



Book Reviews

CARE IN THE PAST: ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES, EDITED BY LINDSAY POWELL, WILLIAM SOUTHWELL-WRIGHT AND REBECCA GOWLAND

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The study of care in the archaeological record has been the subject of growing interest in recent years and it is a pleasure to see this book, which addresses the theme from a multi-disciplinary perspective. A collection of 12 papers, which developed out of two conference sessions, the volume explores care in the past from historical, archaeological and philosophical perspectives and considers how the provision of care might be identified in historical and ancient contexts. The book is organised into three primary themes: care and the life course; care, impairment and disability and care and non-human animals.

Health care is an important factor in society and this is universal across time and in all parts of the world. Its importance is especially pertinent today, at a time when care provision features on an almost daily basis in our news; perhaps nowhere is archaeology's ability to provide a 'deep time' perspective on the present more relevant. These are some of the reflections prompted by Charlotte Roberts in her preface to the book which also defines 'care' and other key terms such as 'disability' and stresses what a challenging and complex endeavour analysis of care in the past is.

The challenges, definitions and complexities of the topic are developed further in the first chapter which reviews historical, archaeological and osteological approaches. Once a largely speculative undertaking, recent studies have developed new and interesting perspectives through the application of clinical and social models, such as an 'index of care' (Tilley & Cameron 2014) and a 'bioarchaeology of personhood' (Boutin 2016).

However, care (provision, motivations and other such factors) varies according to different stages of life and this is explored in the next four chapters in the context of childhood, infancy and the elderly. Mary Lewis considers the potential for palaeopathology to contribute to understanding the past care of children in a discussion which integrates skeletal evidence (for example, congenital disease and trauma) with social history and archaeology. This approach is important because it serves to highlight subtleties and shortfalls of the different datasets and prompts new questions. The chapter provides valuable insights such as, for example, how attitudes towards the care of children with congenital symptoms may differ depending on the age at which they become visible. In the following chapter Ellen Kendall critically reviews palaeodietary studies, more specifically breast feeding and weaning. Citing work undertaken over the last ten or so years, she highlights how individual variation has been obscured in analyses by the methodologies employed. She effectively argues for a methodology which factors in heterogeneity. Heidi Dawson, on the status and care of children in Late Medieval England, intersperses demographic and palaeopathological data, obtained from skeletons from three priory burial sites, in a review of the historical, archaeological and skeletal evidence. The study nicely demonstrates the value of standard datasets in exploring care in the past.

All of these papers draw on research which is relatively well established. Rebecca Gowland's contribution, on elder marginalisation and abuse, is a novel approach which, until now, has really only been considered to be the domain of modern clinical and forensic practice. It is therefore perhaps not surprising to read that identifying elder abuse in the

archaeological record poses many challenges even though, we may assume, it existed. Rebecca presents some interesting case studies, although the evidence (for example, Bourne, Lincolnshire) is not always convincing. However, this perhaps is not the point, because (more important) the case studies serve to demonstrate how elderly abuse and marginalisation might be explored using archaeological and osteological evidence. Further, they demonstrate how the subject holds a relevant place in investigations of the burial record, just as child abuse and domestic violence do (eg, Wheeler *et al.* 2013, Novak 2006; Redfern 2015). It offers a new perspective on the interpretation of skeletal lesions. For example, some periostitis (bone inflammation), frequently observed in the osteological record, could be associated with bed sores. The inability to assign ages to skeletons beyond c. 50 years is a problem with this approach, however. The 'elderly' have to be identified in the first place. In addition, what one group considers to be 'elderly' may differ from that of another's. Rebecca offers some hope here with reference to new ageing techniques and by drawing the reader's attention to written sources for Roman societies.

But what about the remote past for which there are no written records; how far back in time can, or should, we probe to explore care, disability and impairment? The second section of the volume, on care disability and impairment, includes two very thought provoking contributions on prehistoric contexts. The first of these is a review by Nick Thorpe on evidence for compassion and care during the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic. Whether caring existed at this time has been hotly debated and Nick's review is a good synthesis of this debate and of the supporting evidence including primate comparisons. David Doat's contribution is written from a philosophical perspective. Care and care giving behaviours, it is argued, should be considered from an evolutionary, biological perspective; they are part of being human, they are natural.

The final two chapters of this section consider therapeutics in the context of care. Shawn Phillips considers late 19th-century disabled individuals from Oneida County Asylum, Upstate New York, USA. This is a fascinating study which combines the study of the physical remains of individuals with congenital impairments (eg, Down's syndrome) alongside documentation, such as case files notes (not directly related to the skeletons), asylum annual reports and inspection reports. The study poignantly highlights the influence of a number of variables in the standard of care provision, such as economics, morality and different categories of dependency. Marlo Willows' contribution takes us to the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth, East Scotland during the Early Medieval period up to 1580 AD. Marlo considers a range of evidence, including historical sources, burial context, environmental samples, osteology, palaeopathology, radiocarbon dating and isotope analysis to support the suggestion that the Isle of May was a place where individuals went to be healed. It is a thorough case which makes good use of all sources of evidence. There are some interesting examples of disease and, in some cases, a little more information on the skeletal lesions would have been nice to see. In addition, explanation of some of the technical terms would have been good for the non-specialist.

The next two chapters of the book form the third and final section on care and non-human animals. It is nice to see non-human animals considered alongside human animals in the same book; they so rarely are in similar publications and yet they provide a complementary perspective, as is so well demonstrated here. Richard Thomas considers zooarchaeology to explore the care of animals by humans, primarily from the perspective of palaeopathology. As the chapter explains, there are many challenges with this approach and the chapter is suitably cautionary. For example, investigation is limited by the fact that, unlike human skeletons, those of non-humans are typically incomplete and fragmentary in the archaeological record. In addition, palaeopathology methods and scientific applications, such as isotope analysis, are less developed than for human osteology. The impression gained from reading this contribution is that zooarchaeological analysis in the context of care is currently difficult. However, as the case studies demonstrate, it holds a lot of potential; research into non-human animal care in the past is in its infancy and to this end, ways forward are proposed.

Gary King provides an introduction to the use of insect species for medicinal use. The role of insects in healing is a comparatively less explored area of insect fauna research. Here, the topic is considered with a comprehensive review of historical texts and archaeological evidence, primarily Roman. This conveys a wealth of information and highlights some key questions and directions, such as how insect medicaments might be identified in the archaeological record and the need to for literature surveys.

It is without doubt that insect fauna studies offer considerable potential to answer questions about care in the past. This chapter eloquently serves to demonstrate what might be considered one of the achievements of this book: to demonstrate just how rich and varied research on care and the past is and should be. This point – that the topic is rich and varied – is raised in the concluding chapter by Gowland, Powell and Southwell-Wright. The contributions to this book are collectively rich on concepts, theory, method and case studies and the summing up provided here is a much needed consolidation which pin-points the main themes. The authors also propose a way forward arguing for more constructive criticism of methodologies and stressing how important multidisciplinary, bioarchaeological and life course perspectives are. In addition, further work should take the study of care outside the domestic sphere and consider institutional care, such as of workhouse inmates or 19th-century textile mill apprentices. Care of the mentally impaired is even proposed; this is perhaps a little ambitious, but analysis of cranial trauma, for example, may help here.

Overall, this book is relevant to anyone with an interest in past societies. It is both informative and rigorous with valuable lessons and insights. However, these aspects may have less resonance if readers ‘cherry pick’ chapters; appreciating the full coverage of the contributions as well as the background and parameters, set out in the introduction and conclusions, are important.

Although care has been of interest to archaeologists for some years this is the first time it has been explored fully as a topic. Previous work has been sceptical, but this book, which makes excellent use of emerging concepts and approaches, offers a new, exciting and dynamic way of exploring the subject. It serves as a solid foundation for more work to come.

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