

Child archer-warrior and his ‘toys’ from the Bell Beaker cemetery in Popůvky

Dětský lukostřelec a jeho „hračky“ z pohřebiště kultury zvoncovitých pohárů v Popůvkách

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KEYWORDS

Bell Beaker phenomenon – Eneolithic – Moravia – burial – archery – childhood

ABSTRACT

In Central Europe, the Bell Beaker phenomenon is inextricably linked to finds of archery tools equipment and with the first abundant occurrence of copper artefacts. Archery attributes and copper artefacts (mainly daggers and ornaments) are found in the wide area of Bell Beaker distribution, which enables a wide range of researchers to share and connect knowledge about these finds. These artefacts are mostly found in the graves of adult males (exceptionally females) and are referred to as symbols of belonging to archer-warriors, i.e. a group with special and significant status. Sometimes these artefacts also appear in children's graves. However, children (especially very young ones) could not perform the full role of archers and/or warriors, so we interpret the presence of archery equipment and daggers as a symbol of unspecified inheritance. One such child's grave was also discovered during the recent excavation of the Bell Beaker burial ground in Popůvky near Brno, Czech Republic. In the presented paper, this grave is presented in connection with the hitherto rather neglected issue of the position of children at the end of the Moravian Eneolithic period. Also, potential relations with other deceased individuals at Popůvky cemetery will be discussed.

1. Introduction

The Bell Beaker phenomenon ranks among the better-researched periods of Moravian prehistory (Ondráček 1961; Dvořák 1989; 1990; 1991; 1992; 1993; Dvořák et al. 1996; Dvořák, Peška 1993; Matějčíková 1999; Ondráček et al 2005; Turek 2006; Matějčíková, Dvořák eds. 2012; Peška 2013, etc.), but it also receives considerable attention in the broad context of Western and Central Europe, which are territories where this phenomenon reached almost everywhere. However, despite the relatively extensive source base (numerous burial and settlement sites), some aspects of (not only) the Moravian Bell Beakers remain quite lightly explored, a not almost unknown. These aspects also include the life of children and their potential status and role in society at the time.

The paper deals with one of the most interesting graves of the recently excavated Bell Beaker cemetery in Popůvky – grave H858, where a 5-year-old child (probably a boy) was buried. This grave was chosen for its interesting grave goods, with the help of which we will try to shed light on some of the relationships in the local community. Of course, it must be remembered that this is only one grave; after all, the Bell Beaker community was to a certain extent a society focused on the individuality of its members (at least this is reflected in the funeral rite). At least in the graves in Popůvky, individualisation was evident, and there was also a hint of certain social structures, which we will explore in this paper. Popůvky ranks among the largest Bell Beaker graveyards in Moravia and will certainly provide additional interesting information for the state of knowledge of the Moravian part of the Bell Beaker phenomenon.

2. Childhood in archaeology

Childhood is an important part of human life, and it undoubtedly already was for prehistoric populations. Unfortunately, however, this critical stage of life remains almost completely outside the interest of archaeology, including Czech archaeology. In particular, we know very little about childhood in ancient times (Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze Age...), but in later periods the quantity and quality of sources of information gradually increase the closer we get to the present day. It can be said that archaeologists have been dealing with the issue of childhood since roughly the last quarter of the 20th century.

In Czech archaeology, we are talking about the last 20 years of research. However, these are often only isolated studies, often limited only to a description of archaeological finds. In their studies, E. Čermáková (2002; 2005; mainly the Neolithic period), K. Remišová Věšínová (2013; 2017, 184–192; social roles in general, gender), J. Turek (2000; 2013; the end of the Eneolithic period) and especially L. Vělová (2009; 2010; 2011; 2014; 2018; Vělová, Tisucká 2011; prehistory, mainly the Bronze Age).

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<https://doi.org/10.47382/pv0641-04>

Received 6 December 2022; received in revised form 8 Februar 2023.
Available online 24 April 2023.

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Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

The low interest of archaeologists in the issue of childhood, especially in prehistoric societies, is most likely due to the lack of suitable sources of knowledge. Basically, the only reliable evidence of children's lives are their burials. However, the anthropological material from these burials is often very poorly preserved, as children's skeletal remains are more fragile compared to adult skeletons. Moreover, children's burials are often shallower, which makes them more susceptible to external conditions. The grave goods of children's graves are often poor or non-existent, and we also face problems with their interpretation (Vélová 2018).

From other archaeological finds, some miniatures of standard artefacts (small vessels, miniature tools or weapons, etc.) can perhaps be linked to childhood as toys. Far more often, however, these artefacts are interpreted as evidence of cults and ritual activities (Turek 2000).

One of the other reasons for the lack of knowledge of children by archaeologists is their presumed passive role in society. Children are not traditionally thought to have engaged in activities whose traces would be important for learning about the life of ancient societies. However, this is a view influenced by contemporary thinking and societal norms. New starting points for research on the archaeology of children (or childhood) try to break these dogmas and be more objective in considering the potential abilities and roles of individuals in relation to their age. This is primarily aided by ethnological observations, e.g. in connection with the study of various initiation ceremonies, etc. (Vélová 2018).

3. Childhood in the Bell Beaker phenomenon

If we focus on the position of children in the context of the Bell Beaker (BB) phenomenon, we find that we have the same gaps here as in other periods of ancient prehistory. Within the framework of Czech archaeology, we have noticed a certain shift again thanks to the work of J. Turek (2000; 2013) and L. Vélová (2010; 2011; Vejskalová 2009). We know that children's graves do not deviate from the burial customs of the entire population in terms of the character of the grave pit and grave goods, i.e. they generally do not differ greatly from the graves of adults. Noteworthy are rich graves, probably belonging to boys, containing objects typical of 'more important' male burials such as wrist guards, arrowheads, bow-shaped pendants, copper daggers and possibly jewellery. J. Turek (2000; 2013) believes that these graves could be evidence of a system of attributed hereditary power.

Despite quite good knowledge of the funeral rite of the Moravian BB phenomenon (Dvořák 1990; 1991; Dvořák, Hájek 1992; Dvořák et al. 1996; Matějčíková, Dvořák eds. 2012; Peška 2013), we still must consider that the burial rite reflects the ritualized part of the life of the community and their 'real' life could differ from the ideas we form based on the research of their graves. Some information about deceased people could be obtained through anthropological research (health condition, diet etc.), unfortunately (as mentioned above), the skeletal remains of children are by their nature far more fragile compared to the bones of adults and often are not even preserved. Many graves of individuals whose age cannot be determined may have belonged to children, but this can no longer be reliably proven. This is one of the main reasons why so many children are lost to us from the archaeological record. During the BB phenomenon in Moravia, the burial rite is relatively fixed, at least as far as the burial of the deceased's body is concerned (orientation of skeleton), and the rules for the burials of men and women were also observed for children (there are naturally exceptions, but also for adults; Havel 1978; Matějčíková, Dvořák 2012a; Peška 2013; Turek 2013).

If we look at the grave goods in Moravian BB graves, we find that some artefacts appear repeatedly in children's graves: some types of vessels (pots and pitchers), rarely amber artefacts (Matějčíková, Dvořák 2012b, 354; Struhárová 2015, 16). It is interesting that all of these artefacts tend to be typical (or more typical) for female graves. It is possible that this may have expressed a bond between a female relative of the child. After all, we can think similarly if a female attribute is found in the grave of an adult individual (including males). On the other hand, come clues can be provided by some parts of grave goods that are not found at all or hardly at all in children's graves. We know that archer's attributes rarely occur in children's graves: bow-shaped pendants, arrowheads and wrist guards, as well as copper daggers, although these artefacts predominate in male graves. We can think about some kind of hereditary (Clément 2020a; 2020b), but we do not know whether this inheritance was automatic or conditional.

As far as we have mapped the occurrence of artefacts apparently reserved only for a certain group of people regardless of age (and exceptionally also gender; archer's equipment, wealthy goods), other artefacts that can point to the possible different role of children remain somewhat neglected, namely work tools. We already know that children could somehow be included in the social awareness of the community, but we do not know how much they applied themselves in everyday life and activities, which apparently formed a substantial part of their lives. Since wooden working tools, of which a large number certainly existed, rarely survive, we must focus our attention on tools made of more durable materials: stone and bone. For example, at the Popůvky cemetery, chipped stone tools were found mainly in the graves of adults, possibly in the graves of individuals of determined age (in two cases it was cremation, in one case inhumation). Of course, it is possible these were children in cases of individuals with an indeterminate age.

We can consider whether there is any evidence of differential social status of certain children within the Moravian (and also Bohemian) Bell Beaker burial rites. Excavations have revealed that stone tools or weapons accompany some children's burials, mainly those in a male position. In the context of children's graves, these artefacts clearly had symbolic significance (especially with very young children), which may well be anticipating their social roles as adults. Finds of similar situations are also known from the Late Eneolithic (contemporary with BB) Corded Ware culture (Turek 2000). This may mean that demonstrating the status (including the future one) of the child was becoming a common part of the funeral practises of the then societies.

4. Bell beaker cemetery in Popůvky

The Popůvky graveyard is located on the edge of the village of the same name at the 'Vintrovna' site. The village of Popůvky is situated about 8.7 km from Brno (from the city centre; Fig. 1). The graveyard was excavated from 2017 to 2019 in several phases depending on the building activities. The cemetery is situated on a gentle slope oriented to the south between two brooks (Augšperský and Troubský). A total of 82 grave pits were excavated and some other features (Linear Pottery culture, Eneolithic, prehistory in general) were also discovered (Fig. 2). Some of the grave pits were empty from an anthropological point of view, though grave goods were present (human remains were missing); some of graves were completely empty. Human remains from 75 individuals were collected and recently analysed, including cremations. The inhumation burial rite was predominant, and cremations represented only about 10.7%, which is the usual proportion at Moravian BB cemeteries (Dvořák 1993;

Dvořák, Matějíčková 2012a; Peška 2013). A detailed analysis of the whole graveyard, including an anthropological analysis, archaeological finds analysis and cemetery structures, was recently published (Bedáňová, Tvrđý et al. 2022). The Popůvky burial ground can be probably categorized under the group of

finds II, and elements from both the upper and lower phases of the Moravian BB are missing.

Grave H858

4.1 Grave and burial description

Grave number H858 (Fig. 3, 4) is a rectangular pit with rounded corners with the following size: 180 cm long, 100 cm wide and 36 cm deep. The pit was filled with dark brown (almost black) soil without any visible admixtures. The skeleton was lying on the bottom of the pit, roughly in its middle part, and was oriented with its head towards the NNW, face to the east. No construction remains (postholes, etc.) were identified either in the pit or in the surrounding area. The grave is located in the eastern part of the cemetery in the middle of a larger group of graves (see in Fig. 2, 5).

4.2 Anthropology¹

The individual from burial H858 was determined as a child about five years old. Unfortunately, the genetic analysis to determine the sex of the individual was not successful because of the poor preservation of the bones. In this case, the sex of the individual was given based on the orientation of the skeleton, which is characteristic of burials in the BB. Also, the grave goods resembled male burials (see below). The bones were eroded on the surface with a buff colour. Only parts of skull with teeth and

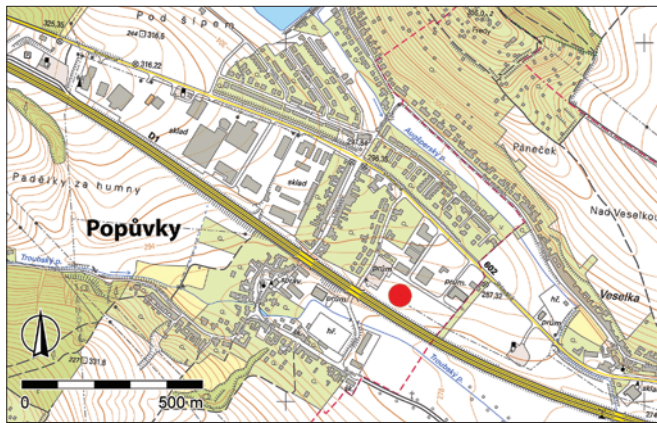


Fig. 1. Location of Bell Beaker cemetery in Popůvky. Author L. Bedáň (map source: © ČÚZK).

Obr. 1. Lokalizace pohřebiště kultury se zvoncovitými poháry v Popůvkách. Autor L. Bedáň (mapový podklad: © ČÚZK).

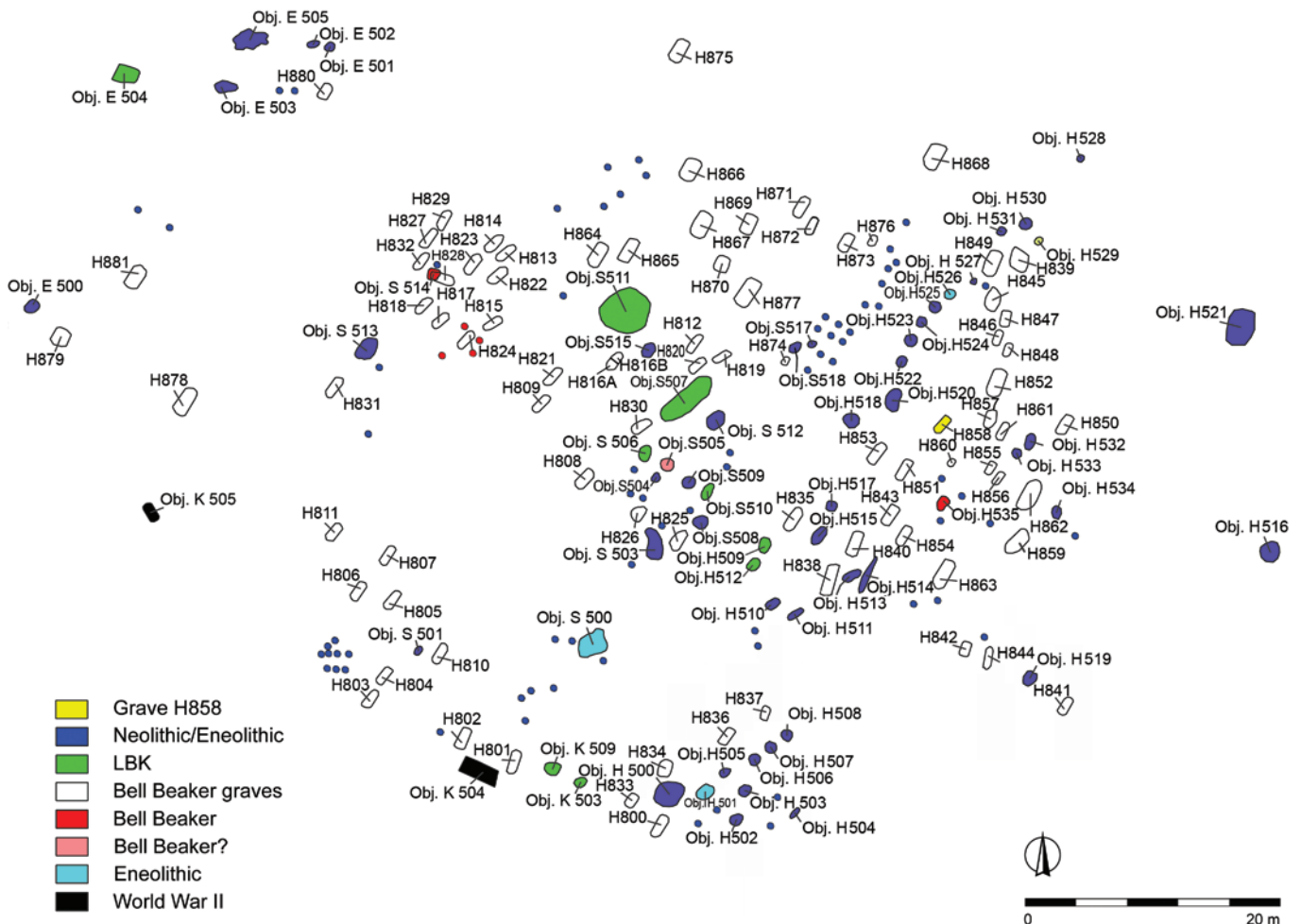


Fig. 2. Map of Bell Beaker cemetery in Popůvky. Grave H858 is marked in yellow. Author L. Bedáň.

Obr. 2. Plánek pohřebiště kultury se zvoncovitými poháry v Popůvkách. Hrob H858 je vyznačen žlutou barvou. Autor L. Bedáň.

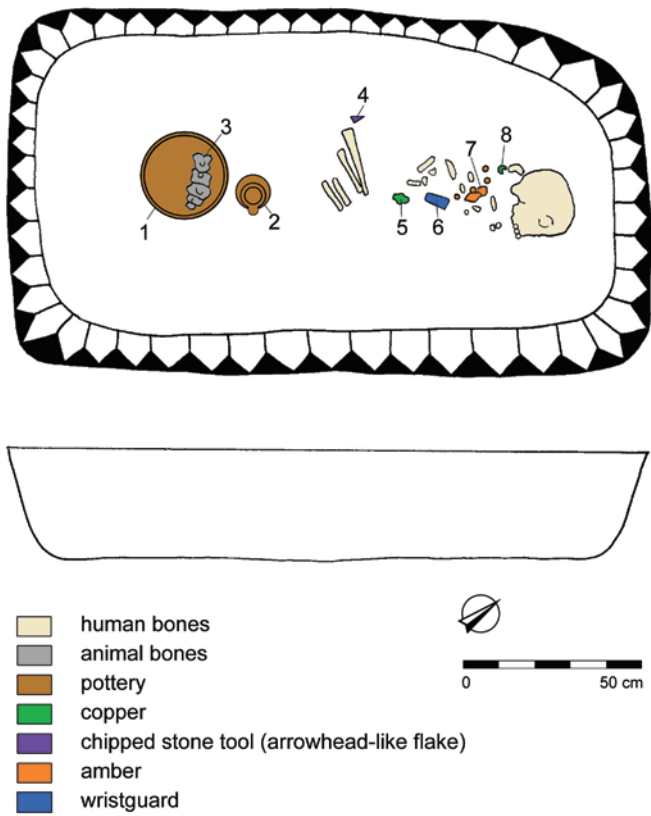


Fig. 3. Grave H858 with marked grave goods based on a field drawing. Author A. Bedáňová.

Obr. 3. Hrob H858 s vyznačenými prvky hrobové výbavy podle terénní kresebné dokumentace. Autor A. Bedáňová.



Fig. 4. Field photo of grave H858. Archive of the Moravian Museum, Brno.

Obr. 4. Terénní fotografie hrobu H858. Archiv Moravského zemského muzea, Brno.

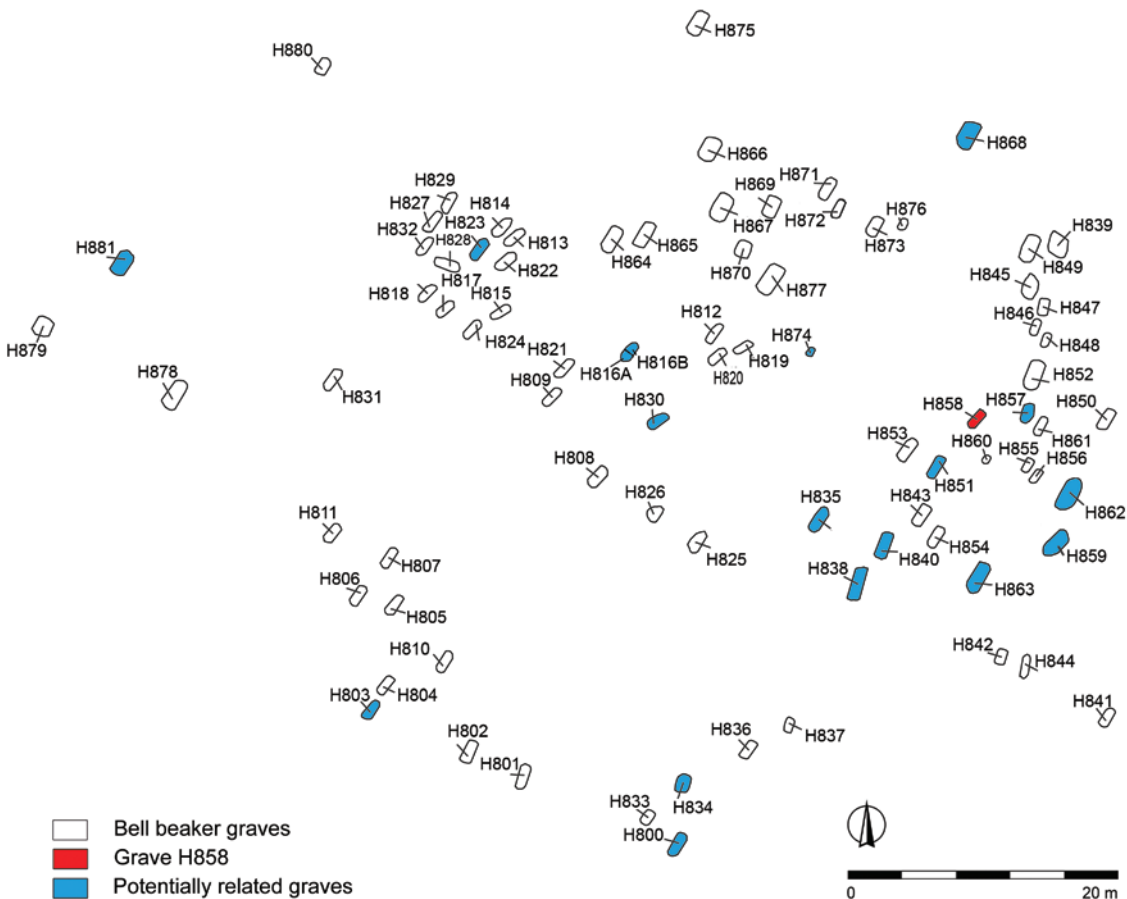


Fig. 5. Grave H858 and potentially related graves mentioned in Tab. 2. Author L. Bedáň.

Obr. 5. Hrob H858 a potenciálně související pohřby zmíněné v tab. 2. Autor L. Bedáň.

some parts of limb bones were preserved from the skeleton. The age was determined based on tooth development. There were some congenital anomalies distinguished on the bones: *ossicula suturae lambdoideae* (inserted bones in the skull lambda suture) and *tuberculum canine* (small bump on the lingual side of frontal teeth); both of these anomalies could be hereditary.

4.3 Grave goods

The grave goods (Tab. 1, Fig. 3, 6) consist of two vessels (bowl and cup; Fig. 3: 1, 6: 2 and 3: 2, 6: 1), a wrist guard (Fig. 3: 6, 6: 4), an arrowhead-like flake (Fig. 3: 4, 6: 3), fifteen animal bones (Fig. 3: 3), amber beads (five whole pieces and three unspecified fragments; Fig. 3: 7, 6: 7a-h) and copper artefacts: two fragments of twisted wire (Fig. 3: 8, 6: 6; some kind of round ornament) and one undetermined piece of metal, probably from a dagger (Fig. 3: 5, 6: 5). The vessels were lying near the presumptive position of the feet (the feet were not preserved), with the cup being slightly closer to the skeletal remains. Both vessels were undecorated and did not show any peculiarities compared to most of the vessels found in the cemetery. The animal bones were deposited in the bowl – probably as a meal. Pork was a quite common grave good in the BB (Peška 2013, 207). Based on an archaeozoological analysis,² the bones came from a single pig (0.75–2 years old). The flake was probably situated behind the pelvis, which is a rather common position connected with a potential quiver of arrows slung over the back (Havel 1978, 107; Olivík 2006, 31–34; Peška 2013, 194). The wrist guard was lying in front of the thorax, but unfortunately the hands were not preserved so we cannot decide if the wrist guard was deposited in the common position at the distal part of forearm (Turek 2004, 207). Due to the poor preservation of the bones of the deceased, we cannot positively determine the position of copper and amber artefacts. One fragment of copper wire was found near the nape so it could be part of some earring, hair jewellery or garment ornament. The specific position of the second wire

fragment is unknown because this artefact was found during the final preparation and excavation of skeletal remains, though it was probably situated in a similar area. A piece of copper, probably a fragment of a dagger, was lying in front of the lower part of the thorax or near the waist. These are typical positions of daggers in BB graves, as we presume that they were carried at the waist (Matějčková, Dvořák 2012c, 189). The dagger-like shape is better recognisable on field documentation photos (Fig. 7), while after conservation a smaller piece survived because of the considerable fragility of the artefact. There were at least five amber beads in the burial and another three fragments of amber were discovered. It is not possible to decide whether these fragments come from one artefact (bead) or from another three different artefacts. They could also be fragments of one of five beads, especially bead number 198154b, which is not preserved in its entire form. Amber artefacts are fragile and could easily be destroyed by external natural conditions while lying in the grave. Amber beads had various shapes: globular, flat diamond shape and flat rectangular. The latter is not very common, while the other two occur regularly. The flat beads were drilled lengthwise (diamond) and through their width (rectangular), the globular beads were drilled in the middle. The drilled hole was always 2 mm in diameter, so it could be made by the same tool for the purpose of wearing on one string of a specific thickness.

4.4 Relationships to other Popůvky graves

The potential relationships to other graves in Popůvky graveyard were explored especially with regard to the location of the grave and grave goods (see Tab. 2 and map in Fig. 5). Anthropological aspects were also considered. A genetic analysis is currently being performed.

There are several graves in Popůvky cemetery that shows some potential relationships to grave H858. First, grave H857, where a 10-11-year-old girl (sex was genetically verified) was buried, seems to hold some evidence of kinship. From an anthropological

Inv. No.	Number	Material	Description	Size				Position in burial	Fig.
				Length (mm)	Width (mm)	Height (mm)	Weight (g)		
198156	1	erratic flint / KL II chert type	arrowhead-like flake	21	12	3	0.610	behind pelvis	3: 4, 6: 3
198155	1	metabazite	wristguard	55	22	6	14.270	in front of the thorax	3: 6, 6: 4
198157	15	animal bones	pig bones (0.75–2 years old)			–		in the bowl	3: 3
198152	1	copper	fragment of wire	36.5	2	–	0.222	near the nape	3: 8, 6: 6
198153	1	copper	fragment of wire	21	1.5	–	0.141	?	3: 8, 6: 6
198151	1	copper	fragment of dagger?	26	18	1	1.546	near waist?	3: 5, 6: 5
198154a	1	amber	diamond shaped flat bead	36	23	6	2.378	upper chest or neck	3: 7, 6: 7a
198154b	1	amber	rectangular flat bead	18	12	5	0.665	upper chest or neck	3: 7, 6: 7b
198154c	1	amber	globular bead	10	10	9	0.635	upper chest or neck	3: 7, 6: 7c
198154d	1	amber	globular bead	10	9	6	0.341	upper chest or neck	3: 7, 6: 7d
198154e	1	amber	globular bead	9	7	7	0.196	upper chest or neck	3: 7, 6: 7e
198154f-h	3	amber	fragments of beads	8	8	2-4	0.180–0.200	upper chest or neck	3: 7, 6: 7f-h
				Diameter of rim	Vessel thickness	Vessel height			
198149	1	ceramics	bowl	233	8	62		below the feet	3: 1, 6: 2
198150	1	ceramics	cup	70	4	76		below the feet	3: 2, 6: 1

Tab. 1. Information overview of grave goods from burial H858. KL II = Krumlovský les chert, variation II.

Tab. 1. Přehled informací o hrobové výbavě z hrobu H858. KL II = rohovec typu Krumlovský les, varianta II.

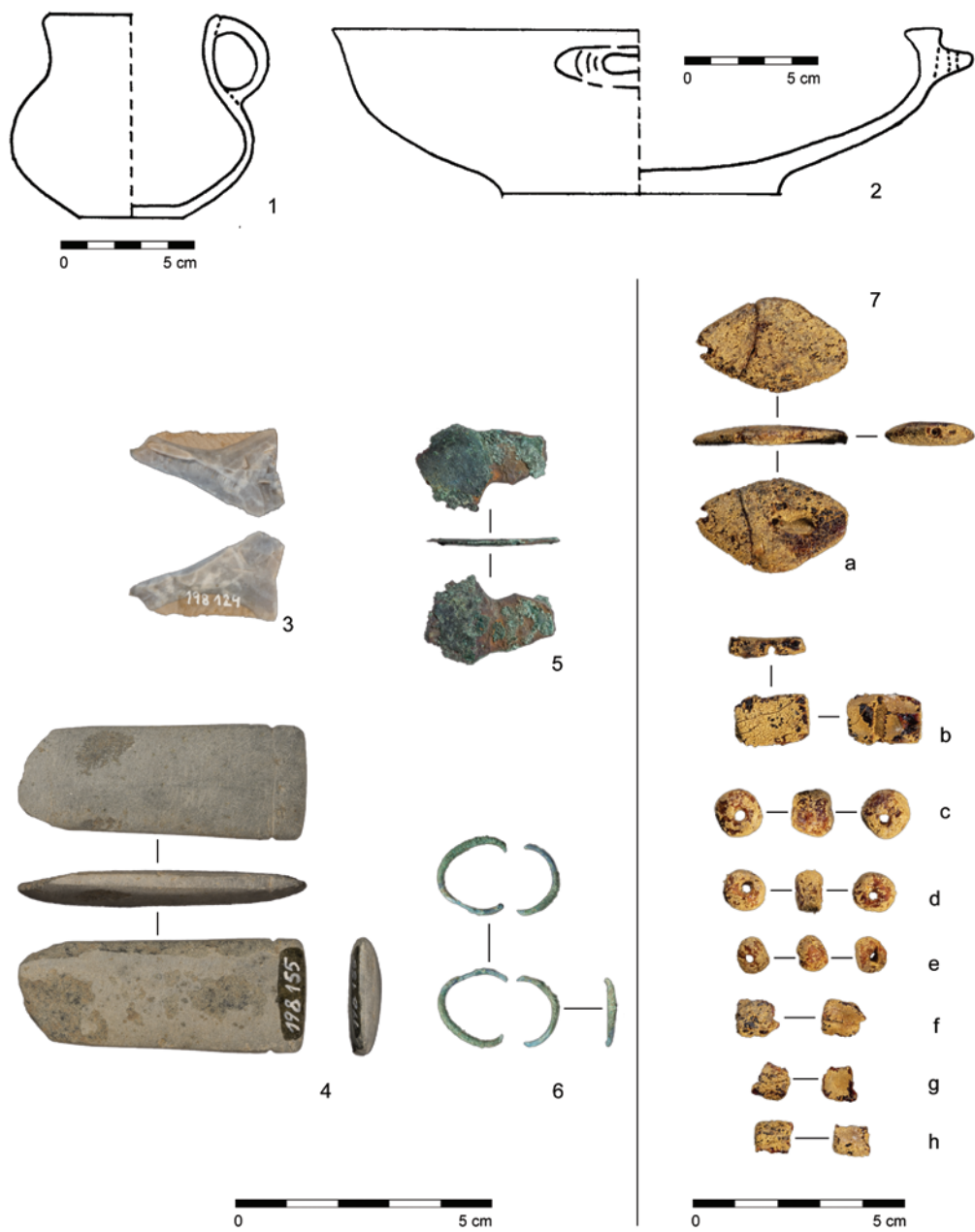


Fig. 6. Grave goods from burial H858. Photo by L. Bedáň, drawing by K. Bučová Čerňavová.
Obr. 6. Hrobová výbava pohřbu H858. Foto L. Bedáň, kresba K. Bučová Čerňavová.



Fig. 7. Detailed photo of copper dagger in burial H858. Archive of Moravian Museum, Brno.
Obr. 7. Detailní fotografie měděné dýky z pohřbu H858. Archiv Moravského zemského muzea, Brno.

Grave No.	Sex[1]	Age	Burial rite	Archer's attributes			Copper artefacts	Golden artefacts	Amber artefacts
				Arrowheads	Wristguard	Bow-shaped pendant			
H800	F	25–35	inhumation						
H803	M	24–60	inhumation		1				
H816B	?	40?	cremation	4					
H823	M	35–40	inhumation	2					
H830	M	20–24	inhumation	1					
H834	?	?	cremation		1				
H835	M	20–30	inhumation	1	1				
H838	M	40–50	inhumation		1		1		
H840	M	40–50	inhumation	1	1				
H851	M	35–40	inhumation	2					
H857	F	10–11	inhumation						1
H858	M	5	inhumation	1	1		2+		5+
H859	M	20–30	inhumation	2		5	1		
H862	M	50+	inhumation	1		1			
H863	M	30–35	inhumation	1		1	1	2	
H868	M	20–30	inhumation		1				
H874	M	adult	cremation			1			
H881	F	20–25	inhumation				1		

Tab. 2. Graves at Popůvky cemetery with grave goods typical for archers and rich graves. Grave H858 is marked in grey. [1] Combination of gender (archaeological sex – burial rite), anthropological analysis and genetics, if available; F = female, M = male.

Tab. 2. Hroby na pohřebišti v Popůvkách s hrobovou výbavou typickou pro hroby lukostřelců a pro bohaté hroby. Hrob H858 je zvýrazněn šedou barvou. [1] Kombinace pohlaví (archeologické pohlaví – pohřební rituál), antropologické analýzy a rozborů genetiky, pokud jsou k dispozici; F = žena, M = muž.

point of view, both children had the same hereditary congenital anomalies: *ossicula suturae lambdaeideae* and *tuberculum canine*. Moreover, these two children were the only individuals with the amber artefacts in the whole cemetery. Graves H857 and H858 were in the eastern part of the cemetery, about 3 m from one another. Their location reinforces the assumption of a mutual relationship, if not direct kinship. In general, graves with amber artefacts are quite rare at BB cemeteries. The presence of amber is usually related to the higher social status of the deceased, especially for the women (Peška 2013, 203; Struhárová 2015, 17–18).

The H858 boy probably had some connection with the group of archers buried in Popůvky, too, as he had some parts of the characteristic 'archer-package' attributes: a wrist guard and 'arrowhead'. As we can assume, children could not decide what they would have in their grave as a grave goods (Turek 2000), especially when we consider very young children. The age of five years, which is the age of the H858 boy, was probably too young for the child to think about his own funeral, even if we consider that encountering death was much more common in communities at that time. What is very interesting about the archer's signs in the boy's grave is that both the 'arrowhead' and wrist guard are not 'true' tools. It is also questionable whether they could have been functional at all. The chipped artefact lacks the typical retouch, and in fact is just a pointed flake copying the arrowhead's shape. We can say the same for the wrist guard: the basic shape was kept, but there are just three holes indicated on one edge of the wrist guard, the second edge is intact. In addition, a tiny groove is visible near the indicated holes; it could be the mark of some string that facilitated the wearing of this wrist guard. Perhaps the drilling of the holes was too laborious in this case, so the maker decided to use string for attachment instead. What is more, the wrist guard looks like some reused artefact, as the shape is not regularly rectangular and we can see some sharpening at the one edge (the edge with indicated holes and string groove). Perhaps the artefact was originally an axe or

similar tool, which the maker remade into a wrist guard. These facts lead us to the idea of some kind of provisional or symbolic wrist guard or perhaps a toy, i.e. the same case as with the 'arrowhead'. The 'toy form' of these artefacts is rare in the Popůvky cemetery: all arrowheads and wrist guards found at cemetery were in their standard form, considering size and production techniques. All men who had this typical archery equipment were adult. Of course, we cannot rule out that the H858 boy had some basic archery know-how, but for some reason, his potential knowledge was not reflected in a way similar to adults. However, we can at least assume some relationship to the local archery community. Despite his age, the people who buried him wanted to highlight his social status. It is not likely that he himself was an archer-warrior in the traditional (or true) sense, but probably, he wanted to be or was required/supposed to be at the proper age. In terms of the spatial distribution of archer's graves, their biggest concentration is in the eastern part of the graveyard, including H858 (Fig. 5).

The extraordinary position of the H858 boy in the local community was also emphasised by the copper and amber artefacts. In terms of both types of these rare artefacts, this boy has the largest number of them: at least two copper artefacts including a dagger and at least five amber beads. From this point of view, the boy is one of the richest people in the whole graveyard. Other rich burials are especially H838 (man with a small copper dagger), H859 (man with a fragment of a copper artefact), H863 (man with a copper dagger and two tiny golden jewels) and H881 (woman with a fragment of a copper artefact). The H858 boy is the only child with copper artefacts, so it is presumable that he had some connection to the part of the community with some relationships to metallurgists or they had access to prestigious goods that were not available to everyone. Most of these rich graves are concentrated in the eastern part of the graveyard like the archers – some archers also had copper artefacts and perhaps they were more eminent than other 'ordinary' archers.

5. Discussion

Since we are primarily dependent on burial finds when researching childhood in prehistoric societies, one of the main questions also arises in connection with the BB burials: what do rich burials (or burials with the attributes of some significant social group – e.g. in the case of BB burials of archers) of children express? We can assume that the difference in grave goods, like that of adults, is also intended to point to some social phenomenon, which, however, we cannot yet explain in more detail. Since burial is a ritualised activity influenced by religious ideas and ideology, it must be considered that the character of the burial does not reflect the form of everyday life. One of the possibilities of what the character of the funeral should express is a demonstration of the relationship of the deceased to the community that buried him. For example, J. Turek assumes: *'child burials accompanied by objects that may be interpreted as symbols of wealth and social status do not reflect the reality of the social relationships, simply because these children died so young. Because other male child burials do not include any such symbolic artefacts, it can be assumed that this group of sub-adult male burials may represent socially favoured individuals of some sort. They might have been firstborn sons – potential heirs of social status and wealth within family or of a whole community'* (Turek 2000). Another possibility is, for example, determining the role of the deceased in the afterlife, which could have had a certain, if not the greatest, significance for people at the time.

At the Popůvky cemetery, we observe grave H858 of a boy with rich grave goods, which is surrounded by other rich graves, some of which also express an archer-warrior status. This spatial arrangement is traditionally explained by the expression of family ties (Matějčíková, Dvořák 2012a). This would support the theory that social status, expressed by e.g. jewellery or archery attributes, was maintained within the family and even inherited. However, further investigation into the potential heritability of social status leaves us with more questions than answers. We come across, for example, the question of how the mutual relations between other (less wealthy) groups of the community were expressed – because we also have to consider artefacts that have not been preserved (mainly artefacts made of wood or leather), which somewhat distorts this issue. Another significant problem is the number of children's graves at burial grounds. Specifically, at the Popůvky cemetery, burials of children are completely absent in the southern part of the cemetery: does this mean that there were no children in this group, or were they buried in a different way, or their graves were not preserved? Could the possibility of burying a child at all have been socially established in some way?

If we return to the symbolism of the grave goods, the question of placing lavish artefacts in children's graves arises. How valuable were the ostentatious artefacts to the community when they could afford to put them in a grave, a child's grave at that, who probably didn't deserve anything more in life than being born? Couldn't these people have become poorer by 'sacrificing' their symbols of power and prestige to a buried child? And if they had enough of them, were these artefacts still ostentatious enough to adequately express prestigious status? Some of the questions could perhaps be answered by the results of genetic analysis (currently in process for Popůvky) in order to establish the kinship of the buried people. A guide for the selection of analysed individuals could be, for example, precisely the spatial connections in the burial ground or the similarity in the grave goods. For the time being, we can perhaps make do with the theory of inheritance of social status expressed by certain artefacts. After all, this fact already provides us certain information about the life of society at that time, including the position of children.

6. Conclusion

At the BB cemetery in Popůvky, a 5-year-old child was discovered in grave H858, which, based on its grave goods, can be described as one of the richest graves in the whole cemetery. There are visible elements of archer-warrior status (arrowhead-like flake, wrist guard, copper dagger), but also ostentatious artefacts of a more feminine nature such as amber beads. The combination of these artefacts points to the individual's relationship with an eminent part of the local community. Given that, with such a young child, we do not assume that he could have influenced the composition of his grave goods, it can be supposed that the rich artefacts were added to his grave by his male and/or female relatives, who had access to the lavish articles, and therefore he was somehow a privileged member of the community.

The rich artefacts in the children's graves indicate that social status may have been hereditary. Given that even the rich grave goods in the graves at the Popůvky cemetery are in general not very rich compared to other BB graveyards (or graves), it can be assumed that the deceased in grave H858 was of great importance to the community, as they did not hesitate to 'sacrifice' their most valuable things to him.

Burial H858 from Popůvky testifies to the fact that BB people did not see their children as passive members of society that just needed to be taken care of, but that they planned their future and perhaps even prepared them for it. Technologically non-standard stone archery artefacts, which could also be described as toys, can refer to the (planned) effort of a 5-year-old boy to penetrate the secrets of archery. This boy's death was probably a great loss to them and therefore they said goodbye as best they could – in fact, in the same way they said goodbye to adults. As similar burials of very young children with miniature (or toy) wrist guards are rare in the Central European BB area (Clément 2020b), the question remains whether these individuals were special on their own or whether the community's relationship to them was exceptional.

It is possible that we have discovered the grave of a 'prince', the son of some chiefs destined for the bright future of the community? In any case, the character of the H858 burial tells us some other small information about the possible role and position of children in the Bell Beaker world. If we gradually put these individual pieces of information together, we will soon need to know more about children's lives at the time. He has also raised some research questions that should be, in any case, considered in further research.

Acknowledgments

The author of the paper would like to thank Lukáš Bedáň for creating maps and taking photos of most of the artefacts. Further thanks go to colleagues from the Moravian Museum, Brno, especially Zdeněk Tvrđý and Martina Roblíčková, for all their help with some important parts of this paper. This article was created with financial support from the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic as part of institutional funding for the long-term conceptual development of the Moravian Museum research organisation (DKRVO MK 000094862).

Notes

- 1 Anthropological analysis conducted by RNDr. Zdeněk Tvrđý (Moravian Museum, Brno).
- 2 Animal bones were identified by dr. Martina Roblíčková (Moravian Museum, Brno).

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Resumé

Předkládaná studie prezentuje, z hlediska hrobové výbavy, jeden z nejbohatších a nejzajímavějších hrobů z pohřebiště kultury se zvoncovitými poháry v Popůvkách (okr. Brno-venkov). Jde o hrob H858, ve kterém bylo pohřbeno 5leté dítě, podle orientace skeletu mohlo jít o chlapce. V hrobové výbavě se objevují prvky tzv. lukostřelecko-bojovnického balíčku: drobná nátepní destička s nedovrtnými otvory, fragment malé měděné dýky a úštěp napodobující svým tvarem hrot šípu. Zejména nátepní destička a „šipkovitý“ úštěp evokují představu hraček či jakýchsi prozatímních (zkušebních, testovacích...) verzí standardních artefaktů – nátepních destiček a hrotů šípu – které bývají spojené

s hroby dospělých mužů. Kromě toho obsahoval pohřeb také jantarové korály, které obvykle řadíme k prvkům spíše ženské honosné výbavy. Vzhledem k tomu, že takto malé dítě pravděpodobně samo nerozhodovalo o složení své hrobové výbavy, je nasnadě se domnívat, že přítomné artefakty odrážejí jeho potenciální roli ve zdejším komunitě. Zejména jantarové korále a malá měděná dýka odkazují na určitou vazbu s významnými členy společnosti, neboť v kontextu celého pohřebiště patří tyto artefakty k těm nejvýznamnějším. Honosné artefakty v pohřební výbavě dětí mohou poukazovat na určitý společenský status, který je vázán na vlastnictví těchto předmětů, a který může být dědičný. Konkrétně v případě malého chlapce v hrobě H858 v Popůvkách je znatelný jeho nemalý význam pro danou komunitu, vzhledem k tomu, že se její členové vzdali svých možná nejceněnějších předmětů pro zajištění chlapcova pohřbu. Zároveň pohřeb tohoto chlapce demonstruje fakt, že nositelé kultury zvoncovitých pohárů nepovažovali své děti za pouhé pasivní členy společnosti (jak máme často tendenci je vnímat ze současného archeologického pohledu), ale že se zamýšleli nad jejich budoucí rolí ve společnosti. Je také možné, že bylo dítě na svou budoucí roli připravováno, což by mohlo být jedním z vysvětlení přítomnosti „prozatímních“ období některých artefaktů lukostřelecké výbavy. Charakter popůveckého hrobu H858 každopádně přináší další informace o potenciální roli dětí v souvislosti s fenoménem středoevropských zvoncovitých pohárů. Naše poznatky tak mohou přispět k lepšímu porozumění dětskému světu dávných komunit, což je stále jedno z nejméně probádaných témat pravěké archeologie.

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