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Contents

Editorial
Eileen M. Murphy .................................................................................................................. 1

Invited Paper
Children within Anthropology: Lessons from the Past
Heather Montgomery................................................................. 3

Research Papers
Phases of Childhood in Early Mycenaean Greece
Judith Lebeyev ........................................................................ 15

Hearth and Home: The Burial of Infants within Romano-British
Domestic Contexts
Alison Moore........................................................................ 33

The Archaeology of Play Things: Theorising a Toy Stage in the
‘Biography’ of Objects
Sally Crawford ........................................................................ 55

Children in an Increasingly Violent Social Landscape: A Case Study from
the American Southwest
Kathryn A. Kamp ..................................................................... 71

Children’s Play in the Later Medieval English Countryside
Carenza Lewis ........................................................................ 86

I Am Not Dead, but Do Sleep Here: The Representation of Children in
Early Modern Burial Grounds in the North of Ireland
Lynne McKerr, Eileen Murphy and Colm Donnelly.......................... 109

Natural History in the Periodical Literature of Victorian Working Class Boys
Christopher Bannham .................................................................... 132
Contents

Saving Childhood in Everyday Objects
Elizabeth Wood ................................................................. 151

Review Paper
Breastfeeding and Weaning Behaviour in Archaeological Populations:
Evidence from the Isotopic Analysis of Skeletal Materials
Mandy Jay ................................................................. 163

Book Reviews
edited by Simon Mays
Babies Reborn: Infant/Child Burials in Pre- and Protohistory
edited by Krum Bacvarov, reviewed by Anastasia Tsaliki ..................... 179

Science in the Service of Children, 1893–1935
by Alice Boardman Smuts, reviewed by Anne Hardy ..................... 181

Children, Identity and the Past
edited by Liv Helga Dommasnes and Melanie Wrigglesworth,
reviewed by Rebecca Gowland ........................................ 182

Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600–1914
by Anthony Fletcher, reviewed by Lynne McKerr .......................... 184

An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on
Children’s Lives
by Heather Montgomery, reviewed by Anna Kjellström ............... 186
Book Reviews


The book opens with a note from the series editor Luiz Oosterbeek informing the reader that this volume consists of the proceedings of a scientific session from the fifteenth world congress of the International Union for the Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (UISPP/IUPPS). Following the table of contents, list of figures and list of tables, the volume editor Krum Bacvarov discusses further the rationale behind the original conference session and the structure of the resulting papers in the current volume.

The book is organised around a temporal framework: it begins with a section on the Palaeolithic (two papers) followed by two sections on the Neolithic, the Chalcolithic and the Bronze Age (thirteen papers), and the Later Bronze Age and the Iron Age (four papers). The final section comprises one paper from the Anglo-Saxon period and one dating to the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries from the Andes, which are technically considered pre- or proto-historic societies too. The papers cover a large area, from Europe to Siberia, Vietnam and the Andes, allowing for cross-temporal and cross-cultural comparisons; however, what is lacking is a synthetic conclusion by the editor. Although the drawings and photographs are in black and white, most are of good quality.

The majority of papers are in English, with three written in French, and most are around eight pages long with multilingual and up-to-date bibliographies. Some terminological inconsistencies and typographical errors aside, the language generally flows well, with a few exceptions. The papers present new research results or re-interpretation and synthesis of older qualitative and quantitative studies. The cross-disciplinarity of the volume allows for a range of diverse scientific approaches and thus it combines bioarchaeology with field anthropology, funerary and theoretical archaeology, ethnography and spatial analysis. This variety, however, also brings to light the urgent need to agree a common terminology for the early human age: the terms used vary from baby, neonate, newborn, infans, infant and very young child to immature, juvenile, juvenis, pre-adult and subadult.

In more detail, the first paper by Tiller reviews the published data regarding intentional child burials in the Middle Palaeolithic of the Near East, but the reader will find some French terms included in the English text. The second chapter by an Austrian academic team (Einwögerer, Händel, Neugebauer-Maresch, Simon and Teschner-Nicola) is a short presentation of an important find of two Gravettian infant burials at the Krems-Wachtberg Austrian site, which raises questions on the possible differential treatment of infants at
death and on the integration of newborns in hunter-gatherer communities.

In the next section, the opening paper by Le Mort discusses the relatively large sample of 240 children buried under house floors at the Pre-pottery Neolithic Cypriot site of Khirokitia. Despite the variability of body position, the author does not elaborate on the unusual prone burials or the argument that the houses might have been abandoned at the time of the interments. The next paper (Lillie) is a balanced review of the ‘visibility’ of children in the Dnieper Rapids region of Ukraine. In her paper, Moses provides a thought provoking contextual analysis of unusual child burials from Çatalhöyük in modern Turkey. In a French paper, Pomadère offers an overview of subadult Neolithic burials in Greece, stressing the limitations and the insufficient osteological analyses in the country. The following three papers examine jar burials, starting with a presentation of Southeast European and Near Eastern sites (Bacvarov), followed by an interesting cross-cultural analysis of Southern Levantine Neolithic data (Orrelle) and a paper on the jar burials of the Chalcolithic necropolis at Byblos (Artin). Another paper in French focusses on the grave goods of infant burials, with a case study from Chalcolithic Bulgaria (Boyadžiev and Gurova). Stefanović attempts to demonstrate a connection between sex and burial in the Serbian Vinca culture, but does not take into account the debates on the limitations of aDNA analysis. In the next paper, Kogălniceanu addresses the problem of defining normality and deviancy in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic child burials from Romania. Hopwood explores the relationship of the living and the dead through seven child and infant burials from the multi-period site of Kenan Tepe in Eastern Turkey. A joint scientific team (Oxenhame, Matsumura, Domeit, Kim Thuy, Kim Dung, Lan Cuong, Huffer and Muller) offers a methodologically sound and well-developed bioarchaeological insight into the role, health and treatment of children in Late Neolithic Vietnam. The last paper by Mishina, analyses infant burials from an EBA Thracian tell, but linguistic shortcomings make comprehension difficult.

The same is true for the first paper of the following section where Andreeva examines the possibility of infanticide in North-Caucasian burials. Van Rossenberg in his paper explores the complex issue of selective burials in late Prehistoric Italy, while Murphy presents a biocultural study of children from Iron Age Siberia drawing on useful analogies from modern nomads living in the area, and Tibetti conducts a funerary and spatial investigation on the importance of infants in Iron Age Southern British communities.

In the final section, Crawford argues on the nature of the infant bodies found within settlements from the Anglo-Saxon period in an interesting paper, but without subheadings. The volume closes with an interpretation by López in French on burial rituals from the Andes mentioned in seventeenth-century texts.

In conclusion, the organisation and publication of an international volume is always an ambitious and difficult task, with special attention required to the linguistic clarity of the papers written by non-native speakers. The temporal and spatial diversity, the variety of disciplinary approaches and the bilingual abstracts serve well the goals of this volume, as defined by the series and the volume editors. Despite the few shortcomings, this book is well recommended, mainly to researchers with a special interest in burials and the study of childhood in the past.

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