

## BOOK REVIEW

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### Review of: *Missing and Murdered: A Personal Adventure in Forensic Anthropology*

**REFERENCE:** Morris AG. *Missing and murdered: a personal adventure in forensic anthropology*. Cape Town, South Africa: Zebra Press, 2011, 249 pp.

Alan Morris' book, *Missing and Murdered: A Personal Adventure in Forensic Anthropology*, is an autobiographical examination of case studies and other professional experiences as a forensic anthropologist in South Africa. It is similar in style to others in the genre, such as *Bones: A Forensic Detective's Casebook* (Ubelaker and Scammel 1992) or *Dead Men Do Tell Tales* (Maples and Browning 1994). Like its predecessors, the audience is the nonscientific lay reader, and it seeks to demonstrate the scientific process of forensic anthropology through a first-person commentary that expresses not only the procedures but also the emotions, frustrations, pride, and human side of the anthropologist.

The book differs from others in the genre in that it is firmly nested in South Africa, rather than in North America, and Dr. Morris articulates well the unique problems and opportunities faced by South African forensic anthropologists. The book consists of seven chapters, the first two of which, "The Role of the Forensic Anthropologist" and "The Lab Analysis," expertly compare and contrast the medico-legal system of Canada, the United States, and South Africa, and lay out the typical tasks ascribed to the forensic anthropologist. The third chapter, "Murder and Mayhem," provides an overview of several "routine" cases and introduces the reader to the human toll of political violence in the country. This theme returns in Chapter 5, "The TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and the Victims of Political Violence," where Dr. Morris discusses the current efforts to locate and identify apartheid victims.

The greatest departure for non-African readers will be Chapter 4, "Muti Murders," which is a sensitive portrayal of traditional medicine and religion in some African cultures. The practice takes on

forensic significance because certain medicines and rituals require the harvesting of fresh (live) human tissues, resulting in murders. While this topic could be presented as a shocking novelty, Dr. Morris adeptly provides a thorough cultural and religious perspective on Muti practices that informs rather than sensationalizes. Chapters 6 and 7 ("Archaeological Remains" and "Death as a Growth Industry") discuss some of Dr. Morris' bioarchaeological projects. Bioarchaeologists may find these to be the weakest chapters given the traditional interpretations of pathological lesions, yet the chapters effectively highlight the similarities and differences between bioarchaeology and forensics.

The strength of the book is the unflinching and contemporary treatment of social race and biological ancestry. Dr. Morris carefully distinguishes between these concepts in Chapter 2 and takes to task forensic anthropology textbooks written in the United States that adhere to the antiquated and damaging three-race paradigm. His argument that biological ancestry may not reflect folk classifications of race is more persuasive than most because his backdrop is the violence of apartheid. Polarization during this period has led to a postapartheid society that is still "obsessed with race."

In summary, this book is a thoughtful, easy-to-read casebook from a South African perspective. The seven chapters are not necessarily sequentially dependent, so single chapters of interest can be easily assigned by instructors teaching an introductory forensic anthropology course. Moreover, a useful glossary of technical terms is provided that may assist nonscientist readers, although some of the cultural and political terms should also be included. Two groupings of color photograph plates are also included that illustrate Dr. Morris or his students at work and particular cases discussed in the text. The photographs chosen are neither gratuitous nor graphic. Dr. Morris embodies the autobiography/case studies style of writing well and tells a story in a way that is both entertaining and thought-provoking.

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