

A system for coded description of skeletons from archaeological excavations

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A system is proposed for numeric description of the positions of the most important human bones. The numeric code is not identical with the position of the buried individual. The code fixes the present position of the skeleton, i.e. it plays a descriptive function whereas the position determination has an interpretative nature. The record is performed in twelve articles. Nine of these (I-IX) are basic and the last three (X-XII) are additional. Each basic article corresponds to the position of a basic skeleton element:

I - of the torso in relation to the horizontal plane on which it lies;

II - of the right thighbone in relation to the backbone;

III - of the right shank in relation to the thighbone;

IV - of the left thighbone in relation to the backbone;

V - of the left shank in relation to the thighbone;

VI - of the right shoulder bone in relation to the backbone;

VII - of the right forearm in relation to the shoulder bone;

VIII - of the left shoulder bone in relation to the backbone;

IX - of the left forearm in relation to the

shoulder bone;

The position of the bones in relation to one another is recorded clockwise on a horizontal plane. Eight positions, through 45° , are determined in the circumference obtained. Numbers 1 to 8 correspond to these positions (Fig. 1). The position of the skeleton laying back with stretched arms and legs parallel to the backbone (position 1) is assumed as initial position. A 45° deviation is recorded as position 2, a 90° deviation as position 3, etc. If necessary, the angle at which the position of each skeleton element is recorded can be decreased thus increasing the accuracy of description. Number 9 designates cases of anatomical disturbance and 0 marks the absence of the respective bone.

Besides the nine basic positions, three additional ones are identified, from X to XII. They present information adding to the overall picture of skeleton condition; skull and backbone position as well as certain details in the limbs position in relation to each other that are relevant for clarifying and recording the postures of the buried. The data in the three additional positions can change for each cemetery depending on the particular situation.

Examples are given of the application of the code concerning both data recording and its decoding.