

# **“Go Tell the Assyrians, Thou Who Passest By, That Here, Obedient to Their Laws, We Lie...”**

FABRICE DE BACKER<sup>1</sup>

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Le vent froid de la nuit souffle à travers les branches  
Et casse par moments les rameaux desséchés;  
La neige, sur la plaine où les morts sont couchés,  
Comme un suaire étend au loin ses nappes blanches.

En ligne noire, au bord de l'étroit horizon,  
Un long vol de corbeaux passe en rasant la terre,  
Et quelques chiens, creusant un tertre solitaire,  
Entrechoquent les os dans le rude gazon.

J'entends gémir les morts sous les herbes froissées.  
Ô pâles habitants de la nuit sans réveil,  
Quel amer souvenir, troublant votre sommeil,  
S'échappe en lourds sanglots de vos lèvres glacées?

Oubliez, oubliez! Vos cœurs sont consumés;  
De sang et de chaleur vos artères sont vides.  
Ô morts, morts bienheureux, en proie aux vers avides,  
Souvenez-vous plutôt de la vie, et dormez!

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is dedicated to all those who died obeying the laws of the King of Assyria.

“It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died.  
Rather, we should thank God that such men lived.”  
General of the Army George S. Patton Jr.

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Ah! dans vos lits profonds quand je pourrai descendre,  
Comme un forçat vieilli qui voit tomber ses fers,  
Que j'aimerai sentir, libre des maux soufferts,  
Ce qui fut moi rentrer dans la commune cendre!

Mais, ô songe! Les morts se taisent dans leur nuit.  
C'est le vent, c'est l'effort des chiens à leur pâture,  
C'est ton morne soupir, implacable nature!  
C'est mon coeur ulcéré qui pleure et qui gémit.

Tais-toi. Le ciel est sourd, la terre te dédaigne.  
À quoi bon tant de pleurs si tu ne peux guérir?  
Sois comme un loup blessé qui se tait pour mourir,  
Et qui mord le couteau, de sa gueule qui saigne.

Encore une torture, encore un battement.  
Puis, rien. La terre s'ouvre, un peu de chair y tombe;  
Et l'herbe de l'oubli, cachant bientôt la tombe,  
Sur tant de vanité croît éternellement.

(Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle, *Le vent froid de la nuit*)

*Abstract:* This paper deals with a topic hardly studied by our fellow scholars: the management of casualties during the aftermath of a victorious battle for the Neo-Assyrians.

The paper will propose a typology of casualties according to different points of their different kinds of status, plus some questions on some problems still encountered by modern soldiers nowadays.

*Keywords:* Neo-Assyrian, Combat, Warfare, War, Casualties, Dead, Soldiers, V. I. P., Officer, Bodies, Mass Grave, Pyre, Mummies, Burials, Limbs, Niniveh, Ashdod, Kalhu, Hassanlu, Pitch Battles, Sieges

## Introduction

Though the proper disposal of dead soldiers was perhaps not considered a priority by the Neo-Assyrian commanders and their Allies at all, with the main efforts being concentrated of winning the battles, one can only assume how they would have managed it.

### I. Security Perimeter

During a combat, there is a moment when the action drifts away, and everything stops. When this lull occurs, the Commanding Officer would bark orders to his Non-Commissioned Officers to gather and resupply all the remaining living soldiers of their outfit (Fig. 1-3).

## **II. Buddy Count**

Once the Security Perimeter has been established, the first action would be to call for a Buddy Count, so a call to the neighbouring living fellows in a way to prepare the census of troops according to their health status.

One would believe that some kind of call would be issued from top to toe according to the census a particular soldier taught as a scribe or the Assistant to the Commanding Officer would have taken along. This particular type of soldiers could be depicted dressed as officers or with a scale-armour as in the reliefs of the Neo-Assyrian kings (Fig. 4-9).

Such a census would have to be copied, as one would be required immediately for the headquarters of the whole army, and another one would be kept by the unit itself. This might explain why such scribes are depicted by two: one writing on wax tablet for the unit's own archives, for such a support can be corrected easily, and the other one on parchment for the overall headquarters, as this last support is far more expensive and hard to correct.

A centralized system would have certainly prevailed to ease and speed the counting around the military standard of the unit.

The scribe would have called for and accounted for the remaining soldiers in different categories according to their immediate status, being only interested with the fate of the warriors belonging to the same side or ethnic group of the winner in charge of the battlefield.

### **A. Able Bodied Personal**

The remaining soldiers immediately visible and understood as seemingly fit for combat would be listed as Able Bodied Personal.

### **B. Wounded In Action**

The people still able to call and visible but seemingly unfit for combat would be listed as Wounded In Action.

### **C. Missing In Action**

The remaining personal belonging to the victorious party and unseen during the call would be firstly listed as Missing In Action, leaving them some time to join. During this time, the remaining Wounded In Action, yet undiscovered or whose recovery chances were far too uncertain, would have the opportunity to reach the next status of casualties.

## **D. Killed In Action**

The dead personal unseen and unheard of until discovered by the fellows during the search for the Missing in Action. This last category was to be looked for, thus leaving time for the unhealable wounded to pass.

The “Butcher’s Bill” would have possibly to be organized in two different entry in the clerk’s register, for some of the military personal would have encountered two types of death.

### **1) First Death**

The dead found on the battlefield would be listed as a kind of first dead.

There was certainly a way to ensure that the bodies recovered were actually dead, to avoid some kind of “Chabert Traumatism”, from the famous character of Victor Hugo who woke up after a battle buried in a mass grave under corpses and whispering, dying fellows, and as it really happened to Hugo’s uncle.<sup>2</sup>

Without any hint at what this dead check would have been during the Neo-Assyrian period, one could think that a prick on the arm or on the sole of the foot, a kick in the groin or a finger pressure on the eye, could do the trick easily as they do today.<sup>3</sup>

### **2) Latter Death: Dead of Wounds Received in Action**

In any case, after some hours or days, the worst wounded ones would have surely passed over, and thus would have been listed in the indirect dead.

## **E) Prisoner of War**

Finally, those last members of the personal who could not have been seen, found or accounted for would be probably listed in the prisoners of war entry of the clerk’s census.

Surely a certain part of them would have been lost in the corners of the battlefield or have deserted.

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<sup>2</sup> Plas 1963: 20.

<sup>3</sup> [villagevoice.com/2004/11/16/dead-check-in-falluja/](http://villagevoice.com/2004/11/16/dead-check-in-falluja/).

### **III. Body Count**

Once the Able Bodied Personal would have been listed, the Assistant to the Commanding Officer would centralize the collection of friendly casualties and the enemy trophies in the meantime (Figs. 4-14).

This would have left the soldiers to have a better search for friends when they tried to identify a possible dead enemy to take his head for trophy.

#### **A) Lining up the friendly bodies**

As the soldiers of a particular outfit go by, in the search for friendly casualties, they can sever enemy heads to come back and be accounted for, which will lead them to military promotion or retribution if they had killed a Chosen One (Fig. 15-18).

Friendly casualties could be lined up in a proper line in front of the standard of the unit or of the Commanding Officer, where any remaining enemy corpse would have been set aside to make room for this (Fig. 19).

#### **B) Piling up the enemy heads**

As they would bring the corpses of their fellows back, on shields or on broken shafts, even by pulling them, the Neo-Assyrian soldiers would gather enemy heads on another side of the fallen, next to the clerk, where room would have been prepared (Figs. 4, 6, 12-15, 18).

As these events might have taken some time to unfold, the carrion birds and other scavenger animals would have surely started to feast on the flesh of the dead and of the dying's flesh (Figs. 20-40).<sup>4</sup>

This centralization would have also helped the head count of the clerk and the Commanding Officer to ascertain the amount of enemy casualties he would have brought to the enemy during the fight.

#### **C) Identification Walk around the Dead**

Once the dead personal had been gathered and lined up neatly, the Non-Commissioned Officers would test the vitals of the bodies lying in front of them again, in a way or the other, to make sure they would bury the dead only.

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<sup>4</sup> First Battalion, 24th Marines: The history of the men of 1/24 in World War II and beyond. "We Had To Bury Those Dead...". OPERATION FLINTLOCK, D+3 to D+12:3-12 FEBRUARY 1944, <https://1stbattalion24thmarines.com/the-battles/roi-namur/occupation/>.

The Non-Commissioned Officers had perhaps, according to its availability, a bucket of water thrown on the dead's faces, to clean them from the dust and help the identification.

As no Commanding Officer would have been able to remember all the men under his command, the best way to identify casualties would be to use the file and ranks relationships of the enlisted men to fill in the gaps and make sure no one has been unaccounted for or forgotten, and list the unidentified ones afterwards.<sup>5</sup>

It clearly seems that some kind of differentiation in the treatment on the bodies could have taken place if the soldier was a common villager or the son of a magnate.

### **1) Rank and File Troopers**

Un-recognizable people, for example with faces crushed by weapons, would perhaps undergo a kind of temporary reconstructive surgery to help the identification of their bodies.

Here, one wonders if the Neo-Assyrian soldier was wearing a kind of dog tag to help his identification in case of death, as the Spartans are described to do so in Polyaeus.<sup>6</sup>

### **2) Nobles, Officers and Chosen Ones**

Particular individuals would have surely been set aside for particular reasons, i.e. their status, their family or other reasons.

Textual evidences from previous periods, but this is rather subject to caution, quote the bodies of officers being buried aside, or not, of those of the troops.<sup>7</sup>

## **IV. Taking Care of the Dead**

If the situation was optimal, one could take care of the wounded and of the dead the day after the battle, once he was sure the enemy was at bay and that his troops would have recovered a while. This fact is also most recalled in the souvenirs of the veterans of the Napoleonic or the Modern Wars.

If the situation was not so, and surely it hardly was the case, dead and wounded had to wait one, two, three days, perhaps even months, before their

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<sup>5</sup> De Backer 2014: 19-47 and 2015: 39-64; Belluci / Bortolussi 2014: 75-82; War Department, FM 10-63, 1945.

<sup>6</sup> Boring 1979: 18; Vaughn 1993: 56.

<sup>7</sup> Richardson 2007: 193.

bloated flesh and festering wounds could be managed, if their side had the upper hand on the battlefield.<sup>8</sup> The attention given to the dead friends, and then to the enemy dead, would surely change according to the strategic or tactical necessities, the weather, the health of the troops or the availability of labour forces.

For strategic necessities, mostly the speed of movement he was known for, Napoleon usually left the battlefield after a victory, where the dead could even wait for months, to be cleaned by details and went on through after his enemies.<sup>9</sup> The Westphalian troops, heavily reduced by the day's losses, were devoted to take care of the battlefield casualties after the battle of Borodino had to change the location of their camp several times to avoid the stench and other miasma freed by the decaying.<sup>10</sup>

Out of safety reasons, and fearing the defeated, but still quite strong, French army, the victorious English army left its dead rot on the field of Agincourt after its victory.<sup>11</sup>

Bad weather also drove the dirt of the quick tombs and exposed the hastily buried bodies of dead soldiers during the campaign of Napoleon.<sup>12</sup>

Fatigue, and shell fire, usually led First World War soldiers to let the bodies in open air or in shell holes without proper treatment, sometimes even mixing the pieces of different bodies from different units together in the same hole<sup>13</sup>.

### **A) Stripping the Corpses of the Friends**

Once the identification of the bodies was realized, some parties would surely be sent back to camp to bring back carts with first aid supplies, i.e. ammunitions, rations and water, plus entrenching tools, i.e. picks, shovels, baskets and ropes.

While those men went on their way, others started to strip the dead of their equipment, to recover what could be useful for the ongoing military events. As most of the equipment was provided by the owner of the unit, it would have saved time and resources to take it back.

In particular instances, the festering state of the corpses might have prevented people to strip the dead of their equipment, as it has been the case in Wisby, where the bodies had stayed more than three days in the sun with all

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<sup>8</sup> Rigeade 2008: 1-9.

<sup>9</sup> de Ségur 1872: 119.

<sup>10</sup> Rose 1913: p. 32-34.

<sup>11</sup> Rigeade 2008: 1.

<sup>12</sup> Bourgogne 1899: 60.

<sup>13</sup> Zerbo 2020: 265; Desfossés 2008: 75.

their equipment and had to be hastily buried, if possible with all the cut off pieces that could be recovered (Figs. 15, 41-42).<sup>14</sup>

### **1) Rank and File Troopers**

In the best case, the recovered common soldiers would be lined up immediately after the battle, and stripped of their equipment.

### **2) Nobles, Officers and Chosen Ones**

Once, or if, their bodies were recovered and clearly identified, for what the specific clothes or equipment of those specific individuals might have helped the task, the Chosen Ones were probably to receive a better funerary toilet, perhaps even in a location devoted to that goal, like their tents.

Then, specific people would certainly have clothed them appropriately.

The treatment reserved to the bodies of the nobles, high ranking officers or the chosen ones surely followed what they had decided before starting the campaign, as good sense for a soldier would dictate, or according to the decision of the person in command and the contemporary situation.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the eve who followed a battle would surely be displaying heaps of naked bodies, of friends and foes alike, dead and dying, crying and shouting for help, while scavengers would roam the area with their burden of stolen equipment, as it is also somehow recalled during the campaigns of the French Empire, like after the battle of Heilsberg.<sup>16</sup>

This would surely give a better insight of the depictions of naked enemies on the Neo-Assyrian visual monuments, as these are depicted clothed or not, beheaded or not, and that this code surely implies a more intense reading than the one assumed nowadays (Figs. 1; 15; 19-40).

## **V. Digging the Grave**

While a party was distributing the supplies brought back from the camp, teams started to dig the pit, perhaps in the Assyrian way: pick-wielders would precede shovel wielders, followed in turn by the basket wielders who would have dumped the earth aside.

The excavation of the pit surely represents an interesting topic to study for Dr. F. Buccelati and his EnCab projet, as well as a first hand digger calculation

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<sup>14</sup> Bengt 2001: 101, fig. 79; 165, fig. 170.

<sup>15</sup> Richardson 2007: 203.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson 1810: 147.



could help assume the time that the battlefield cleaners spent on a battlefield after a victory to clean it during the Neo-Assyrian period.<sup>17</sup>

### **A) Digging for the Friends**

For those whose bodies were, or could, not be brought back to Assyria, the situation surely varied according to the circumstances encountered and the location of the battlefield.

In friendly or neutral territories, the victorious army might as well request, or order, to buy, or be provided with, a plot of land to dig the mass graves of its own fallen soldiers.

This would be more diplomatically advised to prepare for the erection of a future monument, like a stela, and the organization of the area as a tool for political propaganda as well.

In enemy territory, the best advice to take care of the fallen friends was surely to bury them quickly and leave some guarding forces nearby, to prevent vandalism or desecration of the tomb, which would have surely been very bad for the morale for the reasons mentioned above. As the Assyrians were quite familiar with these two customs, they surely did not want their own fallen troops to undergo the same measures.<sup>18</sup>

According to the weather and the tactical priorities, the soldiers fallen in Neo-Assyrian service were perhaps hastily burned if fuel was available and could be spent that way. Their remaining bones and ashes would have surely been easier to bury in a pit, though the process of cremation would have surely spent more time than a burial.<sup>19</sup>

In locations where no suitable place could be found to dig a grave, the survivors possibly took advantage of any features that could ease or hasten their work, as they did with some casualties in a natural cave at Lakish, or with an unfinished noble cave tomb, as the Egyptians did at Deir-El Bahari.<sup>20</sup>

### **1) Rank and File Troopers**

The fallen rank and file troopers could be quite correctly and neatly prepared for the burial, as a mean to keep the morale of any surviving soldier good as he

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<sup>17</sup> Federico Bucccelati, *Energetic Calculator for Ancient Buildings – EnCAB*, <http://encab.net/>; Pranger A., *How to Dig a Grave By Hand*, <https://carolinamemorialsanctuary.org/how-to-dig-a-grave-by-hand/> 16/07/2018; Tuller 2006: 192-200.

<sup>18</sup> Suriano 2010: 64-65.

<sup>19</sup> Pedde 2012: 93-108.

<sup>20</sup> Winlock 1945: 1-6.

could see that the Commanding Officer cared for the proper attention and treatment reserved for the fallen friends, and thus his own possible and future one.

## **2) Nobles, Officers and Chosen Ones**

Particular people would certainly have received a specific treatment, mostly relying on the fore planning of their possible death before departure and the decision whether their body would have to be brought back home for proper celebration, or not.

Specific individuals might have been buried in graves hidden to the locals, as a way to avoid desecration, as M. Suriano points it out, and, perhaps, to leave time for the flesh to fall as a mean to clean the bones and pick them up on the way back home.<sup>21</sup>

Seth Richardson properly explains the relative importance of the body's physical presence, thus some kind of cenothaphs could as well be found in archaeological dig.<sup>22</sup>

## **B) Digging for the Foes**

The enemy casualties were surely the last things the victorious army took off from the battlefield, if they even dealt with that.<sup>23</sup>

According to the Annals of certain Assyrian kings, dead and survivors could be collected to build a pyre that would be set ablaze, but most of the times, it seems that the locals had to deal themselves with that problem.<sup>24</sup>

In the event of mass execution of an enemy nobility, the Assyrian kings might not have desired to hide the consequences, and then would have left the corpses in open air, as it is usually stated in their Annals.<sup>25</sup>

The description of the mountains, the rivers and the deserts that have “eaten” the corpses could as well be understood as an image to depict huge burials.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Suriano 2010: 64-65.

<sup>22</sup> Richardson 2007: 191.

<sup>23</sup> Westenholz 1970: 27-31.

<sup>24</sup> De Backer 2009: 13-50.

<sup>25</sup> De Backer 2010: 393-412.

<sup>26</sup> Richardson 2007: 200.

## **VI. Distribution of Supplies**

As the grave was dug, some parties would sort, list, organize and collect the equipment from the corpses and store it into the carts that have been employed the supplies from the camp.<sup>27</sup>

### **A) Friends**

During sieges, as it happened to the 101st Airborne Division of Bastogne, every item that could be saved or recycled was searched for, collected, centralized and provided to any fighting surviving unit.<sup>28</sup>

## **VII. Organizing the Burial**

Once the tomb had been dug, the bodies could be organized at the bottom of the pit, neatly lined up in the best cases, for one would believe they thought their fellows would have done the same for them, or not neatly, in the worst ones, in superimposed layers, head against head.

Politically and strategically, it would have been a safer choice to respect the customs of each ethnic components of the army, as to give cremation burial to people practicing it at home, like Judaeans or Hittites.<sup>29</sup>

### **A) Friends**

If any kind of organization was devoted to the burial of fallen friends, then one could assume this depended on the relationship they had with the burial detail.

### **1) Rank and File Troopers**

Friends would care for the proper accommodation of their fallen friends, as did the Grimsby Chums for their dead, even putting the parts of the partially recovered ones in their anatomically proper location in the grave.<sup>30</sup> Burying the slain by units would have eased the work of the scribe taking the names and amounts of Prisoner Of War, Missing In Action, Killed In Action, Wounded In Action, Dead of Wounds Received In Action and Able Bodied Personal.

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<sup>27</sup> De Backer, Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunitions.

<sup>28</sup> <http://militarygazette.com/loot-the-dead-the-dark-side-of-supply/>.

<sup>29</sup> Bloch-Smith 1992; Ferreri 2015: 21-23.

<sup>30</sup> Desfossés 2008: 86-87.

The burial details perhaps also chose to bury the officers aside the soldiers or in another pit, as it sometimes happened since the mediaeval period in Europe.<sup>31</sup>

## **2) Nobles, Officers and Chosen Ones**

Surely the V.I.P. burials must have followed basically the same rituals as in civilian life when they had fallen during a campaign or on the battlefield.<sup>32</sup>

This would explain why the loss of the body of Sargon II in the Tabal, and the possible things the enemy did to, or, with it, gave such a shock to the Assyrian establishment.

## **B) Foes**

So far, few is known on the power the Neo-Assyrian soldiers thought the fallen ghosts were empowered with.

The official texts state how they left the corpses decay in open air, eaten by animals, or presented in the art as floating on the water, depriving them of proper burial, as it appears for a threat in the Old Babylonian curses.<sup>33</sup>

The basic custom was surely to let them be eaten by wild animals, birds, pigs, jackals, dogs and so on, giving the civilian some things to do in the aftermath of the battles.

## **VIII. Filling the Grave for the Friends**

Once the grave had received its lifeless content, the living would start to fill the pit in, making sure to trample it heavily enough to prevent the forthcoming gas issued from festering corpses to get out of the dirt and cause epidemy.

While parties would be following each one another to take on the task after a particular time and allow other teams to rest or re-supply, people would trample the dirt covering the corpses, to harden the soil and prevent the gas produced by the rotting corpses puffing out.

## **IX. Marking the Grave**

Once the grave would be ready for service, people would prepare perhaps a surface marker that would help associate the heaps of enemy heads on the side of the tumulus with a particular unit responsible for this damage (Fig. 43).

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<sup>31</sup> Desfossés 2008: 81; 87.

<sup>32</sup> McGinnis 1987: 1-12.

<sup>33</sup> Richardson 2007: 199-203.

The Commanding Officer would mark the location of the tomb on his map, or write it in his itinerary, as a way to remember the area for his further report and set a cist or a stele on top of it, indicating perhaps the names of the fallen and / or some details (Fig. 44).<sup>34</sup>

This process can be assumed after the interest for the Neo-Assyrians to fill in the vacant commissions after a combat, provide military medals to deserving soldier, and account for the dead enemies in their Annals (Fig. 45-47).<sup>35</sup>

Surely, there must have been some kind of historical unit, along with the famous drawers and scribes of the languages, devoted to writing the history of the campaign, count the casualties and mark the places to avoid on the return or during the next campaign in the area because of the rotting corpses or the tumuli.<sup>36</sup>

This would left one to believe that some kind of maps with the mass burials and tombs could have been drawn, as was the case later on for the Elliott's map of the battlefield of Gettysburg (Fig. 44).<sup>37</sup> As the Mesopotamian engineers were able to draw the maps of their fields, buildings and town, they would surely have been able to plot a cross on a map.<sup>38</sup>

The United States Army Center for Military History and the Service of Mortuary Affairs in the United States Army of the Quartermaster Corps are some, amongst others, only to mention one modern army that also has such services nowadays.<sup>39</sup>

In the later period, the Hellens would set a trophy where the enemy mind faltered on the battlefield, as a way to remember their victory with a dummy made of captured enemy armours and weapons nailed on a wooden post (Figs. 48-49).

Anyways, nothing so far indicates if the common graves of soldiers fallen in Assyrian service were marked with something else than a dirt mound, as it is the case for the Athenian and Platean dead at Marathon.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Desfossés 2008: 88.

<sup>35</sup> De Backer 2015: 37-64.

<sup>36</sup> De Backer 2012: 118-119.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3824g.cw0332000/?r=-0.338,-0.046,1.732,1.102,0;> Grave Registration Service, <https://med-dept.com/gallery/graves-registration-service>.

<sup>38</sup> De Backer, *The Destruction of Senacherib*.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.med-dept.com/unit-histories/46th-quartermaster-graves-registration-company>.

<sup>40</sup> Whitley 1994: 213-230.

## A) Friends

If even some markers were set on top of the mounds covering the fallen, one could believe that these had to display the might of Assyria and be quite visible, depending on the status of the dead.

### 1) Rank and File Troopers

Common graves of rank and file soldiers might have been marked by a small cist or a stela, made with a shield or pieces of broken equipment, stating who, or which unit, was resting there, or not (Fig. 45-49).

### 2) Nobles, Officers and Chosen Ones

Specific people might have been the object of peculiar attention, as was the case for the three trepanated skulls of Lakish, the person entombed near Jerusalem, or of the sixty archers of the Pharaoh in Deir El Bahari, for peculiar reasons.

In friendly to neutral territory, one next of kin, relative, friend or any kind of positive emotional link to a dead Noble, Officer or Chosen One could have bought a plot of land to a local, in order to dig a single grave, as it was perhaps the case at Khirbet Beit Leit. There seems to be traces of such a practice near Jerusalem, as it appears in another study who quotes: “Le désespoir exprimé par une inscription découverte sur la paroi méridionale de l’antichambre, dans la tombe rupestre de Khirbet Beit Leit, située à 8 km à l’est du site de Lakiš, au nord-ouest d’Hébron. Les fouilleurs pensent qu’il s’agit d’un graffito laissé par quelques personnes qui y déposèrent un proche tué par l’armée assyrienne, ou qui s’y cachèrent pendant que l’ennemi traversait la contrée”.<sup>41</sup>

Then, he might have rented some local workers to build a small surface marker for the corpse laid to rest underneath, and a priest, to ensure a proper cult was provided to the *etimmu* of the dead.<sup>42</sup>

In enemy territories, the tomb of the fallen V.I.P.’s surely were hidden or left without surface markers, as to prevent the enemy from desecrating them.<sup>43</sup>

One would assume that, upon return from the campaign and according to the circumstances, any surviving personal with a positive emotional link to the fallen would have tried to find a solution to take care of the tombs and of the rituals.

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<sup>41</sup> De Backer 2012: 288.

<sup>42</sup> Bayliss 1973: 115-125.

<sup>43</sup> Suriano 2010: 64-65.

## **B) Foes**

War trophies, as enemy heads and nose, hands, genitals, or eyes, might have been piled up in heaps for census and covered with dirt to display the mass of enemies destroyed by the might of Assur.

Other gruesome examples can be found later on with the Nose Tombs or the Eastern and Western Head Mound at Sekigahara.<sup>44</sup>

## **X. Funeral Service**

The Commanding Officer would then perhaps organize two services on the tomb: one for the sake of the morale of the troops and of his very image to their eyes, and one for the sake of the priestly powers.

### **A) Memorial for friends**

The first service would take place, as it still does today, as a memorial for the fallen comrades manifested as a small discourse of the chief to salute the glorious dead and ensure the morale of the living.

The best everyday example can be observed on TV for the U.S. Military in Iraq or Afghanistan, when soldiers salute a small weapon cross set with the boots, the dog tags and the helmet of the fallen.

It seems highly unlikely that the Neo-Assyrian troops would have rendered some kind of military honours to their dead enemies, and the enrolment in a Neo-Assyrian unit could be considered as a way to honour and save the enemy soldiers that had fought bravely.

A deeper study of these interesting topic would surely shed more light on the decision process to enrol or not specific troops and why.

### **1) Rank and File Troopers**

Survivors of the victorious army, once again according to the strategic situation and context, might have saluted the tomb or sung to their memory, while some people would have given a small eulogy, as a way for the Commanding Officer to stabilise the morale and reinforce the team spirit of his units.

An Auxiliary Spearman appears to receive a bracelet as a military decoration right in front of two scribes, a heap of heads, booty and an official on a relief of Senacherib (Fig. 18).

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<sup>44</sup> Hawley 2005: 475-476, 501; Turnbull 2002: 230.

As this topic still deserves more than a thorough attention, one can only think about basic aspects of military leadership and their application in a mourning situation.

## 2) Nobles, Officers and Chosen Ones

Nobles, Officers and Chosen Ones, with all the caution and depending on the same criteria as they are stated above, might have been the object of a more private ceremony, perhaps even including the deposition of some gifts on their remains and a talk as well.

In his memories, General Baron Lejeune claims he had set a series of weapons, arms and armours on the bodies of General Gudin de la Sablonnière at Smolensk and of General Auguste de Caulaincourt at La Moskowa, arrayed as a star, to honour those great slain warriors.<sup>45</sup>

Though the tomb of General Gudin seems to have been discovered on the 10th July 2019, no traces of such equipment have been mentioned to be discovered by the excavators.<sup>46</sup>

## B) Religious for Friends and Foes

Once the memorial was finished, the priests would perhaps take on to practice a ritual against the ghosts of the fallen, like a *kispu* on the tumulus containing their dead fellows (Fig. 46).<sup>47</sup>

Right after having practiced their ritual, the priests would surely turn their attention to the pile of enemy heads on the site of the tumulus and prepare some kind of rituals to ensure the ghosts of the dead would not rise against them or whatever curse they might have feared.<sup>48</sup>

The pyramids of heads would be left afterwards, as a way to display the courage and strength of the dead lying nearby, but the festering process surely would lead the locals to cover them with dirt as soon as the victorious army would have left the area (Figs. 43, 50-52).

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<sup>45</sup> Lejeune 1896: 197, 220.

<sup>46</sup> Leplongeon M. et alii, Exclusif. Napoléon en Russie : on a retrouvé le général Gudin!, 09/07/2019, [https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/exclusif-napoleon-en-russie-on-a-retrouve-le-general-gudin-09-07-2019-2323472\\_24.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/exclusif-napoleon-en-russie-on-a-retrouve-le-general-gudin-09-07-2019-2323472_24.php).

<sup>47</sup> Tsukimoto 2007 and 2010; Schmidt 1996: 278.

<sup>48</sup> Ferreri 2015: 71.



## **1) Rank and File Troopers**

With no need to handle festering heads for too long and the strong desire to save what can still be after the presence of the warring armies, a simple layer of dirt thrown on the heads would have had to suffice to prevent epidemy.

Locals would perhaps pour some water on the pyramid, just in case, and would then return to the salvation of what could be saved from the battlefield.

## **2) Nobles, Officers and Chosen Ones**

At a moment or another, one surely had to take care of the impaled bodies, the stacks of burnt corpses in front of the gates, dried skins of enemies on the top of the walls and other nasties left by the angry Neo-Assyrian troops (Figs. 28; 50-51; 53).<sup>49</sup>

With the danger to encounter the wrath of the local Neo-Assyrian representative, and the need to cleanse the air from miasma and other fouling smells, locals must have found solutions to get the impaled bodies down and wash the gates of the towns, slippery with human fat after the fires.

What happened to the remains of the dead can only be assumed, perhaps hastily buried in a mass grave and a surface marker to indicate the location where future crops would not be the same taste as elsewhere. In any case, the need to use the invaded area to one's best interest required cleaning to be fast and thorough.

## **XI. The Missing In Action Ones**

Sometimes, the bodies of the dead ones could perhaps, and simply, not be recovered or were laid in places where they were supposed not to be found.

### **A) Fortuitous Burials**

The fortuitous burials of Nineveh and Hasanlu demonstrate that few material evidence can be recovered, but some weapons and, sometimes, a jewel, as the plan of those people was certainly not to end up where they were found.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> De Backer 2009: 13-50 and 2010: 393-412.

<sup>50</sup> Pickworth 2005: 295-316; Stronach 1995: 307-324; White-Muscarella 1989: 24-36; De Backer 2012: 299-300.

## 1) Nineveh

Some tombs of that kind are collected in another study, for example at Nineveh, in the Halzi Gate, which quotes: “Le premier groupe d’ossements se situe à l’extérieur de la première antichambre d’entrée de la Porte de Halzi et se compose de restes très fragmentaires et peu nombreux d’un homme, le Squelette A, et d’un jeune étalon, HZW5 MA 89/93+MA 89/96. Les restes du cheval furent cerclés de bleu sur le schéma car, étant les ossements d’un animal, ils constituent un ensemble à part. L’analyse traumatologique a démontré que le sujet humain, âgé de 30-35 ans, portait les cicatrices d’anciennes blessures et combattait très certainement en tant qu’archer. De plus, l’étalon, les fragments d’armure d’écailles, les pointes de flèches et le fer de lance découverts auprès de lui peuvent permettre d’en déduire que cet homme était un soldat monté.

Les sept squelettes qui se trouvent sur ce point sont très densément disposés, comme si une mêlée avait eu lieu juste avant l’effondrement du plafond ainsi que d’une partie du crénelage.

### a) Squelette n° 1

Le squelette n° 1 est celui d’un homme, âgé de 30 à 35 ans. Couché sur le ventre, blessé par de multiples fractures aux côtes, au bassin, au radius et au cubitus du bras droit, ainsi qu’aux doigts de la main gauche. L’analyse traumatologique montre également, par des signes d’efforts répétés sur le coude droit et l’arrière du pied gauche, qu’il s’agissait d’un archer. Comme l’écrit le fouilleur avec raison, les bas-reliefs néo-assyriens représentent souvent les archers agenouillés, et cette position correspond aux signes laissés sur les os.

### b) Squelette n° 2

Le squelette n° 2 est celui d’un enfant, âgé de 12 à 13 ans. Malgré l’absence de plus d’informations dans l’article concerné, et en observant le relevé graphique des squelettes, il semble que celui-ci soit tombé sur le côté droit. Le crâne porte de nombreuses traces de couteau au niveau des yeux et fut fracturé, sans doute lors de l’effondrement de la porte.

### c) Squelette n° 3

Le squelette n° 3 est celui d’un jeune homme, âgé de 22 à 24 ans, qui repose sur le ventre, et sur un fer de lance, placé au niveau de l’abdomen, et d’une pointe de flèche, située près du fémur droit. Ce sujet présente une fracture écrasante de la cinquième vertèbre lombaire, déjà affaiblie par l’action d’une bactérie issue

des dérivés du lait de chèvre. Il était sans doute déjà mort, ou en train d'agoniser quand la porte s'est effondrée.

d) Squelette n° 4

Le squelette n° 4 est celui d'un enfant, âgé de 11 à 12 ans. Malgré l'absence de plus d'informations dans l'article concerné, et en observant le relevé graphique des squelettes, il semble que celui-ci soit tombé sur le côté gauche. Ce squelette était criblé de flèches, dont une dans le péroné gauche, et une autre sous le poignet droit. Six pointes furent retrouvées autour des restes et une fut extraite de son dos. En observant la position recroquevillée de l'individu, on peut penser qu'il était déjà en train d'agoniser quand la superstructure de la porte fortifiée s'est effondrée sur les personnes qui s'y trouvaient à ce moment.

e) Squelette n° 5

Le squelette n° 5 est celui d'un homme âgé, entre 35 et 40 ans, qui repose sur le dos. Le dos, ainsi que la partie inférieure de la cage thoracique furent traversés plusieurs fois par une arme pointue, et portent les traces de nombreuses et anciennes blessures guéries. L'analyse traumatologique montre également des signes d'efforts répétés sur le bras droit, ce qui indique un archer, qui dégénéra en arthrite, ainsi qu'une maladie périodontale. Tout cela laisse penser que cet individu, le plus vieux des douze squelettes de la porte, était un vétéran, un ancien soldat, dont les deux jambes furent fracturées, sans doute pendant l'effondrement de la charpente, mais il devait être déjà mort, ou en train d'agoniser à ce moment.

f) Squelette n° 6

Le squelette n° 6 est celui d'un jeune homme, âgé de 17 à 18 ans, qui repose sur le côté droit, auprès d'un sceau conique, d'une boucle d'oreille et d'une fibule assortie. L'analyse traumatologique révèle des traces d'effort intense sur le bas du dos, ainsi que la fracture d'une côte située à gauche du sternum, et près de celui-ci. De plus, deux pointes de flèches furent découvertes auprès de ce squelette, ce qui peut laisser penser qu'il était blessé, ou qu'il était prêt à se défendre.

g) Squelette n° 7

Le squelette n° 7 est celui d'un homme, âgé de 30 à 35 ans, qui repose sur le ventre et dont la partie gauche du crâne présente une série d'entailles. L'analyse traumatologique des restes montre des traces d'effort répété sur le bas du dos et les épaules, ainsi que sur la malléole du pied droit, ce qui semble indiquer qu'il était un archer. De plus, ce squelette présente de nombreuses traces de blessures guéries, ce qui laisse penser qu'il savait se battre, et avait l'expérience du combat. À l'entrée du couloir formé par la porte, côté ville, la densité des corps est beaucoup moins prononcée, et les restes appartiennent presque tous à de très jeunes individus. On a précisé que ces corps se situent au côté interne de la porte, donc dirigé vers la ville, car la présence d'un *uppu* / *šulbû* atteste ce fait.

h) Squelette n° 8

Le squelette n° 8 est celui d'un petit garçon, âgé de 7 à 8 ans. Malgré l'absence de plus d'informations dans l'article concerné, et en observant le relevé graphique des squelettes, il semble que celui-ci soit tombé face contre terre, avec le dos terriblement brisé. Cet individu a dû mourir après le Squelette n° 7, car il recouvre partiellement le fémur et le tibia droits de celui-ci.

i) Squelette n° 9

Le squelette n° 9 est aussi celui d'un petit garçon, âgé de 11 à 12 ans. Malgré l'absence de plus d'informations dans l'article concerné, et en observant le relevé graphique des squelettes, il semble que celui-ci soit tombé sur le côté gauche. Ses bras furent brûlés et écrasés lors de l'effondrement de la charpente. La fracture du crâne eut certainement lieu à ce même moment, entraînant la mort de l'individu. Cet individu a dû mourir après le Squelette n° 7, car il recouvre partiellement le pied droit de celui-ci.

j) Squelette n° 10

Le squelette n° 10 appartient à un nourrisson de 10 mois qui, d'après l'état des os, mourut certainement lors de l'effondrement de la charpente de la porte fortifiée.

k) Squelette n° 11

Le squelette n° 11 représente un enfant âgé de 3 ans. Malgré l'absence de plus d'informations dans l'article concerné, et en observant le relevé graphique des

squelettes, il semble que celui-ci soit tombé sur le dos. Il mourut sans doute d'une fracture du crâne lorsque la charpente de la porte fortifiée s'effondra sur le groupe d'individus retrouvés sous les ruines de la porte de Halzi.

### 1) Squelette n° 12

Le squelette n° 12 représente un homme, âgé de 27 à 35 ans, dont l'analyse traumatologique révèle qu'il mourut sans doute d'une perforation de la partie inférieure droite de l'abdomen au moyen d'une arme pointue, qui y ébrécha l'os pelvien. Le crâne de cet individu révèle de nombreuses entailles. De nombreux mouvements répétés pour fermer la main droite et tourner le poignet droit ont mené à une blessure, ainsi qu'à de l'arthrite liée à la fatigue sur l'épaule droite. Tous ces indices laissent à penser que cet individu était un archer, un vieux soldat aguerri, qui fut peut-être blessé par une flèche, dont la pointe de bronze fut retrouvée sous l'épaule gauche. Entouré de pointes de flèches de modèles différents, de javelots et d'un fer de lance, cet homme devait être un combattant aux abois, car ces armes sont principalement représentées comme celles des défenseurs sur les bas-reliefs néo-assyriens. Encore, la profusion d'armes peut permettre de renforcer cette hypothèse, car les attaquants, devant bouger vite sous le feu ennemi, ne s'encombraient certainement pas de toute une série d'armes différentes, ce qui aurait constitué un poids et une gêne qui aurait pu ralentir leur mouvement et leur être fatal. Enfin, puisque cet individu est couché sur le dos, la tête dirigée vers l'intérieur de la ville, il s'agissait peut-être d'un défenseur de la ville qui tentait de protéger les enfants retrouvés non loin de lui”.

### 2) Hasanlu

Other such burials are mentioned in another study, for the site of Hasanlu, which quotes : “À Hasanlu, dans la Grande Salle du Bâtiment Brûlé II, les fouilleurs ont découvert 50 individus écrasés par l'effondrement des murs et de l'étage près de la porte principale nord, lesquels portaient encore leurs armes et leurs bijoux.

Dans différentes aires ouvertes, 89 individus, répartis en trois groupes, furent massacrés, comme l'attestent les blessures portées aux têtes ainsi que les membres désarticulés. Les masses d'armes qui servirent à exécuter ces blessés et ces prisonniers ressemblaient beaucoup à un type d'armes qui fut découvert sur place, parmi les débris et les ossements brûlés.

Au sud du Bâtiment Brûlé XI, 16 individus massacrés ont été découverts, parmi lesquels 6 adultes portaient des traces de blessures multiples à la tête, et les autres sur tout le corps.

À l'est de la porte qui mène à la Cour Supérieure, 8 individus, dont 6 adultes ont été retrouvés, dont un seul portait une blessure à la tête.

Finalement, dans la Salle 2 du Bâtiment Brûlé IV, 27 individus furent massacrés. Les fouilleurs les ont retrouvés pêle-mêle, gisant sur les débris brûlés d'un plafond effondré, et recouverts d'une fine couche de briques brisées. Les traces d'exécution à la masse d'armes apparaissent sur la tête de 4 des corps, ce qui mena les fouilleurs à se demander si il s'agissait de sacrifices ou d'assassinats politiques punitifs qui eurent lieu après l'incendie de la ville".<sup>51</sup>

## **B) Common Graves**

Common burials as left by the Neo-Assyrian soldiers would probably look like one of the Pals Battalions or the Tumulus of the Plateans at Marathon, as they were recruited mostly on a village basis.<sup>52</sup> Then, some kind of basic, clean alignment of the dead, plus some pieces of food remains, would come to fill a pit with skeletons neatly laid and would represent a first type of common burial.

### **1) Pitch Battles**

For pitch battles, one should look on each location in particular, and according to studies such as those of J. A. Scurlock, look where the climax of battle was, and thus search for pits or hillocks.<sup>53</sup>

A second type of common burial type could be proposed, relying on the fact that the skeletons were complete, neatly arrayed and with no equipment, as in Lakish or Koszyce, that they were friendly combat casualties, with their equipment removed for recycling. They could have been buried there by the winners of the battle, or that they were relatives buried or reburied by the people of a vanquished city (Fig. 54).

Such a kind of mass burial have been discovered at Lakish and described in another study, which quotes: "Une fosse commune contenant les restes de 1500 individus, et près de 695 crânes d'hommes, ce qui représente certainement une partie des victimes du siège de la ville, mené vers 701 av. J.-C., fut découverte dans la grotte n° 4 de Lakiš.

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<sup>51</sup> De Backer 2012: 299-300.

<sup>52</sup> Chandler 2003: 241.

<sup>53</sup> Scurlock 1997: 491-517.

Parmi ces ossements, trois crânes portent les traces d'une trépanation qui fut effectuée ante mortem, dont un homme vieillissant et un jeune qui moururent très vite après l'intervention. Le troisième, un autre jeune homme, subi une fracture du crâne, ainsi qu'une trépanation avec enlèvement de matière osseuse, et survécut assez longtemps à l'opération que pour permettre aux bords de la blessure de cicatriser. Quand le fouilleur pense avoir découvert les restes de personnes qui furent soignées par les vainqueurs après la chute de la ville, le présent auteur pencherait plutôt pour des personnes qui reçurent des soins durant le siège. En effet, les Assyriens ne se seraient sans doute pas préoccupés de soigner des ennemis vaincus presque incurables, sauf si ceux-ci représentaient un atout politique en tant que V.I.P.'s, et ne les auraient alors pas enterrés dans une fosse commune".<sup>54</sup>

If peculiar situations erupted as in Falyron Delta necropolis, where the possible followers of Cylon were executed when their coup failed, one could as well find a mass grave of shackled prisoners, neatly arrayed out of respect (Fig. 55).<sup>55</sup>

Another type of common burial would rely on the neat organization of the naked, beheaded and / or mutilated skeletons as the result of activities carried on by the vanquished army of a battle for some of its casualties, some time after the encounter and the departure of the invader, as for Jaffa for the French Revolution period (Fig. 56).

## 2) Sieges

For the soldiers fighting in Assyrian service, one should look somewhere like one kilometer away from the camp, in the opposite direction of the city, on a rather flat ground and far from any mountains, to avoid contamination of the water sources and ease the excavation of the pits.

A disorganized pyre with bodies intermingled in every possible position, naked or not and with pieces missing could demonstrate a hastily burnt series of corpses following an epidemic, as when the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem under Senacherib, or to avoid pestilence when digging was not an option.

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<sup>54</sup> De Backer 2012: 305-309.

<sup>55</sup> T. Kokkinidis, "Shackled Skeletons from Ancient Greece to Get Underground Display", <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2019/06/11/shackled-skeletons-from-ancient-greece-to-get-underground-display/>.

## **B) Mixed in a Mass Burial**

A type of a mass grave would have the disorganized, multiple and complete skeletons perhaps linked to the festering state of the bodies, as in Wisby, Vilnius or Ashdod, or an epidemic if they still have some equipment.<sup>56</sup>

Mass graves would involve a hotspotch of skeletons laid without any proper alignment in a rough pit and with scarce materials, if not arrowheads and spearheads. If the enemies were buried entirely stripped naked, then one should not await the smallest piece of material culture amongst the skeletons, but some pieces of arrowhead or fragments of blades could have fallen from the tissue during the decaying process.

Such a type of mass grave, with disorganized naked, beheaded or mutilated skeletons, could be linked to the hasty activities of civilians after the victory of an invader to avoid pestilence, as in Ashdod, Talheim or Ridgeway Hill (Figs. 57 -58).<sup>57</sup>

Yet another type of mass grave would include the bodies in uncompleted or bad state, buried in specific structures, as siege ramps or walls of some cities. This could as well take place in the besieging ramp on which their bodies had been impaled or in the closest area fit to receive them with few efforts, as the bodies who were found in the ditches of the fortifications of Crow Creek.<sup>58</sup>

Such kind of a burial has been described in another study, for the site of Ashdod, which quotes: “Le chantier D d’Ashdod a fourni une autre fosse commune, dans la strate 3b, qui contenait les restes de 7 individus: le Locus 1151491. Dans cette sépulture, les squelettes décapités furent disposés en rangées, et l’examen plus attentif des os révéla de nombreuses fractures de l’os odontoïde ou de l’axis, ce qui atteste la décapitation violente des individus.

Presque au même endroit, et dans la même strate, une sépulture secondaire contenait dix crânes humains alignés: le Locus 1115”.<sup>59</sup>

## **1) Pitch Battles**

Once the concentration places would be set, the civilian population might have chosen to dig huge graves to throw the naked bodies in a hotchpotch way to gain time and avoid pestilence.

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<sup>56</sup> Rimantas 2012: 984, fig. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Loe 2014; Beyneix 2001: 329-342; Chenal 2015: 1318, fig. 3; Beyneix 2001: 332, fig. 1; Berhardsdotter 2012: 11, fig. 7.

<sup>58</sup> Zimmerman 1980: 100-109; Wiley 1993: 227-269; Schroeder 2019: 10705-10710.

<sup>59</sup> De Backer 2012: 300-302.



In other cases, to gain time and avoid pestilence as well, whenever fuel was available in huge quantities, the corpses of the fallen might have been cremated. The remaining bones and human remains would be then more easily buried in a pit, though sometimes pyres could last for days, with fumes and stench, living on the fat of the burning corpses, as at Hougoumont, ten days after the battle of Waterloo.<sup>60</sup>

## 2) Sieges

As in the cities of Nineveh and Hasanlu, fortuitous mass graves could be found at places where military tactics would locate the heat of the battle. For cities, one would have to look in or right outside the gates, along the walls, not too far from the moats, around temples and palaces.

Arranged common burials, as in Ashdod and Lakish, would happen in the vicinity of the city, at places where the range of bows and javelins would have heaped the corpses, or where there was room available not too far.<sup>61</sup>

One could as well look into the ramps, when the cities were devastated, as it was easier to bury the corpses on the spot that to drag them down to the cemetery, if the survivors left the settlement (Fig. 53).

Such a kind of mass burial have been have been discovered at Lakish and described in another study.<sup>62</sup>

If several officers of an enemy army, as the Babylonians or the Elamites, were executed, and later on buried by their people, one could find a mass grave as the one for the Polish officers in the Forest of Kathyn, in Poland.<sup>63</sup>

## C) VIP Burials in the Structures of Settlements

For particular V.I.P.'s, the survivors might as well bury the corpses in or around the walls of the conquered settlement, as was perhaps the case at Nimrud.

The arranged burials of Kalhu and Ashdod show that some pots can be found as well, or nothing at all but bone splinters, if the victor has been very mean, as in Ashdod.<sup>64</sup>

An arranged burial is mentioned in another study, for the site of Kalhu, which quotes: “À Kalhu, M. Mallowan a découvert deux fosses communes contenant jusqu’à 20 individus près de la salle S42, au sud du mur extérieur

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<sup>60</sup> Coignet 1929: 81; Cornwell 2015: 325.

<sup>61</sup> De Backer 2013: 306.

<sup>62</sup> De Backer 2012: 305-309.

<sup>63</sup> Sandford 2006: 95-111.

<sup>64</sup> Mallowan 1962: 390-391, fig. 316; Haas 1971: 212-213.

ouest de l'arsenal, représentant sans doute une partie des victimes du sac de 612 av. J.-C. et enterrées à la hâte par les survivants.

Dans les deux mètres de débris qui recouvrirent cette fosse par la suite, une deuxième sépulture contenant 6 individus de plus fut creusée, ce qui correspond sans doute à un groupe de victimes tombées lors d'un raid ennemi postérieur, et enterrées par les survivants".<sup>65</sup>

This was the case for General Gudin de la Sablonnière in a bastion at Smolensk, Lieutenant-General Moore in the walls of Corunna or for Major-General R. Craufurd in the breach of the ramparts at Ciudad Rodrigo in 1812.<sup>66</sup>

The 180 skeletons, sometimes with weighted shackles, that were discovered in the south-east corner of the Courtyard 80 of the North-West Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Khalhu could as well demonstrate that, sometimes, the basic infrastructures were used to bury the V.I.P., before or after their death (Figs. 59-61). The bodies of the adult males were discovered in a well 25,5 m deep were the remains of people, servants or members of a royal family that had been executed or drowned in the well, and then the top was blocked with mudbricks.<sup>67</sup>

#### **D) Hidden Burials**

Others, as a defeated king whose body had been hidden, laid in the ground without any surface marker by their attendants to avoid their desecralisation by the Assyrians, could as well be found anywhere. Their bodies could have been stripped of their clothes and their faces made hard to identify by the enemy would the tomb be discovered to ascertain their death, as had been the case for the body of Henri de la Rochejacquelein.<sup>68</sup>

Such kind of tombs could be found on the itinerary used by the Assyrian army to Egypt, Jordan or Arabia, were naturally mummified bodies would be found in the sand, as was Ginger at Gebelein (Fig. 62).

#### **E) The Rivers**

Combats taking action not too far from rivers would leave heaps of corpses along the banks of the river, and thus this would be an exercise in historical

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<sup>65</sup> De Backer 2012: 311.

<sup>66</sup> Cassell 1865: 355; Chisholm 1911: 383; M. Leplongeon et alii, Exklusif. Napoléon en Russie: on a retrouvé le général Gudin!, 09/07/2019, [https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/exklusif-napoleon-en-russie-on-a-retrouve-le-general-gudin-09-07-2019-2323472\\_24.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/exklusif-napoleon-en-russie-on-a-retrouve-le-general-gudin-09-07-2019-2323472_24.php).

<sup>67</sup> Altaweel 2016: 50-51, pl. 198-200.

<sup>68</sup> Deniau 1879: 205-214; Savary 1825: 192.

geography to locate the former trail of the water flow and try to recover those hillocks.

A miraculous archaeological discovery would be a battlefield mass deposit of corpses, as the one of the Tollensee valley, where thousands of warriors's skeletons were found after having spent some time floating on an ancient water course, before being covered with sediments on a bank of the river Tollensee (Fig. 2; 34; 36; 52; 63).<sup>69</sup>

## **F) The Swamps**

Surely some corpses of the battles along the river of Mesopotamia could be discovered in the future, for this kind of environment can sometimes preserve the bodies very well and for a long period, as it is demonstrated, among so many others, by the body of the Man of Tollund (Fig. 64).

The Neo-Assyrian period textual evidence sometimes indicate that Ea-Mukin-Zeri was buried in the swamps, as a mark of infamy or just because it was his place of origin, as Strabo tells it for the Babylonian kings as well.<sup>70</sup>

## **G) The Mountains**

When the kings of Assyria boasted they filled the gullies and ravines of the mountains with enemies, living or not, one can surely take their word on a big part of this.

In anyways, a mass of rotting corpses is quickly dispatched and dispersed by scavengers, then the bones are dried by the sun, broken by the weather, and nothing remains.

According to the location where they had fallen ; some of the dead V.I.P.'s bodies could perhaps not be recovered and were left in the snow of the Urartean Mountains, as has been the case for Ötzi, some soldiers of the World War I in the Italian Alps or on the Everest nowadays, in the Rainbow Valley (Fig. 65).<sup>71</sup>

## **H) The Syncretism of Funeral Customs**

Sometimes, relatives of a King's Magnate ruling a foreign province or working in a delegation abroad could perhaps be buried in a tomb presenting a mixture of

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<sup>69</sup> Curry 2016: 1385; Jantzen 2011: 417-433, fig. 32.

<sup>70</sup> McGinnis 2003: 8, n. 8; Strabon, XVI, X, 2.

<sup>71</sup> K. Killgrove 2016, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/87301/15-mummies-you-can-see-around-world>.

both Assyrian and local funerary customs, as might have been the case at Salamis.<sup>72</sup>

## **I) Hospital Grave**

As in Waterloo, mass graves or common burials could surely be found along the main road leading to the combat areas, or around those cities like Qarqar that might have harboured a hospital, and thus dealt with lots of dying wounded.<sup>73</sup>

Another type of common burial would have skeletons buried neatly with basic clothes and pieces of armament or first aid equipment, like arrowheads or pieces of wood lying close to their limbs.

This kind of details could display the casualties of the winner of a battle, dead from their wounds in a kind of field hospital, lying no too far from an ancient road where carts and friends would have dragged them to ease the work of the doctor and their dispatching in neighbouring settlements, as was the case in Jaromerice na Rokytou.<sup>74</sup>

Parts of weapons, like arrowheads and spearheads would be recovered in or around the skeletons.

The three trepanated skulls found in the common burial of Lakish demonstrate a nearby hospital of any kind must have been active after the siege of the city.<sup>75</sup>

When one comes to think about the distance, he may remind himself that no one wants to walk for hours in company of dead people in the full sun or rain after a day of combat. Thus, it would hardly happen to be further than one hour's walk from the combat location, between two and a half and four kilometres.

## **J) Limbs Burials**

A type of mass burial with only limbs, heads, organs, or amputated bodies et c... could be linked to the activities of civilians after the departure of the winners of a battle to sanitize their surrounding or clean their city.

As several people of the ancient Near East had a tendency to cut everybody into pieces sometimes, one would assume that, some day, the archaeologists could as well find some kind of Limbs Pit, as in Bergheim, where the survivors of a population would have disposed of the remainder of the victims, or at

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<sup>72</sup> De Backer 2017: 157-172.

<sup>73</sup> F. De Backer, forthcoming e.

<sup>74</sup> Čudrnáková 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Ussishkin 1972: 56-58, fig. 52; De Backer, forthcoming c.

Avaris, where the hands of the vanquished were left after a military decoration ceremony (Figs. 66-68).<sup>76</sup>

### **K) Secondary Burials**

Remnants of charred or rotten bodies could surely be buried together in case of immediate reoccupation of a site, as it has been observed at Ashdod, among other sites.

Such burials have been described in another study, for the site of Ashdod, which quotes : “Sur le Chantier D d’ Ashdod, toujours dans cette zone, toujours dans la même strate 3b, les archéologues ont découvert une autre fosse commune, le Locus 1121, qui contenait les restes de 21 individus. Les ossements de ceux-ci n’étaient pas disposés en situation anatomique correcte, ce qui laisse à penser qu’il s’agit plutôt d’une sépulture secondaire, contenant les restes de victimes du sac de la ville par les troupes d’Osias de Judée. Un fragment d’humerus qui y fut découvert portait des traces de scarification au niveau de l’insertion de l’os deltoïde.

Une autre fosse commune fut découverte dans ce secteur, encore dans la strate 3b: le Locus 1113. La sépulture secondaire contenait les restes très fragmentaires de 2434 individus, sans doute aussi des victimes de la prise de la ville.

Toujours dans la zone D, une autre tombe, dans la même strate 3b, a révélé les dépouilles de deux adultes complets, portant de nombreuses traces de fractures soignées et de mutilations, ainsi que les restes fragmentaires de 2 ou de 3 autres individus: le Locus 1050.

Encore dans ce chantier D, et dans la strate 3b, une fosse contenait les crânes incomplets de 6 individus, ainsi que des fragments de crânes et quelques dents représentant au moins 4 autres personnes: le Locus 1052.

Finalement, ce secteur a également révélé une sépulture secondaire près du mur 1106, entre les strates 3a et 3b : le Locus 1006. La fosse contenait les restes incomplets de 45 individus, parmi lesquels 2 crânes d’adulte de sexe masculin, entiers, portaient des traces de traumatismes: le crâne n° 17, et le n° 9, dont l’os occipital comporte les traces d’une décapitation.

Enfin, les restes de près de 3000 individus furent découverts sur le site : 771 petits enfants âgés de moins de 15 ans, 414 adolescents âgés entre 16 et 19 ans, 1746 adultes âgés de 20 ans et plus, et 6295 fragments d’os non-identifiables”.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Chenal 2015: 1316, fig. 2; Bietak 2012/2013: 31, fig. 14.

<sup>77</sup> De Backer 2012: 300-302.

## **XII. Useful Hints to Interesting Questions**

As the initial question arose when this paper was being prepared, one would wonder who dug the graves and where one would have to look to find such common burials on the ancient battlefields and what to expect if one was lucky enough to find some.

### **A) Who digs?**

Most people would believe that the dirty job would be left to prisoners, or to the victorious army, but the local civilians have to be considered as well.

According to the circumstances, casualties had sometimes perhaps to wait between one and four days, or even more, to be recovered and buried.

Sometimes, the tactical situation surely imposed quite a speed in the processing of the dead, and this surely led to bad burials whose horrid contents was exposed after a strong rain, with members protruding from the mounds or the pits, as it also arrived during the Napoleonic campaigns or the First World War.<sup>78</sup>

### **1) Prisoners**

The best way to avoid any kind of uprising among the prisoners is to deplete them of their strength. One would count and register all the prisoners, sort them out according to their status, health and wealth, and then organize them in collection and burial parties under the supervision of fit and strong Assyrian units.<sup>79</sup>

While this process was going on, Assyrian troops would collect all weapons in their combat zone and store them somewhere, close to the place where they rest for a while.

One would not water nor feed the prisoners before all the friendly casualties would have been collected, deposited into their final resting place, these places filled and properly trampled.

All these works would have probably finished the wounded enemy soldiers off, and broken their will to do battle again the same day.

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<sup>78</sup> Bourgogne 1869: 60.

<sup>79</sup> De Backer, forthcoming d.

## 2) Victors

Whenever it was impossible to let prisoners clean the mess, then most units engaged in the fight would clean the mess in their own Control Zone.

The guard of the hospitals, and care to the dead, would eventually stay within the hands of the most battered units of the victorious army, or as a punishment to others, keeping the “fields of honour”, while the other ones would keep on advancing with the King.<sup>80</sup>

Sometimes, the status of the fallen might have required action to save them from the vultures and they might have been buried hastily in pits or caves, as the skeletons of Deir el Bahari display (Fig. 20-22).<sup>81</sup>

The sixty fallen soldiers of Deir El Bahari display the same kind of basic attention given to slain friends that have stayed a bit too long on the battlefield, displaying the marks of carrion birds on their feet and bellies.<sup>82</sup> Though their wounds still display some protruding arrow shafts, they were naturally desiccated in the sand, were neatly wrapped in linen bandages and shroud, before being transported and stacked in an unfinished tomb.<sup>83</sup>

## 3) Civilians

Whenever the situation made it impossible for either the victorious or the defeated parties to take care of the dead, the civilian population would have to handle the case by itself.

The need to restore the locations or industries to their production task would surely require a quick cleaning of the battlefield.

Then, with few or without any military advisers to organize of records the activities undertaken, and then, once most of the able bodied military would have moved, civilians would enter the battlefield.

Having stripped the dead of any valuable element, perhaps already during the aftermath of the battle or the night, and probably dispatched the wounded able to defend themselves, the civilian scavengers’s cleaning would have started.

Locals would have buried the dead closed to places they knew were of lesser advantage for the local industries, collect the dead and gather them at those places.

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<sup>80</sup> Martin 2018: 253.

<sup>81</sup> De Backer, forthcoming b.

<sup>82</sup> Vogel 2003: 244.

<sup>83</sup> De Backer, forthcoming b.

## Conclusion

This interesting, though grimy, point is usually not discussed by scholars.

The Neo-Assyrian army surely fought, not only because the enemy lacked of respect, or disregard the *adê*, but also to conquer resources.

Part of the job of the conqueror lies in the cleaning of the mess when the game is over, as a means to find new valuables so that “the same player can insert another coin” and to start taking advantage of his prized territories or resources.

The enemies, or even the Assyrians, possibly used this habit of cutting the enemy’s head to receive a reward against them, as did the soldiers of General Buonaparte during the Campaign in Egypt.<sup>84</sup>

The keen depictions of the carrion birds and the way they gouge the eyes, pick the behind or the arms of the dead demonstrate a close observation of their behaviour with the corpses on a battlefield, as this behaviour fits with the kind of wounds observed and identified as such on some of the archers of Deir el Medineh.

The huge impact that the post-traumatic stress disorder must have had on the fighters’s morale and their consequences on their later social lives can only be guessed at so far, until new research lead by some kind of palaeo-psychologists, give more clues on that topic.

These lines merely represent some hypothesis and ideas to start the discussion, but they have been based on a deep study of the textual, visual, material and geographical evidence, as well as some good sense and basic military tactics.

These different methods employed by the Assyrians to depict killed enemies, wherever beheaded, dismembered, naked, clothed, killed in combat or executed, find a better understanding and more powerful emotional strength in the light of this paper.

The study of this topic also allows to study the archaeology of the Combat and the Palaeopathology of the period concerned, oppose them to the depiction or description in official art and texts and assume the effect sought by the authors, as it also appears in the study of Talheim (Fig. 69).

Another good point is the possibility to recover parts of armours, weapons and other military equipment from the mass graves that can be recovered with a thorough survey of the battlefields, as in Wisby, Vilnius or the Tollensee (Fig. 70).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Berthier 1827: 161.

<sup>85</sup> See De Backer, forthcoming e.



The discovery of such archaeological finds could also help the study of the genetics of the human remains recovered, sample their DNA and study the ethnic components of the soldiers, plus the possible herbs included in the funerary rituals (Fig. 54).<sup>86</sup>

This seems to an excellent follow up to the first attempts at Neo-Assyrian Battlefield Archaeology endeavoured by the author in some previous papers and books.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Corbineau 2014.

<sup>87</sup> De Backer 2012 and forthcoming a.

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Fig. 1: Assurnasirpal II charges through the enemy (Wallis-Budge 1914: pl. XV, 2)



Fig. 2: The troops of Senacherib secure the area after a battle in the hills (Barnett 1998: pl. 36)

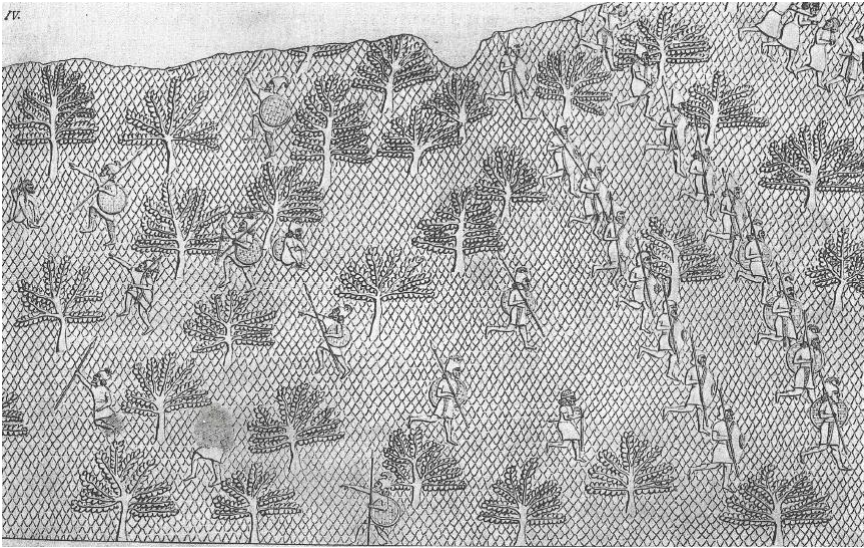


Fig. 3: The troops of Senacherib establish a security perimeter around their location in the hills after a battle (Barnett 1998: pl. 32)



Fig. 4: The guards of Assurnasirpal II bring the heads of the slain enemies to the scribes in music (Wallis-Budge 1914: pl. XVI, 2)



Fig. 5: The officers of Shalmanasar III bring the loot to the scribes  
(King 1915: pl. VII, Bd. II, 1)

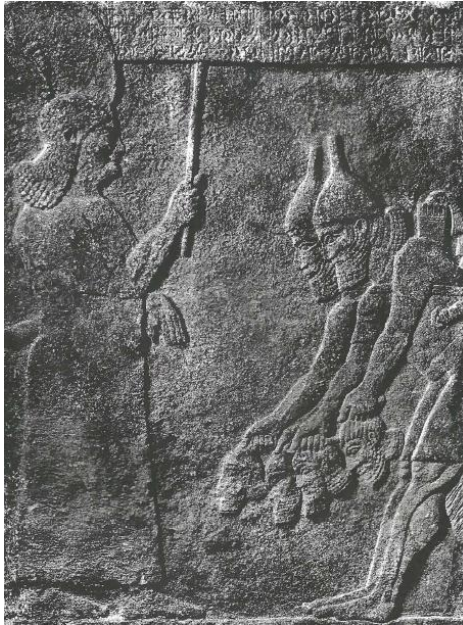


Fig. 6: The guards of Tiglath-Pileser III bring the heads of the slain enemies to an officer  
(Barnett 1962: 99)





Fig. 7: The scribes of Sargon II count the loot after a battle (Albenda 1986: pl. 137)



Fig. 8: The scribes of Senacherib count the heads of the slain enemies and the loot after a battle (Barnett 1998: 193)



Fig. 9: An officer of Assurbanipal brings the enemy prisoners to the scribes (Barnett 1976: pl. 24)



Fig. 10: Hypnos and Thanatos recover the body of a slain hoplite (on the Euphronios Krater (Wikimedia commons))



Fig. 11: Ajax recovers the body of Achilles on the Vase François  
(Wikimedia commons)

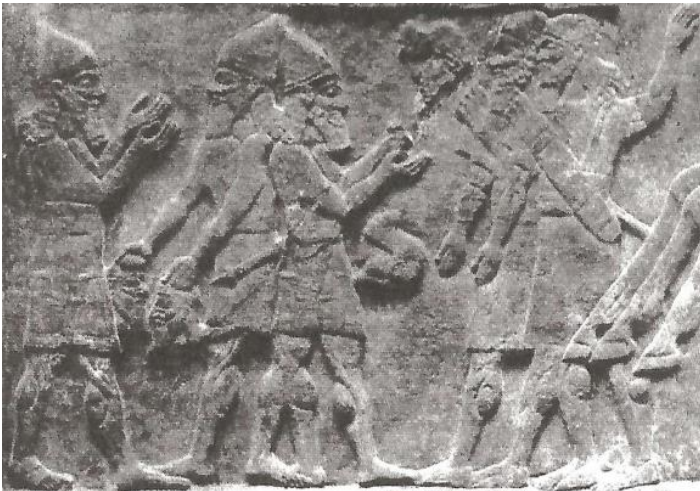


Fig. 12: The soldiers of Assurnasirpal II play with the heads of the slain enemies  
(Wallis-Budge 1914: pl. XVI, 2)



Fig. 13: The Crown-Prince introduces an officer bringing the head of a slain enemy and a prisoner to Tiglath-Pileser III (Barnett 1962: 109)

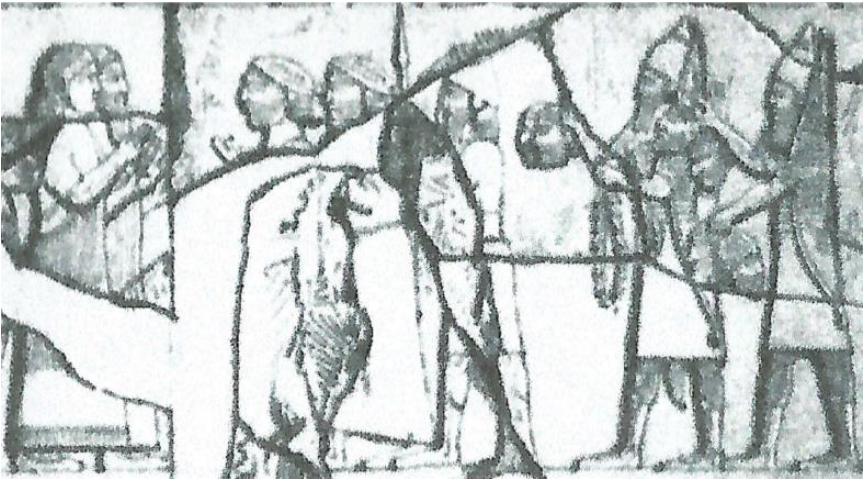


Fig. 14: Officers bring the heads of slain enemies and prisoners to the scribes of Assurbanipal (Barnett 1976: pl. LXVII)



Fig. 15: Soldiers of Senacherib execute Teumman, the King of Elam and his son Tammaritu while another recovers the crown and weapons to the defunct king (Barnett 1998: pl. 299)



Fig. 16: An Elamite officer breaks his bow to prevent his Assyrian conqueror to take it as a booty under Senacherib (Barnett 1998: pl. 295)



Fig. 17: An Elamite officer, Urtaku, begs an Assyrian soldier to take his head and become famous (Barnett 1998: pl. 293)



Fig. 18: An auxiliary soldier receives a bracelet in front of a heap of heads while scribes of Senacherib note his decoration (Barnett 1998: pl. 253)

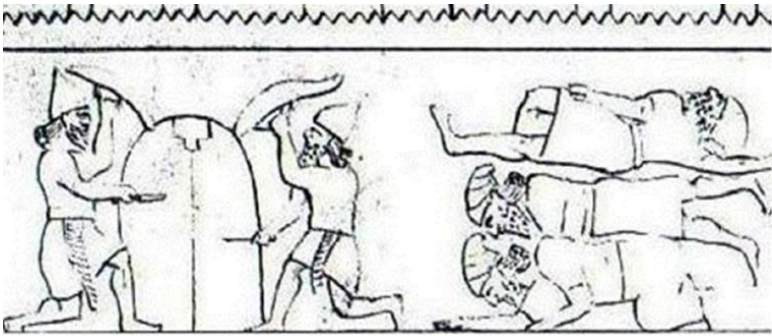


Fig. 19: Slain enemies are piled up high next to the side of the entrance of a besieged town (Barnett 1962: 140)

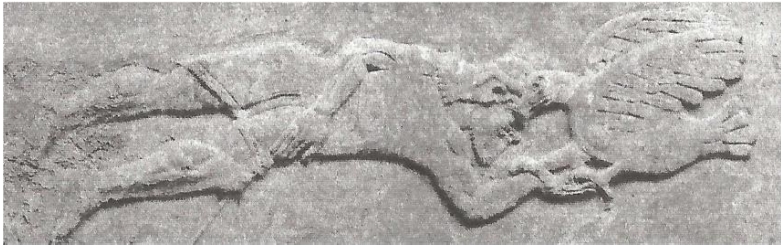


Fig. 20: A carrion bird gouges the eye of a slain enemy of Assurnasirpal II (Wallis-Budge 1914: pl. XIV, 1)



Fig. 21: A carrion bird feasts of the buttock of a slain enemy of Assurnasirpal II (Wallis-Budge 1914: pl. XVIII, 2)



Fig. 22: A carrion bird takes the head of a slain enemy to the scribes (Wallis-Budge 1914: pl. XVI, 2)

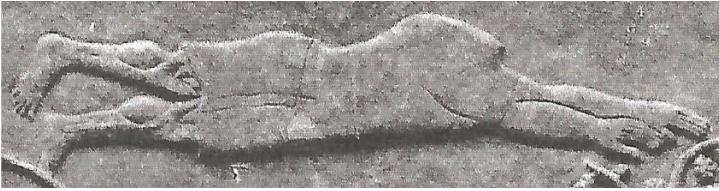


Fig. 23: A slain enemy of Assurnasirpal II lies headless (Wallis-Budge 1914: pl. XVII, 2)

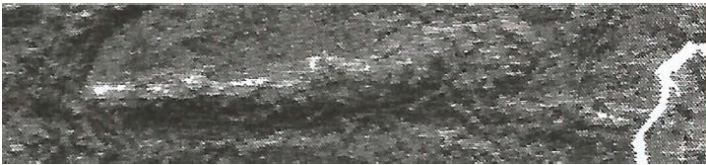


Fig. 24: A slain enemy of Assurnasirpal lies naked and headless on the battlefield (King 1915: pl. LXXIX)



Fig. 25: A slain enemy of Shalmanasar III lies dead on the ground (King 1915: pl. LXXII, Bd. XIII, 1)



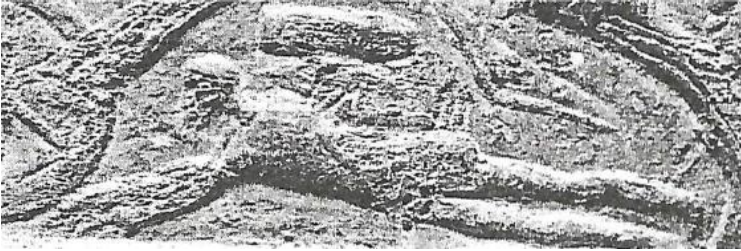


Fig. 26: A slain enemy of Shalmanasar III lies naked on the ground  
(King 1915: pl. LXXI, Bd. XII, 6)

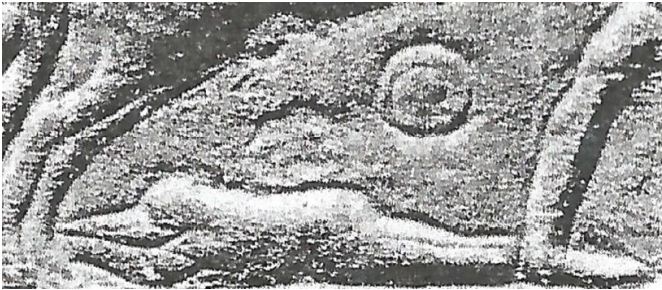


Fig. 27: A slain enemy of Shalmanasar III lies naked and headless of the ground  
(King 1915: pl. XVIII, Bd. III, 6)



Fig. 28: An enemy of Shalmanasar III has the hands and feet cut off before being impaled  
(King 1915: pl. LVI, Bd. X, 3)

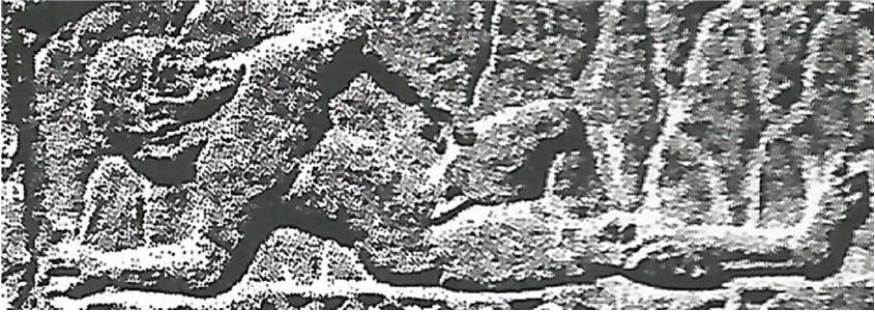


Fig. 29: A slain enemy of Tiglath-Pileser III lies naked on the ground (Barnett 1962: 89)

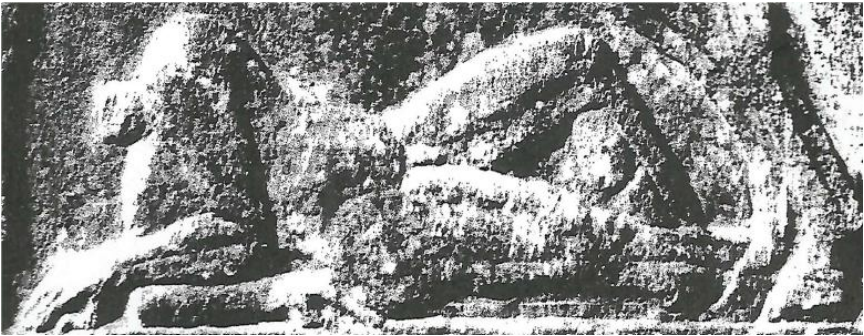


Fig. 30: A slain enemy of Tiglath-Pileser lies naked and headless on the ground (Barnett 1962: 93)



Fig. 31: A slain enemy of Sargon II lies on the ground (Albenda 1986: pl. XX)



Fig. 32: A slain enemy of Sargon II lies naked on the ground (Albenda 1986: pl. XX)

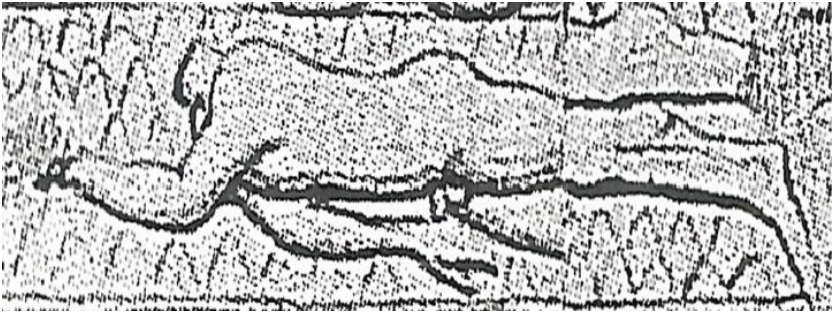


Fig. 33: A slain enemy of Sargon II lies naked and headless on the ground (Albenda 1986: pl. 21)

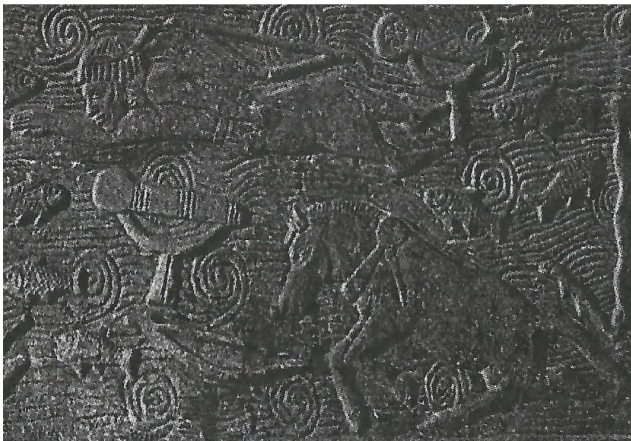


Fig. 34: A slain enemy of Senacherib floats in the river (Barnett 1998: pl. 303)

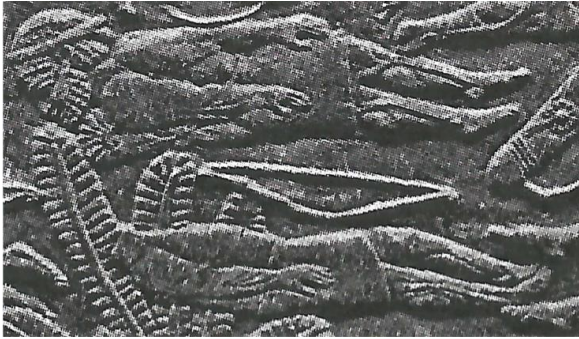


Fig. 35: A slain enemy of Senacherib lies headless amongst the other corpses (Barnett 1998: pl. 299)

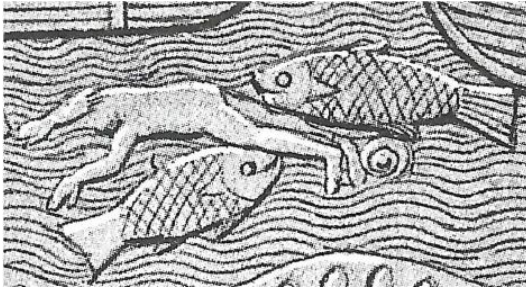


Fig. 36: A slain enemy of Senacherib floats naked and headless eaten by the fishes of the deep (Barnett 1998: pl. 463)

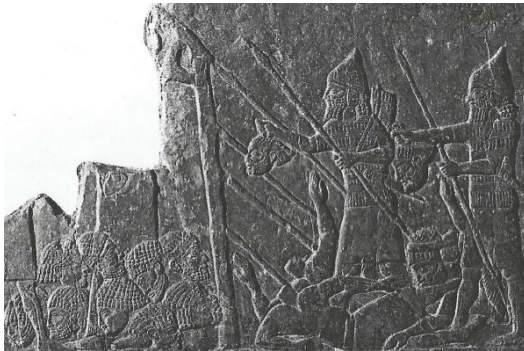


Fig. 37: The bodies of slain enemies of Senacherib lie headless (Barnett 1998: pl. 302)



Fig. 38: A slain enemy of Assurbanipal floats in a river (Barnett 1972: pl. XVII)



Fig. 39: A slain enemy of Assurbanipal floats naked on the river (Barnett 1976: pl. XVII)



Fig. 40: Among bodies of slain enemies of Assurbanipal, lying naked and beheaded or not, an Elamite officer, Ituni, breaks his bow to prevent his Assyrian conqueror to take it as a booty under Assurbanipal (Barnett 1976: pl. XXIV)



Figs. 41 and 42: Soldiers remove arms and armours from slain enemies on the Tapisserie de Bayeux (Léjard 1947: 21, fig. 2)

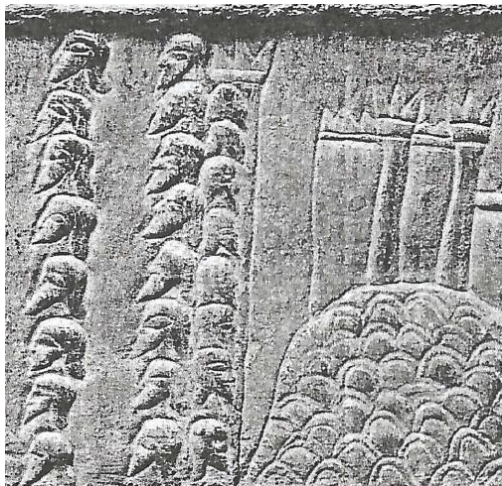


Fig. 43: Heads of the slain enemies of Salmanasar III built in small buildings after a victory (King 1915: pl. XLIV, Bd. VIII, 2)

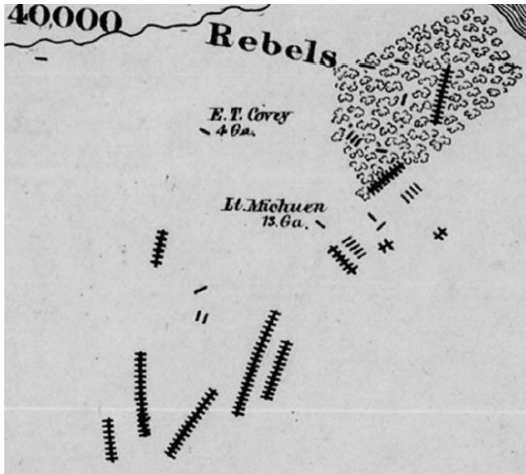


Fig. 44: A part of the Elliot map, depicting the locations of some tombs and graves of Confederate and Federal soldiers on the battlefield of Gettysburg (<https://www.loc.gov/item/99447500/>)



Fig. 45: Craftsmen carve a stele for Salmanasar III on the source of the Tigris (King 1915: pl. LIX, Bd. X, 6)



Fig. 46: The King and officials pay respect to the stele depicting Salmanasar III (King 1915: pl. I, Bd. I, 1)



Fig. 47: A stele of Sargon II adorns a city after his victory (Albenda 1986: pl. 120)

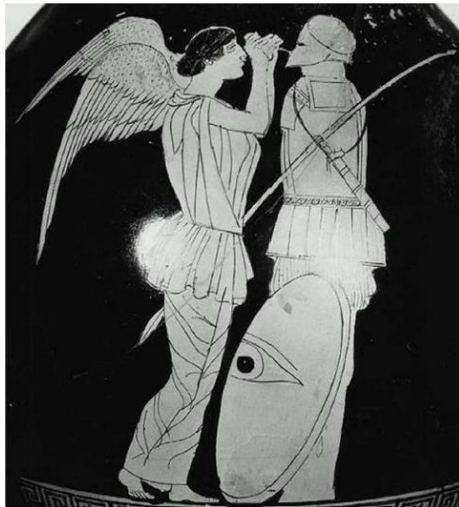


Fig. 48: Nike Erecting a Trophy on a Classical Era Greek Vase, c.450 B.C., in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (<https://theframeblog.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/fig-2-vase-with-nikea-trophy-of-arms-mfa-boston.jpg>)





Fig. 49: Victory writes about the victory of Trajan on a shield next to a trophy (Wikimedia commons)



Fig. 50: The heads of slain enemies of Salmanasar III are nailed on the doors of a city he took, while impaled enemies crown the battlements (King 1915: pl. VI, Bd. II, 1)

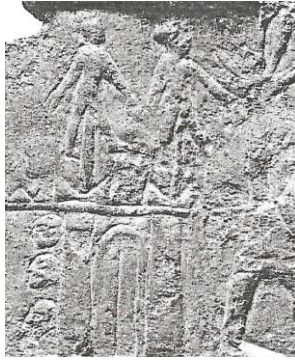


Fig. 51: The heads of slain enemies of Salmanasar III are nailed on the doors of a city he took, while impaled enemies crown the battlements (King 1915: pl. LVI, Bd. X, 3)

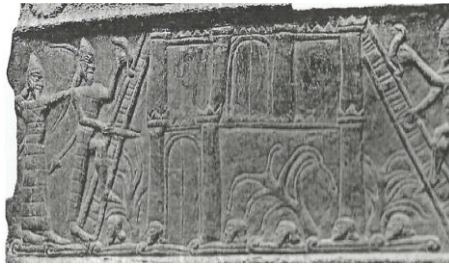


Fig. 52: The heads of slain enemies of Salmanasar III float on the river (King 1915: pl. LXXV, Bd. XIII, 1)

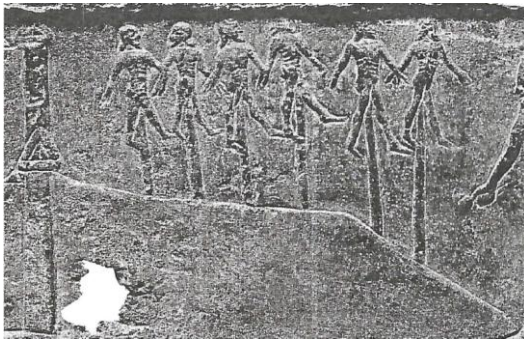


Fig. 53: The impaled enemies of Salmanasar III adorn a ramp he employed to storm a city (King 1915: pl. XXII, Bd. IV, 4)

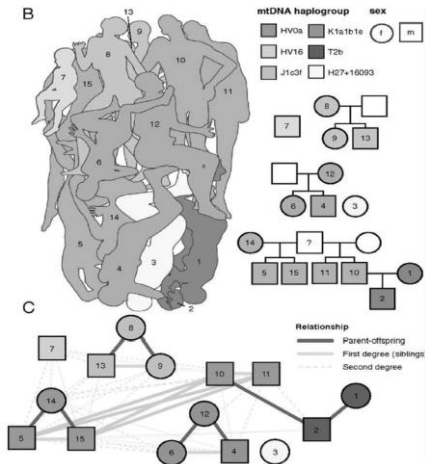


Fig. 54: Schematic depicting the family links based on the DNAs of the people buried in the mass grave of Koszyce (Schroeder 2019: 10707, fig. 3. b)



Fig. 55: Shackled skeletons discovered in a mass grave (Kokkinidis T., “Shackled Skeletons from Ancient Greece to Get Underground Display”, <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2019/06/11/shackled-skeletons-from-ancient-greece-to-getunderground-display/>)



Fig. 56: A French soldier beheaded by the Turks during the Expedition of Egypt in 1799 and recovered at Jaffa (Moshe Hartal, <https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/MAGAZINEmass-graves-found-in-jaffa-date-to-napoleon-conquest-1.5473879>)

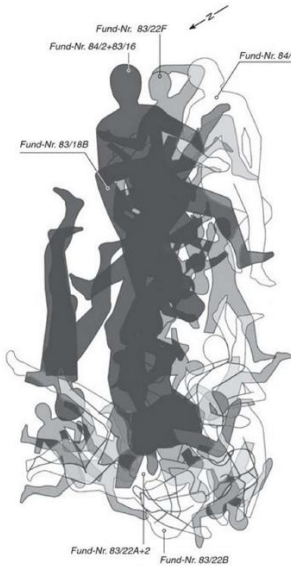


Fig. 57: The different layers of bodies recovered in a mass grave at Talheim (Wahl 2012: 81, fig. 5.2)



Fig. 58: A heap of 51 heads lies next to several beheaded viking warriors's bodies found at Ridgeway Hill ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/dorset/8563719.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/dorset/8563719.stm))



Fig. 59: An archaeologist tries to recompose a body from the thousands of bones recovered in the pit of death of Nimrud (Altaweel 2016: 198)

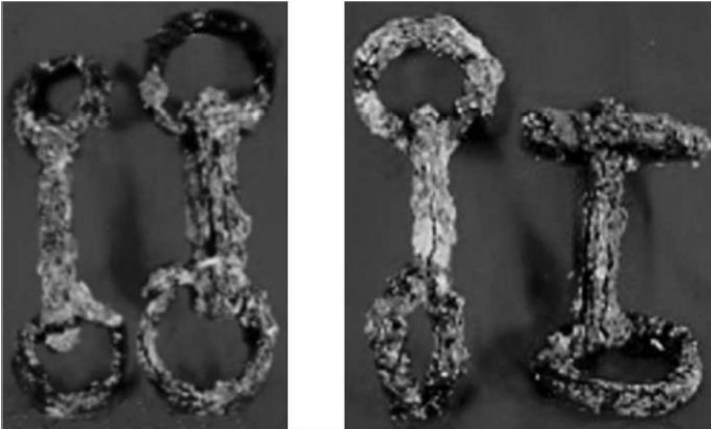


Fig. 60: Several shackles were recovered from the death pit of Nimrud (Altaweel 2016: pl. 200, a-b)



Fig. 61: Individuals found in the pit of death of Nimrud are slowly re-assembled (Altaweel 2016: 199)



Fig. 62: The mummy called “Ginger” (Wallis-Budge 1920: 360)

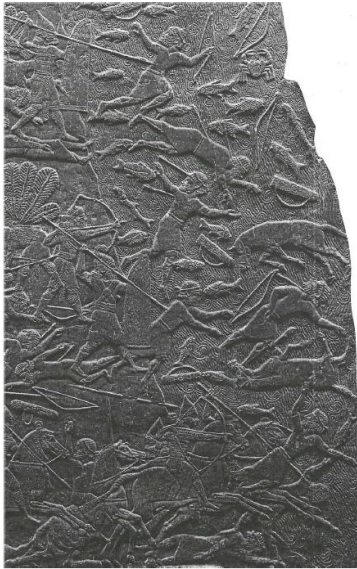


Fig. 63: The Assyrians push their enemies in the river already filled with dead and dying men and animals (Barnett 1998: pl. 299)



Fig. 64: The head of The Man of Tollund (Sven Rosborn, [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homme\\_de\\_Tollund](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homme_de_Tollund))



Fig. 65: The mummy called Ötzi (Samadelli Marco / EURAC, <https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/living-relatives-of-otzi-the-iceman-mummyfound-in-austria>)



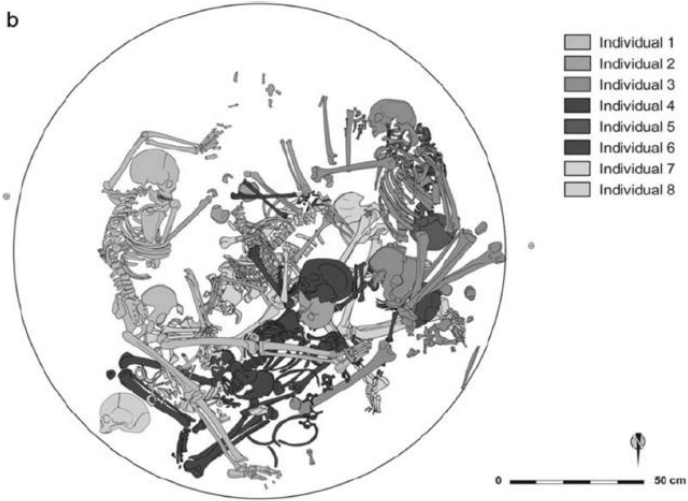


Fig. 66: Amputated bodies discovered in a pit at Bergheim (Chenal 2015: 1318, fig. 3)

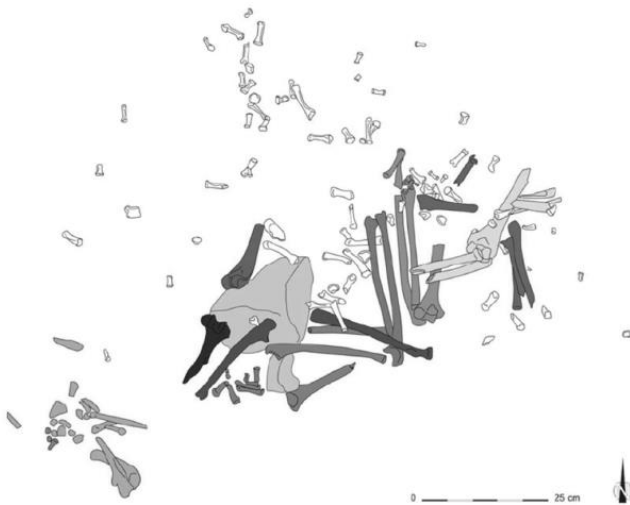


Fig. 67: One of the Limbs Pit of Bergheim, containing severed arms and legs (Chenal 2015: 1318, fig. 4)



Fig. 68: The severed hand of a slain enemy as a token of glory discovered at Avaris (Bietak 2012/2013: 31, fig. 14)

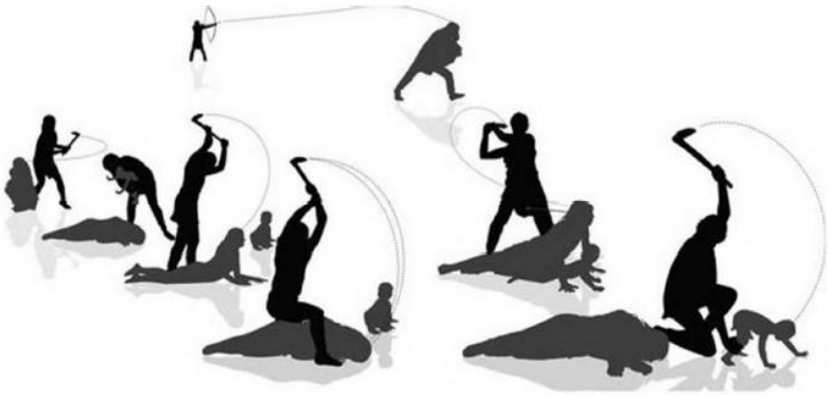


Fig. 69: The study of the wounds found on peculiar individuals allowed the archaeologists to rebuild a possible scenario of their death (Wahl 2012: 87, fig. 5.6)



Fig. 70: Skull of a fallen warrior still bearing its chain mail coif from the battlefield of Wisby (Thordeman 2001: 101, fig. 79)