

Minutes of the 843rd meeting of the BRODIE CLUB, held October 18th, 1988, in the Faunal Lab, University of Toronto

Paul Aird chaired the meeting and Ann Falls acted as recording secretary. Thirteen members and eight guests were present. The guests were Margaret Bodsworth guest of Bodsworth, Oliver Bertin guest of Bertin, Ross Goudie guest of Auger, Polly Baker, Nancy Saxeby, and Jennifer Cridland guests of Savage. Kathy Gruspier and Grant Mullin were guests of the club.

Minutes of the previous meeting were read by Norman Martin and approved. Savage suggested that minutes should reach him at least two weeks prior to the next meeting so that notices could be sent out in good time.

Announcements:

Norm Martin, the FON representative, drew attention to

- 1) the FON membership drive with valuable prizes for signing up new members
- 2) the outstanding programme of the upcoming FON Wetlands Conference
- 3) FON's 1989 Conservation Calendar
- 4) the second printing of the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario
- 5) a brochure re birding trips in Cuba

Introduction of the speakers:

Howard Savage introduced Kathy Gruspier and Grant Mullin, both former students in his faunal archaeo-osteology course. Kathy received her BA from Wilfrid Laurier University, followed by an MA in physical anthropology in Sheffield, England. She has done field work in Jordan, Israel, and Italy, and is working toward a Phd at U of T. Grant Mullin received his BA at U of T, and is currently in the MA programme in the Department of Anthropology.

Topic: Mining, Disease and the Medieval Population of Rocca San Silvestro, Province of Tuscany, Italy.

The speakers reported on preliminary results from an archaeological investigation at the medieval village of Rocca San Silvestro in the highlands of Tuscany about 200 km north of Rome. This village was a mining community from the 11th century until it was abandoned in the early 14th century. Iron, copper and lead ores were mined in the vicinity and smelting was carried out close to the village. People lived in close proximity to their domestic animals which were penned on the first floor while the people lived on the second floor. The village church and cemetery are on the crest of a steep hill, and both are very small. Their work was focussed on excavations in the cemetery which was only 10 by 18 feet. They attempted to assess the pathology revealed in the excavated bones and skeletons in light of what is known about medieval life in general, and the life of this community in particular. There are many possible interactions between aspects of the environment, economy and culture which can affect diet, sanitation, and physical labour, and need to be considered in interpreting pathology observed in the physical remains. Age and sex can be determined with considerable accuracy if the skeleton is sufficiently complete, due to differences in measurements and in the morphology of skulls and pelvic bones. Study methods include visual examination, X-rays, and analysis of samples from the pelvis for parasite remains, botanical remains in the lower digestive tract, and chemical analysis for lead in the bones. There were three types of bone depositions in the cemetery, 1) layers of scattered bones, 2) bone pits where there were more than one skeleton and 3) individual articulated burials - about 35 of these have been examined. Because the cemetery was so crowded and shallow, graves were dug into earlier graves and bones of the first individual were redeposited on top of the new occupant or put in pits. Excavation was done by loosening dirt with a dental pick and vacuuming it away from the bones. Findings included evidence of infection, parasites, and degenerative changes possibly because of the heavy

labour involved in carrying ore from the mine in the valley to the smelter on the hill above. Older skulls showed heavy tooth wear as well as caries and abscesses. Trace metal analysis has yet to be done. An unusual find was a calcified hydatid cyst in a thoracic cavity. Few artifacts were found apart from copper buttons and some belt buckles. No coffins were found although there were some nails.

A lively question period followed the talk and slide show, bringing out further information. The main meat in the diet was wild pig, also sheep and goats, but seed samples have not yet been examined. There is no evidence yet for tuberculosis, nor yet any evidence of plague although it would not show in the bones, and plague victims might not be in the cemetery. The site might have closed before the plague or plague could be a factor in the abandonment of the village. It may have closed because of exhaustion of the wood supply for smelting. It was suggested that it may have been cheaper to move the ore to the wood supply than vice versa. The mines were tunnel mines and the chisels and hammers were the tools used. The lack of identification of the graves was commented upon. There were contemporary effigies in a nearby church but no one was buried in this church. The people buried here were labourers. The University of Siena sponsored the investigation.

John Speakman thanked Kathy and Grant for this interesting glimpse into medieval life and hoped for a followup on this talk in the future.

Members Notes and Observations:

- Speakman confirmed that the peculiar cries he had reported earlier had come from a great horned owl, as he had heard them again at a raptor centre in Dordogne. Carrick said it is a location call young owls use to get their parents to bring them food.
- Margaret Bodsworth saw a horned lark on Lake Muskoka on Thanksgiving weekend.
- Young saw a winter wren land on a customer's head inside Yorkdale shopping centre on October 1st. He also saw an ovenbird in a spruce in his backyard on Oct 8, and two brown thrashers on Oct 1, 8, and 15. One brown thrasher stayed for the winter last year.
- Bertin questioned how well birds count, having observed a female duck with 8 young reappearing apparently unconcerned with only 7 young a few minutes later. Falls said that studies by a professor at Freiburg showed that the smartest birds could count to seven.
- Savage showed a copy of Doug Sadler's latest book "Reading Nature's Clues", and told us that Sadler will soon receive an LLD from Trent University.
- Aird said that this years wild rice harvest out west was the largest ever.

The meeting adjourned at 10 p.m.