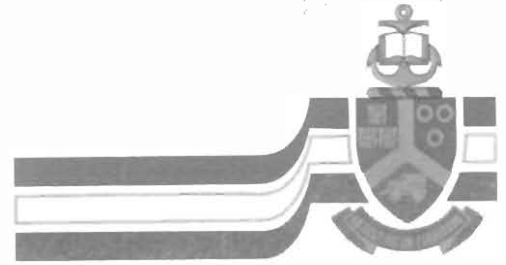


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The archaeological investigation of the grave of King Mgolombane Sandile Ngqika.

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This report is submitted to the King Sandile Development Trust and the South African Heritage Resources Agency in fulfilment of **SAHRA permit no.: 80/05/03/016/51**. It describes the archaeological investigation of the grave reported to be that of King Mgolombane Sandile Ngqika and the *in situ* physical anthropological analysis of the remains encountered at Isidenge, in the Amahlathi Municipality of the Stutterheim District of the Eastern Cape Province on 2005/05/31 and 2005/06/01.

16 August 2005

Summary

King Mgolombane Sandile Ngqika was born around 1820, and led the Gaiga ama Rharabe Xhosa in the 7th -9th Frontier Wars. He died in May 1878 during the 9th Frontier War, or War of Ngcayicibi, after being led into an ambush. A few legends surrounding the death of Sandile exist, one of which stated that he was decapitated before burial and that his skull was taken to England by Lieutenant Carrington, as a mantelpiece. According to this version of events the skull was eventually buried in the garden of a farmhouse in Colesbourne Park, Gloucestershire where a headstone was erected. Historically it is known that Sandile died of a gunshot wound to the trunk, and was buried at Isidenge near Stutterheim, between two British soldiers. A monument was erected over the grave in 1972. The present king felt that the grave should be investigated to confirm the identity of the individual buried here and to establish whether the skull is present. The Department of Anatomy, University of Pretoria was asked to excavate the grave and analyse the remains *in situ*.

The grave was investigated on 31 May and 1 June 2005. The memorial stone was removed and was re-erected on completion of the investigation. Preservation of the remains was generally poor, but a skull and mandible were clearly visible. Characteristics of the skeleton indicate that it had belonged to an older male individual of negroid descent. The feet could not be visualized, but the left tibia had an unusual shape, being slightly more rounded than usual. Historically it is known that Sandile had a “withered left leg” and walked with a limp. The soleal line (where the soleus muscle attaches) was

poorly developed relative to that of the right tibia. This probably indicates an abnormality/weakness of the left lower leg.

All aspects of the grave and remains observed are consistent with known historical facts on King Mgolombane Sandile Ngqika and the manner and circumstance of his death and burial. No indications that this is not his grave, or that he was beheaded and his skull removed, were encountered. The remains of Sandile will probably be exhumed in future reburied with other members of the royal amaRharabe family at the Mngqesha Great Place.

1. Introduction

Questions arising from the conflicting legends and traditions around the death of King Mgolombane Sandile Ngqika and the circumstances of his burial and the state of the remains have been considered by the Sandile Traditional Council. Speculation in local newspapers (Dispatch, Friday, March 23 and 24, 2000) as to whether the skull of Sandile is present in the grave, or whether it was taken to England, also shows a public interest in the matter. The descendants of Sandile resolved to pursue the issue and Prince Zolile Burns-Ncamashe visited the Cheltenham farm, where Sandile's head is alleged to have been buried, to determine if the head was there or not. For various reasons this could not be determined during the visit. In 2004 the family decided to exhume the body of Sandile to determine if his head was with the rest of his remains, before they embark on a further search for the skull in England. The family also felt that Sandile should have a dignified,

decent, royal burial ceremony. They believe he will then rest in peace in the company of his forefathers and his people.

In order to ensure that the correct legal and scientific procedures were followed the King Sandile Development Trust enlisted the help of the Department of Anatomy, University of Pretoria, after initially approaching Dr J Binneman of the Albany Museum. A SAHRA permit (Permit no.: 80/05/01/012/51) for the exhumation of the remains and re-interment in the same grave was granted to Dr Binneman. Although this would have addressed the need to assess the remains as to the presence of a skull, the family foresaw the re-burial of the remains at Mngqesha Great Place at King Williams Town. Dr Binneman also, at this stage, declined further involvement in the investigation and referred the family to the University of Pretoria. After discussions with the family as to requirements for the assessment and exhumation and re-burial of the remains it was decided to first investigate the remains *in situ* and then, based on the information gathered, to pursue further measures. The permit issued to Dr Binneman was withdrawn and a SAHRA permit (Permit no.: 80/05/03/016/51), allowing the *in situ* assessment of the remains, was granted to the University of Pretoria team.

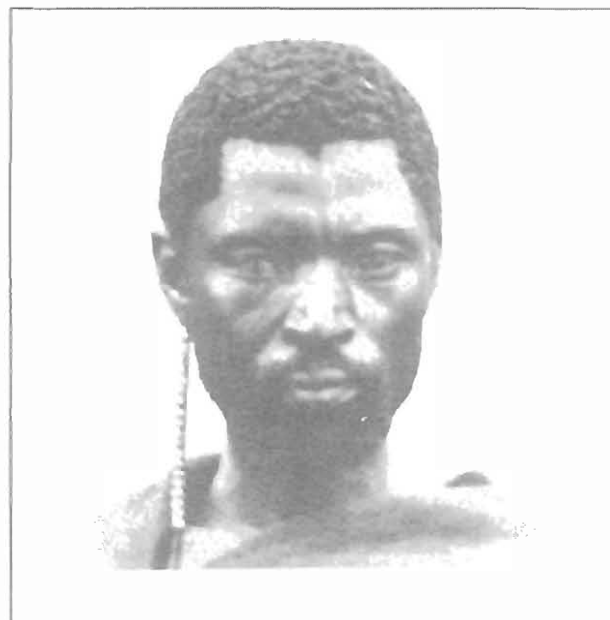
2. Aims of the study

The aim of this research was to investigate the grave indicated as that of King Mgolombane Sandile Ngqika , and to establish (a) whether the remains are indeed those of King Sandile, and (b) to determine whether the skull is present or not.

3. Literature study

Sandile was born around 1820, the son of Ngqika (father) and Suthu (mother). He was known for his physical disability since he had a withered left leg (club foot), most probably the result of a childhood illness. He took over the chieftainship of the Ngqika and paramountcy of the Rharhabe in 1841, but was despised by his brothers because of his disability. His brothers saw him as weak and vacillating and spread the word that he was not a suitable leader. He was, however, described by others as a tall, fine-looking man (Fig. 1), although walking with a slight limp. Sandile was respected and loved by his people and was popular among the other Xhosa chiefs. He led his people in the wars of 1846-47 (Seventh Frontier War), 1850-53 (Eighth Frontier War) and 1877-78 (Ninth Frontier War) in which he was killed (Hummel 1988; Weldon 1993). According to historical accounts he excelled as leader during the Ninth Frontier War and it was in this phase of his life that he became a Xhosa legend (Hummel 1988).

Figure 1. Historical representation of Sandile in life (Weldon 1993).



A lot of uncertain circumstances surrounded his death, following an ambush by a Mfengu patrol in May 1878 (Hummel 1988), giving rise to legends and traditions regarding the event. It was believed by some that he was buried in the natural fortress of Ntaba ka Ndoda and that he will stay there until the time comes for him to rise again. According to a European settler oral tradition, his body was seen being brought into Stutterheim and there it was buried near the site of Döhne Post Fort. (Hummel 1988; Mbangela 2003). The best known oral tradition is that Sandile's body was decapitated before burial and that his skull was taken to England by Lieutenant Carrington, as a mantelpiece. According to the legend Carrington then buried the head in 1905 in a wooden casket, lined with lead, in the garden of a farmhouse in Colesbourne Park, Gloucestershire. He reportedly erected a stone with the inscription "Here lies the head of Sandile (*sic*) chief of the Gaika Nation killed in action at the Peri (*sic*) Bush King Williams Town 1878" (Hummel 1988) at the site.

Historical documents does not support this version of the events: According to Hummel (1988), Carrington left the Ciskei in April 1878 and was send to command the Transvaal volunteer force against Sekhukune, the Pedi chief. Further more there is no written record to support the idea that the body of Sandile was decapitated (Hummel 1988).

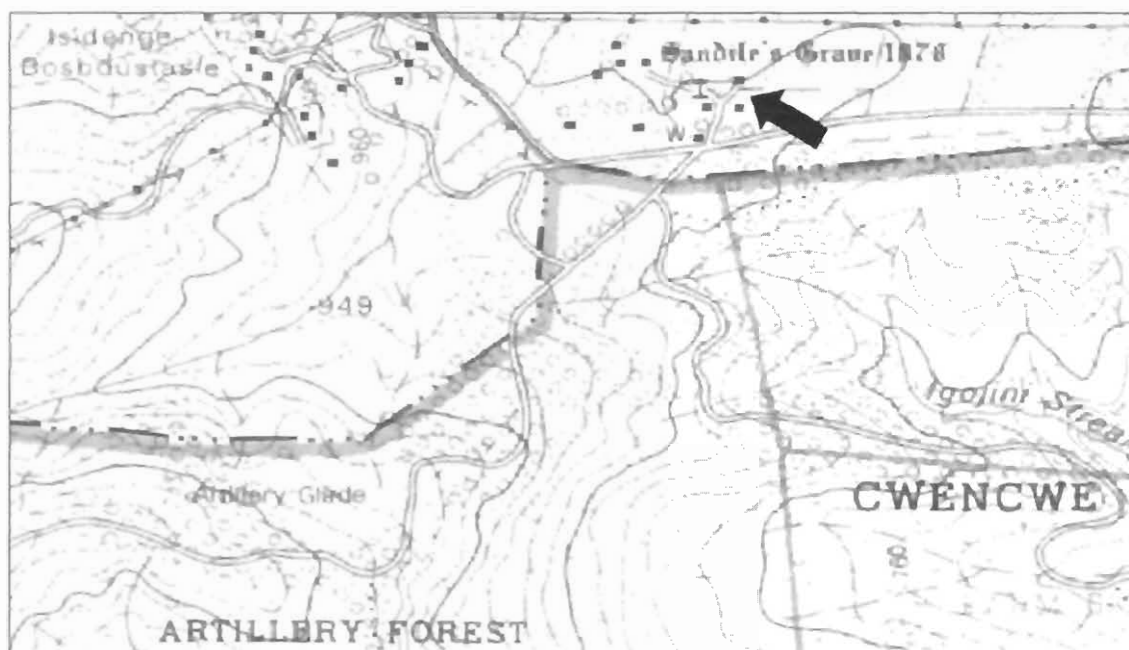
Another description of the circumstances surrounding the death of Sandile is found in the Frontier War Journal of Major John Crealock. According to Crealock (Hummel 1988) there was a skirmish between Sandile and his party and two companies of Captain Lonsdale's Mfengu's on the 29 May 1878. Sandile and his party were surprised on

Isidenge Hill (Mount Kemp) and he was wounded in the skirmish (Hummel 1988). Crealock's account claims that Sandile's body was found a few days later by one of his counsellors named Guba. Guba was captured by the British and Captain Johan Landrey and a party were led by Guba into the Isidenge forest area to retrieve Sandile's body. The body was eventually found on 7 June 1878 by a group of searchers that had lost contact with the main search party. It was wrapped in a blanket and taken to the military camp at Isidenge (Hummel 1988). Here the body was examined by Herbert Everitt, captain of the Tarkastad Volunteers and a medical officer at Stutterheim hospital. The conclusion was that time of death were four days earlier. The left side of Sandile's face, left orbit and right arm and other smaller patches had been eaten away by wild animals. A bullet wound that entered posteriorly in the right hypochondriac region, above the right loin was also found. Its aperture of exit was three inches (approximately 75mm) anterior to the right of the ensiform cartilage, through the seventh and eighth ribs. The bullet fractured the ribs very extensively. Everitt's examination also found injury to the right lobe of the liver and fragments of ribs that were driven into the abdominal cavity. The wound also showed signs of inflammation and extravasation. Everitt concluded that the injury have been received some days before death and according to his knowledge was caused by a Snider bullet (Hummel 1988).

Crealock's account states that Sandile was buried in a wagon sail on 9 June 1878 on the farm Schuch (Fig. 2). According to commandant Schermbrücker's report he was decently buried, but without any military consideration. A volley was, however, fired over the grave. He was buried between two British troops, Joseph Dicks of the

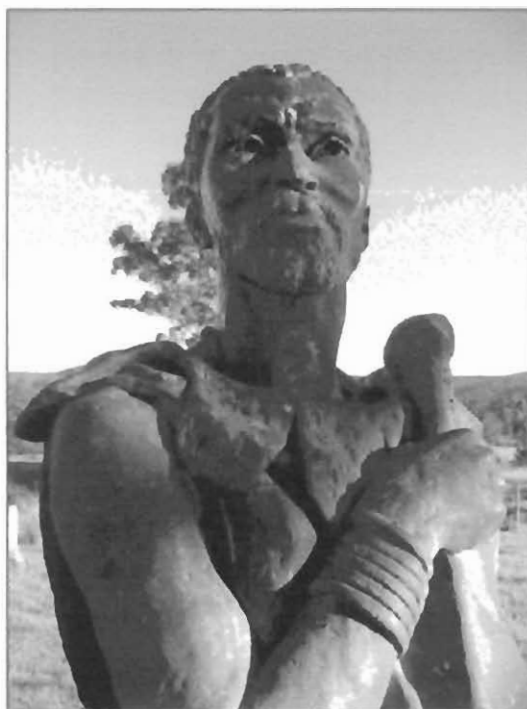
Wodehouse Blues, a member of the Dordrecht volunteer force and Frank Hillier of Bowker's Reserves. The grave was in later years identified by a collection of broken bottles and a weeping willow tree (French 1980; Hummel 1988).

Figure 2. The location of Sandile's grave (excerpt of Chief Directorate Surveys and Mapping 1:50 000 map)



A bronze plaque was erected at the grave by the Historical Monuments Commission in 1941. In 1972 Paramount Chief Apthorpe Mxolisi Sandile and his family requested a more appropriate memorial and a sculpture of Sandile by Maureen Quin and a granite grave dressing were erected at the grave and unveiled in December 1972 (Hummel 1988). The grave is presently still dressed in this way (Fig. 3 and 4).

Figure 3. Statue of Sandile by Maureen Quin erected over the grave.



4. Archaeological investigation

4.1. Description of grave dressing

The dressing on the grave located at 32°40'26.1" South and 027°17'52.2" East (Refer Fig. 2), was photographed and documented as found (Fig. 4). It consisted of a concrete foundation wall on which dressed granite side blocks and a granite slab with a bronze plaque supporting the memorial stone and statue rested. The slab and memorial stone were positioned in the middle (on the north-south axis) of the side blocks with the memorial at the western side of the slab. The grave dressing as a whole was oriented approximately 30° north of west.

Figure 4. The grave dressing as found.



The memorial stone is decorated with a crossed spear and knobkierie engraved above the following inscription:

IN MEMORY OF
PARAMOUNT CHIEF
SANDILE,
(A.A. MGOLOMBANE)
SON OF NGQIKA
BORN IN 1820,
DIED AND BURIED ON THE
9TH JUNE 1878.
THIS TOMBSTONE IS LAID
BY PARAMOUNT CHIEF
A.M. SANDILE,
IN 1972.
AMARARABE
R.I.P.



A bronze plaque on the eastern end of the granite slab bears the following text:

SANDILE
CHIEF OF THE GAIKAS. BORN ABOUT 1820 KILLED IN THE
NINTH KAFFIR WAR 1877-78 AND BURIED HERE ON 9.6.1878
ERECTED BY THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS COMMISSION

The text is repeated in Afrikaans and Xhosa.



Also on the western side of the grave dressing, but outside the concrete foundation wall and granite side blocks, two sandstone crosses occurred on both sides of the central granite memorial. Neither of these crosses is inscribed. The frame formed by the side blocks was covered with a concrete slab which was, in turn, covered with green gravel (Refer Fig. 4).

The granite side blocks consisted of two sections on the eastern and western sides of the dressing, in total 3.6m long and of only one section on the southern and northern sides which was 2.4m in length. The inscribed slab was 1.04m wide, 2.345m long and 10.5cm thick and was placed 1.26m away from each side. The dressing was approximately 30cm

higher than the surrounding surface. The memorial stone was 1.52m high and 60.5cm wide and long at the square base. The bronze statue extended another 60cm high above the memorial stone.

4.2. Excavation of grave

The green gravel covering the concrete slab was removed and stored to one side so that it could be replaced on completion of the investigation.

The dressing was removed by breaking a 30cm wide strip of the concrete slab on both sides of the granite slab so that the slab and memorial stone could be moved away. The memorial stone contactors Crenshaw Monumental of Queenstown (appointed by the King Sandile Development Trust) then moved the memorial stone and granite slab to the sides so that the excavation could continue (Fig. 5).

Figure 5. The grave with the granite slab and memorial stone moved to the sides.



After the granite dressing was moved aside, the concrete slab below where the granite slab was, was broken and removed. Excavation proceeded in this area and a stone cairn (Fig. 6), containing various fragments of broken bottles, was exposed. The shards represented several broken bottles of various shapes and at least five different colours (Fig. 7). Where necks were recovered these were of the marble stopper and cork type rather than screw-top bottles. After the cairn was documented it was removed and the stones were placed aside for later re-erection after the grave was investigated and backfilled.

In the grave matrix below the stone cairn several cartridge cases were recovered. Including those recovered from deeper down, eight corroded cartridge cases in all were recovered from the grave (Fig. 8).

Figure 6. The stone cairn directly below the concrete slab in the middle of the grave dressing.



Figure 7. Some glass bottle shards recovered from between the rocks of the cairn.



Figure 8. Some of the corroded cartridge cases recovered from the grave.



At approximately 20cm below the surface, colour and compaction differences in the matrix indicated the presence of a burial pit. The infill of the burial pit was grainy and

rust-brown in colour in comparison with the sticky, dark-grey, hard and homogenous clay that constituted the surrounding matrix.

The infill of the grave pit was excavated by means of the test trench method. Some bottle shards and cartridge cases, in addition to those found amongst the rocks of the stone cairn, were recovered in the upper part of the excavation.

The remains were found in an extended position with the body lying on the back, approximately 160cm below the surface dressing of the grave. It was oriented from east to west with the skull at the eastern side. The neck was rotated so that the skull rested on its left side. The right upper limb was flexed with the forearm on the abdomen and the left arm was extended along the left side of the body. Both lower limbs were extended and next to each other (Fig. 9). Preservation of the remains was poor to the extent that the ribs and vertebrae, as well as the hands and feet, could not be visualized. Most of the ends and articulation surfaces of the bones were worn or absent.

Figure 9. Human remains *in situ*. The arrow indicates north.



After the remains were analysed it was covered with a layer of excavated material. A layer of white sand was then placed in the grave. The purpose of this was to mark the depth at which the remains occur in order to prevent damage to the remains in the event that the grave is again excavated to exhume the remains for re-interment. The grave was backfilled and the stone cairn re-constructed. Crenshaw Memorials then re-erected the grave dressing and memorial stone as it were before the investigation was done.

5. Analysis of remains

5.1. Preservation

Preservation was generally poor. The skull and mandible were clearly visible, but none of the long bones was complete. All their ends were eroded away. All four limbs could be visualized, but very little could be seen of the ribs and vertebrae. Because the remains were left *in situ*, and because of the brittleness of the bones, it was also decided that it was not necessary to completely expose the hands, thorax and spinal column.

5.2. Age

Due to the fragmentary nature of the remains and the fact that the analysis had to be done *in situ*, age was difficult to determine. No ribs could be visualized. A complete set of permanent teeth had erupted, and advanced wear with large dentine patches was evident. Only two cervical vertebrae could be visualized, and it seemed as though some age-

associated changes were present on their bodies. These characteristics probably indicate an individual of older than 40 years.

5.3. Sex

The pelvis was very fragmentary and not completely exposed, and could thus not be used in sex determination. However, the skull was quite robust with large mastoids, a sloping forehead, prominent brow ridges and rounded orbital margins. The mandible was also robust with a broad ramus. These characteristics indicate a male individual.

5.4. Population affinity

The individual was very prognathic (Fig. 10), with a broad nasal aperture. This indicates an individual of negroid descent. It was not possible to take cranial measurements that could be used in further analysis.

Figure 10. The skull (*in situ*) in lateral view.



5.5. Antemortem stature

None of the long bones was complete enough to be measured. An estimate of the length of the right humerus of about 345 mm was made. Using the formulae of Lundy & Feldesman, this would indicate a stature of about 170.7 ± 3.834 cm.

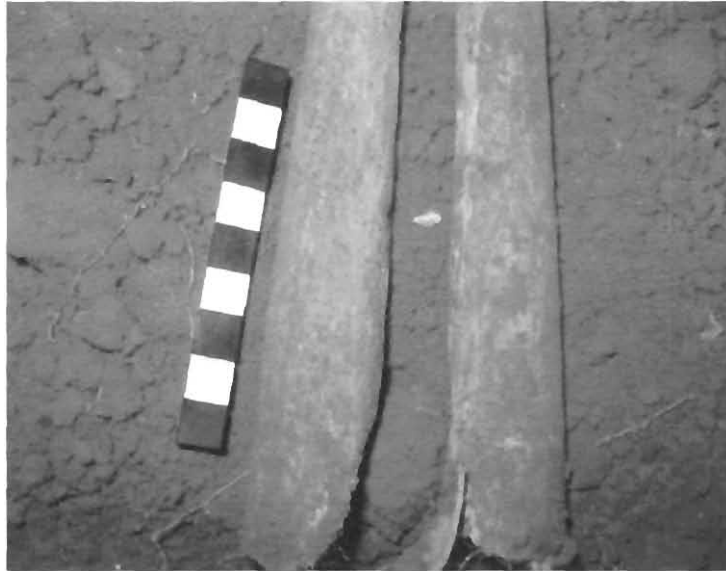
5.6. Dentition

Only the right side of the face could be seen. In this area, the complete set of permanent teeth had erupted, and all teeth were present and healthy as far as could be ascertained. Advanced dental wear was evident.

5.7. Trauma and pathology

Assessment for the presence of trauma and/or pathology was hampered by the poor preservation and the fact that the skeleton had not been completely excavated. Because it is known that Sandile had a possible club foot on the left side and walked with a limp, the lower legs and feet were of particular interest. Due to the position of the remains in the grave, the feet could not be visualized. Neither of the two tibiae was complete, but they were lifted from the soil and assessed. The left tibia had an unusual shape, being slightly more rounded than usual. Its nutrient foramen was on the lateral surface of the bone, whereas it is usually situated on the posterior side of the bone, close to the soleal line. In addition, the soleal line (where the soleus muscle attaches) was poorly developed relative to that of the right tibia (Fig. 11). This probably indicates an abnormality/weakness of the left lower leg.

Figure 11. The two tibiae from behind. Note the prominent soleal line on the right tibia (next to the scale), which is not visible on the left tibia.



6. Synthesis of evidence

A literature study on the circumstances of King Sandile's death and burial was undertaken before excavation, and pertinent historical facts could be tested with the archaeological evidence encountered.

The correct location of the grave (French, 1980; Hummel, 1988) was confirmed by the stone cairn present over the grave directly below the granite grave dressing. The presence of glass bottles at the grave is ascribed to the common cultural practice of placing offerings of food and luxury goods at a grave, marking this as the grave of a black person, possibly of high status. The placing of bottles at the grave at the time of burial is also briefly described in some historical newspaper reports (French, 1980; Hummel, 1988). Cartridge cases found associated with the grave can be ascribed to a historical

account of eight gunshots being fired as a salute at the time of burial (French, 1980; Hummel, 1988).

The *in situ* physical anthropological analysis of the remains indicated that the remains were those of an adult, male individual. The advanced dental wear and age-associated changes on the vertebrae indicated that he was most probably older than 40 years. Although the pelvis could not be visualised, the skull and mandible were robust, confirming the sex as male. The individual was very prognathic, indicating negroid descent. He was about 170.7 ± 3.834 cm tall.

Assessment for the presence of trauma and/or pathology was hampered by the poor preservation and the fact that the skeleton had to be assessed *in situ*. Unfortunately the feet could not be visualized, but the morphology of the left tibia probably indicated an abnormality/weakness of the left lower leg.

7. Conclusion

The investigated grave contained the remains of a male individual of Negroid origin, who had probably been older than 40 years of age. Some abnormalities of the left lower leg were observed, although the poor preservation prohibited a clear diagnosis. All aspects of the grave and remains observed are consistent with known historical facts on King Sandile and the manner and circumstance of his death and burial. No indications that this is not his grave, or that he was beheaded and his skull removed, were encountered.