

Books

Lucy's Child, by Donald Johanson and James Shreeve. *Penguin Books*, 1991. 318 pp., 14 figs., 25 pl. £6.99.

IN THE WORDS of advertising, this book is a 'thoroughly good read'. To borrow further from the world of hype, Johanson's account of his side of the story could well become the 'kiss and tell' version of the familiar debates in palaeoanthropology. These rather sensationalising words perhaps best sum up the general feeling of the book.

The account centres on the discovery of a fragmentary *Homo habilis* skeleton at Dik-Dik Hill in Olduvai Gorge by Johanson and colleagues in 1986. Although it has joint authors, the book is very much from Johanson's perspective, and indeed is written in the first person throughout. By means of series of flashbacks and reminiscences, recalled during a very evocative description of the painstaking recovery of the tiny remains of the individual, Johanson devotes most of the book to outlining the difficulties of getting research off the ground, the practical and political difficulties of fieldwork and the great influence of personalities and rivalries on the conclusions reached after each discovery.

In an attempt to set the Dik-Dik hominid in the context of the many variations on the theme of who is the ancestor of whom in the family tree of *Homo sapiens*, Johanson gives a very interesting run through all the established schools of thought. The reader is also given his view of the egos, beliefs, feuds and (perhaps most importantly) modern preconceptions which went to form these very divergent theories. In particular, he argues convincingly that many of the previously postulated theories of human evolution were formed, probably subconsciously, as the result of contemporary events in the world. For example, Raymond Dart's proposal of an aggressive 'killer hominid' as an early ancestor was all the more credible for being expounded shortly after World War II. Johanson depends heavily on Binford's exhortation not to employ present-day conceptions of human behaviour to read a possibly false interpretation into the fossil record of the presence of traits which may mark the emergence of that modern behaviour.

Only in the final chapter are the old well-worn concerns left behind. It deals with the more recently advanced suggestions that the development of humanity as we know it (that is, the

emergence of a species with enough brain power to alter the environment to suit itself, rather than being at the mercy of changes in its environment) is the result of social relationships and the need to outwit other close members of the same social group to gain access to limited resources, in preference to preceding theories, such as the introduction of food-sharing or the need to evolve strategies to cope with newly-formed open grasslands providing the stimulus for the development of each new hominid species. It follows that the outwitting of competitors within the same social group, and therefore presumably undergoing similar increases in level of intelligence, would provide a greater stimulus to further increases in intelligence than competition from external competitors whose brain power was not expanding. After a very plausible discussion in this direction, Johanson appears to be on the brink of his own pitfall (of present-day attitudes and concerns being misguidedly used to interpret the past) when he expands on the theme of man altering the environment as a survival strategy to suggest, in a rather Green message in his epilogue, that this evolved trait in man may be responsible for much of the environmental damage seen today.

The style of writing has some very nice touches. Witty and humorous at times, it also uses a variety of techniques to explain, successfully, the very complicated subject of hominid evolution in a simplified way which does not patronise the novice reader. As well as flashbacks, he employs to advantage the presence on site of the graduate students of his colleague Tim White. Through reported dialogue between supervisor and students, he explains the first principles of the methodology of palaeoanthropology in very simple terms. A very clear account of the formation and stratigraphy of Olduvai Gorge is also given.

In conclusion, rather than breaking new ground, *Lucy's Child* is an enjoyable, easy-to-read summary of Johanson's position in the major debates in palaeoanthropology today. For anyone familiar with the famous names and events in the field, it is a fascinatingly gossipy account of the usual theories, with the dry bones of the story of hominid evolution fleshed out, so to speak, with the very 'human' influences which formed the background to the story. However, one cannot escape the feeling at various points in the book that the versions of events given is very personal indeed to Johanson, and it would be of equal interest to hear

the other side of many of the related anecdotes.

Janice Conheeneey

Dress Accessories (medieval finds from excavations in London) by Geoff Egan and Frances Pritchard. *HMSO Books*, 1991. 422 pp., many illus., £39.95 paperback.

AT THE OUTSET it must be said that this is a large book, full of useful information, and I have attempted to review it without getting into too much of the detail.

Knowledge of how our ancestors dressed and their adornments in the medieval period is gained largely from illustrated manuscripts and tomb effigies. The redevelopment of the City of London since the Second World War has been closely watched by archaeologists from the Guildhall Museum and later the Museum of London. This has resulted in a large collection of artefacts which enhance our understanding of the clothing worn during the years 1150-1450. Digging on the Thames foreshore and excavation of landfill sites have produced many well-preserved items, which are listed chronologically and carefully documented in this book.

Necessary items for both men and women were the buckled belts and girdles, brooches and buttons which held their clothes together. Buckles have been found of copper alloys and base metals, with only a few of gold or silver. This is not surprising, as the Goldsmiths' Guild forbade the use of precious metals to anyone with an income of less than £500. Even the baser metals were controlled by the Girdlers' Guild Charter of 1321, but by the late 14th century this restriction had ceased. All manner of shapes and types were manufactured and have been found, some attached to belts and long girdles of leather, linen or woven silk. Strap-ends of metal were added; both these and the buckles were decorated and engraved, the workmanship often excellent. 'Mount' decoration occurred in rows along belts, and varied in shape from geometric to leaf types. Armorial bearings were also used in this fashion. Spangles and pendants were sometimes added for sparkle. I was surprised to learn that spherical-shaped bells with lead 'peas' were a 14th-century addition to belt straps and collars. Attached by silken chords, they must have tinkled their way on festive occasions. It is recorded that Richard II had two gold bells fitted to his belt.

Apart from their decorative value, brooches were needed to hold clothing together. However, paste jewels, painted colours and intricate engravings

have all been found on brooches. Large heavy metal alloy types with fixed pins were used for heavy materials, and moveable pins in delicate shapes held finer draperies. It appears that necklaces, bracelets and ear-rings were not worn everyday, so the brooch was an important piece of practical jewellery.

The close-fitting garments of the 13th century used metal buttons in long rows for fastenings, a fashion copied from the East. Most were made of base metals and gave rise to the expression "not worth a button". But whether engraved, highly decorated or polished, the large numbers found prove their popularity.

The other method of fastening was lacing. Metal chapes or tags were fixed to leather thongs or silk plaited cords to enable easy threading. It should be remembered that sleeves, bodices, hose and cod-pieces needed lacing throughout the 13th to 15th centuries.

In old prints of the 14th and 15th centuries, a woman's hair was shown in long plaits, folded and pinned to either side of the face in loops. A braid band circled the forehead and a veil was worn. So for me the discovery of a hair piece, a plait of blonde, real hair attached to a headband which had once held jewels, was very exciting.

A framework of wire covered with gauze veils, or a barrette, around chin and brow, needed many pins to position the style. Over 800 pins recovered from various sites trace their history and show their improvement from thick to delicate stems with ornate heads. A Princess Joan ordered 12,000 for her trousseau in 1348, and Venetian galleys calling at Southampton in 1440 had cargoes of 83,000 pins.

An important part of dress for male and female was the purse which hung or was slotted through belt or girdle. Examples of leather purses, bound in silk with drawstrings or flap-fronted, survive. There are examples of Spanish Twill woven in heraldic patterns which once formed part of metal-framed purses for wealthier citizens. No doubt their contents included the small mirrors framed in metal with intricate open-worked lids, and tweezers, used by ladies for plucking eyebrows and the fashionable hairless forehead. Gentlemen would use them to keep their beards trim. Often the tweezers have survived as part of a cosmetic set, together ear scoop and nail cleaner, the three items riveted together at one end. It shows an obvious pride in appearance. Combs are rarely found as generally they were made of wood or horn and were more

likely to decompose. Only rich people could afford ivory. For instance, in 1285 Edward I paid 32s 6d for two, whilst ordinary folk could but four made of wood for 4d!

Lastly, no lady was probably without a needlecase hanging from her girdle. These have been found ranging from cylindrical base metal shapes to one of great delicacy made from a bird bone.

This is a book for archaeologists and historians to study, and is an excellent guide for writers and illustrators who need authentic information. It is concise, well illustrated with a colour photograph section, and contains plans and graphs for reference. It is a welcome addition to the social history of the English people. E. B. Townsend

Scotland: a new history, by Michael Lynch. *Century*, 1991. xxii + 499pp., 8pp of pl., 7 maps, 2 gen. tables. £18.99.

Edinburgh: portrait of a city, by Charles McKean. *Century*, 1991. 248pp., 16pp. of pl. £16.99 hardback, £9.99 paperback.

EVEN THOUGH the Scottish Nationalist Party was given a resounding vote of "no confidence" in the April 1992 General Election, subsequent rumblings from the northern partner in the United Kingdom should not be ignored even by the safe denizens of London and Middlesex. Two recent books will help the blinkered southerner to appreciate on the one hand the pulse and sweep of Scottish history and on the other the unique flavour of Scotland's capital. The books in question are Michael Lynch's *Scotland: a new history* and Charles McKean's *Edinburgh: portrait of a city*. Naturally both books cover many of the same events, but although the emphasis is fundamentally different, both end with a forward glance to the European perspective of 1992.

Michael Lynch is a professional historian, sober, eloquent and with a preference for economics. Basically a medievalist, he guides us on a steady sweep of events from Mons Graupius to Mrs Thatcher, although he includes neither Lady Macbeth in his genealogical tables nor Mary Slessor in his account of 19th century missions. Perhaps his book's greatest weakness is the lack of emphasis given to the explorers and missionaries, the merchants and emigrants who exported Scotland to the far side of the globe and back. For him the "noblest prospect" is *not* "the high road to London" — although he has chosen a London publisher. His strength is that he can make the internecine strife of the presbyterian churches actually exciting to an outsider.

Of Scotland's capital during the heady days of the Scottish Enlightenment he writes with due approbation:

"In both practical civics and in the pursuit of the intellect, it was the later seventeenth century which had first seen Edinburgh's significant advance towards a fashionable, cosmopolitan society." (p. 353)

But when the architect Charles McKean casts his poet's eye lovingly over the same phenomenon, he writes:

"The eighteenth century comprised Edinburgh's finest years: more glorious than the mercantile Renaissance city of the early seventeenth century, more magnificent, even, than when it was known as the Athens of the North in the early nineteenth century. For the city flourished as a different kind of capital — a capital of the intellect, the product of which is now called the Scottish Enlightenment. It was a city that, uniquely in Europe, made an aristocracy of aptitude." (p. 124)

McKean is essentially concerned to convey his feeling for the magic of the place. Not so much Auld Reekie for him as the Winged Camp or the Mad God's dream, he digs deep into Edinburgh's history to expose in word and picture how the tensions of geography, climate and political happenstance created a unique character. He embellishes his highly individual *portrait of a city* with vivid descriptive phrase, entertaining anecdote and apt quotation.

Lynch's book is a valuable addition to any library, personal or institutional. But for this reviewer, it will be McKean's *portrait* that will be in her luggage the next time she puts her foot down on the AI heading north for her delight.

Brenda M. Cook

Also received

Extinction and Phylogeny, by Michael J. Novacek and Quentin D. Wheeler (eds.). *Columbia University Press*, 1992. 253 pp., index. \$66.

IT IS sobering to remember that over 99% of all life, very ancient or recent, is now extinct. Our own species seems to be busy accelerating the extinction of the species that remain. Clearly we need to know the history of extinct forms to better view the evolution and status of what is left. This collection of papers explores aspects of declining biodiversity which may interest some specialist bioarchaeologists, but is far from being a general reader. Don Brothwell