The Roman Archaeology Conference, 27-30 March 2014

The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies’ biennial conference will be taking place at the University of Reading. There will be a reception and keynote welcoming lecture on the Thursday evening, followed by two-and-a-half days of parallel sessions, ending on the Sunday afternoon with an optional excursion to Silchester Roman Town. This year the conference is joined by TRAC, the Study Group for Roman Pottery and the Roman Small Finds Study Group.

Website: http://www.reading.ac.uk/archaeology/conferences/RAC2014/

Current Themes in the Bioarchaeology of Roman Skeletons – Theories on Health in the Roman Empire

Session organiser: Anna Rohnbogner

Bioarchaeology and its related disciplines enable the investigation of biological stress and ill-health in human skeletal remains. In Roman archaeology, this approach has generated some surprising and conflicting results that diverge from the iconographic and written sources of the time period.

Recent research on health has yielded new insights into the lives of adults and children alike. Differences in health were identified between urban and rural populations and for different geographic locales. Bioarchaeological research also reveals patterns of migration across the Roman world, dietary habits, and child rearing and feeding practices. Holistic approaches are emerging, drawing on not only the body itself but also its treatment in death: much recent work compares and contrasts aspects of health based on bioarchaeology, funerary archaeology, iconography and the classical literature. The integration of bioarchaeological research allows for the identification of subtle patterns in the lives and death of people living under Roman rule, and goes beyond traditional binary opposites such as ‘local’ and ‘Roman’.

This session hosts papers on Roman skeletal materials discussing health and elaborating on theories on behaviour, lifeways and population dynamics. Research in every aspect of the bioarchaeological repertoire is presented, discussing theoretical as well as practical approaches that engage with health during the Roman period.

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Saturday, Room 109, Palmer Building

9.00 Investigations at Poundbury Camp, Dorset: setting the agenda for child health in Roman Britain, Mary Lewis

9.30 Health and disease in Romano-British children: theories on lifeways along the urban-rural divide, Anna Rohnbogner

10.00 Time for a change? New insights and challenges in understanding health, diet and mobility in Roman Britain, Rebecca Redfern

10.30 Coffee

11.00 A ‘new violence phenomenon’? Exploring the evidence for elder abuse in Roman Britain, Rebecca Gowland

11.30 The people of Eboracum: a biocultural assessment of health status in a Roman town, Lauren McIntyre

12.00 The Roman extraurban population during the Imperial Age: migration and endogamy, Mauro Rubini
Investigations at Poundbury Camp, Dorset: Setting the Agenda for Child Health in Roman Britain
Mary Lewis (University of Reading, UK)

Since their excavation (1966-1987), the 1400 skeletal remains from this late Romano-British cemetery have been the subject of many research investigations. In particular, researchers have highlighting several important child burials including a potential embroytomy, a prone deaf child and a possible ‘Greek’. A full re-analysis of the 400 non-adult remains was carried out in 2011 as part of the Diaspora Project at the University of Reading. The results revealed an incredible array of pathology previously unreported: from rickets and scurvy, tuberculosis, trauma and congenital anomalies, to the first examples of genetic anaemia. Why was living in Romano-British Dorset so bad for child health? The extent and range of pathology mirrors similar results from post-medieval England and hints at terrible living conditions for those in Durnovaria. More research into child health from this period is needed to allow us to understand the true nature of the population buried at Poundbury.

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Health and Disease in Romano-British Children: Theories on Lifeways along the urban-rural Divide
Anna Rohnbogner (University of Reading, UK)

Recent archaeological research into life under Roman rule has raised opposing views. Were benefits of sanitation, administration and agricultural inventions outweighed by the detrimental effects of urbanisation? By assessing non-adult (0-17 years) palaeopathology in urban and rural Romano-British populations, trends in health status become apparent. The manifestations of metabolic and infectious diseases in non-adults across Roman Britain are not uniform, indicating differences in diet, status, environmental pressures and feeding practices.

This paper presents preliminary findings on lifeways of non-adults in urban and rural environments by using palaeopathology as an exploratory tool for gauging concepts of ‘Romanisation’. This in turn enables hypotheses on the susceptibility of the ‘Celtic’ population to Roman influence, which is likely to have been spatially mediated.

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Time for a Change? New Insights and Challenges in Understanding Health, Diet and Mobility in Roman Britain
Rebecca Redfern (Centre for Human Bioarchaeology, Museum of London, UK)

Over the last decade, how we understand life in Roman Britain has fundamentally changed, because of the inclusion of bioarchaeology and stable isotope research in the interpretation of these communities. The results of these studies has shown that Romanisation, gender, age and status all played a significant part in the health statuses and diseases observed in these cemetery populations. This paper seeks to further the debate by examining the extent to which our results and perspectives are biased by migrant health and childhoods spent elsewhere in the Roman Empire. It will share new aDNA, stable isotope and bioarchaeological data from London to explore these themes and introduce a new approach to address these issues in Roman Empire.

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A ‘New Violence Phenomenon’? Exploring the Evidence for Elder Abuse in Roman Britain
Rebecca Gowland (Durham University, UK)

The elderly are the most neglected demographic in archaeology. In today’s youth-obsessed society the elderly are consistently denigrated, particularly those perceived to be physically or mentally frail. This negative construction is partly a consequence of the unprecedented ageing population, often conceptualised as problematic and burdensome to society. A related issue is the physical
abuse of the elderly, which has recently been identified as an escalating phenomenon today. This study investigates whether it is likely to have been a feature of past societies too. The utility of skeletal evidence in the identification of violent trauma has been detailed in cases of child and domestic abuse, both modern and archaeological. This study aims to throw a spotlight on the elderly and elder care in Roman Britain and the potential contributions that bioarchaeology can make towards understanding this invisible demographic in the past.

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**The People of Eboracum: a Biocultural Assessment of Health Status in a Roman Town**

Lauren McIntyre (University of Sheffield, UK)

This doctoral study presents new health status information from a comprehensive study of the Roman inhabitants of York, England. New and pre-existing osteological evidence was combined with archaeological evidence in order to examine differences in health according to social and occupational status categories within the population. The results of this biocultural study show that compared to similar Romano-British urban sites, York had significantly elevated prevalence of ante-mortem and peri-mortem trauma, brucellosis, and os acromiale. Comparatively high rates of dislocation, spondylolysis, non-specific infection, porotic hyperostosis and osteochondroma were also observed. Some of the observed pathological conditions with elevated values at York may be the result of poor comparative data, osteological rarity of a condition, or a combination of complex causal factors. Elevated prevalence of traumatic injury to some skeletal elements of the cranium and post-crania was significantly associated with an unusual group of burials from sites located on Driffield Terrace.

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**The Roman Extraurban Population During the Imperial Age: Migration and Endogamy**

Mauro Rubini (Foggia University, Italy)

In the first centuries of the Roman Empire (first- to second-century AD) the development of the economy was mainly based on the military conquest. This fact produced a great movement of people in the Mediterranean Basin and also a parallel flow of gene and pathologies.

The Roman population before the birth of the Empire shows great homogeneity due to an archaic endogamic pattern. With the Empire there was a movement of people toward Rome and (mainly) its extraurban territory. Many Republican villae were transformed into great productive settlements with a new rural society well stratified. For these causes a new endogamy pattern was present in some kinship structures to maintain their commercial, political or social status.

Our study was effected on 1360 individuals from 19 cemeteries of Imperial Roman Age dated between the first- to third-century AD and located in the territory near Rome.

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