

Arthur C. Aufderheide

Arthur C. Aufderheide (1922 - 2013) was educated at St. Olaf College, University of Minnesota Medical School, and undertook a pathology residency at the University of Minnesota. Among his many positions, he served with the U.S. Army Medical Corps (1947-1949) and at the UMD Medical School from 1978-2009. Around this time, Art became interested in anthropology, inspired by his contact with people from traditional cultures, such as the Inuit.



Art played a key role in establishing paleopathology as a new scientific discipline, with his research interests initially focused on paleoepidemiology. He published over 100 scientific papers covering his work in various regions of the world, including the United States, Europe, China, South America, and the Middle East. His enthusiasm, remarkable work ethic, and generosity were all testament to his energetic personality. Art applied molecular biology, chemistry, immunology, imaging, parasitology, among other techniques to his analysis of skeletons, revolutionizing the technological approaches we use to better understand the origins and characteristics of disease in the past, their relationship with ecology, as well as lifestyles and culture.

Art Aufderheide published four books: "Paleopathology: Current Synthesis and Future Options" (1991: Smithsonian Press, with Don Ortner), "Encyclopedia of Human Paleopathology" (1998: CUP, with Conrado Rodríguez-Martín), a comprehensive work on diseases and paleopathology of ancient populations; "The Scientific Study of Mummies" (2003: CUP), a reference book illustrating the potential of mummy studies from a scientific and multidisciplinary perspective; and "Overmodeled Skulls" (2009), with the collaboration of various specialists, providing an update on modeled skulls distributed across different regions of the world.

As a paleopathologist, Art was particularly interested in the study of soft tissues, preserved through both natural and human actions. He pioneered the scientific analysis of Andean mummies, highlighting their importance to the heritage of that region, and was instrumental in organizing the Scientific Congress on Mummy Studies on many occasions. Art is particularly celebrated for his work on mummies, from many different locations and time periods, including ancient Egypt, Peru, Italy, and the Aleutian Islands, where he found cases of tuberculosis, leprosy, malaria, leishmaniasis, and parasitic infections. His research provided valuable insights into understanding the spread of diseases, where he used X-rays and CT-scans to examine the internal structures of mummies without damaging them. Art's work raised awareness of the importance of anthropology to public health, particularly to help prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

Since 2013, the Paleopathology Association has awarded the Art Aufderheide Award in honor of his memory, and his remarkable contributions to paleopathology in its development as a scientific discipline.

Sources:

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