



LETTER TO THE EDITORS

I Bioanthropological Meeting: a multidisciplinary approach

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ABSTRACT

The *I Bioanthropological Meeting*, held at the University of Coimbra on May 31st and June 1st, 2013, was an international event exclusively dedicated to the presentation of the current research in Biological Anthropology. With six invited keynote speakers from the major fields of Bioanthropology (Human Evolution, Primatology, Population Genetics, Anthropology of Past Populations, Forensic Anthropology and Human Ecology) and with more than 90 communications, either in the form of podium or poster presentations, this meeting reaffirmed the benefits arising from the use of a multidisciplinary approach to the study of human kind as a biological entity. In this paper, we aim to convey our personal experience regarding the organization of this meeting.

Keywords: Bioanthropology, meeting, University of Coimbra, science diffusion.

RESUMÉN

El *I Bioanthropological Meeting*, con lugar en la Universidad de Coímbra en los días 31 de mayo y 1 de junio del 2013, fue un evento internacional exclusivamente dedicado a la investigación reciente que se está produciendo en el área de Antropología Biológica. Este encuentro recibió la presencia de seis oradores invitados, que desarrollan investigación en los principales campos de actuación de la Bioantropología (Evolución Humana, Primatología, Genética de Poblaciones, Antropología de las Poblaciones Pasadas, Antropología Forense y Ecología Humana). Con más de 90 presentaciones, tanto en formato oral como poster, esta reunión ha reiterado los beneficios que se suman cuando se utiliza un abordaje multidisciplinar al estudio del hombre como una entidad biológica. En este trabajo, nuestro objetivo es transmitir nuestra experiencia personal con respecto a la organización de esta reunión.

Palabras clave: Bioantropología, reunión científica, Universidad de Coímbra, divulgación científica.

RESUMO

O *I Bioanthropological Meeting*, realizado na Universidade de Coimbra a 31 de Maio e 1 de Junho de 2013, foi um evento internacional exclusivamente dedicado à apresentação da mais recente investigação desenvolvida no campo da Antropologia Biológica. Este evento contou com a presença de seis palestrantes convidados, investigadores dos principais campos de acção da Bioantropologia (Evolução Humana, Primatologia, Genética das Populações, Antropologia das Populações Passadas, Antropologia Forense e Ecologia Humana). Com mais de 90 comunicações, tanto na forma oral como em *poster*, este encontro reiterou os benefícios que advêm de uma abordagem multidiciplinar aplicada ao estudo do homem como entidade biológica. Neste artigo, pretendemos transmitir a nossa experiência pessoal a respeito da organização deste encontro.

Palavras-chave: Bioantropologia, encontro científico, Universidade de Coimbra, divulgação científica

The *I Bioanthropological Meeting: a multidisciplinary approach* – I BAM – (Figure 1) was held at the University of Coimbra on the 31st of May and 1st of June of 2013

(<http://www.uc.pt/en/cia/events/meetings>). This event benefited from the active and effective support of the Research Centre for Anthropology and Health (CIAS) and of the

Group of Studies in Human Evolution (GEEvH), as well as, from the precious collaboration of an international group of volunteers.

The idea of organizing this meeting arose while we were students of the Master course in Human Evolution and Biology. Despite our different backgrounds in Anthropology, Archaeology and Biology, we share a common interest that is Bioanthropology. This collective interest worked as a starting point for all that was about to succeed afterwards.

This event was thought as a practical representation of the intersection of distinct fields of knowledge, at the specific level of Biological Anthropology. Capturing this idea of multidisciplinary, which is also inherent to the fact that this Master course comprises students from different countries and with different scientific backgrounds, it seemed more than appropriate to bring all those areas together in a two-day meeting.

It is known that the applications of Biological Anthropology are very widespread, and they may include as many areas as one might think of. This field of science is by itself the prodigal son of many areas of knowledge, and its roots are deeply connected to the history of mankind and science. Therefore, our main goal was to present the latest research that has been developed in several areas of this field, such as, Human Evolution, Primatology, Population Genetics, Anthropology of Past Populations, Forensic Anthropology and Human Ecology. We gathered researchers from those areas; in order to enhance the benefits that can be revealed when using an approach that combines the individuality of each area with the multiplicity of Anthropology *per se*.

In general terms, the I BAM followed a long tradition on the organization of scientific events of international scope in the field of Biological Anthropology. The Department of Life Sciences of the University of Coimbra has, over the years, stood out not only in research, but also in teaching Anthropology, which is why we feel honoured to have counted with all its support.

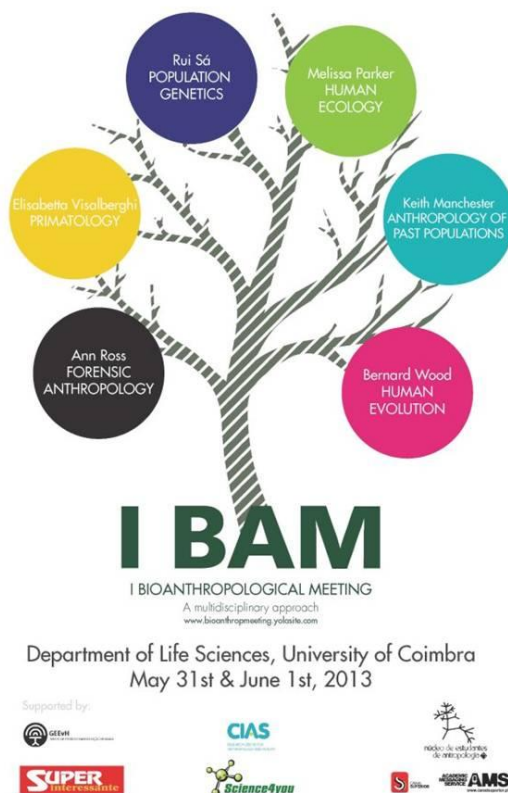


Figure 1 – Official poster of the I BAM

Those were two very useful and enjoyable days due, among others things, to the high quality of the presented works. The first day of the meeting was especially dedicated to the areas of Human Evolution, Primatology and Population Genetics, from different points of view. Professor Bernard Wood (George Washington University, USA) opened up with the communication "*The origins of Homo. What are we looking for?*". The afternoon was marked by the lectures of Professor Elisabetta Visalberghi (Istituto di Scienze e Tecnologie della Cognizione – Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Italy) – "*Insights from the wild capuchin monkeys using stone tools*" – and Rui Sá, PhD (University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Czech Republic) – "*Perspectives of population genetics for primate survival in Guinea-Bissau: progress and prospects*". Each of these lectures opened one session for the presentation of several studies on the considered field. Following the same structure, the second day was dedicated to the analysis of human remains, both for bioarchaeological purposes, with a lecture by Professor Keith Manchester (University of Bradford, UK) – "*Raising the dead: clinical interpretation in Paleopathology*" – and for forensic investigations, with the lecture of Professor Ann Ross (North Carolina State University, USA), "*Case studies in Forensic Anthropology*". The day was completed with the session on Human Ecology, which included a lecture from Professor Melissa Parker (University of Brunel, UK) – "*Biosocial Anthropology and neglected tropical diseases*".

One of the main purposes of the I BAM was to provide students and researchers from a wide range of scientific areas with the opportunity to expose their work, either by oral or poster presentations. The meeting comprised 40 oral presentations and 46 poster communications¹ in all the six fields considered. With a total of 153 participants from 13 different countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Iceland, U.K., Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and crossing the Atlantic Ocean, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and USA) we can surely state that the I BAM was an international event (Figure 2).

The award for the best oral communication, having as first author a non-PhD, was delivered *ex aequo* to Vaidotas Suncovas (Vilnius University, Lithuania), with the study "*Bioarchaeology of dental calculus: plant consumption in Medieval Lithuania*", and to Luís Miguel Marado (University of Coimbra, Portugal) and co-authors, with "*Fluctuating asymmetry in dental non-metric traits: analysis of sex differences in the Coimbra late 19th/early 20th century population*". The award for the best poster presentation was won by Ana Sofia Pedro and collaborators, with the work "*Landmarking in paleoneurology: comparing physical and laser scan endocasts*".

At this point, and after meditating on it, we think that the social networks played a central role on the dissemination of this event. We surely can go further and faster if we resort to this new strategy of

¹ All these studies and many more can be consulted at the Programme and Abstracts book, available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10316/23563>

communication. It creates an open line for interaction between the organizers and the target audience. Consequently, the choice of two foreign languages (English and Spanish) as part of the set of official languages of this meeting, most certainly contributed for such an expressive participation of people from all around the world. Also, the appellative design of the disclosure poster, in addition to the quality and variety of all poster and oral

communications, turned out to be crucial factors for the success of this event. Moreover, the reputation of the University of Coimbra, our distinguished host, and the professionalism that characterizes the Department of Life Sciences, as well as, of course, our beautiful and sunny country were, by themselves, effective invitations to attend this meeting.



Figure 2 - Participants of the I BAM at the Department of Life Sciences. May 31st

Summing to the event itself, we had the chance to introduce a post meeting short course in infectious diseases, with a practical component. This workshop was conducted by Professor Keith Manchester, who gently offered to share his knowledge on the theme with those with a special interest in this field.

Overall, we think that the I BAM, not only achieved all the goals that were established

at the beginning, but also exceeded our expectations. This meeting was essentially organized by students for students, to show that it is possible to practice Bioanthropology in a wide variety of manners. Nevertheless, it was not always an easy process and it took us nearly a year to make it happen. We had to deal with frustrations and deception, especially when trying to obtain funding for

the development and progression of this project. Most of the answers to our requests kept reminding us that we live in a country that is currently going through a severe economic crisis. However, last but not the least, it is important to mention that this was a fruitful experience for all of us, not only at the academic level, but also at the personal one. Seeing our project becoming real made us very pleased. We may definitely say that it was totally worth it and we would like to do it all over again, very gladly. Hopefully, we will, at the II Bioanthropological Meeting, in 2015.

Acknowledgements

As the organizing committee of this event, we could not pass this opportunity to address our acknowledgements to a few special people or entities that worked aside us in order to make this event the best it could be. First of all, we would like to thank to CIAS and GEEvH, who helped us in every possible way. We would also like to acknowledge to the Faculty of Sciences and Technology and to

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Bibliografia

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