

BOOK REVIEW

Meeting Our Ancestors: What Can Their Bones Tell Us/Rencontre avec nos ancetres: ce que nous revelent keurs ossements. Robert Larocque (Rosemarie Bernard & Moira T. McCaffrey, transls.). Montreal: Recherches Amerindiennes au Quebec, 1985. Pp. 64/64. CAN \$6.00 (softcover).

With a scant 36 pages of text, 15½ pages of superb black-and-white photographs, and a 4-page bibliography which concentrates on French-language sources, this engaging little book is an excellent introduction to skeletal analysis for the lay person who never knew or cared anything about the excavation and analysis of human remains. Published by Recherches Amerindiennes au Quebec, it was originally written for French-speakers who had not previously had ready access to materials on the subject. The French original and its English translation are bound together in a single volume. The English text suffers from a few awkward translations and sweeping generalizations, but these are relatively insignificant given the fact that the book is primarily aimed at the nonspecialist.

Chapter headings include: The work of anthropologists; How bones are treated (On the archaeological site and In the laboratory); What can be learned from the analysis of human skeletal remains (Physical traits and Traces of disease); Mortuary practices and their significance; Research in Quebec; Ethical and legal questions; History and archaeology: what is the difference?; and a Conclusion. Each chapter consists of a 1-10-page, non-technical introduction to the topic. Discussion focusses on what can be done, to the exclusion of how. The two-page discussion of nutritional diseases (pp. 34-35), for instance, suggests that agriculturalists and hunter-gatherers have different diets, sometimes reflected in a higher level of dental caries among agriculturalists; that anemia, scurvy, and rickets leave scars on bones; and that "the quantity of each type of food we consume determines the proportion of some of the substances that make up bone." What these substances, the types of food that affect them, or the "series of complex biochemical analyses" necessary to detect them, may be, is beyond the scope of this book. Readers seeking discussions of carbon, nitrogen, and strontium isotope ratios will not find them here. They may wish instead to consult articles like "Chemistry and Paleodietary Research: No More Easy Answers," by Andrew Sillen *et al.* in *American Antiquity* 54(3):504-512.

Canadian readers should find this a useful book to keep in the office and hand to bulldozer operators or backyard gardeners who report digging up bones. They may also wish to show the excellent photographs to students in introductory classes. American readers should be warned, however, that the discussion of ethical and legal questions, while sensitive, reflects only the situation in Quebec. The legal situation is different in the United States, and some Native American groups in this country object to publication of photographs like Figures 1 and 2. It is unfortunate that no publication of this level and quality is available to deal with the situation in the United States. If it were, human remains discovered by chance in this country might receive better treatment, and some of the misunderstandings between paleoanthropologists and the lay public might be reduced.

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