

Peter M. Schneider ISFG Fellowship 2023

Applicant:

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Research visit to the Section of Forensic Genetics in the Department of Forensic Medicine at the University of Copenhagen

The purpose of this visit was to work on a project that aims to evaluate the potential of using human DNA recovered from burial soils for human identification (HID) casework. I have previously successfully recovered hominin DNA from ancient sediments and collaborated on historical human identification cases related to skeletal remains. However, I don't have experience working in a forensic crime lab or directly integrating new methods into forensic casework.

The Peter M. Schneider Fellowship gave me the opportunity to spend two weeks in the Section of Forensic Genetics at the University of Copenhagen. This enabled me to spend time with Drs. Marie-Louise Kampmann and Jeppe Dyrberg Andersen to determine the best methodological steps for our burial soil project. It also allowed us valuable time for troubleshooting of different challenges that have come up during this project. I cannot emphasize enough how beneficial it was to be able to work through these different hurdles in person.

In addition, this visit allowed me opportunities to learn more about the current status of forensic genetics casework in Denmark. This included structural overviews, standards of practice and workflows, how new techniques are integrated into practice within the Danish legal framework, and information on activate areas of development. This information was extremely useful for framing downstream tests and experiments for our burial soil project. The resulting discussions also lead to the initiation of another collaborative project between myself and Drs. Marie-Louise Kampmann and Jeppe Dyrberg Andersen related to integration of methods into forensic casework.

I would like to thank the ISFG Fellowship Review Board for awarding me this unique opportunity and my hosts at the University of Copenhagen. This visit helped to move forward our burial soils project and allowed me to expand my understanding of forensic genetics practices in Europe.

Sincerely,

Elena Zavala