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Bear necessities? On potential uses of the ursine *baculum (os penis)* in archaeological and ethnological contexts

Liane Giemsch

The Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos* L.) is an omnivore member of the carnivore family. With its Holarctic distribution it is the most widespread type of *Ursidae*. Its natural habitat reaches from Western Europe and Scandinavia across Siberia and into Northern America¹. Together with the Polar Bear, it is the largest surviving land based predator of the northern hemisphere. Brown Bears are notable for their adaptive nature. This is reflected in the varied habitats that they occupy. They occur in the treeless arctic tundra, in meadows, boreal forests, on coasts, in mountain regions and deserts². Although the origins of the Brown Bear are likely to date back to the early Pleistocene, it first appears in central Europe only in the late Middle-Pleistocene interglacials. During the latest interglacial, it occurred regularly and – based on the few find spots – appears to have been more common than the Cave Bear (*Ursus spelaeus*)³ that has been shown to have been hunted even in the early Palaeolithic, 30,000 years ago⁴. With the extinction of the significantly larger Cave Bear prior to the last glacial maximum c. 23,000 years ago⁵, the Brown Bear was able to extend its range. By the Holocene it formed part of the natural fauna of central Europe.

The human-like appearance and manner of the Brown Bear – its occasional upright walk, its sitting posture, the hand-like use of the front

paws, the appearance of its face, its tears, its diet as an omnivore, the appearance of its excrement and its masturbation behaviour made it appear less as an animal than as a human in disguise. As such, many cultures elevated the “Master of forests and animals” to being the embodiment or son of a higher being in their myths. Equally, it was frequently seen as an ancestor of humankind – and hunting it needed to be accompanied by complicated rituals⁶.

As early as the Middle and Late Palaeolithic, Cave Bears and Brown Bears played an important role for humans. This is shown by finds of Cave Bear skulls and bones in several European and Caucasian caves (e.g. the Drachenloch [Switzerland]⁷, Salzofenhöhle [Austria]⁸, Grotte Chauvet [France]⁹, Veternica [Croatia]¹⁰, Peștera Rece [Romania]¹¹, Zeda Mgvime Cave in the Tsutskhvati Cave Complex [Georgia]¹², clay-moulded bears such as those found in Montespau, France¹³ and bear depictions in Palaeolithic art (e.g. Grotte du Pechialet [France]¹⁴, Les Trois-Frères [France]¹⁵, Geißenklösterle [Germany])¹⁶. All these attest to the special relationship between humans and bears. Overall, 55 depictions in 23 caves and nearly 80 artefacts resembling bears are known from Europe¹⁷.

Aside from depictions of bears in art and notable bone deposits in caves, the special link

1 Von Koenigswald 2002, 110; Maria Pasitschniak-Arts 1993, 3.

2 Swenson et al. 2000.

3 Von Koenigswald 2002, 110.

4 Münzel et al. 2001; Münzel/Conard 2004.

5 Wojtal et al. 2015, 67.

6 Wamers 2009, 14; Wamers 2015, 43 f.

7 Bächler 1921.

8 Ehrenberg 1954.

9 Clottes 2001.

10 Malez 1959.

11 Lascu et al. 1996.

12 Tushabramishvili 1978.

13 Begouën/Casteret 1923.

14 Breuil 1927.

15 Breuil/Nougier/Robert 1956.

16 Müller-Beck 1987.

17 Braun/Zessin 2008, 22.

between humans and bears is shown by bear canine-teeth worn as amulets, as known from several late Palaeolithic or Mesolithic sites. The penis bone, which exists in bears and some other mammals, is repeatedly found in archaeological context. Its use and possible symbolism, however, are little understood. As such, this paper seeks to investigate the archaeological and ethnological context of this particular ursine bone.

The *baculum* in its archaeological context

The penis bone (*os penis* or *baculum* from the Latin for 'stick') is an anatomically various bone that is not joined to any other bone and occurs in five orders of mammals¹⁸. Across all species in which it occurs, it serves several reproductive functions. These include a mechanical supporting purpose, protection of the urethra from compression and reproductive isolation. It furthermore enables extensive mating and stimulation of the female reproductive tract and organs¹⁹.

Male bears are one of the species of mammals with defined penis bones. In archaeological contexts, ursine penis bones occur from the Middle Pleistocene onwards.

Lower Palaeolithic

320 bear remains were identified at Bilzingsleben in Thuringia, a find-spot dating back c. 400,000 – 350,000 years. Bears are one of the species hunted by *Homo erectus*²⁰, and in Bilzingsleben bear remains constitute 11 % of the assemblage of hunted animals²¹. In this, it is remarkable that the assemblage includes mainly skull and paw-bones, almost all other elements of the bear skeleton are not represented. This lead Dietrich Mania to conclude that bear paws had been cut off or remained on the fur when the animal was

skinned. The skulls, too, show traces of specific working suggesting the same as the paws – either they were separated from the remainder of the body or remained attached to the fur during skinning. Of the overall bear-remains, penis bones make up 1,56 %²². The occurrence of penis bones at the site is explained by arguing that it could have remained attached to the fur. Mania suggests that bears were not hunted primarily to serve as food, but for their furs. The skeletal elements listed above remained attached to the furs which were carried into huts, reconstructed by Mania on the basis of distribution patterns, where they may have been used as sleeping areas. This interpretation of structures as hut-like dwellings is highly contested on the basis of the represented fauna²³. As such, the data from the Middle Pleistocene site Bilzingsleben cannot be used for any reliable interpretation of a specific use of ursine penis bones at the hand of *Homo erectus*.

Middle, Upper and Late Palaeolithic

Finds from the Neanderthal-period site Vindija in north-western Croatia include a Cave Bear-*baculum* with circumferential scoring (Fig. 1). Originally, it was assigned to the Upper Palaeolithic level G1²⁴. Several ¹⁴C Dates suggest that this level was mixed with upper and lower levels due to cryoturbation²⁵. An excavation note further appears to imply that the penis bone actually belongs to the Mousterian Level G3²⁶ and should therefore be seen in a Neanderthal context. Without further detailed analysis, it cannot be stated with certainty whether the circumferential scoring was decorative or symbolic, occurred during defleshing or as a result of use of the bone as a tool.

From the middle Upper Palaeolithic onwards, individual *bacula* are known from several sites. The Gravettian levels (AHV, VI, VII) of the

18 Burt 1960.

19 Dyck/Bourgeois/Miller 1999, 105.

20 Mania 1990, 181.

21 Mania 1990, 190.

22 Mania 1990, 195.

23 Steguweit 2003, 41.

24 Malez 1988, 228.

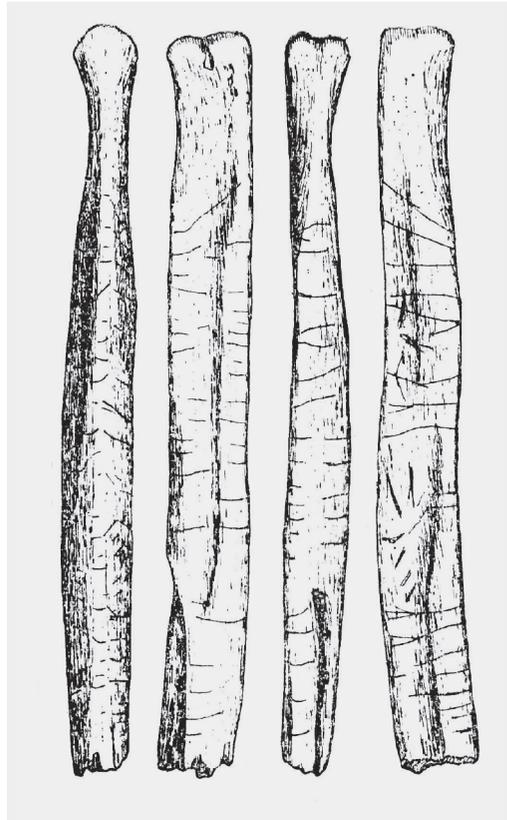
25 Ahern et al. 2004, 29

26 Karavanic 1996.

Brillenhöhle in the Ach valley in the Swabian Alb, dated to 29,000 – 25,000 BP, included an awl made from the penis bone of a Cave Bear. The artefact, held in the state museum of Württemberg in Stuttgart, is generally interpreted as a tool used in the slaughtering process²⁷. The cave site Hohle Fels, also situated in the Ach valley near Schelklingen, known mainly because of a spectacular find of an ivory figurine made several years ago²⁸, also produced a penis bone of a Cave Bear from the Gravettian Levels²⁹. This bone is polished on all sides, suggesting that it was used as a tool; similar types of polishing are known from objects used in leather-working³⁰.

The ursine penis bone of a bear found in the late Palaeolithic double-burial at Oberkassel³¹ is generally interpreted as a grave good (Fig. 2). The c. 14,000 year old grave of a 35–45 year old male and a c. 25 year old female was discovered in the course of quarry-work in 1914. In addition to the human skeletons and ursine penis bone it contains the remains of a dog and two art objects³², making it one of the most important archaeological contexts of the late glacial period. Martin Street was able to identify a series of cuts along the convex edge of the bear bone. These were later overlain by haematite and must therefore have been created before their deposition³³. This suggests a purposeful deposit in the grave. As early as 1919, the original investigator, Max Verworn, interpreted the bone as a cultural grave good and suggested that it had been used as an awl or similar tool³⁴. A similar ursine penis bone, also bearing traces of cuts, was found in the late Magdalénian site Teufelsküche on the Upper Rhine in Baden-Württemberg. Here, the bone is interpreted as part of a hunting assemblage³⁵ or tool³⁶.

The *bacula* from Middle, Upper and Late Palaeolithic contexts may therefore be seen primarily as tools. Only the bone from the funerary context at Oberkassel appears to have had some



1 Penis bone of a Cave Bear with circumferential scoring from the Neanderthal site Vindija in north-western Croatia. Scale 1:1.

form of symbolic function or role. As no further graves with similar finds are known for this period, it is difficult to draw any wider-ranging conclusions. More recent burial sites, however, do include further burials with ursine penis bones as grave goods.

Mesolithic

While bear bones and teeth as grave goods have been identified at numerous Mesolithic burial sites³⁷, no penis bones have been identified in such contexts to date. In many cases, however, archaeozoological analysis of bone finds is still not completed. As such, it cannot be excluded

27 Barth/Conard/Münzel 2009, 9.

28 Conard 2009.

29 Münzel/Conard 2004, 880.

30 Scheer 1995.

31 Szombathy 1920; Mollison 1928; Street 2002;

Giensch/Tinnes/Schmitz 2015, 248 f.

32 Giensch/Schmitz 2015.

33 Street 2002, 280.

34 Verworn/Bonnet/Steinmann 1919.

35 Pasda 1994, 166.

36 Bosinski 2008, 343.

37 Grünberg 2000, 154 ff.; Grünberg 2013, 234.

2 Penis bone of a bear with scraping traces from the Late Palaeolithic grave of Bonn-Oberkassel (Germany).



that identified awls or other tools found in Mesolithic graves may turn out to have been made from ursine penis bones. Of particular note is the deposition of an as yet not further identified bear bone between the upper thigh bones of a female³⁸, found in a triple burial at the Olenij Ostrov site on Lake Onega in Karelia, Russia³⁹. It seems plausible that the deposition of the bone close to the pelvis may indicate use therefore as a fertility symbol – as known from ethnological sources and possibly Neolithic burials (see below).

Neolithic

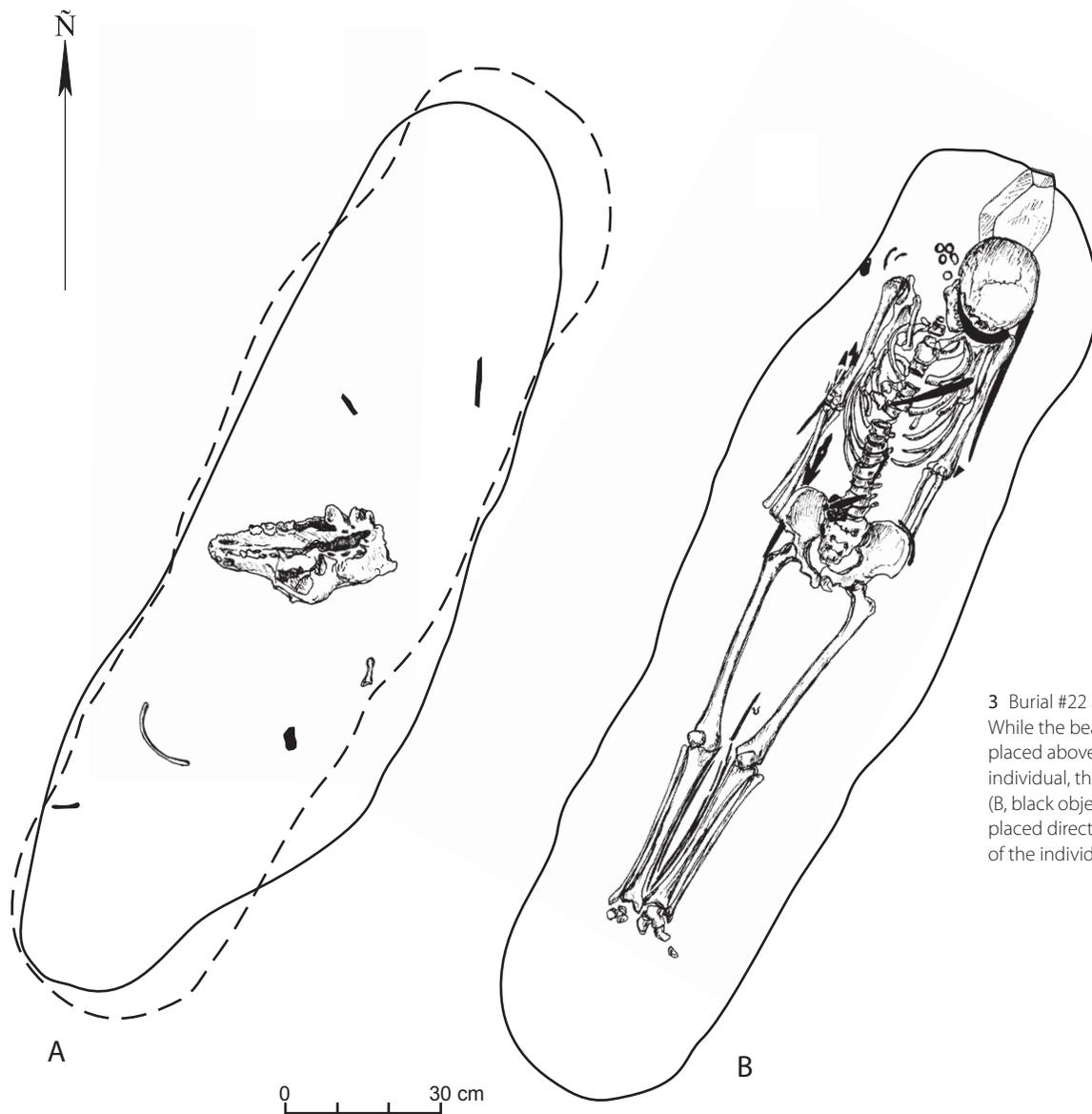
To date, the most important source for prehistoric use of bear *bacula* is the spectacular hunter and gatherer burial site of Shamanka II on Lake Baikal in Siberia⁴⁰. This site, the name of which

translates as “the female Shaman” is dated to the early Neolithic (c. 8,000–7,000 cal. BP) and early Bronze Age (c. 5,400–4,000 cal. BP). It contains the burials of 165 individuals, 154 of which date to the early Neolithic. 35 of these, in turn, contained bones of Brown Bears. The assemblage consists mostly of bear teeth, skull bones and *bacula*. In contrast to the skull fragments, the *bacula* were found directly on the human skeletons (Fig. 3) or in concentrations directly adjacent to the buried individuals. Overall, there are 16 *bacula* fragments or intact bones. These are spread across only eight burials, showing that some graves contained several *bacula*. Six of the graves contained only adult males, or the bones were found in mixed graves but near male individuals. Exceptions to this rule are a *baculum* found beneath the shoulder of a 1.5 to 3 year old child and two further *bacula* that were found amongst

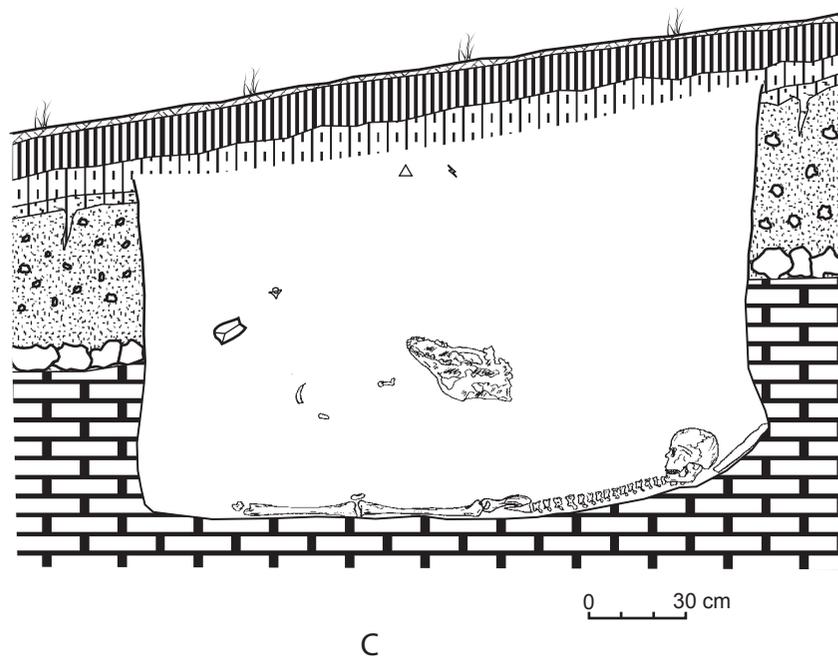
38 Grünberg 2000, 162.

39 Gurina 1956, 304.

40 Losey et al. 2013.



3 Burial #22 at Shamanka II. While the bear skull (A) was placed above the buried individual, the bear *baculum* (B, black object) was diagonally placed directly onto the chest of the individual.



the dissociated and dispersed remains of seven adult individuals of both sexes.

One *baculum* had been smoothed intensively at its distal end in order to create a sharp, awl-like gouging tool. Nine other bones bear slight traces of smoothing or use, while one specimen was deeply scored circumferentially, possibly in order to fasten a string. Another bone was striated along its base; the purpose of this striation is not understood.

The burial site of Shamanka with its graves containing bear skulls and bear *bacula* used as grave goods appears to be the only middle Holocene burial site of this type in the region. The majority of *bacula* is associated with male adults. As such, they could be understood as a direct transmission of the male reproductive organ onto the generative potency and virility of the men of Shamanka II⁴¹. The use of a *baculum* as a grave good for a 1.5 to 3 year old child, however, may imply a belief that the bone helped to transfer the power or strength of the bear to the human. Shamanka II is a burial site of the Neolithic only in chronological terms, and not defined in terms of the Neolithic adaptive package. Furthermore, to date no farming and rearing societies have been identified in which bear *bacula* play a major role. As such it may be concluded that use of the *baculum* was directly connected to life in hunter gatherer societies.

In order to test this hypothesis – and in view of the scarce archaeological data set available – it appears useful to draw upon ethnological data in order to better understand the symbolism of *bacula* for humans, particularly so as it appears that the roots of cultic reverence of bears amongst circumpolar hunter cultures may well reach back to the later Palaeolithic. Whether this rests on a continuity of tradition – despite the implied break in terms of use of bear *bacula* in the Mesolithic as implied by the currently available scarce data sets – or is merely the result of similarities in cultures due to similar life conditions and circumstance, however, must remain an open question.

Use of bear penis bones amongst indigenous populations

Different ethnological sources refer to the use of Brown or Polar bear *bacula* amongst indigenous populations across the circumpolar sphere. The following presents an overview of the source material available:

Friedrich Albert authored a study of the Udege people of the Amur region in Siberia⁴², which includes his own observations of this people as well as those of his deceased colleague Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev. He relates that the Udege and Oroch people – as almost all indigenous populations – condemn the killing of some animals. This is said to stem from the belief that their own tribal history is closely related to these beings. Arsenyev refers to the creation myth of the Udege, who see themselves as descendants of tigers and bears. The Udege see the bear as their forebear and therefore regard him as untouchable⁴³. The mythical story states that a boy grew up and became a hunter: “*once whilst out hunting he came across a bear and injured him fatally with his arrow. Dying, the bear told him that he was the husband of his sister and left him the following legacy: from then on, the sister was never to eat meat from a bear killed by her brother. No woman was to sleep on a bearskin and should at all times keep the os penis (the ursine penis bone) safe at her side and pass it on to her descendants in the female line*”. All of these points are adhered to strictly by the Udege to this day⁴⁴. There are other observations of Udege women carrying amulets of bear penis bones as an *Apotropaion* or ward against infertility⁴⁵. The collections of the Kunstkamera in St Petersburg include a highly interesting Udege vessel that originates in the Khabarovsk Region, from Mount Sikhote Alin on the river Samarga (Fig. 4). Gifted to the museum in 1913 by the famous researcher Vladimir Arsenyev, it is a cylindrical ritual vessel (Inv. Nr. MAE RAS: No 2336–1) often referred to as »*sufulyachi mafagilyamani*«. It measures 22.2 cm in height and is made from birch bark. Neck and base are dec-

41 Losey et al. 2014, 93.

42 Albert 1956.

43 Albert 1956, 109f.

44 Albert 1956, 110.



4 Ritual vessel decorated with 15 ursine penis bones. Siberian Udege culture from the Amur-region, early 20th century. Birch-bark storage vessel for storing spoons that were used in bear feasts. Scale 1:1.

orated with spiral patterns and “birds” painted in black and red paint. A total of 15 ursine penis bones are attached to the upper part of the vessel. It was used to store ritual spoons used to serve boiled bear’s meat during the bear feast. The records of the *Kunstkamera*⁴⁶ further state that “when a bear cadaver was divided, the hunter who killed the animal received its penis. This he would pass on to his wife or another closely related female. This organ symbolises the relationship between man and bear and was seen as a powerful amulet that could heal infertility or ease childbirth⁴⁵.”

The Nivkh (Gilyak) people of eastern Siberia also hold special ceremonies to honour the bear. In his 19th century study, the German-Russian researcher Leopold von Schrenck relates that “... during the preparations of the ceremony, numerous objects were brought out of the stores, all of which were hung from the bear frame or attached to it in some manner or other: pieces of fur and paw skins of bears that had been killed previously, the chains in which they had been held whilst alive, dried bear penises wrapped in birch bark, knives whose hilts were decorated with a tuft of fur from the penis area of a bear ..., with which nothing but bear meat or bear bacon might be cut ...”⁴⁷.

It is interesting to note that von Schrenck relates that an infertile woman would run the risk of being cast out by her husband, and that women would try every possible aid that might help to satisfy the need for an heir – yet bear penises are not mentioned explicitly in this respect, as is related for the Udege. Von Schrenck states: “for example, I have seen several women wear teeth of female dogs around their necks, in the hope that this might make them more fertile. Presumably the women also wear other amulets that are specially carved or whittled for this purpose, but I would not be able to give a closer description of any of these.”⁴⁸

Klaus Müller⁴⁹, citing B.A. Vasil’ev⁵⁰ as source for the bear-feasts of several Siberian peoples,

states that the cultural celebrations surrounding the bear hunt were designed to secure game populations, but also served to strengthen fertility and virility of the humans involved. This is seen as the reason for the joint ritual consumption of bear meat and genitals in particular – which were passed to the women, including the penis bones. Vasil’ev further relates that bear *bacula* were worn by women directly on their bodies in order to ward off or cure infertility and ease birthing⁵¹.

The Ket people, who settle along the Yenisei River in the Krasnoyarsk Krai district of Siberia (also known as Yenisei Ostyaks) are known to deposit the bear skull, skin, snout, lips, gallbladder, eyes and penis in a box, together with an image of a bear sketched on birch bark, upon killing a bear. Together with a cedar twig, braided into a ring, which symbolically joins the different body parts, they were supposed to make it possible for the bear to be reborn in the forest⁵².

The Tuva people from southern Siberia also see penis bones of bears as a symbol of power and strength, as observed by Jean Clottes during a visit to a traditional Shaman of this people⁵³.

Several authors relate that the Saami of northern Scandinavia understood penis bones of bears to be particularly powerful and strong, kept them and attached them to sacred drums⁵⁴. Some sources relate that amongst the Finnish Saami⁵⁵, anyone killing a bear received its skin, head and *baculum*. The *baculum* tradition is part of a fundamental sexual key aspect of typical bear stories in which the mythical bear of the North tends to be male. Other sources state that Saami men would greet bears in the manner of an approaching groom, whilst Saami women would avoid bear penises and penis bones and instinctively protect their abdomens⁵⁶.

The native cultures of Alaska generally refer to the *bacula* of walrus, seals, sea lions and polar bears as *oosik*. Fossilised *bacula* were often polished and used as hilts for knives and other

45 Okladnikova 1979, 67.

46 *Kunstammer* St. Petersburg 2016.

47 Schrenck 1895, 717. Translation C. Rummel.

48 Schrenck 1895, 641. Translation C. Rummel.

49 Müller 2012, 44.

50 Vasil’ev 1948.

51 Vasil’ev 1948.

52 Ivanov/Levin 1964, 221; Kiriyaak 2007.

53 Clottes 2016, 81.

54 Hultkrantz 1992, 141; Kroik 2006, 204.

55 Pentikäinen 2006, 73.

56 Frog 2008, 20.

tools⁵⁷. There is no information on other uses. A further indigenous people from the northern American continent, the Inuit of central and north-eastern Canada and Greenland, revere the bear for its predatory and reproductive qualities, especially its keen sight, its quick movements and sheer strength, which is directly associated with its sexual virility. Amongst Inuit men, the beginning of a direct link between bears and male sexual prowess developed with the first bear kill, which defined the transition into adulthood for a youth, whilst sterile women would eat bear penises⁵⁸. After the hunt, the successful bear hunter would be given a dog whip with a handle made from the bear's penis bone⁵⁹. If a bear was killed by an experienced adult hunter, its gall bladder, spleen, tongue and penis would be displayed in the igloo, together with the weapons used in the hunt. There are records of Shamans using Polar Bear penis bones in traditional Inuit ceremonies. Here, the penis bone is believed to aid communication with the spirit world. By holding the bone in his hand, the Shaman is able to receive the thoughts and will of the spirits⁶⁰.

Conclusion

The earliest ursine penis bones known from archaeological sites date to the Middle Pleistocene. However, a conscious introduction of *bacula* to the sites at the hands of early humans appears unlikely, as the identified bones do not show any trace of working or use. As such, their occurrence is explained as a rather accidental side-effect of bearskins being used as sleeping matting. A *baculum* with circumferential scoring from Moustertian levels at Vindija indicates that this specific type of bone enjoyed particular attention from the time of the Neanderthals onwards. Whether it was used as a tool or ascribed with wider-ranging properties cannot be said with certainty in view of the scarce evidence available. Further *bacula* are known from the Gravettian levels at

two cave sites in the Swabian Alb. Both bones are worked and allow for an interpretation as tools, but no further symbolic role can be identified. A further *baculum* with traces of scoring, dating to the late Magdalénian, is generally seen as hunting booty.

It is only with the bear penis bone from the late Palaeolithic double-grave at Oberkassel that a symbolic property can be ascribed as the bone was used as a grave good – as were the artefacts deposited in the grave. Unfortunately, there are no clear records about the exact positioning of the objects in the grave, making it impossible to associate the *baculum* with one of the two buried individuals. There are no further graves from the Palaeolithic or the Mesolithic that include this bone amongst grave goods, so that there are no further indicators on which to base any interpretations.

This makes the data from the Neolithic burials at the Shamanka II site on Lake Baikal in Siberia all the more important. Here, *bacula* tend to have been deposited near or on the bodies of adult males. This suggests an interpretation of the *bacula*, some of which were placed in the chest area of the buried individuals, as objects to preserve or even increase vitality and possibly sexual virility. An ursine penis bone deposited near a 1.5 to 3 year old child suggest a general belief in the transmission of the power or strength of the bear to the humans by means of the bone.

Similar beliefs exist among indigenous hunter-gatherer cultures of the circumpolar sphere. Udeke mythology, for example, provides insights into their life philosophy and the resulting use of this bone. In this culture, bear *bacula* are used by women to cure infertility and to ease birthing (Tab. 1). Commonly, women wear the bone as an amulet. Use of *bacula* during feasting in the course of bear celebrations is attested by an Udeke vessel decorated with 15 ursine penis bones. Use of the bone in traditional Shaman ceremonies can be shown for the Saami and Inuit through *bacula* attached to shaman drums. During the first

57 Long 2012, 200.

58 Saladin d'Anglure 1990, 179.

59 Saladin d'Anglure 1990, 176; Mithen 2003, 388.

60 Shaman Hivshu, 19. März 2016 in the Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt.

Chronology / Period	Site or ethnic group	Treatment / Working / Finish	Use / context	References
Middle Pleistocene	Bilzingsleben	no special treatment	unclear, possible reached site attached to a bearskin	Mania, D. 1990
poss. Mousterian	Vindija	circumferential incisions	unclear	Malez 1988
Gravettian	Hohle Fels	extensive polishing	tool, possibly for leather-working	Münzel, S. C./Conard, N. J. 2004
Gravettian	Brillenhöhle	tapered	used as a an awl	Barth, M. M./Conard, N. J./Münzel, S. C. 2009
Late Magdalenian	Teufelsküche	traces of incisions	hunting kill or tool	Pasda, C. 1994; Bosinski, G. 2008
Upper Palaeolithic	Oberkassel	traces of scraping on the convex side, haematite	gravegood for males and females	Street, M. 2002; Verworn, M./Bonnet, R./Steinmann, G. 1919; Giemsch, L./Tinnis, J./Schmitz, R. W. 2015
Mesolithic	-	-	not known	Grünberg, J. M. 2000; Grünberg, J. M. 2013
Neolithic	Shamanka II	traces of burnishing and working, some circumferential striations	gravegood mostly for males, usually deposited near the body	Losey, R. J. et al. 2013
Up to 20 th /21 st century	Udege	drilled or unworked proximal ends, attached to a birch-bark vessel	decorated ritual vessel, amulet believed to heal infertile women and ease birthing	Albert, F. 1956; Okladnikova, E. A. 1979; Kunstammer St. Petersburg 2016
Up to 20 th /21 st century	Nivkh	penis wrapped in birch-bark	attached to bear-frame during ceremonies	Schrenck, L. v. 1895
Up to 20 th /21 st century	Siberian peoples	without special finishing	believed to heal infertile women and ease birthing	Vasil'ev, V. A. 1948; Müller, K. E. 2012
Up to 20 th /21 st century	Ket	deposited in a box	together with bear-skull and other parts, it is supposed to aid rebirth of the bear in the forest	Ivanov/V. S./Levin, M. G. 1964
Up to 20 th /21 st century	Tuvan	no special treatment	symbol of strength	Clottes, J. 2016
Up to 20 th /21 st century	Sami	attached to a string	attached to drums, the baculum is believed to be particularly powerful and strong	Hultkrantz, A. 1992; Kroik, A. V. 2006
Up to 20 th /21 st century	Alaskan cultures	worked into a tool handle	handle for knives and other tools	Long, J. A. 2012
Up to 20 th /21 st century	Inuit	handle for a dog-whip	believed to heal infertile women and to transfer the power and strength of the bear to humans	Saladin d'Anglure, B. 1990; Mithen, S. 2003

Tab. 1 Distribution and use of ursine penis bones in different cultures, in chronological order.

bear hunts of Inuit youths, which serve as initiation rites into adulthood, ursine penis bones play a special role: they are used as handles for dog-whips which are handed to the young adult, now accepted amongst the grown men, upon his successful bear-hunt. This shows that even when it is used as a tool, special significance and symbolism is attached to the *baculum*. As such, it may be concluded that the penis bone, together with skull, paws, gall bladder, sometimes snout, skin and eyes belongs to those parts of a bear that were

and are used for their religious-magic properties or as healing aids⁶¹. In this, ursine penises are frequently used in combination with birch bark.

In summary, it may be concluded that use of *bearbacula* by humans developed from sole use as a tool towards a symbolically charged object from the late Palaeolithic onwards. While the hunter-gatherer cultures of the Siberian Neolithic mainly used the *os penis* as grave goods for adult males, indigenous Siberian hunter-gatherer groups tend to see it as a symbol of fertility for

61 Pacher 1997, 337.

women. The Inuit, on the other hand, associate the bone with male initiation rights to adulthood. As such, there is no basis for any overall conclusion regarding a gender-specific use of the ursine penis bone. Nonetheless, it is possible to conclude that the *baculum* is generally seen

as a symbol for the strength and power of the bear: by wearing or using it, humans hope for a transmission of these strengths and powers onto themselves.

*Übersetzung aus dem Deutschen:
Christoph Rummel*

Summary

The idea for this paper arose from the exhibition “Bärenkult und Schamanenzauber. Rituale früherer Jäger”, which ran at the Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt from December 5th until March 28th 2016 and was initiated by Egon Wamers. It provides an overview of sources relating to the *baculum (os penis)* of bears in archaeological contexts from the Middle Pleistocene until the Siberian Neolithic, c. 8,000 to 7,000 ago. The paper furthermore includes a survey of ethnological evidence for the use of this special bone amongst the indigenous populations of the circumpolar sphere, amongst whom Brown and Polar Bears play an important role to this day, the hunt for which is accompanied by complex rituals. The study shows that until the later Palaeolithic, the bear *baculum* was most likely only used as a tool. It is only later that the bone is loaded with a symbolic meaning for humans, as it is found as a grave good in late Palaeolithic and Neolithic contexts. Furthermore, it can be shown that the use of *os penis* is not gender specific. Amongst indigenous Siberian hunter-gatherer populations it is frequently employed as a fertility symbol amongst women, but can also be linked to male initiation rites amongst the Inuit. A common theme, however, is that the *baculum* is seen as a symbol of the strength of the bear. Humans generally use it in the hope that this strength may be transmitted to themselves.

Zusammenfassung

Die auf die Idee von Egon Wamers zurückgehende Ausstellung »Bärenkult und Schamanenzauber. Rituale früherer Jäger«⁶², die vom 5. Dezember 2015 bis 28. März 2016 im Archäologischen Museum Frankfurt zu sehen war, gab den Anstoß für den vorliegenden Aufsatz. Er gibt einen Einblick in die archäologische Quellenlage zum *baculum (os penis)* des Bären im archäologischen Kontext ab dem Mittelpleistozän bis in das sibirische Neolithikum vor 8.000 bis 7.000 Jahren. Es wird weiterhin ein umfassender Überblick über die ethnologischen Hinweise zur Verwendung dieses besonderen Knochens bei indigenen Völkern im zirkumpolaren Raum gegeben, bei denen der Braun- beziehungsweise Eisbär noch bis in die heutige Zeit eine besondere Rolle spielt und dessen Jagd von aufwendigen Ritualen begleitet ist.

Diese Studie zeigt, dass das Bären *baculum* bis ins Jungpaläolithikum mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit ausschließlich als Werkzeug eingesetzt wurde. Anschließend kann für diesen Gegenstand auch eine symbolische Bedeutung für den Menschen angenommen werden, da er als Grabbeigabe im Spätpaläolithikum und Neolithikum zu finden ist. Außerdem wird deutlich, dass der Einsatz des *os penis* keinem geschlechtsspezifischen Gebrauch unterliegt. Er gilt bei den indigenen sibirischen Jäger- und Sammlervölkern häufig bei Frauen als Fruchtbarkeitssymbol, steht aber bei den Inuit mit dem Initiationsritus der Männer in Zusammenhang. Einheitlich ist jedoch, dass das *baculum* als ein Kraftsymbol des Bären angesehen wird. Die Menschen erhoffen sich durch seine Verwendung eine Übertragung dieser Kraft auf sich selbst.

62 Katalog Frankfurt 2015.

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References of Figures

- 1 from Malez 1988, Fig. 5
- 2 LVR-LandesMuseum Bonn/J. Vogel
- 3 from Losey et al. 2013, Fig. 4.3
- 4 From the collection of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Science MAE RAS: № 2336–1, Image ID: 3845867