



Grave reopening in the first millennium CE

- connecting European regions

Session Organizers

Alison Klevnäs (Uppsala University, alison.klevnas@arkeologi.uu.se), Edeltraud Aspöck (University of Graz), Tamara Šarkić (University of Belgrade), Lavinia Grumeza, (Romanian Academy), Alpár Dobos (National Museum of Transylvanian History)

Session Abstract

Taking as our starting point the broad region of central and southeastern Europe in which the conference takes place, this session will discuss evidence of deliberate re-entries into inhumation burials during the first millennium CE.

Graves disturbed soon after burial or while cemeteries were still in use are a widespread phenomenon across first millennium Europe. Usually evidenced by disarranged skeletal remains and artefacts and often pits dug to access contents, they have been noted in many countries since the early days of excavation, and have typically been regarded as grave robbery.

In post-Roman western Europe, recent research has debunked traditional narratives in understanding grave reopening. Methods from micro-stratigraphy, archaeoethnology, and bioanthropology are being used to better understand natural processes and post-burial interventions, as well as the timing, motives and beliefs behind these actions. Far from theft, the widespread reopening there seems to be a selective activity targeting specific forms of artefact, and is argued to represent extended mortuary customs.

The focus of this session is to discuss evidence in central and southeastern Europe against a broader geographical and methodological picture. These regions see even higher intensities of reopening, with whole cemeteries often affected, not least in earlier phases. The territories of the Pannonian Plain, for example, experienced centuries of migrations, warfare, and raiding, and there are cultural discontinuities, as well as elements of continuity. There researchers have observed a widespread phenomenon of grave reopening in numerous necropoli in different phases. However, there are not yet regional discussions, comparisons, or contextualization of the phenomenon within the broader European historical context.

The session aims to connect archaeological and bioanthropological research on grave reopening and post-burial interventions, and to share knowledge and approaches. Contributions may include synthetic research, case studies, and methodological reflections. We plan to publish the papers as a proceedings volume.

Please submit your abstract by 6 February 2025

<https://www.e-a-a.org/EAA2025>