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DIVERSITY, COMMUNITY FORMATION, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL CARPATHIAN BASIN - ARE WE THERE YET?

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It has long been acknowledged that the Carpathian Basin has a great potential in the understanding of the various aspects of transformation during the Early Middle Ages. Due to its geographical position, this territory was a hotspot of changes: communities with diverse backgrounds – the late Roman population and the manifold newly arrived groups of people – created here a fusion of cultures, lifestyles, social models, and probably languages. In the last decade, a growing number of studies have used bioarchaeological tools to better understand the population histories and mobilities in the addressed period. Genetic data has informed about the heterogeneity of populations, multi-isotope analyses have shed light on mobility, migration, and diet, and physical anthropology has provided clues about general health and lifestyles. However, key aspects of the question – how these heterogeneous, probably multi-lingual people, who practised diverse lifestyles formed communities? – have remained unrevealed. The reconstructed diet profiles indicated diverse strategies containing elements of both pastoral and sedentary lifestyles. This paper argues that the processes of community formation – the survival strategies, lifestyles, and social organisation – of these heterogeneous communities cannot be understood without the careful examination of contemporary settlements and their natural environments. The choices of settling places, the use of local resources, the layouts of settlements, the organisation of productive tasks, the crop and animal husbandry strategies, and storage systems are crucial elements of the formation, survival, and ultimately success of a community. Aiming for a deeper understanding of the diversity in the period, this paper proposes a pilot methodological framework, which integrates various disciplines – bioarchaeological evidence on population history, general health, and diet, archaeological data on settlements and cemeteries, environmental data, and historical information – and demonstrates their application through various case studies from the early medieval Carpathian Basin and beyond.

Keywords

early medieval Europe, diversity, community formation, social structures, lifestyles, interdisciplinary approach

Note/comment