**SSCIP sponsored session at the 84th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology**

*Kirsty Squires and Esme Hookway*

Another year, another Society for American Archaeology (SAA) conference. This year the conference took place between 10th-14th April 2019 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past (SSCIP) sponsored the “Health and Welfare of Children in the Past” session, organised by Esme Hookway and Kirsty Squires (both Staffordshire University, UK). The six papers in this session were unique in terms of their temporal and geographical scope but were tied together by the underlying themes of the session. Speakers from New Zealand, Mexico, and the UK came together to explore a range of topics, including childhood health and disease, the care of children, funerary treatment, and the welfare of children in the work place.

To kick things off, Alisha Adams (University of Otago, New Zealand) and colleagues presented some initial findings from her doctoral research. In her presentation, titled “From the Mouths of Babes: Weaning, Diet, and Stress in Neolithic Vietnam”, Adams’ employed a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding stress during childhood during a period of subsistence change in BC 1850-1650 Vietnam. Her innovative research employed the micropolynomial method, which allows the researcher to quantify linear enamel hypoplasia through an examination of changes in tooth enamel depth. Adams’ demonstrated that linear enamel hypoplasia developed through the fetal enamel growth period and after birth, though deciduous teeth showed shorter periods of stress compared to permanent teeth. Here, she concludes that this could potentially indicate “causation, development, or by-product of the methodology”. In further work, Adams’ will be examining mixed dentition to gain a clearer insight into the reasons for the observations made in this presentation; stable isotope analysis will also be employed as a means of understanding weaning patterns.

**Insert image of Alicia here please (figure heading below)**

*Alisha Adams presenting her research on stress in Neolithic Vietnam.*

Melanie Miller (University of Otago, New Zealand) and colleagues (Yu Dong, Kate Pechenkina, Wenquan Fan, and Siân Halcrow) delivered the next presentation, titled “Early Childhood Diet During the Bronze Age Eastern Zhou Dynasty (China): Evidence from Stable Isotope Analysis”. This research focused on the Xiyasi cemetery (BC 770-221), situated on the Central Plains of China. Miller and colleagues examined 15 individuals and employed an incremental dentine sampling strategy to explore childhood nutrition from birth through to 14 years of age. Isotope analysis revealed some fascinating insights into this understudied population. Miller and colleagues demonstrated that children had mixed diets with unexpectantly high amounts of C3 foods, such as wheat and barley, though boys were more likely than girls to consume millet. This research highlighted the value of adopting an incremental isotope approach in understanding the diets of childhood in the past.

**Insert image of Melanie here please (figure heading below)**

*Melanie Miller delivering her research team’s work on the diet of children in Bronze Age China.*

The session subsequently moved into the historical period, with Dawn Hadley (University of York, UK) and Elizabeth Craig-Atkins (University of Sheffield, UK) exploring “The ‘Bitter’ Death of Children: Health, Welfare and the Funerary Treatment of Infants and Young Children in Christian Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries”. This research largely focused upon multiple burials and the spatial distribution of infant and young child burials in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. Hadley and Craig-Atkins made an interesting comparison between burial clusters of infants and children in final stage churchyards from Anglo-Saxon England with post-medieval cilliní in Ireland, which were burial grounds located on earlier sites solely for neonates and infants and were typically isolated from settlements. Infant life histories were also addressed through an exploration of weaning patterns which were compared with funerary rites. The authors observed that children inhumed in clusters close to churches during the period in question frequently received inadequate nutrition from breastmilk, which influenced their social identity. Hadley and Craig-Atkins highlighted that shared life experience may have influenced unique infant and child burials and that the manner of death was not the sole reason for the burial strategies employed in Anglo-Saxon churchyards.

**Insert image of Dawn here please (figure heading below)**

*Dawn Hadley on infants and children in Christian Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in England.*

Next, Patricia Olga Hernández Espinoza (Centro INAH Sonora, Mexico) delivered her presentation titled “Children of Privilege. Infant Mortuary Practices at Late Postclassical Tamtoc Society”. In this presentation, Hernández Espinoza explored the reasons for burying children in La Noria (Mexico) from AD 1000-1400 as this city was typically where Tamtoc elites were buried. An examination of the funerary rites, artificial cranial modification, dental decoration, the provision of grave goods, and pathological lesions of children under 15 years of age revealed that these individuals belonged to important Tamtoc lineages and the stages at which they became part of the adult world. Interestingly, all children examined showed signs of infectious pathologies, such as yaws and tuberculosis. Hernández Espinoza’s multi-disciplinary approach to this subject highlighted the wealth of information that can be obtained from such funerary contexts in Mexico. The chair’s of the session applaud Hernández Espinoza for delivering her presentation in Spanish, making this one of the more inclusive sessions at the SAA conference.

**Insert image of Patricia here please (figure heading below)**

*Patricia Olga Hernández Espinoza delivering discussing the funerary treatment and health of children in Postclassical Tamtoc Society.*

The penultimate speaker, Esme Hookway (Staffordshire University, UK), presented her research (*in absentia*) titled “An Exploration of the Demographics of Non-Adults in Medieval Cemeteries in England (AD 1050-1600)”. In this presentation, Hookway used documentary, archaeological, and osteological evidence to gain an insight into the admission of children in different types of medieval hospital and identified a possible link between the admittance of pregnant women and infants, and leper hospitals. This research also highlighted that hospitals may have been used as a refuge for women and orphaned and abandoned infants, which requires further investigation. Hookway noted that infants and children often suffered from episodes of stress and/or malnutrition, though there is little evidence of trauma in these demographic groupings. Hookway’s multi-disciplinary approach to understanding the health and care of children in medieval hospitals will pave the way for future holistic studies of such cemeteries, on a site, regional, and national level.

**Insert image of Esme’s presentation here please (figure heading below)**

*Esme Hookway’s presentation on the demographics of non-adults in medieval hospital cemeteries in England.*

The final paper of this session was by Kirsty Squires (Staffordshire University, UK), who delivered her presentation, titled “All in a Day’s Work: The Health and Welfare of Children Living in 19th Staffordshire, UK”. Census data, testimonies of workers (including those of children) and officials, and clinical data were used to investigate different jobs held by children in the pottery and coal mining industries, alongside the associated pathological and traumatic lesions we would expect to see in the skeletal remains of individuals working in these roles. Squires identified that there is currently a lack of archaeological and osteological evidence for children working in the pottery industry and their associated coal mines in North Staffordshire; this presentation therefore aimed to provide the theoretical framework needed for archaeologists and bioarchaeologists when skeletal remains and associated cultural material are recovered in this region.

**Insert image of Kirsty’s presentation here please (figure heading below)**

*Kirsty Squires’ presentation on the health and welfare of children working in the pottery industry and their associated coal mines in 19th century Staffordshire, UK.*

This session highlighted the ever-increasing use of innovative methods as a means of understanding the health of children, as well as the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to studying the youngest members of past societies. It is hoped that this session will lead to further discussions around the application of novel techniques and approaches to studying the health and wellbeing of children in both the prehistoric and historic past.

The session chairs would like to thank the SAA for accepting this session, SSCIP for sponsoring this session, and the researchers who contributed to this session.

Keep up to date with the research of the presenters in this session on Twitter and academia.edu:

Alishia Adams: [@alisha\_adams\_](https://twitter.com/alisha_adams_)

Dr Melanie Miller: [@DrMJMiller1](https://twitter.com/DrMJMiller1)

Professor Dawn Hadley: [@DanelawDawn](https://twitter.com/DanelawDawn)

Patricia Olga Hernández Espinoza: <https://independent.academia.edu/HernandezPaty>

Esme Hookway: [@EsmeHookway](https://twitter.com/EsmeHookway)

Dr Kirsty Squires: [@KirstySquires2](https://twitter.com/KirstySquires2)