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by Roberto Delle Donne

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a cura di Roberto Delle Donne

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Archaeogenetics has opened new possibilities for the study of the Early Middle Ages, while also raising important methodological and interpretative questions. Genomes, archaeological remains, and written sources address different kinds of questions and cannot simply be superimposed. This introduction explains the rationale for the dialogue developed in this section, stressing the need to integrate disciplines and different kinds of data without automatically equating genetic ancestry, material culture, and ethnicity. The discussion of Patrick J. Geary's book thus becomes an opportunity to reflect on the possibilities and limits of genuinely interdisciplinary history.

Early Middle Ages, archaeogenetics, interdisciplinarity, written sources, material culture, ethnicity, historiography.

The discussion brought together in the following pages originated with the publication of Patrick J. Geary's *Comment la génétique réécrit l'histoire du Moyen Âge* (2025). Conceived as an exchange among scholars approaching the questions raised by the book from different disciplinary perspectives, it brings together contributions by Walter Pohl, Michel Kazanski, and myself, followed by a concluding response from Patrick Geary. In autumn 2026, while this discussion was taking shape, the English edition, *Resequencing the Middle Ages through Archaeogenetics*, also appeared.

Geary's book offers an especially fruitful opportunity to reflect on the relationship between historical research and the rapidly developing study of ancient DNA. The issue is not simply that a new body of evidence has become available alongside those traditionally used by historians and archaeologists. A more fundamental methodological question is at stake: how can qualitatively different kinds of evidence – genetic data, archaeological remains, and written sources – be brought into dialogue without collapsing the distinctions between them?

The contributions that follow approach this methodological problem from deliberately different angles. Walter Pohl reflects on the experience and results of HistoGenes and on the relationship among population history, cul-

tural integration, and ethnic categorization; Michel Kazanski considers the problem from the perspective of early medieval archaeology and the possibilities – and limits – of ethnic interpretation of material remains; my own contribution places Geary's archaeogenetic work within his longer historiographical reflection on ethnicity and asks what a 'fourth trace' can add to historical inquiry.

Read together, these essays are therefore less a set of parallel reviews than a dialogue across disciplinary practices. Their purpose is not to establish a hierarchy among written, archaeological, and genomic evidence, but to clarify where these forms of evidence converge, where they remain irreducibly different, and which historical questions emerge from their comparison. Geary's response, which closes the section, takes up these points of agreement and disagreement from the perspective of the author whose work prompted the exchange.

Works cited

Geary, Patrick J. *Comment la génétique réécrit l'histoire du Moyen Âge*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2025.

Geary, Patrick J. *Resequencing the Middle Ages through Archaeogenetics: Interpreting the Past through Science and History*. Debates in Archaeology. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2026.