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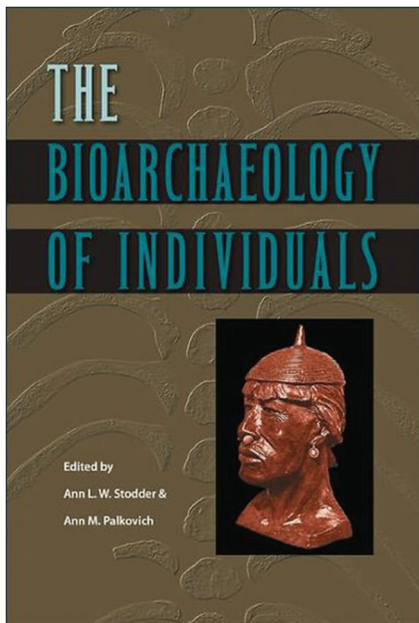
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Book Reviews

The Bioarchaeology of Individuals (Bioarchaeological Interpretations of the Human Past: Local, Regional, and Global).

Ann L. Stodder, Ann M. Palkovich (Eds.). University Press of Florida (April 22, 2012), US, 256 pp. ISBN 10: 0813038073. \$67.76/€ (hardcover).



The volume “Bioarchaeology of Individuals” is a natural response to population-level studies which have been dominating bioarchaeology since the 1970s, when bioarchaeology first began to emerge as a discipline (Buikstra, Beck 2006). The formulation of a new paradigm was at that time a reaction to the descriptive culture-historic approach and advocated a new bio-cultural approach and problem-orientated research focused on temporary and spatial trends in quantifying studies. Population-level studies allow investigators to explore patterns and trends at a greater aggregate level. It would appear, however, that population-level studies cannot be applied in all cases. The transformation of individuals into raw data can ignore the

uniqueness of each context and can result in loss or overlooking of specific information.

The bioarchaeology of individuals is not, in any case, a return to a culture-historic description. Studying individual life from the archaeological record is not a new phenomenon of course. The origin of this approach dates back to the 1930s and is connected with Wilton Krogman (Krogman 1935), and was defined more precisely at a later point by Frank Soul as *osteobiography*¹ or *life history* (Soul 1972). Both authors had forensic experience which influenced their focus on the individual and life history concept.

The volume “Bioarchaeology of Individuals” currently demonstrates the value of applying up-to-date natural science methods, not previously known, to archaeology. The new approach also involves the reconstruction of the basic identity of the individuals whose bones have been recovered. Identity is the way in which individuals express themselves, the social units which they associate with and change over an individual life. Using the advanced technology of natural sciences, the bioarchaeology of individuals has great potential for reconstructing the fluid character of identity, forms of self-identification from human remains, and the social and cultural forces which affect the body. The entire proceeding is an overview of how individual identities and social personas are pieced together from a variety of skeletal markers and archaeological and paleoenvironmental evidence.

The volume under review was edited by Ann L. Stodder, bioarchaeologist at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago in Illinois, and Ann Palkovich, biological anthropologist at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at George Mason University in Fairfax County in Virginia. The volume was created by

¹ *Osteobiography* is a term proposed by Frank Saul in 1972 and was originally viewed from a forensic perspective which focuses on the individual before moving to an aggregated population perspective (Baadsgaard *et al.* 2012).

40 contributors and is divided into four sections: a) Ancestor and Descendants; b) Ancient Travelers and “Others”; c) Craftsmen and Artisans; d) Farm and Village. Each section is further organised in four additional chapters. Each chapter is introduced by the Individual Profile of the skeleton, which is discussed in the following text. An expansion into deeper analytical and interpretative levels, from the description of the findings to the interpretation of the individual’s life and death, follows after this short report.

The first contribution, entitled Magician of Ridge Ruin, represents the original inspiration for the entire volume. The editors realised that that bioarchaeology of the U.S. Southwest consists almost entirely of population-level studies and is completely devoid of bioarchaeology and the interpretation of individual people. Further chapters present new bioarchaeological data on Vikings (The Axed Man of Modfell, Iceland) and Chamorro legends (Legendary Chamorro strength: Skeletal Embodiment and the Boundaries of Interpretation). At the end of this section, two Maya burials are described, representing an example of the link between mortuary treatment and the political or ideological situation in colonial Belize. The second section deals with prehistoric migration and human mobility. Using ancient DNA analyses, strontium isotope analyses and morphology analyses, the contributors recover the identities of the investigated individuals. All the studies present atypical burials and the deviant archaeological context as a consequence of the foreign element in a local community. Part three focuses on the reconstruction of an individual’s activity from skeletal markers of occupational stress and the archaeological inventory found in association with the body. Alexis T. Boutin discusses, for example, the osteobiography of an Early Bronze Age craftsman from ancient Alalakh (southern Turkey), who had skeletal occupational markers associated with physically demanding activity such as harvesting and preparing reeds for baskets. Another example of a craftsman

is reported by Michele T. Douglas and Michael Pietruszewsky. They analysed a male burial from an Early Bronze Age Chiang site in Thailand, where the skeleton, interred with metallurgical tools, bears a number of traces of demanding work. The fourth section deals with ordinary people, usually from a rural environment. This part has an increased focus on childhood, childbirth, diseases and perceptions of physical impairment of the past and the recent population. I was personally most interested in Ann Palkovith's contribution "Reading a Life: A Fourteenth Century Ancestral Puebloan Woman". This consists of an *osteobiography* of a woman from a Late Prehistoric site in New Mexico with permanent bone deformation due to residual rickets. The author points out the issue of distinguishing physical impairment and disability. Impairment means an individual physical condition from a medical point of view whereas disability depends on a social response, how the individuals adapt and how they are perceived by the community. For the reconstruction of a past individual life, we not only have to assess impairment,

but in particular the disability, the impact of the impairment on society. A disability as we view it at present was not necessarily understood in the same way by past populations and the social lives of disabled individuals are not necessarily reflected in the archaeological record.

Researches presented in this volume document individual life histories using multiple evidence, including the identification of geographic origins, the traces of disease, occupational stress indicators and DNA analyses to explore the complex identities of individuals who lived between 3200 BC and 1900 AD almost all over the world. The proceedings "The Bioarchaeology of Individuals" certainly represent a new impulse in bioarchaeology, where case studies concerning individuals are often studies of a secondary category. This is also the reason why the book creates the impression of a collection of texts interesting on their own due to the unique content which has not been published in prestigious journals. This is unfortunately caused by the fact that case studies only form appendices for population studies.

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