

INTERGROUP OSTEOMETRIC VARIATION IN THE GRECO-ROMAN POPULATION OF FAYUM OASIS, EGYPT

The Deir el-Banat necropolis in the Fayum Oasis (Egypt) was in use from the Ptolemaic era (3rd century BC) to the Arab Fatimids (10th–12th centuries AD). Active Greek settlement of the oasis began under the early Ptolemies: land grants were primarily given to retired clerukh warriors, who formed the backbone of the army and interbred with the local Egyptian population. During the Greco-Roman period (roughly 4th century BC — 4th century AD), burial practices shifted from complex mummifications in anthropomorphic sarcophagi to simpler burials, but the material culture remained rich and diverse, indicating social and ethnic mixing. This study tests this hypothesis using postcranial material. Fourteen male and fourteen female skeletons from this necropolis were examined; massiveness indices (diaphyseal circumference to length ratio) and section indices (platolenia, platimeria, pilastry, and platycnemia) were calculated for the long limb bones. It was found that the male bones were predominantly moderately massive or massive, while the female bones were predominantly gracile, with significant variability observed within each group for various indices. The cross-sectional shape was also heterogeneous: the radii and ulnae were all strongly flattened, the femurs were sagittally flattened in the upper portion and narrowed in the middle with a frequent well-developed pilaster, and the tibiae were narrowed in the middle portion but expanded above (eurycnemia). The obtained osteometric data are fully consistent with the craniological data: a robust skeleton is more often associated with mesocranial skulls, while a gracile skeleton is more often associated with dolichocranial skulls. Consequently, the population of the Fayum oasis during the Greco-Roman period was not homogeneous; it was a mixed population, where the incoming Greeks apparently had a more robust build and were more often buried in “rich” sarcophagi, while the women, even in such prestigious burials, retained gracile features, which may indicate their local (Egyptian) origin, perhaps as the wives of colonists. The results support the hypothesis of miscegenation and socio-ethnic stratification in the Fayum during this era.

Keywords: *Ancient Egypt, biological anthropology, osteometry, bone strength, skeletal massiveness, gracility, long limb bones, section index, platolenia, platimeria, pilastry, platycnemia*

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