

The Vampire of Sozopol, 13-14th century CE, Bulgaria

A variation on staking



This is a reconstruction of a 14th c. Bulgarian burial, found in Sozopol in 2012, during the excavation of the St. Nikolay the Wonderworker. A body was pinned through the left chest by a broken ploughshare, and, in the media acquired a nickname “the vampire of Sozopol”. It is one of the two burials found at the site, and was not an uncommon way to treat local revenants. This person may have been of high standing, as the grave was found on the ground of the monastery itself.

“The Director of Bulgaria’s National Museum, Bozhidar Dimitrov, confirmed that the practice of burial with iron spikes run through the chest was common in rural communities until the first decade of the twentieth century. What is more according to Dimitrov, about one hundred such skeletons have been uncovered in Bulgaria....explanation for the large number of vampire burials was due to the existence of a religious sect that was particularly active in Sozopol and the surrounding region of Strandzha in Bulgaria. The rituals practiced in the name of Manichean Bogomilism retained many pagan elements, including the peculiar burial practice of staking the heart.”

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(image from Guide-Bulgaria.com , http://visit.guide-bulgaria.com/a/1173/sozopols_vampire.htm)



(image from Wikimedia Commons)

This skeleton is on display in Sozopol Archaeological Museum, and is one of the prime destinations for European “vampire tourism”.

A broken ploughshare was used instead of a stake, likely because it was readily available, and required no additional expenditure. There is a lot of folklore, associated with magical and apotropaic properties of iron in general, and ploughshares in particular, which may have played a role as well, but is beyond the scope of this leaflet.

References:

Guide-Bulgaria.com, http://visit.guide-bulgaria.com/a/1173/sozopols_vampire.htm

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My vacation Itineraries, <http://myvacationitineraries.com/museums-in-sozopol/>

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