



PLAGUE IN MARSEILLE

The fourth Meeting of the International Congresses on the Evolution and Palaeoepidemiology of Infectious Diseases (ICEPID 4) was organized under the title "Plague Epidemics and Societies" by the Anthropological Unit of the Medical Faculty of Marseille, Mediterranean University, in Marseille on July 23–26, 2001. Its president was the Honorary Professor of Pasteur Institute Henri Hubert Mollaret. Its main organizers were Michel Signoli, Dominique Chevé, Olivier Dutour and Gilles Boetsch who have to be appreciated for their excellent achievements.

While the former three meetings were devoted to syphilis (Toulon 1993), tuberculosis (Szegeed 1997) and lepra (Bradford 1999), the fourth one, dedicated to plague, was arranged in Marseille which witnessed the last and most severe wave of plague epidemic in Europe in 1720–22. Moreover, in 1993 a plague cemetery was found in the locality called Observance in the oldest part of the city and examined by a team from the Anthropological Unit, mainly by M. Signoli and O. Dutour. A film by CNRS on this project was projected to the participants in the meeting during an excursion to the Old Charity hospice on July 25 and several oral and poster presentations of results of that project and a similar one in nearby towns of Martigues and Fédons (Lambesc) were presented in several oral and poster communications.

The meeting took place in the large propedeutic auditory of the Medical Faculty of Marseille in which its 150–200 participants and interested visitors could easily gather. The topic of "plague" was divided into five themes, viz. History of the disease and its treatment, Archaeological and biological data, Historical and demographic data, Epidemiology and microbiology and Representations of the epidemic.

The participants and their scientific contributions were multidisciplinary in the widest sense. There were historians, historians of medicine, archivists, historical demographers, archaeologists, physical anthropologists, microbiologists, epidemiologists and several other medical specialists. A panel devoted to discussion on the two first pandemics: their evolutionary, demic and zootic patterns and the causes of their disappearances, was attended by specialists in rodent archaeology and ecology, microbiology and epidemiology of *Yersinia pestis*, biology of the fleas, demography, palaeodemography, palaeoepidemiology and palaeomicrobiology.

Active participants came from 17 countries, mostly from France, followed by the USA, UK, Italy, Germany and Russia, the remaining ones from other countries. Not only countries in which plague remains an unpleasant historical medical souvenir were represented, but also a few countries of the Third World as Madagascar or Vietnam in which fight against its endemic occurrence remains still a vivid medical problem. From the 63 oral papers listed in the programme about 57 were presented, from 33 announced posters about 26 were shown and commented during the poster sessions. Thus the theme could be elucidated by different scientific approaches and from a wide geographic perspective. The only deficit was the absence of scientists from African and other Asian countries.

The scientific programme was enriched by a lecture on human evolution, presented by the President of the ICEPID Professor Yves Coppens.

As from the previous ICEPID meetings, the publication of a monograph containing all oral and poster presentation is intended for 2002.

Eugen Strouhal

THE WORLD OF ELEPHANTS – LA TERRA DEGLI ELEPHANTI. FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS, ROME, OCT. 16–20, 2001

Compared to the more specialized and topical meetings on mammoth sites (Lawrence, Kansas 1998) and mammoths (Amsterdam 1999), the congress on elephants held in Rome, 2001, opened broader temporal and topical perspectives. This meeting took place at "La Sapienza" University and it was organized by G. Cavarretta, P. Gioia, M. Mussi, and M. R. Palombo. Its scope started with the Pliocene period and followed the various patterns of elephant – human interactions until the early historical times. The individual sessions focused on sites with elephant remains in the Roman area (chaired by G. Cavarretta and M. Piperno), Pliocene and Lower Pleistocene proboscidean sites (P. Tassy and N. J. Conard), Middle Pleistocene proboscidean sites (T. van Kolfschoten and J. Svoboda), Upper Pleistocene elephants, mammoths and mastodonts (A. N. Tikhonov, L. A. Iakovleva, L. D. Agenbrood, and J. Cinq-Mars), and elephants in collective imagery until the early historical times (A. Sommella Mura).

In addition, specialized workshops analysed the use of Proboscidean materials in everyday Palaeolithic life (organized by S. Gaudzinski and E. Turner), stone tools and elephant remains in the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic of Iberia (M. Santonja, A. Pérez-González, and P. Villa), methodological advances and issues (A. Longinelli and M. Barbieri), origin and evolution of the *Elephantidae* (J. Shoshani), dwarf elephants (A. Lister), megalofauna extinctions (A. J. Stuart), the defence of endangered elephant species (E. Morgante), and ivory utilisation during the Bronze Age in Italy (L. Vagnetti, M. Bettelli, and I. Damiani). The papers presented in the sessions and workshops were accompanied by numerous posters.

Several sites and site-museums with elephant and human remains, mostly of Middle Pleistocene age, have been visited in the nearby area of Rome: Casal de'Pazzi, La Polledrara, Torre in Pietra, etc. Especially La Polledrara site offered the participants a magnificent view of a huge elephant bone accumulation.

In interpreting such bone deposits as natural and/or human-influenced, it seems that palaeontologists and archaeologists faced similar methodological problems at both Middle and Upper Pleistocene sites. This concerned the discussions on Lower and Middle Palaeolithic elephant sites in Italy and Spain, but also the considerably later Palaeolithic mammoth bone accumulations found in Siberia, Ukraine, Czech Republic and Poland, in Upper Palaeolithic cultural contexts. Although a large number of additional analyses have recently been realised at these sites and materials, some authors, after decades of previous discussions about the role of natural and cultural impacts, preferred careful phrases in their final statements and conclusions.

This first international congress will be followed by future meetings, and the issue, together with the other problems and topics raised in Rome, will certainly be continuously discussed.

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