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Introduction: Establishing a Bioarchaeology of Community

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we introduce our volume and focus on defining the various ways in which the term *community* is used by bioarchaeologists in this volume, especially with respect to the theoretical ideas within the emerging social and theoretical bioarchaeology. We also provide an initial summary concerning each of the chapters and how each author, or set of authors, focuses on community within their research. Our goals are: (1) to discuss the possibilities and limitations of identifying different types of past community or communities; (2) to expand on methods in bioarchaeology that can be used to identify community; and (3) to develop theoretically based bioarchaeological research on *community* in order to elucidate meaningful relationships that structured past people's lives. [Theoretical bioarchaeology, Community, Social relationships, Daily life, Agency, Practice approach, Group membership]

Bioarchaeology, as a scholarly field, questions how people lived in the past using human skeletal remains from archaeological contexts as the focus. While there are many approaches to examining human bones from antiquity, the research for this volume initially took a speculative approach to broaden our field of study by asking if “community” could actually be “seen” in anything bioarchaeological, or how visible could community be to people who study skeletal remains. My co-author and I also questioned the role of bioarchaeologist as a site specialist, and if that person is responsible for contextual and theoretical interpretations. We both felt dissatisfied with the lack of context when we read things like frequency report comparisons of burial groups, or skeletal differences in specific portions of human anatomy with no reference to the lives of individuals who comprised those bones or teeth. It left us asking who these people were, why culturally would there be differences in pathological conditions, and if these numbers truly represented peoples' existence in the past.

We were not alone, as many other bioarchaeological scholars have begun questioning, through social and theoretical contexts, what the bodies of the dead mean. While this query sounds simple enough, it can be amazingly hard to answer, especially so when we consider the many theoretical and methodological orientations researchers use to ask and respond to the question. We do feel that bioarchaeology is uniquely situated to answer these questions through investigations of past peoples from a perspective different than other subfields. In fact, one of bioarchaeology's original functions was to make these connections between archaeological context and human skeletal remains: in other words, to get skeletons out of the appendices and into the discussion (Buikstra 1977). Because of this emergence and influence from multiple disciplines (i.e., archaeology, medicine, ecology, demography, and skeletal biology), bioarchaeological investigations are naturally multidisciplinary. In addition, bioarchaeologists have been effective at integrating skeletal data and social theory, making prodigious

strides in the last decade toward understanding the social and theoretical nature of the dead from prior foundational research that chiefly studied human skeletal remains as pathological specimens (e.g., *Identification of Pathological Conditions in Human Skeletal Remains* and *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Paleopathology* (Aufderheide and Rodríguez-Martín 1998; Ortner 2003; Ortner and Putschar 1985)). While it is necessary for bioarchaeologists to understand the morbidity and mortality of past populations from a biomedical approach, publications like *The Body as Material Culture: A Theoretical Osteoarchaeology* (Sofaer 2006) and *Bioarchaeology: The Contextual Analysis of Human Remains* (Buikstra and Beck 2006), have shown that bioarchaeology's future must include a contextual, biocultural approach. This change has put bioarchaeologists at an intersection similar to the post-processual crossroads in archaeological theory of the late 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Hodder 1982aa, 1982bb, 1982cc; Miller and Tilley 1984; Shanks and Tilley 1987). Through concepts like identity, agency, and individual experiences, publications such as *Bioarchaeology and Identity in the Americas* (Knudson and Stojanowski 2010), *Social Bioarchaeology* (Agarwal and Glencross 2011), *Breathing New Life Into the Evidence of Death: Contemporary Approaches to Bioarchaeology* (Baadsgaard et al. 2011), *The Bioarchaeology of Individuals* (Stodder and Palkovich 2012), *Tracing Childhood: Bioarchaeological Investigations of Early Lives in Antiquity* (Thompson et al. 2014), and *The Bioarchaeology of Care* (Tilley 2015) have added significance and social meaning to our understandings of populations around the world.

While these other bioarchaeological researchers have answered the call for robust, theoretically-oriented scholarship, there are still many avenues to pursue. Thus, this volume explores the questions posited to us about community—expanding the breadth of bioarchaeological method and theory by conceptualizing, exploring, and utilizing the term *community*. Taking a global approach, our volume has three goals: (1) to discuss the possibilities and limitations of identifying different types of past community or communities; (2) to expand on methods in bioarchaeology that can be used to identify community; and (3) to develop theoretical bioarchaeological research on community in order to elucidate meaningful relationships that structured past people's lives. Because of these wide-ranging goals, we deliberately define *community* very broadly, as a process by which a group of people share some kind of real and/or imagined connectedness. We see “community” as something that can be repetitive, contextually flexible, and temporally changing, with categories that are not mutually exclusive, but emphasize the importance of connectedness in daily life. The authors of this volume all approach community

or the reconstruction of past communities by going beyond examining the material remains left behind, and by considering human skeletal remains as more than physical bodies; skeletal remains reflect the lived experiences of people. It is through the practice of community (following ideas about community in Canuto and Yaeger 2000, and based around Bourdieu 1977 and Giddens 1984) that bioarchaeology offers compelling insights into past populations using the actual bones of people who experienced these diverse relationships. Community as a focus of investigation is innovative and, if applied more broadly, has the potential to augment our understanding of populations throughout the world.

Describing and Applying “Community”

Bioarchaeology as a discipline has begun to explore nuanced social topics, including identity, ethnicity, social hierarchies, socially determined age categories (e.g., childhood and adulthood), and sex and gender, among others (e.g., Agarwal and Glencross 2011; Arnold 2014; Baadsgaard et al. 2011; Buikstra and Beck 2006; Crandall and Martin 2014; Geller 2016; Knudson and Stojanowski 2010; Sofaer 2006, 2011; Stodder and Palkovich 2012; Thompson et al. 2014). This scholarship has also included discussion of social relationships, including ties of ethnic groups, social classes, residential blocks, religious affiliations, and real or fictive kinship. While these topics have contributed important methodological approaches, comparative frameworks, and innovative analyses, few consider *community* as a way to see groups in which past people participated, versus those designed by archaeologists and bioarchaeologists. There is sometimes a failure to recognize or address the idea that group affiliations can be real and can be constructed, both in the lived experience of the population being studied, and in their creation by scholars. Without contextual approaches and reflexive consideration of how individuals and their bones are placed into groups, research concerning ancient communities will remain disconnected from the perspective of past peoples.

In addition, in both archaeology and bioarchaeology, the term *community* has often been limited by physical proximity of burials, site location, or some kind of shared motifs across grave goods, classifications especially true prior to the publication of *The Archaeology of Community* (Canuto and Yaeger 2000). However, community is often more deeply rooted than simple measures can demonstrate. Communities may not always include neighbors, but can reflect enduring connections to those who live far away, ties that may not be captured through something like settlement pattern analysis alone. Likewise, those who share iconography

do not necessarily identify with each other, or even impart an understanding of symbols in the same way. Instead, communities exist somewhere in-between, structuring the way people view themselves and the cosmos, but also requiring at least the semifrequent copresence of people in order to reinforce social bonds and reestablish norms and practices (Canuto and Yaeger 2000). As discussed by Bentley (1987:32-33), common life experiences generate habitual dispositions, and through the commonality of experience, members of a cohort have a sense of being both familiar and familial to each other. Jones (1997) notes that fine temporal control is required to find groups, and this temporal as well as spatial limitation is echoed by Yaeger and Canuto (2000). Jones (1997:13-14) further states that identification of group membership is based on shifting, situational, and subjective identifications of the self and others, which are rooted in ongoing daily practice and historical experience that is also subject to transformation and discontinuity.

In reiterating these points, our approach to community advocates for considering people as agents of their own lives, with self-identification as members of a community or communities. How do we look for agency considering we cannot question the dead directly, and in many cases there are no written records to tell us about their lives? We consider that people show this agency through practicing their own way of life on a daily basis, and that the skeleton can be used as a record of those embodied experiences. Coming out of ideas from Bourdieu's (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, we focus on "habitus" and "hexis," especially as they relate to group membership. Unpacking these terms, we define *habitus* as the social (both public and domestic) enactment of everyday life that people do as part of their actions and perceptions in the world around them, which structure, and are structured by, social relations (Bourdieu 1977:72). We see *hexis* as how people express themselves through personal style (e.g., clothing, hairstyles) and deportment (e.g., movement, gestures) (Bourdieu 1977:82, 87). As one of the first bioarchaeologists to apply "habitus," "hexis," agency theory, and practice theory to human skeletal remains, Sofaer (2006:17) noted that, initially, the skeletal body had been treated as a variable that could be simply compared to many other material culture traits. This made it a one-dimensional component of analysis and ultimately left the body removed from those seeking to highlight the embodied human experience (Sofaer 2006:24). Sofaer also argued that "the body cannot exist in some kind of natural pristine state as it both affects, and is affected by, its surroundings. The environment lends potentials and also places limits on the body" (2006:26). As the skeleton is a record of a lived experience with limitations to that record by the very act of survival, it is the total product of that human life, in that it is the actual

person represented in his or her skeletal remains who lived that life. Thus, in structuring and practicing daily habitus and hexis, there should be repeated changes associated with, or visible on, the bodies of the dead.

From this background and moving beyond simple group affiliations, we discuss how various social definitions and identities can come together to structure daily practices. This is similar to the successful approach advocated by Yaeger and Canuto (2000) of communities through relationship and the community transference of knowledge. We feel that through our ideas on practice theory, the chapters in this volume explore our definition of *community*—a process by which a group of people share some kind of real or imagined connectedness, or both. It is through the process of practice and the intersectionality of human lives that groups or individuals recognize each other as community members and establish a larger community.

Approaches to Understanding Community: History and Case Studies

While we have given a brief introduction and outlined our goals and plan for this volume, we have left further explorations of the term *community* and its historical usage to the second chapter of this volume by Kakaliouras. Noting the potential pitfalls, such as ambiguity of meaning in the past and trying to recover the immaterial from material remains, Kakaliouras further illustrates how bioarchaeology has historically attempted to address these issues. Using a socio-historical approach, she discusses how contemporary social theory may inform bioarchaeology. In addition, Kakaliouras provides two cautionary notes for modern bioarchaeologists, echoing our prior concerns on context and interpretation. First, although people from the same burial location represent a kind of interaction, establishing a community amongst these people needs to be as historically and culturally specific as possible, as the dead do not bury themselves. Second, scholars working with skeletal remains need to be reflexive, ethical, and flexible about the stories they write about past communities, realizing the affect they may have on modern populations and/or descent groups.

While being cautious about these potential problems and following well-reasoned contextual approaches, our volume follows other authors' examples by taking a global perspective, with case studies ranging from the New World to the Old World, using the connections between community and the body as an analytical lens. Each chapter in this volume emphasizes diverse ages (3000 B.C.E. through the modern era) and different geographic areas (North, Central, and South America through to Western and Eastern Europe).

The multiple, global, contextual perspectives in the six case study chapters (Chapters 3–8) address community through innovative approaches, interpretations, and collaborations with archaeologists. These chapters' authors also recognize the intersectionality of human lives and agent-oriented approaches to community as something that can be repetitive, contextually flexible, and temporally changing, with categories that are not mutually exclusive, but emphasize the importance of connectedness in daily life, providing real or imagined bonds, or both.

Our third chapter by Juengst focuses on understanding the ritual lives and connections of people from the prehistoric Titicaca Basin region of Bolivia (800 B.C.E.–C.E. 200). Using multifocal and multidisciplinary methods, Juengst evaluates evidence from mortuary contexts, strontium isotopes for change in residence over an individual's life, and biodistance analyses for familial relatedness. She shows that the practice of burial placement at temple versus non-ritual locations had little to do with clear delineations in the ritual community. Instead, people from many hundreds of kilometers away were welcomed into the region, potentially as pilgrims, traders, or, most likely, the beginnings of extended-kin networks of community, connections that we see continue into later time periods.

Becker, who also works in the South American Andes, shows the same potential kin linkages in Chapter 4. She evaluates both heartland sites in Bolivia and colony sites in southern Peru associated with the Tiwanaku culture (C.E. 500–1100). Looking at evidence of labor and activity, she is able to show that community is practiced at varying spatial levels and that at the smallest and most local level, by neighborhoods of craftspeople. In addition, Becker also evaluates the Tiwanaku social and political situation noting how habitual activity varied regionally, suggesting that people worked within these kinship networks reciprocally, rather than at the behest of elites or a centralized state.

Chapter 5 by Novotny moves from the Andes to Central America, with Maya people from the Belize River Valley. She looks at the built environment for the region from a holistic perspective, emphasizing placement of human remains within specific regions as a "genealogy of place," representing local land ownership as well as interconnectedness with one's ancestors. Interacting with these deceased relatives created a kind of community that was generated and reinforced over time through venerative practices. Novotny notes that by contextualizing change in mortuary patterns over time, she can see both the real data and the imagined communities within her research.

Where the dead are buried as part of the practice of community is the focus in Chapter 6 by Cornelison et al. in their research over the Wisconsin Effigy Mound people of

North America. Through the type of monumental mound, along with placement of various artifacts, including skeletal remains, the authors note that local ritual ties were kept through symbolism and performance. In addition, they see demarcations in local versus regional community identities, so that people living around many of these mounds in smaller communities, likely kin-based groups, were still part of the larger regional society.

Moving from how past cultures may have viewed their landscape and into present-day understandings, links between topographical differences, geographical change, and modern community reinforcement are the focus in Deskaj's Chapter 7. She progresses this volume into the Old World, bringing a modern perspective to tumuli (i.e., mound) burials and landscape ownership in the Shkodra Plain and surrounding hills of the Balkans in Albania. Deskaj examines how religious monuments, such as the tumuli dating to the Early Bronze Age through the Roman conquest, mark today's territory and create religiouscapes from a multidimensional regional perspective. She argues that mortuary landscapes structure the relationships between people from different communities, both a cause and effect of social divisions that recapitulate and reinforce one another, helping or hindering local community relationships.

Zuckerman in Chapter 8 looks at an historic perspective of community inclusivity versus exclusivity, from four Post-Medieval cemeteries in London, UK. Using both historic accounts and modern perspectives on the societal treatment of the diseased, she notes a style of normative burial for the post-Medieval era in this region. Zuckerman expected that burial exclusion would have been practiced if you were considered a "poxed" person who should have been rejected from life in the community. However, she does not find these differences and postulates that the effects of the disease could have been hidden, and therefore, not noted in burial style. Alternatively, normative burial could have been negotiated through Christian charity, or have been commonplace as many people were ill, or that the need for burial of the dead was more important than excluding the diseased dead in cemetery populations.

In sum, this section has given a brief overview of the background that Kakaliouras covers in Chapter 2, while also introducing each of the six case studies using community as a theme. In the next section, we focus on describing where we see the connections between the case studies, as well as ways that bioarchaeology can use these ideas to move further into social and theoretical perspectives. In addition, we introduce the final chapters in this volume, one from a bioarchaeologist's perspective by Blom (Chapter 9) and one from a theoretical archaeologist's view by Meyer (Chapter 10).

Establishing our Bioarchaeology Community: Intersections, Overviews, and Conclusions

Given problems of identifying past communities in archaeology and that archaeologists have struggled with the idea of community (see for example Agbe-Davies 2010, 2011; Davis 2011; Janusek and Blom 2006; Yaeger and Canuto 2000), we advocate for investigating community through scholarly collaborations. The increasing emphasis on cooperation between subdisciplines is also common across modern archaeology. The intersections within the case studies in this volume emphasize that value.

First, adapting archaeological approaches, bioarchaeologists apply GIS mapping (Chapter 7), changes in the ritual landscape (Chapter 3 and 6), as well as ethnographic and ethnohistoric comparisons (Chapter 4, 5, and 7), to understand each past community. Second, each of these case studies uses known methods in new ways within bioarchaeology, showing how a range of concrete, valuable analyses of skeletal material (both destructive and non-destructive) can be used to identify past communities. Tackling a different suite of methods in each chapter demonstrates how multiple approaches to answering the similar inquiries can strengthen our arguments and broaden the range of questions that bioarchaeology can answer. For instance, Juengst (Chapter 3) and Cornelison et al. (Chapter 6) use biodistance analyses in combination with isotopic analysis and/or associated mortuary goods to consider how biological relationships intersect with lived relationships. Novotny (Chapter 5) and Deskaj (Chapter 7) both consider the mortuary contexts of skeletal material and make comparisons with ethnographic and ethnohistoric literature, while both Becker (Chapter 4) and Zuckerman (Chapter 8) use historic, ethnohistoric, and ethnographic examples to investigate what the lived experience would have been like for people from their burial samples. These chapters represent the multiple ways bioarchaeological scholars can investigate the communities in question, and how bioarchaeology provides methods for working with and within modern groups in many political climates.

Third, in addition to the various methods, the range of how communities are recognized—specific to each study region, culture, and time period in these case studies—is useful for understanding *community* from diverse environments and moments of socioeconomic complexity, with the common assumption that communities are central to the practice of daily life. As the settlement scale (i.e., from small horticultural settlements to modern Albania) differs in each chapter, these studies also provide a cross-cultural perspective and comparative schema on community identification. For example, Becker (Chapter 4) finds that pre-Columbian

state-level groups of people were working together as laboring, neighborhood communities in the South American Andes, while Cornelison et al. (Chapter 6) investigate how past corporate identities could be part of regional inclusiveness, possibly even members of multiple communities at a local level within the North American Wisconsin Effigy Mound culture.

Connections between modernity and the past are equally important, as noted in both Deskaj's (Chapter 7) and Novotny's (Chapter 5) contributions. Deskaj sees historic regional mortuary monuments influence modern landscape and religious interpretation, while Novotny notes that the dead from many generations past can be brought to the present as part of contemporary community. These authors view community as both real and imagined among peoples' interactions with their local countryside. In addition, the ability to hide connections is addressed in Zuckerman's (Chapter 8) contribution concerning individuals with venereal syphilis, where this disease should have separated them from others, and may have in life, but in death, their burial style did not set them apart. Hence, depending on the location in time and space, community can be considered as inclusion as well as separation. Overall, these chapters present a range of diversity when it comes to group formation, structure, and practice, while tied to the theme of real and imagined community connectedness.

Fourth, the final two chapters within the volume, one from inside by bioarchaeologist Blom (Chapter 9) and one from outside by archaeologist Meyer (Chapter 10), represent the general reflexivity we hope to promote within bioarchaeology. From her perspective as an Andean bioarchaeologist, Blom summarizes many important aspects of this volume, such as the importance of defining and using community, using a non-static interpretation of community, and that various lines of evidence complement one another to form a more complete means of addressing ancient community dynamics. She brings together the different types of community identified in each chapter, as well as the significant impacts these may have had on ancient societies. Most notably, Blom draws upon her bioarchaeological expertise to discuss how the methods used in each chapter demonstrate the various strengths and weaknesses of a bioarchaeological approach. Overall, she reinforces the importance of contextualization—while bioarchaeologists have much to offer discussions of community, all scholars investigating community must remember the social, cultural, and historical context, and that definitions of kinship, community, and hierarchy shift continually and are heterogeneous over time and space. Blom advocates for interrogating the “noise” of lived social relationships, thus providing a productive space for imagining and analyzing past communities.

In Chapter 10, Meyer helpfully connects important archaeological theory from a social and landscape archaeologist's perspective to the chapters in this volume. He is quick to call us on our tardiness to the theoretical conversation, while also praising broader impacts and major contributions by bioarchaeologists, notably our contribution to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and addressing NAGPRA-style ethics of working worldwide with descendant communities. Meyer's chapter situates bioarchaeology within the history of thought and theory in archaeology, and anthropology more broadly. Crucially, Meyer reminds us all that the communication between disciplines within anthropology can only be productive, and that a holistic anthropology is necessary for a deeper understanding of what communities may look like in the past and present. He calls for increased awareness of social issues and definitions that continue to plague anthropology more broadly and urges archaeologists of all stripes to engage with social theory in their analyses. Thus, both Meyer and Blom tie the methods and theory into larger archaeological and anthropological debates to promote the novel research opportunities that this framework presents. They also represent a bridge between theoretical and methodological applications of fundamental ethnographic ideas, like community, outside of their typical placement in cultural anthropology, promoting interdisciplinary thinking and research.

In conclusion, as community is at the core of anthropological research and social theory, the circumstances under which people live together has always been a driving force in the study of the human experience. This volume adds new dimensions to this conversation by discussing how these trends extend into the past, and by investigating the ways community can leave its fingerprint on the human skeleton. As such, the chapters in this volume provide unique methods combined with theory to identify communities in nuanced, illustrative, and multidisciplinary ways. Our aims are to identify community and the diverse forms communities take, expand bioarchaeological methods to see community, and to elucidate meaningful relationships that structured past peoples' lives and we feel this volume accomplishes that. Our hope is that this the scholarship from the "Bioarchaeology of Community" volume will influence bioarchaeological and archaeological ideas about the past, present, and future, as well as expand social and theoretical perspectives through the study of human skeletal remains and burial populations.

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