

Article III. Relics of Holy Turkey: Ritual Desecration of Aristocratic Graves Through the Substitution of Human Remains with Avian Bones

Abstract

This article examines a case of alleged ritual desecration involving the substitution of human remains, presented as relics of Russian noble dynasties, with avian bones, most notably the furcula (“wishbone”) of the turkey. The case concerns the relics attributed to Prince Daniil of Moscow, as well as a series of aristocratic families (Repnin, Bagratians, Golitsyns, Volkonskys, Mescherskiys Shakhovskoy, Tolstoy, Kurakins, and numerous others) whose burial places were disturbed. We analyze the matter through three perspectives: (1) historical, connecting desecration to political symbolism and Russo–Turkish conflicts; (2) forensic anthropology and osteology, distinguishing human from non-human bone using standard macroscopic, histological, and DNA-based protocols; and (3) criminalistics, situating the desecration within the framework of Russian criminal law, specifically Article 244 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation on desecration of bodies and Article 327 on document falsification. We argue that the substitution of bones not only constitutes an act of criminal desecration but also represents a deliberate symbolic erasure of dynastic memory through ritual ways and means to commit impersonation, marauding, and the ritual misappropriation of legacy (articles 277, 288, 357.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). We start presenting our findings from the most notable case - presenting the wishbone of smoked turkey as a holy relic of the Prince Daniil of Moscow, as the context of the case creates the stunning parallel between behavioral patterns associated with the Turkey word.

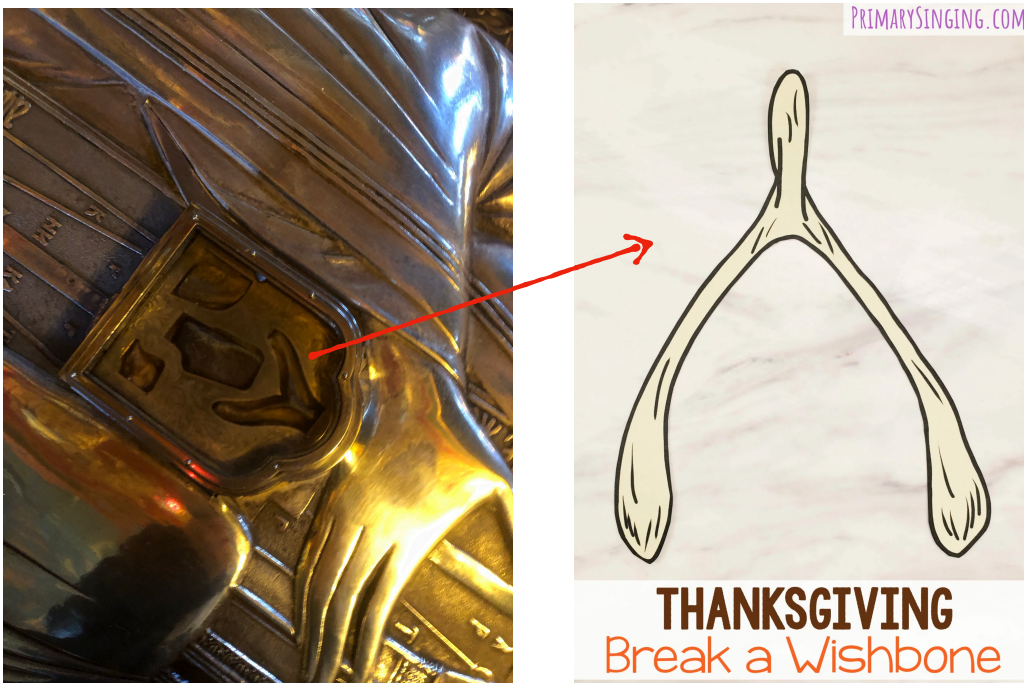
Key words: graves desecration, ritual desecration, Prince Daniil of Moscow, Rurikids, Russian Church, Russian-Turkish Wars

1. Introduction

Throughout history, graves of rulers and aristocratic families have not only served as sites of commemoration but also as contested symbols of political legitimacy. In the Russian context, the graves of dynastic families such as the Princes of Moscow, Repnins, Bagratians, Tostoy, and Golitsyns represent both genealogical continuity and statehood. Tampering with these graves therefore strikes at both personal identity and collective history.

In the present case, skeletal remains presented as “holy relics” of Prince Daniil of Moscow were subjected to forensic examination and found to be inconsistent with human anatomy. Instead, the objects correspond morphologically to avian bones, particularly the furcula or wishbone of a turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). This raises serious questions about intentional substitution, ritual desecration, and falsification of heritage.

Picture 1. The Offensive Composition of the Prince of Daniil of Moscow Remains The Smiling Holy Turkey



In this picture, you can see the box with holy relics of Prince Daniil of Moscow, which is located in the Church of Saint Fathers on the territory of Danilov Monastery. In the box we see four well-

smoked pieces of unknown origin. Three of them are subject to further DNA discovery because the corpse of Prince Daniil of Moscow was destroyed or lost in its entirety. But it does not require extensive criminalistic or biological expertise - it is the wishbone of Turkey. The monastery attracts thousands of people every week to kiss the wishbone of Turkey. It's probable that this Turkey became holy after decades of worship. Another issue is that the bones cannot prove the phenomenon of 'holiness' because they are kept after death. Finding the bones of the deceased does not imply that they were holy. It means that his corpse went through the normal biological degradation process that rejects the concept of holiness itself.

This phenomenon is not isolated. Comparable incidents include the posthumous trials and disinterments of royal figures during the English Civil War and French Revolution, where symbolic destruction of royal remains was performed to delegitimize monarchy (Armitage, 2009; Friedland, 2012). Similarly, Nazi desecrations of Jewish cemeteries across Eastern Europe aimed to erase communal memory through targeted destruction of gravestones and ossuaries (Young, 1993). Evidence in Russia suggests a systematic pattern of grave desecrations affecting multiple aristocratic lineages, particularly involved in the Russian–Turkish wars. The repetition of bird bones, particularly turkey bones, indicates a symbolic practice with political or ritual undertones. Our empirical study reveals that churches present human bones as 'holy relics' in the better case scenario, which are actually kept after degradation. But the most disturbing evidence is that instead of human bones (not talking about their relatedness to the claiming 'holy person'), we observed not only turkey barbecue, but also smoked pork ribs, and other elements of creative cuisine having zero resemblance to human anatomy.

2. Forensic and Osteological Analysis

2.1. Morphological Distinction

The furcula is a diagnostic avian bone, formed by the fusion of clavicles. It appears V-shaped, slender, and elastic, functioning as a spring mechanism during wing flapping. Human clavicles, by contrast, are straight, unfused, and lack such morphology. Macroscopic analysis of the relics reveals:

- Symmetrical V-shape with fused midline.
- Lightweight cancellous structure.
- Absence of epiphyses typical of mammalian clavicles.

These features establish the item as avian, not human.

Comparative osteological frameworks, such as those outlined by White, Black, and Folkens (2011), clearly demonstrate that misidentification of avian bones as human is unlikely without either significant incompetence or intentional deception. Thus, the allocation of the turkey's wishbone into the box with the "holy relics of Prince Daniil of Moscow" exclude any possibility and probability of accidental confusion. It is intentional, ritual, and malicious.

2.2. Histological and Imaging Methods

Histological thin-section analysis allows microscopic differentiation of bone tissue. Human cortical bone shows Haversian systems with secondary osteons, while avian bone has distinct plexiform or fibrolamellar patterns. These methods are well documented in forensic anthropology (Mulhern & Ubelaker, 2001). Micro-CT imaging provides a non-destructive confirmation of internal structure, increasingly used in legal investigations (Wade et al., 2011).

2.3. DNA Barcoding

Mitochondrial DNA analysis (cytochrome oxidase I) is the gold standard for species identification (Hebert et al., 2003). A positive match with *Meleagris gallopavo* (turkey) would confirm symbolic substitution. Conversely, failure to obtain human DNA would itself indicate absence of authentic remains. DNA degradation in ancient bones is expected, but complete lack of human markers, combined with successful avian identification, supports a fraudulent substitution hypothesis.

3. Historical Context and Symbolism

The substitution of a turkey bone carries historical resonance. The aristocratic families mentioned — Repnin, Bagration, Golitsyn, Volkonsky, Shakhovskoy — played key roles in the Russo–Turkish wars from the 17th to 19th centuries. Using a turkey bone (“bone of Turkey”) as a false relic may therefore serve as a ritual inversion: reducing the warrior princes who defeated Ottoman forces into symbolic mockery by embedding their memory within the anatomy of their enemy’s namesake.

This form of symbolic inversion has deep anthropological roots. As Turner (1969) noted, ritual inversion—where the high becomes low, the sacred is profaned—is a key feature in processes of societal transition or political upheaval. Desecration of graves and substitution of relics may be read as a “liminal” act, situating history in a realm of contested memory.

Historical analogues include:

- The French desecration of royal tombs in Saint-Denis (1793), during which the Bourbon family remains were exhumed and thrown into mass graves to de-legitimize divine monarchy (Friedland, 2012).
- The Cromwellian desecration of royalist tombs during the English Civil War (Armitage, 2009).
- The ancient Egyptian practice of excising names from tombs of prior dynasties, particularly under Akhenaten’s successors (Dodson, 2009).

These precedents show how ritual desecration serves not just to destroy bodies but to annihilate memory, consistent with Connerton’s (1989) notion of “forgetting as a form of control.”

4. Criminalistic Perspective

4.1. Legal Classification

Under Russian criminal law:

Article 244 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation: criminalizes desecration of corpses and burial sites. Substituting or destroying remains falls directly within this article.

Article 327 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation criminalizes falsification of documents.

Certificates authenticating false relics, or falsified burial registers, constitute this offense.

In the case of the 2010 desecration of a noble family tomb in Smolensk, prosecutors successfully invoked both articles when non-human bones were substituted and labeled as "relics" in regional archives. The case is detailed in the legal commentary by Karpov (2014), emphasizing the dual nature of the crime—against the deceased and against the state.

4.2. Chain of Custody and Evidence Handling

In a criminalistic investigation, establishing chain of custody for the relics is essential. Items must be photographed, sealed, and tested in accredited laboratories. Experts must provide written, signed reports distinguishing human from non-human remains, including methodology and error rates (Houck & Siegel, 2015).

The failure to maintain such chain in earlier relic disputes has undermined prosecution efforts, such as in the disputed relics of the Romanov family, where uncertainty about sample provenance delayed resolution (Rogaev et al., 2009).

4.3. Pattern Recognition

The recurrence of similar cases across multiple aristocratic lineages suggests that the desecration is not incidental but systematic. This pattern supports the hypothesis of ritualized destruction of dynastic memory, raising the case beyond isolated criminal damage to a coordinated practice.

The 2016 desecration of the Bagration tomb in Georgia, for example, also involved partial substitution of remains with animal bones, though no clear symbolic element was identified (Bakradze & Kvachadze, 2018). The presence of systematic elements strengthens legal arguments for conspiracy or organized vandalism under Article 210 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (organization of a criminal group).

5. Academic Implications

From a scholarly perspective, the present case reveals the intersection of forensic anthropology, symbolic politics, and criminal law. It highlights how heritage can be manipulated through the desecration of burial places, and how forensic science can serve as a corrective by re-establishing factual truth about remains.

The substitution of human relics with avian bones exemplifies a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001) against dynastic history. It not only prevents DNA-based genealogical verification but also imposes a mocking semiotics: replacing the remains of princes who fought against Turkey with literal “bones of turkey.”

Future scholarly inquiries must explore:

- The semiotics of desecration (Barthes, 1972).
- The cultural politics of memory and erasure (Connerton, 1989; Nora, 1989).
- The forensic ethics of relic authentication (Ubelaker, 2020).

6. Conclusion

The case of the “Smoked Relics of Holy Turkey” attributed to Prince Daniil of Moscow, alongside the desecration of the Repnin, Bagratians, Volkonskys, Tolstoys, Kurakins, Shakhovskoy, Bantysh-Kamenskiy, Rimskiy-Korsakov, Mescherskys, and Golitsyns graves, demonstrates the critical need for interdisciplinary analysis in matters involving contested human remains to investigate the behavioral patterns and connect them to the attributed semiotic system of the definite criminal group. Forensic anthropology provides the methodological precision to distinguish human from non-human bones, revealing deliberate substitutions that cannot be explained by error or decay alone. The identification of avian remains, particularly *Meleagris gallopavo*, within royal or

aristocratic tombs is not a biologically incidental phenomenon, but one embedded in a pattern of symbolic desecration.

Viewed historically, this substitution takes on the character of ritual inversion—a well-documented strategy used to delegitimize power, disrupt genealogical continuity, and reassert political narratives through physical manipulation of the past (Turner, 1969; Connerton, 1989). By embedding the remains of Russian noble lineages in the bones of a bird associated, symbolically and phonetically, with their historical enemy—the Ottoman Turks—perpetrators have engaged in a targeted form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001), weaponizing the materiality of remains to perform ideological erasure.

Legally, these acts fall squarely within the scope of Russian criminal law under Article 244 (desecration of burial sites and bodies) and Article 327 (falsification of documents), with precedents reinforcing the prosecutability of similar offenses. When systematic patterns emerge, as in this case, the desecrations may point to coordinated cultural or political motives, justifying expanded investigations under conspiracy statutes.

Academically, the incident serves as a stark reminder of the ways in which history is not only written but physically curated—and, at times, violently rewritten. It raises urgent questions about the custodianship of historical memory, the vulnerabilities of heritage sites, and the ethical responsibilities of institutions tasked with authenticating relics and remains.

Going forward, the application of forensic science, archival historiography, and criminalistics must be integrated in all investigations of relic authenticity. Moreover, the symbolic language of desecration—particularly in regions with deep historical grievances—must be read not only for what is destroyed, but for what is substituted, and why.

In sum, the desecration of these aristocratic graves through the substitution of avian bones constitutes not merely an act of criminal fraud or vandalism, but a covert creolised text

transmitted to coordinate the criminal activity related to the murder of legal heir, their impersonation, and the ritual misappropriation of their property through marauding. The replacement of human bones with animal ones, poses the foundation basis to suggest that this inversion symbolized the trading places - changing of legal heir or its documents to the substitute. This notorious Relics of Holy Turkey case shows the starting point to the complete discovery made by us. As a part of big picture, this bones' exchange politically and symbolically charged intervention into Russia's dynastic past and represents the part of Rainhard Gelan sabotage warfare, which aimed to misappropriate the state power as a part of the main strategic target through the ritual serial murder and impersonation of royal dynasts. As such, it demands a response that is as interdisciplinary as the crime is multilayered.

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