

Bioarchaeology of the Trypolye, Verteba Cave, Western Ukraine

Speaker: Dr. Gwyn Madden, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Grand Valley State University

Host Department: Museum of Anthropological Archaeology

Date: 10/15/2015

Time: 12:00 pm

Location: Room 2009 Ruthven Museums Building

Description:

Our international research team has been working at Verteba Cave beginning in the 2008 field season. The agricultural Trypolye/Cucuteni culture ranged across Romania, Moldova and Ukraine from 5500-2300 CalBC, using Verteba Cave around 3500 CalBC. Verteba Cave is one of only two Trypolye sites in Ukraine in which multiple human remains have been discovered. Our focus has been on understanding the mortuary component of the cave including collections of skulls some have called "skull nests," commingling of most remains with only one location where various articulated skeletal elements have been found, evidence of exposure (eg. sun bleaching, carnivore puncture marks), and many crania with perimortem skull fractures. Additionally, we have studied the dentition, other trauma, and pathology to understand the health of the Trypolye buried at this site. Limited isotopic study has offered evidence of diet and migration information for these people. DNA from the 2015 field season shows the presence of haplogroups from the Middle-East present in the local population. Thousands of faunal remains have also been found in the commingled matrix of the site, ranging from fish to pig and auroch. The team's Ukrainian archaeologists have analyzed several whole pots found in association with the human remains, as well as many sherds. At other Trypolye/Cucuteni sites female figurines have been observed, we also have a large number of these, but to date no complete at Verteba Cave. Other artifacts found in the matrix include ceramic animal figurines, bull head-shaped amulets, and pieces of miniature house models along with bone amulets, shell beads, and worked stone and faunal tools. Based on known environmental change during the use of the cave, and population increase, we hypothesize that so did the demand on resources. This new demand fractured the culture resulting in violent interaction to control the available resources and new mortuary practices developed as a form of identity formation.