

This new issue of *Human Remains and Violence* is again made up of *varia*, in line with the journal's aim and policy of publishing interdisciplinary research on the treatment and management of dead bodies and human remains. This issue takes us through different times and places, starting in the Middle Ages in the French region of Normandy and ending with the funerary and medical situation generated by the current COVID-19 pandemic in several Muslim contexts. Aside from this voyage through history, the articles in this issue also take us on a journey into different disciplines: archaeology, anthropology, ethnology, ethnography, history and law. They all explore various instances of the handling of mortal remains, some linked to armed conflicts, some linked to rituals, some to violent deaths in peacetime, some to religious rituals and some to sanitary crises. All these contributions highlight the multiplicity of challenges – be they religious, political, military or sanitary – that stem from the different uses of corpses and human remains.

In their compelling article 'Human skeletons showing traces of violence discovered in disused medieval wells: two case studies', Florence Carré, Aminte Thomann and Yves-Marie Adrian use their respective expertise in archaeology, anthropology and pottery to explore two distinct cases of adult skeletons disposed of in wells, following violent deaths, during the Middle Ages in the French region of Normandy. In their work, the authors expose the different possible scenarios behind such violent deaths and discuss the reasons for the deposition of the cadavers in wells, in which animal remains were also found, rather than in cemeteries. Further, the authors also consider the place of these individuals cast into wells – here a man and a woman – in their communities.

Also exploring the fate and significance of human remains deposited in places that may be used as dumping places, ethnologist Marie Daugey takes us to Kabye territory in Togo to discuss the ritual, practised until the beginning of the twentieth century, of burying the heads of male enemies in earth mounds known as *hude*, which literally means manure. She explains how the *hude*, situated in every locality, were of utmost importance, since the head of the enemy buried therein was bound to guarantee the sustainability and durability of the group living on Kabye territory. Daugey also emphasises how, even if this practice has since long passed, the *hude* still exist and are of great significance for male initiation rites into adulthood.

If Daugey's unprecedented study focuses on a specific internal context, highlighting the post-mortem treatment reserved to enemies, historians Adrien Douchet, Taline Garibian and Benoît Pouget – staying within the realm of conflict studies – turn to the French dead of the Great War in an original contribution that zooms into a generally overlooked time period, namely the very first years of the war. By detailing the various proposals related to the management of the dead as discussed and debated at the time, this ground-breaking article highlights both the diversity of the challenges – sanitary, logistical, material, legal, ethical, moral – raised by the handling of the dead and the multiplicity of actors, from both the civil and military spheres, involved therein. As the authors show, the years 1914 and 1915 were deeply impacted by a divide between the health administration, for which hygiene amounted to an obsession, the wish of the French nation to bury its dead individually and the various political and military imperatives generated by the war.

Aside from the diverse imperatives identified by Douchet, Garibian and Pouget, religious imperatives may also play a substantial role in the management of the dead, and the interactions between religion, politics and medicine can considerably impact on this management. Focusing on Roman Catholicism, Francesca Sbardella, in her fascinating article 'Against the sacred body: the processing of remains in Catholic circles', recounts twenty years of ethnographic observation in enclosed convents where the human remains of certain individuals, considered as exceptional, are stored and transformed into relics. This unprecedented research details the practices of production and reproduction of these relics, exposes the roles of the different actors involved in this process and considers the relevant political and ecclesiastical dynamics linked with it.

Turning to Islam and to a very current situation, and thereby establishing a bridge with the next two special issues of *Human Remains and Violence*, which will be entirely devoted to the burial and the politics of dead bodies in pandemic times, legal expert Ahmed Al-Dawoody offers a thought-provoking read on the impact of COVID-19 on religious practices and on the necessity of maintaining dignity in the handling of the mortal remains of individuals who have died from the virus in Muslim contexts. Drawing from different case studies, his article highlights the creativity of Islamic law-making as well as the necessary cooperation between jurists and medical and forensic experts. In turn, this necessity of collaboration demonstrates once more the necessity of a cross-disciplinary dialogue when it comes to managing corpses and human remains, be it in times of conflict, in peacetime and/or in times of pandemic. It is precisely this dialogue that this new issue of *Human Remains and Violence* once again exemplifies.

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