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Equids in Time and Space
Papers in Honour of Véra Eisenmann



*Véra Eisenmann, 2006, in the Palaeontology Gallery of the Natural History Museum, Paris
(photo by Mahvash Mehramouz)*

*Proceedings of the 9th Conference of the International Council
of Archaeozoology, Durham, August 2002*

Series Editors: Umberto Albarella, Keith Dobney and Peter Rowley-Conwy

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Edited by
Marjan Mashkour

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Preface

Umberto Albarella, Keith Dobney and Peter Rowley-Conwy

This book is one of several volumes which form the published proceedings of the 9th meeting of the International Council of Archaeozoology (ICAZ), which was held in Durham (UK) 23rd–28th August 2002. ICAZ was founded in the early '70s and has ever since acted as the main international organisation for the study of animal remains from archaeological sites. The main international conferences are held every four years, and the Durham meeting – the largest ever – follows those in Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, England (London), France, USA, Germany and Canada. The next meeting will be held in Mexico in 2006. The Durham conference – which was attended by about 500 delegates from 46 countries – was organised in 23 thematic sessions, which attracted, in addition to zooarchaeologists, scholars from related disciplines such as palaeoanthropology, archaeobotany, bone chemistry, genetics, mainstream archaeology etc.

The publication structure reflects that of the conference, each volume dealing with a different topic, be it methodological, ecological, palaeoeconomic, sociological, historical or anthropological (or a combination of these). This organisation by theme rather than by chronology or region, was chosen for two main reasons. The first is that we wanted to take the opportunity presented by such a large gathering of researchers from across the world to encourage international communication, and we thought that this could more easily be achieved through themes with world-wide relevance. The second is that we thought that, by tackling broad questions, zooarchaeologists would be more inclined to take a holistic approach and integrate their information with other sources of evidence. This also had the potential of attracting other specialists who shared an interest in that particular topic. We believe that our choice turned out to be correct for the conference, and helped substantially towards its success. For the publication there is the added benefit of having a series of volumes that will be of interest far beyond the restricted circle of specialists on faunal remains. Readers from many different backgrounds, ranging from history to zoology,

will certainly be interested in many of the fourteen volumes that will be published.

Due to the large number of sessions it would have been impractical to publish each as a separate volume, so some that had a common theme have been combined. Far from losing their main thematic focus, these volumes have the potential to attract a particularly wide and diverse readership. Because of these combinations (and because two other sessions will be published outside this series) it was therefore possible to reduce the original 24 sessions to 14 volumes. Publication of such a series is a remarkable undertaking, and we are very grateful to David Brown and Oxbow Books for agreeing to produce the volumes.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the University of Durham and the ICAZ Executive Committee for their support during the preparation of the conference, and all session organisers – now book editors – for all their hard work. Some of the conference administrative costs were covered by a generous grant provided by the British Academy. Further financial help came from the following sources: English Heritage, Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek (ROB), County Durham Development Office, University College Durham, Palaeoecology Research Services, Northern Archaeological Associates, Archaeological Services University of Durham (ASUD), and NYS Corporate Travel. Finally we are extremely grateful for the continued support of the Wellcome Trust and Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) who, through their provision of Research Fellowships for Keith Dobney and Umberto Albarella, enabled us to undertake such a challenge.

If dogs are our earliest companions and cattle, sheep, goat and pigs the species that revolutionised the way we procure our food, there is little doubt that equids, and horses in particular, have had the most profound effect on human mobility and warfare. Wild horses – now almost completely extirpated from the face of the earth – represented an essential prey for many Palaeolithic cultures, but it is probably the domestic horse that has had the

greatest impact on human history. The domestication of the horse represents a particularly controversial issue in zooarchaeology, with various claims and counter-claims about identification criteria and likely areas of origins raised over the years. Whenever, wherever and however horses and donkeys were domesticated, this certainly occurred later than for other animal species. In turn, domestic equids became important cultural markers and in some cases even status symbols; in Europe, the appearance of the domestic horse has been taken to represent the arrival of new people or at least the emergence of new links with eastern populations. The history of equids is associated with the history of human movement, trade and exchange in later prehistory, and this is why the relation between people and horses, more so than for any other species, is widely regarded as an issue of general archaeological, and not simply zooarchaeological, interest. To identify truly domestic horses and donkeys it is vital to understand the history of their wild ancestors and their eventual disappearance from various areas of the globe. It is also essential that sound methods are devised to tackle that most intractable of zooarchaeological problems – the separation of wild and domestic forms and of various equid species (including their hybrids). If in Europe the only native equid species are represented by the horse and the enigmatic and now extinct ‘hydruntinus’, several species live and lived in the Asian steppes, making the identification of equid bones a real problem for zooarchaeologists working in those areas.

The archaeological investigation of the history of the human-equid relationship is, therefore, complex, diverse and fascinating – and the ideal subject for an ICAZ session and a book of the series. All subjects mentioned above are discussed or at least touched upon in this volume. There are methodological as well as historical chapters dealing with problems ranging from the earliest purported evidence for domestication, to the role of horses in the classical periods; the geographic scope is also vast, spanning Portugal to China, and Siberia to Africa. Marjan Mashkour did an excellent job in drawing on many experts in the field and in assembling such a complete and diverse range of topics. Marjan dedicated the session and the book to a scholar who, probably more than anyone else, has contributed to the advance of the research into the history of equids – Vera Eisenmann.

This session was held on the last day of the ICAZ conference in Durham, and so the celebration for Vera – supported by an excellent choice of French wine tasting – overlapped with our final get-together for the conference and eventually all parties re-united in a very English visit to the pub. This book is a testimony to the excellence of current archaeological research into equids, Marjan’s hard work, Vera’s remarkable career, and the good time that we all had together. But finally, it is a testimony to one of the most remarkable animals ever to have thrown in its lot with mankind.