

## On the report “From the Sungir Children to the Romito Dwarf”

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The aim of the Formicola's contribution (Current Anthropology. 2007. 48: 446-453) is to point to a possibility of human sacrifices in the Upper Paleolithic in Europe. Nevertheless, the article fails to give real grounds for supposing there were such practices.

In short, the author believes that the existence of multiple burials can be explained by the possibility that one of the buried persons died naturally, whereas the other(s) was/were killed intentionally, i.e. he comes with the concept of Paleolithic ritual murder.

The article says: „Analysis of the European record reveals an intriguing high frequency of multiple burials“, but the connected tables 1 and 2 show that of 24 European Gravettian burials there were just 6 multiple and of 24 Italian Epigravettian 5 were multiple. This contradicts the author's view and shows that multiple burials were in a small minority. Another author's point is that the members of the common graves have generally different sexes. Nevertheless, table 1 shows that of 6 Gravettian multiple burials 3 contained members of different sexes, whereas the sexes of some individuals from the other three burials were questioned. Moreover, one of the three latter graves, namely the triple burial of Dolní Věstonice contained only males. One of the latest publication on this topic (Brůžek et al. 2006) says about the individual who was earlier considered female that “...it is best viewed as a gracile male...” Table two shows that of 5 Epigravettian multiple burials one contained members of different sexes, one the same sexes and the sexes of some individuals from the other three burials were questioned. Considering all the facts, it seems that the type of burial that, according to the author, allegedly leads to the question about sacrificial practices, was neither typical, nor common (4 proven cases of 48 mentioned in tables 1 and 2).

We should also keep in mind high selectivity of the burials. For example, there were unearthed and documented remains of 25 individuals in Předmostí and 29 in Dolní Věstonice (both in Moravia, the Czech Republic) (Vlček, 2002). Of these, only 1 individual from Předmostí and 5 from Dolní Věstonice were included in the aforementioned table 1.

Considering the possibility of sacrifices, it is not unimportant that it was not proven that any individual in Upper Paleolithic burials died of an injury (Svoboda, 1999) and the commented article does not come with any information of this kind.

An important factor was also the climate. Long and severe winters of the Ice Age on the one hand made burying difficult, on the other hand low temperatures could inhibit decaying of the body, which made it possible to postpone the burials. Secondary burials are not unknown (Svoboda, 1999). There was also practice of burying in the open air (Svoboda, 2006). It follows that simultaneous inhumation did not necessarily mean simultaneous death. It is even possible to imagine that when a "shaman" died, and some time after the death of a shaman another/other member/members of the group died, the event could be considered symbolical and it would be important to bury the two (or more) together. A possibility that somebody wanted to follow the shaman voluntarily may seem ridiculous, but I think it is still more natural than ritual murder.

As for the children of Sungir, one can assume that also a child could have some „supernatural“ or healing abilities in the eyes of the then people.

Finally, I would like to point out to a problem that I consider important. I do not think it is a good idea to accuse any ethnic group of practising ritual murders without any real proof, only on the basis of mere speculations.

There were times when Europeans considered most native inhabitants of the other continents cruel and mindless. These views are fortunately no longer acceptable. I believe it is time we began to treat also the Paleolithic human beings with respect. By doing so, our chances that we will understand them better will increase substantially.

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