



The Body as Material Culture: A Theoretical Osteoarchaeology (Topics in Contemporary Archaeology)

Joanna R. Sofaer

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Bodies intrigue us. They promise windows into the past that other archaeological finds cannot by bringing us literally face to face with history. Yet 'the body' is also highly contested. Archaeological bodies are studied through two contrasting perspectives that sit on different sides of a disciplinary divide. On one hand lie science-based osteoarchaeological approaches. On the other lie understandings derived from recent developments in social theory that increasingly view the body as a social construction. Through a close examination of disciplinary practice, Joanna Sofaer highlights the tensions and possibilities offered by one particular kind of archaeological body, the human skeleton, with particular regard to the study of gender and age. Using a range of examples, she argues for reassessment of the role of the skeletal body in archaeological practice, and develops a theoretical framework for bioarchaeology based on the materiality and historicity of human remains.

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