DECOY WHISTLES FROM MEDIEVAL URALS SETTLEMENTS

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The collection of decoy whistles from medieval Urals settlements Idnakar, Donkikar, Guryakar (Chepetzk culture), Anyushkar (Rodanov culture) is a large one. Now it comprises 89 intact objects and 45 fragments. Although these finds are well known in archaeological literature (Ivanova 1982, 1985, 1985a; Smirnov 1928; Oborin 1960) they have never been considered as sound producing devices.

The names of ancient Udmurt settlements come back to the legends telling us about bogatir Dondi and his very strong and tall sons Idna, Vesya, Gurya, Zuy. They could take a top of a hill and draw it up to a size of a mountain. Then they enclosed it with a firm fortification and settled themselves there.

The hunting was one of the main employments for Udmurts living in a forest region. The author ot the past described admiraly the craftsmanship of Udmurt hunter : "Votyak is going near you and you don't hear his steps. He is going alongside the cane the same highness as the cane, he is going in the grass the same highness as the grass. As soon as he sees a bird in the grass he immediately becomes a motionless stone, bends down to the grass and sprawls as a cat. At first you can see a leaf of the grass bent one by one as he passes a step and then it disappeares until you can hear a low sound of his arquebus and the noise of bird falling far away. The modern hunting practice allows to compare ancient and recent hazel-grouse decoy whistles.

The material is different. All archaeological specimens are made of sable's or marten's thigh bones. Let's see the reasons. The sable was a furry animal which was flayed straight in the forest at the place of hunting. So the bone may be obtained in the same place. The choice of marten's bone can also be explained by the fact that the marten is a worst enemy of hazel-grouse.

The modern decoy whistles are made of various materials :

- metal,

- hair's or bird's bone,

- bark of the young willow twig,

- goose feather.

During the ethnographic expedition in August 1987 I asked present day hunters to play archaeological decoy whistles. They told me the sound is tender and very close to real hazel-grouse voice.

The results of trace examination clear how the ancient bone was transformed into sound tool.

1. A distal eiphisis is cut at the right angle. Through this hole the air is blown. There are two methods of its production :

a) sawing off; the thickness of tube board doesn't change, it remains permanent;

b) the edge of distal end is sharp; maybe because of notching it before breaking off;

2. the marrow is removed;

3. the proximal end is cut diagonally; partial closing of this end allows; to change the pitch of the sound;

4. the surface of decoy whistle is whittled;

5. two different ways of making sound hole on bone's surface can be illustrated by decoy whistles from Anyushkar :

a) 21/903 (fig. 1 in the middle) : the hole is precutting by one or two angle-cutting movements. Then it is widening : the hole's edges are thin : the object is well sounded;

b) 21/222 (fig. 2 below) : the hole is begun by sawing in the middle, then enlarged by the top of a knife in vertical position : the hole's walls are thick;

6. There are some variations in placing the sound hole on the bone surface. In 20 intact objects from Idnakar 9 holes are cutting on dorsal surface, 8 - on ventral, 3 - on medial, 0 - on lateral (maybe, because of its concave shape).

Although there are not two identical ancient decoy whistles, the algorythm of their building is the same and wasn't changing during IX-XIII centuries. What is more the tradition proved to be of great vitality. The modern hunting manuals (Mikcheev 1952, Maltzev 1958) suggest the same mode of decoy whistle making. Only one detail - the block - is absent in archaeological finds. But some of them can function without it. So you can see the structure of decoy whistles is very conservative and hasn't undergone much changes while the time passed. Just as the hazel-grouse ovoices remain permanent and the hunter's intentions are the same.

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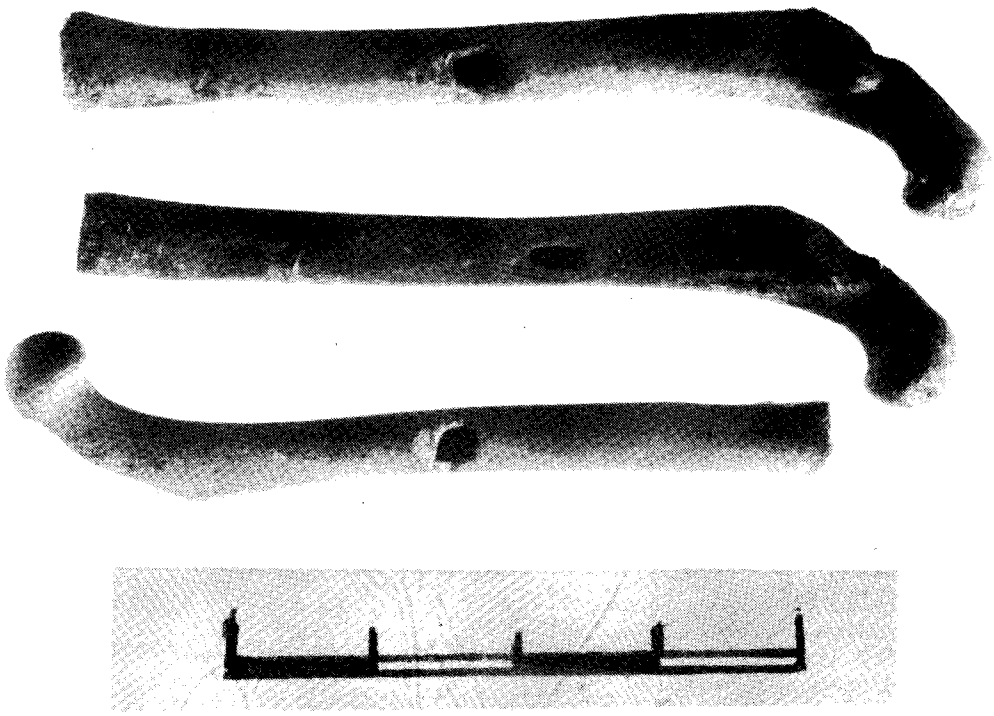

Fig. 1 : Decoy whistles from Anyushkar.

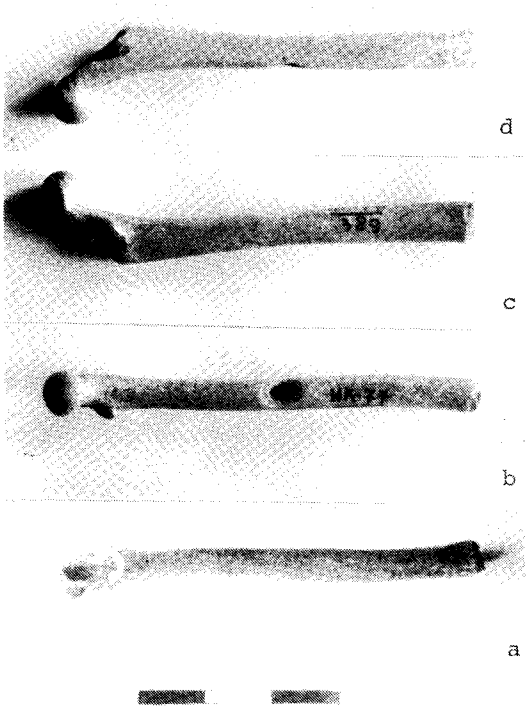

Fig. 2 : Decoy whistle from Idnakar IK-77/389

a) lateral surface;
b) medial surface;
c) dorcal surface;
d) ventral surface.

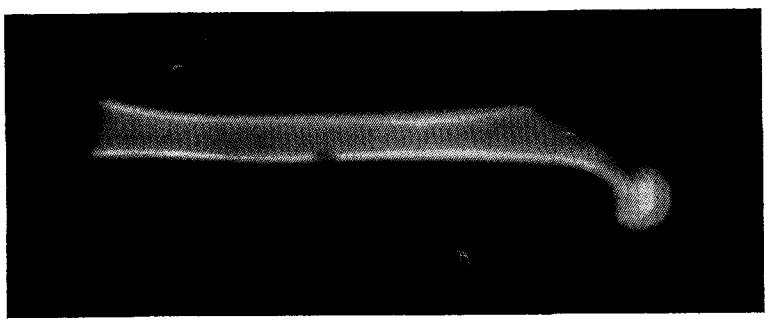

Fig. 3 : Decoy whistle from idnakar, x-ray.

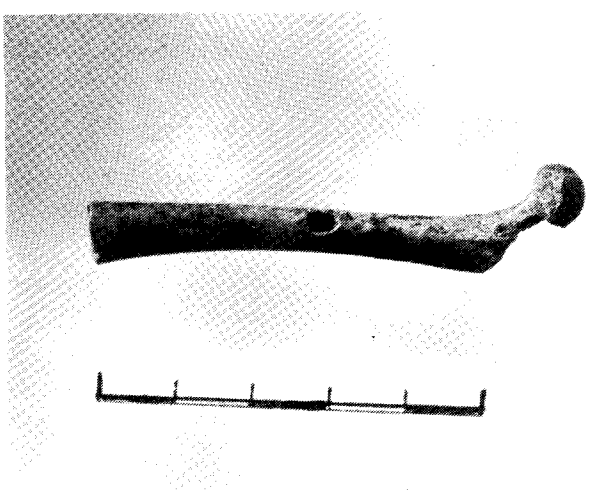

Fig. 4 : Decoy whistle from idnakar 130/264.

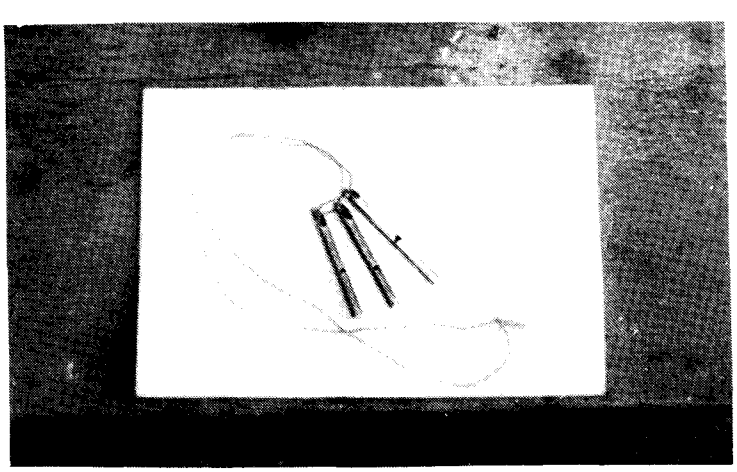

Fig. 5 : Modern decoy whistles made by V. Kotov, hunter from Lyuk, Udmurtiya, 177.