Human Manipulative Behavior in the Central European Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age: Humeral Bilateral Asymmetry

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ABSTRACT It is assumed that the transition from the Late Eneolithic to the Early Bronze Age in Central Europe was associated with substantial changes in subsistence and the perception of gender differences. However, the archeological record itself does not entirely support this model. Alternatively, this transition may be interpreted as a continuous process. We used asymmetry in external dimensions, and asymmetry in size and distribution of cortical tissue of humeri to elucidate the nature of this transition with respect to differences in manipulative behavior. The total sample of 67 individuals representing five archaeological cultures was used. The results indicate that the pattern of asymmetry of the humeral external measurements and the cross-sectional parameters taken at 35% of humeral biomechanical length remain stable during the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age. However, females of both periods show fluctuating asymmetry for all of the cross-sectional parameters, but directional asymmetry for biomechanical length. Males are nonsignificantly shifted from the line of equivalence for biomechanical length, but exhibit directional asymmetry for the cortical area and polar moment of area. Only distal articular breadth yields fluctuating asymmetry for both females and males in both periods. Thus, the transition from the Late Eneolithic to the Early Bronze Age can be seen as a continuous process that probably affected only a limited part of human activities. We interpret the differences between females and males of both periods as evidence of gender-specific activities; males might have been associated with extra-domestic agricultural labor that resulted in asymmetrical manipulative loading and females with domestic labor with symmetrical manipulative loading in both periods. Am J Phys Anthropol 000: 000–000, 2007.

The transition from the Late Eneolithic to the Early Bronze Age (2800–1500, B.C.; see chronological details in Table 1) has been viewed as a significant shift in economic and social organization (Childe, 1930; Gilman, 1981). During the Early Bronze Age the degree of production and distribution of metal increased (Shennan, 1993; Harding, 2000). Exchange networks were extended beyond the regional level and ethnic boundaries (Kristiansen, 1998). It has been suggested that craft specialization emerged to ensure efficient production and distribution of goods (Childe, 1930; Tihelka, 1953; Bátor, 1991; Shennan, 1995; Kristiansen, 1998). The intensification of production was associated with the activities of individuals who facilitated the exchange of goods and their long-distance transport (Harding, 2000).

It has been argued that in the Central European record the intensification of economy resulted in changes of gender relations (Shennan, 1993) and subsistence strategy (Vencel, 1994; Kadrow, 2001). Based on mortuary evidence, it has been suggested that gender was the dominant structuring principle in the Late Eneolithic, but was overshadowed by hierarchical relationships among males and females in the Early Bronze Age (Shennan, 1993). While orientation of the bodies and associated artifacts were gender-specific in the Late Eneolithic, these distinctions become less rigid in the Bronze Age. Also, it has been argued that mobile subsistence was common in the Late Eneolithic (Vencel, 1994; Kadrow, 2001), while mixed agriculture dominated in the Bronze Age (Neugebauer, 1987; Harding, 2000).

Several authors mentioned that neither the intensification of economy nor subsistence completely restructured the socio-cultural system; instead, the transition was a continuous process (Shennan, 1993; Neustupný, 1997; Harding, 2000; Sládek et al., 2006a). The assumed change in gender relations might be the result of modifications of mortuary rituals, rather than the change of gender roles. Moreover, elaborate burial costumes of adult females and gender symbolism in hoards suggest that gender identity continued to shape social differentiation even during the Early Bronze Age (Shennan, 1975; Neugebauer, 1987).

The impact of economic intensification on subsistence during the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age is subject to discussion. Recent studies have rejected pastoralism as the primary mode of subsistence in the Late Eneolithic and

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have suggested that subsistence and mobility remained stable (see review in Harding, 2000; Sládek et al., 2006a). The continuity of mobility and subsistence during the period has been supported by studies of the cross-sectional properties of lower limb (Sládek et al., 2006a,b). However, both femora and tibiae showed higher (although nonsignificant) resistance to parameters related to a higher level of mobility for Corded Ware group (Late Eneolithic). We argued that this is the result of random impact on a small sample. It is necessary to elucidate the pattern of subsistence differences between the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age using other skeletal features.

There are difficulties in understanding the transition from the Late Eneolithic to Early Bronze Age using only archaeological evidence because of the absence of the settlement features (see review in Sládek et al., 2006a,b). Therefore, reconstruction of life in the Late Eneolithic is based mostly on mortuary evidence that only reflects part of behavioral repertoire (Shennan, 1993). It is surprising how little information has been extracted from human skeletal remains themselves that are intimately related to daily activities.

We assume that social and economic changes during the transition to the Bronze Age would influence behavior of individuals and subsequently the morphology of the upper limb. This influence could be visible in the bilateral asymmetry of those humeral measurements, which are sensitive to mechanical loading. Our assumption is based on the expected differences in the asymmetry of mechanical loading during different physical tasks.

Human dominant limb asymmetry is a primary response to right handedness contralaterally related to a larger left cerebral hemisphere (Falk, 1980; Holloway, 1981; Annett, 1992; LeMay, 1992; White et al., 1994). It has been shown that upper limbs are variably employed during manipulation. Some of the physical activities are expected to affect both arms equally (e.g., maize pounding in prehistoric American Southeast; Bridges (1991); digging activities of San females in Namibia and Botswana; Marshall (1976); Ledger et al. (2000); Lee (1979)) but other habitually produce the pronounced unilateral mechanical loading (e.g., professional tennis-players, Trinkaus et al. (1994); Later Stone Age and Holocene hunters in South Africa, Marshall (1976); Ledger et al. (2000)). The variability in the asymmetry of humeri has been used to reveal habitual behavioral differences within or between temporal groups (Bridges, 1985, 1989, 1991; Fresia et al., 1990; Trinkaus et al., 1994; Albert and Greene, 1999; Trinkaus and Churchill, 1999; Ledger et al., 2000; Stock and Pfeiffers, 2001, 2004; Rhodes and Knüsel, 2005). Differences in manipulative tasks between males and females (Fresia et al., 1990; Bridges, 1991; Weiss, 2003), age grades (Stirland, 1993; Steele and Mays, 1995), and socially unequal groups (Constandse-Westermann and Newell, 1989).

There are controversies about the relationship between the asymmetry of humeri and behavior when either external upper limb dimensions or geometry of diaphyseal cross-sections are studied. It has been shown that bilateral asymmetry in mechanical loading has a minimum or moderate effect on the length and distal articular breadth of humeri (Trinkaus et al., 1994). Further, it is expected that the length and distal articular breadth of humeri are more ontogenetically constrained and there is little influence induced by differences in behavior and environment (Lieberman et al., 2001; Ruff, 2003). It is supported by studies of tennis players (Haapasalo et al., 1996). Nevertheless, studies of past populations have demonstrated that asymmetry in length and articular breadth of upper limbs can be attributed to the effect of mechanical loading (Steele and Mays, 1995; Mays et al., 1999; Plochocki, 2004) or other environmental but nonmechanically induced factors (Albert and Greene, 1999).

The impact of mechanical loading on bilateral asymmetry in the geometry of cross-sections has been supported by numerous studies (see references above and review in Trinkaus et al., 1994). Any activity-related interpretation of cross-sections expects that the impact of mechanical loading is specific and localized, and that the impact of nonmechanical factors on size and distribution of cortical tissue is minimal. Some of the recent studies questioned these assumptions. Lieberman (1996) has shown that mechanical loading also affects those parts of skeleton that are not directly related to mechanical loading. Lovejoy et al. (2002) argue that activity level is not the primary factor in guiding the morphological formation of cortical tissue. It is assumed that differences in cortical tissue distribution are influenced by endocrinal and genetic factors (see review in Ruff et al., 1993; Trinkaus et al., 1994; Lovejoy et al., 2002; Saxon and Turner, 2005). However, there is extensive clinical, experimental, and bioarchaeological evidence that supports the localized and specific effect of mechanical loading (Trinkaus et al., 1994;
Haapasalo et al., 1996; Larsen, 1999; Ruff, 2000a; Rubin et al., 2001; Holt et al., 2004). Recently, Ruff et al. (2006) reviewed the limits and potential of bone structural analysis and concluded that traditional geometric parameters give the best estimate for mechanical loading studies. Moreover, the advantage of bilateral asymmetry analysis of cross-sections is that both arms approach the same non-mechanical stimuli (Trinkaus et al., 1994; but see Albert and Greene, 1999).

Using asymmetry in external and cross-sectional parameters of humeri, we are concentrated on the nature of the transition from the Late Eneolithic to Early Bronze Age. Two models of the transition can be proposed. First, the transition resulted in substantial changes in the everyday activities of humans. Second, we hypothesize that the transition was rather slow and did not result in substantial changes in the gendered division of activities and subsistence strategy. Such a transition would result in a stable bilateral pattern of mechanical loading in upper limb morphology during the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age. We test the hypothesis via the documentation of humeral asymmetry focusing on humeral length, distal articular breadth, and cross-sectional geometry. We investigate both temporal changes and differences in the bilateral asymmetry between females and males in both periods.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample

A sample of 67 individuals with both right and left preserved humeri was selected from Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age skeletal material (Table 1). The Late Eneolithic sample includes sites of the Únětice, Unterwöbling, and Wieselburger cultures. All of these sites are located in Lower Austria, Moravia, and Bohemia (Fig. 1, see also definitions of the archeological cultures and details about selected sites in Buchvaldek, 1986; Teschler-Nicola, 1992; Shennan, 1993; Neugebauer, 1994).

Since the Central European Late Eneolithic cemeteries are characterized by small numbers of burials, the sample from the Late Eneolithic had to be selected from larger number of sites. We assume that for our purpose the individuals from different Late Eneolithic cemeteries can be studied as one population. The Corded Ware and Bell Beaker groups in Central Europe are considered to be closely related and share similar adaptive strategies and symbolic systems (Neustupný, 1981, 1989; Turek and Peska, 2001). There was also evidence for a certain degree of interaction visible in the temporal overlap of archaeological findings (Dvorský, 1992). Grave goods made from nonlocal materials and variation in ceramic style indicates that commodities were exchanged among communities in Central Europe. Moreover, stable isotope analyses have shown that individuals moved between regions (Price et al., 2004). Therefore, the Late Eneolithic communities in the Czech Republic and Austria were not isolated units.

The age structure of the samples stems from the observation that age is a significant factor that influences cross-sectional morphology (Ruff, 2000a). Only mature individuals were used in this study. The interval for age allocation spans from individuals with complete fusion of long bone epiphyses or closure of the sphenoooccipital suture to individuals without marks of advanced degenerative and senescence features, such as tooth loss and significant alteration of articular surfaces. Therefore, these individuals were older than ~20 years at the time of death but younger than 50–60 years at the time of death. The latter
boundary is estimated with a higher degree of uncertainty because there is a low correlation between calendar age-at-death and skeletal traits after the process of ontogeny is completed (see review in Schmitt, 2004). Nonetheless, there is no observed shift in age-at-death among selected samples. Therefore, if any bias appears because of inappropriate older age boundary, it will affect all samples equally.

The sex of the individuals was estimated through assessment of the pelvis, femora, tibiae, and humeri using primary and secondary sex analyses (Murail et al., 1999; see details in Sládek et al., 2006a). The primary sex assessment was done by metric (Novotný, 1975; Brůzek, 1984) and morphological assessment (Brůzek, 2002) of the pelvic bones. Forty-one individuals from the total Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age sample (n_total = 171) were sexed by means of primary analysis. Fourteen discriminant functions were selected for the secondary sex analysis. The correct classification of the secondary discriminant functions ranges between 89 and 99% of the primary allocated individuals. The final decision for sex allocation was based on the consistency between the results of primary and secondary analyses. If only the data for the secondary discriminant function were available, the allocation was based on the majority of allocations embodied in posterior probabilities of the discriminant functions. If agreement between the selected parameters was not reached, the sex of the individual was allocated as undetermined. Since we are interested in the gender-specific pattern of humeral asymmetry, the undetermined individuals were not used in the study.

### Linear and cross-sectional parameters

Distal articular breadth and humeral biomechanical length were used to compare the bilateral asymmetry of external humeral morphology. Distal articular breadth was taken following the standard osteometric approach (Hu4, Bräuer, 1988). The humeral biomechanical length was taken between the most proximal point on the humeral head to the most distal point on the lateral lip of the trochlea (Ruff, 2000b).

Humeral shaft sections were taken at 35% of humeral biomechanical length by CT scan images. Prior to scanning, each bone was oriented in a standardized position with respect to the antero-posterior and medio-lateral planes following an approach specified by Ruff (2000b). The CT scan images were taken by CT HiSpeed Dxi (General Electric, Milwaukee, WN) at 120 kV. Final CT scan images consist of 1-mm-thick slices with a resolution of 512 × 512 pixels with a pixel dimension of 0.196 mm.

The CT scan images of 35% humeral cross-sections were further processed using the software for digitizing and computing biomechanical parameters previously developed by our team (CT-i software, Sailer et al., 2003). The CT-i software is a Borland Delphi implementation and calculates all biomechanical parameters by manually set points in the periosteal and endosteal contours. These points are free of scanning bias due to the composition and preservation of cortical bone tissues. Furthermore, we have shown that the inter- and intra-observer error that occurs during the manual determination of bone outlines does not significantly affect further computer analysis (Sailer et al., 2003).

Cross-sectional geometry of humeral diaphyses was estimated by CT-i values of areas, second moments of area, and polar moment of area. Cortical area (CA) estimates cross-sectional rigidity in axial compression and tension (Larsen, 1999; Ruff, 2000a). Maximum second moment of area (I_max) and the one perpendicular to it (I_min) were used to evaluate resistance to bending rigidity (Larsen, 1999; Ruff, 2000a). Consequently, the polar moment of area (J), as a sum of any two second moments of area perpendicular to each other, was used to estimate torsional rigidity (Levenstone et al., 1994; Larsen, 1999; Ruff, 2000a) and overall bending strength. The polar moment of area has also been shown to be a good estimate of skeletal robusticity (Ruff et al., 1993). Finally, the ratio of I_max/I_min was used to compare diaphyseal shape (Larsen, 1999; Ruff, 2000a).

### Humeral asymmetry and statistical treatment

Two patterns of deviation from symmetry were used following Van Valen’s (1962) approach: a) directional asymmetry may occur when the normal development of bilateral character is shifted to one side from an expected line of equivalence; b) fluctuating asymmetry may result from stochastic fluctuation of bilateral character around line of equivalence.

Therefore, humeral maximum asymmetry was first computed with respect to the larger side and expressed as a percentage:

\[
\text{maximum asymmetry} = \frac{\text{max} - \text{min}}{\text{min}} \times 100
\]

Max refers to side with maximum value and min to side with minimum value. Zero indicates bilateral symmetry, and an increasing deviation from zero describes the magnitude of bilateral asymmetry. Since the degree of maximum asymmetry is expressed without respect to side, its distribution is skewed (see Trinkaus et al., 1994). Therefore, nonparametric treatment and graphs of medians were used. Medians and 95% confidence intervals of medians were computed using the bootstrap procedure (Resampling Stats for Excel 2.0, Resampling Stats). Nonparametric Mann-Whitney U tests were employed to compare differences between samples both on the inter- and intra-specific level.

Second, humeral standardized asymmetry was computed using following formula and expressed as a percentage:

\[
\text{standardized asymmetry} = \frac{\text{R} - \text{L}}{(\text{R} + \text{L})/2} \times 100
\]

where R refers to the right side and L to the left side. The absolute values of the standardized asymmetry indicate absolute deviation from symmetry. Tendency to the right is expressed in the standardized asymmetry by positive deviation from zero, tendency to the left by negative deviation. Since the distribution of standardized asymmetry is nearly normally distributed, parametric one-sample t tests were used.

Finally, fluctuating and directional asymmetry were visualized and tested also by the bivariate distribution of the right and left character. Since all studied parameters are measured with error, the reduced major axis model was used to compare the bivariate distribution (Kermack and Haldane, 1950; Clarke, 1980; McArdle, 1988; Aiello, 1992). The slope and intercept of the reduced major axis model were computed with Software for Reduced Major Axis Regression (Bohonak, 2002) using the pooled Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age sample of the respective analysis. In addition to the reduced major axis, the line of expected right and left equivalence (the symmetry line) was projected to each bivariate distribution.
The Quick Test was employed to compare differences in
distribution along the reduced major axis as well as the
line of equivalence (Tsutakawa and Hewett, 1977). The
Quick test is arranged as Fisher’s Exact two-tailed test
when the number of individuals above the respective axis
is compared with the number of individuals below the
axis. The null hypothesis is that either temporal sex-spe-
cific groups (interspecific level; comparison between tem-
poral groups) or sex groups in each period (intraspecific
level; comparison within temporal groups) have equal dis-
tribution along the respective axis. If equal distribution
along the reduced major axis is reached, we expect that
both groups will not exhibit significant differences in the
level of asymmetry (either fluctuating or directional).
Further, directional asymmetry was inferred from signifi-
cant departure from an equal distribution along the line
of symmetry. Fluctuating asymmetry was inferred from
equal distribution around the line of equivalence.

The data for Fisher’s Exact two-tailed test were prepared
in Excel tables and further processed with the StatXact 6.1
software (Cytel Software Corporation, 1989–2002). The ad-
vantage of StatXact 6.1 software is the computation of
exact values instead of an approximation by asymptotic
values (Mehta and Patel, 1999). Unless otherwise specified,
Excel 2003 (Microsoft Corporation, 1985–2003) and Statis-
tica 6.0 (StatSoft, 1984–2001) were used for basic computa-
tion and statistical treatment.

RESULTS

Temporal differences

Temporal differences between the Late Eneolithic and
Early Bronze Age were compared at the interspecific level
when both sexes were processed separately. The percent-
age of maximum asymmetry of humeral external meas-
urements and 35% humeral cross-sectional parameters
for the sex-specific samples of the Late Eneolithic and
Early Bronze Age are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The re-
sultant \( P \)-values of the Mann-Whitney \( U \) test for the
interspecific temporal differences are provided in Table 2.
The summary for median and 95% confidence interval of
percentage asymmetry of \( I_{\text{max}}/I_{\text{min}} \) is in Figure 4. The
Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age females are not sig-
nificantly different in the percentage maximum asymme-
try of the humeral external measurements and 35% hum-
eral cross-sectional parameters including the \( I_{\text{max}}/I_{\text{min}} \) ra-
tio. The Late Eneolithic males have a significantly higher

Fig. 2. Median and 95% confidence interval for the percentage maximum asymmetry of humeral biomechanical length (BML) (a),
distal articular breadth (DAB) (b), and cortical area (CA) (c) for the Late Eneolithic (LE) and Early Bronze Age (EBA) samples. Open
circles: females; filled squares: males.
percentage of maximum asymmetry of humeral biomechanical length in comparison to the Early Bronze Age males. All other parameters including the diaphyseal shape estimate between the male temporal groups remain statistically nonsignificant.

The bivariate distribution of the right and left sides of humeral biomechanical length and 35% humeral cross-sectional parameters, and the results of Quick tests are given in Figures 5–7. Quick tests and temporal comparison is further proceeded using a pooled sample line (the RMA line) and the expected line of symmetry (i.e., the line of the right and left equivalence). As in the previous comparison, the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age distribution of asymmetry remains statistically nonsignificant in comparison to the pooled RMA line. Both female samples have directional asymmetry significantly shifted to the right side in humeral biomechanical length, but fluctuating asymmetry in cortical area and polar moment of area. The comparison based on distal articular breadth also yields fluctuating asymmetry. Similarly, there is not a significant difference in the distribution asymmetry for any external and cross-sectional parameters between the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age males (i.e., RMA comparison). Thus, the Quick test for the RMA analysis and Mann-Whitney $U$ test produced different results when humeral biomechanical length of male humeri was compared. The male samples have fluctuating asymmetry in humeral biomechanical length and distal articular breadth, but present directional asymmetry to the right side in cortical area and polar moment of area.

We conclude that there are nonsignificant differences between the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age groups in the interspecific comparison. Therefore, the bilateral pattern of manipulative behavior remains stable during both periods. The only contradictory result has been found in the case of the male humeral biomechanical length: the differences between the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age males' yields significant results when Mann Whitney $U$ test is employed but nonsignificant results in the RMA bivariate distribution analysis.

**Sex differences**

The sex-specific comparison within the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age groups has been applied to reveal differences in sexual dimorphism in the bilateral activities of manipulative behavior. The $P$-values for the within-
group differences in the percentage maximum asymmetry are shown in Table 2. The median and 95% confidence interval for the $I_{\text{max}}/I_{\text{min}}$ and Figure 4. The Late Neolithic males show greater percentage in maximum asymmetry than females only for maximum second moment of area and polar moment of area. The same comparison in the Early Bronze Age sample has yielded similar results. The Early Bronze Age males show significantly higher percentage in maximum asymmetry than females for maximum second moment of area and polar moment of area. A significantly different percentage of maximum asymmetry has been identified also in humeral biomechanical length between Early Bronze Age males and females. There are no significant differences in 95% confidence interval for median of diaphyseal shape of the $I_{\text{max}}/I_{\text{min}}$ ratio between sex-specific groups.

Differences in sexual dimorphism between the two periods can be revealed also from the RMA bivariate distribution of the humeral biomechanical length and cross-sectional parameters presented in Figures 5–7. In both periods, females show fluctuating asymmetry in all cross-sectional parameters studied. However, both Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age females are significantly shifted from the line of symmetry when humeral biomechanical length is compared. Males show fluctuating asymmetry in humeral biomechanical length, but have directional asymmetry shifted to the right for cortical area and polar moment of area in both periods.

The statistically insignificant difference in the pattern of sexual dimorphism between the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age is supported by the bivariate distribution of the mean difference in standardized asymmetry between sexes for each time period shown in Figure 8. Mean difference between males and females was computed by 1,000 iterations of difference between bootstrap means of percentage standardized asymmetry for females and males. The differences between sexes mean difference estimates is not significant when 95% confidence intervals are compared. The Early Bronze Age confidence interval of sex mean difference is shorter mainly in the cortical area and polar moment of area asymmetry, but this may reflect the larger sample size for the Early Bronze Age group. Thus, there is no significant difference between males and females in the selected temporal groups.

Finally, one-sample $t$ tests of mean standardized asymmetry compared to the zero (i.e., symmetry) are provided in Table 3. Females are significantly different from zero in humeral biomechanical length, while males show significant difference from zero in the cross-sectional parameters.

We conclude that females in both periods are characterized by manipulative behavior with equally distributed mechanical loading between the right and left arm but show directional asymmetry in humeral biomechanical length. Manipulative behavior of males in both periods is characterized by higher mechanical loading on the right side while showing fluctuating asymmetry of the external humeral measurements. However, asymmetry in diaphyseal shape remains similar among both males and females.

### DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the pattern of asymmetry of the humeral external measurements and 35% of the cross-sectional parameters remain stable during the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age transition. At the same time, the pattern of sexual dimorphism in humeral asymmetry remains stable too. A significant difference was found when the pattern of humeral asymmetry was compared between females and males. Females of both periods have fluctuating asymmetry for all of the cross-sectional parameters, but exhibit directional asymmetry for biomechanical length. Males are nonsignificantly shifted from the line of equivalence for biomechanical length but exhibit directional asymmetry for the cortical area and polar moment of area. Only distal articular breadth yields fluctuating asymmetry for both females and males. Also the measurements of diaphyseal shape (the $I_{\text{max}}/I_{\text{min}}$ ratio) show no significant differences between males and females.

The results demonstrate that the economic and social changes that happened during the transition from the Late Eneolithic to Early Bronze Age (Childe, 1930; Neugebauer, 1994; Harding, 2000; Bátor, 2002) had a minor impact on the bilateral asymmetry of manipulative behavior. Given the fact that no significant difference in mechanical loading between the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age is supported by the bivariate distribution of...
Age has been found also when lower limb cross-sections were compared (Sládek et al., 2006a,b), we propose that the transition was rather continuous from the perspective of daily physical activities (i.e., manipulative and locomotor).

The low impact of economic and social changes on bilateral activities in manipulative behavior during the transition from the Late Eneolithic to the Early Bronze Age is also apparent in the pattern of sex differences. During both periods, the sex differences in asymmetry remain identical. The geometric properties of humeri are symmetrical among females but directionally asymmetrical among males. According to the expectations that cross-sectional parameters are highly sensitive to mechanical loading (Trinkaus et al., 1994), we can hypothesize similar gender-specific physical tasks for females and males during both periods.

Similar patterns of gender-specific differences in physical tasks are reported from other archaeological settings. It has been demonstrated (Bridges, 1985, 1989, 1991; Freśia et al., 1990) that directional asymmetry of humeral geometry decreased significantly after the transition to agriculture in Southeastern United States among females, while directional asymmetry remained relatively unchanged among males. The authors argue that fluctuating asymmetry among females is influenced by female participation in agricultural activities associated with food preparation or other tasks that required the use of both arms. At the same time, the association of directional asymmetry with agriculture among males was questioned. Males were associated with activities, such as hunting, which was practiced even after the transition to food production (see review in Bridges, 1991).

Despite the shared similarities in the distribution of humeral cross-sectional asymmetry between American Southeastern populations at the time of transition to agriculture and the Central European populations at the time of the transition to the Bronze Age, the interpretation of the results must account for the different socio-economic contexts of both phenomena. It is apparent that agriculture in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age was more developed than the early agriculture in the Southeastern US. Therefore, it remains uncertain whether the
Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age agriculture had a low impact on the life ways of males, and whether females had to participate more than males in agricultural activities.

The archaeological record in Europe indicates that the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age societies used intensive techniques of farming and that hunting probably played a minor role in their subsistence. [Intensive agriculture is understood broadly as any activity that increases yield per hectare (Burton and White, 1984)]. The minor role of hunting is inferred from the low frequency of wild animal remains in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age (ca. 10–15%, Neustupný, 1969; Furmánek et al., 1991; Harding, 2000). The intensive agriculture is inferred from evidence of wooden yokes from Bronze Age sites (Harding, 2000). Since full pastoralism was rejected in the Late Eneolithic based on the cross-sectional analysis of the lower limbs (Sládek et al., 2006a,b), it is clear that cultivation was practiced during the Late Eneolithic as well. The use of intensive form of agriculture during the Eneolithic is also supported by evidences of furrows, models of oxen, and buried pairs of oxen (Neustupný, 1969; Sherratt, 1983).

Thus, to explain the differences in asymmetry of upper limbs between males and females of the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age, we have to compare differences in gender roles among societies with intensive agriculture. It has been shown that the participation of females in agriculture decreases with increasing intensification (Boserup, 1970; Martin and Voorhies, 1975; Ember, 1983) because of differential physical abilities for plowing (Murdock and Provost, 1973), incompatibility of plowing with childcare (Brown, 1970), or an increase in the domestic work for females (Ember, 1983; Burton and White, 1984). Based on the differences in gender roles among the ethnographic groups with intensive agriculture and asymmetry in humeral cross-sections we expect that the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age females might have been closely tied to the domestic sphere, while males might have prepared the soil and used animals for traction in the fields. Thus, in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age males were probably more closely associated with extradomestic agricultural labor that probably resulted in asymmetrical manipulative loading, and females with domestic labor with symmetrical manipulative loading. However, the identification of particular activities responsible for the observed pattern of asymmetry would be speculation at the moment.

Our findings do not support the supposed changes in gender relations during the transition from the Late Eneolithic to the Early Bronze age (Shennan, 1993). It appears more likely that the decrease in gender differences in the Bronze Age, suggested by Shennan (1993), is shaped by the specific nature of the burial record rather than everyday activities in the Early Bronze Age. Relatively weak gender symbolism may reflect ideology inscribed in mortuary rituals and the value that was given to activities performed by men and women. As our results indicate, the activities themselves did not change during the transition.

Distal articular breadth did not show gender specific differences and has fluctuating asymmetry among both females and males. The result was consistent in all performed analyses. Thus, factors that influenced asymmetry in distal articular breadth remain stable during the Late
On the other hand, to explain the fluctuating asymmetry supported in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age transition of mechanical impact on length asymmetry must be of humeral length in the male sample, we would expect that cortical area also fluctuates around the line of equivalence. The bivariate comparison of right and left cortical area indicates that this is not true for males and females (Fig. 6). The Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age females have fluctuating asymmetry in cortical area, but males have directional asymmetry shifted to the right.

The minor effect of mechanical loading on humeral length asymmetry is also supported by the comparison of absolute values between asymmetry of humeral length and cross-sectional parameters (Table 3). The absolute difference between mean standardized asymmetry for humeral length of females and males is about 10 times smaller than the absolute differences between means of cross-sectional parameters. A similar degree of difference has been found when humeral asymmetry was studied after long-term tennis loadingboth in humeral length and section modulus (Table 5 of Haapasalo et al., 1996). Moreover, the deduced minor effect of mechanical loading is consistent with the nonsignificant difference in the asymmetry of humeral length in long-term tennis players (Haapasalo et al., 1996).

In contrast to our results, Steele and Mays (1995) did not find significant differences between females and males in their comparison of asymmetry of humeral length. On the contrary, Schultz (1937) showed that both females and males are asymmetrical in their humeral length, but that females are more frequently directionally asymmetrical. Given the sex specific differences in humeral length asymmetry for the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age, it is hard to expect that such an inconsistent pattern between fluctuating and directional asymmetry of length is found when only pure genetic control operates.

Therefore, we suggest that length asymmetry in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age underwent some kind of environmental impact. This environmental impact varied with behavioral differences but was only weakly associated with mechanical loading. We hypothesize that such nonmechanical environmental factors affect growth, as suggested by Albert and Greene (1999). They demonstrated that the overall environmental stress might produce length asymmetry primarily due to the high sensitivity of epiphyseal union. In addition, since Albert and Green (1998) did not find significant differences between females and males, they concluded that this environmental perturbation has similar impact on males and females. Given our results, we expect that at least in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age, this environmental perturbation was sex-specific. Since little is known about the skeletal features connected with environmental stress and deprivation during ontogeny in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age, it is difficult to discuss it in more detail here.

### Table 3. Percentage standardized asymmetry for the humeral external measurements and 35% cross-sectional parameters of the combined Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hu-BML</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu-DAB</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I&lt;sub&gt;max&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I&lt;sub&gt;min&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 See Table 1 and 2 for the abbreviations.

2 One-sample t test for sample mean significant difference from zero (i.e. symmetry). The P-value significance is indicated by *** (P < 0.001).
CONCLUSION

The following conclusion can be drawn from our results:

1. There is no significant change in the asymmetry of humeral external measurements and geometric properties of humeri between the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age. Therefore, both temporal groups have similar bilateral patterns of manipulative behavior. We assume that the transition between the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age was gradual and probably affected only part of the socio-economic organization.

2. The only exception from the above statement is the result of the asymmetry of the biomechanical length when males of the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age are compared. There is significant difference between the males of both periods when the Mann-Whitney U test is used. However, the finding is not supported by Quick test for the RMA analysis and the significance could be influenced by sample size.

3. There are significant differences in the asymmetry of humeral external measurements and geometric properties of humeri when sex is considered. Females and males of the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age exhibit sex specific bilateral activity in manipulative behavior, which indicates continuity from the Late Eneolithic to the Early Bronze Age. This finding does not support temporal shifts in gender relations elucidated using the burial record.

4. Females do not have directional asymmetry in the geometric properties of cross-sections, suggesting that loading was equally distributed between the dominant and nondominant arms. These findings are in agreement with other studies of gender-specific activities during the adoption of agriculture. However, we interpret this result as a reflection of intradomestic activities of females in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age associated with intensive agriculture.

5. Males have directional asymmetry shifted to the right arm when biomechanical properties of cross-sections are compared. Thus, males continue to perform those physical activities that produce bilateral asymmetry in manipulative behavior. Since hunting is less likely for the Late Eneolithic and the Early Bronze Age, we expect that males of both periods were not excluded from agricultural activities. Given the intensive nature of agriculture for the Late Eneolithic and the Early Bronze Age, males are viewed in the sphere of extra-domestic activities producing bilateral asymmetry of humeral biomechanical parameters.

6. Females have directional asymmetry in biomechanical length of humeri shifted to the right, and males have fluctuating asymmetry without a clear shift to either side. It is difficult to present a behavioral conclusion for the length asymmetry comparison. Given the asymmetry of biomechanical properties of humeri, we assume that mechanical loadings had a minor impact on the variability of asymmetry. However, genetic factors are not clearly supported by our data. Therefore, the length asymmetry can be best explained by either nonmechanical environmental factors or by some kind of relationship between genetic, mechanical, and nonmechanical factors.

7. Comparisons of distal articular breadth did not indicate either temporal or sex specific differences. Therefore, we assumed that the breadth of humeral articular surfaces shows little importance for the reconstruction of behavioral differences in the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age.

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LITERATURE CITED


