

## BOOK REVIEW

*Mortal Wounds: The Human Skeleton as Evidence for Conflict in the Past.* By MARTIN SMITH. South Yorkshire, UK: Pen & Sword, 2017. Pp. 290. Hardback, \$34.95. ISBN 9781473823181.

The history of interpersonal violence is a topic that has garnered much scholarly attention, as the effects of violence can be perceived in many different categories of archaeological evidence ranging from the material to the biological. Smith's book focuses on the latter since its aim is to explore what human remains can reveal about violent conflict.<sup>1</sup> Using examples ranging from the Paleolithic period to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, special emphasis is placed on ritual violence, the treatment of prisoners of war and non-combatants, the role of war in social change and the demography of war, among other subjects.

The book is organized into 12 chapters that are bookended by an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction, entitled "Introduction: 'The Best Available Evidence,'" briefly discusses the archaeology of human conflict, states the author's aims and summarizes the chapters that follow. The initial chapters are geared towards non-specialists: Chapter 1, "I See Dead People: The Human Body as Archaeology," serves as a primer on human skeletal analysis while Chapter 2, "The Fragile Body: Recognizing Injuries to the Skeleton", describes the ways in which skeletal injuries can be recognized and interpreted.

<sup>1</sup> For other recent scholarship on forensic anthropological and bioarchaeological approaches to interpersonal violence, see Erin H. Kimmerle and José Pablo Baraybar (eds.) 2008, *Skeletal Trauma: Identification of Injuries Resulting from Human Rights Abuse and Armed Conflict*, London: CRC Press; Debra L. Martin, Ryan P. Harrod, and Ventura R. Pérez (eds.) 2012, *The Bioarchaeology of Violence*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida; Christopher Knüsel and Martin Smith (eds.) 2013, *The Routledge Handbook of the Bioarchaeology of Human Conflict*, London: Routledge; Debra L. Martin and Cheryl P. Anderson (eds.) 2014, *Bioarchaeological and Forensic Perspectives on Violence: How Violent Death is Interpreted from Skeletal Remains*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Nicholas V. Passalacqua and Christopher W. Rainwater (eds.) 2015, *Skeletal Trauma Analysis: Case Studies in Context*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell; Rebecca C. Redfern 2016, *Injury and Trauma in Bioarchaeology: Interpreting Violence in Past Lives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The remaining chapters present chronological surveys of human violence, with Chapters 3 through 8 focusing on prehistoric material. Chapter 3, “The Earliest Times: Violence in the Deep Past,” describes the earliest extant evidence for hominid and human interpersonal conflict, which includes weapons (e.g., clubs and hafted spears) as well as incidences of skeletal trauma (e.g., blunt-force and sharp-force injuries). Chapter 4, “Rolling Back the Temporal Frontier: Modern Humans and the Origins of War?,” argues that although group skirmishes were perhaps always an aspect of human existence, organized warfare likely has its origins in the Upper Paleolithic period (ca. 50,000 to 10,000 years ago). The next two chapters, Chapter 5, “Out from the Cold: Mesolithic Hostilities?,” and Chapter 6, “‘The Children of Cain’: Conflict in the Neolithic,” discuss skeletal evidence of violence dating to the Mesolithic Period (ca. 15,000 to 5,000 years ago) and Neolithic Period (ca. 4,500 to 2,000 years ago) respectively. In Chapter 7, “Cutting-Edge Technology: Violence in Bronze Age Europe,” the author explores an interesting paradox—while the invention of bronze in the Bronze Age (ca. 3200 to 600 BCE in Europe) revolutionized warfare and allowed for the development of a “material culture of violence” (107) comprised of specialized weapons and defensive gear, the actual incidence of violent deaths does not appear to be any higher than previous periods. Instead, the evidence suggests that Bronze Age peoples appreciated the “‘performance value’ of acts of violence,” (128) which led to conspicuous displays in the form of ritual killings, “warrior” burials (i.e., a burial that features an elaborate array of arms and armor) and war-related iconography. Ritual violence also figures prominently in the last chapter on prehistory, Chapter 8, “Out of the Shadows: The End of Prehistory,” which chronicles the changes accompanying the shift from bronze to iron technologies (depending on region, the shift ranges from ca. 1200 to 500 BCE in Europe). In addition to a significant uptick in organized conflict (evidenced by large fortified hilltop sites and battlefield casualties), there was also a marked increase in the ritual killings of humans and animals.

Jumping ahead in time, Chapters 9 through 12 focus on historic periods. Starting with the Romans, Chapter 9, “Imperial Anger: Violence under Roman Rule,” asserts that “violence was an intrinsic part of the Roman world” (157) as it was used as an institutional means of control. This point is illustrated through examples of victims of military campaigns, executions (including crucifixions), gladiatorial combat and slavery as well as domestic and urban violence. Chapter 10, entitled “‘The Judgement of God’: Violence in Early Medieval England,” chronicles the collapse of social order and institutions in Britain that followed the

fall of the Roman Empire, and casualties of skirmishes with invading foreigners, namely the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, are examined. Although European society eventually stabilized, warfare persisted and Chapter 11, “‘The True Son of Gentle Blood’: The High Middle Ages to Renaissance,” discusses the war dead (including English King Richard III), the losers of Trials by Combat and the victims of public executions. The nature of skeletal trauma dramatically transforms in Chapter 12, “The Shock of the New: The Changing Face of Violence,” which describes unique skeletal injuries caused by firearms and artillery. Finally, the brief conclusion presents an overarching summary of the ways in which trends in violence have shifted over time.

Overall, this book provides an excellent introduction to the bioarchaeology of interpersonal conflict. It will likely be of greatest interest to bioarchaeologists, but the thorough explanations and descriptions of concepts and methods make the book accessible to a general, non-specialist audience. Scholars of classical studies will find particularly useful the foundational chapters (Chapters 1 and 2) and the chapter that focuses on Roman evidence (Chapter 7). Nevertheless, it is hoped that the plethora of chronological case studies and historical trends presented in this book will allow for the emergence of a clearer understanding of the history of human violence.

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