Proceedings of the First Zooarchaeology Conference in Portugal

Held at the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, 8th–9th March 2012

Edited by
Cleia Detry
Rita Dias

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Proceedings of the First Zooarchaeology Conference in Portugal, Held at the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, 8th-9th March 2012

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The cover illustration by Joel Marteleira depicts a Roman pit containing faunal remains from Odrinhas (Sintra, Portugal). This find/context is described by Alexandre Gonçalves in this volume.

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FOREWORD

The Zooarchaeology in Portugal – 150 years of bones…

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Introduction

Zooarchaeology, the study of faunal materials recovered from archaeological sites, had a slow beginning among Portuguese archaeologists. Nevertheless, over the last two decades substantial advances have been made, resulting in exponential increases in the number of sites sampled and scholarly reports/papers published on archaeofauna in Portugal. This development was made by the individual efforts of scholars such as Professor JL Cardoso, with the creation of the Archaeosciences Laboratory (DGPC, formerly IGESPAR) that included a comprehensive faunal bone reference collection, and by the introduction of courses on zooarchaeology in several universities (e.g. U. of the Algarve), thus making archaeologists better trained on the subject.

One of the most cited early publications on animal bones is Pereira da Costa’s (1865) paper in which he mentions remains recovered by Carlos Ribeiro at Cabeço da Arruda excavations (Muge shell middens). Pereira da Costa used the faunal species to interpret the chronology of the site at a time where direct dating, such as C14, was far from being discovered, and the species present provided a good proxy for the age of the site. He further made Paleoecological and Paleoconomical interpretations of these past populations through animal bones.

Portuguese archaeology benefited from the newly established scientific community in Portugal, particularly through the efforts of Carlos Ribeiro, a notorious and visionary geologist who established the Geological Commission of the Portuguese Kingdom in 1857. He further promoted geological surveys throughout Portugal which lead to the discovery of numerous important archaeological sites. He also promoted the publication of the results in international conferences such as the IX Session of the International Congress for Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology, held in Lisbon (Ribeiro, 1884, Delgado, 1884). Significantly, Ribeiro also collected and documented zooarchaeological materials from the sites he studied.

Unfortunately, during the 20th century, zooarchaeological research was more or less forgotten except in a few studies made by foreigners (eg. Harlé 1910-11). Since the 1980s two authors – MT Antunes (1985, 1987) and JL Cardoso (1993) have been almost the sole researchers working in this subfield.

In 1999 the Archaeosciences lab (former CIPA from IPA) was formally established, today belonging to DGPC, with its main contribute having been the construction of an extensive osteological reference collection of mammals, birds and fish which is open to students and researchers making it essential to Zooarchaeologists work. This lab team also produced an extensive number of publications and zooarchaeological studies (Moreno-Garcia et al. 2003, Davis & Moreno-Garcia, 2007).

Over the last decade numerous young students and researchers have dedicated their work to animal bone analysis and consequently, archaeologists are also giving increased importance to animal remains. The zooarchaeology’s future is promising and Portugal is benefiting from the surging of new minds dedicated to this cause and the organization of the International Conference on Portuguese zooarchaeology in 2012 is a proof of that.

Contributions to this volume

This volume is the result of the First International Conference in Portugal held at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon during 8 and 9 March of 2012. It brought together several persons that have dedicated their works to Zooarchaeological studies in Portugal, both foreigners that came for several years to collaborate in Portuguese projects, and Portuguese researchers that have dedicated or began to dedicate their research to this area of expertise. During the two days of the conference a wide range of Portuguese research was presented, not only exclusively by zooarchaeology students and/or senior researchers but encompassing techniques such as ancient DNA. The resulting meeting was highly enriching, as can be seen from the articles presented in this volume.

The conferences, as well as the papers in this volume, discuss faunal remains recovered in Portuguese sites, and include the work of specialists and non-specialists which deepened the interpretations of the sites. Archaeologists also participated giving their view of animal bones interpretation and showing how important the interpretation of this particular kind of remains is important to their readings, something that in Portuguese archaeology is clearly innovative.
This volume is organized by the chronology of the sites in order to allow a comprehensive and quick finding of the articles. The later chapters discuss works that either look at broader time span or use research techniques that are different from orthodox zooarchaeology.

We begin with the paper of M. Évora on the worked bone industries from Upper Palaeolithic sites in Portugal, which summarizes earlier and recent experimental research on this subject and the amount of work already done in the area of experimental research dedicated to animal bones.

Following that we have two articles on the Muge shellmids, one from A. Pereira summing the Zooarchaeology research on these sites and Dias & Detry on the role of rabbits on past human populations. The first is a synthesis, and the second analyses the use of small mammals such as rabbit and compares them with the nutritional value of other species.

M. J. Valente studied the Mesolithic and Neolithic sites in Western Algarve with an economic, ecological and Taphonomic detailed analysis of these sites, shedding some light on the shell middens of these geographical area comparatively much less studied than the Tagus’ and Sado’s Rivers ones.

Costa & Baptista as well as Porfírio & Serra, papers analyze animal remains from the Bronze age of Southern Alentejo in sites with similar contexts, that have human and animal burials, animal limbs and scattered remains in halls or sitos. Costa & Baptista studied the event in terms of Taphonomic aspects and Porfírio & Serra describe the archaeological context in more detail, reflecting these authors' background.

After these, we look at articles that study animal remains from historical archaeological sites in Portugal.

Valenzuela studied the mammal remains from the excavations at Casa do Governador and Núcleo Arqueolóxico at Rua dos Correeiros (NARQ-BCP, Lisbon) both in Lisbon, from levels dated of the 1st to 5th century AD. Both assemblages were created by fish salting factories but in the abandonment phase. The author also makes interesting comparisons with other Roman sites from Southern Iberia.

M. Nabais studies the mammals and birds from Tróia, also from a context of a fish-salting workshop, between the 1st and 5th cent AD.

A. Gonçalves an archaeologist that excavated a well in the roman town of Odrinhas, were there is a Museum dedicated to this period, described the animal remains and mainly its archaeological context, more profound zooarchaeological and biological study these remains is still lacking. The assemblage is very interesting not constituting a normal food refuse accumulation but probably having some ritual implication.

Covaneiro & Cavaco do an extended description of the animal remains recovered from several sites in Algarve from the Iron Age to the Modern period, giving a comprehensive guide to the work done in this area of Southern Algarve. Also in the Algarve, V. Pereira presents a broad analysis of Islamic sites and the use of animals by these populations.

Back to the north of Portugal Detry, Cardoso & Correia study the food refuse remains deployed near a roman amphitheater of the well-known roman town of Conimbriga. The remains studied are from roman and mostly medieval levels. Also in Coimbra, but from modern period Santa Clara-a-Velha monastery, Detry, Gambini & Corte-Real reveal the use of animals by 17th century nuns and how the animal remains could reveal more than written documents on the very high economic status of the people that produced this waste.

Masseti & Veracini, explain how the Neotropical mammals circulated after the discoveries in the modern period, in a time were the globalization started to influence animal commerce and transportation.

O. Paulo shows one of the most expressive areas in the presentations: genetics applied to the study of animals in the past and the movements of these animals namely by the influence of humans. In this case, he studies the introduction of the chameleon in the Iberian Peninsula.

Finally an important study by Almeida & Costa on the details of the rise in researchers’ and students’ dedicated to archaeofaunal studies in Portugal, demonstrating that zooarchaeology is still a young scientific area in Portugal, which developed enormously over the past few years.

Acknowledgments

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