

An offprint from

DEVIANT BURIAL
IN THE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

edited by
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ISBN 978-1-84217-338-1

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1. Unusual Burials and Necrophobia: An Insight into the Burial Archaeology of Fear

Anastasia Tsaliki

Abstract

'Unusual' or 'deviant' burials are considered to be cases where the individual has been buried in a different way relative to the norm for the period and/or the population under examination. Deformity and disease received scholarly attention in antiquity but, at the same time, they have also been the focus of social prejudice and superstition. Anthropological and ethnographical investigation has revealed that socially deviant and diseased individuals may receive different mortuary treatment relative to unaffected members of a society. In some cases, unusual disposal is accompanied by evidence for practices, which indicate fear of the dead (necrophobia). These practices usually include methods for the restriction of the dead in the grave by weighing down the body with large rocks, decapitation or the use of nails, wedges and rivets. For example, vampirism can be seen as a notion based on necrophobia, since legend indicates the vampire is a reanimated dead body. Anthropology and folklore have studied superstitious social fear for long but the 'Archaeology of Fear', based on the study and interpretation of evidence from the funerary archaeological record, is a relatively new concept. Although deviant individuals were not always treated differently in life or death, and were not necessarily regarded as outcasts or misfits, it is important for anthropologists and archaeologists to combine social, biological and burial data, as this approach may enable us to improve our understanding of atypical burials in the past.

Introduction

In an effort to understand ancient humans, archaeology obtains a plethora of evidence from cemeteries and the burials within. By exploring the manner of death and the treatment of the dead it may be possible to gain a clearer picture of the living – of their society, practices and spirituality. Archaeological investigation has revealed the phenomenon of unusual burials: these are cases where an individual has been buried in a different way than what is considered the norm for the period and/or the population under examination. Unusual burials can also be termed 'atypical', 'anomalous', 'extraordinary', 'non-normative', 'abnormal' or 'deviant'.

Methodology

The theoretical premise of the research presented hereinafter is that the type of burial together with the analysis of associated human skeletal remains may reveal significant information about the nature of the life, status, and manner of death of an individual. For instance, evidence of trauma, disease, and/or deformity in the skeleton may offer an insight into an individual's deviant treatment. An extensive literature review has been conducted for the purposes of establishing the necessary theoretical basis concerning death and its related subjects and to identify the usual burial customs and beliefs for the groups and periods under study. This was necessary to enable the detection and selection of the case studies included in the paper, and to enable these findings to be placed within their broader funerary context.

Unusual burials are often difficult to locate in the archaeological record as this depends on the experience of the excavators and recorders in addition to the background knowledge and aims of those responsible for interpreting the finds. Furthermore, it is difficult to associate every atypical burial with specific causes of crime or marginality. Both the bones and the burial context play an important role towards the achievement of this aim. As special treatment in the burial record can take many different forms within different cultures, a list of unusual human burial traits has been provided in Table 1.1. The list is not considered to be exhaustive, but rather as a reference guide to help with the adequate recording and categorisation of unusual cases.

In some cases unusual disposal is accompanied by evidence of practices, which appear to indicate fear of the dead (necrophobia). Necrophobia can be defined as a morbid fear of death and the dead. It is a term used also within medicine, which implies that the phobia may cause extreme and morbid reactions, such as intense anxiety, obsessions, or even a panic attack associated with acute distress, mental confusion and fear of impending death

Basic criteria applied to distinguish unusual burials:
– Primary and secondary burials in unusual places and/or positions when compared to the ordinary burial customs of the cultural group or of the time period (e.g. skeletal remains in wells, pits or kilns, skeletons laid in a prone position).
– Mass burials (inhumations and cremations), especially those without evidence or historical documentation for a crisis (e.g. epidemic, war, civil unrest) or those unique in the given burial ground.
– Inhumations or cremations, in cemeteries or isolated, associated with indicators of unusual ritual activity (e.g. cut marks, unusual artefacts of possible symbolic or ritual use).
– Cremations found in an inhumation site and vice-versa.
– Skeletons with evidence that may be indicative of crime, torture or special mortuary ritual (e.g. victims of infanticide, senicide, human sacrifice, cannibalism).

Table 1.1. Basic criteria applied to enable the identification of unusual burials.

(Youngson 1992). It is a Greek word deriving from ‘necros’ (*νεκρός*), which means ‘dead’, and ‘phobos’ (*φόβος*), which means ‘fear’, and in Latin it is known as ‘terror mortis’.

Necrophobic practices usually include methods of restriction of the dead within the grave (Table 1.2). The fear of the dead seems to have had a substantial influence on burial customs from at least as far back as the Neolithic period, and it would appear to have had a worldwide impact (Tsaliki 2001).

Pathology and Deviancy

It has been hypothesised that pathological conditions which cause deformities, pathologies that can affect an individual’s mental state and behaviour, diseases with social stigma, or a violent death, may be linked to the nature of an individual’s burial. Social marginalisation during life and/or death can occur for a wide variety of reasons, including disease (e.g. smallpox, leprosy, tuberculosis and other epidemic infections), congenital and mental conditions, an immoral life, murder, the nature of one’s birth, family status, witchcraft, a curse, excommunication, heresy, death prior to baptism, violent death, death by suicide, and improper burial rites (Ucko 1969; Shay 1985; Sledzik and Bellantoni 1994). In his *Natural History* of AD 77, Pliny made a clear connection between a cross-eyed person and evil eye traditions. In Britain, information derived from folk superstition would tend to suggest that personal disability or deformity was often regarded as unlucky in the past (Roud 2004, 81).

Shay (1985) drew attention to pertinent information within the field of sociology and formed three hypotheses regarding deviancy, which were all tested and confirmed by burial data derived from ethnographic cases, but could not always be confirmed in archaeological material due to the often insufficient nature of the evidence. She proposed that:

- The criteria of deviancy vary in different societies.
- Deviant burials may not reflect the status of the deceased during his/her life, but the social identity they acquired by certain actions or circumstances of death.
- In simple societies volitional and non-volitional forms of deviancy are not distinguished, so they are treated equally at death.

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Skeletons with evidence of tied body parts. – Skeletons in prone position. – Bodies buried unusually deep in the ground. – Burials being covered by rocks or other weights. – Bodies found cremated in an inhumation site. – Skeletons with evidence of decapitation. – Burials with evidence of rivets/stakes. |
|---|

Table 1.2. Possible indicators of necrophobia apparent in burials.

Although deviant individuals were not always treated differently in life or death, and were not necessarily seen as outcasts or misfits, it is important for anthropologists and archaeologists to combine information derived from social, biological and burial data, as this approach may improve our understanding of atypical burials in the past.

The ‘Special Dead’

Ucko (1969) successfully demonstrated the variability of body treatment and the dynamic nature of human societies as early as in the 1960s using ethnographic parallels, which he believed could widen the horizons of archaeological interpretation. For instance, fear of the dead has been noted in Kenya and amongst other African people. These groups treated a wide variety of individuals within their society – leprosy sufferers, young children, those killed by lightning, those who died in childbirth, those who had a violent death in battle, those who drowned, those who died from smallpox or dropsy, witches, twins, priests, chiefs, murderers, suicide victims and the very old – differently at burial. The very young (infants who did not yet have their first teeth) and the very old could be considered to be closer to the land of spirits (Ucko 1969, 271).

In other cultures, such as among the Romans, neonates and infants were buried at night in a closed family ceremony, because the very young had a marginal status and no public identity, so their burial could not be a social event of the community (Norman 2002). Roman writers referred to the death of young children as ‘mors acerba’ (unripe death) or ‘mors immatura’ (untimely death) (Norman 2002). Similarly, special dead in the ancient Greek World were the ‘aoroi’ (ἄωροι, the untimely dead), such as infants, young adults, and the unmarried. They were feared because witches saw them as suitable couriers of ‘katadesmoi’ (κατάδεσμοι, curse-tablets) (Garland 1985; Kurtz and Boardman 1994). Special dead also included heroes and the war dead, who were highly respected, as well as the murdered and their killers. The latter constituted feared and ‘unquiet’ dead (βίαιοθάνατοι). The murdered were angry against their killers and those who did not avenge their violent death. The killers, on the other hand, were afraid of being haunted by their victims and were condemned to shamefully wander after death, as Aeschylus wrote about Klytaimnestra (Garland 1985). Plato in his *Laws* recommended that murderers should be executed and their bodies cast out of the victim’s country without any burial rites performed. He stated that those found guilty of the murder of a family member or infanticide should be executed and dumped naked at a crossroads outside the city. He also suggested that a stone should be thrown by all the archons on the corpse’s head in the name of the state, using overkill as an expiatory act for the crime, and that the body should then be left outside the city without burial. Xenophon in *Hellenica* wrote that in Athens traitors and tomb robbers would be thrown to the ‘varathron’ (βάραθρον, gulch or pit) situated in, or near, the demos of Melite (Stalley 1983; Garland 1985; Mikalson 2005). In Sparta the bodies of condemned criminals were thought to have been thrown into Keadas (also spelled as ‘Kaiadas’ or ‘Kaeadas’), although there is no conclusive archaeological evidence to support this assertion (Pitsios *et al.* 2003).

Another category, suicide victims, were condemned by Christianity as early as the fifth century AD. It is difficult to determine the ancient Greek attitude towards such individuals, however, as Homer and the tragic poets saw suicide as appropriate under certain circumstances, although Pythagoreanism and Platonism condemned it as a kind of hubris (Garland 1985, 97). Aristotle indicates that suicide was seen as socially irresponsible and illegal in Athens (Garland 1985, 98; Brody 1989; Marks 2003). Suicide was viewed as an untimely and violent death; Aischines and Plato indicate the spirits of these dead were feared and that the interpreters of sacred law ('exegetai' / *εξηγηταί*) needed to be consulted on purification rituals and the burial of a suicide victim (Garland 1985, 96–8; Brody 1989; Marks 2003).

'Diobletoi' (*διοβλητοί*), those struck by lightning, were regarded with reverence by ancient Greeks, as they were thought to have been killed by Zeus himself. Plutarch reported that their bodies were believed to be incorruptible and sometimes they were left where they had been struck without burial. 'Deuteropotmoi' (*δευτερόποτμοι* or *υστερόποτμοι*), those who were thought to have died abroad but subsequently returned home alive, were considered impure and had to go through cleansing rites. Finally, the most fearful and dangerous category of dead were the 'ataphoi' (*άταφοι*) – those who remained unburied. In epic poetry and tragedy it was stated they could not enter Hades and that they haunted the living (Garland 1985; Barber 1988; Johnston 1999; Lawson 2003).

The attribution of proper burial rites was a matter of dignity and responsibility for the living, as witnessed by Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles. If the body was not found, it was necessary to create a cenotaph burial, sometimes with a stone as a substitute for the body (Kurtz and Boardman 1994).

Harmful Entities: Ghosts, Demons and the Undead

Many peoples believe the soul of the deceased does not reach its final destination immediately after death but remains for a time marginally between worlds. During this liminal period the soul is believed to be vulnerable to attack by evil spirits. The fear of revenants is based on this theory (Barber 1988; Summers 1996). The corpse is thus seen as polluting, and cathartic measures are applied both before and after the funeral (Kurtz and Boardman 1994; Johnston 1999; Lawson 2003). Even in non-Western cultures, as in ancient and contemporary Japan, the spirits of the dead are considered to be potentially dangerous and may wander for many weeks. If appropriate rituals are not performed the soul cannot move on to the land of the dead to meet the ancestors. These wandering spirits suffer from bitterness and malice and can curse their descendants. Those who died a violent or untimely death ('bad death') are also believed to be filled with hate and spite and it is anticipated they will return to hurt the living. It is thus necessary to be purified by a series of rites before and after the funeral (Mullins 2004). Ghost stories are abundant in Japan.

In the ancient Greek and Roman Worlds, there was a plethora of harmful entities such as the 'lamiae' or 'larvae', the 'empussae' or 'lemures', the 'striges', the 'mormo', and the 'ephialtae' or 'hyphialtae', equivalent to 'incubi' and 'succubi', who were thought to attack people in their sleep. There were also special festivals for the honour and appeasement of

the dead, such as the *Anthesteria* in Athens and the Roman *Lemuria*, *Laralia* and *Saturnalia*, which were very closely connected to the idea that malignant spirits or ghosts existed who wanted to feed upon the vitality of the living (Summers 1996).

Ancient Greek and Roman beliefs concerning ghosts, witches and revenants have been preserved mainly in the writings of the following Classical authors (Summers 1996; Felton 1999; McIlveen 2001; Keightley 2003; Raucci 2005):

- Photius, in a summary of Antonius Diogenes', *The Wonders Beyond Thule* (c. second century AD), included the story of Paapis, an evil Egyptian priest, who had ensorcelled the siblings Dercyllis and Mantinias to make them live during the day and be corpses at night.
- Philostratus, a famous sophist of the late second century AD. He narrated the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, a wise man. It included an account of a Corinthian revenant in the story of Menippus, also known as *Bride of Corinth* (4.25). A vampiric or ghoulish creature in the form of a woman haunted men, devoured their flesh and drank their blood.
- Phlegon of Tralles, the Greek writer and freedman of the Emperor Hadrian (second century AD). In his *Mirabilia (Book of Marvels)* he presented the story of a young girl named Philinnion, who got out of her grave and seduced young Machates. A diviner ordered her body to be burned to ashes in a remote spot outside the city walls. After that the whole city was ritually cleansed with holy lustrations. In another story, Polycrites died suddenly but then returned from his grave to kill and eat his newborn hermaphrodite child, who was considered to be an ill-omen by the priests and the augurs. *Mirabilia* also includes other stories concerning the resurrection of corpses.
- Lucan (AD 39–65), in his poem *Pharsalia* (Book VI) talked about the Thessalian witch Erichtho, who slept in her grave and had the ability to raise the dead.
- Apuleius (second century AD) in his book *Metamorphoses*, also known as the *Golden Ass (Asinus Aureus)*, narrated stories of witches who drank blood, hurt the living, and mutilated and stole members from corpses in graveyards.
- Propertius, a Latin poet of the first century BC, in his *Elegies* (4.7 and 4.11) referred to two women, Cynthia and Cornelia, who returned from the dead as spectres to proclaim their final wishes.
- Ovid (43 BC–AD 17), in his Latin poem, *Fastes/Fasti (Festivals)* (6.125–6.180), presented the 'striges' as blood-drinking birds.
- Pliny the Younger (first to second century AD), in one of his letters (7.27), narrated the story of Athenodorus and a house in Athens that was for sale at a bargain price because it was supposed to be haunted by a murdered man; the body was subsequently found and a proper burial put the ghost to rest.
- Finally, stories of haunting and haunted houses are also found in the writings of Plautus' *Mostellaria* and Lucian's *Philopseudes*.

It is probably the case that people sometimes practiced unusual burials with apotropaic and preventive purposes in order to deal with the fear of the rising dead and revengeful

ghosts. According to Kyle (2001), pagan Romans were scared of the bodies of executed Christians, even more so because they were aware that Christians believed in resurrection. As a response to this fear they burned the corpses of Christians to assure that they would not resurrect and seek revenge.

Despite a widespread general belief to the contrary, stories of the undead also existed in Medieval Britain. In William of Newburgh's *Chronicles*, Chapters xxii–xxiv narrate relative events, which allegedly occurred in AD 1196, during the reign of King Richard I. One story in the county of Buckinghamshire describes how a dead man wandered out of his grave, attacked his wife, harassed his brothers and beset animals. The living sought help from the church and the Bishop of Lincoln wrote a chartula of Episcopal absolution and sent it to the local archdeacon with orders to open the grave and lay the chartula upon the breast of the corpse. When the tomb was opened, the body was found to have been incorrupt but after the archdeacon acted as instructed, it was reported that the dead man never wandered from his grave again (Summers 1996, 78–82). In fact, the British vampire of this story shares a lot in common with traditions concerning the Greek vampire, which have been found to be slightly different to those of Slavonic vampires. In Greece, the term for a vampire is used to delineate a corpse reanimated by a demon who does not necessarily drink blood but seeks to harm the living by attacking them, killing their animals and disturbing the household (Mouzakis 1989; Tsaliki 2001).

After the twelfth century AD, however, the tradition of vampires seems to have died out in Britain, while the fear of witchcraft increased (Bunson 1993). It is interesting to note though that the classic study of witchcraft – *Malleus Maleficarum* – written in AD 1486 by two Dominican friars, Fathers Kramer and Sprenger, also mentions remedies against the vampiric demons 'incubi' and 'succubi' (Kramer and Sprenger 1996).

It is known that until AD 1823 those who committed suicide in Britain were denied burial in consecrated ground and were interred by the public roadway or at a crossroads, in some cases with a wooden stake having been driven through their bodies. Written evidence for this practice exists, for instance, from Derbyshire dating to AD 1573. This custom is believed to have been applied as a deterrent to others, but since a suicide victim's body was considered to be cursed by the church and deprived of a religious burial, the fear of the dead cannot be excluded. An Act of Parliament of AD 1823, banned the driving of a stake through the body and, after this time, suicide victims were interred in a proper burial ground, but between nine and twelve at night and without religious rites. These limitations were removed in AD 1882 (Roud 2004, 61–3).

As noted above, Greece has a long tradition of revenants and bloodsucking creatures dating back to ancient times. In Byzantium, Slavic influence in conjunction with the precepts of the Greek Orthodox Church formed the legend of the Greek vampire species 'vrykolakas' (*βρυκόλακας*). Related superstitions have been recorded in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Christian texts, orthodox canon laws, novels, folk songs and manuscripts, which were written both by Greeks and Western travellers in Greece (Mouzakis 1989). Priests attempted to explain the phenomenon and also carried out destruction of the revenants. Major aetiologies for the creation of vampires were considered to have been excommu-

nication and the incorruptibility of the corpse; so special prayers were applied to enable priests to revoke an excommunication (Summers 1996). Related texts have been found in the codices of the monasteries of Mount Athos and Meteora. Many of them originate from the peak period of the 'vampire craze' in Greece – the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries AD. Protective amulets in the shape of crosses and pentagrams were worn by the living, placed on the corpse, or hung around the house. In addition, salt, garlic, vinegar, sulphur, onion, and quicklime were used as apotropaic substances, probably because of their strong smell and/or caustic action (Mouzakis 1989; Davias 1995).

Case Studies

Researchers in anthropology and folklore have long studied superstitious social fear, but the interest in the 'Archaeology of Fear', based on the study and interpretation of evidence from the funerary archaeological record, is relatively recent. Five examples of deviant burials – one from Cyprus, three from Greece, and one from Italy – will now be presented and briefly discussed. The aim of this section of the text is to demonstrate the wide chronological and geographic span of the phenomenon.

1. Khirokitia in Cyprus (Neolithic period: 4500–3900/3800 BC)

Burials at Khirokitia have been found within the settlement and in most cases they were placed under the house floor. The bodies were buried in pit graves in a flexed position. Heavy millstones, which were placed on the head or the body, may attest to necrophobic beliefs and practices (Niklasson 1991). Similar practices have been reported from other Neolithic and Chalcolithic Cypriot sites as well, such as Lemba and Kissonerga-Mosfilia. In addition, the first excavator of the Khirokitia site, Porphyrios Dikaïos, identified two unusually flexed and prone individuals – Tholos XVII and especially one at Tholos XVII, Burial II (Figure 1.1). He interpreted the individuals as having been human sacrifices and considered the individual from Tholos XVII, Burial II, to have been associated with foundation rituals (Tsaliki 2000).

2. Capo Colonna, Trani, Italy (c. ninth–eighth century BC)

Two cist graves excavated by Dr. Ada Riccardi in a possible sacred area and dated to Protogeometric times, on the basis of associated pottery, are considered to be unusual since a large sandstone had been placed over each of the interred individuals. The area was considered to be sacred because a building, which may have been a temple, and a circular pit of unknown function were located near the graves (A. Riccardi 2002, pers. comm.). Grave 1 was found to have included the remains of two young adult males and an adolescent, while Grave 2 contained the remains of a young adult male. All three of the individuals recovered from Grave 1 displayed palaeopathological lesions in addition to perimortem or postmortem tooth ablation of the right central maxillary incisor. Lesions apparent in the spine of one of the adult males from Grave 1 were considered to suggest that he may have suffered from spondylitis of traumatic origin (Saponetti *et al.* 2007). In addition, it was



Figure 1.1. Khirokitia, Cyprus. Tholos XVII, Burial II. Note the unusual flexed and prone body position, where the arms seem to have been tied behind the back. The skull is intentionally artificially deformed, a common trait for this population (after Dikaios 1953).

thought that he may have sustained facial trauma which had resulted in the loss of four frontal teeth (Saponetti and Scattarella 2003). A very tall young adult male recovered from the disproportionately small Grave 2 had been placed in a prone and tightly flexed position and his remains were considered to display signs of severe cranial trauma (Saponetti and Scattarella 2003). It has been speculated that all four of the individuals were sacrificial victims, with the large rocks having been deposited on the bodies out of fear, to prevent them rising from their graves and seeking revenge on those responsible for their deaths (S. S. Saponetti 2002, pers. comm.; Saponetti *et al.* 2007).

3. Kalyvia in Attica, Greece (mid eighth–fifth century BC)

A. Tsaravopoulos and K. Papathanasiou excavated a multi-period cemetery at Kalyvia, where cremation was the predominant burial rite and individuals were associated with a wide variety of grave goods (Papatsarouha 2001). A few unusual inhumations, however, have also been discovered at the site dating from a variety of periods. These inhumations occur in simple pits and are not constrained to a specific area of the cemetery (A. Tsaravopoulos 2003–05, pers. comm.). A number of the inhumation burials have been found to contain simple grave goods, mainly in the form of small crude jars. Unfortunately, the preservation of the inhumations is generally extremely poor, with only a couple of exceptions, and the human remains have not yet been fully studied. In at least two cases, a large rock had been deliberately positioned at the centre of the body. In another case the skeleton was

positioned within the pit in a contorted supine position, with the forearms bent parallel to the arms and the legs slightly flexed. This latter individual appears to have had a major fracture of the tibia, which was malaligned and possibly infected (Figure 1.2). The presence of these unusual inhumation burials within a cremation site in addition to the relatively simple nature of their grave goods may suggest that these burials were deviant.

4. Merenda in Attica, Greece (c. fourth century AD)

The second Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (Β'ΕΡΚΑ), under the direction of Dr. O. Kakavogianni, conducted large scale rescue excavations at the site of Merenda in Attica. A collection of disarticulated human remains were discovered in a limekiln during 2002. According to the excavators (O. Kakavogianni and V. Vlachodimitropoulou 2003, pers. comm.), the limekiln was in disuse when the burial took place. The deep pit of the kiln appeared to have been deliberately sealed with large rocks, which were located predominantly over the human remains.



Figure 1.2. Kalyvia, Attica. An unusual pit inhumation in a cemetery where cremation predominates. Despite the poor preservation it is obvious that the body is in a supine position with the forearms bent parallel to the arms and the legs slightly flexed. Note the fracture of the right tibia (courtesy of A. Tsaravopoulos).

The author has studied the skeletal remains and they were found to comprise one 'main' individual, a probable female 25–35 year old adult, along with the incomplete remains of a probable adult male. The body position of the 'main' individual was abnormal and she appears to have been deliberately cut in half before the body had fully decomposed and while the skeleton was still articulated. It is not possible to ascertain, however, if this had occurred during the ante-, peri- or postmortem periods. The head, torso and upper limbs along with part of the right ilium were found deposited prone in anatomical articulation, while the lower part of the body, consisting of the rest of the pelvic bones and the femora, tibiae, fibulae and bones of the feet rested next to, and parallel to, the upper part in a flexed articulated position. Hence the pelvis was lying approximately parallel to the head and the flexed legs were parallel to the torso (Figure 1.3). The very specific positions of the two body halves *in situ* cannot be explained by processes associated with taphonomy, decay or animal scavenging, but only by the intentional placement of the body in this manner. In the former situations the lower vertebrae would have been the location where the body would have been likely to naturally sub-divide. As such, the nature of the division of the body could only have been achieved by having cut it in half when flesh was still present on the corpse.

While cleaning the area of the 'main' individual's lower torso, between the arms, a segment of a third pelvic bone was found in articulation with the head and neck of an additional left femur. These body parts probably belonged to an adult male. The excavators are adamant that no other skeletal remains were found in the kiln. This raises the question of what happened to the rest of the second body.

Dismemberment and mutilation are perceived by different cultures and in various periods as strong punishments and a further humiliation of a wrong-doer (Riley Scott 1995; Spyropoulos 1998; Taylor 2003). The modest burial of these skeletal remains was performed in a pagan way, with a small plain trefoil Roman jar having been placed near the body in addition to a coin from the reign of Constantine (AD 307–337). The latter object may well have been the boat-fare to Charon (Davies 1999, 149). In an effort to interpret this unusual case, one probable scenario could be religious persecution against pagans. However, in this case one would expect a larger scale of events and more victims present. Alternatively, the study of the position of women in Greco-Roman and Byzantine societies, in addition to Roman law and the Roman perception of ritualised punitive executions, could suggest adultery (Carey 1995; Smythe 1997). Another, even more serious crime, was the relationship between a free woman and a slave. In the fourth century AD, Constantine enacted a number of laws against marriages between partners of different social status. If such unions were then discovered the offenders were to be executed (Evans-Grubbs 1993; Tsaliki forthcoming a).

5. Taxiarchis Myrintzou, Lesbos island, Greece (c. eighteenth–nineteenth centuries AD)

During 1999 the fourteenth Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities (14th EBA), under the direction of A. C. Loupou, conducted salvage excavation of a few Post-Byzantine graves situated to the north of the church of Taxiarchis Myrintzou at the site of Ano Halikas

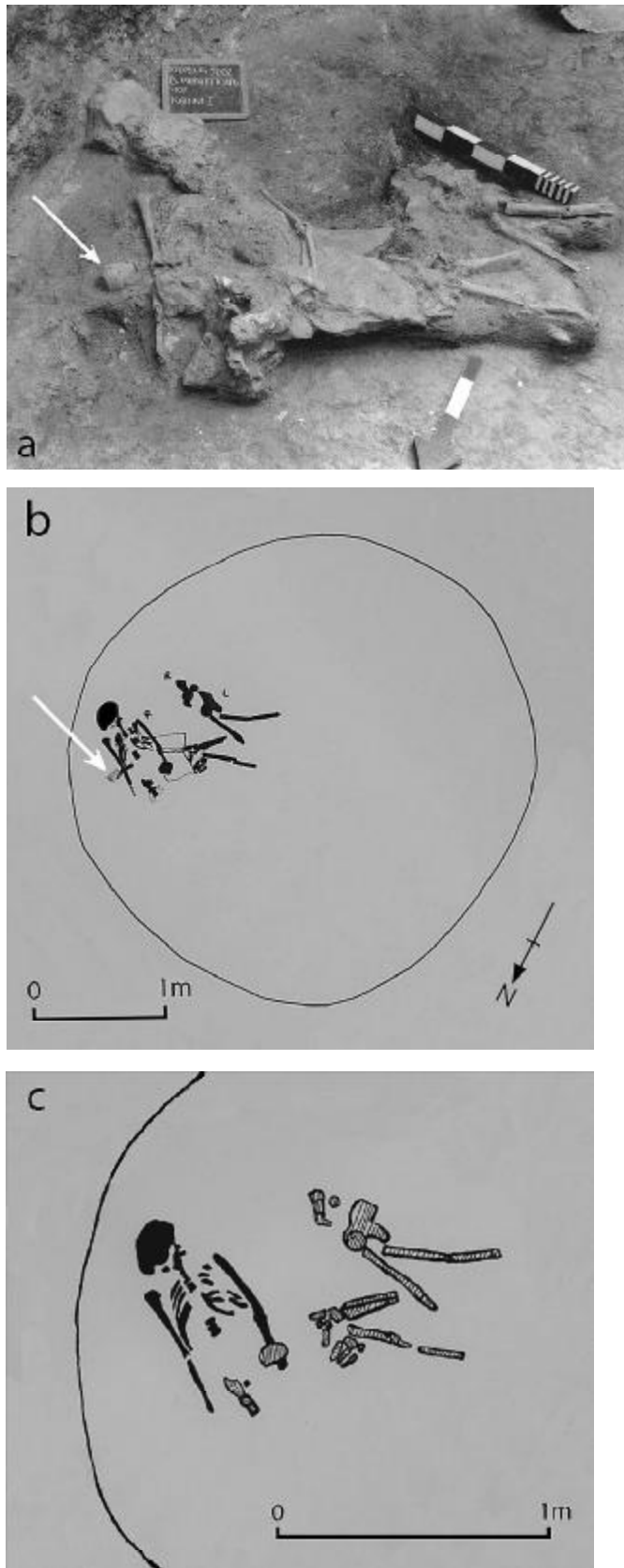


Figure 1.3. Merenda, Attica. Unusual burial in a kiln. (a) Photograph of the remains in situ. Note the small jar near the left arm (courtesy of B' Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities). (b) Drawing of the kiln and the skeletal remains in situ. Note the small jar near the left arm (adapted from the drawings of A. Petrou, courtesy of B' Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities). (c) Detail drawing of the human remains in which differential shading has been used to highlight the different but associated bone assemblages. The upper body part of the 'main' individual is shaded in black, its lower body parts are striated, while the skeletal elements belonging to a second individual are stippled (A. Tsaliki).

(M. Fountouli 2001, pers. comm.). The author undertook the osteological and palaeopathological analysis of the burials and radiographic examination was done by F. Takis. A male of 60+ years of age had been buried in a cist grave (Grave II). According to the excavators (A. C. Loupou and M. Fountouli 2001, pers. comm.), three bent spikes, each approximately 16 cm long with square sections and large heads, were found in association with the bones of the individual (Figure 1.4). The grave was considered to have been too narrow for a coffin and there was no evidence that one had been used. As such, the location of the long wedges within the grave was very unusual and they cannot be explained as coffin fittings.

The remains of the individual displayed a wide range of pathologies and deformities, some of which may explain his atypical postmortem treatment (Tsaliki forthcoming b):

- Frontal sinusitis with a large cloaca formation to the right of the nasion, which had resulted in asymmetry of the supraorbital ridges (Figure 1.5).
- Nasal, maxillary and mandibular deformities. A possible aetiology could be facial paralysis due to neurological problems of the facial and trigeminal nerves (C. Rodrígu-



Figure 1.4. An example of a spike similar to those found in association with the human skeleton at Taxiarchis Myrintzou, Lesbos, Greece. NB: The three spikes associated with the Taxiarchis Myrintzou individual were all bent, although their tips were straight (A. Tsaliki, courtesy of the wardens of the Castle of Mytilene).

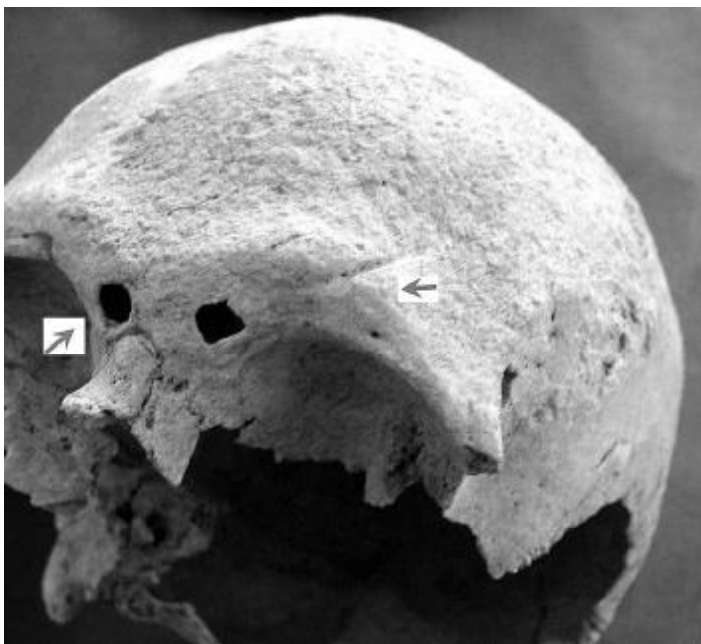


Figure 1.5. Cranium of the individual from Grave II at Taxiarchis Myrintzou, Lesbos, Greece. Note the frontal sinusitis with a large cloaca on the right (the hole on the left is probably due to taphonomy), the nasal deformity and the healed linear fracture over the left orbit (A. Tsaliki).

- ez-Martín 2004–05, pers. comm.). The deformity of the mandible may alternatively have been due to biomechanical adaptation of the maxilla during occlusion and mastication. Radiographs did not reveal any evidence of fractures or other pathology.
- A healed linear fracture, approximately 16 mm long, over the left eye orbit which appeared to have arisen as a consequence of sharp-force trauma.

The man appears to have managed to live a long life despite his deformities. The nature of the frontal injury, however, may suggest that he had engaged in interpersonal violence and it is possible that he had been socially stigmatised because of his facial deformities. The spikes in his grave may be related to rituals that were known to have been undertaken in order to prevent a corpse from becoming a vampire. Physical disability is known to be a factor that can predispose an individual to become a vampire and means of prevention include among others – proper burial, pounding nails into various body parts, and putting stakes and nails in the coffin to prevent the bloating of the corpse, which in the popular mind was a sign of vampiric transformation (Bunson 1993; Tsaliki 2001).

Conclusions

To summarise, folklore and literary sources have long provided information on necrophobia, deviancy and marginality in human societies, as has been shown above through the writings of Classical and Medieval authors and the brief analysis of the vampire legend. Archaeology on the other hand is largely based on excavation and evidence, as demonstrated from the case studies discussed above. This paper aspires to show the potential benefits that could be gained from a collaborative framework between anthropology, palaeopathology, sociology, literature, archaeology, and related disciplines for the optimum recovery, recording and interpretation of the remains of past societies.

Beyond the facts provided by osteological examination, the process of interpretation in archaeology and anthropology, especially of unusual burial contexts, can sometimes be perceived as ‘risky’, with the formulation of hypotheses that may appear farfetched. However, when undertaken with reference to scientific methods and by following an objective approach, interpretation is vital in order to provide an understanding of skeletal remains and to enable insights to be gained concerning the material and cognitive aspects of past cultures.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on my doctoral research thesis entitled – *An Investigation of Extraordinary Human Body Disposals with Special Reference to Necrophobia*. I would like to thank Dr E. Murphy for the invitation to participate in her initiatives relating to deviant burials, Dr C. Gerrard, and all the Ephorates and excavators who allowed me to study the burials derived from their excavations; they are mentioned individually in the text. Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to the institutions that funded my research, especially the (former) Bioanthropology Foundation, UK, and the P. Bakalas Bros. Foundation, Greece.

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