

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *Bones: A Forensic Detective's Casebook*

REFERENCE: Ubelaker, Douglas and Henry Scammell. *Bones: A Forensic Detective's Casebook*, HarperCollins, Publisher, New York, New York, 1992, 317 pp.

Bones: A Forensic Detective's Casebook, is a vivid account of some of Dr. Douglas Ubelaker's most intriguing forensic cases. This volume contains 25 relatively short chapters, many concentrating on a single forensic case involving the analysis of skeletal remains. The cases are related in an entertaining manner which makes the volume readable to the general public as well as the forensic specialist. There is a humorous vein throughout despite the tales of death which unfold. Woven into these skeletal cases is a wealth of information for forensic specialists. The reader is given information on the history of forensic anthropology and key figures in its development. In particular, Dr. Larry Angel (Ubelaker's predecessor at the Smithsonian) is described in the midst of his forensic work. Not only does Ubelaker describe pioneers in the field, he brings numerous colleagues and their contributions to light throughout these chapters.

The volume contains cogent reminders to seasoned forensic experts regarding a number of principles and procedures. The importance of using the comparative method to bridge archaeology

and modern forensics is noted in a number of examples. Objectivity is stressed both as the forensic scientist proceeds with his analysis and appears in court as an expert witness. Ubelaker stresses the importance of using reference skeletal samples in making identifications and the importance of using experimental techniques in the interpretation of trauma on bone. The actual cases presented in this book illustrate a wide variety of techniques and/or problems faced by practitioners today which go far beyond the core procedures of basic identification (age, sex, race, stature reconstruction). The reader is given information on: 1) distinguishing carnivore activity from trauma, 2) effects of fire, roots on bone, 3) using insects to study time interval since death and sometimes even the cause of death, 4) facial reproduction or photographic superimposition used in the identification process.

The writing style and general presentation of the cases insure that this volume will be read by interested members of the general public. They may not understand all the scientific technicalities but the cases can be understood. This volume may help to raise the awareness of the public as to the principles and procedures of the forensic anthropologist. The inclusion of Dr. William Bass's experiments in decomposition at the University of Tennessee is excellent and may broaden the horizons of certain readers. The readability of this book insures that most who start it will probably finish it. Throughout this volume, Ubelaker comes forth as a caring human being, objectively and thoroughly pursuing the goals of a forensic anthropologist, but in touch with the emotions and circumstances of the families of the victims.

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