

## Iconographic approaches to the study of musculoskeletal stress markers

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Poster

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Reconstruction of past human lifestyles represents an enormous challenge since human behaviour does not fossilize. Nevertheless, a profound gap remains between the type of bone lesion observed and the biomechanical stress produced by human movements. As a result, a biocultural approach that joins the biological information obtained from the skeleton with historical and ethnographic information has been proposed (Robb, 1994). In this perspective involving the ethnographic study of material culture, iconographic portrayals and written documents are significant sources for the interpretation of everyday activities. The aim of this work is to consider the usefulness of iconographic collections in the difficult task of understanding the musculoskeletal effects of occupation in past populations. Starting from a corpus of artefacts from Africa representing fishing and hunting activities and stored at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Coimbra, certain hypotheses can be addressed: Is it possible to infer the precise body posture and movements? What kind of information can we obtain about sexual labour division? Is it possible to evaluate the effects of those behaviours over the musculoskeletal apparatus? What are the advantages and drawbacks of this analysis, namely applying information from one region and chronology to a different one? Although there are serious interpretative limitations in the absence of a biological record, we can assume that these activities must have imposed some biomechanical constraints in the iconographical groups represented. After all, the study of material culture can give some clues in the study of MSM.

**Key Words:** biocultural approach; material culture; physical stress; fishing and hunting

Robb, J. 1994. Skeletal signs of activity in the Italian metal ages: methodological and interpretative notes. *Human Evolution*, 9: 215-229.