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Rebay-Salisbury, K. and Pany-Kucera, D. Eds. (2020): *Ages and Abilities: The stages of Childhood and their Social Recognition in Prehistoric Europe and Beyond*. Oxford: Childhood in the Past Monograph Series 8. (264 pages + 73 black and white figures). ISBN: 978-1-78969-768-1. (25,1 x 17,7 cm)

AGES AND ABILITIES The Stages of Childhood and their Social Recognition in Prehistoric Europe and Beyond Edited by Katharina Rebay-Salisbury and Doris Pany-Kucera

This edited volume is based on a session titled "Pregnancy, birth, early infancy and childhood: life's greatest transitions in the past" presented at the 11th annual international conference of the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past that was held at the Natural History Museum of Vienna in 2018. It is the newest addition to the *Childhood in* the Past Monograph Series which already has nine volumes dedicated to the study of children in the past from all disciplines and perspectives. This monograph complements the increasing amount of research on children in prehistoric times published in recent years. The standout aspect of this book is its emphasis on one of the most discussed top-

ics among childhood archaeologists. While most of the previous works deal with broader themes such as tracing children in the archaeological (Romanowicz 2013; Sánchez Romero et al. 2015; Crawford et al. 2018) or funerary record (Murphy and Le Roy 2018), this volume focuses on investigating the eventual stages of childhood through the analysis of bio-anthropological and archaeological data recovered (mostly) from the funerary record. Both the specialisation of the most recent monographs (Sánchez Romero and Cid López 2018; Lillehammer and Murphy 2018) and the increasing number of sessions on childhood in the past in archaeological conferences highlight the significant development that the discipline is having in, what might be called, its maturity stage.

The volume begins with an introduction to the editors, Dr. Rebay-Salisbury and Dr. Pany Kucera, an archaeologist and a biological anthropologist with a wide and recognized experience in mothers and children in prehistoric times (Rebay-Salisbury et al. 2018). This opening which, as will be shown later, would also serve as a concluding chapter, begins with the state of the investigation on age definition and categories from the perspective of bioarchaeology and social anthropology. Both editors highlight the difficulties of cross-cultural comparison due to the lack of consensus on the terminologies and conventions used by researchers. In this first chapter, the main questions raised during the session to be solved throughout the different chapters are also addressed: when do children begin to be considered as members of the community? When would the transition to adulthood take place? Which were the major developmental stages of childhood and adolescence?

The book consists of 15 chapters (excluding the introduction) chronologically ranged from Early Prehistory to Antiquity. Despite this wide coverage, most of the contributions focus on Later Prehistory, from Bronze to Iron Age (chapters 5-12), although there are also two chapters dedicated to Neolithic and Copper Age (chapters 3-4) and four to Antiquity (chapters 13-16). Finally, chapter 2, which is based on ethnoarchaeological research can be applied to any period of Prehistory. The extensive geographical frame, which, as indicated by the tittle, covers not only Europe but also the Near East, is one of the strengths of this volume. Even though the works are not homogeneously distributed and there is a clear preference for Central and Eastern Europe, it is enriching to get to know different areas other than Great Britain and Scandinavia, where the research on the Archaeology of childhood arose and developed. Notwithstanding the substantial variability between themes, most of the chapters follow the same methodology, the bioarchaeological (osteological and archaeological) analysis of child graves, with also similar objectives, detecting patterns related to developmental stages. This is extremely useful as it enables the comparison between the results obtained in different geographical areas and chronological periods. Furthermore, another strong point of this book is the impressive number of individuals sampled that reaches almost 1000 non-adults.

About a third of the contributors to this volume are established researchers in the field, but almost two thirds have only occasionally participated in research about childhood in the past. Although at first this may appear to be a disadvantage, these writers from outside the field bring fresh perspectives and points of view to the discussed theme. A clear example is chapter 7 by Eszter Melis et al., one of the most complete contributions of the book. The authors manage to distinguish up to three quite differentiable stages of childhood through the analysis of almost 200 child graves from Early and Middle Bronze age Hungary. The scarcity of pictures is perhaps one of the weaknesses of this and the rest of the chapters. It is unfortunate that despite the great number of impressive child graves described throughout the volume, they are only illustrated in black and white photographs (an average of four figures/ chapter). Especially striking is the absence of pictures in chapter 3, where child tombs from

the famous cemeteries of Varna and Durankulac (Bulgaria) are analysed.

Several other chapters deserve mention. Chapters 5, 15 and 16 are particularly relevant because they focus on children under 1 year old. This age group, which is extremely underrepresented in most prehistoric and late antiquity cemeteries, deserves special attention. Chapter 5 focuses on foetuses and new-borns from the Unětice Culture (Czech Republic and Slovakia) and apart from verifying their general underrepresentation, their authors promote reviewing osteological collections from old excavations since they have shown that this low representation may be due to methodological biases. In chapter 15, Alexandra Syrogianni investigates social consideration of mothers and new-borns and care practices in Ancient Greece through the study of classical texts and artistic representations.

Although the four chapters covering Antiquity may seem deviated from the rest of the book, there is a clear sense of strong editorial direction, which makes those chapters extremely valuable. Undoubtedly, methodologies used for historical times are quite different to those of Prehistory, but in this monograph the access to written sources and artistic representations enables the support of some of the results obtained through the analyses of prehistoric graves. For example, chapter 16 explores the first days of a new-born in Ancient Rome through descriptions that appear in classical texts. This research provides interesting clues to determine when children would begin to be considered as people by their communities.

Even though the main themes of this volume are age and abilities, these categories cannot be understood without taking into account the gender. In this sense, several chapters include this variable in their studies, for example chapter 6, where Katharina Rebay-Salisbury investigates at what age gender differentiations would begin in a Middle Bronze Age site of Lower Austria. In chapter 4, Daniela Kern criticizes gender assignations based on grave goods typologies or the body position, very common in studies of central European sites. This chapter is particularly attractive since it questions the concept of status inheritance, repeatedly used by most of the researchers when important grave goods appear in child graves. Daniela Kern states the key role that boys and girls would have within their communities,

which would make them worthy of being buried with valuable objects.

Since there are so many stimulating results that appear throughout the book, and considering that some social age categories have been noticed in several chapters, the book would have benefited from a concluding chapter that recapitulates the common points achieved as well as future directions. In particular, since one of the objectives of the original session was to reach a general agreement on the terminologies and conventions used to refer to age groups, some summary tables would have been very useful. Indeed, the introduction of the two editors could also work as a closing chapter as, among other things, it compiles the main age classes used by researchers from different disciplines on which archaeology relies.

In conclusion, the volume represents a blunt first step in the direction of a multidis-

ciplinary approach to age categories that takes into account the diversity between different human groups. At the same time this book makes it clear that this line of research is a long way from being closed and raises several new and challenging horizons. For example, future works that incorporate archaeometric data, such as Sr analysis to track adolescent's mobility or diet isotopes to detect eventual nutrition differences in each age group could shed some new light. Meanwhile, this book is the most up-to-date and complete work that will certainly satisfy the interest, not only of specialists on childhood in the past, but also researchers involved in the study of early societies.

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