

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of Personal Identification from Human Remains

REFERENCE: Rogers, S. L., *Personal Identification from Human Remains*, Charles C Thomas, 2600 South First St., Springfield, IL 62794-9265, 1987, 84 pp., \$23.50.

Is it possible for a book to be published without passing editorial review? This book is filled to distraction with run-on sentences, inappropriate subtitles, typographical errors, and misspellings. Parts of it are written in a stream-of-consciousness style that is quite disorganized and results in a great deal of unnecessary repetition.

The author, a physical anthropologist, states that the purpose of the book is the presentation of the most convenient and frequently used identification procedures for a routine investigation, as well as a review of the complex and expanding field of forensic science. Topics covered include visual recognition, process of decomposition, time since death, fingerprints, dentition, skeletal system, and facial reconstruction. There is, however, little discussion on what it means to apply one's scientific expertise to the law. The nonforensic slant of the book is not surprising, given that the author is not known to be active in the field. Why then did he write this book?

I am equally confused as to the intended audience. The book's lack of breadth and depth make it of little value to veteran or neophyte forensic scientists. The danger is that novices to the identification process may buy this book for its low price, instead of a more expensive but more comprehensive book, and unknowingly fall victim to its inaccuracies (many of which are in the author's own field).

Examples of these inaccuracies or misleading statements include: "[Rigor mortis] results *in* chemical changes in the glycogen and other muscle constituents" (emphasis added); isn't this backwards? The author states that any racial determinations of hair require embedding and thin sectioning, which completely ignores observations of the medulla. Table 3 on estimation of stature confuses fibula and femur and gives the wrong correction for older individuals. Carabelli's cusp is mentioned only for its appearance on the second deciduous molars of Mongoloids, though the trait is a reliable Caucasoid marker. One and one-half pages are spent on a discussion of aging by cranial suture closure while only two lines are devoted to the much better documented age changes in the pubic symphysis. Facial reconstruction, discussed in some detail, is not an expedient or routine technique and often is used only as a last resort. It is implied that the deceased's vocation can be easily appraised through an examination of calluses and other occupational marks on hands and teeth, but it is not said that one's ability to make these appraisals only comes from long experience.

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The text contains 5 tables and 18 figures. Figure 3, which is never referenced in the text, is a near duplicate of Table 2. Some figures are not particularly clear or informative. In addition to the 64 pages of text, there is a bibliography with 93 sources, an index, and a glossary with such terms as “accounterments” and “arthridides” and the oddest definition of race I have ever seen.

Whether the errors result from the author or the publisher, the end result is that this book has serious flaws.