

Burials with sickles

A plausible contributor to the iconography of death

This is a reconstruction of a late 16th – early 17th century CE burial from Drawsko cemetery in Poland. It was a custom to bury the dangerous dead with the sickle or a scythe across their neck or abdomen, as they would decapitate themselves, or cut themselves when they rise out of the graves.



(this image is from LiveScience.com, *Demon Burials Discovered*, depicting burials from Drawsko cemetery)

The only photographs I was able to find are from Poland, but the custom of burials with sickles or scythes is attested to in multiple Eastern European countries. The earliest mention of it dates to 9th century CE.



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(images are from LiveScience.com, *Demon Burials Discovered*, depicting different burials from Drawsko cemetery)



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It is plausible that this associated of the dangerous dead or revenants with scythes contributed to the depictions of death as a copse wielding a scythe. (While our modern iconography depicts death as a skeleton, it still has the scythe.)

The image to the left is one of the earliest known poison labels depicting death as a rotting corpse, with a scythe, unwound shroud, and large worms. (this image is from 15th century CE Germany, reproduced in Lehners' *Devils, Demons and Witchcraft*).

References:

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