1278 who had been elected German Roman King five years earlier. The Habsburgs ruled Austria for 640 years. In 1740 the dynasty died out in the male line, but continued to rule as the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty until 1918 (Hamann 1988a).

The analysed sample includes all people that belonged to one of the two dynasties through birth or marriage, as well as spouses of other houses, totalling 868 individuals who died over a period of 1000 years. The analysis proves that very varied processes are at hand to produce

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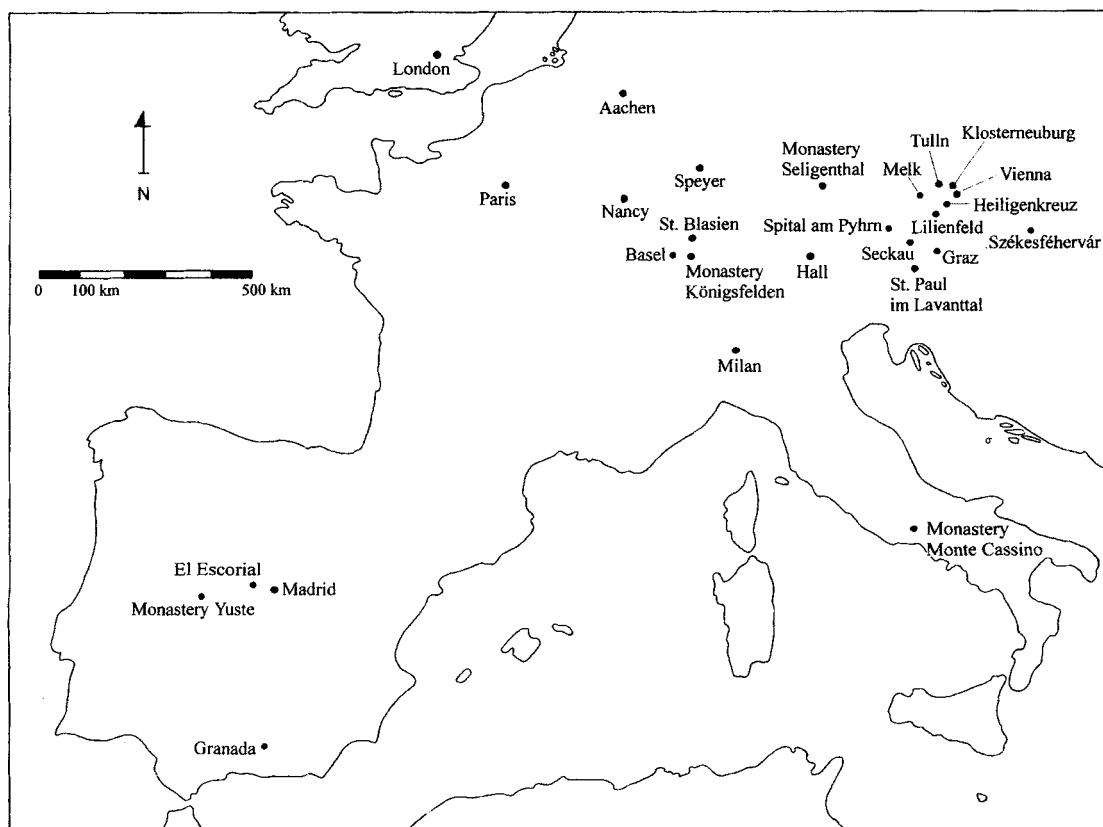


FIGURE 1. Part of Europe, showing sites mentioned in the text.

what an archaeologist simply calls a 'secondary burial'. In the present sample the main responsible agents are *multi-stage burial programmes*, *postfuneral relocation* and *disturbance*.

Multi-stage burial programmes

Most medieval kings and queens had burial places assigned or constructed years before death. But high mobility in the Middle Ages resulted in people rarely dying where they had planned to be buried. Records from the 10th and 11th century prove that the wish for the royal burial place was taken seriously by the survivors, since several corpses of Holy Roman emperors of the Ottonian and Salian dynasties were transported from the place of death to the burial place (Gerbert *et al.* 1772 (4,2): 62–3). Before that time the wish was only occasionally followed and even a mighty emperor such as Charlemagne did not have his way in death. While he wanted to be buried in Paris at St Denis beside his parents, he was instead bur-

ied at Aachen (FIGURE 1) where he had died (Schaller 1993: 66). What was royal standard by the 10th century was soon exercised on nobles of lesser rank who were also transported long distances from their death to their burial places (Schäfer 1920: 491).

Body processing: evisceration and excarnation

Transportation of the deceased required special treatment of the corpse in order to delay putrefaction. Removing the intestines and the heart combined with embalming would usually guarantee a successful transfer, especially if death occurred during the winter months. But, when death occurred ever further away from Central Europe, mostly during military expeditions and in warmer climates, transport of merely eviscerated, deceased nobles back to their homelands became increasingly more difficult. A more efficient treatment of the corpse was required, especially in the much warmer

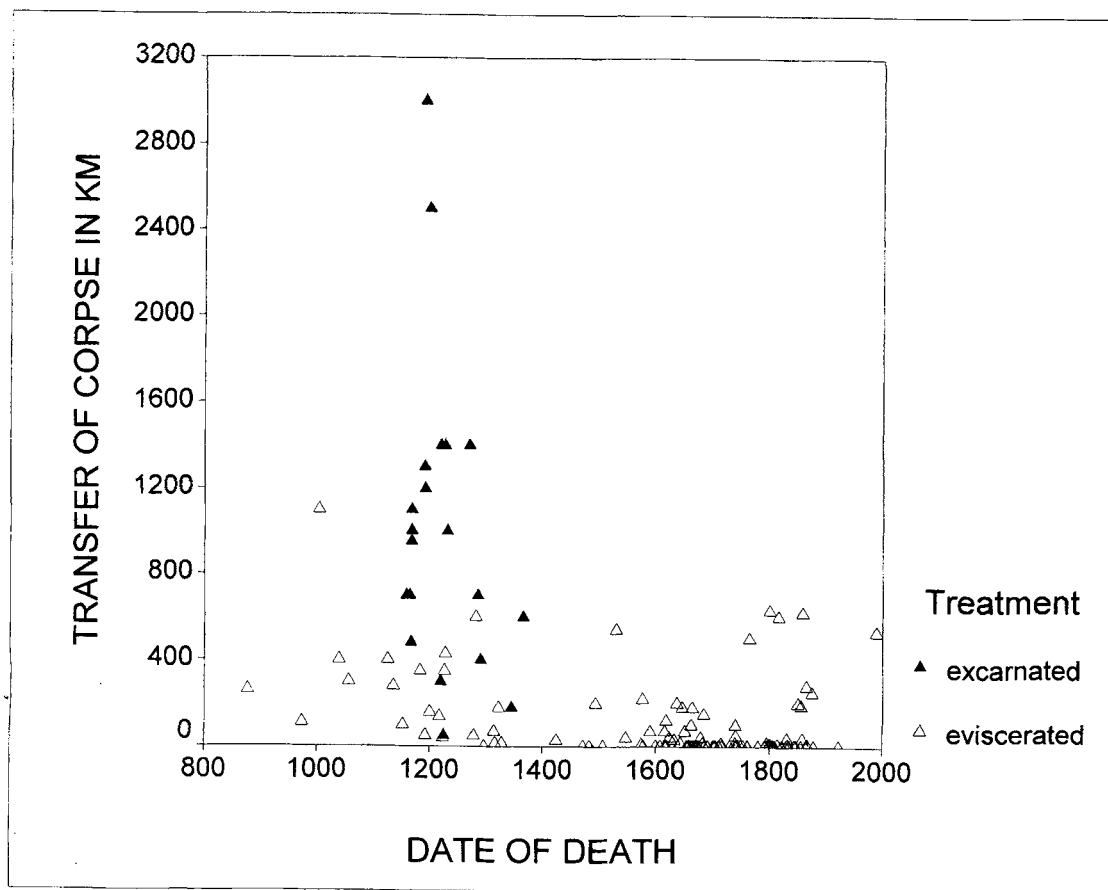


FIGURE 2. For a better demonstration of the relationship between corpse transport, evisceration and excarnation in the Middle Ages, in this graph data on 40 people were added to the sample, among them German, French and English kings and some nobles and bishops that all died between 877 and 1471. From the 17th century onwards, evisceration in the Habsburg dynasty was not related to body transport or an extended time interval between death and burial.

Mediterranean region, where many people died after AD 1000. Burial in what were considered foreign, hostile, heathen lands was out of the question for a high-ranking noble in the Middle Ages, who wanted to be buried in his own territory, in order to await resurrection there (Boase 1972: 113). Cremation had not only been explicitly forbidden under Charlemagne in the 8th century under the threat of the death penalty (Schuchhardt 1920: 499), but such destruction of the bones was also construed as destruction of the soul and thus the chance of resurrection. Burning the body was only used as a punishment (Finucane 1981: 57–8).

The solution for the dilemma was a body treatment that became known as *mos teutonicus*

(the German custom). The bodies were disembowelled, cut into pieces and the flesh removed by boiling the body in water, wine or vinegar. While the flesh and intestines were mostly buried *in situ*, sometimes cremated, the clean, excarnated bones were wrapped in animal hides for their journey (Finucane 1981: 46). FIGURE 2 shows that there exists a relationship between the distance of transport and the choice of the method. Occasionally the *mos teutonicus* was also applied for shorter distances when a long time period between death and burial was required (Schäfer 1920: 485).

Division of the corpse was never favoured by the church, and was even banned in 1299 and again in 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII as a

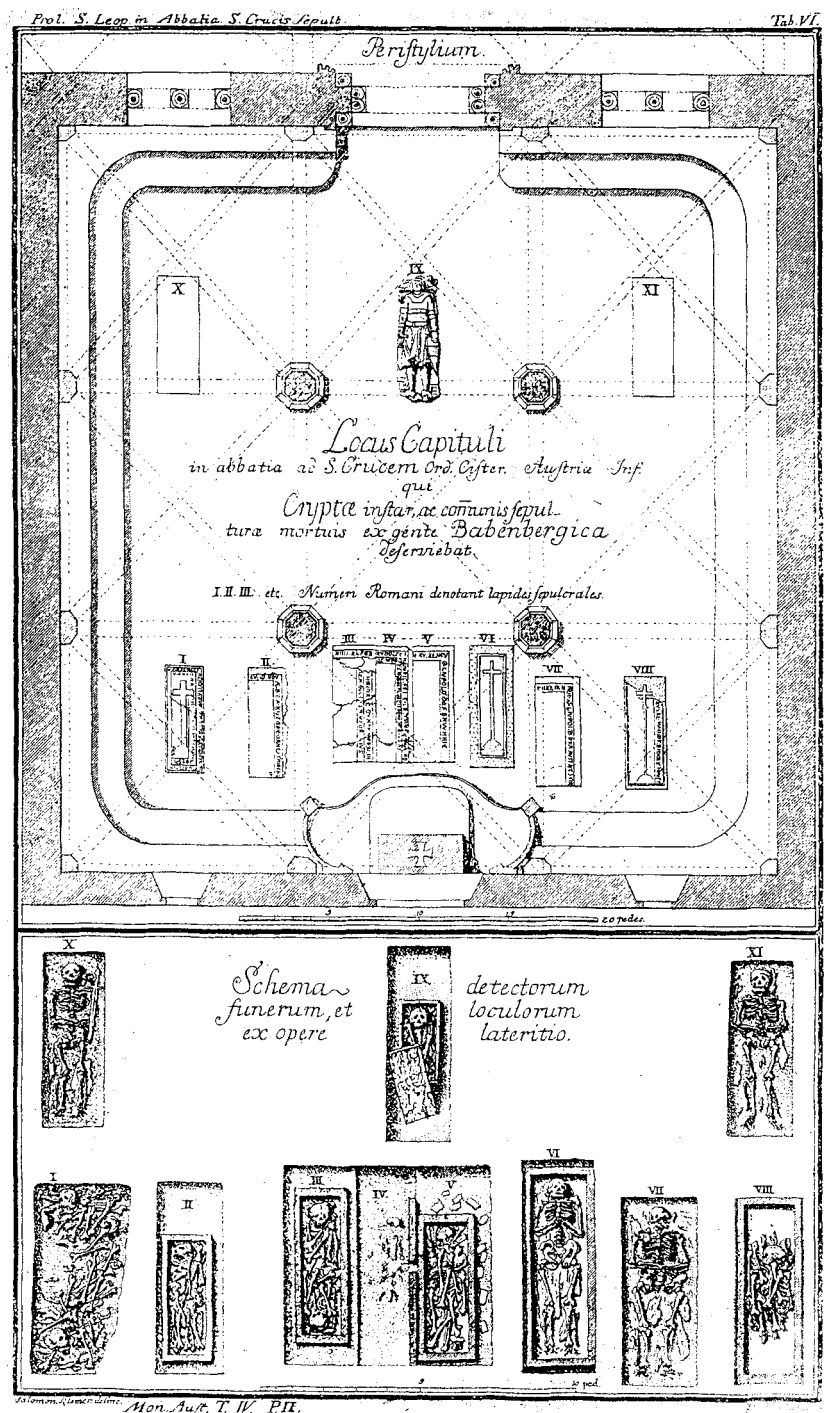


FIGURE 3. Chapter house of the Cistercian Monastery Heiligenkreuz (Austria): the 12th-century foundation became the final burial place of 13 members of the Babenberg dynasty (Gerbert et al. 1772 (4,2): plate VI).

'mos horribilis' (Schäfer 1920: 497; Brown 1981: 221). Nevertheless, both disembowelling and boiling the corpse remained extremely popu-

lar among European dynasties (Brown 1981; Dodson 1994), although separating the flesh from the bones ceased in the 15th century. At least

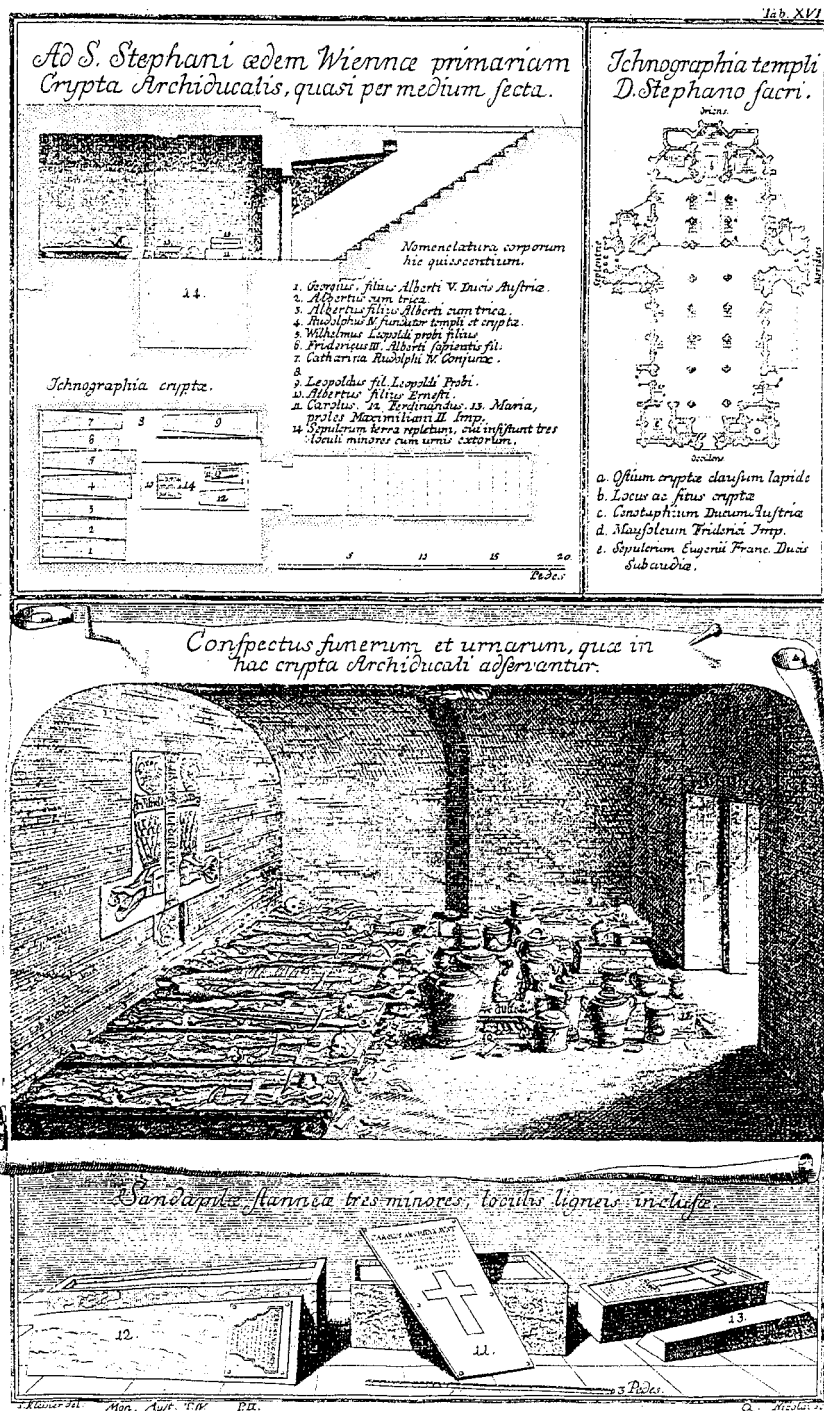


FIGURE 4. Old dukes' crypt at St Stephen's cathedral in Vienna: Rudolph IV rests on the left side in the centre (no. 4). People buried in the crypt died between the 14th and 15th century, but three children of Emperor Maximilian II were added in the 16th century. 21 intestinal urns and 4 heart urns belong to Habsburgs that died in the 17th and 18th centuries (Gerbert et al. 1772 (4,2): plate XVI).

two Babenbergs and probably one Habsburg received the latter treatment.

When the Heiligenkreuz monastery was investigated in 1739 the skeletons were found in

varying states of articulation (FIGURE 3). In coffin VIII rest the remains of Babenberg duke Frederick I, who died on 16 April 1198 during a Crusade and had been treated in *more*

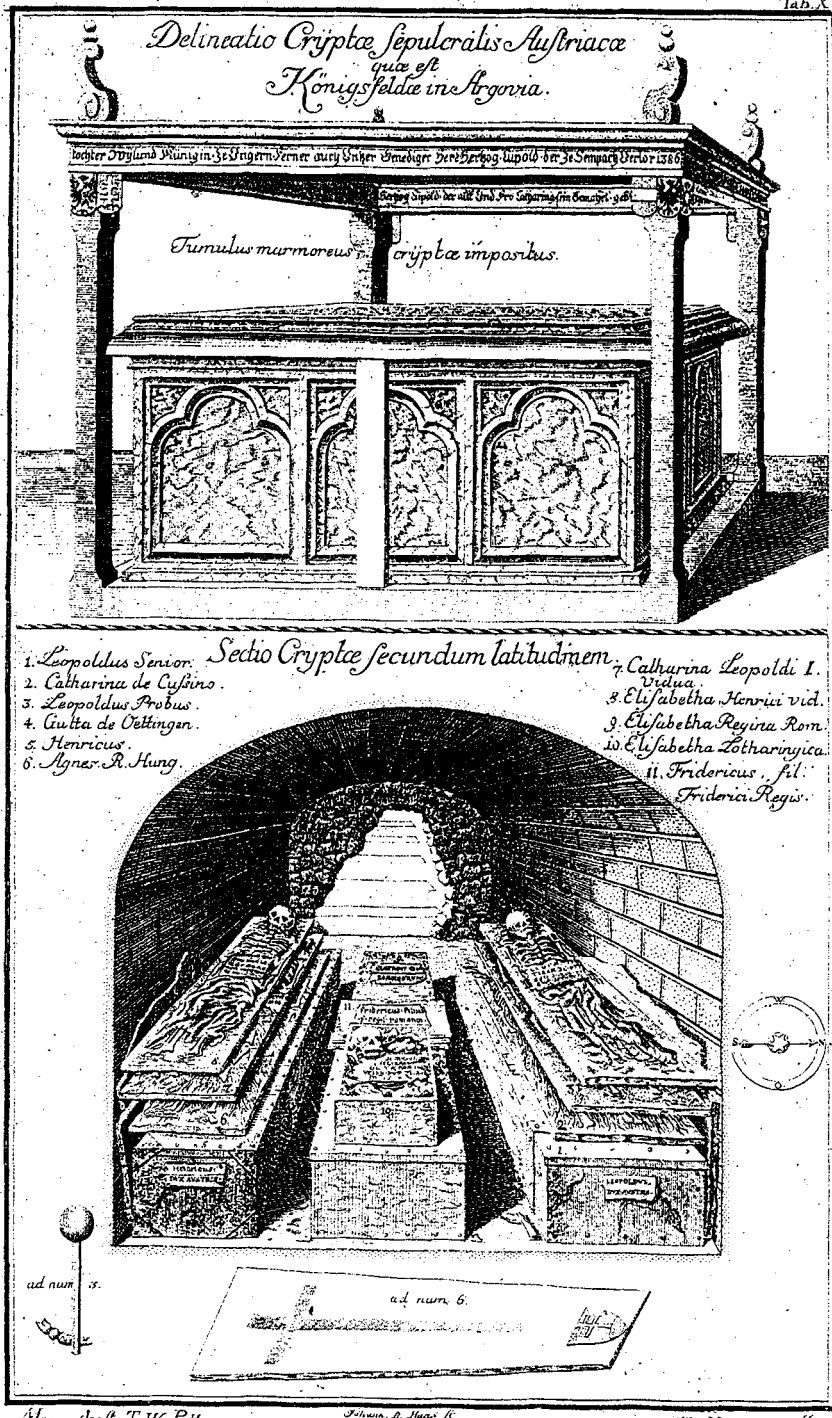


FIGURE 5.
Königsfelden
Monastery
(Switzerland):
Elisabeth of Gorizia
rests in the bottom
centre coffin (no. 9),
Henry is to the left
bottom (no. 5) and
Elisabeth's
disarticulated bones
can be seen in the
small open coffin (no.
10) (Gerbert et al.
1772 (4,2): plate X).

teutonico (Lechner 1976: 193). The engraving displays a tightly packed bone bundle that differs from other secondary arrangements at the site, such as bones in coffins I, II and III that have been reburied from the monastery of Klosterneuburg (Koch 1976: 194–6).

Babenberg Leopold VI, who was returning from a crusade, died on 28 July 1230 in San Germano (today Cassino), Italy. He was eviscerated and excarnated in the monastery of Monte Cassino, where his soft tissue was buried, while his bones were brought to Lilienfeld, Austria and buried four months later (Gerbert *et al.* 1772 (4,1): 78). Habsburg Rudolph IV died in Milan on 27 July 1365. His bones were brought to Vienna sewn into a cowhide (FIGURE 4) and buried in the crypt in St Stephen's cathedral before December of the same year (Baum 1996: 312).

Temporary storage

From the late 11th century on, temporary storage of a corpse also became increasingly an option. A series of new orders were founded between the 11th and 13th centuries¹ and dramatically expanded throughout Europe. Each order was responsible for the construction of hundreds of new monastic buildings under donations given by members of the aristocracy (e.g. Dunn 1997: 114–15; Bordua 1997: 116–17). Founders of religious houses not only could expect insurance of their spiritual welfare, but also a burial place for themselves and their family members. With such burial places established, the need for transport of corpses increased, if death occurred elsewhere; but if immediate transport was not possible, there existed many new ceremonial structures that allowed bodies to be temporarily stored.

Three corpses in the 14th-century Habsburg crypt in the Swiss monastery Königsfelden (FIGURE 5) had been stored before burial. Elisabeth of Gorizia, the founder of this monastery, died in Vienna in 1313 (Gut 1999: 105). Her corpse could only be transported to Königsfelden three years after her death because of the tense political situation and eventual war that broke out between her son Frederick 'the Fair' and Louis 'the Bavarian' (Friess 1890: 59).² Her daughter Elisabeth had first been stored in Nancy (Gerbert *et al.* 1772 (4,1): 144) and her son Henry in Graz (Stelzer 1988: 162).

Storage could also take place within the same city if the building was not ready, or even in the same building, if the tomb or funerary chamber were still under construction. Temporary burial was also a welcome alternative to body processing and transport when someone was suspected to have died from a communicable disease. Albert VI died in 1463, two days after two black carbuncles had emerged on his body. Since these were interpreted as plague-boils, his doctor refused to eviscerate and embalm the body and Albert was temporarily buried in a plague pit (Mraz 1988: 43).

Death dates of children and adolescents sometimes precede construction dates of tombs and crypts in which they were buried. Habsburg queen Anna (*alias* Gertrud), wife of Rudolph I, was buried in 1281 at Basel cathedral with her infant son Charles who had died 5 years before. Three children of archduke Charles II of Inner Austria, who rest in the monastery of Seckau in Styria, had also died before the construction of the burial crypt in 1587.

Postfuneral relocation

When bodies were exhumed and reburied after the final funeral, very different processes were involved. In the analysed sample two main kinds can be distinguished. Relocation could take place either within a building complex, building or funeral chamber (*internal relocation*), or from one building, town or country into another (*external relocation*).

External relocation

Relocation from one burial site to another was primarily done for political reasons and often involved more than one corpse. In 1770, 14 Habsburgs who had been buried in Switzerland between 1276 and 1386 (11 at Königsfelden in FIGURE 5) were exhumed. Switzerland had become a very improper burial place for this royal dynasty, since it was no longer part of the Habsburg Empire nor even a Roman Catholic country. By initiative of abbot Martin Gerbert the bones were brought to his newly rebuilt monastery, St Blasien in the Black Forest. But only 36 years later, after Austria had lost all surviving possessions in the German southwest, the monastery was secularized and the convent was forced to leave for Spital am Pyhrn in 1807. The bones were exhumed and forwarded, but already in 1809 the monks moved to St Paul

1 Carthusians 1084, Cistercians 1098, Premonstratensians 1120, Carmelites 12th century, Franciscans (approved in 1209), Dominicans 1214.

2 Both claimed to be legitimate successors to German Roman King Henry VII, who had died in Italy in the summer of 1313. It should be mentioned that this king's body was also processed before burial (Lipburger 1997: 131; Meyer 2000: 55).

im Lavanttal taking the bones with them. After several relocations within the monastery of St Paul, the bones were finally buried into a small crypt under the main altar of the monastery church in 1936 (Gut 1999: 105–10).

One of the most bizarre acts of corpse transfer happened in December 1940, when by order of Adolf Hitler a coffin was removed from the Capuchin Crypt in Vienna and brought to Paris. It held the remains of the Duke of Reichstadt, the only son from the marriage of Napoleon with Marie Louise of Habsburg, a great-niece of Marie Antoinette. This present to Marshal Philippe Petain, the leader of the Vichy government, was made on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the relocation of Napoleon's corpse from St Helena to France (Hawlik-van de Water 1993: 213).

Despite the larger political context dynastic reburial could also be guided by personal motivations. In Spain, 10 Habsburgs were exhumed and reburied into the newly constructed Monastery of San Lorenzo, also called El Escorial in the 16th century. According to the Foundation charter of 1567 the creation of a burial place was a prime motive for the monastery's foundation by Philip II. During childhood Philip had suffered the loss of his mother and two brothers, and before the foundation two wives had died. Additionally his father, Charles V, who was buried at the monastery of Yuste, had left the choice of his final resting-place to his son (Martínez Cuesta 1992: 12–13). By 1573, when the first bodies arrived at El Escorial from Madrid, the list of dead family members had grown to include Philip's oldest son Don Carlos, his third wife Isabel of Valois and her premature baby. The reunion with his deceased family was a strong dynastic statement. The exhumation and reburial act not only included parents, brothers, wives (only Mary Tudor remained in London at Westminster Abbey), and children, but also two paternal aunts, Eleanor (first queen of Portugal, then queen of France) and Maria (queen of Bohemia and Hungary) (Martínez Cuesta 1992: 101).³

3 His grandparents Philip 'the Fair' and Joanna 'the Mad', through which the Habsburgs had inherited the Spanish throne, but whom Philip had never known, were left in Granada, the burial place which had been founded by great-grandmother Isabel 'the Catholic' of the Trastámara dynasty after the conquest of the town.

Internal relocation: enlargement, refurbishment, violation, natural disasters and translation

For a large dynastic family that chooses a long-term burial place such as the Habsburgs and succeeding Bourbons at El Escorial, accumulation of bodies over time will create a space problem. This was overcome by the creation of additional mortuary chambers. Due to the construction of the Royal Pantheon under Philip IV in the 17th century and the Princes' Pantheon under Bourbon queen Isabel in the 19th century, of the 46 individuals in the sample that are buried at El Escorial at least 40 are secondary burials.

A similar process can be observed at the Capuchin Crypt in Vienna, the largest Habsburg burial site of all time. The crypt, which in 1633 consisted of one chamber with two coffins that held the secondary remains of Empress Anna and Emperor Mathias, was continuously enlarged over a period of 300 years. Today the crypt consists of 10 connected chambers and holds 143 corpses (Hawlik-van de Water 1993). On the order of Maria Theresa, who had inherited the throne in 1740, several coffins were either re-dressed or renewed. Such behaviour is not surprising for a person who displayed extreme orderliness in mortuary issues. Maria Theresa's own gigantic funerary monument was ready 26 years before her death, the clothes, shoes and even the bier that were to be used in the funeral had been waiting for more than a decade (Wolfsgruber 1887: 254).

Maria Theresa's care for mortuary monuments was not restricted to the Capuchin crypt. In 1754 the bodies from the old St Stephen's crypt were exhumed, put in new metal coffins and reburied in a new order in the enlarged crypt together with the intestinal urns (FIGURE 6). The unnamed skeletal remains in FIGURE 4 (marked as no. 8) were not reburied. They almost certainly belonged to one of three women who were interred at St Stephen's cathedral between 1362 and 1463 (Hamann 1988b: 180; Strnad 1988: 65). Of the medieval crypt population the bones of one woman survived, whereas the remains of all eight males still exist.

There are several examples of mortal remains of less important dynasty members who were treated with disrespect. Nine unnamed infants of King Albert I, who had died around the end of 13th century, were thrown into an adjoin-

(Minoritenkirche) in Vienna was remodelled in 1784 (Vocelka & Heller 1997: 307).

During warfare and riots, tombs were frequently desecrated, grave goods were stolen and the bones disturbed or thrown out. The royal tombs at Székesfehérvár, Hungary were destroyed by the Turks between 1543 and 1688 (Meyer 2000: 166–8) and some tombs at Speyer cathedral were looted by French soldiers in 1689 (Klimm 1953: 57). Other violent incidences that caused destruction or damage of graves were Hussite raids in Bohemia, the Thirty Years' War, the French Revolution and Campaigns under Napoleon. In some cases the bones were later reburied into collective tombs (e.g. Brown 1985: 255).

Natural disasters such as earthquakes (Basel 1356) and fires (Melk monastery 1297) have possibly also contributed to the process of relocation (Gut 1999: 100; Jungwirth 1971: 663).

A very special and isolated reason for exhumation in the data set is *canonisation*, which in the later Middle Ages included the opening of the tomb and exhumation of the bones. The function of this ritual, the *translatio* or translation, was to move the bones to a holier, more honourable position (Finucane 1981: 52–3). Babenberg Leopold III, who had died in 1136 and was buried at the monastery of Klosterneuburg, was canonized in 1485 and first exhumed in 1506. The bones were put in a silver shrine, but by the early 17th century the cranium, the left arm bones and some smaller bones were separately kept. The silver reliquaries were melted to fill the empty imperial treasuries in 1529 (Turkish invasion) and 1810 (after surrendering to Napoleon), but each time the saint's bones were rescued from the monastery and returned and reburied into new shrines some time later (Röhrig 1976: 237–8).

Disturbance

The establishment of monastic *collective* burial crypts into which sequential interments were made contributed to the process of disarticulation of skeletal remains. Where bodies were buried in shrouds, disturbance was naturally considerably higher than in tombs where wooden or even metal coffins were used. In the 15th century at the Cistercian monastery Seligenthal, a foundation of the house of Wittelsbach, at every new burial the tomb was reopened and the corpse placed between the

bodies of previously buried house members and covered with lime and soil (Ziegler 1997: 259).

Last but not least bones were disturbed when coffins were opened for curiosity or during scientific investigations.

Conclusions

Of 868 people who died between 994 and 1993 three people were excarnated, one person was cremated (USA 1958) and two people were lost in a storm around Cape Horn in 1890. Corpses of 32 people were temporarily stored and saw later burial in a more or less excarnated state. In two thirds of the 32 cases the storage time ranged between six months and five years, but more extended periods were possible. Empress Anna was stored for 15 years and Emperor Frederick III (V) was moved into the large marble tomb at St Stephen's cathedral only 20 years after his death. At least 117 people were eviscerated and intestines and heart (rarely also brain, eyes, tongue or a finger) were buried into separate containers.

Exhumation after the final funeral and relocation from one country, town, or building into another took place 95 times and involved 70 corpses. 392 relocations were carried out inside a building involving 247 corpses. Coffins were renewed 168 times (127 individuals) or opened 112 times (99 individuals). One may conclude that by archaeological definition at least 351 corpses (40.4%) have been tampered with. A more detailed investigation will most likely reveal an even higher percentage, since 200 cases (23%) could not be evaluated with certainty.

While part of a highly specific historical scenario, the study stresses that 'secondary burial' in other elite contexts may also be the result of such a complex set of cultural phenomena. For the Classic Maya (AD 250–900), archaeological research, skeletal studies and the decipherment of the ancient script indicate a similar behaviour such as body processing, exhumation and reburial, caching of tomb contents, looting and desecration of royal tombs, tomb re-entry, ritual use of human bones and sequential interments in collective crypts (Whittington & Reed 1997; Tiesler Blos 1999; McAnany 1998; Houston *et al.* 1998: 19; Sievert 2001; Hammond *et al.* 1975; Chase & Chase 1996).

These different kinds of behaviour have recently been attributed to ancestor worship

(McAnany 1995). Though care for ancestors is a critical element in a dynastic mortuary context, the formation of 'secondary' human remains should be viewed as the product of a wider range of both circumstantial and intentional, ritual and non-ritualistic behaviour. The death of Maya nobles during one of many long distance journeys (Schele & Mathews 1991) and rapid decay in a tropical environment would have made transport of a deceased an unpleasant undertaking. Since cremation was only introduced in the Maya area at the Classic-Postclassic transition (Welsh 1988: 215) temporary burial and dismemberment may have been adequate solutions (Hertz 1907; Bloch 1971; Metcalf & Huntington 1991; Murphy & Mallory 2000). Body processing may also be directly connected to separate burial of different body parts (Becker 1986: 46-8; 1992). Untimely death or shifting territorial ties may have caused reburial of deceased family members. Several Maya tombs have been recorded as containing 'sacrificial victims'. These victims are generally lacking signs of violent death and their sacrificial status has merely been inferred from the disarticulated state of their bones. The 'sacrificed youths' in Tikal Burial 10 and the 'slain woman' in Burial 166 (Coe 1990: 482,

240-1) could just as easily represent exhumed relatives who were reburied with the main occupant of the tomb.⁴

Evidence from medieval and post-medieval Europe demonstrates that the methodology applied in burial analysis needs to take into account the complex potential scenarios of 'secondary' burial formation and apply a wider variety of examination techniques to disarticulated bones. Eventually, only an increased utilization of skeletal biological data and a close collaboration between archaeologists and bioarchaeologists (Buikstra 1997: 228) will lead to a thorough understanding of the nature of such evidence and thus contribute to the development of improved social and political models.

4 Ucko, discussing Merina mortuary behaviour (1969: 269), has already argued this.

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