

## Ritual deposits at Garab-Dzong, Dist. Mustang

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In 1996 the third excavation campaign of the Garab-Dzong project took place in South Mustang. During this campaign we were able to conclude our work at the fortified settlement itself. Beside this, we started with archaeological research in the immediate area around Garab-Dzong. The question about the chronology and formation of political centres related with the settlement of Garab-Dzong also requires investigation in the environment of the centre. Which effect have changes in settlement at Garab-Dzong on the settlement structure of the vicinity? How was the structure of settlement of this micro region prior to the establishment of a fortified complex with central functions? In order to answer these questions, since this year several abandoned settlements near Garab-Dzong have been included in the investigations. We opened trenches in the settlements of Dzokhang, Piangdang and Bumchekhang to check the chronological position of each site. All these settlements are situated just a few hundred meters apart from Garab-Dzong and therefore of great interest for our research.

During all excavation campaigns, different kinds of deposits were uncovered at Garab-Dzong. Within the settlement of Garab-Dzong only two human burials were found, in contrast to the excavation at Khyinga, where burials occurred frequently.<sup>1</sup> Remains of a new-born baby's skeleton have been recovered from trench B III/XIII. There is no evidence of its connection to any construction activity since the bones have been found amidst a layer of filling in a very small and flat mark of dark soil. A second feature from trench B XLII/LII has to be classified in connection with building activity. Here, the skeleton of a child was found in a burial pit dug into the natural soil. Probably in the same way as in Khyinga, it was an extremely flexed burial<sup>2</sup> covered by a bulbous vessel. The clay floor of house 6/2 is covering the entire complex.

Deposits of selected parts of animal remains are numerous. Concluding from the location and the manner of their deposition, as well as from features on the animal remains themselves, the ritual character of these deposits is evident. Though

depths are varying, each of it had a diameter of about 10–20 cm. They were all situated right in front of the buildings' entrances and contained parts of animal skeletons, as well as - in two cases - textile remains.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of these features became evident already in course of the first campaign 1994. In trench B II/XII several animal skulls were recovered. However, since no particular features could be observed in connection with these, it is assumed, that they were no longer in situ.

A different situation was encountered when excavating the area in front of the entrance to house 2 (fig. 1). Here we recorded a distinct stratigraphic sequence at the borderline between B I/XI and B II/XII. When we excavated this area, the strata above the clay floor F1 were cleared away and the surface of the floor was cleaned. Besides two burned areas, several circular dark soil marks were encountered; they had partly been covered with flat stones (fig. 2). After the documentation of the planum each feature was recorded and is listed in the following:<sup>4</sup>

**F 52 (B I, 1/2):**

Archaeological evidence (= A.e.): Circular soil mark of 20 cm diameter without stone covering. The pit had a depth of 15 cm. In the refill animal remains and ceramics.

Zoological evidence (= Z.e.): Three horn sheaths of big bovids.

**F 53 (B I, 1/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 20 cm diameter without stone covering. The pit had a depth of 14 cm. In the refill animal bones and ceramics.

Z.e.: Several unidentifiable bone fragments which

apparently had no ritual significance.

**F 54 (B I, 1-2/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 30 cm diameter without stone covering. The pit had a depth of 21 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: 1. Two horn sheaths of a big bovid. 2. The disintegrated cranium of a young dog. The age of the animal was approximately six months as can be seen from the mature teeth which had begun to erupt shortly before death. All sutures of the skull are still open. Cut marks on the occipital bone indicate that the head was cut off from the animal's body. 3. Skull (the cranium with both mandibles) of a small sized adult domestic cat.

**F 55 (B I, 2-12/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 22 cm diameter without stone covering. At the western side of the pit a stone was inserted on edge. The pit had a depth of 8 cm. In the refill a piece of textile.

**F 56 (B I, 11/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 24 cm diameter without stone covering. The pit had a depth of 10 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The heavily damaged cranium, atlas and axis of a dog. The animal was young adult and medium sized. The teeth show no wear.

**F 57 (B I, 11/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 18 cm diameter with stone covering. The pit had a depth of only a few cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The heavily damaged cranium of a relatively large dog (size of a shepherd dog) of considerable age. The skull is medium slenderly built. Atlas and axis (*Dens epistrophei*) are present. Thus the head

of the animal was cut off in between these first two cervical vertebrae.

**F 58 (B I, 11/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 20 cm diameter with stone covering. The pit had a depth of 16 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: 1. Horn sheath of a big bovid. 2. The left lower jawbone of an adult, medium sized to large dog (size of a shepherd dog). No cut marks.

**F 59 (B I, 11/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 16 cm diameter without stone covering. The flat pit had a depth of only a few cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: Several unidentifiable bone fragments. Obviously no ritual context.

**F 60 (B I, 11/1-12/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 20 cm diameter without stone covering. The flat pit had a depth of only a few cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The upper canine tooth of a young adult dog.

**F 61 (B I, 21/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 14 cm diameter with stone covering. The pit had a depth of 12 cm. No finds.

**F 62 (B I, 21/2):**

A.e.: Eight-shaped soil mark of 28 cm length and 20 cm width with stone covering. Probably two pits. The northern appears flat, the southern cylindrical in the section with a depth of 19 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The cranium of a juvenile, small sized domestic cat. The milk teeth were about to be replaced by the permanent teeth; thus the age of the

animal was approximately 5 months.

**F 63 (B I, 22/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 20 cm diameter without stone covering. The pit had a depth of 16 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The disintegrated cranium and mandibles of a young adult, medium sized dog.

**F 64 (B I, 21/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 17 cm diameter with stone covering. The pit had a depth of 18 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The more or less complete skull of a small domestic cat. Its teeth were about to change, so an age of 4 to 5 months can be assumed.

After the documentation of these features and the recovering of the find material, the tamped clay floor (F 1) was cleared away within these quadrants and the filling layer below (F 9) was cleaned. Here, three additional soil marks appeared.

**F 65 (B I, 22):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of about 18 cm diameter without stone covering. The pit had a depth of 10 cm. In the refill animal remains.

Z.e.: Horn sheath of a big bovid.

**F 66 (B I, 21-22/3):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 22 cm diameter without stone covering. The flat pit had a depth of only a few cm. In the refill animal bones were attached to a piece of textile.

Z.e.: The more or less complete skull of a medium sized and medium slenderly built dog. Cut marks on the occiput demonstrate, that the head was cut off. Beside this, the *foramen magnum* was enlarged

intentionally by means of an instrument. The age of the animal was about 6 years or older as can be deduced from the medium wear of the teeth.

**F 67 (B I, 1-11/3):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 18 cm diameter without stone covering. The flat pit had a depth of 10 cm. In the refill animal bones and ceramics.

Z.e.: The complete skull of an aged, medium to large sized and slenderly built dog with heavily worn teeth. The facial region is damaged. This skull also has cut marks on the occipital bone verifying decapitation and opening of the occipital foramen.

After these features have been studied and recognized as ritual deposits by A v.d. Driesch and H. Manhart and after a written source on ritual animal deposits was studied by P. Maurer, an additional trench was opened in front of the northern entrance to the central square in the 1995 season (trench B XII/XXII), in order to gain more well recorded features of this kind. The investigation of these deposits of animal remains and their relation to the entrances of houses enabled us to discover more deposits in other entrance areas of the central square.

**F 90 (B XXII, 96/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 15 cm diameter without stone covering. The flat pit had a depth of 10 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The damaged skull and the foot bones of a newly born goat kid.

**F 91 (B XII, 6-7/2):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 20 cm diameter, overlapped by F 92 in the West (fig 3), covered with two flat stones placed oblique upon the

ground. The pit had a depth of 10 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The more or less complete skeleton of an unborn calf

**F 92 (B XII, 6/2-3):**

A.e.: Circular soil mark of 25 cm diameter with stone covering (fig. 3). The pit had a depth of 25 cm. In the refill animal bones.

Z.e.: The well preserved skull of a medium sized, relatively slender dog (fig. 4). The animal had lost most of its teeth due to its great age. This skull also exhibits cut marks on the occipital bone. Its foramen magnum is intentionally enlarged.

The arrangement of further characteristics of the animal bone material and its distribution within the excavated area show, that during the period of settlement at Garab-Dzong this custom of deposits was used more often than can be proved by the evident features. The distribution of selected animal skeletal parts also shows a characteristic accumulation of such occurrences in the area of entrances and approaches.

Analysing the distribution of these deposits, their relation to the central square on the upper plateau is striking. Similar features were not found within the rooms of the trenches B I/XI and B III/XIII or within the trenches A XI-A XIII and B XLII/LII. Therefore, the few animal bones recovered without special features east and west of the central place must not be regarded as disturbed ritual deposits; they appear to be ordinary debris inside the refill layers.

Further study of entrance areas within other settlements is required in order to show, whether this was a custom, carried out only as a public ceremony at a central square, or was practised by each family at their respective houses, as described

in the literary source introduced below. This type of deposits could neither be recorded in excavations in the Muktinath valley nor from the abandoned settlements of Dzokhang, Piangdang and Bumchekhang in the vicinity of Garab-Dzong.<sup>5</sup> Within these settlements no area in front of buildings like the central square at Garab-Dzong has been excavated so far. Therefore, we are not able to decide, whether this type of deposits belongs to a local ritual at Garab-Dzong only or whether it has comparisons in other regions of the High Himalayas.

#### Archaeozoological analysis of the ritual deposits

In these deposits, we are dealing with horn sheaths of big bovids and skulls of dogs and cats which have been laid down in little pits in front of several entrances at Garab-Dzong. The ritual deposits predominantly comprise skulls of dogs, either complete or of which only the crania were represented. In two instances skulls with the first and second cervical vertebrae were found. In one other case only the mandible of a dog and in another case only a single canine tooth were deposited. The skulls represent a considerable variation of dogs, with respect to size and proportion (fig.5). There are medium sized and rather elongated skulls, however the majority of the dogs possessed a broader and shorter, stumpy head. This type of dog can still be found in the region (fig.6). Skulls of very small dogs, nowadays rather often kept as pets in the households of Jomsom and further upstream the Kali Gandaki River (similar the 'Lhasa Apso' <sup>6</sup>), have not been ascertained.

Horn sheaths of big bovids (yaks or cattle-yak-hybrids) form another group in the sample. The sheaths of the horns, of which often only the ends are preserved, cannot be identified as horns of yaks

or cattle-yak-hybrids. The hybrids of cattle and yak, locally named dzos or dzopas, are used quite often in the region as animals for transport or as draught animals. At present they are not bred in the Mustang district, but imported from elsewhere, since the population of yak is constantly decreasing and bulls of the zebu cattle used for the cross-breeding do not develop well in high altitude. The yak and its hybrids with cattle, the males of the latter being sterile, have long, protruding and pointed horns. In the case of the ritual deposits, we need not take cattle into consideration, because the dwarf cows living in this region develop only very short and small horns which have no pointed ends like the ones found at Garab-Dzong.

Only three specimens belong to cats. Within the assemblage of dog skulls, all age groups are represented. We could verify juvenile, young adult and very old individuals. In contrast, the cats were all comparably young. Assuming that the animals, whose skulls were used in the ritual, were not killed but died a natural death, then the statement could be made that dogs lived under better conditions, reaching a higher age than cats. This assumption is confirmed by observations of the present situation in the region. The enlargement of the occipital foramen of some of the skulls may have served to make it easier to put something into the braincase. Finally the specific customs in ancient Garab-Dzong included the ritual deposition of parts of young goats and unborn calves.

As additional specimens from refill layers have been identified: at least another 15 further dog skulls, three more cat skulls, one skull of a red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) the left lower jawbone of a beach marten (*Martes foina*) the well preserved cranium of a snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*) (fig.7) and further horns of big bovids.

### Ethnological analysis of the ritual depositories

*mTshams pa ngag dbang* (abbreviated as M), who owns a tourist lodge and practises traditional medicine, possesses a manuscript he inherited from his father, who lived in the village of Chongkor in the Muktinath valley (fig.8). It describes a ritual to fight or to control demons. M said that the text was written down by his father, but we were not able to determine whether the father was also the author or had just copied the text. The ritual is still practised in the Mustang district. A brief summary of the contents follows:

The performer of the ritual must draw a picture of the demon on a piece of cotton cloth from a graveyard or on a piece of bark (fig.9). The text describes precisely how the appearance of the demon has to be drawn. It has to have a man-like shape. The right hand beats the chest, the left hand pulls the hair of the head upwards, blood drips out of the mouth, the eyes look like the eyes of a dead person, and the arms and the legs are fettered with iron chains. An arrow, a bow, a spear and a knife surround the demon, and mantras are written on his belly and on the lower half of his limbs.

In order to combat the demon, the following steps have to be executed: first a vajra is pressed into the picture of the demon, and then the picture is sprinkled with blood, then fumigated and bound by mantras. Thereafter, the picture is rolled up and put into the skull or the horn sheath of an animal. Before the demon, now captured in the skull or in the horn, is buried, which is commonly done outside the door of a house or at a cross-roads, a ritual for the earth must be performed.

The text mentions different kinds of demons: dGra sri is the demon of the enemy; Chung sri is the name of the demon who kills little children; God

sri is the demon of misfortune who is supposed to cause harm to live stock and Dur sri is the demon of cemeteries. To each kind of demon, a particular kind of skull or horn is attributed: For dGra sri, the left horn of a breeding bull, and if not available, that of a not castrated yak is necessary. Chung sri requires the skull of a female mule, God sri the right horn or the skull of a yak. For Spyi sri, a demon who causes misfortune in general, the skull of a sterile animal should be buried. As a substitute, the skull of a goat, a pig or a dog can be taken. The performer of the ritual must draw a double vajra on the forehead of the skull, a swastika on its back, and the skull is sealed with wax. According to M, all members of the family have to attend the ceremony, and all of them have to press the seal in order to make the ritual effective.

While there seem to be no exact parallels to the practice recorded in the Muktinath valley in the rest of Tibet, Tibetans are known to believe in the existence of demons and believe that they can be controlled by burying them in different kinds of skulls. R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz reports Tibetan traditions which relate that all demons came from the country of the nine continents (*sri yul gling dgu*) and that they were all born in the castle of the Sri, in a castle composed of piled up skulls<sup>7</sup>. The class of demon called Sri was hatched from eggs; it had a human body and an animal head, the species of which do not correspond to the species of the buried skulls.

To summarise, the deposits of carnivores, mainly skulls of dogs and horn sheaths of yaks or dzos found within the round pits at two entrances of the central square on the plateau of Garab-Dzong do not yet have comparisons at other excavated sites in Southern Mustang. According to a newly dis-

covered text the ritual deposits served to avert demons, which are ghosts bringing all kinds of wrong and bad fortune as accidents, illness and death to man and animal. Numerous comparable features from the excavated areas illustrate that this custom apparently had few analogies in Tibetan literature, but was practised frequently during the entire period of occupation of Garab-Dzong. According to several informants from the surrounding villages, it is still sporadically carried out today.

In comparison with the written source the textile finds from two features (F 55 and F 66) do not appear strange; bits of cotton or bark were mentioned as writing- and drawing-sheet within the ritual. In course of the excavation we were able to recover a series of folded bark fragments from several walls and refill layers, yet they are not known from deposits. Further research has to show, whether there still are or at least have been similar customs in other valleys of the Himalayas.

#### Explanations of the figures:

- Fig. 1. Garab-Dzong, Trench B I/XI: Entrance area of house 2. Scale 1:30.  
 Fig. 2. Garab-Dzong, Trench B I/XI: Ritual deposits in front of house 2.  
 Fig. 3. Garab-Dzong, Trench B XII/XXII: Deposits F 91 and F 92.  
 Fig. 4. Garab-Dzong, Trench B XII/XXII: F 92, skull of a dog.  
 Fig. 5. Garab-Dzong, type variation of dog skulls.  
 Fig. 6. Garab-Dzong, a recent type of dog.  
 Fig. 7. Garab-Dzong, skull of a snow leopard exhibiting cut marks and an intentionally

enlarged foramen magnum.

- Fig. 8. Garab-Dzong, part of the manuscript owned by *mTshams pa ngag dbang*, Jomsom.  
 Fig. 9. Garab-Dzong, picture of a demon which has to be buried in a dog skull.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> H.-G. Hüttel, *Archäologische Siedlungsforschung im Hohen Himalaya. Die Ausgrabungen der KAVA im Muktinath-Tal/Nepal 1991-1992. Beiträge zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Archäologie* 14, 1994, 47-147 esp. 122ff. with fig. 163-165. Meanwhile, the number of burials inside the settlement of Khyinga has increased to more than 50 assured features (oral information H.-G. Hüttel, Bonn).

<sup>2</sup> A great part of the bones has been very badly preserved. Apart from the observation of the position of a few bones, the interpretation as flexed burial is justified by the very small burial pit.

<sup>3</sup> It cannot be proved whether the pottery found inside the pits had been deposited intentionally. - The textile remains have been delivered to the German Museum of Textiles in Krefeld for restoration. Results are not expected prior to spring 1997.

<sup>4</sup> The description of the archaeological evidence is given by E. Pohl; the archaeozoological analysis is done by A. v.d. Driesch and H. Manhart.

<sup>5</sup> Information about Khyinga by H.-G. Hüttel, Bonn, about the excavations at Phudzelin and Mebrak by W. Schön, Cologne.

<sup>6</sup> H. Epstein, *Domestic Animals of Nepal*, fig.111 (1977), Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., New York, London.

<sup>7</sup> R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (1956), esp. 514ff.

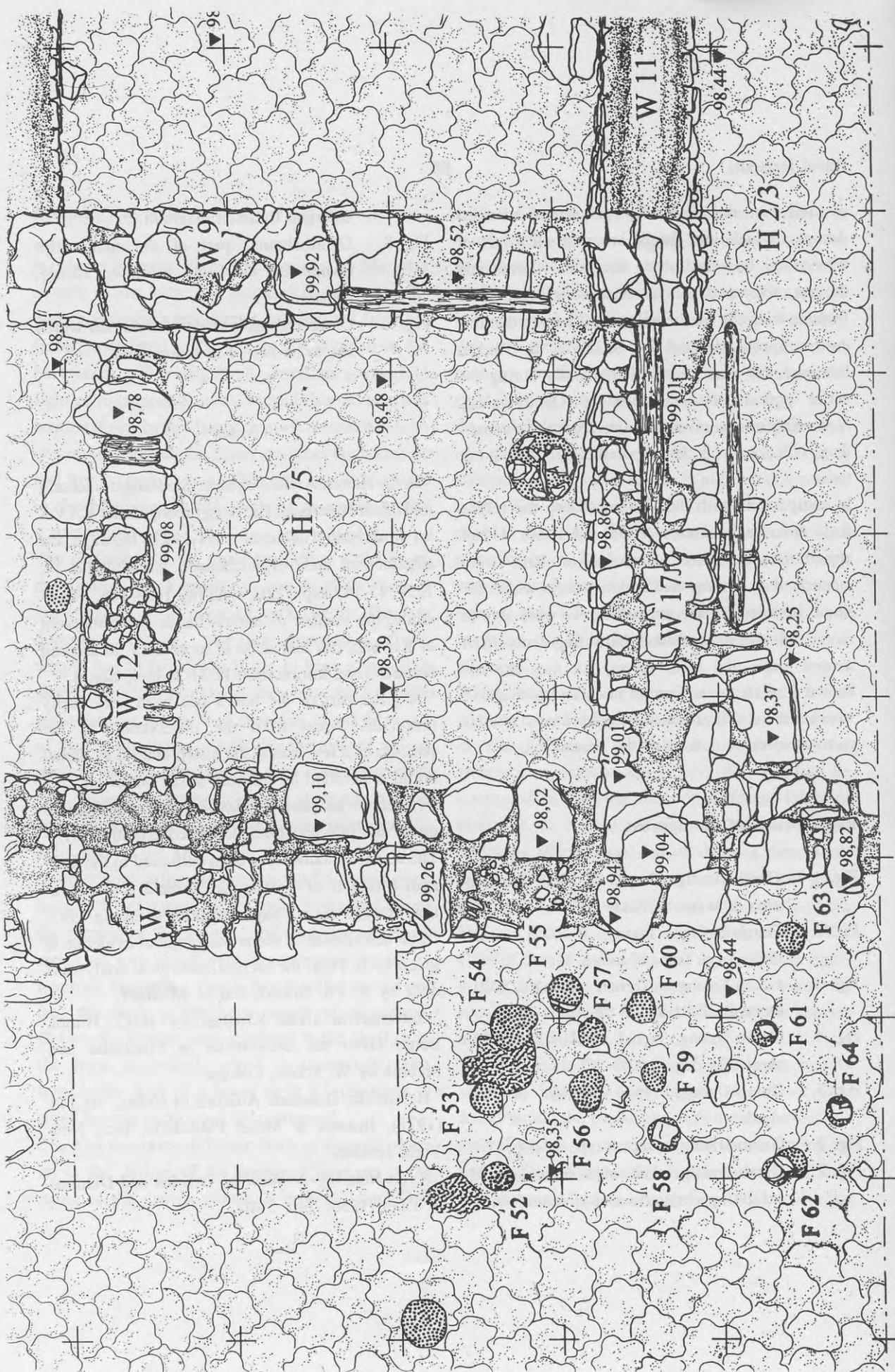


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

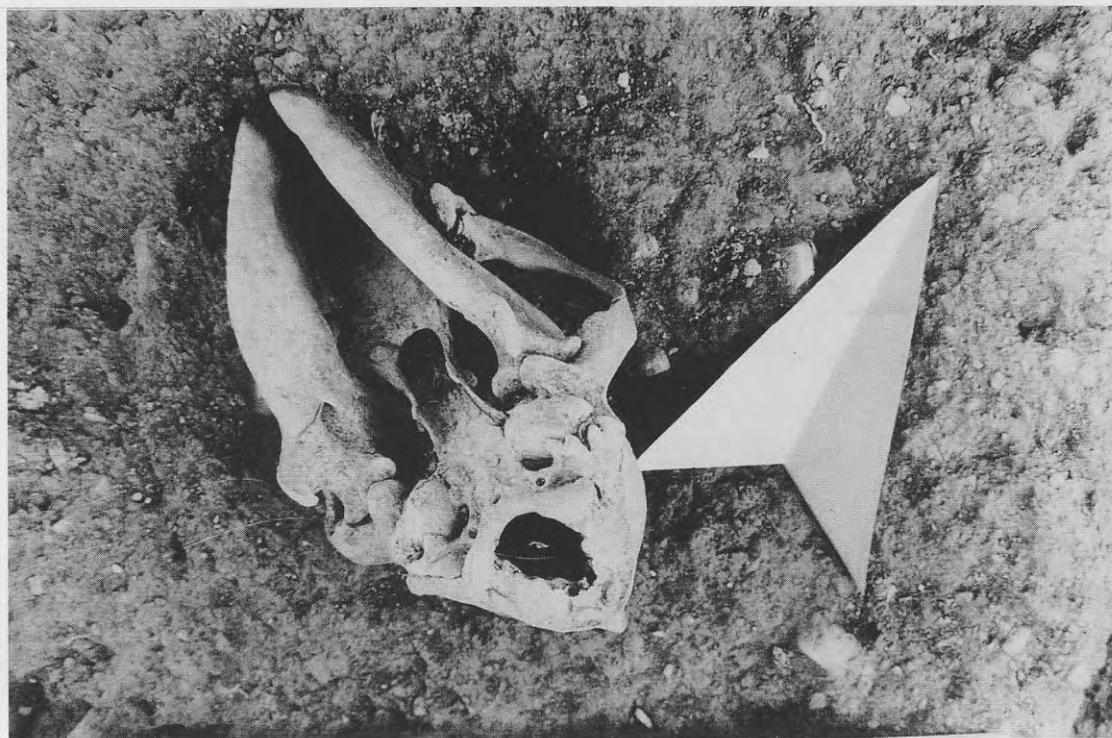


Fig. 4

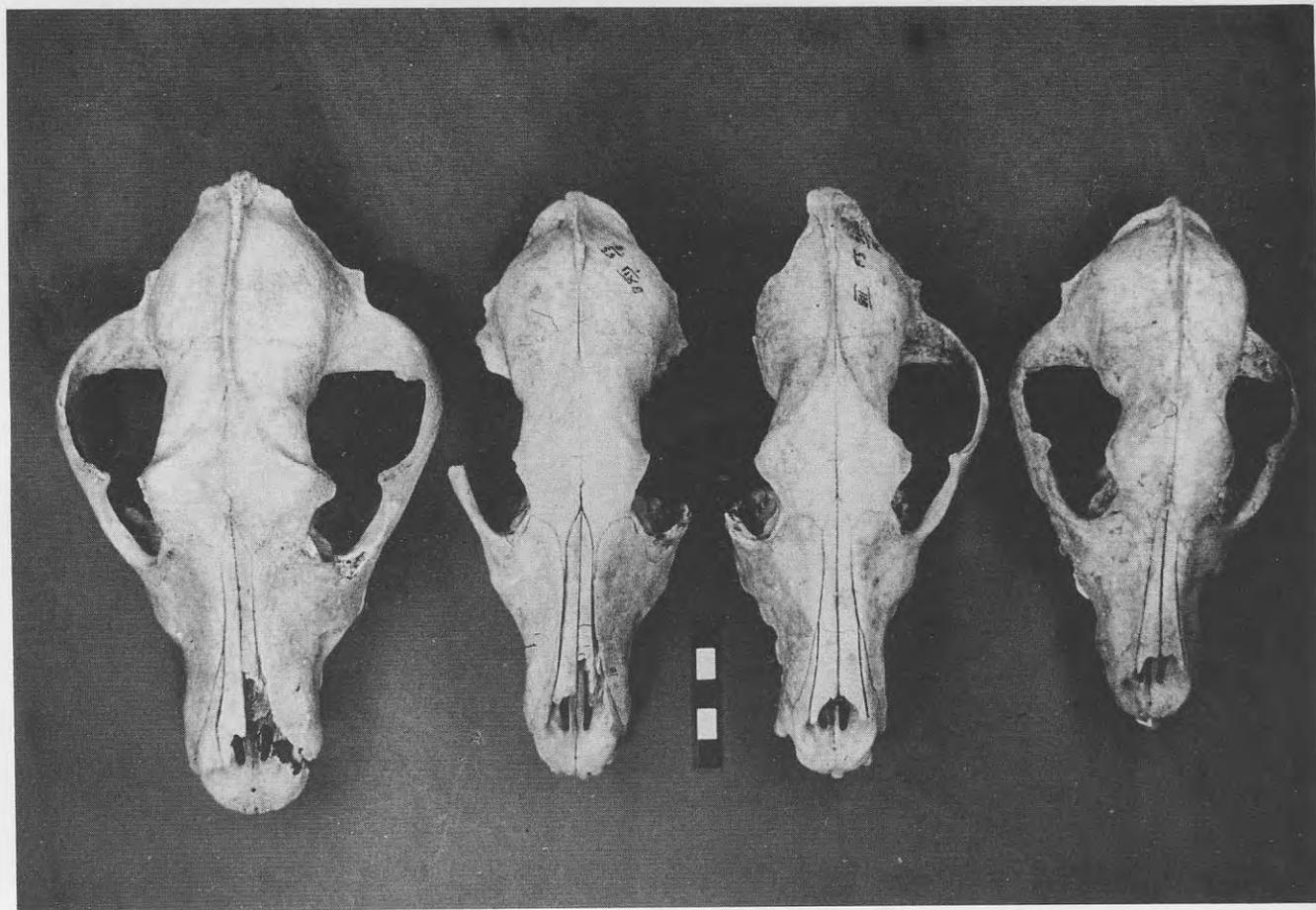


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

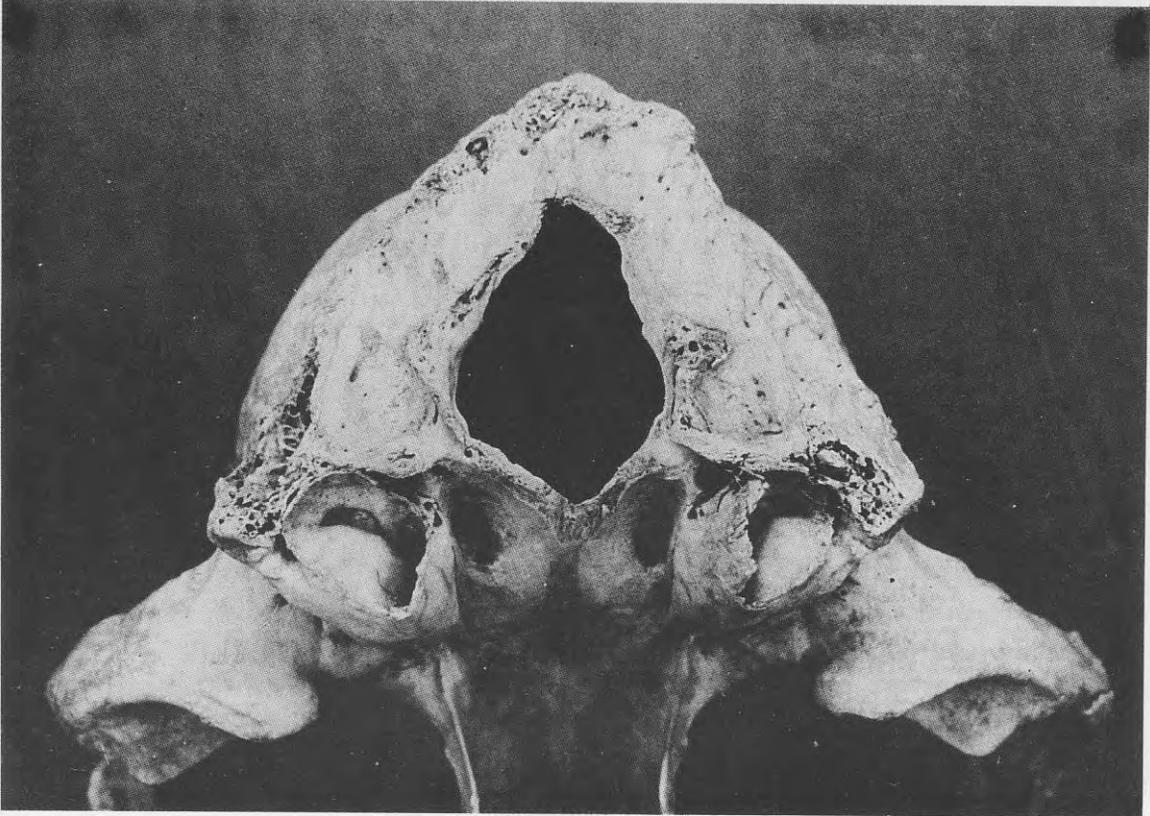


Fig. 7

