

Archaeology of pain and suffering

Today, archaeologists are increasingly turning their attention to the felt, lived-in and tangible worlds of the past. Archaeologists have also increasingly recognized the need for consideration of living, feeling and fleshed bodies in archaeological research. Still, pain and suffering have been avoided topics among archaeologists because of their elusiveness, subjectivity and difficulties in cross-cultural comparison.

In the past, without efficient painkillers and medical aid, common ailments took severe forms and caused intense pains. Notions of suffering and pain were understood in their social and cultural context. Ideas of pain and suffering were also related to the conceptions people had about the human body and its relationship to the surrounding world. Therefore it should be remembered that pain may not have been perceived as a negative feeling but may have been a desired result in some social situations. As an example one might recall many painful initiation rites practiced among several societies documented by ethnographers. The existence and social meaning of such rites and rituals in past societies must be acknowledged in archaeological research even though the rites and rituals cannot be reconstructed. Circumstantial evidence of the existence of such rites may however be observed in archaeological record even outside osteological evidence.

This session aims to discuss how pain and suffering can be incorporated into the study of the lived-in worlds of the past. We encourage papers pertaining to, for instance, archaeology of disease, trauma, violence, fear, hunger etc. We also welcome papers that discuss pain and suffering in theoretical and cross-cultural perspectives and papers that tangle the subject via artefact- or site studies.

Chairs:

Anna-Kaisa Salmi & Jari-Matti Kuusela, Archaeology, University of Oulu
anna-kaisa.salmi[at]oulu.fi, jari-matti.kuusela[at]oulu.fi

Days of weeping: the emotional experiences of a funeral

Death is a complicated phenomenon that affects everyone in the community. It goes hand in hand with a wide range of emotions and feelings, such as, shock, anger, fear, sorrow, joy, laughter and even the desire for revenge. Death might strike a family or a community very abruptly or it might be expected

and even come as a relief to the people who are left behind. The cause of death might thus influence these emotions.

Cemeteries are not only social and political places but also places of remembrance, memories and emotion. They are the outcome of religious or emotional activity, even though they are seldom interpreted in that way in archaeology. The cognitive and emotional aspects of death and burial should therefore never be excluded, even though it is difficult to reconstruct ancient feelings.

It is also important to bear in mind that the burials are not the remains of one single event but the outcome of a complex pattern of actions. People have throughout time mourned and remembered their dead loved ones, particularly at certain times of the year. This commemorative practice also often leaves material traces for the archaeologist. Through repetition, these ritual acts are remembered and stored in our bodies as are the emotions, smells and pictures which might enhance our ability to remember, especially events we have experienced ourselves.

There is some legitimate debate whether or not emotion is useful, meaningful or possible to archaeological study. However, this paper argues that it is possible to construct emotional pasts within mortuary contexts. As both biological and psychological beings we have feelings and emotions. These emotions are also subjective to cultural and social aspects. This paper argues that cremations, especially, have evoked feelings and memories both amongst those who have eye-witnessed the funeral and those who have performed the ritual acts.

Anna Wessman, University of Helsinki
anna.wessman[at]espoo.fi

Aggression in Iron Age Fennoscandia

My paper discusses various viewpoints of pain and suffering related to inter-human aggression during the Iron Age in Northern Europe - including the archaeological traces of physical harm and more hypothetical themes such as sexual and initiatory violence.

Sami Raninen, University of Turku
sraninen[at]hotmail.com

Pain in the past I – Theoretical approaches to past pain and disease

Recent approaches in palaeopathology have underscored the many ways in which the study of ancient human remains can shed light on past gender identities, ethnicities and cultural attitudes to illness and disability. The pain caused by the diseases, its treatment and its effect on the everyday life of people in the past have gone largely unacknowledged. Even though there are differences in pain thresholds

among various ethnocultural and religious groups, it has been argued that it is because of differences in criterion for reporting pain, and not in the sensory experience of pain itself. According to Kleinman *et al.* (1992:7), pain is “an experience that simply cannot be avoided, an experience that sets limits to the meanings given it by cultural beliefs, discourses, or practices”. People and their bodies are not similar, though, but historically, culturally and individually particular, which is why people give meaning to their bodily experiences through cultural modes of interpretation. How people experience pain and illness is therefore not only dependent on the physiological symptoms, but also other people's reactions, cultural interpretations and folk beliefs. This paper discusses the different ways people can understand and experience pain and disease. Especial attention is paid to Finnish folk etiologies. The paper is followed by a case study on dental diseases and pain in Northern Finland, presented by Rosa Vilkama.

Reference:

Kleinman A, Brodwin PE, Good BJ & Del Vecchio Good M-J. 1992. Pain as human experience: An introduction. In *Pain as Human Experience. An Anthropological Perspective*, Del Vecchio Good M-J, Good BJ, Brodwin PE & Kleinman A (eds.). University of California Press: Berkeley; 1–28.

Anna-Kaisa Salmi, Archaeology, University of Oulu
anna-kaisa.salmi[at]oulu.fi

Pain in the past II – Dental pathologies, pain, and pain relief in 15th–16th century Ii in Northern Finland

Palaeopathology is defined as the study of evolution of diseases and human adaptation to the environment. While recent approaches in palaeopathology have underscored the many ways in which the study of ancient human remains can shed light on past gender identities, ethnicities and cultural attitudes to disability, the pain caused by the diseases, its treatment and its effect on the everyday life of people in the past have gone largely unacknowledged. In this paper, I discuss how the pains caused by dental diseases were experienced and interpreted by the people of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Ii in northern Finland. The dental pathologies in the human skeletons from the Old Ii Harbour cemetery are used as a case study to explore what paleopathological observations can infer about the fleshed, feeling and suffering bodies of past people. I also discuss how folk etiologies and folk healing methods, and their archaeological remains, were connected to the conceptions about the human body in fifteenth- to sixteenth-century northern Finland.

Rosa Vilkama, Archaeology, University of Oulu
rosa.vilkama[at]oulu.fi

Places of internment – on problematics of hospital institutions during the early modernity and as sites of cultural heritage today

During 2009–2011 University of Turku has done preliminary research on early modern leper colonies and mental institutions on the island of Seili in the Archipelago Sea in southwestern Finland and in Kronoby in Ostrobothnia. The aim of this project has been to apply the archaeological method and create a broader understanding of cultural heritage. The research of the hospital has mainly been done mainly by medical, psychiatric and theological scholars with the help of historical sources. The historical narrative is often told in sorrowful undertones covering the phenomena with darkness and suffering. The canonical perception of hospitals as the absolute places of pain and suffering can be challenged by the archaeological material. The living conditions do not seem to differ a great deal from the life of the contemporary peasantry or the urban centres. However, the social isolation and topographical whereabouts of these asylums suggest conscious planning of the internment. I will address the problems and possibilities in handling the problematic cultural heritage. In the sites presented here archaeological cultural heritage has been mediated directly through on-going academic research and antiquarian reconstructions. The sites remain uncanny as they can be understood to mirror the wider process of modernity itself.

Mikko Helminen, University of Turku
mikko.helminen[at]gmail.com