

most innovative and informative books on the history of natural history that I have recently read. Instead of elaborate hand-waving towards trendy, but transient, buzzwords, Cooper tells a story well grounded in a canon of neo-Latinate texts that speak to unique themes which could have emerged only through years of painstaking reading and rereading. This uniqueness comes through again and again in strategically chosen examples that convincingly show that there was an influential and diverse world of indigenous natural-history practices in early modern central Europe.

MATTHEW D. EDDY
Durham University

MARIANNE SOMMER, *Bones and Ochre: The Curious Afterlife of the Red Lady of Paviland*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 398. ISBN 978-0-674-02499-1. £25.95 (hardback).
doi:10.1017/S0007087409990525

Palaeoanthropology has received relatively little attention from historians of science, despite its public appeal and obvious ideological import. For years, Peter J. Bowler's *Theories of Human Evolution* (Oxford, 1986) and Roger Lewin's *Bones of Contention* (Chicago, 1987) were the only scholarly book-length studies of the discipline's development. Then in 2007 came two new books, though of very different kinds: Richard Delisle's comprehensive *Debating Humankind's Place in Nature 1860–2000* (reviewed in *BJHS* (2008), 41, 451–2) and the book under review here, by Marianne Sommer. In order to get a grip on the complex and often entangled history of studies of human origins, Sommer organizes her account around the 'curious afterlife' of a single specimen, the skeletal remains of a young man, buried approximately 26,000 years ago in a cave presently located on the Welsh coast, but then overlooking periglacial plains one hundred kilometres inland. Despite this seemingly narrow focus, which follows some of the latest trends in the history of science, Sommer manages to paint a rich panorama of the variegated history of palaeo-anthropology.

It must be said right from the start that the afterlife of the skeleton of the 'Red Lady of Paviland', as the person in question was originally called, is not really that exciting. The most dramatic event was certainly its discovery, excavation and eventual transport to Oxford in 1823. There it has remained ever since, despite calls for its 'repatriation' to Wales. It can thus safely be assumed that the Red Lady of Paviland has spent most of its afterlife in skeletal pieces, safely tucked away in boxes stored in the Oxford University Museum, from which it has only occasionally emerged for short periods to be drawn, photographed, measured or sampled for radio-carbon dating or mtDNA sequencing. It would have been interesting to learn more about the energy expended by museum professionals to ensure that nothing actually happened in the skeleton's afterlife. But this is not what Sommer's book is about. She reveals relatively little about what was actually done to the skeleton, nor does her book contain a single reproduction of the various technical representations that must have been produced from it. Instead, she focuses entirely on the discursive afterlife of the Red Lady of Paviland, describing in painstaking detail its changing position in the social imagery of paleoanthropologists.

With this approach, the story of the Red Lady unfolds in three major episodes. For William Buckland, the colourful Oxford geologist with a fascination for caves and an inclination to lick bones, the main question was whether the skeleton represented our antediluvian forebears. He would rather bestow a questionable moral and social status to the Red Lady – tax collector, witch, prostitute – than concede that 'she' might have been a contemporary of the mammoths, bears and hyenas whose remains were found next to human ones. The question was a serious one, because an antediluvian origin would have brought humanity into the purview of geology rather than revelation and thus theology. It took a good fifty years after Buckland's death for the

Red Lady to attract sustained attention from a geologist again. William Sollas, who held the chair of palaeontology and mineralogy at Oxford University from 1897 to 1936, was less interested in the skeleton's status as an individual human being than in its relative position in human prehistory, envisaged as a battleground of 'lower' and 'higher' human races. The Red Lady of Paviland became a Cro-Magnon male, and Sommer provides a succinct analysis of the various modes of evolution – unilinear, dendritical, parallel – that were brought to bear on the question of the origin of 'modern' humans. The last episode in the Red Lady's afterlife is a relatively recent one. In the year 2000, the archaeologist Stephen Aldhouse-Green, then at the University of Wales, Newport, edited a 'definitive report' on Paviland Cave and its Red Lady, presenting the results from an international, multidisciplinary project. What captured the imagination of the involved scientists now was the local setting and cultural significance of the burial which preserved the Red Lady for posterity. 'He' became a 'shaman' and a testimonial to 'how Wales', as Aldhouse-Green put it, 'has been an active participant in European developments for more than 25,000 years' (quoted on p. 266).

Sommer's account, of course, is itself part of this last episode in the 'curious afterlife of the Red Lady of Paviland'. Her book uncovers the surplus of imagination which is invested into palaeoanthropologists' attempts to bring the objects of their science to life – and which, ironically, just seems to bury them again under a thick layer of representations.

STAFFAN MÜLLER-WILLE
University of Exeter

DAVID STACK, *Queen Victoria's Skull: George Combe and the Mid-Victorian Mind*. London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008. Pp. xviii + 350. ISBN 978 1 84725 233 3.
doi:10.1017/S0007087409990537

The worst thing about this book is its misleading title. The references to Victoria's skull and the mid-Victorian mind may suggest an account of psychology or mental philosophy in the 1850s and 1860s. In fact the book is a biography of George Combe, the chief publicist for phrenology, who began writing on his subject in 1818, well before Victoria came to the throne. What is more, Combe's best-known book, *The Constitution of Man*, appeared in 1828 – too early to count as Victorian. The choice of title is still less appropriate when one considers the absence from David Stack's analysis of real mid-Victorian philosophers of mind such as Alexander Bain. Bain produced a series of influential works on mental and moral philosophy, originally embedded in phrenology. However, together with virtually everyone else who was then keen on the relationship of brain to mind, Bain abandoned phrenology well before Combe died in 1858. That Stack chose not to write about figures such as Bain is not due to ignorance; he is remarkably well informed about mid-nineteenth-century intellectual history. Rather, he seems simply to have had no desire to write about mid-Victorian philosophy of mind.

Quibbles about the title aside, Stack's biography of Combe has great merit. It provides an archival basis for many of its judgements, and provides an intelligent picture of a Scot who was, by the standards of the time, a publishing sensation, in addition to being a popular lecturer and an effective educational reformer. However, while it records Combe's life well, the book is not a neutral account. Stack has adopted the genre of biography in order to mount a sustained critique of historians of science. These, he believes, have misconstrued Combe's life and ideas for the last four decades. Stack is particularly critical of Steven Shapin, Geoffrey Cantor, Roger Cooter and John van Wyhe, all of whom, he charges, have used Combe as a shuttlecock in interpretive games played within the history of science. To follow Stack's criticisms in detail would require a lengthy review article, but the gist of them is that much Combe scholarship has been concerned not with offering plausible interpretations of its subject's actual life and texts, but with crude applications of later philosophical or sociological theory.