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PASTS 2-6 SEPTEMBER
EAA 2025
BELGRADE

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European Association
of Archaeologists

31st EAA Annual Meeting 2–6 September 2025 Belgrade Virtual

Abstract Book

31st EAA Annual Meeting (Belgrade Virtual, 2025) - Abstract Book

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Technical editing: Magdalena Karabáš (EAA)
Design and layout: Magdalena Karabáš (EAA)
Cover design: Miross Travel Agency

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ISBN: 978-80-88441-10-6
31st EAA Belgrade Virtual Annual Meeting — Abstract Book (online PDF)

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Abstracts

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Finally, integrating archaeological and osteological evidence will shed light on the socio-cultural dimensions of this multi-layered practice.

2195. ANALYZING THE BIOLOGICAL PROFILE OF CREMATED INDIVIDUALS FROM HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PERIOD THESSALONIKI

Contribution format: Oral
Contribution authors: Christina Kakasa – Panagiota Bantavanou (Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, Democritus University of Thrace) – Frank Siegmund (Abt. Ur- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie, University of Münster) – Konstantinos Moraitis (Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) – Maria Eleni Manthou (Laboratory of Histology-Embryology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) – Christina Papageorgopoulou (Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, Democritus University of Thrace)

Cremation during Greek antiquity was a common burial practice, increasing in frequency during the Hellenistic (323-31 BCE) and the Roman (31 BCE – 324 CE) periods. During cremation, however, the human body and consequently the skeleton undergoes intense alteration and destruction, preventing standard anthropological methods to perform efficiently retaining the identity of the individual largely unknown. This project attempts to explore the practice of cremation by identifying the biological profile (age-at-death) and the taphonomical alterations of the bone microstructure emerging by high temperatures. For this, age-at-death was assessed through the application of a new histomorphometric method based on Haversian System Density (HD) regression equation (Bantavanou et al., 2025) modified for cremated femur bones. The modification of the method was conducted on experimentally cremated (400-900°C) modern individuals (n=19) with documented data. The Percentage of Difference (PoD) was calculated between the HD values before and after cremation for every 100°C. HD values were mathematically corrected according to the PoDs. The new method was applied on 30 cremated individuals dated to the Hellenistic (n=11) and Roman (n=15) period Thessaloniki in northern Greece. The modified method produced accurate age estimates with standard estimation error of ±5 years. The age-at-death of the ancient cremated individuals was estimated at 42 years for the Hellenistic and 43 years for the Roman period, respectively. While, histological analysis of the taphonomical alterations provided information (i.e degrees of cremation) regarding the practice of cremation. Overall, our methodology provided significant information for the biological profile of ancient cremated individuals rendering a significant part of the ancient world accessible for demographical analysis. Funding: ERC-Consolidator Grant CityLife (Project: 101126337).

816. BIOARCHEOLOGY OF CREMATION IN THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE EAST OF THE CARPATHIANS

Contribution format: Oral
Contribution authors: Mihai Constantinescu (Faculty of History, University of Bucharest)

In the hilly area east of the Carpathians, two archaeological cultures, Monteoru and Costișa, developed throughout the Middle Bronze Age (2200-1500 BC). Both cultures are extensively documented from an archaeological perspective, particularly regarding their funerary practices, several hundred inhumation burials being published and discussed in the literature. Inhumation in large cemeteries was the dominant funerary rite of these communities, with individuals exhibiting relatively standardized orientations, body placements and grave goods. The presence of cremation as a secondary funerary rite in these cultures has been only briefly addressed, no cremation grave being published in detail, but rather mentioned in general overviews. Based on recent discoveries from the cemetery at Cărlomănești-Arman, on the burials from Năeni-Colarea and the grave from the settlement at Poduri, we will present a bioarcheological perspective on cremation practices east of the Carpathians during the Middle Bronze Age. We will discuss the archaeological contexts in which cremated remains have been found, their chronology, an analysis of burning temperatures, the preserved skeletal segments and their weight. These aspects will be analyzed in comparison with similar practices within the neighboring archaeological cultures to explore the significance and origins of this funerary treatment in a region where inhumation was the prevailing rite.

1691. THERMALLY ALTERED HUMAN REMAINS FROM PREHISTORIC AUSTRIA: A HISTOTAPHONOMIC ANALYSIS

Contribution format: Oral
Contribution authors: Estella Weiss-Krejci (University of Vienna) – Caroline Partiot (Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Numerous ethnographic, historical, and archaeological studies have demonstrated that cremation is not a uniform practice. Indeed, there are many differences in the method of burning, the positioning of the body, and the temperature. This presentation explores the issue of variability in thermally modified bones from the perspective

of histotaphonomy, an archaeological method for drawing conclusions about ancient burial practices and depositional environments. Histotaphonomy involves the analysis of the microscopic structure of bone to assess postmortem biogenic degradation and diagenetic processes. In recent years, the number of studies dealing with the histotaphonomy of thermally altered bone has significantly increased. This paper presents the results of histotaphonomic analyses of bone samples from Austria using transmitted light microscopy and SEM. The time periods range from the Urnfield Culture to Late Antiquity. The presentation explores the similarities and differences observed and discusses the implications for our understanding of the state of the body prior to cremation and broader funerary ritual practices.

2479. THE AGE OF DEATH AND FIRE: DATING BURIAL CUSTOMS BY RADIOCARBON AND CORRESPONDENCE ANALYSIS AT LATE BRONZE AGE CEMETERY, INZERSDORF

Contribution format: Oral
Contribution authors: Michaela Fritzl (Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Science)

The Late Bronze Age is marked by an increasing homogenization of material culture and burial customs. The cemetery of Inzersdorf, situated in the Lower Traisen Valley, Austria, serves as a case study to examine diachronic changes in burial practices. This paper interprets radiocarbon data from 49 calcined human bone samples and employs correspondence analysis of grave contexts. The carefully integrated dataset enables the precise delineation of the cemetery's chronological structure in relation to the burial practices, which include body-sized graves, graves encircled by ditches, and urn graves. Insights into rituals or ancestral veneration emerge from temporal discrepancies in graves with multiple occupation. The analysis indicates the cemetery's early origin at around 1400 BC, at the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age, and identifies two peak phases of activity before burial practices decline around 950 BC. The integration of typo-chronological markers, 14C data, and comparisons with nearby contemporary cemeteries reveals a complex temporal framework, emphasizing the fluidity and regional variability of burial practices. This challenges assumptions of a linear development in mortuary rites and establishes an absolute as well as relative chronology of the Late Bronze Age for eastern Austria.

1528. THE ROLE OF CREMATION CUSTOM IN THE EARLY METAL PERIOD OF THE SOUTHEASTERN BALTIC REGION

Contribution format: Oral
Contribution authors: Lijana Muradian (Lithuanian Institute of History)

This presentation analyzes cremation as a complex mortuary practice in the southeastern Baltic region during the Early Metal Period (2nd-1st millennium BC). During this time, cremation first appeared in the mentioned region. The emergence of cremation, alongside other burial practices such as inhumation and barrow burials, provides a unique opportunity to study the social and cultural aspects of funerary practices. Focusing on the Southeastern Baltic region, the presentation will examine the development of the cremation custom, including the factors influencing its spread and the ways it intersected with other funerary practices. It will also consider the reasons why some individuals were buried in burial mounds, while others were buried outside of them. A key case study from the Mišeikiai mound cemetery in Lithuania, which features cremation burials outside barrows, will be highlighted to shed light on these practices. Investigations at this burial site were carried out in 2024 in order to test the area between the barrow mounds and to compare this material with a previously investigated barrow.

411. FROM EARTH TO FIRE: FUNERARY RITUALS IN MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS IN CENTRAL ALENTEJO (PORTUGAL)

Contribution format: Poster
Contribution authors: Leonor Maria Pereira Rocha (CHAIA, Universidade de Évora) – Daniela Anselmo (CCDR Lisboa) – Paula Morgado (Câmara Municipal de Monforte, Portugal | CHAIA, Universidade de Évora)

All the details of prehistoric funerary rituals are important for understanding ancient societies - primary burial, secondary burial, with or without cremations. Understanding when cremation rituals began is essential, as it implies a new mentality towards death. In the case of Central Alentejo, where most of the megalithic graves were excavated in the first half of the 20th century, with stratigraphy recording methodologies that were not always (or almost never) very rigorous and often did not even collect osteological remains (human bones), this analysis is more difficult. Thus, the osteological analysis of bones, despite being crucial for understanding the evolutionary process of funerary contexts (with or without cremation), reconstructing biological profiles and assessing the conditions of cremation, may be completely lost for some regions. In this work, we intend to present the existing data for the Central Alentejo (Portugal) based on the research projects of the author, which focused on ancient works, but also to present data from more recent excavations, which have allowed us to clearly identify several monuments where cremations took place between the late Neolithic and the 1st Iron Age (5th century BC).