



Injured, maimed, and impaired: Female experiences of physical impairment and disability in medieval Scotland

Abstract

Within medieval society, perceptions of disability and able-bodiedness were largely based on the extent to which an individual was able to perform the socially-defined duties that they were expected to undertake. As such, many variables affected the social assignment of disability including; status, age and gender. The aim of this research is to explore how chronic physical impairment, both acquired and congenital in nature, impacted the lives of medieval Scottish women. Through a series of case studies, this paper reconstructs the lived experiences of three medieval women with acquired and congenital impairments including: severe scoliosis, bilateral hip dysplasia and an antemortem pelvic ring fracture. The human skeletal remains were macroscopically examined, and biomechanical data was derived from micro-computed tomography. When historically contextualised and interpreted through the lenses of the 'bioarcheology of care' framework, the unique care requirements for each individual are discussed, as are the physical and social consequences of living with a physical impairment during the medieval period. This research highlights the heterogeneity in the lived experiences of women with physical impairments which contributes to the ongoing discussion about care provision and social constructions of disability within the rigidly constructed gender roles of medieval society.

Professor Marc Oxenham is a British Academy Global Professor at the University of Aberdeen (2020-2024) and Professor in Biological Anthropology at the Australian National University.

Details

4pm AEST, Thursday 19 May 2022

Attend in Person:

Room 4.69, RSSS Building, ANU Acton Campus

Register for a Zoom Link:

<https://tinyurl.com/2j8xd4zw>

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