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Os, bois, ivoire et corne : l'exploitation des matières dures d'origine animale

Selena Vitezović (ed.), *Close to the Bone: Current Studies in Bone Technology*

Belgrade, Institute of Archaeology, 2016

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- 1 Over the past ten or so years, the study of osseous (antler, bone, ivory) material culture has exploded with specialist meetings each year occurring alongside focused papers and volumes promoting the value of “bone” technology in archaeological research. The volume edited by Selena Vitezović is one such example, being a mammoth work including 41 chapters from some 64 contributors. Presented papers include initial reports of osseous finds from recent excavations (Arabatzis, Bikić and Vitezović; Vuković-Bogdanović and Bogdanović; David *et al.*; Gál; Ružić; Ivančan; Sztancs *et al.*; Tkalčec; Winnicka), as well as new studies of museum collections and/or previously excavated sites (Baron *et al.*; Campos-Martínez and Pérez-Roldán; Čerškov *et al.*; Gidney; Grassi; Hrnčiarik; Kalafatić *et al.*; Lang; Luik; Luik and Piličiauskienė; Manojlović-Nikolić; Mărgărit; Marković and Stamenković; Nuțu and Stanc; Osipowicz; Riddler and Trzaska-Nartowski; Vinayak). The dominance of these latter studies (those examining material excavated some time ago) is not surprising as, in many cases, the osseous artefacts were put aside or glossed over in favour of their lithic, ceramic, or metal counterparts – and thus, such finds were still waiting to receive detailed examination – a point noted in the introduction of this volume.
- 2 Also found within the pages of this book are reviews of artefacts from particular regions (Ashby), detailed analyses of special finds (Beldiman *et al.*; Buc *et al.*),

presentations of new methodologies (Bradfield), experimental work (Mărgărit; Orłowska), and interesting reassessments of the meaning of particular artefacts or artefact classes (Bugarski; Kovancaliev; Petković; Redžić; Shatil; Sidéra and de Maret; Stokes). Often grouped together with osseous material culture in the archaeological and ethnographic literature are items made on marine and freshwater shell, and thus, it is then not surprising to also find two chapters focusing specifically on such artefacts (Mărgărit; Sztanics *et al.*), nor the mention of such finds scattered in several of the other chapters. I was also very interested to see that three chapters (Shatil; Redžić; Sidéra and de Maret) touched on the issue of children in the archaeological record, suggesting that the consideration of this once ‘erased’ portion of past populations is becoming more common in mainstream reconstructions of archaeological assemblages.

- 3 The wide temporal (Mesolithic to 18th century AD) and geographical (Eurasia, Africa, South America, South Asia) scope of the work makes navigating the volume interesting, though splitting the chapters into thematic sections would have been a challenge, something rightly stated by Vitezović in her Introduction. Having said this, there did seem to be a dominance of papers focused on material from European contexts which might have been grouped together, perhaps into course temporal themes. Indeed, a quick account of the periods focused on in the chapters reveals that ten dealt with Roman material, six with medieval contexts, and another six with the Bronze Age (for example). Papers focusing on material from outside of Europe provided a rather stark contrast, and initially appeared as “token” papers to provide a more global dialogue, although upon consideration it seems likely that this result reflects the current dominance of studies on European osseous material, as against those found outside this area, rather than pure Eurocentrism. In fact, studies on osseous tools recovered from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania have only become more than a rare occurrence since the early 2000s, with researchers based in these areas having to either go to Europe to be trained in “bone tool” analysis before returning to their home countries, or themselves teaching. Consequently, it could be said that the make-up of Vitezović’s volume reflects the current state of osseous technological studies in archaeological science.
- 4 With the exception of one chapter which included the images at the end of the text, the photographs and illustrations in the volume were timely and very clear, with many of the photographs beautifully presenting the discussed artefacts. The inclusion of numerous data tables and breakdowns of artefact types which are so immensely useful to researchers looking to compare assemblages is fantastic. It was also good to see descriptions of artefact types in many places, alongside detailed microscope images of characteristic manufacturing and use traces, making a number of the chapters very useful for those new to osseous technology.
- 5 Overall, I found this volume to be an interesting and useful addition to the growing corpus of work on osseous technologies, and one which I would recommend to those interested in learning about the diversity of later Holocene European traditions.

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