
Health, power and welfare from the perspective of Early Bronze Age cemeteries in SW Slovakia

Martin Bača*¹ and Jozef Bátora*^{†1}

¹Comenius University [Bratislava] – P.O.BOX 440, 814 99 Bratislava 1, Slovakia

Abstract

This paper will deal with two well excavated cemeteries located in SW Slovakia – Branč and Jelšovce. Hundreds of uncovered graves which are dated in terms of relative chronology to BA1 and BA2/3 according to Reinecke's chronological system (roughly 2200BC-1500BC in terms of absolute chronology) provides good data for analysis of Early Bronze Age population. Findings from both cemeteries were already published and evaluated from the point of social stratification. We can safely assume, that in both cemeteries there is evidence that wealth was distributed unevenly. However not much was written about how much this social inequality corresponds with the health of the buried population. The aim of this paper is therefore to focus on this topic from a larger perspective of two consequent archaeological cultures – Nitra and Únětice. The quick analysis of available bioarchaeological data (diet, paleopathology) already suggests significant differences in the health of the buried population. These differences are observable on two levels. Firstly there are differences between the buried population on the level of a single generation, suggesting access to better food resources for some privileged individuals. Secondly there are differences on the level of multiple, consequent generations. For example the Nitra culture population had much better access to wider range of food resources than subsequent Únětice population, which (for example) suffered from quite significant deficit of Vitamin C leading to scurvy which was evident mostly among the children (almost double presence of scurvy among children of Únětice culture than Nitra culture). This is even more striking if we realize that Únětice population had much better access to more valuable" artefacts (mostly metal ones) than previous Nitra population. We are asking the question, why was malnutrition so spread among the Únětice population, when the artefact assemblages suggests better access to long-distance networks and higher level of social organization and welfare in general (as is also suggested by the research of fortified settlements from this period)?

Keywords: Early Bronze Age, Slovakia, Únětice culture, Bioarchaeology, Social inequality, Malnutrition, Health

*Speaker

†Corresponding author: jozef.batora@uniba.sk