



Above: *The legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead: the Lisle Psalter, c.1310 AD (Gilchrist 2012: Fig 18)*

Left: *Rood Screen (c.1480-90 AD), parish church of St Mary, Sparham (Norfolk), showing two clothed cadavers (Gilchrist 2012: Fig 8)*

## Frailty, Thy Name is (not) Woman: A bioarchaeological perspective on bone loss, strength, and aging

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*5:00 – 6:15 pm*

Bioarchaeology (the study of archaeological human remains together with contextual and documentary evidence) offers a unique avenue to investigate aspects of social change and identity in the past. As a dynamic tissue that is forged by biocultural factors over the entire lifetime, the human skeleton provides a record of individual and community life history. Various aspects of adult bone health, particularly bone loss and fragility, have been examined in past populations. The focus of bone loss in the past has been on females as a “weaker sex” and interpretation has traditionally been on the signature of diminished reproductive capabilities and fragility, contrasted against the male signature of bone strength. However, empirical research on bone maintenance and bone aging in the Medieval archaeological record will be presented that show that patterns of bone loss do not constitute predictable consequences of aging or biological sex. Instead, critical examination of bioarchaeological data highlights the complex and changing processes crafting the human body over the life course, and the role of archaeological remains in revealing the biosocial worlds of our ancestors.

