

The Bioarchaeology of Children: Perspectives From Biological and Forensic Anthropology

(Mary E. Lewis, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007.)

Dejana Vlak

Institute for Anthropological Research, Zagreb, Croatia

Among several books devoted to human juvenile osteology (Scheuer and Black 2000, 2005, Baker et al. 2005), it is welcome to see a first comprehensive volume devoted to the study of non-adult skeletal remains from archaeological and forensic contexts. Summarizing the literature from various fields, *The Bioarchaeology of Children* emphasizes the necessity of interdisciplinary approach, focusing on the specifics of the juvenile anatomy and physiology.

The book is divided into nine chapters, devoted to the review of the study of children in anthropology and archaeology (Chapter 1 – The bioarchaeology of children), taphonomy (Chapter 2 – Fragile bones and shallow graves), biological profiling (Chapter 3 – Age, sex and ancestry), growth and development (Chapter 4 – Growth and development), mortality (Chapter 5 – Difficult births, precarious lives), nutrition (Chapter 6 – Little waifs: weaning and dietary stress), pathology (Chapter 7 – Non-adult skeletal pathology, and Chapter 8 – Trauma in children), and future directions in study of juvenile skeletal remains (Chapter 9 – Future directions).

The broad range of topics covered is a recommendation in itself, but the volume's most important contribution, in my opinion, is the emphasis Lewis places on topics that can rarely be found in bioarchaeological texts. In the first chapter, she states that childhood is culturally determined, and that it is consequently necessary to re-define it for each population studied. Discussing the problems of juvenile bone preservation (Chapter 2) author indicates the importance of excavators' knowledge and experience, as well as burial customs, and provides

details on soft-tissue and bone decomposition in children. Interesting and unusual is a part of the Chapter 3 that deals with ancestry determination. After »common« morphological analyses, Lewis describes the use of DNA and stable isotopes in determination of ancestry, birthplace and residence. In growth and development chapter the discussion of factors that influence growth in different age groups might be of interest. The section on pathology that provides descriptions, causes, differential diagnosis, as well as distribution of the lesions on the skeletons using examples from both archaeological and contemporary settings, represents another rare and valuable contribution. References section, with 58 pages of citations, provides a foundation for navigating through the diverse literature on the juvenile osteology.

Omissions are few. What I found missing was a chapter on ethics. It is hard to understand why author decided to avoid this problem, especially since children are even more vulnerable than other age groups. Also, with wide variety of topics that book covers, 188 pages of text seem particularly limiting, and more illustrations would certainly be welcome. Considering the length of the volume it could be considered expensive, especially for students.

Overall, this book reviews the present knowledge about analysis of juvenile skeletal remains. It conveys the richness of data and identifies new directions, pulling together vast quantities of disparate literature. This well written volume substitutes the void currently present in anthropological literature and it will be of a great value for both students and professionals.