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## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BRONZE AGE OSTEOLOGICAL FINDS FROM THE LOCALITY VELIM NEAR KOLÍN

**ABSTRACT** — The archaeological research of the Bronze Age locality "Skalka" in Velim near Kolín (in central Bohemia) has resulted in the unearthing of 103 "objects" (pits, graves, heaps of waste and debris, etc.) and has yielded so far twenty-five human and animal skeletons. Some research features contain pebbles, small and big stones, scattered human and animal bones and parts of skeletons, sherds, and also occasional finds of bronze and gold. The single and agglomerated finds of human and animal bones are situated irregularly or are randomly dumped. On the osteological material (amounting to 50 thousand items of human and animal bones) we can follow their smashing, crushing, breaking and splitting, rare operations (cuttings, etc.), or cases of charring and cremating of bones. The traces linked with the eating of human and animal meat, as visible on the osteological finds can be explained only as documents of anthropophagy. The extraordinary amount of human and animal remains from earlier and contemporary excavations will be subjected to further studies to explain the rites connected with human and animal sacrifices in the Bronze Age.

**KEY WORDS:** Bronze Age — Central Bohemia — Anthropophagy.



FIGURE 1. Examples of spiral fractures of broken distal parts of humeri of various individuals.

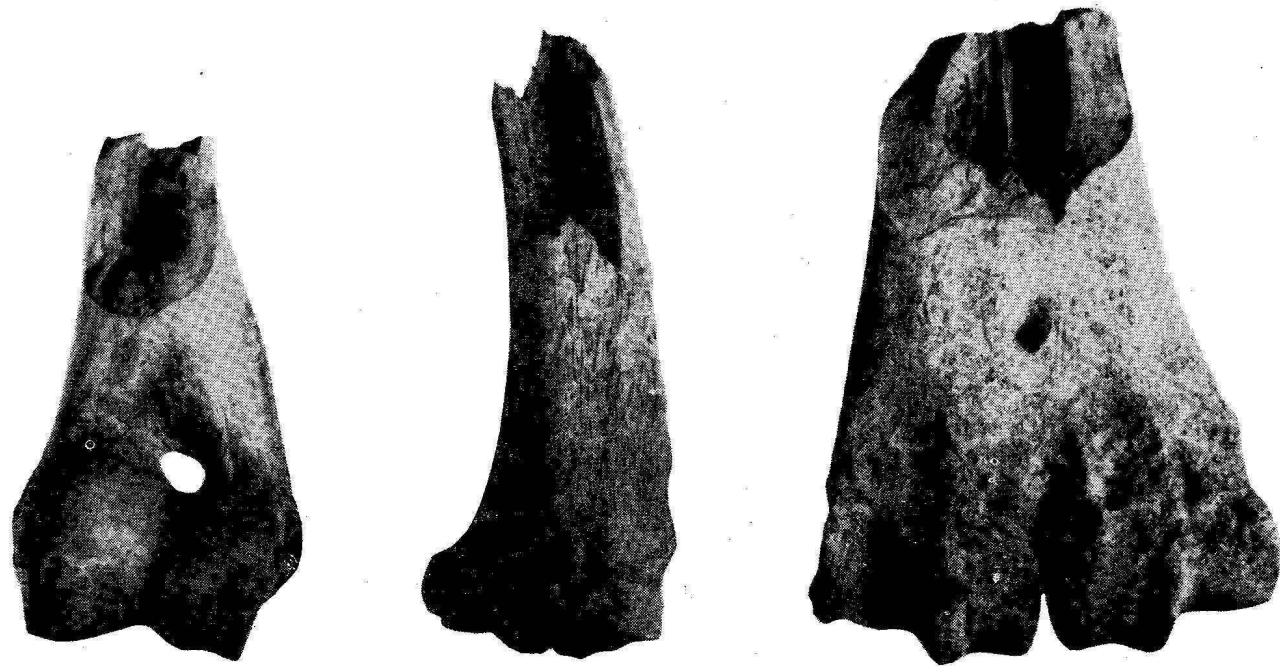


FIGURE 2. Examples of spiral fractures on animal long bones.

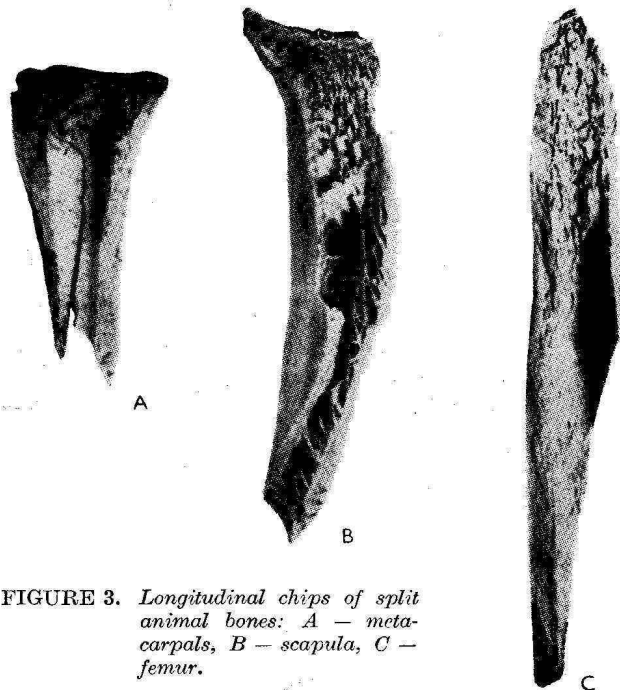
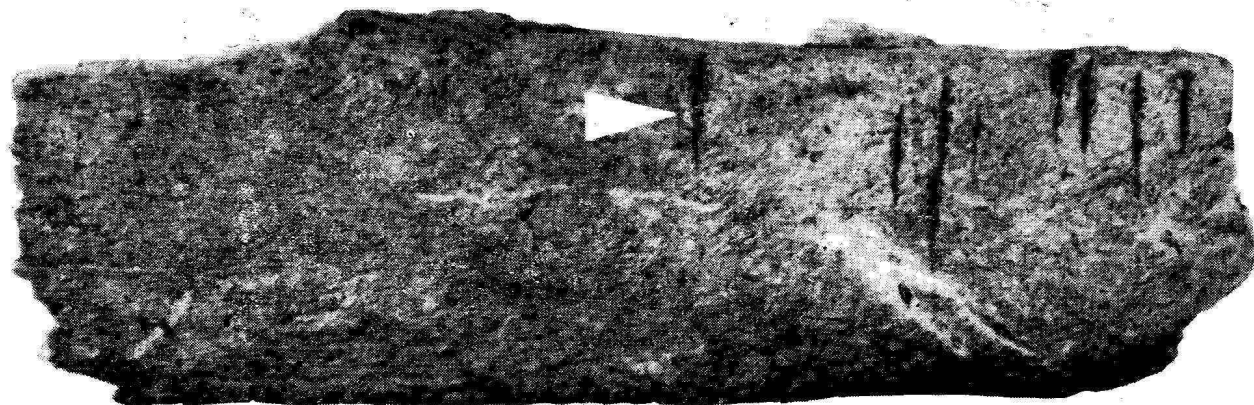


FIGURE 3. Longitudinal chips of split animal bones: A - metacarpals, B - scapula, C - femur.

FIGURE 4. Minor cuts on a human rib.



J. Hrala and M. Vávra from the Prague Archaeological Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in co-operation with Z. Sedláček from the Kolín Museum have started a rescue research of the "Skalka" Bronze Age locality in Velim. The work of the archaeologists is hindered by the earthmoving operations in full swing. Since the year 1984, 103 various pits have been discovered at the site, yielding twenty-five human and animal skeletal burials (Hrala et al. 1986). As this research is subordinated to the concrete needs of the housing construction, it is impossible to make systematic excavations of the individual pits. For this reason the osteological material may be assessed only preliminarily, as the excavation of some of the pits has not yet been completed. With this preliminary information I would like to characterize the find circumstances of the osteological material and to determine the ways of violently damaging the human and animal bones.

In the individual pits we find large agglomerations of smaller and bigger stones, small pebbles, scattered human and animal bones and parts of

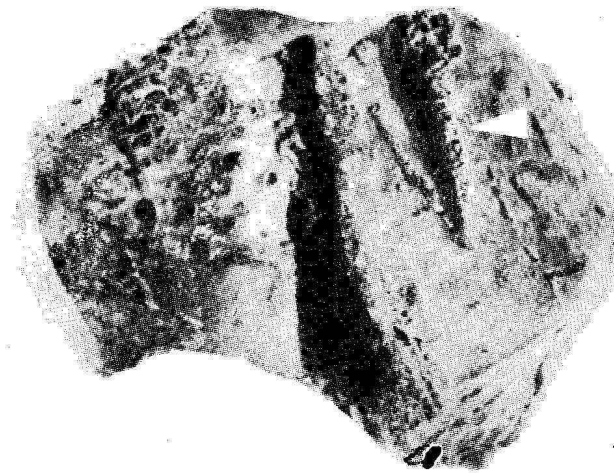


FIGURE 5. Deep cut in a human talus of an adolescent.



FIGURE 7. A smashed part of frontal bone above the right orbit.

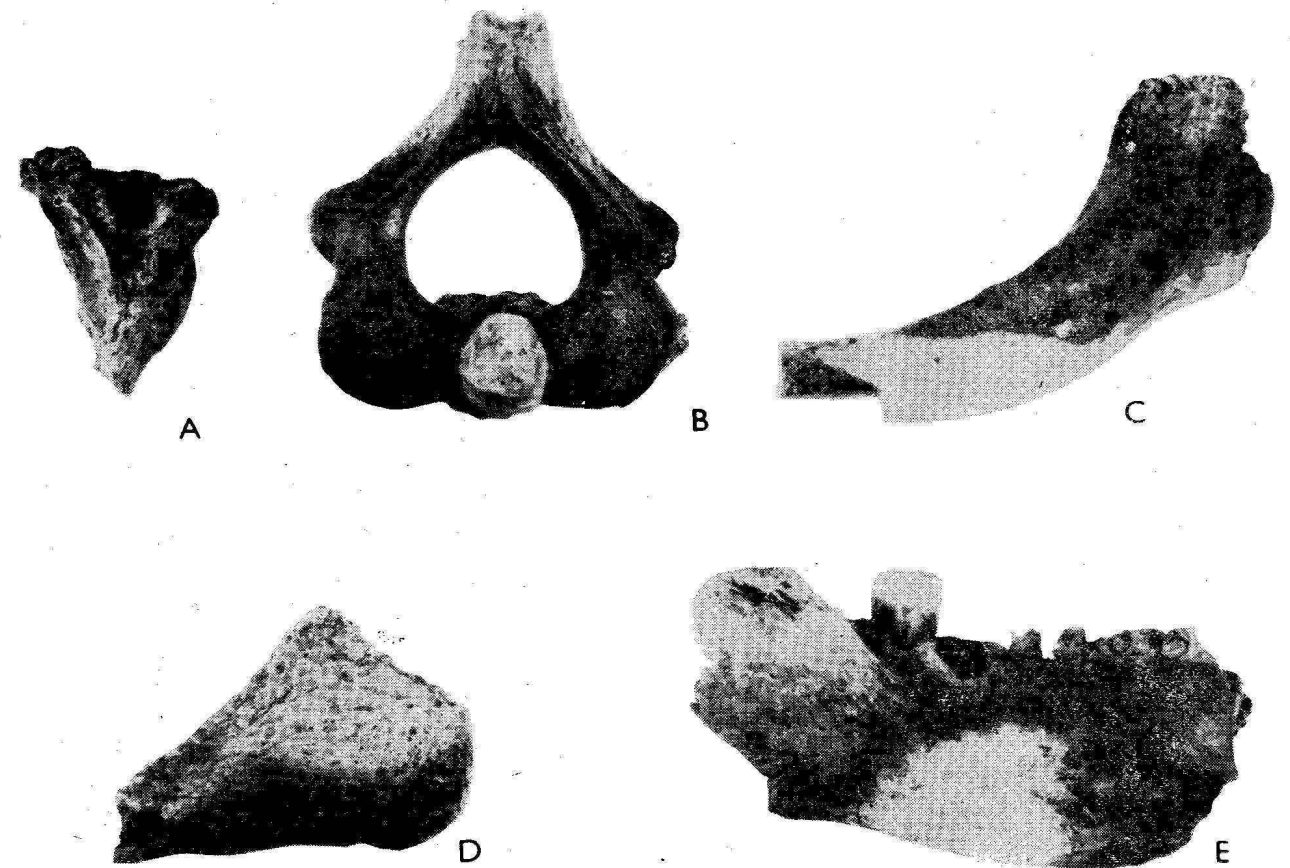


FIGURE 6. Examples of charred and burnt human bones: A - fragment of a cervical vertebra, B - second cervical vertebra, C - medial part of a clavicle, D - fragment of an acromion, E - left half of a mandible.



FIGURE 8. Smashed olecranon process of an ulna.



skeletons, but also pottery sherds with sporadic finds of bronze or golden artifacts or their fragments. The finds of human and animal bones are isolated or in irregular agglomerations, in agglomerations or randomly thrown away. The bones have been broken, fragmented, crushed in various ways, split longitudinally or broken transversally. But one thing is clear, the spiral fractures can be made only with fresh bones, containing organic material. They prevail in human long bones (Fig. 1) and in animal long bones (Fig. 2), i.e. in bones containing marrow. Longitudinal splits or small come from various bones (Fig. 3). On some bones we can see fine fragments cuts (Fig. 4). At places of the attachment of tendons, the cuts have sometimes the character of deep notches (Fig. 5). Exceptionally appear also burnt (grey in hue) or charred bones (black) (Fig. 6) from the most varied parts of human skeleton, mostly of human bones. More frequent are the hammered human and animal bones (Fig. 7, 8) and broken mandibular branches, as consequence of separating the mandible from the skull (Fig. 9). We can find interesting damage on the — teeth — crowns (Fig. 10). Those are split longitudinally, in the middle of the teeth, transversally to the middle of the crown, or over the entire surface of the teeth, and only the root in the socket remains. Teeth damaged in this way appear only in human remains, regardless of the age or sex of the deceased, i.e. in skeletal remains of children and adults alike. In certain pits appeared also drilled animal teeth (of *Canis fam.*) (Fig. 11). Quite exceptio-

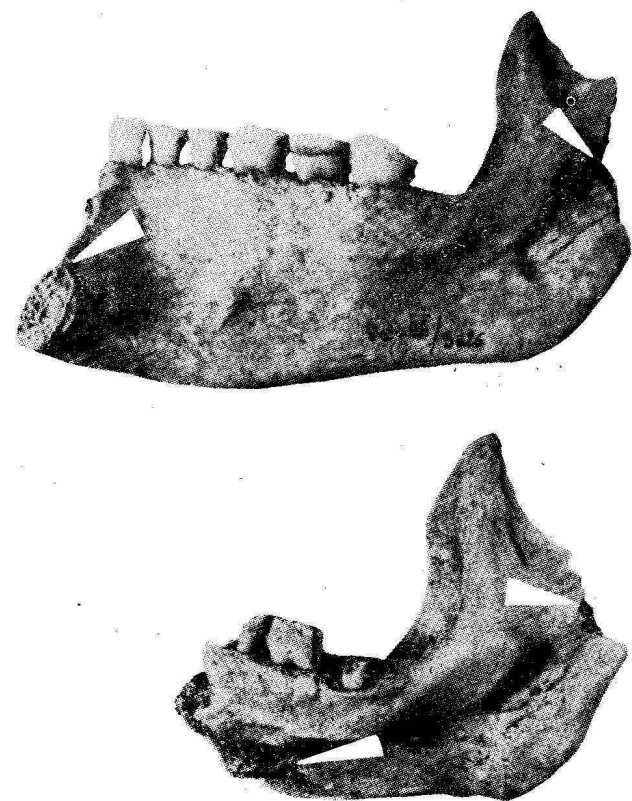


FIGURE 9. Broken rami with spiral fracture in the front part of the mandibular body.

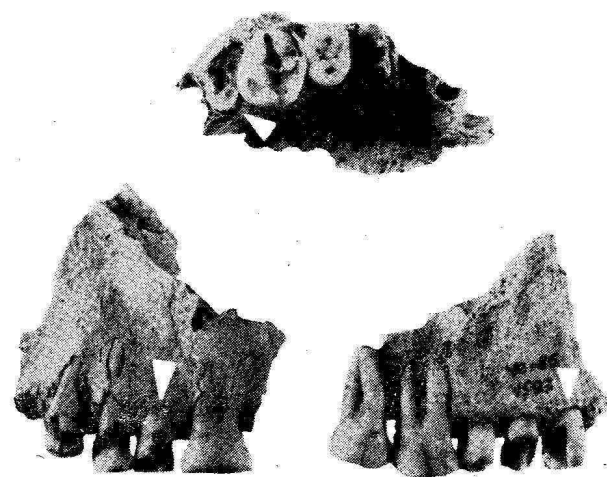


FIGURE 10. Examples of violently split teeth crowns of individuals of various age.

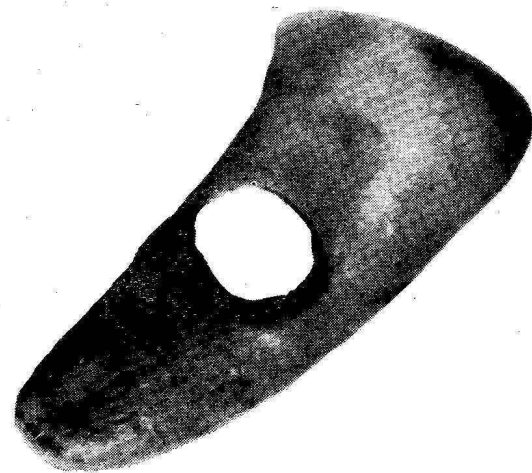


FIGURE 11. A drilled dog tooth (*Canis fam.*).



FIGURE 12. Left half of a trephined child skull with traces of violent blows at the upper edge of the occipital bone.

nal is the case of trephination (by boring small orifices along the circumference) in the temporal part of the parietal bone of a six years old child (Fig. 12). On the upper part of this incomplete child skull fragment there are well perceptible traces of heavy blows.

It cannot be said definitely whether the bones were selected on purpose, since all types of bones are represented among these finds. In general in the osteological material found at the Skalka site prevail finds of cranial bones, fragments of mandibles with preserved teeth, entire and incomplete long bones and phalanges of hands and feet. Similar is the situation also with the remains of animal bones, of cattle (*Bos taurus*), horse (*Equus caballus*) pig (*Sus domestica*) dog (*Canis fam.*), goat (*Capra hircus*).

The finds of human bones found together with animal bones in such an agglomeration, bones split and shattered in order to get to the marrow are clear documents of anthropophagy. There is no other explanation (Jelínek 1957).

One of the special features excavated in Velim in the years 1986—1988 is the feature No. 23: it is a dish-shaped pit 4—5 m wide and 1.30 m deep. The bottom of the pit is sloping gradually and the filling at the bottom layer was formed by an agglomeration of stones, small pebbles, sherds, split and fragmented animal bones, mixed with randomly

scattered fragments of human bones, of adults and sub-adults. At the southeastern edge of the object there was a narrow ditch containing the skeleton of a male lying on his right side, in crouched position, facing east. On the skull of the roughly 45 years old man there was a healed cut wound on the left parietal bone (Fig. 13). It follows from the situation of the find that the skeletal burial of the male is



FIGURE 13. Healed injury in the skull of a 45 years old male.



FIGURE 14. Find of a male skeleton with the left arm bone missing.

probably older, the object No. 23 was excavated later. This presumption seems to be supported also by the absence of the left arm bone of the deceased (*Fig. 14*), probably lost during the excavation of object No. 23. Anyhow, all these remarkable find circumstances remain unanswered in several respects. There is some analogy in the find circumstances at the Bronze Age site in Cézavy near Blučina. In the early fifties an extensive research was launched there (Tihelka 1950, 1951, Jelínek 1951, 1954). The excavations restarted in the year 1983. The osteological finds at Cézavy are more numerous, the human and animal remains were found in a variety of positions, there were complete and uncomplete skeletons, or parts of split, broken, charred or burnt bones. The position of the bones varies, ranging from randomly dumped, or in crouched, prostrate or in prone positions. The animal bones were isolated or dumped together with human bones, sherds and bronze objects.

The Blučina and Velim localities have a number of common characteristics, making them both quite exceptional. These features present also a number of problems and enigmas. The new rich finds of human remains in Velim enable the solution of the key problem of the social development of the Bronze Age in Central Europe: What happened at the sites one to two thousand years ago, to what

extent can we speak of human and animal sacrifices, which individuals were sacrificed and under what conditions, in what form, when and to what extent existed anthropophagy, and other problems that will appear in the course of the research. The great number of human and animal skeletal remains will be subjected to further study to explain the problems connected with ritual life in the Bronze Age.

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