

CHILDHOOD OF THE AVARS AND GEPIDS: RECONSTRUCTING DIET AND WEANING PRACTICES USING STABLE ISOTOPIC ANALYSIS AND MULTIPLE TISSUES

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This presentation explores the breastfeeding, weaning and overall dietary practices in non-adults of Avar and Gepidic period populations in the Great Hungarian Plain during the Migration Period (5th-8th century). This research investigated hypothesis that breastfeeding and weaning practices (BWPs) differed between Avar and Gepid populations due variation in overall subsistence practices and general cultural practices. Bone collagen samples from 131 individuals (60 non-adults) from five sites (Berettyóújfalu, Tiszapüspöki, Tiszabura, Rákóczi-falva sites 8 and 8/A), were analyzed for nitrogen and carbon stable isotopes. Collagen samples from non-adults were assessed using a Bayesian model called WARN. First permanent molars were also samples from 37 (16 adults, 21 non-adults) individuals across the five sites with tooth dentine incrementally sampled to analyze for nitrogen and carbon isotopic values. No significant differences in isotopic values from bulk collagen analysis was found between adults and non-adults at each of the sites analyzed, apart from breastfeeding or weaning non-adults. BWPs patterns drawn from the stable isotope data and the WARN program revealed no specific similarities between sites or populations. Incremental sampling of the first molars also suggests no specific patterns of BWPs within populations, as each site analyzed revealed different BWPs.

With no clear BWPs within the populations and a generally similar diet, it is suggested through the lens of life course theory that cultural practices, generational cohort differences and agency are responsible for variations in BWPs within the sites and populations. Additionally, the dietary practices found in non-adults paired with other archaeological evidence offer indications of the roles non-adults played in Avar and Gepid society.

Keywords

bioarchaeology, breastfeeding and weaning, stable isotopic analysis, Migration Period, Childhood

Note/comment