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Urban Archaeology Project in Senigallia: from Anthropological to Archaeological Analysis. A short presentation

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Section: Notes

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Introduction

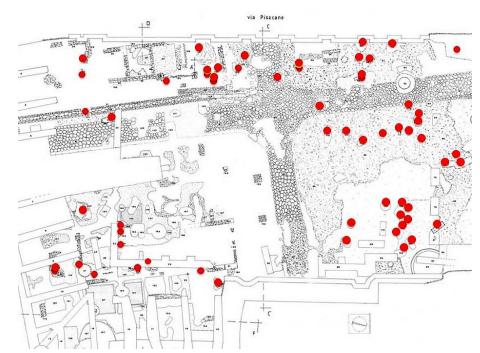
The project "Urban Archaeology in Senigallia" is the result of a collaboration between the Soprintendenza Archeologica of the Marche Region, the municipality of Senigallia and the Department of History, Culture and Civilisation of the University of Bologna and has the objective to enhance the knowledge of the history of Senigallia. Since 2010, researchers have shed light on the Roman and Pre-Roman ages, whilst the Late Antique and Early Middle Ages still remain substantially unknown. Analyses of skeletal remains aim to obtain information about the Late Antique and Early middle Ages, in order to contribute to the completion of the archaeological and historical context of the city of Senigallia.

The present study has tried to integrate and compare data and information obtained by using different approaches, both historical and archaeological, with the contribution of physical anthropology, in order to gain more information about transformations that are relevant to Senigallia in the post antique age.

The analyses reveal useful information about the chronology of the burials, the distribution of the graves, their relationship with the surrounding structures and the life conditions of the population,

helping thus to enhance the knowledge of the archaeological and historical landscape of the city of Senigallia.

Fig. 1 Archaeological area La Fenice. A secondary crossroad is visible. The burials invaded this area and are distributed throughout the thickness of the layers, proving the cimiterial function for a long period (red dot). A central area free from burials can be noticed: this space can be explained by the presence of a church as the historical sources report, but a localization is not possible. The interpretation is complicated by the fact that this area has undergone several radical interventions, such as the construction of the sixteenthcentury walls and the presence of the eighteenth-century theatre La Fenice which was located here until the 1930 earthquake.



Archaeological Analysis

Since 2010, the Department of History, Cultures and Civilizations of the University of Bologna is involved in a series of excavations close to the historical centre of Senigallia (AN). The remains of the individual graves were recovered in the first half of the 1990s, during the excavations of the archaeological area *La Fenice* (Fig. 1) on the occasion of the rebuilding of the nineteenth-century theatre.

This site has been inhabited since the third century B.C. and archaeologists revealed remains of at least three *domus*, a secondary crossroad and mid republican and late imperial floors. From the sixth century AD, this area changed its function: remains of lime kilns and a series of layers over the Late Antique plans of frequentation were found. The burials are distributed throughout the thickness of the

layers. The most ancient graves are cut in the Late Antiquity floors and are related to the *domus* and the paved road (Fig. 2). The distribution of the other burials, instead, is characterized by a complete indifference to the Roman structures as their memory seems to have disappeared, buried under the sediments.

The archaeological analysis has been extended to other funerary contexts in the western zone of the historical centre. In via Baroccio the excavations have brought to light remains of a sanctuary and a section of the city walls of republican period. Similarly to the excavation of La Fenice, the stratigraphic sequence have shown deposit layers over the Late Antique level. Outside the walls, in these levels, two burials with the same orientation of the wall have been identified, proving that at the moment of the burial, the walls—or at least a part of them—were still visible.



Fig. 2. Tomb 175. This burial cuts the Late Imperial floor. If the anthropological remains will be deemed well preserved, this skeleton will be analyzed with radiocarbon method

A similar stratigraphic sequence was documented in another funerary context, during the excavation of piazza Garibaldi, where in the deposit layers on topo of the Late Antique floors, two more burials have been found. These anthropological remains have been referred to the the sixth century AD by radiocarbon dating. This absolute chronological value can be applied also to the other contexts.

Anthropological Analysis

The study of the burials was particularly difficult due to the conservation of the anthropological material and lack of documentation relative to the early 90's excavations. The anthropological remains refer to about 200 individuals and are constituted by an ossuary and individual graves, covering a wide time span from the end of the Late Antique to the Early Middle Ages. After a remarkable operation of washing and making inventory, the methodologies of the physical anthropology were applied using different approaches to individual graves and ossuary in order to extrapolate a paleobiological outline.

The findings indicated a population in good health for the standards of the period, constituted mainly

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by adults; it is though necessary to underline that in these kind of studies children and infants often are underestimated, since during excavations their tiny bones could be confused with animal ones.

The life expectancy is 27 years and the average height is 1.63 cm. (Fig. 3). The observation of osteo-phitic processes and articolar erosion has demonstrated that working activities involved mainly the superior limbs (Fig. 4).

Young dead / total dead Rate	16 %
Probability of dying during the first year from birthday	261 ‰
Probability of dying between the first and fifth years	273 %
Probability of dying between the fifth and tenth years	65 ‰
Mortality rate	37,7 ‰
Life Expectancy	26,7 years

Fig. 3. Model life tables are very useful in providing estimates of overall mortality conditions in countries for which vital registration is incomplete or of lesser quality. A set of model life tables was developed by Coale and Demeny (1983). These models classify the life tables into four different sets, labeled West, East, North, and South, according to the patterns of mortality in the predominant regions of Europe represented in the original data. In this study the South life table is used. The average height of the population was 1.63 cm and it was obtained throughout the equation of Sjovold by using the most representative bone found: right femur.

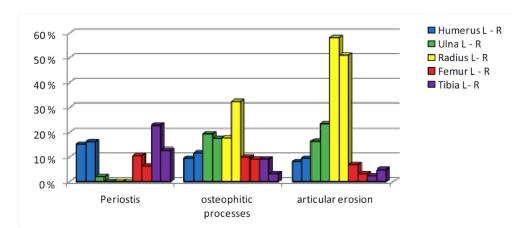


Fig. 4. In relation to the paleopathological outline, it is possible to assert that the examined individuals were in a good state of health for the standards of the age. Periostitis is concentrated on the districts of tibia, femur and humerus. Osteophitic processes and articular erosion are concentrated on the radius and ulna.

Comparisons between the two groups are limited due to lack of documentation, but it is possible to notice that the most widespread pathologies are gum disease and caries with an halved incidence in the sample of the ossuary compared to individual graves (Fig 5). In both groups *spina bifida occultais* is noticed. This genetic disorder indicates a rather closed population. A substantial continuity in life conditions is noticed within Late Antique and Early Middle Ages.

Conclusion

At the end of Late Antique period, Senigallia was extened on the whole original area of the roman colony, as the excavations show. Nevertheless a contraction of the populated area and the formation of two separate zones occurred; these were respectively named *civitas* (having a higher population density) and *civitas vetere* (with lower population density) (Fig. 6). In the latest area three contexts have been investigated, where archaeologists found scattered groups of burials that are included in deposit layers over the Late Antique plans. The archaeological data seems to emphasize that the widespread ritual practice is represented by simple pits dug into the soil.

Since the sixth century, this area was interested by some structural and topographic transformations that changed the concept of space, as shown by the presence of the burials inside the residential areas.

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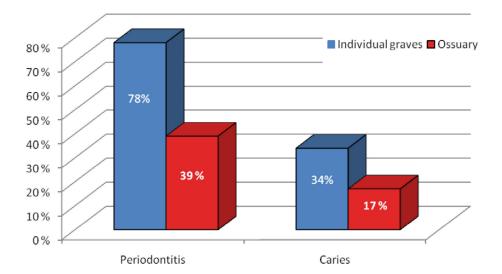


Fig. 5. The etiology of periodontitis is hardly identifiable and different factors cause the inflammation of the gums as for example genetic predisposition, lack of vitamin C or a different amount of sugar in the diet of two groups.

This feature has already been observed in many other cities in Italy and Europe.

Many buildings were transformed in facilities caves for reuse materials and the landscape turned into ruralisation, and was characterized by wide empty spaces, few scattered buildings and gardens.

Some of the activities that used to take place in the countryside, such as agriculture and craftsmanship, were transported to the city. The walls, at least initially, were not an any more an insuperable limit—also from a cultural point of view—permtting thus burials inside the urban area.

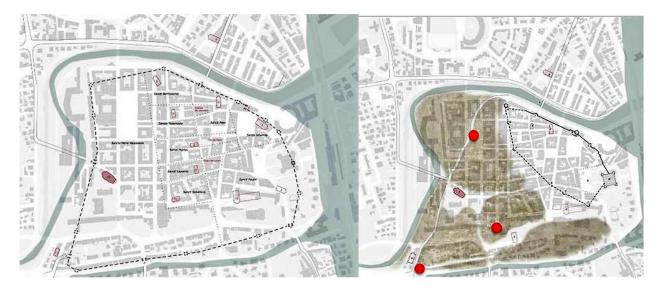


Fig. 6. The formation of two separate zones named civitas (clear area) and civitas vetere (dark area) is showed.

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