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Monográfico:
*Arqueología y medio ambiente,
una historia de una ida y una vuelta*

Monografikoa:
*Arkeologia eta igurumena,
izan eta etorri baten istorioa*

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Monographic: Archaeology and environment, there and back again

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Entrevista

Elkarrizketa

BIOARCHAEOLOGY AS SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY: INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR PAM J. CRABTREE

Bioarqueología como Arqueología Social: entrevista con la profesora Pam J. Crabtree

Bioarkeologia Gizarte Arkeologia bezala: Pam J. Crabtree irakaslearekin elkarrizketa

*“Without close collaboration between members of an archaeological team, we tend to lose sight of the society that produced the pottery or the animal and plant remains”
(Pam J. Crabtree)*



Pam J. Crabtree

Pam J. Crabtree is currently associate professor of Anthropology at the New York University and member of the Center for the Study of Human Origins, the Society for Historical Archaeology, the Society for American Archaeology, and the International Council for Archaeozoology.

Her main research interest is zooarchaeology, focusing on animal domestication and the history of domestic animals, Late Prehistory and Early Medieval Europe, and historical archaeology of North America. However, she has also been

involved in several research projects covering different chronological periods and various geographical areas, such as Natufian sites in Levant, Bronze Age sites in Ukraine, Armenia and Turkey, Iron Age sites in Ireland and Turkey, Early Medieval sites in England, and other research projects in Egypt, Uzbekistan, Hawaii and New Jersey.

Prof. Crabtree's large number of published works includes titles such as *Exploring Prehistory: how Archaeology reveals our past*, *Anthropological approaches to Zooarchaeology: colonialism, complexity and animal transformation*, *The Symbolic Role of Animals in Archaeology*, *Middle Saxon Animal Husbandry in East Anglia*, and *Early animal domestication and its cultural context*, as well as numerous scientific papers¹.

1 The Editorial Board would like to thank Idoia Grau for her kind collaboration for producing this interview.

1. This volume of the journal is dedicated to environmental archaeology. How was the beginning of your career as a zooarchaeologist and what led you to dedicate yourself to this discipline?

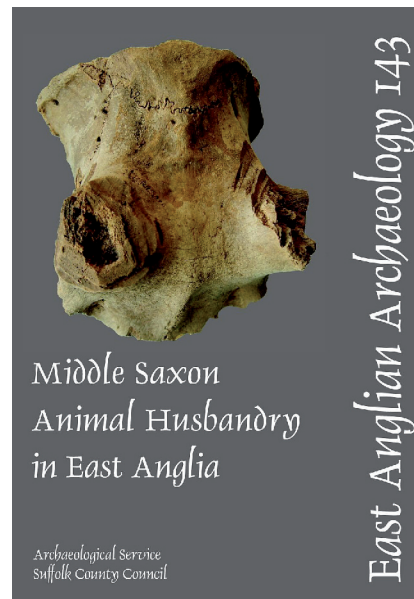
This is a great question. I always had a long-standing interest in the Middle Ages. As a beginning undergraduate, I was interested in early medieval material culture, so I decided to major in art history, focusing on the medieval period. While I was an undergraduate, I had the opportunity to take part in the Winchester Excavations in England. I worked at the Brook Street Site where we excavated a street that was home to tanners in the early Middle Ages. The excavations showed that the Winchester Street plan was Anglo-Saxon in date and very different from the underlying Roman street plan. I realized that my real interests were in early medieval archaeology (rather than art), so I applied to graduate school to study early medieval archaeology. At that time I was interested in Anglo-Saxon settlement patterns. I took a human osteology course as a beginning PhD student, and that led to a course in archaeozoology. I realized that understanding hunting practices and animal husbandry patterns was a crucial part of the study of settlement patterns and human use of the landscape. I also really enjoyed working with animal bones. I wrote my PhD thesis on the animal bone remains from West Stow, one of the very few extensively excavated early Anglo-Saxon settlement sites.

2. You have worked in many different countries, and, as you mentioned in your paper "A New York Yankee in King Arthur's court", you are aware of many differences on the teaching, practice and theoretical approaches of Archaeology between North-America and Europe. Which positive and negative aspects would you like to address on these different types of Archaeology?

There are positives and negatives on both sides. I think that Europeans are far ahead of

North Americans in many aspects of archaeological science. In particular, I think that many of the European labs are doing wonderful work on ancient DNA, ceramic residues, and stable isotope analyses. All these technologies are making important contributions to environmental archaeology. In the US, in particular, we have not invested enough resources in the archaeological sciences. In my own case, even though I received a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, I did the laboratory work for my PhD while I was a visiting student at the University of Southampton in the UK. The risk for students, of course, is overspecialization.

The main advantage of the North American system is that I was very broadly trained. As a post-graduate student, I took courses in Paleolithic archaeology, later European prehistory, and medieval archaeology, as well as methods courses in both human osteology and archaeozoology. This broad training has allowed me to work in several different areas of the world. It is also a big help when I teach my more general under-



CRABTREE, P. (2012): *Middle Saxon Animal Husbandry in East Anglia*. East Anglian Archaeology 143. Bury St Edmunds

graduate courses on topics like plant and animal domestication. The primary disadvantage is that most US archaeologists are part of department of anthropology. We are always trying to balance the needs of cultural anthropologists, biological anthropologists, linguistic anthropologists, and archaeologists.

3. In the last years the economic global crisis has severely affected both scientific research and the education system. In your opinion, how has this affected to archaeological work in the USA? Could you give some advice to researchers in the beginning of their career in archaeology?

The economic crisis has affected us in several ways. First, many of our students take on loans to pay for their educations. Since the unemployment rate is high and starting salaries are low, it has been difficult for many recent graduates to pay back their loans. Universities have hired more part-time, and fewer full-time faculty members. The part-timers are often very poorly paid and usually do not receive benefits (like health care and retirement benefits). This is hard on the part-time faculty members who often have to teach 4 or 5 classes a term to survive. It is also hard on the students since part-timers do not have time to work with students in the lab and to write letters of recommendation. The economic crisis has also made it more difficult to obtain funding for archaeological work.

My best recommendation for students is to develop a good set of skills. It is easier to find a job if you have specialized skills in fields like archaeozoology, GIS analysis, archaeobotany, archaeogenetics, or human skeletal biology. It is also important to have lots of basic archaeological field experience. Take advantage of any opportunities to do field and lab work.

4. In Spain, the development on environmental disciplines to historical periods is still making its first steps. You have dedicated a good amount of your work to medieval archaeology in Europe and to historical archaeology in North-America. In your opinion, what are the main contributions that environmental archaeology could make to the understanding of complex societies, such as Roman, Medieval and Postmedieval Spain?

Great question! Archaeologists have always been interested in questions of urban origins and development as part of a broader interest in the growth and development of complex societies. Environmental archaeology has a critical role to play in the study of these societies. Archaeozoology and archaeobotany can address basic issues of diet and urban foodways. How did these early urban dwellers obtain their food, and how did systems of rural production change to accommodate these growing urban areas? In some situations, we can also address issues of identity, including class and ethnicity. Claudia Milne and I worked on the animal bones from a 19th-century working-class neighbourhood in New York City known as the Five Points. We were able to see significant differences in diet between the immigrants from Central European Jewish communities and immigrants from Ireland. Our colleagues who worked with coprolites were able to identify some of the parasites that plagued these immigrant communities.

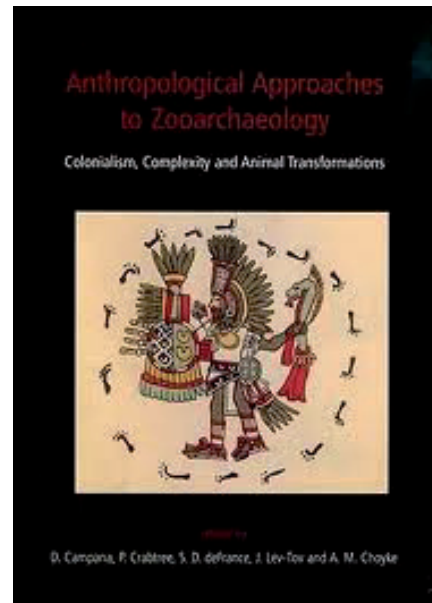
I think that archaeologists working in Spain have the potential to do similar kinds of analyses. Dietary differences between Christian and Muslim communities in the Middle Ages are a particularly interesting area of research. I would be really interested in differences between Roman and Visigothic faunal and floral assemblages. For the post-medieval period, there are lots of interesting questions that could be raised about the introduction of new foods from the Americas and other regions of Spanish colonization.

5. The current research model is leading archaeologist to what we could call 'ultra-specialization', sometimes causing an excessive focus on environmental issues and forgetting past societies. In this sense, interdisciplinary approaches are of key importance for the study of the past. How do you think this interdisciplinary work should be carried out?

I agree completely on the need for interdisciplinary work. Without close collaboration between members of an archaeological team, we tend to lose sight of the society that produced the pottery or the animal and plant remains. I think that there are a few ways to avoid this. As an archaeozoologist, I love to be on site and to take part in the actual excavations. I also like to be involved in the planning for the recovery and the analysis of the animal bones and other environmental data. When I worked on the Five Points project, all of us (the historians, the artefact analysts, the zooarchaeologists, etc.) worked in one big lab space. While that kind of arrangement is not always possible, it helps to avoid hyperspecialization. Claudia Milne and I had a basic comparative collection (cattle, sheep, goat pig, chicken, turkey, etc.) in the lab. We took the more unusual specimens to the NYU lab, to the Brooklyn College lab, or to the American Museum of Natural History. It was really useful to see what other members of the team were working on.

6. You have a wide working experience in countries where modern archaeological research has only recently started being carried out, such as Uzbekistan. Among others, ethnoarchaeological work has remarkably increased in the last decades. With what positive or innovative aspects do you think that archaeological research contributes to our understanding of past societies? How do you think that archaeology is being perceived by local communities?

Although I have worked on materials from Uzbekistan, I was not part of the excavation team. I



CAMPANA, D.; CRABTREE, P., DEFRANCE, S.D.; LEV-TOV, J. and CHOYKE, A. (eds) (2010): *Anthropological Approaches to Zooarchaeology: Colonialism, Complexity, and Animal Transformations*. Oxbow. Oxford.

have excavated in Ukraine as part of a joint Ukrainian-US team. I hope to go back to the Ukraine this summer. I will be there for a conference, and then I plan to spend some time looking at some Neolithic animal remains that appear to include some early domestic cattle and pigs. My Ukrainian colleagues and I hope to use these data to develop a joint publication. I think that international collaboration will continue to play an important role in environmental archaeology, especially in regions like Uzbekistan that are historically understudied.

For the past 3 years, I have been working on archaeological projects in Hawaii with my colleague and former student, Dr. Janet Six who teaches at the University of Hawaii, Maui College. The program serves as a field school for undergraduate students from Maui College, NYU, and other undergraduate colleges and universities in the US. We have had a number of Native Hawaiian students who have taken part in the excavation program with us. Most were high

school students from the Kamehameha schools which serve Native Hawaiian students. At the site of Lo'iloa in the Iao Valley on the island of Maui, we worked closely with a Native Hawaiian colleague. We helped him plan and map the traditional wetland taro fields, and he has worked with community groups to replant the taro which was and is the staple agricultural crop in Hawaii. In traditional Hawaiian mythology, the taro plant is seen as the older brother of the Hawaiians. The Native Hawaiian communities have been very concerned about archaeology, and their concern is well founded. After Hawaii became a state in 1959, many parts of Hawaii experienced rapid development, and many native burial grounds and other important places were destroyed. We have worked hard to cooperate and collaborate with the Native Hawaiians. I would love to do some ethnoarchaeological work in Hawaii. I would like to interview the *kapuna* (elders) about traditional fishing and hunting methods.

When we work in Hawaii, we try to observe appropriate cultural protocols. We chant in Hawaiian before we begin work each day. One traditional chant is called *E Ho Mai*. It is a chant that asks for wisdom.

7. Recently you have visited Vitoria-Gasteiz for attending a conference focused on bioarchaeological analysis of medieval chronology. In your opinion, what are the main issues that these disciplines and medieval archaeology must face in the following years, especially regarding Spain?

I was delighted to have the opportunity to visit Vitoria-Gasteiz and to attend the conference. It was a real pleasure to be there. I was particularly impressed by the archaeozoological and archaeobotanical work that is being carried out in the Basque region. I think that we need more detailed and focused regional studies in medieval archaeology, both in Spain and elsewhere. Clearly, the medieval history of the Basque region

is different from areas like the Madrid region or Andalusia. We face the same problem in Britain. As Terry O'Connor showed in his paper at the conference, most of what we know about Anglo-Saxon animal husbandry from the 5th to the 10th centuries comes from two regions in England—East Anglia and South Yorkshire. We need more regional studies from other parts of the British Isles. I think that the same is true for France where most of our early medieval archaeozoological studies come from the northern parts of Merovingian Francia.

I think that all of us working in medieval archaeology and environmental archaeology need to keep the focus on some of the “big picture” questions in medieval archaeology. These include the decline of the Roman Empire and its replacement with the Visigothic successor kingdom, the growth of urbanism in the Middle Ages, and Muslim-Christian interactions in al-Andalus and elsewhere. As long as archaeologists keep an eye on the big picture questions, they can avoid the trap of over-specialization.

8. In general, landscape is seen as either cultural heritage or natural heritage. What is your opinion about it? Do you think that both perspectives could be considered together? How should landscape heritage be managed?

I think that both perspectives have to be considered together. I am a long-time member of the Historic Preservation Commission for my hometown, Hopewell Township, New Jersey. Traditionally, historic preservation has focused primarily on cultural heritage, particularly on the preservation of historic buildings. What we have realized in the past 10 years is that it is not enough just to preserve the historic buildings. We need to preserve those buildings within their natural environment. Hopewell Township has been a farming community since about 1700. We don't just want to preserve old farm buildings; we want to

conserve the natural environment that surrounds them. We have worked to save the fields and woodlands that were part of these historic farms. We have been particularly concerned about preserving the historic viewsheds.

9. The zooarchaeological work that you have carried out has gone beyond the traditional site reports to the consideration of animal bones as material culture, contributing to what we could call social zooarchaeology. However, often, ancient environments are analysed by natural scientists with little interest in the society that interacts with that landscape. How do you think that this purely environmental approach should be overcome?

A lot of the responsibility falls to the archaeological team. The director of the excavation needs to bring together all the specialists (not just the excavators, but also the environmental specialists and the experts in material culture) at the very start of the project. They need to discuss how environmental studies can contribute to an understanding of the site and the people who lived there. They need to discuss excavation strategies, sampling methods, and the ultimate goals of the excavation. In other words, how can environmental studies contribute to our understanding of this site and the broader society of which it was a part? It is also a matter of training. We need environmental specialists who have basic training in and interest in archaeology. I see myself as an archaeologist first and a zooarchaeologist second.