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TWO EARLY NEOLITHIC FEMALE BURIALS WITH FOETAL REMAINS

ABSTRACT: *An early Neolithic cemetery was excavated near Vedrovice in South-Western Moravia. In two burials were discovered female remains with foetuses in the seventh and ninth months of age.*

KEY WORDS: *Early Neolithic Moravia — Foetus remains — Burials.*

In August 1979 during the excavations of the Early Neolithic cemetery the grave No. 81 was excavated. It was a typical oval-shaped grave with skeletal remains of a young female. Since the remains were well preserved — due to limy loess in which they were buried — they were in such a condition that the whole finding situation and the detailed anthropological observations were clear. In the pelvic region the remains of a foetus could be recognized.

Considering the dentition of the female skeleton in the upper and lower jaw we see that all four third molars are in their position but without any trace of attrition. The second permanent molars were all in contact but the relatively slight attrition demonstrates that they were not long in use. Considering the fact that all cranial sutures are open and that the sphenoccipital union is completed, it is clear that this female died at the age of 20–23 years. All the cranial and postcranial features represent a gracile female. Therefore there is no doubt about the age and sex of this individual.

The situation is further illustrated by archaeological finds accompanying the burial. Near the skull (*Fig. 1.*) large pottery sherds have been found, under the left arm there was a large spondylus ornament and in front of the belly of the buried female there was a complete pot of the Early-Neolithic Linear pottery

culture type. Nearby, there was another spondylus ornament — a pendant. Both these objects, the pot and the pendant, have been found at unusual places. It is highly probable that this was due to the pregnancy or to the fact that the female died during childbirth. The pendant can have a symbolic significance, either protective or other.

As it is frequent in many other graves at this cemetery, the skeleton was on its left side, the arms sharply bent so that both hands were in front of the face. On the contrary the legs were only slightly bent. As the situation was the same also with the other burial of a female with a foetus found at this cemetery (Grave No. 93, see further on) it is probable that the legs were in this position due to the large volume of the belly of the deceased.

Unique and interesting is the find of the skeletal remains of the foetus. Between the mouth of the pot and the upper rim of the left iliac bone of the mother we see a tiny femoral shaft, and near the spondylus pendant a tibial fragment. On the flat left iliac bone there is a small rib and a fragment of another rib. The mandibular body of the foetus touches the left femoral head of the buried female. In the pelvic outlet we find fragments of parietal bones, other cranial fragments, the petrous portion of the temporal bone and a vertebra. Touching the proximal part of the left femoral

shaft of the female, there is a small humeral shaft of the foetus and between both the female's femora there is another small cranial fragment with the right orbital rim and other smaller cranial fragments. Underneath the proximal part of the right femoral shaft of the female, the petrous part of the left temporal bone of the foetus has been found. We see therefore the disposition of the remains of the foetus: Highest in the abdominal region (Figs. 3, 4) was the leg, in the pelvic outlet there was the part of the skull and the mandible. The petrous bone was under the proximal part of the female's femur. Between the female's femora were the arm bone and the frontal part of the skull of the foetus. This signals that the arm of the foetus was going out before the head, dispersed partly out and partly inside the pelvic outlet. Highest, and therefore laterally from the lumbar vertebrae was the leg of the foetus.

Interesting enough is the fact that also the body of the hyoid bone was found. M. N. Nacfer (1990) describes a find of a hyoid bone from a medieval burial. She does not mention the exact age of the small child but the body of the hyoid bone and its great



FIGURE 1. Early Neolithic grave No. 81 from Vedrovice, Moravia. Note the large pottery sherd near the skull, the pot and spondylus pendant in front of the abdominal region, the foetus' remains in the pelvic region and slightly bent legs.



FIGURE 2. Early Neolithic grave No. 81 from Vedrovice. Detail of the abdominal and pelvic regions with burial gifts. Compare with Figure 3.

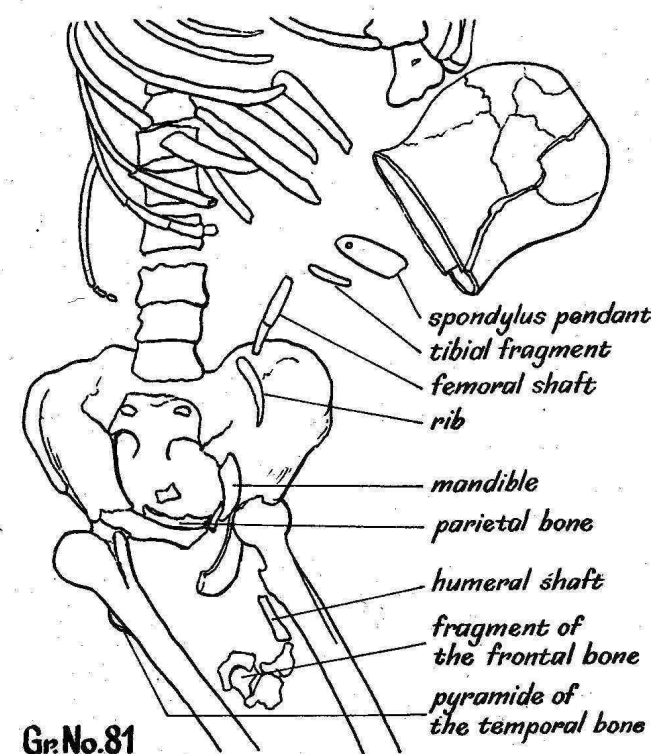


FIGURE 3. Early Neolithic grave No. 81 from Vedrovice. Drawing of the disposition of foetal remains and burial gifts.

horns were not united. In our find of a 6-7 months' foetus the body of the hyoid bone was also isolated. Paturet (1951, Vol. 1, p. 336) mentions the ossification of the body and great horns of the hyoid bone during the 9th month of foetal life. All this indicates that our knowledge of the ossification conditions of this isolated bone is insufficient and only more finds can make our knowledge more exact.

As all the foetal remains are in fragments or their marginal parts are corroded, they do not deliver exact measurements and therefore their age can be estimated only approximately (Farkas et al. 1978). According to the thickness and approximative size of the bones and according to the dimensions of the petrous part of the temporal bone, the foetus cannot be younger than six months and older than seven months. Similar information may be obtained also from the germ of the first mandibular incisor and from the conserved part of the left frontal squama.

In July 1980 another grave with female remains and with skeletal parts of a foetus was found. It was the grave No. 93 of the same Early-Neolithic cemetery at Vedrovice, SW Moravia. The skeleton was situated on the left side in a crouched position. The arms were (like in the grave No. 81) sharply bent, so that the hands were nearly touching the chin of the mandible. The legs were only slightly bent — probably due to the large belly which did not allow stronger flexion. The



FIGURE 4. Early Neolithic grave No. 93 from Vedrovice. Note the spondylus pendant in front of the abdominal region and slightly bent legs.



FIGURE 5. Early Neolithic grave No. 93 from Vedrovice. Note the dispersed remains of the foetus with cranial remains in the female pelvis, the occiput directing to the pelvic outlet. Compare with Figure 6.

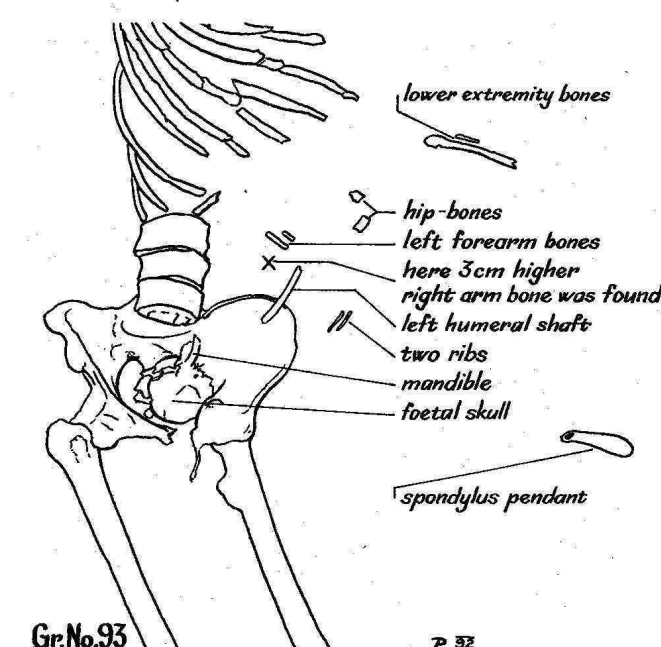


FIGURE 6. Early Neolithic grave No. 93 from Vedrovice. Drawing of the disposition of foetal remains and spondylus pendant.

left foot bones were slightly dislocated, evidently by a mole. The burial was in limy loess which conserved



FIGURE 7. Early Neolithic grave No. 93 from Vedrovice. Detail of the pelvic region with the skull of the foetus.



FIGURE 8. Early Neolithic grave No. 93 from Vedrovice. Detail of cranial remains of the foetus in pelvic region.

all the details, even the foetus's bones. A slightly different colour of loam indicated the large belly of the cadaver. In front of this a pendant spondylus ornament was found — certainly an unusual position for such an object.

In the cranial part of the ribcage a third permanent molar tooth was found. Its roots are open and the occlusal surface has no traces of use. This and the fact that the crest of the iliac bone is not fully fused gives the approximate age round 20 years. The morphology of the whole skeleton demonstrates a young muscular female individual. In the proximity of the elbow a femoral shaft of the foetus was found (Figs. 5, 6, 7), and halfway to the iliac bone two small circular remains of pelvic bones of the foetus. Between this place and the rim of the iliac bone there were parallelly situated poor remains of the left forearm bones, and touching the iliac bone was the shaft of the humerus of the foetus. This demonstrates the original position of the left arm. The poor remains of the right arm of the foetus were found three cm higher in the loam. Nearby the left humeral shaft of the foetus were poor remains of two ribs (Fig. 8). Inside the small pelvis we see the foetal skull turned with its occiput to the pelvic outlet and with the splanchnocranium up in the opposite direction. Here we can also see the mandible. According to the cranial bones dimensions and dental germ of the first upper incisor these remains point to 9 months of age of the foetus.

Interesting in both cases (graves Nos. 81 and 93) are the finds of the similar spondylus ornaments in similar but unusual positions. We can conclude that in the first case (No. 81) the female died during the misbirth in the seventh month of her pregnancy. The other female (No. 93) died during the delivery of the child. The exact reasons of these fatal events remain obscure.

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