

**Book Review**  
**Forensic Anthropology: Current Methods and Practice**

Christensen, A. M., Passalacqua, N. V., & Bartelink, E. J. (2014). *Forensic anthropology: Current methods and practice*. Amsterdam: Academic Press. 448 pages. \$67.46. ISBN: 978-0-12-418671-2

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One need only peruse the television listings for virtually any given evening to see the fascination in American popular culture with all aspects of forensic work. This attraction is also reflected in course offerings in the many institutions of higher learning, such as classes in forensic psychology and forensic anthropology. Christensen, Passalacqua, & Bartelink (2014) have as their stated intent in *Forensic anthropology: Current methods and practice*, the provision of "a comprehensive introductory text that approaches forensic anthropology as a modern and well-developed science" (p. xiii). This goal is achieved well.

Chapter 1 of this book provides a brief historical sketch of the field of forensic anthropology and its development, including mention of important professional organizations such as the American Association of Physical Anthropologists and the Scientific Working Group on Forensic Anthropology. There is also an outline of the scope of the text, and a brief section on job prospects and training required; the latter is a nice feature for introductory students.

The second chapter gives a brief overview of the bones and teeth of the human body and the third is a review of methods of investigating and documenting those materials in the laboratory. Basic anatomical information is almost impossible to provide in anything but a dry manner, and, in this case, the presentation is hampered by black-and-white graphics that are a bit difficult to see. Early on the reader is told that as a cost-saving measure, all graphics in the book are black-and-white, and is then referred to an Elsevier website where color versions are available.

In Chapter 5, the authors discuss various factors "which affect the preservation and recovery of human remains" (Christensen et al., 2014, p. 119). This includes a number of different forces which can and do act on a body after death, such as scavenging by different organisms, geological factors that can disperse and/or bury a cadaver, or the influence of the climatic and chemical environment on preservation of bone and other remains. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss archaeological and other techniques for proper recovery and documentation of such materials, and management and preservation of them.

The next several sections of the book are perhaps of greater immediate interest to forensic psychologists, although the previous material provides a critical backdrop for understanding the content of Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11. Those chapters address, respectively, means of determining the gender of skeletal remains, the racial/ethnic ancestry of the individual represented, the age of the individual at time of death, and the person's stature. Treatment of these issues is, of course, not fully detailed, given the scope of the book. There is good, up-to-date information provided, such as frequent reference to the Forensic Anthropology Data Bank (Jantz & Moore-Jansen, 1988) and the Fordisc Computer Forensic Discriminant Functions (Jantz & Ousley, 2005). (Both of these resources are described in greater detail in Chapter 3 of the book.)

It seems a bit odd that Chapter 12, which covers "Individual Skeletal Variation," is inserted at this point in the text. Given the import of normal variation to accurate interpretation of other features of a skeleton (or any of a large number of other things, as well), I might have preferred that this either be covered prior to introduction of gender, ancestry, and/or age at death estimation; or that discussion of normal variation be incorporated into these other chapters topically.

Chapters 13 and 14 may well also be of great immediate interest to forensic psychologists. The former addresses analysis of trauma, including sections on the effects to bone of blunt force, sharp force, blasts, and high-velocity projectiles. There is also consideration of discrimination between antemortem and postmortem traumas. Chapter 14 covers personal identification of the individual represented by skeletal remains via means ranging from facial approximation to DNA analysis. The final chapter is titled "Contemporary Issues in Forensic Anthropology," and emphasizes the importance of maintaining and adding to one's knowledge in the several related areas involved, including investigative technologies and developments in the legal arena.

In the preface to this book, the authors conclude: "Although we do not see this text as a primary professional reference for practicing forensic anthropologists, it could serve as a general reference for professionals with little or no training in forensic anthropology" (Christensen et al., 2014, p. viii). In truth, many if not most forensic psychologists will probably not find this volume to be of great utility in informing their practice. Some of the information is frankly rather dull – there is simply no way to make basic skeletal anatomical description exciting. On the other hand, the forensic psychologist seeking a nice review of background information will find this book to be useful, either of relevance to a specific case or to supplement general knowledge.

## References

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