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REMARKS ON THE GRAVE ABOVE BURIAL 2 AT THE SUNGIR' SITE (RUSSIA)

ABSTRACT: The burials of the male (burial 1) and the two children (burial 2) from Sungir' near Vladimir (Russia) with their rich inventory are well known. Less known is a badly preserved grave above the children's burial which is the object of this contribution. Besides some beads, pendants, two perforated slate-pebbles, and a fossil shell, two clubs from reindeer antlers found near the left hand require special interest.

KEY WORDS: Early Upper Palaeolithic burials – Clubs from reindeer antlers

In fall 1968 during the excavation of burial 2 at Sungir' containing two children an upper grave above burial 2 was discovered in the same burial-pit (Bader 1998: 51–64). The remains of the skeleton were found in an area of ice-wedges and solifluction of the section, 0.78 m below the topmost finds, and 0.74 m above the main burial of the two children. Accordingly the conditions of conservation were bad. The preparation of the bone-crumbs and the reconstruction of the skeleton was a master-piece of excavation-technique (*Figures 1, 2*). Contrary to the well known burials of the man (burial 1) and the children (burial 2) this upper grave is seldom mentioned. This is the reason for this contribution dedicated to the memory of Karel Valoch.

The position of this grave in a higher part of the same burial-pit as the underlying children's burial points to

a close relation between these burials; probably they were dug at the same time.

The upper burial is that of an adult who was placed on a red coloured sediment conserved only in patches, in a 2.60 m long and 1.17 m wide burial pit. The dead person was extended in a supine position, head to the southwest, feet to the northeast. The bones of the skull were missing, and it is very possible that the dead person was buried without the head. It is possible that the skull without mandible assigned to a woman and found above burial 1 (male) belongs to this skeleton. The distribution of the small bone-pieces permitted reconstruction of the shoulders, the spinal column, the arms, the right hand, and both legs and feet (*Figures 1, 2*).

Ivory-beads of the Sungir' type (*Figure 3:1–6*) as well as a small round bead with unfinished perforation

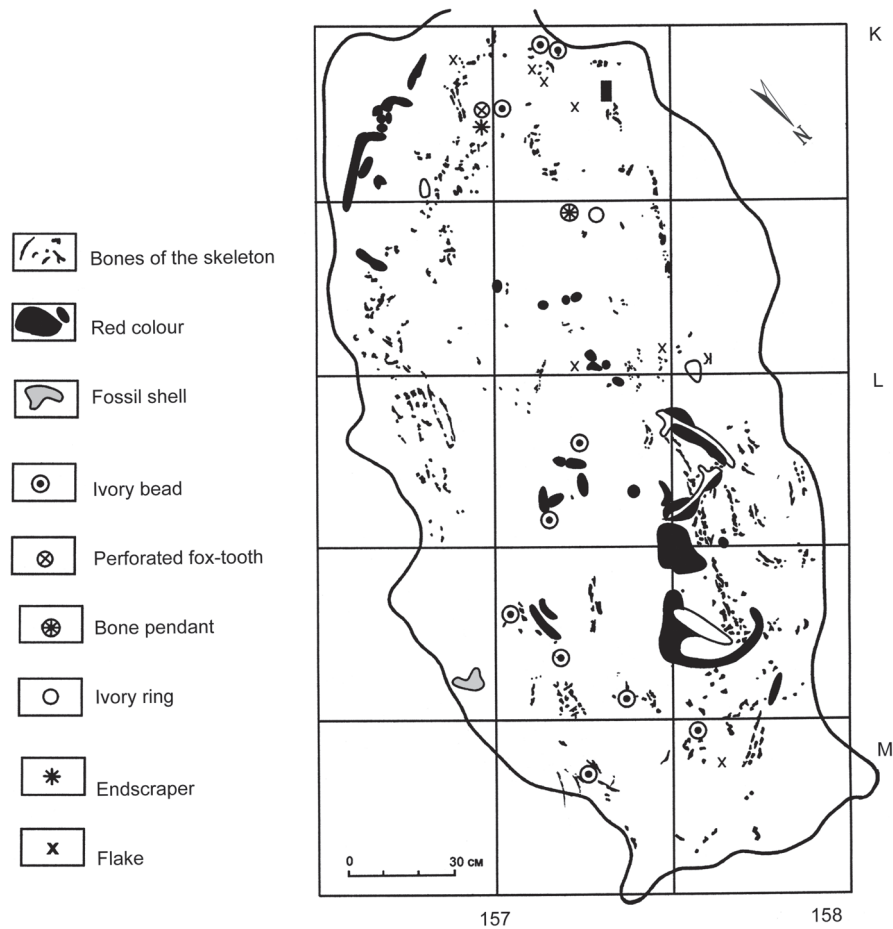


FIGURE 1. Sungir'. Plan of the grave above burial 2. Modified after Bader (1998).

(Figure 3:7), and perforated fox-teeth (Figure 3:8–9) were found in the upper and lower part of the grave (Figure 1). In addition, a carefully polished triangular bone-item with a perforation on top (Figure 3:11) finds equivalents in the male burial (1) where such specimens were found near the hands and lower legs.

The grave also contained two flat slate-pebbles with slightly asymmetrical perforation (Figure 3:12–13). Such pebbles are typical at Sungir' and may have originally been painted, and play an important role in the origin of art (Bosinski 2013).

On the chest a small ivory-ring the size of a finger-ring was discovered (Figure 3:10). This closed ring was worked out of one compact piece of ivory and is without parallels at Sungir'.

Somewhat higher than the skeleton a regularly shaped leaf-point was found (Figure 3:14). At Sungir', only one other example of such a leaf-point is known

(Bader 1978: Fig. 86:10). The usual triangular Sungir'-points (Bosinski 2013) are missing in the upper grave.

Near the right leg a large fossil shell with carefully shaped border was deposited (Figure 3:15). Such a shell used as a vessel is also without parallels at Sungir'.

Especially interesting are two clubs made from shed reindeer antlers (Figure 4) which lay near the left hand and the left leg respectively (Figures 1, 2). After detaching the palmate antler shovel the handle was formed by the beam. The bez tine, also without its shovel, was the functional part. The first (brow) tine is undeveloped on the two Sungir' specimens.

Such clubs of reindeer antlers are known from different periods and regions. The oldest example comes from the Middle Palaeolithic site of Salzgitter-Lebenstedt and is worked from an unshed antler (Figure 5:1). At Lebenstedt S. Gaudzinski (1998) reconstructed autumn reindeer-hunting of at least 86 animals. Possibly



FIGURE 2. Sungir'. Photographic plan of the grave above burial 2. After Bader (1998).

the animals were hunted when swimming, and possibly they were dispatched with such clubs. B. Klíma (1955) described such antler-implements from the Gravettian site of Pavlov and supposed that they were used in cultivation.

In the Late Palaeolithic these items are termed *Lyngbybeile* and characterise the Ahrensburgian. A. Rust (1943) devoted a special chapter to the *Lyngbybeile* in his *Stellmoor* monograph (Figure 5:2–3), while a map of the distribution of the *Lyngbybeile* can be found in the classical study of the Ahrensburgian by W. Taute (1968: Map 8). Because it is impossible to split wood with them functionally they are clubs. Possibly the *Lyngbybeile* of the Ahrensburgian were primarily used to kill swimming reindeer.

In post-Palaeolithic Alaska such *Lyngbybeile* were known as war-clubs or tomahawks. A. Rust (1943) figured

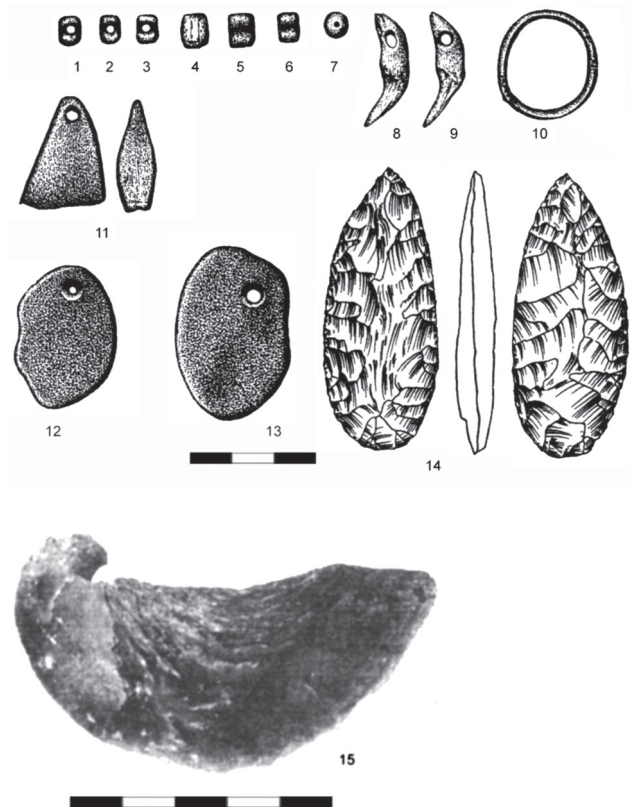


FIGURE 3. Sungir'. Finds from the grave above burial 2. 1–7, ivory-beads; 8–9, perforated fox-teeth; 10, ivory-ring; 11, bone-pendant; 12–13, perforated slate pebbles; 14, leaf-point; 15, fossil shell. After Bader (1998).

one example, the tine armed by a stone-point. Beam and tine are decorated by linear ornaments, the handle wrapped by tanned hide. Other war-clubs of caribou antlers were collected along the Copper River in 1839–1845 (de Laguna, McClellan 1981, Troufanoff 1970).

One club (Figure 6:1) is decorated by wavy lines and raised rhomboids carved along the back and filled in with brown colour (ochre). Beam and tine are decorated by white and black European beads. The proximal part (handle) is wrapped by tanned hide, and has a tassel. On top of the wrapping occurs a wavy embroidered line of black and red moose (?) hair.

Another club (Figure 6:2) has a hole at the end of the tine for a (missing) stone or metal point. Sharp bits of iron are inserted along its back. The implement is decorated by straight lines with short hatches filled with brown colour, probably red ochre. The proximal end is covered by tanned hide and ends in a tassel strung with European beads.



FIGURE 4. Sungir'. Reindeer antler clubs from the grave above burial 2. After Bader (1998).



FIGURE 5. Reindeer antler clubs. 1, Salzgitter-Lebenstedt, modified after Gaudzinski (1998); 2–3, *Lyngbybeile* from Stellmoor, After Rust (1943).



FIGURE 6. Post-Palaeolithic antler clubs from Alaska. Decorated clubs with wrapped handles and tassels from the Copper River. After Troufanoff (1970).

Other items (*Figure 6:3–4*) are also ornamented by linear patterns and have the same handles wrapped by tanned hide, and the same tassels.

At Sungir' the two antler clubs from the grave above burial 2 are unique. Together with the ivory-ring and the leaf-point they indicate a distinctive individuality of this grave compared to the other Sungir' burials.

This is the only case where such antler clubs come from a grave. The position of them next to the left hand and easily available for a right-hander may indicate that they were hunting artefacts or weapons, comparable to the war-clubs or tomahawks of some more recent hunter-gatherer groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Martin Street and Alan Bilsborough for their help with the English text.

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