

## Book Reviews

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*Paleopathology of the ancient Egyptians: annotated bibliography.* Edited by Lisa K. Sabbahy (American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2013); pp. 339; e-book; \$90.00; ISBN 978-1-61797-110-5.

In the age of the Internet, Google Scholar, and numerous online databases everyone is almost certain that there is no need for published bibliographies, but this seems not to be the case. In 1990, I co-authored a paper presented at a colloquium held at the British Museum and our intention was to provide a summary of all the dental anthropological literature for the Nile Valley (Egypt and northern Sudan). To achieve that goal our group included an experienced reference librarian who was adept at using all of the then available electronic bibliographical resources. Thus, with our own extensive bibliographies combined with the use of the latest search engines, we were confident that we had located all of the relevant literature on Nile Valley dental research. Our notion of completeness was quickly and vociferously disabused during our presentation at the colloquium. We had missed many important publications. Turning to more conventional methods, I began looking through the table of contents of hundreds of journals, the bibliographies of every paper found, and continued to use computer searches to produce a bibliography of the bioarchaeology of ancient Egypt and Nubia subsequently published by the British Museum (Rose et al. 1996). Starting with the 1,451 entries in the published bibliography and keeping up with the literature, I felt confident that I was current with what was being written. This self-satisfaction came to an end when I was given the opportunity to review this bibliography by Lisa K. Sabbahy which covers the paleopathological literature between 1998 and 2011. In reading the bibliography, I found 101 references that I did not know about and, thus, was forced to conclude that there is still a role for published bibliographies despite considerable advances in bibliographical search engines.

This annotated bibliography, published as an e-book, has over 800 entries distributed over 339 pages organized alphabetically by the first author's last name, and as noted in the title covers 13 years of publication. The focus is only on paleopathology of Egypt and Nubia and does not include cemetery studies or the reporting of skeletons without analysis. The vast majority of the entries were personally evaluated by the author, but, in the few that were not, this circumstance is duly indicated. Each entry is provided with a summary sometimes written by the author and sometimes taken in abbreviated form from the published abstract. These are excellent comple-

ments to the title and are very useful in providing an idea of the content. This makes it easy to decide if one should pursue a particular publication or not.

This bibliography has numerous entries from journals where I never would have thought to look for Egyptian paleopathology. Masters and doctoral theses are also included in the listings. There are a number of nice features such as making a note when an author has made a name change so it is apparent which articles are the work of the same person.

The bibliography is virtually free of mistakes and errors, but there are a few instances where the portion of the published abstract chosen for reproduction in the bibliography is not the most informative reflection of the publications contents. There are also three textbooks and one methodological article which do not reference Egypt and really should not have been included. But these are small things and it is clear that modern technology cannot find everything and annotated bibliographies remain very useful.

## Reference

Rose J.C., Tucker T.L., Lovell N., Filer J. (1996), *Bioarchaeology of Ancient Egypt and Nubia: A bibliography*, London: The British Museum.

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*Social bioarchaeology*. Edited by Sabrina C. Agrawal and Bonnie A. Glencross (Blackwell Studies in Global Archaeology 14, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); pp. xx+449; US\$40.95; ISBN 978-1-4443-3767-9.

*Social Bioarchaeology* is not a typical book presenting results of the current research in the field, nor is it a simple introduction to the discipline. Although designed, as stated in the *Series Editors' Preface* (p. xx) to cover central areas of undergraduate archaeological teaching, this publication is far from being a simple textbook. It can serve as a textbook for students as well as a source for senior faculty members to prepare lectures. It can also be a source for new research ideas for those who already work with human remains and seek new ways of interpreting information provided by their analysis.

As with many others in the last decade, this book was not created by one researcher to present the results of his/her research; instead it is a joint venture of nineteen contributors from North America, Europe, and Australia coordinated by two well-known American researchers who are actively engaged in many different projects in the field of bioarchaeology. This, along with the contributors' varying career stage—ranging

from PhD candidates to senior faculty members—assures not only a high level of scholarship, but also gives a voice to the younger generation of scientists. That, however, results in the fact that this book is not a consistent, uniformed, and smooth text with typical parts like an introduction, material presentation, and conclusions, but instead is a compilation of more or less independent articles, not even cross-referenced frequently. At times it is difficult to follow the ideas presented, especially given that the chronological and geographical dispersal of the research subjects is not well defined either. The reader therefore has to have some training in bioarchaeology to appreciate theories and results presented in each chapter/article.

The book is divided into three main parts, each consisting of an almost even number of articles. The first—*Materials and Meaning: The Nature of Skeletal Samples*—was thought to give an introduction into the current state of development of the discipline, present the interpretative meaning of social theory, and discuss (?) practical nature of the research. Zukerman and Armelagos provide the reader with a comprehensive history of bioarchaeology with special attention paid to the bio-cultural approach. Turner and Andrushko deal with ethical concerns, presenting their experiences in working with descendant communities, in relation to analyzed skeletal samples. Another chapter by Weiss-Krejci tries to clarify the level of understanding of the phenomena of mortuary behavior in past populations through looking at different ways of creating mortuary deposits. The last one, by Jackes, is a well-written and comprehensive study on the representativeness and bias in the skeletal samples, and how that knowledge should influence interpretation.

The second part—*Social Identity: Bioarchaeology of Sex, Gender, Ethnicity, and Disability*—consists of four articles dealing with the interpretation of past societies' identity. Hollimon analyses gender identity beginning with biological sex as a universal variable, and later using archaeological sources, mainly related to human remains and the information derived from them (mortuary analysis, health and disease, diet, violence). Zakrzewski proposes a more “holistic” approach in the reconstruction of ethnic identities, pointing to intra-group variation as a potential source of information. Barret and Blakely reconstruct identity through skeletal features related to social inequality, using archaeological, skeletal, and documentary sources on African slaves in New York. Roberts is interested in perception of disease as a factor influencing social identity, and researches quality of life and social stigma towards people suffering from leprosy and tuberculosis in late medieval England.

The third part—*Growth and Ageing: The Life Course of Health and Disease*—is probably the most related to the bio-cultural approach and the influence of social theory on bioarchaeological research. Sofer examines how the understanding of ageing and age influences the determination of age of skeletal remains, and the interpretations based on such an approach. She points out that age and the process of aging has

to be understood together with human development, life experiences, and attitudes towards age in the reconstructed population being studied. Agarwal and Beauchesne provide an overview of the concept of plasticity and adaptation in bioarchaeology, research developmental systems theory, and life course theory integrating ideas of biological and social theories. Halcrow and Tayles, along with Littleton, consider the bioarchaeology of childhood. Halcrow and Tayles start from a more theoretical point of view, pointing out that researchers' approach to the concept of age and childhood should integrate social and bioarchaeological data. Then Littleton, using bioarchaeological indicators of stress, reconstructs the process of growing in the Hellenistic period in Bahrain, and explores the childrens' chances for survival from biological, environmental, and socio-cultural points of view. Glencross integrates the results of palaeopathological analysis of the skeleton—mainly age-related patterns of injury visible on bones—with other contextual data related to and influenced by traditional value systems. This way she shows how past societies could shape social relations and responsibilities towards and of injured members, and create their own influenced by that value system. Prowse uses a similar approach in her interpretation of diet and dental health in the Roman Empire. She integrates the results of stable isotope analysis and dental pathology data with the archaeological and written evidence about food choice. She finds the difference between diets of men and women, and compares this result to the historical evidence of male domination over women in this period.

*Social Bioarchaeology* is a comprehensive overview of the biocultural approach in bioarchaeology. As aimed towards the undergraduate reader, it primarily emphasises the origins of the social theory approach, and its traditional applications. This is why almost all of the chapters have an extensive introduction into the problems being presented later, which might be a little hard to handle for more experienced researchers. The latter, though, should be satisfied with the extensive bibliographies given by the contributors after their articles, and with the results of their individual projects, especially those related to new ways of interpretation that include both biocultural approaches and the application of social theory to the skeletal data. Bioarchaeologists interested in the Near East, however, will be a bit disappointed with the lack of the studies using data from their area of interest (with the possible exception of Bahrain). On the other hand, however, they will surely find new ideas regarding what they might do with the material they have and how they might go about widening their interpretation of the past societies' life style, thereby incorporating social theories into their research.

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*The bioarchaeology of the human head. Decapitation, decoration, and deformation.* Edited by Michelle Bonogofsky (University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2011); pp. 223; \$74.95; ISBN 978-0-8130-3556-7.

Besides its lengthy introduction, the volume includes 11 papers discussing bioarchaeological cases from a wide range of geographical contexts ranging from the British Isles through Siberia, Melanesia and Polynesia to the New World. Although no paper specifically deals with Near Eastern skulls, the introduction chapter authored by book's editor may be of interest to readers of *Bioarchaeology of the Near East*. In Bonogofsky's general review of the research on the bioarchaeology of human head, she frequently refers to the Neolithic cranial deformations and plastered skulls present at several archaeological sites found in the Fertile Crescent and sets them in the broader anthropological context. The volume as a whole is an interesting example of combining archaeological and ethnographical evidence in the anthropological contextualization of the beliefs on the human head.

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*Bioarchaeology and behavior. The people of the ancient Near East.* Edited by Megan A. Perry (University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2012); pp. 211; \$74.95; ISBN 978-0-8130-4229-9.

Literature about research on human remains from Near Eastern archaeological sites is rare and any attempt to bring together such research is highly appreciated. The book, whose title is slightly exaggerated, contains eight papers that were presented during three annual meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) (2006–2008), preceded by a short introduction by Megan Perry and Jane Buikstra. The content is highly variable, both in terms of chronology and of discussed topics, which reflects the scope of the ASOR meetings. However, one feature is striking: as many as seven papers report bioarchaeological research at coastal sites located in the Eastern Mediterranean (Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Turkey). This clear regional bias seems to be the direct consequence of the contemporary American archaeologist focus on the Levant and especially on non-Arabic countries. The authors of the introduction suggest also another potential source of this bias when they reduce the early history of Near Eastern bioarchaeology to the activity of Lawrence Angel who was most interested in the ancient populations of Greece, Cyprus and coastal Turkey.

In comparison to other publication venues (e.g., journals), the conference proceedings usually leave more freedom to the authors. The papers of the volume are quite

lengthy (24 pages on average), often contain more archaeological data and sometimes are more speculative compared to average bioarchaeological papers.

The first paper in the volume (S. Gauld et al., *On the tail end of variation in Late Neolithic burial practices. Halaf feasting and cannibalism at Domuztepe, southeastern Anatolia*) reports some results of research on a peculiar deposit of commingled human and animal remains that was excavated at Domuztepe between 1997 and 2003. According to the authors, this “Death Pit” contained evidence of a cannibalistic ritual. However, this interpretation is supported by a superficial set of observations including the catastrophic age profile, perimortem damage to the skulls, cut marks and percussion marks, discoloration, localized burning, pot polish and shallow tooth marks. The authors seem attached to the idea that people buried in the “Death Pit” were killed and eaten and do not treat seriously any alternative explanation, e.g. removal of an earlier cemetery and disposal of disarticulated human remains in a midden where they were at least partially exposed to various taphonomic agents. The figures are dim, but none of them is as unequivocal as the authors suggest in the captions and they might be just various kinds of post-mortem damage to the dry bone. Although the idea of cannibalism is an attractive one for archaeologists, a more definitive interpretation is best made once the final report is presented along with a differential diagnosis.

If the first paper raises several doubts for a sceptical reader, the second one (Ch. Torres-Rouff and W. Pestle, *An exploration of infant burial practices at the site of Kish, Iraq*) presents a very cautious and a well-balanced interpretation of a small Neo-Babylonian infant cemetery found at Tell Ingharra. The authors used available archaeological and textual data to reject the previous speculative interpretations of this cluster of perinate burials as the evidence of infanticide or child sacrifice. Instead they associate it with the nearby temple of Ištar who, according to the written sources, was considered the divine protector of stillborn children. This paper is just a part of larger project, as the authors undertook great effort of re-studying the whole set of more than 750 skeletons retrieved from Kish during the extensive excavations in 1920s. Scholars interested in the bioarchaeology of Mesopotamia will impatiently look forward to more news about this unique skeletal sample.

With two next papers, we move back to the Eastern Mediterranean to visit five Late Roman and Byzantine cemeteries in Cyprus (S. Fox et al., *The burial customs of Early Christian Cyprus: a bioarchaeological approach* & B. Baker and A. Papalexandrou, *A bioarchaeological perspective on the burials and basilicas of Medieval Polis, Cyprus*). The scope and the organisation of both papers is similar and they both contain a preliminary but quite comprehensive synthesis of archaeological and osteological data, with some references to historical sources. All studied skeletal samples are dated to a very turbulent period in the history of Cyprus, with outbreaks of the plague and long-term competition for the island between the Byzantine Empire and expanding

Muslim Caliphate. These troubles are perhaps reflected by a deposit of nine skeletons in a cistern at Kalavastos-Kopetra and multiple secondary burials at Polis. Research on these contexts is still in progress, so more detailed papers about human remains of these sites may be expected in the future.

The second half of the volume contains more technical papers, beginning with an isotopic and elemental analysis of a sample of human remains excavated at Khirbet Faynan, Jordan (M. Perry et al., *Condemned to metallum? Illuminating life at the Byzantine mining camp at Phaeno in Jordan*). The cemetery was used by local inhabitants, but also by people working in nearby copper mines, among them criminals and Christian martyrs. However, the analysis of stable strontium and oxygen isotopes revealed only one possible immigrant. On the other hand, the levels of copper and lead in dental enamel were elevated in all analysed samples, perhaps due to environmental pollution. The evidence suggests then that excavated part of the cemetery contained remains of local inhabitants who to some extent were involved in mining activities. Most of the data in the paper has been published elsewhere (see AJPA 140, 429-441; JAS 38, 558-569).

In the next paper (L. Gregoricka and S. Sheridan, *Food for thought. Isotopic evidence for dietary and weaning practices in a Byzantine urban monastery in Jerusalem*) research on stable carbon and nitrogen isotopes is conducted on a sample of more than a hundred individuals buried in the St. Stephen monastery in Jerusalem. One of repositories of commingled human remains contained not only bones of adult individuals (presumably monks) but also many subadult elements. The authors took advantage of such an age distribution to reconstruct not only the monastic diet, but also weaning practices in the Early Byzantine period. Results of the isotopic study were compared with contemporary medical texts, both lines of evidence suggesting that weaning started at the age of 6 months and was over at the age of 2-3 years. Small sample sizes confound this research; the sample includes few pre-weaning infants as only two individuals died in age under 6 months. One striking feature of this assemblage of human remains is the lack of neonates, which may strengthen the author's speculation that children buried in the monastery were orphans taken in by the monastery. The diet of adult individuals from the repository was rich in animal proteins, as elevated average  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  values suggest, and this result is not consistent with available records of the monastic life. The authors, however, offer only a very superficial explanation of this unexpected finding.

The seventh paper in the volume discusses the pattern of microwear in the population of Epipalaeolithic gatherers living in the Southern Levant (M. Alrouسان and A. Pérez-Pérez, *Buccal dental microwear as an indicator of dietary habits of the Natufian people of El-Wad and El-Kebarah*). The results of this research confirm many earlier studies, as the authors observed continuity of microwear patterns from Natufian

to Pre-Pottery Neolithic and concluded that the diet of terminal Levantine hunters-gatherers relied on wild cereals.

Finally, the reader moves back to Jordan. The last paper published in the volume (J. Ullinger et al., *Daily activity and lower limb modification at Bab edh-Dhra', Jordan, in the Early Bronze Age*) is a re-edited and expanded part of the first author's PhD dissertation (Skeletal health changes and increasing sedentism at Early Bronze Age Bab edh-Dhra', Jordan; Ohio State University 2010). It focuses on the lower limb and aims to reconstruct physical activity using the degree of degenerative joint disease and several non-pathological joint modifications (e.g., squatting and kneeling facets, Allen's fossa, Poirer's facet, etc.). Statistical differences in the frequency of some features of individuals dated to two phases of the Early Bronze Age were interpreted as the result of change in grinding posture. Although such an explanation is rather speculative, the comparison with archaeological evidence from the region (e.g., temporal differences in the shape of the grinding stones and in the organisation of houses) may be a potential direction for future research.

Although collections of papers presented at conferences are sometimes less valued than journal articles, the volume is very interesting as a whole. First, it shows great potential of bioarchaeological studies that are carefully and properly set in archaeological and historical context. Second, with the impressive temporal and methodical variability, the volume may be used as a textbook for students of bioarchaeology, to make them not only familiar with tools, but also to show how difficult is the art of interpretation of obtained results.

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