An Ottoman-Age Femme Fatale. Archaeothanatological Context for the Deviant Burial of a Woman from Site No. 6 on the Haemus Highway in Bulgaria

Abstract:

The work presented here discusses the largest known Islamic necropolis in Bulgaria explored in 2012/2013 in connection to the construction of Haemus Highway, in its section nearby the Makak residential area of Shumen, Northeastern Bulgaria. The excavations revealed more than 700 inhumation graves. 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 seen to be a conservative one, strictly adhering to the canon as in most graves the deceased have been placed in supine extended position. However, some skeletons exhibit variations showing that those buried have not been arranged especially careful during the funeral. Furthermore, some skeletons indicated post mortem dislocation of bones. The finding of a female individual in grave No. 172 is the perfect example for such neglectful treatment. The current contribution will address this phenomenon by exploring in depth its archaeological and anthropological aspects. The burial will be analyzed both in its immediate intra-site context and within the range of similar cases during the Early and Late Middle Ages registered in one Islamic and some Christian cemeteries. Exercising thick descriptions in the engendered analysis of nonnormative mortuary behavior offers another look on the social mosaics of Balkan communities from the Ottoman age.

Keywords: *mortuary behaviour, development archaeology, popular beliefs, violence, Ottoman period.*