

Book Reviews

HUMAN REMAINS: DISSECTION AND ITS HISTORIES. By Helen MacDonald. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2006. 224 pp. ISBN 0-300-11699-3. \$35.00 (cloth).

Human anatomy has a complex and controversial past. From its beginnings, dissection has existed in various permutations of science, art, ritual, punishment, and, most recently, traveling museum displays. Helen MacDonald (The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne) takes a different perspective than previous authors who have explored the history of anatomy and offers her view on the cultural history of dissection. She advocates a social understanding of dissection through narratives of the individuals involved, the dissectors and the dissected, as well as the sociocultural connections between them. The book, aimed at popular as well as academic audiences, comprises a set of interwoven stories about how tangible, living people came to be subjects for dissection. Through these “histories,” MacDonald attempts to provide insight into the role of 19th-century anatomy in shaping and reflecting the attitudes of doctors and scientists towards death and dead bodies, evolution, and the cultures of indigenous peoples.

The introductory chapter begins with a description of Gunther von Hagens’s public dissection of a human body in November 2002. This lays the groundwork for the author’s thesis that dissection includes “performative” aspects that are extraneous to its scientific merit (p 9), and has thus fostered an environment in which human remains may be treated unethically. Chapter 1 describes the practice of anatomy in London prior to the passage of the Anatomy Act in 1832. MacDonald recounts that during this time convicted murderers received the dual sentence of death and public dissection, the poor who died in hospitals were routinely given to surgeons for anatomical study, and scientists commonly traded in human remains. She presents ample evidence that public dissections were spectacles of social power, while the scientific study of anatomy was carried out privately and usually illegally.

In Chapter 2, MacDonald explores the relationships between dissection, gender, and class through a rich illustration of the life, death, and dissection of Mary McLauchlan, a woman transported from Scotland to the penal colony in Tasmania (then Van Diemen’s Land). MacLauchlan’s story is enhanced by comparisons between British anatomy and practices in Tasmania, providing glimpses into the sociocultural contexts of medical and governmental establishments at the time.

Chapter 3 shifts from a discussion of crime and its punishment to the scientific study of race as a way of gaining access to the dead. At the time of McLauchlan’s hanging, relations between colonists and Tasmanian Aborigines was the foremost social issue. The information MacDonald provides in this chapter is more than descriptive background for the remainder of the book, as racialized cadavers were used to provide evidence for scientific theories of the time. Medical doctors, who

were often self-taught physical anthropologists, collected human bones of all kinds, but especially those of diminishing aboriginal populations, to be used as evidence to support either monogenic or polygenic theories of human origins.

Chapter 4 provides an absorbing account of the principal bone collectors in both Britain and Tasmania. Among others, she describes Joseph Barnard Davis, a British physician and disciple of American physician and early physical anthropologist Samuel Morton. The lives of colonial physicians such as William Crowther are also illustrated in detail. MacDonald skillfully interweaves the racial theories of Davis, the corpse-gathering activities of Crowther, and the implications of these activities for the social relations between colonists and natives. In Chapter 5, this theme is developed most fully as MacDonald analyzes the 1869 scandal surrounding the death of William Lanney. As the last Tasmanian Aboriginal man, Lanney’s death turned him into a desirable collector’s item. This began an international struggle for his remains, resulting in the theft of his skull by the Tasmanian Royal Society.

MacDonald concludes in the final chapter by drawing analogies to more recent examples of unethical treatment of the dead, notably at Bristol Royal Infirmary and at Alder Hey in Liverpool. She argues that “medicine’s past suffuses its present” (p 186). MacDonald thus returns to her original thesis that a culture of dissection has been created in which “privileged access to the dead is continually abused” (p 186). She argues that only by understanding this cultural history can we prevent such attitudes in the present.

I have several criticisms of this text. Throughout the book, MacDonald takes liberties with her writing style, and overemphasizes her own viewpoint. For example, most of her histories are set in 19th century England and Australia, but her interjections are often formulated in the present tense, mixing the past and the present to support her thesis. She is exasperatingly speculative, and I found this style both distracting and somewhat indulgent.

MacDonald’s book is different than many previous histories because she attempts to take the perspective of the cadaver. In doing so, she objects to the “anonymization” of cadavers for dissection as “turning human beings into things for surgeons” (p 9). This is an oversimplification of a complex issue. MacDonald is correct in stating that human dissection anonymizes the bodies, but it does not dehumanize them. For example, most medical schools conduct memorial services in honor of the dead used for teaching anatomy. Such ceremonies emphasize the underlying perception of the human body as being borrowed for the sake of science and medicine, but ultimately the body is returned to the humane sphere. The distinction between anonymization and dehumanization, not espoused by MacDonald in her book, is relevant to medical education because it balances objective, evidence-based conceptualizations of the body with compassionate, and personal clinical attitudes.

Since virtually every known human society has well established traditions of disposing of the dead rather than using them, it is difficult to construct a

theory of ethics with regard to the use of human cadavers. *Human Remains* is far from offering a comprehensive evaluation of the ethics of anatomy. However, MacDonald succeeds in challenging us in different ways. She focuses on the cultural history of dissection and, although heavy handed at times, forces readers to ask similar questions in a contemporary framework. In summary, *Human Remains* presents an intriguing history that will be thought provoking for anyone involved in the study or teaching of human anatomy.

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MAPPING OUR ANCESTORS: PHYLOGENETIC APPROACHES IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND PREHISTORY. By Carl P. Lipo, Michael J. O'Brien, Mark Collard, and Stephen J. Shennan. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction. 2006. 353 pp. ISBN 0-202-30751-4. \$29.95 (paper).

A quick glance at the title of this book might suggest that this is a text on how to perform cladistic analysis, particularly in paleoanthropology. This assumption would only be correct in part and would miss a major feature of the book. Although the book does deal with phylogenetic analysis, with primary emphasis on cladistic methods, it is not concerned directly with evolutionary biology. Instead, the focus is on examining the applicability of phylogenetic methods to a variety of data across the subdisciplines of anthropology in order to reconstruct cultural history. How do cultures change over time? What impact does cultural contact have? How can we reconstruct the cultural evolutionary dynamics of a society? These (and other) questions are being asked by anthropologists, and this book provides examples of how phylogenetic analysis can help answer them.

This book had its origin in two symposia that took place at the 2003 annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology. It is thus not surprising that many of the contributions focus on the application of phylogenetic analysis to archaeological data, although other chapters also look at ethnographic, linguistic, and bioarchaeological data in phylogenetic studies of culture history and evolution. Studies of cultural history are based on the idea that both biology and culture are inherited from our ancestors. As with traditional cladistic analysis in evolutionary biology, there is concern with identifying the different causes of population affinity and the consequent need to partition relationships, be they cultural or biological, into those reflecting homology versus homoplasy. A cultural trait, for example, can be inherited from one's ancestors or can reflect independent invention or the blending of cultures. As with biological data, simply considering overall similarity without regard to cause can result in a distorted view of evolutionary relationships (e.g., a focus on shared primitive traits would not tell us anything about evolutionary relationships).

The book consists of six major parts. Part I is an introductory essay by the editors pointing to the need for a phylogenetic approach to cultural data in order to address questions of cultural evolution and a short review of similarities and differences between cultural and biological phylogenetic analysis. I often find discussions comparing biological and cultural evolution difficult and/or too abstract to follow, but that was not the case here. The authors make their points clearly and with useful exam-

ples that are easy to follow. I particularly enjoyed Collard and colleagues' chapter comparing branching and blending modes in cultural evolution, and their finding that blending of cultures (e.g., through trade) has not had as great an impact on cultural change as is often thought and that a branching model often fits the data better.

Part II contains six chapters concerned with basic questions and methods ranging from the fundamental nature of a culturally transmitted unit of inheritance and quantification of cultural relatedness to papers dealing with the relationship of phylogenetic analysis to seriation and graph theory. Although these chapters often contain specific case studies for illustration of basic points, the next three parts of the book focus more on specific examples of cultural history. Part III is labeled "Biology," but this term is a bit broad ("Bioarchaeology" would be more descriptive). The two chapters here are actually more narrowly focused on using data from skeletal biology to address archaeological issues. Part IV consists of five chapters dealing with the application of phylogenetics to "Culture" and gives examples using data from lithics, ceramics, and, in the case of a chapter by Jordan and Mace, a synthesis based on material culture, social practices, and linguistics among Northwest Coast indigenous groups. Part V consists of two chapters focusing on linguistic relations: one, an analysis of the spread of Bantu languages in Africa; the other, a more general discussion of linguistic evolution using the origins of Indo-European languages as an example. Part VI is a short afterword by the authors.

As with any edited volume, the focus, length, and style of individual contributions vary from chapter to chapter. I did find, however, that pretty much the entire book was readable and accessible to someone like me who is not that versed in the specific archaeological and linguistic controversies, or phylogenetic analysis for that matter. The main thrust of the book, to illustrate how phylogenetic methods can be used to investigate human history using a variety of data, came through clearly throughout the book. Any fears I might have had about the potential problems of inappropriately applying biological evolutionary models to cultural data disappeared during reading. The authors were all very clear about where and how phylogenetic methods could be applied to cultural data. These were carefully thought-out arguments and not wild and inappropriate analogies. The differences between biological and cultural transmission and evolution—e.g., cultural transmission must allow for blending as well as branching, the subject of an entire chapter in Part II—were always clear and not brushed aside.

I found the book particularly useful in showing me how practitioners in different subfields are often wrestling with similar questions, and sometimes even similar methods, to those in biological anthropology. Although I

have always advocated the holistic ideal of anthropology, in practice it has often been difficult to point to specific examples of interests that cut across different subfields, particularly in recent decades. This book made me feel a little more optimistic, in large part because it played to my own predilection for defining anthropology as the history and geography of the human species in both biological and cultural dimensions. Others will, of course, have a different view of what anthropology is, or should be, but a concern for history and ancestor-descendant relationships does give us all at least one starting point for continued dialogue across the subdisciplines.

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PRIMATES IN PERSPECTIVE. Edited by Christina J. Campbell, Agustín Fuentes, Katherine C. MacKinnon, Melissa Panger, and Simon K. Bearder. New York: Oxford University Press. 2007. 720 pp. ISBN 0-195-17133-0. \$52.95 (paper).

In 1987 *Primate Societies* (edited by Barbara Smuts and colleagues) was published. It became one of the most treasured books of many a budding primatologist, as well as a rich source of information for those already established. The book contained an outstanding volume of information on living primates. It also showed where our knowledge was incomplete or lacking, providing inspiration and incentive for further research. Now twenty years later we are treated with a sequel, *Primates in Perspective*. This book stands in evidence that primatologists have not been idle over the intervening years and attests to the amazing quantity of new information that has been added to the field. It is especially encouraging to see the great amount we now have on species previously more or less unknown, especially nocturnal strepsirrhine primates.

The list of contributing authors, all experts within the field, is long ($n = 58$). With so many contributors and so much to present, chaos could have ensued; however, the editors have done a remarkable job in structuring the presentation. Even though the contributors follow a template, which provides uniformity, there is allowance for flexibility as dictated by the topic or the contributor's personal style.

The book begins with two chapters that present a historical perspective on primate field studies and a synopsis of primate evolutionary history. The remainder is divided into five sections. The largest, close to half of the book, is devoted to 17 chapters where vital statistics on specific primate groups are provided. Other sections pertain to topics such as reproduction and life history, ecology, and social behavior and intelligence. There is also a section, comprising three chapters, devoted to methods. The section "The Primates" is an impressive synthesis of quantitative information. Each chapter is laden with tables containing a remarkable array of data, and each contains detailed lists of species' distributions, habitat preferences, population density and group size, and range size. Especially useful is the inclusion of information on all populations studied, clearly showing the extent of intraspecific variability. Most chapters provide

detailed information on diet and activity budgets; the species' physical characteristics; and life history parameters and reproductive behavior. Beyond data, what will make these chapters invaluable to students are the extensive citations in each table. This is especially pertinent in the tables listing all field studies conducted on each species.

The "Methods" section is a welcome addition to this book. It will be especially useful to beginning graduate students planning research projects. The chapter "Research Questions" is particularly valuable, covering basic but important topics such as how to design a research project, how to collect different kinds of data, and how to analyze these data. The remaining chapters cover endocrinology and biomolecular primatology and reveal new approaches now commonly used to address questions pertaining to reproductive cycles, stress levels, paternity and kin relationships, and tracking infectious diseases. The chapter on molecular primatology addresses the biomolecules studied, the methods used, and the utility of this approach to elucidating a range of questions pertaining to primates. It considers both laboratory and field conditions and is accompanied by excellent illustrations as well as extensive references. The section "Reproduction" contains five chapters. The first is a brief overview of the theoretical framework for and historical background of life-history study, which goes on to discuss variation in life history patterns among primates. The second is a synopsis of what we know about growth and development in primates. The next three chapters pertain to sexuality and reproduction, which is covered in its physical, behavioral, and endocrinological manifestations. A special focus is given to reproductive cessation in female primates and whether menopause is an exclusively human phenomenon. The potential adaptive value of postreproductive females is also discussed. The last chapter explores different expressions of mate choice, with a special focus on female choice and levels of competition. It considers the potential explanatory power of female choice on discrepancies between grouping pattern and mating system, a topic that is discussed further in the social behavior section.

"Ecology" comprises six chapters that cover a wide range of topics. The first charts how the field of socioecology has evolved over the years and points out ongoing problems: e.g., we are still attempting to place arguments in dichotomous categories, which seldom give a satisfactory result. A chapter on primate feeding ecol-

ogy focuses on the nutritional requirements of extant species and the possible evolutionary trajectory of diet adaptations. Primate positional behavior is discussed in a chapter that includes informative tables detailing, for select species, how often specific substrates are used during different locomotor modes. Another chapter considers the potentially important role of primates as seed-dispersal agents. Two chapters deal with primate survival. In one, the evidence for primates as prey is considered. A table lists published accounts of observed predation events, and indirect evidence, such as antipredator behaviors, is discussed. Though humans have preyed upon primates for millennia, the hunting of primates for food has now reached crisis proportions. The fact that primates prey upon each other (e.g., chimpanzees hunting red colobus) and may even cause local populations to go extinct is also discussed. The chapter on conservation is dire reading: close to one-third of all primate species are endangered, many being on the brink of extinction. The take-home message is that we all need to become more proactive in protecting extant primate species. To ensure that future generations have the opportunity to observe primates in the wild, we must devise creative ideas for how humans can live alongside other primates.

Primate cognitive study is probably the field that has made the greatest advances over the past two decades. This is reflected in the eleven-chapter section, "Social Behavior and Intelligence." The theme of this section is how primates manage to live in social groups. Topics include how individuals cooperate, form alliances, and resolve conflicts; how aggression is controlled; and how the social fabric of a group is maintained. The presence of reconciliation behavior is used as evidence of a sophisticated social awareness. Two chapters take tool use and communication as bases for exploring cognitive ability in primates. The evolution of tool-using behavior, especially in light of recent archaeological studies at chimpanzee nut-cracking sites in the Tai forest, and the origin of language are considered. The "Social Beginnings" chapter charts the social development of infant primates and their interactions with adult group members. In addition,

the extent to which variation in mothering style influences the developing individual is entertained. The question as to whether nonhuman primates are cultural beings is addressed in another chapter. The underpinning problem is a lack of consensus on how to define culture and what aspects of behavior are indicative of cultural traditions. A chapter on primate self-medication covers topics related to avoidance of disease transmission, consumption of plants known to have medicinal properties, and the application of specific leaves or insects to the body-behaviors thought to be directly related to the well-being of individual primates. That most of these behaviors appear premeditated may explain why this chapter is included here rather than in the ecology section. In the last chapter, the editors provide not only an overview of what we have accomplished so far but also directions for the next couple of decades. One recommendation to would-be primatologists is to keep up the multidisciplinary approach that has yielded such good results so far. They also suggest that more general data should be collected on more species, since so many are under direct threat of extinction.

The strength of this book is the very detailed information, including tables upon tables brimming with data, provided in each chapter. The contents of this book will provide an invaluable source of information to all students of primatology, whether just starting out or well established within the field. In the end, *Primates in Perspective* is a font of information, interesting to read, and we now have a new primatology book to treasure.

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THE SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF FUNERARY REMAINS. Edited by Rebecca Gowland and Christopher Knüsel. Oxford: Oxbow Books. 2006. 312 pp. ISBN 1-84217-211-7. \$120.00 (hardcover).

The primary purpose of this volume is to address what the editors refer to as a "distinct lack of synthetic treatment of human remains and their burial context" (p. ix) in osteological analyses. They suggest that this is partly a product of the postprocessual movement in archaeology and that osteological analyses, along with other archaeological sciences, fell out of favor among social archaeologists. The basis for this issue notwithstanding, it is certainly true that osteological analyses have not always addressed questions that are of fundamental interest when studying human beings in the past.

The first several papers in the volume present a series of case studies that examine the contexts in which human remains enter mortuary samples, including the postmortem factors that affect preservation and recovery

and, therefore, ultimately influence the level of interpretation. Andrews and Bello address the issue of bone representation in two chapters: the first, an illustration of the utility of a variety of indices for understanding preservation and representation within osteological assemblages; the second, a more in-depth case study on Çatalhöyük, which explores the meaning of the spatial representation of differential bone preservation in differing burial contexts. Similarly, Beckett and Robb's chapter reviews taphonomic processes through spatial analysis of skeletal remains in sites from Neolithic Britain and Ireland. Of particular use to the regional specialist is an extensive appendix of over 100 archaeological sites for the period. Somewhat out of place in the book, but nevertheless relevant to the broader discussion of post-depositional processes and human osteology, is Duda's chapter on the archaeology of death, translated from the original French by one of the editors.

The bulk of the papers in this volume are osteological studies that attempt to interpret the past more broadly

through inclusive analyses of burials' archaeological contexts, including zooarchaeology, biochemical studies, the archaeology of gender, and trauma. Of particular note was the chapter by Gowland, which takes a very fundamental aspect of human osteological research, age estimation, and looks at age and aging in the past from associated funerary evidence. This chapter, in particular, provides an example of the kinds of analysis osteologists should and can strive to attain. What better than age—estimated foremost to understand other aspects of interpretation (demography, pathology, etc.)—to examine as part of a broader reconstruction of the social aspects of aging. Similarly, chapters by Sofar and Stone and Walrath provide gentle reminders of the distinction between sex and gender in the bioarchaeological record. Although often clearly denoted in introductory lectures as not being the same thing, there has been a relative paucity of osteological studies of gender *per se*, and these papers are good illustrations of the potential of such approaches. Additional chapters include examinations of interpersonal violence, including domestic violence (Novak), cannibalism (Knüsel and Outram), and body modifications as representations of cultural identity (Geller).

At a somewhat more theoretical level, but equally intriguing, is Knüsel's chapter on the "investiture contest." While I suspect that this level of reconstruction will be seen as too "social" for many of today's students, who are drawn to the discipline by the evidentiary approach of forensic anthropology, this and other chapters are excellent tools for training future skeletal biologists. It is a small irony, likely not lost on the editors, that a volume coming out of the United Kingdom, where anthropology is more clearly distinguished from archaeology and physical anthropology than in North America, reminds us that we are anthropologists first. Although the study of

human skeletal remains provides an important record of human biological variation over time and through space, it also provides us with a unique resource for understanding human behavior. Ultimately, human osteology is about trying to understand human behavior in the past. For the archaeologist, material culture is the data to which such questions are addressed. For the osteologist, it is the biological remains of past people from which interpretations are made. Of course, our understanding of the past is that much richer when all sources of information are integrated.

Overall, the volume provides a very good assortment of papers, many of which will stand on their own, particularly for a variety of topics at the graduate and senior undergraduate level. The book is not meant to be all inclusive in its topical coverage of human osteology, but it nonetheless provides a wealth of examples to illustrate the potential of broader analyses of burials or funerary archaeology. The volume is an excellent reference for illustrating the strengths of osteological interpretation. This is particularly relevant today, when there is increasing importance surrounding issues of the analysis of human skeletal remains, repatriation, and reburial.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

- Abel EK (2007) *Tuberculosis and the Politics of Exclusion: A History of Public Health and Migration to Los Angeles*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 188 pp. \$23.95 (cloth).
- Fennell CC (2007) *Crossroads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 168 pp. \$59.95 (hardcover).
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