

BOOK REVIEW

Richard L. Jantz,¹ Ph.D.

Review of: *Forensic Anthropology: Case Studies from Europe*

REFERENCE: Brickley MB, Ferllini R, editors. Forensic anthropology: case studies from Europe. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2007. 250 pp+xi, \$68.95.

Case studies are an integral part of forensic anthropology. Although every case is unique, each one teaches us something about a methodological or theoretical issue. America's leading role in the professional development of forensic anthropology is evident in the several case study books appearing in the past two decades. The present volume illustrates the rapid development of the field in Europe.

The book contains 15 chapters, a forward and a preface. There is not obvious organization of the chapters. Cases are presented from 10 European countries (three from England, three from the Balkans, and one each from Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Sweden). Most of the authors hold positions in Europe and are European trained, although at least two are U.S. trained and one holds a faculty position in the U.S. The cases cover numerous topics and presentation strategies. Various kinds of trauma, burning, dismemberment, taphonomy, race/ancestry/population affinity, human rights work, and field recovery are all dealt with. One chapter deals with identification of a living suspect through facial recognition, gait analysis, and photogrammetry. All other chapters deal with interpretation of human remains. Some papers proceed directly to presentation of the case; others set up broader questions and then turn to cases to help answer those questions or illustrate their points.

The debt owed to American, and specifically U.S. forensic anthropology is apparent throughout. Comparison of the development of forensic anthropology in Europe and America is the topic of the first chapter, where the editors discuss the different development of anthropology in general, the different legal environments,

and differences in training. In Europe, specific training in forensic anthropology is seldom available.

Different things will strike readers of this volume, depending on their areas of expertise. What struck me most forcefully is the virtual absence of European reference data that can be used to estimate the main components of the biological profile, age, sex, ancestry, and height. To a considerable extent this situation may be attributed to the more restrictive legal environment in Europe, which either does not allow or restricts research using tissue of recently deceased individuals. Consequently, it is not possible to establish a facility to study human decomposition and taphonomy in Europe, and collections of skeletons of modern, documented individuals are uncommon. For the most part, authors in this volume utilize the standards developed on American populations. It is likely that European populations differ from Americans in a number of respects, and for that matter that European populations differ from each other. It would presumably be possible to systematically collect data from the forensic cases that pass through European laboratories, as has been done in the U.S. to good effect.

Buikstra points out in her forward that this volume is a lineal descendent of Rathbun and Buikstra (1), which has served to educate law enforcement, forensic professionals, and countless students about the value of forensic anthropology. There is every reason to believe the current volume will serve European forensic anthropology equally as well. It will also serve to inform American forensic anthropologists about development of the field in Europe and hence to promote its development in both continents.

Reference

1. Rathbun T, Buikstra J. Human identification: case studies in forensic anthropology. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1984.

¹Department of Anthropology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.