

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of Human Identification Case Studies in Forensic Anthropology

REFERENCE: Rathbun, T. A. and Buikstra, J. E., Eds., *Human Identification Case Studies in Forensic Anthropology*, Charles C Thomas, 2600 South First, Springfield, IL 62717, 1984, \$55.00.

This is a good book that fuses the methods of human identification with anecdotal experiences of the authors. An occasional chapter has an almost whimsical approach to the subject which makes for enjoyable reading. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on the analysis of osseous material presumably from Jesse James and the melodrama in two acts concerning the identification of a notorious train robber, Elmer J. McCurdy.

I first began reading the book with some prejudice, expecting the subject of human identification to be presented in a scientific and boring fashion. Contrary to my expectation, I found the book eminently readable from cover to cover because of the manner in which the scientific methods of identification were blended into actual case studies. My overview is that this was exactly the intent of the editors of this multiauthored book.

The contributors to this volume include recognized authorities in the area of forensic anthropology. Contributions and support from other disciplines of engineering, forensic pathology, odontology, and law enforcement are also included. The fact that the editors were able to take multiple styles of the various authors and guide the reader to an enjoyable conclusion is noteworthy. An outstanding feature of the book which allows for ease of reading is the brevity of most chapters. The longest chapter constitutes 23 pages. On the average, the chapter lengths vary from 10 to 15 pages. Each chapter deals with a particular subject, develops the scientific background of the methodology involved, and then uses case histories to assemble pieces of information to their conclusion.

Some chapters are technical without becoming tedious. Generally most chapters are adequately referenced so that further followup information about the technique and scientific basis of the method used in this identification can be pursued independent of this volume.

The quality of the illustrations is generally good. A criticism of Chapter 20 regarding skeletal aging of unidentified persons is that the photographs are somewhat out of synchronization with the text. This is a minor irritation. This could have been overcome if fewer photographs of intact and decomposed bodies were included with emphasis placed on the detail of aging of the bones. Similarly, a chapter which I found intriguing, but of limited value, was the chapter on "Adult Age Determination From Denition." As someone totally unfamiliar with this technique of sectioning teeth and developing raw scores for an estimation of age, I had difficulty

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understanding the methodology. Similarly the corresponding photographs, although of good quality, did not noticeably increase my understanding of the subject.

An outstanding message is carried through each chapter of the book: cooperation between anthropologists, forensic pathologists, and other related disciplines. This is repeatedly emphasized to the point where it becomes somewhat tiring. This, however, is more of a reflection of the common concern of multiple contributors wishing to make the same point rather than a shortcoming of the book itself. The message is clear. After reading this volume, I will never approach a skeleton with the expectation that I have the requisite information necessary to do a complete and thorough examination.

I highly recommend this book to all death investigators since the material presented covers the spectrum of available identification methods and resources. For the novice in training or the experienced and worn death investigator, the book should serve a useful purpose. It is a book which would sit comfortably on the shelf of any scientific library, whether it be private or public, but would be equally at home on a nightstand for bedtime reading. How else can you spend \$55.00 and be entertained and informed at the same time?