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Review of

Hackman, Lucina

Published in:
Journal of Forensic Sciences

DOI:
[10.1111/1556-4029.13872](https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13872)

Publication date:
2018

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Hackman, L. (2018). Review of: New Perspectives in Forensic Human Skeletal Identification . *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 63(5), 1609-1610. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13872>

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Book Review: New Perspectives in Forensic Human Skeletal Identification 2017, Edited by: Krista Latham, Eric Bartelink, Michael Finnegan. Academic Press, eBook ISBN: 9780128125380, Hardcover ISBN: 9780128054291

Author: Dr Lucina Hackman PhD,

Leverhulme Research Centre in Forensic Science, University of Dundee

l.hackman@dundee.ac.uk

In their preface and introduction, the editors describe this as a text book about human skeletal identification and the different methods that can be brought to bear on this central question and the book fulfils this claim. Assisting with the identification of the unidentified, is one of the core remits of the forensic anthropologists and the most common reason for their involvement in casework where skeletal or fragmentary remains are recovered. As a text on human identification, this book is therefore a welcome addition to the forensic anthropology literature.

This book is separated into four sections. The sections cover: Biological Profile construction, molecular and microscopic methods of identification, radiographic and superimposition methods of identification and finally international studies and mass disasters. The chapters offer the reader an overview of modern methods of analysis as well as more traditional methodologies. These latter are brought up to date and the most recent developments are discussed.

Section 1 includes 9 chapters on biological profile determination including analysis of ancestry group, sex and age estimation using different methods. These chapters address the most fundamental role of the forensic anthropologist in the identification process, which is assisting with creating a biological profile. Many chapters in this section, as expected, discuss traditional methodologies and how they have been modernised. Some chapters are relatively short, reflecting the fact that for many identification methods, the biggest issue in ensuring that they are fit for current use, is ensuring that

they are population specific, reflecting the increasing involvement of forensic anthropologists in the international arena. Many of the original methods were developed on a population that could now be considered archaeological and certainly does not necessarily reflect a modern population. Research in these methods therefore is often limited to testing and refining a method to develop these population specific standards. The recognition that a large number of methods were developed on very limited skeletal samples that are country and time specific is welcome and very relevant to the students of today, who will be the researchers and practitioners of the future.

The section culminates in a final chapter that presents the role of NamUS, and how it works to bring together information on missing persons and human remains which are recovered but remain unidentified. The chapter gives an overview on the way in which NamUS tries to overcome the issues which are prevalent in the current identification process, bringing together the different players in the identification process who work within a system which can be described as fragmentary at best.

Section 2 includes 7 chapters pertaining to the use of histological and microscopic methods which can assist in the identification process. Methods include the use of DNA, stable isotopes and carbon dating, all of which have a role to play in specific circumstances. The chapters do allow the reader an overview of where these methods might fit into, and assist with, an identification process, but methods such as the use of isotopes for international use are often limited, as much by inadequate databases as by the method themselves. The chapters do allow the reader to understand the potential for these methods however and make the current input that they can offer clear, although some are strongly US based which means that for students and practitioners outside the US, the utility and accuracy of the methods may not be so clear.

Section 3 includes 6 chapters which discuss the use of radiographic and superimposition methods for identification, these include discussion of the use of frontal sinuses and comparison of ante-mortem and

post-mortem radiographs for identification of individuals. Whilst some of these methods are utilised in countries other than the US, they are not commonly used and they would not be relied upon as primary identifiers. Therefore whilst of interest to all, these chapters are most relevant to students and practitioners in the US.

Section 4 contains 6 chapters which can be separated into 3 which relate to progress in identification internationally and 3 which relate to mass disasters. These are all interesting and give an oversight into progress that is being made in these areas on a worldwide basis. It would have been interesting to see a greater contribution of international work and changes with the increase in the role of forensic anthropology on the world stage.

The chapters in the book build up to offer an insight into the way in which forensic human identification, and specifically the role of the forensic anthropologist has developed over time and would be useful as a reference text. The development of new techniques and the modernisation of traditional ones demonstrates the ways in which the profession has modernised. One weakness of the book is its focus on practices in the US, although that is not evident in all of the chapters which recognise that research and progress is happening across many other countries. Where this is not the case, this does limit the relevance of some chapters, meaning that students and practitioners will have to look outside the chapters for significance to their own countries of practice. A sound understanding of statistics is required to work your way through some of the chapters but this echoes the reality of casework and presentation of the findings of the forensic anthropologist to the court as well as the increased robusticity of research in this subject area. We as practitioners or researchers can no longer rely on the 'seen it before' approach to our practice but have to be able to underpin our findings on a sound research based, statistical foundation.