

A Glimpse at the Bioarchaeological History of the Late Antiquity Necropolis of Centocelle (Rome): Results from a Multiproxy Approach

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Given an emphasis on historical sources, the vast majority of the people that lived within the Roman world remains voiceless. In their aid, isotopic analyses of archaeological human remains provide important insights into the diet, nutrition, and mobility of single individuals.¹¹ Nonetheless, available Roman isotopic data is still sparse and periods of contrasting forms of political and social organization, such as late antiquity, remain comparatively unexamined.

Burials from a Roman villa complex next to the Via Labicana (within modern day Centocelle, Rome) offer an opportunity to reconstruct the lives of late antiquity Romans. A pilot interdisciplinary research project was undertaken that included osteological analysis, radiocarbon dating, and multiple isotopic analyses of human remains. Caloric contributions from food groups and macronutrients were quantified using a Bayesian mixing model (FRUITS)²² and relied on a database (IsoArch)³³ of isotopic values for roughly coeval food remains.

Radiocarbon dates revealed a complex chronology while isotopic results demonstrated that the Centocelle individuals likely lived for several years in the region prior to their deaths. Most individuals had comparatively poor diets with low contributions from animal protein and major caloric contributions from plant foods. Given the limited amount of available samples different interpretations of the results can be put forward. Namely, if reconstructed diets reflect a specific socio-economic condition, a cultural choice, or a more general trend towards impoverishment within late antiquity. This provides a basis for future extended research into the lives of late antique Romans.

Notes

¹ Fernandes – Chowanec 2018.

² Fernandes et al. 2014.

³ Salesse et al. 2018.

References

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