

ARCHAEOLOGY OF WOMEN: MORTUARY PRACTICES AND BIOARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION – AN INTRODUCTION

The main goal of the volume is to complete the studies regarding childhood, violence, climate change or migration and to disclose new discoveries about mortuary practices from different European geographical areas. The editor's intention was to publish studies related women from around the world and from various periods of time.

Bioarchaeology attempts to reconstruct a glimpse from an individual's life and death. Whether the discussion relates to the archaeological context or/and from the biological perspective, the social implications within historical communities can only be apprehended by correlating them. Considering these, we constructed the topic of this volume.

Before presenting each article, a short statistic can be useful. There are a total number of 29 authors from 10 countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Spain, Portugal, UK, Azerbaijan, Argentina, and Brazil). Time span and geographic areas of the subjects presented by this volume, encompass Mesolithic Spain and Romania's Eneolithic period, goes back to Portugal's Bronze Age and travels afterwards to the Iron Age of the Eurasian steppes. Four studies take us back to the Iberian Peninsula in Medieval and Modern periods of Portugal and Spain and then finally we make a short leap into the Ottoman period in Early Modern Serbia and Bulgaria.

In the article "Sex-related Inequality in Mesolithic Societies from Northern Iberia", the authors' aim is to test if the gender can influence the access to resources. Their study is concentrated on a female skeleton from Late Mesolithic found in northern Spain (Aizpea site, Arife-Navarra). The anthropological analysis extended by stable isotopes results for diet and, ancient DNA for haplogroups determination. All data proved low protein consumption and a high carbohydrates diet, but her haplogroup was not found in the present-day population. As consequence, it was very possible that this could demonstrate an inequality between sexes regarding food gathering.

The first article from Romania, "Cranial Fractures in 2005 Early Eneolithic Multiple Burial from Alba Iulia-*Lumea Nouă* (Romania)" deals with the incidence of cranial injuries and sex differences in a mass grave excavated in 2005 from Transylvania. The site is well-known for other mass graves with a total number over 120 individuals (both sexes and all ages) and dated in the Early Eneolithic. This funerary complex from 2005 is the largest of all and contains a number of 50 skeletons. As results, the authors established the minimum number of individuals, sex and age determination of the cranial fragments, identified palaeopathological changes on bones and recorded the non-metric traits. The

perimortem cranial injuries are identified and analysed based by location, type, shape, and dimension. The minimum number of adult individuals within the sample was established by macroscopic analysis, following cranial traits, and pointed out a number of 23 female individuals. Multiple perimortem traumatic lesions are visible on all of the skull caps, triggering a discussion regarding the broad definition of what nowadays we determine as violent behaviour. An extensive and comparative discussion regarding other similar discoveries from Europe and from the same period explains the causes and the behaviour towards these individuals.

The second article from Romania (“The Women Among the Others. Some Insights Regarding Women’s Status in Eneolithic Society Based on Evidence from Sultana-Malu Roșu Cemetery”) has as subject the women’s status in this Late Neolithic/Early Eneolithic necropolis. A number of 104 skeletons were analysed by grave constructions, skeletons positions, inventory, and spatial location in relation to anthropological data. This particular type of analysis revealed that the women graves were evaluated in relation with the men’s graves, but also with indeterminate skeletons (most of them assigned as non-adults). The results demonstrate a uniform society.

“The Hand that Threads the Needle can also Draw the Arrow: The Case of Bela Vista 5”, integrates thoroughly into studies regarding bioarchaeology of women. The authors’ aim is to report a funerary complex within a double ditched enclosure, dating back to the 3rd millennium BC from Beringel, (Beja) Portugal. The individual was laid to rest in a pit, within the inner circle of the enclosure, and was accompanied by important grave goods, including a prestigious weapon, a Palmela copper point. Such votive items are not characteristic for female graves, thus the researchers concluded that this individual was an important person for the community. Secondary burial practices and post-mortem alteration of the original position of the body was observed as well, indicating the preoccupation of the community towards the deceased.

“The Cult of Female Warriors and Rulers in the Scythian and Sarmatian Cultures” discusses the representations of women in the ancient Greek and Sarmatian art from the northern Black Sea and Caucasus mountains. Numerous depictions of women can be found in the Scythian/Sarmatian art findings and in the ancient sources wrote about the Amazons. Despite the discoveries of women warrior graves, they were never represented in art carrying weapons. In some cases, archaeological findings clearly indicate in certain circumstances, those women were buried with weapons. The discoveries of Massagetic queen Tomyris and burials of armed females from the Mound No. 5 near village Zelenoe of Kherson (Ukraine), or from the necropolis of Plovdag in Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan) are eloquent in this topic.

The article – “Monasticism and Activity Patterns” – focuses on the degenerative joint disease and markers of occupational stress on a monastic

community inhabited by women (Santa Maria de Vallsanta), in medieval Spain. This kind of residence was isolated as against the ordinary people and it had its own rules and lifestyle. Carrying out the same activity daily, such as working in agriculture and the everyday monastery duties, shaped and changed the skeletons of the nuns. The authors demonstrate the aforementioned hypothesis.

Any study such “Theoretical Perspective on Bioarchaeology of Gender and Identity in Medieval and Modern Portugal” is welcome in this field. Since the bioarchaeology emerges as a new discipline within anthropology, the theoretical debate over mortuary discoveries and funerary representation or historical data is still ongoing. The author tries to construct her approach based on Portuguese women from medieval to modern times, using the written sources and burial practices. This original work investigates how the description of funerals and body manipulation (known from various papers) are reflected by the archaeological discoveries.

The article “Portuguese Women’s Activity in the Past” refers to the enthesal changes identified in samples from 5th to 20th Century found in Portugal. The innovative method is comparing these bone modifications by using observations concerning asymmetry or to see differences between muscles. The men activities were well documented in the past and skeletons provide evident results. The women displayed different frequencies from the left to right side. The chronological pattern suggests lifestyle changes.

“A Study of Skeletal Markers of Activity in Female Monastic Populations” was conducted on six samples (three monastics and three seculars) from Portugal and Spain dated from 16th to the 20th Century. A historical source, as “Constitutions of the Nuns”, was used to understand better the lifestyle and activities in a Catholic monastery. A number of 23 entheses of the postcranial skeleton were recorded for the scoring; seven markers of occupational stress were added for counting. A statistic was performed to observe the differences amongst samples. The authors conclude that nuns behaved similar activities as secular populations.

The necropolis excavated near Niš (Serbia) discloses a “Female Identity at the Beginning of the Modern Age”. A number of skeletons assigned as females were very careful and detailed analysed. According to the standard procedures in bioarchaeology, the age and sex determination was established, non-metric traits were recorded, and pathological conditions identified. During the analysis, observations about the spinal vertebrae and the sacrum showed that the anatomical elements displayed congenital anomalies probably indicating kinship. An image of a hardworking community is offered by the dental pathology and as well as other pathological conditions, encountered within this skeletal sample. The article offers as well a discussion referring to the usual burial practices in this particular timeframe, revealing certain complex customs of the Christian Serbs under the Ottoman rule.

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“Archaeothanatological Context for the Deviant Burial of a Woman” is a genuine bioarchaeological analysis of a deviant burial from Makak (Bulgaria). The anthropological results are explained in connection with the archaeological context. A skeleton assigned as an adult woman was found in an atypical position among standard burials. Historical data and various archaeological findings proved a post-mortem manipulation of the body as an effect of religious beliefs. Additionally, the authors expose different burial practices within the Islamic communities that inhabited this area, noting the variety of funerary customs.

THE EDITORS