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## Zooarchaeological analyses in the Roman Durrës amphitheatre (Albany)

### *Indagini archeozoologiche presso l'anfiteatro romano di Durazzo (Albania)*

Summary - This paper deals with the zooarchaeological analysis on the sample coming from the Medieval phases of the amphitheatre of Durrës (Albany), mainly from the famous building (*palatium*) dating from the 13th to the 14th century. People used domestic animals for diet, above all sheep/goat and pigs. Although the percentages of wild animals are low, the presence of some remains belonging to auroch, that is a rare find among the wild animal remains from other contemporary sites, is of particular interest.

Riassunto - Le analisi archeozoologiche sono state condotte su di un campione proveniente dagli scavi delle fasi medievali dell'anfiteatro di Durazzo (Albania), ed in particolare dalle stratigrafie relative ad un edificio (*palatium*) databile tra XIII e XIV secolo. Il gruppo umano privilegiò il consumo di animali domestici, soprattutto di pecore/capre e secondariamente di maiali. Pur essendo trascurabili le percentuali di selvatici, si segnala la presenza di alcuni resti di uro, ungulato raramente attestato nei campioni faunistici coevi.

Key words: Albany, Middle Ages, farming, auroch.

Parole chiave: Albania, Medioevo, allevamento, uro.

#### **INTRODUCTION: THE FRAMEWORK AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

The Durrës amphitheatre was probably built by the emperor Trajan (98-118 A.D.), who promoted a global city development. The monument was properly used as an amphitheatre just until the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. An important seismic event around 346 A.D. probably contributed strongly to the abandonment. It is not clear whether after it was used for shows, the monument has been reused for defensive reasons between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century, when the Byzantine walls were built very close and partially superimposed to the external façade of the amphitheatre. As far as the urban position is concerned, the amphitheatre is placed in the south-west area of the ancient city and south-east of the hill that dominates the town.

The excavations were never extended to the whole amphitheatre area and started again in 2003 within the "Durrës Project", an International Cooperation Agreement for the safeguard of the archaeological heritage of Durrës (director prof. Sara Santoro).

In the southeastern area of the excavation a building (*palatium*) formed by massive outside walls was partially shown. The main feature of this structure is that of having been inhabited and rebuilt continuously up today, with the progressive rebuilding of the walls together with beaten earth floors. The chronological range of these walls and floors is clearly divided into two phases starting from the catastrophic earthquake of 1270 followed by a phase of "reconstruction" on heap soil and the levelling of the ruins dating back to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the

beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, until the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Buora, Santoro 2003; Santoro *et al.* 2008).

#### **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This paper is a preliminary report about the *palatium* context dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century: the animal bone sample is composed of 1488 identifiable fragments.

Sheep/goats are the main resource of the human group; pigs, second species in the faunal assemblage, were also used for the human diet. The presence of the other domestic animals (dogs, cats and equines) is not related to the human consumption. The low percentages of poultry could indicate a negligible domestic economy. Wild animals are not frequent: some roe deer, deer, wild boar, hare and bird bones can be recognized (Fig. 1). It is worth noting, anyway, the presence of two auroch (*Bos primigenius*) remains: a fragment of proximal metatarsus (Bp: 68 mm) and a fragment of distal femur (Bd: 120 mm) (Fig. 2). The marine remains are negligible; among them, few mollusca such as *Cardium* and *Murex* can be found. The preliminary sheep-goat kill-off pattern was calculated on the basis of 72 mandibles and single teeth after Payne 1973. The sheep/goats breeding was practiced for meat and wool production: the animals were mostly killed into the fourth year of their life when they came to maturity. The low presence of young individuals demonstrates the irrelevant interest in milk and dairy products (Fig. 3). The pigs were specially butchered into the second year of their life when it was convenient to kill them to have a good quantity of meat and fat compared

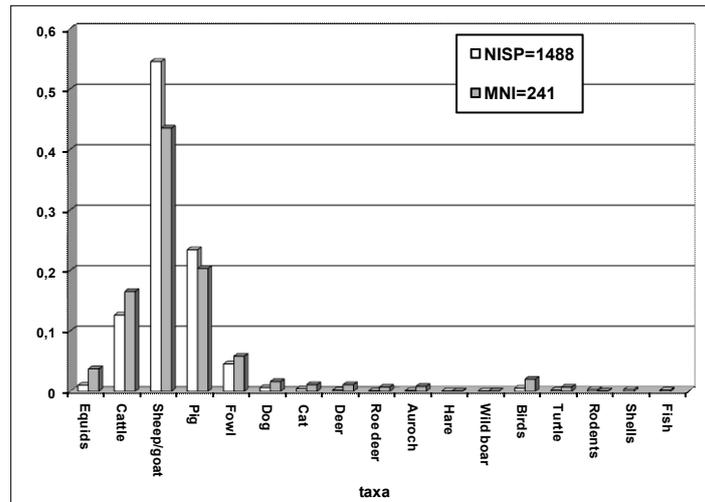


Fig. 1. Durrës Amphitheatre: NISP and MNI percentages of the animal species attested in the building's layers (13th-14th centuries).



Fig. 2. Durrës Amphitheatre: proximal metatarsus fragment of the auroch (13th-14th centuries).

to the costs of keeping (after Bull, Payne 1982). The cattle were kept for agricultural needs: few individuals were killed before three years life, probably to obtain meat.

A.B.

## DISCUSSION

These data suggest a prevalence of domestic animals in the human diet; particularly sheep/goats were the most important resource. Their breeding was addressed to the meat supply as the mortality pattern shows. As the anatomical distribution demonstrated, the parts of the animal rich in meat, such as hindlimb and forelimb, were above all

introduced in the *palatium* (Buglione *et al.* in press). The animals were bred probably in the surrounding territory of the city and, after the butchering, they were exchanged in the urban markets. The importance of the meat supply is confirmed by the pig's data that show an intensive raising. Unlike sheep and goats, pigs were probably maintained around the area of *palatium* or it is possible that the people introduced all the animals into the settlement for slaughtering and consuming them afterwards. The wild animals and fishes were not relevant in the economy. As far as the auroch is concerned, this animal is not frequent in the European medieval bone samples (some examples are in Bartosiewicz 1997; Kysely 2005) but it often appears in some pre-Roman and Roman samples of Southern Italy (Farello 1995: 377); it disappeared in the 17<sup>th</sup> cent. (exactly in 1627) in Poland (Pyle 1994). The ungulate hunting activity can reveal remarkable skills of a high social level group. The wild faunal sample can suggest a natural habitat composed of forests and surrounding open lands for the pasture of the ungulates, close to the medieval town. The data from Durrës can be compared with Stari Bar, an abandoned town in the South-Western region of Montenegro. The study by A. Pluskowski and K. Seetah (2006) shows the sheep/goats resource from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century as the most important; a high prevalence of juvenile animals suggests a raising of milk and dairy products. Unlike the Durrës context, the second more represented species were cattle: the most important pig supply could reveal a different demographic regime for the Albanian town with a stronger meat demand for the territory market.

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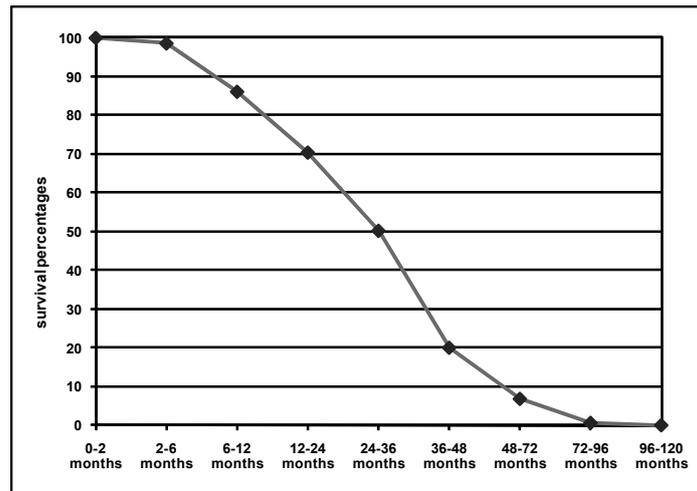


Fig. 3. Durrës Amphitheatre: mortality curve of sheep/goat (13th-14th centuries).

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