



The Archaeological Journal

Book Reviews



DISEASE IN LONDON, 1ST – 19TH CENTURIES: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO DIAGNOSIS. Edited by Don Walker. Pp. xix and 268, Illus 446. Museum of London Archaeology (MoLA monograph, **56**), 2012. Price: £28.00. ISBN 978 190758 610 1.

This is a beautiful book published by Museum of London Archaeology. It provides a unique glimpse at a large number of pathological lesions present in populations spanning over two thousand years from a single geographic location. The individuals are from the vast skeletal collections curated at the Museum of London, encompassing Romano-Britain, the Medieval plague epidemics, and the industrial revolution in London. The principal author is Don Walker (Museum of London Archaeology), with contributions from Jelena Bekvalac, Brian Connell, Lynne Cowal, Amy Gray Jones, Michael Henderson, Tania Kausmally, Richard Mikulski, Natasha Powers, Rebecca Redfern, Gaynor Western, and the late Bill White.

The introduction provides a brief outline of the aims and intentions of the book, which is to act as a field and laboratory reference guide for bioarchaeologists and palaeopathologists. As mentioned in the introduction, books such as this, with highly detailed descriptions, photographs, and radiographs, will become increasingly important due to the increase in students and researchers using the collections, as well as the potential problems that may arise as a result of reburial issues, which may restrict access to some skeletal collections.

The first impression made when opening this volume is that the photographs and radiographs illustrating the text, and in particular the lesions described therein, are stunningly clear. The photographers, Andy Chopping and Edwin Baker, have managed to consistently take high-quality photos which allow for full illustration of the lesions in detail. As most bioarchaeologists are aware, photographing skeletal elements has its challenges, and so the quality of the images presented in the volume is refreshing. There are over four hundred high-quality photographs and radiographs, as well as diagrams illustrating lesion distribution which accompany the text, creating a complete description of each disease and condition. There is, however, an assumption of experience and prior knowledge of palaeopathology, and although the photographs will be ideal to use in a teaching session, the text will be challenging for students or a non-specialized audience.

The book systematically presents case studies of pathological conditions commonly encountered in archaeological human remains (e.g. congenital disorders, specific and non-specific infections, trauma, joint disease, metabolic disease, etc.). The authors provide differential diagnoses, where appropriate, and clearly outline the rationale for the most likely diagnosis. A very useful aspect of this volume is that the authors usually

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begin by presenting a classic case and then continue with variations in expression and/or location of the lesions.

Another admirable feature of this book is that the authors make sure to discuss how the conditions or diseases would have impacted on the quality of life of the afflicted individuals. For example, individual GDA06 from the City Bunhill burial ground, who was afflicted with treponematosi, may have suffered not only from 'boring pain in the bones affected by proliferative periostiti, fever, tenderness, and soft tissue swelling', but also from the social stigma of the disease (p. 78). Another example is individual MST87 from Londinium's eastern cemetery who would have suffered from pain and severe disability due to osteoarthritis of both coxal joints (p. 162). It can be easy to forget the personal aspect of the lesions we study, and the authors successfully remind the reader that the skeletons discussed were real people living with often painful and disabling conditions.

With its detailed, yet concise, descriptions of both common and rare pathological conditions, and with over four hundred figures, this book will surely become an invaluable reference guide for bioarchaeologists and palaeopathologists.

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