

The Gender Roles In Late Stone Age Societies According To Human Skeletons 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 past Central European societies. We have chosen such burial grounds that fulfill two main conditions: 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 (especially flint tools) that are suitable for an application of the microwear analysis. We have started our project with artifacts from Jinonice, today part of the city of Prague city (56 graves, 43 pieces of chipped industry) and Vlíněves, near the city of Melník (75 graves, 41 pieces of chipped industry). Both are burial grounds of Late Stone Age (Corded Ware Culture) and they meet the aforementioned conditions very well. These places are also important in their category from an archaeological point of view in the whole Central European context (Fig. 1). The microwear analysis was applied on dozens of the stone artifacts from these burial grounds. This research is the first one 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 complex, which was expanded at the end of the Late Stone Age from the Rhine to the Ukraine and from the Alps to southern Scandinavia. In Scandinavia this culture is called Battle Axe Culture; in northern Germany and the Netherlands the name used is Single Grave Culture (Fig. 2).

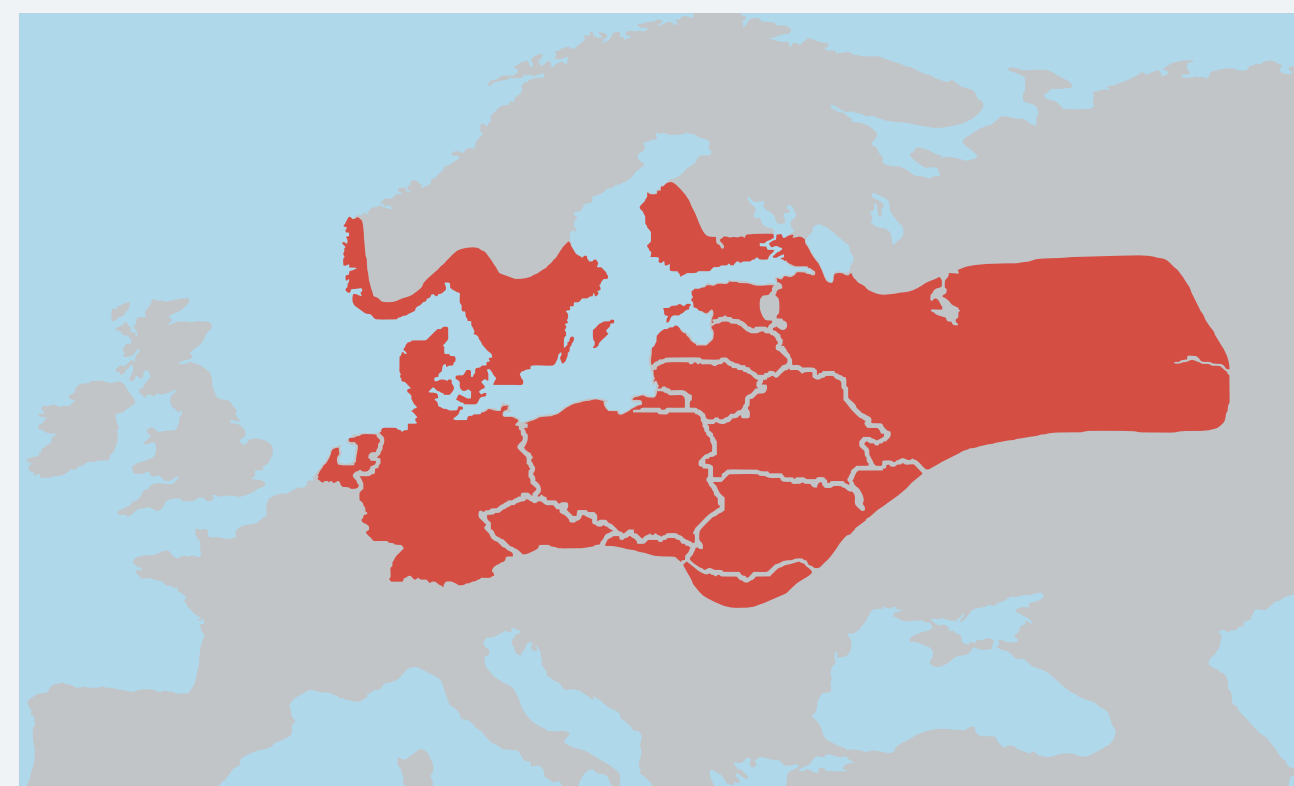


Fig. 2 – Map of the Corded Ware Culture 2800-2500 BCE (www.eupedia.com)

Some burial areas were small (a dozen graves), and in some well-researched cases the necropolis Corded Ware Culture consists of several hundred graves, divided into small groups and covering multiple phases of culture (e.g. Víkřetice, district Chomutov; Prague – Jinonice district Prague; Vlíněves district Melník). Presented burial grounds are situated in the central part of Bohemia (Fig. 5). The frequency, location of graves, and composition of additions indicate generally known indicators of Corded Ware Culture. Relatively well-preserved skeletal remains in both cases allow for further analysis.

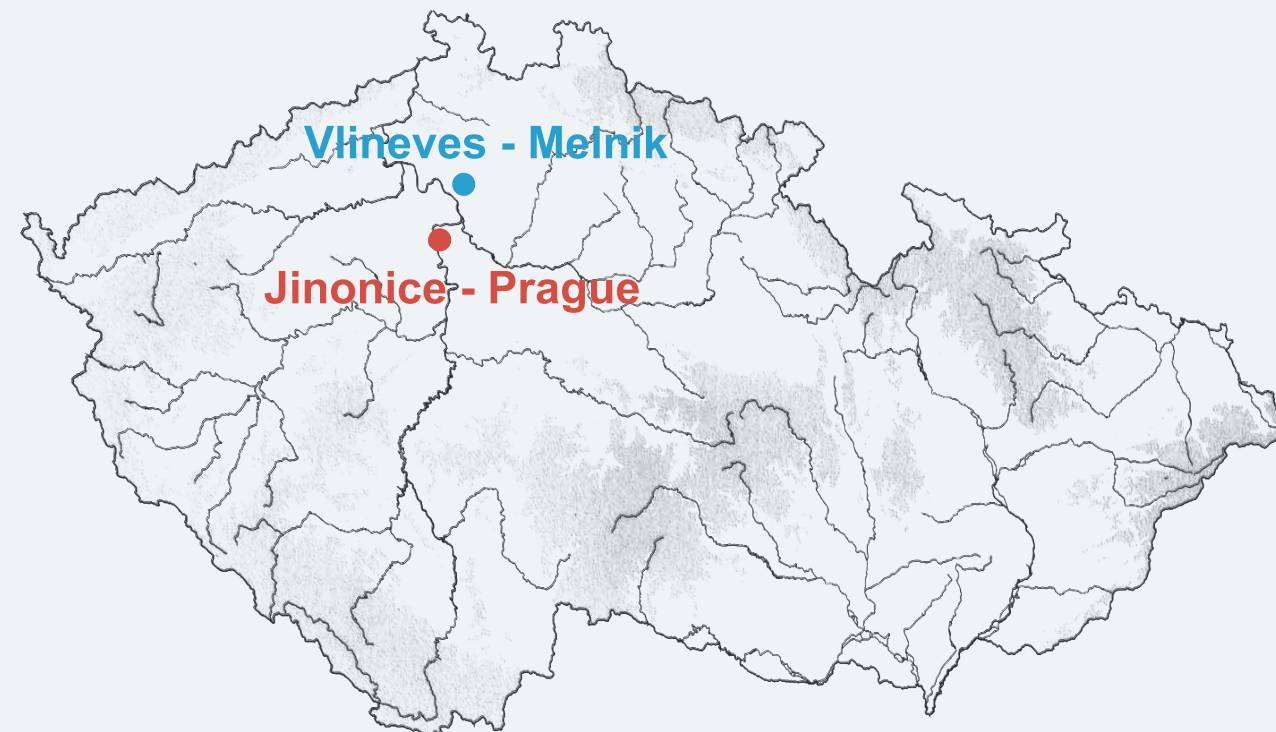


Fig. 5 – Burial grounds in Central Bohemia

Burial ground Vlíněves district Melník is situated in the northern part of Central Bohemia in the flat landscape on the left bank of the Elbe, at an altitude of about 163 m above sea level. In 1999-2008, there were excavated 75 graves of Corded Ware Culture divided into three groups³. Only 26 graves contained chipped stone industry (Fig. 6). Burial ground Jinonice district in Prague lies in the middle of central Bohemia, on the southwest outskirts of the capital city of Prague, at an altitude of approximately 320 m above sea level. From the northern and southern part, two river streams flow around the area of necropolis. In 1979-1986 there were excavated 56 graves of Corded Ware Culture divided into six groups⁴. Chipped industry contained 30 graves (Fig. 7).

In the Czech Republic the Corded Ware Culture appears most probably in central Germany and takes place approximately between the years 2800 - 2500 BCE. The internal chronology of the Czech group has not yet been fully defined, to a significant degree of resolution contributed M. Buchvaldek⁵ and E. Neustupný².

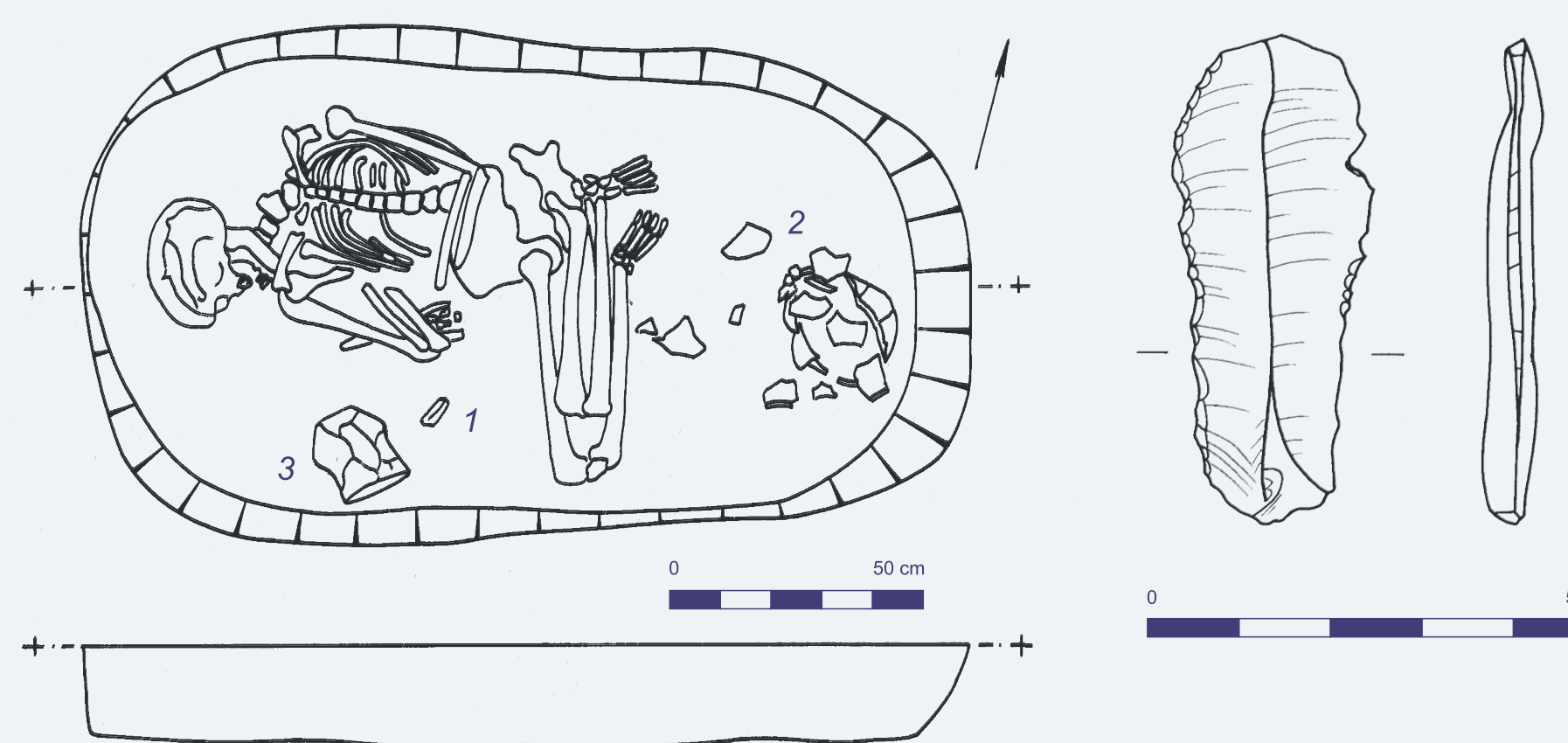


Fig. 3 – Typical male CWC grave goods (1 - chipped stone industry, 2 - amfora, 3 - beaker)³

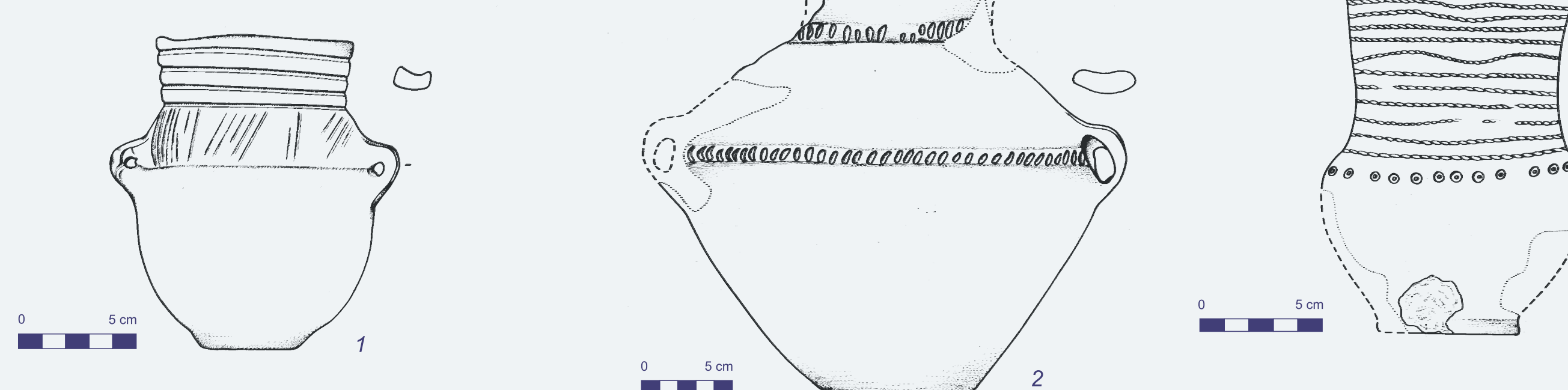


Fig. 4 – Typical female CWC grave goods (1 - small amfora, 2-6 - chipped stone industries)³

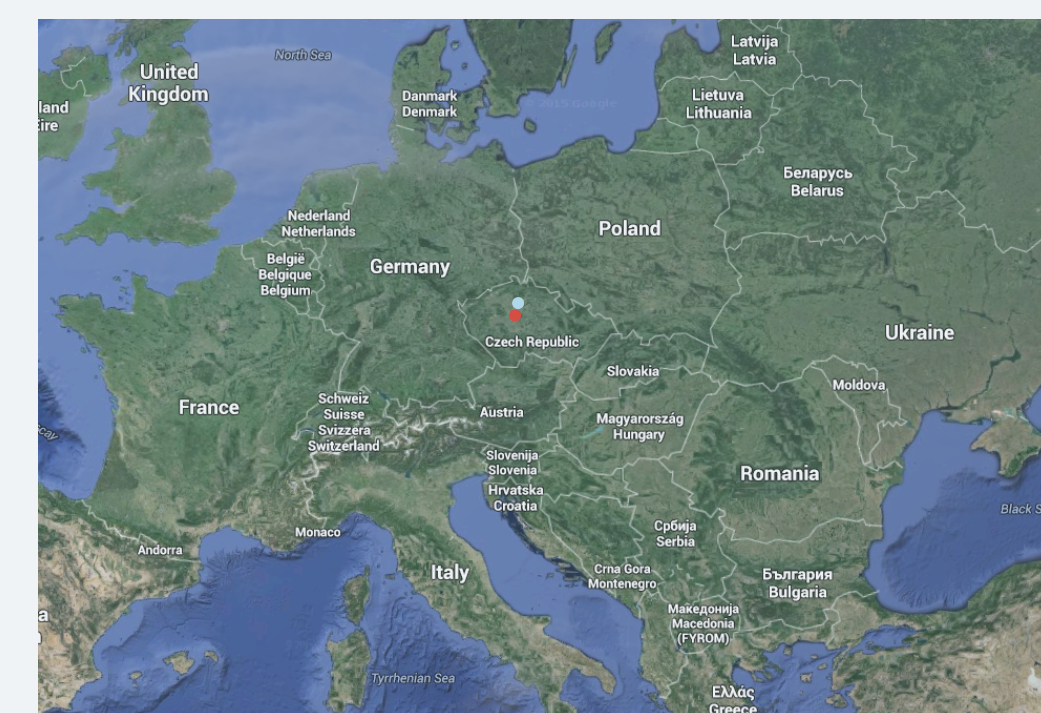


Fig. 1 – Burial grounds Vlíněves (district Melník) and Jinonice (district Prague) in Central European context

Culture settles the most fertile areas of Bohemia and rarely 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 funeral activities. An unambiguous way of burying is the inhumation in shallow tomb pits, often with interior wooden construction. These are usually the graves of individuals (except funerals of adults with children). Saving the orientation of the body in a crouching position and sepulchral additions show a differentiation by gender: man lies on his right side, head to the west, and woman on her left side, head to the east, both facing south.

According structure of addition to sex can allocate groups: a) artifacts that are found in men: hammer axes, axes, stone maces, beakers, bone artifacts (Fig. 3) and b) artifacts with the majority occurring in women: Copper ornaments, pots, small amforas, animal teeth, rings and ornaments from shells (Fig. 4). A specific group remains chipped stone industry.

The burial difference 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 populations has taken a long time. The early idea of the male dominance, so called Matriarchal Myth⁶, and of the easy pattern *male = hunter, female = gatherer* showed in the light of new researches as too reductive and inaccurate.

The better understanding of the real women's roles 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 relative sciences especially during the 1980s and 1990s⁶ 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 artifacts from prehistory or the new application of modern methods on older finds. The microwear analysis belongs to the useful archaeological 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 in the prehistory were created e.g. by L. Hurcombe⁷, M. – A. Dobres⁸ or Jane Peterson⁹.

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 Jinonice and Vlíněves burial grounds and tries to find similarities or differences in connection to their gender.

Vlíněves: The microwear analysis was applied to 35 silicite artifacts, and the work traces were found on 20 these artifacts and one case was unclear (grave 2898, N. 1194 – woman - adult; Fig. 8). More than half of the used tools have work traces on more than one edge (both edges and/or tip of the artifacts). The state of the retouches or polishes allows for interpretation of the contact material (category of the contact material) in ten cases. The group of stone artifacts coming from 10 male graves consists of 11 artifacts. Two flints from them wear the traces typical after work with plants – cereals or grass. The other artifacts have no significant use-wear traces for interpretation of particular contact material, and some of them show no visible work retouch, 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 plants (three cases), bones or antler (two cases), hide (three cases) and probably meat (one case) /Fig. 9/. Similar to the first group, some artifacts have no visible work traces, but the intentional retouch was present in all cases (Fig. 10, 11).

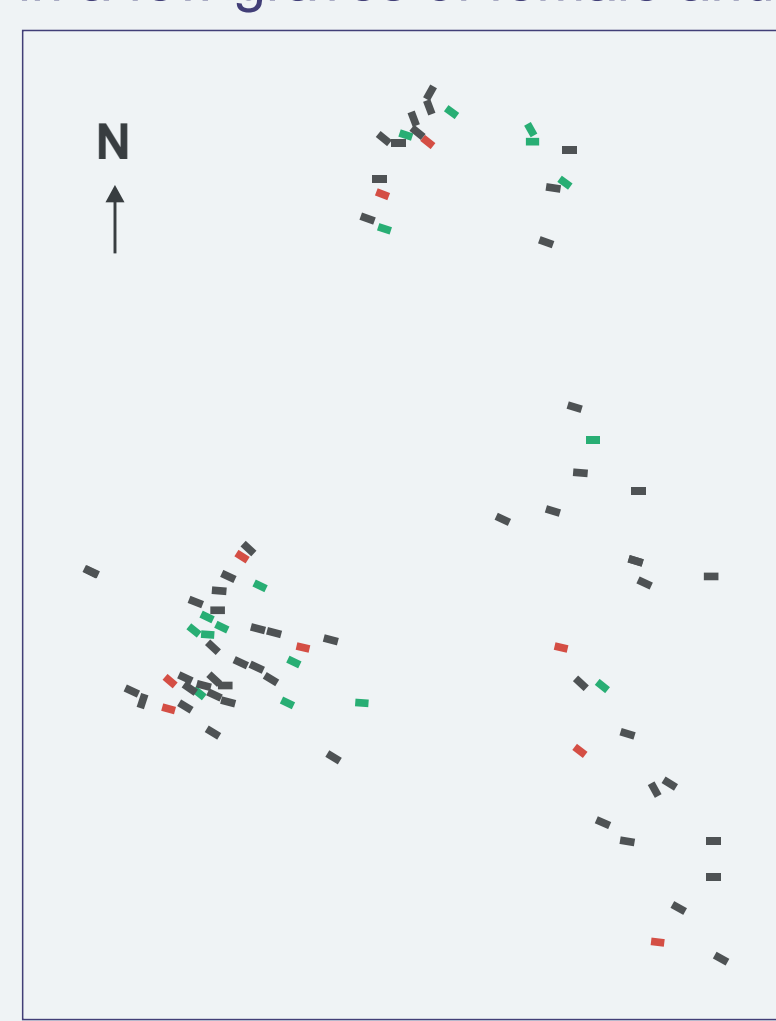
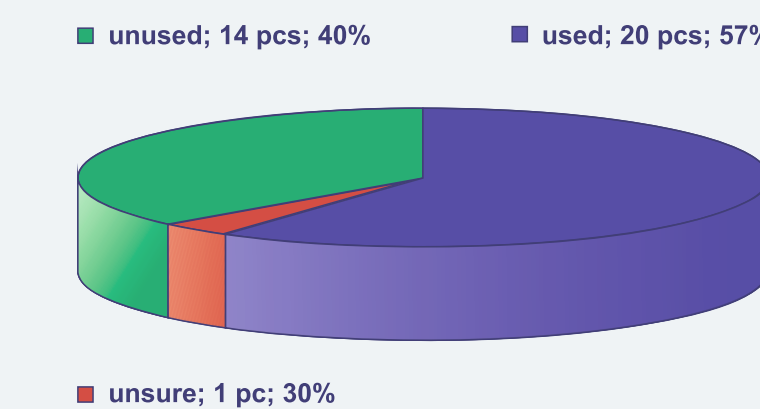


Fig. 6 – Spatial distribution of CWC graves in Vlíněves (Melník) with a chipped stone industry³:



Vlíněves	20
used	20
unused	14
unsure	1
Total number	35

Fig. 8 – Application of use-wear analysis in Vlíněves (Melník)

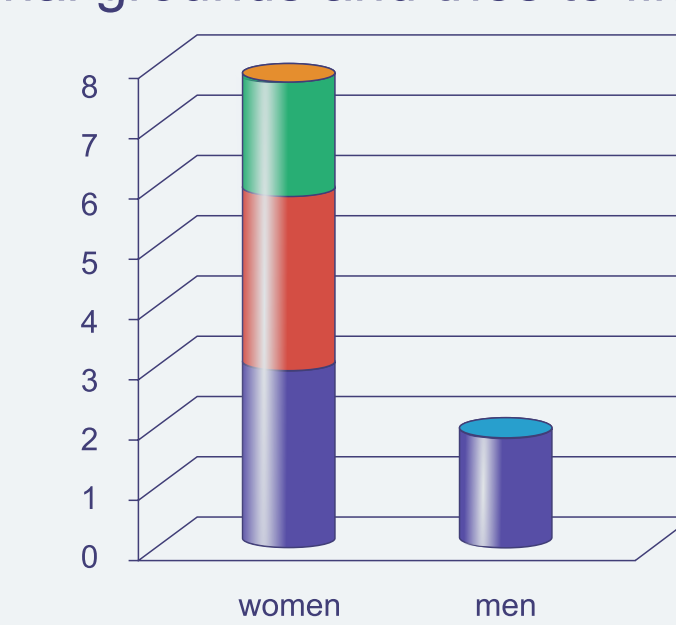


Fig. 9 – Contact materials

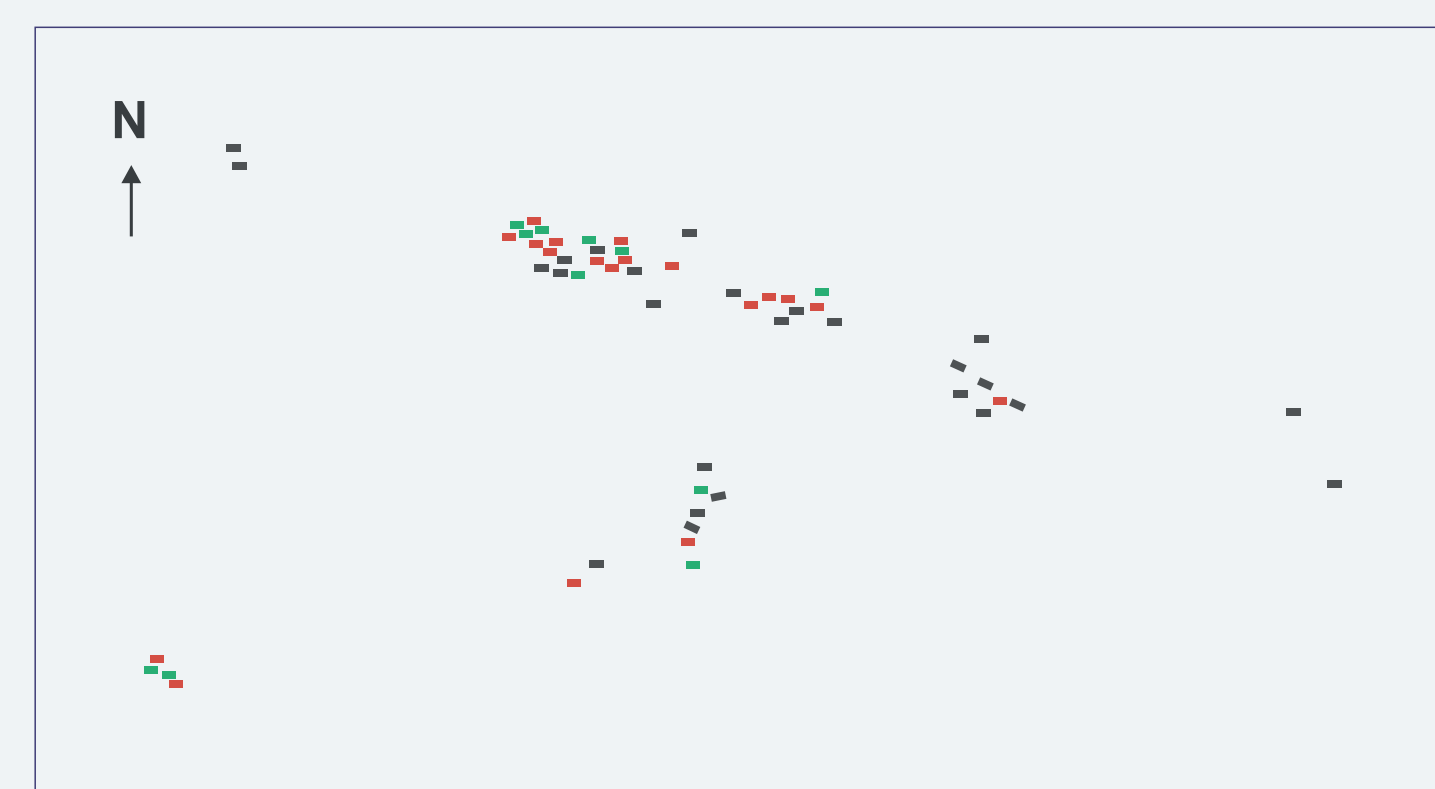
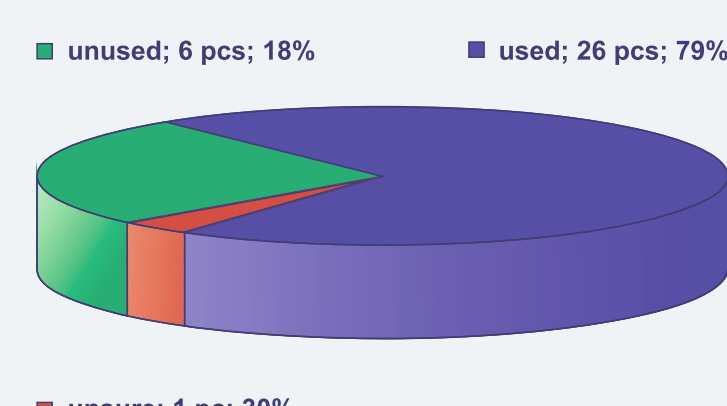


Fig. 7 – Spatial distribution of CWC graves in Jinonice (Prague) with a chipped stone industry⁴:

■ male graves
■ female graves
■ graves without chipped stone industry



Jinonice	26
used	26
unused	6
unsure	1
Total number	33

Fig. 12 – Application of use-wear analysis in Jinonice (Prague)

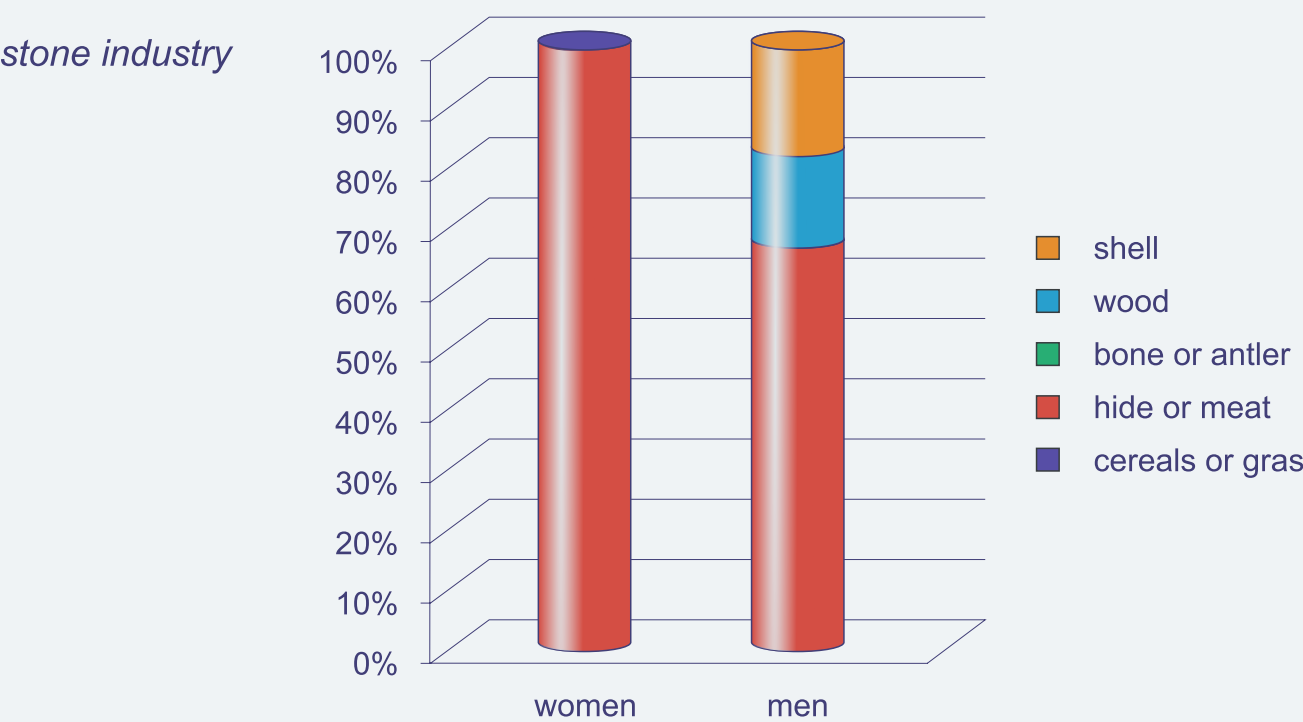


Fig. 13 – Contact materials

Jinonice: The microwear analysis was applied to the amount of 33 silicite artifacts. The work traces were found on 26 these artifacts (involved 12 tools with work traces on more than one edge) and seven artifacts were without found work traces or were unclear (grave 24, A158/2002 woman – child; Fig. 12). The state of the retouches or polishes allows for interpretation of the particular contact material (category of the contact material) in eight cases. The group of stone artifacts coming from 22 male graves and one *probably male* grave consists of 23 artifacts. Three flints from them wear the traces interpreted as traces after working on hides. One other tool has use-wear traces typical for working with meat and hide, one implement shows the signs of contact with quite hard material, probably shells. And one artifact was used on some plants – probably wood. The group of stone artifacts coming from 10 female graves consists of 10 artifacts (Fig. 13). The results of the analysis show 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 for practical purposes. Therefore, they seem to be actual possessions of the persons and not, for instance, 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.

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⁹Design & Graphic: K. Petrišćáková, M. Kafka, I. Kyncl. Photos by L. Hroníková, Drawings by M. Fabíková
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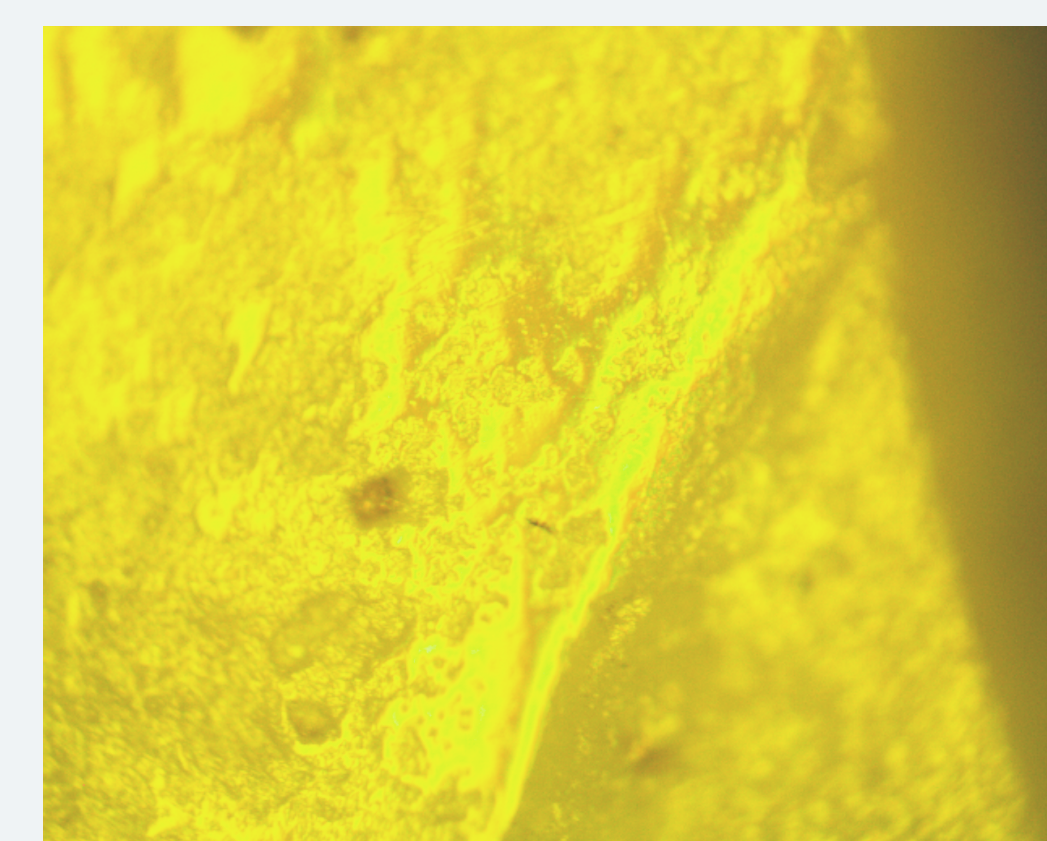


Fig. 10 – Vlíněves, N. 611, 100x, ventral side, polish

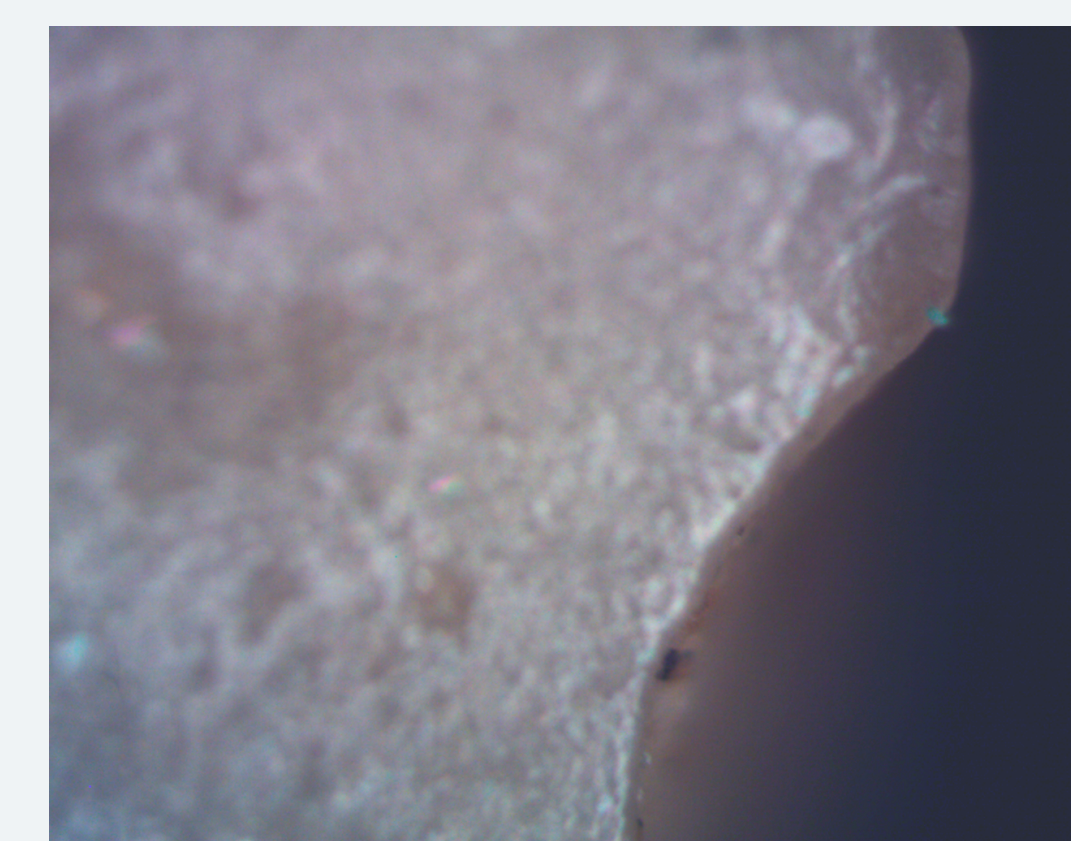


Fig. 11 – Vlíněves, N. 412, 100x, ventral side, polish