Frequent Hearses: The Archaeology of Funeral Ritual in Early Iron Age West-Central Europe

"On all the line a sudden vengeance waits, and frequent hearses shall besiege your gates."

To the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady

It has been said that archaeologists excavate burials, not funerals. It is certainly true that the presence of a body, or bodies, whether preserved or implied by the presence of grave goods, is the defining feature of mortuary contexts in prehistory. However, in Early Iron Age west-central Europe the grave itself represents just one inflection point, a single stage in a process extending back in time to the period before the interment as well as after it. The four-wheeled and two-wheeled vehicles found in late Hallstatt and early La Tène burials in the West Hallstatt zone and other evidence for post-depositional activity in a select number of elite graves are part of a complex, multi-stage process that appears to have been accompanied by mourning activity including the cutting of hair, opening of the grave to remove or insert objects or persons, and depositing food offerings after the laying to rest of the dead. Some of these activities, represented by evidence of burning and small stone altars on burial mound surfaces, appear to have gone on for several generations, as this presentation will demonstrate. Viewed as a process rather than an event, the funeral rituals of the early Iron Age in west-central Europe provide a window into how people dealt with death in the past even in the absence of documentary evidence.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The seminar is directed only to graduate students.

Up to twenty students will attend the seminar in person. In order to reserve a seat please contact the Assist. Director at irishinstitutegr@gmail.com.

Ten students will register via Eventbrite to attend online here: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/6th-theoretical-seminar-of-the-iihsa-given-by-prof-bettina-arnold-tickets-547263308287

The lecture is co-hosted by University College Dublin, Department of Classics.

Thursday, 18th May 2023
Lecture begins at 19.30 pm (Greece time)-17.30 pm (Ireland time)