21. The use of birds in funerary practices: the example of the tomb n. 2 in the Forum of Caesar (Rome – Italy).

L'utilisation des oiseaux dans les pratiques funéraires: l'exemple de la tombe n. 2 du Forum de César (Rome – Italie).

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Abstract

Zooarchaeological analysis of animal remains is given for a cremation grave (tomb n. 2) recently excavated in the Forum of Caesar (Rome) dating to the Final Bronze-Early Iron Age transition (11th-10th cent. BC). The funerary outfit is rich and complex; personal miniaturized features include pottery and bronze ornament and weapons. Inside various potteries some bird bones, belonging to larks (Alaudidae), chaffinches (Fringillidae) and doves (Columbidae), were found. These remains show evident traces resulting from the food practices that characterized the use of animals in the cemetery. They contribute to understand if and how animal food offerings reflect the emergence and development of socio-political complexity in human societies.

Résumé

Cet article présente les résultats de l'étude zooarchéologique conduite sur les restes animaux provenant d'une tombe à incinération (tombe n ° 2), récemment fouillée dans le Forum de César (Rome) datant du Bronze final - début de l'Age du Fer (XI-X siècle avant JC). Le mobilier funéraire est riche et complexe; la parure miniaturisée comprend la céramique, des ornements en bronze et des armes. A l'intérieur des vases ont été trouvés quelques os d'oiseaux appartenant aux Alaudidés (Alaudidae), pinson des arbres (Fringillidae) et Columbidés (Columbidae). Ces vestiges montrent des traces évidentes résultant des pratiques funéraires qui ont caractérisé l'utilisation d'animaux dans la nécropole. Ils contribuent à comprendre si et comment des offrandes animales représentent

l'émergence et le développement de la complexité socio - politique dans les sociétés humaines.

Key-words: Iron Age, Ancient Rome, Grave, Animal offering, Birds.

Mots-clés: Age du Fer, Rome antique, Tombe, Offrande animale, Oiseaux.

Introduction

The analysis of faunal remains from a protohistoric cremation grave in the Forum of Caesar is presented in this paper. Archaeological investigations carried out between 1998 and 2008 led to the discovery of a group of burials, spanning between the end of the Final Bronze Age and the Iron Age and included "well tomb" cremations and inhumations in pits depending on the sex of the deceased (Bietti Sestieri & De Santis 2003; De Santis 2001; 2009). The six cremation graves were all referable to males, while the three inhumations to females. Instead, the age at death does not seem to influence the modality of the burial. Moreover, all the graves contained a rich ensemble of goods, like pottery, bronze objects and animal food offerings (Table 1), found sometimes inside the pottery. They could be interpreted as food eaten during the funeral ceremony (Minniti 2012 a, b). In particular, the archaeozoological analysis of bird remains found in the unique tomb n. 2 is here presented (Fig. 1).

Tombs	**1**	**2**	**3**	**5**	**8**	**4**	**6**	**7**	**9**
Chronological phases of Latium Iron Age	**between I and IIA1**					**IIA1**			**IIIB2-IVA1**
Taxa	**NISP**	**NISP**	**NISP**	**NISP**	**NISP**	**NISP**	**NISP**	**NISP**	**NISP**
Cattle - *Bos taurus*	-	-	-	-	5	-	1	-	-
Sheep or Goat – *Ovis* vel *Capra*	36	-	45	-	13	-	1	4	-
Sheep – *Ovis aries*	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Pig – *Sus domesticus*	-	21	-	1	-	8	-	-	1
Pigeon und. – *Columba* sp.	-	16	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chaffinch - *Fringuilla coelebs*	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lark und. – Aludidae sp.	-	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Und. fragments	-	-	-	4	2	-	2	-	3
Total	**44**	**46**	**45**	**5**	**20**	**8**	**4**	**5**	**5**

Table 1: animal remains of the grave of Forum of Caesar necropolis (from Minniti 2012) (NISP = number of identified specimens).

Fig. 1: the Tomb n. 2 in the Forum of Caesar (from De Santis A. 2001).

The tomb 2 and the animal remains

The tomb n. 2 is a cremation grave and is dated between the Final Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (11th-10th cent. BC; between the Latial phases I and IIA1). The burial belonged to a young man died between 18 and 25 years, whose ashes where collected in a large pottery urn with a conical cover (De Santis 2001). The grave goods consist of nine miniature vessels, one fibula and some miniature weapons (one knife, one spear and two double shields) (Fig. 2). The presence of the miniature vessels, reproducing that used to store food, of the small weapons, among which a knife that was commonly used during sacrifices, and of the double shields, highlight that the deceased could cover the social role of a priest (Bietti Sestieri & De Santis 2000). The high social role of this individual could also explain the abundance of the remains of piglet and the presence of bird bones, that seems to be particular of only this grave (Tables 1-2).

Taxa	Skeletal elements	Localization	Anthropic modification	Measurements (von den Driesch 1976)
Sus domesticus	2 frr. costae, 2 frr. intercostae	Three-footed dish (nr. 10)		
Sus domesticus	2 frr. sternum	Three-footed dish (nr. 10)		
Sus domesticus	2 frr. costae, 6 frr. intercostae, 4 frr. Sternum, 3 frr. undet.	Ground floor		
Columba livia/oenas	Scapula (left)	Ground floor		Dic=8,9
Columba livia/oenas	Coracoid (left)	Three-footed dish (nr. 10)	Cut-marks	Gl=33,4 Lm=32,8 BF=7,6
Columba livia/oenas	Humerus (left)	Ground floor	Cut-marks and burnt	GL=45,7 Bp=10,5 Dip=17,2 SC=5,3
Columba livia/oenas	Humerus (right)	Ground floor	Burnt (articular ends)	GL=46,7 Bp=10,9 Dip=16,7 SC=5,3
Columba livia/oenas	Radius (left)	Ground floor	Burnt?	GL=45,9 SC=2,3 Bd=5
Columba livia/oenas	Radius (right)	Boat-vessel (nr. 8)	Burnt (distal)	GL=46,2 Bd=4,8
Columba livia/oenas	Ulna (left)	Three-footed dish (nr. 10)		GL=50,8 Bp=6,9 Dip=7,2 Did=6,8
Columba livia/oenas	Fr. ulna (right; distal)	Boat-vessel (nr. 8)	Burnt (distal)	Did=6,9
Columba livia/oenas	Carpometacarpus (left)	Three-footed dish (nr. 10)	burnt	GL=32,1 Bp=9,2 Did=5,4
Columba livia/oenas	Carpometacarpus (right)	Bowl (nr. 6)	Burnt (articular ends)	GL=32,5 Did=5,6
Columba livia/oenas	Phalanx (wing)	Ground floor	Burnt?	GL=17,4

Taxa	Skeletal elements	Localization	Anthropic modification	Measurements (von den Driesch 1976)
Columba livia/oenas	Pelvis	Ground floor		
Columba livia/oenas	Femur (left)	Ground floor	Burnt (distal)	GL=38,6 Bp=7,9 SC=3,2 Bd=6,8
Columba livia/oenas	Tibiotarsus (left; distal)	Ground floor		SC=3,7 Bd=6,2
Columba livia/oenas	Tarsometatarsus (left)	Ground floor		GL=29 Bp=6,8 SC=3,2 Bd=7
Columba livia/oenas	Phalanx (foot)	Ground floor	Burnt?	
Alaudidae	Frr. mandibula	Ground floor		
Alaudidae	Humerus (left)	Ground floor	Burnt (articular ends)	GL=27,1
Alaudidae	Humerus (right)	Ground floor	Burnt (articular ends)	GL=27,1 Bp=7,5 SC=2,5 Bd=5,5
Alaudidae	Fr. radius (left; distal)	Ground floor		Bd=2,4
Alaudidae	Fr. ulna (left; distal)	Ground floor		Did=3,6
Alaudidae	Ulna (right)	Ground floor	Burnt (proximal)	GL=34,6 Bp=4,2 Dip=4,5 Did=3,5
Fringilla coelebs	Scapula (right)	Ground floor	Burnt?	Dic=3,9
Fringilla coelebs	Humerus (left)	Ground floor	Burnt ?	GL=19,4 Bp=6,5 SC=1,9 Bd=5

Table 2: the list of the animal remains founded in the Tomb n. 2.

Fig. 2: the funerary outfits of the Tomb n. 2 (from De Santis A. 2001).

Bird bones (25 NISP) were found inside some pots: they belong to larks (Alaudidae), chaffinches (Fringillidae) and doves (Columbidae). In the three-footed dish (nr. 10) (Fig. 3) were found four ribs and two bones of sternum of piglet (Fig. 4) and three bones (left coracoid, ulna and carpometacarpus in anatomical connection) of a Columbidae, whose whole specific assignment is not possible.

Fig. 3: the three-footed dish during the excavation (from De Santis A. 2001).

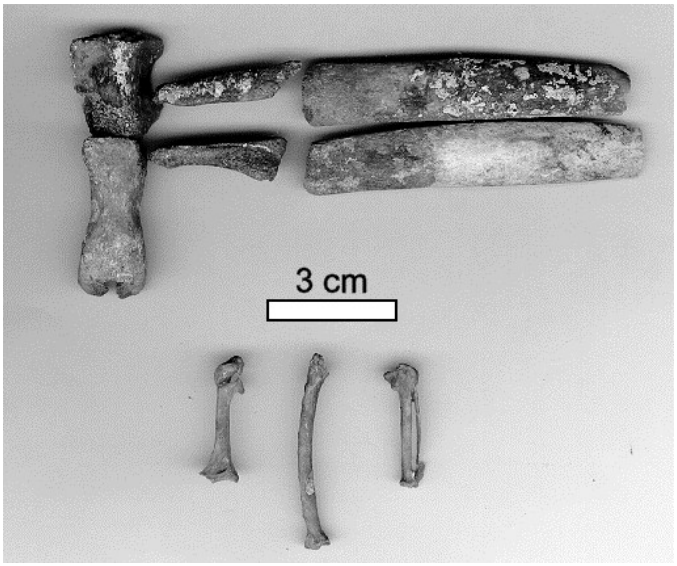

Fig. 4: the ribs and sternum bones of piglet and the bone of Columbidae found in the three-footed dish (Photo J. De Grossi Mazzorin; scale bar: 3 cm).

In fact, the two medium sized species of pigeons living in Italy, that are the rock pigeon (*Columba livia*) and the stock pigeon (*Columba oenas*), are very similar in the shape of bones and therefore these remains were identified as *Columba livia / oenas*. In the bowl (nr. 6) (Fig. 5) was found a right carpometacarpus of a Columbidae and in the boat-vessel (nr. 8) two wing bones - right radius and ulna - of a Columbidae.

Fig. 5: the bowl with a carpometacarpus of a Columbidae (from De Santis A. 2001).

All these remains likely belonged to the same individual, as the other dove remains that have been found scattered in the tomb (Tab. 2). Almost the entire skeleton of the dove is represented, except for the skull (Fig. 6), maybe removed during the food preparation, and the right hind limb, possibly eaten during the funerary ritual.

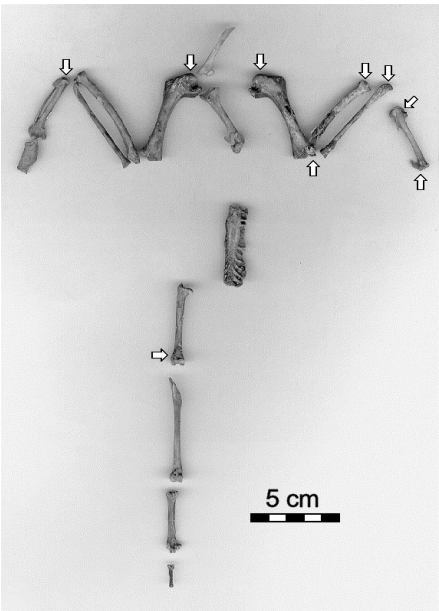

Fig. 6: the Columbidae's bones (Photo J. De Grossi Mazzorin; scale bar: 5 cm).

Other two families of birds were also present in the grave: the Alaudidae and the Fringillidae. The first one is represented by the bones of the wings and part of the beak, while the second one by a fragment of the scapula and the humerus.

Traces of human activities were on most bird bones: cutmarks on the humerus and on the coracoid of the Columbidae and burning on the articular ends of the wing bones (humerus, radius, ulna, carpometacarpus) and the femur of the Columbidae.

Traces of burning are also present on the distal epiphysis of the humerus and on the proximal epiphysis of the ulna belonged to the Alaudidae and on the scapula and the humerus of the chaffinch. The presence of burning traces on the articular ends means that these anatomical elements were first disjointed and then put onto the fire for cooking (Fig. 7).

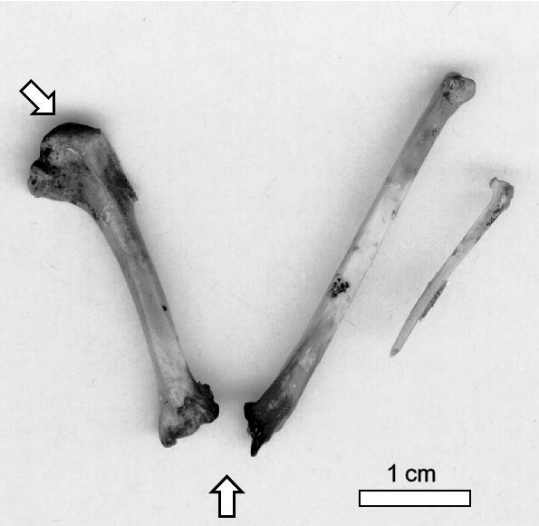

Fig. 7: traces of burning on the articular ends of wing's bones of an Alaudidae (Photo J. De Grossi Mazzorin; scale bar: 1 cm).

Conclusion

The discovery of bird bones in the Bronze Age/Iron Age transition graves located in the archaic Latium is exceptional. Only three other findings are actually known: some bones of Aves *sp*. from the proto-Villanovan (Bronze Age) cemetery of "Le Caprine" near Guidonia (Damiani *et al*. 1998), some unburned bones of a pigeon found in a urn of the Iron Age cemetery near the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina (tomb Q), dated to the Iron Age (Latial phase IIA, first half of the 9th cent.BC) (Gjerstad 1956) and finally some chicken bones recovered in a cremation grave from the cemetery of M. Cucco near Castel Gandolfo (Bartolini et al. 1987 : 229), preserved in the British Museum and dated to Iron Age (Latial phase IIA).

Other bird bones, belonged to a thrush (*Turdus merula*) were found in the Villanovian tomb 58 at the cemetery of Villa Bruschi-Falgari, southern Etruria (Minniti 2012 a, b).

The use of chicken in funerary ritual in the Padan Area, northern Italy, started from the last fourth of the 8th cent. BC, as documented by the osteological remains from the tombs Benacci Caprara 38 and Romagnoli 1 (Bertani 1995). Moreover, Giovanni Gozzadini found two chicken eggshells from a burial at the cemetery of Villanova (locality Caselle), dated to the Villanovan III, while other eggshells remains, whose species was not identifiable, were recovered in the tomb 19 of the cemetery of Castenaso (Bertani 1995) dated to Villanovan II. Unfortunately, these materials are relative to old excavations and should be verified: many of them are missing and the reports often refer to eggshells that should be reviewed to verify their correct

identification as species, also using modern techniques such as scanning microscopy (Sidell 1993).

The remains from the Forum of Caesar clearly suggest food consumption practices that characterized the use of animals in the cemetery.

The dove could have been first disarticulated (as documented by cutmarks on left coracoid and humerus) and then rosted on charcoal fire. The position of burning on proximal epiphyses of the humeri clearly suggests the physical contact between the animal part and the fire. The fire should burnt meat and articular jonting between humerus, ulna and carpometacarpus leaving clear traces on bones. Similar traces were also present on the left distal femur. All bones from the right hindleg were completely absent. As the grave represents a sealed feature, their absence could suggest this body part of the dove was not consumpted during the funeral ceremony and laid into the grave. The hindlegs of the chaffinch and the lark were also absent, maybe for the same reason. The same preparation and cooking methods have been noted for these little size birds. Burning traces were observed on the proximal epiphyses of the humerus and the ulna of the lark, and on the proximal epiphyses of the right scapula and the left humerus of the chaffinch.

The use of birds in the cemetery of the Forum of Caesar is a peculiarity of the burial 2. The high social status of the dead (possibly as a priest) is also suggested by the presence of rich grave goods as the miniature bronze objects (vessels, weapons and doubles shields).

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