

COMMENTARY ON “SKELETAL PATHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF LITHUANIAN MUMMIES” (PAPERS ON ANTHROPOLOGY XXIII, 1, 2014, pp. 118–126)

DARIO PIOMBINO-MASCALI

Faculty of Medicine, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Ten years after publishing research on skeletal pathologies in Lithuanian mummies, the lead author seeks to address a lexical ambiguity in the use of the term “osteoarthritis” [1]. In the original study, “arthritis” was used both as a broad descriptor of degenerative joint disease (DJD) and specifically to refer to osteoarthritis in its strict sense [2]. This dual usage reflects a common conflation of terms, as “osteoarthritis” is often used interchangeably with DJD, despite the former being limited to synovial (diarthrodial) joints in its precise definition [3, 4]. This conflation may arise from differing academic traditions in clinical and palaeopathological contexts [5, 6]. For example, in Italy, the term “spondylo-disco-arthrosis” describes the concurrent degeneration of intervertebral discs (amphiarthroses) and posterior facet joints (diarthroses), effectively merging DJD with osteoarthritis [7]. To improve terminological precision, it is recommended that some degenerative changes observed in the mummies – such as those affecting vertebral bodies, the sterno-manubrial joint, the sacroiliac joint, and the pubic symphysis – be classified under the broader category of degenerative joint disease. These changes are likely to represent independent, age-related phenomena distinct from osteoarthritis as it occurs in synovial joints [2, 4].

REFERENCES

1. Piombino-Mascali D., Kozakaitė J., Tamošiūnas A., Valančius R., Panzer S., Jankauskas R. (2014). Skeletal pathological conditions of Lithuanian mummies. *Papers on Anthropology*, 23(1), 118–126. <https://doi.org/10.12697/poa.2014.23.1.10>

2. Waldron T. (2009). *Palaeopathology*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
3. Mobasheri A., Batt M. (2016). An update on the pathophysiology of osteoarthritis. *Ann Phys Rehab Med*, 59, 333–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rehab.2016.07.004>
4. Waldron T. (2019). Joint disease. In: Buikstra J. (ed.). *Ortner's identification of pathological conditions in human skeletal remains*. London: Associated Press, 719–748. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-809738-0.00020-X>
5. De Falco R., Scarano E., Barbato R., Grasso U., Guarnieri L. (2007). Le ernie lombari alte L1-L2 ed L2-L3. Caratteristiche, peculiarità e differenze. *Riv It Neurobiologia*, 53(3–4), 203–209.
6. Giuffra V., Fornaciari G. (2021). *Fondamenti di paleopatologia*. Pisa, Pisa University Press.
7. Fine N., Lively S., Séguin C.A., Perruccio A.V., Kapoor M., Rampersaud R. (2023). Intervertebral disc degeneration and osteoarthritis: a common molecular disease spectrum. *Nat Rev Rheumatol*, 19 (3), 136–152. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41584-022-00888-z>

Address for correspondence:

Dario Piombino-Masali

Department of Anatomy, Histology, and Anthropology, Institute of Biomedical Sciences, Vilnius University

MK Čiurlionio 21, 03101 Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: dario.piombino@mf.vu.lt