



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2005

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### H32 Forensic Anthropologist and Forensic Pathologist: Why Work Together? Some Illustrative Cases of Homicide

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation for the resolution of current forensic cases involving bodies in various states of preservation.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by showing the experience of two European countries in this field.

It is well known that while the forensic pathologist mainly deals with fresh cadavers, the forensic anthropologist “prefers” skeletonized remains. Yet, very often, bodies present an array of preservational states which fall in between these two extremes. In all such situations, from putrefied to skeletonized remains, the presence of both experts should be mandatory. In order to construct accurate biological profiles and, particularly, to interpret traumatic injuries to the skeleton, both anthropological and pathological expertise are crucial from the crime scene, where retrieval of every bone and tooth is significant, to the actual autopsy.

Four homicide cases are discussed, two performed at the Portuguese National Institute of Forensic Medicine and two cases from the Institute of Legal Medicine in Milano, which emphasize the need for interdisciplinarity to increase the frequency of successful cases.

In one case, a routine autopsy of a partially skeletonized body found at a residence revealed apparent perimortem blunt force trauma to the skull. It was concluded that this injury was the cause of death. This led to the conviction of a suspect. A second case involved a suspected gunshot wound to the head. In this case, an examination of the nearly skeletonized remains was conducted five years after the initial incident and revealed concentric and radiating fractures involving the parietal and temporal bones. Although a gunshot wound could not be excluded as the cause of death, the injuries were more consistent with blunt force trauma. The third case, involving skeletal remains found in a cellar, illustrates the necessity of the anthropologist in distinguishing between very recent antemortem trauma and periostitis. Finally, the fourth case, involving a badly decomposing body, demonstrates the importance of osteological expertise in the recovery of skeletal elements at the scene.

**Skeletonized, Homicide, Interdisciplinarity**