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**Treatment of the "special" dead in the Early Middle Ages:**

**Anglo-Saxon and Slavic Perspectives**

**By**

**Vladimir Kaznakov**

**A dissertation submitted in part requirement  
for the degree of PhD in History.**

**May 2013**

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## ***Abstract.***

This work deals with "special" burials among the Anglo-Saxon and Slavs in the early medieval period. The individuals in these graves are frequently labelled as "deviant", "criminals", as "socially other". This dissertation aims to focus more on the possible danger which "special" individuals represented for their communities after their death and on the possibility that the "special" burials were those of potential revenants or vampires.

The introduction begins with a brief sketch of the evolution of approaches to burial by archaeologists and historians writing in English. It goes on to argue that "deviant burial" is not a self-explanatory category, but can be applied to a variety of very different inhumations. It suggests it might be better termed "special" burial or the burial of the "special" dead and formed part of regular inhumation practice; and it argues that the best way to understand these practices is an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural framework. In particular, it discusses the possible insights offered by the development of the cognitive study of religion and belief, with particular reference to death and burial practices and introduces a "theoretical alternative model" for accessing how the deceased was treated from corpse to the grave.

Chapter 1 examines Anglo-Saxon "special" burials, focusing on selected cemeteries where we can observe multiple occurrences of "special" burials or the employment of several "special" practices in one locality. These will first be analyzed with regard to the location of deposition and secondly compared within the wider framework of Anglo-Saxon "special" burial practices. Comparison with "special" funerary rites recorded elsewhere in the world by anthropologists will lead to the proposal of an alternative approach to some of recent and current interpretations of these practices.

Chapter 2 focuses on Slavic archaeological material represented by the "special" graves excavated in Slovakia and the Czech Republic: both burials from cemeteries and also a group of individuals deposited in a range of objects

found during excavation of Slavic settlements - in grain silos, wells or pits. As with Anglo-Saxon graves, the Slavic "special" burials are analyzed from the point of view of location and then in more global context of Slavic society. The possible interpretations of these findings are discussed.

Chapter 3 focuses on the primary sources and their descriptions of "pagan" funerary rituals. It charts shifts in ideas and attitudes towards "special" funeral practices ranging from descriptions of these "pagan" practices, through efforts to delimit and penalize them in the law codes, to narratives of revenant sightings and descriptions of how to recognize and destroy them. This chapter will indicate some of the theories and new approaches proposed in the thesis.

The concluding chapter brings these strands together. In particular, it discusses the possible insights offered by the development of the cognitive study of religion and belief, with particular reference to death and burial practices. It examines the changing patterns of religion - from traditional or "pagan" to Christianity – and the ways in which this change influenced both "special" burial practices and perceptions of vampires and revenants, with particular reference to the Christian doctrine of Purgatory. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the theories proposed on the basis of the material collected in this work and reference to corresponding interpretative shifts in present day archaeology and history.

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## **Introduction**

This work deals with "special" burials among Anglo-Saxon and Slavs in the early medieval period. Its intention is to show these burials as representations of beliefs connected with death and especially with the journey to the afterlife - as visualized by the early medieval communities before the introduction of Christianity - and also consequently to what extent Christianization changed it. Moreover, my intention is focus more on the possible danger, which "special" individuals may represent for the community after their death, than on their "social status" when alive. The persons deposited inside these graves are often labelled as "deviant", "criminals" or more globally as "socially other" and mostly as members of the lower levels of society. The material collected in this dissertation aims to provide a rather different approach to their "status" and for the reason why they were buried in such a way.

### **The evolution of approaches to burial in works written in English**

Anglo-Saxon burials have been studied for over three centuries, but as Tania Dickinson points out in the recently published *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, only fairly recently has their historiography become of critical interest.<sup>1</sup> Although the first documented record of Anglo-Saxon burials dates from the 17th century, antiquarian interest really began in the 18th century.<sup>2</sup> The finds were firstly associated with Britons and Romans and only later on the antiquarians started connecting them with the Anglo-Saxons. "The implications of this were not realized, however, until the middle decades of the 19th century, when a surge in field activity, generating a mass of reports to journals and material for museums, went hand-in-hand with a drive to explain the finds through knowledge derived from historical and literary sources..."<sup>3</sup> However, these readings had been construed in the light of contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> T. Dickinson: "Overview: Mortuary Ritual", in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. by H.Hamerow, D.A. Hinton and S. Crawford, (Oxford, 2011), pp .221-237

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.222

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

industrial, national, and imperial experience, and of prevailing racial and evolutionary theories.<sup>4</sup>

More systematic codification and synthesis of data that could generate historical reconstructions began only in the early 20th century. It was a Swede, Nils Aberg<sup>5</sup>, who first and systematically presented evolutionary typologies according to the methods developed by Scandinavians and German pre-historians in order to chart the chronological development of Anglo-Saxon grave goods.<sup>6</sup> This cultural-historical and empiricist tradition, with its ultimate goal of making burials to contribute to the (re-) writing of Anglo-Saxon history continued to develop through the middle decades of 20th century and beyond.<sup>7</sup>

As Howard Williams summarized the development of ideas in Anglo-Saxon mortuary archaeology:

The "pagan grave" can be seen as part of a nineteenth-century romantic-nationalist desire to portray the Germanic successors of Rome as primitive yet noble ancestors. Such rites as cremation, the deposition of grave goods, animal sacrifice, boat burial, have all been seen as "customs" inspired by pagan perceptions of the afterlife. Following critiques of culture-historic approaches in the 1970s, archaeologists tended to leave religious interpretations to one side and focus on social and economic explanations for burial rite. ...Mortuary symbolism was seen as constituting and displaying the socio-political identity of the deceased, rather than eschatologies, cosmologies or mythologies.<sup>8</sup>

The "old" cultural- historical approach studying "...the history of "cultures" or "tribes", rather than the people wearing and using the material..."<sup>9</sup> is deemed in the present day as inadequate and more focus is devoted to the identities of an individual. Julian Richards explored how the designs of cremation urns and their associated grave-goods expressed individual (age and gender) and group

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> N. Aberg: *The Anglo-Saxons in England during the Early Centuries after the Invasion*, (Uppsala, 1926)

<sup>6</sup> Dickinson, *Overview: Mortuary Ritual*, p.223

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> H.Williams: "At the Funeral", in *Signals of Belief in Early England*, ed. by M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple, (Oxford, 2010), pp. 67- 82

<sup>9</sup> S. Lucy: "Burial Practice in Early Medieval Eastern Britain: Constructing Local Identities, Deconstructing Ethnicity", in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by S. Lucy and A. Reynolds, (London, 2002), pp. 72- 81

(regional and national) identities.<sup>10</sup> Using a national sample of inhumation cemeteries, Heinrich Härke conclusively demonstrated that weapon-burial was not necessarily a sign of a warrior, but a symbolic act, even a mythic evocation of a masculine, martial ethnicity.<sup>11</sup> Using an almost identical sample, Nicholas Stoodley went on to show how the form and contents of graves were structured by gender and age as a strategy for negotiating status and identity within and between the families, households, and communities; variation in the patterns between regions and over time gave the possibility of relating these to wider historical developments.<sup>12</sup>

Guy Halsall, using archaeological material from Continental Europe as a basis for his research, while taking into account issues discussed above, came to the conclusion that changes in the artefacts deposited in the graves around 600 AD in the Merovingian Kingdom "...of which we have been aware for almost a century, but changes which have never been explained except in the most vacuous terms of changing fashion..."<sup>13</sup> can be now explained as a part of a transformation of the ruling strata in Austrasia.<sup>14</sup>

A slightly different approach to the reflection of "social" status in mortuary rituals was applied by Andrew Reynolds in his study of Anglo-Saxon deviant burial customs.<sup>15</sup> According to him, expression of secular power in the early Middle Ages can be approached in a wider range of contexts and archaeology, in the form of execution cemeteries, is now making a major contribution to our knowledge of judicial activity.<sup>16</sup> Reynolds' examination of execution

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<sup>10</sup> J.D. Richards: *The Significance of Form and Decoration of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Urns*, (Oxford, 1987); look also in Dickinson, *Overview: Mortuary Ritual*, pp. 221- 237

<sup>11</sup> H. Härke: "Material culture as myth: weapons in Anglo-Saxon graves", in *Burial & Society: The Chronological and Social Analysis of Archaeological Burial Data*, ed. by K. Jensen and H. Nielsen, (Aarhus, 1997), pp. 119- 127

<sup>12</sup> N. Stoodley: *The Spindle and the Spear: A Critical enquiry into the Construction and Meaning of Gender in the Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite*, (Oxford, 1999)

<sup>13</sup> G. Halsall: "Social Change around A.D. 600: An Austrasian Perspective", in *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The seventh century in north-western Europe*, ed. by M. Carver, (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 265- 278

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273

<sup>15</sup> A. Reynolds: *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, (Oxford, 2009)

<sup>16</sup> A. Reynolds: "Crime and Punishment", in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, (Oxford, 2011), pp. 892- 913

cemeteries led him to the conclusion that although certain traits of outcast burial can be followed across the pagan/Christian transition in England, we can observe a distinct change in the archaeological record from the later seventh century onwards, which led to the fact that the burials of social outcasts are found outside community cemeteries rather than within them and to the fundamental shift in social practice.<sup>17</sup>

The theory of Anglo-Saxon burial mounds, for example Sutton Hoo, as a reflection of increased social stratification, suggests that Anglo-Saxon society in the 6th and 7th century experienced the rise of an aristocratic class presaging the creation of kings.<sup>18</sup> Martin Carver assumed in his older works that these monuments were created "...in response to the activities of the Christian Merovingian Empire; that is, the symbols of pagan autonomy in confrontation, even defiance, of the predatory attentions of Christianity ..., ...as for Sutton Hoo, the battle of ideas in 7th-century Europe was surely its principal inspiration and prime mover ..."<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, he changed his opinion recently and concluded his article in *Signals of Belief* with the statement:

The 5-8th century was a time of ideological experiment and inventive thinking, for the very good reason that no single power had sufficient might or authority to control it. There was no single orthodox pagan community, and no single orthodox Christian authority. Intellectual positions were adapted to local conditions, in particular the structure of society and political agendas of the communities. They were worked out - negotiated- between communities across the seas and across the land, and expressed in monuments, burial practice and other kinds of investment that we have been fortunate enough to inherit.<sup>20</sup>

The selection and quantity of grave goods may represent "social status", but can indicate also political and ideological changes as illustrated in the previous paragraphs. "It is no longer enough to study aspects of burial rites, or artefacts in isolation. It is the selection of particular rites and artefacts, and their

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 893

<sup>18</sup> M. Carver: "Reflections on the Meanings of Monumental Barrows in Anglo-Saxon England", in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by S. Lucy and A. Reynolds, (London, 2002), pp. 132- 143

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 142

<sup>20</sup> M. Carver: "Agency, Intellect and Archaeological Agenda", in *Signals of Belief in Early England*, ed. by M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple, (Oxford, 2010), pp. 1-20

combination at any one point in time that gives any specific burial its meaning."<sup>21</sup>

However, we should note that the ongoing discussions among academics about the importance or non importance of the social status on the way that the funeral rituals were executed and how the deceased was deposited into the grave are not without problems.<sup>22</sup> As C.J. Arnold remarked it is difficult to determine the significance of the identities defined by archaeologists, because they may signify the identity of the person during their lifetime (age, sex, gender, family, region, role etc.), but alternatively, the identity may have been given to the person after death for more emotional reasons by mourners.<sup>23</sup>

The form of burial may reflect a person's life, their relationship to the other people, the perceptions of mourners and ritual in varying degrees and combinations. It is difficult to determine which is most relevant. It is therefore most appropriate to examine cemeteries as an expression of how society perceived itself rather than precisely how it was. It is the psyche of the society that is perhaps most reflected through the patterns of behaviour of those responsible for funerals.<sup>24</sup>

It is also now recognized that the emergence of furnished cremation and inhumation graves may be no longer regarded as reflecting a single and coherent "Anglo-Saxon paganism,"<sup>25</sup> nor need the decline in accompanied burial relate directly or exclusively to Christian conversion.<sup>26</sup>

The very term "pagan Anglo-Saxon burial" compounds the conceptually naive assumption that there existed a one-to-one correlation between ethnic affiliation, religious beliefs and ritual practice that archaeologists have been so keen to move beyond. Therefore, on both theoretical and methodological grounds, pagan mortuary ritual is an area of study bedeviled with problems and

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<sup>21</sup> S. Lucy and A. Reynolds: "Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales: Past, Present and Future", in: *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by S. Lucy and A. Reynolds, (London, 2002), pp. 1- 23

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of archaeological approaches see M.P. Pearson: *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*, (Somerset, 1999), Chapter IV pp. 72- 94

<sup>23</sup> C.J. Arnold: *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, (London, 1997), p. 178

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, "At the Funeral", p.67

<sup>26</sup> H. Geake: *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-period England, c.600-c.850*, (Oxford, 1997)

recent considerations of religion that have sometimes avoided the burial evidence all together.<sup>27</sup>

Most recently there have been reconsiderations of the ritual significance of the act of mortuary deposition itself as a form of cultic practice.<sup>28</sup> Sally Crawford's approach stresses the importance of looking at the furnishing of graves itself as a dedicatory or votive rite. According to her "...the mortuary domain was one of the few places where a level of "organized" ritual and cult activity took place in the pagan Anglo-Saxon world in an archaeologically identifiable way."<sup>29</sup> Sarah Semple examined the sacral geography implied by the location of cemeteries in the landscape:

It is clear we can see elements of pre-Christian or non-Christian belief in the way the landscape is labeled: there is an appreciation of natural places and of previous prehistoric practice..., ...both the verbal and material make references to belief systems that are more clearly drawn in Scandinavia; it seems likely, however, that Anglo-Saxon paganism made reference to local British and prehistoric practice too... ...All these monumental investments however, were, and needed to be, situated in a wider ritual landscape, so that every day life of the people took place in a theatre which was also occupied by spirits, benign, malevolent and ancestral.<sup>30</sup>

The ancestor cult and its influence on mortuary rituals has been evaluated also by Alexandra Sanmark. She showed in her study that an ancestor cult was a highly significant and fully integrated part of pre-Christian religion in Scandinavia and Iceland, and from this point of departure, she demonstrated that it must have been an important feature in the pre-Christian religion of Anglo-Saxons too.<sup>31</sup> According to her "...there are clear similarities between the Anglo-Saxon and the Norse concept of the soul, implying that both had an ancestor cult and also strengthening the link between them."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, "At the Funeral", p.67

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.68

<sup>29</sup> S. Crawford: "Votive Deposition, Religion and the Anglo-Saxon Furnished Burial Ritual", in *World Archaeology* 36 (1) 2004, pp. 83- 102

<sup>30</sup> S. Semple: "In the Open Air", in *Signals of Belief in Early England*, ed. by M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple, (Oxford, 2010), pp. 21- 48

<sup>31</sup> A. Sanmark: "Living On: Ancestors and the Soul", in *Signals of Belief in Early England*, ed. by M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple, (Oxford, 2010), pp. 158- 180

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 158

Howard Williams' study focusing on the performance of the funeral, suggests that by considering the social and religious dimensions of both the form and variability of early Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices, embodied beliefs can be discerned, although, we cannot use this evidence to "read off" cosmologies from mortuary practices any more than we can reconstruct social structures.<sup>33</sup>

The mortuary rituals were not primarily about representation, nor were they primarily about symbolising religious or social concepts. Instead, they were mnemonic performances, enabling the living to transform the dead and to reconstitute the relationship between them. The variability we find in early Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices, and the contrasting uses of cremation and inhumation, are testimony to the complex local negotiations of these broader themes in using the ritual process as a technology of remembrance. These were not geared to manifesting a single afterlife belief, but localised variants of pagan practice geared to the construction of cosmologies, ancestors and social memories.<sup>34</sup>

These newer discussions have moved a little away from the prevailing "quasi functionalist" discourse, moving somewhat more in the direction of discussion of beliefs and some of the issues which will be discussed in this thesis. The interest of the majority of the authors discussed in this section is nevertheless focused on the status of the deceased during their life and how it influenced funeral rites, grave goods and etc. The social significance of "special" burials is hard to address, because, as we will see, we can find in this group both burials with rich funerary attire and also funerals without any grave goods. The constant factor in their evaluation is the longevity of these burial practices and the "special" or "unusual" way of corpse deposition, which is often the prime mover in the decision to label the individuals buried inside them as "deviant" or "criminals" - a notion which will be challenged in this dissertation. The fact that we can witness occurrences of these graves in almost every culture and any time period, makes them an important factor in evaluation of what we might call the "psyche of the society" and elevates their "status" in overall view of the society. Therefore, the major concern of this work is not the "social status" of the deceased buried within "special" graves; at least, not their "social

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<sup>33</sup> Williams, "At the Funeral", p. 79

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



status" when they were alive. Although archaeological material will constitute the basis of my research, my thesis will examine material from different angles, principally - though not exclusively - those suggested by anthropology and ethnography.

## **1. Preliminary observation – Soul Belief**

The important factor which needs to be considered here is the difference between Christianity and other religions in the area of soul belief and the afterlife. In comparison with the single Christian soul we can encounter belief in soul dualism amongst indigenous tribes throughout the world, in Archaic Greece and surviving in European folk tales<sup>35</sup>, where every person is constituted by two kinds of souls: 1.) the free soul which represents the individual personality and is inactive when the body is active, manifesting itself only during unconsciousness or dreams or at death; 2.) one or more body souls which endow the body with life and consciousness.<sup>36</sup> Jan Bremmer in his study of the early Greek concept of the soul remarked that "...for the Greek, as for many other peoples, the free soul of the living continued as the soul of the dead, although other manifestations of the deceased were also thought to exist. There was no uniform representation of the dead in an afterlife; neither did all the dead have the same status."<sup>37</sup>

The fate of the Christian soul after death depends on moral conduct during the individual's life. To simplify this, we can say that the "good Christians" go to Heaven, the "bad one" to Hell. By contrast, the afterlife in other religions "... may be relatively lightly conceptualized and is often virtually an extension of the present life..."<sup>38</sup> The free soul released from the body at the time of the death must be guided on the way to the afterlife, otherwise it may stay in the world of living, roam around astray and as a consequence of this begin to

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<sup>35</sup> M. Dunn: *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons c. 597-c.700: Discourses of Life, Death and Afterlife*, (London and New York, 2010), p.7

<sup>36</sup> See more about this in Dunn, *Christianization of Anglo-Saxons*; A. Hultkrantz: *Soul and Native Americans*, (Woodstock, 1997); J. Bremmer: *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, (Princeton, 1983)

<sup>37</sup> Bremmer, *Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, pp. 11- 12

<sup>38</sup> e.g. Valhalla, Hades or Elysian fields, otherworld in Native American beliefs, see Dunn, *Christianization of Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 8- 12

molest the living. In such a belief-systems shamans or other mediators are "...indispensable in any ceremony that concerns the experience of the human soul as such ... ..a precarious psychic unit, inclined to forsake the body and an easy prey for demons or sorcerers ... ..it is always the shaman who conducts the dead person's soul to the underworld, for he is the psychopomp par excellence..."<sup>39</sup> We can see, that although the afterlife is visualized as "an extension of the present life", the journey into it is far more complicated and dangerous than in Christianity and this fact needs to be taken into account in the evaluation of these burial practices. The extraordinary character of "special" graves enables us to assume that the individuals buried inside them were deemed as "special" too, in either a positive or a negative way, and different from the rest of the community; the way of their deposition represents the rituals performed to safeguard the journey into the afterlife.

Even though this work is not specifically about the early medieval conceptualization of the afterlife among the Anglo-Saxon and Slavs, "special" burials represent an opportunity to examine the mortuary beliefs of early medieval people, in order to shed more light on these "unusual", "special" or "deviant" burials as well as who was buried inside them - and why. Taking into account the distinctive nature and complexity of these graves my approach needs to be complex too. While archaeological sources comprise the majority of my material, they cannot supply on their own enough information for proper evaluation. Thus the thesis will also make use of the primary sources and anthropological and ethnographic material in comparison with the archaeological excavations, starting with an overview of the subject regarding terminology, theories and terms connected with the "special" or, as they are often now referred to, "deviant" burials.

For the structure of this work is important to show that even when particular rites vary in different cultures, the reasons why they were practiced has a certain "universal" character. The examples used in my dissertation will therefore try to demonstrate possibilities which could lead to these processes in different cultures and time periods and will be consequently used in

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<sup>39</sup> M. Eliade: *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, (Princeton, 2002), p. 182

comparison with archaeological material in an attempt to present alternative view. It does not matter if the argument uses Are Are people in one case and gypsies in other – the majority of the examples used in my dissertation are some of the most commented and quoted in academic literature dealing with topics of burial rites, rites of passage and possible return of the dead and will be used in an attempt to demonstrate “alternative” possibilities of their application in conjunction with archaeological material. More important is that the already mentioned "universality" doesn't change in regard to geographical location or time period. This fact cannot be overlooked and indicates the suggestion that these processes could be products of certain common trait of "human psyche". The search for this trait is one of the main topics of my dissertation and the use of anthropological and ethnographic material is necessity.

## **2. Understanding "unusual" or "deviant" burials: theories of liminality**

One of the most influential and useful concepts in theorizing death and funerary practices in this period is that liminality, pioneered at the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular by Arnold van Gennep and Robert Hertz. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, liminal (adj.), in its rare usage, is: “Of or pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process. A more specific definition of liminal as it pertains to psychology states: “Of or pertaining to a ‘limen’ [in Latin] or ‘threshold.’”<sup>40</sup> These two definitions recognize the threshold, being the “beginning of a state or action, outset, opening,” as synonymous with the liminal state. Arnold van Gennep, the first person to introduce the notion of liminal period in his *Rites of Passage*, stated in this work that

...the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another...one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another...Because of importance of these

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<sup>40</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, online source, accessed 24.10.2008

transitions, I think it legitimate to single out *rites of passage* as a special category, which under further analysis may be subdivided into *rites of separation*, *transition* [or liminality] *rites*, and *rites of incorporation*.<sup>41</sup>

According to van Gennep “...whoever passes from one to the other [zone] finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds.....this symbolic and spatial area of transition may be found in more or less pronounced form in all ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another.”<sup>42</sup> For van Gennep crossing the threshold is (as an important part in marriage, adoption, ordination, and funeral ceremonies) the same as uniting oneself with a new world.

Victor Turner, using van Gennep’s categorization explained the above mentioned phases of rites of passage in his *Ritual Process*. According to him, the first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both. During the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual object (the “passenger”) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and “structural” type; “he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions.”<sup>43</sup> When explaining liminality, Turner constructs the attributes of liminality or about liminal personae as necessarily ambiguous,

...since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space....Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and

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<sup>41</sup> A. van Gennep: *The Rites of Passage*, (Chicago, 1960), pp. 1- 14

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 18

<sup>43</sup> V.W. Turner: *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (London, 1969), pp. 94- 95

ceremonial....As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions.....Thus, liminality is frequently linked to death, to being in womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to eclipse of the sun and moon.<sup>44</sup>

The symbolism attached to and surrounding the liminal *persona* is complex and bizarre. As Turner stated in his other work *The Forest of Symbols*, much of it is modeled on human biological processes, which are conceived to be what Levi-Strauss might call “isomorphic” with structural and cultural processes.<sup>45</sup> They give an “outward and visible form” to “an inward and conceptual” process. According to Turner “...the structural “invisibility” of liminal *personae* has a twofold character....They are no longer classified and not yet classified....In so far as they are not classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge...”<sup>46</sup>

Another essential theoretical tool can be found in the work of van Gennep’s contemporary Robert Hertz (1881-1915). In his work *A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death*, Hertz pointed to the importance of postmortem changes of the corpse in the context of liminality. According to him the period in which the corpse decomposes is in many cultures a marker for how long the transition or liminal period will last. It is also period when “...the body is particularly exposed to the attacks of evil spirits and all harmful influences by which man is threatened, its diminished powers of resistance have to be reinforced by magical means.”<sup>47</sup> The period which follows death is particularly dangerous in this respect; this is why the corpse must be exorcised and be forearmed against “bad spirits”. So long as the final rite has not been celebrated the corpse is exposed to “grave perils.”<sup>48</sup> Hertz’s theories, which have more recently been studied and promoted by

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.95

<sup>45</sup> V.W. Turner: *The Forest of Symbols*, (Ithaca, 1967), p. 96

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> R. Hertz: “A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death”, in *Death and the Right Hand*, transl. by R. Needham and C. Needham, (New York, 1960), p.33

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Metcalf and Huntington, will be discussed in association with others – particularly those of Paul Barber and Pascal Boyer at greater length later in this thesis.<sup>49</sup>

The widespread and long-lasting nature of beliefs associated with the liminal nature of death is shown not only among non-European peoples but has been recognized and examined in present day Europe. For instance, Gypsies in 20<sup>th</sup> century England guarded the corpse of the deceased day and night in a special “death tent”, usually somewhere on the edge of the camp; sitting around a fire, with the lights up in the former trailer of deceased. “Afraid of the ghost, they said; that is why they sit in company round the fire.”<sup>50</sup> They believe that the dead body, before its proper deposition into the grave, is extremely dangerous. Judith Okely observed during her field work amongst the Gypsies that death should occur ideally in a liminal place, outside the camp, and in the present day in hospitals of non-Gypsy people.<sup>51</sup> According to T. W. Thompson, the favorite possessions of the deceased were placed inside the coffin and a Gypsy informed him these were “things what the dead person was fonder on than others and might find want of”.<sup>52</sup> This practice “...ensures that the dead person will not come looking for these possessions among his/her family or former *atchen tans* (stopping places).”<sup>53</sup> In the past, relatives kept watch over the grave, because removal of the whole or parts of the body is dangerous as the *mulo* (ghost) will not rest.<sup>54</sup> The cart used to take the coffin to the burial was burnt afterwards, equally as the former home- trailer, where the body was laid for the final vigil and to which the *mulo* is most likely to return. Also the personal possessions of the deceased were destroyed, because they were both

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<sup>49</sup>P. Metcalf and R. Huntington: *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, (Cambridge, 1991); P. Barber: *Vampires, Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality*, (Yale, 1988); P. Boyer: *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts that Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*, (London, 2001) and P. Boyer: *The Naturalness of Religious ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion*, (Berkley, Los Angeles and London, 1994)

<sup>50</sup> J. Okely: *The Traveller-Gypsies*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 217

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>52</sup> T.W. Thompson: “English Gypsy Death and Burial Customs”, in: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, third series, 1924, Vol.II. (1-2): pp. 5-38, 60-93

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>54</sup> Okely, *Gypsies*, p. 221

polluted and a magnet for *mulo*.<sup>55</sup> The consequences of retaining a dead person's property were fatal – the retainer would suffer bad luck, disease, insanity and ostracism by other Gypsies, including close kin who would consider the wrongdoer under a curse.<sup>56</sup> All these funerary rituals were taking place to ensure that the spirit (*mulo*) of deceased will not harm the rest of his family and other members of the community.

### **3. "Unusual" or "deviant" burials: ethnographic and anthropological approaches**

The understanding of religion and death, particularly among non-literate cultures in the modern period, has been greatly advanced by the pioneering anthropological and ethnographic work which began in the nineteenth century, pioneered by Emile Durkheim and then taken up by Bronislaw Malinowski in the twentieth. In his *Elementary Forms of Religion*, Durkheim focused on totemism, a "primitive and simple religion" of the aboriginal people of Australia. He picked this example because he believed that the simplest religions offered the purest examples of the essential elements of religious life. In his study Durkheim tried to trace the social origins and the social functions of religious beliefs. As the embodiment of collective ideals, religion is reinforced through ceremonials and rituals.<sup>57</sup> He suggested that categories are collective representations; that is, categories are the product of society. To the extent people collectively constitute society, our categories of knowledge can be said to be human creations, but because society is a *sui generis* phenomenon, they are prior to the experience of any particular person.<sup>58</sup>

In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* he noted,

... primitive civilizations are prime cases because they are simple cases. This is why, among all the orders of facts, the observations of ethnographers have

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 222-223

<sup>56</sup> Thompson, "Gypsy Death", p. 87

<sup>57</sup> *Classical Sociological Theory*, ed. by C. Calhoun, J. Gerteis, J. Moody, S. Pfaff and I. Virk, (Oxford, 2012), p.199

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

often been veritable revelations that have breathed new life into the study of human institutions. ...but primitive religions do not merely allow us to isolate the constituent elements of religion; their great advantage is also that they aid in its explanations. Because the facts are simpler, the relations between them are more apparent. The reasons men invoke to explain their actions to themselves have not yet been refined and revamped by sophisticated thought: They are closer and more akin to the motives that caused those actions.<sup>59</sup>

Durkheim's ideas were strongly present in the emergence of "structuralism" and influenced future anthropological and ethnographic research not only on the theoretical level but also in the field as we can see in the work of Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942).

Malinowski is often considered one of anthropology's most skilled ethnographers, especially because of the highly methodical and well theorized approach to the study of social systems. He is often referred to as the first researcher to bring anthropology "off the verandah", that is, experiencing the everyday life of his subjects along with them. Malinowski emphasized the importance of detailed participant observation, and argued that anthropologists must have daily contact with their informants if they are to adequately record the "imponderabilia of everyday life" that are so important to understanding a different culture. His declared vision goal of the anthropologist, or ethnographer, is "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world."<sup>60</sup>

Looking from far and above, from our high places of safety in developed civilization, it is easy to see all the crudity and irrelevance of magic. But without its power and guidance early man could not have mastered his practical difficulties as he has done, nor could man have advanced to the higher stages of culture. Hence, the universal occurrence of magic in primitive societies and its enormous sway. Hence do we find magic an invariable adjunct of all important activities. I think we must see in it the embodiment of

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<sup>59</sup> E. Durkheim: *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York, 1995), pp. 5-6

<sup>60</sup> B. Malinowski: *Argonauts of Western Pacific: an account of native enterprise and adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, (London, 1978), p. 19



the sublime folly of hope, which has yet been the best school of man's character.<sup>61</sup>

This is what we would now call an emic research strategy, one that seeks the 'native' or 'primitive' (sic) viewpoint and which relies on informants to say what is and what is not significant.

The work of anthropologists such as Durkheim and Malinowski has influenced later anthropologists and sociologists in examining the relationships between the individual and the group in which s/he lives or lived and the way in which the individual is regarded by society.

It has been observed that behaviour which qualifies one person for punishment in a given society may qualify another for sainthood, depending on the circumstances under which the behavior was performed and the temper of the audience by which it was witnessed.<sup>62</sup> As deviancy is not a property inherent in any particular kind of behavior, but is a property conferred upon a behavior by the people who come into direct or indirect contact with it, many sociologists define deviancy as any extreme conduct that elicits explicit sanctions from the people of a group, who consider it to threaten them or to produce ambiguity regarding the limits of conduct.<sup>63</sup>

This definition is based on the assumption that deviancy helps to mark out the boundaries of group experience by providing the group with a contrast to the accepted norms of conduct. Since these boundaries are never a formed feature of any society and need to be repeatedly tested by the community, deviancy is beneficial to social life and therefore maintained by it.<sup>64</sup> This idea was first set forth by Durkheim<sup>65</sup> in 1895 and was later elaborated by Erikson.<sup>66</sup> The same

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<sup>61</sup> Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, (New York, 1954), p. 90

<sup>62</sup> K.T. Erikson: *Wayward Puritans: A study in the Sociology of Deviance*, (London, 1966), pp. 5-6

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 6

<sup>64</sup> T.Shay: "Differentiated treatment of Deviancy at Death as Revealed in Anthropological and Archaeological Material", in *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 4, (1985), pp. 221- 241

<sup>65</sup> E. Durkheim: *The division of labor in society*, (New York, 1964), pp. 70-109 and E. Durkheim: *The rules of sociological methods*, (New York, 1966), pp. 67-72

assumption is to be found in other anthropological thinkers as well. Thus Malinowski remarks that in traditional societies, like that of the Trobriands, illegal magical and nonmagical systems enabled people to circumvent the law.<sup>67</sup> Another anthropologist, Drucker, claims that the Nootka tribes of North America tolerated various deviant behaviors.<sup>68</sup> In other words, societies permit criminal behavior in order to maintain their social structure.

This has implications for the treatment of the individual in death, and the application of different treatments in burial to different individuals. Shay contends that,

... among the social dimensions reflected by burial customs, we can expect to find a variety of behaviors in life and different circumstances surrounding deaths that were regarded as being deviant by different societies.<sup>69</sup>

From a sociological point of view,

when archeologists excavate burials, they are exposing the remains not merely individuals but social personae who had engaged in social relations with other social personae<sup>70</sup>

Each social persona is composed of the social identities that make up what has been called a person's social position, or status, which he maintained in life and which is recognized as appropriate for consideration at death in given social system. According to Binford, the primary dimensions of *social personae* given recognition in differential mortuary treatment are:

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<sup>66</sup> Erikson, *Wayward Puritans* and K.T. Erikson: "On the sociology of deviance", in *The collective definition of deviance*, ed. by F.J. Davis and R. Stivers, (New York, 1975), pp. 11-21

<sup>67</sup> B. Malinowski: *Crime and custom in savage society*, (London, 1926), p.82, 86

<sup>68</sup> P. Drucker: *The northern and central Nootkan tribes*, (Washington, 1951), p. 330

<sup>69</sup> Shay, "Differentiated treatment of Deviancy at Death", p. 223

<sup>70</sup> Shay: "Differentiated treatment of Deviancy at Death", p. 224

...age, sex, relative rank and distinctiveness of the social position occupied by the deceased within the social unit, and the affiliation of the deceased with respect to membership segments of the broader social unit, or in the case of intersocietal symbolism, the form appropriate to the society itself...<sup>71</sup>

but he continued:

...peculiar circumstances surrounding the death of a person may be perceived by the remaining members of a society as substantially altering obligations of the survivors to acknowledge the social persona of the deceased as it was in life. Instead, such persons are treated as “members” of a post-mortem membership unit (those killed in war, those struck by lightning, etc.) and afforded mortuary ritual appropriate to such a membership group at the expense of recognition of other components of the social identity.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, they will receive “unusual” or “deviant” burial, different from the other members of society. Justification of these assumptions may be found in ethnological and anthropological analysis of burial customs.

The second dimension is the one already discussed above and suggested by Binford: that persons dying under special circumstances are treated as members of a postmortem membership unit.

These two dimensions were further subdivided into several categories of behavior or circumstances treated as deviant. The first dimension was subdivided into deviant attributes, crimes or aliens, and public service; the second dimension was subdivided into violent death, diseases, suicide, and death in battle. “The data confirm that mortuary practices reflect, among other things, nonhomogeneously defined deviant actions and circumstances among different societies.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> L.R. Binford: *An Archaeological Perspective*, (New York and London, 1972), p. 227

<sup>72</sup> Binford, *An Archaeological Perspective*; p. 227

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Saxe in his *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices* characterized deviancy in these words:

...since “deviance” defines the ego as having breached the rights/duties relationships with alter-egos and hence brings an end to formal reciprocity, a deviant life and/or death would elicit only the social persona culturally congruent with that deviance, that is, one that lacks the right (among others) to “normal” treatment. Social personae of deviants will expectably be quite shallow (i.e., contain few social identities). As social complexity varies the very definition of what constitutes “deviance” and its treatment should vary.<sup>74</sup>

In summary: the final deposition of the deceased could be influenced by many factors: by individual preferences of the bereaved, circumstances surrounding the death, social position, climate, time issues. Nevertheless, the “shallow personae” and “unusual” and/or “violent” circumstances of death are the most prominent reasons for “unusual” burial recorded by anthropologists. Criminals, murdered people, women who died in childbirth, warriors killed in battle, shamans, people who died from epidemic disease, suicides, witches, people feared during their life etc., are believed to have tendency return after the death and haunt the living. Specific practices are needed for the disposal of above mentioned “special dead”.

The horror inspired by the corpse does not spring from the simple observation of the changes that occur in the body. Proof that such a simplistic explanation is inadequate lies in the fact that in one and the same society the emotion aroused by death varies extremely in intensity according to the social status of the deceased.... At the death of a chief, or of a man of high rank, a true panic sweeps over the group.....On the contrary, the death of a stranger, a slave, or a child will go almost unnoticed.<sup>75</sup>

The passing of an influential person, on whom many people depend for leadership or livelihood, is a momentous event and perhaps calamity. “It leaves

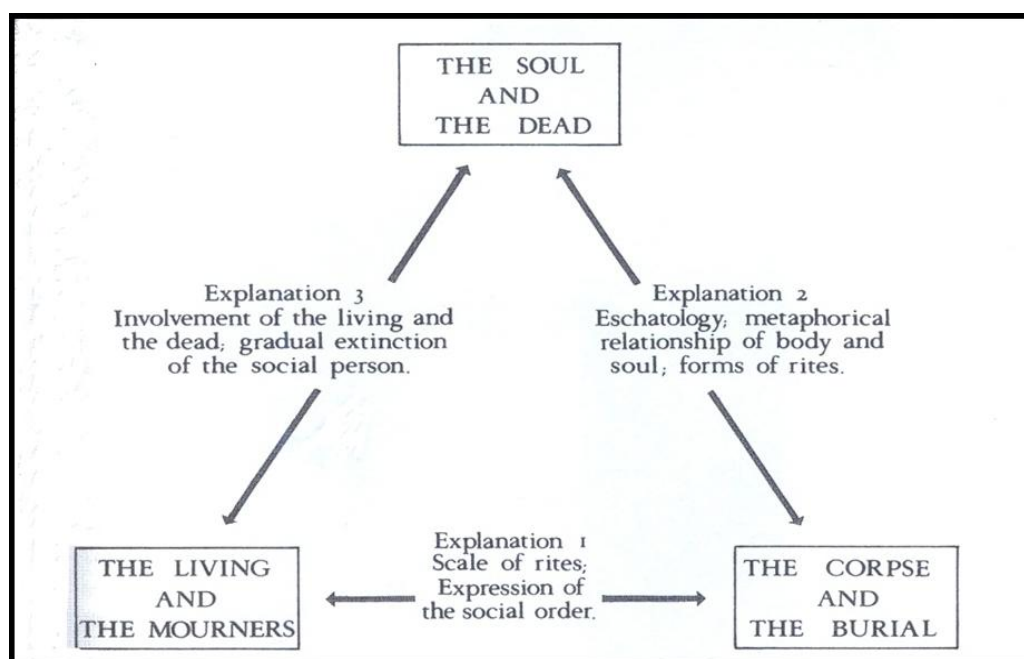
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<sup>74</sup> A.A. Saxe: *Social Dimension of Mortuary Practices*, (PhD. Dissertation The University of Michigan, 1970), pp. 10- 11

<sup>75</sup> Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, p. 76

a large rent in the fabric of society.”<sup>76</sup> The same may be not true of the socially insignificant (**Fig.1**).

Dead children are in many cultures a typical example of “the socially insignificant”. The position of abandoned, murdered, un-baptized, aborted or stillborn children is problematical in that they never belonged to the group of the living, they died before the necessary status-giving rites have been carried out, and for this reason cannot belong to the group of the dead.<sup>77</sup>



**Fig. 1: The living and the dead: schematic diagram of Hertz's argument. P. Metcalf and R. Huntington: *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, (Cambridge, 1991), p.83**

According to Pentikäinen the name proves to be the most important symbol of the social acceptability of the child. “Name-giving rites which are usually thought to give the child, in addition to the name of a living or dead relations, also his qualities, signify the legalization of the child's membership of the family.”<sup>78</sup> A child which for one reason or another was not accepted into the family and which was not given a name was abandoned. Both in sagas and in

<sup>76</sup> Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 80

<sup>77</sup> J. Pentikäinen: “The dead without status”, in *Temenos* (1969) Vol.4, pp. 92 - 102

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.99

provincial laws, the abandoning of a baptized child was called “murder”<sup>79</sup>. Legally-historically, child abandonment seems to have been an approved popular custom in the Nordic countries before the advent of Christian influences and was still part of the social system among the Eskimos in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>80</sup> Burial ceremonies are either performed in a special way or left unperformed. Moreover, when burial rites were not properly carried on, the children murdered and those un-baptized or buried in unconsecrated ground, were more liable to become revenants:

...The type of death also causes numerous exceptions to the normal ritual. All those who die a violent death or by an accident, women dying in childbirth, people killed by drowning or by lightning, and suicides, are often object of special rites. Their bodies inspire the most intense horror and are got rid of precipitately; furthermore, their bones are not laid with those of other deceased members of the group who have died normal death. Their unquiet and spiteful souls roam the earth forever; or, if they emigrate to another world, they live in separate village, sometimes even in a completely different area from that inhabited by other souls.<sup>81</sup>

"Special" circumstances surrounding death are leading to "special" burial practices and to different perception of the corpses and souls of peoples who died under these circumstances. The following belief is found all over Finland: "If one dies a bad death, one will haunt."<sup>82</sup> According to Pentikäinen the basis of this concept is to be found in a Swedish-Finnish law which right up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and partly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century classified the departed and their funeral ceremonies in four categories, according to the manner of death:

- 1) "Public" – for those who died normally with usual burial rites.
- 2) "Quiet" – were for stillborn children, the unbaptized, those who had committed suicide in a fit of temper, alcoholics and those who

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.100

<sup>81</sup> Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, p. 85

<sup>82</sup> Pentikäinen, "The dead without status", p.93

had given their bodies for anatomical research. The priest was present, but was allowed to read only committal.

3) “Depraved” burial was for victims killed in duels, for those who killed one another in anger, for those who died in prison, those who lived ungodly lives, those found dead, murdered children and for those beheaded. The priest was not allowed to be present and there was no Christian ceremony. The graves were situated in what was considered to be the worst corner of the graveyard.

4) “Shameful” burial was for deliberate suicides who were excommunicated, and for those executed, the bodies buried in the forest<sup>83</sup>, far away from the community of living and also “normal – non special dead”.

Similarly, in rural Greece, the classes of persons who are most liable to become revenants (*vrykolakas*) are:

- 1) Those who do not receive the full and due rites of burial.
- 2) Those who meet with any sudden or violent death (including suicides), or those who having been murdered remain unavenged.
- 3) Children conceived or born on one of the great Church festivals and stillborn children.
- 4) Those who died under a curse.
- 5) Those who died excommunicated.
- 6) Those who died un-baptised or apostate.
- 7) Men of evil and immoral life in general, more particularly if they have dealt in the blacker kinds of sorcery.
- 8) Those who have eaten the flesh of a sheep which was killed by a wolf.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> J.C. Lawson: *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion. A study in survivals*, (Cambridge, 1910), pp. 375 - 376

According to Lawson the people of Greece, both ancient and modern, shared the belief that both the murderer and the murdered were predisposed to become revenants. “The murderer, in the class of men polluted and accursed by heinous sin, and his victim, in the class of those who have met with violent deaths...”<sup>85</sup>

It is understandable and logical that in the case of murderer the violent deed needs to be punished and the soul of murderer is doomed. Moreover, according to popular beliefs, it is the murdered man himself who, in form of a revenant, plagues his murderer, because his soul cannot cross to the Underworld before his death has been revenged.<sup>86</sup> The testimony to the existence of such a belief is the practice of mutilating the murdered man by cutting off his hands and feet, and either placing them under his armpits or tying them with a band round his head – the act which is supposed to deprive the victim of power to exact vengeance for his wrongs.<sup>87</sup>

These practices could be verified by archaeological excavation and mutilated and decapitated bodies belong to a particular group of “special burials”, but unfortunately, Lawson didn’t describe how the people of rural Greece treated this type of dead. But the following example from Melanesia seems to offer another example of the same ideas and beliefs.

Among the Are Are in Melanesia, people are divided after death into two main categories: those *murdered by the living* and those *afflicted by illness and death given by their personal ancestors*; in other words, on those who have been murdered (died violent death) and those who died “normally”.<sup>88</sup> Each living adult is believed to be a combination of three different elements – the “body”, the “breath” and the “image” – and it is of great interest to trace transformations after death attributed to each of these elements. The chains of transformation are very different in the case of “murdered persons” and those “killed by their ancestors”:

Murdered:

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp.435- 436

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 435

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> D. de Coppet: “The Life-giving Death”; in *Mortality and Immortality: the anthropology and archaeology of death*, ed. by S.C. Humphreys and H. King, ( London, 1981), pp. 175- 204



1) The murdered who have been avenged have no “breath”. Their “bodies” are not buried but left to rot in the forest or eaten, and it is believed that their “image” will never enter any real after-life. No funeral feasts and no funeral cult will ever be offered to their “image”. It may sometimes be heard crying in the forest, but it does no harm.<sup>89</sup>

2) In the case of unavenged murder victims their “breath” will not disappear until it has been covered with the “breath” of a new victim, and if that event is too long delayed, the victim’s “breath” will try to change his blood into “biceps” foreign spirit.\* The “body” and the “image” of an unavenged victim will have the same fate as an avenged victim.<sup>90</sup>

3) The category of murdered persons also included women who have died in childbirth, suicides and infants who die during the first forty days of life.<sup>91</sup>

Killed by their ancestors:

Two out of their three constitutive elements are dealt with by funerary rites. Their “bodies” are buried, exposed, cremated, or sunk at sea. Two or three years later a funeral feast honours the “image”. But nothing is organized for the “breath”, for it is said that it has disappeared at the time of death when the ancestors put an end to it by not liberating the “image”.<sup>92</sup>

It is interesting how the mourners of the victims of murders cope with the situation of the soul of the deceased:

A settlement can only be made by murdering “in return” the murderer or someone related to him. In the case of a murder victim there is no “image” to be cared for, just a corpse to be dealt with. More important is his “breath”: it will be dangerous threat to his relatives until it has been avenged and thus neutralized. The second murdered person will extinguish the anger of the first

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 178. The “Biceps” foreign spirit is a kind of association or body incorporating the anger of the ancestors of a murdered person who was not avenged by his kin. For more see de Coppet, “Life-giving Death”, p. 177

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 178

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

and “replace the (first) man’s breath”. In such a series of murders, how can the “breath” of the last murdered person be replaced? Simply by a gift of money offered to his relatives.<sup>93</sup>

The analysis and examples just discussed illustrate that 1) belief in the liminality of the soul, fear of the dead and revenants is not only a phenomenon known worldwide but is also across an extremely wide time period; and 2) certain categories of dead are more predisposed to become “special” and we can trace some of their “unusual” ways of disposal in the archeological record. In the anthropological or sociological terminology discussed above, “shallow personae” and “unusual” and/or “violent” circumstances of death are the most prominent reasons for “unusual” burial recorded by anthropologists. Criminals, murdered people, women who died in childbirth, warriors killed in battle, shamans, suicides, witches, people feared during their life etc., are believed to have a tendency return after the death and haunt the living. But can we call these people “deviants” and is “deviant” the right word to describe these practices?

#### **4. "Deviant" Burial - A Concept and Its Problems**

The Oxford English Dictionary explains “deviant” as an adjective, defining it as: diverging from normal standards, especially in social or sexual behavior; and as a noun: a deviant person. If we take into account this explanation is understandable that “deviancy” in modern society is linked with criminals, sexual offenders and other people who are different from majority of society and has a generally bad meaning.

In archeological jargon “deviant” burials are “the 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.”<sup>94</sup> A group of these burials, always constituting a minority within the cemetery, is an important factor for evaluation of mortuary practices and consequently for an understanding of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 179- 180

<sup>94</sup> A. Tsaliki: “Unusual Burials and Necrophobia”, in: *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*, ed. E.M. Murphy, (Oxford, 2008), pp. 1- 16

beliefs surrounding the death. Even when these burials are called “deviant” their frequent appearance in the cemeteries of different cultures and through huge time period, indicates that these “unusual” rites or “communications” between the living and the dead, constituted constant part of funerary rituals. But what marks them “deviant”? Can we trace in them the criminals or sexual offenders of early medieval period? Or were they part of normal burial practices reserved for the “special” dead?

To better understand this problem, we need to look into the past and examine the theories which formed British archaeology in second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Childe the “unusual” burials were those of immigrants or, in other cases, they were “foreign rituals” which might have been introduced by chiefs from somewhere else.<sup>95</sup> Other explanations offered for Anglo-Saxon face-down burials or burials with strange positions included drunken undertakers or an undertaker who was too lazy to “excavate a grave of sufficient length.”<sup>96</sup> Even while we can’t absolutely exclude these assumptions, particularly Childe’s theory, the frequency and longevity of these “deviant” burials demonstrates that they were intentional practices, reserved for the “special dead” and different from “usual” burial practices. In this context, we need to recognize that the validity of archaeological sources is limited by excavated remains and inventory of excavated burial. We can determine, in most cases, the sex, age and physical parameters of buried individual. The grave inventory could be a marker of social status, but this assumption could be also misleading:

Two important theoretical points have been made on the subject of the social significance of burial goods... The first, by Professor Piggott, stresses that all tomb offerings are bound to have been socially selected, according to criteria that remain unknown today, and that where offerings were placed in the tomb, these will in no sense represent a random sample (Piggott, 1969). It follows that the richness or poverty of offerings may in no real sense reflect either the actual material conditions of a society or the actual wealth of any individual,

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<sup>95</sup> V.G. Childe: *The Dawn of European Civilization*, (London, 1947), pp. 4, 7, 69, 125, 298

<sup>96</sup> E. Aspöck: “What actually is a “Deviant Burial”, in *Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record*, ed. E.M. Murphy, (Oxford, 2008), pp. 17 - 34

for these may both be subordinated to social and ritual sanctions. The second, by Professor Childe, stresses the impossibility of making relative assessments of wealth and poverty without having comparative material (Childe, 1958). In other words, it is impossible to assess whether a particular megalithic burial, for example, is really significantly rich unless one also has available for comparison less rich forms of contemporary burial.<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, a rich inventory is not always a sign of high social status and conversely neither does a poor or no inventory necessarily indicate low social status.

For example, when archeologists excavated Grave 18 in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Edix Hill, they discovered body of a female between 17 and 25, placed upon a bed – a rare rite in this period – with a range of high– status seventh century artefacts (weaving batten, box containing comb and key, bucket by her feet, etc.)<sup>98</sup> – at first glance, the burial of a wealthy, respected and venerated person. However, forensic examination discovered that the woman was a leper with substantial changes to her face, including nodules and profuse discharge from the nose, as well as tooth loss. Even though we cannot reconstruct the precise cause of her death, as Howard Williams stated in his *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*:

...we can suggest that her death would have involved intimate handling of her remains, including the washing and dressing of her leprous cadaver and the provision of objects in close association with her.<sup>99</sup>

But why was this done? Archaeological material – the inventory of the grave and the skeleton – can only indicate the wealth of grave and medical status of buried women, pointing to a conclusion that the deceased was an important person for the community and Williams writes in terms of “good death”, even pointing to the possible social status of her kin, reflected in the wealth of the

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<sup>97</sup> P.J. Ucko: “Ethnography and archaeological interpretation of funerary remains”, in *World Archaeology* Vol. 1, No.2, Oct. (1969), pp. 262- 280

<sup>98</sup> T. Malim & J. Hines: *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Edix Hill (Barrington A), Cambridgeshire*, Council for British Archaeology 112, (London, 1998), pp. 52- 53

<sup>99</sup> H. Williams: *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain*, (Cambridge, 2006), p.101

grave.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, if we were to take into account the observations of anthropologists, which I will discuss below, we might suggest that that precautions have been taken to keep her in the grave and hasten her way to the afterlife. A weaving batten found in the grave could have been placed there to occupy the deceased so that she stayed in the grave and the key found there could make it easier to open the gate to the next world. This is not to refute Williams' theory: nevertheless, at the same time as respect, we can see here also fear of the dead and their return, which could be supported by the physical appearance of the woman. The richness of the inventory - as an offering for "dangerous" dead to keep them in the underworld - could also be the result of her disability. It is not hard to imagine that her alarming physical appearance was probably the most important factor for "special" treatment after her death.

Similarly, in the Slavic cemetery at Velké Bílovice in Czech Republic, the archeologists discovered a skeleton with a clear defect: teeth adhesion. The body was thrown into a pit (probably an old well) on north periphery of the cemetery. The skeleton was discovered 1,8 – 2,1 m deep and under it at a depth of 2,3 m were 79 sheep bones. The object was surrounded with a post construction (probably a palisade) and was without grave goods only with shards of pottery. According to the excavators the visible physical defect may have been the reason for the "unusual" way of disposition. We don't know if the community killed that person, if he/ she died normally, or if the death was the consequence of a fall. However, the position of the burial on the outskirts of the cemetery together with the body's deposition in the (disused) well was interpreted by the excavators as relating to the power of the water as a ward against evil spirits; while the palisade around the objects points to the conclusion that these were the means to protect the community against the return of "dangerous" dead.

We can assume that in both of these cases the reason for "special" treatment of the body was the physical appearance of the deceased with their visible defects. However, one was buried in a grave with a rich inventory and even laid out on

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 103

a bed; the second was thrown into an old well, without grave goods and with no piety. Nevertheless, it appears that visible disability made both the evident “targets” for “special” treatment after the death. But not all “special” dead were disabled or lepers.

The excavation of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Sewerby uncovered the double grave G41/49 with the famous “live” burial. This burial was that of a female in the 35-45 age bracket; head to the west, and in an abnormal attitude. The skeleton was prone with face inclined towards left. The right arm was bent back, the right fingers clenched, at the same level as the trunk. The left arm was also bent back on the other side of the body. The shoulders had subsided round a large piece of limestone which lay immediately beneath them. The right leg was bent back and rested with the knee at the same level as the rest of the body with the foot up at the subsoil surface level. The left leg was also bent back, to a lesser degree, and the foot was raised to a level of 8 cm lower than the right. Over the pelvis, having partially damaged it and the sacrum, was a sooty fragment of beehive quern. In the grave were also a perforated jet disc, small knife, iron buckle, annular brooch and 15 beads of amber and glass. Under this female another burial was discovered of a young female adult (17 – 25 years), in supine position, with remains of wooden coffin and very richly furnished. Forensic examination did not discover any physical disabilities on the bodies of both females. There can be no absolute certainty as to the relationship of the two burials but it seems very likely that they are contemporary.<sup>101</sup>

According to Susan Hirst:

The impression given by this skeleton at the time of excavation is of a female fully dressed who was not dead when put into the grave...The position of arms and legs suggests that after being pushed, put or dropped into the grave face downwards, the woman tried to force herself up to her knees, but fell back with her lower legs and elbow bent up. She remained in this position and was

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<sup>101</sup> S.M. Hirst: *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Sewerby East Yorkshire*, York University Archaeological Publications 4, (York, 1985), p. 3

perhaps prevented from further movement by the shoveling of soil on to her or the throwing of the piece of quern on to her back, or by her immediate death from one of these cases.<sup>102</sup>

It is interesting that German archaeological term for what are called in English ‘deviant’ graves is *Sonderbestattung*. *Bestattung* being the German for burial, the prefix *sonder-* meaning something special or exceptional, which is quite a different meaning from the term “deviant” used in English academic world. As Edeltraud Aspöck recently pointed out,

..."deviant burial" rites are at the same time an integral part of the normal mortuary practices in most communities. Being part of the funerary rituals of a particular society means that "deviant burials" can only be studied in this context. Therefore, the archaeological definition of what a "deviant burial" is, as well as their interpretation is only possible in the immediate context of any burial, which is either within cemetery, region and period of time.....what needs to be studied together with what is "deviant" is what is "normal". Norm and exception – normal and "deviant" burials - are ultimately linked together.<sup>103</sup>

The examples just discussed tend to vindicate her suggestion that ‘deviant’ is not a particularly natural or satisfactory category. They indicate that “deviant” burials are not a homogenous group. We can find here the physically disabled and also people without disabilities, graves with a rich inventory and (more usually) without, all sexes (although all my examples were females, we have also male and infant “deviant” burials); a long time period during which these rites are practiced; and a wide geographical disposition. Forensic examination of bones can tell us if the deceased died normally or violently, if he/she had

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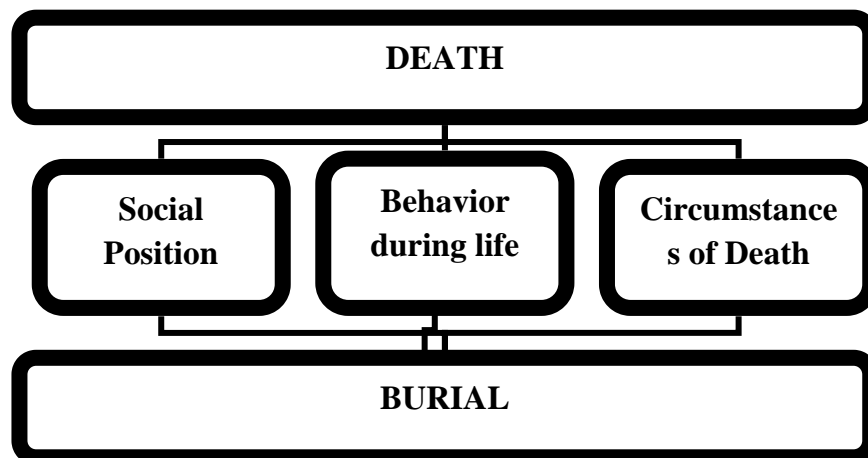
<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 39 I should emphasize that I do not support the “live” burial theory, as the discussion throughout this introductory chapter indicates. If we take into account beliefs in transformation of the "free soul" into the "soul of the dead" after cessation of the life together with importance of mortuary rites for successful journey of this soul into the “otherworld”, deposition of live person into the grave - without proper rites of passage - could be seen as more harmful for bereaved and increases the risk that the deceased will become revenant. It is the case that even though we cannot tell the exact reason why she was buried like this, her prone position together with the stones on her back and pelvis, suggest an alternative explanation: that precautions have been made to prevent her return from the grave, similar to some of those discussed in the chapter below on Anglo-Saxon funerary archeology.

<sup>103</sup> Aspöck, "What is “Deviant” Burial", p.30

suffered from any illness, if the illness had permanent effects and if the effects were visible. All these findings are possible reasons for “unusual” treatment during life and/or after death.

In my research and in this thesis, I have preferred to use the term “special” burials and refer to the “special” dead, sometimes the “dangerous” dead as these words do not carry the same potentially misleading connotation as “deviant” and point better to the way that both related to “normal” beliefs and practices in the societies in which they can be found.

The manner of burial in the past might depend on a multitude of factors (**Fig. 2**). The route of corpse from “death bed” to “grave” was influenced either by one or by all of these factors and if we want to examine these processes, we need to take in to account all of them. This same applies to the journey of soul to the underworld. Some people were predisposed to become objects of “special” treatment in childbirth, born with physical disabilities; some were disabled by incident, either by disease or wounded in war and surviving when many other before and after died and that made them “special”.



**Fig. 2:** Factors which may influence the manner of burial in the past.



## **5. Burial rites in anthropological literature – summary**

The overview of anthropological and ethnographic material dealing with the burial rites presented above allowed me to propose the notion that many indigenous tribes (before Christianization) believed that when a person died he/she become a member, so to speak, of the "post-mortem tribe" and his/her status in this tribe could be different than that which he/she held during life. This status in the afterlife depended on several factors, of which the "social status" in the community of living was just one of many and not necessarily even the most important one. Taking into account this observation we can assume that "the social status of the dead" could be different from "the social status of the living" and there is no automatic equivalence between these two states. The king or high priest can turn into the revenant in the same way as a criminal or leper, although some categories of the dead are more prone to become revenants than others as we will discuss later in this dissertation. The key factor is the proper execution of the rites of passage, which would secure the safe journey to the afterlife. Failing to perform these rites properly could end in a catastrophic outcome - the return of the dead.

However, we still have to examine even more important questions: what leads people to start burying their dead in the first place? Why do death and dead people have such a impact on us?

In an attempt to answer the question why people are so anxious and frightened in the presence of a fresh corpse I will examine in the following pages some theories presented by Pascal Boyer and Paul Barber.<sup>104</sup>

## **6. Burial and corpse handling: an alternative explanation of what lies behind the fear of the dead**

Pascal Boyer is one of the leading members of the rapidly developing group of cognitive anthropologists who study religion. *Cognitive anthropology* is an

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<sup>104</sup> For more look in P.Boyer: *Religion Explained.The Human Instincts that Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*, (London, 2002) and P. Boyer: *The Naturalness of Religious ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion*, (Berkley, Los Angeles and London, 1994)

approach within cultural anthropology in which scholars seek to explain patterns of shared knowledge, cultural innovation, and transmission over time and space using the methods and theories of the cognitive sciences (especially experimental psychology and evolutionary biology) often through close collaboration with historians, ethnographers, archaeologists, linguists, musicologists and other specialists engaged in the description and interpretation of cultural forms. Cognitive anthropology is concerned with what people from different groups know and how that implicit knowledge changes the way people perceive and relate to the world around them.<sup>105</sup> The basis of Boyer's research is built around the examination of how human minds work and the implementation of this knowledge in the explanation of human behavior. I will focus in this chapter on his theories regarding religious ideas and particularly those connected with death. Boyer's main idea about this topic could be summarized by these words:

The explanation for religious beliefs and behaviours is to be found in the way all human minds work. I really mean *all* human minds, not just the minds of religious people or some of them. I am talking about *human* minds because what matters here are properties of minds that are found in all members of our species with normal brains. The discoveries I will mention here are about the ways minds in general (men's or women's, British or Brazilian, young or old) function..<sup>106</sup>

*Chapter Six: Why is religion about death?* in Boyer's *Religion Explained* starts with this statement:

Dead people, like vegetables, can be pickled or preserved. You can abandon them to the beasts of the field, burn them like rubbish or bury like a treasure. From embalming to cremation, all sorts of techniques are used to do something with the corpse. But the point is, *something must be done*. This is constant and has been so for a long time.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> For more see R. D'Andrade: *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology*, (Cambridge, 1995)

<sup>106</sup> Boyer, *Religion Explained*, p. 3

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 231

Boyer suggests that

...people have vague notions about the dead in general..., ...but people have more detailed representations of the recently dead, of what they can do to the living..., ...rituals are about the consequences for the living..., ...the rituals are all about the corpses..., ...the reason why people feel the need to handle corpses, the reason why they have done so for hundreds of thousands of years may well be *something to do with the corpses themselves*.<sup>108</sup>

Boyer's reasoning would seem to support the theory presented above that the major issue in mortuary practices is the corpse. However, the question remains why?

According to Boyer, the feelings of people regarding the dead could be explained by the examination of the processes of the human mind. Systems in the mind are complicated and complicatedly connected. Some of this complexity is crucial in understanding why people have religious concepts and equally why was the proper deposition of the corpse so important for them. Boyer's theory is based on the fact that all objects we encounter are mentally sorted into what he calls different *ontological categories* with associated expectations.<sup>109</sup> We can understand under the term ontological categories some very abstract concepts, like ANIMAL, but also TOOL or PERSON or NUMBER.<sup>110</sup>

Having rich ontological categories like ANIMAL or TOOL amounts to having "mini-theories" of certain kinds of things in the world. Our expectations about animals are not just the outcome of repeated encounters with animals. They differ from such mindless accumulation of facts in two very important ways. First, we speculate about many aspects of animals beyond what we know. For instance, we all assume that if we opened up a tiger and inspected its innards what we would find could be found in other tigers too. We do not need to cut up a huge number of tigers, produce a statistic of what we found and conclude that organs are probably similar in all members of the TIGER category. We just assume that; it is part of our expectations. Second, we establish all sorts of

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp. 241- 243

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 109

<sup>110</sup> See further explanation in Ibid., pp.58- 106

casual links between the facts available. We assume that tigers eat goats because they are hungry, they are hungry because they need food to survive, they attack goats rather than elephants because they could not kill very large animals, they eat goats rather than grass because their digestive system could not cope with grass, and so on.<sup>111</sup>

On this basis, Boyer proposed that the human attitude towards corpses has something to do with the way human mind functions when faced with that very particular kind of object.<sup>112</sup> For instance, while the body of a close relative is the object of intense feelings, the body of an unknown person may trigger different kinds of emotion, but is still unlikely to leave us indifferent. To simplify this, the dead person, or more particularly, the corpse, will activate several mental systems, which are not compatible:

A dead body is biological thing. We have special systems in the mind that handle some biological properties of living things and they are probably active and describing that object too. Also, it is a biological thing in a very special state, and some mental systems may be activated by what corpses look like. Finally, a corpse is a person. The mental systems that describe persons will be active too. All these special representations produced in the basement may better explain what is so special about dealing with a corpse.<sup>113</sup>

Boyer's Contagion system is mainly concerned with the fear of contact with unseen contaminants. Dead bodies are biological objects in a process of decomposition. As I have already discussed earlier in my thesis, the rites of passage connected with the dead and especially the period when the corpse is believed to be most dangerous for the living, are often linked to decomposition. The disappearance of the soft tissue - the source of decomposition - is in many cultures the sign that the soul of deceased successfully reached the afterlife and the remains of the body are prepared for their final deposition in the grave. According to Boyer:

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 243

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 243

People's contagion system is activated, not because the dead are polluting for some metaphysical reason, but more directly because they actually are a dangerous source of pathogens... ...Activation of the contagion system may well be one of the major reason why we find these special attitudes to dead bodies the world over, why special handling of the corpses is present from the earliest stages of modern human cultures, and why it takes on this overtone of urgency and great though undefined danger. But this is not the whole explanation. People do not perform elaborate rituals to dispose of all sources of biological pollution. Another, obviously important component of people's emotional reaction is that a corpse is not just a mass of polluting agents, but also a living thing that is not alive any longer, a conspecific, and very often a previously known person.<sup>114</sup>

Again, according to Boyer, the sight of a dead person creates discrepancies especially between the Animacy system and Person-File system. On the one hand, the Animacy system is quite clear in its output concerning such persons - they are ex-persons, they have no goals, etc. On the other hand, it seems that the Person-File system just cannot "shut off" and keeps producing inferences about the particular person, on the basis of information about past interaction with that person, as if the person were still alive.<sup>115</sup> The problem is not the notion that the person is leaving this world and heading into the "afterlife", but the conflicting intuitions delivered by two systems, both focused on persons, one dealing with animacy and the other with person identification. In this regard Boyer argued that:

People's representations are focused on the dead body's passage to another state of being, rather than about detailed descriptions of the afterlife. Also, this account makes better sense of the two stages of death-passage often noted in such rites. These two stages may correspond to two different periods in terms of psychological activity: a first period during which the living are still in the discrepant state described here, followed by a second stage where they simply have memories of the dead person, but these are gradually fading and do not create Person-File inferences any longer.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 246

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 255

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Taking into account these observations, it is not surprising that the souls of the dead or their "shadows" or "presence" are the most widespread kind of supernatural agent around the world. According to Boyer, this equation - *the dead as seen by our inference systems = the supernatural agent* - is the simplest and therefore most successful way in which concepts of supernatural agency are transmitted.<sup>117</sup>

The theories proposed by Boyer may help us understand also the reasons why some of the dead were buried in the "normal" way and others differently. If we accept that this emotional turmoil and conflict between mental systems accompanied all burials, we are able to speculate about what the people experienced during burials of the "special" dead. All the usual emotions and worries were most likely multiplied and individuals regarded as "special" or "dangerous" were therefore sent off from this world with even more elaborate and from the modern point of view more cruel rites, because also their supernatural powers were thus multiplied and their intentions were in the majority considered to be harmful to the living. The major reason for "special" burial rites was to keep these dead safely in the graves, hasten their journey to the afterlife and at the same time protect the community against their vindictive attacks.

I have already discussed in this chapter characteristics which determine why particular persons become members of the "special dead" category. Taking into account Boyer's theories, it becomes more comprehensible why some people were deemed as "dangerous" or "special". Using his approach we can say that the Person-File system delivered even more emotional data, which in this case most likely involved feelings of fear, hate or pity and was also influenced by their social position, behaviour during the life and/or the circumstances of their death. We have to ask, though, if we can find the origins of this categorization? If we look once again at the theories proposed by Boyer, it is very hard to determine the exact reason for this classification. If the human mind reacts similarly all the time in the presence of dead people, personal

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 260

experience (his Person-File system) and the Danger-Contagion system may be the sole reason for this division between "the special" and "normal" dead. However, we have to also consider additional possibilities in the search for the origins of beliefs in revenants.

While Boyer explains reasons for special burial, Paul Barber in his work explains why people dug them up. The beliefs which led people to do it were based on the same ideas; however Barber is using in his research modern period written sources in attempt to demonstrate the differences between the views and opinion of "ordinary" people in the past and present day forensic medicine in regard of the freshly dug up corpses of the "revenants".

My thesis has already examined the notion that the mortuary practices are connected with the corpse and its decomposition, although revenant beliefs are also closely connected with bodies which do not decompose, or seemed "not to decompose" in the eyes of people who didn't have the medical knowledge about decomposition processes that we have today. The facts that the nails seems to grow even after the death, the skin has a life-like reddish colour as during the life, the body doesn't smell as it suppose to do, the blood flows from the mount and so on are easily explained today by modern forensic theory, but in the past were definitely perceived as "strange" and "magical" and a clear sign that the person was a revenant/ vampire. As Paul Barber remarked "...one must learn about the reality of death and decay in order to understand the folklore of death and decay."<sup>118</sup>

Paul Barber was the first who tried to explain in his study *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* the belief in vampires from the point of forensic medicine, focusing mostly on the changes of the body after the death and how they were perceived in the past comparing to the present day medical knowledge. According to him when we read the reports about "vampire" sightings carefully and compare their findings to what is now known about forensic pathology, "...we can see why people believed that bodies came to life

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<sup>118</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, p. 103

and wreaked havoc on the local population...."<sup>119</sup> The vampire lore proves in Barber's opinion to be in large part an elaborate folk-hypothesis designed to account seemingly inexplicable events associated with death and decomposition.<sup>120</sup> In order to understand these folk beliefs Barber pursued the following course:

- 1) He looked at the fullest accounts of vampires and other supposed revenants that were exhumed.
- 2) He examined what we are told about their appearance, their origins, and how to ward them off and kill them.
- 3) He compared this information to what is known about the events of death and decomposition, while considering how these events have influenced body-disposal practices in general, as well as those associated specifically with supposed vampires and revenants.<sup>121</sup>

This course of action led him to the discovery that we are not considering a local phenomenon at all, but a problem that arises naturally in any preliterate culture.

The common course ... ..is to blame death on the dead, who are apt to be observed closely for clues as to how they accomplish their mischief. Our sources, in Europe as elsewhere, show a remarkable unanimity on this point: the dead may bring us death. To prevent this we must lay them to rest properly, propitiate them, and, when all else fails, kill them a second time. And stalking of the vampire, while it has become virtually a symbol for this procedure, is just one of many methods of ending the threat from the dead.<sup>122</sup>

In an attempt to explain the motives which could have lead people to believe in revenants, I will summarize Barber's main ideas.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 3- 4



Barber notes that the body undergoes remarkable changes after the death and most of the attributes defining the corpse of a revenant could be seen as the result of these changes. One of the most evident signs of a revenant/vampire is an apparently well-preserved corpse without visible signs of decomposition, even after a moderate time period (from a couple of weeks to months) in the grave. The body may be preserved in a variety of ways, for example, when buried in lime, mummified, or preserved by saponification - "...a form of post-mortem change " in which there is alteration of the appearance and consistency of the fatty tissues of the body consequent upon the transformation of the neutral fat into new compounds, mostly fatty acids."<sup>123</sup> The compound is called adipocere. When the fat completely converts to adipocere " ...a pink-to-red compound is present in the depths of large muscles ... in few instances the reddish colour seen immediately on cutting into a muscle has been bright enough to give the impression of muscle freshly dead, even though the death occurred more than 100 years previously."<sup>124</sup> According to Paul Barber saponification may be the reason why the corpses of some saints, as for example Saint Cuthbert, looked as freshly buried, although he remarked that the revenants/vampires were most likely not buried long enough for saponification to have taken place.<sup>125</sup> On the other side, Dr. Ian Banks, who have encountered adipocere formed 90 years ago, remarked that "...I personally doubt that anyone would mistake a corpse with adipocer as living (or just freshly buried); they would certainly smell the decomposition."<sup>126</sup> The mummification of these corpses also seems unlikely, given the information contained in the reports and chronicles. However, as Barber pointed out, "...while our informants invariably say that "the body had not decomposed", they almost always present evidence that it really was decomposing."<sup>127</sup> The bloating of corpses, new skin, nails and hairs and etc. are all normal signs accompanying the process of decomposition.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 108

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 109

<sup>126</sup> Pers.comm.

<sup>127</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, pp. 3- 4

Because the oxygen in the blood is used up, and the blood, as a consequence, become darker, one might expect the corpse to become darker as well. ... however, the matter is complicated by the end of circulation, which causes the blood to move downward, impelled by gravity, toward whether is the lowest part of the body. The face of the body, then, is likely to be pallid if the body is supine but dark in color if it is prone. ...if the temperatures is low enough, the oxygen may not been used up, causing a hypostasis (also called *livor mortis*) that is bright red, not livid ...also, when the putrefaction is rapid, as when death is brought about by septic infection, "the veins beneath the skin of the body generally become prominent as a bluish-brown network." And if the body is in the open, the skin becomes darkened by the activation of the sun, much the way it does during life. Finally, changes in color can take place with the process known as saponification, which preserves the body: "The epidermis vanishes as adipocere forms, presumably from a combination of decomposition and shedding, and the dermis becomes darkened in bodies interred in coffins, shades of brown and occasionally black appearing."<sup>128</sup>

The bloating occurs because the microorganisms of decomposition produce gas, mostly methane, throughout the tissues, and this gas, lacking an escape route, collects both in the tissues and in the body cavities. "...it is not uncommon to see advanced decomposition within twelve to eighteen hours, to the point that facial features are no longer recognizable, most of the hair slips away from the scalp, and the entire body becomes swollen to two or three times normal size..." That this is a normal event in decomposition was pointed out in 1732 by the Royal Prussian Society of Science, although without leaving the slightest trace ... ...in the literature of vampirism.<sup>129</sup>

The sloughing away of the outer layer of skin ... ...is also normal event, known as "skin slippage", and the skin underneath is not "new" but simply raw looking. The same is true of the nails that were said to fallen away, leaving "new" nails.<sup>130</sup>

The appearance of blood at the mouth ... ...is also normal. ...once blood is no longer circulating, its movement is determined by gravity. ...If the body is lying face down, then the trachea is apt to be in vicinity of pooling blood, which tends to seep through the mouth and nose. ...But blood migrates to the mouth and nose in the course of decomposition as well. ..."the gases in the abdomen

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 105

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 109

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

increase as the putrefactive processes advance and the lungs are forced upwards and decomposing blood escapes from the mouth and nostrils.".. ...that we were observing the effect of capillary attraction on the shroud. The moisture would presumably cause the shroud to be plastered against the mouth, so that it would adhere to the mouth as it dried.<sup>131</sup>

The most noteworthy of these is the belief that the hair and nails of the vampire ... ..continue to grow, ...sometimes, in the case of vampires, the teeth also continue to grow. In actuality, neither hair, nails, nor teeth grow after death, they merely *appear* to do so. This is because the skin shrinks back as it becomes dehydrated. The toothy appearance of a skull is similar: it does not have longer teeth than it had in life, they are just more evident.<sup>132</sup>

As we can see, all of the attributes which usually characterize the body of revenant/vampire are in fact signs of decomposition, which will be most likely the same or similar also in the case of bodies of all exhumed individuals - even those who were deemed normal. The exhumation of a corpse is surely an emotional and horrifying experience, especially in the case of the individual who is deemed to be a vampire. It is without question that superstition and lack of knowledge about the decomposition processes played an important role in these events, although the very act of exhumation, only during which the physical characteristics listed above could be seen for the first time, was activated by certain suspicions that such-and-such person could be a revenant/vampire. Taking into account this assumption, we need to determine what made the persons described in these stories prone to become revenants and if these parameters could be compared with the anthropological and ethnographic sources discussed in the previous and following chapters.

According to Paul Barber the factors that bring revenants into existence ( from the point of view of his informants – i.e. the authors of sources examined by him) fall into the following categories: 1.) predisposition; 2.) predestination; 3.) events: things that happen to them; and 4.) non-events: things that are left undone.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 115- 116

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 119

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 29

- 1) Predisposition: difficult, troublesome person; people who are different, unpopular, or great sinners are apt to return from the dead. In some parts of Eastern Europe alcoholics are regarded as prime candidates for revenants. The murdered; suicides, partly because of their potential for returning from the dead or for drawing their nearest and dearest into the grave after them, which meant that suicides were refused burial in churchyards; sorcerers.
- 2) Predestination: frequently people become revenants through no fault of their own, as when they are conceived during a holy period, according to the church calendar, or when they are illegitimate offspring of illegitimate parents. Often potential revenants can be identified at birth, usually by some abnormality, some defect - child born with teeth, lack of cartilage in the nose, split lower lip, or features that are viewed as bestial, especially if covered by hair. Children born with a red caul, or amniotic membrane, covering their heads were also frequently considered a high risk of being revenants.
- 3) Events: sucking blood, biting, when an animal jumps over it; if the brother of deceased is a sleepwalker, and if, during his lifetime, a person's shadow is stolen; murder victims; victims of plague; suicides; people who drowned; victims of stroke; priest anathema; Christians who convert to Islam; priests who say Mass in a state of mortal sin; children whose grandparents stumbled while reciting the Apostle's Creed at their baptism.
- 4) Things left undone: the great majority of things that, if left undone, may cause a body to become revenant are funerary and burial practices. It is considered dangerous for a corpse to be left unattended. A mother may return from the dead if her child is not cared for or needs her, as may someone who dies with something on his conscience or dies unrepentant and without the last unction. If his name is not removed from his clothing when he is buried; when the body is put in the coffin, the ropes, having been cut away, should be put near it, and if this is not done (because the ropes are valuable as magical charms), the body will become *strigoi*. The lack of burial itself, then, is a sufficient reason for murder victims and suicides to become revenants, but another common explanation for their transformation is that they have not lived out their allotted span of life.

The characteristics of revenants/ vampires collected by Barber are in the majority similar to those collected by anthropologists and ethnographers.<sup>134</sup> Those predisposed to become revenants, either in time of birth, or the way of death and circumstances surrounding it; were probably observed more cautiously even or just after the death. In the case that some unexpected or "supernatural" phenomenon occurred, as for example plague, illness or sudden inexplicable deaths and endangered the community, these were the first people who were deemed responsible and the precautionary measures took place - the exhumation and subsequent liquidation of the vampire/ revenant.

## **7. Theoretical alternative model: from corpse to the grave**

Sociology, anthropology and ethnography together with forensics and cognitive studies examined during my research seem all to pointing in one direction - to a certain "universality" of mortuary practices. Combining and comparing the older or "classical" anthropological and ethnographic sources and newer, more "alternative" research of Boyer and Barber allowed me to propose an theoretical alternative model of how to approach burial rites and to examine processes influencing the way the deceased was treated - "ordinary" or "special" (**Fig.3**)

When people encounter the corpse of a dead person, systems of the brain start sending and exchanging information between each other. The data in this case are not compatible and will put the brain into the state of confusion to a greater or lesser content- however it will not leave it unaffected. This could be the reason why the corpse of a dead person always has an emotional impact on people and at the same time, has a direct impact on the burial itself.

However, the burial, or more specifically the way the deceased will be treated, depended not only on the functions of the brain, but more on how this information was transcribed and evaluated by the members of society in particular time period. As we can see in the diagram, the burial could be

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<sup>134</sup> See above and Chapter 3.

influenced by the social position of the deceased during the life, his/her behavior and memories which those deeds left in the community and also on the circumstances of the death. All these characteristics affect the social position of the dead which could be different from the social position during the life. The "bad", "dangerous", feared people together with shamans, cunning women and also the disabled will be treated differently from the ordinary people; a king could become a revenant in the same way as a beggar; the most important fact influencing the rites of passage is to which **social category of the dead** will person belong depending on the multitude of factors. (**Fig. 2**) "Normal" dead will have "ordinary" burial rites, possible revenants "special".

However, this theoretical model has to be tested on archaeological material and to a lesser degree by an examination of primary sources. To this end, I have decided to work with two control groups: Anglo-Saxons in Britain (6th - 11th centuries) and Slavs in Czech and Slovak Republics (7th- 11th centuries). Each control group is of different origin and resided in a different territory and therefore we can assume that their funeral rituals were influenced by different customs and ideas. However both of them were Christianized which influenced mortuary rituals and we can observe how this influenced and/or changed the mortuary rituals - especially "special burials". Different influences - tribal, religious, political and geographic - affecting these rites will be taken into account in an attempt to determine if similarities between Anglo-Saxon and Slavic "special" burials were a product of some cross-cultural exchange of ideas or lay more likely in the "universal" character of these rites.



The migration of Germanic peoples to Britain, an area occupied by partially Christianized Britons and Roman citizens of diverse origin, from what is now northern Germany, the northern part of the Netherlands and southern Scandinavia is attested from the 5th century AD. Based on Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, the intruding population is traditionally divided into Angles, Saxons, and Jutes<sup>135</sup>, but their composition was likely less clear-cut and may also have included Frisians and Franks. During the 5th to 7th centuries, the incomers became culturally and linguistically dominant and created new kingdoms (Kent, East Anglia, Northumbria and Wessex).<sup>136</sup> The creation of kingdoms was coincident with political pressure from the Continent and the arrival of a new Christian mission from the south, although it is not clear which of these initiatives was primary and determinant.<sup>137</sup> The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms built up alliances and exchanges with other kingdoms on the Continent, although the strongest relationships were created with the Merovingian Kingdom (mostly through Kent) and with Scandinavian territories (East Anglia). Exchange of goods and ideas is also visible in the material culture and the inventory of graves and we have to take it into account in an analysis of mortuary rituals. There is also possibility that these rites could have been influenced also by Celtic and Romano-British culture. An important period in my research is that of Christianization (end of 6th/ beginning of 7th centuries) and this raises the question of how and to what extent this phenomenon changed "special" mortuary practices.

The Slavic territory examined in my dissertation lies in the middle of Europe: we could say it is on the borders of Central and Eastern Europe, and became Slavic in the 6th century. Relations with the neighbours, from West Merovingian Empire, from South and Southeast Avars, were mostly hostile.

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<sup>135</sup> Bede: *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by B.Colgrave and R. Mynors: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of English People*, (Oxford, 1969, reprinted 1991), Book 1, Chapter XV.

<sup>136</sup> For more about the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, see Chapter 2.

<sup>137</sup> M. Carver: "What they were thinking? Intellectual Territories in Anglo-Saxon England", in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. by H. Hamerow, D.A. Hinton and S. Crawford, (Oxford, 2011), pp. 914- 947



The Avars crossed into the Carpathian basin in the middle of the 6th century and settled in the area of present day Hungary. They occupied southern parts of Slovakia and subjugated Slavs living in this territory until the uprising led by Samo, a Frankish merchant, in 623. Samo's reign lasted until 658 and after his death Slavs of southern Slovakia fell under the influence of Avars again till the late 8<sup>th</sup>/ early 9th century. Although older theories proposed Avar supremacy over the Slavs, new research sees this relationship as rather gradual - from hostility to symbiosis, which is supported by archaeological material of so-called Slavic-Avaric period, representing a mix of Slavic and Avaric influences; according to some authors, there was even a slight Slavic dominance.<sup>138</sup>

The relationship with the West Frankish Kingdom was hardly on good terms. The Merovingian Kingdom used Slavic dukedoms usually as buffer areas against attacks from the East and as supporters in their military campaigns. On the other side, Slavic dukes often played the Frankish card in their political scheming and either supported Frankish kings or stood against them depending on the situation. Christianity was introduced to the Slavs in 9th century and the final conversion of political elites was also influenced by the political situation. Christianization from the West, led by the political aspirations of the Frankish Kingdom was not welcomed by the Slavic elites and they rather turned to Byzantium and were converted by a Byzantine mission in 863.

This short overview of both control groups shows us that they have very little in common. They had to deal with different set of problems, which not only influenced the political situation, but would have had an impact also on the development of mortuary rituals. However, we can observe "special burials" in the archaeological material in both of these groups. Examination of these rites will constitute the basis of my dissertation.

The value of primary sources lies in the fact that their authors observed and recorded the events of their time period. We could even call them

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<sup>138</sup> The most recent work dealing with Avar-Slavic relationship and assessing above mentioned topics is J. Zábojník: *Slovensko a avarský kaganát*, (Bratislava, 2004)

"anthropologists", "ethnographers" or "journalists" of their time and the information collected by them is a vitally important factor in the evaluation of a particular time period. Although their description would have been influenced by social position, education and religion to mention only the most obvious factors, it is an invaluable source informing us not only about events, or in case of my dissertation about "pagan" rites, mortuary practices and revenant sightings, but also about the individual personality of the author, his opinions, hopes and fears, which could be retrospectively used in portrayal of contemporary society. We can observe it, for example, in the case of Gregory of Tours and his *Histories*, which are one of the most important sources of the history and the life in Merovingian Kingdom. But are they really describing what happened or is it just Gregory's personal opinions and views recorded at their pages? In one of his books Gregory recorded the vision of Nicetius of Trier who saw one night in a dream a great tower with "a great number of windows through which angels watched."<sup>139</sup> Similarly, the world described in the *Histories* could be seen as observed from this many-windowed tower: depending on the eye of the observer and the window through which we are looking. Gregory looked at the world from his own "private" window and his view described in the *Histories* was different; not only from present day views, but probably contrasted also with the historical reality of early medieval Gaul.<sup>140</sup> As Martin Heinzelmann remarked, the *Ten Books of History* may be the history of society as seen by Gregory, rather than simply a record of historical events; confirming this fact is Gregory's immense interest in the kings and the description of their government.<sup>141</sup> Gregory's vision of the true Christian reign differs greatly from the intentions of Merovingians and their portrayal in the *Histories* was also often different than in the other contemporary sources. The Merovingians, as we know them now, are mainly

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<sup>139</sup> *Liber Vitae Patrum* XVII: 5, in Gregory of Tours: *Life of the Fathers*, translated by E. James, (Liverpool, 1985)

<sup>140</sup> V. Kaznakov: *Murder and Assassination in the Histories of Gregory of Tours: Reality and Gregory's Vision*, a dissertation submitted in part requirement for the degree of MLitt. in History, (University of Glasgow, 2006), p. 38

<sup>141</sup> M. Heinzelmann: *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, translated by Ch. Carroll, (Cambridge, 2004) , p. 202; see also G. de Nie: *Views from a many windowed tower*, (Amsterdam, 1987) in regard of Gregory of Tours and his perception of the world

Gregory's kings and were in "real" life probably different people to those depicted in Gregory's *Histories*.<sup>142</sup>

However, my dissertation is not about Gregory of Tours or the Merovingian Kingdom. The point of this short detour was to present the problems and obstacles which we have to take into account in evaluation of the primary sources. It is important to recognize, or at least try to recognize the counterparts of historians, anthropologists or journalists among the early medieval authors. It is also equally important to take into account the fact that they lived in different period than ours and their thinking was influenced by different set of norms and values. In attempt to observe the evolution of "special" burial rites, their alterations and similarities, I will examine in my dissertation primary sources ranging from the early medieval period to the eighteenth century with the objective of finding descriptions of "special" burial rites and revenant/ vampire sightings, and the methods of discovering and dealing with them. I will start with early medieval sources - writings by early medieval historians and travelers, works of the Church Fathers, penitentials and early Anglo-Saxon law codes; then continuing through writings of later Middle Ages - in works of William of Malmesbury, William of Newburgh, Jan Neplach and Wenceslaus Hagecius; and finish with descriptions of revenants in 18th century as portrayed in the reports of Austrian officials. Given the amount of written sources for such a long period, my research will focus only on Anglo-Saxon and later British sources and Slavic material: however, the time span and diversity of these sources is important factor in my attempt to prove a certain "universality" of these "special" rites. This information will be consequently compared with modern forensic medicine knowledge about the post-mortem processes of the body and evaluated considering the perception of the freshly exhumed body in the past.

Taking into account the information collected during my research of archaeological material and primary sources I will use anthropological and ethnographic research in order to find parallels between the rites and beliefs of early medieval communities and "indigenous" people of our modern time

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<sup>142</sup> Kaznakov, *Murder and Assassination*, p. 39

period. I will focus on "special" mortuary rites, soul beliefs and revenant/vampire lore, which will be compared with archaeological material and primary sources. The outcome will be subject of analysis and the results will be discussed in attempt to draw parallels between them and present these rituals in an alternative way. I am fully aware that the time span and geographical distribution of my research is immense, nevertheless I am convinced that an interdisciplinary approach comparing different geographical areas is the proper one in attempting to getting closer to understanding the beliefs of medieval people and for an explanation of the processes which led to this "dialogue" between the living and the dead.

### **Outline of the work.**

This chapter has introduced the subject of the dissertation, beginning with a brief sketch of the evolution of approaches to burial by archaeologists - and some historians who use archaeology - writing in English. It has highlighted the use and problems attached to the use of the term 'deviant' burial and have indicated that it is not a self-explanatory category, but can be applied to a variety of very different inhumations. It has also introduced some relevant theories drawn from the fields of archaeology and ethnography, suggesting that so-called "deviant" burial, which might be better termed "special" burial or the burial of the "special" dead was part of regular inhumation practice. It has attempted to suggest that the best way to understand these practices is an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural one and has outlined the two 'control groups' which will be used, Anglo-Saxons and Slavs in the Early Middle Ages. In particular, it discussed the possible insights offered by cognitive studies of belief, with particular reference to death and burial practices and whether these altered over time. Present day medical knowledge about post-mortem processes affecting the body was taken into account in an attempt to explain the possible reasons for beliefs in revenants. Finally, a "theoretical alternative model" of how to approach burial rites and to examine processes influencing the way the deceased was treated - "ordinary" or "special" was proposed, with intention to help accessing archaeological material discussed in this thesis.

Chapter 1 is devoted to the examination of a selected group of Anglo-Saxon "special" burials, focusing mainly on cemeteries where we can observe multiple occurrences of "special" burials or the employment of several "special" practices in one locality. I will examine a range of "special" styles of deposition drawn from different regions of Britain between the 6th and 11th centuries. These "special" burials will first be analyzed with regard to the location of deposition and secondly compared within the wider framework of Anglo-Saxon "special" burial practices. Comparison with "special" funerary rites recorded elsewhere by anthropologists will lead to the proposal of an alternative approach to some of recent and current interpretations of these practices. Chapter 2 also contains a sub-section dealing with early Anglo-Saxon law codes in connection with the recently advanced theory which identifies the "special" dead as executed criminals.

Chapter 2 focuses on Slavic archaeological material represented by the "special" graves excavated in Slovakia and Czech Republic. The group of graves examined will contain not only burials from cemeteries but also interesting group of individuals deposited into a range of objects found during excavation of Slavic settlements - e.g. grain silos, wells or pits. The term used in Central and Eastern European archaeological terminology for this type of objects can be translated as "settlement object", since there seems to be no exact equivalent or more descriptive term in English archaeological terminology, I will use the term "settlement object" throughout this work to describe this type of objects. As with Anglo-Saxon graves in the previous chapter, the Slavic "special" burials will be firstly analyzed from the point of view of location and then in more global context of Slavic society. I will also discuss the Christianization of Slavs in this region and its political background, together with a brief survey of Slavic law codes. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of academic interpretations of "special" funeral practices and will look on differences, which exists between current approaches to mortuary rituals in Anglo-Saxon and Slavic archaeology.

Chapter 3 will focus on the primary sources and their descriptions of "pagan" funerary rituals, the increasing efforts of the Church to delimit them and on the

emergence of revenants/ ghosts/ vampire sightings in Anglo-Saxon and to a lesser extent in Slavic literature from 11th century onwards. We will be able to observe shifts in ideas and attitudes towards "special" funeral practices ranging from description of these "pagan" practices to the efforts to delimit and penalize them in the law codes, and consequently to the statements about revenants sightings and descriptions how to recognize and destroy them. Taking into account this information I will create a list of "revenant" characteristics, which will be compared with the characteristics of the vampires derived from 18th century sources. Overall material contained in this chapter will outline some of the theories and new approaches which will be proposed in this dissertation.

My dissertation will conclude with a chapter summarizing the outcome of my research. Some parallels will be drawn with existing approaches and some alternative approaches will be proposed. I will examine the changing patterns of religion - from "old pagan" to Christianity - and how this change influenced the "special" burial practices, together with its influence on the popular culture, on the lay and also on the clerical level. I will also look briefly on the development of purgatorial ideas as possible reaction of the Church on its "inability" to deal with the "special" dead and survival of beliefs in the revenants in the folklore of later Middle Ages and modern period. This chapter will conclude with short overview of alternative trends in the present day archaeology and history, discussion about my theories proposed on the basis of material collected in this work and some suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 1: "Unusual" burials among the Anglo-Saxons

The most common position of bodies in "pagan" Anglo-Saxon cemeteries is either supine, extended, or on one side with flexed legs.<sup>1</sup> However, alongside this majority of normal graves archaeologists have excavated a number of burials belonging to individuals buried in different, a more "unusual" or "special" way: so called "deviant" burials.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, these "unusual" burials were found almost without exception in otherwise "normal" communal burial grounds. So who were the individuals in these graves?

In her 1999 survey of post-Roman to Anglo-Saxon burial practices, Elizabeth O'Brien suggested that:

...while they had adopted Anglo-Saxon dress and burial traditions, certain members of the indigenous population may still have retained knowledge of ancient traditions. In a specific regions, practices from earlier era in Britain such as the use of chamber graves and decapitated burial, where the head was placed usually near the legs survived or re-emerged in an Anglo-Saxon milieu.<sup>3</sup>

O'Brien's theory offers one possible explanation of who these individuals were. Yet if we take into account the global distribution of these rites, it cannot be the only explanation of why some individuals were buried differently than the rest of community or what made them so "special".

According to Andrew Reynolds the characteristics commonly denoting "deviant" burial in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are crouched burials, prone burial, decapitation, stoning, and evidence of restraint, mutilation, and miscellaneous disrespectful treatment of corpses.<sup>4</sup> These characteristics demonstrate their special nature and how they were differentiated from the "normal" Anglo-Saxon graves: however it doesn't say anything about the reasons leading to such practices. As I have already discussed in the introductory chapter, the manner of burial in the past depended on a multitude of factors (Fig. 1)<sup>5</sup> and people considered somehow "different" from or "dangerous" to the living were treated differently after death.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Wilson: *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, (London, 1992), p. 81. See also E. O'Brien: *Post-Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England: Burial Practices Reviewed*, (Oxford, 1999), pp. vii, 1-6; 60-177.

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction, where I discussed this problematic at greater length.

<sup>3</sup> O'Brien, *Post-Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 185

<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 62

<sup>5</sup> See Introduction, p. 29

The objective of this chapter is a detailed examination of "special" burial rites among the Anglo-Saxons. However, even though these burials constitute a minority in cemeteries, thorough research of every single Anglo-Saxon "special" grave would be well beyond the parameters of one thesis. The fact that some of the cemeteries are without these "special" graves and others contain a single exemplar of such practices, while some of them have multiple individuals buried in a "special" way, led me to focus my research on the last mentioned group, as the best option for examining the attitude of Anglo-Saxons to their "special" dead.

The localities chosen for this dissertation are not the only Anglo-Saxon localities with "special" burials – examination of all cemeteries where the "special" burials were discovered would far exceed the volume and scope of this work. The intention of my research is to show that "special" burial rites were not restricted by geographical location, political situation or tribal affiliation. Therefore I am using selected cemeteries as case studies – each locality representing one of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (See **Fig.4**) - 1) to observe any potential changes in attitude to the "special" dead influenced by the political situation in different kingdoms; 2) to examine whether we can find any differences in treatment of the "special" dead depending on the latitude and geographical location and 3) to assess the possible impact of Christianization on each particular location influenced by above mentioned variables.

Employing a similar approach to Andrew Reynolds in his *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* I will devote parts of this chapter to a particular type of "special" treatment and examine in each subchapter chosen cemeteries which demonstrate multiple occurrences of a specific treatment. Decapitations will be represented by Littleton, Hampshire and prone burials by Empingham, Rutland and West Heslerton, North Yorkshire. At Apple Down, West Sussex I will look at the post holes and wooden constructions - "houses of the dead" - in connection with the burial rites; and at Finglesham, Kent I will focus on ditches around the graves, extensive use of stones in grave fill and the high percentage of coffins used at this



cemetery. Moreover, we need to take into account that in many cases several "special" ways of treatment are used together.



Fig.4: Location of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries examined in this dissertation: 1.) West Heslerton, 2.) Empingham, 3.) Littleton, 4.) Apple Down and 5.) Finglesham.

In the most recent study of "deviant" burials among the Anglo-Saxons Andrew Reynolds recorded in the Early Anglo-Saxon period (5th- 7th century) 54 possible examples of decapitations from 32 cemeteries<sup>6</sup> and in the Late Anglo-Saxon period (7th- 11th century) 99 possible instances of decapitation from 14 sites.<sup>7</sup>

In the first group (5th- 7th century) 27 examples are male, 6 female, 19 of indeterminable sex, with another 2 unsexed individuals represented by the skulls of children. Overall, 52 percent of decapitations were unfurnished; 19 percent were poorly furnished; 17 percent were buried with standard kit; while 2 burials were well furnished.<sup>8</sup> The range of objects found with the furnished decapitations reflects patterns in otherwise "normal" graves.

In the second group (7th- 11th century) 14 individuals had the head rotated by the neck, 34 corpses were minus their heads, and in 33 cases the head was interred with the body but apart from the neck area. With the latter examples the area of legs was favored for the deposition of the head, but with no clear preference for any particular place.<sup>9</sup>

The national distribution of decapitation burials is even, if sparse, throughout eastern, midland, and south-central England, with no evident clustering.<sup>10</sup>

David Wilson observed in his *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, published in 1992 , that "...of the thousand of inhumations that have been excavated (excluding Sutton Hoo), only fifty or so have been found buried in a prone position in flat cemeteries and hardly any in barrows..."<sup>11</sup> (19 female, 16 male and 11 plus of undetermined sex). New data collected by Reynolds and published in 2009 includes 115 examples from 60 cemeteries.<sup>12</sup> Of these, 37 are male, 52 female, seventeen are unsexed adults, and nine are juvenile and thus also unsexed.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, at any rate, the percentage of prone burials is very small, with slight majority of females over the males.

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<sup>6</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 78

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 166

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 78

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 168

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 81

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, p. 80

<sup>12</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 72

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 72

The national distribution of prone burials indicates a widely applied rite, but with some interesting concentrations and certain regions where cemetery evidence is abundant but where prone burial is relatively rare or absent.<sup>14</sup>

## Localities:

### Littleton, Hampshire: chronology: 8th - 11th century<sup>15</sup>

The Saxon cemetery at Old Dairy Cottage lies at the meeting of three Anglo-Saxon estate boundaries, one of which followed the line of a Roman road which must have remained a significant feature in the landscape.<sup>16</sup> A total of 37 features were recorded comprising ten postholes, eight ditches or gullies, four pits and 15 graves that constituted the remains of at least 17 individuals (**Fig.5**).<sup>17</sup> The majority of individuals appeared to have been decapitated with the head placed towards the foot of the grave or missing. Owing to the good preservation of human bone, severed and refitted human vertebrae were recorded intact and evidence for traumatic blows on clavicle bones and jaw bones survived. One infant burial was aligned E-W and one adult burial W-E, while the rest were aligned S-N, perhaps respecting a linear feature of the line of Roman Andover road. A number of iron buckles found with the S-N burials suggest a 7th century date for at least that group<sup>18</sup>, however the new examination assumed the Late Saxon period as more likely, on the basis of new C14 dates.<sup>19</sup>

In his work on “deviant” burial, Andrew Reynolds advances the theory that here we are dealing with “...the first excavated execution cemetery to be described in contemporary documents...”<sup>20</sup> He notes that the Domesday Hundred of Falmere, formerly known as the Chilcomb estate, perhaps represents the 7th century *territorium* of Winchester and the Chilcomb charter bounds of 909 refer to the *ealdan cwealmstowe* (old killing place) at a different point on the boundary of the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 75

<sup>15</sup> According to Annia Cherryson, email communication: publication forthcoming

<sup>16</sup> *Archaeological Excavations at Berwick Field and Old Dairy Cottage, West Andover Road, Winchester, Hampshire, 1989-1994*: Post-excavation assessment report and project design for analysis and publication, p. 10

<sup>17</sup> p. 73

<sup>18</sup> *Medieval Archaeology* 35, 1991, pp. 157- 158

<sup>19</sup> Helen Rees (personal communication), N. Crummy: *The Metalwork*, courtesy of Winchester Museums Services

<sup>20</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 120

estate, which might suggest, according to him, that the execution site at Old Dairy Cottage succeeded it during the later 9th century.<sup>21</sup> Aelfric's *Lives of the Saints* refers to stakes for the heads of the executed outside the town walls and Reynolds suggests that "...as a pupil in Winchester under Bishop Aethelwold in the later 10th century, it is possible, even likely, that Aelfric himself would have seen the Old Dairy Cottage *heafodstoccan* literally "in the flesh" ..."22 I will discuss the general viability of his "execution cemetery" theory later in this chapter; but looking at this particular cemetery alone, while Reynolds makes his case taking into account the primary sources, archeological material, location (on the outskirts of royal residence) and the dating of Old Dairy Cottage cemetery, there are other factors which might help us present these finds in the broader context of medieval beliefs.

The graves I would like to examine more thoroughly are Graves 117, 125 and 129, because all of them show slightly different signs from the rest of graves at Old Dairy Cottage. Grave 117 together with Grave 129 were the only two graves with different orientation and were inserted into a feature which was older than the other features at the locality.

Even though these ditches do not seem as old as presumed, both of these graves were probably the oldest at the cemetery. The adult of indefinable sex from Grave 117 had one of the best preserved skeletons ( though the skull is missing) and taking into account the "calcified" remains of wood and nails it is possible that this individual was inserted in a coffin prior to the burial, which is quite rare at "execution cemeteries".<sup>23</sup> Even though the cut mark on the vertebra suggests decapitation, (although we don't know if ante- or post-mortem), the insertion into the coffin and greater level of care differentiate it from other burials and points more likely to the fear of revenants. This theory could be further supported by Helen Rees' suggestion of two phases in this burial, which could correspond with a primary burial, then reopening of the grave, anti-vampire practices (decapitation + coffin) and final deposition.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 119

<sup>22</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 119

<sup>23</sup> Helen Rees (pers. comm.)

Grave 129 contained a very fragmentary skeleton of a child of 10-12 years old, with only the skull and left side of upper body preserved. The age may be evidence of Late Saxon ideas of age of criminal responsibility,<sup>24</sup> but the fact that this child was buried prone and not decapitated, points in my opinion more to the suggestion that we are dealing here not with a criminal and instead can see here another example of anti-vampire practices.

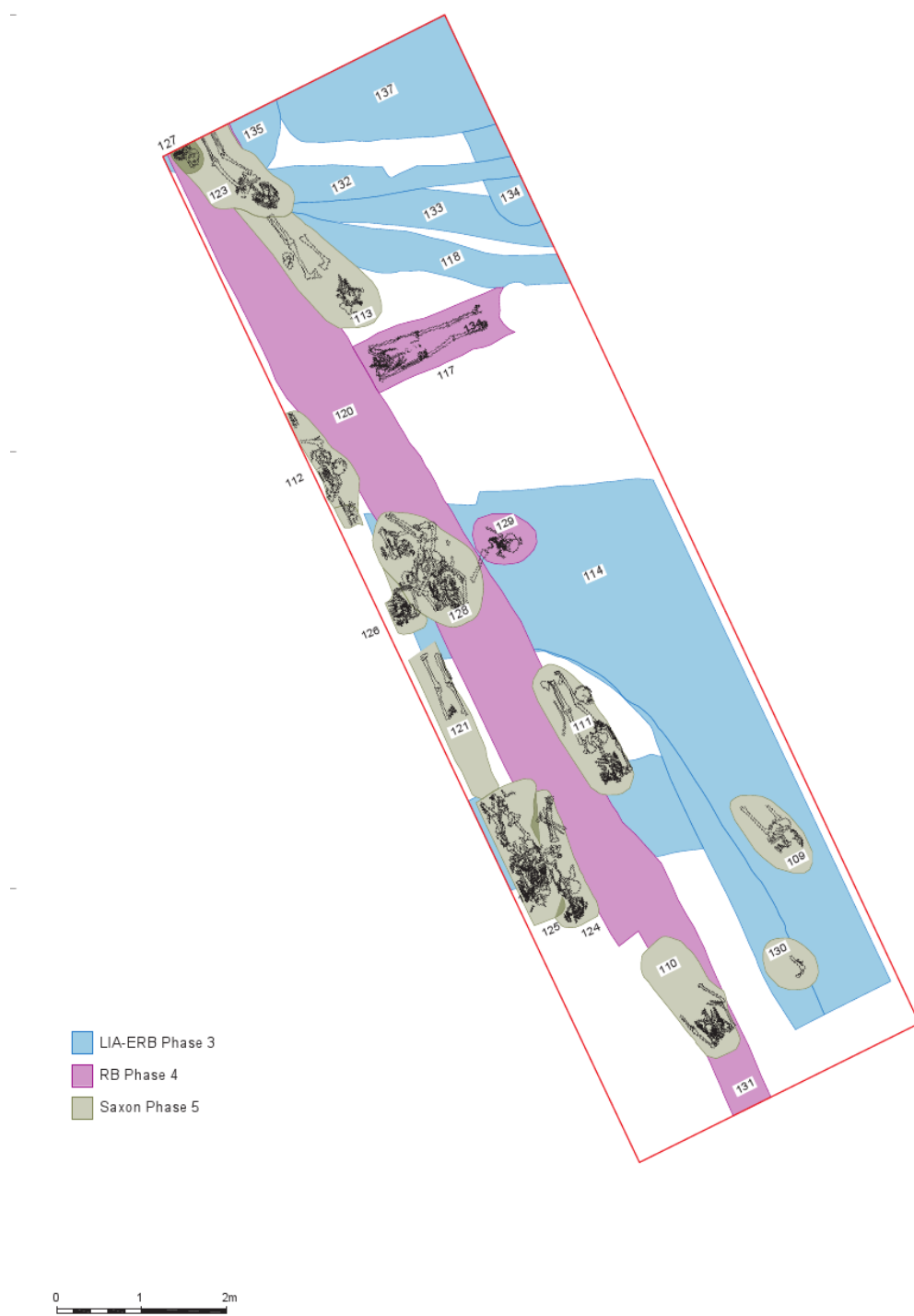
Grave 125 was a well defined cut extending beyond the western side of the excavation. It contained a partially truncated double inhumation, as well as the vertebrae and ribs of an infant, probably aged less than one year old. The almost complete skeleton of an individual aged 18-20, on the east side of the grave, was supine and extended although the skull had been turned round so that the top of cranium abutted the neck vertebrae. The skeleton to the west, of an adult female aged c. 33-46, was only partially recorded. It lay almost prone on its left side, with the leg bent at the knee. According to the forensic report the individual in Grave 125b could have suffered from Klippel-Feil syndrome:

Klippel-Feil Syndrome is a rare disorder characterized by the congenital fusion of any 2 of the 7 cervical (neck) vertebrae. It is caused by a failure in the normal segmentation or division of the cervical vertebrae during the early weeks of fetal development. The most common signs of the disorder are short neck, low hairline at the back of the head, and restricted mobility of the upper spine. Associated abnormalities may include *scoliosis* (curvature of the spine), *spina bifida* (a birth defect of the spine), anomalies of the kidneys and the ribs, cleft palate, respiratory problems, and heart malformations. The disorder also may be associated with abnormalities of the head and face, skeleton, sex organs, muscles, brain and spinal cord, arms, legs, and fingers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Helen Rees (pers. comm.)

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/klippel\\_feil/klippel\\_feil.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/klippel_feil/klippel_feil.htm) accessed 10.08.2011



**Fig.5:** Old Dairy Cottage combined phase plan (even though Graves 117 and 129 are marked as RB Phase 4, according to new C14 dates belongs to Saxon Phase 5), reproduced from *Archaeological Excavations at Berwick Field and Old Dairy Cottage, West Andover Road, Winchester, Hampshire, 1989-1994: Post-excavation assessment report and project design for analysis and publication* Fig. 4

The illness, which singled him out in the community, could be the reason why he was treated in such a way after death and could argue also against possible criminal behaviour. The fact that this individual was decapitated (by two or more blows) may act as an argument against this suggestion, though the positioning of the skull, which indicates some kind of special attention during the funeral, could support the possibility that physical disability may influence final deposition and that fear of its return led to the application of anti-vampire practices. It is also interesting that the only female buried at this cemetery was inserted precisely in this grave. The prone position of this female together with the presence of the bones of an infant less than a year old in the grave were most likely connected with the way of their deposition. It is also unlikely that a child who was at most a year old was treated as a criminal.

Archaeological examination together with the primary sources indicates that the cemetery at Old Dairy Cottage served as the last resting place for the victims of execution, most likely from the 9th/10th century onwards. However, the characteristics of the Graves 117, 125 and 129 differ from the rest of the graves (as explained above) and point to the suggestion that the individuals buried inside them were not "criminals" but most likely "the special dead".

Taking into account this suggestion and the fact that the Graves 117 and 125 were the earliest graves at the cemetery, we could assume that Old Dairy Cottage was initially place reserved for "special" or "dangerous" dead. The position of the locality outside the city, near the old Roman road and in the vicinity of an old Iron Age settlement, which even if no longer visible at that time, could have survived in the memory of the people as part of the legend or myth as a place where in the past were cemeteries or places reserved for "the special dead" as discussed in the previous chapters. The transformation into an execution cemetery was most likely connected with the initial function of the cemetery: executed criminals were viewed in similar fashion to the "special dead" as individuals who were also more prone to return from the grave to haunt the living, because of their deeds during their lifetime or the violent causes of their death.<sup>26</sup> Therefore the deposition at the same place seemed as the safest and probably easiest option. This trend is visible

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<sup>26</sup> See Introduction pp. 20-23

not only at Old Dairy Cottage cemetery and was connected with the liminal perception of these places.

**Empingham, Rutland. Chronology: Late 5th - early 7th century.**

No clear patterns emerge between earlier and later graves in terms of location or orientation within this cemetery. According to Jane Timby there is perhaps a slight tendency for a clustering of the earlier graves in the eastern and most densely populated area of the graveyard.<sup>27</sup> The later graves conversely show a tendency to be distributed around the periphery, although there is some obvious intermixing in the middle of the concentration.<sup>28</sup> The discrete cluster of male burials to the north (Graves 29-32) appears to include examples of earlier and later burials, and generally undated graves. All prone burials are located near the periphery of the cemetery; Grave 113 and Grave 125 are in close proximity to each other and near the edge of an Iron Age/Roman trackway.

A total of 136 burials and one cremation were found, dating the use of the cemetery between the late 5th and 7th centuries, using the widest possible margin, but with most of the datable graves falling into the 6th century. Eight prone burials, 6 percent of the cemetery population, were found, all but one with some form of material culture found within the grave, although the range of grave finds was variable. Three of the burials were of females (Grave 5, 107, 122 [**Fig.7**]), one aged 10- 12, with four men (53, 113 [**Fig.7**], 125) and one unsexed child aged 3- 4. The young woman in Grave 107 was moderately well furnished in typical regional 6th century style, while the 15-year-old female in Grave 122 was found only with an iron buckle at the waist. The 10- 12-year-old in Grave 5 is sexed as female on the basis of the grave finds. The male graves were generally poor, with a knife and buckle from Grave 53, a few scraps of iron from double Grave 113 of a man and child, and spearhead and knife from both Graves 110 and 125.<sup>29</sup>

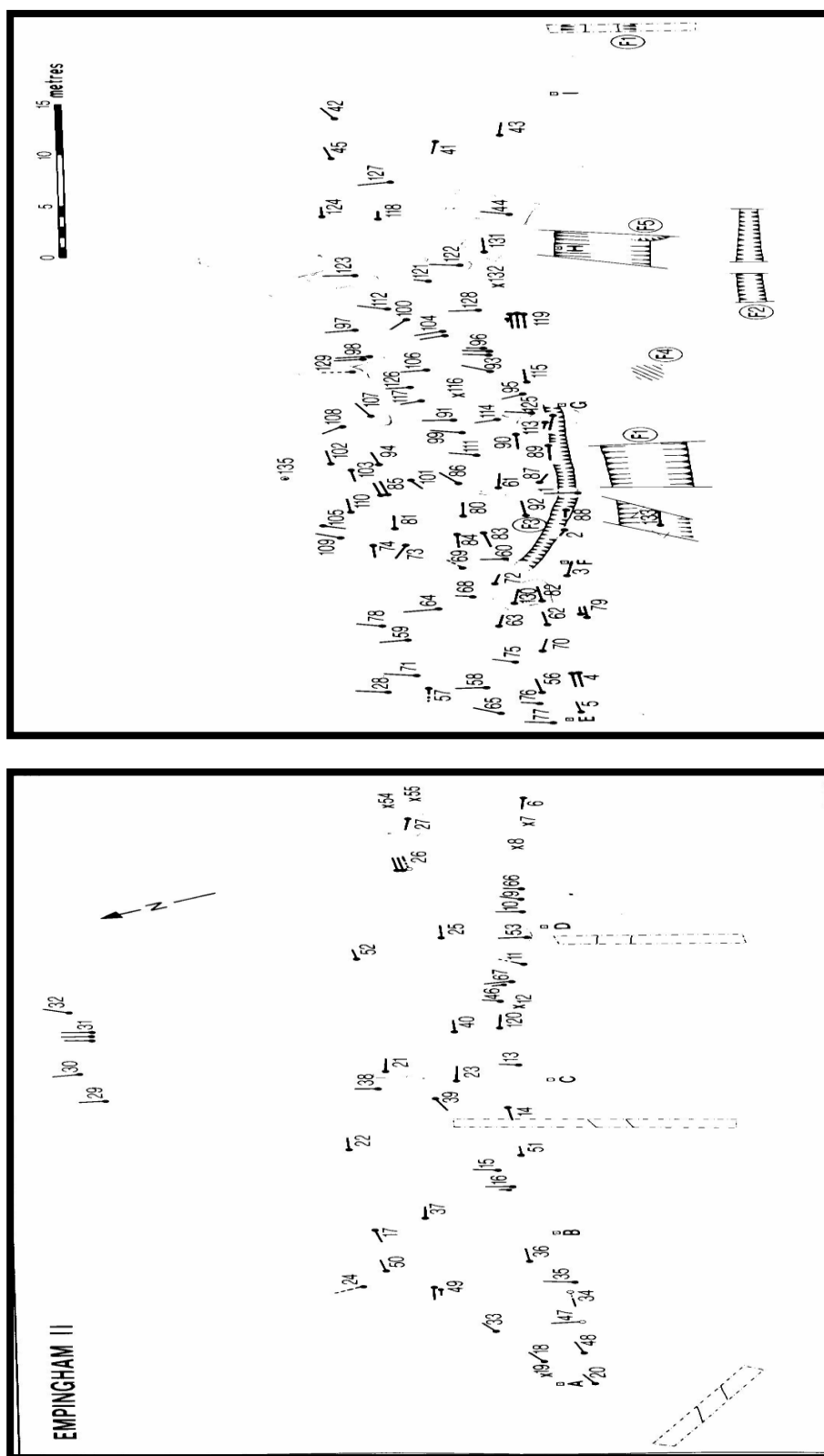
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<sup>27</sup> J.R. Timby: *The Anglo- Saxon Cemetery at Empingham II, Rutland*, Oxbow Monograph 70, (Oxford, 1996), p. 96

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 96

<sup>29</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, pp. 191 - 192





**Fig.6: Emphingham II: plan of the cemetery.** Reproduced from J.R. Timby: *The Anglo- Saxon Cemetery at Emphingham II, Rutland*, Oxbow Monograph 70, (Oxford, 1996)

While, according to Andrew Reynolds "deviant status at Eppingham was expressed through prone burial, with a lack of other deviant types, although a single burial (Grave 133) was placed outside the southern boundary of the cemetery, but was otherwise normal in terms of its body positioning"<sup>30</sup>, prone burials were the major but not the only "deviation" from "normal" burial rites at Eppingham. We can add to this group the "decapitations" (**Fig.8**) and several graves with post-mortem disturbances of the body. The fact is that the skeletons were badly damaged by the contractors' earth moving machinery, but according to Nicholas Reynolds it was clear that in most cases there had been an earlier series of disturbances to the bodies.<sup>31</sup> A young male, from Grave 130, had been buried on his back, with head turned to the right. The legs were extended, the right arm was bent back with the hand touching the shoulder, while the left arm lay bent at right angles over the chest. As the rib cage collapsed, weight from above had been sufficient to split slightly apart the radius and ulna, pushing them downwards. The hand bones collapsed and the upper part of skull moved, away from the lower mandible, which remained in position.<sup>32</sup>

Another male was buried in Grave 131, the right arm lay over the chest, and the left arm was extended down to the pelvis. It was difficult to determine in what position the legs had been buried, they were probably originally slightly flexed with the knees pointing upwards. At some stage they had moved over to the right, the right tibia had become dislocated and had fallen at an angle over the lower left leg-bones. The skull was not damaged, but the upper part had slipped sideways intact away from the lower mandible.<sup>33</sup>

Dislocation of the skull in this way was noted in several instances, for example in Grave 129 (young female), Grave 123, Grave 113 (female 17- 25 years old and child 3- 4 years old), Grave 98 where the crouched body of a woman had been laid over that of a man, and the female skeleton was dislocated wherever it lay

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<sup>30</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 191

<sup>31</sup> N. Reynolds: "The structure of Anglo-Saxon Graves", in *Antiquity* 50 (1976), pp. 140- 143

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140- 141

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142

directly on the bones of the male. Behind the male skull lay an iron shield boss.<sup>34</sup> This was a common occurrence at Empingham, and according to Nicholas Reynolds in some cases there did not seem to have been room, in the position in which the boss now lay, for the rest of the wooden shield to have been in the grave as well.<sup>35</sup>

It seems that these movements of parts of skeletons happened randomly and while some ligaments were still in existence. Some of the features could be caused by decay of fatty tissues, but some are too pronounced for this to be sole cause of movement. Nicholas Reynolds suggests that when the bones moved, they clearly had empty space into which they could fall.<sup>36</sup> This could be not possible if the grave had been backfilled around the body immediately after burial. We cannot exclude the possibility that the bodies were deposited inside coffins and the bones moved after their decomposition, although there is no evidence that coffins were used in these graves.<sup>37</sup> According to Nicholas Reynolds the only explanation seems to be that the graves were covered with some form of timber planking, and that the material excavated from the grave pit was then piled on top of the timber structure.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, at the end of his article, Reynolds even compares these graves with "houses" for the dead with pitched roofs.<sup>39</sup>

Metcalf and Huntington recorded among the Berewans the belief that after death, the soul is not within the corpse and this makes the body itself a source of intense danger, aside from the threat of the malicious soul.<sup>40</sup> Constant vigil must be maintained over it and no adult should sleep at night during the funeral; the soul of the dead person must be entertained, to make its last hours in the longhouse jolly.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 142

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 143

<sup>40</sup> Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, p.91

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Moreover:

The other aim of the vigil is to prevent harm from befalling the corpse. ...Intense horror centers on the idea of the putrescent corpse becoming inspired by some demon. There is a particular spirit that attempts to gain control of fresh corpses, and if it should succeed, a monster results of superhuman strength and nightmarish mien is invulnerable to human weapons.<sup>42</sup>

Taking into account Nicholas Reynolds' assumption that these graves could be "houses of the dead" in conjunction with these anthropological observations, it is possible to propose a theory that timber planking over these grave pits may represent possible wards against "malicious spirits", and also could be easily removed to check on the state of the corpse, which was important for determining if the soul had already crossed to the "other world". When the soul finally departed, "the house of the dead" was covered with earth, the bereaved had fulfilled their duty and soul of the departed was safe – as was the community.

Another interesting category which distinguishes Empingham cemetery from other Anglo-Saxon cemeteries is the orientation of its graves. Two dominant orientations are present: one group have their heads in the south to the south-west arc, approximately towards the trackway (44%), the second group is oriented south-west to north-west arc (37%).<sup>43</sup> As Jane Timby remarked, "Empingham is perhaps a little unusual in having an almost total absence of burials with the head to the north, and the almost equal number of graves with their heads in the southern sector as in the west-east/ east-west direction."<sup>44</sup> According to her, the prevailing orientation in south Germany was with the head to the south, and it may be that the ethnic origins of the families had some influence on burial orientation.<sup>45</sup>

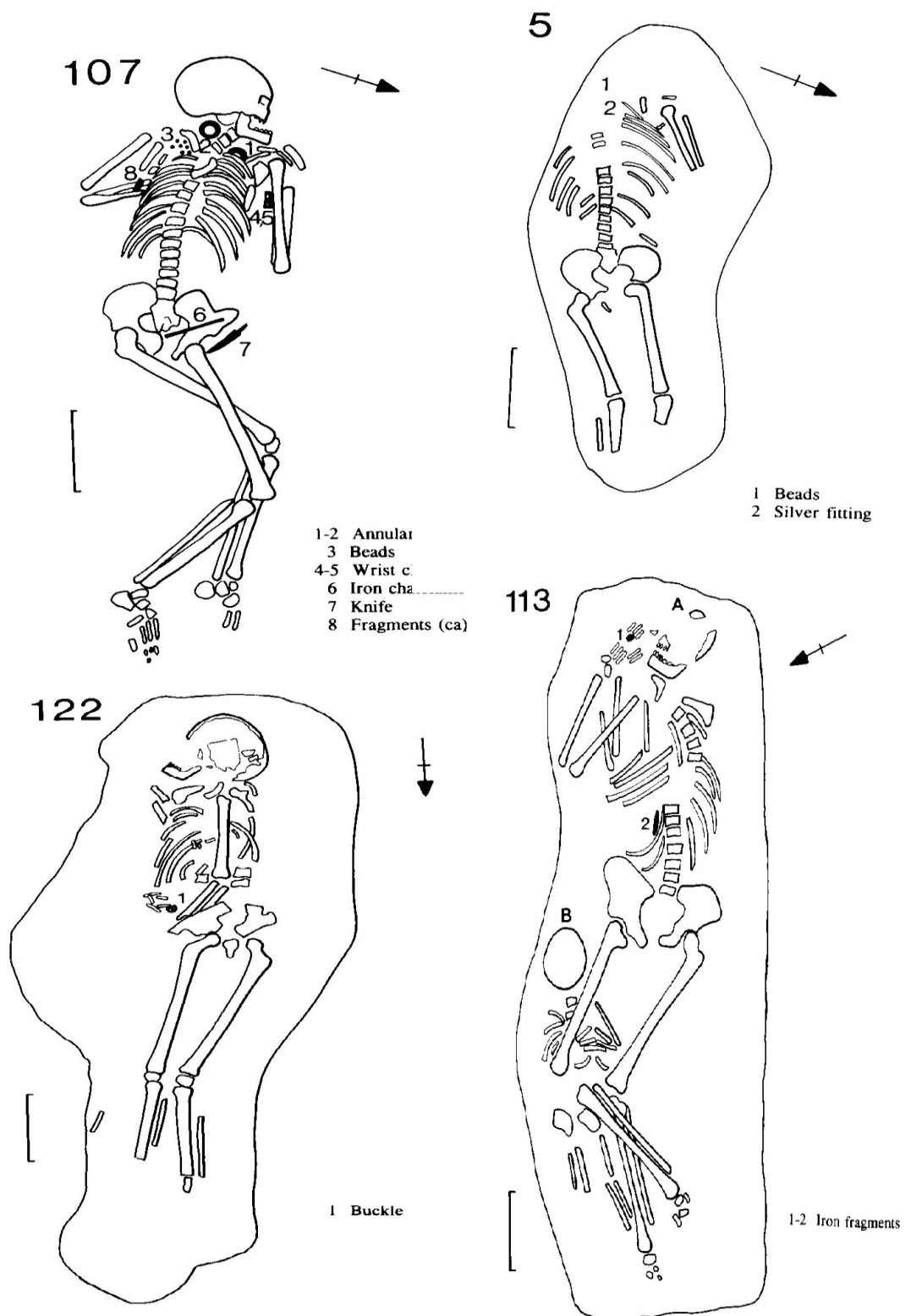
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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

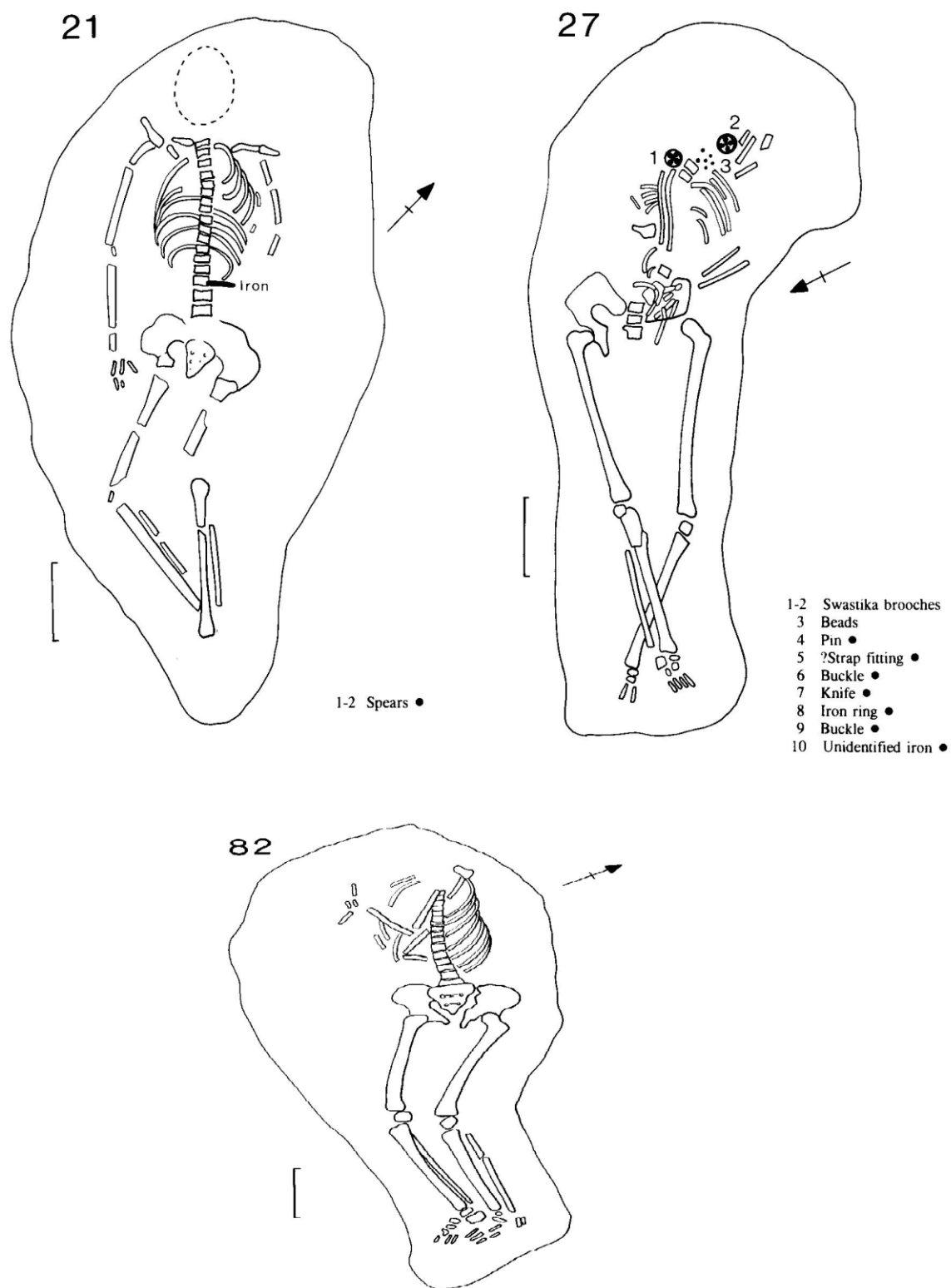
<sup>43</sup> Timby, *Empingham II*, p. 16

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



**Fig.7 : Empingham II: Graves 5, 107, 113 and 122.** Reproduced from J.R. Timby: *The Anglo- Saxon Cemetery at Empingham II, Rutland*, Oxbow Monograph 70, (Oxford, 1996)



**Fig.8 : Empingham II: Graves 21, 27 and 82.** Reproduced from J.R. Timby: *The Anglo- Saxon Cemetery at Empingham II, Rutland*, Oxbow Monograph 70, (Oxford, 1996)

The demographic data appears to show a definitive bias in that the number of children and infants represented appears abnormally low.<sup>46</sup> According to Simon Mays neonatals are apparently completely absent, or may have been overlooked by the excavators.<sup>47</sup> The assemblage contained only two infants, one aged 1 year and one aged 1 - 1.5 years.<sup>48</sup> Mays remarked that "...it is inconceivable that no neonates would have died in the population during the period of use of the site..."<sup>49</sup> and follows with the statement that "...it seems likely that at Empingham II, in common with most other Pagan and Christian Saxon cemeteries, many infants were disposed of outside the cemetery area ..." <sup>50</sup>, which is also suggested by Jane Timby.<sup>51</sup> We cannot exclude the possibility that some shallow burials were destroyed during the topsoil stripping prior to excavation; however, the machinery is most likely not the only reason for total absence of neonatal graves at the cemetery. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter<sup>52</sup>, the position of dead children is problematic "...in that they have never belonged to the group of the living and for this reason cannot belong to the group of the dead."<sup>53</sup> Burial ceremonies are either performed in a "special" way or left unperformed. As Juha Pentikäinen remarked about this topic "...from all this is evident that the child is considered an "outsider"; he has at no point been a member of the family, nor has he been accepted in the group of the dead, which is the object of a cult."<sup>54</sup> The absolute absence of neonatals at Empingham and other Anglo-Saxon cemeteries could be for similar reasons. The restrictions on the deposition of dead children at the same cemetery as the rest of community may be even more strengthened by the fact that abandoned, murdered, unbaptized, aborted or stillborn children belongs among the categories of individuals, who are prone to become revenants.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See S. Mays: "3.6 The Human Skeletal Remains", in Timby, *Empingham II*, pp. 21- 33

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.25

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Timby, *Empingham II*, p. 17

<sup>52</sup> See Introduction, pp. 24- 26

<sup>53</sup> Pentikäinen, *The dead without status*, p.98

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.99

<sup>55</sup> See Introduction, pp. 21-24

The broad spectrum of "unusual" burial rites applied at Empingham could be seen as proof that the community burying their dead at the cemetery employed different types of deposition for particular "types" of individuals. Moreover, the variety of "unusual" graves at Empingham shows the complexity of beliefs connected with death. One possible explanation for this could be ethnic origins of families burying at Empingham:<sup>56</sup> variations in deposition of "special" dead may be seen as the result of different cultural background. Another explanation could be that even when the community had the same ethnic origins, the differences in funeral customs may represent minor variations between particular families or clans. One way or another, the examination of funeral rites employed at Empingham brought several interesting results:

- 1) The community probably didn't bury their children at the "communal" burial grounds, either because they didn't perceive them as a part of the community of the living, which also banned them from becoming a part of the community of dead; or they feared of their possible return from the "other world".
- 2) Comparison of graves with possible post mortem disruption of bones with "houses of the dead" and anthropological observations, allows us to assume that the individuals buried inside were probably not "deviants" or "social outcasts", but represented "ordinary" members of community buried according to traditional beliefs and practices, to help the soul travel safely to the afterlife and prevent its transformation into a malicious spirit.
- 3) Prone burials were probably the only group of graves which contained individuals who were deemed as "dangerous" for the community and were buried according to this belief.

### **West Heslerton, North Yorkshire. Chronology: c. 475 - 650 AD**

The indication from the excavation report's phase plans is that the cemetery develops from at least five centres, two on Site 1 (Groups C and D) and three on Site 2 (Groups A, B and E) (**Fig.9**). As the site developed each group expanded,

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<sup>56</sup> Timby, *Empingham II*, p. 16



sub-groups were added and the gaps were filled. According to the excavators, the polycentric nature of the distribution encourages us to think that each group relates to an individual extended family or kinship group.<sup>57</sup> The grave distribution reveals a great number of concentrations, with the highest concentration, Group A, which also contains the highest number of early graves.<sup>58</sup> Burials of all phases occur over the whole of the cemetery area and the groups which emerge early in the use of the cemetery seem to continue throughout its life. Even though there are a number of later graves towards the edges, they also occur in the heart of the established group.<sup>59</sup>

The highest concentration of prone burials is in Group A (5), followed by Group B (2), E (2) and D (1). Grave 126 was located at the west periphery of cemetery aside of others.

Out of 185 inhumations excavated at West Heslerton 12 (7%) were prone, "...making it a veritable den of witches" if, as the authors note, we were to accept a correlation between prone burial and "witchcraft".<sup>60</sup> Seven were female, three male and two of unknown sex. The two female burials with high grave scores, G89 and G113 (**Fig.10**), were both buried in fairly deep graves cut into the prehistoric enclosure ditch of the barrow and another, G6, was cut through the suspected barrow ditch, while the remainder show no particular distribution. Three at least were bound, G132 (**Fig.10**) at the knees, G17 at the ankles (and partially cut away by a later grave) and G114 (**Fig.11**) also at the feet. The position of the head and the hands in G113, G89, G6 and G70 all suggested "live" burials to the excavators.<sup>61</sup> Other possible examples include G16, which extended beyond the limit of excavation: the legs were bent up with the feet sticking out at the base of the plough-soil. It was not possible to excavate the skull, and the bones of the torso had not survived.

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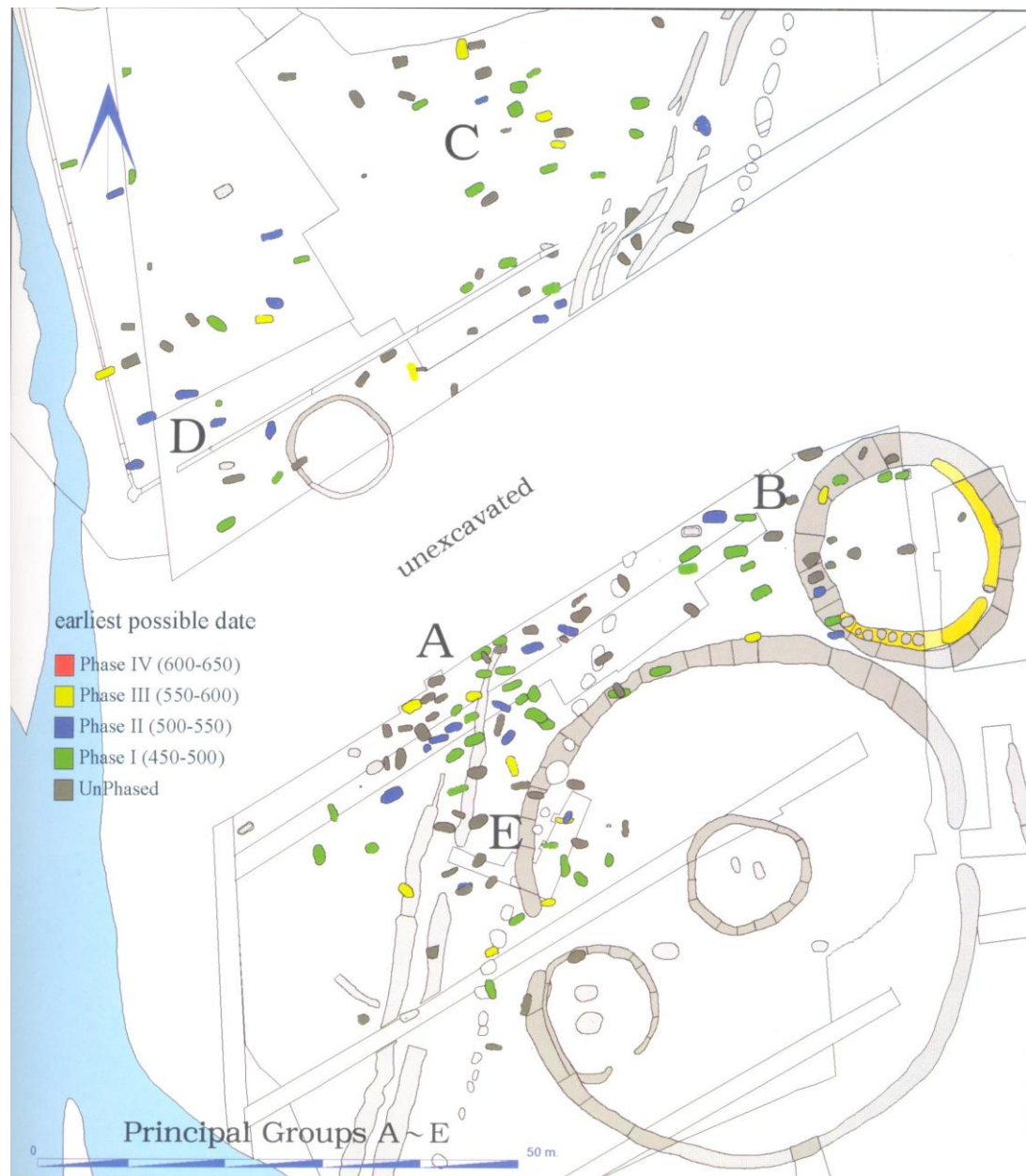
<sup>57</sup> Ch. Haughton and D. Powlesland: *West Heslerton: The Anglian Cemetery. Volume I*, (Yedingham, North Yorkshire, 1999), p. 83

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83- 84

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



**Fig. 9: West Heslerton: plan of the cemetery.** Reproduced from Ch. Haughton and D. Powlesland: *West Heslerton: The Anglian Cemetery. Volume I.* (Yedingham, North Yorkshire, 1999)

Taking into account the above evidence, it is clear that some of the individuals buried at West Heslerton were deemed "different" or "special" and the burial rites reserved for them varied too from the "usual"<sup>62</sup> deposition used by majority of the community. In addition to the fact that all these individuals were buried in prone

<sup>62</sup> Crouched or flexed (55 %), followed by extended (14 %) and then prone (7%), 3 multiple burials (one of them prone; see more in the summary of West Heslerton subchapter

position, it is possible to distinguish different groups within this set of prone burials.

### **Group of interesting female burials:**

The burials in Graves 89, 113 and 132 show several interesting features. The excavators classified Graves 89 and 113 as possible “live’ burials<sup>63</sup> and the skeleton in Grave 132 was, according to them, bound at the knees.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the only two examples of walnut amulets recovered at the cemetery were found in Graves 113 and 132, which in Grave 113 was also accompanied by a beaver tooth pendant. Grave 132 also contained a cup filled with brassica seeds. According to researchers at the University of California Berkley 3,3’- Diindolylmethane in brassica vegetables is a potent modulator of the innate immune response system with potent anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-cancer activity.<sup>65</sup> If we take into account the suggestion that females buried in these graves (Grave 113 and 132) could be so called "cunning" women, the presence of brassica seeds as potential healing or magical agent supports this theory.

Audrey Meaney in her *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* published in 1981 listed only six examples of beaver teeth mounted as pendants found at Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and all of them in late, female and children’s graves.<sup>66</sup> One of the mentioned examples from the unknown site called Wigber Low was even set in gold. Taking into account this fact, Meaney stated: "...obviously, these beaver teeth were especially prized: none of the other animal teeth found has been set in gold; and the women and young children who wore them were wealthy, and almost certainly of noble rank as well..."<sup>67</sup> According to Meaney the beaver teeth amulets were worn in hope of warding off dental decay and pain, and encouraging children’s teeth to grow stronger. Although the beaver tooth pendant from West Heslerton was also found in a rich female grave, the burial is older than burials

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<sup>63</sup> Haughton and Powlesland, *West Heslerton*, p. 92

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Omar I. Vivar, Chia-Lei Lin, Gary L. Firestone, Leonard F. Bjeldanes: *3,3’-Diindolylmethane induces a Glarrest in human prostate cancer cells irrespective of androgen receptor and p53 status*, (Elsevier, 2009), online source accessed 24.05.2013

<sup>66</sup> A.L. Meaney: *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, (Oxford, 1981), p. 136

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 137

mentioned by Meaney. We can only conjecture whether it is simply an exception to the pattern or whether we are dealing here with a phenomenon of longer duration, which seems quite possible, taking into account the attributes of the beaver - the strong teeth capable of cutting down the trees. However, in this case we cannot exclude the possibility that the amulet was not only for personal use of the person who owned or wore it - it could also have been used for healing of other members of community and in that case part of "magical" equipment of "cunning" women.

Although walnut amulets appear to be unique to West Heslerton, similar objects were recorded at Little Wilbraham, Cambridgeshire in the grave of a middle aged woman: "...an oak apple or made from oak bark enclosed in two bronze hoops with an iron bolt running through it longitudinally ...";<sup>68</sup> and also at Welbeck Hill, Lincolnshire in graves of two adult women - "...two objects consisted of flat coils about 12mm in diameter, held in position by crossed silver shackles and a central stud, and with a loop for suspension at one side ..."<sup>69</sup> All three of these graves were richly furnished and Meaney remarks that "...in the types of objects they took to the grave with them, these women show signs of superstitious outlook ..."<sup>70</sup> She also suggests that the bindings of these pendants are similar to those used for rock crystal balls as well as for "curing stones".<sup>71</sup> The purpose of these balls (either wooden, walnut or rock) was most likely for magical and herbal healing.<sup>72</sup>

Another interesting issue is that the walnut is not a native British species, and the date of introduction to the country is a matter of some debate.<sup>73</sup> Some authors claim that the walnut was introduced in the second half of the 16th century, some of them that it was already well established in the 16th century<sup>74</sup>; the West Heslerton excavators remarked that Romans certainly imported walnuts and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 61

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 59

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 61

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Haughton and Powlesland, *West Heslerton*, p.119

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

walnut pollen grains have occasionally been found in the soils beneath Iron Age camps: the tree was present in Britain at that time.<sup>75</sup> The Late Neolithic pits discovered at West Heslerton contained carbonised hazelnut shells and the excavator suggests that the presence of hazel trees during the Anglo-Saxon period is implied by the Anglo-Saxon place name, meaning "the hamlet in the clearing amongst the hazel":<sup>76</sup> however, there is no available evidence about walnut trees from this period. Either way, the walnut was most likely not "common" at that time and its insertion into the amulets has an important symbolic and "magic" meaning. Even though walnuts do not appear to possess any particular medicinal properties, "... later herbalists claim that infusions of walnut husks and kernels would ward off plague and expel worms and poisons ..."<sup>77</sup>

Although these women were buried prone, the relatively rich furnishing of their graves could be seen as a mark of a certain "social" status, which is further supported by the finds of amulets, possible attributes of "cunning women". Their collaboration with the powers of the "other world" placed them in the group of individuals who required "different" or "special" burial rites to ensure an "easy" and "fast" way to "the beyond" or prevent their possible return from the "other world". However, the respect which they experienced during their lives is symbolized by the grave goods and attributes of their profession deposited in their graves.

Another interesting female burial is of the sub-adult (12 - 15 years old) in Grave 118. Even though the remains were incomplete and fragmentary, the female grave goods indicate that it was most likely the burial of a young girl. Grave 118 was classified during the excavation as intercutting Grave 120 (fragmentary remains of an adult female): however, the excavators later reconsidered this decision and came to the conclusion that "... it seems more likely that this represents another double burial like that at Sewerby ..."<sup>78</sup> If we take into account this suggestion that

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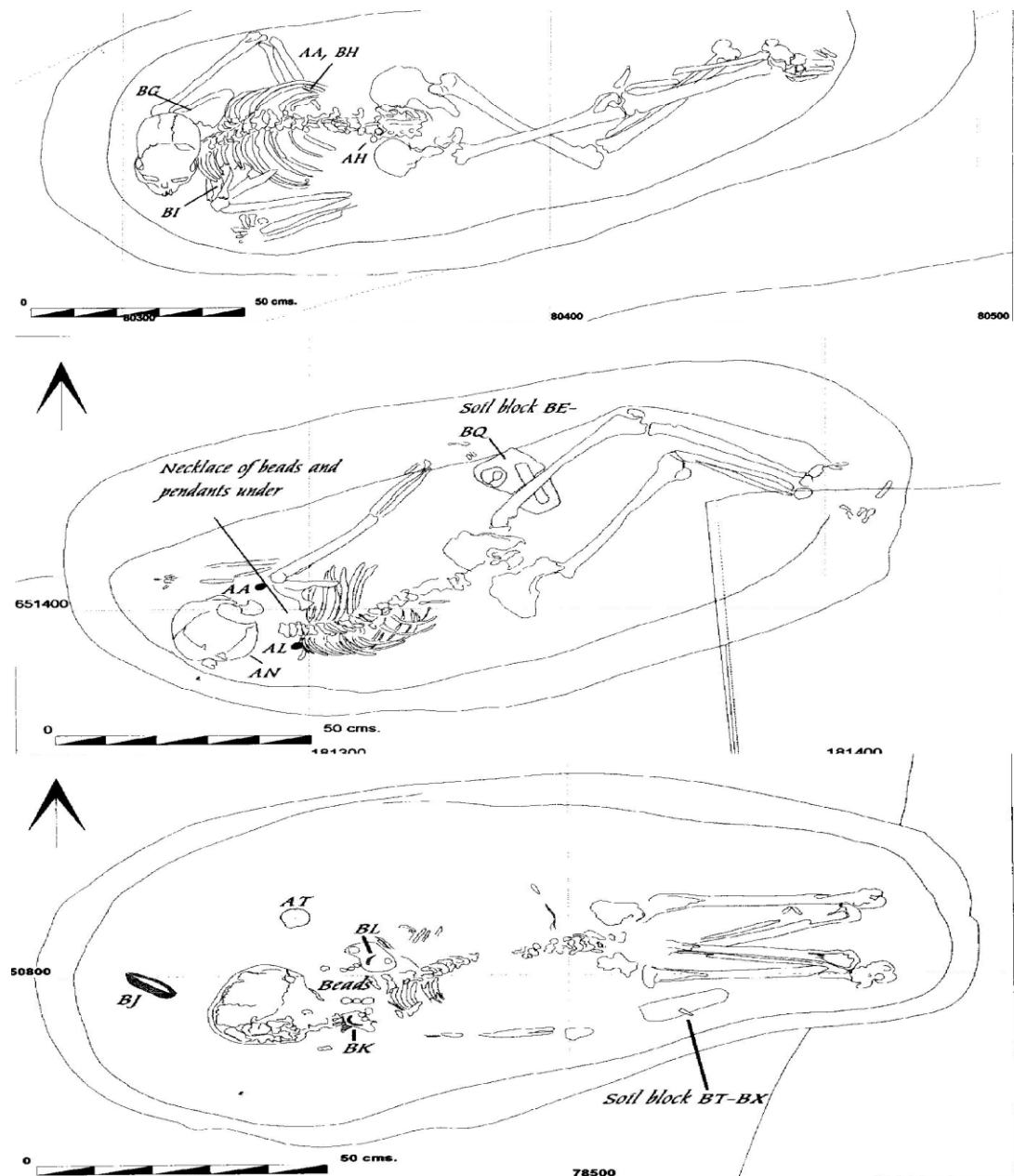
<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 119

<sup>78</sup> Graves 44 and 45 - the famous "live burial" in Hirst, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Sewerby*, p.3; Haughton and Powlesland, *West Heslerton*, p. 92

these graves may represent a similar situation to that at Sewerby<sup>79</sup>, even though at West Heslerton the girl is placed over the older female instead of the older female over the younger at Sewerby, and on a much less grand scale, we have to investigate these graves further.



**Fig.10: West Heslerton: Graves 89, 113 and 132, from top to bottom.** Reproduced from Ch. Haughton and D. Powlesland: *West Heslerton: The Anglian Cemetery. Volume I.*, (Yedingham, North Yorkshire, 1999)

<sup>79</sup> See also the earlier discussion of Sewerby in Introduction, pp. 14- 16

The condition of the remains does not allow us to determine if the girl from Grave 118 was another "live" burial or why these two individuals were buried in such a way: however, the really fragmentary remains of the female in Grave 120 (cranium, mandible and dentition only) together with unidentifiable fragments of four burnt bones and a portion of rib, the left clavicle and the premolar of an adult (probably belonging to a different individual) could point to deposition in a different place prior to burial and to some kind of "pre-burial" practices prior to the final deposition. Taking into account the examples from anthropology and ethnology, it is known that in some cases "the rites of passage" between the "world of the living and the world of the dead" could be not completed before the person deemed responsible for the person's death is identified and dealt with, which could be possible explanation also in this case. One scenario might be that the woman from Grave 120 died under strange circumstances and the community come to conclusion that it was the work of a "witch"; the body had to be placed in a "safe place" until the "culprit" was found, otherwise her "spirit" would not rest at peace and could become a revenant. After some time the young girl buried in Grave 118 was identified as the person responsible, the female was placed in the grave and girl buried over her, face down – possibly dead, but possibly also alive. This suggestion cannot be either verified or disproved as the state of skeletal remains makes it impossible: however, similarities with the Sewerby burials may argue in favour of this hypothesis.

#### **Burials with "tied" individuals:**

Grave 17: Very narrow, probably with feet tied together. Only the bones below the pelvis survived, the rest of the grave was cut away. No grave goods.

Grave 114: A woman who had suffered a stroke: her left foot had been cut off either ante-mortem or at the time of death - there is no evidence of healing and the condition of bone indicates that the damage is not post mortem. The gracility of the surviving bones of the left side of this individual would appear to reflect a hemiplegia occurring after the completion of skeletal maturation - most likely the cause of the stroke. These symptoms were evident on the person, affecting the left

side of body and clearly marked her as "different" or "deviant" from the rest of society. Such a person could have suffered from the following problems:

*Difficulty with balance while standing or walking*

*Difficulty with gait*

*Having difficulty with motor activities like holding, grasping or pinching*

*Increasing stiffness of muscles*

*Muscle spasms*

*Difficulty with speech*

*Difficulty swallowing food*

*Significant delay in achieving developmental milestones like standing, smiling, crawling or speaking*

*The majority of children who develop hemiplegia also have abnormal mental development*

*Behavior problems like anxiety, anger, irritability, lack of concentration or comprehension*

*Depression*

The legs appear to have been tied at the knee; an iron ring between the knee caps was evidently used as part of the binding. Below the knees the legs were splayed apart.

..This implies that this young woman would have been severely disabled for some time before her death. Apart from mobility problems she may well have experienced partial or total loss of bladder and rectal control. In terms of contributing to the communal life of the village and her immediate family, her capabilities would have been severely restricted when compared to healthy and active women of her age. It is possible that she would have required special care.



Her survival after her disability reflects the versatility and values of the society in which she lived.<sup>80</sup>

The young woman buried in the grave was disabled, with the symptoms clearly evident not only from her physical but also by her mental state. An encounter with such a person would probably have an emotional impact on modern individuals, to say nothing of the impact which her condition probably would have on the early medieval community where she lived. It is understandable that after her death precautions may have been taken to prevent her return and to minimize the possibility that her "revenant" would haunt the living.

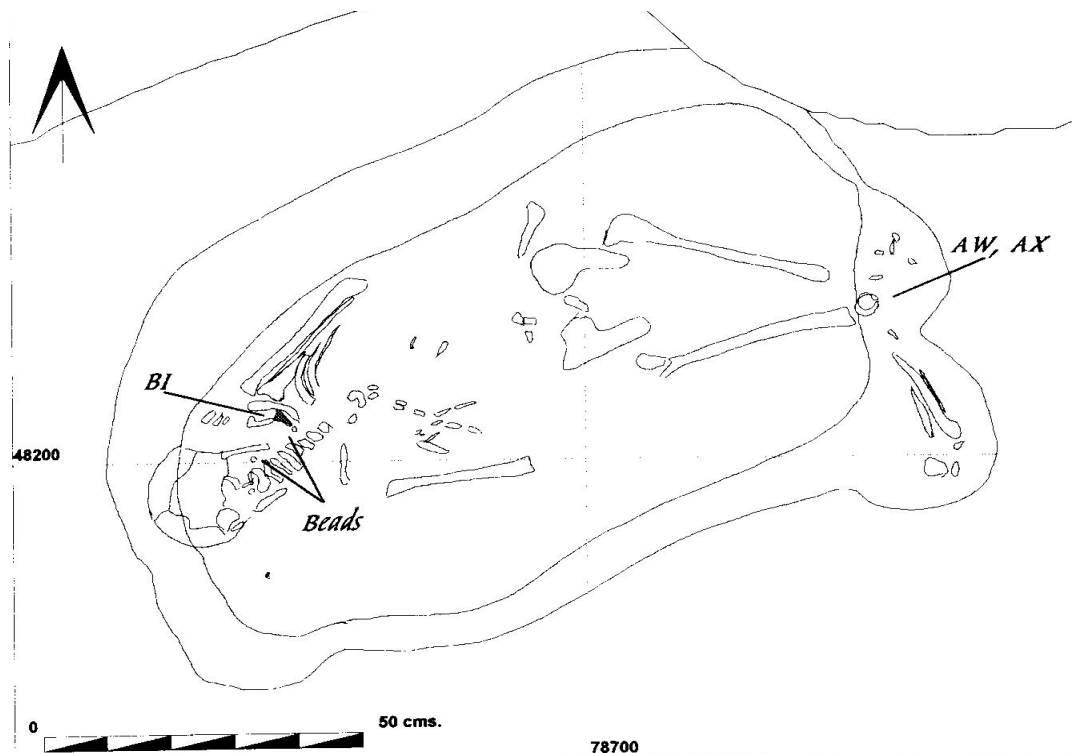
According to Andrew Reynolds "...the occurrence of tied hands...is perhaps the most positive indication that a burial is that of a felon..."<sup>81</sup>, however, in my opinion we cannot speak about individuals buried in Grave 17 and 144 as felons, and not only because they have been bound at the legs and not at the hands. The remains in Grave 17 are not complete and the excavated bones, apart from the possibility that the legs have been tied together, do not bear any marks suggesting some kind of judicial practices. Even though the body was prone, buried in a very narrow grave, cut by another grave (Grave 14) and with no grave goods (all features marking it as an possible felon according to Reynolds<sup>82</sup>), the position in the middle of cemetery, surrounded by other "ordinary" graves, suggests that the reasons to bury this individual in such a way were different and most likely connected with the "fear of revenants" similarly as in case of young woman from Grave 144, where the above mentioned data clearly shows that she was not capable of any felony, taking into account her physical condition. The fact that the "cunning woman" from Grave 132 was also bound at knees and placed in a small grave, probably with force employed to fit her into the grave, but without any sign of judicial practices, supports the hypothesis that these practices served for disposal of "dangerous" individuals, but potential revenants rather than felons.

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<sup>80</sup> Haughton and Powlesland, *West Heslerton*, p. 187

<sup>81</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 44

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



**Fig.11: West Heslerton: Grave 114.** Reproduced from Ch. Haughton and D. Powlesland: *West Heslerton: The Anglian Cemetery. Volume I.*, (Yedingham, North Yorkshire, 1999)

### **Cramped burials:**

Grave 16: The body (adult, probably male), was lying on the right side and was clearly far larger than could be easily accommodated by the grave cut, so that the lower legs were jammed up against the northern edge of the grave with the feet almost at the surface. Staining around the side of the grave at the base may indicate the presence of some sort of coffin.

Grave 126: The grave was insufficiently large to contain the body and the lower legs were thus bent up against the southern end of the grave so that the ankles were at the top of the cut when first identified. Adult male, 25- 35 years old.

Grave 166: A small, but deep oval grave. The grave was not large enough to contain the body in any other than a distorted position. The spine must have been broken to achieve the final resting position; whether this occurred during burial or as a result of settlement was unclear. Adult female.

Grave 133: Cuts on the cranium. Narrow grave, no grave goods, incomplete fragmentary remains:

The cranium bears marks of four circumferential cuts running from the front to the rear. An adult female who died aged approximately 35 years, her skeleton survives in a fragmentary and incomplete state. The condition of the bone strongly suggests that the cuts were either ante-mortem or that they occurred at the time of death..., ...cuts have penetrated through the cortical bone deep into the diploe, but none have pierced the inner table..., ...the loss of the outer table renders evaluation of healing and possible infection impossible and consequently it is not possible to estimate at what time before death these cuts were penetrated. Because of their length, the cuts are unlikely to have been result of an accident. Similarly they bear no resemblance to cuts incurred as a result of scalping, either in terms or position, morphology or angle, or cuts incurred during trephination.<sup>83</sup>

Cramped burials in narrow graves, too small for the body. No, or very few, grave goods. We can suggest that these individuals were deemed as dangerous during their lives or died under such circumstances that they need to be deposited in "special" way. As I already briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter, people who died under "special" circumstances as for example violent death (either killed in battle or murdered), suicides or people stricken by lightning, were deemed more prone to become revenants than the other who died "normally". To this category also belong the people who left "unfinished business" in this world and returned from the "other world" to finish it. As J.C. Lawson remarked in his study of Greek folklore:

... the ancients also believed that for certain causes, men were doomed to remain incorruptible after death and to rise again in bodily form from their graves, and that one class of these *revenants*, those namely who had wrongs of their own to avenge, inflicted upon their enemies (and upon any who shielded or harboured them) the same suffering as are now generally believed to be inflicted in an unreasoning manner by all classes of *vrykolakes* alike upon mankind at large, with no justification, such as a natural desire for vengeance might afford, in the case of those whose resuscitation is not the outcome of any injury or neglect at the hands of

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<sup>83</sup> Haughton and Powlesland, *West Heslerton*, p. 185

other men, and with no discrimination between friend and foe on the part of those who have real wrongs to avenge..<sup>84</sup>

To prevent them returning from the "grave" and safeguard the community of the living "special" rites were applied and these cramped prone burials could be seen as one of the means of providing it. However, in contrast to the above mentioned group of rich female burials, either their social position during life was not one of great esteem or was changed by the circumstances surrounding their death. The way of their deposition - probably just thrown into their small and narrow graves - most likely corresponds with this notion. The prone position in which these individuals were buried, together with the broken spine of the person in Grave 166 could be seen as signs of possible post mortem manipulation - rites or practices, which were supposed to keep them in the grave.

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The most common position in which the deceased were deposited in the graves at West Heslerton was crouched or flexed (55 %), followed by extended (14 %) and then prone (7%). Even though the prone position is the least used at the cemetery<sup>85</sup>, and the only one which can be characterised as "unusual" or "special", its relatively high percentage indicates that the fear of revenants and funerary rites connected with deposition of these "special" individuals constituted an important part of the beliefs and practices of the community burying at West Heslerton. Moreover, we can even trace several types of deposition among prone burials pointing to certain social patterns according to which these people were selected for this kind of deposition. Although the basic condition was most likely the belief that these individuals were deemed more prone to return from the dead, either thanks to their occupation (cunning women), temper, disability or the "unusual or special" circumstances of death, the excavated remains allow us to observe that some of them were deposited with more piety than others. The reason for this was either the greater fear of their special powers which meant that their soul or spirit

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<sup>84</sup> Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*, p. 461

<sup>85</sup> Not taking into account three multiple burials, from which one after examination was classified as prone (Graves 118 and 120)

was deemed more likely to return from the other world; or the fact that respect which these people achieved during life was recognized also after their death. In my opinion, the latter could be the case in West Heselton's Graves 89, 113 and 132. Even though a line had been crossed which meant they could not be buried in a different way, we can observe some kind of piety and honour which is in contrast to the way individuals were deposited in Graves 16, 126, 133, 166 (cramped) or 17 and 114. The prone burials at West Heselton support the "hierarchy" of "special" burials reported by ethnographers and anthropologists and allows us to observe the workings of the medieval mind and give an insight into the feelings which they cherished for each other, as well as the customs which required to be adhered to, in order to safeguard the wellbeing of the community.

#### **Apple Down, West Sussex: Chronology AD 490-510 to c. AD 680-90**

At this cemetery, excavators uncovered 115 inhumations and 64 cremation burials with a further 74 cremations inferred from ring-ditches, as well as timber structures and unstratified finds in the topsoil of Cemetery 1 (total approx. 253 individuals).<sup>86</sup> They represent perhaps some 80- 90 % of the community buried in this cemetery over a period of just under 200 years, from c. AD 490-510 to c. AD 680-90. Cremation was practiced in Cemetery 1 from its foundation into the second half of the 7th century, whereas the 13 burials in 11 graves, which is all that survives of Cemetery 2, include no cremations at all. The majority of the burials in Cemetery 2 were unaccompanied.<sup>87</sup> On the basis of a generation of thirty years, Cemetery 1 will have been in use for between six and seven generations and implies a community with a population of between 36 and 42 in any one period.<sup>88</sup>

A number of inhumations showed signs of disturbance or other anomalies in the burial pattern and, after discounting those caused by rabbit-burrowing and tree roots; there are at least five burials where the disturbance noted by the excavator

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<sup>86</sup> A. Down and M. Welch: *Chichester Excavations VII: Apple Down and The Mardens*, (Chichester District Council, 1990), p. 108

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 108

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

needs another explanation. In the case of Grave 19, the body was laid in a partially backfilled grave and tilted to the south (uphill); both arms were bent upwards, with the right hand by the jaw and the left forearm twisted up behind the shoulder (**Fig.12**). Grave 55 had evidence of a charred plank laid across the body and the left femur was detached and reversed, with the "ball" end of the bone facing outwards instead of inwards.<sup>89</sup> Grave 97 had been disturbed by rodents, but the arms were in unusual position, being bent upwards, and both hands and feet were missing (**Fig.12**). The neck and skull of burial in Grave 23 were twisted out of the normal position and the torso was badly disturbed, three vertebrae being the wrong way round and some of the ribs being out of position (**Fig.12**).

The disarrangement of parts of the five skeletons cited above could not be attributed to any obvious disturbance by rabbits or rodents. Where this had occurred on site, the path taken by the animals was quite clearly marked by darker soil brought into the burrow. The unusual position of the arms in Graves 19 and 97 might well, according to the excavators, be due to the unskillful arrangement of a body that had been exposed before being placed in the grave. They note that it is apparent that the left femur of the skeleton in Grave 55 must have become detached and replaced the wrong way around at some time after the body had decomposed, but whilst the grave was still open.<sup>90</sup> The fly larvae cases on some of the brooches from Graves 10 and 14 are also relevant here, implying exposure of the corpse for some period of time before it was finally sealed by the soil of the grave.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, in six graves (14, 102, 107, 120, 138 and 171) traces of silting were observed, although according to the excavators, this evidence is not sufficient to support the view that the grave cuts may have been left open for any significant length of time between being dug and having a corpse interred in them and the small amount of silt could easily have accumulated in a single day of heavy rain.<sup>92</sup>

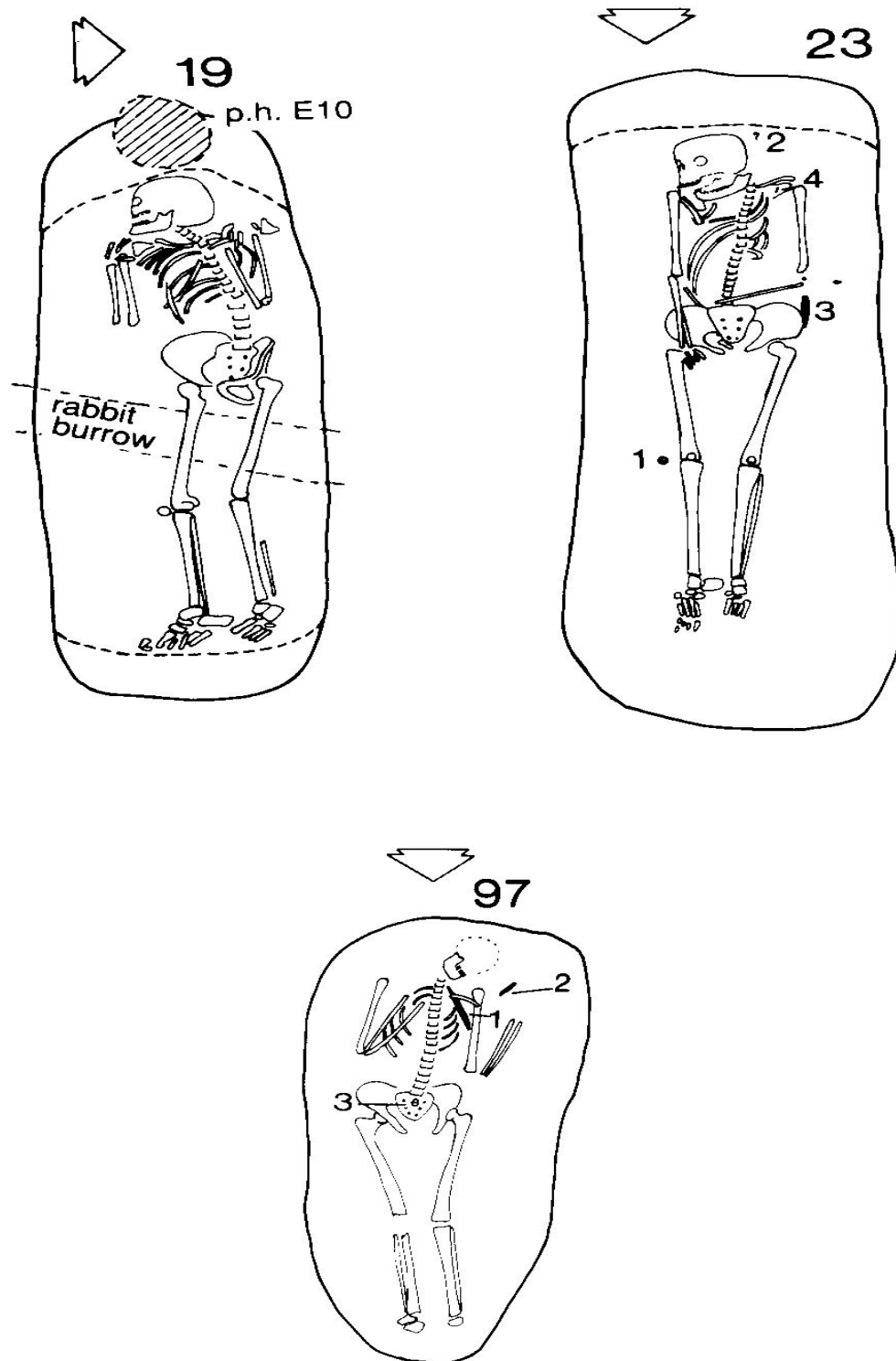
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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 18

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 19



**Fig.12: Apple Down: Graves 19, 23 and 97.** Reproduced from A. Down and M. Welch: *Chichester Excavations VII: Apple Down and The Mardens*, (Chichester District Council, 1990)

### **Marker Posts:**

Marker posts were associated with three inhumation burials. A post had been inserted at the head end in both Graves 19 and 22 respectively and apparently this was done while they were being backfilled. Both posts subsequently rotted in position. In the case of Grave 17 a posthole had been dug through the west side of the grave and the insertion of this post may have been subsequent to the deposition and backfilling of this burial. Uncertainty exists over Grave 66, where a posthole appears to have been cut by the grave.

### **Timber structures - inhumations:**

Timber structures standing above and based on earth-fast posts or radially split planks may be associated with inhumation burials in two cases. A four-post structure appears to have been placed around and above the early 7th century warrior in Grave 99 (**Fig.13**) and the much shallower female burial (Grave 93) set at right-angles at his feet. There was a rectangular arrangement of six postholes around Grave 157 (**Fig.13**), which belonged to a woman wearing a buckle. This second example suggests a canopy over the grave. In both cases we should allow for the possibility that these two examples were six- and four-post cremation structures of the type recorded in another 31 instances in this cemetery, and that the inhumation graves were dug through them, either coincidentally or perhaps as the result of the continued use of the family plot where the rite had changed from cremation to inhumation.<sup>93</sup> The top fill of Grave 99 contained traces of re-deposited cremation at the south end and there was a disturbed cremation (Grave 158) very close to the edge of Grave 157, but these facts are not conclusive and on balance it is perhaps best to regard both examples as instances of canopies erected above graves which had been dug through unmarked cremation deposits belonging to an earlier generation.<sup>94</sup>

### **Timber structures - cremations:**

These appear to be based on four earth-fast posts or perhaps in some cases radially split planks. Some have a fifth posthole in the centre and one (no.10) has five

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 15

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 15



posts around the periphery.<sup>95</sup> They are in most cases associated with the deposition of cremations (according to the excavators, 31 posthole configurations were associated with cremations and 2 with inhumations).<sup>96</sup> It is not possible to demonstrate that all of the four-post structures originally enclosed a central hole which contained a cremation deposit (as Structure 32). It is possible that some of the more shallow central holes could have contained urned or un-urned cremations which had been ploughed out subsequently without leaving a trace. Structures 29 and 28 had three and two un-urned cremations placed in the postholes.

The best preserved was Structure 32 with a central cremation deposit enclosed by a shallow rectangular ditch cut at each corner by a posthole. Two of these structures (3 and 20) occur within the ring-ditches labeled N and K by the excavators. In the case of Structure 3 it is not possible to demonstrate whether it was contemporary with or postdates the ring-ditch, but two of the postholes on the northern side of Structure 20 cut the ditch, indicating that they postdate the silting of ring-ditch K. Structure 10 was distinctly different from the other postholes structures because it possessed a fifth post at its periphery. Three of the postholes were stone-packed and all five were deeper than the adjacent fence posts and were quite clearly part of the same structure.<sup>97</sup> These 31 structures vary in dimensions, ranging from 10 squares to 2.7 by 2.5 m. The absence of any sign of burning in the postholes rules out their interpretation as supports for cremation pyres.

The findings of pupae cases in Graves 10 and 14 together with the traces of silting in several other graves (in Grave 14 both found pupae cases and also traces of silting were found)<sup>98</sup> constitute important evidence that the graves and corpses deposited in these graves could have been exposed before they were finally sealed by soil. The question remains for how long and whether the corpses were deposited in the graves during this time period, or were kept in a different place and moved to the graves after some time. Even though the excavators seem sceptical about this assumption, especially in the case of the graves containing silt,

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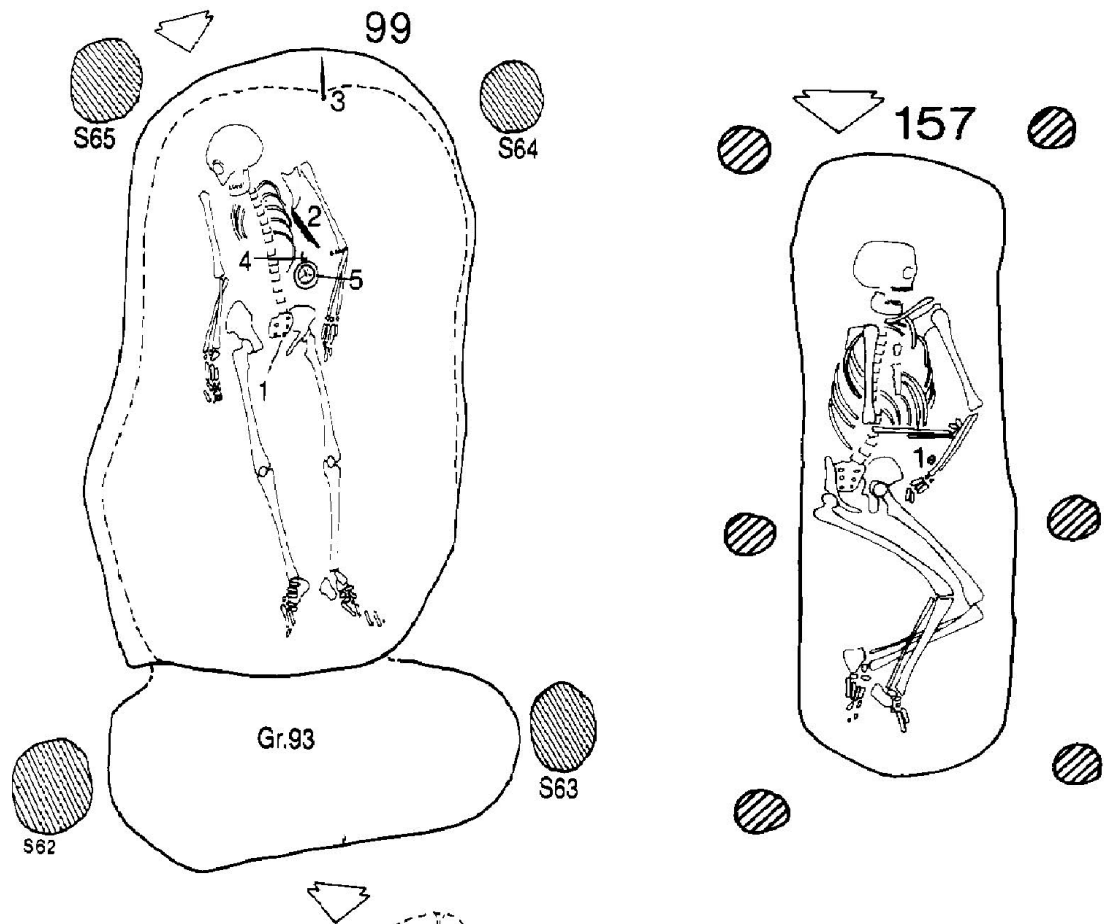
<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> See p. 78

the existence of a large number of timber structures at this cemetery, particularly in the close vicinity of these graves<sup>99</sup>, in my opinion, supports the possibility that the bodies of the deceased were exposed in these structures prior their deposition.



**Fig.13: Apple Down: Graves 99 and 157.** Reproduced from A. Down and M. Welch: *Chichester Excavations VII: Apple Down and The Mardens*, (Chichester District Council, 1990)

As I mentioned in my introduction, anthropologists and ethnographers have recorded that it is not uncommon to expose or even display the bodies of the dead

<sup>99</sup> except Grave 171

before their final deposition in the grave.<sup>100</sup> For example, Peter Metcalf records of the Berewan mausoleums:

...some are single massive posts up to forty feet tall and four feet diameter, with a small niche in the top to accommodate one small jar. Others have chambers varying in capacity from one to forty jars, supported six to thirty feet above the ground on one, two, four, five, six or nine posts, or sitting on the ground, or even underground ...<sup>101</sup>

The description of the excavation report's hypothetical reconstruction of timber structures at Apple Down suggests something similar (although the reconstruction assumes that they are at ground level [**Fig.14**])

... One [reconstruction] has the pitched roof brought down close to the ground, leaving a gap between the four corners, while the other has a roof set higher on to a wallplate above the side panels of planking or hurdling ... the urn cremations located in some of the fills of roof bearing posts could represent either foundation deposits or secondary burials inserted during repairs or post replacements...<sup>102</sup>

However, we can find similar structures not only among Berewans but also among North American Indians, and analogues were also found in other Anglo-Saxon cemeteries<sup>103</sup> and in Germany.<sup>104</sup> The excavators connect them most usually with cremations: for example Liebenau in Lower Saxony, where the structures were burned in situ in a funeral pyre, could be seen as clear evidence of their assumptions. Nevertheless, the existence of these structures connected also with inhumation at Apple Down, and the absence of any sign of burning, points probably to a different explanation.

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<sup>100</sup> See Introduction, pp. 11-15

<sup>101</sup> Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 146

<sup>102</sup> Down and Welch, *Apple Down*, p. 29

<sup>103</sup> For example Lechdale, Spong Hill

<sup>104</sup> Oldendorf, Liebenau

The assisted or monitored decomposition of a corpse prior its deposition in the "final" resting place, as a means of preventing the return of the dead is one of the most common mortuary practices, recorded by anthropologists and ethnographers. One of the possibilities and in my opinion the most feasible, is that the structures at Apple Down were "houses of the dead", where the deceased were placed and left during the transition period. This transition or liminal period when the soul of the deceased is travelling to the "beyond" constitutes an important part of mortuary rituals among many non-Christian peoples in numerous cultures<sup>105</sup> and its duration depends on a multitude of factors (**Fig.2**).<sup>106</sup>

..."Temporary" storage means a period of a few months or years, but not a few days. At least two things follow in terms of ideology. First, that dying is a slow process of transition from one spiritual state to another. Second, the process of spiritual change is disagreeable. ...others beliefs that may be found include: an emphasis on decomposition in symbols or statements referring to the recently dead; a fear of the recently dead; a fear that corpses may be horrifically reanimated; an assumption that the malice of the recently dead will gradually wane, being replaced by the benign influence of the long dead, and also that the recently dead somehow hover near human habitation, whereas the long dead are removed and anonymous...<sup>107</sup>

The complete decomposition and secondary burial of remaining bones is in some cultures ideal and the safest way to prevent the return of the dead, although, not always attainable or necessary. The partially decomposed bodies could be buried after a particular time period, mostly after the end of "rites of passage", when the soul of deceased finally arrives in the other world; or are burned to destroy even more completely the ties with the world of the living and render the corpse to ashes. We are probably dealing with both alternatives at Apple Down. The "houses of the dead" connected originally with cremations, could be used for partial or full decomposition of bodies prior to either cremation or burial. This may happen as a part of the above mentioned practices, but may have also more practical reasons. Cremation is a time consuming and expensive process, the body is mostly made from water and since decomposition helps to lessen the amount of

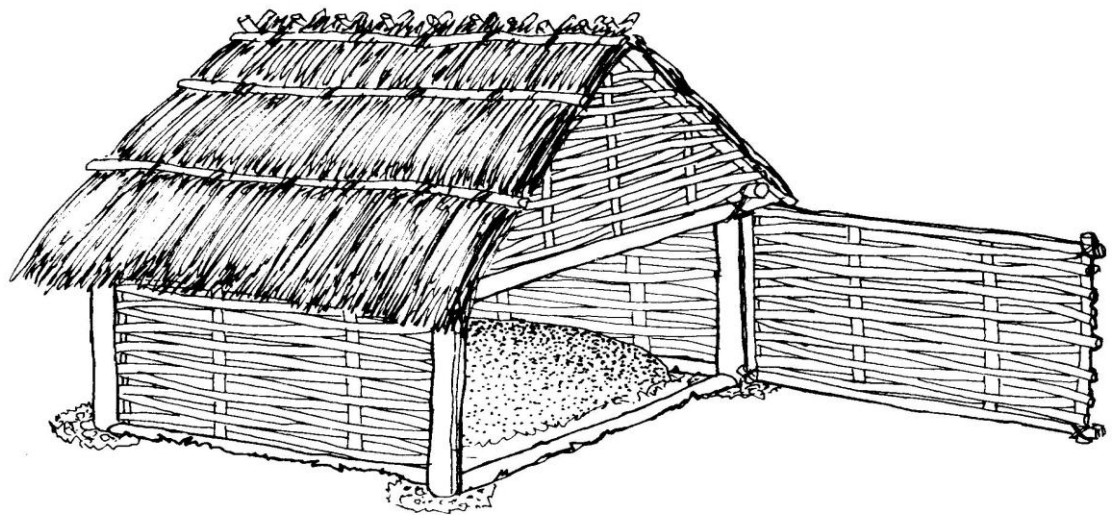
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<sup>105</sup> See Introduction, pp. 11-15

<sup>106</sup> See Introduction, p. 32

<sup>107</sup> Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 97

fluids in corpse it could also help to shorten the time needed for cremation, not to mention the amount of wood and manual labour of the bereaved needed to finish it properly. Another important factor would have been the weather and the seasons: it takes more time for body to decompose in winter than in summer.



**Fig.14: Apple Down Cemetery 1: Two alternative reconstructions of four-post timber structures.**  
Reproduced from A. Down and M. Welch: *Chichester Excavations VII: Apple Down and The Mardens*,  
(Chichester District Council, 1990)

The disturbed skeletons in Graves 19, 23, 55, 97 and especially the skeleton in Grave 55 with the left femur detached and reversed, with the "ball" end facing outwards instead of inwards, constitute clear evidence of manipulation of bodies some time after the death. The graves 19, 23 and 55 were located near each other and not far away from timber structure connected with Grave 157; Grave 97 was located near the NW corner of cemetery and in between two structures connected with cremations. The inhumations in Graves 93, 99 and 157 are directly connected with timber structures, with the "houses of the dead" placed right above them. Taking into account that some of the skeletons were more disarticulated than others,<sup>108</sup> I suggest that the bodies were left in the "houses of the dead" until the end of the "rites of passage", which were probably different for each particular person depending on social status, wealth, type of death, seasons etc.

It seems likely that decomposition preceded the majority of cremations at Apple Down, taking into account the amount of timber structures. We cannot say the same about the inhumations: however it is possible that we are dealing here with survival of old traditions in particular families, which could be supported by their location near each other and/or near the structures. The cast saucer brooches from Grave 10 (Dickinson Group 14.3) and Grave 14 (Dickinson Group 1.2) both contained pupae cases as I mentioned above. This type of brooch was found also in Grave 13. All three graves are located in proximity to each other. The woman in her early twenties from Grave 14 was buried probably within the first third of the 6th century. The date of manufacture of the brooches from Grave 10 is most likely the middle decades of 6th century, with burial no later than the third quarter of that century. "Pupae cases on the brooches suggest that this mature lady was kept waiting for some time before she was buried, as had been the younger woman in Grave 14 a generation earlier."<sup>109</sup> This assumption once again demonstrates that these "rites" (decomposition or partial decomposition before burial) were used for some time and were not only a short term trend.

The number of timber structures or "houses of the dead" at Apple Down and their connection with both cremations and inhumations points to the suggestion that

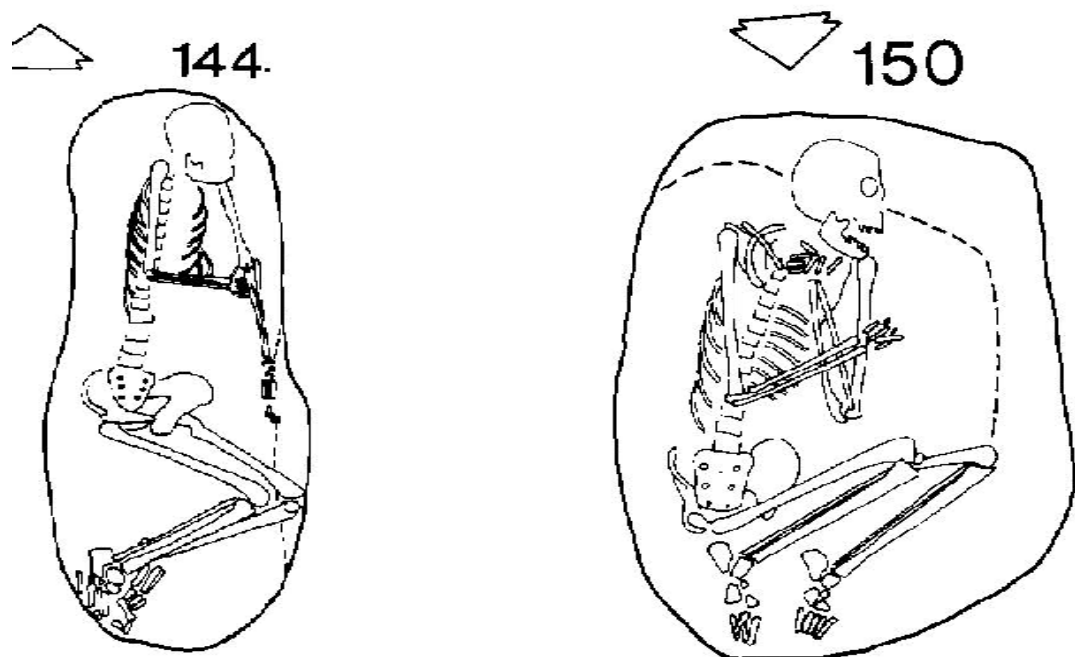
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<sup>108</sup> See above p. 88 and Appendix 1

<sup>109</sup> Down and Welch, *Apple Down*, p. 97

these burial practices were not seen as "unusual" for the community burying at this cemetery. We cannot assume that all individuals buried in these graves were seen as "deviants" and were receiving "special" funerary treatment. The fact that not all graves in the cemetery could be connected with this type of deposition, shows rather the variability of rites in the later period of the cemetery, with the influence of Christianity, which was introduced towards the very last years of its use, becoming a possible factor in attitudes towards the dead.<sup>110</sup>

If we want to look for "special" burials of people who were feared by, or considered in some way dangerous to, the community burying at Apple Down, we need to focus on two graves (Grave 144 and 150 [Fig.15]) at the north periphery of cemetery.



**Fig.15: Apple Down: Graves 144 and 150.** Reproduced from A. Down and M. Welch: *Chichester Excavations VII: Apple Down and The Mardens*, (Chichester District Council, 1990)

<sup>110</sup> See Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 107 and 156

Both graves are located at the north periphery of the cemetery, separated from the rest of the graves: Grave 144 is even surrounded by a ring ditch. The combination of shallow burials in a crouched position with separation from the others at the bottom of the hill could be a sign of the potential danger which these individuals were thought to represent. The positioning at the bottom of the hill and on its other side so that they were not visible from the main area of the cemetery, suggests even more that these two individuals were deemed as "different", either too dangerous to be buried with the rest of community or "socially" unfit or unworthy to share its the last resting place. The way of deposition supports this assumption: even though the excavators did not discover any "anti-vampire" practices such as decapitations, tied hands or legs, severed limbs and so on, these two individuals represent the clearest examples we can point to of people who appear to have been deemed a threat to the Apple Down community. While the absence of grave goods might be thought to disallow precise dating, it is also a possible indicator of a late date, suggesting that these two graves could represent a "new" way of treating the "dangerous" deceased after the cessation, under the influence of Christianity, of funerary rites connected with the houses of the dead.

### **Finglesham, Kent: Chronology c. 500-c.725**

Sonia Chadwick Hawkes dated the use of the cemetery to c. 525-725.<sup>111</sup> More recent research suggests an earlier start date, around 500.<sup>112</sup> The majority of Finglesham graves date to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and relatively few graves fall into the second half of the 6th.<sup>113</sup> According to excavators, a small cluster of early graves apparently formed a nucleus from which a large cemetery seems to have fanned out.<sup>114</sup> Guy Grainger suggested that many graves were originally covered by barrows, now all ploughed away but a number still identifiable by an encircling

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<sup>111</sup> S.Ch. Hawkes and G. Grainger: *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Finglesham, Kent*, (Oxford, 2006), p. 21

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 22



ring ditch or gully.<sup>115</sup> The bulk of these ditched graves occurred along the south-eastern edge of cemetery. It seems that late graves were located at the periphery of cemetery and could be associated with above mentioned ditches (**Fig.16**). It is also interesting that we can date majority of the "special" graves discussed below to the period 650-700.<sup>116</sup>

Kent was the first kingdom which accepted Christianity:<sup>117</sup> however, the quantity and dating of "special" graves (the majority dating to the second half of 7th century), lead me to the assumption that the beliefs and mortuary practices practiced at Finglesham differed from "official" Christian doctrine. If this assumption is correct, and the data produced above supports it, we need to ask the same questions again: What was the reason? Why were these people buried in such a way, and more specifically, at that late date? Was this a renewal of "pagan" practices initiated by disagreement with Christianity or by different reasons?

The survival of "old" beliefs among populations, early medieval and even modern day, is documented not only by archaeology, but also by contemporary sources.<sup>118</sup> However, the reasons which triggers these actions are harder to explain and even harder to prove. The woman from Grave 138 (**Fig.17**) was buried in a coffin, with a rich inventory, which included also a necklace, made from beads, silver rings and pendants. Two bronze pendants, hanging in a prominent, easily visible place on the necklace, were decorated with a cross motif formed of 3 rows of dots. On the first glance, this could be the jewellery of a pious Christian. At the same time, underneath the mandible, probably in a small leather pouch, was a Cu alloy pendant, representing a male, human face with a pair of curved "horns". The excavators described this pendant as "... clearly a pagan amulet, and its wearer may have preferred not to display it openly on the necklace with its Christian cross-decorated pendants but have to worn it hidden in a small pouch."<sup>119</sup> Moreover, it is possible that the pendant had been placed in the mouth post-

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 30

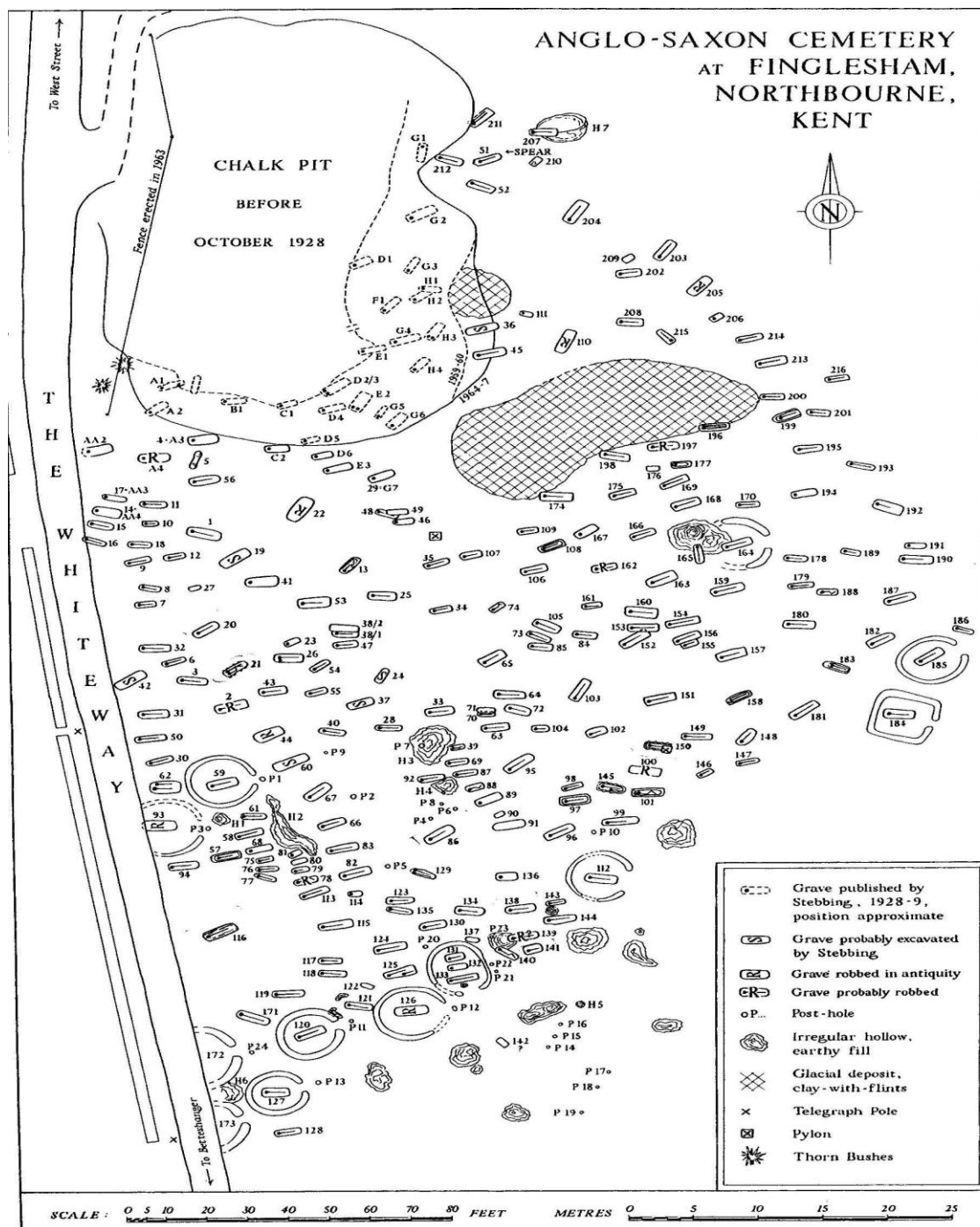
<sup>116</sup> post hole graves - G21 (650-700), G150 (675- 700); graves with stones - G20 (650- 700), G86 (650-675), G138 (675-700); graves within ditches - G59 (650- 675), G120 (650-700), G131,132,133 (620- 700), G164 (650- 700)

<sup>117</sup> Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 54-6 and 101-2

<sup>118</sup> See Chapter 3

<sup>119</sup> Hawkes and Grainger, *Finglesham*, p.100

mortem and didn't belong to the necklace<sup>120</sup>, though it had remained hidden in a leather pouch. The head on the pendant is very similar to the head of the male on the Finglesham buckle from Grave 95, the famous “Finglesham Man”.



**Fig.16: Finglesham: plan of the cemetery.** Reproduced from S.Ch. Hawkes and G. Grainger: *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Finglesham, Kent*, (Oxford, 2006)

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

Grave 95 has been dated to the second half of the 6th century<sup>121</sup> and was the last resting place of a young man approx. 18 years old. Grave 138, on the other hand, could be dated to 675- 700. Both of them were deposited in a coffin, and Grave 138 was covered by flints. Even though the time lapse between burial of these two individuals could be more than a century, an interpretation of probably the same personage or deity found its way into the inventory for their last journey. The "pagan" symbolism of both these artifacts is evident, although the purpose for wearing these images was probably different. The depiction of a male "deity" holding a spear in each hand on the buckle in alliance with spearhead found in Grave 95 is most likely to indicate the warrior status of the young man's buried within this grave. The "deity" was probably meant to protect him during battle and was placed in the grave as a part of warrior attire symbolizing young man status. On the other hand, the "pagan amulet", hidden in the mouth of a dead "Christian", is likely to have had a different meaning: protection for a safe journey to the next life or prevention against return from the grave - even more likely in view of the stones covering the top of the coffin - could be possible alternatives. The combination of Christian and "pagan" symbols in one grave argue in favour of this hypothesis, indicating the invocation of both systems of belief for the good of the deceased individual and the community. Religion was a practical thing for medieval as well as modern people, perhaps even more so, and the employment of practices forbidden by the "official" creed in order to protect the community is a trait we can observe not only in the early Middle Ages, but in the centuries to come. Rather than disagreement with Christian doctrine, these practices could be seen as a result of the inability of Christian funerary practices to prevent the "return of the dead" when the need was dire as for example during an epidemic. It is probably no-coincidence that the Grave 138 is located in the vicinity of graves within ditches which are dated to the second half of the 7th - start of the 8th century and could be seen as designed to prevent against revenants. The plague of 664-87 hit Kent very hard. According to Bede the king and Archbishop of Canterbury died on the same day in July 664.<sup>122</sup> As Marilyn Dunn remarked about this group of Finglesham's graves: "... while there is no suggestion that the kings

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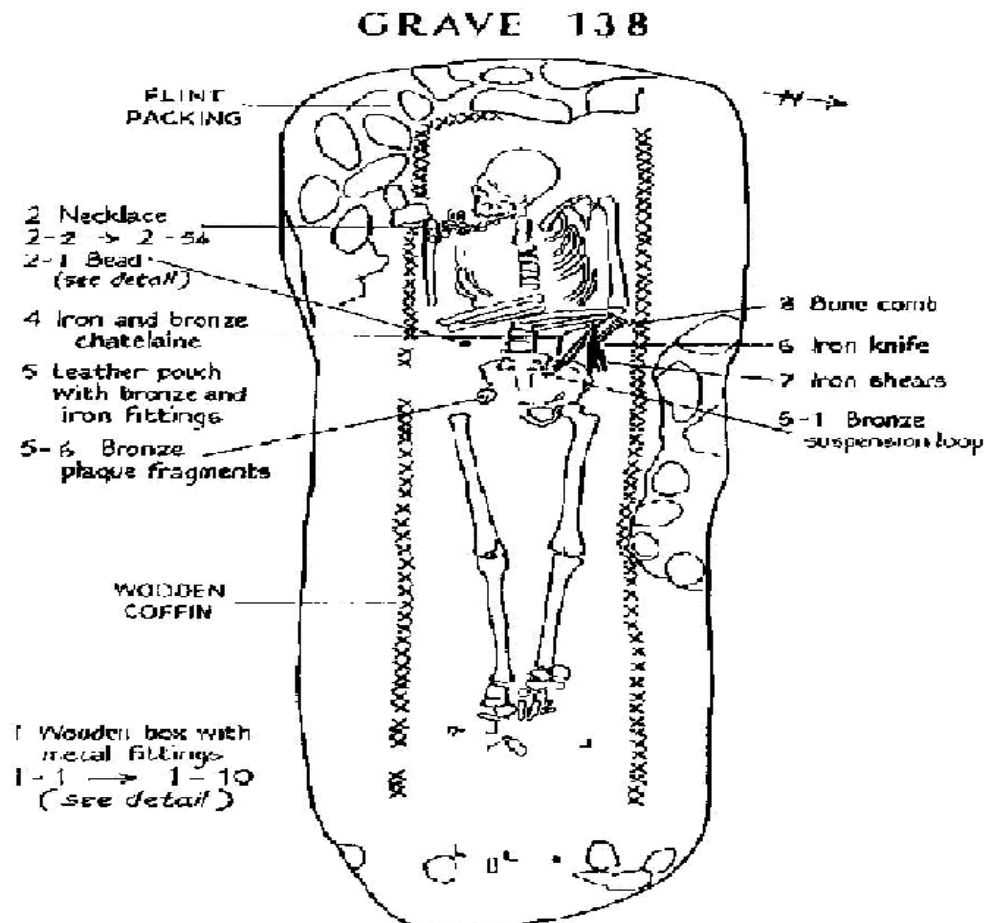
<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 21

<sup>122</sup> Bede: *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Book IV, Chapter I

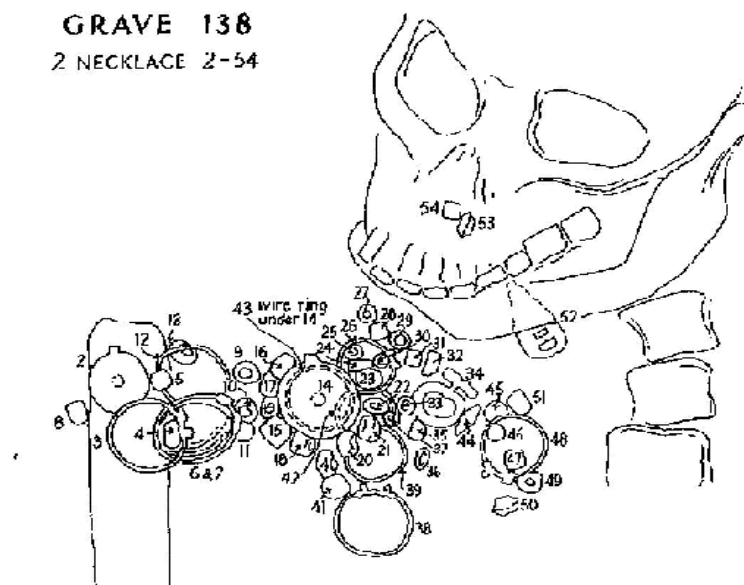
or people of Kent reverted to paganism like some of their East Saxon neighbours, a virulent outbreak of plague in some areas could have prompted a temporary return to traditional modes of inhumation, such as these late ring-ditch graves."<sup>123</sup> Despite the fact that these graves are not particularly rich in grave-goods, the amount of work needed to dig the ditches surrounding them and the high percentage of coffin usage illustrate the importance which was dedicated to the construction of this group of graves. If we take into account the idea that the individuals buried within these ditches could be the victims of plague, it is understandable that the rest of community made all possible precautions to prevent them return from the grave, employing all available means.

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<sup>123</sup> Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, p.179



**GRAVE 138**  
2 NECKLACE 2-54



**Fig.17: Finglesham: Grave 138.** Reproduced from S.Ch. Hawkes and G. Grainger: *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Finglesham, Kent*, (Oxford, 2006)

## **Were the "special dead" criminals?**

A recent and important book put forward the suggestion that a number of Anglo-Saxon “special dead” were executed criminals and that the unusual ways in which the corpses were deposited is connected with executions. At the beginning of this study Andrew Reynolds states that:

In the pre-Christian centuries Early Anglo-Saxon communities arguably marked the burials of people considered somehow different, and perhaps dangerous to the living, in distinctive ways, and certain of these locally determined but widely understood modes of treating social "others" can be observed to continue until the nineteenth century in England. A further argument of this book is that it is possible to observe a gradual process whereby local practices for marking out wrongdoers and others of whom their peers were wary came under the increasing influence of emerging political authorities, namely kings and their councillors. By the tenth century Anglo-Saxon kings operated a fearsome judicial system, although, as archaeology shows, places of execution would have been an everyday sight for both town- and country- dwellers from a much earlier period.<sup>124</sup>

I intend to look at this theory from several angles. In following section, by examining the early Anglo-Saxon law codes, I will argue against the theory "the special dead" buried at early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries were criminals and also with Reynolds' suggestion that "...places of execution would have been an everyday sight ... ....from a much earlier period (i.e. than the 10<sup>th</sup> century)..."

### **An examination of the early Anglo-Saxon Law Codes**

Four series of early Anglo-Saxon laws have been preserved. Three are Kentish and one from Wessex. The earliest are those of Aethelbert I of Kent, who was reigning at the time when the mission from Pope Gregory the Great arrived in the year 597. The exact dates at which the laws were issued is not certainly known,

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<sup>124</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 1

but it was evidently after Aethelbert's conversion.<sup>125</sup> The second series of laws bears the names of Hlothere, who reigned from 673 to 685, and Eadric, Hlothere's brother. Hlothere died of wounds received in battle against the South Saxons, whom Eadric had brought against him. Eadric succeeded to the throne and reigned for a year and half.<sup>126</sup> The third code was issued by Wihtred, brother of Eadric, who succeeded to the throne after a few years. "The time was evidently one of great disturbance in the south east of England. The Mercian power seems to have temporarily broken down, and the kings of Essex, Wessex, Sussex and Kent were all struggling for mastery."<sup>127</sup> Wihtred succeeded in the autumn of 690 and his laws appear to have been issued in the autumn of 695. Peace was made with Ine, king of Wessex, the author of our fourth set of laws, in the preceding year and the fact that one of Wihtred's laws (28) is practically identical with one of Ine's (20), points to communication between the two courts<sup>128</sup>, or to the influence of Church and its dignitaries, which is clearly visible in both. The exact date of the law code of Ine of Wessex is uncertain, but most likely falls between 688 and 694<sup>129</sup>, a date also supported by the similarities in a number of clauses just mentioned. It is possible that we do not have Ine's laws in their original seventh-century form. In the ninth century, Alfred of Wessex mentions in the prologue to his laws that he rejected earlier laws which he disliked. He did not specify what laws he omitted, but if they were the ones no longer relevant in his own time, it cannot be assumed that the surviving version of Ine's laws is complete.

The law code of Aethelbert, although issued after his conversion and opening with compensations for theft of Church property (no. 1), seem in general not to be influenced by Christian principles. One of the possible reasons could be that these law codes were originally oral texts, "as is the case of customary law among pre-literate societies"<sup>130</sup>, and that they were committed to writing with the help of

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<sup>125</sup> F. L. Attenborough: *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, (Cambridge, 1922), p.2

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34

<sup>130</sup> P. Lendinara: "The Kentish Laws", in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration period to the eight century an ethnographic perspective*, edited by J. Hines, (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 211- 245

Christian missionaries who arrived in Kent around the beginning of 7th century, or were written even later than Aethelbert's own time.<sup>131</sup>

The "introductory" clue is the privileged position given to the Church by Aethelbert's laws, in as much as theft of Church property required elevenfold compensation as against ninefold for theft of the king's property. There must have been the hand of missionaries or the Church in this transcription....It would be not outlandish to think that a Christian mission arriving in England, realizing that the population was in a pre-literate state in which customary law was entrusted to the memory of elders, thought they would make themselves useful to the population, and at the same time strengthen the position of the king who protected them, by writing them down in the vernacular.<sup>132</sup>

Given these facts, Aethelbert's laws most likely represent the "old customary laws" of Kentish society before the Christianization and in that case also serve as an important starting point in an evaluation of early Anglo-Saxon judicial dealings, in particular if we take into account that they may not change substantially under the influence of Christianity<sup>133</sup>.

The following clauses deal with the king and list of compensations paid to him for various offences. Clauses 4, 5, 6, 7 are the first to assess what we might call "criminal deeds" - stealing from the king, murder in king's presence and several cases of murder of a freeman, or a smith in the king's service and so on :

10. If a freeman should steal from the king, let him compensate with 9-fold compensation.

11. If a person should kill someone in the king's dwelling, let him pay 50 shillings.

12. If a person kills a free man, 50 shillings to the king as lord-payment.

13. If [a person] kills the king's official [?,] smith or ? herald/guide, let him pay an ordinary person-price.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 231-232

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 232

<sup>133</sup> except Aethelbert I

<sup>134</sup> L. Oliver: *The Beginning of English Law*, (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2002)



It is noteworthy that all of these cases are to be resolved by monetary compensations without any capital punishment for the perpetrator. These clauses are followed by several relating to freemen and although there are several punishments for slaying either a freeman or a slave, all of them are again resolved by financial compensations. The majority of the remaining part of Aethelbert's law code (33 - 72) deals with compensations for damaged body parts, with women's rights and the financial rights and privileges of widows (73- 85), servants and slaves. Even though theft and murder figure in some of these clauses too, the resolution is once again compensation.

The Laws of Hlothere and Eadric consist of a series of judgments, and while providing historical information about Kentish compensation and management of public order, this text focuses more on procedure than do the other two Kentish codes. Moreover, there are no provisions directly related to the Church. The compensations are ordered according to offence, as was the case in Aethelbert's laws, rather than according to social rank. The only exception seems to be the last clause, which deals with the acquisition of property in London. As in the laws of Aethelbert, the penalties are monetary without any capital punishment.

The laws of Wihtred are primarily concerned with religious affairs; only the last four of its twenty-eight chapters do not deal with ecclesiastical matters. The first clause of the code gives the Church freedom from taxation. Subsequent clauses specify penalties for irregular marriages, heathen worship, work on the Sabbath, and breaking fasts, among other things; and they also define how members of each class of society—such as the king, bishops, priests, ceorls, and esnes—can clear themselves by giving an oath. In addition to the focus of the laws themselves, the introduction makes clear the importance of the Church in the legislative process. Bertwald, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was present at the assembly which devised the decrees, and so was Gefmund, the Bishop of Rochester; and "every order of the Church of that nation spoke in unanimity with the loyal people".<sup>135</sup> The last four clauses deal with penalties for theft and murder, and we encounter here for the first time the option to put the accused to death, depending on the king's wishes.

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<sup>135</sup> Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest Kings*, p. 25

21. If a person seizes a free man having [the goods in] hand, then the king rules one of three things: either one should kill him, or sell [him] across the sea, or release him in return for his *wergild*.

21.1. He who seizes and delivers him [the thief], owns him half; if he [the thief] is killed, let them be paid 70 shillings.

22. If a slave steals and a person redeems him: 70 shillings, whichever the king wants

22.1. If he [the slave] is put to death, one should pay the owner half his [the slave's] value."

However, it is clear that the option to deal with these "crimes" through compensation is still open.

The provisions for slaves are an important indicator of the use - or not – of the death penalty. The major source of slaves in the early Anglo-Saxon period was war. According to David Pelteret in his study *Slavery in Early Medieval England*, there is ample evidence to show that at least until the eighth century wars of conquest and inter-tribal strife were a fertile source of slaves, and he notes that the Anglo-Saxons continued to take slaves in war right into the tenth century.<sup>136</sup> By the reign of Alfred we should regard the Anglo-Saxons as major participants in the slave-trade.<sup>137</sup> Pelteret mentions a treaty between a *rex Anglorum* and *rex Langobardorum*:

...which exempted Anglo-Saxons from the payment of tolls in return of three-yearly payments of such a desirable goods as refined silver, long and short haired greyhounds, shields, spears, and swords. Though the clause containing this agreement does not specify that these Anglo-Saxons had been tithed nor does it indicate what goods they have been bringing with them, the preceding clause in the text declares that all traders entering Lombardy by specific routes had to pay a tithe on horses, male and female slaves, wool, linen, and canvas cloth, tin and swords.

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<sup>136</sup> D.A.E. Pelteret: *Slavery in early medieval England: From the reign of Alfred until the twelfth century*, (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 70

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

All these were products for which England become famous, and mention of tin is perhaps the clearest indication that the two clauses should be associated with each other.<sup>138</sup>

Though this refers to a later period, it is apparent that a slave was an important commodity not only as a worker, but also as a trade article. The law codes points to the fact that precautions have been taken to avoid wasting such a valuable work and monetary resource, and to apply the death penalty only as a last resort.

The prologue to Ine's laws lists his advisors. Three people are named: bishops Hedde and Erconwald, and Ine's father, King Cenred. Ine was a Christian king, whose intent to encourage Christianity is clear from the laws. The oath of a communicant, for example, is declared to carry more weight than that of a non-Christian; and baptism and religious observance are also addressed. Significant attention is also paid to civil issues— more so than in the contemporary Kentish laws.

Another law specifies that anyone accused of murder required at least one high-ranking person among his "oath-helpers". An oath-helper would swear an oath on behalf of an accused man, to clear him from the suspicion of the crime. Ine's requirement implies that he did not trust an oath sworn only by peasants. It may represent a significant change from an earlier time when a man's kin were expected to support him with oaths.

As in Wihtréd's laws, it is possible to punish the person who fights in the king's house by death, according to the king's wishes.

"6. If anyone fights in king's house, he shall forfeit all his property, and it shall be for the king to decide whether he shall be put to death or not."

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 74

However, as before, monetary compensation is still possible. In contrast, in clause 24 the punishment for the escape of "...an Englishman in penal slavery..."<sup>139</sup> is hanging. This is the first time when we encounter this specific type of execution in Anglo-Saxon law-codes. Moreover, the clause contains no mention of any mention of possible compensation.

Ine's laws are in some ways more elaborate and advanced than the Kentish laws, even though they are similar to Wihtred's, as I have mentioned above. We can clearly see some differences in the rights and punishments for English (*Engliscmon*) and Welsh (*Wealh*). *Wealh* seems to have had its original meaning "a foreigner". As Alfred Smyth pointed out:

The coining of such a definitive term as "foreigner", and its use in a generic sense by the English towards the Welsh or by the Irish towards Scandinavian invaders, shows that in the Early Middle Ages some people were more "foreign" than others. For while the English viewed the Welsh as *Wealh*, they regarded their Scandinavian enemies in the ninth and tenth centuries - however "heathen" - for the Danes (*Danescan*) that they were - at a time when Irish observers applied the generic label "foreigners" to the same enemy from Scandinavia. But while the Welsh were "foreign" to the English, to Irish observers the Welsh were "Britons" - those sub-Roman inhabitants of what was once the Roman province of Britannia.<sup>140</sup>

David Pelteret, similarly suggested that the word *Wealh* was early used to indicate "a foreigner of British origin", "a Celt" and in English sources (mainly south-western) it also acquired the sense "a Celtic slave" or simply "slave", presumably because many of the conquered Celts in the south-west of Britain were enslaved by the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>141</sup> Pelteret also suggests that if the conquered society was sufficiently large, as was the case of Celts in Britain, tribal law might even have

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<sup>139</sup> Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest Kings*, p. 45

<sup>140</sup> A. Smyth: "The emergence of the English Identity, 700-1000", in ed. by A. Smyth: *Medieval Europeans: studies in ethnic identity and national perspectives in medieval Europe*, (London, 1998), pp. 24-52

<sup>141</sup> Pelteret, *Slavery in early medieval England*, p. 43

been forced to recognise the rights of the conquered people, merely indicating their subject position by according them a lower legal status than the members of the conquering group,<sup>142</sup> which seems to have been the case with Ine's *Wealas*.

Ine's laws also shows more sophisticated judicial procedures with capital punishment as one of the outcomes for perpetrators, and in Clause 24 we can for the first time encounter a situation when compensation is not an option and the final outcome is capital punishment alone:

24. If an Englishman (living) in penal slavery absconds, he shall be hanged, and nothing shall be paid to his lord.

- 1. If he is slain, nothing shall be paid for him to his kinsmen if they have left him unransomed for twelve months.
- 2. The wergeld of a Welshman who holds five hides of land shall be 600 shillings.<sup>143</sup>

Nevertheless, the exact judicial practices for particular types of "crime" (except the above mentioned hanging for the escaped English slave) are missing and we can only speculate as to how these "executions" were performed. One relevant piece of evidence, however, may be provided by the corpses discovered at the Littleton cemetery, which were decapitated and it is possible that the majority of these individuals had been executed.<sup>144</sup> It is probably not coincidence that this cemetery is the only one in this study located in Wessex and in the vicinity of Winchester as seat of power, which most likely played an important role in the exercise of royal power. The law codes do not mention decapitation as a possible way of execution, though taking into account the archaeological sources, it would seem that this practice was the preferred form at least in the Winchester area.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-35

<sup>143</sup> Ine 24

<sup>144</sup> See also pp.53-57

Another interesting fact is the possibility of avoiding the death penalty by fleeing to a church:

5. If anyone is liable to the death penalty, and he flees to a church, his life shall be spared and he shall pay such compensation as he is directed (to pay) by legal decision.

- 1. If anyone renders himself liable to the lash and flees to the church, he shall be immune from scourging.<sup>145</sup>

Our examination of early Anglo-Saxon law codes demonstrates that the clauses dealing with "criminal behaviour" changed and become more advanced and elaborate. The change is most visible in Wihtred's and Ine's laws: in both we encounter the possibility of punishing crimes by death; moreover, Ine's laws contain clauses sentencing escaped slaves to hanging. Monetary compensation is one of the possibilities in the former, but not in the latter example. Christian influence is undisputable in both: however, the fact that Ine's laws are clearly more focused on dealing with "crimes" and their punishment than Wihtred's, which are more concerned with religious affairs, could well indicate that Christianity and the Church were not the major factors leading to the introduction of the death penalties, at least in this time period. This suggestion seems to be lent further support by the sanctuary clause<sup>146</sup>, which arguably represents some desire on the part of the Church to help people sentenced to death rather than to support executions in every case. The reason for different laws in contemporary Wessex and Kent could be more influenced by geographical, political and social (Welsh - English/ slave - freeman) issues – discussed above.

To conclude this short survey of early Anglo-Saxon laws, it is certainly the case that the development of law codes is evident and at the end of 7th century we encounter the change from compensation to capital punishment in particular cases. Nevertheless, to speak about places of execution as "... an everyday sight

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<sup>145</sup> Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest kings*, p. 39

<sup>146</sup> Ine 5, and see also above

for both town and country-dwellers..."<sup>147</sup> is not borne out by the textual evidence of the codes themselves. These suggest a gradual introduction of the death penalty in a limited number of cases, with compensation, sale into slavery and sanctuary as possible alternatives.

### **"Places of execution"**

Andrew Reynolds states at the beginning of his study that:

It would be unwise to think of deviant burials in the community cemeteries of the fifth and sixth centuries as the result of secular judicial behaviour, although an unknowable proportion may well represent the straightforward killing of individuals for wrongs committed against others. Rather, it seems that local community-based practice determined the way that an individual was treated if he or she had contravened social norms. The variation of grave furnishing of deviant burials in early Anglo-Saxon period, especially the "cunning women", indicates that prone burial and other comparable rites were applied both to "positively" powerful individuals and to more straightforward wrongdoers in the case of poorly furnished burials, although a superstitious motive underlies the range.<sup>148</sup>

Though Reynolds acknowledged a variety of reasons for 'deviant' burials, his association between "more straightforward wrongdoers" and "poorly furnished burials" is not supported so clearly by the archaeological evidence. Yet Reynolds develops the hypothesis that many of the 'deviants' were criminals to constitute to one of the major points of his study. Even though he recognizes the importance of the beliefs leading to these practices, he is still more focused on the possibility of potential "criminal" behaviour, than on alternative understandings of these rites in the context of everyday life in early medieval community. This is evident also when he writes:

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<sup>147</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 1

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236

A crucial development in the process of kingdom-formation surely comes when authority is extended beyond immediate kin or folk, and it can be argued that such a situation requires a more permanent display of authority and status. It is proposed here that such requirements were met not only by structural display and military campaign, but also by the administration of justice, the erection of gallows, and the incorporation of existing markers of outcast status with regard to modes of burial.<sup>149</sup>

The administration of justice is indisputably one of the markers indicating the rise of the king's authority and status, although we can only wonder whether the erection of gallows were amongst the most effective or most popular instruments of doing so in this time period. Moreover, the post holes connected with "special burials" and categorised as possible execution places by Reynolds are in first place too sporadic and inconclusive, as for example at Sutton Hoo and Ashted<sup>150</sup>, where the placing of post holes has a similar pattern to Apple Down cemetery, where the function of post holes was not that of a gallows.<sup>151</sup> Secondly, they could be interpreted also as the places for deposition of "special" or "dangerous" dead without any "criminal" background in the earlier period with which we are concerned here. Reynolds himself states that "...evidence for judicial processes from archaeological excavations and from charters potentially reflects an increase in wrongdoing from the tenth century..."<sup>152</sup> and this later period may be the time when we can begin to speak about execution cemeteries *per se*. Even if we were to theoretically accept that in the earlier period "criminals" were buried besides other categories of "special" dead and the same practices were used, "the incorporation of existing markers of outcast status with regard to the modes of burial" is understandable and could be interpreted as evidence of the practical thinking of early medieval people. "Criminals" in the same sense as "overly violent" or "dangerous" people also fits very well into the more general category of people who need to be treated more cautiously after death and to which "special" practices have to be applied in order to keep them safely in the graves.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 159 fig. 40

<sup>151</sup> See more pp. 80-86

<sup>152</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 245



A similar way of thinking is visible also in Reynolds' theory about changing perceptions about liminal places and "special" ways of deposition:

A point of particular interest from the seventh and eight centuries onwards is the fusion of age-old modes of marking outcast status in the form of prone burial, decapitation, stoning, and amputation, with such burials often placed at the edge of community cemeteries, with newly developing concepts involving the use of landscape, specifically the boundaries of local territories, and the redefinition in a negative way of perceptions of ancient monuments, namely barrows and linear earthworks.<sup>153</sup>

The issue raised in this quotation is interesting, although the proposed "negative perception" statement could be seen as one sided and focused only to support Reynolds' theory. The old monuments as "liminal places", or nodes connecting "the world of the living" and "the world of the dead" could also be regarded as obvious loci in which to depose the "special" dead.<sup>154</sup> The symbolism of these places could be understood not only in Reynolds' negative way, but also more positively - the closeness of both worlds making it easier for the souls of "dangerous" or "special" dead to cross and in that case helping to prevent their return.

The "negative" tinge connected with the "special" dead became more evident in the later period and is tied in with the greater influence of Christianity and consequent shifts in thinking. As Reynolds states:

There is evidence from Lewes to support the notion that deviant burial cemeteries are largely pre-Conquest phenomena, with certain sites continuing in use into the twelfth century. After the Norman Conquest executed criminals might be buried in monastic hospital cemeteries ..., ...it seems that from the twelfth century executed

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 237

<sup>154</sup> See more in H. Williams: "Monuments and the past in early Anglo-Saxon England", in *World Archaeology*, Vol.30, No. 1 (June 1998), pp. 90-108 and S. Semple: "A Fear of the Past: The Place of Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England", in *World Archaeology*, Vol.30, No. 1 (June 1998), pp. 109- 126

felons were commonly buried in enclosed consecrated cemeteries administered by religious authorities, ...the burial of outcasts in hospital cemeteries may indicate a desire to bury criminals alongside the corpses of the sick, all being regarded as "unclean" ...; ...the changes visible in the treatment of wrongdoers in the century following the Norman conquest suggest a slackening of the ideological fervour which had apparently motivated the Late Anglo-Saxon state.<sup>155</sup>

Though the influence of the Church is evident, it is possible to contest Reynolds's idea that only reason to bury these "outcasts" in hospital cemeteries is their association with "uncleanness".

The combination of "old anti-vampire" practices with Christian ritual demonstrates that early medieval people used all available means to protect themselves against the return of the dead.

Another interesting point about the execution cemeteries raised by Reynolds is:

A final point relating to the longevity of execution cemeteries is how few victims they contain. If sites like such as Stockbridge Down and Sutton Hoo functioned for up to 500 years, then a very crude reckoning indicates one execution every ten years: a figure that further necessitates a reappraisal of the severity and "barbarity" of judicial practice in Anglo-Saxon England during the Christian centuries.<sup>156</sup>

This figure also necessitates a reappraisal of Reynolds' own theory about execution cemeteries. Reynolds here raises questions about the scarcity of executions: this does not fit with his argument about "rabid lawmaking" and indeed might be another indication that these individuals were not "criminals". Moreover, as I have already pointed out earlier in this chapter, old barrows and mounds and most of the execution cemeteries in Reynolds' study are connected with these monuments, were deemed as "liminal" places, where it was much

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<sup>155</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, pp. 245 -246

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 247

easier for the dead to cross into the "other world" and in that case used frequently for deposition of these "special" individuals.<sup>157</sup>

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Taking into account the archaeological sources, identifying "special dead" at Anglo-Saxon cemeteries as "law offenders/criminals" emerges as a one-sided interpretation. Several important points might be regarded as telling against it:

- Most of the individuals in question are buried at cemeteries which were used by whole community and not at the isolated spots where we find the later "execution" cemeteries. Nevertheless, we must admit that some of them were located near the borders of the burial grounds or separated from the others by specific features (ditches, palisades etc.).
- Not all of these graves were without grave goods or only poorly furnished, which is one of the signs of the burial of a criminal. On the contrary, in many cases the "special" graves were amongst the most richly furnished in the cemetery.
- The state of skeletal remains does not allow us to determine the precise cause of death in all instances<sup>158</sup>, for example in the case of hanging. The "running noose"<sup>159</sup> method of hanging "... cuts off the arterial blood supply to the brain by occluding the carotid arteries and also interferes with breathing by compressing the vagus nerves in the nerves. There is usually no disarticulation of the neck nor is any bony damage caused."<sup>160</sup> As Reynolds remarked "... while long-drop hangings are more likely to leave distinctive indications on the skeleton, a study of modern hangings ... ..

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<sup>157</sup> See p. 103 and footnote 154 for more

<sup>158</sup> damaged bones, some bones dissolved because of soil profile etc.

<sup>159</sup> method used until 1760 when new method was introduced at Tyburn - long-drop method, which given the long drop of the body breaks the neck immediately

<sup>160</sup> A. Waldron: "The Human Remains"; in R. Poulton: "Rescue excavations on an Early Saxon Cemetery Site and a Later (Probably Late Saxon) Execution Site at the Former Goblin Works, Ashted, Near Leatherhead", *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 79, pp. 71- 91

concluded ... that only 8 percent displayed fracture of the hyoid bone, while fracture of cervical vertebrae was found only when a substantial drop is involved in the hanging...", and he continued with the statement that "...the hyoid bone itself very rarely survives in archaeological contexts, and even though elements of it might be preserved, they may not be recovered during excavation."<sup>161</sup> Simon Mays' case study illustrating the effects of recovery factors and bone survival on the composition of skeletal assemblage showed that:

...the sternum, vertebrae, ribs and hyoid are elements which have high proportions of trabecular bone and these tend to be under-represented compared with, for example, the limb bones, which have high proportions of dense, strong cortical bone. ...The hyoid bone is particularly poorly represented; this may be because it is rather more fragile even than other bones with high trabecular bone contents, but may also be because it is often omitted from standard skeleton recording sheets used in the field, and hence overlooked by excavators unaware of its existence.<sup>162</sup>

These facts led Reynolds to the assumption that "...the identification of Anglo-Saxon hangings, therefore, is much more reliant on circumstantial evidence, such as the tying and flexion of hands."<sup>163</sup> However, tied and flexed hands could be seen not only as proof of execution. As I have stressed in several occasions throughout this study, tying of hands and legs is one of the ways of deposition of the "special" dead to prevent their movement and return from the grave. Moreover, when combined with other techniques, as for example prone burial, stones over or through the body, placement in the coffin and etc., it is more likely that these individuals were perceived as the "dangerous dead" rather than being criminals.

Considering all the above, the individuals buried in the graves examined in the thesis do not fit the profile of criminals, even as portrayed in the contemporary

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<sup>161</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 39

<sup>162</sup> S. Mays: *The Archaeology of Human Bones*, (London, 1998), p. 23 and also Fig. 2.6 at p. 24

<sup>163</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 39

law codes. The assumption that the early Anglo-Saxon kings took over the powers of execution after Christianization is not sufficiently attested either by the law codes or the archaeological sources. There is not sufficient proof that "special" dead are execution victims: what marked them "special" depended more on factors connected with everyday life inside the community, physical appearance and circumstances of death, than on their criminal behaviour, although we cannot discard the possibility that some of these individuals could be persons who broke the rules and laws of the community. Moreover, Reynolds pointed out that the ratio between the duration and amount of possible victims of execution at particular cemeteries actually speaks against a high number of executions.<sup>164</sup> The influence of Christianity on "rabid lawmaking" could be also challenged if we take into account the sanctuary clause, which guaranteed safe haven for those condemned to the death penalty.<sup>165</sup>

### **"Special" treatment of individuals**

In his summary of his research Andrew Reynolds stated that the explanations for individual "deviant" burial rites in the pre-Christian period lead to three major conclusions:

... first, that there was a developed sense of the "powerful dead" and that specific burial rites were applied in a range of circumstances but with common motive to lay potentially troublesome individuals in the grave without fear of their returning to inhabit the world of living; secondly, that the deviant burial rites were commonly understood throughout England in the period prior to centralized authority; and thirdly, that a concept of liminality can be observed in the context of community burial grounds...<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 247

<sup>165</sup> Ine 6

<sup>166</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 236

Moreover, he continued that:

.....it would be unwise to think of deviant burials in community cemeteries of the fifth and sixth centuries as the result of judicial behaviour, although an unknowable proportion may well represent the straightforward killing of individuals for wrongs committed against others. Rather, it seems that a local community-based practice determined the way that an individual was treated if he or she had contravened social norms. The variation of grave furnishing of deviant burials in the early Anglo-Saxon period, especially the "cunning women", indicates that prone burial and other comparable rites were applied both to "positively" powerful individuals and more straightforward wrongdoers in the case of poorly furnished or unfurnished burials, although a superstitious motive underlies the range..."<sup>167</sup>

While the results of my research shares similarities with Reynolds' conclusions, this statement could be seen as quite a simplification of this phenomenon. The archaeological material demonstrates that the sense of "deviant"/"powerful" dead, as Reynolds calls them - or "special", which I would suggest as more appropriate term for this kind of individual - was developed not only among 5th/6th century Anglo-Saxons, but could be attested before and also after this period. I agree with Reynolds that the common motive was to "... lay potentially troublesome individuals in the grave without fear of their returning to inhabit the world of living..."<sup>168</sup> and that the specific burials rites were applied in a range of circumstances. Nevertheless, the material collected in this chapter has allowed me to examine more specifically the ways in which a "special" individual was treated and why.

Multiple occurrences of certain ways of deposition indicated that each community employed a "special" way of depositing these individuals, either decapitating them, burying them prone, covering them with stones or letting them decompose prior to final deposition. The only cemetery in this study which we can connect, at least partially, with "straightforward wrongdoers" or "criminals" is Littleton Old Dairy Cottage. The cut marks on several bodies suggest that they have been decapitated,

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 236

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

though we cannot determine precisely if the act was the cause of the death or inflicted post-mortem. However, closer examination of this cemetery, especially the Graves 117, 125 and 129 suggest that it could have been used initially for the deposition of "the special dead" and only later transformed into an "execution cemetery." Therefore, it is possible to assume that its liminal position, together with certain similarities in the perception of the "special" dead and "criminals" and other factors described earlier in this chapter predetermined its initial function as a place for deposition of "dangerous"/ "special" dead and its later use for "straightforward wrongdoers".

In some cases several of the "special" practices were used together at the same cemetery, either on one individual or as variation among deposited "special" dead. A nice example of the first is West Heslerton and of the latter, Empingham.

At Empingham we find prone burials ( Graves 5, 53, 107, 113A, 113B, 122 and 125), burials with missing heads (Graves 21, 27, 44, 61 and 82) and burials with post mortem dislocation of the bones (Graves 98, 123, 129, 130 and 131)<sup>169</sup>. Although all twelve "special" burials at West Heslerton were prone (Graves 6, 16, 17, 70, 89, 113, 114, 118, 126, 132, 155 and 166), some of them have been marked as "live burials" (Graves 6, 70, 89 and 113), in some cases their hands or legs were tied (Graves 17, 114 and 132) and some were deposited in small, cramped graves (Graves 16, 126, 133 and 126).<sup>170</sup> But was it because these individuals contravened social norms as Reynolds' approach suggested?

It is a fact that Empingham is one of the few cemeteries, and the only one in this study, where we can observe several types of deposition for the "special" dead. As I suggested in the section devoted to Empingham, the broad spectrum of "unusual" burial rites applied at Empingham could be seen as proof that the community burying their dead at the cemetery employed different types of deposition for particular "types" of individuals. However, the archaeological material is not conclusive enough to allow us to make more specific links. If we take into account Jane Timby's suggestion that it may be that the ethnic origins of

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<sup>169</sup> See above pp. 64-72

<sup>170</sup> See above pp. 64-72

the families burying at Empingham had some influence on burial orientation<sup>171</sup> it is possible to propose a similar theory about the variation in deposition of "special" dead - it could be the result of different cultural backgrounds or even represent a survival of ancestral beliefs which could vary from family to family.

In contrast with Empingham the "special" way of deposition at West Heslerton was represented only by prone burials, although with some variations, which probably depended on how dangerous the deceased was thought to be for the community.<sup>172</sup> However, we can recognize at this cemetery a certain "social" stratification.<sup>173</sup> Some of the burials, especially those of potential "cunning women", were more richly furnished than others, while some were without grave goods: a number of these individuals were deposited in narrow graves, scarcely large enough to contain them. Even though it is possible to observe here a kind of hierarchy, under closer investigation Reynolds' statement that these rites were applied both to "positively" powerful and more "straightforward wrongdoers"<sup>174</sup> is not only an over-simplification but is actually inappropriate in this case. While I agree with his notion about the "positive" role of "cunning women", which is supported by the quantity, quality and "magical" attributes of their grave goods, together with the position of their burials in midst of "normal" graves (rather than at the cemetery periphery), I cannot agree with classification of the remaining graves as the last resting place of "more straightforward wrongdoers". Moreover, the positive role of "cunning" women could be overshadowed by the fact that they were after death deemed as "dangerous" for the community, just as the rest of the "special" dead at West Heslerton. Taking into account this assumption, we can see "social" stratification from an alternative point of view.

The main reason for deposition of these individuals in a particular way was most likely the potential damage which it was considered they could inflict on the community after their death. The variation in deposition was determined by a number of factors: for example, if these individuals "cooperated" with the powers of the other world, either in a positive or a negative sense during their lives

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<sup>171</sup> Timby, *Empingham II*, p. 16

<sup>172</sup> See above pp. 72-85

<sup>173</sup> See above p. 84

<sup>174</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 236



("cunning women", shamans and etc.); their physical appearance (disabled persons); their behaviour and deeds during their lifetime; or circumstances of their death. Here we have a "social stratification of the dead" depending on these factors more than on the person's actual social position during life, even if some of individuals were treated with more care than others. Even a person with "high social status" could be buried in a "special" or "unusual" way as we can observe in case of "cunning" women. Therefore, an "unusual"/ "special" burial is not to be seen automatically as some kind of "social degradation", or a mark of "social outcast" or "deviant", but rather as a way of dealing with particular individuals, taking into consideration the range of factors just mentioned. Even though some of these practices could be seen from modern point of view as cruel, barbaric or too superstitious, their main reason was maintaining the equilibrium between the worlds of the living and the dead: the means were dictated by the outcome. Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington noted when they discussed the attitudes to death and the decomposition of the corpse that:

...for Berewans, with their fluttering spirits, corruption is an ugly necessity; only through it can the soul be released from appalling bonds of flesh. But for the Mambai, the same process takes on a positive, life-renewing quality in and of itself. Where the Borneans, ...equate the fate of the soul with the fate of the corpse, the Mambai make an even stronger association. For them, disposal of the corpse affects the fate of the whole world of living things. ...it explains why the Berewan recover the bones of the deceased, and also why the Mambai sit by and watch for as long as they can tolerate it, while the corpses of their kin rot away...<sup>175</sup>

The point which I want to raise for consideration is not to suggest that the beliefs of Anglo-Saxons and Berewan/Mambai were the same; but that viewing "unusual" ways of disposition among Anglo-Saxons from this angle would support the suggestion that these practices, often characterized as burials of "deviants", were in most cases not acts arising from dislike but from necessity, so

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<sup>175</sup> Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, p. 107

as to prevent "...the cosmos to be thrown out of kilter; plants would not grow to nourish humans, and children would not be born..."<sup>176</sup>

What we would regard as an "unusual" way of deposition is not always a mark of a "special" individual. The cemetery at Apple Down demonstrates that a "special" way of deposition, in this case exposure of a body prior the final deposition into the grave, was not deemed special for community burying here.<sup>177</sup> The archaeological material from this cemetery points to an assumption that decomposition preceded a majority of the cremations at Apple Down, taking into account the amount of timber structures, not to mention the fact that cremation was practiced until the second half of 7th century.<sup>178</sup> It is not possible to say the same about inhumations, however; looking at the close proximity of some of them to timber structures and finds of pupae cases in inhumation Graves 10 and 14 allows the suggestion that these practices constituted a respected tradition. The categories of "special" or "deviant" individuals at Apple Down is rather represented by two burials in crouched position without grave goods, in shallow graves separated from the others at the other side of the hill<sup>179</sup>, which, as argued earlier in this chapter, could represent a new way of the treating the "dangerous" deceased after the cessation or prohibition of old funerary rites under the influence of Christianity.

"Old" beliefs and funerary practices changed under the influence of Christianity, though "special" burials remained minor but ever present factor in centuries to come. Under some circumstances, for example during an epidemic, as Dunn suggested,<sup>180</sup> and is possibly the case at Finglesham, we can observe that when Christian funerary rites were considered ineffective, people started to employ "old" practices again to prevent the return of "dangerous dead". But these beliefs and practices did not make early medieval people "... wretched characters whose lives and deaths were determined by a world-view blurred by religious belief,

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> See above pp. 85-96

<sup>178</sup> Down and Welch, *Apple Down*, p. 108

<sup>179</sup> See above pp.95-96

<sup>180</sup> Dunn, *Christianization of Anglo-Saxons*, p. 179

whether community-prescribed custom or supernatural nature or rabid lawmaking under Christian influence..."<sup>181</sup> as Reynolds remarked. Even though I have to agree that the following of certain rules and customs in funerary rites was essential, the alternative approach presented here rather suggests that their main objective in treating the "special" dead was the prosperity and longevity of the community. The latter group's lives had been determined by their own character and social position: and while lawmaking and community customs may have governed the manner of their death, their deposition after death depended on a "social stratification" which, though it may have differed from their social position when alive, nevertheless represents another expression of the needs of the community.

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<sup>181</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 250

## Chapter 2: “Unusual” burials among the Slavs

The complex research of each particular "special" burial in Slovakia and the Czech Republic could in itself provide a theme for a standalone publication and is outside the limit of this work. Moreover, we have to take into account the fact that Slavic burial rites were influenced by a different set of variables from Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices. However, as in the Anglo-Saxon area, graves of the "special dead" were not discovered in the majority of Slavic cemeteries and in most cases the archaeologists excavated just a single "special" burial per cemetery. The multiple occurrences of "special burials" is reported only in a minority of cemeteries. Therefore I will focus in the following pages on a more thorough examination of cemeteries where we encounter the "special" burial rites in higher extent and we can assume that communities burying there dealt more often with "dangerous" dead. To determine which localities would be most suitable as my research examples I took into account several key characteristics: 1) a higher percentage of skeletons in an "unusual" position (prone, hands tied behind back; with removed skull, stones over the skeleton, extremely bent limbs, missing limbs and etc.) or in a position combining these "unusual" positions, excavated in one locality; 2) how long these individuals were buried in a particular locality; 3) the influence of Christianization; 4) geographical distribution. The comparison of selected localities - Čelákovice, as the most westerly locality with its 100% "vampire" occupancy; Staré Město, Great Moravian seat of power and centre of Christianization; and Devínska Nová Ves, easternmost location with a Slavic-Avaric population - allowed me to examine the full spectrum of beliefs and practices appearing as "special" among Slavs in Slovakia and the Czech Republic and is the key element of this chapter (**Fig.18**). To examine the topic of "unusual" burials among Slavs more properly, I have also included in this chapter an overview of a rare group of burials excavated at settlements, which, because of its "special" nature, constitutes an important part not only of my research, but also in respect of the perception of death and revenants in Slavic communities.

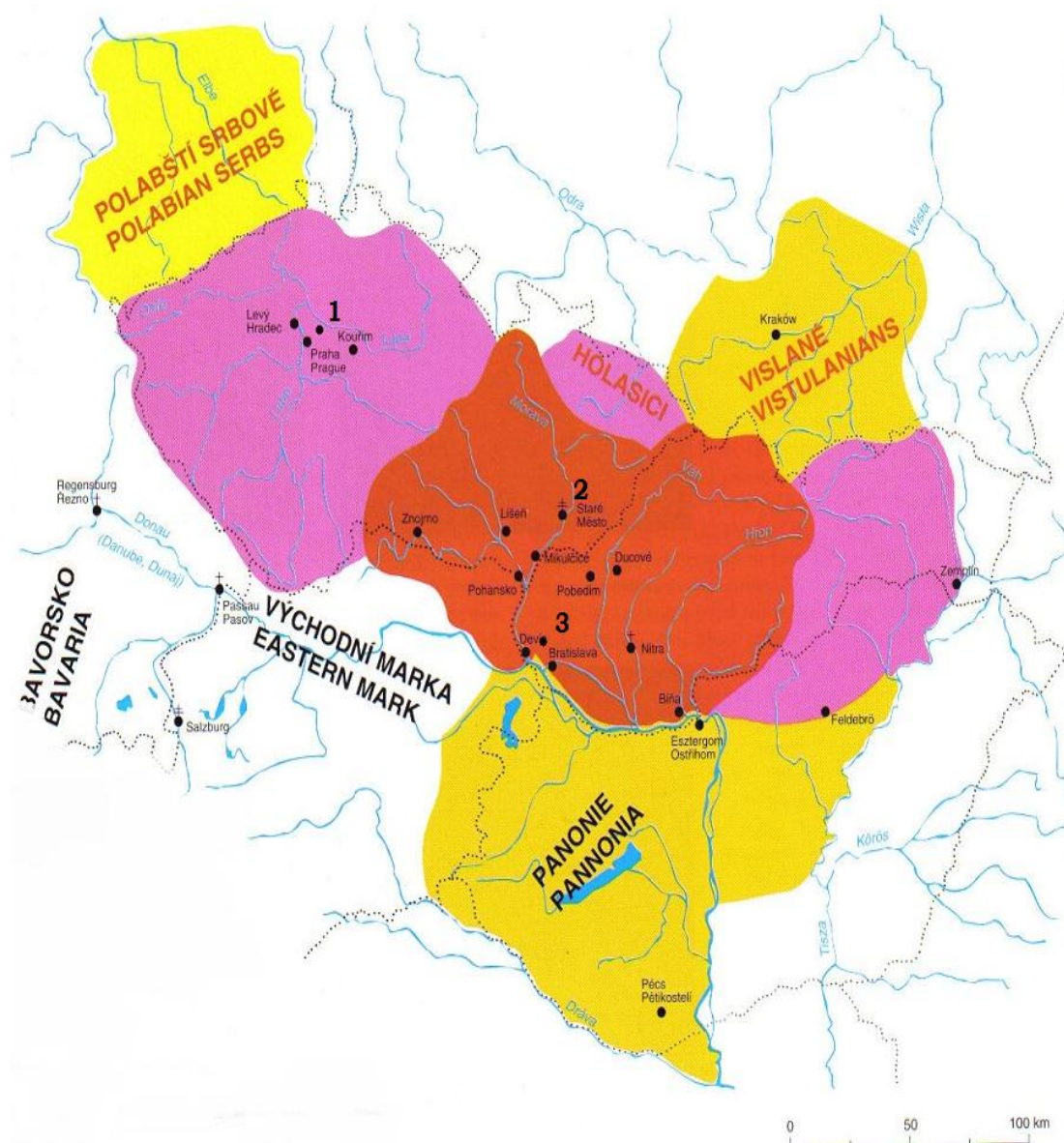


Fig.18: Location of Slavic cemeteries examined in this dissertation: 1.) Čelákovice, 2.) Staré Město, 3.) Devínska Nová Ves.

## Skeletons in "strange" positions: The archaeology of the "special" dead

### Burials in "settlement features" from 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> Century

The rarest form<sup>1</sup> of burial practice among the Anglo-Saxons is the deposition of the deceased into settlement features of various characters. Although this kind of deposition is also a minority rite in Slovakia and is concentrated only in the SW

<sup>1</sup>The best known example in England being inhumation AX at Yeavering, see Dunn, *Christianization of Anglo-Saxons*, p. 99

part of the country, the burials in these objects form an important group, which reflects the beliefs and practices associated with the deposition of “different”, feared or “dangerous” people among the Slavs.

These settlement features are characterized by common features:

- 1) situated at settlements, very rarely at cemeteries
- 2) not regular grave-pits; but “settlement features”
- 3) the skeletons were not carefully put into the grave as an act of piety but just deposited (for example thrown in)
- 4) they demonstrate an unusual way of deposition
- 5) the majority rest on the left or right side, are rarely prone; deposition on the back is usually associated with unusual positioning of the head, body or legs.
- 6) a small area of distribution

The localities with burials in settlement features are distributed approximately between Bratislava and Trnava and in the middle and lower Nitra area (**Fig.19**). These objects are usually presented as borrow pits, or features which resemble these pits and were used for deposition of bodies after the end of their primary function (according to Slovakian archaeologists). This assumption could be correct, but considering the fact that apart from a few burned grains from the Objekt 297<sup>2</sup> from Muzla- Cenkov and Objekt 1 in Nitra we don't have any other evidence of their function<sup>3</sup>; it is possible that these features may be more specific and built deliberately for the deposition of the “special” dead. Their position inside the settlements, in the immediate vicinity of the houses, where they constituted a part of the everyday routine of the community, points even more strongly to their importance and “special” nature.

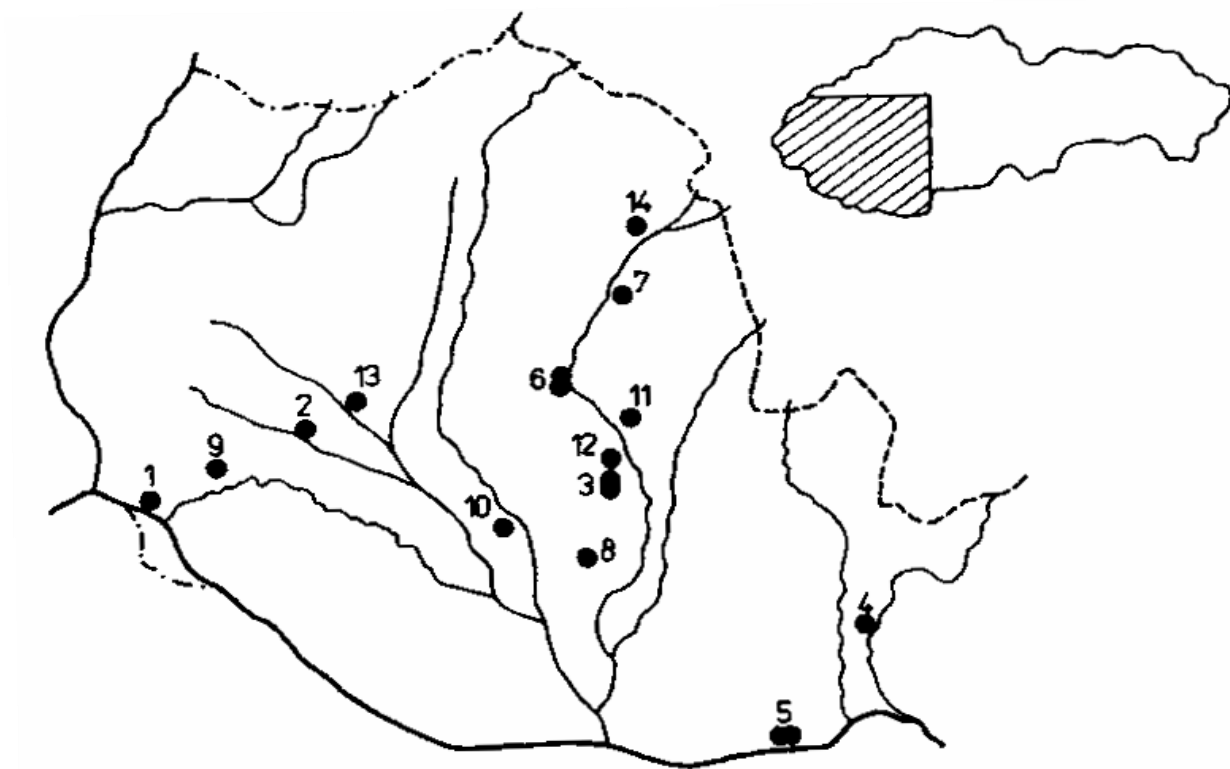
I will use for my research mostly the data collected by Hanuliak, considering the fact that some of those features could be not properly recorded or the examination reports are not available. According to Hanuliak, objects from 17 localities belong

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<sup>2</sup> Specific settlement features will be referred in this text in original Slovakian description as recorded in the excavation reports.

<sup>3</sup> M. Hanuliak: "K problematike skeletov ľudských jedincov zo sídliskových objektov"; in *Slovenska Archeológia XLV-I*, (1997), pp.157- 182

to this category and are chronologically situated in the early and high Middle Ages, with one reliably dated object from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The number of features differs between localities, which Hanuliak deemed to be in relation to the extent of excavated areas in this part of Slovakia.<sup>5</sup> In my opinion, this might also relate to the higher occurrence of possible revenants in specific communities rather than the extent of excavated area and Hanuliak also includes this assumption as “...one of the less important factors...”<sup>6</sup>



**Fig.19:** The localities with burials in settlement features from Slovakia. 1 - Bratislava; 2 – Cifer-Pac; 3 – Komjatice; 4 – Male Kosihy; 5 – Muzla- Cenkov; 6 – Nitra; 7 – Nitrianska Streda; 8 – Palarikovo; 9 – Senec-Martin; 10 – Sala- Veca; 11 – Velky Cetin; 12 – Velky Kyr; 14 – Zabokreky. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> Object 1/84 from Nitra; the coin founded inside was positively dated to 16<sup>th</sup> century, see Ibid., p.158 for more

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.159

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Deposition of human skeletons

The skeletons from 29 settlement features were mostly deposited at the bottom or up to 20 cm above the bottom of these features (55 %); the remainder of the skeletons were deposited at a variety of depths (45 %). In the majority of all the known features the bodies were deposited in the 20- 80 cm above the bottom – in the lower part of the features. The only exception is the remains of a young woman from Objekt 297 at the Muzla- Cenkov, where the body was compressed into the hollow of rectangular shape, dug into the very bottom of the feature.

The majority of the bodies were laid on the left or the right side. In this group are the skeletons: A. with slightly bent body, B. with moderately bent body and C. with extremely bent body. 22.4 % of skeletons lay supine. In 9 cases the body position was unrecognizable. The most striking examples are in the Objekt 18 from Sala-Veca (**Fig.24.2**) and Objekt 726 from Muzla- Cenkov (**Fig.22.7**), where the bones were scattered around. From three individuals deposited in the lower part of the borrow pit only bones from the body, arms and legs, together with three mandibles and one skull were excavated; two skulls were missing. Only three skeletons were deposited in the prone position (Objekt 489 Muzla- Cenkov [**Fig. 22.5**], Objekt 15 Sala- Veca [**Fig.24.3**] and Objekt 21 Velky Kyr [**Fig.26.1**]). The positions of bodies from Objekt 489 from Muzla-Čenkov and Objekt 21 from Velky Kyr are interesting. In the first case the legs have been forced over the back (resembling the “live burial” from Sewerby<sup>7</sup>) and in the second the arms are forced over the back in similar fashion, looking as if they had been tied prior to the deposition. Moreover, in 8 cases the skulls were broken or dislocated from the body. It was not possible to analyze whether the skulls had been removed prior to deposition or during secondary entry to the grave.

71.4 % skeletons buried in the settlement features bear marks of possible “anti-vampire” practices.<sup>8</sup> The percentage is very high and we need to take these features into account, if we want to examine Slavic perception of the "special"

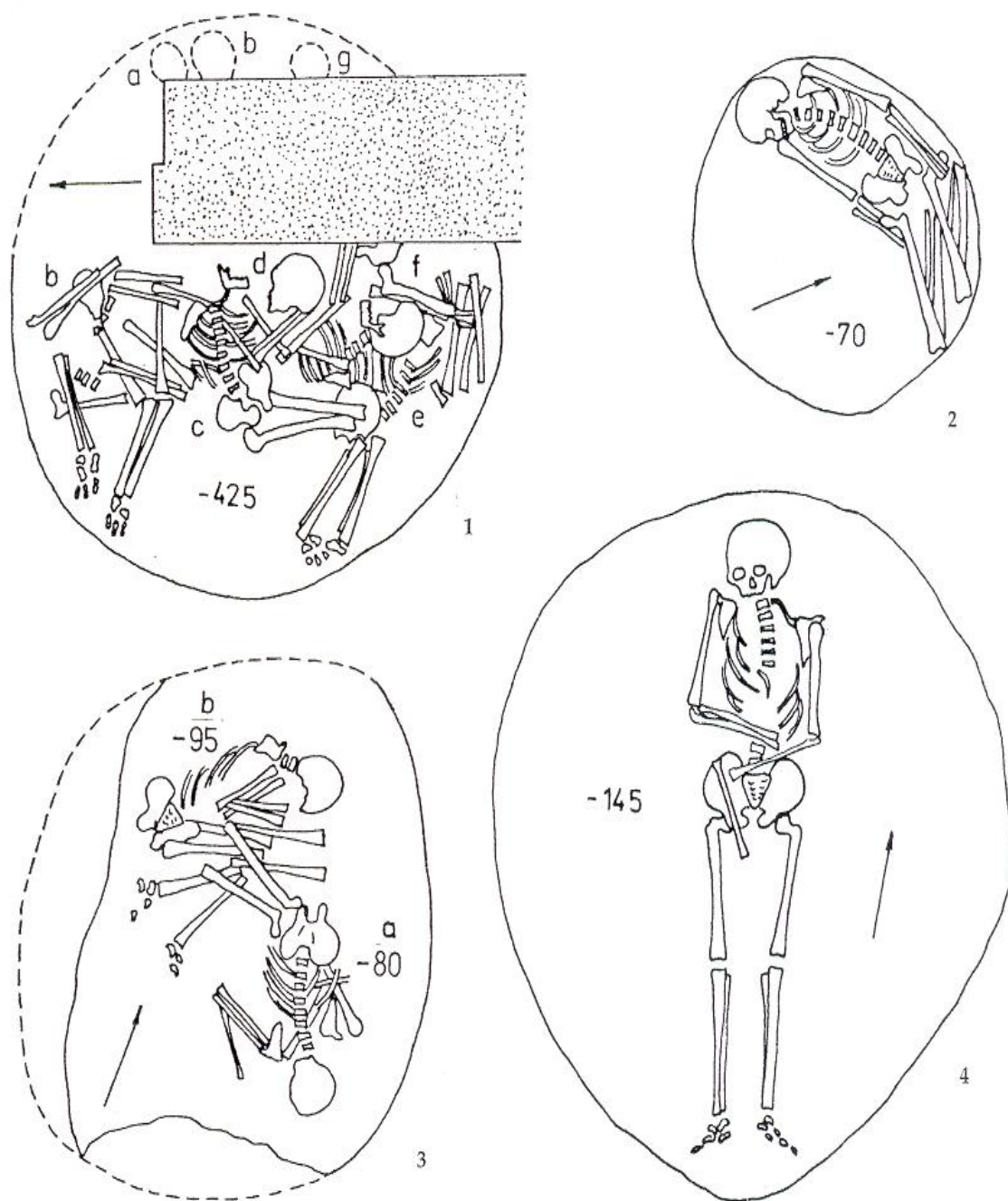
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<sup>7</sup> Hirst, *Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Sewerby*, p.3

<sup>8</sup> Hanuliak, *Velkomoravské pohřebiská*, p.176



dead. Moreover, burials in settlement features are just one part of the overall picture and we need to examine also other ways of deposition of the “special” dead among Slavs to evaluate their beliefs properly.



**Fig.20: Settlement features with human burials. 1 – Objekt A1/5 from Bratislava; 2 – Objekt 28 from Komjatice B; 3 – Objekt 145 from Komjatice A; 4 – Objekt 3 from Male Kosihy. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)**

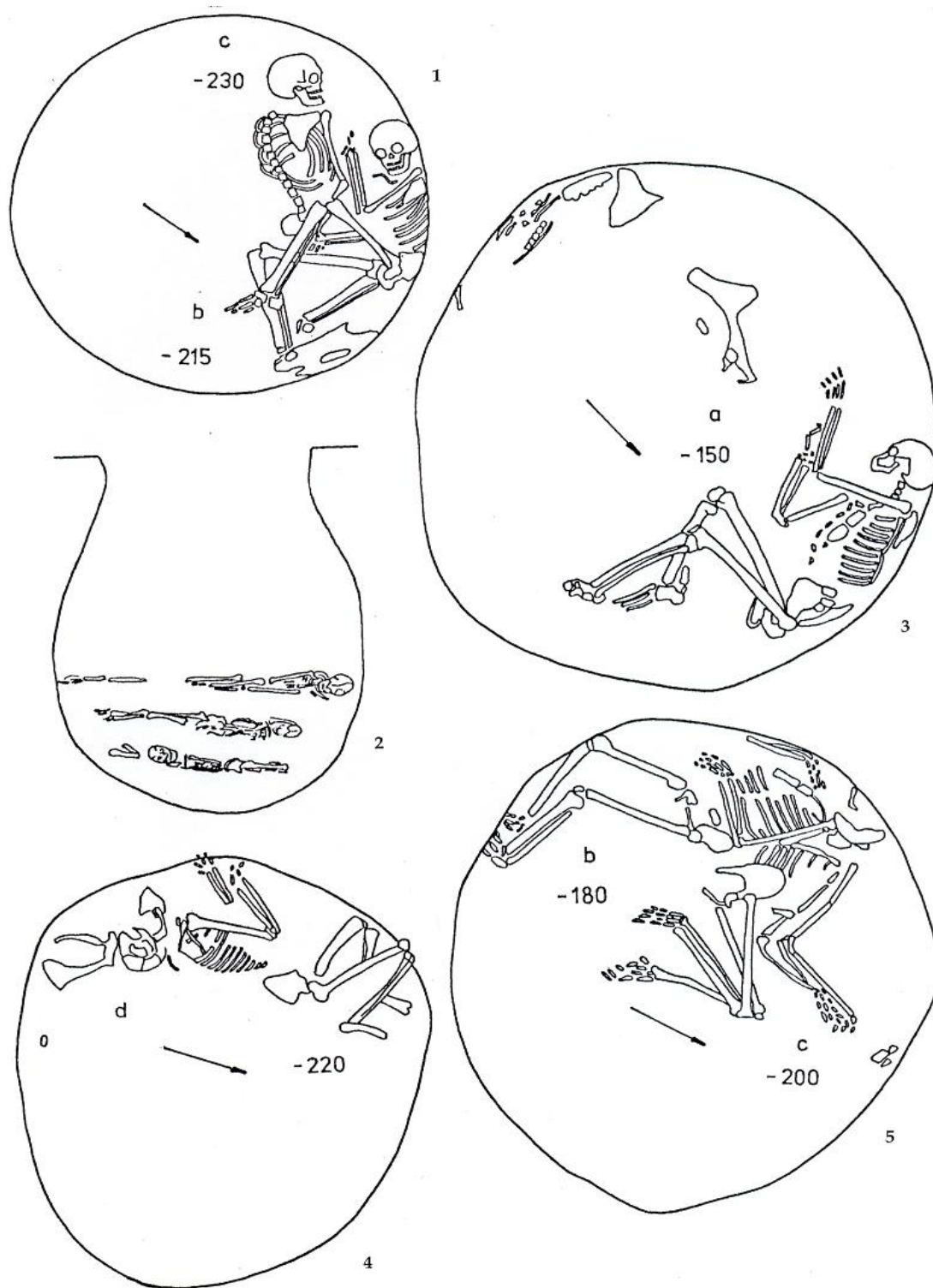
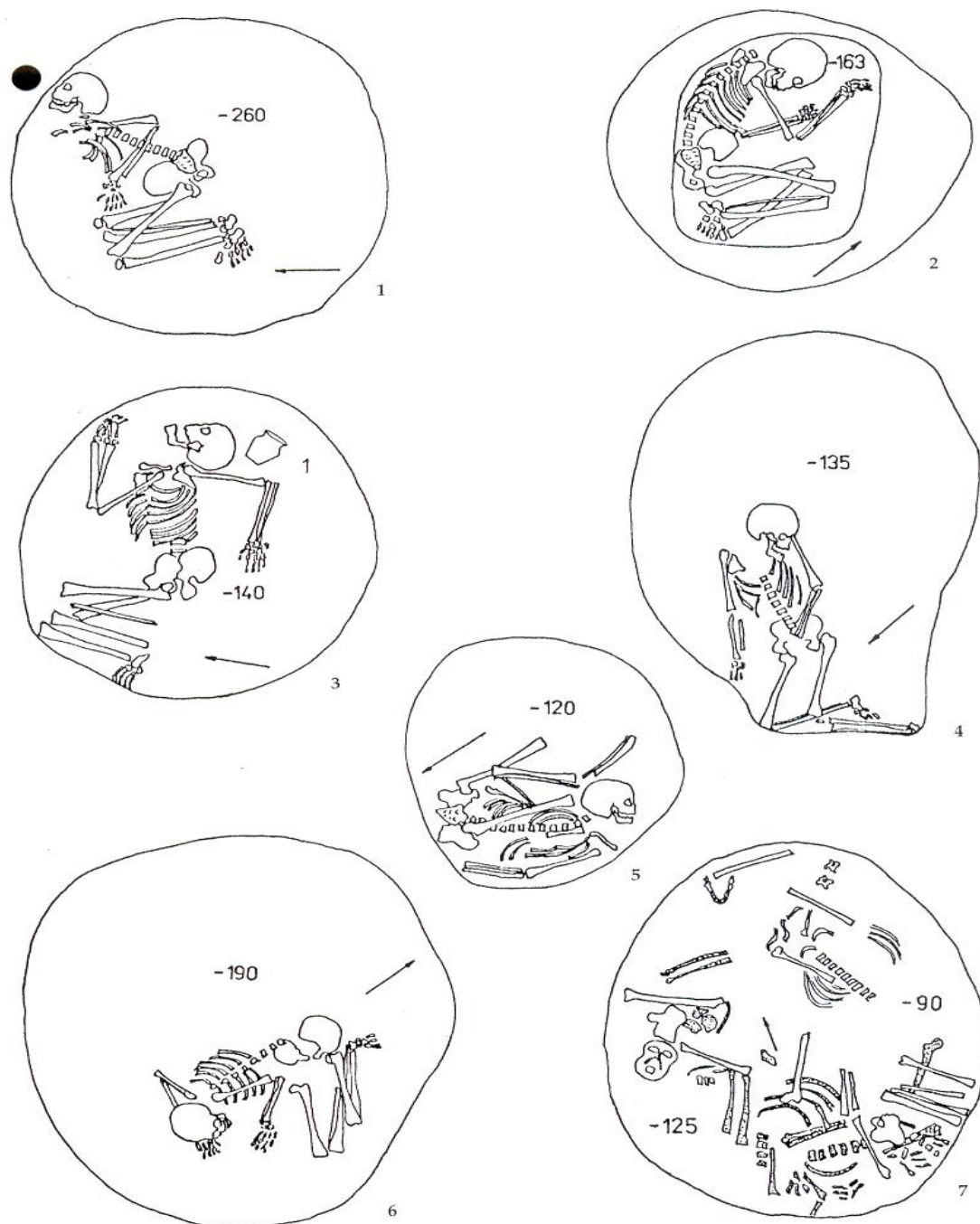


Fig.21: Settlement features with human burials. 1 – Objekt 4/7 from Cifer- Pac; 2- 5 Objekt 32 from Cifer - Pac. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)



**Fig.22: Settlement features with human burials. 1 – Objekt 71 from Muzla- Cenkov B; 2 – Objekt 297 from Muzla- Cenkov B; 3 – Objekt 336 from Muzla- Cenkov B; 4 – Objekt 438 from Muzla- Cenkov B; 5 – Objekt 489 from Muzla- Cenkov B; 6 – Objekt 488 from Muzla- Cenkov B; 7 – Objekt 726 from Muzla- Cenkov B. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)**

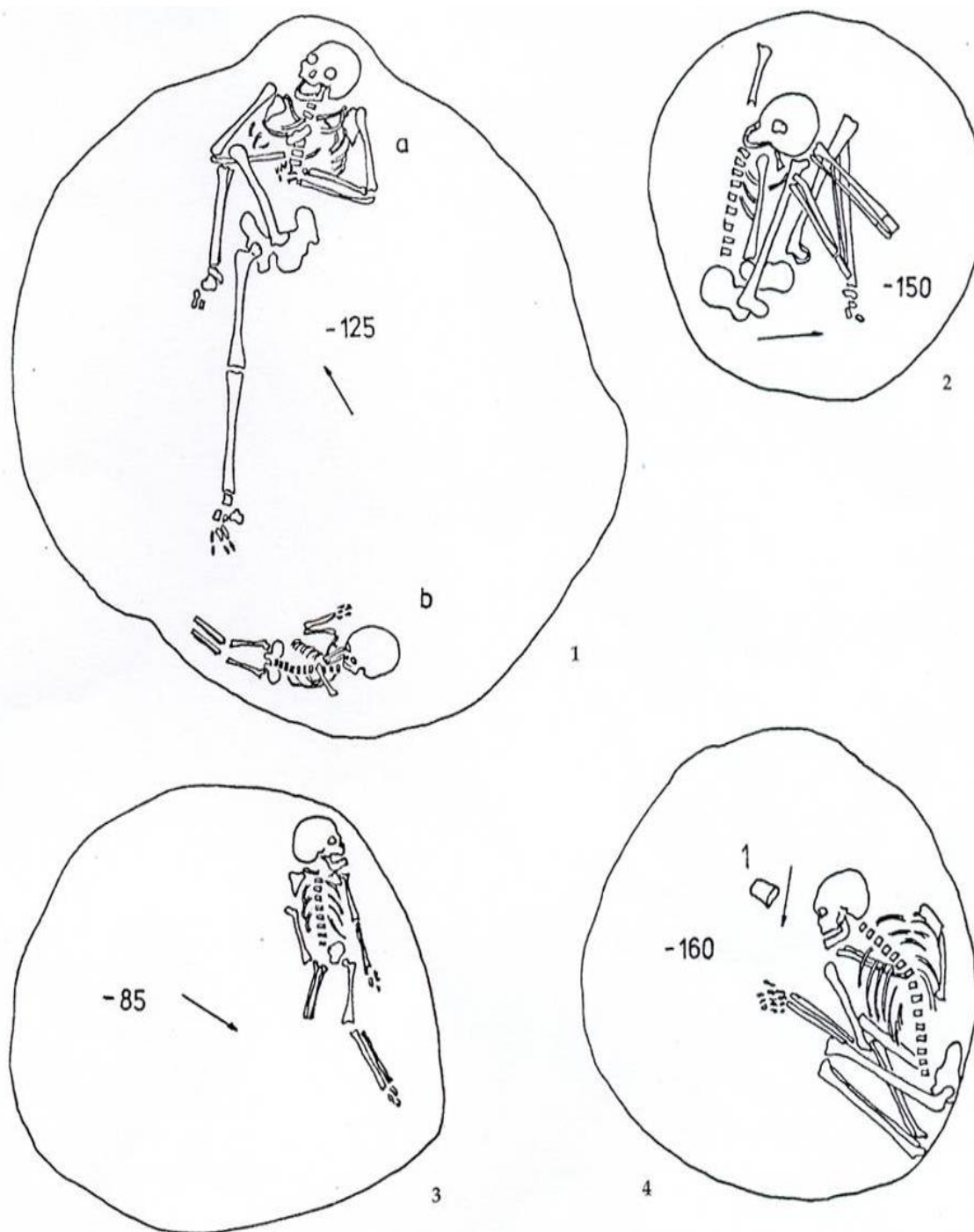


Fig.23: Settlement features with human skeletons. 1 – Objekt 966 from Muzla- Cenkov B; 2 – Objekt 2 from Nitra A; 3 – Objekt 27 form Muzla- Cenkov A; 4 – Objekt 1 from Nitra A. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)



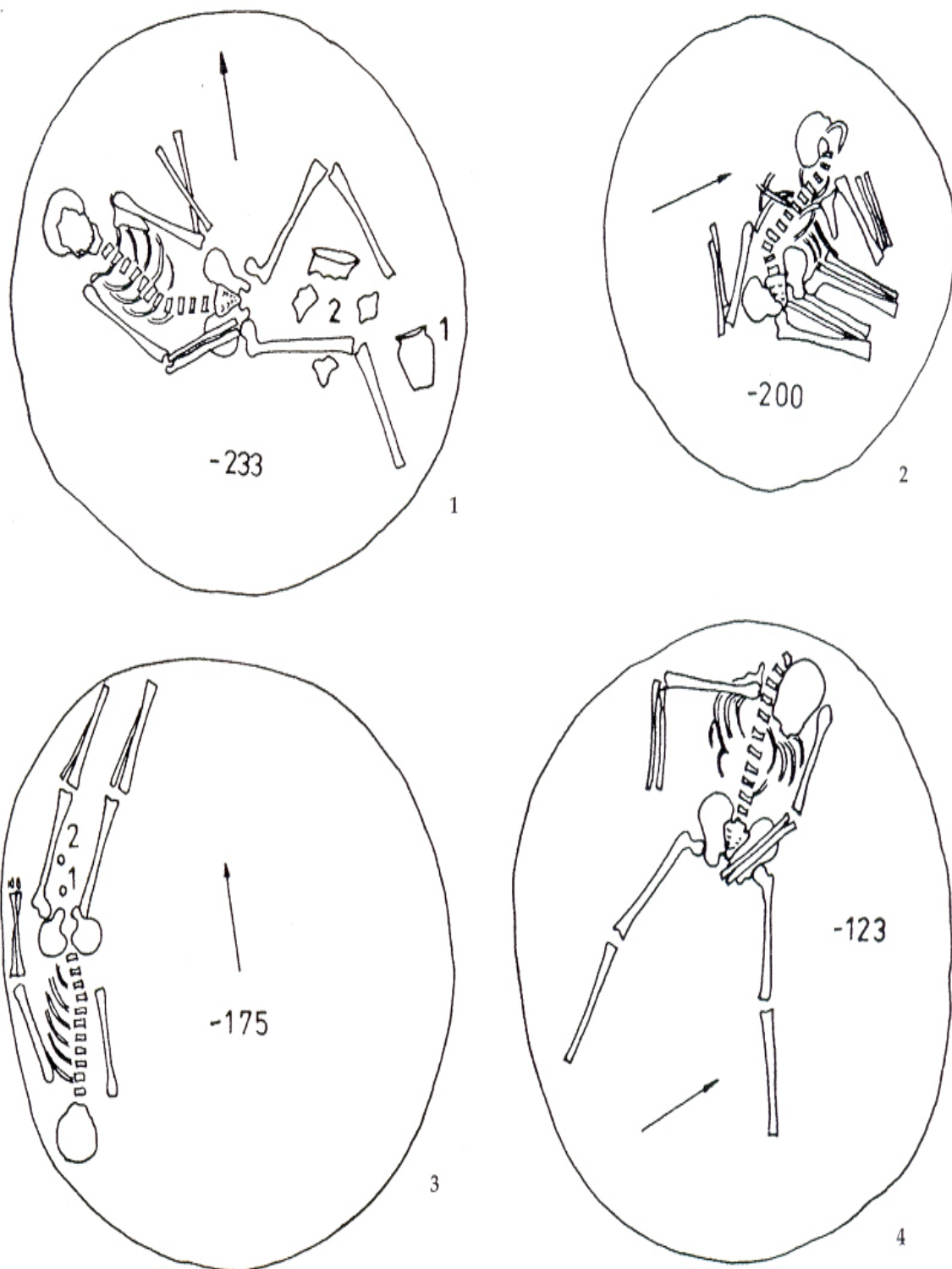
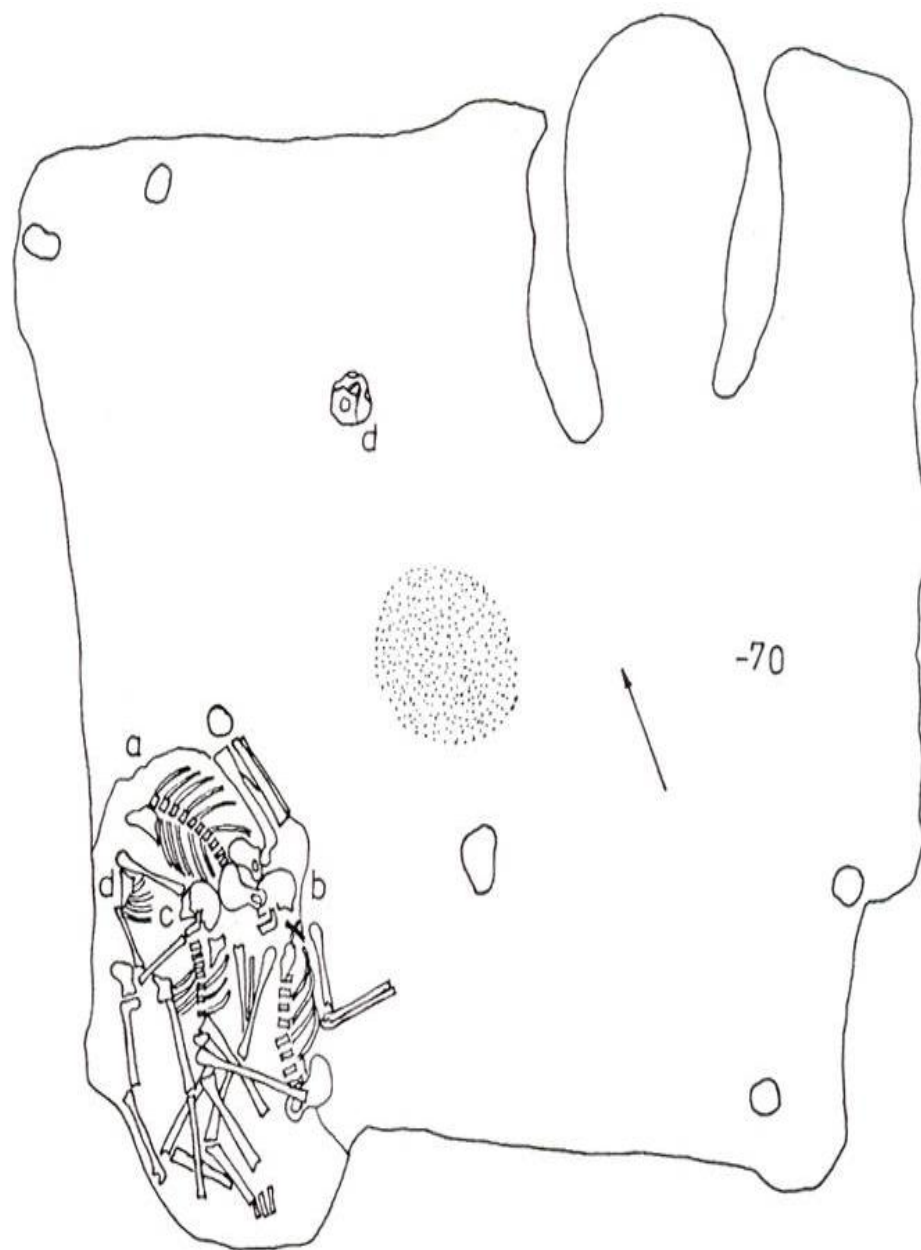
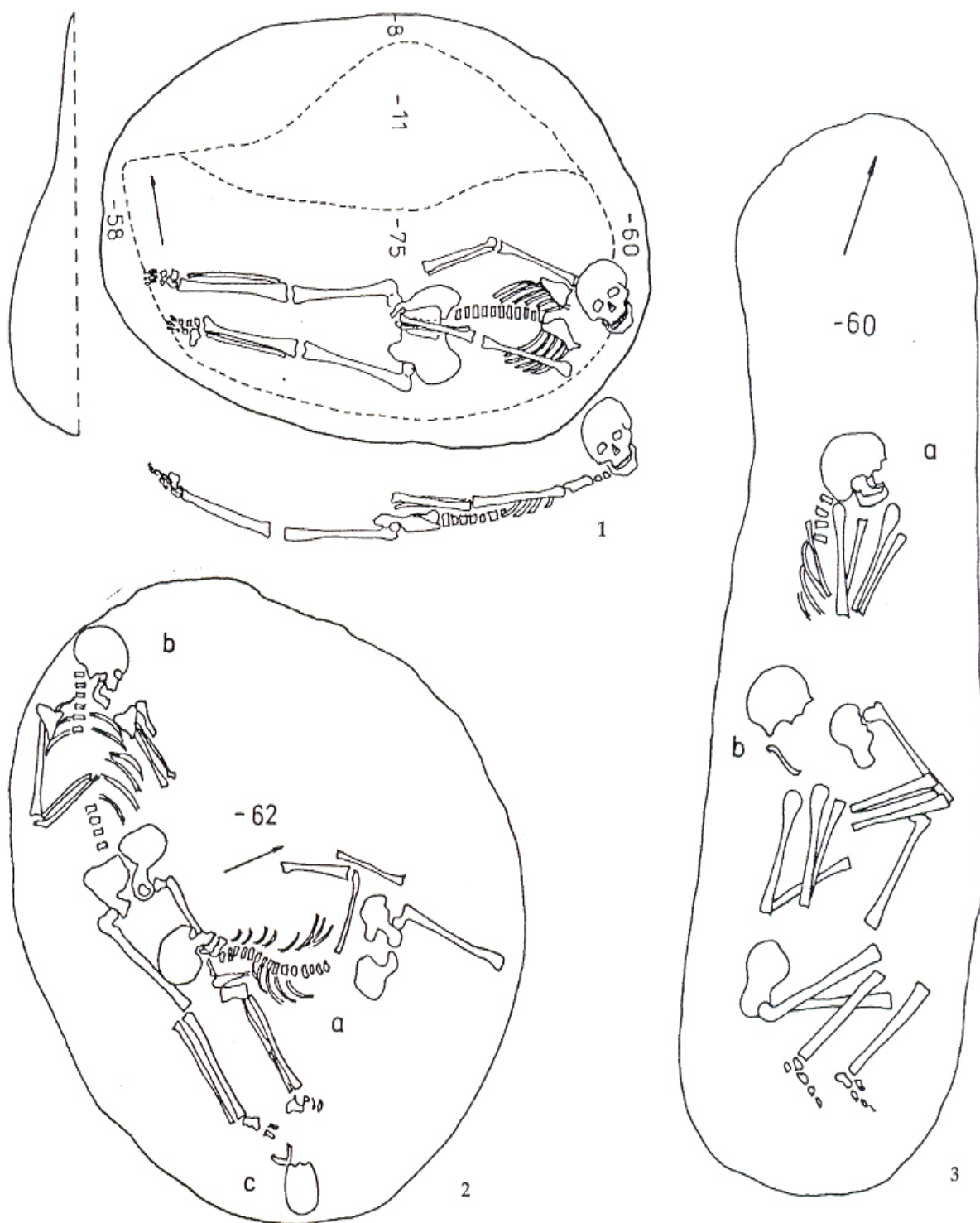


Fig.24: Settlement features with human burials. 1 – Objekt 1 from Nitrianska Streda; 2 – Objekt 18 from Sala-Veca; 3 – Objekt 15 form Sala- Veca; 4 – Objekt 5/77 from Senec-Martin. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)



**Fig.25: Settlement features with human burials. 1- Objekt 3/74 from Palarikovo. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)**



**Fig.26: Settlement features with human burials. 1- Objekt 21 from Velky Kyr; 2- Objekt 2 from Velky Cetin II; 3 – Objekt 3/76 from Zelenec. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)**

## **The “special” dead in cemeteries**

The percentage of "special" burials in regular cemeteries is definitely smaller than the high percentage of this type of burial in settlement objects. The characteristics usually taken to denote "special" or "deviant" burials in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are crouched burial, multiple burials, shallow and cramped burials, prone burials, decapitation, stoning, evidence of restraint, mutilation, and miscellaneous disrespectful treatment of corpses.<sup>9</sup>

In Slavic areas we need to add to this category burials in settlement features and burials in side alcoves. However, as many authors have stated before, the most problematic aspect of those "special" burials is that "...such burials are found almost without exception in otherwise "normal" communal grounds."<sup>10</sup>

The fact that these "special" dead were not found at every cemetery suggests that not all communities were forced to deal with the problems associated with revenants and makes them an important factor for our evaluation of medieval beliefs and the functioning of each particular community. Nevertheless, when those problems occurred, "dangerous" and/or "problematic" dead were buried in a "special" way, distinguishing them from the rest of community.

We can recognize the full range of aberration (from slight to extreme) from the "usual" burial customs at Slavic cemeteries from the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century in Slovakia.<sup>11</sup> I will focus in my work mostly on the extreme alterations, which are in most cases linked to burials of the "special" dead.

### **Prone position:**

The rarest form of "unusual" burial is burial in the prone position. To this group belongs 16 graves from 9 localities. Only at two localities do we find multiple prone burials (Bratislava Devín- Za Kostolom [3 graves], Trnovec nad Váhom -

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 62

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 61

<sup>11</sup> Position on the back, with arms beside the body and straight legs



Horný Jatov). The skulls of these skeletons lay on their temples, mandibles or were twisted in unnatural position. The arms were placed in various positions. The legs were in a straight position or slightly bent at the knees.

#### **On the right side:**

This is the most usual position in this group (52 graves from 26 cemeteries). Multiple occurrence at the cemeteries only in three cases ( Bratislava Devín- Za Kostolom, Cífer-Pác Drahy [both 4 graves], Nitra Zobor- Dolnozoborská ulica [5 graves]). Legs moderately or extremely bent. Arms in several cases placed under the back, or in other unusual positions.

#### **On the left side:**

29 graves from 14 cemeteries. The skulls lay mostly on their temples, in some cases with the head facing down. The positioning of arms and legs similar to that of the group placed on the right side.

It is interesting that in all three above mentioned groups, we encounter a small percentage of children and juveniles; adults are dominant with higher percentage of females than males.<sup>12</sup> In the category of prone burials the percentage of males is even smaller.<sup>13</sup> Another important fact is the absence of grave goods (in 76.3 % of these graves), which points not only to the low social status of the deceased, but is also one of the attributes for recognizing "special" burials.

### **Čelákovice**

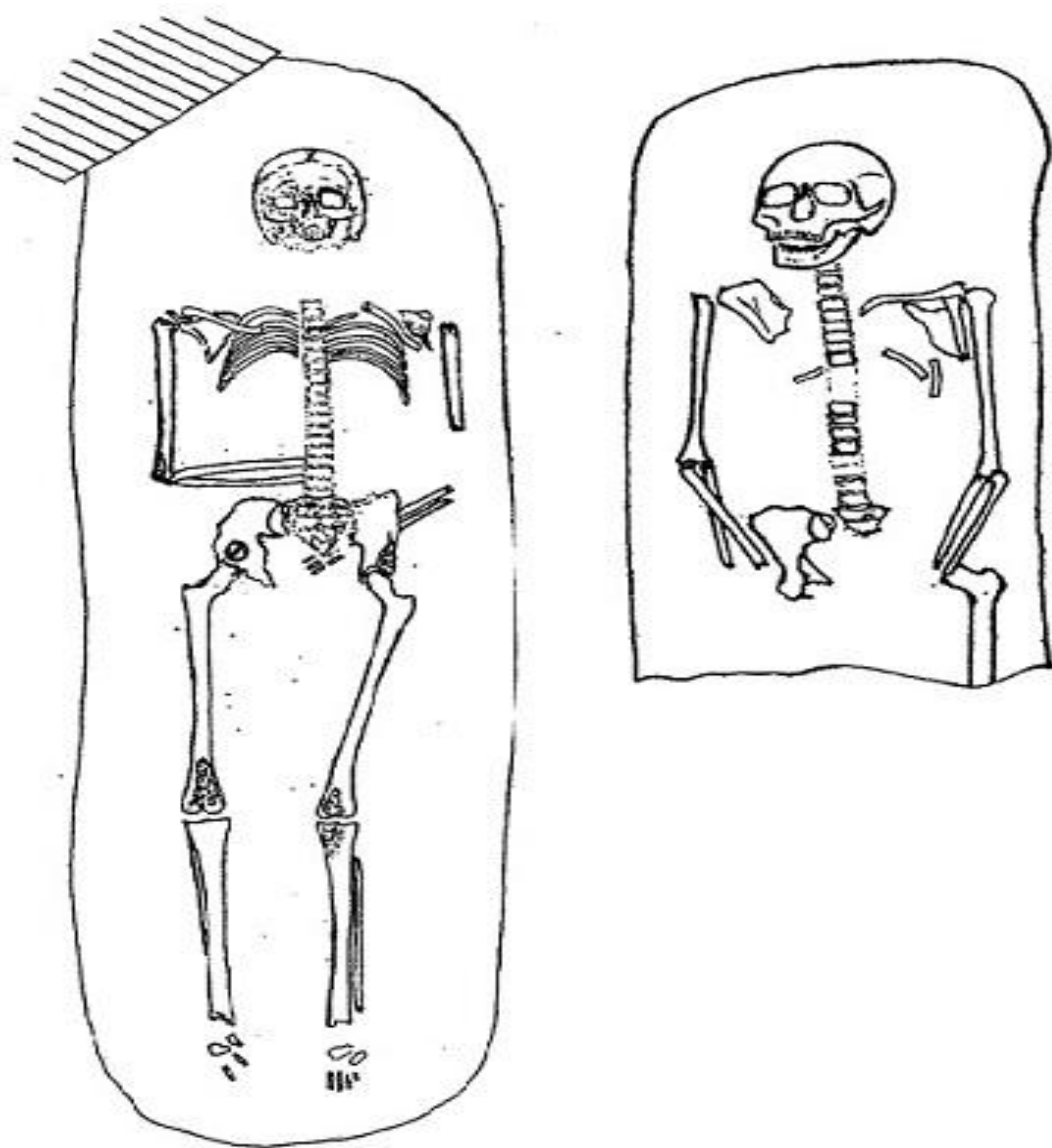
In July 1966 at Čelákovice in the Czech Republic, a small Slavic cemetery, with 20 individuals in 11 graves, was discovered. When the excavators carried out their field work they found that all the individuals buried inside these graves bear the

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<sup>12</sup> Hanuliak, *Velkomoravské pohrebiská*, p.108

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

marks of anti-vampire practices.<sup>14</sup> All the excavated skeletons were buried in a "special" way and were the sole occupants of this cemetery, most likely created especially for them. It is even more interesting that approximately one kilometre to the NW, an old Slavic settlement was excavated, and to the WNW another Slavic cemetery from 9<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century, where the archaeologist didn't discover a single "special" burial.



**Fig.27:** Grave 3 and Grave 4 from Čelákovice (from left to right), reproduced from J. Špaček: "Slovanské pohřebiště s projevy vampyrizmu v Čelákovicích", in *Časopis Národního Muzea* (XL 1971/1), pp. 190- 217

<sup>14</sup> J. Špaček: "Slovanské pohřebiště s projevy vampyrizmu v Čelákovicích", in *Časopis Národního Muzea* (XL 1971/1), pp. 190- 217

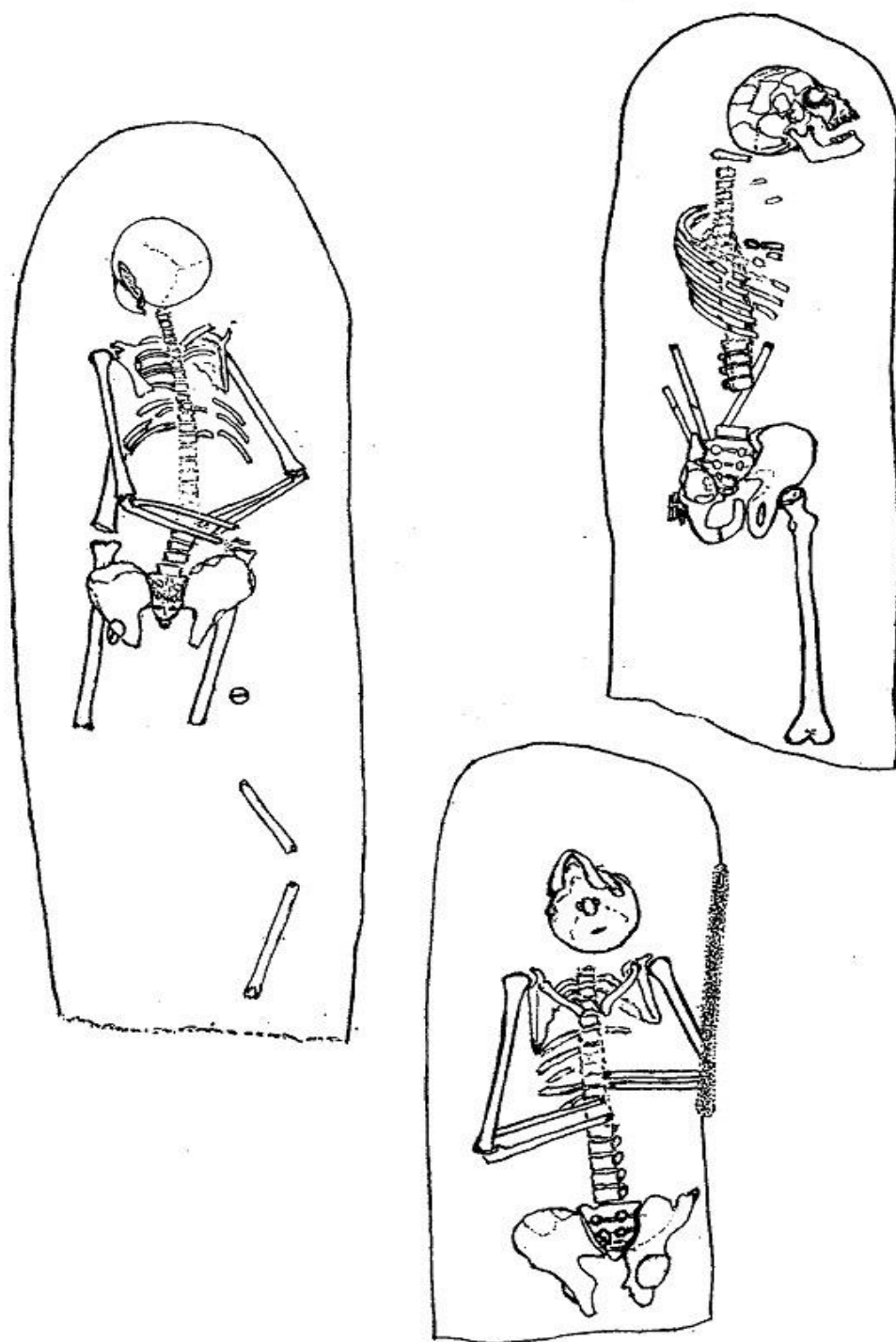


Fig.28: Grave 5, Grave 7 and Grave 6 from Čelákovice (from left to right), reproduced from J. Špaček: "Slovanské pohřebiště s projevy vampyrizmu v Čelákovících", in *Časopis Národního Muzea* (XL 1971/1), pp. 190- 217

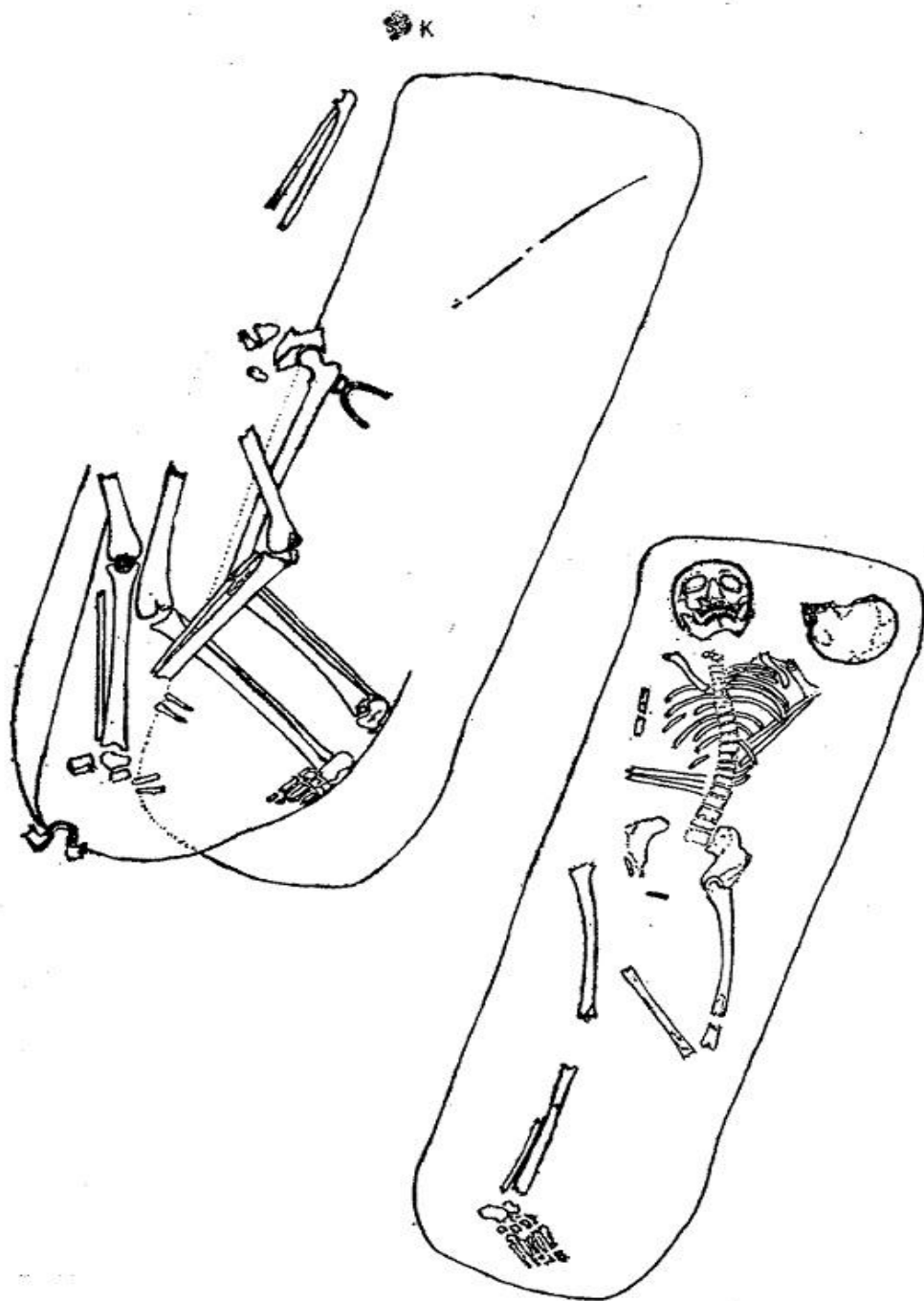


Fig.29: Double grave 10 and Grave 11 from Čelákovice (from left to right); K is a part of a wooden post, reproduced from J. Špaček: "Slovanské pohřebiště s projevy vampyrizmu v Čelákovících", in *Časopis Národního Muzea* (XL 1971/1), pp. 190- 217

## Staré Město - "Na Valách".

The cemetery at Staré Město is the biggest necropolis of the Western Slavs.<sup>15</sup> The total area of this cemetery was originally approximately 10ha, but only 0.5ha was excavated (5% of the total area); the rest of the area is covered by modern buildings. The archaeologists did not find any prone burials at "Na Valách": however, they did uncover several graves with bodies in "unusual" positions. In Grave 15/48 lay the skeleton of a woman around 25 years old, with jaws open, arms bent at the elbows and with legs extremely outstretched, evoking the victim of rape, with earrings and knife<sup>16</sup> In graves 329/49 and 32/51 were two males in their sixties, lying supine, with their skulls resting on the left temple and their right legs so bent that the knee was touching the right elbow; there were no grave goods. According to Hrubý, such a position cannot be natural and the leg was put in the place by force and then most likely tied to the body.<sup>17</sup> In Grave 37/St archaeologists excavated the skeleton of an adult, lying supine with legs bent at the knees and no grave goods.

Grave 153/49 contained the skeleton of a 50- 60 year old woman, without grave goods, lying supine, with the hands beside the body, jaws wide open with a triangular piece of sandstone in the mouth and with a piece of sandstone through groins. Grave 153/49 was located near the foundation of the church, deposited in the highest stratum of graves (there are 5 strata at cemetery - the first is oldest, the fifth most recent) and belonged to the most recent graves at cemetery (approx. second half of the 9th century). Two or three years ago archaeologists excavated a similar burial in the near vicinity. At "Modrá"<sup>18</sup>, the grave of a child was discovered. It was located a couple of decameters from the church, isolated from the rest of the graves and covered by a huge pile of stones. The stones bore marks of extensive heat - most likely from a great funeral pyre. When the archeologists removed the stones they discovered a skeleton deposited in a narrow grave-pit with a huge block of stone through the skull. The complete anthropological report is still not finished, but a preliminary report indicates that the skeleton belonged to

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<sup>15</sup> V. Hrubý: *Staré Město: Velkomoravské pohřebiště "Na Valách"*, (Praha, 1955), p. 47

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 79

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Approx. 1km from the locality "Na Valách" on the opposite hill

a child approx. 8 years old of indefinable sex and that the stone was inserted into the skull postmortem, most likely as a part of anti-vampire practices.<sup>19</sup> The grave was without grave goods, but given the location and chronology of the remaining graves at "Modrá", archaeologists have dated it to the 9th century. The preliminary report also affirmed that the skeleton was of a healthy individual without disabilities.

A block of sandstone (22x10x6 cm) lay also over the shinbones of the 20 year old man in Grave 11/50. The man lay on his back, with the right hand in his lap and the left beside his body. The left femur was 8 cm shorter than the right, indicating that the young man limped. Stones were discovered also in Graves 84/50 and 69/51. Grave 84/50 belonged to a 20-30 year old woman, lying on her back, skull to the left, right hand in the lap and with a block of sandstone (34.5x14.5x12.7 cm) over the body. In Grave 69/51 a 40 year old woman lay supine, without grave goods, the skull on the left temple, the arms beside body and with a stone (51x36x14 cm) with marks of burning excavated 50 cm above her skull. She was only 140 cm tall.

Another interesting group of burials at "Na Valách" consist of graves where the lower part of skeleton is in a normal position and the bones of the upper body are scattered.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting that the richest grave at the cemetery (Grave 282/49) belongs to this category. Grave 282/49 contained the skeleton of a 20- 25 year old woman. The grave was 2m long, 0.5m wide and 2.65 m deep. The walls of the grave were lined with wood to 0.35 m above the base. The bones were scattered: collar bone on the pelvis, jaw between the feet, long bones of the arms over the shinbones and vertebrae on the chest. The grave goods were scattered in similar way. The burial was very richly furnished with several pairs of golden and silver earrings, golden buttons and pieces of iron.

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<sup>19</sup> Pers. comm. with excavator Mr. Mirek Vaškových and unpublished preliminary report from Mrs. Jana Langová

<sup>20</sup> Graves 282/49, 291/49, 187/51, 255/51, 11/AZ; more in Hrubý, *Staré Město: Na Valách*, p. 79  
142

## **Devínská Nová Ves.**

The cemetery at Devínska Nová Ves belongs to the Slavic-Avaric period, which is characterised by the appearance of a grave inventory with an individualistic style, intermixing pieces of Avar provenience (weapons, belt garnitures, horse burials) with Slavic ones (pottery, tools). In older Slovakian academic literature this coexistence was explained as slaver vs. slave relationship. According to those archaeologists, the Avars subjugated the Slavs in the Slavic-Avar border area (see Fig. 14) and raiding parties spent the winter in Slavic settlements, where Slavs were responsible for their food, lodging and other kinds of hospitality, including their own women. New information obtained from archaeological research led to the abandoning of this theory and present day archaeologists believe that we can speak here about coexistence of equals, even with a slight Slavic dominance. Nevertheless, the burial rites reserved for the "special" dead at Devínská Nová Ves differs slightly from the Slavic cemeteries examined above. To determine if it is reason of cultural mixture or just local phenomenon we need to look at it more closely.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, decapitations are not common at Slavic cemeteries. However, in several graves at Devínska Nová Ves either only a head has been buried (without the body), or the head was detached and placed beside the body. In Grave 13, 1.6 m from the bottom, two heads were placed. No other skeletal remains were discovered. The lower jaw lay beside one of the skulls.<sup>21</sup> A similar situation was found in Grave 17, where two skulls were placed 30 cm from the bottom, both in a standing position. Beside one of them lay a spindle. The lower jaws were detached from the skulls and deposited between them, lying approx. 50 cm from each other. In the west corner of the grave lay a pile of human bones.<sup>22</sup> In Grave 216A, 2 m long, there was a skull 45 cm down. The rest of the grave contained no additional skeletal remains, although at the bottom of the grave a knife and pieces of iron were discovered.<sup>23</sup> In Grave 258, 1.2 m long, the skull lay on the left side and in Grave 322 the skull was found in

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<sup>21</sup> J. Eisner: *Devínska Nová Ves*, (Bratislava, 1952), p. 243

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

the middle of the base, with the face towards the left side.<sup>24</sup> Other skulls were excavated in Grave 332, 80 cm long; Grave 340, 1 m long; Grave 344, 95 cm long; Grave 738, 1.15 m long with pot, skull and beads and Grave 794, 1.5-1.6 m long with parts of a skull and 8 beads.<sup>25</sup>

At this cemetery Eisner excavated, just as Hrubý did at Staré Město "Na Valách", graves with the bones of the lower body in a normal position and bones of the upper body scattered, and described them as "burials in sitting position".<sup>26</sup> Over the majority of these graves burned soil was uncovered, suggesting the presence of fire.

### **Burials in side alcoves**

Only three cemeteries with burials in side alcoves have been found in Slovakia. The most important locality is Borovce, where the archaeologists excavated a cemetery with the highest percentage of burials in side alcoves in the Middle-Danube area. A lower percentage of these graves were excavated at Dubovany and another cemetery was uncovered at Trnava- Nad Weislom. Unfortunately we don't have enough information about this group of burials: the field reports were not properly published and some of the more detailed information is still kept secret.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, we have more information from the Moravian region of the Czech Republic. This type of burials is most likely only a South Moravian phenomenon. The alcoves were dug up evenly in left or right side of the grave walls and almost half of the graves have wooden furnishing.<sup>28</sup> The small percentage of these graves in the overall amount of Slavic graves, together with the fact that some of them were quite rich and some without grave goods, doesn't suggest that their primary function was to protect the deceased against grave robbers. Moreover, another explanation could be that the side alcove acted as some kind of means to make it more difficult for the dead to return from the grave.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 243- 244

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 239- 240

<sup>27</sup> Hanuliak, *Veľkomoravské pohrebiská*, p. 96; This is intriguing as it is not clear why the information remain secret.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 96



## **The chronology of the "special" dead: dating the existence of possible Slavic "vampires".**

The "special" burials among Slavs in Slovakia and the Czech Republic are documented across a broad time span, from the middle of the 7th century onward. After the Slavs changed from cremation to inhumation (from the beginning of the 8th century onwards) the "special" rites reserved for certain individuals become "visible" for present day archaeologists as part of burial customs. It doesn't mean that the idea of "special" dead was previously unknown to the Slavs: it is only unrecognizable in remains of cremation in most of the cases. The destruction through fire was likely to have resolved any issues about the return of the deceased (which could be impossible without the corpse), and therefore broke the connection between the spirit and the body. The fact, that "special" burials constitute a minority in cemeteries and in the majority of cases only a single "special" burial is found per cemetery, makes it very hard to determine the exact period in which these rites were used to a greater or lesser extent. The exceptions are cemeteries where we can encounter multiple occurrences of "special" burials and which could supply more reliable data for more proper evaluation.

### **Burials at cemeteries**

#### **Čelákovice**

There are not enough grave goods in the inventory of these graves for an exact dating. The location is very close to the old church centre of Stará Boleslav. The church was founded in the time of Duke Wenceslaus<sup>29</sup>, and was enlarged during the reign of Břetislav I.<sup>30</sup> According to Špaček, we cannot assume that old pagan beliefs were tolerated in such an environment<sup>31</sup>, specially under the bans and punishments of Břetislav I and Břetislav II, two major supporters of

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<sup>29</sup> Wenceslaus c. 907 - 935

<sup>30</sup> Charter of Břetislav I. from 19th May 1046; in G. Friedrich, CDB I; pp. 358 - 362

<sup>31</sup> Špaček, "Slovanské pohřebiště v Čelákovících", p. 210

Christianization and persecutors of pagans.<sup>32</sup> Taking into account the Fe buckles and all the other evidence, Špaček dates the cemetery from 10th to the first half of the 11th century. However, the fact that around the year 1040 Břetislav I. penalized burials in the woods and in the fields (those guilty of such a deed must give an ox to archbishop, 300 ducats to the duke's treasury, and the deceased must be dug up and buried in a Christian cemetery)<sup>33</sup> and Břetislav II still persecuted the old burials rites (in the woods and on fields)<sup>34</sup> around the year 1090, demonstrating that "pagan"-style burials were practised even at that late date.

### **Staré Město**

The cemetery was used over a period of almost 500 years, from the 6th - 10th century and belongs to one of the biggest Great Moravian power centres. I will focus on the locality "Na Valách" with remains of the Church from second half of 9th century, where the archaeologists excavated 2179 graves.<sup>35</sup> The oldest burials from the 6th-8th century are cremations: however it is very hard to reconstruct their location exactly, because they were mostly destroyed by later inhumations - starting at the beginning of the 9th and ending approximately in the first half of 10th century. The Church is probably associated with the mission of Constantine and Methodius (863) and was the centre of Christianization in this area.

The "special" burials at Staré Město "Na Valách" constituted a constant part of burial customs from the beginning of the 9th century and were also applied after Christianization. The oldest group are graves with bones of the lower body in normal position and scattered bones of the upper body from the first half of 9th century.<sup>36</sup> To the most recent graves at the cemetery belongs the burial of the old female "vampire" nailed with stones to the bottom of her grave near church walls dating from the early 10th century.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cosmas; *Chronica Boemorum*, Book II, Chapter IV and Book III, Chapter I

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter IV.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Book III, Chapter I.

<sup>35</sup> Hrubý, *Staré Město: Na Valách*, p. 539.

<sup>36</sup> See pp. 166- 167.

<sup>37</sup> Grave 153/49.

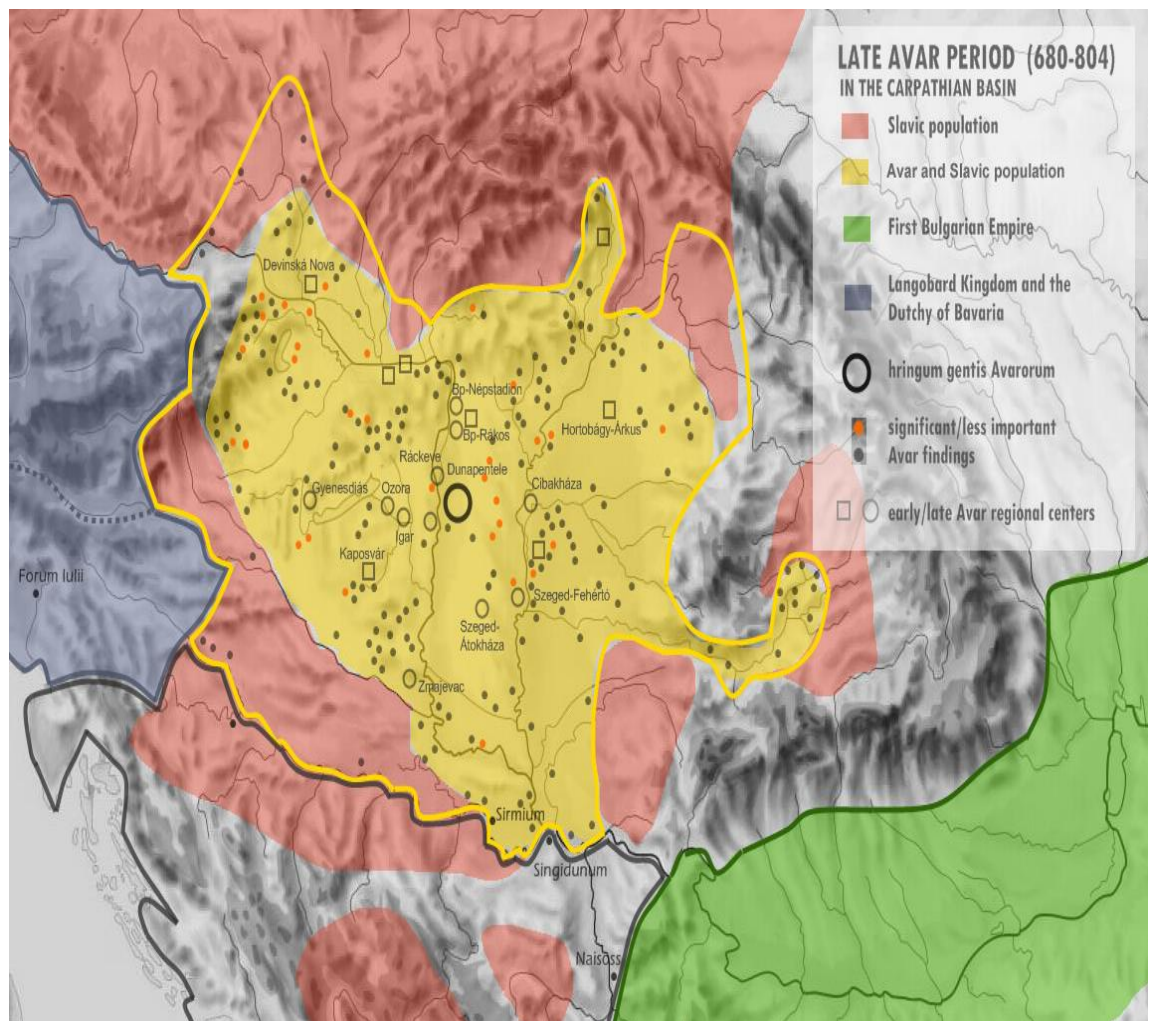


Fig.30: Late Avar Period in the Carpathian Basin<sup>38</sup>

### Devínska Nová Ves

This cemetery belongs to the Slavic-Avaric period and was used from the 7th to the 9th century. We cannot trace a higher occurrence of these graves to any particular period and "special" rites were used throughout the whole duration of the cemetery.

### Burials in "settlement features"

According to Hanuliak, 2 localities **A** (Velky Cetin II and Zabokreký) date to the first half of 9<sup>th</sup> century; 6 localities **B** (Bratislava, Muzla- Cenkov A, Muzla-

<sup>38</sup> online source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_Avars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Avars)

Cenkov B, Nitra A, Nitrianska Streda and Sala- Veca) to the second half of 9<sup>th</sup> century and first quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> century; 3 localities **C** (Cifer- Pac, Male Kosihy and Velky Kyr) to the second – fourth quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> century; 4 localities **D** (Komjatice A, Komjatice B, Senec- Martin and Zelenec) to 11. – 12<sup>th</sup> century; 1 locality **E** (Palarikovo) to 13<sup>th</sup> century and 1 locality **F** (Nitra B) to 16<sup>th</sup> century (**Fig.31**).

As we can see, the biggest group is **B** with 6 localities and it is interesting that the biggest occurrence of burials in the settlement features almost exactly coincides with the expansion of Christianity, and becomes less apparent in group **C**, approximately at the same period as the ending of Great Moravia by the attacks of the Magyars (906 A.D.).

Group **C** shows the decrease of burials in settlement features. Moreover all features in this group were excavated in cemeteries and not at settlements. The role of these features at the cemeteries is the same as at the settlements – for the deposition of “special” dead, but it is less clear why they started to appear exactly at this period.

### **"Under the cross": Christianization of Slavs.**

The regrouping of Slavic tribes in Moravia began in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The wars with the Avars accelerated this process and strengthened the position of tribal chiefs, who led the defense of the territory with their war bands. The prosperity of Moravia increased rapidly after the removal of the Avars following Charlemagne's victory. Bishop Einhard reported<sup>39</sup> that in 822, the process was complete and that the tribes in the valleys between the Danube and Thaya and Morava had acknowledged the supremacy and taken the name of the most important tribe, Moravians, under the reign of Mojmir. Another important center was Nitra and the unification of tribes around this center ended at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, in the reign of Pribina.

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<sup>39</sup> *Annales Regum Francorum* (ad a. 822), MGH Ss 1, ed. F. Kurze, p.159

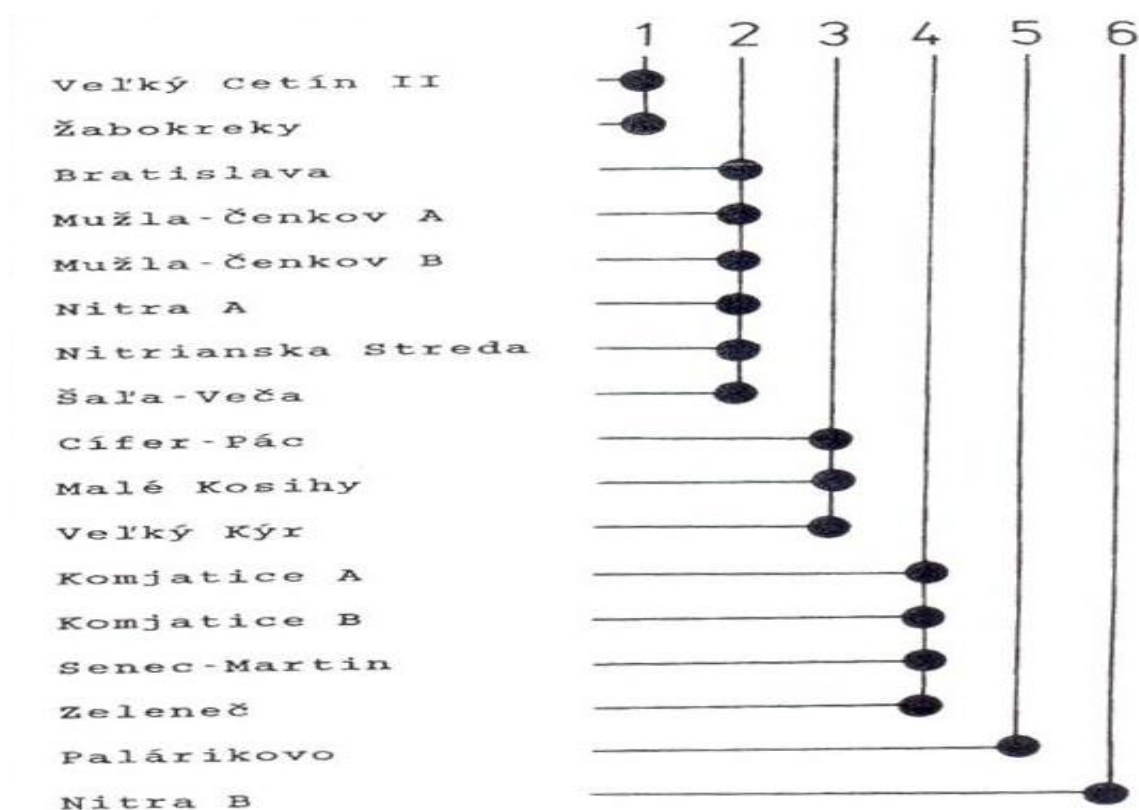


Fig.31: Chronology of settlement features with human burials. 1 – first half of 9<sup>th</sup> century; 2 – second half of 9<sup>th</sup> century – first quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> century; 3 – second – fourth quarter of 10<sup>th</sup> century; 4 – 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century; 5 – first half of 13<sup>th</sup> century; 6 – first half of 17<sup>th</sup> century. reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)

From this point we can trace the rapid growth of Frankish church influence on the Slavic lands. Salzburg was active principally in Carinthia, and Passau began to reach into the Moravian area. Monasteries placed on the frontiers of this diocese had been active since 770 and the heart of Mojmir's state was most easily accessible from Passau. When the imperial frontier was advanced from the Enns to the Raab in 791, Passau become responsible for the new area. Regensburg in due course also acquired interests in this direction, mostly after large grants of land were made to the see by Louis the German in 850, bringing the diocese within striking distance of Moravia.

There are several churches dating from this time in Moravia. One of the earliest is the small church at Modra - Staré Město, dated to first quarter of 9<sup>th</sup> century and built in Dalmatian- Istrian style, together with several churches in Mikulčice, from the same period. There is a strong connection between Moravia and Aquileia. Moravia and Pannonia both exhibit a notably southern, essentially Lombard, element in their earliest Christian architecture. We can find a similar situation in Bavaria, which looked as much south to Lombardy as west to the Franks. Aside from Lombard architectural influence on Moravia, Mikulčice was the main center of Frankish ecclesiastical influence from Passau.

Nitra also enjoyed good relations with the Franks. Pribina, still pagan, did not object to the Frankish missionaries' activities. It is possible that the missionaries were successful among the native Slavic population. However, the fact that Pribina himself was still pagan excluded the possibility of mass conversion. The duke's reluctance to accept the Christian faith appears to have cost him his land. Mojmir attacked Pribina, chased him from Nitra and added this territory to his realm. That most probably happened in 833<sup>40</sup>. Pribina fled across Danube to the Margrave Radbod, governor of the Frankish East Mark. He sought Frankish intervention against Mojmir, as he considered himself as a vassal, but nothing happened and Pribina was ordered to be baptized. The fact that Louis the German refused to intervene against Mojmir, indicates that he was already Christian and enjoyed good relationship with the Franks. Pribina was given a fief in Lower Pannonia, where he built a new residence, Blatnohrad, Mosaburg, at the southern end of Lake Balaton. Mosaburg remained ecclesiastically under Salzburg.

The disputed succession after Mojmir's death in 846, gave Louis the German a chance to intervene in Moravian affairs. He installed Rastislav, Mojmir's nephew as duke, in expectation that he would be obedient to the Franks. Pribina became Margrave in 847 and his lands were granted to him in hereditary possession<sup>41</sup>. Shortly after his installment, Rastislav revolted against Louis the German and

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<sup>40</sup> F. Dvornik: *Byzantine Mission among Slavs. SS. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius*, (New Jersey/ New Brunswick, 1970), p. 78

<sup>41</sup> *Annales Bertiniani*, MGH Ss 1, p.444; *An. Fuld.*, Ibid., pp.365- 366, ed. F. Kurze, pp. 38- 39; *Annales Xantenses*, MGH Ss 2, p. 229

from 849 they were almost constantly at war. In 855 Louis gathered a large army to invade Moravia. By all accounts the expedition was a large one, but failed in the end because of Moravian fortifications. Unable to take these strongholds, Louis had to be satisfied with pillaging the countryside.<sup>42</sup>

We can say that after 855 Rastislav became an independent ruler, but his situation was difficult, with the Frankish Empire on his west and southern borders and the Bulgarian state on the east. Evidence of possible cooperation between the Bulgars and Franks forced him to send an embassy to Constantinople. A mission from Constantinople arrived in 863 with the brothers Constantine and Methodius as leaders. These brothers of Slavic origin translated the Scriptures into Slavic and created a Slavic alphabet. Rastislav's position as an independent ruler was strengthened after the arrival of the missionaries, as he was able to minimize the influence of the Frankish Church and Frankish kings. Nevertheless, the struggle between Frankish and Byzantine missionaries continued, with the active participation of Rome and ended only after the deaths of Constantine and Methodius. The fall of Great Moravia under the attacks of Magyars marked the end of independent Slavic kingdoms and SW Slovakia became an area controlled by the Magyars. Though the Magyars were still pagans at that time, Christianity remained an inherent part of Slavic lives.

The decision to accept Christianity was made by the assembly "...of princes and Moravians..."<sup>43</sup>, therefore by the Slavic elite. However, according to some authors, the decision to accept baptism was accompanied by stipulations to allow continued pagan practices, as was the case in Iceland.<sup>44</sup> In one of the main strongholds of Moravia, at Mikulčice, a pagan sanctuary continued in uninterrupted use until the middle of the ninth century<sup>45</sup>; in the 860s Constantine

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<sup>42</sup> *Annales Fuldenses*, MGH Ss 1, p.369; ed. F. Kurze, p. 45. We learn from the letter addressed by the Archbishop of Mainz, Hatto, to Pope John IX in 900 in which he protested in the name of the Frankish clergy against the expulsion of Bavarian priests from Moravia (PL, 131, col. 1180). This must have happened between 850 and 855 when Rastislav had broken his relations with the Empire

<sup>43</sup> *Vita Constantini*, Ch. 14

<sup>44</sup> P. Sommer, D. Třeštík, J. Žemlička: "Bohemia and Moravia", in *Christianization and the rise of Christian Monarchy*, ed. by N. Berend, (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 214- 262

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221

reproached the priests of Passau active in Moravia for "not preventing the holding of sacrifices according to earlier custom"<sup>46</sup>, and as late as the last third of the ninth century Methodius was credited with returning many pagan Moravians to the faith.<sup>47</sup> The transition from old "paganism" to Christianity was not straightforward and "old" and "new" beliefs existed alongside each other. Moreover, Cosmas' *Chronica Boemorum* attests the survival of old "pagan" burials rites as late as at the end of 11th century.<sup>48</sup> Some aspects of "pagan" cult slowly dissolved into the amorphous sea of "superstition", to be criticized by clerics along with moral failings and abuses of Christian ritual and through time; official and public pagan cults had disappeared, leaving practices that generations of clerics labeled "popular", and by modern intellectuals dubbed "folkloric".<sup>49</sup> Belief in "vampires" and "revenants" remained part of this "Christian folklore".

The political situation recorded by the primary sources corresponds with the situation delivered from archaeological findings. The influence of Christianity is distinguishable also in the burial rite and is demonstrated not only by the growth of cemeteries in the vicinity of churches, but also by unfurnished graves and Christian symbolism. However, more important for my research is that "unusual" burials remained part of funerary rituals even after Christianization.

### **"Voices of the past": What Slavic archaeologists thought about the "special" dead?**

The thoughts of an older generation of Slovak and Czech archaeologists (Hrubý [1912- 1985] and Eisner [1885- 1967]) were influenced by Marx's "materialist conception of history", which focused more on the economic areas of human past and less on thoughts and "superstitions". The space given to the "special" dead in publications was not extensive and graves with individuals in strange position tended to be interpreted as remains of old "pagan" cults and practices. Though

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<sup>46</sup> *Vita Constantini*, Ch. 15

<sup>47</sup> *Vita Methodi*, Ch. 10

<sup>48</sup> Cosmas, *Chronica Boemorum*, Book II Chapter IV and Book III Chapter I

<sup>49</sup> R. Bartlett: "From Paganism to Christianity in medieval Europe", in *Christianization and the rise of Christian Monarchy*, ed. by N. Berend, (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 47- 72



Eisner remarked about burials at Devínska Nová Ves that: "...it is incredible how many beautiful examples of respect and love to the dead we can see at Devínská Nová Ves and on the other side considerable evidence about fear of vampires ..." <sup>50</sup>, he didn't elaborate further about the reasons behind this and why there was "special", more severe, treatment for some people. Moreover, archaeologists of that era preferred to look first at other interpretational options for these burials - as evidence of grave robberies, landslides etc. The thoughts of medieval people and especially motives leading to "special" burials were not so important for them.

More recent generations of archaeologists (Špaček, Hanuliak) are more influenced by post-processual and cognitive archaeology and are more inclined to take into account the thoughts, superstitions and fears of early medieval people. Špaček remarks at the end of his article that "...in the time span of several decades they buried here only "vampires", persons deemed in that time dangerous for bereaved and other people..." and that "...the degree of anti- vampire practices was carried on according to the expected possible threat to the living..." <sup>51</sup> Hanuliak similarly assumed that "...between the world of living and the world of dead was only a thin line represented by death..." <sup>52</sup> and therefore the goal of "anti-vampire" practices, was to prevent the return of the "suspicious" person from the grave and to deprive it of possible intention to harm lives and possessions of living. <sup>53</sup>

### **Burials in "settlement features"**

In his paper, Hanuliak separates 3 localities with special circumstances – Bratislava, Palarikovo and Nitra Objekt 1/84. In Bratislava (**Fig.20**), he interprets 7 skeletons in a well like feature as warriors, deposited at the same time, probably linked to a battle: he justifies his explanation by the level of burned soil and remains of destruction found approximately at the same level as the well. On the other hand, according to Vallašek, it is a ritual burial and he supports his opinion

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<sup>50</sup> Eisner, *Devínska Nová Ves*, p. 247

<sup>51</sup> Špaček, "Slovanské pohřebiště v Čelákovících", p. 212

<sup>52</sup> Hanuliak, *Veľkomoravské pohrebiská*, p. 209

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 209

with the discovery of ten iron axe-like objects (used as a kind of currency) found in a semi-circle around the walls of pit on the same level as the skeletons. Moreover he interprets the burned soil as remains of a purgative ritual, which was supposed to help to clean the object or grave from evil spirits.<sup>54</sup> The cottage from Palarikovo (**Fig.25**) with the skeletons of 2 adults and 2 infants is linked according to Hanuliak with the Tartar expansion in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century: he interprets the excavated individuals as a family killed by Tartars. The adult from Nitra appears to Hanuliak as a victim of crime and his deposition linked with the effort of hiding the proof of this crime than with deposition of “special” dead. The dating of this object to 16<sup>th</sup> century is, for Hanuliak, further proof of his conclusion. I am inclined to agree with Hanuliak only in the Palarikovo case, which involves a different type of settlement object (cottage instead of borrow pit). The sex of the skeletons, which points to a family, and the dating also support his conclusion. The other two cases are in my opinion examples of deposition of “special” dead rather than victims of crime and battle. In particularly the adult from Nitra could demonstrate that the old beliefs and superstitions were still alive even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Appearance during the individual's lifetime could be one of the factors determining the style of deposition. As we observed in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, disability can lead to “special” burial rites. Out of 49 skeletons deposited in the settlement features, physical disabilities were detected only in 4 cases. The infant in Objekt 488 from Muzla- Cenkov has the right side of their skull deformed (**Fig.22.6**); the young woman in Objekt 3 from Male Kosihy (**Fig.20.4**) has the left leg shorter than the right and also partially split vertebrae in the waist area. According to Hanuliak, apart from being lame she could also have problems with random urination.<sup>55</sup> Objekt 32 (**Fig.21.2**) from Cifer-Pac contained two individuals; skeleton “b” with changes on the elbow and skeleton “c” with healed chest bone and with advanced spondylosis. Similarly as in Anglo- Saxon cases, the percentage of people whose appearance and its influence on the community could lead to different or “special” treatment after the death is very small and

<sup>54</sup> A. Vallašek: “Hromadný hrob z 10.stor v Bratislave”, in *Monumentorum – tutela. Ochrana Pamiatok* 8., (Bratislava, 1972), pp. 229-248

<sup>55</sup> Hanuliak, *Veľkomoravské pohrebiská*, p.170

cannot be the sole motivation for “unusual” burial rites. Moreover, the great occurrence of “anti-vampire”<sup>56</sup> practices recognizable on the bodies of those individuals validates the assumption that these “unusual” rites were applied as protection against revenants.

Gender is another important category for evaluating the motives leading to burials (or depositions) in settlement objects. Out of 49 individuals deposited in those features, the sex was determined by anthropological analysis only in 19 cases (**Fig.32**). The results are not sufficient and therefore we must rely in many cases on the opinion of the archaeologists leading this particular excavation. 81.7% of those individuals were adults and there were not many children and young people buried inside these objects (in both cases under 10%). An exception is Muzla-Cenkov B (Vilmarket) where we can observe a high percentage of children’s skeletons not only in settlement features but also in graves excavated at the settlement area. Out of 27 excavated skeletons (from both settlement features and graves together), 17 were non adults (63%). The majority of non adults belong to the age group between 6 months and 8 years (11 skeletons). As I have already discussed in the introduction, in many societies age is an important factor for determining if an individual was a rightful member of society and the children up to a certain age are not perceived as one. Moreover they are more apt to return from the grave.<sup>57</sup> According to Hanuliak this is possibly the main reason for the “unusual” way of deposition also at Muzla-Cenkov B, because the rite of passage to the adult society among the Slavs was practised circa between the third and seventh year of life.<sup>58</sup> The skeletons from graves at Muzla-Cenkov B also bear marks of intentional disruption of the bones, probably a remnant of practices to prevent the return from “the otherworld”, which supports even more strongly their “special” role in society.

In the group of adults we have more males than females (30 % > 15 %) with approximately the same percentage of adults of indeterminate sex as males. Those numbers, if we do not take into account the group of indeterminate sex or split it

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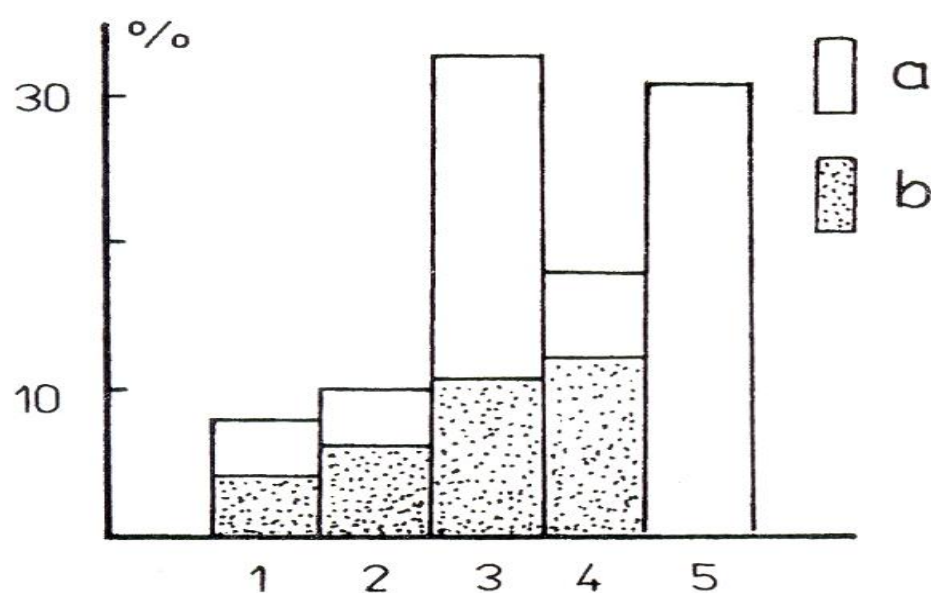
<sup>56</sup> 71, 4 %; Ibid., p.176

<sup>57</sup> See Introduction, pp. 19-20

<sup>58</sup> Hanuliak, Kuzma, Salkovsky: *Muzla- Cenkov I*, (Nitra, 1993), p. 157

evenly, between males and females, clearly indicate a conclusion that the males are the group with highest percentage of “unusual” burials in this particular category (burials in settlement features).

According to Hanuliak, the grave-goods at cemeteries from Male Kosihy (**Fig.20.4**) and Velky Kyr (**Fig.26.1**), with clear elements of non- Karpathic provenience and marks of non- Slavic ethnicity on the excavated skeletons, point to the conclusion that depositions in settlement features were also not unknown among the Magyars. If we take this conclusion into account, depositions in cemeteries could be a Magyar modification representing their beliefs or just an alteration of Slavic burial rites under the influence of Magyars or vice versa. Nevertheless, it is another indicator that these ideas are not specific only for one particular ethnicity but have a more global undertone.



**Fig.32:** Gender of human skeletons found in settlements features: 1 – children; 2 – not adults; 3 – adult males; 4 – adult females; 5 – adults with non determined sex. a) total number of skeletons b) number of skeletons with determined sex. Reproduced from M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)

## Burials in cemeteries

### Čelákovice

According to Špaček, the cemetery at Čelákovice is a new addition to the study of vampirism among the Slavs, as the first of the kind where all graves bear marks of anti-vampire practices.<sup>59</sup> It is the only known "vampire" cemetery in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The location, orientation and disruption of bones attests that belongs to individuals deemed as "dangerous" and the fact that these individuals were buried at Čelákovice for several decades and were not just victims of a plague outbreak or a "one-off" warfare incident, supports Špaček's opinion that the cemetery at Čelákovice is an important example of how Slavs treated their "special" dead.

But on the other hand, a more recent evaluation of this cemetery by Pavlína Mašková, suggests that Špaček's assumption could be wrong and that these graves were the last resting places of executed criminals.<sup>60</sup> Mašková questions the dating of this cemetery, pointing to the fact that the skeletons were dated only on the basis of five Fe buckles, which, according to her, were used throughout the entire Middle Ages and also in the modern period. Although her theory raises some valid points, Mašková drew her conclusion purely from a comparison of Čelákovice with modern execution cemeteries and the existence of the right of execution for Čelákovice granted in the 16th century. In my opinion, this is neither undeniable evidence supporting Mašková's assumption nor does it argue against Špaček's theory.<sup>61</sup> However, taking into account the forensic evidence, I am more inclined to agree with Špaček's proposition.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Špaček, "Slovanské pohřebiště v Čelákovících", p. 211

<sup>60</sup> P. Mašková: "K otázce interpretace kostrového pohřebiště "s projevy vampyrismu" v Čelákovících", in *Studia mediavalia Pragensis* 5 (2005), pp. 9- 19

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>62</sup> See below pp. 162-167

## Staré Město "Na Valách".

According to Hrubý, the cemetery mirrors the turbulent situation in 9th and 10th century<sup>63</sup> and we can track not only the changes in burial rites under the influence of Christianity, but also the social stratification of the Slavic community buried at this cemetery. Staré Město- "Na Valách" was the cemetery of an urban population; with its higher level of craft skills and furnishing of some graves, it is distinguished from the smaller, mostly village, cemeteries.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the wider range in wealth of the graves and greater diversity in burial customs reflects the social stratigraphy of a feudal system. Equally, the thinking of town people, influenced by direct and periodic contact with Christian beliefs, possibly better education and with more knowledge about the world, was on a different level to the thinking of the ordinary villager. Nevertheless, archaeological material indicates that the community burying its dead at "Na Valách" is also subject to fears and superstitions and some of the deceased were buried in a more "special" way than others.

Grave 153/49 is according Hrubý a clear example that old "pagan" beliefs were still alive and that "special" burial practices were also used after Christianization, even at such a prominent locality as "Na Valách".<sup>65</sup> The group of burials with the lower part of the body in a normal position and the upper part scattered bear no signs of secondary entry and we can dismiss the possibility that the violation of bones was the work of grave robbers.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Hrubý continues: "...we cannot speak here about any dismemberment of the body in connection with anti-vampire practices, because just individual bones and not whole limbs (in their natural order), were scattered around the grave."<sup>67</sup>

A similar situation is reported about the graves from cemetery at Devínska Nová Ves<sup>68</sup>, and according to Eisner, the individuals buried inside were deposited in a

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<sup>63</sup> Hrubý, *Staré Město: Na Valách*, p. 104

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 104

<sup>65</sup> Hrubý, *Staré Město: Na Valách*, p. 103

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 79

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> See later in this chapter for the cemetery at Devínska Nová Ves

sitting position. Eisner didn't exclude the option that the graves were open, that they had collapsed inwards after some time and that the resultant landslide is responsible for the scattering of the bones.<sup>69</sup> However, Hrubý didn't discover any signs pointing to a "special" adjustment of graves at "Na Valách" pointing to preparation for burial in a sitting position: the grave pits have the usual dimensions and shape, without any remains of wooden poles to hold the bodies in a sitting position.<sup>70</sup> He is more inclined to believe that landslides, decomposition (in case of possible air cavity around body: burial in coffin or wooden chamber)<sup>71</sup> and water were responsible for dislocation of upper body bones.<sup>72</sup>

### **Devínska Nová Ves**

According to Eisner, burials of bodies without heads and heads without bodies were not unknown among Avars and were recognized also at cemeteries of Sarmatian Jazygs and Teutons; this custom is widespread and has its roots in vampires and revenants beliefs.<sup>73</sup> Taking into account the higher percentage of these burials at Devínska Nová Ves we cannot exclude the possibility of Avaric origin. Nevertheless, this practice is also known among the Slavs and Hulle records the find of a young woman's skull, detached at the fifth vertebrae and deposited inside a Slavic pot.<sup>74</sup> It may be relevant that Thietmar of Merseburg records in his chronicle that Poles during the reign of Mešek I (922/945 - 992) still decapitated women after the death of their husbands.<sup>75</sup> Removing the head from the body belongs to the index of anti-vampire practices and the deposition of the head in a separate grave renders the revenant's return more difficult if not impossible. On the other hand, Eisner remarked that Avars buried sometimes only heads: in cases when person died far away from his "home" cemetery (battle, travel and etc.) the head was removed and brought back to be buried, though he

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<sup>69</sup> Eisner, *Devínska Nová Ves*, p. 240

<sup>70</sup> Hrubý, *Staré Město: Na Valách*, p. 80

<sup>71</sup> no remains of coffin were discovered in those graves

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 80

<sup>73</sup> Eisner, *Devínska Nová Ves*, p. 245

<sup>74</sup> W. Hulle: "Eine slawische Schädelbestattung im Burgwall am Kapellenberge bei Landsberg"; in *Jahresschrift für die Vorgeschichte der sächsisch-thüringischen Länder* XIX, (1931), pp. 96- 104

<sup>75</sup> *Chronicon Thietmari*, Book 8, Chapter 2, in "Ottonian Germany : The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg", translated and annotated by David Warner, (Manchester, 2001)

continues that this is probably not the case at Devínska Nová Ves, because he discovered burials of children's heads without a body<sup>76</sup> and he is also more inclined to believe that we are dealing here with anti-vampire practices.

### ***"Fear of the dead": Alternative approach to the problem of "special" burials***

#### ***"We will bury them at the threshold of our homes": Deposition in settlement features and Christianization***

According to Hanuliak's research, the greatest occurrence of burials in settlement features almost exactly coincides with the expansion of Christianity (Fig. 11)<sup>77</sup> A similar process occurs also in the Anglo- Saxon area, where we can monitor in some areas a return to the old "pagan" beliefs during or shortly after Christianization, probably in this case under the influence of plague. Looking at Anglo-Saxon England in the late seventh century, Dunn suggested that:

The Justinianic Plague – in the 660's, and its continued outbreaks over the next two decades, must have reinforced old beliefs and fears..., ...the failure of Christian funerary ritual to confront popular perceptions that those who have died in epidemics might return to carry others off is likely to have triggered acute fears – especially in view of other popular perception that revenant activity can be caused by inadequate or inappropriate funerary rites.<sup>78</sup>

The result was a return to the old funerary practices, confirmed by archaeological material even in the kingdom of East Angles, where Christianity had been introduced in the 630s and which was ruled by some notably pious kings, as I will discuss further in the following chapter.<sup>79</sup> Even though we don't have any proof of a similar plague among Slavs, it is likely that in cases when the new funerary rituals were deemed insufficiently powerful to prevent the return of the dead, old beliefs and rites, proved by long centuries of successful use, were added to or

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<sup>76</sup> Eisner, *Devínska Nová Ves*, p. 245

<sup>77</sup> Hanuliak, "K problematike ľudských skeletov", p. 173

<sup>78</sup> Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, p. 175

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176



substituted for Christian ones. However, this could be just one of many possible reasons for return to old "pagan"- style practices.

Politics, together with economical and social factors also played an important role in the decision as to what kind of religion kings, dukes and ordinary people will support. Time and again apparent conversions were reversed by pagan reactions: not only in England, but also in Scandinavia and central Europe: Poland 1032-1034, Hungary 1046, in Sweden 1120 and resistance of the Slavs between Elbe and Oder.<sup>80</sup> Although we don't know the exact reasons for the higher occurrence of burials in the settlement features at the time of Christianization, one of the possible motives for these rituals could be a "fear of the dangerous dead", a need "to drive the spirits away", especially in the period when new ideas took the place of old ones and were "tested" and "scrutinized" by some members of society, most likely the "old" spiritual leaders. When the Christian rites failed to defend the community against the revenants, the "traditional" practices were applied.

Another question is: was this increased threat of the "dangerous dead" in the time of Christianization genuine or was it just an artificially created "hysteria" to boost the power of the old "spiritual elite"? The deposition of these individuals in features at settlements, possibly as a part of a ceremony with a big audience, could act as an reminder of the danger from revenants on one side and relief that the threat was pacified and the dead would not harm community again on the other - to say nothing of the fact that it would gain the upper hand for the party responsible for stopping this threat, in this case the supporters of the old beliefs. Christianity in Great Moravia was not imposed by invaders, as in 9th century Saxony or in the eastern Baltic region in thirteenth century, but adopted by native elites. Although the seats of power become centers of Christianization, people living outside these centers were less influenced by Christian teaching than the inhabitants of towns. It is possible that when the Christian beliefs "finally arrived"

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<sup>80</sup> Bartlett, "From Paganism to Christianity", p. 67

in the "countryside"<sup>81</sup>, they were met with greater hostility or suspicions by local "pagan elites" and also by member of community. This could be one of the possible reasons why these rituals seem to be used more frequently in this particular period. Moreover, to differentiate between "pagan" and "Christians" in the Early Middle Ages, in the same way that we do today, is in my opinion impossible.<sup>82</sup> Early medieval people absorbed new ideas, but still kept older beliefs, creating "the mix" which corresponded with everyday reality of their lives and had use for the welfare of community. The deposition of the "dangerous dead" was no exception.

### ***"Vampires exist": The identity of the males buried at Čelákovice***

An important factor for finding out who was buried at Čelákovice is the sex of individuals. All 20 skeletons excavated at the cemetery belonged to males between 20 and 60 years old.<sup>83</sup> If we take into account Reynolds' study<sup>84</sup>: the deposition of only males in "unusual" positions (hands tied behind back, decapitations etc.) during moderate time period is a mark not only of "vampire/revenant" burials, but also for so-called "execution" cemeteries, whose parameters are fulfilled also at Čelákovice almost to the point and only supports the theory of Pavlína Mašková. I will now cite Reynolds' characteristics of execution cemeteries to better illustrate the similarities between execution and revenant/vampire cemeteries:

The deviant burial characteristics of execution cemeteries are, variously, prone burials, multiple interments, decapitation, evidence of restraint, shallow and cramped burial, and mutilation. Intercutting graves, indicating burial over period of time, are common, in combination with varied orientation of individual graves. Finds are likely to be limited to low-status dress-fittings, indicating a lack of

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<sup>81</sup> The majority of the settlements discussed above (except Bratislava and Nitra) were located in countryside, away from power centres

<sup>82</sup> More about this topic in Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*; N. Berend: *Christianization and the rise of Christian Monarchy*, (Cambridge, 2007); Ch. Lee: *Feasting the Dead: Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon Burial Rituals*, (Woodbridge, 2007), M. Carver: *The Cross goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300 - 1300*, (Woodbridge, 2005 )

<sup>83</sup> M. Blajerová: "Čelákovické pohřby vampýru v pohledu antropologa", in: *Časopis Národního Muzea XL* (1971/1), pp. 218- 233

<sup>84</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p.44

preparation for burial. Execution sites are normally located on principal administrative boundaries, associated with earthworks such as barrows or linear earthworks. The occurrence of tied hands, either behind the back or in front, is perhaps the most positive indication that a burial is that of a felon.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, as is the case with Anglo-Saxon laws, Slavic law codes speak very little about the "special" dead. The main issue addressed in Slavic law codes is pagan practices, however not those connected with funerary rituals and the dead, but mostly polygamy and free relationships between men and women. The punishment of criminals is treated on various levels, ranging from fasting and monetary compensation to the death penalty, although I have found only one clause prescribing capital punishment.<sup>86</sup> The following examples are from two Great Moravian law codes *Zakon sudnyj l'udem* and *Zapovedi svetych otc*, whose time of issue corresponds with the time period of Slavic archaeological material discussed in this dissertation.

**"*Zakon sudnyj l'udem*" ("Law code for laity")<sup>87</sup>**

This was created most likely during preparation for the Byzantine mission to the Great Moravia by Methodius. At the beginning he refers to a *rescriptum* of the emperor Constantine, included in the *Ekloga* during the reign of first Isaurians (first half of the 8th century). In Great Moravia the law code was further updated and influenced by Roman and Frankish law, which would explain why it is less benevolent and more strict than its Byzantine predecessors. It was not in use for a very long period.

I. (1) Every village where people practice pagan sacrifices (offerings) or pagan, oaths, let them forfeit all their wealth to the Church.

I. (2) When they have a lord (chieftain), in that village, who is practicing pagan sacrifices and oaths, let him sell himself and all his wealth and the sum give to the poor.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 44

<sup>86</sup> *Zakon sudnyj l'udem* XV. (1)

<sup>87</sup> *Zakon sudnyj l'udem*, in *Pramene k dejinám Vel'kej Moravy*, ed. by P. Ratkoš, (Bratislava, 1964), pp. 267- 274

XV. (1) Who ... will burn buildings, if it is in the city, let him burn to death; if it is in the settlement or village, let him be decapitated by sword. But according to Church law, let him fast for 12 years, because he is a criminal.

XXVII. Who will disrobe the dead in the grave, let him sell himself.

**"Zapovedi svetych otc"** ("Law codes of the saintly fathers" - penitential)<sup>88</sup>

This was created for the needs of Methodius and was influenced by the western law codes after the year 870. However, it is not very strict and there are no offences punishable by death.

1. If someone will commit murder, or will kill someone of his kin, let him do penance abroad...

23. If someone will go on the 1st of January to celebrate winter Solstice, as pagans did before, let him fast three years only on bread and water.

Although the focal point of Slavic law codes was paganism, they were focused more on the issue of polygamy and on free relationships between the sexes than on the mortuary rituals and the dead. "Special" burial rites were not mentioned in these law codes, which, given the archaeological evidence of their existence, indicates that these practices were either not a major problem in the conversion period or were kept untouched by "new" Moravian Church. The fact that the only crime punishable by death was arson and decapitation for this crime was applied only in villages, together with the lack of "execution" cemeteries in the Slavic area, led me to the same suggestion as in the case of Anglo-Saxon "special" dead: the Slavic "special" burials examined in this dissertation cannot be seen as resting places of the criminals, but rather as the evidence of beliefs in return of the dead.

Reynolds' observation that "...the examples from the later Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries show all the signs of decapitation as the cause of death, exhibiting

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<sup>88</sup> *Zapovedi svetych otc*, in *Pramene k dejinám Vel'kej Moravy*, ed. by P. Ratkoš, (Bratislava, 1964), pp. 274- 278

major trauma to the head and neck regions..."<sup>89</sup>, can't be verified for the examples from older cemeteries. Reynolds himself admitted that "special" burial rites in Early Anglo-Saxon England served essentially the same purpose: "...to render the corpses of the suspect dead 'safe'"<sup>90</sup> and the removal of the head was applied as an effective means of laying the "dangerous" corpse to rest.<sup>91</sup>

The fact that in all three cases of decapitation (Graves 6, 7 [Fig.28]; 8) at Čelákovice the heads were removed from the body some time after the death during secondary entry to the grave (the soft tissue was not completely decomposed when the skulls were moved and anthropological analysis did not discover any damage on vertebra or any cuts indicating beheading)<sup>92</sup>, indicates that beheading was not the cause of death. Moreover, the jaws of the skeleton in the Grave 8 were intentionally wide open and filled with sand (a known anti revenant/ vampire practice), which could be seen as proof that we are dealing here with burial practices reserved for "revenant/ vampires" and not for felons. The more severe mutilation of these individuals (Graves 6, 7, 8), together with the superimposition of these graves and their location in NW part of cemetery, away from others, also marks them as more "unusual" even in this cemetery for "special" dead and allows us to examine different types of treatment for various types of "dangerous" dead. Moreover, Reynolds also suggests that the combination of decapitation with other "deviant" rites can mark such graves as even more "unusual" or "special."<sup>93</sup> Even though we cannot exclude the possibility that certain offences were punished by beheading as they were in later periods, in my opinion even in these instances a superstitious motive seems likely (similarly acknowledged by Reynolds)<sup>94</sup>. In the same way, Meaney and Hawkes remarked that the motivation to decapitate in the Early Anglo-Saxon period seems to have been founded on the same principle as prone burial, stoning and etc.: to prevent the dead from haunting the living.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 78

<sup>90</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 89

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 78

<sup>92</sup> Špaček, "Slovanské pohřebiště v Čelákovících", p. 209

<sup>93</sup> Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*, p. 80

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 91

<sup>95</sup> A.L. Meaney, and S.C. Hawkes: *Two Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries at Winnall, Winchester, Hampshire*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series 4, (London, 1970), p. 31

In comparison with the males from other Slavic localities of the same period, the males from Čelákovice differ from others in basic skull measurements and indices.<sup>96</sup> Other metric and descriptive data are identical with the rest of Slavic population. Miroslava Blajerová, the anthropologist examining skeletons, raises several questions at the end of her paper: Is this difference a sign of brachycephalic group of Slavs in this area? Is this difference in some way linked to anti- vampire practices examined on the skeletons of these individuals? Are these individuals members of a "dangerous and violent" clan?<sup>97</sup>; however, she does not answer her own questions. Some people are more liable to become revenants and references about the clans with hereditary predispositions to return from the grave are not unknown in anthropological and ethnographic sources. Moreover, violent and dangerous behaviour during life is another attribute which could lead to "special" treatment after the death. The cemetery at Čelákovice could be an example of the last resting place of such a "dangerous and vile" family, whose members didn't stop terrorizing the living even after death.

The existence of a cemetery such as Čelákovice under the very nose of the Church and without some kind of approval seems improbable. Taking into account that the deceased were buried here over a period of several decades, we can either support Špaček's assumption that the burials ended around the middle of 11th century under the influence of the Church and the duke's decrees, or survived until late 11th or early 12th century. This would imply the tacit approval of Church dignitaries, necessitated by the needs of the community, where revenants had become a problem which exceeded the power of Christian rites. The function of the cemetery as a resting place only for "dangerous" (special) dead, located outside (but not far from) the cemetery for "normal" people and at the outskirts of the church centre, together with its duration<sup>98</sup>, could be proof of some kind of compromise between Christianity and traditional beliefs, between the strict following of Christian doctrine and turning an blind eye to help the community.

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<sup>96</sup> Blajerová, "Čelákovické pohřby vampýru", p. 226

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 226

<sup>98</sup> The time span of cemetery is quite a long and is improbable that the dead were buried there secretly for so long

The exceptionality of this small cemetery<sup>99</sup> at Čelákovice would argue strongly for this assumption.

### ***"Shadow of the vampire": 200 years of "special" burial practices***

The burial rites at "Na Valách" changed and evolved through the time under the influence of many factors: political and economic changes, which made Staré Město one of the most important centres in Great Moravia and had an impact on the social status of community burying at "Na Valách"; and Christianity, which influenced beliefs and way in which people treated the dead. The old "pagan"-style burial rites gave way to Christian rituals; graves became more uniform and without grave goods. However, a minority of "special" burials, with at least similar if not almost the same characteristics, is present in all time periods at "Na Valách". The belief, that certain dead need "special" treatment survived within the community burying at "Na Valách" for almost 200 years. The longevity of these practices demonstrates that "fear of the dead", in this case not meant in a negative sense, but more as a label describing full range of relations between the living and the dead, is an essential part of human cognition. Whether the reasons were veneration or fear, "special" practices had to be fulfilled, to protect the family, clan or whole community and when necessary, severe methods applied. Although the Church did not agree with these practices and openly criticized "pagan rituals", some graves at Staré Město "Na Valách", as for example that of the old woman from Grave 153/49, indicating that when the need is grave "pagan rites" are accepted and accompanied by Christian practices, which work to annihilate the threat together. The deposition of this woman in close vicinity to the Church, in consecrated ground, could be seen as another means of preventing her return from the grave. We can assume from the way of her deposition that the woman was probably regarded as very dangerous and "old" anti-vampire practices were boosted by Christian beliefs: together these created a more powerful protection against the revenant than each individual element alone. This would show how

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<sup>99</sup> This is the only cemetery with "special" burials only which I found during my research; there are similar cemeteries tied with executions examined by Reynolds, but we cannot rate this cemetery as one of them - see above pp.162-167

practically the medieval mind worked, combining all possible instruments and using them in behalf of community.

These assumptions could be further supported by another recently excavated burial of a child at Staré Město "Modrá" (**Fig.33**). The community employed a significant amount of time and resources to bury this child and prevent its possible return from the grave. The location of the grave (between the church and settlement) and the size of the pyre, which must be substantial given the fact that the stones were very fragile and friable because of extensive heat, only supports the assumption that this burial was an affair attended by the majority, if not all, of the members of society, with significant importance and impact on the community living at Modrá. The existence of the church, which most likely predates, or is contemporary, with this funeral<sup>100</sup>, makes it another example where traditional non-Christian practices were applied, even after Christianization. The age of this individual together with the fact that he/she died a non-violent death, make it possible to assume that we are not dealing here with a criminal and that the reason why he/she was deposited in such a way depended more on beliefs of revenants. Though, we can only speculate what made this person dangerous for the community, its remains act as evidence of beliefs and practices of early medieval Slavs.

The body of the deceased is especially dangerous in the period between the death and the final deposition in the grave, and it is important to fulfill all rituals properly to prevent a possible return of the deceased. The belief that the decomposition of the corpse is a marker of how long the transition or liminal period will last is known in many cultures<sup>101</sup> and I have already discussed this topic in the Introduction and will discuss it further in the following chapter. Depositing the body into the grave too soon and/or omitting essential parts of ritual can be the reason for its return. The individuals buried with the lower part of body in normal position and bones of the upper body scattered may have been left to decompose prior their deposition to follow ritual, which will safeguard their

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<sup>100</sup> Pers. Comm. with excavator Mr. Mirek Vaškových

<sup>101</sup> Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, p.33



journey into the afterlife. The fact that those graves were usually deep and some of them reasonably rich (especially 282/49) is indicative of a certain social status of the deceased and the reverence of the community. Hrubý dates these graves amongst the oldest at the cemetery and taking into account that not all individuals at "Na Valách" buried in this time period enjoyed the same attention, we can assume that these rites were reserved only for certain individuals, supporting the conjecture that they can be seen as rituals employed for "special" dead.

The burial of a young man from Grave 11/50, with sandstone over his shinbones,<sup>102</sup> is one of a few examples of the physically disabled among the "special" dead and we can assume that the disability could be one of the reasons why he was treated differently after death. Disability, which was if not painful than at least troublesome probably affected the man's state of mind and influenced his behaviour - and also the attitude of his community toward him. A moody, limping person, with his face twisted in pain and sunken eyes, whispering to himself, is an uncomfortable sight for many people even today. From an alternative perspective, physical difficulties caused by disability could be the reason for the death of this young man and his "special" treatment just a necessary precaution to prevent his return from the grave.

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<sup>102</sup> See above p. 142



**Fig.33: Burial of a child at Staré Město "Modrá", courtesy of Mirek Vaškových**

### ***Wind from the East*': "Special" dead and cross-cultural exchange.**

The practices described by Thietmar of Merseburg and Ibn Fadlan, are, according to Eisner proof that decapitation was not unknown among the Slavs.<sup>103</sup> However, in my opinion, we should not link the practices at Devínska Nová Ves with the decapitation of widows after the death of their husbands, for several reasons: the skulls do not belong only to females; archaeologists discovered mostly single skulls in the graves, some of them even intentionally erected or placed facing in a certain direction; and the jaws were dislocated and placed beside the skulls, which is not possible before the decomposition of the soft tissue. Eisner did not discover any secondary disturbance of these graves, which eliminates the possibility of grave robbery and removal of the body or secondary entry with intention to pacify the "revenant".<sup>104</sup>

It is more likely that the bodies were left to decompose, that the skulls were removed afterwards and placed inside the grave. What happened to the body is open to question: it could have been burnt, thrown into the river or swamp, or left to rot in the forest or some other place. Another question is the reason for such practices. Taking into account the fact that these graves belong to a minority at Devínska Nová Ves, we cannot exclude the hypothesis that we have here once again practices reserved for the "special" dead as at other cemeteries.

Similarly, the graves with lower body parts in normal position and bones of the upper body scattered were probably not created as a result of a landslide or being moved by water. The occurrence of a similar type of burial at Staré Město, and discovery of burned soil over these graves, possibly indicating a hearth, is indicative of burial practices reserved for a particular type of dead, different from the rest of society. As I have already mentioned regarding this kind of grave at Staré Město "Na Valách", we cannot exclude the possibility that the bodies were left to decompose prior to their deposition in the grave as a part of rites securing safe passage to the afterlife.

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<sup>103</sup> See above p. 147 for Thietmar and *The Travels of Ibn Fadlan*, in: J. Simpson: *Beowulf and its analogues*, (London, 1968), pp. 341-345

<sup>104</sup> Eisner, *Devínska Nová Ves*, p. 245

It is indisputable that Slavic community burial at Devínska Nová Ves was influenced by coexistence with Avars, thus creating a distinctive cultural group. We could say the same about the burials of the "special" dead: with skull burials, most likely of nomadic origins, because they are rare at Slavic cemeteries in Slovakia and the Czech republic and "burials in sitting position" as a Slavic tradition, with equivalents in Moravia. However, more important for my research is that the "special" or "deviant" personae were also treated differently to "normal" persons in this mixed community and we can observe cultural variations of these rites at Devínska Nová Ves.

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My examination of "special" burials among the Slavs indicates a belief in the "dangerous" dead and fear of their return. Practices reserved for this kind of dead vary and each community developed some local alternatives, depending on the particular type of individual, the social and political situation or ethnicity. As in the Anglo-Saxon area, archaeologists did not excavate "special" burials at all Slavic cemeteries, suggesting either that not all communities had to deal with the "special" dead or that they dealt with them in such a way that cannot be recognized in the archaeological record. The Slavs feared their dead in towns as much as in villages, although the case of burials in "settlement features" suggests that these rites may have survived to a greater extent in the countryside. This fact was most likely influenced by the Christianization and location of the Church centers in the seats of power, though even increased Church influence was not capable of rooting out these beliefs completely. As we can observe in particular cases (the woman from Staré Město, the child at Modrá, Čelákovice) "old pagan" and Christian practices could be seen as cooperating in an effort to eliminate revenants and restore peace in the community. Alternatively, as I have discussed earlier in the text, an increased occurrence of burials in "settlement features" in the time of Christianization could also be a sign of a power struggle between the old "pagan" elites and the Church. One way or another, fear of the dead remained constant in centuries to come and survived in Central and Eastern Europe to the modern period.

As we observed during our examination of Anglo-Saxon archaeological material, the plague could be one of the reasons behind the return to "old" burial practices. Although plague is not documented in Slavic areas in the time period under my observation, we cannot dismiss the possibility that the waves of epidemics in the High Middle Ages or in the modern period, together with nomadic attacks from the east; Magyars in the 10th, Tartars in the 13th and Turks in the 15/16th centuries; may have had an impact on the beliefs of the people and could be responsible for the increased occurrence of "vampire" sightings in the Austro-Hungarian empire and also for so called "vampire craze" in the first half of the 18th century in the area of the present day Czech Republic. In the last instance, the situation escalated to such an extent that the Empress Maria Theresa authorized her own private physician Gerhard van Swieten to investigate these events.<sup>105</sup> Van Swieten attempted to look at the events from the medical point of view and remarked that the reason behind such beliefs was the lack of medical knowledge, especially about the decomposition processes of the body, and consequent panic spreading in the community when dealing with an "inexplicable" series of deaths. Van Swieten also mentioned in his report that these beliefs were not uncommon among the people in less developed areas. Moreover, he was especially outraged by the fact that it was mostly members of the clergy and "charlatans" who were called in the first place to assess the state of the corpses rather than proper medical practitioners.<sup>106</sup> Van Swieten's investigation led Maria Theresa to issue on 1st March 1755 a decree in which she banned exhumations and prohibited the Church from dealing with these events, which were put under the authority of the state department. The politics of Maria Theresa certainly influenced the emergence of "vampires", at least in the primary sources, in the Central and Eastern Europe, though belief in "vampires" didn't cease to exist, as shown by the evidence from the Balkans.<sup>107</sup> However, it is possible to assume that geopolitical situation and industrial development could be

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<sup>105</sup> G.van Swieten: *Vampyrismus von Herrn Baron Gerhard van Swieten verfasst, aus dem Französischen ins Deutsche übersetzt, und als ein Anhang der Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster beigefügt*, (Augsburg, 1768), available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/30886/30886-h/30886-h.htm>, accessed 19.02.2012

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore*

the reason why from 13th century onwards belief in revenants played a less significant role in Britain and Western Europe than in Central and Eastern Europe.

The theories connecting the "special" dead with "socially others" or "criminals" appeared in the Anglo-Saxon area as one sided and inadequate and we can say the same about any attempt to these rites among the Slavs in the same way. Neither the primary sources, which mention capital punishment only in one case, nor the archaeological material, can be used as evidence that the "special" dead examined in this chapter were criminals. "Execution cemeteries" are absent in the Slavic area<sup>108</sup> and even though Mašková's theory marked Čelákovice as an execution cemetery and dated it to a later period, the fact that the heads were removed some time after the death and forensic investigation has failed to find any damage on vertebrae or cuts on the bones suggesting execution, speaks rather on behalf of Špaček's assumption and points to the fear of return of the dead.<sup>109</sup>

Comparison of Anglo-Saxon and Slavic archaeological material showed that the fear of the dead played an important role in burial practices of both cultures. We can identify deviations in performance of "special" burial rites, which given the differences in ethnicity and geographical location could be expected. However the attitudes toward the "special" dead display more than accidental similarities; if we take into account the anthropological and ethnographic material examined in the previous chapters, this points to certain "universality" of these rites not only among various Pacific, Asian and Aboriginal peoples, as documented by anthropologists and ethnographers, but also in communities in early medieval Europe. Moreover, it also points to the assumption that these beliefs must originate from certain common denominators of human thinking which seem not to be fundamentally influenced by time, ethnicity or geographical location.

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<sup>108</sup> In the time period examined in this chapter

<sup>109</sup> See above pp.162-167

### **Chapter 3: The Restless Dead in the Primary Sources.**

A conception of mortuary rites in which both living and the dead play an active role, their actions affecting the whole process of transformation from one state to another, from life to death and vice versa, seems to have existed in the medieval mind – as it does also among many non-Christian cultures and peoples in the modern period. The primary sources are full of evidence about funerary customs, popular beliefs and superstitions, attesting the longevity and geographical distribution of such mortuary rituals and the beliefs on which they were based among “pagans”. But did these rites survive under the influence of Christianity? The difference between “pagan” and Christian dead is often perceived to be fundamental, but as Christina Lee has observed “...the difference between pre-Christian Europe and its successor is not as marked as previously suggested.”<sup>1</sup> The Early Middle Ages were more like a transition period in which the old rites still continued and the new had just been introduced: according to Lee again, “...rites continued to exist, not because they represented an obstinate adherence to “pagan” ideas, but because they had a meaning for the variety of people.”<sup>2</sup> While Christian authors understandably condemned these practices, their records provide valuable evidence about the practice and survival of these rituals, as well as enabling us to examine them from their point of view, which certainly differed from the “pagan” one, just as the view of an anthropologist (or even better in this case a Jesuit missionary<sup>3</sup>) differs from the view of Amazonian Indian or African Zulu.

#### **“Pagan” burial practices in primary sources**

The majority of pre-Christian funeral rites were deemed as being a passage from one state to the other, a voyage from "the world of living" to "the world of the dead", in which the proper execution of prescribed rites by the bereaved ensured the safe passage of the soul to the afterlife and at the same time safeguarded the

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<sup>1</sup> Ch. Lee: *Feasting the Dead: Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon Burial Rituals*, (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>3</sup> See R.G. Thwaites (ed.): *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (Cleveland, OH, 1901)



community against the potential return of the dead. The involvement of the bereaved was essential and omitting any particular step of the rite could result in a "catastrophic" outcome, in which the soul would not reach the next world and the body would not stay in the grave. These rites were comprised of a wide range of practices, which diametrically differed from the present day perception of mourning and seemed unusual and/or interesting for medieval authors. Around the year 550 Jordanes in his *Getica* recorded the funeral of Attila with these words:

... the corpse was laid out in the middle of the camp between silk tents, and solemnly exhibited as a sight for all to wonder at. The finest horsemen in the whole Hunnish nation rode round and round the place where he was laid, as if in the circus games, while they proclaimed his deeds in a funeral dirge...;...after he had been mourned with such laments as these, they celebrated what they themselves call a *strava* by holding a great feast on his grave-mound; thus, linking opposite notions together, they carried out the funerary mourning with a mixture of gaiety, and then committed the corpse to the earth in the secrecy of night.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Wulfstan of Hedeby, traveling around northern Europe, observed the funerary customs of the *Este*:

There is also a custom with the *Este*, that when a man is dead, he lies, in his house, unburnt with his kindred and friends a month,-sometimes two; and the king and the other men of high rank, so much longer according to their wealth, remain unburnt sometimes half a year; and lie above ground in their houses. All the while the body is within, there must be drinking and sports to the day, on which he is burned... It is also common with the *Este*, that there men of every tribe must be burned; and, if any one find a single bone unburnt, they shall make a great atonement.<sup>5</sup> (late 9<sup>th</sup> century)

The idea of wanton gaiety and drunkenness as an appropriate commemoration of the deceased is alien not only to the majority of present day people but was judged as so by the Early Medieval Church. The performance of anything remotely

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<sup>4</sup> Jordanes: *Getica*, Chapter XLIX; in MGH edition T. Mommsen: *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, (Berlin, 1882)

<sup>5</sup> Wulfstan Travels; in *King Alfred Anglo-Saxon Version of the Compendious History of the World by Orosius*, transl. Rev. Joseph Bosworth, (London, 1859), Book I: 21, 22, 23



resembling “pagan” rituals by Christians were condemned in the clerical literature. Caesarius of Arles (468/470- 542) in his *Sermones* mentioned that:

There are some people who come to the birthday festivals of the martyrs for this sole purpose, that they may destroy themselves and ruin others by intoxication, dancing, singing shameful songs, leading the choral dance, and pantomiming in a devilish fashion....What is worse, there are many people who not only get drunk themselves but also beg others to drink more than is proper...<sup>6</sup>

According to Augustine (354-430), Christians, unlike pagans, must not concern themselves with the bodies of the dead. Only the soul is important, and they must pray to God for its salvation. The pomp of funeral services and the state of the burial place are important only to the living, who are thus consoled in their time of grief.<sup>7</sup> Augustine tries to deny the possibility of any communication between the living and the dead. “Just as the living know nothing of the destiny of the dead in the hereafter, so the dead know nothing more of the living.”<sup>8</sup> The fate of the soul in the afterlife was dependent on the conduct of the individual during his or her life and not on the correct performance of funerary ritual.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, his own mother Monica, a pious Christian, who persuaded him to leave the Manichean sect and led him to Christianity, “...brought to certain oratories, erected to memory of the saints, offerings of porridge, bread and wine – as had been her custom in Africa...”<sup>10</sup>, and ceased to doing it only after the intervention of Bishop Ambrose of Milan, late in her life.

The tensions between strict Augustinian doctrine, minimizing the importance of funerary ritual on one hand and popular beliefs and practices on the other are also evident when we find the Church elaborating funerary ritual beyond the

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<sup>6</sup> Sermon 55, Caesarius: *Sermones*, transl. Mueller in *Saint Caesarius of Arles: Sermones*, Volume I (1-80), (New York 1956), pp. 271-273

<sup>7</sup> Augustine: *De cura pro mortuis gerenda ad Paulinum liber unus*, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol.40, cols. 591-610; ed. J.Zycha, C.S.E.L., 41 (Prague, Vienna and Leipzig, 1900), pp. 621-660; also see J.C. Schmitt: *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, transl. T.L. Fagan, (Chicago and London, 1994), pp. 11-34

<sup>8</sup> Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, pp. 20- 21

<sup>9</sup> Dunn, *Christianization of Anglo-Saxons*, p. 22

<sup>10</sup> Augustine: *Confessions*, in *Confessions and Enchiridion*, transl. by A.C. Outler, (Grand Rapids, 1955), Book VI, Chapter 2, p. 81

conventional norms - especially when they were dealing with the "special dead".<sup>11</sup> The *Dialogues* attributed to Pope Gregory the Great give the story of a young monk, too attached to his parents, who leaves the monastery without the blessing of his abbot, who happens to be St Benedict, and goes home. As soon as he arrives there, the boy dies. His parents bury him, but the day after the burial they discover his body lying outside the grave. They bury him again: next day he is found once more out of the grave. The terrified parents hurry to the abbot and plead with him to forgive their son for what he has done.

Moved by their tears, Benedict gave them a consecrated Host with his own hands. "When you get back," he said, "place this sacred Host upon his breast and bury him once more."<sup>12</sup>

Once they did what the abbot told them "...his body remained in the earth without being disturbed again."<sup>13</sup> According to the *Dialogues*, the reason why the boy's corpse remained inside the grave was Benedict's favor in God's sight and the story finishes with the statement that "...not even the earth would retain the young monk's body until he had been reconciled with blessed Benedict."<sup>14</sup> The consecrated host acts here as a tool against what looks very like a revenant and in fact became one of practices in the Church's repertoire to prevent their return from the grave, as we will see later in this chapter. Benedict himself, or his disapproval of the boy's deed, could be seen as one of the reasons behind this situation.

The actions attributed to Benedict are not in accordance either with Augustinian doctrine or the decrees of several Church councils, which forbade burial of the consecrated host with the corpse.<sup>15</sup> We can see here that the old habits die hard and those new and old beliefs can coexist and supplement each other. The

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<sup>11</sup> For the meaning and development of Christian funerary ritual, see G. Rowell: *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* (London 1977), pp. 1-73 and also F.S. Paxton: *Christianizing Death. The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1990), pp. 1-91

<sup>12</sup> Gregory the Great: *Dialogues*, translated by O.J. Zimmerman, (New York, 1959), Book II.24

<sup>13</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*; II.24

<sup>14</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, II.24

<sup>15</sup> This was forbidden by the Councils of Hippo (393), Carthage (419), Auxerre (c. 578) and in Trullo (692): see Rowell, *Liturgy of Christian Burial*, p. 15

consecrated host was not the only instrument used for keeping the "special dead" in their graves mentioned in the *Dialogues*. Sometimes offering and prayer was satisfactory, as in case of two nuns<sup>16</sup>, sometimes burial in the church or in consecrated ground was enough. In fact, the authenticity of Gregory's *Dialogues* has long been debated and recent work is in agreement although it contains some genuine Gregorian material, the bulk of the text was likely to have been composed in the 670s.<sup>17</sup> Francis Clark argued in his study of the text that "...it is not Gregorian air we breathe when we read in the *Dialogues* such stories..." as those just discussed.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, he does think that *Dialogues* contain evidence about survival of non-Christian beliefs which were still alive during the author's life:

...implausible as it undoubtedly is to attribute to St Gregory the Great any concern to use, in such a cryptic fashion, elements of pagan belief a magical lore, nevertheless the traces of such conceptions in the *Dialogues* afford another indication of the pseudonymous author's acquaintance with the cruder folk-religion of rural Italy."<sup>19</sup>

More recently, Marilyn Dunn has asserted that this theory "...is less convincing, especially in view of its depiction of monasteries which used the Benedictine Rule mingled with other elements: the Rule is unlikely to have been known in Rome at this stage..."<sup>20</sup> She suggests that rather than being composed in Rome, the *Dialogues* were written in Northumbria as part of the drive to Christianize the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>21</sup> If we take this assumption into account, the text's more flexible approach to Christian doctrine could be attributed to the influence of "old" Anglo-

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<sup>16</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, II.23

<sup>17</sup> Dunn, *Christianization of Anglo-Saxons*, p. 157

<sup>18</sup> F. Clark: *The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues Vol. II.*, (Leiden, 1987), p. 636. According to him "...is not only that the real Gregory would not have given credence or circulation to the ludicrous tales with which the *Dialogues* abound, but also that he could have had no part in the pretence and deceit with which they were consciously composed." Moreover, Clark also contends in his study that "...the signs are that he (author) was a *scrinarius*, employed in the Lateran secretariat which was responsible for the papal letters and other official documents, for the book-production bureau, and for the care of the library and archives of *librarii*, and other lesser scribes and clerical apprentices," that he was a monk and that the *Dialogues* were written in Italy in the middle or later years of the seventh century. *Ibid.*, p. 639 and pp. 722-44

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 737

<sup>20</sup> Dunn, *Christianization of Anglo-Saxons*, p. 157

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157

Saxons' beliefs about the dead and be an attempt to offer the clergy in late seventh-century England an alternative way of dealing with them.

However, not all church dignitaries even in England were prepared to extend this reassurance to pagans who may have been buried in structures in cemeteries or even in early churches: as, for example, Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury (668- 690).<sup>22</sup> The importance of Theodore's canons is generally recognized, though the *Poenitentiale Theodori* is not the direct work of Theodore of Tarsus.<sup>23</sup> It professes to be made up mainly of answers given by the archbishop to a certain presbyter, Eoda, and edited by a scribe known by the pseudonym of "Discipulus Umbrensium", who was "...either a native of Northumbria who had been a disciple of Theodore, or, more probably, an Englishman of southern birth who had studied under the northern scholars ..."<sup>24</sup> The text was most likely influenced by Welsh and Irish penitential documents.<sup>25</sup> It rules that in a church where dead unbelievers are buried an altar may not be consecrated; if it was previously consecrated, the bodies of any dead pagans buried there are to be removed.<sup>26</sup> A related text, the *Canons Attributed to Theodore* also contains these two clauses:

Dead pagans shall be cast out from the places of saints.  
No dead person shall be buried in a sanctified church. If indeed the dead  
have been buried in one that has not yet been sanctified, it shall not be  
sanctified.<sup>27</sup>

As we can see in the second text, burial in the church was banned not only for pagans, but even for the rest of the people, with exception of "the saints". Although the burials of the "special dead" in consecrated ground, especially at monastic hospital cemeteries - together with criminals and the sick - became one

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<sup>22</sup> For discussion of this topic, see D. Bullough: "Burial and community in the early medieval west", in P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins (eds): *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 177-201, esp. pp. 189-90

<sup>23</sup> J.T. McNeill and H.M. Gamer: *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: a translation of the principal "libri poenitentiales" and selections from related documents*, (New York, 1965), p.180

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.180

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.181

<sup>26</sup> *Penitential of Theodore* II, I, 4-5, Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>27</sup> *Canons Attributed to Theodore*, 5[59] and 8[98], Ibid., p.216

of the usual practices in later periods, we can observe here certain hesitance and/or wariness of the Church in allowing the dead to be buried near or in the churches. The question is whether this might have been the case because the Church feared that it would not be able to deal successfully with the "special" dead. As we will see, archaeological excavations suggest that Christian practices alone were in particular cases not satisfactory in preventing the return of dead and have been combined with "special - pagan" rites.<sup>28</sup>

The survival of "old" beliefs and funerary ritual practices after Christianization, as for example keening and wailing, keeping a watch or wake at funerals and burial in woods or fields, is documented in a wide range of clerical literature. In old Irish canons we can find penances for beliefs in revenants and "pagan" practices. The first example is from the canons attributed to St. Patrick, which were derived most likely from the acts of an Irish synod of the seventh century.<sup>29</sup> The other examples are from *Canones Hibernenses* (ca. 675), another important early Irish collection:

A Christian who believes that there is a vampire in the world, that it is to say, a witch, is to be anathematized; whoever lays that reputation upon living being, shall not be received into the Church until he revokes with his own voice the crime that he has committed and accordingly does penance with all diligence.<sup>30</sup>

The penance for the wailing of a woman after [the death of] a layman or a laywoman, fifty days on bread and water.

If [the dirge is sung] after [the death of] a servant woman with [a babe] in her womb, or after [the death of] one who cohabits with her, forty days on bread and water.

If after [the death of] a cleric of the parish, twenty days on bread and water.

If after [the death of] an anchorite or a bishop or a scribe or a great prince or a righteous king, fifteen days on bread and water.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>29</sup> McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 75. According to McNeil and Gamer the inclusion of these canons in a collection of penitential documents may not seem entirely justifiable, because they are not strictly within the class of penitential materials, since they do not consist of lists of offenses with period of penance, even though they have to do with church discipline and excommunication, and in some of the canons the duration of penance is determined.

<sup>30</sup> Canons attributed to St. Patrick, 16 and *Canones Hibernenses* 26, 27, 28, 29, Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> The Irish Canons, 26-29, Ibid.

Both examples are clear in their stance against “pagan” beliefs and practices, however the penances are quite mild and we can see here the efforts of the Church to limit these practices. A similar way of thinking is visible also in the following examples from Spain and Burgundy.

The penitential of Silos (ca. 800) is a penitential from the monastery of Silos (situated in the eastern part of diocese of Burgos, Spain). Their common material is largely Insular; much of it is identical with sections of Cummean, of Theodore, and of Pseudo-Cummean.<sup>32</sup> In it we find the following clauses:

XI (107). *Of various cases of penitents.* ....If for the health of living, a woman burns grains where a man has died, she shall do penance for one year.

The St. Hubert Penitential (ca 850) contains 62 canons, of which 1-43 are substantially identical with the Burgundian penitential. But even within this section, and especially in the remaining canons, there are elements derived from Frankish synods of 803 and 814, and a Roman synod of 827. Here we find:

53. *Of mourning of the dead.*- If anyone lacerates himself over his dead with a sword or his nails, or pulls his hair, or rends his garments, he shall do penance for forty days.<sup>33</sup>

Such offerings for death and this type of ritual mourning belonged to the funerary practices with a long tradition and as above mentioned examples proved, were practiced a long time after Christianization<sup>34</sup>, most likely as a cultural residue of the old beliefs, which allowed people to communicate with the dead and use their power for the good of family or the community.

Regino of Prum (? – 915) denounced funerary feasting too in his penitential. He became abbot of Prum in 892, was expelled from the office in 899, and then entered the service of Ratbod, archbishop of Trier. About 906, at the bidding of

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<sup>32</sup> McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 285

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 294

<sup>34</sup> See the example of St. Augustine's mother p. 163

Ratbod, he compiled his work *De synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis*. This is an extensive collection of varied canonical regulations and includes a considerable number of penitential clauses. While the latter are mainly extracted from the greater penitential books, in some instances they exhibit fresh material or diverge freely from their sources. Regino lays down that

Laymen who keep watch at funerals shall do so with fear and trembling, and with reverence. Let no one there presume to sing diabolical songs nor make jests and perform dances which pagans invented by the devil's teaching. For who does not know that it is diabolical, and not only alien from the Christian religion, but even contrary to human nature, that there should be singing, rejoicing, drunkenness, and that the mouth be loosed with laughter, and that all piety and feeling of charity be set aside, as if exult in a brother's death, in the place where mourning and sobbing with doleful voices for the loss of a dear brother ought to resound?...<sup>35</sup>

The disapproval of "pagan" funeral feasts is evident; though we can only speculate to what extent Regino understood the meaning of these practices: taking into account his depiction of them as "contrary to human nature" he most likely did not see them as a way to help the dead to cross to the afterlife. With its Christian perspective, Regino's approach seems to correspond to a more modern perception of funerary rites.

Burchard of Worms (950-1025), was a distinguished ecclesiastic who was elevated from the diaconate to the see of Worms in the year 1000 and died in 1025. He was active in church reforms and on terms of close acquaintance with the three emperors of his period, Otto III, Henry II, and Conrad II. His important work is the *Decretum*, written about 1008-12. This is an extensive collection of documents on church government and discipline, selected and edited in accordance with the author's ecclesiastical interests. Burchard made great use of Regino of Prum's *Ecclesiastical Discipline*, but he also treated it with extreme freedom.<sup>36</sup> The *Decretum*, following the Frankish penitentials, combines Irish, Anglo-Saxon and Roman elements. Burchard is concerned with the element of

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<sup>35</sup> Regino of Prum: *Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis, libri duo de synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis*, ed. Wasserschleben, (Leipzig, 1840), Book I, Chapter CCCXCVII

<sup>36</sup> McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 321

superstition and folklore to such a extent that Jacob Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie* remarked: "...The German words in it, "holda", "werwolf", "belisa", lead me to think that, here more than anywhere, he puts together what he himself knew of German superstitions..."<sup>37</sup> In the following example Burchard describes "pagan" wakes:

Has thou observed funeral wakes, that is, been present at the watch over the corpses of the dead when the bodies of Christians are guarded by a ritual of the pagans; and hast thou sung diabolical songs there and performed dances which the pagans have invented by the teaching of the devil; and hast thou drunk there and relaxed thy countenance with laughter, and, setting aside all compassion and emotion of charity, hast thou appeared as if rejoicing over a brother's death? If thou hast, thou shalt do penance for thirty days on bread and water.<sup>38</sup>

Cosmas of Prague (c. 1045 – October 21, 1125) was a Bohemian priest, writer and historian born to a noble family in Bohemia. Between 1075 and 1081, he studied in Liège. In 1086 Cosmas was appointed *canonicus* of Prague. His *magnum opus*, written in Latin, is called *Chronica Boëmorum* ("*Chronicles of the Bohemians*"). Cosmas in his *Chronica* recorded an edict of Břetislav I, issued around the year 1040, which penalized burials in woods and in fields. He rules that those responsible for such a deed, must give an ox to archbishop, 300 ducats to the duke's treasury, and the deceased must be dug up and buried in a Christian cemetery.

...Similiter et qui in agris sive in silvis suos sepeliunt mortuos, huius rei praesumptores archidiacono bovem et 300 in fiscum ducis solvant nummos: mortuum tamen in poliandro fidelium humi condant denuo...<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, Cosmas later in his *Chronica* remarked that in 1090 Břetislav II still persecuted "...the burials, which were taking place in the woods and fields, as

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<sup>37</sup> J. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, translated by J.S. Stallybras, (London, 1880), Book IV, p. 1743

<sup>38</sup> Burchard of Worms *Corrector at medicus*, Chapter V.91, in McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, p. 333

<sup>39</sup> *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Boemorum*; in MGH edition B. Bretholz: *Die Chronik der Bohmen des Cosmas von Prag*, (Berlin, 1923), Book II, Chapter IV.



well as the games (plays), which they were performing according to pagan rite (ceremony) on the crossroads and junctions, for the rest of souls...”<sup>40</sup>

*Item et supersticiosas instituciones, quas villani, adhuc semipagani, in pentecosten tertia sive quarta feria observabant, offerentes libamina super fontes mactabant victimas et demonibus immolabant, item sepulturas que fiebant in silvis et in campis, atque scenas, quas ex gentili ritu faciebant in biviis et in triviis quasi ob animarum pausationem, item et iocos profanes, quos super mortuos suos inanes cientes manes ac induti faciem larvis bachando exercebant*<sup>41</sup>

It is clear that all the above excerpts from chronicles and penitentials condemn and persecute “pagan” rituals and old beliefs. It is important for us that in doing so, they have left proof that these beliefs and practices still existed and took place all over Europe. But it is equally significant that even when these sources inform us about survival of the "old" funerary practices, which contain elements of or echoes of rituals to ensure the safe transit of the soul to the next life, they give no information about how to deal with the individual who has not made this transit and who therefore becomes a revenant. They are quite silent about the manner of dealing with a "vampire" and how to arrange his final deposition so as to render him - or her- harmless. This situation changed from the 11th century onwards.

### **Clerical or popular culture? - revenants in medieval society**

When looking at the primary sources about revenants, it is not possible to make a neat division, assigning theological attitudes to the clergy and/or an educated elite, and folkloric ideas to an underclass. Encountering the supernatural is never a simple matter, and we must be grateful that chance has allowed us to overhear few fragments of what must have been an ongoing medieval debate in which neither clerics nor laity spoke with a single voice.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, as Carl Watkins remarked in his *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*:

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. , Book III, Chapter I

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Book III, Chapter I

<sup>42</sup> Simpson, "Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse?", p. 400

In exploring for pagan survivals, we might begin by considering some selling silences: instances of belief and practice which seem to us to preserve vestiges of the pagan but which were not identified as such by medieval churchmen...  
...Stories of revenants, ... present another case of which might seem pagan but were not identified as such by any of the churchmen who wrote about them.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, we do not find any significant differences in depiction of the revenants and their “elimination” between sources from Britain and Central and Eastern Europe. The fact that some of the authors could be more influenced by new ideas of Christian ideology and some of them traveled more than others does not seem to have had an influence on the way how and why these encounters with the revenants were recorded.

Exactly why revenants wandered the earth, whether by demonic power or by spirits re-entering their own bodies, was not resolved by these churchmen, who tended to leave the issue open. But in narrating something of the rich complexity of unofficial belief, they did not think they were lifting the lid on lurking paganism. They illustrate that, between normative and condemned belief and praxis, there existed substantial space in which extra-ecclesial ideas could flourish. The willingness of so many churchmen to discuss these so expansively and neutrally suggests the desire to control them was hardly strong and that, while the revenants themselves might be a danger, belief in their existence was not.<sup>44</sup>

The miraculous and mystical were not the first resorts in framing explanations for the wondrous thing they encountered for many of them.<sup>45</sup> For example, when William, archbishop of York, died, William of Newburgh pointed to signs of foul play, such as the dead man’s blackened teeth which he thought suggestive of poison.<sup>46</sup> These authors were not only “churchmen”; they could be compared to present day reporters, who even while they are influenced by religion, political affiliation or education, observe and comment about events, albeit from their point of view, but always strongly affected by the local community. Therefore, the “local” might thus be far more powerful than the “universal” also in the emerging

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<sup>43</sup> C.S. Watkins: *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*, (Cambridge, 2010), p. 86

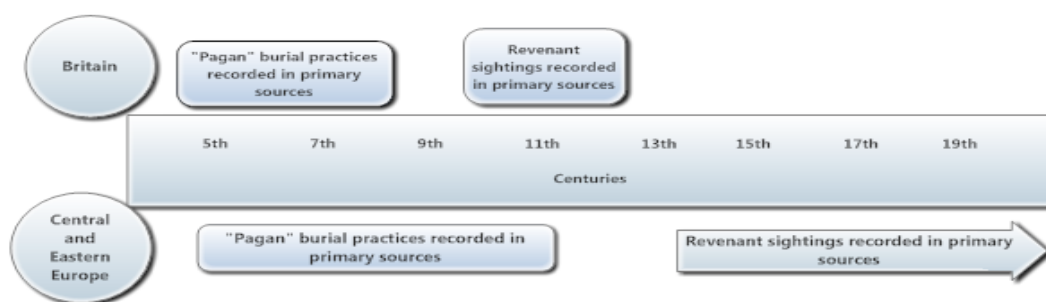
<sup>44</sup> Watkins, *History and Supernatural*, p.87

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 34

<sup>46</sup> *The History of William of Newburgh*, transl. by J. Stevenson, (London, 1856), pp.55-56, pp.79-81

parishes of the early and central middle ages<sup>47</sup> and we have to take these reports into account as “genuine” pieces of information, a valuable “inside view” into the feelings of medieval communities. If we look at these reports from this point of view, we will see that the “big gap” between clerical and popular culture become thinner and sometimes even fades away, especially when dealing with impulses which bring our brain into a very vulnerable state - such as death, dead people and return of the dead in particular.<sup>48</sup>

It is also important here to notice changes in character of these records. Taking into account the timeline of the records we can observe a shift from the comments about “pagan” burial practices to the records of “revenants” sightings and description of their “elimination” (Fig.34).



**Fig.34:** Timeline of records about “pagan” burial practices and revenant sightings in primary sources originating in Britain and Central and Eastern Europe.

This shift didn’t occur at the same time in Britain and Central and Eastern Europe, although it is visible in both regions. Moreover, it is important to notice that the time when the Christianity consolidated its position and become basically only force in spiritual life of people, either in Britain or Central and Eastern Europe, the comments about “pagan” burial practices ended. This fact allows me to assume that the Christianity played important role in evolution of beliefs in revenants and influenced authors of primary sources and people depicted in them alike.

<sup>47</sup> Watkins, *History and Supernatural*, p. 106

<sup>48</sup> See Introduction pp.30-34

Nevertheless it did not answer the question why the reports about revenant sightings emerged again after approx. 200 years.<sup>49</sup> However, if we implement the theoretical alternative model proposed in the Introduction<sup>50</sup>, we can say that since the data processed by the brain when dealing with the dead will throw its owner into emotional turmoil and confusion, the mind requires access to a particular ideology in order to overcome this period, which in this case has to be especially focused on the burial rites. This seems to be an issue where the Christianity at first succeeded, only to find the means to “keep dead in the grave” lacking after quite a short time period and overcoming this problem only with the idea of Purgatory.<sup>51</sup>

### **Revenants in primary sources**

Anglo-Saxon literature from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries is one of the richest sources of tales about the “walking dead”. In it, as the following accounts show, there are not only stories about the encounters with revenants, but also the details of the methods used for the final treatment of their bodies, designed to put an end to their “vampiric” activities.

#### **Burton Abbey (a generation before the Norman Conquest)**

The villagers of Stapenhill, and the nearby hamlet Drakelow, stand nervously around the grave of two recently buried peasants who have been wandering around Drakelow with their coffins on their backs, banging on doors and summoning the inhabitants to sickness and death. The graves are opened, and as the coffin-lids are wrenched off, expectations of an unholy continuing life seem to be horribly confirmed: the corpses have resisted the natural processes of decay, and the cloths over their faces are stained with blood. Like murderers caught in the act, these vampires stand condemned by the manifest of their misdeeds. The living can reach only one possible judgment on the undead, and they proceed at once to execution. The heads of corpses are severed and placed between their legs, their hearts are torn from their chests and the graves are backfilled. The hearts are carried across the running water of the Trent to a hilltop beacon above Burton at a junction of parish boundaries. There the hearts

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<sup>49</sup> There seems to be a gap between approx. 700/750 to end of 10<sup>th</sup>/ beginning 11<sup>th</sup> century in Britain and between 11<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 13<sup>th</sup> century in Central and Eastern Europe.

<sup>50</sup> See **Fig.3**, p.74

<sup>51</sup> I will discuss these issues in greater detail in the following chapter.

are burned on pyre; as the smoke rises, the vampires' surviving victims recover but a black crow flies up from the flames.<sup>52</sup>

This is a classic example of a story about revenants: recently buried individuals are blamed for inexplicable sickness, most likely some viral outbreak. When their graves are opened they are found undecayed and with blood on the faces – a clear indication that they are vampires/ revenants, which taking into account the contemporary level of knowledge about the post-mortem processes, is quite understandable.<sup>53</sup> The anti- vampire practices are applied to safeguard the community and the revenants were destroyed. The author noted that the surviving victims recovered: we would tend to assume that they just recovered rather than accept that the anti-vampire measures were successful. Either way, the story is a nice example of how the medieval mind tried to process information which it didn't understand.

Another relevant story comes from William of Malmesbury (c. 1095/96 – c. 1143). This author was born in Wiltshire. His father was Norman and his mother English. He spent his whole life in England, and his adult life as a monk at Malmesbury Abbey in Wiltshire. He is known for strong documentation and his clear, engaging writing style. An accomplished Latin stylist, he shows literary and historiographical instincts which are, for his time, remarkably sound. He is an authority of considerable value from 1066 onwards; many shrewd judgments on persons and events can be gleaned from his pages. His ability to recount a telling anecdote can also be observed in the following tale:

They say that [King] Alfred was buried first in [Winchester] cathedral, because his own monastery was still unfinished; but that not long after, the deluded canons maintained that the king's ghost returned to his dead body and wandered at night through their lodgings, and so his son and successor took up his father's remains and laid them in peace in the new monastery. This nonsense and the like (it is believed, for example, that the corpse of a wicked man after death is possessed by a

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<sup>52</sup> J. Blair: "The dangerous dead in the early medieval Britain", in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. by S. Baxter, (Ashgate, 2009), pp. 539 -540

<sup>53</sup> For more about this topic, see Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, pp. 102-132; A. Dundes (eds.): *The Vampire: A Casebook*, (Madison and London, 1998) and Conclusion, pp. 189 - 197

demon, and walks (*demone agente discurrere*)) wins credit among English from a sort of inborn credulity.<sup>54</sup>

Although William of Malmesbury clearly didn't agree with this kind of superstitious "nonsense", his comments indicate the existence and popularity of such beliefs. The idea that "wicked men" were particularly prone to become revenants is very similar to the beliefs recorded by anthropologists and points to a "superstitious matrix" which didn't change through the centuries and was just modified regarding the situation, location and time period.

William of Newburgh (ca. 1135 - 1208), was a canon of Newburgh, a priory of Augustinian monks, which he appears to have entered shortly after it was founded in 1145 and probably spent the rest of his life there.<sup>55</sup> Joseph Stevenson remarks in the preface to his translation of *History* that "...far from being a barren chronicle of events, collected without discretion, and recorded without taste, it aims at narrating, with some historical precision, the leading incidents of ... history - pointing as well to the causes in which these events originated as the results of which they were productive..."<sup>56</sup> William of Newburgh didn't record only "the leading incidents of history": he also recorded a quite significant number of stories about revenants and ghosts. This would encourage us to assume that they may have been as important for him as major historical events and needed to be recorded for a proper description of society and its beliefs at that time.

#### **The Buckinghamshire Ghost**

...A certain man died, and, according to custom, by the honourable exertion of his wife and kindred, was laid in the tomb on the eve of the Lord's Ascension. On the following night, however, having entered the bed where his wife was reposing, he not only terrified her on awaking, but nearly crushed her by the insupportable weight of his body. The next night, also, he afflicted the astonished woman in the same manner, who, frightened at the danger, as the struggle of the third night drew near, took care to remain awake herself, and surround herself with watchful companions. Still he came; but being repulsed by the shouts of the watchers, and seeing that he was prevented from doing mischief, he departed. Thus driven off

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<sup>54</sup> Blair, "Dangerous Dead", pp.548 -549

<sup>55</sup> *The History of William of Newburgh*, p. vii

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

from his wife, he harassed in a similar manner his own brothers, who were dwelling in the same street; but they, following the cautious example of the woman, passed the nights in wakefulness with their companions, ready to meet and repel the expected danger.

... After having for some time rioted in this manner during the night-time alone, he began to wander abroad in daylight, formidable indeed to all, but visible only to a few; for oftentimes, on his encountering a number of persons, he would appear to one or two only though at the same time his presence was not concealed from the rest. At length the inhabitants, alarmed beyond measure, thought it advisable to seek counsel of the church; and they detailed the whole affair, with tearful lamentation, to the above-mentioned archdeacon, at a meeting of the clergy over which he was solemnly presiding. Whereupon he immediately intimated in writing the whole circumstances of the case to the venerable bishop of Lincoln, who was then resident in London, whose opinion and judgment on so unwonted a matter he was very properly of opinion should be waited for: but the bishop, being amazed at his account, held a searching investigation with his companions; and there were some who said that such things had often befallen in England, and cited frequent examples to show that tranquillity could not be restored to the people until the body of this most wretched man were dug up and burnt. This proceeding, however, appeared indecent and improper in the last degree to the reverend bishop, who shortly after addressed a letter of absolution, written with his own hand, to the archdeacon, in order that it might be demonstrated by inspection in what state the body of that man really was; and he commanded his tomb to be opened, and the letter having been laid upon his breast, to be again closed: so the sepulchre having been opened, the corpse was found as it had been placed there, and the charter of absolution having been deposited upon its breast, and the tomb once more closed, he was thenceforth never more seen to wander, nor permitted to inflict annoyance or terror upon any one.<sup>57</sup>

Even though the man was buried "according to custom", he came back from the grave and started to terrorize first his wife and then his family and neighbors. The bishop instead of using the "usual" method of dealing with this problem - digging up the body and burning it - decided to use the letter of absolution instead and was successful.

This story has two interesting aspects. Firstly, the author informs us " ...that such a things has often befallen in England ...", which we can take as evidence that the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Book V., Chapter XXII.

revenants were quite a common thing in 12th century England; and secondly, we can see here that the Church dignitaries sometimes tried to replace "old pagan" anti-vampire practices with new ones, more appropriate for the Christian creed, though by doing so they acknowledged the veracity of these beliefs and indirectly supported them.

### **The Berwick Ghost**

... a certain man, very wealthy, but as it afterwards appeared a great rogue, having been buried, after his death sallied forth (by the contrivance, as it is believed, of Satan) out of his grave by night, and was borne hither and thither, pursued by a pack of dogs with loud barkings; thus striking great terror into the neighbors, and returning to his tomb before daylight. After this had continued for several days, and no one dared to be found out of doors after dusk -- for each dreaded an encounter with this deadly monster -- the higher and middle classes of the people held a necessary investigation into what was requisite to be done; the more simple among them fearing, in the event of negligence, to be soundly beaten by this prodigy of the grave; but the wiser shrewdly concluding that were a remedy further delayed, the atmosphere, infected and corrupted by the constant whirlings through it of the pestiferous corpse, would engender disease and death to a great extent; the necessity of providing against which was shown by frequent examples in similar cases. They, therefore, procured ten young men renowned for boldness, who were to dig up the horrible carcass, and, having cut it limb from limb, reduce it into food and fuel for the flames. When this was done, the commotion ceased.<sup>58</sup>

The character of the deceased, "a great rogue", is again the major factor why this individual was marked as a revenant. However, this story contains no description of the state of the body when it was dug up and only the way of final deposition is mentioned. It is possible that the deeds of the deceased during life and the fact that they become known only after his death, created some kind of psychic pressure on the community "striking great terror into the neighbors" and the easiest method of dealing with it was by treating this individual as an revenant. We will never know what really happened in Berwick, but to blame a recently deceased individual with a bad reputation as responsible for that situation and to destroy the corpse of this revenant, most likely with the whole community in attendance, must have had a deep psychological impact on society.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Book V., Chapter XXIII.



### **The Hounds' Priest**

...That the corpses of the dead, moved by some kind of spirit, leave their graves and wander around as the cause of danger and terror to the living before going back to tombs which open up to receive them, is not something which could be easily believed, were it not for the fact that there have been clear examples in our own time, with abundant accounts of such events. Nothing of the sort is reported in books of former times, which those of us who are inclined to study might meditate upon, and surely, since these ancient books recorded everyday and matter-of-fact events of former times, they would not have been able to suppress accounts of stupefying and horrible events if indeed had occurred...

...Some years ago the chaplain of a noble lady died and was buried at Melrose Abbey. Although he had taken holy orders, and should have been accorded a certain respect as a consequence, he tended to behave during his life in a secular fashion, playing down the role as the messenger of the divine. Such was his concern for hunting, and such was the vanity and indeed infamy of his way of life, that he was known to the people as "Hundepest" [The Hounds' Priest]. But if during his life he was smilingly tolerated for his human failings, the consequence of this indulgence became apparent after his death. By night, for instance, he would leave his grave and enter the very monastery itself, keeping people from benefiting from the holy place, and it was not possible to frighten or push him away. He also wandered around outside the monastery, groaning and murmuring in an alarming fashion outside the chambers of his former mistress...

...seeing that the priest was now alone, the demon judged the time right to try and break his robust faith, and rose out of his tomb. Glimpsing the monster at a distance, the man at first froze with fear, but soon his courage returned and, with no prospect of escape, he prepared to resist the attack of the evil creature as it came towards him groaning terribly. He struck it with the battle-axe he carried in his hand. Groaning still louder, the wounded creature turned round as suddenly as it had come and retreated while the heroic defender chased it back to its tomb. The tomb opened to offer the creature refuge from its assailant and then closed behind it...

...they prepared themselves at daybreak for the task of digging up the cursed corpse from the depths of its tomb. As they cleared away the earth, they saw many traces of blood which had flowed from the wound inflicted on the creature, and finally reaching the body, they carried it outside the confines of the monastery to burn it and scatter the ashes.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Book V., Chapter XXIV.

In this story William of Newburgh expresses his doubts about existence of revenants, "... is not something which could be easily believed...", although at the end he has to agree with it, because of "... the fact that there have been clear examples in our own time, with abundant accounts of such events..." Nevertheless, he is still concerned because "...nothing of the sort is reported in books of former times..." This is an interesting remark, which may suggest that the stories about revenants started to emerge only from 11th/ 12th century onwards. This could be linked with the persecution of old "pagan" beliefs connected with funerary rituals and the final triumph of Christian funerary rites, which appear to have been not very effective in keeping the "special dead" in their graves. The bad character of the priest and "infamy of his life" appear again to be the major factors in creating his construction as a revenant; moreover, his sightings even in the monastery, on consecrated ground, could point to the assumption that even the monks were influenced by "old beliefs" and felt the inadequacy of Christian funerary rites when applied to the "special dead." William of Newburgh as a monk, who spent almost all his life in monastery, knew very well how such an event can influence the community in the monastery and may even refer to his personal experiences.

#### **The Ghost of Anant**

...Armed with sturdy mattocks, the two brothers went to the cemetery and began to dig. After a short while, they laid bare the corpse, which had not been covered to a very great depth, and which was grotesque and distended, with a swollen, reddened face. The fragments of a shroud, which had been wound around the body, were found inside the grave. Undaunted, driven by their anger, the young men struck at the lifeless corpse, from which such a continuous flow of blood gushed and soaked the earth that they realized the creature must have been a vampire, sucking the blood of many people...Then, dragging it outside the town; they quickly constructed a funeral pyre. One of them said the noxious corpse would not burn until its heart was removed, and the other opened up its side with blows from his mattock and reached in to seize the heart which had been the source of such harm and evil. Then, with the corpse finally dismembered and burnt, the two men returned to announce what they had done to the people present at the priest's banquet, who ran outside to see for themselves. Thereafter, with the infernal heart

removed and the dire cadaver consumed by the fire, the air was purged and the pestilence which had prowled around the town was finally allayed ...<sup>60</sup>

The pestilence is the key player in this story. In the majority of such cases the first persons who died in the viral outbreak, or even died before the sickness became an epidemic, were deemed as responsible for the pestilence. Medical knowledge of how to deal with pestilence was most likely not at a very high level, although the destruction of what was considered to be the potential cause of the outbreak seems a rational choice. The fact that the body was "...not been covered to a very great depth..." may be the reason why the contagion spread and its final destruction by fire could prevent further contamination.

There can be no doubt that these stories were describing a folk belief which was apparently quite widespread at that time - the return of particular category of the dead - and were attempting to harmonize it with the Christianity by claiming that it was "Devil" or "Satan" who reanimated the corpses<sup>61</sup>, even though the analysis shows that the reason lay more likely in inadequate medical knowledge, social tensions inside the community and Christian influence on funerary rituals, especially those reserved for the "special" dead. It is also interesting that from the 13th century onwards revenant stories seem to disappear from the English primary sources. As Jacqueline Simpson has noted:

...there remained a folk tradition that the evil dead should be buried face down or pinned with a stake to prevent them walking; but the urge to reopen graves in order to seek and destroy any undecayed and blood-filled corpses is never recorded again, even during times of plague, and does not feature in the corpus of British local legend. This change may well be due to the more spiritual theology of Purgatory which developed from the thirteenth century onwards...<sup>62</sup>

Purgatory as a place where "special" dead or "sinners" may dwell and are assured of their salvation, in what we could even describe as a liminal stage of the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Book V., Chapter XXIV.

<sup>61</sup> J. Simpson: "Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England", in *Folklore* 114 (2003), pp. 389 - 402

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 394

Christian afterlife, was definitely more appealing (in respect of the "special" dead) than a black and white vision of Heaven and Hell. Moreover, it could be seen as substitution for time consuming and expensive rites necessary for the souls of "special" dead to cross into the afterlife completely and to keep the community safe. But although the British primary sources remained silent about revenants from the 13th century onwards, the rest of Europe and particularly its eastern parts became at this time "the new territory" of revenants/ vampire sightings.

Jan Neplach (1322 -1371) was Benedictine abbot in Opatovice monastery (in what is now the Czech Republic) during the reign of Charles IV. His chronicle *Summula chronicae tam Romanae quam Bohemicae* was created most likely around 1360, and although is not voluminous or of huge literal value, contains several interesting stories about revenants. The close proximity of revenant sightings to the monastery where Neplach lived and worked, together with the fact that these stories happened during his own lifetime, makes them a very important source about the 14th century beliefs in this part of Europe.

*A. d. MCCCXXXVI Philippus, filius regis Maiorikarum, cum XII nobilibus regni ordinem fratrum Minorum in vigilia Nativitatis Christi ingreditur et in Boemia circa Cadanum ad milliare unum in villa dicta Blow quidam pastor nomine Myslata moritur. Hic omni nocte surgens circuibat omnes villas in circuitu hominus terrendo et iugulando et loquebatur. Et cum fuisset cum palo transfixus: dicebat, multum nocuerunt michi, nam dederunt michi baculum, ut me a canibus defendam ; et cum cremandus efoderetur, tumebat sicut bos et terribiliter rugiebat. Et cum poneretur in ignem, quidam arripiens fustem fixit in eum et continuo eupit cruor sicut de vase. Insuper cum fuisset effossus et in currum positus, collegit pedes ad se sicut vivus, et cum fuisset crematus totum malum conquievit, et antequam cremaretur, quemcumque ex nomine in nocte vocabat, infra octo dies moriebatur. Eodem eciam anno Johannes papa XXI moritur et Benedictus XII in papam eligitur.*<sup>63</sup>

A.D. 1336 Philip, son of the king of Majorca, entered the [Franciscan] Order of Friars Minor along with 12 nobles of the kingdom on Christmas Eve Day. In Bohemia about one mile from Kadaň in a village called Blow a certain shepherd called Myslata died. Every night he rose and went about every farm in the area and

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<sup>63</sup> J. Neplach: *Summula chronicae tam Romanae quam Bohemicae*, Fontes rerum bohemicarum Vol. III (Prague, 1882), pp.443- 484

spoke to frighten and kill people. When he had been impaled with a stake, he said: They hurt me much, as they gave me a staff to defend me from the dogs; and when he was exhumed for cremation, he swelled up like an ox and roared terribly. When he was placed in the fire, someone grabbed a stick and put it into him, and immediately blood poured out from him as from a vessel. Furthermore, when he had been dug up and was being put on a cart, he drew his feet to himself as if alive, and before he was cremated, anyone whom he called by name at night, died within eight days. Also the same year the pope John XXI died and Benedict XII was elected as pope.

The story is similar to those discussed above, although impalement alone is not enough in itself to destroy the revenant. Another interesting point is the eight day time period during which individuals "called by name" died, which could indicate another viral outbreak as a reason behind these events.

*A. d. MCCCXLIV Quedam mulier in Lewin mortua fuit et sepulta. Post sepulturam autem surgebat et multos iugulabat et post quemlibet saltabat. Et cum fuisset transfixa, fluebat sanguis sicut de animali vivo et devoraverat slogerium proprium plus quam medium, et cum extraheretur, totum fuit in sanguine. Et cum deberet cremari, non poterant ligna aliquantulum accendi nisi de tegulis ecclesie ad informacionem aliquarum vetularum. Postquam autem fuisset transfixa, adhuc semper surgebat; sed cum fuisset cremata, tunc totum malum conquievit.*<sup>64</sup>

A.D. 1344 a certain woman died in Lewin and was buried. But after her burial she rose, killed many and ran after whomever she pleased. And when she was impaled, blood flowed as from a living animal. She had devoured more than half of her veil, and when it was pulled out, it was full of blood. When she was to be cremated, the wood could not be set afire unless it according to the belief of some old women was made of thatch from the church. But after she had been impaled, she once again rose at all times; but when she was cremated, then all evil ceased.

The same story was recorded also by Wenceslaus Hagecius in his *Kronika Česká* written in the 16th century:

Again, in 1345, in the town of Lewin, a potter's wife, who was reputed to be a witch, died and owing to suspicions of her pact with Satan, was refused burial in consecrated ground and dumped into a ditch like a dog. The after-events proved that she was not a good Christian, for, instead of remaining quietly in her grave,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.481

such as it was, she roamed about in the form of divers unclean beasts, causing much terror and slaying sundry persons. Thereupon her body was exhumed, and it was found that she had chewed and swallowed one-half of her face-cloth, which on being pulled out of her throat showed stains of blood. A stake was driven through her breast, but this only seemed to make matters worse. She now walked abroad with the stake in her hand and killed quite a number of people with this formidable weapon. Her body was then taken up a second time and burned, whereupon she ceased from troubling. The efficacy of this post-mortem *auto-da-fé* was accepted as conclusive proof that her neighbours had neglected to perform their whole religious duty in not having burned her when she was alive, and they had been thus punished for their remissness.<sup>65</sup>

It seems that impaling didn't work on Bohemian vampires and only fire was powerful enough to destroy them. The mixing of "pagan" and "Christian" beliefs in the arsenal of anti-vampire techniques is visible here in the use of thatch from the church, suggested by "some old women", instead of normal wood, which could not be set afire. The same story retold by Wenceslaus Hagecius two centuries later is curiously enough more detailed than original one and we can see here how it was changed to fit the author and the new contemporary worldview. The "certain woman" changed to "a potter's wife, who was reputed to be a witch", the place of burial is specified "...owing to suspicions of her pact with Satan, (she) was refused burial in consecrated ground and dumped into ditch like a dog ..." and also the depiction of anti-vampire practices is more colorful. The author finished the story with the remark that "...her neighbours had neglected to perform their whole religious duty in not having burned her when she was alive...", which was according to him the reason why she become a revenant. The revision of the original and the implementation of the story for a contemporary audience familiar with burning as a penalty for witchcraft is evident, although, we can trace here the remainder of belief that "special" rites have to be applied for the "special" dead and when they are not executed properly (the witch was not burned, burial in non consecrated ground) the "special" dead are more prone to return. On the other hand, we can maybe witness here the reasoning of Wenceslaus Hagecius about

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<sup>65</sup> Václav Hájek z Libočan: *Kronika Česká IV: Čechy Královské R. 1254-1347*, edition V. Flajšhans, (Praha, 1933), pp. 387- 389

potential revenants/ vampires/ witches and his own theory about how these things can happen and how they can be solved, allowing us to observe how perceptions about revenants changed to a relatively same degree over a span of 200 years.

Taking into account the examples from chronicles depicting revenant sightings collected in this chapter, we can observe that these stories share similar characteristics, which are summarized below:

Deeds of revenants:

- banging on doors, making noise
- wandering around
- frightening and killing people
- lying on the bed and nearly crushing person who is sleeping there
- sometimes pursued by dogs

Attributes of corpses deemed to be revenants:

- resisting decay
- clothes over the face stained or filled with blood, clothes chewed
- swollen reddened face or body
- sometimes when touched or moved the corpse moves as if it is alive
- when impaled, a stream of blood will spring forth from the body

Practices used for destruction of revenants:

- heads severed, sometimes placed between the legs
- hearts torn from their chests
- heart carried across the water to a hill at the junction of parish boundaries
- hearts burned on a pyre, which ensures recovery of any surviving victims
- letter from bishop laid upon the breast
- cutting off limbs
- burning of corpses

- impaling

When we look on these facts from a modern point of view, we can't avoid asking whether these stories arise purely from superstition. Taking into account the fact that the tales were collected and recorded by medieval chroniclers, either laymen or clergy, probably at second or third hand or even created artificially, their credibility could appear very low. However, many of their features find striking confirmation in an account found in an official report from the modern period.

In the year 1718, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Republic of Venice on one side and the Ottoman Empire on the other signed the Peace of Passarowitz, by which parts of Serbia and Walachia were turned over to the Habsburgs. The belief in revenants in these parts of Europe was an important part of folklore and the Austrian officials "...began to notice and file reports on a peculiar local practice: that of exhuming bodies and "killing" them."<sup>66</sup> Literate outsiders began to attend such exhumations and document these practices. The story of Peter Plogojowitz is found in one of these reports:

After a subject by the name of Peter Plogojowitz died, ten weeks past- he lived in the village of Kisilova, in the Rahm District - and had been buried according to the Raetzian custom, it was revealed that in this same village of Kisilova, within a week, nine people, both old and young, died also, after suffering a twenty-four-hour illness. And they said publicly, while they were yet alive, but on their dead bed, that the above mentioned Plogojowitz, who had died ten weeks earlier, had come to them in their sleep, laid himself on them, and throttled them, so that they would have to give up the ghost. The other subjects were very distressed and strengthened even more in such (beliefs) by the fact that the dead Peter Plogojowitz wife, after saying that her husband had to come to her and demanded his *opanki*, or shoes, had left the village of Kisilova and gone to another. And since with such people (which they call vampires) various signs are to be seen - that is, the body undecomposed, the skin, hair, beard and nails growing - the subjects resolved unanimously to open the grave of Peter Plogojowitz and to see if such above mentioned signs were really to be found on him.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, p. 5

<sup>67</sup> R.Grenz: "Archäologische Vampirbefunde aus dem westlavischen Siedlungsgebiet", in *Zeitschrift zur Ostforschung* 16:2 (1967), pp. 255-265



As we can see, these 18th century revenants behaved, or were believed to behave, in similar fashion to their medieval predecessors. Although we are dealing here again only with testimonies of villagers, and these events were not witnessed by the author of the report, it is striking how similar these reports are to those dating from five hundred years earlier. The author actually provides eyewitness testimony of the following events:

...the body of Peter Plogojowitz, just exhumed, finding,... ...that first of all I did not detect the slightest odour that is otherwise characteristic of the dead, and the body, except for the nose, which was somewhat fallen away, was completely fresh. The hair and beard - even the nails, of which the old ones fallen away - had grown on him; the old skin, which was somewhat whitish, had peeled away - and new fresh one emerged under it. The face, hands, and feet, and the whole body were so constituted, that they could not have been more complete in his lifetime. Not without astonishment, I saw some fresh blood on his mouth, which, according to the common observation, he had sucked from the people killed by him.<sup>68</sup>

The description of the corpse, on top of the fact that it is again very similar to medieval descriptions, is quite thorough and provides us with a great deal of information for the better evaluation of this phenomenon. Moreover, the following information about the practices employed for the destruction of a vampire, adds even more value to the report:

...all the subjects, with great speed, sharpened a stake - in order to pierce the corpse of the deceased with it - and put this at his heart, whereupon, as he was pierced, not only did much blood, completely fresh, flow also through his ears and mouth, but still other wild signs (which I pass by out of high respect) took place. Finally, according to their usual practice, they burned the often-mentioned body, *in hoc casu*, to ashes...<sup>69</sup>

Taking into account these facts it seems that medieval and 18th century vampires not even behave and look similarly, but were also destroyed in similar fashion. Although the 18th century perception of a freshly exhumed body was probably

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

different from the perception of a present day coroner, the report of Peter Plogojowitz's case is detailed and described alterations of the corpse, which emerged after its deposition into the grave, form a good basis for examination of these bodies with the help of forensic medicine. Taking into account the information about decomposition processes of the body discussed in the Introduction <sup>70</sup> and its comparison with material collected from primary sources, we can say that the bodies of medieval revenants show the same characteristics as the bodies of revenants examined by Barber<sup>71</sup> and could be therefore explained as a result of decomposition, which was misinterpreted by contemporary society.

The examination of the primary sources and the stories about the revenants which they contained bring several important points into consideration: 1) the longevity and continuity of belief in revenants; 2) its wide geographical extent and 3) the role of the Church and Christianity in the perception of this phenomenon.

1) The information acquired from the primary sources presented in this chapter attests that belief in revenants was an old, continual and quite frequently recorded phenomenon. This fact is proved not only by the sources but also by the archaeological finds which were discussed in the previous chapters. Taking into account these facts it is possible to propose a timeline of the development of this phenomenon. The primary sources between the 6th and 10th century were mostly focused on the description of "pagan" funerary rites and tried to delimit and ban them with punishments which varied depending on the place of origin and ethnicity. One exception in this study is the *Dialogues* which reported revenant sightings and also the practices needed to render them harmless. However, this power is bestowed only on St. Benedict; these practices did not reflect the official Christian creed; and they differed from the "usual" anti-vampire practices, introducing new Christian elements to their arsenal. "Pagan" funerary rituals are not of concern for authors (especially in England) from the 11th century onwards and their interest is captured by the wave of emerging revenants. In English primary sources this trend remains quite popular to the 13th century and then

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<sup>70</sup> See Introduction pp. 39-45

<sup>71</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burials and Death*, pp. 98-119

ceases to exist, which may be explained according to Jacqueline Simpson, by the influence of the developed theology of Purgatory. On the other side, from the 13th /14th century onwards, continental Europe and especially its eastern parts, became the "new" territory of frequent revenant/vampire sightings, observed and recorded in some parts until the 18th/ 19th century. These beliefs live until today and are quite popular, today even more than before. Starting with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and ending with the *True Blood* and *Twilight*, people have been fascinated by vampires, although modern depiction of these revenants have very little common with their description in the primary sources examined in this chapter. Nevertheless, the material presented in the previous pages allows me to assume that this fascination has a strong cognitive basis and may be seen as a proof of the longevity and continuity of this phenomenon.

2) If we take into account only the primary sources examined in this chapter we can say that the belief in revenants was known across the whole of Europe. Moreover, if we add in the anthropological and archaeological material alluded to in the introductory chapter and discussed in the remainder of this thesis, we probably will find not many places in the world where the revenants are not a part of folklore and belief. Our primary sources demonstrate a wide geographical distribution of this phenomenon, although we can trace changes in perceptions about revenants depending on the geographical area and time period. This allows us to observe how the geographical location and economical factors can influence the mind - it seems more likely that these beliefs will survive longer in the rural areas of less developed countries than in the cities of super-powers.

3) The study of primary sources shows the changes in perception of revenants from approximately the 10th century onwards both in England and Central/Eastern Europe. Authors move from description of "pagan" funerary rituals and attempt to delimit them to reports of revenant sightings and descriptions of how to destroy them. The fact that all of the later authors were clerics - such as, for example, William of Newburgh who spent his whole life in a monastery and gathered information about the revenants only from his informers - points to two conclusions.

The first is that this change, which was in my opinion created by the Church alone (and I will explain this below) influenced the laity to such a level that it retrospectively produced the revenant stories, which they reported to the authors and so are found in our primary sources. The Church's attempts to delimit and destroy "pagan" practices were in the end mostly successful and Christian funerary practices become the only ones employed, at least officially. However, Augustinian philosophy concerning the dead, which basically condemned any funerary 'rites of passage' as useless, failed to take into account the people's feelings about the dead and also their need to account for things which they do not fully understand and are afraid of: viral outbreaks, inexplicable deaths in the wake of the death of an "evil" person and so on. Official Christian rites were not able to stop such feelings or occurrences; and we can assume that "old" practices were still remembered by some members of the community and that people continued to employ them to protect themselves. The uncertainty on this topic is evident also among clerics, who in some cases even deployed Christian measures against the revenants: in doing so they unintentionally show us that they, too, were influenced by these phenomena.

Secondly, when clerics record and comment on such phenomena – as William of Newburgh does <sup>72</sup> - they appear to indicate that they are dealing here with something new and that they are giving expression to their own doubts. We can see here that this theme was important for the Church; and the development of Purgatory may be seen partly as an attempt to answer and accommodate these doubts. Nevertheless, the revenant/ vampire, in the form which influenced future generations, was born. We can attribute this to the fact that the Church, by not respecting the status of the "special dead" and by banning the traditional funerary rites reserved for them, led people to open the graves of those deemed "dangerous" for the community and to discover bodies, which, given the lack of medical knowledge, showed signs which "proved" that revenants/vampires exist.

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<sup>72</sup> See above pp.190-195

## Conclusion

Two or three years ago *National Geographic* magazine published a picture of the “Vampire of Venice”. The picture of the skull of a medieval women with her jaw open and with a brick in it, excavated among other plague victims in the mass grave on Lazzaretto Nuovo Island near Venice, traveled around the world: “as never-before-seen evidence of an unusual affliction: being “undead.””<sup>1</sup> However, the material presented in this thesis demonstrates that this “unusual affliction” had been discovered many times before, even if often deprived of such publicity as the “Vampire of Venice”.

The examples collected in this work demonstrate that the “Vampire of Venice” is definitely not a “never-before-seen evidence of an unusual affliction: being “undead.”” However its discovery provides important testimony about how similarly people thought and behaved in the 8th/9th and 16/17th centuries. According to excavators, the taphonomic evaluation of bodies buried at Lazzaretto Nuovo cemetery allowed the reconstruction of the various decomposition phases of each corpse as well as the understanding of the stratigraphical seriation and recognition of different phases of body depositions, with post-burial disturbances and intersection of skeletons.<sup>2</sup> Their study concludes with the suggestion:

... that during the digging of a hole in the ground for a person who had just died of the plague, the gravediggers cut off the ID deposition. They noticed the shroud (its presence is suggested by the verticalization of the clavicle) and a hole, which corresponded with the mouth. As body appeared as quite intact, they probably recognized in that body a so-called *vampire*, responsible for plague by chewing her shroud. As a consequence, they inserted a brick in her mouth. The sequence of those events (time since death) can be deduced by the lack of alteration on the skeleton joints, so that we can suppose that the gravediggers dealt with the corpse when it was not disjointed yet. The insertion of the brick into the mouth at the time

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<sup>1</sup> Online source: National Geographic News from 10.03.2009, “*Vampire*” Picture: Exorcism Skull found in Italy, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2009/03/090310-vampire-graves.html>, accessed 03.05.2009

<sup>2</sup> E. Nuzzolese and M.Borrini: “Forensic Approach to an Archaeological Casework of “Vampire” skeletal remains in Venice: Odontological and Anthropological Prospectus.”, in *J Forensic Sci*, (November 2010, Vol. 55, No.6), pp. 1634- 1697

of the primary deposition can be ruled out because we have no reference, even folkloric, for such a practice in that historical and cultural context.<sup>3</sup>

Although this woman is not the first example of a "vampire" excavated by archaeologists, her discovery and especially the circumstances surrounding her burial, which allowed archaeologists a more precise evaluation of practices leading to her final deposition, is important for future assessment of newly excavated and re-assessment of already discovered similar types of "special" graves. However, most of excavated "special" burials are not preserved in such a condition and we have to look for other possible ways of explaining the meaning of these practices, especially when we want to understand why these bodies were deposited in a different manner to the majority of the community buried at the same cemetery.

According to Bonnie Effros "...scholars must avoid reading missing evidence into early medieval mortuary rites."<sup>4</sup> While I can only agree with this statement, we have to broaden our horizons in search for this evidence. Bonnie Effros remarked that from an archaeological perspective, many practical explanations aside from the fear of the dead exist for seemingly abnormal funerary or burial phenomena - executions, death of relations far from home, *rigor mortis* etc.<sup>5</sup> However, if we combine our approaches to reach an inter-disciplinary level, we will discover new possibilities, which nonetheless have to be scrutinized in the search for the meaning of these rites. The same material may be under study, but with different questions there are different presumptions, theoretical positions and attitudes to processing, analysing and interpreting data.<sup>6</sup> This trend is visible in present day Anglo-Saxon and in a lesser extent in Slavic archaeology, although we can see clear differences between traditional, culture-historical positions and post-processualist theories. As Tania Dickinson observed about the latter in her 2002 article about recent trends in early medieval burial archaeology:

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 1636- 1637

<sup>4</sup> B. Effros: *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the making of the Early Middle Ages*, (Berkley, Los Angeles and London, 2003), p. 83

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 83

<sup>6</sup> T.M. Dickinson: "Review article: What's new in early medieval burial archaeology?", in *Early Medieval Europe* (2002 II (I)), pp. 71- 78

...structuration theory and contextualism underpin their argument that material culture is an active and ideologically-recursive constituent of practice; with burials, the living are using the dead to shape, and re-shape, their world and their own identities. The meaning of burials is thus bound up in the context of action: it is relative, changeable and historically contingent.<sup>7</sup>

This and similar approaches are beginning to encourage an inter-disciplinary engagement between mortuary practice, ideology and cosmology, in particular when focusing on the treatment and transformation of the body in death in the construction and commemoration of personhood. According to Howard Williams "...at the very least, these perspectives provide a powerful antidote to those studies that are content to explore the material manifestations of Christian beliefs in mortuary practice through both archaeological and written sources whilst doggedly denying any connection between pre-Christian worldviews and the mortuary arena."<sup>8</sup> Howard Williams is one of the archaeologists with an alternative view on early medieval mortuary practices, who instead of focusing only on grave goods and their social significance in the interpretation of mortuary rituals, examines this topic in a broader inter-disciplinary context:

One way of by-passing some of the limitations of a primarily meaning-focused approach to early Anglo-Saxon mortuary ritual might be to regard funerals as contexts for the production and reproduction of social memories and cosmologies through mnemonic practices: sequences of performances that aim to transform the identities of the living and the dead. ...The intended outcome may not always be reached, might be the subject of negotiation between different groups, and a range of practical, economic, socio-political and religious factors might influence how the technology of the funeral proceeded. Yet, it helps us to understand that the funerals in the past were not repeated and formulaic procedures reflecting the identity of the dead directly, but ritualised performances that were essentially of their time and place. Conversely, mortuary rites in this light were not unstructured and impromptu, but the result of informed decisions and choices by mourners who actively remembered past funerals and sought to reproduce and reformulate remembered templates in appropriate but also innovative ways.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 74

<sup>8</sup> Williams, "At the Funeral", p.71

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.71

As we can see the study of early medieval mortuary rituals and "special" burial rites especially, is complex and multifaceted. In the quest to better understand this phenomenon we have to be versatile and we have to try to avoid looking at the problem only from one side. Therefore, an inter-disciplinary approach and the alternative theoretical model proposed in the Introduction chapter (**Fig.3**) emerged over the course of my researches as the most valuable tool for a proper evaluation of early medieval mortuary practices reserved for the "special dead".

A similar approach was chosen by Edeltraud Aspöck – using the archaeological material in a taphonomy-based approach to the study of reopened graves, she aimed to highlight the potential value of early medieval “disturbances” of graves as sources of information.<sup>10</sup> In order to do that she draws on two case studies: the Langobardic cemetery at Brunn am Gebirge, Flur Wolfholz, Lower Austria (6<sup>th</sup> century AD) and the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Winnal II (half of 7<sup>th</sup> – beginning of 8<sup>th</sup> centuries):

#### **Brunn am Gebirge.**

Analysis of the archaeological evidence reveals regularities in the practice of “grave robbery” at Brunn am Gebirge. Upon reopening, the treatment of a burial would have depended upon the stage of decomposition of the corpse. Corpses that were not fully decomposed frequently showed manipulation of the skulls and, after reopening, the graves were immediately and completely refilled. Graves where the corpse was found reduced to clean bone tended either not to have been refilled after the reopening or else any refilling was only partial. Skulls were frequently either removed or left behind higher up in the grave pit. Grave goods were removed from all graves... ...The different treatment of graves according to their stage of decay may be related to ideas about passage of the dead to another world or state. Non-skeletonized corpses may have been associated with unfinished mortuary rites, where the passage of the dead was still ongoing. This may be why the skulls were manipulated and the grave was completely refilled afterwards... ...Burials that were already fully disarticulated may have been seen as a sign that the dead had completed their passage... ...Nevertheless, the frequent removal of skulls from these

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<sup>10</sup> E. Aspöck: “Past “disturbances” of graves as a source: Taphonomy and interpretation of reopened early medieval inhumation graves at Brunn am Gebirge (Austria) and Winnal II (England)”, in *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* (2011 30(3)), pp. 299-324; see also Ch. Kümmel: *Ur- und frühgeschichtlicher Grabraub: Archäologische Interpretation und kulturelle Erklärung*, (Münster, 2009)



burials may show that some form of precaution, possibly against revenants, was still deemed necessary.<sup>11</sup>

## **Winnal II.**

The middle Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Winnal II gives the impression of highly irregular burial practices: bent or twisted legs, heavy flints placed on burials, tied feet, decapitated burials and arms placed in front of the head. However, the evidence presented suggests that in many cases what was found at excavation was not the original burial evidence but post-depositionally manipulated burials... ..Analogous to the other cemeteries of that time, the bodies may have been laid into the graves in supine position, with their heads aligned westwards. At some stage after the burial, however, graves were reopened and the corpses manipulated... ..At Winnal II, reopening of the graves appears to have taken place rather soon after burial because disarticulation of the corpses had not yet started or was not very advanced when the graves were reopened. One interpretation of the burial evidence at Winnal II is that the performance of invariable burial practices, where all individuals were buried in more or less the same way, did not provide opportunities to respond to different lives and deaths. It may be that, for this reason, mortuary practices were not perceived as entirely successful by the burying community, and this led to the development of various post-burial practices where the graves were reopened and the buried bodies manipulated.<sup>12</sup>

Aspöck's implication differs from the traditional view of early medieval graves where a grave's story ends with the burial of the corpse and grave furnishing. She believes that thorough analysis of the archaeological record left by the reopening of graves allows for a reconstruction of post-burial practices and a valuable discussion of the nature and motivation behind these practices.<sup>13</sup> The analysis of the archaeological evidence of the post-burial practices at Brunn am Gebirge led Aspöck to a characterization of the practice of removing grave goods from graves different from the traditional perception of Merovingian-period grave robbery: the occurrence of systematic reopening of graves to take out grave goods influences the meaning of the original burial practices, giving them a slightly more transient character.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the case study Winnal II raises the question of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 311-313

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 318-319

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 319

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 319-320

whether there could be many more Anglo-Saxon “deviant burials” that were actually the result of post-burial manipulation of the corpse.<sup>15</sup>

The outcome of Aspöck’s research points in a similar direction to the examination of “special” burial rites collected in this dissertation:

- 1) Archaeological material can be seen as an important primary source in discussion about mortuary rites and beliefs in revenants. Post-mortem manipulation of the bodies of the dead points to the fact that the transitional period between physical death and the final “departure of the soul” was an important part of the burial rites and could be understood in the same sense as rites depicted by the anthropologists and ethnographers.
- 2) Not all members of the community were treated in the same way after the death and the way they were buried depended on a multitude of factors.<sup>16</sup> On the other side, Aspöck’s examination of archaeological material from Winnall II leads to the suggestion that even future revenants were buried “normally” and “special” practices were applied only some time after the burial as a result of their “return from the grave” and consecutive exhumation.
- 3) Aspöck’s case studies, in the same way as the material presented in this work, showed that these beliefs were widespread and that we have to take into account a certain “universality” of these ideas, together with the hypothesis that these processes could be explained as by-products of the responses of the brain when confronted by corpses.<sup>17</sup>

**"Special" burial rites: meaning, reasons and performance - an alternative view.**

The archaeological material examined in this work could be seen as evidence about the belief that the soul, or one of the souls, stays in the world even after death and to safeguard its journey to the world of dead certain practices must be employed. As I have already mentioned in the introductory chapter, death and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See Introduction pp. 28-29

<sup>17</sup> See Introduction pp. 30-34

burial were perceived as a passage from one state to another in similar sense as marriage or initiation ceremonies. Although each of these ceremonies was accompanied by a different set of rites, the meaning of these practices was the same - to help the person leave the "old" state and to introduce him to the "new" one. This process is very important, because to linger somewhere "in between" more than is required is an undesirable risk which can only result in a bad outcome. As Robert Hertz stated:

The stay of the soul among the living is somewhat illegitimate and clandestine. It lives, as it were, marginally in the two worlds: if it ventures into the after-worlds: it is treated there like an intruder; here on earth it is an importunate guest whose proximity is dreaded. As it has no resting place it is doomed to wander incessantly, waiting anxiously for the feast which will put an end to its restlessness. It is thus not surprising that during this period the soul should be considered as a malicious being; it finds the solitude into which it has been thrust hard to bear and tries to drag the living with it.<sup>18</sup>

If we accept this scenario it is not very hard to follow the logic behind these rites and the meanings behind them and the reasons why they were practiced seem more understandable. The fear and feel of uncertainty experienced by the bereaved, multiplied even more by the belief that the soul in this state is endowed with supernatural powers, are by themselves stressful factors which certainly influenced the thinking and behaviour of the bereaved to a greater or lesser extent. The death of a beloved person, family member or friend is even today a very emotional situation and we can only assume that it was equally emotional in the early medieval period.

The state of the soul, both pitiful and dangerous, during this confused period explains the complex attitude of the living in which pity and fear are mixed in variable proportions. They tried to provide for the needs of the deceased and to ease his condition; but at the same time they remain on the defensive and refrain from contacts which they know to be harmful. When, the very next day after the death, they have the soul led into the world of the dead, it is not known whether they are motivated by the hope of sparing the soul a painful wait, or by the desire to rid themselves as quickly as possible of its sinister presence; in fact both of these preoccupations are mingled in their consciousness. These fears of the living can

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<sup>18</sup> Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, p. 36

only end completely when the soul has lost the painful and disquieting character that it has after the death...<sup>19</sup>

We can say at this point that death, burial and the dead activated a certain emotional response, which is characterized by mixture of feelings ranging from pity to fear, depending on a multitude of factors. However, we can also recognize one group of "normal" burials with a set of practices which can be described as "usual" or "common" representing the majority of the burials and a second group of "special" burials, which always constituted a minority in the cemetery. The same could be also said about the occupants of these graves.

The important factor here is what predetermined and characterized the people belonging to the category of the "special" dead. In the course of my dissertation I came to the conclusion that the theories which connect the "special" dead with "socially others" in communities are only partially valid and treat this problem only from one angle. It is true that we can find in this category disabled individuals, who could be ostracized and labelled as "socially other" even during life and therefore were buried in different way or with lesser respect than the other members of the community. However, they constitute a minority of the burials examined in this work. Moreover, in some cases, as for example that of the young woman from Edix Hill, these individuals are buried with more piety and richer funerary attire than the "normal" at the same cemetery.<sup>20</sup> Social position during life is one of the factors determining the way of final deposition, although taking into account my research, I am inclined to believe that "social" position was only one of the factors and most likely not the most influential in determining if the person was buried in "normal" or "unusual/ special" way. As I mentioned in the Introduction, even a king can turn into a revenant in the same way as a criminal, while sociological and anthropological sources indicate that "shallow personae" were more likely to be treated in a "special" way.<sup>21</sup> Other factors influencing the way of final deposition were behaviour during the life of individuals and the circumstances of their death (**Fig.2** and **Fig.3**). The latter was in most cases the most influential factor in determining the way that individuals were buried. People

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 37

<sup>20</sup> see Introduction, p. 25

<sup>21</sup> see Introduction , pp. 23-27

who died before their time - victims of murder, suicides, those who were struck by lightning, women who died in childbirth, warriors killed in the battle and etc. are more prone to become revenants. An unusual or violent way of death, which suddenly cut the thread of their lives, implied that they left "unfinished business" in the world of living, and therefore gave them a reason to return from the grave. We can assume that this or similar kind of explanation lied behind these beliefs and influenced the thinking of the people regarding this category of "special" dead. If we take these assumptions into account it is understandable that people were even more emotionally perplexed than normal when dealing with the "special" dead.

Taking into consideration the information discussed in this chapter up to now, it seems logical that the "special" dead require "special" burial rites. It is interesting that while every culture and equally every community inside a particular culture has own set of "special" burial practices, the differences between them are minimal and we can see a certain "universality" of these practices throughout the world. To keep them in their graves, their legs and arms were tied, they were buried prone, decapitated, weighed down by rocks, rocks or bricks were inserted into their mouths, hearts were pierced by stakes: all or some of these practices were applied and then they were burnt. Cremation seems to have been considered as one of the most powerful means of destroying the revenant and this could be also one of the reasons why it was practiced in spite of demands in terms of labour and time. Purgative flames transformed the corpse into ashes and in the same way insured the transit of the soul to the afterlife. The annihilation of the corpse - through cremation, decomposition or even excarnation - is deemed as the ultimate sign that the soul of the dead left this world. This in turn indicates that the corpse in particular is the major issue in a huge range of mortuary practices - both "normal" and "special" - and is also responsible for the fear of return of the dead.

The influence of Christianity is evident in the adding of new techniques to anti-vampire practices and also by creating some "new", using Barber's terminology,

"predestination" and "events" for the identification of potential revenant<sup>22</sup>, although we do not see its influence in the burial practices which could prevent the return from the dead in first place. It is interesting that primary sources started to comment more about these events only from 11th century onwards. As I discussed previously, the sources up to the 10th century mostly commented or banned old "pagan" funerary practices and we don't have any mention of revenants/ vampires emerging from the graves. It seems that when Christianity became the only religion, at least officially, the revenants/ vampire started to be a problem and as William of Newburgh remarked "...there were some who said that such thing had often befallen England, and cited frequent examples to show that tranquillity could not be restored to the people until the body of this most wretched man were dug up and burnt."<sup>23</sup> The sources collected by Paul Barber indicate that these events didn't stop in Middle Ages but continued to the modern period and in some areas of Europe broke out into a "vampire craze" even as late as the 18th and 19th century<sup>24</sup>. Taking into account these facts, we can assume that the change of burial practices, from the "old pagan" to the Christian, was the reason why the revenant/ vampires "struck" more frequently. By banning old burial practices - the rites of passage needed for successful crossing to the afterlife and by offering the new ones - which were not so effective in the case of people prone to become revenants - the Church became an important factor in the creation of the emerging wave of revenants from 11th century onwards.

It is understandable that the community psyche may be more influenced by the death of the person deemed as "dangerous" or "special" and the cognitive impact could be greater than when dealing with the "normal" dead. Recalling the primary sources examined in the previous chapter, we can observe that the majority of revenant/vampire sightings and encounters happened during the night; the first victims were blood-related or somehow connected with the revenant and they were harassed in their beds (indicating the dream nature of this experience) by the revenant who tried to suffocate them. These characteristics are very similar to the feelings experienced during nightmares and may be attributed to the state of mind

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<sup>22</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, pp. 29-38

<sup>23</sup> *The History of William of Newburgh*, Book V., Chapter XXII.

<sup>24</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, pp. 15-20

described by Boyer and discussed in the Introduction chapter. The rites of passage connected with death and dead individuals were most likely applied to help the bereaved to bridge this emotional and "dangerous" period. Taking this assumption into account, "special" treatment must be applied during or at the end of these rites, on the grounds of either characteristics determining the "special" nature of dead during his/her life, "special" circumstances at the time of death or post mortem changes which began to be visible, or more likely in this case, didn't "become visible at all", near the time of final deposition. Particularly these changes, or the fact that they may be visible on some individuals and "invisible" or "strange" on others may lead the people to believe that some of the dead are different than other and need to be handled in a "special" way. This belief, most likely rooted in the observation of decomposing bodies, together with the reaction of the human brain when in contact with the corpses of the dead, plus "special/strange" circumstances surrounding their deaths<sup>25</sup>, may be responsible for creation of "special" category of the dead and also for the "special" way of their deposition.

Therefore, it is possible to suggest that between the time of the death and final deposition into the grave there existed a certain period when the body of the deceased was placed in a specific place until the proper rites of passage were fulfilled and the corpse could be placed in the grave, in either the "normal" or a "special" way. This hypothesis is lent support by the finds of pupae cases discovered on the metalwork in some Anglo-Saxon graves<sup>26</sup>, existence of "construction" sometimes described as "houses of the dead"<sup>27</sup> where bodies may have been placed prior their final deposition and also by specific types of graves as for example those with the bodies in sitting position, where the partial decomposition of the body and consequent landslide of the soil covering the top of the grave, may be seen as the signal that the transition period is over and the grave may be filled again and finally closed.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Introduction pp. 33-47

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 86

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 88-95

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 1., pp. 64-72 and Chapter 2., pp. 171-172

This emerges from the conjecture that the “special” dead were recognized as “special” prior to their final deposition and were handled in the appropriate way. However, as we have learned from the primary sources and also by modern examination of archaeological material<sup>29</sup>, some of the "special" dead were categorized as such only after their exhumation. Although the examples collected in this thesis almost in all cases recorded certain suspicions about the potential revenants even before exhumation, as for example the man who was "very wealthy, but, as afterwards appeared, a great rogue", the final verdict about the character of particular dead was always reached only after the exhumation and observation of the corpse. Therefore, we have to ask: what led people to open these graves, in spite of the powerful feelings experienced in vicinity of corpses?

### **The “special” dead and Christianity**

The differences between the concepts which formed traditional practices before the introduction of Christianity and Christian beliefs are evident. To better demonstrate these contrasting sets of dynamics I will use Harvey Whitehouse’s theory of divergent modes of religiosity.<sup>30</sup> Harvey Whitehouse is another leading cultural anthropologist, who after carrying out two years of field research on a 'cargo cult' in New Britain, Papua New Guinea in the late nineties, developed a theory of ‘modes of religiosity’ that has been the subject of extensive critical evaluation and testing by anthropologists, historians, archaeologists, and cognitive scientists.<sup>31</sup> The modes of religiosity theory seeks to explain the role of ritual in group formation and social and cultural evolution and its aim is "... to tie together all the features of the two modalities of religious experience ... and to explain why these contrasting modalities come about in the first place."<sup>32</sup> As Whitehouse states in his book *Modes of Religiosity*:

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 3 for former and above pp. 208-210 for latter

<sup>30</sup> H. Whitehouse: *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*, (Oxford, 2004)

<sup>31</sup> H. Whitehouse: *Inside the Cult*, (Oxford, 1995); *Theorizing Religions Past: Archaeology, History and Cognition*, ed. by H. Whitehouse and L.H. Martin, (Oxford, 2004)

<sup>32</sup> Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, p. 64



...some religious practices are very intense emotionally: they may be rarely performed and highly stimulating (e.g. involving altered states of consciousness or terrible ordeals or tortures); they tend to trigger a lasting sense of revelation and to produce powerful bonds between small groups of ritual participants. By contrast, certain other forms of religious activity tend to be much less stimulating: they may be highly repetitive or “routinized”, conducted in a relatively calm and sober atmosphere; such practices are often accompanied by the transmission of complex theology and doctrine and also tend to mark out large religious communities composed of people who cannot possibly all know each other (certainly not in any intimate way).<sup>33</sup>

Whitehouse’s concept of “modes of religiosity”, assign religions to two divergent groups: doctrinal and imagistic. There are basically two kinds of memory – implicit and explicit.<sup>34</sup> Implicit memory deals with things we know without being aware of knowing. Explicit memory deals with things we know at a conscious level and can be further subdivided into two types - short-term and long-term. Short-term memory enables us to hold on to concepts for a matter of seconds. Long-term memory enables us to hold onto concepts for hours – and in some cases for a whole lifetime. Long-term memory can also be subdivided into two types - semantic and episodic.<sup>35</sup> Semantic memory consists of general knowledge about the world and we can seldom recall how or when we acquired this sort of knowledge. By contrast, episodic memory consists of specific events in our life experience.<sup>36</sup> These types of memory are activated somewhat differently in doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity.<sup>37</sup>

In the case of the doctrinal mode of religiosity, ritual action tends to be highly routinized, facilitating the storage of elaborate and conceptually complex religious teachings in semantic memory, but also activating implicit memory in the performance of most ritual procedures.<sup>38</sup> These cognitive features are linked to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 63- 64

<sup>34</sup> P. Graf and D.L. Schachter: "Implicit and Explicit Memory for New Associations in Normal and Amnesic Subjects", in *Journal of Experimental Psychology, Learning, Memory and Cognition* (II 1985), pp. 501- 518

<sup>35</sup> Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, p. 65

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 65

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 65- 66

particular social morphology, including hierarchical, centralized institutional arrangements, expansionary potential, and dynamic leadership.<sup>39</sup>

The sorts of practices that lead to the coalescence of imagistic features are invariably low frequency – rarely enacted, and they are also, without exception, highly arousing.<sup>40</sup> Examples might include traumatic and violent initiation rituals, ecstatic practices of various cults, experiences of collective possession and altered states of consciousness, and extreme rituals involving homicide, cannibalism, excarnation or destruction of revenants. These sorts of religious practices, although taking very diverse forms, are extremely widespread and archaeological and historical evidence suggests they are also the most ancient forms of religious activity.<sup>41</sup>

Following Whitehouse's modes theory, we can say that Christianity was developed in accordance with doctrinal concepts while old "pagan" beliefs demonstrate more imagistic signs. "Special" burials could be seen as those rituals with infrequent repetition and high arousal, which activate episodic memory. The emotional turmoil which accompanied burials, especially when even more heightened in the case of "special" dead, could and most likely did trigger vivid and enduring episodic memories among the people who participate in them, as I have already discussed on the previous pages. These facts must have certain degree of influence on the longevity and "universality" of these rites. According to Harvey Whitehouse these memories "...can be so vivid and detailed that they can take a form of (what some psychologists call) flashbulb memories. It is almost as if a camera has gone off in one's head, illuminating the scene, and preserving it forever in memory."<sup>42</sup>

It is difficult to determine precisely how vivid or emotional Christian funerary rites were in the eyes of early medieval people during this transitional period between "old" imagistic and "new" doctrinal perception of the religion. That the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 66

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 71

transformation was not sudden or straightforward can be deduced from funerary remains and also in contemporary literature. Nevertheless, the archaeological and primary sources point to the conclusion that Christian rituals were definitely not so elaborate and on many occasions also considered as not fully sufficient. Although the burials become more uniform and in accordance with Christian norms in the following centuries, we can't reject the possibility that the memories of these "old" rites were aroused and triggered by the same basic impulses, which seems to be the case of the "new wave" of revenant/vampire sightings from 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

As I have already discussed several times in my thesis, one of the prominent ideas responsible for the conversion to Christianity among "indigenous" people was the assurance on the topic of death, and it seems that we can apply the same for the early medieval period. In Christianity, "good" people go to heaven, the "bad" to the hell, depending on their behaviour through their lives and burial practices cannot influence this outcome. Initially, the fast, quick and relatively cheap Christian funerary rites, probably appealed to the common sense of ordinary people and could have been seen as the better option in comparison to the time consuming and emotionally demanding traditional funerary ritual.

Harvey Whitehouse suggests that:

If people cannot remember what to believe or how to do a ritual, these beliefs and rituals cannot be passed down from one generation to the next, and so the religious tradition would not be able to establish itself. Equally, if people do not think that particular beliefs and rituals are important enough to pass on, the beliefs will mutate or become extinct.<sup>43</sup>

The fear of the dead and belief in revenant/vampires didn't cease to exist, although we can say with Harvey Whitehouse that they mutated. If we take into account Boyer's theory about the mixture of feelings experienced in the vicinity of corpses, it is understandable that people always looked for a better and easier way to cope with this problem and Christianity offered such an option. But even if

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 64

this perhaps worked in the case of the “normal” dead, the “special” dead were more resilient and were seen as “dangerous” long after the conversion to the Christianity. Moreover, the “outburst” of ghost/revenants stories in 11<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup> century England and 14<sup>th</sup> / 15<sup>th</sup> century Central and Eastern Europe, points to the assumption that they became even greater threat than before. Why?

Christianity is predicated on the afterlife as a reward for behaviour on earth: or at least by the sixth century it had developed the concepts of immediate heaven for martyrs and saints, immediate hell for major sinners.<sup>44</sup> These destinies of the soul were confirmed at the Last Judgment. The souls of ordinary people who had sinned but not greatly were thought of as waiting in "refrigeria" until the Last Judgment when they would pass through purifying fire. The point about western Christian funerary ritual as it had developed to the sixth century is that it effectively bids farewell to the deceased - until the Last Judgment. So there was no communication with the dead and no reassurance either for the living that the souls of the dead were safely in the afterlife.<sup>45</sup> However, the idea that the bereaved don't have to worry about funeral practices and equally about the soul of the deceased, which was taken care of, would have had attractions for medieval people. The fact that the generation of new converts is usually not worried about the “old” burial practices, because they think that there is no need for them anymore, is documented in anthropological literature and the same could be also possible explanation for gradual transformation of old burial practices to Christian in the early Middle Ages. However, peace of mind regarding the “dangerous” dead didn't last long as we can deduce from primary sources and archaeological material. But why did the revenants return?

My research offers a possible alternative. Since “special” burial rites were not employed under the influence of Christianity, even the potential revenants were buried “normally”. However, the emotional and psychological influence which these “dangerous” dead may have on the bereaved and community, remained. Therefore, we can assume that the dreams or nightmares heralding the return of

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<sup>44</sup> Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 12- 14

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 12- 14

the dead led to exhumations which, given the lack of medical knowledge about the post-mortem processes, led in most recorded cases to the identification of the revenant and its consequent destruction – using the arsenal of the same “special” practices as in the centuries before. This assumption leads to another question - what lay behind this return to the “old” traditions?

It seems evident that the Christian burial rites began to be regarded as insufficient for the proper destruction of revenants. One of the possible reasons may be the epidemics<sup>46</sup> and as I have already discussed previously in this work, the plague or any contagious disease was often seen as work of the revenants. The fear of spreading contagion could be one of the factors influencing the thoughts and dreams of the people, and from that point is just a small step to blame it on an especially “evil”, “strange” person, or on a “witch” and “vampire”. Epidemics could be seen in the eyes of the people as a sign that Christian burial rites were not adequate and something else needs to be done. Hence, the possible revenant was located and destroyed. As Paul Barber states “...when one considers that vampires commonly infect others with their condition, it will become obvious that, if even single vampire escapes the ministrations of the local people, vampirism may increase in geometric proportion.”<sup>47</sup> According to him this was believed to explain epidemics of plague, although it was sometimes thought necessary to find and destroy only the original vampire and in other cases all of the potential vampires. The former may be the case of old woman from Lazzareto Nuovo cemetery discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the latter may possibly explain the group of graves inside the ring ditches at Finglesham cemetery. These ring ditches could be seen as barriers against the revenants and therefore against the spreading of epidemics.<sup>48</sup> This assumption also supports the theory that the plague and insufficiency of Christian burial practices to deal with it, may lead the people to return to older tradition of the “special” burial rites. The success of these practices is questionable, though primary sources attest that these beliefs were still alive even in the 17th/ 18th centuries.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.179

<sup>47</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, p. 56

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 96-101 and also Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, p.179

<sup>49</sup> See Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, pp. 5- 9, 15- 20

The Justinianic Plague may be one of the reasons why the authority of the Church regarding the "special" dead diminished in the eyes of the people: however, we can assume that the uncertainty about the exact fate of the soul after death, especially those who were either too bad or very good, was questioned for some time. One important issue, which began to be discussed more frequently, was the idea of a "liminal" place where the souls of these people will go and where they can purge their sins in order to be allowed into heaven. It is possible to assume that the problems and issues surrounding the funerary rituals and final deposition of the corpse influenced the formation of purgatorial ideas. Although we can only speculate as to the exact way this confusion influenced the funerary rituals, the return to "old" burial rites could be seen as one of the by-products of this discussion.

We can observe this situation not only in the archaeological material, but also in clerical literature. When looking on Bishop Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) in his role as sermon-writer we are presented with the measured tones of Episcopal authority, exhorting his flock to be mindful of Judgment Day. We glimpse another Caesarius in his hagiography, written within a few years of Caesarius' death by five members of his clerical staff.<sup>50</sup> His deacon Stephanus recalled how one night, on his way to check the time for the night office, he heard Caesarius whispering in his sleep: "There are two places, there is no middle place, only two: either one ascends into heaven or descends into hell."<sup>51</sup> As Isabel Moreira notes in *Heaven's Purge*:

In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, incremental steps were taken that bound the idea of post-mortem purgation with the efficacy of prayers for the dead and masses for the dead to intercede for somewhat less than exemplary Christians. There was also an increasing concern to situate the penitent's place in the commemoration offered by the Church and by private prayer. At the beginning of the period, the unreconciled penitent (even the catechumen) was excluded from the comfort of the Church's efforts on his or her behalf. By Isidore's time, however, the penitent could hope to make good on penitential debt owed by being purged after death. This trend would

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<sup>50</sup> *Vita Caesarii*, ed. by Morin, G., CCSL 103 (1953), translated by Klingshirn: *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, Vol. 19, TTH Latin Series, (Liverpool, 1994)

<sup>51</sup> I. Moreira: *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford, 2010), p.84

come to full fruition in Bede, whose Vision of Drythelm assured salvation to the penitent (even the death bed penitent) through a long process of tortuous purgation. The fire of purification, which cleansed the light sins of the elect, would eventually be supplemented by the tortuous purgation of grave sinners in Bede.<sup>52</sup>

Marilyn Dunn also implied that by the eighth century, there are clear signs that conceptions of the afterlife are beginning to alter. According to her "...we know this through a number of accounts of visions, a genre which appears to proliferate from the 7th century onwards and which ... is largely concerned, in the early medieval period, with the make-up of the afterlife Heaven, Hell, Paradise- and the first development of something which becomes, recognisably, a proto-Purgatory."<sup>53</sup> A crucial factor for understanding these visions and the development of the Purgatory itself, are the Irish Penitentials, which made a distinctive contribution to the process of Christianization or the strengthening of Christianity in regions where it was already known.<sup>54</sup>

From the church's point of view, the penitentials forcibly made the point to both recent converts and lax Christians that they owed a moral debt to God, that their moral status was important to Him. From the point of view of new Christians in Ireland or in Anglo-Saxon England, it was possible, even though the penance might be severe, to relate to the concept of set penance for a specific offence, as this was the way in which wergilds and other compensatory tariffs operated in secular law.<sup>55</sup>

However, this solution was not without problems. It is understandable that the people were concerned about what would happen if one died before completing the penance. Although the vision-literature of this period, in particular the *Vision of St. Fursey*, tried to introduce and propagate the idea of afterlife penance, this notion was still unacceptable to some Christian dignitaries. Nevertheless, as Dunn suggests:

..once the concept had been posited, however vaguely or tentatively, further development in thinking along these lines was possible. If a set penance is

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<sup>52</sup> Moreira, *Heaven's Purge*, pp. 111- 112

<sup>53</sup> M. Dunn: *The Vision of St. Fursey and the Development of Purgatory*, (Norwich, 2007), pp. 7- 8

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

interrupted by death only to re-commence immediately after the soul passes into the next world, it should, logically, be capable of completion in the afterlife. If this is the case, it becomes possible to say that the intercession of the living can now have a definitive impact on the fate of the soul after the death. Thus so many prayers or masses may be offered by monks or priests for the souls of the dead - and these can be presented as having the effect of speeding the release of the soul from post-mortem purgation.<sup>56</sup>

Although we can glimpse the ideas of purgatory in the clerical literature of 6th/7th/8th centuries, its development was a long process and the purgatory in its final version was codified only in 13th century.<sup>57</sup> This fact points to the difficulties which the Church faced during this development and also allows us to assume that people had to deal with same difficulties, although on the less academic and more practical level of everyday life.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a major effort by the church to strengthen universal values within local religious cultures and, through them, to reinforce in parochial religion common practices designed to prepare the soul for the next world. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 marks a significant staging-post in this process.<sup>58</sup> Carl Watkins has recently summarized these developments:

Synodal statutes produced for the majority of dioceses indicate the development of programmes of basic religious instruction for the laity and elaborated sacramental obligations laid on all parishioners... ..Priests were required to instruct parishioners more closely in the faith, regular preaching became an expectation and parishioners were compelled to make confession and take communion at least on an annual basis. But if the new religious discipline was to take root in the localities it needed to be underpinned by a practical theology which priests might preach and parishioners might be willing to accept. We are not, in other words, dealing with simple imposition here but the creation of systems of belief and praxis which could be promoted effectively in the parishes. Central to this development was the effective negotiation of the needs of body and soul in a system of practice which

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 20

<sup>57</sup> Second Council of Lyon (1274), Council of Florence (1438-1445), Council of Trent (1545-1563)

<sup>58</sup> Watkins, *History and Supernatural*, p. 170



placed salvation within the grasp of ordinary believers, obliged as they were to struggle through life in a sinful world.<sup>59</sup>

The topic of the afterlife and the appropriate rites to ensure arrival there played an important role in this dialogue. However, the soul's journey through the otherworld was not a genuine Christian idea, so we have to rather "...answer why that 'purgatorial' story ceased to be one of many and emerged instead as the dominant explanation of what happened to souls in the afterlife – a hegemonic position it would occupy throughout the latter Middle Ages."<sup>60</sup>

According to Watkins, central to understanding this is the Church's didactic project:

As papal and diocesan hierarchies strove to standardise core beliefs in the parishes by implementing regular confession and communion, binding the parishioners more tightly to their local churches and improving the education of the clergy, they also had to offer an account of salvation which all could grasp... ..By means of these vivid and evocative stories about middle place and its inhabitants, constructed out of new theology, old motifs and even folklore, the church would try to resculpt assumptions about sin, satisfaction and the fate of souls which were deeply entrenched in the religious culture of the parishes.<sup>61</sup>

However, we can perceive two motives leading to this change. First, we can see here the efforts of the Church to centralize its power and standardize its systems, which could be seen as a political move. Secondly, if we take into account the cognitive processes of the human brain when in the vicinity of corpses, we can see these efforts as a way of tackling this problem, which points to the importance of this topic for both clerics and laity. At this point we can ask which one of these motives was more responsible? The proper answer is that both of them played a significant role, although if we look at the hierarchy of cognitive processes of human mind and my research collected in this work, the latter could be seen as a place where we can look for origins of these motives. The fact that even the authors of the 12<sup>th</sup> century chronicles examined in the previous chapter "...struggled with contritionist theology and theories of post-mortem

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.200

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.201

expiation..."<sup>62</sup>, with the result that we can witness the rise of vivid and colourful visions and revenant/ghost stories, leads to the same assumption. Therefore popular culture could be seen as primary level where these ideas were born and it is also the place where most of these interactions took place.

It is important to acknowledge that beliefs in revenants continued to be a part of folklore even after the full development and codification of purgatorial ideas, though it seems that these beliefs remained active longer in less industrially developed areas and later on mostly in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, these beliefs were frequently transformed into a mixture of "old" and Christian beliefs, as we can see in the case of Chonrad Stoeckhlin.

Chonrad Stoeckhlin was a herdsman from alpine regions on the borders of Germany and Switzerland who, during one night in February 1578, struck a deal with his friend and fellow herdsman Jacob that "whichever of the two should die first should come to the other one (as long as God did not forbid it) and should show him what it is like in that world."<sup>63</sup> When Jacob died after two weeks, he kept his promises and several times visited Chonrad and shared the information about "the Otherworld" with him. However these visits were just a preparation for a much intensive encounters with the supernatural. An angel appeared to Chonrad and commanded him to follow him:

And so he fell as unconscious. And thus in this rapture he went with him to a place where he observed pain and joy, which he took to be purgatory and paradise. There he saw many people, but recognized no one.<sup>64</sup>

They travelled long distances and for many hours, in groups that included both men and women and Stoeckhlin had a precise notion of this group and specific name for it: "the phantoms of the night."<sup>65</sup> As Wolfgang Behringer remarked in his study " ...in valleys that have been longer protected from tourism and from the collapse of the old village structures, ...the myth of the people of the night

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> W. Behringer: *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the Phantoms of the Night*, translated by H.C.E. Midlefort, (Charlottesville, 1998), p. 11

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 23

remained strong into the 20th century"<sup>66</sup> and he follows with examination of several theories, which points to suggestion that these beliefs most likely have Celtic and Germanic origins.<sup>67</sup> Taking into account the evidence assembled in this thesis, it is possible to draw some parallels between "phantoms of the night" and "special" dead. The "phantoms of the night" could be seen as a "group of souls" of the "special dead" in transition from the world of living to the world of dead. The souls are unable to enter either heaven or hell because the proper burial rites were not fulfilled properly, or the Christian rites were not sufficient for this kind of dead. On the other hand, they could be seen as witches and demons – as was Chonrad, who was condemned for the crime of witchcraft and burned to death in January 1587.<sup>68</sup>

One way or another, we can see that beliefs in revenants or "phantoms of the night" were still alive in 16th century. The basic ideas remained the same, although popular perceptions had changed under the influence of Christianity. As Behringer reflected at the end of his study:

When physical force was deployed against folk magic and when lived folk beliefs and myths were demonized, another stage in their suppression was begun. The people of the night were pushed underground and the fairies took leave of history. With his phantoms of the night, Stoeckhlin was looking for a personal compromise that would reconcile the stresses of myth, Tridentine Catholicism, and popular needs, but he was unable to find one. When push came to shove, not even his own neighbours were able to understand their "virtuoso representative of popular culture" any more. The witch hunt replaced the witch finder, the state replaced magic. The church became part of state administration, and these myths were transformed into the stuff of legend and fairy tales ...<sup>69</sup>

Whether classified as fairy tales or just superstition, the echoes of believes in revenants still resonated throughout the world and "special" burial rites were practised even in the 18<sup>th</sup>/ 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 27

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 26- 34

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 105

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 159

When John Williams, a condemned murderer, committed suicide, he was loaded on a cart, paraded through the streets of London, later dumped into the small pit on the crossroads and staked from the back through heart. He was then covered with quick lime and soil, although the top of the stake was left above the ground level as a remainder of his last resting place.<sup>70</sup> This story seems to recall some of the tales in William of Newburgh's medieval *Chronicle* and it is interesting that we can witness here the same scenario of how to deal with "special" dead – in this case murderers and suicides – as in the early middle ages. Moreover this wasn't the only case: we have 7 other stakings like this, all suicides – from this period and a dozen more from 18<sup>th</sup> century East Anglia.<sup>71</sup> These "special" rites, officially approved by local authorities, ended only after an 1823 Act of Parliament, which outlawed these practices. This involvement of British government resembles similar actions taken by Maria Theresa in Austro-Hungary almost a century previously.<sup>72</sup> These facts show us again that the geographical location, time period, religion and different cultural level are not the major factors in disposition of these beliefs and points in the direction of a "universality" located in the cognitive processes.

Another important task is to examine to what extent the differences between Catholic and Orthodox Church influenced the survival of these beliefs. The fact is that even in 20th century the Christians in rural Greece practiced secondary burials and determined the time of purgation from the state of the skeletal remains of the deceased. Bones without flesh and nicely clean were a sign that the period

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<sup>70</sup> "So, on New Year's Eve 1811 the grisly procession wound its way slowly through the streets of Wapping stopping for ten minutes at a time outside the scene of each of the murders. Some ten thousand people lined the route but there was none of the feared disorder. In the event only one person, a Hackney Carriage driver reached down from his seat and struck the body three times about the head with his crop. When the cart carrying Williams' body arrived at the crossroads of Cable Street and Cannon Street, close to Hawksmoor's St George's Church which, just a couple of weeks previously had seen the interment of the Marr family, the procession halted at the point where a grave had already been dug. The corpse was removed from the cart and a stake driven through its heart. Williams' body was then dumped into its grave in a kneeling position..... And there it remained for about a hundred years, until a gang of workmen discovered the body whilst laying some gas mains. The body was removed for research and investigation although, it is said that the skull was kept in a nearby public house for a number of years, until, one day that too disappeared." Thames Police Museum: The Ratcliffe Highway Murders, accessed on 09.04.2013

<sup>71</sup> For example case of William Snell and John Carter, July 31<sup>st</sup> 1779 Ipswich Journal, <http://www.foxearth.org.uk/1778-1779IpswichJournal.html>, accessed on 09.04.2013

<sup>72</sup> 1755, see more in Chapter 2, p. 159

of purgation was over and the remains of the deceased were ready for the final deposition. As Loring Danforth observed in his *Death Rituals of Rural Greece*:

Ideally, during the liminal period following death, the soul, its sins forgiven, journeys to paradise, while the body in the grave decomposes. However, there are occasions when all does not go well, when the desired passage or transition does not take place. In such cases the body does not decompose completely and at the exhumation bits of flesh, hair, and clothing are found. In less serious cases the bones of the deceased lie black and unclean in the grave. ...where any of this occurs,...the sins of the deceased were exposed and his bad reputation confirmed by the poor condition of the remains, ...[it is/] a proof, that the sins of the deceased have not been forgiven and that the soul has been condemned to hell<sup>73</sup>

The view that the bodies of certain categories of sinners do not decompose receives expression in the official teachings of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox funeral service itself contains prayers of absolution explicitly concerned with the possibility that the corpse might not decompose completely and also lists several reasons why this may occur.<sup>74</sup> In summary, if a person's sins have been forgiven by a priest on earth they will be forgiven by God in heaven, and his soul will enter paradise. On the other hand, if a person's sins have not been forgiven by a priest they will not be forgiven by God, and his soul will be condemned to hell.<sup>75</sup> However, according to Danforth, an undecomposed body was not a sign that the soul of the deceased had been consigned to hell, but a sign that the soul had not been separated completely from the body and from the world of living, which presented the possibility that the body might be reanimated either by the soul of the deceased or by the devil.<sup>76</sup>

It is interesting, although not so surprising if we take into account the material discussed in this work, how similar these practices are to the rites described by anthropologists and to alternative explanations of archaeological material proposed in this dissertation. However, it is not my intention to imply that the survival of these ideas in particular areas of Europe was caused by the differences

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<sup>73</sup> L.M. Danforth: *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*, (Princeton, 1982), pp. 49- 50

<sup>74</sup> N.M. Vaporis: *An Orthodox Prayer Book*, (Brookline, 1977), pp. 113- 114

<sup>75</sup> Danforth, *Death Rituals of Rural Greece*, p. 51- 52

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53

between the Catholic and Orthodox creeds. It is more likely that this state of affairs depended more on the geopolitical situation, which was different in the West than in the East. The fact that Anglo-Saxons were Christianized from the West and Slavs from the East does not seem to have significant influence when we take into account the "special" dead. On the contrary, both control groups examined in my dissertation showed similar attitudes towards the "special" dead, with only minor regional differences in "special" burial practices. Therefore, a proposed certain "universality" of these rites throughout the World, depended more on the automatic reaction of the human mind in the vicinity of the corpses, the soul beliefs which we can see as one of the by-products of this reaction and on the misunderstanding of decomposition process, which was given by the lack of medical knowledge.

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Taking into account the material discussed in this dissertation, the notion of the "special dead" as criminals or as "socially other" began to appear as a one sided assumption, which does not fit well for the majority of the cases presented in the pages of this work. As I have shown in Chapters 1 and 2, archaeological material together with information collected from primary sources demonstrates that we are dealing here with a phenomenon exceeding the framework of early medieval judicial law. However, it is the case that a high percentage of later "execution cemeteries" was built on "liminal" places, which were connected with "old" beliefs regarding the dead, the afterlife and the ancestors. Moreover, archaeological material excavated from these cemeteries, allows us in some cases to assume that former burial places reserved for the "special" dead were transformed into the execution cemeteries, as for instance in the case of Littleton.<sup>77</sup> This transformation seems only logical if we take into account the information collected by anthropologists. Criminals or "bad"/"dangerous" people belonged to one of the categories of the "special" dead and therefore were more prone to become revenants. Separating them from the others and burying them at the places designated for such a purpose with a long tradition of use, is a logical

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<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 59-64

step and could be seen as another proof that the people still believed in the possible return of the dead. As Sarah Semple's analysis in *Signals of Belief* implies, veneration of ancestors had formed a central part of the Anglo-Saxon pre-Christian religion<sup>78</sup> and according to Alexandra Sanmark:

Ancestors were not always good-natured: when not properly looked after, they were seen to become angry and dangerous, and were thus often feared. It would not be surprising if horror stories regarding burial mounds were spread in Christian times. Where the belief in ancestral spirits was strong this unrest could be transferred to Christian burial grounds. After the introduction of Christianity in Finland, when the population had to bury their dead in the churchyards, the dead ancestors could no longer be cared for in line with the old traditions. As a result, the churchyards came to be seen as "frightful places, full of dissatisfied dead."<sup>79</sup>

Sanmark's comment corresponds with some of the theories discussed in this work. The inability of the Church to deal with certain types of dead is supported by the return to the old burial practices, documented by the archaeological material. My research lead me to assumption that the major reasons lay in the differences between the concepts of "pagan" and "Christian" beliefs, especially those dealing with the soul of the deceased and the afterlife. However, looking at this problem from a cognitive point of view, the major problem seems to be the corpse. Dead people and especially their bodies, were, are, and most likely will always be a source of discomfort, confusion and fear. "Old" burial practices were applied to help people cope with this confusing period. Burial rites were seen as a rite of passage - transformation from one state to another- not only for the deceased, but also for the community of the living. Christian rites were not deemed sufficient in particular cases - especially when dealing with the "special" dead or during epidemics. A degree of confusion when dealing with these problems could be seen in clerical literature about the afterlife emerging in the 6th/7th centuries and in the consequent development of the idea of Purgatory, which I have discussed earlier in this chapter.

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<sup>78</sup> Semple, "In the Open Air", pp. 21- 48

<sup>79</sup> Sanmark, "Ancestors and the Soul", p. 168

Belief in revenants has remained alive in some places right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>80</sup> and given the facts presented in this dissertation, the only difference determining if the revenant/vampire will look like Dracula or like a corporeal nightmare of a fellow community member, is the influence of the environment and the community in relationship with it. The idea of revenants emerging from graves and killing, or sucking people's blood, could seem as exaggerated, "Romantic", or just as a horror story or fairy tale. However, this notion has achieved a degree of popularity in present day society, which is isolated from death and where the interaction with the corpses is handed over to a small group of specialists. It would be interesting to conduct medical trials examining the reaction of present day people when in the vicinity of corpses, and their influence on the psyche of these individuals. Future analysis and examination heading in such a direction on medical, psychological and retrospectively in archaeological and historical levels could lead us to the better understanding of the origins of the beliefs in revenants and to further explanations of why revenants/vampires existed in the past and exist till today.

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<sup>80</sup> The Observer 19.06.2005, online source:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jun/19/theobserver> accessed 18.03.2012





## Appendix 1

### Catalogue of graves:

#### Anglo-Saxons

##### Littleton, Hampshire: chronology: 8th - 11th century<sup>1</sup>

**Grave 109:** Older Middle Adult/ Mature Adult, male, supine, the skull not present, Fe buckle.

**Grave 110:** The burial comprised the bones of possibly two individuals. Middle Adult, mal , supine, the skull was not present, no grave goods.

**Grave 111:** Middle adult, male (30- 40) ?, supine, decapitated, the skull was found by right knee almost face up, no grave goods, a large animal bone. Sharp force trauma to base of the body cutting off at anterior margin, probably with one blow.

**Grave 112:** Disturbed, 2 individuals: 1.) Young Adult, male, supine, decapitated, the left hand covered by displaced and badly damaged skull 2.) young adult, Fe buckle.

**Grave 113:** Disturbed, Young Adult, male, supine, decapitated, the skull was found to side of left knee, no grave goods. The fragments of both arm and legs were recorded, with an articulated hand, probably from the right arm, near the left shoulder suggesting that the right arm was bent up behind the neck area. Sharp force trauma to base of body of C2, sharp force trauma to neural arch of C3. The marks on vertebrae and mandible suggests multiple blows (at least two).

**Grave 117:** Disturbed, Adult, sex unrecognizable, supine, decapitated, the skull was not present, Cu alloy buckle, two nails and traces of "calcified" wood, possibly the remains of coffin. The grave was previously dated as Romano-British, but most recent radiocarbon data place it in the Late Saxon period. There was also a cut mark to the superior part of the vertebrae, delivered by single blow.

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<sup>1</sup> *Archaeological Excavations at Berwick Field and Old Dairy Cottage, West Andover Road, Winchester, Hampshire, 1989-1994: Post-excavation assessment report and project design for analysis and publication*

The ditch in which the grave was inserted was deemed as Romano-British, but it looks as if it is Late Saxon too; however it does seem that there are two phases of burial, even though they are both Late Saxon.<sup>2</sup>

**Grave 121:** Disturbed, Young Adult, sex unrecognizable, supine, the skull was not present, no grave goods.

**Grave 123:** Young Adult, male ?, prone, decapitated - sharp force trauma to neural arch; the skull was found by lower right leg, Fe buckle, arms tied behind the back. Healed fracture of proximal diaphysis of right femur. possible perimortem sharp force trauma to C5. A sample of human bone from the skeleton produced a radiocarbon date of cal AD 775-965 (OxA-12045, 1163±25 BP).

**Grave 124:** Disturbed, Young Middle Adult, male, supine but slightly twisted on the right side, decapitated, the skull was found beneath left knee, right arm bent under the torso, no grave goods. Sharp force trauma to vertebral body and right neural arch, delivered probably by single blow. Vertebrae and ribs of infant ? also found in this grave.

**Grave 125a:** Disturbed, Middle Adult, female (33 - 46)?, into a prone position, the skull was not present, no grave goods.

**Grave 125b:** Young Adult (18 - 20), male, supine, decapitated, the skull was found on the neck - but inverted, no grave goods. Congenital fusion of C3-4 - Kippel Fail syndrome ??, fusion of L6 to sacrum, 6<sup>th</sup> lumbar vertebra. C6- cut through body, possibly from back, C7 cut through entire body by a second higher cut.

**Grave 126:** Disturbed, Young Adult, sex unrecognizable, supine, the skull was not present, no grave goods.

**Grave 127:** Juvenile- Young Adult, sex unrecognizable, supine, the skull was not present, no grave goods.

**Grave 128:** Old Middle Adult, male, supine, decapitated, the skull was found by knees, grave goods in fill of the grave, arms tied behind the back. C14 data - 890-

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<sup>2</sup> Helen Rees (pers. comm.)

1020 (OxA-12046, 1088±26 BP). Spinous process of C4; body and neural arch of C5, the blow was directed from behind and also damaged the clavicle. Articulated and disarticulated bones from a number of other individuals were also recovered from the grave fill, from both below and above skeleton, including from a child aged 6-8 years, a young adult female aged 16-20 years, an adult male aged over 21, and adult aged over 17.

**Grave 129:** Disturbed, 10- 12 years old, sex unrecognizable, prone, skull in anatomical position, no grave goods. New radiocarbon exams dating it to Late Saxon period.

**Grave 130:** Disturbed, Adult, sex unrecognizable, supine, the skull not present, no grave goods.

**Empingham, Rutland. Chronology: Late 5th - early 7th century.<sup>3</sup>**

**Grave 5:** Juvenile. Age 10- 12 years. Prone with the right arm hand bent to shoulder. Two beads and three white metal items.

**Grave 53:** Male adult. Age 25- 35 years. In prone position head facing left. The left arm missing; the right arm is parallel to the side. The right leg is bent out at an angle to the body, the left leg is missing. Iron knife, copper alloy buckle.

**Grave 107:** Female adult. Age 25- 35 years. Prone with head facing right. Legs slightly bent, left under right. Arms bent with the right hand to the right shoulder and the left hand under the chest. 2 annular brooches, beads, pair of wrist clasps, iron chatelaine, iron knife and copper alloy fragments.

**Grave 113A:** Male. Age 17- 25 years. Prone with legs semi flexed. The left leg is bent over the right. The arms are bent with hands under left shoulder: "...slightly

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<sup>3</sup> R. Timby: *The Anglo- Saxon Cemetery at Empingham II, Rutland*, Oxbow Monograph 70, (Oxford, 1996)

unusual position with the hands placed together in front of the face (? perhaps tied)..."<sup>4</sup> Shallow grave. 2 Iron fragments.

**Grave 113B:** Child. Age 3-4 years. Placed in prone position under the legs of 113A. Fragmentary remains. No recorded grave goods.

**Grave 122:** Female. Age 15 years. Prone with head facing to the left and upwards. Legs slightly bent. Arms under body.

**Grave 125:** Male. Age 11 years. Upper and lower parts of body are missing. Prone with legs probably extended. Arms uncertain.

There are also 5 graves with missing heads (the reasons for this are not explained by the excavators):

**Grave 21:** Male. Age 17-21 years. Supine. Left leg extended, right leg bent with foot crossing left shin. Right arm parallel to side, left arm and skull missing.

"No grave goods were recorded in the site catalogue but amongst the finds are two spearheads labelled Grave 21. Also a note that two lumps of iron went through the spine. It is uncertain whether this is simply where grave goods have fallen onto the spine, or whether the spear had pierced the spine."<sup>5</sup>

**Grave 27:** Female adult. Age 30- 40 years. Supine with upper torso slightly bent to the right. The feet are crossed at the shin, right over left. The left arm is slightly bent with hand resting on pelvis. The right arm and skull are missing. 2 swastika brooches, beads, copper alloy pin, strap fitting, 2 iron buckle, iron ring and iron knife.

**Grave 44:** Unsexed adult. Fragmentary remains with only legs extant. These are parallel and extended suggesting a supine body position. No recorded grave goods.

**Grave 61:** Female adult. Age 25- 35 years. Supine legs extended. The head and arms are missing but from the position of a pair of wrist clasps the left hand was probably resting on the pelvis. Square-headed brooch, trefoil brooch, pair of wrist clasps, iron knife and copper alloy fragment.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 18

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 102

**Grave 82:** Male. Age 15- 23 years. Supine with legs slightly bent to right. Arms flexed, hands both to right shoulder. No recorded grave goods.

**West Heslerton, North Yorkshire. Chronology: c. 475 - 650 AD.<sup>6</sup>**

**Grave 6:** The grave contained the partially preserved skeleton of an adult male (probably 25- 35 years) buried in a prone position with the head to the west. The arms lay beneath the body with the hands together beneath the pelvis; the legs were flexed with the feet together. No grave goods.

**Grave 16:** Contained the fragmentary lower limbs of an adult, probably male, accompanied by a number of knives and a wooden vessel. The body, lying on the right side, was clearly far larger than could be easily accommodated by the grave cut, so that the lower legs were jammed up against the northern edge of the grave with the feet almost at the surface. Staining around the sides of the grave at the base may indicate the presence of some sort of coffin.

**Grave 17:** A very narrow grave partially cut away by Grave 14 to the east, which has removed everything above the pelvis. This feature was unusual on a number of counts; it contained the eroded and fragmentary lower limbs of an individual in a prone position with the feet either tied together or simply jammed into a very narrow slot. It is unfortunate that the western half of the grave had been cut away and that it had also been truncated by ploughing, so that any further evidence had been lost. There were no grave goods in the surviving part of the grave.

**Grave 70:** The grave contained the prone burial of an adult marked by bone fragments and body staining. The position of the body led to the suggestion at the time that this might have been a live burial. The bone preservation was very poor; however, the head, which lay to the north, was twisted round over the left shoulder. The arms were folded up with the hands probably beneath the shoulders;

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<sup>6</sup> Ch. Houghton and D. Powlesland: *West Heslerton: The Anglian Cemetery. Volume I*, (Yedingham, North Yorkshire, 1999)

the right leg was pulled up towards the left elbow and the left extended. No grave goods.

**Grave 89:** Deep sub-rectangular grave cut into the fill of the Neolithic enclosure ditch 2BA M38. The grave, which was defined following the discovery of the skull, contained the exceptionally well preserved skeleton of an adult female (25-35 years) lying face down with the head twisted round to face south and raised up against the western end of the grave cut. The right arm was folded beneath the body and the left was folded up with the hand to the left shoulder. The left leg was extended across the right which was flexed, the knee against south side of the grave. Grave goods: 2 iron annular brooches, beads, 2 wrist clasps and buckle.

**Grave 113:** Deep grave cut through the Neolithic hengiform enclosure ditch 2BAM38 on its northern side. The grave, which was cut into the side of the filled ditch, was somewhat small for the burial it contained, and it was distorted as a result. The skeleton (adult female c.20 years), which lay on the left side with the head to the west, had settled with the head twisted back and facing down into the rock-cut side of the grave. The legs were flexed with the feet almost projecting from the grave. The burial was accompanied by a number of amulets both as parts of a necklace and with a girdle complex located beneath the right thigh. The walnut amulet, one of two recovered at Heslerton, would seem to be unique to this site. Grave goods: 2 annular brooches, silver bead, iron "bead", beaver tooth pendant, beads, silver ring, copper alloy discs, ?purse mounts, soil block containing a chatelaine group: latchlifters, girdle hangers and a walnut amulet.

**Grave 114:** A sub-rectangular grave within the area of the Neolithic enclosure and to the west of barrow 2BA M264. The grave contained the partial skeleton of an adult female ( 17- 25 years) buried in prone position with the head to the west.

Not only had this woman suffered a stroke affecting her left side but her left foot had been cut off (either ante-mortem or at time of death). The body was laid out with the torso prone but extended, the right arm folded up so the right hand was beneath the right shoulder, the left arm bent up at the elbow. The legs appear to have been tied together at the knee; an iron ring between the knee-caps was

evidently used as part of the binding. Below the knees the legs were splayed apart. Grave goods: annular brooch, iron ring, beads.

**Grave 118:** An ovate and truncated grave cut aligned W-E and cutting through Grave 120, containing the fragmentary skeleton of a sub-adult; the body was placed in a prone and extended position. The age of the dead was in the mid to late teens (12- 15 years<sup>7</sup>). Grave goods: 2 annular brooches, knife and beads.

**Grave 126:** A steep-sided and large ovate grave aligned N-S on the western edge of the cemetery. The grave contained the fragmentary skeleton of an adult male laid on the left side (or prone) with the head to the north facing east. The grave was insufficiently large to conveniently contain the body and the lower legs were thus bent up against the southern end of the grave so that the ankles were at the top of the cut when first identified. Grave goods: buckle, knife and two iron rods.

**Grave 132:** A small ovate grave containing a prone burial (sub- adult 15- 20 years) accompanied by a female grave assemblage. The grave had been disturbed by animal action with skull fragments occurring up to 60 mm above the in situ fragments. The rest of the cranium was poorly preserved and facing south. The left upper arm and elbow remained flexed and raised at the elbow to nearly top of the grave as excavated; the right arm did not survive. The position of the legs indicates that force was probably employed to place the burial in the grave, since the legs were tightly folded up with the feet, which did not survive, under the pelvis, the left leg over the right. A copper alloy band just to the west of skull was presumably a cup mount, which contained a quantity of brassica seeds. Annular brooches and a bead necklace were *in situ* at the shoulders while an iron pendant lay behind the skull to the north. To the left of the pelvis and upper thigh lay a purse group including a walnut amulet and a set of latchlifters. There is copper staining on the clavicles, left mandible and first rib. Grave goods: 2 annular brooches, beads, copper alloy flake, iron pendant, copper alloy band, soil block containing purse group: walnut amulet, latchlifters, lace tags, copper alloy ring and buckle.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 195



**Grave 155:** A large sub-rectangular grave towards the northern limit of the area in the centre of the cemetery, containing the well-preserved skeleton of an adult male. The body was probably placed on the left side but had settled into a semi-prone position with the legs flexed and the torso extended and the skull lying directly face down. The evidence of damage to the spine indicates heavy work or perhaps stress resulting from battle. Grave goods: spear and knife.

**Grave 166:** A small but deep ovate grave cut through the infilled ditch of barrow 2M130; the grave contained the well preserved and prone burial of an unaccompanied adult female. The bone preservation was unusually good on account of the chalk in the surrounding soils. The grave wasn't large enough to contain the body in anything other than a distorted position. The head was to the east, twisted round against the side of the grave. The legs were flexed and on the left side, the torso being twisted with the hands beneath the pelvis. The spine must have been broken to achieve the final resting position; whether this occurred during burial or as a result of settlement was unclear.

#### **Apple Down, West Sussex: Chronology AD 490-510 to c. AD 680-90.<sup>8</sup>**

**Grave 19:** Inhumation, supine; aligned S-N. 0.40m deep.

Sex: Male. Age: 35-40

Right fibula healed fracture and periostosis.

No finds.

**Grave 23:** Inhumation, supine; aligned S-N. Average depth of grave: 0.62m.

Sex: Female. Age: over 45.

Finds: Buckle, hook, knife, iron object, nail?.

**Grave 55:** Inhumation, supine with legs slightly fixed; aligned W-E. Some evidence for a plank over the body and extending below the feet. There are also signs of disturbance or re-arrangement of some of the long bones, in particular the left femur. Possibly the body was exposed before burial.

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<sup>8</sup> A. Down and M. Welch: *Chichester Excavations VII: Apple Down and The Mardens*, (Chichester District Council, 1990)

Sex: Male? Age: 45+

Finds: Buckle, knife, object, five fragments, bead.

**Grave 93:** Inhumation, supine; aligned E-W; intercut with Grave 99 to the S, but not as deep. 0.36m deep (from turf).

Sex: Female. Age: over 45

Finds: Buckle.

**Grave 97:** Inhumation, supine; aligned S-N.

Sex: Female. Age: 20-25

Finds: Knife, belt plates, buckle.

**Grave 99A:** Inhumation of an infant just a few weeks old; bones scattered through the fill of Grave 99B and must be from an earlier burial.

Sex: ? Age: 0+

**Grave 99B:** Inhumation, supine; aligned S-N in a large grave, 0.82m deep. Enclosed by four-post structure 13 and with the shallow W-E female burial of Grave 93 at its foot end; fragments of charcoal, calcined bone and two sherds of pottery from a disturbed cremation found at the S end in the top grave fill.

Sex: Male. Age: over 45

Finds: Three shield studs, knife, spearhead, buckle loop fragment, shield boss.

**Grave 144:** Inhumation lying on its left side with legs flexed; aligned N-S, within ring ditch. Very shallow, 0.33 m deep, skull damaged by plough. Male, 25 - 30 year old. No grave finds.

**Grave 150:** Inhumation crouched on its left side, aligned S-N. 0.50 m deep. Male, 30- 35 years old. No grave finds.

**Grave 157:** Inhumation lying on its left side with legs slightly fixed; aligned S-N. 0.55 deep. Surrounded by a six-post structure.

Sex: Female. Age: over 45.

Finds: Buckle.

### **Finglesham, Kent: Chronology c. 500-c.725<sup>9</sup>**

#### **Post holes in graves:**

**Grave 21:** The grave contained two burials. In the bottom of the pit were the undisturbed remains of Individual B, which lay in a fill of chalky rubble, apparently uncoffined, while above were the undisturbed remains of Individual A which lay in a fill of loamy earth. The two burials were either made at the same time, and the difference in fill was deliberate, or Individual A was deposited some time after Individual B. Four pairs of post-holes had been dug into the sides of the grave to a depth c. 0.15 m. These would originally have contained vertical posts of what was presumably a pitched-roof structure.<sup>10</sup>

Individual A: Male, 30+ years. Slightly contracted and tilted to his left side, knees drawn up and at a higher level than pelvis or feet; left arm sharply bent, with hand at shoulder, right arm largely missing. No grave goods.

Individual B: Female, 20- 30 years. Extended supine, the whole body slightly tilted to her left side, left shoulder higher; head bent to left shoulder, right arm bent across waist, left arm and legs straight with feet pointing left. Cu alloy buckle, Fe knife, chatelaine which contained Fe key.

**Grave 150:** Undisturbed in antiquity, but with the lower right side and foot end of grave cut by a modern trench for a pylon. The main grave pit was surrounded by a shallow continuous ledge, cut in turn by 4 pairs of opposing sockets. It is thought that these sockets would have accommodated wooden cross-beams which would have acted as supports for a horizontal wooden long board covering.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> S.Ch. Hawkes and G. Grainger: *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Finglesham, Kent*, (Oxford, 2006)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 44

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.106

The grave-fill was hard-packed chalk, suggesting to the excavators that either the board cover was removed before backfilling or that the grave was backfilled before the board cover was laid.

Female, 20-25 years. Right lower leg removed by excavation of pylon. Extended supine, left arm bent across waist. Fe steel, Fe knife, pair of Fe shears, wooden box/leather pouch.

### **Stones in graves:**

**Grave 20:** This grave contained two individuals. Individual B was an undisturbed burial in the bottom of the pit, while Individual A was only recognisable from a few long-bone fragments during the osteological examination. Remains of a wooden coffin, which contained Individual B, surrounded on 3 sides by a packing of large flint lumps. The 4 coffin nails apparently secured the lid of the coffin.

Individual A: Sex and age not discernible; just a few long-bone fragments. No grave goods.

Individual B: Female, c. 50 years. Extended supine, legs straight. Quite rich.

**Grave 65:** Undisturbed. A series of large flints were placed to the left of the skull and upper part of the torso.

Female, 20- 25 years. Extended supine. Wooden box with Fe fittings.

**Grave 86:** Undisturbed. Traces of wooden coffin some 0.51m wide were visible at the foot end of the grave, and could be planned up to the mid-shaft area of the femora. The coffin had been laid on a layer of flints and chalk lumps some 0.13m deep. A further group of large flints had been placed at the head end of the grave to the right of the skull. There is no demonstrable association between this grave and a series of 4 post-holes between 1.5 and 4m to the north of the grave.

Male, c. 20- 30 years. Extended supine. Glass bag beaker, wheel-made pottery bottle, Fe spearhead, Fe knife, Fe tool.

**Grave 116:** Undisturbed. The body was laid on a layer of chalk rubble and large flints, the latter occurring above and to the left of the left arm and underneath the right leg and foot and beyond to the foot end of the grave. The sides of the grave sloped inwards sharply so that the base of the grave pit was only slightly larger than the body. The grave was surrounded by a large circular grave-free area.

Male, 20- 25 years. Extended supine; left arm bent across abdomen, right arm and legs straight. No grave goods.

**Grave 138:** Undisturbed. Coffin trace. Flint packing.

Female, c. 25 years. Extended supine. Very rich grave-goods.

**Grave 141:** Undisturbed. The main grave pit was surrounded by relatively deep ledges, those at the right side and foot end being covered by a layer of flint packing. There is just enough space for a wooden board cover to have been placed on the ledges over the body with the flints placed on the boards.

Sex not discernable, 3- 4 years. Extended supine. Fe nail on ledge at the centre of foot end of grave.

**Grave 151:** Undisturbed. The grave edges were lined with flints in the upper fill and other flints were found scattered throughout the chalky fill. It is suspected that this flint lining was associated with a horizontal wooden board covering, similar to those suggested for certain of the ledge graves.<sup>12</sup>

Female, c. 40 years. Extended supine. Fe knife.

#### **Graves within ditches:**

**Grave 59:** Simple wooden coffin visible as a trace 25mm wide. The coffin was 2.29m long and 0.51m wide. The fill was compact chalk, becoming very loose around the skeleton. The grave was surrounded by a penannular ditch (Ditch 1). The area enclosed by the ditch was covered by a layer of packed chalk rubble 25-50mm thick- the last traces of a chalk mound originally raised over the grave.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.106

Female, elderly. Extended supine. Wheel-made pottery bottle, wooden box with Fe and Cu alloy fittings, Fe ?steel, Fe knife.

**Grave 93:** Robbed in antiquity, soon after burial?<sup>13</sup> The grave was surrounded by a penannular ditch (Ditch 2) with a single post-hole for a wooden marker post in causeway.

Sex not discernible, c. 35 years. Skeletal remains thrown back into grave after robbing. No grave goods.

**Grave 112:** Traces of wooden coffin. The grave was surrounded by a penannular ditch (Ditch 3). No sign of post-hole or traces of a mound visible.

Female, c. 35- 45 years. Extended supine. No grave goods.

**Grave 120:** A distinct coffin line surrounded by hard chalk packing. The grave was surrounded by a penannular ditch ( Ditch 4) with a single post-hole for a wooden marker post in the causeway.

Female, 40+ years. Extended supine. Necklace, Fe knife, two Fe pin/nail fragments.

**Grave 126:** No traces of structure visible inside grave pit. The grave was surrounded by a penannular ditch ( Ditch 5) with a single post-hole in the entrance. No traces of mound were seen.

Sex not discernable, 10- 12 years. Either disturbed and thrown back into the fill or possibly undisturbed but severely eroded. No grave goods.

**Grave 127:** Simple wooden coffin. The grave was surrounded by a penannular ditch ( Ditch 6) with a single post-hole for a wooden marker post in causeway. The area enclosed by the ditch was covered by a layer of hard packed chalk, all that remained of the chalk mound that had originally covered the grave.

Female, c. 25 years. Extended supine. No grave goods.

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<sup>13</sup> According to the excavators, Ibid., p. 78

**Grave 131:** No coffin. The grave was surrounded by an oval ditch ( Ditch 7) together with Grave 132 and 133. No causeway.

Sex not discernable, c. 4 years ? Extended supine. Handmade pottery jar.

**Grave 132:** No coffin. Enclosed with Graves 131 and 133 by a oval ditch. Outside the ditch, beyond the foot end of the grave, was a single post-hole for a wooden marker post. No trace of mound survived.

Female, c. 5 years. Only teeth were recovered. Pale turquoise blue glass palm-cup, small hand-made pottery cup or jar, necklet.

**Grave 133:** There was slight evidence of a possible coffin, but it could not measured. Over the legs was a deposit of black "seeds". The grave was enclosed together with Graves 131 and 132 by an oval ditch. Outside the ditch, beyond the foot end of the grave was a single post-hole for a wooden marker post.

Male, 25- 30 years. Extended supine, though half turned onto right side. Spear, Fe and bronze buckle, waist belt fitting, Fe knife, Fe steel, organic object with Cu alloy fittings.

**Grave 164:** No coffin. The grave was originally surrounded by a penannular ditch (Ditch 8 in the excavation report).

Female, 40- 45 years. Buried in semi-extended supine position; upper body turned partly onto left side with right humerus parallel to and almost directly vertebral column. Bronze pin, Fe knife.

**Grave 172:** Not excavated, under road. Surrounded by a ditch ( Ditch 9). A post-hole for a wooden marker post had been dug out just to the east of the causeway.

**Grave 173:** Not excavated, under road. Surrounded by a ditch ( Ditch 10). At the very east of the circuit the ditch was interrupted by a causeway. No evidence of a mound.

**Grave 184:** Clear traces of a wooden coffin. The grave was surrounded by an unusual sub-rectangular ditch (Ditch 11) with a causeway in the middle of the eastern side. No sign of a mound.

Male, adult. Extended supine; left forearm bent, hand on lap, right arm straight by side. No grave goods.

**Grave 185:** Slight traces of a wooden coffin. The grave was surrounded by a penannular ditch ( Ditch 12). The causeway was in the north- eastern part of the ditch circuit. No trace of a mound.

Female, c. 25 years. Extended supine, head partly turned to right. Fe knife.

## **Slavs**

### **The catalogue of features with human skeletons.<sup>14</sup>**

#### **1. Bratislava- Old City**

**Objekt AI/5** – 274 – 299 cm deep; well; tube like shape; remains of 7 adults (male); dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 4.1)

#### **2. Cifer- Pac**

**Objekt 4/7** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 270 cm deep, dated to 10<sup>th</sup> century, skeletons of 3 adults (Fig. 5.1)

**Objekt 32**– borrow pit, pear like shape, 260 cm deep, skeletons of 4 adults (Fig. 5.2 – 5)

#### **3A. Komjatice (Knazova jama)**

**Objekt 145** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 138 cm deep, dated to 11. -12<sup>th</sup> century, 2 adults (Fig. 4.3)

#### **3B. Komjatice (Strkovisko)**

**Objekt 28** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 70 cm deep, dated to 11. – 12<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult (Fig. 4.2)

#### **4. Male Kosihy**

**Objekt 3** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 165 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, female 15- 18 years (Fig. 4.4)

#### **5A. Muzla- Cenkov (Orechovy sad)**

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<sup>14</sup> M. Hanuliak: *Veľkomoravske pohrebiská: Pochovávanie v 9.-10.storočí na území Slovenska*, (Nitra, 2004)



**Objekt 27** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 156 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, - 8 years (Fig. 7.3)

#### **5B. Muzla- Cenkov (Vilmarket)**

**Objekt 71** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 260 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, male 15- 18 years (Fig. 6.1)

**Objekt 297** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 160 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, female 15- 18 years (Fig. 6.2)

**Objekt 336** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 160 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, male 25- 65 years (Fig. 6.3)

**Objekt 438** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 155 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century; 8- 15 years (Fig. 6.4)

**Objekt 488** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 200 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, infant (Fig. 6.6)

**Objekt 489** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 120 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, female 25- 65 years, the legs turned over the back by force (Fig. 6.5)

**Objekt 726** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 125 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, absolutely shattered remains of 3 adults, a lot of bones from body, arms and legs + 2 skulls missing (Fig. 6.7)

**Objekt 966** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 160 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult and 1 infant (Fig. 7.1)

#### **6A. Nitra (Old City)**

**Objekt 1** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 200 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult (Fig. 7.4)

**Objekt 2** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 160 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult, skull dislocated and turned around (Fig. 7.2)

#### **6B. Nitra (Old City)**

**Objekt 1/84** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 235 cm deep, dated to 16<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult

#### **7. Nitrianska Streda**

**Objekt 1** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 290 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, adult (female ?) (Fig. 8.1)

#### **8. Palarikovo**

**Objekt 3/74** – cottage, rectangular shape, 70 cm deep, dated to 12. – 13<sup>th</sup> century, 4 skeletons ( 2 adults + 2 infants) (Fig. 9)

#### **9. Senec**

**Objekt 5/77** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 232 cm deep, dated to 11. – 12<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult (Fig. 8.4)

#### **10. Sala – Veca**

**Objekt 1** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 120 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, absolutely shattered remains of 1 adult

**Objekt 15** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 210 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult (female?), between the femurs two weaving battens. (Fig. 8.3)

**Objekt 18** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 200 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult (Fig. 8.2)

**Objekt 28** – borrow pit, pear like shape, 245 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, absolutely shattered remains of 1 adult (165 cm deep)

#### **11. Velky Cetin**

**Objekt 2** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 62 cm deep, dated to early medieval period, 3 skeletons (adult female? 15 - 25 years (50 cm deep) + infant (50 cm deep) (Fig. 10.2)

#### **12. Velky Kyr**

**Objekt 21** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 75 cm deep, dated to 10.- 11<sup>th</sup> century, adult, arms turned over the back by force (Fig. 10.1)

#### **13. Zelenec**

**Objekt 3/76** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 205 cm deep, dated to 11.- 12<sup>th</sup> century, 2 skeletons (2 infants) (Fig. 10.3)

#### **14. Zabokreký**

**Objekt 11/61** – borrow pit, tube like shape, 240 cm deep, dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century, 1 adult

### **GRAVES:**

#### **Čelákovice.<sup>15</sup>**

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<sup>15</sup> J. Špaček: "Slovanské pohřebiště s projevy vampyrizmu v Čelákovících", in *Časopis Národního muzea* (XL 1971/1)

**Grave 1:** Disturbed by the landowner; according to him, the skeleton was supine, head facing NNW; grave 195 cm long and 60 cm deep. When the bones were examined, archaeologists found out that they actually belonged to two individuals: A. male 50- 60 years old and B. male 40- 50 years old. It is possible that male B was deposited in the grave fill over male A and was probably originally deposited in a prone position.

**Grave 2:** Skeleton supine, with head facing NNW. The bones belonged to a 30 year old male. His skull was lying on the right temple, and the arms were placed under the pelvis. According to the excavator the chest and hips were decomposed. Grave 190 cm long, 65 cm wide and 60 cm deep.

**Grave 3:** (Fig. 11) Skeleton supine, male 40- 50 years old. Right arm was bent at the elbow and placed under the spine, left hand placed under the pelvis. On the right leg, in place where the femur meets the pelvis, a Fe buckle was excavated. Grave 195 cm long, 65 cm wide and 65- 75 cm deep (skull 75 cm deep, legs 65 cm).

**Grave 4:** (Fig. 11) Skeleton of male around 30 years old, with the head facing WNW. The skeleton is slightly turned to the right side, with the left arm lying on the bosom and the right hand little away from body. The legs were not found (probably taken out during construction works, although we cannot eliminate the possibilities that the body was deposited without the legs or that the legs were removed some time after the burial). Grave 110 cm long, 55 cm wide and 60 cm deep.

**Grave 5:** (Fig. 12) Double grave. Male A 40- 50 years old, in prone position, with head facing WNW. Skull slightly turned on the right temple, arms placed on the back with crossed wrists (most likely tied behind the body). Under the pelvis a Fe buckle.

A couple of centimetres under Male A lay Male B, 50- 60 years old, on the back with the head facing ESE. On the left side of right femur, Fe buckle. Grave 200 cm long, 65 cm wide.

**Grave 6:** (Fig. 12) In the west part of the cemetery. Male 30- 40 years old lying on the left side, head facing ENE, with arms under the back and palms together (probably tied behind the back). The skull was removed and laid on the right

temple on the right side, not in line with the spine. The skull had been removed some time after the deposition (secondary intervention)<sup>16</sup>. Grave 140 cm long, 35- 50 cm wide and only 20 cm deep. Grave was situated across graves 7 and 8.

**Grave 7:** (Fig. 12) Male 20- 30 years old, supine. Skull removed at first neck vertebra and placed with nape hole up. The skull had been removed some time after deposition. Arms were folded on the chest, legs missing, apparently destroyed during construction work in 1950. Grave 110 cm long, 48 cm wide and 95 cm deep. In the right side of grave, 30 cm from bottom a piece of pine wood panel approx. 70 cm long was excavated.

**Grave 8:** Near Grave 7, Male A 20- 30 years old, supine with the head removed between second and third neck vertebra, facing NW. Skull lying on the skull-cap and the jaws wide open filled and with sand. The skull had been removed some time after deposition and the mouth filled with sand at the same time. The left arm was placed under the body, right arm slightly bent at the elbow and placed under the body, where it met with the left arm under the pelvis, palms together. In the filling of grave and around the head of Male A were scattered bones of Male B, 50- 60 years old. Grave 200 cm long, 53 cm deep and 90 cm deep.

**Grave 9:** Heavily damaged during construction works. Male 20- 30 years old, lying on the left side, with palms of both hands together and placed near the upper end of left femur.

**Grave 10:** (Fig. 13) Double grave. Adult A, slightly turned to the left side, left leg bent in knee and placed over the legs of Adult B under. At level of the feet the mandible of adult male had been secondary placed.

Adult B, male 30- 40 years old, in prone position, with legs so bent at the knees that the heels touched the grave wall. Only the right forearm was excavated. Under the right femur was a Fe buckle. 10 cm under the buckle was the mandible of an adult (possibly from Grave 11). 15 cm from right forearm of Adult B the remains of a pine wood post, approx 22cm long.

**Grave 11:** (Fig. 13) Under Grave 10. Male, supine, head facing west. Right arm bent at elbow and placed under the back, left arm placed in such a way that was almost at a 90 percent angle to the bottom of the grave, almost dislocated, bent at the elbow and placed under the back, where the arms lay close together. Right arm

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 197

lay under the buckle of Adult B from Grave 10 and on the right side of skull was secondary internet adult skull, which the mandible from Grave 10 could belong.<sup>17</sup>  
Grave 165 cm long, 50 cm wide and 116- 120 cm deep.

## **Staré Město.**<sup>18</sup>

**Grave 37/st:** Inhumation, supine with flexed legs.

Sex: ?

No grave goods.

**Grave 15/48:** Inhumation, supine; aligned W-E.

Sex: Female. Age: approx. 25.

Finds: Six silver earrings, two silver buttons, Fe knife.

**Grave 153/49:** Inhumation, supine; aligned W-E.

Sex: Female. Age: 50-60.

No grave goods.

**Grave 282/49:** Inhumation, bones scattered.

Sex: Female. Age: 20-25.

Finds: Five pairs of golden earrings, two pairs of golden buttons, two silver pendants, two gold plated copper buttons, two pairs of silver earrings, atypical shards of Fe.

**Grave 329/49:** Inhumation, supine with right leg flexed; aligned SWW-NEE.

Sex: Male. Age: approx. 60.

No grave goods.

**Grave 11/50:** Inhumation, supine; aligned NEE-SWW.

Sex: Male. Age: approx. 20.

No grave goods.

**Grave 84/50:** Inhumation, supine; aligned SWW-NEE.

Sex: Female. Age: 25-30.

No grave goods.

**Grave 32/51:** Inhumation, supine with left hand and right leg flexed; aligned W-E.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 204

<sup>18</sup> V. Hrubý: *Staré Město: Velkomoravské pohřebiště "Na Valách"*, (Praha, 1955)

Sex: Male. Age: 60.

No grave goods.

**Grave 69/51:** Inhumation, supine; aligned SWW-NEE.

Sex: Female. Age: approx. 40.

No grave goods.

## **Devínska Nová Ves.<sup>19</sup>**

**Grave 13:** Two skulls. Rectangular, 160 cm deep; aligned NW-SE. North of the first skull but nearby was a mandible. The second skull was located 42 cm NNW from the first one.

**Grave 17:** Two skulls; 270 cm deep; in 55cm deep was excavated burnt space, most likely remains of the fireplace. The skulls were discovered in 240 cm depth together with two mandibles. The first skull was small, erected in the grave, facing east. SE from it was second skull, facing EE and two mandibles.

Grave goods: spindle and Fe tool.

**Grave 216:** Skull. Oval; 150 cm deep; aligned WWN-EES.

Grave goods: Fe knife.

**Grave 258:** Skull. Rectangular, 120 cm deep; aligned WWN-EES.

Grave goods: shards of pottery.

**Grave 322:** Skull. Rectangular, 93 cm deep; aligned NW-SE.

**Grave 340:** Skull. Rectangular, 75 cm deep; aligned NW-SE.

Grave goods: pot.

**Grave 344:** Skull. Oval, 105 cm deep; aligned WWN-EES.

Grave goods: pot and two flat stones.

**Grave 738:** Skull. Female, 180 cm deep.

Grave goods: beads.

**Grave 794:** Skull. Female, rectangular, 220 cm deep.

Grave goods: pot and beads.

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