The Gender Roles in Late Stone Age Societies According To Human Skeletal and Stone Tools: The Preliminary Results

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Foreword
This contribution presents the preliminary results of our current anthropological & archaeological research. Its aim is to bring some dates to the discussion about possible "gender roles" in the Central European societies. We have chosen such burial grounds that fulfill two main criteria: 1) There were a few graves found that contained preserved human skeletons where it was possible to find out—thanks to an anthropological research—if they were female or male; 2) These graves contain, together with the human remains, some pieces of stone industry (at least partially). We have started our project with the artefacts from Jinoice, today part of the city of Prague (city 36 graves, 43 pieces of chipped industry) and Víneves, near the city of Malá (75 graves, 41 pieces of chipped industry). Both are burial grounds of Late Stone Age (Corded Ware Culture) and they meet the above-mentioned conditions quite well. These places are also important from a cultural point of view from the anthropological point of view in the whole Central Europe, as mentioned in Fig. 1.)

The microwear analyses are applied to some of the stone artefacts from these burial grounds. The research is the first of its kind in the Czech Republic and could be an interesting resource for the better understanding of our ancestors’ lives.

Corded Ware Culture
Corded Ware Culture (CWC) is a part of the significant cultural complexes, which expanded at the end of the Late Stone Age from the Rhine-Main area and from the Alps to southern Scandinavia. This culture is called the Corded Ware Culture in northern Germany and the Netherlands the Middle Linear Grave Culture (Fig. 2).

Some burial areas were small (a dozen graves), and in some well-researched cases the necropolises Corded Ware Culture consists of several hundred graves, divided into small groups and covering multiple phases of culture. Vikalisk, district Cherkassy, Ukraine – Jinoice district Prague; Víneves district Prague. Presented burial grounds are situated in the central part of Bohemia. (Fig. 3.) The frequency, location of graves, and composition of additions indicate gendered known indicators of Corded Ware Culture. Relatively well-preserved skeletal remains in both cases allow for further analysis.

The burial differences according to the gender mentioned above call into question the impact of the deep differences between female and male social roles in their daily life and in their culture generally. The discussion of female and male roles in prehistoric societies has taken a long time. The early idea of the male dominance, so called ‘Mater nal Matri’, and the easy pattern male hunter female gatherer showed in the light of new researches is too simplistic and inaccurate.

The better understanding of the entire women’s role in the past societies has changed as the leading evolution opinions have changed. The discussion of gender as a social construct in the prehistoric period expanded in archaeology and other related sciences during especially the 1980s and 1990s and it is still actual. The new perspective was enabled thanks to research conducted in various fields, e.g. study of African apes, ethnographies of the today hunter-gatherer way of life, the analyses of new found fossils and artefacts from prehistory, or the new application of modern methods on older data. The microwear analysis allows to the used archaeo logical methods that can help gain better insight into this problem and it provided the interesting results. The inspiring archaeological works focused on the topic of the gender role in the prehistory were created e.g. by L. Hummel, M. A. Dodrill, or Jane Peterson.

The preliminary results of the research
Our preliminary research aims to interpret the function of the stone artifacts found in a few graves of female and male members of Corded Ware Culture in Jinoice and Víneves burial grounds and tries to find similarities or differences in connection to their gender.

Víneves:
The microwear analysis was applied to 35 silicate artifacts, and the work traces were found on 20 of these artifacts and one case was unclear (Fig. 4). More than half of the used tools have work traces on more than one edge (both edges and/or lip of the artifacts). The state of the retouches or polish shows for interpretation of the contact material (category of the contact material) in ten cases. The group of stone artifacts coming from 15 male graves consists of 11 artifacts. Two flakes from the group are, in the traces typical after work with pebbles, cobbles or grind. The other artifacts have no significant use-wear traces for interpretation of past used contact material, and some of them show no visible work traces, but display the intentional retouches in all cases. The group of stone artifacts coming from 19 female graves consists of 24 artifacts. The analysis of their function was wider — the interpreted contact materials were pebbles (three cases), cobbles or entire (five cases), hoes (three cases) and probably meet (one case) (Fig. S). Similar to the first group, some artifacts have no visible work traces, but the intentional retouch was present in all cases (Fig. 10, 11).

Jinoice:
The microwear analysis was applied to the amount of 33 silicate artifacts. The work traces were found on 26 of these artifacts (12 tools with work traces on more than one edge) and seven artifacts without found work traces or were unclear (24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31). The state of the retouches or polish allows for interpretation of the particular contact material (category of the contact material) in eight cases. The stone artifacts' analyses (Fig. 9) show that both male and female groups have different use-wear traces, with some working with hard material, one experiment shows the signs of contact with quite hard, probably useless stone. One artefact was used with stone pebbles, probably hard wood. The group of stone artifacts coming from 10 female graves consists of 13 artifacts. The microwear analysis shows that two of these ten artifacts were used on hide, while the others display no significant traces for interpretation of particular contact material.

The analyzed collections of artifacts are very suitable for the research of the gender question in prehistoric societies. However, the total number of 68 artifacts allows for only brief insight into this complex issue. It is apparent that these stone artifacts placed in the graves were, for the most part, used to practical purposes. Therefore, they are actual possession of persons, symbols of social roles or funeral gifts. This premise gives us an opportunity to discuss the possible differences in work between female and male members of these populations. The results of this preliminary analysis show so far that specific "female" or "male" work materials did not exist at the time. Additionally, it was found that there were bigger differences in the variability of the contact materials between two archaeological sites than between women and men. This research is the first investigation of its kind in the Czech Republic, so we hope that further analyses will bring more comparative dates from this area.

Culture settles the most fertile areas of Bohemia and rarey exceeds 300 m above sea level. Locations have a slightly greater distance from the nearest watercourse than other sites of prehistoric cultures. For the Czech group, Corded Ware Culture is typical absence of settlements, although many evidence suggest that the bearers of this culture were farmers. The absolute majority of findings are the remains of residual activities. An unambiguous way of buying is the immersion in shallow tomb pits, often with interior wooden fences. These are the graves of individuals (except funerals of adults with children). Saving the orientation of the body in the crouching position and sepulchral additions show a differentiation by gender: men, according to premises, lying to the west, and woman on her back facing south. A similar way of culture addition of sex can allocate groups: a) artifacts with grid lines, axe, axes, stone maces, beakers, bone artifacts (Fig. 12) and b) artifacts with the majority occurring in women. Copper ornaments, pot, small artifacts, animal loom, spurs and ammunments from shells (Fig. 4). A specific group remains chipped stone industry.