

DESCRIPTION, DIAGNOSIS AND THE USE OF PUBLISHED DATA IN ANIMAL PALAEOPATHOLOGY: A CASE STUDY USING FRACTURES

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Summary. In order to offer viable interpretations to archaeologists, experts in ancient animal disease are hard-pressed to diagnose pathological conditions whose osteomorphological symptoms are recognised during routine archaeozoological analysis. Since live bone tissue is known to have a limited repertoire of responses, it often reacts in similar ways to different pathogenic factors. Consequently, the usefulness of readily published diagnoses is understandably debated in the literature. However, there is a major body of such published finds, whose diagnoses should be critically integrated into the statistical/epidemiological evaluation of newly recovered palaeopathological finds. Based on the synthesis of 1294 of individual bone finds extracted from numerous publications spanning over half a century, an attempt is made in this paper to review the applicability of such data, demonstrating how their usefulness varies depending on the types of questions posed and the physiological nature of different pathological conditions. A special group of 261, mostly unambiguously identified, lesions resulting from traumatic injury, were analyzed in detail, in order to demonstrate differences in the taxonomic and anatomical distributions of symptoms in refuse bone material. In addition to skeletal morphology, live weight and animal behaviour, the prognosis of healing was established as an important factor in the manifestation of healed fractures in archaeozoological collections.

Key words: symptoms, bone fracture, aetiology, statistical analysis, databases.