

Introduction

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War, like epidemics, is a subject of study that can only be understood by taking into account as many of its constituent parameters as possible – ideally all of them (biological, historical, cultural, etc.).

War, like epidemics again, is often a source of extraordinary deaths, raising the question of how the living adapt to the abnormality of Death: how did the survivors – comrades-in-arms, enemies, civilians – manage the corpses, balancing respect for funeral traditions with sanitary emergencies?

Bones¹ carry an individual's identity – their age, sex, but also the marks of their past life and sometimes the causes of their death. Bone tells the story of a body, a story that current techniques allow us to reconstruct with increasing precision. Of course, bone contains only part of the information about an individual's life experience; some events, being too brief, will leave no physical trace. The analysis of human remains makes it possible to understand the individual or collective experiences of the deceased through the biological study of all preserved remains, and also to apprehend the behaviour of the living toward the dead through the analysis of how bodies were deposited in graves.

For a long time, researchers showed little interest in questions surrounding the management of funerals for those who died in combat or during conflicts. Historians, even those specialized in the history of mentalities or the body, rarely addressed this issue through historical sources. It was ultimately through the lens of archeo-anthropology that the first approaches emerged (for example, the article by P. L. Walker, 2001). Since the early 1990s, archaeology and biological anthropology have converged in the study of more recent periods. From that point on, this archeo-anthropological approach began to focus on funerary events, gradually moving away from laboratory studies to include fieldwork-based methods.

Other factors – such as the increase in preventive excavations, the first studies on collective burials (in archaeological contexts), and the accidental discovery of multiple graves related to the First World War – opened a new field of research in which young scholars began to specialize. These developments have enriched the corpus of available archives. In addition to historical archives, pedological and biological records (that is, exhumed human remains) provide information about the deceased and the management of death.

Since the 2000s, the scope of research in conflict-related archeo-anthropology has continued to expand through scientific discussions held at conferences, roundtables, collaborative research projects, and publications. These forums contribute to advancing the study of individual or mass violence through the perspective of archeo-anthropology.

For example, the international symposium held at the Louvre-Lens in 2014 offered a multidisciplinary perspective on violence and conflict through the lens of archeo-anthropology². Monographic and thematic publications continue to fuel discussions on the archaeology of conflict, not only for recent periods (World Wars I and II) but also for medieval and older conflicts (López Quiroga and Ríos Frutos, 2022).

This book is the result of a collaborative research project, *Archaeology and Anthropology of Conflicts (2020-2022)*, authorized by the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs (DRAC). The project brought together around thirty researchers from various disciplinary backgrounds (anthropology, archaeology, history, genetics). Far from being exhaustive in terms of the sites presented, this work aims to provide an inventory of sites related to this issue and to demonstrate, through concrete case studies, the diversity of situations encountered across time and space. Its goal is to broaden our knowledge and highlight these innovative, multidisciplinary studies to enrich ongoing debates and future research.

In total, twenty articles are divided into two main parts, structured both chronologically (before and after the 20th century) and according to legal and administrative realities. Indeed, contexts dating before the very end of the 19th century fall within the field of archaeology and the legal texts that govern this discipline. However, this is not the case for the human remains of soldiers who died in 20th-century conflicts. With the enactment of the 1915 French law regarding the official recording of deaths, the transfer and return of bodies, and the right to a perpetual grave, the status of the deceased soldier's body changed. In France, only the *Office national des combattants et victimes de guerre* (ONaCVG) is authorized to excavate, study, identify, and return the remains of these soldiers. A similar legal and administrative framework exists for soldiers of Commonwealth countries, managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC),

¹ We include dental remains under the term “bones.”

² Archéologie de la violence-Violence de guerre, violence de masse (October 2-4, 2014), <https://www.inrap.fr/archeologie-de-la-violence-violence-de-guerre-violence-de-masse-12341>

and for German soldiers, whose remains are handled by the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* (VDK). Finally, comparable legislation exists in many other countries (with links to each nation's embassy), the most recent example being the republics of the Russian Federation.

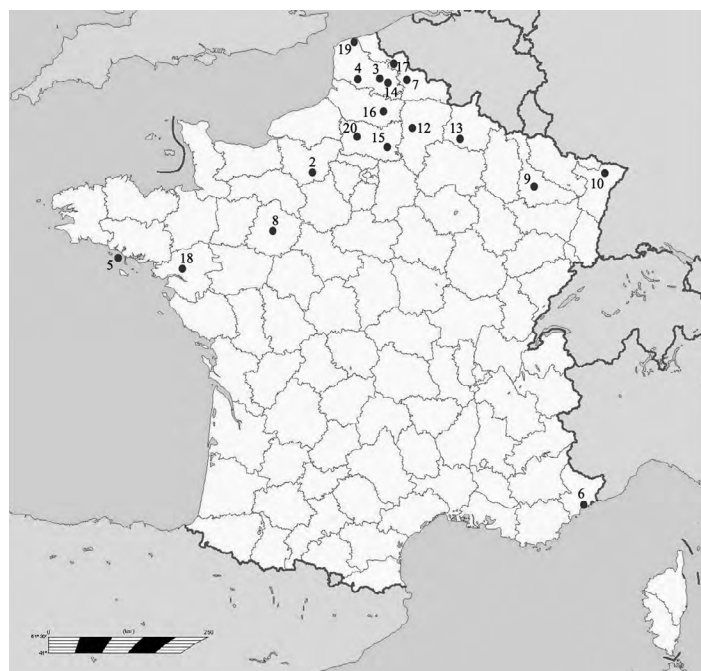
Admittedly, archaeological contexts prior to the 19th century are rare in this field. It therefore seemed essential to present previously unpublished cases (chapter by J. Roul and L. Dalmau et al.) and to open up prospects for future collaborations based on historical research (contributions by T. Guérin). Four articles present contexts from the modern era (between the 16th and 18th centuries), following accidental discoveries at sites in Auxi-le-Château, the island of Houat, Nice, and Douai. At the very end of the 18th century, two sites related to the French Revolution are discussed: one in connection with the Vendée civil wars (E. Cabot et al.), the other related to the treatment of soldiers in military hospitals. The article by E. Verna et al. presents the results of a chance discovery of graves associated with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 at the emblematic site of the Battle of Reichshoffen. This

first part of the volume concludes with a methodological article on the possibilities and limitations of individual identification of exhumed soldiers, both on archaeological sites and in 20th-century contexts (C. Costedoat).

The second part mainly focuses on sites from the First World War (N. Robin et al., E. Verna et al., L. Margely-Lardecky et al., D. Veyssier, M. Meucci et al., L. Loe et al., A. Le Boulaire), reflecting the quantitative reality of discoveries, the diversity of contexts, and the variety of disciplinary perspectives contributing to their study.

The contributions by M. Meucci et al. and L. Bouniol et al. conclude this volume by presenting two case studies related to the Second World War. The proximity of the events and the origins of the deceased (colonial troops, Luftwaffe bomber crews) provide an opportunity to broaden the scope of our reflections.

Figure I.1 complements this overview of the chapters, showing all the sites presented in the remainder of the book. Almost all of the sites are located in northern France.



Some examples of conflicts over the centuries: from 15th to 19th

- 2. Verneuil-sur-Avre, Eure
- 3. Anzin-Saint-Aubin, Pas-de-Calais
- 4. Auxi-le-Château, Pas-de-Calais
- 5. Ile-d'Houat, Morbihan
- 6. Nice, Alpes-Maritimes
- 7. Douai, Nord
- 8. Le Mans, Sarthe
- 9. Nancy, Meurthe-et-Moselle
- 10. Woerth, Alsace

The two World Wars on French soil

- 12. Several sites around Soissons, Aisne
- 13. Le Chatelet-sur-Retourne, Ardennes
- 14. Héminel, Pas-de-Calais
- 15. Boissy-Fresnoy, Oise
- 16. Ablaincourt-Pressoir, Somme
- 17. Fromelles, Nord
- 18. Savenay, Loire-Atlantique
- 19. Oye-Plage, Pas-de-Calais
- 20. Beauvais, Oise

Figure I.1. Localisation of the sites presented in the following chapters.