

# On the investigation of possible remains of Field Marshal Iosif Gurko and his wife Maria (Salias de Turnemir) found in their former estate Sakharovo (Tver Region, Russia)

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## Abstract

Two skeletons, found in the tomb of the former estate Sakharovo near the city of Tver, were investigated. Although fragmentary and lacking skulls, according to age of death and anthropometry they could have belonged to Field Marshal Iosif Vladimirovich Gurko (1828-1901) and his wife Maria Andreevna (Salias de Turnemir) (1838-1906). Further investigations are necessary to locate clavicles of the male skeleton. Fused fracture of one of them can strengthen the idea of the male skeleton belonging to Field Marshal, who broke the clavicle during manoeuvres of 1874.

**Keywords:** Archaeoanthropology; Tver; Field Marshal; Gurko; Balkans; Russo-Turkish War

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## Introduction

Count Iosif Vladimirovich Romeyko-Gurko (1828-1901), also known as Joseph or Ossip Gourko, was a Russian Field Marshal prominent during the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) (Figure 1). Of Belarusian/Polish extraction, Gurko was educated in the Imperial Corps of Pages, entered the hussars of the imperial guard as sub-lieutenant in 1846, became captain in 1857, adjutant to Alexander II of Russia in 1860, colonel in 1861, commander of the 4th Hussar regiment of Mariupol in 1866, and major-general of the emperor's suite in 1867. He subsequently commanded the grenadier regiment, and in 1873 the 1st brigade, 2nd division, of the cavalry of the guard. Although he took part in the

Crimean War, being stationed at Belbek, his claim to distinction is due to his services in the Turkish war of 1877. He led the van of the Russian invasion, took Tarnovo on July 7, crossed the Balkans by the Ham Bogaz pass, which debouches near Hainkioi, and, notwithstanding considerable resistance, captured Uflani, Mag-lizh, and Kazanlak; on July 18 he attacked Shipka, which was evacuated by the Turks on the following day. Thus within sixteen days of crossing the Danube, Gourko had secured three Balkan passes and created a panic at Constantinople. He then made a series of successful reconnaissances of the Tundzha valley, cut the railway in two places, occupied Stara Zagora (Turkish, Eski Zagra) and Nova Zagora (Yeni Zagra), checked the advance of Suleiman Pasha's army, and returned again over the Balkans. In October he was appointed commander of the allied cavalry, and attacked the Plevna line of communication to Orkhanie with a large mixed force, captured Gornidubnik, Telische and Vratsa, and, in the middle of November, Orkhanie itself. Plevna was isolated, and after its fall in December Gourko led the way amidst snow and ice over the Balkans to the fertile valley beyond, totally defeated Suleiman Pasha at the Battle of Philippopolis, and occupied Sofia, Philippopolis (Plovdiv) and Adrianople, the armistice at the end of January 1878 stopping further operations. Gurko was made a count, and decorated with the 2nd class of St. George and other orders. In 1879–1880, he was governor of St. Petersburg, and from 1883 to 1894 Governor-general of Poland, where he enforced the Russification policies of Alexander III (28).

Iosif Gurko was married to the countess Maria Andreevna Salias de Turnemir (1838-1906). Part of their life they have lived in their estate Sakharovo near the city of Tver (Figure 2). Here, at night of January 15th, 1901, Field Marshal Gurko has died. His body was deposited in the family tomb, constructed earlier, in 1889, in the estate park for the son, Alexei. Next year, remnants of Gurko have been moved to the burial vault in the sanctified family Church after Iosif Volotsky. Body of Maria Andreevna, who died in Paris in 1906 was embalmed for the transportation and deposited in the same vault. On May 20th, 1925 remains of Field Marshal and his wife were thrown away by activists of Komsomol (The Communist Union of Youth). Eyewitnesses of this action report, that remnants of the couple were subsequently buried somewhere in the park. They also report, that skeleton of the Field Marshal was not complete since it has been first thrown away in the water trench. Skulls of Field Marshal and his wife have been seen in hands of children, who played with them.

In the year 2007, on the course of restoration works, led in the estate and park by the senior priest of Iosif Volotsky Church, Father Gennady (Ul'yanitch), the family tomb of Gurko was discovered. Two partial skeletons were found inside. Identified by Moscow specialists as belonging to senior man and woman, they have been temporarily deposited in Iosif Volotsky Church, which is still under reconstruction. The DNA analysis, carried out in Moscow, brought no results due to the deficiency of genetic material. In July, 2010 the author of this paper was asked to investigate human remains, found in the tomb, to provide any additional information on the possibility of their attribution to the couple of Gurko.



Figure 1. Field Marshal Iosif Vladimirovich Gurko.

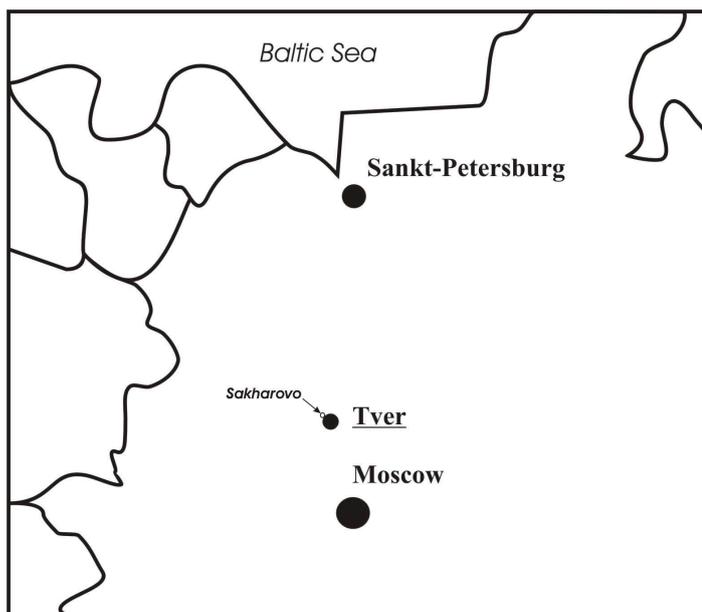


Figure 2. Tver and Sakharovo on the map of European Russia.

### Materials and methods

Investigations of skeletal remains have been carried out on June 14th, 2010 in the Josef Volotsky Church (Figure 3).

Two incomplete human skeletons of good preservation were objects of the study (Figure 4, 5). Bones of highly fragmentary male skeleton were found under the fallen part of the tomb roof while more complete female skeleton was lying under its undisturbed part. Skeletons were deposited in cultural layer, which filled the tomb after partial destruction in 1925. Besides unrelated fragments, this layer contained small pieces of zinc coffin (-s), as well as parts of woman's toilet (comb, corset etc.) (Father Gennady, pers. communication).

The age of buried individuals has been determined by combination of several methods using postcranial features (1-5, 9-12, 15, 18, 20, 24, 26, 27), Figures 6, 7. The stature estimation was based on a number of methods, provided in the work of Alekseev (1). To check the results several later methods were applied (6-8, 13, 16, 17, 21, 23, 25). An original computer program "Stature of Buried" (2007), developed at the Physics-Technical Faculty of Tver State University, has been used to find an optimal value for the stature of buried. The skeletons were sexed using preserved pelvic bones of female skeleton (14, 19, 22) together with other morphological characteristics. Skeletons on figures 3 and 4 have been vectorized by the author in Corel-Draw 10. Forms for vectorization have been generously provided by Thierry Vette (France).



Figure 3. Author during the investigations of possible skeletons of Gurko couple in Iosif Vo-lotsky Church. Estate Sakharovo, Tver Region. 14 June 2010.

<b>№ of skeleton</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Stature (cm)</b>
<b>1</b>	Male	65-75	Senilis	166 ± 5,0
<b>2</b>	Female	60-70	Senilis	153 ± 0,6

Table 1. General data on buried individuals.

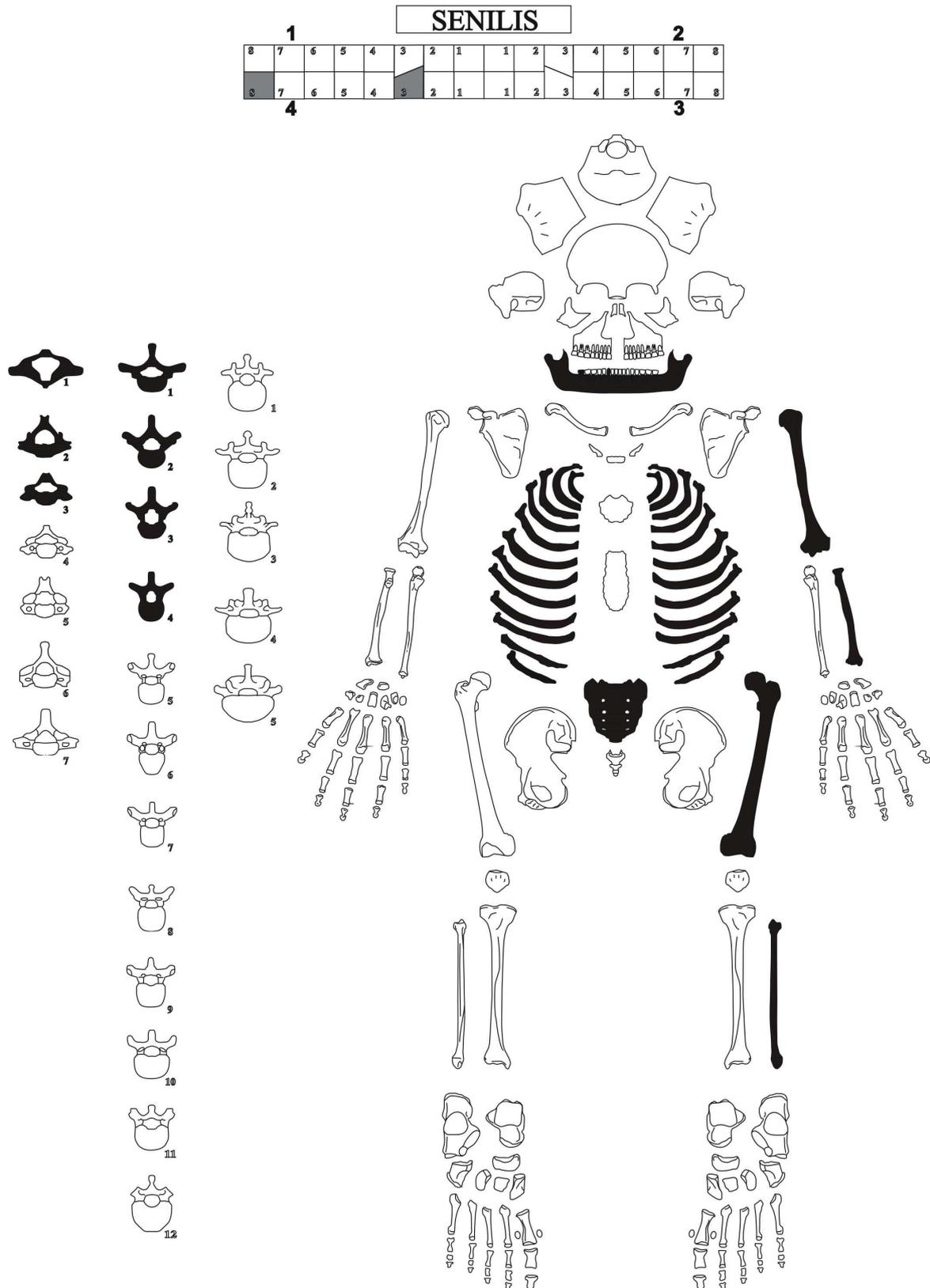


Figure 4. Skeleton №1. Bones available for study are filled with black. Teeth, fallen postmortem, are filled with grey.

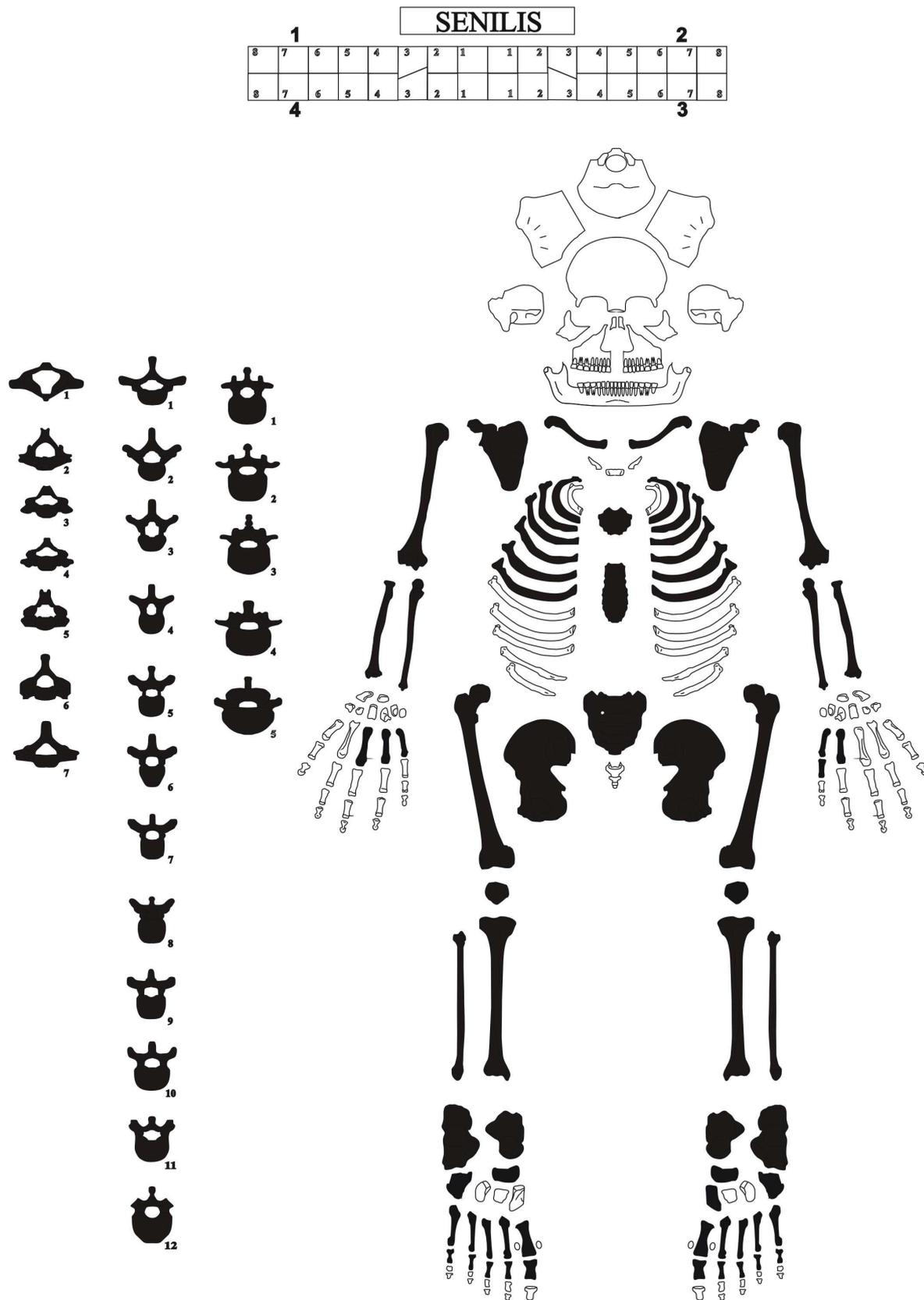
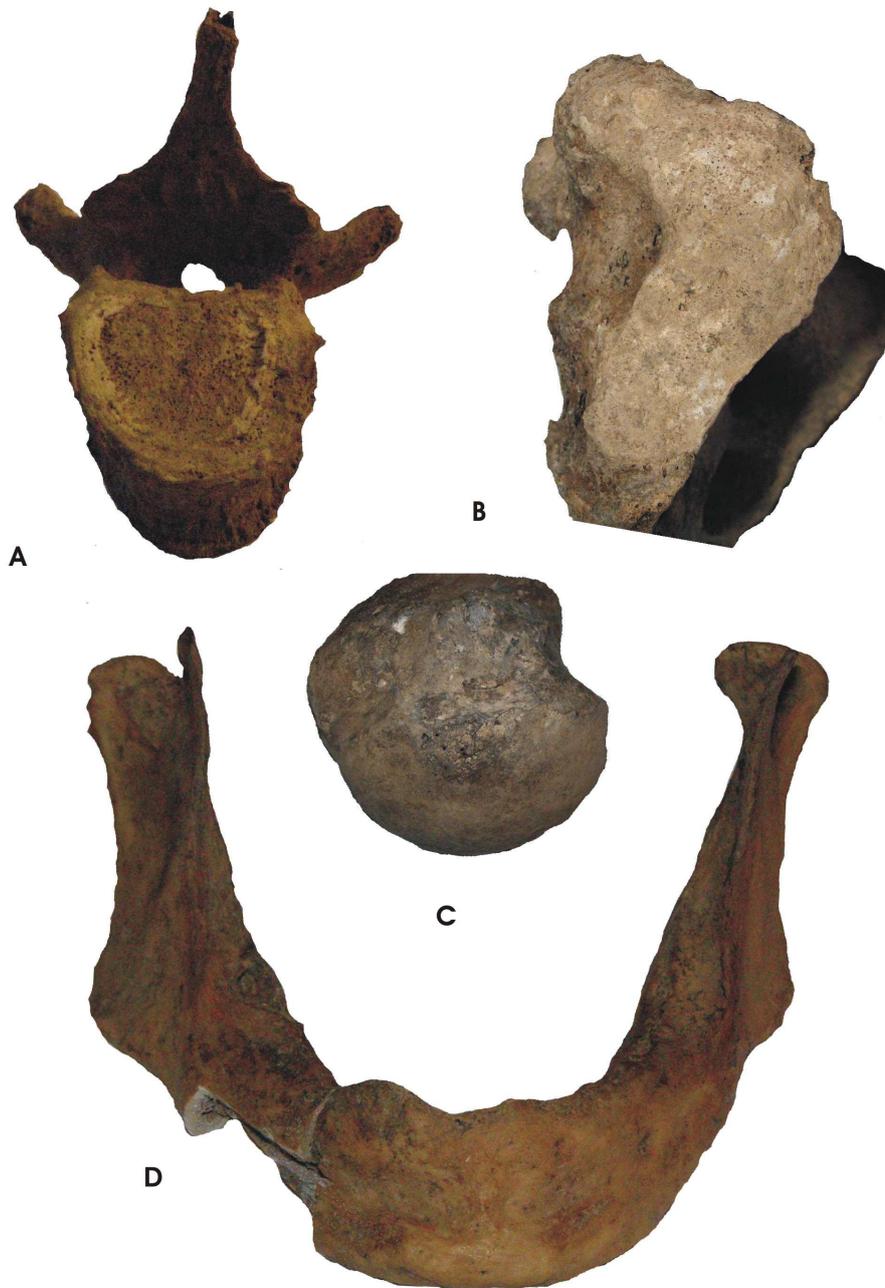
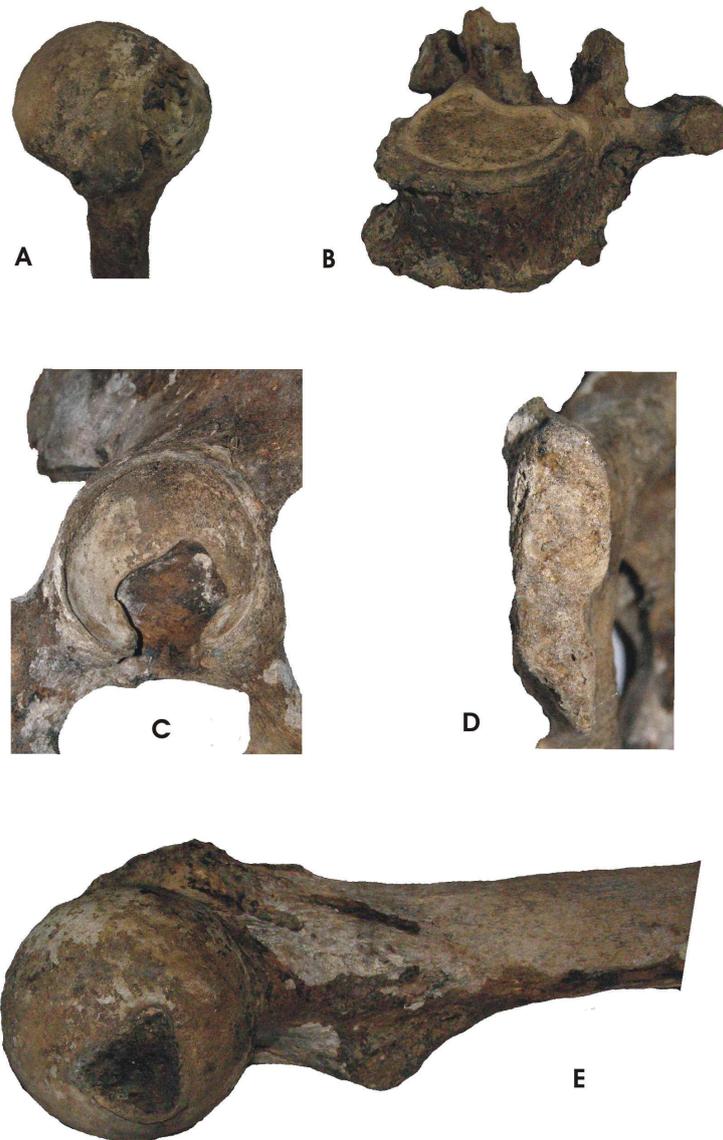


Figure 5. Skeleton №2. Bones available for study are filled with black. Teeth, fallen postmortem, are filled with grey.



*Figure 6. Bones, used for age determination of the Skeleton №1. A – thoracic vertebra with age changes; B – right iliosacral junction surface; C – caput of right humerus; D – lower jaw.*



*Figure 7. Bones, used for age determination of the Skeleton №2. A – caput of the left humerus; B – thoracic vertebra; C – left acetabulum; D – pubic symphyseal surface; E – proximal third of left femur.*

## Results

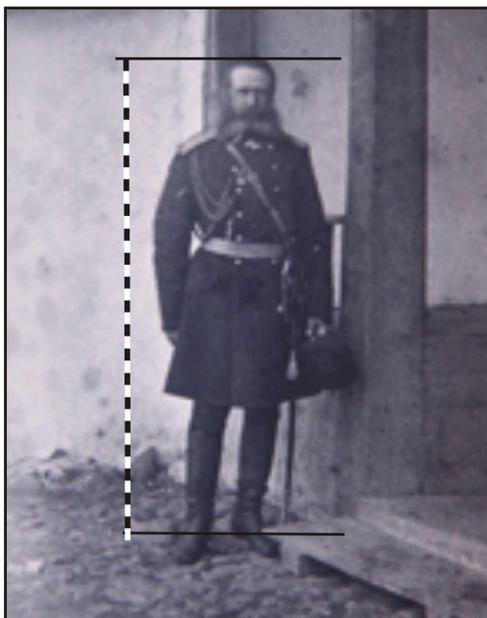
Two skeletons, presented for the investigation, belong to senior man and woman. The general data on them is presented in the table 1:

Skeleton 1 (Figure 4). Relatively few preserved bones belong to the senior man of gracile constitution. Lower jaw has two alveoli of two teeth lost postmortem – right lower canine and third molar (Figure 6 D). Other lower teeth have fallen long before death. The deterioration of alveolar mandibular bone made the mandible to look senile. Age changes are detectable on cervical and thoracic vertebrae (Figure 6 A). The degree of them, though, is quite moderate for the individual of such an age. Poor development of crests and muscular attachments on pre-served bones along with non-deformed vertebral bodies point on the absence in the life of buried of regular heavy physical stresses.

Skeleton 2 (Figure 5). The second skeleton, belonging to the senior woman, is by far more complete, that the first one. Better preserved long bones of limbs allowed the more precise de-termination of the stature. Besides three last thoracic vertebrae (Figure 7 B), age changes are poorly seen in the vertebral column and other bones. In this way she resembles the male skeleton.

## Discussion

Age, determined for both buried matches age of death of Gurko couple: Iosif Vladimirovich has died at the age of 73 (65-75) and Maria Andreevna – at the age of 66 (60-70). The absence of skulls and incompleteness of male skeleton are in accordance the eyewitnesses' statements. Field Marshal was not tall, which corresponds to the stature, found for the male skeleton. To find the approximate height of Iosif Gurko, we used his photograph, made during Russo-Turkish War in 1877-1878 (Figure 8). There he is pictured in the full stature with the 2nd class of St. George on the neck. Knowing the size of the order (5x5 cm) and keeping in mind its slightly tilted position on the picture, we can estimate the stature of Field Marshal. It was between 160 and 171 cm (Figure 8, scale), which well matches our findings (166±5 cm). The gracile constitution of Gurko is also seen on this picture, although masked by the uniform. Unfortunately, we do not know the picture with Gurko couple standing, so the height of Maria Andreevna remains enigmatic to us. However, according to the matrimonial traditions and sexual dimorphism, she must have been shorter than her husband. Lack of traces of heavy physical work on skeletons and their deposition in the family tomb additionally support the idea of remnants belonging to the couple of high social hierarchy, namely to the couple of Gurko.



*Figure 8. Picture of I.V. Gurko taken during Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). Point on the scale equals the length of projection of 2nd class of St. George ( $\approx 41-44$  mm). This gives the height of Gurko between 160-171 cm.*

## Conclusion

Two skeletons, found in the tomb of Sakharovo, with high degree of probability belong to the couple of Gurko: Iosif Vladimirovich (1828) and Maria Andreevna (1838-1906). Further genetic investigations are necessary to support this conclusion. The discovery of broken and fused clavicle in the tomb can support the hypothesis, since Iosif Gurko has broken it during manoeuvres in 1874 (29).

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