

**Dr Hella Eckardt**

**A Long Way from Home - Diaspora Communities in Roman Britain  
End of Year Report for 2007**

Our project adopts an integrated approach to the question of diaspora communities in Roman Britain, combining scientific (osteology, isotope) analysis with theoretical approaches to material culture. Previous work has only ever employed a single technique (e.g. Wenham 1968) or involved small sample sizes (Evans et al. 2006). While sampling and analysis are running to the planned timetable, and while initial results from Poundbury and Gloucester are encouraging (see below), it is still too early to present results.

Progress on the project is on target, and the issues over isotope sampling at the NHM have actually proved to be fortuitously helpful. Two hundred and five Trentholme Drive skeletons have been re-examined, a further 64 skeletons from neighbouring cemeteries at York, and 24 skeletons from Catterick using new forensic techniques. Dr Leach (RA) has shown that many of the original assessments by Wenham (1968), suggesting African ancestry for individuals from Trentholme Drive, were incorrect. However, SL identified several individuals with marked African facial features from other cemeteries in York. Isotope analysis is just beginning on the York collection to test whether these individuals have oxygen and strontium ratios indicative of an origin from areas outside Britain, and whether their diet varied from that of the control sample. We have also obtained permission for isotope analysis for individuals from the York Driffild Terrace cemetery site, which includes a group of 30 beheaded individuals (2 with shackles) in a mass burial pit, an assemblage that has been interpreted as representing slaves. It is too early for results, but we feel that the focus on York, and the addition of individuals from other cemeteries held by York Museum and York Archaeological Trust has added a welcome new dimension and focus to the project. We will now be able to compare and contrast findings from within a single major late Roman cemetery site, allowing for greater statistical and analytical rigour and reliability, and for the development of more focused educational and public outreach projects.

Work is also progressing well on Catterick, where unusual grave goods have been used (Wilson 2002) to suggest the presence of a eunuch priest of Isis, who may have originated from outside Britain. Initial results on 24 skeletons (including the so-called eunuch) from Catterick suggest a largely homogenous (and local) group in terms of skull morphology and in terms of diet. More work on the migration (oxygen and strontium) isotopes is required to establish whether the so-called eunuch originated from outside Britain.

At Poundbury, Dr Lewis has continued the analysis of the skeletons of 385 children, some of which display clinical features of Thalassaemia, a condition indicative of Mediterranean origins. Unless there is a drastic change in the curator's views, it will, however, now probably not be possible to sample these individuals for isotope analysis.

To balance the loss of isotope samples from Poundbury, we have chosen another southern site for in-depth isotope analysis. We were fortunate in

gaining access to a highly unusual assemblage from Gloucester, where 90 individuals were buried together in a large pit. There has been some debate as to whether this represents the victims of a plague-like event, or perhaps the remains of poor or enslaved members of the community. Isotope samples of 11 individuals from the mass burial pit, and a further 10 skeletons from surrounding graves used as a control sample, now show that there is no isotopic distinction between the two groups, suggesting that the catastrophic disease interpretation is correct. Detailed analysis of both the migration and the diet isotopes does, however, demonstrate how complex and intermingled the population of Gloucester was at this time. Thus, both in the mass burial pit and in the surrounding graves, there are individuals originating from outside the UK, suggesting that the population of Gloucester was diverse, but relatively highly integrated. It also appears that immigrants and locals consumed a similar diet, with no significant outliers identified. For both Catterick and Gloucester Dr Chenery has also collected and analysed 54 vegetation samples to build up baseline data for strontium analysis, a major additional achievement of the project.

Finally, research by Dr Eckhardt on diaspora theory and its application to the Roman period has begun, and we have made significant progress in planning a range of outreach activities. We have begun to develop collaborations with the Yorkshire Museum (York) and with the children's author Caroline Lawrence.

HE had several initial meetings (May & August 2007) with Caroline Lawrence, focusing on the development of teacher packs and possibly a short story, presenting the results of our study to children at Key Stage 1. We have also held (October 2007) a joint meeting with the curator of Yorkshire Museum (Andrew Morrison), and will contribute to his forthcoming 'Roman York' exhibition (to open in 2009) as well as give public lectures at the Museum (late 2008).