

Professional Zooarchaeology Group (PZG) Minutes

Palaeopathology, University of Leicester, 21st January 2006

The second meeting of the PZG was held in the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester on Saturday, January 21st, 2006. The meeting was organised by Jen Browning, Matti Holmes, Richard Thomas and Stephanie Vann. About 20 members attended. The theme of the meeting was Palaeopathology.

Grey literature

Prior to the main meeting, an update was provided about grey literature. Alan Hall (University of York, e-mail: biol8@york.ac.uk) has provided guidance for including grey literature in the Environmental Archaeology Bibliography. For the present time, he suggests submitting details of our reports as outlined in his notes. A couple of extra fields are suggested and appropriate thesauri indicated.

Palaeopathology

In the morning session Richard gave an informal introductory talk, in which he discussed the current state of research into animal palaeopathology, commenting on the apparent neglect of the subject over the last 30 years. He noted that a number of reasons can account for this, including:

- problems of perception and approach
- lack of standardised recording
- inadequate research into the archaeological potential of specific lesions
- lack of population studies of animals with known life histories.

A discussion followed, including about photographic documentation of specimens. One of the problems noted is that if photographs are taken, they often end up in site archives, which are not easily accessible. One solution might be to include them in the ADS digital archive with detailed descriptions. General comments were made about who should photograph and what should be photographed. The general consensus was to keep it simple. Line drawings were also considered useful. The group agreed that one of the meetings be dedicated to the photography of faunal specimens.

General comments were raised about the distinction between what may be considered abnormal (non-metric traits) versus pathologies. Naomi Sykes raised the point that our initial understanding of the origins of pathology may not be clear. Jennie Coy pointed out that it's important to record even the odd bone, because other similar specimens subsequently may be found. Richard commented that the primary aim should be to examine pathologies that inform on human-animal relationships, as much of pathological changes we see may not be important or informative.

He continued this theme, discussing evidence for:

- abuse of animals (eg. fractured ribs in dogs)
- veterinary care (eg. set fractures)

- use of livestock for traction or riding. He made the suggestion that the stages provided in Bartosiewicz 200? could be referred to.
- stock density and viral diseases (eg. osteopetrosis in fowl)
- management (eg. tethering; deer leaps)
- feeding practices (eg. hypoplasia)

Zoonoses and their diagnosis were discussed, including evidence for tuberculosis.

To conclude the morning session, the group agreed the need for:

- an image database
- a glossary
- a bibliography of research
- a standardised recording system
- regional syntheses and comparative studies of prevalence
- population studies

In the afternoon session, Stephanie elaborated on these themes, discussing the complexities and methodologies of recording pathological changes on animal bones, which is the main subject of her PhD. Stephanie is currently developing a glossary and recording protocol, which we were encouraged to try out. She is hoping to receive feedback from users so do get in touch with her. The glossary of terms and protocol are on the PPWG (Palaeopathology Working Group) website. (<http://www.apwg.supanet.com/recording.htm>)

She began the talk with a discussion about basic principles of bone growth and destruction. This was followed by a number of palaeopathological themes including:

- relevance
- terminology
- prevalence
- consistency
- usability

One of the problems noted in past and current documentation of pathological specimens is the tendency to diagnose specimens, while providing little if any description of the bony changes. Furthermore, the terminology is often vague, fanciful or incorrect. Hopefully, the use of a glossary of standard terms will result in clearer descriptions and the possibility of intersite/interauthor comparisons.

The important message from this session was to describe, describe, describe. Diagnose if you will, but description of the bone changes is essential

Members had been asked to bring pathological bones to the meeting, so the second part of the afternoon was spent “admiring” each others specimens. We saw some gruesome examples of fractures along with many other interesting specimens.

The meeting was very informative and very enjoyable, and emphasised the benefit of meeting face to face on occasions other than major conferences. Just to reiterate, the aim of the group is to bring together specialists working in commercial archaeology (in units or freelance), academic departments, and English Heritage, in

order to encourage exchange of information, provide support, and access to reference collections or grey literature and publications.

Our thanks go to Jen, Matti, Richard and Stephanie for organising a great day, including a lovely lunch.

The next meeting will be held on Saturday, July 1st, 2006, at Oxford Archaeology, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 OES. The main theme will be microfauna (small mammals and herpetofauna). Dr Jim Williams (English Heritage) and Dr Chris Gleed-Owen (The Herpetological Conservation Trust) will lead the sessions. Invitations with programme and location details will be sent out nearer the date.

Minutes contributed by Naomi Sykes

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