

**Relations between metatarsal proximal extremity
parameters and weight and height
at the withers of the dromedary
(*Camelus dromedarius* Linnaeus, 1758)
in the Sahraoui and Targui “breeds”**

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Anthropozoologica est une revue en flux continu publiée par les Publications scientifiques du Muséum, Paris, avec le soutien du CNRS.
Anthropozoologica is a fast track journal published by the Museum Science Press, Paris, with the support of the CNRS.
Les Publications scientifiques du Muséum publient aussi / *The Museum Science Press also publish*: *Adansonia*, *Zoosystema*, *Geodiversitas*,
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Diffusion – Publications scientifiques Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle
CP 41 – 57 rue Cuvier F-75231 Paris cedex 05 (France)
Tél.: 33 (0)1 40 79 48 05 / Fax: 33 (0)1 40 79 38 40
diff.pub@mnhn.fr / <https://sciencepress.mnhn.fr>

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ISSN (imprimé / *print*): 0761-3032 / ISSN (électronique / *electronic*): 2107-08817

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Submitted on 25 August 2021 | Accepted on 25 January 2022 | Published on 5 August 2022

Babelhadj B., Thorin C., Benaissa A., Colléaux M., Guintard A., Nair R., Tékkouk-Zemmouchi F., Ridouh R., Picard C., Borvon A., Adamou A., Betti E. & Guintard C. 2022. — Relations between metatarsal proximal extremity parameters and weight and height at the withers of the dromedary (*Camelus dromedarius* Linnaeus, 1758) in the Sahraoui and Targui "breeds". *Anthropozoologica* 57 (9): 211-221. <https://doi.org/10.5252/anthropozoologica2022v57a9>. <http://anthropozoologica.co/57/9>

ABSTRACT

The metatarsal bone is one of the strongest bone in Ungulates and can provide various information about live animal. A sample of 86 metatarsal bones of 43 adult dromedaries (*Camelus dromedarius* Linnaeus, 1758) was studied. Two breeds were compared, with a total of 22 males and 21 females, organised in four groups: 13 Sahraoui females, 14 Sahraoui males, nine Targui females and seven Targui males. Prior to the osteometric study, biometric parameters (body weight [BW] and height at the withers [HW]) were measured. For each bone, the area of the proximal articular surface was calculated, and the proximal width and thickness were measured. No differences were observed between the left and right sides of each individual and therefore analysis was done only for the right side. The multivariate analysis (PCA) carried out on the articular surfaces and proximal linear measurements highlights sexual dimorphism, however, no statistical difference was noted between the two breeds. The best predictive model for obtaining body weight using osteometric measurements involves the "step-by-step" procedure which only contains one predictive measurement, namely the BpT (the metatarsal proximal width): $BW = 128.88 \cdot BpT - 302.55$. Inclusion of the articular surfaces does not improve the prediction of weight in a bivariate model. However, taking into account the total surface area (SA) allows the body weight to be predicted using the following formula: $BW = 21.728 \cdot SA + 136.840$. Finally, no measurements allow the animal's height at the withers to be estimated with a simple bivariate model.

KEY WORDS

Camel,
Sahraoui breed,
Targui breed,
metapodial bone,
metatarsal bone,
osteometry,
zooarchaeology.

RÉSUMÉ

Relations entre les paramètres de l'extrémité proximale du métatarse, le poids vif et la hauteur au garrot chez le dromadaire (Camelus dromedarius Linnaeus, 1758) dans les « races » Sahraoui et Targui.

Le métatarse est l'un des os les plus solides du squelette des ongulés et permet de fournir des renseignements sur l'animal vivant. Un échantillon de 86 os métatarsiens provenant de 46 dromadaires (*Camelus dromedarius* Linnaeus, 1758) adultes a été étudié. Deux races ont été comparées, comprenant un total de 22 mâles et 21 femelles, correspondant à quatre groupes : 13 femelles Sahraoui, 14 mâles Sahraoui, neuf femelles Targui et sept mâles Targui.

MOTS CLÉS

Camelin,
race Sahraoui,
race Targui,
métapodes,
os métatarsien,
ostéométrie,
archéozoologie.

Préalablement à l'étude ostéométrique, des paramètres biométriques des animaux vivants (poids vif et hauteur au garrot) ont été mesurés. Pour chaque os, la surface articulaire proximale a été calculée et la largeur et l'épaisseur proximales ont été mesurées. Aucune différence significative n'a été observée entre le côté droit et le côté gauche, de sorte que l'analyse a été faite sur le côté droit. L'analyse multivariée (ACP) réalisée sur les surfaces articulaires et sur les mesures linéaires permet de mettre en évidence le dimorphisme sexuel, alors qu'aucune différence statistique n'est notée entre les deux races. Le meilleur modèle afin de prédire le poids de l'animal à partir des mesures ostéométriques, selon la procédure pas à pas est celui à partir de la largeur proximale du métatarse (BpT) : $BW \text{ (poids vif)} = 128,88 \cdot BpT - 302,55$. Si l'on rajoute les surfaces articulaires, le résultat n'est pas meilleur dans un modèle bivarié. Il est toutefois possible de proposer un modèle de prédiction du poids vif à partir de la surface articulaire totale (SA) : $BW \text{ (poids vif)} = 21,728 \cdot SA + 136,840$. Finalement, aucun modèle bivarié ne permet d'estimer correctement la hauteur au garrot de l'animal à partir des mesures ostéométriques réalisées.

INTRODUCTION

The bone studied here is the hind metapodial bone, also known as the metatarsal or cannon bone or *Os metatarsale III-IV*, which is one of the strongest bones in the ungulate skeleton (Berteaux & Guintard 1995). It is located in the animal's foot and carries the weight of the body, except the weight of the phalanges which are situated more distally. Bovines have often been studied since the end of the 1950's (Boessneck 1956; Zalkin 1960; Higham 1969; Van Wijngaarden-Baker & Bergström 1988; Albarella 1997; Guintard 1998; Tekkouk & Guintard 2007), but the dromedary (*Camelus dromedarius* Linnaeus, 1758) is a species that still needs to be explored. Several initial works have already been done on the subject since 2013, including recent research on the osteometry of metapodial bones (a population of both Sahraoui and Targui breeds) using a linear measurement of the bones (Adamou *et al.* 2013; Babelhadj *et al.* 2016, 2017, 2020; Guintard & Babelhadj 2018). The uniqueness of this study and its unprecedented nature come from its novel approach that uses the proximal articular surfaces of the metapodial bone in the dromedary as an estimate for its size. The theory behind this method is as follows: the metatarsal bone is positioned vertically, so its proximal articular surfaces receive the entire weight of the body and can hence act as a record for it. O'Connor (2000) describes the tarsometatarsal junction in ungulates and demonstrates that this articulation with bones of the distal row of the tarsus is made in a horizontal plane that is almost perpendicular to the vertical. This would mean that the weight of the animal going through this articulation is not diverted from the vertical component of the gravity that acts upon it. The proximal articular surface of the metatarsal bone can thus theoretically record the body weight of the animal to near perfection. The general question is to understand if it is possible to estimate the body weight (and perhaps the height) of the dromedary from the proximal extremity of a metatarsal bone found at the archeological dig site. This bone is frequently found whole in these sites so it would be very useful and interesting if the animal's size could be estimated

from these artifacts. On a young adult dromedary which has not yet undergone epiphysation, the distal extremity can be missing and hence the proximal extremity can reveal more information. Various linear regressions between a live animal and its bones have already been shown in bovines (Matolcsi 1970; Forest 1998). The underlying question therefore is to know if the size of the articular surfaces is a better estimator of the animal's body weight than conventional methods used in osteometry and proposed by Angela von den Driesch (1976), namely the proximal width of the metatarsal bone (Bp) or its proximal depth (Dp). A future study should look at metacarpal bones to see if the metatarsal results are identical. The current sample did not contain these bones and did not permit this work.

Are proximal articulating surfaces of the metatarsal better indicators of the animal's body weight than proximal width (Bp) and depth (Dp)? These last two measurements are already known to be linked with body weight (Guintard 1998). How does sexual dimorphism and belonging to either the Targui or Sahraoui populations affect bone morphology?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data used for this study originated from 43 adult dromedaries: 27 Sahraoui animals (13 females and 14 males) and 16 Targui animals (nine females and seven males) corresponding to a total number of 22 females and 21 males. These individuals were over five years old and were slaughtered at Ouargla slaughterhouse in Algeria, between November 2010 and September 2014. For each individual, two biometric measurements were made prior to slaughter: the height at the withers (HW) and body weight (BW). Following slaughter, the rear left and right cannon bones were collected. A total of 86 metatarsals thus constituted the material for the study. The morpho-biometric differences between the two breeds (Sahraoui and Targui) are not explored in this study as there are already many other papers on the subject (Babelhadj *et al.* 2016, 2017; Guintard & Babelhadj 2018).

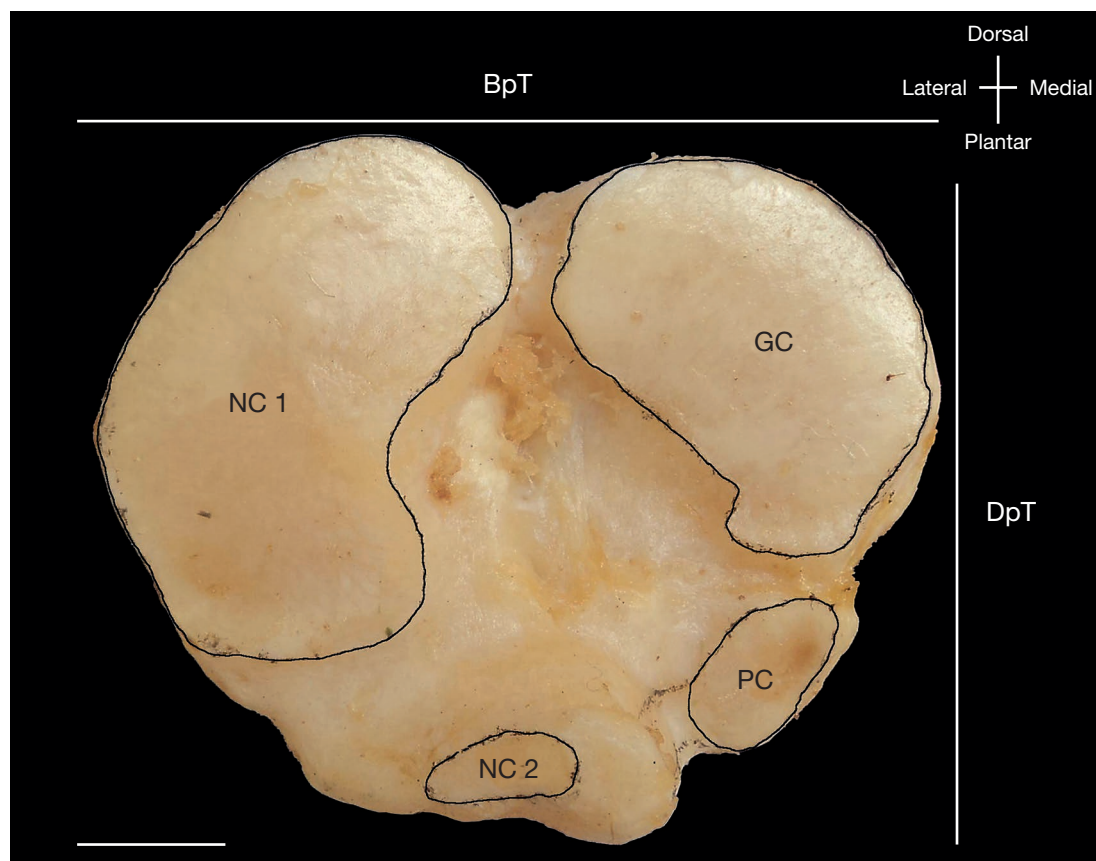


FIG. 1. — Proximal view of a left metatarsal bone of a dromedary. Surface measurements (cm²): surface for the great cuneiform bone (GC); great cranial articular surface for the cuboid bone (NC 1); little caudal articular surface for the cuboid bone (NC 2); surface for the small cuneiform bone (PC). Linear measurements (cm): proximal width with T at the extremity (BpT); proximal depth with T at the extremity (DpT). Scale bar: 1 cm.

These two camelid populations from Algeria are characterised by their versatility (milk and meat production as well as being used as a beast of burden). The Sahraoui are excellent draught animals that also produce meat, fleece and milk. Their population extends from the Great Western Erg to the center of the Sahara (Ben Aissa 1989). According to Messaoudi (1999), the Targui are excellent racing animals. They have very long, lean limbs and have a grey coat with short, fine hairs. This is the dromedary of the northern Tuareg and it is found in central Sahara, in Hoggar and in the extreme south of Algeria (Tamanrasset). It is also found a little further north as it is often used for breeding and racing. It is also used as a saddle animal and a beast of burden. Algerian studies to distinguish the country's camelin phenotypes and studies on North African genotypes tend to show that Sahraoui and Targui are less actual breeds than ecotypes with little or no genotypic differences. However, the Targui is morphologically slightly larger (Oulad Belkhir *et al.* 2013).

MEASUREMENTS

For live animals, the biometric parameters were measured using a centimeter-accurate height scale for HW and a precise scale per kilogram for BW.

The weight of the animal (BW) was obtained by the barymetry method, according to the equations of Boué (1949), described by Babelhadj *et al.* (2016).

The right and left hind feet were extracted from below the tarsus and were labelled in order to identify the animal they originated from. After dissection of the surrounding soft tissues, the bones were cooked by immersion in boiling water for several hours. After cooking, they were cleaned with running water and dried for several days in the open air.

Several measurements were performed for each bone (Fig. 1):
– Two linear measurements were made with calliper (Electronic Digital Calliper, with a precision of 1/100 mm reduced for statistics to 1/10 mm), according to the nomenclature of Von den Driesch (1976), which included:

- BpT = Bp width of the proximal extremity with T at the end for metatarsal;
- DpT = Dp depth of the proximal extremity with T at the end for metatarsal.
- Four measurements were made of the proximal articular surface: after taking a photograph with a scale of the proximal extremity, the surfaces were measured using ImageJ software (multi-platform and open-source software for processing and image analysis developed by the NIH [National Institutes of Health-USA]):

TABLE 1. — Osteometric and biometric measurements, depending on the breed and the sex. Abbreviations: **BpT**, proximal width with T at the extremity for the metatarsal; **BW**, body weight; **DpT**, proximal depth with T at the extremity for the metatarsal; **GC**, surface for the great cuneiform bone; **HW**, height at the withers; **NC1**, great cranial articular surface for the cuboid bone; **NC2**, little caudal articular surface for the cuboid bone; **PC**, surface for the small cuneiform bone; **SA**, total proximal articular surface; **Sd**, standard deviation; **SF**, Sahraoui Female; **SM**, Sahraoui Male; **TF**, Targui Female; **TM**, Targui Male.

Measurement		Right Side				Left Side			
		min	max	mean	sd	min	max	mean	sd
GC (cm²)	SF	4.127	7.057	5.445	0.968	4.186	7.462	5.595	1.037
	SM	5.221	7.047	6.140	0.521	5.953	7.592	6.552	0.539
	TF	3.867	5.799	4.850	0.654	4.480	5.776	5.192	0.498
	TM	5.571	7.995	6.643	0.816	4.631	7.910	6.429	1.080
PC (cm²)	SF	0.430	1.541	0.868	0.276	0.628	1.057	0.890	0.138
	SM	0.843	1.220	0.986	0.114	0.614	1.473	1.040	0.268
	TF	0.559	1.033	0.858	0.163	0.531	1.137	0.801	0.174
	TM	0.431	1.665	1.057	0.471	0.642	1.748	1.082	0.371
NC1 (cm²)	SF	6.331	9.429	7.882	1.040	6.483	11.456	8.038	1.474
	SM	5.168	10.019	7.996	1.327	6.208	10.443	8.257	1.213
	TF	5.487	7.699	6.594	0.757	5.425	8.792	7.111	0.932
	TM	7.661	10.360	8.960	1.080	6.441	11.068	8.649	1.638
NC2 (cm²)	SF	0.275	0.926	0.627	0.222	0.334	1.027	0.576	0.214
	SM	0.316	2.254	0.872	0.483	0.268	2.474	0.912	0.567
	TF	0.248	1.427	0.730	0.425	0.306	1.424	0.682	0.332
	TM	0.198	1.520	0.849	0.516	0.567	1.660	0.844	0.389
SA (cm²)	SF	11.569	18.196	14.821	2.056	11.958	19.006	15.100	2.370
	SM	11.548	19.968	15.993	2.006	13.578	20.357	16.761	1.988
	TF	10.305	14.468	13.032	1.308	12.169	15.897	13.787	1.125
	TM	15.588	19.281	17.508	1.310	13.322	19.116	17.005	2.027
BpT (mm)	SF	5.365	6.504	5.894	0.364	5.496	6.750	5.979	0.397
	SM	5.345	6.597	6.151	0.323	5.662	6.692	6.248	0.314
	TF	5.015	5.925	5.532	0.282	5.250	5.905	5.654	0.191
	TM	5.483	6.925	6.392	0.460	5.443	6.715	6.298	0.475
DpT (mm)	SF	4.594	5.610	5.117	0.348	4.759	5.846	5.174	0.340
	SM	4.698	5.774	5.322	0.293	4.959	6.132	5.415	0.316
	TF	4.328	5.166	4.865	0.262	4.845	5.138	4.967	0.107
	TM	4.697	5.732	5.443	0.383	4.773	5.839	5.406	0.414
BW (kg)	SF	325.000	555.000	433.462	64.210	325.000	555.000	433.462	64.210
	SM	391.000	689.000	538.214	94.638	391.000	689.000	538.214	94.638
	TF	210.000	527.000	377.556	106.026	210.000	527.000	377.556	106.026
	TM	416.000	690.000	511.286	99.368	416.000	690.000	511.286	99.368
HW (cm)	SF	162.000	190.000	179.923	8.995	162.000	190.000	179.923	8.995
	SM	172.000	208.000	186.214	9.862	172.000	208.000	186.214	9.862
	TF	178.000	189.000	181.111	3.551	178.000	189.000	181.111	3.551
	TM	184.000	200.000	192.286	5.736	184.000	200.000	192.286	5.736

– **GC**: surface for the great cuneiform bone (*Os tarsale II et III* [*Os cuneiforme intermediolaterale*] = fused second and third tarsal bones);

– **PC**: surface for the small cuneiform bone (*Os tarsale I* [*Os cuneiforme mediale*] = first tarsal [medial cuneiform] bone);

– **NC1** and **NC2**: both surfaces for cuboid bone (*Os tarsale IV* [*Os cuboideum*] = fourth tarsal bone or cuboid bone), (respectively labelled **NC1** for the great cranial articular surface, and **NC2** for the little caudal articular surface);

The total proximal articular surface (**SA**) was calculated by summing the four previous ones (noted as $SA = NC1 + NC2 + GC + PC$).

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

In the following statistical analyses, descriptive parameters used for each group were the minimum and maximum values, the mean and the standard deviation. The four groups included in statistical analyses are as follows: **SF** for female Sahraoui

($n = 13$), **SM** for male Sahraoui ($n = 14$), **TF** for female Targui ($n = 9$) and **TM** for male Targui ($n = 7$).

The asymmetry between the right and left side samples was further investigated by comparing the data of each side using a linear mixed model, individuals treated as random effect for each measurement. The independence and the normal distribution of the residuals and random effects have been verified using a graph proposed by linear mixed effects authors (Pinheiro & Bates 2000). The confidence interval for each side was set at 95%.

Firstly, the relationship between body weight (**BW**), height at the withers (**HW**) and other different measurements was analysed by a PCA (PCA2) using only the data from the “right” side. The surface variables (**NC1**, **NC2**, **GC**, **PC**) and the linear variables (**BpT**, **DpT**) were considered as the active variables, whereas the height at the withers, the body weight, **SA**, the breed and sex were treated as supplementary variables. A 95% confidence interval was set for each breed and sex group.

TABLE 2. — Osteometric statistic parameters depending on the side. Abbreviations: **BpT**, proximal width with T at the extremity for the metatarsal; **DpT**, proximal depth with T at the extremity for the metatarsal; **GC**, surface for the great cuneiform bone; **L**, left; **NC1**, great cranial articular surface for the cuboid bone; **NC2**, little caudal articular surface for the cuboid bone; **PC**, surface for the small cuneiform bone; **R**, right; **SA**, total proximal articular surface; σ , standard deviation.

Measurement	Mean value		σ		p-value
	L	R	L	R	
GC	5.95	5.74	0.96	0.95	0.028
PC	0.95	0.93	0.25	0.26	0.632
NC1	8.01	7.82	1.37	1.30	0.175
NC2	0.75	0.76	0.42	0.41	0.759
BpT	6.05	5.98	0.42	0.45	0.044
DpT	5.25	5.18	0.35	0.37	0.066
SA	15.70	15.30	2.28	2.27	0.071

Secondly, a multilinear regression of BW and HW based on surface and linear measurements was done using a “step by step” procedure to select the best bivariate model (RegBest of the FactomineR package), resulting in a predictive equation for each of the two biological variables to be estimated.

The statistical analyses were carried out using the free R software, Rstudio. The FactomineR package was used for multivariate analyses. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

RESULTS

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Table 1 shows the measured values including four surface measurements, two linear measurements, the total surface calculated for each bone and biometric data (body weight, the height at the withers) for each breed and sex for the right and left side. The raw values of each individual are shown in Appendix 1.

INFLUENCE OF ASYMMETRY L *VERSUS* R

The study was conducted on the whole population ($n = 86$; 43 left and 43 right metatarsal bones).

Results of linear mixed effects models show significantly different averages for both sides only on GC and BpT measurements (p -value = 0.0276, and $p = 0.0439$ respectively) (Table 2). However, the power of these two models was less than 0.80, respectively 0.6 and 0.528, which means that the false rate risk was too high to conclude a clear, significant difference. Considering these results, the study was then conducted on the right side dataset.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS AND MODELLING

All multivariate analyses were carried out for the 43 right metatarsals (27 Sahraoui animals [13 females and 14 males] and 16 Targui animals [nine females and seven males]).

The PCA was performed on four surface measurements and two linear measurements as active variables; HW, BW and SA were added as supplementary variables.

The inertia of the first factor plane was 79.43% (59.16% for factor 1 and 20.27% for factor 2). Given the number of variables and individuals, the inertia percentage of these two

dimensions is satisfactory for the analysis. On the first axis, the PCA showed a size effect and the parameters that contributed the most were DpT, BpT, GC, NC1 in decreasing order while PC and NC2 contributed to the second axis. Concerning the correlation of supplementary variables with axis 1, SA was highly correlated ($r = 0.89$), while BW and HW presented a low correlation ($r = 0.24$ and 0.13 respectively) (Fig. 2A). Concerning the qualitative supplementary variables, the coordinates for male and female points (two breeds together) were significantly different from zero on axis 1 (male abscissa = 1.087, female abscissa = -1.087) (Fig. 2B, D).

The coordinates of each breed's points were not significantly different from zero and confidence ellipsis of the two breeds are practically superimposed (Fig. 2C), this means that there is no statistical difference between the breeds for the osteometry measurements of metatarsals. Moreover, despite the lack of a significant difference between the two breeds, the sexual dimorphism is well marked because the intervals between males and females are disjointed (Fig. 2C, D). However, the sexual dimorphism was not expressed in the same way in the two breeds. Hence, the coordinates for Targui male and Targui female were opposite and significantly different from zero. For Sahraoui breed, the coordinates of male and female were opposite but not different from 0. The biological interpretation of this difference in dimorphism between the two breeds is not clear, probably due to sample selection and to the geographic origin of the animals.

Therefore, it seems logical to examine how the articular surfaces and the height at the withers or the body weight are related to each other in order to determine how a zooarchaeologist who finds the proximal end of metatarsal of a camel could estimate the size of the animal.

BODY WEIGHT MODELLING

The best predictive model of body weight from the osteometric measurements according to the step-by-step method contains only one predictive measurement, the proximal width of the metatarsus (BpT) with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.534$ (p -value = 0.0002). The predictive equation is written as follows:

$$BW = 128.88 \cdot BpT - 302.55$$

The standard error of the slope is 31.88, and the standard error of the original y-axis is 191.25.

Although the previous model is deemed the best, the prediction of the body weight from the proximal thickness of the metatarsus (DpT) is also interesting ($r = 0.415$, p -value = 0.003). In this case, the predictive equation is:

$$BW = 127.9 \cdot DpT - 194.52$$

The standard error of the slope is 40.97, and the standard error of the original y-axis is 212.94.

The predictive equations for the articular surfaces are not better than the linear measurements, but we can propose the following equation for the sum of the articular surfaces which is the best model when using the articular surfaces:

$$BW = 21.728 \cdot SA + 136.840 \quad (r = 0.438; p\text{-value} = 0.00196)$$

The standard error of the slope is 6.566, and the standard error of the original y-axis is 101.3.

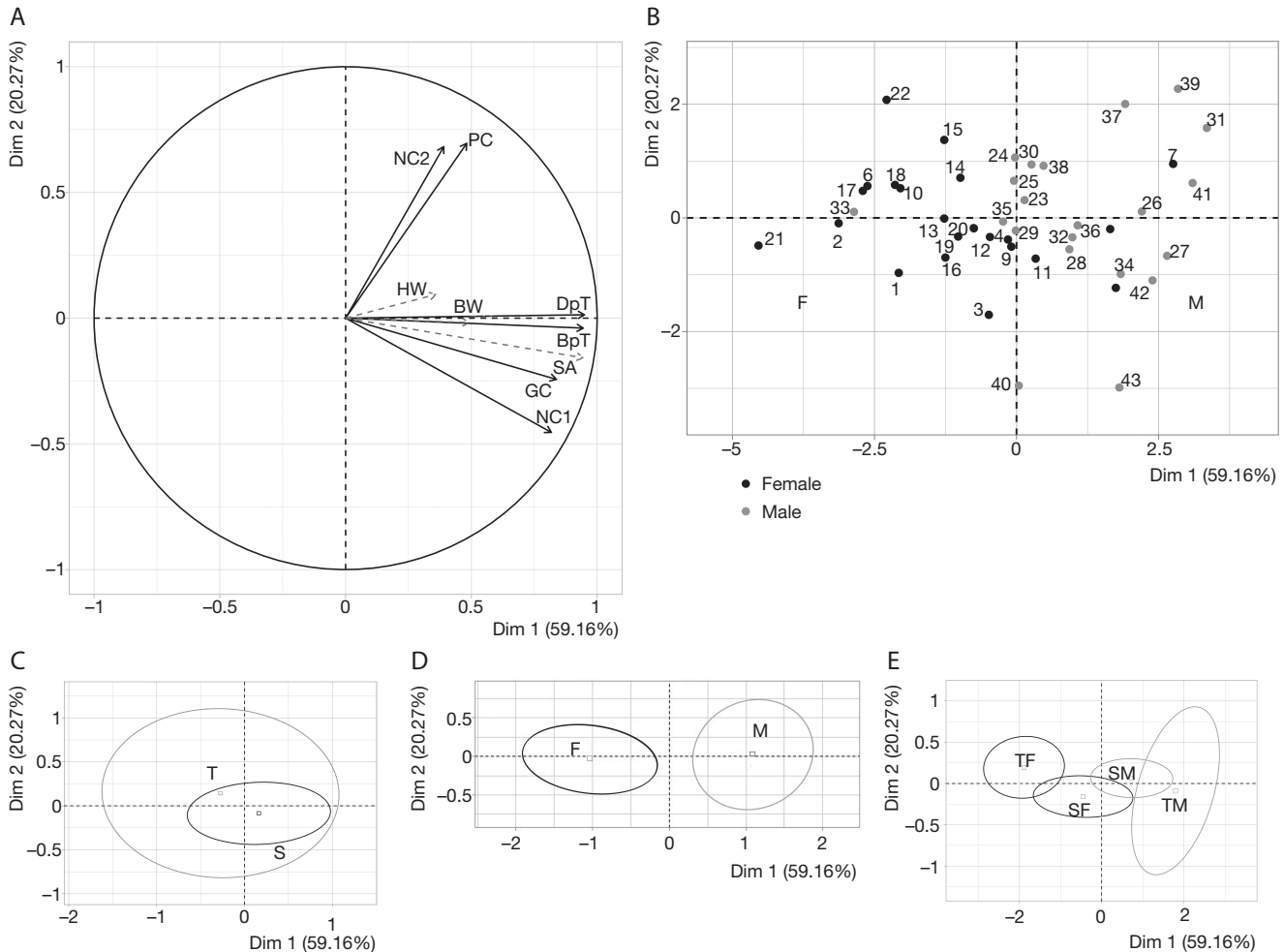


FIG. 2. — Principal component analysis (PCA), graphs for seven parameters per bone, 43 right metatarsal bones. **A**, graph of variables; **B**, scatterplot of individuals; **C**, 95% confidence ellipsis for breed; **D**, 95% confidence ellipsis for sex; **E**, 95% confidence ellipsis for breed and sex. Abbreviations: **BpT**, proximal width with T at the extremity for the metatarsal; **BW**, body weight; **Dim**, Factor of the PCA (Dim 1 = Factor 1, Dim 2 = Factor 2); **DpT**, proximal depth with T at the extremity for the metatarsal; **F**, female; **GC**, surface for the great cuneiform bone; **HW**, height at the withers; **M**, male; **NC1**, great cranial articular surface for the cuboid bone; **NC2**, little caudal articular surface for the cuboid bone; **S**, Sahraoui breed; **SA**, total proximal articular surface; **SF**, female Sahraoui; **SM**, male Sahraoui; **T**, Targui breed; **TF**, female Targui; **TM**, male Targui.

HEIGHT AT THE WITHERS MODELLING

The best predictive model for the height at the withers is a single variable model, the linear measurement corresponding to the proximal width of the metatarsus, BpT. The p-value is 0.02 and the r^2 is 11.9%. This model proves to be of poor performance because it explains only 12% of the variability. The prediction of the height at the withers by osteometry measurements of width and depth of metapodials cannot be reliably done.

DISCUSSION

Faye *et al.* (1997) mention the appearance of the dromedary in Africa around 2650 BP and Bartosiewicz (2017) suggests that dromedary bones appear frequently at archeological dig sites from the Roman period in the Mediterranean basin, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Carpathian Basin. Hesse & Wapnish (1997) mentioned dromedary remains at Tell Jemmeh

from earlier periods (Bronze-Early Iron [1400-800 BC], Assyrian [800-600 BC], Persian-Babylonian [600-400 BC] and Hellenistic [400-200 BC]).

The establishment of a baseline osteometric reference for dromedary metapodials is of particular importance as they are very strong bones often found at dig sites (Morales Muñoz *et al.* 1995; Pigièrè & Henrotay 2011; Grigson 2012; Galik *et al.* 2015). Bartosiewicz *et al.* (1993) highlighted that the plasticity of the distal articular surfaces of metapodials is linked to the power of an animal. It seems logical to particularly focus on the articular surfaces of a bone as they show planiform surfaces and are easy to quantify in terms of area. To our knowledge, the identification of a relationship between proximal articulation surfaces of dromedary metatarsal and body weight and height at the withers of live animals has never been studied. The establishment of the largest possible sample of metapodial bones required the inclusion of two populations of dromedaries that have otherwise been studied separately (Babelhadj *et al.* 2016, 2017; Guintard & Babelhadj 2018). Those two camelid

breeds are close enough in terms of average height and average body weight and are considered to be eumetric. The lack of significant differences for measured parameters between the two breeds justifies, *a posteriori*, grouping them in one single population. Similarly, in order to ease the data presentation, the lateralisation was not studied until the end of the work, as both the right and left sides show no significant difference.

It is interesting to observe that in our study, the most discriminative articular surfaces between males and females are the two biggest surfaces, GC and NC1, located on the dorsal surface of the bone and are gathered on the factor 1 of the PCA (size factor). The other two smaller surfaces (the small surface articulating with the naviculocuboid bone [NC2] and the surface articulating with the small cuneiform bone [PC]) are more variable in shape and are gathered on factor 2 of the PCA (shape factor). The sum of the four areas of articular surfaces (SA) is correlated to factor 1 of the PCA, the other two linear measurements – BpT and DpT, as well as the animal's body weight. As has already been demonstrated in bovines (Guintard 1996), measurements of width and depth are well correlated to the animal's body weight.

The best predictive model of body weight from osteometric measurements, coming from step-by-step procedures, emphasises BpT and to a lesser extent DpT. It also shows that measurements related to areas of articular surfaces are not better than linear measurements when estimating the animal's body weight. This result is interesting because it allows zooarchaeologists to continue making simple measurements with a calliper without having to measure articular surfaces. The proximal width and thickness of the metatarsal bone include not only the articular width, but also the rest of the proximal extremity of the bone and hence is a better estimator of the animal's body weight. This width and thickness integrate not only the force which passes through the articular surfaces, but also the internal configuration of the bone which has to be organised so as to cope with the centrifugal forces that tend to deform the bone structure. The peripheral bone layers, which surround the proximal articular surfaces of the metatarsal bone, thus play a major role, much like the buttresses of a Romanesque church that support and strengthen the structure against which they are built.

Finally, parameters of width, depth and articular surfaces of the proximal end of the metatarsal bone do not allow the height at the withers to be estimated precisely. This is not surprising, as in all osteometric studies performed on ungulates (bovines, ovines, caprines and dromedaries), the height at the withers is above all correlated to elongation parameters of the bone, such as the great length of the metapodials (Guintard 1998; Guintard & Lallemand 2003; Tekkouk & Guintard 2007; Guintard & Tekkouk-Zemmouchi 2010; Adamou *et al.* 2013; Babelhadj *et al.* 2016, 2017; Guintard *et al.* 2018).

It might also be interesting to see whether young individuals (five to seven years) have significantly different values from older animals, since bone growth in this species is relatively late and ends at about seven years of age. The actual data regarding the age was not available in this study. Age was estimated by examination of the dentition by experienced breeders and butchers. Despite being the most common method for camels, it is not of exact accuracy.

Similarly, the weight variations observed between individuals do not reflect differences in overweight status, feeding or watering of animals, parameters known to vary significantly with the total mass of an animal; but weight values were obtained by the barymetry method. A study based on the individual weighing of animals would probably be more informative, but this kind of data was not available to us because it is difficult to set up in the field.

CONCLUSION

This study, performed on a relatively large sample of proximal ends of metatarsal bones from Sarahoui and Targui breeds of dromedaries, allowed us to study areas of articular surfaces and to compare them with linear measurements of width and depth. Even if articular surfaces are well correlated to the body weight of the live animal, they do not give a better estimation of the body weight than simple linear measurements, and we highlighted that the best bivariate model to estimate the body weight is based on the proximal width of the bone. A further study on the distal condyle of the metatarsal bone would be interesting to perform, in order to investigate whether this part of the bone follows the same trend as the proximal one.

However, a spatial 3D study is more complicated to carry out, due to the shape of the distal articular surfaces that are curvilinear. Zooarchaeologists do not always find entire bones, and hence setting up a baseline for very strong bone ends (proximal or distal end) such as metapodials is of the greatest interest.

Acknowledgements

The authors are very thankful to the author Baaisa Babelhadj's mother, Messaouda Boulal, who helped in preparing the bones. Many thanks to Tom Hinton for the proofreading of the manuscript. Finally, thanks to Vianney Forest and the second anonymous reviewer whose insightful comments helped us improve this article.

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Submitted on 25 August 2021;
accepted on 25 January 2022;
published on 5 August 2022.

APPENDIX 1. — List of measurements carried out. Abbreviations: **BpT**, proximal width with T at the extremity for the metatarsal; **BW**, body weight; **DpT**, proximal depth with T at the extremity for the metatarsal; **GC**, surface for the great cuneiform bone; **HW**, height at the withers; **L**, left; **NC1**, great cranial articular surface for the cuboid bone; **NC2**, little caudal articular surface for the cuboid bone; **PC**, surface for the small cuneiform bone; **R**, right; **SA**, total proximal articular surface.

	Sex	Side	GC (cm ²)	PC (cm ²)	NC1 (cm ²)	NC2 (cm ²)	BpT (mm)	DpT (mm)	Age (year)	BW (kg)	HW (cm)	SA (cm ²)
Sahraoui n°1	female	R	4.852	0.5	7.431	0.597	5.682	4.705	13	481	172	13.38
Sahraoui n°1	female	L	6.588	0.628	11.456	0.334	6.018	5.101	13	481	172	19.006
Sahraoui n°2	female	R	4.127	0.836	6.331	0.275	5.365	4.594	12	385	184	11.569
Sahraoui n°2	female	L	4.43	0.873	6.852	0.442	5.52	5.017	12	385	184	12.597
Sahraoui n°4	female	R	5.955	0.43	8.267	0.562	5.727	5.298	8	360	168	15.214
Sahraoui n°4	female	L	5.831	0.678	7.669	0.466	5.926	4.963	8	360	168	14.644
Sahraoui n°5	female	R	5.301	0.722	8.191	0.864	5.991	5.243	14	401	162	15.078
Sahraoui n°5	female	L	4.186	0.752	6.483	0.537	5.628	4.759	14	401	162	11.958
Sahraoui n°6	female	R	6.442	1.076	9.429	0.867	6.283	5.357	7	467	184	17.814
Sahraoui n°6	female	L	5.778	1.019	8.593	1.027	6.235	5.343	7	467	184	16.417
Sahraoui n°7	female	R	4.182	0.867	6.392	0.688	5.534	4.616	11	394	171	12.129
Sahraoui n°7	female	L	4.967	1.009	6.576	0.435	5.925	4.86	11	394	171	12.987
Sahraoui n°8	female	R	7.057	1.541	8.761	0.837	6.504	5.61	7	388	186	18.196
Sahraoui n°8	female	L	7.192	1.057	9.49	0.646	6.75	5.766	7	388	186	18.385
Sahraoui n°9	female	R	6.919	0.899	8.864	0.426	6.389	5.608	5	325	178	17.108
Sahraoui n°9	female	L	7.462	1.04	9.026	0.475	6.672	5.846	5	325	178	18.003
Sahraoui n°10	female	R	6.058	0.963	7.7	0.404	5.936	5.193	7	458	181	15.125
Sahraoui n°10	female	L	6.006	0.867	7.677	0.501	5.849	5.307	7	458	181	15.051
Sahraoui n°11	female	R	4.644	0.785	6.743	0.926	5.425	4.851	11	450	190	13.098
Sahraoui n°11	female	L	4.784	0.894	7.155	1.025	5.496	4.923	11	450	190	13.858
Sahraoui n°13	female	R	5.066	0.894	9.175	0.547	6.149	5.299	14	465	186	15.682
Sahraoui n°13	female	L	5.684	0.971	9.437	0.606	6.181	5.412	14	465	186	16.698
Sahraoui n°14	female	R	4.867	0.722	8.136	0.813	5.935	5.241	16	555	190	14.538
Sahraoui n°14	female	L	4.527	0.837	7.204	0.514	5.876	5.022	16	555	190	13.082
Sahraoui n°15	female	R	5.315	1.043	7.045	0.343	5.701	4.911	9	506	187	13.746
Sahraoui n°15	female	L	5.306	0.947	6.877	0.478	5.649	4.944	9	506	187	13.608
Targui n°1	female	R	5.78	0.858	6.299	1.02	5.621	5.088	11	396	178	13.957
Targui n°1	female	L	5.776	0.93	6.531	0.604	5.75	5.045	11	396	178	13.841
Targui n°2	female	R	4.553	1.033	7.121	1.159	5.513	5.015	13	409	181	13.866
Targui n°2	female	L	5.029	1.137	8.792	0.939	5.56	5.024	13	409	181	15.897
Targui n°4	female	R	5.166	0.897	7.699	0.248	5.805	4.869	12	459	189	14.01
Targui n°4	female	L	5.684	0.789	7.965	0.523	5.905	4.909	12	459	189	14.961
Targui n°5	female	R	4.222	0.955	6.471	0.508	5.418	4.622	10	211	179	12.156
Targui n°5	female	L	4.48	0.743	7.248	0.472	5.537	4.852	10	211	179	12.943
Targui n°6	female	R	4.651	1.002	6.286	0.528	5.521	4.805	7	371	182	12.467
Targui n°6	female	L	4.941	0.789	6.755	0.657	5.66	4.889	7	371	182	13.142
Targui n°7	female	R	4.981	0.86	7.293	0.44	5.925	5.052	15	527	178	13.574
Targui n°7	female	L	5.195	0.871	7.297	0.742	5.731	5.078	15	527	178	14.105
Targui n°8	female	R	5.799	0.623	7.067	0.979	5.722	5.166	9	439	182	14.468
Targui n°8	female	L	5.776	0.626	7.02	0.475	5.819	5.138	9	439	182	13.897
Targui n°9	female	R	3.867	0.559	5.62	0.259	5.015	4.328	8	376	183	10.305
Targui n°9	female	L	5.325	0.531	6.964	0.306	5.671	4.919	8	376	183	13.126
Targui n°10	female	R	4.629	0.939	5.487	1.427	5.247	4.842	10	210	178	12.482
Targui n°10	female	L	4.525	0.795	5.425	1.424	5.25	4.845	10	210	178	12.169
Sahraoui n°2	male	R	5.755	0.878	7.42	0.976	6.036	5.3	15	669	206	15.029
Sahraoui n°2	male	L	6.089	1.449	7.688	1.071	6.233	5.471	15	669	206	16.297
Sahraoui n°3	male	R	5.574	1.122	7.234	0.745	5.998	5.215	13	495	183	14.675
Sahraoui n°3	male	L	6.362	0.961	7.995	0.894	6.472	5.615	13	495	183	16.212
Sahraoui n°4	male	R	5.853	1.22	6.869	0.748	6.144	5.241	13	459	178	14.69
Sahraoui n°4	male	L	6.062	0.852	7.211	0.818	5.892	4.971	13	459	178	14.943
Sahraoui n°5	male	R	6.007	0.963	9.608	1.22	6.335	5.774	14	569	188	17.798
Sahraoui n°5	male	L	7.592	1.473	10.443	0.409	6.692	6.132	14	569	188	19.917
Sahraoui n°6	male	R	6.552	1.165	10.019	0.567	6.597	5.689	6	451	172	18.303
Sahraoui n°6	male	L	6.583	1.144	9.914	0.702	6.558	5.425	6	451	172	18.343
Sahraoui n°7	male	R	6.522	1.013	8.293	0.502	6.195	5.344	11	594	183	16.33
Sahraoui n°7	male	L	6.413	1.178	8.207	0.662	6.087	5.367	11	594	183	16.46
Sahraoui n°8	male	R	6.518	0.943	7.796	0.71	5.818	5.066	16	563	186	15.967
Sahraoui n°8	male	L	6.259	0.614	7.799	0.268	5.82	5.11	16	563	186	14.94
Sahraoui n°9	male	R	5.946	0.883	6.649	1.335	6.076	5.133	18	628	189	14.813
Sahraoui n°9	male	L	5.953	0.719	6.767	1.634	6.346	5.308	18	628	189	15.073
Sahraoui n°10	male	R	7.047	1.033	9.634	2.254	6.52	5.66	15	689	208	19.968
Sahraoui n°10	male	L	7.278	1.36	9.245	2.474	6.579	5.657	15	689	208	20.357
Sahraoui n°11	male	R	5.873	0.982	8.63	0.674	6.372	5.333	13	532	185	16.159
Sahraoui n°11	male	L	7.253	1.116	9.463	0.924	6.443	5.614	13	532	185	18.756
Sahraoui n°12	male	R	5.221	0.843	5.168	0.316	5.345	4.698	6	391	182	11.548
Sahraoui n°12	male	L	6.164	0.76	6.208	0.446	5.662	4.959	6	391	182	13.578
Sahraoui n°13	male	R	6.978	0.926	8.684	0.513	6.408	5.626	9	430	178	17.101

APPENDIX 1. — Continuation.

	sex	side	GC (cm ²)	PC (cm ²)	NC1 (cm ²)	NC2 (cm ²)	BpT (mm)	DpT (mm)	age (year)	BW (kg)	HW (cm)	SA (cm ²)
Sahraoui n°13	male	L	7.181	0.93	8.869	0.497	6.463	5.683	9	430	178	17.477
Sahraoui n°14	male	R	5.977	0.897	7.467	0.746	5.958	5.074	7	447	186	15.087
Sahraoui n°14	male	L	6.362	0.904	7.432	0.926	6.015	5.234	7	447	186	15.624
Sahraoui n°15	male	R	6.132	0.93	8.474	0.899	6.313	5.353	12	618	183	16.435
Sahraoui n°15	male	L	6.174	1.098	8.361	1.039	6.207	5.259	12	618	183	16.672
Targui n°1	male	R	5.909	1.665	8.123	1.017	6.403	5.478	10	554	195	16.714
Targui n°1	male	L	5.455	1.748	7.804	0.624	6.378	5.405	10	554	195	15.631
Targui n°2	male	R	5.571	1.173	7.866	0.978	6.174	5.171	17	449	188	15.588
Targui n°2	male	L	4.631	1.223	6.441	1.027	5.837	4.898	17	449	188	13.322
Targui n°4	male	R	6.939	1.502	7.661	1.52	6.563	5.71	9	416	184	17.622
Targui n°4	male	L	6.838	1.242	7.542	1.66	6.497	5.689	9	416	184	17.282
Targui n°5	male	R	7.995	0.431	10.36	0.495	5.483	4.697	8	465	189	19.281
Targui n°5	male	L	7.08	0.945	10.428	0.663	5.443	4.773	8	465	189	19.116
Targui n°8	male	R	7.074	1.149	9.423	1.393	6.609	5.681	8	574	192	19.039
Targui n°8	male	L	7.91	1.041	8.264	0.714	6.636	5.548	8	574	192	17.929
Targui n°9	male	R	6.212	1.006	9.254	0.341	6.925	5.732	9	690	200	16.813
Targui n°9	male	L	6.507	0.642	8.999	0.655	6.577	5.689	9	690	200	16.803
Targui n°10	male	R	6.801	0.47	10.033	0.198	6.586	5.635	8	431	198	17.502
Targui n°10	male	L	6.58	0.734	11.068	0.567	6.715	5.839	8	431	198	18.949