

1989 DENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY SESSIONS AND SYMPOSIA

As usual, the DAA meeting and symposia will be part of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA) meetings on April 5-8, 1989. Our very conscientious program chair, Gloria y'Edynak, has managed to get an advance schedule of symposia of interest to the DAA membership. On April 6, 1989 the DAA will sponsor a full day consisting of two symposia. The morning session presents 12 speakers on "Primate Tooth Formation" organized by Dr. Daris Swindler. The afternoon session offers 8 papers and a distinguished panel of discussants who will deal with "The Genetic and Environmental Components of Tooth size and Morphology" organized by Drs. Gloria y'Edynak and Michael Mahaney. We are proud to announce that all submitted abstracts were accepted for presentation in these symposia.

Because of Gloria's strong "lobbying" efforts, there will also be a contributed session containing 15 papers in Dental Anthropology on the afternoon of Friday, April 12th. In addition, several dental anthropology papers will be presented in the Paleopathology session on Saturday morning, April 8th. They will also appear in the Poster Sessions on skeletal biology, primate biology, and craniofacial growth. Furthermore, dental topics will be included in the Paleontology sessions, which Mike Little indicates will dominate the AAPA program this year.

The annual DAA business meeting will be held from 5:00-6:00 PM April 6th following the DAA sponsored afternoon session. The entire dental program will be published in the next issue of DAN.

COMMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

At last year's meetings we discussed the idea of collecting teeth with dental defects of various types and varieties in order to construct a standard. This project is now underway with Alan Goodman in charge of casting teeth for possible inclusion. If you have specimens that you feel could be used to illustrate a type or severity of defect then please, if possible, send them to Alan Goodman, Box NS, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA 01002.

TABOO TEETH IN YORUBA CULTURE

Among the Yoruba, an ethnic group of people found mainly in the West African sub-region (especially in Western Nigeria), certain tradocultural beliefs persist of witches as causes of misfortune believed to afflict human society. Since witches are believed by them to manifest themselves on earth at birth or shortly thereafter. Children born under such circumstances were believed to bring disaster, illness or death to the families into which they were born. They were apprehended as witches and dealt with accordingly.

Certain signs prominently ascribed to these "newborn witches" include the presence of natal teeth and the incidence of maxillary teeth commencing eruption of the deciduous dentition. Other signs are breech birth, eighth month or later parturition and an extra digit (six fingers or toes).

In the past, babies with such signs at birth or during teething were customarily killed or abandoned to die from exposure and starvation. Their families were sometimes not spared, some were stoned dead with their babies, while the few luckier ones were ostracized from the society, banished forever to the jungles.

More recently, purification rituals and/or animal sacrifices continue, even now, to be performed in certain parts of Yorubaland. Sometimes, mothers (very rarely, fathers) present such newborn babies at Dental Centres where they demand invariably that the "offending" teeth be extracted.

While I respond favorably to their requests with regards to natal teeth (since most make breast feeding traumatic and painful), I reassure parents of children erupting maxillary teeth first, warning them of the unfavorable sequelae (e.g., malocclusion, etc.) that can result from unnecessary extraction.

This therapy is sometimes taken with grudging silence, and a follow-up of ten such cases showed two infant deaths resulting from subsequent secret extractions by quacks - native doctors "babalawos" or even blacksmiths - under the most unbelievably septic conditions. Unfortunately, such deaths are unintentional, but avoidable.

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DAA BUSINESS

We encourage the membership to contribute not only to DAN, but also to contact the appropriate executive Board member with any suggestions or questions you might have. They can be reached as follows:

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