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REVIEWS

Elizabeth Wayland Barber. *The Mummies of Urumchi*. W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1999.

Doubtless most people are aware that round about 1,000 B.C. a people with a Celtic iron-age culture began moving north and south-west, south and south-east from near the headwaters of the Danube and the Rhine (a Celtic name). They finally reached Ireland in 500 B.C. or earlier, following in the footsteps of the previous Celtic bronze culture. In 387 B.C. they sacked Rome and, in the following century, after desecrating Delphi and fighting their way through Macedonia, they settled in that area of northern Turkey re-named Galatia - Anatolia today. Galatia is a Celtic word with the same root as Gaul and Gaelic. There Phrygian peasants tilled their lands for them (Tarn 1964: 106) which is relevant to this story because Phrygian caps were de rigueur gear upwards of four millennia ago in Outer Mongolia.

But did a group of Celts reach the Tarim Basin towards the eastern end of what later became known as the Silk Road four thousand years ago? Surely not.

This is what Dr Barber's beautifully produced and highly readable book is all about. The museum in which the mummies of the title are stored is at Urumchi (Urumqi on some maps), the regional capital of the Uyghur Autonomous Region more often known as Sinkiang (Hsieh 1973: 190). A professor of Chinese Studies at Pennsylvania University saw them in 1987 and reported their existence to the western world. He was "stunned" by their appearance. Their facial type was not Mongoloid. They were clearly Caucasian "with high-bridged noses, deep round eye sockets, fair hair, and - on the men - heavy beards. They may have had blue eyes - their present-day, Chinesespeaking descendants do. Some, including at least one woman, stood over six feet tall.

Dr Barber is well known for her work on prehistoric textiles. She is a most appropriate person to write this book because of the woven clothes the mummies wore at their interment. These textiles are still largely intact and even their colouring has faded very little. The colour plates reveal a fondness for bright colours - red, blue and yellow being especially favoured on brown backgrounds. More interesting still, many are plaids which our Scottish relatives esteem highly today, thanks to Sir Walter Scott's championship of the tartan!

If this volume can be said to have a weakness it is in the second and third chapters which are largely devoted to details about weaving techniques. This is rather tiresome for readers not into weaving. However, the knowledge of these techniques is essential for determining the age and original provenance of these artifacts. So you will learn all about plain weave; 2/2 twill; long-hop twill; balanced weave; weft-faced weave; halfbasket twill (unusual) and so on. Types of loom are described in Chapter 4 and in an Appendix to Chapter 7. Tapestry was also represented. Tapestry? The Egyptians acquired this technique from the Syrians in about 1,500 B.C. While radio-carbon dates of 1,000 B.C. came from undisturbed tombs and the cemetery was in use into the first centuries of our era, the tapestry sample, from a disturbed tomb, could be a late post-Christian burial. Furthermore this tapestry was not made in quite the same way as tapestry is in the rest of the world - read the book to find out why and why the Bayeux Tapestry is not actually tapestry!

The wool came from the local huge wild sheep of the area, the Argall (*Ovis ammon*), four feet tall with large curled horns. Some of the wool is of a finer quality and has been recognised as cashmere from the goats native to Kashmir. This suggests either that they had access to India or that they kept some goats themselves; we are not told. There was a connection too with the people of Pazyryk several hundred kilometres due north in the Altai Mountains between Siberia and Mongolia. Some of their tapestries, found in the late twenties, are very similar to the Urumchi ones. The kurgans or mounds which they came from have been dated by tree rings to around 450 B.C.

While a short review such as this has to be very selective of the topics chosen for mention, nevertheless one cannot avoid referring to the "Beauty of Loulan". "She has captured the imagination of the Turkic population" of the Region, as she adorns CD covers of local Turkic music recordings (a four thousand year old supermodel!). The artifacts found around her tell us much about her people's lifestyle. She wore leather moccasins (fur-side outside) and a middy-

length leather skirt (fur-side inside), a warm woolly knee-length overwrap and a Little Red Riding Hood's woolly cap made by felting two pieces of woven cloth which were then sewn together. This was strengthened with cords plaited with brown, red and possibly blue yarns which shows that by 2,000 B.C. her people knew how to dye wool. Beside her lay the remains of a comb probably used for weaving rather than her hair. She also possessed a woven bag or basket with wheat grains in it. There was also a winnowing tray covering her head and chest. Neither the wool nor the wheat could have come from China since neither of them existed there at that time, nor were the wild ancestors of the sheep and the sheep indigenous to the Tarim Basin. They had to have come from the west after 4,000 B.C.; and of course her features are Caucasian. Her woven garments suggest the use of the vertical loom which existed in the Middle East well before 2,000 B.C.

Radio-carbon dating by Beijing University produced a date of 1880±95 years B.C. - an earlier sample had produced a date of 4, 500 B. C., in the Stone Age! The discovery of bronze trinkets ruled out any Stone Age date and made the 2,000 B.C. date more acceptable. The Chinese Bronze Age did not begin until nearly 1500 B.C. Radio-carbon dating is fully discussed in Chapter 5.

A good deal of scholarship not only about weaving but also about linguistics lies behind the text but it is very readable (unlike many archaeological treatises). At times the writing descends into American slang which this reader cannot understand: "noogies" (p.43) and "sassy-looking Argali sheep" (p.65). The work is complemented by 16 full colour plates, line drawings galore within the text and, *mirabile dictu*, many maps to explain where obscure Chinese places are. One map, however, may be unnecessary: surely everyone knows where the Fertile Crescent is! But better a map than no map. It is churlish perhaps to point out that one of only two misspellings I could find is on a map, figure 2.9, where Phrygians is mis-spelt.

There is an extensive bibliography including works in French and German; one in Russian and one in Japanese, both titles of which are translated, and one in Chinese (title untranslated). Several refer to Tokharian, the language which may have been spoken by the mummies in life. There are curiously no books specifically about the Celts except for some articles in German about Hallstatt and Hallein textiles. Regrettably the misquote from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* on page 114 is not sourced and Chaucer is not indexed in the otherwise comprehensive index.

All archaeologists, both armchair and field, should read this book if only to discover how textile experts go about their work. A warning for backpackers desirous of exploring the Tarim Basin: don't. One explorer spent seventeen days trying to find water! The last paragraph is a stunning link with a people who prospered upwards of four thousand years ago.

References

- Hsieh, C.M. 1973. *Atlas of China*. McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York. Map III-116, p. 190 names the province Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region; other atlases call it Sinkiang, especially *The Times Atlas of the World Family Edition*. Times Books: London 1993. Maps 22, 25, 39 and Urumqi is printed for Urumchi. Xinjiang is probably a more acceptable modern spelling for Sinkiang.
- Tarn, W.W. 1964. "The New Hellenistic Kingdoms". In, S.A. Cook et al. (eds). *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 1st ed. Vol. VII. Cambridge University Press. P. 106.

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Grauer, A and P. Stuart-Macadam (eds) *Sex and Gender in Paleopathological Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998; A\$99.00; hardback; pp192 + xi.

Panther-Brick, C and C. Worthman (eds) *Hormones, Health and Behaviour: A socio-ecological and lifespan perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999; hardback; 290pp. + ix.

These books are a response to an increasing interest in Biological Anthropology in biocultural perspectives on health (see also Goodman and Leatherman 1998). Grauer and Stuart-Macadam have collected a series of papers dealing with sex and gender differences while the papers collected by Panther-Brick and Worthman deal with the inter-relationship of hormones with behaviour, health and work.

The papers in *Sex and Gender in Paleopathology* are collected from a 1995 symposium at the annual meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropology. Given this beginning, they differ considerably in focus. The introductory chapter by Armelagos raises an issue that bedevils biological anthropology, particularly skeletal analysis: the confusion of sex ("defined by

biological differences", p 1) and gender ("the cultural construction", p.1). As he notes, for biological anthropology discussion of gender differences is meaningless without an accurate means for sex determination. He further argues that for studies of prehistoric health and disease issues of sex and gender are particularly pertinent since the pattern of pathology in a population is often a complex combination of biological and behavioural differences.

These issues are explored within the next five chapters of the book with a series of papers on specific pathological conditions or analyses: trauma (Kilgore and Jurmain), osteoporosis (Weaver), iron-deficiency anaemia (Stuart-Macadam), trace element analysis (Cook and Hunt), and immune reactivity (Ortner). In various ways these authors explore assumptions of basic sex-based differences in pathology. From this several themes emerge:

1. the need for improved methodology, particularly of age estimation;
2. the need to avoid *a priori* assumptions of differences being due to reproductive demands or to status differences;
3. the recognition of male/female differences in immune response;
4. and the need for more work on interpretation in palaeopathology, particularly the basic biological mechanisms of skeletal disease.

Some of these chapters, particularly those by Ortner and Cook and Hunt, introduce new concerns and demonstrate significant attempts at overcoming interpretive problems. Others, like that by Stuart-Macadam, are more recent restatements of issues already dealt with. As a group they form a coherent whole in dealing with sex differences in biology.

In contrast the chapters by Roberts *et al.*, Storey, Grauer *et al.*, and Larsen follow a more traditional line being focussed upon various levels of analysis of human remains. Grauer *et al.* summarise results of sex differences in the Dunning County poorhouse, Storey deals with sex differences in the context of class inequality in Mayan samples, Roberts *et al.* with infectious disease in Medieval samples, and Larsen with a diachronic comparison of Georgia Bight populations. These chapters are basically surveys and are often unavoidably plagued by small sample sizes and inconclusive results. They deal with varying degrees of success with the issue of sex and gender. Larsen's assurance, for instance, that "the leap from sex determination to social identity and behavioural inference is not a long one" (p.165) sits oddly against Armelagos' introduction of just this issue.

To some extent, apart from the introduction, the book fails to deal satisfactorily with the issue of gender. There is, however, one notable exception - the chapter by Leatherman. In this paper he examines contemporary female health in relation to the household division of labour in the Maya and in South Peru. His article demonstrates the extent to which women's health can structure household production and reproduction. In this he uses the broader frameworks of health, illness, gender, and status which are often only paid lip service in the remainder of the book.

Overall the book seems to demonstrate that the most innovative and challenging work in palaeopathology is at the level of the basic biology (are there differences in response and what do they mean) or at the broadest level of how these patterns impact on society. The middle level of basic analysis and comparison, if the last papers in this volume are an indicator, needs to take more account of what is happening in research at both the upper and lower levels.

In contrast, the papers gathered together by Panter-Brick and Worthman form a more coherent group. The aim of the volume is clearly set out in the introduction: "to draw together the existing conceptual and empirical threads linking hormones, behaviour and health with specific anthropological contributions that examine sources of human variation and its consequences across social contexts and through time (p.13)."

Apart from the introduction, the book contains seven chapters dealing with various issues from social and family relations (Sapolsky and Flinn), to developmental aspects (Worthman and Flinn), work (Panter-Brick and Pollard), reproductive cancers (Ellison), diet, particularly phytoestrogens (White), and modernization (McGarvey). These papers consistently deal with themes of

1. life history - the importance of development in establishing patterns of response and tolerance to stress and hormone levels;
2. evolution - the inheritance of adaptive responses that are no longer adaptive in modern society; and
3. the complexity and pervasiveness of biological and social interactions.

They are uniformly helpful, each giving both a valuable overview of a current issue as well discussing a piece of relevant research by the author. For instance, McGarvey writes about modernization but places his own research on changing work and dietary patterns among Samoans within this context. The book

therefore is extremely useful for people considering research in this area as well as for upper-level teaching.

The implications of this area of research are far reaching. In a recent workshop on the socioeconomic determinants of health (Wellington, July 1999) one of the keynote speakers extensively referred to Sapolsky's work on social relations, ranking and stress among baboon populations. While some members of the audience thought he was being funny, the message was clear - hormonal reactions to social and environmental conditions may be highly significant in explaining the complexity of public health. These papers which clearly recognize the equal complexities of biology, social circumstances, and health are a valuable contribution to biological anthropology literature.

Given the greater focus of the book, the evenness of the contributions, and their recognition of broader issues, the Panter-Brick and Worthman volume seems to be a more useful contribution to current health literature than *Sex and Gender in Paleopathology* which serves primarily to show how much more work needs to be done.

Goodman, A, and T. Leatherman . 1998. *Building a New Biocultural Synthesis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

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