

**Dr Hella Eckhardt**  
**A Long Way from Home - Diaspora Communities in Roman Britain**  
**End of year report for 2008**

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 and identity. Previous work has only ever employed a single technique (e.g. Wenham 1968) or involved small sample sizes (Evans et al. 2006). Early results suggest significant population diversity at Roman York, including a number of individuals that may represent first and second generation Africans. At Gloucester, we were again able to distinguish isotopically between locals and incomers, but their origins did not have an impact on their treatment in death. Work on Catterick and Lankhills is ongoing.

Progress on the project is on target: we are entering the final stage of analysis, and have begun to write up results; this is despite the sampling issues outlined in the last report.

SL successfully completed her contract (which was extended by two months to allow for the recording of additional material at York). She completed the recording of nearly 300 skeletons, and conducted detailed ancestry assessment (using Fordisc, a programme employed in forensic studies to analyse skull metrics to assess ancestry). She identified a number of individuals that may be of African descent, and generally showed considerable variability within the population at York. She also produced a first draft of the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* paper, which combines the ancestry assessment and isotope analysis for all York sites.

CC has continued the Strontium and Oxygen analysis of skeletons from York, Gloucester and Catterick, and of additional skeletons from Lankhills (Winchester); the latter replaced intended samples from Poundbury, which could not yet be sampled due to a change in NHM sampling policy. She has also collected and analysed comparative vegetation samples, making an important additional methodological contribution to this field of research. CC's work (150+ samples) represents a considerable increase on previous work in the UK on Romano-British skeletons (25 individuals had previously been sampled). CC has also contributed to the AJPA paper (now in final draft form) and to the paper on Gloucester (*Journal of Archaeological Science*). The Gloucester paper has offered an opportunity to review the methodology for the use of oxygen isotope in migration analysis.

ML has taken the lead on the paper discussing the evidence from York for AJPA. Having completed the analysis of 385 children from Poundbury, she has carried out more research on Thalassaemia, a condition indicative of Mediterranean origin. A paper on these children is in preparation for the *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*.

Diet and foodways are an important way in which communities express their identities; in Britain, fish was rarely consumed in the pre-Roman Iron Age, and during the Roman occupation continues to be a high status food, possibly associated with immigrants. GM has continued to sample individuals from York, Gloucester and Catterick, and analysed their carbon and nitrogen isotope ratios, which are indicative of the amounts of marine protein consumed. Initial results show fairly homogenous dietary practices at Gloucester and Catterick, with greater variability at York. For Lankhills, dietary isotopes have been studied by an Oxford PhD student, who will contribute to the edited volume (see below).

Building on a successful project workshop in February, we organised a 2 day conference with 10 invited speakers on 'Diasporas in the Roman world' in September 2008. This brought together epigraphers, artefact specialists and archaeological scientists (some of whom are working on isotope analysis in other parts of the Empire). This was a unique opportunity to explore links and contrasts between our projects; HE is planning to produce an edited volume based on the workshop, strengthened by a number of invited papers. Given the timescale for the production of this edited volume, it is hoped to launch the book in a 'Diasporas in the Roman world' session at the international Roman Archaeology Conference in 2010.

HE has also completed a draft of a paper to be submitted to *Antiquity*, which aims to present the results of the project to a humanities audience using a single case study from York. This is the burial in a stone coffin of a wealthy young woman, whose gravegoods combine local (jet) and exotic (ivory) jewellery, and who may have been a Christian. Her ancestry assessment suggests that she is of African/mixed race descent, and her isotope values point to an origin outside the UK. HE has also completed a purely archaeological paper reviewing the evidence for Africans in Roman Britain, reviewing inscriptions mentioning African soldiers and other individuals, and artefacts associated with an African presence in Roman Britain.

We have continued our outreach activities with the children's author Caroline Lawrence and with the Yorkshire Museum (see separate entry below). In addition we have begun to work with the archaeological illustrator Dr Aaron Watson (<http://www.monumental.uk.com>).

#### **Other highlights:**

- Public session at York Museum on Diaspora project and skeletal interpretation in October 2008 (SL)
- Presentation on whole project at Dept Archaeology, University of Durham, November 2008 (ML)
- Presentation of whole project to Hampshire Archaeology Society, in November 2008 (ML)
- Roman Diaspora Workshop, 19th-20th September 2008, Department of Archaeology, University of Reading, Reading UK (HE & ML organised, all gave presentations/posters)