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Prehistoric Cypriot Skulls by Peter M. Fischer (Review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE PLEISTOCENE OLD WORLD. REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES, edited by *Olga Soffer*. Pp. xxi + 380, figs. 72. Plenum Press, New York and London 1987.

This book has 23 papers covering topics which range in time from the beginning to the end of the Pleistocene, and in space from western Spain to eastern China, southern Africa to southeastern Australia. This makes it sound comprehensive, but in reality, western Europe (the "classic" area) is covered by half of the papers, while one each provides regional summaries for India, Soviet Central Asia, China, and Australia. The four regional summaries dismiss vast topics in a couple of sweeping paragraphs. There is much that is really interesting and important in these papers. Binford shows that for both the Lower Palaeolithic Oldowan and Acheulean industries core tools seem to result from one sort of behavior, flake tools from another; Dibble shows that some of the Mousterian tool types might simply be different stages within the same reduction sequence; Gamble argues that frozen mammoths, made accessible by wooden snow-probes, represented an obvious store of possible food for Middle Pleistocene hominids in Europe, a suggestion which Frison extends (tongue in cheek?) to the colonization of the Americas; Audouze summarizes the remarkable Magdalenian open sites of the Paris basin, with details about the reduction strategies and raw material movements in the stone industries; Wediger, Hahn, and White, in separate papers, demonstrate and argue the need to concentrate on the fine grain of local settlement systems before embarking on broader generalizations about the nature of human behavior in these remote periods; Hayden and others use ¹³C analyses to show that marine foods probably contributed little to the diet early in the Upper Palaeolithic of southwestern France, with an increase to about 16% at the end of the Magdalenian; Clark calculates niche width and resource diversity for the faunal collections of the Cantabrian region of Spain, showing that the data from the Mousterian to the Iron Age fit a model of diversification and intensification under conditions of population growth predicted from optimal foraging theory; Soffer undermines Gamble's (1982) argument about social networks in Europe by pointing to the lack of chronological restriction and lack of stylistic uniformity among the Venus figurines which were essential to his argument; Parkington discusses the detailed changes in the sequence at a site in the western Cape of South Africa, arguing that they reflect "organizationally different components" not "simple cultural change."

As someone who has worked in Mediterranean Spain, I would have liked more emphasis on the unfashionable bits of Europe or on smaller regions within the continent-sized land masses. One factor in the lack of attention to these regions is the difference in prehistoric behavior which created their less spectacular archaeological records. Conkey, and Rigaud and Simek suggest that the behavior of archaeologists is another major factor. These papers consider understanding of the non-human formation processes of the archaeological record as central to our primary concern with understanding hu-

man behavior. The units of description and analysis are not necessarily units which have any relationship to meaningful prehistoric entities. Gamble neatly sidesteps some of the methodological problems by discussing the conditions for the first colonization of Europe in the context of the broad patterns of climatic change on a long time scale.

Was regional human occupation continuous from the first colonization? This is an issue raised by Gamble for Europe, and Davis for Soviet Central Asia, but not by Lourandos for Australia. A further issue is how to identify continuity or discontinuity. Is similarity of stone flaking technology or typology an indication? Davis clearly thinks so, although he opposes the Soviet emphasis on continuity. As Olsen points out for China, domination by the knowledge of artifact sequences in Europe has not helped understanding of the local record.

The final broad theme is the interpretation of stone assemblages. Some authors (Phillips on Sinai, Bar-Yosef on the Mediterranean Levant, David and Bricker on the Périgord), wittingly or unwittingly, are stuck in the typological paradigm, and attribute stone assemblage variability to ethnicity. The alternative is to look forward to a greater emphasis in interpretation on technology and use (Dibble, Audouze, Wediger, Bar-Yosef, Hahn on Central Europe). That some work seems to overlap these two approaches is characteristic, given the difficulty of changing one's attitudes despite being able to see the virtues of a new paradigm. There will be many more indications of this clash in the next few years. Conference volumes of this sort will probably be the battleground.

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PREHISTORIC CYPRIOT SKULLS, by *Peter M. Fischer*. (*SIMA* 75.) Pp. 93, figs. 113. Paul Åströms Förlag, Göteborg 1986.

Human skeletal remains, from graves and other contexts, are becoming of increasing importance to archaeologists. The analysis of these materials greatly increases our ability to reconstruct ancient societies. Peter Fischer has contributed to these studies through his publication of the skeletal remains (only skulls in almost all cases) recovered from a series of sites on Cyprus between the years 1927 and 1958. This slim volume is organized into three sections: a "medico-anthropological investigation," an interpretation of find contexts, and a very brief note on trace element studies written with A.R.E. Lodding and J.G. Norén. The second part, in which Fischer places these bones in their proper archaeological context, is the most successful aspect of the study.

Reconstructing the original find locations of these crania was not an easy task, but is essential to the effective use of the skeletal data. Fischer found that the skeletons often are not

recorded in the excavators' notebooks, post-cranial remains were ignored in almost all cases, and subsequent treatment of these bones led to scrambling of what little information had been recovered. Even when these remains had been studied and published by physical anthropologists prior to the publication of the excavators' reports, the latter often omitted even basic age and gender information. Despite these difficulties Fischer has been successful at reconstructing much of this important part of the archaeological record.

Fischer recognizes that 156 skulls from a widely dispersed series of sites spanning thousands of years do not provide a sample from which meaningful statistical studies may be derived. Obviously the very poor condition of the recovered material and post-excavation deterioration reduced the potential for craniometric study. The absence from this report of such data, either collated from previous studies or newly derived, as well as any non-metric observations now in common use (cf. Berry and Berry, *Journal of Anatomy* 101 [1967] 361) is unusual. The post-cranial remains which do survive are not discussed.

The first portion of this report unfortunately suffers from a number of problems, including sources which are out of date and an approach which ignores recent developments in physical anthropology. Fischer notes that x-ray studies *might* yield a higher rate of pathologies, but this is a statistically irrelevant concern and far from being the only aspect of this research which might have been handled differently. Attempting to evaluate gender on the basis of cranial remains alone is not highly reliable in the Mediterranean area, but this is the approach followed. Although Fischer places considerable emphasis on the surviving dentition, he does not use odontometrics to determine gender despite the success of such procedures in the Mediterranean and elsewhere (e.g., Brace and Nagai, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 59 [1982] 399). Similarly, his use of dental attrition to determine age of adults fails to note that this process often is culture (or social group) specific. A single rate-of-attrition scale may not be the best means to determine ages of adults deriving from several different populations. As a non-metric observation, as being a result of pathology is most interesting. Since non-metric cranial observations as well as craniometric data have become increasingly important to computer-assisted studies of skeletal populations, their omission here must be noted. Such information also might have clarified what Fischer identifies as cranial deformations among these people. The unusual tooth coding, redundant footnote and bibliographic system, and the inclusion of many photographs which are not revealing and poorly cross-referenced all create difficulties for the reader. These concerns pale before the use of the term "race" where the term "population" now might be considered more suitable. The application of Angel's dated "racial" typology to the dentition of these ancient Cypriots does no credit to the memory of that noted scholar.

This report provides an important reminder of what can be achieved when archaeologists are concerned with reconstructing ancient societies and not simply searching for treasure. Skeletal remains from all contexts, and not just graves which hold museum-quality artifacts, offer us an astonish-

ing array of information when conjoined with the archaeological findings. The precise recording of skeletal findspots and the complete recovery of the remains are essential components of appropriate field technique. Fischer's reconstruction of this evidence from these many sites on Cyprus provides a valuable and lasting contribution to archaeology.

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POTTERY ANALYSIS: A SOURCE BOOK, by *Prudence M. Rice*. Pp. xxiv + 559, figs. 134, tables 52. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1987. \$45

For many years the student of ancient ceramics has relied on Anna Shepard's *Ceramics for the Archaeologist* as a fundamental statement, for here is a clear exposition of the principles and methods of pottery study. During the past 20 years, however, there has been unprecedented growth in this area of investigation, and even when the last edition appeared in 1976 the text was beginning to show the strain. A complete rewrite was called for. The mantle of Anna Shepard, as the first lady of American ceramic studies, has fallen on Prudence Rice and her new book *Pottery Analysis* must now take the place of Shepard's classic work.

The book covers much the same ground as *Ceramics for the Archaeologist* with chapters on the properties of clays, the technology of production and analysis of form, style and fabric, but it is much more detailed because there is a wealth of research to draw upon and the scope has been broadened to include developments in Europe as well as America. It is altogether a most commendable effort which must remain a standard work of reference for many years to come. It is worth noting that this substantial volume costs a modest \$45—and this at a time when most European publishers are cutting corners and escalating prices to unrealistic levels.

With a work of this nature, which is almost encyclopaedic in conception and content, there is a temptation to put it to the test by looking up some of the more esoteric aspects of the subject. I tried this a number of times, and in each case found a clear paragraph or section on the subject of my choice with ample bibliographic references for further reading. This is exactly what the reader wants, whether he is an undergraduate student writing an essay or a research worker wanting to refresh his memory of a specialized aspect of the subject.

Naturally, in a concentrated and detailed treatment running to 559 pages, any reviewer who is deeply involved in the subject will find points of debate and criticism. I give a few of mine, without I hope detracting in any way from the essential worth of the book. Firstly, I found the ethnographic and technological sections much better than the discussion of scientific methods of fabric analysis, no doubt because Rice is better acquainted with the former. The latter would have been greatly improved with more concrete examples of application to demonstrate their worth and limitations. Secondly, while I was glad to see a section on quantification