

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of Age Markers in the Human Skeleton

REFERENCE: İşcan, M. Y., Ed., *Age Markers in the Human Skeleton*, Charles C Thomas, 2600 South First St., Springfield, IL 62794-9265, 1989, 359 pp., \$64.75, cloth.

When I first saw this book, I wondered just how much it would add to the body of knowledge on age determination from human remains. Were the claims of the editor—that the book is a comprehensive presentation and evaluation of the state of the art in this speciality—well founded?

As more researchers investigate the problems of age determination, developing new methods or retesting and modifying old ones, attention is increasingly drawn to the range of variability. As many have pointed out, while the process of maturation is fairly regular and relatively well documented, that of degeneration is highly individualistic. For this reason and because we as investigators cannot predict the condition or completeness of any remains we may be called upon to examine, we must be familiar with many techniques on different body areas.

That so-called “multiregional approach” is an underlying theme of this book. It contains seven chapters on skeletal aging and five on dental aging, followed by two summary chapters. The diversity of the contributors is one of the book’s strengths: Kósa on the fetal skeleton; Ubelaker on subadults; Masset on cranial sutures; Loth and İşcan on the thoracic region; Meindl and Lovejoy on the pelvis; Sorg, Andrews, and İşcan on radiography; Stout on bone histology; Bang on developmental and regressive changes in teeth; El-Nofely and İşcan on subadult dentition; Kilian and Vlček on dental histology; Charles, Condon, Cheverud, and Buikstra on cementum growth layer groups; Brothwell on tooth wear; Maples on practical applications; and İşcan on research strategies.

The various techniques discussed have applicability beyond the samples on which they were developed, a crucial criterion for general acceptance, and can be used in both archaeological and forensic contexts. Some of us may prefer to leave the histologic techniques to experts in the area, but any anthropologist working in the field of human identification should have the ability to evaluate radiologic information.

As is the nature of an edited volume, the contributions are uneven: some are general surveys, others discuss one or more specific techniques. The surveys (Ubelaker is an example) are useful in that they point out the non-comparability among studies. Some chapters present methods, tables, and photographic documentation for immediate use

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(the chapters by Loth and İşcan and by Charles et al. are good examples). The bibliographic references are comprehensive.

There are some minor annoyances in the editing and printing of the book. There is a certain amount of overlap, especially in the dental chapters. Kósa's formulae do not all list standard errors. Masset gives a useful discussion of sources of systematic error in age determination from cranial sutures, but the chapter seems overly long for a technique with a maximum 0.63 correlation with age. There are lines of text missing on pages 119 and 321. Book titles within the text are in boldface, while those same titles in the reference list are italicized. The correct plural forms for "cadaver" and "incus" are used, but the word "data" is misused several times.

This book does form a useful reference, especially for those persons actively engaged in human identification. The contents are not new, having been previously published in other forms elsewhere, but it is useful to have them all in one volume. A similar type of book on racial determination by a different group of authors is in press. İşcan here correctly emphasizes the need to build up a current database (to include pertinent skeletal parts) from the medical examiner cases we analyze. Only then can we continue to progress in our ability to identify human remains.