

Toward the valorization of our anthropological and paleopathological heritage. The musealization of the osteoarchaeological contexts

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Abstract. The musealization of the osteological finds inside the archaeological context is a proposal of our Center of Research and concerns the enhancement and promotion of the archaeological heritage of our territory. The creation of Laboratories of Physical Anthropology and Paleopathology, set up directly on the archaeological sites of necropolis once the anthropological study is completed, will realize a visibility of its operation, proposing precisely the restoration and museum display of the osteoarchaeological finding. The project will activate local development processes that will improve tourist attraction of the archaeological site and implement strategies that integrate the site with other resources and socio-economic structure of the area.

Key words: musealization of the osteological finds, archaeological heritage, Laboratories of Physical Anthropology and Paleopathology

The study of our anthropological heritage represents an important tool to activate development processes in several cultural fields. We really need to be aware of it.

The model of research that some centers are adopting, such as the setting up of anthropology laboratories *in situ*, represents a significant starting point in this sense. We know the importance of the results obtained by the analysis of human remains, but now, we want to stimulate the valorization of anthropological finds within cultural heritage (1). In fact, osteoarchaeology deals with the study of bone remains from archaeological excavations, with the reconstitution of ancient demographics being one of the main objectives. The “biomedical narrative” of the populations of the past is thus added today to traditional historical sources, consequently increasing our knowledge of the people who have inhabited the same spaces before us. Experts (paleopathologists, anthropologists and archaeologists) have always emphasized the bivalent nature of osteoarchaeological research, which on the one hand enriches

the knowledge of living conditions; on the other hand it can play a significant role in the etiological investigation of some pathologies whose origin is still obscure today (2-4).

The study experiences carried out to date show us how the osteoarchaeological discipline can also be included in the field of cultural heritage, not only as investigative research but also as a proactive tool that collects, restores, protects and enhances human remains understood as anthropological finds which are also intended to museum display.

In particular, by showing the proposal of our project regarding the valorization of archaeological heritage of Valcuvia and that could be summarized with the title *The creation of archaeological itinerary from the museum of three medieval cemetery areas of Valcuvia*, we want to increase the awareness that all anthropological fields can receive great interest also outside of the academic world.

Three sites of Valcuvia are included in this project: Saint Agostine in Caravate, San Biagio in Cittiglio



Figure 1. Laboratory of Physical Anthropology and Paleopathology

and Saint Eusebio and Antonio in Azzio. All three archaeological contexts have preserved funerary areas, inside and outside the churches. Actually, the cemetery areas under archaeological investigations have allowed us to set up a laboratory for the study of the human remains inside the churches or in other covered spaces close

by. It is clear that, also during the study phase, these spaces acquire “archaeological value” and become “sites of interest”. Starting from these considerations, we also proposed to transform these sites into *oste archaeological museums*, or museum of cemetery areas, in which to realize the valorization of funerary spaces and also the osteological finds directly inside the churches annexed. Indeed, especially for the strong thematic and territorial links of these sites, it is also envisaged the creation of archaeological itinerary under three thematic lines: *Christianity and rituals in medieval and post-medieval times in Valcurvia*, *Christian art in Valcurvia in medieval and post medieval times* and *The ancient populations of Valcurvia*.

We believe that the musealization of the osteological finds inside the sites can solve many questions related to the display of human remains in museums from a purely archaeological and an ethical point of view (4). Under the archaeological profile, the possibility to preserve human remains close by to the place of the recovery assists in not decontextualizing the finds. From the ethical point of view, the preservation of the human remains inside the sacred place in which the deceased was buried could solve, in part, the remonstration moved by some groups that see an outrage in the exhumation of human remains from the burial site.

In our project, we are sure that the anthropological study of human remains will also develop the inclusion of these archaeological sites within the museum circuits of the Lombardy region.

In fact, the study of osteoarchaeological sample, especially through a great attention to deep demographical, pathological, ritual aspects (5), will guarantee the realization of the archaeological itinerary, which will include also a theme of the “*History of population through human remains*”.

Muzealization of osteoarchaeological context will activate development processes that will improve tourist attraction of the archaeological site and implement strategies that integrate the site with other resources and socio-economic structure of the area.

With archaeobiology, we have a tool to spread the human experience of ancient populations. Through the exhibition of human death, through the museum display of human remains, funerary objects, tombs and in general the sacred funerary context, it is possible to raise awareness of the historical knowledge of our past.

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