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Ancestors and additional bones: Mixing of burial traditions in Late Iron Age Finland

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Abstract

In this chapter, I review variations in burial traditions within eight cemeteries in the area of modern-day Finland and the Karelian Isthmus. These cemeteries date to the Late Iron Age and Early Medieval Period (AD 1000–1400), a time of change in this area, which fell between two rising power centres, the kingdoms of Sweden and Novgorod. These power centres had a major influence on the borderlands examined in this review, and one of the most visible forms of influence was the spread of Christianity. The presence of different burial types reveals a slow process of Christianization in this area, but this religious transformation was more complex than has previously been thought. I argue that the variety of different burial customs within these cemeteries attests to a period of hybridization and third-space encounters. Specifically, the presence of cremation burials and additional bones within inhumation burials is a sign of combined ritual. This is a strong indication of hybridization, a process by which old customs are combined with new ones, creating something new in the process. The presence of this process shows that changes in belief systems in this area were negotiated independently and continuously within these borderland societies during the use period of these cemeteries.

Key words: Christianization, hybridity, cremation, Iron Age, medieval, burial customs

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss eight cemeteries with mixed burial traditions in the area of Finland and the Karelian Isthmus. These cemeteries feature both inhumations and individual cremation burials contained within the inhumations. Some of the cemeteries include inhumations containing additional bones belonging to individuals other than the primarily inhumed. All of the cemeteries date to the period between the 11th and 15th centuries AD, from the Late Iron Age to the beginning of the Middle Ages.¹ (Puolakka 2019a.)

During this period, this area saw a change in burial customs, which transitioned mostly from cremation burials to inhumations. A similar transformation was also seen elsewhere in Fennoscandia during the Late Iron Age (Gräslund 2010; Therus 2019). These cemeteries form an exception, as both

1. In Finland, chronology is classified differently from the neighbouring countries. The Iron Age lasts until the crusades from Sweden, which give their name to the Crusade Period around AD 1050–1300. The crusades and the arrival of Christianity mark the beginning of the Middle Ages in southern Finland. Although the exact nature of the crusades has been questioned, the chronology remains in use. The chronology is not unproblematic and does not depict the situation throughout the whole of Finland. (Haggrén 2015: 369–375.)

cremation burials and inhumations are present within the same cemetery and even within the same graves. The presence of these different combinations of burials shows that conversion and adopting Christian faith and ritual practices was not a fast or straightforward process. I have examined these cemeteries through the postcolonial theory of hybridity and the concept of third space (Bhabha 1994; Soja 1996, 2014; Thomas et al. 2017).

Christianity arrived in the kingdoms of Sweden and Novgorod during the Late Iron Age and the beginning of the Middle Ages (Berend 2010; Gräslund 2010; Therus 2019). In the early medieval period, these power centres started to actively convert their citizens, as well as to send missionaries to nearby territories (Berend 2010; Ylimaunu et al. 2014).

The area that fell between these kingdoms, namely modern-day Finland and Karelia, has been called a *borderland* due to its geopolitical placement between Sweden and Novgorod. Borderlands are defined as places between colonial domains or cultural and social landscapes between emerging states, such as Sweden and Novgorod. (Ylimaunu et al. 2014: 245, citing Adelman and Aron, 1999: 816.) Both kingdoms were expanding during the Late Iron Age and early medieval period, and the area between them, the borderland, came under increasing pressure from both east and west. The areas where these cemeteries were located did not immediately fall under any rule, religious or otherwise, but they did receive and convey influences from these centres. (Ylimaunu et al. 2014.) The spread of Christianity was a very visible form of influence from these power centres.

The nature of borderlands creates third spaces. Borderlands are not stagnant places, but places where people, cultures, languages, and religions meet. This makes borderlands constantly changing and interlacing social landscapes. (Ylimaunu et al. 2014.) Such is the case with the area of modern-day Finland, where influences and people from the east, west, north, and south met. The third space is not a literal geographical area, but rather the abstract space of hybridity in which encounters and interactions happen and new ideas are formed. We cannot see the third space, but we might be able to see the results of third-space encounters in the archaeological record (Fahlander 2007: 25).

The nature of borderlands as areas, bridges, and meeting places in between can create an ambiguous space, a third space, where interactions between cultures, as well as religious transformations, are dynamically and continuously negotiated within the heterogeneous populations of the borderland. This heterogeneous group was not of a single ethnicity or culture. (Bhabha 1994; Fahlander 2007; Ylimaunu et al. 2014.)

This constant renegotiation and transformation define hybridity. Hybridity shows an active view of actions between cultures via the concept of third space, in contrast to (and in critique of) the earlier theories of passive colonial encounters. (Bhabha 1994, Thomas et al. 2017: 305.) The residents of these 'third spaces' were not simply passive receivers of influences, but active builders of realities and new religious systems. In these systems we can see hybridity, that is, the result of a constant transformation of different elements from different origins. At its core, hybridity is a process, a continuous state of mixing influences and change. (Thomas et al. 2017.) Hybridity is always more than the simple sum of old and new traditions and influences, and it creates something new and different in itself (Bhabha 1994: 162; Fahlander 2007: 22; Naum 2010).

I will argue that during this era within the cemeteries in this study, we can see a slow transformation and change of religion negotiated via third space. While the form is unique to these cemeteries (individual cremation burials within inhumations, additional bones and grave goods), the phenomenon itself, namely hybridity and the transformation of religion and slow change of beliefs, is universal (Thomas et al. 2017). I believe that by taking a closer look at this one era and area of change, we can learn more about these transformations and hybridity within such borderlands.

1.1.1. The burial data

The material of this study consists of eight cemeteries: Valmarinniemi (Keminmaa), Illinsaari (Ii), Tuukkala (Mikkeli), Visulahti (Mikkeli), Kirkailanmäki² (Hollola), Toppolanmäki (Valkeakoski), Suotniemi (Käkisalmi), and Tontinmäki (Räisälä, Hovinsaari) (Fig. 1.1). All of these cemeteries date to the Late Iron Age and early medieval period, around AD 1000–1400. The burial customs in these cemeteries vary: there are individual cremation graves, individual inhumations, cremation burials and additional bones within inhumations, and inhumations with more than one inhumed individual. Some burials have a rich array of grave goods, such as weapons, jewellery, or tools, others contain only small items, such as simple brooches or knives, and some have no grave goods at all. (Lehtosalo-Hilander 1988; Uino 1997; Saksa 1998; Mikkola 2009; Taavitsainen et al. 2009; Kuusela 2015a; Ikäheimo et al. 2017; Koponen and Peltari 2017.) While the exact combinations vary, all these cemeteries have at least two features in common: all of them had cremation burials laid into inhumations and all of them had similar objects of so-called Karelian type, such as oval brooches and belt fittings, which show their connections with each other (Puolakka 2019b; Taavitsainen et al. 2009).

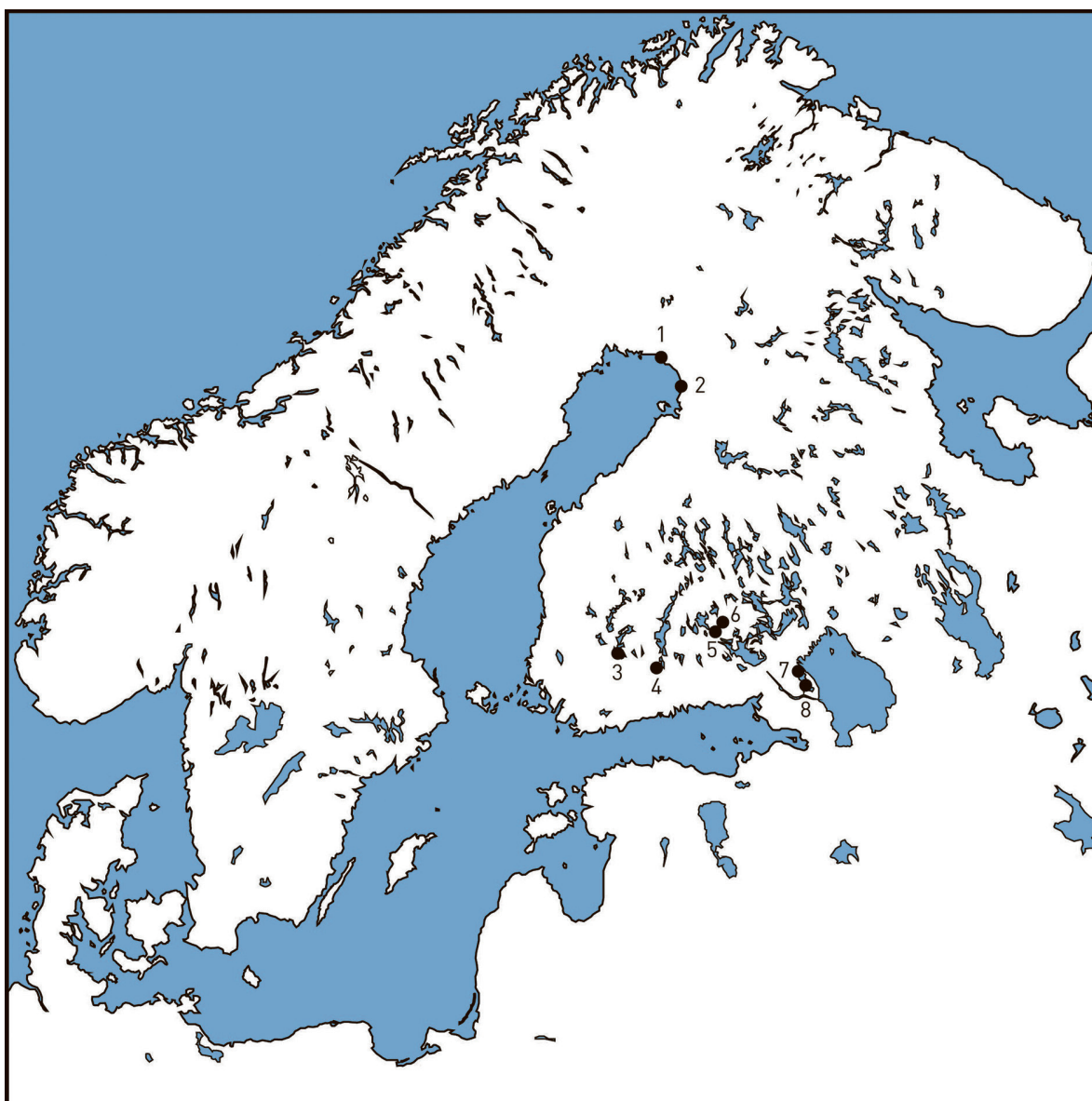


Figure 1.1. The cemeteries on map. 1. Valmarinniemi (Keminmaa) 2. Suutarinniemi (Ii) 3. Toppolanmäki (Valkeakoski) 4. Kirkailanmäki (Hollola) 5. Tuukkala (Mikkeli) 6. Visulahti (Mikkeli) 7. Suotniemi (Käkisalmi) (Приозерск, Яаркое) 8. Hovinsaari Tontinmäki (Räisälä) (Мельниково, Большой Полуостров). (Map: H. Puolakka.)

2. Also known as Kirkkailanmäki, Kirk'ailanmäki, Kirkk'ailanmäki, see e.g. Hirviluoto 1985 and Kivikoski 1955. In this chapter, the name used in the National Register of Antiquities is used.

The cremation burials within the inhumations, as well as the additional bones, have raised questions among researchers. These questions include whether cremation burials were an older custom or concurrent with the tradition of inhumation and whether cremation burials and additional bones were put inside the inhumation openly or secretly. Further questions are raised about the meaning of this custom. In this chapter, I present some possible explanations for these shared graves.

1.2. Background

The Late Iron Age and early medieval period (AD 900–1400) was a time of great changes in the society and belief systems of Finland and Karelia. The Christianization of the area was one of the biggest changes during this time. Christianity was introduced first to Finland Proper around AD 1000–1100. The Christianization of Finland was formerly thought to have been a rather straightforward process centring around three Swedish crusades first to Finland Proper around AD 1050–1200 and then to Eastern Finland and the Karelian Isthmus around AD 1200–1300. The nature and effect of these crusades was questioned already in the late 1990s. (Purhonen 1998: 13–14; Haggrén 2015: 369–375.) The first known church in Finland was found at Ristimäki, Ravattula, near the city of Turku, and it dates to the late 12th to early 13th centuries AD (Ruohonen 2017: 46).

The Christianization of Eastern Finland and especially Northern Finland happened later than that of Southern Finland and Finland Proper. Christianization within the areas of the cemeteries discussed can be dated on an administrative level to the 14th century. Historical records show that several small parishes were established in and near the areas covered by this study during the 14th century. (Luukko 1954: 78–83, 256–261; Korpela 2005: 58.) However, the administrative level cannot describe the beliefs held by individuals or even the beliefs still held and rituals still practised by society at large, as the mixed burial traditions within these cemeteries further prove. The administrative level also comes into play only with the introduction of a parish system and therefore cannot provide information on the first Christian influences or the initial process of Christianization. For this reason, the archaeological material can be an important source on the matter of the process of Christianization, especially from the viewpoint of the societies and individuals making the burials. (Korpela 2008: 321–322; Puolakka 2019a: 7.)

Contacts with the Christian world are evident in the archaeological material of the cemeteries in this study. For example, some cross pendants have been found in these cemeteries, as well as rings and brooches with biblical themes, such as pictures of Jesus or Virgin Mary. Sometimes these items have been taken as proof of their wearer's Christianity, but this view has been critiqued. (Nordman 1945: 233–237; Erä-Esko 1965: 107–112; Purhonen 1998: 47–51; Hiekkanen 2001: 55–56; Salo 2005: 278–291; Puolakka 2019a: 28–32.) These items are indeed examples of contacts with the Christian world, but they do not necessarily mark the faith of their owner (Kivikoski 1955: 30–41; Puolakka 2019a: 29–32). The change from cremation burials to inhumation burials has been thought to demonstrate the effect of contacts with Christianity. However, these burials should be studied as a whole, including the position of the buried person, the nature of the possible grave goods, and any additional elements within these graves. Just one feature cannot and should not be held as a marker of the faith of the buried person or the society carrying out the burials. (Puolakka 2019a: 40.)

As seen through burials, the process of Christianization in Finland has earlier been divided into three phases. The first phase includes burials aligned from east to west and containing rich grave goods: these graves are not considered Christian. In the second phase, the graves contain only jewellery or other objects considered as parts of the dress, and these are viewed as Christian burials. The third phase includes graves with no grave goods at all, which are designated as clearly Christian. The third and last phase has been dated to the 11th century. (Purhonen 1998: 373; Wickholm 2008: 92.)

I have already criticized this division for considering only the categories of Christian and non-Christian without recognizing any era of change and possible hybridization of beliefs. Such a division reduces a period of hundreds of years of slow change and multiple different forms of burial into just one category, the middle category. It also ignores the graves of those individuals who did not receive rich grave goods: for example, simple knives and brooches remained in use for a long time. The dating also does not take into account the whole of Finland. (Puolakka 2019a: 61–63.) In the cemeteries discussed in this article, we can see the overlapping traditions and hybridity which continue to the very last phases of use of the cemeteries.

1.3. The norm and the deviation?

The most common burial types in Iron Age Finland and Karelia are cremation fields under level ground and later inhumation cemeteries, with an earlier type of earth-mixed cairns without structure still in use in the Late Iron Age (Wessman 2010: 31). While inhumation cemeteries with individual cremation burials are more unusual, this is not simply a local phenomenon. These eight cemeteries span an area from North-Western Finland to the Karelian Isthmus. Similar individual cremation burials that are not part of a burial ground have also been found near these cemeteries on the Karelian Isthmus, as well as in Suomussalmi in Eastern Finland, for example (Hakamäki 2018: 43–45).

The individual cremation burials differ from the cremation fields under level ground that are more common in Southern Finland and Karelia. In cremation fields, the cremated bones have been scattered, usually upon a stone setting, and mixed with all the other cremated bones with some individual burials among them. The stone settings are low and usually not very clearly visible under the moss. (Wessman 2010: 19–25.) The cremation burials found at the sites discussed in this chapter usually contain only one individual, and they have been buried in the ground and usually placed within an inhumation. The cremation burials are often quite even in shape, indicating that the cremated remains were buried in some kind of vessel. (Leppäaho 1937; Puolakka 2019a: 25.) The remains of a box made out of bark or wood shingles were found only in two cases (Schwindt 2012 [1893]: 52; Leppäaho 1938: 2).

Earlier research has considered cremation burials in inhumation cemeteries as a deviation from the norm, an anomaly in a “clearly Christian burial ground” (Taavitsainen et al. 2009: 210), but nothing more. The researchers have given several quick explanations for this phenomenon, mostly in the context of one burial ground, but none of them have considered the phenomenon as a whole. Cremation burials have mostly been thought simply to represent the older tradition, which gave way to (early Christian) inhumations. Ella Kivikoski (1955: 66; 1961: 231–233) suggested that it was the opposite, a pagan reaction to Christianization, but later proposed that the cremated individuals were people who died far away and were cremated for easier transport to the home cemetery. Many researchers have agreed with this idea (Purhonen 1998: 129–131; Taavitsainen et al. 2009: 210; Ikäheimo et al. 2017: 103). Even a panic reaction has been suggested: Pirkko-Liisa Lehtosalo-Hilander (1988: 198) argues that the cremated remains and additional bones might be a sign of the local people moving the bones of their ancestors hastily from old graves into a new burial ground as a ‘panic reaction’ to Christianity. This was done to ensure that their ancestors had access to the eternal Christian afterlife, as well as to secure the good graces of the Christian authorities.

Calling these cemeteries simply inhumation cemeteries or Christian cemeteries is an oversimplification of a diverse set of burials within a shared burial ground. The cremation burials are not simply a deviation, since they can form up to 20% of all burials within these cemeteries (Puolakka 2019b: 57). Most of the cremation burials have been found inside and usually on top of the inhumations

(Fig. 1.2). This means that the cremation burials were not simply an older burial custom in these cemeteries, as stratigraphically they would have been buried at the same time or later than the inhumed bodies underneath them.

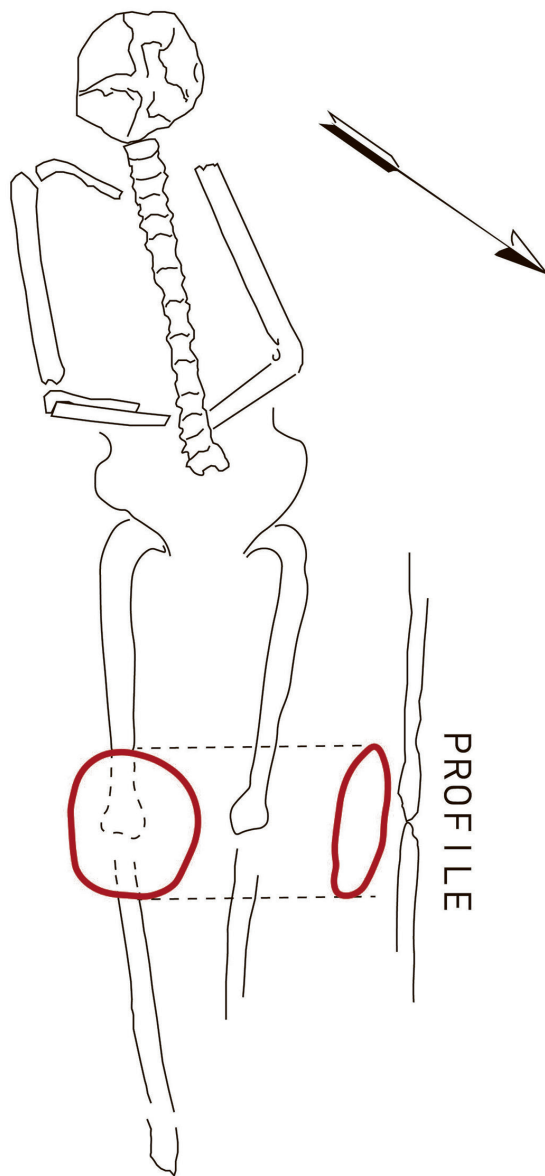


Figure 1.2. Grave IV/2/1935 in Kirkailanmäki, illustrating the usual position of the inhumation and the cremated bones (red). Although the details are not documented, the relationship (cremation on top of the knee of the inhumation) is made very clear. (Drawn by H. Puolakka after the sketch (original made without scale) made by J. Leppäaho 1935.)

In connection with many of these shared graves, it is specifically mentioned that there were no signs of the disturbance of an older grave. The same applies to both cremation burials and additional bones, which means that the additional bones were not simply parts of earlier, disturbed graves either. (Leppäaho 1937; Kuusela 2015b.) There are also examples of disturbed graves within some of the studied burial grounds. In those examples, most of the graves were disturbed by recent land use, such as ploughing or road building. When the disturbance seemed more contemporary to the burial, the newer grave usually did not disturb or destroy the older as a whole, but the older grave was left under the newer one. There are no signs that these older, disturbed graves would have been emptied: they seem to have been left as they were. Whatever bones were disturbed were put back into the older grave. (Leppäaho 1937.) This would further indicate that there was no 'practical' reason to move older remains into new graves in the case of such a disturbance.

1.4. The materiality of bodies

1.4.1. The cremated individuals

Most of the cremation burials were found from within inhumations, but some were found as their own, individual graves within the cemeteries. Such individual cremation graves have been found at Kirkailanmäki, Suotniemi, and Valmarinniemi. (For the minimum amount of burials at each site, see Table 1.1.)

Table 1.1. Amounts of inhumations and cremations by site.
The table includes the minimum amount of cremations on each site.

Site	Inhumations	Cremations	Cremations % of all burials
Suotniemi	4	1	20,0 %
Hovinsaari	31	2	6,1 %
Kirkailanmäki	122	29	19,2 %
Tuukkala	58	9	13,4 %
Visulahti	30	4	11,8 %
Toppolanmäki	12	1	7,7 %
Valmarinniemi	88	12	12,0 %
Illinsaari	7	2	22,2 %

An interesting feature is the variation in the amount of bone material within these individual cremation burials: the amount of bone ranges from just a few dozen grams to 1 500 grams, which is not enough to cover all of the bone material left from the body after cremation (Ubelaker 2009: 4). While taphonomic factors will count for some of the loss of bone material, they do not explain the greatly varying amounts of cremated bone within the same cemeteries. It seems that the cremated bone material was divided and part of it was either left at the burning site, scattered, or deposited in different places. This seems to be the case in other forms of cremation burials in Finland during the Iron Age, as well as in many other cremation burial traditions (McKinley 1989: 71-73; Williams 2004; Wickholm and Raninen 2006). The example of the cremation burial in grave 3 at Illinsaari provides a hint of how carefully the cremated bones might have been collected from the pyre. The cremation burial within this grave included over 180 tiny droplets of molten metal. If all of these were collected from the pyre, it would seem that collecting accuracy is not the reason for the missing bones. The bone material in these cremation burials is usually quite clean and does not include much pyre material, such as coal. Occasionally, pieces of burnt jewellery or other molten objects can be found within the cremation burials. (Kuusela 2013; Puolakka 2019a: 21–23.) (Fig. 1.3)

Unfortunately, a lot of information about the cremation burials has been lost due to a lack of accuracy in the excavation reports and the earlier, less meticulous excavation methods. The sites of Tontinmäki, Suotniemi, and partly Tuukkala were excavated already in the 19th century, and the Tuukkala cemetery was partly excavated by soldiers with no professional archaeologist present (Schwindt 2012 [1893]; Mikkola 2009). Tuukkala was also excavated multiple times during a period of more than a century (Mikkola 2009). Toppolanmäki was excavated mostly in the 1930s³ and Visulahti in the 1950s, and these reports are naturally not up to modern standards (Puolakka 2019a). Two big cemeteries, Kirkailanmäki and Valmarinniemi, were excavated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but their excavation reports were written in the 21st century, over 30 years after the excavation,

3. Two graves in Toppolanmäki were re-examined with modern methods in the 21st century. Neither of them included any cremated remains or additional bones. See: Moilanen, U. 2019. Alustavia tuloksia kalmistokaivauksista Valkeakoskella 2017–2018 [Preliminary results from an excavation at a burial ground in Valkeakoski 2017–2018]. Pirkan maan alta 16, 30–37.



Figure 1.3. Cremation (PH2) within the grave 3, Illinsaari. Some of the cremations had considerably big pieces of burnt bone, such as the half of the mandibula in this cremation. (Photograph: H.-L. Puolakka.)

which is why they are not as accurate as they could be (Hirviluoto and Vuoristo 2010; Koponen and Pelttari 2016). Illinsaari is the only site that has been researched with fully modern methods (Kuusela 2013, 2015a; Puolakka 2019a). Especially in the case of the older excavations, the meticulousness of the reports varies greatly. For this reason, the exact number of cremation burials is unclear. In many cases, the cremation burials within the inhumations were not recognized as burials, and the cremated bones were reported only as findings from within the inhumation or the cemetery. Due to this, it is hard to reconstruct the exact positions or amounts of the cremated bones and burials within some of the cemeteries. The greatest number of cremation burials has been found at the Kirkailanmäki site in Hollola. In the excavation report from Kirkailanmäki, Leppäaho states that most of the cremation burials were placed on top of the inhumations (Leppäaho 1937.)

The question of when the cremation burials were interred in the graves remains unanswered. The earliest researchers thought that they were older burials that were simply moved aside when the inhumation was made. On the basis of the large number of combined burials, I would argue that not all of these inhumations were placed accidentally on the site of an earlier cremation grave. In many cemeteries, the graves do not overlap much, which indicates that there was enough unused space for new burials (Fig. 1.4). This leaves the question of whether the cremated bones were interred in the grave at the same time as the initial burial or later. While no signs of any disturbance in the soil of the inhumation grave has been recorded, the possibility of disturbance cannot be completely ruled out due to the aforementioned lack of accuracy in the initial reports. However, we can look for clues, one of which consists of possible traces of disturbance within the inhumations themselves.

Two of the cremation burials at Kirkailanmäki had disturbed the inhumation in which they were placed. In one case, the cremation burial was inserted on top of the body in the inhumation, but the head and the hands of the body had been moved on top of the cremation burial. In the other example, the feet of the inhumed individual were missing, and the cremation burial had been placed at the feet of the inhumation. In the first case, the manipulation of the unburnt body within the same grave is

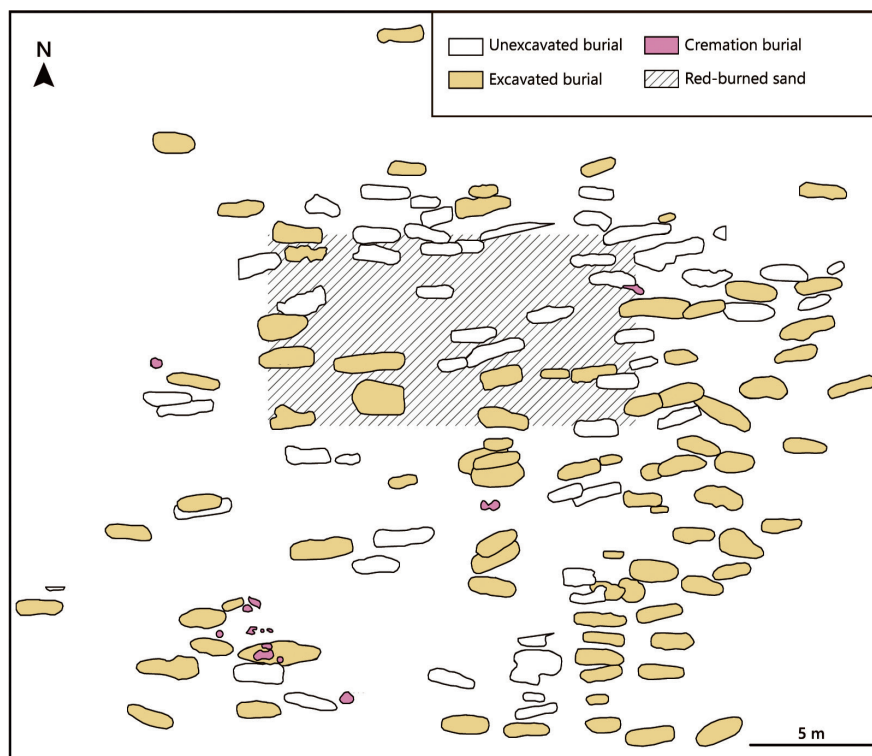


Figure 1.4. Map of Valmarinniemi cemetery, with cremation graves and inhumation graves marked separately. (Map: T. Matila and P. Pelttari.)

clear, but in the second case, it is hard to say whether the feet were lost before death or after, or during the placement of the cremation burial. (Leppäaho 1937.)

There is a possible case of manipulation at the cemetery of Tuukkala as well. One inhumation grave contained a cremation burial, but the foot of the unburnt body was found within the cremation burial. While the foot itself was disarticulated from the body, the bones of the foot were articulated, which indicates that the manipulation of the remains happened when the body was still intact, at the same time as the initial burial was made or not long after this. The report does not mention any disturbance in the topsoil over the grave, which would indicate that the cremation burial was inserted within the inhumation while it was initially made. (Mikkola 2009.) Just like in the Kirkailanmäki cases, it is impossible to say whether the foot was separated from the body before the death of the unburnt individual or during the initial burial, or whether the cremation burial was interred in this inhumation later, disturbing it. The articulation of the bones of these body parts at both Kirkailanmäki and Tuukkala would suggest that if the cremation burial was added to the grave later, it could not have happened long after the initial inhumation was made.

Radiocarbon dating can provide more hints about the relationship of the cremation burials to the inhumations. Unfortunately, not many radiocarbon dates are available from these cremation burials. Cremation burials have been dated only at two sites, Illinsaari and Valmarinniemi. According to the radiocarbon datings, cremation burials were made simultaneously with the inhumations at least at the Valmarinniemi cemetery, where radiocarbon dates from cremation burials range from the 11th century to the 14th century cal. AD (Taavitsainen et al. 2009: 210; Puolakka 2019a: 42–46). These dates prove that cremating was not simply an older burial custom that was neatly replaced by (Christian) inhumations. It is also a clear example of the coexistence of several belief systems within the same area, since some inhumations date to the earlier phase as well (Koponen and Pelttari 2017). Interestingly enough, Valmarinniemi also represents the only actual churchyard within this study since Valmarinniemi is the only one of these eight sites with the remains of a church, which was most likely built in the 14th century (Paavola et al. 2013: 54–55; Koponen and Pelttari 2017). The presence of

a church suggests that Christian authorities were present, but these authorities either accepted or did not know about the cremation burials.

Illinsaari provides the only example where both the inhumation and cremation burial within the same grave were dated separately. Grave no. 3 at Illinsaari is the most interesting example, including two different cremation burials, a whole inhumation, and an additional unburnt mandible and cranium. Both cremation burials within the inhumation are at least 100 to 200 years older than the unburnt individuals, as both cremation burials date to cal. AD 1030–1160 and the unburnt bones date to the 14th century cal. AD. (Kuusela 2015a: 10.) This means that there was no direct link between these individuals. It is also good to question whether we can talk about reburial at all in the case of the cremation burials. The cremation burials may not have represented an 'older, disturbed grave', but instead the cremated bones may have been kept elsewhere after the initial cremation ritual and only buried with the inhumation.

Siv Kristofferssen and Terje Oestigaard (2008) present the idea of 'death myths' as the reason for a variety of burial types within the same cemetery. They define death myths as certain ideas that society had about different kinds of death and how to handle the dead. Death myths might explain some of the hybridity seen within the burial grounds and the different ways of handling the remains of the dead. While I do not believe this to be the reason for all the differences between burial types, some of the lingering traditions, such as burning the bodies and burying others with these cremated remains, might be explained by such myths. Maybe the cremated individuals were considered special people who had to be handled in a special way. According to Kristofferssen and Oestigaard, status in life affects rituals in death. Since the cremation burials within this study contain both men and women, both burials with grave goods and without, it seems that the reason for using cremation burial was not connected to the gender or wealth of the deceased. One reason for different burial types within shared burials could be status, but not necessarily economic or social status. Kristofferssen and Oestigaard give the example of religious status holders in Viking-Age Scandinavia (Kristofferssen and Oestigaard 2008: 135). Such status might be one explanation for some of the variation seen in the cemeteries in this study.

Later inhumations have been made in some cremation fields under level ground in Finland. In these cases, a form of collective memory and significance of the place held by the society who used the cemetery throughout the years has been suggested as a reason for continued burial despite the change in burial custom (Wickholm 2008: 91–92). In the case of the cemeteries discussed here, the cremation burials are not simply an older form of burial. The cremation burials are most often made in the same pit with an inhumation. The cremated remains themselves can be contemporaneous with or older than the inhumed remains. As with cremation fields under level ground, this might show a form of collective memory, yet differing in that the memory was not attached to the place, but to the human remains themselves.

1.4.2. Additional bones

A related practice is the presence of 'additional bones': human remains which do not belong to the whole individual buried in the inhumation grave. They do not form a second, whole individual. They are unburnt, and thus do not belong to a possibly cremated individual either. These additional bones have been found from at least three cemeteries in my material: Suutarinniemi, Valmarinniemi, and Kirkailanmäki (Leppäaho 1937; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1988; Kuusela 2015b; Koponen and Pelttari 2016). They might be present at some other cemeteries in Finland as well.

One of the explanations given for these additional bones has been that maybe these bones were reburied along with the inhumation as an attempt to give a long-dead relative the possibility of a Christian burial (Lehtosalo-Hilander 1988: 198). This suggestion does not explain why only individual bones were placed in the new grave instead of whole bodies. There are no explanations of where

the bones come from, either. For example, in the case of Illinsaari and Valmarinniemi, there are no known older inhumation (or cremation) cemeteries in the vicinity. A disturbed earlier burial might be seen as an explanation, but in these cases, there are no other signs of an earlier burial to be seen within the graves.

The additional bones are harder to study simply because unburnt bone material does not survive well in Finnish soil. Thus, the unburnt bones from the Late Iron Age have often decomposed to a point where they can no longer be analysed fully, or in the case of the most delicate bones, even identified. Some smaller bones might have decomposed altogether or gone unnoticed during the archaeological excavation. The similar decomposition state of the whole individual in these burials might also make it harder to identify the additional bones. However, this does not mean that a whole additional body could go unnoticed within the grave. While the overall preservation is poor, the bones are usually discernible and the outlines of the body are well visible.

I have presented the graves with additional bone elements in Table 1.2. Because of the poor overall state of preservation, long bones and skulls as elements might be overrepresented in the material. Bigger bone elements are more easily recognized at the excavation, even by workers with no osteological background. Especially mandibles are easy to recognize as such due to the presence and better preservation of tooth enamel.

Table 1.2. Additional bones in inhumation graves within each site.

Site	grave no.	skull/s	long bone/s	other	reference
Illinsaari	3	x	x	x	Kuusela 2013
Illinsaari	12	x	x		Kuusela 2015a
Illinsaari	13	x			Kuusela 2015a
Valmarinniemi	11		x		Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	14	x			Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	17		x	x	Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	24		x	x	Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	38	x			Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	44	x			Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	46		x	x	Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	47		x	x	Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	51		x	x	Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Valmarinniemi	54			x	Koponen & Pelttari 2016
Kirkailanmäki	XX-XXI/1935		x	x	Leppäaho 1937
Kirkailanmäki	XXV/1935	x	x	x	Leppäaho 1937
Kirkailanmäki	1/1936		x		Salmo 1936
Kirkailanmäki	3/1936	x	x		Salmo 1936
Kirkailanmäki	4/1936	x			Salmo 1936
Kirkailanmäki	12/1936		x		Salmo 1936
Kirkailanmäki	13/1936	x			Salmo 1936
Kirkailanmäki	17/1936	x			Salmo 1936
Kirkailanmäki	52/1936	x			Salmo 1936

At Illinsaari, there were at least two additional skulls placed on top of the inhumation. In grave 3, a cranium was placed on top of the chest of the whole body. In grave 12, mandible and cranium were placed on top of the knees of the whole body. In grave 13, an additional bone, identified as possibly part of a cranium, was placed at the feet of the whole body. Other additional bones within these inhumations at Illinsaari were more scattered: most of the additional bones were found from underneath the whole individual within grave 3, and an unidentified long bone was found at the feet of the whole individual within grave 12. In addition to the additional human bones, also the cranium of a cervid was found in grave 2, where it was placed on top of the head of the body. (Kuusela 2013; Kuusela 2015b.) This is unusual, since no other animal crania are known from these cemeteries, and usually the animal remains can be traced to funerary meals or furs used in clothing or wrapping of the body.

Sometimes the bones are articulated in a way that reveals that they were probably inserted into the grave while the soft tissue was still attached to the bones. Such is the case at, for example, Illinsaari, Ii, where the skull in grave 12 had the mandible still articulated with the cranium. In grave 3, the additional spine and ribs were interpreted to have been articulated as well (Kuusela 2013).

The excavation report from Valmarinniemi also contains several mentions of additional bones. Unfortunately, the bone material from Valmarinniemi was in a such an advanced state of decomposition that the additional bones could not be further analysed in most cases. The osteological report was written in 2015, 30 years after the initial excavation, and many of the stored bones could no longer be identified or analysed. (Maijanen 2015.) As in the case of Illinsaari, skulls and long bones might be overrepresented in the material from Valmarinniemi due to better preservation and easier identification.

The report from grave 11 at Valmarinniemi mentions additional long bones that were positioned on top of the pelvis and legs of the whole body in the inhumation. Grave 14 contained two adult-sized bodies along with one additional skull placed on top of the pelvises of the whole bodies. It is specifically noted in the excavation report that there is no body attached to this third skull. In grave 17, there were some additional bones on top of the inhumation, and these bones did not belong to the whole body. In grave 24, the report mentions several additional post-cranial bones, that were found disarticulated on top of the whole body within the grave, but there is no mention of a disturbed burial at the site of the grave. In grave 38, an additional child's skull was placed on top of the pelvis of the whole body. The excavation report specifically mentions that the body of the child was missing. In grave 44, the report again mentions that a child's skull was buried on top of the body of an adult, but there is no mention of the rest of the body of the child, and the age could not be estimated. The report also mentions badly decomposed additional bones in the filling of graves 46 and 47. In grave 51, there were several additional bones without a skull buried in a hollowed-out log or a sled on top of another inhumation. These bones were not anatomically positioned and lacked mandible and cranium. In grave 54, some additional but unidentifiable bones are reported as lying on top of the inhumation. Interestingly, there was also a reported inhumation grave of a child on top of cremation burial M at Valmarinniemi. However, the bones were so badly decomposed that it remains unclear whether the body was whole. (Maijanen 2015; Koponen and Peltari 2016.)

I have excluded clearly disturbed burials from this list. Grave 45 at Valmarinniemi could form an example of such a burial. In grave 45, disarticulated bones were found in the filling of the grave. These bones most likely belonged to grave 45, which was disturbed, while another grave was made adjoining it. (Koponen and Peltari 2016.)

At least some of the additional bones at Kirkailanmäki might come from older, disturbed burials. In his excavation report of the site, Salmo (1936) had carefully marked the relationships between graves, but the possibility of disturbance cannot be wholly ruled out, as the cemetery was more densely occupied with more overlapping graves than the other two sites. Unfortunately, the quality of the reports from Kirkailanmäki varies greatly, and full certainty cannot be reached. Because it closely re-

sembles the sites of Illinsaari and Valmarinniemi, especially with the placement of skulls on top of the middle region of the whole body, I have decided to include it for reference. As with Valmarinniemi, I have excluded obviously disturbed graves from Kirkailanmäki from the list and only included the inhumations that include probable additional bones (Fig. 1.5). For example, in the 1978–1979 excavations, a few disturbed graves or 'bone pits' were found in which the bones of one or more individuals were completely disarticulated and mixed (Hirviluoto & Vuoristo 2010). As interesting as these features are, they do not fit the description of additional bones in an otherwise whole inhumation and were thus excluded from the list, although they might link to it.

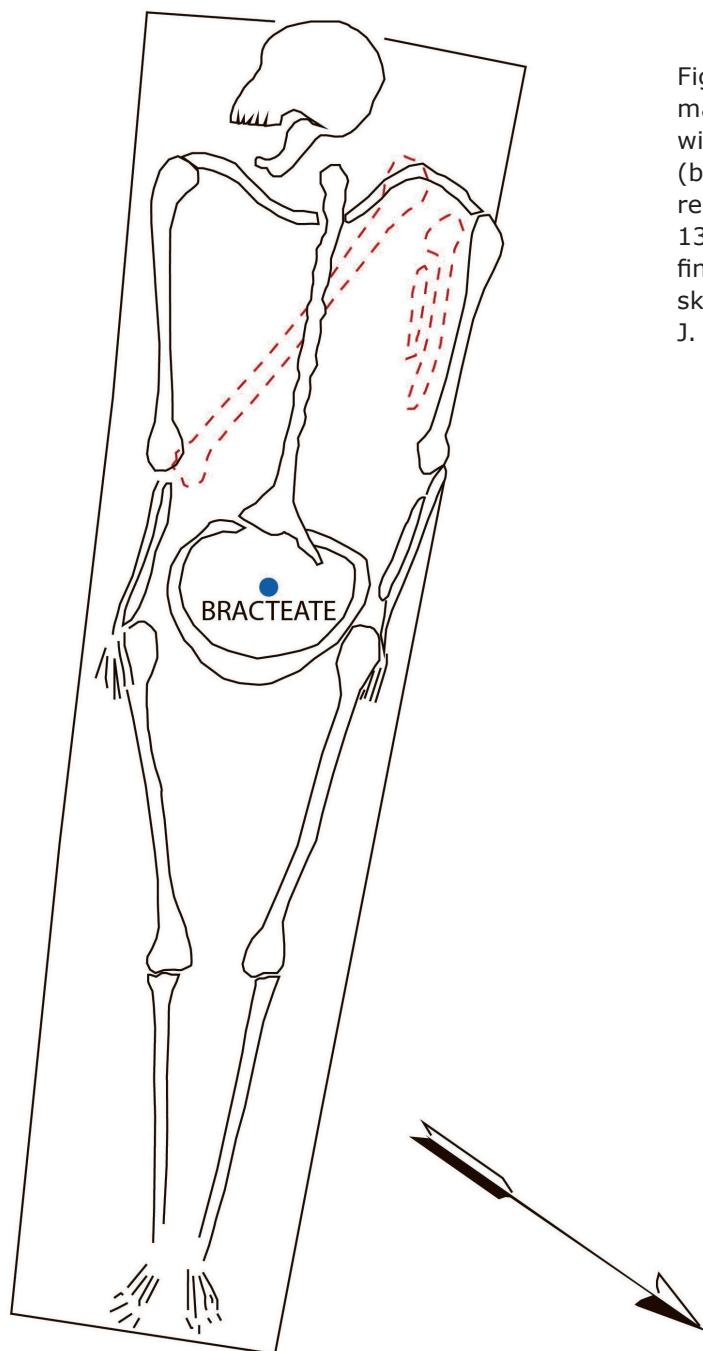


Figure 1.5. Grave I/1936 in Kirkailanmäki, illustrating the additional bones within the grave (red). The bracteate (blue) was probably made during the reign of Albert of Mecklenburg, circa 1370-1380. Note the outlines of a coffin. (Drawn by H.-L. Puolakka after the sketch (original made without scale) of J. Voionmaa 1936.)

Most often the additional skulls seem to be placed on top of the middle part of the primary body. In comparison to the Illinsaari material, it seems that some of the skulls from Valmarinniemi that are interpreted as belonging to children and found on top of adult inhumations might actually be additional skulls without a body. Children buried as whole bodies at Valmarinniemi were either buried alone, or in the case of double graves, placed next to, not on top of, the adult body. (Maijanen 2015; Koponen and Pelttari 2016; Puolakka 2019a: 36.)

As additional bones are present in many graves both at Illinsaari and Valmarinniemi, and possibly also at Kirkailanmäki, it is likely that this practice held a particular meaning. The handling of the skulls seems as ritualistic and careful as the handling of the whole bodies in inhumations. It is worth noting that in many societies, the head has been regarded as the seat of personhood (Pardo 1989; Williams 2004). While the positioning of the post-cranial additional bones seems more random, it might still form a ritual that we cannot identify. These bones might have been considered as having less value and might thus have been treated indifferently, or their exact position in the grave might not have been considered important. Maybe the way they were handled did not carry any special meaning at all. This is hard to believe, however, when we look at the handling of other material in the grave. If these additional bones were handled in an indifferent manner, this was done intentionally.

The positioning of these additional bones raises another question: Why were they treated differently from the cremated and inhumed whole individuals? Perhaps the owner of the additional bones was not buried at the cemetery for a certain reason. The reason might be a punishment or a previously unrecognized disposal method involving either burial and then exhumation, or the above-ground storage of the body. The question still remains of whether the additional bones were put in the inhumations as a sort of 'grave good' for the whole individual or whether the intention was to benefit the individual represented by the additional bones, or perhaps both.

The radiocarbon dates from grave 3 at Illinsaari provide an interesting perspective on these additional bones. Unfortunately, Illinsaari is the only site where the additional bones have been dated separately from the other elements within the grave. In grave 3, the additional skull was dated to be contemporary with the whole body within the grave (cal. AD 1300–1410) (Kuusela 2015a: 10). This rules out the theory that older bones would have been reburied here. It also rules out the possibility that the skull came from an older, disturbed grave. If a contemporary or only slightly older grave had existed in the same place, it would most likely have been known or even visible to the people making the inhumation. Again, the possible presence of an older grave also does not explain why only some of the bones would have been kept with the new grave.

While this radiocarbon dating answers an interesting question, it also raises a lot of new questions: who was this individual and why did only their head end up within this burial? Was the individual who was represented only by the additional bones specifically sacrificed and killed for this burial or did they simply happen to die at the same time as the inhumed person? Why would they get such a different treatment from the primary inhumation? And how does such a complicated burial relate to the arrival of Christianity and the local parish, which was formed in the 1370s? The age difference between the different elements within grave 3 further underlines the complexity of this burial, in which the cremated remains were as much as 200 years older than the unburnt remains.

1.5. Agency in death

These areas, the borderlands, had their own agency. In these borderlands, influences, beliefs, people, and thoughts from the surrounding areas met and, through third-space encounters, were then formed into new ideas and beliefs. The societies of the borderlands were not fully submissive to the forming states of Sweden and Novgorod, but they were not isolated either.

The material at hand raises the question of the agency of the dead in these past societies. The dead could have had a lot of agency, like in the suggested explanation of the cremated individuals representing special people. People could have been seen as having a lot of agency even after passing from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. Or the material bodies could also have been considered as only a type of grave good, an object without much agency, included in the grave only to profit the whole individual and perhaps their society. One explanation might be that the cremated bones were not put into the inhumation to ensure a better afterlife for the cremated individual; they might have been an offering of sorts to the inhumed individual. The same might apply to the additional bones, although the mechanism would not be the same, since the form is different. It is important to remember that the dead could have held meanings associated with both objects and people at the same time (Williams 2004). I find this to be the most likely explanation for the handling of the dead within these cemeteries.

I believe the dead also had their own agency within these societies. This can be seen in the mixed burial customs where old customs met new ones. The agency of an individual did not end with death, although it might have transformed into something new, such as the position of an ancestor, through possible cremation and burial rites. The personhood of the dead did not necessarily disappear when death occurred (Williams 2004). The old, cremated remains did not seem to lose their agency when new beliefs reached these areas. In the cases where the cremated remains are as much as 200 years older than the inhumed individual, there is no straightforward connection between the buried people. However, there might have been an indirect connection formed by memories or recognized ancestry passed down through the generations. The old remains were treated with the same respect as the new ones. The burial of the cremated bones does not necessarily mean that old customs or the memory of the ancestors were abandoned. Perhaps only the place of memory and way of remembrance changed.

In the case of inhumations made in cremation fields under level ground, it has been suggested that the individuals making the inhumations belonged to the same society as the cremated individuals. Despite adopting new a burial custom, these inhumed individuals, as well as the society that buried them, still wanted to connect with their former dead, their ancestors. (Wickholm 2008: 92.) It is likely that in the cemeteries discussed in this chapter we can see a similar idea, though applied in a different manner in practice. People's desire or need to be close to their ancestors did not change, only the way of accomplishing this changed.

Inserting the cremated remains could have been a means of creating ancestry. There are examples of other cases in which there are long intervals between the deaths of the buried or burials made in the same place. In some cases, the newer burials made long after the previous ones have been explained as a means of securing and claiming land ownership or claiming status through ancestry, a way of kinship building (Satalecki 2016: 50–51). Perhaps the inhumed individual or the relatives who buried them claimed a connection to a mythical past by burying the recently dead with the cremated ancestor. Perhaps the ancestors did not have to be from times long past. Maybe ownership could be transferred also from recently cremated special individuals to a recently inhumed one. Cremation as a form of transforming an individual from the realm of the living to the realm of ancestors has been suggested before (Williams 2004; Wickholm and Raninen 2006).

In the shared burials, we can see the hybridity of old and new ideas. Maybe some of the old beliefs placed more significance on the handling of the dead and the material body, especially the cremation and subsequently the cremated remains of an individual. The old beliefs could also have held different meanings for different parts of the dead body, which is why they were included in other burials. Christian influences suggest that bodies should be buried whole, with no grave goods, and in a shared burial ground. It seems like the societies using these cemeteries neither abandoned their old beliefs nor continued them as they were, but kept some customs and combined them with new ones: they buried the cremated remains and additional bones with modern bodies in a respectful way as a part of

the same ritual. One example of a such careful ritual might be seen at Illinsaari, where the cremated bones were probably intentionally scattered very evenly in the filling of the inhumation grave (Kuusela 2013). Maybe the custom of creating ancestry with a shared burial was born only of this hybridity.

In the material, we can see a slow process with multiple different rituals performed over time. Most show careful placing of the cremated remains and additional bones inside the graves. The cremated remains and additional bones were not buried to get them 'out of sight, out of mind'. On the contrary, they were buried in a new location of collective memory, a location for remembering the dead. They were taken where the new customs had moved, and there is no reason to believe that they were not respected and remembered in the same way that the inhumed individuals were.

These shared burials show that the society making the burials did not completely give up their old beliefs but negotiated a system of their own, combining old ideas with new influences to create something distinctly different. This is typical of the hybridity of the third space. In such religious transformations, new ideas are not just accepted as a given or forced from the top down but made to work by the society and for the society itself (Fahlander 2007, Ylimaunu et al. 2014; Puolakka 2019a).

1.6. Conclusions

The long timespan during which burials with cremation burials, additional bones, and grave goods were made contradicts the earlier suggested quick conversion to Christianity. There is nothing in the studied material that suggests an abrupt change or a panic reaction from one burial type or belief system to another. The material resembles a more traditional slow religious transformation where hybridity has played a great role in the creation of new traditions and forms of burial. This begs for a closer look at the process of Christianization. I would suggest abandoning the simple dualistic classification of Christian and non-Christian, which ignores this slow process and hybridity.

While the burnt and unburnt remains seem to have been handled and treated in different ways and thus probably held different meanings to the society who made the burials, they are connected within the context of these burials, sometimes being a part of the same ritual. The agency of the dead was not lost by a sudden conversion to Christianity. On the contrary, the sites show respect towards and careful handling of the remains, both old and new, cremated and unburnt. This paints a picture of a practice where manipulating the bodies played an important role, and the ways of handling these bodies, burnt or unburnt, whole or in pieces, were not insignificant. The custom shows that while the form of handling the dead was changing during this time, it did not mean that ancestors and old beliefs were completely abandoned. The careful burial within the same graves shows a continuing remembrance and a hybridization of beliefs.

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