



PALEOPATHOLOGY NEWSLETTER

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Letter from the Editor

Dear PPA Members,

A new season has arrived, and with it a new Newsletter to keep you informed about what our members have been up to over the past three summer months.

Reports on Field Schools, Summer Workshops, and new research take you from China to Panama, from Egypt to Switzerland and Italy (pp. 11); a historical note introduces you to the story of Pales' contributions to the discovery of HIV (pp. 19), and personal reflections by a colleague on a palaeopathology-filled sabbatical can be found on pp. 26.

If you would like to explore new literature and web-links in the world of Palaeopathology, have a look at pages 31 onwards; and if you are already thinking of how to best spend time in 2018, peruse the *'Future*

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A new project investigating Roman infant feeding practices in Switzerland

by Chryssi Bourbou (Hellenic Ministry of Culture/University of Fribourg), Véronique Dasen (University of Fribourg), Sandra Lösch (University of Bern)

A multidisciplinary research project entitled “*To be a child in Roman Aventicum/Avenches (1st-3rd c. AD): Evidence on health, disease and feeding practices from bioarchaeology and stable isotope analysis*”, has launched on October 2016. This three year project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, is directed by Prof. Véronique Dasen and Dr. Sandra Lösch. Dr. Chryssi Bourbou, will study the skeletal remains recovered from four Roman cemeteries (“En Chaplix”, “Les Tourbières”, “Porte de l’Ouest/Sur Fourches” and “à la Montagne”), in Avenches, the *civitas* capital of Switzerland. The cemeteries, located outside the inhabited area, represent some of the most important and socially diverse burial sites of Switzerland during the Roman era. Non-adult inhumations were scattered among those of the adults, without exhibiting a specific preference for location or orientation. Non-adults have been buried in individual graves, either interred in small pits, or in wooden coffins within pits; in one case from En Chaplix a lead sarcophagus has been used (Castella, 1999). Burial offerings, consisting usually of ceramic and glass vessels, are more commonly encountered in the non-adult burials of En Chaplix. A few of these offerings inform us on gestures made by their grieving parents, as for example the little bronze bell or the perforated coin used as protective amulets to secure a safe journey to the underworld. Of similar medico-magical significance must have been the non-carbonized seeds of the species *Juniperus communis*, *Quercus* sp. and *Rosa* sp. found within the lead sarcophagus, species known for their medicinal and healing properties.

The principal aim of the project is the bioarchaeological study of the human skeletal remains, which in some of the cemeteries are exceptionally well preserved, as well as their stable isotopic analysis (along with some animal bones). A total of 169 individuals, 93 non-adults and 76 adults, have been subject to anthropological and paleopathological analysis. The majority of non-adults individuals are fullterms (from 37-42 weeks gestation), while preterms (from <37 weeks gestation), infants (birth to the age of 1 year), children (after 1 year-14.6 years) and adolescents (after 14.6-17 years), are also included in the samples (Scheuer and Black, 2000; Lewis, 2007). During the first year of the project, besides the thorough study of the skeletal remains, samples have been collected for specific further analyses. In particular, we have collected 135 human bone samples, 81 from non-adult individuals, 54 from adult individuals (16 from females, 38 from males), and 27 animal bone samples for the investigation of dietary/weaning patterns of the populations.

Testing the appliance of the recommendations attested in the written sources, especially the medical texts, against the biological and isotopic data, is of significant importance for a holistic reconstruction of infant feeding practices in Roman Avenches. Furthermore, the combination of archaeological, documentary, biological and stable isotopic data will shed more light on how socio-cultural beliefs influenced feeding practices and consequently how these practices are possibly associated with the observed health and disease patterns. The derived data are expected to considerably add to the ongoing scientific research on infant feeding practices in the past, since spatial and temporal differences in child care within the diverse communities incorporated in the Roman Empire must have existed.

The project will also include activities, such as workshops and seminars, thus ensuring the widespread dissemination of the discussion on Roman childhood to the scientific community, as well as the public.

We are welcoming any feedback and possible interchange with colleagues working on the subject.

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References cited

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Lewis, M.E. 2007. The Bioarchaeology of Children: Perspectives from Biological and Forensic Anthropology, Cambridge University Press.



Figure 1. Possible pathological lesions observed on the cranial fragments of a fullterm (SF012): although such features may be also present during normal fetal growth, diffuse apposition of subperiosteal new bone with vascular impressions is noted on the endocranial surface.