

## *Book Reviews*

HISTORY OF PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA (TWO VOLUMES). Edited by Frank Spencer. New York: Garland. 1997. 1,195 pp. ISBN 0-8153-0490-0. \$175.00 (cloth).

This is a two-volume, encyclopedic treatment of the history of our profession. Edited by Frank Spencer and written by 169 contributors from over 30 different countries, it includes many entries by Spencer himself. Such a resource may be important to several audiences. It should, of course, be relevant to anthropologists and practitioners of closely related fields, but because it is a history of physical anthropology it could also be read far more widely. While it is certainly true that all science is embedded within society, so that histories of science are critical parts of social histories, physical anthropology has played such a major and direct political role in the Western world that its history has special value to all students of the human condition. In this light, we evaluate the encyclopedia from both these narrow and broader perspectives.

Putting these volumes together was a monumental task, one that we deeply appreciate. Our research in preparing *Race and Human Evolution* (Wolpoff and Caspari 1997) made good use of Spencer's (1986) earlier *Ecce Homo* (even as he made good use of our cover neandertal) and we are sure that *History of Physical Anthropology* would have been even more helpful. These volumes will be valuable resources for anybody with specific interest in those elements of our field included in its entries. Most are clear and succinct and provide further useful references. However, the *History* will have less value if used to extract an overview of the field, or if its selection of entries is taken to reflect what is most important in the field, either broadly (addressing how anthropology is embedded in society) or even specifically, in terms of what is most important within the subdisciplines themselves. All

considered, we think that its worth will be greater to those within the field than to those trying to learn the history and nature of physical anthropology as a synthetic whole.

Inevitably, works of this kind will have omissions, and their editors will find some topics and people to be more relevant than will many readers. This is even more problematic in anthropology, whose nebulous origins and boundaries allow inclusion of many entries which seem peripheral to practice in the field itself. Moreover, the very admirable diversity among the contributors also leads to unevenness of presentation. But even given the dispersed nature of anthropology, some decisions are truly puzzling and Spencer offers no explanation of his editorial criteria. Why did physical anthropology in Australia require two articles whereas, despite its importance in early hominid evolution, there was none for Ethiopia? Why is there an entry for James Hunt but not Ed Hunt, for Adelaida Diaz Ungria but not Al Dahlberg, for John Robinson but not Charles Kimberly Brain, for Józef Majer but not Neil William George Macintosh? Entries for some Czech scholars such as Karel Absolon and Karel Maska are missing, although at least their first names are given in the index (which lists many others only by their initials). Perhaps most surprisingly, an entry for Joe Birdsell—that most eclectic and experienced of American physical anthropologists—does not appear, yet one for Fred Hulse does. It is always a sensitive matter to treat living scholars in writing history, and it might have been better not to have included any. But if it was important to have articles on preeminent living senior scientists such as Philip Tobias, Stanley Garn, and Sudhir Ranjan Das, then why not also articles on Jan Jelinek, Clark Howell, and Frank Livingstone?

We also find an unevenness in the presentation of places and topics. We are best able to assess those within our own subdiscipline, in which, for instance, the section on Australopithecines ends with the 1980s, and

the Afar Triangle section is the only source referring to key australopithecine sites such as Maka and Aramis. The several pages on *Homo habilis* fail to mention that every known specimen is later than the first appearance of what the encyclopedia refers to as *Homo erectus*. The Modern Human Origins entry is excellent and even-handed, but there is no reference article for *Homo sapiens*. We do appreciate the absence of articles on the so-called species into which *Homo sapiens* has been subdivided during the recent spree of over-taxonomizing: *Homo antecessor*, *daliensis*, *heidelbergensis*, *neanderthalensis*, *rhodesiensis*, etc.

This same unevenness extends to the treatment of the field as a part of wider social history. Although many entries provide far more than thumbnail sketches and do address the development of intellectual traditions, others are excessively terse, providing little more than the sparest biographical information. Moreover, some of the more interesting historic details which might only appear in a historic encyclopedia seem missing. These range from the harmless—such as the circumstances by which Electrolux stock was used to found the Viking Fund—to the not-so-harmless, as are the significant omissions from the treatment of Ernst Haeckel. His assertion that the human races are species with different degrees of evolutionary development was not “naïve and speculative,” as the Haeckel article states, but an uninformed and exceedingly dangerous formulation of human evolution, one whose links to the American eugenics movement and to National Socialism go unmentioned. One would never gather from this article the influence of Haeckel’s social philosophy on science, nor the seminal contribution of Haeckelian physical anthropology to National Socialist ideology. And only at its end does this entry refer us to the separate sections on Race and on Rassenkunde, which are

well developed and written. Without looking very carefully, it is too easy to miss the features that give the encyclopedia its broader value in illuminating the importance of sociopolitical issues to physical anthropology as a whole, and vice versa.

Perhaps it is too easy to be critical of so extensive (and expensive) a work as this, and we must re-emphasize Frank Spencer and his contributors’s prodigious achievement in conceiving and producing it. It is far more comprehensive than the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution* (Jones et al., 1992), and mostly avoids the latter’s obvious agendas and biases. This work is an important contribution to the literature and will be very valuable to anthropologists. But perhaps it really requires a committee of scholars to design a historic encyclopedia that fulfills its broadest potential. Perhaps it remains beyond the scope of any single person to design a set of entries fully incorporating the complexity, depth, and social impact of physical anthropology. A camel, the old joke goes, is a horse designed by a committee. But camels have adapted quite well throughout their history, and perhaps there is more to committee design than meets the eye.

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Spencer F (1986) Homo: An Annotated Bibliographic History of Physical Anthropology. Bibliographies and Indexes in Anthropology 2. New York: Greenwood Press.  
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METAPHYSICS AND THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES. By Michael T. Ghiselin. Albany: State University of New York Press. 1997. 377 pp. ISBN 0-7914-3468-0. \$24.95 (paper).

“Of definitions of species,” lamented Pierre Trémaux as long ago as 1865, “there are as many as there are naturalists.” Despite the population explosion among naturalists and