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**The cemetery of Enisala Palanca: history and
bioarchaeology of a rural community in Dobruja of
the 14th century.**

**Supervisor:
Prof. Univ. Dr Andrei Dorian Soficaru**

**Doctoral student:
Serena Siena**

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Introduction.

The aim of this work is to investigate the lifestyle and the general health status of a medieval rural population in Dobruja, throughout the history of the site, the funerary context, and the anthropological data. The subject is the history of Enisala Palanca (Sarichioi, County Tulcea) and the bioarchaeological study of the sample of human remains brought to light in its cemetery (14th -15th century AD).

Starting from the millenary history of this region, the period during which the cemetery is dated was then examined. After an in-depth analysis on the despot Dobrotitsa from which the name of the region derives, attention and research were shifted to the Genoese, highly skilled Italian merchants who dominated the coasts of the Black Sea with their business. It is a presence that many believed they could also recognize in the settlement of Enisala, a strategic place at the mouth of the Danube in whose heart stands the fort of Enisala. Many scholars have wanted to see links with the Genoese fortresses in Crimea, but in reality, as we will see, thanks to the notarial deeds and the very rich Genoese archives, it was possible to demonstrate the "non-presence of the Genoese" in Enisala.

Afterwards, another step followed for the reconstruction of this rural community was the analysis of the funerary context: graves typology, orientation, body positions, inventory. In fact, to understand and reconstruct the behaviour of ancient populations regarding of death and all the actions associated with it, we collect, above all, information in funerary contexts. Characteristics of mortuary practices (such as grave architecture and inventory, body position and treatment, and spatial patterning etc.) inform about world views, social organisation, and concepts relating to death. Together these different lines of evidence permit examination of additional aspects of individual life histories, including their social positions, symbolic systems, and interactions with their social and natural environment, and their own biological condition. Rather than investigating only the biological remains or studying material culture alone, integrating these components allows a more complete understanding of how people experienced an array of circumstances over the course of their own lives and through multiple generations.

The anthropological study *sensu stricto* was preceded by the evaluation of the quantitative and qualitative conservation of the human remains, followed by the estimations of the age-at-death, sex, and stature. Then we dealt with the non-specific stress indicators, such as

hypoplasia of dental enamel, porotic hyperostosis and periostitis; skeletal and dental paleopathologies and traumas. Finally, the results were compared with samples from medieval cemeteries from Romania. Given the lack of similar studies for contemporary samples coming from the same region but also from other areas of Romania, another aim of this work is to represent a beginning to fill this gap and being a spur for future studies and publications.

1. The archaeological context of the cemetery of Enisala Palanca

The main point from which and around which the entire research revolves is the Enisala Palanca cemetery. Excavated in 2013 following preventive archeology work, it is the largest funerary area ever excavated in the entire Dobrogean region (approx. 6000 m²). This unique fact could only arouse my interest and desire to investigate. The territory of Enisala has yielded archaeological evidence from every era. This territory is quite well known in the archaeological literature, despite this there is an important lack of historical information about this settlement. According to some scholars, the medieval fortress of Enisala was built by the Genoese, thus assuming its presence in the settlement. Enisala was mentioned for the first time with its Ottoman name “Yeni-Sale” (literally “New Settlement”) in a list of cities entitled "*Așa se numesc orașele rusești îndepărtate și apropiate*", written at the court of Metropolitan Cyprian of Kiev at the end of 1300.

On some ancient nautical maps of the 14th-15th century, the toponym "Bambola" is found in this area, which might be a Genoese settlement that many authors identify with Enisala. The Genoese annals and notarial deeds are a precious and unique source of information through which it was possible to shed light on this issue in this thesis.

1.2. History of Dobruja.

The historical-geographical region of Dobruja occupied the Northeastern most part of the Balkan Peninsula in modern Romania and Bulgaria: it included all of the provinces of Dobrich and Silistra, as well as a part of Varna province, and the rest being situated in southeastern Romania, in the provinces of Constanța and Tulcea.

The region takes its name from Dobrotitsa, a despot who in the 14th century with a brilliant rise under the favors of the Byzantines, brought the region to a major post in the Byzantine Empire in the Black Sea. The fiefdom of Dobrotitsa developed during his lifetime. After the deaths of his brothers Balika and Teodor, Dobrotitsa inherited a state region whose main center was Cavarna, inhabited by a mixed Greek, Romanian and Bulgarian population and which was probably under formal dependence of the Byzantine Empire. During his expeditions, facilitated by the feudal desolation in which Bulgaria found itself due to the death of Tsar Ivan Alexander, Dobrotitsa added localities scattered along the Bulgarian coast

to his state formation. The Dobrotitsa territory extended along the western coast of the Black Sea to Anchialos and Mesembria, included southern Dobruja with the ancient fortress of Caliacra, which became the residence of the despot when he lost his capital Varna. In 1368 the death of a local chieftain of Tartar origin, Prince Dimitri protector of the cities at the mouths of the Danube, allowed Dobrotitsa to get those territories, except Silistra. To the north, the Dobrotitsa domain certainly extended as far as Mangalia (Pangalia). Thanks to his double role of ally and Byzantine vassal of the Palaiologos family and despot of Dobruja, Dobrotitsa tried to drive the Genoese away from the cities at the mouths of the Danube, Chilia and Licostomo, defending his commercial privileges in war.

Dobrotitsa, Byzantine despot, ally and vassal of the emperor John V Palaiologos, to whom he remained faithful throughout his existence, reigned for almost 40 years. His state included the entire Black Sea basin and was among the most important states in Southeastern Europe. The despotate was inherited by Dobrotitsa's son Ivanko in 1385, who most likely held his domain until the end of the 14th century, when Ottomans conquered Dobruja (1388-1417).

1.3.The non-presence of the Genoese in Enisala.

As mentioned before, the fortress of Enisala, located on the Grass hill, might be belonged to the Genoese according to some scholars. For this reason, it was considered important to address a little the history of the rise of the maritime republic of Genoa in the ancient Mediterranean, and in particular in the Black Sea.

The Genoese were allowed to establish colonies in the Black Sea thanks to the Treaty of Nymphaeum, an agreement signed with the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261. Their colonization has only commercial purposes: in fact, they use strategic ports for their business.

The first settlement on the Black Sea coasts that became the heart of the Genoese commercial domain was Caffa (Fodosia), in Crimea. Other colonies settled on the Black Sea's coasts at the end of the 13th and in the early decades of the 14th century (fig. 1): Copa at the entrance of the Sea of Azov, Simisso, Sinope and Samastri to the North, Maurocastro in Moldavia, Messembria, Anchialos, Varna, Kaliakra in Bulgaria and finally Vicina, Kilia and Licostomo at the mouth of the Danube in the northern Dobruja.



Figure 1: Genoese ports on the Southern Black Sea coast during the 14th century (Deletant 1984, p. 512).

Until the beginning of the 1370 the Genoese emporium in the Danube Delta, for political and economic reasons, was Licostomo. During the despotate of Dobrotitsa the Genoese had many problems. In fact, the despot did not hesitate to attack them on various occasions. In 1484 Licostomo was taken by the Ottomans, which was the end of the Genoese presence in Dobruja.

2.The funerary context of the cemetery of Enisala Palanca.

In the cemetery of Enisala Palanca 114 graves brought to light (fig. 2). It consists of single burials placed in parallel rows at depth between 0.20-1.40 m compared to the current level of the ground. The grave's typology is simple pit in different shape, such as oval (36%), rectangular (14%), trapezoidal (2.6%) and circular (1.7%). Different orientations were observed: E-W (1.7%); SW-NE (43.8%); W-E (40%). There are no areas strictly dedicated to categories such as non-adults, females or individuals affected by important pathologies.

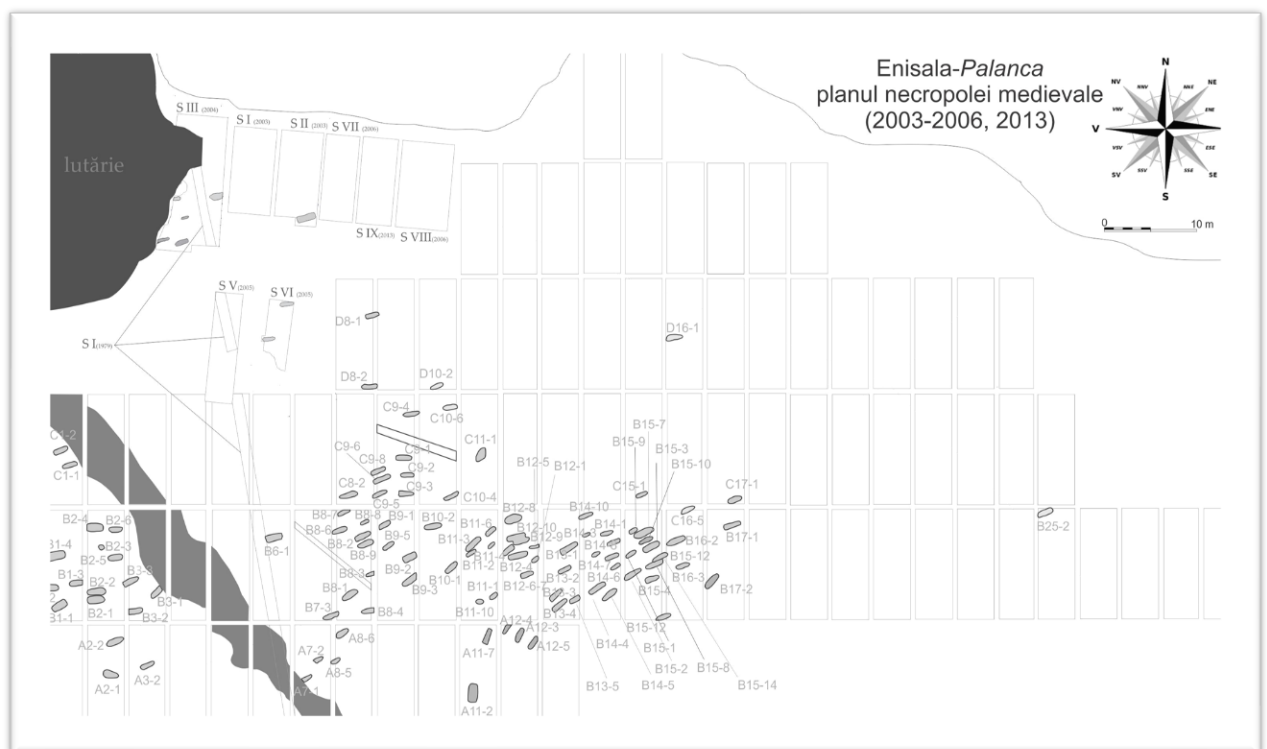


Figure 2: Plan of Enisala Palanca cemetery.

The reconstruction of the original position of the body, that is the relationship between the upper and lower limbs with the body, is an essential step for funerary archaeology. It can only be reached through a detailed recording of the position of the skeletal remains in the different skeletal districts and the state of the joint connections at the time of the discovery of the burial. The possibility of reconstructing the sequence of taphonomic events that took place during the decomposition and after until the excavation, allows to distinguish what is related to the funeral practice with what is not. In Enisala Palanca a number of 97 skeletons

were in dorsal decubitus (85%); only the individual SVIII-4 was in lateral decubitus. Instead for 16 skeletons (14%) no information about their position is available.

The term ‘grave goods’, as used by archaeologists, simply denotes anything found in a grave in addition to human remains and encompasses a variety of items, from the remains of dress to deliberate depositions of objects in graves, as well as sacrificial offerings. It is important to make a distinction between them and the so called “sépultures habillées”, literally “dressed burial”. We can define grave’s goods all those objects or offerings intentionally deposited with the deceased. We talk about “sépultures habillées” instead, when the deceased wore clothes, which in general can be demonstrated only finding accessories related to clothing, jewelry, beads and even knives may be considered part of the dress, in a functional position compared to the skeleton. A total number of 33 burials (28.9%) showed objects relating to clothing and grave’s goods: earrings, buttons, iron object and three coins that allowed this cemetery to be dated from the end of the 14th to the beginning of the 15th century.

2.1. Comparisons with other cemeteries.

For comparisons it was very interesting to have available data relating to numerous cemeteries excavated in Dobruja belonging to a period of time ranging from to. This made it possible to reconstruct the funerary ritual of the Dobruja over the centuries. The cemeteries were also divided into urban and rural, to investigate any similarities or differences. These cemeteries are:

- urban: Capidava (9th-11th century), Derwent (end of 10th - first half of 11th), Dinogetia-Garvăn (11th-12th), Noviodunum-Isaccea (11th-12th), Nufăru (10th-13th), Durostorum-Silistra (12th-14th), Păcuiul lui Soare (mid-13th-mid 14th), and Caliacra (13th-14th); *Tomis-Constantia*-Constanța (10th-11th) and *Beroe*-Ostrov (10th-12th) are probably urban;
- rural: Cavarna (8th-11th), Garvăn (end of 8th to the beginning of 11th century), Sitorman (8th-11th), Durankulak (9th-10th), Valu lui Traian (9th - beginning of 11th century), Odărți (11th) and Enisala (15th -18th).

Three cemeteries located in different regions were also included in the comparison sample:

- Ciocadia in Oltenia County, Romania (end of 13th century);
- Vratsa in Bulgaria (end of 11th-14th century);

- Lozova-La Hotar cu Vornicenii in Republic of Moldova (14th-15th century).

Although many data about the cemeteries mentioned above were missing, it was possible to recognize a continuity regarding certain rites.

In the rural cemeteries starting from the 8th century, we can notice that the burial's orientation is always W-E according to the Christian custom, also in the urban ones, with exceptions which, however, always concern a few burials compared to the total sample. This orientation persists over the centuries.

In the rural cemeteries the pit's depth is known only for 3 of them (Cavarna, Garvăn and Enisala), it falls within a range from 0.23 a 1.40 m, as in Enisala Palanca. Also, for the urban cemeteries the depth is known only for three of them (Devert, Isaccea and Păcuiul lui Soare) and it is between 0.10 and 1.25 m. Interesting evidence is that the deepest burials in Enisala Palanca, 0.70-1.25 m, are at the same depth as those excavated at Enisala in the 1970s. In fact, their depth is 0.70-1.40 m and have been dated from the 15th century. This element could lead us to suppose that the Palanca burials are probably contemporary with those of Enisala.

In two rural cemeteries (Cavarna and Valu lui Traian) single burial is practiced. In the urban cemeteries we noticed single and multiple burials in Dinogetia-Garvăn, Nufăru and Siliștra, but it needs to be borne on mind that these three cemeteries are earlier than Enisala Palanca, where the burials are all single. Then, in Isaccea there were only single burials. From the 8th century the dorsal decubitus is the canonical position adopted in every cemetery all over the centuries, according the Christian custom. Taking up the categories of the positions of the upper limbs observed in Enisala Palanca, we can observe them also in the other cemeteries.

From the comparison with other cemeteries contemporary to that of Enisala Palanca, such as Vratsa in Bulgaria (11th-14th century), Ciocadia in Romania (13th century) and Lozova-La Hotar cu Vornicenii in Republic of Moldova (14th-15th century) we can observe many common characteristics. All of them follows the Christian custom burying people in dorsal decubitus and W-E orientated. The common grave's typology is the simple pit with rectangular and trapezoidal shape. The inventory is often poor, and the elements of clothing and jewellery are always present. In fact, the custom of depositing grave goods disappeared from the various European regions at different times and for different reasons. While this disappearance often coincided with the spread of Christianity, it is by no means certain that Christianity was the cause of its disappearance in every single case. In the case of Enisala

Palanca and the other cemeteries examined, also with poor inventory, it can be assumed that they belonged to rather poor local communities.

Comparison with studies relating to other cemeteries also reveals a lack of data and importance regarding issues such as the cemetery spatial organization relating, for example, to any differences between adults and non-adults, females, and males. For this reason, an inaccurate collection of data in the field, involves an irremediable loss of data, since the excavation is an unrepeatable action, but also the inability to give a correct interpretation to the investigated funeral practice.

3. Anthropological and paleopathological study of the population buried in the cemetery of Enisala Palanca.

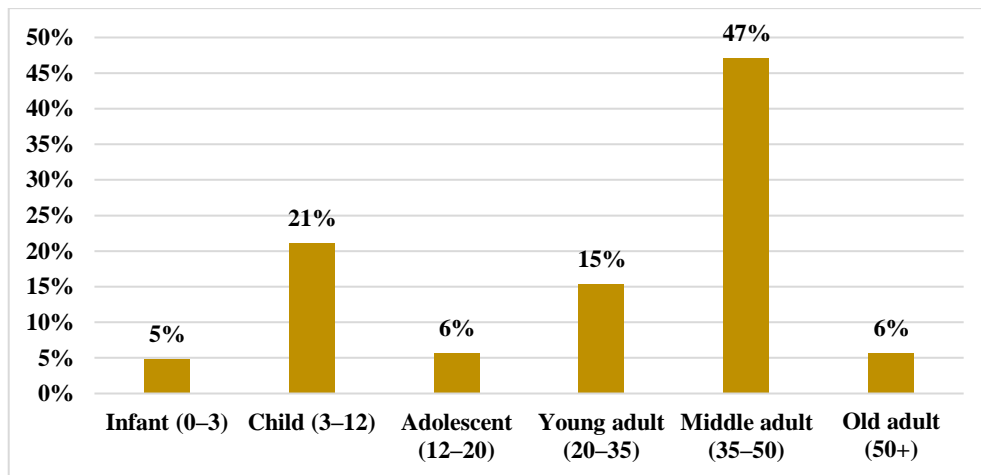
The reconstruction of the lifestyle and the health status of this small rural community was carried out on 114 skeletons through the following steps:

- estimations of the age-at-death and sex;
- paleodemography;
- estimation of stature;
- non-specific stress indicators;
- skeletal and dental paleopathologies and traumas;
- comparisons with samples from medieval Romanian cemeteries.

A preventive evaluation of the representation and preservation status of the bones was carried out in order to understand the potential of the entire sample. It was thus possible to estimate that over half of the sample had a complete skeleton in excellent condition. This proved to be very important at the time of the various determinations.

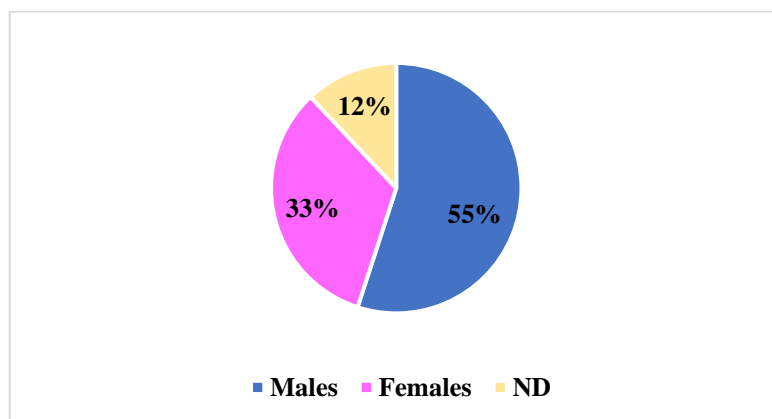
Each skeleton was then restored and measured in order to record useful data for assessing the distinctive characteristics of sex, age, etc. The anthropometric measurements must always be carried out with proper tools, such as sliding calliper, spreading calliper, etc.

Out of a total of 114 skeletons, it was possible to determine the age-at-death of 33 non-adults (29%) and 71 adults (62%), only 10 individuals (9%) were indeterminates. Individuals were also divided into six age groups and, as we can see from the graph below (1), the most represented category is middle adult (47%), followed by child (21%).



Graph 1: Percentage of individuals per age groups.

Sex determination was possible only for a total number of 74 individuals 46 males and 28 females (graph 2); *sex ratio* (M/F) is 1.64.

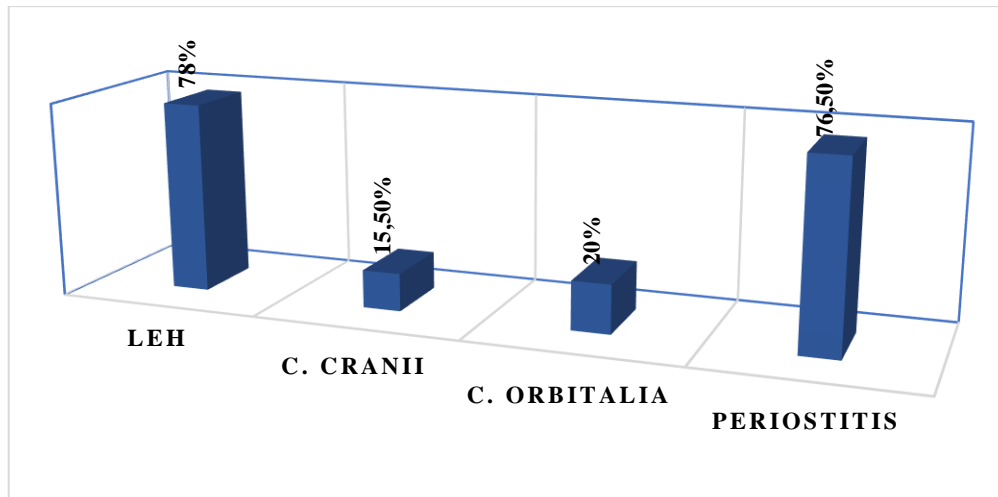


Graph 2: Percentage of individuals per sex

It was possible to determine the stature of 42 adult male individuals, which average is 166.06 cm, and 27 females, which average is instead 155.29 cm.

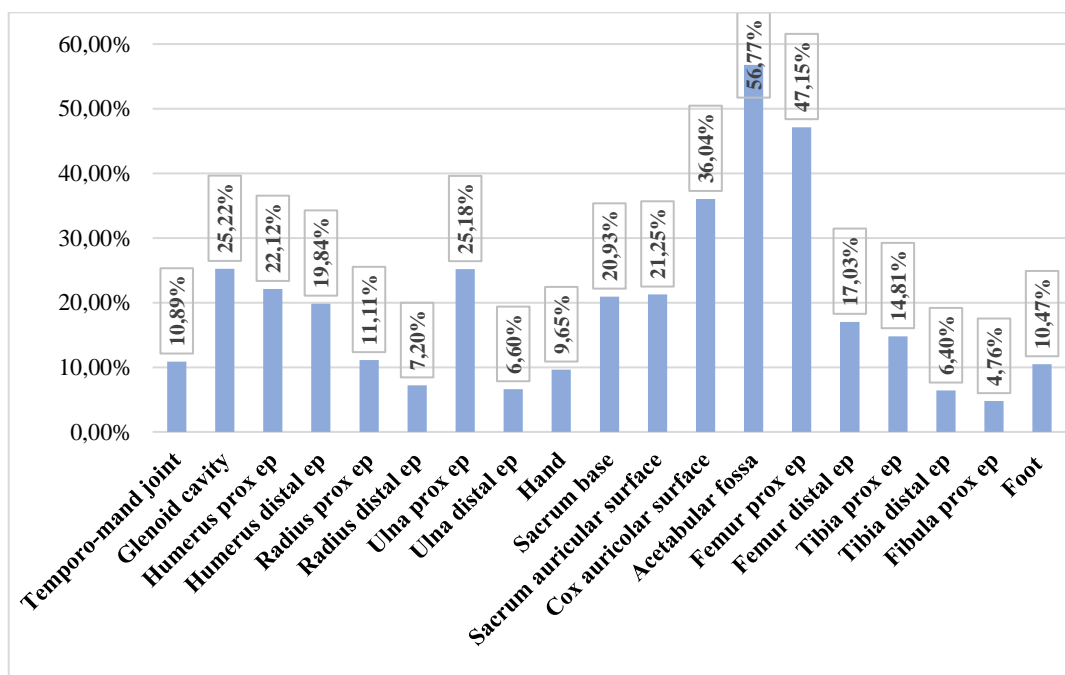
The study of skeletal pathologies and traumas on the individuals of Enisala Palanca was carried out by observing each skeleton macroscopically and in few cases through Computed TomoCharty.

First, non-specific stress indicators such as linear enamel hypoplasia (LEH), *cribra cranii* and *orbitalia* and osteoperiostitis were observed. As we can see in the Chart below (3), the most common non-specific stress indicators showed by the Enisala Palanca sample are the dental hypoplasia (78%) and the osteoperiostitis.



Graph 3: Distribution of non-specific stress indicators in the skeletal sample of Enisala Palanca.

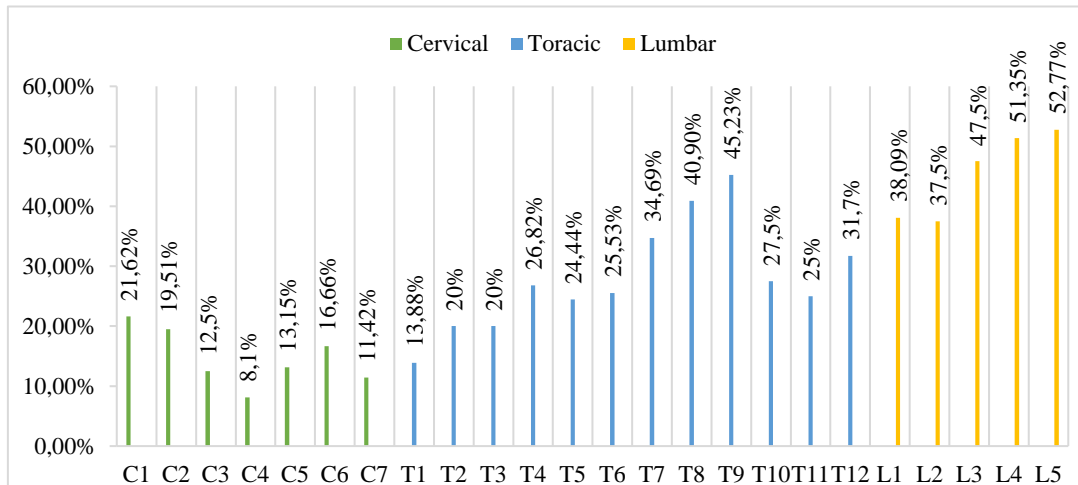
Osteoarthritis (OA), or degenerative joint disease, it is a pathology characterized by the breakdown of the articular hyaline cartilage. It is a condition very common in modern times and usually observed even on ancient human remains. For this analysis the non-vertebral and vertebral joints of 81 adults were analyzed.



Graph 4: Distribution of OA in the non-vertebral joints.

As the graph above clearly shows (4), the most affected joints concern the innominate (56.77% the acetabular fossa and 36.04% the auricular surface) and the proximal epiphysis of the femur (47.15%).

As for vertebral osteoarthritis (graph 5), a higher incidence is observed at the lumbar spine, especially the last 3 vertebrae are affected (L5 52.77%, L4 51.35% and L3 47.5%); in the thoracic the most affected are T9 (45.23%) and T8 (40,90%); in the cervical the most affected are C1 (21.62%) and C2 (19.51%).

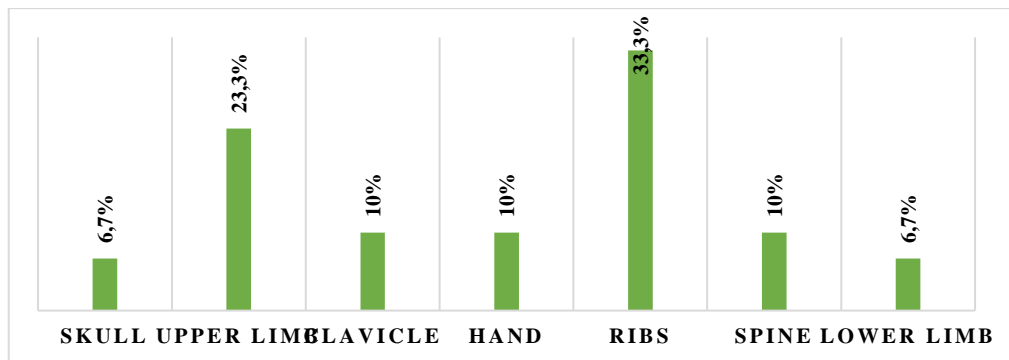


Graph 5: Distribution of OA in each vertebrae.

Three individuals affected by rare pathological and traumatic conditions are part of the sample:

- the adult male B2-2 which is affected by Multiple Osteochondromas, a rare genetic disorder caused by mutations in the EXT (exostosin) genes, EXT1 on chromosome 8 and EXT2 on chromosome 1 characterized by multiple benign (noncancerous) bone tumors;
- The non-adult individual B15-15 (age-at-death 15 ± 3 -year-old) suffering from juvenile multifocal osteoarticular tuberculosis, a rare systemic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*;
- Finally, the adult male C17-1 (age-at-death of 45 years-old), showed humerus varus deformity on the left humerus, caused by a birth-related proximal humerus fracture.

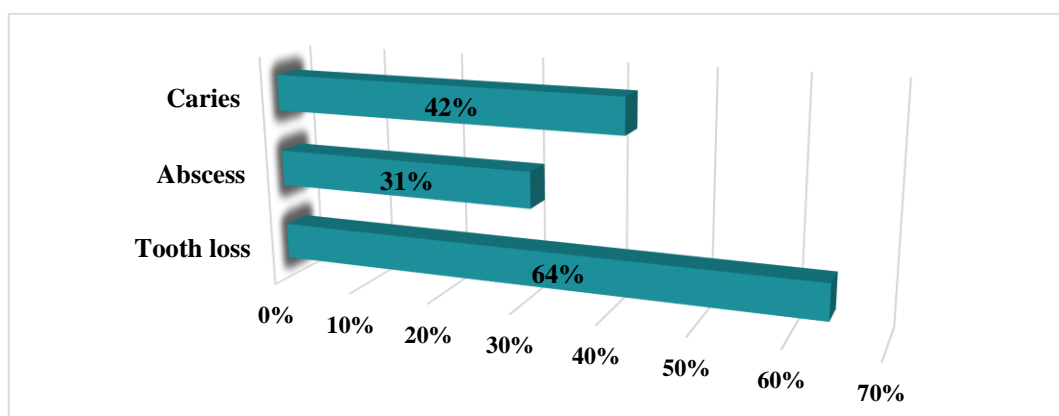
Out of a total number of 87 individual, a percentage of 17.2% showed at least a trauma in different regions of the skeleton (graph 6). The most involved, as we can see in the graph, are the ribs (33.3%) and the upper limbs (23.3%).



Graph 6: Distribution of traumas in different skeletal regions.

In the skeletal sample of Enisala Palanca cemetery a case of sharp force trauma was found. In forensic osteology sharp force trauma (SFT) involves injury to bone with a sharp object that forms an incision (narrow or wide) or a puncture/cleft. Marks of a sharp instrument on the bone are generally identifiable by a well-defined margin where the blade or sharp edge has cut into the bone. The male individual B13-1 (age-at-death 35 years old) showed an interesting weapon injury on the right transverse process of the 5th lumbar vertebrae. The possible weapon was found in the grave, most likely still stuck in the vertebral body as the rusty remains present on the wound, but unfortunately there is no excavation data or photoChartic documentation to support this.

In paleopathology the study of dental disease is important. The tooth, for its physical features tends to resist destruction and taphonomic conditions better than any other body tissue and therefore, is a valuable element for the study on individual's diet, and social and cultural factors related to it, from a population perspective. Conditions such as caries, dental wear, abscesses, and ante-mortem lost teeth were macroscopically investigated in the teeth of the Enisala Palanca sample (graph 7).



Graph 7: Distribution of dental pathologies.

Conclusions.

Enisala Palanca is a small medieval rural community in Dobruja, a Romanian region involved in many historical events over the centuries. Despite this, sometimes there is a lack of historical source and archaeological data not always are published. In this context is inserted the debate regarding the presence of the Genoese in Enisala and the attribution of the fortress to them.

Many notarial sources inform us about the life of Genoese colonies in Vicina, Chilia and Licostomo, but it is reasonable to assume the Genoese have had contact with settlements close to the colonies. Anyway, this does not mean Genoese settled in those cities. This is the case of Enisala, a site located in Northern Dobrudja not so far from Vicina. No historical Genoese source mentions Enisala, nevertheless many scholars believe that the Enisala fortress is Genoese only based on stylistic analogies with other Genoese fortresses in the Crimea.

About the funerary context, this rural cemetery shows common features observed in others medieval cemeteries, such as the grave typology (simple pit), the orientation (O-E), the body position in dorsal decubitus, which are Christian customs. The same about the presence of grave goods, which were found only in 9% of the graves. Observing the location of the burials par sex, we cannot see any area strictly dedicated to female's burial or male's ones. The same situation was noticed for non-adults.

The anthropological study of the skeletal sample from the medieval cemetery of Enisala Palanca provided very interesting data on the health status and the lifestyle of this small rural community in Dobruja. The sample consists of the remains of 114 individuals, 71% adults and 29% non-adults. This is not a particularly surprising result, even considering the comparisons that showed how even in other medieval cemeteries non-adults are almost always underestimated, maybe for taphonomic process or funerary practices.

Research on non-specific stress indicators revealed that a small part of the population in Enisala Palanca faced possible difficult episodes or periods of illness or malnutrition.

The most affected joints by osteoarthritis are in the coxofemoral area. About the spine, OA is present mainly in the lower part. This fact is not surprising since osteoarthritis of the vertebrae is very common in human populations, especially in the lumbar spine which sustains most of the load due to standing position.

A number of 15 individuals out of 87 presented trauma. For the analysis of the incidence and interpretation of trauma, the study of trauma on medieval English samples from both rural and urban settlements was used, according to which there is a direct relation between the incidence of trauma and the type of economy of a context: a high percentage of trauma in a population would be significantly connected with a subsistence economy, often of an agricultural type, unlike the low frequency of trauma is linked to urban contexts. In Enisala Palanca, although it is a rural community, this model is not observed: in fact, we find a low long bone fractures frequency (1.04%), which is a very low value compared to rural sites and it's instead closer to values recorded in urban samples.

The results obtained from the study of dental pathologies suggest the consumption of carbohydrates and low quality of hygiene which is frequently observed in past populations.

To sum up, the results of this anthropological study revealed an overall decent level of quality of life in the rural population of Enisala Palanca.

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