

FOREWORD

Beyond the Bones is a particularly apt title for this book, because this volume shows how we can reach beyond the remains of our ancestors into their actual lived experiences. This is increasingly achievable through accessing the range of methods available for scholars from a variety of disciplines and encompassing varied datasets. In tandem, this provides a platform for making this subject matter accessible to the interested public. As many of the chapters show, comparative analysis of different sets of data can be challenging, but this does not mean that it should not be attempted. The synthetic project, *Health and disease in Britain. From prehistory to the present day* (Roberts and Cox, 2003), indeed showed, albeit using only one dataset (skeletal reports), how it is necessary that skeletal report authors use the same analytical methods and present data similarly.

The subject matter of the chapters in this book is varied and provides “something for all.” The extensive project of digital radiography at the Museum of London (Bekvalac) shows the “added value” of such work for enhancing knowledge and as a learning tool, not forgetting the challenges of the ethics of sharing such data widely. Lockau’s focus on metabolic bone disease emphasizes the need to take heed of clinical understanding of these diseases and think about diagnosis on a scale of confident to cautious and, very importantly, the continued need to explore early stages of bone changes in the skeleton—rather than always referring to “classic” examples reflecting people who had experienced the disease for some time. A consideration of living people’s perceptions of the quality and quantity of their food intake (Holland) reminds us that, when looking to the past, we can forget that our ancestors were individuals, as we are today, who had dietary beliefs and preferences specific to them but also their social context. Marciniak’s approach to Roman health and well-being through ancient pathogen DNA analysis shows the benefits of such approaches that link historical, skeletal, and contextual data, especially the gaps in knowledge for any one of those datasets that may be filled by another. Historical data are also a focus for Mant, Murphy, and Reusch.

We learn what we do not know about trauma in an 18th/19th century London hospital through skeletal remains, and yet find that considering contemporary documents in tandem may tell us about the nuances of health care decision making (Mant). We find that infant mortality as seen in skeletons is not linked to climate, following correlation with many variables (Murphy), and are allowed to explore the world of castrated people in the past through Reusch's fascinating multidisciplinary study. Finally, and unusually for bioarchaeology, Schillaci and Wichmann consider linguistic and craniometric data to look at genetic relationships in a New Mexico Pueblo group, identifying that they did not "evolve" together.

While dealing with disparate datasets and subject matter, this welcome volume will provide bioarchaeologists with ideas and challenges for being holistic in their approach to understanding the past.

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