

## Sticks and Stones

Weighing them down

This is a reconstruction of a stone filled grave of a richly furnished female burial, Gloucester, England, dating from mid to late 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, early Anglo-Saxon England, Grave 18 at Lechlade.



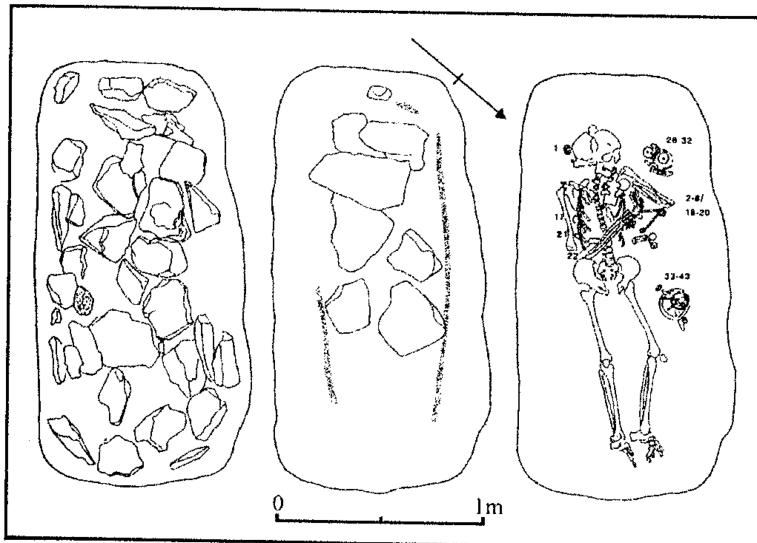
This is a burial of a young female, who was interred with many objects including jewelry and amulets. The grave was tightly packed with large stones.

Based on the grave goods, the woman fits the criteria for a cunning woman, or a witch.

Witches were considered at risk for becoming revenants, and their burials are known for apotropaic measures, not limited to stoning. Witches were known to be decapitated, staked, burned, or pinned down in bogs, or buried at cross roads.

This burial, though treats the deceased with respect, was located at the edge of the main cemetery, which is consistent with liminal location.

The placement of stones in graves presented a physical impediment to the dead rising. Bodies weighed down with stones, either across the chest, throat, or entire bodies, or found in graves filled with large rocks, are found throughout Europe.



In the environments where large stones are not available, such as in bogs or forests, large sticks, branches, or logs were used, but the stone mounds are better preserved. The custom of placing small stones on the grave of one's loved ones in some cultures may be a remnant of the same superstition.

Related to this is the custom of placing stones on roadside cairns, which often housed the bodies of the dead travellers found by the side of the road or criminals buried in liminal places. While it is still considered good luck to add a stone to the pile, in period the luck was more literal, as it was definitely lucky not to be followed by a murderous revenant as one travels.



(the image above is of Grave 18 at Lachlade, from 1998 article by Boyle *et al*, reproduced in Reynolds' *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*)

(the image to the left is from Farrell's *Prone, Stoned, and Losing the Head* article)

The custom seems to be persistent throughout Europe. This is an example of a medieval Irish grave, completely filled with stones.

Occasionally, there is filling of the entire grave with small stones or pebbles, especially quartz of flint. Sometimes, these have to be brought from far away. These serve a dual function: weighing down the corpse and having a magical apotropaic function.



Later, weighing the body down with stones is more symbolic, than literal, only a few stones maybe placed on the abdomen, chest or throat of the corpse.

In the example on the left, from late 16<sup>th</sup>-early 17<sup>th</sup> c. Poland, only a few stones were placed on the throat of the corpse.

(this image is from Barrowclough's *Time to Slay Vampire Burials* article)

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