

## Reference

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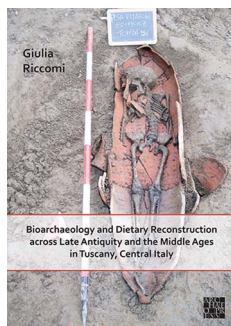
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GIULIA RICCOMI. 2021. *Bioarchaeology and Dietary Reconstruction across Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages in Tuscany, Central Italy*. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-78969-865-7 paperback £34.



Multidisciplinary studies in bioarchaeology that combine skeletal analyses with biomolecular methods increasingly contribute to the rich context of human health and behaviours against a backdrop of global socio-political and environmental change. Giulia Riccomi's book seeks to add to this expanding dataset with the comparison of 'indicators of stress' (e.g. reduced stature, cribra orbitalia, cribra cranii, dental enamel defects, non-specific periosteal lesions) and dietary analyses measuring carbon, nitrogen and oxygen stable isotopes from Late Roman (third to fifth centuries AD) and early medieval (sixth to thirteenth centuries AD) Tuscan populations.

The book is a published version of Riccomi's PhD thesis and reads as such, both in scope of content and structure. The introductory chapter primarily focuses on biological concepts of stress to initiate the foundation for the research questions and objectives within this work. Chapter 2 focuses on the history of Tuscany in the first millennium AD and provides a useful and comprehensive overview of the region. This includes the municipal divisions of the region post-Roman Empire, interesting details of the agrarian economic systems, and alterations in the geographical landscape. The background information is well presented, well written, and essential for the biocultural context needed to interpret the skeletal remains being studied. Chapter 3 provides the archaeological specifics for the skeletons in the study, focusing on three archaeological sites: Via Marche (Pisa) (third to fifth centuries AD, urban site, n=169), Vicus Wallari/borgo San Genesio (Pisa) (sixth to thirteenth centuries AD, rural site, n=57) and Pieve di Pava (Siena) (tenth to twelfth centuries AD, rural site, n=164). This chapter also reviews some of the variations in burial practices of the region,

which fosters a deeper understanding of cultural diversity within central Italy. One of the key ambitions of the work is to understand stress and dietary changes in Tuscan populations during the transition from Late Antiquity to Early Middle Ages but the nature of bioarchaeological analyses often yields limited and fragmented datasets that may not offer direct comparatives; therefore, the overall objective is difficult to achieve given the selection of skeletons—for example, there is no overlap between Late Antiquity and medieval time periods, sample sizes are uneven, and urban versus rural contexts limit meaningful comparisons. Chapter 4 reviews the methodology used for this study including how bone preservation was scored, standard osteological processes, specific palaeopathological recording, and protocols for carbon ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ), nitrogen ( $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ ) and oxygen ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ) stable isotope analyses. The text is sufficient for data replication, but figures presenting features being scored and classification scales used in osteological methods would have been helpful for non-experts and novice readers. As expected, the results in Chapter 5 are data-heavy with numerous graphs and bar charts illustrating the distribution patterns of the skeletal preservation, demographic make-ups of the sites, the distribution of pathological lesions and multiple isotope scatter plots. The author does well to separate the pathological data by true prevalence rate (i.e. pathologies evident based on observable skeletal elements present) versus crude prevalence rate (i.e. simply counting pathological lesions in a given sample) and sets a tone for good practice moving forward. The isotope data also benefit from the incorporation of animal remains to provide a comparative faunal baseline. The author provides a useful discussion in Chapter 6 drawing in the previous historical context and concludes that health did not significantly change in the transition from the Roman Empire to the ‘Dark Ages’ in medieval Tuscany. Additionally, the author concludes the dietary isotope data are more reflective of swathes of cultural change that need to be further contextualised against the backdrop of successive upheavals and population changes rather than viewing these changes as cross-sectional events related directly to the Empire’s collapse.

As a published PhD thesis, it is necessarily focused on its scope and approach but, because of this limitation, there is a missed opportunity to contextualise fully the health, stress and diet of people in Late Antiquity and early medieval Tuscany. For example, the author emphasises the dearth of bioarchaeological data from this time and geographical space but limits their analysis of ‘health’ to a few variables rather than doing a full palaeopathological analysis. Similarly, for the isotope analysis, bone collagen was used to measure carbon and nitrogen isotope values reflective of the years immediately preceding death, and tooth enamel carbonate was used to measure carbon and oxygen isotope values to gauge non-adult diet and locality. Given the data available, a comparison of childhood versus later diet would have added a further element of interest here; however, it can be extrapolated from the data presented.

Despite these limitations, which the author acknowledges, this book does contribute to the growing scholarship on human health in the past using multidisciplinary bioarchaeological approaches, and it serves as an aspirational companion to students wishing to undertake publishable PhD work. It also offers a solid foundation for future studies that might identify

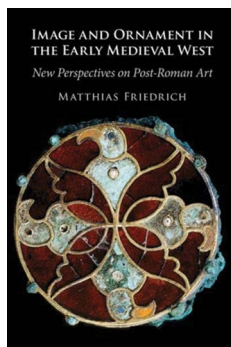
interesting skeletal collections with excellent historical and associated archaeological context, and to suggest interesting opportunities for new research.

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MATTHIAS FRIEDRICH. 2022. *Image and ornament in the Early Medieval West: new perspectives on post-Roman art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 978-1-009-20777-5 hardback £85.



In Merovingian archaeology, a new book does not often offer a large-scale change in perspective, but Matthias Friedrich's monograph does just that. On a mere 174 pages (not including 31 pages of references and 31 coloured plates), Friedrich achieves what early medieval goldsmiths may have intended with their art: that is, to guide our eyes in one direction, make us switch focus and then simultaneously see the same image as before, as well as something else entirely.

In the Introduction, Friedrich states that the main aim of the book is to overcome the binary concepts of Roman/Germanic and Christian/Pagan by identifying their character as scholarly categories rather than mirrors of ancient realities. The first part of the book 'The great divide' (Chapters 1 & 2) sets out to dismantle old constructs, but part II 'New perspectives' (Chapters 3 & 4) offers a new interpretative framework for early medieval art.

Chapter 1 'Problematising the "Germanic"' delves into the history of research of the *Germanenbegriffe*. Four concepts are singled out as having a particularly large influence on the analysis of art and archaeology: *Heilsbild*, *Gefolgschaft*, *Sakralkönigtum* and shamanism (Old Norse *sejdl*/magic). Shorter paragraphs then discuss the problematic terms Roman/Barbarian and Pagan/Christian. The outline is easy enough to follow as it is written in an anecdotal style, with details fleshed out in examples. This lends the book appeal for a larger readership, which is a desirable direction especially in the current socio-political context outside academic research in which so-called 'Germanic' art is received today.

Chapter 2 'The enduring power of images' presents four case studies in which Friedrich pinpoints the hold that Roman Imperial iconography had on early medieval art. Most of the arguments given are thoroughly convincing, except for the case of individual depictions on gold bracteates. Here, Friedrich claims the arguments for identifying Norse gods on bracteates are thin, though offers no other avenues of interpretation. The Imperial derived composition of the bracteates, however, is obvious regardless of the individual figures' meanings and is, in my opinion, separate from them. The next example is studied in much more