

## BOOK REVIEW

## The comparative palaeopathology of males and females in English medieval skeletal samples in a social context

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This reproduction of a PhD thesis is aiming to compare male and female palaeopathology, based on analysis of skeletal samples from medieval England, focusing on sex differences in mortality, general health status, activity related pathology and dental disease. It has great informational and educational value for different professionals interested in the research on human remains, like forensic anthropologists, forensic archeologists, forensic odontologists, and students connected with this field.

The book comprises 10 chapters and a total of 240 pages. The 10 chapters go through a brief introduction, description of material used, subadult sex determination based on tooth measurements, database design, demography, general health indicators, trauma, joint diseases, dental pathology and research conclusions. After the completion of the thesis in 2000, the author has updated this project, by adding a postscript (2016), following the same chapter structure for fluency of reading, and highlighting research advances in this field. All chapters have clear sub-headings, and follow a similar structure to include introduction, methodology, results and discussions, limitations are extensively evaluated and recommendations for future research are made.

Potential differences in health and mortality are systematically assessed using a large volume of existing cemetery data from a clearly defined historical period, interpreted in a bio-cultural context referring to influence of both 'sex', as a biological feature, and 'gender', as the social idea of sex in a medieval system where women were generally subordinate to men. There is a significant input of historical and medical evidence in the process of evaluation, based on extensive and well-documented research. The cultural generalization of women's 'inferior' social status was integrated in the biological framework of physiological differences between males and females impacting on health status.

Over-representation of male skeletons, common characteristic to many archeological series, and earlier age at death in female, although with substantial site differences in the latter, were the main demographic features. A poorer general health status was identified in males, in contrast to women subordination expected to be in detriment of their health. On the other hand, dental health of adult females was inferior to that of males. Furthermore, considerable differences between cemeteries revealed the influence of living environment, urban/rural divide, socio-economic factors like migration and population aggregation on health and mortality.

Methods employed for skeleton's sex estimation were essentially the same for all cemetery samples and based on currently accepted anthropological techniques. Potential bias of sexing methodology towards over-representation of males was highlighted together with subsequent significant consequences on validity of pathology prevalence figures. One chapter aimed at validating a subadult sex estimation method based on tooth measurements, with the mandibular canine having the highest discriminative potential.

Age at death in adult and subadult was estimated using methods based on dental attrition and eruption respectively, together with osteological ageing methods. Unlike sex estimation, osteological methods used varied between different collections, all subject to recent data confirming increasing inaccuracy and bias with increasing age. Dental attrition on the other hand

had been applied to all the samples, and due to relatively greater confidence, it was used as basis to categorise data for statistical analysis. Also subadult age estimation methods are considered to yield accurate and reliable estimates.

There is an undeniable research potential revealed by this book, in terms of using skeletal evidence as a tool to study sex and gender in past human populations. Although the study material comprised a large number of skeletons, an even larger collection could be used to overcome most of the study limitations, this being also highlighted by the author herself.

In summary this book should generate interest among both general public and specialists in the field like anthropologists, archeologists and forensic scientists. It adds evidence to the growing recognition of the value of skeletal human remains to complement historical evidence in the research on past human societies.

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