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British  
Association of  
Biological  
Anthropology  
and  
Osteoarchaeology

CODE OF ETHICS

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BABAO Working-group for ethics and  
practice

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## 1. Preamble

As its name implies, the British Association of Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology (BABAO), is concerned with the disciplines of biological anthropology and osteoarchaeology. The Association's name is defined thus: "Physical anthropology is the study of human biology within the framework of evolution and with an emphasis on the interaction between biology and culture. This subdiscipline is also referred to as biological anthropology, and you'll find the terms used interchangeably." (Kilgore et al. 2009: 8). In Britain, professionals and students who study archaeologically derived human remains often apply the terms, osteoarchaeologist or bioarchaeologist to describe themselves and their professional activities (Buikstra 1977; Knüsel 2010; Roberts 2009: 5-6, 2010). Osteoarchaeology is generally regarded as the study of human remains from archaeological contexts, but the term is also applied to research using archaeologically derived faunal remains (Reitz and Wing 1999: 3; Roberts 2009: 5-6; Sofaer 2006: xi). BABAO seeks to advance our understanding of humans and non-human primates past and present, and views the generation, dissemination, and use of this knowledge as a valuable goal that should be undertaken in an ethical manner.

Since the study of biological anthropology and osteoarchaeology is multidisciplinary by its very nature (Turner 2005), BABAO members have interests and backgrounds that range broadly within the natural and social sciences. The researchers, teachers, and practitioners that make-up the BABAO membership are often members of many different communities, each with its own moral rules or codes of ethics, and BABAO members often have moral obligations as members of these other groups (e.g., family, religion, and community) as well as to the profession.

In an area of such complex relationships and responsibilities, it is unavoidable that misunderstandings, conflicts, and the need to make choices among apparently incompatible values will arise. It is a BABAO member's responsibility to deal with such challenges and explore avenues to resolve them. This Code and the BABAO Code of Practice will provide BABAO members with tools to engage in developing and maintaining an ethical framework for biological anthropological and osteoarchaeological work. Members should recognise that the activities they engage in may be subject to more than one code of ethics, and they should aim to familiarise themselves with those affecting their particular working practices. The purpose of this Code is to foster discussion and provide guidance for conducting work in an ethical manner. BABAO does not and will not adjudicate claims for unethical behaviour. BABAO considers that this Code may change in the future to accommodate changing needs.

## 2. Introduction

BABAO recognises that the study of humans and non-human primates from the past and in contemporary populations is a privilege and not a right, because these remains differ from all other archaeological and anthropological material and therefore, these biological remains<sup>1</sup> should always be treated with dignity and respect<sup>2</sup>. BABAO's recognition of this fundamental tenet is the basis for this Code. This Code replaces the 2008 BABAO Code of Ethics and is a direct response to the following:

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<sup>1</sup> In this document the phrase 'biological remains' is used to encompass living human and non-human primates, human and non-human primate skeletons, and other body tissue (i.e. hair).

<sup>2</sup> BABAO recognises that the professional activity of its members also extends to fossil and forensic material, and does not limit the application of this ethics statement to the study of anatomically modern human and non-human primates.

- The results of the BABAO member's opinion survey (2008) (<http://www.babao.org.uk/index/reburialissues>).
- The 2007 change by the Ministry of Justice in how it applied and interpreted burial laws in England and Wales (<http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/burial-law-policy.pdf>)
- The proposed amendment of burial legislation in England and Wales Legislative Reform Order by the Ministry of Justice (<http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/burial-law-policy.pdf>), and
- The change in the responsibility of the 'Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Christian Burials in England' (APACBE) to the newly assembled 'Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England' (APABE)

In revising the Code, the BABAO working-group (WG) reviewed many of the available ethical statements published by archaeological, anthropological, primatological and biological societies, organisations and institutions around the world. As such, the WG has drawn on 2008 BABAO Code, recent publications (e.g. Fforde et al. 2002, Walker 2008, Turner 2005, Cassman et al. 2007), guidance documents relevant to the practice of biological anthropology and osteoarchaeology in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and, in particular, the code of ethics published by the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA) (2003) and the American Anthropological Association (AAA) (2009). BABAO recognises that although its members live and work in many different countries throughout the world, it hopes that in conjunction with the BABAO Code of Practice, this Code will provide its members with a framework that will enable them to uphold their professionalism and commitment to the understanding of humanity's shared past.

BABAO is aware of the ongoing debate regarding the ethics of excavating, analysing, curating and displaying human remains. It is a complex and multifaceted debate, influenced by concerns of genealogical descendants and cultures of origins; the multi-cultural nature of modern society, modern religious and humanist philosophies; medical ethics; museological concerns; and ongoing research initiatives. BABAO wishes to engage fully with this debate and to ensure that it considers the treatment of biological remains in a way that maximises their research and educational use while being sensitive to the issues referred to above and treating them with the utmost respect.

### 3. Excavation, analysis, and further research

BABAO members involved in excavation, analysis and further research should adhere to the following:

- In both proposing and carrying out these activities, to be open about the purpose(s), potential impacts, and source(s) of support for research projects with funders, colleagues, the public and persons participating, or providing information, and with all relevant parties affected by the research;
- Endeavour to identify potential ethical difficulties when designing projects and determine how these can best be resolved following ethical codes beyond those of BABAO, where appropriate;
- Strive to maintain objectivity and integrity in the conduct of excavation, analysis and further research;
- Adhere to the highest possible ethical and technical standards in excavation, data collection, further research and publications (see Brickley and McKinley 2004; Mays et al. 2002);

- Report findings without omission of any significant data — to the best of their ability, research must disclose details of hypotheses, research designs, and materials and methods used that might influence the interpretation of their research findings;
- Endeavour to make every reasonable effort to complete the project on schedule, especially when financial support for the project has been accepted;
- Establish explicit agreements regarding the division of work, rights and responsibilities, access to data and rights of authorship at the onset of a project when several researchers, colleagues from other fields, or students are involved;
- Make their analyses and research findings available to other colleagues and the public in a timely fashion;
- Be aware of situations that may lead to a misuse of knowledge. This should be conscientiously considered before the information is made available to the public; and
- Be aware of local, national, and international laws and regulations that have bearing on professional activities (see, Marquez-Grant and Fibiger 2010).

## 4. Teaching

### 4.1. Teachers/Mentors

BABAO members who take on the role of teacher or mentor should adhere to the following:

- Seek to engage in professional development in order to improve their teaching/training skills;
- Endeavour to be fair, objective and reliable, and help students obtain support, as appropriate, for their studies or placements, counsel, and be realistic with respect to career opportunities in the discipline;
- Avoid conflicts of interest with students for whom they are responsible;
- Provide fair and honest statement of the scope and perspective of their courses and/or modules they teach, and give clear evaluations of students' performance in a fair, timely and easily accessible fashion;
- Avoid presentation of students as their own;
- Acknowledge the contribution of students in publications and act on their behalf in setting agreements regarding authorship and other recognitions, such as acknowledgements;
- Ameliorate personal animosities or intellectual differences with other colleagues that prevent student access to, and collaboration with, those colleagues.

### 4.2. Students

BABAO members who are students should adhere to the following:

- Acknowledge the time and effort teaching and mentoring involves, and understand that teachers and mentors have many commitments beyond these roles;
- Recognize the contribution of mentors in publications regarding authorship, data collection etc..., such as acknowledgements; and

- Strive to achieve a high level of professional and academic honesty and assume appropriate responsibility for their own education; this includes during their taught courses/modules and research dissertations.

## 5. Application

BABAO members should endeavour to adhere to the following guidance:

- Biological remains, particularly human remains, of any age or provenance must be treated with care and dignity.
- Recognise that human remains can be viewed differently in other countries at local, regional or national levels.
- Biological remains should only be studied or viewed for legitimate purposes, e.g. the production of human bone reports by commercial units, analysis and research in institutions.
- Biological remains should not be considered as private property.
- All applicable laws and regulations within institutions and countries regarding biological remains should be followed, and relevant guidance considered.
- Health and safety precautions must be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of researchers, students and visitors, or other collections.
- Not to traffic, sell, or illegally appropriate any type of cultural items or biological remains.
- To the best of their knowledge, members should refrain from working with or even consulting on cultural items or human remains acquired illegally<sup>3</sup>.
- All forms of study which involve sampling, particularly those concerned with destructive methodologies, should weigh the potential findings against resource availability and the amount of information that could be gained from such a study. All extant material, results, and associated documentation should be returned to the institution or individual who provided the samples for analysis.
- All research methodologies should consider the preservation and conservation of the item being studied. Remains, or parts thereof should not be destroyed in their entirety, as this would prevent the replication of the study in the future.
- Treatment and invasive methods undertaken for a particular study should not hinder future studies using different techniques.
- All results of scientific value should be published, ideally in peer reviewed publications as well as publicly accessible media (e.g., museum exhibits, non-specialized publications, and/or internet) within a reasonable time. In sensitive cases, where biological material can be demonstrated to be connected to genealogical descendants or affiliated cultural communities, these groups should be informed of the results prior to publication, if feasible.

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<sup>3</sup> BABAO recognises that within the context of repatriation, such work may have to be undertaken for the human remains to be returned to their country of origin.

- Facilities that hold biological remains should maintain archival quality copies of all records (e.g., written records, maps, raw data, results of analyses, all type of illustration ( i.e. pictures or drawings), film, tape records, or digital images).
- All those responsible for projects should ensure that outputs are properly archived with the curating institution or relevant stakeholder, and their own place of employment or study.
- Researchers should be open to all funders, colleagues, providers of information and data and relevant parties involved in their work about its purpose, potential impacts, and source(s) of support.
- Images of human remains should not be published without consultation with and permission from the curating institution or relevant stakeholder.
- In all dealings with employers: be honest about one’s qualifications, experience, capabilities, and aims.
- In employment: an employee should review the employer’s mission and strategy, and be careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions that contravene competing commitments and professional ethics.
- When providing an informed opinion: be responsible for its content and integrity when giving and explaining statements, and the foundations on which they are given; and bear a professional duty to contribute to a satisfactory definition of reality.
- Aim to ensure that the biological remains available for research are curated in adequate environmental standards to ensure their long-term survival.

## 6. Dissemination of Results

Often, the results gathered by the study of biological remains are often complex, subject to multiple interpretations, and susceptible to differing and unintended uses. BABAQ members have an ethical obligation to consider the potential impact of their research, and the communication or dissemination of the results of their research on all directly or indirectly involved.

- Researchers should acknowledge all persons who contributed to a research project and subsequent publications. In addition, claims and ordering of authorship and acknowledgement should accurately reflect contributions of all main participants in the work and its dissemination (i.e. conferences, publications, teaching, outreach and media).
- Data and material taken from another person’s published or unpublished written work should be approved in advance, and explicitly identified and referenced to its author(s), including the citations of ideas developed in the written work of others.
- Researchers should acknowledge and make public the communities, institutions, and/or individuals that supported or funded their research.
- Where applicable, images of human remains should not be published without consideration to the views of any demonstrated genealogical descendants or affiliated cultural communities.
- Copyright issues must be respected.

## 7. Epilogue

Throughout their working-lives, those studying or interested in the fields of the social and natural sciences are required to make decisions that pose ethical questions. The nature of these questions is not static but influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic events. Therefore, it is essential that decisions must be undertaken in such a way as to ensure individual and collective ethical responsibility. As no single framework will fit all circumstances or eventualities, individuals should understand that this Code has been formulated to provide general guidelines to help BABAO members in their decision making.

## 8. Acknowledgements

The BABAO code of ethics was drafted by the ethics working-group during 2009-10, who acknowledge the use of some language from the AAPA and AAA codes. The members of the working-group are Margaret Clegg, Myra Giesen, Louise Loe, Rebecca Redfern (chair), and Charlotte Roberts. The working-group wish to thank all of those who participated in the writing of the previous code, particularly Simon Mays; the incumbent BABAO Chair, Christopher Knüsel, for his help in the drafting of this document; Robert Jurmain for his assistance with terminology; past and present members of the BABAO committee; and the BABAO membership for their comments during the consultation period.

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## 10. Additional Resources

These provide an introduction to ethics in biological anthropology and osteoarchaeology

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