

Introduction

Jorge López Quiroga and Luis Ríos Frutos

*Véronique Gallien,
In Memoriam*

The chapters contained in this book present different evidence surrounding forms of violence and injuries documented in skeletal remains from a bioarchaeological perspective which address the question posed in the title of this book for the first time for a specific chronological period: Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. In this volume various studies corresponding to a wide geographic area are presented: England, Germany, France, Greece, Italy and Spain. The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary character is evident in the list of authors that make up this volume: anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, and specialists in forensic medicine, osteoarchaeology, bioarchaeology, bioanthropology and biology. The text gathered in this volume is not the result of a conference or workshop on the subject under study. In this sense, the editors of the volume have commissioned the texts from recognized specialists in the field, to present specific case studies and/or syntheses for a specific region or geographical area, in order to have an overview, obviously not systematic, on the material evidence of violence and injuries in skeletal remains.

In the first chapter of the book a series of cases are presented, not addressed by the authors of the text (either because they deal with different themes from those analysed by them or because they correspond to different geographical areas), and which does not pretend to be exhaustive, of interpersonal violence, collective violence and punishments from a bioarchaeological perspective focusing on the period between the 5th and 10th centuries (Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages). Cases outside this chronological period are also included, whether from the late Roman period (3rd and 4th centuries), from the Middle Ages (11th to 15th centuries) or even from the Modern Period. We believe that the inclusion of examples corresponding to a broader chronological period allows us to have a diachronic perspective that shows how, in some cases, some forms and/or types of violence and/or punishments are not exclusive to Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, and in other cases they show some changes that may be more characteristic and specific of that time frame. Some examples of interpersonal violence, collective violence (mass graves), punishments, antemortem and post-mortem injuries are also presented and discussed. In this text, in addition, the issue of what are known as anomalous and/or atypical burials (so-called deviant burials) is likewise addressed, which in some cases, but not always, constitute evidence of some type of individual and/or collective violence.

Executions, as capital punishment imposed in judicial proceedings, constitute an example of violence that is generally difficult to document accurately through the archaeological record and for this reason is a less frequent topic in bioarchaeology. This is the theme of the second of the book's chapters: a review of the osteological evidence of execution in Anglo-Saxon England, particularly beheading. The authors argue that modern osteological analyses make it possible to identify cases of decapitation, although they also warn of the need to be very cautious when determining such evidence, because decapitation is also frequently evidence for disturbance of burials. They also underline that beheading is the only type of judicial punishment that can be osteologically identified, highlighting, however, the case of a fracture to the cervical vertebra (identified in the archaeological excavations of the execution cemetery of Weyhill Road, Andover, Hampshire) that is related to rare evidence of hanging. It is of great interest, from the examples studied for Anglo-Saxon England by the authors, to highlight that decapitation was a resource exceptionally used as capital punishment that, in addition, had an exemplary and dissuasive character by exhibiting the heads of individuals.

Among the forms of violence that are shown in the skeletal remains, traces of interpersonal violence are relatively frequent in the period studied in this book (Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages). This is, specifically, the subject of the third chapter of the book: skeletal traumas as an indicator of direct interpersonal violence and the relationship between evidence of violence and social status. The authors analyse examples of cranial traumas in Germany during the Early Middle Ages from the Merovingian cemetery of Bösfeld (Mannheim-Seckenheim), integrating the results of the anthropological and archaeological analysis from a biocultural perspective. The authors' perspective is particularly interesting, since they place the various bone fractures (injuries) recognized in various individuals in the cemetery in the context of the social parameters that are identified in this funerary area, for example, addressing issues of status and gender. The authors rightly point out that post-mortem damage should be excluded from this type of analysis, especially if burials have been subject to secondary burials or looting. In the same way, they highlight the importance of taking into account the archaeological context, which is very clear when it comes to mass graves related to a war event, but much more difficult to determine in the case of injuries documented in funerary areas that are not

necessarily associated with some violent event. This is the case of the Bösfeld cemetery, not linked to particular collective violent events, but which would be an example, as the authors point out, that would represent the type and intensity of violence that could affect individuals in their daily lives. The archaeological context is essential here in differentiating blunt force injuries from those that are merely accidental and that are much more frequent. In Bösfeld, it has not been possible to identify a connection between post-cranial fractures and social status, although it has in the case of bladed weapons, mainly affecting “armed” men, something that the authors suggest could be socially regulated and sanctioned. The presence of weapons in the tombs, according to the authors, would not be merely a symbolic act, since traces of their use could be identified on the male skeletons. It seems to us very correct, on the part of the authors, to warn that postcranial fractures cannot be systematically used to quantify the intensity and degree of interpersonal violence in the Early Middle Ages. The fact that the injuries that are visible today in the skeletal remains are a minimal part of the original real wounds, leading the authors of the study to conclude that the number of invisible cases and victims of violence in the Early Middle Ages would have been, in general, quite high.

The text that offers an overview of the evidence of violence in the skeletal record, from various osteological examples, for Gaul during the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, draws attention to the fact that such violence is not exclusively “a male issue” (according to a society ruled and dominated by men) as the result of conflicts and judicial violence, but there is also significant domestic and/or family violence which mainly affects women, children and slaves. The authors expose interesting examples, as well as complexities in their interpretation, of violence probably linked to war due to the presence of mass graves (Reichstett-Mundolsheim, Bas-Rhin; “Place de la Préfecture” in Arras, Pas-de-Calais) and/or silos (Berry-aubac, Aisne) with individuals stacked on top of each other, in some cases with signs of violence and in others not; as well as graves of adult individuals with various perimortem injuries (Toulouse and Erstein, Bas-Rhin) or collective funerary areas with an atypical topographic apposition (a small necropolis in the enclosure of the walls of the Late Antiquity in Poitiers). Violence linked to military events is certainly an “adult issue” (men and women), although it is not always the case, as exemplified by the necropolis of Lisieux (Calvados) where, together with several adults, three immature subjects (between 2 and 7 years of age) were found with various perimortem head traumas. The authors analyse, from funerary areas dated between the 5th and 10th centuries in the Normandy region (Caen plain and the Seine valley around Rouen), the presence of violence in the bone remains for that period (whether this violence linked to military and/or judicial events, or related to the family or domestic environment). They highlight, among other extremely interesting data, that violence is not exclusively associated with men (although they present more evidence of fractures), since it is also documented

to a significant degree among women, as well as that the presence of weapons in the tombs is not directly related to interpersonal violence, particularly since from the seventh century onwards said weapons ceased to be part of the funerary deposits (contrary to what was pointed out for the Merovingian cemetery of Bösfeld, Germany, in the third chapter of the book). As we have pointed out, one of the most interesting, and to a certain extent novel aspects of the study on Gaul, is related to the violence exercised outside the public sphere (military and/or judicial events), that is, in everyday life and domestic sphere, since it affects the most vulnerable people: women, children and the elderly. The identification of possible cases of mistreatment of women is of great interest, as the authors point out for the Colombier necropolis in Vaison-la-Romaine (Vaucluse) and the Norman site of Aubevoye, where the injuries observed in the skeletal remains of various women could be interpreted as examples of domestic violence. Child abuse is extremely difficult to detect, because as the authors point out, the consequences of such abuse are not easily visible. They cite the exceptional case of the two- or three-year-old girl buried at the beginning of the 4th century in the Michelet necropolis (Lisieux, Basse-Normandie), whose death is directly related to ill-treatment, since the multiple identified wounds show repeated blows and malnutrition as the cause of death. The presence of skeletons in domestic structures (silos, rubbish dumps, wells) is understood as evidence of rejection and/or social exclusion (criminals, defeated in a military event, people in a servile condition, etc.), with children and women also being found among them. Lastly, the authors address the evidence of violence as a result of judicial sentences and/or punishments. They mention a possible “execution cemetery”, of those sentenced to death, in Évreux (Eure), dated between the 4th and the beginning of the 5th centuries, thus interpreted by the location of wounds that would show that these individuals were immobilized (bent over and/or kneeling) at the moment of death. As in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, isolated individual burials or those placed in “marginal” locations (crossroads, at one end of the cemetery, etc.) are also documented in Gaul, with individuals decapitated (Saint-Germain-Laxis, Seine-et-Marne), dismembered (Le Mans, Sarthe) or mutilated (Erstein, Bas-Rhin) as a result of death sentences imposed in court proceedings. Particularly interesting, precisely because of the complexity involved in documenting them, is the possible evidence of corporal punishment such as whipping (with a whip or a stick) that the authors relate to the presence of bilateral wounds on the shoulder blades as a result of punitive actions (as the examples of Michelet necropolis in Lisieux, Eure; the necropolis of the Îlot des Bouchers in Amiens, Somme; and the small Pontôme necropolis of Saint-Jean-d’Assé, Sarthe; all of them male subjects from the 4th century). Another very different thing, as they rightly point out, is to determine whether these injuries are the result of judicial decisions or correspond to the private sphere (slaves, for example, punished by their owner).

The text corresponding to the territory of present-day Greece (one the chapters in this volume), addresses the

issue of violence both from the point of view of accidental injuries and those that are the result of interpersonal violence, also doing so from adult and sub-adult Byzantine populations between the 6th and 12th centuries. The author of the study specifically addresses the fractures and ossifications involving injured muscles, representing cases of accidental injuries, interpersonal violence, and biomechanical stress due to an underlying pathological condition, as well as cultural practices such as cranial modification. Certainly interesting, and novel, is the discussion of healing processes and their complications, as a parameter that allows a better understanding of the daily life of people who have suffered, at some point in their lives, this type of injury. Undoubtedly of great relevance and pioneering approach is the author's analysis of childhood traumas, something that has practically never been addressed for Byzantine populations; something that, in addition, broadens the social spectrum of our gaze on these populations, mostly concentrated on elites and urban areas. The author analyses several examples of traumas in the adult population: skull fractures (in Crete: Kefali and Kastella), fractures of the upper limbs and chest, two of the most frequently fractured bones (Kastella, Stylos, Galleazi, Eleutherna, Korytiani, Kefali and Sourtara), lower limb fractures (Stylos, Korytiani, Sourtara, Eleutherna and Kefali), multiple fractures (Gortyn, Maroneia, Kastella) and myositis ossificans traumatica (Sourtara, Messene and Alikianos). Next, the author addresses patterns of childhood trauma (examples from Sourtara and Eleutherna), noting that four types of fractures are seen in a growing child: torus or buckle fracture, green-stick fracture, plastic bowing deformation and epiphyseal fracture. This chapter specifically addresses the issue of artificial deformation and/or modification of the skull, based on the case of a 44–50-year-old woman (5th and 6th centuries), in Maroneia (Thrace), the first documented in Byzantine populations from Greece. The author warns, in her study, very rightly in our opinion, about systematically relating fractures (as, for example, parry fractures) as evidence of interpersonal violence due to its repercussions on the way in which we interpret family and/or social relationships in a given society. As for other geographical areas (Anglo-Saxon England, Germany or Gaul), even taking into account the risks of generalization for such a wide territory and chronological period, in which disparities in regional, temporal and settlement type (urban and rural) are especially significant, male adults in Greece seem to be exposed to activities (violent or not) that place them at high risk of suffering trauma, with complications throughout their lives, precisely by the type of activity carried out.

The study of skeletal remains from southern Italy (Puglia), combining historical, archaeological, anthropological and paleopathological data, focuses specifically on signs of violence during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages directly connected with war, also analysing the type of weapon used to cause such injuries. The authors have selected 38 individuals with single and multiple lesions corresponding to various necropoleis in the Apulian region,

chronologically presented for the period between the 5th and 11th centuries. The 38 cases with injuries described and analysed correspond to men (young and adults), with the exception of three women, confirming that puncture wounds are the majority (50%), followed by contusions (30%) and sharp wounds (20%), with the head being the most affected part of the body (front and right). The weapons that would have caused these injuries, according to the authors, would be mostly arrows (40%), sharp weapons (30%), the dolabra (20%) and the sword (10%). The authors, based on the analysis of the injuries and their trajectory (in the 38 individuals studied), point out that in Late Antiquity cranial injuries were caused by blows from the top down, while in the Early Middle Ages, the skull was hit by swords and knives. The authors observe a lower incidence of arrow wounds in the Early Middle Ages, pointing to an almost exclusive predominance of wounds caused by swords and knives, predominating, nevertheless, in both periods, with melee weapons with long blades and points (*spathae*). The injuries documented by the authors, for the group of individuals selected by them, are always related to the various episodes of war and violent events that historical sources document for the region of Apulia during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

The osteological study of the skeletal remains corresponding to funerary area (7th–12th centuries) linked to the hermitic community of Las Gobas de Laño (Burgos, Spain), is of special interest as it is a very different context from those analysed for Anglo-Saxon England, Germany, Gaul, Greece and southern Italy. The authors documented a total of 20 traumatic injuries for a set of 42 individuals, specifically in 14 male adults and one female adult. The lesions are concentrated in the upper part of the body (thorax, upper extremities and head), being non-existent in the lower extremities (a picture quite similar to that documented for the Italian region of Apulia). One peculiarity, however, of the funerary area of Las Gobas is that 35% of the fractures are located on the bones of the hands and feet, which the authors correctly relate, in our opinion, to the rocky environment in which the funeral area of the hermitic settlement is located, characterized by very rugged terrain and a complicated orography. Accidental blows and/or falls, rather than interpersonal violence, could be the cause of the injuries of individuals 101 (male adult with eleven fractured and healed ribs) and 47 (female adult with forearm fracture). The authors of the study document injuries resulting from episodes of interpersonal violence, inflicted by sharp weapons (knives and/or swords), on the frontal bone and left side of the skull, in some cases healed and in others a direct cause of death. The authors deserve special mention for individual 22 (buried in a sarcophagus excavated in the rock) who they identify as a “prototype of the medieval warrior”, due to his height (1.81 m) and skeletal robustness, whose non-fatal injury is a superficial diagonal wound, which according to the authors could indicate that he was protected by a helmet or chain mail. This interesting, as well as novel study, shows that despite being a small community linked to a hermitic settlement and that most traumatic injuries are the result of accidents

and/or falls, episodes of interpersonal violence are not unrelated to this type of population, as shown by the presence of antemortem and perimortem injuries caused by weapons.

The last of the chapters in this volume also focuses on the north of the Iberian Peninsula, the region of Navarra, analysing the osteological evidence in Christian and Muslim funerary contexts between the 7th and 11th centuries. The author begins by presenting a case that, despite being outside the chronological scope of this book, since it is temporarily located between the 2nd and 4th centuries (in Roman times), acquires special relevance as it is a mass grave located in the city of Pamplona (Plaza del Castillo), containing the remains of five individuals buried simultaneously. The fact that one of the skeletons had its hands tied behind its back, in addition to the simultaneous burial of five adult individuals, along with its orientation and topographic layout, leads the author to interpret this mass grave as evidence of an execution. This is a case, in relation to the Iberian Peninsula, which is exceptional to date, although it is probably not the only one. For the Early medieval period, the author presents evidence of violence corresponding to various individuals documented in three funerary areas of Pamplona (the Islamic necropolis from the 8th century, and two Christian cemeteries, from the 7th–9th centuries and from the 11th century onwards), one Islamic necropolis in the town of Tudela (the *maqbara* dated between the 9th and 11th centuries) and a Christian cemetery (11th to 14th centuries) in the town of Arizkoa-Monreal. In the Christian funerary area (7th to 9th centuries) of the Palacio del Condestale (Pamplona), the only known case to date of an adult woman with signs of violence (two skull injuries: left parietal and occipital and right parietal) has been documented). In the *maqbara* of Pamplona (8th century Islamic cemetery), there are several individuals with various injuries and traumas caused by interpersonal violence (10 of them have fractures of the ulna and/or radius compatible with a parry's fracture), which leads the author to suggest that some of these adult males could have been involved in military activity (exemplifying this military character in individual 34, with perimortem injuries and antemortem fractures in the left ulna, radius and clavicle). Some of the individuals analysed died as a result of injuries caused by interpersonal violence, as in the case of adult male individual 150 from the Islamic necropolis of Tudela (9th–11th centuries), while others survived these traumas for a long time, such as adult male 91 from the same necropolis. The author mentions, in a Christian context (Santiago Convent in Pamplona, 11th–14th centuries), head injuries (fatal in one case and with survival in the other) caused by a strong blow with a cutting weapon, probably a sword. The author suggests a possible "decapitation attempt" for individual 206 from the Christian cemetery of Arizkoa-Monreal (11th–14th centuries). The author emphasizes, with discretion and prudence, that the cases analysed have been found in funerary contexts, let's say "classic" (with the exception of the mass grave from Roman times in Pamplona), not directly related to events of war and/or conflict, diagnosing

those individuals who present injuries and/or traumas compatible with acts of interpersonal violence. In all the cases (except for the woman in the Christian cemetery of the Plaza del Condestable in Pamplona), they were young male adults (16 to 19 years old) and mature (45 to 55 years old), of foreign origin (African) in a high percentage in the case of the Islamic necropolis of Pamplona (8th century).

We would like to end by indicating that this volume is dedicated to our colleague and friend Véronique Gallien, one of the co-authors of this collective volume, who died suddenly in 2021, a great anthropologist and an extraordinary person. We miss you, Véronique! We will not forget you!