

## Conference Paper

# Exhumation: Past and Present

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## Abstract

The modernization of a society leads to changes in the society's attitude towards funeral practices. This article is devoted to the study of socio-cultural, historical, religious and political-legal aspects of the exhumation phenomenon. Thanatosociological, historical, biographical, religious studies, legal and political approaches form the methodological basis of the study, which made it possible to identify features of exhumation in the past and present. The study has fixed that modern experts criticize the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) for the fact that the return to church life of already known relics and the inclusion of new shrines in it do not always meet the canonical requirements. As a result, gaining and 'traffic' of the last decades relics "with their historical unreliability, political background and clerical ambitions" causes direct damage to the spiritual life of a society. It has been established that exhumation, on the one hand, 'compensates' for losses in family relationships, gives impetus to the development of religious life, and solves specific problems of scientific research and investigative actions. On the other hand, sometimes exhumation is carried out for opportunistic, political, mercenary or criminal purposes thus, the problem of ensuring the peace of the buried remains very relevant.

**Keywords:** funereal, cemetery, exhumation, reburial, relics.

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## 1. Introduction

Exhumation always excites public opinion. Relocation of burials often stimulates the activation of a certain part of society political activity [27]. In Russia, discussions continue about the mausoleum of the founder of the Soviet state V.I. Lenin. More recently, in Spain, the transfer of the remains of Caudillo F. Franco intensified the confrontation between left and conservative forces.

Although the issues related to exhumation are rather broadly explored, there remains a lack of understanding of the exhumation sociological study. Our study seeks to fill this gap.

This article is devoted to the analysis of the socio-cultural, historical, religious and political-legal aspects of exhumation.

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## 2. Methodology and Methods

Tanatology as a scientific discipline reveals the phenomenon of death in all its representations [7, 17, 25]. From a sociological point of view, exhumation can be considered as a kind of social mobility. P. A. Sorokin believes that “social mobility means any transition of an individual or a social object (value), that is, everything that is created or modified by human activity, from one social position to another. There are two main types of social mobility: horizontal and vertical” [19].

According to J. Urry, “mobility” includes “various types and temporalities of physical movement, from standing, sitting, walking, climbing and dancing to those that have been improved with technological devices” [22]. Therefore, digging out the body from the grave for the sociologist acts as a specific process / institution that can be analyzed through the prism of the structural-functional methodology.

The application of the biographical approach allows us to more fully take into account the vicissitudes of life and the posthumous fate of specific individuals in a historical context.

The religious, legal and political aspects of exhumation are of undoubted interest.

That is why the thanatological, sociological, historical, biographical, religious studies, legal and political approaches are the methodological basis of our study, which made it possible to identify the features of exhumation in the past and present.

## 3. Results / Findings

Different circumstances emerge after the burial of the deceased. Sometimes it becomes necessary to remove a corpse from the place of its burial, that is, to exhume (Table 1).

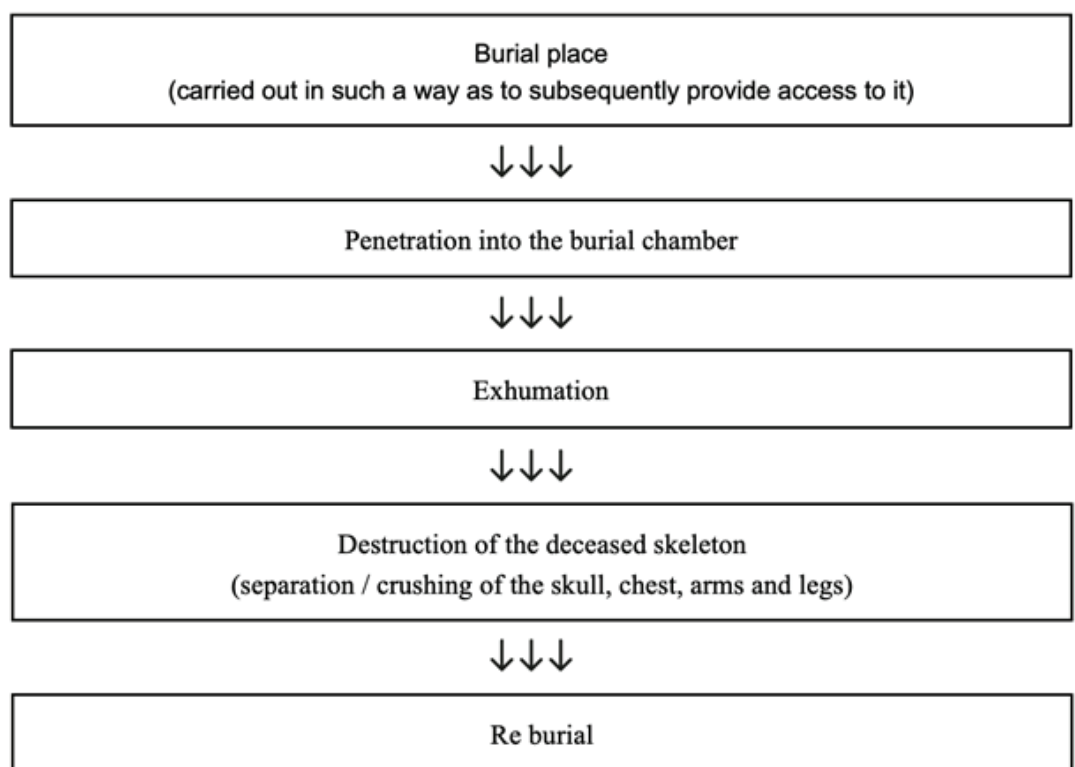
TABLE 1: Exhumation

No.	Criterion	Type
1	Purpose	research, religious, reburial, identification, identification of new facts in the case, destruction, robbery
2	Legality	legal, “semi-legal”, illegal
3	Un) intentional	intentional, random
4	Character	scientific, confessional, family-related, political, legal, criminal

Thanks to the excavation of graves, knowledge was accumulated about the anatomy of men and women, as well as the knowledge about the development of the peoples’ religious views of the planet. The complexity of people’s ideas about death and posthumous fate reflects the diversity of their ‘connections’ with the other world. In the past

(and now), many people believed that if a dead man was disturbed, then there could be big trouble, even to the point that he/she could come to life. Therefore, occasionally, the destruction of burials was carried out with magical purposes in order to protect the living from the harmful influence of the dead.

Thus, archaeologists have established that among pre-Christian ethnic groups of the Lower Volga region, the North Caucasus, early Bulgaria and the Slavs, the burial neutralization rite was widely used (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Rite of neutralization of the deceased

The essence of the ceremony was to destroy the skeleton, after the process of decay of bodily tissues was completed. It is significant that the ritual continued to be used by the peoples who adopted Christianity, up to the 20th century. The preservation of this custom testifies to the 'incomplete' Christianization of part of the population of regions historically committed to Orthodoxy [1, 2, 23].

Sometimes the movement of the human remains is done with the blessing of the church authorities, benefiting from this, because the institutionalization of the worship of the relics began before the cult of holy places arose. The temples where the relics of the saints rested became centers of pilgrimage and increased their prestige among believers [15]. This is due to the fact that for early Christianity "relics were not just

fragments of the flesh, they were signs of victory over death, a materialized confirmation of fidelity to the chosen path” [3].

The saints relics have a different degree of preservation. For example, the remains of the ascetics of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra are imperishable, and in the tomb of Seraphim of Sarov in 1903 only fragments of bones were found. However, the belief that all relics were imperishable was widespread among the people. Contrary to the call of theologians, they did not only fight against it, but made concessions to superstition. The result was inevitable retaliation. The revelation by the Bolsheviks of relics, many of which turned out to be bones, sowed a huge temptation [12]. S. N. Bulgakov argued: "The reproach of St. relics, committed in Russia, according to its cynicism, the godless and blasphemous, knows no examples in the history of Christianity. <...> servants of the Antichrist <...> created an atmosphere of mockery and lack of knowledge in advance, because only in this mood can such an investigation be undertaken. Can anyone, without a shudder, think about tearing up the grave of their father, mother, relatives, breaking the grave's peace in order to investigate the contents "[5].

From the church point of view and criminal law, different forms of anti-religious activity should be distinguished (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Anti-religious activities

<b>sacrilege</b>	<b>blasphemy</b>	<b>profanity</b>
(church. tatba — theft) — property infringement on sacred objects, comprises a selfish purpose and an insult to the religious feelings of believers) Since 1653, it was gradually regarded as a crime against religion — the desecration of shrines	(art. glor. — mockery) — "stingy mockery, proving a clear disrespect for the rules or rites of the Orthodox Church, or Christianity in general." The object of blasphemy could be church rules, objects of worship and rituals, but not faith itself	in criminal law — disrespect to God, expressed in bold words or by some actions. The criminal act of assaulting the Divine and religious beliefs. Its composition and punishment at different times were very different. In 1738, the death penalty was established for blasphemy, later — a reference to hard labor from 12 to 15 years

Of course, the relics revelation can be qualified as a serious crime — blasphemy. One of its consequences was the neglect of religious and cultural traditions. For centuries, the peace of the necropolises has often been violated in the name of the 'vital material interests' of the authorities. Thus, archaeologists have established that over time (usually about a century) for the ancient Greeks, the graves of their ancestors were no longer a shrine. "The ruin of the necropolises, expressed in their development, removal of tombstones for the purpose of secondary use, was quite common and even occurred on a state scale" [6].

For example, in extreme conditions, the destruction of graves was carried out to provide defense. According to Thucydides, under Themistocles, when the Athenians urgently strengthened Piraeus, many gravestones were embedded in the wall [24].

”During subsequent burials, the dead were often placed on earlier burials, separated by a layer of earth, or laid on the bottom of the grave, and if there was not enough space, then the bones of the previously buried were moved away, sometimes thrown away” [10]. That is why curses were applied to the crypts against the destroyers of graves.

Centuries later, in Russia in 1748, by decree of Elizaveta Petrovna, it was ordered to liquidate all cemeteries in the center of Moscow and use commemorative stones during construction [16]. In the USSR, as well as in the pre-revolutionary period, graves ‘by force of necessity’ were razed to the ground and tombstones were used for household purposes.

In the second half of the 20th century, “innocent fashion” caused irreparable damage to the necropolises of England to turn vaulted rooms in temples into offices or tea rooms, often crypts or crypts. Demand immediately generated teams of “professional destroyers” who “cleaned” the buildings in the most unceremonious way [3].

Nevertheless, exhumation is most often done to carry out reburial. In the Middle Ages, as soon as the family reached a certain level of well-being, it became his concern to “tear out” their dead from the common grave — relatives ordered a family tomb, this marked the beginning of overcoming the “depersonalization” of burials [8].

The reburial of Peter III undertaken by Paul I deserves special attention. The transfer of his remains to the Peter and Paul Cathedral and the posthumous coronation were designed to solve a number of problems: 1) to give the afterlife honors to the deceased, whom he was deprived of during the initial burial; 2) to compensate for the damage caused to his reputation by the Catherine nobles; 3) to refute rumors about the dubious origin of Paul I ascended the throne; 4) to legitimize kinship with father and great-grandfather and the continuity of power; 5) belittle the memory of Catherine II; 6) demonstrate the triumph of justice; 7) warn possible conspirators of future retaliation [18, 21, 26].

Significance is not only the elite reburials of representatives of the reigning dynasties, but also the movement to the homeland of the remains of ordinary members of society. For example, descendants, family friends and regional associations of Chinese entrepreneurs organize the repatriation of the ashes of those men who in the 19th-20th centuries went to seek livelihood abroad, and could not return home to rest there [28].

It should also highlight the activities of the reburial of the bodies of dead soldiers, personifying the ‘sacred past.’ That is why the funeral ceremonies and the new location

of the graves should correspond to the grandeur of their feat [29]. This issue has not only a moral, but also a political aspect.

In our country, a lot of work to detect the beds of honors and their reburial is carried out by volunteer search teams. Archaeologists do their duty to the fallen heroes. Representatives of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and clerics make burials of the discovered remains in accordance with military and religious rites.

For legal purposes, exhumation is carried out to study the causes of death, establish the identity of the deceased, recognize paternity, discover new facts and evidence in a criminal case, etc. [9]. Now it is envisaged that after all the necessary authorities confirm permission for exhumation, forensic experts and doctors are sent to the place of burial. After the arrival of all groups, a burial site is opened. All actions must be recorded on video and cameras, and the procedure is recorded in the protocol. After the exhumation, the body is either transported for re-examination, or to another burial site.

The criminal exhumation is considered to be exhumation undertaken for abuse of the body, for the sake of looting, blackmail, or a proposal to redeem the body. Thus, a specific example of invading the world of the dead is the death penalty — a rite associated with the exhumation and ritual "execution" of the body of the deceased (Table 3).

The posthumous death penalty has three main functions: 1) a possible obstacle to the "resurrection" of the enemy / ghoul; 2) mockery of the dust of a defeated enemy; 3) a form of "belated" enforcement of the sentence when the offender has already passed away.

It is known that the tomb robbery has already begun in ancient times. According to the ideas of that era, only the graves of their ancestors and related groups were considered sacred to the social community. Tomb robbery becomes widespread during periods of tribal clashes and the great migration of peoples [6]. In modern times, the sale of artifacts from necropolises has become a source of livelihood for part of the population in several countries of the Middle East and Latin America.

In Czarist-era, the so-called "tomb raider" live on it. Treasure hunters were "inspired" by faith, fear and hope. In the USSR, monuments were dug up occasionally by residents of nearby villages (often after participating in archaeological expeditions). Sometimes they also used earthmoving equipment, and visiting collectors could provoke them to this activity [4].

In the modern period, specialization of tomb raider has taken place and the scale of the criminal "business" has significantly increased — it is served by intermediaries,

TABLE 3: The posthumous death penalty

Personality	Life and death	Posthumous fate
Leonid the First (up to 420–480 years BC)	The king of Sparta from the Agid family, who ruled in 491–480. BC e. Member of the Greco-Persian wars, died in the Battle of Thermopylae	Enraged by the heavy losses and desperate resistance of the Spartans, the Persian king Xerxes I ordered to search for the corpse of Leonid, chop off his head and put on a stake, and beat the body to the side of his personal ship
Formoz (816–896)	The Pope (891–896) saw as his main task the deliverance of the papal throne from the pressure of the influential Frankish clan Guidonides. He died in unclear circumstances.	Stephen the VI, the successor of Formosa, put his dilapidated body on trial at the Cadaverous Synod: his election was declared invalid, the decrees were canceled, the fingers with which he performed the sign of the Cross were cut off. The body of Formosa, deprived of clothes, was dragged along the streets of Rome and buried in a mass grave for foreigners
False Dmitry the First (1582–1606)	The impostor, who declared himself the youngest son of Ivan the Terrible, the Russian Tsar (1605–1606), was killed by rebellious Muscovites	The deceased was abused for three days on Red Square — he was smeared with “all kinds of abominations”, a mask was thrown on his body, a pipe was stuck in his mouth. After the funeral in the “wretched house”, they dug up the corpse, burned it, and, mixing the ashes with gunpowder, shot from a cannon towards Poland
Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658)	The leader of the independents and the leader of the English Revolution. He suddenly died of malaria and typhoid fever	During the restoration of the Stuarts, the bodies of Cromwell and two of his comrade-in-arms were exhumed, transported through the streets of London and hanged. Later their heads were placed on poles near Westminster Palace
Lavr Grigorievich Kornilov (1870–1918)	Infantry General, Civil War participant, leader of the White Movement in southern Russia. He was killed during the assault of Yekaterinodar	The coffin with the body of Kornilov was secretly buried (and the grave was “leveled”) during the retreat through the German colony Gnachbau. The Bolsheviks, having occupied it, accidentally dug up the grave — the corpse was disfigured, it was taken to Yekaterinodar, where it was burned.

resellers, informants, guides of expeditions and, probably, some professional archaeologists (Table 4).

Experts believe that in order to counteract extortionary excavations, it is necessary to do the following: 1) destroy the widespread illusion that noble and energetic treasure

TABLE 4: Tomb raiders in Russia

N°	A type	Specialization	Search scope
1	"Tomb raider"	wide	mounds
2	"Field workers" ("Diggers")	"Black archaeologists" ("Chernyaki")	archaeological monuments
		members of the underground	root cellar
		"Diggers"	dungeon
		divers	water bodies
3	"Trophies" ("Black trackers")	Gunsmiths	scenes of the fighting
		grave digger	burial places

hunters extract material for research by scientists, collect and save it from death; 2) recommend that interested parties record cases of predatory excavations, draw up acts on the destruction of archaeological sites and contact law enforcement agencies; 3) to collect information on the facts of illegal trade in ancient things; 4) legally prohibit work with metal detection and put under the control of the antiquity markets [14].

## 4. Discussion

W. Warner, who studied the problem of the reburial of relatives, found out that they are due to two main reasons: 1) changes in religion; 2) upward social mobility motivated to move the ashes of loved ones to the "best" places. In his opinion, "extracting the bodies of mother and father from their low prestigious graves and transferring the remains to mourning splendor <...> not only allows the guilty son to react to his guilt <...>, but also provides an opportunity to flaunt his wealth" [20].

Modern experts criticize the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) for the fact that the return to church life of already known relics and the inclusion of new shrines in it do not always meet the canonical requirements. As a result, gaining and "traffic" of the relics of the last decades "with their historical unreliability, political background and clerical ambitions" causes direct damage to the spiritual life of society [13].

According to the Director of the Institute of Archeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences N. A. Makarov, the current expansion of robbery at archaeological sites is due to a combination of three factors: 1) the formation of the antique market in Russia as a part of a new market economy; 2) the distribution of advanced metal detectors; 3) the demonstrative removal of the state from the protection of cultural heritage in the early 1990s. [11].



Obviously, the exhumation of individual burials often gives rise to acute social conflicts at various levels. This article is intended to fill the gaps in the sociological study of the exhumation phenomenon.

## 5. Conclusions

Thus, exhumation, on the one hand, 'compensates' for losses in family relationships, gives impetus to the development of religious life, solves specific problems of scientific research and investigative actions. On the other hand, sometimes exhumation is carried out for opportunistic, political, mercenary or criminal purposes. Thus, the problem of ensuring the peace of the buried remains very relevant.

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