

Deviant Positions of Skeletons in the Islamic Necropolis Near Makak Residential Area, Shumen, Bulgaria

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The fear of a dead man's transformation into a demonic creature is known to all communities which perceive death as a transition from one world, the world of the living, to another one – the world of the dead. The rich rituals associated with this transition reveal that according to people's perceptions the soul must meet a number of social and moral - ethical standards and to be sent in a due manner. Otherwise he/she risks remain on the border between both worlds, that intermediate mythological layer populated with vampires, goblins, witches, demons and other evil forces. It is the rites of death and burial that aim to ensure the smooth passage of this transition.¹

(Петрунова, Дисертация 1996, 97).

The work here presented discusses a necropolis investigated in 2012/2013 in connection with the construction of Haemus Highway, in its section next to Makak residential area, Shumen town, Northeast Bulgaria. The excavations revealed more than 700 graves with inhumation (fig. 1). So far six necropolises of population professing Islam have been archaeologically explored on the territory of Bulgaria as the one in question is the largest among them².

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1 Бони Петрунова, *Позребални обичаи и обреди в българските земи през XV-XVII в. (по данни от християнските некрополи)*, Дисертация, София 1996, с. 97.

2 Павлина Петрова, „Ислямски некропол при с. Градище, Шуменско“, *Археологически открития и разкопки*, Кюстендил 1990; Ангел Конаклиев, „Сондажи на късносредновековен некропол при село Драгановец, Търговишко“, *Археологически открития и разкопки през 1988*, Кърджали 1989; Красимира Стефанова, „Сондажни разкопки в двора на джамията в Казанлък“, *Археологически открития и разкопки през 1987 г.*, Благоевград 1988; Бони Петрунова, Цветана Комитова, „Старата джамия в град Гоце Делчев“, *Археологически открития и разкопки през 1999-2000 г.*, София 2001; Елена Василева, Стефан Бакърджиев,

Some rules that Muslims must conform to during funeral are known. The book contains descriptions of many rituals which precede the actual burial but now we shall observe only those whose traces could be registered during archaeological research.

Rules for funeral.³

“88. The deceased must be buried even if he/she is an infidel or of a different faith (88/1).

94. The grave must be dug deep and spacious and also needs to be strengthened (94/1).

95. It is appropriate also to have lyahad and shaqqa. Lyahad - this is not a big dent in the bottom of the grave at the side directed to the Kaaba. Shaqqa is the bottom of the grave (just dug grave without lyahad) (94/2).

96. In one grave, if necessary, two or more people can be buried.

102. The body of the deceased is laid in the grave of its right hand and his/her face is directed towards the Kaaba, as the head remains right of the Kaaba and the legs left of the Kaaba.

105/1. After the burial the following practices are performed corresponding to the Sunnah: the grave should not be more than one inch above the ground and should not level with the ground for to be known that this is a grave.

105/2. The grave must be in the form of a hill.

105/3. A stone should be set up on the grave for to be recognized by the relatives of the deceased.

107. It is allowed to take the body of the deceased out from the grave to verify that all essentials necessary for the funeral have been performed as for instance the body has been buried before being washed or whether the body was wrapped, etc.

108. Some people dig their graves before they die.”

„Археологическо проучване на обект № 16 по трасето на АМ „Тракия“, ЛОТ 4, между селата Зимница и Чарда, община Стралджа“, *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2009 г.*, София 2010.

3 Rules for funeral. Шейх Мухаммед Насруддин Ал-Албани, *Талхис Аххам ал-Джанаиз*, Рияд, Кралство Саудитска Арабия 1989.

According to the studies of ethnology and cultural anthropology the Muslim burial rite is rather simple compared to the pagan or Christian ones. It is conservative and strictly adheres to the canon. The burial is through inhumation on the back. The arms are stretched along the body. The grave is rectangular in shape and oriented west – east. The head is resting west inclined to the right shoulder to face south – southeast (direction of Mecca). The body is covered with boards arranged in a sloping way and propped up on a ledge. Initially the grave is marked with poles – *gyonderi*, set up at the head and feet and different in shape for woman and man, and afterwards – with a stone. On the surface the grave is marked with an ashlar or a stone plate. Tombstones are arranged – one at the head or two – at the head and feet. Their purpose is to pronounce *Fatiha*⁴ immediately⁵.

The burials in the necropolis near Makak residential area, Shumen region, have been performed through inhumation and orientation of the burial pits and of the skeletons respectively west – east except for three graves oriented south – north (fig. 2). The deceased have been laid in graves various in size and shape. Most of the skeletons are close to the southern wall of the pits as the northern part remains vacant. Grave niches containing the skeleton have been registered in a few cases. Some graves revealed sloping wooden cover used also as a barrow.⁶ Certain grave pits did not contain human remains. This circumstance suggests the practice to prepare graves in life time subsequently left unused or they are cenotaphs. Similar cenotaphs have been registered in the Alevian village of Mogilets (Veletler), Omurtag municipality. Tombstones of people who had died abroad were set up on the graves which were outside the graveyard (information from Aldjan Jaffer).

In most of the graves the deceased have been laid on back with stretched legs and arms along the body. However, some skeletons show deviations from this position as the arms were on the pelvis or abdomen, and the legs were not stretched which shows that those buried have not been arranged especially careful during the funeral.

Some of the skeletons revealed in the graves indicated a post-mortem dislocation of bones. This is a practice broadly spread during the Early and Late Middle

4 *Fatiha* (Arabic) – *requiescat*.

5 Конаклиев, *a.g.e.*, с. 166-167; Алексей Пампоров, *Ролското всекидневие в България*, София 2006, с. 264; Петрова *a.g.e.*, р. 168; Стефанова, *a.g.e.*, с. 215.

6 *Tabut* (Turkish) . “51. Funeral procession may be accompanied on both sides of the barrow *tabut*”.

Ages registered in the course of research of some Christian and one Islamic necropolises. Namely those deviant positions we shall pay attention to in the work here presented. Similarly to the Christian beliefs, notions of transformation of dead men into demons (vampires, goblins, jinn, ghosts, etc.) are known among the Muslims as well. According to the studies released, there are several reasons for transformation of the deceased: immoral life (murderers, thieves, etc.) or unnatural death (suicide). We have to note that according to the Islam suicide is to be strictly prohibited and when such an act has been determined the relatives of the suicide are severely punished. Non-observed rituals at burial are still another reason for the thought transformation⁷. For both Christians and Muslims the dishonored rules for the care of the dead, suicidal acts, violent death as well as too long or too short life unbalance the cycle and thus the deceased enter a special category. This in turn leads to some additional measures to protect the living from the dead. Many of these measures have been registered in ethnographic studies and also archaeologically in the course of exploring necropolises.

With methods of archaeology in the necropolis near Makak a couple of graves revealing deviant positions of skeletons have been found. Unlike similar cases known from the Christian necropolises though the deviations in Makak are in the area of the necropolis or in other words no special sector has been separated for those deceased. We have to pay attention to the circumstance that not all of the deviant positions are post-mortem. This is the case of two skeletons of elder women. They are a result of severe pathology with disability due to *luxacio* of the hip and advanced *spondylosis* of the spine.

The deviant positions of skeletons registered are as follows:

1. The skull had been separated and was found sideward of the skeleton, in the area of the shoulder girdle; between the legs; was missing; or was turned face down or sideways (fig. 3)
2. Damaged bones of the torso (fig. 4)
3. Displaced bones of arms and legs/ separated bones of the wrist or feet (fig. 5)
4. Combination of shifts, turned face down/ separated skull, separated bones of the wrist or feet, etc.⁸ (fig. 6)

7 Евгения Троева-Григорова, „Дракусът: между вампира и стопана“, *Ислям и култура. Изследвания*, София 1999, 413-414.

8 For similar combinations see Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon deviant burial customs*, Oxford 2009, figs. 44, 164.

5. Laid on his abdomen with separated skull found between the legs (fig. 7)
6. Slain⁹ (fig. 8)

Some publications present data on the rituals performed right after death and in the course of funeral. Nevertheless, we have not yet described all the activities proving that the deceased threatened potentially the peace of the living. In such cases the researcher sure has to be very careful as not all of the registered violations of bone remains come as a result of this kind of actions. We have to note the rest of the factors contributing also to the same result: subsidence of the soil, intervention of animals, and accidental damage of the grave (for example during construction works), etc.

However, according also to the anthropological analyses a feature of the necropolis in question is secondary disorders of bone remains which cannot be explained with some later diggings or structures. The existence of similar practices has been recorded in 46,9% of all complexes subjected to anthropological study. In general the violation has been concentrated on the area of the head, neck, spine and abdomen as damages to the vertebral column are the most common ones. We have observed also a certain sexual dependency concerning the adults – women display characteristic violations in the area of both head and abdomen with the same frequency which is relatively rare with men. The cases we can interpret as negligence to the deceased concerning the burial rite are also in a certain connection with this feature. This is evidenced by the unintentional position of a skeleton suggesting the body has been just thrown down into the grave.¹⁰

The rituals that take place at the necropolis and aimed at making the dead harmless are known as *Magia posthuma magna*.¹¹ Special attention to these studies is paid in Western Europe. *Magia posthuma magna* represents ritual actions performed mostly by a special person or according to his instructions and has entirely apothropaic functions. It illustrates the belief that a dead man can be transformed into a demonic creature. The Bulgarian folklore tradition knows well such

- 9 Woman 30-40 years of age, unintentional position; vertebral column - discontinuation in the sixth - seventh thoracic and seventh cervical vertebrae, the seventh - tenth thoracic vertebrae lie on the fifth – sixth ones; possibly the discontinuation is a result of slash.
- 10 The anthropological analysis has been done by D-r Victoria Russeva (Institute of Experimental Morphology, Pathology and Anthropology with Museum – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences).
- 11 *Magia posthuma magna* – Higher post-mortem magic.

creatures under the names of vampires, bogies, werewolves, demons and ghosts¹². The reason for the transformation is mostly a violent or unnatural death - murder, suicide or drowning. A dead man can be transformed into a demon also in case his/ her corpse has been jumped over by an animal before burial or he/ she lacks something in the Netherworld. According to the Christian folklore superstitions the people who can see and neutralize the transformed dead have been born on Saturday or are children of a paranormal liaison between a transformed man and a living woman. In most of the cases the Higher post-mortem magic represents a counteraction against transformation by means of post-mortem mutilation – partial damage of the corpse or skeleton. Thus in certain cases part of the legs, the wrists or the head are removed. Still another manifestation of *Magia posthuma magna* is impaling or violating of torso with a stake, nail, fire irons, needle, etc. This practice has been known since the Antiquity and its traces are also found in the Islamic necropolises despite prohibitions¹³.

It seems interesting to note that the necropolis here discussed is to be the largest one explored archaeologically up to now belonging to population professing Islam. Nevertheless there we have registered practices characteristic also of Christian necropolises. As already noted, the burial rites of the Islam are strict and generally not violated. The graves registered in the necropolis near Makak though show a large number of deviations from these stricter rules and practices. We can associate them with two factors which have their role and influenced the population that used this necropolis. These factors are the neighborhood and the mystical orders broadly spread in the Ottoman Empire in the course of the late 14th – 17th c.

The studies so far show that the Late Medieval society was ambivalent in general for during the years after the conquest there was "... a classic clash between a Christian society of well developed Christian culture and another society..."¹⁴. In practice most of this cultural development was carried out on foreign soil. This in turn leads to interaction and change of already existing cultural model concerning equally both people living "here" and those whose life begins a new development in another, quite different environment. All these factors inevitably affect life in all its spheres including uncertainty of death. The neighborhood plays a huge role in these processes being not just living nearby but rather a manner of life in

12 Христо Вакарелски, *Български погребални обичаи*, София 1990.

13 Пампоров, *a.g.e.*, 2006, 266-267; Петрова, *a.g.e.*, 1990, 168.

14 Христо Матанов, *Залезът на средновековна България*, София 2016, 227.

the regions of mixed population different in ethnic origins and faith. The factor in question is well observed in time of religious feasts requiring mainly exchange of festive food or “exchange of participants from the other religious community during the traditional rituals of the festive cycle - weddings, births and deaths”. The ethnological studies show that even today the mutual participation in burial rituals and practices of both religious communities is the other decisive norm of coexistence. Without exception they are strictly observed by both Christians and Muslims and are expressed in processions accompanying the deceased, wake over the dead, burial rites, etc.¹⁵. Undoubtedly in such interaction inevitably occur practices and deviations from the canon so far unidentified.

There are data available to proof this thesis, namely the existence of special people who deal with “solving such cases”. The sources definitely confirm the conclusions of the archaeological research. The book by Reşat Ekrem Koçu contains a document recording that in the lands of Rumelia, in the town of Tarnovo a vampire appeared who “intrudes” all by mixing flour, oil and honey in one adding also soil; by moving cushions and bundles from one place to another; removes babies from their mothers’ beds to the front doors; throws stones, soil, pottery and copper dishes on people in the rooms. To get rid of this scourge the people of Tarnovo ask the Great Gate for help: “...the town population realizing that this is caused by evil spirits – vampires, when they complained and asked to find salvation, the Christian Nicholas was brought... and after a bargain for 800 pennies the mentioned one...promised to start out with solving the case and to drive them out, then moving a board with pictures on it... and to which grave focuses the board there is the vampire... and it became clear that he is in the graves of the traitors to the janissary odzhak murdered in lifetime... accustomed to robbery, and when their graves were opened they saw that their bodies have grown... their hair and nails have extended... their eyes are bloodshot and terrible...”. “...on this type of corpses that have been penetrated by evil spirits they thrust a wooden pole in the abdomen and downpour the heart with boiling water...”¹⁶.

The other main reason and far from unimportant is the existence of various religious orders preaching their own view on the religion all over the territory

15 Цветана Георгиева, „Системата на комшулука“, *Либерална библиотека*, книга 12, <http://hermesbg.org/tr/nova-biblioteka.html>, 2010.

16 *Reşat Ekrem Koçu, Yeniçeriler. İstanbul 1964*, pp 335-336.

of the Empire. The Bektas and Kazalbash were some of them. Their beliefs did not differ very much and they were broadly spread in Dobrudzha, Deliorman in Eastern Bulgaria and the Rhodope Mountains. We know from the registers that Acincilar lived in Makak a village neighbouring the necropolis (today residence area of Shumen). They were avant-garde of the army doing raids and most likely they were not a part of the large settlement wave from the early 16th c. Nevertheless, they indeed settled down in Makak¹⁷.

Probably they were sects with beliefs composed of elements of the official religion and also Shamanism and religious concepts of the Christians. For example their women retained their position as liberty and equality with men known from the pre-Islamic society. These two lines and especially the Bektas played a significant role for the cultural, social and religious life in the Empire and for their democracy they included members from all social strata. According to a description of Evliya Çelebi from the mid 17th c. there were 700 Bektas- tekkeler in the Empire. The Turkish folklore recognizes as Bektas one who does not tolerate people's stupidity, gently mocks religious fanaticism and treats everything with tolerance believing that everything is transient and relative¹⁸.

17 *Аузе Каярѝнар, Емине Ердоған Ъзѝнлѝ, Мѝхалођуллари'на Аит 1586 Тарихли. Акѝнци Деѝтери*, Ankara 2015.

18 *Халил Иналдђѝк, Османската империя. Класическият период 1300 – 1600*, София 2006, 182-197.

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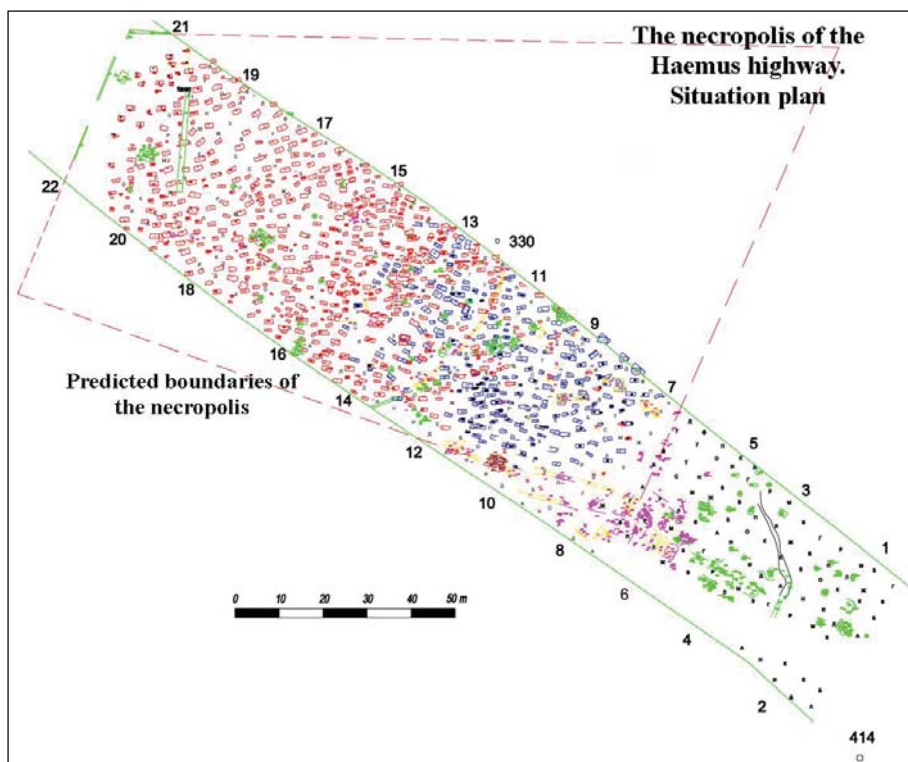
Ekler**Figure 1**



Figure 2

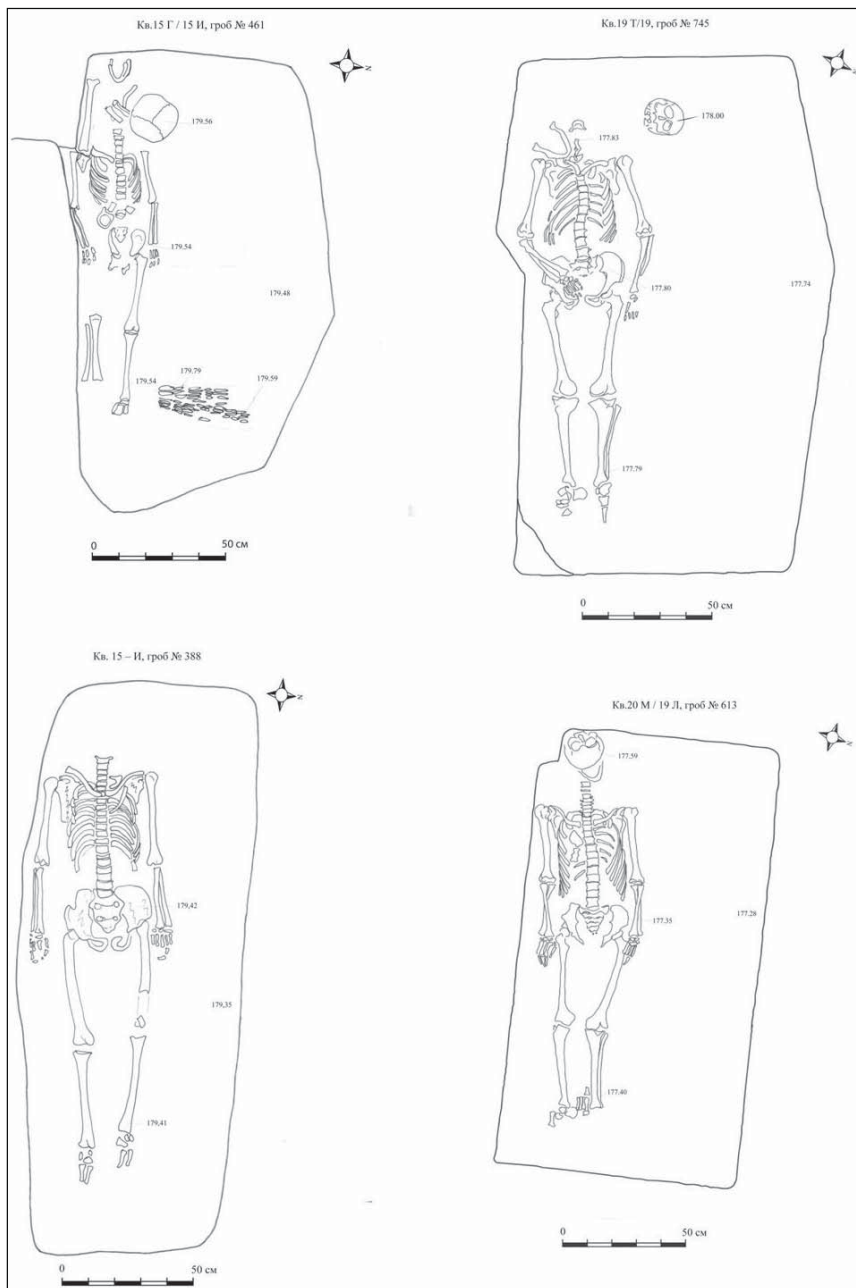


Figure 3

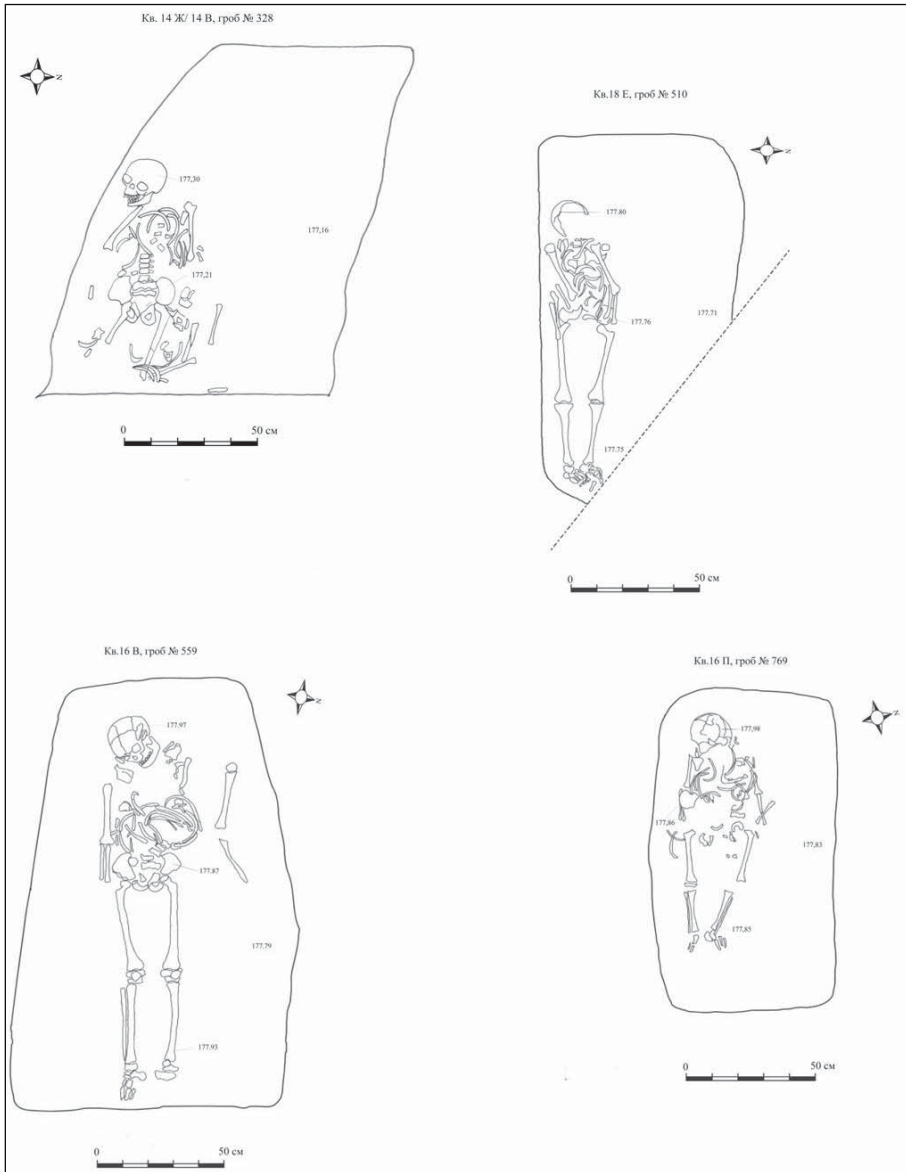


Figure 4

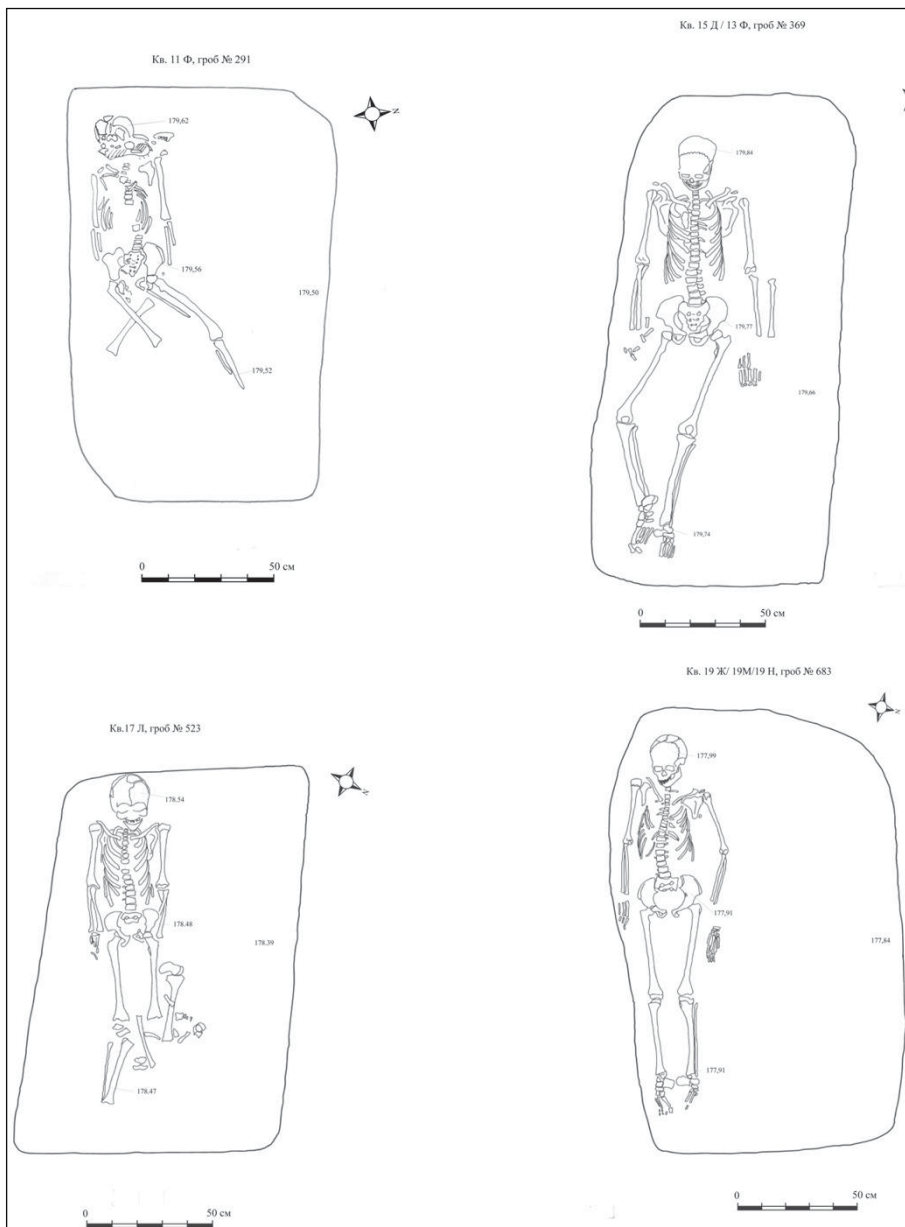


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8