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## The clothed dead body in Northern Ostrobothnian Finland between the 17th and mid-19th centuries

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### Abstract

This chapter deals with the phenomenon of an intra-active clothed dead body in Northern Ostrobothnian Finland from the 17th century to the middle of the 19th century. Ontologically, body and clothing may be considered inseparable, a phenomenon that is produced in ritual performance. The dead body and its funerary attire are approached through the concept of the object, which is also contrasted with the rich Finnish and Swedish folkloric and ethnographic evidence concerning the 'living dead' and ghosts. The clothed dead body was subject to a number of emotions and feelings as well as beliefs that affected how it was prepared for burial. Preparation rituals are viewed as creators of meaning and significance in an ongoing and unfixed material performance of designing and dressing the individuality of the clothed dead body.

Keywords: dead body, object, funerary attire, mummified remains

### 3.1. Building an approach

This chapter was inspired by a poem written by a person working with the dying in Finland. The poem speaks how death undresses and buries our future dreams. The rhymes of this unknown writer say that death takes our power and frivolity and leaves us completely naked, but also dresses us again as a person who looks like our life. They continue that if you remembered to live, there is no reason to be afraid of being naked. Finally, death dresses you in the threads of your life. (Utriainen 1999, 164; Utriainen 2006, 16, KK 272.)

In the face of death, the identity of the person is endangered, and in this poem a person's individuality is compared to a costume. Clothing, skin, and the relationship between them may be considered as forming an important material, expressive, and functional tissue that is significant for existing as a human being (Utriainen 2006: 16, 43). Ontologically, body and clothing may be considered inseparable, a phenomenon that is produced as an effect of becoming, a product of actions, doings, and practices in the world. Together, as matter and meaning, they form an ontological unity that is fundamentally agential and active (Barad 2007: 145–146). A clothed body is in a causal relationship with discursive practices and words. Material-discursive practice, in this case undressing and redressing the

dead body, mediate knowledge and agential engagement with a clothed body. Significant differences, such as gender or age categories, are produced in performative intra-action in phenomena. These practices are open-ended with no intrinsic boundaries. (Barad 2007: 44–45; Marshall and Alberti 2014.) As the wrappers and carriers of fragile and constantly unfinished identities, clothes are inseparable from the person. For this reason, in the face of death, undressing represents an important event in relation to identity. (Utriainen 2006: 19.)

This chapter considers the dead individual and how both public and private conceptions of death directed the funerary ritual of dressing the deceased in the coastal area of Northern Ostrobothnia during the 17th through 19th centuries. A clothed dead body, the cadaver and the funerary attire, is viewed as an intra-active abject from the viewpoint of both private and public mourning and the rituals of families and communities. Sensory experiences during death rituals make them emotive performances (Williams 2007; Nyberg 2010; Lipkin et al. manuscript). The dead body and the act of dressing it were contrasted with a number of emotions and feelings from love and sorrow to fear and disgust. To successfully control these emotions and act according to social rules requires understanding and accepting the reality of death and acting according to cultural and social norms.

A human body is primarily a living body, a subject. It is affective and demonstrates practical attitudes, places, gestures, and postures and has an active hold on the surrounding world. Others' bodies may be considered as moving objects, means to reflect the self in an intersubjective manner. (Utriainen 1999: 47–48.) Death starts the decay of the body, which leads to bad smells and disfiguration. A dead body is neither a subject nor an object, it is in a state of the abject. Facing a dead body limits the individual's ability to give meaning; the abject is and is not something that just a short while ago used to be similar to 'me'. The abject is neither living nor truly dead but something indeterminate in a horrifying liminal state between the living and the dead. (Kristeva 1980: 11–12; see also Nilsson Stutz 2003 for an archaeological development of Kristeva's theory.)

Across cultures, humans have explained death and eased mourning in ways that are fundamentally similar. A recently living individual, now turning into a decaying cadaver, is often transformed through different processes into something stable and permanent, such as a mummy, a lock of hair, a memorial, or an ancestor. They may also start a new life in the afterlife. (Humphreys 1981: 268.) Considering the clothed dead body as an intra-active abject allows us to understand why it has become the focus of the liminal phase of a ritual that helps the mourner to deal with the crisis of death. Control over the dead body involved a ritual that also enabled control over biology, nature, and social death. (Nilsson Stutz 2015: 5.) Death often brings discomfort to communities and families, and to restore order, the memory of the deceased needed to be stabilized and the threatening decay process needed to be ended or completed.

In addition to discussing general conceptions of death among post-medieval Northern Ostrobothnians, the focus is specifically on conceptions related to preparing the dead body for funeral and burial. This chapter discusses how the dead were treated for burial and what beliefs directed these customs. Additionally, it explores how the clothed dead body was understood after burial, when the decay process had already started. In addition to written accounts and ethnographic evidence, ideas concerning the deceased can be observed through the vast funerary material unearthed in a churchyard (Oulu cathedral, 266 burials) and a burned church site (Hailuoto, 87 burials), as well as inventoried in situ under two churches (Keminmaa, 60 burials; Haukipudas, 18 burials). The burials in the churchyard surrounding Oulu cathedral belonged to so-called ordinary people of the town, whereas the individuals buried below the floors of the other churches were priests, officers, soldiers, and wealthy peasants of the rural communities. This introduces a bias into the consideration of the status of these individuals, and local differences in funerary customs (such as coffins, floral accessories, and the use of fabrics to dress the dead) are evident in the preserved materials. Altogether about 430 burials have been recorded in detail at these sites. Of those, about 170 burials included remains of funerary attire

or coffin textiles. Unearthed textiles are generally more fragmentary than those found inside the coffins under church floors that have never been in contact with the soil. Despite this preservation bias, the interpretation of the fragmentary fabrics has been relatively easy when their construction methods have been compared to the extremely well-preserved fabrics in the burials under the church floor. In the crypts, the remains inside 17 coffins have been recorded as mummified. (Lipkin et al. 2020b.)

The church burial tradition was common throughout Europe, and in Finland it remained so until the middle of the 18th century, when parishes first became reluctant to bury their parishioners under church floors. Bad smell was a problem, especially in churches that were already full of putrefied bodies. The bodies produced such ill odours that church services had to be held outside during the warm summer months. The presence of the deceased was increasingly considered unhealthy and unsanitary (Kallio-Seppä and Tranberg 2020). Nevertheless, in some churches the tradition persisted until 1822, when the Russian Emperor gave an order to end it (Paavola 1998: 43). To provide space for new burials, in many churches older burials were removed and decayed remains placed into ossuaries. Additionally, older burials were covered with sand at the end of the church burial tradition (Paavola 1998), and only the latest burials are currently visible under the floors. For these reasons, the burials studied *in situ* date predominantly between the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Most of the buried individuals currently under church floors are infants, which is a consequence of both high child mortality and local traditions of giving highly valued resting places to newborns or small children even after most of the adults were already buried in the graveyard outside the church (Lipkin et al. 2020a).

In Sweden, of which Finland was a part until 1809, the social status of people was important from the Middle Ages to the modern era, but the Reformation changed burial customs so that they included more individual features (Jonsson 2009: 195–198). Before the Reformation, the human body was treated more collectively by wrapping it in a shroud and laying it in the grave usually without a coffin, whereas after the Reformation, families selected the styles and materials of coffins as well as the funerary textiles and decorations based on the status of the individual. The burial was then considered as a social medium (Karonen 1999; Tarlow 2002; Cherryson 2013; Tagesson 2015). During the late 17th century and the 18th century, rituals related to death were no longer considered as required only to secure the salvation of the soul and negotiate its passage through Purgatory, but they also became meaningful for mourning the end of a close relationship. Death often occurred at home where family members and friends said goodbye to the deceased. Both faith and grief became more private matters. For example, elite families in Finland often found comfort in their faith and expressed their emotions of sorrow and tenderness through writing letters (Ilmakunnas 2019).

During the Age of Liberty (1718–1772), new movements such as Pietism evolved in Sweden and Finland (Karonen 1999). The Northern Ostrobothnian funerary material from this period onwards exhibits the new ideas of faith as a private individual matter. For example, the names of the deceased were written on the coffin plates, inside the coffin lid, or on pieces of paper placed inside the coffin. Nevertheless, people were buried according to class (nobility, clergy, merchants, and peasants), even though the class system was rather complex in reality. For instance, servants, paupers, soldiers, craftsmen, and seamen did not belong to any of the official classes (Korhonen 2002). The differences between the classes were believed to be ordained by God and were reproduced in life and death. So-called ordinary people were buried outside the church, whereas the members of the higher classes received burial places under the church floor. Inside churches, families were buried according to their fixed seating, which was assigned based on status (Parland-von Essen 2010: 29). Deceased family members were placed just below the feet of the seated churchgoers. Priests and their families were buried closest to the altar, and families with inferior status next to the doors (Paavola 1998: 36).

Sumptuary laws were needed to regulate the excessive consumption of the higher classes, and these laws also regulated funerary attire and coffins (Modée 1774: 7142–7147; Pylkkänen 1953: 35). During the post-medieval period it was important to dress the deceased as befits their social standing even

for burial. The deceased were valued and appreciated by funeral guests and relatives, as the coffin was open at funerals (Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 228; Åhrén Snickare 2002: 130) and the deceased could be visited in cold storehouses during the wake period that lasted one week for children and two weeks for adults (Lipkin et al. 2020a). In the Northern Ostrobothnian church burial data, an individual's class can be seen in both burial location and funerary attire.

### 3.2. Souls define life and death

The death of a person is one of the big mysteries of life, and different cultures have created their own perceptions of death. Understanding death is often closely intertwined with religious thinking and conceptions of the world surrounding us. Religious customs often guide people in perceiving death, mourning the deceased, and coping with the uncertainty brought on by death. Death is often described as a liminal space (Turner 1992) between life and afterlife. Life is something every living person knows, whereas death is beyond the experience of the living.

General European changes in the understanding of death were reflected in Finnish society, but there was great variation between regions as well as between different social classes. Finnish death culture can be divided into eastern and western culture, where eastern Orthodox traditions emphasized kin and village graveyards and western Lutheran traditions focused on family chambers inside village or small-town churches or in graveyards. (Pentikäinen 1990; Koski and Moilanen 2019: 63.) Northern Ostrobothnia is a strongly Lutheran area, even though some individual examples of eastern influence may be noted (Lipkin and Kuokkanen 2014). Even though the public funeral ceremony was controlled first by the Catholic and then the Lutheran Church, funerary practices had regional features that followed long-standing traditions and beliefs regarding good death, death omens, and ways to prevent the dead from returning as ghosts. Christian and traditional beliefs were integrated and reproduced in folklore. The influence of local folk belief was stronger in the hinterlands than in the towns, where the influence of the church was more powerful (Pentikäinen 1990).

Death was noticed by observing bodily functions, but what was believed to happen to a human being after death? Fenno-Ugric people believed that a person had several souls. The *breath* (Fi. *henki* or *löyly* = steam raising from a sauna stove) was the power of life, the spirit that left the cooling body as vapour. Breath was meant for life and bodily functions. Life was constantly dependent on breath and lost when a person drew their last breath. The dead person had lost their breath. The word *henki* is also connected to supernatural beings, ghosts, and spirits of the dead. Breath is the soul that is closely connected to the body. (Pentikäinen 1990: 21–24.)

*Itse, selfhood* is actively aware of the surrounding world. This shadow of the soul may step out of the body while sleeping, and the person can be *itsetön*, unconscious, or in a soulless state that could also result from getting too drunk, for instance. *Itse, selfhood* lives a life that is not dependent on *henki, breath*. *Selfhood* was inherited from the ancestors. (Pentikäinen 1990: 21–24.) The ghost spirit followed the deceased to the coffin, but simultaneously with the body's decay, it faded away, and in the end, it was only a sleeping shadow (Harva 1945: 24; Lehtikoinen 2011: 20).

On the basis of Fenno-Ugric folklore, a human being had both a physical and a spiritual life. Death was followed by a six-week period during which the dead person lived between the worlds of the living and the dead. This pre-Christian conception was assimilated with the Christian perception of Christ's resurrection six weeks after his death. After six weeks, *itse, selfhood*, moved right next to the body and appeared to the relatives. After one year, the dead person was memorialized privately, after which they became a part of the worshipped community of the dead. The souls that were left outside of this community became 'restless souls' whose *itse* needed rest and peace and appeared as

ghosts to those who were responsible for this wicked state. *Henki*, *breath* lived only once, but *selfhood* lived in cycles and could return amongst the ancestors and the deceased, which means that *selfhood* could roam from one generation to the other. This belief became manifest, for instance, if a child was named after an ancestor. It was believed that a part of the soul of the ancestor returned to life with the child. (Pentikäinen 1990: 24–27.) Because the general opinion was that ghosts existed, the Lutheran church was somewhat flexible in this regard and acknowledged that the dead could return to the living. Folklore indicates that before entering Heaven, the dead soul lived in the Otherworld or Underworld (Fi. *Tuonela* or *Manala*) and the grave was considered their home, but after the Reformation, the concept of the Otherworld as a place similar to Purgatory was replaced by viewing it as Damnation. Accordingly, from this time onwards the returning dead were considered as demonic and dangerous lost souls. This change occurred at different times in different parts of Finland (east, west, town, rural areas). (*Kanteletar* 1887; Waronen 2009 [1898]; Hagberg 2016 [1937]; Harva 1948: 489–490; Koski 2011: 100.)

### 3.3. Dressing life on dead individuals

In the Lutheran context, death may be considered as a temporary undressing that leads to a new dressing according to Paul's (1 Corinthians 15: 35–58) understanding of the Resurrection (Utriainen 1999: 164). When dressing the dead, these identities are first undressed and then built on the deceased by relatives, neighbours, and friends. In archaeological contexts, interpreting these unique events is problematic. Often it remains unclear whether the deceased had any opportunity to influence which clothes were chosen or what was the world view or religious thinking that resulted in certain outcomes. However, we may assume that the choices followed the public ideas of the deceased person and their roles in the community. They were also closely intertwined with the conception of the dead clothed body.

Undressing or dressing an abject is not primarily dressing a body but dressing personhood or identity. People are living historical embodied beings who have an intra-actional conception of the past and of themselves. The clothed body defines and transforms the self-conception, both personality and social identity (Horn and Gurel 1981: 134–157). Folklore may preserve social memory, and even though it does not provide historical accuracy, it may confirm or inform archaeological narratives (Silva 2015). Together, material and oral records mediate knowledge through dynamically reconstituted practices. This means that a mummified or decayed clothed body uniquely, specifically, and particularly mediates the phenomenon that has been and still is in a state of flux in regard to knowledge.

Preparing a dead body for burial is a ritual that is a communal and traditional action rooted in beliefs (see Bell 1997: 94). As a phenomenon and source of meaning, the clothed dead body is not a thing but a specific ongoing and unfixed material performance of the world in its differential intelligibility (see Barad 2007: 335, 376). Performance, framed through structure and the material conditions (being discursive practice), creates ritual that creates meaning and significance to be experienced (Turner 1981: 155–156; Bell 1992: 82; 2008; Barad 2007: 335). The sense of structure evolving through embodied active action, in this case preparing the dead body for burial, is more important for the participant than the rationalizations or coherent and uncontested meanings of actions (Nilsson Stutz 2015: 6). The ritual takes the decomposing cadaver and its treatment under social control, which ensures that the dead does not remain in the dangerous liminal space for eternity but moves from the world of the living to the afterworld (Hertz 1960 [1907]: 36–37, 83; Eilola and Einonen 2009: 198–199). Structural relations in a poststructuralist sense are “specific material (re)configurings of bodies, that is, ongoing re(con)figurings of space-time-matterings” (Barad 2007: 448, note 8) and as



such they contribute to the production of phenomena, but also implicate power dynamics that rule out agency and “deterministically produce subjects of ideological formations” (Barad 2007: 237, 240).

A clothed dead body was the result of two individual rituals, namely the selection and preparation of the funerary attire and the washing and dressing of the body in the coffin. Different people performed these rituals: the first was conducted by the relatives, the second by a fearless older woman. (Wacklin 1844; Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 184; Lipkin et al. in press.) The meanings of these rituals were different, and they resulted in different experiences for the participants who were acting in accordance with their emotions.

### 3.3.1. Designing the clothed dead body

The fabrics for the dead and the coffin were likely provided by the family. In the Northern Ostrobothnian archaeological data, this is occasionally evidenced by exactly the same fabrics in burials that belonged to members of the same family (Lipkin et al. 2018). Family relationships are identified based on the church records identifying the burial place or the names inside the coffins. Even though death strips the deceased of the veil of their individuality, the relatives put it back on by choosing clothes for the deceased. The clothes of the deceased represented the family’s understanding of the person, as well as their understanding of the world of the dead and of what kind of clothes were suitable for burial. Fabrics chosen for burial are predominantly reused white domestic fabrics such as sheets, old clothes such as shirts repurposed for burial, or caps, stockings, and gloves that used to belong to the deceased. As items, all of these held memories of family life and possibly even of the deceased person. They were filled with emotions arisen during their use as fabrics or items. Now, as they were transformed into funerary attire, chosen, measured, cut, folded, ironed, sewn, and decorated, they were contrasted with a new set of emotions including at least sorrow, yearning, and love (Fig. 3.1). The sensory interactions evoked emotions and created memories. These performances helped the mourners by keeping them active and allowing them to provide something for the loved one. Humans derive pleasure from actual physical movement and creating something new with their own hands, and this must have been important for the coping of the mourners (Lipkin et al. manuscript).



Figure 3.1. Neatly folded and pinned funerary attire of a newborn from Haukipudas. (Photograph: S. Lipkin 2014.)

The 19th-century evidence implies that it was the duty of young virgin godmothers to provide clothes and accessories for young children's burials in Northern Ostrobothnia. Godfathers and godsons usually made the coffin. Sara Wacklin (1844), a local schoolteacher, implies that these godmothers arranged a happy evening event, in which they invited their friends to help prepare the clothes and floral wreaths for infants. Young gentlemen were also invited, and Wacklin states that soon after these events, weddings were planned. The event in which no-one thought of death may be regarded as a way to socialize young people into accepting the realities of life and the fact that as future parents, they would most likely lose one or more children. In addition to sorrow and joy, these events likely evoked the feeling of falling in love. (Lipkin et al. 2020a; Lipkin et al. manuscript.)

### 3.3.2. Clothing the dead body

The clothed dead body was soaked in emotions, but because of the fear of death, neither parents nor the youth dressed children, nor did family members dress their loved ones. First of all, ethnographic evidence suggests that in some regions of Sweden it was believed that dressing a dead body would prevent family members from joining each other in Heaven (Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 184). Secondly, children and youth were not allowed to touch and handle dead bodies (Paulaharju 1924: 116). The clothed dead body was considered a pseudo-spirit, an abject, which represented the feared force of death. Kalma, the force of death, would easily catch others if they handled or touched the deceased. For this reason, the dressers were usually neighbours or other older, post-menopausal women who had previous experience and were not afraid of death. The force of death might have been dangerous for unborn babies, making them sickly and morbid, which prevented pregnant women from being close to dead bodies. (Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 184.)

It was important that the deceased were clean when entering Heaven. For this reason, the dead body was first washed in the person's own bed. After washing, the sheets, mattress, and sometimes even the whole bed, if it was old, were burned. In the spot where the deceased had lain, an iron nail was beaten to prevent death from catching the living and the deceased from returning to haunt the house. The deceased was addressed by name and kindly told that they would be washed and placed in their coffin. They were also asked to keep death with them and not let it spread. (Waronen 2009 [1898]: 58; Paulaharju 1914: 106–107; Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 184–186.)

Archaeological evidence shows that the funerary attire was not functional but constructed on the human remains from selected pieces of fabric arranged, folded, and pinned to look like clothes. The funerary clothes followed the fashion of the living, but they were not clothes for the living. (Lipkin et al. 2015, Lipkin et al. 2020a.) Even though people in the past did not concretely believe that the clothes followed the dead into the Otherworld where the deceased waited for the Resurrection, the dead individuals were not thought to enter the Otherworld naked either. The funerary clothes likely had a symbolic value for the deceased; after all, the dead were buried dressed according to their social standing.

Preparing the dead for burial was directed by official instructions and customs that were regulated by the state and religious authorities, but charms were also used to appease the unsatisfied dead. The dead could become furious if they were offended during the dressing process. For instance, in some regions of Sweden, pins had to be attached to the textiles in such a way that the dresser stood on the same side of the coffin on which the pin was attached. Reaching over the body was not permitted. It was also important how the pins were attached to the fabrics; if the sharp ends pointed towards the legs, the deceased could not rise on the day of Resurrection. However, if the intention was to prevent haunting, the pins were pointed towards the legs on purpose or the legs were tied together. In some regions of Sweden, using pins was prohibited. (Waronen 2009 [1898]: 60; Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 176–182, 201–206.) In Northern Ostrobothnian burials, pins are often found attaching the funerary gown to the coffin bedding. Additionally, sleeve cuffs, laces, and bodices are regularly attached to the gown with pins.

If the deceased was not dressed properly, they could not rest in peace. In this respect, caps, stockings, and gloves were extremely important. Otherwise the deceased was considered naked. Folklore knows many stories of the deceased who come to haunt the living and complain about the lack of these items and feeling cold. (Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 187–194.) In Northern Ostrobothnian burials, unlike the false gown laid on the deceased, caps, stockings, and gloves were usually items most likely owned by the deceased and as such worn and occasionally repaired and mended for life or burial (Fig. 3.2).

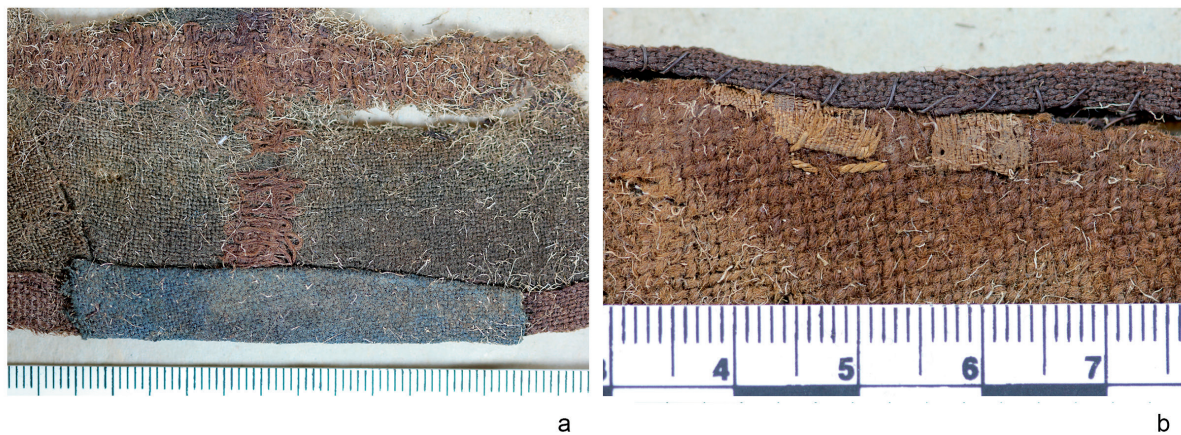


Figure 3.2. A man's skull cap from Hailuoto (Burial 98) was mended with a patch attached with a horsetail string. At some point, the cap had a silk tape, but it was later replaced with a woollen one. (Photograph: S. Lipkin, 2017.)

As archaeological data indicates, the coffins were furnished with pillows and mattresses as beds, and the deceased slept and waited for the Resurrection. It was believed that the dead should enjoy their time in the coffin, which would keep them from coming back as ghosts. Even though children were born naked into the world, it was believed that if a human being needed something on earth, they would need the same thing on the other side as well. (Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 215.) As the clothes did not have to be real clothes, we may assume that like the body itself, the clothes were not expected to be resurrected as matter. However, as it was believed that pins or tying feet together could prevent resurrection, it may also have been believed that the image or resemblance of the clothes could be resurrected with the soul. The body and the clothes were the same, and they were considered equal in death. Nevertheless, dressing the body was regulated by strict norms and traditions, and it was believed that the clothing type was important for the souls of the deceased both in Heaven and while still in the Afterworld (inside the coffin). If the deceased were not happy, they could haunt the living.

The ontological problem of the dead body being neither dead nor alive or the frightening cadaver resembling less and less the individual who was once known (Nilsson Stutz 2003: 95) led to a belief that most likely relieved the fears of the living. It was believed that a person's life did not end at the moment of death. Even though the deceased was stripped of life and an identity as a living person, they received another ancestral identity that could be inherited by future generations. It is possible that the cycle of souls and future resurrection comforted the living and ensured an eternal life.



### 3.4. Living clothed dead bodies: Facing the decaying bodies

False clothes pinned on the deceased, the decay process of both material and human remains, and haunting were neither religious nor philosophical concerns for past Finns. Despite the fact that the living bodies, the abjects, and the force of death were feared, Uno Harva (1945: 23) notes that questions concerning the ‘living bodies’ of the dead and their clear dissimilarity to actual living bodies were not relevant for people in the 18th and 19th centuries, and such questions did not disturb their faith. It is possible that the messages of the Bible were read concretely: “For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies” (1 Corinthians 15: 35–58).

Kristeva (1980: 12) does not see a lack of purity or health as defining an abject. Indeed, in Northern Ostrobothnia, retaining the purity of the clothed dead body was considered crucial. It was important that the deceased was washed before being dressed. Being clean was not connected only to the body: the funerary clothes or fabrics needed to be washed too, otherwise the dresser could die. (Hagberg 2016 [1937]: 134, 187–188.) Retaining purity and the unchanged state of the decaying cadaver was further aided through a selection of materials in the coffin preparation ritual. The fabrics for the clothes were often white, a colour of purity, as were also the fabrics that covered the pillows and mattresses. Northern Ostrobothnian church burials exhibit cleanliness and careful folding that was most likely done by ironing. Mattresses and pillows were made of hay, straw, birch bark, or anti-bacterial sawdust that would soak up the liquids that were evident in the putrefying process (Lipkin et al. 2020b). Purity may be especially connected to children’s burials; children themselves were considered as pure of earthly sins (Heywood 2013), and both folklore and historical sources emphasize that their lives and death were considered pure (Wacklin 1844). This purity is further evidenced by Northern Ostrobothnian burials. Children received more beautiful funerary attire with more silks and other precious fabrics. Additionally, the burials of very young, even prematurely born infants have been found below church floors, and the burial of the youngest continued well after the church burial tradition had otherwise ended. The fact that children’s dead clothed bodies produced less putrefying products and smells than adults had possibly led to the belief that children were considered pure also after death. (Lipkin et al. 2020a.)

Purity was one of the central aims in the funerary preparation process; it was important that the deceased stepped in the Afterworld clean and wearing simple white funerary attire. However, even the contemporary people knew that the result was the opposite. Soon after burial, or even during the wake period, the human remains started to decay and produce unpleasant smells. The unpleasant effects of decay were prevented by different means. Spruce boughs found inside the coffins in churches were used both as mattresses and to cover the body. They had originally had a strong fragrance used to cover the smells of the putrefying body. During the funeral procession, spruce boughs were also spread on the ground in the house and church until the early 20th century, and originally this was done to expel ghosts (Pentikäinen 1990: 54). Herbs placed in the coffins and sniffed during the church services were also used to cover the bad smell. Additionally, coating the inventoried coffins under the church floor with tar would have served the same purpose for a while. (Tranberg 2015; Kallio-Seppä and Tranberg 2020; Lipkin et al. 2020b.)

The use of antibacterial and absorbent coffin bedding and fragrant herbs and washing both the body and the clothes may be considered as rituals that aimed to retain the state of a subject and to prevent or slow down the transformation of the clothed dead body into an abject. However, it is intriguing that even though purity was a goal, everyone knew that most of the deceased decayed. It is claimed that Nikolaus Rungius (ca 1560–1629), a vicar in Kemi, had preached: “If my words are not true, my body will decompose, but if they are true, it will never decompose.” Apparently, he and many others knew that not all human remains decayed, but some mummified, and their clothes

maintained their softness. Based on Rungius's words, which apparently were true because he can be found mummified under the floor of St Michael's church in Keminmaa, it is possible that mummification was the preferable outcome in his time (Väre et al. 2020a). Rungius acted as a Lutheran priest living while the Reformation process was finalized in Finland (Vahtola 1997: 152–156; Lipkin et al. 2018). However, his conceptions regarding the soul and death could have been affected by Catholic perceptions. The bones of Catholic saints retained the vigour of the saints, and the saints were better encountered through their bones (Harva 1945: 26). Furthermore, God gave tendons, flesh, and breath to dry bones in the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37, which may have been interpreted as meaning that the preservation of bones and human remains was a necessary prerequisite for eternal life (Harva 1945: 28). Indeed, through the material continuity of the body (the marking of graves and the containment and religious dressing of the body), medieval Christian burial rites in England confirm the belief of bodily resurrection and the continuity between the body in the grave and the soul (Gilchrist 2014).

If the soul was believed to fade away with the body (Harva 1945: 24; Lehtikoinen 2011: 20), was the soul of naturally mummified remains still present in the coffin? The vigour of the human being was considered to be preserved especially in body tissue. As long as there were remains of tissue, it was possible that a person who had died violently or too early could return to haunt the living. Furthermore, it was believed that human bones, flesh, and mummified tissue contained spiritus, vigour of life, that could be used for medicinal and magical purposes. This vigour was thought to transfer to the clothes as well. Any part of the body or clothing would represent the person as a whole, and the soul of the dead could be controlled through them. Especially the body parts of executed criminals and others who had died a violent death were considered effective because these individuals' lives had been cut short, which retained their vigour more powerfully than in the case of those who died of old age. (Eilola and Einonen 2009: 194, 196–197; Tarlow 2014: 406–408.) If such a belief prevailed, decayed and mummified individuals were contrasted with different perceptions. Even though mummification may have been preferable, so far no clear evidence is known from Finland of an artificially aided mummifying process, or at least any such attempts were not successful. However, even during the warm summer months, preserving the corpses in cellars may have aided their preservation (Núñez and Silver 2019). The fate of the human remains may have been left into the hands of God. The living understood that the body was to decay, and the clothes along with it.

In Finland, mummification was the result of good ventilation and freezing air under the church floors. The human remains were freeze-dried, but natural mummification was rarely perfect (Väre et al. 2020b). Temperature and moisture could vary during winter months, and the torso area was less likely to dry completely. With time, the skin of the individuals has turned dark brown. Because space under the floors was cleared from time to time and new bodies were buried, many people were aware of the appearance of the mummified and partly decayed individuals. At least from the 19th century onwards, people had a morbid interest in the dead bodies and their nonconformity and unsocial nature, which has driven people unconsciously to re-personify and resocialize fleshed mummies (Nystrom 2019: 257). These remains may have affected the stories of so-called church people (Fi *kirkonväki*), who were spirits of the dead or the invisible power of death. The tradition of believing in church people is recorded only in the west of Finland, among the Lutherans (Koski 2011: 12–13). Church people were described as smelly, black or grey, small crippled creatures that were sometimes invisible or transparent. Dressed in white, they are often headless, armless, footless, or somehow deficient. They could also cause constriction and pain in whoever confronted them. Most often church people passed the living in crowds and could be sensed by smelling or hearing: they could hiss, whoosh, or sigh. Previous research indicates that the ideas of the appearance of the church people were due to thinking that they appeared in their funerary attire and that their crippled state was caused by time spent in the grave. The size of the church people was connected to their age: someone who had died

as a child would become a haunting child. (Krohn 1914: 67; Harva 1945: 20–21; 1948: 492–496; Koski 2011: 187–192.) A dark appearance and the bad smell of death could also be attached to these abject creatures.

Finnish historical sources also support the view that the deceased was present also in the bones. The bones, pieces of funerary attire, or soil around the burial could be used in witchcraft. To take or steal parts of the clothed body was a penal act that could lead to fines. The crime was especially severe if the parts were used for magical purposes. (Tittonen 2008.) This malicious act aroused the anger of the dead person, and together with the power and spells of witches, as well as the evil nature and sinfulness of the deceased, the body parts could be extremely powerful in ill-natured witchcraft. However, if the clothed body parts, wood chips from the coffin or soil surrounding the burial were collected with the intention of helping households economically or healing sickness, the deceased and the church people were supposed to be given payment in coins. On the contrary, if the intention was to get the deceased to start haunting, no payment was to be left behind. (Harva 1948: 499–500, Koski 2011: 242.) Wood chips and coins occur together in an old tale called *Kirkonwäki* (Church people) printed in 1856. In this tale a Christian woman is taken to the world of church people to aid in a delivery and as a reward for her service she is given wood chips and a skein of yarn. By morning these have turned into gold coins and necklace. Occasionally coins are found in the burials or in their filling soil at the Oulu cathedral graveyard and observed on the surface of soil under church floors. Coins were especially frequently found inside the extensively excavated Hailuoto church, where hundreds of coins were found. They could either have been left deliberately in connection with acquiring the clothed body parts, wood chips or soil, or they could have slipped between the floor planks. To further emphasize their magical nature, three of the coins were wrapped in fabric or paper. Additionally, hundreds of small hooks and eyes used to fasten clothing have been found below floors. They may also have been slipped there to please the deceased and the church people. (Fig. 3.3)



Figure 3.3. A coin wrapped in paper found below the floor at the Hailuoto church (KM86088:255). Hundreds of hooks and eyes have been found below the floor as well (KM87131:505). (Photographs: S. Lipkin 2019.)

Folk belief does not directly imply whether the church people were the deceased themselves or the power sent by the deceased. However, they were the guardians of the church and the deceased buried both inside and outside the church. They could punish those who violated consecrated ground. Church people were the power of death. (Koski 2011: 12–13.) Describing the church people as objectionable and obnoxious emphasizes the confrontation between the church people and the living (Koski 2011: 189). It is unlikely that all members of the community saw mummified or decayed remains in their coffins, but knowledge of their appearance was based on the experiences of those

who emptied the space under the floor for new coffins. However, the smell of decaying human bodies inside churches was a shared experience. Shared experiences of decaying human remains and their smells were manifested by the belief in church people and ghosts, which were an important part of daily life and the afterlife. Belief in church people continued well after the church burial tradition ended and people lost their original understanding and common memory of the smell or sight of rotting corpses (Paulaharju 1914: 112–114; Koski 2011). As such, church people may be considered as one expression of the clothed dead body as an intra-active abject that, as a concept, is an open-ended practice with no intrinsic boundaries.

### 3.5. Conclusion

The beliefs concerning death and the deceased directed the daily life and attitudes of the living community, as well as affections, emotions, caring, and attitudes towards disease. The dead were something different in contrast to the living. Although the dead once used to be a part of the living world, they had just lost one of their souls, *breath*, the soul of bodily functions. Their other soul, *selfhood*, *itse*, could roam between generations, and if demonic, return as a ghost. They lived in the Otherworld and were connected with feelings of prejudice and fear. These feelings directed how the dead clothed body was prepared for the funeral and burial.

Based on material culture, it is important to understand past peoples' conceptions of the individual in the Otherworld or Heaven. Understanding these conceptions is about understanding the otherness the living ones felt towards the pseudo-spirits, *abjects*, the dead people who were neither subjects nor objects. Respect for the dead can be seen in the burials through the clear intention to ensure that the deceased had a comfortable and beautiful resting place and a coffin and clothing according to their social status. When a person died, they needed to be taken care of with respect and honour. The clothed dead body was subject to different kinds of emotions, the most prominent of which were perhaps sorrow, love, respect, and fear. The rituals of the liminal phase gave the mourners control over this life stage and helped them cope with sorrow and the fear of death.

The meaning of the clothed dead body is not fixed, but different performers of different rituals created their own understanding through material-discursive open-ended practices. Different performers gave their own meanings to individual clothed dead bodies, and as such the clothed dead body mediates neither one perception of the individual nor a cultural conception of death and the deceased. In the historical perspective, the meanings are open-ended, in a state of flux, and archaeological research adds to this discussion.

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