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'Deviant' Burials in Archaeology

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## **Introduction:**

The term 'deviant' is used to describe burials that deviate from the normative burial rites of a given society, at a given point in time. The problem with applying such a term to the archaeological record rests predominantly in the fact that the term 'deviant' has a negative connotation. This negative connotation insinuates that the individual in the burial context may have been viewed by their society in a negative light, however, through analysis of case studies it is shown that many 'deviant' burials are not in fact burials of people viewed as deviant, but 'different' burials given to people based on their circumstances of death. Thus one can observe that their position or reputation in life has not lead to the differential burial, and we cannot assume that they were viewed as deviant in any way. Another problem with the label of 'deviant' is its application to people in a society. Deviancy, if interpreted as deviation from a norm, is completely dependent upon a society's social norms. Therefore deviancy can be a somewhat arbitrary label, as its definition is dependent on a very specific time and place. Behaviours that may be considered deviant in a modern, western setting may not be considered deviant elsewhere, and vice versa.

## **Deviancy**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century western culture and science has interpreted deviancy as an embodied social trait. Until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term 'normal' was restricted to the realm of statistics and physics, but it was around this time that the term began to be applied to medicine, people and even behaviours (Lock & Nguyen, 2010, 44). A 'social deviant' is seen as someone who is somatically different than a 'normal' individual with a 'normal' body. It was during this time that there was a push in the realm of science to be able to

categorize bodily traits as either ‘normal’ (i.e. healthy, secure) or ‘pathological’ (i.e. abnormal, unhealthy, dangerous and deviant). Studies were often performed on criminals and other ‘socially deviant’ individuals to try to prove that moral character was tied to physical appearance and the biology of the body in some way, for example measuring the ears of criminals or the clitorises of prostitutes (Terry & Urla, 1995,1). As much as we may like to think that this outlook has changed, much of this discourse is still present in the realm of scientific research today, for example, the attempts to find a ‘violence’ gene in inner city youth, or a ‘gay gene’ to link with HIV susceptibility (Terry & Urla, 1995, 2). It is argued that today, much like in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ideal body is that of a robust, European, Caucasian, heterosexual gentleman, and that any contradiction to this norm is considered ‘deviant’ (Terry & Urla, 1995, 4). Not only does this method of labeling exclude any other race or cultural background, it also undermines the position of women in society by labeling them as fundamentally deviant. It is important that this idea be deconstructed, and that those who deviate from the supposed norm no longer be viewed in this negative light (Terry & Urla, 1995, 4).

When it comes to the study of deviant burials in particular, there are a few approaches that differ from the Anglophone term ‘deviant’. Terms such as atypic, non-normative or differential are all alternatives that lessen the negative connotation attached to the word ‘deviant’; however, they still imply that these burial practices are not normal, and ‘normal’ is a somewhat arbitrary label. The German word applied to ‘deviant’ burials is ‘Sonderbestattungen’, which means ‘special’ or ‘exceptional’ burial. It is considered to be a neutral term, though it describes the exact same phenomenon as the Anglophone term ‘deviant burial’ (Aspöck, 2008, 17). The original use of the term was actually

paleodemographic, meaning ‘statistically missing’. For example, if a certain demographic group was found to be missing from cemetery records it would often be found that they were buried in an ‘special’ way, but they were still invisible in the sense that they were not included in cemetery records. The archaeological meaning has shifted slightly from this, it has taken on less of an ‘invisible’ sense and more of a ‘visible’ sense, in that these burials are studied as special burial practices that are unique from the more commonly practiced burial rites (Aspöck, 2008, 20).

In Anglophone archaeology, the term ‘deviant’ burial became popularized with processual archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s. The processual model of burial saw the living as having a ‘duty relationship’ to the dead, their purpose being to assure that the individual’s social persona is symbolized in mortuary ritual. However, with certain life or death circumstances, the ‘duty relationship’ is changed and the individual loses the right to a normal burial. If this is the case, the individual’s social persona is less visible in the burial context, and this is seen as a method to change the process of the after-life. The processual model is a step towards viewing ‘deviant’ burials within the ‘normal’ or expected burial rites of a society, however this kind of approach requires an explicit knowledge of a society’s spectrum of burial practices as well as their views towards the after life (Aspöck, 2008, 25). Though the analysis of ‘deviant’ burials may have developed to the point where researchers are attempting to study these burial rites and within the spectrum of ‘normal’ rites, the term itself still carries with it a negative connotation. It is certainly worth considering new methods of analyzing and labeling deviant burials, and using the terminology of other languages, such as the German ‘Sonderbestattungen’ as inspiration.

Though it is important to the phenomenon of ‘deviant’ burials within the context of their specific culture and time period, there have been some widespread generalizations made that can be useful in identifying deviant burials across many (though clearly not all) cultures. These traits include: burials in unusual places (such as wells, kilns, or pits), burials in unusual positions (such as a prone position or hands tied), mass burials without any historical documentation of epidemic or war, unusual ritual activity (such as cut marks on bones or unusual artifacts associated with the remains), cremated remains found in an inhumation site or vice versa, very deep burials, burials covered by rocks, or remains indicative of some sort of crime or torture (such as decapitation, infanticide, sacrifice or cannibalism) (Tsaliki, 2008, 2). Physical deformities, mental health conditions, diseases such as leprosy and small pox also cause individuals to be stigmatized throughout life. Other reasons for stigmatization include immoral behaviour, nature of birth, family status, witchcraft, curses, violent deaths, suicide, or even being cross-eyed (Tsaliki, 2008, 3).

Many burials that fall into the ‘deviant’ category are also evidence of ‘necrophobia’, the fear of the dead or of death itself. Practices such as weighing down of the body, decapitation or use of nails or stakes to hold the body down are all examples of a society striving to keep the dead within the grave, to assure that it does not return to haunt the living (Tsaliki, 2008, 1). Examples of these practices are seen most commonly in suspected cases of vampirism, which will be discussed further in this paper.

As stated earlier, it is important to analyze burial contexts within the set of normative rites for a certain society at a certain point in time, otherwise we risk the ethnocentric western view that any burial that differs from a typical, Judeo-Christian burial is in some way ‘deviant’. One must look at the historical context and how socially outcast

people across different cultures were treated, as well as analyzing different reasons that one may be buried in a 'deviant' fashion. In ancient Rome for example, neonates and infants were buried in close, intimate family ceremonies rather than in cemeteries, as the society did not identify them as members of the community at this time. Roman Pagans would often burn the Christian dead out of fear of resurrection, because the Christians believed in resurrection while the Pagans did not (Tsaliki, 2008, 7). In ancient Greece the untimely dead, such as infants, young adults or unmarried individuals were often buried in a 'special' way, different than the norm of the time. The ancient Greeks also had different burial customs for individuals that were feared, such as witches, murder victims. Murderers were often cast out of the country and buried without any ceremony. In Kenya, those who were buried differently included lepers, people struck by lightning, women who died in childbirth, murder victims, and witches (Tsaliki, 2008, 4). In Christian faiths, suicide was seen as deviant behaviour and before 1823 A.D. suicide victims would be denied burial altogether, it was not until 1882 A.D. that they were awarded the right to a full, Christian burial rather than an 'deviant' burial (Tsaliki, 2008, 7). Even in our present society, we can look at ways that individuals that are commonly considered as 'others' experience differential burial rites. The typical Euro-American burial tradition consists of a funeral, a burial and a period of mourning and remembrance. Homeless individuals, criminals and even murder victims may experience differential processes such as archaeological excavation, forensic examination and medical dissections (Tarlow & Stutz, 2013, 451).

### **Vampirism**

The phenomenon of vampirism, or rather, the *belief* in vampirism, has been present across many cultures over the course of history. In medieval Britain this folklore was most

common before 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, in Greece this belief was most common in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (Tsaliki, 2008, 7). In Poland and Russia there was a documented ‘epidemic’ of vampirism in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century (Barber, 1987, 1). When it comes to the study of ‘deviant’ burials, there has been an issue, specifically in Poland and other eastern European countries, with interpreting all ‘deviant’ burials as ‘vampire’ burials, without much further analysis or alternative interpretation. In analysis of vampire burials along with folkloric evidence from the specific time period, we may come to understand how societies may have interpreted the decomposition process given their limited understanding at the time.

Most accounts of vampirism can be explained through forensic pathology and knowledge of the decomposition process of the human body. Folkloric accounts of vampirism usually include the following: earth is disturbed at the site of a grave, exhumed body looks bloated and flushed *or* unchanged since the time of burial (therefore if a body is suspected of being a vampire and is exhumed it will most likely take on one of these appearances and be determined a vampire). Other examples include: friends and family dying shortly after the individual in question, continued growth of hair and nails after death, an ‘evil smell’ emanating from the grave, or moaning heard from grave (Barber, 1987, 5). Often times the disturbed gravesite is due to a shallow burial, for if a body is not buried sufficiently deep it will likely attract the attention of carnivores. As decomposition occurs, the face and body become swollen and discoloured, and the abdomen distended, but this process takes time and is slowed considerably in colder environments. Thus, depending on the temperature and environment, an exhumed body could be found completely unchanged after weeks of interment, while in other cases it may be found bloated and flushed in colour

(Barber, 1987, 6). Family and friends of the individual dying shortly after the suspected 'vampire' can often be explained by the individual dying of a contagious disease and passing it on to those closest to them before death. Folkloric explanations however, state that the 'vampire' comes back to haunt and kill their living relatives. Hair and nails may appear to grow after death, but this is actually due to skin shrinkage during decomposition. The foul smell and moaning noises can also be related to the shallow nature of the burial, for if it is not deep enough the smell of decomposition will emanate from the grave; likewise the noises of the body bursting or shifting can also be heard above ground (Barber, 1987, 6).

Reasons that an individual may be buried as a vampire range greatly cross-culturally, but for the most part they are similar to the reasons for many other deviant burial practices, such as: death without baptism, suicide, witchcraft, immoral life, violent death, infectious disease (such as Tuberculosis) and physical disability (Tsaliki, 2001, 297). Other characteristics that are specific to a belief in vampirism include photophobia (fear of light), porphyria (extreme light sensitivity), anthrax, and even red hair (Tsaliki, 2001, 298).

The interpretation of sites as 'vampire' burials is often problematic, and this conclusion is often jumped to without further investigation or consideration. The term 'anti-vampire' burial was first used as a throw-away term in a paper by Helena Zoll-Adamikowa in 1971 (Gardeła & Kajkowski, 2013, 3). Since then, the study of vampirism has remained quite popular in Slavic archaeological literature. The problem is that there is very little evidence of what type of revenants the Slavs may have believed in throughout history (Gardeła & Kajkowski, 2013, 3). It should not be assumed that all burials that deviate from the modern, Christian norm are automatically vampires and other explanations should

certainly be explored. Gardeła & Kajkowski (2013, 1), suggest that ‘deviant’ burials be analyzed in relation to judicial practices in order to determine whether burials previously interpreted as ‘vampires’ may actually be examples of criminals put to execution.

Individuals buried in the prone position are often assumed to be vampires, because the face down position is thought to prevent the corpse from coming back to life. However, it can also be seen as an act of shame or atonement for an individual’s actions in life. Thus, prone burials may be interpreted as criminals being buried in a manner that shows contempt and disrespect (Gardeła & Kajkowski, 2013, 7). Decapitation, another characteristic commonly associated with vampire burials, can also be interpreted as a punishment to criminals.

Pierced holes, found in many of these decapitated crania show that these heads may have once been attached to something, perhaps a building or stake of some sort in order to warn others and make an example out of an individual (Gardeła & Kajkowski, 2013, 9). These suggestions, though innovative in that they look at these ‘vampire’ burials in a new way, are lacking in historical and cultural information, as there is very little information about legal practices in early medieval Poland (Gardeła & Kajkowski, 2013, 14).

### **Vampirism: Case Study**

This case study is from the Nuovo Lazzaretto site in Venice, and is part of a mass grave containing plague deaths from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. The individual in question is an adult female buried in a supine position with a large brick in the oral cavity. Age was determined to be approximately 61 +/- 5 years using apposition of secondary dentine, and further dental analysis showed no evidence that the individual suffered sustained malnutrition or disease in childhood (Nuzzolese & Borrini, 2010, 1635). The researchers claimed that the location of the brick could not be due to taphonomic process, and that it

must have been placed there intentionally. Their reasoning for this is that there were apparently no other bricks or stones located around the remains so there was no way that these objects were used as “grave filler” and accidentally fell into the individual’s mouth. Nuzzolese and Borrini suggest that the individual was at one point covered in a shroud (given the verticalization of the clavicles) and that this shroud had a hole where the individual’s mouth was. They go further to suggest that the grave diggers at the time of burial saw this hole, and out of fear that the individual was a “shroud eater”, placed a brick in the oral cavity (Nuzzolese & Borrini, 2010, 1635).

Minozzi et al. argue that this interpretation is based on very little evidence and the burial must be further analyzed. First of all, the photos of the burial in context showed many bricks and stones scattered around the body, thus one cannot rule out the possibility that the brick accidentally fell into the individual’s mouth post-burial as a taphonomic process. The assumption that the individual was covered by a shroud is also criticized, as the only evidence they have gathered is the “slight verticalization of the clavicles”. The hypothesis regarding the grave diggers and the ‘shroud eater’ myth is also based on very little evidence, as we cannot assume that there was even a shroud present, let alone a hole in this specific area of the shroud. Lastly, the legend of the “shroud eater” is East Germanic in origin, and was not popular in Italy at this time, so it should not be assumed that the gravediggers would be aware of this folklore (Minozzi et al., 2010, 843). This case study shows how the analyses of ‘deviant’ burials are often problematic and based on insufficient evidence, and that it is critical to draw from multiple types of sources (historic, ethnographic and archaeological) before coming to a conclusion regarding the individual’s place in society.

## **Witchcraft**

‘Deviant’ burials are also often interpreted as witch burials, though this is problematic based on the fact that this analysis often assumes that witches are viewed negatively by a society, and also that burials of witches would be different or deviate from burials of other members of a society. Witchcraft occurs all over the world, but there is very little evidence of this phenomenon in the archaeological record (Walker, 1998, 245). In general, archaeologists have difficulty accessing religious information, because it is difficult to interpret religious or ideological information from the archaeological record, thus it is difficult to gain information on how witches, or other magical beings may have been buried. Walker (1998, 246) proposes that witch burials may be wrongfully identified among burial deposits previously thought to be associated with warfare or other violent activities. In order to gain more information from the archaeological record regarding the treatment and burial of witches, ritual behaviour must be reconceptualized as a material process of bodies interacting with artifacts (Walker, 1998, 246).

Walker’s theory is similar to the “Hybrid Theory” proposed by Sofaer (2006, 138), which proposes we analyze how relationships between human and non-human objects change over the life course. These relationships may change from ritual to utilitarian based on the age of the individual, their level of experience, social category or location (Sofaer, 2006, 138). One of the greatest problems with the analysis of artifacts is that archaeologists tend to divide objects into those that are utilitarian or non-utilitarian. Those that are utilitarian are used in every day life, such as pots, knives and weapons, while non-utilitarian objects are often seen to be symbols of social roles, beliefs and ritual items. This reinforces Cartesian Dualism in archaeology, in that objects used by the body are seen as utilitarian,

while those used for symbolic purposes belong to the realm of the mind. The problem with this approach is that archaeologists assume that practical, utilitarian objects were in no way used in rituals. Walker (1998, 246) proposes assigning a function to an object based on the behaviours an object participates in throughout its history, rather than simply its use in the archaeological context. This can be problematic, because identical objects can serve very different purposes, and it can be difficult to access this kind of information from the archaeological record. Useful information on ritual contexts and artefacts may be missed by assuming that practical objects are not used in ritual, and a change in approach is key to understanding ritual practices in the past as well as providing useful information regarding witch burials. Rather than assuming that objects are either practical or symbolic, it would be beneficial to assume that objects have a practical use and a symbolic use, and that all are used for varying activities throughout their existences (Walker, 1998, 149).

To put his approach into practice, Walker (1998) studies anomalous burials of the Hopi people of the American Southwest. He looks specifically at the phenomenon of burned Pueblo houses and the stratigraphy of these sites, to suggest that these acts may not have been due to warfare between villages but rather acted as a ceremonial destruction of a ritual area. These houses may not have previously been identified as a ritual area due to the presence of utilitarian artefacts, which is why Walker calls for an updated approach to the study of these objects. Walker puts forth the idea that any human skeletal remains in these houses may be evidence of witches, who were burned and mutilated and set in these contexts to be removed from other burials (Walker, 1998, 293). This article takes a different approach to the study of 'deviant' burials, using material culture as a way of

getting at individual identity, however this method proves to be problematic when there are no grave goods present, such as the following case study.

### **Witchcraft: Case study**

This burial is from a slave cemetery in Newton Plantation, Barbados, and dates to the late 1600s/early 1700s. The researchers suspected the individual possessed unusual characteristics or died in special circumstances based on the context of the burial. Burial 9, located in mound 1 (the largest mound in the cemetery) was buried without any other individuals, while all other mounds in the cemetery contained multiple burials. There were no grave goods present, and the individual was interred in the prone position, the only prone burial in the cemetery. High lead content in the bones indicates that the individual probably suffered from lead poisoning and that this was likely the cause of death (Handler, 1996, 76). If the individual had lead poisoning this would have certainly led to 'odd' behaviour such as paralysis, seizures or moaning, that may have contributed to this individual being ostracized by their society.

The archaeologists at this site had no ethnographic information or oral history from Barbados to work with, so they turned to ethnographic sources from West Africa, where many of the slaves from this area of Barbados originated. They found that most West African graves were level, *not* mounded, but those that were mounded belonged to high status, respected individuals (Handler, 1996, 80). One exception, however, was the LoDagaa people, who buried 'dangerous' individuals (i.e. witches, suicide victims or victims of epidemics) in trench graves removed spatially from the other burial areas. They also used mound burials for witches, to avoid the burial of the witch within the earth itself. As the earth was seen as a guardian of the living and custodian of corpses, and witchcraft

was seen as an offence against the earth, they used this method to keep the witch outside of the earth while still covering its body entirely (Handler, 1996, 82). Through investigating prone burials in West Africa, Handler found that almost all individuals buried in this position were found to have a 'socially negative trait' or were convicted of witchcraft. Using the data on mound and prone burials in West Africa, Handler infers that the group may have considered burial 9 to be a witch, and buried her according to the West African burial rites for someone convicted of witchcraft.

Though Handler consulted many sources, it is difficult to know exactly how this community may have viewed the individual in question. Were they buried in a 'different' way because of their behaviour due to lead poisoning, or were they actually suspected of witchcraft? Is it accurate to use West African ethnographic information for a slave community in Barbados, as one cannot be sure if all individuals in the community were from West Africa, or even if they maintained certain traditions from their homeland after being brought to Barbados. One should question whether it is indeed worthwhile to analyze a burial as 'deviant' when there is very little cultural or historical information on burial rites within the immediate group to make comparisons and conclusions.

### **Social Deviants**

As discussed earlier a 'deviant' is just as arbitrary a label for human beings as it is for burials. The preceding case studies gave examples of individuals who were buried in a 'deviant' manner due to supernatural belief. The following examples are individuals who were most likely viewed as socially deviant by their society, based on their behaviour, or even their appearance. This section looks at how the label of deviancy changes based on the historical context, cultural context, and social class.

## **Illegitimate Births: Case Study**

This case study looks at the effect of social class and reputation on the label of 'deviancy'. In Philadelphia, two infant individuals were found in a privy pit in a middle-upper class neighbourhood. The remains of a 9-month fetus and a 7-month old fetus were dated around 1750-1780 A.D. and were mixed in with domestic refuse of this time period (Burnston, 1982, 154). Historical sources were used to determine the burial norms for infants of this specific time period and location, and help illuminate the reasons that these infants may have been buried in a 'deviant' manner (Burnston, 1982, 151). Abortion was practiced in Philadelphia at this point in time though not condoned, and given that these infants were both of 'viable age' rather than earlier in the pregnancy it is unlikely that these fetuses were aborted (Burnston, 1982, 156). Cemetery records were consulted to determine whether stillborn or unbaptized infants were typically buried in cemeteries, and it was found that they were in fact listed, so it is unlikely that the remains in question were stillborn or unbaptized infants (Burnston, 1982, 161). Another possibility is that the mother(s) of the individuals could not afford a proper funeral, however this is unlikely as there was plenty of support available for individuals who could not afford burial expenses (Burnston, 1982, 165).

A likely explanation is that these infants were illegitimate children, who were killed to conceal evidence of adultery, which was a punishable crime at the time (Burnston, 1982, 173). If this was the case, and a woman committed a behaviour that was considered 'deviant' by the society at that time, she would be faced with a decision of keeping the child and living with that label, or avoiding this label, perhaps through committing another

'deviant' behaviour, infanticide (Burnston, 1982, 183). This is where one can turn to social class, as deviancy is socially defined, and the label can be avoided depending on a woman's position in society. Wealthy women would be able to conceal their pregnancy with more ease, and had the opportunity of 'farming out' their illegitimate child, and thus whether they were 'deviant' or not, they would avoid the label. Openly poor and unemployed women often did not rely on their reputation, and would bear illegitimate children because the label of 'deviancy' did not considerably affect their living situation. It was the middle-lower class women, predominantly servants, who depended on public acceptance for their employment, and would feel more pressure to commit infanticide in order to preserve their reputation (Burnston, 1982, 184). Looking at this case study, one can see that 'deviant behaviour' depends very much on the social climate of the time, for example, bearing an illegitimate child in the present would not be as frowned upon as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is also clear that whether a deviant act is committed or not, individuals are able to avoid the label of deviancy depending on the privileges of their social class.

### **Adultery: Case Study**

A burial excavated at Merenda in Attica, Greece consisted of disarticulated remains in a limekiln and was sealed with large rocks (Tsaliki, 2008, 10). The remains, which were dated to 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. were identified as female and aged as approximately 25-35. The individual's body was cut in half, with the lower half placed beside the upper half, and this placement was seen as intentional rather than taphonomic. Excavators uncovered a segment of a pelvic bone and the head of a left femur, which appeared to be placed in the individual's arms. These remains were identified as probably belonging to a male, and no other remains were found in the burial context (Tsaliki, 2008, 11). It is speculated that in

Greece at this time dismemberment was seen as disrespectful, and a form of punishment to a wrongdoer, so one could interpret this burial as that of someone who was regarded negatively by society. The remains were also buried in the Roman, Pagan tradition of the time, so it could be interpreted as anti-Pagan religious persecution. However, if this were the case, one would expect a higher number of victims, and it would not fully explain the presence of the male remains in the grave. An alternate explanation suggested is that of adultery, or even a relationship between a free woman and a slave, which was considered a serious crime. In 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. marriages between individuals of different social statuses were illegal, and the perpetrators were often executed for this crime (Tsaliki, 2008, 11). Of course, it is difficult for archaeologists and researchers to know the exact situation that led to this specific burial context, and there may be other unexplored explanations.

### **Physical appearance: Case Study**

In 1999 a gravesite was excavated at Taxiarchis Myrintzou, Lesbos Island, Greece, consisting of a male, 60+ years of age, in a cist grave with three bent spikes associated with the grave. In this case, it is the three spikes that are unusual compared to other burials in the area. The researchers considered the possibility that the spikes were coffin fittings, however the grave was too narrow to have been used with a coffin, and there was no other evidence of a coffin being present (Tsaliki, 2008, 13). The remains showed evidence of severe pathologies and deformities of the face, such as frontal sinusitis, and a large cloaca to the right of the nasion, which led to asymmetrical supraorbital ridges. There were also nasal maxillary and mandibular deformities, which led researchers to believe that this individual may have experienced facial paralysis due to neurological problems with the facial and trigeminal nerves (Tsaliki, 2008, 13). There was also a healed fracture over the left orbital

bone, which appeared to be due to sharp force trauma. It is possible that this individual was stigmatized due to their facial deformities, and the fracture above the orbital presents the possibility that he was physically assaulted around the time of his death. In ancient Greece, disability was seen to predispose individuals to become revenants after their death, so the spikes associated with the remains may have been present to prevent the body from coming back to life as a revenant (Tsaliki, 2008, 14).

## **Discussion**

Through the analysis of case studies that highlight different forms of ‘deviant’ burials and different reasons that societies may label ‘deviant’ individuals, we can come to a greater understanding of how different cultures can have varying burial practices that remain within their normal spectrum of burial rites. Throughout many studies, it is emphasized that terms such as ‘atypic’, ‘non-normative’, or ‘differential’ are a better alternative to the use of ‘deviant’ as they represent a burial that deviates from the normal burial rites of a society, without attaching a stigma to the individual in question (Murphy, 2008,xiii). As mentioned earlier, the German ‘sonderbestattungen’ offers an approach to the study of ‘deviant’ burials without implying a negative connotation to the burial or individuals involved. Scholars in this field agree that archaeologists must use multiple sources that draw on osteoarchaeology, history, folklore literature, studies of material culture, ethnography and paleopathology so that a multidisciplinary approach can be taken to better understand the nature of the ‘deviant’ burial.

Perhaps ‘deviant’ burials could be viewed as a spectrum rather than as a strict binary. If we were to view deviancy as a spectrum, what would the spectrum look like? What would be on either end of the spectrum? Perhaps if we look at the idea of the sex and

gender spectrum for inspiration, we can construct a spectrum that compares the ‘normal’ burial to the ‘deviant’ burial while refraining from labeling ‘deviant’ burials as negative in any way. The study of sex and gender resembles that of ‘deviant’ burials in that both studies attempt to gain information on social identity from a source that is very difficult to interpret (i.e. the skeleton and gravesite). In sex and gender studies, artefacts are often associated with certain types of bodies, which leads to a superimposition of a ‘constructed gender’ onto a biological sex (Sofaer, 2006, 89). This is quite similar to the way that ‘unusual’ burial contexts are often used to superimpose a ‘deviant social identity’ onto an individual.

Much like sex and gender are often viewed as binary (a body is either male or female, man or woman) deviancy is also often seen as binary (one is either ‘deviant’ or ‘normal’). Perhaps we can draw from skeletal studies that look at biological sex as a spectrum: (1) typical male, (2) probable male, (3) unknown sex, (4) probably female, (5), typical female. This type of analysis acknowledges that, statistically speaking, a population is dimorphic, but it also accounts for varying levels in between each cluster (Sofaer, 2006, 92). Deviancy could be viewed as a spectrum of ‘typically deviant’ to ‘typically normal’ with levels of variation in between. The gender spectrum is problematic, however, in that it is based upon ‘ideal’ examples of gender, for example, the idea that the male ‘ideal type’ is a strong, robust, heterosexual male (i.e. Rambo), while the female ‘ideal type’ is weak, dainty, heterosexual female (i.e. Snow White), and that the ideals actually act as the extreme ends of the spectrum, with any deviations to this norm laying in between. In the case of the gender spectrum, anything that deviates from the ideal type would be considered ‘queer’ (Fuglestedt, 2012, 17). This is similar to how ‘deviant’ burials are studied, in that

anything that deviates from the norm is seen as 'deviant'. The spectrum should account for any variation between 'typically normal' and 'typically deviant' without simply dividing the characteristics into two separate boxes.

The spectrum should also acknowledge the fact that a 'deviant' burial can occur for many different reasons, some to do with the label of deviancy, some to do with circumstances of death. The study of sex and gender identity gives agency to individuals in that they are able to manipulate others' perception of them and choose how they would like to display their identity. This could be applied to the study of deviancy if we are able to understand how different individuals might 'identify' with the label of deviancy. There will be those who are aware of the label and its implications and continue to behave a certain way, this is considered 'secondary deviance', in that they willingly 'play the role' of deviant in their society (Raybeck, 1991, 17). There will be those who are perhaps falsely labeled and have no way to get rid of the stigma from society. There are also those cases where an individual was never labeled as a 'deviant' by society, but their circumstance of death lead to an unusual burial. This however, is difficult to apply to burial archaeology as we have little to no way of knowing exactly how an individual may have identified with the label of 'deviant', or whether they were labeled at all. It is important, however, that a spectrum of 'deviant' burials should consider all of these possible circumstances.

If we were to construct a spectrum on which to observe 'deviant' burials, we would need to construct a separate spectrum for every culture and every time period, or more specifically for every archaeological site. If there were enough data to do so at a site, we could gather a collection of traits that were most common in the burials, and a list of traits that were less common and construct the 'ideal type' and 'different type' from this data.

This, however would be difficult in cases where there is only one ‘deviant’ burial in a collection, or in cases where there are numerous ‘deviant’ burials, all of which with very different traits. If this were the case we may need to assign a measure of deviancy to specific traits, which would be quite arbitrary if there was not enough historical contextual information. If we are able to do this then how exactly should deviancy be measured? Can one deviant burial be ‘more deviant’ than another? If so, what are the characteristics that contribute to a ‘more deviant’ burial? In order to come up with a theory for varying levels of ‘deviancy’ in a burial site, further studies would need to be undergone in order to determine which burial rites should be considered more or less ‘deviant’ than others.

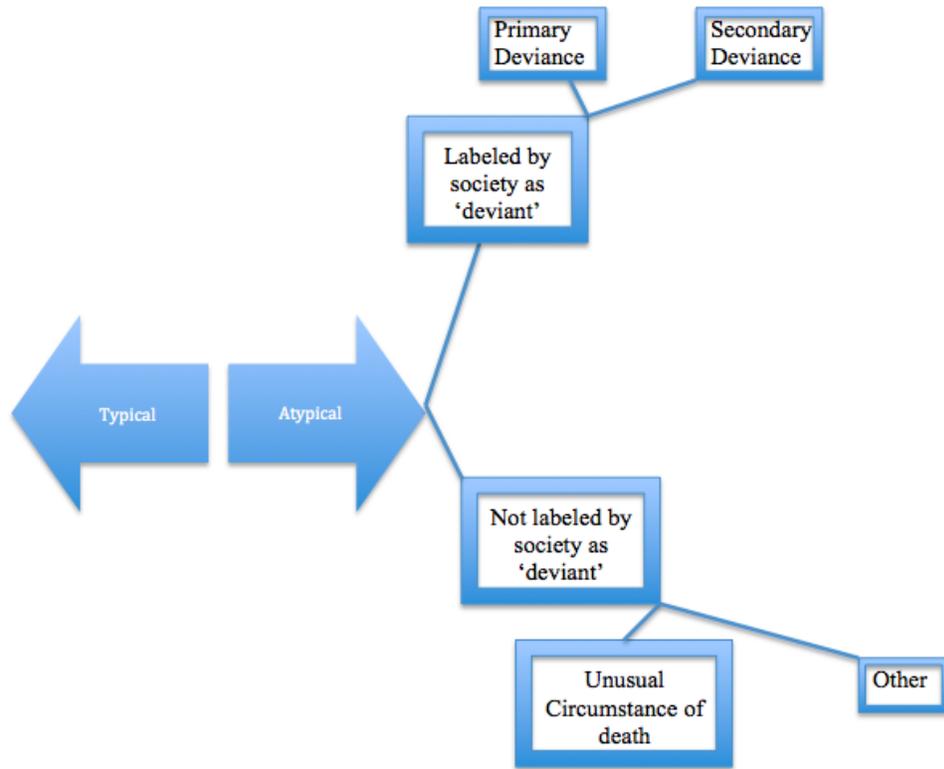
For the purpose of this paper, I propose a spectrum that uses the words ‘typical’ vs. ‘atypical’, and accounts for variation between either of these extremes (see appendix a for illustration). I have chosen these words over ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ because I feel that they compare the two phenomena without implying a negative connotation to the ‘atypical’ or ‘deviant’ category of burials. As mentioned earlier, each spectrum must be specific to the known burial rites of the specific culture and time period of the burial site, so as to avoid a modern, western bias of what is ‘normal’ and what is ‘not’. Once a burial is considered to fall into the ‘atypical’ category, one should determine whether the individual in question was viewed or labeled as a ‘deviant’ by the society they were a part of. If it is presumed that they were, in fact, labeled as ‘deviant’, we must look at whether they may have identified with the term and practiced ‘secondary deviance’ or whether it was simply a label, and they did not attempt to ‘play the deviant role’. This will be considered as the individual practicing ‘primary deviance’. If it is determined that the individual was not viewed as a ‘deviant’ by their society we must look at whether they were buried in an

‘atypic’ manner because of an unusual circumstance of death (such as accidental death, death by a certain disease, etc.). If none of these criteria apply to the individual they may fall into the category of ‘other’, which for the purpose of this spectrum represents burial rites that may not yet be understood, supernatural beliefs, personal choice, or perhaps even an accidental ‘atypic’ burial.

### **Conclusion**

A spectrum such as this looks at many different categories of bodies, and accounts for the many varying reasons that an individual may be buried in a ‘deviant’ manner. It is designed so that a greater level of understanding can be achieved in cases where the archaeologist has taken a multidisciplinary approach and is able to study the burial within its own cultural and historical context. Using this spectrum we can look at difference *as* normal, rather than difference *vs.* normal. Of course, it is not possible to access this kind of information from every burial, as knowing how an individual was labeled or may have identified with a label is difficult to infer from a burial. Hopefully, with further study of ‘deviant’ burials, archaeologists will be able to gather more information on the subject and be able to make these types of inferences to better understand the nature of ‘deviant’ burials.

Appendix A:



A possible spectrum with which to analyze 'deviant' or 'atypical burials

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