

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of "The Pathology of Homicide"

REFERENCE: Adelson, L., *The Pathology of Homicide*, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., 1974, 976 pages, \$39.50.

The subtitle of this book reads "A Vade Mecum for Pathologist, Prosecutor and Defense Counsel." It is indeed a vade mecum, in the sense that it is "a book for ready reference" (Def. 1). We do not recommend that it be "regularly carried about by a person" (Def. 2). Weighing nearly 2.6 kg, this handbook is more like a tome.

Those of us who have followed Dr. Adelson's contributions in professional journals over the past 25 years are familiar with his particular literary style, and those of us who have been fortunate enough to be personally acquainted with the man and the teacher will recall the numerous (indeed, innumerable), cogent "Adelsonisms" which characterize his teaching method. They are all here, expressed with the same panache in an organized, well-indexed format. The book is pure, undiluted, unadulterated, vintage Adelson.

Those readers who are not familiar with Professor Adelson's way with words should be informed that he speaks and writes as he thinks, with precision, often with legalistic precision, having been conditioned by years of interaction with waves of practicing criminal lawyers. Spanning the breadth of the English language, his remains a highly disciplined style of writing, always employing the precise word with the precisely correct meaning. It is tight writing, and it is tight reading; this reviewer recommends that the book be read in small portions, in order to be assured of maximum absorption.

It should be obvious to any reader that Dr. Adelson is a litterateur, such is the frequency with which these pages are sprinkled with references from primary sources. We are unaware of any other handbook of forensic pathology in which one can find quotations from John Webster and Keith Simpson, admixed with allusions to Alan Moritz and Shakespeare, all within the first few pages.

We note that this book is written for a readership which includes our legal colleagues. That some of these colleagues may at times play the role of the pathologist's adversary at the bar is clearly irrelevant to the author, as it should be. His ax is truth, calling to mind the public statements of Dr. John Edland following the Attica prison riot in 1971. Please don't misunderstand, however; the text is primarily directed to forensic pathologists and to those anatomic pathologists and students who would pursue this peculiar persuasion.

Following four chapters of an introductory nature, the subject matter is subdivided into units according to the usual and customary modalities of homicide as practiced in our western culture within our recent history. The chapters entitled "Asphyxial Deaths" and "The Fatally Abused Child" are particularly well done. In the latter, the author's

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frustration and rage peek through, in spite of his studied objectivity. It should be required reading for all future jurists.

The chapter on "Murder by Poison" is an excellent presentation, and constitutes an *arbeit* in itself, totaling some 150 pages with 78 references.

In all the topical chapters, it is refreshing to read a balanced presentation of the differential diagnosis of homicide, with analyses of those anatomic and circumstantial data which must be considered in any day-to-day evaluation of accidental, suicidal, or murderous violence. The book is well supplied with gross and microscopic photographs of good quality, and numerous case reports illustrate and illuminate the text.

No review can be entirely accolade, and this one is no exception. I do find fault with Dr. A's choice of anthropometric source material in his determinations of age, sex, and race in those cases which come to the pathologist's attention as skeletons. Perhaps I write from a sense of frustration with the quality of the published data which are available for use in these cases, but Adelson's sole reliance upon Dutra's 1944 study, and the implied endorsement thereof, cannot go unremarked. Other equally reliable references are available, and some are more recent and of a wider racial scope.

But the foregoing is a minor distraction. In all, the book is a tour de force. The forensic sciences can claim very few scholars and still fewer scholarly writers. Dr. Adelson is both. In this volume he has given us his best effort.