



F9 The Vampire Bites Back in Odontology and Anthropology: Case Report of Skeletal Remains in Nuovo Lazzaretto Island, Venice

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about one of few cases where a presumed vampire is analyzed from an odontological and radiological perspective.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by showing the importance of a taphonomic profile for forensic assessment.

Since the summer of 2006, the Archaeological Superintendent of Veneto (Italy) has promoted research on ancient mass graves located on Nuovo Lazzaretto Island in Venice. During the searches a large number of fragmented and commingled human bones were found. The burials were at different stages and are believed to be the remains of plague victims from numerous outbreaks of pestilence which occurred between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Among the remains, an unusual burial was found. The body was laid supine, with the top half of the thorax intact, arms parallel to the rachis axis, the articulations were anatomically unaltered. Both the skull morphology and the dimensions of the *caput omeris* suggest the body was female. A brick of moderate size was found inside the oral cavity, keeping the mandible wide open.

Data collected by the anthropologist was used to generate a taphonomic profile, which precluded the positioning of the brick being accidental. Likewise, the probability of the brick having come from the surrounding burial sediment was rejected, as the only other inclusions found were bone fragments from previous burials in the same area. The forensic profile was based conceptually on the “circumstances of death” and concluded that the positioning of the brick was intentional, and attributed to a symbolic burial ritual. This ritual confirms the intimate belief held at those times, between the plague and the mythological character of the vampire.

Vampires, or the “un-dead”, were in fact considered to be the cause of the pestilence and during the exorcism it was usual to insert something into the mouth to prevent mastication. Such individuals were interred with the sudarium removed, and the mouth filled with a handful of earth, a stone, or brick.

The taphonomic profile is presented together with the results of the odontological and radiological analysis of the jaws and tooth fragments.

This case could well be the first “vampire” burial archeologically attested with medico-legal, and forensic odontological analysis.

Cranial Trauma, Forensic Taphonomy, Dental Radiology