

Petar Parvanov

**MEDIEVAL DEVIANT BURIALS FROM BULGARIA**

**(7<sup>TH</sup> – 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)**

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization  
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2016

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(Bulgaria)

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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External Reader

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External Supervisor

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I, the undersigned, **Petar Parvanov**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 19 May 2016

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# Abstract

The thesis is dealing with the archaeologically known medieval deviant burials from the territory of Bulgaria. The deviant burials have long received the attention of archaeologist, but this is the first systematic collection of the evidence from the Bulgarian lands. The study examines the characteristics of mass graves, prone (face-down) burials, fixation of the body, decapitations and mutilations in long-term perspective. Various elements of the phenomenon are discussed, including chronology, spatial distribution, associated grave goods and correlation between the deviant burial practices. Special attention is paid to the interpretative issues of the deviant burial rites. The traditional explanation as anti-transfiguration or anti-vampire rite is critically evaluated and more balanced interpretations are offered. Their significance as material manifestations of legal culture and social complexity are particularly emphasized.

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For the players



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# List of Abbreviations

AOP                      *Археологически открития и разкопки* [Archaeological Discoveries and  
Excavations]

# Introduction

An early medieval prone burial of a girl from San Calocero in Albenga, Italy. A 14<sup>th</sup> century seated burial of hanged and decapitated post mortem missionary from Bolgar in Tatarstan, Russia. A late medieval mass grave of supposed plague victims from Paris. This short list of recent finds accumulates and reflects the growing awareness that funerary archaeology needs to tackle the unusual and go beyond its normativity (just like its subject of study does). What is deviant burial and why it occurs are questions that have been part of archaeological thinking longer than we may assume. Nevertheless, the interest of such special cases where the deceased received noticeable differential treatment is just now forming systematic approach towards them. Comprehensive understanding of such varied archaeological record will enhance our perspectives on human behavior across time and space on different levels from invisible long-term processes to individual agency and experience.

Recently the theme of deviant burials was reappraised in European archaeology, sometimes creating very heated debate over it. The present situation demonstrated perfectly that the deviant burials were not only sparsely discussed in historiography, but the approach towards them lacks appropriate methodology and theoretical comprehension of this widespread phenomenon. The thesis shall introduce the deviant burial rites in medieval times from the territory of Bulgaria into the wider scholarly discussion by examining unpublished data in consistent manner or reconsidering marginalized finds. The chronological framework for this work will include diachronic perspective on the pagan period of the Bulgar state on the Lower Danube and the following Christian period until

the end of the fourteenth century. The geographical scale will be limited to the territory of modern day Bulgaria for the sake of feasibility. The diachronic regional perspective will not only examine its development, but enables the comparison on wider geographical scale with areas of diverse social and cultural characteristics as well. The archaeological evidence will be the very core of the thesis. Additionally, anthropological data and observations will be drawn to support the analysis of the funerary contexts. Written historical accounts will also be occasionally used to contextualize the material remains.

The thesis will elaborate on the following research questions:

1. How deviant burials appear in the national archaeology?
2. What spatial relationships exist in relation to deviant burials?
3. Can we trace the existence of continuity between deviant burials from the pagan and Christian periods?
4. Judicial or religious interpretations should be preferred for the archaeological record?

The thesis is structured in introduction, six chapters, conclusion and a catalogue.

Chapter one deals with the methodological considerations and the terminological basis of the thesis. It will include the definition of deviant burials, accepted in the present work, as well as detailed explanation on the selection criteria. In this chapter briefly will be discussed some cases of burial deposits that may be considered deviant, but were excluded from the present study.

The next chapter will examine the previous scholarship on the topic. The critical review takes on two levels of academic networking. First, the European debate concerned with deviant burials will be introduced. This is done to outline the current trends in archaeological thinking and to situate the methodological framework in its intellectual background. The wider continental perspective will trace the development of the term deviant burial and will demonstrate its increasing explanatory value. The second level will focus on medieval funerary archaeology in Bulgaria. This part will describe not only scholarly attitudes, but will account for what is accepted normative custom against which deviant burials are recognized. The ethnographically-dominated anti-transfiguration rite hypothesis will be considered in some length. Related to that is the assessment of public interest in archaeological findings.

The first truly analytical chapter is devoted to two medieval mass graves from Bulgaria. The part will try to summarize the structural features of these archaeological complexes. They will be used for the historical interpretation in association with specific episodes from the past. Also, the patterns from the mass graves will serve as point of comparison for the rest of deviant burials. The chapter is supplemented by Appendix A containing some figures from the quantitative analysis and images.

The next chapter is intended to naturally follow the same analytical techniques in relation to the deviant burials from individual and collective graves. The chapter will be organized around the groups established in the previous discussions on methodology and mass graves. Various aspects of the burial record will be described and measured in the attempt to find patterns. Particular attention will be paid to the chronological development and geographical distribution. The chapter is supplemented by Appendix B containing graphic and visual records for some of the graves.

The following chapter five will focus on the spatial aspects related to deviant burials. The aim of this work is to provide some dimensional context to the in-depth long-term processes emphasized in the previous chapters. The analysis will include a discussion on the location of graves with deviant burials in the intra-site topography of selected sites and a case study adopting landscape approach.

The sixth chapter titled “Narratives of deviance” is concerned above all things with the interpretation of the archaeological findings. It will be also most relevant to the last of our research questions, because it will contrast the religious and legal meanings attached to the phenomenon. This discussion will aim to promote more nuanced understanding on the themes and raise awareness that the multiple meanings of the funerary record are not necessary mutually exclusive.

Finally, the conclusion will recapitulate on the issues and will try to present an accessible synthesis of the current knowledge regarding the medieval deviant burials from the territory of Bulgaria.

# Chapter 1 – Methodological Considerations

The entire thesis is centered on a set of highly individualized graves that have remained poorly understood as separate group. Deviant can only be understood in the context of accepted patterns observed by the society. There could not be an element of the rite to be considered deviant on its own right. Here, deviant burials are defined as distinctive non-normative form of body disposal made under the pressure of extreme conditions or negative social evaluation in the past or today. It is a composite term with intertwined descriptive and interpretative elements, which are reflected in the methodology and the structure of the present work.

By nature deviant burials are understood in terms of structural oppositions. This is necessary for the selection of appropriate sample and cases and also reflects the accumulation of irregularities in the mortuary behavior. The primary marker for recognition of deviant burial practices is the particular direct treatment of the body. This assessment is strongly dependent on archaeological and anthropological observations on the skeletal remains. For deviant burials are accepted those that are placed in prone position, fixated down, decapitated or with other form of mutilation of the postcranial skeleton. These four categories were highlighted for two reasons. First, they are borrowed from research on the Anglo-Saxon deviant burial customs as objective and comparable classification. Some of them like the mutilation and the fixation of the body have relatively established presence in Bulgarian archaeological studies too. Second, they were reaffirmed by the detailed analysis of individual treatment of the bodies from the mass grave from Devnya-3. However, the grouping criteria are not absolute tool, especially when interpretation is required. In this sense is necessary to explain that the deviant burial is an umbrella term for the extreme variations in the culturally and psychologically sensitive spectrum of burial practices. The juxtaposition of normative and

deviant treatment, of different rites originating from the same continuum of available customs was the strategy to convey messages about the person and the society within their immediate cultural context.

The strong emphasis placed upon the selection of appropriate examples requires a brief demonstration on the logic behind excluding potentially deviant burials from the data sample. The first example comes from the necropolis near Cherna, often given as illustration for the practice of fixation with stone piles in graves 7, 10, 17, and 21. However, a careful look will reveal that from twenty-one excavated graves, seven were inhumations. Of them only one belonged to an adult individual and he was not covered with stones. Additionally, the soil layer between the skeletal remains and the stone pile was excluding the possibility for direct fixation.<sup>1</sup> More likely is to accept that stone piles were part of locally accepted grave structure for burials of infants. Similar argument may be raised for several graves in Devnya, where the large stones are better explained as grave markers visible from the ground rather than application of deviant burial rites.<sup>2</sup> Another unlikely case is the dual grave 33 of two men and two horses from the biritual necropolis in Novi Pazar. Hristina Stoyanova is citing it as a case of extreme bodily mutilation with anti-transfiguration purpose, but the proposal of Stancho Vaklinov for robbery of the grave in the past seems more plausible.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes, burials were omitted from the catalogue simply, because there was not enough available information at the present time. This is the case of two female graves from Kabile

<sup>1</sup> Ivan Vasilchin [Василчин Иван] Двубреден езически раннобългарски некропол при Черна, Толбухински окръг [Biritual pagan early Bulgarian necropolis near Cherna, Tolbuhin district], *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 1 (1989):198-200.

<sup>2</sup> Dimitar Dimitrov [Димитър Димитров], Погребалният обряд при прабългарските некрополи във Варненско (VIII-X век) [The funerary rite in the Protobulgarian necropoleis in the Varna region (eight-tenth centuries)], *Известия на Археологическия Институт* 34 (1972):51-95.

<sup>3</sup> Hristina Stoyanova [Христина Стоянова], Обредът „обезвреждане на мъртвите“ в езическите некрополи (по данни от района на Плиска и Варна) [The ritual against transfiguration of the dead in the pagan necropoleis (based on data from the area of Pliska and Varna)], in *Изследвания по българска средновековна археология. Сборник в чест на проф. Рашо Рашев* [Studies in Bulgarian Medieval Archaeology presented to Prof. Racho Rashev] ed Pavel Georgiev, Sofia: Faber(2007): 156. Contra, Stantcho Stantchev and Stefan Ivanov [Станчо Ваклинов и Стефан Иванов], *Некрополът при Нови Пазар [Necropolis near Novi Pazar], Sofia: Наука и Изкуство (1958): fig. 9.*



or the mass grave findings from the medieval capital of Veliko Tarnovo, for instance the site of the monastery “St. John of Rila”.<sup>4</sup> The remains of more than 50 individuals were found under the ruins, probably dying in the catastrophic event that destroyed the building. The dead were not properly buried, but no attempt to recover and rebury the bodies was made. This demonstrates well how extreme conditions can generate irregularities in the funerary behavior. In clear deviation from the pattern a proper burial was not made for them. Also, the site can be considered a part of the larger issue of human relationship with the corpse. Same principle is applied to the dubious fixated burial from Lom, reported only in a local media with a photograph leaving the impression that the original context was much disturbed by construction work.<sup>5</sup> The discrepancy between media presentation and archaeological reports is a recent outcome of the academic state and raises another methodological challenge. The burial from Sozopol is emblematic example on the matter, but is included in the present work. However, the information for second female burial from the same site with similar form of fixation was insufficient and at least for now is regarded doubtful.

The first task in the research is the review of existing historiography. The critical literature analysis is performed to explain the emergence and development of the concept and to establish refined definitions and data collection. Evaluating the data quality is important basis for the sampling of appropriate examples. It has been used to demonstrate the academic neglect on the topic, but also to set the limits for interpretation. Existing work on the topic often engages in circular arguments with misleading results. A perfect example for this can be the abuse of ethnographic analogies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the interpretation of the finds.

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<sup>4</sup> Boni Petrunova [Бони Петрунова], Некрополите от XIII-XVII в. като източник за практикуването на обредите против превъплъщаване [Cemeteries from 13th-17th century as a source on practicing rituals against transfiguration after death], *Конфесия и фолклор* (1998): 71; Yordan Alexiev [Йордан Алексиев] Велико Търново. Крепостта Трапезица. Манастир „Св. Йоан Рилски” [Veliko Tarnovo. Trapezitsa fortress. St. John of Rila Monastery], *АОР* (2009):605-607.

<sup>5</sup> Lyubomir Yordanov [Любомир Йорданов], И Лом вече си има „вампири” [And Lom finally got a “vampire”] <http://www.trud.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=1642053> published 20.11.2012, last accessed on 27. 04. 2016.

The records on rites against demonic creatures replaced written historical accounts as master narrative to which archaeological finds from much earlier period and different cultural context had to be adapted. Of course, ethnography has much to offer on the topic. This is true only if the limitations of the analogy are acknowledged and what is even more important, the choice of case studies is more careful.

The critical literature review proves how important is for the current analysis not to attach direct meaning to the archaeological burial record. Context related analysis is applied to the selection of excavated graves organized in a catalogue. They have been selected, recorded and analyzed on the basis of available information on standard variables. The sources of information include excavation records and reports and secondary site-specific articles and monographs. On several occasions information lacking from this academic sources was supplemented by mass media. An effort has been made to match site diary and written descriptions with plans, photos and drawings from the site. Limited numbers of them feature in the catalogue. The variables are site-related and particular for each grave. The variables for individual graves are date, grave structure, body position and orientation, the availability of grave inventory (grave goods, animal remains etc.), age and sex, application of deviant rite. Among them date is often determined by the general dating of the site. On their basis was performed the quantitative analysis.

Often the site characterization by the original researcher is accepted and attempts to reinterpret it have not been made. In many aspects deviant burials are taken out of their immediate context and compared between each other. This approach and the rarity of these specific grave types entail the acceptance of *longue durée* perspective. The wide chronological framework of the project also corresponded well to its aim to explain broad and chronological variations.

# Chapter 2 – History of Research

## 1. Introduction

The following chapter offers a survey on earlier research not merely to provide exhaustive list of literature, but to create a sense of the ongoing academic endeavors. It delves into two, hitherto largely unrelated, archaeological pursuits. First the European literature focusing on deviant burials will be reviewed. Then the state of medieval mortuary archaeology in Bulgaria will be evaluated, with the aim of refining the term itself and unravel the logic behind it. Accordingly, normative burial customs will be outlined to contextualize how deviant burials fit the archaeological data and prevailing scholarly attitudes.

## 2. United in diversity: European perspectives on deviant burials

The funerary behavior of past societies has been integral part of archaeological thinking and often stimulates the empirical and theoretical advancements.<sup>6</sup> Archaeologists often deal with recurrent patterns, but recently there has been a surge of interest in less common material insights into the past. The subject of deviant burials was reappraised in European archaeology, sometimes creating very heated debates. Coincidence or not, new untypical discoveries began to receive attention.

The introduction of the term deviant burial must be understood as part of the growing importance of statistical and scientific methods in archaeology. Arthur Saxe and his research on the social dimension of mortuary practices had major role in this methodological shift.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Parker Pearson, *The archaeology of death and burial* (Phoenix Mill, UK: Sutton, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Saxe, *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices*, PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms Inc. (1970).

Among his eight cross-cultural hypotheses based on anthropological observations over the West African Ashanti, the Kapauku from New Guinea and the Bontoc Igorot of the Phillipines, Hypothesis No.7 has significant impact on the argument of this thesis. According to Saxe, the simpler a society is, the less variation exists in deviant funerary practices. Several aspects of this hypothesis are relevant here. First, the term is used to designate unusual burials and is purely statistical. Second, it is associated with individuals considered as outsiders in one way or another. Third, the complexity of this phenomenon and the society as a system are directly interdependent.

Edeltraud Aspöck reviewed the theoretical and epistemological background of the term deviant burials in her contribution to the first volume dealing exclusively on the topic.<sup>8</sup> Her comparison of the Anglophone and German academic traditions is noteworthy. A common concept is that modes of living and dying are reflected in the mortuary treatment. On this matter she is influenced by Meyer-Orlac explaining social evaluations in the burial situations.<sup>9</sup> E. Aspöck regards the term deviant burial as English equivalent of the German *Sonderbestattung* and points to the fact that the word deviant is charged with sexual and negative connotations. She argues for the use of a neutral term and favors the German term for remaining closer to the archaeological evidence and its classificatory character.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, *Sonderbestattung* should be translated rather as special or unparalleled burial and expresses internal single site observations. Non-normative is more applicable as an analogous term in English for the use of *Sonderbestattung* by German-speaking archaeologists. However, precisely the shortcomings of the term can turn into advantage.

<sup>8</sup> Edeltraud Aspöck, What Actually is a Deviant Burial? Comparing German-Language and Anglophone Research on “Deviant Burials”, In *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record* ed. Murphy, Eileen, 17-34. Oxford: Oxbow Press, (1998); Murphy, Eileen M. *Deviant burial in the archaeological record*. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Meyer-Orlac, R. Zur Problematik der Sonderbestattungen in der Archäologie, In *Sonderbestattungen in der Bronzezeit im Östlichen Mitteleuropa*, ed. Rittershofer, K.F., 1-10, Espelkamp: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH (1997).

<sup>10</sup> Edeltraud Aspöck, What Actually is a Deviant Burial?, 29.

Non-normative burials cover a wide spectrum of contextual variations, while deviant burials should be understood as sub-category of non-normative burials associated with a certain negative image upheld by society. Another article from the same volume examining the impact of the fear of dead (*necrophobia*) is also relevant here.<sup>11</sup> Anastasia Tsaliki stresses the need to understand biological and social aspects entanglement in burials. Elsewhere, the same author discusses vampirism as a form of *necrophobia* on the basis of palaeopathological examination of skeletal remains from ancient Greece.<sup>12</sup> Her argument underpins the importance of archaeological and (if possible) anthropological indications for specific body treatment regarding deviant burials.

Very influential and detailed analysis of deviant burial rites is made by Andrew Reynolds for the Anglo-Saxon period in Britain.<sup>13</sup> He integrates his observations on large sample deviant burials and long-term perspective of traditionally big themes like the political processes in post-Roman and Anglo-Saxon England. Another feature of his work is the discussion of the possible motivations behind the choice of deviant burials for certain individuals (e.g. suicide), as well as the potential archaeological indicators for each one of them. Reynolds puts strong emphasis on spatial contextualization of the individual cases and considers isolation as another sign of deviant burial. The number of execution cemeteries excavated in England enabled him to link deviant rites to criminals and judicial activities. With the help of charters and analysis of geographical distribution he provides another point of view to the construction of power in the landscape and the archaeological trace of governance. This approach is further developed into a model of developing social complexity

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<sup>11</sup> Anastasia Tsaliki, "Unusual Burials and Necrophobia: An Insight Into the Burial Archaeology of Fear", In *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record* ed. Murphy, Eileen, 1-16, Oxford: Oxbow Press, (1998).

<sup>12</sup> Anastasia Tsaliki, "Vampires Beyond Legend: a Bioarchaeological Approach" Teramo *Proceedings of the XIII European Meeting of the Paleopathology Association, Chieti, Italy, 18-23 Sept. (2000 (2001))*.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

through legal culture.<sup>14</sup> Deviant burials are included among other elements (court, confinement and ordeal facilities) in the archaeological characteristics for the development of legal culture. However, the main contribution of Reynolds' work from Eastern-European perspective is the introduction of landscape-awareness and alternative interpretations relying less on religious rituals.

Polish archaeologists seem to be the most active in the academic discourse about deviant burials. Archaeology does not happen outside its contemporary society and this makes the Polish case an ideal study for the purpose of this review.<sup>15</sup> Poland and Bulgaria share many cultural, political and historical trends, especially in the post-war period. Therefore, the similarity of responses to deviant burials is therefore not surprising. Following Helena Zoll-Adamikova the protective anti-vampire ritual commentary received unchallenged association with deviant burials (*pochowki atypowe*).<sup>16</sup> Unusual early medieval Polish graves have been collected and categorized according to position, inventory, body treatment, etc by Przemysław Żydok.<sup>17</sup>

Legal interpretations are proposed by Leszek Gardela and Kamil Kajkowski.<sup>18</sup> They summarize evidence for prone, stoned and decapitated burials and argue for alternatives like capital punishment for decapitations or weighting down individuals accused of performing magic. However, they note that a universally accepted explanation is unlikely. The debate is

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Reynolds, Judicial culture and social complexity: a general model from Anglo-Saxon England, *World Archaeology* 45:5(2013): 699-713.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Social Theory and Archaeology* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1987)

<sup>16</sup> Helena Zoll-Adamikova, *Wczesnośredniowieczne pochówki szkieletowe Małopolski. Część 2. Analiza*. [Late medieval burials from Małopolski. Part two. Analysis.] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk/Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1971), 47-54.

<sup>17</sup> Przemysław Żydok, *Wczesnośredniowieczne pochówki antywampiryczne* [Late medieval anti-vampire rites], In *Hereditatem Cognoscere: Studia i szkice dedykowane Profesor Marii Miśkiewicz*, ed Z. Kobylński, 38–66. Warszawa: Wydział Nauk Historycznych i Społecznych Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego/Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne/Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Gardela Leszek and Kamil Kajkowski, Vampires, criminals or slaves? Reinterpreting 'deviant burials' in early medieval Poland, *World Archaeology* 45:5 (2013).

fueled by discoveries from late medieval and early modern periods, which indicate cremation was a measure against revenants and stress judicial significance for atypical inhumations.<sup>19</sup>

The principal struggle with atypical burials is evident in a case from Bohemia as well. The cemetery of Celakovice was originally dated to the tenth or eleventh century when it was excavated in the 1960s. It was also cited as a typical example for anti-vampire rituals performed on several individuals. However, the apparent picture needed to be reconsidered. The typology of the small finds and C14 dating on the skeletons suggested a dating between the thirteenth and the seventeenth century, most probably the latter.<sup>20</sup> The disposal of the bodies and the local toponymy together made Pavlina Maskova to contemplate the execution character of the site.<sup>21</sup>

The Polish-Czech experience demonstrates well the broad chronological spread of the debate. Just as time limits may be closer to our time, irregular mortuary behavior can be traced back to prehistory. Indeed, from the earliest prehistory of the Balkans and Central Europe, John Chapman's work contributes to the conceptualization of deviant burials by raising awareness of the bodily condition.<sup>22</sup> The completeness or fragmentation of the corpse, he claims, can have various implications for the identity and often can inform us about enchainment of different social agents. It is intriguing to explore how enchainment through fragmentation can be understood in a religious environment where bodily resurrection is an integral concept.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Wojtucki, *Publiczne miejsca straceń na Dolnym Śląsku od XV do połowy XIX wieku* [Public execution places on Dolnym Śląsku from fifteenth to late nineteenth century] (Katowice: Fundacja Zamek Chudów., 2009), 211-3 ;Pawel Duma, *Grób alienata: pochówki dzieci nieochrzczonych, samobójców i skazańców w późnym średniowieczu i dobie wczesnonowożytnej* [Alienated graves: burials of neonates, suicides and convicts from the late medieval and early modern age] (Kraków: Avalon, 2010)

<sup>20</sup> Pavlina Mackova, Dovetok o Celokovickem "pohrebisti s projevy vampyrismu" [Postscript about Celokovice Cemetery with Sign of Vampirism], *Stredocensky Sbornik Historicky* 36, (2010): 131-2

<sup>21</sup> Pavlina Mackova, K otazce interpretace kostroveho "pohrebiste s projevy vampyrismu" v Celakovich [Towards the Interpretation Issue of the Skeletal Burial Place with Signs of Vampirism at Celokovice], *Studia Mediaevalia Pragaensia* 5 (2004): 14-17

<sup>22</sup> John Chapman, 'Deviant' burials in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic of Central and South Eastern Europe, in *Body Parts and Bodies Whole* eds. K. Rebay-Salisbury, M.L.S. Sorensen and J. Hughes, , Oxford: Oxbow, pp. (2010): 31, 41-43

### 3. Medieval funerary archaeology in Bulgaria: establishing the norm

The study of the medieval burial practices in Bulgarian archaeology began in earnest only after the Second World War. In this period the traditional culture-historical archaeological thinking was already deeply rooted in the field, while the political environment pushed the application of Soviet Marxism into practice. These two factors strongly affected the way of thinking about funerary records and their potential as archaeological source, which is evident from the questions asked and the way the findings were handled.

The discovery of the Novi Pazar necropolis not far from Pliska is still a defining moment for the research of medieval death rites. The work of Stantscho Vaklinov on the site proved to be the basis for research until today both in terms of observations and style of work.<sup>23</sup> His descriptive account of the prevailing manner of burial in this biritual necropolis confirmed it as the preferred practice among the Bulgars. The attempt to define the ethnic attribution of the sites is taken further by Zhivka Vazharova.<sup>24</sup> On the basis of her excavations of various cemeteries, she differentiates Slavic and Bulgar components in the early medieval populations of the area thus contributing to the never-ending debate on the ethnogenesis of the Bulgarians. In her classification there is a clear-cut difference between Slavic necropoleis where only cremation was practiced, and bi-ritual necropoleis and specifically the inhumations attributed to Bulgars. The conclusions of Vazharova represent a simple bi-ethnic model with a dominant Slavic population in the pre-Christian period when

<sup>23</sup> Stantcho Stantchev and Stefan Ivanov [*Станчо Ваклинов и Стефан Иванов*], *Некрополът при Нови Пазар [Necropolis near Novi Pazar]* (Sofia: Наука и Изкуство, 1958)

<sup>24</sup> Zhivka Vazharova [*Живка Вџарова*] *Славяни и прабългари: по данни на некрополите от VI-XI в. на територията на България* [Slavs and protobulgarians based on data from the necropoleis from seventh to eleventh century on the territory of Bulgaria] (Sofia: БАН, 1976)



burial rites, assumed as indicative of ethnic identity, were unified by the imposition of the religion.

The preoccupation with ethnic identification is evident also in the most comprehensive research so far by Uwe Fiedler, who studies the early medieval funerary record in the Lower Danube region and compares Bulgarian and Romanian findings and interpretations.<sup>25</sup> His focus lies on the chronology of the sites on the basis of pottery and small finds and the identification of the ethnic identities attached to them. More or less, his conclusions fall within the characteristics of the funerary record established by Vazharova. Of particular interest for him is the definition of the ethnic areal of these two groups within loosely-defined borders that correspond to the political geography of the earliest period of the Bulgar state on the Lower Danube according to the written sources.<sup>26</sup> The anthropological studies of populations from Bulgarian sites, especially from earlier excavations, are also locked in the ethnocentric discourse.<sup>27</sup> The analysis of medieval anthropological series focused on recording evolutionary and biological variations in the skeleton and rarely addressed alternative research avenues like demography, paleopathological studies and so on.

Strikingly similar is the attitude by Rasho Rashev who uses burial data to complete the picture of the archaeological culture of the pagan Bulgars.<sup>28</sup> This emphasis in the interpretation can even be misleading for recording and publication. In the joint work of Rasho Rashev and Stanislav Stanilov on the Nozharevo necropolis, a prone burial is

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<sup>25</sup> Uwe Fiedler, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern des 6. Bis 9. Jahrhunderts an der unteren Donau* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolph Habelt GmbH, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Uwe Fiedler, Bulgars in the Lower Danube Region. A survey of the archaeological evidence and of the state of current research, *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars and Cumans* ed. Florin Curta (Leiden: Brill 2008): 154-162.

<sup>27</sup> See for a typical example, Nelly Kondova, Slavcho Cholakov [Нели Кондова, Славчо Чолаков] Антропологични данни за етногенезиса на ранно средновековна популация от североизточна България [Anthropological data for the ethnogenesis of an early medieval population in the north-east of Bulgaria ] *Българска етнология* 2 (1992):61-68.

<sup>28</sup> Rasho Rashev [Рашо Рашев], *Българската езическа култура VII-IX век*. [Bulgar pagan culture 7th – 9th century] (Sofia: Класика и стил, 2008), 191-210.

mentioned as a curiosity in the short excavation report and in the preliminary publication this clear deviation from the ritual is absent from the description since it is not considered informative about the ethnic character of the site.<sup>29</sup> To be fair, 30 years on the complete publication of the site that can make amends is still wanting, a common problem in archaeology.

Nonetheless, despite the problematic interpretations the persistent efforts established some patterns of normative practices against which the deviant rites can be recognized. Cremation burials are generally excluded from the present study, as the skeletal conditions prevent the recognition of deviant rites according to current methodology. Therefore in the pagan period between the seventh and the mid-ninth century the standard is the inhumation supine extended burial with variations in the position of the arms. The grave orientation of pre-Christian inhumations in Bulgaria is north-south. Weapons or dress accessories are rare, but present. The offerings are typically entire domestic animals (often poultry, only rarely cattle, horses, or dogs) or meat, eggs, and pottery. Ceramic assemblages often include small pots for food and jugs, later also table amphorae or amphora-like jugs.

The problem of recognizing and defining deviant burials is present in the literature, particularly regarding the frequency of other non-normative burials. For the earlier period, both Rashev and Fiedler focus on the crouched burials as a special form of disposal as long as the exception confirms the norm, hence the ethnic interpretation. The latter regards the burial pits with niches as another exceptional burial practice. In her recent dissertation, Katja Melamed argued for more a refined social grouping of the grave types based on additional

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<sup>29</sup> Rasho Rashev and Stanislav Stanilov [Рашо Рашев и Станислав Станилов], Старобългарски езически некропол при Ножарево, Разградска област [Old Bulgarian necropolis near Nozharevo, Razgrad district], АОР (1988): 160; Rasho Rashev and Stanislav Stanilov [Рашо Рашев и Станислав Станилов], Раннесредновековный могильник в с.Ножарево, Силистренский округ [Early medieval necropolis in Nozharevo, Silistra district], *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 1 (1989): 214-220.

categories like age and gender within the ethnic framework.<sup>30</sup> In any case, it is clear that the variations and the complexity of mortuary behavior must be acknowledged. The occurrence of differentials in the funerary record is commonly expected. Essentially, the accumulation of variations constitutes a non-normative treatment and deviant burials emerge from flexible patterns. For instance, the crouched burials in pre-Christian bi-ritual necropoleis represent roughly up to 12% of the excavated graves, depending on the individual site. It is more appropriate is to consider them as discrete type of restricted (non-)normative practice reflecting particular social conditions rather than deviant burials as they are defined here.<sup>31</sup> The list of exceptions from the standard can be extended by the burials of elite character such as Grave No. 5 from Madara or Kabiyuk.<sup>32</sup> How the non-normative rites relate to one another is an interesting question, but beyond the scope of the present research.

Even though Christianization after the ninth century is one of the major transformations in the history of medieval Bulgaria, surprisingly little is known about it from funerary archaeology. Medieval Christian funeral practices are explored on the basis of single-site excavations or included in general surveys of the archaeological materials for the period. Presumably, Christian funeral canons are equivalent to the archaeological reality and the burial rites are considered as static phenomenon. However, proposing a universal Christian practice limits the expectations for ethnic differentiation. Usually normative Christian practice is detected through the shift towards western orientation of the skeleton, the disappearance of cremations within the cemeteries and a decrease in grave goods. Supine

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<sup>30</sup> Katja Melamed [Катя Меламед] *Етно-културни процеси в българското общество по данни от езическите некрополи 7-9 век* [Ethno-cultural processes in the Bulgarian society based on data from the pagan necropoleis from seventh to ninth century] PhD dissertation (Sofia: НАИМ-БАН, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Evgenia Komatarova-Balinova [Евгения Коматарова-Балинова], *Хокери и псевдохокери от биритуалните некрополи в Североизточна България* [Crouched and pseudo-crouched burials from the biritual necropoleis in Northeastern Bulgaria] (in press).

<sup>32</sup> Rasho Rashev, Stanislav Stanilov and Stanimir Stoychev [Рашо Рашев, Станислав Станилов и Станимир Стойчев], *Кабюк: ранносредновековен могилен комплекс* [Kabiyuk: early medieval mound complex] (Sofia: Klasika I stil 2014).

body position and variations of the positions of the hands remain constant in the treatment of the complete body.

Sometimes particular grave features with relevant social and religious implications facilitate focused case studies like the work of Ivan Dzambov on the placement of tiles or stones under the head of the deceased in royal centers.<sup>33</sup> Also, the potential existence of archaeologically undetected mortuary practices must be taken into account, including those of various social groups like the anti-materialist dualist sect of the Bogomils.

#### 4. Ethno-archaeology and the anti-transfiguration ritual

Very often when irregularities are detected in the archaeological record, they are automatically characterized as archaic rituals. The label of anti-transfiguration ritual is often used for pagan burials. The contribution of Dimitar Dimitrov is crucial for the understanding of the phenomenon and the relevant academic tradition. He excavated and published some of the necropoleis in Northeastern Bulgaria with the highest frequency of irregularities including the sites of Devnya and Varna-1.<sup>34</sup> Dimitrov identifies the various manipulations of the skeleton as ritual measurements against the harmful dead. He classifies the ritual amputation of the legs and unusual positions as attempts to counter the *orenda* or the spiritual power of individuals based on Veselin Bashevliev's reconstruction of pagan Bulgar beliefs.<sup>35</sup> Soviet

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<sup>33</sup> Ivan Dzambov [иван Джамбов] Някои характерни черти на погребалния обред в Търново през XIII-XIV в. [Some characteristic traits of the funerary rite in Tarnovo in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries] *Сборник студии по история*, Veliko Tarnovo: University of Veliko Tarnovo (1981): 177-199.

<sup>34</sup> Dimitar Dimitrov [Димитър Димитров], "Раннобългарски некропол № 3 при Девня" [Early Bulgar Necropolis No. 3 near Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 8, no. 23 (1972): 45 – 65; Dimitar Dimitrov and Georgi Marinov [Димитър Димитров; Георги Маринов], "Раннобългарски масов гроб при град Девня" [Bulgar mass grave near the town of Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 10, no. 25 (1974): 109 – 43; Dimitar Dimitrov [Димитър Димитров] Старобългарски некропол № 2 при Девня [Old Bulgarian necropolis no 2 near Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 6 (1970).

<sup>35</sup> Veselin Beshevliev [Веселин Бешевлиев] *Вярата на първобългарите [The religion of the Protobulgarians]*, *Годишник на СУ истор.-фил. Факултет* 35 (1939): 1–63.

archaeologist Valeriy Flerov builds on this and implies that it can be seen as ethnic marker for the Bulgars.<sup>36</sup> He saw the tenth and eleventh-century archaeological horizon Sarkel-Devnya 2 stretching from the Danube to Volga and stressed the importance of proving the intentionality of the rite. However, these arguments are based on identifying widespread contemporary deviation from burial rites which fit the archaeologists' bill, and their respective research covers vast areas. The shortcomings of this approach demonstrate the necessity of studying the phenomenon on a regional scale.

Very often when irregularities are detected in the archaeological record, they are automatically characterized as archaic rituals. The label of anti-transfiguration ritual is often used for pagan burials. After the conversion to Christianity these are considered pagan reminiscences, encoded in the mentality of the people. Essentially this reflects an underlying concept of universal unilinear evolution where funerals are viewed as the most conservative cultural tradition linking people from different historical ages.<sup>37</sup> In the words of Yordanka Tschangova these are “throwback from the pagan period, an echo of outgrown funeral tradition.”<sup>38</sup> The use of ethnographic analogies played a big role in the formation of this approach. Also, in the latter half of the twentieth century this notion corresponded to the determinism of scientific Marxism resulting in similar short remarks with limited interpretative potential.

Ethnographic argumentation enters the discussion of deviant burial rites in the Christian context. Peyo Gatev establishes this framework on the basis of his twelve-century

<sup>36</sup> Valeriy Flerov [Валерий Флеров], Обряд обезвреживания погребенных у праболгар (предварительное сообщение) [Anti-transfiguration rite among the Protobulgarians (preliminary observations)], *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 1 (1989): 185.

<sup>37</sup> This cliché in Bulgarian archaeology follows Sergey Tokarev [Сергей Токарев] Ранние формы религии и их развитие [Early forms of religion and their development], (Moscow', 1964), 20.

<sup>38</sup> Yordanka Changova [Йорданка Чангова], Перник [Pernik], vol. 2 (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1983), 181.

finds in Kovachevo.<sup>39</sup> He directly correlates the archaeological data to ethnographic records. He interprets deviant burials as manifestations of an anti-vampire tradition trying to prevent ill-tempered people from becoming undead. Furthermore, following L. Niederle and similar finds from elsewhere in Eastern Europe, he presents anti-vampirism as characteristically Slavic.<sup>40</sup>

Only two short articles aim to give a wider overview of what is considered anti-transfiguration ritual and even they exhibit limited geographic and chronological coverage. Hristina Stoyanova summarizes the known examples of anti-transfiguration ritual from pagan necropoleis in the area of Pliska and Varna.<sup>41</sup> Continuing the existing academic tradition, Stoyanova emphasizes the Bulgars' fear from the returning dead and looks for analogies in the northeast Black Sea region. However, she sees the deviant burials as examples of advanced attempts to separate the dead from the living and sides with Dimitrov who suggests that stone grave covers are element of the separation rites. Although this seems to be over-interpretation of the liminal character of the funerary ritual, it is worth entertaining the idea of gradation in the treatment of certain deceased. She concludes that these cases cannot be seen as anything else but evidence for the existence of an anti-transfiguration ritual recorded ethnographically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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<sup>39</sup> Peyo Gatev [Пейо Гатев], *Средновековно селище и некропол от 12 век при с. Ковачево, Пазарджишки окръг* [Medieval village and cemetery from 12<sup>th</sup> century near Kovachevo, district Pazardzhik] (Sofia: National Archaeological Museum, 1985).

<sup>40</sup> L. Niderle *Life of the old Slavs Zivot starých slovanu*, vol.1, (Praha', 1911): 11.

<sup>41</sup> Hristina Stoyanova [Христина Стоянова], Обредът „обезвреждане на мъртвите” в езическите некрополи (по данни от района на Плиска и Варна) [The ritual against transfiguration of the dead in the pagan necropoleis (based on data from the area of Pliska and Varna)], in *Изследвания по българска средновековна археология. Сборник в чест на проф. Рашо Рашев* [Studies in Bulgarian Medieval Archaeology presented to Prof. Rasho Rashev] ed Pavel Georgiev, Sofia: Faber(2007): 154-166.

Boni Petrunova's article dedicated to the evidence for anti-transfiguration rite from cemeteries is the seminal for the study of this phenomenon in the later medieval period.<sup>42</sup> Petrunova reviews findings from multiple sites in a long-term perspective, but eventually provides few examples with little contextualization and no discussion of larger processes and patterns. Petrunova also relies heavily on ethnographic records and accepts the continuity between medieval and early modern belief systems uncritically. She broadens the range of archaeological indicators for anti-transfiguration practices by pointing out the deposition of amulets or charcoal in graves. In this respect, she acknowledges the variety of practices and downplays its use for ethnic characterization by contrasting it with universal magical symbolism from the "most ancient mythological layers of the human mind". Finally, Petrunova briefly points out that a practical fear from the deceased lies behind the complex ritual system.

Several major problems are combined in the current state of archaeological research on deviant burials in Bulgaria. The first one is the lack of clear definitions and inconsistent theoretical comprehension, largely dominated by ethnocentric culture-historical approach. Naturally, this results in the absence of representative collection of relevant data and its systematic analysis. The situation is rendered more complicated by the fact that most of the evidence for deviant burial rites are scattered across single site reports. Another setback is the random chronological sampling, particularly when it comes to analogy and comparative observations.

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<sup>42</sup> Boni Petrunova [Бони Петрунова], Некрополите от XIII-XVII в. като източник за практикуването на обредите против превъплъщаване [Cemeteries from 13th-17th century as a source on practicing rituals against transfiguration after death], *Конфесия и фолклор* (1998): 67-76.

## 5. Between PR and public intellectual: an archaeological dilemma?

Quite recently David Barrowclough published a paper called “Time to Slay Vampire Burials? The Archaeological and Historical Evidence of Vampires in Europe.”<sup>43</sup> As evident by the title already, he wanted to look behind the popular image of vampires publicly available in mass media and popular culture. A lot of his criticism is in fact reaction to the increasing number of deviant burials from Eastern Europe getting news coverage and the narratives presented by the excavators. Although Barrowclough does not state it explicitly, many of his examples are from Bulgarian sites and his sources come from journalist reports rather than peer-reviewed academic articles. A point that he raises in comparison to the Anglo-Saxon burial from Southwell or Irish burials from Knockvicar criticizes precisely the methodological discrepancy in seeking direct correlation of early modern folklore tradition and much earlier archaeological records. However, his criticism is premature for several reasons. He does not take into account the late dating of his Polish cases which can be matched to contemporary descriptions of anti-vampire rituals. Moreover, he neither seems acquainted with the research tradition on deviant burials nor does he acknowledge the diversity of data. As a result, his argument remains within the same simplistic framework as those he criticizes. Barrowclough risks accusations of academic hubris and entertaining a colonial attitude towards continental archaeology.

Barrowclough’s resentment of vampire publicity (e.g. the case of the so-called Sozopol Vampire) was not an isolated reaction. For instance, Ivan Dukov, director of the Historical Museum in Assenovgrad, gave an interview for online media passionately denying

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<sup>43</sup> David Barrowclough, *Time to Slay Vampire Burials? The Archaeological and Historical Evidence for Vampires in Europe*, Cambridge: Red Dagger Press (2014).



any vampire classifications and trying to promote the term ritual instead.<sup>44</sup> In a subsequent academic publication he cites several unusual burials and identifies them as instances of protective ritual against the possession of the body by evil creatures.<sup>45</sup> It turns out that the academic skepticism is directed towards a word emerging from certain popular beliefs of the past and to a large extent present in contemporary popular culture. Simultaneously, some unearthed deviant burials are presented to the media and missing from the academic limelight. Unfortunately, this contributes to difficulties in assembling usable database for further analysis.

The real problem lies in the non-existent debate about public archaeology in Bulgaria and the inability or reluctance of archaeologists to engage with wider communities. On the long run, this not only fossilizes archaeological knowledge, but endangers cultural heritage protection as well. The issue of deviant graves exposes the failure to interact with the public discourse beyond passively serving the mobilization of cultural identities for political agendas. Politics, in turn, is increasingly interested in the economic contribution of archaeology through cultural tourism or in specialized construction service.<sup>46</sup> Archaeologists must appreciate that the story-telling experience is the greatest asset of their discipline and public attention does not devalue research.<sup>47</sup> Despite its direct impact on the topic, problematizing all aspects of public archaeology is far beyond the scope of this chapter. Human fascination with its own mortality is omnipresent, although rarely explicit. The threatening and uncomfortable reality of death is confronted and explored by the means of

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<sup>44</sup> Ivan Dukov [Иван Дуков] *Няма вампири!* [There are no vampires!], <http://www.blitz.bg/article/38093>, published 25.04.2014, last visited 12.03.2016.

<sup>45</sup> Ivan Dukov [Иван Дуков], Няколко специфични погребални практики от средновековната епоха в Асеновград и региона в светлината на теренни археологически проучвания 2005-2013 [Several specific funerary practices from the medieval period in Assenovgrad and the region in the light of recent excavation], *Стенимахос-Станимака-Асеновград* [Stenimachos-Stanimaka-Assenovgrad] ed. Grigor Boykov, Assenovgrad: Dikov (2014): 62-74.

<sup>46</sup> Jaime Almansa Sánchez To be or not be? Public archaeology as a tool of public opinion and the dilemma of intellectuality *Archaeological Dialogues* 20:1 (2013):6-8.

<sup>47</sup> Cornelius Holtorf, Meta-stories of archaeology, *World Archaeology* 42:3, (2010): 381-393.

religion, news, artwork and science and provoked Jacque Foltyn to call the cadaver “pop culture’s new star”<sup>48</sup>. Archaeology in its representation of past long gone by its material remains turned into a proxy for public consumption. It goes to show, however, that dealing with deviant burials is as relevant today as it was in the Middle Ages.

## 6. Conclusion

The chapter reviewed the question of deviant burial practices in European and Bulgarian literature. The introduction and development of the term in archaeology was traced. It is argued that the term deviant burial has more value than is often recognized. The normative burial customs and the academic tradition around them have been described. The emphasis on ethnic interpretations is believed to be the major reason for the unsatisfactory state of research on the topic. Furthermore, the use of ethnographic analogies has been represented as the main analytical approach in the study of deviant burials so far. Finally, a view on the value of the deviant burials as cultural resource open to the public was offered.

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<sup>48</sup> Jacques Foltyn Dead famous and dead sexy: Popular culture, forensics, and the rise of the corpse *Mortality* 13 (2008): 154.

# Chapter 3 – The Ultimate Deviant Rite? Medieval Mass Graves in Bulgaria

## 1. Introduction

The title of the current chapter asks if the mass grave can be considered the ultimate deviant burial. It is important to distinguish the mass graves from the collective burials. The obvious characteristic of the mass grave is the number of dead bodies disposed in it. In the current thesis, a mass grave should have five or more different individuals. Excavations of mass graves, especially related to more recent historical episodes, receive more recognition with the advancements in forensic and conflict archaeology. Such projects have stressed on the moral consequences from archaeological practice and emphasized the need to enable culturally appropriate funerary rites to be enacted and to bring some psychological and emotional comfort for the surviving relatives.<sup>49</sup> While this is objectively impossible when we are dealing with medieval mass graves, one can assume that people from a period in time when individual burial was the norm would express very similar attitudes. The current chapter will use the example of two mass graves from northeastern Bulgaria. A detailed look on the archaeological and anthropological characteristics on the principle *pars pro toto* will assess the importance of both sites as historical monuments and representatives of deviant burial customs.

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<sup>49</sup> Rebecca Saunders, Tell the truth. The archaeology of human right abuses in Guatemala and the former Yugoslavia, in *Matériel culture. The archaeology of twentieth century conflict* ed. John Schofield, Coleen Beck, William Johnson, 103-115 (London: Routledge, 2002)

## 2. The mass grave near Devnya

### 2.1. Archaeological context and grave structure

The round (circular) mass grave from Devnya belongs to the necropolis designated as Devnya-3 and was excavated in 1968-1969 by a team led by Dimitar Dimitrov<sup>50</sup>. The bi-ritual necropolis is associated with the early medieval settlements and fortress that had emerged in the vicinity of the late Roman city of Marcianopolis, the necropoleis Devnya 1 and 2, and the cremation necropolis near Razdelna to the south. This densely inhabited area is important, because the other necropoleis with inhumations, particularly Devnya 3, provide a large number of individual deviant burials.

The mass grave is located in the northeastern periphery of the necropolis (App. A Fig.12). The liminal position in comparison to the rest of the graves is important. Grave 114 from the latest Christian phase of the necropolis is situated in superposition above the round mass grave. This is the result of the continuous use and expansion of the cemetery and perhaps the earlier structure falling out of memory. Thus, the stratigraphy provides *terminus ante quem* of the late ninth – early tenth century for the mass grave. Uwe Fiedler dates the grave before the ninth century on the basis of a single earring<sup>51</sup>, but this is problematic for

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<sup>50</sup> The following description and analysis are based on rectified data from Dimitar Dimitrov [Димитър Димитров], “Раннобългарски некропол № 3 при Девня” [Early Bulgar Necropolis No. 3 near Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 8, no. 23 (1972): 45 – 65; Dimitar Dimitrov and Georgi Marinov [Димитър Димитров; Георги Маринов], “Раннобългарски масов гроб при град Девня” [Bulgar mass grave near the town of Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 10, no. 25 (1974): 109 – 43; I.Yordanov [Й. Йорданов], “Антропологическо Изследване на костения материал от раннобългарски масов гроб при град Девня” [Anthropological Study of the Osteological Material from the Bulgar Mass Grave near the town of Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 12, no. 25 (1976): 171 – 273; J. Aladjov, “Die Religion der heidnischen Protobulgaren im Lichte einiger archäologischer Denkmäler,” *Praehistorische Zeitschrift*, 60 (1985): 70-92.

<sup>51</sup> Fiedler, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern*, 319, Taf. 106/2

two reasons: it is of a very simple type with long chronological presence and a single unspecific find hardly has dating value.

The grave pit itself is a peculiar structure. The feature is almost perfectly ring-shaped, dug into yellow clay and has an outer diameter between 5.48m (N-S) and 5.78m (W-E), inner diameter of 3.06 (N-S) and 3, 34 (W-E), and maximum depth from the topsoil 3.40m. The width of the pit is tapered from the top towards the bottom and from 1.25m is as narrow as 0.2m at some places (App. A. Fig.13). According to the archaeologist, the pit was carefully prepared for a previously calculated number of people and was filled not long afterwards at once, which is attested to by the homogenous fill of humus with some inclusions of yellow clay.

## 2.2. Treatment of the deceased

### 2.2.1. *Demographic characterization*

The bodies of up to 76 individuals were disposed of inside the feature. The analysis of the osteological material provides a detailed account about the demographic character of the people buried in the mass grave. The first distinguishable pattern is the far greater number of females as demonstrated by Fig. 14 (App. A). The significance of this pattern increases even more when it is compared to the age composition of the people buried there (App. A Fig. 15). The biological age at the time of death corresponding to infants, juveniles and young adults is dominant. Together they contribute 79% of all individuals. The age profile of the male group is significantly different. From all six male individuals, only one is under 15 years old, one is above 60 and is the oldest individual, two are unidentified and two reached adulthood (App. A Fig. 15.1.). Interestingly enough, one of these two adults suffered from osteoporosis<sup>52</sup> that

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<sup>52</sup> Osteoporosis is a disease where decreased bone strength increases the risk of a broken bone

probably disabled him. The individuals' age at the time of death in the mass grave fits the expected proportions of age categories for attritional and catastrophic mortality regimes (App. A Fig. 16). The mortality rate in Devnya also corresponds to the demographic composition of civilian casualties during armed conflicts as recorded for prehistoric and modern warfare mass grave sites.<sup>53</sup>

Another important characteristic is the ratio of artificial skull deformation among the deceased (App. A Fig.17). The practice of modifying the skull of the newborn is not unknown from other sites.<sup>54</sup> However, the frequency of 76% in the mass grave is remarkably high. In comparison, artificial skull deformation was recorded in 40% of the cases in Topola, 22% in Devnya-1 and in 14% in Novi Pazar. This practice is usually seen as one of the markers of Bulgar populations with analogies among other nomad and semi-nomad cultures like the Huns or the Mongols<sup>55</sup>. The social significance of artificial skull deformation is yet to be understood, but arguably this somatic modification signifies particular social status and identity.

### 2.2.2. *Pathologies*

Pathologies exhibited by the skeletal remains from the mass grave in Devnya-3 provide some insights into the living conditions and the mode of death. Besides the above mentioned osteoporosis in one of the individuals, one female (No.74) was diagnosed with plagiocephaly<sup>56</sup>. She was further treated to cause prominent artificial skull deformation.

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Chamberlain, *Demography in Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77-78.

<sup>54</sup> Petar Boev [Петър Боев], Върху изкуствените деформации на главата [On the artificial skull deformations], *Известия на Института по Морфология 2* (1957): 263-287

<sup>55</sup> Uwe Fiedler, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern des 6. bis 9. Jahrhunderts an der unteren Donau* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 1992), 331-32.

<sup>56</sup> Plagiocephaly, also known as flat head syndrome, is a condition characterized by an asymmetrical distortion (flattening of one side) of the skull.

Another characteristic trait is the general good dental health and the minimal number of caries in the skeletons.

Many skeletons demonstrate evidence of an extremely violent death. Flat cut marks from the edges of sharp cutting weapons (perhaps sabers) are displayed on bones in No. 6, 13, 31, 38, and 65. Particularly clear are the cut marks on No. 68, an adult female. Her skull is damaged on the left supraorbital ridge (*Arcus superciliaris*), the left cheekbone (*Zygoma*) and the mastoid part of the left temporal bone (*Os temporale*). Another individual with distinctive cut marks is No. 5, an adult female with artificial skull deformation. Her occipital bone (*Os occipitale*) was wounded near the *Foramen magnum*. Additionally many skeletons were subject to decapitation and severe mutilations, including multiple instances of disintegration. Probably all the victims suffered similar fate. Although the level of violence suffered varies among the individuals, they were killed more or less simultaneously and perhaps at a single location not far away from the place of disposal. Although injuries, including fatal ones, often leave no trace on the skeleton, the variations in the traces left from the massacre, notably the use of violence and mutilation, suggest selective and differentiated treatment within the sample.

### 2.2.3. *Finds and grave goods*

Small finds are almost absent from the mass grave. One notable artifact is an iron ellipsis-shaped belt buckle found near the right foot of No. 35. Three more iron belt buckles were discovered. There are two spherical ceramic beads associated with No. 24. Two copper earrings belonging to No. 71 were found *in situ*. One of them was decorated with small conical bone bead. Two corroded iron knives were also excavated from the pit. Occasional potshreds were found, including Roman ones, but these were probably transferred with the soil fill. Uwe Fiedler dates the grave before the ninth century on the basis of a single

earring<sup>57</sup>, but this is problematic for two reasons: it is of a very simple type with long chronological presence and a single unspecific find hardly has dating value. Finally, disarticulated animal bones from one cattle and two sheep have been recorded. The limited finds are small dress fittings and personal items of little value. This neglect of standard funerary preparations as opposed to the deliberate preparation of a grave pit with its special shape points to a rather unusual and negative meaning ascribed to the performance of burial rites. Such conclusion is further supported by the treatment of the deceased.

#### 2.2.4. *Isolating types of deviant burials*

The way in which the victims were disposed of creates an impression of the random clearance of the murder site. As noted above, the disposal of the bodies demonstrates a series of maltreatment implemented around the time of death and burial. Sometimes types of maltreatment were combined, and, importantly, many forms of maltreatment are not archaeologically or anthropologically recognizable. The types identified on the remains from the mass grave in Devnya-3 are tied limbs, disintegration, decapitation, prone position, contracted and crouched position, position lying on the side, and weighed down by stones (App. A Fig. 18). Some of these may have been caused by the nature of disposal, especially in narrow or dense parts of the pit but others were intentional treatment and are of particular interest for our study.

The orientation of the dead is haphazard and is dependent more on their position inside the round pit rather than any cosmological appreciation of the cardinal directions. However, many skeletons are in direct stratigraphic relationship to each other reflecting the micro-chronological sequence of their deposition (App. A Fig. 19). After the initial placement of several bodies at the bottom, a preference for bunching the victims together in

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<sup>57</sup> Fiedler, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern*, 319, Taf. 106/2



heaps is identifiable. This practice left some space unused and resulted in the greater density of skeletal remains in the western half of the round pit than in the eastern half. It is against the logic of most mass graves to save time and effort by maximizing the use of limited space. It is justifiable to suggest that such disrespectful treatment was another demonstration of social denial and a practice to make an example out of the victims.

The evidence of restraint, both legs and arms tied, is a sign that the deceased were felons. Tied limbs are the most common treatment in the mass grave and are often recorded together with other practices without any discernible preference (App. A Fig. 20). Contracted position on the side may be considered as another sign of restricting the movement through bounding. This is probably the case for No. 63, a pregnant woman around 16-18 years old with artificial skull deformation, whose body was placed at the bottom. Tied lower limbs and severe mutilation are also evident in 4 out of 6 males.

The individuals placed on the bottom of the pit, such as No. 63, are perhaps the most important for our analysis. On one hand, the very fact of their literally lowest position has to be accounted for. On the other hand, these are the only skeletons found complete, hence giving the clearest account of the variety in treatment. The 8 individuals there represent around half the instances when prone, fixation with stone or side burial is recorded (App. A Fig.20). The prone position and body disintegration show a tendency to correspond with artificial skull deformation, but it should be noted that deformations are quite common among all the victims (App. A Fig.21). Stone fixation is combined equally with prone and position on the side in this site and is generally rare. Weighing down here is secondary practice, an additional element of maltreatment and therefore can be considered another kind of distinction between deviant burials within the mass grave. The perfect example to illustrate this point is No. 74. She was 30-35 year old woman with plagiocephaly and distinctive

artificial skull deformation. She was placed in prone position at the bottom of the grave with her right hand under her body and the left one next to the head. Her body was tightly covered with 49 flat stones with the exception of her head and left hand. The last example of prone burials is No. 53, a 15-18 year old female with prominent artificial skull deformation. Her head is thrown back in an unnatural way, the hands were flexed at the elbows under the body and the legs were also flexed. All these are symptoms of cadaveric spasm and high nervous tension upon death, which suggest live burial.

Finally, decapitations seem to form a group of their own displaying internal variations in the mode of deposition but without any clear age-specific pattern (App. A Fig. 22). Decapitation is sometimes combined with other mutilations of the postcranial skeleton (App. A Fig. 23).

## 2.3. Discussion

The varied categories of deviant burials exhibited within a single mass grave further strengthen the impression of formalized killing with selective employment of diverse methods of killing. It is plausible that the choice behind the mode of death has been dictated by the association of each individual to a particular social group or to a particular action or behavior condemned by society. As the victims did not receive normal burial, it is clear that the massacre burial was undertaken by the perpetrators of the slaughter rather than the victims' own kinsmen. The archaeological record suggests the remains of judicially sanctioned execution probably due to the felon-like treatment of the victims. The mass grave from Devnya-3 shares many functional characteristics with the execution cemeteries known

in English scholarship.<sup>58</sup> The main differences can be explained by the short time span of the site-formative event.

The probable cause of such a horrific deed necessitates the historical interpretation of the archaeological record. The lack of absolute dates for any of the skeletons is unfortunate, but there is sufficient evidence to speculate on the matter. Some information, like the presence of animal bones or the sexing of the victims, has been altered to imply one guess or another. Various proposals have been made, but they all tend to seek a strictly religious ritual in the archaeological record: Dimitrov explains the mass grave as a sacrifice as part of Vladimir-Rassate's (889-893) attempt to re-establish pagan religion in Bulgaria at the end of ninth century.<sup>59</sup> This hypothesis is accepted by Zhivko Aladzov who emphasizes the solar semantics of the ring shape and links it to the cult of Tangra.<sup>60</sup> An extremely speculative explanation is provided by A. Kaloyanov on the basis of much later ethnographic data connecting the mass grave to a sacrifice around the time of raise to power of Khan Telets in 760.<sup>61</sup> Katja Melamed provides the most reasonable interpretation on the basis of the *Responsa Nicolai pape ad consulta Bulgarorum*.<sup>62</sup> Following the account describing the aftermath of the rebellion against Boris-Michael and the conversion to christianity in 865, she

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<sup>58</sup> T. Dickinson, *Cuddesdon and Dorchester-on-Thames* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports 1974), 23; A. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44-45.

<sup>59</sup> Dimitrov and Marinov, "Раннобългарски масов гроб при град Девня": 125.

<sup>60</sup> Aladjov, *Die Religion der heidnischen Protobulgaren*, 88.

<sup>61</sup> A. Kaloyanov [A. Калоянов], *Старобългарското шаманство* [Old Bulgarian Shamanism] (Sofia: ROD, 1995): 141-44.

<sup>62</sup> Katja Melamed [Катя Меламед], Към тълкуването на масовия гроб от некропола Девня 3 [Towards interpretation of the mass grave from Devnya 3], *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 4 (2007): 147-152; Katja Melamed [Катя Меламед], *Етно-културни процеси в българското общество по данни от езическите некрополи VII-IX век* [Ethno-cultural processes in the Bulgar society based on data from the agan necropoleis from 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries] , PhD dissertation, National Archaeological Institute with Museum – Sofia, 2014, 87-89.

connects the mass grave to the severe punishment of the aristocratic houses that raised arms against him.<sup>63</sup> To her opinion joined Kamen Stanev.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, the archaeological and anthropological data matches the account from Chapter 17 where the events are described in the *Responsa*. Particularly important is the information on the execution of all the leaders along with their children and wives.<sup>65</sup> Having in mind the demographic character of the mass grave, it is plausible to suggest that the people buried in the mass grave at Devnya-3 were executed for treason after the unsuccessful armed rebellion. It is also logical that the conspicuous lack of male individuals in active fighting age is due to their involvement in combat away from their families. The historical sources inform us that the participants of the rebellion were from the outer provinces (*comitates*). They included representatives from all strata in Bulgar society and *primates*, *maiores*, and *mediocres* among the nobility. Although the *Responsa* claims only the leaders (and their families) were executed and most people were freed in an act of mercy, the differential treatment during the execution and burial demonstrates a complex judicial system. Especially in the case of burial practices it is clear that the performative potential of the funerary event has been thoroughly exploited to project a negative image onto the victims. This also supports the existence of a

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<sup>63</sup> For an overview see, Daniel Ziemann, "The Rebellion of the Nobles against the Baptism of Khan Boris (865-866)," in *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium 2: Byzantium, Pliska, and the Balkans*, ed. J. Henning, 613-24 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007)

<sup>64</sup> Kamen Stanev [Камен Станев] Бунтът срещу покръстването в светлината на масовия гроб от Девня [The rebellion against Christianity in the light of the mass grave from Devnya], in *Заговори и преврати в историята [Coups and intrigues in history]* ed. Vladimir Stanev, Veliko Tarnovo: Faber, (2008): 25-28

<sup>65</sup> Chapter 17 in Hincmar of Reims, "Responsa Nicolai I papae ad consulta Bulgarorum," in *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, vol. 6: *Hincmari archiepiscopi Remensis epistolae*, ed. E. Perels, (MGH Epp. 8 (Berlin: 1925), 577: "Igitur referentes, qualiter divina clementia Christianam religionem perceperitis qualiterque populum vestrum baptizari omnem feceritis, qualiter autem illi, postquam baptizati fuerunt, insurrexerint unanimiter cum magna ferocitate contra vos, dicentes non bonam vos eis legem tradidisse, volentes etiam vos occidere et regem alium constituere, et qualiter vos divina cooperante potentia adversus eos praeparati a maximo usque ad modicum superaveritis et manibus vestris detentos habueritis qualiterque omnes primates eorum atque maiores cum omni prole sua gladio fuerint interempti, mediocres vero seu minores nihil mali pertulerint: de his nosse desideratis, qui vita privati sunt, utrum ex illis peccatum habeatis. Quod utique sine peccato evasum non est nec sine culpa vestra i eri potuit, ut proles, quae in consilio parentum non fuit nec adversus vos arma sustulisse probatur, innocens cum nocentibus trucidaretur"

law enforcement system designated to control people of certain social identities and, in this case, based on involvement in the rebellion.

Finally, accepting Melamed's interpretation, some ritual and religious aspects of the site should be brought to the forefront. The uprising targeted Boris and Christianity and perhaps was undertaken by members of aristocracy with not only anti-Byzantine sentiments but social position based on both military and religious functions. Some titles known from the epigraphic monuments like *ichirguboil kolobar* (inscription No. 65), *bagatur boil kolobar* (inscription No. 69) or *kana boila kolobar* (inscription No. 14) probably designated precisely such people.<sup>66</sup> The strong link between the secular and divine power in the political ideology of the Bulgar state, exemplified in the cult of the khan in the pre-Christian period, is of profound importance here. Undoubtedly these political actions had certain spiritual connotations adding additional gravity and meaning to them.

### 3. Mass grave No. 80 from Kyulevcha

#### 3.1. Archaeological context and grave structure

The biritual necropolis in Kyulevcha was excavated in 1971-1974 by Zhivka Vazharova who also published the results.<sup>67</sup> The necropolis is located on top of a hill in the Sraelu locality to the west from the modern village. Altogether 98 graves were excavated in this completely unearthened necropolis. Unknown number of graves was destroyed before the

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<sup>66</sup> [Stepanov, T.] *Власт и авторитет в ранносредновековна България* [Power and Authority in Early Medieval Bulgaria] (Sofia: Agato, 1999), 87-88

<sup>67</sup> The following description and interpretation are based on rectified data from her primary publication [Zhivka Vazharova] *Живка Въжарова, Славяни и прабългари по данни от некрополите от VI-XI в. на територията на България* [Slavs and Protobulgarians according to data from the necropoleis from 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries on the territory of Bulgaria], 1976, Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, pp. 126-133, supplemented by Georgi Ikononov [Георги Икономов], Палеопатологични изследвания на колективно погребение на 26 българи от края на VIII век [Paleopathological studies on the collective burial of 26 Bulgars from the end of 8<sup>th</sup> century], in: [Vasil Gyuzelev] Васил Гюзелев ed. *История, изкуство и култура на ранносредновековна България* [History, Art and Culture of Early Medieval Bulgaria], (Sofia: Narodna Prosveta, 1981): 244-251

beginning of the excavations due to construction work in the area. The necropolis is dated to the eight-ninth century. Several graves are from much earlier age, probably the early Bronze Age. There is no other data on the archaeological and cultural context of the necropolis in its vicinity.

The mass grave is in the western periphery belonging to a group of graves separated from the rest of the necropolis. In the cluster and on the site in general no intercutting between graves was detected.

The grave has irregular rectangular shape (App. A Fig.24). The length of the pit is 10, 2m with depth around 0, 6m. The pit is oriented W-E and has initial wide 1, 7m, but suddenly narrows down around the center and is only 0, 65m wide in its eastern end. The recorded plan of the pit, particularly the angle of the narrowing to the north, gives some ground to believe that the rectangular western section was initially dug out. The eastern enlargement was necessary when it was realized that the space available will not be enough to contain all victims. This change indicates that the intended structure was dug in great haste and even had to be finished faster than anticipated.

## 3.2. Treatment of the deceased

### 3.2.1. *Anthropological observations: demography and pathology*

In the mass grave were disposed the bodies of 25 individuals. The demographic profile of the group is very consistent. All the bodies in the mass grave represent males in their twenties, or in other words belonging to age categories *adultus I* or *juvenilis II*.

Observations on the pathology of the skeletal remains reveal evidence on another common thing between the individuals. All the skeletons had cut-marks and traces from *perimortem* injuries suggesting the violent combat circumstances of their death. Two men had suffered particularly severe deaths. The first of them, individual No.3, was hit by an arrow at least once with the arrowhead remaining inside the body by the pelvis. The arrowhead was the only piece of attacking weaponry found inside the mass grave and it is bent from the impact. However, this injury was not the immediate cause of death, although probably decreased the fighting capabilities of the individual. The body was cut into two pieces by a sword or other cutting blade at the waist. Another man, individual No. 9, was decapitated and his skull was found elsewhere in the grave.

### 3.2.2. *Position and orientation*

The treatment of the deceased is also varied, probably due to the rush in the burial activities. The position of the bodies can be described as supine, but almost all skeletons have variant positions of the limbs. This is most likely a sign that the bodies were placed in the pit with less care about the position. Two skeletons (individuals No. 16 and 17) are placed on the side to maximize the use of space in the narrow half of the pit.

Same motivation can be ascribed in the orientation of the disposed bodies. In the western end individuals No. 1-10 are placed according to the norm of the pagan period burials following N-S orientation. The remaining victims are buried oriented E-W. Most of them are disposed in the narrow eastern half of the ditch, but one individual was placed on top of the skeletons in the western part. Interesting is the position of skeleton No. 3 in the western half of the pit. The accepted orientation of the body is N-S in line with the rest of the group. However, because of the characteristic pathology the upper part of the body is placed by the lower skeleton, but with orientation W-E.

After examining the available plan and photos, an analysis of the stratigraphic relationship between the bodies confirms the observation that the disposal of the bodies started from the west to the east (App. A Fig.25). The skeletons can be categorized into two groups. The western group is closer to the normative rites and there is less superposition between the skeletons, while the eastern had to be adjusted to the narrow side of the pit. The compression of the bodies in the eastern section and the findings from the western group described below can indicate difference in the importance of individuals from the two groups. This can serve to illustrate once again the incompleteness of the grave structure and the funeral custom itself.

### 3.2.3. *Finds and grave goods*

The finds from the grave are of relatively high number and are associated with warrior culture in archaeology, thus demonstrating consistency with expected demographic and pathological profile of the deceased. The forty-one finds are not distributed equally and yet more than half of the skeletons were found with artifacts. Weaponry is not found in the mass grave and this is not a surprise as the valuable metal items were almost always collected before burial. Exception is the single arrowhead discussed above. Five knives found around the bodies might have been used as weapons, but their primary function is as tools. Probably they were attached to belts and stripes. The dress and minor objects left with the bodies reveal some degree of respect, another argument that the fallen soldiers were buried by their own side. The same practice was usually applied to armor. In Kyulevcha are found several iron rings from mail armor. Other finds include three iron S-shaped fire strikers and stirrup elements. The single piece of adornment is the bronze ear ring found by the skull of individual No.8. The artifact belongs to a very simple type with wide chronological distribution, but is important reminder that not all medieval adornments are gender-specific.



The elements of the belt are receiving most attention. Buckles and fittings made from copper alloy and iron are found associated with several individuals. The importance of the belt decoration in the culture of semi-nomad societies and early states like the Danubian Khanate has often been discussed. These finds are the main chronological indicator and are important signs of warrior identity, arguably used as military insignia. The belt of individual No.3 is the most distinctive with its Avar-style bronze lyre-shaped buckle and bronze pendants and fittings.<sup>68</sup> The belt finding, even though is not the most lavish one, is still of fine quality and is outstanding within the context of the mass grave.

### 3.3. Discussion

The discussion of the date and the historical interpretation of the mass grave in Kyulevcha are inevitably entangled. The typo-chronological analysis of the belt garnish from the mass grave dictates the debate. The proposed dating for the object varies between the late 8<sup>th</sup> century and the late 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>69</sup>. However, the contextualization of the site makes it more likely to accept the earlier date for *terminus post quem* of the mass grave<sup>70</sup>. Probably the mass grave is related to a battle during the campaign of Nicephore I Genik towards Pliska in 811. The graves of the necropolis are contemporaneous and the site was a visible landmark in use at the time of the burial. The deliberate decision to bury them near the communal burial ground is important. It is uncertain if the site selection is identity-related or simply this was the nearest necropolis to the battlefield. However, the treatment of the deceased suggests that the fallen warriors were buried by their own side, but in great heist. This confirms the

<sup>68</sup> [Stanislav Stanilov] Станислав Станилов, Памятники аварского типа в староболгарской культуре, *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 3 (1997): 195

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, contra, Uwe Fiedler, *Studien zu Gräberfeldern des 6. Bis 9. Jahrhunderts an der unteren Donau*, Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 1992, p. 318

<sup>70</sup> [Kamen Stanev] Камен Станев, Масов гроб 80 от Кюлевча-опит за историческа интерпретация [Mass Grave No. 80 from Kyulevcha – an attempt for historical interpretation], *История* 5-6 (2008): 58-59. However, some of the arguments of the author like that the Byzantines were leaving their dead unburied after battle are presumptuous and exercises in logic based on written evidence.

information for fast advancement of the Byzantine army and the initial military struggle of the Bulgars against the invasion. In terms of deviant burial customs this mass grave is very different from the one in Devnya-3. The variety and severity of applied deviant practices is lesser in Kyulevcha. The social status and identities are strikingly different and the sex of the individuals is illustrating the point perfectly. Nonetheless, the mass grave in Kyulevcha also reflects a situation of significant social stress with menace to the state and social organization on highest level. The death during unsuccessful fight was the main factor for choosing a mass burial that initially tried to follow the normative rites as much as possible. Eventually, the negative factors of the ongoing war prevailed in the funerary considerations. This site demonstrates in quite dramatic fashion the impact that public recognition of practical necessities and negative social conditions that may outweigh the adoption of normative burial.

## **4. Conclusion**

The two mass graves in Devnya and Kyulevcha were described here. The interpretations offered attempted to link them to historically known events, both from the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The sites were formed in quite different circumstances leaving their print in the material remains. Despite their principal differences, features from both sites can be drawn to inform us about the deviant burial rites in general. While the mass grave from Devnya-3 enabled the identification of practices to be examined in individual graves, the study of Kyulevcha demonstrates best the decision-making principles in mortuary behavior.

# Chapter 4 – Deviant Burial Rites in Individual Graves

## 1. Introduction

Series of quantitative and comparative analyses of sampled individual graves were made to obtain qualitative characterization of deviant burial rites. The results will be presented in this chapter. The four groups (prone, decapitation, fixation and mutilation) are discussed separately with detailed accounts on their chronology, distribution, grave structures, grave goods and other characteristics. Further categorization is proposed for each group. Some burials featuring more than one element of the deviant burial rites appear in more than one group. Indication of the correlation with other deviant rites is provided for each type of body treatment. The indicated dates should not be regarded absolute. Rather they suggest probable temporal proximity of individual graves. Absolute dating techniques, like radiocarbon dating, are extremely rarely applied, even though they could enable more elaborate analysis for deviant and isolated burials. The anthropological analysis of the human remains is far from satisfactory, but an effort has been made to represent age and sex profiles on the most reliable data.

## 2. Prone burials

Prone or face-down position is generally accepted as clear sign of special treatment of the body. Despite the variability of positions known from grave evidence, the placement of the dead person in prone position remains a rare practice in medieval Bulgarian archaeology and even on global scale. To some extent it is also the most transparent deviant burial rite, because it is highly unlikely for prone position to take place due to post-depositional factors

and changes.<sup>71</sup> It is also naturally the opposite of the supine position, which is by far the most predominant in the inhumation graves in medieval Bulgaria. Thus, prone positioning of the body must be accepted as a deliberate act.<sup>72</sup>

Prone position burial rites are indeed very rare. Up to now, sixteen prone burials from twelve sites are known. In the catalogue they appear under numbers 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 36, 40, 42, 43, 69, 75, 90, 92, 93, 107, and 108. Recorded prone burials contribute between 0.25% and 5% on individual sites and altogether they form 0.9% of the graves on these sites.

The prone burials are known in two types, depending on variations in skeletal position:

I. Complete prone burials. This type consists of eight instances (No. 5, 6, 8, 11, 36, 42, 43, and 107). The double grave from Hauza (No. 69) is provisionally added to this count, because of the analogous grave structure and body treatment to the prone burial in Kyulevcha (No. 8).

II. Head in prone position. This type has two subtypes, namely:

A. The rest of the body in supine position. There are six known cases (No. 40, 75, 90, 92, 93, and 108). It is also an indication for decapitation.

B. The rest of the body is in crouched position. It is documented in only one case from Topola (No. 4).

## 2.1. Chronology

The chronology of prone burials is indicated in Table 1.

<sup>71</sup> Reynolds, Andrew *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 69

<sup>72</sup> David Willson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 81

Date	Frequency	Catalogue number
650-750	0	N/A
750-850	4	No. 4, 5, 6, 8
850-950	3	No. 11, 36, 40
950-1050	3	No. 42, 43, 69
1050-1150	0	N/A
1150-1250	1	No. 75
1250-1350	5	No. 90, 92, 93, 107, 108
1350-1450	0	N/A

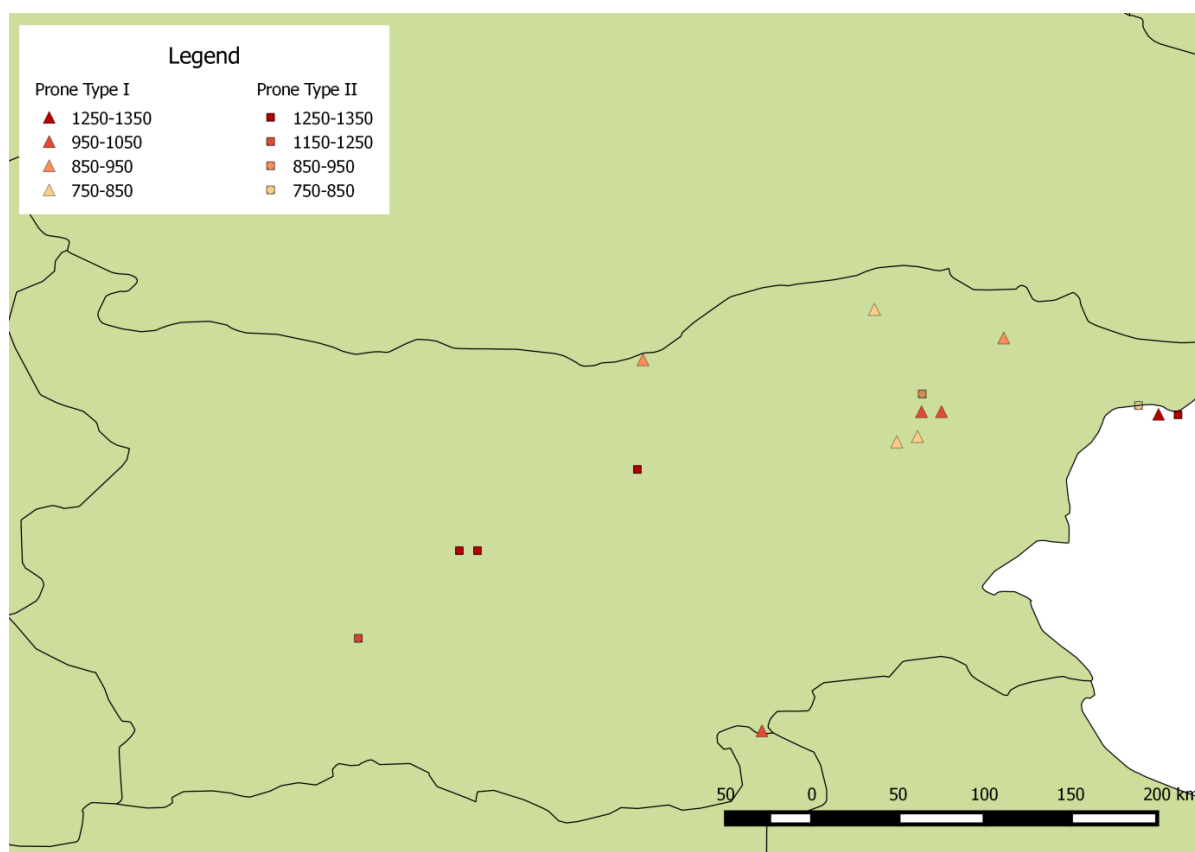
*Table 1 Relative chronology of prone burials from medieval sites in Bulgaria.*

The chronological development exhibits some correlation to the types of prone position burials. The phase between the eighth and the early eleventh century represents a stable practice dominated by Type I burials and roughly corresponds to the historical period of the First Bulgarian Tsardom. The only known case of Type IIB burial also belongs to the early Bulgar period. The practice re-emerges as Type IIA probably in the twelfth century and experiences peak in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. In this phase there is only one case of a complete prone burial (No. 107). Historically, this development matches the late Byzantine domination and the Second Bulgarian Tsardom.

## 2.2. Distribution

The change of patterns demonstrated by chronology is also evident in the geographical distribution (Fig. 1). The place and role of deviant burials in the landscape will be discussed in more detail later.

The type of sites where prone burials are found merits attention. The sample is more or less evenly distributed between urban and rural contexts. Biritual necropoleis from open settlement and rural landscapes contain five of the prone burials, while Christian rural cemeteries contain two prone burials. Eight prone burials can be found in urban contexts, and 4 of them are located in monastic graveyards open to lay people (No. 40, 90, 92, 93). The deviant burials in monastic context all belong to Type IIA, but one of them dates to the late ninth-tenth century.



*Fig. 1 Prone burials from medieval sites in Bulgaria*

## 2.3. Grave structure and orientation

The preferred grave structure is quite consistent and generally standard. Simple rectangular grave pits are used in twelve cases with remains in a coffin in one (No.90) and a tile placed beneath the head in No. 92. One of them has a stone cist (No. 43) and round pits are recorded twice (No. 8 and 69).

The grave orientation differs from the norm characteristic for their respective site in four cases, which constitute quarter of the sample. These prone burials are oriented north-south (No. 36), southwest-northeast (No.6), northwest-southeast (No. 5), and east-west (No. 40). Notably, deviation from standard orientation is combined with the rite in the graves belonging to the first phase, and is characteristic for the pagan and early Christian period.

## 2.4. Demography: age and sex

Presently, the age and sex of only half of the individuals is determined and available. Out of all prone burials two are identified as female, one probable female, three male and two probable male. The current data, thus, presents a ratio of about 2:1 more males buried in prone position than females. Regarding age, three of the analyzed individuals have biological age *adultus* (21-40), two are *juvenilis* II (15-20), and one belongs to the group *infans* II (6-10 years).

## 2.5. Grave goods and animal remains

In terms of inventory, prone burials are generally poor. Potsherds were found in two graves (No. 40 and 49). Earrings are found twice: copper alloy earring come from No. 92, while the woman in No. 49 had two gilded earrings discovered in situ. Her grave is the richest as also brocaded textile and a copper spherical button were unearthed. Charcoal was present in the fill in only one grave (No. 40). Animal remains in these graves pose interesting questions. They are generally missing from the graves with prone burials, but in one case (No.11) the animal skeleton is present in articulated form. The sheep skeleton (animal bone group) is covered with a stone, a direct resemblance to the fixation rite used in human deviant graves.

## 2.6. Correlation with other deviant burial rites

There are various combinations of prone burials with other attributes of deviant burial rites. Besides the type IIA, decapitation is part of the disintegration of the individual in Kyulevcha (No.8). Mutilation of the body is recorded in one other instance (No. 36) and fixation by stone was part of the rite in the case of No. 90. There are also four cases of tied limbs indicating coercion (No. 8, 42, 43, 69), all complete prone burials. Generally, prone



burials tend to be combined with other types of deviant burial, but rarely with more than one additional element.

In comparison to the prone positioned skeletons from the mass grave in Devnya-3, the individual instances of this deviant rite present significant similarities. The most indicative is the level of correlation with other categories of unusual treatment, notably tied limbs. Without doubt the closest parallel is the individual from Kyulevcha (No. 8), where the position is complimented by bodily disintegration, the shape and location of the grave, and chronological proximity. Differences compared to prone burials from the mass grave include the lack of artificial skull deformation, as well as different age and sex pattern. However, all these are unique characteristics found in the mass grave in Devnya-3 and are most probably the result of specific historical circumstances.

### **3. Fixation of the corpse**

The fixation of the corpse is also referred to as stoning or weighing down in the archaeological literature. It is the practice of placing a heavy or sometimes symbolically significant object on top of the body. The manner of direct contact between the skeletal remains and the fixation object is crucial for the recognition of this deviant burial rite. The presence of stones around the body and in the grave fill is not necessarily part of the funerary rites and most likely is a result from the geology of the area or the structure of the grave. Sometimes building materials were used to secure the position of certain body parts. Essentially, the fixation as deviant rite is following the same principle, but symbolically ensures the proper place of the corpse inside the grave. Relevant archeological issue is to what extent the stones were directly placed on the body (fixation) or on the burial (with separating layer of soil between the body and the stones). This is an issue, as reports about these graves are not always clear about this. Also in the case of fixation with metal objects

the clearly stated information on the position of the object is even more important. A sickle or a plough in the grave can also be “ordinary” grave good, not simply tool of fixation. The two can only be separated if we have got detailed documentation on the position of the object and the body. Thus, evidence of fixation relies on more or less subjective judgment. This means that some cases should be taken with pinch of salt, but also that many other instances of such deviant rite have remained unrecorded.

Fixation of the corpse is registered in forty cases across twenty-one sites. They can be found in the catalogue under entries No. 12, 14-16, 21-29, 47-51, 54-57, 67, 68, 70, 72, 76, 80, 82-87, 89, 90, 94, 95, 112, 116. They constitute 2.6 % of all graves on the sites where this deviant burial rite is detected. Excluding sites with high concentration of deviant rites and limited number of excavated graves like Tsarkvishte, Skalishte, Hauza and Gradishte, the highest occurrence of the fixation rite is in the sites Devnya 1-3. 9.3% of the graves in Devnya 1 display evident fixation, 4% in Devnya 2, and 1.3% of the individual graves in Devnya 3, making altogether fifteen cases in the current sample. The cemetery on the acropolis in Perperikon has a high score: 6.66% of all graves there contain fixation burials.

In Pliska, Varna 1, Sakardza, Anevsko kale and Sevtopolis the percentage varies between 1.3% and 1.8%. In Bdintsi, Durankulak, Sedlari, Kovachevo, Tarnovo, Pernik, and Plovdiv fixation burials constitute less than 1% of all graves.

Burials with fixation of the corpse can be grouped according to the material used to perform the rite:

I. Fixation with stone. This is by far the most common type with 33 cases.

II. Fixation with stone and tile. Only one case (No. 83) which is essentially a mixture of Types I and III.

III. Fixation with tile. Two known cases (No. 97 and 116).

IV. Fixation with ferrous tools. It is recorded in four cases so far and has two subgroups:

IV.A. Fixation with plough – recorded twice (No. 80, 89)

IV.B. Fixation with sickle – two times (No. 82, 95).

### 3.1. Chronology

The chronology of the fixation burials is presented in Table 2 below. Type I and the fixation rite in general appear in the eighth century and continue until the fourteenth century without interruption. However, in the eleventh century the frequency of this rite decreases. This is primarily due to appearance of other types of fixation rites, but it is notable that the higher numbers for the eighth– tenth century are to a large extent due to the concentration of Type I burials in the necropoleis of Devnya. Excluding these, the frequency of Type I remains consistent throughout the medieval period. Type III is a late development and is characteristic for the fourteenth and probably fifteenth century. The single example for Type II has a wide dating of twelfth–fourteenth century, but the use of tile in it may indicate a dating similar to Type III. Finally, Type IV dates to the twelfth–thirteenth century, when it seems to become the preferred mode of fixation.

Date	Frequency	Catalogue number
650-750	0	N/A
750-850	13	12, 14-16, 21-29
850-950	6	49, 50, 54-57
950-1050	5	47, 48, 51, 70, 72

1050-1150	2	67, 68
1150-1250	4	76, 80, 82, 89
1250-1350	4	90, 94, 95, 97, 112
1350-1450	1	116
1150-1350*	5	83-87

*Tab.2 Chronology of fixation burials from Bulgaria*

### 3.2. Distribution

The geographical distribution of fixation burials demonstrates the development of patterns related to the chronological and classificatory observations made so far. Type I burials are quite widespread in the territory of modern-day Bulgaria, but the already mentioned concentration of such burials around Devnya and other sites from the period of the First Bulgarian Tsardom between the region of Pliska and Black Sea is notable. It seems that the practice spread westwards after the tenth century.

Type IV is characteristic for what is today southern-southeastern Bulgaria. Another important observation is that Type IVA is found in urban cemeteries (Sozopol and Perperikon), while Type IVB is known from urban monastic cemetery (Anevsko kale) and an open settlement's cemetery (medieval Sevtopolis) in central southern Bulgaria. These preferences perhaps are not entirely dependent on the modes of production practiced by the inhabitants of these settlements, rather than the accessibility and value of the selected tools.

Compared to the overall picture nine fixation burials were found in urban cemeteries, including three (No. 90, 94, 95) in monastic cemeteries open to lay population. Biritual

necropoleis associated with rural and open settlements contributed thirteen graves to the general count of such burials, while similar sites dated after the conversion to Christianity contain fifteen other cases. The site of Skalishte is the only isolated burial ground in this count with three cases of fixation (No. 85-87).

Finally, Types II and III are found in southwestern Bulgaria with Type III being associated with urban contexts (Pernik and Plovdiv).

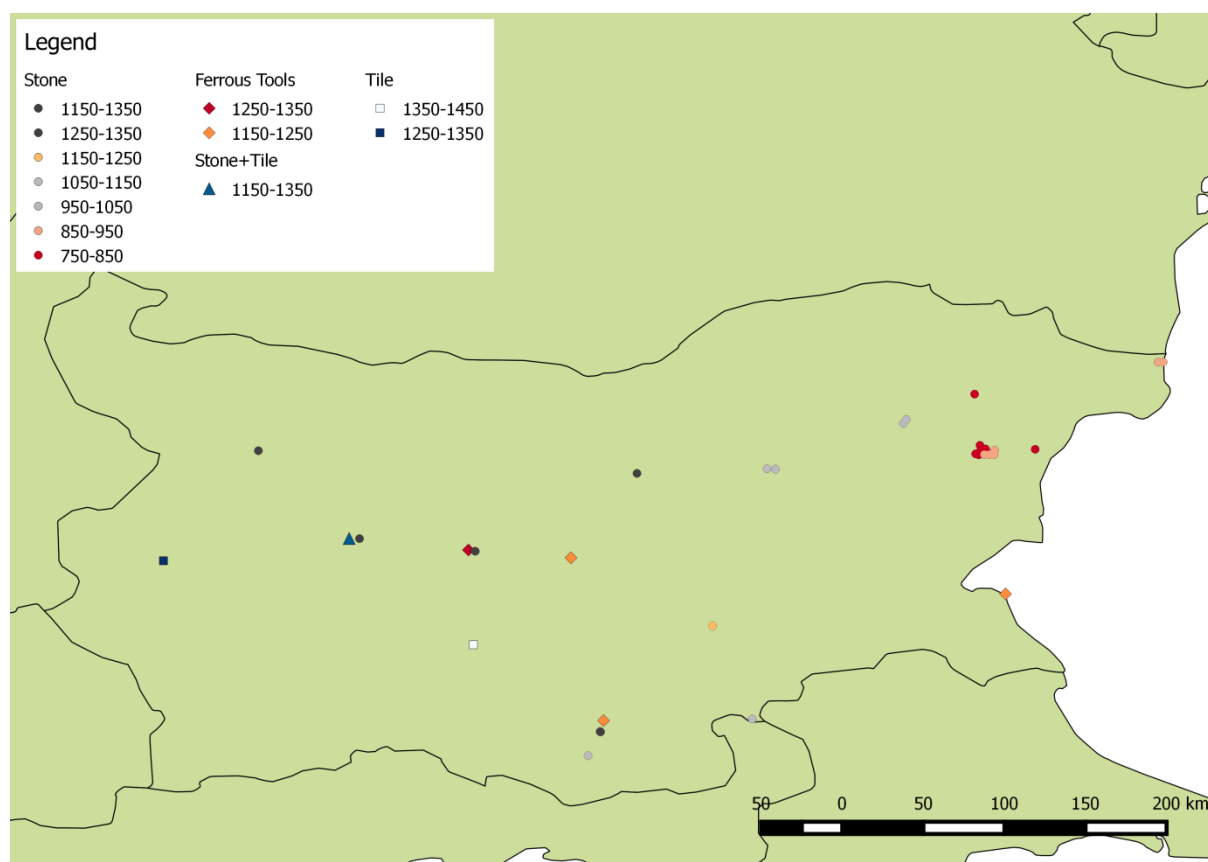


Fig. 2 Distribution of graves with fixation

### 3.3. Grave structure and orientation

The most frequent shape of graves is the simple rectangular pit recorded in twenty-three cases. Stone and tile elements are part of the structure of the pit in one case (No. 84) and coffin remains were recovered in five cases (No. 54, 57, 67, 68, 90). The pit has an oval

shape in three graves (No. 24, 25, and 70). The shape is unclear in one instance (No. 47). A stone cist is used in four instances (No. 49, 50, 80, 112), while on the site of Skalishte three cists have been rock-cut (No. 85-87).

The burial from Sedlari (No. 72) requires some attention as the body was covered by a large concentration of stones that served as grave structure in some way. The stone pile was directly heaped on top of the body and its weight probably contributed to the poor preservation of the bones.<sup>73</sup> This is the only such structure on this site. The intentional use of the natural qualities of stonesuch as its weight to influence the decomposition cannot be ruled out as a possibility. To some extent the Sedlari burial is similar to the collective burial in Mound 32 in Pliska, where stone concentration was found above the skeletons. However, in Pliska it is impossible to determine if there had been direct contact between the bones and the stone pile. Elsewhere, stone piles have been used as grave markers and cover, but the lack of direct physical contact between them and the bodies suggests they were not elements of deviant burial rites.

The orientation of fixation burials generally follows the norm for the particular period and site. The N-S orientation is followed in eleven graves (No. 12, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 24-27, 29). In the pagan period graves deviating from the dominant orientation was recorded twice (No. 23 and 28) in favor of an E-W orientation. After the conversion to Christianity the normative orientation W-E is documented in twenty cases, while variations NW-SE and SW-NE occurred in four (67, 82, 83, 95) and two (No. 76 and 94) instances respectively. The orientation of one grave (No. 70) remains unspecified.

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<sup>73</sup> Katja Melamed, Personal conversation, 2016

### 3.4. Demography: age and sex

As always, the anthropologically analyzed burial assemblages are not sufficient to provide a comprehensive picture. The sex and age of the deceased was determined for about half of the individuals included in the sample. Twelve individuals have been identified as male (No. 23b, 23c, 24, 25, 27, 29, 50, 80, 89, 95, 97, and 112). Five individuals have been identified as female (No. 22, 23a, 26, 28, and 76), leaving the other twenty-five individuals as unspecified. To illustrate the sex ratio, a little over 70% of fixation burials were male and nearly 30% female.

The age composition of the individuals in fixation burials is as follows: *infans* II (6-10 years) are four (No. 14, 21, 47, and 56), *juvenilis* I (11-15 years) is one (No. 94), *juvenilis* II (16-20 years) is also one (No. 22), five individuals (No. 23b, 24, 27, 29, and 50) classified as *adultus* I (21-30 years) and six other (No. 25, 48, 76, 89, 97, 112) in the following category *adultus* II (31-40 years), then four (No. 23a, 28, 80, 95) individuals from age group *maturus* (41-60 years) and one (23c) male belonging to the group *senilis* (60+ years). The age of 20 individuals was not determined.

### 3.5. Grave goods

The objects found in graves where fixation rite was registered are limited. The ferrous tools used for fixation in Type IV burials are not included in this category. A reddish jar was placed by the skull in one grave (No. 14) and pottery fragments were found in another one (No. 24). Iron nails are found in three graves (No. 84, 87, 112). They may indicate a wooden cover or coffin, but the one from Skalishte (No. 87) was found on the pelvis and may have been deposited there intentionally. One individual (No. 76) was buried with three bracelets – two copper alloy bracelets on the right hand and one made of black glass on the left.

Particularly interesting is the iron spearhead placed on the right shoulder of the child from Devnya 2 (No. 56). There are no animal bones in these graves, except one knucklebone found at the legs of the woman from the triple grave in Devnya (No. 23).

### 3.6. Correlation with other deviant burial rites

The number of fixation burials correlating with other deviant burial rites is relatively high. The most common combination is the mutilation of the postcranial skeleton which is known from eight burials (No. 21, 22, 47, 48, 67, 68, 82, 86). Next in line are the five fixation burials combined with decapitations (No. 48, 76, 86, 90, 94). Fixation was applied in collective graves three times (No. 23, 24, 86). Tied limbs and disrespectful position are recorded in two graves (No. 70 and 87), while prone position is recorded only once (No. 90). Fixation of certain individuals is also present among the victims in the mass grave from Devnya 3. Charcoal is present in a single grave (No. 83).

### 3.7. Other characteristics

It has been noted that the direct contact between the fixating object and the skeleton is an indication of a fixation rite in a grave. Furthermore, the correlation between the object and specific body parts is also relevant. The following table summarizes the exact placement of the fixating object on the skeleton.

Covered body part	Frequency	Catalogue number
Head	9	15,24,27,28,57,86,94,97,116
Torso (incl. clavicles)	5	29, 68, 80, 89, 112



Pelvis	3	49, 70, 82
Legs	1	48
Feet	7	16, 54-56, 76, 85, 90
More than one	11	22,23,25,26,47,50,67,72,83,84, 87
Unspecified	4	12, 14, 21, 95

*Tab. 3 Target body parts for fixation*

In the instances where more than one specific body part were weighed down the combinations were head and legs in four burials (No. 25, 26, 50, and 67) and the head and torso were covered together four times (No. 22, 23, 72, 87). The combination of torso and left arm (No. 84), torso and left leg (No. 47), and torso, pelvis and legs (No.83) are recorded in one occasion each. This was usually done using large stones or alternatively, using multiple stones or tiles. In the cases where feet were involved, usually both of them were fixated, with the exception of one case where the right foot, and one where the left foot was weighed down only (No. 76 and 55 respectively). The fixation burial from Plovdiv (No. 116) is peculiar, because in addition to the tile cover of the head, an additional brick piece was placed in the mouth of the deceased.

## 4. Decapitations

Decapitation is another deviant rite based on deliberate action: the removal of the head from the rest of the body. The principal anthropological indications for decapitations are concerned with the status of the skull and cervical vertebrae. Pathological indicators like cut-marks and evidence for violent blows on them are definite markers for decapitations, but are

rarely reported. Thus, very often the identification is dependent on observations of disposition or absence of the skull. One major condition that must be taken into account is the possibility for taphonomic causes for secondary disturbance or decay. Not only the sample strategy, but the approach towards the included burials is based on these considerations. The situation is more or less universal. For instance, Robert Philpott discussed the decapitation burials from Roman Britain in three groups, depending on the placement or absence of the skull.<sup>74</sup>

There are thirty-two confirmed cases of decapitations in the catalogue under No. 8, 13, 17, 18, 37-40, 51, 60-62, 66, 71, 75-77, 81, 86, 88, 90, 92-94, 101, 103, 104, 109-111, and 115. They are distributed across twenty archaeological sites. Excluding the cases of individual burials (e.g. Voden) or sites with prominent use of deviant rites (e.g. Skalishte), the ratio of decapitations vary between 0.2% and 5.88% of the overall number of graves per site. For instance, in Sakardza, Kaliakra and Durankulak decapitations constitute 0.8% of all excavated graves, while in Kyulevcha, Batin 1 and Devnya 3 the figures are 1.07%, 1.07% and 1.27%. A high percentage of decapitations are found at the sites of Krasen (12.52%), Hotalich (8.33%), Preslav 1 (5.88%), and Anevsko kale (5.36%). With the exception of the latter though, the numbers of archaeologically studied graves is significantly lower than other sites.

Decapitations discovered in medieval sites in Bulgaria can be grouped in four types determined by the recorded skull setting:

I. Only skull present. Six cases: No. 13, 18, 60, 62, 103, 104.

II. Skeletons missing skull. Six cases: No. 52, 76, 77, 81, 94, and 110.

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<sup>74</sup> Robert Philpott, *Burial Practices in Roman Britain* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports 219, 1991).

III. Displaced skull. The most common type of decapitation with seventeen registered cases: No. 8, 38, 39, 40, 51, 61, 66, 71, 75, 88, 90, 92, 93, 101, 109, 111, and 115.

IV. Skull of another individual present in the grave. The rarest type of decapitation found in three cases: No. 17, 37, 86. This group does not form unified chronological or geographical pattern and consists of highly individualized cases. It is also the most ambiguous among decapitation burials, because of the possibility of reburial and the reuse of the grave. Reusing earlier grave was disregarded in these cases, because the long bones are usually also present among the remains of the earlier burial, often collected in one of the corners.

#### 4.1. Chronology

The chronology of the decapitation burials is indicated in Table 4 below. It seems that the decapitations burials peaked in the period between the eighth and tenth centuries, followed by rapid decrease and steady increase in frequency between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. However, in the later period decapitations tend to concentrate in smaller number of sites. For instance, decapitations No. 75, 76, and 77 from the early twelfth century were all found in the site of Kovachevo. All practices seem to coexist throughout the medieval period. Still, Type II appears a bit later than the others, sometime in the ninth-tenth century, while Type I decapitation is not yet registered in the fourteenth century. Also, the decrease of recorded decapitations in the late tenth and eleventh century resulted in a gap for all types except Type III. The date for the decapitation burial from Madara (No. 115) is unknown, because the site was excavated in the interwar period and absolute dating techniques were not available at the time. The site will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter about the spatial and landscape aspects of deviant burials.

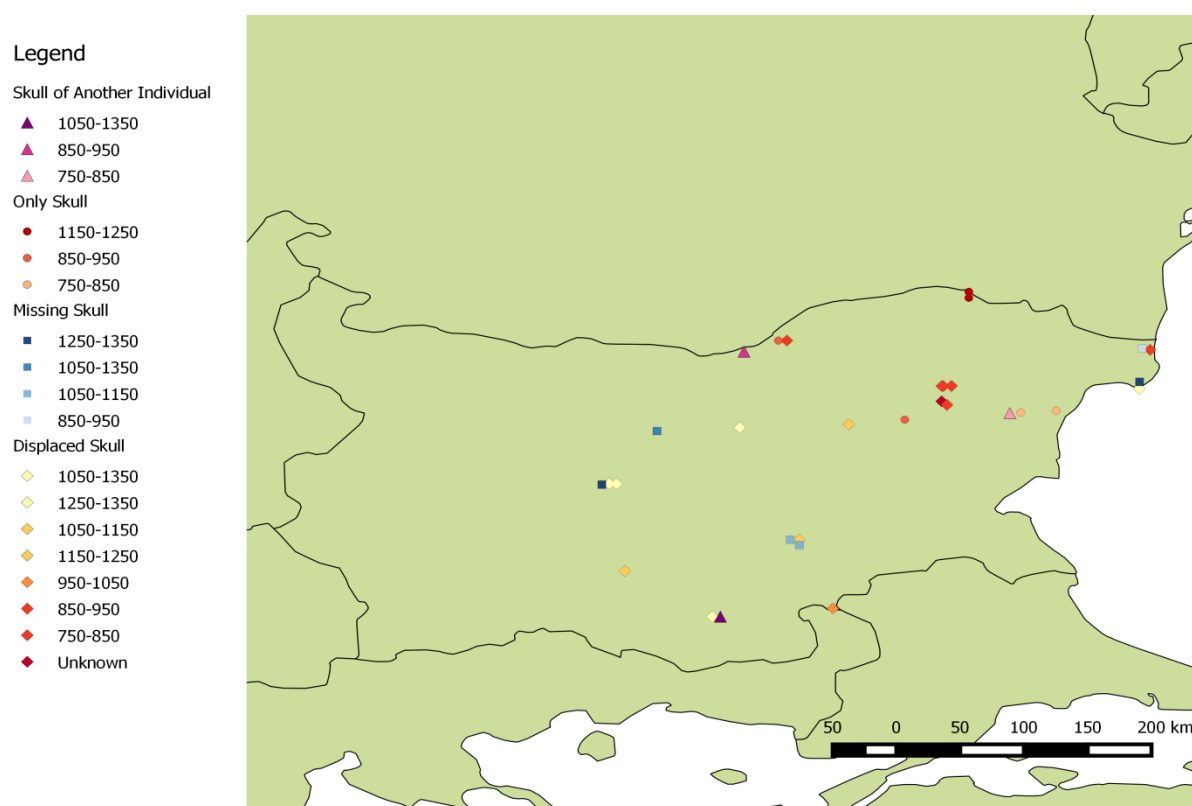
Date	Frequency	Catalogue number
650-750	0	N/A
750-850	6	8, 13, 17, 18, 38, 39
850-950	7	37, 40, 51, 52, 60, 61, 62
950-1050	1	71
1050-1150	3	75, 76, 77
1150-1250	4	66, 101, 103, 104
1250-1350	7	90, 92, 93, 94, 109, 110, 111
1350-1450	0	N/A
1050-1350	3	81, 86, 88
Unknown	1	115

*Table 4 Relative chronology of medieval decapitations in present-day Bulgaria*

## 4.2. Distribution

The geographical distribution of decapitation burials and the types of sites show that urban cemeteries accommodated seven such burials (No. 60, 81, 103, 104, 109, 111). Five more cases were located in monastic grounds serving as urban cemeteries (No. 40, 90, 92, 93, 94). Biritual necropoleis with more rural character had six decapitations (No. 8, 13, 17, 18, 38, 39), half of which are located in the area of Pliska. They contribute to the concentration of Type III decapitations there between the eighth and tenth centuries. Towards the High and

Later Middle Ages such burials are found dispersed throughout the country and in other fortified towns. Eleven decapitation burials were located in rural and field cemeteries (No. 37, 51, 52, 61, 62, 66, 71, 75-77, 101). Type I, where only the skull is present, is characteristic for what is today northeastern Bulgaria. Interestingly, in the period of the eighth and tenth century such burials come from rather mixed contexts, but the two thirteenth-century examples are both from the town of Drastar. Two sites with three graves can be regarded as isolated burial ground (No. 86, 88, 115).



*Fig. 3 Medieval decapitation burials from Bulgaria*

### 4.3. Grave structure and orientation

The orientation of decapitation burials also displays certain differences. After the conversion to Christianity, the most common orientation is the W-E, which is followed in fourteen cases. The N-S orientation preferred in the pagan period is recorded seven times of which three (No. 51, 62, 81) are atypical for the specific site. Other variations include S-N

(No. 104), NW-SE (No. 39, 61), SW-NE (No. 75-77, 94, 109), SE-NW (No.38), and E-W (No. 40). Two burials have unspecified orientation (No. 60 and 71).

The most common grave structure is the simple rectangular pit used in eighteen burials. In one pit a tile was placed beneath the head (No. 92) and in two other graves from Varbyane (No. 38 and 39) two niches were dug out on the side. The pit is of a circular or elliptical shape on three occasions (No. 8, 60, 71), while in two cases the shape is unclear (No. 40 and 81). Remains of a coffin are recorded in one grave (No. 90). A stone cist was made for three graves (No. 18, 52, 101), and two graves from Skalishte used rock-cut cist (No. 86 and 88).

#### 4.4. Demography: age and sex

Anthropological analysis of age and sex is available for less than half of the described burials. The sex of nineteen individuals remain unidentified. Five individuals are male (No. 8, 37, 52, 61, and 77) and three more are probably male (No. 40, 51, 75). Four individuals (No. 76, 93, 103, 104) are females and one (No. 92) is probably female. To give a clearer perspective, the sex ratio among the anthropologically analysed individuals is 62% male and 38% female.

The age at the time of death is unknown for twenty individuals. The distribution of age for the rest is as follows: *infans* II (6-10 years) is represented by two individuals (No. 71, 75), one (No. 94) for *juvenilis* I (10-14 years), *juvenilis* II (15-20 years) for two individuals (No. 61, 93). Five individuals (No. 37, 39, 52, 76, 81) belong to the category *adultus* (21-40 years) and three more (No. 77, 103, 104) were determined as *maturus* (41-60 years).

## 4.5. Grave goods and animal remains

Most of the decapitation burials are without grave goods and finds are limited. Pottery was found in six graves (No. 13, 38, 40, 60, 93, 101) and is mainly in fragmented state. Well preserved vessels are known from two graves (No. 38 and 60). Additionally one ceramic bead was found among the ribs in one of the graves (No. 39). Other noteworthy finds are the adornments. These consist of three earrings (two gilded from No. 93 and copper from No. 92), two glass bracelets (No. 76 and 88), two copper bracelets from the same grave (No. 76) and the spherical copper button from No. 93. Textile remains were also found in the same grave around the head. Two coins come from the same grave (No. 101), one of them attributed to Manuel Comnenos and one Roman bronze coin. The individual finds of a flint (No. 77) and an animal knucklebone (No. 13) also belong here.

The inventory of the decapitation and cremation grave from Preslav (No. 60) is particularly interesting. In addition to the cremation urn, a clay jar was found filled with chicken bones and one bone awl. The most peculiar find, however, is a small pectoral cross. The cross (inventory number 2718) is part of the collection of the National Historical and Archaeological Reserve and Museum in Veliki Preslav. It is listed under number 422 by Lyudmila Doncheva-Petkova in her study of pectoral crosses from Bulgaria.<sup>75</sup> It belongs to a widespread type of pectoral crosses made of copper alloy used as a reliquary as well. The iconography represents the Crucifixion of Christ and Virgin Mary. A small cross is notched/engraved above the head of Christ and another small Maltese-like cross is added above the figure of the Virgin. The date for this object is early tenth century and the most

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<sup>75</sup> [Totyu Totev] Тотю Тотев, "Проучвания в Новите гробища в Преслав през 1963-1964" [Excavations in the new cemeteries in Preslav during 1963-1964], *Известия на Народния Музей в Шумен* 5 (1972): 43; [Lyudmila Doncheva-Petkova] Дончева-Петкова, Людмила, *Средновековни кръстове-енколпиони от България* [Medieval Pectoral Crosses from Bulgaria] (Sofia: National Archaeological Institute with Museum, 2011), 149

likely provenance is the metal production center in Novosel near Veliki Preslav<sup>76</sup>. There are plenty of well-known analogies for the find, including more than sixty items from Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and the tenth-eleventh-century findings from Szentes-Szentlászló and Vésztő in Hungary.<sup>77</sup>

## 4.6. Correlation with other deviant burial rites

Decapitations seem to correlate with other deviant burial rites. The largest number of combinations occurs with other forms of mutilation in nine burials (No. 8, 17, 38, 39, 61, 77, 86, 88, and 101). In addition there is the already mentioned correlation between seven instances of displaced skull and Type IIA prone burials. Tied limbs and disrespectful treatment are suggested for three cases (No. 8, 81, 115). Again three times (No. 76, 90, 94) fixation was performed on the decapitated skeleton. In one case (No. 60) the decapitation dated well into the Christian period is associated with cremation burial. It is hard to confirm if the two rites belong to a single event or to a single individual. Nevertheless, the skull and the cremation urn are in direct physical relationship suggesting an awareness of the disposal and perhaps chronological proximity. Charcoal was discovered only in two graves (No. 38 and 40). All forms of decapitations known from the mass grave in Devnya 3 are recorded among individual graves as well, just like the preference for combination with other forms of skeletal mutilation.

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<sup>76</sup> Lyudmila Doncheva-Petkova *Средновековни кръстове-енколпиони*, 151.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem. Compare with, Katerina Hornickova Between East and West: Bohemian reliquary pectoral crosses as testimony to religious and cultural exchange, in Rome, Constantinople and Newly-Converted Europe. Archaeological and Historical Evidence eds. M. Salomon et al., 157-172 (Krakow: Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej akademii nauk, 2012).



## 4.7. Other characteristics

The skull placement for graves from Type III demonstrates some correlation with other body parts. In seven instances (No. 8, 40, 75, 90, 92, 93, 109) the skull is prone positioned reproducing its original anatomical place. This group of decapitation burials is equivalent to Type IIA for the prone burials. In four graves (No. 38, 39, 66, 71) the skull was away from the rest of the skeleton, often placed in a niche. In two instances the removed skull was found associated with the left knee (No. 17 and 61) and in another two the pelvis (No. 51, 86). In two cases the skull was linked to the right clavicle (No. 37 and 75), while once it was positioned on the right humerus close to the shoulder (No. 115). There are single examples for placing the skull under the torso (No. 8), between the legs (No. 111) or in unspecified position (No. 101). Regarding the vertical relationship between skull and postcranial skeleton the skull was beneath the rest of the body on three occasions (No. 8, 17, 37) and four times (No. 61, 75, 86, 115) was on top of it.

## 5. Mutilations of the (postcranial) skeleton

The mutilation of the dead body, sometimes referred to as amputation, is the most commonly mentioned deviant burial rite in Bulgaria and apparently the most ambiguous one. Deliberate manipulation of the corpse, often focusing on the postcranial skeleton, can be identified by detailed observations of the archaeological context and the anthropological condition of the human remains. The possibility of natural factors or disturbance of the grave makes this practice very hard to prove, especially when accessible records are insufficient. Likewise, this type of deviant rite is most often cited in relation to the anti-transfiguration rituals discussed in historiography. Another decisive point for the recognition and the interpretation of such burials is how the mutilation relates to the time of death. The character

of any secondary activities in the grave is very hard to be determined even with careful excavation and recording.

The current analysis is based on fifty-two recorded cases of mutilation of the skeleton. In the catalogue they are described as entries No. 1-3, 7-10, 19-23, 30-36, 38, 39, 41, 44-48, 53, 58, 59, 61, 63-65, 67, 68, 74, 77-79, 82, 86, 88, 91, 96, 98-100, 102, 105, 106, 113, and 114, distributed across twenty-six sites. Two sites have significant numbers of skeletal mutilation among the excavated graves, namely Krusheto (25%) and Skalishte (12%). Otherwise, the highest concentration is in Devnya-1 (7.2%), Krasen (6.25%), Durankulak (5.8%) and Varbyane (5.3%). Burials with mutilation constitute between 2% and 4% of all excavated graves on the sites Varna 1, Sakardza, Kyulevcha, Novi Pazar, Pliska, Kovachevo. Mutilation appears in 1.9% of the graves in Balchik 3.1, 8% in Pernik and Anevsko kale, in Sevtopolis (1.4%), Devnya-3 (1.3%), and Batin 1 (1%). Burials with mutilated corpses comprise less than one percent near church No.18 on Tsarevets, in Tuhovishte, Nikolovo and Nozharevo.

The mutilation of the skeleton is a quite varied practice. On the basis of the skeletal condition five types of maltreatment can be distinguished:

I. Tied limbs. The simplest form of mistreating the corpse is usually tying only the lower limbs: three cases (No. 1, 3, 98).

II. Displaced bones and body parts. Cases where the anatomical order of the skeleton is clearly disturbed, but the relevant bones were found within the grave. There are fifteen known examples grouped according to the body part where the displaced bones belonged.

II.A. Displaced mandible: three cases (No. 39, 46, 59)

II.B. Displaced arm: three cases (No. 78, 86, 99)

II.C. Displaced hand: once (No. 77)

II.D. Displaced leg: four cases (No. 44, 48, 88, 100)

II.E. Displaced feet: five cases (No. 19, 67, 73, 74, 82, 114)

III. Missing bones and body parts. The term amputation is most relevant in this group of burials with mutilation. Accepting that the absence of the bones from the grave is not caused by different factors, suggests the loss of extremities *ante mortem*. Alternatively, the missing part may have been selected for separate treatment.

III.A. Missing leg: six cases (No. 2, 23, 36, 45, 47, 96)

III.B. Missing feet: eleven cases (No. 9, 21, 22, 30-35, 61, 106)

IV. Combined forms of mutilation. The type can be found in eleven examples:

IV.A. Missing and displaced leg bones: three cases (No. 68, 79, 105)

IV.B. Missing hand and tied legs: twice (No. 7, 65)

IV.C. Missing limb and bones from another individual: twice (No. 20, 63)

IV.D. Displaced torso and right hand: once (No. 64)

IV.E. Displaced mandible, pelvis and leg: once (No. 91)

IV.F. Displaced arm and missing foot: once (No. 113)

IV.G. Displaced leg, missing foot and torso destruction: once (No. 58)

V. Disintegration, or severe destruction or mutilation of the body as a single entity, is recorded six times (No. 8, 10, 38, 41, 53, 102).

## 5.1. Chronology

The chronology of burials exhibiting mutilation is summarized in Table 5 below. The great variability in the forms of mutilation itself makes it difficult to highlight definite chronological developments. Type I provide the earliest forms of deviant rites in the late seventh century and is followed by the emergence of Type III. There is a slight tendency for Type III to be more common in the period between the seventh and tenth centuries, while

Type II had the greater popularity between the twelfth and fourteenth. This shift is perhaps best illustrated by the combination of displaced and missing bones in the treatment of the individuals from Type IVA around the twelfth century. Once again, there is a decrease in the frequency of known deviant burials in the eleventh century. It is clear that Type V burials date mainly to the period between the eighth and tenth century. Only one example (No. 102) from this type belongs to the thirteenth-fourteenth century, while the burial of unknown date (No.41) from Pliska is highly likely to be contemporaneous with the rest.

Date	Frequency	Catalogue number
650-750	3	1-3
750-850	17	7-10, 19-23, 30-35, 38, 39
850-950	9	36, 45, 53, 58, 59, 61, 63-65
950-1050	1	74
1050-1150	5	46-48, 67, 68
1150-1250	4	77-79, 82
1250-1350	6	91, 96, 98-100, 102, 106
1350-1450	2	113, 114
unknown	2	41, 44
1150-1350	3	86, 88, 105

*Tab. 5 Relative chronology of the burials with mutilation*

## 5.2. Distribution

Thirteen cases (No. 44-48, 91, 96, 98-100, 102, 105, 106) of mutilation in the sample come from urban contexts, while thirty-five cases of mutilation were found in rural and open settlements present. Twenty-two (No. 1-3, 7-10, 19-23, 30-35, 38, 39, 58, 59) of them belong to biritual necropoleis. Thirteen cases (No. 36, 53, 61, 64-65, 67, 68, 74, 77-79) in the sample were discovered in rural complexes. Three graves (No. 41, 113, 114) were in earlier burial mounds. Two cases from Skalishte (No. 86, 88) can be classified as belonging to an isolated burial ground.

The distribution of burials with mutilations is shown in the map below. The rite has wide distribution on sites from Bulgaria. The concentration of deviant burials around Pliska, Kyulevcha, Devnya and Varna is significant. All these sites belong more or less to the same chronological period and this can be accounted for the greater frequency of mutilation between the eighth and early tenth century in the overall figures. The concentration in this area is characterized not only by the high number of deviant burials, but the variety of mutilations coexisting on these sites. Early combined forms (Type IV) seem to appear in northeastern Bulgaria. Type V mutilation is also dominant in northeastern Bulgaria with one later example from the Rhodopes.

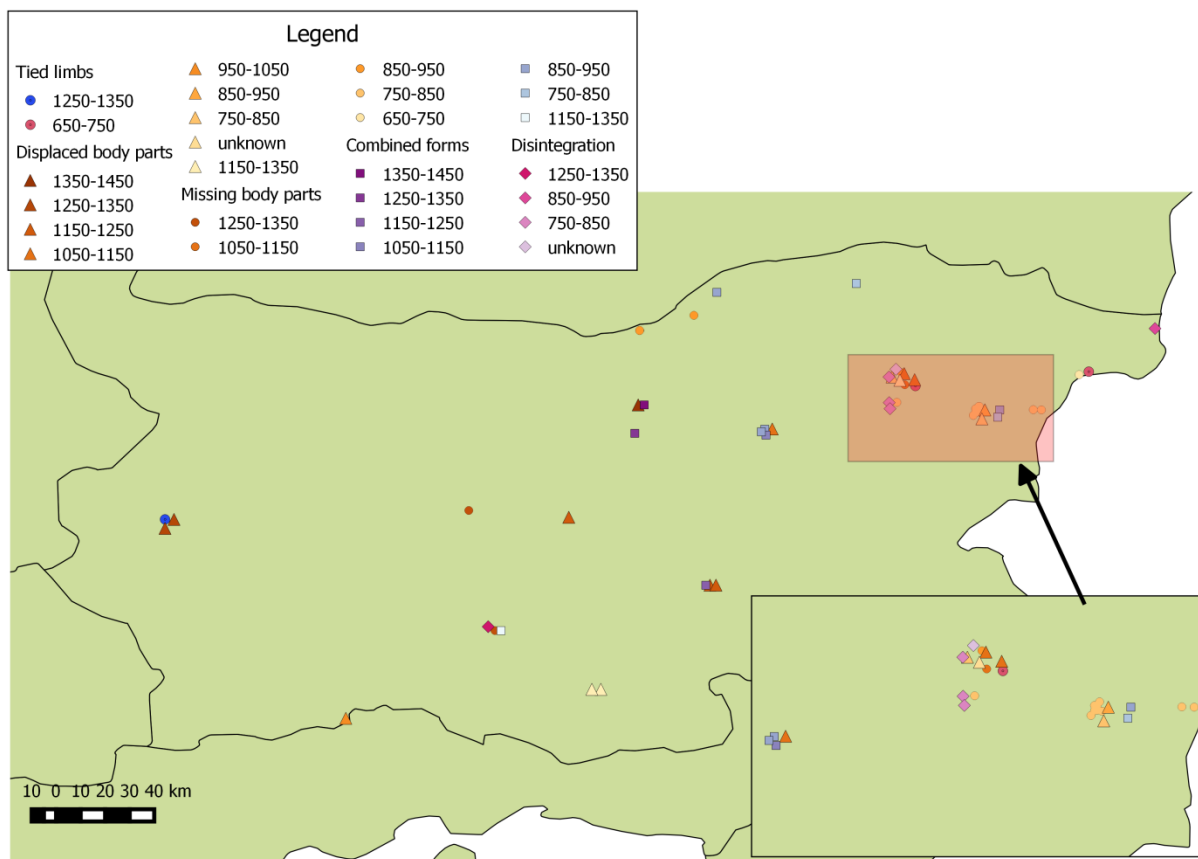


Fig. 4 Mutilations of the skeleton from sites in Bulgaria

### 5.3. Grave structure and orientation

Twenty-six cases of mutilations were disposed in a simple rectangular pit. Three graves from Devnya (No. 30-33) had stone covers. Four pits (No. 7, 38, 39, 63) have niches on the side. Three graves (No. 45, 47, 96) have an unclear grave structure. Coffins were detected in four cases (No. 67, 68, 113, 114). Two burials with mutilations from Kyulevcha (No. 8 and 10) are placed in round pits. One burial (No. 41) was in a simple pit secondary to an earlier mound. Six stone cists (No. 32, 53, 59, 74, 102, 105) are recorded, while in two instances the structure is rock-cut (No. 86, 88). One case from the Assenova krepst (No. 106) used a natural niche in the cliffs.

The standard N-S orientation is found in fifteen instances (No. 1, 3, 7, 10, 19-22, 31-35) and in two cases (No. 36, 63) on sites where N-S orientation was non-standard. The

Christian norm W-E is exhibited in twenty-one graves (No. 47, 48, 58, 59, 64, 68, 79, 86, 88, 91, 96, 98-100, 102, 105, 106, 113, 114) and was atypical for the site in one instance (No. 41). Similar are the eight graves with NW-SE orientation (No. 30, 39, 46, 61, 65, 67, 73, 78) and three oriented SW-NE (No. 2, 53, and 77). In one case (No. 44) the orientation is S-N, E-W is detected twice (No. 9 and 23) and two instances of its variant SE-NW (No. 38 and 45). Using orientation as secondary marker to emphasize the deviant character of the burials is relatively rare and is characteristic for the period before or not long after the conversion to Christianity.

## 5.4. Demography: age, sex and pathologies

Anthropological study is wanting for more than half of the sampled burials with mutilations. Twenty-eight cases lack certifiable information about age and sex. Identified cases include sixteen male (No. 3, 8, 23b, 23c, 31, 32, 34, 41a, 44, 45, 61, 77-79, 96, 99 and 105), three potentially male (No. 7, 34, 106) and ten female individuals (No. 1, 19, 22, 23a, 33, 41b, 53, 63, 64, and 98).

Two individuals (41c and 41d) belong to the age category *infans* I (0-5 years) and four (No. 21, 35, 46, 47) are declared *infans* II (6-10 years). There is one male (No. 32) in the group *juvenilis* I (10-14 years) and three individuals (No. 22, 30, 61) are *juvenilis* II. Adult individuals form the largest group. Four of them (No. 3, 23b, 53, 63) are *adultus* I (21-30 years) and eight (No. 32, 36, 39, 48, 78, 79, 96, 99) are *adultus* II (31-40 years). It must be noted that from the *adultus* II group, five are identified as male and the remaining three individuals are of unspecified sex. Five burials (No. 23a, 31, 33, 77, and 98) are of people from the age category *maturus* (41-60 years). There are a female (No. 1) and a male (No. 23c) determined as *senilis* (60+).

Marks from cutting weapon are recorded from one grave (No. 88). Blunt trauma is evident on the skull of one individual (No. 102). The skeleton of a female from Pernik (No. 98) revealed signs of syphilis.

## 5.5. Grave goods and animal remains

Most of the burials with mutilation lack grave goods. Nevertheless, in comparison to other types of deviant burials, the number and diversity of small finds from burials with mutilations are higher. Pottery is found in seven graves, but in three of them only fragments (No. 41, 63, 102). The grave from Balchik (No.1) was furnished with a jar decorated with wave lines and an oenochoe. A grey polished bowl was found in another grave (No. 7) and a vessel made of sandy clay (No. 23) completes the list. The aforementioned small ceramic bead (No. 39) may belong here too. Personal adornments are another artifact group that is well represented in the burial record. Four earrings from silver (No. 46), silver alloy (no. 64) and bronze (No. 41) were discovered *in situ*. Other jewelry includes one glass bracelet (No. 88) and a silver ring (No. 114). Dress accessories are represented by one silver button (No.114), a tripartite iron buckle (No. 31) and an iron fibula (No. 63). Six coins are discovered in five graves (No. 46, 100, 102, 106, 113). The silver coin of Ivan Shishman (No. 113) is an important find among them. A flint was unearthed from one grave (No. 77).

Two graves containing mutilated bodies are distinctly well furnished. A grave from Nozharevo (No.7) contained a copper vessel, a wooden pail and an iron knife. An isolated grave by the southern fortification wall of the Inner City of Pliska (No. 45) held two iron buckles, two iron stirrups, four ring hoops, a bridle, one whetstone and two other ferrous fragments.



Perhaps the most distinctive find among the burials of this type is the pectoral cross from Pernik (No. 98). It is a high-value object made from gilded copper alloy and belongs to very rare type representing Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary and the four evangelists. The shape of the cross is also distinctive<sup>78</sup>. The cross from Pernik comes from a site securely dated to the thirteenth century. The only other such cross from Bulgaria is of unknown origin and without gilding. Their closest parallels are from Cherson, the fortress on the Danubian island Pucuil lui Soare, and one cross from Constantinople now in the Hermitage in Saint-Petersburg. However, the iconography and the shape of the cross are more similar to artifacts from the tenth -eleventh century.<sup>79</sup> Arguably, the cross had obtained cultural biography and added value on its own before it was deposited in the grave of the woman from Pernik.

Animal remains are found in four graves. A lamb knucklebone was placed on the right patella in one grave (No. 10), while another was at the legs of the female from the triple grave in Devnya (No. 24a). The well-furnished grave from Nozharevo (No.7) contained the articulated skeleton of a horse. Finally, an articulated goat skeleton was placed in the niche of the grave in Nikolovo (No. 63).

## 5.6. Correlation with other deviant burial rites

The mutilation of the corpse is found in combination with all other deviant burial rites across the sample. Coercion by tying limbs is found as an additional element not only in Type I burials, but in three other cases (No. 7, 36, 74). Prone positioned burials contained evidence for mutilation two times (No. 8 and 36). Decapitation was accompanied by mutilation in nine burials (No. 8, 17, 38, 39, 61, 77, 86, 88, and 101). Fixation is also relatively often combined with mutilation, as this was recorded in eight graves (No. 21, 22, 47, 48, 67, 68, 82, and 86).

<sup>78</sup> Lyudmila Doncheva-Petkova, *Средновековни кръстове-енколпиони*, 169.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem

Four collective graves contained mutilated skeletons (No. 23, 41, 88, 102). Charcoal was uncovered in four graves (No. 23, 32, 63, 78). Finally, the mutilation of the body and particularly the disintegration from individual graves are markedly similar to the treatment of the victims in the mass grave in Devnya 3.

## 5.7. Other characteristics

The mutilation of the body enables us to observe the modes of treatment of certain body parts when they are discovered in the grave. The practice of keeping the selected bone in anatomical order, but turning it 180 degrees, thus disturbing its natural position in the skeleton, is particularly interesting. This is highly unlikely to occur by bioturbation, neither it is possible before an advanced stage of dry decomposition and skeletonization. This rite is documented in three cases, the bones involved were different in each case, specifically femur (No. 46), mandible (64) and clavicle (No. 88).

Generally, however, the bones were put by the rest of the body without particular preference. Four times they were found on the right side of the skeleton (No. 48, 64, 77, and 114) and four times on the left (No. 74, 82, 91, 100). In four cases (No. 19, 59, 67, 78) the bones of the severed body part were found between the legs. Sometimes the bones were placed on top of the skeleton: three times the bones were positioned on the torso (No. 48, 63, 105) and twice on the pelvis (No. 86 and 113). In one case (No. 39) bones probably cut from the chest were placed instead of the skull. The left arm of one male (No.99) was placed beneath the body.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter provided descriptive account on the patterns emerging from the analysis of deviant burials in long-term perspective. The most common form of deviant burial is the mutilation of the body, followed by fixation burials, decapitations, and the rarest prone positioned burials. The relatively high level of correlation between the four groups must be acknowledged. Separate typologies are proposed to organize the variations within each of them. The long-term perspective on the phenomenon traced their development, but one common feature is the decrease of known deviant burials in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The geographical distribution of the deviant burials was also summarized, but it must be accounted that the representativeness of the sample depends on the overall state of research. From the available anthropological data it seems that male individuals prevail over female when it comes to deviant burials and children are relatively rarely treated this way. Finds of grave goods and additional characteristics were also commented on.

# Chapter 5 – Outsiders in Death: Spatial Aspects of Deviant Burials

## 1. Introduction

So far the emphasis in the contextualization of the medieval deviant burials from Bulgaria was on the inside, within the groups of studied rites. As it has been stressed, deviant burials are to large extent a situational construct against the background of normative practice. One possible way to apprehend into the nature of this relationship is through observations on its spatial appearance. This chapter will take a step in this direction on two levels. First, the position of deviant burials on the topography of selection of sites will be discussed. The second level will take diachronic point of view on a site system in local geography and argue for the particular role of deviant burials in the construction of landscapes.

## 2. Intra-site topography

It is well established notion that death requires the performance of rites of passage separating the living from the dead and eventually incorporating them into the other world.<sup>80</sup> This process is often physically manifested in the choice of a special location.<sup>81</sup> However, segregation is often introduced by the living into the space of the dead and intra-site topography should be examined in relation to deviant burials as well. It is also relevant for the general occurrence for deviant burials, and particularly for the documentation of these types of graves. Deviant burials are more often recognized in the process of excavating cemeteries, even though graves and deviant burials on the periphery of cemeteries or just

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<sup>80</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960 [2011]).

<sup>81</sup> Michael Parker-Pearson, *Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Sutton: Phoenix Mill, 1999), 124-25.

beyond the borders of the burial areas (for example outside of the churchyard cemeteries) are often not excavated because of their position. Individual graves in remote areas, far from settlements or cemeteries are found only accidentally, often not by archaeologist. Therefore the deviant character of these burials is not recorded probably in a large number of cases. Thus, the spatial issue connected to segregation or intra site topography is a crucial question, but relevant data for such analysis is problematic. Many necropoleis are not completely excavated or their layouts are unavailable at the present. One principal difficulty is that the chronological relationship between individual graves within the same site can often be only partially reconstructed, because of the nature of site-formation processes.

The site of Devnya-3 is a telling example in this regard. The site is a biritual necropolis with continuous usage after the conversion to Christianity. The proposed date for the Devnya-3 necropolis is between the eight - tenth centuries. Overall 153 graves were excavated of which 103 are inhumations. As other sites in the immediate area, the site demonstrates a particular intensity of deviant customs. In Devnya-3 decapitations are 1.27% of all individual burials, fixation is applied to 1.3% of the skeletons, and mutilations burials are also 1.3% from the necropolis. Notably there are no prone position burials among the individual burials, but the practice is present in the mass grave on site discussed in length previously. On the side several clusters with a concentration of graves are formed without particular distinction between the space for cremations and inhumations. Occasional organization in lines and rows and rare intercutting between graves also characterize the site.

The placement of the deviant burials is marked on the site plan below. Graves 30, 39 and 71 are included in their respective clusters, but they rather center around the rest of the associated graves. The isolated position of the circular (ring-shaped) mass grave stands out on the northeastern periphery of the site. There is another deviant burial, no. 119, to the south of

the mass grave on the site. In addition to the proximity to the mass grave, this grave is also in the periphery of the closest cluster and the site in general. Several isolated graves are also found on the northeastern periphery, but they do not exhibit any confirmed deviant customs. Isolation in itself can be regarded as an indication for the irregularity of the grave. In cases of community necropoleis like this one it should be confirmed only with combination with other deviant customs.

The Christian grave 114 is located in superposition to the mass grave in Devnya 3 and is clearly of later date. The stratigraphy demonstrates that deviant burials indeed tend to be of peripheral position to community burial grounds, but with the expansion of the sites can be included. Such change is significant, because deviant burials may be used as markers of earlier limits of the cemetery areas. Also, the collective memory and changing attitudes of the local people towards certain places may contribute to that.

A similar situation, but in terms of horizontal stratigraphy, may be observed in the case of the deviant burial from grave 106. The grave is liminal to the site and between two clusters of pagan inhumation with N-S orientation and cremations. However, in the final arrangement of the site grave 106 is included in the grounds by the addition of new graves, notable the likely Christian W-E oriented no. 105 and 155.

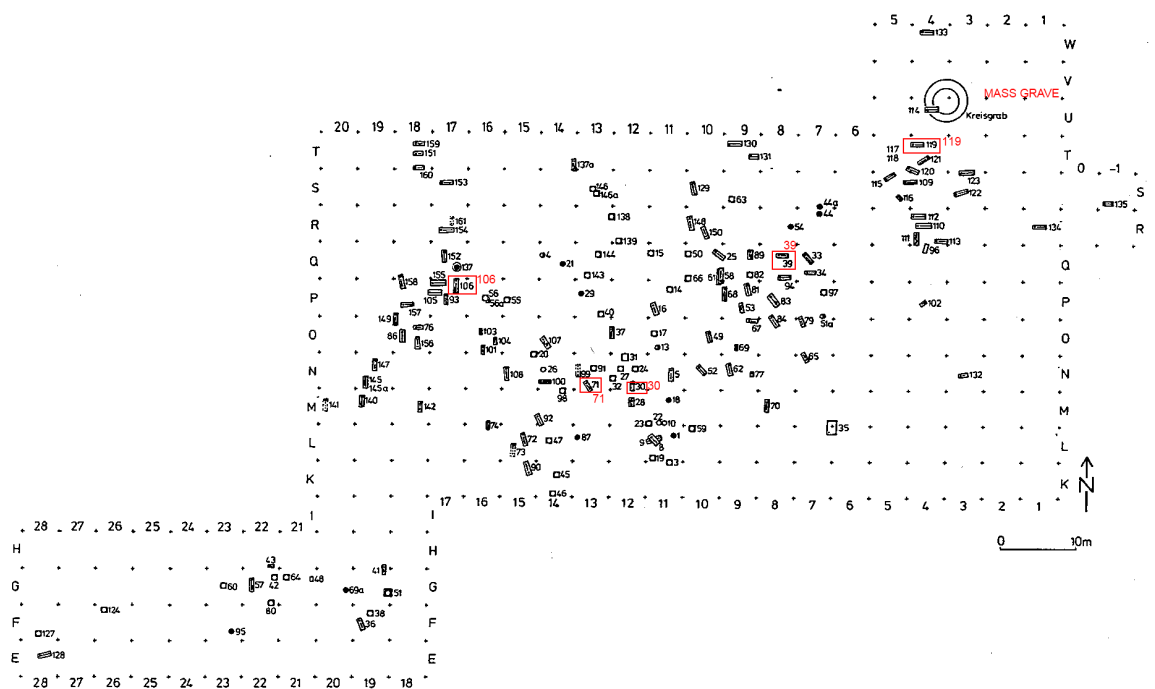


Fig. 5 Plan of Devnya-3 with marked locations of deviant burials

Devnya-1 is another biritual necropolis from eighth-ninth century, belonging to the same group of sites as Devnya-3. Altogether 97 graves have been excavated from the complex, out of which 53 are inhumations. Deviant rites are distributed between only two types, namely fixation (9.3%) and mutilation of the corpse (7.2%). The site is organized around a linear central concentration. Interestingly, most of the cremations constitute the focal point of the concentration with inhumations distributed around them. To the south there are two smaller clusters of inhumations and cremations, while to the north dispersed inhumations are found. However, the site was disturbed by a modern road; therefore the probability that data is missing needs to be taken into account.

The placement of deviant burials resembles the situation in Devnya-3. Included in the main section of the necropolis are graves no. 7, 18, 59, and 77, while no. 53 and 48 seem peripheral to the rest. Graves No. 2 and no. 92 have liminal location in the southern cluster

and the former is singled out between the cremations there. To the north graves no. 21, 66, 73 and the triple grave no. 24 are easily recognized as liminal.

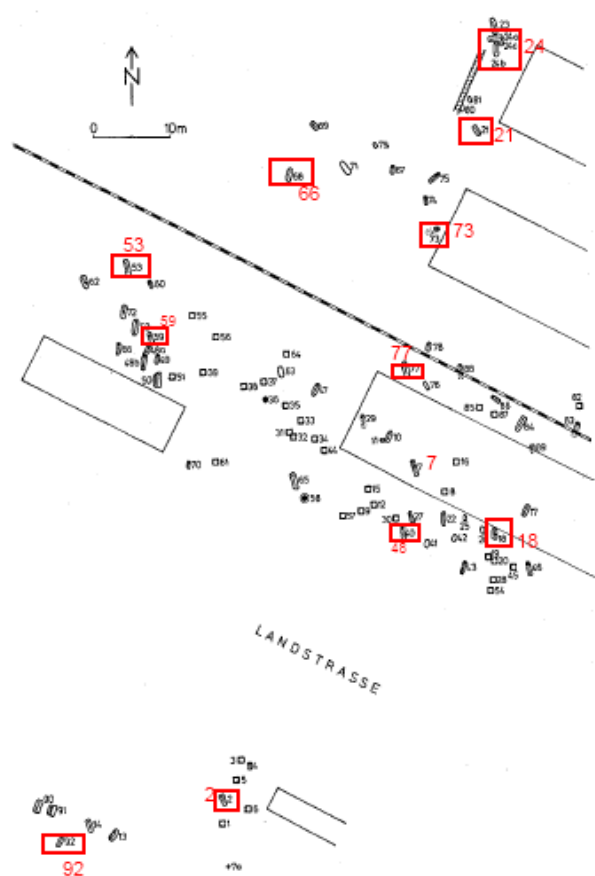
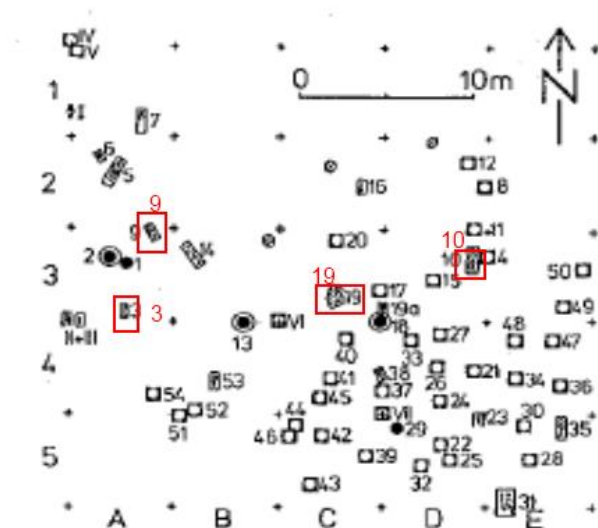


Fig. 6 Plan of Devnya-1 with marked locations of deviant burials

There is a certain degree of interaction on the periphery between deviant graves and cremations on the contemporary site of Varna-1. In this biritual necropolis from the pagan period the cremations have dominant role with only 16 inhumations out of 56 graves. In this case inhumations in general are on the eastern periphery with graves 3 and 9 being liminal



between the two groups, while graves 10 and 19 are located in the northern periphery of the cremation field.



*Fig. 7 Plan of Varna-1 with marked locations of deviant burials*

Kyulevcha is well documented biritual necropolis from the eighth-ninth century consisting of 93 graves. The majority of them are inhumations. From all types of deviant funerary practices the fixation of the body is the practice not found in Kyulevcha. In individual graves prone burials and decapitations represent 1% each and mutilation of the corpse was applied to 3.2% of the burials. Two central concentrations including both inhumations and cremations merged. A linear arrangement of a distinctive group of cremations is situated in the southern part of the necropolis. In the north section graves seem more randomly placed, still without intersecting each other.

The ground plan of the site confirms the form of spatial organization displayed in Devnya-3 and other sites with deviant burials. Graves 35 and 36 have liminal location in the northern edges of the necropolis. Grave 36 is peripheral to its associated cluster and is flanked by cremations and inhumation graves. To the northwest there is an isolated cluster of graves. The mass grave discussed earlier is placed in this cluster. In close proximity there is

the unearthed grave 81 of a male individual who was probable executed. The dual grave 84 with irregular orientation is also found in the same cluster, but no traces of deviant rites are detected on the skeletons. The other two graves in the cluster lie to the west and the males buried there received normative funerary treatment.

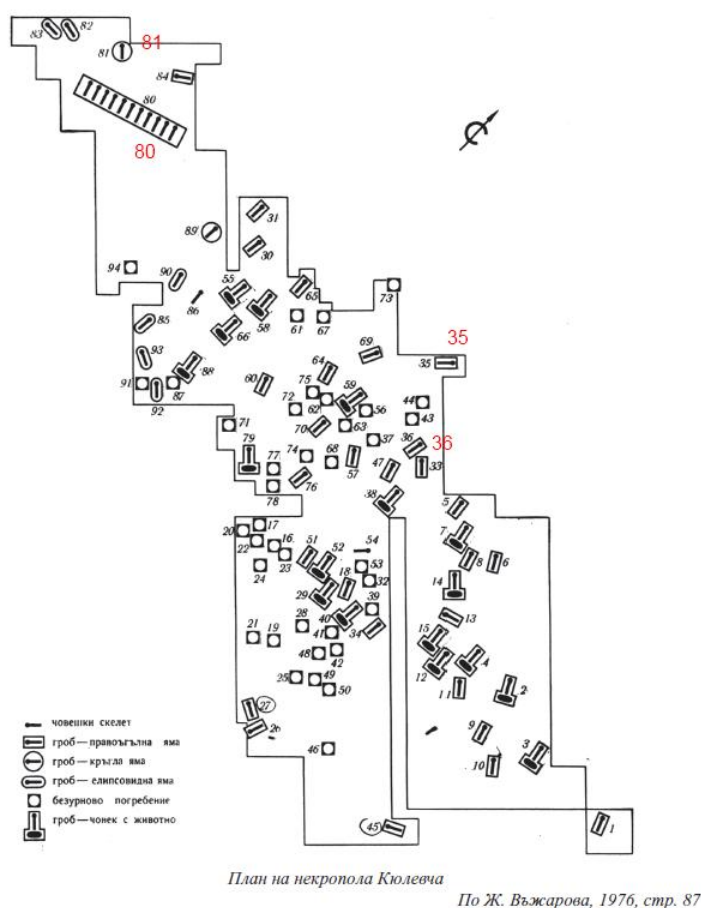
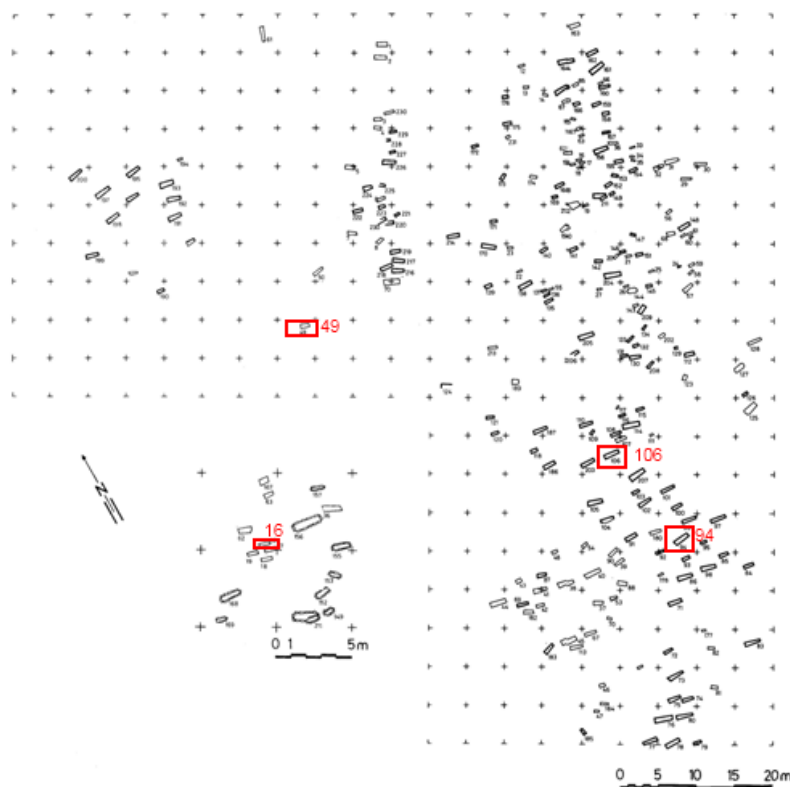


Fig. 8 Plan of Kyulevcha with marked locations of deviant burials

On the multi-period site of Durankulak a settlement with several burial grounds from ninth- or tenth-century century was unearthed. The main cemetery was on the mainland by the lake and contains 248 graves. The local population also disposed their dead around the cult center and in smaller cemeteries on the periphery of the island where the settlement was located. Well represented on site are the mutilations of the body, which is evident in 5.8% of the graves. Decapitation (0.8%) and fixation (0.8%) are also recorded in Durankulak.

The plan of the main cemetery demonstrates rows of graves grouped in different clusters. The borders of the cemetery are quite clear on two sides. Graves 16 and 49 are peripheral and isolated in comparison to the main concentration of graves in the cemetery. Graves 94 and 106 are, however, included within the southeastern cluster on the site. It is possible that originally they were also liminal towards the concentration in the northeast. This is indicated by the slight detachment of otherwise linear rows oriented W-E around grave 94 and emphasized by variation in grave orientation. In Durankulak there is also a deviant burial 29 (no. 51 in the catalogue) in liminal position not far from the cemetery on the southern periphery of the settlement.



*Fig. 9 Plan of Durankulak with marked locations of deviant burials*

The rural cemetery from Kovachevo belongs to the settlement from the twelfth century. The cemetery is in the vicinity of the village. All deviant rites known from individual burials are found among the 132 graves in the cemetery. In Kovachevo

decapitations and mutilations of the postcranial skeleton are evident in 2.3% each and prone position and fixation score 0.75% of the overall count. The main concentration forms a hub in the south-western periphery with two offsets to the north and to the east.

In the area with greatest density are graves 76, 78 and 88. Liminal position is probable for graves 97, 104 and 165. In such small rural community the pattern for placing the deviant burials in peripheral areas is yet again present, but not clearly discernible. Apparently the emphasis on the treatment of the body in the funeral event was enough in the context when personal impression can contribute greatly to the creation of long-term collective memory.

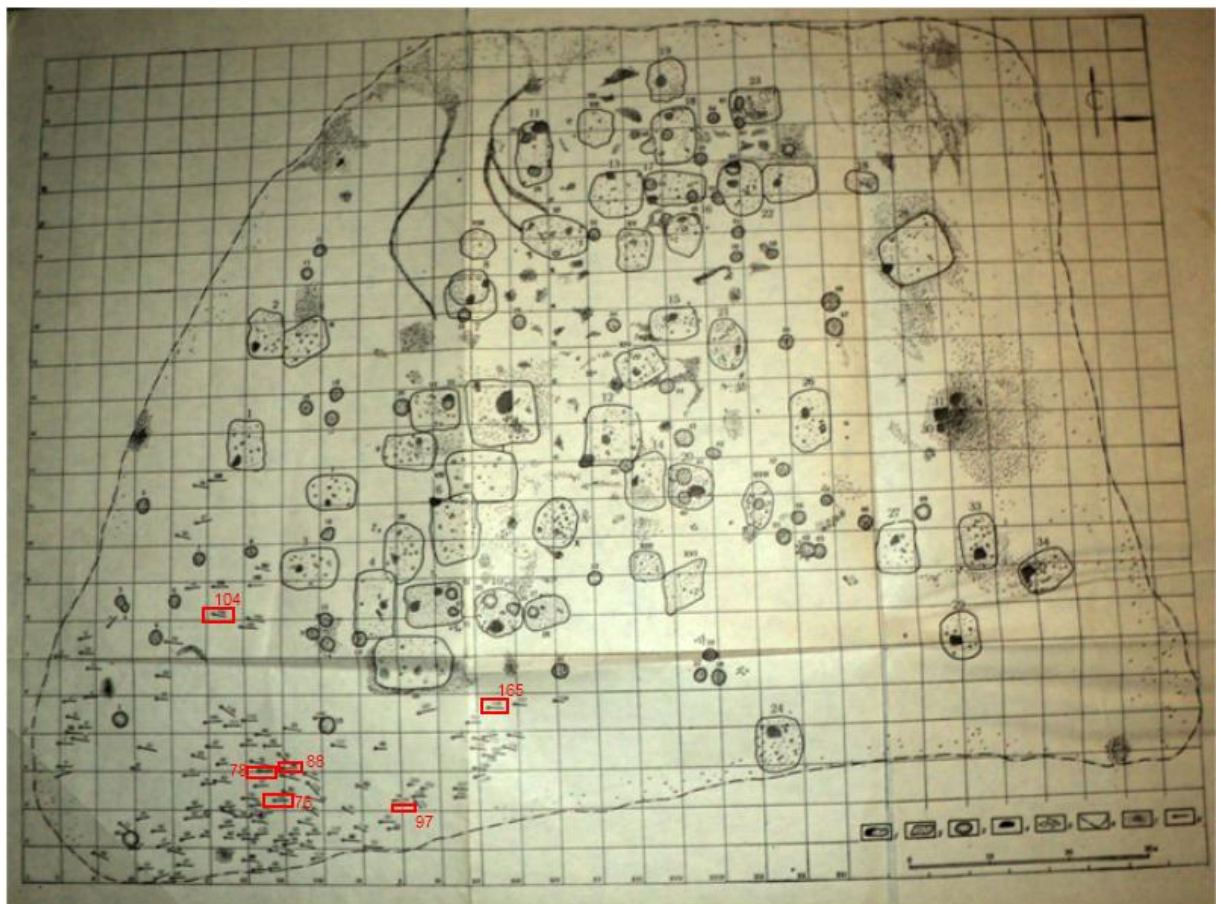


Fig. 10 Plan of Kovachevo with marked locations of deviant burials

The urban cemetery on top of Krakra Hill in Pernik developed on top of the destructions brought on by Stefan Nemanja's invasion of in 1190 serving as *terminus post*

*quem*. Overall 167 graves were excavated on this site. Both fixation and mutilation of the corpse were registered in this community cemetery. The former represents 0.6% of the graves and the latter occurs in 1.8% of them. The cemetery is concentrated around the ruins of a church, probably destroyed in the Serbian campaign of 1190.

The location of deviant burials in Pernik varies. One of them, grave 4, is placed on what should be a prominent position within the remains of an abandoned church around which the cemetery developed. The elevated social position of the woman buried there is evident from the gilded pectoral cross found with her. Grave 80 is situated to the south well incorporated into the cemetery. Grave 72 is found further south in what can be described as liminal position.. Finally, grave 155 from Pernik is not marked on this ground plan as it is isolated elsewhere on the hill.



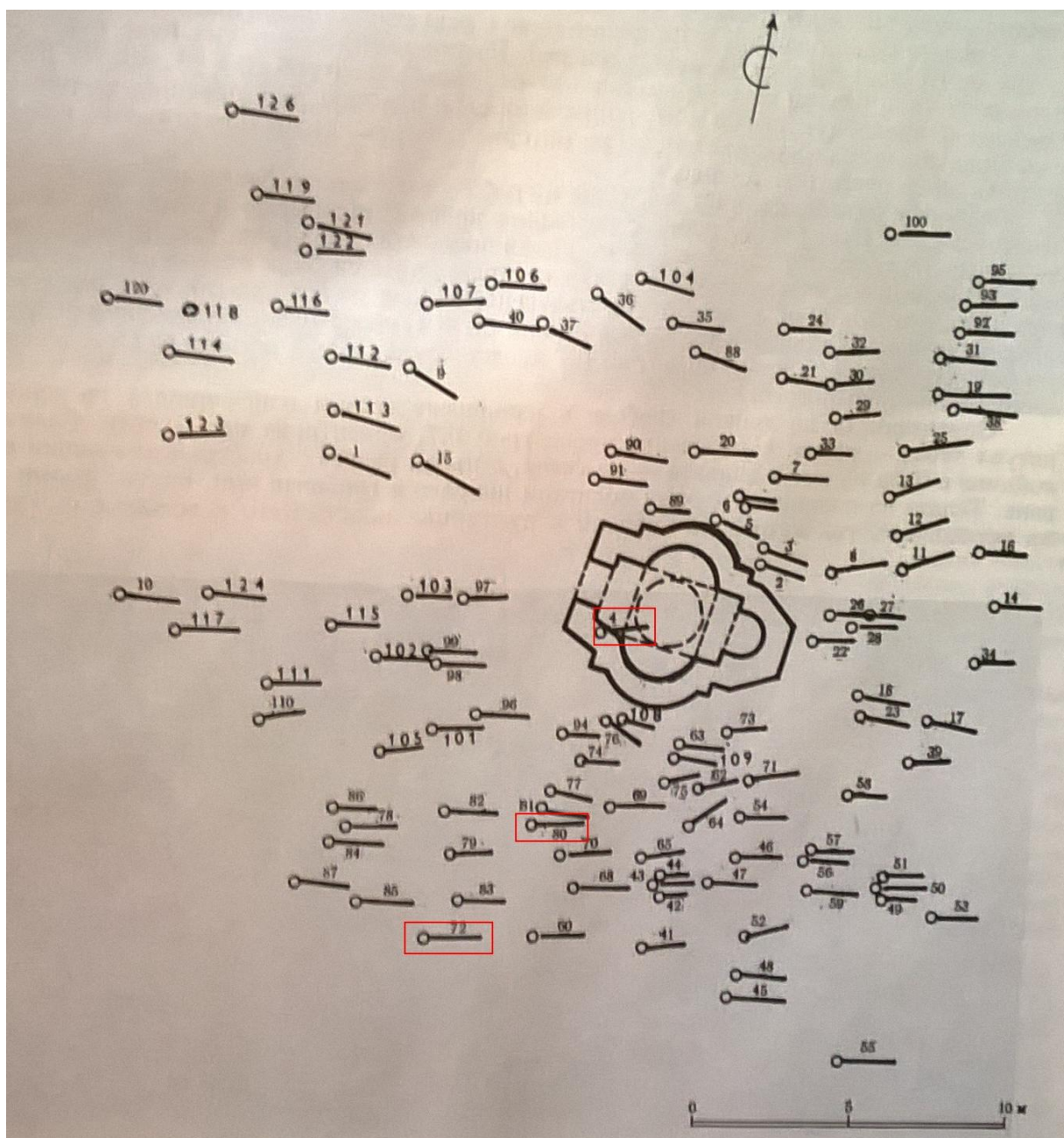


Fig. 11 Plan of Pernik with marked locations of deviant burials

Isolation was a powerful statement about the deviant character of certain burials and the negative social evaluation surrounding them. The tendency for deviant burials to appear in the periphery of communal cemeteries is a conspicuous manifestation of this practice. Such strategy for differential treatment is especially noticeable in complexes from the First Bulgarian Tsardom and even more in its pagan period. Some execution sections and burial grounds clearly developed in Devnya and Kyulevcha on the periphery of the necropoleis. The

necessity for distinguishable space arrangement to support deviant rites decreases on sites of lesser size and regional importance.

However, the existence and number of isolated burial grounds is likely misrepresented in the archaeological record so far. The intentional focus on excavating architecturally significant complexes from the High and Late Middle Ages diverted the attention from attempts to identify other type of sites. No doubt, the difficulty of detecting isolated cemeteries and the seeming randomness of such sites contributed to the current state of our knowledge. Particularly telling example in this respect is the site of Skalishte in southern Bulgaria.

Skalishte is a well-organized isolated burial ground with several rock-cut cysts. There is evidence for deviant burial rites, reburials and collective graves (No. 86-88 in the catalogue). More importantly for the present discussion is how the site is situated in the landscape. The isolation of the place is further emphasized in terms of natural and visual distinction. The burial ground is not only isolated on a rocky ridge, but is separated from the inhabited valley by the river Kazlardere.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the contemporaneous twelfth to fourteenth-century church graveyard lies on the opposite bank of the river and in direct visual contact. The isolated burial ground lies in between four cemeteries from the same period and is possible that it served as outcasts' cemetery for the community.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> [Milen Kamarev] Милен Камарев, Средновековен некропол, с. Скалище, общ. Кърджали [Medieval necropolis, Skalishte village, Kardzhali Municipality], *AOP* (2008): 749.

<sup>83</sup> [Ivan Balkanski] Иван Балкански, Средновековни некрополи в кърджалийски окръг [Medieval necropoleis in the region of Kardzhali] (, Kardzhali: Regional Historical Museum of Kardzhali, 1977).

### 3. Transforming landscapes: Madara beyond the Rider

Madara is one of the most significant medieval heritage sites in Bulgaria, about 15 km to the south from Pliska. There is the state cult center and part of the core region of political power around Pliska and Preslav.<sup>84</sup> The complex emerges around the distinctive landscape feature of the Madara plateau with vertical cliffs high up to 120m rising above the surrounding plain. On the cliffs is carved the rock-relief relief representing a hunting rider in a highly-ideological composition with historical inscriptions dedicated to Bulgar victories. The interpretations of the imagery tend to link it to the cult of Tangra and the royal power of the Bulgar khans. Beneath it a pagan cult complex has developed, later replaced by a church. In the field of medieval funerary archaeology in Bulgaria Madara holds a special place as well.

To the north of the plateau is located small tumular necropolis of six prehistoric barrows. Four of them were excavated in the interwar period of the last century by Vassil Mikov.<sup>85</sup> The primary burials and the mounds themselves date to the Bronze Age. In mound III he unearthed several graves, including the well-known grave 5. In it was found inhumation grave oriented N-S with lavish inventory, including luxurious belt and articulated horse skeleton. The gold and glass belt elements suggest dating in the late seventh century. Furthermore, the grave is identified as part of the Sivashovka group, known for the characteristic secondary burials in prehistoric mounds.<sup>86</sup> Grave 5 from mound III in Madara is usually perceived as the material remains from the early Bulgar warrior elite on the Lower

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<sup>84</sup> For the most detailed and recent account on the complex, see Velina Dimitrova, *Zeugnisse der Kunst und Kultur der Protobulgaren aus der heidnischen Periode des Ersten Bulgarischen Reiches (7.-9. Jh.). Wesen. Ursprung. Parallelen*. PhD dissertation (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2007), 131-143, 178-204.

<sup>85</sup> Vasil Mikov [Василь Миковъ], Последни могили находки [Last Tumular Finds], *Madara* 1 (1934): 429-438.

<sup>86</sup> Rasho Rashev [Рашо Рашев], *Прабългарите през V-VII век* [Protobulgarians in the 5-7<sup>th</sup> centuries] (Sofia: Orbel, 2005), 176-178.



Danube and a link between the cultures of the Danubian Khanate and the Old Great Bulgaria of Kubrat in the northern Black Sea region.

Nevertheless, there is another secondary burial in the tumular necropolis in Madara that deserves our attention. It is discovered again by Vassil Mikov during his excavations there<sup>87</sup>. Mound I is the southernmost mound in the necropolis and at the time of the expedition had the highest preserved size with diameter of 24m and height of 3, 6m. From the four burials in the mound, grave 2 (No. 115 in the catalogue) demonstrates deviant burial characteristics.

The burial is located in the southeastern section of the mound not far from its center. It was found on depth of approximately 0, 6m. There is no inventory, but the skeleton is determined as belonging to an adult individuals. It is oriented W-E and the skull is placed on right humerus close to the clavicle with orientation S-N. The article describes the skull as placed on the right shoulder, but here is accepted the position according to the drawing. Additionally, the legs of the skeleton were probably tied as they are placed on top of each other in the lower tibiae and fibulae.<sup>88</sup> The positions of both the legs and the skull cannot be attributed to external factors and indicate intention in the practice.

The skeleton from grave 2 in mound I illustrates some of the recurring problems with the study of deviant burial customs. The lack of any grave goods makes the importance of absolute dating with scientific methods even greater. However, at the time of the excavations such methods were not available and today they are often too expensive to be applied to findings considered of lesser importance. In the specific case of Madara, the current whereabouts of the skeleton itself are unknown.

<sup>87</sup> [Mikov Vasil]Василь Миковъ Последни могилни находки [Last Tumular Finds], *Мадара* 1 (1934): 430.

<sup>88</sup> Ibidem.

Nonetheless, some argument based on the data acquired for the present study about the relative dating of the burial can be offered. It has been shown that deviant burials in communal burial grounds are more likely to follow the normative orientation, especially after the conversion to Christianity. Decapitations from the sample analyzed so far seem to follow the pattern. Therefore, the W-E orientation of the grave probably signifies that the burial happened after the conversion in mid-ninth century. The other feature of the rite that can be used is the placement of the skull. The two closest examples, where the skull is linked to the right clavicle, date to the tenth-twelfth century. The dating tenth-twelfth century for the deviant burial from Madara is far from perfect, but is a plausible proposal based on the available evidence.

If we accept the relative dating, this will stress even further the isolated character of the burial in Madara because not many deviant burials are recorded at the period. Then again, most of them come from archaeologically known communal burial grounds. The tumular necropolis remained visible marker in landscape of decreasing political importance. In this period the cult center lost its pagan character and the political center shifted further away to Preslav. Later on, the region became peripheral both for the Bulgarian and Byzantine states. Perhaps the area remained important in local memory and served as space with elite association and potential assembly site away from the urban or ecclesiastical centers at the time. Some hints in that direction can be found in the text of the apocryphal Anonymous Bulgarian Chronicle dated to the eleventh century. The text describes the time of the legendary tsar Slav who led the Bulgarian people to populate the lands abandoned by Romans and Hellenes. The narrative specifically points out the connection of this first Bulgarian ruler to the mounds as landscape features: “[...] and this tsar made hundred mounds in the

Bulgarian land. Then they gave him the name ‘the Hundred-mounded tsar’. In those years there was abundance of everything. And they were hundred mounds in his tsardom.”<sup>89</sup>

There is a clear juxtaposition between the ancestral elite association of the monuments exemplified by the early Bulgar burial and the introduction of deviant burial practices to the site. Perhaps these activities aimed purposeful transformation of the meaning attached to the landscape.

Similar cases of changing mortuary landscapes are known from Anglo-Saxon archaeology. The most telling example is from the well-known site of Sutton Hoo. The tumular necropolis is familiar as royal burial ground with rich funerary deposits from 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century. Anyway, on mound 5 and in the eastern periphery of the complex are recorded two groups of inhumation burials. Group 1 has been cited as evidence for human sacrifice among the Anglo-Saxons, but the evidence is far from conclusive.<sup>90</sup> Group 2 in association with mound 5 is clearly an execution cemetery, an observation confirmed furthermore by the identification of gallows’ postholes on the mound. The dating of the two groups has approximately the same beginnings in the seventh century, but Group 2 continues until tenth century as radiocarbon dates prove<sup>91</sup>.

The two high-status sites were selected as appropriate location to dispose of unwanted individuals and at least for Sutton Hoo to execute them. The burial monuments were erected and used to memorize social identity, power, and political authority. Precisely this aspect of mounds as long-term message was used by later and different elite to negotiate its empowered position. The deviant burials played double role. On one hand, continuity in

<sup>89</sup> И този цар сътвори сто могили в земята българска. Тогава му дадоха име “стомогилен цар”. В тези години имаше обилие от всичко. И имаше сто могили в неговото царство. Translation from Petkanova Donka [Петканова, Донка], *Стара българска литература. Апокрифи*. [ Old Bulgarian Literature. Apocrypha.] (Sofia: Balgarski pisatel, 1982).

<sup>90</sup> Andrew Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Human Sacrifice at Cuddleston and Sutton Hoo? *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 7 (1996): 24-28.

<sup>91</sup> Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, 132-134.

terms of space is evident. On other side, the strategy of power representation is different. To some extent, the outcasts of the present were used to deny the leaders of the past by creating symbolic connection between them in the landscape. In this sense, the burial from Madara can be understood as physical marker of the incorporation of former Bulgarian core territory into Byzantine provincial governance following the military effort of John I Tzimiskes (969-976) and Basil II (976-1025).

In Madara the deviant burial demonstrates apparent relation to isolated monument from earlier period. Secondary burials with traces of deviant burial customs in prehistoric mounds are also recorded in Pliska and Krusheto. At the current state of research cannot be decisively stated if deviant burials often appear in connection to earlier monuments and barrows in particular. Generally, the role played by the numerous prehistoric and ancient mounds in the medieval period in Bulgaria is another poorly understood aspect of landscape archaeology, despite several excavated cemeteries reusing earlier monument. Anyway, the closer look at Madara provides solid argument for considering this idea in more systematic manner.

## **4. Conclusion**

The inquiry into the spatial aspects of deviant burials reaffirmed their ambiguous position compared to other forms of funerary contexts. Recurring tendency towards peripheral placement is a spatial testimony to the obscure social position of the deceased. Of course, the pattern should not be turned into generalization, but signals for awareness that many other instances of deviant burials may be missing from the archaeological record. Another aspect of the deviant burials is potential as agents of transformation in a strategy of power claims in association with landmarks.

# Chapter 6 – Narratives of Deviance: Interpreting the Burial Record

## 1. Introduction

One of the main critical points promoted by the thesis is the limited interpretative element in previous scholarship. Now, after the archaeological evidence for deviant burial rites was contextualized as precise as possible, some possible explanatory remarks are necessary. This chapter will elaborate on the interplay between religious and legal meaning in the archaeological record. A clear-cut distinction between the two spheres is not always possible and in fact inaccurate on many occasions. Thus, an attempt for multifaceted discussion on the issue, supported by selected case studies, will be offered in the following account.

## 2. Christianization and belief system

The religion is unquestionably big factor in the choices shaping the burial custom, but also in the explanation of their meaning. The belief system establishes the means to manipulate the body and directs the funeral performance in which the underlying social motivation is negotiated. The role of religion and Christianity in particular goes even deeper in the treatment of outcasts, because it is embedded in the socially accepted norms.

The Christianization of the medieval Bulgar society is a complex and long process. Even before the conversion from 864, there were multiple encounters of the population of the Danubian Bulgar Khanate with the Christianity. Despite that, the conversion in the times of Boris serves as dividing line in history with deep political, social and cultural consequences.

Funerary behavior also experienced significant change demanded by the teachings of the new religion.<sup>92</sup> Hence, how Christianity interacted to the deviant burial customs is aspect that needs further elaboration. To certain degree the two phenomena are related directly. For instance, in Poland the deviant burials are perceived as consequence of the conversion, as the earlier dominant cremation rites make it practically impossible to detect unusual treatment of the dead.<sup>93</sup> The material from Bulgaria is slightly different, because deviant graves are found in some biritual necropoleis before the Christianization.

The conversion to Christianity in Bulgaria is connected to deviant burial practices from the very beginning. The interpretation of the mass grave from Devnya-3 as the archaeological signature of the rebellion of some pagan aristocrats against Boris and the new religion has already been discussed. Besides the legal and political aspects in the interpretation of this burial site, the mass grave is the physical manifestation of the social stress caused by the statewide change of religion.<sup>94</sup>

The chronological survey on the individual graves revealed continuity of all major deviant burial practices before and after the conversion to Christianity in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The burials with deviant characteristics tend to follow the dominant orientation. Different orientation of the grave is sometimes used to emphasize the deviant character, especially concerning prone burials from the period before and immediately after the conversion. Nonetheless, the acceptance of standard W-E orientation demonstrates the widespread

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<sup>92</sup> Indicative for the lack of up –to-date research is that there is not a single study of the funerary archaeology in relation to Christianization in the most recent volume on the topic: Pavel Georgiev (ed.) [Павел Георгиев (ред.)] Християнската култура в средновековна България [Christian culture in medieval Bulgaria] (Veliko Tarnovo: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2008). For some related observations, see Zhivka Vazharova [Живка Въжарова] *Славяни и прабългари: по данни на некрополите от VI-XI в. на територията на България* [Slavs and protobulgarians based on data from the necropoleis from seventh to eleventh century on the territory of Bulgaria] (Sofia: БАН, 1976).

<sup>93</sup> Gardela Leszek and Kamil Kajkowski, Vampires, criminals or slaves? Reinterpreting ‘deviant burials’ in early medieval Poland, *World Archaeology* 45:5 (2013):785.

<sup>94</sup> For Central European analogies, see Nora Berend, ed. *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

incorporation of Christian ideas into the funeral practices. This was also a two-way process and the adoption of deviant rites in the Christian tradition suggests that there was not specific and strictly religious meaning in them that contradicts the faith.

The transformative nature of the Christianization is well captured by the grave from Preslav. In the decapitation burial from Type I from the site Preslav-1 the skull with a pectoral cross is placed on top of an urn containing cremation following the pagan custom. The cross is the Christian object *par excellence*. It is unlikely that the pectoral cross was deposited just as a precious object, because it is not placed in the clay vessel by the urn containing grave goods and animal bones. It is unclear if the cremated remains and the skull belong to the same individual or if the grave was reused. However, the deliberate disposal of the skull in direct relation to the urn is certain and creates physical and symbolic association between them. It is possible that the pectoral cross was included in this composition to purify the pagan grave, thus emphasizing the Christian identity of the decapitated person.

Christianity is a space-aware religion and the Church as an institution utilizes various strategies of exclusion and inclusion. They vary from access to space in churches and monasteries to the very membership in the ecclesiastical community achieved through sacraments or lost by expulsion. The organization of communal burial grounds requires similar approach and exploitation of peripheral space for deviant burials has already been demonstrated. Particular connection exists between the prone burials from Type IIA and urban cemeteries that developed on monastic grounds. Moreover, these cases of face-down placed decapitated skulls tend to appear in prestigious monastic complexes like the cemetery of the Great Basilica in Pliska (No.40) or in the monastery Velika Lavra in Tarnovo (No.90). Such institutions were patronized and used for funerals by the aristocracy, including the royal house and attracted the urban population to themselves. The inclusion in them ensured the

long term collective memory of a person and his or her kin. The local spiritual authorities had immediate control over this social resource. Arguably, deviant burials of this type served as obligatory performative element directed towards the people present at the funerary event and compensating certain wrongdoings of the deceased. One burial from Anevsko kale (No. 94) where the skull is replaced by a large stone probably reproduces the same requisite of urban cemeteries under monastic regulation.

Another contiguous aspect of belief systems and deviant burials is the popular Christianity, notably the magical practices, superstitions and the anti-transfiguration rite. The latter was used to explain a wide range of practices, including fixation, mutilation, placement of amulets in the grave, and using the purifying power of fire to prevent the raise of vampires. The intellectual and historical background of this has already been discussed, as well with some of the problems of this interpretation. The low degree of correlation between deviant rites and findings of charcoal in the grave indicates that in the medieval period the two were separate practices. The same can be stated about the deposition of amulets.

Written evidence and ethnographic data for belief in vampires in the Slavic world are confirmed for the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. The vampirism as we know it and imagine it is most probably attached to the deviant burial customs in that period. This is not to say that beliefs in evil powers and the dangerous dead were not feared in earlier times. The very existence of deviant burial rites is one indication for existing notion of powerful dead capable of influencing the world of the living.<sup>95</sup> The belief in bodily resurrection promoted by Christianity (among other mystic religions and cults) must have made those anxieties even more relevant. Rather the social outcasts and criminals treated in particular ways gradually turned into the demographic group recognized as potential vampires. Thus,

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<sup>95</sup> Mike Parker Pearson, The powerful dead: archaeological relationships between the living and the dead. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 3, no. 02 (1993): 203-229.



the rites applied to them were also acknowledged as the appropriate means to deal with the supernatural danger. It is a possibility for some of the burials, but only on the basis of much later examples and cannot be seen as the only possible interpretation. The argument for emergence of vampire beliefs from essentially legal practices is still speculative at this point, but reflects better the nature of the available evidence.

Finally, the fixation with ferrous tools must be commented in the context of material expression of belief systems. As far as our current knowledge goes, it is rare practice with discrete territorial and chronological extent, recorded in southern Bulgaria for the twelfth – early thirteenth century. The disposal of sickles in the graves is well known from Central Europe, where it received significant scholarly attention. The scholarly efforts are particularly focused on the topic in Slovakia and Poland. Sickles are found among the grave goods in the Middle Danube region from the seventh century until the eighteenth century. Interestingly, both Slovakian and Polish sites have a gap of nearly three centuries between the thirteenth and sixteenth century in recording such finds. The graves with sickles from Hungary began in the middle Avar period and appear consistently until the fourteenth century. The introduction of the practice is attributed to part of the Bulgar tribes migrating deep in the Avar khaganate in the seventh century.<sup>96</sup> The Bulgarian examples correspond to the latest medieval phase of the phenomenon and direct link on ethnic basis is unlikely. The systematic analysis of the graves with sickles from Slovakia revealed that there is a connection between the sickle as an object and the social rank of the deceased. Furthermore, there is a decrease of the frequency of graves with sickles from the Avar and Great Moravian periods to the Arpad age, supplemented by the decrease in the size of deposited objects. Also, it seems that in the Arpad age some gender specification occurred with preferred use of the sickle in female

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<sup>96</sup> Péter Somogyi, A Kárpát-medencei sarlós temetkezési szokás eredete, [Into the origin of burials with sickles in the Carpathian Basin] *Archaeológiai Értesítő* 109 (1982).

burials.<sup>97</sup> However, it must be noted that these studies did not fully took into account the position of the sickle compared to the skeleton. In contrast, the Polish research is emphasizing the apotropaic function of these objects, especially for the later findings.<sup>98</sup>

The Bulgarian examples also used sickles of smaller size. They were smaller in comparison to the Central European artifacts, but also in comparison to the objects for everyday use. This is easily seen in Sevtopolis, where two sickles were found. The one originating from household context is clearly larger and probably more expensive than the one placed in the grave (Fig.1). The possibility of the sickle in the grave being a symbolic object with little every-day use should not be disregarded completely without use-wear analysis. Related to this is the use of iron ploughs in two contemporary graves from Sozopolis and Perperikon. Plough is an important object in this context, as it was usually regarded as expensive. It is interesting that the Bulgarian graves demonstrate targeting of particular body parts – the pelvis and the left clavicle. This probably reflects the symbolic and protective function ascribed to these tools.

On the basis of the Central European analogies it is reasonable to argue that the fixation with ferrous tools appeared in what is today southern Bulgaria under influence from the Catholic world. However, the custom was adapted to the local cultural background and beliefs, as the difference in the sex of the deceased (all known and anthropologically determined individuals are males) demonstrates. It was probably sort of high-status fixation with dual symbolic meaning of expensive investment and preventive magical power. The location of some of the graves with such form of fixation nearby churches also leads the

<sup>97</sup> Karin Reichenbach, Sickeln als mittelalterliche and neuzeitliche Grabbeigaben in der Slowakei, *Leipziger online Beiträge zur Ur- und Frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie* 10, (2004): 4-6.

<sup>98</sup> Marek Polcyn and Elzbieta Gajda, Buried with Sickles: Early Modern Interments from Drawsko, Poland *Antiquity* 89/348 (2015):1384-1386; Andrzej Janowski, Tomasz Kurasiński, Rolnik, wojownik czy „odmieniec”? Próba interpretacji obecności sierpów w grobach wczesnośredniowiecznych na terenie ziem polskich [Farmer, soldier or foreigner? An attempt for the interpretation of sickles in late medieval graves from the Polish lands], *Acta Archaeologica Lodziensia* 56 (2010):79-96.

interpretation in this way. Perhaps, these cases can show how the elevated social position of the individual can affect the choice of non-normative treatment. Comparison can be made to the 13th century female grave from Pernik. The woman was buried in central position within an abandoned church with precious pectoral cross and her legs were probably only tied, despite that mutilations were more common treatment at the time.

### 3. Law enforcement

So far it was emphasized several times that deviant burial rites can be understood only in the context of diverging from the recognized standard. This very practical observational technique applies to the interpretation of the archaeological findings as well. The claim for reinterpreting the deviant burials in legal terms as the physical manifestation of judicial activities is very well grounded. The law enforcement does not exclude rituals from the burials of the criminals and wrong-doers. The ritualized behavior exercised by the authorities reflects their power, sometimes in purely physical means. Therefore, the symbolism will be more transparent and often applying reversed performative strategies focusing on maltreatment and exclusion.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, to consider deviant burials as the remains of law-breakers is not entirely contradicting the narrative of superstitious explanations. The much later ethnological records on which they are based single out individuals disobeying certain social norms. The mode of deviant burial seems to be subject to the social context and level of authority issuing the norm. Thus, the laws coming from the top of state hierarchy are enforced with greater severity and often include serious maltreatment.

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<sup>99</sup> The thesis operates mainly within the Anglo-American framework, but archaeology of legal culture is branch with significant tradition on its own. See for instance, Karl von Amira and Claudius von Schwerin, *Rechtsarchäologie* (Berlin: Ahnenerbe-Stiftung Verlag, 1943); Hermann Baltl, *Rechtsarchäologie des Landes Steiermark* (Graz-Köln: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachf., 1957); Witold Maisel, *Rechtsarchäologie Europas* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1992); Wolfgang Schmale, *Archäologie der Grund- und Menschenrechte in der Frühen Neuzeit. Ein Deutsch-Französisches Paradigma* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997).

The archaeological evidence confirms such hypothesis. The mass grave from Devnya-3 was discussed in great detail as the archaeological record of execution sanctioned from the monarch himself and displaying multiple forms of maltreatment towards convicted felons and traitors. The comparison with another nearly contemporary mass grave, namely the one from Kyulevcha, stressed even more the differences resulting from state-sanctioned execution. The correspondence of deviant burial rites found in the context of the mass grave in Devnya-3 and in medieval individual graves from the territory of Bulgaria validates a legal explanation of the funerary record. Naturally, some cases fit the narrative better and are better suited for such interpretation.

The clearest example in this respect seems to be grave 81 from Kyulevcha (No.8 in the catalogue). The grave is in the peripheral cluster of the biritual necropolis from the eighth-century and is also close to the mass grave. The male individual buried there was most likely tied before his execution, probably nearby the grave. He was decapitated as part of the disintegration of his body into three parts with a sword, as the cut-marks indicate. Then, his remains were disposed in prone position inside a round pit. The combination of several distinctive elements of deviant burial leaves strong impression of the severity of the maltreatment and presumably, the committed crime. It can also serve as illustration of the types of burial practices most easily associated with the grave of law-breakers. The prone position, decapitation and disintegration can be recognized as a marker of deviant social behavior and negative mode of dying, probably execution. The disintegration has peculiar meaning in this sense. It is not merely the enforcement act of a capital punishment, but involves the violent performance of destroying the physical identity of the convicted and by extension, his social personality.

A noteworthy link between deviant burial rites and a circular shape of the grave structure occurs. The recent find of three rounded pits (No. 69-71 in the catalogue) from tenth-eleventh century containing deviant burials from the prehistoric site of Hauza near Kapitan Andreevo is significant on the matter. The pits are of considerable depth up to 1.5 m. On the bottom were found four individuals with different signs of maltreatment. The neglecting mode of disposal, fixation with stone and decapitations probably signify these as the remains of executed local people during a military campaign rather than a sacrifice, as suggested by the archaeologist excavating the site. The use of pits for disposal of the bodies can be another meaningful form of disrespectful treatment. The question of the initial use of such pits is open and can raise doubts on the use of the term grave in these cases at all. However, similar structures are also known from cemeteries (see above).

Another potential execution from Varbyane (No.39) demonstrates that the killing is not always done easily. Despite the lack of pathological investigation at the present time, it is possible to argue that the execution happened with a cutting blow from the top under an angle of around 45 degrees. The cut or series of cuts possibly not only decapitated the individual, but cut part of the chest too. In the grave, the skull without the missing mandible was placed in a niche, while the clavicle, ribs and vertebrae placed instead of the skull. However, without closer anthropological examination of the skeleton this remains only a guess.

It is also notable that deviant burial rites from the pagan period and the early Christian period up to the eleventh century can be more conspicuously assigned to judicial activities. In the twelfth-fourteenth century the importance of religious symbolism prevailed in deviant burial customs and the elements of state-induced rites were absorbed. This opens a possibility to use this in a future comparison with other historical data to assess the cooperation or competition between ecclesiastical and secular power in the state.

However, the question of interpreting the mutilation burials does not have a single satisfying conclusion. This should not come as a surprise, because the deviant rites including mutilation of the body are the most common and with most internal diversity. Probably all internal variability requires different contextualization. To see them as part of law enforcement is plausible. Historical studies claim a common development of mutilations use by legal systems across medieval Europe. The mutilation was favored as compromise penalty of lesser gravity than the execution. The deliberate impairment had immediate physical and social implications for the person and perhaps echoed the medieval mentality for visual recognition and social distinction. It is believed that the application of blood-shedding law, especially by secular authorities, was on the rise towards the later medieval period.<sup>100</sup>

It is important to remember that the mutilation sometimes targeted parts of the body like the eyes, nose, testicles, or ears that hardly can leave traces in archaeological context, but the methods of impairment often led to the death of the person.<sup>101</sup> This can be matched to the account of the Bulgar written laws at the time of khan Krum (803-814), which also revealed tendency for mutilation.<sup>102</sup> The most authoritative Bulgarian law code, utilized by other Slavic states as well, Law for Judgment of People (*Законъ соудный людьмъ*) can also be cited in this respect. It was introduced short after the conversion to Christianity and imposes its moral system into the legal sphere of life. Interesting is the penalty for setting fire or destruction on another's property. The convicted has to be slashed with a sword and the law specifically states that this is valid in both rural and urban settlements.<sup>103</sup> The same document often assigns simultaneous penalties for the same crime under the temporal and church law. So for instance, the marriage between god-parents and god-children or the affair with a

<sup>100</sup> Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages. Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 13-15, 21

<sup>101</sup> Ibidem, p. 20.

<sup>102</sup> Suidas. *Lexicon.*, vol. I, ed. Ada Adler (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928), 483-4.

<sup>103</sup> *Законъ соудный людьмъ*, XV, in Stefan Bobchev [Стефан Бобчевъ] *Старобългарски правни паметници* [Old Bulgarian Legal Documents] (Sofia: Pечатница на P.M. Buzhaitov, 1903), 89.

married woman is sanctioned with cutting the nose of the man by the temporal law and penance for fifteen years by the church norms.<sup>104</sup> One wonders if the offender will receive sort of deviant burial in case he passes away before his repentance. A more thorough investigation into the punishments in medieval Bulgarian legal system can reveal more patterns to be matched by the burial record.

The archaeological data at its present does not follow the overall European picture. Mutilations as a phenomenon is relatively stable from the seventh to the fourteenth century with peaks in the eight to tenth centuries and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The first period with intensity of physical impairment can be matched with the emergence of codified legal system in the First Bulgarian Khanate and Tsardom. Then again, probably not all of the cited cases should be regarded exclusively results of legal punishments.

Alternative explanation for the amputation of body parts are the injuries in combat or other medical reason. The impairment in military context can be considered judicial in a vague sense, if it is performed on captured enemies by the victors. However, the most common missing or displaced limbs are the feet. The possibility for medical amputation should not be disregarded. Uncontrollable infections from injury or disease and frostbite can lead to amputation. Until recently, the frostbite was mainly military problem during prolonged campaigns when the refreezing cycles of soldiers harmed the body parts. The retreat of Napoleon from Moscow in 1812 is perhaps the best documented account connecting the diagnosis with warfare condition. A study on medieval populations from the territory of Russia shows the big impact of temperature stress in trauma among males<sup>105</sup>. Also, horse riding and hunting accidents can be relevant in this context.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibidem VII, 86.

<sup>105</sup> Alexandra Buzhilova [Бужилова Александра] Homo Sapiens История болезни [Homo Sapiens. History of disease] (Moscow: Языки славянской культуры, 2005), 239.

Similar study is not undertaken for Bulgaria, but bodily mutilations and deviant burial rites should also be contextualized with other social stress markers. The deviant burial rites largely depend on the social life of the deceased. The amputation, if survived, is not simply irreversible sign for criminal activity. It has deep impact on the physical identity of the person. It evokes psychological trauma and societal association with limb loss that creates the image of incomplete individual. Additionally, the impairment imposes dependent lifestyle, which can also contribute to the stigma of a social outcast.

#### 4. Social complexity and political development

The emergence of “barbarian” complex societies and administrative-states in the periphery of the Eastern Roman Empire is one of the major historical processes perceivable from historical and archaeological sources.<sup>106</sup> The well-established tradition to use funerary evidence to comment on social complexity raises the issue how deviant burial customs can contribute to the debate and vice versa. Originally, deviants signified all forms of variability in the treatment of the dead, but the observation on diversity of deviant burials as defined here to social complexity can be applied. Here we must go back to the previously-mentioned Hypothesis 7 of Saxe. The logic is clear – more complex society will develop more elaborate normative system that will result in differential conduct towards the offenders depending on the seriousness of their act.

The variability of parallel deviant rites practiced is not the only marker for complexity. The combination of several deviant rites within the same context should also be regarded in this way. The accumulation of non-normative traits characterizes the deviant burials and their combination is probably expressing the sacred and power ideologies

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<sup>106</sup> Tsvetelin Stepanov, *The Bulgars and the Steppe Empire in the Early Middle Ages. The Problem of the Others* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).



embedded in the respective norms and stressing the gravity of the misconduct. For instance, the synchronicity between physical damage or body fragmentation and symbolic restriction in some graves can be understood in terms of simultaneous preventive acts against the corrupted body and soul. For instance, the burials 65 and 89 from Sakardza (No. 67 and 68 in the catalogue) show the fixation of the individual with stones, even though the feet are separated from the body. Interestingly, in one of the graves the amputated right foot has been also covered with a stone. The prone burials from Type IIA are another example of this, notably the individual from Tarnovo (No. 90) exhibiting the combination of decapitation with prone disposal of the skull and fixation by stones targeting the feet.

The same approach can be applied in the context of individual sites. In the eight-early tenth century the three necropoleis around Devnya stand out with their concentration of deviant burials. What is typical is not only the frequency of the deviant rites, but their co-existence in the same complex. Regardless of them, the area around Devnya and the nearby coastline around Varna are among the most intensely inhabited in the period. The existence of a larger settlement and possibly an *aul* (urban-like power center in the Bulgar khanate) has been suggested for Devnya. According to some theories, the initial power center of the Bulgar polity was located there.<sup>107</sup> The existence of local elite with prominent position within the khanate there is very likely. Members of this group are also candidates for the identity of the victims from the mass grave in Devnya-3.

Building on the legal aspects of the interpretations of the deviant burials, Andrew Reynolds also saw them as another possible indicator of social complexity in medieval times. His work on the deviant burial customs in early medieval England generated a three-stage

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<sup>107</sup> Pavel Georgiev [Павел Георгиев], За столицата на Аспарухова България [On the capital of Asparukh's Bulgaria], *Исторически преглед* 5-6 (2002): 208-227

model linking the judicial culture and political development.<sup>108</sup> As the author himself urges, the model must be tested in cross-cultural background. Arguably, this work is making the first conscious steps in this direction. The results from the current research are not conclusive for at least several reasons, but we must highlight that the territorial extent of the medieval Bulgarian states has not been completely covered; neither the chronological changes nor neighboring polities were fully represented. The collected data and the results from the analysis leave the suspicion that many potential sites with medieval deviant burials remained undetected or unstudied. That being said, the data allows some speculations on the topic that only prove the need for more systematic surveys to shed light on the mortuary and administrative landscapes of the medieval Balkans.

The first stages in the model are kin-based groups occupying rather small territories. Among these groups the deviant burials are the principal manifestation of casting out people failing to observe the social order. The archaeologically visible executions appear exceptionally rare and the individual families are the agents producing deviant burials. There is a lack of formalized legislation by the chief and the tradition of religious beliefs and superstitions dominates the treatment of the wrongdoer.

In Bulgarian context this depicts the period from the late seventh to the early ninth century.<sup>109</sup> The Danubian Bulgar Khanate at the time can be best understood as chiefdom organized around tribal affiliations, a confederation including mixture of Bulgar groups and Sclavenes. The khan and the kavhan most likely exercised form of diarchy regulated by the major aristocratic clans. The best evidence of their importance is recorded in the genealogical

<sup>108</sup> Andrew Reynolds, Judicial culture and social complexity: a general model from Anglo-Saxon England, *World Archaeology* 45:5(2013): 708-710

<sup>109</sup> Georgi Nikolov [Георги Николов] Централизъм и регионализъм в ранносредновековна България [Centralization and particularism in early medieval Bulgaria] (Sofia: Marin Drinov, 2005), 63-85; for the archaeological manifestation of this in the site system of Pliska see, Andrey Aladzov [Андрей Аладжов (съст.)] Археологическа карта на Плиска [Archaeological map of Pliska] (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2013), 185-189

Nominalia (List) of the Bulgarian Rulers.<sup>110</sup> In this historical account the individual rulers are listed accordingly to their house and time in power. Thus, after the members of the charismatic clan Dulo, the supreme power was shifting between the competing houses of Ermi, Vokil, and Ugain. The Sclavenes, an umbrella term used for the dependant Southern Slavic tribes like Severes, were also loosely governed by the khan and strategically settled in the frontier zones. Their main responsibility was the defense of southern and western borders and perhaps included certain tribute. Generally, the local communities exercised autonomy in dealing with their internal issues and norms were regulated by the local elites. The graves from the period are usually considered to reflect the ethnic diversity during the period. The basic pattern is viewed as contrast between Slavic urn-fields surrounding a cluster of Bulgar biritual necropoleis in Dobrogea and on both sides of the river Danube. It is believed that there was little archaeologically attested co-existence of the two groups within the same burial group.<sup>111</sup> The ethnic attribution aside, this can be understood in terms of weaker links between set of tribal communities.

The deviant burial rites appear in communal biritual necropoleis from almost the very beginning of the period on sites like Balchik and Novi Pazar on the coastline. Their frequency and variability slowly increased. Most characteristic are the tying and fixation of the dead bodies that evolved into more drastic mutilations of the dead body. Arguably, the earliest prone burials from Type I and Type IIB in Topola also occurred around that time. The geographical distribution remained limited within what is today northeastern-Bulgaria, which constituted the core territories of the khanate. It is impossible to determine the extent of their presence in the territories where cremation was dominant. However, an ambiguous note for the placement of unburned bones from human feet on top of several cremated remains in the

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<sup>110</sup> Antoaneta Granberg, Transferred in translation: Making a state in early medieval Bulgarian genealogies, *Slavica Helsengiensi* 35 (2008)

<sup>111</sup> Uwe Fiedler, *Bulgars in the Lower Danube Region*, 158

biritual necropolis in Bdintsi can mean that certain bodies were subject to special treatment before the cremation.<sup>112</sup>

The second phase of political development in the model is the emergence of supra-local power exploiting the core – periphery dynamics within the large-scale territories under control. This stage is characterized by increased geographical reach of political control and resources for power display. The incorporation of new territories within a larger polity required performance of the social order dictated by remote center. Usually this happens by codification of the legal system and increased judicial activity at the limits of the state. The formation of distinctive execution sites and burial grounds supplementing dispersed institutional network are alternative mode of this ideological colonization of the landscape. At the same time, continuation of the earlier rites for burying the outsiders in the core regions is to be expected.

The historical processes in the ninth century urged the Bulgarian khanate into the status of supra-local power.<sup>113</sup> The rule of khan Krum at the beginning of the century accelerated the centralization and expansion of state power. His politics were followed by his successors and eventually lead to the conversion to Christianity in Bulgaria. The establishment of far-reaching Bulgar authority carried many elements of legal and administrative culture, increasingly based on ideology of divine-sanctioned power and codified norms. The afore-mentioned written laws of Krum are not the only sign of bureaucratic state control exercised by the power of the written word. The stone inscriptions dispersed across the state regulate various aspects of political life like border control and allocation of military equipment. For instance, the well-known inscription from Hambarli (813) reveals the territorial re-organization of the newly conquered lands south of the Balkan

<sup>112</sup> Zhivka Vazharova Славяни и прабългари, 143

<sup>113</sup> Angel Nikolov [Ангел Николов] *Политическа мисъл в ранносредновековна България* [Political thought in early medieval Bulgaria] (Sofia: Paradigma, 2006), 32-38

Mountains. In historical secondary literature is accepted to see the beginnings of territorial governance transforming the kin-based tribes into administrative units at that time. Another, archaeological evidence for the transformed nature of social organization is the monumental architectural enterprise in Pliska shaping the city as fully-formed center of secular and ecclesiastical power.<sup>114</sup> The situation was to some extent similar after the conversion to Christianity and with the further territorial expansion in the second half of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth century.

The deviant burial rites largely confirm this historical reconstruction. The continuation of customs in the core territories between Danube and the Balkan Mountains is evident. Many deviant burials occur in the limits of communal burial grounds, probably being undertaken by the families of the deceased. However, the frequency of such burials increased, probably reflecting more elaborate normative system. Also, the spatial exclusion in peripheral position of deviant graves was regularly implemented. More often in this period different orientation was also followed to increase the message of separation. Archaeologically recognizable executions dating from this period are known, sometimes grouped in distinctive sections on site. The elimination of internal resistance from the centralized power can explain the ambiguous geographic characterization of some execution sites. They are found in what is considered the core territory of the state, but in its peripheral areas.

Some deviant burials can be understood in terms of the social tension caused by conflicts and wars between competing states. For instance, the burials from Hauza are not far from Adrianopolis (today Edirne, Turkey). The city was the principle center of the frontier zone in Thrace between Bulgaria and Byzantium and lied on the route of any major military campaign. The dating of the site to the tenth-eleventh century probably means that the buried

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<sup>114</sup> Rasho Rashev, *Българска езическа култура*, 82-98; compare to Vasil Gjuzelev Hauptstädte, Residenzen und Hofkultur im mittelalterlichen Bulgarien, 7.-14. Jh. (Vom Nomadencampus bis zum Zarenhof), *Études balkaniques* 27, no.2, (1991): 82-105

people were civilian casualties either of the wars during the time of Symeon I or the raid of the Rus-Bulgarian army of Svyatoslav towards Constantinople.

In Pliska during the pagan period the deviant burials were discovered in the common necropoleis spread in the periphery of the city. After the Christianization some deviant burials appear within the city limits in urban cemeteries (the Great Basilica) or isolated (the Southern wall of the Inner City). However, they are later and belong to the tenth-eleventh centuries.

There is another, reversed manifestation of this second phase of the model evident from the deviant burials from Bulgaria. So far, execution sites and cemeteries from the peripheral lands conquered by the Bulgarian state are a blank spot. However, the core territories of Bulgaria were incorporated into the Byzantine Empire at the time of Basil II Bulgar-Slayer. Hence, they had to be administratively re-organized into provincial territories subordinate to Constantinople. The consistent decrease in the number of burials with deviant characteristics in the eleventh century can be regarded the outcome of this process. The pattern is further stressed by the chronological gap registered for the prone burials and the change of their dominant form from Type I to Type IIA. Of course, certain national bias can explain the reluctance to ascribe sites to the period of Byzantine domination, but its impact should not be overestimated. Additionally, the reinterpretation of the decapitation burial from Madara offered here indicates the re-appraisal of landscapes for judicial purposes, which is a distinctive feature of the model.

The third stage is the one of large – scale power and well-organized state governing. At this point, the social distance between ruling elite and the majority of people is extended beyond going back and facilitates new forms of expressing power. The demonstrations of judicial activities and the continuous issuing of new laws lead to proliferation of execution sites and cemeteries within what was the heartland. In Anglo-Saxon context the correlation

between estate boundaries and execution sites was complete at this point. Related is the concern with public attention to performance of justice focusing either on the decision-making or the law enforcement.

Little is known on the internal affairs of the Bulgarian state as large-scale power in the tenth century, even less regarding the legal culture. It is accepted that the Byzantine political culture strongly influenced the Bulgarian court, especially after the marriage between Petar I and Maria-Irina in 927.<sup>115</sup> The existing administrative organization must have been maintained until the internal political changes and the shift of the Bulgarian center of power to the west under Samuel. The distribution of lead seals around important political centers can be one sign of active administrative control.

As far as deviant burial rites are concerned, there seems to be a continuation of the practices described above. It is possible that public executions were not the preferred mode of power display or very likely, such sites were not yet identified.

At this point of the research, it is apparent that the First Bulgarian Tsardom fits the model to some extent. The evolutionary change from complexity to a large-scale power unifying more or less the British Isles is possible due to the geographical and historical specifics of Britain. On the Balkans the competition for dominance in the region and the tendencies for decentralization are much stronger. Another major difference is in the form of Christianity and ecclesiastical organization, particularly when it comes to power ideologies.

However, the three elements of the model should not necessarily represent linear development. Different social strata and smaller groups generated additional co-existing norms with different level of relevance to the rest of the society. Deviant mortuary treatment

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<sup>115</sup> Paul Stephenson, *The Byzantine Balkan Frontier. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900-1204* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24

is dependent on the ideological charge and social stress impact on the disobedience. The origin of the norms and the immediate context determined the prominence of legal or cult features in the funerary rites.

The deviant burials from the twelfth-fourteenth centuries or roughly the period of the Second Bulgarian Tsardom can serve as useful example. It has been stressed that religious symbolism and popular religion revived the various rites. Many of them continued to exist and re-emerged among small kin-based social groups in rural environments in the twelfth century. The rural site of Kovachevo provides the link between earlier and later forms of treatment. The cemetery is directly adjusted to the settlement and does not have a church operating the activity. The diversification of the fixation rites also occurs in the period, possibly in circumstances of more intense cultural contact. For instance, analogy for the burial from Plovdiv (No. 116) was found in late medieval Italy.

Some fortified urban centers that at times achieved relative autonomy from Tarnovo and Constantinople tend to demonstrate concentration of deviant burials. The thirteenth century sites of Assenova krepost and Voden on the northern slopes of the Rhodope Mountain offered the discoveries of several isolated burials with mutilations of the postcranial skeleton. Again in the Rhodopes is the isolated burial ground at Skalishte with large concentration of deviant rites. The site seems to have been used by several settlements to contain the remains of obscure individuals and was used to demonstrate the modes of spatial separation. It's seldom discovery during road construction work also hints that more similar sites have remained unknown.

To continue in this line of thought, one can refer to the decapitations and prone burials from Kaliakra (No.107-111) or Anevsko kale (No.92-96), associated with the medieval city of Kopsis. Both are important aristocratic centers and their rulers probably exercised



significant executive powers and feudal rights. The former turned into the center of the Principality of Dobrogea in the fourteenth century, while the latter was the domain of the house Smilets related to the royal dynasties of Bulgaria, Raska and Byzantium. The presence of graves marked by deviant rites within the communal burial grounds represents the capability of local elites to sustain circumscribed authority in the observance of the social norms. It could be that this responsibility was delegated to church representatives, as in Anevsko kale the burials come from one of the monastic cemeteries with burials of the local population. The church as norm-inducing organization and dominant agent in funerary activities adopted the strategy for differential treatment of sinful individuals within the realm of consecrated burial grounds. The deviant burial (No. 91) from churchyard in one of the quarters of Tsarevets in Tarnovo is a rare illustration for this in the capital.

Finally, the social organization on some places can be seriously disturbed by social challenge like war or epidemics. In such cases is likely that the communities and the elites can rely to greater extent on customs with low-level origin than to the legislation from the distant center. Deviant burial rites are part of the response strategy in such circumstances. The thirteenth century site of Pernik is good illustration of these processes. The urban community experienced great losses during the invasion of Stefan Nemanja, which seems to have caused much destruction on otherwise prosperous fortified town. Despite the damage, the hill was reoccupied and cemeteries developed around the ruins of churches. Mutilation and fixation were used to mark the fail to comply with morals. The case of a woman with syphilis among them evokes the various form of non-conformity to expected behavior that can cause differential treatment.

## 5. Conclusion

The chapter addressed the issue of interpreting deviant burials. It has been argued that one all-embracing narrative cannot be equally valid for all features of the deviant rites. The framework used here is juxtaposing belief systems and legal and political developments in the medieval Bulgarian society. Significant attention was paid to the judicial connotations. Some forms of deviant burials are considered manifestations of power and control. In the later period, the practices were adopted in more social contexts and increasingly understood through religious and superstitious way of thinking.

# Conclusion

The medieval deviant burials from the territory of Bulgaria were collected and analyzed in systematic and comprehensive manner for first time in the present work. The sampled included hundred and eighteen graves with overall more than two-hundred individuals. Despite the fact that their existence has been acknowledged in previous academic literature, the observations on their nature were usually restrained to links with ethnographically-attested anti-vampirism rites.

The approach of the current thesis took the stance that the problems in research were largely a consequence of missing definitions and theoretically-informed archaeological practice. Deviant burials were defined as distinctive non-normative form of body disposal made under the pressure of extreme conditions or negative social evaluation in the past or today. The statement makes it clear that deviancy is not entirely separate phenomenon and can be understood only in the context of a given society, its traditions and norms. The outstanding set of burials considered deviant required long-term perspective to trace their development and to get an insight on the characteristics of the phenomena.

Methodological and interpretative framework was adapted to handle the source material. It was based on English research on Anglo-Saxon deviant graves and supplemented by Polish debate on similar assemblages. The basis for it are four group of burials recognized through archaeological and anthropological observations on the condition of the skeleton. The categories are prone positioned burials, fixation, decapitation and bodily mutilations. To them were added two mass graves, understood as deviation from the common medieval practice of individual burials.

The two mass graves from the sites of Devnya-3 and Kyulevcha in Northeastern Bulgaria proved to be essential for the understanding of deviant burial rites. The interpretation of the mass grave from Devnya-3 as execution burial related to the revolt from 865 is reaffirmed here. A closer look on the different modes of maltreatment there confirmed the grouping strategy borrowed from abroad. Furthermore, it established a frame of reference for the recognition of executions for high crimes. The mass grave from Kyulevcha was related to the Bulgar-Byzantine conflicts in the early ninth century. The site illustrated the deviant burials as social mechanism used when practical necessities and negative conditions outweigh the adoption of normative burial.

The sampled record of excavated individual graves matching these four types was organized in one single database. The performed analysis relied on comparison and identifying recurring patterns in them. The most common form of deviant burial is the mutilation of the body, followed by fixation burials, decapitations, and the rarest prone positioned burials. Also, each group was further categorized depending on the particular attributes presented by the burials. Something very distinctive for the Bulgarian cases is the relatively high level of correlation between the different categories.

The chronology of deviant burials was also clarified with occasional formation of well-distinguished chronological and to lesser extent geographically distinct groups. However, one common feature is the decrease of known deviant burials in the eleventh century. The prone burials are most telling in this respect, because there is a gap and change in the dominant form around this time.

The geographical distribution of the deviant burials was also summarized and represents a shift from compact concentrations to more dispersed spread. It should be noted that the representativeness of the sample depends on the overall state of research. The

standard tradition also has its impact, as deviant burials are ultimately related to inhumations. So, especially in the early period with strong presence of cremations in the funerary custom, it is hard to assess the full extent of different body treatment. From the available anthropological data it seems that male individuals prevail over female when it comes to deviant burials and children are relatively rarely treated this way.

Finds of grave goods and additional characteristics are mostly missing or of low value. Particularly interesting are the two pendant crosses. Important observation is the low coincidence between a deviant burial and charcoal in the grave. This speaks against the usual inclusion of the two under the umbrella of anti-transfiguration practices.

In addition, deviant burials relationship to the normative practice can be approached by its spatial appearance. Issues of segregation or intra site topography are crucial, but relevant data for such analysis remains problematic. Nonetheless, pattern towards peripheral placement emerges to show the obscure social position of the deceased. The message was even stronger when the deviant burial demonstrates apparent relation to isolated monument from earlier period like in Madara. It was argued that this was a purposeful transformation of the meaning attached to the landscape to promote social identity, power, and political authority.

Interplay between religious and legal meaning is proposed as the main interpretative context of the archaeological evidence. The chronological survey on the individual graves revealed continuity of all major deviant burial practices before and after the conversion to Christianity in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The adoption of deviant rites in the Christian tradition was a two-way process incorporating Christian ideas into the funeral practices. The very existence of deviant burial rites is one indication for existing notion of powerful dead capable of influencing the world of the living. Rites like the fixation with ferrous tools or building

materials were acknowledged as the appropriate means to deal with the supernatural danger. The preventive anti-demonic actions are possibility for some of the burials, but only on the basis of much later examples and cannot be seen as the only possible interpretation.

Reinterpreting the deviant burials as the physical manifestation of judicial activities is based on strong arguments. The correspondence of deviant burial rites found in the context of the mass grave in Devnya-3 and in medieval individual graves from the territory of Bulgaria validates a legal explanation of the funerary record. The matching accounts of punishment in some law codes also support the archaeological evidence. It must be admitted that deviant burial rites from the pagan period and the early Christian period up to the eleventh century can be more conspicuously assigned to judicial activities.

Appropriately, deviant burials can be considered alternative indicator of social complexity and linked to political developments in early states. A model for archaeological identification of developing judicial culture from small kin-based societies to large-scale power was tested on the basis of the deviant burials from Bulgaria. At this point of the research, it is apparent that the First Bulgarian Tsardom fits the model to some extent. However, the record from the period of the Second Bulgarian Tsardom deviates more reflecting increasingly religious and superstitious way of thinking and decentralization tendencies.

To conclude, the results of the current work should not be considered final. The must serve as a sobering reminder that theoretically-aware practice should be better implemented in Bulgarian archaeology and funerary archaeology can contribute even more meaningfully to the study of the medieval period. Further steps in that direction and particularly for the deviant burials will be the expansion of the sample on regional scale. The comparative analysis can successfully draw archaeological findings from the neighboring areas in two

directions. On one side, the southern parallels, associated with the Byzantine culture will fit the scholarly tradition and the intensive cultural dialogue in the medieval period. Another direction to seek analogies is westwards in the Adriatic and the Middle Danube region. There similar cultures and political formations developed under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Finally, the contradicting public and academic attitudes towards certain archaeological discoveries, among which are the deviant burials was commented throughout the text. Two unrelated factors like media attention and unavailability of detailed and updated databases and publications of the archaeological findings are distorting the study. The deviant burials can contribute most significantly in comparison to other forms of mortuary behavior, but that can be achieved only persistent and systematic effort.

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# Catalogue

## *Alphabetical list of sites with deviant burials:*

The list is presenting the name of the site, overall number of unearthed graves, reference, and the relevant catalogue entries.<sup>116</sup>

1. Anevsko kale, 56 graves, No. 92-96  
Ivan Dzambov [Иван Джамбов], Средновековният некропол край Сопот [Medieval cemetery near Sopot], *Известия на музеите в Южна България* 14 (1988): 144-158
2. Assenova krepost, unknown number of isolated graves, No. 105-106  
Ivan Dukov [Иван Дуков], Няколко специфични погребални практики от средновековната епоха в Асеновград и региона в светлината на теренни археологически проучвания 2005-2013 [Several specific funerary practices from the medieval period in Assenovgrad and the region in the light of recent excavation], *Стенимахос-Станимака-Асеновград* [Stenimachos-Stanimaka-Assenovgrad] ed. Grigor Boykov, Assenovgrad: Dikov (2014): 63-64
3. Balchik, 106 graves; No.1- 2  
Marin Dimitrov [Марин Димитров] Ранносредновековен двубреден некропол при гр. Балчик, *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 1 (1989): 231-240; Marin Dimitrov [Марин Димитров]. Старобългарски некропол при Балчик [Old Bulgarian necropolis near Balchik], *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 2 (1991): 87-100;
4. Batin-1, 93 graves, No. 36-37  
Dimitar Stanchev [Димитър Станчев], Прабългарски компоненти в погребалния обряд и инвентара на ранносредновековните некрополи в Русенско

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<sup>116</sup> Additional commentary of the research status of each site is intended to compliment the catalogue. However, this requires new assessment on the burial sites on much larger scope.



- [Protobulgarian features in the funerary ritual and inventory in the early medieval necropoleis in the area of Ruse], *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 1 (1989): 243-248
5. Bdintsi, 308 graves, No. 12  
Zhivka Vazharova, *Славяни и прабългари*, 158,
  6. Devnya-1, 97 graves, No. 21-33  
Dimitar Dimitrov [Димитър Димитров], Новооткрит раннобългарски некропол при Девня [Newly discovered early Bulgarian necropolis near Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 7 (1971) 57-75
  7. Devnya-2, 101 graves, No. 54-59  
Dimitar Dimitrov [Димитър Димитров] Старобългарски некропол № 2 при Девня [Old Bulgarian necropolis no 2 near Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 6 (1970): 21-47
  8. Devnya-3, 157 graves, No. 15-20  
Dimitar Dimitrov [Димитър Димитров], “Раннобългарски некропол № 3 при Девня” [Early Bulgar Necropolis No. 3 near Devnya], *Известия на Народния Музей Варна* 8, no. 23 (1972): 45 – 65
  9. Dibich, 23 graves, No. 5  
Rasho Rashev and Stanislav Stanilov [Рашо Рашев и Станислав Станилов], Старобългарски некропол при с. Дибич, общ. Шумен [Old Bulgarian necropolis by Dibich, Shumen district], *АОР* (1992-3) 121
  10. Durankulak, 248 graves, No. 49-53  
Katja Melamed [Катя Меламед], Средновековният некропол [The medieval necropolis], *Дуранкулак* 1 (1989)
  11. Gradishte – Vratsa 4 graves from ongoing survey and excavations, No. 112  
Narciss Torbov and Alexandra Petrova [Нарцис Торбов и Александра Петрова]  
Археологическо проучване на късноантична църква в м. Градище, западно от гр.

- Враца [Archaeological excavations on late antique church in the Gradishte locality, western from Vratsa], *AOP* (2014): 429
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Cat. No.	Site	Site Context No.	Date	Grave Structure	Position	Orientation	Age	Sex	Grave goods	Description of (Deviant) Burial Rites	Image
1	Balchik-3	9	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	NE-SW	Senilis	F	Grey polished jar, oenochoe jug	Tied legs (The feet are placed one over the other, lower tibiae and fibulae)	N/A
2	Balchik-3	12	7 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	SW-NE	N/A	N/A	No	Missing bones of the right leg (patella, fibula, tibia, metatarsals). Left bend at the knee	N/A
3	Novi Pazar	25	Late 7 <sup>th</sup> -early 8 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	Adultus I	M	No	Tied legs (The feet are placed one over the other, lower tibiae and fibulae)	N/A
4	Topola	405	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Flexed	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	The skull is in prone position, the rest of the body is on the side	N/A
5	Dibich	N/A	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Prone	NW-SE	N/A	N/A	No	Prone position, legs are bent backwards towards the pelvis (pushed/thrown in the pit)	N/A
6	Nozharevo	N/A	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Prone	SW-NE	N/A	N/A	No	Prone position	N/A
7	Nozharevo	56	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Rectangular pit with niche	Supine extended	N-S	N/A	M?	Copper vessels, wooden pail, a knife, horse ABG	Missing feet and right hand bones	N/A
8	Kyulevcha	81	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Round (ellipsoids) pit	Prone	N/A	N/A	M	No	Prone position, disintegrated skeleton (cut marks from a sword) in 3 parts (Contracted pelvis and legs in the E part, skull towards the S, the rest of the skeleton on top of the skull), probably tied limbs.	N/A
9	Kyulevcha	35	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup>	Simple pit	Supine extended	E-W	N/A	N/A	Dark grey polished bowl	Missing feet bones.	App. B Fig. 26
10	Kyulevcha	36	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Round (ellipsoids) pit	Supine extended	N-S	N/A	N/A	Lamb knuckle bone by the right patella	Upper half of the body (skull and chest) destroyed	N/A
11	Hitovo 2	32	8 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with a niche	Prone extended	E-W	Adultus II	F	Sheep ABG with large stone on top	Prone position Animal fixation	N/A



12	Bdintsi	54	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	A stone slab on top of the skeleton	N/A
13	Varna-1	3	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	N-S	N/A	N/A	Grey pots, a knuckle bone	Only skull	N/A
14	Varna-1	19	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with a niche	Supine	N-S	Infans	N/A	A red jar	Several big stones on top of the skeleton	N/A
15	Devnya-3	71	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Contracted position	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	Large stone (d.>60cm) placed over the skull	App. B Fig. 32
16	Devnya-3	39	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine with contracted legs	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	Large stone (d.>60cm) placed on the feet	N/A
17	Devnya-3	106	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	Missing bones of the right leg and left foot Beneath the left knee joint – a skull of another individual placed on flat stone slab	App. B Fig. 34
18	Devnya-3	30	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Supine	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	Only skull in the N half	App. B Fig. 35
19	Devnya-3	119	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	N/A	F	No	The feet bones in anatomical order placed between the tibiae	App. B Fig. 33
20	Devnya-3	106	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	Missing bones of the right leg and left foot Beneath the left knee joint – a skull of another individual placed on flat stone slab	App. B Fig. 36
21	Devnya-1	59	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	Infans II	N/A	No	Missing feet bones Large stones on top of skeleton	N/A
22	Devnya-1	53	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	Juvenilis II	F	No	Missing feet bones 4 large stones placed on the skull and the chest	N/A
23	Devnya-1	24(a,b,c)	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	a.E-W b.N-S c.E-W	a. Maturus b. Adultus I c. Sinilis	a. F b. M c. M	Animal Knuckle-bone	Collective grave a. Missing bones from lower legs 2 stones placed on skull and chest b. Missing bones from lower legs A big stone on the chest	N/A
24	Devnya-1	7 (a,b)	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Round (ellipsis) pit	Supine extended	N-S	a. Adultus I	a. M b.	No	Dual grave 2 layers of stones on the skull of the adult	N/A

							b. Infans	N/A			
25	Devnya-1	48	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Round (ellipsoids) pit	Crouched position	N-S	Adultus II	M	No	A big stone on the skull, 3 large stones on the legs	N/A
26	Devnya-1	66	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	N-S	N/A	F	No	2 stones on the skull A stone on the legs	App. B Fig. 27
27	Devnya-1	77	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	N-S	Adultus I	M	No	A large stone on the skull	N/A
28	Devnya-1	73	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	E-W	Maturus	F	No	A large stone (d.>40cm) on the skull	N/A
29	Devnya-1	18	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Crouched	N-S	Adultus I	M	2 pot fragments	Medium sized stone on the chest	N/A
30	Devnya-1	2	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Trapezoid pit with stone cover	Supine extended	NW-SE	Juvenilis	N/A	No	Missing feet bones	N/A
31	Devnya-1	13	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with stone cover	Contracted	N-S	Maturus	M	Tripartite Fe buckle on the pelvis	Missing feet bones	App. B Fig. 28
32	Devnya-1	21	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with side stones	Supine extended	N-S	Adultus II	M	No	Missing feet bones A lot of charcoal in the fill	N/A
33	Devnya-1	92	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with stone cover	Crouched	N-S	Maturus	F	No	Missing feet bones	N/A
34	Varna-1	10	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	Juvenilis I	M?	No	Missing feet bones	App. B Fig 30
35	Varna-1	9	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	N-S	Infans	N/A	No	Missing feet bones	App. B Fig. 31
36	Batin-1	20	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Prone extended	N-S	Adultus	N/A	No	Prone position Tied hands (beneath the body) Missing bones of the lower legs	N/A
37	Batin-1	55	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	Adultus II	M	No	Skull from another individual beneath the dexter clavicle and scapula	N/A
38	Varbyane	23	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with niche to the	Semi-contracted position	SE-NW	N/A	N/A	Sandy clay vessel between	The skull without the mandible is placed in the niche Missing bones from the torso Charcoal in the grave fill	App. B Fig. 37

				S	n				the arm and leg bones		
39	Varbyane	11	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with niche to the N	Supine extended	NW-SE	Adultus	N/A	A ceramic bead found among the bones	Skull with the separated mandible in the niche. Dexter scapula, clavicle, ribs and some vertebrae on the place of the skull.	App. B Fig. 38
40	Pliska – The Great Basilica	13	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit of unclear shape	Supine extended	E-W	N/A	M?	Potsherds by the legs	Head is in prone position A lot of charcoal in the grave fill	N/A
41	Pliska – Mound 32	1-4 (= a-d)	9 <sup>th</sup> c.	Reused burial mound  Stone pile over the bodies	Supine extended	W-E	a. Adultus I b. N/A c. Infans I d. Infans II	a. M b. F c. N/A d. N/A	Bronze earring of open shape Grey incised pottery fragments	Collective burial. Disintegrated female skeleton and skull and ribs from child skeleton on top of the male skeleton. To the E of them – the skull of a second child	N/A
42	Pliska – Inner city S fortification wall	29	10 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Prone extended	W-E	Adultus	M?	No	Prone position Arms possibly fixed in the abdominal area by the elbows	N/A
43	Pliska – Inner city S fortification wall	30	10 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Prone	W-E	Juvenilis II	M	No	Prone position Possibly tied legs	N/A
44	Pliska- Inner City S fortification NW tower	10	9 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> c.	In the tower wall	Supine	S-N	N/A	M	No	Missing skull – only the mandible present The tibiae and fibulae of both legs found displaced and crossed 0,55m away from the femur bones	N/A
45	Pliska- Inner City S wall area	20	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	No clear pit, isolated	Supine extended	SE-NW	N/A	M	Bridle, 2 Fe stirrups, 4 Fe hoops, 2 buckles, 2 Fe fragments, 1 copper alloy whetstone	Missing bones of the lower legs (tibiae, fibulae, feet)	N/A
46	Pliska –	30	Mid-	Simple	Supine	NW-	Infans II	N/	Silver	The mandible is turned around	N/A

	Outer city East		11 <sup>th</sup> - 12 <sup>th</sup> c.	pit	extended	SE		A	earring by the skull, Anonymous Byzantine coin class B (1030-1042)	on 180 degrees and the skull lies on top of it	
47	Pliska – Outer City East	51	975-12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit of unclear shape	Supine extended	W-E	Infans II	N/A	No	Missing bones of right leg Two flat stones on the top of the chest and instead of the missing femur	N/A
48	Pliska – Outer City East	77	975-12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	W-E	Adultus ?	N/A	No	Skull and sinister femur placed on the chest Dexter tibia and fibula displaced to the S Stone placed instead of the displaced sinister femur	N/A
49	Durankulak	94	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Supine, slight turn rightwards	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Large flat stone pressing the pelvis	N/A
50	Durankulak	106	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Supine extended	W-E	Adultus I	M	No	2 stone slabs placed on the skull and on the feet	N/A
51	Durankulak	29	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit, isolated	Supine extended	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	Skull placed to the W from the pelvis	N/A
52	Durankulak	49	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Supine extended	W-E	Adultus II	M	No	Missing skull	N/A
53	Durankulak	16	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Supine extended	SW-NE	Adultus I	F	No	Missing upper skeleton (above the pelvis)	N/A
54	Devnya-2	56	10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit and coffin	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	2 flat stones placed on the feet	N/A
55	Devnya-2	57	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Stone placed on top of the left foot (direct contact with calcaneus and talus)	N/A
56	Devnya-2	59	Late 9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	Infans	N/A	Fe spearhead on the right clavicle	Flat stone placed on the feet	N/A
57	Devnya-2	97	Late 9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit and coffin	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	2 stones placed on the skull	N/A
58	Devnya-	35	10 <sup>th</sup>	Simple	Supine	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Right tibia dislocated	N/A

	2		c.	pit	extended			A		Missing bones from the feet Destruction of the chest with ribs collected to the N (left) from the skull	
59	Devnya-2	74	Late 9 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with long side stone on the S	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Mandible placed between the femur bones at the knees	N/A
60	Preslav-1	15	Late 9 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Round pit with urn	Crema tion	N/A	N/A	N/A	Brown urn with incised decoration Vazharova's Type IB Conical jar with chicken bones and bone awl Pectoral cross	Unburned skull placed on the urn with the cremated remains	App. B Fig. 29
61	Krasen	11	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	NW-SE	Juvenilis II	M	No	The skull is placed on the left knee Missing bones of the left foot	App. B Fig. 39
62	Krasen	N/A	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit 0,5x0,7m	Supine	N-S	N/A	N/A	No	Only skull placed in the N half of the pit	
63	Nikolovo	185	9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with niche to the N	Supine extended	N-S	Adultus I	F	Fe fibula under left clavicle Grey polished pottery Sheep ABG in the niche	Missing bones of the right hand and right lower leg Arm of another individual in partial anatomical order placed diagonally on her skeleton Charcoal in the SE corner	App. B Fig. 40
64	Sakardza	118	10th c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	F?	2 silver alloy earrings	Right hand bones in anatomical order placed next to the right femur Left clavicle turned on 180 degrees Displacement of the hip and ribs	App. B Fig. 41

65	Sakardza	115	Late 9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	NW-SE	N/A	N/A	No	Missing the bones of the right hand Tied legs (very close tibiae and fibulae)	App. B Fig. 43
66	Sakardza	1	12 <sup>th</sup> - 13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Skull decapitated and placed 0,7m SW from the skeleton	
67	Sakardza	89	11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit with coffin	Supine extended	NW-SE	N/A	N/A	No	Large stone on the skull Left foot bones in anatomical order between the tibiae, right foot bones in anatomical order on the medial side of the right femur and covered with stone	App. B Fig. 42
68	Sakardza	65	11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with coffin	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	4 stones (2 big and 2 small) placed on the chest Missing are the bones of the feet Disturbance in the position of the left femur, tibia and ribs	App. B Fig. 44
69	Hauza	Pit 1	10 <sup>th</sup> – early 11 <sup>th</sup> c.	Round pit	Two skeletons in irregular supine position	NW-SE	N/A	N/A	No	Disposed in neglectful manner with outstretched arm and intertwined legs like thrown away. The second individual is in superposition to the legs and right arm of the former. Partially on side. Tied hands and intertwined legs.	App. B Fig. 45
70	Hauza	Pit 3	10 <sup>th</sup> -early 11 <sup>th</sup> c.	Round pit bell-shaped, deep 1,5m	Supine position with legs in splits	N/A	N/A	N/A	No	The pelvis is covered with multiple stones	N/A
71	Hauza	Pit 2	10 <sup>th</sup> -early 11 <sup>th</sup> c.	Round pit bell-shaped, deep 1,5m	Supine position	N/A	Infans	N/A	No	The decapitated skull is displaced and on higher level than the rest of the skeleton (difference of 0,6m)	N/A
72	Sedlari	118	11 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone pile	Supine position	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Stone pile directly covers the body, main concentration on the skull and the chest. Bones smashed by the stone weight.	N/A
73	Sevtopolis	27	12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	NW-SE	N/A	N/A	No	Fe sickle with linear length 50cm and blade wide 3,2 cm pressing the pelvis. The feet bones in anatomical order displaced by the left femur	N/A
74	Tuhovishte	20	10 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Supine position	E-W	N/A	N/A	No	Left foot in anatomical order is displaced by the left tibia with the toes heading E (towards the head)	App. B Fig. 46
75	Kovach	78	12 <sup>th</sup>	Simple	Supine	SW-	Infans II	M?	No	The skull placed in prone	App.

	evo		c.	pit	extended	NE				position	B Fig. 47
76	Kovachevo	165	12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	SW- NE	Adultus II	F	2 copper alloy bracelets on the right hand 1 black glass bracelet on the left hand	Missing skull  Right foot pressed by a stone	App. B Fig. 48
77	Kovachevo	88	12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	SW- NE	Maturus	M	flint	Missing skull  Bones of left hand in anatomical order cut and placed by the right radius heading towards the elbow	App. B Fig. 49
78	Kovachevo	97	12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	NW- SE	Adultus II	M	No	Lower right arm (radius and ulna) displaced on the medial side of the right femur. Charcoal around the head, the right arm, left of the pelvis and the legs	App. B Fig. 50
79	Kovachevo	104	12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	Adultus	M	No	Missing bones of the lower left leg. The bones of the right lower leg displaced transversely (bent at the knee)	N/A
80	Sozopol	N/A	12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Supine	W-E	Maturus	M	No	Large iron plough head pressing on the left ribs, close to the clavicle	App. B Fig. 51
81	Hotalich	2	12 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Unclear	Supine	N-S	Adultus ?	N/ A	No	Missing skull – decapitation Neglectful disposal	N/A
82	Sevtopolis	27	12 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	NW- SE	N/A	N/ A	No	Fe sickle with linear length 50cm and blade wide 3,2 cm pressing the pelvis. The feet bones in anatomical order displaced by the left femur	App. B Fig. 52
83	Tsarkvishte	15	12 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine with flexed legs	NW- SE	N/A	N/ A	No	Left clavicle covered by a tile, two tiles on the pelvis and the two femur bones. Large stone with on the axis N-S presses the femur bones, a small stone is on the right clavicle Charcoal in the grave fill	N/A
84	Tsarkvishte	17	12 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with stone and	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/ A	Fe nail beneath the left tibia	3 large stones on top of the left arm and the chest oriented N-S	N/A

				tile base							
85	Skalisht e	16	12 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Rock- cut pit with irregul ar shape	Supine extend ed	W-E	N/A	N/ A	No	Several stones placed on the feet	N/A
86	Skalisht e	15A 15B	12 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Rock cut cist	Supine	W-E	N/A	N/ A	No	Collective burial 15A both humerus bones are displaced on the pelvis 15B only skull placed on the pelvis of 15A. On top of the skull – a stone. Remaining disarticulated remains are in NE corner	N/A
87	Skalisht e	9	12 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Rock- cut cist	Supine with flexed legs (tied?)	W-E	N/A	N/ A	No	4 large stones on the skull (1) and the chest (3). On top of individual 9 are individual 10 and disarticulated remains from individual 11	N/A
88	Skalisht e	7	12 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Rock- cut cist with stone cover	Supine extend ed	W-E	N/A	N/ A	Blue glass bracelet by the right leg	Decapitated skull and fixed with stones on the N, W, SE sides. Left femur is turned on 180 degrees. Bones from individual 8 with cut-marks are on top of th stone cover.	N/A
89	Perperik on	141	12 <sup>th</sup> - 13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	W-E	Adultus II	M	No	Large Fe plough pressing the left clavicle	N/A
90	Tarnovo – Velika Lavra Monaste ry	192/'77	13 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit with coffin	Supine	W-E	N/A	N/ A	No	The skull is decapitated and placed in prone position. The feet bones are covered with stones.	N/A
91	Tarnovo – church 18	90	13 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extend ed	W-E	N/A	N/ A	No	The mandible is 0,1 m to the N from the skull. Pelvis, fibulae and tibiae bones are displaced	N/A
92	Anevsk o kale	7	13 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with tile basis for the head	Supine extend ed	W-E	N/A	F?	Copper alloy earring	The skull is placed in prone position.	N/A
93	Anevsk o kale	49	13 <sup>th</sup> - 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extend ed	W-E	Juvenili s II	F	Copper spherica l button, Brocade d textile on the place of the	The skull is decapitated and placed in prone position 0,2m to the N from the postcranial skeleton	N/A



									head, 2 gilded earrings, pot shreds		
94	Anevska	33	13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit, isolated	Supine extended	SW-NE	Juveniles I	N/A	No	Missing skull  Large stone placed instead of the skull	N/A
95	Anevska	29	13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	NW-SE	Maturus	M	No	Fe sickle placed directly on the skeleton, unspecified body part	N/A
96	Anevska	23	13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit of unclear shape	Supine extended	W-E	Adultus	M	No	Missing the bones of the lower legs (Tibiae, fibulae, metatarsals)	N/A
97	Pernik	80	13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	Adultus	M	No	3 tiles placed in superposition directly over the skull	N/A
98	Pernik	4	13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit within the ruins of a church	Supine extended	SW-NE	Maturus	F	Gilded pectoral cross on the pelvis	Tied legs (legs placed on top of each other in the lower tibiae and fibulae). *Signs of syphilis	App. B Fig. 53
99	Pernik	72	13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	Adultus II	M	No	Left hand bones (radius and ulna) beneath the skeleton on the left side	
100	Pernik	155	13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No (early Byzantine coin in the grave fill from disturbance of earlier layer)	The bones of the left lower leg (tibia, fibula to metatarsals) in anatomical order placed on the chest	
101	Voden	2-3	13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist, isolated	Supine	W-E	N/A	N/A	Potsherds, 13 <sup>th</sup> c. Coin of Manuel Comnenos, bronze Roman coin	Mixed skeletal remains of 3 individuals over a stone layer. Only skull with evidence of blunt trauma facing W. In the E half tibiae and feet bones in triangle-like arrangement.	App. B Fig. 54
102	Voden	2-3	13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist, isolated	Supine	W-E	N/A	N/A	Potsherds, 13 <sup>th</sup> c. Coin of Manuel Comnenos,	Mixed skeletal remains of 3 individuals over a stone layer. Only skull with evidence of blunt trauma facing W. In the E half tibiae and feet bones in triangle-like	N/A

									bronze Roman coin	arrangement.	
103	Drastar	70	1 <sup>st</sup> half of 13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	W-E	Maturus	F	No	Only skull	N/A
104	Drastar	69	1 <sup>st</sup> half of 13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine	S-N	Maturus	F	No	Only skull	N/A
105	Assenov a krepst	N/A	12 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist, isolated	Supine	W-E	N/A	M	No	Missing the bones of the lower legs. The patellae placed by the right clavicle	App. B Fig. 55
106	Assenov a krepst	N/A	13 <sup>th</sup> c.	Natural niche in the cliffs, isolated	Supine	W-E	N/A	M	Copper coin Latin imitation Thessaloniki Type A (1204-1224) on the pelvis	Missing feet bones	App. B Fig. 56
107	Kaliakra – Osmano va mogila	59	13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Prone position	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Prone position	N/A
108	Kaliakra – Osmano va mogila	163	13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	SW-NE	N/A	N/A	No	Skull in prone position	N/A
109	Kaliakra – Osmano va mogila	163	13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	SW-NE	N/A	N/A	No	Skull in prone position	N/A
110	Kaliakra – Osmano va mogila	154	13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No *Fe triangular arrowhead found between the ribs	Missing skull	N/A
111	Kaliakra	66	13 <sup>th</sup> -	Simple	Supine	W-E	N/A	N/	No	Skull placed between the legs	N/A

	Osmanova mogila		14 <sup>th</sup> c.	pit	extended			A			
112	Gradishte	1	13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Stone cist	Supine extended	W-E	Adultus	M	Fe nail in the grave fill	Large stone placed on the chest	App. B Fig. 57
113	Krushetovo	7	2 <sup>nd</sup> half of 14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with coffin	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	Silver coin of Ivan Shishman on the ribs	Right arm bones (radius and ulna) are placed on the pelvis.  Missing right foot bones.	App. B Fig. 58
114	Krushetovo	4	14 <sup>th</sup> c.	Pit with oak coffin with 2 Fe nails	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	Silver spherical button, Silver ring with round plate image of a bird of prey	Right feet bones in anatomical order separated and deposited 0,3m to the S (right) from the skeleton	N/A
115	Madara	2	N/A	Simple pit in a Bronze Age mound	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Skull without the mandible is placed on the right humerus close to the clavicle. Oriented N-S.  Tied legs – legs on top of each other in the lower tibiae and fibulae	N/A
116	Plovdiv	507	14 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> c.	Simple pit	Supine extended	W-E	N/A	N/A	No	Skull covered with a tile. Piece of brick inside the mouth.	App. B Fig. 59



## Appendix A

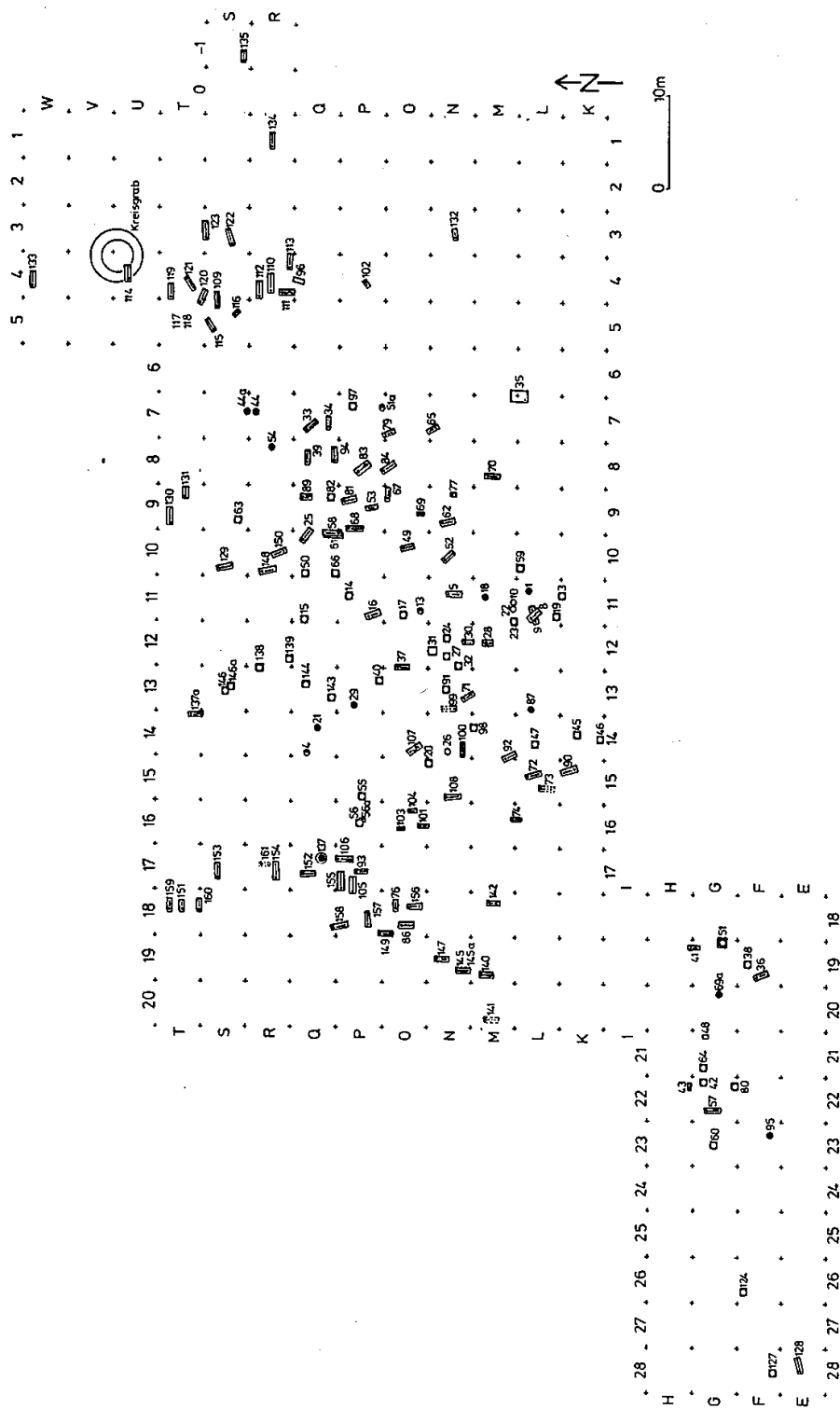


Fig. 12 General plan of the necropolis Devnya-3

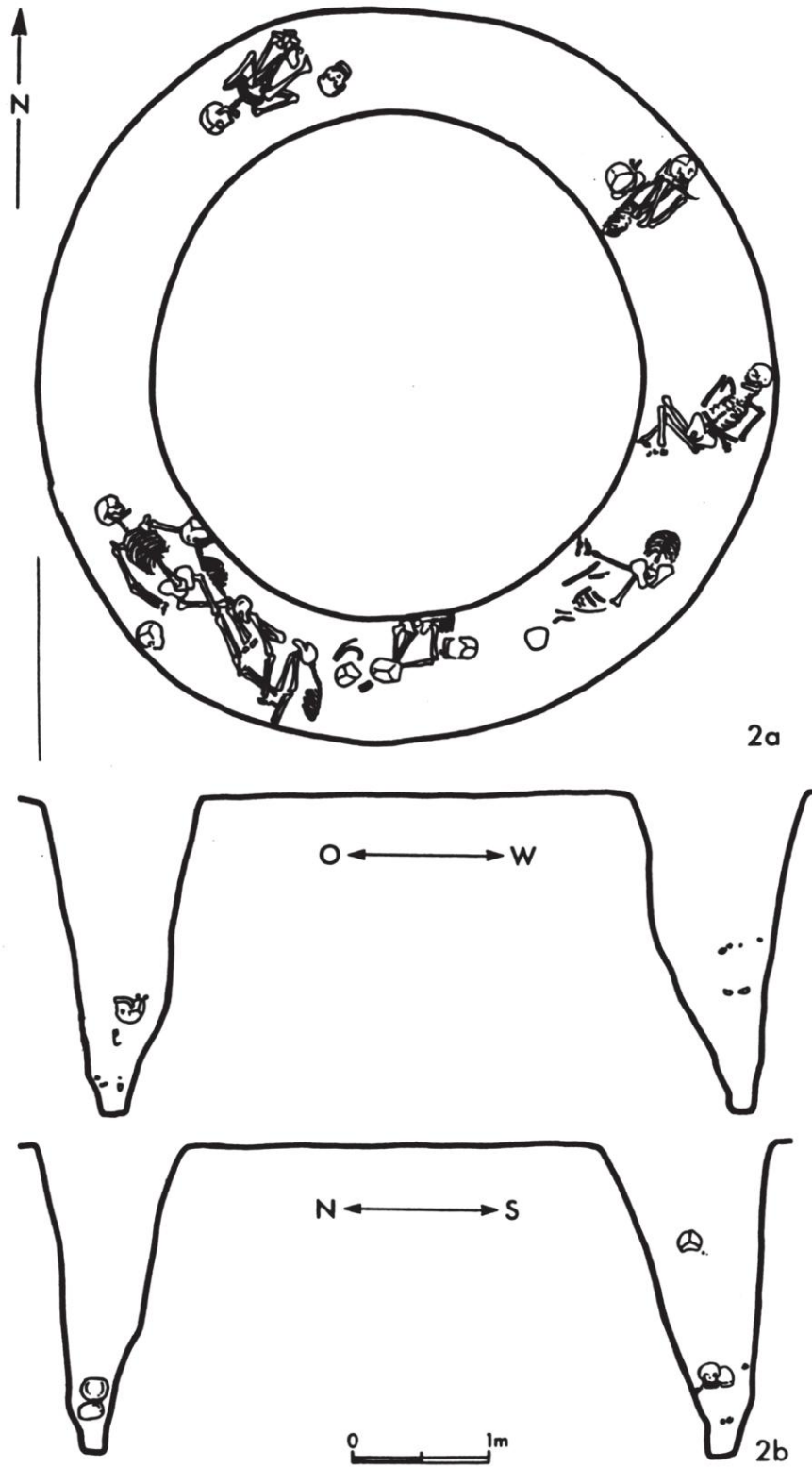


Fig. 13 Mass grave from Devnya-3. Section and plan of the top layer. Following Fiedler, U. *Op.cit.*, Taf. 112/2

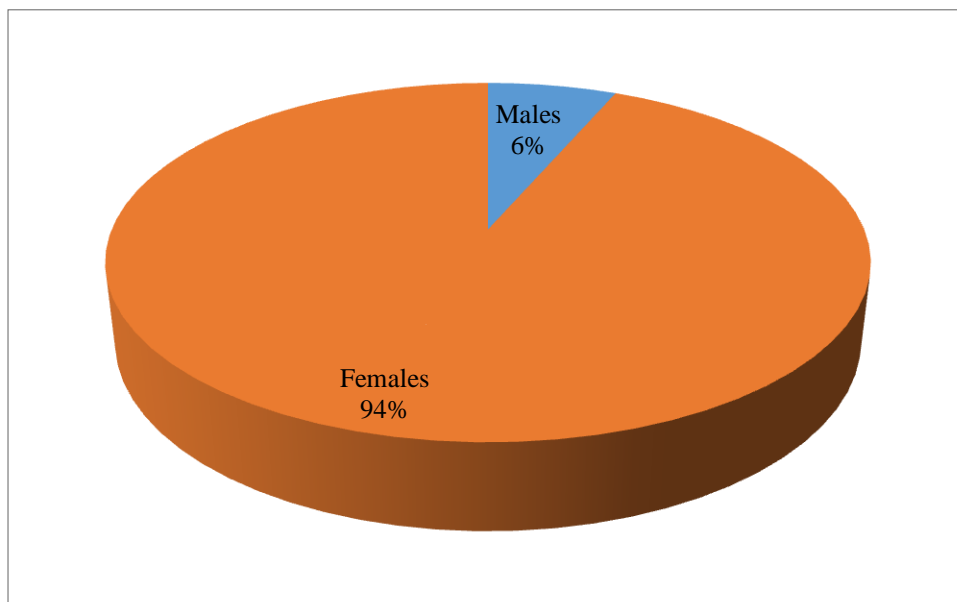


Fig. 14 Sex ratio within the group

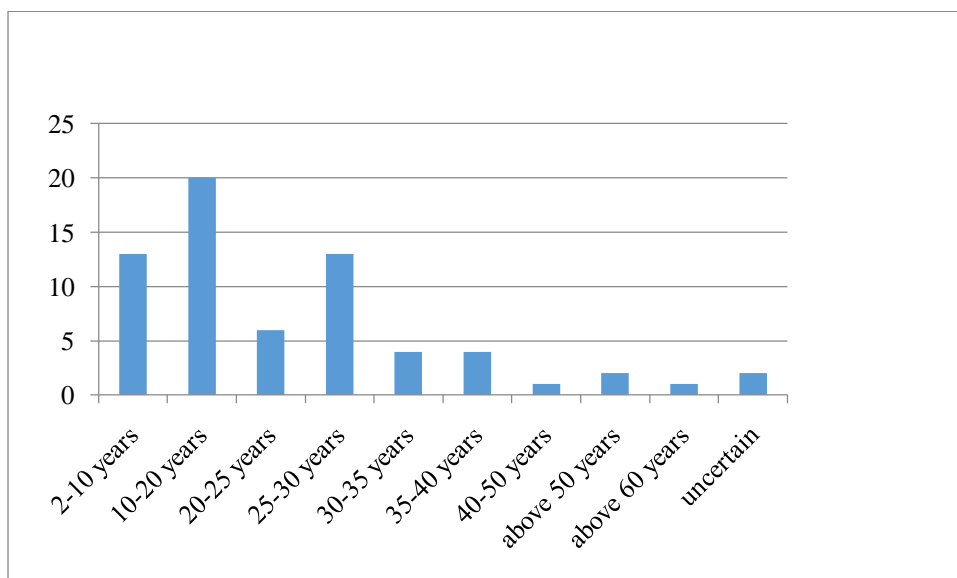


Fig. 15 Age structure of the victims in total numbers (above) and percentage (below)

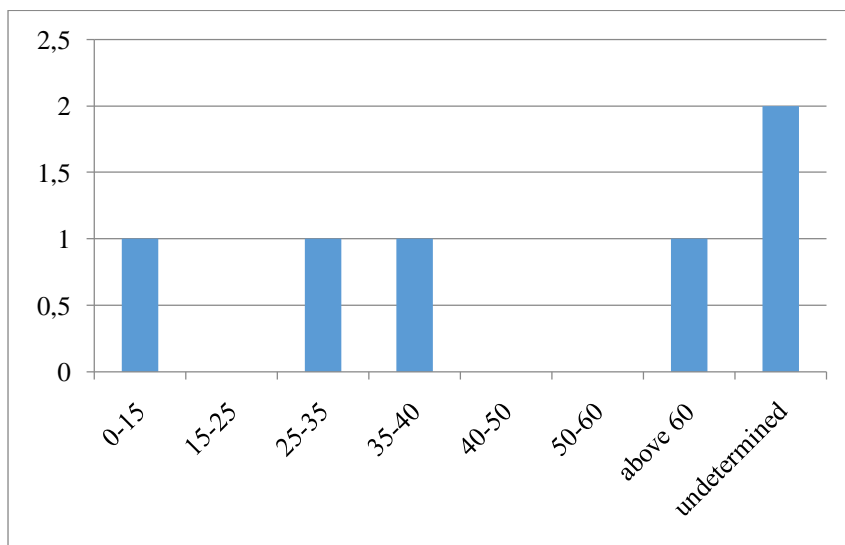
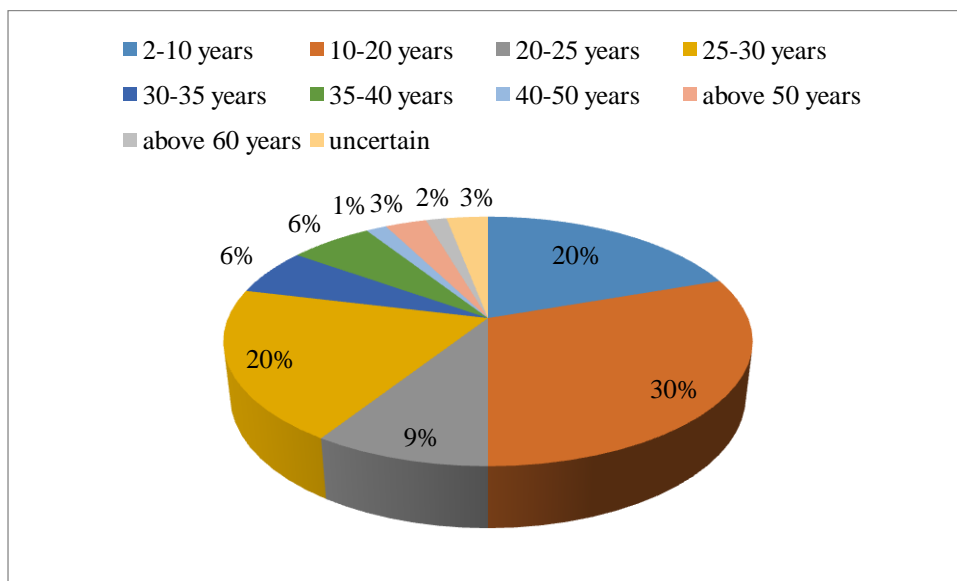


Fig.4. 1 Age profile of males



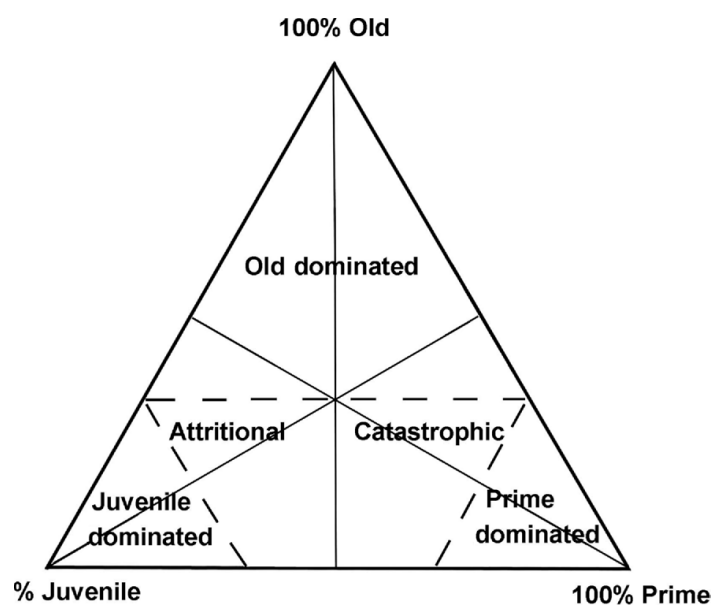


Fig. 16 Triangular graph of mortality depicting the relative proportions of juvenile, prime-adult and old-adult individuals. The axes of the graph run from the middle of the sides of the triangle to the opposite apex. The expected proportions of the age categories for attritional and catastrophic mortality regimes are also indicated. After Chamberlain Op.cit., p. 18

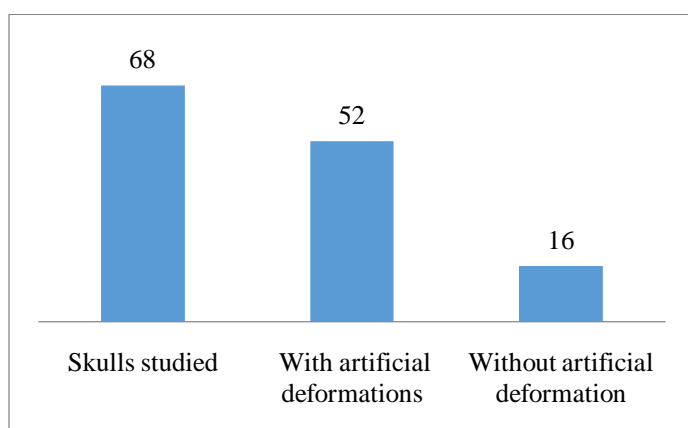
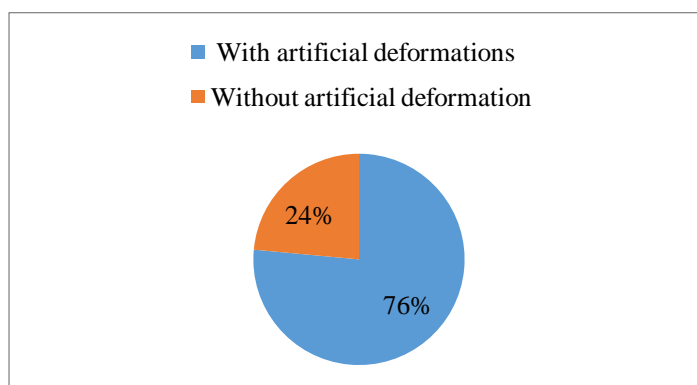
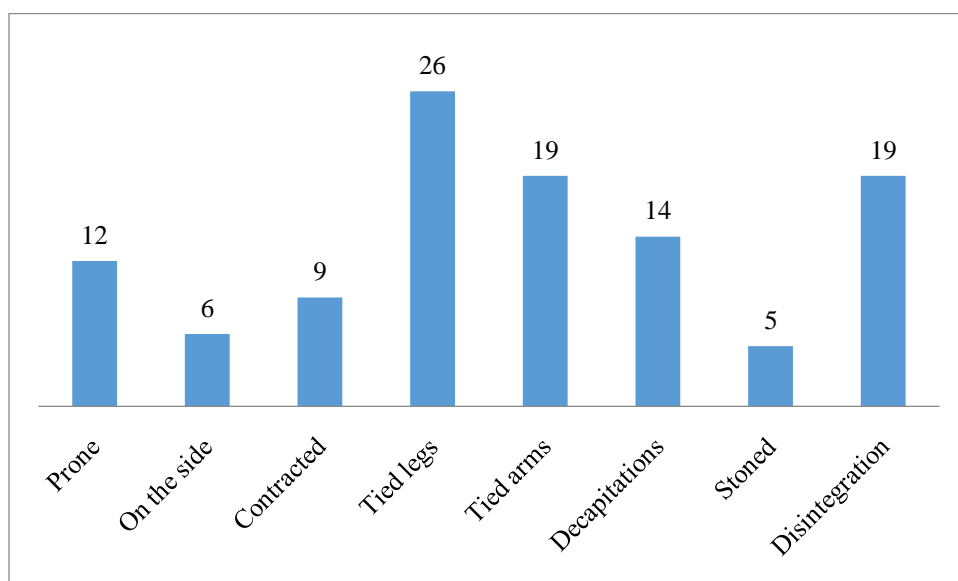


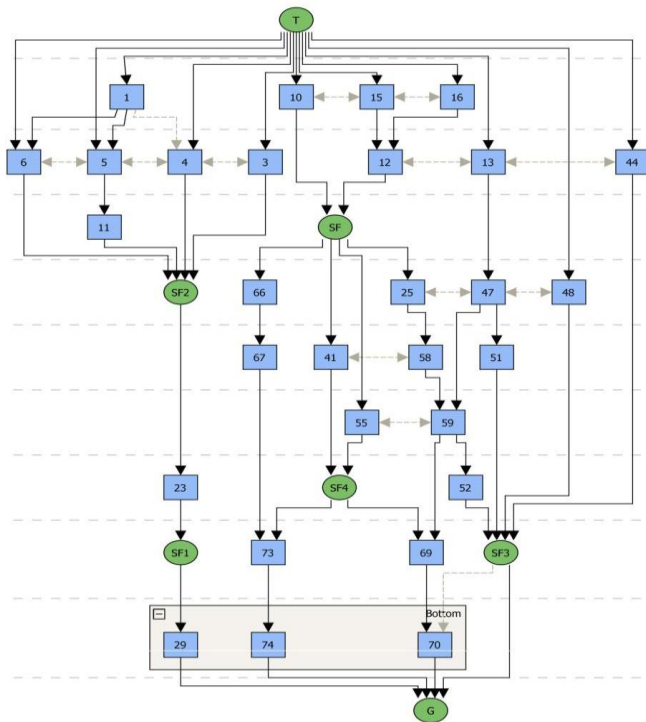
Fig. 17 Ratio of artificial skull deformation among the victims. Total number (above) and percentage (below)

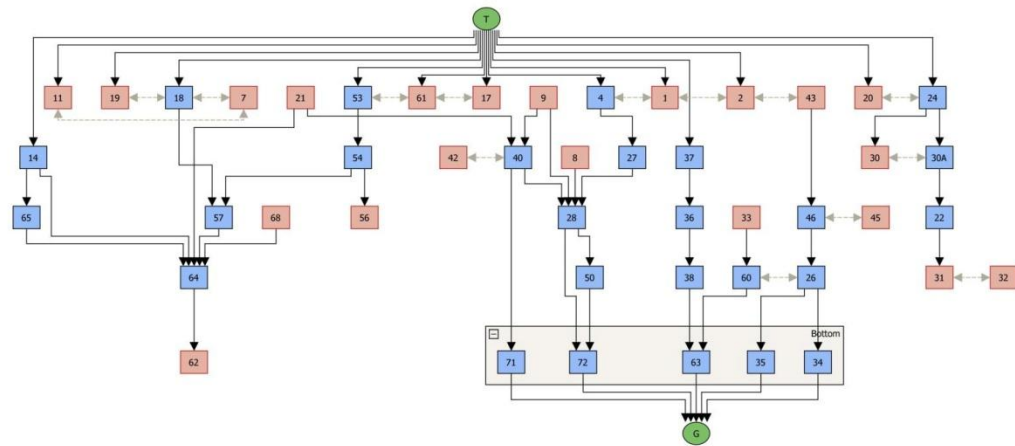




*Fig. 18 Individual types of maltreatment occurring in the mass grave*

Fig. 19 Harris matrix showing the stratigraphic relationship between individual skeletons. Eastern (upper image) and western (lower image) half of the mass grave





■ Infants ■ Juvenile Females ■ Adult Females ■ Adult Males

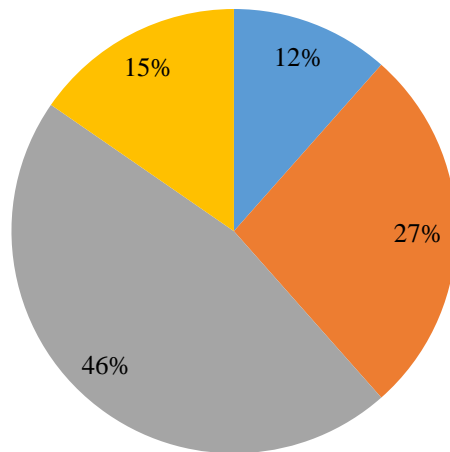


Fig. 20 Age and sex of individuals with tied lower limbs

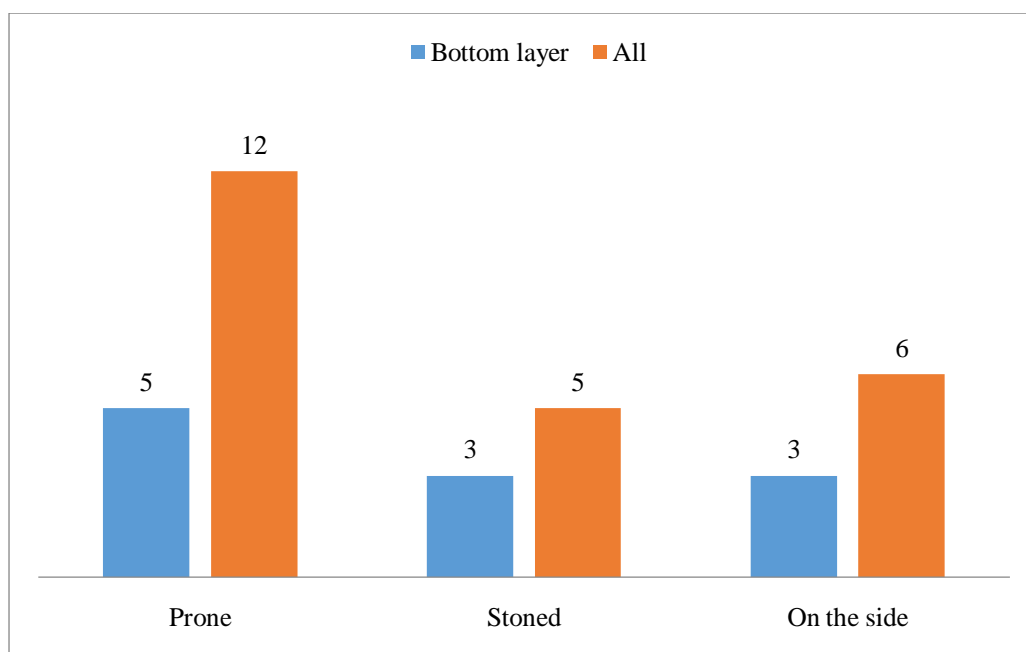


Fig. 21 Patterns of maltreatment in the bottom layer

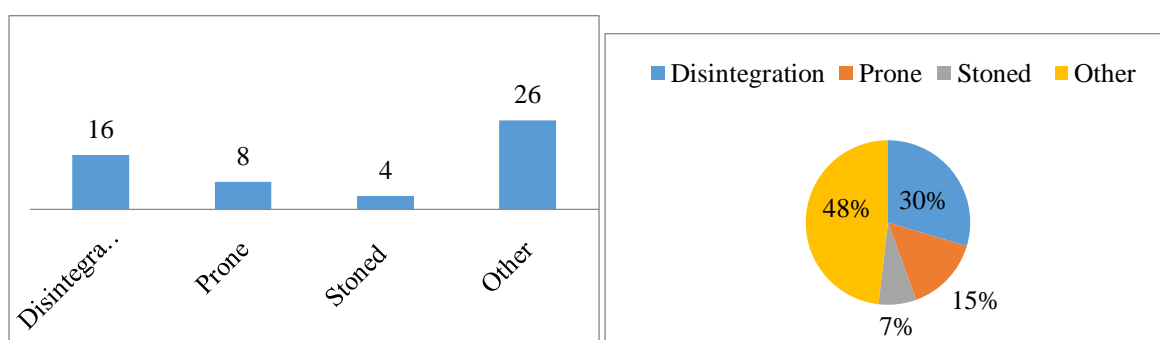
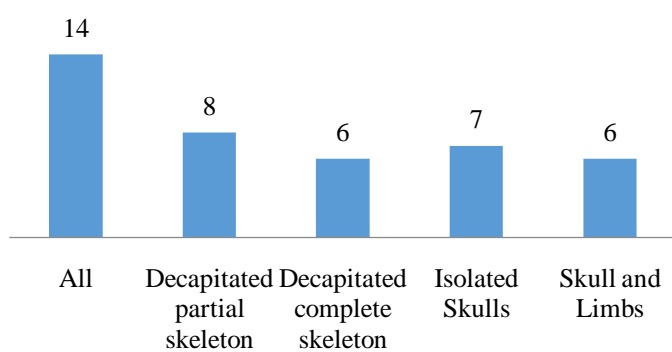
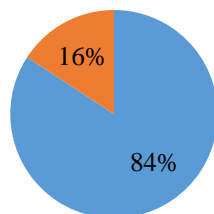


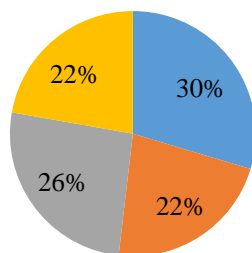
Fig. 22 Maltreatment of individuals with artificial skull deformation

## Disintegration and Artificial Skull Deformation

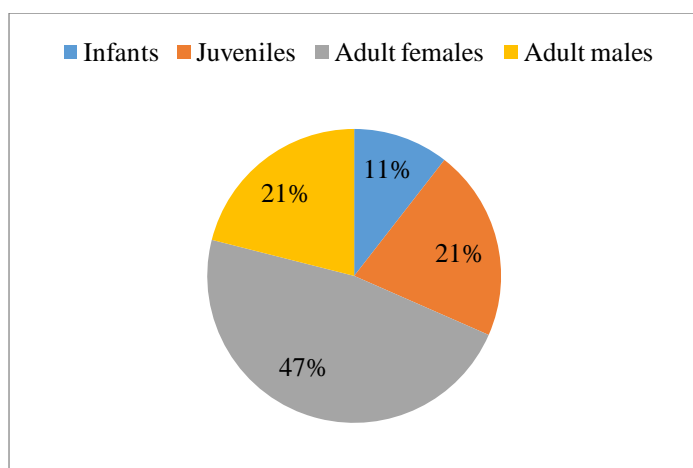
■ With ASD   ■ Without ASD



■ Decapitated partial skeleton   ■ Decapitated complete skeleton  
■ Isolated Skulls   ■ Skull and Limbs



*Fig. 23 Decapitations in the mass grave from Devnya-3*



*Fig. 24 Severe mutilation and disintegration in the mass grave from Devnya-3. Age and sex profile.*



Fig. 254 Mass grave No. 80 from Kyulevcha. Original plan



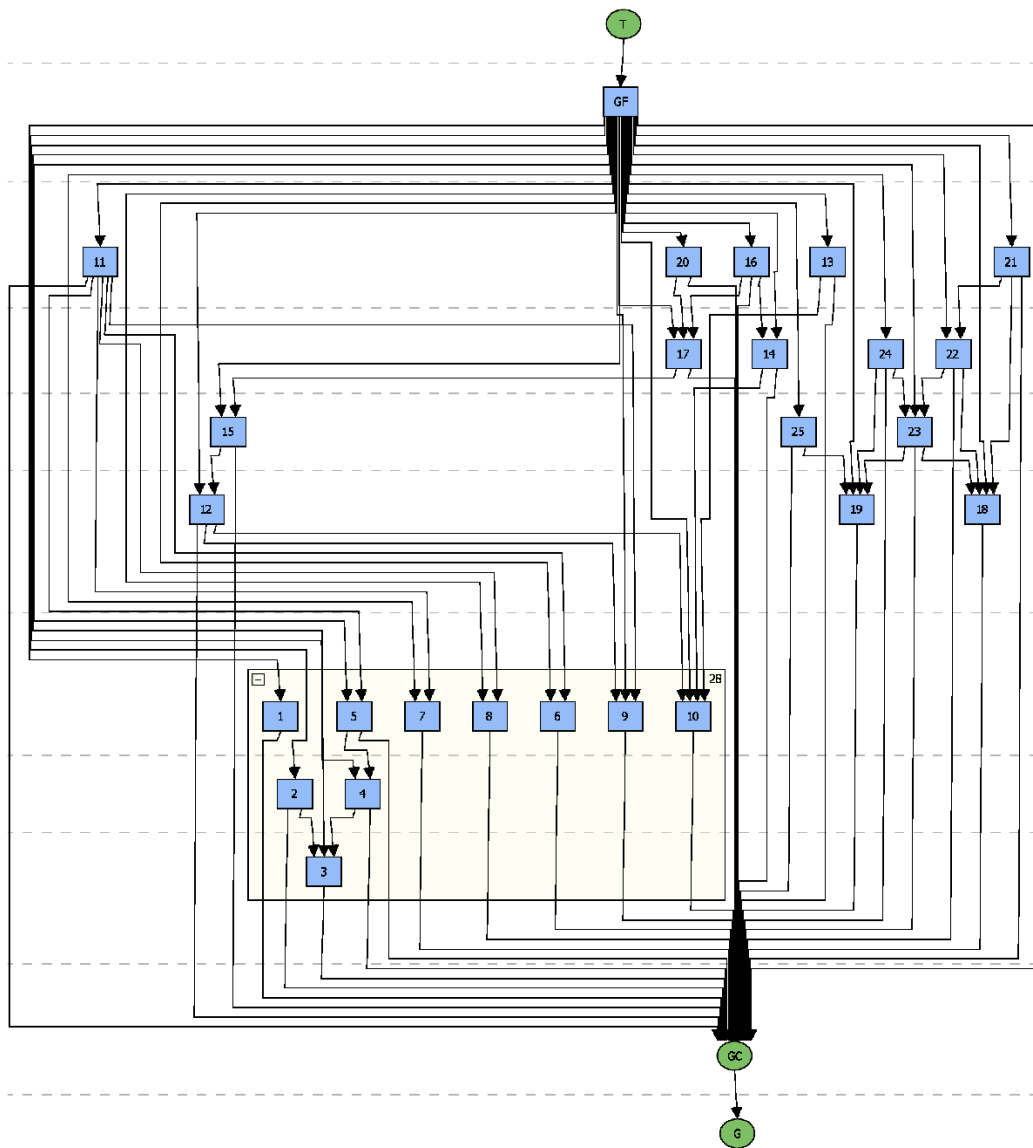


Fig. 15 Harris matrix of grave No. 80 demonstrating the stratigraphic relationship between the skeletons

## Appendix B

Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



*Fig. 30*



*Fig. 29*



*Fig. 32 (Up)*



*Fig. 31*

*Fig. 33 (Below)*



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

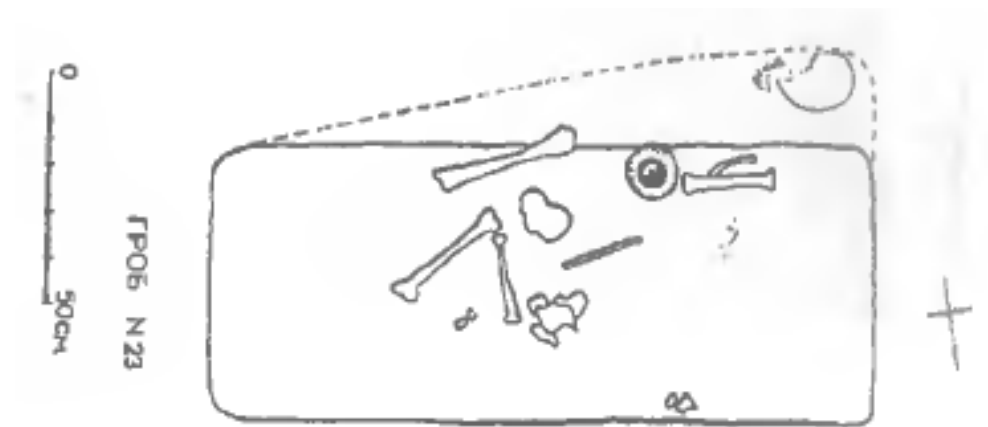


Fig. 37

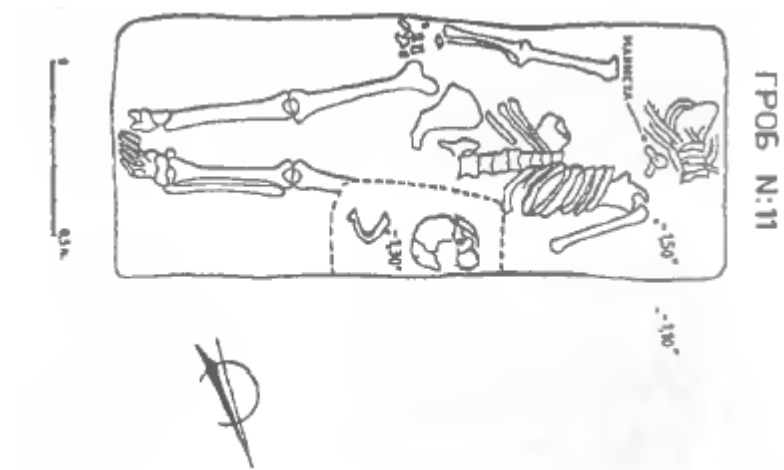


Fig. 38

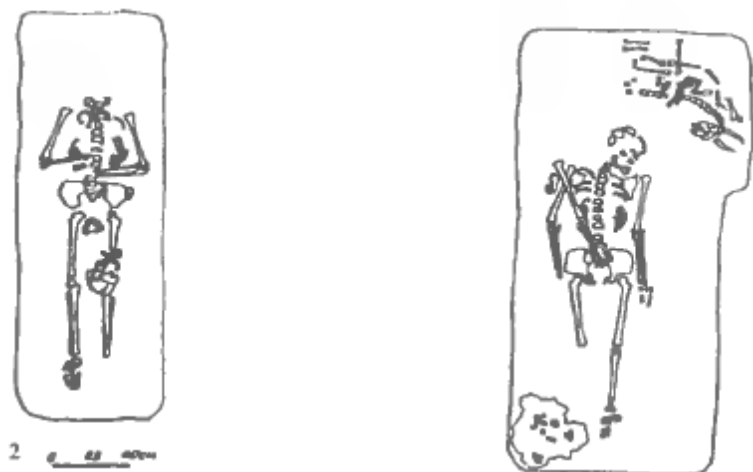


Fig. 39

Fig. 40



*Fig. 41*



*Fig. 42*



*Fig. 43*

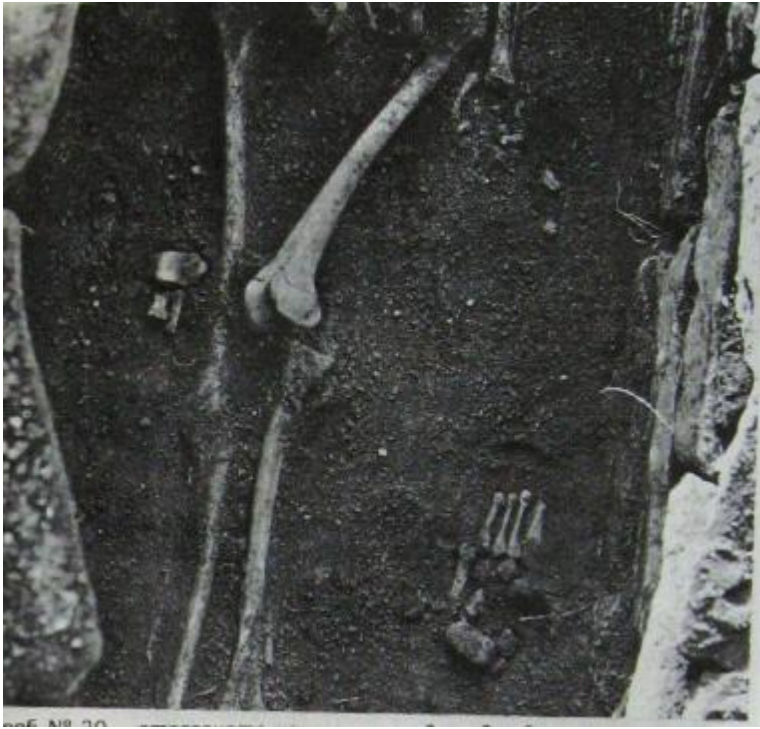


*Fig. 44*





*Fig. 45*



*Fig. 46*



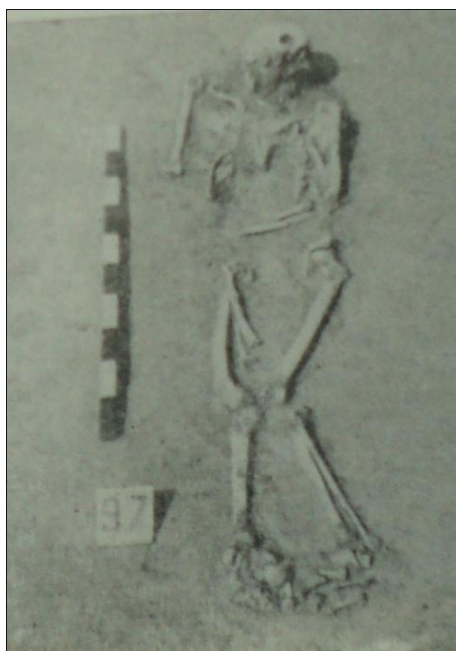


*Fig. 47*



*Fig. 48*

*Fig. 49*



*Fig. 50*





Fig. 51



Обр. 27. Сърпове: 1 — от кв. H<sub>60</sub>;  
2 — от погребение № 27

Fig. 52

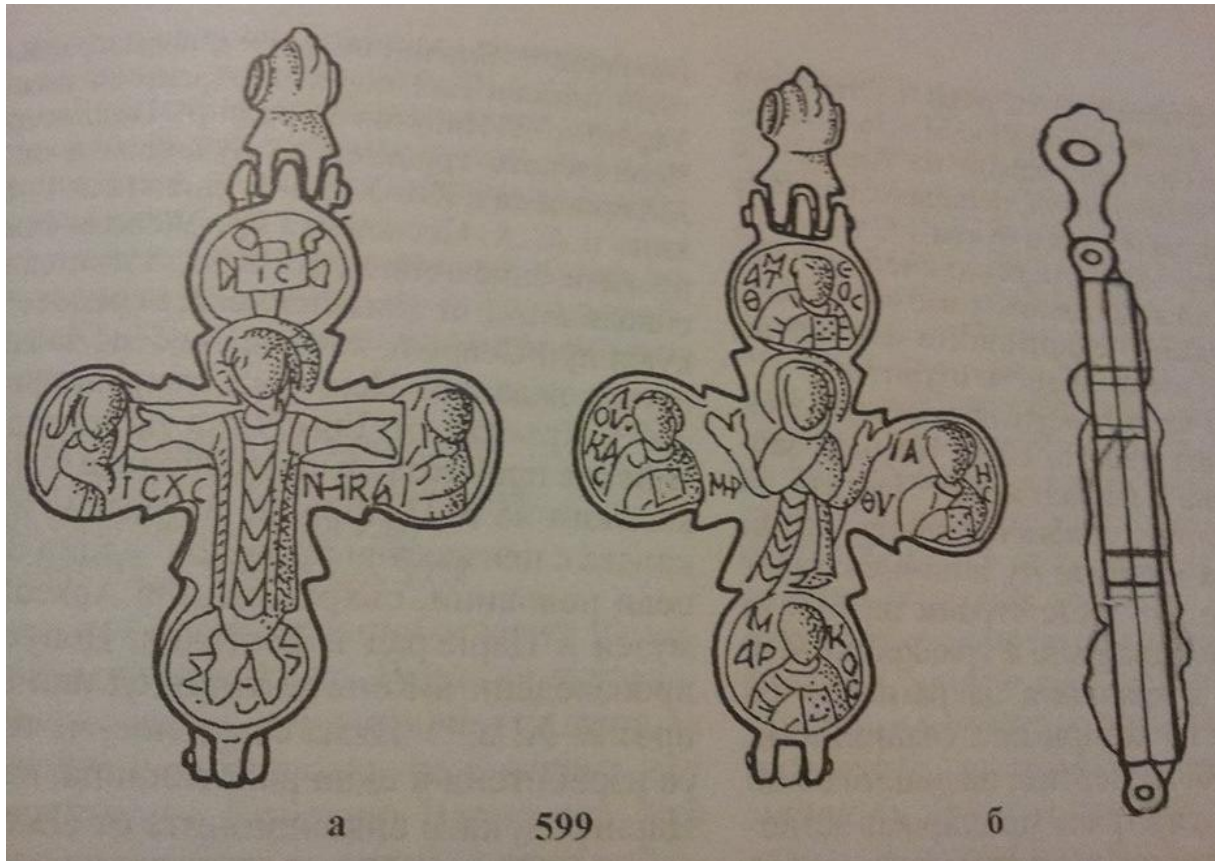


Fig. 53



*Fig. 54*



Fig. 55





*Fig. 56*



*Fig. 57*



*Fig. 58*



*Fig. 59*