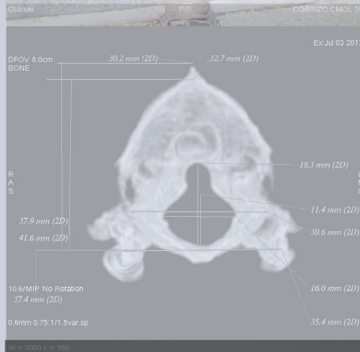


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# DOGS past & present

## 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference

**DOGS - PAST AND PRESENT -  
An interdisciplinary perspective**

**Rome, 14th-17th November, 2018**

Associazione Italiana  
di Etnoarcheologia  
Roma



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## Dogs - Poster session discussion

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### 1. TOPICS

The range of posters presented can give us an idea of the topics under main scrutiny, in the mixed parterre of this conference: in fact, both archaeozoologists, archaeologists, anthropologists and biologists have contributed to the discussion. I found it fruitful to classify the papers in terms of what appeared to me as the main topic, in order to draw some conclusions about the ongoing perceived debates.

16 posters of the Poster Session of the Conference have been reviewed, which I divided under the following main keywords:

- wild and domestic canid identification (1 poster): Blazquez Orta *et al.*;
- domestication (and symbolism and iconography) (3 posters): Bea *et al.*; Chilardi *et al.*; Di Maida *et al.*;
- symbolic behavior (funerary and underworld rituals) (2 posters and partially one with a wide perspective): Di Matteo *et al.*; Giardino & Zappatore; partially Alhaique *et al.*;
- symbolic behavior (not clearly funerary, maybe sacrificial) (3 posters and partially one with a wide perspective): Alhaique alone; Bauer *et al.*; Bertolini & Thun; partially Alhaique *et al.*;
- human-dog association and social roles (together with breeds, iconography and symbolism) (2 posters): Andreeva & Eliseeva; Tanganelli & Masseti;
- dogs' breeds (4 posters): Brassard *et al.*; Gil *et al.*; Nutini & Marini; Janulardo (alone).

It is clear that the great majority of the posters focus upon, or at least include a discussion of the symbolic aspects possibly associated with dogs, both in their domestication process, in their relation with humans, and in their relevance as part of domestic or funerary rituals. Indeed, it is expected to be so in a conference with a strong archaeological focus. In fact, "The early domestication of dog and the special relationship between dogs and humans, reflected in various kinds of archaeological sites from different time periods, make the dog a unique animal species in human cultural history." (Mannermaa, Ukkonen & Viranta 2014, p. 25), and as such it is perceived by archaeologists.



## 2. METHODS

The posters make use of different methods and tools, often in combination, providing interpretive perspectives based on their integration.

Direct analysis of animal bones is obviously the basic issue. In fact, 7 papers have a central focus on palaeontological/archaeozoological analysis: Alhaique (alone); Alhaique *et al.*; Bertolini & Thun; Blazquez Orta *et al.*; Brassard *et al.*; Di Matteo *et al.*; Gil *et al.* 2 further posters include a discussion of archaeozoological data, as a relevant part of their issue: Bauer *et al.*; Chilardi *et al.*

The other main method applied is iconography of canids'/dogs' representations. 4 papers have their central focus on it: Bea *et al.*; Di Maida *et al.*; Tanganelli & Masseti; and Nutini & Marini. 4 other papers made some use of it, in combination with other methods: Andreeva & Eliseeva; Alhaique *et al.*; Chilardi *et al.*; Giardino & Zappatore.

3 posters, studying later periods, make use of historical sources, either epigraphic or textual/literature ones: first of all Andreeva & Eliseeva; and somehow Alhaique *et al.* and Giardino & Zappatore.

Ethnoarchaeological, ethnographical or anthropological perspectives are used by 3 posters: Janulardo (alone) is mainly focused on them, while Chilardi *et al.* and Giardino & Zappatore make a rather sketchy use of these perspectives as *longue durée* factors.

Contextual analysis is also important for a number of papers, maybe less than one would expect, given the high relevance generally attributed to the context in recent archaeological research, as a key to specific behaviors and meanings. Alhaique (alone) and Alhaique *et al.* both frame interpretation in the wider general contextual analysis of the excavated site; Chilardi *et al.* and Di Matteo *et al.* refer to the associations in a constricted deposit (resp. a cave and an underground artificial chamber).

Another peculiar analysis, targeting a micro-context is in Bauer *et al.*, where CT-scan was used for an analysis of the position of bone and ivory fragments inside the skull of a dog or wolf in the Upper Palaeolithic context of Předmostí. The interesting analysis doesn't anyway seem to have solved all the problems of contextual formation processes, and the interpretation of the micro-context is left widely open.

## 3. CONCLUSIONS

As a matter of fact, like in this last discussed paper, in many cases the final remarks are left rather open-ended as well. The discussion of symbolic aspects, so relevant as we undelined above, and the remarks of special relations between humans and dogs are rarely defined in a more precise way. This is probably a consequence also of the present day perspective of archaeological research, where, after the post-processual wave, multi-faceted and non-unilinear and "non-dominant" interpretations are preferred, as we appreciate the complexity of human societies. Anyway, this leaves sometimes a reader uncertain whether he is simply facing a rhetorical understatement/suspension of judgement or an effective convincement of the author(s).

In the end, it is clear that after this poster session we get a view of human-dog relations as deep and relevant, and also symbolically constructed, but more thorough contextual analysis and structured reasoning could maybe bring to more clear and insightful interpretations of the different cases.

## 4. ADDENDUM: DOGS, HUMANS AND THE SPECIES CONCEPT(S)

The incredibly profound and long-lasting relation of humans and canids/dogs has been highlighted recently, as scholars started speaking of co-evolution of humans and dogs (e.g. Schleidt & Shalter 2003; Shipman 2010; Wang *et al.* 2013; Nagasawa *et al.* 2015). But there is also another impressive aspect of dogs and canids, that has

not been discussed in the present poster session, and probably in the conference: the relevance of canids for a discussion of the species concept, which is interesting also for recent debates on human evolution.

The point is not in the diversity of dogs' breeds, which have nothing relevant to do with human diversity, but for the fact that an impressive variety of dogs (from Great Dane to tiny Chihuahua) do effectively stay under the same species concept; the point is the impressive interbreeding capacity of different canid species. This fact compels us to reflect about the way(s) we use the concept of species, particularly for humans. It is here argued that humans would likely require a more nuanced approach to the concept of species, than simply employing it as a categorically dualistic concept: transitions, transformations and hybridizations are not to be easily understood if the concept is rigidly applied.

I would first report three quotations from Charles Darwin, because I guess that his statement still keeps its actuality.

“Nor shall I here discuss the various definitions which have been given of the term species. No one definition has as yet satisfied all naturalists; yet every naturalist knows vaguely what he means when he speaks of a species. Generally the term includes the unknown element of a distinct act of creation. The term ‘variety’ is almost equally difficult to define; but here community of descent is almost universally implied, though it can rarely be proved.” (Darwin 1859: 44).

“Many years ago, when comparing, and seeing others compare, the birds from the separate islands of the Galapagos Archipelago, both one with another, and with those from the American mainland, I was much struck how entirely vague and arbitrary is the distinction between species and varieties.” (Darwin 1859: 49).

“No clear distinction has been, or can be, drawn between species and well-marked varieties. It cannot be maintained that species when intercrossed are invariably sterile, and varieties invariably fertile.” (Darwin 1859: 481).

Every trained scholar knows that the division of species in a phylogenetic sense applies when, as just stated in Darwin's quotation, interbreeding results in fertile offsprings: in the case of -say- felids, lion (*Panthera leo*) and tiger (*Panthera tigris*) can have sterile offsprings (either tigons or ligers), while canids of genus *Canis* but different species can instead generally have fertile hybrid offsprings. This peculiar character of canids is a well-known fact (e.g. Mengel 1971, Wayne *et al.* 1997), recently also analyzed from a genetic point of view, like in the case of coyote (*Canis latrans*) and wolf (*Canis lupus*) or of golden jackal (*Canis aureus*) and domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*) (Lehman *et al.* 1991; Galov *et al.* 2015).

In fact, as Pigliucci debated in 2003, by analyzing different “species” concepts used in research: “Commonalities among species concepts are actually not difficult to find [...] there are broadly speaking only three factors entering into the equation [for the definition of species]: phylogenetic relationships, genetic continuity (sometimes specifically concerned with reproductive traits, sometimes more broadly defined) or similarity, and ecological similarities, broadly construed. [...] There are, it seems, more commonalities among the various species concepts than one might at first suspect.” (Pigliucci 2003: 597-598).

In the case of humans, the interpretation of genetic results recently changed drastically in perspective, widening our views, but with a background noise of thought still centered on the peculiarity/superiority of Anatomically Modern Humans (AMH), independently of their hybridization processes with other humans.

Analyses based on mtDNA had been forced to assume that AMH were drastically separated from Neanderthals (Krings *et al.* 1997) – and by extension the same should have applied to all other humans roaming around the world in the last 200 ky. Instead, since 2010 genetic data, based on the whole genome, recognized the effective repeated interbreeding episodes that took place between different purported human species (Green *et al.* 2010; Reich *et al.* 2010; Yotova *et al.* 2011). Recent research has furthermore brought on the humans' scene a much wider variability (Denisovans, Flores and Luzon humans, other more?). Even if this wider familiarity of

humans has been now acquired, the popular interpretation of the evolutionary success of AMH results in a behavioral or biological superiority, even beyond the data themselves.

The general problem is that any concept we use, we generally adopt a much too essentialist position, where we are generally brought to assume a rather drastic mechanism of mutation as a trigger to speciation. This may have something to do with an unnecessary search for unicity of humanity, an attitude that can easily slip into racist attitudes concerning AMH and other humans. Instead, it is my opinion that the dogs' case helps us thinking that we should approach the human species (and more generally the species) problem with a different, population approach, in which all humans (probably since the spread of *H. ergaster/erectus*, but almost certainly of *H. heidelbergensis*) can be considered as basically a single pool of genetic and behavioral traits. Therefore, differentiations in single species (or sub-species), whether having significance in terms of morphological, genetic or ecological variability, should not be aprioristically assumed as drastic divides (Gibbons 2011). This seems to me another intellectual gain helped by our pleasant pard the dog/wolf/canid.

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